a place for creation  artisans' retreat

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This thesis is a study of separation, asking the question of whether the act of separation can elevate the composition of material, space, and light to awaken the mind, eye, and soul. The vehicle for this study is an artisans' retreat placed on the ridge line of Brush Mountain located in Blacksburg, Virginia. This project explores the idea of separation and the moments it creates at many scales: man to nature, maker to made, public to private, structure to skin, and detail to whole. This project consists of two lines. One houses the makers and one supports the place for the making, consisting of studio spaces for sculpting, painting, and creating ceramics. Lastly, this project contains two other structures for the public to partake in the celebration of the creations: an outdoor amphitheater and a gallery which displays current and past work of resident artists.
To my wife, Denise, whose sacrifices have not gone unnoticed. Thank you for your love, patience, and vision. To my children, Peyton, Jayden, and Graisen who can now stop asking “when is Daddy coming home?”
a place for creation
artisan retreat

separation

place
- finding the path
- early sketches
- the site
- master plan
- place of entering
- place of entering
- place of dining
- place of work

visual autonomy
- dialogue of parts
- the floor
- the base
  - the studios
  - housing units
- the structure
- the envelope

composition
- path entrance
- sculptor studio and gallery
- sculpture garden
- plaza to studios
- path; reflection pool
- housing units and painter studio

conclusion

bibliography
The geometries, both regular and irregular, were separated to create place. Early sketches helped to determine how much separation was needed. It is possible to have too much separation and lose the intention. When the separation was too large, the moment or feeling of place was lost. Another intention of the retreat was to keep a close connection between working and living. As depicted in this sketch, too much separation can take that connection away. A resident is less likely to feel connection with the housing units core. The regular geometry of the housing units serve as a line and formal reference point for the entire retreat. Separating the irregular geometry of the studios allowed for a harmony between the two. However, if this separation is too much, this harmony is lost. The regular geometry of the housing units sets the reference point for the entire retreat. Everything else plays off of this point, reminiscent of notes on a staff of sheet music. These early sketches helped to determine where these harmonies were lost and found.
early sketches: finding the path
Through separation of the Architectural elements, the use of perspective, rhythm, material, light, boundary, and termination can be invoked to create place.

“I see Architecture not as a form that contains space, but as an experience, a passage.”

Maya Lin

sketches: linear rhythm of work and rest
early sketches: place of gathering
At the instance of light hitting water that is contained by a positioned wall, place is awakened by the dynamic quality of light.

early sketches: place of water and light
"I see Architecture not as a form that contains space, but as an experience, a passage."

Maya Lin
I see Architecture not as a form that contains space, but as an experience, a passage.

Maya Lin
place
the site

The mountain is the place of the earth’s noblest boundaries. It possesses a moment of achievement for one who challenges the hardship of the journey to the peak. The mountain once conquered, reveals the softness of the trees mapped along the earth’s hardened edges and the grandness of views of the land beyond. A place for reflection on the journeys of the past and the inspiration for the ideas of the future, the ridge line becomes the threshold between the earth and the sky. A moment is created to recognize the distance between man and nature, and presents an instance to walk between the two. This ridge line provides the place for creation, the place for the movement from the maker to the made, and the place for art to begin.
**place of gathering**

*view of the fire pit behind the ceramics studio:*

A place is created from the separation between the painting and the ceramics studio. These buildings, along with the existing forest, position a boundary to help create the place. The fire pit is placed strategically to help draw people into a gathering for warmth.
view from the housing entry to the painters’ studio entry:

A view of the surrounding woods is unveiled by separating the painter studio and ceramics studio. Bamboo planters, structural shading elements, and the direction of the stone path taper the entry space to produce a framed view of the surrounding woods.
Place to dine and look over the mirror finish of the reflecting pool is made to create a pause along the path. The sound of water rolling off the reflecting pool is experienced, as views of the painters' studio, ceramics studio, and housing units converge into the forest beyond. Bamboo planters and a stone threshold define the special limits.
Through the extension of the structural elements, an exterior workspace is created. This workspace is defined by a stone floor and a perforated metal canopy to provide relief from the sun. A reflecting pool and water wall provide the "garden" with sound and ambiance.

Along the north wall, an external corridor leads from the gallery to the artist's studio. A layer of fast-growing plants separates the space from the plaza below. On the other side, the surrounding walls define the boundary.
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Creating visual autonomy

The walls speak not of enclosure but rather inform the space with elements of threshold, texture, direction, depth, and shadow.
The idea of separation is introduced to give autonomy to the elements and presence to the place; making one aware of the beauty of material, space, and light. This project is ordered by a rhythm made along a linear path that is derived from the geometry of the site. The created path is a sequence of movements that are influenced by the tapering of space and volume. Separation is employed at many scales generating the order of the structures to the connection of the structure to the earth.

**Man to Nature:** The first act of separation is made by carving the land. At this moment, a void in the woods is created to make way for the built environment and views of the surrounding scenery.

**Public to Private:** The separation of a public realm from a private realm is mediated by a vertical change in the elevation of the amphitheater and provides a threshold into the project.

**Maker and Making:** The place of rest is separated from the place of work yielding moments for circulation, gathering, and reflection.

**Structure and Skin:** The structure and skin are differentiated creating opportunities for the direction of material to influence the space’s texture and rhythm of shadow.
Separation of two architectural elements also allows for programmatic requirements to be part of the architecture. This establishes a hierarchy between the architectural elements and the programmatic needs. For example, separating the housing units from the studios creates a path, which provides the circulation throughout the retreat.

**Dialogue of parts**

Through the separation of parts, opportunities are created such as differentiation of volumes, ordering of utilities, introduction of light, and awareness of the assembly.

- **base**
- **utility box**
- **structure**
- **envelope**

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**View**

- (3) 2x12 composite beam
- 6' structural insulated panels
- bolts and spacers
- (4) 2x6 column assembly
- 2nd pouring
- connection assembly
- concrete base
- reflecting pool rock garden

**Path**

**Rest**

**Work**
The floor of the painters’ studio addresses various elements including the direction of material, and the scale, threshold, and path. The floor is used most commonly as a threshold distinguishing the interior from the exterior. As shown in the painter’s studio, the floor passes under the glass wall to emphasize the extension of space. The floor consists of two types of material. Concrete is used for the collective work area and the path. To add warmth the material for the individual work area is wood. The scales of the floor material define place and help differentiate the room. The orientation of the wood helps to extend the visual perception of space throughout the studio.
the base

Being made of poured-in-place concrete, the base interacts with the wooden structure at various levels throughout the retreat. The base rises up to meet the structure and envelope to bring awareness to the point of separation to the visual eye. The contrast of the cold concrete heightens the awareness of the wood’s warmth. By providing a softer material in this manner, it provides a more comfortable and personal experience for the resident.

The remaining structures concrete bases allow for the insertion of wooden storage units as well as providing a resting place for the structure and envelope. By articulating the base a place is created by the articulation of the base to receive these crafted wooden inserts. As with the housing units base, these bases are separated to provide storm water control, a place for entry and threshold, and warmth for creation.

1. concrete base  2. wood flooring  3. wood storage units  4. wood counter top  5. wood utility box  6. wood work top  7. concrete termination wall
The base of the housing units contain a concrete base that cradles the wooden housing pods. By providing separate bases for each housing unit, a sense of individuality and privacy is achieved. A place of entry and threshold is also created by the separation of the concrete bases at every two housing units. And lastly, a place for storm water control is created through the separation of housing units right beside each other. By continuing the design of the cold concrete meeting the warmth of the wood structure, the resident feels the warmth for living.
the structure

By separating the structure, a rhythmic order to the volume is created. This suggests a place for individual work, as well as a place for collective work such as classes. In the center of the separated work areas, the structure creates a place for path. The place for path is created by separating the proportioned structures within and extending out from the studio. The structure yields allowing light to enter the studio through the path. At the point of entry into the painters studio, and individual can walk through the studio in its entirety terminating with an outdoor work area. At the entry point, the structure extends beyond the footprint of the base of the studio to establish the path, mark the entrance, and provide a shading element. Structure, by its nature, possess qualities of rhythm, direction, depth, and texture. The separation of the structural elements brings the architectural elements that are often hidden in the wall assembly. As portrayed in the painters' studio, the structure's mass is differentiated into multiple parts. Doing this provides a means to present order, place, light, shadow, and direction of volume.

structure informs the scale of the space

structure yields creating a place for path and light

1. copper skin  2. wood window frame  3. door-2x4 assembly  4. exhaust fan  5. ventilation louvers  6. metal window frame  7. perils
**The Envelope**

"In Architecture, there are two basic possibilities of spatial composition: the closed architectural body which isolates space within itself, and the open body which embraces an area of place that is connected with endless continuum."

*Peter Zumthor*

The envelope generally provides enclosure, shelter, and view. It also acts as a mediator for light. By opening the envelope at the ends, top, and sides, various elements are created and/or controlled. As depicted by the painter’s studio, glass walls are placed at each end of the studio. This is done for the following reasons: to continue visual movement, to free up the sense of containment, to blur the line between the interior and the exterior, for ventilation purposes, and to control light.

Louvres are placed in the glass wall at the lowest volume of the studio. These louvres allow air to pass through the glass wall, continue through the space, and exit through an exhaust located at the highest volume of the opposite glass wall.

Light is controlled through openings of the envelope at not only the end glass walls, but at the side walls and ceiling. The side walls are framed with steel, which passes through the envelope. This provides an element of transition. Skylights are placed at the top of the folded surface creating a rhythm of shadows throughout the studio.

1. copper skin  
2. wood window frame  
3. door-2x4 assembly  
4. exhaust fan  
5. ventilation louvres  
6. metal window frame  
7. perkins  
8. skylight  
9. volume
I see Architecture not as a form that contains space, but as an experience, a passage.

Maya Lin
early sketches: perspective studies of sequence of the path
Through composition of the architectural elements, the use of perspective, rhythm, material, light, boundary, and termination can be invoked to compose moments.

"An architect is a composer. Truly his greatest act is that of composing and not designing"

Louis Kahn
Composition

Path, entrance: perspective moving from the public realm to the place of the artist

The path is made by the separation of the elements of work and rest. The path extends outward along the rolling ridge of the mountain with a forty foot change in elevation and receives the public as they move throughout the retreat. The transverse orientation of the stone path is bordered with longitudinal stones, which slow down the visual movement along the forced perspective. Moments are composed along the path with elements to compress and release space. This makes forced perspectives and emphasizes places with sound and light. To the right of the path, a bed of weathered stones articulate the meeting between the path and the housing units. Extending from the public realm of parking to the artisan’s community, the left side of the path meets towering concrete walls. These walls are punctured to allow a rhythm of light and shadow marking the path.
composition

View of circulation through the separation of the sculptors’ studio and gallery

Perpendicular movement from the path to the surrounding woods is defined by a polished concrete wall of water and a tapering bamboo planter which leads to the plaza level. The visual axis is terminated by a concrete planter creating a layer of separation from the public spaces. The concrete stairs are freed from the wall of water and the planter, by a small channel. This gives visual autonomy and threshold to the vertical movement. The channel also serves as a collection point for the water wall.
Dry-stacked stone walls are layered to create a sculpture garden in the joint formed between the sculptors' studio and dining hall. The tapering of the building mass displays the termination created from the housing units and surrounding forest.
View from the plaza to the artist studios

Forced perspective of the tapered path leading into the artist realm creates a place in the forest. The mass of the studios on the left and the housing units on the right provide a sense of boundary to the path. Vertical change in the path gives a sense of hierarchy between the public and private sectors.
The separation of the sleeping units from the place of work is strengthened by differentiating scale, material, and direction of volumes. The horizontal wood cladding of the sleeping units brings the warmth and scale of the wood down to make a place for the artist. This is in contrast to the studios which have a standing seam copper skin. This skin contrast provides a warm material for more of an individual space, where the colder material is for more of a collective, communal space. The extruded horizontal volumes of the sleeping units are open at each end. This directs a view from the living quarters to the place of work. The opposite end presents a view of the surrounding forest. The skin of the studios is punctured along its transverse axis and framed with copper. This allows a view to the housing pods and the mountains beyond. A reflecting pool and stone garden create a joint between the path and the studios. The forest terminates the perspective view.
The separation of the housing units from the path creates a place of entry and a moment of threshold. The place of entry is defined by an ivy-covered concrete wall separating a housing base on both sides. The separation distance between the housing pods, the scale of the concrete pavers, and the vegetation of the floor and walls establishes the scale of the space. The orientation of the stone path enforces the perspective of the view and helps create threshold through the change in materials.
Separation can be a primary tool to create presence in architecture. The findings in this thesis prove that separation facilitates the making of place at three scales: it allows for place to be made with architectural elements at the scale of the outdoor room, it allows for the creation of path, pause, and entry; and within the buildings it allows for programmatic requirements to be incorporated. Separated elements, in close proximity, can be used to create tension between materials, textures, scales, and directional surfaces.

Separating two elements that otherwise would not be separated, causes individuals to notice not only the separation, but the poetic composition of the material qualities between the elements. For example, separating the structure from the base and floor makes one aware of the separation, role, and process of making. At this moment, the assemblies of the structure as well as the material qualities of the wood are contrasted with the qualities of the concrete base. This condition also explodes the metal joint, exposing it to the observer as the mediator of this material contrast. Without this separation, this poetic composition might otherwise go unnoticed.

Separation is an architectural connector. Its goal is to distinguish by allowing places, materials, and directions to become visually present. Separation establishes a visual hierarchy that continues to reveal the way we exist on the earth—be it humble, working with, or arrogant working against; formal, casual, unified, fragmented, in wealth, in poverty, caring for, or in spite of the human hand. Being able to distinguish the way things are made allows for the built place to tell the story, should the observer want to know.


Jensens, Olav Jan (1989) Truck Garage in Rolvsøy, Rockport Publishers, Gloucester, Massachusetts

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