

Images : A Mask for Scuola Vecchia della Misericordia, Venice

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MASTER OF ARCHITECTURE

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Images : A Mask for Scuola Vecchia della Misericordia, Venice

Mahjabeen Zaheda

abstract

This thesis engages in the idea of a mask in Architecture.
It is a mask for Scuola Vecchia della Misericordia, in a small campo in Venice.

The thesis further explores the following ideas through a set of drawings and images :
'Revealing' made possible through the degree of concealment.
'Parting of the Veil' as a Byzantine influence in Venice.
Theater and the mask.
Temporary and the Permanent.
Memory and imagination.

This book is dedicated to my parents and my sister.
Thank you for your endless love, support and encouraging words.

acknowledgments:

I want to thank

Professors Bill Galloway, Kay Edge and Sal Choudhury:
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My studio pals and other friends in Blacksburg:
for the times of hard work and fun.

And lastly , my best friend Saumya:
for keeping me grounded. I could not have done this without your support.

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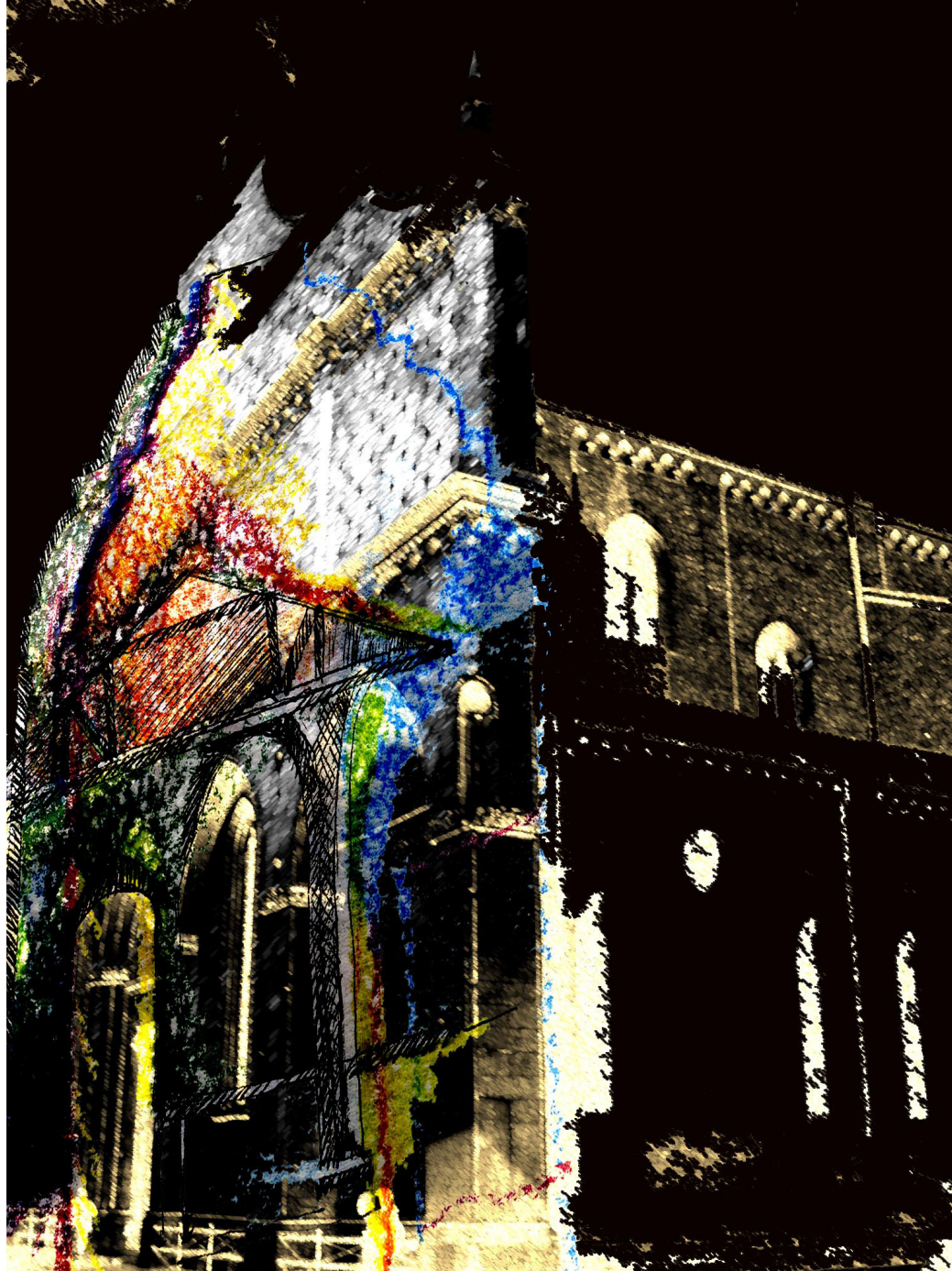
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introduction



A mask.
A mask in Venice.
A mask in Architecture.
A mask in the architecture of Venice.



“To know what is serious, we must also know what is laughable.”
- Socrates, *Symposium*

“The Greeks thought of the theater in terms of masks and, in particular, of displaying one half of the face as laughing comedy, the other half in the serious mien of tragedy, the driving life force beside the tragic experience.”

(Walter Sorell : ‘The Other Face - The Mask in the Arts’)

A Collage of Aldo Rossi's Venice Biennale Gateway.

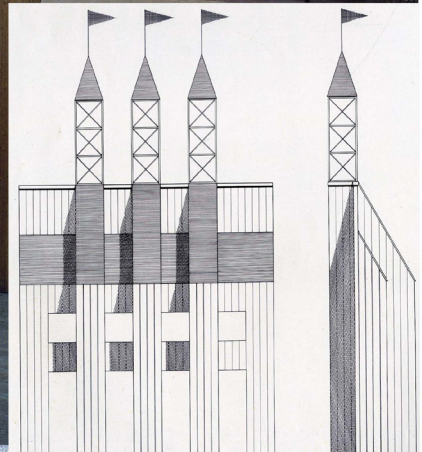
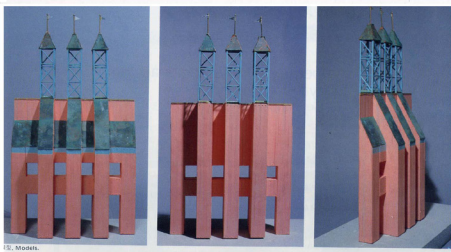
The structure temporarily became a backdrop to everyday Venice as it allowed room for play and created a stage-like space in the campo.

However, once taken down, it held a permanent place in the memory of the children who once played there...

“The street [is a] rectangular stage set where encounters, gossip, games, fights, jealousies, courtship, and displays of pride occur.”
(Aldo Rossi: “The Architecture of the City”)



Entrance Gateway to the Biennale Architecture Exhibition, 1980



FR 88 - intonaci veneziani
Teatro veneziano da 'quaderni d'architettura'

A typical theater-like construction site in Venice.

'Parting of the Veil' is also a delicate idea of the Islamic influence where "revealing" is made possible through the degree of concealment.

The precious/significant part emerges from within to give us a glimpse of its beauty, only when the veil is parted...



Gondola, painting.





In a quiet campo in the Cannaregio District in Venice, a mask is placed in front of the old and forlorn face of the Scuola Vecchia della Misericordia that once displayed its beautiful gothic features with pride.

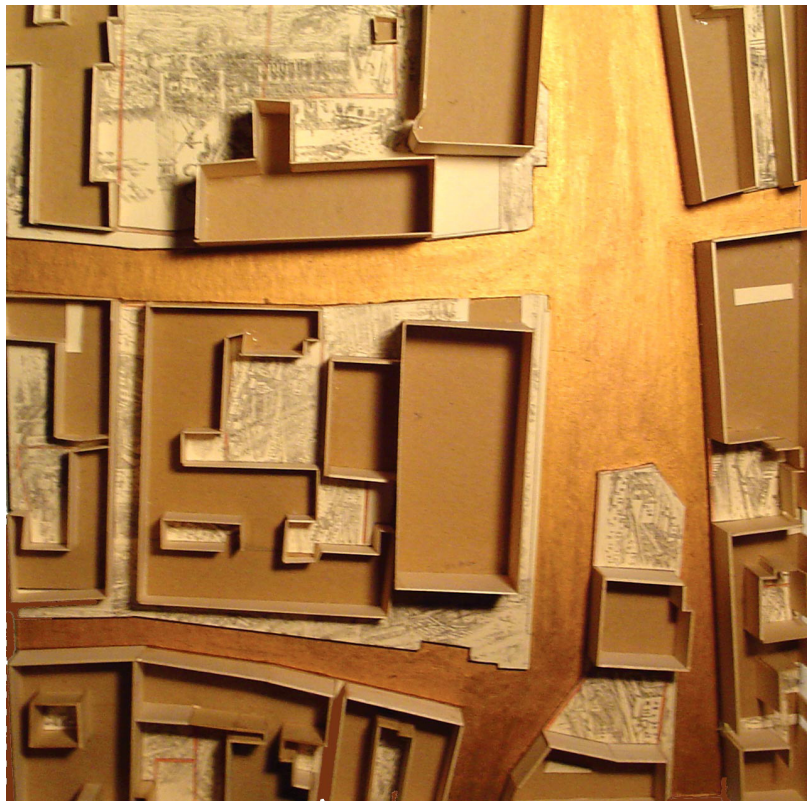
This is a mask that reveals.

It celebrates the beauty of the Scuola façade, the playfulness of its situation perpendicular to an ornate Baroque Church, and the green valley that is hidden behind the intersection of the Church face with that of the Scuola.

The theatrical nature of this mask allows a set of situations to occur in this campo.

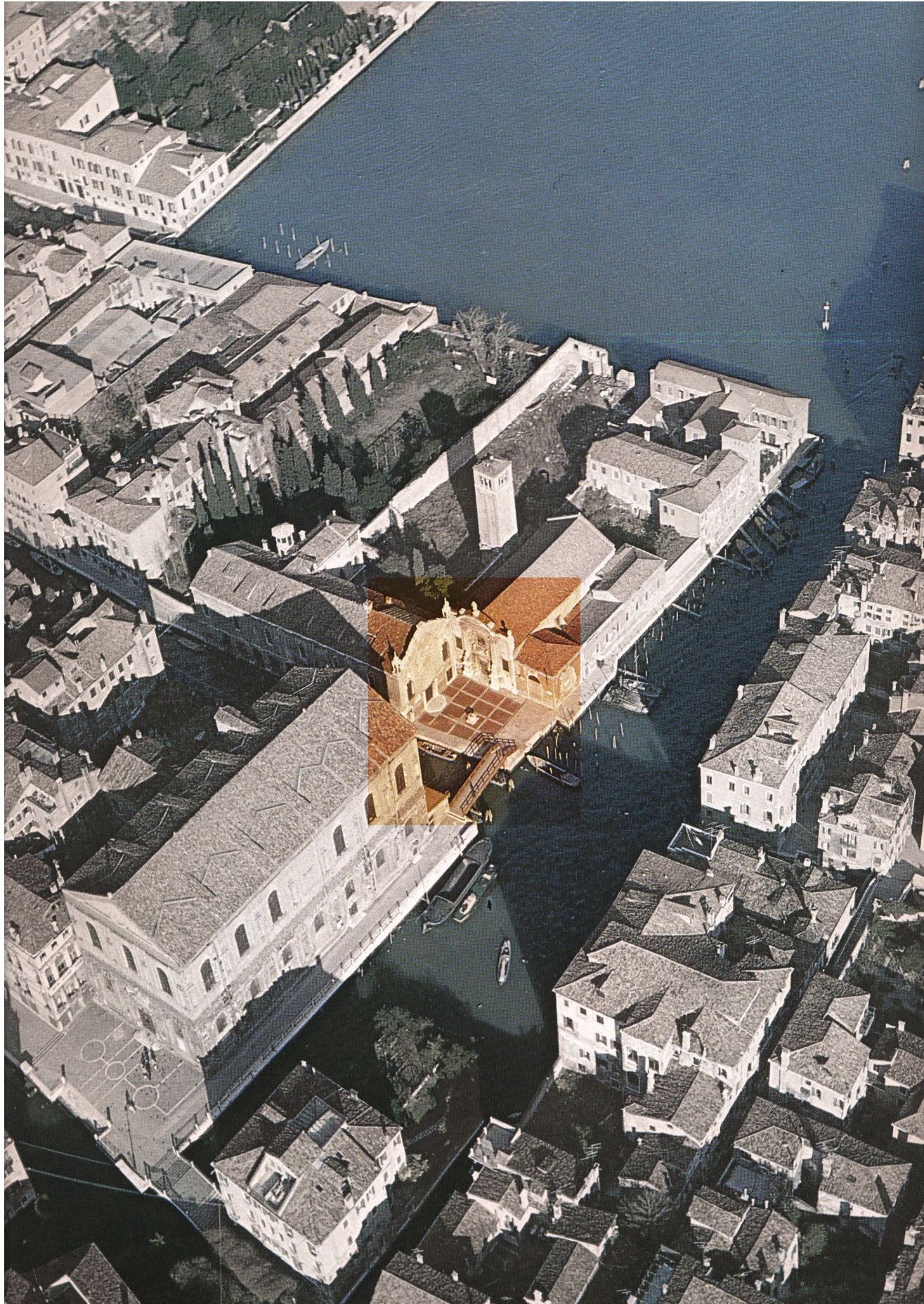
A set of comedic situations...

At the end of these situations, the mask is taken off.
The memory of the mask and its theatrical play lingers in the campo.
The quietness resumes...



the setting

Campo de L'Abbazia



The well head in itself is a mask that hides the intricate and complex drainage system beneath its ornate and pristine part in the campo.



Scuola Vecchia della Misericordia

The Scuola Vecchia Della Misericordia, a religious confraternity, was founded in the 1320s. The masonry dates back to the 14th century, but it underwent later additions/renovation such as the fifteenth century gothic elements present on the façade today. Sotoportego de L'Abbazia, the public portico along the side of the canal was added in the late 16th century for public access.

The alternating stepped profile of the top of the façade with its elegant pinnacles is a common Gothic arrangement in Venice. The richly decorated doorway once carried a sculptural piece, Madonna della Misericordia which is now in Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

In the late 16th century, the building was considered too small for the guild's purposes and a new scuola was commissioned across the canal from it.

Later uses of the building included housing the Silk Weaver's Guild, a private theater under Napoleon, theater storage and even a general warehouse.

The building was finally bought and renovated by painter Italo Brass, resulting in an exhibition space for his 17th and 18th century paintings.

The Scuola building, in much need of repair, was finally bought by the Italian government in 1974 from Brass's heirs. Currently it houses the Restoration Laboratory for Artistic and Historic Monuments of Venice.

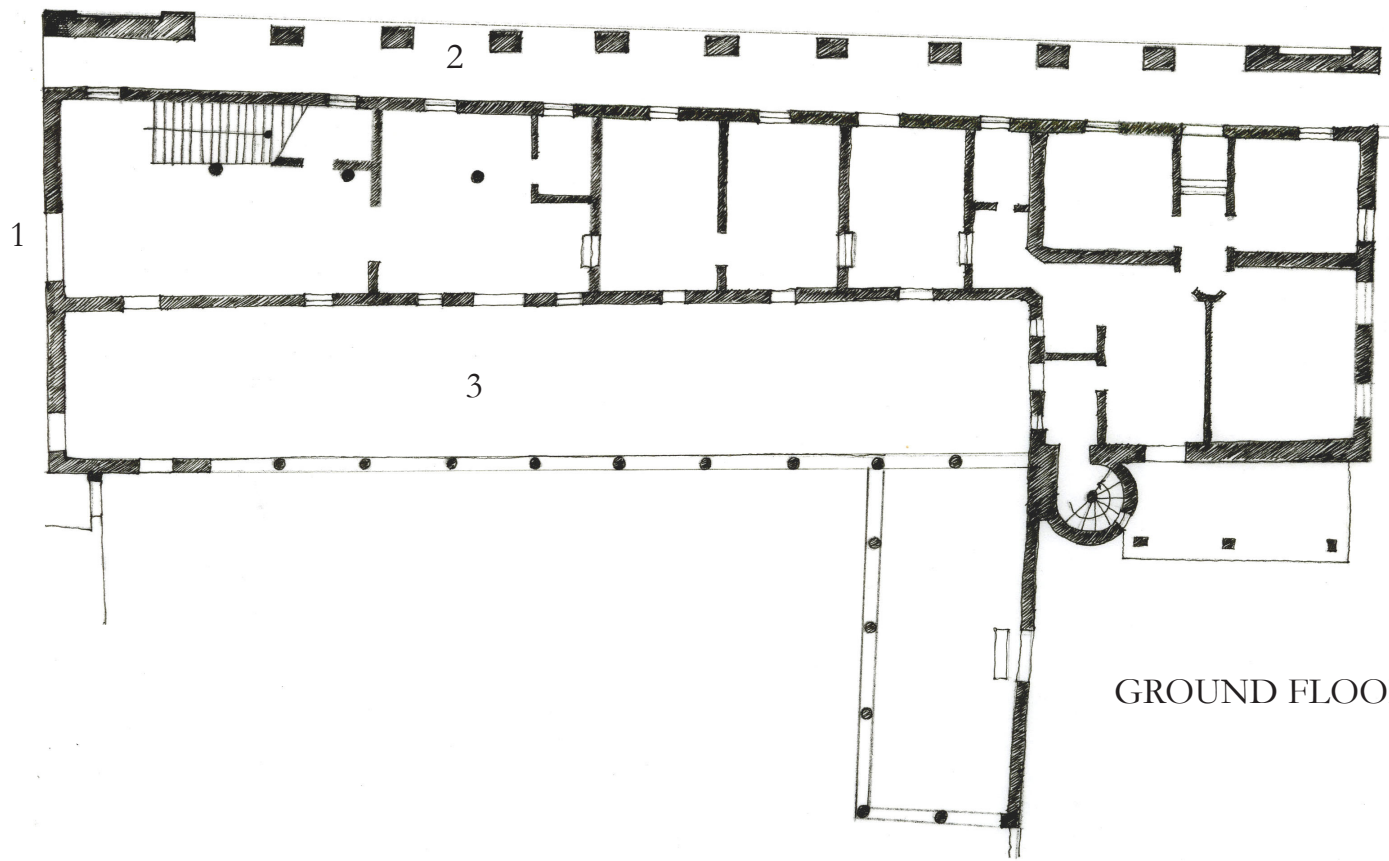


Floor Plans, Scuola Vecchia Della Misericordia

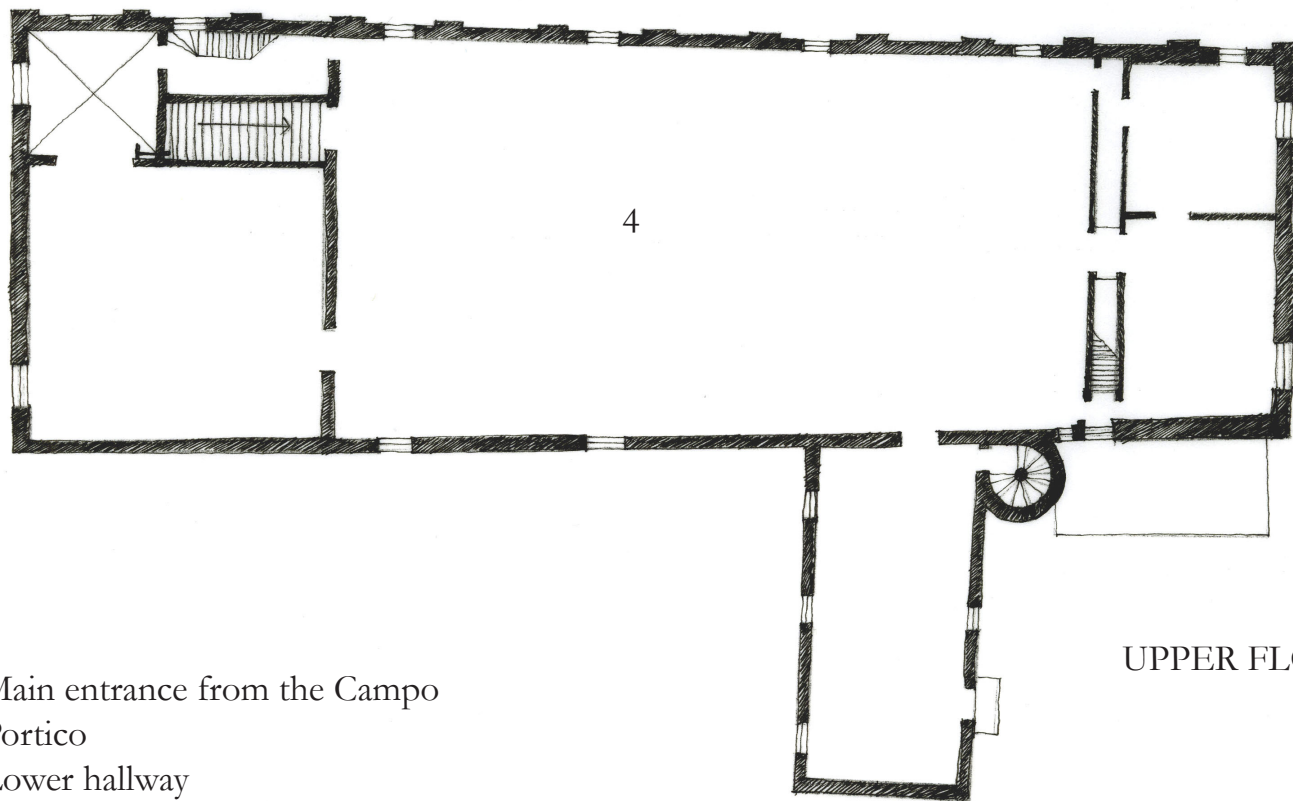
Inside, there is a small entrance hall with a stone staircase, and coffered ceiling decorated with Scuola symbols. The lower hall is a rather narrow , long and dark space , resulting from the addition of the portico on one side and the cloister of the abbey on the other.

The upper floor houses a huge, well lit salone defined by the expanse of the terrazzo floor and the rhythmical order of the ceiling beams.

This upper room was used by Tintoretto for painting the enormous Paradiso for Palazzo Ducale.



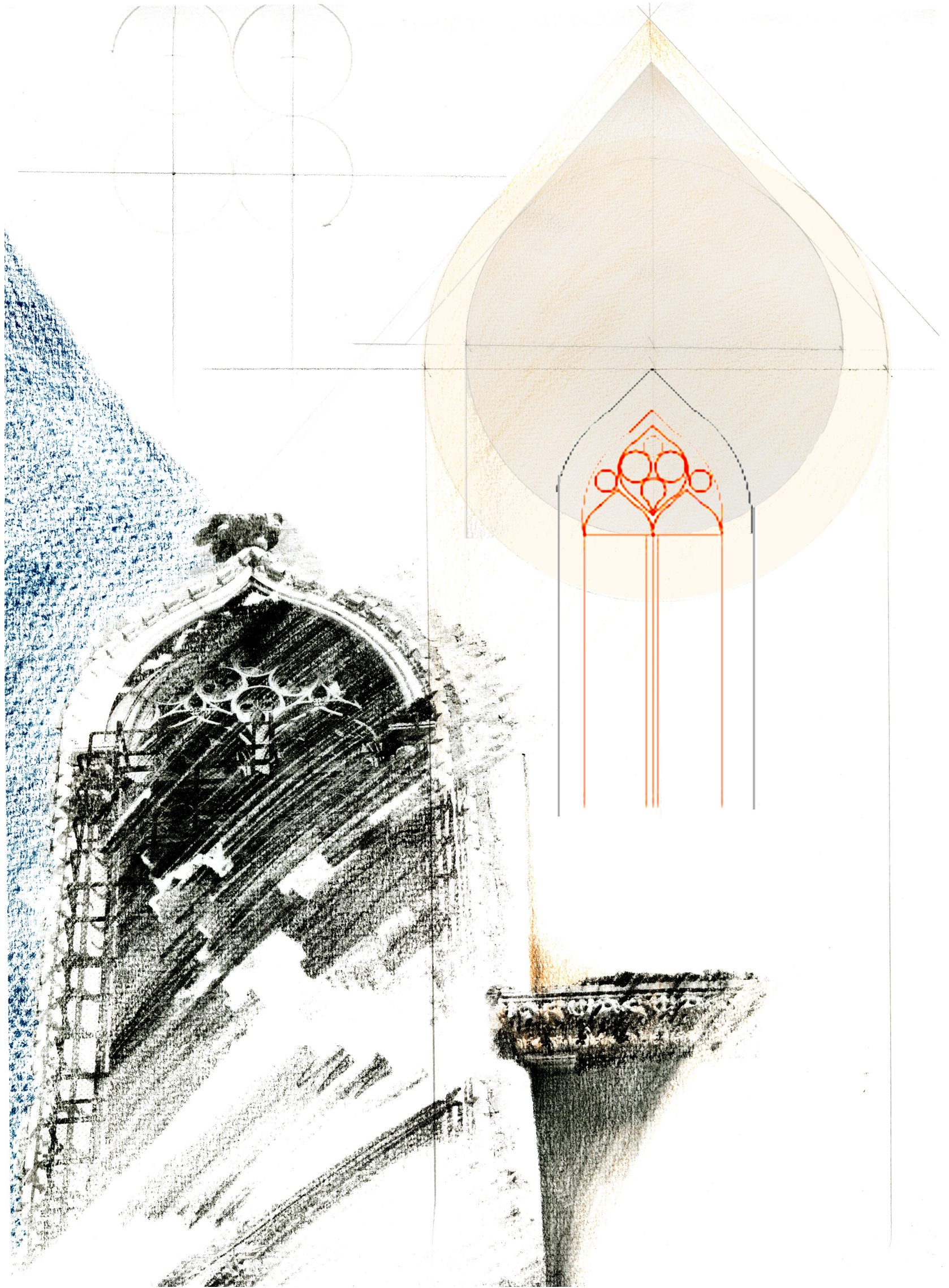
GROUND FLOOR PLAN



UPPER FLOOR PLAN

- 1 Main entrance from the Campo
- 2 Portico
- 3 Lower hallway
- 4 Upper floor salone

The piano nobile windows , topped by finials and decorated with finely - carved 15th century traceries, are similar to those of Ca'd'Oro and the Giustiniani palaces.





memory of the place

Rio de la Sensa (the canal)



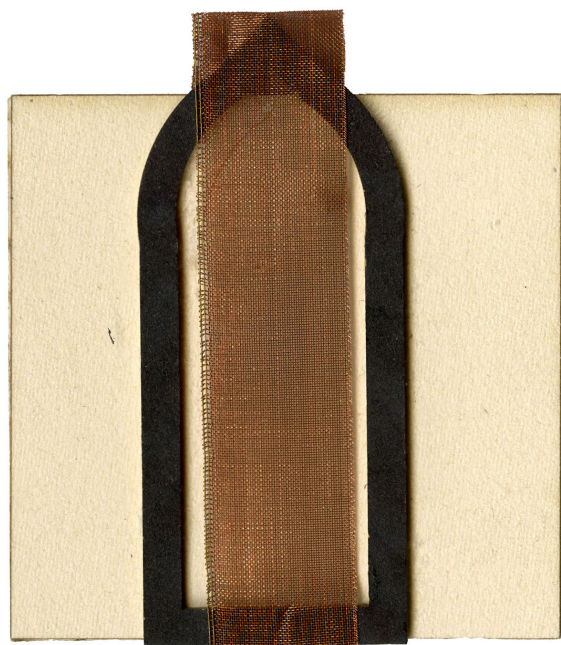
Sotoportego de L'Abbazia (the portico)



Backside of the Scuola with the newer building on the right

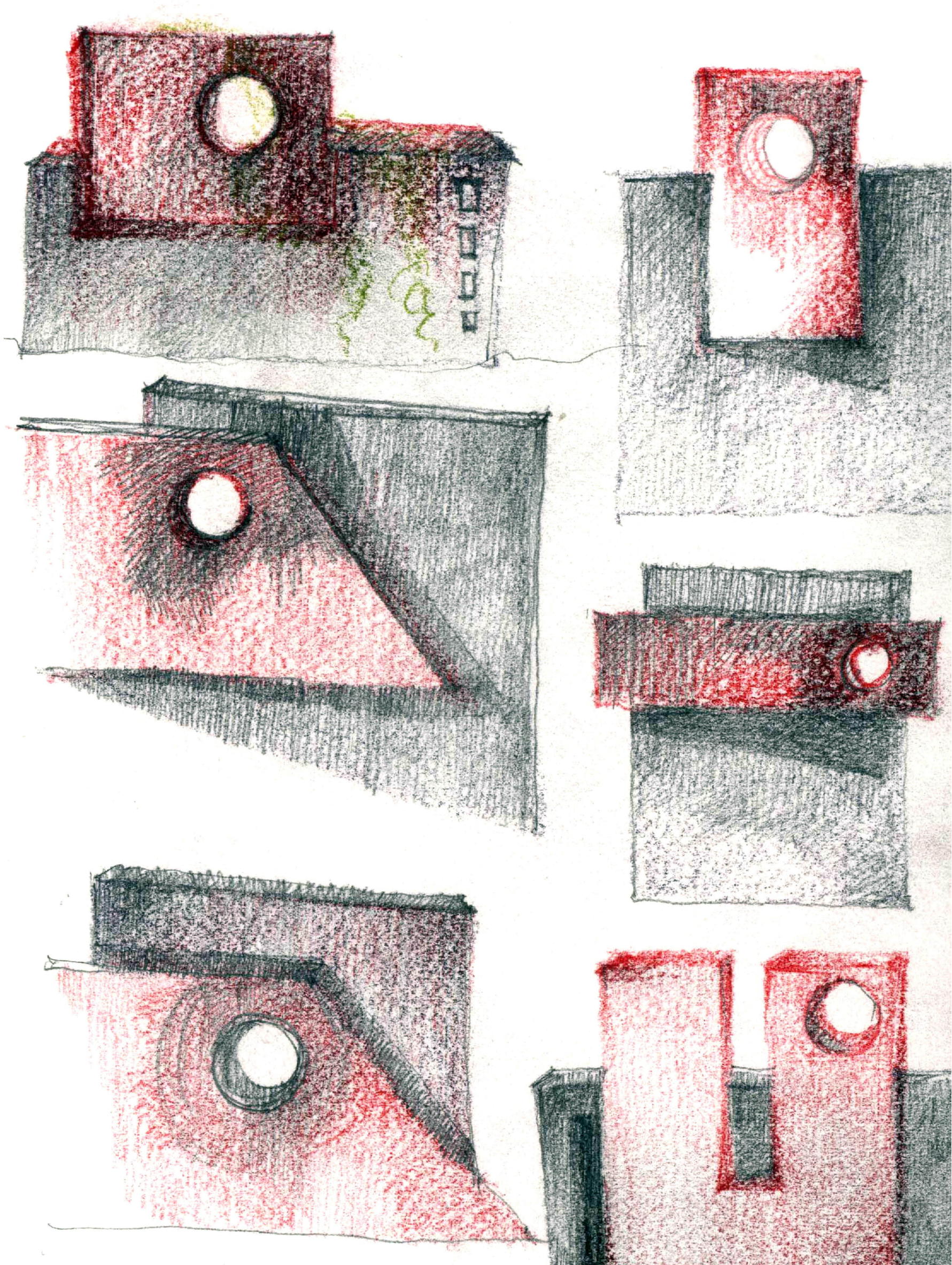






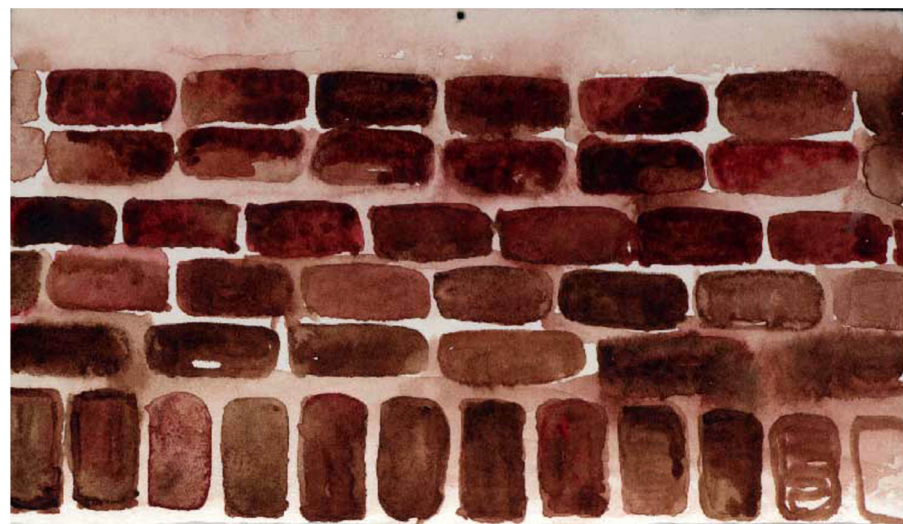
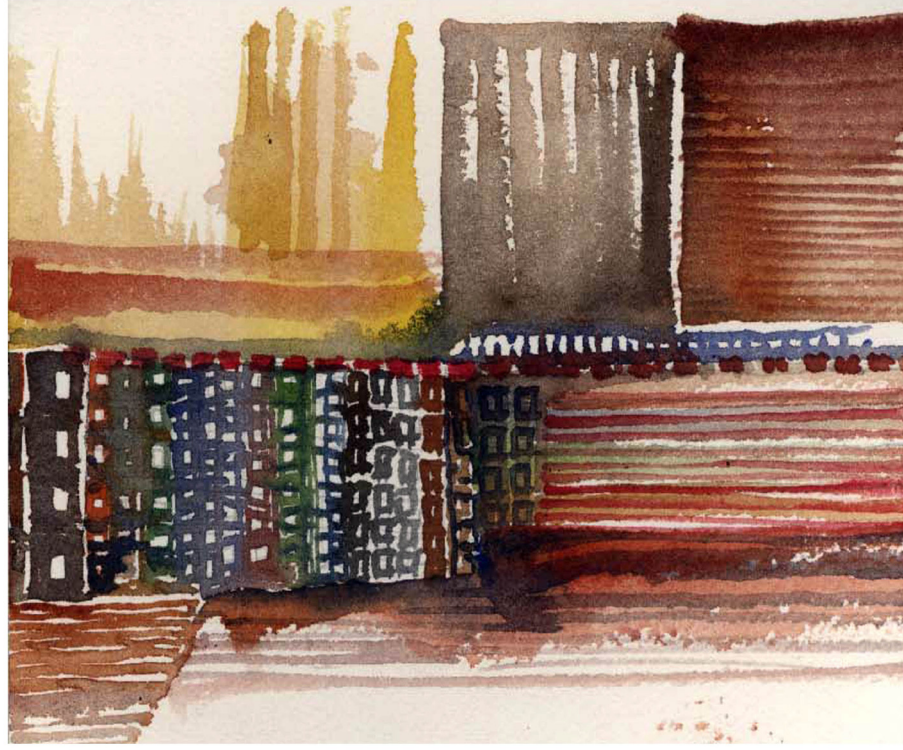
facade / mask studies

The Oneness of Two Elements

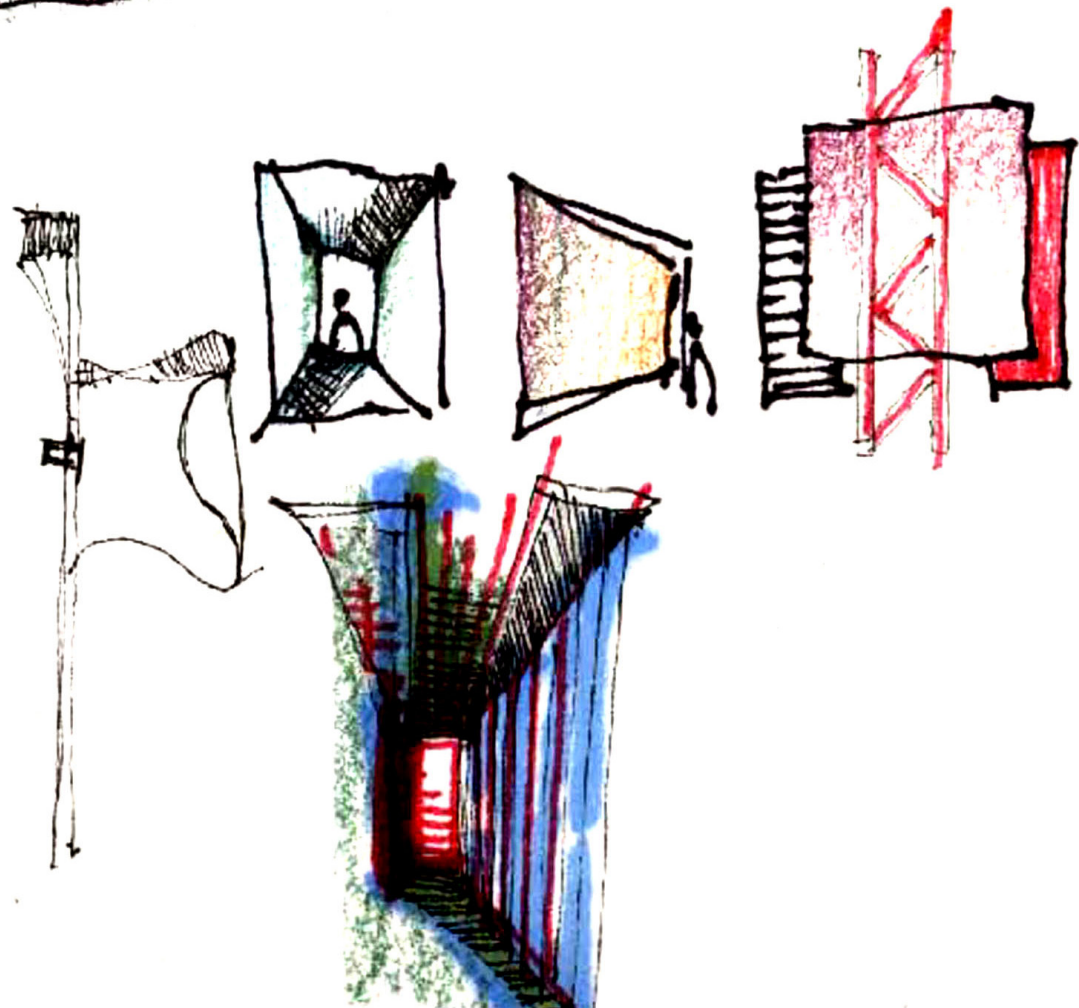
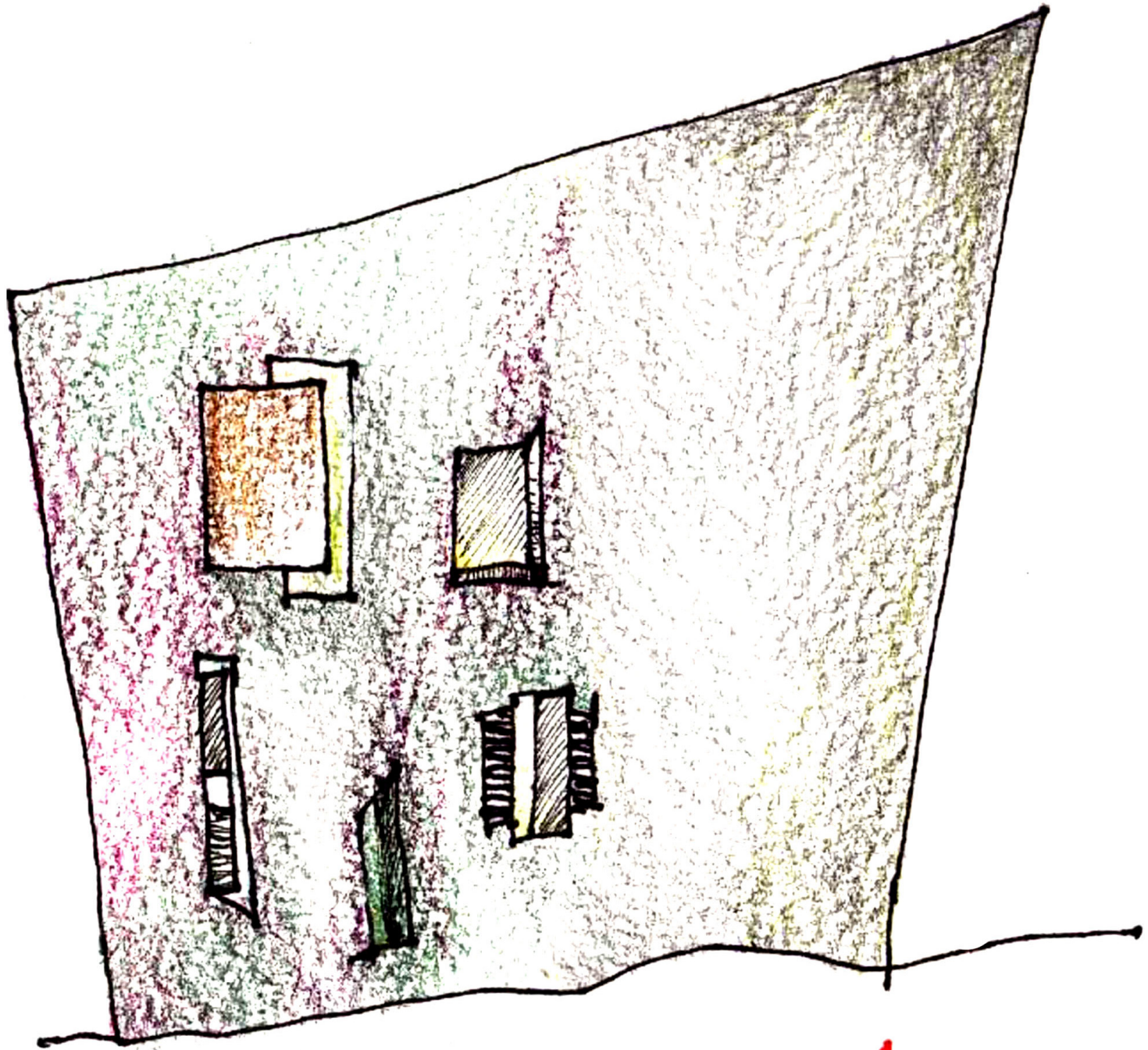


Color of the Mask?

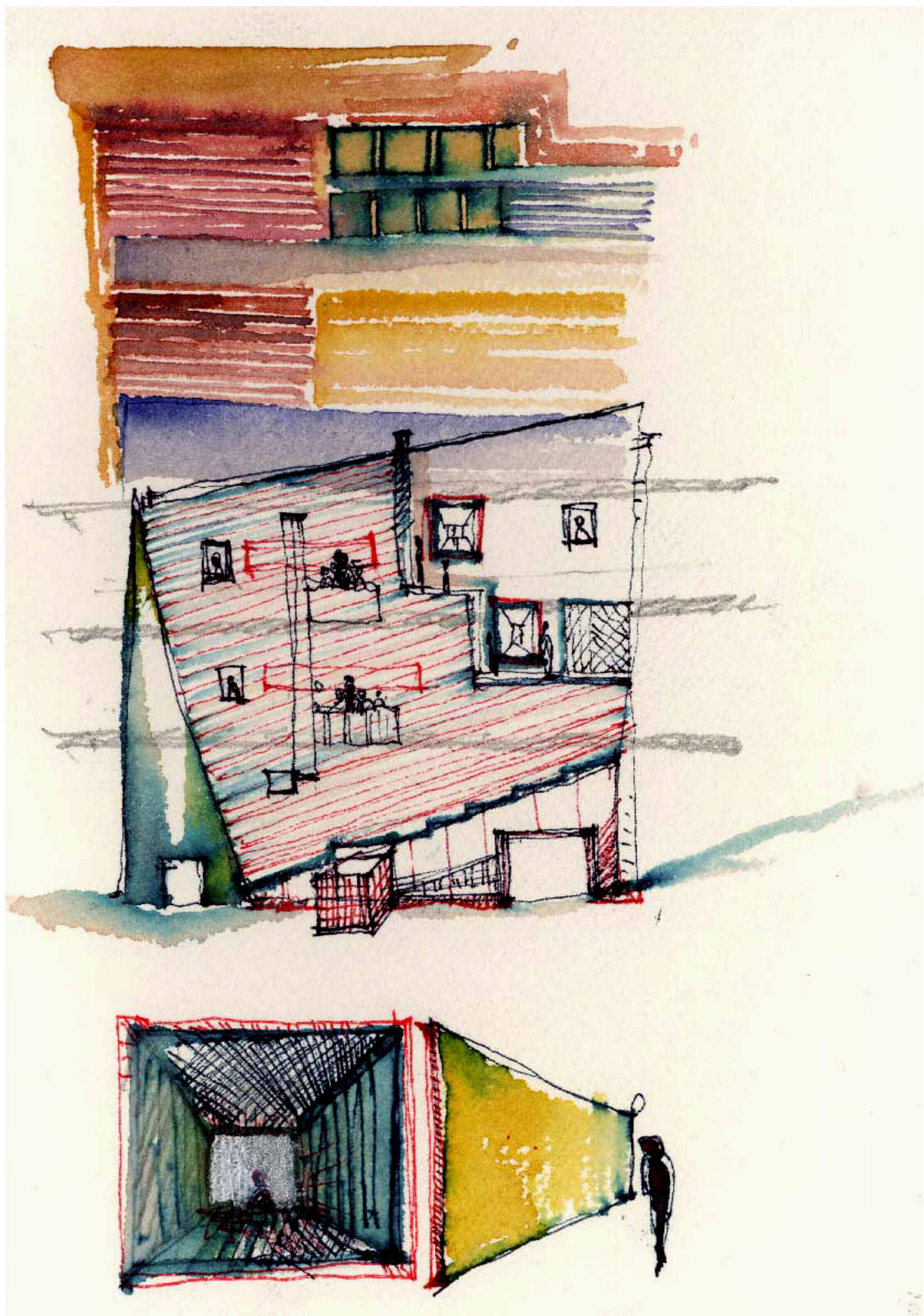
The brick façade of the scuola has lost the intensity of color over the years...
However, the memory of red still lingers in the campo ...



Apertures, Openings and Viewfinders.

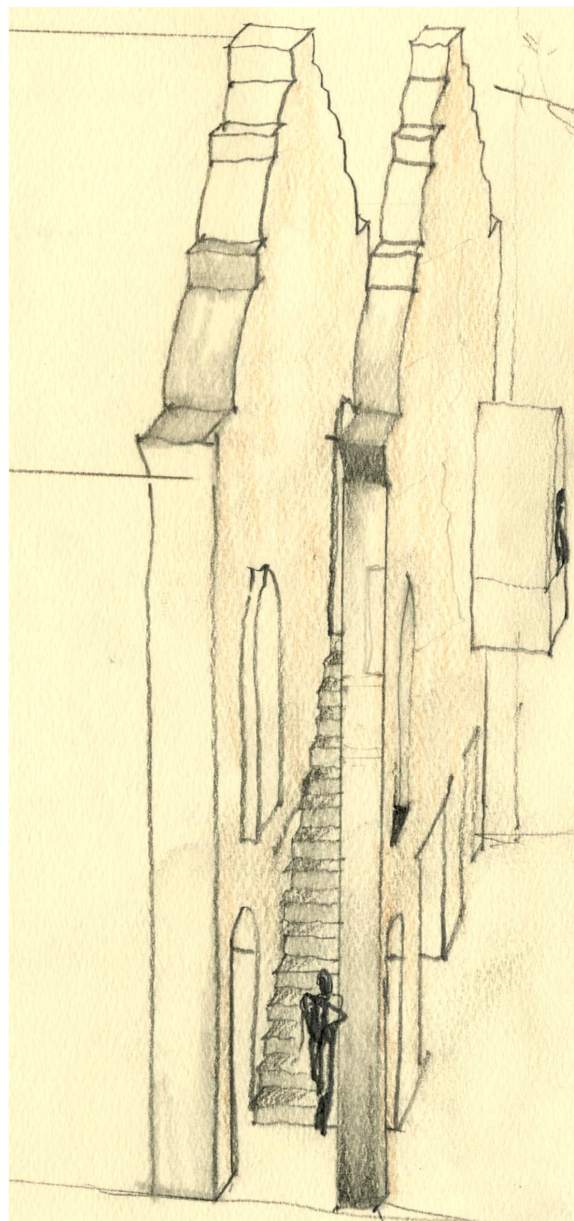
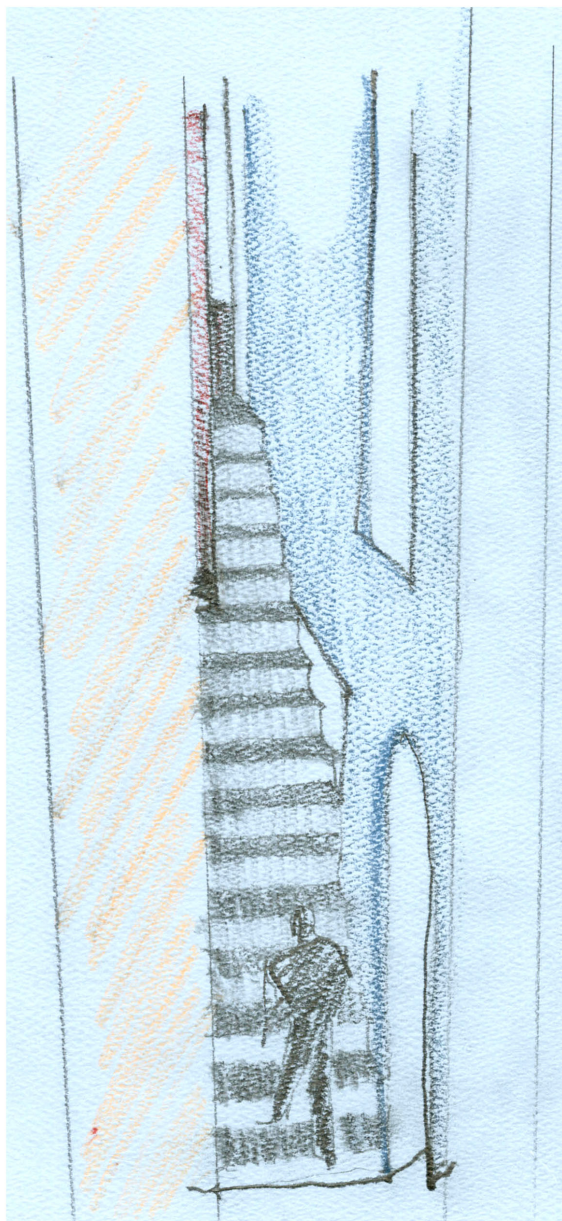
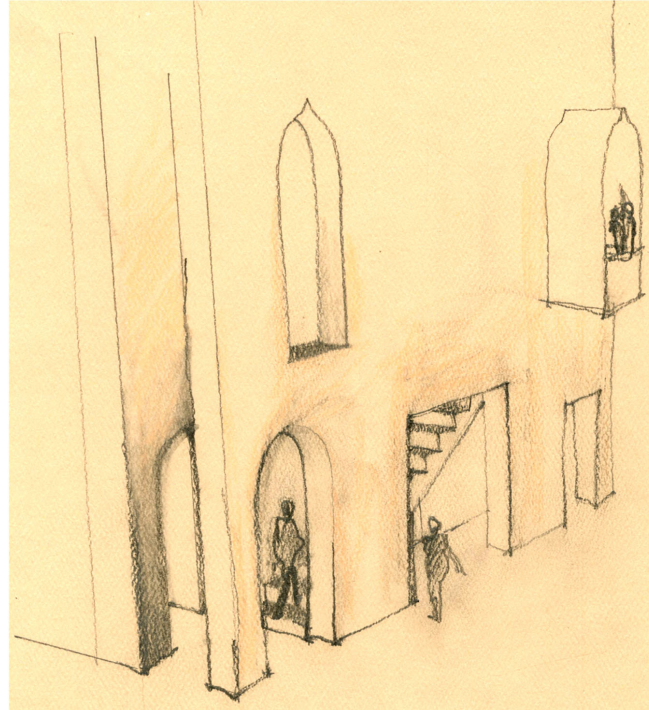
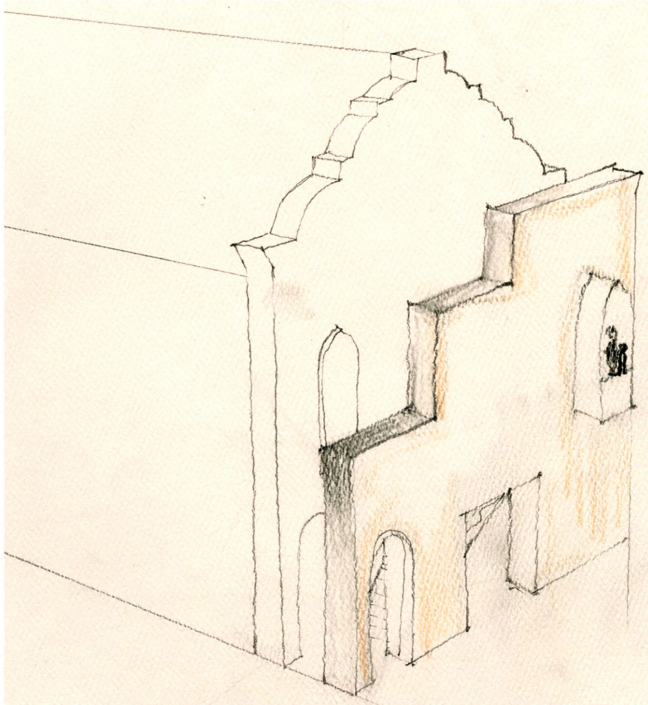


Animations, movement and prospect of the Mask.



Situation(s)

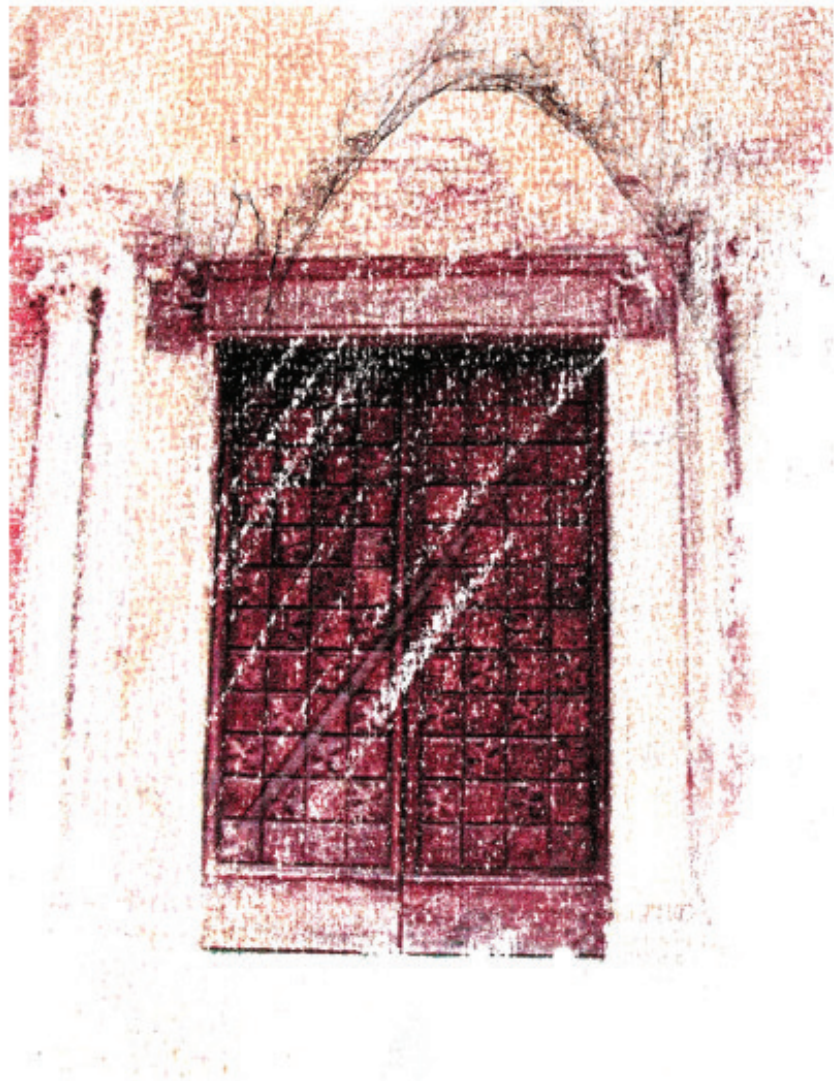
Early sketches of the mask showing spaces that allow room for play, similar to Rossi's Biennale Gateway.

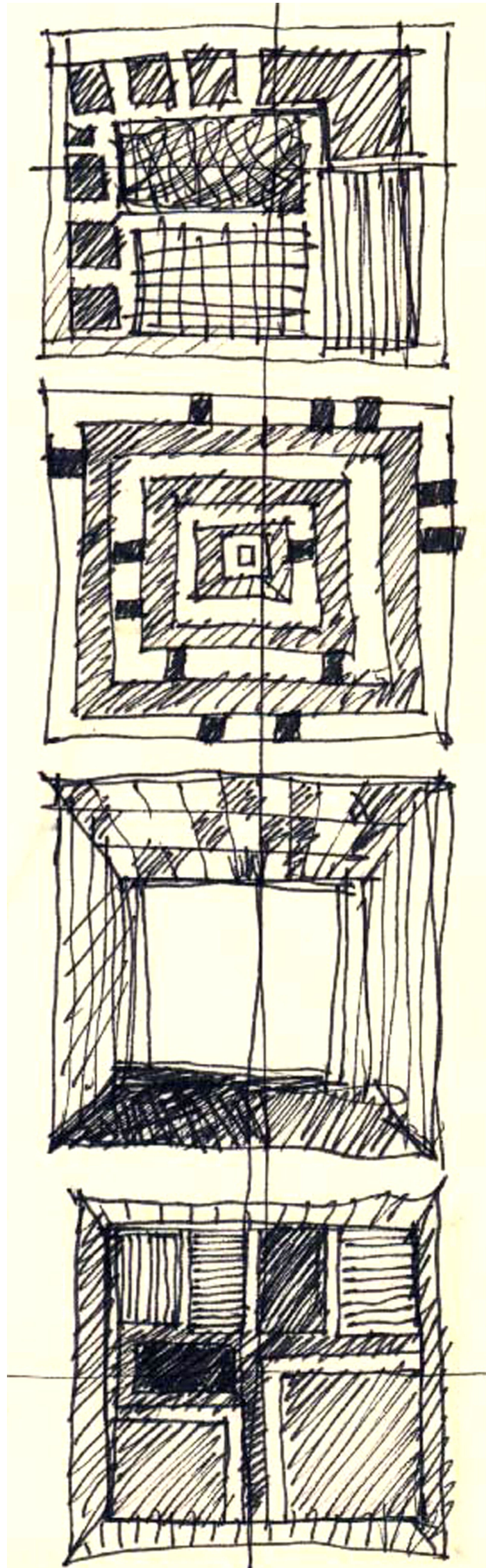




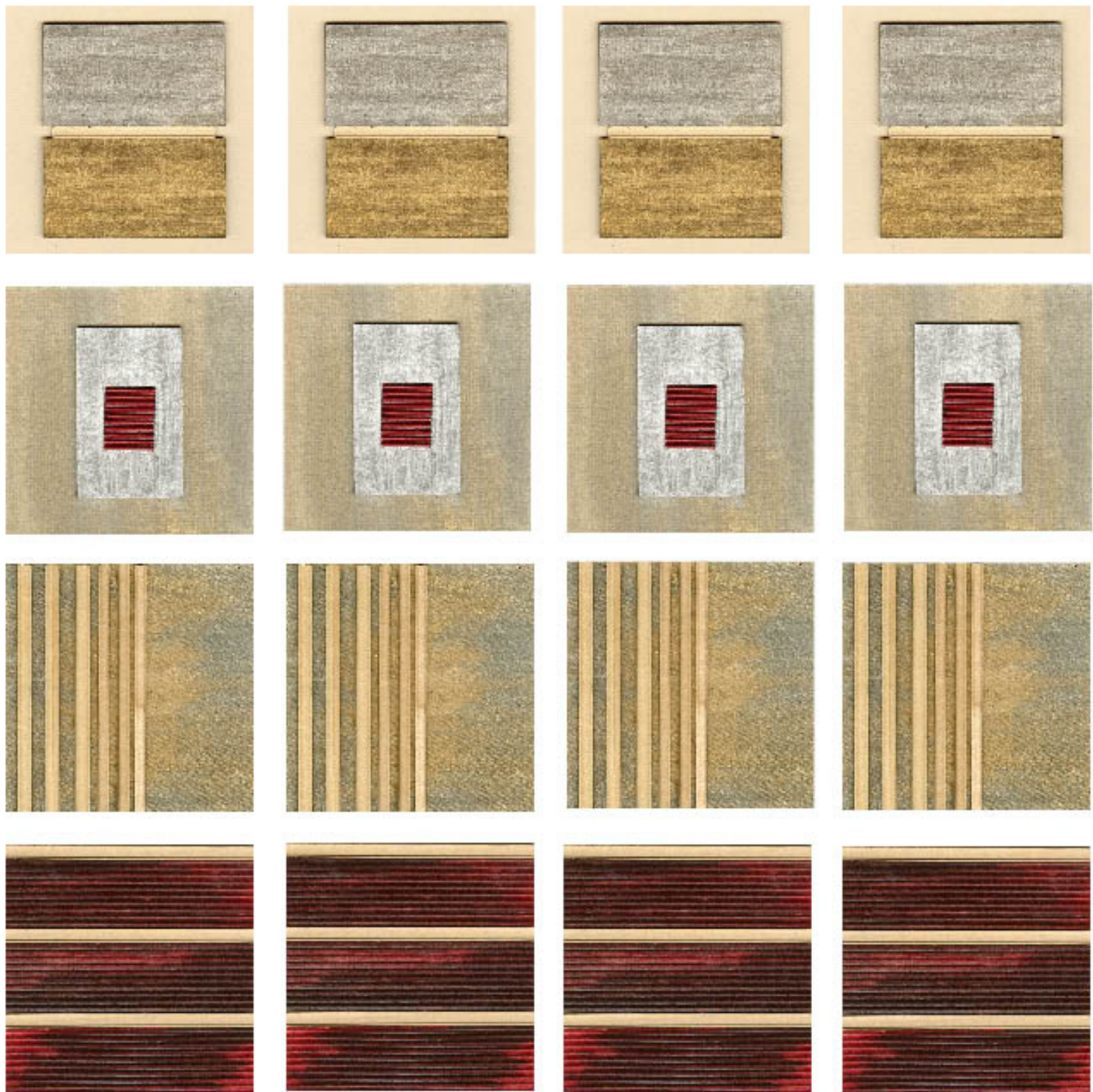
the square

The square in the Campo

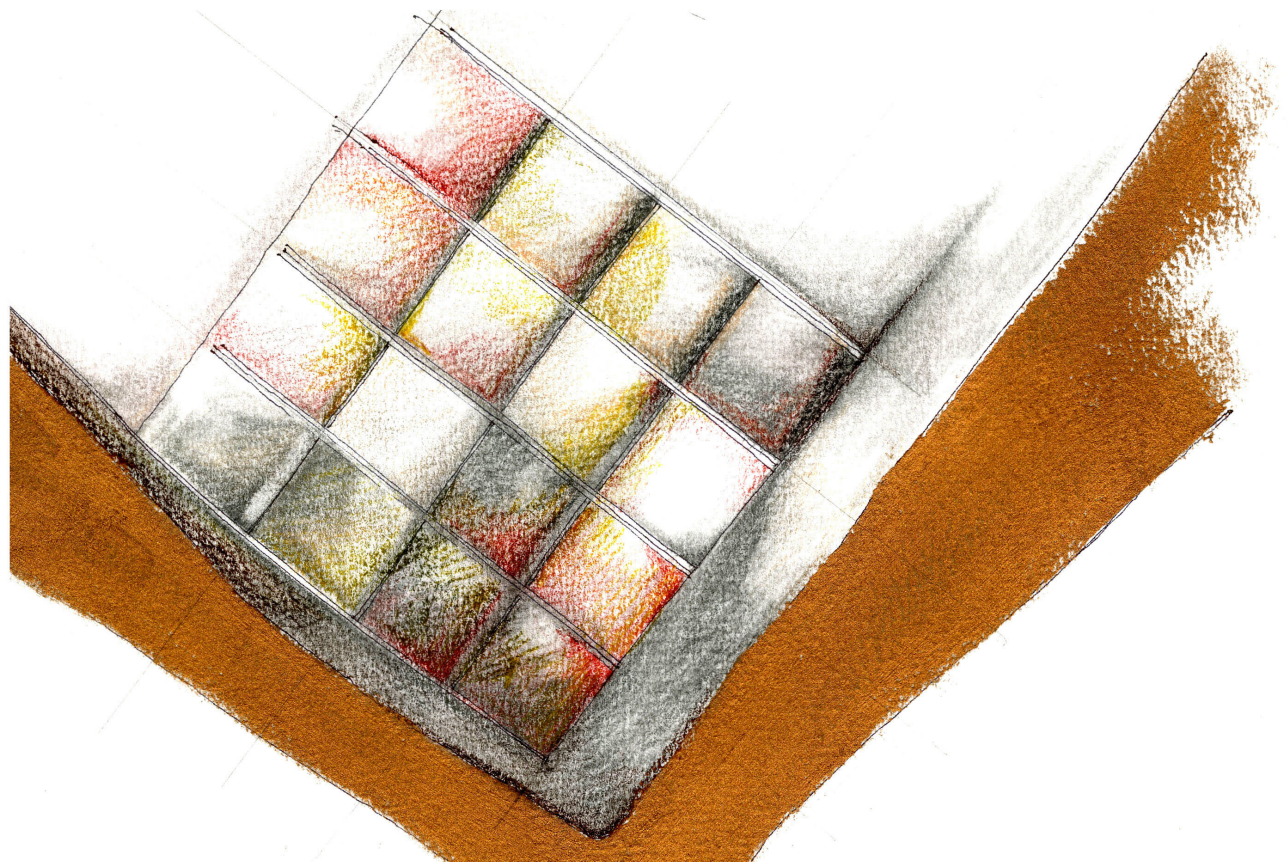
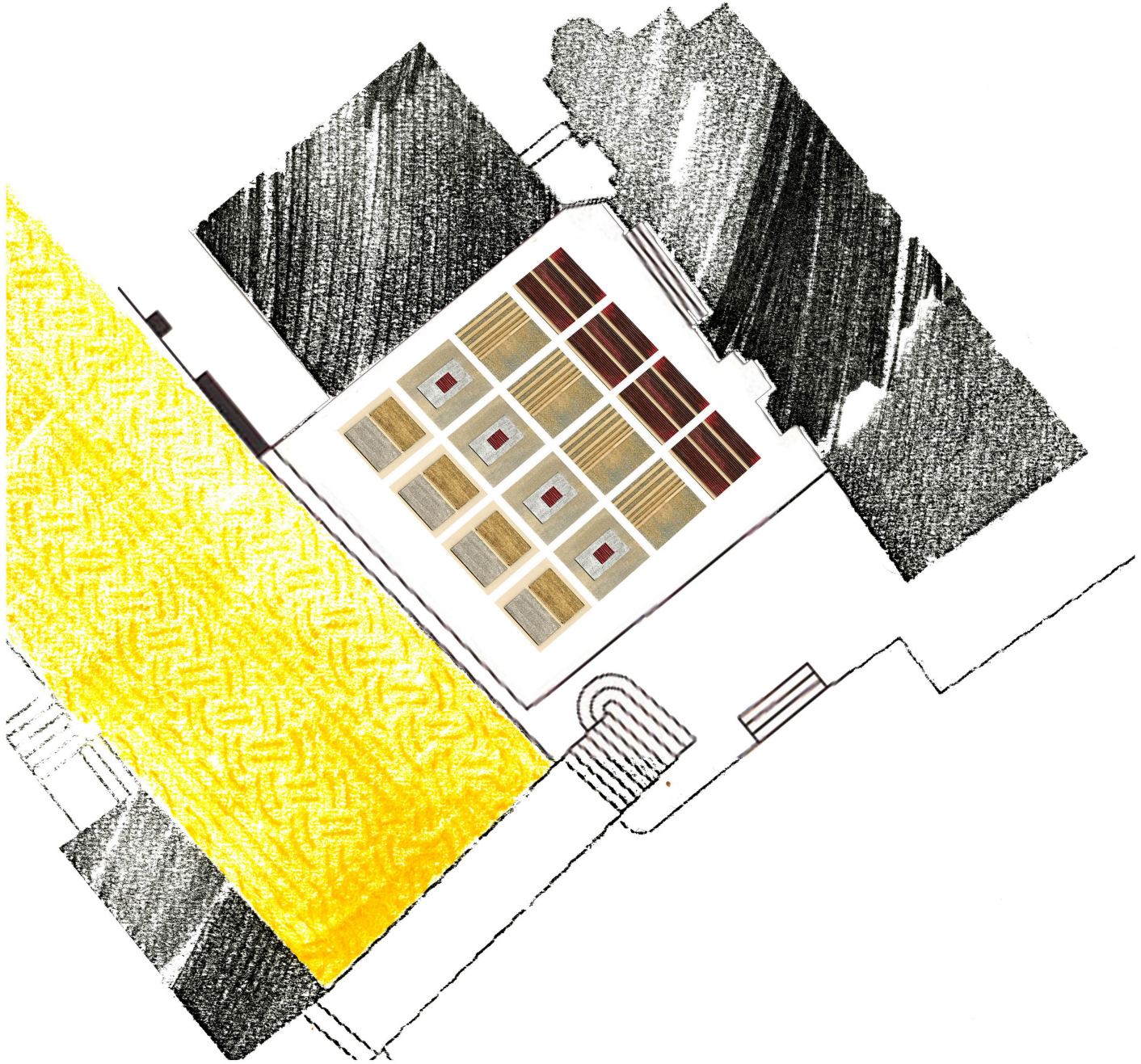




Sixteen Square Tiles



Campo with the tiles



The Madonna della Misericordia (position/size of the sculpture assumed in this collage).

Bartolomeo Bon executed this great relief sculpture in the late 1430s, and it was placed over the main doorway of the Scuola.

The sculpture is now in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

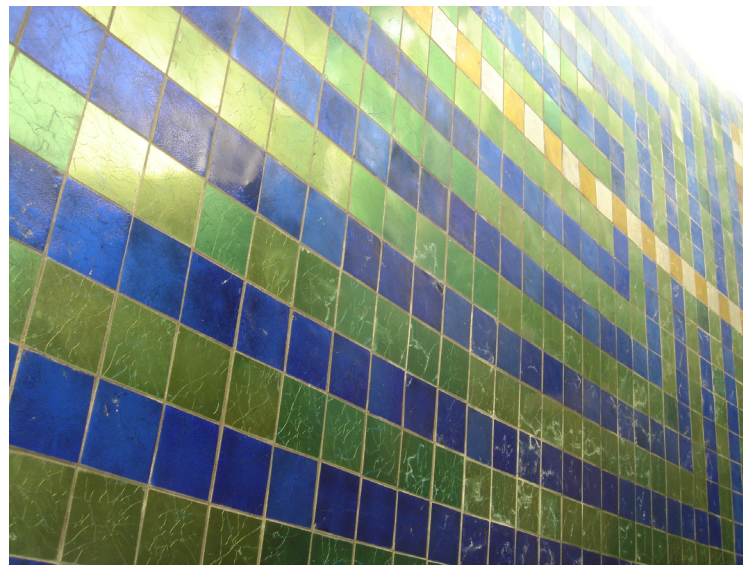
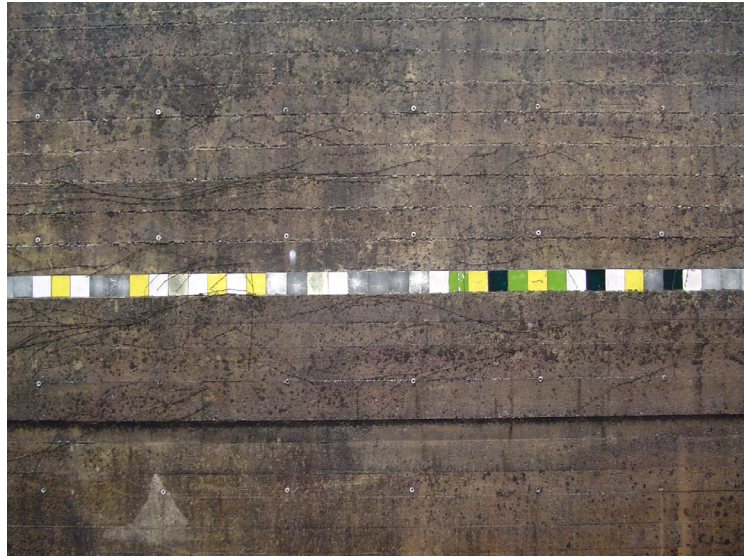
The removal of this ornament has left a mark of bareness on the Scuola face.



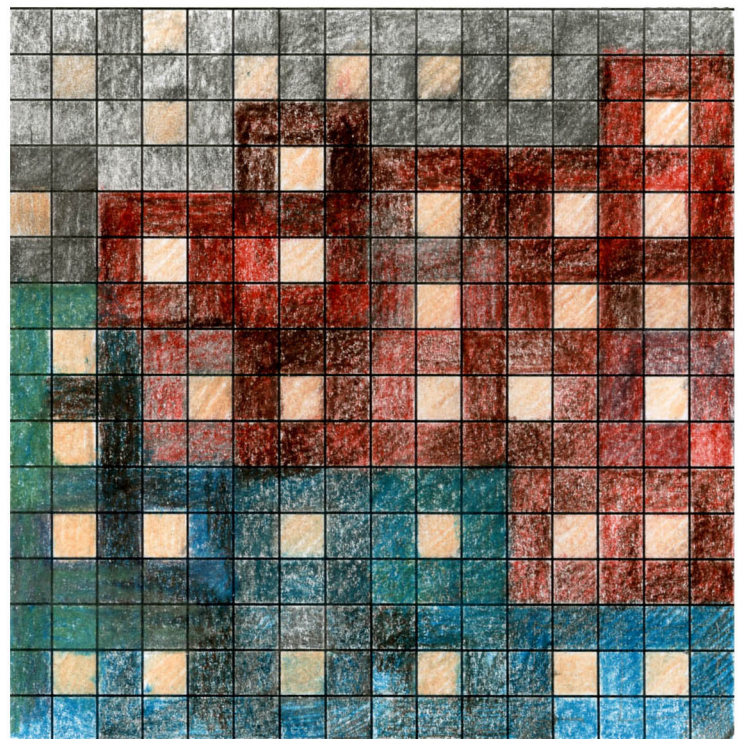
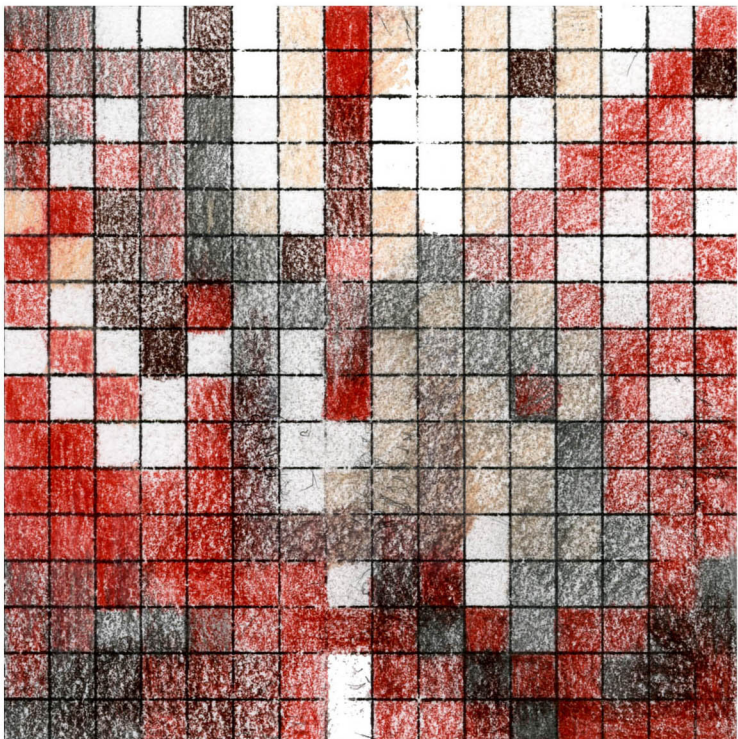
(i) Carlo Scarpa used glass tiles in the Brion Cemetery and also in the Querini Stampaglia garden to create square compositions, rich in color and geometry.

(ii) Grids investigating arrangement and abstraction for a sculptural piece for the Scuola facade.

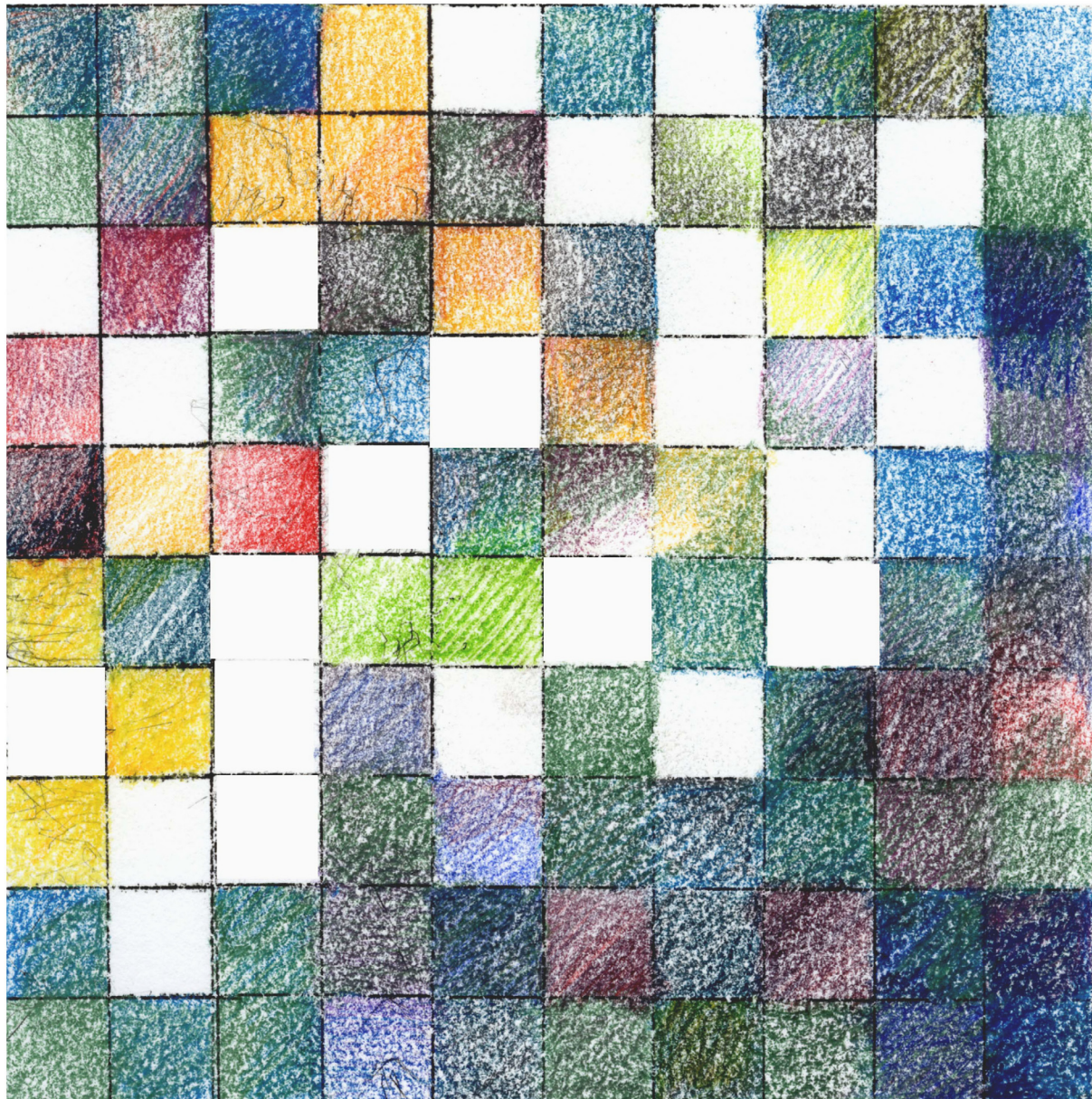
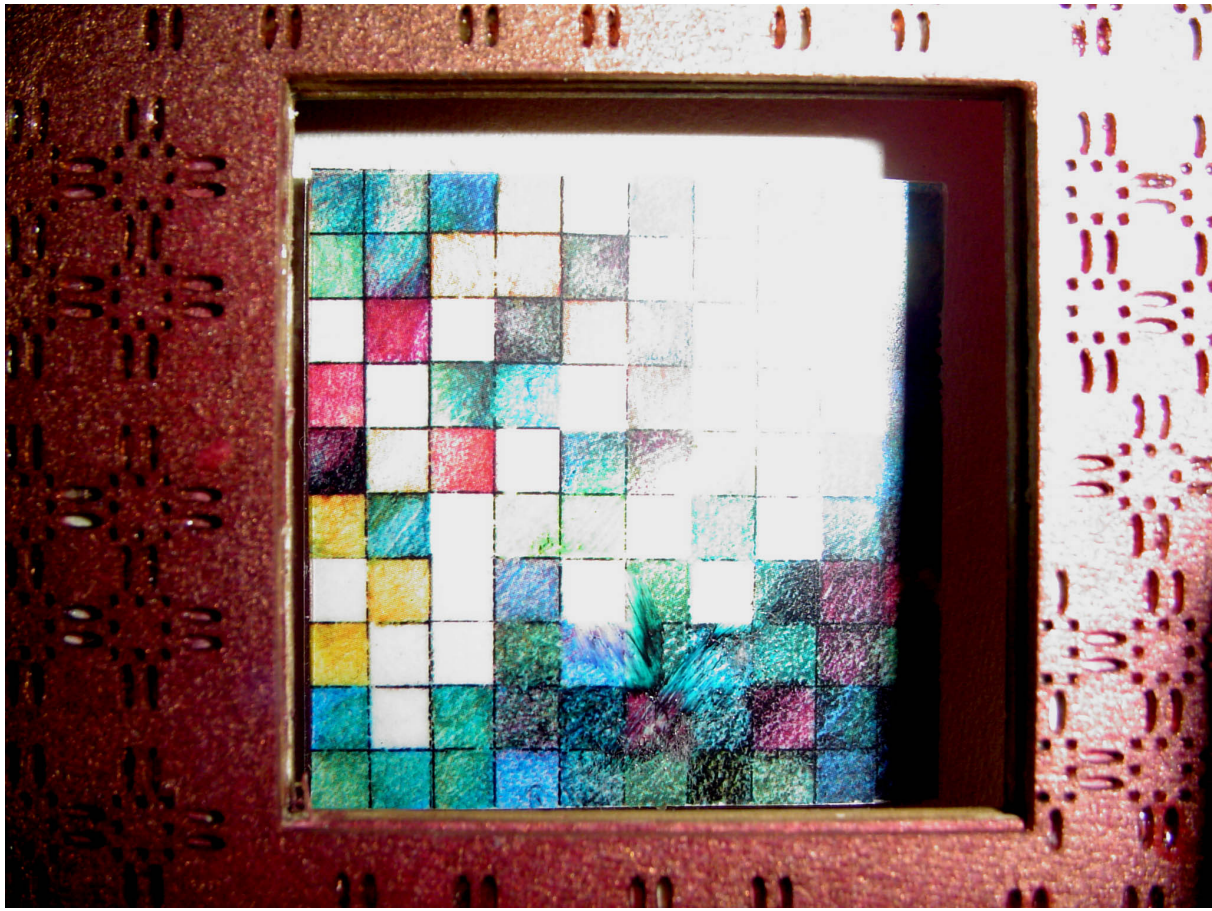
(i)

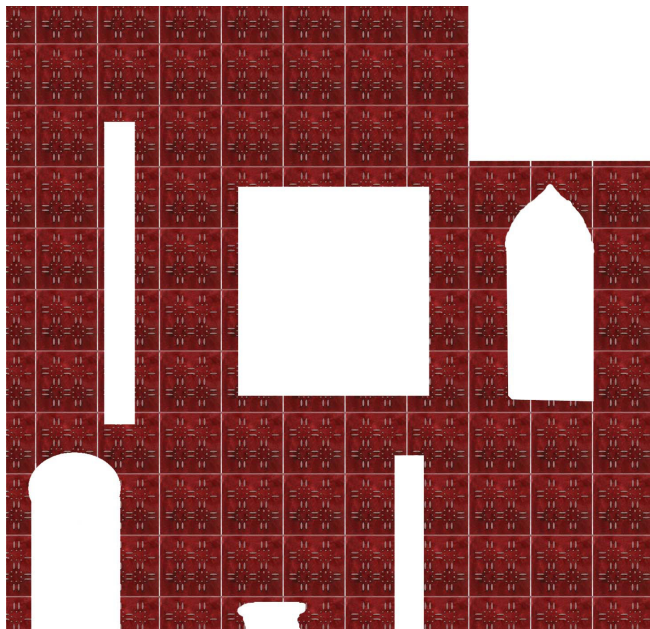


(ii)



The final sculptural piece made of glass tiles, representing the color and spirit of the gothic ornamentation that the Scuola once had, replaces the void...





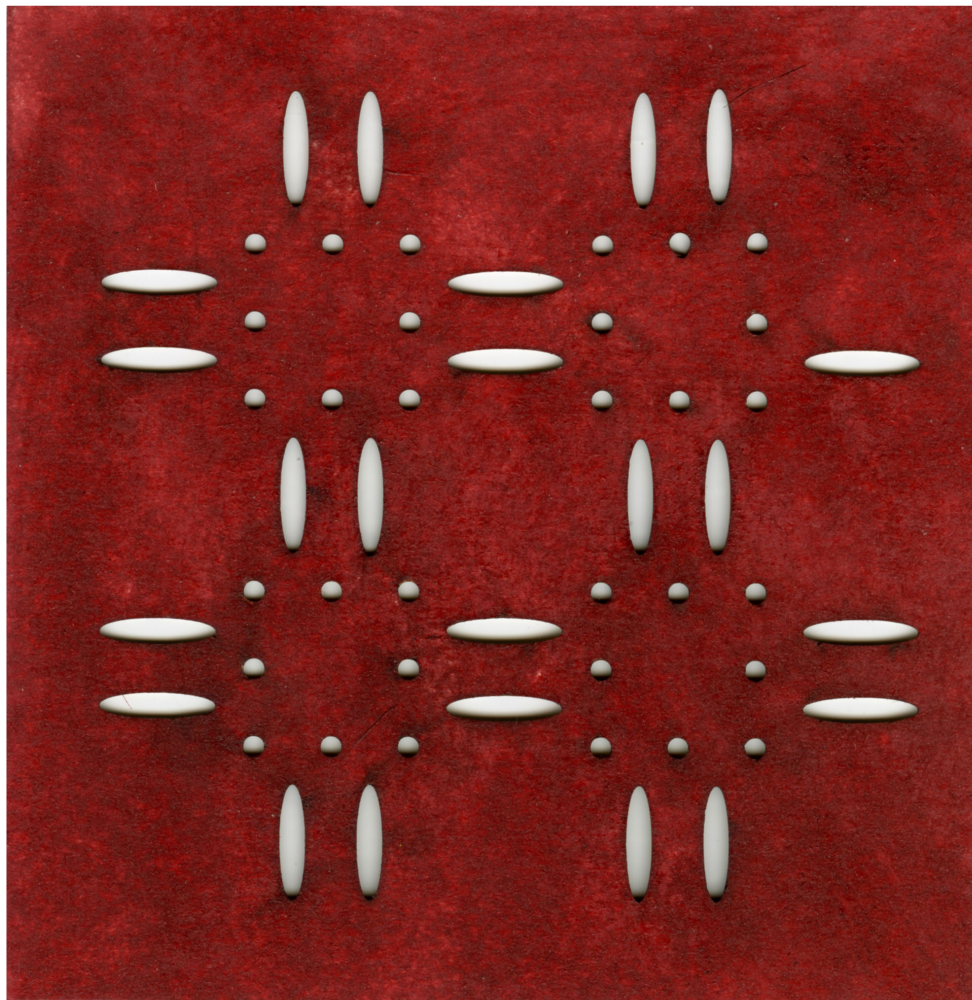
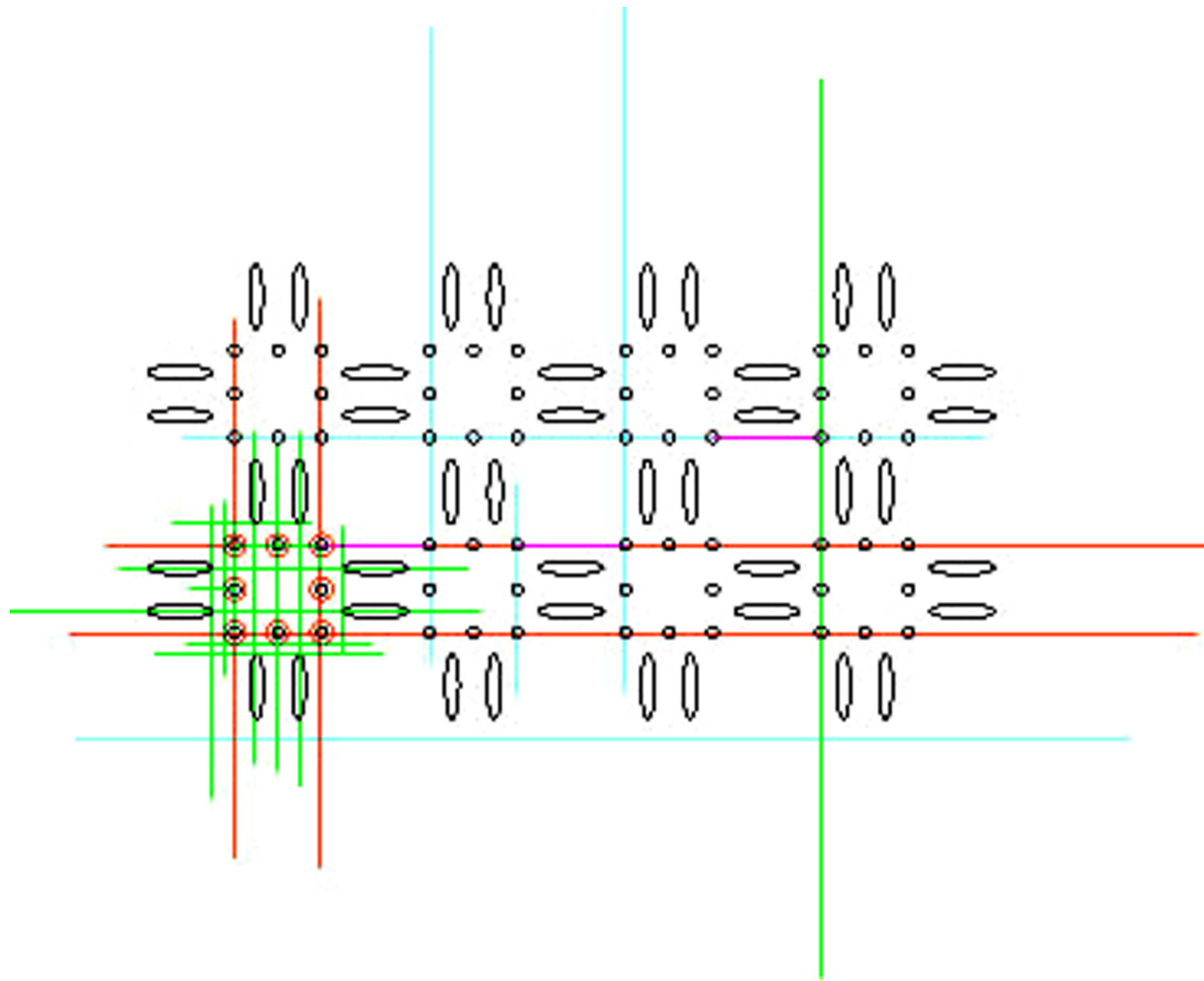
the mask

A screen or skin with intricate geometric perforation is a very delicate idea in Islamic Architecture. The Byzantine influence allowed for such beautifully ornate screens with exquisite patterns to emerge in Venice.

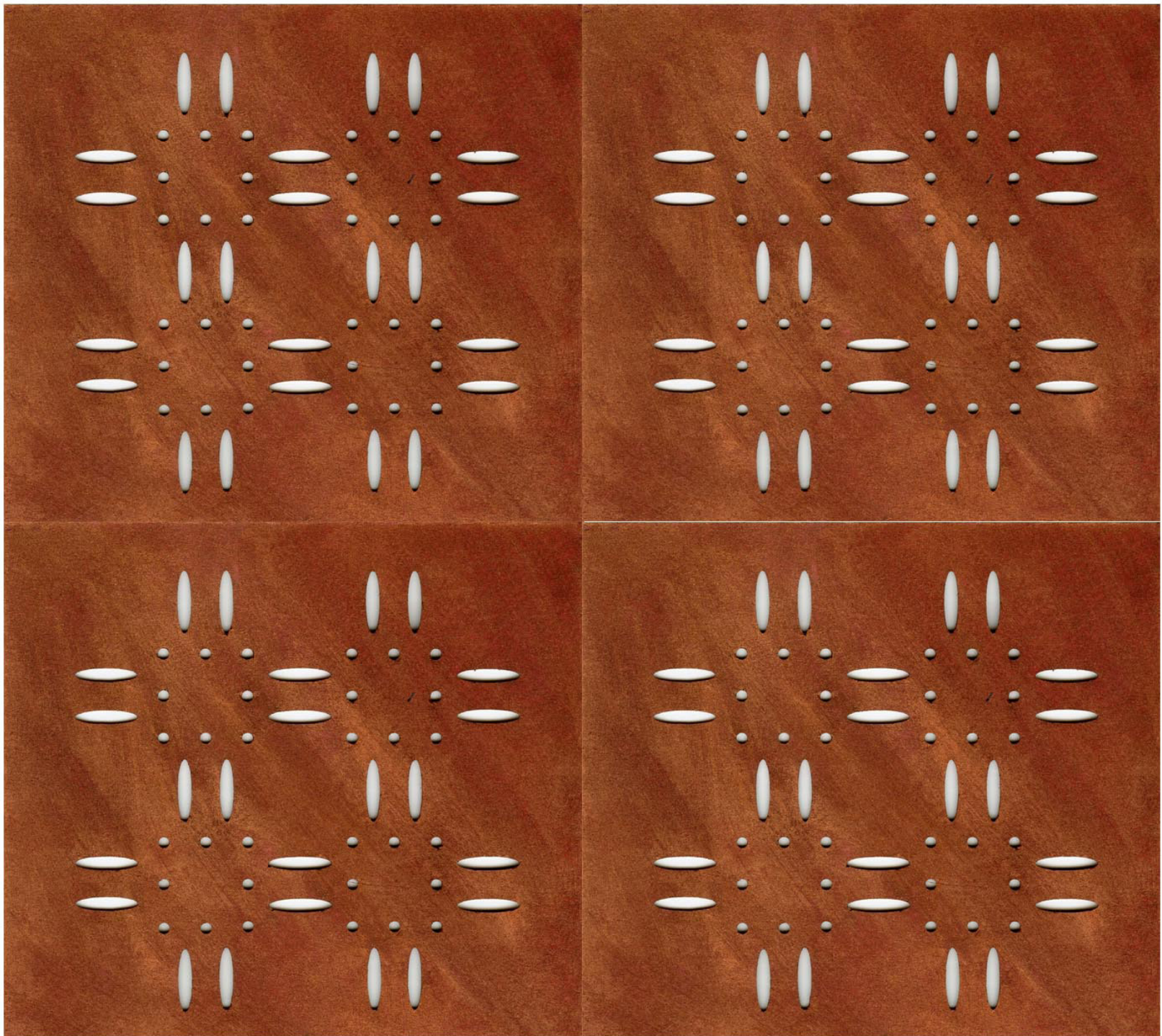
The screen hides a part of the whole, in many cases the most precious part.

A screen as such becomes the skin of this mask that reveals parts of the precious gothic elements on the face behind it.

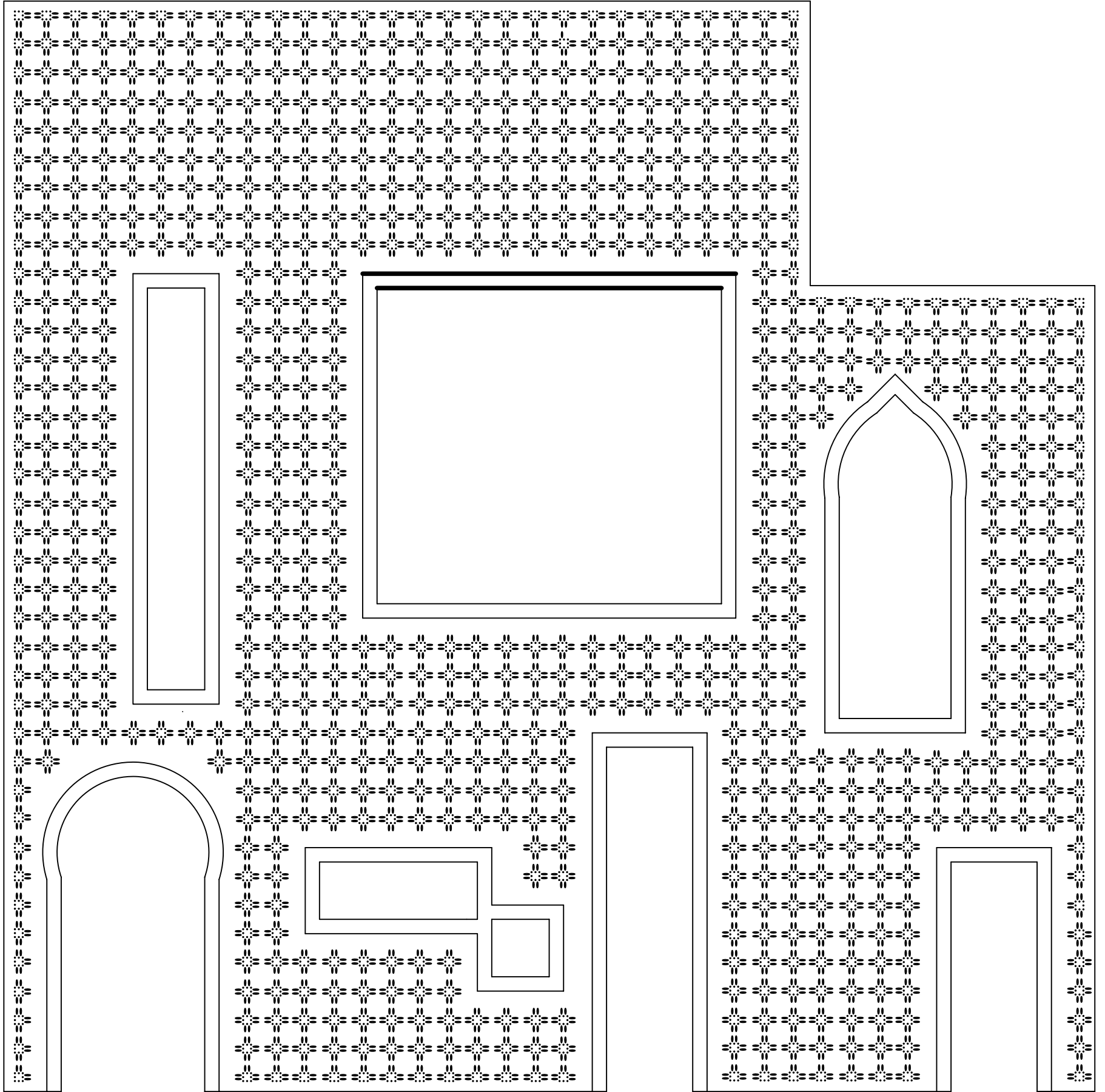
The pattern is generated from a single module that is the abstraction of the square campo being surrounded by gondolas on all four sides.



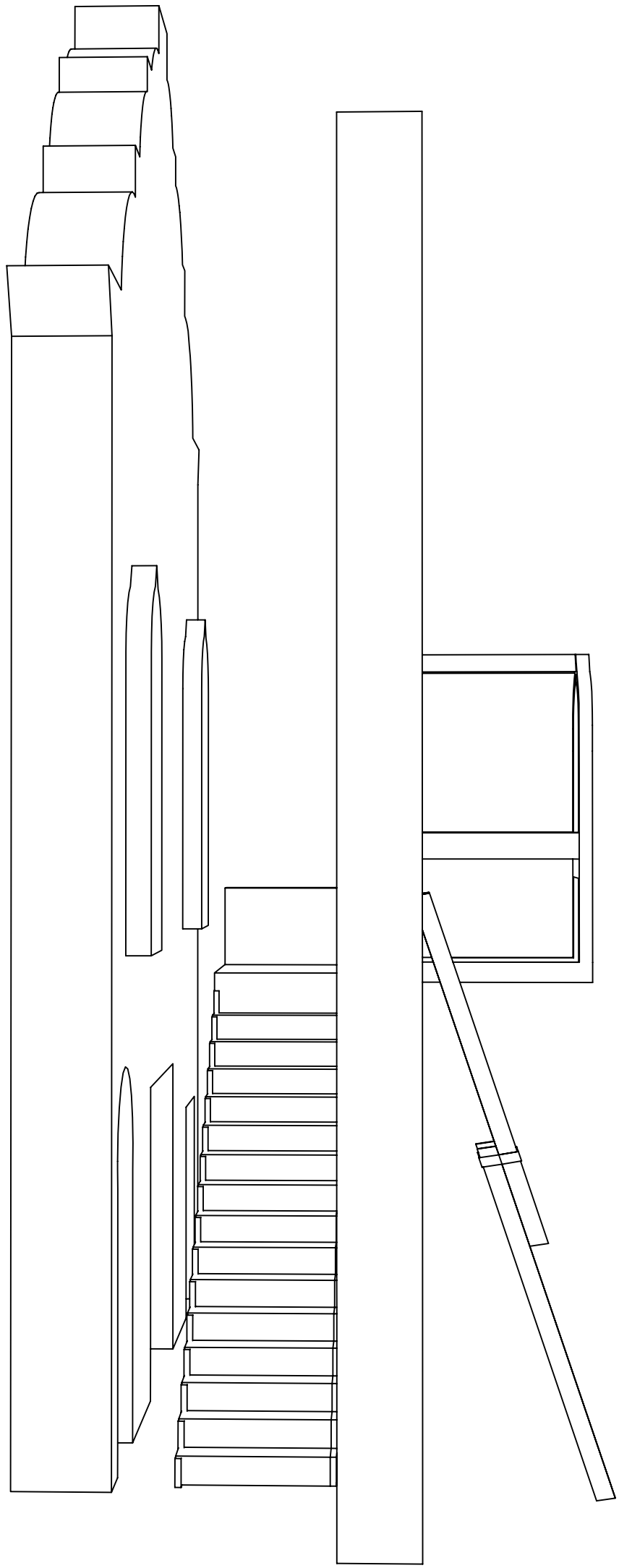
The skin of the Mask.

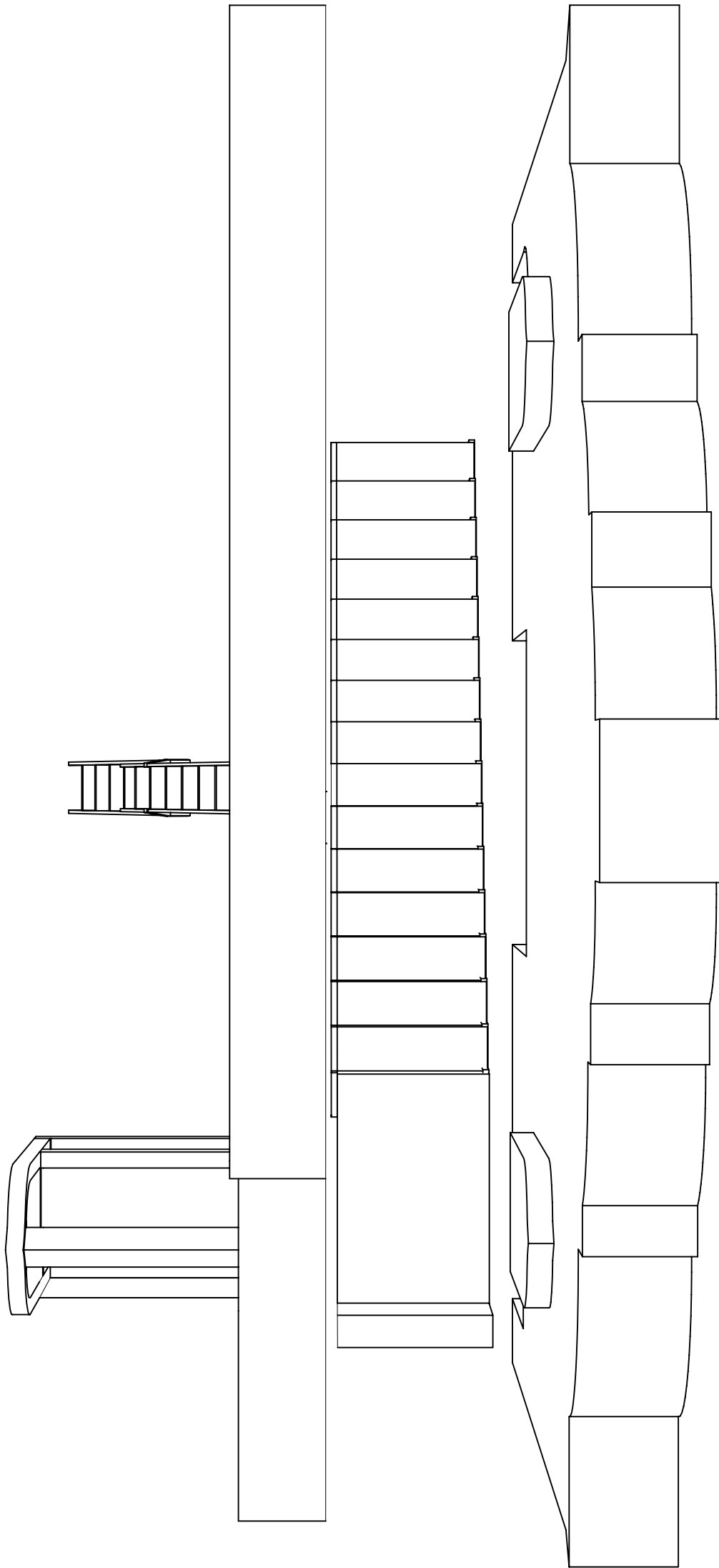


Elevation



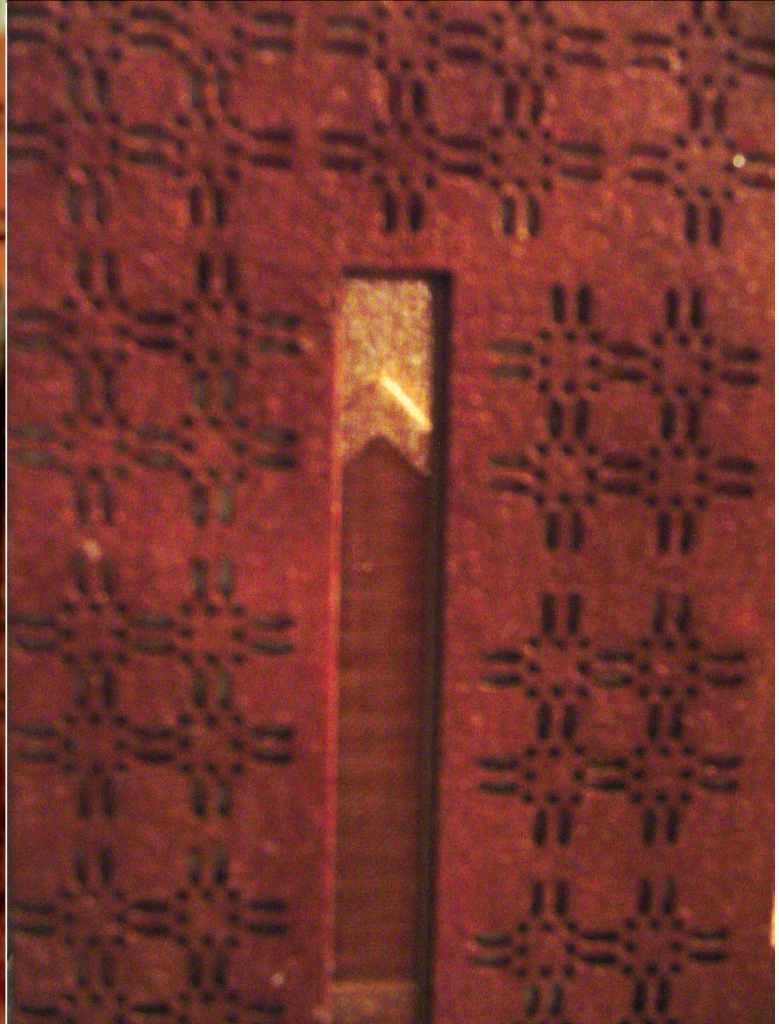
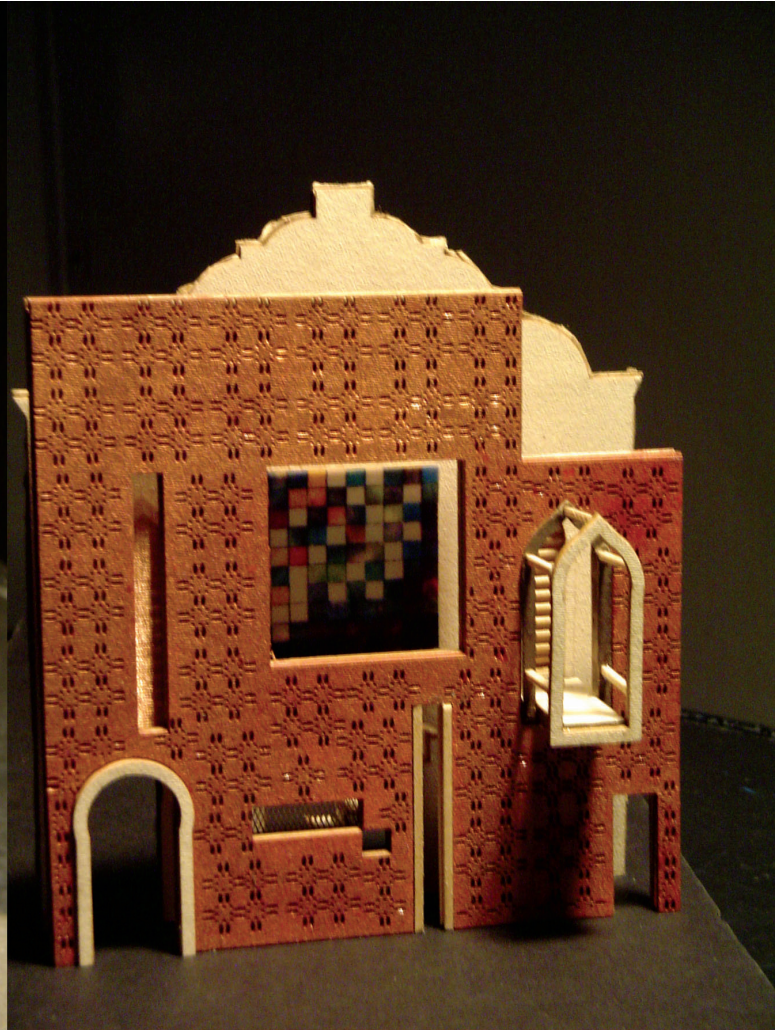
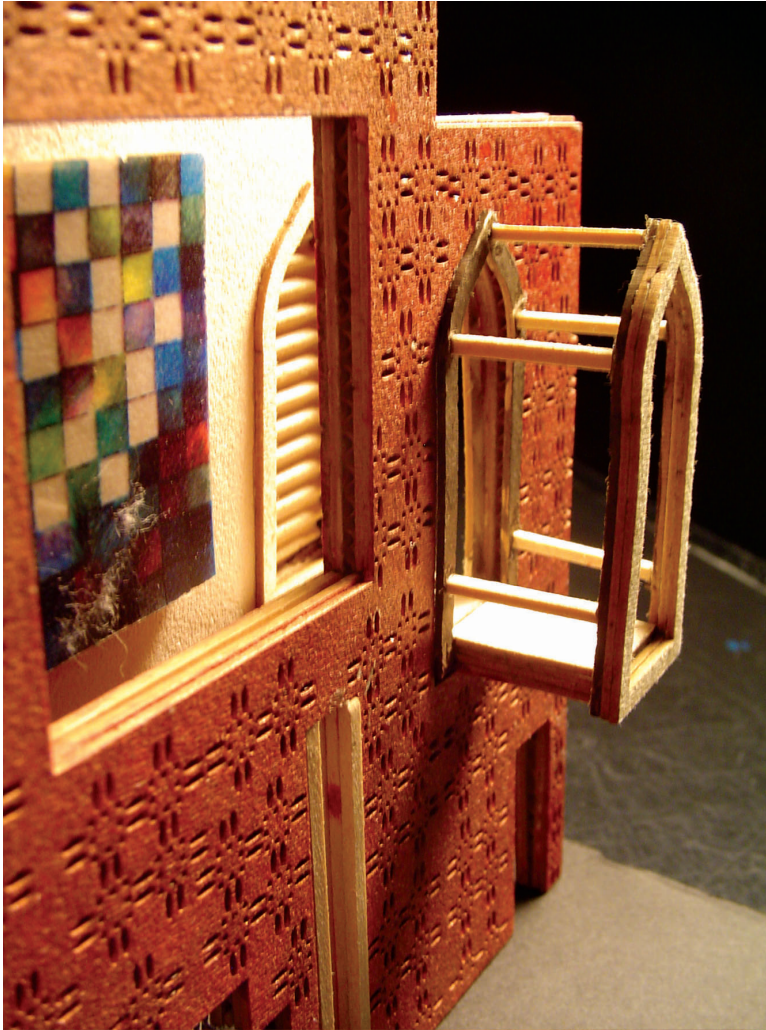
Section

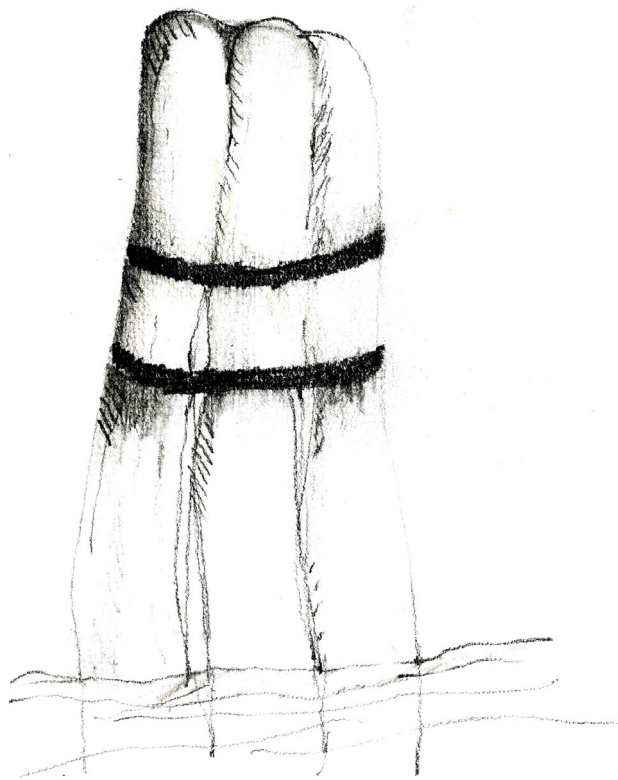




'Parting of the Veil'.

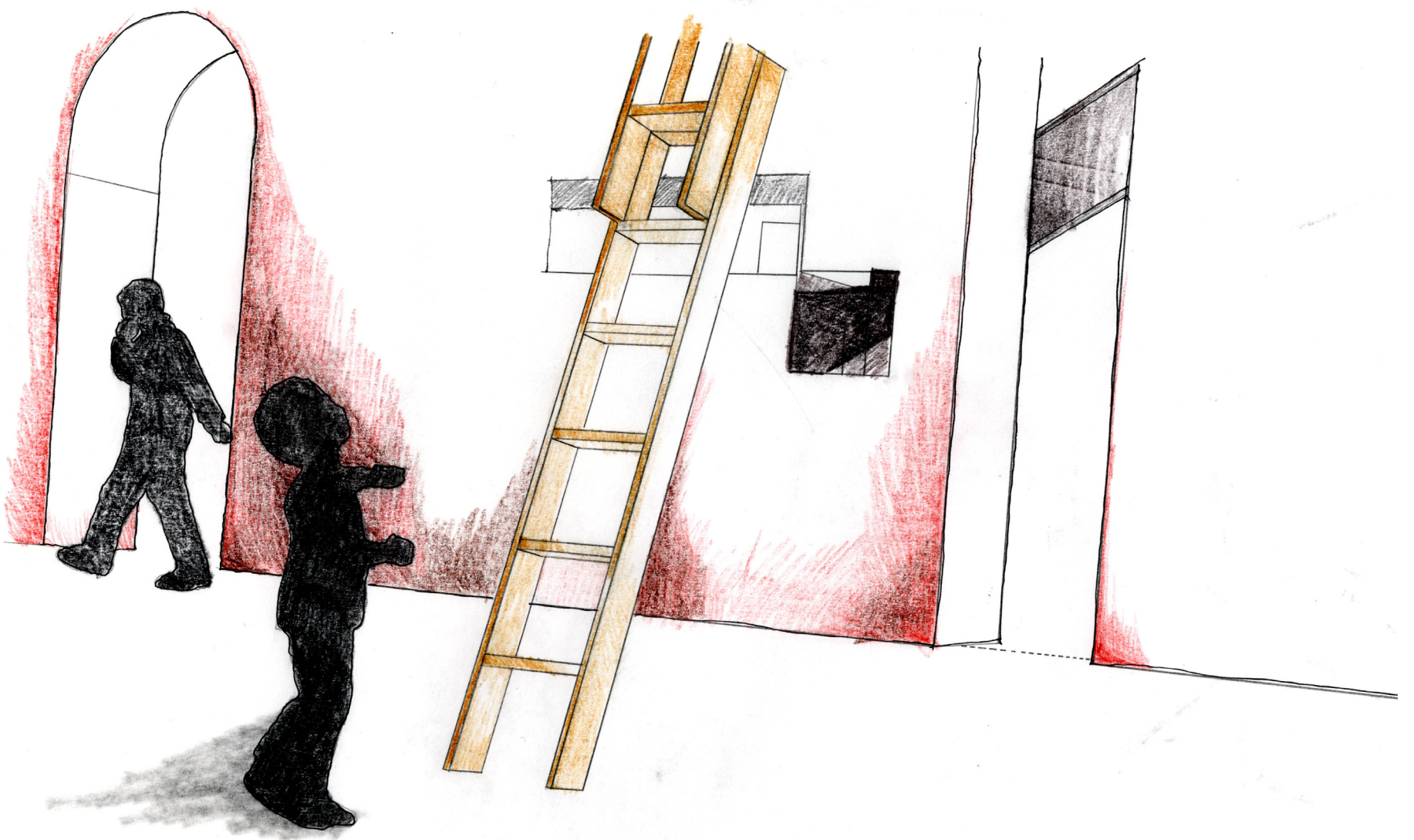
The view of the sculptural piece emerges through the central opening of the mask, as if the veil were parted to give us a glimpse of its beauty...



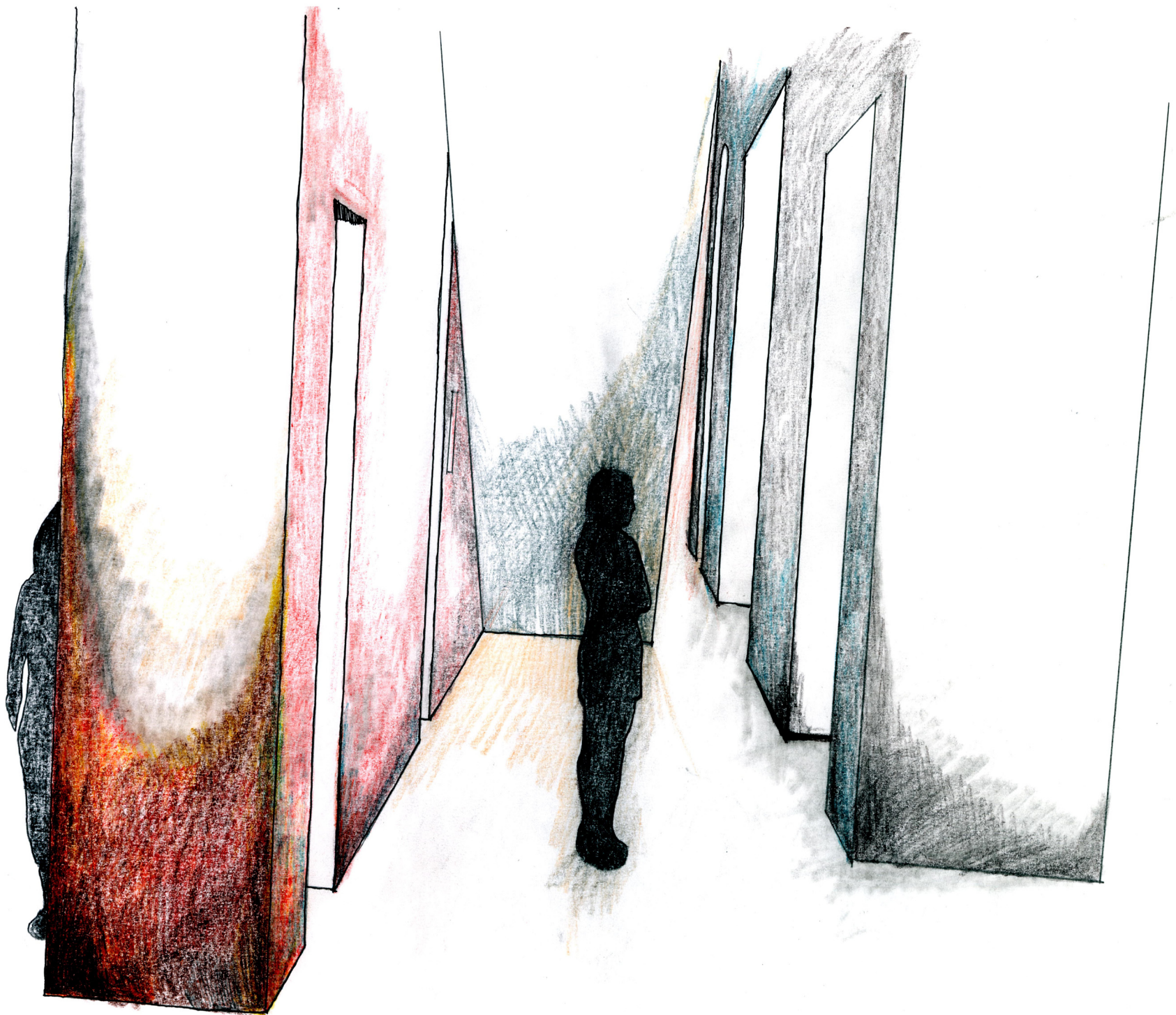


situations

A series of Sketches brings out the animated nature of the mask that allows for play to happen in different levels of the structure. The set of situations are similar to those behind a theater setting – ladders and stairs going in different directions...



Narrow and dark spaces that are between the temporary and permanent...

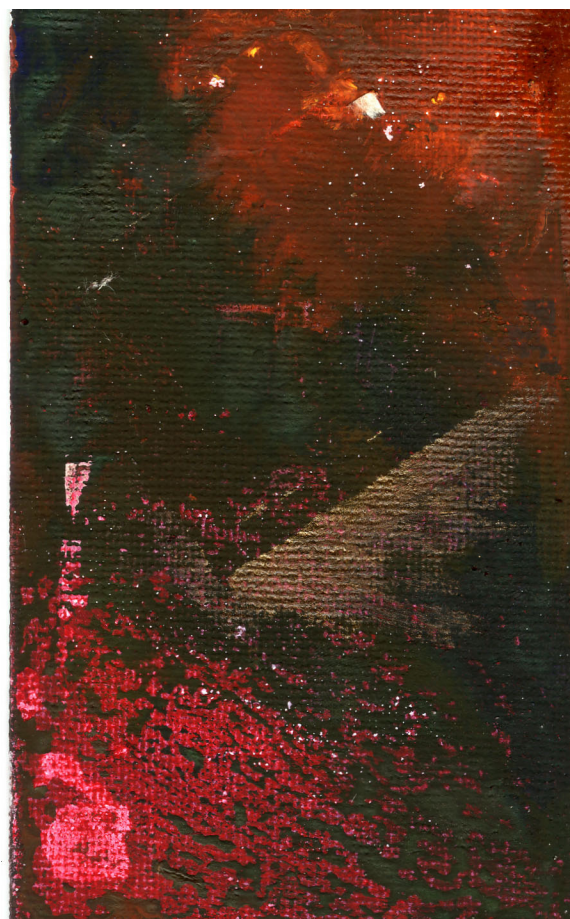


One can be a part of the new and the old simultaneously...



Theater blends the old with the new, imagination with creativity, the inner world with the metaphysical...





conclusion

This is a mask that reveals...



The lonely characters from De Chirico's paintings along with Pantalone from Commedia dell' Arte come to visit...

“Within the twilight zone of the memories one can find the emblems of a mythical theater. It is a distant, eccentric theatre, whose stage is as estranged from life as an island full of spirits which materialize themselves under the cover of darkness. The night is the climate of theater as mythology.”
(Andre Breton: 'First Manifesto of Surrealism')



Epilogue

At the end of these situations, the mask is taken off.
The memory of the mask and its theatrical play lingers in the campo.
The quietness resumes...



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