

In Conversation with Mabel O. Wilson

Zainab Yaqub and Shadman Chowdhury are Teen Thinkers at the Bard Graduate Center. They spoke with Mabel O. Wilson, a professor at the Columbia Graduate School for Architecture, Planning, and Preservation on July 24, 2019. Below is an excerpt from their interview.

Location: Columbia University, New York City

Zainab: How are you today?

Mabel Wilson: I'm very well. Thank you both.

Shadman: So our first question is, careerwise how do you self-identify? Would you call yourself a designer, professor, historian, or other?

Mabel Wilson: I think of myself... well I could say Professor pays the bills. So being an academic is my primary profession. But in terms of what I do because I practice architectural design, I write down art projects, curatorial; I like to think I have a multidisciplinary practice. So I don't quite fit in anywhere exactly just my practice is called Studio and is all the other stuff.

Zainab: What made you want to pursue architectural design? Is it what you always wanted to do? Because I know you pursued it at university. That was your major.

Mabel Wilson: I did an undergraduate degree, a B.S. in architecture at UVA and then I have a Masters of architecture here at Avery here, from Columbia. But then I... while I was here I believe it actually, well while I was an undergrad I also went to the Architectural Association in London briefly. You know I was just kind of exposed to a whole other world and set of ideas and everything that I had been curious about but not able to address about black identity, culture space building, architecture. And So my graduate degree I started asking these questions and working on them in my seminars and papers that I was writing and then at my studio. And then I started teaching and then I was an assistant professor at the University of Kentucky and decided I wanted to do a doctoral studies. So I ended up doing a phd in American studies. So that's why I'm really a cultural historian and not an architectural historian.