WHEELWRIGHT PRIZE

WHEELWRIGHT PRIZE 2013

Winner  GIA WOLFF
BROOKLYN, NEW YORK
Harvard GSD Announces Winner of Wheelwright Prize 2013

Gia Wolff, Brooklyn-based architect, wins $100,000 travel grant for her proposal *Floating City: The Community-Based Architecture of Parade Floats*

May 15, 2013

Mohsen Mostafavi, Dean of Harvard University’s Graduate School of Design, is pleased to announce that Gia Wolff, an architect based in Brooklyn, New York, is the winner of the inaugural Wheelwright Prize, a $100,000 traveling fellowship dedicated to fostering new forms of architectural research informed by cross-cultural engagement.

The Wheelwright Prize jury—Mostafavi, Yung Ho Chang, Farès el-Dahdah, K. Michael Hays, Farshid Moussavi, Zoe Ryan, and Jorge Silvetti—selected Gia Wolff from among 231 applicants from 45 countries, including Afghanistan, Brazil, Burkina Faso, China, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Iran, Nigeria, and Spain. Applicants were asked to submit portfolios along with a research proposal and travel itinerary, outlining an extended field investigation and its anticipated benefits for the field of architecture. “The positive response to the Wheelwright Prize has been extraordinary,” said Mostafavi. “It is inspiring to see so many talented architects with clear agendas and visions.”

The jury commended Wolff as an original talent who has developed an innovative, multifaceted architectural practice. The 35-year-old architect has worked for Acconci Studio, LOT-EK, Adjaye Associates, and Architecture Research Office (ARO), where she has been involved in projects that range from libraries to residences, exhibition designs to urban installations. She is presently an assistant professor adjunct at the Irwin S. Chanin School of Architecture at the Cooper Union and a visiting assistant professor at Pratt Institute. She leads her own practice, which focuses on “performance and its use of space and objects to convey narrative, form, and emotion,” in her words. Recently, she has been collaborating with the Phantom Limb Company on set designs for productions including *The Devil You Know* (presented at La Mama Experimental Theater, New York, 2010), *The Composer Is Dead* (Berkeley Repertory Theater, Berkeley, 2010), and *69° South* (BAM Next Wave Festival, Brooklyn, 2011). Wolff received a Master of Architecture from Harvard GSD in 2008 and a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Parsons School of Design in 2001.

Wolff is the first winner of the new Wheelwright Prize, an update of the Arthur Wheelwright Traveling Fellowship, which was established in 1935 and previously available only to GSD alumni. The original prize was conceived at a time when few architects traveled abroad, and for many early recipients—including Paul Rudolph, Eliot Noyes, William Wurster, and I. M. Pei—the fellowship financed travels that followed the tradition of the Grand European Tour. Under Dean Mostafavi, the GSD opened the prize to architects practicing anywhere in the world, recognizing the increasingly fluid flow of ideas and talent across the globe today, and the necessity of diverse forms of architectural research to developing new modes of practice. “The GSD has always emphasized the relationship between locations, themes, and issues,” says Mostafavi. “We are pleased to be able to make this opportunity available to young architects, who rarely have the freedom or resources to construct a research project that might push them to the next level of their development.” (continued)
Wolff’s winning proposal, *Floating City: The Community-Based Architecture of Parade Floats*, proposes the study of the tradition of parade floats—elaborate temporary and mobile constructions that are realized annually in carnival festivals in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil), Goa (India), Nice (France), Santa Cruz de Tenerife (Spain), and Viarreggio (Italy). As Wolff describes in her essay, “The float transforms the city. Its scale makes exterior streets into interior rooms of street theater.... This research ties into contemporary interests in performance and architectural notions of mobility, temporality, spectacle, urban space, and community-based design.”

The jury was enthusiastic about the strong continuity between Wolff’s existing body of work and her proposed area of study. The following comments emerged during the final premiation: “Wolff embodies a new way to think about practice”; “Though her work deals with impermanence, it engages with contemporary architectural concerns with flexibility, modularity, mobility, art”; “With her interest in the community-based creative production of carnival floats, Wolff’s proposal has a social dimension that resonates with the current preoccupation with local fabrication and maker economies”; and “Her research promises to touch on ideas that will help the analysis of the city.”

The $100,000 grant will fund Wolff’s research over the next two years.
Wheelwright Prize 2013 Jury

Mohsen Mostafavi is an architect, educator, and dean of Harvard University GSD. He serves on the steering committee of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture and the board of the Van Alen Institute, and consults on numerous international design and urban projects. His publications include Landscape Urbanism: A Manual for the Machinic Landscape (Architectural Association Publications, 2004); Ecological Urbanism (Lars Müller Publishers, 2010).

Yung Ho Chang is an award-winning architect and principal of Beijing-based practice Atelier Feichang Jianzhu. He teaches architecture at Tonji University in Beijing and at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where he served as head of the Department of Architecture from 2005 to 2010. His work has been included in architecture and art exhibitions worldwide, including the Venice Biennale.

Farès el-Dahdah a professor of architecture and director of the Humanities Research Center at Rice University. As a recipient of the Arthur Wheelwright Traveling Fellowship (2000–2001), el-Dahdah studied the evolution of utopian superblocks in Brasilia since 1960, and he has continued to write about modern architecture in Brazil.

K. Michael Hays is Eliot Noyes Professor of Architectural Theory and associate dean of Academic Affairs at Harvard GSD. Hays was the founder of the scholarly journal Assemblage and the first adjunct curator of architecture at the Whitney Museum of American Art (2000–2009). His research and scholarship focus on European modernism and critical theory. He is a member of the Wheelwright Prize organizing committee.

Farshid Moussavi is the founder of London-based Farshid Moussavi Architecture (FMA) and a professor of architecture at Harvard GSD. She was previously a principal of Foreign Office Architects (FOA), and has served on numerous advisory panels and international design juries, including the RIBA Gold Medal and Stirling Prize. Since 2011, she has been a columnist for Architectural Review.

Zoë Ryan is the John H. Bryan Curator of Architecture and Design at Art Institute of Chicago. Previously senior curator at the Van Alen Institute, Ryan has organized exhibitions on fashion, architecture, industrial, and graphic design. She has contributed articles to publications worldwide, and is the author of the book Building with Water: Concepts, Typology, Design (Birkhäuser, 2010). She is currently teaching at both the University of Illinois and the Art Institute of Chicago.

Jorge Silvetti is a principal of Machado Silvetti and the recipient of numerous awards, including ten Progressive Architecture Awards. His writings have appeared in Oppositions, Daidalos, and Assemblage. He has been teaching at Harvard GSD since 1975; he was named the Nelson Robinson, Jr. Professor of Architecture in 1990, and served as chair of the Department of Architecture from 1995 to 2002. He is a member of the Wheelwright Prize organizing committee.
Mohsen Mostafavi: “The positive response to the Wheelwright Prize has been extraordinary. It is inspiring to see so many talented architects with clear agendas and visions. I am delighted for Gia Wolff, the winner of the prize. Her proposed investigations at the intersection of design, performance, and temporality will surely provide us with new insights and new directions for the future of architecture.”

Yung Ho Chang: “Gia Wolff’s field of work is perhaps not within the typical practice of architecture but it is in essence the design of architectural experience, spatial and temporal. In her design endeavors, she has demonstrated tremendous creativity and imagination, opening up unforeseen possibilities of what the profession can be. It is significant that the Wheelwright Prize is given to someone like Wolff, who promises to expand architecture as a design discipline.”

Farès el-Dahdah: “The Wheelright Prize is about putting a voyage together in order to discover, and learn from, a particular architectural production somewhere distant in the world. Gia, whose work is all about imagination, has identified the parade float—in such cities as Rio de Janeiro, Nice, and Goa—as an ephemeral form of architecture both laden with cultural exuberance and remarkable for the communitarian organization it requires.”

K. Michael Hays: “It was important for me that the winner use architectural techniques and processes as a mode of research and knowledge production, and not just treat research as an add-on to building practice. Gia has carefully constructed her career thus far, making projects happen on her own, in which architecture just is research into movement, placement, and ritual. Her travel and research project is integral and necessary to her overall career trajectory.”

Farshid Moussavi: “Gia Wolff’s proposal for the Wheelwright Prize is outstanding in outlining a form of research that can lead to a new form of practice as well as to new ideas for architecture. I was very impressed by Gia’s awareness of this double articulation within her proposal and look forward to the combinations she makes of them.”

Zoë Ryan: “Gia Wolff’s experimental practice, which takes into account all scales of architecture, has resulted in a diverse and exciting range of work that aims to open up the discipline and foster new thinking and output based on ideas drawn from areas such as theater, installations, and temporary events. Gia’s manifold approach, based on in-depth research and analysis of social, cultural, and location-based practices, is exemplary of the types of work that can benefit from the Wheelwright fellowship, promoting exploration and discovery based on firsthand experiences made possible through travel.”

Jorge Silvetti: “Among the many excellent submissions, in Gia’s proposal I found the most accurate fulfillment of our expectations as to what this new expanded Wheelwright Prize should be and do: support an intense, prolonged journey to a specific place where the tools of the architect could be deployed to reveal new aspects of the relationships between society, place, and design. Gia’s startling originality in her choice of topic together with her unique set of artistic and technical talents opens new doors for architectural inquiry and experimentation. It takes our focus away from the most current and fashionable research topics and invites us, with great audacity, to delve into fresh and unexplored territories of the imagination.”
Winner’s Portfolio

**Stargazer**

Wolff’s Masters Thesis Project at Harvard GSD is a planetarium whose ground is a labyrinth in which the stars give direction. The building mediates the users’ experience between ground and sky. (Harvard GSD, 2008)

Photo Credit: Gia Wolff

**Stepping into the 21st Century**

As a project designer at Acconci Studio, Wolff designed an exhibition of fabric surfaces that twisted through the gallery and made pockets of spaces above and around the visitor. Projections passed through the fabric and allowed for multiple readings and re-readings of the work. (Pratt Manhattan Gallery, 2004)

Photo Credit: Acconci Studio
69°S

As architectural designer working with the Phantom Limb Company’s set designer Jessica Grindstaff, Wolff designed dynamic iceberg sets that were enormous three-dimensional monolithic forms at full height, and flat two-dimensional topographic drawings when contracted. (BAM Next Wave Festival, Brooklyn, 2011)

Photo Credit: Pavel Antonov, Phantom Limb Company

The Devil You Know

As architectural designer working with the Phantom Limb Company’s set designer Jessica Grindstaff, Wolff designed sets that rotated and hinged open to reveal a series of marionette stages. (La MaMa Experimental Theater, New York; 2009)

Photo Credit: Phantom Limb Company
**Boffo Pop-Up Store Competition**

Motivated by the idiosyncrasy that lingerie is simultaneously a constructed and natural form, the design for a pop-up store borrows from 17th-century French topiary gardens. Set as an enchanted garden, dioramas remove preconceived notions of who should wear lingerie. (Designed in collaboration with Sofia Krimizi and Jessica Grindstaff, 2011)

Photo Credit: Gia Wolff

---

**Portaali**

Finnish for “portal.” Portaali is a reference to the dock workers who occupied the Brooklyn waterfront buildings in the late 1800s. Wolff designed and fabricated an installation that is a 25-foot diameter circle situated at the edge of a three-sided courtyard and acts as a physical threshold between the buildings as well as a metaphorical portal between the real and the imaginary. (Exhibited as part of SUPERFRONT Gallery’s Public Summer Program, Sunset Park, Brooklyn, 2011)

Photo Credit: Gia Wolff
Fire Signs

For New York City’s Department of Transportation’s Renewable Times Square Competition, Wolff proposed painted street surfaces that appear as abstract shapes from the ground and read as dynamic words from the buildings above: AMAZE, THINGS, SOLID, REALLY, SHINY, EXTREME. The words’ ambiguity generates a world of discovery and meaning for each viewer. (New York, 2010)

Photo Credit: Gia Wolff

Ascensores Valparaiso

As project designer at LOT-EK, Wolff collaborated on an urban ideas proposal that rejuvenates the funiculares in Valparaiso, Chile. The proposal extends the tram lines to link the expanding residential neighborhoods above with the downtown below. The resulting structures are cultural conduits for transportation and people. (Exhibited at Museo de Arte Contemporáneo, Santiago, Chile, 2010)

Photo Credit: LOT-EK
Body Building and Flexed Spaces

As visiting assistant professor at Pratt Institute, Wolff taught an advanced design studio course that challenged students to consider whether a body can be a paradigm for a building. With a synaesthetic approach, the students developed structures around their bodies to create several micro environments. (Pratt Institute Undergraduate Architecture Department, 2012)

Photo Credit: Gia Wolff
### Past Wheelwright Prize Winners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Project Title</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Project Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007–2008</td>
<td>Carlos Arnaiz</td>
<td>Four Experiments in Urbanism: The Modern University City in Latin America</td>
<td>1988–89</td>
<td>Elizabeth A. Williams</td>
<td>Event, Place, Precedent: The Urban Festival in Western Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992–1993</td>
<td>Jeffrey A. Murphy</td>
<td>Housing Courtyards of the Amsterdam School</td>
<td>1970</td>
<td></td>
<td>Indeterminate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1973–1974  Klaus Herdeg
MAUD '64
1954–1955  Ferdinand Frederick Bruck
1955 Daniel Meyerson
MCP '49
1972–1973  Ozdemir Erginsav
MArch '61,
MAUD '63
1953–1954  Royal Alfred McClure
MArch '47
1945–1946  William Lindus Cody
Wheaton
1971–1972  Minoru Takeyama
MArch '60
1952–1953  William J. Conklin
MArch '50
MArch '63
1969–1970  Robert Kramer
MArch '60
1968–1969  Adele Marie de Souza Santos
MAUD '63
1951–1952  Frederick D. Holister
MArch '53
MArch '56
1950–1951  Ieoh Ming Pei
MArch '46
MArch '58
1950–1951  Ieoh Ming Pei
MArch '46
1965–1966  Peter Woytok
MArch '62
1949–1950  Henry Louis Horowitz
MArch '50
1964–1965  William Morgan
MArch '58
1949–1950  Henry Louis Horowitz
MArch '50
1963–1964  Paul Krueger
MArch '59
1949–1950  Henry Louis Horowitz
MArch '50
1962–1963  B. Frank Schlesinger
MArch '54
1948–1949  Vaughn Papworth
MCP '49
1961–1962  Albert Szabo
MArch '52
1948–1949  Vaughn Papworth
MCP '49
1960–1961  Donald Craig Freeman
MArch '57
1948–1949  Vaughn Papworth
MCP '49
1959–1960  John C. Haro
MArch '55
1948–1949  Vaughn Papworth
MCP '49
1958–1959  Paul Mitarachi
MArch '50
1948–1949  Vaughn Papworth
MCP '49
1957–1958  Don Hisaka
MArch '53
MCP '47
1956–1957  George F. Conley
BArch '53
1946–1947  Jean Paul Carlhian
MCP '47
1955–1956  Dolf Hermann Schnebli
MArch '54
1945–1946  William Lindus Cody
Wheaton
1944–1945  Robert William Blachnik
MArch '45
1944–1945  Robert William Blachnik
MArch '45
1943–1944  Christopher Tunnard
1942–1943  Albert Evans Simonson
1941–1942  Phillip Emile Joseph
1941–1942  Phillip Emile Joseph
1940–1941  Leonard James Currie
MArch '38
1939–1940  Eliot Fette Noyes
MArch '38
1938–1939  Walter H. Kilham, Jr.
MArch '28
1937–1938  Constantine A. Pertzoff
1936–1937  Newton Ellis Griffith
1936–1937  Newton Ellis Griffith
1935–1936  R. Prentice Bradley
MArch '33
1935–1936  R. Prentice Bradley
1932–1933  Walter Egan Trevett
1932–1933  Walter Egan Trevett
1932–1933  Walter Egan Trevett
1932–1933  Walter Egan Trevett
1932–1933  Walter Egan Trevett

For background on the Wheelwright Prize, please visit wheelwrightprize.org

The 2014 Wheelwright Prize will begin receiving applications in January 2014.

For more information about the Wheelwright Prize or access to high-resolution images for press purposes, please contact:

Cathy Lang Ho
cathy@CLHoffice.com
CLHoffice [editorial + curatorial projects]
New York, NY

OR

Benjamin Prosky
Assistant Dean for Communications
Harvard University
Graduate School of Design
Tel: 617 496 1069
bprosky@gsd.harvard.edu
WHEELWRIGHT
PRIZE