OFF SHORE VISITOR’S CENTER 1607-2007
ONE GOOD ROOM WITH FOUR REMARKABLE WINDOWS

>> Issues:
If one is clearly a visitor to a new land, then who might be the host?

Pocahontas was here first.
Captain John Smith came second.
She came from the West and moved down the paths of Four Mighty Rivers to pause patiently at the Tidewater between land and sea waiting optimistically for the Sun to rise.

Out of the ever-present fog to the East, Captain John Smith set anchor to his previously wind-borne vessel first emphatically off shore.
Pocahontas waited, watched behind a veil of trees and bore witness to a strange strategy for settlement building.

>> Site / History:
The Captain ordered that a coastal copse of trees be cleared, with the staunchest trunks used immediately to triangulate and to seal up this space by a palisade set up against the unknown. The remainder was burned continuously within; this fire has not diminished in North America for four hundred years. The culture of climate change commenced then and there. Smith endowed this New World settlement with an alien idea of discrete, enduring permanences, [Rossi] places set in contrast to those who harvested not trunks but lighter limbs/twigs and vines affording discrete, porous yet sensible weavings of fabric and frame. Two distinct senses of time and weight confronted one another briefly on this eastern threshold between clay and sand, the permeable and the petrified.

Daniel Borstin in The Americans tells us that Smith was not a man of the Renaissance nor the Enlightenment, but a representative of the late medieval period, the dark ages to some, of self-evident pragmatism: reclusive, militant, with putrid flesh blanched from his ever-present skin of metal armor. Pocahontas, burnished by the ever-present vitality of Virginia red clay, wore fabrics and skins of permeable membranes and was at peace with the rhythms of the Tidewater reciprocities of sweet rivers and salt marshes.

The Lost Colony on Roanoke Island was the first attempt [1587] by Others, and failed. In 1607 Captain John Smith returned to the New World to establish successfully this time the first North American settlement by Europeans. This competition permits us to ponder the significance of how we might build in Arcadia, our collective home and commonwealth for Citizens and Strangers alike as if Pocahontas was still bearing witness.
Problem:

A second chance, a second strategy is presented herein as we ponder paths followed and opportunities offered at this coincidental celebration of the 150th anniversary of the AIA in Virginia and the 400th anniversary of the successful Jamestown settlement.

For this competition, the site is not grounded but deliberately off shore. This time we do not take landing for granted. Indeed Pocahontas will guide us slowly, step-by-step up a gangplank of your invention to reach a remarkable room set on a barge. This time set yourself adrift on a river barge 30'-0" wide 120' long. Envision the deck as the construction site of one good room [30' cube] with four windows to view perhaps four distinct settlements [of your selection / invention] constructed over the past four hundred years: Roanoke / Jamestown / Norfolk / Rosewell / Fredericksburg / Washington DC, etc.

The barge will come to rest, first, perhaps on the James River on Spring Equinox of 2007 at Jamestown; then move up by the Summer Solstice to the York River perhaps at the curiosity of Carter's Rosewell Ruins, onto the Rappahannock, perhaps Fredericksburg on the Fall Equinox, ending the year at the time of the Winter Solstice at the Tidal Basin of the Potomac at Washington DC. Each of the distinct three remarkable windows [ESW] are to frame one particular view. One might be determined by a Surveyor, a Nomad, and Lunatic if you wish. Others recruit the aid of a Gardener and an Engineer. Singular Monks and a Circus of Magicians have been useful at times when all else fails. The North Window is a distinct condition, maybe a blank slate, a computer screen, and/or the mirage of the beginning and/or the end. These windows are located reasonably on the walls, but trespassing lunatics have been known to mirror the moon in baptismal fonts and/or janitor's buckets which serve as windows to the sky with clouds and sails and wind-mill blades causing a cacophony of sensibilities on the chamber floor/ceiling within.

In addition to the four remarkable windows rendered as a sequence of perspectives from the inside looking out to the settlement views of your own invention, there are three remarkable doors, two remarkable attic conditions, but only one modest out-house. These elements should be rendered as four elevations and two [floor and roof] plans. Finally, at least one major section is required. All the orthogonal drawings should be at the scale ¼"= 1'-0". The barge is the basement of unlimited capacity, perhaps, where a body can be isolated and where re-fuse and re-newal coincide. It should be clear that Pocahontas is still here watching now what choices we make as to the renewable resources of sun and wind, water and fire, lightness and permeability as they are selected and celebrated. A narrative of then and there and here and now is offered this New Year.

Select a barge, or design a raft of your own specifications. Your site is on water and meanders between salt and sweet. Views are revealed by precise coordinates, and shuttered perhaps more often than not. Various links will be provided to historic maps and a collection of settlement views. Students may wish to use these inventories and/or fabricate others to make all surfaces, inside and out to serve as mirages of a construction site. We hope the students keep this good room small but the construction on each of the four sites at the time of the four openings may have progressive or regressive origami tendencies.
Happy 150th anniversary VSAIA! May we all celebrate the 400th as one generation discovers for itself lessons imagined by other folks so very long ago, but close at hand, remaining on the edge and/or in the center.

>> Requirements:

> Entrance/Gangplank Strategy [Consultant: Leonardo da Vinci]
> Indoor/Outdoor installation/ performance space [Curator: Piranesi]
> Stairs/Ramps/Elevator [if required by design, must be hydraulic]
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>> Site documentation:
Drawings and photographs of Tidewater Virginia are available at:
http://faculty.virginia.edu/vsaia_competition

>> Submission:
The competition begins on Friday, January 26 @ 5pm and concludes on Monday, January 29 @ 9am. Each school will select one first prize and up to seven finalists to go to the final jury in Richmond. VSAIA competition rules require that all work must be generated by a single author – no collective projects are allowed. Complete the following required drawings, site plan as temporal strategy, floor plans, elevations and section, and interior perspectives with additional drawings/texts/specifications for construction as desired. Work in any medium [paper/computer, etc.] you prefer. Mount your work on a single 20”x30” board [max. total thickness ¼”; no models accepted]. Securely fasten an unlabeled sealed envelope on the back that contains your name/school and e-mail address. The author’s name and school affiliation may not appear [unconcealed] anywhere on the board.