

NMMU SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP 2016



Nelson Mandela
Metropolitan
University
for tomorrow

2005-2015



Nelson Mandela Bay: Making a Place

NMMU WELCOMES INTERNATIONAL ARCHITECTS

Mieke Kotze



On Monday the 1st of February Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University students and staff gathered to welcome a prestigious line-up of architects, both local and international. The opening ceremony marked the beginning of an action-packed three-week workshop hosted by the NMMU School of Architecture, which will see various activities, such as nature walks, public lectures and exhibitions, taking place over the course of the month, at various locations around the city.

Opening the event, Professor Derrick Swartz, Vice-Chancellor of NMMU, extended a warm welcome to students, staff and esteemed guests. In attendance were Professors Armando Dal Fabbro, of University luav in Italy, Matías Imbern of the National University of Rosario in Argentina, Stephen Read of TU Delft in the

Netherlands, and renowned South African architect, Carin Smuts, all of whom will be conducting public lectures and contact sessions with NMMU architecture students during February.

Prof Swartz expressed inspiring sentiments regarding the transformative potential of architecture, emphasizing in particular its importance, both locally and abroad, as a means of addressing some of the 21st century's most pressing concerns. Additionally, Swartz shed light on the changing role of educators in the face of such challenges. He expanded on their duty to endow students, not with second-hand solutions and archaic methodologies, but with the tools to approach obstacles critically and creatively. He underlined the necessity for workshops such as these as a means of generating "out-

of-the-box solutions" to problems such as widening economic and social divisions, and the rampant deterioration of ecosystems the world over.

This message of unity and transformation was echoed by Swartz's fellow speakers, Professor Rose Boswell, Boban Varghese, Dr Nico Jooste and Ernst Struwig. These speakers similarly urged architects, both aspiring and esteemed, to collaborate in the "reimagining" and "remaking" of the world in a manner which is conducive to both human and environmental flourishing.

Students, staff and guests left the event feeling inspired, and aware of the role of students, architects and educators in the laying of foundations for a greener and more equitable tomorrow, both locally and globally. ■

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GUGA S'THEBE ARTS, PHASE 1: CULTURE AND HERITAGE VILLAGE via csstudio.co.za

CARIN SMUTS "WHY LISTEN?"

Mieke Kotze

In Port Elizabeth's historic heart, guests gathered for the first of four public lectures to be held in conjunction with the NMMU School of Architecture's international workshop. Acclaimed South African architect Carin Smuts shared knowledge and experiences of a career spanning 30 years.

Having worked and won esteem both locally and internationally for projects from Cradock to China, Smuts is perhaps best known for her work on local upliftment initiatives, and for the strong ethos of engagement, responsiveness to local needs and sustainability which permeates all of her projects.

This spirit is perhaps best embodied in Langa's Guga Sthebe Cultural and Heritage Village. A project which came together over several years of consultation with residents of the area, Guga Sthebe incorporates

elements of both traditional and contemporary design, a reflection of the continuous exchange between Smuts and her team with various sectors of the community. Not only was the Village designed to respond to local needs, but construction also harnessed and embraced local talent, which can be seen in the vibrant mosaics that brighten the walls and floors of the centre.

Completed in 1999, the Village attracts thousands of tourists annually, and constitutes an economic hub in the area. Guga Sthebe provides not only a space for local entrepreneurs to sell their goods, but also hosts community events, performances and skills development workshops.

More critical however, Smuts feels, is Guga Sthebe and similar centres' potential to "engage the metropole with the periphery" and allowing

urban residents and tourists alike to partake in the diversity and energy which characterises South Africa.

Smuts and her team have spearheaded many such initiatives, such as the Ulwazi Youth Centre, the Eerste Treetjies Community Centre and the Woodlands People's Centre. While these projects have undoubtedly changed the lives of the relevant communities, they also highlight a radically transformative approach to architecture.

For Smuts, plans are not developed in the isolation of a studio, but in the bustling meeting places of the communities in which she works. These buildings are not designed solely for their aesthetic appeal, but rather for their ability to reflect the identities, and cater to the unique needs of those who will use them.

The lecture ended with Smuts challenging the aspiring architects in attendance to rethink the



Arch. Carin Smuts, CS Studio Architects, Cape Town, South Africa

manner in which spaces are created. To embrace the unique spirit of the communities in which they work and to create something which is not only functional and sustainable, but something which innovatively responds to the socio-economic needs of locals. ■

SCHOOL TALK

NMMU Architecture students working on workshop projects



1st year students, Alexandra Edmayr & Aphiwe Tunyiswa



2nd year student, Falatsi Erasera



3rd year students, Aiden Killian & Ruaan Van Niekerk

BRIAN WINTERMEYER "HOW DO WE USE HERITAGE IN ARCHITECTURE?"

Mieke Kotze

The second School Talk, held at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University on the 3rd of February 2016, saw the School of Architecture welcome prominent Port Elizabeth Architect, Brian Wintermeyer.

Well-equipped to address issues of heritage in architecture, Brian Wintermeyer has undertaken several heritage projects in Port Elizabeth and surrounding areas. Focusing on the Baakens River Valley and surrounding areas, Wintermeyer discussed various concerns, issues and approaches to the treatment of heritage architecture.

Wintermeyer stresses a forward-looking attitude to heritage buildings, with a focus on "present and future, more than history" for its own sake. Wintermeyer suggests an approach which seeks solutions which are driven by present needs and maximum benefit, while retaining the historically significant elements of the buildings in question. This is of particular importance in developing countries, such as South Africa,

where questions of heritage, can be contentious.

A site which has, like many others, posed such questions is the Donkin Reserve. Once a static and forlorn-looking colonial monument, the

Wintermeyer stresses a forward-looking attitude to heritage buildings

Donkin Reserve has in recent years undergone a drastic overhaul. Wintermeyer, who was closely involved with the project, oversaw the transformation of the drab public park into a vibrant and modern urban monument to the diversity of our democratic society. This revamp entailed the installation of new walkways and seating, making the park more

accessible and user-friendly. But, more noteworthy, is what Wintermeyer refers to as the "resymbolizing" of the space. This was achieved with the inclusion of bright mosaics, sculptures and paintings by South Africans and representing South Africans.

This makeover perfectly encapsulates Wintermeyer's approach to heritage architecture, with its retention of the historically significant, reinvigorated by what is timely, relevant and representative of its context. Heritage, at the Donkin Reserve, is used as a tool to offset and precipitate the new and functional, rather than remaining a stagnant relic of the past.

Today, the old colonial memorial stands amongst the contemporary works of South African artists, united under the largest South African flag in the world. The Donkin Reserve is a testament to our diverse heritage, a respect for both the new and old, and the unified future we strive for as a nation. ■



*The Donkin Reserve, Central, Port Elizabeth
Photo via commons.wikimedia.org and
<http://www.lightningprotectionservices.co.za/projects/4>*



Prof. Arch. Matías Imbern, National University of Rosario, Argentina

Professor Matias Imbern is one of four esteemed international architects hosted by NMMU's School of Architecture.

After obtaining his degree in architecture from the National University of Rosario, for which he was awarded a gold medal, Imbern went on to complete a Masters degree in Design and Technology at

MATÍAS IMBERN

Mieke Kotze

the Graduate School of Design and Technology at Harvard University.

Currently based in Rosario, Argentina, he runs a practice, I+CG[ar] as well as a research group, Lab.Id., alongside his positions of Professor of Architectural Design at the National University of Rosario, and Professor Fellow at the School of Architecture and Urban Studies at the Torcuato Di Tella University.

Additionally, Imbern has presented and published his work across the globe, as well as lecturing at renowned institutions such as Harvard Graduate School of Design

and Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).

This February he, alongside John Andrews, Magda Minguzzi and Lucy Vosloo, will be facilitating a workshop at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University's School of Architecture entitled "A Proposal for a Mixed Use Development on the Northern Bank of the Lower Baakens River in the Baakens Valley Nature Reserve". The aim of this workshop is to encourage the reuse of existing buildings in order to develop "creative industries" in the area. ■



Prof. Stephen Read

Economic Space Solutions

Virgil Jacobs

City Hall provided its popular atmosphere for the second evening lecture of the 2016 NMMU School of Architecture International Workshop.

The gathered audience of students and members of the public were there to listen to Professor Stephen Read, a renowned intellectual in the field of Architecture. He is currently an associate professor in the chair of Spatial Planning and Strategy in the Faculty of Architecture at the Delft University of Technology, Netherlands.

Professor Read presented a very philosophical perspective on architecture and the ontology thereof. He focussed on the history of architecture, as well as a reflection on Ancient Greece and its significance for modern architecture. His lecture consisted of a timeline as he moved towards Paris and its infrastructure and steadily towards Shenzhen, China and its urbanization. His work on local urbanization in Shenzhen has a correlation with South Africa. Prior to its urbanization, Shenzhen was an agricultural environment where people lived off the food they grew, but the ideology of urbanization

destroys the concept of people making a living from the food they grow. South Africa consists of many people who grow their own food, and research is being done regarding how urbanization can assist in maintaining that practice. Professor Read stated that that he had a solution to that in the form of an alternative that involves change.

The alternative to agricultural practices Professor Read was trying to convey was the concept of 'economic space'. Examples of economic space were referenced throughout his timeline of architecture where he referenced illustrations of the concept in Greece (The Ancient Agora), Paris and Shenzhen. In essence, if urbanization takes place there should be enough space created for businesses to bloom in order to sustain an urban area, which he illustrated with images from Shenzhen. From his urbanist perspective, to cater for the growing population urbanization seems to be the best solution even if agriculture diminishes, as displayed in Shenzhen. It was Charles Darwin who said that, more or less, it is not the smartest or the strongest who survive but, the ones who are willing to change.

Baakens Valley walk

What did you learn from the walk?

Q&A
Carmen Manthe

// The importance of the walk was embracing nature and to give context to our projects in respect of nature and history.

//

// The importance of the preservation of Baakens valley is crucial to the identity of Port Elizabeth. The uniqueness of Port Elizabeth relies as much on its buildings as on the topographical landscape.

//

// Not only does the valley add to the beauty of the city but also the importance of the conservation of the flora and fauna in the area.

//

Why is the Baakens Valley so important to Port Elizabeth?

// It is the green lung of the city.

//

// It holds the historical content of the nature reserve. It's important to attract tourists and other exciting events and activities.

//

// It creates a beautiful niche within the boundaries of the buildings.

//