

## Editorial

The Art Historical Work Group of South Africa is celebrating the 23<sup>rd</sup> year of the *South African Journal of Art History* and continuing its distinct mission to stimulate debate in and between the disciplines of art, architecture, design, craft, film and other manifestations of visual culture.

This year also marks the second AHWGSA conference, hosted by the Department of Architecture of the University of Pretoria, that was expressly structured as a provocative and stimulating event that has the additional purpose of acting as a nursery where papers that are intended for publication in the *SAJAH* can evolve in content and quality through debate and critique in a nurturing peer review environment.

The ISSN listed and accredited *SAJAH* has become a sought after publisher for South African scholars, but it is attracting ever more international contributions – the editors can report that back copies of the Journal have become sought after commodities that are auctioned on the WWW. The editorial board is intent on building on the existing quality through stringent peer review, through advice from its international Advisory Board as well as through attracting contributions from acknowledged scholars – at the same time the journal wants to provide opportunities to young or emerging talent by providing support for crafting the contributions to the set standards.

As intended, the theme “Space and Place and/or Spaces and Places: Production, Process and Contestation” elicited a wide range of well researched, provocative responses, both synchronic and diachronic, from a multi-disciplinary group of authors. The topics embrace a large register of scales of place, and include work from practitioners, theoreticians, historiographers and pedagogues from the arts and sciences, engaged in an interesting melange of aspects of art, heritage conservation, landscape architecture, architecture, town planning, urban advocacy and various forms of activism in the public realm. Despite the range and diversity of the topics, the content acknowledges the inherent changeability of landscapes, the dynamic nature of culture, the relative and complex nature of historical interpretation and the flexibility of memory of event and/or place. These sentiments and realisations possibly explain the strong bias against monolithic representation of meaning that is reflected in the collection of contributions in this Volume, and the authors’ resonance with concepts like complexity, inclusivity, participation, activism and multivocality as regards the production of space and place, as well as any participation in the interpretation, presentation and/or representation of meaning of historical event or of place.

Some authors propose theory or methodology of interpreting the intangible landscapes, how memory pertaining to an experienced landscape can be retrieved through the process of mnemotechnics and how intangible components of place can be safeguarded and sustained into the future, while the research of others offer new and/or more complex and rich meanings of place through analytical frameworks that subvert canonical, vested or monolithic representation, or through suggesting alternatives to the alienation accompanying western consumer space, through reference to thought on what constitutes “human space”.

A collection of the authors reflect critically on historic and recent manifestations of memorialisation of historical events. There is criticism of built manifestations of the meanings of a particular event or place that erase memory and fail to establish a genuine conversation with the tangible and intangible content nature of events, so bringing monolithic interpretation and memorialisation that lead to another level of contestation, not present in society before the initial interventions, so controlling or suppressing further engagement by members of society with a place’s diverse meaning.

In the papers that focus on the city, there is an inquiry of the role of the designer vis-à-vis political power, the relationship between the processes involved in the production of the Urban Project and democratic place-making, the dialectics relating to socio-cultural use of space and the restriction of space on users. Also, the potential of urban space is seen in relation to the theoretical problems, contradictions and limits of architecturally oriented place-making. There is inquiry related to contestation in market spaces of informal settlements, and additionally a topical inquiry of the principle of urban porosity as a positive model for urban renewal.

The role of public art and design activism in memorialisation is investigated in various papers – topics that are focussed on include the relationship between art and public architecture, the inability of memorialisation that has permanence to deal with the inherent changeability of landscapes and the dynamic nature of memories, as well as design activism, the educational dimension of memorialisation, transferability of symbols, the intangible aspect of design activism as part of memorialisation, the memorial as public event and the need for memorials to be flexible to allow for transformation of memory. In other contributions the relationship between official vs public memorialisation is inquired into, as well as the need for ephemeral memorialisation – these are enlightened through analysis of public art intended as design activism in the form of contestation of statically memorialised sites, public protest and installations in the public domain that allow for a reinterpretation of the role and focus of memorialisation, as well as projections on monuments that reconfigure the permanent, blur boundaries between object and observer, overcome the muteness of the permanent and allow for multivocality. The topic of design activism is extended to include the role of ecological artworks as socio-political tools, intended to educate and sensitise viewers to the fragility of nature, the interconnectedness between people and the planet, and the need to sustain the delicate balance between human life and extinguishing the earth.

Various articles bring new knowledge and an increase in understanding of the dialectic relationship between coloniser and colonised through the former's representation of the spatio-temporal location of the other, based on research on the representation or non-representation in rare historic maps, through study of the coloniser's representation of the behaviour of the oppressed in urban settings and also of the cultural significance of the tangible and intangible aspects of historically important places of shared heritage through scholarly research.

Together, the contributions in this issue indicate a weft with richness and diversity of texture and pattern, existing in a warp of lightly woven strands that suggest a preponderance towards the need for richness and diversity of space and place in terms of their production, process, use, interpretation, presentation and representation.

In my capacity as the host of the venue for the initial presentation of ideas and debate around the theme, as well guest editor of this thematic volume of the journal, it is my express wish that the contributions will act as catalyst, spark further debate and see an increase of scholarship around the theme.

**Karel A. Bakker**