

# **Learning Latency through Blatancy: Introducing Digital Realism in an Early Design Studio with an Emphasis on Imagination and Play**

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Realism is sometimes an obstacle to creative thinking for the inexperienced design student. The moment a surface is labeled “brick”, it appears unbreakable. Add a door or a window into the mix, and they seem unscalable. For this reason, a logical studio brief might guide students through a series of abstract explorations, steadily gaining realism throughout the semester. In contrast, the 2nd year design studio discussed in this paper, began with detailed digital replicas of real-world sites to be gradually defamiliarized over the course of the semester. This approach encouraged students to be nimble digital creatives that use 3D models as an exploratory design tool instead of merely a method of final production. It was expected that they would both model reality and break it, to uncover new, otherwise unimaginable possibilities.

The studio takes inspiration from the 2017 Exhibition, *Souvenirs: New New York Icons*, which featured 59+ objects designed to reimagine the global perception of the city. Many of these models merged icons of the everyday lived experience like trashcans and bicycles, with the built urban context. In the spirit of this exhibition, students were sent out into the city of Knoxville to collect and measure a souvenir of their choice, which was a building scale “chunk”. This chunk was 3D modeled in extreme detail, including bricks, graffiti, and even loose trash. Souvenirs are precious objects and the immaculately modeled chunks seemed resistant to change, which set up the premise of the rest of the semester to uncover as many possible realities within the resistant object as possible. Students gained a greater understanding of how realism is achieved technically, but also how realism can be disrupted.

Through a series of drawing, rendering, and digital modeling exercises, this studio served as a prototype for how robust technical skills can be introduced early on without compromising student’s ability to engage in qualitative, messy methods of expression and ideation.