

Press Release

2024 RIBA NORMAN FOSTER FOUNDATION TRAVELLING SCHOLARSHIP FUNDS RESEARCH INTO SUSTAINABLE OFF-GRID INFRASTRUCTURE IN AFRICA

The Norman Foster Foundation (NFF) and The Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) are pleased to announce Thomas Warren, nominated by London Metropolitan University (UK), as the winner of the 2024 RIBA Norman Foster Travelling Scholarship for his project 'Africa 360°'.

The annual scholarship awards a £7,000 travel grant to facilitate international research by an architecture student who demonstrates outstanding, original thinking on issues relating to the sustainable survival of cities and towns.

Thomas intends to use the travel scholarship to investigate how future off-grid cities can eliminate the time consuming, costly, and maintenance-heavy nature of city scale infrastructure – instead using self-sustaining energy, water, and food systems. Thomas was inspired after observing how African cities had skipped fixed-line telecommunication infrastructure and went straight to distributed mobile network towers, effectively leapfrogging technologies.

Africa's young population, digitised education, solar energy, and abundant resources offer vast potential. Diverse landscapes, cultures, and contexts make for unique research locations for off-grid living and future cities. Starting and ending in Cape Town, Thomas plans to travel to off-grid projects, communities, and initiatives to understand solutions for future off-grid sustainable cities. These locations include the Earthship Biotope project in Malawi, the Fambidzanai Permaculture Research Institute in Zimbabwe, the Irente Biodiversity Reserve in Tanzania, the Kipepeo Village in Kenya, and the Enkanini informal settlement in South Africa.

Given the exceptional standard of applications this year, the jury also commended three other entries:

- Henrick Michael (University of New South Wales, Australia), for 'Urban Biomimetics'
- Qianqian Ma (Royal College of Art, UK), for 'Finding the Eel and Flounder: A Project to Witness Tuvalu's Retaliation Against Rising Sea Levels'
- Santiago Fernandez Perez (European University of Madrid, Spain), for 'Deserted Horizons: The Silent Crisis of Rural Europe'

2024 RIBA Norman Foster Travelling Scholarship recipient **Thomas Warren** said:

'I am honoured to have been selected as the winner of the 2024 RIBA Norman Foster Travelling Scholarship. The scholarship will allow me to conduct research on my project *Africa 360°*, gathering valuable first-hand information on existing off-grid communities to inform the design of future cities. I would like to thank the judging panel of the scholarship for selecting me and London Metropolitan University for nominating me. I am also immensely proud and grateful to be the first South African recipient.'

Muyiwa Oki, President of RIBA, said:

'We urgently need to make our cities greener. So, Thomas's proposal really resonated with the judging panel – he plans to investigate off-grid communities in countries in Africa, where he thinks there is great potential for sustainable solutions to be nurtured. I look forward to hearing how his findings can help to address the global challenge of sustainable urban development. I would also like to thank Lord Foster and the Norman Foster Foundation for having established this initiative with RIBA, generating invaluable support that allows students like Thomas to travel for research projects.'

Norman Foster, President of the Norman Foster Foundation, said:

'There were a high number of entries for this year's Travelling Scholarship. The jury was impressed by the quality of so many of these entries, but unanimously selected Thomas Warren's proposal to investigate sustainable infrastructure solutions in off-grid communities across Africa. We offer our congratulations to Thomas for his accomplishment and look forward to seeing the results of his research.'

This year's scholarship attracted 79 entries. The judging panel was comprised of:

- **Norman Foster**, Lord Foster of Thames Bank (Founder and Executive Chairman, Foster + Partners; President, Norman Foster Foundation)
- **David Jenkins**, Publisher, Circa Press; Trustee, Norman Foster Foundation
- **Diego Tobalina**, Head of Innovation and Design, Norman Foster Foundation
- **Richard Dilworth**, Trustee, Norman Foster Foundation
- **Muyiwa Oki**, Senior Architectural Manager, Mace; RIBA President 2023-25
- **Mehrnaz Ghojeh**, Head, C40 Cities Finance Facility

Notes to editors

First established in 2006, the scholarship, supported by the Norman Foster Foundation, is now in its eighteenth year and is intended to fund international research on a topic related to the survival of our cities, in a location of the student's choice. Past RIBA Norman Foster Scholars have travelled through the Americas, Europe, Africa, South East Asia, the Middle and the Far East.

Norman Foster Foundation

The Norman Foster Foundation promotes interdisciplinary thinking and research to help new generations anticipate the future.

The first mission of the Norman Foster Foundation is to promote the importance of architecture, infrastructure and urbanism for the betterment of society. To this end, the second mission is to encourage new thinking and research across traditional boundaries to help younger generations anticipate the challenges of future change. In particular, it addresses those professionals who are concerned with the environment—architects, engineers, designers, urbanists, civic leaders, planners and artists. This is at the heart of a holistic approach to design and is ever more relevant as populations shift to cities. With the implications of climate change, robotics and artificial intelligence, sustainable design is not about fashion but about survival.

The Norman Foster Foundation is based in Madrid and operates globally.

Visit <http://www.normanfosterfoundation.org> for more information.

The Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA)

The Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) is a global professional membership body that serves its members and society in order to deliver better buildings and places, stronger communities and a sustainable environment. Follow @RIBA on Twitter for regular updates www.twitter.com/RIBA

PRESS ENQUIRIES

Santiago Riveiro
Head of Communications
Norman Foster Foundation
<mailto:srp@normanfosterfoundation.org>
+34 91 219 15 47