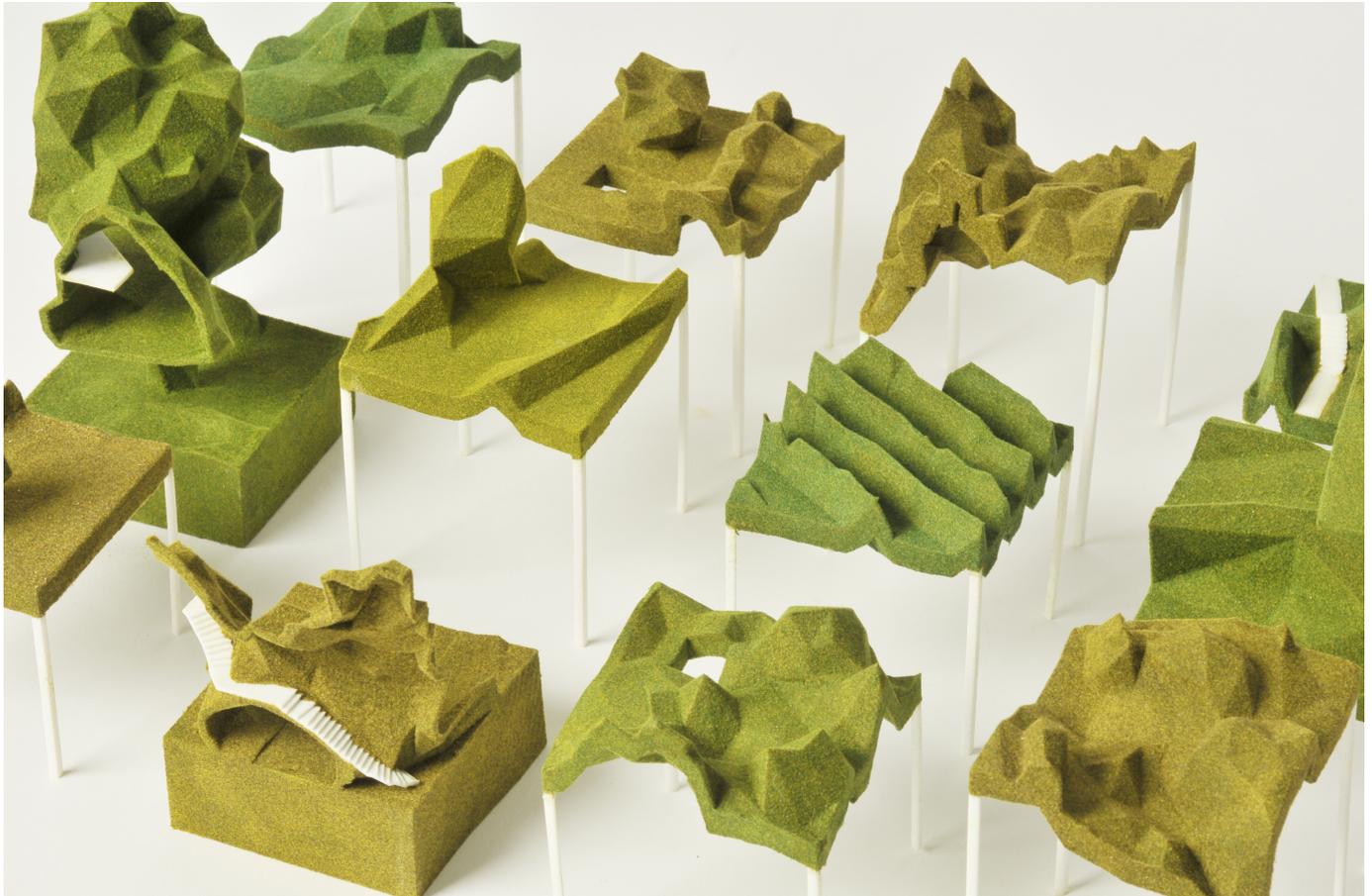


17-18 UNIT ELEVEN NATIONAL RESERVE



U11 is established as a laboratory for research, invention and spatial speculation which we pursue through iterative, inquisitive and imaginative processes. The unit is primarily interested in space and materiality, with a focus on the future of landscapes and urban cultures. We are passionate about developing individual design and research methodologies alongside innovative representational techniques that inform our work throughout the year.

Last year we dreamt of 'future pasts' with a focus on shaping the emerging histories of cities and landscapes via complex and intriguing local, national and international preoccupations. This year we will continue our adventures into the curious scenarios that affect the continuum of landscape and urban histories.

The **National Reserve**¹ brief interprets the landscape of margins and architectures 'on the edge' to expose overlooked stories of life and data. Spatial opportunities within the often-misunderstood interlacing of planned

and undesignated urban and rural landscapes will be exposed via two interrelated concepts:

1. The Green Belt Planning designations, particularly the green belt policy, provide a curated buffer zone, an idealistic hinterland between city, suburb and 'satellite' village. However, it is a perpetually threatened (spatial) concept and (legislative) landscape.

2. 'Terrain Vague'² 18% of the green belt is classed as 'neglected' with derelict buildings, rubbish, electricity pylons and other blots on the landscape. Only 45% is green and much of that is monoculture farmland, spending whole seasons beige or brown.²

Permanently open in perpetuity

The original, enduring, and necessary role of the green belt is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently 'open' in perpetuity. The initial Metropolitan Green Belt (MGB), surrounding London was formalised in the 1940's and there are now 55 designated green belts in the UK: 14 in England (encompassing 1.6 million

hectares and covering about 13% of the total land area), 1 in Wales, 10 in Scotland, and 30 in Northern Ireland. Controversially, the MGB has steadily extended over the years and is now three times the size of an increasingly space-pressured London.

Instances of green belt thinking also exist around the world, in the USA they've Urban Growth Boundaries (UGB's), Canada has its Green Zones and there's the European Green belt, stretching down the length of the former Soviet Union boundary.

In the UK, no aims are set for acceptable land uses and no indication is given as to their preferred form beyond a general concern that green belts should retain their 'open-ness'. But open-ness is a vaguely-defined requirement and must inevitably be renewed and transformed as our territorial requirements change, to keep up with the demands and desires of the 21st century—be they local, national, technical, cultural or social—and to provide an essential landscape for defining the transforming prospect of Britishness itself.

"If mountains and lochs are the cinemascope version of our countryside, the greenbelts are the sitcom. Cosy, familiar, cyclical. To be seen in regular short bursts."³

Occupying the *Terrain Vague*

The public perception of green belt as countryside is at odds with the reality of this landscape. Green belts were never explicitly provided for nature conservation or to preserve the appearance of the UK's rural idyll but rather to produce a peri-urban edge to the city in the form of a national reserve: land squirreled away, not left to squirrels.

'Open-ness' also doesn't necessarily mean natural, accessible or absent from development. In fact, much of its area could be described as *Terrain Vague* a term coined by Ignasi de Sola-Morales to suggest a spatial phenomenon that, contrary to the legislative designations that surround it, defies categorization—an in-between 'ambiguous space'. Its unexpected lack of definition and appearance of being left to its own devices, permits a kind of freedom from the palimpsest of previous lives and the promise of future ones. This is the territory where our architectural imaginations can thrive.

Field Trip

In U11 we alternate short and long haul trips. This year's field trip is to oasis city of Palm Springs and the Salton Sea in California's the environmentally precarious desert regions. We will visit the nearby Joshua Tree National Park in the Mojave Desert, mining and modern-day ghost towns such as Eagle Mountain, Salvation Mountain—the visionary folk art construction, and the 'alternative' RV Metropolis of Slab City.

U11

Synergies between theory and design studies, together with thinking and making processes, allow students to develop strong individual approaches to design, via real and hypothetical problems that are design-led and fed by research, curiosity and innovation.

Project 1

Will look deeper into the 'terrain vague' and explore individual methodologies and typologies for understanding these spaces.

Project 2

From term 2 onwards, individual design themes will be pursued in greater detail and complexity using real, imagined, built, unbuilt or fantasy sites found or inspired by our field trip.

1. *Reserve* from the Latin *Reservare*, meaning 'to keep back'. In this case referring to spaces, objects and attitudes
2. "Green belt is more likely to be wasteland than a slice of countryside". Paul Simons, *The Guardian*
3. A more genial description of the green buffer is offered by John Grindrod in his book *Outskirts: Living Life on the Edge of the Green Belt*.

Image: Agostino Nickl, *Low-Res City*. Bannister Fletcher Medal Winner MArch U11, 2017