



University of Southern California School of Architecture

ARCH 402abc Topic Studio
Fall 2004 WF 2:00 to 6:00PM
Instructor: Richard Corsini, AIA

INVESTIGATIONS IN ABSTRACTION, FORM AND MEANING

Abstraction in Modern architecture by the 1960's began to lose its poetic dimension and degenerated into a realm of repetitive reductivism. The banality which resulted from this impoverished language led to the wholesale rejection of Modernism and the subsequent rise of Postmodernism in its several guises: historicism, pop, neo-traditionalism, deconstruction, etc. Now that these reactions have been questioned or rejected, it is important to expand the expressive vocabulary of abstraction in architecture in a systematic way. Can architectural abstraction match and exceed the emotive, experiential, symbolic capacity of historical representation? Can abstraction be utilized for intentions beyond criticism and dissent and toward a positive and transformative cultural impact? This issue parallels the theoretical question in contemporary painting between figuration and abstraction in the development of pictorial space: to what degree does figuration engage, before it suffocates, the viewer? To what degree does abstraction expand emotive possibilities before it dissolves them?

The focus of this topic studio will be the study and development of the language of abstraction and its application in architectural terms. Conceptual intentions and programmatic relationships between form, space, and material, manifested through structure and tectonic development will be emphasized. Readings, lectures, and discussions will focus on the communicative power of abstraction in modern and contemporary art, music, and architecture, with the goal of leading the student toward a sophisticated and personal vocabulary of expression and "making".

The studio will begin with two- and three-dimensional design assignments with various media, including digital media, to examine the relationship between intuition, intention, and material in the creative process. Various approaches to composition and process will be explored. Understanding the expressive capacity of various media will be a primary goal of this phase and serve as a stepping stone to the meaningful development of conceptual, programmatic, and tectonic expression in the final architectural project.

The architectural project will have two equal programmatic components: a large chapel and garden, to be located on a promontory in Griffith Park. Both components will be designed as equal parts of an integrated whole.

Each student will also be required to choose a primary building material at the onset of design to study its technical parameters and explore its expressive capabilities in terms of structure, construction, and tectonics for use in the project.