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**2021 Master of Architecture graduate**  
**April 23, 2021**

Friends and faculty,  
I hope these words find you well. I hope you are keeping safe and healthy. I'm sure these words of address have become second nature to you all. The last time I saw many of you was March 2020. I remember taking only a few things from my desk, purposefully leaving my posters pinned on the wall, because I assumed that we would return soon. Like many of you, I didn't know that a few weeks off would turn into:

*"Good morning everyone,  
Today is a big day as our fall term gets underway. To all our new and returning Ravens:  
Have a great first day of class!"*

And now, somehow, we are in April 2021 — April, which has simultaneously signified beginnings and endings. Many of us have defended our thesis, and a few will be joining us soon. So, first of all, I'd like to congratulate you and say, 'We did it,' and congratulations in advance to those who will be finishing sometime in the near future. We are here for you.

Over the past few days, I've contacted all of you individually, asking you to reflect with me on beginnings, moments, struggles, endings, and revelations, and you all got back to me. Thank you. It reminded me of being in studio again, looking over the shoulder of a classmate to ask what they were working on and feeling left inspired by the creativity I was surrounded with. A lot of us here at Carleton have come to see the studio as an extension of our homes — a place for friendship and growth. And, in having to complete a thesis online, I know a lot of you feel like the camaraderie so special about our time together has been lost, and no virtual medium, Zoom, Facebook, Facetime, WhatsApp, etc., can replace that. I asked you to reflect with me to enlist you in what I hope is not our last group project together but the first in our journey beyond the studio as we look towards the future.

With the help of your words, I have composed a story as a fond memory we can look back on as we dream of possibilities, remembering the beautiful moments shared, the struggles we overcame, and the triumphs we celebrated. This story — our story — is a celebration of our life at Carleton and all the joy it has brought us. And if you recognize your voice in it, I hope it makes you smile. I hope it makes you realize how perfectly you are positioned to embrace the world in these uncertain times.

*Every studio I passed was a small victory.*

*Getting models ripped apart was both a struggle and a revelation.*

*We all came from different backgrounds, but it somehow all just fit.*

*There was a sense that the school was an extension of our homes and that no matter what day or time you showed up, there would be a friendly face and conversation.*

*The first semester was so excruciatingly overwhelming with the six classes they had us taking, and it was a wild transition from working in the daytime to pulling all-nighters.*

*I went from a regular diet of homemade lunches to eating two Jamaican patties from the convenience store.*

*But, somehow, I got through with the supportive nature of the studio.*

*Studio culture ended up creating a family out of diverse group of individuals from all backgrounds that really came together to support each other through all the obstacles we faced along the way.*

*I remember going to Oasis during all-nighters with the same people almost every night for some time during the first semester.*

*Also needing to leave studio in the middle of the night because I lost track of time, the train has stopped running, and the whole city is getting hit with a snowstorm and freezing rain.*

*I miss the damn -O-Train somehow.*

*Stressing over deadlines you never thought you could make but always succeeding to produce something that matched the requirements by the final.*

*The first project I presented, I think I sweat through my shirt, but slowly I overcame the fear of oral presentations.*

*Gateway and Abs were also tough, especially for those who didn't have prior technical knowledge, and cutting my finger while making models was annoying.*

*The all-nighters and determination always paid off at the end of the crit. And there was a thrill in frantically running trying to find a printer that worked on crit day and walking into the studios and seeing everyone's familiar faces made it all worth it.*

*Carleton gave me the opportunity to experience other cultures, from Barcelona to Brazil or walking the steps of Petra. I got to see architecture and design through a new lens. Before Barcelona, I have never been continuously drunk for five days. I learned this prevents hangovers (maybe I could have used that trick at Ollie's).*

*Sharing a 12-person room was a hilarious experience (perhaps less so at the moment...and Girona was special. But I also remember the night we spent in the favela*

*in Santo Andre, having dinner with the neighbourhood, where we helped the kids assemble their trampoline.*

*Brazil was an unforgettable experience for a studio - it seemed surreal to be commuting to Escola de Cidade in the summer heat while classmates were in Ottawa in the cold. Death marches around Barcelona for 10 hours. The beautiful group dinners we shared, like at Moritz, and going to Toronto to see how concrete is made at the Spring Valley Tour.*

*The best moments, however, were often just showing up and chatting with people over their work in studio and watching everyone get so good at what they were pursuing.*

*I got into the program with very little knowledge about the architectural industry or any architectural skills and came to learn very quickly that this was something I had to be a part of.*

*Winning one of the prizes at the Ottawa Urban Design Awards and being shortlisted for the Vimy Ridge Competition was pretty cool.*

*Also interviewing for KooZA/rch, winning 2nd place Stantec award in Gateway, a Maxwell Taylor prices in thesis.*

*The Johannesburg studio was a moment of pride for me as our studio won the studio prize with architect magazine. That studio completely changed how I understood space and pushed all of us to reconsider relationships with the ground.*

*I am happiest when I think of the amazing friendships to come out of this program. I genuinely don't think I would be graduating if it wasn't for them.*

*I look forward to is the thought that there might be some kind of reunion in the future. The day I get to return to the building and see some familiar faces and hear how everyone is doing, I think that will be a great day.*

*It is true that Zoom meetings cannot replace studio culture. Roasting friends virtually is not as fun, and it's not as easy to feed off of other peoples' energy.*

*In this past year of change and unpredictability, I learned you're probably not going to fail, but you might always feel behind. Being surrounded by supportive people helps. Because the truth is, even the most individual of projects, for them to be successful, cannot escape any level of collaboration.*

Class, I hope that wherever we are in the world, we might continue this spirit of camaraderie, which is so unique to Carleton. From the story I have just shared, I think one can reasonably conclude that we are achievers. We are resilient. We are open to new experiences. We are hard workers, team players, compassionate, critical thinkers.

But most important of all, we are dreamers with unique visions to offer at an especially important time in history.

As director Jill Stoner has said, we are graduating at a unique time as potentially the first architecture class to complete their entire thesis online in a pandemic. Also, during a time where paradigms of thought are being called into question, and ideas that once seemed foundational are being unsettled.

This means we are at a time of beginnings, a time ripe for new manifestos, new poetry, new ways of seeing, and new ways of embracing the world. Having survived our thesis year online, I think we have shown we are capable of adapting and that we are ready to take on many challenges, including what many people are calling the new normal.

We'll need to call on all the skills that we've learned to innovate, exercise compassion, and tackle challenges that may be completely unfamiliar to us. However, don't fear. I am full of optimism that with all our unique talents and voices, we are ready. Continue to trust in the process, focusing on your goals, not the obstacles, being proud of your unique journey and the importance of what you have to offer.

If you forget, I hope you keep a strong community around you to remind you that your contribution is needed. The future might be uncertain, but the world has now become our campus, and I hope you approach it with the same level of curiosity and empathy that has been so characteristic of our time together.

I hope you remember that the realization of dreams is a collaborative effort, as we learned in studio and that we'll need to work together in order to achieve the equitable and sustainable future that we all look forward to.

When I first started my personal architectural journey in 2013, which some of you may know took a few detours. I remember the most important thing a professor said to me in one of my studios was that to be a better designer, you need to become a better person. Read more, do more, draw more, explore more, travel more, and these words have been with me ever since.

It has been an amazing experience to have such a creative class that challenged me to become one step closer to the best version of myself, I learned from you just as much as I learned from my professors, and I hope you also learned from me. I hope every day you wake up and dream about the future, you strive to do more and be more. Be open to new experiences without the fear of failure. When you fail, fail forward.

Here is to life and every joy it has brought us. May all our storms be weathered, and all that's good get better.

Thank you to everyone who joined us tonight. Thank you to the professors, Jill, and the entire faculty at Carleton, who conspired to help us get here.