Vedhant Maharaj wins the 2015 Corobrik Architectural Awards

*Johannesburg, 12 May 2016***.**

Vedhant Maharaj from The University of the Witwatersrand became the 29th architectural student to take first prize at the Corobrik Architectural Awards in Johannesburg last night.

For nearly three decades, this prestigious award has been presented to a talented young graduate who is on the brink of making a name for themselves in the extremely competitive architectural profession.

Vedhant Maharaj's winning dissertation, entitled *Yantra*, Infrastructure of the Sacred and Profane, exhibited critical elements that had been picked out by the judges – innovation and technical excellence expressed with a keen understanding of the combined social, economic and environmental context that is changing the approach to the built environment today.

"Innovation differentiates design resolutions and helps define architecture. Innovation in sync with context provides the delight factor permitting architectural design to compete comfortably on the world stage. Technical skill, the ability to create memorable form that draws one in while treading softly on our planet put the finishing touches to sustainable architecture," said Corobrik managing director, Dirk Meyer.

He admitted that it had been a challenge to separate a winner from the eight regional finalists from the country's major universities this year. These finalists won their respective regional awards during 2015 and went forward to compete for the national award.

Meyer said that all eight entries showed how innovation could blend with sustainability, social awareness and technical excellence. However, Vedhant Maharaj's offering, illustrated how creativity could make an exceptional and meaningful contribution to South Africa's diverse and multi-cultural landscape.

Responding to the announcement that Vedhant Maharaj had been presented with this year's Corobrik Architectural Award, Dr. Mpho

Matsipa, Maharaj's co-supervisor said that, *Yantra,* explored water infrastructure provided water that was safe for human consumption while respecting the rich architectural heritage of Varanasi. "In so doing, he demonstrated both a nuanced and layered understanding of sustainability, technological and social innovation which encompasses daily spatial practices on the Ganges River, larger scale developmental processes in India, heritage in the built environment and everyday spatial practices as well as the complexities of religious plurality in India. Additionally, this thesis is rigorously researched, using both primary and secondary sources, with confidence and creativity."
She said that Maharaj's attention to questions of access for the majority populations was both poetic and attentive to questions of social and spatial justice.
"The mastering of change of scale is exceptionally convincing: *Yantra* works as political argument down to the design of bricks in 1:1. He uses the language of tectonics as a tool to make the city into a space for a society of the collective, a rare yet highly needed ambition within our profession," added co-supervisor, Kirsten Doermann.

Dr Matsipa concluded: "I believe that Vedhant demonstrates a lot of passion for thinking about the spatial, technological and ambient possibilities of infrastructure as culturally informed architecture. I would advise him to continue working and thinking across different scales and locations. I believe that he could become a leader in the field - specifically in terms of thinking about water architecture from the Global South."

Meyer said that Corobrik's commitment to recognising emerging talents of tomorrow through this important award hinged on the fact that the clay bricks produced in the company's factories across the country also had an important role in both design and construction going forward.

"The architecture of the future will see application drive design and the choice of building materials play a key role in ensuring sustainability. Emerging talents within the profession will be called on to embrace technological expertise and apply this through selecting building materials that meet specific needs," he pointed out.

Clay brick addresses sustainability, longevity and financial challenges. “It offers a myriad of benefits whilst adding distinctive aesthetic and textural appeal and the ability to meet design and construction challenges. Brick can accommodate virtually any shape or form. Yet, it is ultra practical in that it requires minimal maintenance and provides thermal efficiency which contributes to improved indoor comfort in all temperatures and lower energy costs throughout the life of a building,” he said.

Guest speaker, Peter Rich, who is a practicing architect and has been a Professor of Architecture at the University of the Witwatersrand for 30 years, also touched on the compelling future of architecture in his keynote address entitled” “Evolving design and materiality trends set to influence tomorrow’s sustainable architecture”.

Meyer thanked this year’s judges - Phill Mashabane of Mashabane Rose Architects, Johannesburg, Karuni Naidoo from CNN Architects in Durban and Andre Eksteen from Earthworld Architects in Pretoria – for their hard work and dedication.

Photographs:
Caption: Vedhant Maharaj is the winner of the 2015 Architectural Student of the Year Awards. His winning architectural thesis is entitled Yantra, Infrastructures of the Sacred and Profane and is a water purification infrastructure for the hazardously polluted River Ganges in India.