Comprehensive Design Studio

This brief is for one of six studios offered to fulfill the requirements for a comprehensive design semester. The sites, programs, and building typologies are unique to each studio, and intended to provide students with a range of projects to consider.

Please note that regardless of which program you select, the overall schedule of the comprehensive semester will have shared lectures and deadlines, along with coordinated studio outcomes and deliverables. Each studio will satisfy the NAAB Student Performance Criteria listed in the common studio syllabus.

Program for Drawing, Dwelling, Detailing

We will explore concepts of Communal dwelling in the modest sized program of a small artists commune. The Commune will include ten dwelling units, shared amenities, individual and shared studio spaces and shared gallery spaces for the formal exhibition of work. Since artists are sometimes single and sometimes part of family groups, the program will provide for several “modes of dwelling” within the commune. A program of 30 - 40,000 square feet on three stories is envisioned.

Site for Drawing, Dwelling, Detailing

The site for this exploration will be the “Menil Neighborhood” or “St. Thomas Neighborhood” of Houston, Texas. The complex relationship between modest residential buildings from the 1930’s and 1940’s and the many institutional and commercial structures of more recent decades will form our “context” for design.

Three Areas of Focus:

1. Zoninglessness
   
   Houston Texas is often noted for its lack of conventional zoning laws—thus permitting a mix of uses and scales unprecedented in other large cities. This mixture gives rise to a phenomenon sometimes called “heterotopia” and we will investigate the potential value of this open urban system.

2. Minimalism
   
   Among the most challenging forms of architectural expression, the design, detailing and construction of a minimal aesthetic and ethos will form another territory of exploration in our studio. We will seek the limits and meaning of “the minimum” and the challenges to normative occupation it entails.

3. Dwelling
   
   Finally, we will explore the relationship between “Building, Dwelling and Thinking” as a point of departure to proposing a communal mode of living for artists. Sometimes known as “co-housing” in contemporary literature, we will explore the deep roots of communal dwelling in both eastern and western cultural traditions.