

Letter from the Executive Director

Maria Nicanor

A lot has happened since you held the last issue of *Cite*, realized under former *Cite* Editor Raj Mankad's purview and guest edited by Publications Committee Chair Ernesto Alfaro and Marie Rodriguez. Though it's been a while, we gratefully salute Raj's years with RDA, the relationships he forged with our community, and the work he poured into *Cite* over the years. Thank you, Raj!

In our year plus of existing online, we've gathered in many online lectures, conversations, and civic forums; we've celebrated our first online gala, *Who Builds Our City?*, a celebration of those who build our city every day and an event unlike anything RDA had ever attempted before; and in early June we'll host our first architecture tour online with UPWARDS, which explores the benefits of housing density in Houston. In short, this time has been a fruitful metamorphosis from which we continue to learn.

And yet, we haven't seen each other in so long. The second half of 2021 may likely bring renewed hope. Our travel program returns with a late June trip to Santa Fe, and glimpses of in-person gatherings seem possible in the fall. We look ahead the only way we can, with optimism and curiosity.

At the center of it all is *Cite*. The forever fiery soul of RDA. Now under the care of Editor Jack Murphy and with a smart new design by Houston-based designers MG&Co., *Cite* enters the next phase of its trajectory to bring you features about architecture & design in Houston and beyond—the stories, the people, the provocations, and hopefully, some inspiration.

The current number you now hold was started in pre-pandemic times. Its ideas were first sparked by re-reading art historian Linda Nochlin's *Realism*, from 1971: A quote in the book from nineteenth century caricaturist Honoré Daumier (although later spread by painter Édouard Manet) categorically dictates that “one must be of your own time” (“*il faut être de son temps!*”). This idea—being of your own time—is a question that has followed me since. In the book, in essence, it meant this: Stop painting pretty landscapes in a time of extreme social unrest. Show us what you see and discuss *reality*, because it's urgent.

For RDA's work in the current moment, this idea is essential. As a group, RDA has challenged itself to speak up as the world descended into a plethora of crises—notably a global pandemic, the racial justice movement, and the severe effects of climate change. All of these realities have serious spatial and architectural implications that our programming has and will continue to address. Our future lies in being intentional and strengthening our commitment to our community, especially in a time when the roles of architects and designers have seen dramatic shifts.

One overall difficulty that emerges as these crises evolve is our inability to find common ground, or even a common reality. During the pandemic, everyone has been dealt a different hand of cards. It seems, despite appearances, as though we might not be fully equipped to understand our neighbors as well as we might have hoped. With as many realities as there are individuals, there is a change in the fundamental meaning of empathy and trust with each other.

To attempt a cohesive narrative of our current time is elusive, because the times aren't cohesive. *Cite* 102 instead, seeks to make sense of this contemporary strangeness. It captures some ideas that architecture, as a wide discipline that intersects with many others, concerns itself with today. This issue contains a multiplicity of voices, a patchwork of ideas for your reading and appreciation. All are someone's reality, if maybe not always your own, and each contributes to collectively figuring out what “being of our own time” might mean for ourselves and the design disciplines. That meaning, as we all slowly re-emerge into society by the time this issue reaches you, is what we're searching for.