

The Link between Art, Science, Technology and Architecture

Atenkosi Plaatjie

One of the most recognized unconventional contemporary architects, Prof. Renato Rizzi, gave a lecture on the “Critique of Contemporary Architecture” and a site visit tour of the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Art Museum, at the first NMMU School of Architecture international workshop held on Tuesday morning.

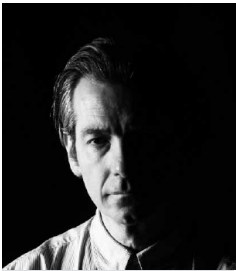
Prof. Rizzi opened the conversation by having an interaction session between himself and the 2nd and 3rd year NMMU Architecture students. He dabbled into the roots of Architecture by explaining the process which architecture has taken from the beginning of mankind to the present day. Prof. Rizzi critiqued the separation of art and technology when it comes to architecture. “Art is not only science and technology,” argued Rizzi.

He made examples of Port Elizabeth’s infrastructure and showed how it was built based on a European image, and how the nature of the city was not taken into account.

When asked by a student, Thamsanqa Futha, as to how this problem could be eradicated, and how architects can attach themselves to nature, Rizzi responded “We need to always start from nature and knowledge, that’s the only way to proceed in architecture or in art”.

Later in the evening, the students were given a tour of the most famous architectural building in Port Elizabeth, the Nelson Mandela Art Museum. The site visit was extended from the Art Museum to the 1882 Victorian Pearson Conservatory, The Athenaeum building and then to the Donkin Reserve site.

Most of the students were surprised to see how down-to-earth and normal Prof. Rizzi was. “Prof. Rizzi’s knowledge of architecture is extraordinary; I feel so lucky to see the world through such an experienced man’s eyes. It is also surprising to see that this great man is also normal,” said Architecture student Shawn Erasmus.



Prof. Renato Rizzi

LEVELING THE FIELD

Workshop 3 held on Tuesday, 4th of February 2014, held talks addressing a common theme; how to decrease the number of people living below the poverty line.

The first speaker, Municipal Strategic Planning Assistant Director Mr. Schalk Potgieter, who is tasked with developing and implementing the vision, mission and strategic objectives and plans of the (a) municipality addressed the concept of spatial planning. Briefly summarized, spatial pattern is a perceptual structure, placement or arrangement of objects on Earth. It also includes the space in between those objects. Patterns may be recognized because of their arrangement; may be in a line or by a clustering of points. “We start by

looking at the region,” he stated, adding that “Port Elizabeth has 1 152 115 people living in it and among the 1 million, 71 411 live in a non-formal structure.” Potgieter added that it is his job to build houses for those who need them. The question related to this though was where and how?

Potgieter claims that by 2020 there will be 100 000 strong population growth in Port Elizabeth and that might hold some challenges for spatial planning, arguing that spatial and infrastructure resources will be dependent on whether the people living on grant income can afford to take care of the houses built. Potgieter inked the 2020 vision to the 15 year plan that

was started in 2005 by former President Thabo Mbeki who explained that “the peoples’ contract is for a better tomorrow”. This vision has different implications for The Bay, such as Embizweni, Youth Development and Njoli square redevelopment. Their most successful endeavor is Coega IDZ, a project that has created jobs for many in the Motherwell area.

Professor Stephan Read concluded the talks by showing the links between the two men saying that their primary role is to create jobs. However with all this talk about economic development and getting jobs, does it actually do just that?

Port Elizabeth: Building Together in Architecture

Sinesipho Mbandazayo

ON Tuesday, the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University’s School of Architecture had the honour of hosting a workshop by Professor Raul Pantaleo at the Donkin Reserve, a local heritage site and architectural marvel.

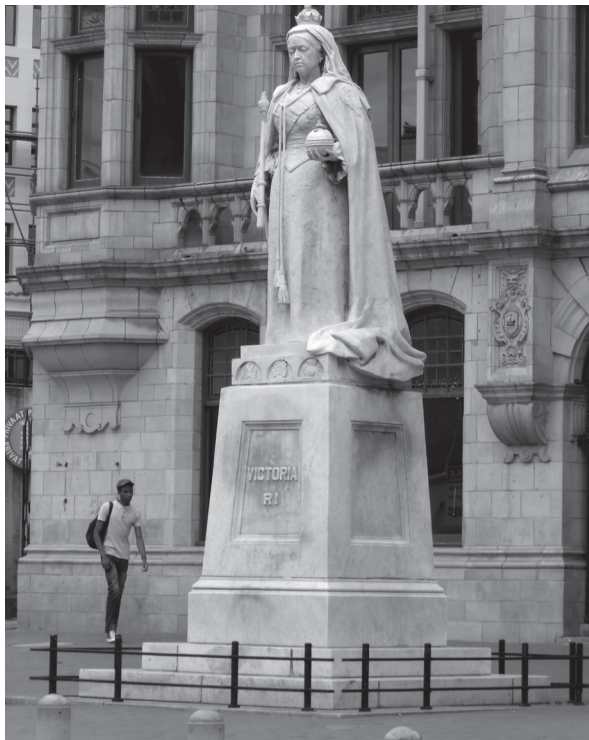
The event was centred on identifying the problems with all the structures of Centrahil, Belmont Terrace, Russell Road and Chapel Street, as well as finding solutions to these problems. This portion of Port Elizabeth is identified as the dome of the city as every structure and every idea is built around it, as that is where it all “begins”.

Undergraduate Architecture students in attendance, were fortunate enough to receive insight from someone not just with experience, but who is also a renowned architect from Venice.

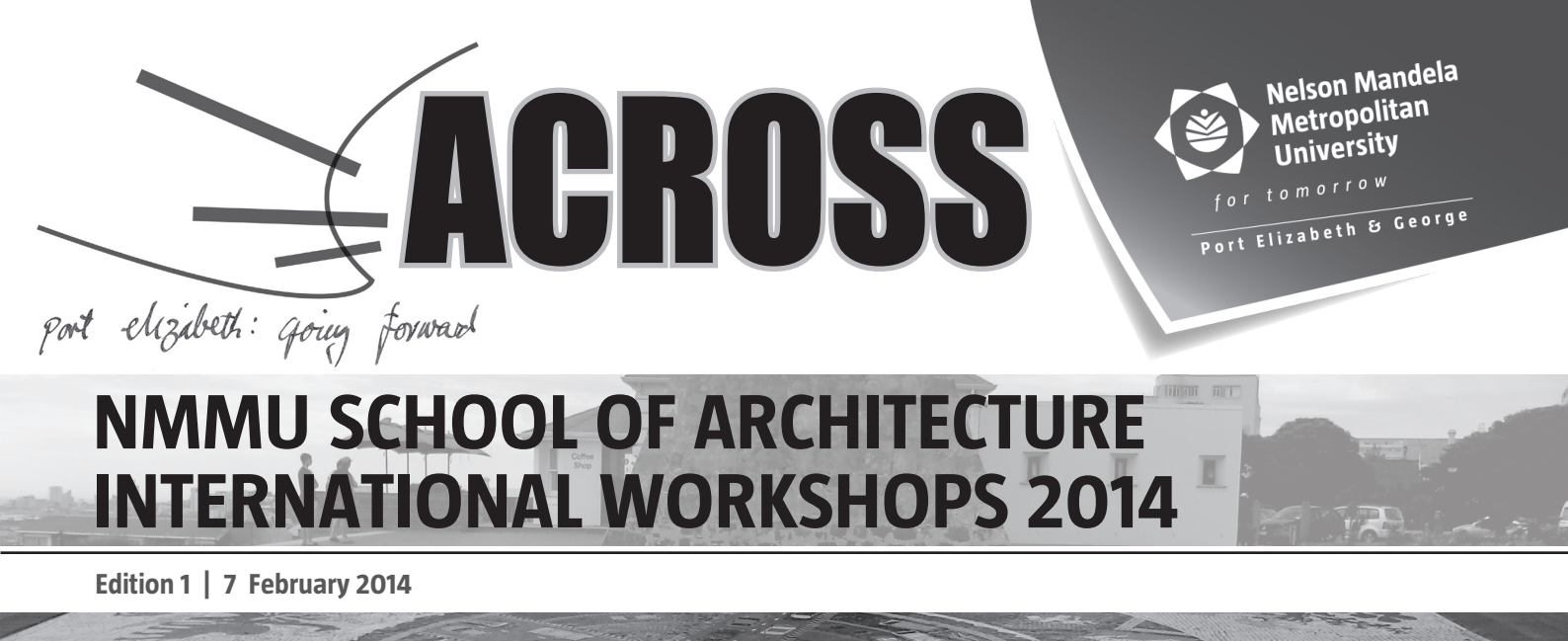
The tour around Central gave one a new outlook at viewing buildings as more than just constructed entities, but more so offered an understanding of their history and the inspirations behind the structures. Most of the buildings looked grim but assistant Simon de Vries managed to see the beauty and potential of every abandoned building.

Some students found the experience overwhelming and nerve wrecking, being in the same space and breathing the same air as Raul Pantaleo seemed almost surreal. However, Prof. Pantaleo exuded in his ‘informal’ and humble approach throughout his workshop, putting students at ease while emphasizing the importance of principles in the workplace. “One of the most important principles in architecture is proportions, space and working together”.

“Another important principle of architecture is to remember that it is not a battle, but about working together to build a good project”, said Pantaleo.



The Queen Victoria statue situated in Govan Mbeki Street, Port Elizabeth.



A Warm Welcome

Babalwa Mtenganya

Monday, the 3rd of February 2014, saw the kick off to the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University’s School of Architecture’s first International Workshop for undergraduate students. Hosted at the University with site visits and talks happening around the metro, several international delegates and numerous students began a journey of insurmountable experiences.

The event began with several hundred Architecture students enjoying the wise words and ‘know-hows’ of the main workshop hosts; Raul Pantaleo, an Italian Architect born in Milan but now currently living and working in Venice, Renato Rizzi, another architect from Venice and Professor of Architectural Theory and Design at the University of Venice, and Stephen Read, Professor of Architecture at the University of Technology in the Netherlands.

Students and visiting delegates embraced Vice Chancellor, Prof Derrick Swartz’s uplifting words during his welcoming speech, reminiscing on his past “my first year was the most important one because it was a new journey with a rough map of where you want to go, but the route you take will be determined by the choices you make”. Swartz further epitomized the three week event by saying, “[t]his workshop is about architecture and the vision of the future. It will give students the ideas to be creative, innovative and think out of the box”.

Swartz further offered words of encouragement to aspiring and seasoned architects by professing that students know their role as architects in society, they have the potential to correct the injustices of the past by taking into consideration the environment and the limitations of natural resources, reinforcing his ideology

that resources should be used responsibly and in a manner that is environmentally friendly through the use of renewable resources.

Continuing on this Swartz concluded by asking the students how they planned on changing a world that is faced by such huge challenges such as global warming, exploitation of natural resources and economic turmoil, raising the issue of organizing a future society in a world characterized by increasing complexity. Deputy Vice Chancellor, Prof Piet Naude, finalized the proceedings of the Welcoming ceremony with the exciting news that Architecture students will now enjoy a new state of the art computer infrastructure, concluding that, “[t]his University wants to be an African university by producing cutting edge knowledge, we have to draw from the best that is available in the world”.

INTERNATIONAL ARCHITECTURE WORKSHOPS KICK OFF THIS WEEK

Deon van der Walt

Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University’s School of Architecture launched a series of workshops on Monday with the goal of upgrading certain parts of Port Elizabeth.

Spread across different workshops, design projects are presented by first, second as well as third year students from the NMMU Department of Architectural and Technical Design.

The three projects undertaken by the collaboration between the NMMU School of Architecture and the MBDA (Mandela Bay Development Agency) is for the upgrading of specific parts of the city including, Centrahil, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Art Museum as well as Kings Beach Lifesaving Club, situated in Port Elizabeth.

All of the locations considered for upgrading are a crucial part to the image of Port Elizabeth. Centrahil, located in the area between Donkin Street, Belmont Terrace, Russell Road and Chapel Street is the location where Port Elizabeth had its beginnings and is therefore import for Urban Conservation.

The Nelson Mandela Bay Metropolitan Art Museum plays a very important role in the Metro’s tourism industry. The upgrade to the Art Museum includes making it more spacious. At the moment the museum is not able to function to its full capacity due to its limitations.

The final prospective upgrade to Nelson Mandela Bay is the upgrading of the Kings Beach Lifesaving Club. The building is for different uses as it is ideally situated between sand dunes around it which offer protection against flooding and occasional natural hazards.

The Mandela Bay Development Agency is already responsible for some of the upgrades in the Nelson Mandela Bay Metropolitan area including the upgrading of Govan Mbeki Street, Parliament Street and the Market Street Square located in Uitenhage.



The Donkin Reserve in Central, Port Elizabeth

Editorial Team

Editors

Mr Devon Koen
Mr Jakub Siwak

Art Director

Mrs Tarryn Rennie

Designers

Bianca Wicks
Deon van der Walt

Articles submitted
and written by third
year N Dip Journalism
students, NMMU,
Department of
Journalism, Media
and Philosophy.

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Prof. Stephen Read informs and encourages SA youth

Natali Iverson and Angelique Hawes

Prof. Stephen Read presented a lecture at the Port Elizabeth City Hall in the hope of inspiring young architect students at NMMU.



Professor Stephen Read

Originally from Cape Town, Prof. Stephen Read studied Architecture in 1979 at the University of Cape Town. Although he has been out of practice for many years, Read is recognised in South Africa as well as internationally for his knowledge and understanding of urbanization and technology.

Today, Read is a professor at the Delft University of Technology in Amsterdam. He is passionate about urbanism and modernity as well as how humankind seem to be programmed “backwards” with regards to the use of technology.

He spoke about the role of the youth in today’s modern world and said “there is nothing more important than education.”

Read’s speech focused mainly on power and energy and how they link to other important factors like segregation, civic unrest, industrialization and modernity. He took the audience through history showing how the end of the 19th century brought about fundamental change and the end of the “British Century,” allowing a profound shift to what Read called, “a new beginning.”

Professor Read was very candid throughout the lecture and even admitted to being very pessimistic when it comes to architecture and how it affects our future here on earth.



Fifth year Architecture student, Thea Pretorius, makes a collage of Port Elizabeth architecture. The pictures were sorted by colour rather than a specific design or feature. Some of the pictures were placed upside-down or at an angle. The collage tries to influence students’ cognitive thinking by presenting them with a familiar structure displayed in a different way. By focusing on a picture that is upside-down and trying to turn it around in their minds, they are forced to look beyond the surface of what they immediately recognise and focus on the details.



UPGRADES PLANNED FOR NELSON MANDELA BAY: Inspired by restoration of the city’s heritage



port elizabeth: going forward

Plans to upgrade some important landmarks in Nelson Mandela Bay are in full swing as day two of the International Architecture Workshops 2014 drew to a close on Wednesday.

The workshops, which started on Tuesday are part of an exciting new initiative undertaken by Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University’s School of Architecture, three International lecturers and a local guest lecturer from the field of Architecture. The workshops are aimed at the upgrading of infrastructure in four specific areas around Port Elizabeth.

The workshops are split into four sections with each guest lecturer heading one of the four events. Workshop two, which took place on Wednesday, was conducted by Professor of Architecture, Renato Rizzi, of Venice.

The theme of workshop two was Environmental Upgrading, Urban Master Plan for Western Road, including the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Art

Museum Complex at St George’s Park. Part of this master plan is the Environmental upgrade of Western Road as this is a vital link between the Donkin Reserve and St George’s park central area.

Experts have identified that the development of a comprehensive framework as well as a design master plan which can be used as assistance for the planned environmental upgrade of Western Road.

Prof. Rizzi believes that with the right people involved and lots of hard work, this project can be a huge success. The workshops will run until 17 February 2014 with presentations of models scheduled for 18 February and final presentation and printing of posters to be held on 19 February 2014.

If you are interested in the exciting new developments planned for Nelson Mandela Bay and wish to learn more about this project, be sure to attend the exhibition.



Pantaleo: “What is cultural heritage for you?”

Bianca Wicks

Italian architect Raul Pantaleo’s workshop returned to their studio to reflect on Wednesday the previous day’s site visit. The students, who were divided into groups of five, presented their drawings and findings. The points discussed included the fact that a social resource is any space that provides comfort for people and that the site seems to be blocked off.

Later, Janet Cherry joined the workshop to contemplate the idea of cultural heritage. Pantaleo asked the students “what is cultural heritage for you?” thereby challenging them to find a definition for the concept from a South African perspective.

One argument was that perhaps the age of a building should not be considered when deciding whether it forms part of our cultural heritage; a building is simply an architect’s interpretation of a significant event or sequence of events. Another student then argued that style could represent a certain culture’s heritage and referred to the Cape Dutch buildings.

This led to the question of whether South Africans had a shared cultural heritage and if it was possible to make everyone happy. The discussion kept leading to the construction of Western buildings during the colonisation period and Pantaleo wondered what had been in the city before this time.

He encouraged the students to look beyond a certain point in history. The students were given a five minute break to reflect on what they had discussed and Pantaleo mentioned that “an architect has to be involved in a participatory process.”

The workshop provided the students with an opportunity to consider different ideas, to participate physically, better their workmanship and absorb knowledge from an international professional. “I’m glad I chose this workshop,” said first year BAS student ChansaChansa, “It was very engaging and I liked the fact that Raul Pantaleo allowed us to discuss the different topics.”

Pantaleo said that he is pleased with the student’s progress and looks forward to the students working together in order to produce one final project.



Raul Pantaleo (right) was joined Donald Flint (Left) on a site visit in Centrahil - Port Elizabeth

Women in Architecture



Prof. Ora Joubert

Former head of the Architecture Department at the University of Free State and University of Pretoria, Prof. Joubert, is proof that this country is indeed moving in the right direction in terms of gender equality.

Prof. Joubert who is now doing her own private practice, has enough energy to make any women want to change their career path towards Architecture, although she still feels that there are some challenges in being a woman in this profession. “Men don’t always like to listen to us, there’s a fair amount of discrimination, not [only] discrimination, they just don’t take you seriously,” said Joubert. She added that there are a few advantages with being a woman in this profession. For instance, if you challenge men and tell them they cannot do something right then they try and prove you wrong and get it right.

Coming from Pretoria, she added that Port Elizabeth has very friendly people and especially the students. She has enjoyed working on this project for the past four days. “It’s a great project for PE, to have people coming here from abroad. There is a lovely energy focused on Port Elizabeth and I’m enjoying it tremendously because I don’t know Port Elizabeth,” said Joubert.

“The focus of this project is to engage with the public on public space...”

The focus of this project is to engage with the public on public space where people can congregate. Prof. Joubert’s focus is the beach and upgrading of the life guard’s facility and to also turn it into a public space for public use. Because the life guards are not really visible there and at the moment the facility is not exposed either to the public or the sea. The life guards approached NMMU hoping that once the design is complete it will be revealed to the public.

Melissa Pause, a second year student said she is also excited about the project and the only challenge is with the dunes around King’s Beach being that they are not allowed to be trimmed due to environmental reasons. Other than that, there is a lot of positive energy with the professors and the students. Port Elizabeth is in for a brilliant upgrade.