

Art notes: SITE architect James Wines champions drawing

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By Mary Thomas / Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

James Wines is a thinking wo/man's architect with the soul of an artist, a combination that infuses his projects with inventiveness and possibility. His entry to the creative world was as a sculptor, so by both training and aptitude his perception of the three-dimensional embraces not only objects defined by physical laws but also a spatial realm that he can give form to.

These characteristics were the foundation for an exhilarating lecture Mr. Wines presented Friday at Carnegie Museum of Art. "Seen & Not Seen — Mind to Hand" compressed a verbal and visual history of mark making into a persuasive argument for drawing, here specifically as an architect's tool in the computer age.

The founder and president of New York-based SITE architectural studio and a professor of architecture at Penn State University, Mr. Wines affirmed the utility of computers in architectural design, and he uses both modalities prolifically to guide projects from concept to actualization.

He said he advises his architecture students to also employ both, cautioning them that "those dpis have all been programmed into [their devices]. Somebody else is telling you what to do. The human hand is much more flexible."

To support that argument, Mr. Wines cited Brown University neuroscience researcher Chris Chatham's assertion that an accurate biological model of the brain would have to include some 225 million billion interactions occurring between cell types, neurotransmitters and the like. Nonlinear brain processes multiply that complexity.

"When you are drawing, you are conceptualizing your thinking and developing your ideas simultaneously," Mr. Wines said.

In 1953, he was a 20-year-old student at Syracuse University when he began teaching in a Catholic

home for elders. He sketched the residents — “even then I was interested in light and shadow” — and continued to do so even though his teachers “disdained” the resultant works. A nun at the home noticed his drawings, leading to a commission for Bible illustrations, for which he was awarded a Pulitzer Prize for graphics.

“I was 22 years old, and I figured drawing was OK.” The year he graduated, 1956, he became a Fellow of the American Academy in Rome, and his art, then architecture, career continued an uphill swing via an effusive flow of ideas and fluid, complex, sometimes romantic, conceptual drawings.

The “ultimate genius” was the individual in Africa who made the “first markings in the sand,” he said as he led the attentive audience into a journey from the first cave drawings made 40,000 years ago to contemporary graffiti and body art.

“Those little symbols made early [in caves and on rocks] began developing into language.... Unless you understand the human body, you cannot do good architecture. Unless you draw it pretty well, you don’t understand proportion.”

Mr. Wines’ drawings jumped off the paper and literally into the visitors’ space for a 2012-13 exhibition at the Spitzer School of Architecture, City College of New York. Included was a 10,000 percent enlargement of his sketch for the PAT Management Building in Nam-myeon, Korea, lain across the floor. Viewed from the bridge overlooking the gallery it appears as a surreal melange of actual beings moving through the magnified original vision.

Writing about another project in the exhibition his daughter, architect Suzan Wines, said: “Ideas, space and nature are powerful, exacting, and in a constant state of flux. To fix them is to destroy them. My father’s drawings make this indeterminacy palpable, buildable and inhabitable.”

Or, as Mr. Wines declared Friday, “The main thing I do is think inclusively.”

Seventeen James Wines drawings are in the collection of the Heinz Architectural Center, Carnegie Museum of Art, and some of them appear in the exhibition “Sketch to Structure” which continues through Aug. 17. Information: 412-622-3131 or www.cmoa.org.

Westmoreland reopens in October

The Westmoreland Museum of American Art will introduce its renovated and expanded Greensburg building with a grand reopening celebration Oct. 24-25 that will include a gala party and free community day. Details at www.wmuseumaa.org.

Twachtman visit

Jeremy Twachtman was always aware that his ancestors included famed 19th-century American Impressionist John Henry Twachtman (1853-1902), But he didn't give it much thought until he happened to step inside the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City, Mo., during a business trip in 2012. There he saw "Harbor View Hotel," the last painting made by his first cousin four times removed. It was the inspiration for a quest to visit, and photograph himself with, as many of Twachtman's artworks as he could find. On Thursday,] he visited Carnegie Museum of Art in Oakland to see three paintings and three works on paper in its collection.

"The museum was gracious enough to let me see the ones in storage," as well as "River in Winter," which hangs in the galleries, Mr. Twachtman said. He's learned that the artist created several hundred artworks in his lifetime, some of which are in unknown locations and/or private collections. The Tampa, Fla., resident has averaged about 15 visits a year, viewing about 40 works in at least 25 places. Those have all been in the U.S., but he hopes to visit European sites in the future.

Astria Suparak

It was good to see Astria Suparak as juror of this year's Juried Visual Art Exhibition at the Dollar Bank Three Rivers Arts Festival. While a juried exhibition allows less input than a curated show — the first is a product of submissions, the second of invitation — all exhibitions have space limitations and the final cut reflects the juror's preferences.

Since her position as director of Carnegie Mellon University's Miller Gallery was abruptly ended a year ago, Ms. Suparak has been exploring options, she said. She's maintained professional ties by jurying, participating in writing projects for "The Exhibitionist" journal and "Women Inc. Lexicon," and touring, from Philadelphia to Portland, Ore., with the highly successful exhibition she co-curated, "Alien She." Her installation with Brett Kashmere, "Goals," is at the Pittsburgh Center for the Arts through Aug. 15. She will participate in four artist or curator residencies this year, heading next as an invitee to Chicago-based ACRE

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