

The Waltz on the Seine

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The container and the contained, the art and the architecture,
are one thing, made for each other.

Ada Louise Huxtable

ABSTRACT

The desire to recognize and celebrate a forgotten artist and her work presents an opportunity for an investigation into the meeting of art and architecture. The dialogue between these two entities highlights the complexity of exhibiting works of art within a space of architectural integrity. The challenge is to successfully address both the art and the architecture in order to achieve a relationship that is mutually beneficial and equally powerful.

This thesis investigates the transcendent themes created in such a dialogue. An innovative approach creates opportunities for extraordinary spatial experiences of the architecture and the artwork itself while addressing the challenges proposed by the site, one that has tremendous historical and cultural significance.

The ultimate goal is a place where the architectural conditions provide a canvas for the acknowledgment and celebration of the artistic endeavors.

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CAMILLE CLAUDEL

Camille Claudel was born in 1864 in Villeneuve-sur-Fère, a small town outside of Paris, France. At an early age, she displayed tremendous aptitude and talent as a sculptor, showing incredible promise. In 1881, the Claudel family relocated to Paris so that Camille could pursue further studies in sculpture.

At the age of nineteen, Claudel was sharing a studio at 117, rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs when her teacher Alfred Boucher introduced her to Auguste Rodin. She began to take lessons from Rodin, and a relationship of instruction quickly transformed into a personal and professional collaboration that spanned fifteen years. Claudel had met Rodin as a student and eventually became his colleague and mistress.

It was an extremely volatile relationship, filled with passion and turmoil. Rodin and Claudel were mutually beneficial to one another, tremendously influencing each other's work. Rodin produced his most significant pieces of sculpture during this time period, while Claudel blossomed under his tutelage. However, as Claudel began to establish herself in the Parisian art world she became frustrated in Rodin's shadow. She yearned to break free and be recognized based on her own merits as a sculptor. At the same time, the romance and passion between the two lovers diminished as Claudel realized that she would never be more than Rodin's mistress.

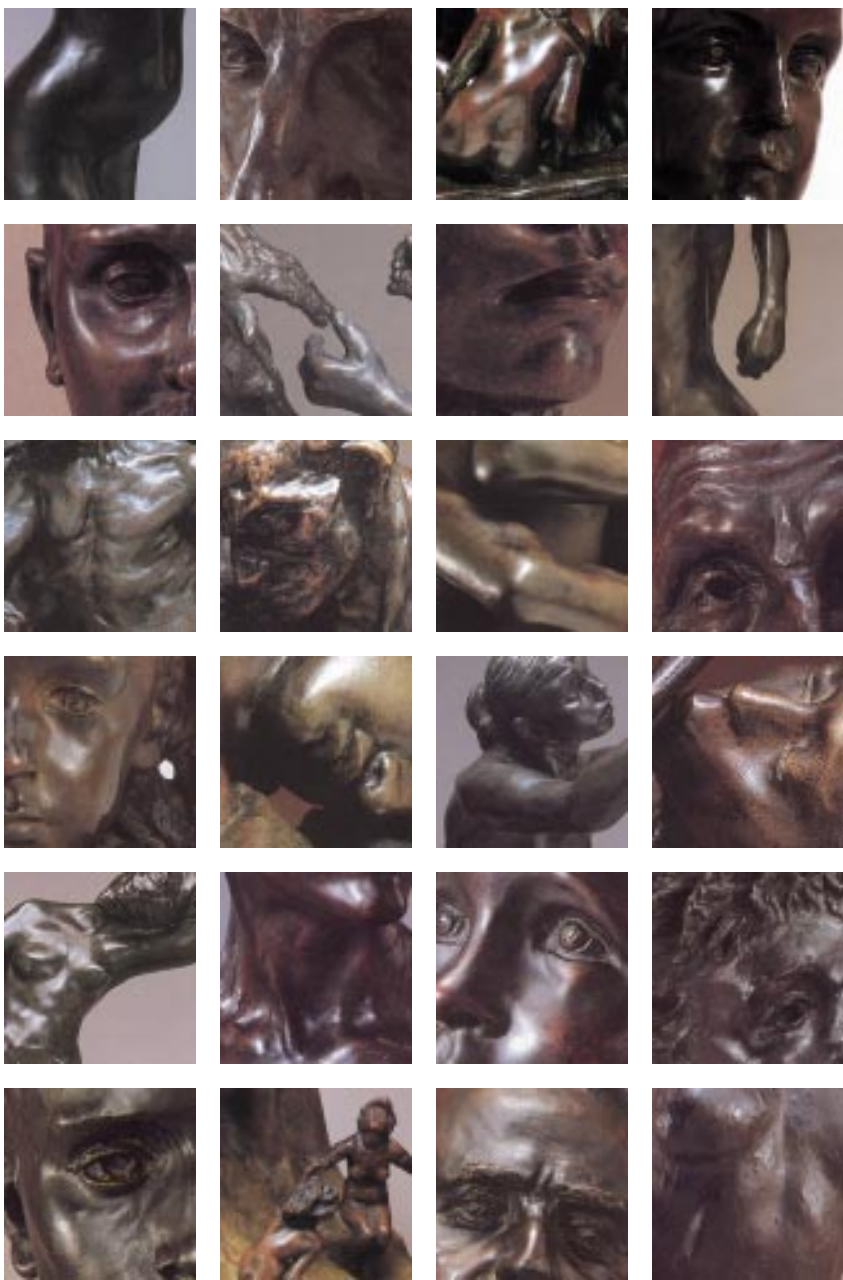


After fifteen years with Rodin, Camille Claudel left his studio and his life at the age of thirty. However, a move that was filled with promise and hope for artistic independence and freedom turned into a virtual prison for Claudel.

Although she received commissions and produced some of her best works to date, Claudel faced enormous opposition from the art world. She lacked Rodin's influence and connections in the male-dominated art society of the late nineteenth century and found it difficult to establish herself among the artistic elite. Frustrated with the lack of significant success and recognition, Claudel began to believe that Rodin and his circle of friends were conspiring against her.

As Claudel's paranoia worsened, she went into seclusion and stopped working. She fell into poverty, ignored her friends and family, declined commissions, and at the end began to destroy her own works. In 1913, Claudel was placed in a mental asylum at Montdevergues by her family at the age of forty-eight. Having lost her youth, beauty, and career, she was forced to spend the rest of her life imprisoned in mental anguish. Claudel never created another piece of sculpture. She passed away in 1943 at the age of seventy-nine, forgotten by the world.





The majority of Camille Claudel's works are small in scale and rather personal and intimate in nature. Unlike Rodin's robust, exaggerated, raw figures, Claudel's works are elegant and beautiful in their silence. The majority of the sculptures are busts and small figures, no larger than fourteen to eighteen inches in overall dimension. During her brief but brilliant career, Claudel worked with bronze, marble, terra cotta, and plaster casts as well as unusual materials such as onyx and jade. She also generated sketches, drawings, and paintings.

Claudel's busts convey a certain tranquility in their facial expressions. She has a level of innate observation and comprehension of the intimacy of the human face and figure. The faces of these busts come alive in their understated gestures, full of emotion and depth.

The full-figured sculptural pieces also display Claudel's extraordinary talent in presenting the human body. Her interpretation of the human form is one that is full of grace and beauty, where the small details and the nuances of the form are celebrated and brought into light.

Camille Claudel's body of work is one that is simultaneously luminous and intense. The viewer is immediately drawn to these sculptures; they communicate a certain strength and coherence in their silence, while the inner emotion and spirit call out to the fully engage the senses.

Due to the brevity of her career, Camille Claudel's work is still relatively unknown throughout the world. Unfortunately, her identity and place in the art world are overshadowed by those of her master, Auguste Rodin. Since her death, there have been numerous exhibitions of Camille Claudel's work in Europe, Japan, and the United States. However, the exhibitions themselves have featured the same works at a rather selective and minor scale.

The largest permanent collection of Claudel's work is housed at Musée Rodin, which currently owns fifteen pieces. The rest are scattered throughout Western Europe in small, regional museums and in private collections. Because of the short duration of Claudel's career, only sixty examples of her work survive today. During her battle with mental illness, Claudel was overcome with paranoia and destroyed many of her later pieces.

This project is not another attempt at a temporary exhibition. Rather, it is the investigation into the creation of a permanent place to house all of Claudel's sculptures. A place where her body of work can be fully appreciated within the context of the environment where she worked and lived is long overdue. It is time to establish Camille Claudel's identity as her own and to provide the public with an opportunity to discover her for themselves.









PARIS

Ile Saint-Louis is the smaller of the two islands that are situated in the Seine River in Paris, France. These two islands are in the heart of Paris, part of the illustrious fourth arrondissement, well known for its culture and history. Ile de la Cité, the larger of the two islands is famous for the location of the cathedral of Notre Dame, the Palais de Justice, and the Saint-Chapelle cathedral.

While much smaller in scale and atmosphere, the Ile Saint-Louis nonetheless retains its own charm and sophistication. It is very much residential in scale, creating an environment that seems a world away from the cosmopolitan feel of a large, metropolitan city like Paris.

“...the beauty and subtlety of color that distinguishes the Ile Saint-Louis and combines with the elegance of the facades to make this one of the most aristocratic of townscapes. To arrive in Paris on a fine summer evening after a long day's journey from the south, turn out of the Gare de Lyon, drive westward along the quays and watch the relations of tone on the inhabited cliffs of the Ile Saint-Louis, the gradations of silver-gray and palest yellow-all this is one of the greatest rewards of European travel. Nor is it simply a subject such as Bellotto would have delighted in; it suggests that somewhere among the tall-faced houses, behind the balconies that Le Vau made obligatory, the enlightened life is going forward. At such moments the Ile Saint-Louis is like some phantom city to which none but the good and the clever and the beautiful may seek admission.”

John Russell, Paris





The site of the proposed project is on the Quai de Bourbon, a riverfront street on the northeastern side of Ile Saint-Louis. The lot is presently occupied by a seventeenth century townhouse, a few doors down the street from Camille Claudel's last studio. The building lot itself is extremely tight; the site is open to the street only at the front and the surrounding buildings block off the rest of the building.

The existing building is a typical example of the Parisian buildings constructed during this time period. The lot was typically filled by first building a front mass along the main street. Other smaller masses were added to the front building, built along the perimeter of the lot and working inwards, leaving a small, central courtyard. The buildings were vertically oriented and consisted of multiple levels due to the limited space for construction. The only method of expansion was to build upwards.

The proposal for the project references many of the characteristics of the Parisian townhouse. For example, the project calls for the preservation of the front mass of the existing building. A new addition along the Seine riverfront that disregards its historical fabric would disturb the overall character of the island that is so vital to Paris. The facade retains the continuity of the riverfront of Ile Saint-Louis and sustains its cultural significance. To create space for the new addition, the smaller masses behind the front facade will be demolished.



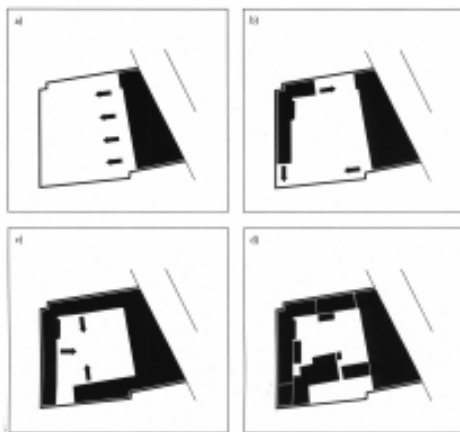
Quai de Bourbon



Five Floors of Parisian Life. Edouard Texier, 1853



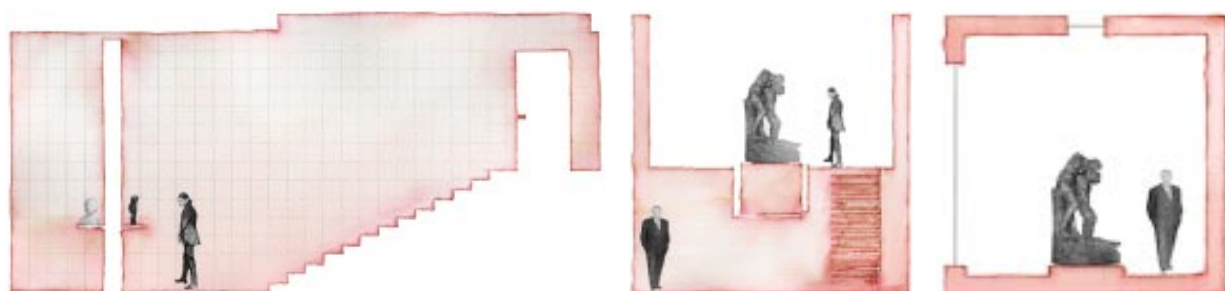
A nineteenth-century
Parisian building



Diagrams of nineteenth-century
Parisian lot construction



This particular site establishes a relationship between Claudel's history and her new, permanent place in Paris. The site on the riverfront brings enormous focus and attention to Claudel's gallery due to its location in the heart of Paris. Its place along the Seine is a declaration of a major act; the gallery benefits from the island's historical and cultural significance and becomes a part of a wonderful legacy. The proposed site's distance from the Musée Rodin at last takes Claudel away from Rodin's shadow to a part of Paris that retains the last remnants of her life and work. This is an opportunity for the rediscovery of Camille Claudel.





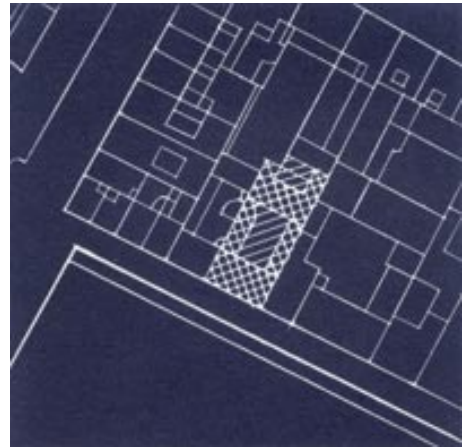
GALLERY

The proposed site for the gallery presents many issues for discussion. The introduction of a new building into a site with an existing structure necessitates a successful marriage of the new addition and the old building. It is important to simultaneously maintain the dialogue between the historical integrity of the site and the role of the gallery on the Seine riverfront.

Second, the logistics of the site pose a challenge in the provision of natural light into the new building. The extreme verticality of the building and its lot restrictions present the opportunity to introduce light in an effective and aesthetic manner.

Finally, the narrow and vertical orientation of the building limits opportunities for exhibiting works of art successfully. Within the ideas of exhibition, issues of circulation in a multi-leveled space become a unique challenge in that while the viewing of the artwork is most important, the spatial experience of the building is also essential. The challenge lies in placing the works of art for exhibition into an architecturally complex environment without diminishing either the building or the art.

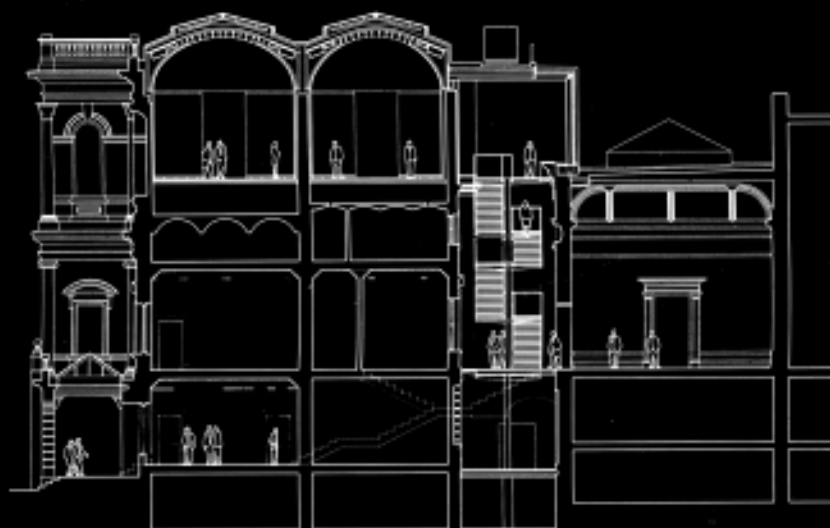
The new building will house a permanent collection of Claudel's works in gallery spaces as well as provide space for temporary exhibitions. Space for administrative offices, a cafe, and a bookstore will also be included in the overall building scheme.

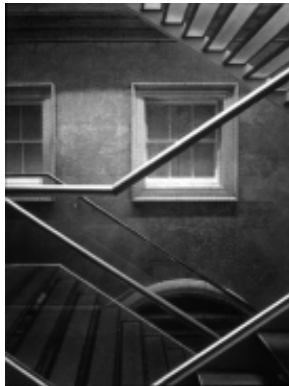


The preservation of the front mass of the existing building was essential to maintain the important riverfront facade of Quai de Bourbon. Although the characteristics of the site are retained, the building's new mission on Ile Saint-Louis needs to be recognized.

A good example of a renovation and restoration project in a similar context to that of the proposed gallery is the Royal Sackler Galleries in London, England. Designed by Sir Norman Foster of Foster & Partners, the building presents a wonderful interpretation of the adaptation of pre-existing architectural conditions into a new design. A radical remodeling of a little-used gallery space, the new galleries were created in the shell of the old. Foster introduces a new system of circulation while preserving the old part of the existing gallery, revealing the historical significance of the building.

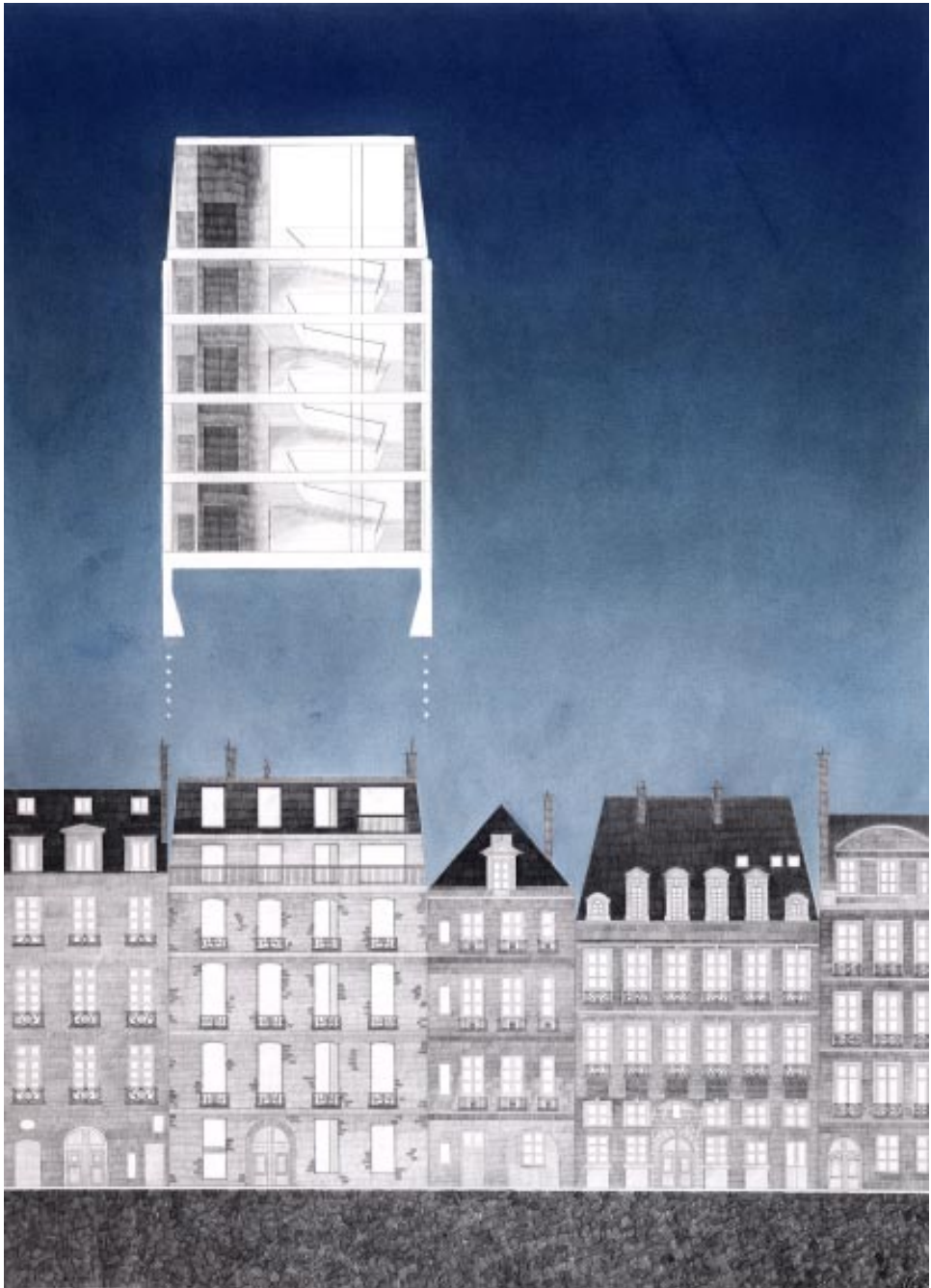






The new role of the building on the Quai de Bourbon is emphasized through an alteration of the front facade. The basic masonry structure is preserved but the fenestrations are removed for many reasons. The new openings improve the views from the gallery, while they allow much more of the interior to be seen from the riverfront. By changing the characteristics of the windows, the building is differentiated from its neighbors and assumes a distinct presence along the Seine riverfront.

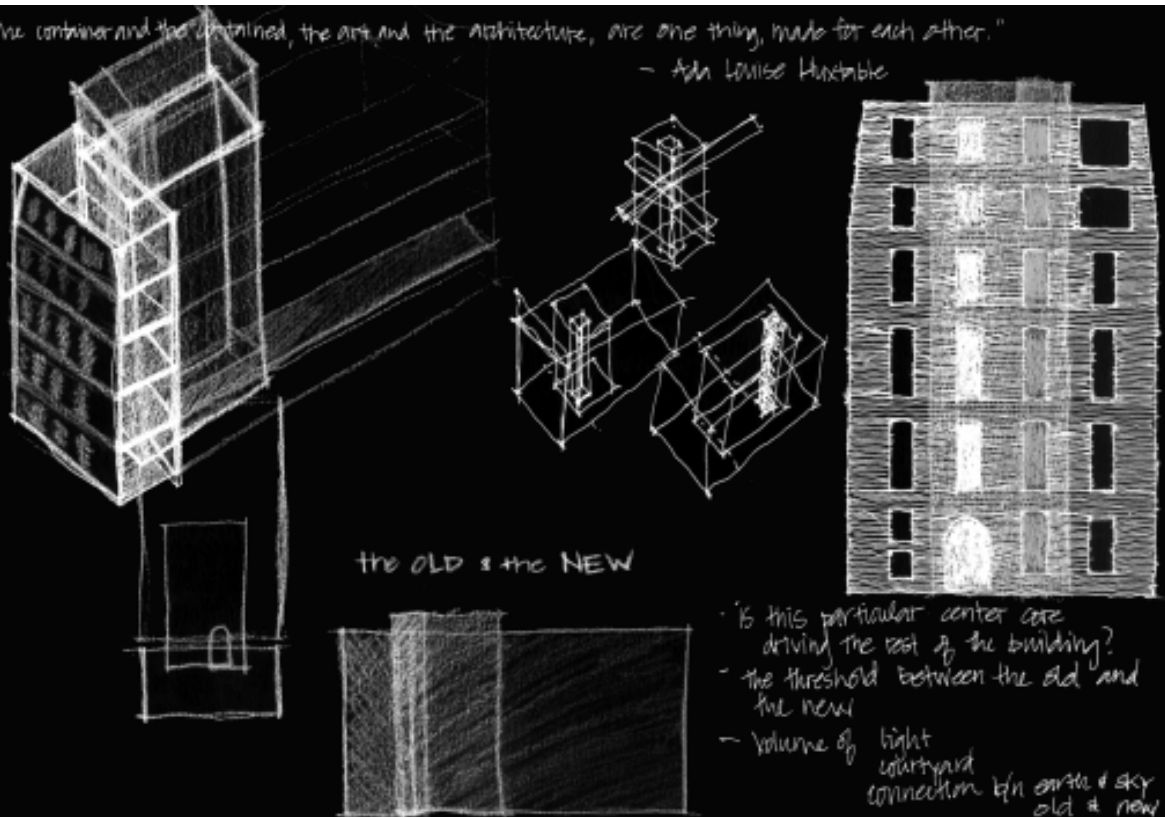




front elevation and section of the building

"The container and the contained, the art and the architecture, are one thing, made for each other."

- John Louis Murakami



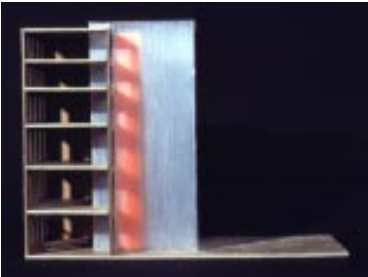
- Is this particular center core driving the rest of the building?
- the threshold between the old and the new
- Volume of light courtyard connection b/w old & new



The new fenestrations are highlighted from within by a new source of natural light. Prior to the new construction, the building received natural light only from the front of the building. There was a need to bring daylight into the tall, narrow building at another location since it was undesirable to rely solely on artificial lighting to illuminate the building. Following the tradition of the interior courtyard of Parisian buildings, there is an atrium placed at the back of the gallery. Daylight enters the back of the gallery through a large skylight in the roof. The atrium penetrates through all the floors of the building, creating a connection between earth and sky. The new building follows the floor structure of the existing building to ease the transition from the old to the new. The floors are reinforced concrete slabs with beam construction.



The atrium creates an effect of walking in and out of light within the gallery space. This phenomenon of the light at the end of the tunnel attracts viewers to the source of the light, naturally establishing the beginning of a pattern of circulation within the gallery. The journey from the front of the building to the rear is one of an intense visual play of light and shadow.

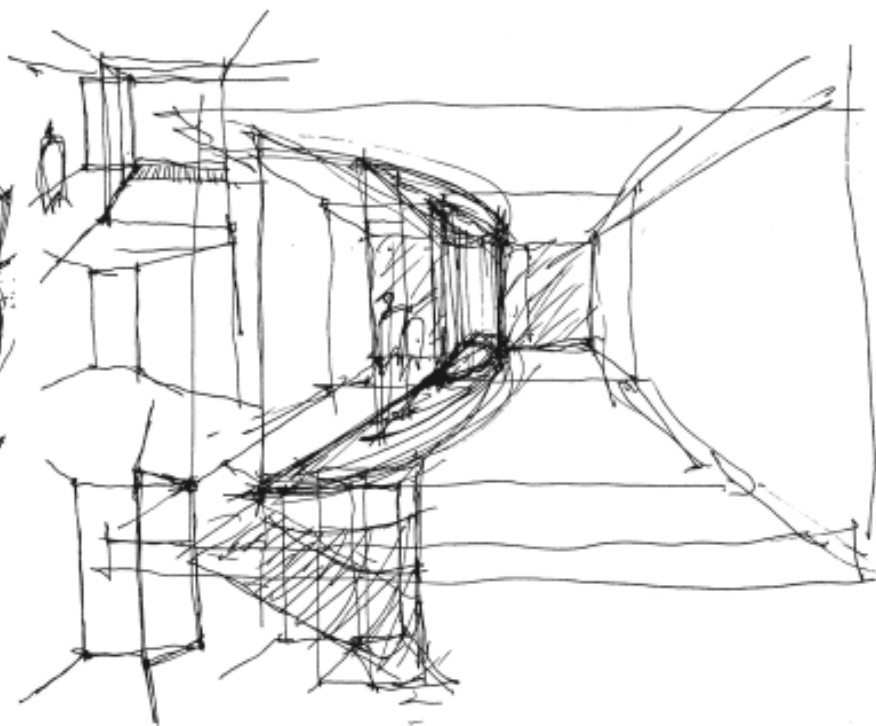
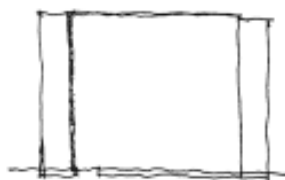
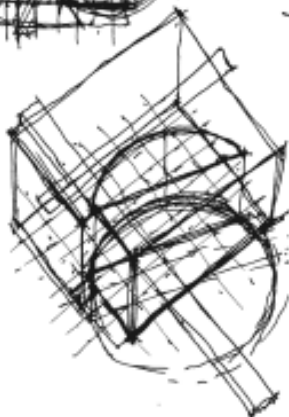
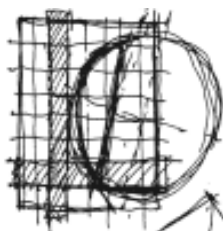


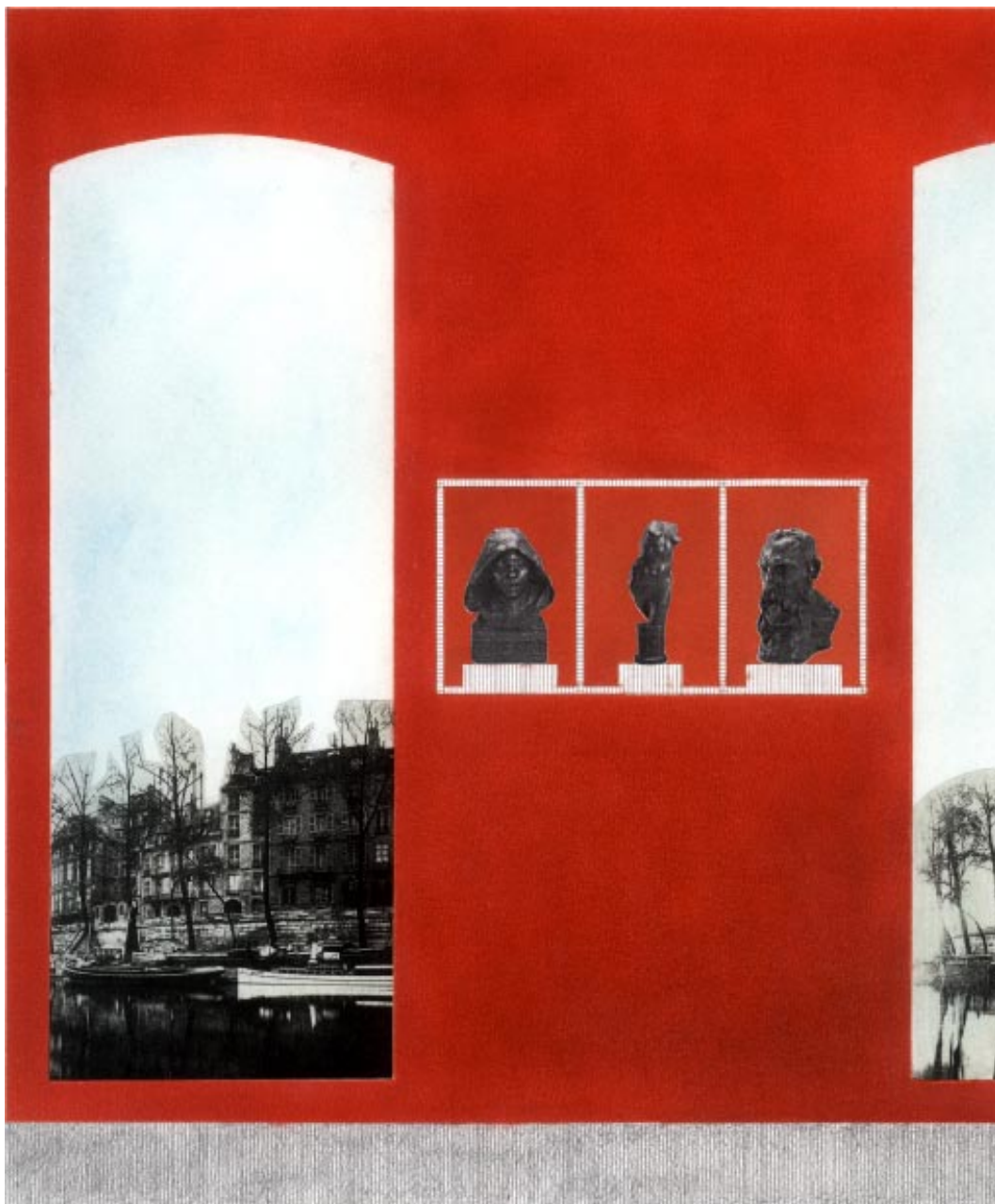




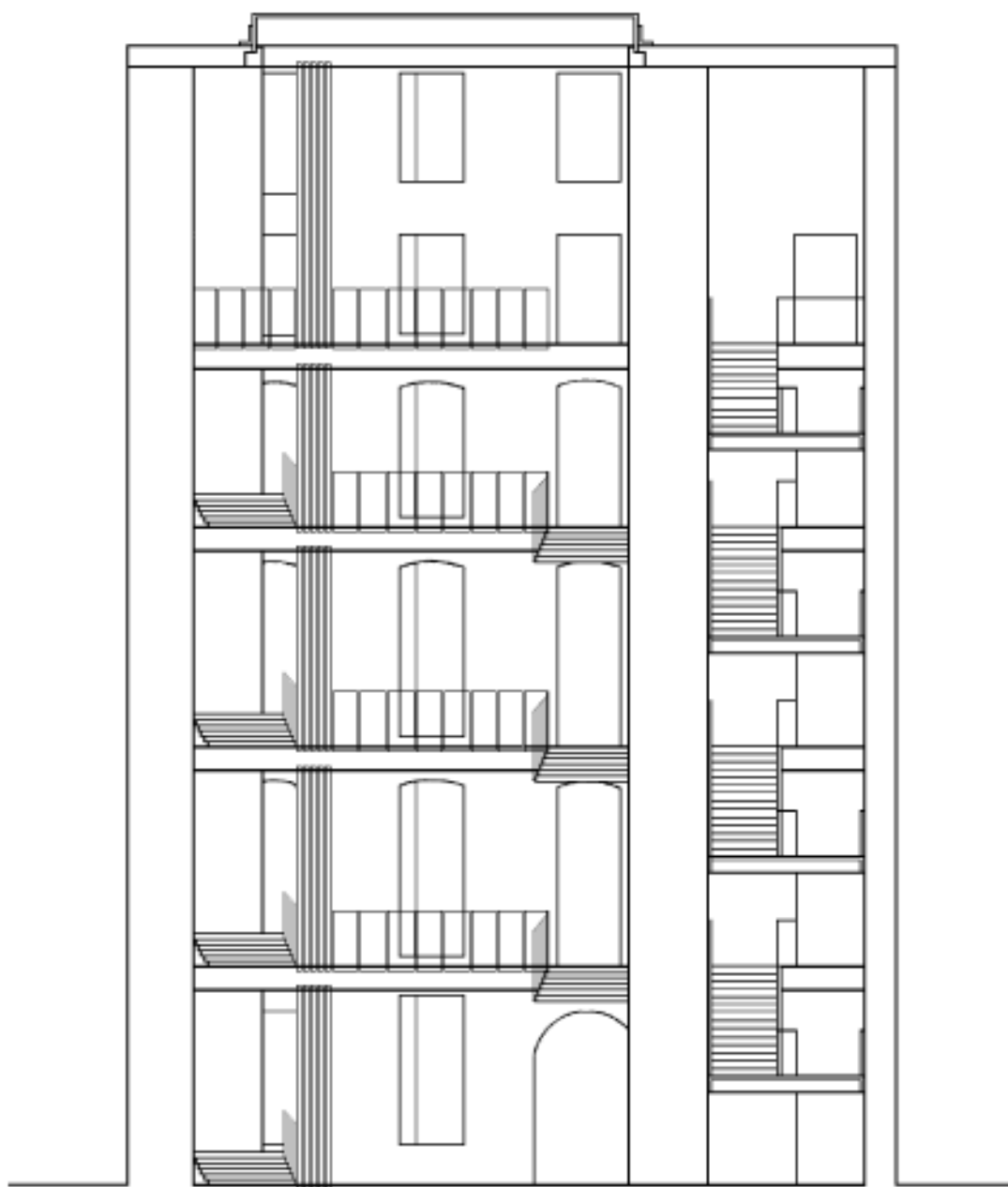
street front

simple
clean
elegant
inviting
tranquil





view of the Seine riverfront out of the front fenestrations



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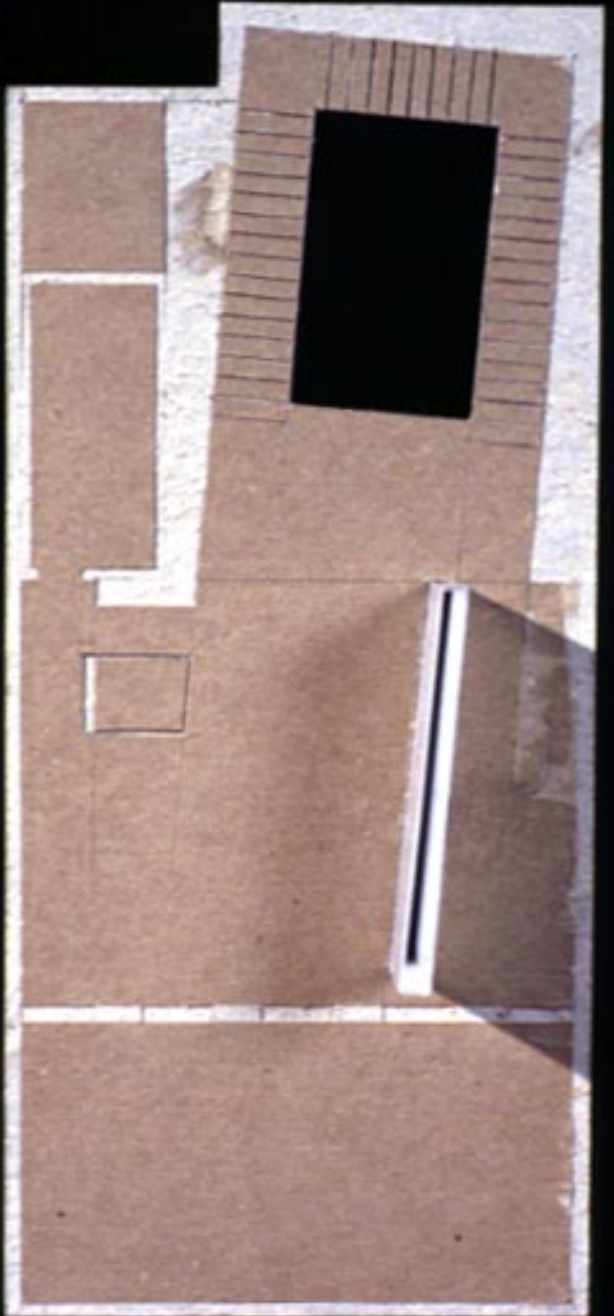
cross section of building towards the
river

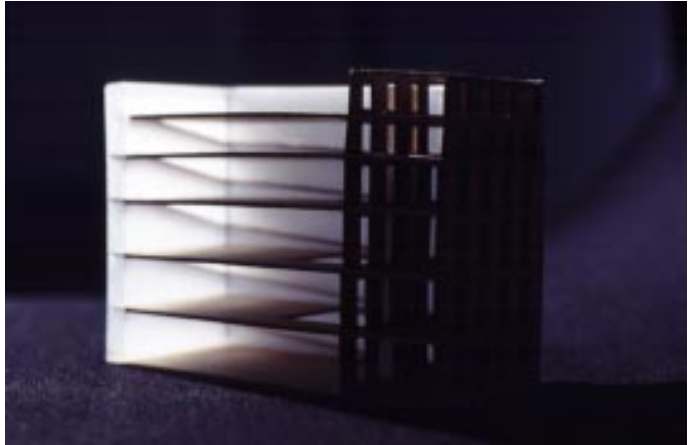
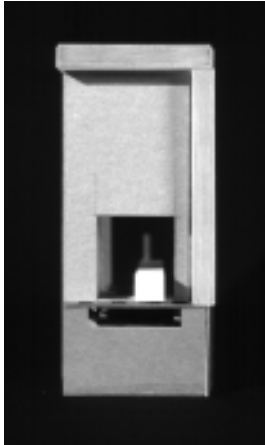
perspective view towards the atrium



This atrium of light establishes the main circulation pattern of the gallery by acting as the focal point of the space. Located at the rear of the building, the atrium is five degrees offset perpendicular to the front facade. This geometrical manipulation is a powerful act in engaging the atrium with the rest of the building.

By offsetting the space five degrees, the front and the rear of the building begin to have a dialogue and introduce the circulation pattern. Before the offset, the circulation path of the gallery was too peripheral in that it remained a separate entity from the rest of the gallery space. The offset negotiates the centrality of the gallery by shifting the focus closer to the pre-existing part of the building.





A glass wall further enhances the relationship between the old and the new buildings begun by the atrium. Running almost the entire length of the sculpture gallery, the glass wall follows the five-degree angle of the atrium and acts as the threshold between the existing building and the new addition behind it. This glass wall is constructed out of two panels of sandblasted glass, placed two feet apart and held together at the openings by a glass frame. The frame itself is built out of multiple layers of glass and threaded together with steel bars. The layers of glass translate into a single wall that begins in the front of the building, penetrates through the existing wall, and continues throughout the cavity of the gallery, ending at the atrium.

Robert Irwin is an artist who recently investigated the qualities of light via transparent walls in his recent installation at the Dia Center for the Arts in New York. Titled *Homage to the Square*³, Irwin constructed a site-specific installation comprised of walls of scrim, filled with fluorescent lights positioned on the walls. The openings in the fabric walls were determined by the position of the existing columns and beams. The result was a series of rooms illuminated by the walls, with a clear, designated pathway in and out of each room.

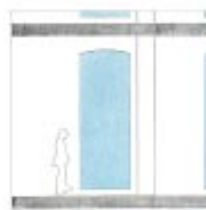
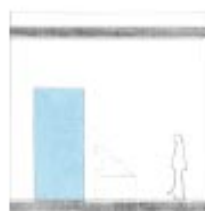
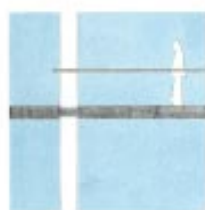
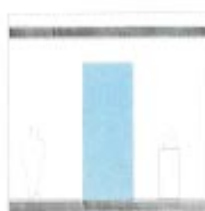
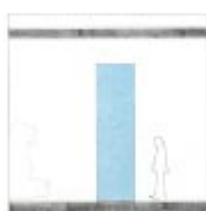
Irwin's project is a visual experience of transparency and illumination. Qualities of surface, light, and material are in constant play with one another, creating various levels of experiences for the visitor. Interactions between the openings in the walls and the visitors also address issues of the public and the private as well as the manner in which the visitor interacts with other visitors.

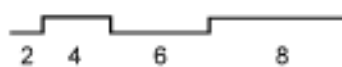
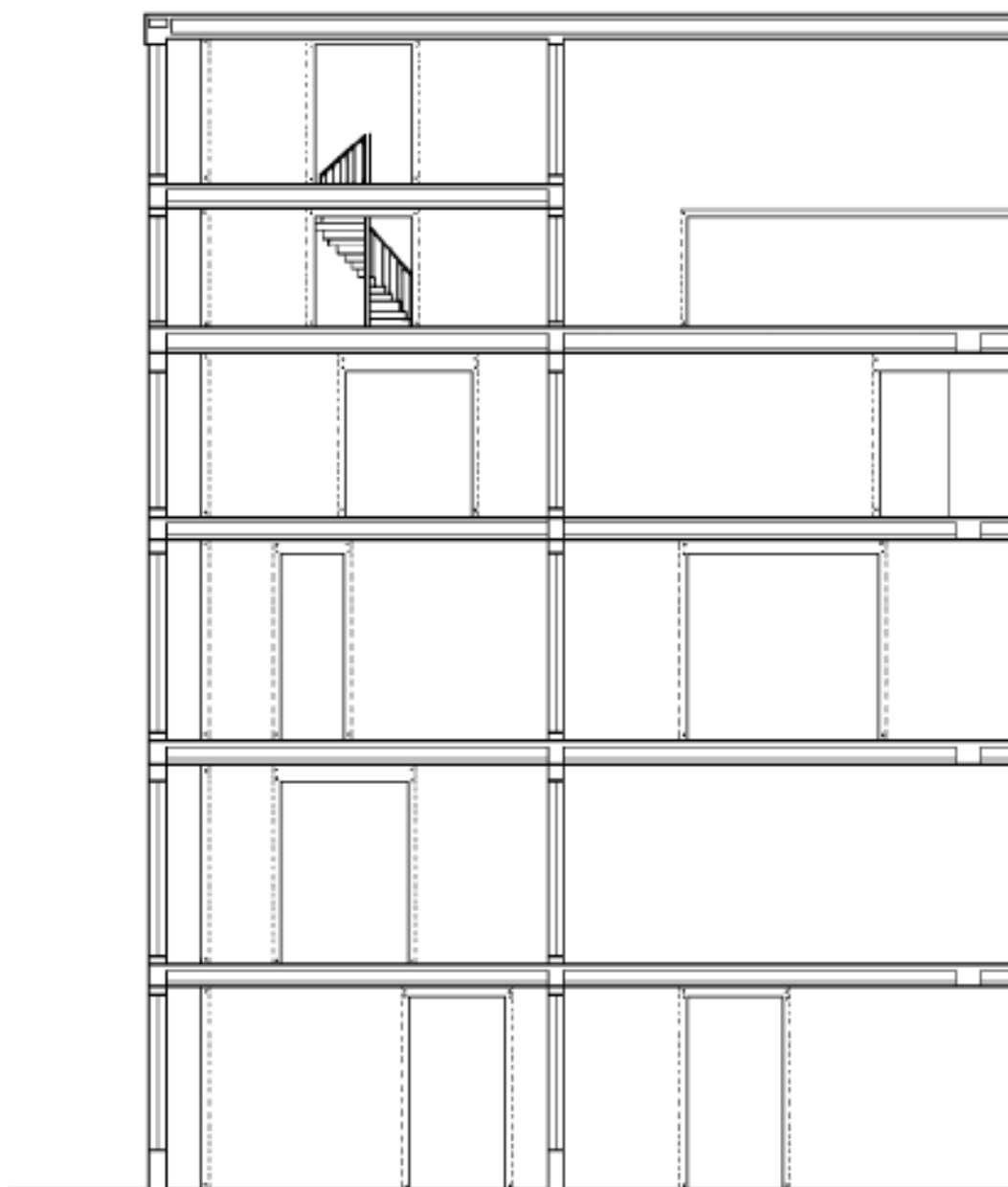


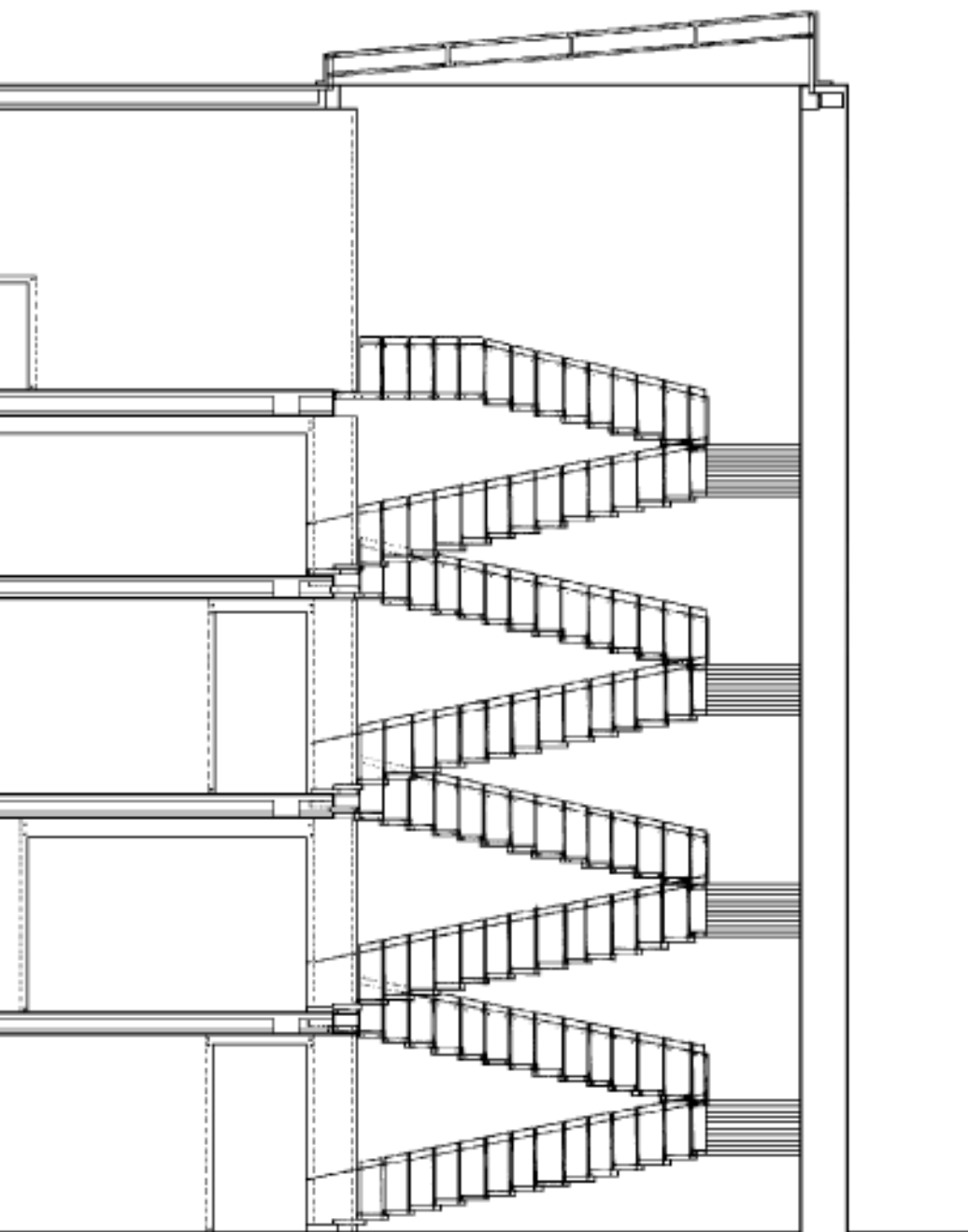
*Homage to the Square*³ by Robert Irwin



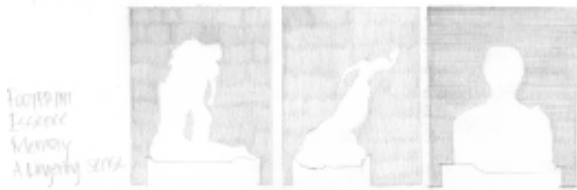
early study of the glass wall







longitudinal section of
gallery



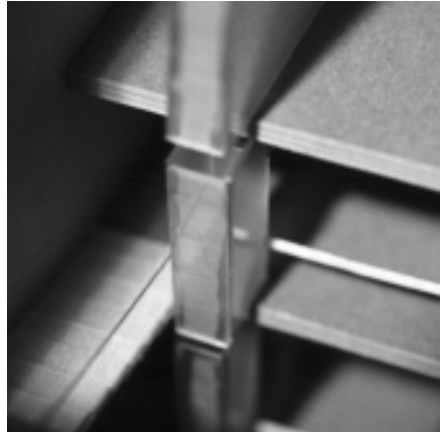
The glass wall in the gallery for Camille Claudel addresses many of the issues discussed in Irwin's recent work. It acts as the main divider within the gallery space, eliminating the need for small multiple rooms and creating one or two large galleries. Due to the narrow qualities of the building, this single architectural act establishes clear, definitive areas for sculptures and avoids the tightness and the disarray of spaces that may have resulted from the creation of multiple rooms.

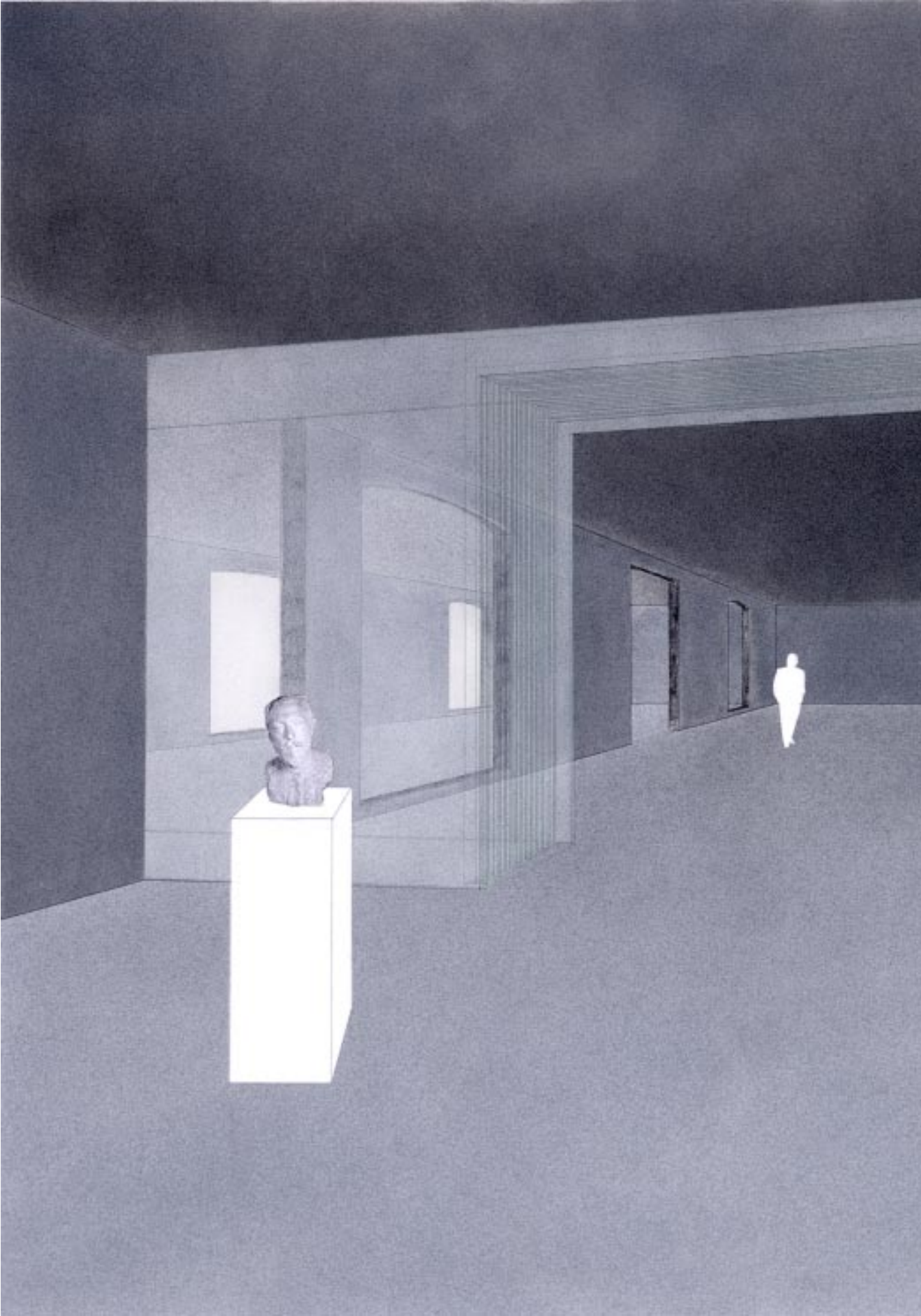
Second, the wall acts as a canvas where multiple situations for viewing the work can occur. The simple, neutral qualities of the translucent glass present an ideal contrast to the rich, textured, materialistic elements of Claudel's sculptures.

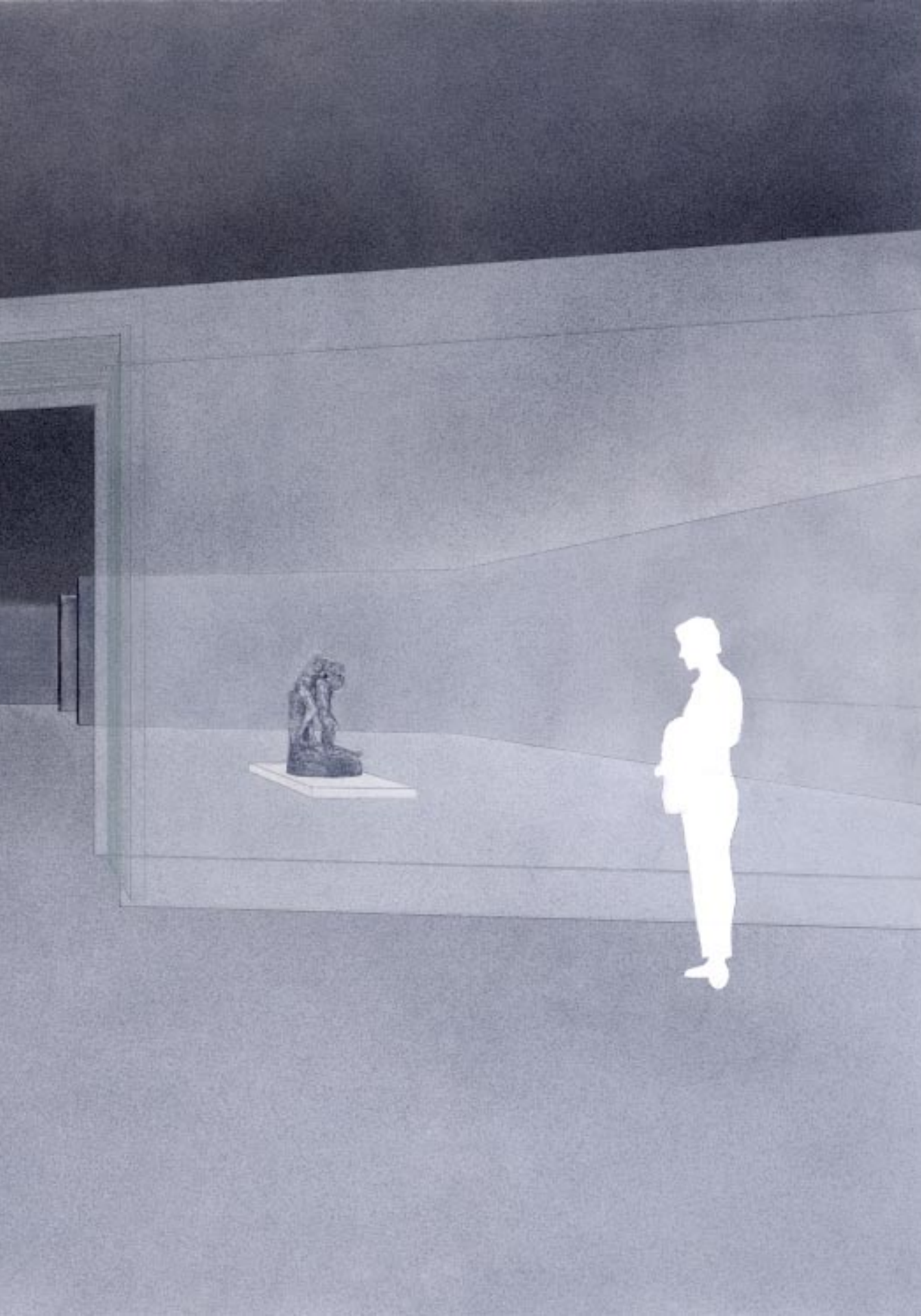
Finally, the glass wall provides an opportunity to present the memory of the lost works of Camille Claudel. The outlines of the missing sculptures are etched into the glass panels, creating a footprint. The image is a memory of what once was, made available to the visitor for viewing and contemplation.

While the sandblasted glass creates privacy and intimacy within the gallery spaces, its translucency maintains the viewer's relationships with the works and the other visitors as well. Openings in the glass wall throughout the building allow the visitor to interact with the space at all the floors. The wall is oriented perpendicular to the front facade to preserve the views from the interior of the building toward the facade. This orientation takes advantage of the linear quality of the building and attempts to preserve all the different opportunities for viewing.

The glass wall is a subtle act, clearly delineating the public and private areas in the building and at the same time providing a chance for the play of light and shadow, creating a certain luminosity in the space. It is another step towards making a place of serenity for Camille Claudel's turbulent life.





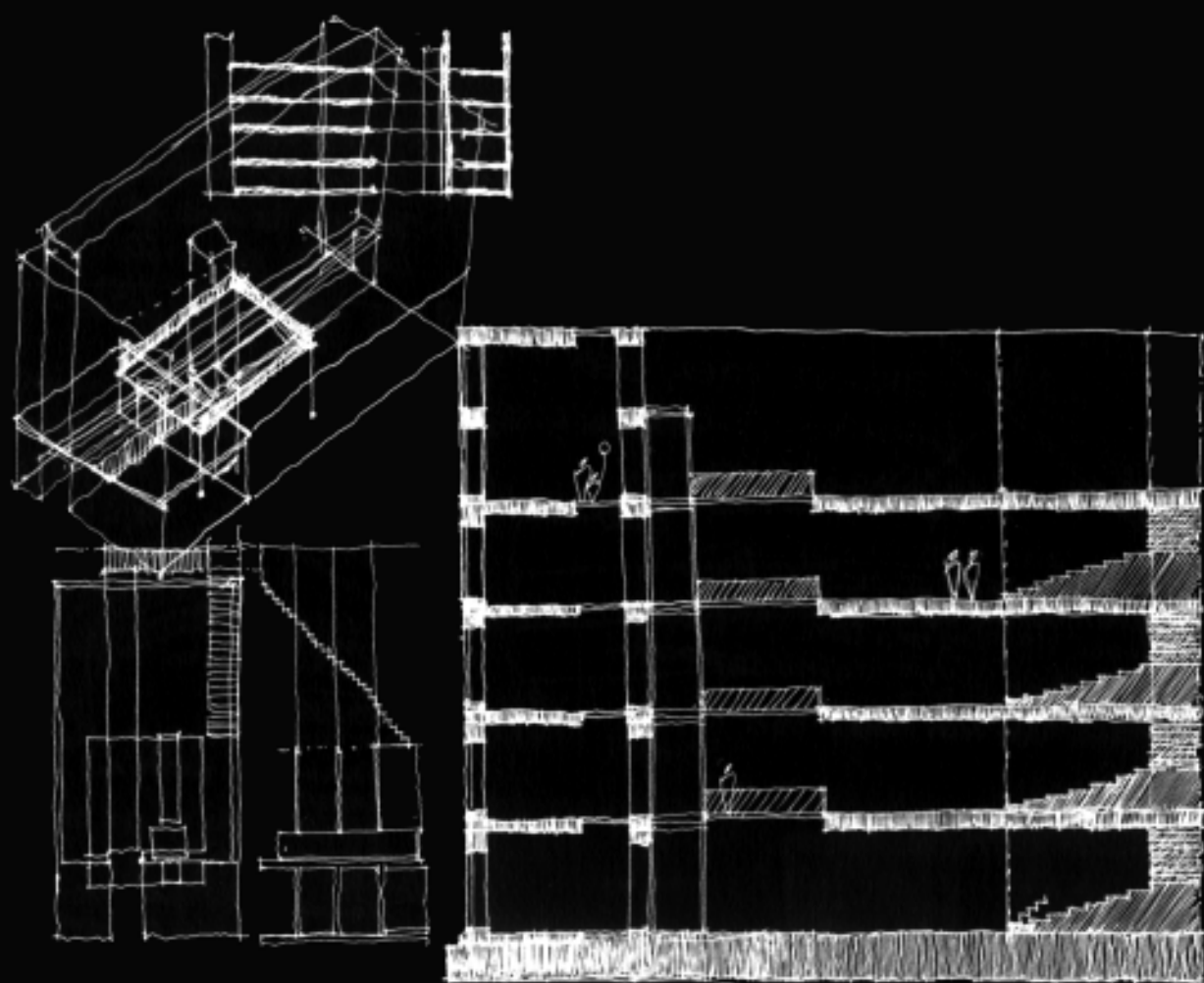


A set of stairs located in the atrium completes the threshold between the old building and the new addition in this gallery. The role of this particular staircase is to provide a place for the visitors to experience the gallery from the atrium and to truly enjoy and delight in their discoveries. The task at hand is to design a set of stairs that psychologically influence the visitors in a positive manner, allowing for moments of contemplation and joy, serenity and tranquility as well as serving the functional aspect of moving from floor to floor.

The staircase in the Göteborg Law Courts in Stockholm, Sweden is a great interpretation of such thoughts. Designed by Erik Gunnar Asplund, the stairs in the main hall lead up to the courtrooms above. In what is normally a stressful, anxious environment, Asplund attempts to reduce the tension in the visitors by creating a staircase that calms and soothes visually and experientially. The driving idea behind these stairs is one of transition rather than efficiency, creating a gradual ascension to the courtrooms by experimenting with the relationship between the rise and run of the treads.



Goteborg Law Courts by Erik Gunnar Asplund



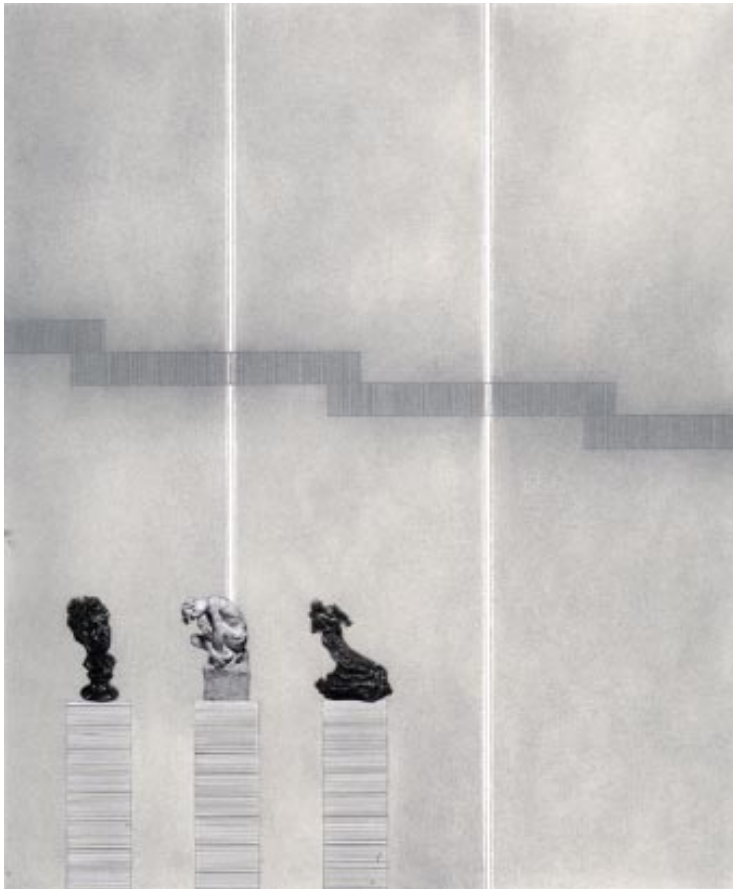


Addressing issues of circulation and movement, the stairs in the gallery wrap around the majority of the atrium and meet each floor. The staircase in the atrium follows the offset angle of the atrium and the glass wall and engages these elements with the rest of the building. This creates one whole unit that serves as the unifying theme between the old building and the new gallery.

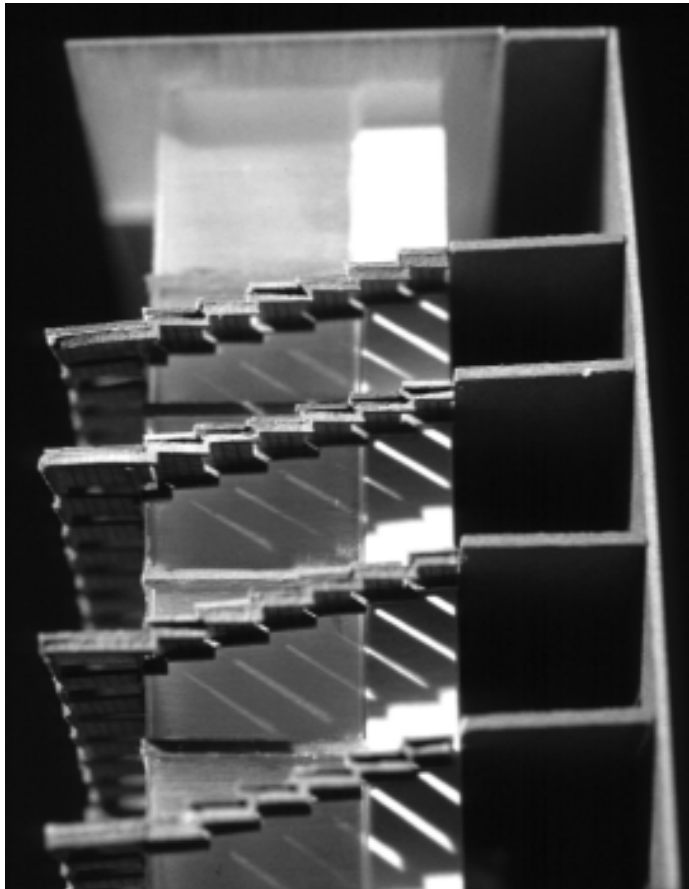
In order to create a natural ascension through the floors, the stair treads are designed to be transitional and experiential rather than functional. The treads are four inches high and twenty inches deep to produce subtle vertical movement. The stairs become an extension of the floor, encouraging a slower stroll which allows the visitors to fully experience the sculpture gallery at a different, enjoyable pace. It creates a place where people can have uninterrupted views of the entire gallery from within.



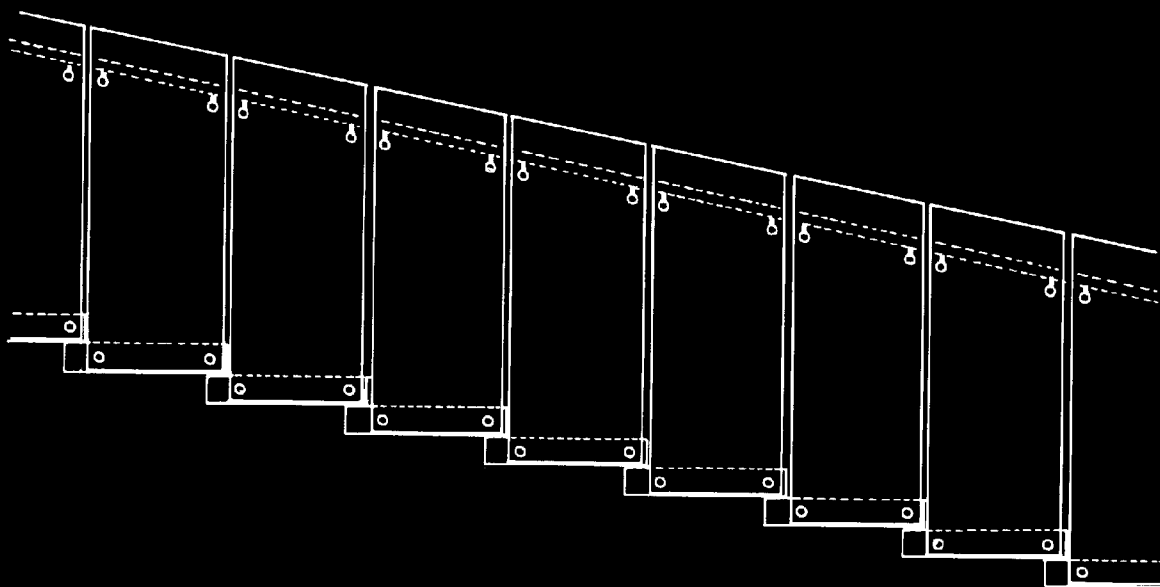




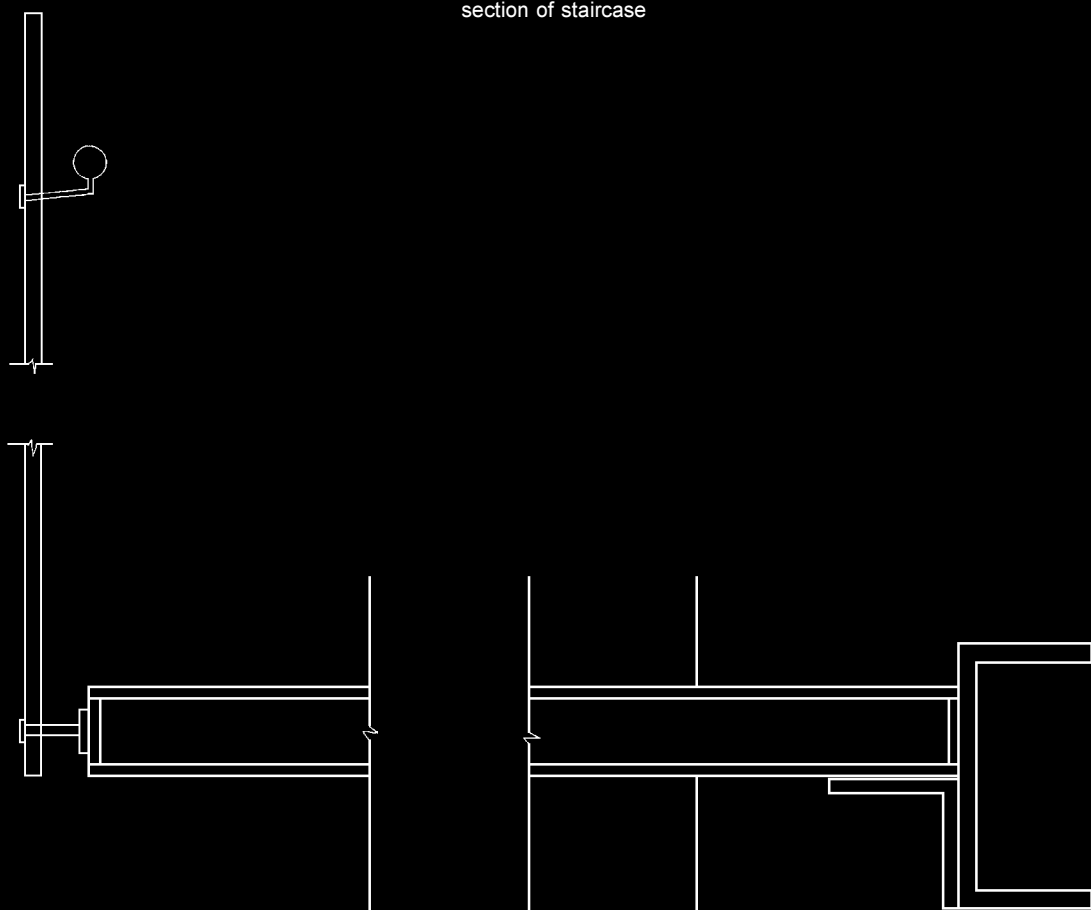
view of stairs and sculptures



study model of stairs



elevation of staircase



section of staircase



view of stairs from above

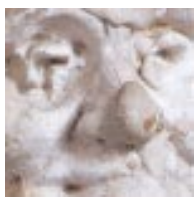
Each stair tread is a box made of steel plates that are welded together. The series of boxes making up the stairs are cantilevered off a steel frame in the bearing wall, attached to steel angles. The cantilever action gives the illusion that the stairs are floating in space. The staircase is visually light and becomes a continuous line from floor to floor.

The guardrail is made of tempered glass panels to allow views to and from the staircase. It is attached to the end of each tread with bolts that protrude from the tread. The handrail is a single extruded piece of metal that penetrates the glass guardrail and is secured with a cap at the end.

This staircase is the result of designing a complex element with very few architectural acts. In order to achieve simplicity and elegance for the staircase, the various components of the stairs are streamlined so that it reads as a whole unit rather than a group of separate parts.

model of staircase in atrium

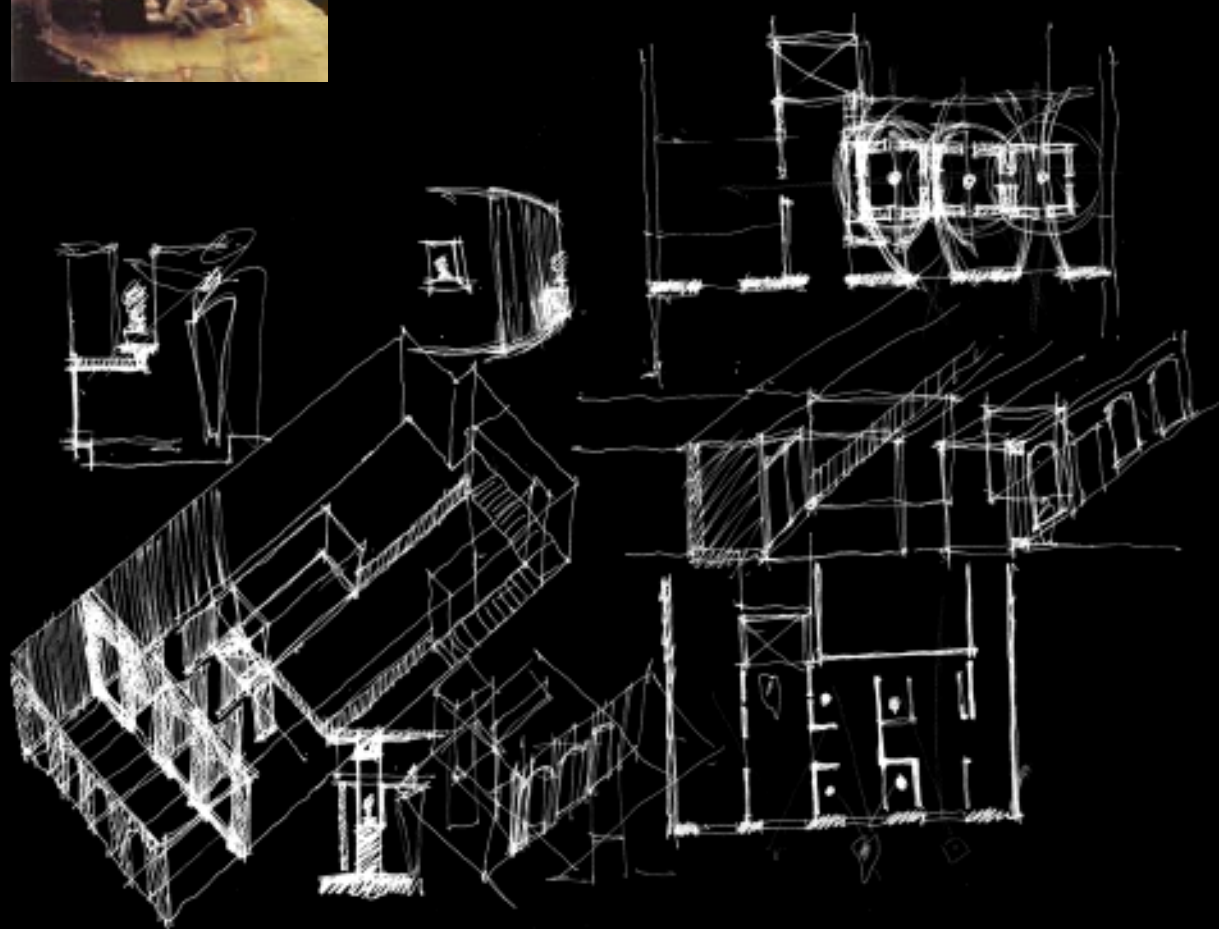




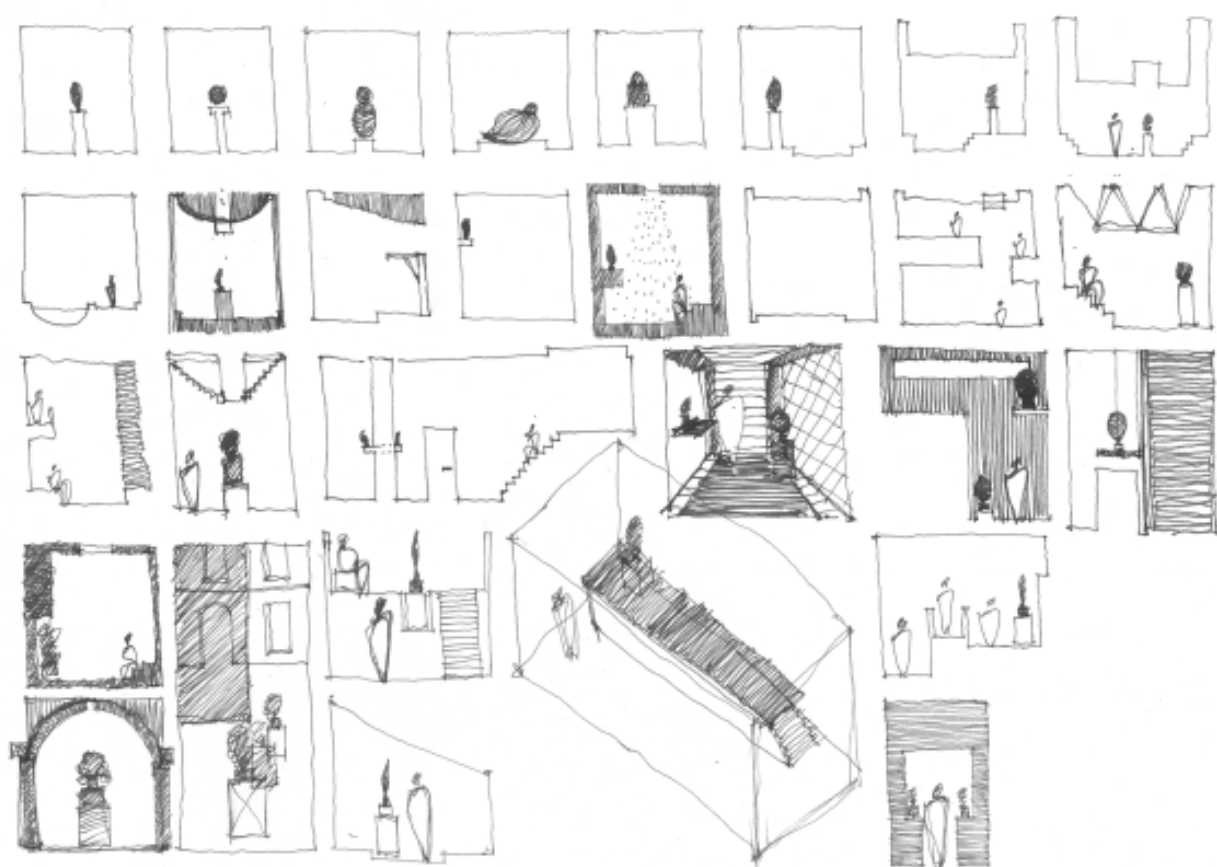
The architectural conditions of the proposed gallery contribute heavily to the overall atmosphere of the exhibition spaces. Rather than working with several small areas of exhibition, the architectural elements provide two large exhibition areas per floor.

The curatorial team of the gallery would determine the placement of these sculptures. Ideally, the works would be divided evenly throughout the building while leaving room for a temporary exhibition as well.

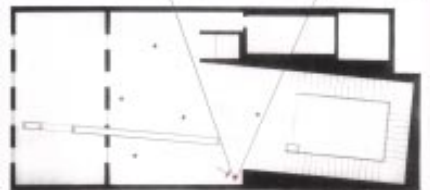
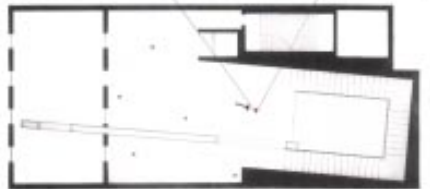
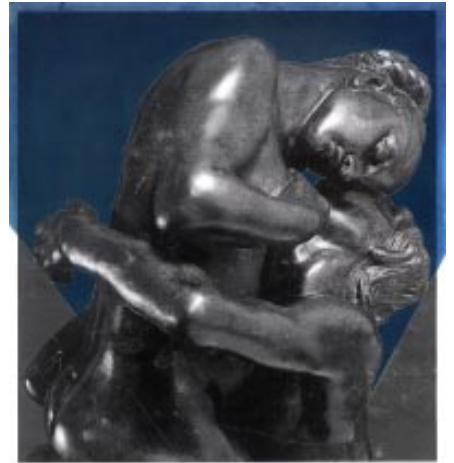
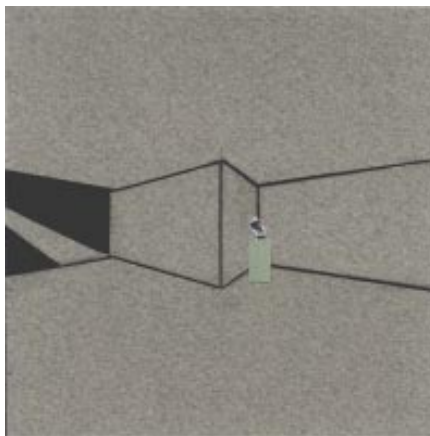
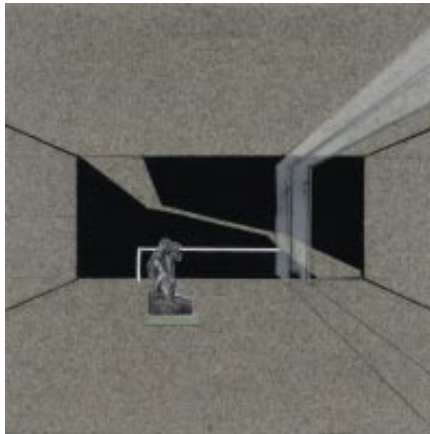
The following studies illustrate initial attempts at placing the works in situations where they interact with the architecture of the gallery and create moments of unexpected beauty within.

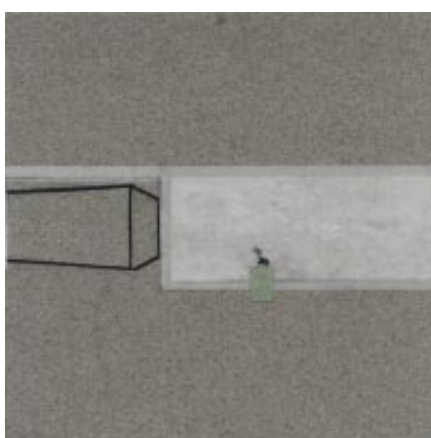
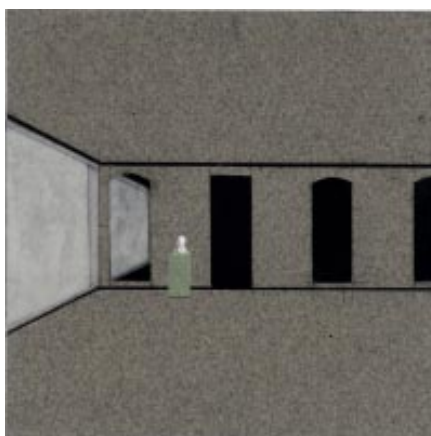
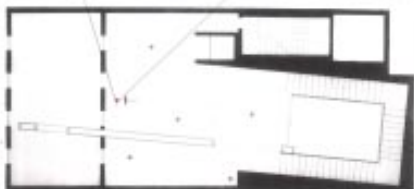


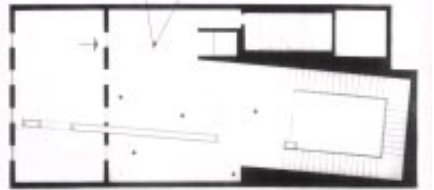
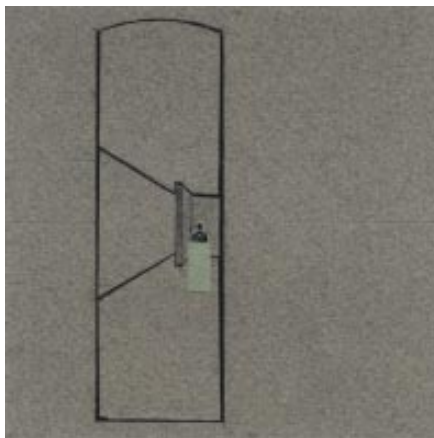
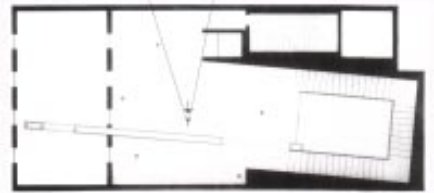
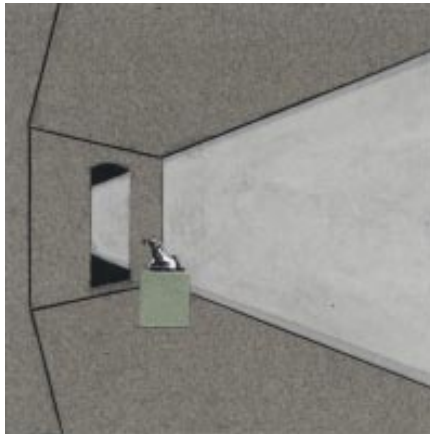
sketch page of sculpture placements



study drawings of sculpture exhibition in gallery space

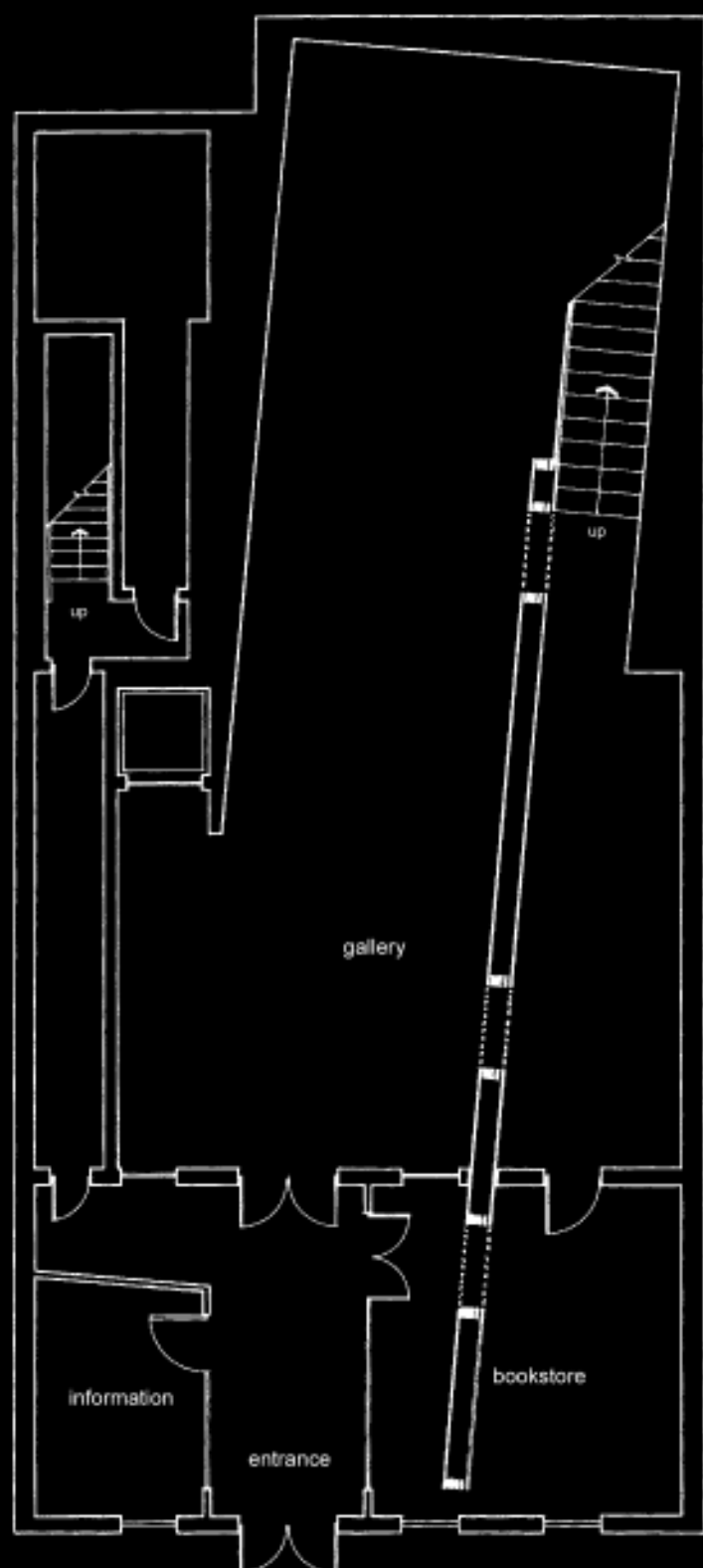




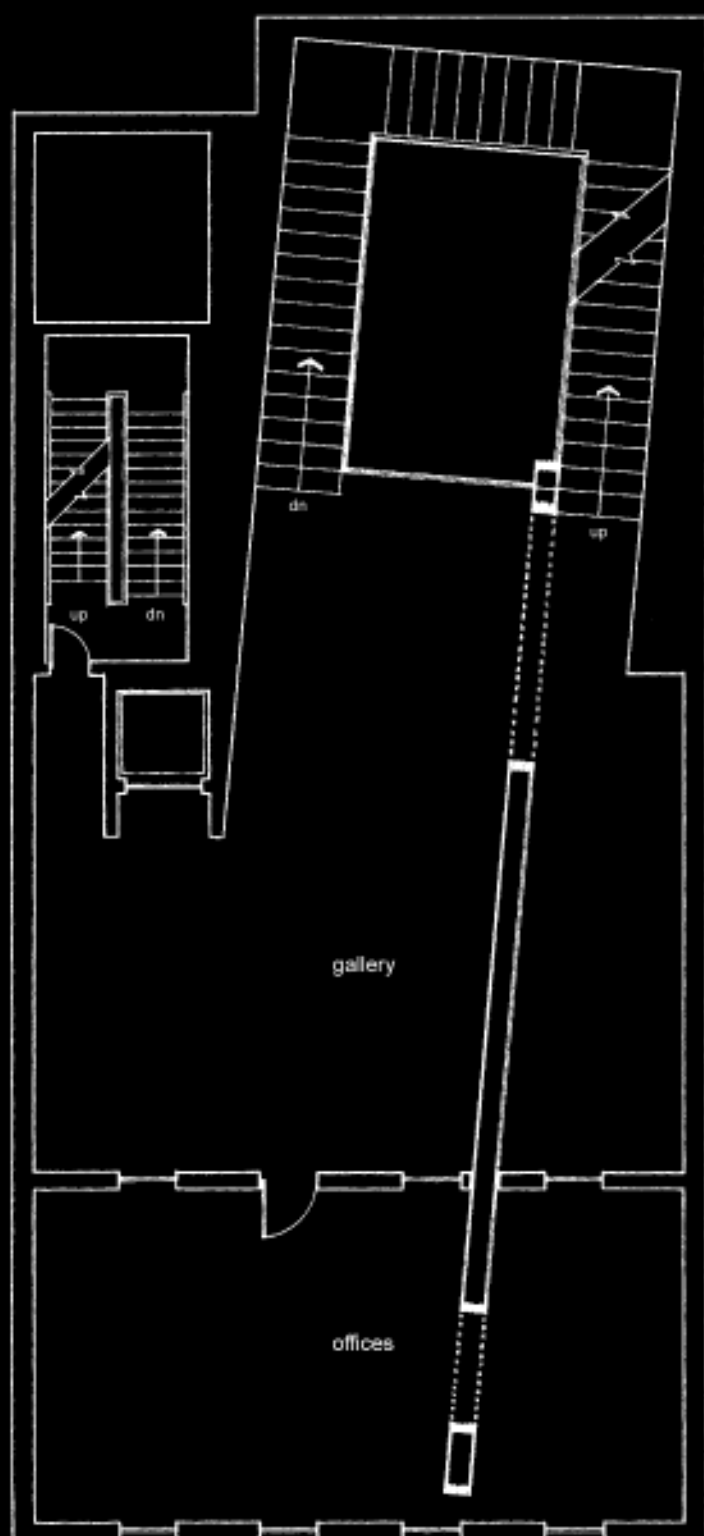




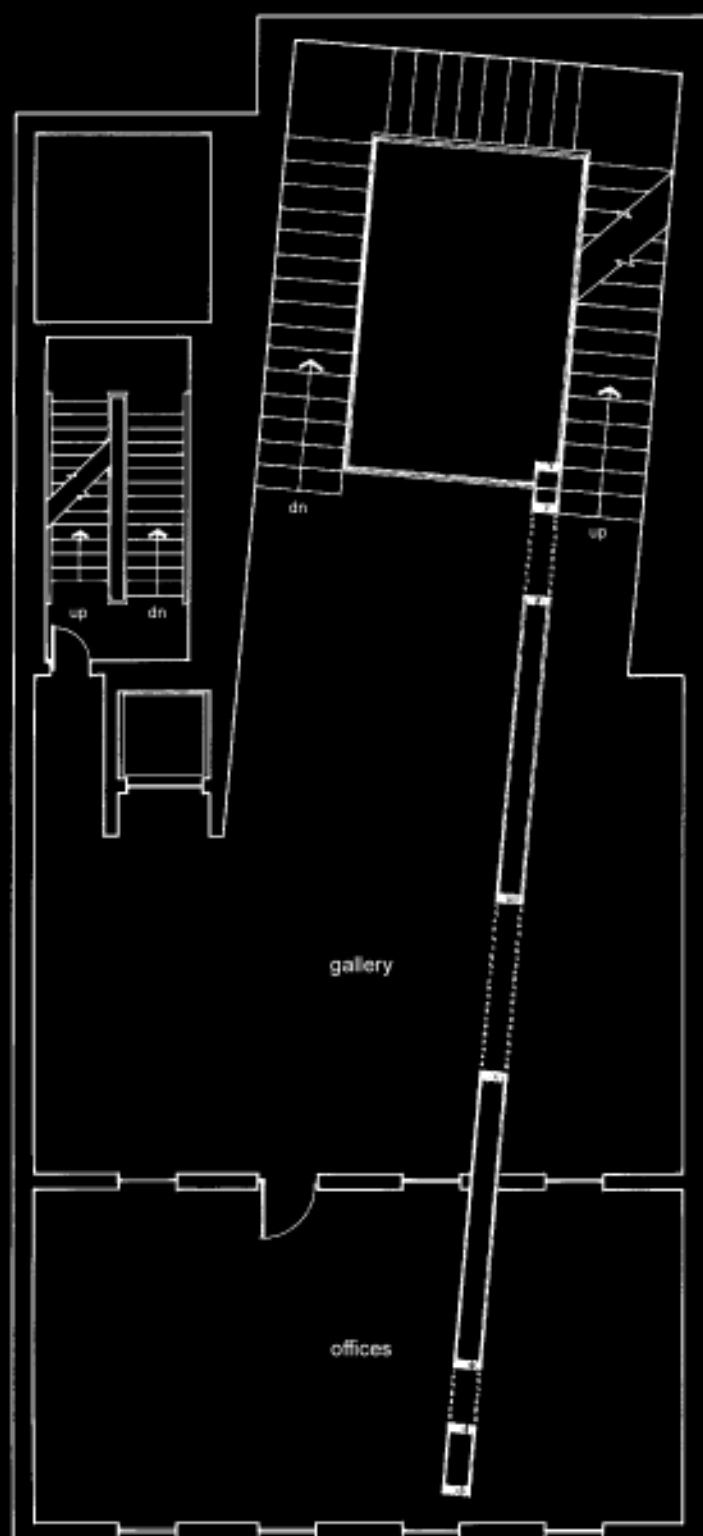
first floor



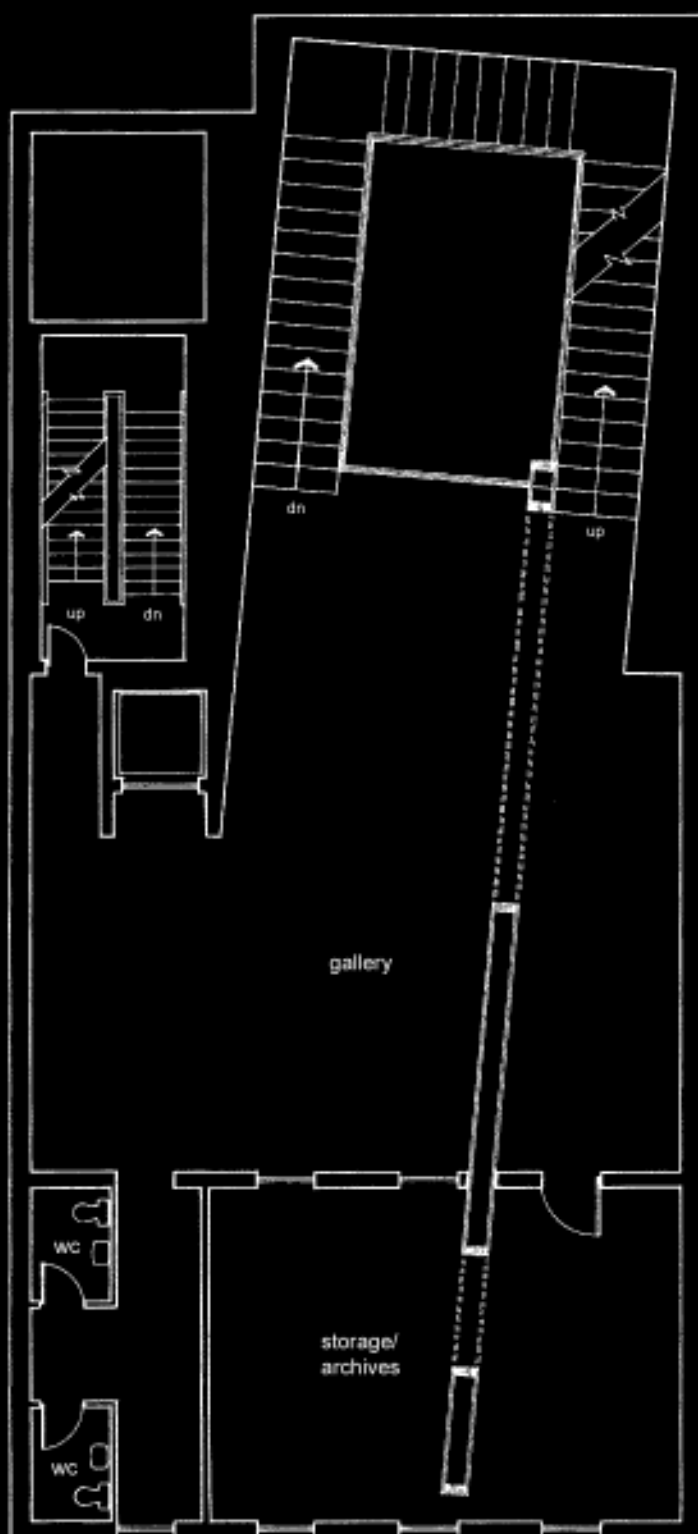
second floor



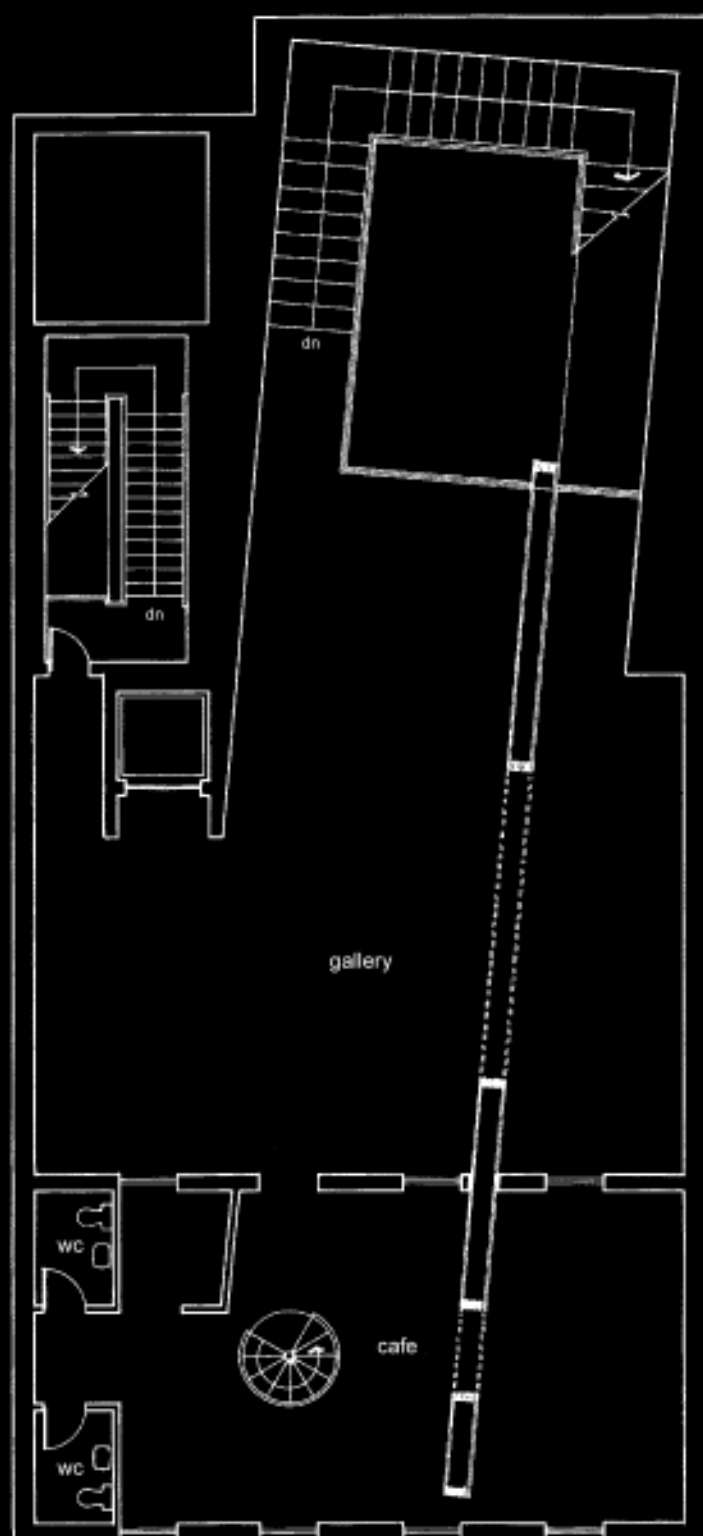
third floor



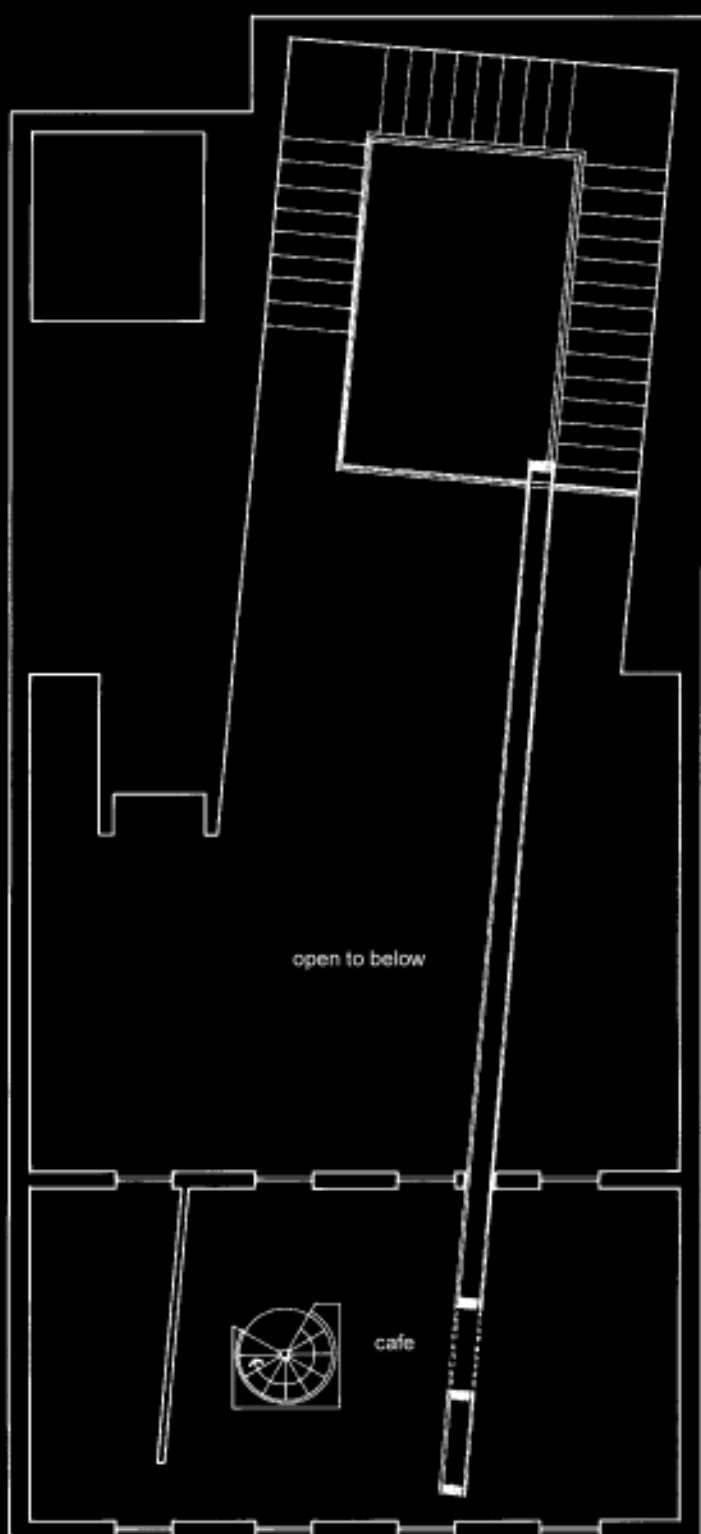
fourth floor



fifth floor



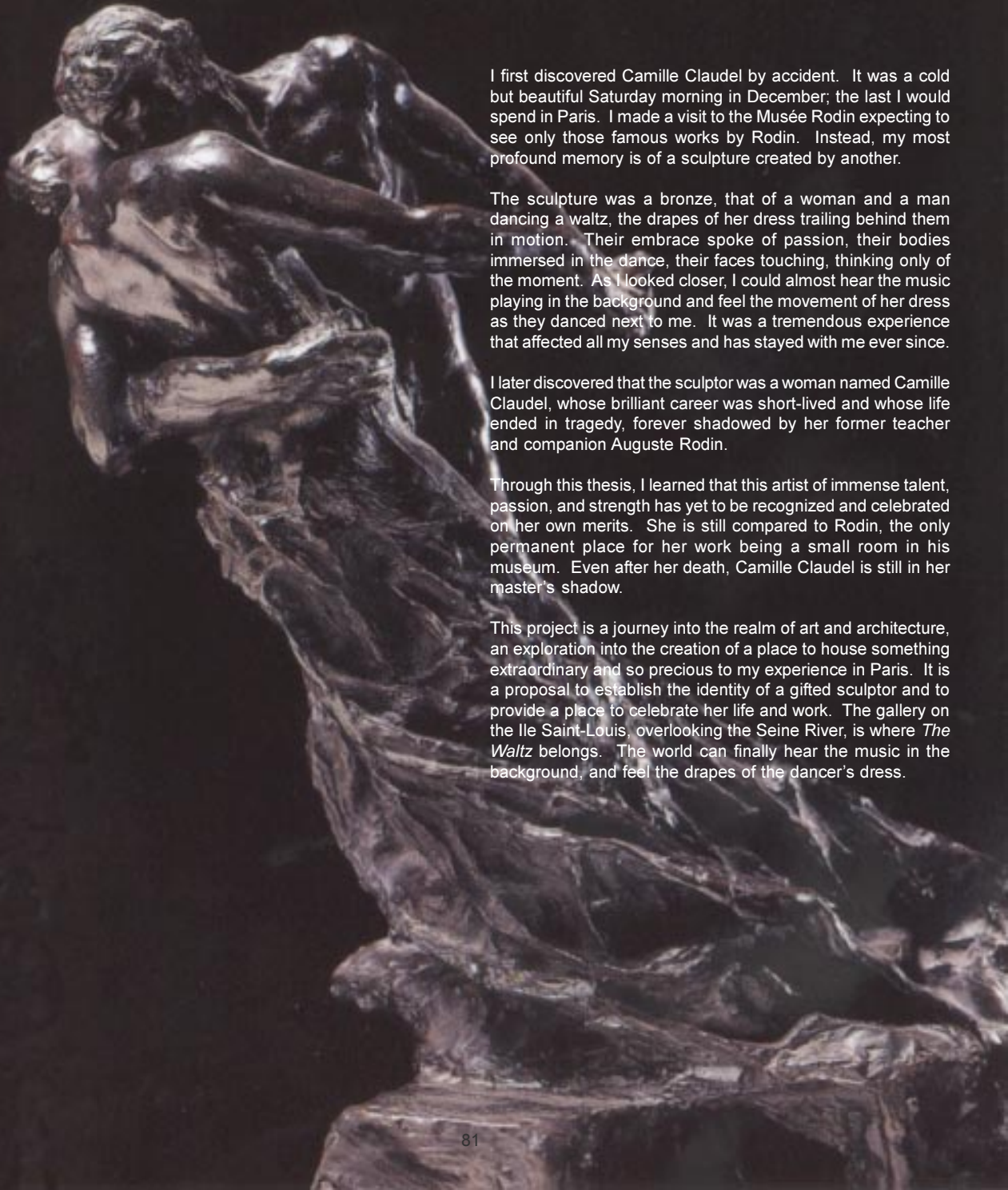
sixth floor



EPILOGUE

If you are lucky enough to have lived in Paris as a young man, then wherever you go for the rest of your life, it stays with you, for Paris is a moveable feast.

Ernest Hemingway, A Moveable Feast



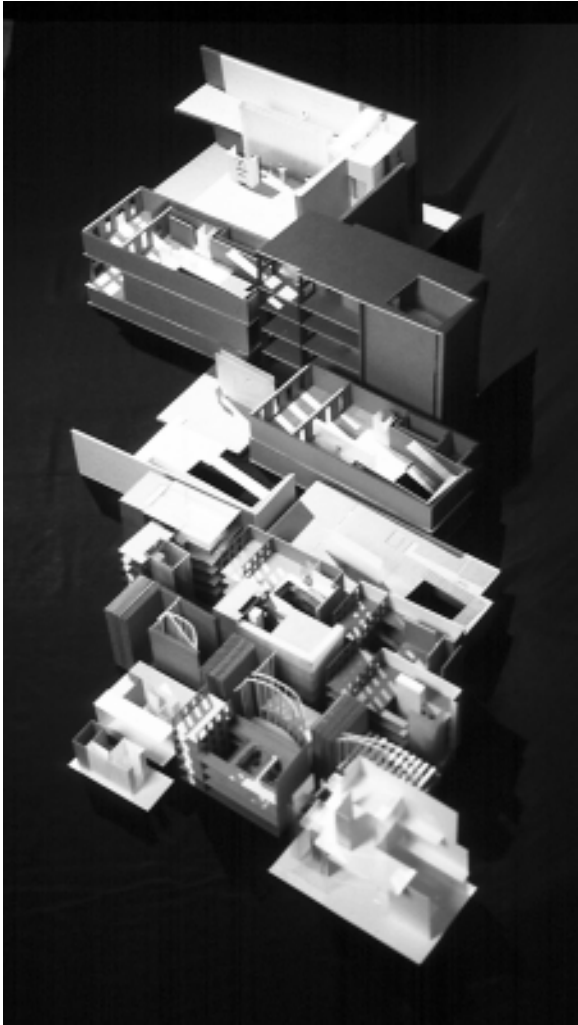
I first discovered Camille Claudel by accident. It was a cold but beautiful Saturday morning in December; the last I would spend in Paris. I made a visit to the Musée Rodin expecting to see only those famous works by Rodin. Instead, my most profound memory is of a sculpture created by another.

The sculpture was a bronze, that of a woman and a man dancing a waltz, the drapes of her dress trailing behind them in motion. Their embrace spoke of passion, their bodies immersed in the dance, their faces touching, thinking only of the moment. As I looked closer, I could almost hear the music playing in the background and feel the movement of her dress as they danced next to me. It was a tremendous experience that affected all my senses and has stayed with me ever since.

I later discovered that the sculptor was a woman named Camille Claudel, whose brilliant career was short-lived and whose life ended in tragedy, forever shadowed by her former teacher and companion Auguste Rodin.

Through this thesis, I learned that this artist of immense talent, passion, and strength has yet to be recognized and celebrated on her own merits. She is still compared to Rodin, the only permanent place for her work being a small room in his museum. Even after her death, Camille Claudel is still in her master's shadow.

This project is a journey into the realm of art and architecture, an exploration into the creation of a place to house something extraordinary and so precious to my experience in Paris. It is a proposal to establish the identity of a gifted sculptor and to provide a place to celebrate her life and work. The gallery on the Ile Saint-Louis, overlooking the Seine River, is where *The Waltz* belongs. The world can finally hear the music in the background, and feel the drapes of the dancer's dress.



APPENDIX



SOURCES

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ILLUSTRATIONS

All images produced by the author unless noted otherwise.

pp.1-7: Paris pp.85-127, 177-215

pp.8-9: Plan de Paris à Vol d'Oiseau. Paris: Blondel la Rougery, 1957.

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p.12: Plan de Paris. Paris: Préfecture de la Seine, 1947.

*p.13: *Five Floors of Parisian Life*, Russell p.23*

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p.34: Robert Irwin, Part I: Prologue x18³ and Part II: Excursus: Homage to the Square³, front cover

p.46: Caldenby p. 111

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p.57: Paris pp.85-127, 177-215

p.59: Beaux Arts Magazine p.11

*p.81: *La Valse*. Paris: Musée Rodin, 1995.*

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