

2019 Corobrik Architectural Student of the Year announced

Nelson Mandela University's Riaan Huiskens has been named the overall winner of the 32nd Corobrik Architectural Student of the Year Awards.



Riaan Huiskens from the Nelson Mandela University is the 32nd winner of the Corobrik Architectural Student Award.

Speaking at the awards at the Maslow Hotel in Sandton, Johannesburg, CEO of Corobrik Dirk Meyer said the architects of the future will be the pathfinders who use the sophisticated technologies of the future to tackle the challenges of today whilst addressing both the learnings and the mistakes of the past. He said this applied to both this year's winner and the seven regional finalists whose work showcased the high calibre of young professionals that were entering the profession in South Africa.

During 2018, eight regional finalists from universities across the country were recognised and put forward to compete for a national title and a prize of R70,000 at the Corobrik Architectural Student of the Year Awards.

Architecture moving towards paradigm shift

Huiskens' thesis, entitled *The design of a 3D printing facility in Central Port Elizabeth*, explores how architecture is moving towards a paradigm shift with the development and incorporation of digital fabrication technology. This is extended into the discussion of recycling existing infrastructure and ties together both the heritage and ecological discourse and recognises the significance of historical urban elements and the finite quality of heritage resources within the city.

"A historical building used as a host for the design of a 3D printing facility invites a dialogue between the architecture of the old and the expression of the new. The Premier Mill Building is identified as a historical urban artefact and the programme complements the historical background of the building, which was a granary. The primary architectural exploration focuses on the possibilities offered by 3D printing in the making and expression of architecture. The nature of the facility organises function before sign. Meaning the initial architecture lies in the systematic operations of the facility as a place of digital fabrication. Therefore, it focuses on successfully incorporating existing infrastructure as functioning components to the system. Secondly, the building is a sign of its function, a visual opportunity for a new architecture to reflect the nature of the facility," he explains.

A new way of making buildings

Andrew Palframan, head of the Department of Architecture at NMU, believes that this thesis addresses a very relevant topic as we head into the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

"While increasingly mechanised and technologically advanced, the building process has essentially not changed for millennia. Riaan's thesis creatively explores the potential for a fundamentally new way of making buildings, implementing cyber-physical systems that blur the lines between the physical, digital and biological spheres. The project lends insight not only into the systems and materials involved in this new way of making but comments on how these might be implemented in the preservation of our built heritage," he pointed out.

He said that awards such as the Corobrik Architectural Student of the Year Award brought public attention to architecture in general. "This is particularly important since architecture and the issues involved in its making are not generally part of public discourse in this country. Furthermore, the award programme is aspirational, driving quality through competition, promoting the adoption of contemporary issues and values and setting a benchmark for standards of excellence in architecture."

Judging panel

Meyer thanked this year's judges – Lauren Haiden from Paton Taylor architects in Durban, Rob Gillard from Intsika Architects in East London and Luyanda Mphahlwa, president of the South African Institute of Architects (SAIA) and director of Design Space Africa - as well as guest speaker Ilse Woolf from Wolff Architects in Cape Town whose presentation 'Border Practice: Some attitudes towards architectural publications, exhibitions and design' addressed the relationship between restorative justice, embedded research and juicy design aesthetics.

"The creative output from our studio considers the past in terms of how to act restoratively and imaginatively when making interventions into the present," she noted.

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