

Ground Zero Memorial planner visits campus



Jovelle Abbey Tamayo / Senior Staff Photographer

Daniel Libeskind, master planner of the Ground Zero Memorial, discusses symbolism behind the monument last night in the Douglass Campus Center.

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By Aleksi Tzatzev / Correspondent | [0 comments](#)

Daniel Libeskind, master planner of the Ground Zero Memorial, and James Young, professor of English and Judaic studies at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, came together last night to discuss architecture as a civil art in public spaces.

The guests, speaking at Traves Hall in the Douglass Campus Center, also gave insight to the planning behind some of Libeskind's biggest projects, including the Ground Zero Memorial and the Jewish Museum Berlin.

"When I entered architecture, I was not interested in imitating buildings in a kind of a commercial line," Libeskind said. "Architecture is civic art and deals with public space."

Libeskind and Young discussed the Ground Zero Memorial as a public space but also emphasized its symbolism behind the falling water and the names engraved on the memorial itself.

"As a master planner, it was not my primary idea to build office buildings," Libeskind said. "The space was no longer real estate — it is just a sacred space, a space where forever it will be marked."

Libeskind's idea was to build office buildings and skyscrapers on the periphery of the space and to leave the center as a memorial to those who have fallen.

“I think that was right, and I think Michael Arad [architect who designed the memorial] understood very well the centrality of the memorial as a public space,” he said. “My goal was to create a public piazza, a reaffirmation of life.”

He said the museum at the site, which reached all the way to the bedrock in the ground, would allow for people to connect with the memorial outside.

“A very moving emotional aspect of the museum is looking down toward Michael Arad’s memorial and you look down at the water sinking,” Libeskind said.

Young said he and Libeskind wanted to construct the building to serve as a convenient hub for New Yorkers and tourists visiting the city, either for work or as a holiday.

“We stitched this whole thing into the grid of city so that people could cross it on the way to work or lunch or whatever they maybe doing,” Young said.

The two spoke of the symbols of the waterfalls as parts of the memorial and a central focal point of the space.

“The water element was crucial, and this water did not go up in a fountain in a celebratory fashion,” Young said. “It is descending, signifying the fall of the towers without being too literal.”

Names on the memorial are not arranged alphabetically, but in a way that depicts the life of those fallen, he said. Family members had the opportunity to decide where their loved ones would be inscribed on the memorial, a decision Young believes makes the memorial all the more symbolic.

“We arrived at what the architect called ‘meaningful adjacency,’” Young said. “They actually invited the family members to determine to whom their loved one would be adjacent — it was up to the families.”

Young said the arrangement took into account the way 9/11 victims lived rather than the way they died.

“This is not a space that can be simulated. It’s not a simulation of an event,” Libeskind said. “It is actually here ... so it is not something you can access through the Internet, but only by being there [do] you get the full sense of the loss but also of life.”

Libeskind also spoke about the architecture of the Jewish Museum Berlin, located in Germany, and posed the question of reaffirming humanistic values in architecture rather than adhering to simply technical statistics.

“For me architecture is of course a technical art, but primarily it is one of the liberal arts and maybe one which is the most formative because it forms in the unconsciousness how our world looks,” he said.

Libeskind mentioned the difficulty of planning and building the Berlin museum because of its inaccessibility to the public.

“The central structure is not an atrium, it is not a structure you can walk through, but actually an inaccessible space,” he said. “It’s kind of a wasted space — it is a space that a responsible architect should never design, but I always believed that the void is the central story.

He said the museum was not meant to tell the Jewish people their story, but to tell it to others.

“It’s a space left unfilled within German culture,” Young said. “And our generation is the one which misses that space the most.”

Libeskind and Young discussed the nature of competition in architecture and how projects might be chosen or rejected.

“Winning a competition is usually a ticket to nowhere, to oblivion,” said Libeskind, who had won a past competition that allowed him to design the Jewish Museum Berlin.

Libeskind said in the Jewish Museum competition, he tried to break certain rules.

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