

# The Color Studio: A Monochromatic Preserve

Leslie Gill/Mike Jacobs

Advanced Studio VI

Spring 2014

*Color exists in itself. – Henry Matisse*

*Color cannot stand alone. – Wassily Kandinsky*

*Color is suited to simple races, peasants and savages. - Le Corbusier*

*Color is a concrete expression of a maximum difference within identity. – Adrian Stokes*

*Color is a kind of bliss. – Roland Barthes*

## Brief

The study of color is a tricky endeavor that breeds contradictory and didactic opinions. It is slippery: part quantifiable scientific study, part cultural interpretation, and part phenomenological observation. Umberto Eco articulated this dilemma when he stated “that color is not an easy matter.” Yet, color has maintained a central role in cultural discourse, continuously evolving, understood through new technologies, altered by production capabilities. David Batchelor has argued that the Western world is currently *chromophobic*: “it manifests itself in the many and varied attempts to purge color from culture, to devalue color, to diminish its significance, to deny its complexity.” And as Batchelor asserts, society today regards color as simultaneously dangerous and trivial.

This studio aims to explore the ways in which we can harness this fear through a critically relevant discourse and re-engage color as an important tool in architectural production. In our “color blind” digital world, can a contemporary study of color lead us towards architectures we have yet to imagine? Can we blend, calibrate or rigorously filter color with multivalent user-friendly interfaces? Can we train our perception to critically evaluate the phenomenon of the visual in digital production? Can we control the many ways color can communicate?

For centuries architects have envisioned spaces utilizing black lines on paper, turning to color only when deliberately emphasizing an atmospheric condition, or in elucidating a thought process by systematically applying color as a diagrammatic coding system. With the advent of the pixel, new possibilities for both color theory and color application emerged.

Today, we are bathed in color. It literally emanates from every screen. Every pixel we draw vibrates with red, green and blue; we view our creations in printed layers of cyan, magenta, yellow and black; we experience buildings while seamlessly decoding millions of tones. Yet, the majority of us, work in a world of color without using or understanding its power to communicate. The full integration of digital technologies in architecture has dulled our ability to use color effectively and deliberately. This same technology offers new opportunities to re-gain control over color as an area of speculative study, a cultural tool, and a technical exploration.

This studio intends to research three parallel trajectories of color theory in order to assemble strategies to design:

Philosophical - symbolic study of cultural constructs

Scientific - measurable production of data and manufacturing

Phenomenological - perceptual systems of aesthetics

### **Three Landscapes and Two Sites**

Three Arctic landscapes form the research topic, and program for this studio:

The singular hues of the Arctic Circle provide tangible constraints from which to explore color. Individual theses will be developed testing relationships within specific arctic landscapes: the boreal forest (green), fresh and salt water (blue), and the cryosphere (white). Topical research will speak to the Arctic's history, its people, cultures resources and wildlife, and to its political significance. The program will acknowledge the controversies of global warming, global development and ecological preservation.

Two sites, linked by global warming, have been chosen to explore architecture:

Our first site (the Arctic) is defined by the Arctic Ocean, the Boreal Forest, and cryosphere. The effects of climate change and the multi-national interests that lay claim to its resources render its definition in flux. Each student will define a specific local.

Our second site will be in a landlocked block on Manhattan's west side and contains two of the most critical flood zone designations.

### **Program**

Students will be asked to design two structures during the course of the semester: The first, an Arctic-based data collection outpost, designed to support the research of our increasingly fragile ecosystem; the second, a 'Habitat Preserve' an Archive, Bank and Museum designed with the mandate to preserve in miniature, increasingly threatened Arctic landscapes. Part scientific archive, part visual spectacle, the Habitat Preserve should consider all key stakeholders (Human, Animal, Mineral and Plant) in an effort to effectively lobby for, and protect the biodiversity of this globally significant eco-region for future generations.

### **Technique**

This studio will expect students to engage a wide range of technical skills. Conceptual color studies will be tested through the design of the Arctic Collection Outpost utilizing physical model building, photography, 3-D and Adobe software programs and through the exploration of parametric relationships. The studio will participate in series of workshops led by Carson Smuts and Joe Brennan, with an emphasis on relational and formal color strategies through digital modeling.

### **Kinne Trip**

The studio Kinne destination is Japan. There we will explore the relationship between color, light, landscape, and architecture in the two highly constructed environments. Tokyo a city nuanced and imagined through artificially emitted light and Kyoto a city of framed pigmented landscapes articulated through shadow.