

Instruments of Memory: The Architect as Archivist

Liam A. Smith

Thesis submitted to the faculty of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
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Master of Architecture In
Architecture

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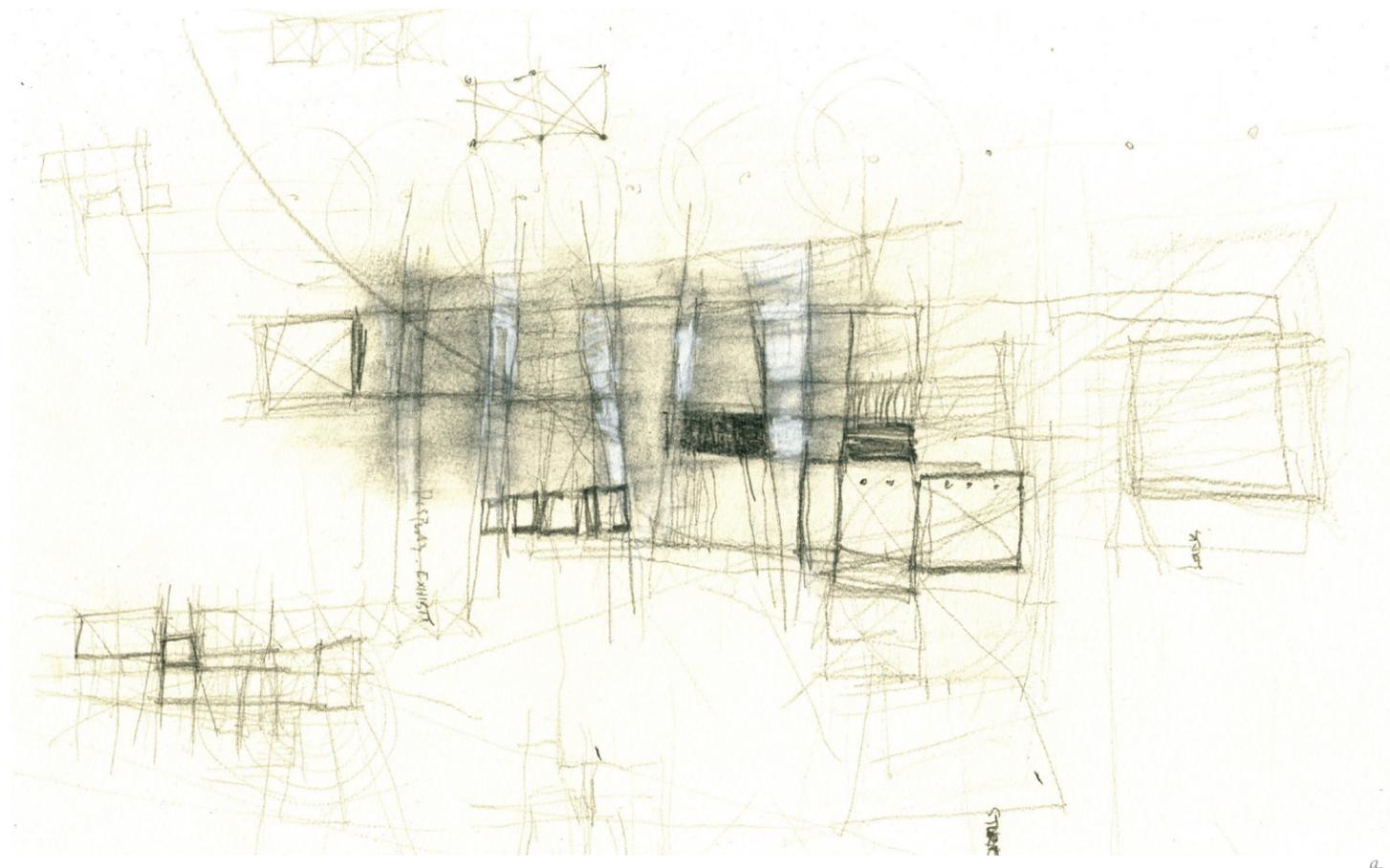
Keywords: archive, memory, Philadelphia, tower, catalogue, image, house, icon

Instruments of Memory: The Architect as Archivist

Liam A. Smith

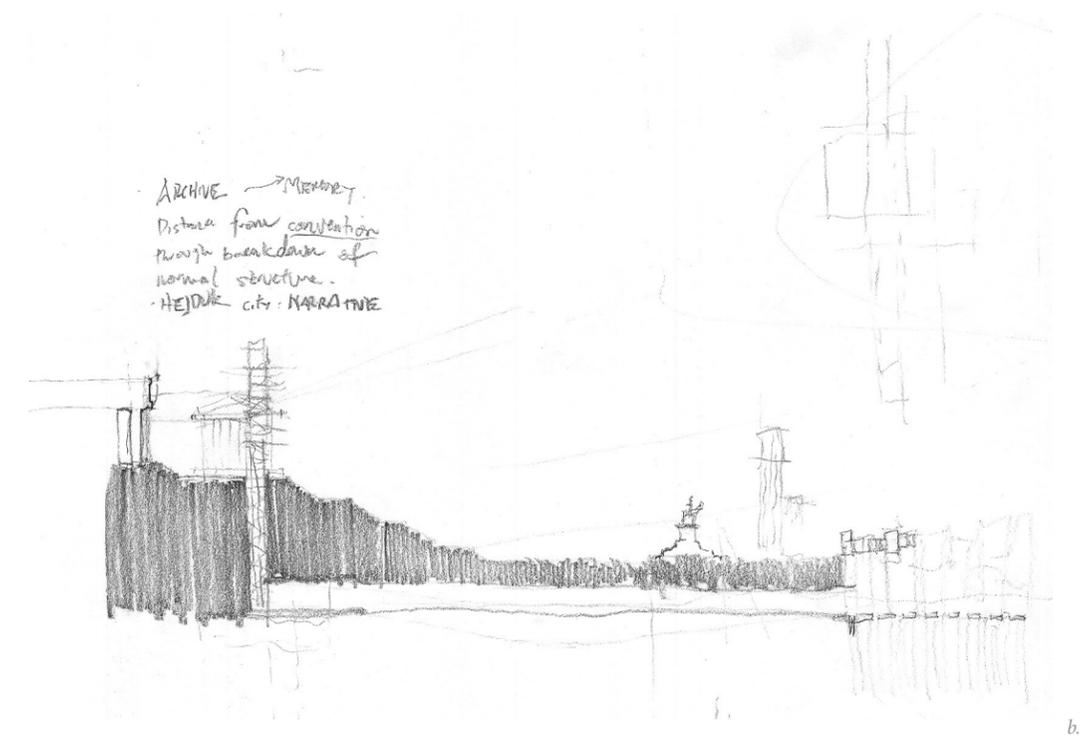
The mental space in which the architect formulates, tests, and cultivates an idea is deformed by memory, so that nothing projected into this space is bereft of association. However, neither is this space constrained by physical reality, allowing the architect a certain freedom to visualize the totality of an object and the world in which it is projected, simultaneously and in suspension: a space between memory and imagination. Memories and experiences layer richness upon this inner world and form the context for its manifestation; its realization. The deliberate and conscientious curation of this inner world-- *the architect as archivist of memory and experience*-- is an essential practice for the development of the architect and the worlds in which they operate.

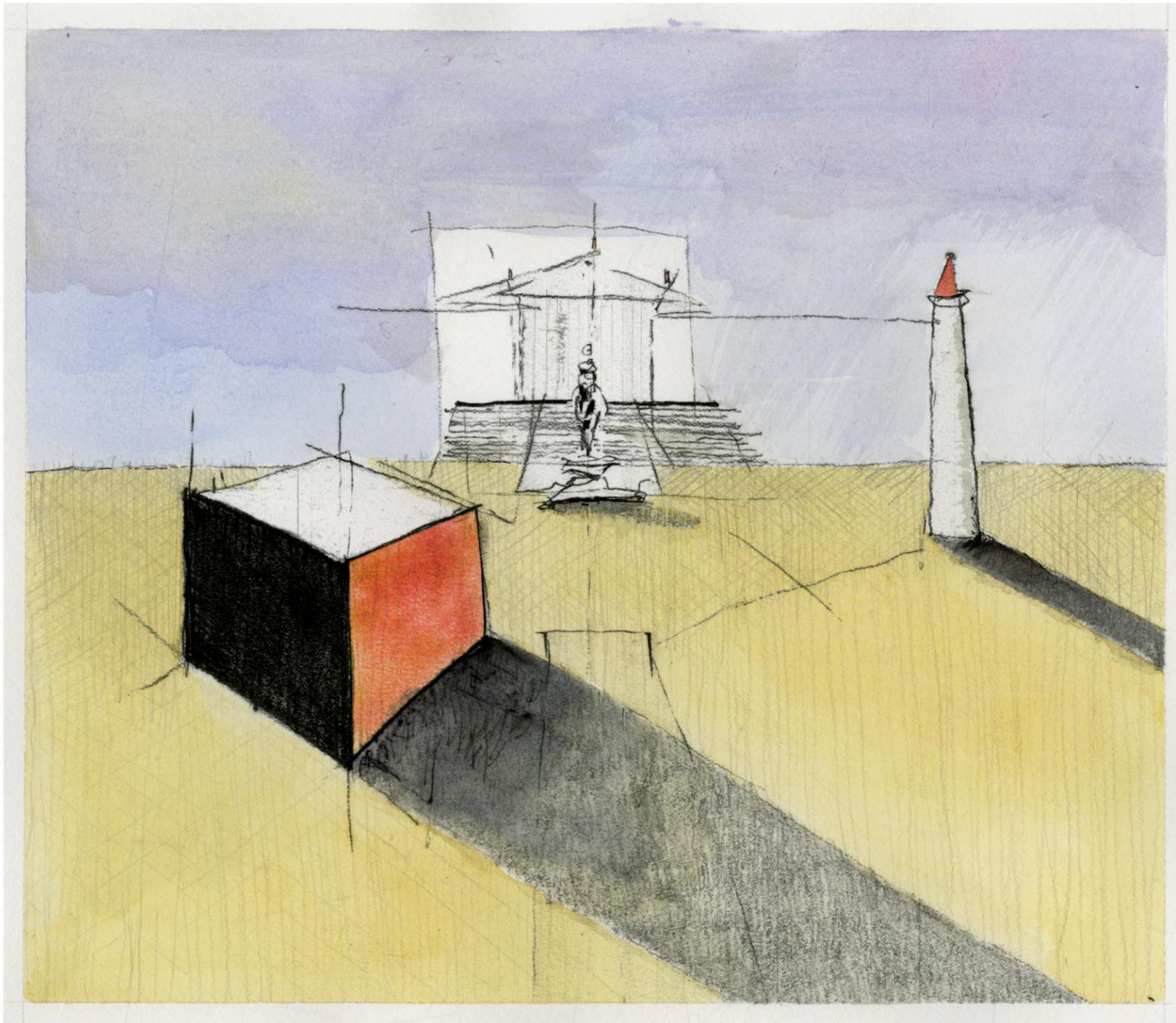
Abstract



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Situación

“Perhaps the observation of things has remained my most important formal education; for observation later becomes transformed into memory. Now I seem to see all things I have observed arranged like tools in a neat row; they are aligned as in a botanical chart, or a catalogue, or a dictionary. But this catalogue, lying somewhere between imagination and memory, is not neutral; it always reappears in several objects and constitutes their deformation, and in some way, their evolution.”

-Aldo Rossi, *A Scientific Autobiography*



d.

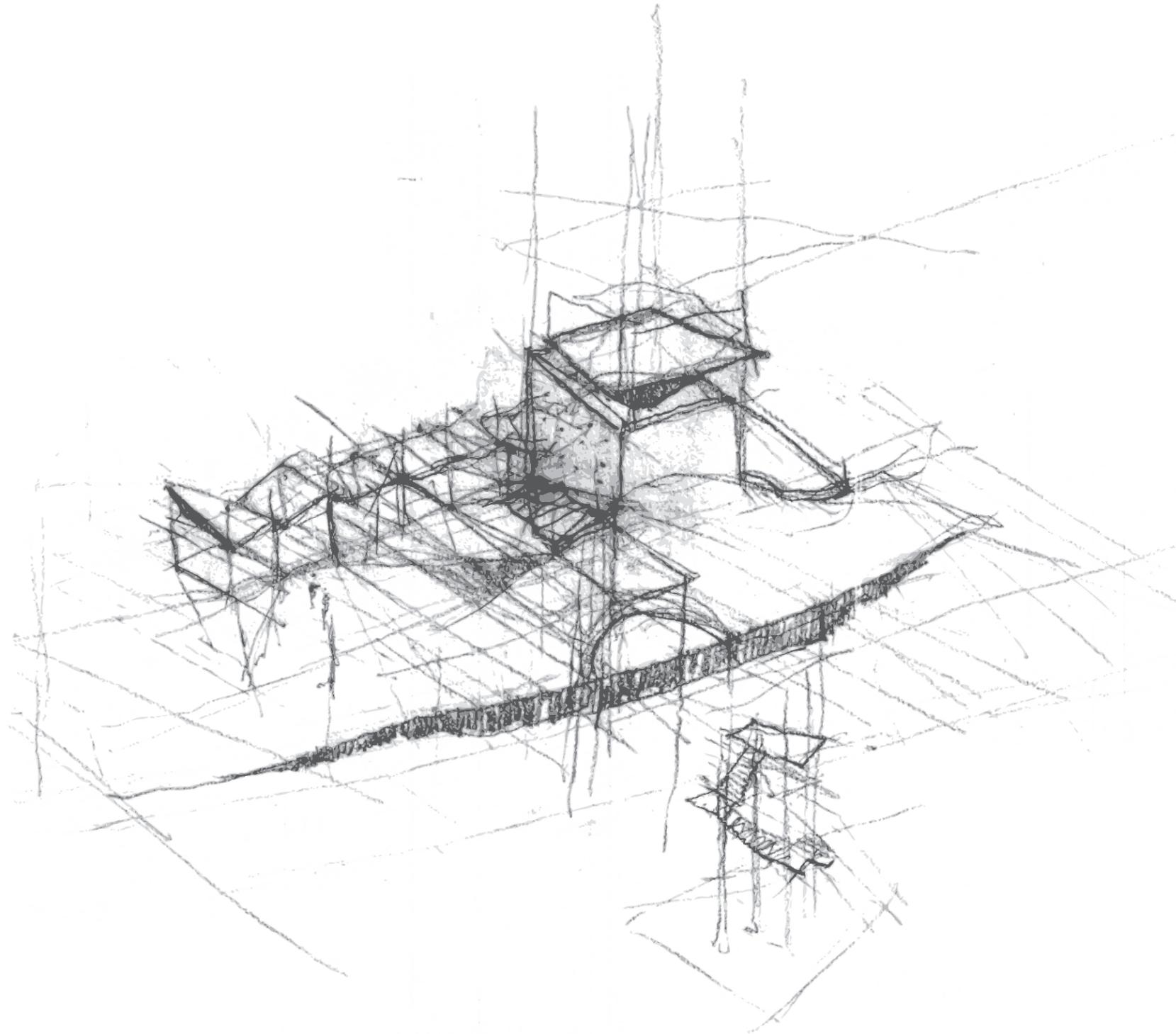


e.

I have always been fascinated by the character of Ireneo Funes in Borges' collection of short stories, *Ficciones*. Funes' physical paralysis forces the development, and precision of his memory. He is able to recall and reconstruct every experience, sensation and thought, to the most precise detail, working towards a "usable mental catalogue of all the images of memory" (Borges). Funes' inner world-- the space of his mind-- is no less vibrant than that of reality.

The mental space in which the architect formulates, tests and cultivates an idea, is deformed by memory, so that nothing projected into this space is bereft of association. However neither is this space constrained by physical reality, allowing the architect a certain freedom to visualize the totality of an object, and the world in which it is projected simultaneously and in suspension. Memories and experiences layer richness upon this inner world, and form the context for its manifestation; its realization, "a grasping of reality" (Tarkovsky). Once an idea is given form, it carries with it the deformation of that inner world, yet does not remain neutral, as it resists and critiques in both arenas, and struggles to find its representation.

Rainer Marie Rilke expresses the gestation of memory as it develops into poetic verse as follows: 'For the sake of a single verse, one must see many cities, men and things, one must know the animals, one must feel how the birds fly and know the gesture with which the little flowers open in the morning' ... 'And still it is not enough to have memories. One must be able to forget them when they are many and one must have the great patience to wait until they come again. For it is not yet the memories themselves. Not till they have returned to blood within us, to glance and gesture, nameless, and no longer to be distinguished from ourselves - not till then can it happen that in a most rare hour the first word of a verse arises in their midst and goes forth from them.' Likewise, the architect constructs drawings from the cultivated ground of memory as a means to link the vision of the inner world with the outer.

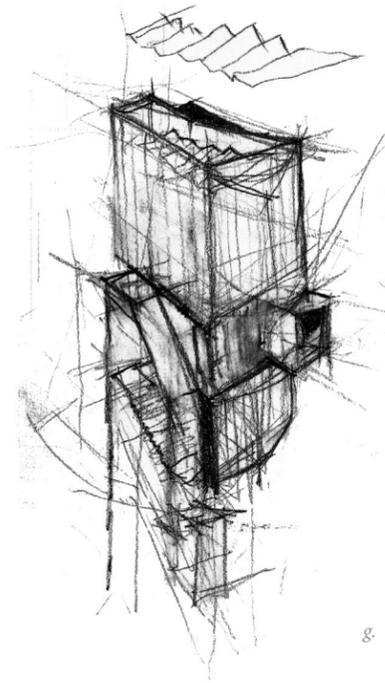


“Whenever we search for something, we do not find merely what we have sought; in every search there is a degree of unforeseeability, a sort of troubling feeling at the conclusion. Thus the architect must prepare his instruments with the modesty of a technician; they are the instruments of an action which he can only glimpse or imagine, although he knows that the instrument itself can evoke and suggest the action. I particularly love empty theaters with few lights lit and, most of all, those partial rehearsals where the voices repeat the same bar, interrupt it, resume it, remaining in the potentiality of the action.”

-Aldo Rossi, *A Scientific Autobiography*

This set of images is an attempt to unearth and prepare these ‘instruments’ taken from memory and through experience. They represent significant distilled formulations of architecture-- that which constitutes the meaningful and cultivated ground of this thesis.

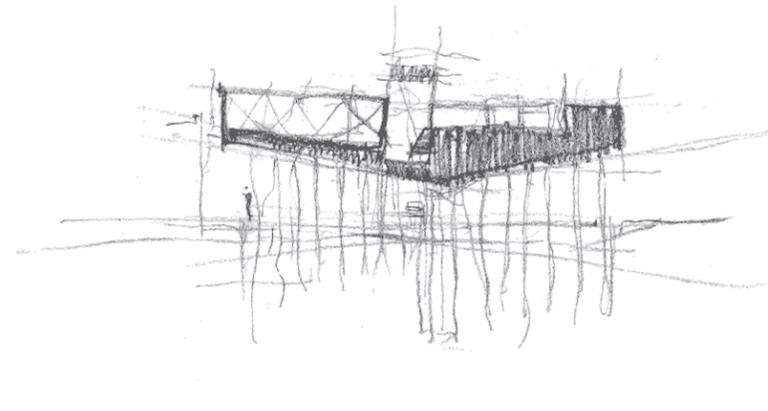
f.



Archivist's house

Structure: Steel frame on concrete bearing walls, 4" wood slat cladding, single-pane stained glass window facing South-East: the tower of concentric walls.

based on Dürer's etching of st. Jerome in his study, the archivist's house supports the archivist's *studiolo*, an ideal square, apart and above. The archivist orders a growing collection of books, manuscripts and inspired objects, and fills shelves 16' high from a ladder which runs on a track around the room. The room permits only the archivist: a place cleared rather than enclosed.

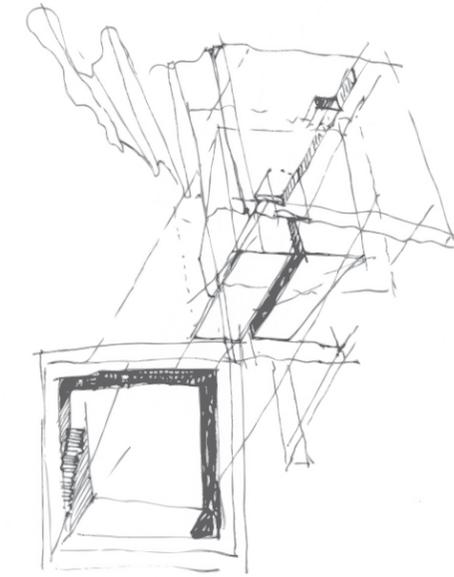


Archive: a viewing apparatus

Structure: 10 precast concrete cells, cast concrete bearing walls, stone pedestals, stone impressed boxes, collapsable wood platform (folds and unfolds depending on the position of the sun), perforated metal canopy supported by 16 concrete 16' tall columns, 18" in diameter, 24' intervals.

the 10 cells hold 10 icons: inspired paintings, that ascend and descend through the 4' square aperture in the bottom of the cell. The floor and pedestal belong to the icons. The cells are lit by sunlight, indirect and diffuse from above, devoid of light, the cells are inanimate. Each cell measures 10' x 8' interior dimension, and is reached from the anti-chamber of wood, separated by a bench, a bowl, a curtain, and a bridge. A hydraulic lift raises the platforms into place through the 4' square aperture, from their position in stone below. The archivist visits the archive at dawn and dusk.

Observers are permitted to view the icons during the hours of sunlight, by appointment, careful to remove hats and refill basins, leaving shoes at the entrance.



Tower of concentric walls

Structure: 16 Steel columns 72' tall : 12' sections, supporting steel frame armature cantilevered 4' from the face of the columns.

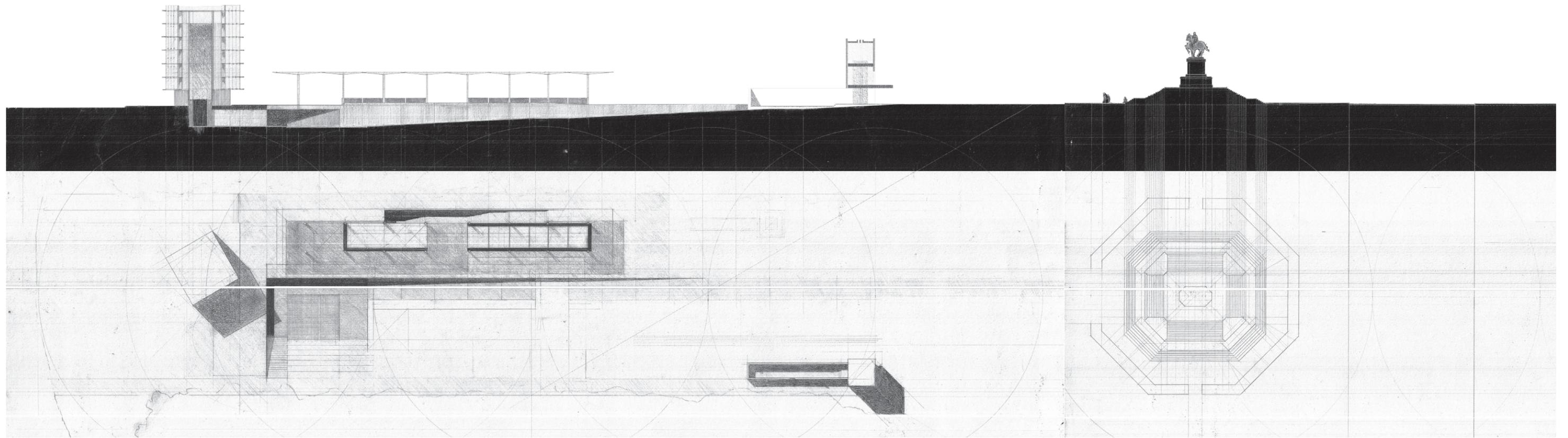
canvas stretched over the steel armature, grommets attached at 8' intervals.

Woven fabric, hung from above the suspended wall and suspended form, fastened at 8' intervals hangs 4' below the pedestal, inside of the columns.

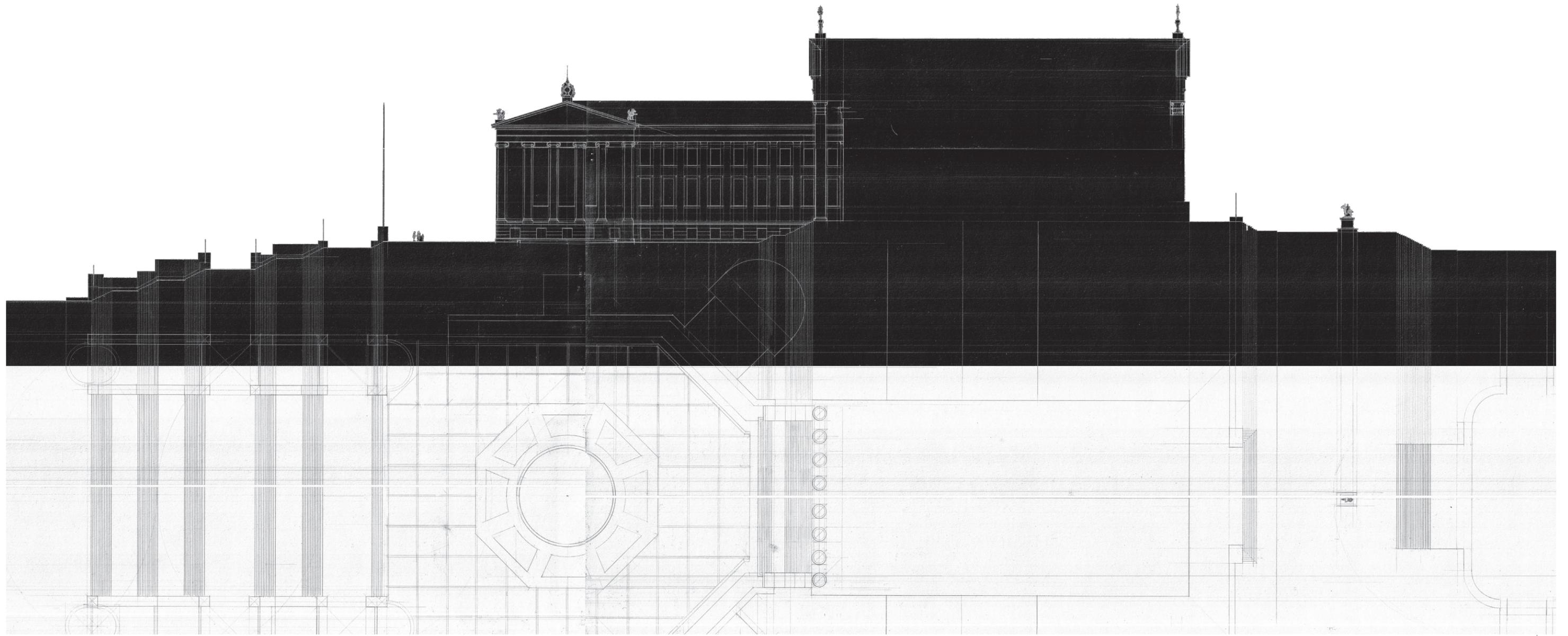
48 stone stairs ascend the 22' square stone pedestal clockwise.

The tower of concentric walls, billowing shadows, repetitions. A labyrinth centering on a sanctuary.

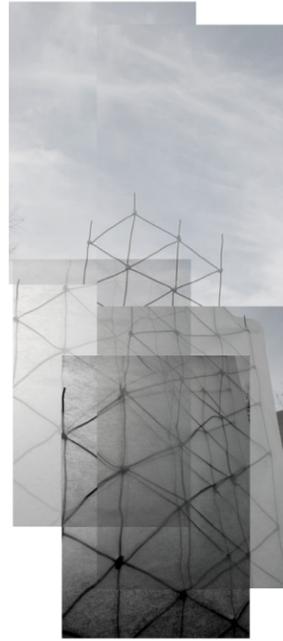
Elements



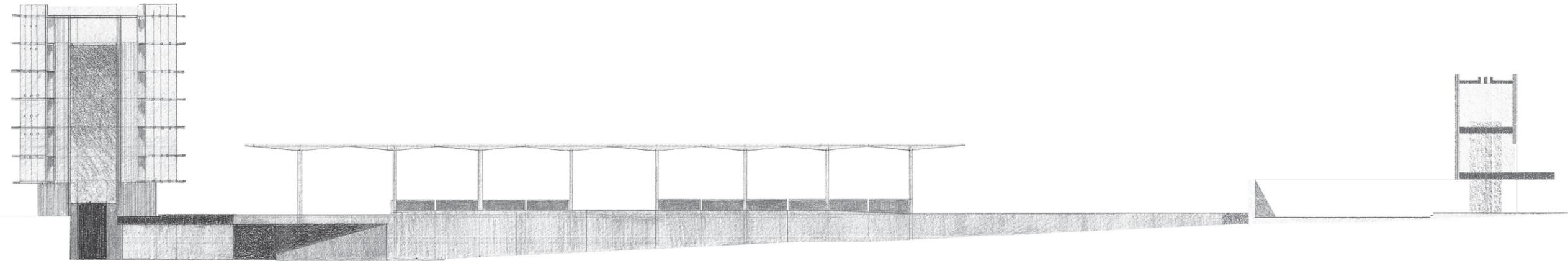
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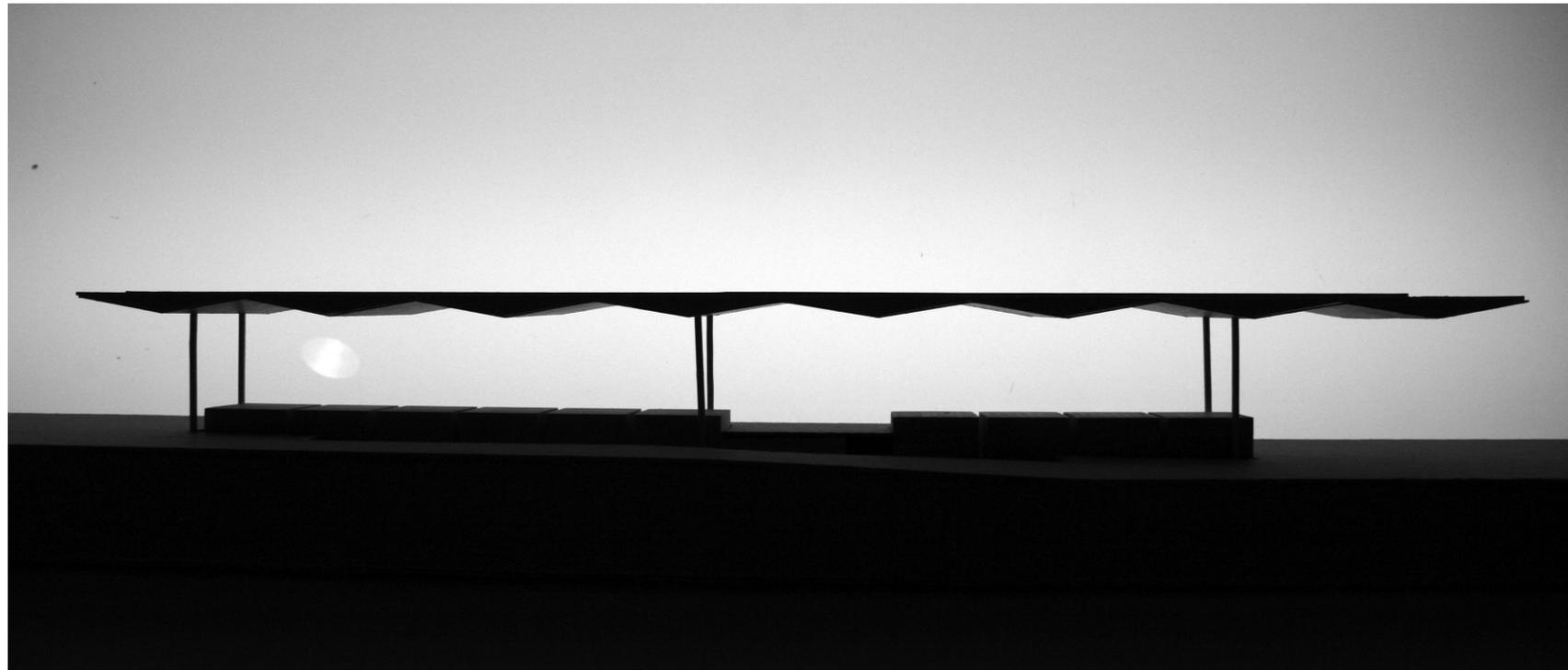


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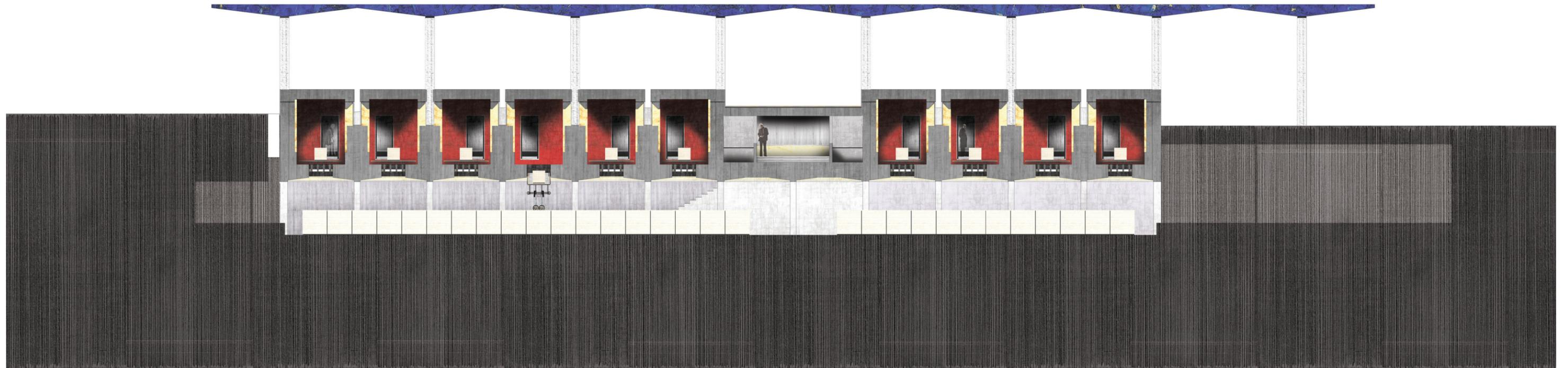




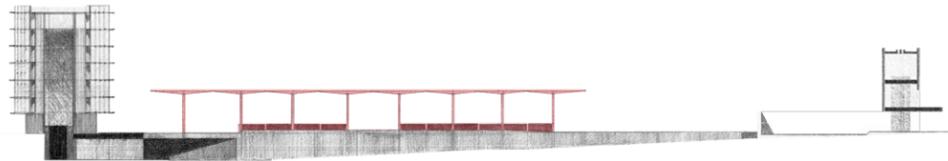
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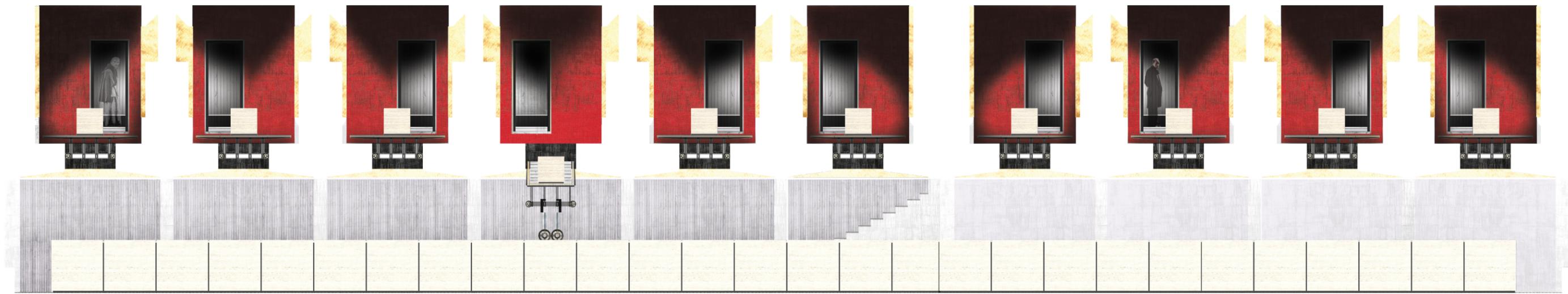
Archive

At dawn, the archivist visits the objects in the collection. Although he has spent many hours carefully measuring and recording all of their physical specification, he feels as though he sees them for the first time. He is not convinced that these objects at dawn and dusk, are the same, or should be referred to in the same way.

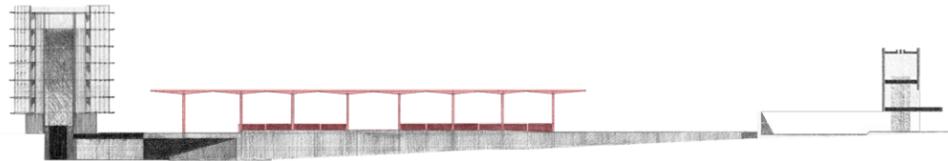


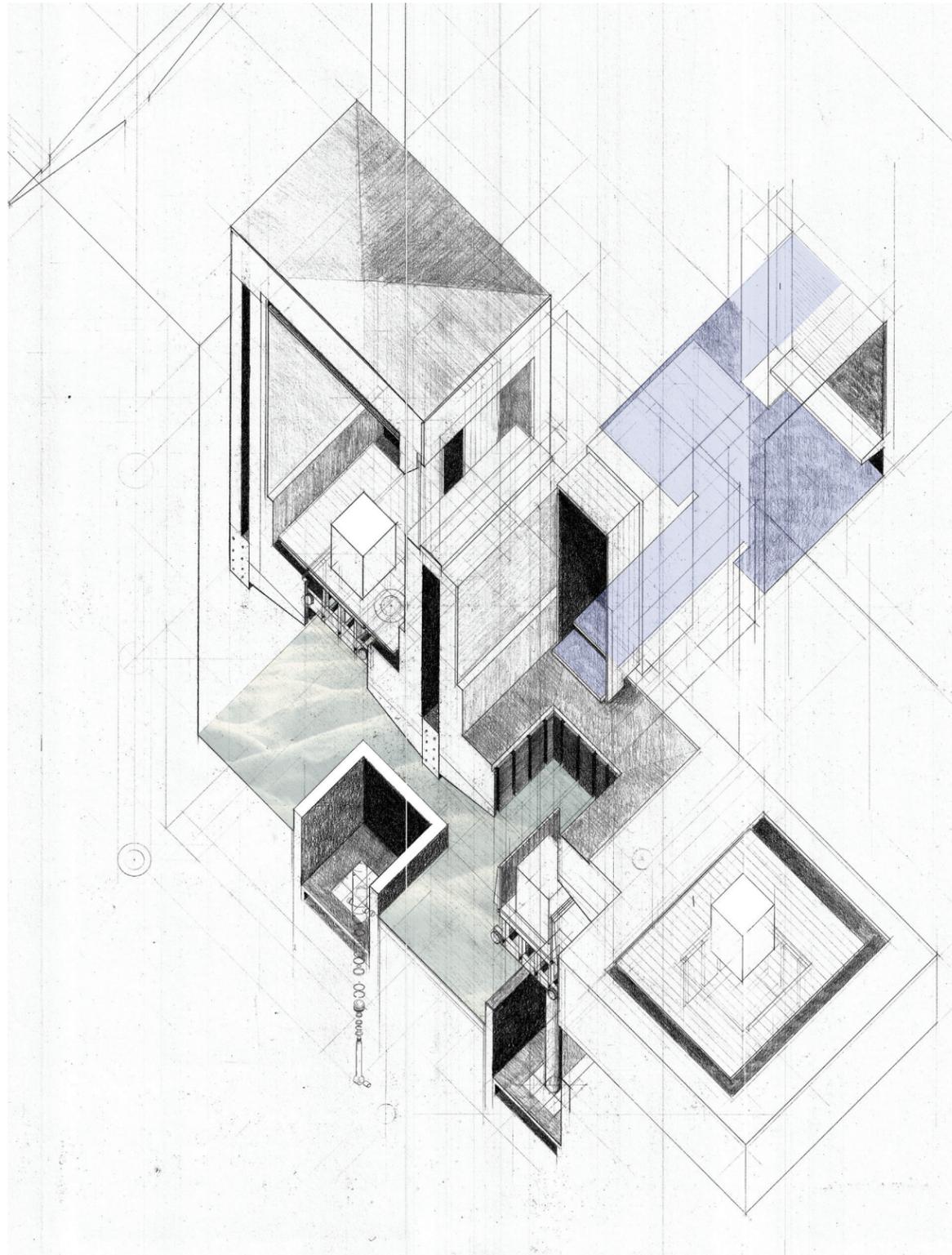
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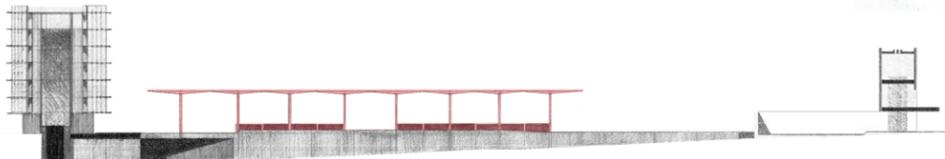


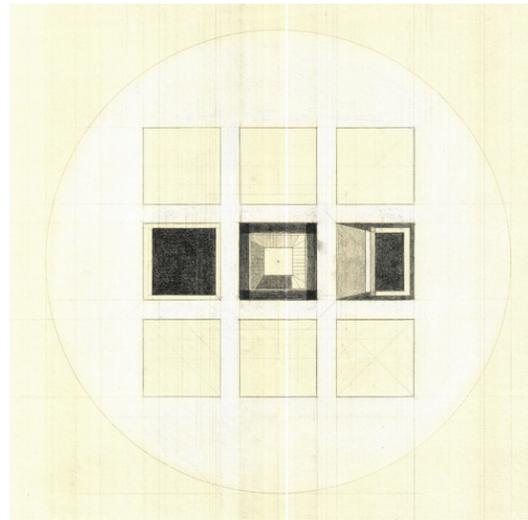
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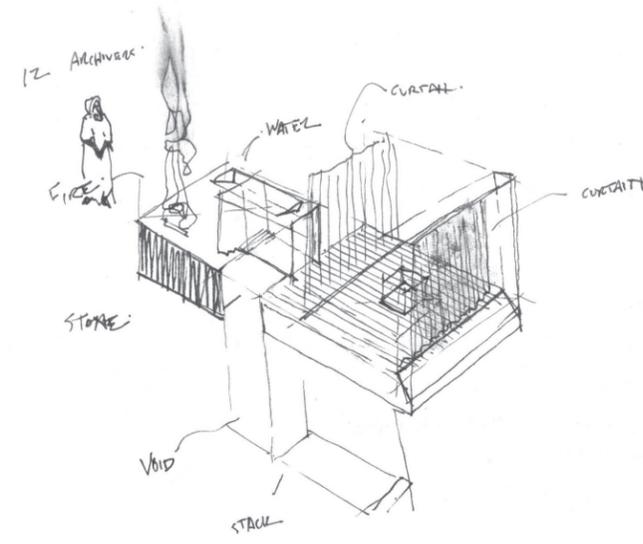


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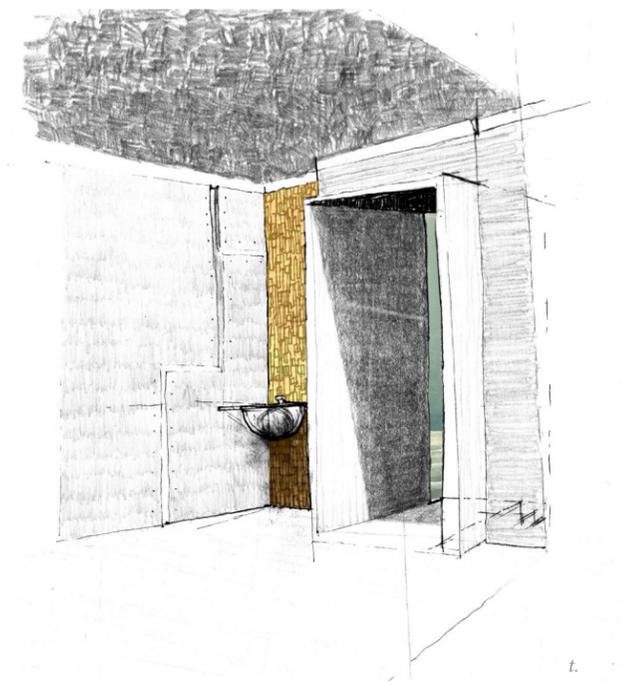




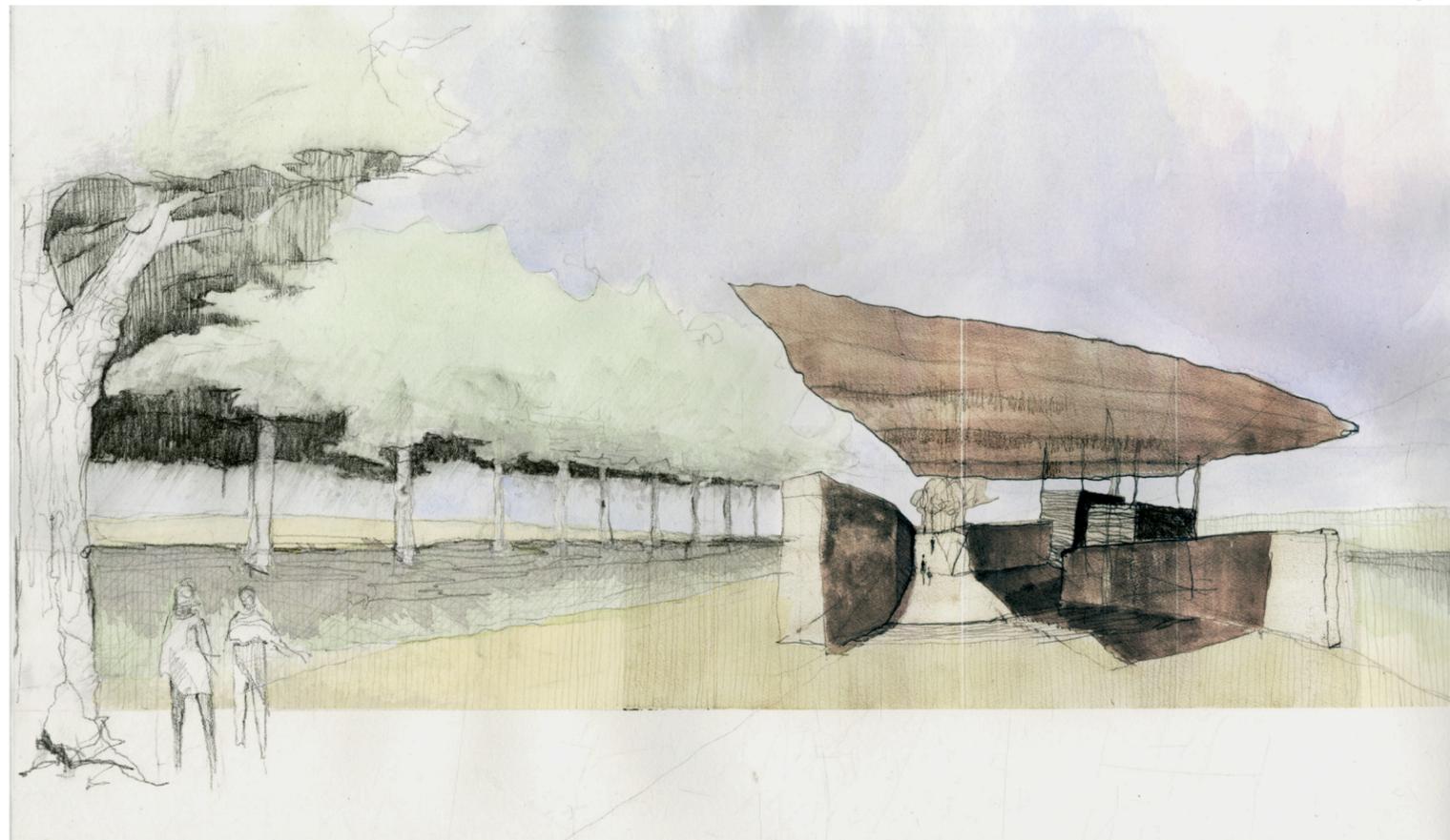
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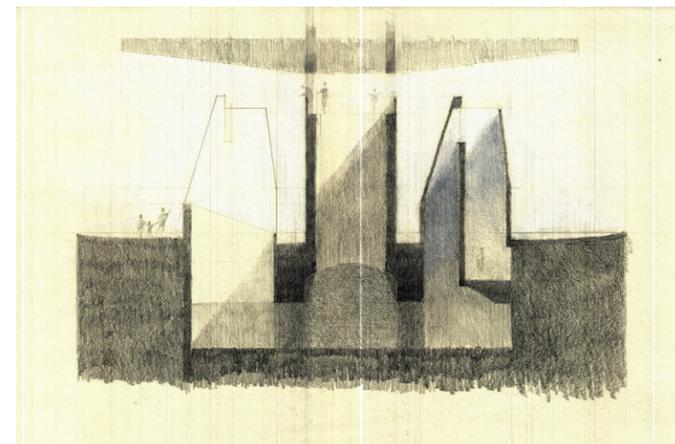
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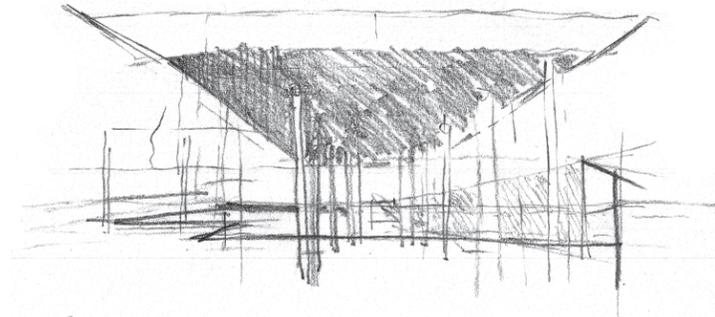
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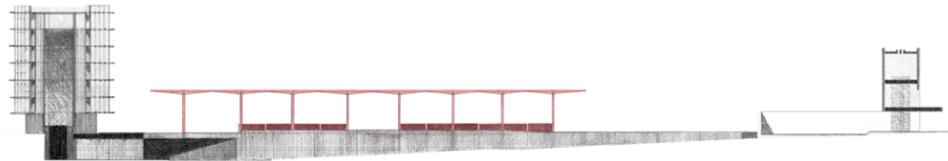
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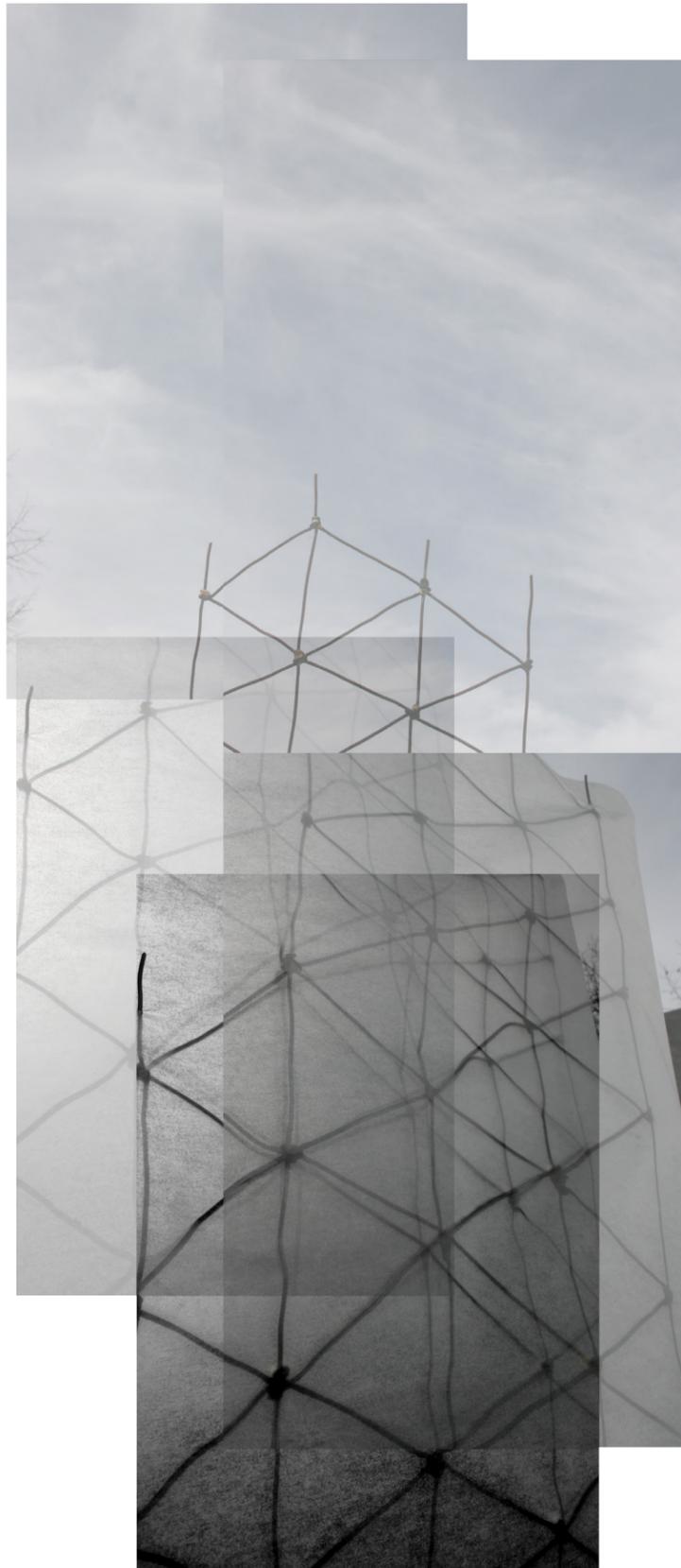


s.



u.



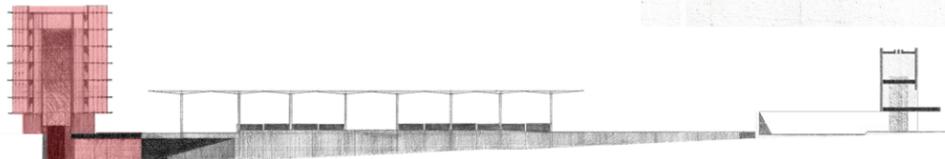
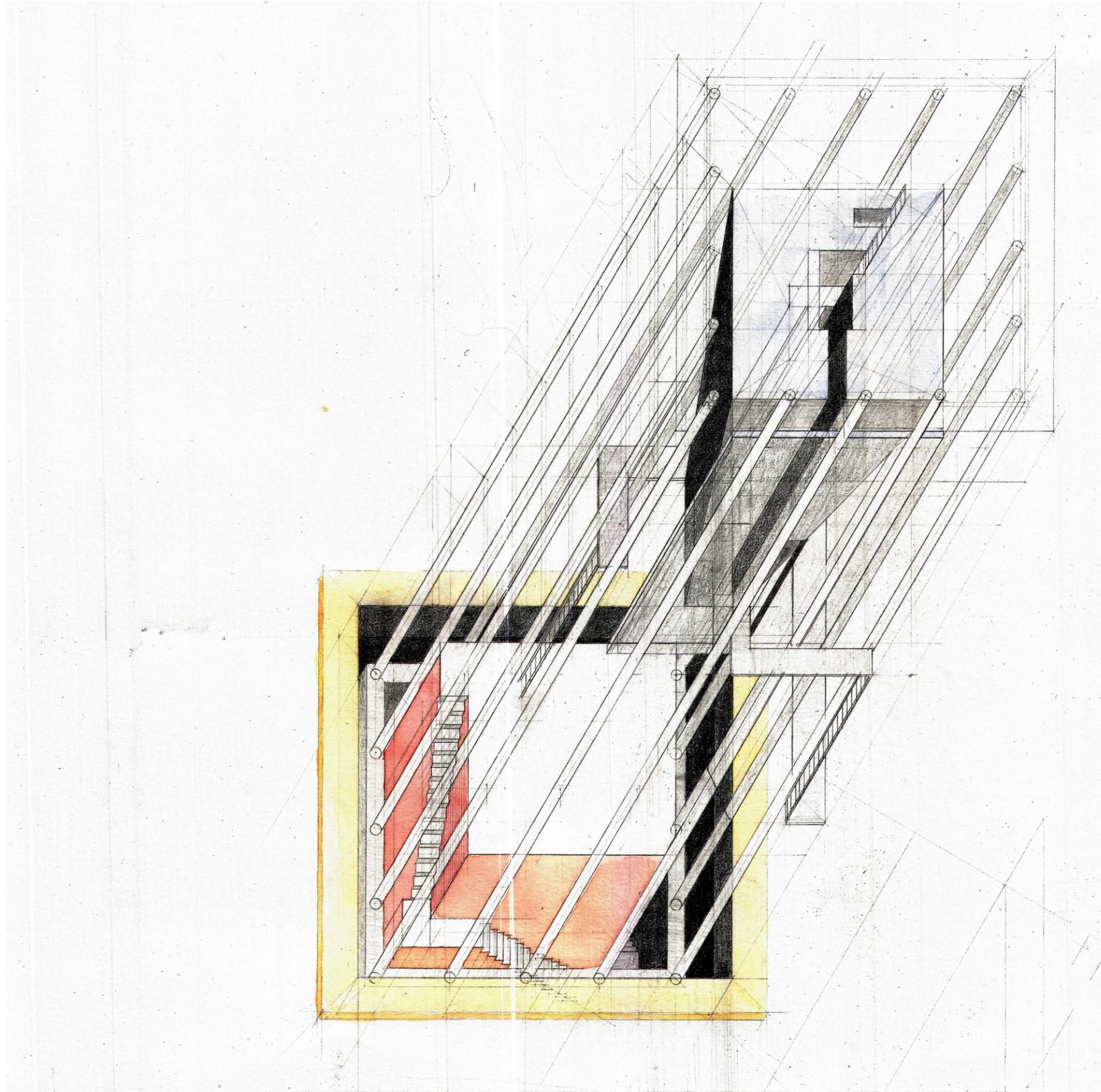


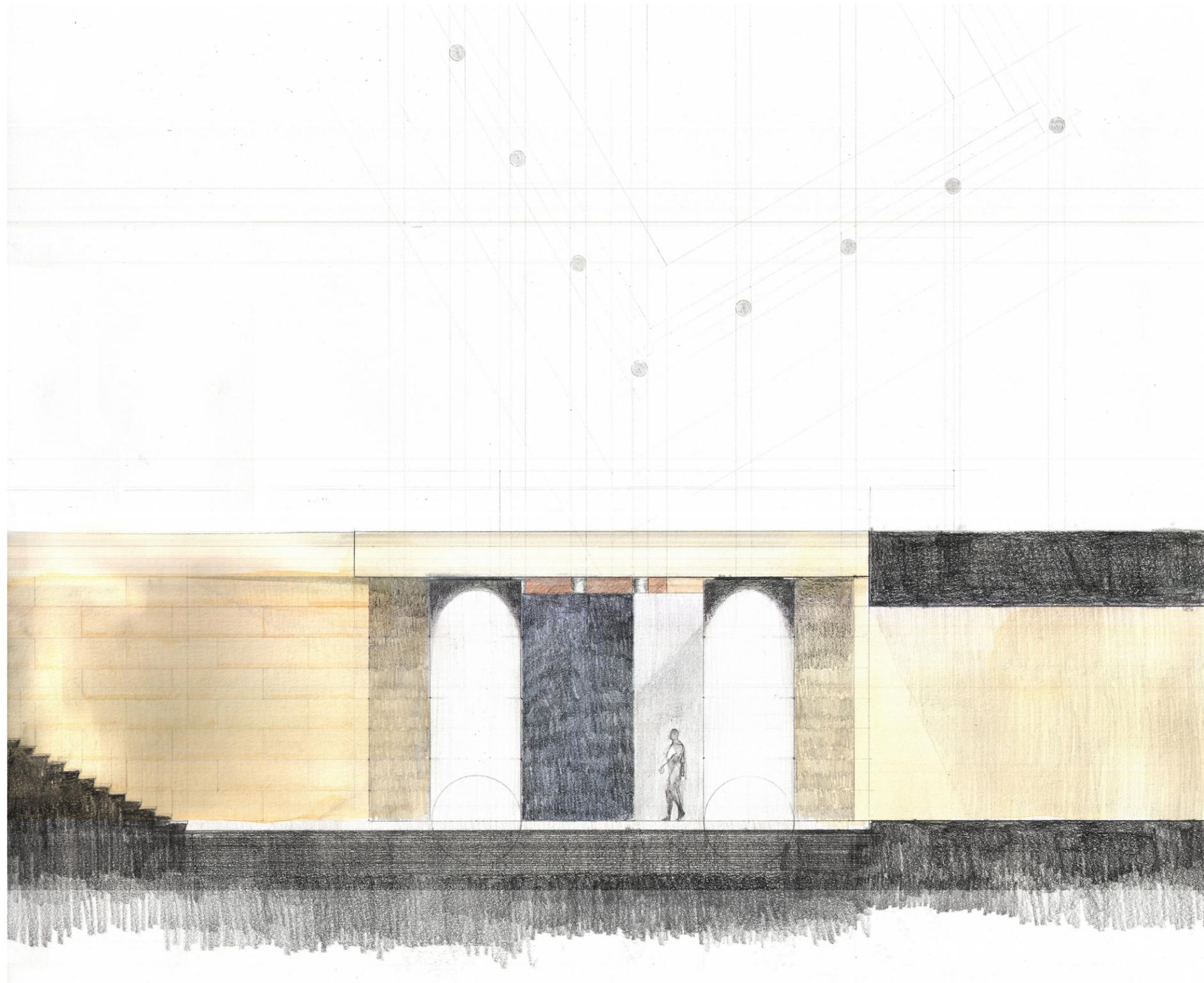
v.

Tower of concentric walls

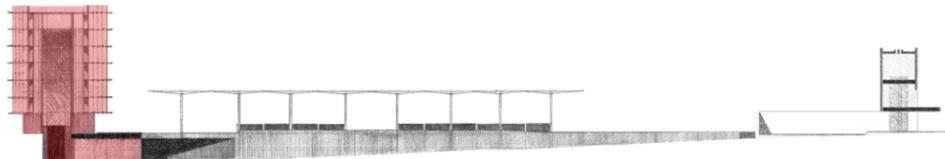
The archivist conceived of the tower of concentric walls as the antithesis of the archive cells. A vertical labyrinth rotated off of the city's axis and corresponding to the cardinal directions. A series of stairs, ladders and catwalks allow the ascension of the tower. Its indefinite, enigmatic nature is a source of anxiety for observers.

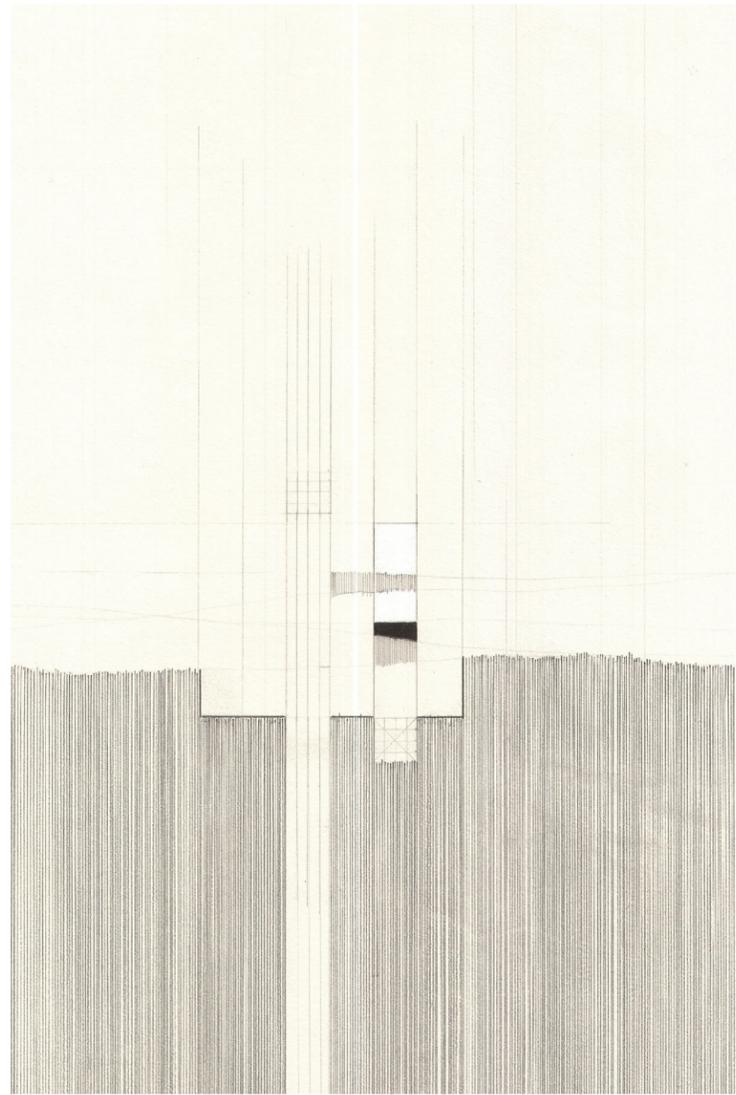
The archivist built the tower from intuition, inspired by a dream that a significant event in the city would occur on the pedestal. He named it the tower of concentric walls, but thinks of it as the tower of anticipation.





x.

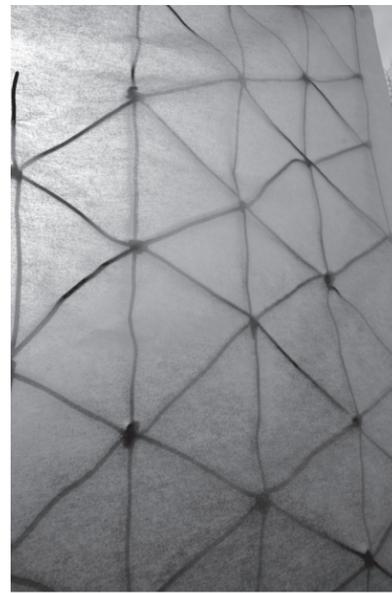




y.



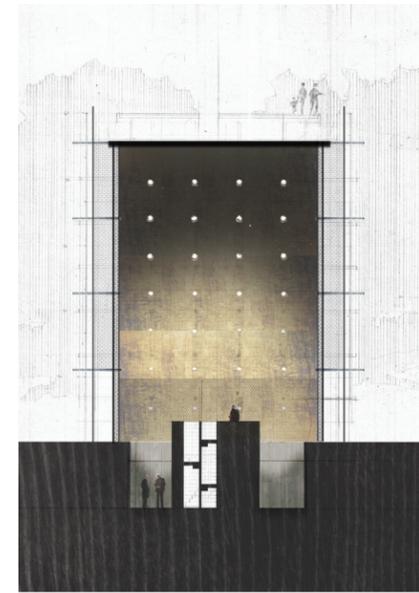
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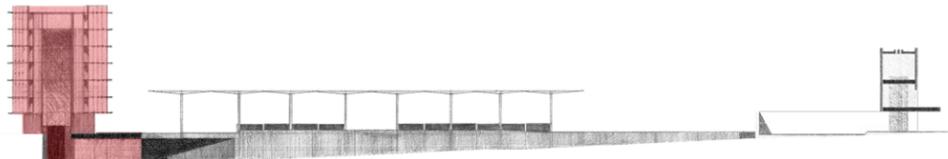
aa.



bb.



cc.



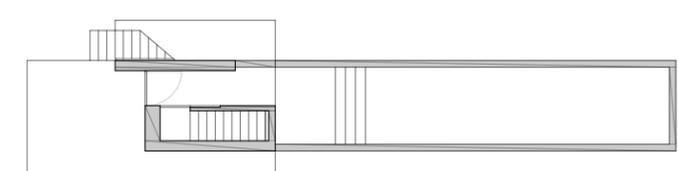
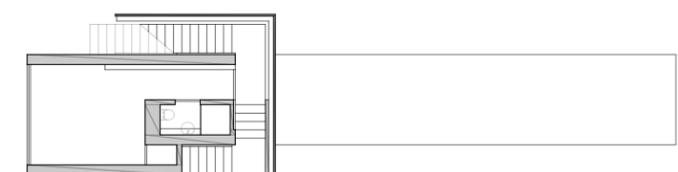
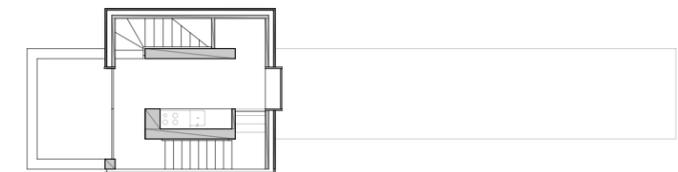
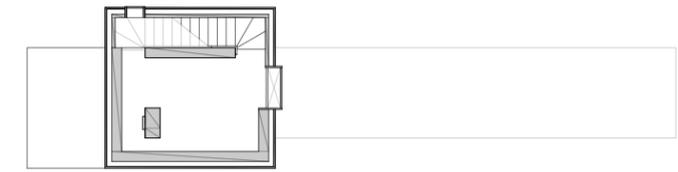
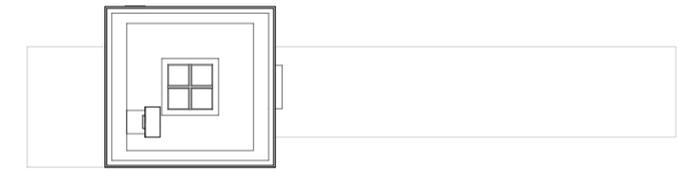
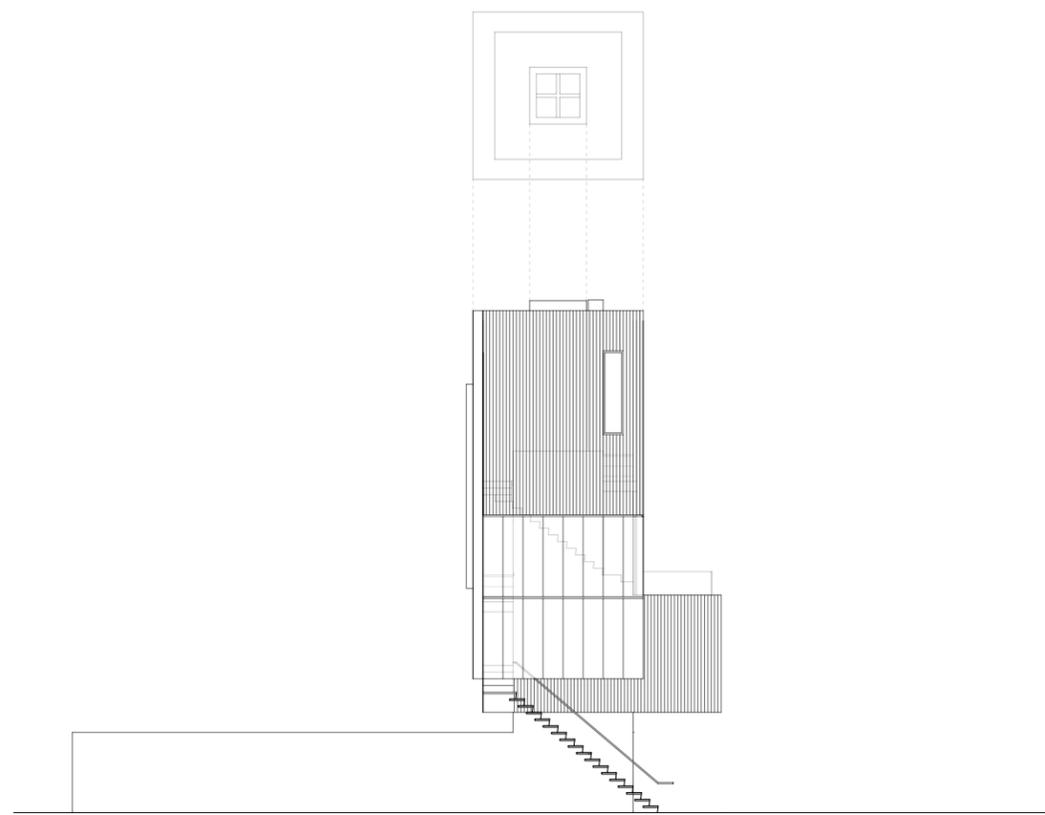
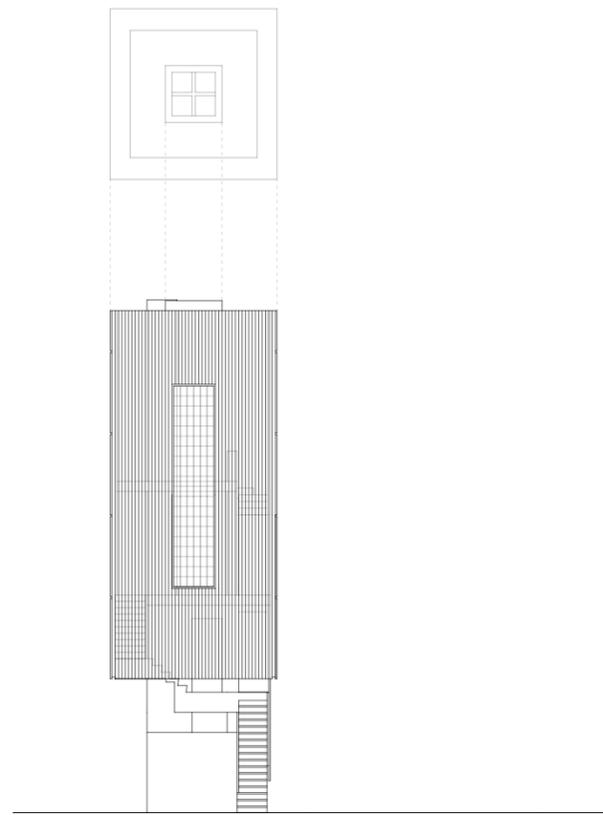


dd.

The archivist's house (*studiolo*)

The *studiolo* is the most important room in the house, a room of ascension, placed above the necessities of sleep and sustenance; it is a space for the cultivation of the inner world.

The archivist's dream is the dream of the total collector, "one who is able to keep with himself all of the objects in the world, lined up on shelves or in his bookcases" (Rella). The archivist believes himself the enemy of oblivion: that force which erases memory and reduces all to insignificance, and as a means of remembering his adversary, built his house as a tower. The archivist fears a time when there no longer will exist the belief of inspired objects and images.

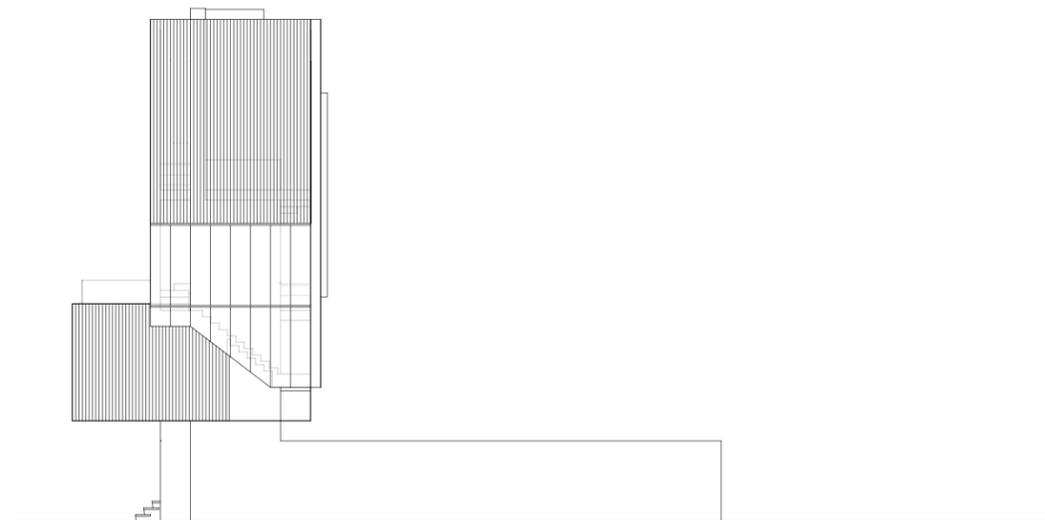
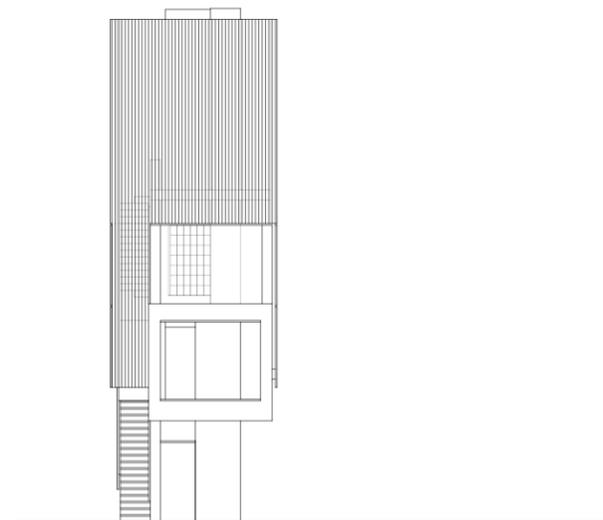


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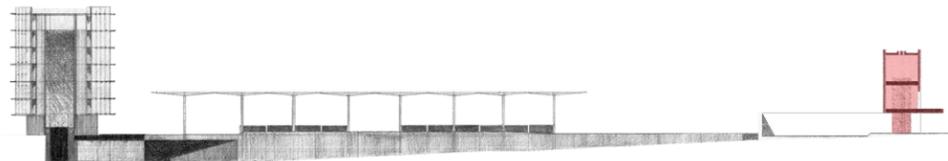
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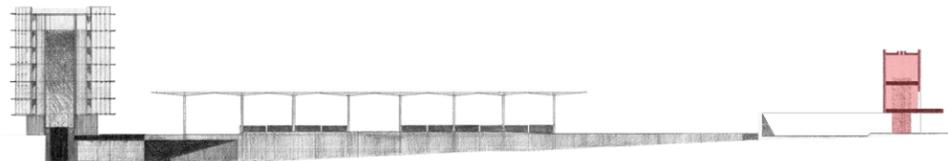
ee.





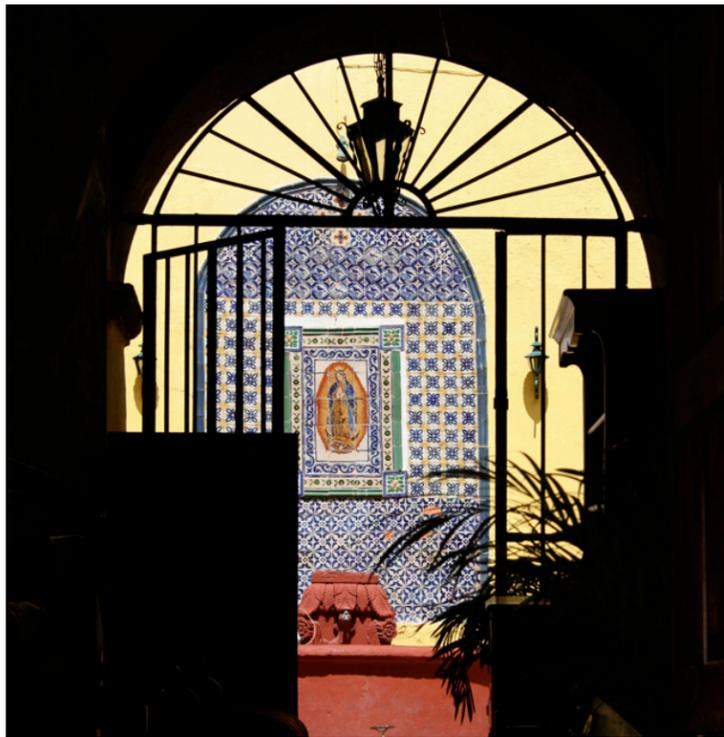
ff.

gg.



This set of images is not to be understood as simply the documentation of travel, but rather, an attempt to situate, and condense significant memories, as the distillation of architectural ideas they represent, into the meaningful and cultivated ground of this thesis.

Autobiographic Image Catalogue



hh.

San Miguel de Allende, Mexico

blue tile fountain, a glimpse of the inner courtyard from the street. depth, frame, an invitation.



ii.

The Joys and Enigmas of a Strange Hour, Giorgio DeChirico

Ariadne in suspension, the arrangement of forms in light.



jj.

Carcassonne, France

A wall for protection



kk.

Casa Barragan, Mexico City, Mexico

Mattias Goeritz: space-specific painting for Luis Barragan



ll.

Salamanca, Spain

City of stone, city of austerity



mm.

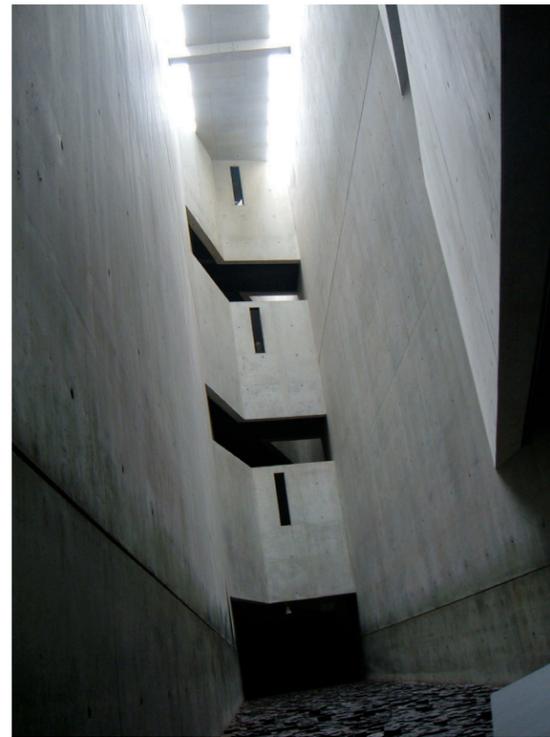
Punto de Lobos, Chile

A frame of the break



nn.

San Pedro de Atacama, Chile



oo.

Jüdisches Museum, Berlin, Germany

void: a man walked across the faces of the exhibit and every step echoed a hollow sound.



pp.

Lisbon, Portugal

City of white, city of terraces



qq.

Sacsayhuamán, Cusco, Peru

City of sand, city of tattered elements



rr.

Österreichische Postsparkasse, Vienna, Austria

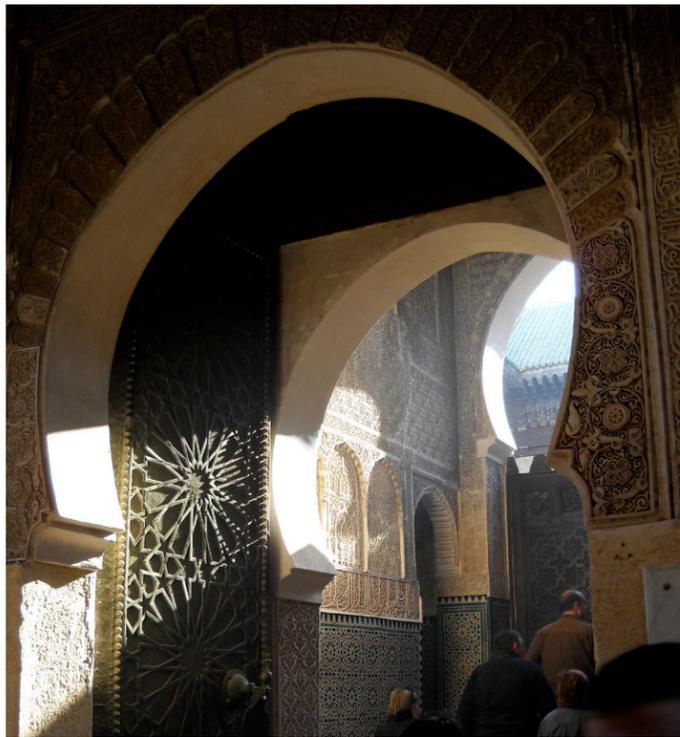
filter of light, immaterial



ss.

Fez, Morocco

The steps of the rug merchant, who offers mint tea from a copper pot, in a city of geometric pattern



tt.

Marrakesh, Morocco

City of arches



iii.

Sevilla, Spain

stage of sand, anticipation



vv.

Castelo de São Jorge, Lisbon, Portugal

fortification, vantage



ww.

Beethoven Frieze, Gustav Klimt

Poetry: the transcendent, verse, the nontarnishable



xx.

Plečnik gardens, Prague, Czech Republic

the sound of water; hidden fountains lead stair, terrace, and balustrade



yy.

Guadalupe, Spain

From the steps of the monastery, the plaza is a stage, a witness to every significant event



zz.

Generalife, Granada, Spain

Proportion



aaa.

La Matanza, Guadalupe, Spain

Ritual, tradition



bbb.

The Tower of Babel, Pieter Bruegel the Elder



ccc.

Guadalupe, Spain

Abandoned military outpost, sentinel's watch, form of the necessary



ddd.

Grande Mosquée Hassan II, Casablanca, Morocco

On the edge of the ocean, the minaret towered above the desolate stone-scape. it was a spectacle; a floor so vast and empty that those drawn to the mosque avoided the exposure, favoring routes along the various supporting building of the complex.



eee.

San Miguel de Allende, Mexico

impasto, city of color, city of festivals

a. Plan sketch, conte crayon and pencil on drawing paper: 18” x 24”	ii
b. Section sketch, pencil on drawing paper: 4” x 6”	iii
c. Archetypal Figures: drawing, ink, pencil, watercolor. original dimensions: 8.5” x 10”	1
d. Eakin’s Oval Landmark: pencil on drawing paper: 24” x 18”	2
e. ‘Grande Perspective’ Philadelphia: photograph collage, artist’s own photographs 9” x 12”	2
f. Elements sketch: pencil on paper: 5” x 6”	3
g. House sketch: pencil on paper: 4” x 2”	4
h. Archive sketch: pencil on paper: 3” x 5.5”	4
i. Tower sketch: pencil on paper: 3” x 2”	4
j. Philadelphia Site Section (Eakin’s oval to the Art Museum): drawing, pencil on drawing paper: 48” x 160”	5,6,7
k. Albrecht Durer: <i>St. Jerome in His Study</i> , engraving, original dimension: 25 cm x 19 cm: 1514 public domain image: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Dürer-Hieronymus-im-Gehäus.jpg	7
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m. Archive section: CAD drawing, photograph overlaid, original dimensions: 24” x 96”	9
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o. Archive Sequence Axon: pencil on drawing paper, photograph overlaid, original dimensions: 40” x 32”	11
p. Archive Labyrinth plan: conte crayon and pencil on drawing paper: 24” x 18”	12
q. Archive perspective: ink, pencil, watercolor. 24” x 36”	12
r. Archivist Sequence sketch: ink on paper: 5” x 6”	12
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t. Archive chamber perspective: pencil on paper, photograph overlaid: 10” x 10”	12
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v. Tower of Canvas: photograph collage, artist’s own photographs, original dimensions: 18” x 12”	13
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aa. Tower model wire armature and trace paper: photograph, original dimensions: 12” x 9”	16
bb. Tower model wire armature and pig intestine: photograph, original dimensions: 12” x 9”	16
cc. Tower section concept: pencil drawing, photograph overlaid, original dimensions: 24” x 18”	16
dd. Vittore Carpaccio: <i>St. Jerome in his Study</i> , tempera on panel, original dimensions: 141 cm x 210 cm: 1502 public domain image: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Vittore_carpaccio,_visione_di_sant%27agostino_01.jpg	17
ee. Archivist’s House plans and elevations: CAD drawing	18
ff. Archivist’s House South-West elevation: CAD drawing, photograph overlaid: original dimensions 24” x 18”	19
gg. Archivist’s House section: CAD drawing, photograph overlaid: original dimensions: 24” x 18”	19

Further reading

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Tarkovskii, Andrei Arsenëvich. *Sculpting in Time: Reflections on the Cinema*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987. Print.

hh. <i>Courtyard</i> , San Miguel de Allende, Mexico, author’s own, 2011	21
ii. <i>The Joys and Enigmas of a Strange Hour</i> , Giorgio De Chirico, oil and graphite on canvas, original dimensions: 53 3/8” x 71” 1913, o/c, (ISBN 0821224999)	21
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