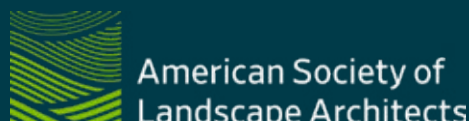


EMERGENCE

ASLA Associate Advisory Committee's Newsletter

June 2020



Watching the World Burn

Kene Okigbo, ASLA - Past Assoc. Advisory Committee Chair

According to Greek lore, Prometheus stole fire from the gods and shared it with man. Over the years fire has been interpreted often as a metaphor for knowledge, wisdom, and understanding. Prometheus was under no obligation, but shared the flame because he saw the good it would eventually bring to humanity.

As landscape architects we design the public realm - which we are seeing being commandeered and misused for the murder of our common man. I keep thinking about how many curb details I've drawn in my short career, and how I never imaged that a life would be cut short 36 inches away from one, thinking especially of George Floyd and James Scurlock.



A mural of George Floyd, near the spot where he died while in police custody, in Minneapolis, Minnesota. / AP Photo. Beбето Matthews

Few of us think about the extreme misuse of the spaces we design, but if you subscribe to the manifesto by the WAI Think Tank, you would be less surprised. In [Un-Making Architecture: An Anti-Racist Architecture Manifesto](#) the think tank states, "Buildings are never just buildings. Buildings respond to the political foundations of the institutions that fund, envision, and desire them. Buildings are physical manifestations of the ideologies they serve." Reading this, I have to draw the conclusion that landscapes and urban environments operate under the same rules. When reading [The Bottom: The Emergence and Erasure of Black American Urban Landscapes](#) by Ujiji Davis and after internalizing the history of [Tulsa's Black Wall Street](#), it's clear that historically, black landscapes have not mattered. It seems evident that time after time black art, space, and people have been systematically removed from the shared narrative. But I haven't completely sunk into pessimism just yet.

These same writings ignite a slight spark in me because they are more complete continuations of our shared narrative. Professor Kofi Boone continues adding to the story in his Ground Up Journal article, [Black Landscapes Matter](#). He lays out 8 propositions which we should each take to heart. I encourage you to seek these out and read.

If I could make a request of emerging professionals, it would be to be like Prometheus. Dive into the subjects/causes you are passionate about and share them with people around you. Educate them. Advocate on behalf of the silenced voice. Venture to take the road less travelled by learning the fuller version of the story.

If our role is to design the public realm and to protect the health, safety, and welfare of our fellow humans, then it is also our responsibility to be cognizant of the systemic influences which direct our decision making. Implicit bias, racism, sexism, gender discrimination, and much more permeate our designs. We have to go beyond writing, "this space was designed for all people to come together" in our award submittals and design briefs. I hope you'll take an implicit bias test. Dive into this recommended [reading list](#). Engage with [Movement for Black Lives](#). After reading these articles and engaging in these conversations, I have never been more interested in learning where funding dollars for projects come from.

"... (B)e like Prometheus. Dive into the subjects/causes you are passionate about and share them with people around you. Educate them. Advocate on behalf of the silenced voice."

It would be disingenuous of me to not talk about the second half of the tale of Prometheus. Zeus discovered the treachery and made an example of him. Prometheus was bound by chains and forced to endure an intense torture for eternity. At least that's where the story usually ends, but there are two more parts to it. The first: He is eventually saved by the hero Heracles. The second, I would argue, is more important. Because they had fire, humans were able to build great cities, invent new technologies, and discover lifesaving medicine. Art and culture developed because of sharing the flame.

Design for the New Emerging Professionals Honor

Earlier this year, ASLA announced the Emerging Professional Medal, a new honor that recognizes the outstanding and innovative contributions of emerging leaders in the field. In support of this new honor, we are launching a medal design contest!

The purpose of this contest is to design a medal for the inaugural ASLA Emerging Professionals Honor. The winning design of this medal will have a long-lasting impact within the Society, and is expected to be used for the foreseeable future. Entries are [now being accepted](#). For official contest rules, [click here](#). The deadline for submissions is Friday, July 10.

Getting Involved on a Committee

Over the next several weeks, President-elect Thomas Mroz, FASLA, will be considering appointments for committee service during his term as ASLA president (October 6, 2020–November 23, 2021). To volunteer for service on one or more of the committees, please fill out [the committee appointment form](#). Please share this with your chapter members. Application deadline is July 24.

Looking Ahead

June 25, 4 pm ET - [Virtual LGBTQIA Pride Month Happy Hour!](#)
July 10 - Emerging Professional Honor Medal Design Deadline
July 24 - Committee Appointment Application Deadline

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