

OPTION STUDIOS S24

In Spring 2024 there will be a set of second year option studios 48:205. The studios offer opportunities to explore differing disciplinary interests. There will be a preference process with an on-line form issued on Nov 11th. Second year students are asked to submit three preferences with the reasoning by November 22nd. Studio numbers will be balanced and the rosters will be published on Dec 4th.

DESERT LANDS/ DRY LANDS Other ways of Worldmaking

With me along the strip of Herbage strewn
That just divides the desert from the sown,
- Omar Khayyam, Rubaiyat (1048-1131), translated by Edward Fitzgerald (1859)

Land back is a demand, a stand against the Age of Exploration and Extraction,
a call for the Time of Reconciliation, the Now of Restoration
- Tanaya Winder, Stone Mother (2021)

PROMPT: The view of the deserts as “empty”, useless ecologies, devoid of inhabitants was borne out of a colonial world-view that allowed for the erasure of entire indigenous cultures, traditions, and forms of knowledge. Yet humans have dwelt in desert ecosystems for millennia, inventing rituals, settlements, and forms of architecture that promote a deep stewardship of the land. The climate emergency brings renewed and urgent attention to architecture in the desert. Desertification remains one of the greatest environmental challenges of our times. Already, half the planet’s surface is covered with drylands, fragile ecosystems in threat of desertification, often liminal frontiers to the desert. With anthropogenic climate crisis, it is essential to reimagine the architecture of the desert as one of radical empathy with the land. Using the desert as a prompt and area of study, the studio opens up other ways of building, dwelling and worldmaking.

CONTEXT: Situated in the desert lands/ dry lands of the American Southwest, this studio builds upon current debates on architecture’s entanglements with growth, colonization and land, to partake in a critical reimagination of dwelling in the desert. The studio challenges contemporary models of desert occupation fueled by settler colonialism, unchallenged fossil capitalism, limitless resources, and unfettered growth. In doing so, it also questions alternatives like green or eco-capitalism, smart cities, and other techno-fixes that fail to question the contemporary civilizational model and its concomitant practices of extraction and growth. Instead, the studio will be inspired by movements in solidarity with decolonial thinking, indigeneity, and transitional justice to consider how architecture might stage a renewed connection between people and the land.

METHODS: Students will engage with a broad and diverse range of precedents, writings – fictional and architectural, that consider dwelling in the desert, as well as contemporary modes of desert territorialization. The studio will foreground the role of research at two levels. The first will consider the relocalization of everyday life, to offer new models of communal living that build upon proximities of social and cultural production – spaces of gathering, food, work and leisure. The second will consider the material of architectural production and its concomitant impacts on energy and carbon. This will include a focus on thermal mass, biobased monoliths, and the embodied energy of construction as well as its environmental performances.



1. Sarosh Anklesaria MWF 2.00-4.50

1. Sarosh Anklesaria

2. Theo Issaias

3. Steve Lee

4. Misri Patel

5. Tulisa Sindi



Edward Burtynsky, 'Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Reservation / Suburb, Scottsdale, Arizona', 2011.