

Beyond the WOW Factor

Is academia in the country failing our students, are students becoming victims to superficial trends sweeping the region, or are local architectural firms simply behind the times?

Linda Hindi

An innovative idea to honour and encourage aspiring architects was realised last month through a unique competition in the capital. However, the jury's unexpected analysis overshadowed the awards and a debate ensued as to whether academia is failing our students or, whether or not Jordan's architectural firms are simply behind the times.

The competition, a first of its kind in the Kingdom, and indeed in the region as a whole, was designed to select the best Jordanian Architecture Graduation Project in 2008, and award cash prizes to the top three. Furthermore, the event was created to recognise quality in the teaching of architecture in Jordan, and to encourage students in Jordan's architecture schools to excel in their design performance.

The "Student Award for Excellence in Architectural Design" was a joint initiative of Omrania & Associates (O&A), architecture and engineering consultants firm, and the Center for the Study of the Built Environment (CSBE). An independent jury of three well-known architects, two from Jordan and one from abroad, reviewed the entries and



selected the winners — this was completely separate from any grading given to students by the universities themselves. In line with the contest regulations, the jury evaluated the submissions on their standalone merit, while taking into consideration the clarity of presentation, purpose, creativity and design competence.

The winning projects were chosen and an awards ceremony was held at the Jordan National Gallery of Fine Arts in late August. A young and enthusiastic crowd of students and their professors gathered to celebrate the results, but what they may not have anticipated was being confronted with a barrage of critical comments from some of the country's veterans of architecture. These seasoned architects highlighted that the overall quality of the projects submitted were less than remarkable.

Jury members agreed that on the whole many questions remained unaddressed: how these projects would serve the community and whether or not they have taken into consideration what community residents themselves actually need. An underlining argument the judges were keen to emphasise was the fact that the undergraduates lacked neither panache nor ability — to the extent that the students themselves may not realise that they are capable of much more.

At the awards ceremony, Dr Farouk Yaghmour, jury member and Principal, Yaghmour Architecture, began his address expressing the board's consensus that the participants clearly showed "significant creativity". The jurors report begins by stating "The graduation design projects presented to this Award underline considerable talent and ability..." This com-

ment is closely followed by noting that certain features in the projects raised "serious concerns regarding the general state of architectural education as it has evolved over the past few years". It seems that talent and skill could not make up for the fact that some projects were "cluttered, lacked clarity" and were generally insensitive to social and cultural surroundings.

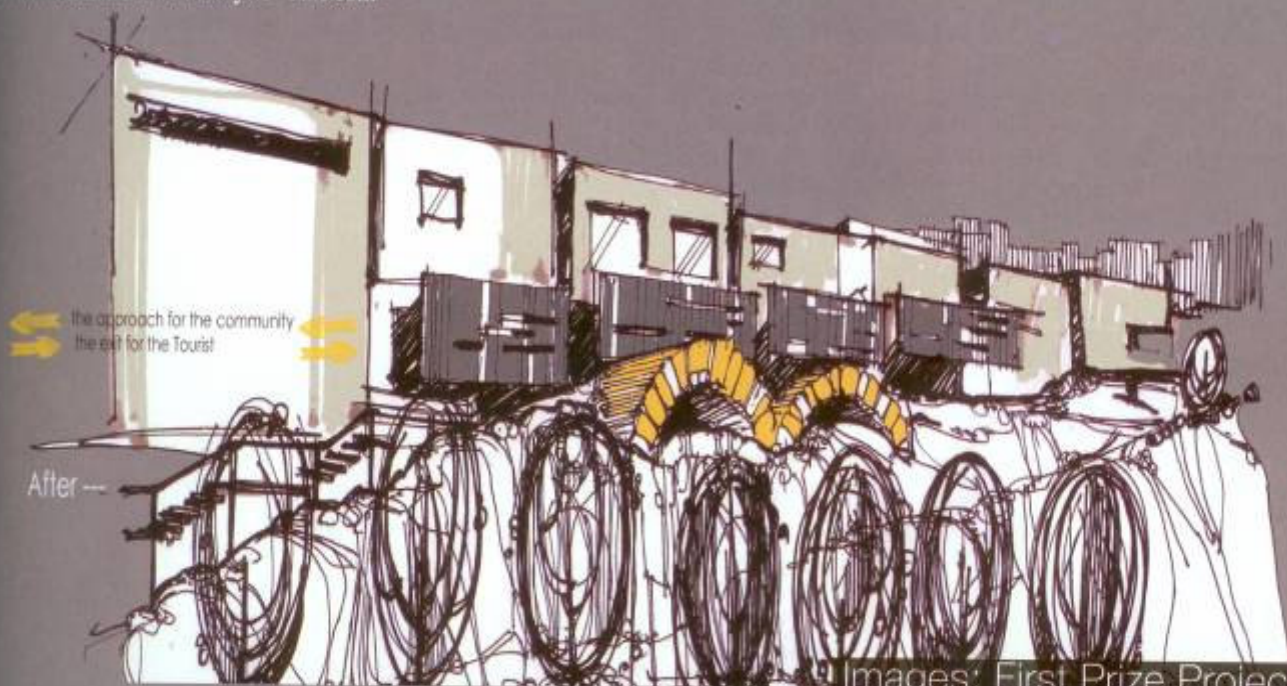
Sahel Hiyari, an architect and jury member, told JP that the root of the problem is students being "obsessed with form" which results in the projects revolving around "the image". He explained that this stems from a dependency on new computer technologies that make things "look better than they really are". To this effect, many family members and onlookers were very impressed with the futuristic modern designs. One observer repeated what most in the room were thinking, "Wow, these look amazing". Nevertheless, when JP approached Dr Yaghmour, he explained that it was precisely the "Wow factor that was worrisome". "This is what we want to avoid, it is often these types of projects that are not practical when studied further," Yaghmour said.

The testimony posted on the CSBE website clarifies this view with the following statement, "Numerous student projects end up intending to impress at first sight and provide a degree of "shock value" through exhibitionist presentation techniques. These techniques often consist of collages of images that incorporate a multi-layering of forms, colours and lines, and that do not adequately reflect the physicality and materiality of architecture".

Attending the event was May Shaer, a conservation architect, responsible for international cooperation projects with the Department of Antiquities. According to her, the projects overall were "generally good", although Shaer could identify with the judge's remarks, "It has become a phenomenon that students stress about graphic presentation. This is not OK when it comes at the sacrifice of some other very important studies that surround a project," Shaer said. For Shaer, it was clear why the first prize project was chosen, she explained that although it was not the flashiest, undoubtedly some deep thought was put into the design, while at the same time taking into consideration the surrounding area. "It appears to be the most realistic and functional," she said.

Hiyari expressed his regret to JP that one of the other problems faced by universities is the fact that admissions are based only on marks rather than merit, without any sort of entrance portfolio or exam. "This is troubling, some youth may have brilliant abilities with a passion for design and architecture, but not necessarily the highest average," he said. He explained that in a culture that obsesses with titles, honour students who are unable to land a spot in medicine or dentistry move to other impressive titles such as becoming "building architects".

Meanwhile, this issue is not hindering students' prospects of finding jobs; on the contrary, there is a high demand for architecture graduates locally and across the region, with the majority of students joining the workforce before their graduation ceremonies.



Cover Story

Hani Hussaini, partner and head of Omrania Jordan's Architecture Department, told JP that although students often graduate before they are ready, they are unconcerned as, "By the time any of them receive a graduation certificate, they are already working," he said. He explained the building boom in Jordan and across the region has made this possible.

Hussaini sent the following statement to JP on behalf of the firm:

"Jordanian Universities do have their fair share of talented students. We have been consistent in actively seeking out, recruiting and training outstanding, fresh graduates...Architectural education is heavily reliant on a one to one interaction between student and teacher. Over the last few years, prominent architectural schools have significantly increased their intake of students, without the balance of an adequate increase in teaching resources. This seems to have impacted the general quality of graduates — the average standard of graduates has dropped. Although the standard of graphic skills is generally quite high, many complete their education lacking basic tools. Communication skills, whether written, spoken, or drawn, have particularly suffered. The same goes for analytical and spatial visualisation skills which are instrumental in the making of an architect. There are obviously noted exceptions, but these, unfortunately, do not make an industry."

Dima Abu Arida, 2nd prize winner now working at Omrania, agreed that finding a job in the industry is trouble-free. "All the graduates in my class are now working, most of us even before we graduated," she said. The 23-year-old Applied Science University graduate told JP that all the students at the ceremony took the comments "very positively" because learning different perspectives will encourage them to become better rounded architects. Abu-Arida added that among the students, it is common knowledge that those who are "weak" in architecture put up the biggest graphic show to compensate.

From the University of Jordan, 24-year-old

Mousa Shahin was more verbose on the matter, and quickly pointed out what he saw as the drawbacks in Jordanian universities. "Having been part of the university system these past five years, I believe that students are hooked on creating a bold visual impact because they are not being creatively inspired by their professors. Also, most professors do not pay much attention to the projects we submit at the end of year. They don't give us ideas that fit the current market trends because they're stuck in academia, rather than being out in the field. When we present them with 'wow' projects, crammed with 3D images, they are awed because they themselves don't know how to do this."

Shahin, on of the 1st prize winning team, stressed that the universities are too overcrowded for the professors to be able to give the students the attention needed. "Classes are way over capacity which is killing the quality of work; and, through the Internet, students are tracing a subject even if they don't understand what the project is about." At the University of Jordan, entry for architecture has more than quadrupled in the past five years.

Most of all Shahin stressed that his team was "very lucky" to have one of the few extremely dedicated teachers in the field. "Our teacher, Leen Fakhoury, spent many days with us at her home, and extra hours at the university, working and helping us...behind every shining graduate there is a great professor," he said.

ACADEMIC PERSPECTIVE

For all the controversy involving Jordan's academia, the country's professors readily offered their perspectives and explanations on the issue. At the request of the CSBE, Nather Abu Obeid, Dean - College of Architecture and Design, Jordan University of Science and Technology (JUST), prepared a written response to the Jury Report. Obeid was also the professor of the 3rd prize winners.

Obeid began his in-depth reply by stating, "The jurors noted that the current work of

graduating students portrays an unhealthy dependence on Computer-Aided Design (CAD) technologies. This statement seems to connote that such computer technologies are merely a drawing tool. I believe this position is biased and built on a value system connected to traditional techniques of conceptual creation and design development."

The letter (published below with the jury report) went one step further to imply that it is the old-school practitioners who need to embrace new computer technologies that have now become mandatory for anyone who wishes to compete in today's world of design. "It was only relatively recently that the computer was introduced simply as a drafting tool...But it eventually emerged as an essential component in the culture of architectural practice. In fact, it is currently not feasible, or even acceptable, to develop certain three-dimensional architectural compositions without totally involving CAD programmes in the process," the report said.

The report makes clear that current architectural practice has come to stress the use of computers and architectural firms look to employ students who excel in computer graphics and representation. "Computer-generated graphics are becoming powerful marketing tools in the architectural industry, and architectural graduates need to master the generation of such graphics to effectively compete in the job market" it reads.

Dr Obeid, as well as other professors who discussed this issue with JP, conceded that there is a current widespread tendency of "overusing computer graphics" but in their belief, the way forward is not to look back into traditional ways of work processes but rather to encourage newer computer technologies that can incorporate traditional design thinking. To this regard, the report highlights that there are "many serious current investigations addressing the capabilities of computing in decision-making and intelligence within the context of architectural design".





Saleem Dahabreh, an experienced professional and an architecture graduate from Jordan, with master's in Urban Design from Belgium, master's in environmental psychology and a PhD in Architectural Morphology from Georgia institute of Technology, offered a different perspective that supports both the jury's reaction and the academics. "First and foremost, the question we need to ask is in what context and set of ideas was the jury members judging these projects, was it functional, social, or religious? He asked. "The way in which we view things is influenced by our experiences." Although Dahabreh did not have the chance to view the projects, he contends that a jury report depends on the criteria used to judge the winners.

"Architecture is like fashion," he explained, "There is the ready-to-wear, and the haute couture, the haute couture you may not ever wear, but which you can still appreciate because it reflects the genius of the designer," he said.

The architect of 14 years gave further details noting that some architectural designs are only viable for the drawing board but are still important and fascinating as they show that the architect has the capacity, imagination, creativity and theoretical means to

produce such architecture. The other type of design any contractor can build and is cost efficient. "In a competition you would expect that submissions would have the best of both sides, to start from something that can actually be built, but still reflects extraordinary creativity," Dahabreh said.

He went on to stress a crucial point that must not be overlooked: in the architecture of today, by and large, nothing is unrealistic anymore. "If you look at Dubai and some of the latest projects being built, many of them seemed outrageous and impossible to construct only a few years back, and all of them began with a designer daring to dream. Some architectural images may look egotistical and unrealistic today, but fast forward five years from now and someone will have managed to build it. It is all about illusion; you are selling art and illusion. In our virtual reality world you need these 3D, futuristic designs for clients to respond," he added. In short, he accentuated the notion that today's regional investors want architects to dream and leave the worry of how it can be realised to them. As for preparing a student to work in the competitive industry, Dahabreh agreed with the academic response that students need to abandon some of the traditional ways of

working and become CAD professionals. "For a large architectural firm to survive, it must abandon theory and some of its ideas to serve the client's demands." However, he also empathised with the underlying analysis of the jury that evolution is being masked by futuristic images and distorted with trends that are rarely sensitive to surroundings or the "end-user's" needs.

So, what is the solution? In Dahabreh's opinion, the industry and those involved should not give too much significance to the overuse of computers, or how students are following architectural trends, but, instead, on how to reformulate the current way of dealing with these issues. He proposed that there should be combined efforts from both academia and practising firms to develop a multidisciplinary approach that incorporates dialogue, while educating both investors and clients.

Regardless of the different perspectives, the true merit of this event lies in its triumph in initiating a healthy debate between a wide spectrum of key figures in the industry. The ramifications of this integral issue will ultimately affect our urban reality, and the personal space in which we all live. ■

FIRST PRIZE

Re-Development the southern terrace of Jabal Al Qalaa

Amman Archeological Museum
Al Qalaa Community Re-habilitation Center



Conceptual scenario

To reflect the relation between the different levels of the city and how the past must not just be preserved, but made part of the future. Our purpose must be to rediscover how an interface and memory can become vibrant and relevant to what we build now.

Rooms, street, walls and such corridors every thing are silent each space are empty, in our site the cluster is an enclosed and protected space holding only an essential elements, ceiling, floor, and small bits of lights, groves between the walls opens the view towards the city, all these impressions gives us a house that tells a mysterious story about these houses.

These impressions and perception about the site gives us a strong feeling that we are visiting a creature.

The concept of the cemetery structured in designing a place which preserves a memory for such people.

In conclusion
(Preserve a memory for something was alive)

And we can see in our site many trace that indicate something was alive. And the light pattern in our site gives us a strong trace for something want to live or being alive.

The most distinct character of the space is established by the play of natural light and shadow light only enhances the columned quality of a corridor (by way of shadows), which is its most significant visual character. At the same time, if it is interesting to see that light can also be used to totally change the character of a space.



Name: Dina Hadi, Mousa Shahin, Hazim Samawi
University: University of Jordan
Supervisor: Arch. Leen Fakhoury

Jury conclusion:

This project expresses considerable restraint and sensitivity that establish a degree of connectedness to its context. It also shows an understanding of local preexisting vernacular typologies. The jury appreciates the project's clear design thinking processes as well as outcomes. The project also effectively addresses issues relating to conservation, materiality and function. The final result is one that conveys an overall sense of "silence" and a sense of place.



SECOND PRIZE

AQABA SEAPORT PASSENGER TERMINAL

Creating a new Gate to Jordan

The goal of this project is to create a traffic TRANSPO...
 tion media at the Jordan's only Naval gate, which is ad...
 movements and routes, which directly effected the des...
 final layout... **TERMINAL AS A LIVING MUSI**...
 which is influenced in the CIRCULATION movements, routes...
 projects... for a start; concepts of circulation and co

Flow Charts
 Passengers
 Departures

Understanding Circulation

Baggage

Arrivals

Conceptual Approaches

Movement Circulation models

Site Plan

Legend

1. Main Road
2. Access Road
3. Main Access Terminal
4. Underground parking in access Road
5. Access Road
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Site Plan

Scale 1:750

Name: Dima Abu Arida
University: Jordan University of Science and Technology
Supervisor: Dr. Abd Alsaheb Alazzawi

Jury conclusion:
 This project effectively addresses the challenges of programme and function. It also resolves issues relating to site and spatial components in a balanced manner. It develops an original conceptual diagram into a well thought-out design with considerably developed planning features. The project also expands the original function of the complex to include cultural and recreational activities that engage a wider range of users from the surrounding community.

THIRD PRIZE



Name: Diana Ziadat
University: Jordan University of Science and Technology
Supervisor: Dr Natheer Abu Obeid

Jury conclusion:

This project shows a reasonably well-proportioned and refined articulation of forms, and also presents clearly thought-out and developed planning features. Both plan and form are elegantly developed in a harmonious manner that takes into consideration the topography of the site. The project's horizontality helps counteract the verticality of the adjacent large-scale development.

HONOURABLE MENTION



Name: Ajwad Masarwa
University: Jordan University of Science and Technology
Supervisor: Dr Natheer Abu Obeid

Jury conclusion:

This project presents a creative interpretation and redefinition of a conventional building programme. It allows a centralised, serious corporate function to fragment and expand throughout the city, and, moreover, injects a recreational component into it.

Jury Report

The graduation design projects presented for this award underline the considerable talent, ability, as well as the will to learn and grow, evident among students of architecture in Jordan.

Such awards can greatly encourage establishing a positive exchange of ideas between students, architects, faculty members and universities. Moreover, the constitution of the jury helps establish linkages between academia and practice through which both local and foreign architects are represented.

It is hoped that this event will be institutionalised to become a regularly recurring one, and that it will be expanded to include graduating projects from both Jordan as well as the surrounding region.

Even though we greatly appreciate the effort and passion expressed in the submitted projects, certain prevalent features in the projects do raise serious concerns regarding the general state of architectural education as it has evolved over the past few years in Jordan, as well as in other countries of the region.

Our general consensus as a jury is that although the students are relatively well-versed in the techniques of visual graphic presentation, much of the student design work coming out of our universities today is highly formalistic and focuses on graphic visual impacts and stimuli. In such work, clarity and discipline are often absent, and ambiguity prevails. The ordinary, the silent, and the neutral are feared — clutter often dominates in both design and presentation.

Such work portrays an unhealthy dependency on CAD technologies to produce images that are detached from architecture as a multi-disciplinary endeavour and as a material manifestation of the creative process. Under such circumstances, architectural representation techniques that denote basic design skills and delineate careful planning, spatial qualities, and materiality suffer greatly. Moreover, while a project may begin with very promising diagrams and sketches, these are often not developed fully or seriously, and, in many cases, function is sacrificed for the sake of form.

Although the process of architectural design requires a high level of critical and analytical rigour, the end results of architectural design studios today, often consist of derivative and watered down versions of trendy vocabularies primarily disseminated through architectural magazines and the Internet. Consequently, students of architecture have become heavily dependent on superficial readings of such

sources in their development as architects. In doing so, examining the rich and diverse examples of architecture and urbanism that history has to offer us is absent. This deprives students of an in-depth intellectual and visual investigation of the making of architecture, and also prevents them from fully developing and polishing the considerable talent they possess.

Numerous student projects, therefore, end up intending to impress at first sight and to provide a degree of "shock value" through exhibitionist presentation techniques. These techniques often consist of collages of images that incorporate a multi-layering of forms, colours and lines, that do not adequately reflect the physicality and materiality of architecture.

Often, the final result is an obsession with image and arbitrary form. This means that issues relating to physical, technological, social, and cultural contexts are to a great extent absent, resulting in what may be referred to as a state of disconnection between the architectural design process and architecture as built form.

Response from Academia

Response from Academia to the Award's Jury Report

Natheer Abu-Obeid, Ph.D.
Dean - College of Architecture and Design
Jordan University of Science and Technology (JUST), Irbid

This brief essay provides feedback on the comments and concerns raised by the jurors of The Omrania | CSBE Student Award for Excellence in Architectural Design regarding certain aspects of architectural education in Jordan. The jurors focused on the following points:

- The overuse of computer and visual graphics in architectural design.
- The sacrifice of function as well as social and cultural contexts for graphics, images and arbitrary forms.
- A heavy dependence on superficial readings of trendy vocabularies in architectural magazines and on the Internet, and the lack of an adequate reflection on the physicality and materiality of architecture.

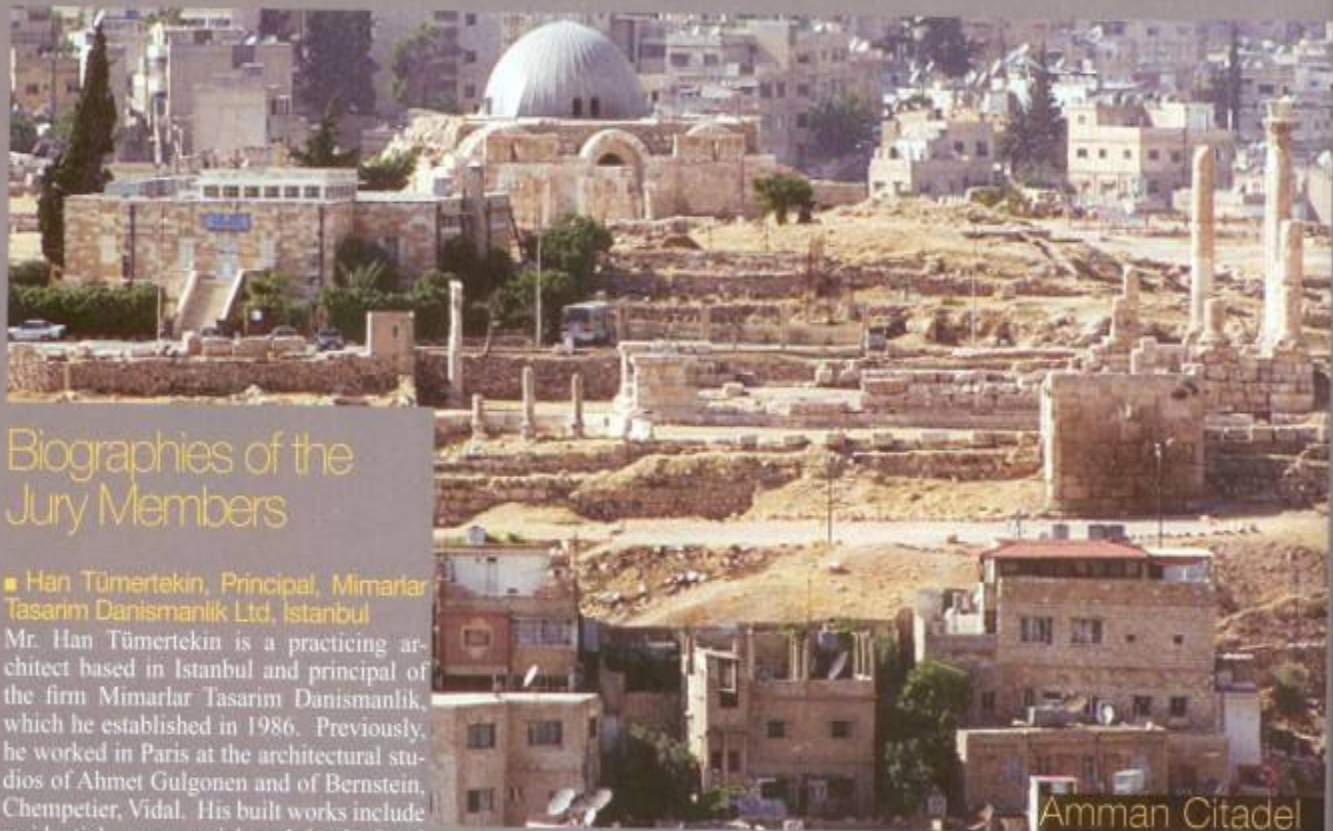
The jurors noted that the current work of graduating students portrays an unhealthy dependence on Computer-Aided Design (CAD) technologies. This statement seems to connote that such computer technologies are merely a drawing tool. I believe this po-

sition is biased and built on a value system connected to traditional techniques of conceptual creation and design development. It was only relatively recently that the computer was introduced simply as a drafting tool, and many practitioners and academics felt it to be slower than traditional drafting techniques, and not as effective. But, eventually, it emerged as an essential component in the culture of architectural practice. In fact, it is currently not feasible, or even acceptable, to develop certain three-dimensional architectural compositions without totally involving CAD programmes in the process (e.g. pendentives and the muqarnas).

In addition, it has become common to come across architectural students with considerable talent, a sense of imagination, and the ability to generate interesting concepts and design solutions, but who might have limited sketching and manual presentation skills. Moreover, current architectural practice has come to stress the use of computers to the point where, in their search for architects to employ, architectural firms focus on those who excel in computer graphics and representation. Computer-generated graphics are becoming powerful marketing tools in the architectural industry, and architectural graduates need to master the generation of such graphics to effectively compete in the job market.

Nonetheless, we have to admit that the current trend of overusing computer graphics in architectural representation is problematic. I do not believe, however, that the solution lies solely in returning to traditional design processes. In fact, I believe it could be the other way around. In other words, the role of CAD technologies could be investigated and explored more thoroughly and deeply, and such technologies could be further integrated into the process of design thinking, rather than merely being utilised for the presentation of design solutions. There are many serious current investigations addressing the capabilities of computing in decision-making and intelligence within the context of architectural design. The concepts of narrative, plots, actors, agents, and interaction are being introduced as new ideas within newly emerging trends in digital design thinking. A parallel process should be taking place with regard to CAD technologies.

Therefore, I propose that encouraging traditional manual skills amongst students of architecture should focus on those who have salient talents in using them and have clear potentials in integrating them in the generation of design ideas and solutions. But parallel with traditional design tools, we should further encourage the use of computers as exploratory and thinking tools



Biographies of the Jury Members

■ Han Tümertekin, Principal, Mimarlar Tasarım Danışmanlık Ltd, Istanbul

Mr. Han Tümertekin is a practicing architect based in Istanbul and principal of the firm Mimarlar Tasarım Danışmanlık, which he established in 1986. Previously, he worked in Paris at the architectural studios of Ahmet Gulgonen and of Bernstein, Champetier, Vidal. His built works include residential, commercial and institutional projects primarily in Turkey, as well as in the Netherlands, Japan, Canada, the United Kingdom, and France. Tümertekin was trained in architecture at Istanbul Technical University and completed graduate studies in historic preservation at the University of Istanbul. He has taught architecture since 1992, and is presently a design critic at Harvard University's Graduate School of Design. He lectures at universities and cultural institutions throughout the world, most recently at the Technical University of Delft; at the 6th mAAN International Conference in Tokyo on "Our Modern - Re-appropriating Asia's Urban Heritage"; in Zagreb, at the International Symposium on Architecture "Dan' Orisa"; and at Harvard. Tümertekin's works have been widely published in international architectural journals, including *Domus*, *Abitare*, and *AV*, and in the *World Atlas of Contemporary Architecture*. His projects were exhibited in the 2006 Venice Biennale. He was awarded Turkey's National Architecture Award in 1998 and 2000, and received the Tepe Centre Architectural Award in 2000. A monograph of his recent work was published by Harvard University Press in 2006. Tümertekin won a 2004 Aga Khan Award for Architecture for B2 House, a private residence he designed for two brothers in Canakkale, Turkey. He also served on the Award's 2007 Master Jury. The participation of Han Tümertekin was made possible through the support of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture.

■ Sahel Al Hiyari, Principal, Sahel Al Hiyari and Partners, Amman

Mr Sahel Al Hiyari is the principal architect in the firm Sahel Al Hiyari and Partners in Amman. He holds bachelor's degrees in both architecture and the fine arts from the Rhode Island School of Design, and a master's of architecture in urban design from the Graduate School of Design at Harvard University. He also undertook post-graduate study at the School of Architecture at the University of Venice, where he taught from 1993-1995. In 2002, Hiyari was chosen as the first architect to participate in the Rolex Mentor and Protégé Arts Initiative, and he subsequently was chosen as a protégé of Álvaro Siza in Portugal. His architectural work has been published in a number of local and international architectural publications, and has been exhibited in Jordan, Lebanon, Italy, and the United States. He has lectured at the Jordan University of Science and Technology in Irbid and Columbia University in New York. Hiyari's current architectural projects include an awareness centre in Wadi Musa for water reuse and landscaping in arid climates, the urban development of Ayla Oasis in Aqaba, housing towers in Kuwait, and private residences in Yemen and Jordan. He served as an On-Site Project Reviewer for the 2002-2004 cycle of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture, and also served on the Award's 2007 Master Jury. Hiyari is also a painter, and exhibitions of his work have been mounted in Jordan, Lebanon, and Italy.

■ Farouk Yaghmour, Principal, Yaghmour Architecture Office, Amman

Dr Farouk Yaghmour is an architect and planner, and is the principal of Yaghmour Architecture Office (Amman, Bethlehem, Sharjah, and Dubai). He studied architecture at the Hochschule für Architektur und Bauwesen in Weimar, and did his graduate work at the State University of New York at Buffalo, where he holds a master's degree in architecture and a PhD in planning. He taught at the University of Jordan, Amman, and the State University of New York, and was the founding chairman of the Department of Architecture and Interior Design at Petra University, Amman. Dr Yaghmour has practised architecture in Jordan, Palestine, the United Arab Emirates and the United States. He has been in charge of the urban and architectural development for a number of important historical sites including the Solomon Pools in Bethlehem, the Palestinian village of Beit Sahur, and the Baptism Site along the Jordan River in Jordan. He also was involved in efforts aimed at preserving the historical Palestinian city of Hebron. Dr Yaghmour is the author of several publications addressing the subjects of architecture and environmental and urban planning. He also has served on a number of public advisory committees in Jordan that have been involved in advising and following up on large-scale development projects in the country.

Amman Citadel

Cover Story

in design education and practice, and in a totally different context than that of traditional ones.

I tend to agree with the jurors that there is a general trend amongst many students to focus on graphics, images and arbitrary forms, and to ignore function as well as the social and cultural contexts. I believe this is a problem Jordan's architectural academia suffers from, and that there is no sincere attempt to overcome it. There is a prevailing myth that function is much more a technical and economic issue rather than a creative dimension of design thinking, and I think this (mis)understanding of function is shared amongst many local academicians as well as practitioners. Consequently, the design programme is usually reduced to the quantitative exercise of merely generating lists of measured spaces rather than developing a comprehensive diagnostics of activities (physical, mental, and social) within a spatial setting. Rather, function should be approached within the context of issues such as life-quality and lifestyle.

I expect that is why students search in their designs for narratives in images and forms rather than in the research-oriented pre-design thesis required for graduating projects. As such, students eventually find themselves constrained by depending on imported images to tell imported stories, which involve introducing vocabularies from differing sources unrelated to the context of the design problem. My assumption is that the jurors' criticism is directed towards importing readily packaged images, rather than on the use of already developed architectural vocabularies. In fact, it seems acceptable to me to use and further develop such vocabularies, especially those coming out of functional necessities or technical developments in the architectural industry.

However, a careful examination of local practice reveals similar symptoms. Importing readily-packaged, unauthentic images into the local environment is commonplace. The same also applies to regenerating images that were previously developed locally regardless of contextual differences. As a result, we in academia need to further help students effectively distinguish between the different — though related — concepts of architectural language, image, design concept and thesis. At the same time, we need to echo such efforts in local practice by developing the culture of architectural criticism as an essential component within the environment of practice.

Finally, it would be helpful to open up and sustain a dialogue among architecture schools in Jordan to address these issues, and extend this discourse to the institutions of local practice. ■

CSBE

Center for the Study of
the Built Environment

CSBE PROFILE

The Center for the Study of the Built Environment (CSBE) is a non-profit, private study and research institution that aims at addressing these challenges that affect the built environment in Jordan and beyond. The built environment is defined in a comprehensive manner to include all physical components of human settlements such as buildings, streets, open spaces and infrastructure. CSBE is therefore an interdisciplinary center that addresses areas including environmental studies, urban design and planning, conservation, architecture, landscape architecture and construction technologies. To accomplish our goals, we engage in a variety of activities including research projects, print and digital publishing, workshops, and the design and implementation of pilot projects.



OMRANIA & ASSOCIATES PROFILE

Omrانيا & Associates was first established in Saudi Arabia in the early seventies as an integrated architectural and engineering practice. Buildings have always constituted the core of Omrania's business. Its areas of expertise extend through the various architecture and engineering disciplines to include master planning, interior and landscape design as well as project management and site supervision. Omrania is best known for its work on the iconic Kingdom Tower in Riyadh, and has received several regional and international awards, including the Aga Khan Award for its Towaiq Palace project. Omrania operates through offices in Riyadh, Manamah, as well as Amman and has amassed an extensive portfolio of completed projects that extend throughout the Middle East as well as Europe.

