

SYLLABUS

Culture Containers II A Contemporary Art Non-Institution

Columbia University, GSAPP
Advanced Studio V
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Summary

This studio will look at the relationship between architecture and the evolution of the contemporary art institution as a space of collectivity. Students will design a new contemporary art facility that challenges preconceived ideas of the institution and speculates on new forms of collectivity. Simultaneously, the studio will explore architecture as both an aesthetic practice and a social practice through research into contemporary art and other spaces of convergence.

Collectivity and the Institution

“Museums are not for profit. They are participatory and transparent, and work in active partnership with and for diverse communities to collect, preserve, research, interpret, exhibit, and enhance understandings of the world, aiming to contribute to human dignity and social justice, global equality and planetary wellbeing.”
- International Council of Museums

This fall the International Council of Museums will vote on a new definition of museums with language that includes “social justice, global equality, and planetary well-being.” While this proposal may seem like an overdue update to the definition of a museum for some, significant debate has erupted amongst its stakeholders including 20,000 museums across the globe.

Meanwhile, throughout the United States, cultural institutions are re-evaluating their role as civic platforms. For many museums, the current political climate and ecological crisis has intensified a sense of social responsibility while amplifying long-standing challenges related to accessibility and inclusivity. Phrases like “transparency” and “community engagement” are prevalent in these narratives for more democratic and representative institutions.

This semester our studio will speculate on the relationship between architecture and the contemporary art “institution.” Historically, architecture has been synonymous with institutionality-- a physical manifestation of authority, cultural legitimacy and capitalism. The recent efforts by the New Museum staff to unionize coinciding with its plans for a \$63 million expansion, for example, place architecture in the middle of a conversation about social equity.

“The place of the museum is not only Fifth Avenue or Wilshire Boulevard but also Crenshaw Boulevard. It’s about democratizing our idea of a museum’s mission.”
- Darren Walker, Ford Foundation

At a quick glance, it appears that many cultural institutions in the United States are trying to accommodate a void in the public realm (and experience economy) as places of education, ritual, community, and social exchange. While communal experiences may have once been accommodated by religious spaces or situated on the consumerist landscape, the role of cultural institutions is up for revision.

Collectivity and the Non-Institution – New Forms of Hospitality

“Form is not the eradication of the informal. Form is what emerges from the informal.”

– Fred Moten

In The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study, poet Fred Moten and philosopher Stefano Harney speculate on the need for informal spaces of collectivity and intellectual “study” that work against the oppressive forces of the institution. While their conversation is centered on the university, the contemporary art institution is an imaginable site of inquiry as well. Often times, alternative art spaces (eg. New Museum, Studio Museum, The Underground Museum, etc.) are founded as intimate spaces that convene historically marginalized voices and communities. The informality of these collective spaces enables a form of sanctuary, experimentation and self-determination. The involvement of architecture within this process typically signifies the imposition of an order or coherent formalization of an emerging collectivity. This studio will explore the relationship between the informal qualities of collectivity and architecture’s capacity to work within but against the institution. In other words, how can architecture play a role in the creation of an *undercommons*?

Through extensive readings and conversations with artists and curators, the studio will become familiar with the current discourses informing the role of contemporary art institutions in the US and internationally. As a point of departure, the studio will critically examine the spectrum of contemporary art institutions as:

- A social infrastructure for community outreach (Art + Practice, Underground Museum, Pioneer Works)
- A technology for aesthetic entertainment (The Shed).
- An incubator for cultural production (The New Museum, New Inc.)
- A retreat for contemplative reflection (Glenstone, Chichu Art Museum)

Embedded within these narratives about the contemporary art institution, are discourses about the role of contemporary art as an activist social practice directly engaged in the transformation of the world or an aesthetic practice maintaining a critical autonomy from its immediate context. The studio will reflect on the relationship between aesthetic practice and social activism through close readings of contemporary artists with clearly defined social or aesthetic agendas. As a result, students will develop their own position on contemporary art informing their design methodology and conceptualization of a new non-institutional model.

Typological Speculations – From Container to Constellation

“The fundamental question is to explore the possibility for play. To discuss how to produce forms for the presentation of objects, for the organization of spaces that thwart expectations. The main enemy of artistic creativity and political creativity is consensus— that is, the inscription within given roles, possibilities, competencies.”

– Jacques Ranciere

“The museum ceased to be a place for a permanent collection and became a stage for changing curatorial projects, guided tours, screenings, lectures, performances, etc. In our time, artworks permanently circulate from one exhibition to another, from one collection to another. And that means that they are getting more and more involved in the flow of time.”

– Boris Groys, *In the Flow*

In Western histories, the first art museums were semi-public palatial villas of aristocratic families. Accessible by invitation only, the collection of objects functioned as displays of cultural prominence and diplomacy. In the 20th Century, the emergence of the modern art institution sought to “neutralize” the environment of art exhibition within a “white box.” The experience and production of art in the 21st century is intertwined in the proliferation of the art market and the increasing circulation of art objects within the global network of international biennales and art fairs. Similarly, the physical scale and format of contemporary art is more varied and open-ended than ever before.

Curatorial trends point toward art experiences not contained within the protection of a neutral white box but within a constellation of permeable environments generating dialogue with the specificity of context, climate and nature. How do we design spaces to experience art when an art work can exist within a single VR headset or at the monumental scale of an Olafur Eliasson installation?

The studio will reflect on preconceived dichotomies to identify design concepts, methodologies and subversive subtext for new aesthetic experiences and emergent social relations.

Dichotomies:

- Protection / Permeability
- Intimacy / Monumentality
- Informal / Formal
- Agility / Legacy
- Flow / Fixity
- Cheap / Expensive
- Impermanence / Permanence
- Field / Object
- Network / Node
- Fast / Slow
- IRL / URL
- Virtual Reality / Reality
- Art / Nature
- Difference / Consistency
- Contamination / Neutrality

Site – South LA Wetlands Park

In the last decade, Los Angeles has rapidly grown as an incubator of art practices, galleries, and institutional initiatives reinforcing its image as a global art destination. Although the city has a long history of cultivating artists, today's thriving art community and art market cannot be disassociated from the transformation of the city itself. The current real estate development cycle has exacerbated longstanding stratifications in the urban context historically determined by class and race. Emerging artist communities and the institutions that support them frequently find themselves at the center of debates around gentrification and social equity.

South Park has remained a central location for the *undercommons* of Los Angeles. Situated in a zone confined by racially restrictive housing covenants from the 1920's to 60's, South Park developed as a district exclusive to black business and activity, and has gradually made room for LatinX neighborhoods in recent decades. In an effort to reach a broader and more diverse audience, LACMA recently announced a community outreach initiative which identified several sites in South Los Angeles for development, with the intention of expanding education and increasing accessibility within historically marginalized communities.

The Non-Institution will be sited at the South LA Wetlands Park, one of the proposed homes for the new LACMA site. Located near Slauson Ave. and Avalon Blvd., the 9-acre park is an expansive ecological project that can treat up to 680,000 gallons of polluted runoff per day. Running along the site is a former bus maintenance facility that has sat empty for 30 years, and as part of the lease (in negotiation), LACMA will retrofit the building and use 36% of the 80,000 square foot for institutional facilities.

Methodology

This studio will focus on the making of architecture through physical models and material experimentation establishing continuous non-stop feedback loop between cultural speculation and rigorous design production. Design and research will become interchangeable mediums of speculation.

The semester will be divided into a series of intensive research and design exercises that seek to understand and represent relationships between aesthetic and social practices in art and architecture:

- 1A/ Art Practice Methodologies
- 1B/ Architecture Methodologies (Precedent research)
- 1C/ Creation of Proto-Institution (Short Design Project)
- 2A/ In-person research with Institutions, Artists, and Site
- 2B/ Design a Non-Institution (Final Design Project)

Schedule

09/12	Pin-up of 1A
09/19	Pin-up of 1B
09/26	Pin-up of 1C
09/28 - 10/2	Studio Travel to Los Angeles
10/7	Pin-up of 2A
10/25	Midterm Review
11/14	3/4 Review
11/28	Thanksgiving
12/09	Final Review

Studio Travel

Saturday, 9/28 - Wednesday, 10/2:

The studio will travel to Los Angeles to engage in research with institutions and artists in Los Angeles to analyze and develop a greater understanding of the cultural context, emerging art practices, and architectural precedents.

Artists:

- EJ Hill
- Glenn Kaino
- & others

Institutions:

- Art + Practice
- Hammer Museum
- Hauser & Wirth
- Inner City Arts
- Institute of Contemporary Arts
- LACMA
- MAK Center
- Marciano Foundation
- Underground Museum

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