Some of the earliest evidence of Khmer dance is found in the presence of dancing figures as a motif on ornamented bronze kettledrums found at burial sites, associating this art with funerary rituals.
PLACE

Research into site
Defining framework of intervention
Groupwork masterplanning
Errol, Perth and Kinross (56°N, 3°W)
A village between Perth and Dundee. Just north of the River Tay, on the banks of which grow reeds which are habitat to bearded reedlings. In late April of this year there occurred a large and destructive fire, destroying much of the wildlife habitat. Surrounded by flat agricultural fields. On the field trip we encountered very few locals, many of whom were elderly and friendly to strangers with cameras. The streets were very quiet, we could walk down the middle of the road with little disturbance, though there were many more cars (parked) than people or signs of pedestrians. The weather was grey but not so cold or harsh (to a Canadian). Though small and relatively isolated, there is a sense of local character and identity in the cared for front gardens, the atmosphere is not, as one might expect, one of loneliness. The new suburban developments and additions to the primary school are disappointingly generic, and reinforce the narrative of ‘commuter town’ though the rest of the village resists being defined this way.
Soil — Clay

In the research phase of this project, my fellow group members (Katie, Megan, and Freya) and I returned frequently to this soil map produced by The Macaulay Institute for Soil Research. Of course, its graphic presentation is beautiful in itself. It also draws a clear boundary line around the edge of the village development, telling a straightforward story of why buildings were built where they were, and why they were made of bricks, and why they are the colour that they are. Paying attention to what is below ground was important to understanding what could be planted and where, and what materials could be made from the immediate ground. Paying attention to soil was also a mode of defiant embrace of the earth, a small but potent shift in disposition that we, as architecture students, could adopt in the face of widespread historic disregard for the planet, a personal beholding of integrity in accordance with our professed concern for the climate.

Groundscapes — Pathmaking

Responding to the brief, developing a ‘masterplan’ for Errol, our group felt a significant discomfort with what we felt would be a top-down intervention, an unwelcome imposition. We stubbornly worked from the ground up. Our primary move was pedestrian, drawing walking maps of imaginary inhabitants, making paths for people rather than cars. An improved groundscape was to be our public realm, with an ethos of reframing the landscape, rather than quantifiably optimizing commuter routes or the economic potential of the high street.

Primary group gesture / stroke of path making / walking to and through Errol from the train station (mapped against patches of trees).
Photographs taken on a field trip to Errol — January 16, 2020.

The town is framed by the River Tay to the south and Sidlaw hills to the north. Over the mainly flat landscape is a big sky.
Tiers Paysage — Planting

Alternatives to techno-optimist approaches to dealing with climate change have been top of mind. Félix Guattari’s ecosophy is the closest naming of the many layered facets of the current state of emergency that encompasses the depth and roots of human alienation from the planet that I have encountered as of yet. Gilles Clément’s radically simple proposals for landscape reclamation have significantly informed a lot of the ideas about planting and how to design an integration of the natural. Tiers paysage (third landscape) is what Clément refers to as areas of wild, self-sustaining growth of plants, weeds, insects, animals, etc.—sites of biodiversity and interaction that can occur in any ‘leftover’ bit of land.

In an effort to make a radical rift with the associations of suburban typologies and its components (the driveway, the lawn), another layer of the masterplan proposal of added planting encroaches on the lawns (now monotonously grass) of the houses at the northern edge of the town. By planting wildflowers around this area, an invitation to pollinating insects (explicitly) and a closer proximity to landscape (implicitly) is made. These are goals that are stated in extensive and optimistic policy proposals in response to the UK’s declaration of a climate emergency.
Group masterplan overlaid on map of Errol, with project boundary extents defined.

Group members:
Freya Hodgkinson
Katie-May Munro
Megan Ellis
Painting exploring themes of botanics and minimalism.

Mierle Laderman Ukeles’ Manifesto for Maintenance Art, Exhibition “Care” 1969.
New planting

*Beech, birch, oak, weeping willow, horse chestnut, eucalyptus, magnolia, cherry blossom*

Existing tree species in Errol

*Old orchard groups, beech, birch, oak, weeping willow, horse chestnut, eucalyptus, Scots pine, and cedar of Lebanon*

Deciduous and flowering tree species

*Scots pine, cedar of Lebanon, juniper, yew*

Evergreen tree species

Planting considered in the context of geographic location, as well as symbolic planting in the context of death. Evergreens as symbols of immortality and longevity, yew as the northern counterpart to the sacred cypress, the weeping willow as symbolic of mourning, weaving of funerary wreaths...

Reading: *The Vegetal Setting of Death* by Michael Ray- on in *Death and Architecture* (Stroud: Sutton, 2002).
Some time was devoted to situating this project within the historical genealogy of funerary architecture. In particular: Johan Celsing’s New Crematorium for the Woodland Cemetery in Stockholm followed the study of the architect’s Årsta Church, Gunnar Asplund’s and Sigurd Lewerentz’s Woodland Cemetery itself, Lewerentz’s designs for the Eastern Cemetery in Malmö, and Aldo Rossi’s Nuovo Cimitero San Cataldo. Of course these examples were informative for their pragmatic organizations and space dimensioning. They also informed the understanding of the idea of a cemetery, the associations and memories that are woven into society and culture. It is especially apparent in these architectures the importance of landscape, and the sensitivity with which approach and movement are orchestrated.
Procession from town to place of funeral
Threshold for mourners—significant, own character of space
Descent into protected sanctuary
Reception as a gathering room, meeting of mourners
Room for ceremony
Joins the body of the deceased
Room to be alone
Requires: niches, acoustic privacy
Threshold to burial site
Procession away from burial site

Journey to and from burial site: for visitors, commemorative return
Access to sheltered rooms for privacy
Service rooms such as toilets

Path for deceased body to get to funerary building
Room for receiving the body
Room for washing the body — Accessible to mourners if desired
Cleaning of dirt, body fluids, solids, anything on the skin
Purification with water, poured (not immersed)
Drying
Dressing, natural fibre materials
Laying in casket
Note on caskets: all wood, no metal or other materials, holes in the bottom
Requires: plumbing, strong ventilation

Room for ceremony
Casket is brought here
Mourners join
Connecting room between ‘public’ and ‘private’ functions
Requires: lighting specificity (tower (ie. Ron champ), clerestories)

Threshold to burial site

Burial and Cultivation
No burial vaults
Cultivation / maintenance by gardeners
Opportunity for mourners to take part in cultivation / gardening as a commemorative ritual (for a sustained amount of time)
Requires: Protected area of land — woodland, meadow, more as area grows, garden shed, tools & infrastructures
LAYERING OF SURFACES

From landscape to tablecloth
Liminality as content

The programme of this project is thematically concerned with a heightened awareness of the liminal as it pertains to existence. The temporary, transitory nature of life (towards death) is ever looming over the immediacy of grief. The primary architectural moves are an expression of and accommodation for the navigation of this experience. A slow, ramping descent into the ground marks the start. An inflection in plan, a widening of the path welcomes. Within the rules of simple geometry, thresholds are inflected, carving out the space for human inhabitation.
Consideration of the surfaces on which this inhabitation takes place was especially important to the development of this project. These occur at the scale of the landscape (in path making and planting), the articulation of courtyard paving and its permeation of thresholds, differences in interior flooring materials (brick to timber, timber to carpets), timber finishes on benches and balustrades, to long runner tablecloths.
Pieces of balsa wood scored with bricks organized and oriented according to the particularities of the plan (corners, diagonals, edges, etc.)

Courtyard drawing.

Drawing groundscapes

In a process akin to stone rubbing (a method often practiced on gravestones to preserve genealogies), the texture was transferred to layers of trace paper with graphite.

How do bricks turn corners?
- deal with inflections?
- make paths?
- generate mindfulness in walkers?
Intervening on the ground
Stereotomic gesture

CARVING
Plaster cast ground model study.

Displaced-replaced mass

Heizer’s displaced-replaced mass poetically illustrates how the ground receives an object—aptly an object that comes from the ground it is sitting in—where the space of cutting is left empty as a reminder of the intrusion.

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Michael Heizer, displaced-replaced mass, Silver Springs, Nevada, United States

Plasticine clay ground and landscape model study (1:500).
Plaster cast ground and volume model (1:500).
“Buried architecture,” in the words of Étienne-Louis Boullée, situate the project in a genealogy of a funerary typology with an emphasized aim of poetic perception. This particular character of spiritual place emphasizes the embodied, the worldly. Windows in the most ‘sacred’ spaces offer views to courtyards, gardens, and the surrounding ground. The flat roofs which are sat inside the massive walls evoke a sensation of being contained on earth, rather than opening towards the heavens.

Painting isolating and abstracting ground cut shadows as lines.
Thinking in the peripatetic
Choisy on axonometry: “In this system, a single image, agitated [mouvementée] and animated like the building itself, replaces the abstract figuration fractioned in plan, section, and elevation. The reader has in front of their eyes, simultaneously, the plan, the exterior of the building, its section, and its interior disposition.”


The development of this project is an attempt to design for embodied perception (rather than spiritual transcendence, synaesthetic experience, or photographic staging). Bodily, earthly, phenomenological architecture. Much of the process work was done in axonometric projection, a mode of drawing which enabled multiple points of view to be accounted for simultaneously. The tendency was a result of the desire to be considerate of movement, rather than adhere strictly to a convention. The drawings were also led by iterations of maquette making. Reflection on these modes of production has been instructive in their revelations of the effects of alternative constraints to the design process (compared to designing strictly in plan and section, for example).
Series of layered drawings, thinking through the interaction between groundscapes, building volumes, influence of construction on design.
Programmatic axonometric sketch.


