



06 2007

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE AUCKLAND BRANCH OF THE NEW ZEALAND INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS **BLOCK**

Obsessive Compulsives Unite

Stephen Brookbanks and the need for quiet heroes

Block visited Ponsonby Road's Objectspace gallery several times this month, taking advantage of a rare public outing of some extraordinary odds and ends from the back-yard shed of Stephen Brookbanks – a packing-crate maker at the Auckland Museum. Master of Architecture student Jessica Barter had hauled these relics from the cobwebs, adroitly playing off his intensely delicate timber constructions – see illustration at right - against her own fragile porcelain slip casts for a show entitled *The Crafted Container*.

Having spent a grey, drizzly weekend hunting John Scott houses in the Hawkes Bay, we felt a surge of enthusiasm for that body of great work that sits quietly unheralded; because Stephen belongs to the "I just knocked the bugger off" school to which Scott belonged, we determined that his work ought not be allowed to slip away again without comment.

The result of a long-term project, his work is endlessly interesting, consolidating a constructivist education with a life rich in places, spaces, and people. Brookbanks' heroes - a legion of Constructivists like Rodchenko and Lissitzky, and *Block's* own Sean Flanagan - complement an ideology about making that has no truck with intellectualism, yet is no-less intelligent. It is an ideology thus brought to bear with startling effect on his humbler sources: scratched, buckled and long-treasured snapshots of half-built zeppelin encased in vast fields of scaffolding; a childhood spent in sheds full of grandfathers' tools; a life lived in small crevices of space carved from the museum's enormous fields of left-over treasures.



First Constructivist Exhibition 1921

In the construction illustrated at right, miniature walkways spin up and around a grandfather's heavy wooden plane, impossibly suspended in a matrix of 1mm square redwood scaffolds, touching its museum-salvaged curio base at just four points. What is wonderful about all this is that

it evokes for us the same emotions that drove Stephen to make in the first place. For every architect there must surely be a resonance in the plane's worn, scratched handle, sinuously shaped to a careful, calloused hand. These are not just objects – and he assures us they're not art - but swirling spaces that stink of cedar dust and tool steel. They sound like the national station on a large silver radio hung from a rusty nail; they are dimly but warmly lit, cold but no less cosy. They probably taste of lukewarm tea drunk from a thick, cracked mug.

Stephen is a maker who does not talk except to enthuse over the work of others; he simply makes - quietly, and well. In a grey, drizzly Hawkes Bay at each of Scott's houses we were struck by how quietly heroic his architectural legacy is; a late modernist plugging away deep in the provinces; either side of the earthshaking Futuna moments were decades devoted to eking out civility, generosity, clarity, and beauty from the smallest of opportunities. It is this tireless, focussed, and largely unseen production that makes Stephen's assemblies as much of a joy to discover as Scott's. It gives us heart to know that on a cold, wet Saturday morning Stephen too, wrapped up in depthless layers of wool, hands wrapped around a mug of tea, kept company by morning report, is sitting down to work – and that that work is spitting out stuff that's so interesting you'd spend your weekends hunting it in the rain. NC



An untitled construction by Stephen Brookbanks, 2004-06

Treat 'Em Mean

An Insiders' Guide to Pissing Off Potential Staff

At the recent NZIA clambake in Wellington the sun shone enthusiastically through Sir Miles's Town Hall windows and fell upon a good sized gathering of architects, many of whom were showing visible signs of that particularly architectural dilemma of being at once prosperous while appearing somewhat haggard. Lest one think I am being unreasonably churlish about those around me I hasten to add that while the birth of a new practice rather constrains the former condition I certainly shared with my fellow architects the sense of having taken refuge from a battering.

Those of you who were not there will jump to the conclusion that we had braved one of the city's notorious northerlies en route across the Civic Square. Nothing, however, could be further from the truth; for three days we enjoyed a cloudless sky with only the slightest of zephyrs to ripple Port Nicholson's waters. No, it was not inclement weather but the very circumstance which give rise to that soft glow of prosperity that gave conversations a piquancy, a sense of being on borrowed time. The malaise of course is a few unbroken years of good business, of desperately balancing the getting of work with its doing, of promising and scrambling to deliver, of fending off project managers and above all, of trying to balance the inherently unstable trinity of family, client and architecture.

A few hours over the teacups, listening to 'Ken the pen' and sympathising with Richard Farr-Jones' angst was blessed relief indeed yet I sensed barely a soul there escaped the gnawing feeling that yet another deadline was fast approaching and the cellphone was stacking up stored messages by the score. It is no secret that the country is desperately short of skilled people and I suppose many industries might experience the changes of fortunes that a small economy delivers up from time to time. I suspect though that the combination of projects involving large lumps of time, the fine differentiation and relative expense of skills required, a sticky contractual environment and the property and construction industry's rapid response to reversals of economic optimism make our trade a special form of cot case.

This mercurial environment leads to a kind of 'full ahead slowly' approach to employment, a stratagem involving a strongly felt desire to employ staff coupled with a profound nervousness about the possible consequences of taking on employees. The resulting hubris invariably leads to pressure all round. The nervousness associated with employing staff is exaggerated with the possibility of taking on a recent graduate; the uncertainties of global economics and vagaries of practice micro economics being coupled with the wild uncertainties of trying to identify nascent geniuses.

A recent conversation with a graduate trying to reach the first rung on the architectural career ladder suggested just how demoralising an employer's ambivalence can be, and also suggested a few hot tips for those of you trying to staff up. The graduate I spoke to had a pretty slick degree, good computing and modelmaking skills and, as is possible in a full employment market, had marked out a few of the flashier joints around town to hit on for work. The selection process was interesting in itself, the daily papers eschewed as were web sites including the Institute's which require one to be part of the gang before signing in.

Rather than advertisements, the aspiring architect had relied on word of mouth to sort out a fair bit of information and narrow down the targets for a direct email hit. Information gained included who was employing, who were good designers but tough on staff, who had management under control and offered an ordered if somewhat dull diet, which practice streamed you from day one into one or another speciality, who threw autocratic tantrums and who had a suspiciously high staff turnover. Most half-pie decent practices were caught up in this sweep and I felt quite relieved to have steered the conversation around our joint least we be outed as the practice from hell with confused autocrats throwing tantrums and doing dull work.

The email assault seemed to have garnered a number of interviews and it was at that stage that the potential employer's uncertainties came out with the hapless candidate enduring a very mixed bag of encounters. These included protracted uncertainty, serial multi-partner multi-meetings, erratic changes of mind, failure to read a CV that clearly stated 'no experience' in capitals and the delightful,

informative and positive interview with a person who had no authority to employ.

I suspect in my former life I displayed all of these behaviours and have no little shame in now proclaiming that graduates deserve to be treated fairly. If basic servility is not reason enough, then the simple efficiencies to be gained by a marginally more ordered approach to interviewing are a good reason for getting your act together before involving some exhausted graduate with a cold flat and study loan. I know that in times of full employment one is often forced to reconfigure jobs to suit available skills and that this may take some time. The hopeful soul whose future working life hangs in the balance however should not bear the cost of a practice's vacillations over skills required, nor should they suffer the consequences of poor internal practice communication. If you employers do get a live one you would like to employ the inside word is that taking time out for coffee and an interview on neutral territory is good, as is showing the candidate around the office and talking about your work, reading the CV ahead of time, not dithering about nor, of course, offering jobs then changing your mind.

For all such advice to those who have the power of appointment there is a corollary; pearls of wisdom for the aspirants, the insider's view on how, in this age of whirling animations, electronic collaging and the hyper-real, to raise a flicker of interest in the jaded and exhausted - ah but for that you need to cross my palm with silver... PC

Kengo Kuma

Japanese architect Kengo Kuma will speak at the Dorothy Winstone Center on the evening of July 2nd. Tickets from Ticketek.



Question of the month

Name one great building of the twentieth century that has a hipped roof. Roofs set to minimum drainage fall are excluded, as is anything by F. L. Wright.

My youthful belligerence wagers there aren't any but as usual I'm bound to be proved wrong. Send your submission or - heaven forbid - a list to nat@cheshirearchitects.com. We'll publish them next month.

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The Fine Print

Excerpts from the reports to NZIA Auckland Branch meeting held June 5th, 2007

TECHNICAL ISSUES PORTFOLIO: Michael Middlebrook

Building Control Issues:

The Technical Sub Committee of the NZIA Auckland Branch (Michael Middlebrook, Alex Shaw, John Sutherland, Rosemary Scofield) is working on resolving building control issues in the Auckland region. The goal is to improve the interface between architects and the various BCAs.

We are looking at surveying Auckland practices to understand the main issues affecting the building control process. We have held off on conducting a web-based survey as CTMA are currently doing a similar survey that has been endorsed by the NZIA. CTMA's experience is that mailed questionnaires get a much better response (about 4x) than an email/web based survey. We plan to conduct a survey this month. We encourage members to undertake the CTMA survey which also covers Resource Consents

CTMA Survey Website: www.feedback-direct.com/nzconsents

The technical subcommittee will be attending the June meeting of the Auckland Regional Building Consent Managers to bring one or two central issues to the table for resolution.

Building Code Review:

There has been no news off the public review document which we expect to be issued shortly, as this needs to be completed by July. The Final Report of the Building Code Review IS to be with the Minister(s) by November 2007.

COMMITTEE FOR AUCKLAND / FAL PORTFOLIO: Stephen Martin

The Skills for Auckland new Auckland migrant mentoring pilot project is progressing to schedule. Mentors have been recruited from Auckland business services organisations. Auckland Regional Migrant Service has provided a list of 20 migrant candidates skilled and qualified in the business services sector for admission to the programme. These candidates are currently being assessed for selection. The programme commences with an introductory meeting of mentors and migrants on 11 June 2007.

A group discussion on leadership was held with Brian Corban QSO. Brian is a commercial lawyer and professional director with a life long commitment to community service. He is the Chairman of Genesis Energy and Radio New Zealand, is a past Chairman of Television New Zealand, and has served on the Waitangi Tribunal. The discussion centred on leadership style and the concept of 'servant' leadership.

SPONSORSHIP PORTFOLIO: Stephen Martin

Current sponsor database compiled and circulated to GH, PB & JB with draft prospecting letter and supporting NZIA Auckland Branch events documentation.

ENVIRONMENTAL GROUP PORTFOLIO: Carolyn Savage

No report has been prepared for the last two months due to the role of convener being vacant and a break down of communication on who was organising what or if people were available for meetings. Therefore April's speaker did not eventuate and May's meeting only three people sent apologies and the remaining members did not respond.

To ensure the rest of the year runs more efficiently the following confirmed guest speakers from different fields and perspectives of sustainability will speak. The speakers will be put on the website for notification. Registering will be required to confirm numbers. It is intended to have a representative from BRANZ to talk on the new Housing Rating scheme and one site visit is being currently organised.

12 June Karl Brentnall

Asmuss Plastic Systems Limited

Topic: Plastics, pipes, brands, and what environmental benefits occur through their use. "While all can replace traditional metals such as copper and galv. pipe,the materials that are gaining favour are the welded plastics such as Polyethylene (PE), Polypropylene (PP) and Polybutylene (PB). These are all light weight, flexible, environmentally friendly and offer the perfect long term solution for modern buildings."

10 July Fred Braxton

Eco Design Advisor from Waitakere City Council

Topic: What the EDA role covers and the information they can provide to assist architects in sustainable and environmental design projects.

See: www.ecodesignadvisor.org.nz

14 Aug. Sue Ira

Stormwater management, design of subdivisions,

Topic: How architects can have an impact through 'creative' design in new subdivisions. Presenting what simple principles can be put into smaller and larger developments to achieve 'passive' stormwater management.

11 Sept. Alan Drayton

Bio Build – builders of eco homes

Topic: Building Green; the types of construction, cost implications and budgets.

Please note in your diaries that the NZ Green Building Council is holding a Sustainable Building Conference from the 14th to 16th November. Check out their website: <http://www.sb07.org.nz>. The objectives of the SB07 NZ conference are numerous including focusing industry minds on sustainable building and the differing roles within the sector to get sustainable building outcomes. The conference will also facilitate the sharing of experience, provide some benchmarking of best practice and provide a clear understanding of the state of sustainable building in New Zealand.

The keynote speakers are:

Ray Cole, Nigel Howard, Toshiharu Ikaga, Michael Pearce.

GRADUATE DEVELOPMENT PORTFOLIO: Nicole Tarlton

The Minister has set the fee for assessment at \$2,036.25.

Applications have just gone in and Case Studies are due on July 1st for the next round of graduate assessments.

We had a full house with a few people standing for the very successful presentation by three recently registered architects. More graduates wanted to attend but the venue was full. The National Office also has a recently registered architect speak at one of their presentations, so those who missed out can get the opportunity elsewhere. Having three perspectives presented was very stimulating as each had a different way of preparing and presenting.,

The next seminars will be in Lecture Theatre 1 (Rm 2075), kindly donated by UNITEC. This will hold 160 people, so we will definitely have plenty of space for everyone. I have also extended the invitation to graduates from the Hamilton region who regularly come to Auckland for the APL GDP Seminars.

Upcoming seminars:

June 12th - Tendering by Norrie Johnson & Brendan Rawson

July 3rd - Contracts by Norrie Johnson & Brendan Rawson

July 10th - Insurances by Graham Strez & Norrie Johnson

Calder  Stewart
Roofing



Last month we promised the full list of submissions for contemporary buildings that should be identified for protection, and the top ten is followed by the full list below. We'll keep the ballot open...

The Top Ten

West Plaza	Price Adams Dodd
Futuna Chapel	John Scott
Wanganui War Memorial Hall	Geoff Newman
Congreve House	Cheshire/JASMAX
Christchurch College	Warren & Mahoney
Mitchell Stout House	Mitchell and Stout
Athfield House	Ian Athfield
Brake House	Ron Sang
Chappel House	Mike Austin
Canterbury Arcade	Peter Beaven

The Contenders

Harewood Crematorium	Warren & Mahoney
First Gibbs House	Manning Mitchell
Blumenthal House	Vladmir Cacala
Own House	Vladmir Cacala
Miles Warren's House	Warren & Mahoney
Rotherham House	Bruce Rotherham
Jewish Synagogue	John Goldwater
Skybox	Herriot Melhuish
Heatley House	Pete Bossley
Parnell Baths	Donner/ACC
Christchurch Town Hall	Warren & Mahoney
Lyttelton Road Tunnel	Peter Beaven
Manchester Unity Bldg CHCH	Peter Beaven
Auckland Uni Student Union	Tom Craig/W&M
Site 3	Andrew Patterson
Brick Bay House	Noel Lane
Harewood Crematorium	Warren & Mahoney
Sergent House	Sang/Fearon Hay
151 Queen Street	Dino Boratelli/PDA
All Saints Church Pononsby	Richard Toy
Thom House	James Hackshaw
International House	JASMaD
Des Britten House	Roger Walker
Norris House	Claude Megson
School of Music	Manning Mitchell
Kelly House	Nigel Cook
Thompson House	Rewi Thompson
Cook House Brighton Road	Marshall Cook
Clifford house	Clifford/Architectus
Bambury House	Cheshire/JASMAX
Wellington Civic Square	Athfield/Moller et al
Peregrine Winery	Architecture Wrkshp
Cumulus	Andrew Patterson
Reserve Bank, Customs St	Stephenson Turner?
FAI Insurance	Thorpe Cutter
St. Peters Technology Block	Pickmere & Douglas
Pioneer Womens Memorial Building	Architectus
Waiouru Army Museum	Tibor Donner/ACC
New Brighton Library	Warren & Mahoney
Civic Admin Building	Barclay/W&M
Freemans Bay Housing	Tibor Donner/ACC
Hapua Street Townhouse	ACC/Govt architect
Anzac Ave Apartments	Claude Megson
Mirror House	Richard Toy
AMP Building	Swann RAILLEY
Union House	Patterson
Lyttelton Tunnel Authority Building	Thorpe Cutter
Wong House	Pickmere & Douglas
Massey House	Warren & Mahoney
Sam Neill house	Peter Beaven
	Claude Megson
	Ernst Pliischke
	Ian Athfield

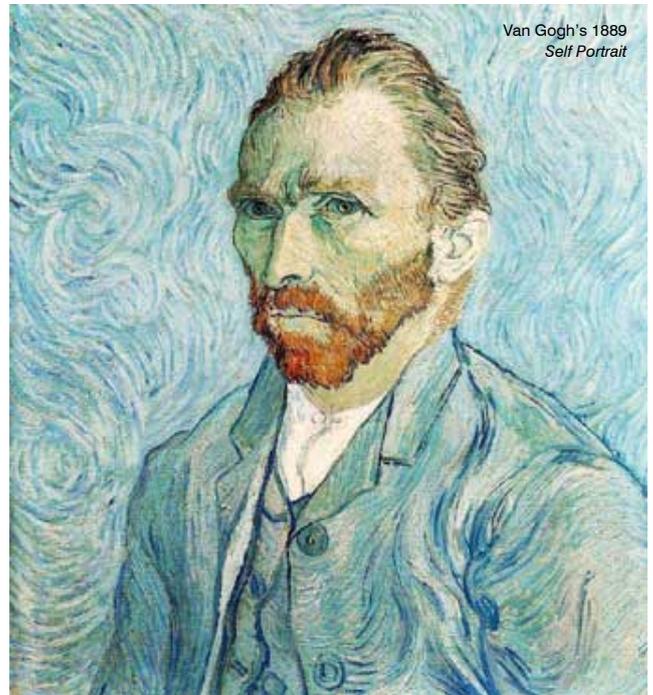
Send your top ten list to pip@cheshirearchitects.com

Urban Gaze '07

This year's competition is about to be launched with an introductory lecture from the judges on July 18th. Check the AAA website for details: www.aaa.org.nz. Thanks to Panasonic for their continued support.the

Continued from back cover...

was a painstaking perfectionist, van Gogh set to work with such vehemence that his working method has been likened to someone painting with a shovel. Gayford describes how van Gogh's brush was so heavily loaded that paint reached all the way up the stem and ran over the artist's fingers. With this loaded brush, van Gogh attacked his canvases day and night, producing an incredible number of works. In just over a year spent in Arles, he produced around 200 paintings (about 1/3 of the total Gauguin produced in his entire life) and many of these were masterpieces. Gayford's story therefore captures an intense artist working in one of the most intense periods of his life.



Van Gogh's 1889
Self Portrait

Along with describing their daily routines, what they ate, where they went to paint, and who they met, Gayford dwells upon van Gogh's changing mental state and explores the issues of mental health that affected his family. Indeed, the idea of family is an important theme here; Gayford develops the thesis that van Gogh's devotion to Gauguin lay in a desire for family. To pursue his artistic vocation, van Gogh had left behind the home he had made with a prostitute and her children. Gayford considers this prior family home to be a predecessor to the Yellow House. He considers Gauguin's visit as an attempt by van Gogh to establish an artistic family, a vocational family driven towards painting the world in a different light. The stresses that build between these two artists working in the confined space of the Yellow House and the unpredictable consequences that stem from their exchange of technique further contribute to making this an engaging book. *SF*



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Painting with Mops and Shovels

Sean Flanagan reviews two recently published books that revise the stories of modern art history

TVNZ is often berated for its inability to schedule decent programmes at a deserving hour. A case in point is the current series *Power of Art*, which plays on TV One around 10pm on Sunday nights. Although it is scheduled well outside of peak-viewing times, the fact that there is an audience for *The Power of Art* signals a healthy interest in art history. More particularly, there is an interest in revisionist accounts that reinterpret the dominant narratives that encircle artists and artistic movements.

Two recently published books contribute to this ongoing revision. The first is *The Judgement of Paris* by Ross King and the second *The Yellow House* by Martin Gayford. Both books are of a populist persuasion, proving to be intellectual and accessible. Both also appeared on the 'best of 2006' lists compiled by several contributors to the *Times Literary Supplement*.

The Judgement of Paris revises the well mythologised victory of the moderns over the ancients. This is the victory of the avant-garde 'sketchers' - whose works gave only an 'impression' of reality - over the historical painters who went to exorbitant lengths to capture the world on canvas. In effect, the story traces the rise of Impressionism in Paris in the late 19th Century and does so by studying the lives and works of those who preceded the movement's birth.

The story has two protagonists. The first is Ernest Meissonnier, a renowned painter of historical scenes of 18th and 19th century life. Meissonnier was one of the most celebrated painters of his age. His highly finished works were lauded for their pictorial realism and he commanded extravagant prices. The 1890 sale of his Napoleonic celebration *The Campaign of France* fetched 850,000 francs and was the most expensive painting purchased in the 19th Century. To give a sense of scale to the purchase and to Meissonnier's prestige, King relates how the annual budget of the Paris Opera House - sufficient to maintain an 80 piece orchestra, 70 ballet dancers, and 60 choristers - was 800,000 francs.



The second protagonist is Édouard Manet, whose paintings *Dejeuner sur l'Herbe* and *Olympia* are regarded as some of the founding works of modern art. Like many modernists, Manet suffered at the hands of the Academie, who had a strangle hold on the annual Salons (the *Exhibition of Living Artists*) and could thereby

make or break an artist's reputation. Manet's paintings were condemned by the Academie as being poorly finished, concerned with debased subject matter, and lacking in technique. One critic described Manet's paintings as so lacking in finesse that it looked as though they were done with a floor mop.



In *The Judgement of Paris*, the lives and interrelations of the most famous artist of his generation and a rising figure of the avant-garde are drawn out to complicate the war between the ancients and the moderns. Through these characters and their associates, King tries to relate how society turned towards, or was drawn towards, recognising the validity of the new form of vision of the avant-garde. Along the way he recounts a story of changing taste and fortune, a story that leaves one with a sense of sorrow at the unfortunate hand that 20th century art history has dealt to Meissonnier. In this respect, King identifies casualties on both sides of the war.

The Yellow House by Martin Gayford is a study of the 9 week period in which Vincent van Gogh and Paul Gauguin shared a small residence in Arles in the south of France in 1888. These were the weeks leading up to the infamous episode in which van Gogh sliced off a piece of his ear lobe and then entered into psychiatric care. This episode dominates van Gogh's career, tying him to the labels of the tortured artist and the mad genius. Wishing to revise this interpretation, Gayford focuses upon the weeks immediately preceding 'the episode', but not to try and explain it. Rather, he wants to show that both before and after the episode, van Gogh was engaged in an initiative to develop his art and foster an artistic community. The weeks that van Gogh and Gauguin spent together also prove a rich resource for understanding van Gogh's character, as his thoughts and actions can be examined alongside those of his house guest.

Van Gogh admired Meissonnier's work, though apparently not his methods. Whereas Meissonnier
Continued on inside back cover...



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