
2020-06-11

Re: SALA's Statement: "Support for Black Lives Matter"

Dear SALA Leadership and Faculty,

We are writing to you in response to the statement issued in an eBlast from the School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture (SALA) on June 4, 2020, titled "Support for Black Lives Matter", and the subsequent letter from SALA's Director titled "# SHUTDOWNSTEM, #SHUTDOWNACADEMIA: A MESSAGE FROM SALA TO OUR STUDENTS." While these statements are acknowledged as gestures towards a more just discipline, there remains a profound need for a more direct and actionable set of policies to which the school can be held accountable. Further, there is a wave of change in the industry as evidenced by petitions and open letters to various Canadian architectural associations and institutions in recent days, including the OAA, OALA, CSLA, the University of Toronto, and others. The professions of Architecture and Landscape Architecture, their schools, and their problematic histories are rife with long-standing issues of equity and diversity, which have been rebuffed due to widespread negligence and institutional fragility. As a premier architecture school in Canada, SALA remains complicit through its failure to outline steps towards change.

We want to stress that this letter is a critique of an institution that we care deeply about. This is a chance to challenge ourselves and reflect on what we research, how we design, why we work, and who our efforts serve. SALA can be at the forefront of ground-breaking research on how design industries can be decolonized and diversified within the Canadian and North American contexts. We must transparently learn and unlearn from each other, reconciling our beliefs and our actions in the process. While our efforts have been reignited by the tragic murders of George Floyd, Regis Korchinski-Paquet, Chantel Moore, Randy Cochrane, Machuar Madut, and countless others by police, these conversations have been occurring in the SALA community for a long time. The complicity of our industry in creating and perpetuating conditions which dehumanize and place structural barriers in front of Black, Indigenous, people of colour (BIPOC), Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA) community, and all visible minorities is no longer up for any debate.

Capital-A Architecture is now facing a collective reckoning, and an opportunity has arisen for SALA to demonstrate initiative through actions, not platitudes. In lieu of asking SALA's leadership to amend their original statement, we have provided some urgent demands to steer the school in a direction which prioritizes action over words.

SALA students & alumni demand urgent action on the following items:

- 1. Promote institutional accountability and transparency.**
 - a. Rename the Frederic Lasserre building and provide formal, public acknowledgement of the racist¹ and misogynistic² history of its namesake. Keeping the Lasserre name attached to one of our buildings perpetuates the legacies of white supremacy and patriarchy within our school.
 - i. The new name chosen for the building should reflect SALA's commitment to atonement and egalitarianism. In the event that a new namesake is selected,

individuals who were denounced by Lasserre (including Douglas Cardinal and Esther Marjorie Hill) must be strongly considered.

- b. Develop a strategic plan—open and accessible to the SALA community—explicitly laying out a set of concrete goals and policies towards achieving equity and promoting Design Justice.
 - i. Develop a diversity task force and/or a paid diversity coordinator to oversee and track these efforts.
 - ii. Require diversity and anti-racist sensitivity training for faculty and staff.
 - iii. Ensure student and community involvement throughout the drafting and review of the plan report.
 - iv. Revise the plan each year, to reflect emerging issues and initiatives related to the policies proposed in this document. Provide an annual report which reflects the outcomes of the strategic plan and delineates statistical data on demographic diversity. This document should be widely disseminated, and made publicly available on the SALA website.
 - v. Research and adapt tools used by other institutions (architectural and otherwise) to address equity and inclusion. Compile a report listing examples of best practices and programs; assess the feasibility of implementing them at UBC; and propose a selection of initiatives to be carried out during the 2021-2022 school year.
 - vi. Work with BIPOC communities to draft ethical best practices for architectural research and community engagement. When engaging with BIPOC communities, do so on *their* terms and take the required time to engage in preparatory research and real, thoughtful community consultations. Further, avoid tokenizing BIPOC experiences or diminishing collaborative relationships into architectural voluntourism. Teach capacity-building within the communities you engage in, so that they can continue the work after you leave. Implement surveys after each community-oriented program to evaluate SALA's successes and failures, and disclose the findings to SALA's student body.
 - vii. This plan should entail a formal mandate and timeline outlining actionable steps that SALA will take to align to the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action](#). Mandate that territorial acknowledgements are consistently read aloud at all SALA events, and take time [to understand and teach the direct implications of these statements](#).
- c. Clearly outline the contact information for the [University Office of the Ombudsperson](#) on each course outline, allowing students who have seen or experienced discrimination to voice their concerns without fear of retaliation from SALA leadership.
- d. Give permanent seats at the table to people and organizations involved in the support of equal representation at SALA, namely the elected representatives of For a Feminist architecture (FaFa) and the National Organization of Minority Architects (NOMAS) when discussing actions which impact institutional culture, such as: hiring, dismissal, and strategic vision for the school.
- e. Create policies which promote financial transparency and equity:
 - i. Make a commitment to funding research by and for BIPOC communities on an annual basis.
 - ii. Implement a study of salaries for existing tenured faculty which includes:

1. Redirecting funds to existing BIPOC faculty who may be underpaid in relation to their workloads and/or the hiring of additional BIPOC educators/practitioners.
- iii. Disclose where SALA research dollars are spent, provide a regularly updated list of all active research topics, and begin posting bulletins on research objectives prior to the commencement of new work. Provide diversity statistics accordingly.
 1. Conduct open student surveys which value student input on where student tuition dollars are spent.

2. Create policies and initiatives which support diverse faculty contributions.

- a. [Uphold UBC's HR10 hiring policy](#), which commits to *“advance the interests of women and Indigenous, disabled, and racialized persons; ensure that fair and equal opportunity is afforded to all who seek employment at the University; and treat equitably all faculty and staff.”*
 - i. To this end, SALA should strive for fair representation of race, self-disclosing gender, PWDs, and self-disclosing LGBTQIA for all faculty members, of all SALA departments. SALA's recent lecture series have been diverse and have offered a variety of worldviews to students; this thinking should extend to SALA's hiring practices.
 - ii. Revise SALA's Faculty Search surveys for students at candidate lectures to address the above.
 - iii. Broaden the range of institutions from which SALA hires, **extending the search beyond the usual pool of North American Ivy League universities.**
 - iv. Place a greater importance on practical experience and ties to local communities as employment prerequisites.
- b. Promote a diversity of faculty members to leadership and decision-making positions in order to foster a culture which represents a variety of views.
- c. Ensure an equal possibility of tenure for all faculty members, regardless of their race, disabilities, self-disclosing gender, or self-disclosing sexuality.
- d. Develop an annual research fellowship for BIPOC researchers and practitioners.

3. Teach course content and support student research that engages a variety of backgrounds and histories.

- a. Ensure that mandatory courses critically engage with the settler colonial histories which have shaped the city we call Vancouver and the country we call Canada.
 - i. Course content should include, but is not limited to the following: Indigenous history and contributions, the reservation system, Japanese internment camps, formation of Chinese, Japanese, Punjabi, Black and other ethnocultural communities in Canada and their contribution to urban development, and practitioners who have been complicit in perpetuating settler colonial structures (see: MoA), etc.
 - ii. Mandate that (required) history courses include architectural histories of architects, communities, and regions outside of the western canon. Focus on projects, writing, and theory created by BIPOC. Engage critically with the western canon and situate it within the context of colonialism and systems of oppression when discussed in these history courses. This is especially

appropriate given SALA's diverse student body which includes many international students, BIPOC, and other visible minorities.

- b. Expand and critically frame the architectural canon.
 - i. Work with the library to acquire resources which extend beyond canonical content and allow for BIPOC authors and critical theory to be more readily accessible to students, making the acquisition of new media and resources accessible to everyone.
 - ii. Contextualize problematic architectural theorists who are embedded in the western canon by immediately acknowledging their dubious words and actions (Frank Lloyd Wright, Philip Johnson, Le Corbusier, Adolf Loos, Frederick Law Olmsted, etc.).
- c. Use the mandated Research Methods course to expose students to critical tools which allow them to find and evaluate the efficacy and diversity of their academic sources.
- d. Teach students about the struggle for equity in architecture as well as their rights as architectural workers. Discuss tools and methodologies for equitable practice, including ethical issues which extend beyond mandated CACB and CSLA content.
 - i. Mandate the inclusion of issues including but not limited to: gender pay gaps, labour exploitation, and the environmental footprints left by our projects. While some efforts have been made in the past to expand the curriculum to address these issues, such critical classes remain the exception, and not the norm.

4. Establish diversity in outreach and research.

- a. Promote relationships with local and global institutions that are not predominantly white. Explore research and models of practice that diverge from histories written by white men of the western architectural canon.
- b. Financially support architectural research which is undertaken by BIPOC students and faculty. Allocation of SALA research funding should be more equitably allocated between technological and social research streams. This action could include establishing relationships with industry or other cultural entities to ensure the social stream is adequately funded and represented.
- c. Create an additional research theme within SALA which extends beyond the four current topics [listed on the SALA website](#)—one explicitly centred on socio-spatial justice, critical practice, decolonization, race, and diversity.
- d. Work with NOMAS and FaFa to create and fund critical publications, events, and exhibitions that engage justice, diversity, and equity within architecture today. This work could constitute a regular course offering and/or paid research positions.
- e. Work with NOMAS and FaFa to develop a regularly maintained and readily-accessible repository of resources (readings, organizations, precedents, and more) on Design Justice, decolonization, race, and diversity, to be accessible to both students and faculty looking to supplement their course content, independent learning, and thesis projects.
- f. Equip students and faculty with training and tools for responsible community engagement.
 - i. Develop a formal and accessible ethics process and coaching strategy within SALA for students and faculty who are considering doing community engagement, rather than solely referring to the Office of Research Ethics. The skills developed through community engagement are essential to our profession, and this process is often seen as a barrier to furthering these efforts.

- ii. Work with the [School of Community and Regional Planning's Indigenous Community Planning Concentration](#), and/or the [Social Justice Institute's Ecologies of Social Difference \(ESD\) Research Network](#), and/or [The Indigenous Pedagogies Research Network](#), to develop course content within SALA that teaches students to understand the importance of Indigenous consultation, engagement and participatory design.

5. Expand the range of ideas at SALA by inviting a diverse group of external guests and lecturers.

- a. Pay all guest critics, acknowledging that not all people share equal levels of privilege, and require compensation for their time and absence from work and/or families.
- b. Invite BIPOC guests to speak about their work, communities, and past experiences working in design, and/or with other designers. These guests should be appropriately remunerated for their time and labour.
 - i. Utilize NOMAS's and FaFa's extensive networks in and beyond Vancouver to ensure critics from diverse backgrounds are available to offer a variety of perspectives at all reviews.
- c. Balance visits for architectural lecture series with guests from local BIPOC communities.

6. Combat structural barriers in the profession from the ground up.

- a. Make a commitment to increasing the recruitment and graduation rate of BIPOC students from SALA's programs.
 - i. Investigate current obstacles, discriminatory cultures, application processes, and gaps in bursary/scholarship funding.
 - ii. Create sustained long-term relationships with elementary, middle school, and high school students in less affluent communities to combat structural barriers into SALA (see: [Taubman College's ArcPrep program](#)).
 - iii. A locally-based initiative SALA can implement immediately is supporting the establishment of [Project Pipeline](#); a series of free weekend summer workshops offered by NOMAS which would allow middle and high school students in Vancouver to combat structural barriers into design disciplines, while offering mentorship.
- b. Improve computer facilities in all campus buildings used by SALA to ensure equitable access to technology—an issue which disproportionately affects students with limited privilege. This includes access to both equipment and software required to complete coursework, and equal opportunities for training on *all* tools and equipment purchased with school funds.
- c. Improve access to all SALA facilities to ensure equity for Persons with Disabilities (PWDs). Further, offer virtual classes and meetings as well as flexible scheduling to PWDs to improve accessibility, as proven effective by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- d. Clearly advertise all student teaching and research positions and allow equal access to student jobs, eliminating the existing system of favoritism which reinforces covert power structures. This applies to both academic assistant and work-learn positions.
- e. Eliminate all advertising in the eBlast (and by other means) for unpaid competitions, internships, and positions. These create unequal access to opportunity, disproportionately impacting less privileged and BIPOC students and reinforcing the exclusivity of the discipline.

- i. This includes, but is not limited to: unpaid short-term internships and “volunteer opportunities” for students by local firms, and “pay to play” schemes / programs / design-builds which do not provide students with monetary compensation for labour performed.
 - ii. For co-ops and similar programs, ensure that students are paid prevailing wages for their labour before granting academic credit. Blacklist firms that do not pay fairly or adhere to ethical labour practices.
- f. Actively seek out and advertise external funding opportunities for BIPOC students at SALA. These should be provided in addition to the list of internal scholarships, grants, and awards already on the school website.

The transition towards equitable institutional practices can draw upon an extensive network of engaged students, interns, practitioners, and educators for support. Students look to SALA for mentorship and perspective on the industry. SALA has prided itself on its reported position as the top architecture school in Canada, and the largest architectural institution in Western Canada. These positions place an additional responsibility on SALA to commit to institutional reform through concrete action and will create a transformative precedent for other schools and the industry to emulate.

As Whitney M. Young said in his 1968 AIA address, “We are going to have people as committed to doing the right thing, to inclusiveness, as we have in the past to exclusiveness.” We recognize that these demands underscore the need for a significant culture shift within the school—and, by extension, the profession at large. Although the actions outlined in this letter represent a significant undertaking, they also highlight a latent potential in our field which can only be activated with a diversity of voices, and a variety of worldviews. We must work together to achieve these ends.

This letter was collectively drafted and co-signed by a group of students, alumni and practitioners seeking academic and cultural output which reflects their diversity. We look forward to discussing the above items with SALA Leadership and Faculty to create and maintain an actionable plan together—ideally during the course of the Summer 2020 semester.

Sincerely,

FaFa (For a Feminist Architecture), NOMAS (National Organization of Minority Architecture Students), ARCHUS, LASA, and the undersigned;

Ada Sakowicz (MArch 2020)
Alena Pavan (MArch 2020)
Alex Francheville (MARCLA 2020)
Alexander Turton (MArch Candidate 2022)
Alex Scott (MLA 2019)
Alexander Preiss (MArch 2019)
Alexandra Stewart (MArch 2019)
Alexandra Ianoul (MArch Candidate 2021)
Alicia Kingdon (MARCLA, 2020)
Alison Maddaugh (MLA 2005)
Allison Tweedie (MLA 2017)

Alyssa Brosch (MArch 2017)
Alyssa Quiring (MArch 2018)
Amalie Lambert (MArch 2017)
Amy Wu (MArch 2020)
Andjela Vasic (MArch 2019)
Andrea Hoff (MArch 2010)
Andy Grellmann (MArch Candidate 2022)
Angela Wen (MArch Candidate 2021)
Angelina Sangulin (MArch 2019)
Angus Derocher (MArch Candidate 2020)
Anna Thomas (MLA 2018)
Anne Pearson (MArch 2006)
Annie Dahan (MArch Candidate 2022)
Annie Liang (BEnds 2013)
Azin Etesami (MArch 2018)
Amanda Jehring (MArch 2018)
Blaike Allen (BEnds 2018, MArch Candidate 2022)
Blaire Schille (MArch 2019)
Brandon Schwartz (MARCLA Candidate 2021)
Breanna Mitchell (MArch 2018)
Breanna Mulhall (MArch 2017)
Brendan Buchanan Dee (MARCLA Candidate 2020)
Brit Naylor (MArch 2020)
Brittany Shalagan (MLA 2019)
Bryn Davidson (MArch 2005)
Caleb Westerby (MArch 2019)
Camille Bianchi (MArch 2018)
Celia Winters (MLA 2019)
Chantelle Lupieri (MArch 2019)
Chaitrali Salvi (MLA 2018)
Charlotte Falk (MArch 2012)
Chris Boldt (MArch 2005)
Chris Boni (MArch Candidate 2021)
Christian Kliegel, Architect OAA (MArch 2011)
Christine Rohrbacher (MArch 2019)
Christopher Torres (MArch 2017)
Christopher Lacsina (MLA 2020)
Claire Saksun (MArch 2017)
Colin Clark (MArch 2012)
Colin Jones (MLA 2020)
Colin Mbugua (MArch 2019)
Courtney Healey (MArch 2009)
Craig Burns (M.Arch 2003)
Daichi Yamashita (MArch 2016)
Dana Salama (MArch 2019)
D'Arcy Hutton (MLA 2020)
David Meiklejohn (MArch 2020)

Devin Connell (MArch 2020)
Dina Dudokh (MLA 2017)
Divine Ndemeye (MLA 2020)
Dylan Maeers (MArch 2019)
Ellen Harper (MArch Candidate 2021)
Ellen Ziegler (BEnds 2009, MASA 2014)
Elyse Kavanagh (MArch 2017)
Elsa Snyder (BEnds 2009)
Emilia Brasdefer (MArch Candidate 2021)
Emily Boulton (MLA 2018)
Emily Huser (MArch Candidate 2022)
Emily Kazanowski (MArch 2020)
Emily Nadene Scoular (MArch 2019)
Emily Seider (MArch 2017)
Emily Wildfong (MArch Candidate 2023)
Emma Durham (MArch Candidate 2021)
Emma Gosselin (MLA Candidate 2022)
Eric Lajoie (MArch 2015)
Farwa Sadiq-Zadah (MArch 2019)
Fiona Jones (MArch 2017)
Gary Baker (MLA Candidate 2021)
Genta Ishimura (MArch 2019, BEnds 2009)
George Berking (BEnds 2014)
Glenis Canete (MLA 2013)
Graham Case (MArch Candidate 2020)
Hanako Amaya (MLA 2005)
Hannah Leyland (MArch 2018)
Hannah Teicher (MArch 2006)
Helen Pang (MArch 2002)
Hock James (MArch Candidate 2021)
Ian Lowrie (MArch 2016)
Ian Robert Sandilands (MArch 2018)
Idette Zwaantina de Boer, Architect OAA (MArch 2010)
Iris Janssen (BEnds 2019)
Isabelle Binette (MArch Candidate 2021)
Ivy Smith (MLA 2017)
Jacob Darowski (MArch 2021)
Jackson Lindsay (BEnds 2016)
Jason Skladan, Architect AIBC (MArch 2009)
Jean Dieres Monplaisir (MArch 2015)
Jedrik Mangahis (MArch Candidate 2022)
Jennifer Leung (MArch 2015)
Jennifer Whelan (MArch 2017)
Jeremy Schipper (MArch 2019)
Jeremy Shigemitsu (MArch Candidate 2022)
Jessica Hunter (MArch 2016)
Jessica MacDaniel (MLA 2019)
Jessica Udal (MLA 2020)

Jiffy Lee (MLA 2016)
Joelle Sept (MLA 2015)
Joanna Speed (MARCLA Candidate 2022)
Johanna Becker (MArch 2018)
John Musil (MLA 2018)
John Roddick (March 2006)
Jon Ackerly (MArch Candidate 2022)
Jonas Dodd (MArch 2011)
Jordan Yule (MLA Candidate 2022)
Joshua Potvin (MArch 2019)
Julia Lorimer (MLA 2019)
Julian Hou (MArch 2010)
Justin Neenan (MArch 2015)
Justin-Benjamin Taylor (MLA 2016)
Kaia Nielsen-Roine (BEnds 2020/MArch 2022)
Kaili Sun (BEnds 2020)
Kaiyu Liu (March 2021)
Kalli Niedoba (MLA 2020)
Kareem Obey (MArch 2019)
Karen Lai (MArch 2020)
Kathy Oke (MArch 2019)
Kathryn Pierre (MArch Candidate 2022)
Katie Peruniak (MArch Candidate 2021)
Katie Carroll Smith (MLA 2015)
Katy Young, Architect AIBC (MArch 2010)
Keara Brown (BEnds 2015)
Kelsy Whitten (MArch 2017)
Kendra Scanlon (MLA Candidate 2022)
Kevin Isherwood (MArch 2019)
Kimberly Wong (MLA Candidate 2022)
Krista Kals (MArch Candidate 2020)
Larraine Henning (MArch 2010)
Laura Kozak (MASA 2012)
Lee-Ann Kam (MArch Candidate 2022)
Lee Patola (MARCLA Candidate 2021)
Lórin Vass (MArch 2015)
Lorraine Roche (MArch 2016)
Lys Hermanski (MArch 2017)
Madison Bartsch (MArch Candidate 2022)
Magali Bailey, Architect AIBC (MArch 2010)
Manuel Muñoz (MArch Candidate 2021)
Marion Gelinias (MArch 2020)
Marsha Farrow (MArch 2018)
Mary Cuk (MArch 2005)
Mary McMains (MArch 2006)
Mark Dennis (MArch 2005)
Matt Purvis, AIA (MArch 2012)
Matthew Harty (MArch 2016)

Meredith Yee (MArch Candidate 2021)
Michael De Luca (BEnds 2016)
Mike Teed (MLA 2006)
Miles-Christopher Ryan (MArch 2019)
Michelle Gagnon-Creeley (MLA 2019)
Mingjia Chen (BEnDs 2019)
Myriam Assal (MArch 2020)
Nathan Keebler (MArch 2019)
Nat Kim (MArch Candidate 2021)
Natradee Quek (MLA 2018)
Nicole Alden (MLA 2018)
Nicole Crawford (MLA 2020)
Nicole Sylvia (MArch 2016)
Nicole Tischler (MArch 2018)
Olena Chytra (MArch 2010)
Oliver Frayne (MArch Candidate 2021)
Olivia Bull (MArch 2019)
Olivia Daigneault Deschênes (MArch 2018)
Olivia Lyne (MLA 2018)
Patrick Beech (MLA 2018)
Patrick Mella (MArch Candidate 2022)
Paulette Cameron (BEnds 2013)
Pauline Moskal (MLA 2019)
Pera Hardy (MArch 2019)
Philippe Le Quellec (MArch 2020)
Rachel Killoh (MArch Candidate 2022)
Rebecca Anderson (MLA 2019)
Renata Kisin (MArch Candidate 2022)
Rothery Chris (MLA Candidate 2022)
Rose-Marie Pickard (MLA Candidate 2021)
Roxy Nazar (MArch 2020)
Roy Cloutier (MArch 2016)
Ruby Barnard (MArch Candidate 2022)
Ryan Brown (MArch 2015)
Ryder Thalheimer (MArch 2018)
Sahar Khelifa (MLA Candidate 2021)
Sally Miller (MArch 2016)
Samuel Morgan Joseph (MArch Candidate 2022)
Samuel McFaul (MARCLA 2019)
Sara R. Duffin (MArch 2018)
Sara Tavakoli (MLA Candidate 2022)
Sarah Klym (MArch 2020)
Sébastien Roy (MArch 2018)
Scott Archer (MLA Candidate 2021)
Shaheed Hassan Karim (MLA 2020)
Shannon MacGillivray (MArch 2020)
Shasha Wang (MArch Candidate 2022)
Shiloh Sukkau (MArch 2017)

Sophie MacNeill (MLA 2013, BEnds 2010)
Stefan Reindl (MArch Candidate 2020)
Tai Adler (MArch 2016)
Tanyaradzwa Paine-Motsi (BEnds 2017)
Tatum Lawlor (MLA 2017)
Teena Aujla (MLA 2018)
Théo Van Vugt (MArch 2021)
Theresa Lum (MArch 2019)
Thomas Foster (MArch Candidate 2021)
Thomas Gaudin (MArch 2016)
Tillie Kwan (MArch 2002)
Tori Hamatani (MArch 2019)
Tory Michak (MLA 2019)
Trevor Whitten (MArch 2019)
Tricia Marie Tecson (MArch 2020)
Tyler Dellebuur (MArch Candidate 2021)
Vahid Farbod (MArch 2017)
Valia Puente (MArch 2020)
Vanessa Kuiper (MLA 2017)
Vincent Perron (MArch 2020)
Weirong Li (MLA 2020)
Yekta Tehrani (MArch Candidate 2021)
Zacharie Lauziere-Fitzgerald (BDes 2023)
Zahra Asghari (MArch Candidate 2021)
Zeke Kan (MArch 2020)
Zoë Jackson (BEnds 2018)

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