

## Observatory Tower between Practicality and Aesthetic

Roslina Sharif & Shafizal Maarof

A good architecture must embody the sense of balance between practicality and aesthetic. Located at a beach which is accessible by many visitors, the observatory tower that functions as a watch tower for lifeguards demands its structural design to be practical as well as aesthetically pleasing sculpture. To inspire the students in designing the structure, a set of paintings from famous artists is selected as a reference in developing the idea. From the paintings, analysis is conducted to extract the essence and meaning of the paintings which includes the feelings and moods portrayed by the paintings. This may also include the methods utilized by the artist in achieving the moods through the application of design principles and elements. Based on this understanding, translation and transformation take place to create a three-dimensional structure that expresses the same feeling as displayed by the chosen paintings.

In addition to this, the practical aspect of the observatory tower needs to be considered. The flow and practicality of the vertical circulation, viewing deck and protection from climatic factors especially solar gain and precipitation are the main concerns of the design. A visit to an existing lifeguard tower of Civil Defense Department at Bagan Lalang Beach, Selangor provided the actual experiential learning to the students. A discussion session held with the officers from the Civil Defense Department enhances and supports the understanding of the practical requirements necessary for an observatory tower.

With the new inspiration and explanation from the various sources of knowledge, an observatory tower that does not only aesthetically pleasing but also functional is designed. The incorporation of both aspects -practicality and aesthetic- in the design can be well evidenced in the Year 1 first project.



# Jury Review

Mohd Zafarullah

## OBSERVATION TOWER: DEPLOYING SPATIAL HISTORY

The Observation Tower Project ushers in the Year One hopefuls in all of its architectural education splendour. It has a comprehensive brief that spans a sea of tectonic and spatial ideals; the so-called ideals of function, form, context and composition. It aims to introduce materiality and the structural notion of defying gravity. Last but not least, the design task put each one of these young minds on a steady platform where they are able to make the seemingly difficult creative choices.

With all these thrown in to tempt their green, oozing creative energy, we could not help but witness each and every individual freshman's journey through space; each finding his or her own way to each of his or her own individual architecture. By deploying each individual history in space as the only resources deployable, we slowly witness considerable gains in greater understanding of the process of creating spatial knowledge by way of each student's development in spatial intelligence; thus marking the first milestone of success for the programme.

This is indeed the first quest of finding their holy grail of architecture (with a capital A). So, by allowing students to make these creative choices, we ask ourselves: are these not about deploying one's own personal spatial history? Are these not what architectural education is all or should be about? And having said these, has the programme achieve its intended aim and objectives? Can it meet this second, ultimate milestone?

The programme introduces sculptural form via an understanding of a 2-dimensional medium found in great notable modern paintings. As points of reference, I personally see this, and without going to extremes, as an effective jump-start in the appreciation of form and the

endless possibilities of space-making as a result of its transformative experiences into 3-D. The choices of modern paintings however, could do some justice by also including notable modern local ones too, especially if they are truly contextually befitting. (Again, without us going to extremes.)

Students make brave choices in making sense of what adult designers do; balancing the delicate architectural composition of sculptural form and space being assigned their perfunctoriness. Armed with their limited spatial histories, students attempt the task with a spectrum of result.

There is indeed, an over-reliance on fantastic and iconic sculptural forms typical of young, precocious, energetic mind-sets which can be refreshing and fun, as always. Whether this is a built-in feature of the programme that truly succeeds in helping students' design composition could probably be grounds for a healthy debate. However, the real successes here are those that truly juggle context into their personal array of choices. Bio-climatatic, human cultural and its locale, associated marine forms and a host of other contextual concerns are being thematic consideration. Fortunately for these young minds, these contexts which exist in many forms are equally valid contents if only students realize and know how to deploy them beyond their perceived 'moral' opinions.

Perhaps after exploring these individual spatial histories, now given due substance, are we able to deliver a just opinion on their skin-deep formalistic architectural journey? Skin-deep it is nonetheless, but still, a journey in spatial history, no doubt.



# The Lively Movement

Roslina Sharif, Shafizal Maarof, Afiza Churemy, Nurul Syafinaz Jamel & Abdul Rahim Mohd Zain

The soft and bluish-toned painting by James Knowles titled 'Sea Shell' was chosen by Wendy Tan Wan Joo in designing her lifeguard cum observatory tower for the Civil Defense Department. The design concept, 'Lively Movement' is derived from the sea shell depicted by the painting and also from the feeling that was experienced by Wendy from her visit to the site. The site physical and environmental condition, the sea breeze and fresh air help relax the mind and yet dynamic enough to make the visitors enjoy the beach scenery and the sculptural tower design.



■ Wendy Tan Wan Joo

Named as Venus-Sky-Tower, this project is inspired by Cubist Landscape painting, Albert Gleizes. Taking 'rapidity' as the concept of this design, this conceptual idea comes from the dominant principle in the painting which shows that all the shapes are actually generated from one perspective point. Based on her understanding of the painting, the translation and transformation applied by Nurafiqah is through repetition of various planes, radiation and gradation in an attempt to show movement in the design of the tower, subsequently creating a very dynamic design

■ Nurafiqah Binti Mat Yasin



■ Muhammad Ashraf Peruzudin

Taking an abstract painting titled 'Yellow-Red-Blue' drawn by a Russian artist, Wassily Kandinsky as the main idea of the transformation of this observatory tower, Muhammad Ashraf Peruzudin's perception on the piece of famous artwork becomes the fundamental on the overall design idea of his work. He interprets the painting as 'freedom', where it is characterised by the treatment and manipulation of lines and planes which are rich in colours and magnificent gradations of the three colours show constructivism and suprematism movements. Consisting of geometrical elements and colours in multiple numbers, they contribute to its delicate complexity whilst creating a reciprocal harmony as a whole.

This particular proposal by Muhammad Mukmin has successfully translated the mood of the painting onto the observatory tower design without losing its functional efficiency. It has a similar aesthetic feel as the painting only that it is in three dimensional. Where the mood from the artwork is obvious, the function of each individual space can still work in tandem.

■ Muhammad Mukmin bin Abdullah Sukri

