

Transcendent Architecture

Much of architecture strives for permanence and grandness, symbolizing our highest aspirations. This is especially true of religious architecture, which comprises the most commanding and perdurable examples. Our existential presence, the passage of time and human spirit should be embodied in this architecture; yet, these buildings often miss the connection with the individual. In this studio, we will examine a transcendent, accessible architecture, engaging the individual through a combination of simple materiality and passing light. For this project, we will focus on Buddhist ideas of transcendence as well as a multitude of influences from architecture, art and theory. The program for this exploration is a well-crafted contemporary temple or shrine (Jingū-ji or Zendo) located at the far north end of Manhattan. The building is intended to endure for no more than 20 years and touch down lightly, leaving little trace once removed.

Transience and Imperfection

Architecture translates 'pure' ideas into form and space. Contemporary architecture rarely acknowledges the possibility of the synthesis of 'pure' and practical through eclectic or divergent theories. In the studio, we will test an architecture that is not only temporal, but also syncretic and is linked to the aesthetic concept of *wabi sabi* or the 'three marks of existence' from Buddhism, a beauty that is imperfect, impermanent, and incomplete.

Time and Materials

Wood architecture speaks to a temporal and immediate relationship with our time on earth. Ancient examples of wood architecture are found throughout the world including the 1400-year-old Hōryū-ji Buddhist pagoda as well as examples of temporary construction, which embody the same high craft, traditions and techniques. Every 20 years for the last 1,300, the Ise Jingu Grand Shinto Shrines in Japan have been reconstructed using local cypress in the *Sengu* tradition, passing down traditional crafts and culture. We will examine the role of craft in contemporary (Eastern and Western) architecture, learning techniques such as Cidori used by Kengo Kuma, which use no nails or glue, to the wild works of Russian artist Nikolaj Polissky, to better understand the relationship between materials and the message they send.

Theories of Making

Rather than differentiate making and theorizing, we propose a practice of “thinking with our hands,” which allows for both proactive and spontaneous production of ideas. We will examine the very nature and immediacy of construction through large physical models, full-size joinery, research and writing. We look to a multitude of sources for inspiration, from furniture to art and architecture, as we progress.

Studio Process

A series of parallel exercises will unfold through the semester including site analysis and research on architecture, religion, theory, and construction techniques. The early stages of the project will include models, which reveal material attribute or capture its essence (metonymy), providing a visceral understanding of sound, light, area, volume and scale without the use of metaphors. These exercises and others will ultimately establish methods for gathering information from place and site, which can be abstracted into memorable architecture. Each student will document the process and research in a folio. The studio will also develop a simple website.

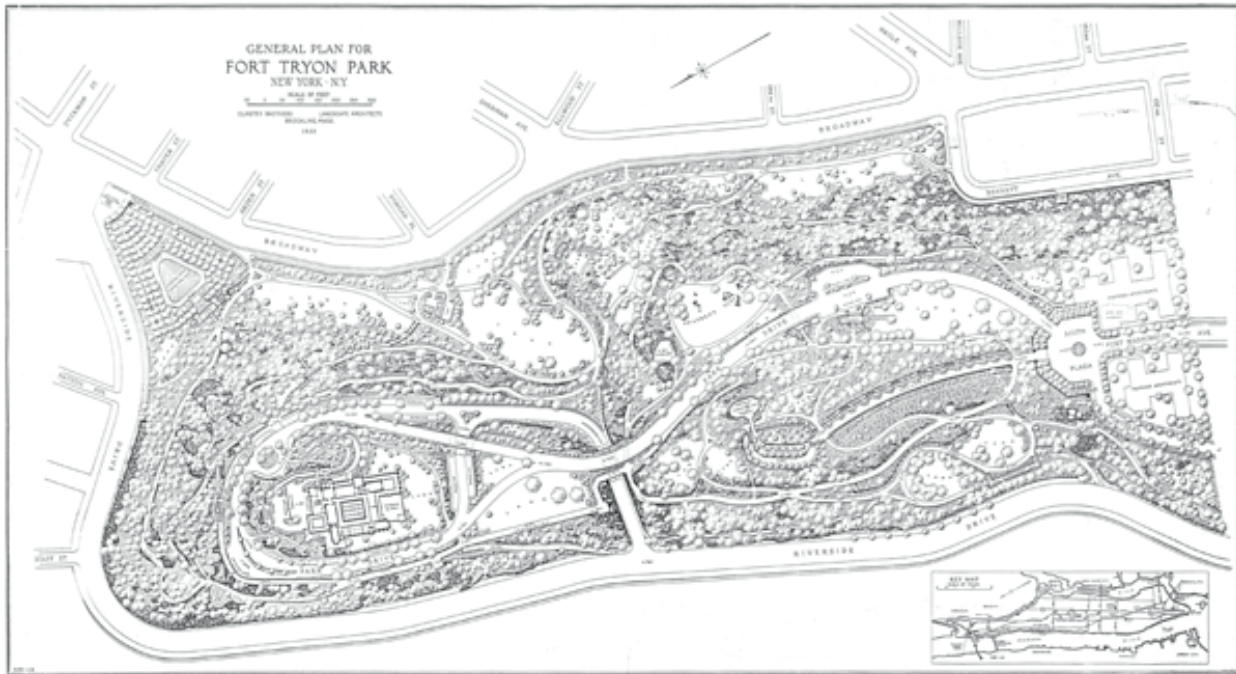
Precedent

The mission of the Rothko chapel is to inspire people to action through art and contemplation, to nurture reverence for the highest aspirations of humanity, and to provide a forum for global concerns. The Rothko chapel was dedicated in 1971 as an intimate sanctuary available to people of every belief. A tranquil meditative environment inspired by the mural canvases of Russian born American painter Mark Rothko (1903-1970), the chapel welcomes over 60,000 visitors each year, people of every faith and from all parts of the world. The Rothko chapel is an independent institution, a sacred place open to all people, every day... the chapel has two vocations: contemplation and action. It is a place alive with religious ceremonies of all faiths, and where the experience and understanding of all traditions are encouraged and made available. Action takes the form of supporting human rights, and thus the chapel has become a rallying place for all people concerned with peace, freedom, and social justice throughout the world. © Rothko Chapel

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Syllabus

Site

Fort Tryon Park in upper Manhattan will serve as the site for the project. Students will have the opportunity to select the precise location for the temple installation.



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