Voices in the Industry
By Karla Perez

As designers we proudly take the path of social responsibility. We influence the quality of life not only in the home, but in workplaces, hospitals, and places of congregation. There is no doubt that in the coming years with higher productivity rates due to innovations in technology, we will be further tasked with shaping our communities. However it would be naive to think that the scope of the people we’re serving is expanding at the same rate. Growing up in NYC as a daughter of two Mexican immigrants, I was able to witness how minorities are excluded from the design world. It has become a privilege to live or interact with spaces that are safe and highly curated. Why in a world with so much tech and information available over the internet have we not been able to reach the average person’s life? This year IIIDA 2019 (Re) Designing our profession for Diversity student roundtable was able to put that question into perspective. Our struggle as a profession, like many others, is we don’t have enough voices participating in the conversation. Where and how do we build? How will this affect this marginalized community? We have become targets of the eurocentric model that gravely influences much of our society at a global scale. We must strive to give these communities a chance to correct us when we use staged sets of color and calculated trinkets placed upon shelves to create the illusion of culture.

Our responsibility lies further than the physical, it extends towards a mental well being. By allowing ourselves to exclude entire communities because it’s not trending we contribute to the marginalization of minorities and have kids like me at age 7 wondering why my mom was ashamed. Stressed her house wasn’t as clean as perfect as the one’s she spent her days cleaning modeled after minimalist ideals. We hide our culture behind curtains moving “stuff” into rooms so visitors don’t notice it. But why shame us, this is how our people hold onto what little they have left of their homes. Homes left to provide new ones. I used to want a princess chandelier because all the American girls had one. Now I would want nothing more than the soft glow of a hundred veladoras lining the streets of the cathedral in Puebla.

The technology we’ve become excited about are visions of robotic arms and new forms of Material ecology pioneered by Neri Oxamn. Many of these innovations are possible with the constant migration and immigration of all kinds of people. Technology doesn’t necessarily mean 3D printing or robots. It means using long standing traditions, cultures and rituals, especially those involving nature and fusing them with new tools. Technology will be our greatest ally in empowering designers by sharing and collaborating. Without this integration, we may be able to produce faster and greener spaces, but we won’t be able to do our job. Designing for everyone, not just those who can afford a voice in the profession.