Thomas Hoepker, Young People relaxing during their lunch break along the East River while a huge plume of smoke rises from Lower Manhattan after the attack on the World Trade Center, 2001, Brooklyn, New York, USA.
‘Preparing for the apocalypse’ takes you to the south of Italy, where people are confronted with millions of century-old olive trees dying due to Xylella Fastidiosa, devastating the olive groves and uprooting many traditions. In dialogue with local communities and through design research, we will explore whether architecture can help create a new future for a country that is seeing its most important heritage disappear and has to start all over again.

A design research project in which student teams explore whether and how (interior) architecture can make a positive contribution in the search for a new and sustainable future for residents of Puglia whose olive trees, once the foundation of their family, business, landscape and cultural heritage, fell victim to the Xylella Fastidiosa bacteria.

The focus will be on the interaction and relationship of the human being with the site. We seek to understand the implications of the disappearance of a natural habitat and more specifically how this affects the daily activities of inhabitants of the area. This is not necessarily about ‘building’ pure and simple, but rather on how the unique perspective and creative thinking of the future architect can help initiate long-term change by proposing short-term targeted action.

‘Preparing for the Apocalypse’ starts with a letter from the government stating that 13 weeks after receiving the letter, all olive trees on the recipient’s property will be uprooted because they are located in the 5km buffer zone that runs from coast to coast across the heel of the Italian boot.

For each felled tree, the owner will receive compensation of 1,000 euros as indemnity and as start-up capital to help establish a new tomorrow.

This assignment allows students - young future architects and designers - to delve into this topic and search for opportunities within the problem statement. They will explore and analyze their sites, situated in the 5km bufferzone, in such a way as to gain new insights into what these places were in the past and could be in the near as well as the distant future, based on the belief that a specific approach can result in a sustainable narrative. Most of this research and analyses will be done while observing and drawing. The focus of the design process is on the use and the quality of the space, exploring a personal, expressive language, the dialogue with the environment and building stronger communities.
Methodology

5 Exercises
- #1 Copycat + #2 Location Location Location + #3 Pro memoria + #4 Project + #5 Object of fascination

1 Study Trip
During the fourth week of the semester, we plan a study trip to Puglia (IT) in order to visit the affected area and the different sites in the bufferzone. We will have the chance to meet interesting people who will introduce us into the socio-cultural background of the region. We will talk to both locals and immigrants who have (recently) started businesses in traditional agriculture, tourism and property development. Additionally we’ll visit some interesting projects and cities. Besides the need to explore the area, this study trip is also a way to get to know each other. It marks the start of a promising and very exciting semester!

8 Table talks
A table talk is a moment in which we discuss with a group of students around a desk. Other students are free to participate. Students learn from each other as they operate on the same location (exercise #1) or work on the same objects (exercise #2). Both exercises will be done in small groups of 3 to 4 students.

3 Reviews
- 2 Intermediate Review + 1 Final Review
The table talks will alternate with 3 reviews in which students present their work. A review is a time in which we discuss and evaluate the individual design process of each student. The student will give a presentation of their work ‘so far’ to the other students and teachers. It is a moment of discussion and evaluation with the entire studio. One or more external guest critics from inside or outside the school will participate. For the representation of the different exercises students will use a specific presentation technique as listed below. The format of the reviews involves students gaining new insights and different perspectives through additional input from one or more experts.

At the end of every review, the student will not only be asked whether everything was clear in the talk and debate, whether other aspects are expected in the talk or debate, or whether the debate has not overruled or misunderstood the student’s ambitions and direction or goals at all. More importantly, the student is asked to briefly reformulate the criticism and if possible already formulate a certain direction the student would like to take after the criticism. The table talks and the reviews are general training methods which will be the format of education on an alternating basis. These talks and debates are considered to be oral and not the subject of a written report or any other method of reporting. It is recommended that the students help each other to repeat the talks as eventually required.

The format of the final review is similar to the format and implementation of the intermediate reviews. At the final review, several external guest critics will be invited to participate in the debate and discussions, in the presence of all students and teachers. Students are encouraged to reflect on the past semester, expressing what they learned, how they want to move forward, and how they intend to approach future projects.
This first exercise starts with the premise of the pleasure of making.

Looking at the oeuvre of artist, architect, designer & theoretician Ugo La Pietra, students make 1-to-1 copies of one of the artist's furniture or objects. By copying, they gain insight into the making process, the creation of the design and the ideas of the master designer. From this accurate and deep understanding, students are encouraged to further develop their own design methodology during the assignment, to use the acquired knowledge and insights in their own thinking and design process.

This exercise takes place in groups of 3-4 students on campus, during the first three weeks of the semester. After the study tour, the copies are presented during the first review. During these three weeks, we also simultaneously initiate the research of the different sites, we study the problems and consequences of Xylella Fastidiosa bacteria, and become familiar with the history and culture of the region.

Output:
/ 1 model scale 1:1
/ Construction drawings
/ Process documentation

#1 Copycat

W01 + W02 + W03

In group of 3-4

1_Ugo La Pietra, Vaso di Vietri ‘scaramantico’, 2008
2_Ugo La Pietra, Portadocumenti, 1998
3_Ugo La Pietra, ‘Colonna plissé’, 1987
4_Ugo La Pietra «Soggiorno urbano», via della Spiga, Milano, 1989
5_Ugo La Pietra, Genius loci, 1998
6_Ugo La Pietra, Casette, 1977-80
#2 Location Location Location

W01 + W02 + W03 + W04 + W05

In group of 4

Output:

/ 1 plan and 2 sections on a scale adapted to the size of the site.
/ 10 high-quality photos, printed and presented on the same format.
/ 1 movie of max. 2 minutes

#3 Pro Memoria

W04 + W05

In pairs

Output:

/ More information will follow

Both these exercises will mainly take place during our study trip. To build an understanding of the landscape, students will explore 5 different locations, in small groups of 4 students per location. They will analyze these locations by drawing by hand. Information will be thus collected, processed and presented through drawings and sketches.

Each student will build their narrative based on observations of the area: a collection by memory (Pro Memoria) of meaningful fragments, objects, local icons, buildings, materials or natural elements. This methodology will further initiate, guide and enrich the design process during the semester.
W07 + W08 + W09 + W10 + W11 + W12 + W13

In pairs

This exercise is the actual design assignment in which the aspiring (interior) architect learns to think about the impact of a large-scale problem on everyday life and is able to translate this into an architectural design or project.

In doing so, they seek to find an opportunity within the project as a possible answer to a complex problem statement where the use of the space, its functionality and expressiveness become important features of the design. Ideally the architectural project resonates with the other exercises.

The design process is illustrated by means of various representation techniques: the student makes hand drawings, they practice mastering plan and section, and explore the possibilities in the third dimension through model and axonometry.

Output:

/ 1 horizontal and 1 vertical section of the design ‘so far’.

/ 1 model on a scale adapted to the size of the intervention or plot. Scale is determined by the student.

/ 5 high-quality photographs of the space represented by the model; printed and presented on the same format

/ 1 axonometry
The objective of this exercise is to create an object or detail at a 1:1 scale related to the project. Taking into account the background acquired during the first exercise and the pleasure of making, the object or detail must have a strong link to the project, and will speak of use and materiality.

The exercise will take place during the last three weeks of the semester, after the intermediate critique when the project will be at an advanced stage.

Output:

/ 1 model scale 1:1
Study Trip

W04

Together with the studio of Theo De Meyer & Hilde Bouchez of - students 3rd Bachelor interior architecture of KU Leuven department Ghent (BE) - we will visit the affected area. During our field trip we will experience the rich history, the social and cultural background of the area; the overwhelming landscape.

We will have the chance to meet interesting people who will introduce us into the socio-cultural background of the area. We will talk to both locals and immigrants who have (recently) started businesses in traditional agriculture, tourism and property development.

This study trip is - in addition to the need to explore the different locations - a way to get to know each other and to learn how to work in a team. The exchange between the students from Lausanne and Ghent represents a great opportunity to learn from each other as future (interior) architects. We see traveling, eating and exchanging views together among students from different backgrounds as a unique opportunity to learn from each other and share in each other’s experiences.

During the trip time will be provided to visit certain towns and villages, such as Lecce, Serranova, Carovigno, Matera, Alberobello, Ostuni as well as certain projects of architectural and cultural interest.

1. A. Ansellini & P. Chiata, Cimitero Comunale, 1970, Parabita (IT)
2. Sassi di Matera
3. G. Pesce & C. Cardonei, Piscetrullo, 2009, Carovigno (IT)
4. O. Ponti, Concattedrale, 1970, Taranto (IT)
5. S. Musmeci, Ponte Musmeci, 1978, Potenza (IT)
Learning Objectives & Assessment Methods

Learning Objectives

Translating the original design or furniture object into a 1 on 1 copy, in which the student shows to have gained insight into both the making and the conception of this object.

Developing their own design language by learning to observe and analyze while drawing.

Participating in a collaborative project, working together with fellow students.

Understanding the complexity of the problem statement and translating this into a design opportunity.

Proposing a new program for the location, addressing the issue.

Presenting the project in a way that the student shows the ability to give a clear explanation, both verbally and non-verbally.

Reflecting on the past semester, articulating what the strengths of the design are and what could possibly be improved.

Assessment Methods

The work of the student will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

(DESIGN)

The quality of the final result of each of the 5 exercises and their graphic representation.

The extent to which the student knows how to relate the different exercises to each other.

The extent to which the student knows how to formulate a clear and relevant concept or narrative.

Fundamentals

The project studio is based on a spirit of solidarity and mutual respect in order to create and defend a safe space where everyone is free to express, or not, their identity, share their experiences and their work.

Respect and mutual attention guarantee the possibility of disagreements between each other. Each participant in the studio is expected to engage in self-moderation and to report problematic and/or oppressive behaviors, so that we can learn from our mistakes together.

Everyone taking part in the studio activities is committed to being aware of and reporting oppressive behaviors, which can manifest as: sexism, racism, xenophobia, homophobia, transphobia, classism, validism, psychophobia, ageism, judgments on clothing, origin or religion, as well as all other forms of oppression. This list is of course non-exhaustive.

The different points of the chart will be discussed, accepted, changed or added from a collective discussion between the teaching staff and the students. The charter is evolutive and can be built up over time. It aims to raise awareness of problematic situations in the context of a project studio in order to legitimize the use of dialogue to discuss these situations, and to all emerge from them stronger.

Each student is responsible for announcing, and as far as possible, justifying to the teachers and to their colleagues their absences and/or delays in order to maintain a collective dynamic and mutual support.

Teachers and assistants undertake to produce summary of instructions, or summaries of instructions, every time there is new information given in order to homogenize and clarify the work to be done. Each student undertakes to tidy up their work space and to maintain the workshop in a state that allows collective and individual work in good conditions.

Everyone agrees to consider collective values as well as their own individual interests in order to contribute to a healthy working space based on mutual support and respect.

Criticism and feedback from both teachers and students should be respectful, honest and constructive. Everyone is committed to questioning and discussing their ideas freely in order to maintain a healthy and collaborative working atmosphere.

Have fun!
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01</td>
<td>19–20 Feb</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02</td>
<td>26–27 Feb</td>
<td>Table talk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03</td>
<td>4–5 March</td>
<td>Table talk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04</td>
<td>11–12 March</td>
<td>Study Trip to Puglia (IT)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05</td>
<td>18–19 March</td>
<td>Table talk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06</td>
<td>25–26 Mar</td>
<td>Review EX#1 + EX#2 + EX#3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1–2 April</td>
<td>Holidays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07</td>
<td>8–9 April</td>
<td>Table talk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08</td>
<td>15–16 April</td>
<td>Table talk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09</td>
<td>22–23 April</td>
<td>Table talk</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>29–30 Apr</td>
<td>Mid-term Review EX#4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>6–7 May</td>
<td>Table talk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>13–14 May</td>
<td>Table talk</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>20–21 May</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>28–31 May</td>
<td>Final Review EX#4 + EX#5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>