Press Release

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MEDITATION “CAVE” STRIVES TO DRAW VISITORS TO PEACEFUL AREA OF CAMPUS

Houston, February 19, 2010 – The Cave of the New Being is an extension of a dream first realized by Frederick J. Kiesler, an Austrian-American stage designer and architect that died without seeing his vision fulfilled. However, for the past two years, UH architecture students and faculty have been quietly working behind the scenes to capture Kiesler’s vision and turn it into reality. An exhibit about the project debuted last month at the College of Architecture’s archive. Visitors can learn the history of the original project and its rebirth by examining wall displays and viewing a quarter size model built by students and faculty that reinterpret the project which was first proposed some forty-seven years ago in the historic small town of New Harmony, Indiana.

The family of Jane Blaffer Owen, a patron who has commissioned art on UH’s campus, has a long history in New Harmony and Houston.

Andrew Vrana, AIA, Visiting Assistant Professor in the College of Architecture, said that Kiesler was known for using techniques such as surrealism and inventing his own esoteric architectural terms. “He was interested in building things that had other geometries besides right angles. He’d work ‘from the inner space of consciousness outward’.” Vrana stated how the UH students began to see a correlation between Kiesler’s notion of space and the use of contemporary digital design and fabrication tools.

The full scale project, which includes the assembly of 250 unique digitally fabricated parts, is being assembled in the Burdette Keeland Jr., Design Exploration building. According to Vrana, once it is finished, the structure will be relocated to an existing concrete slab located east of the Architecture building and close to the “meditation” pond. Vrana said, “We began to see the correlation between the pond that was being built by Facilities Planning and Construction (FPC) and the presence of water inside and outside of Kielsa’s original project.” The pond, which debuted last year, was reshaped
by an FPC landscape architect and installed by Plant Operations’ Grounds Department. Bass, catfish and other species fill the pond; other design features, such as a wooden bridge, currently serve as a temporary placeholder for a prefabricated footbridge also designed by the group. FPC has generously assisted the academic team with logistical and site modification support. Vrana said this location is the perfect spot for the “Cave”; centrally located between the College of Architecture, Engineering, and the Keeland building and the disciplines they support.

Joe Meppelink, Adjunct Assistant Professor and Director of Applied Research, said, “A sculpture building is ultimately planned for this surface parking lot area…and it will coincide with the fact that Kiesler was essentially a sculptor working as an architect. While called a “Cave” as a reference to Mrs. Owen’s original title, it is actually stainless steel trellis that will be planted a thick canopy of creeping vegetation. In addition, once installed, the 350 square foot space will incorporate a discrete source of water that emerges from an undulating surface and flows into the existing pond. “The cellular structure was designed to provide shade from the sun with the presence of leaves and vines growing on the frame,” Meppelink continued, “Ultimately, we want to string hammocks that the students can check out and we’ll have a seating area. It will be a cool shaded place; a very relaxing meditative space…something that students and faculty need more than anything.”

Scale model of Gerald D. Hines Architecture Building, Meditation Pond, & Cave of the New Being
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