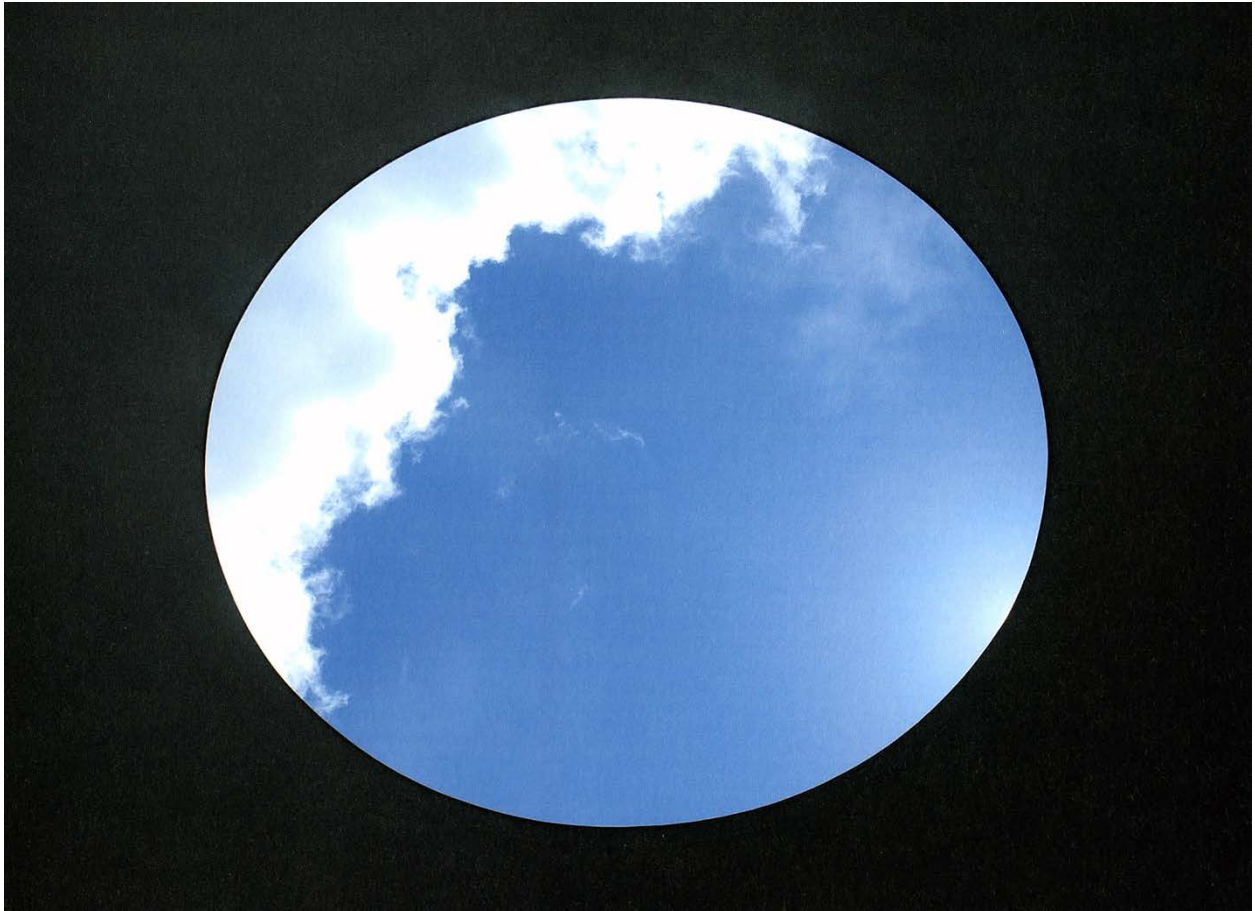


Notice • Unearth • Repurpose



Cat Cairn, 2000, James Turrell, Kielder Water and Forest Park, Northumberland, England

I discovered in nature the nonutilitarian delights I sought in art. Both were a form of magic, both were a game of intricate enchantment and deception.

Vladimir Nabokov, *Butterflies*

Well, I must endure the presence of a few caterpillars if I wish to become acquainted with the butterflies.

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *The Little Prince*

Ah, the pickerel of Walden! . . . They are not green like the pines, nor grey like the stones, nor blue like the sky; but they have, to my eyes, if possible, yet rarer colors, like flowers and precious stones, as if they were the pearls, the animalized nuclei or crystals of the Walden water.

Henry David Thoreau, "The Pond in Winter", *Walden*

The secret of seeing, then, is the pearl of great price.

Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker's Creek*

How do we perceive the world we live in? What do we notice? What do we take for granted? What do we ignore? How can we, as designers, expand the ways we notice, see and experience the world? And how can we translate these discoveries into material configurations that enhance our interactions with each other and our surroundings?

To set the stage for the inquiry, weekly readings, discussed every Tuesday at the start of studio, include excerpts from *Walden* by Thoreau, “Thinking Like a Mountain” by Aldo Leopold, “The Flow of the River” by Loren Eiseley and “Seeing” by Annie Dillard. In these essays, the writers look around, notice, and evocatively render physical and emotional connections between themselves and their surroundings that transcend the everyday. They also relate what they unearthed and noticed to things unearthed and noticed by others, creating a sort of natural history field guide that repurposes what has come before, but in a way that adds new and unexpected forms, colors and details to how we see and experience the world. What is critical is the way each of these narratives pictures the landscape to make real statements about things and metaphorical assumptions about likenesses; maps it to delineate territories, boundaries and values; dissects it to discern scientific facts, political realities, and economic imperatives; and experiences it to provide disconcertingly magical sensory encounters. Perhaps best of all, each narrative illustrates that our thoughts, feelings and actions toward our surroundings — how we imagine, live in, try to control, or long to escape from them — are inextricably tied to how we choose to see them, the ways we choose to describe them, and how we choose to connect them. Taken together, this narrative legacy produces a language of discovery that animates our collective memory and enlivens the ways we place ourselves in the world.

Several years ago, I summarized my impressions of these authors in the essay “Knowing What the Mountain Knows” (<http://www.manifestproject.org/news/issue3/knowning-what-the-mountain-knows>). Acting as exploratory prompts, these essays and my thoughts on them will serve as the launching point for individual and collective explorations. As the studio progresses, students will supplement these initial prompts with additional readings that call attention to things these authors failed to notice or took for granted. In addition to the legacy of transformative landscape encounters described by the Thoreau, Leopold, Eiseley and Dillard, inspiration for the studio comes from the visual portals created by the artist James Turrell (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=L6XQBF-pd1E>).

Landscape design, like environmental writing, does not exist in a vacuum: it borrows and repurposes ideas garnered from art, literature, science, current events, social media, and others. The trick is not to copy, but to repurpose these things to make them your own. It is also important to keep in mind that a singular design cannot do everything. Conversely, a series of designs, collectively assembled, provides a more complex and inclusive array of temporal and material experiences.

Accordingly, this studio asks students to consider how we see and experience the world we live in and create a design intervention based on this inquiry. The individual products, sited throughout New Jersey, will be collectively assembled and juxtaposed to provide an array of temporal and material experiences that expand and enrich what is noticed and revealed in each singular project, unveiling, in turn, the landscape of everyday life in new, and perhaps, surprisingly different ways.

The studio consists of three parts and incorporates mapping, temporal and spatial diagrams, plans, sections, models, and writing:

- Site selection.
- Site observations that incorporate photography and assemblies of material objects.
- Site designs that incorporate biophysical conditions — topography, hydrology, soils, plants and animals — and socio-cultural interactions — the economics and politics of our collective and personal values, traditions, beliefs and habits.