

AAVS BASEL – ART BASEL

The Materiality of Art Fairs

07-16 June, 2024

University of Basel, Department of Social Sciences, Urban Studies Division
Spalenvorstadt 2, CH-4051 Basel, Switzerland



Augustas Serapinas, "Čiurlionis Gym," Art Basel Unlimited 2023. Photo: Fabrizio Furiassi.

Course Description

Brief: One of the major commonalities of international art fairs like Art Basel, Frieze London, and The Armory Show in New York, is the gigantic mobilization of materials and bodies that, from disparate parts of the globe, travel to aggregate in one place (for a week or so) before moving on to a new destination. It's an endless cycle of assembling and disassembling the material and the social components that constitute them. Through the lens of materiality, by which these events unfold, this summer school will take a critical look at world fairs, expos, biennials and triennials, and the works of artists, architects, urbanists, curators, and institutions involved in them. This will be done according to a double register of materialism: one inspired by theories and methodologies of the material turn in the social sciences, and the other one inscribed into the market logics of material consumption and accumulation that foreground phenomena of extractive capitalism and exclusionary urbanism. For the edition 2024, the summer school will provide the students with visitor passes and guided tours of the

Art Basel and Basel Social Club exhibitions, and will ask them to document, identify, compare and visualize under-observed social and urban phenomena linked to them, with a specific focus on their environmental impact. After the visits, the students will be challenged to reimagine these art fairs through project-based urban interventions that hinge on the material artifacts that constitute them— from artworks to publications, exhibition spaces, museum buildings, and the cities that host them— and to generate a critical discussion during a public event hosted at Basel Social Club.

Format: The summer school will be hosted at the University of Basel, Urban Studies division, and will consist of 2 days of intensive seminars and tutorials (readings, discussions, and frontal lectures), 3 days of field research and interpretation of data (including guided tours at Art Basel and Basel Social Club), and 5 days for the preparation of the final work (texts, drawings, printed and physical works, and presentations). During the seminar, the students will address a variety of critical and theoretical literature and relevant research work by artists, architects, urbanists, scholars, and curators. Tutors will provide the students with short tutorials on investigative research, drawing techniques, photography, filmmaking, storytelling, and public speaking. The seminar will serve as a forum to discuss students' interests and ideas, and for planning the field research through which they will document and analyze "the materiality of art fairs." As a final work, the students will focus on creating and delivering proposals that forge critical urban interventions by mobilizing the material dimensions of the art fairs.

Outcome: The final work deliverables will take the form of print-based visualizations, publication mock-ups, exhibition concepts, artworks, short films, or a combination of them. Regardless of format, the final work should contain evidence of substantial and original research conducted during the summer school, and a physical component that can be exhibited or deployed during an art fair. Students will work in groups under the supervision of tutors in a supportive workshop environment that will hone in on each participant's research agenda and approach to "the materiality of art fairs." The course aims at providing theoretical foundations and qualitative tools of research, analysis, and representation to identify and document complex material trajectories in the city, as well as to interpret and narrativize them into project-based interventions. Final works will be publicly presented.

Eligibility: The program is open to current university students, recent graduates, and young professionals in architecture, urbanism, design, arts and related fields. Required software: Microsoft Office (or equivalent), Adobe CS, and 2D/3D CAD (for architects only).

Diversity and Inclusion: The AAVS Basel promotes diversity and inclusion and is committed to providing equal access to high-quality education for all students. Depending on available funds, full-tuition and partial-tuition scholarships will be offered to the broadest possible number of students based on merit and financial need.

To apply for a scholarship, send a CV and a one-page motivation letter to aavs.basel@gmail.com by May 6th. Please note that, regardless of scholarship status, all attending students are required to pay a GBP 60 covering administration costs.

University credits: Upon completion of the program, students receive a certificate valid for 3 credits at the University of Basel. For credit recognition purposes, students are advised to consult with their respective home institutions.

Institutional Setting

AA School of Architecture (London, UK), programme supervision, administration and registrations.

University of Basel, Urban Studies, programme supervision and access to the university facilities.

Art Basel, access to the exhibitions and guided tours.

Basel Social Club, access to the event and collaboration for public programme.



Students and Tutors of the AA Visiting School Basel 2023,. Photo: Georg Gatsas.

Program Heads

Fabrizio Furiassi is an architect, educator and scholar from Rome, based in New York and Basel. He teaches architectural history/ theory and design studio at Parsons School of Design and the University of Basel, where he is pursuing doctoral studies in architectural and urban history. Fabrizio holds master's degrees from Columbia University GSAPP in New York and Sapienza University of Rome. He also studied at the Institute of Architecture in Moscow, where he was also a research fellow at the Strelka Institute for Media, Architecture and Design. Fabrizio's research exposes the relations between urban transformations and material flows, using theories and methodologies from the social sciences, to centralize the agency of construction materials in historical change. His current study elucidates the social and spatial impacts of the Mafia's concrete developments in Sicily. Besides academia, he has over ten years of experience in exhibitions and public projects at cutting-edge architecture firms and cultural institutions in Asia, Europe and North America. Fabrizio

is the founder of Distributed Architecture, a New York-based practice versed in urban research and participatory design initiatives that connect and strengthen communities. His ongoing projects include a system of architectural installations bringing free wifi to open spaces of NYCHA's public housing in East Harlem, NYC. At the AA, Fabrizio is programme head of the visiting school in Basel and Sharjah, and co-leads a unit at the visiting school in Seoul.

Vinício Altmann is an anthropologist and urban researcher from Bahia, based in Basel. He recently completed his MA in Critical Urbanisms at the University of Basel, and works as a student assistant at the Urban Studies division. Vinício holds a BA in Social Anthropology and Philosophy from the University of Fribourg, where he served as president of the Student Association and as a student representative for the Social Sciences at the Humanities Faculty Council. His research focuses on informal settlements, and employs methods and concepts stemming from varied traditions of sociology of action and cultural studies. Vinício's recent study explores urban apparatuses that, within/beyond their materiality, promote emancipation for vulnerable populations by functioning as platforms for re-socialization and re-qualification of citizenship. At the AA, Vinício is programme co-head of the visiting school in Basel.

Admin and Teaching Assistant

Amélie Rywalski is an artist, actress, and a student of the MA in Critical Urbanisms at the University of Basel. She received her BA in Human Geography at the University of Lausanne. Prior to this, she studied Acting at VanArts in Vancouver.

Workshop Tutors/ Guests

To be announced in May.