

Karen Wong, New Museum's Director Of External Affairs, On Architecture, Untapped Capital And The 'Big 5'

Posted: 04/02/2013 3:50 pm

While perusing the hefty list of jurors for [Architizer's A+ Awards](#), we couldn't help but pause at [Karen Wong's](#) impressive resume.

As the Deputy Director and Director of External Affairs at the New Museum, co-founder of the [Ideas City Festival](#) and board member for the [Storefront for Art and Architecture](#), Wong seems to have a hand in the city's most forward-thinking art hubs. We reached out to her to learn more about her experience with the downtown art scene and her involvement with one of the largest competitions in architecture.



HP: How did you become involved with the Architizer A+ Awards?

KW: I am good friends and colleagues with [Architizer founder] Marc Kushner, so about a year ago when he had this idea he was using me as a sounding board. He got me more involved; I ended up being on the jury [and] starting around November I wrote every week about one of the folks on the jury.

HP: Was there a particular member of the jury who fascinated you?

KW: [Iwan Baan](#)-- he had just taken [that magnificent picture of the Manhattan Island from a helicopter that appeared in New York Magazine](#) after [Hurricane] Sandy... The image went completely viral and [subsequently the post that we wrote also received a lot of attention](#). That was my first intimate experience with blogging.

HP: Tell us about the [Ideas City Festival](#) coming up this May.

KW: It's a four-day festival, and through a variety of projects we're looking at the thesis of untapped capital. We held a think tank about a year ago with a lot of cultural and civil leaders and together we decided we wanted to explore the idea of unused resources.

HP: How do you see the New Museum in the grander scheme of New York's artistic landscape? Is it alternative or mainstream?

KW: We are definitely the David to the Goliath, but when people talk about museums we are mentioned. Five years ago when we had our new building Time Out New York included us in the "Big 5," but our budgets are so much smaller than the other folks. The Guggenheim and the Whitney are monsters -- in a good way. Being smaller makes us much more nimble; we can react quickly to current events. Being downtown is helpful too, because a lot of energy is coming from Brooklyn.

HP: How does this compare to your experience with the Storefront For Art & Architecture?

KW: The Storefront is very young, really tapping into the architectural community, asking *What is the future of the field? What are young architects looking for?* I think we're really lucky to have that alternative space in New York.