



## COMPOSITION

In western architecture both the traditional and modernist understanding of composition relates primarily to the geometric and formal – a classical understanding of aesthetics; as explored through *The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa*; that links Palladio with le Corbusier. We will consider composition in wider terms – aesthetic and formal certainly, but also materially, economically and programmatically. After all it is through visual and sequential composition that buildings obtain much of their power; through programmatic composition that they fulfill their economic purpose and material composition which determines their lifespan. An understanding of composition that combines all these aspects (and indeed more) will be the focus of the unit's work this year.

How can the composition of context be measured or appreciated? Can typologies and densities be understood in terms normally associated with film or graphic design? We know that material composition at the detail level will define the character of a place at the urban level, but how can the demographic composition of a city affect the composition of its architecture?

We are as interested in composition in painting, photography, music and film as we are in material science, digital modeling and construction. Through the use of composite tools – cinematography combined with model making, CNC meshed with craft and hand drawings crossbred with digital models we will explore how ideas of composition can be considered as a useful frame through which to explore the city.

We will develop these techniques into a propositional approach that will enable buildings with poise, organisational elegance and environmental efficiency.

### Project 1 - Disassembly

#### (1 wk) Identify

A composition is a collection of parts, arranged together to form a whole. It may be harmonious or it may harbor tension but it is the placement of these which lead to a proposition greater and more potent than the sum of the individual elements. The first exercise requires an analysis and disassembly to expose the core ingredients. Sited in London, an iconic view, painting, photograph, song or representation of the city will be identified and the mechanism of composition found within it.

Examples of these mechanisms may be:

- Positive and negative space
- Light and dark
- Rhythm / repetition; disarray
- Harmony and tension
- Geometric and organic forms
- Hue, brightness and saturation
- Texture and smoothness

### **(7 wks) Speculate & construct**

Drawing upon inspiration from the initial investigation a speculative proposal will be developed either a scale model or physical, inhabitable installation. Continuing the unit's preoccupation for 3 dimensional form, digital manufacturing and mixed-media, students are encouraged to engage with new production techniques as well as combining hand-crafted making and drawing.

### **Project 2 - Assembly**

We will travel to Morocco, landing in Marrakech before touring through the Atlas Desert to Fez, which will become the base for the unit's projects. En-route we will have the opportunity to visit berber villages; the spectacular Todra Gorge (20m wide, 200m deep); cedar forests and roman ruins. Arriving in Fez we will see that the city is in fact a composition of three very distinct urban forms – the 1200 year old Medina, a UNESCO World Heritage Site; the 'new' Fez, dating from the 13th Century; and the colonial city, established by the French as a regional capital in their North African empire.

Our focus will be on the Medina, a fascinating confluence of 10<sup>th</sup> century buildings, 15<sup>th</sup> century artisanal industry and 21<sup>st</sup> century politics & social media. It is the world's largest contiguous car free urban zone, and is the composite of Arab, Berber and Jewish influences, where individual buildings can be a combination of artisanal workshop, hammam, bakery and private residence. The urban form of constricted alleyways and compact squares, private courtyards and concealed service streets provides for a tight mesh of activity where the extraordinary demographic mix is held together through the use of discrete signs and the highly sophisticated composition of public and private space.

The Medina combines fantastic and unusual sites, textures, sounds, smells and noise; it is visually and aromatically sensational. Vibrant, noisy and bustling it is a city filled with a rich variety of inspiration, each combining as potential components for the building proposal. Whether these be programmatic ideas, colours, patterns or environmental requirements they will need to be sorted, organised and arranged together into a cohesive proposition - a well considered composition of all the things you have found and learnt along the way.

Project sites will be primarily located in the old medina district with the opportunity for 3rd years to explore further afield.

#### **Macro**

Upon return from Fez the first exercise will be a contextual study of the area surrounding your chosen building site. This will be an empirical survey and analysis focussing upon common themes established in the earlier project. The output may include: a series of site drawings (plans and sections); 3d physical or digital model; abstracted installation; film or animation.

This study will provide the necessary background and understanding of the environment prior to engaging in the main building project from January onwards.

#### **Micro**

A further exercise later in the term will require both 2nd and 3rd years to develop a detailed study of either a building fragment or system sited within the whole - these studies will fuel parallel exercises being undertaken within the technical modules for both years.

3rd year technical support: Andrew Best, Buro Happold

For examples of past student's work please visit [www.unit8.org](http://www.unit8.org)