

26 August 2023

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

RE: JF Mentz | Identification number: 9207055174082

I have pleasure in providing a reference for Mr Mentz.

In 2017, Julian completed his Masters degree in Architecture (professional) at the Department of Architecture, University of the Free State, South Africa. As Julian's third year studio facilitator, theory lecturer, post graduate programme director and friend, Mr Mentz is well known to me.

It is always an enriching experience to work with Julian; he is an extremely passionate and inventive person. Although Julian's academic record might well be proof of straightforward, coherent and typical architectural accomplishments, it is by no means a true testimony of Mr Mentz's creative journey, not in academia and certainly not in life at large. In fact, the words: straightforward, coherent and typical do not apply to Julian's character or to the world viewed through Julian's eyes. Note, the preceding does not imply that the words: complex, contradictory and atypical will fare any better at summarising this original life; these sentences simply aim to highlight the fact that categories and binaries are themselves questioned by and in the presence of Mr Mentz.

At the risk of employing bookends, Julian exemplified both the most responsive and the most challenging student. A student, who attentively listened, appropriated, and reacted to guidance with critical insight into design solutions | *prudent student*. However, the same critical insight that for instance would understand the pitfalls of a design-move could mutate into a labyrinth of experimentation at the blink of an eye. Once understanding the possibility of a pitfall, the zealous and imaginative self could sometimes not steer away from the pitfall; instead Julian would direct attention towards the pit, fall into it with the sole purpose of testing the unexplored design mechanisms which might fill, cover, dissolve, change or bridge the pit. As quick as insight pathed the highway to certain success, experimentation and questioning would detour into divergent paths, sometimes sacrificing a fine solution – a well-articulated sentence – for a series of experimentations – a series of if-sentences | *challenging student*. Such a challenging student, never difficult or disrespectful student, is not taxing or cumbersome but keeps the lecturer on zir toes, and vibrates the sedimented world, the routine acceptance of conventions, to allow new possibilities, to open new gaps and identify new ways of stabilising. Such students create lines of flight, which prudence and cautiousness will never allow for.

Viewing the world not through a conventional "either-or" lens but instead an "and-and" lens has lead Julian to identify "ifs", even "ifs" within a cracked vase. Many would regard Bloemfontein's CBD as a failed container, which should either be forgotten or completely remoulded. For Mr Mentz, this cracked urban bowl is a thing of beauty offering multiple and plural opportunities: art projects, inner-city roof-top parties, guerrilla interventions, even just a simple place to accommodate the fusion of horizons. Through their creative enterprise, *Big Massive*, Julian and his band of artists began a cleanup of the inner city by virtue of artistic interventions. These interventions continuously rallied artists that lived in the CBD to partake in painting wall murals, creating street art and to curate self-organised impromptu gallery exhibitions and performances inside abandoned buildings. What started as an artistic vision of an individual whose aim was to catalyse neglected and abandoned urban spaces into functional ones, evolved into a collaborative movement that consisted of numerous artists intent on building a better future. Julian and his band of urban actors shared their unadulterated and imaginative knowledge of the urban networks with all kinds of audiences, to the extent where these urban excursions became one of the best experiential learning activities for the honours students of architecture before his departure for Ballito.

My best wishes for Mr Mentz in future!



JAKO OLIVIER | LECTURER