



Cultural Transposition

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Jury Review

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Photo by:
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Background and Objectives

Continuing the traditions of UPM's Bachelor of Architecture Programme, the 2008-2009 group of 7 students from the 5th year were required in their 1st semester to study as a group the development of a particular Malaysian urban entity. This is the first part of ARC4002 Advanced Architecture Studio 3. In this case, Kuching. Particularly, the Kuching Waterfront Area was analysed the proposed urban intervention in the selected area within its urban context. As a final part of their study, they were to propose several potential projects within the study area which would address specific problems/issues they had identified. Subsequently, in the latter part of the semester and throughout the second semester under ARC4003 Comprehensive Architecture Studio, each student was required to develop a building design for one of the potential sites and typologies as his or her 'Comprehensive Design Project'. They were required to apply sustainable design approaches and techniques during their design processes.

Group Study of Kuching Waterfront

In January, 2009, the class visited Kuching to gather insights into the study area. Personal observations and analyses were supplemented by briefings and guidance from various city and state agencies as well as selected local architects. The group produced a comprehensive report and made a number of proposals to further improve the waterfront area. The class proposed that the northern riverbank be included in the waterfront area and this could be linked by a pedestrian bridge to supplement the river ferries. They also extended the pedestrian riverside walk right up to the existing Malay *kampung*. They also proposed changes to the traffic circulation to better serve the Waterfront area and the pedestrianisation of additional streets in the Chinatown area to enhance visitors' experience. The final part of the group's study was to also identify 14 individual building typologies as potential design projects on a variety of sites throughout the waterfront area. These would serve as the source of their individual projects.

Background of Individual Projects

Each student was required to select two projects for further evaluation. Subsequently, this was reduced to just one preferred 'Comprehensive Design Project'.

The 'Comprehensive Design Project' under ARC4003 is the final design exercise in the formal education of a student in architecture. It examines his or her accumulated knowledge and skills in handling architectural design problems. It provides a unique opportunity for students to design a building or a complex of buildings from the preparation of the brief to design proposal. These should be accompanied by a full documentation of investigations, findings, alternatives, decisions and conclusions. The chosen project would demonstrate comprehensiveness and sensitivity to the design problem and comprehension of sustainability issues including understanding of the Green Building Index (GBI) and its implementation. It provides a learning programme about the building type and its specialised aspects. The final work demonstrates the students' ability in the whole design process including the capacity for independent decision-making. It also demonstrates understanding of the relevant technology and its appropriate application as well as the ability to communicate the design intentions visually, verbally and in written form. The final solutions should demonstrate appropriateness in terms of human needs, environmental, social and cultural contexts as well as an aesthetic response. An understanding of economic values in design and construction is also expected and appropriate sustainable/environmental aspects of the designs are assessed by the students using the GBI Assessment Criteria.

Individual Projects

The chosen projects included a wide range of typologies and a variety of sites. Five students chose sites with direct river frontages. Two projects were located across the Sarawak River on its northern bank. They are the Sarawak Academy of Arts by Muhammad Helmi bin Noor Rahmat and the other was Kampung Lintang Homestay by Jamilah Halina bt Abdul Halim. On the southern bank in the Waterfront area itself were Munirah@Siti Nur Fatimah bt Muhamad's Kuching Festive Bazaar and Patinggi Ali Mosque Complex by Muhsin bin Abd Aziz.

The remaining three projects were located inland in the Waterfront area but without direct water frontages. These are the Kuching Performing Arts Centre by Asraf bin Jamil; Carpenter Community Centre by Syarulzaini binti Abdual Rahman and; Kuching City Centre Terminal by Azwinda binti Rozali.

The Sarawak Academy of Arts is a very extensive project located on a very challenging site adjacent to the 19th century Fort Margherita. It has a beautiful river frontage facing Kuching City. The site slopes steeply down to the river and Helmi's solution maximises the potential with a layered design stretched along the contours of the hill.

The Kampung Lintang Homestay, on the other hand, is a scheme with a sensitive approach to incorporating an existing riverside kampung into a homestay centre for local and foreign tourists. The interesting aspect of Jamilah's proposal is that this peaceful relaxing setting is very close to the bustling Kuching (waterfront) and just a few meters over the river.

The Kuching Festive Bazaar is proposed for phase 2 of the Kuching Waterfront redevelopment area. It was very controversial when the heritage buildings at the site were all demolished during 2009. It was surprising that Munirah's proposal for a new bazaar at the waterfront included preservation and incorporation of some of these buildings in her proposal.

The Patinggi Ali Mosque Complex is a bold attempt by Muhsin to restore this landmark to its former glory by building on the original historical imagery of its pyramidal roof whilst at the same time, make the mosque a true community building for the adjacent kampung. The proposal even links it to the riverside walk to encourage non Muslims to experience the complex.

The Kuching Performing Arts Centre is located on a site in the central public/cultural/heritage belt of the waterfront where the authorities are planning to build a shopping centre. Asraf thought this intention is totally inappropriate for the site and instead designed a significant public building. His form is inspired by the indigenous dance movements. The building would enable this important location to remain in the public realm.

The Carpenter Community Centre uses adaptive reuse and infill techniques to rejuvenate an important urban block of the old Kuching Waterfront. Sharul Zaini has proposed the community centre to be located at the rundown area at the rear of 4 rows of heritage shophouses in the centre of the scheme. She has also incorporated a budget hotel and other facilities within the existing fabric.

The Kuching City Centre Terminal is located inland from the mosque. The proposal for an integrated transport interchange caters to the Waterfront area and links to the new main Kuching bus terminal located in the south of the city. Azwinda has proposed to incorporate some novel ideas such as a one-stop centre for payments/government departments and has proposed strong linkages to the adjacent mosque, the waterfront and heritage areas.

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The proposal is an exemplary display of the institutional approach for an Academy of Arts by the boldness of its form and by the formality in the language of its components such as the towering columns, stepped terraces, hard waterscapes and corridor-compartment based circulation.

Strict and rigid formalities, however, are very rightly compromised in the overall configuration as the complex modulates the programme into the topography in order to achieve homogeneity with the surroundings. It displays a conscientious approach to surface earth management of the site which would have benefited much more for ground water management as well if there were not as much hard surfaces covering the ground.

Prominent formalities within the design are further offsetted by pockets and layers of relatively whimsical display of geometry and colours around the complex and seemingly based on well-established lexicons of known artists such as Mondrian. The design, therefore, succeeds in being more about the curatorship rather than the creation of arts.

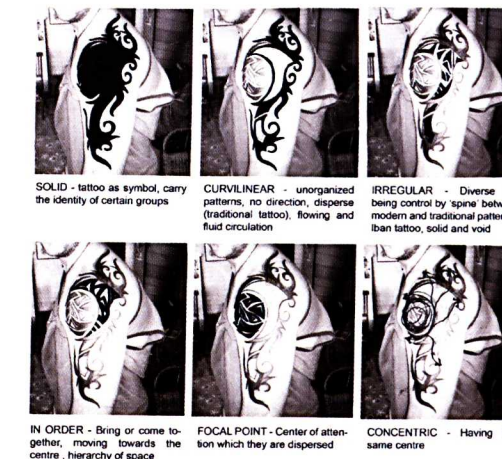
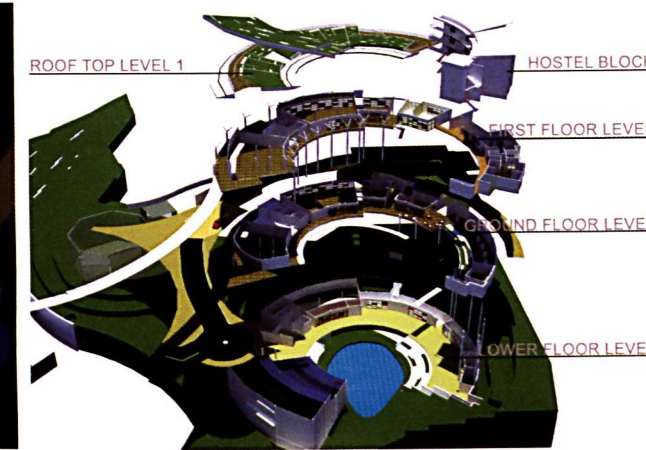
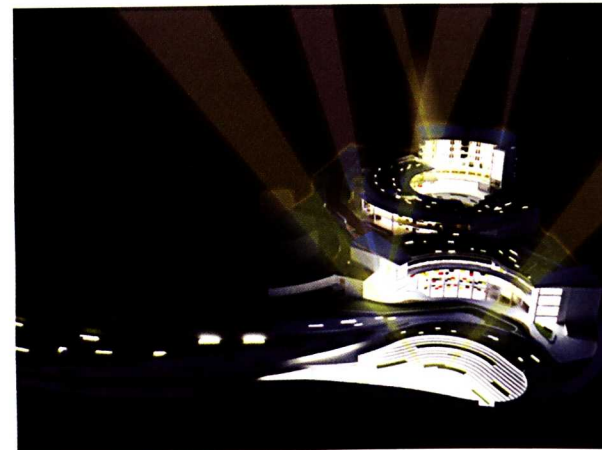
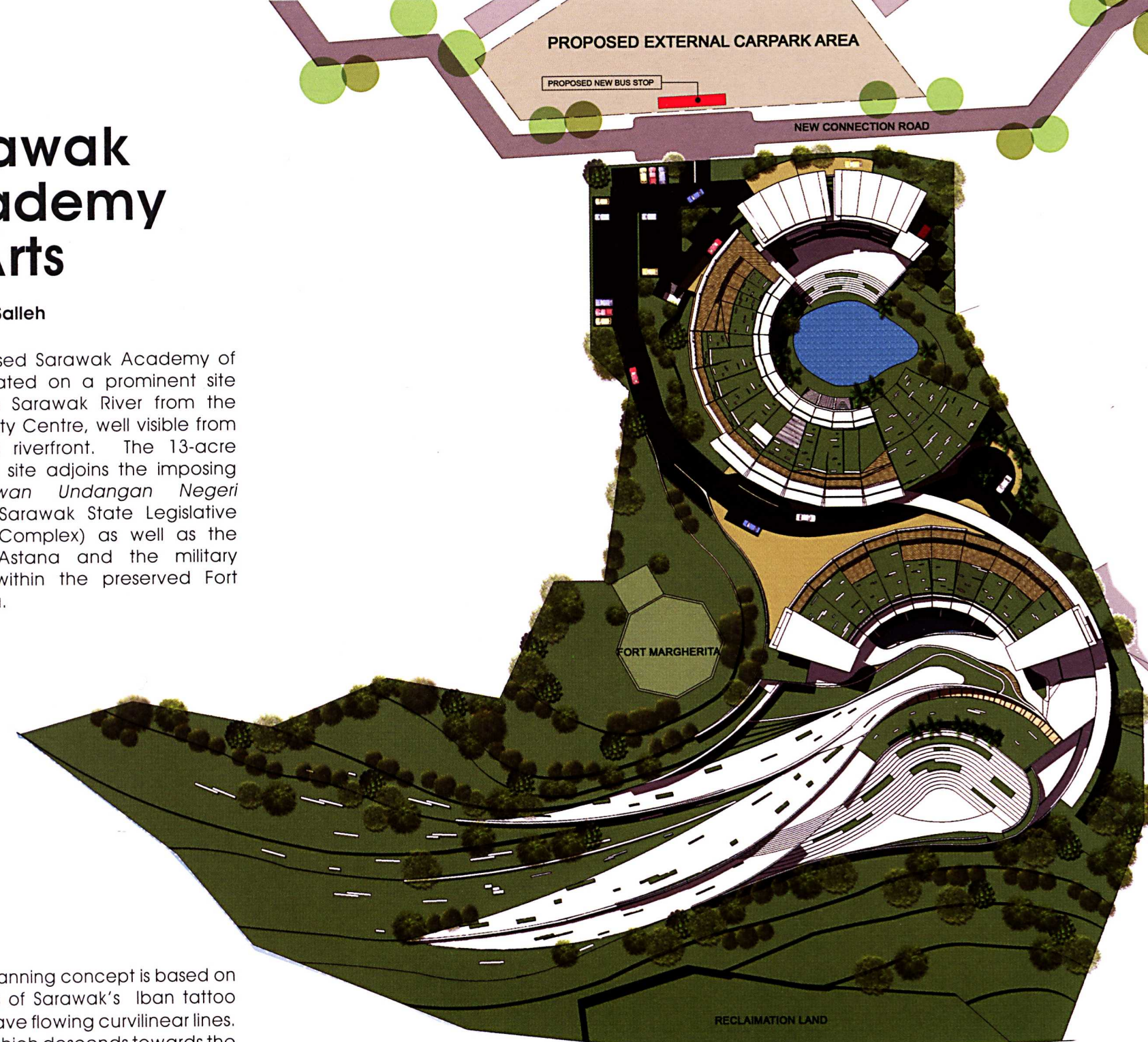
Sarawak Academy of Arts

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The proposed Sarawak Academy of Arts is located on a prominent site across the Sarawak River from the Kuching City Centre, well visible from its famous riverfront. The 13-acre undulating site adjoins the imposing new *Dewan Undangan Negeri Sarawak* (Sarawak State Legislative Assembly Complex) as well as the historical Astana and the military barracks within the preserved Fort Margherita.

The site planning concept is based on the motifs of Sarawak's Iban tattoo with its suave flowing curvilinear lines. The site, which descends towards the river, is divided into two zoning rings by the central avenue. It forms the pedestrian circulation spine, linking the two campus entrances - the main one from *Dewan Undangan Negeri Sarawak* and the other from *Kampung Boyan*. The strategy of the campus layout is to limit vehicular access into the site thus creating a safe and healthy environment.

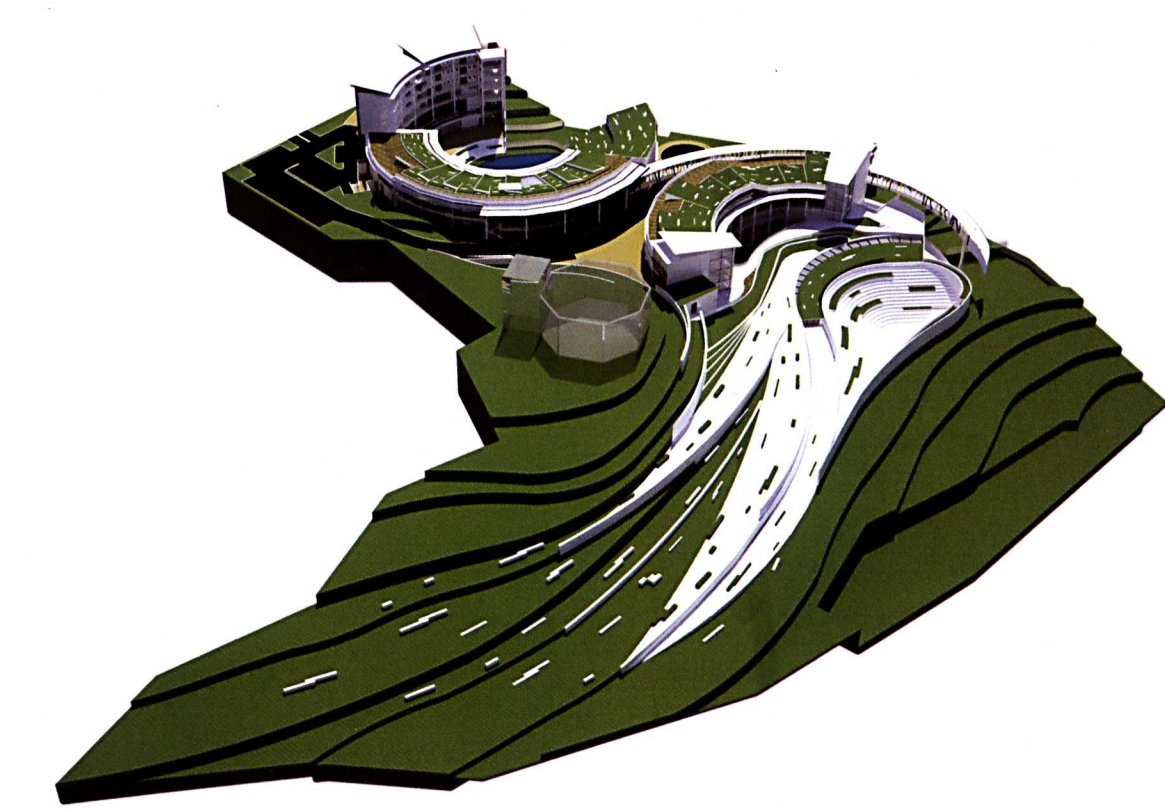
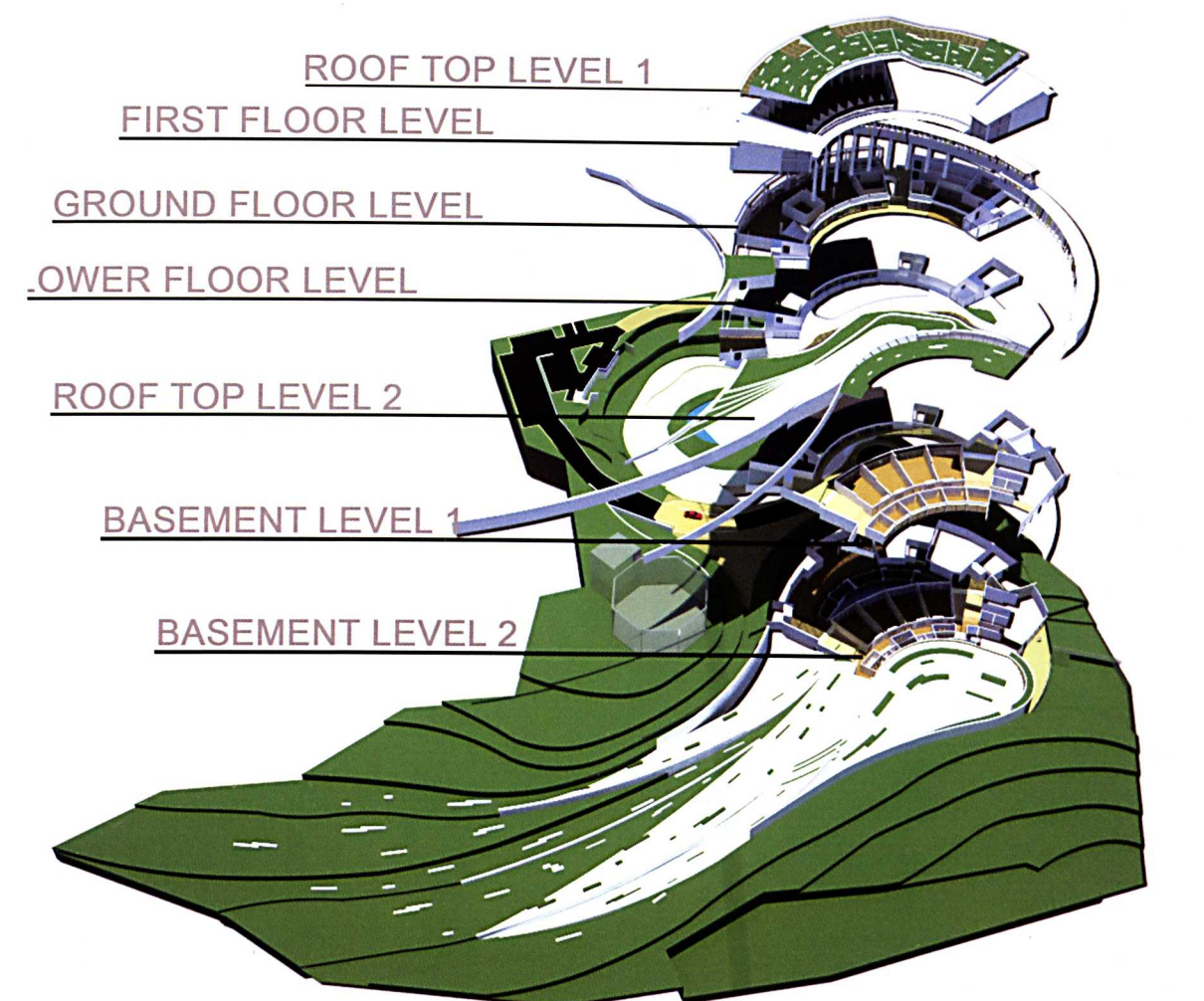
The Academy is intended as an art learning centre for research and experimentation of heritage and cultural activities of Sarawak.



It comprises six components designed by layers where each layer has a different function. The six components are: 1) the Open Art Plaza incorporating administration, public facilities and spaces with large open foyer descending to the open plaza and main gallery; 2) the Multi-purpose Complex consisting mainly of recreation facilities with man-made water body and pedestrian mall; 3) the Living Cluster for students and essential staff; 4) the Library Complex and the Great Hall; 5) the Academic Complex for learning purposes and 6) the Amphitheatre as the culmination space which opens for public events. The layering of functions is created to achieve various experiences of circulation leading to different functional and spatial characteristics in the campus.

Environmental considerations have been addressed by maximising natural ventilation, sun-shading and daylighting applications in the building's layout and design while adopting rainwater harvesting and water element landscaping. Sunken courtyards and pocket gardens interplay between building blocks and descending levels.

The hallmark of this campus design is the articulated exploitation of multi-level opportunities for indoor and outdoor spatial integration while ensuring flexible indoor space utilisation. This is highlighted in the academic complex. The overall design has maintained respect for the heritage sites nearby and successfully augmented the Dewan Undangan Negeri Sarawak riverfront view from the Kuching City Centre across the Sarawak River.



■ Muhammad Helmi Noor Rahmat