Outpost Office: Winner of the 2020 Ragdale Ring competition

Lake Forest, IL
Ragdale Foundation today announced the winner of the 2020 Ragdale Ring competition. This contest is near and dear to Ragdale in its efforts to celebrate and further the field of architecture.

“Drawing Fields is an expansive, minimally invasive solution that responds to the extraordinary context of 2020. The project invites numerous opportunities for programmatic reinvention, collaboration, and education. It addresses our present-day concerns of physicality, public space, and engagement, while embracing the question that is central to this competition— "What is Architecture?"

- Jeffrey Meeuwsen
Executive Director, Ragdale Foundation

Outpost Office, an architectural practice co-directed by Knowlton School Assistant Professors of Architecture Ashley Bigham and Erik Herrmann, has won the eighth annual Ragdale Ring Competition for their design, Drawing Fields. Their proposal is a contemporary interpretation of the original Ragdale Ring garden theatre designed by architect Howard Van Doren Shaw in 1912. Drawing Fields will begin monthly performances in late July.

Embracing a design approach that celebrates the ring as a temporal condition of performance, Drawing Fields will utilize GPS controlled field marking robots to create a series of site-specific drawings or paintings produced throughout the Ragdale campus at 1:1 scale. Visitors will engage the installation as large scale, occupiable paintings in individual clearings or dynamically weaving through the entire Ragdale site.
The design is time-based, mobile, and fleeting. Eventually, *Drawing Fields* disappears with only rain, sun, growth and time. There’s no waste, no toxins and no messy clean up. In the matter of a few months, the site is ready for the next ring.

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Bigham and Herrmann acknowledge that COVID-19-era social distancing will affect access to the Ragdale site, and they are working with the Foundation to understand how to address concerns of access and engagement through their proposal. "Our current plans call for limiting site access to essential personnel and performers," commented Herrmann. "The performances will be filmed and broadcast online for the larger Ragdale community. We’re placing a real emphasis in how this story might be told by collaborating not only with the performers, but with cinematographers and filmmakers renowned for their approaches to place-based storytelling."

Installing *Drawing Fields* on the Ragdale campus will also be affected by the pandemic. While the conventional design-built residency of past installations is impossible this summer, Outpost Office views the use of robots as an advantage in minimizing on-site labor. "Our plan is to conduct our installation over the course of several weekends. We’ll begin with modest tests of the robot’s functionality and each monthly installation will increase in scope and complexity. The final performance will include elaborate patterns, drone photography and movement artists!" said Bigham.

Ragdale is a nationally acclaimed artist residency program in Lake Forest, Illinois. In 2013, Ragdale launched an international competition to reinterpret Shaw’s Ring as a temporary, experimental environment. The annual competition provides artists, architects, and designers with the unique opportunity to devise and construct a performance venue and gathering place on the historic Ragdale campus. They seek inventive, site-responsive, large-scale submissions that explore intersections of architecture, sculpture, landscape, public art, and performance disciplines.

Outpost Office is an architectural practice seeking new public audiences through experimental creative production ranging from the serious to the absurd, often simultaneously. Outpost Office has been supported by institutions including the University of Michigan, The Ohio State University, The Kharkiv School of Architecture, The MacDowell Colony, The Cranbrook Art Museum, the US State Department and a few private clients.
Ragdale Ring 2020 Performance Dates (broadcast online)

July 15th  
August 12th  
September 9th

To purchase tickets to Ragdale Ring, please visit Ragdale’s Eventbrite page.

About The Ragdale Foundation
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