

pillbox

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Adrian Ray

for Ballet

Also: The Gol Team,

Byzantine, and Dr. Kai Gutschow

on campus.

Breaking the Box

Kai Gutschow speaks about self-expression through architecture

As most students know, Carnegie Mellon University has heralded its creed as “innovation with impact” for years. Kai Gutschow of the CMU architecture department spoke last Tuesday on this creed’s parallel in “breaking boxes” and the strong connection with advancement in architecture.

Gutschow has taught at Carnegie Mellon University since 2000, and he recently earned his Ph.D. from Columbia University. Coming from a humble career as a cabinetmaker in Hamburg, Germany, he now directs the second year of studies in the CMU architecture department. Gutschow has spent time in India, Asia, and Nepal, and he has used his knowledge of architectural design and history to become a leading scholar in his field. Now Gutschow lectures for organizations such as the Pittsburgh museums, teaches many courses at CMU, and furthers his research through articles and publications.

Launching a series of lectures at the Carnegie Museum of Art, Gutschow spoke last Tuesday on Frank Lloyd Wright’s design techniques and their impact on the architectural world. The lecture focused on Wright’s literal and metaphorical deconstruction of architectural “boxes.” Whether these boxes kept houses in bland arrangements or the art of building design in stagnation, Wright helped to break their restricting nature. Gutschow emphasized

that this not only broke precedents but erected new ones that affected the architectural world for decades.

In breaking with tradition, Wright set what Gutschow termed a “trajectory for the present.” Gutschow himself sees such a trajectory as important for architectural insight, and in his classroom he stresses the necessity of precedent. In the second year of the architecture program, his students learn about the importance of history, for in Gutschow’s view, people work together “with an agreement on what has already been done.” He tells his students that “you have to know the rules before you can break them.”

Acknowledging that not all of the architectural world agrees with this viewpoint, Gutschow noted, “I consider myself first and foremost a historian. I work very hard to see how a building came out of its context.” He and his colleagues argue vociferously on the idea of precedent and the present, and Gutschow says his strong hope is that his students will “defend their own position with the constellation of ideas and theories we present to them” with “passion.”

Gutschow asserts that his students enter the program with an existing knowledge of buildings that they use daily, and this excludes a truly “blank slate” from the

classroom. He helps his pupils become aware of that “knowledge pool” they have and works with them to build upon it. When students draw connections between their past experiences and the topics covered in their classes, Gutschow says his job in teaching becomes much more rich and fulfilling.

As his students know, constraints are inherent in architecture and in Gutschow’s philosophy, as all art implies constraints placed upon the artist. They come in the form of 12-tone scales, painting materials, body flexibility, and zoning laws. Gutschow believes that for his chosen art, “every constraint is a positive one.” He continued, “Constraints aren’t handcuffs. They help find direction and focus.... With unlimited freedom, we couldn’t build or think.”

“The greatest architects find their way through restrictions,” Gutschow added. He hopes that his students still find their passion for art and self-expression through architecture even through the fog of restrictions. He affirmed for his students that “the sign of a true genius ... is one who can find creativity within any constraints.”

MATTHEW MCKEE
STAFFWRITER