

Data visualisation workshop and Design Chat

By Visual Arts

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Ferdin van Heerden at the 2012 Design Chat, on what he calls the \square values proposition \square .

Third year Information Design students in the Department of Visual Arts recently took part in a Data visualisation and visual storytelling workshop, facilitated by international guest lecturers Ferdin van Heerden and Sven Ehmann.

Ferdin van Heerden is an independent design and business strategy consultant with over 20 years branding experience at major international companies such as Adidas, IDEO, frog design and Saatchi & Saatchi. Sven Ehmann is currently a creative director, curator and publisher at Gestalten Verlag in Berlin and has worked on numerous exhibitions and design publications such as Tangible (2009), Tactile (2007), CrEATe (2008) and Let's Play (2008). Since their collaboration on the publication Data Flow (2006), a landmark in the field of visualisation design, Van Heerden and Ehmann offer a unique combined perspective on visualisation design strategy and storytelling.

During the four-day workshop, Van Heerden and Ehmann focused students' attention on the masses of data surrounding them on a daily basis and how this data can be represented visually in order to make sense of it. Various activities and experiments explored the processes of data collection, organisation and visual presentation, often by utilising something as simple as a piece of string. Students were also exposed to conducting research in the field by gathering information about consumer preferences and experiences in Brooklyn Mall.



Workshop activities included the construction of social networks based on various social factors by creating webs of string; and representing statistical values by means of tying and knotting two pieces of string together.



Students were encouraged to work in a hands-on manner, removing the data from its usual digital context.

Students were extremely positive about the outcomes of the workshop and have expressed a new realisation of the vast potential of data visualisation to create understanding. One student, Toka Moshesh, commented that the workshop's focus on "dynamic ways of thinking about data visualisation has opened new possibilities for discovery with regard to information design and its importance in the public sphere".

Whilst at the Department of Visual Arts, Van Heerden and Ehmann also spoke at the 2012 Design Chat, organised to promote dialogue between the design industry and education. Van Heerden and Ehmann were joined by another international speaker, Ravi Chhatpar; each of them offering their own unique perspectives on the place of design in a changing economic landscape. Chhatpar, who has worked for Frog in New York, Shanghai and Johannesburg, presented his views on rethinking strategy in terms of an immersive design research approach for innovation in emerging economies. Van Heerden spoke of his unique insights on what he calls the "values proposition" which considers design from the perspective of an ethical-economic rather than an isolated economic framework. Ehmann was also present to offer his own particular perspective into design, visual culture and storytelling in conversation.



The Design Chat also launched the "I am in" campaign – an initiative aimed at enabling the Information Design division to support and empower a new generation of designers: by providing financial aid to students in need and helping them to cover costs for expensive materials and project production; by supplementing limited resources in the Department to facilitate additional educational opportunities such as field trips and expert seminars; and by supporting research and staff development activities. For more information, or to support this cause, please go to: <http://upinfodesign.givengain.org>.

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