

UE-M

Constructing Materials



Fridays, 12:30 - 18:00

AAC 120

Whether stone or concrete, plywood or timber, materials are produced not just physically but also conceptually. How we conceive of materials and their properties—what they should be used for, how long they should last, whether they are natural or artificial, cheap or noble, etc.—shifts in relation with societal concerns. How we think about materials, in short, intertwines with how we think about architecture— and infrastructure and the city—as well as how it is built, occupied and maintained, demolished and disassembled.

This course examines conceptual constructions of materials and their significance for architecture. We will consider materials not just from design to build but within a longer process of extraction, development, inhabitation, and demolition. In doing so, we will also draw on a variety of sources from related disciplines such as anthropology, gender theory, art and art history, and environmental history.

We will do so while getting our hands dirty, considering physical properties of the material directly while conducting discussions to put in conversation the concrete and the abstract. Several trips around the region will be organized to see materials in action at all phases of their life from extraction to waste. We will guide student-led research projects in which you will deploy architectural tools to critically describe material conditions.

The aims of the course are to explore the agency of materials, the preconditions that materials put on architecture (and how these might be appropriated or subverted in individual projects), and how material notions and materials themselves mutate over time.

Instructors:
Prof. Sarah Nichols
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Image: Building material demonstration at ETH D-Arch, 1946