**Main
Space**

Design + Community
Atanas Bozdarov, Danica Drago, Lido Pimienta, Patterns Magazine, Team Sagittarius
January 15 – February 27, 2016

Design + Community explores the complex relationship of human interaction in design processes and methodologies. The five projects included in this exhibition by emerging designers, artists and collectives highlight not only how communities interact with objects, but show the nature of this symbiotic relationship. These works emphasize how the designed object shapes its community as the community shapes not only the end result of design but also the process itself. Within the field of community-centered design, three priorities are set in place in order to realize social change: equity, empowerment and participation.[1] The works in this exhibition put these priorities to practice by using design and its process as tools for education, creative expression, and liberation, as well as creating spaces for intimacy and community-building.

Danica Drago's *Pedal Potter* is a mechanical system that invites participants to share in the experience of making wheel-thrown clay objects with a potter. Drago combines a clay-throwing wheel and a bicycle to create a participatory machine. People are invited to power the machine: a participant mounts the bicycle and pedals to give direct power to the belt drive, which turns the throwing wheel. Although the form of the clay object is still largely decided by the potter's hand, the speed of the wheel is determined by the cyclist, thus creating a process that demands collaboration from both the potter and the cyclist in order to create a clay object. This performance generates a situation in which the power of creation gets distributed from the artist's hand to include potential participants.

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[1] Katherine Melcher. "Equity, Empowerment, or Participation: Prioritizing Goals in Community Design." Landscape Journal: design, planning, and management of the land 32, no. 2 (2013): 167-182.

Drago's artistic practice centers on "the methods, failures and risks involved in the making of objects, rather than the final products themselves."[2] Their machine fuels a critical discussion on the creation of objects and its broader relation to social and spatial contexts. Drago's machine is built to take the production process out of the studio and into a setting where it becomes accessible to the public through direct interaction. When not in use, the machine and the clay objects it creates act as artifacts of a complex process of production that highlights community-based design as a process rather than a means to an end.

Lido Pimienta's installation *Adult Toys* is made up of a collection of two series of objects meant to bring out the inner child in us while inciting connection, intimacy and learning. Pimienta describes her artistic practice as one "charged with the narratives of oppression and survival" through "the healing powers of art and design."[3] Her work in this exhibition demonstrates how interaction with her designed objects can tackle trauma, pain and loneliness. The first series within Pimienta's work is a set of hand-made pillows embroidered with slumberous faces. Pimienta cites the inspiration for this work in a break-up and the need for company after losing someone.[4]. The purpose of her anthropomorphized pillows is to ease loneliness and keep company while still being functional objects.

The second series is comprised of a number of wooden dollhouses inspired by the history surrounding Canada's residential schools. The surfaces of the dollhouses are adorned with imagery of human figures, buildings and foliage meant to represent Indigenous peoples and Christian churches. Their child-like aesthetic invites people of all ages to engage with these objects and the history they share. Pimienta's dollhouses function as educational tools that facilitate the learning about a difficult history within Canada in order to remind settler populations of the past as well as the on-going injustice to Indigenous peoples. The houses also provide an opportunity to discuss what can be a traumatic experience for many individuals in the hope that these interactions promote personal and communal healing.

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[2] Danica Drago artist statement, 2015.
[3] Lido Pimienta artist statement, 2015.
[4] Author in correspondence with Lido Pimienta, January 2016.

Team Sagittarius is a design collective made up of Nicole Pacampara, Raoul Olou and Hope Erin Phillips. Their project *We Are Fine, We'll Be Fine* is a game-based experience where participants can explore multiple anecdotes told by individuals facing marginalization and oppression. Played on a wooden board by three people, the main interface of the game becomes activated by the act of touching the board and holding hands with the other players. Team Sagittarius' design was made to create a temporary intimate space. The interface of the game promotes the closeness and physical interaction one might have while confiding to close friends.

Another important aspect in the design process of the game and its progression is a conscious effort for a decentering of power, where the active gaze is taken away from the status quo and given to those who are often marginalized. This shifts the objective of *We Are Fine, We'll Be Fine* from an explanation or learning experience to an act of intimate sharing, witnessing, active listening and support. Team Sagittarius describes the experience as a cathartic process that builds solidarity among those who are labeled as "Others."[5] The narrative structure of the game contains the recorded stories of over twenty individuals. Through the sharing of these narratives, participants connect not only with the other players but also with those whose stories unravel by playing the game. The communal sharing of feelings of marginalization, oppression and exclusion take individuals through a process of healing by means of self-help and helping others that ends the game with a vision of hope.

Atanas Bozdarov's *To Be* presents a series of public installations and interventions that examine section 2(b) in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.[6] Section 2 discusses fundamental freedoms including religion, peaceful assembly and association with part "b" stating "freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression, including freedom of the press and other media of communication."[7] The objects in this series consist of multiple posters, screen-printed on newspaper, which quote the freedoms presented in section 2(b). The posters are then distributed to newsstands throughout Toronto, reminding consumers of print media of the rights given to the press. The second

[5] The author in conversation with Nicole Pacampara and Hope Erin Phillips, Skype, 2015.
[6] Atanas Bozdarov's artist statement, 2015.
[7] Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, s 2, Part I of the Constitution Act, 1982, being Schedule B to the Canada Act 1982 (UK), 1982, c 11.

set of objects consists of simple wallets, which Bozdarov has altered to function as small booklets containing the information found in the Canadian Charter. These wallets were dispersed throughout Toronto's public transit to be picked up by curious commuters. *To Be* creates surprising representations of Canadian law that use design intervention as a method of generating dialogue regarding the rights Canadians have been granted. Bozdarov's work empowers individuals through a building of awareness that causes its viewer to acknowledge their rights and critically contemplate on the political and legal systems that surrounds them.

Another work presented as part of *Design + Community* is Patterns Magazine's *Apathy Issue*. Founded by Nyssa Komorowski and Megan Yetman, Patterns Magazine is a conglomeration of social, political, creative and critical discourse causing disruptions within hegemonic narratives. Its first issue aims to pervade public spaces with art, writing and critical thought to promote social and political change. *The Apathy Issue* contains forty-four posters to be disseminated throughout the city by wheat-pasting the content onto surfaces easily seen by the public. Its topic was taken from a Town Hall meeting with OCADU students regarding the perceived apathy regarding post-secondary education from university staff, students, and the public at large. *The Apathy Issue* came together after Canadian and International artists, writers and designers submitted to the project, amounting to a collection of poetry, photography, critical writing, drawing and illustration discussing topics like love, democracy, narcissism, alienation, philosophy, mental illness, youth, humour and much more.

In addition to taking art away from the white cube, *The Apathy Issue* promotes accessible creative expression and invites its viewers to interact with the work through simple viewing, to sharing it online, to street artists physically adding to the work. It also contemplates the nature of public space, hijacking it back from its private or corporate uses to forcefully create a space for art and design. Its design as a collection of mini billboards rather than a print magazine takes action overtly by physically demanding attention and taking charge of large amounts of space. *The Apathy Issue* acts as a reminder of the socio-political nature of public spaces that empower its viewers through art and design.

Community-centered design not only shifts the focus from the maker to the user, but also works towards blurring this division altogether.[8] As the projects in this exhibition demonstrate, the objective of design does not have to be the creation of an object, but rather it can be about the building of an environment where individuals are able to influence the design process. Contemporary design holds the potential to empower people and create intimacy while still being able to teach something new or communicate a different perspective. It is this respect for current community-based needs while still introducing new ideas that makes design a method of generating social change and human connection.

– Maya Wilson-Sanchez

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[8] Winschiers-Theophilus, Heike, Nicola J. Bidwell, and Edwin Blake. 2012. Community consensus: Design beyond participation. Design Issues 28 (3): 89-100.