BEAUTY AND ETHICAL FUNCTION
This is a studio about environmental performance—performance of the building envelope and the life cycle environmental performance of the building materials. It is also a studio about beauty and the performance of beauty, especially the kind of beauty that is directly connected to the ethical function of the building. Can the things that are right (the things about the building that are most in keeping with some shared values, perhaps valuing life, refinement, light, wellness, biodiversity, the long-term) also be the things that are most beautiful?

As in abstract drawing or minimalist art and design, can this be the kind of beauty and revelation that comes from editing experience or view to reveal particular phenomena? Can we design these buildings to be selective lenses through which to view what is most beautiful in this landscape? Or through which to re-frame our relationship with or our experience of this environment?

In this context, the fundamental question is: How can we use unusually rigorous design in the context of equally rigorous environmental ethics to make something truly beautiful?

CARBON CONTEXT
Scientists identified 350 ppm as the proportion of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere that is manageable without catastrophic consequences. Atmospheric carbon dioxide was recently measured in the tropics at 400ppm. The built environment is responsible for more than half of US annual carbon emissions. 5-8% percent of global annual carbon emissions come from the manufacture of cement for construction. What does it mean to be a designer of buildings in this context?

Looking at carbon emissions in the life cycle of a building shows that the construction phase building materials are responsible for a large proportion of the life cycle global warming potential of a new building in a region like the northwest where building materials are manufactured using relatively dirtier fuels and buildings are operated on relatively cleaner fuels, the green house gas emissions over the life of a 50-year building are heavily weighted to the first years of construction. High-emissions materials—like the steel, concrete, and plastics in new buildings—mean a lot of greenhouse gas emissions in the near term.

In this context, the fundamental question is: What is an architecture that combines industrial technologies and a high level of design experimentation with very low-emissions construction materials like earth, straw, stone, or timber?

SITE
The studio will develop proposals for a museum in the agricultural zone between the Willamette River and the Finley Wildlife Refuge along 99W between Eugene and Corvallis. The Willamette and the Willamette Valley are a river, a riparian zone, a watershed, a population center, and an agricultural zone. The site and program are ripe with contradiction in terms of land-use, transportation, and social and ecological function.

PROGRAM
Movements in contemporary environmental art engage relationships between humans and nature in ways that connect the scale and senses of the human body with the scale and richness of the landscape or material world. Contemporary environmental art defies any conventional scale or medium and can exist as only idea, performance, event, social interaction, or experience, with or without physical documentation. Contemporary environmental art poses challenges in collecting, housing, exhibiting, and viewing artwork that challenge traditional notions of museum design and operations.