

NOH PLACE

ARCH 4101 - FALL 2021 SYLLABUS

Thomas Forget, Associate Professor: tforget@uncc.edu
University of North Carolina at Charlotte, School of Architecture
5 Credit Hours: M/W/F 2:00 - 5:15 pm
Storrs 255



Chikanobu Toyohara: *Noh Theater* (1881)

PREMISE

This studio is a design-research project conducted in close collaboration with Theatre Nohgaku, an international theater company based in Japan devoted to sustaining and evolving the world's oldest continuing theater art still in practice today: Noh. This classical form of Japanese theater involves drama, dance, elaborate costumes and masks, and a precise architectural condition: stages are required to adhere to precise measurements and specifications.

Theatre Nohgaku is distinguishing itself among theater companies that practice Noh in two ways: first, it is dedicated to expanding the traditional boundaries of the art by creating plays in English and by confronting the contemporary relevance of the theses and practices of the traditional art form; second, it emphasizes the practice of Noh over the performance of Noh.

Our objective in this studio is to create project proposals that further their ambition to construct a practice center in Japan. The group is considering two types of sites: one urban, one rural. Students will develop design iterations for both types of sites, using potential actual sites for context.

METHODS

Aligning with Japanese tradition and contemporary culture, project proposals will be resolved at both the spatial and the tectonic level, in a highly integrated manner. The work will include large scale models that leverage the assets of the labs in Storrs, as well as meticulous drawings and experimental videos that promote the agenda of the studio and the theater company.

The center will include: a practice stage and auxiliary spaces built to precise specifications; two apartments to be occupied full time by founding members of Theatre Nohgaku; housing for 16-to-20 people in quad-plexes, to be used by Theatre Nohgaku members and guests during practice seasons, and by tourists (in an Airbnb manner) during off-seasons in order to generate revenue to sustain year-round operating expenses; and a public space for community events, and perhaps a revenue-generating cafe. In addition, the urban and rural settings allow for different ways to add complementary program elements suggested by students.

A distinguishing quality of Noh is that its audience space is directly connected to its performance space, without the normal barrier of a curtain. Because this project is a practice center without an audience space, an opportunity arises to rethink that traditional relationship to address a significant challenge of this endeavor:

Japanese culture maintains that projects of this type must contribute to society, which means Theatre Nohgaku cannot simply raise money and build what they want where they want. They must approach a municipality with an argument about the value of their proposal. Our work, therefore, is to contribute materials that help further that argument: compelling materials that demonstrate both the architectural and the social merit of the idea of the center.

That said, the group also needs to raise funding, and the materials produced in this studio will also contribute to that fundraising goal. In this sense, the studio straddles the material, social, and economic dimensions of architectural practice. We are tasked with devising an argument both for a building and for its societal value. Throughout the process, students will engage with Theatre Nohgaku members in Japan and around the world through video conferences. One of the founding members, Professor Gary Matthews at NCSU, will be a valuable local asset in our research.

NOH

Noh offers us multiple sources of inspiration: its theatrical themes, which traditional, help us to reflect upon contemporary issues, in particular the role of masks and costumes in the practice of Noh; its association with dance engages human movement and occupation of space; its aesthetic, at once both austere and richly detailed, challenges us to develop complexity within simplicity; its integration of the form and content ask us to consider how architecture, too, is an integration of the material and the immaterial; and, through the work of Theatre Nohgaku, it demonstrates the power of cross-cultural exchange without the trappings of appropriation.



Precedents for urban site: SO&CO; Ando; Azuma; Ashihara



Precedents for rural site: Karuizawa; Kuzushima



Program precedent: Nippon Kyodo Kikaku Architectural Design Office: Tessenkai Noh Laboratory Theater, Tokyo (1983)