



Ex-Chimica Arenella, 2025, Studio Tom Emerson

Arenella

The post-industrial area Ex-Chimica in the district of Arenella is a microcosm of Palermo's social and economic history of the last century. Founded by German immigrants to produce citric acid from lemon trees cultivated in the Conca d'Oro region, the factory grew into one of the biggest chemical plants in Europe by the middle of the 20th century. In the 1960s, the fortunes of the factory declined rapidly until it was abandoned in 1965.

Today, it stands among the many ruins of contemporary Palermo: part of the city, but unused except for non-human residents. Some believe it is a lost cause, its resurrection a romantic dream that should be left to the wrecking ball. Other local actors see incredible human, ecological and architectural potential lying dormant in this unique situation between Monte Pellegrino and the Tyrrhenian sea. On invitation by the local organisation Studio Rizoma, we will produce a new kind of Atlas, anchored in the social,

architectural and natural reality of Palermo. The Atlas will draw knowledge from the material of the site and local partners, including youth associations and shipbuilders, to imagine a first step into the future for Arenella and Palermo, which mirrors an official call for visions for the site. The specific architectural difficulty of saving the site for the public good is matched by wider challenges of a traumatic past, contemporary migration, and tourism which is transforming the city from far beyond its shores. However, if migration is the most pressing crisis of the Mediterranean today, it has also been the making of Palermo's exquisitely layered history.

The studio will involve a trip to Palermo for extensive site investigation during an integrated Seminar Week. The budget for the latter and the design studio is expected to be max. 750 CHF (Costs Category C). Students who are fluent in Italian are welcome.