



A FRIENDLY ALIEN LANDS

Bond University Architecture School by CRAB Studio // Cultural Studies // 2GBX // CS2200 // Instructor: Todd Gannon

A friendly alien has finally landed in Australia. The curvaceous, fat and bloated qualities of Peter Cook's previous Graz alien have been toned down slightly in this iteration and a couple of regionalist gestures have been made to sneak this curvy object into the developer box ridden hinterland of the Gold Coast. Upon viewing the object, its obvious budget cuts have been made and construction period extended. However, it achieves its lipstick purpose, signalling a tiny new overpriced private architecture school opening its doors in this affluent area.

It's seemingly a microcosm of Cook's intrepid study of architecture schools around the world. The studio spaces step down overlooking each other, like the famous terraces of the GSD at Harvard. It also has transparency and beacon-like qualities similar to Steven Holl's Pratt Institute project. The program steps along and overlooks both sides of an internal street. This polished concrete crevasse runs the entire length of the building, sloping from a high point at the entrance, down to the workshops at the other end, possibly a reference to the quarter mile long hallway at SCI-Arc. Also like SCI-Arc, one walks the length of the street, sees lots of interesting things along the way but arrives at nothing, not even a path or connection to another buildings.

Off the main street are four raw off-form concrete scoops. Formally interesting, and a construction nightmare in the land of tilt-up concrete walls, these warped inverted cone shapes bring light down deep into the middle of the plan. Where the scoops land on the ground plane, they generate cute pin-up niches and small gallery spaces. The circulation to the series of studio terraces winds up around these curiously shaped scoops, providing opportunities for CRAB to boolean out curvy shapes in the scoops for peering down into the little galleries.

On the northern side of the internal street there is a disguised cheap cellular office wing. CRAB clearly spent their money focussing on the ground plane and the scoops. The office wing sticks out its nose, literally, figuratively and formally at the rest of Isozaki's 1980s campus, continuing Cook's obsession with noses, nostrils and all things that stick out in weird directions. CRAB plays with a standard set of windows, placing them in a faux random fashion all over the back and only flat façade of the building. Metal plate is then folded and curved, in a playful manner around the windows to shield them from the sun. Amongst the raw polished concrete and refined timber detailing, that's become expected in contemporary architecture, CRAB splashes bright yellow and orange around the interior spaces of the building.

Like a flat lid on top of an Aalto vase, the thin roof soars out over the curvy glass façade around the front of the building. The extreme cantilever is supported by a forest of really tall thin steel posts clad in local timber, which can be seen in conjunction with the adjacent grove of skinny tall pine trees. This can be read as CRAB's nod to the regionalist timber batten tendencies of architecture in this area of Australia and mostly likely why the jury picked their scheme over other more brutal competition entries.

The scoops are broken at the ground plan, to highlight the internal street. The internal street divides the plan into three distinct parts. Part A, the flexible studio zones and classrooms is separated by Part B, the internal street, from Part C the cellular office wing. The scoops puncture through the three part logic generating a juxtaposing diagram of four objects within a larger object. As well as, these evenly distributed parts within the whole, there are also three separate parts readable at the extremities of the plan. One of these parts is the nose, which protrudes out of the office wing, a formal meeting space and staff rooms.

In addition to the three part logic and objects within the larger object, there is another complex system at play – bi-folding segments. These segments are clear in the roof plan and also the way the scoops divide the studio spaces without walls or doors. The segments radiating from the scoops project higher on the roof. Where as, the segments wedged between the scoops are lower and slope in alternating directions, folding generating concertina roof planes highlighting the different studio spaces below.

As shown in the diagrams, there are no enclosed classrooms instead zones and niches are wedged and divided along the southern façade between the scoops. Parts of the ground plane get sliced and sunken down to create these zones. Around each gathering area, the ground is lifted up into seats and benches for model display.

The concrete walls of the scoops puncture the large open ground floor with enough pin-up space and thermal mass, due to the building's large glass facades. Formally an alien creature, in this very industrial and developer driven area, CRAB's project uses a couple of clever tricks and layers of sensible yet innovative logics to land this friendly alien firmly adjacent Isozaki's Bond University campus.



Photographs: Peter Bennetts