Graduate Thesis, Master of Architecture

An architectural thesis is a proposition. A proposition that results from a critique and re-examination of the role of architecture as a critical participant in the conditioning of (public) space. A thesis demands that the student take a position and have something to say, something to contribute to the ongoing discourse in the widening sphere of architecture.

In this studio, students are expected to engage and develop a wide range of interrelated capacities, including critical thinking, analytical writing and reflective design production; ranging from building construction, design research, emerging technologies and materiality, social issues, landscape, urbanism, spatial perception and methods of conceptual thinking.

Thesis culminates with a presentation and public exhibition of a holistically-researched architectural proposition. Marking the transition between academic and professional practices, the thesis project is an opportunity to define an individual position relative to the discipline of architecture.

Organization

The M.Arch thesis studio will be conducted to support each individual student’s independent thesis through both readings, discussion groups, and collective exchanges. As a cohort, the studio will interrogate broader sets of collective questions that concurrently inform thesis research. Through a series of “Thesis Talks,” students will reflect and collectively frame issues and topics relating to their theses. Outside critics and guests will be invited to participate and engage to encourage broad discussion.

Design Research & Representation

Architecture is a cultural project that contributes to a developing understanding of how tradition and identity affect our built environment. An architectural argument is supported not only through the design and research, but through the expression of the idea through representation and presentation. As such, this thesis based studio will focus heavily on the representation of each student’s thesis.

The thesis projects will be fully represented through sets of architectural representations. It is necessary for a cultural practice such as architecture to deeply investigate questions of aesthetics. How architects have made aesthetic arguments through a variety of different mediums is of crucial importance for the discipline of architecture.
Exhibition & Symposium

An architectural thesis demonstrating such creative understanding would be able to sustain critique at various levels of interpretation and enquiry. In a symposium-like forum to consider, debate, and dispute emerging questions in architecture, students will present and exhibit their thesis projects to the public. Students will articulate, propose, and defend their ideas and positions on architecture as well as engage with professionals as peers and colleagues.

Learning Outcomes

The course is designed for students to produce a semester long, studio based project. The course will hinge around the transition from the prerequisite thesis seminar to the articulation of the architectural argument into a design proposition.

- Articulate a clear argument; translate the design ideas into cohesive design based argument.
- Leverage verbal, written, and visual forms of communication to describe complex ideas.
- Transition research based design to projective design processes.
- Understand how the choice of design media, method and representations relates to your thesis topic.
- Development and execution of design methodology.
- Production of final materials for the Thesis Exhibition and Symposium.

Selected References


Gage, Mark Foster ed.; Aesthetics and Politics; 2018
Critical Inquiries, Observations, and Provocations through Architecture

SARAH RAFSON

"Choose carefully the site of rebellion."
—Terence van Elslander

"Writing a thesis requires a student to organize ideas and data, to work methodically, and to build an ‘object’ that in principle will serve others. ... With time, a writer becomes more astute and knowledgeable, but how he uses his knowledge will always depend on how he originally researched the many things he did not know."
—How to Write a Thesis, Umberto Eco, 1977
Program
Class time will be devoted to:
• Developing a thesis exhibition and publication
• Desk critiques to ensure the timely development of your work
• Group discussions to review project milestones, requirements, and ideas
• Reviews with advisors and outside critics to refine design projects and exhibition design strategies
• Independent design, research, and writing

Learning Outcomes
• Refining research skills in architecture and design
• Developing and expressing a critical outlook and perspective on architecture practice
• Designing and installing an exhibition of work
• Writing, editing, and designing a thesis book that compiles the outcomes of the research and design process
• Sustaining and managing a long-term independent project
• Polishing verbal and visual presentation skills

The Installation view of Fulfilled, an exhibition and symposium at Ohio State University curated by Ashley Bigham and designed by Outpost Office in February 2020. The exhibition explores the role of architecture in a culture shaped by excessive manufacture and assuagement of desire—from warehouses, suburban homes, cardboard boxes, shopping malls, to shipping containers and material life cycles.