

Knep Residency Explores Architecture, Technology, and Biological Forms

How do computational systems, embedded into our surroundings, make spaces more interactive—give them intelligence, history, sentience? What happens when buildings become aware of the people who inhabit them—who the people are, where they are, what they are doing, and where they come from? How can buildings respond to this awareness, as well as reflect upon external environmental conditions such as weather or time? How can buildings encourage people to reflect upon how they interact with each other?

These were some of the questions pursued at “Sentient Architecture: Examining the Intersection of Interactive Technologies and Physical Space,” the first in a series of discussions presented in conjunction with the 2005-06 Harvard residency of artist **Brian Knep**. The event was hosted on January 17 by the Harvard Graduate School of

A talk is planned for March 13 at Leverett House, coordinated by Co-Master and Undergraduate Advisor for Research in the Life Sciences **Ann Georgi**. The Knep residency has also included meetings between the artist and undergraduates throughout the year. In addition, the artist is spending one day a week at DSB.

A major component of the residency is the commission of a temporary public artwork by Knep. As in some of his previous projects, Knep will explore the territory of healing—as a physical, psychological, and spiritual space—in his new work for Harvard. The work will address reconciliation and reunion across the divides that separate vital meditation for our global village, torn by political differences. Inspired by the architecture and history of Memorial Hall, Knep chose this site for his temporary installation and refers to the legacy of this building, erected as a memorial for soldiers, in his examination of these timely themes. The project will open on Thursday, April 6 and be on view for two weeks.

The OFA’s Learning From Performers program will present a slide talk by the artist on Tuesday, April 11 at 6 pm at the Division of Engineering and Applied Sciences, Maxwell Dworkin Building G115 (see article, page 2.)

Marc Kirchner, Chair of DSB, notes that Knep’s work demonstrates many of the concepts central to systems biology, which uses computer and mathematical models to examine the interaction of components within living organisms. From the perspective of the Office for the Arts, commissioning new work from forward-thinking artists encourages students and the university community to consider familiar spaces in new ways, and to gain new insights into the relationship between public and private space.



Brian Knep

SCOTT SHIBBE

Design and presented in collaboration with Harvard’s Office for the Arts (OFA) and Department of Systems Biology (DSB), the co-sponsors of the residency.

Moderated by **Jeffrey Huang**, Associate Professor of Architecture, Digital Media, and Information Technology, Harvard Graduate School of Design (GSD), panelists were Knep; **Pattie Maes**, Associate Professor of Media Arts and Sciences, MIT; **Antoine Picon**, Professor of Architecture, GSD; and **Muriel Waldvogel**, Principal, Convergeo and Visiting Lecturer in Visual and Environmental Studies. A capacity audience of architects and architecture students, visitors from MIT’s Media Lab, artists, and undergraduates participated.

As part of the residency, in the fall term Knep also visited VES 60r, Professor Huang’s studio course on interactive media.

A second talk took place February 21 at the Department of Systems Biology, Harvard Medical School. Moderated by **Jeremy Gunawardena**, Senior Lecturer on Systems Biology, this discussion focused on how artists and engineers are inspired by biology. Knep delved into the mathematical models behind much of his work; **Radhika Nagpal**, Assistant Professor in Computer Science, discussed her biologically inspired approach to creating and understanding self-organizing systems; and artist **Jonathan Bachrach**, a Research Scientist at the MIT Artificial Intelligence Laboratory, described his work with modular-robotics and sensor-networks.

What happens when
buildings become aware
of the people who inhabit
them—who the people
are, where they are, what
they are doing, and
where they come from?

The residency is funded by the DSB, the Marshall S. Cogan Fund at the Office for the Arts, and a grant from the Office for the Provost for Interfaculty Collaboration.

For more information, visit the Brian Knep blog for the project at www.harvardart.blogspot.com or the Office for the Arts at www.fas.harvard.edu/ofa; or contact Project Manager Teil Silverstein or OFA Director of Programs Cathy McCormick at 617.495.8676. ■■■