

**Competition ESSAY** discussion on precedents and initiatives

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Status non winning entry

Website [www.warminghuts.com](http://www.warminghuts.com)

There exists a wide spectrum of projects to undertake in the architecture competition community: projects ranging in all scales from furniture to urban planning, and projects located in all continents of the world. Amidst the variety of differences between each project, however, is a constant that permeates through each one of them: the search for an architectural solution to a well-defined issue.

In my search for a competition to participate in, a series of factors would help focus my decision on which architecture competition to choose from: firstly, an ambition to address a wide audience required the desire to choose a project with an interaction at the public scale; secondly, an ambition to work freely and creatively with the form required a project with flexible program; thirdly, an ambition to experience and learn more hands-on work required a project that would preferably but not strongly required be built and have myself be involved in the build; and fourthly, the desire to potentially build or help build a structure required a project to be of small to medium scale. The danger with defining many factors before finding a competition is the potential of not being able to find a competition that would suit all of the criteria. It does, however, help one in finding a project that would best suit most. I was lucky enough to find, in my search, an art and architecture competition that would satisfy all of my criteria, with a plus being located in our home country (pretty cool, eh). The competition is called “Warming Huts.”

Warming Huts is an Art and Architecture competition seeking the design and built work of three new, and unique shelters that when chosen be built and installed along the world's longest skating trail - the Assiniboine River in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. The competition is segmented into three components: the first, the design and submission of the proposed hut; the second, the jury's decision on three entries; and the fourth, the building of the structure along the river. After being chosen, the shelters are to be built and installed in the period of time between the end of January and the beginning of March: the period in time when the river is bound to keep a thick enough layer of ice to be

safe for hundreds of visitors and a few zambonis to frequently clean the ice. During these shivering cold winter months the Assiniboine River is used as an alternative route to access downtown Winnipeg by foot, bike, skates, and skis. Along the river there are many access points from suburban and urban zones in the city, and many opportunities designated for curling, hockey, socializing, relaxing, and other social activities. The chosen Warming huts become a place to take repose from the many activities along the skating trail and to find a physical and (or) psychological warmth. The competition is an experimentation of Art and Architecture where designers are encouraged to investigate the relationship between built artifact and the frozen riverscape. Being mostly free in choosing an approach, the competition did ask to creatively incorporate a provided skid in the design - a four foot by eight foot ice skid for transportation from The Forks to the desired location along the river.

The project's challenge encouraged me to investigate an approach that could through the experience of the warming hut effectively induce a psychological warmth: it was an interest of mine to explore the potential for humans to psychologically induce the feeling of warmth in a cold environment. The question then became about how an environment could trigger and engage the person in feeling warm without the actual presence of heat. Seeking inspiration from previous warming hut winning entries lead me to draw inspiration from a hut by 701 Architecture in 2010 entitled "ICE CUBE" (Figure 1): the hut utilised natural wood tones, and framed pictures of fire hung on the interior walls to evoke a sense of warmth - potentially by recalling familiar memories of warmth by the fireplace or by a bonfire.



Figure 1 : ICE CUBE - 701 architecture inc. in collaboration with Soul Seeker

The idea of using a medium to encourage the viewer to think of something warm and as a result feel an inner warmth either through an image of something that can produce actual heat or something that can potentially trigger a memory of warmth became the driving force of the project. The ambition however was not only to provide an image of something warm but to involve the visitors to actively engage in thinking and potentially doing something that can inspire warmth.

A study conducted at the University of Southampton showing the psychological effect of nostalgia and its effect on happiness and inner warmth began the shaping of the programmatic strategy taken for the design of the shelter. The study conducted a few experiments where participants were placed in a variety of cold environments and encouraged through the use of music and pure thought to induce nostalgia. The study showed that the participants who experienced nostalgia were able to cope with the cold environment better than those who didn't experience it.<sup>1</sup> Drawing inspiration from this article I decided to encourage the visitors to actively engage in recalling a past memory that inspired warm thoughts so as to use it to fight the cold winter days. The hut would then act as a memory box that could make one feel at home: in that way it can compensate for a vulnerability.<sup>2</sup> In thinking about how to encourage such thoughts to arise, the idea of having the visitors actually write down their nostalgic thought seemed to be a fun and effective way to recall a close memory, contemplate it, feel 'warm,' and share the warm thought with anyone willing to read it in hope of inspiring warmth in them. The question was then about how the act of writing of one's thoughts on a surface could be incorporated into the tectonic form of the architecture and what that form would look like.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> University of Southampton (2012, December 3). Heart-warming memories: Nostalgia can make you feel warmer. *ScienceDaily*. Retrieved December 28, 2013, from <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2012/12/121203082050.htm>

<sup>2</sup> de Botton Alain, "Memory," *The Architecture of Happiness*, Vintage Books, New York, 2006, pp. 106

<sup>3</sup> Frampton, Kenneth. "Introduction: Reflections on the scope of the tectonic," *Studies in Tectonic Culture: The Poetics of Construction in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Architecture*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1995. pp. 15

Another question being considered at the time was how to create an enclosed environment that would shelter one from the overwhelming conditions present outside such as strong winds, loud sounds, and light. This was essential for anyone spending some time in the hut while writing down their thoughts or taking repose. In order to satisfy these questions, the form that took shape was enclosed by walls and a roof: for the walls, a material that would reduce the amount of glare, and brilliantly diffuse the interior space with ambient light was desired in order to create a calmer atmosphere. The solution was to use white translucent polycarbonate panels. The walls then became a great opportunity to allow the visitors to draw and write upon (Figure 2), essentially acting as structural and artistic canvasses: the natural glow as a backdrop to the drawn and written work would present a vibrant contrast.

Once the the enclosure was partially resolved, iterations of circulation became important. Seeing as the walls were the point of interest and programmatically located on the perimeter of the design, the circulation made best sense offset and along the walls, with the entrance to a corner of the space. With the experience of the program being on the perimeter, I found an opportunity to use the skid provided as a rest bench located in the center of the space. The bench would allow the visitors to gravitate towards it, acting as the resting place for anyone is deep nostalgic thought or simply seeking repose.



Figure 2 : young girl expressing her inner warmth

By this time, the form began to possess its poetic nature or its sentimental factor, as Aris Konstantinidis says<sup>4</sup>. Three primary elements were currently at play: the first being the enclosure and structure; the second being the walls; and the third being the bench. However, without a mimetic<sup>5</sup> quality to these elements, no poetry could flourish through the architecture. The project's aim was to embody the an inner warmth in an outwardly cold environment. The enclosure took on the form of a jagged ice cube with sharp edges and white translucent surfaces, expressive of the cold outwardly environment of the human body (Figure 3). The supporting structure is constructed with plywood and painted white with a lattice form, expressive of the rigidity of an ice structure (Figure 4). The bench is constructed with warm douglas fir, expressive of the 'fire' which burns within each one of us (Figure 5). The project was given the name "Transcending Frost: one imagination at a time."

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<sup>4</sup> Frampton, Kenneth. "Postscriptum: The Tectonic Trajectory, 1903 -1994," "Introduction: Reflections on the scope of the tectonic," *Studies in Tectonic Culture: The Poetics of Construction in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Architecture.* Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1995. pp. 15

<sup>5</sup> Heynen Hilde, "Mimesis in Architecture," *Architecture and Modernity*, MIT Press, 1999, pp. 193 – 219



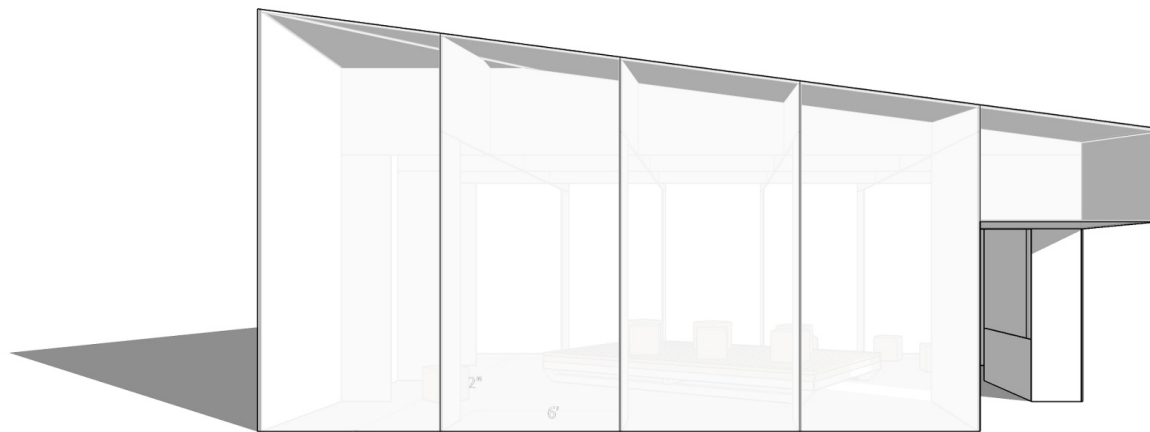


Figure 3 : front elevation

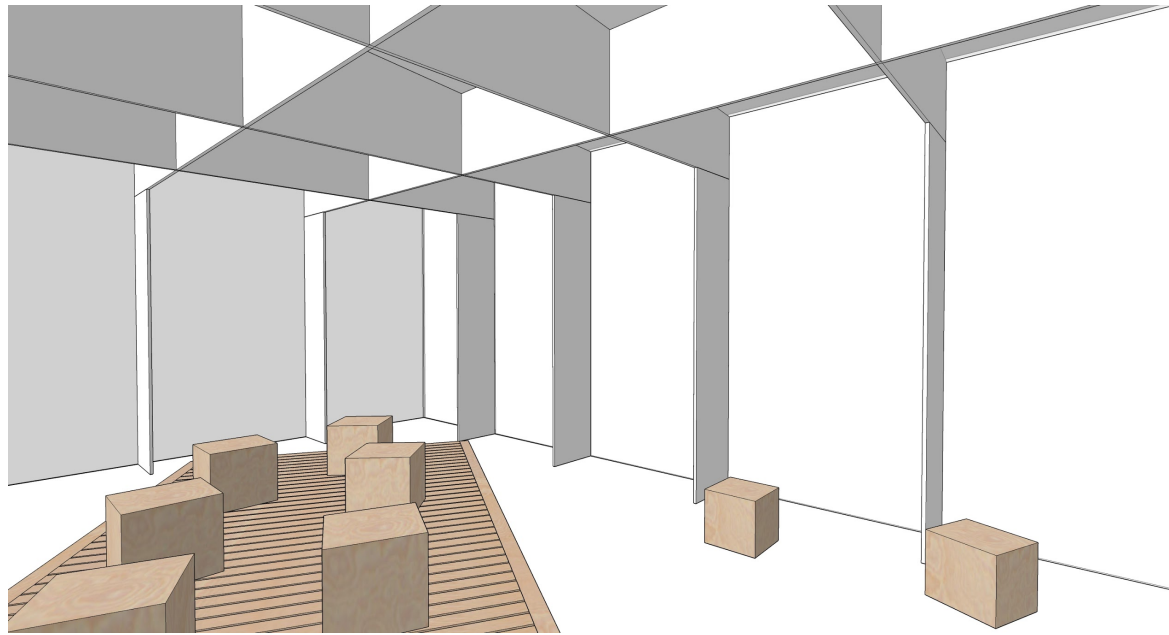


Figure 4 : interior view

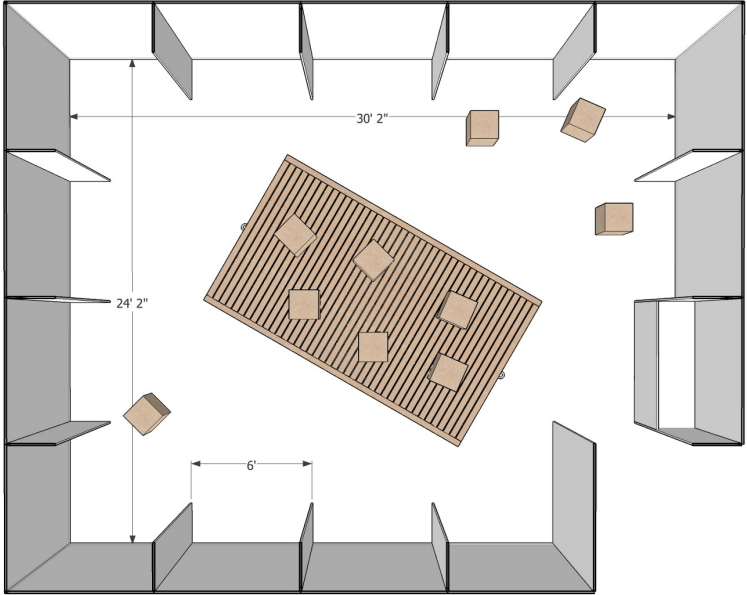


Figure 5 : plan perspective

Implied in its architectural realization are the mediation of contradictions through the mimetical shaping of the project: the outwardly cold and the inner warmth. The impact of the perceived tension between the two begins a dialogue of how a cold environment can interact whether negatively or positively with humans and our ability to psychologically produce warmth if we so desire it. As Adorno claims, “Beauty today can have no other measure except the depth to which a work resolves contradiction. A work must cut through the contradictions and overcome them, not by covering them up, but by pursuing them.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, “Functionalism Today,” *Oppositions*, no. 17 (1979), p. 41; translated from “Funktionalismus heute,” in Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 10, pt. 1 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1977), p. 395