

Studio Anne Holtrop

ETH Zürich

design studio

HS22



Tokujin Yoshioka, KOU-AN GLASS TEA HOUSE, Japan 2011. Photo Kuniham Uchida

MATERIAL GESTURE:

GLASS

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“Any work of architecture which does not express serenity is a mistake. That is why it has been an error to replace the protection of walls with today’s intemperate use of enormous glass windows.”

— Luis Barragán in The Architecture of Luis Barragán, 1976

Glass is the miraculous material that allows sunlight and the surrounding environment into space. Thanks to the technological advancements in modern steel and concrete construction, this material has continuously acquired presence and relevance in the buildings we inhabit. Being very malleable in its viscous state, its properties can be strongly manipulated and its intrinsic fragility has become questionable as it can also be an insulating and load-bearing element. The float glass process is responsible for 90% of today’s flat glass production, but other techniques such as blowing, casting, thermoforming and stretching into fibres, offer endless possibilities.

We will approach the historic evolution of glass with a wide lens, from the first evidence of use dated 1.5 million years ago, as blades formed from naturally occurring volcanic Obsidian glass. We will go on to study its cultural origins in Syria and Egypt, and its import to Europe and beyond. Glass moved into the discussion of architecture during the modernist period, seen as a symbol of purity and renewal, and has only grown in architectural curiosity since. From an artisanal perspective, we will study its range of chemical compositions when melted, and the techniques used to deliver colour, pattern and texture when manipulated into form; working to discover new material gestures of glass in architecture.

The focus of this semester is to challenge the possibility of glass as a building material, questioning its predominant architectural use as a pictorial frame. Miesian architecture can be understood as the merging of the modernist constructional logic of the frame with the romantic pictorial instrument of framing; expanding the gaze on the exterior site and allowing a connection to the landscape. This speaks in stark contrast to the writings of Beatriz Colomina on Adolf Loos, where she details his aversion to transparency, believing instead that the purpose of a window is purely to let light in. This semester, we will study the dialectics surrounding glass transparency, the frame, and site to reimagine what can be gained and achieved with glass as a space-defining material.

Prof. Anne Holtrop

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