

Suzanne Lettieri
Assistant Professor
Cornell University
College of Architecture, Art, and Planning

“Critical Pathways”
Diversity Achievement Award Submission
ACSA 2023 Architectural Education Awards

Supporting Material

Foregrounding Background (2022)

-Institution: Cornell University Vertical Studio

-Partner: University of Michigan ArcPrep with Detroit Public Schools

Painting Public Surfaces #1 (2022)

-Institution: Cornell University

-Partner: Science and Technology Entry Program (STEP)

Imagining Material Realities (2023)

-Institution: Cornell University

-Partner: 4H

Painting Public Surfaces #2 (2023)

-Institution: Cornell University

-Partner: Science and Technology Entry Program (STEP) and Ithaca High School

School's Out (2023)

-Institution: Cornell University

-Science and Technology Entry Program (STEP) and Ithaca High School

User Profiles (2020-ongoing)

-Institution: Fashion Institute of Technology, Cornell University

-Partner: Urban Assembly Maker Academy High School (New York City)

Prom Picture (2018)

-University of Michigan ArcPrep

-Detroit Public School Students.

Painting Public Surfaces #1

August 2022.

As part of the Cornell University Science and Technology Entry Program (STEP), local high school students engaged with Cornell Department of Architecture's &Lab led by Lettieri to explore a prototypical design project which introduced the idea of design mentorship in which local high school students worked with university students studying Art and Architecture, and together explored a design challenge about visual access, pattern, color, and surface in the public realm. The program exposed high school students to educational enrichment opportunities in STEM and licensed professions.

In the two-day workshop students developed independent patterns based on their personal affinities as well as a collective drawing that was translated into a 1:1 painted installation on "Sibley Beach." Individual patterns were chroma-keyed onto the collective painting, designed in conjunction with Lettieri and AAP mentors. The students pattern-making exercises were prefaced by a discussion with Judith Byfield who shared her research on the Adire production of textiles and patterns in Abeokuta, Nigeria.





The design challenge included three phases:

1. Research: Students engaged with the meaning of color and pattern in relationship to their personal identities and intuitive design tendencies through explorations in color, shape, scale.

2. Design and fabrication: Students designed individual and collective patterns in conjunction with AAP mentors. This phase included Photoshop and collaborative drawing workshops. High school students were exposed to the process and tools that designers use to make digital designs into physical reality.

3. Installation: On campus “site survey” (measuring) and site preparation were conducted for the painted installation. Together we painted a new ground surface! The project established a framework of rules and operations that are suggestive of design processes that are typically taught in a fundamental architecture course at a college level. The final result is a collaboration between high school students and university-level students of architecture serving as mentors.

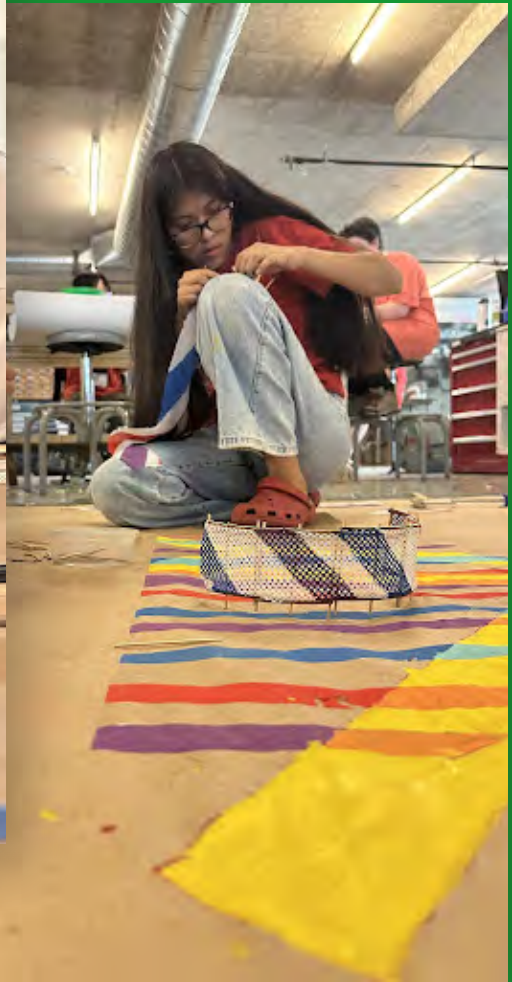


In teams, students coordinated and negotiated an advanced choreography of instructions to intersect multiple figural loops. The procedures and manuals employed served as an analog to construction drawings and the practice of architecture.

Imagining Material Realities

June 2023.

This two day workshop introduced the poetics of graphic prints and architectural design to high school students who collaborated with university students studying Art and Architecture. Together students and faculty critically investigated visual access in public spaces through site-specific installations on the Cornell Arts Quad. Participants embarked on material investigations of mesh guided by research into pattern, color, and surface in the public realm. Designs were informed by artifacts that inspire us and color theory to be then reproduced via printmaking techniques. Collective actions transformed the material into temporary landmarks. Students considered site, strategically placing our landmark installations to best utilize the sun in a play of light and shadow. Our process reflected holistic practices that stitch architecture, art, and humanities.



Students explored a set of provided design cues, expanding and redefining them to create iterations of lawn painting and pavilion models that were handed on to their high school colleagues in future workshops.

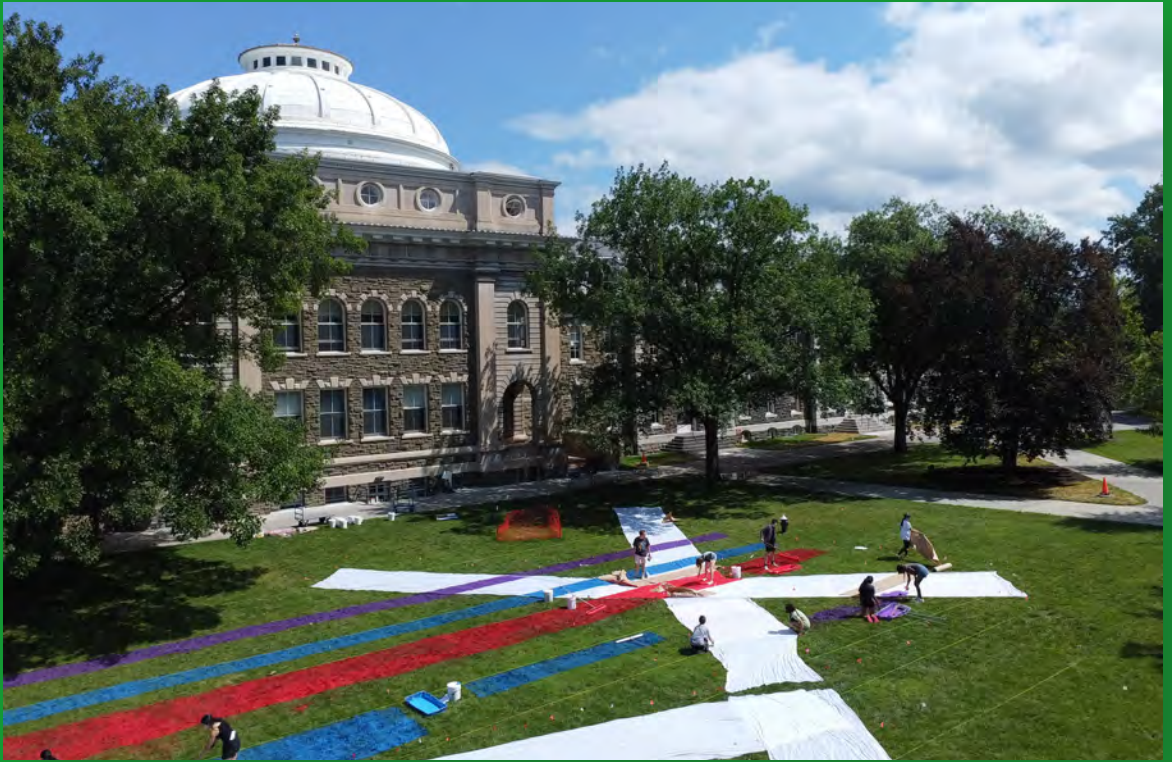
Painting Public Surfaces (#2)

July 2023.

As part of the Cornell University Science and Technology Entry Program (STEP), local high school students engaged with Cornell Department of Architecture's &Lab led by Lettieri to explore a prototypical design project which introduced the idea of design mentorships in which local high school students worked with university students studying Art and Architecture, and together explored a design challenge about visual access, pattern, color, and surface in the public realm. The program exposed high school students to educational enrichment opportunities in STEM and licensed professions.

In it's second running, Painting Public Surfaces served as a link between the preceding workshop, Imagining Material Realities, and the subsequent pavilion construction, School's Out. 4-H students in the Imagining Material Realities workshop created a series of design iterations that were used to create the final design for students in the Science, Technology, and Engineering Program (STEP) to construct. The design, leveraging desire lines dictated by STEP students, refer to the diagonal paths prevalent across Cornell's Arts Quad. A series plywood sheets and fabric swaths used during the construction of the lawn painting were reused soon after for the construction of the School's Out pavilion.





Materials including plywood sheets and fabric mesh employed in the painting of the lawn became components of the structure and skin of the subsequent pavilion, School's Out, constructed with the same group of high school students.

2023 Architectural Education Awards / Diversity Achievement: Critical Pathways



Cornell architecture students collaborated with and guided the STEP high school creating an exchange of architectural expertise and a platform for informal mentorship to occur.

School's Out

August 2023.

Developing links to previous workshops, the pavilion is a collection of outdoor classrooms exploring the capacity of “placeholding” in architecture: how design tactics, including the use of new media and technology, might leave space, both physical and conceptual, for participants and publics to engage on their own terms; thus expanding and democratizing architecture’s role as a device for inclusion. The installation is a lightweight wood structure and painted fabric. Its form, construction logic, and aesthetic qualities will introduce architectural thinking that empowers students to engage with their built environments (for example the painting of the fabric). Important to the project is co-making the space with high school students, providing them the opportunity to occupy space and be positively acknowledged in an esteemed environment. Harnessing the knowledge developed during the Imagining Material Realities workshop two months prior and working with the materials used to create Painting Public Surfaces, School’s Out leaves a conceptual and material index of the high schools who co-created the work on the Cornell University Arts Quad to be viewed and inhabited throughout Fall 2023.



The pavilion occupies the intersection between several walking paths on Cornell University’s Arts Quad, residing directly to the south of the Painting Public Surface lawn painting. As the grass slowly grew out and the painting disappeared, the pavilion emerged. Coincidentally, due to the misalignment of academic calendars, the high school students were present on campus to erect the pavilion as college students returned to campus, offering the high schools opportunities to engage with Cornell students whose interest in the project prompted informal conversations with the high school students who were given the opportunity to explain the project; thus, building confidence and developing ownership of the project.



Above: STEP high schools students building the structural walls of the pavilion on campus.
Below: Cornell classes being held in the pavilion (visible through the translucent skin).



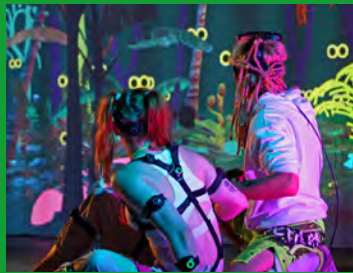
2023 Architectural Education Awards / Diversity Achievement: Critical Pathways

Foregrounding Background

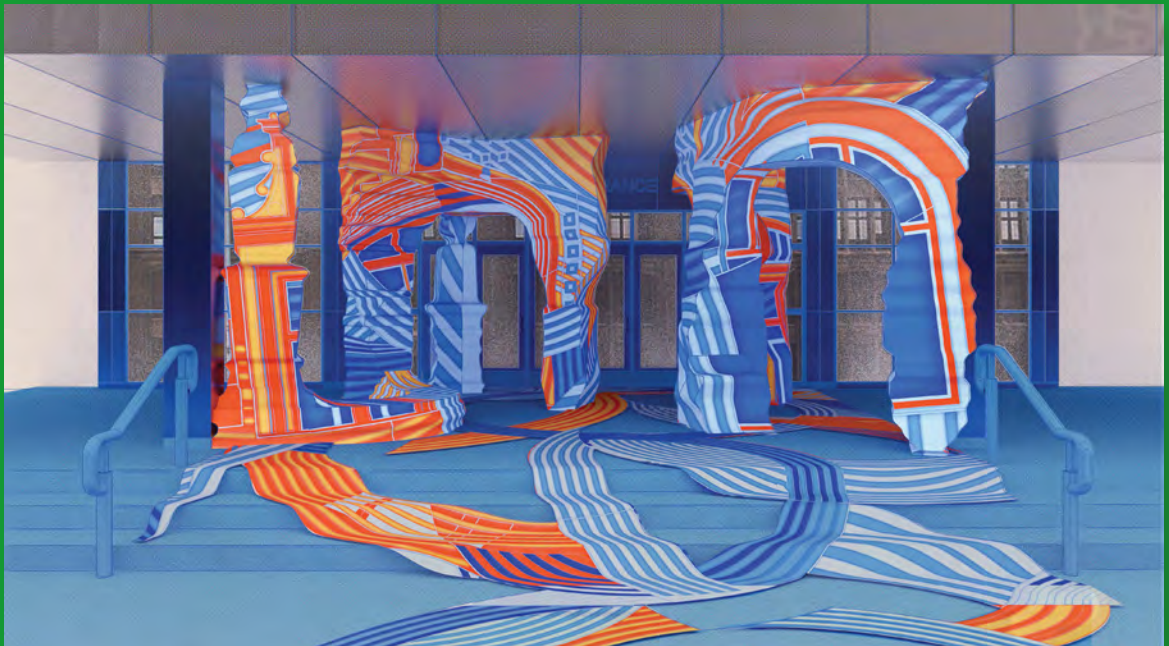
Teaching. August-December 2022.

Backgrounds, operating as aesthetic instruments, have the capacity to envelop inhabitants in an environment that amplifies personal style, defines identity, and projects alternative futures. Contrary to the object, the background – as part of a secondary perceptual realm and subconscious context – offers surreptitious opportunities for imparting personality, emotion, and agency within a space.

The studio grapples with questions of context and interface. What is a nuanced relationship between a community and the city in which it resides? And, at more extreme scales, between an individual and the larger social systems they inhabit? The contexts that individuals and communities are shaped by are the background conditions, conventions, and built environments they inhabit in visceral and corporeal as well as hidden ways. In reconsidering background, both conceptually and literally, the studio focuses on how latent backgrounds (those present in our domestic, real-world spaces and those that curate our digital selves alike) provide means of expression, identity, and agency to facilitate and activate participation, identity formation, and community.



Above: Peter Campus experiments with chromakey (left). Theo Triantafyllidis' *Anti-Gone*, merges IRL performance with virtual settings (middle). Robert Adam's *Etruscan Room* blurs wallpaper, furniture, and architecture (right).
Below: A virtual review between Cornell University students (in Ithaca) and Detroit high schools students (in Ann Arbor).



Student work from *Foregrounding Background* virtually occupied sites explored during a field trip to Detroit with local high school students. The installations sought to latch onto architectural elements from these sites and develop hybrid physical-digital objects to be inhabited locally and create connections beyond in virtual space.



The final review of the studio included the construction of a temporary green screen set that cast both students and critics into a collective virtual environment projected in the space. Consequently, the typical oppositional setup of students and critics “facing off” was dismantled as they occupied a shared virtual space together, prompting new forms of dialogue and conversation.

User Profiles

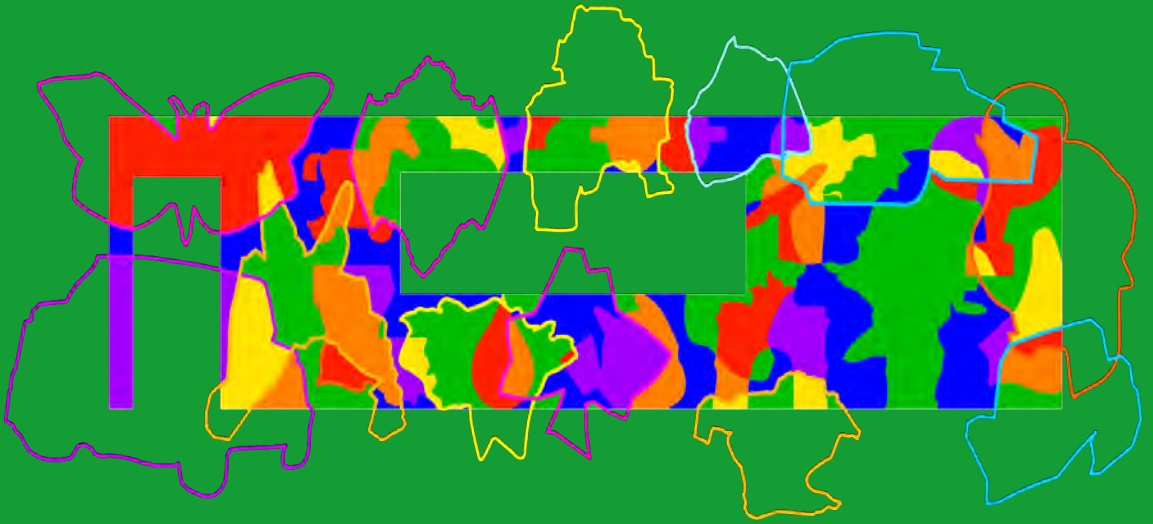
Teaching/Practice. 2020

Ongoing work supported by 2023 New York Council of the Arts Grant.

“User Profiles” broadens the definition of equitable design by working within the high school environment of Urban Assembly Maker Academy (UAMA) to co-create a chroma-keyable (blue and green screened) three-dimensional wallpaper for and with students that reconfigures the classroom learning experience. Conceived as a celebration of the way students envision, image, and project themselves, our project aims to foster inclusivity by developing architectural literacy and framing positive exchanges between diverse New York City-based high school students and architecture. While serving as a photography documentation space that accommodates display and storage needs of UAMA, the installation doubles as a scenographic display of colorful pop architectural objects. In this role it functions as a space of encounter and assembly. As a place for teenagers to gather and express themselves it is further amplified as an instrument for self expression by the green and blue screen backdrops which can be digitally substituted according to the students’ taste and vibe.



Following workshops occurring during Spring 2023, students worked together to create a mural comprised of profiles that had been generated in a series of exercises. The hyper saturated colors presented in the mural offered the opportunity for future work in the classroom to use the mural as a chromakeyed backdrop, allowing for the colors to be substituted with virtual wallpapers amplifying the students’ presence and agency within the space.



2023 Architectural Education Awards / Diversity Achievement: Critical Pathways

Prom Picture

Design Research. 2018.

The presentation of projects featured here was born out of research conducted while a Michigan-Mellon Fellow in Egalitarianism and the Metropolis at the University of Michigan.

In tapping into the American phenomenon of high school prom and the social media ecology surrounding it, Prom Picture enlists contemporary image culture as a foil to envision a culture of its own. The project constructs an image that is both unique to the prom-goer while celebrating the larger collective and emerging cultural phenomenon surrounding prom in Detroit. The installation features a set of physical chroma-keyed objects upon which patterns generated by an image-based algorithm are mapped. The three-dimensional, chroma-keyed backdrop allows Prom-goers to thoroughly imagine their aesthetic sensibilities by customizing their environment through digital overlay.



Students selected a series of styled patterns and colors that were merged with a physical set piece using AI technology. Digitally, these montaged patterns were applied to generate a set of photos that amplified the prom-goers style and character. Physical elements of the monocolored green screen set blended with the digital image, collapsing real and virtual and working between the realms of scenography, photography, and architecture.

Collaborations

Project Title: Painting Public Surfaces (Version 1)

Month/Year Completed: July 2022

Role of Nominee (in the project): Workshop Instructor and Co-principle of Jefferson-Lettieri Office (two-person design/research practice).

Collaborators & Funding Sources Expenses: 4H Career Exploration and Science & Technology Entry Program. STEP is a paid internship for high school students funded through the NY State Education Department. Funding support for the project also came from nominee's research funding and the nominee's grant from The President's Council of Cornell Women (PCCW).

Student Compensation: 1 Cornell student worked as a design/research assistant for 20 hours. Paid through the nominee's faculty research funding.

Project Title: Painting Public Surfaces (Version 2)

Month/Year Completed: August 2023

Role of Nominee (in the project): Workshop Instructor and Co-principle of Jefferson-Lettieri Office (practice which completed the installation).

Collaborators & Funding Sources Expenses: Science & Technology Entry Program. This is a paid internship for high school students funded through the NY State Education Department. Funding support for the project came from the AAP College, and the Art and Architecture Dpt.

Student Compensation: 4 Cornell students worked as paid design/build assistants for 12 hours each. Paid through the nominee's faculty research funding.

Project Title: School's Out

Month/Year Completed: August 2023

Role of Nominee (in the project): Workshop Instructor and Co-principle of Jefferson-Lettieri Office (practice which completed the installation).

Collaborators & Funding Sources Expenses: Science & Technology Entry Program. This is a paid internship for high school students funded through the NY State Education Department. Funding support for the project also came from the nominee's Cornell Council for the Arts grant, the nominee's grant from The President's Council of Cornell Women (PCCW), AAP College, and the Art and Architecture Dpt.

Project Title: Foregrounding Background: Perceptions, Identities, Space

Month/Year Completed: December 2022

Role of Nominee (in the project): Advanced Option Studio Instructor

Collaborators & Funding Sources Expenses: Mellon funding from the seminar co-taught with Karen Pinkus, Mellon Design Justice Workshop: Community/Engagement: Methods for Critical Theory paid for student travel, lodging and field trip related expenses.

Student Compensation: 12 students contributed to this project for 6-credit hours.

Project Title: User Profiles

Month/Year Completed: June 2023

Role of Nominee (in the project): Workshop Instructor

Collaborators & Funding Sources Expenses: Urban Assembly Maker Academy Students were paid through NYC Board of Education Internship Program.

Student Compensation: Cornell students worked as paid design/research assistants for 15 hours each. Paid through the nominee's faculty research funding.