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Hello everybody. It is wonderful to see you all together this evening.

This year began – and is now ending – unlike any other before.

For an entire academic year, we have all been trapped inside of Zoom boxes that are stuck inside of screen boxes that are stuck inside of room boxes. Inside these boxes, we have learned to be together digitally while being apart physically. We grew new house plant friends. We renewed the bonds with our pets, partners, and roommates. We rediscovered board games and tried to remember just how many times we've watched the Tiger King.

Meanwhile, outside of our boxes, a confluence of crises culminated into great forces of acceleration and transformation. A global pandemic, a worldwide reckoning with systemic racism, a burning planet, and a near-total transition to a digital world have left us feeling adrift in our tiny boxes amidst this great sea change. We felt small. We felt isolated. We felt powerless.

As our boxes tumbled, awash in the currents of change, we contemplated the inescapable interconnections between the microscopic and the planetary; endless growth and mass extinction; our collective past and our present inequalities; the risk of taking a breath and the horror of breath being taken. We grieved. We were angry. We demanded change. Stuck at home, we knew all too well that life is lived in the built environment, and thus we realized not only that we could take action but that we must.

Inside your boxes, you got to work. You used your ingenuity, your talent, your persistence, and your resilience to do the most important work of all: you made ideas. The past two days of thesis reviews were rich with meaningful confrontations between architectural practice and pedagogy, between the individual and the collective, between race and the built environment, between the human and the planetary, between what is known and what is possible, between what the world is and what the world should be. In short, this year, you taught us.

Soon, but not soon enough, our boxes will begin to open, and we will walk out into a different world. This new world desperately needs your ideas. Now is a time to leave behind old ways of thinking, to build new forms of community, to fight for each other, and to walk together toward a more socially just and ecologically sound future.

We need you to use your ideas to lead us all there. And you will need each other. Remember how you adapted during this difficult time; these are the valuable lessons that will carry you forward into a fast-changing world. Do not be cautious. Be bold. Be brave, speak your truth, and continue to teach us all.

I'd like to thank each of you for letting us, the faculty, and the staff of the school, join you on your journey through our Master of Architecture program. Education is built upon trust, and just as you have trusted us to guide you through your years here, we now trust you to guide us all moving forward.

The generous spirit and enormous talent of our students are what defines our school. Now, use these gifts to begin building a new and better world. Congratulations to the Master of Architecture class of 2021.