What value can architecture generate when there's no longer market value? After the 2008 crisis had caused the prices of homes in Detroit to drop to unusual levels, this project transforms a vacant house into a cultural infrastructure for the community. Understood as an opera, the house not only becomes a piece in itself, but also an urban strategy for the reconsideration of what we usually understand as the drama of deterioration and blight.

**Keywords** - demolition, blight, vacancy, performance, drama

The House Opera | Opera House project seeks, through architectural innovation, to propose a fertile alternative to the binary of blight and demolition. Implications of the project at the urban planning level include: how can residential vacancy be converted into an opportunity to support local cultural assets? What are the zoning, planning and building code changes that make this possible? The project addresses these questions through a suite of spatial and material tactics to facilitate exploration of performance, community, and form. The experimental aspects architecturally include strategies of subtraction, programmatic collaboration, and expanded territories of adaptive re-use. The project seeks to explore what might occur when the borders of a house open up to annihilate the borders between art and community, makers and receivers of art, museums and home.

Inspired by the flexibility of uses for houses in Detroit, this project stages an opera as a house, the house and its dramas of occupancy and vacancy, demolition, and re-purposing, as an opera. As indicated in the title – House Opera | Opera House – the project pursues multiple relationships of physical structure to performance. Instigated by architectural designers working with a network of artists and curators, the House Opera | Opera House project situates built form in active relationship with choreography, costume, music, language, and drama. The doubling of the project’s title warns that opera will be explored and mined as an art form as much as the house as a typology of building and program.

As a long-term project of architectural experimentation, House Opera | Opera House actively explores dynamics of public and
Arquitectos / Architects
A(n) Office (anoffice.us)
Arquitectos asociados / Associated architects
McEwen Studio
Colaboradores / Collaborators
Tyrene Calvesbert, Rebecca Curtis, Ye Fu, Juan Martínez, Salam Rida
Ubicación / Location
1620 Morrell St, Detroit, MI, USA
Cliente / Client
afrotopia
Ingeniería estructural / Structural engineering
Sarah Millsaps Towles
Contratista de obras / Building contractor
Lands Friend Builders
Materiales / Materials
Madera, madera recuperada / Wood, reclaimed wood
Terminaciones interiores y exteriores / Interior and exterior finishing materials
Envoltura Tyvek, madera recuperada, cobertura plástica Heat Shrink / Tyvek wrapping, reclaimed wood, Heat Shrink construction Film
Presupuesto / Cost
USD $30,000
Superficie construida / Built area
185,8 m² / 2,000 ft²
Superficie terreno / Site area
464,5 m² / 5,000 ft²
Año de Proyecto / Project year
2014 - 2015
Año de construcción / Construction year
2015
Maquetas / Models
A(n) Office

Condiciones previas, vista desde la calle / Previous conditions, view from the street © Marcelo López-Dinardi

Vista exterior / Exterior view © Marcelo López-Dinardi
cultural engagement at the scale of the single family home. The title alludes as well to the “opera publica” of Rome, literally public works, which defined the state of the art of physical infrastructure roughly two millennia ago. House Opera | Opera House aims to open and produce new possibilities of public engagement for architecture as a discipline and for houses as a built typology, investigating the means by which a formerly vacant house may serve as a node of cultural infrastructure. As historian Reinhold Martin argues, infrastructure (financial, political or social) is what is reproduced and repeated. The House Opera | Opera House produces—and is product of—communal infrastructures.

The House Opera opened temporarily to the public on July 24-25 with SigiFest, an arts, music and performance festival organized by afrotopia, directed by Detroiter curator Ingrid Lafleur.

The House Opera | Opera House was originated by Mitch McEwen when McEwen Studio bought the house and received funding by grants from the Knight Foundation, Graham Foundation, University of Michigan Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning. The first phase of design-subtraction-build was achieved with support from individual donors through a crowdsourcing campaign with funds matched by the Michigan Economic Development Corporation.

www.houseopera.us
Nuevo marco 6 x 8" (madera, madera laminada, acero)

Revestimiento Tyvek / Tyvek surface

LEYENDA / LEGEND
1. Cielo y estructura de segundo piso removida / Removed ceiling and second floor structure
2. Muro removido desde el primer piso al techo / Removed wall from first floor to roof

Planta original primer piso /
Existing first floor plan
E./ S. 1: 250

Elevación poniente original /
Existing west elevation
E./ S. 1: 250

Planta de techos / Roof plan
E./ S. 1: 250

Elevación poniente propuesta /
Proposed west elevation
E./ S. 1: 250

Axonométrica / Axonometric
S. e. / N. s.

Nuevo marco 6 x 8" (madera, madera laminada, acero)
New 6"x8" beam (timber, laminated wood, steel)
MITCH MCEWEN


MARCELO LÓPEZ-DINARDI

Architect, Master in Critical, Curatorial and Conceptual Practices in Architecture, Columbia University gsapp (usa, 2013). Bachelor in Architecture from the Polytechnic University of Puerto Rico, 2004, cum laude. He was researcher and production coordinator of House Housing: An Untimely History of Architecture and Real Estate, for the Buell Center of Columbia University exhibited in Venice in 2014, co-edited the book Promiscuous Encounters for gsapp Books, founding editor of Polimorfo and director of ciudadlab, and has been selected to represent the usa Pavilion in the Venice Architecture Biennale in 2016. He is an Adjunct Assistant Professor at Barnard+Columbia Architecture, Columbia University, and Faculty at the New Jersey Institute of Technology.