



Rethinking the Australian Outback: Imagining Leigh Creek Post-Industrial Future

This option research studio seeks to study the relationship between architecture, environmental remediation, extreme climate and Oceanian aboriginal culture through the transformation of Leigh Creek, a recently closed coalmine town camp in north-central South Australia, into an ecotourism and cultural destination.

The Leigh Creek mine landscape is an immense and compelling topography of deep cavities and false hills made from the spoils of mining. Beyond and to the north lies the flat arid lands that reach to Lake Kati Thanda or Lake Eyre the vast salt-lake into which much of central Australia drains. To the south are the Ediacaran fossil fields laid down over 540 to 640 million years ago and now sites of great scientific and cultural interest to researchers and visitors alike. And the majestic Flinders Ranges terminate at around the Leigh Creek environs. This is a place of extensive journeys and trade routes made over time by Aboriginal Adnyamathanha people, settlers and now tourists. The air is some of the cleanest in the world, but water is scarce and when you come across a waterhole creek or spring with water, it becomes a magnet for stopping and pausing.

The studio will be led jointly with the Department of Landscape Architecture of the University of Melbourne with the support of Professor Gini Lee and the South Australian government. Faced with the remoteness of the site, its sheer size, and lack of local expertise in ecotourism design, they are seeking ideas to revive the place and bring new economic activities to the inhabitants of the region.

During the term, students will lead an analysis on Leigh Creek's ecological and cultural landscapes, review ecotourism and land art case studies, visit transformed post-industrial sites in Ontario, and produce a joint masterplan for Leigh Creek which will address site remediation, ecotourism, aboriginal traditions and the pragmatics of achieving a sustaining existence in the outback, some 700 kilometers from the nearest major city. Experts from the South Australian government, and faculty from the University of Melbourne and the University of Adelaide will advise students throughout the term.

The studio will focus not only on experimental representation techniques documenting the multiple layers of the site, but also on the processes and narratives describing its potential futures. The final review will take the form of an exhibition, which will be shown both at Daniels and at the University of Melbourne.

Right after the end of the term, (timing TBD and decided as a group at the beginning of term), we will undertake as a group a sponsored studio trip* to Australia. We will first visit Melbourne, attend a symposium on Leigh Creek at the University of Melbourne, mount and present the student exhibition that resulted from the option studio, then head to the site. At Leigh Creek, students/ faculty from Daniels and the University of Melbourne will explore the landscape of the abandoned town, mine, hills and plains, and meet and interview locals: Aboriginal tribes, pastoralists, townsfolk, miners, tourists, researchers, filmmakers and artists living in the site. At last, we will spend a week at an artist farm residence located near the site to synthesis the collected data.

In the Fall 2018 term, students will be encouraged, but not obliged, to use the research outcomes of the studio as a basis for their thesis, which they could develop either in Leigh Creek or in an appropriate site of their choosing.

*details of the financial sponsorship of the studio trip will be discussed during the studio presentation on Monday December 18th