



Carnegie Mellon University

School of Architecture

College of Fine Arts, CFA 201

Carnegie Mellon University

Pittsburgh, PA 15213



Floor and wall tile reclamation by Rotor DC, the materials reuse spinoff of cooperative design practice Rotor, Brussels, Belgium. Ophoto, 2020

48-367: Material Histories

Units: 9

Instructor: Francesca Torello

Materials affect the way we engage with a building and carry cultural meanings connected with complex histories, deeply and at times messily intertwined with the social, political, and ecological context. In this seminar we will look at the history of the architecture of the last two centuries by following the thread of the history of materials. We will discuss the ways in which buildings of the past and the practice of architecture were affected by which materials were available, how they were produced, and the craft required to work them. We will reflect on how architects interpreted, manipulated, or added to those meanings through their own work. Materials' lifecycles and the networks of extraction, production, transportation, and reuse had an impact on the built environment in the past, just as they do today. We will learn from historical examples to assess the consequences of the choices we make as designers. Finally, we will critically engage with the presence of history as a layer of complexity embedded in the material itself – an effect that is compounded in the practice of reuse of materials with patina, marked from their past use.