



***CFA Lab: Seeking Refuge and Making Home in NYC to Open
at the Center for Architecture***

November 16, 2023–March 23, 2024

The exhibition will feature Center for Architecture Lab’s 2023 residents, Kholisile Dhliwayo, A.L. Hu, and Karla Andrea Pérez, who present three visions of making, feeling, and being at home in the city.

November 14, 2023, New York, NY – The work of the three CFA Lab 2023 residents—Kholisile Dhliwayo, A.L. Hu, and Karla Andrea Pérez—will be on view November 16, 2023–March 23, 2024 at the Center for Architecture in the exhibition *CFA Lab: Seeking Refuge and Making Home in NYC*. The installation presents three visions of making, feeling, and being at home in the city, foregrounding stories of three communities central to urban life in New York City who have continuously grappled with the marginalization of their ways of life. Selected from over 50 applicants, Kholisile, Hu, and Pérez bring their unique insights based on research and co-creation with community partners.

“The 2023 cycle of CFA Lab is the first time since the program’s launch in 2021 that the residents have created physical installations in our home at LaGuardia Place,” says

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Jesse Lazar, Executive Director, AIA New York and the Center for Architecture. “We are proud to hand over our space to these three exciting voices, and look forward to welcoming visitors who may have never come into the Center for Architecture before,” adds Lazar. “The process of institutional collaboration that’s informed this project has already proven the initiative’s value, as we seek to bring lessons learned surrounding inclusivity, relationship building, and idea generation into all future versions of CFA Lab.”

Home is deeply ambivalent—at once a refuge and an oasis of freedom, it may also be a zone of containment and restriction. In this iteration of CFA Lab, the residents focused on home in New York City, in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, as the porous threshold between public and private, and personal and political, which has outsized ramifications on marginalized communities. *CFA Lab: Seeking Refuge and Making Home in NYC* presents ways in which groups and communities have created rich experiences and dreamworlds that go beyond shelter. In the exhibited work conceived and presented by the three residents, we encounter the idea of “being at home” extended into practices of claiming public space, creating community, and safeguarding the right to shelter and refuge.

Kholisile Dhliwayo, NCARB, ARBV, NSWARB, Principal Architect, Culture as Creative; Curator, [afrOURban](#); Curator, [Black Diasporas](#), will exhibit *Making Home: Affirming Black Diasporic Agency*, which considers the profound influence of diasporic cultures on shaping physical space. According to NCARB 2023 statistics, 3% of licensed architects in the US are Black, yet “generations of Black people living in New York City have affirmed the agency of Black communities in molding the built environment,” says Dhliwayo. “We often acknowledge the impact of cultures on the culinary landscape, but rarely do we consider their profound influence on shaping the physical spaces around us. This exhibition is a celebration of the liberatory cultural practice of making home,” adds Dhliwayo.

Making Home is a counter-narrative oral mapping project that celebrates the creativity and ingenuity of BIPOC communities as active agents that shape the city. The installation celebrates stories about Black life, including mundane everyday activities and acts of resistance, all of which shape the city we live in and its culture. Seven video screens feature interviews edited by Dhliwayo, as well as videography provided by the BlackDiasporas.com project. By centering Black voices across the five boroughs, the project prompts conversations about how we can collectively create a more inclusive and equitable built environment—fostering relationships and frameworks that affirm Black agency in the making of our city.

A.L. Hu, NOMA, NCARB, AIA, EcoDistricts AP, Design Initiatives Manager, [Ascendant Neighborhood Development](#), will exhibit *Queeries: Designing Reality Equitably and Madly (Q:DREAM)*, a research-creation process and queer data analysis project that seeks to queer the architectural discipline by “telling new (queer) stories of ‘home’ in new (queer) ways, which demand new modes of assessment and accountability,” explains Hu in their exhibition text. Gathering stories from queer communities over the past few months and throughout the course of the exhibition, Hu’s installation asserts that highlighting queer perspectives and expansive definitions of “home” is vital to address systemic impacts of queerphobia, both within and beyond the field of architecture.

Q:DREAM investigates historical and emerging sites and situations of queer architecture, activism, and community-building through highlighting existing projects and organizations, but the exhibition also encourages and necessitates community participation. Viewers are invited to write their story, take a selfie, and create a postcard from their future home to add to the installation. *Q:DREAM* will also hold public workshops for queer and trans collective visioning and dreaming, asking attendees to share their stories and experiences, and to reflect on them through collaging and model-building exercises. Quotes from the workshops, collages, and models will be added to the gallery. Over the course of the exhibition, visions of “home” dreamed up by participants will actively insert everyday queer and trans voices into the architectural discourse on “home.”

“The CFA Lab has been an incredible incubator for ideas and institutional processes. Collaborating with my fellow residents, Center for Architecture staff, and the curators has highlighted the importance of inclusive design practices that prioritize relationship-building over final product,” says Hu. “I wanted to work on Q:DREAM as a way to bring queer spatial perspectives to the forefront of architectural discourse, as well as create time and space for LGBTQIA+ folks to collectively dream about and manifest places that are designed to their desires—to question the rigidity of traditional design standards, and to queer architectural imagination. I have learned that there are infinite layers to the definition of ‘home,’ and that impact can be measured through deepening connections. I am excited to continue this work with CFA Lab!”

Karla Andrea Pérez, CCCP Candidate, Columbia GSAPP; Co-Director, Manhatitlan, will exhibit *Undocumented*, a project to document the existing homes of individuals who live with the status of “undocumented” in the New York City area through video, photography, and interviews. “As it stands there are over 11 million undocumented

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immigrants residing in the United States of America coming from all parts of the world,” Pérez reminds us in her exhibition text. “As a sanctuary city, NYC has been positioned to experience these shifts, most recently with the migrant crisis.” This population lives between worlds, with the threat and expectation of removal and violence. Pérez asks, how is this in-between reality reflected in the interiority and spatialization of the home, if at all?

Undocumented doesn't aestheticize or romanticize the featured homes, but rather presents them as a platform for self-advocacy. The installation includes photo albums meant to create a sense of familiarity that connects us all. Visitors are invited to hold and interact with the albums as a way to acknowledge and experience these families' presence. Pérez offers visitors an invitation into the participants' homes, expanding the conversation on how to document the undocumented.

CFA Lab: Seeking Refuge and Making Home in NYC is curated by **Vyjayanthi V. Rao, PhD**, Visiting Professor, Yale School of Architecture, and Co-Editor in Chief, *Public Culture*, with **Matthew Bremer, AIA**, Founder, Architecture in Formation; 2023 President, AIA New York.

The residents will also have opportunities to continue the dialogue around their work through public programs during the length of the exhibition and beyond. The exhibition opening will take place Thursday, November 16, 2023, 6–8pm, at the Center for Architecture. All are welcome! Registration details at calendar.aiany.org.

ABOUT THE RESIDENTS

Kholisile Dhliwayo, NCARB, ARBV, NSWARB, Principal Architect, Culture as Creative; Curator, [afrOURban](#); Curator, [Black Diasporas](#), is an African-Australian creative working between Naarm-Melbourne and Manahatta-NYC. His work explores the symbiotic relationship between diasporic cultures and the built environment. His research and practice focus on modalities and frameworks that affirm community agency in place and space making. Dhliwayo works across multiple disciplines, including oral narrative, filmmaking, exhibition, interior design, the built environment, and mapping. He is in the final year of the Master of Design Studies research program at the Harvard Graduate School of Design. He is a registered architect in the District of Columbia and Connecticut State, as well as New South Wales and Victoria, Australia.

A.L. Hu, NOMA, NCARB, AIA, EcoDistricts AP, Design Initiatives Manager, Ascendant Neighborhood Development, is a transgenderqueer Taiwanese-American

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architect, activist, and organizer. Their interdisciplinary practice synthesizes organizing for racial, class, and gender justice with world-building and spatial planning; queers the architect's role in facilitating accessible spaces; and manifests in design, visual media, cartographies, events, and collaborative cultural work. Hu was a 2019-2021 Enterprise Rose Architectural Fellow and they are currently Design Initiatives Manager at Ascendant Neighborhood Development in East Harlem. They are a core member of Design as Protest and Dark Matter U. Hu provides brainpower and energy for Queeries, an ongoing community-building design-queering initiative for and by LGBTQIA+ architects and designers.

Karla Andrea Pérez, CCCP Candidate, Columbia GSAPP; Co-Director, Manhatitlan is a first-generation Mexican-American designer, researcher, and folkloric dancer. She received her BFA in Interior Design from the New York Institute of Technology and is currently pursuing her MS in Critical Curatorial and Conceptual studies in Architecture at Columbia University. Her work acknowledges the gaps in historic archival representation of overlooked, often misrepresented minority community spaces, with a particular focus on the Mexican immigrant and Mexican-American communities in New York City, drawing from her upbringing in Queens. She has focused on community programming experiences that reclaim public space by using dance and installations as tools of empowerment. Pérez is always looking for ways to collectively bring forward these narratives through active collaboration, community engagement, and cultural organizing.

ABOUT CENTER FOR ARCHITECTURE LAB

Center for Architecture Lab is a multi-month, multi-disciplinary residency program that offers new voices in architecture and design full authorship over dedicated areas of the Center for Architecture's platforms, allowing them to develop and share compelling and provocative content meant to elevate underrepresented perspectives. Created in response to the destabilizing forces of the global COVID-19 pandemic and reinvigorated racial justice movement in the United States, Center for Architecture Lab programming invites a greater diversity of professionals to participate in the fields of architecture and design and encourages our community to consider new perspectives, critical questions, and innovative solutions to systemic problems.

In April 2023, the Center for Architecture launched an open call inviting individuals and collectives to participate in this year's cycle of the CFA Lab. Applicants were asked to respond to the idea of "home," a concept that can take on many different forms and meanings, especially in post-COVID New York City. Since the onset of the pandemic,

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our relationship with domesticity has changed, as our homes took on multi-functional roles, blurring the lines between residential and professional spaces. But while the pandemic made universal the collapsing of domestic and public spaces, for many communities, especially marginalized groups, the boundaries between home and the outside world have always been in flux. For these groups, home may not be a guaranteed place of comfort and domesticity; they may have to search outside the confines of a traditional residence to find a sense of home.

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About the Center for Architecture

The Center for Architecture is the premier cultural venue for architecture and the built environment in New York City, informed by the complexity of the City's urban fabric and in dialogue with the global community. The Center shares a home with the AIA New York Chapter and has the unique advantage of drawing upon the ideas and experiences of practicing architects to produce thought-provoking exhibitions, informative public programs, and quality design education experiences for K-12 students. It also leads New York City's annual month-

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long architecture and design festival, Archtober. The Center for Architecture's aim is to further public knowledge about New York City architecture and architects, foster exchange and collaboration among members of the design, development, building, scholarly, and policy sectors, and inspire new ideas about the role of design in communities by presenting contemporary and practical issues in architecture and urbanism to a general audience.

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