The University of Minnesota School of Architecture fall 2017 lecture series Decolonizing Design explores the relationships between colonialism and design.

Modern design practices, and its engagement with the environment, perpetuates an ongoing colonial narrative that positions the colonizer (i.e. those aligned with hegemonic power structures) as having historically seized and laid claim to foreign and Indigenous lands as external agents defined to manage the commercial production and extraction of resources from colonially acquired property.

This is the basis of modernism, and by extension, modern architectural practice. Decisions over land protection, preservation, restoration and/or exploitation are often performed in the interest of colonial agents and in alignment with colonial values and relationships to the land (i.e. property ownership). Design performed within that context is a colonizing act that perpetuates a colonialist agenda.

Addressing these habits forms an uncomfortable construction of new narratives. Narratives that acknowledge contemporary settler colonialism and the systemic racism and violence that accompany it. Narratives that question the roles for design professionals and their agency to affect positive change within the complex systems they claim expert sway over. Narratives that question the ambitions behind design and the nature of design delivery and service.

This lecture series focuses on how design can help people and communities move beyond these habits. However, before we can engage the social, environmental, and material narratives we need to acknowledge the realities of the colonial context in which we work.

Decolonizing Design brings together designers and researchers focused on finding solutions to the fundamental humanitarian challenges facing the world. The work intends to explore decolonizing narratives that emerge at the convergence of human need and design theory in an effort to expose design’s agency as a decolonizing force.

September 18, 5 pm
Pierre Belanger
Harvard University
Graduate School of Design

October 23, 5 pm
Chris Cornelius
Studio Indigenous

October 30, 5 pm
Olga Bannova
University of Houston

November 13, 5 pm
Elizabeth Tunstall
Ontario College of Art and Design

All lectures are free and open to the public.

Lectures are held in Rapson Hall 100 at the UMN School of Architecture located at 89 Church Street in Minneapolis.

For event updates please visit http://arch.design.umn.edu

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