

Te Kāhui
Whaihanga
New Zealand
Institute of
Architects



Top student architecture competition combines optimism and protest

A project proposing an architectural pilgrimage trail in Fiordland and another protesting the closure of the Architecture Library at the University of Auckland have won the annual national competition for final year architecture students which was held at Victoria University of Wellington.

[For images of award-winners go [here](#)]

For the first time, the prestigious Student Design Awards, which are contested by graduating students from New Zealand's three Schools of Architecture – at the University of Auckland, Unitec and Victoria University – had two winners: Abdallah Alayan and Jeremy Priest, both of the University of Auckland School of Architecture and Planning.

Institute of Architects President Tim Melville, the convenor of the awards jury which also comprised Auckland architect Courtney Kitchen and Melbourne architect Amelia Borg, said it was impossible to separate the winning entries.

“The two winning projects are very different but equally meritorious,” Melville said. “They are highly accomplished pieces of work that illustrate architecture’s ability to respond to social and political conditions, identify issues and offer solutions.”

Melville said Abdallah Alayan’s scheme, which proposes four non-denominational pilgrimage structures on a trail from Te Anau to Milford Sound, makes a sophisticated and timely case for tolerance and mutual respect.

“By focusing on what people can all share – a sense of awe in the face of natural wonder – instead of what can drive them apart – the exclusivity of particular belief systems – Abdallah has provided an compelling vision for peaceful co-existence in Aotearoa,” Melville said.

Melville added that the jury admired Abdallah’s resilience in completing such a high-quality and optimistic project in the year in which his older brother Atta lost his life in the Christchurch mosque massacres.

In the other winning entry in the Student Design Awards, Jeremy Priest channeled his protest at the closure by the University of Auckland of its Architecture Library into a proposal for modern learning environments for architectural students.

“Jeremy’s design mixes dissent and satire with a positive proscription for teaching spaces that reflect the realities of contemporary architectural education and practice,” Melville said.

“Jeremy has obviously taken the closure of his School’s library personally, but his project makes a bigger point about the university’s treatment of disciplines like architecture and the arts at a time when so much resource is dedicated to STEM subjects such as the sciences, engineering and maths.”

Both Abdallah and Jeremy received a \$5,000 cash prize and \$1,500 travel grant as their winning prize. Travel grants also went to two students whose projects were highly commended, Patrick Kelly from Victoria University of Wellington and Kun Tao of Unitec.

The awards jury praised the ambition of Patrick’s entry – an architectural translation of James Joyce’s *Ulysses* – that was presented with “beguiling fluency and discursive wit”.

Kun Tao’s project Dairyland proposes a building in Auckland’s Aotea Square that exposes to the public the realities of dairy production and its waste by-products. The “provocative treatment of a contentious issue,” the jury said, “is enough to make you swear off burgers”.

Social commentary and a concern with environmental issues characterised many of the entries by the other eight finalists in the 2019 Student Design Awards.

Maito Akiyama of the University of Auckland highlighted New Zealand’s binge-drinking culture in his scheme for a series of “inebriation stations” on Queen Street, while his classmate Nicole Teh proposed turning a Point Chevalier petrol station and fast food outlets into a facility for re-purposing recycled goods.

In her project Ekta Nathu of Victoria University of Wellington looked at architecture from children’s perspective as she investigated how to create more equitable environments for high school students.

Joseph Wellwood of Victoria University of Wellington proposed a new settlement of buildings on stilts for the Hawkes Bay community of Haumoana, which is threatened by rising sea levels, and Ryan Western, also of Victoria University, designed a series of memorial buildings for a site in Central Otago ravaged by strip mining.

Two Unitec students examined ecological subjects in Auckland. Eva Jenkin designed a ‘Museum of the West’ to exhibit the flora and fauna of the Waitākere Ranges, and Jacob Bowden proposed a plastics recycling plant for Queen’s Wharf.

Fellow Unitec student Wesley Twiss found a new use for the tunnels under Albert Park as the site for ‘a pilgrimage of grief’ culminating in a subterranean crematorium.

Jury convenor Tim Melville he was inspired by the work of all the students, and heartened that such talented graduates were about to enter the architectural profession.

“It was great to see imaginative work addressing important issues such as health, education and community welfare, climate change, building in sensitive eco-systems, and dealing with waste and polluting industries.”

The Student Design Awards are organised by Te Kāhui Whaihanga New Zealand Institute of Architects (NZIA) and supported by Resene. Twelve fifth-year architecture students are selected to enter the competition, four from each of the Schools of Architecture at the University of Auckland, Unitec and Victoria University of Wellington.

[For images of award-winners and their projects go [here](#) - photo credit: David St George].

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