Building a Bridge Across Disciplines, People, and Thoughts
By Liwam Beraki

With today’s exponential growth in technology comes an increased demand for creativity and innovation. The world is dramatically evolving in ways never imagined, especially in regards to design, the sciences, and the bridge being built between them. This interdisciplinary approach is in parallel with the need for a diverse representation of thought in all settings. Diversity is more than a trending topic or mere buzzword, rather it is a stimulant for creativity and the mother of innovation.

The future of design thinking starts with a multidisciplinary and inclusive environment. A group of individuals, representing various backgrounds fosters collaboration in the most ideal sense. This diversity of thought is shaped by factors like race, ethnicity, sexual identity, religion, age, gender, ability/disability, and socioeconomic status. These factors, along with many others, form a natural skill set that is interwoven by our multidimensional experiences. With major global challenges ahead, like climate change, for instance, designers will be required to find holistic solutions that are only found in the ultimate collaboration of perspectives.

Technology is a medium in achieving this. It is a network of pathways creating an intersection of cultures and ideas. With the exception of travel, cultural exposure has always been limited to simple conversation, later progressing into something more visual like videos and images. But now, experiences can be curated in real-time, introducing people to unfamiliar ideas, scenarios, and places. Current and incoming technology like Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) allow designers to immerse people into new and sometimes strange environments. Imagine viewing a space through the perspective of someone with visual, hearing or mobility impairments; or visualizing the cultural fit of your building in the context of its surroundings on a human scale. These emerging technologies are reshaping the conversation of how we design for a diverse range of end-users.

This blend of disciplines exists in a multitude of ways. Take Neri Oxman for instance, an American-Israeli designer, architect, and now professor at MIT whose focus is on designing materials “for, with and by nature”. Oxman founded and currently leads a research group called Mediated Matter that combines aspects of the built, natural, and biological environment to explore design possibilities from micro-scale to building scale. The research group consists of an interdisciplinary team pushing the boundaries of what is known to the world of architectural design, product design, digital fabrication, and construction. The range of backgrounds represented both culturally and academically spark the creation of the innovative design ideas Neri Oxman is recognized for.

Designers have the obligation of expanding their horizons across subject lines. Interior architecture pulls inspiration from within and outside a space, and those interacting with that space. This means any and everything can be used as a muse, and designers must use technology as a tool to transcend the limitations of the title itself. With globalization and urbanization on the rise, we as designers must engage ourselves in the uncomfortable, to create an inclusive environment, better serving the vast and diverse populations ahead.