

# Becoming Credible: Developing Pedagogies for Inclusive Design Futures

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## ABSTRACT

2020's racial reckoning produced student, faculty, staff, and alumni calls for action to many North American schools of architecture and design. For example, Notes on Credibility, by the Harvard Graduate School of Design's African American Student Union and AfricaGSD, demands that the GSD must "institutionalize anti-racism and acknowledge that pedagogy has a cultural obligation."<sup>[1]</sup> Many calls echo Notes, prompting a rethinking of architectural pedagogy from long-held Beaux-Arts models and late image-making practices. As we collectively advance, studio instruction requires new pedagogical and inclusive modes incorporating identity, culture, history, memory, and place. Empathic instruction, through a strategically designed collegial environment, allows for personal and instructional creativity resulting in personal discovery. To rise to the Calls, and this time, pedagogies must include a full human experiential perspective, whereby students develop a skill toolkit based on ethics and aesthetics to support design activism.

## INTRODUCTION

This paper responds to the calls, answering our urgent research question: "What is a pedagogical model for design research studios producing empathic designers, successfully incorporating topics of identity, culture, history, memory, and place?" \_mpathic design (a pedagogy, initiative, and design practice) is an example, established in 2017, emerging from three decades of academic, community, and professional practice. \_mpathic design received the 2020 ACSA Diversity Achievement Award and the U.S. Department of Education Blue Ribbon School Award. This paper details a design research studio implementing \_mpathic design's empathic design thinking method, Mind, Hand, and Body to develop designs focused on The Great Migration at the University of Virginia's (UVa) School of Architecture<sup>[2]</sup>. Possibly no other school is more prepared to respond in teaching to this time, proven by the implementation by the UVa School of Architecture's Call to Action in June 2020. This paper showcases the method in action and its integration into a studio. A future paper will share outcomes and expand on student designs, extend comprehensive student feedback, and clarity of themes.

## PEDAGOGICAL CONTEXT

Origins for \_mpathic design began with the author/instructor's experience as an undergraduate African American student at the UVa School of Architecture. At the time, a singular, panoptical Jeffersonian narrative effectively suppressed the paradox of liberty, hiding the truth of the Enslaved African Americans' lived experience that built the University. The School of Architecture upheld this narrative in studios and courses. Returning in 2016 to teach at the very same School of Architecture entered an active system of delivery, taking the singular Jeffersonian narrative heads-on, led by the President's Commission on Slavery and the University. This system includes a Walking Tour of Enslaved African Americans at the University, inclusive exhibitions in the Academical Villages' Rotunda, new interdisciplinary curriculums, and the Kitty Foster Site by Walter Hood (the site of a freed African American woman in a community once called Canada on the South Lawn).<sup>[3]</sup> Student, faculty, alumni, and community efforts to develop the Memorial to Enslaved Labourers were then in progress, recently completed in spring 2020 (designed by Howler and Yoon Architects, and a design team of Mabel O. Wilson, Frank Dukes, and Gregg Bleam).<sup>[4]</sup> The author contributed to the system through an exhibition, Mapping, with a student team from the Schools of Architecture and Engineering (supporting the Walking Tour), allowing visitors to learn more of the materials the enslaved utilized to build the Academical Village. Mapping was installed in the West Oval Room of the Rotunda for one year and currently displays at the UVa School of Architecture.<sup>[5]</sup>

## METHOD BACKGROUND + THE STUDIO

\_mpathic design's (self-formulated and coined in 2017 by the author/instructor) method contains three themes as the instructional basis for teaching: Mind, Hand, and Body. In Mind, students learn definitions and approaches to Empathy, forming their own empathic design thinking. In Hand, students learn how to deconstruct the built environment through six modes of design, then reversing - using the six modes to develop designs. Lastly, In Body, students learn what it feels like to be the other in the built environment, and how built form responds to interpersonal relationships and emotions.

The method evolves from decades of inclusive professional empathy-focused design experience (including

government-mandated equity and inclusionary practices in Canada).<sup>[6]</sup> With knowledge of the skills required for professional practice, the white supremacy events/violence of 2017, and the racialized climate of our community, the author/instructor implemented the method in seminars, courses over a period of three years. This prototyping period culminates in a fall 2020 design research studio: *\_mpathic design: The Great Migration*, consisting of thirteen fourth-year students (pre-professional and design thinking), graduate architecture, and landscape architecture.

### STUDIO PROGRAM

The Great Northern Migration, defined by journalist and author of *The Warmth of Other Suns*, Isabel Wilkerson is the outpouring of six million African Americans from the Jim Crow South to cities in the North and West between World War I and the 1970s. Wilkerson notes that the Migration marks the first time in American history that the lowest caste people signaled they had options and were willing to take them - and the first time they had a chance to choose for themselves what they would do with their innate talents.<sup>1</sup> “These people, by their actions, were able to do what the powers that be, North and South, could not or would not do,” she says. “They freed themselves.”<sup>[7]</sup> Virginia holds a significant role in the East Coast Migration Pathway (including Florida, Georgia, Carolinas) to northern cities such as D.C., Philadelphia and New York. Ninety percent of African Americans lived in the South before the Migration began, with half redistributed around the country by the 1970s.

An inclusive studio requires an inclusive program - allowing for hybrid design responses in Grand Central Terminal’s Vanderbilt Hall. The hybrid framework allows for individual discovery of empathic intersections of untold Black narratives into the Hall’s Beaux-Arts former waiting room, opening students to designs critiquing this chapel to New York’s capitalism. The hybrid program asks students to:

- Tell an experiential narrative - incorporating the progression of migrants from the South to NYC, providing a comprehensive timeline for visitors in the Hall.
- Provide Interpretation / Exhibitory for visitors to understand the historical accounts - of Jim Crow, The American South, Pathways, Arrival in New York, Migration Series.
- Provide an Oral History Resource Center.
- Spaces for interstitial conversations
- Include two small Offices (for Hosts and Storage).
- Exhibition Space (for local art and possible items influenced by the Migration Series).

- Gathering for Educational (school groups).
- Event Space / Performance Space (and ideas for those who would use this space).
- Provide lighting, accessibility, structural concepts, and material definition.
- Follow details for installation, and takedown, following GCT Guidelines.
- Connections between nature and the narrative.
- Cultural connections – food, music, art.
- No Public Restroom facilities are required (assume the use of those in the space).

**Mind, Hand, and Body** is the focus of the first 5 weeks (of a 15 week semester) of instruction, as follows

### METHOD: MIND

**Mind** begins in the first two weeks of the studio with students learning definitions of Empathy through interdisciplinary readings, discussed in diverse smaller groups called Degin Research teams (DRT’s). Strategically selected by the author/instructor, DRT’s collaborate for the 15 weeks of the semester, providing space for conversations and sharing to occur. Simultaneously in the first week of the studio, students begin Isabel Wilkerson’s Pulitzer Prize-winning book *The Warmth of Other Suns*, detailing the lives of African Americans Robert Pershing Foster, Ida Mae Gladney, and George Swanson Starling. *Warmth* expertly informs students with an empathic understanding of African American life in the early 1900s.<sup>[8]</sup> In the book, and in supporting prepared readings/resources, students learn of the racial terror and Jim Crow racial codes of the American South, double architectures to meet the codes of Jim Crow, and the paradoxes of new racial codes upon arrival in the West, Central, and North.<sup>[9]</sup> Examples of Jim Crow in Charlottesville add to sociocultural, historical, economic, and contextual reading resources, setting the context.

In these first two weeks, students expand their individual empathic design thinking through readings from the author, social science researcher, and educator Karla McLaren (who coined the term *empath*, as well as joining reviews during the semester). In Karla McLaren’s *The Art of Empathy*, students learn that empathy is “a social and emotional skill that helps us feel and understand the emotions, circumstances, intentions, thoughts, and needs of others, such that we can offer sensitive, perceptive, and appropriate communication and support.” McLaren continues to frame that “(architectural) empathy helps us re-engage with public spaces and read anew the nuances, subtexts, undercurrents, intentions, thoughts that structure social space.”<sup>[10]</sup> Both definitions frame discussions



Figure 1. Collage by student Lauren Brown

of UVa’s racialized built environment, asking where and how empathy can exist within Jefferson’s deliberate hiding of black bodies in the design of the Academical Village. These discussions continue into systematic spatial racism in Charlottesville’s urban fabric, including the violence and murders of the Unite the Right Rally White Supremacist Rally in 2017. The Universities’ Memorial to Enslaved Laborers provides an accessible empathic design model, with students aligning learnings from the empathy readings to its nuance, form, and ritual.

At the end of the first two weeks of the studio, students are asked to anonymously summarize why empathy is important in design, then shared with the entire studio. Examples:

It is necessary to design with empathy because architecture embodies humanity, and our humanity should be to treat others the way you want to be treated.

We’re designing things for people first and foremost. And for people who are all different and have different perspectives. We won’t be doing a good job if we aren’t taking into consideration how people feel.

It is critical that we think about the way spaces impact the people that use them and move through them, not only physically but emotionally impacts (on mental health, access, class, etc.) How do the spaces we contribute to or alleviate issues in our society? Where is our accountability as designers?

The third week begins a focus on the Black spatial lived experience, starting with Simone Browne’s *Dark Matters: Notes on the Surveillance of Blackness*. *Dark Matters* primes students with an understanding of the conditions of blackness as a site where surveillance is practiced, narrated, and resisted from the Trans – Atlantic Slave Trade to the current day.<sup>[11]</sup> Critical interpersonal empathy references from Nursing and Medical fields follow with Dr. Teresa Wiseman’s *Concept Analysis of Empathy* and Dr. Helen Reiss and Gordon Kraft – Todd’s *E.M.P.A.T.H.Y.*, prompting students to take empathy to interaction level.<sup>[12]</sup> Students then frame their past studio experiences with a canonical pedagogy, the *five identifiable stages of designing and making*, citing British author, scholar, and architect Patrick Nuttgens.<sup>[13]</sup>

- Identification: discovery or recognition of needs

- Collection: of information, assembly of facts
- Analysis: of those needs and facts
- Idea: the new potential thing that which exists, or will exist, to bring together and make into one the needs, techniques, demands, and means
- Realization: things take shape, work, or fail. Fail, you may go back to further thought and analysis.
- If it works, followed by implementation

Students are reminded to think of the stages in terms of the studio's material and shift their thinking from a Eurocentric worldview to bring forth untold Black narratives located in the readings. This shift achieves with each student's scenario building for stakeholders, resulting in deep data research of visitors to the Hall, integrating new audiences from marginalized communities. Students follow the author/instructor's model from professional experience to develop inclusive inquiry questions to critically think of stakeholder needs, operating within Nuttgens' stages.<sup>[14]</sup>

- What do I want (the selected identity) to know when experiencing my design?
- What do I want (the selected identity) to feel in my design?
- What do I want (the selected identity) to understand from my design? And with others?
- How do I design for (a selected identity) not interested in my design, or this topic)?
- How will I know that my Design is making an impact?

Data from scenario building is shared in DRT's, with students closing **Mind** with developing a *To, By, So That* statement, ending with an empathic design thinking framework for the studio.

#### **METHOD: HAND (WHAT HAS BEEN, WHAT CAN BE IN DESIGN AND THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT)**

**Hand** begins in the fourth week, with students learning of \_mpathic design's self-formulated concept 6D (six areas of design) - systems, spaces, objects, products, graphics, and experiences. 6D is an analytical lens, deconstructing existing designs focusing on natural, historical, social, cultural, economic, and racial origins. In the findings, connections to The Great Migration become evident through racialized histories of Jim Crow codes, segregation design, and economic prosperity through systematic oppression. 6D opens discoveries of

Cornelius Vanderbilt's (and New York's) economic links to the Migration, the often untold northern paradox, northern racism, entered in the once Waiting Room of Vanderbilt Hall.

6D then moves to designing and making, supported by Black creative references modeling creativity and innovation in the face of adversity (Figure 1 demonstrates collage responses). Students learn of Jacob Lawrence's Migration Series and Romare Bearden's Collages of New York urban life, while visited by practicing professionals such as Rodney Leon, of Rodney Leon Architects, designer of the African Burial Ground National Monument. 6D provides examples for students a framework for deconstructing non-inclusive spaces, then creating inclusive ones connecting identity, culture, history, memory, and place.<sup>[15]</sup>

#### **METHOD: BODY (WHAT IT FEEL LIKE TO BE THE OTHER IN THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT)**

In the fifth week, **Body** opens students to understanding Black lived experiences in the built environment, with all students completing *Isabel Wilkerson's The Warmth of Other Suns. Walking While Black by Garnette Cadogan, and I am a Black Designer in Charlottesville, This Is What It Feels like to Walk in my City*, by the author/instructor, shifting students to the present day.<sup>[16]</sup> Simultaneously, students review approximately fifty global examples of empathic designs – ranging from the National Memorial for Peace and Justice (Montgomery, Alabama), the National Museum of African American History and Culture, to the M9 Memorial by Gonzalo Mardones V Arquitectos.

Students study and envision stakeholder and lived experience with built empathic designs for integration into their designs from micro to macro scales through **Body's** two principles, first, your embodiment in space, citing architect and humanist Robert Lamb Hart. Hart states that “we read relationships between buildings, landscapes, and streetscapes in social terms, too, imagining their dialogues and conflicts and sensing them rejecting or welcoming us, almost like a family member or a friend.”<sup>[17]</sup> **Body's** second principle is *Einfühlung* – an aesthetic (*feeling into*), a dialogical act of projecting oneself into another body or environment. In – *feeling* (from Susan Lanzoni – citing German philosophers Theodor Lipps and Robert Vischer), captures projection of feeling and movement into paintings, objects of art (extending to architecture), and nature.<sup>[18]</sup>

Body ends with a full studio discussion of how the empathic readings, precedents, and emotional spatial understandings can take form in response to the Hall in a full studio review, summarizing the experience of learning the method.

#### **STUDIO INSTRUCTIONAL DETAILS**

The Studio's timeline (with connected contextual moments in Charlottesville):

- Author arrival at University of Virginia School of Architecture – August 2016
- Unite the Right White Supremacist Rally – August 2017
- \_mpathic design established, September 2017
- Design Seminars, Courses (with approximately 200 students from School of Architecture and University per year using methodology) – 2017 – current
- Studio first imagined – April 2020
- Summer Design Research Team created (lead by author/ instructor and funded by School of Architecture) with two BIPOC undergraduate students (and members of NOMAS) and a white male recent graduate student (all active in spatial justice design work) – May 2020
- Summer Research Team – Social, Cultural, Historical Research – May, June 2020
- Summer Research Team – Example Collages produced, 3Dmodel of Vanderbilt Hall - June 2020
- Summer Research Team – Development of five instructional Modules: The South, Moving On, Arrival, Looking Back, Going Forward, and Response - June / July 2020
- Author / Instructor / Inclusion Training with UVa Acts – August 2020
- Studio begins (online) fall semester – August 2020 (one student from Summer Research Team joining the Studio)
- Aligned Stakeholders / Professionals integrated into studio – October 2020
- Studio final Reviews – December 2020
- Presentation at ACSA Member Schools, Conferences, and National Design Firms – January 2021 – current.

The studio, amplified in an online format, successfully achieved its goals of producing empathic designers and operating at the intersections of identity, culture, history, memory, and place. Student feedback proves:<sup>[19]</sup>

“This is the best course I’ve taken at UVa. I’m a fourth-year architecture student and I truly believe this should be a required course. What I’ve learned in this course will help me as a designer and as a member of society. The skills I developed in this class have made me a stronger designer and more inquisitive individual actively participating in my society and community.”

“Best studio I have ever been a part of. (The instructors) organization of the course is amazing, and the relevance to today’s cultural climate made it have a much larger impact than just being a design studio.”

“This course was extremely helpful and should be required for Architecture students. I notice that in our courses that we do not put much emphasis on the people and cultures we are designing for and the ways to do so are not integrated into our studios.”

Considering replication at other schools, providing students with prepared resources is a must so that students have open time and space to focus on the content material. Funding for students to aid in the preparation is needed to ensure proper care and dedication, proven in the case of the studio as one student participating in the summer research then joining the studio in the fall. Students, as well as visitors to the studio, noted the well-developed narratives due to the resources, and on instructor reflection, an addition would have been to supply further documentation on the three Wilkerson narratives. This addition would have saved time as students prepared further research to support their design ideas. The studio plans to be given again in an in-person format in fall 2021, which adds the symbolic train trip from Virginia to New York City to experience the Hall itself. The field trip inevitably would add another Module to process findings, as well as onsite interviews with aligned professionals.

As an instructor, I found that the selection of Vanderbilt Hall, Grand Central Terminal, allowed for rapid development of student strategies and tactics for operating with the Beaux-Arts canon. This proved in the final presentations, as each student independently defined their empathic design thinking and resulting moves, while supported by their peers. On reflection, the studio sessions focused on “Who are we designing for,” provided students with air-tight visions of the visitor experience, consistently framing the wide range of stakeholders that encounter proposed hybrid designs. Inviting a wide range of guests to the studio in addition to the aligned critics amplified the sense of reality for students, which included local artists, high school students, to Virginians connected to the Migration. In each review, reviewing *To, By, So That* statements allowed students to prototype real-world interactions.<sup>[20]</sup>

In summary, this studio is the aspired model the author wished for as a student at the School of Architecture. At the core is what we all want as educators and practitioners – to take students on a journey of self-discovery and development to an individual design voice with a collaborative effect. The community evolving from the Migration studio sets the foundation for a lifelong learning experience, moving us forward at this essential time.

Figure 2. The Great Northern Migration Design Research Studio Modules (in online instruction)

| Module                           | Student Activities   | Deliverables / Products   | Goals   | Significance   |
|----------------------------------|--|---|---|--|
| <b>1—The South<br/>(3 weeks)</b> | All studio reading of <i>The Warmth of Other Suns</i> , empathy readings, African American lived experience, <i>Dark Matters</i> : Simone Browne. Creation of DRT's, empathy skills training. Setting Studio Community Agreements. Introduction to <i>Mind</i> (2 weeks), <i>Hand, Body</i> (1 week).  | Initial writing reflections, Making Collages (influenced by Romare Bearden and Deborah Roberts) based on reading reflections, shared discussions of reading reflections. Collective sharing of related videos/music/articles/ideas at the beginning of each studio session (throughout) | Provide comfortable and supportive spaces for learning and Setting Context – Social, Historical, and Cultural, supported by DRT'  | Allows students to have difficult conversations, opportunities to share and relearn with fellow students, and the Studio as a whole.<br><br>Module 1 provides life skills for students, operating on social/spatial justice projects – modeling conversation for the field and community engagement. |
| <b>2—Moving On<br/>(2 weeks)</b> | <i>Body</i> (1 week), <i>Hand</i> (1 week): Continued Reading <i>The Warmth of Other Suns</i> , Jim Crow historical readings, aligned social, cultural, historical research and timelines,<br><br>Mapping Racialized landscapes via <i>The Green Book</i> , empathic precedents of racial/spatial justice (National Memorial for Peace and Justice, the National Museum of African American History and Culture, and the University's Memorial to Enslaved Laborers), Introduction to Site – Grand Central Terminal's Vanderbilt Hall. Strategic, applied studio visits from faculty and professionals working in the social/spatial justice field (including Karla McLaren, the author of <i>Art of Empathy</i> and Garnette Cadogan, <i>Walking While Black</i> , and the author's account from Charlottesville). Students access a prepared 3D model of Vanderbilt Hall.<br><br><i>Mind Hand and Body</i> completed all studio reviews. | Empathic design precedent research, initial conceptual design, and design development, two aligned professionals' reviews.<br><br>Design Development with 3D models and physical models.<br><br>Reassessing Community Agreements.   | Develop student empathy skills in practice with fellow students and guests, supportive design development, individual and student critique, and determining one's hydric response to program, topic, and site.<br><br>Rigorous presentation development, with To, By, So That statements.<br><br>First conceptual development of empathic visitor experience. | Ensure development of each student's empathic design thinking framework, and put six aspects of Empathy (from Karla McLaren) into practice: individually, in DRT's, and in the full Studio.  |

|  |   |  |  |   |
|--|---|--|--|---|
| <p><b>3—Arrival<br/>(2 weeks)</b></p>                          | <p>Complete Reading of Warmth of Other Suns – with arrival in New York City - Deep research into African American life by the result of the Migration (to the end in the 1970s to today), Cornelius Vanderbilt, Grand Central Terminal, Harlem, Jacob Lawrence’s The Migration Series, exhibition design research and review/narrative. (in-person Field Trip to New York City via train on the Northern Pathway shifted for online instruction into videos).<br/><br/>Reviews of Mind, Hand, and Body.</p> | <p>Design Development, Midterm review with the same aligned professional group.<br/><br/>Reassessing Community Agreements.</p>                                     | <p>Continued development of empathy skills, in-depth design development for program, narrative, continued individual and collective critique and narrative study, presentation development.<br/><br/>Design development of empathic visitor experience.</p>  | <p>With the Method now integrated into students’ toolkits, preparation for designing in the complexities of the site begins.<br/><br/>Students feel secure and refer back to the empathic design thinking to support the development of design concepts</p>   |
| <p><b>4—Looking Back, Going Forward<br/>(3 weeks)</b></p>      | <p>Collective Reviews with aligned professionals and faculty, determining<br/><br/>Review of Mind, Hand, and Body.</p>  | <p>Continued Design Development, with two extended Penultimate Reviews with an aligned professional group, expanded.<br/><br/>Reassessing Community Agreements</p> | <p>Sharpening of empathy skills, full narrative, and details in response to research, with supportive visual and written citations, integration of visual influences from African American lived experience, and creative work covered in the studio, presentation development.<br/><br/>Full design development of empathic visitor experience.</p> | <p>Use of the method increases, now supported with reviews and stakeholder conversations, modeling workplace skills. Use of the method increases, now supported with reviews and stakeholder conversations, modeling workplace skills. Openness for self, DRT, and full studio critique strengthen, based on cumulative development of the Mind, Hand, Body method.</p> |
| <p><b>5—Vanderbilt Hall: Response<br/>(remaining time)</b></p> | <p>Final Production</p>   | <p>Final Design Production to Final Reviews</p>  | <p>Full confidence in design ideas – with supporting deliverables, presentation development, and empathic visitor experience. Exact, detailed presentation.</p>  | <p>Each student confidently leads their narrative – determining visuals that fully detail not only a position on the topic but in an invitational manner to final reviewers.</p>  |

## CONCLUSIONS

Images of completed student work below:



Figure 3. Ribbon, Housetop, Traveling Star, Taro Matsuno



Figure 4. Omer Gorashi, The Block, 2020.



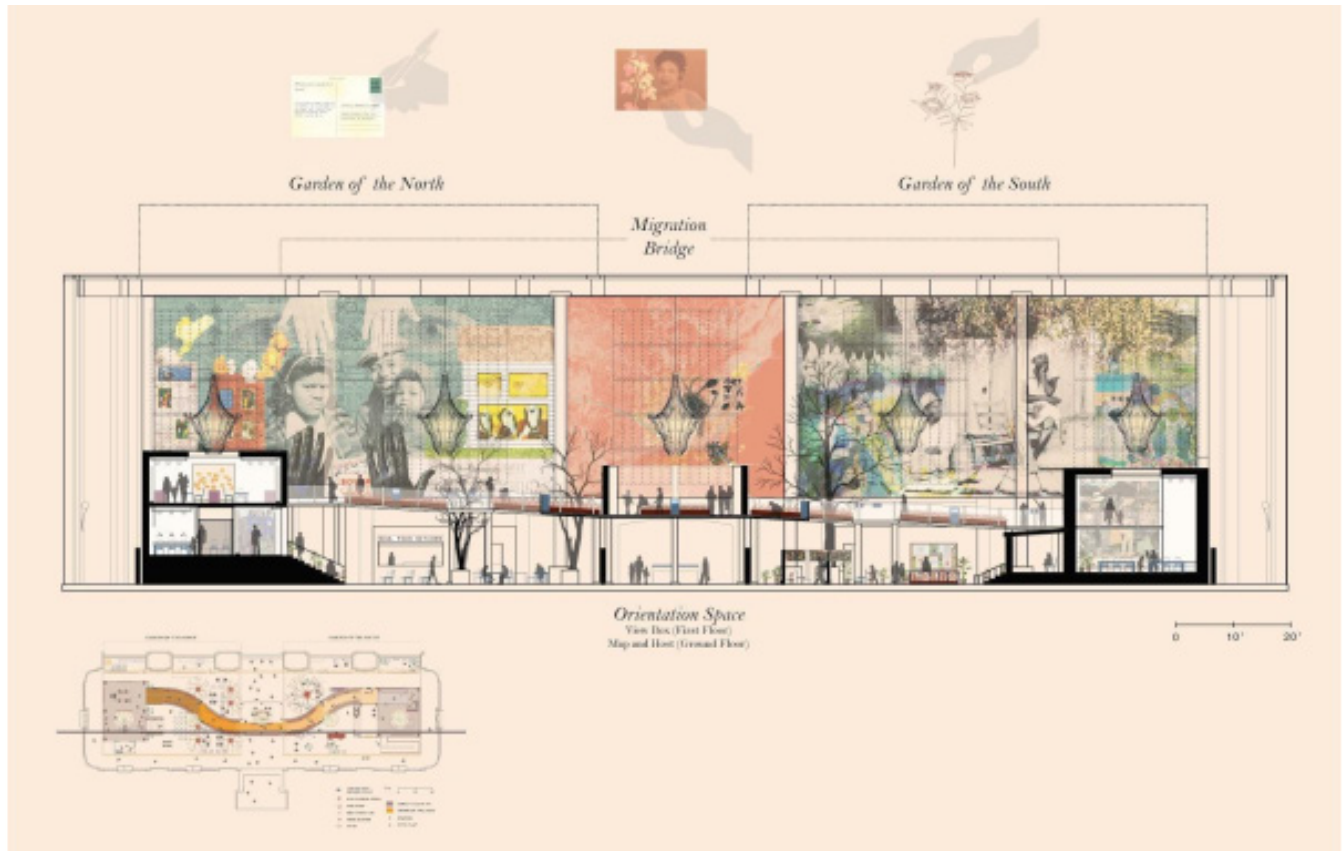


Figure 5. In the Garden, Rebecca Hinch.



Figure 6. Anti Black - Box, Gabriel Andrade.

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