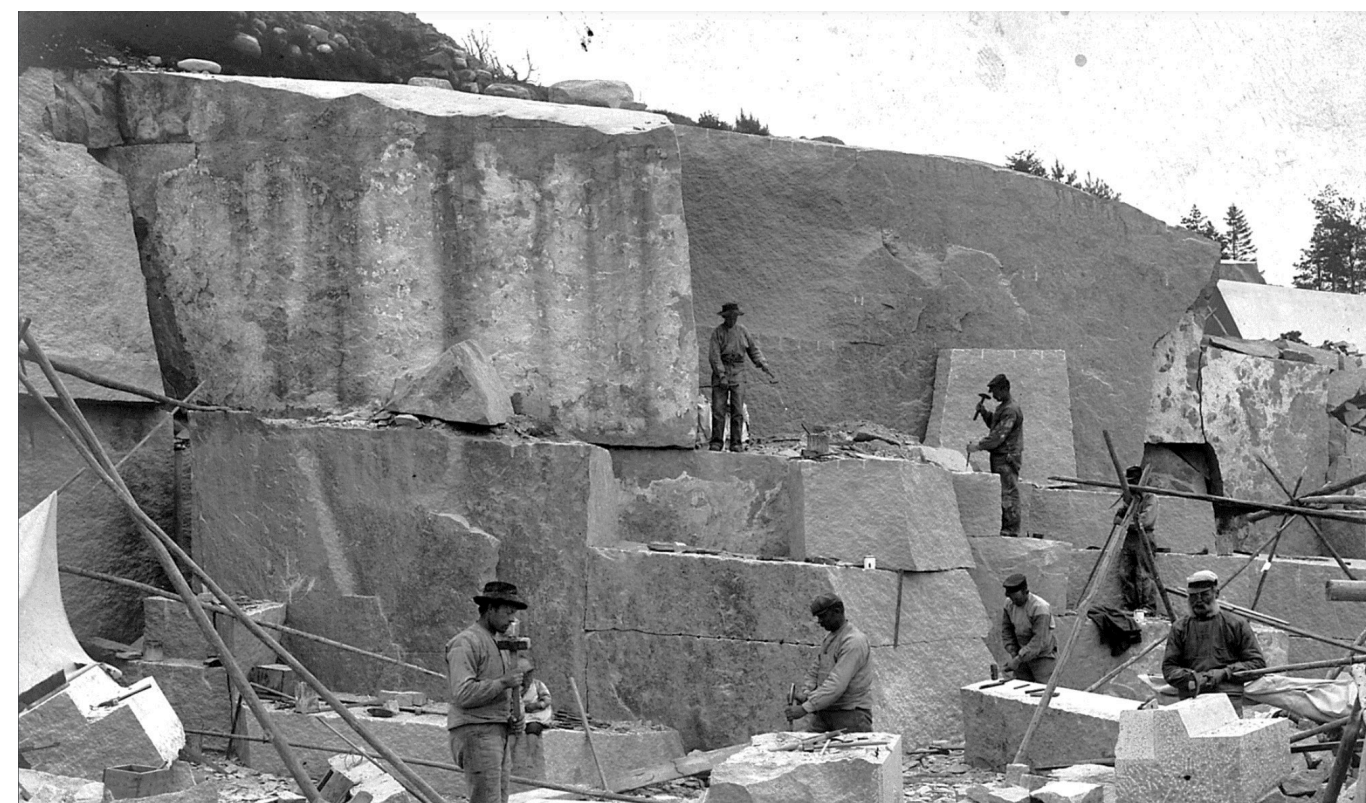


Universals X

Fra Brudd til Bygning

Master studio
Fall 2023
Bergen School of Architecture

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Tord Træen



The tenth iteration of Universals will concern itself with a reformulation of how we use the material stone in architecture for the public. We will aim to revisit, re-imagine, and renew this ancient material through the study of quarries, geology, precedents, and modern uses of the material.

This course aims to re-contextualize the collective and public areas and buildings of old urban settlements (Tun) of the west coast of Norway. The “meeting stone” one can find outside the Tun is also an important social element relating to the material. By this stone one would greet strangers or agree on issues with the neighboring farms. The course asks questions about how one lives in a community in close proximity, in an urban or proto-urban setting, and how a settlement meets the given natural situation. We will design with emphasis on and understanding of how people organize socially, and work on public buildings that serve as spaces for meeting someone unknown.

Stone as a building material has gained renewed interest today due to a number of qualities such as a far lower carbon footprint than concrete (only 15% of concrete), long durability and thermal mass, among other things. The interest in stone is not about using it as a cladding material, as

it has been used for the last century, but as a primary construction material both under tension (prestressed) and pressure.

Norway has a rich history of stone buildings, and consequently several thousand smaller and larger quarries have been registered. There are 320 stone churches that we know of and of these 23 can be said to be preserved in their original condition. Most of these are small, but very strong and characteristic constructions. Stone has also been used in “forgotten” buildings and structures: Everything from rural castles to old road construction, from barns to water mill houses and stone fences and an incredible amount of small construction projects throughout history. Later, in the 18th and 19th centuries, stone was used deliberately in civic buildings such as libraries, city halls, and train stations. We can see a long line of stone being a fundamental material for the construction of a “common imaginary” and nation building all the way through to today.



Although many of these are in Western Norway, these buildings can be found throughout most of the country. We will visit several of these, measure and document them both in plan, section and detail, and form an understanding of their architectural heritage.

The course will begin with initial investigations of the entire process, the logistics, and the consequences from quarrying to building in stone, and this will form an important foundation for further investigations in the course. The study of these buildings will also lead to a library/publication/catalog of these buildings to disseminate and present the material in a new and exciting way. This master course would also like to cooperate with the material course held in second year and expand on the stone part of that. The students will then also get the hands-on experience of working with stone. Together with experts on geology and building techniques involving stone, the student will gain a broad understanding of the material.

But we are not only interested in stone buildings from a materialistic perspective, we also want to examine the cultural, political and historical foundations. The Middle Ages, from which most of these buildings originate, have been seen in traditional architectural historiography as the unreflected forerunner of the enlightened Renaissance. Especially how work was organized is of interest, as much of the crafts were organized in guilds, but the stone churches in particular were largely built by migrant workers with a

strong inner cohesion. What is the potential for thinking about the organization of work and the construction site in connection with a new use of stone?

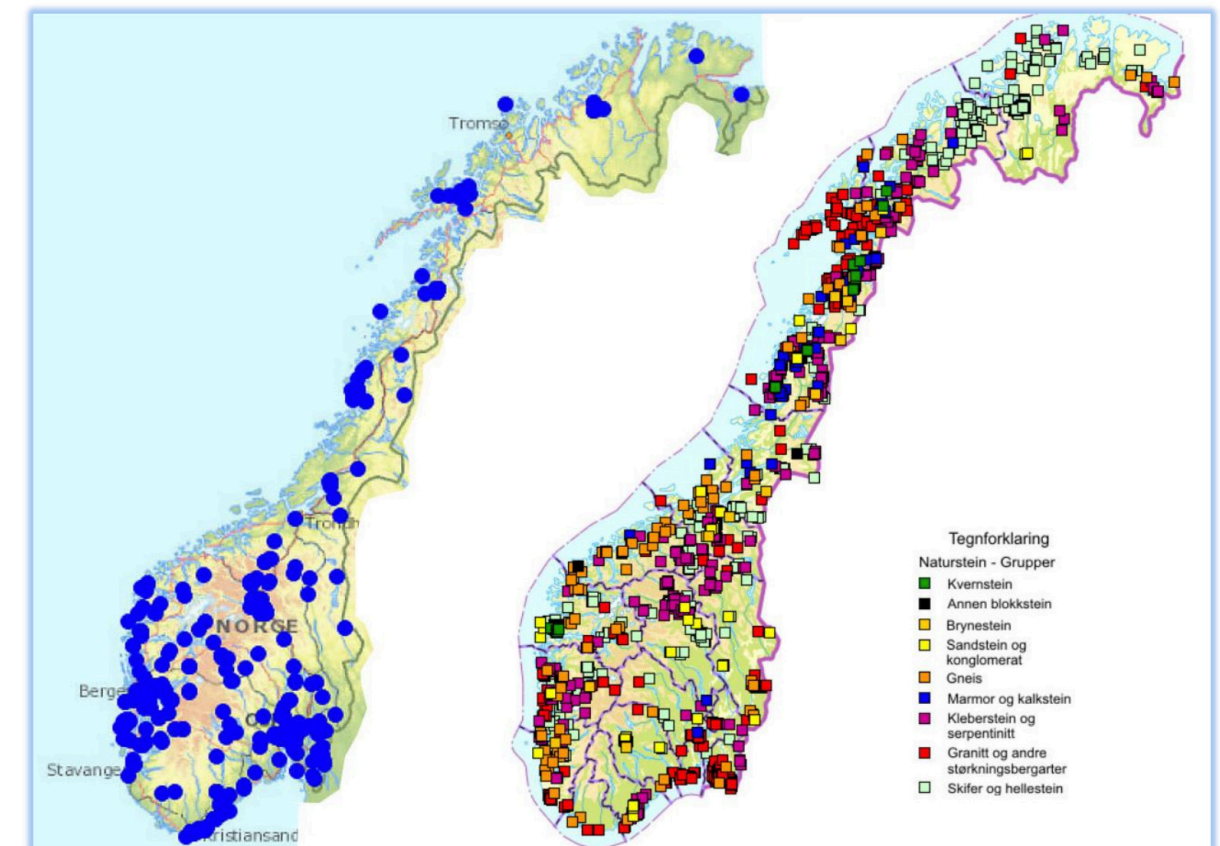
Project planning

The buildings we study in the introductory phase of the course are relatively small buildings, and we imagine that it is advantageous to work with projects of a similar size in connection with an experimental approach to a well-known material. So, small buildings that could have been a house but aren't.

The task is to draw a small public building and through that the question is asked: What is the smallest possible form in which a public ambition in architecture can be manifested? The studio will focus on small-scale buildings serving public functions. As an alternative to pharaonic scale public prestige projects, we will investigate how small public buildings can be instrumental in developing a direct engagement with a community.

The studio will work on recognizing and developing fundamental civic qualities in architecture. Each proposal may dedicate itself to one specific function, or be flexible to accommodate a series of chosen functions.

The studio will revisit questions of typology and generality in relation to site, investigating ways in which small (200-400m²), self-



Figur 5. Kartutskrifter fra Askeladden (til venstre) og NGUs natursteinsdatabase.

contained systematized structures can support a specific social structure. We will investigate the possibilities for architecture to, in its implementation, be specific to its site condition, and still provide general answers relating to type. In addition to investigating construction and fabrication techniques, the studio will have an ongoing discussion about theories of collectivity - what it means to define a space and architecture as “public”.

Learning Outcomes

After completion of the semester students can expect to have designed a small to medium sized building down to relative detail (1:20 / 1:10). Students can expect to work on and develop ideas on what a public building should and could be today, and manifest such ideas in the structure of the building.

Judgement & approach

Students are expected to work in the studio and to be active participants in the collaborative studio environment. Sharing knowledge, techniques, and ideas with your fellow students is incredibly important to your own creative development and to the studio environment.

**Examination/assessment of students work:
How will a student be assessed?**

Evaluation will be based on weekly discussions in the studio. We will aim to have many forms

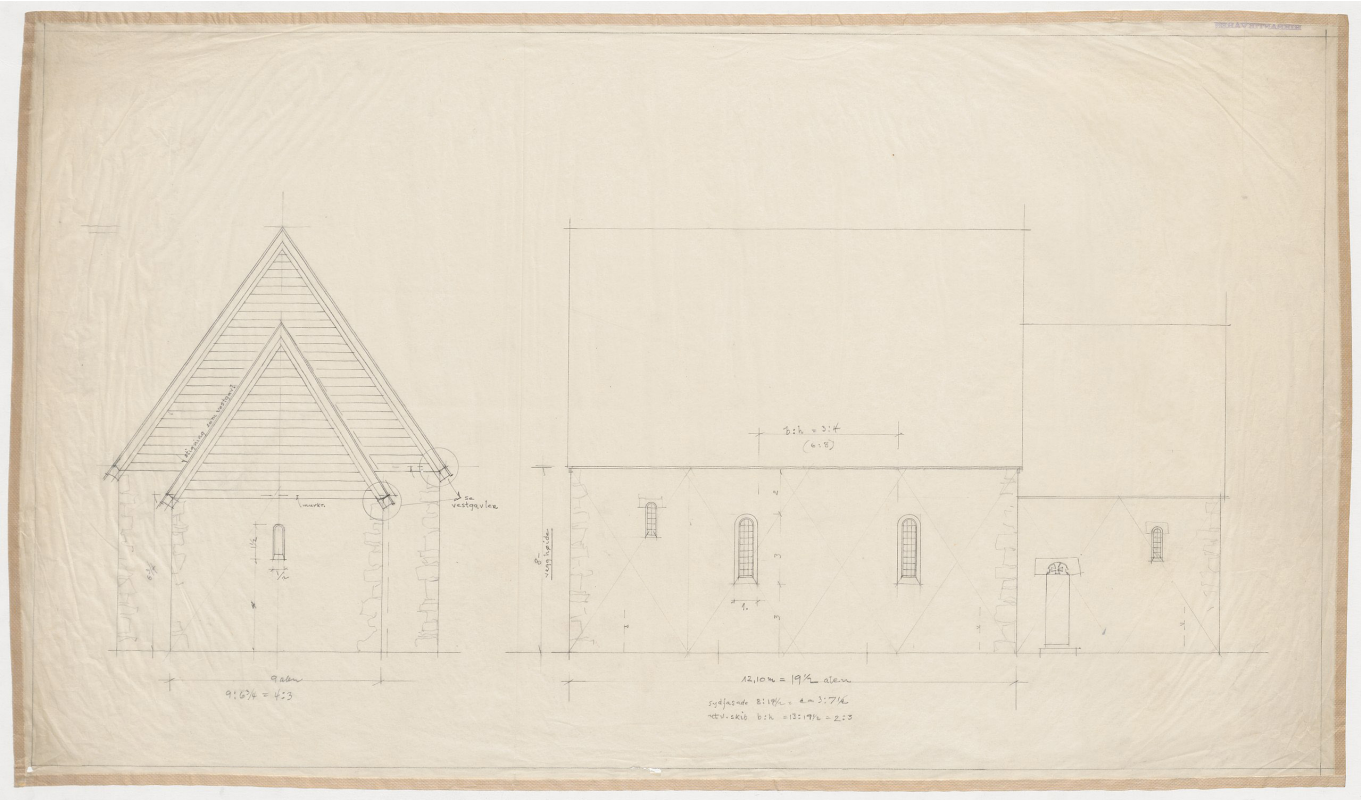
of discussions, from lectures and presentations, discussions around a table, pin-ups, charettes. We aim to foster an inquisitive and open learning environment based on a shared passion for architecture. Active participation in reviews, meetings and lectures is an integral part of gaining a deeper knowledge of the subject matter and is strongly encouraged.

Working and learning activities.

There will be one project task throughout the semester. The final project delivery consists of a drawing set, models, descriptive text and presentation. The final evaluation will be based on the overall quality of project and development throughout the semester. The students will also be evaluated on the quality of the models and the clarity and communication of the architectural drawings and argument.

How is the course structured?

The questions the studio raises will be addressed from within the discipline of architecture by working with form, notation, material qualities and construction. We will work on structural systems, architectural elements, technical installations and the civic dimension of the projects. In addition to the development of a design proposal, the studio will deal with the historical and literary dimension of architecture through a parallel study of selected texts and films and conversations with guests. Students will be encouraged to write throughout



the entire semester to formulate theoretical positions.

Competence & skills

Students Model making skills, drawing skills, surveying skills, interest in material studies, interest in structures.

Different phases? Is it phase-based or fluctuating forth and back to inform each other?

The semester will start with an analytical phase where we study precedents, quarries and their natural landscape, geology, and building methods. This will be approximately ¼ of the semester. We will aim to distill some core qualities from each individual study that can be brought into the design project. Designing is never a linear process so we expect every student to continue the interplay of analytical thinking, intuitive work and making throughout the semester.

Theoretical study /practical work, building activities?

The semester will contain theoretical studies and design work in drawing and model. We very much welcome mock-ups of details or parts of the design work.

Group work or individual work?

Individual work

Study trip? Where, when and for how long?

The study trip will be in Norway to see stone architecture and quarries, lasting no more than a week.



About the studios

The studio series Universal Architecture seeks to develop projects with qualities which goes beyond the singular condition that can address larger cultural issues and be meaningful in society, by working from within the discipline of architecture.

The studios aims to establish critical relationships to the past, and precedents are an important part of the studio series. Every studio begins with a thorough evaluation and understanding of a precedent, either as something to learn from or an opportunity to make an oppositional argument. The buildings we research in the studios are not that of a celebratory and canonical linear study of preceding architecture, but are seen as cultural and material artefacts from the history of architecture enabling new and contemporary readings.

The studio series views architecture as a discipline with history, theory, layered embedded intelligence in built artefacts and practical inherited knowledge with the capacity to provide universal qualities.

Espen Vatn