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Studio H: Design. Build. Transform.

Emily Pilloton Brings Humanitarian Design Thinking to Portland

Studio H: Design. Build. Transform.

November 17, 2011 – February 25, 2012

Curated by Namita Gupta Wiggers

June 30, 2011—Portland, OR— This November, the Museum of Contemporary Craft offers the Portland community an opportunity to immerse itself in the design process with the exhibition *Studio H: Design. Build. Transform.* The exhibition asks viewers to reflect on how that process can teach the next generation of designers to transform the world for themselves. Artifacts from the studio classroom in rural Bertie County, North Carolina where Pilloton teaches design thinking to high-school students will be on display to illustrate how a socially engaged design process can result in significant and positive solutions.

Emily Pilloton exemplifies an emerging generation of designers who believe that design has the power to positively change the world but that new design strategies are required to effect those changes. Pilloton is the founder and director of Project H Design (design initiatives for Humanity, Habitats, Health and Happiness), which connects design to the people who need it most and to the places where it can make a real and lasting difference.

According to Pilloton, design solutions can, and should, empower people, communities and economies, and she has set out to prove her point by challenging the design world to join her in building solutions: “We need to go beyond ‘going green’ and to enlist a new generation of design activists. We need big hearts, a bigger business sense and the bravery to take action now.”

Frustrated by the design world’s scarcity of meaningful work, Pilloton has redirected her efforts to move beyond product, client or budget to service-centered design. Well-designed objects or systems, she believes, should not be evaluated solely by their form and function, but by their positive social impact. These design solutions would optimally engage all the people of the world, not just those who can afford well-designed objects.

For Pilloton and Project H partner Matthew Miller, this does not mean developing products from afar, nor does it mean dropping in on a community for a short time. Instead, it means intimately knowing the people and place for which the design is intended. These principles are

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grounded in a six-tenet design process: • There is no design without (critical) action • Design WITH, not FOR • Document, share and measure • Start locally and scale globally • Design systems, not stuff • Build.

To put theory into practice, Pilloton and Miller moved to rural Bertie County, North Carolina in 2009 to engage in a bold experiment of design-led community transformation. Through a design/build high-school shop class called Studio H, Pilloton and Miller exercised both minds and bodies while bringing design strategies and new opportunities to the poorest county in the state. In August 2010 they began teaching their first class of 13 students.

The yearlong shop class begins with the basics of reading a ruler and progresses to the design, fabrication and implementation of a community-focused farmer's market in their own town. As the project moves into its final phase in the summer of 2011, Pilloton, Miller and their students are photographing, blogging, lecturing and recording their experience on film. The exhibition *Studio H: Design. Build. Transform.* unites these various documentary threads in order to celebrate the process of socially engaged design. Museum visitors will be asked to consider how this non-linear process of "creative magic," of designing while building and building while designing, results in more thoughtful, meaningful solutions.

The exhibition features elements from the classroom, examples of projects completed along the way, and opportunities to learn about the experience first-hand through photographs, film and writing by the students who are applying design systems to create something lasting for their own home town. Pilloton has recently compiled a book about her students and their experiences called *Design Mind*.

The idea is to create an exhibition that showcases the design process and does not merely present static objects or images of objects in use. Pilloton is interested in the challenge of expressing the dynamic nature of the design process in a museum environment. *Studio H: Design. Build. Transform.* re-imagines the gallery as a laboratory and a teaching space so that the members of the community who are designing and building alongside the design leaders are visibly part of the story.

Pilloton is also the author of *Design Revolution: 100 Products that Empower People*, a compendium and call-to-action for design for social impact, as well as a challenge to prevailing ideas about environmentally conscious design. The book features such products as the Hippo Water Roller, a rolling barrel with a handle that eases transportation of water over long distances and rough terrain, AdSpecs, adjustable liquid-filled eyeglasses, and low-cost playgrounds that mesh learning math skills with physical activity.

"... the work means something, and every day we feel that something positive is happening, whether or not we can put our finger on it. "

- Emily Pilloton in *Design Mind*

ABOUT MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY CRAFT

Committed to the advancement of craft since 1937, Museum of Contemporary Craft in partnership with Pacific Northwest College of Art is one of Oregon's oldest cultural institutions. Centrally located in Portland's Pearl District, the Museum is nationally acclaimed for its curatorial program and is a vibrant center for investigation and dialogue, expanding the definition of craft and the way audiences experience it.

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Since its founding in 1909, Pacific Northwest College of Art (PNCA) has become a leader in innovative educational programs that connect students to a global perspective in the visual arts and design. In addition to its nine Bachelor of Fine Arts degrees, PNCA offers graduate education with an MFA in Visual Studies, a Low-Residency MFA in Visual Studies and an MFA in Collaborative Design, as well as an MFA in Applied Craft and Design developed in collaboration with the Oregon College of Art and Craft.

PNCA is actively involved in Portland's cultural life through exhibitions and a vibrant public program of lectures and internationally recognized visiting artists, designers and creative thinkers. With the support of PNCA+FIVE (Ford Institute for Visual Education), the College has a partnership with the nationally acclaimed Museum of Contemporary Craft. For more information, visit www.pnca.edu.

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Museum of Contemporary Craft

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www.MuseumofContemporaryCraft.org

Hours

Tuesday through Saturday 11 am to 6 pm
First Thursday of every month 11 am to 8 pm
Closed Sunday and Monday

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High resolution images available for download on the press center at:
<http://www.museumofcontemporarycraft.org/press>



Working in the studio, 2011.
Photo: Project H Design.



Students stand in front of their
Chicken Circus coop, 2011.
Photo: Project H Design.



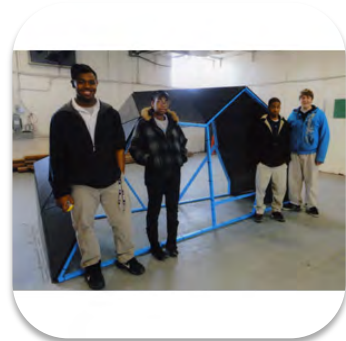
Raising the roof on the *Coopus Maximus* chicken coop, 2011.
Photo: Project H Design.



ChickTopia coop, 2011.
Photo: Project H Design.



Studio H billboard as you enter Bertie
County, North Carolina, 2010.
Photo: Project H Design.



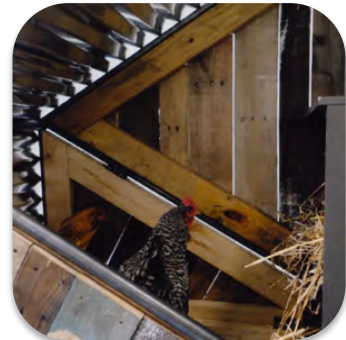
Students proudly display their
Buckminster Fuller-inspired *Coopus Maximus* coop, 2011.
Photo: Project H Design.



Placing the siding on *ChickTopia*
coop's chicken run, 2011.
Photo: Project H Design.



Sketch models from the chicken coop
design process, 2011.
Photo: Project H Design.



Chickens Henrietta and Jezebel enjoy
their new home, 2011.
Photo: Project H Design.