



Public eye

Jack Wu takes a multidisciplinary approach to activating urban spaces, orchestrating opportunities for colourful interactions.

Now that such a large portion of our lives seems to exist only online, many struggle with feelings of isolation. Even when we are out in the world, so much of our time is spent shuffling between our homes, our vehicles and our workplaces. With minimal unexpected interactions, we have a tendency to get stuck in a mindset where we forget just how interconnected we really are. But it's something that Auckland-born architectural designer Jack Wu puts a great deal of energy into contemplating.

Jack says he first discovered his love for human-centric design and urbanism during his most formative years and he made an effort from a young age to actively immerse himself in diverse communities. "Being from a first-generation immigrant family, where conversations carry and constitute culture, I became fascinated by the possibility of architecture, installation art and activation – particularly for its capacity to connect worlds that are otherwise hostile to others."

Jack is on the cusp of finishing his Master of Architecture (Prof) and Urban Planning (Prof) degree and entering his fourth year of teaching for the University of Auckland's School of Architecture and Planning. As one of the younger teachers in the programme, he believes it's easier for him to connect with his students.

"I aim to teach without holding worlds apart, by embracing cultural differences and the things that make people unique," Jack says. "For example, one of the courses I have taught was media-based and focused on expanding architectural thinking beyond the built environment. I was interested in using this course to offer students an opportunity to connect with themselves as individuals, ungoverned by the restraints of typical design outputs. This year, I will be teaching a Master of Advanced Studies design paper, which I co-wrote with the amazing Dr. Andrew Douglas."

On top of his studies and teaching, Jack has been creating work at varying scales, from housing to community projects to installations and furniture. He has also completed a number of activation projects for Heart of the City, Auckland's city centre business association. The first two projects, *The Box* (2021) and *The Chairs in the Room, quiet beside the Elephant* (2022), he did in collaboration with talented friends who share Jack's interest in connecting community members.

"I think I have been lucky in that, no matter where I have gone, everyone has been so friendly, inspiring and – most of all – passionate. Because of that, I have been fortunate to build a strong network of people who I am lucky enough now to be friends with. Conversations go a long way when it comes to opportunities, particularly in New Zealand," he says.

For Jack, the key takeaway with his Heart of the City installations is that they allowed him a chance to break away from his academic and professional life and focus on something bigger. "These projects allowed me to be actively engaged and thus part of the environment that we aim to shape, which is rare. Usually the product of this degree and profession is hidden behind photographs, awards and a sort of power structure that makes invisible what's really important. So, these installations which evolved in design-confidence one after the other were a sort of oxygen when compared to those current realities."

In each of his activations, Resene paints have played an important part. Jack loves putting Resene testpots into the hands of the public to see what they'll create together – a sum of many parts and perspectives. "I am super grateful to have had Resene's support with these particular projects. Apart from appreciating the array of product choices Resene offers, it has taught me so

much about the possibilities of colour in art, installations and architecture, and I've found the flexibility of the formulas are quite endless and scaleless," says Jack. "Resene's super supportive and knowledgeable staff are an amazing network of people who encourage local creatives like me to turn ideas into fully-realised possibilities. Given the scale and impact Resene has had in the creative and building industry here in New Zealand, it's amazing to still see how active they are in supporting communities."

Jack's third project for Heart of the City formed part of his thesis. Titled *Dandelion Minds, stories that make a room*, Jack was inspired by the propagation and resiliency of these ubiquitous plants. "Dandelions are often looked down upon as a non-native species, but these resilient wildflowers have enchanted people for centuries with their representations of hope, perseverance and transformation. When you blow a dandelion puff, you are giving life to many more. They are carriers of one life to another and carriers of one's wishes," he says.

His concept was to prompt citizens to paint a flower for someone they love using Resene testpots on to a piece of a 3 x 5m modular installation. Jack documented more than 300 people who contributed to decorating the mural during its week-long creation process, which took place on Auckland's O'Connell Street and Freyberg Square. The modules started out separated, serving as low tables for community members to gather around and paint, sparking conversation between strangers. Once completed, the panels were united together into a 'city garden' and displayed in front of the School of Architecture and Planning.

Derek Jarman was heavily influential to the concept, Jack says. "Jarman's garden played a vital role in slowing down the ravaging illness of HIV. As his partner described, 'for a time he cheated death by hiding amongst the flowers and dancing with the bees.' Since Jarman's death, the garden has continued to be cultivated by his partner, friends and supporters."

The garden directly inspired the paint colours that were used. Jack handpicked fifteen hues by referencing photographs of Jarman's garden, including Resene Pohutukawa, Resene Happy Hour and Resene Sunshade.

"The whole project was honestly sort of crazy," recalls Jack. "Despite weather uncertainties, the turn-out was amazing. I had a brief description of the thesis printed out, so people knew what they were part of, and just the amount of people who actively engaged in conversation and showed support for it, I was beyond grateful."

Jack also recently collaborated with Raimana Jones to create a concept for an installation titled *Perch & Promenade: A Folly named Ophelia* that's been shortlisted for the 2024 Brick Bay

top tip

Inspired to create a colour palette from a photographic reference? Upload your image to the free online Resene Colour Palette Generator, www.resene.com/palettegenerator, or use Resene ColourMatch Online, www.resene.com/colourmatchonline, to find the nearest Resene paint colour matches.

left: Jack Wu's *Dandelion Minds, stories that make a room* project brought Aucklanders together to paint a community garden using Resene testpots, including Resene Pohutukawa, Resene Happy Hour and Resene Sunshade. The activation for Heart of the City formed part of his Master of Architecture (Prof) and Urban Planning (Prof) thesis.

 Resene Ghost  Resene Sunshade  Resene Pohutukawa

diverse creative circle present in Tāmaki Makaurau. But Jack sees the future of n/a as something yet to be defined.

“I think the direction is dependent on collaborations, with a particular focus on making design accessible and brandless – coloured by the networks and environments it engages with,” he says. “In terms of further architecture and planning work, for me, it is important to understand that everything is relational – whether that be between scales, time or people. Design is temporal, relational and social. It's this sense of not attempting to achieve perfection; that everything will, in the end, be exposed to contingencies and be adaptive. So, I want to allow that to happen and not perpetuate the idea of perfection.”

A dream project for Jack would be to create a space that could curate and showcase interesting installations and activations. “I have always wanted to design a gallery or an exhibition. Maybe it's because I've been following Hans Ulrich Obrist – a director at the Serpentine Galleries – for too long, but the idea of curating is quite attractive to me. When something is allowed to go beyond its autonomous self in order to relate to something else, it almost creates a conversation between things.”

With so many irons in the fire, Jack is surely one to keep an eye out for as he conjures up more ideas for activating shared spaces and connecting members of our local communities. **BW**

To see more of Jack's work, check out his Instagram profile at www.instagram.com/j.vvu.



Folly Competition. If selected as the winning design, it will give Jack another opportunity to bring an idea to life using Resene paint. According to Jack, he and Raimana were interested in ways they could use off-white colours when they were coming up with its design. “The idea of the folly was that it gave opportunities for the landscape to colour the white space. Like a fallen leaf on a white background, using white Resene paint would allow the space to track the colours of the immediate site both seasonally and over time as it ages.”

Then there is nowhere architects, also known as n/a, which is a side project Jack's currently working on. “n/a is a design studio that aims to forward co-learning and co-practice by being

actively engaged with other networks beyond architecture – local networks, in particular. I see it as a sort of architecture-adjacent practice that focuses on spacemaking through objects, drawing, conversing and making at varying scales.”

When creating the identity for this new project, Jack looked to his favourite hue, Resene Ghost. “Grey is my favourite colour, and Resene Ghost is a beautiful, smooth grey. It's between light and dark, it's a soft shadow and it's become the colour of the n/a profile,” he says.

During the inaugural Auckland Design Week, n/a collaborated on an activation piece for the event titled *Bold and Brave* to gather members of the community, spur conversation and celebrate the