



stroke of genius

Kent Neo's calligraphic architecture may just be the next epoch in the making

Do the practicalities of urban planning and functional spaces mean that form should take a back seat to function? Kent Neo's *Sketchcity 2005*, an exhibition of non-standard architecture, is anthesis to this notion.

The modernist movement in architecture, where extraneous elements are done away with except for structural necessities, has spawned modern cities that lack character. The functional and standardised slabs of modern architecture advocated by gurus like Le Corbusier,密斯 van der Rohe and Gropius, made sense for most of the 20th century, an age of rapid industrialisation and consumption boom. In the 21st century though, architects are starting to step away from the frozen construction of glass-and-concrete boxes and rethink the relationship between art and architecture once more.

Non-standard architecture, or in artist/architect Kent Neo's words, "Organic forms that are conceptualised in the digital environment", is a collision of styles and proudly so. Art meets psychology. Yin and Yang is given form. East meets west. Aesthetics receive unabashed attention. These concepts are illustrated in *Sketchcity 2005*, a showcase of Kent's journey towards his technique of calligraphic architecture. His style is inspired by the curves of calligraphic brushstrokes and part of the movement towards non-standard architecture.

"Calligraphic art emphasises on the flow between body, mind and spirit. Zen calligraphers elevated calligraphy into a meditative art where the calligrapher momentarily forgets about the world and becomes totally absorbed with the meaning of what is being painted", expounds the 34-year-old.

The exhibition comprising four series of abstract digital works: *Transformation*, *Tao*, *Teastroke* and *Urban Stroke*, shows how Kent's technique has evolved from 2003 to the present. The *Transformation* series involved the use of a "freeze-frame" technique, where a fast-moving camera sporting a highly distorted lens angle captured still images. The result is a series of seemingly coherent images when interpreted individually, yet remote and isolated when seen as a whole.

The *Tao* series explores the permutations on the "Tao" character when traditional two-dimensional calligraphy rules were given a third dimension in digital space. Path and stroke rules were given a new interpretation with the stroke following a rotated path. In the *Teastroke* series, Kent uses a "mediated freeze-frame" technique, where two strokes, one cloned from the other were magnified several times to reveal the relation of the strokes at a deeper level. Through mediated selection, the images that were captured reflected a sense of harmony within



Sketchstroke 1



Stroke 3



Kent Neo

Urban Stroke

his latest series of work, thus envisions a futuristic architectural landscape inspired by calligraphic art. Edges melt and lines disintegrate into sensual curves. The pink-and-white colour scheme of the series suggests a softer urban environment that incorporates more contours and fewer edges. The series explores the sculptural possibilities of merging calligraphic traditions with architecture. With themes like imaginary domicile and cityscape in solidified brushstroke and imaginary skyscrapers appearing like dots and vertical strokes in calligraphy, the images in the four works in the series are part of the artist's work-in-progress towards using calligraphic architecture in housing, skyscrapers and the cityscape. The question of how form and function can complement each other remains a constant challenge for architects. But proving that calligraphic architecture can be a functional reality, Kent designed *Sketchhouse_01*, a five-storey house designed in a continuous stroke within the digital environment, complete with fluidly curved furniture. "I'm seeking someone who can appreciate it and has the funds to build it", he quipped.

With any luck, calligraphic architecture would represent a new epoch and shape the cityscape of tomorrow, just as gothic did for the middle ages. **he**

Those interested in Kent Neo's works and techniques may obtain more information at www.sketchcity.org or contact him at kent@sketchcity.org