

Questions and Answers for/from the SESAH Scholarship Recipient Danielle Willkens

I'm sure you've been to SAH many times, how was this year different?

As the recipient of SESAH's SAH Annual International Conference Fellowship, I had the fortune of attending the 71st Annual SAH International Conference in Saint Paul, Minnesota in April. Despite an unexpected snowstorm, the conference attracted a global cohort who, over the course of several days, were able to explore the architecture of the Twin Cities and attend papers sessions as well as several other workshops, meetings, and roundtables. The forty-eight paper sessions were condensed into two days (Thursday and Friday), unlike past SAH conferences that typically featured paper sessions on Saturday morning. With this adjustment, the conference accommodated two days of preconference events as well as tours on both Saturday and Sunday and the Saint Paul Seminar on Saturday. For those interested, the full program is available [here](#).

This year, SAH was truly a global and multifaceted event, with a diversity of session speakers, ranging from those in academia to architects, conservationists, museum professionals, post-graduate students, and many others. In particular, there were a number of diverse voices, in terms of both presenters and subject matter, cultivating a more inclusive conference that went beyond canon-driven studies to examine more deeply the architectural contributions of previously-overlooked females and designers of color as well as workmen and women. In comparison to previous years, there also seemed to be a greater range of time periods and geographic regions represented in content and authorship.

The exhibit space was active throughout the conference, complete with much appreciated coffee and tea, and as a venue, the Saint Paul RiverCentre provided comfortable meeting rooms as well as several convenient, open spaces for serendipitous conversations and catch-ups.

Where did you "see" the SESAH region at SAH this year (papers, etc.)?

SESAH was well-represented, through both paper topics on the architecture of the southeast and presenters from SESAH's twelve states. With concurrent sessions, it was impossible to hear all of the fascinating papers, but a survey of the program illustrates that SESAH was certainly well represented in the Graduate Student Lightning Talks and Paper Sessions:

Graduate Student Lightning Talks

- "A Monument's Message: The Politics of Preservation in Moldova" by Rachel Rettaliata, The University of Texas at Austin, USA
- "Brutiful Brum: Brutalism and Preservation in Birmingham, England" by Kelsey Dootson, University of Virginia

Papers:

Session (organized as per the SAH program)	Paper
Alternative Histories of the Pavilion	"The Temporalities of Lundy's Inflatable AEC Pavilion" Susanneh Bieber, Texas A&M
Climatic Landscapes	"Unnatural Sunlight: Projects of the Early Anthropocene" Thomas Forget, University of North Carolina at Charlotte
Histories of Architecture Against	Ghostly Fragments: Tracing the Architecture of Anti-apartheid Aspiration Sharone Tomer, Virginia Tech "Persistence, Meaning and the Working Class: The Theatre of the Coal Miners of Lota, Chile" Magdalena Novoa, University of Texas at Austin
Designing Homo sapiens: Architecture, Environment, and the Human Sciences	Philosophical Anthropology and Postmodernist Architectural Discourse Joseph Bedford, Virginia Tech
Constructing Memory in Ancient and Pre-Modern Architecture	Literary Nostalgia in the Fifth-Century Forum of Trajan, Gregor Kalas, University of Tennessee
Architectural Preservation in Asia	Making Preservation Relevant: Culture as a Tool for Urban Revival Priya Jain, Texas A&M University
Medieval Structures, Digital Tools, and Architectural Knowledge	Holy Land Architecture, Virtual Reconstruction, and Embodied Experience Kathryn Blair Moore, Texas State University
Working with Mr. Gilbert: Cass Gilbert and His Collaborators	Visualizing the Woolworth Building with Scalar at Vanderbilt, Mary Anne Caton, Vanderbilt University Library
Colonial Past in the Neo-Colonial Present	Colonial Carcerality and the Neocolonial Indian Prison, Mira Rai Waits, Appalachian State University British Colonial Singapore Today: Post-colony or Neo-colony? Nathan Bullock, Duke University
Visualizing Ruined Asias	Mood and Meaning in Ruins: Revisiting Deserted Settlements of Turkish Cypriots in South Cyprus Bahar Aktuna, University of Florida

Queer History at the Intersection	Gendering Furness or Fashioning the Grotesque in Philadelphia Jason Crow, Louisiana State University
A Matter of Life and Death: Spaces for Healing in the Premodern Era	Healing the City: Medicine and Urban Renewal in Sixtus IV's Rome Johanna Heinrichs, University of Kentucky Uterus House: Incubating Obstetrics in Early Modern Bologna Kim Sexton, University of Arkansas
Temporal Junctures	Biennale di Venezia: Transforming the Permanent with the Ephemeral Phoebe Crisman, University of Virginia
Cold War Architecture	Between Today and Tomorrow: Bridging the Diomedes Andrew Wasserman, University of North Carolina at Greensboro

Several sessions were either chaired by researchers from the SESAH region and/or focused on the architecture of the south:

Session (organized as per the SAH program) and chair(s)	Paper(s)
Life to Architecture: Uncovering Women's Narratives Anna P. Sokolina, International Archive of Women in Architecture Paola Zellner, Virginia Tech,	The Professional Couple in Histories of American Modernism Kevin Murphy, Vanderbilt University Mary Anne Hunting, Independent Scholar Network as Process: Flora Ruchat-Roncati's Modes of Practice Irina Davidovici, ETH Zürich and Katrin Albrecht, ETH Zürich Hilde Reiss: A Narrative of Teaching, Consultancy and Curatorship Erin McKellar, Boston University Reclaiming the Work of Women Architects in Mandatory Palestine Sigal Davidi, Tel Aviv University, Israel Uncovering Her Archive: Ayla Karacabey in Postwar Architecture Meral Ekincioglu, Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Modern Architecture and the Rise of the New South Lee E. Gray, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, USA Virginia Price, Independent Scholar	Race, Larry Halprin, and the Retreat from Modernism in Atlanta Matthew Lasner, Hunter College, CUNY Race, Modernism and Architectural Identity at Virginia Union University, Bryan Clark Green, Commonwealth Architects Site Stories: Modern Churches, Politics, and Social Justice, Ann Marie Borys, University of Washington

<p>Architecture and Disability Sun-Young Park, George Mason University</p>	<p>Modernity and Relief: Burnham Hoyt’s Boettcher School Justin Fowler, Princeton University</p> <p>Air or Access: Spaces for Children with Physical Disabilities Laurin Goad, Pennsylvania State University, USA</p> <p>Remodeling to Stay Home: An Architectural History of Aging in Place Chad Randl, University of Oregon,</p> <p>Architectural Heritage, Disabled Access, and the Memory Landscape Wanda Liebermann, Florida Atlantic University</p>
<p>Reconsidering Renaissance Architecture and Urbanism Carla Keyvanian, Auburn University</p>	<p>The Classical as Colonial Legitimation: Inigo Jones, Stonehenge, and the Transfer of Civility Aaron White, Columbia University, USA</p> <p>Viewing Renaissance Architecture in/from Turkey Sevil Enginsoy Ekinci, Middle East Technical University, Turkey</p> <p>Stereotomy: A Mediterranean History, Sara Galletti, Duke University,</p> <p>Rethinking Tuscan Landscape History Giulio Giovannoni, Università degli Studi di Firenze</p>
<p>Architectures of the Slave Economy: Past and Present Patrick D. Haughey, Savannah College of Art and Design</p>	<p>Unearthing Anguish: Tracing and Curating Charleston’s Slave Trade Sites, Nathaniel Robert Walker, The College of Charleston</p> <p>Identifying Slave Craftsmen and Their Building Projects: A Case Study from Charleston, SC Barry Stiefel, College of Charleston</p> <p>“Negro Artisans” at Work: The Tuskegee Institute Campus as Object Lesson, Maura Lucking, University of California, Los Angeles</p> <p>Fingerprints in the Clay: Chattahoochee Brick and the History of Convict Slavery in Atlanta Richard Becherer, Southern Polytechnic State University</p>

In addition to representing SESAH as a member and faculty member at Auburn University, I also had the privilege of presenting on behalf of the Society of Architectural Historians of Great Britain (SAHGB). I co-chaired a session entitled “The Audience for Architectural History in the 21st Century” with Dr Jonathan Kewley from the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England. This collaborative session welcomed five international scholars from private architectural practice, historic preservation, museum studies, and the academy; thereby, actualizing the aspiration for a diverse panel as articulated in our initial call for papers. In conjunction with the paper session and as an extension of research endeavors through the SAHGB, Jonathan and I also led a roundtable, entitled “Essential Skills for the Architectural

Historian.” Today’s historians are fortunate to have a wealth of digital resources at their fingertips, from databases to archives to documentation and dissemination tools. However, to the extent that these tools cultivate the potential of our field, they simultaneously build factions within the discipline due to technological divides in skill level as well as the price of access to select databases, hardware, and software. This session addressed the questions: (1) how does the 21st century architectural historian address these growing divisions while cultivating essential skills, in school and in practice and (2) what are the essential skills, and tools, of the architectural historian, and (3) how can academic and professional training augment these skills in practice? The conversation was lively and inquisitive, with an interesting exploration of the need for and metrics associated with evaluating the ‘professionalization’ of the architectural historian, especially due to projects associated with governmental funding, tax incentives, and private sector interests.

Did you see any good buildings while you were in Minnesota?

The SAH Awards Reception, Ceremony, and Plenary Talk at the Landmark Center was a phenomenal opportunity to explore the Richardsonian Romanesque structure by Willoughby J. Edbrooke. A restoration in the 1970s transformed the 1902 federal building into a cultural center, complete with a breathtaking four-story atrium as well as offices and exhibitions tucked into the former courtrooms.

Unable to stay for the SAH-led tour of the structures by Marcel Breuer & Associates at [Saint John’s Abbey and University](#) (1958-1961) on Sunday, I was able to take an independent excursion on Saturday with mentor, former professor, and fellow SAH conference presenter Phoebe Crisman, Associate Professor and Director of the Global Sustainability Minor at the University of Virginia. We were fortunate to have the church to ourselves on the quiet Saturday morning, allowing us to slowly and carefully explore the myriad patterns of the *beton brut*, the hand-painted stained glass within the honeycomb concrete structure of the sanctuary’s northern wall, and the details within trapezoidal nave and cantilevered gallery. The building is one of the most incredible examples of light and pattern that I have ever had the opportunity to see in person.

Across from the church, the concrete trees of the Alcuin Library (1964-66) created a truly serene place, transforming the waffle slab into a perforated canopy. The recently unveiled addition and renovation condensed the stacks and transformed the space into a more fluid reading room, with the addition of a glazed series of study bays and a terrace that overlooks the pastoral surroundings of Collegeville.

Bio

Dr Danielle S. Willkens, Associate AIA, FRSA, LEED AP BD+C, is an Assistant Professor of Architecture at Auburn University’s School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape Architecture. She has practice experiences in design/build, public installations, heritage documentation, and extensive archival work in several countries. Most recently, she was the

recipient of the [Society of Architectural Historians' H. Allen Brooks Travelling Fellowship](#). Between June 2016 and May 2017, she traveled to Iceland, the Faroe Islands, Cuba, and Japan to research the impact of tourism on cultural heritage sites. Building on time as a historical interpreter at Monticello and a Sir John Soane Museum Travelling Fellow, she pursued a PhD at UCL's Bartlett School of Architecture and her manuscript is in development for publication with the University of Virginia Press: *The Transatlantic Design Network: Jefferson, Soane, and agents of architectural exchange, 1768-1838*. Thus far her research has been supported by grants from Auburn University, Sir John Soane's Museum Foundation, the Society of Architectural Historians of Great Britain, and a Franklin Research Grant from the American Philosophical Society, as well as two short-term research fellowships from the International Center for Jefferson Studies.