



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE

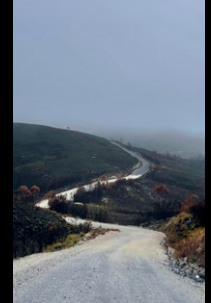
Faculty of
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Attrium



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From the Dean Julie Willis

It is my pleasure to introduce the latest edition of *Atrium*. The first half of 2025 has been a whirlwind of activity, filled with thought-provoking events, inspiring exhibitions, and engaging discussions that have enriched our community and pushed the boundaries of design thinking.



It is my pleasure to introduce the latest edition of *Atrium*. The first half of 2025 has been a whirlwind of activity, filled with thought-provoking events, inspiring exhibitions, and engaging discussions that have enriched our community and pushed the boundaries of design thinking.

We started the year with the launch of the exhibition *Edible Urban Futures* (p06). Curated by Professor Justyna Karakiewicz and Mr Theo Blankley, it asked how cities can feed their growing populations sustainably in a changing world.

In March, we welcomed international guest speakers Associate Professor Claudio Rossi and Associate Professor Daniela Atencio to deliver the first Dean's Lecture of the year. In it, they discussed how machines can work with the natural environment, instead of against it, to create alternative methods of caring for and restoring the land. Our second Dean's Lecture in May featured African housing and sustainability expert, Fatou Kiné Dieye, who unpacked the future of the green construction sector in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The Faculty came alive during Melbourne Design Week, when we hosted a range of talks and workshops alongside the launch of Catherine Griffiths: *Out of Line*, the largest exhibition of the Aotearoa New Zealand artist's work in Australia to-date. It featured new and archival pieces from the internationally renowned graphic designer including a stunning site-specific installation.

In May I travelled to Venice for the 19th International Architecture Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia, where I was proud to see works from our staff, including those from Associate Professor Peter Raisbeck, Dr Andrew Martel, Dr Kirsten Day and Professor Alex Felson. Professor Felson led the *Song of the Cricket* installation at La Biennale (pXX), an exhibit that is part ecological research and part living artwork, that raises awareness of the endangered Adriatic Marbled Bush-Cricket while offering tangible solutions for habitat rehabilitation.

Elsewhere in this issue of *Atrium*, we delve into the stories of our remarkable alumni, students, and academics, showcasing the diverse range of work and research happening across our Faculty.

With an international lens, we explore the Faculty's focus on Africa and the collaborative impact of our work (p16) and share the experience of students delivering projects to communities in rural Thailand (p12).

Closer to home, recent architecture graduate Bella Argyrou takes us on a fascinating journey through the hidden stories of Melbourne's unmapped underground (p08). While Master of Landscape student Ysabelle Lane shares her insights on the uncertain future of north-west Tasmania's ghost towns (p10). Finally, alumni Tony Luo shares his passion for creating sustainable, livable cities (p14).

Looking ahead, we'll soon be launching *MSDx Winter 2025*; a vivid exhibition of student projects that are conceptual, experimental, sometimes messy – but always meaningful. We hope to see you there.

I hope you enjoy this issue of *Atrium* and wish you the very best for the second half of this exciting year.



When the song returns: Designing for an ancient lagoon's future

— IMOGEN CRADDOCK KANDEL

On the quiet edges of the Venice lagoon, something extraordinary is beginning to hum back to life. At the 19th International Architecture Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia, a team of designers, ecologists, engineers and sound artists from across the University of Melbourne, together with Italian entomologists, is orchestrating a comeback – not for a grand piece of architecture designed for humans but for a fundamental building block of nature, the cricket.

Song of the Cricket is both ecological initiative and living artwork. At its heart is the Adriatic Marbled Bush-Cricket, a once-abundant but now critically endangered insect whose soft, rhythmic calls were formally a soundtrack to summer nights along the Adriatic coast. Its loss, driven by habitat degradation over the past century, has left more than silence. It has undone part of the ecological fabric that sustained this unique urban lagoon.

A unique team

Led by landscape architect and ecologist Professor Alex Felson from the Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning, the Song of the Cricket combines floating, mobile habitats with a sound installation developed by Associate Professor Miriama Young from the Faculty of Fine Arts and Music. Together they hope to bring the

cricket's lost song back to Venice. However, the exhibit is far more than a piece of commentary.

The genesis of Song of the Cricket can be traced to the work of School of BioScience's Professor Michael Kearney and Professor Ary Hoffmann, who trialled small scale reintroductions of grasshoppers at Royal Park in Melbourne. Professor Theresa Jones, also from the School, worked with Felson and his team on transferring the learnings from the Royal Park trial into a Venetian context.

"Studies such as the Song of the Cricket provide a unique opportunity to showcase a potentially endangered species within the habitat it needs to survive," Jones says. "People have probably 'heard' crickets before, but this allows them to immerse themselves in the sounds, the sights and,

if they get close enough, the smells. This is so important because it takes a village to solve the monumental problem of biodiversity loss and these deeper immersive connections are what we need to ensure everyone does their bit."

The Faculty of Engineering and Technology (FEIT), together with industry partner ARUP, led the development of a cutting edge geospatial study to support the translocation of the endangered cricket.

This research revealed critical patterns of land use and climate change affecting cricket habitats, enabling the identification of promising restoration zones.

"This project shows the power of true interdisciplinary collaboration. Engineers, artists, ecologists, and bioscientists working side by side to achieve outcomes



LEFT TO RIGHT: PROFESSOR ALEX FELSON HOLDING A CARRIER OF ENDANGERED CRICKETS; AN ADRIATIC MARBLED BUSH-CRICKET HABITAT INSTALLATION; PREPARING THE FLOATING HABITATS ON THE VENICE LAGOON





AN ARTIST'S RENDER OF THE SONG OF THE CRICKET INSTALLATION HELD ON THE SITE OF A 16TH CENTURY VENETIAN SHIPYARD.

none of us could have delivered alone," says Associate Professor Jagannath Aryal, who specialises in Earth observation and spatial information.

Associate Professor Alice Kesminas, who also worked on FEIT's contribution to the project, agrees. "It reminded us that data tells a more complete story when interpreted through multiple lenses – it's a model for how we should approach complex challenges."

Foundations of a food web

The Adriatic Marbled Bush-Cricket is flightless, tiny, and seldom seen. According to a [study](#) by the International Union for Conservation of Nature, its habitat has shrunk to a mere 0.57 km². The cricket lives for only a few months, never moving more than 10 metres from where it hatches.

"This is a reintroduction strategy," explains Felton. "We're not just working to save one species; we're rebuilding the base of a food web. Crickets are food for birds, reptiles, amphibians and small mammals. Without them, the associated food webs are fragmented."

Graduate landscape architect and research assistant on Song of the Cricket, Harrison Baxter explains how the cricket plays a key role in a fragile ecosystem under enormous pressure.

"Because they don't travel far, they're extremely susceptible to disruption," says Baxter. "Something as routine as mowing reeds where they've laid eggs can wipe out an entire population."

Yet it's precisely this fragility that makes the cricket such a potent symbol for the wider ecological health of the lagoon. In fact, Felton's research into urban food webs has revealed this species plays a vital role in supporting biodiversity.

A living experiment

Song of the Cricket is a designed experiment – an approach pioneered by Felton to embed research into public-facing urban interventions. Six cricket enclosures and three mobile habitats, each with different levels of vegetation diversity, will test which environment is best for rearing crickets. The goal is not just to protect, but to learn how to scale habitat rehabilitation.

"These aren't static displays, they're experiments with consequences," says Baxter.

The crickets were collected from an area near the Venice lagoon and will be housed temporarily in containers at the Biennale where visitors can see and hear them. Researchers hope the crickets will breed and that their eggs can then be relocated to sites within the lagoon, building toward self-sustaining populations.

The floating islands themselves are mobile, designed to be transported by boat to suitable reintroduction sites within the lagoon. Their compact design demonstrates how even modest interventions can support real ecological restoration.

This idea sits squarely within the emerging field of action science and species translocations to support food web rehabilitation. Intentional food web construction in conservation zones around cities is still rare but growing. Their vision encourages "learning-by-doing" design prototypes, exactly the ethos behind Song of the Cricket.

Poetic ecology

Inherently multi-disciplinary, the exhibit combines science with the architecture of sound. Young's team uses a blend of natural, interactive, and synthesised elements to bring the cricket's song to life.

"Antonio Vivaldi's Venice was once alive with the sounds of nature. This project re-imagines a healthy bioacoustic environment, and develops synergies in ecological art practice through architectures of sound and sustainability," Young says.

As cities around the world grapple with climate change, habitat loss, and biodiversity decline, Song of the Cricket offers a hopeful alternative: one that combines aesthetics, ecology, and local community in a shared project of repair.



**It's not just about crickets...
It's about the kind of cities
we want to live in and
whether we can continue
to support the wildlife that
calls them home."**

- Professor Alex Felton

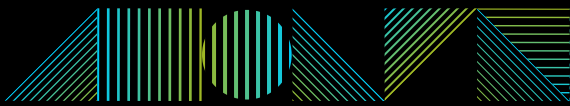
From Melbourne to Venice and back again

While the project is deeply embedded in the Venetian context, its implications reach far beyond. "We're already applying the same thinking in Melbourne," says Baxter. "There's a great pollinator corridor down in Port Phillip and Bayside that's using similar microhabitats to support insect life. If we want birds in our cities, we need to start with bugs."

Felton believes the modular, reproducible nature of the mobile cricket habitats opens possibilities for broader adoption. "Could these life rafts serve as a reminder that humans have the capacity to repair our fragmented ecosystems? Could these artistic designs educate people around conservation and habitat rehabilitation in the face of climate change? Absolutely. That's the dream – when ecological repair becomes part of everyday life."



Edible Urban Futures





How can cities feed their growing populations sustainably in a changing world?

Edible Urban Futures, curated by Professor Justyna Karakiewicz and Mr Theo Blankley, invited visitors to explore bold, creative proposals for one of the most urgent challenges of our time: urban food security.

The exhibition showcased cutting-edge ideas from the University of Melbourne's 2024 Edible Urban Futures winter intensive, where over 110 students and academics from 10 countries collaborated to rethink how design, architecture, and urban planning can transform the way we produce, access, and share food in cities.

IMAGE CREDIT: JORDAN KAYE

From urban agriculture innovations to Indigenous practices and climate-responsive design, the exhibition revealed how the next generation of designers is tackling food insecurity with local action and global insights.



The art of darkness: Melbourne's subterranean secrets

— IMOGEN CRADDOCK KANDEL



In the heart of Melbourne's bustling CBD, an unassuming corner hides a gateway to a labyrinth of abandoned tunnels and subterranean passages. This is the realm that recent Master of Architecture graduate Bella Argyrou has uncovered and reimagined through her aptly titled thesis project *The Art of Darkness*.

Argyrou's journey into Melbourne's subterranean depths began on a construction site. "We started digging our basement, and when we were digging, we hit this underground tunnel," she recalls. "I was kind of shocked because how did we not know that was already there?" This encounter sparked her curiosity, leading her down a rabbit hole of research into Melbourne's hidden underground network.

What Argyrou uncovered was a vast, intricate system of tunnels snaking beneath the city's surface – remnants of old sewers, creeks, and even rumored secret societies. "I started finding out all these stories," she says. "There were myths of serial killers and bodies being buried in these tunnels, but there were also stories of secret societies being held underneath Parliament."

Determined to unravel these mysteries, Argyrou embarked on a quest to locate the elusive maps and records detailing the underground labyrinth. Her search led her to the State Library of Victoria, where she pored over sealed documents under tight security, piecing together a comprehensive map of the subterranean world.

The Art of Darkness envisions the transformation of these forgotten tunnels into a series of immersive cultural hubs, each one a portal into a different facet of Melbourne's layered history. At the heart of the project lies The Anchor – a striking, brutalist structure that serves as the primary entrance, gradually transitioning visitors from the familiar world above to the unfamiliar depths below.

As visitors descend into the spiral depths of the Anchor, they are enveloped in a sensory experience that blends light, sound, and raw materials, evoking a sense of curiosity and intrigue. The journey continues through a network of secondary tunnels, each one a carefully crafted narrative experience.

The Abandon tunnel, for instance, pays homage to the city's buried artifacts and forgotten ruins, drawing parallels to the ancient city of Pompeii. Visitors can wander through a museum showcasing Melbourne's historical memories, surrounded by the eerie ambiance of abandonment and darkness.

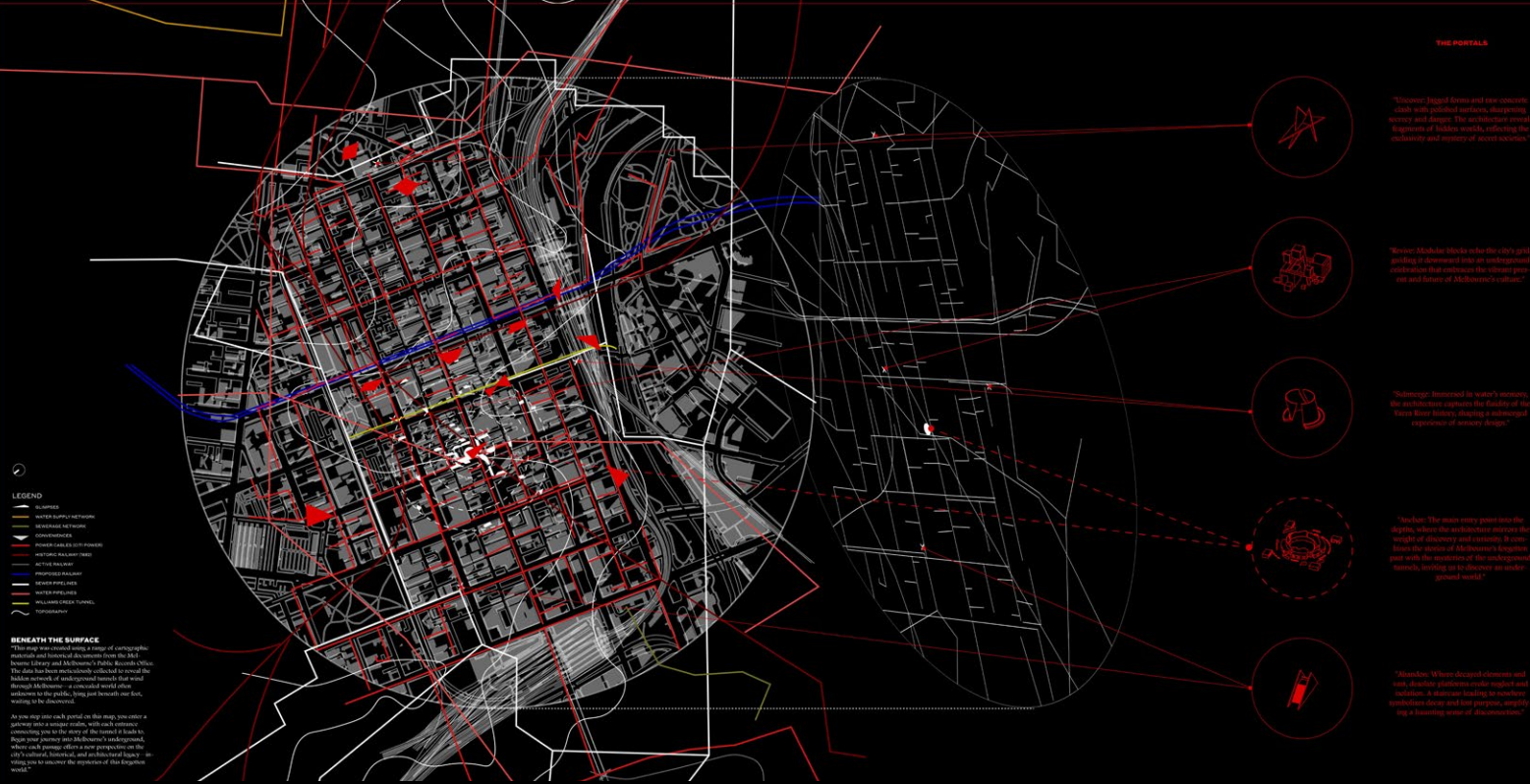
Elsewhere, the Submerge tunnel transports visitors back to the devastating floods of 1934, when the Yarra River overflowed, submerging parts of the city. Here, the tunnel's design creates a sense of immersion, with views of the river and interactive water experiences that evoke the feeling of being submerged in the floodwaters.

Perhaps the most intriguing is the Uncover tunnel, which delves into the city's urban myths and legends surrounding secret societies. Pockets of light guide visitors through a series of social spaces, each one paying tribute to a different society, occasionally hosting performances that bring these stories to life.

Finally, the Revive tunnel celebrates Melbourne's contemporary urban fabric, housing an exclusive underground club that embodies the city's renowned laneway culture and vibrant nightlife.

Through her meticulous research and innovative design, Argyrou has crafted a powerful narrative that challenges conventional urban development and encourages a deeper connection with Melbourne's heritage.





The Art of Darkness is a bold piece of research that urges us to rethink our relationship with the city, to embrace its hidden depths, and to uncover the stories that have long been buried beneath our feet.

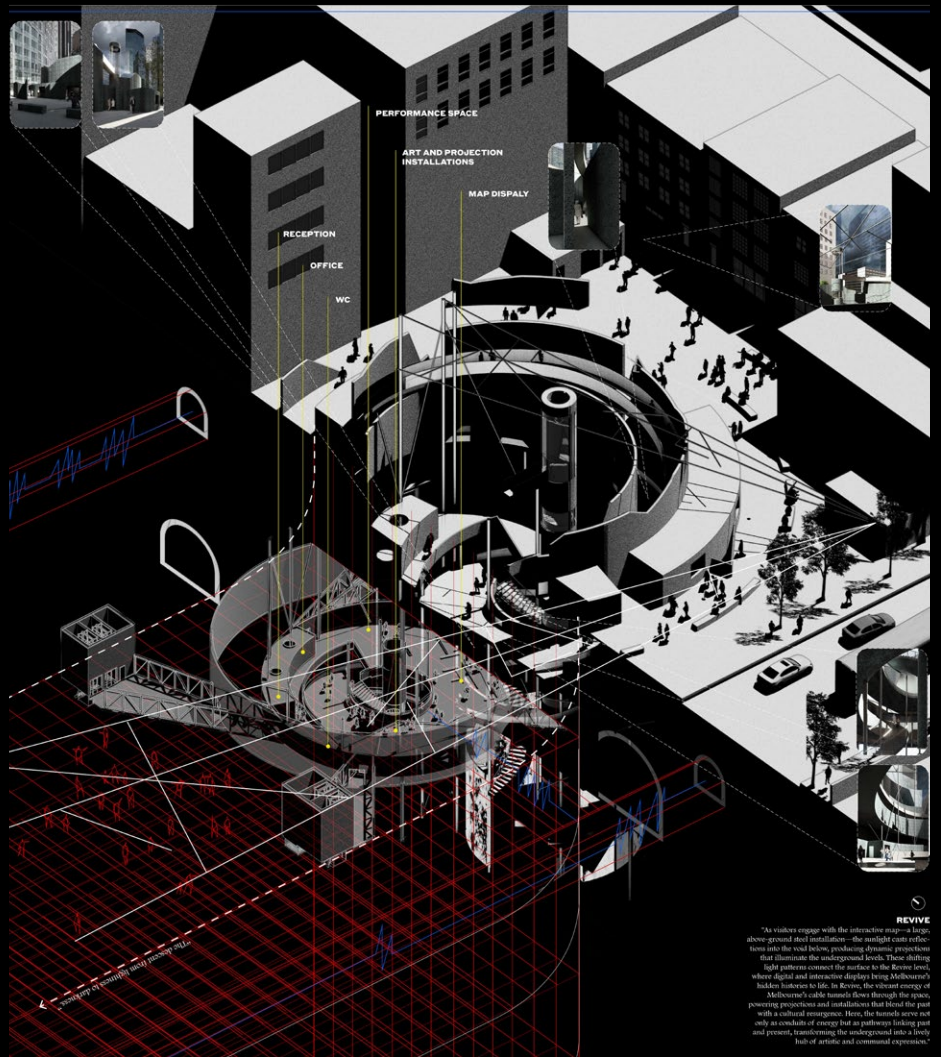
As Argyrou reflects, "Living in a city where you don't know the history, I think, is kind of bizarre. If you've lived here your whole life, you should know a little bit about what's going on and what's happened." With The Art of Darkness, she has given us a compelling reason to explore the mysteries that lie beneath Melbourne's surface, reminding us that sometimes, the most captivating stories are found in the darkest of places.



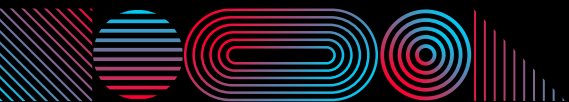
Living in a city where you don't know the history, I think, is kind of bizarre.

TOP: A MAP OF MELBOURNE'S SECRET UNDERGROUND TUNNELS, CREATED USING A RANGE OF MATERIALS AND HISTORICAL DOCUMENTS.

RIGHT: A RENDER OF REVIVE, ARGYROU'S CONCEPT FOR AN UNDERGROUND HUB OF ART AND INSTALLATION.



"As visitors engage with the interactive map – a large, show ground and installation – the digital data reflects into the world below, producing dynamic projections that illuminate the underground levels. These shifting light patterns connect the surface to the Revive level, where digital and interactive displays bring Melbourne's hidden business to life. In Revive, the vibrant energy of Melbourne's cable tunnels flows through the space, showing perspectives and installations that blend the past with a cultural resurgence. Here, the tunnels serve not only as conduits of energy but as pathways leading past and present, transforming the underground into a lively hub of artistic and communal expression."



Boom or bust on Tasmania's rugged west coast

— IMOGEN CRADDOCK KANDEL

Nestled amongst World Heritage wilderness, the remote northwest coast of Tasmania harbors stories of wild success and catastrophic collapse – the remnants of a rich mining and hydroelectricity heritage now fading into history. But can wilderness tourism bring the region back from the brink? For landscape architecture student Ysabelle Lane, this tension between decline and rehabilitation lies at the heart of her research.



Shaped by extraction

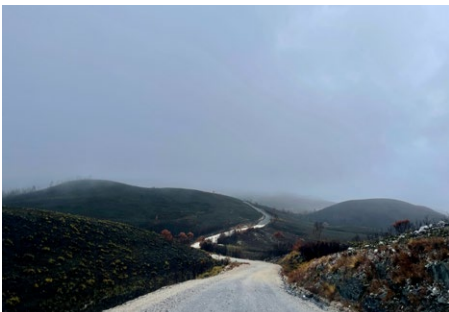
Tasmania, or Lutruwita in the revived Palawa language, has been shaped by a legacy of mining and industrial development. The discovery of coal by Europeans in the early 1800s kicked off a frenzy of prospecting along the mineral-rich northwest. The Mount Bischoff tin mine in Waratah triggered the first boom in 1871, followed by major silver, lead, copper and gold strikes that gave rise to towns like Zeehan and Queenstown.



The harsh geography was precisely what drew settlers, convicts and industrial prospectors to the island's fringes. But the days of extraction are almost over. "Mines, the economic life support of the West Coast, are living on borrowed time," Lane says.

Boom and bust

Today, those thriving mining hubs have become virtual ghost towns as their resources have depleted and industries have shut down. Lane is investigating how these cycles of boom and bust can shape the region's future.



"They don't have those [industries] anymore. The mines are all closed down, so hundreds of people have moved away," Lane says.

TASMANIA'S WEST COAST TOWNS HAVE LIVED THROUGH GENERATIONS OF BOOM AND BUST. IS WILDERNESS TOURISM THE ANSWER TO THEIR SURVIVAL?





A CONFLUENCE IN THE WILD LANDSCAPE OF TASMANIA'S WEST COAST.

This economic decline poses complex questions: Should these dwindling settlements be left to slowly decay, their heritage folding back into the landscape? Or is wilderness tourism the answer, though it risks compromising the very remoteness that draws visitors?

Chaos landscape

Lane's approach is guided by emergence and chaos theory – embracing the unpredictable, non-linear dynamics at play. By distilling the region down to its core components and tensions, Lane hopes to uncover potential futures for the struggling towns that are community led rather than imposed by outsiders.

“It's very much up to the town to decide what they want to do with their future. My position is to just give them options,” Lane states. “There's a success story and there's also a ruin story.”

Some towns like Queenstown are experiencing a renaissance, with a flourishing arts scene and the potential reopening of the Mount Lyell copper mine. But others like the former hydro town of Tullah face a more tenuous future as “a transitional town” with just 200 residents remaining.

For Lane, the way forward lies in analysing each town's unique context, including gleanings from literature, theatre and film. Novels by authors such as Tasmanian born Richard Flanagan together with a recent spike in gritty television productions, like ABC's Bay of Fires drawn to the West Coast's cinematic landscapes, all have a role to play in understanding the region's appeal, and its dark side.

Ultimately, Lane hopes her work encourages more thoughtful approaches to the landscape that move beyond formulaic solutions. “I want people to be more involved and engaged with Tasmania as a whole,” she says, “to acknowledge the shameful things that have happened in our history and just immerse themselves with that landscape's character a lot more.”

As the island's mining ghost towns stand at the crossroads, it's the landscape's character – raw, uncompromising, steeped in tragedy and human perseverance – that will help shape their next chapter.



What you've got are towns that are sitting on their last generation. There's no work, so there's no young people.”



Designing on the ground

— IMOGEN CRADDOCK KANDEL



Master of Architecture student Jasmine Lam was awarded the Macdonald Scholarship in 2024. The scholarship gives students the opportunity to travel anywhere in the world to develop practical career skills.



LAM AT THE GAI KAI RECORDING STUDIO A CONSTRUCTION SITE.



The scholarship gave Lam the opportunity to accept a month-long placement with PASU Studio, a small grassroots practice just outside Bangkok. As a full-time student balancing part-time work, Lam thought she would have to turn down the opportunity due to financial constraints. But the scholarship's financial support gave her the freedom to pursue an experience that reshaped her understanding of architecture's role in community and culture.

PASU Studio's ethos resonates strongly with Lam's evolving architectural values. Working across both large-scale and community-centered projects, the studio uses a unique working methodology that combines digital tools with local methods and making. This utilisation of local knowledge to respond to real-world needs drives practical, yet beautiful, designs.

As part of her placement, Lam was invited to work on the Betong Divine Mercy Sanctuary in southern Thailand. Tasked with supporting the concept design of a new village church after the building was originally lost to fire, Lam explored how to express the sacred through simplicity. "The brief was a balance between the holy and the ordinary," she explains. "The church needed to serve traditional Catholic ceremonies while reflecting the way of life of the villagers." This tension, between symbolism and function, provided fertile ground for creativity.

Outside the design studio, Lam's learning continued on construction sites that were specific to each community's way of working. At the Gai Kai Recording Studio, she encountered improvisational building practices, where bamboo substituted for scaffolding and safety protocols were often informal. "It was a challenge to walk around the site without bumping into the bamboo," she recalls. At another site, a brewery renovation, the fabrication yard was simply a parking lot behind the building.

In Chiang Dao, in the country's north, Lam joined the PASU team for a visit to the Wildlife Sanctuary and met with environmentalist Dr Oy Saranarat Kanjanavanit. There, she observed the wetland regeneration efforts and took note of how local building design responded to climate, sun, and community life.

For Lam, the contrast with architectural education in Australia was striking. "University studios are rather speculative and rely heavily on theory. I did not realise it, but it had led me to hold a rather pristine or even sterile view of architecture."

Her time in Thailand offered something less polished, but far more grounded. It revealed architecture as a tool of necessity, not luxury – where negotiation between humans and their environment is at the core.

Now back in Melbourne, Lam is about to embark on a new adventure. She's recently accepted a position at the Sydney based architecture and interior design studio Sylvester Fuller.

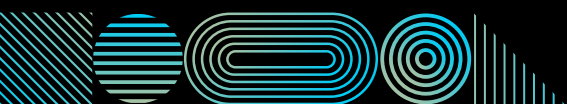
For Lam, architecture is no longer just an academic pursuit – it's an evolving dialogue across cultures and communities. Thanks to the Macdonald Scholarship, that dialogue has found new depth, clarity, and connection.



Being on site in Thailand is completely different. It's more about understanding there's just different ways to construct a building."



BAMBOO USED AS IMPROVISED SCAFFOLDING, PROPS AND LADDERS.



A rising star in urban sustainability

— IMOGEN CRADDOCK KANDEL

For alumni Tony Luo, urban planning wasn't his initial calling, but it became his passion. Most recently, a strategy and performance lead at Sustainability Victoria, Luo has built an impressive early career in urban planning, sustainability, and public policy. Recognised as a rising star in the field, he is about to embark on his next adventure as a Schwarzman Scholar in Beijing.



Strong foundations

Luo's journey into urban planning began with an unexpected turn. Initially enrolled in civil engineering, he took an elective in urban planning and found himself captivated by the interplay between living beings and the built environment. "I found it fascinating to learn how we shape liveable cities and neighbourhoods," he says. That curiosity drove him to shift his academic focus, leading him to graduate in 2018 with a Bachelor of Environments, majoring in urban design and planning, and property.

Luo's first professional experience came through a student internship with Chancellery Research and Enterprise, where he honed his skills in research, policy, and strategic planning.

This foundation helped him secure a role in the Victorian Government as a student and later a graduate urban planner, where he worked on major infrastructure projects, including the Big Build and State-significant precincts. "I was fortunate to work with exceptional leaders who were passionate about sustainable urban development," he reflects.

During his time at Sustainability Victoria, Luo tackled one of the most pressing global challenges: transitioning to a circular economy. His work involved shaping the Victorian Government's strategy on systemic changes to decarbonise and contribute to Victoria's net-zero emissions.

In June 2024, his team released a three-year strategic plan outlining the roadmap for a more sustainable future.

"This is about rethinking the way we produce, collect, and reuse waste starting at the design stage," he explains. His role involved not just policy and strategy development but also engaging communities and industries to foster sustainable practices.

A global perspective on sustainability

Luo's commitment to sustainability extends beyond Australia. Recently awarded the prestigious Schwarzman Scholarship, he will soon pursue a Masters in Global Affairs at Tsinghua University in Beijing. He sees this as an opportunity to gain international insights into urban governance, city diplomacy and environmental sustainability.

"I want to absorb new perspectives, understand best practices from around the world, and bring that knowledge back to Australia," he says. He is particularly interested in China's long-term planning approach, citing innovations like "sponge cities" that enhance flood resilience. "Concepts like these could be incredibly useful in flood-prone areas in Australia."

Community engagement

Beyond his professional work, Luo has remained deeply engaged in social justice and volunteerism. As a student, he led the online community Architects for Peace, focusing on the intersection of urban planning and social equity. He has also been involved in non-profits like the United Nations Association of Australia, serving as co-president of the Victorian Young Professionals Network.

These experiences, he says, have shaped his approach to policy. "They've made me more empathetic and aware of how government decisions impact people's lives. It's about ensuring that policy is not just technically sound but also socially inclusive."





LUO WITH YOUNG PROFESSIONALS FROM ACROSS THE GLOBE AT THE UN'S YOUTH CAMP IN THE MALDIVES.

The future of our cities

As he prepares for his next chapter in China, Luo remains optimistic about the future of urban planning and sustainability. Recently awarded in the 2024 Asian Australian Leadership Awards for his experience in public sector and government, he draws hope from his peers, both colleagues and the students he mentors at the Faculty, who are increasingly vocal and proactive in addressing climate change.

At the heart of his journey is a belief in collaboration. "The conversation around climate change is becoming more polarised. I want to learn how we can move beyond division and work together towards practical, inclusive solutions."

With a growing portfolio of impactful projects and a global perspective on sustainable urban development, Luo is not just helping to shape cities – he's helping to shape the future.

“

This is about rethinking the way we produce, collect, and reuse waste starting at the design stage.”



TOP: LUO WAS GIVEN THE CLIMATE ACTION HERO AWARD AT THE UN'S MALDIVES YOUTH CAMP.

BOTTOM: LUO WAS HONOURED TO RECEIVE THE GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC SECTOR AWARD AT THE 2024 ASIAN AUSTRALIAN LEADERSHIP AWARDS.



The future is African

— CATH NEWELL



According to sustainable housing expert Fatou Kiné Dieye, the world's top three urban centres will be in Sub-Saharan Africa by the end of this century and they will be nearly three times the size of today's megacities. The Faculty is excited to meet the opportunities and challenges presented by Africa's rise. Three of our researchers sat down with Atrium to explore their work both in Africa and within Australia's African diaspora.



Placemaking practices of African migrants

Dr Kelum Palipane is Senior Lecturer in Architectural Design.

Palipane moved to Melbourne from her home country, Sri Lanka, 20 years ago where she'd studied and worked as an architect, and always with an interest in how human relationships are managed within physical space.

Palipane has taught undergraduate and graduate subjects at the University of Melbourne since 2010 and published dozens of research papers. Her current project is called Ubuntu as Place.

"The word 'ubuntu' translates as humanism or humane-ness," she explains. "It is the Black African world view that describes the significance of group solidarity."

Her research is focussed on the ADRA Community Centre in Melbourne's suburban Springvale where social and family services are offered to local people, many of whom are of African or South Asian descent.

"I've been investigating how multimodal mapping and creative ethnographic methods can inform design in demographically complex urban conditions. Specifically, I'm looking at the diverse place-making practices of marginalised communities," she says.

Unfortunately, one of the challenges that migrants often face is racism.

"It comes back to a lack of nuanced understanding around place-making activities.

With young African men, for example, we tend to see groups of them as possible gangs, perhaps even threatening gangs. But when we understand that all they are doing is what they've always done – gathering as a group – we understand the deep significance of place."

Palipane's research is examining the Centre, a former house, as it facilitates the processes of material, cultural and social exchange between the people who work and volunteer there, and their community members.

Designing a social fabric

Francesco Stassi is a Lecturer and Creative Practitioner.

He is also a registered architect in Italy and Rwanda, with extensive experience in socially engaged architecture in East Africa.

Since 2014, Stassi has been a Director and Partner at ASA Studio, Active Social Architecture, an architecture firm based in Kigali.



TOP: FRANCESCO STASSI'S ASA STUDIO CONSTRUCTING A RETAINING WALL.

BOTTOM: PEOPLE COMING TOGETHER AT THE ADRA COMMUNITY CENTRE IN MELBOURNE.



“The practice has a strong commitment to the social value of architecture,” he explains. “We know that architecture is a powerful tool to empower communities, and in places like Rwanda where our work is focussed, we feel that responsibility very strongly.”

Over the past decade, Stassi has worked on more than 100 projects across East Africa, with a strong focus on environmentally sustainable design, social engagement, and community empowerment. He specialises in designing education, sanitation, health and community facilities in rural areas, refugee camps and informal settlements.

In 2024, he co-led a Master’s design studio focussed on a Rwandan project.

“Drawing from my own experience, we explored how design decisions, material choices and technologies impact not just the environment but the country’s social fabric,” he adds.

A cornerstone of his work in African countries is the participatory process he describes as “absolutely vital.”

“Collaborating with all stakeholders is key, from way before the project starts to when it is up and running. Community engagement doesn’t stop at design. We are working on projects that will impact local life and economy so we design for the long-term.”

ASA has recently begun a training program for women in construction involving community groups, local governments and built environment businesses.

Stassi’s experiences working in East Africa also inform his teaching back in Melbourne, saying “I’m very happy to bring learnings from my African project experience home to our students and vice versa.”

Tackling climate change in Rwanda

Associate Professor of Urban Planning Patrick Cobbinah joined the University of Melbourne in 2019.

Originally from Ghana, Cobbinah’s background is in human geography. He has broad experience in urban and regional planning gained through teaching and research at universities in his home country and Australia.

His special interest is climate change and its impacts on urban and regional planning.

“I always knew that environmental management in countries like mine was critical to the future. When we look back we realise that we didn’t adequately resource for the future,” he says.

As a result, Cobbinah has developed what he calls “research packages” that will help guide urbanisation and sustainable environmental development in Africa focussing on Ghana.

“

African people are very proud of their heritage and culture. If there is anything I can do for Rwanda and Africa, I will.”

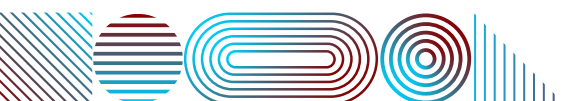
- Professor Patrick Cobbinah

Into the future, Cobbinah hopes he can build stronger connections between African and Australian urban planners.

“They are both beautiful places with much talent in the built environment sector – we can always learn from each other.”

LEFT: A COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT PROJECT RUN BY FRANCESCO STASSI’S ASA STUDIO.

RIGHT: THE FIRST HEALTH CENTER IN RUGERERO, RWANDA, DESIGNED BY ASA STUDIO.



Inside the faculty

People and news

Christhina Candido won the Educator of the Year at the International WELL Building Institute Community Awards.

Sofia Colabella, Katie Skillington and Hannah Hopkins' [RE]Maker research project was launched by Nina Taylor MP as part of the Fishermans Bend Circular Design Collective. Circular design in action, they are prototyping design solutions using upcycled wetsuits from Rip Curl.

Kirsten Day and her co-authors launched The Organiser's Guide to Architecture Education with events at California Polytechnic State University and Woodbury University in Los Angeles.

Hemanta Doloi was appointed as a Lead Coordinator for CIB Working Commission W107 – Construction in Developing Countries. He is joined by Hannah Robertson as a co-coordinator.

Alex Felson led a team of University of Melbourne researchers who unveiled the Song of the Cricket at the 19th International Architecture Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia, which opened in Venice Saturday 10 May. The exhibit blends ecological conservation and interactive sound art in the heart of the Venice lagoon.

Philip Goad was an invited final juror and guest panel speaker at the Monsoon Architecture Festival organized by the Indian Institute of Architects Cochin Center in Kochi, India.

Rochus Hinkel, James Helal, James Thompson, Nancy Ji, Melissa Iraheta and **Tony Yu** received \$135,000 research funding from the Royal Children's Hospital Foundation for their 2025 collaborative R&D project with the Paediatric Intensive Care Unit team.

M. Reza Hosseini has secured a Networking Grant for his project Towards a Circular Nexus: Establishing 3D-IN (Data-Driven Deconstruction International Network) from the Academy of Medical Sciences (UK), in collaboration with Brunel University London, Concordia University (Canada), and ITB (Indonesia).

Anna Hürlimann was lead author on a study published in Climate Policy about Victoria's city build policies falling critically short of what's required to net zero by 2050.

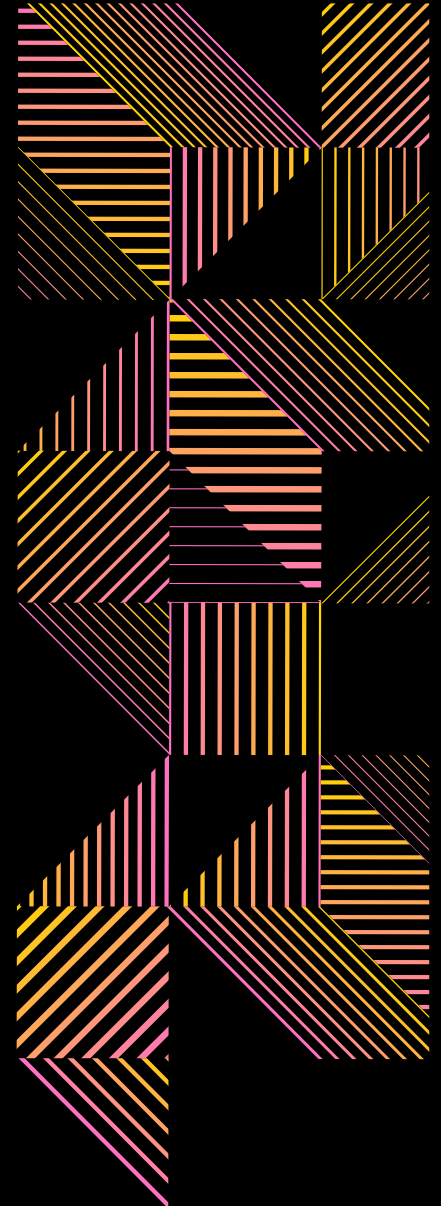
Chris Jensen has joined the Architects Institute of Australia (AIA) Victorian Chapter Sustainable Architecture Committee (SAC) to represent Architectural Science Research and Education.

Stuart King spoke at the Situating Architecture Lecture Series at The Bartlett, UCL in London. Together with Tania Sengupta, they launched their book Reclaiming Colonial Architecture.

Brendon McNiven was part of the first meeting of the Don't Waste Buildings movement.

Cathy Oke was selected as a lead author of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Special Report on Climate Change and Cities.

Alan Pert and **Theo Blankley** launched their exhibition Off Form, Off Modern at Hamilton Gallery, Victoria.



Events and exhibitions

Edible Urban Futures

Curated by Professor Justyna Karakiewicz and Mr Theo Blankley, this exhibition and associated panel series invited visitors to explore bold, creative proposals for one of the most urgent challenges of our time: urban food security. The exhibition showcased cutting-edge ideas from the University of Melbourne's 2024 Edible Urban Futures winter intensive, where over 110 students and academics from 10 countries collaborated to rethink how design, architecture, and urban planning can transform the way we produce, access, and share food in cities.

Bio_lent Machines

In our first Dean's Lecture for 2025, international guests Claudio Rossi and Daniela Atencio discussed how machines can work with the natural environment to create alternative methods of caring for and restoring the land. This future-focused lecture will explore the use of the robotic arm as a tool in the creative design process, revealing new and exciting creative approaches rarely explored in Australian design industry and academia.

Catherine Griffiths: Out of Line

The largest exhibition of internationally renowned Aotearoa/New Zealand designer Catherine Griffiths' work presented in Australia to-date, Out of Line encourages audiences to engage in spatial dialogues and read between the lines. Curated by Ela Egidy and Megan Patty, it featured typographic installations, time-based media and a newly commissioned site-specific installation, alongside a wide-ranging panel event series.

Presented by the Melbourne School of Design, with the support of the Melbourne Art Book Fair and the Victorian College of the Arts, Faculty of Fine Arts and Music at the University of Melbourne.

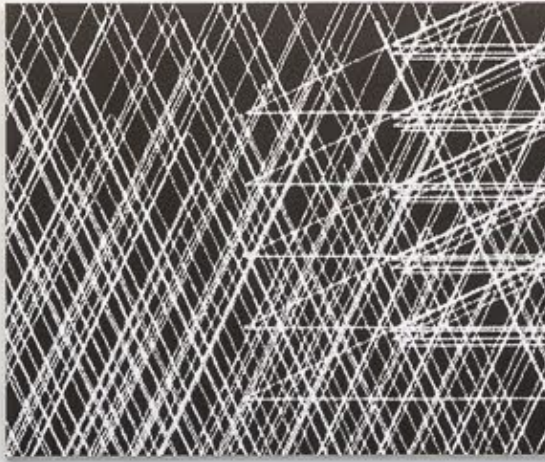
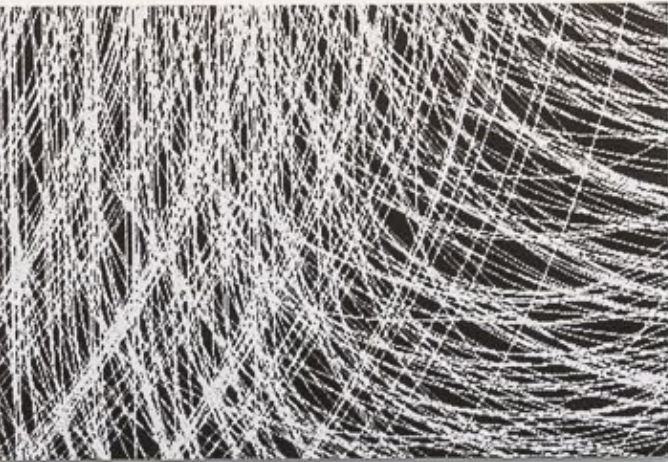
Melbourne Design Week 2025

As part of Melbourne Design Week, the Melbourne School of Design hosted a series of exhibitions, workshops and talks that explored how design can respond to the challenges of our time. From rethinking waste and repair, to experimenting with new materials and ways of learning, our program brings together students, researchers and practitioners who are asking big questions and testing bold ideas.

Building the Engine: Industry and the African Urban Agenda

The next generation of Sub-Saharan Africa's green and inclusive cities is just around the corner, but only if designers embrace the opportunity. Can small-scale entrepreneurship drive new sustainable housing, or will the overburdened sector fail to meet the challenge of climate change? In our second Dean's Lecture of the year, African housing and sustainability expert, Fatou Kiné Dieye, unpacked the future of the green construction sector.





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