The studio takes as its starting point the Chinati Foundation in Marfa, Texas. Founded by Donald Judd in 1979, the former Fort Russell campus was opened to the public in 1986 with the mission to preserve and present art in direct dialogue with the landscape. Originally conceived to present the work of Donald Judd, John Chamberlain, and Dan Flavin, the foundation has expanded to include pieces by many other artists including Carl Andre, Ingólfur Arnarsson, Roni Horn, Ilya Kabakov, Richard Long, Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen, David Rabinowitch, and John Wesley. Each artist is exhibited in a separate building on the 340-acre site, creating a campus of autonomous buildings, each with a specific relationship with the landscape. The foundation is unique in its treatment of art and its context as a permanent condition. By always positioning art within a landscape, the work is continuously defined by its surroundings: its scale, its expanse, its relationship to the sky and to the horizon, to the desert and to the terrain. This permanence between art and landscape is embedded in the territory of the town, creating a unique terrain in which work can be experienced as stable artifacts, “specific objects” unbeholden to the increasingly market-driven world of art. The project will also present an opportunity to critique the project of Marfa. Although originally intended to create a space in which art could exist apart from the culture of consumption, Marfa now participates in that same culture it tried to escape, perpetuating the partnership between art and capital. How can a project reveal and undermine this capitulation? In what ways can a new space in Marfa interrogate Judd’s original intentions and reclaim an ethos of restraint, clarity, and autonomy? In practice and the academy, there is a constant swing between an over-rationalized (didactic) architecture and subjective formal expression. In this studio we will aim for pure form, moving past narrative, past image and past abstraction to experience. We accept the uncomfortable and unresolvable realities of design as we grapple with several key questions: Is it possible to create architecture which is not an abstraction? Is an unselfconscious form possible? Is it possible to make non-contextual architecture?

The studio will specifically address this notion of exile within a desert and the relationship between an ascetic way of life and artistic production. The project will be the development of an artist colony at Marfa, with each proposal including an artist residence, studio space, and gallery as part of the Chinati Foundation campus. As an enclave within Marfa, the campus will require both interiors and exteriors for living, making and exhibiting, and the projects should serve as both measure and critique of these spatial demands. Through a precise programming of these rituals, the architecture must also respond to the landscape in the most direct terms, creating a series of object-places that is part of its terrain. It is through the device of the room – both indoor and outdoor – that the projects will interrogate the territoriality of the rural interior. Each student will choose a specific artist to create a residence, studio space, and gallery. The students should develop an ethos of art and landscape and advance a project that maintains a strong discourse with its space and context, between terrain and object.
1. Program: The studio aims to investigate the relationship between the rituals of private life, the habits of production, and the demands of exhibition in an artistic campus. The project program will be an artist residence and gallery, requiring spaces for domestic life as well as artistic production and display. The dwelling spaces must accommodate all of the habits of private living – sleeping, dining, laundry, bathing, leisure – while also including shared spaces for the community. The technical spaces will contain all of the instruments required by the process of each artist. The gallery space can be either an interior room or an exterior domain, and should reflect the work and spirit of the artist chosen.

2. Site: The project will take place in the rural terrain of Marfa, Texas. The site will demand a precise relationship between the ethos of the artist and the landscape. Each project will develop a position on the role of permanence and curation, art and its context, the artistic enclave in a rural American town, and architectural space and art. The projects will take a specific stance on the interior as well as the exterior, on the implications of an artistic campus on the outskirts of a city. What are the spatial and territorial implications of an enclave within desert? The studio will explore the contested sovereignties between art and architecture, between interior and exterior, investigating notions of the precinct, the portal, the facade, and the threshold.

3. Scale: The specificities of the program will be developed through an interrogation of each artist and their work, developing a spatial metric for living, making, and displaying. The size and scope of each project will determine the number of residence, specific habits of living, the technical and spatial demands of production, and the metrics of artistic display.

4. Typology: Each student will choose a specific typology to interrogate through the design process, investigating how a collection of interior and exterior spaces can obey the structuring systems and formal logics of a typology. How can the reductive process of form create a specific relationship between the program and the landscape? How do the formal demands of typology change the sequencing of the rituals of living, production, and exhibition to create a specific object?

5. Material: The student must choose a single material that serves as part of the visual expression of the buildings. This material will not only determine the project’s structural and tectonic ordering system, but will also profoundly affect the buildings’ relationship to the landscape.