M.ARCH.2 THESIS PROPOSAL

COMMUNITY NARRATIVES FOR ARCHITECTURE SPACES; CHRISTIANSBURG INSTITUE

Byronae' Lewis

In honor of my grandparents and my own heritage that provided the foundation for me to pursue design.

DIG DEEPER

ORIGINAL OBJECTIVE:

I want to investigate the relationship between social narratives, the role of an architect, and creating community spaces. My thesis will use an audio ethnographic research approach to further understand communities. I hope to broaden the existing design process to be more inclusive for BIPOC and non-designers. Storytelling, dialogue, methodical questions, and videos will be combined to tell different stories.

REDEVELOPED OBJECTIVE:

I want to investigate the relationship between social narratives, the role of an architect, and creating community spaces. I want to understand how the involvement of community members can influence the design process. As a case study, my thesis will explore the Christiansburg Institute as a direct influence on the African American community in Southwest Virginia. Specifically, I will work to understand my own heritage and connection to the institute. In reflection, I will establish my own approach to honor the legacy built before me through architecture and planning.

CURRENT QUESTION AT THE TABLE?

1 What landmarks were originally at the institute?

2 How did migration happen after the institute disbanded?

3 How did the recipients perceive community spaces at that time? How do they perceive them now?

4 Ideally, what would recipients want built to honor the legacy?

NARRATIVES, RESEARCH, AND DESIGN

NARRATIVES

My research will begin by interviewing four legacies of the Christiansburg Institute; my grandmother, grandfather, great-aunt, and great-uncle. I expect that the interview candidates may grow to include other relatives and close peers. For larger groups, I can facilitate COVID-friendly focus groups either online or in in spaces approved for in-person discussions. However, my main objective at this time is to hear the four distinguished candidates' specific stories.

I will document the responses for "experiences at the Christiansburg Institute and community spaces." I believe my findings will show me rituals and spaces that formed the community. These will be documented through in-person and video interviews. I plan to use their responses as a guide to what I will design to honor the space.

Prior to research, further investigation on the following topics will need to be addressed.

What platform for in-person interviews?
    Rentable audio equipment on campus.
    Cellphone.
    Interview Space Needed.

What platform for online video interviews?
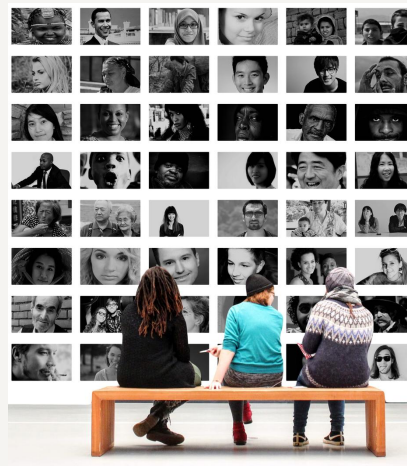   ZOOM
    Anchor, free platform for podcast.

    Storage for audio and virtual platforms.

Reach out to following individuals for advisement in August.
    - Christiansburg Institute
    - Debbie Sherman-Lee
    - 4 Primary Interviewees

Redefine the narrative by including multiple narratives in the conversation. Listen to the elders and their legacy to define the future.

NARRATIVES, RESEARCH, AND DESIGN

RESEARCH

My research will include multiple mediums. I plan to create a survey that will be given to the Christiansburg Institute, attendees of the institute, and any additional members interested within the BIPOC community from Southwest, VA. The survey will be a maximum of ten questions. (Questions still being determined) However, it will allow me to compute a larger range of responses and understand how different methods can be used for research.
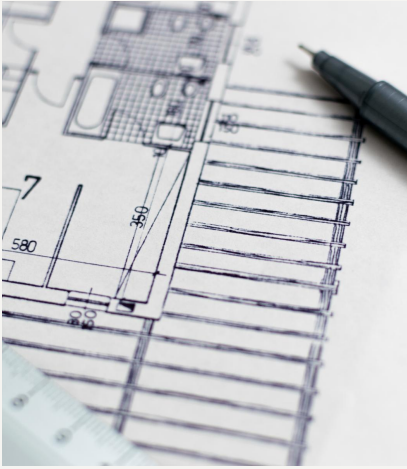
I am looking at newsletters, maps, statistics, etc. that help me to better understand the history of the Christiansburg Institute. I also want to investigate the site and the building compositions that were originally part of the entire institute. I plan to visit the site and photograph it's current conditions to create a typographic mapping.

I have been participating in video conferences recently to influence how I want to approach my work. This included the "Reclaiming Spaces and Places" conference. I plan to continue participation in events that align with my values through-out the semester. I am also planning to read excerpts from suggested readings discussed with my committee.

Prior to research, further investigation on the following topics will need to be addressed.

What platform?
– Determine platform to document resources
– Determine survey platform.
– Reach out to VT Human Research Protection Program to verify that all research is done ethically and legally with interviewees and surveyors.

NARRATIVES, RESEARCH, AND DESIGN

DESIGN

My thesis is research heavy. However, I hope this fuels into a better design process this semester. I've listed all of the design parts I want to include for my final presentation. This list will be open to variance through the semester and I am mentally preparing my self to be flexible, not rigid in the design process. As a designer, I have found interest in the use of light, transparency, and resin in my past projects. I hope to introduce this interest into this current project.

September - October: Research, Conceptual and Schematic Design

November: Model-Making, Programming

December: Design Development and Commit to Site/Form

January: Design Development; Digitally draw the space.

February: Design Wrap-Up, Render Site

March: Thesis Book, Finalize Interviews for Public Access.

April: Final Wrap-UP

Can we tell a story, for the community and with the community, through design ?

Design Objectives:
- Sketchbook: To document schematic ideas through-out the semester
- Rendered Primary Building and Site
- Floor plans and Elevations for Primary Building
- Laser Cut Models (5 Minimum,
- Laser Cut Site Plan
- Typographic Site Photos; Current and historic
- Interviews in digital form; visual or audio to be determined
- Surveys in database with graphs.

Committee Schedule:
- Meet once a week individually through email, video, or in-person depending on needs. Once every three weeks, all members will meet at a designated time for group-check in.

An online database and google doc will be set-up for all members to access at any time.