Tactile Intersections
A Wool Production, Education, and Fiber Arts Facility

More than 2 million sheep grazed in Oregon in 1920, a figure that dropped to 1 million by 1945, 541,000 by 1970 and 210,000 by 2000 (as reported by the Oregonian.). It has stabilized at this number for the last decade. Between 1996 and 2000, more than 25,000 sheep producers went out of business in the United States, with domestic wool production facing competition from the ready availability of garments from China and other producers throughout the world. As one of the top producers of domestic wool within the US, Oregon produces 1.1 million pounds of wool each year. As a dwindling industry, ranchers and farmers have had to adapt quickly to new methods of production and innovative economic streams to remain in business. Folded into these new models of processing and production include sustainable farming practices and environmental responsibility. This studio will examine these new enterprises of wool production and use it as a springboard for the design of a wool production facility and fiber arts center.

The studio will explore the following intersections throughout the term:

- Integration of traditional craft techniques with contemporary design practices
- Reformulation of hand processes – weaving, felting, knitting – as digital fabrications
- Exploration of material’s technical applications for tactile environments
- Interrogating relationships between production and environment, communities and globalization.

The project will be sited in Oregon. Students will engage independently in a series of analog and digital conceptual activities for the first few weeks; these interrogations will establish the architectural design direction for the latter half of the term. There will be an emphasis on a high level of craft and technique. A field trip will include a visit to a local production facility.

The studio is part of a series that explores infrastructural, cultural, economic and environmental issues in Oregon communities and how they relate to 21st c networks.

Jolie Kerns is the principal at Jolie Kerns Architecture, a research-based architecture practice with work that spans multiple scales including infrastructural, residential, and exhibition design. The firm’s collaborative approach focuses on confronting contemporary conditions through creative and pragmatic means, with an attention to both detail and the environment.