Education, Design and Practice – Understanding skills in a Complex World

• Paper / Proposal Title:
  Design/Science Fictions: Worldbuilding as Landscape Practice

• Author(s) Name:
  Marc Miller

• University or Company Affiliation:
  The Pennsylvania State University

• Abstract (300 words):
  Environmental modeling is making it evident that borrowing formal conventions from the past will become inadequate as viable design solutions. Historical design conventions are already balanced against scientific projections, resulting in hybrid design solutions.

  Given that landscapes increasingly face uncertain futures, designers need ways to test, illustrate and present ideas about changing landscapes. Speculative projects that take advantage of science and contemporary media to present problems and solutions to the public are needed. A more appropriate name for the resulting work would be "design fiction" given the combination of design and narratives.

  Design fictions are needed to illustrate the implications of changing environments to the public, while also explaining the role designers can play in reconciling these differences between the present and future. As fictions, they are not beholden to the restrictions of a client but are still required to project social and cultural conditions. These forward-looking images will also require landscape architects to look for new design processes.
Science fiction writing offers a platform that is suitable for adaptation to create and present design fictions. At the core of the writing process is worldbuilding, the disciplined process of inventing a framework for the narrative. Worldbuilding uses scientific research combined with social and cultural speculation to propose alternative worlds. While landscape architects are not proposing alternate worlds, the process can be adapted to imagine future landscapes and how they impact emerging demographics.

This presentation will describe how worldbuilding can be adopted as a framework for design speculation. Available resources from imagining future climates, places, and people will be identified in the process of understanding environmental change, and social change will be referenced. Emphasis will be placed on the process and resources more than the designed solution.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Marc Miller's research examines representation, technology, images, and their impact on people. He is interested in how landscape architects communicate environmental futures to people that do not understand the value of landscape architecture beyond, parks, plazas, and gardens. This work also challenges the methods used to image landscapes, looking beyond the static rendering that is a snapshot in time. To that end, he is interested in contemporary forms of media as a way to communicate design problems to a broad audience. At the core of all of the research the idea that landscape architectural ideation and practice must make a shift to look towards problem-solving for the future instead of repeating design processes from the past.