



Numbers and Trees: Palm Canyon, Palm Trees Series 3, Tree #6, Mississippi (Detail). 2020. © Charles Gaines. Hauser & Wirth. Fredrik Nilsen

marginal landscapes *about community resilience*

Option Studio Spring 2021. Gesa Buttner Dias. MWF12:25 - 4:25 pm EST. (OL)

Cornell University – Department of Architecture

The option studio collaborates with the initiative for a Center of Community Organizing, launched by the Community Coalition (CoCo) South LA. The Center will be a place of education, exhibitions and events for the benefit of the local community of South LA.

What other place better to explore remotely than Los Angeles, city of imagery and imagination. Los Angeles is a place of dialectics, of oscillating definitions, a muse to radical art, architecture and social projects. It is a city of margins and inversions, where the dominant urban landscape, the rasterized inner city suburbs, home for the majority of the population and production, is neglected for the edges, the hillsides, beachfront and inner boundaries of the freeways. This dichotomous identity makes for a place that is both object and neutral background, a destination and a stand-in for other urban scenes. The option studio will attempt to break down this binary definition by putting the

extraordinary quality of the edge conditions in dialogue with the ordinary urban fabric of the neglected central neighborhoods. The project will be located in South LA, the geographic center of the flat plains of the inner-city suburb. South LA contains the mayor part of a contiguous, undisturbed expanse of the Jeffersonian Grid, a formation more typical of the subdivisions of mid-western cities. Most street fronts still have the patina of vernacular structures saved by disinvestment. Bound by major freeways, rail corridors, industrial land and oil fields, this is the hub of Black culture in Los Angeles, object of desire and backdrop in the complex story of the Black diaspora and its resilience in the face of racist planning and policies.

The option studio will explore Los Angeles at three scales of marginality, the landscapes at the edge of the urban agglomeration, the landscape at the edge of inner-city infrastructures, and the landscape at the

edge of a building. The project will explore an architecture of the in-between, as “a space for radical perspectives from which to see and create, to imagine alternative, new worlds.” (bell hooks. yearning. p.147)

In a first part, the studio will use workshops, student research and short design exercises to engage with the topic, location and program. We will have direct contact with our onsite partners at Coco LA, and – by the nature of this being Los Angeles – access to a wide range of visual and written documentations of the spatial and cultural context. We will study and translate Black and other visual art practices for their negotiation of material, object and context. Discussion of relevant theoretical texts will accompany the exercises.

In the second part, students will develop a design for the Center of Community Organizing at three scales. Group work is encouraged. *****This studio can be taken as ARCH 5115 Expanded Practice***