Center for Cinema Studies

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Sited roughly in the center of Savannah College of Art and Design’s sprawling campus in Savannah, GA, the Center for Cinema Studies is a multi use mid-rise containing apartments for graduate students, gallery space, and accommodations for both displaying and teaching film.

The essence of film is encapsulated in the control of light. By manipulating the relationship between dark and light, both within film and the spaces that house it, the emotional experience of the viewer is manipulated by the maker. This control of aperture, coupled with the stitching together of still-frames to create a whole underlaid our design process.

The Center is itself a gradation of light, with the program broken up according to the light quality required by each space. Two theatres and small classrooms sit below grade, above which are two levels of gallery space are accessible to public and could be used for film showings, receptions etc. Above these public functions are two residential towers, containing one and two bedroom units, that are connected by a enclosed atrium space that connects back down to the sublevel space via a series of floor plate openings.

As sunlight fills the void between the residential towers, the floor plates act as filters, which gradually sift the intensity of illumination in order to optimize each programs below. During sunlit hours, cinema is shown on the first and subterranean levels. Once the sun sets, the cinema showings move upward: projections of class projects, favorite films and music videos dot the gently angled walls of the atrium.

The Center for Cinema Studies establishes a strong identity within the historical fabric of Savannah, while actively responding to the direct site context, which determines building datum lines and materiality, reflected by the local housing typology as well as The Center’s adjacent neighbor, a highly ornate Scottish Rite Temple. The heavy masonry base of the 100-year-old masonic temple continues the Spanish moss ‘ceiling’ line, draping a light sunshade over the sidewalks below.

The proposed Cinema Studies project reacts to this condition, using a large, panelized translucent concrete system at the human scale, which portrays the weight of traditional Savannah homes, but then illuminates the streetscape after dusk, advertising the film gallery. The same panel scheme is used above for a contrasting plastic system, consisting of unique variations using opaque, translucent, and transparent infills to create privacy as well as thermal comfort for each space. This facade emphasizes verticality in response to the tall pilasters of the adjacent Scottish Rite Temple.

The Center for Cinema Studies reinforces a cultural and academic node through its adjacencies to SCAD’s Student Admissions Building and the historic Scottish Rite Temple in the center of Savannah’s discontinuous campus layout. It creates public spaces for SCAD to showcase student work, reach out to prospective students and further integrate the city of Savannah with the academic and artistic community.