

An Essay on Precedent
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“The works of the past always influence us, whether or not we care to admit it, or to structure an understanding of how that influence occurs. The past is not just that which we know, it is that which we use, in a variety of ways, in the making of new work...”¹

The question “what influences us?” provokes us to answer to what kind of designer we are. There are many different ways that the bits of idea-debris in our mind end up on the panels at final review or on the job site while at work. “Eventually everything connects - people, ideas, objects. The quality of the connections is the key to quality per se.”, Charles Eames². In this quote Charles argues that quality design comes from good taste, a skilled eye to decide what pieces of the puzzle to put together. Ray Eames would put anything interesting she found into her pockets to reference at a later design point. Ray even had special pockets sewn into her pants to facilitate this curiosity³. Charles and Ray would sort through the piles of objects and colors and books to produce some of the best American design to exist. Charles and Ray demonstrate that quality design is not fashionable, it is not a copycat. They demonstrated that quality design comes from connections; from splicing our interests in humankind into one great idea.

Charles and Ray held strong influence during the design process for Wall_001. The Wall_001 team aspired to design with curiosity and taste in order to make something that wasn't catchy, but relatable to the site and users. Many objects fell out of our endless “Ray Eames pockets”. Wall_001 found precedent from previous architectural projects. It also found roots in Calgarian culture, Calgarian History, music, movies and many more subconscious resources. It was from this influence, from the inner roots of our interests, that the vision for the Wall_001 proposal was realized.



Figure 1: Charles and Ray Eames in their LA office.⁴

1. The Harvard Architectural Review. Volume 5. Precedent and Invention. Between History and Tradition: Notes Toward a Theory of Precedent. John E. Hancock.

2, 3. Ince, Catherine, and Lotte Johnson. The World of Charles and Ray Eames. London: Thames & Hudson, 2015

4. “Charles and Ray Eames Hollywood Connections (and How They Snuck Their Furniture into a Few Films) - Film and Furniture.” Film and Furniture. 2016. Accessed March 22, 2016. <http://www.filmandfurniture.com/2016/03/eames-hollywood-connections/>.



Figure 2: Lion's Park C-line stop.⁶

“The lost spaces competition is a call for ideas to re-frame how underused spaces in Calgary might be used. The aim is to address a particular challenge of public space--what to do with seemingly remnant pieces of public property. The challenge: what opportunities do lost spaces afford? A lost space as a passageway, a roundabout, space between two buildings, a highway shoulder, or tenants of the city's history and memory. We'd like to ask you to dream, take risks and stretch what we think is possible.”

D.talks proposed a challenge: What to do with lost spaces. There was a list of recommended sites and the Lion's Park C-line stop was chosen. The linear relationship between the underused fence, sidewalk and bus stop seemed like an interesting design opportunity. There were a series of underused public spaces around other c-line stops. There was potential in making the design an aggregated solution; an opportunity to implement the design into other lost c-line sites as well. The team began to look at the C-line stops as lost spaces within the public realm, rarely designed to function with both social and environmental benefit to the city. With this in mind, one began to answer what it meant for a Calgarian to experience these spaces that remain under-utilized within their urban environment.

Modern Calgary was founded in 1883 when the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway reached the city.⁵ Calgary started to grow in size and importance on the premise of a “port-town” before trade would hit the mountains and head towards settlements west of the Rocky Mountains. In the late 1990s, the Canadian Pacific Railway moved headquarters to Calgary. As a result, trains, in specific, the Canadian Pacific Railway have a strong presence in the city.

5. “Browse by Topic.” The City of Calgary. Accessed January 12, 2016. <http://www.calgary.ca/CA/city-clerks/Pages/Corporate-records/Archives/Historical-information/Historical-Information.aspx#city>.

6. “Google Maps.” Google Maps. Accessed March 22, 2016. <http://maps.google.com/>.



Figure 3: Acre Architects, In Transit.⁷

As adolescent artists, the team immediately reflected on the relationship between graffiti and train cars and the opportunity this relationship could facilitate in a city with such deep roots in the railroad. The proceeding discussion focused around graffiti culture and helped formulate visual precedent for the design intent. These precedent included Sam Cooke's 1960 song "chain gang" which describes prisoners working on the railroad "painted train cars passing by". The movie "Into the Wild" was also discussed as it depicts a story of train passage across North America. Sam is seen in many scenes riding in vandalized train cars in Midwest America.

Upon further research, it became apparent that there was a also very serious graffiti problem in Calgary. "While Calgary's city council is debating the pros and cons of supporting public art projects, on a more localized level, the city's graffiti problem continues to affect some of our best and most innovative artists." - "It's time to consider a public graffiti wall", Metro Paper, 14/05/23. Furthermore, the painting of train cars had significant roots in the North American railroad, in specific in Mid West America and in the Canadian Prairies where train cars had a prominent presence transporting grain.

This rich and deep rooted part of Prairie culture as well as the graffiti cultural precedents had a compelling impact on deciding the design intent. There was desire to touch on the unspoken exchange between the city experience of art, grime and mischief seeping into the wholesome, blue collar country experience through this graffiti and train car relationship. There was equal intent to design something that could exist in 1960 "Chain Gang" or the 1999 "Into the Wild"; a simplistic design that spoke to the timelessness of the exchange. In the end, the function for the Lion's Park site was realized: a linear public art wall. The wall would play on the relationship between graffiti and train cars with intentions to take a positive spin on the Calgarian Graffiti problem.

7. "In Transit - Theacre.ca." Theacre.ca. 2011. Accessed March 22, 2016. <http://theacre.ca/2011/03/01/in-transit-2009/>.



Figure 4: Studio North, Home Away.⁸

The form for the public art wall was largely inspired by tangible architecture precedent, in specific, the work of Acre Architects and Studio North. Studio North and Acre Architects produce work that appreciates materiality, cares for material detail and treats the outdoors as a feature in their designs. These intentions aligned with the team's design values.

Studio North produces projects that hold an heartening Canadian quality. Their work provoked the team to ask "What does it mean to produce architecture in a Canadian Climate?" "What does it mean to produce Canadian Design?" The answers to these questions resonated particularly in their "Home Away" project. The project focuses on materiality and construction detail, detailing simple 2"x4" dimension lumber to create an interesting trellis pattern. They burned the cedar entrance to naturally seal it. This process allows for the cedar scent to carry into the solarium when it rains.

Similarly, Acre Architects holds Canadian character in their projects. They are a firm based in St. John, New Brunswick. Their beginnings are humble and honest, finding roots in traditional East Coast residential projects. The team was specifically drawn to their project "In Transit" which treats a bleak highway in New Brunswick with a series of undulating metal road signs. The "In Transit" site is very similar to the Lion's Park site. The team was inspired by the simplicity of the design of the bent formed metal to create both a composition and a seating environment.

As a result, recycled bent-form Canadian Pacific train metal became the decided material for the design. The metal would be sourced from the Calgary Alyth yard, a place old train cars go to die, and used to create the art wall. The South-East industrial neighborhood in Calgary, a close neighbor to the Alyth yard, would be the location for well-detailed panel fabrication.

8. Erikson, Mark. "Homeaway." Studio North. Accessed March 22, 2016. <http://www.studionorth.ca/homeaway>.

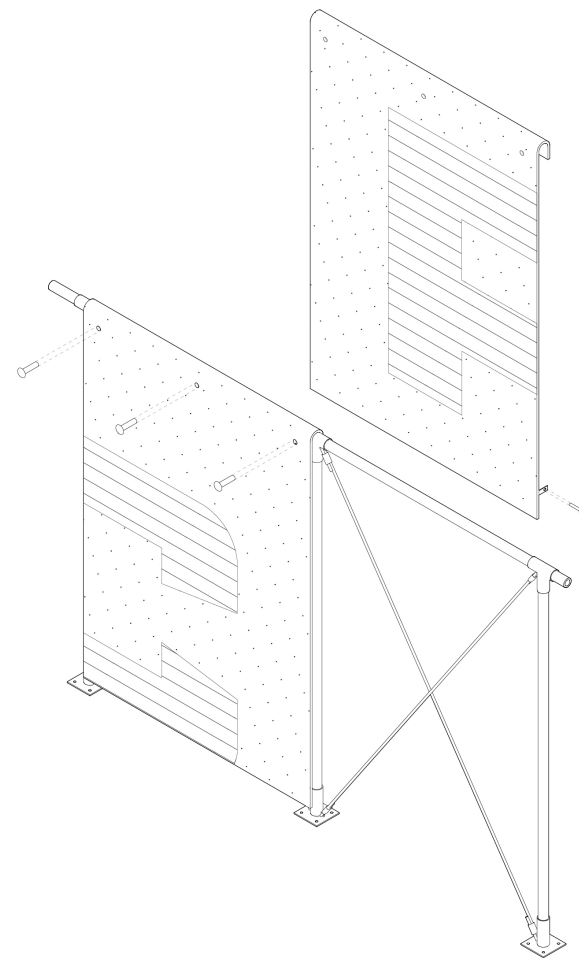


Figure 5: Axonometric of Wall_001 Component

“Wall_001 is the first public art wall in Calgary. Wall_001 is constructed of recycled train metal, finding roots in Calgary’s historical connection to Canada’s train transit and street art’s relationship to the side of a train car. The site chosen is Lions Park Station on the C-line transit network, with hope that Wall_002 and beyond can spread to the rest of the C-line stops. Wall_001 is made up of 16 removable panels. Once painted, the panels can move to be displayed in other lost and public spaces around the city. The panels can be displayed and also repainted by the residents of its new home. Panels may then be brought back together to create a mosaic of the neighborhoods of Calgary. This process can be repeated infinitely. Wall_001 is art by the public, aspiring to display the depth of creative culture in Calgary.”

The idea-debris connected to create Wall_001, a prefabricated wall system made from recycled Canadian Pacific Railway train car metal. Canadian Pacific Railroad letters are visible to give a sense of artists painting on train cars, as the C-line trains passed behind. The dimensions for each panel are an adult arm span, the authentic marking mechanism for mural size by muralists.

The public art wall treats the Lion’s Park site as an opportunity to change lost space into a place for public artwork. The function of the project drew inspiration from the needs of Calgary. The form of the project drew inspiration from the most appropriate detailing and shape for recycled train metal.

The wall is well detailed. The support structure for the panels is made of recycled 51mm piping. Metal plates are welded to piping connections to allow for bolting to concrete slab. Wired cable prevents the structure from racking. The structure is 5cm taller than the panels to allow draining and to lift the panels off of the ground. Panels are folded over the piping and bolted to themselves using hydraulic equipment. Tags at the base of the panels allow panels to attach to one another behind the piping to prevent them from flying around in the wind.

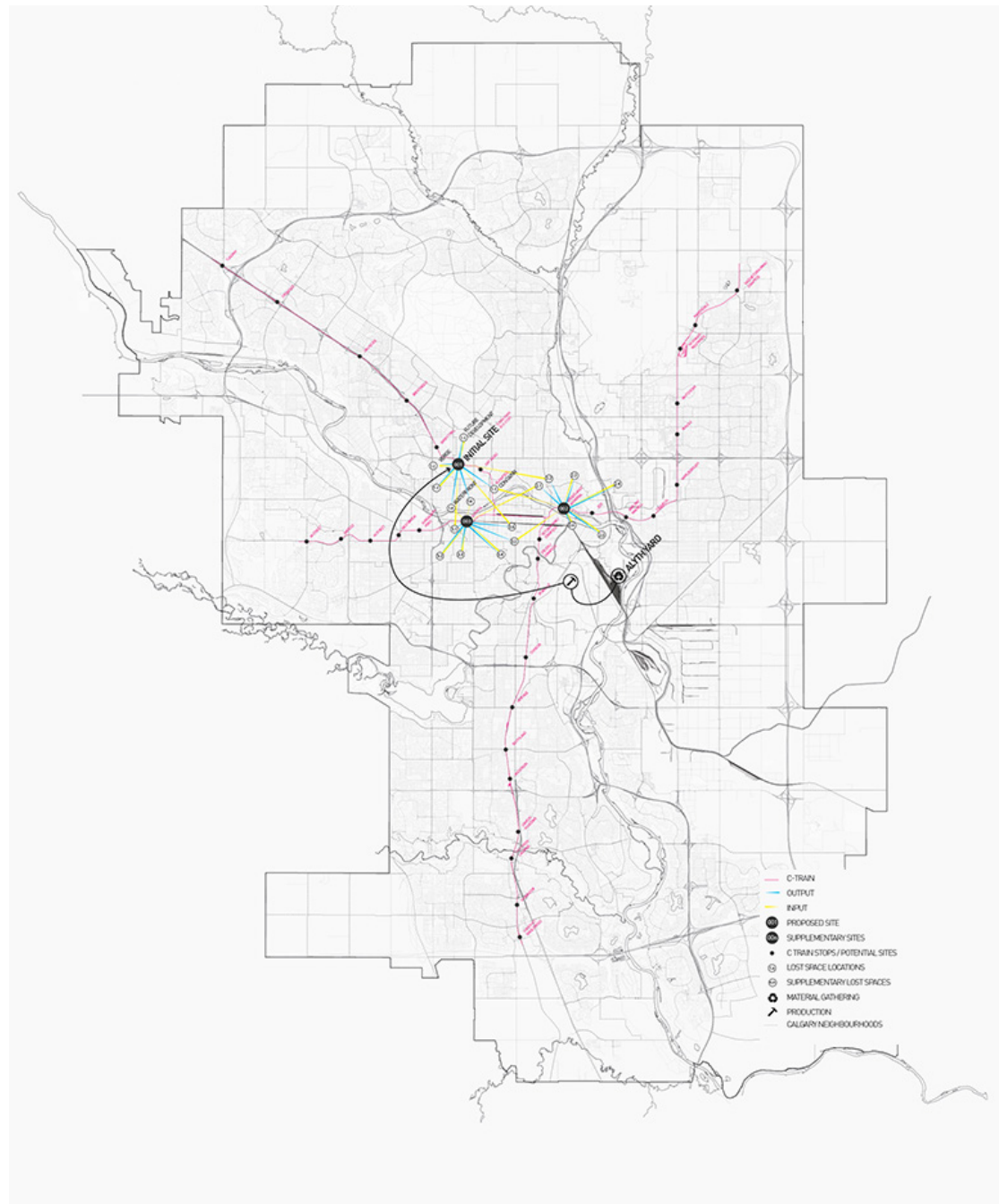


Figure 6: Map of Site, Implimentation of Design Scheme

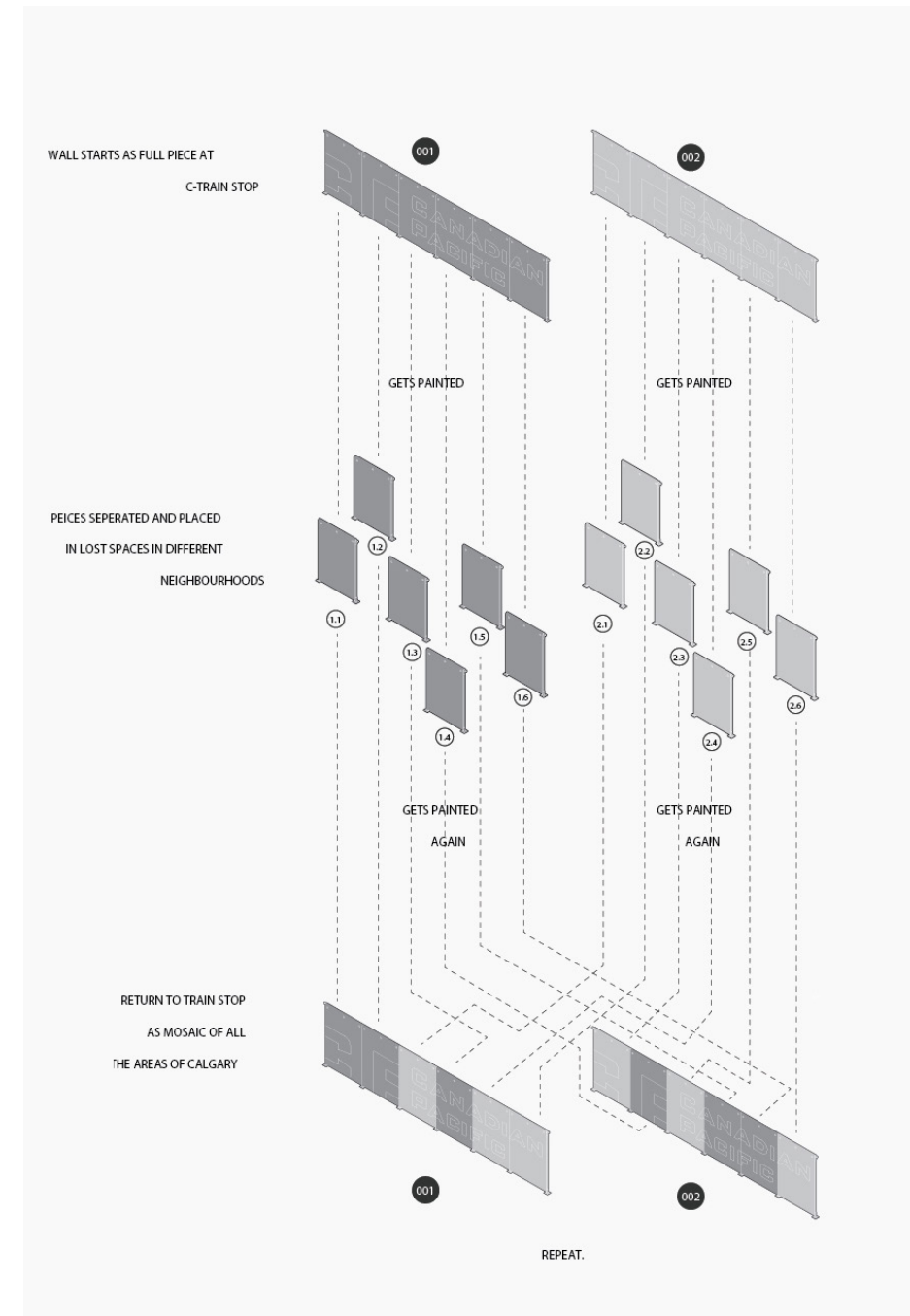


Figure 7: Diagram Illustrating wall disassembly and reassembly.

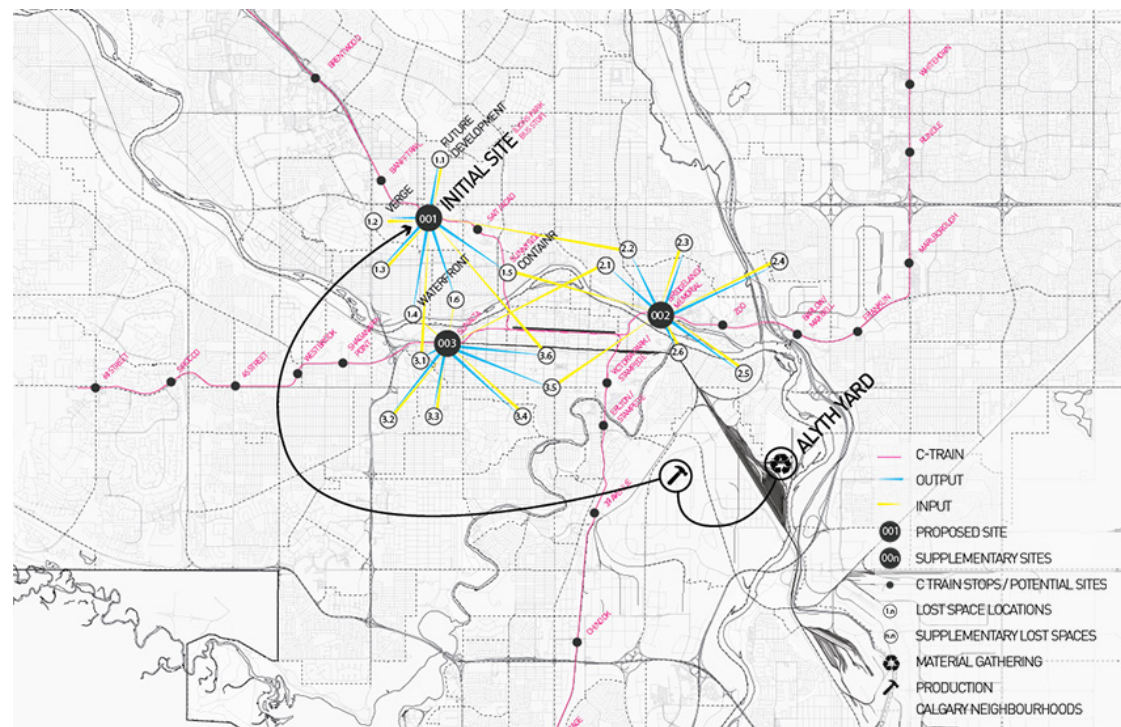


Figure 8: Zoomed - In Detail of Site Map

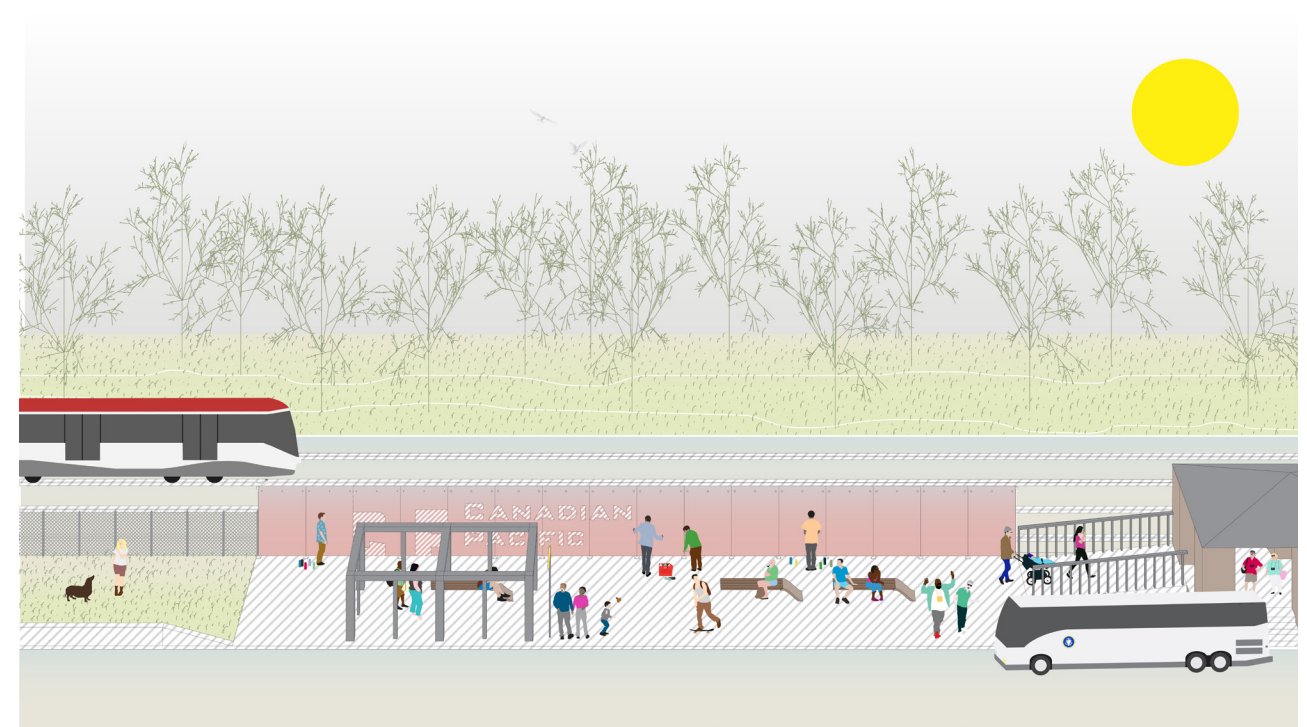


Figure 9: Illustration of Design Scheme

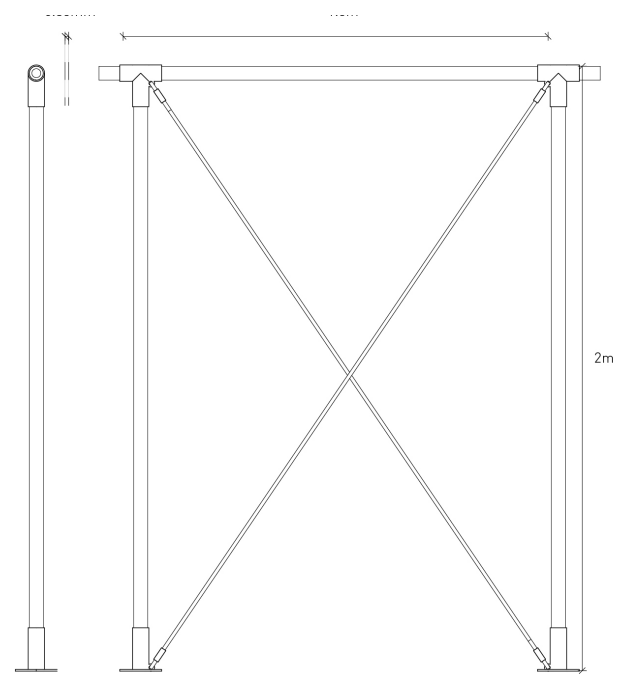


Figure 10: Elevations of Piping Support Structure

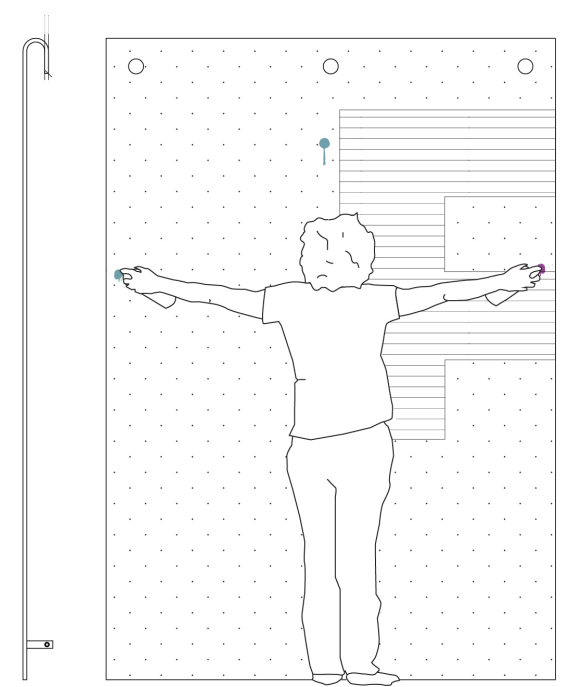


Figure 11: Elevation of Wall_001 Panel, Artist arms indicating mural size



Figure 12: Ray Eames Playing with a Polaroid. ¹⁰

“Take your pleasure seriously” - Charles Eames ⁹

What is it? What really does influence us? What from the past past is not just that which we know, but which we use? The “Ray Eames Pockets” were emptied and the team selected to reference the Sam Cooke song we heard when we were young, the movie we watched on a first date during our first year at university and architects that resonated with the team’s intentions. The Lost Spaces proposal pulled from Calgary, from its history, its culture, its music, its design. It pulled from what it means to be a Calgarian, what it means to be a Canadian, what Canadian design represents. Instead of the typical inclination to rush to discover the relationship between the form and function for the project, the team first took a serious look into Calgary’s past history and present reality. It found context in the scratched surface perception of Calgary; the team began to understand that the city was brimming with artists, the C-line was something that needed attention and that public graffiti was an untapped resource that had amazing potential.

The result was the design of a simple bent metal wall, designed to treat an underused space in Calgary with program that the team found fascinating and important. Wall_001 was a work of pleasure.

9. Ince, Catherine, and Lotte Johnson. *The World of Charles and Ray Eames*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2015

10. “WHORANGE.” WHORANGE. Accessed March 22, 2016. http://www.whorange.net/whorange/fab_furnishings/page/7/.