

Valedictorian for Ceremony C12 - 13 July 2026 Monday (10:00am)

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Master of Architecture/Bachelor of Arts (Architecture) with Honours

Thank you, Dr. Federico, for your kind introduction.

Good morning.

Ms Angelene Chan, NUS Trustee;

Professor Teo Kie Leong, Dean, College of Design and Engineering;

Your Excellency Dr Sa'ed Radaideh, The Ambassador of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan;

Ms Lillian Shieh, Senior Director, Head of Design Practice, GovTech Singapore;

Distinguished Guests, Faculty Members, proud families and friends, and of course, my fellow Graduates.

I am deeply honoured to speak on behalf of the graduating cohort of the Department of Architecture today.

I must confess, I was nervous preparing this speech, because no single voice can fully represent the many journeys that brought us here today.

But what all those journeys have in common is this: we found the ability to see beauty in what was often overlooked.

Strangely enough, what we have learned in design school is difficult to explain. Maybe because there is no single textbook, no fixed answer and certainly no perfect solution.

In fact, behind every finished image is a folder with forty-seven other versions named "Final_version2, version 3, Really Final, Final Final.psd" and so on.

Behind every clean model is a bin of foam board, failed joineries and endless iterations.

And behind every confident presentation is a 3 am crash-out text to a friend asking, "Does this make sense, or have I completely lost it?"

It means that we learned to sit with the space between what we imagined and what we could actually make.

It also means that the final image never tells the full story, because much of our learning happened in those unseen moments of failure, questioning, and uncertainty.

For me, those questions went beyond the studio - through an exchange at TU Delft and my later contribution to the Venice Biennale, where I encountered people, places, and realities far beyond what I knew.

In fact, I found myself unprepared for conversations about growth, extraction, sustainability, and even inequality; many of these questions came from perspectives I hadn't yet learned to inhabit.

I had no answers to offer.

But those uncomfortable conversations followed me home and eventually shaped my thesis, where I began to trace what architecture takes from land, labour, communities, and the uneven consequences that remain long after such extraction. I realise that our footprint leaves a debt someone else has to pay.

This reshaped my understanding of what we might call "beauty" in architecture or design. Beauty, for us, became less about the image and more about relationships - with the land we build on, and the communities who live alongside it, long after we've moved on.

To build and maintain these relationships, it asks for three qualities:

First, the courage to question what appears settled. To look beyond the finished image and ask: What made it possible and what are its consequences?

Second, the patience to sit with uncertainty. To keep revising, reconsidering, remaking, even if the outcome is uncertain.

Third, the humility to listen beyond ourselves. To listen to people whose perspectives differ from ours or are overlooked as we rush to our own solutions.

Perhaps these three qualities would allow us to see beauty differently, as a relationship we stay accountable to.

But in developing our courage, patience and humility; in developing our new perspectives on the beauty and how to create it, we were not alone.

Let us take this opportunity to thank our professors, tutors, and mentors who challenged us and helped us grow.

To thank the admin staff whose unseen labour held this place together.

To thank our friends who shared criticism, encouragement, and the occasional 3 am spiral.

And above all, to thank our families, who reminded us to rest and supported us through every sleepless night.

Their support carried us here. As we leave, the question is what we will carry forward: the trust of those who believed in us, and the responsibility for what our work will impact in the future.

This responsibility matters especially now, as AI generates endless beautiful images in seconds.

But AI cannot bear the weight of responsibility for the world. It cannot sit through conversations that unsettled us, or stumble through the failures that shaped us. The responsibility is for us to carry.

So today, in these gowns, with the cameras flashing and everything looking polished and final, we know that this image does not tell the whole story.

Behind it are the failed attempts, difficult questions, and quiet care that taught us to see beauty as a relationship.

This is what we carry forward.

So to my fellow graduates, may we bring the same courage, patience, and humility to wherever our paths take us next. May they outlast every image, and find their way into everything we leave behind.

Congratulations to the Class of 2026.

Thank you.