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Nataly Gattegno

Principal at Future Cities Lab

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2325 Third Street, #229
San Francisco, CA 94107

Introduced by Laure & Magali

My name is Nataly Gattegno, I am one of the principals of Future Cities Lab in San Francisco, I also teach at California College of the Arts¹, we have been in San Francisco for 3 years. Before that we called ourselves the Traveling Circus, the Nomadic Circus, because we had a fellowship at the University of Michigan², so we taught there. We had a fellowship in New York, so we were with the Van Alen Institute³, for 6 months. Prior to that, we were teaching at the University of Virginia for about 5 or 6 years. I came to the States to come to Grad school. I am originally from Greece, from Athens. I was born there, did my Undergrad in England, worked in London for a couple of years, and then came to the States to do my MARCH and then stayed. That's the kind of skip and move all the way, further away... That's kind of who we are, and the kind of work we do is experimental, we see it as a way to kind of test the limits. The work that we've done maybe the last couple of years has been on the one hand speculative large scale but then on the other hand kind of taking parts of those and bigger speculations and trying them out in installations or physical pieces.

The building you wish you had designed?

I think because a lot of the work that we do is speculative, we have done a lot of proposals, that were never intended to be built, but we kind of think some, like the Thermaespheres, would have been interesting to try out. We also got a chance to make a piece of it. After we designed that project, we got a commission to design a pavilion in San Francisco. We basically took the 3 structures from the Thermaespheres in that project. In the

beginning we thought it was impossible to build, but we had just started to find ways to maybe be able to construct it.

The project you designed that makes you the proudest?

A project that was significant then was the Aurora Project. This was a project that we did in New York, while we were fellows of the Van Alen Institute, and it was probably one of the first projects where there were these kind of two ideas, one was environmental, one interactive.

The entire project was an interactive surface that was lofted, off the ground where we were exploring the Arctic, and the transformations that are taking place in the Arctic over time, and how you would represent something that is constantly changing and shifting so far away. The geometry is all using maps of the Arctic, its outline, its perforations are all based on topography maps, temperature maps... It's almost like we took a piece of the Arctic and lifted it. The idea is that as the people would interact

“*Why do buildings need to be the way that they’ve been for centuries although our technologies have radically changed?*”

with it, they would actually be degrading or killing the system. As you moved away it would brighten up again and we would have this reverse interaction.

In that same show we had the Glaciarium, where we had asked the gallery to freeze a piece of ice everyday, and drop it into this “lantern”. When you would look into it, you would see this piece of ice, you’d also trigger a heat lamp, so you would be melting the ice as you were looking at it. The water would drop and hit a contact mic to emit the sound of melting ice. Here only one person is slowly killing what we were trying to protect, in a sense.

In parallel to these 2 pieces we had a “map room”, where we had historic maps and contemporary maps of the Arctic.

A striking detail in one of your projects?

Pretty much everything that we make is handmade, so everything has detail in it. The detail that I find most interesting that I thought

I’d never be doing is sewing. A lot of our models are sewn because it gives them flexibility, so they can move or they can shift. We try not to use glue, and when we do, it’s to fuse two materials permanently, to make one thing. We’ve become good at making notching systems, or ways of connecting things mechanically.

The project you would never design?

For us, it’s hard to say there is something we would never touch. We enjoy working on projects where we collaborate. We wouldn’t touch a project if someone specifically asked me to do one thing that is predetermined. A project with not enough room for experimentation.

The ideal/perfect city ?

We’ve lived and practiced in a number of different places, so... I don’t know if there’s an ideal city, but we’re happy here in San Francisco because we wanted to live and work in a place that we could do both.

For people to collaborate with, on software or hardware, on technologies... A lot of people say San Francisco is very conservative, in terms of architecture. For a lot of people who practice architecture, it’s a bit frustrating. For all the innovation that takes place, it never really happens in the buildings, or with the clients.

Do you prefer talking or drawing?

When we work together, it’s usually a combination of talking, drawing and modeling. We do a lot of test models. Usually a project has tons of models. We make something and sketch over it and talk back over and model again... We use a lot of tools, cutters, mills, etc. that allows us to make bigger pieces, bigger models.

The first time you felt like an Architect?

I don’t think I’ve ever felt like an Architect. Probably the only time I did was when I was interning at an architecture firm. We feel just

as much Architects as we feel like Designers, or model makers, or problem solvers... I think that we do architecture, but then again a lot of people look at our work and they don't call it architecture. It kind of depends on your definition.

The question that's bugging you?

One of the questions that we've been trying to experiment with, and really looking at the ways in which we can question the environment that's around us. Why does it need to be static? Why do buildings need to be the way that they've been for centuries although our technologies have radically changed? Simultaneously to that I think there's kind of a concern as to "yes climate is changing, yes the environment is evolving, now how do we embrace that?" instead of fortifying, sealing the bad weather out. How can you coexist with all of it that is changing? Does the stuff that's around us actually change?

What infuriates you as far as Architecture is concerned?

Mediocrity. Enough said.

The most ridiculous building in San Francisco?

There's a building in the Mission, it's called the Armory. It started off as an armory, where they stored arms... It's a whole block, it's thick,

it's brick, it's a beautiful building. It had a firing range where they would practice. As historic as you get in San Francisco. There are two interesting things about it. One is that it takes a whole block, the second that it sits on a creek that was filled. The building remained empty for years and the company that bought it is an online pornography company. So now the entire building has been used as a film set for porn. Not only that but the creek has started corroding the foundation and coming up from the basement. It's a very interesting building, because of the crazy program and the historical layer and the environmental layer together.

The song you listen to over and over again?

I wouldn't be able to tell you. We have Pandora⁵ playing over and over. It's kind of an online playlist/radio.

Your message to young Architects?

Be experimental, be bold, there's no reason to be conventional, test the limits, work hard in order to be able to prove what you really believe in. There's a place in architectural practice for people to go out and do building that we need, but there's also room for speculation and research, and experimentation. Also, persevere, because it takes a while.

Who is the Architect who accompanies you?

I always have a team around me. We accompany each other in the design process, but we also have certain common references.

What do you remember about your student years?

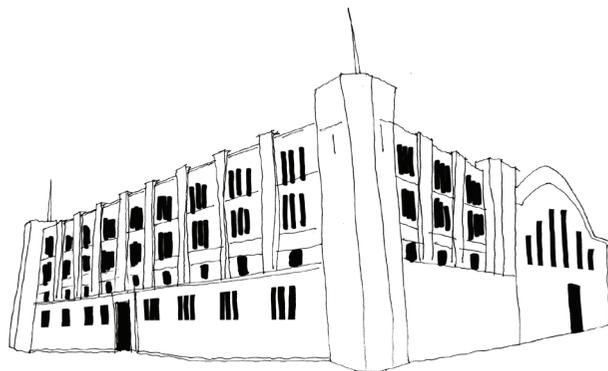
My undergrad, I remember hating architecture. I wanted to change, I didn't get it. I was just doing what I was asked to do but I didn't get why. But then when I went to Grad school, in my 2nd year I took a studio, and it was a moment where I got it.

What's next?

We've moved into this bigger space. Expanding like that was an attempt at another scale of intervention. We've been starting to make things bigger in scale and to do more design products.

Why did you choose the name Future Cities Lab?

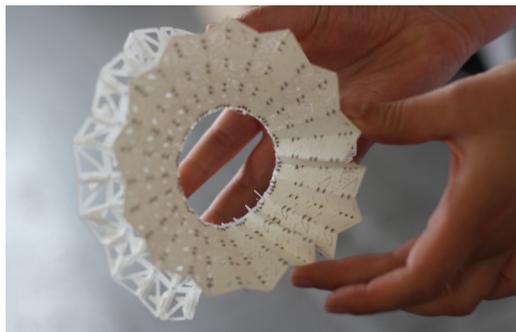
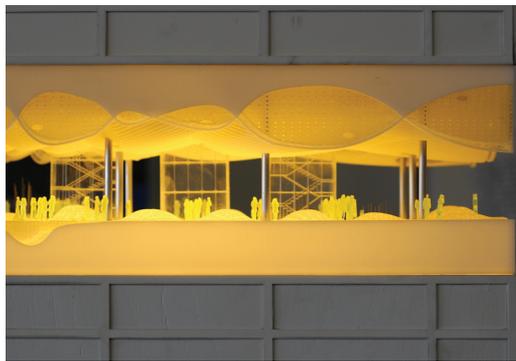
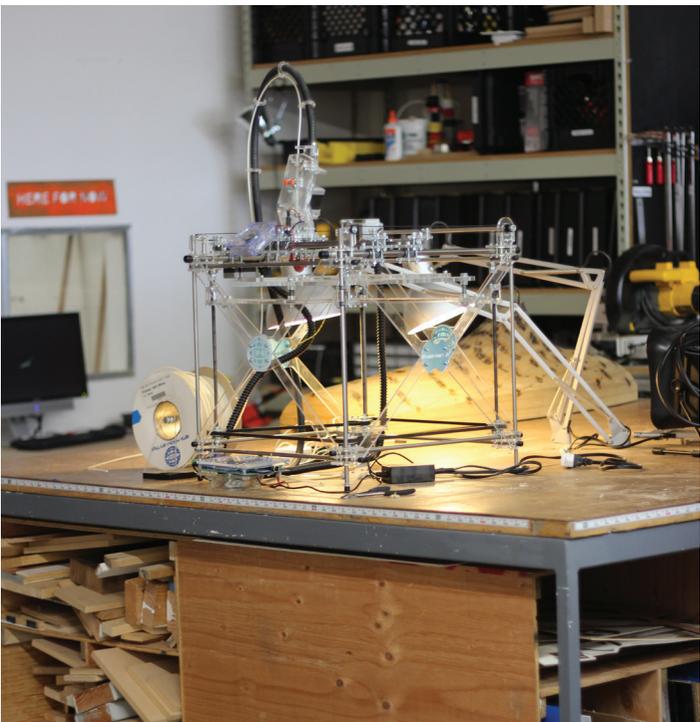
The first competition Jason and I entered, it was 3am and we needed to submit it and we didn't have a name. It was an urban competition and we came up with "Future Cities Lab". Conceptually, it was a book of short stories that we had been reading called "Future Cities". We really wanted to think of the work that we do as "future thinking" but also have urban ramifications.

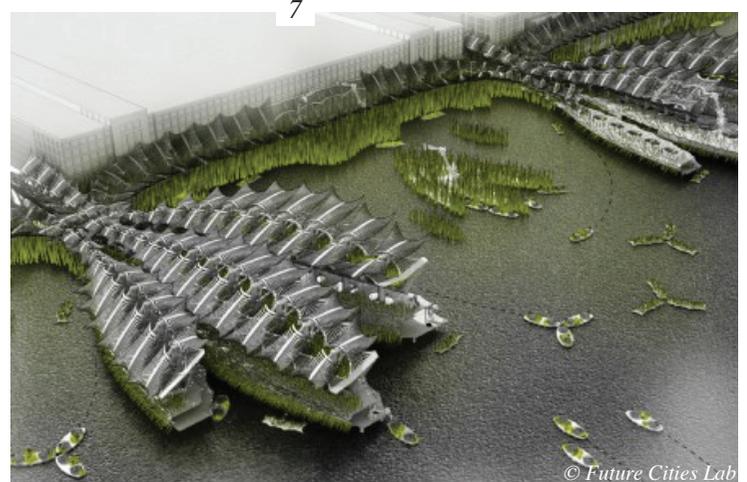
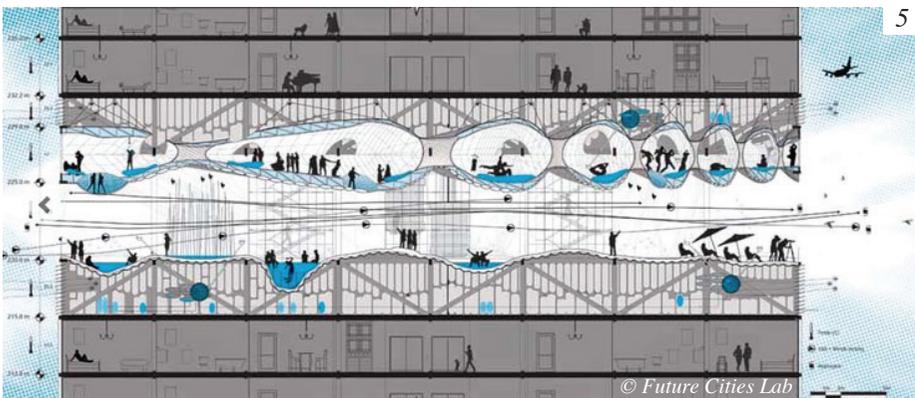
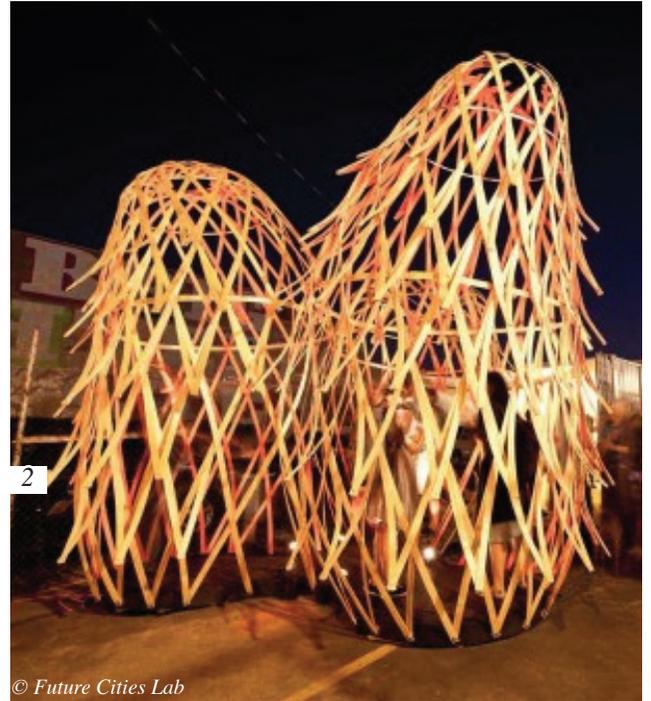
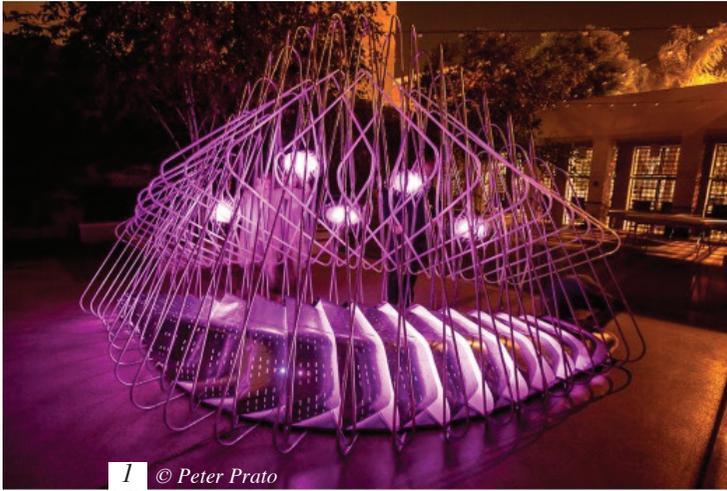


The Armory, San Francisco



1-California College of the Arts - www.cca.edu
 2- University of Michigan - www.umich.edu
 3- Van Alen Institute - www.vanalen.org
 4- University of Virginia - www.virginia.edu
 5- Pandora - www.pandora.com





WORKS

- 1 Datagroove, San Francisco, 2013
- 2 Trilux Pavillion, San Francisco, 2011
- 3 Urban Archipelago ,Hong Kong, 2006
- 4 Thermasphere, Athens, 2011
- 5 Glacarium, New York, 2009
- 6 Supergalaxy, San Francisco, 2006-10
- 7 Hydramax, San Francisco, 2012