

## Introducing Other Forms of Art to the Design Studio: An Approach of Using 'Poetry' as a Source of Inspiration

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**Abstract** – 'Design studio' is the core course unit/module of any architecture degree programme as well as the place where the architecture students learn by self-involvement with the teachers 'guidance. Although the Design teachers often try to employ different methods to teach Design, it is observed that most of the students struggle with formulating a meaningful design concept in their process. Therefore, a new approach is needed which would help the students to come up with a good design concept. It is hypothesized that, as Architecture is considered as a form of art (useful art), introducing another form of art (Poetry) as a source of inspiration in the design process would be beneficial for most of the students.

This paper presents how the first design project of the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of BArch programme conducted by Southern Campus of General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University (KDU) helped the students for formulating a meaningful concept. As this is a 'studio/classroom research', the students' involvement is remarkable and highlighted. The primary objective of this study is to examine the effectiveness of using Poetry in the Design Studio as a source of inspiration to identify the qualities of the generators of architecture. Two groups of Architecture (BArch) students who were in their 2<sup>nd</sup> year respectively in 2016 and 2017 were selected as participants by using purposive sampling method. The both groups of students were provided with 'Haiku' poems as the source of inspiration so that they could use them individually to identify the generators. Final task of the project was to design a space for a specific purpose preceded by a design concept. The process and the final design were evaluated and analysed qualitatively and quantitatively. The analysis showed that this approach was effective in the design process as it facilitated the students in formulating meaningful design concepts.

**Key Words** – Design studio, Design process, Poetry, Generators of architecture, BArch programme

### I. INTRODUCTION

Many architects, theorists and critics have expressed their opinion on architecture saying it is a form of 'art'. Greek rationalist philosopher Aristotle identified architecture as a useful art which employs nature's own machinery. According to him, architecture does not possess the 'imitative' quality which was regarded as essential to fine art. (Butcher, 2005, p.148-157) George Hegel, one of German philosophers has stated that architecture gave birth to all arts. (Dissanayake, 2002, p.97) Since the time of Renaissance, Italian theorists listed architecture, painting and sculpture as the three sister arts of design. (Collins, 1965, p.176) Le Corbusier, a master of modern architecture has stated that architecture is a thing of art, a phenomenon of emotions, lying outside questions of construction and beyond them. (Corbusier, 1989, p.19) Thus, we see some relationship between architecture and other forms of art. Rather than talking of mere parallelism, some architecture theorists have emphasized the importance of learning from other art forms. Jones (1984, p.25) has stated that he is trying to learn from the temporal arts such as poetry, film, music and theatre. According to Collins (1965, p. 248) 'in practice the disdain for style has meant that in literature, the man and the author have been merged into one. Similarly, in architecture, the architect now creates by direct experience rather than by the application of a system of rules based on a common fund of knowledge.'

Architects or artists are inspired by many ways. Inspiration is not essential for every architect/ artist, however, might be beneficial. It is 'a process that takes place when somebody sees or hears something that causes them to have exciting new ideas or makes them want to create something.' (Hornby, 2000) According to Paustovsky (1955, p.124) most writers have their particular geniuses to inspire them. Generally, these geniuses are writers too. Similarly, architects are often inspired by other architects and artists. 'Abstract art' had influenced modern architecture for its progression. For instance, Cubism has

undeniably influenced modern architects like Le Corbusier. Mondrian’s neo-plastic paintings have inspired Mies Van der Rohe and constructivist paintings and sculptures have given birth to Russian constructivist architecture. (Collins, 1965, p. 279-281) Therefore, introducing other art forms to the design studio as a source of inspiration would be beneficial for the students of architecture in their designing process.

‘Design studio’ or any other name used to refer the same purpose, is the core course unit/ module in any architecture degree programme. ‘Design studio’ is also the name used to identify the place where the students involve in learning design. Design teachers usually assist the students using different teaching methods and introducing diverse design projects. However, it is observed that most of the students struggle with formulating a design concept. A concept can be just an inspiring idea to start the design generated through identifying the qualities of the generators of any given design project. (User, context, activity pattern and higher purpose are generally considered as the generators of architecture.) Experimenting new teaching approaches is important to help the students particularly who struggle with formulating a good design concept.

This paper presents how the first design project of the design studio, as an orientation to the second year of BArch programme, has helped the students to come up with a meaningful design concept through identifying the qualities of architecture. As this is a ‘studio/classroom research’, the students’ involvement is remarkable and highlighted. Primary objective of this research was to examine the effectiveness of using another art form (poetry) in the design studio as a source of inspiration to come up with a meaningful design concept through identifying the qualities of the generators of architecture. The secondary objectives of this project are as follows.

- Improving the ability of students to interpret the generators of another art form (poetry) in terms of their quality/ essence and express them in a three dimensional abstract form.
- Facilitating the students to identify the generators of architecture through a process of interpreting the generators of another art form (poetry).
- Examining the ability of students to use the theoretical knowledge for the conversion of abstract ideas into built form in order to achieve the qualitative and quantitative aspects of architectural design.

## II. METHODOLOGY

The project was offered as a research to the two groups of second year Architecture (BArch) students of KDU Southern Campus respectively in 2016 and 2017. These participants (33 students in total) were selected by using purposive sampling method. ‘Haiku’ poems without authors’ names were given to both of the student groups (3 poems for each group) as the source of inspiration. Generally, the designers tend to inspire directly from the generators of the particular project by analyzing them. Here, the students were provided with an artifact which is created by the prospective user so that they can be inspired by it instead of analyzing the user by other ways. Each student was asked to select one poem according to the individual preference. The poems were given in English with their Sinhala translation for the easiness of understanding.

The poems given in 2016 to the group 01 (Intake 32) were named as A, B and C (Table 01). Similarly, the poems given in 2017 to the group 02 (Intake 33) were named as D, E and F (Table 02).

Table 01: Poems given to the group 01 (Intake 32, 2016)

Poem	Name of the poem
The summer shower Cutting straight through it, there goes A white sailboat	A
Sick and feverish In the gleam of cherry blossoms I keep shivering	B
A Spider web Hanging before my eyes, evening Mountains and rivers	C

Table 02: Poems given to the group 02 (Intake 33, 2017)

Poem	Name of the poem
Spring morning marvel lovely nameless little hill on a sea of mist	D
Early summer rain	E

houses facing the river two of them	
Factory dismissing the workers- it vomits cloudy autumn water into canal	F

The research (design project) was conducted as two tasks.

Task 01: Individual task

Interpreting and abstracting

In this task, it was expected to interpret the generators of the selected poem in terms of their quality/essence and to express them in a three-dimensional abstract form. As the first step, each student was encouraged to read the particular poem and find the generators behind it. Further, the generators of the poems were described as ‘a sudden experience’ (a moment of perception) of the poet and his/her ‘specific emotional response’ towards it. This sudden experience generated from a specific context was considered as the first generator. The ‘poet’s state of mind’ which caused emotional response was considered as the other generator.

As the next step, the students were asked to grasp the quality/essence of each generator found. As the final step of this task, the students were supposed to come up with a three dimensional (3d) abstract form (a physical model) to express what they grasped as the qualities of the selected poem.

Task 02: Individual Task

Designing a ‘monumental space’ for an unknown poet (to the group 01, intake 32/2016) and Designing a ‘retreat’ for an unknown poet (to the group 02, intake 33/2017)

This was the final task of the research. Here, the students were instructed to consider that the selected poem is the only source to be used to find the generators of the proposed architectural space. Generators of ‘the context’ and ‘the user’ which have already been explored in task 01 were to be considered for this task. The other generators were to be considered as secondary in this task.

- Total floor area should not exceed 500 sqft.
- A meaningful concept and a design brief should be developed according to the interpretation of generators.

- Immediate context can be incorporated into your design according to the interpretation of ‘generator –the context’
- The ‘poet’s state of mind’ was to be assumed as the quality of ‘generator – the user’

Final assessment was done by a panel inclusive of external and internal examiners and marks were moderated by a portfolio examination panel at the end of each year. Detailed versions of the results were gathered from all the students and summarized them categorizing in four groups based on the moderated final marks as Very good (75% and above), Good (65%-74%), Average (50%-64%), Poor (49% and below)

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Final moderated marks of the total participants are summarized as in figure 01.

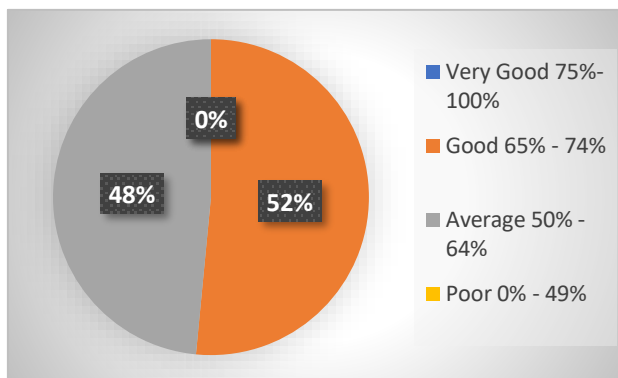


Figure 01: Summary of final moderated marks




None (0%) of the students of both groups received ‘very good’ marks (75% and above). None (0%) of the students received ‘poor’ marks (49% and below). 17 students (52%) received ‘good’ marks (65% - 74%). Rest of all students (48%) got ‘average’ marks. (50%-64%) The highest mark received by a student was 72%. The lowest mark received by a student was 50% which is pass mark for any design project in BArch curriculum.

Detailed results of the students who got highest, lowest and average marks are presented in table 03 and 04 taking as examples to show the profile of each participant group. The average student was selected randomly. Most of the students (more than 80%) have come up with a meaningful concept which was related to the quality of the generators. Those concepts also showed a close

relationship with the quality of the generators of the poem selected by respective student. In general, the students of good and average categories have showed a philosophical approach to capture the qualities of the generators of the poems as compared to the students who got 50% or close to 50%. They have tried to develop a design concept based on the qualities of generators

captured. Further their concepts seem to be more detailed than those of the students who got lower marks. These concepts have defined the quality of the form and the space of the final design. In contrast, the concepts of the lower schemes showed vagueness and were less detailed so that the students could define the quality of the space and form well.

Table 03: Detailed results (Intake 33, 2017)

Student	Good (highest/ 69%)	Average (randomly selected/ 60%)	Lowest (50%)
Selected poem	D	E	F
Identified quality of generators with 3d abstract form	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>The sudden experience of the poet</u>: a strange feeling which builds a strong empire within his mind set (soul)</li> <li>• <u>The poet's state of mind</u>: restless mind, frustration, unclerness</li> </ul> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>The sudden experience of the poet</u>: Unexpected Incident at an unexpected time of life.</li> <li>• <u>The poet's state of mind</u>: being confused in his/her state of mind. (just imagined a scenario thinking that the poet had lost his/ her, wife/husband when they were a young married couple, so he/she had left along with a baby)</li> </ul> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>The sudden experience of the poet</u>: a sudden feeling of impermanent human life</li> <li>• <u>The poet's state of mind</u>: Being sensitive to the hidden truth of impermanence of life</li> </ul> 
Design concept	<p>"Guiding the poet from his mindset (restless mind, frustration, unclerness) towards wisdom through a spatial progression."</p> <p>Gloomy Entrance- Walking into mystery                      Gloomy Circulated Path- Path of Bravery                      Sanctuary of Heaven and Solitude- Blessings of Heaven                      Sanctuary of Light- Guiding into the enlightenment</p>	<p>"Finding the way out"</p> <p>Taking the journey through the unstable bridge crossing the confused mind with confident and finally ending up in the building with the view of the context in a clam environment where him/ her mind can be consoled so he/ she could live with the hope of present, rather than not worrying about the past.</p>	<p>"Sympathy over the misery"</p>

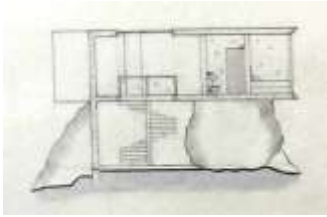







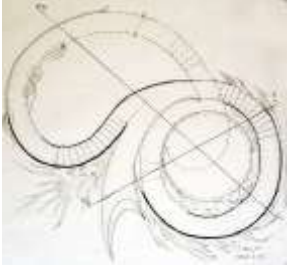

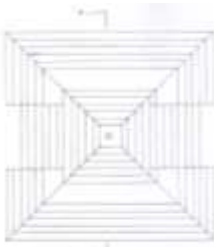

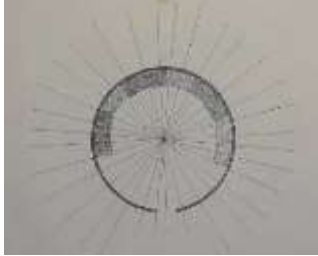

Final design			
			

Table 04: Detailed results (Intake 32, 2016)

Student	Good (highest/ 72%)	Average (randomly selected/ 60%)	Lowest (50%)
Selected poem	B	C	A
Identified quality of generators with 3d abstract form	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>The sudden experience of the poet:</u> being repentant to the upcoming sparks of destruction called Truth by living under the sky of sinners.</li> <li>• <u>The poet's state of mind:</u> emotions of a person who understood what the Truth is, without knowing the way to cessation of suffering, emotions of a person at a transition point.</li> </ul> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>The sudden experience of the poet:</u> The poet is experiencing the ups and downs of life. Life is a journey of obstacles- just like tangled spider web, however the beautiful things do exist for everyone.</li> <li>• <u>The poet's state of mind:</u> The poet initially is in a low state of mind to being with, as the confusion is expressed with the explanation of a spider web. However, the poet's state of mind doesn't stay this way for long as he has discovered a means of elevating it into something happier- although the spider web stands</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>The sudden experience of the poet:</u> A sudden curious scene</li> <li>• <u>The poet's state of mind:</u> a state of a curious and enthusiastic condition of mind</li> </ul> 
Design concept	<p>"Fear because of the contrast of truth and fake in the world" The structure is provided with a comfortable clear path way through a colourful but complex and highly conflict looking structure to walk at a distance.</p>	<p>"Clarity in life that comes with obstacles. " When the obstacles and confusions are somehow dismantled the required sense of clarity is always achievable. The obstacles are indicated by the spider web which indicates the hardships. However, amongst these lies the positive vibe</p>	<p>"Curiosity" The circular shape of the building creates misrecognition about the exact volume of the space among people who are seeing from the outside. At 3m height from the ground level, a bamboo panel stretches from inside of the building to the outside. It covers whole circular envelop of the building as</p>

		as well on the other side- indicated by the mountains and rivers in the haiku. In the design process clarity is expressed through the use of steps, the structure is created with flights of steps.	well as provides extra shading. Main intension of this bamboo panel and circular building is to create the curiosity and enthusiasm about the hidden image of this circular building
Final design	 	 	 

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Even though none of the students have scored in very good range (75% and above) it is an important result that none of the students haven't received fail marks (49% and below) and all were in good (65%- 74%) and average (50%- 64%) ranges. It is a good remark that most of the students (more than 80%) have come up with a meaningful concept which was related to the quality of the generators. Those concepts also showed a close relationship with the quality of the generators of the poem selected by respective student. Considering all above important results, it can be concluded that this approach was effective in applying in the design studio and was beneficial for the students to come up with a meaningful design concept.

#### V. FURTHER RESEARCH AND LIMITATIONS

It is recommended that the results can be improved by conducting workshops or seminars on appreciation of other art forms parallel to design tutoring sessions involving experts in both disciplines. There is a high potential to experiment this with other art forms such as painting, music and cinema in addition to poetry. Less opportunity to improve interest in poetry, especially to the students who were not that much interested in other art forms and lack of examiners and tutors who are expert

in both architecture and other art forms were identified as limitations.

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