

HARLEM PORTALS: Art, Culture and Architecture



STUDIO DESCRIPTION

Advanced Architectural Design II (aka the Harlem Semester Studio) engages different art institutions, local communities, spatial dynamics, and urban conditions in Harlem. We will explore the histories and futures of this world-renowned place that has also been the quintessential center for African-American life and culture and for the African diaspora. At play in this historically distinct part of upper Manhattan are interconnected communities and spaces of art, culture, religion, and activism. Their transformations, or persistence as distinct yet diverse social and urban moments, reflect as well as refract the complex forces shaping the everchanging New York City. Somewhat controversially, amongst (or despite) various economic and real-estate pressures: tall housing towers, mega chain-stores, expanding university campuses, etc., Harlem seems to thrive. Depending on who one asks, it can often simultaneously be described: as a local cultural hub; as a cosmopolitan city; as a neighborhood of black and diasporic experience; as a lost and gentrified neighborhood; as an activist place; as an artistic, jazz, gospel theater; as a dense multi-ethnic-religious community, as an integral part of New York, etc. Within these diverse, and potentially conflicting or complementary networks, we will explore what opportunities exist, or can be leveraged, to sustain and advance Harlem's rich legacies and dynamic futures.

The studio will partner with The Apollo Theater in Harlem. Students will design an expanded annex next to Apollo's current facilities between 125th & 126th street. Combining specific assignments that incorporate cultural research, urban analyses and design, students will develop an in-depth architectural proposal for a multi-story building. The collective aim of the studio projects will be to explore what architectural design may offer to understand and to reimagine Harlem's portals of art, culture and architecture.