

**Paul Kotze<sup>1</sup>**

## **The Sophia Gray memorial Lectures and Exhibitions**

### **1. Introduction**

In 1989 the University of the (Orange) Free State in Bloemfontein, SA, inaugurated an annual lecture and exhibition to highlight the contribution made by architects and architecture to society. This was named after Sophia Gray, the first professionally active architect in Bloemfontein. It is generally agreed that she was responsible for the design of the initial chapel that eventually became the Anglican Cathedral of St Andrew and St Michael in St George's Street.

Soon after the inception of the Sophia Gray Lectures and Exhibitions, the Senate of the University formally recognised these as one of the University's official public lectures with the following aims, namely to:

- *Honour the person or group of people invited.* The following criteria for invitation apply: the staff of the School of Architecture must be convinced that the person or group has made a fundamental contribution to the praxis of architecture, the theoretical debate within the profession or professional matters; those invited should have a sense of, and take the responsibility for the effects their creations have on the well-being, life and advancement/development of the general community; they must be connected to the Southern African region. The process of selection is one of proposal, debate and consensus, and to:
- *Draw attention to the architectural heritage of the city of Bloemfontein.* The city has a rich architectural tradition and by choice of venue attention is drawn to it.
- *Serve the community.* The Lecture and Exhibition is viewed as one of the many ways in which the University and the School of Architecture engage in and assist the community.

---

1 Paul Kotze is a professor at the School of Architecture, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa.



Figure 1: Sophia Gray (1814-1871 ) (Gutsche 1970: 192a). When comparing her drawings made in England to those made in South Africa, an interesting shift in emphasis is apparent. It is evident that architecture was the main focus of the 'English' drawings, while in South Africa her emphasis shifted to nature, and architecture was relegated to reasonably insignificant objects 'floating' on the landscape

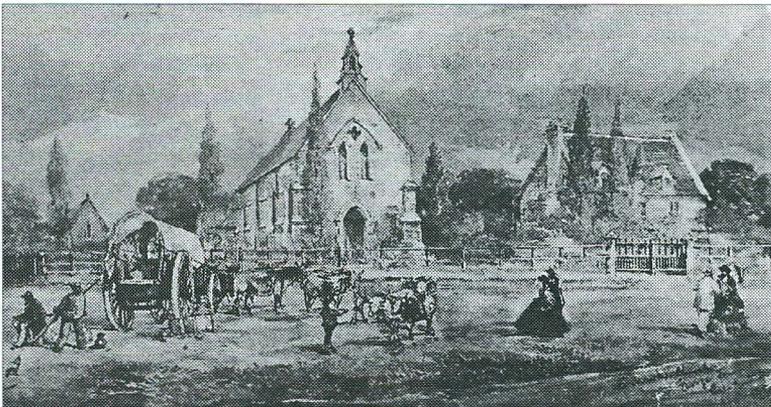


Figure 2: The St Mark's church in George Town (currently George), designed by Sophia Gray, as painted by Thomas Bowler in 1859 (Gutsche, 1970: 112a)

- Engage in the regional and international architectural debate. By its nature, the lecture and exhibition serve as a window into the thoughts of those seen to be making a contribution and as a means to gather basic information regarding their work.

## 2. Sophia Gray: the historical background

*The blue-blooded Sophia Wharton Myddleton, talented wife of the first Anglican Bishop of Cape Town, Robert Gray, stands revealed as one of the most singular characters in South African history. Architect, accountant, managing director of a vast business, graceful water-colonist, expert horsewoman, gracious hostess and accomplished calligraphist, Sophy Gray actively participated in the determining events of the most formative 25 years of her adopted country (Gutsche, 1970: cover).*

Born in 1814 in Durham, England, Sophia was known to have a deep interest in the world around her and preferred to spend her time doing clear and precise landscape paintings. She was by nature a perceptive draughtsperson and delighted in drawing exact objects such as buildings and architectural details. The Grays arrived in Table Bay in February 1848. Merely two months after their arrival Robert Gray asked for textbooks on architecture (Langham-Carter, 1974.10.17). By the end of 1848, Sophia had prepared eleven church plans for her husband to hand out to the communities they served. Although she had no formal training in architecture, she is considered to be South Africa's first female architect. Sophia Gray was the wife of the first Anglican bishop of Cape Town, Robert Gray. During the 25 years that they were active in establishing the Anglican Church in the country she managed to built approximately 58 churches. In 1850, Sophia's husband, Robert, visited Bloemfontein as part of his itinerary to visit the interior of the country (Gutsche, 1970: 112; Schoeman, 1980: 11 & 1982: 71), and was involved in the building of two cathedrals in Bloemfontein: St Andrew and St Michael (Nienaber, 1987: 27).

Throughout her husband's ill-health, her multiple duties on their farm, her work as secretary to the church, her role as mother and social worker, Sophia still emerged as a remarkable architect. She toured the country on horseback and designed architecture to suit the climate and available materials. She was never seen without a sketchbook to document the places she had visited. Many of her original drawings are presently kept in the William Cullen library at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

## Kotze/Sophia Gray memorial Lectures and Exhibitions

On the 27th April 1871, Sophia Gray died of cancer at the age of 57. She and Robert were buried at St Saviour's Church in Claremont, Cape Town. Her contribution to life in South Africa was commemorated with a stained glass window in St George's Cathedral in Cape Town (Gutsche, 1970: 215).

### **3. The annual Sophia Gray Lectures and Exhibitions: invitees and venues**

The topics of the lectures and the venues are as follows (The city where the invitee resided at the time of the invitation is indicated in brackets):

- 1989 Ms Mira Fassler Kamstra (Johannesburg)  
Mimicry & camouflage  
Old Presidency, President Brand Street.
- 1990 Prof Roelof S Uytenbogaardt (†) (Cape Town)  
Timelessness in architecture  
Queen's Fort, Church Street.
- 1991 Dr Gawie Fagan (Cape Town)  
Architect and community  
Abraham Fischer Residence and School of Architecture  
UFS.
- 1992 Mr Wilhelm O Meyer (Johannesburg)  
The three pasts to our present  
UFS Boyden Observatory, Maselspoort.
- 1993 Mr Glen Gallagher (Johannesburg)  
The exclusion of conclusion in architecture  
Fourth Raadzaal, President Brand Street.
- 1994 Mr Jack Barnett [†] (Cape Town)  
Building the best – Africa's essential mission  
Corobrik brick factory.
- 1995 Mr Hannes Meiring (Pretoria)  
Architecture - the great adventure  
National Museum, Aliwal Street.
- 1996 Professor Amancio Guedes (Lisbon)  
Seven manifestoes  
City Hall, President Brand Street.
- 1997 Dr Revel Fox (Cape Town)  
Reflections on the making of space  
Ramblers Club, Aliwal Street.

- 1998 Prof Adèle Naudé Santos (San Francisco)  
Narrative maps: Concepts and creations  
Cathedral of St Andrew and St Michael, St Georges  
Street.
- 1999 Dr Jack Diamond (Toronto)  
Practising scales  
Reunion Hall, Grey College.
- 2000 Professor Stanley Saitowitz (San Francisco)  
Expanded architecture  
SEDCOM Auditorium, Fairview Street.
- 2001 Dr Hentie Louw (Newcastle Upon Tyne)  
Architecture and craft: a working relationship?  
SA Amour Museum, Tempe.

The *Oliewenhuis* Art Museum in Bloemfontein has a standard arrangement to mount the exhibitions for approximately one month after the lectures have taken place. As an adjunct to the exhibition various lectures, workshops for school children and guided tours of the exhibition are conducted under the auspices of the Friends of the *Oliewenhuis* Art Museum.

The lectures and/or exhibitions have been held in other centres in South Africa and Namibia. The exhibitions of Dr Gawie Fagan (September 1992), Ms Mira Fassler Kamstra (December 1992 - January 1993) and Professor Roelof Uytenbogaardt (June - August 1993) have been shown separately at the South African National Gallery in Cape Town. Uytenbogaardt's exhibition was reviewed (Nolte in *Die Burger*, 1993.07.24). The work in these three exhibitions was shown jointly in the Standard Bank Gallery in Johannesburg in January - February 1995 under the title "Three Architects: A Vision". This exhibition was reviewed by Hannah le Roux, Wilhelm van Rensburg, Urielle Berry, Tony Lange and Michael Coulson. The exhibition was reported on SABC TV's Collage programme and on its "Woman's World" radio programme. In response to this exhibition, an invitation was extended by the (then) South African ambassador to the European Union, Mr Neil van Heerden, to mount the exhibitions (in existence at that time), and a wider selection of South African architecture, at the European Parliament in Brussels.

The Fassler-Kamstra & Holmes and Professor Roelof Uytenbogaardt's exhibitions were shown separately in Windhoek under the auspices of the Namibian Institute of Architects in 1994. Ms. Mira Fassler-Kamstra's, lecture "Mimicry and Camouflage"

was published in the July/August 1990 of *Architecture SA*. Articles on the work of Prof Naudé Santos, Dr Jack Diamond and Prof Stanley Saitowitz appeared in the *SA Architect* in the years in which they presented their lectures. Reviews of the exhibitions also appeared in the *Sunday Independent* and the *Weekly Mail and Guardian* (Dr Fox) and the *Financial Mail* (Dr Diamond). The Fassler-Kamstra & Holmes exhibitions were subsequently shown at the University of Pretoria (1995) and "The Pines", Johannesburg. The Fagan exhibition was repeated in Durban (1993), under the auspices of the Natal Provincial Institute of Architects, the Pretoria Art Museum (July 1993) and at the Art Gallery of Stellenbosch University (October 1993). Mr Glen Gallagher's exhibition and lecture was repeated at the Sandton Library (1995) and Prof Uytenbogaardt's exhibition was shown again at the King George V Art Gallery in Port Elizabeth (1995). The exhibitions of Dr Revel Fox (1998), Professor Adèle Naudé Santos (1998) and Dr Jack Diamond (1999) were repeated at the School of Architecture at the University of Pretoria while the exhibition of Prof Saitowitz (2000) was shown at the Pretoria Art Museum.

Prof Guedes' lecture was repeated at the University of the Witwatersrand (reported in the *Weekly Mail & Guardian*) while Mr Willie Meyer and Professor Uytenbogaardt repeated their lectures at "The Pines", Johannesburg, under the auspices of the (then) Transvaal Provincial Institute of Architects. Meyer also repeated his lecture at the Johannesburg Art Gallery and in Port Elizabeth under the auspices of the Eastern Cape Provincial Institute of Architects. Prof Santos and Dr Diamond repeated their lectures at the Universities of Natal and Cape Town. Professor Saitowitz repeated his lecture at the Universities of Cape Town and the Witwatersrand.

#### **4. The Sophia Gray Lectures and Exhibitions: a wider perspective**

The lectures and exhibitions are within the traditions of the Academy Architecture Lecture of the Royal Academy of Arts, (London) where exhibitions are held in the Sackler Galleries (lectures and exhibitions have been presented by Kisho Kurokawa, Sir Norman Foster, Professor Bernard Tschumi, etc.) and the Thomas Cubitt Memorial Lecture of the Royal Institution (London) (presented previously by Prof Colin Rowe, Prof Giancarlo de Carlo, etc).

However, the purpose of the Sophia Gray Lectures and Exhibitions is different. Its organisers have as their goals only that which was stated above and not an ideology or propaganda similar to that of the "Modern Architecture" (1932) exhibition of the Museum of Modern Art (Wilson, 1982: 93) or the *New Architecture* (1938) exhibition of the MARS group (Gold, 1993: 357). The work exhibited in this series of exhibitions is work produced by the architect in his daily professional endeavours whose poetic quality is such that the organisers (society?) believe that it should be shared with and explained to a wider audience in its galleries and academic institutions. The distinction should be made that it is work produced by a living and everyday tradition, placed by others in a category of excellence, and not works produced for the galleries or curators for different purposes. Reyner Banham claims that history is made in an ordinary moment of time (Maxwell, 1993: 15).

## 5. Conclusion

*Drawings are projections through which architects visualise, test and order relationships. Along with prints, photographs, computer images and texts they convey intentionality to client and contractor and, in published form, to a broad public. The built world is conceived and presented through such images that preserve knowledge of the past and project how we will live in the future (Lambert, 1989: 121).*

The above implies that 'all' material that enables the total comprehension of the history and theory of architecture needs to be collected and made available. In this way those concerned would be able to participate in an informed manner in the decisions and debate regarding the built environment. How else are we to write the history and future of architecture in South Africa?

In its thirteen years' existence, the lecture and exhibition series has proved to be the most prestigious event that deals on a continuous basis with the built environment in South Africa. It is highly esteemed throughout the country; however, it is known more outside than within its University and city of origin.

## Kotze/Sophia Gray memorial Lectures and Exhibitions

### References

#### AMERY

1992. Glittering history in Portman Square. *Financial Times*. London. 1992.06.01.

#### BROWNLEE, D.B. & DE LONG, D.G.

1991. *Louis I Kahn: in the realm of architecture*. New York: Rizzoli.

#### GOLD J R

1993. 'Commodities, firmness and delight': Modernism, the MARS Group's 'New Architecture' exhibition' (1938) and imagery of the urban future. *Planning Perspectives*, No 8, pp. 357-376.

#### GUTSCHE THELMA

1970. *The bishop's lady*. Lansdowne: Citadel Press.

#### HARRIS, J.

1992. Storehouses of knowledge: the origins of the contemporary architectural museum in Centre Canadien d'Architecture/Canadian Centre for Architecture, Building and Gardens. (Ed) L Richards. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, pp. 15-32.

#### LAMBERT, P.

1989. Director's choice: report on selected acquisitions 1985-1989. *Canadian Art Review*, pp. 121-130.

#### LANGHAM-CARTER, R.R.

1974. Notes from the collection of the William Cullen library: University of the Witwatersrand. 1974.10.17.

#### MANSER, J.

1992. Grand designs in two dimensions. *Independent* (London). 1992.06.10.

#### MAXWELL, R.

1993. *Sweet disorder and the carefully careless – theory and criticism in architecture*. Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press.

#### NIENABER, P.J.

1987. As quoted in Roodt, L. 1987. The architecture of the Orange Free State Republic, 1854-1902. Unpublished Ph D Bloemfontein: University of the Free State.

#### NOLTE, M.A.

1993. Die argitektuur as debat tussen mens en estetika. *Die Burger*. 1993.07.24.

#### SCHOEMAN, K.

1980(1982). *Bloemfontein: die ontstaan van 'n stad 1846-1946*. Kaapstad: Human & Rousseau.

#### SEIDLER, H.

1995. Phillip Johnson at 90 – a personal reflection. *Monument*, pp. 44-69.

#### WILSON, R.G.

1982. International style: the MoMA exhibition. *Progressive Architecture*, No. 2, pp. 3-104.