

Candidacy for the Cumulus Executive Board VII 2022-2025

Merav Perez

1.

Last September, I traveled with five of my graduate students to the Salone del Mobile in Milan to present their projects in the "Lost Graduation Show" in Rho Fiera. Due to the pandemic, the event was smaller than usual and more reflective. Among the commercial stalls, a few arenas accommodated talks and panels. One of the talks was held by Alejandro Aravena, the Chilean architect, who chose a non-conventional format: Instead of lecturing or discussing case studies, he invited the small audience to engage in direct dialogue.

He sat on the stage in front of a slide that boldly asked: "So, how will we live together?" The small audience responded, commented and interacted in an unmediated session. One of the strong observations that arose from the discussion was that we are now in transition from the famous Modernist motto "Less is more" to a period of "More or less." That is, we are moving from a rigid ideological agenda to a pluralistic arena where different actors are in a constant state of dialogue and debate about resources, beliefs and communal processes. In the rather empty halls of the Rho Fiera, the question echoed in the air long after the session ended.

2.

As an academic leader, department head and founder of diverse collaborative design projects, and as someone from the Middle East, I would like to bring such questions to the Cumulus community. I view this global network as an effective and fruitful arena for examining ideas and beliefs, and for spawning and fostering new ones. We can use our power as a community, or as an ecosystem with micro communities and ad-hoc alliances, to promote the practice and discourse in our field.

Together, we can really delve into the question of how we can live together – as academics from different national, geographic and cultural backgrounds; and as researchers and practitioners living in turbulent times, when urgent action is required

to sustain democratic regimes and our natural environment. Moreover, as an educator from a less privileged part of the global community, where human rights and democracy have yet to be firmly established, I believe that imagination is a key part of the answer to the question: “So, how will we live together?”

3.

During two decades of pioneering social and co-design processes, I have focused on bringing people together and using the pragmatic nature of design as a productive meeting point. As part of this effort, I have founded, managed and documented a wide range of projects: working with underserved communities; collaborating with craftspeople in Israel and Palestine in the GoGlobal project; bringing together designers, architects and social activists in working groups at the MAXXI Museum in Rome; inaugurating new cohorts and tracks for design and engineering students; and other activities.

In each of these initiatives, there were always naysayers who insisted, “They won’t come, you’ll see. This is not going to happen. They’ll never collaborate, or even sit in the same room. There’s no chance this will succeed.”

For a moment, their skepticism made me doubt the viability of these initiatives. But even when I started to feel discouraged and got “cold feet,” I was stubborn enough to stick to the original plan. Eventually, people always came, and even collaborated. For some, it was a life-changing event; for others, a collaboration to be remembered. But they always came. Not even once were the pessimists correct in their dark predictions.

4.

My CV and recommendations provide a wider picture of my activity – locally and internationally. I have lived, lectured, chaired and held workshops in different cultures and countries, and I am fluent in four languages. If selected to serve on the executive board of Cumulus, I would bring two decades of academic leadership and managerial experience, along with a strong vision of the future of design education and a rare ability to see both the “big picture” and the smallest details.

I look forward to making a significant impact as a board member by creating new possibilities for others and contributing to the growth of the Cumulus community – geographically and intellectually.

So, how will we live together?

I think that we, as Cumulus, can establish the foundation for discussing this question. Moreover, we can create a safe space where we can give free rein to our imaginations, allowing them to soar in less common and unexpected directions. It may be difficult, but we must live together – we, the people, the trees, the earth.

I encourage those of you who share this hope and vision to endorse my candidacy.

Merav Perez

Head of the Industrial Design Department

Shenkar - Engineering. Design. Art.

meravper@shenkar.ac.il

+972 (0) 544 505924