This poster presents research to integrate culture into the design process and studio, undertaken with fourth year undergraduate BFA and Liberal Arts Architectural Studies students.

“Culture” (exists in architecture) in two senses. One relates to activities that are often understood as specific to architecture. The other is inextricably connected to the realm of human existence and demarcates the ways in which human life differentiates itself from nature. Taken in isolation each is potentially problematic – holding to the exclusivity of the culture of architecture denies its presence as part of human society, while thinking of “culture” can be fraught when used as an instrument of chauvinism or nationalist myths of origin, we recognize that it is also what gives depth to our societies and sense of being in the world.

The International Style was a call to neutralize what was viewed as the idiosyncrasies of the historical and the regional—i.e. culture—and to impose an abstract “functional” aesthetic. Since the 1980’s Critical Regionalism has stood as a strong critique of the International Style as well as the more superficial tendencies of Post-Modernism. (Frampton, Kenneth. “Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six points for an Architecture of Resistance” in The Anti-Aesthetic, essays on Postmodern Culture edited by Hal Foster. Bay Press, 1983.) However, methods for achieving a cultural awareness of sufficient depth to practice Critical Regionalism effectively, is often neglected in architectural education. Architectural precedents are often the extent of the research, which, while rich, overlook deeper considerations that only emerge from a broader historical study, not only of material culture but of modes of thought, social structures, rituals and even policy.

Our pedagogical goal was to provide a studio condition in which this interface of architecture and culture could be explored in an accessible and fruitful way. We developed an assignment sequence where research topics and readings segued into analytical writing and diagramming, then further into making exercises. In this way, students “channeled” the thought processes, techniques and values embodied in the individuals, artifacts or issues they were examining. Initially students researched an artist or designer and selected one artifact from that artist for analysis, be it a ceramic vessel, a paper lantern, a woven basket, a dress, etc. Students ruminated on the processes, patterns, and materiality of their objects as the starting point in a three-dimensional making exercise combining bamboo skewers, fuel tube and paper. Subsequently, students are introduced to a specific site and cultural program to develop a project proposal enriched by the cultural awareness acquired.
INTEGRATING CULTURAL RESEARCH INTO THE DESIGN STUDIO

Naomi Darling – Fire College Assistant Professor
(Kaplan University, M. K. Muyse College, University of Massachusetts, Amherst)
Ray Knojiidr Mann – Associate Professor University of Massachusetts, Amherst

This poster proposes research to integrate culture into the design process and studio, undertaken with fourth year undergraduate BFA and Liberal Arts Architectural Studies students.

"Culture" (architecture) in architecture in two ways. One relates to activities that we have often understood as specific to architecture. The other is the interdisciplinarity of human existence and differentiates itself from nature. It is held to the explanatory of the culture of architecture and in its presence as part of human society. While people think of architecture is nothing other than cultural practice and not the construction of understanding of, for example, the way different materials make different effects within architectural practice. What matters is the culture of the understanding of one another in – perhaps should – intrude into the other.
(http://architecture.com/articles/essay-architecture-and-cultural)

THE CULTURE OF ARCHITECTURE VS. ARCHITECTURE AS A PART OF CULTURE

In the mode of Comparative Literature or Cultural Studies, we introduced a project that would provide both a window into another culture and a test for our own. Accepting that "culture" can be fraught when used as an instrument of chauvinism or nationalized myths of origin, we recognize that it is also what gives depth to our societies and sense of being in the world.

The International Style was a call to neutralize what was viewed as the idiosyncrasies of the historical and the regional – i.e. culture – and to impose an abstract "functionalitarian" aesthetic. Since the 1980's Critical Regionalism has stood as a strong critique of the International Style as well as the more superficial tendencies of Post-Modernism. (Frampton, Kenneth. "Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance" in The Anti-Aesthetic, essays on Postmodern Culture edited by Hal Foster. Bay Press, 1983.) However, methods for achieving a cultural awareness of sufficient depth to practice Critical Regionalism effectively is often neglected in architectural education. Architectural precedents are often the focus of the research, which, while rich, overlook deeper considerations that only emerge from a broader historical study, not only of material culture but also of the modes of thought, social structures, rituals and even politics.

Our pedagogical goal was to provide a studio condition in which these interfaces of architecture and culture could be explored in an accessible and fruitful way. We developed an assignment sequence where research topics and readings segued into analytical writing and diagramming, then further into making exercises. In this way, students "channelled" the thought processes, techniques and values embodied in the individuals, artefacts or issues they were examining. Initially students researched an artist or designer and selected one artifact from that artist for analysis, be it a ceramic vessel, a paper lantern, a woven basket, a dress, etc. Students summarized on the processes, patterns, and mentality of their objects as the starting point in a three-dimensional making exercise combining bamboo skewers, fuel tube and paper. Subsequently, students were introduced to a specific site and cultural program to develop a project proposal enriched by the cultural awareness acquired.