UIC Architect Receives Rome Prize to Explore Energy as Building Material

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[NOTE: Photos for download at: http://newsphoto.lib.uic.edu/v/lally/]

Newswise — An architect at the University of Illinois at Chicago has received an international award that began in the 19th century to develop a 21st-century idea: to use energy systems as building materials.

Sean Lally, assistant professor of architecture, received the 2011-2012 Prince Charitable Trusts Rome Prize in landscape architecture from the American Academy in Rome, established in 1894 for advanced research in arts and humanities.

"The same way we use steel, glass
and concrete to build space, we can now do with energy — the waves, particles and chemical properties of energy," Lally said, noting that the potential of these properties has not yet been realized. "Instead we use them to condition interiors with ideal light and temperature. We don't ask them to be architectural, to define space.

"That will soon change," Lally said. "Architecture will shift from being defined solely as walls and surfaces, and start engaging the design of micro-climates on the outside."

The academy awards the Rome Prize annually to 30 artists and scholars worldwide. Recipients spend six or 11 months in Rome, pursuing their work within the academy's community of resident and visiting artists and scholars.

Lally is using his 11-month fellowship to write a book, "The Air on Other Planets," which he describes as a projection into the future in which architects will design spaces defined by energy systems.

The book, Lally said, will incorporate ideas from his Chicago-based firm, WEATHERS/Sean Lally LLC, which designs "exterior
installations as well as larger-scale proposals for public buildings and parks that engage a broader city fabric."

His recent proposals include designs for the Academy of Arts in Estonia, an extension to the Stockholm's city library, and an urban redevelopment in Reykjavik, Iceland, in which future urban development "is organized not by avenues, monuments and park/building dichotomies, but by a 'climatic wash' – from existing geothermal resources – that's as much an architectural space as it is a planning infrastructure."

Lally was co-editor and contributor to "Softspace: From a Representation of Form to a Simulation of Space" (2007), a book of essays on the growing use of digital tools for architectural design that indicate not only form, but qualities such as air, gas, sound, scent and electricity.

Last year, he wrote on "material energies" for the Seattle-based design journal ARCADE. He was guest editor for the 2009 "New Material Energies" issue of AD, an architectural design journal.

UIC ranks among the nation's leading research universities and is Chicago's largest university with
27,000 students, 12,000 faculty and staff, 15 colleges and the state's major public medical center. A hallmark of the campus is the Great Cities Commitment, through which UIC faculty, students and staff engage with community, corporate, foundation and government partners in hundreds of programs to improve the quality of life in metropolitan areas around the world. For more information about UIC, please visit www.uic.edu.