

*Landscapes of Repair: the Role of Photography and  
Film in Documenting the Legacy of Modern and  
Contemporary Architecture and Public Spaces*



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## VISUAL ESSAYS

# **Making Temporal Landscapes: A Visual Essay on Snow, Site, and Seeing**

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## **Abstract**

Making Temporal Landscapes: A Visual Essay on Snow, Site, and Seeing explores the relationship between landscape, perception, and the physical act of engagement through a process developed at the Oslo School of Architecture and Design (AHO) since 2019. In these workshops, first-year landscape architecture and architecture students are introduced to an extended form of fieldwork that aims to expand their initial reading of public space. The essay describes a pedagogical approach, conducted in 2025, that combines embodied experience and material transformation as a way to engage with place.

The workshop highlights the value of fieldwork in design education. By working directly on site, students learn to understand landscape through both action and reflection. The process moves them beyond a first person perspective into a position where space can be observed from the outside. Through images, the body becomes an instrument for measuring and framing. The temporary nature of the interventions, both as photographs and spatial forms, opens a discussion about the relationship between what is constructed, what is left behind, and what continues to change in the landscape.

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Material appears to flow down the slope. Is it soil, or merely water? A lorry, half tilted, interrupts the scene, a witness to the artificiality embedded within the material. It is only when we read the title underneath the photo, that we recognise what we are seeing; *Asphalt Rundown* (Smithson 1969). In this work, asphalt becomes more than surface; it becomes an agent that reveals the hidden contours of the terrain. It runs across the ground, absorbing each depression, outlining the micro-reliefs that our eyes might have overlooked unless the added material declared them visible by contrasting the existing surface. The photo makes the asphalt stiffen, transforming it to something that preserves. The asphalt follows its own course, allowing us to see, along lines shaped by gravity and chance, the steep decline of the hill. The asphalt shifts our reading of the geology from the ordinary to the sculptural. The photograph amplifies this contrast, becoming more than a record, perhaps an interpretation, or an encounter that stands on its own. When we introduce a sculptural form that contrasts with the landscape, do we see things that we would not have seen otherwise?

Each winter, the first snow arrives as a quiet shock, restricting and redefining our freedom to move. It covers familiar paths and gentle slopes, silencing the details beneath a uniform white surface. Beneath it, roads and tracks vanish. In response, the snowplough begins its work, removing the forgiving layer that restricts our movement. In this fragile negotiation between weather and human will, the priorities of society reveal themselves in lines of salt and cleared asphalt. Routes once trusted may become inaccessible, shaped by the snowplough's passage. Banks and piles of snow become boundaries that separate what is accessible and revealed from what remains hidden. They emerge through repetition and the mechanical limits of the plough. As temperatures shift between thaw and freeze, edges harden and become more defined. These urban snow ridges function as both obstacles and monuments, evidence of how snow, machinery, and daily routine combine to form a temporary structure in the city.

A landscape is never static. It transforms with time, and how we approach the pedagogy of landscape design must reflect this constant transformation. Rather than beginning with drawings or abstract plans, we start with an experience of the specific place. The workshop has been developed since 2019, with a focus on using performative engagement as a process of discussing the use of public space. By thinking of the collective body as a tool to explore space from another perspective, photography becomes a process of adding a new level of understanding when seen from a third-person perspective. In February 2025, first year landscape and architecture students ventured into the vast forest of Oslo in a continuation of this process, now adding an element of design at a scale of 1:1. A four-day workshop explored how minimal interventions, embodied presence, and material transformation allow us to see otherwise. The course also aims to help the students to verbalise spatial qualities using form in the landscape. Finding a site is part of the process, so that the discussion of the boundaries and extension of a site and its relationship to the larger field becomes part of the understanding.



[Fig. 1]

Performative engagement workshop 2019 – Students AHO



[Fig. 2]  
On the Flat - 2025

[Fig. 3]  
In the Dense - 2025



A group of five to six students received a term to guide their selection of a site. They should find a place that they feel has the property of being *on* or *in*, *on the edge* (*på kanten*), *on the flat* (*på flaten*), *in the steep* (*i det bratte*), or *in the dense* (*i det tette*). The students were asked to locate a site that corresponded to their given term and to begin a discussion around why that place felt embedded in the word. Why does a landscape feel flat? Do we need the forest to define where, and in what way, it feels dense? How steep does a terrain need to be to feel steep? In this exercise, the selection of the site and the later design on that site has consequences in an extended field. The expansion of the place should subsequently guide the size and form of the final design.

Through bodily and performative actions, we continued our investigation of the snow-covered landscape. Five verbs structured our work on site on the second day. Each group carried out all five to activate and expose the particular attributes of the terrain. The students spent the day discussing how to *enclose*, to *surround*, to *reinforce*, to *contrast*, and to *extend* the landscape they had chosen using the sum of bodies within the group. How do you enclose an edge or extend a flat surface? This exercise allowed the students to intervene directly, using their bodies as instruments to register and alter the spatial conditions. The photographs served as documentation and as a tool for seeing the site from a flattened perspective, influenced by the presence of figures. Moving from being in the landscape to analysing it through images required a shift in perspective. The photograph captured gestures and actions that revealed the complexity of the terrain and invited further interpretation.

This physical registration laid the foundation for the next stage. On the third day, the workshop shifted from exploration to intervention. Equipped with simple tools and a growing understanding of the site, students worked directly with snow to produce forms that responded to specific landscape conditions. These interventions were not final designs, but pedagogical exercises aimed at articulating spatial qualities through temporary transformation. Some groups used the contrast between vertical forms and flat ground to emphasise the horizontal plane. Others created barely perceptible edges with distinct geometries, extended views and explored how the suggestion of depth could strengthen the experience of flatness. Some carved snow walls that framed views, revealing the contrast between open white surfaces and the density of the forest floor. Others shaped new paths or boundaries, clearly distinguishing between light snow and the dark uncovered ground, drawing attention to the tension between openness and intimacy in the tree-filled landscape. Some groups removed snow to create hollow spaces that suggested shelter and invited occupation, while others introduced a horizontal line through snow walls to indicate the reclining character of the terrain. In every case, the goal was not to impose form, but to explore how subtle gestures could reshape the perception and use of space.

[Fig. 4]  
To Reinforce – 2025 – Lars Hovland

[Fig. 5]  
To Extend – 2025 – Lars Hovland



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Snow proved to be an instructive material. It resisted, collapsed, and shifted, reminding us that form in the landscape is always provisional. What seems stable in the morning may disappear by dusk. This did not call for control, but for responsiveness. The interventions highlighted edges, amplified slopes, and exposed boundaries that the snow cover had hidden. The simplicity of snow as both medium and recorder made our design decisions immediately visible, but also fragile.

On the final day, we returned to the school to reflect and present our findings. Black and white images of bodies in the landscape and of the transformed snow surfaces were displayed in the gallery. Each group gave a short presentation explaining how their assigned term shaped their reading of the site, how physical actions revealed new understandings, how those actions translated into form, and how the site changed through intervention. These presentations were not reports but opportunities to reflect on the value of direct, embodied fieldwork in design education.

Seeing and creating are often perceived as separate, but here they became part of the same process. The landscape architecture project functioned because of creative production, combining representation with observation and poetic reinterpretation. Working at a scale of one to one, the act of sketching became a form of fieldwork that merged process and production. A place was no longer a predefined object or space waiting to be used, but something that emerged through time, use, and imagination. In this context, to work on site is to understand it.

What did we learn? First, that a landscape form may be read and understood in relation to the surroundings and the human-made forms imposed on it. Second, that design may emerge through modest, temporary acts that respond to the shifting conditions of a site. Third, that the act of making, even in its simplest form, requires attentiveness to material behaviour and the environment. By working at full scale and within a changing context, we saw that design is not only about imposing form, but also about negotiating with the forces that exceed our control. The snow, the bare surface underneath the trees, the flatness of the frozen lake, the forest edge surrounding it, and the slopes surrounding it all become part of an ongoing conversation between what is there, what is constructed, and what is left. The temporary snow forms will vanish with the next thaw, but the knowledge gained remains embedded in how we see and how we design.

The workshop was carried out in 2025 with first-year landscape architecture and architecture students at the Oslo School of Architecture and Design (AHO), in collaboration with, Christine Petersen, David Eladio Hugo Cabo, Eirik Stokke-Mikalsen, Espen Ropstad Heggertveit, Mads Øiern, Petter Kveseth, Silje Kolltveit, Sindre Wam, and Anna Røtnes. Three of the photographs were taken by architecture student Lars Hovland; these are indicated under the image. The workshop is part of an annual curriculum.

[Fig. 6]  
To Enclose – 2025 – Lars Hovland

[Fig. 7]  
On the Edge – 2025



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[Fig. 8]

The Steep – 2025





[Fig. 9]  
On the Flat - 2025

