Context
Amongst the open questions of the Canadian colonial era are: Who owns the thousands of things taken or purchased from Indigenous people in the 19th and 20th centuries, and isn’t coming to an agreement on how to answering this question part of the process of reconciliation with Canada’s Indigenous people that the federal government has claimed it is committed to?

In British Columbia, perhaps the most rarified of these artifacts is the Yuquot Whalers’ Shrine, taken from Nuu-Chah-Nulth territory by ethnologist George Hunt at the behest of Franz Boas, who was chief ethnologist for the American Museum of Natural History.

This description of the shrine from Aldona Jonaitis:
“An assemblage of 92 carved wooden figures and whales, 16 human skulls, and the small building that housed them – variously identified as a burial place for great chiefs and a shrine used for rituals associated with whale hunting – the shrine had for centuries stood in Yuquot, or Friendly Cove, on the remote west coast of Vancouver Island, to be visited only by chiefs and their wives...”

We will assume that the AMNH and Canadian government have agreed to repatriate the Shrine to its place and community as well as to fund construction, O&M training, and operating costs.

Site
Yuquot is a peninsula on Nootka Island, off the western coast of Vancouver Island. It has been occupied for millennia by the Mowachaht/Muchalaht people. It is accessible only by water, is very stormy and wet.

Yuquot’s people were evicted in the mid-1960s, moving first to a reserve at the mouth of Gold River, next to a pulp mill, then, some thirty years later, to Tsaxana, their current home. Today, the community returns to Yuquot every year for a two-week Summerfest.

Little of what can be seen in the 1966 photograph remains. There is a small church, barely visible in the upper left-hand corner, the Coast Guard station, and the pier. The photograph also shows a row of buildings oriented toward Friendly Cove. A single house that is occupied year-round by a Mowachaht/Muchalaht family and caretaker of the site is all that remains. Over time, the houses have been replaced by a long berry patch, which will be the studio’s physical site.

Program
1/ How can the sacred function of this artifact, now to be stored in a new historical and cultural setting as the community works through the contentious question of what to do with it, inform a modestly-scaled, phased program grounded in a critical conceptualization of Reconciliation?

2/ How might the elements of this artifact be carefully unfurled, and might they be embedded – in other words, organized and integrated – in form, material, and space?

3/ What economic/institutional scenarios might the community consider with the return of the shrine?

4/ How can modern building material technology and off-site manual and digital prefabrication address remote site construction challenges? How can the off-the-grid technical systems address the realities of a remote site and the need for energy production and climate control?

Structure
The studio will be organized in two basic parts: An three-week program, prefabrication, and technology research phase that will include a site visit transitioning to a nine-week design phase.

September
Two weeks of research – a conceptual inventory of the Shrine, site environment, off-grid energy options and digital and manual prefabrication. This research will inform development of a phased functional program, with some functional parameters set. A three-day weekend community visit after mid-September. After return, individuals will refine and set their conceptual/functional programs and begin testing it by the end of September.

Mid-October review
Site plans and sections with landscape and building materials at 1:500; Schematic designs in plan and section at 1:200 illustrating conceptual and programmatic juxtaposition, coopted technical systems; Bodies represented in 3D with other bodies and things.

Mid-October through Final review
See above, repeat, and add a large scale (1:100 or 1:50, or 1:20, tbd) physical model. Scope of the projects will be modest, so significant depth of resolution of site and building vis-à-vis the design of integrated technical, programmatic, spatial, material fabrication and conceptual systems, illustrated spanning scales from 1:500 to 1