An aerial, isometric view of a city block. The buildings are represented as 3D rectangular blocks of varying heights and widths, arranged in a grid-like pattern. The perspective is from a high angle, looking down at the city. The colors are muted, with various shades of beige, tan, and light brown. The shadows are soft and cast to the right, suggesting a light source from the upper left. The overall style is minimalist and architectural.

Memories — A Codex

Sherefah Alhamdan
GSAPP MSAAD 2024–2025



On Material, Memory, and the Architecture of the Forgotten

This portfolio explores the intersection of tradition, modernity, land, and cultural memory through architecture, materiality, and socio-spatial practice. At its core is a search for how history, identity, and craft shape the spaces we inhabit and the narratives we inherit.

Across diverse geographies and methods, from scaffold reuse in New York, to weaving traditions in Panama, to casting Kuwaiti materials in concrete the investigating how architectural fragments and cultural techniques transform over time. Fabric, structure, and material become not just construction elements, but carriers of meaning and memory.

Through these explorations, the work challenges conventional notions of fidelity by reinterpreting familiar elements and techniques. In doing so, it seeks to create contextually grounded designs that do not replicate the past, but evolve it honoring the stories embedded in place while opening space for new ones to emerge.

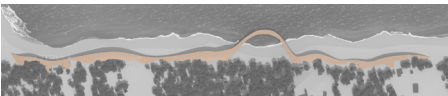
Material Acts in Tradition, Labor, and Space



5 Moments to Cross — Carried in the Fibers.



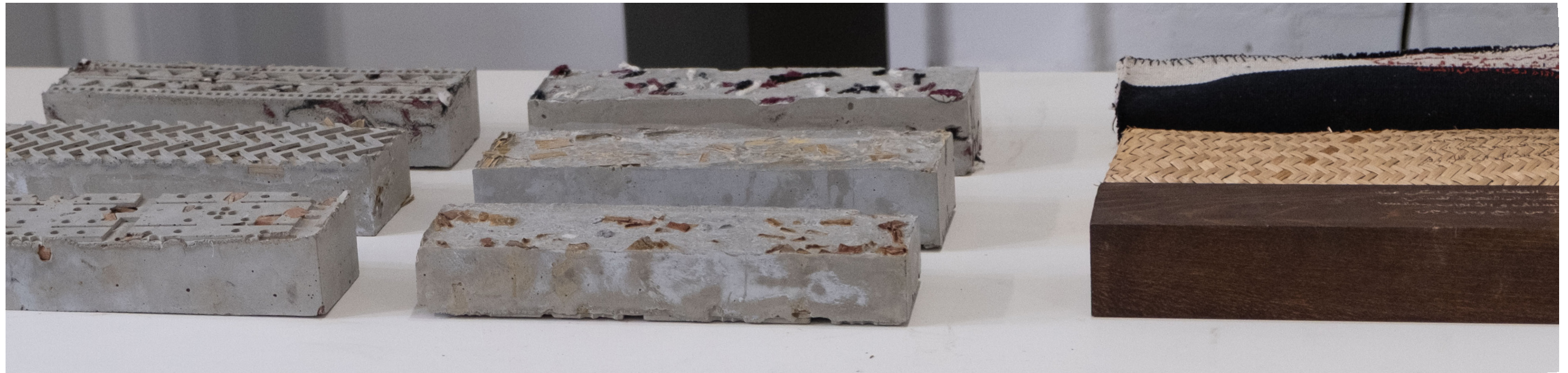
23 Sacred Turn — Sanctuaries for Cursed Spcaces.



37 Right by the beach — Negotiating the shoreline.

Weaving, casting, and scaffolding three acts, three geographies, three methods each grounded in a shared purpose: to preserve memory, protect community, and reclaim space.

Moments to Cross — Carried in the Fibers
Where Concrete Becomes Archive and Craft Becomes Resistance





(al-qurā)- The villages

القرى



(al-bādiyyah)- The desert

البادية



(al-hāzīr)- Today

الحاضر



(al-mudun)- The cities

المدينة

Inside the concrete walls of my family's home in Kuwait, I began to notice what was missing. Built during the height of the oil boom, the house felt still, not just in its silence, but in the absence of memory. Its surfaces were smooth and uniform, leaving little trace of what came before. But as I sat with family, listened to their stories, and pieced together fragments of our past, I began to understand what these walls had replaced.

The desert — al-bādiyya — open and vast, was home to herders who spun wool into woven shelters. The villages — al-qurā — dense with palms and vegetation, where families wove fronds into fences and roofs. The coastal cities — al-mudun — centers of trade where wood arrived by sea and was carved into beams and doors.

In all of these places, material wasn't just a resource, it was a way of life. The land was a teacher, shaping identity.

But as oil wealth surged, so did a new architectural language, one defined by concrete. If we begin with the dictionary definition of colonization as “the act of sending people to live in and govern another country,” then Kuwait's modernization through oil might be understood as a form of capitalist colonization, not by foreign occupation, but through the erasure of native materials, labor, and identity. Concrete became a tool of that shift: efficient, strong, but silent, void of cultural specificity, displacing the textures of place in favor of a homogenous, often Westernized, construction logic.

This is where material becomes a vessel of memory in the face of cultural erasure. In Kuwait, names like Badawi, Qarawi, and Hadari are more than geographic label. they are reflections of distinct ways of living shaped by the land and its materials. These names once described entire ways of life, deeply tied to specific environments. Today, they remain tied to people, but no longer to the lived environments that once gave them meaning.

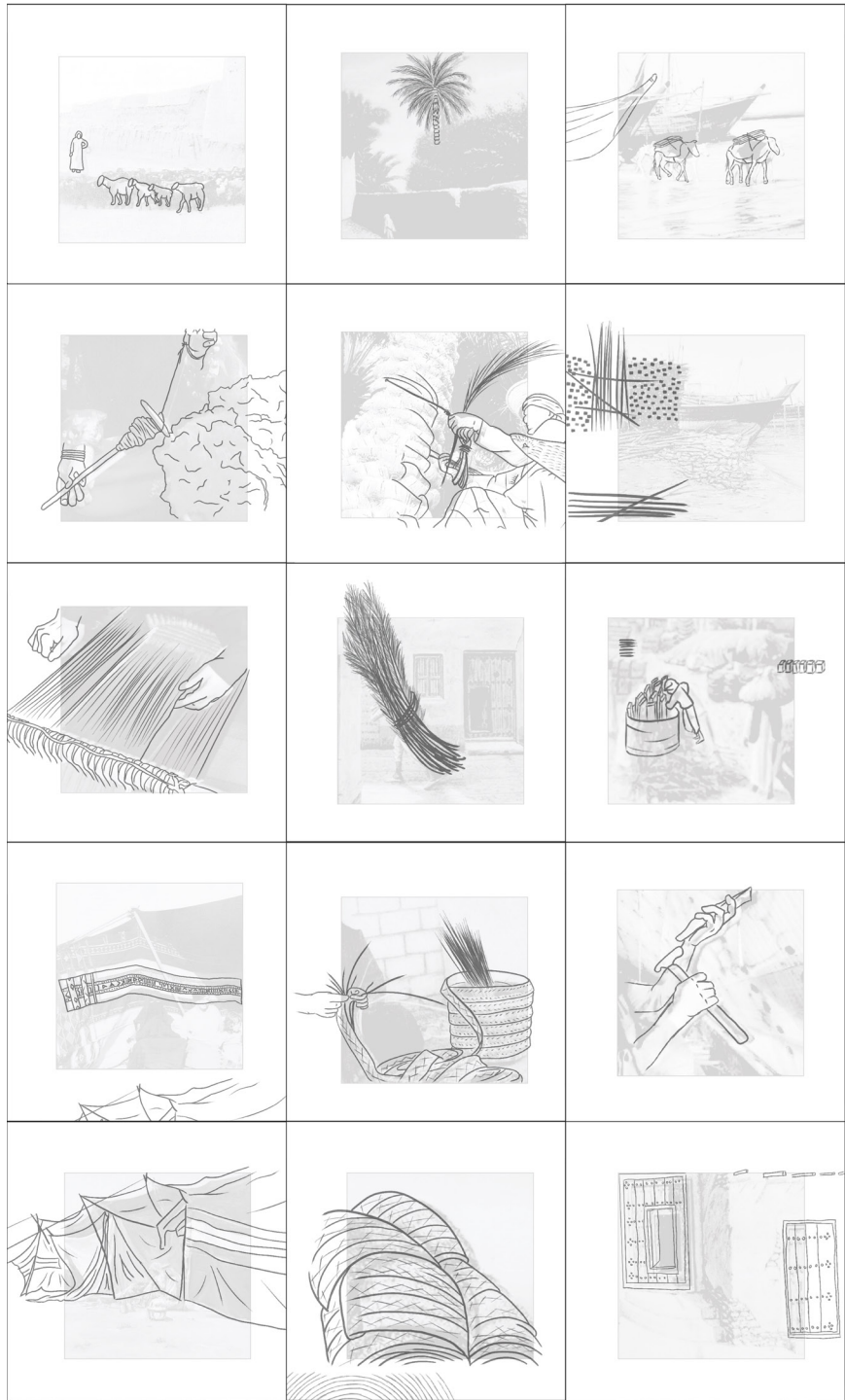


From Sand to concrete:
Landscapes of Memory



I let my hands lead. I studied old footage of weaving, carving, stitching and traced the process behind the material.





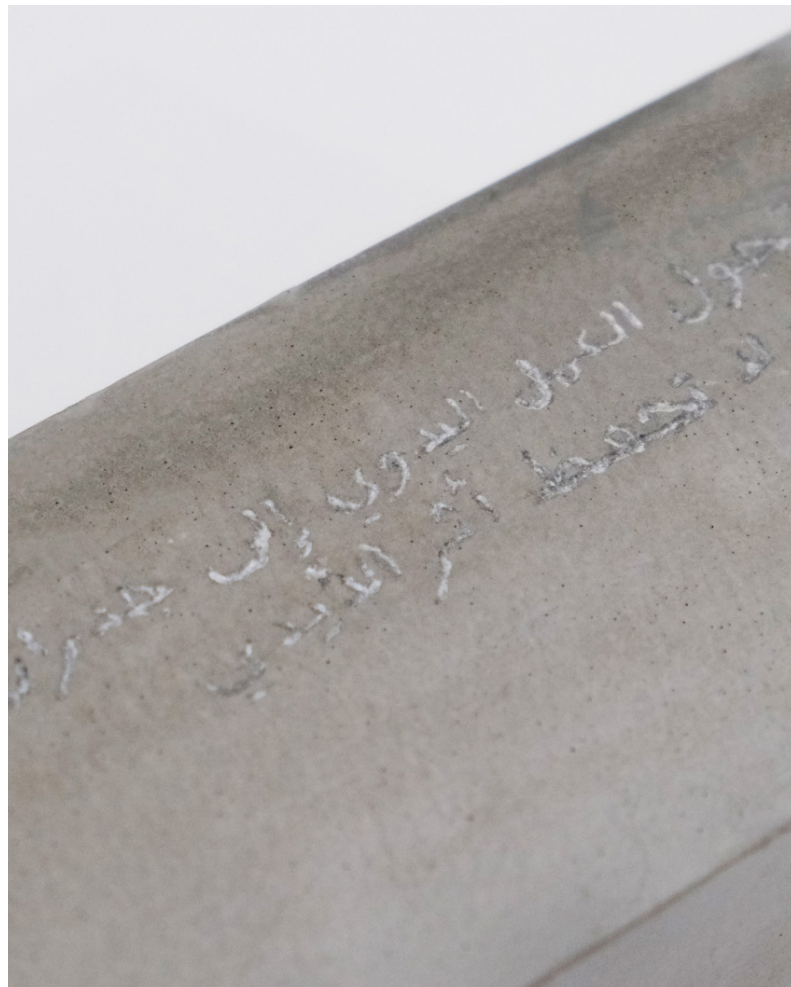
To visualize how memory fades, Drawing that traces a slow process of forgetting.

It begins with full scenes of homes, moves through layers of fragmentation. Eventually, all that's left are silent blocks stripped of context, but still holding patterns. Each row is a step in disappearance. something remains, a patten.



وتحوّل العمل اليدويُّ إلى جدرانٍ صماءٍ لا تحفظ أثر الأيدي

The blank concrete brick, in its pristine form, acts almost like a memorial: a symbol of an architecture that no longer reflects the lives or traditions it houses.





Memory bricks, starting with original materials like wool, palm, and wood, each carrying a story. In the second row, Casting these materials into concrete, embedding their forms and textures. In the final row, traditional patterns reemerge on the surface of the concrete itself memory becoming tactile again.



Traditional materials rupture through the concrete, disrupting its anonymity. These sculptures take on a battle-like quality where memory is not quietly preserved, but actively fights to reinsert itself into the present. This is not a return to the past, but a confrontation with the present. The bricks reclaim space for cultural identity within the very material that tried to erase it. The result is not uniform or seamless it is rough, uneven, and rooted in history.



SHEREFAH ALHAMDAN



Design Studio/ Jayden Ali, Chloe Munkenbeck

SP 25

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Can concrete remember?



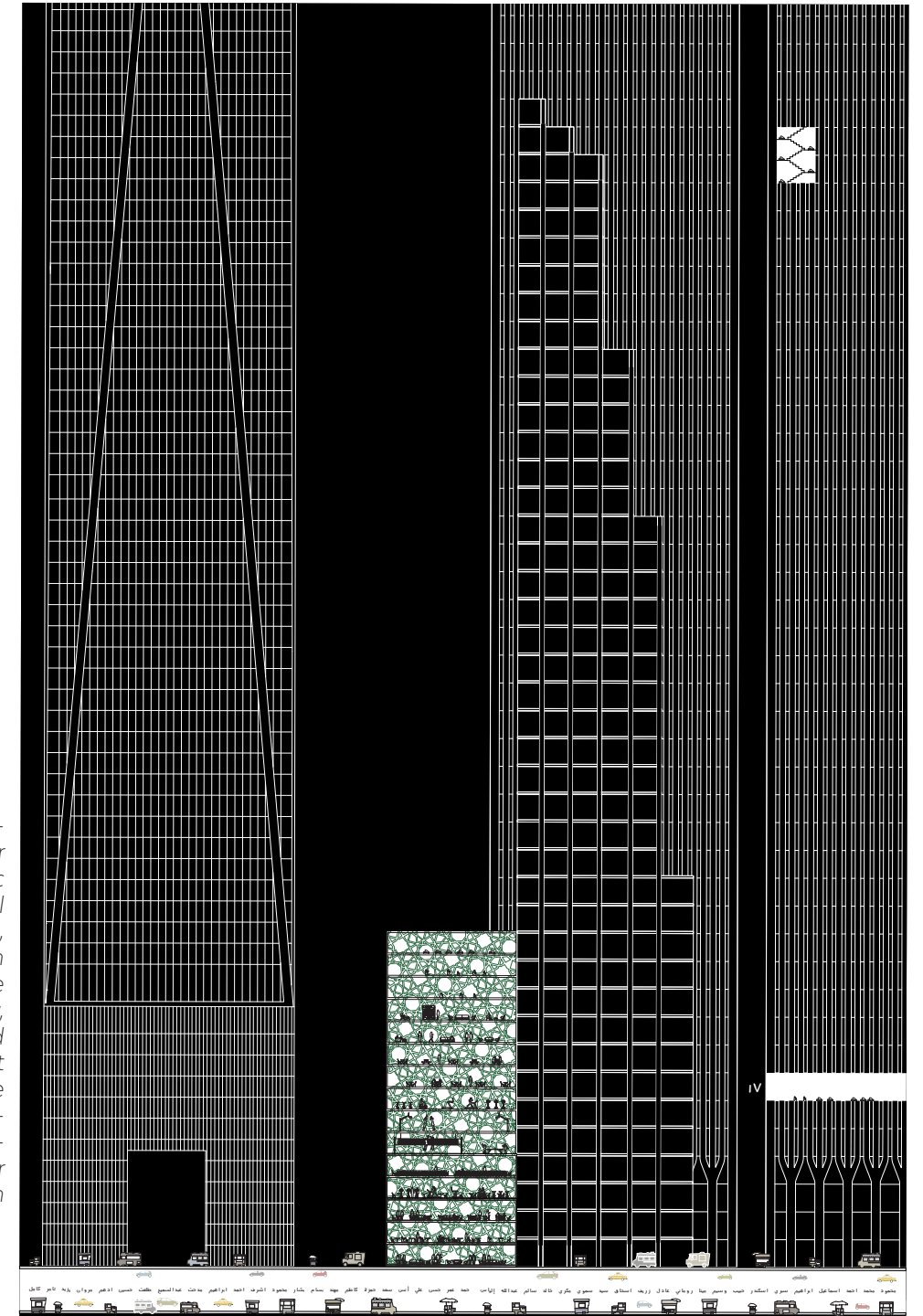
Partner: Mariam Alothman





It begins with two case studies: Al-Ula in Saudi Arabia and Park51 in Manhattan. In AlUla, development was halted in the 1970s due to a religious fatwa claiming the land was cursed. This long-standing belief preserved the site, much like a sacred place. Over time, however, as Saudi Arabia moved away from strict literalism, the area was reimagined as a cultural and touristic landscape. Highlighting how local fears, beliefs, and stories once used to avoid the land can now be mapped and understood as social and spatial knowledge.

In Manhattan, Park51 was a proposed Islamic cultural center near Ground Zero, facing intense public backlash despite addressing a real community need. Hidden histories, such as prayer spaces in the Twin Towers and the spiritual presence of halal food carts across the city, were ignored in favor of fear and controversy. The luxury condo next door was built without issue, while Park51 was scaled down to a modest space for prayer. These dynamics reveal how sacred spaces for marginalized communities are often silenced or erased.



Building on the two examples, Proposing a new kind of waqf:

Within the dense grid of Manhattan, a scattered network of halal cart vendors has quietly become part of the city's everyday rhythm, serving food, creating gathering points, and sustaining immigrant livelihoods. Yet behind their presence is a more precarious reality. Through our conversations with these vendors, we learned that many work long hours without access to restrooms, running water, electricity, or a place to pray. Despite being deeply embedded in the public fabric of New York City, their presence is marginal welcomed for convenience, yet unsupported in infrastructure.

In response, we propose a new kind of waqf, a mobile, adaptable sacred infrastructure that temporarily revives stalled or "cursed" lots in Manhattan. Drawing from the Islamic notion of a waqf as a permanent charitable endowment devoted to public good, this version reimagines permanence through movement. Constructed from scaffolding a material that already signals construction, care, and transition our intervention is built to serve.

How sacredness, abandonment, and community needs can reshape stalled or denied urban sites through an Islamic charitable endowment where property or assets are permanently dedicated to serving the public good, such as education, worship, or welfare, without being sold or inherited.

Waqf — وقف

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful.
Praise be to God alone,
and may God bless him after whom there is no prophet, his family, his Companions, and grant them peace thereafter,

When the lands across Manhattan succumb to a curse, and development work to 'upgrade' these sites becomes stalled or denied, it becomes clear that a cleansing of these cursed spaces is necessary to release them from their misfortune.

The waqf identifies three primary sites for this uncursing (65 W Broadway, 51 Park Place, and 25 Park Place). Flooding these lands with scaffolding from nearby construction sites initiates a ritual of renewal, putting the space in a state of active transition and communal, public use until it becomes restored.

With the support of the local community, particularly that of halal cart vendors across Manhattan, this waqf is sustained, assigning the benefit to halal cart vendors themselves, along with their customers, through temporary infrastructural support and provision on abandoned and unused lots, once cursed, now given a sacred space. This waqf is developed with two non-profit organizations: the Cordoba Initiative and the American Society for Muslim Advancement. These redeemed sites will serve the beneficiaries by providing vital resources, namely water, energy, and storage.

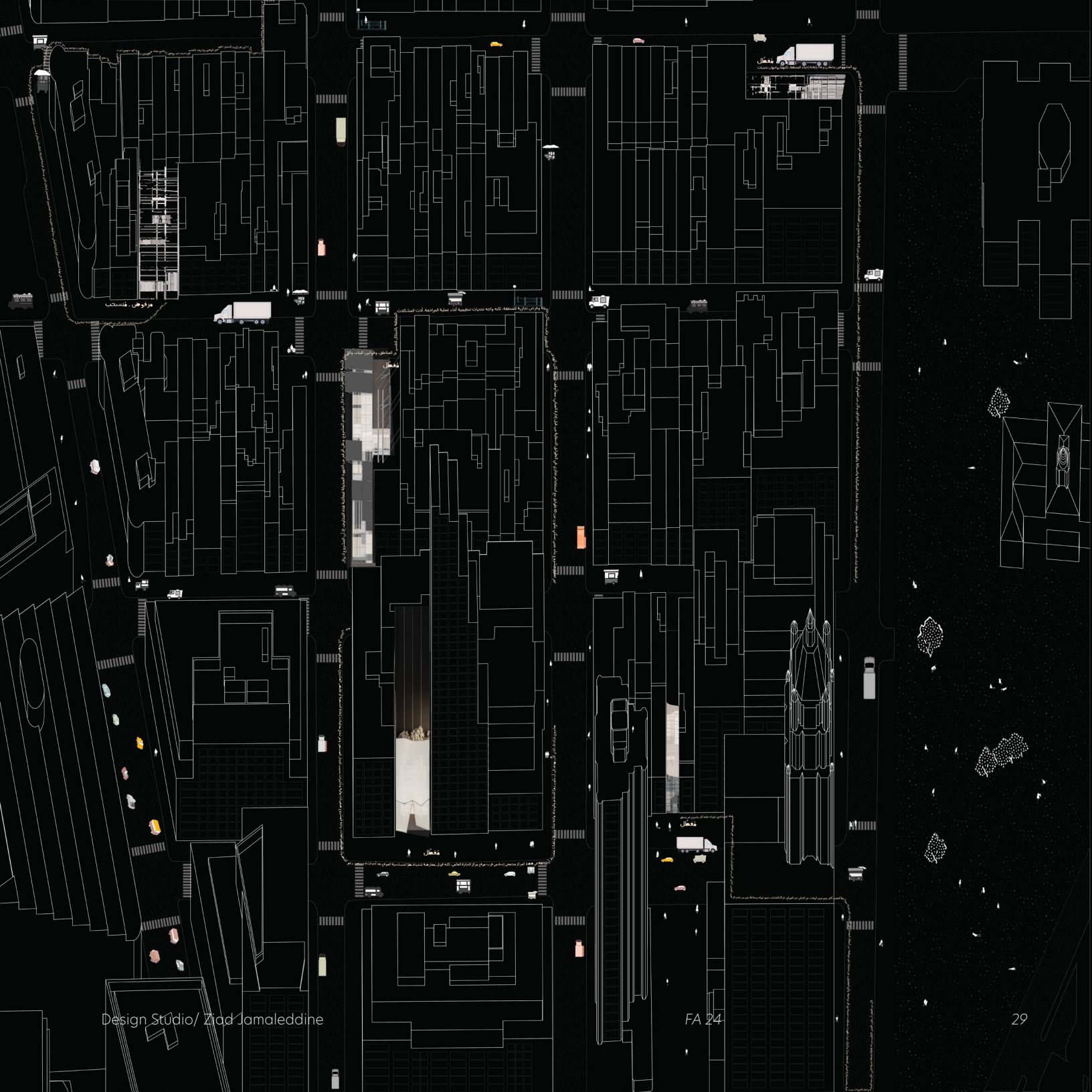
Each location is designed to fulfill a specific function based on the site's context. Scaffolding not only designs the space architecturally as a quick and temporary spatial strategy that is already frequently deployed across the city, but also plays a dual role as a storage solution, distributing itself beyond the primary storage space. Located on 65 W Broadway, the site harnesses solar power to generate energy, recharging the batteries that power the halal carts while providing shaded dining areas.

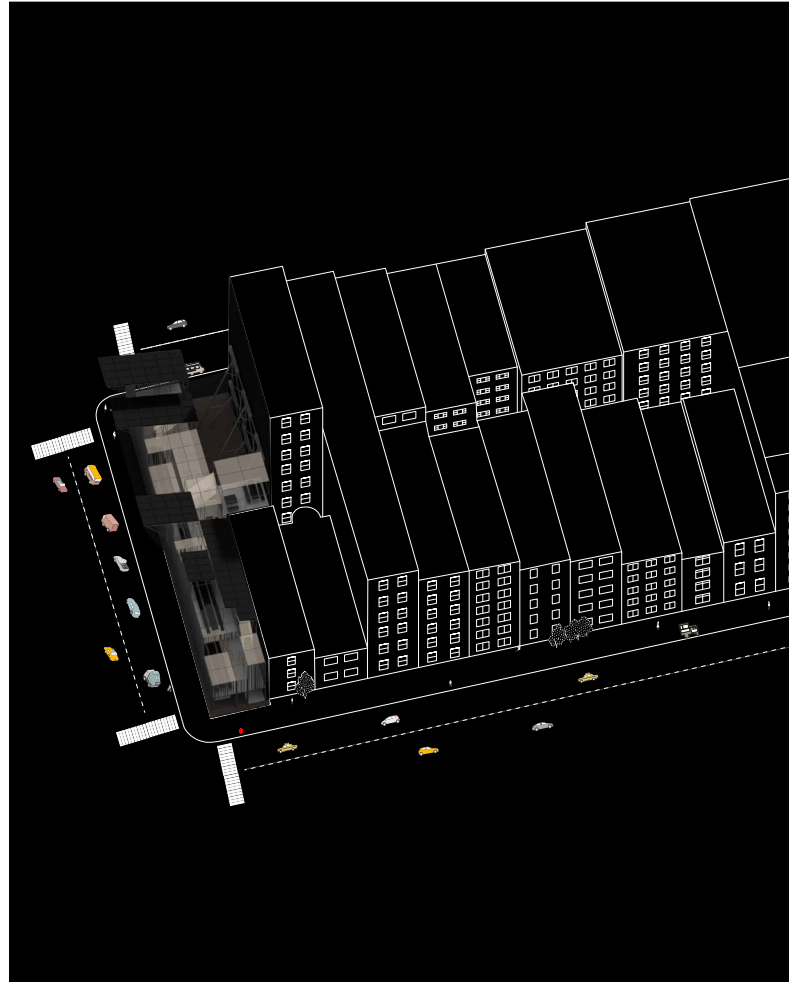
A second site on 51 Park Place collects rainwater from sloping roofscapes and utilizes it for ablution facilities for the prayer spaces below. The third site on 25 Park Place is a primary storage space for the scaffolding materials that move between temporary sites and has designated resting areas for the workers.

This waqf will evolve, incorporating more cursed sites into its expanding network. Each new addition adopts its own distinct function and temporary form. To that, it will continue to reinforce its mission to remain a relevant and sacred entity, preserving its purpose of space purification.

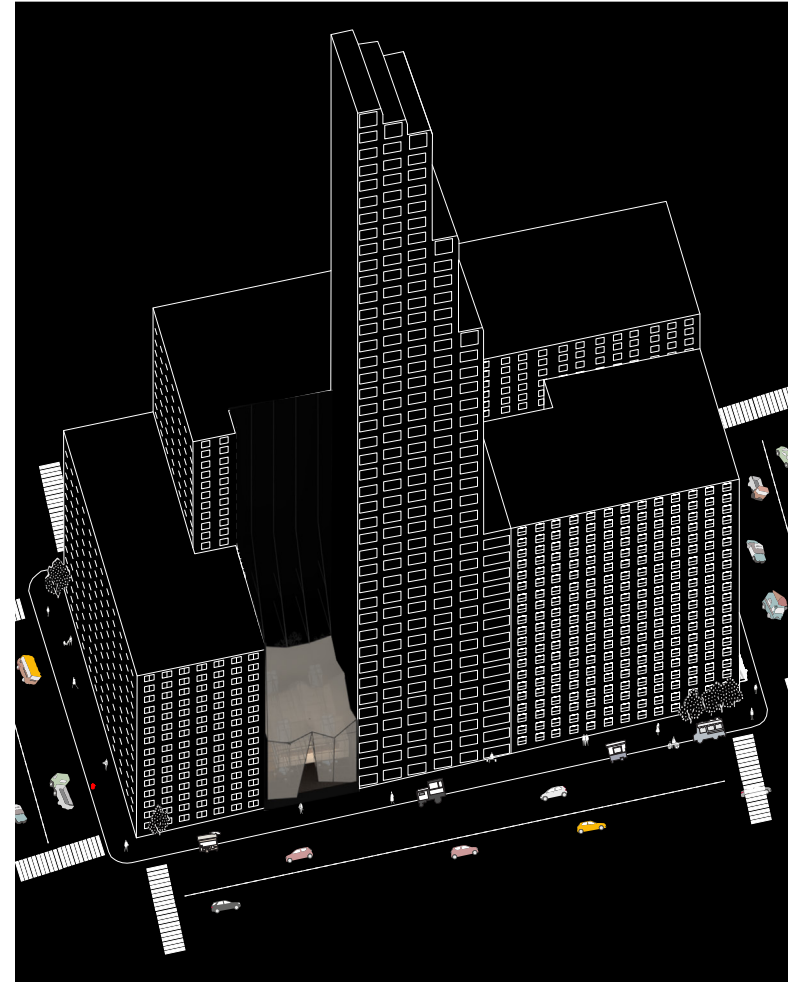


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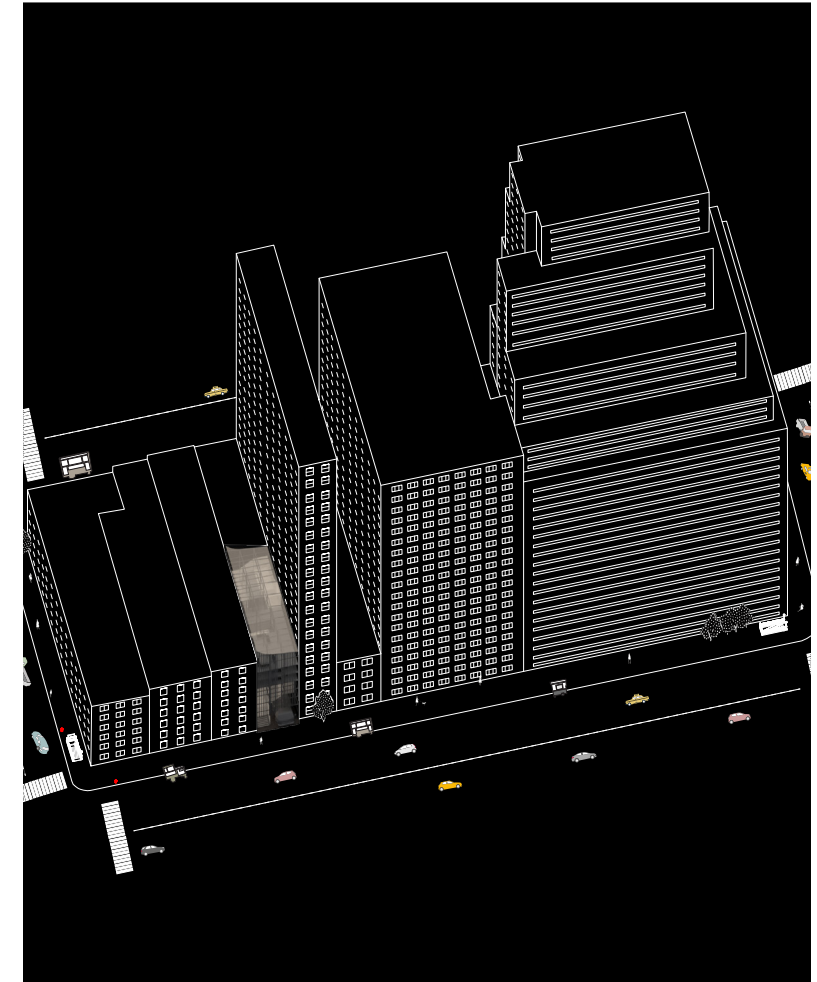




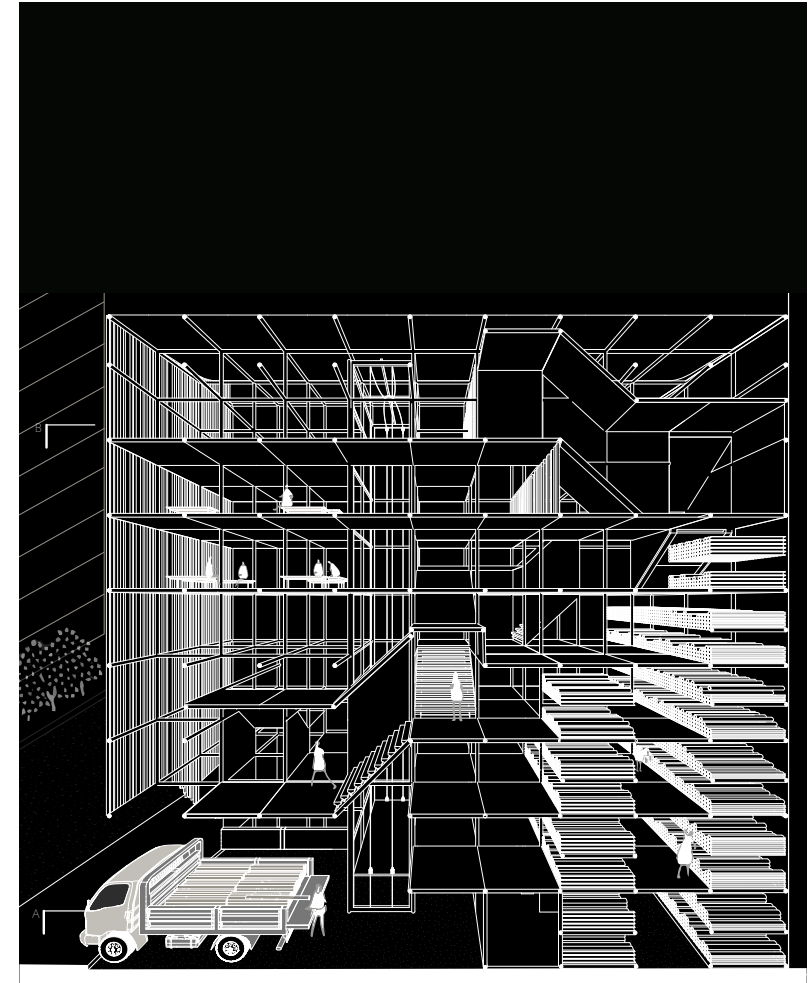
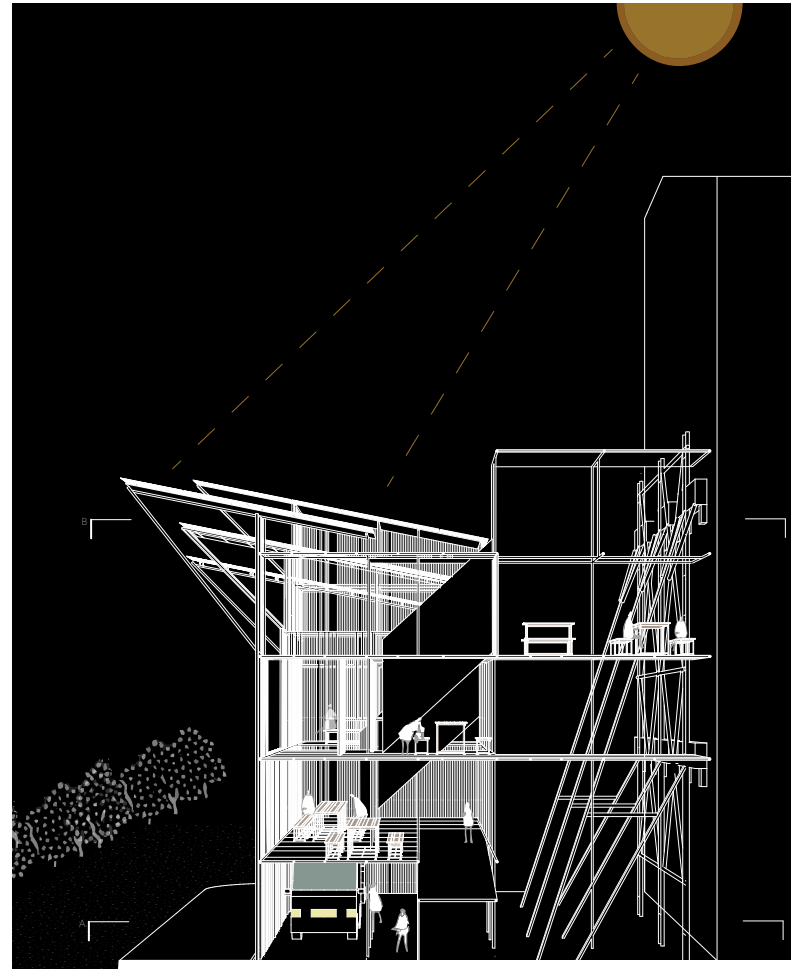
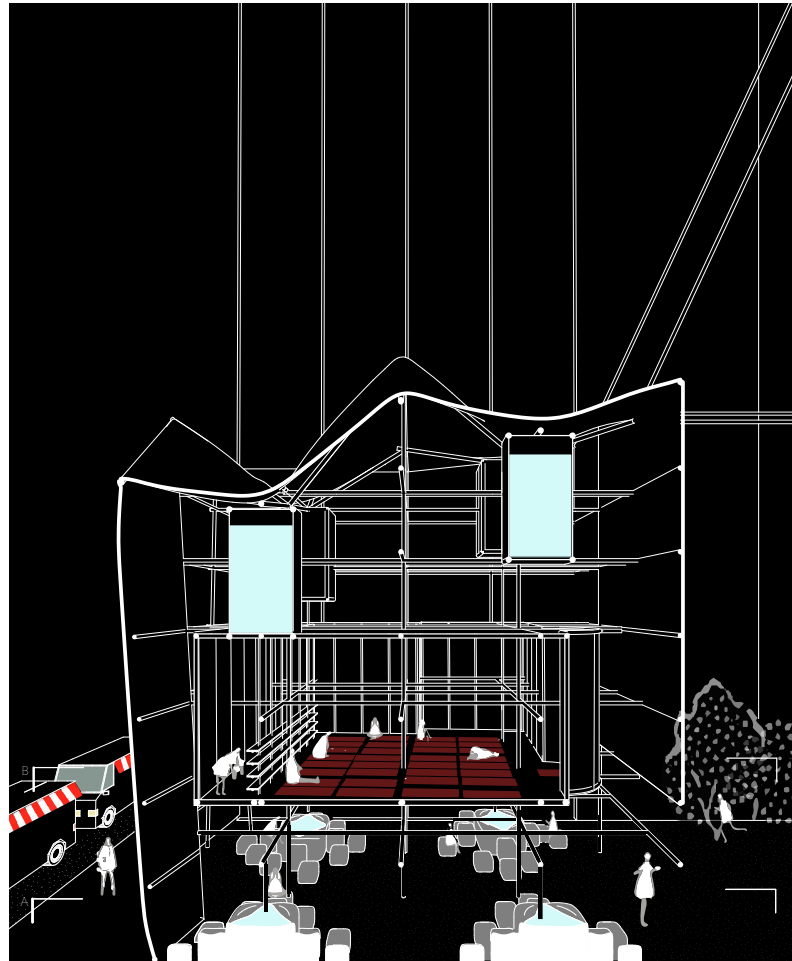
65 W Broadway, currently frozen under a Stop Work Order, harnesses solar power to recharge halal carts and provides shaded eating areas.

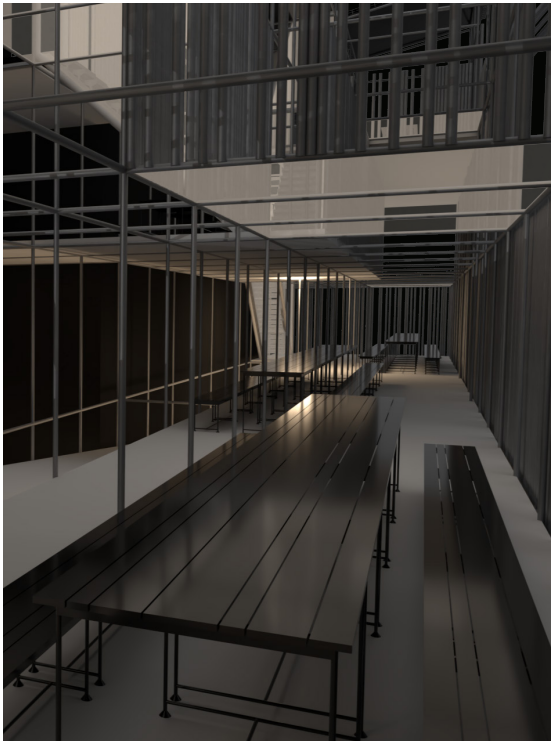
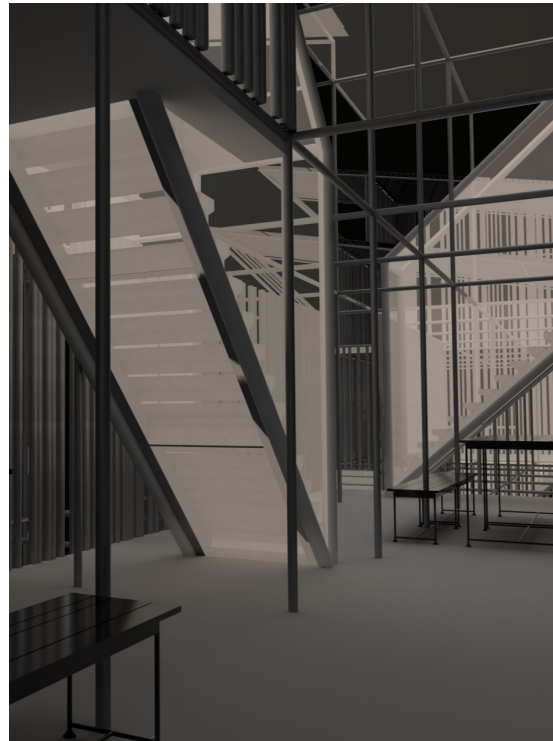
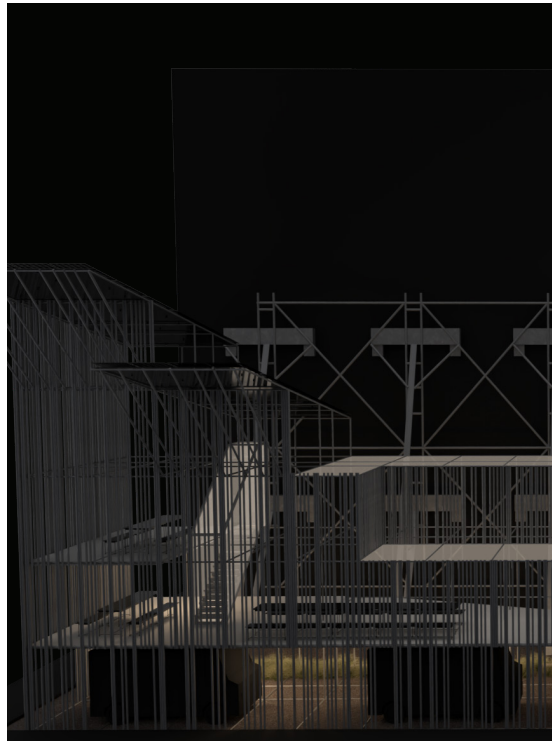
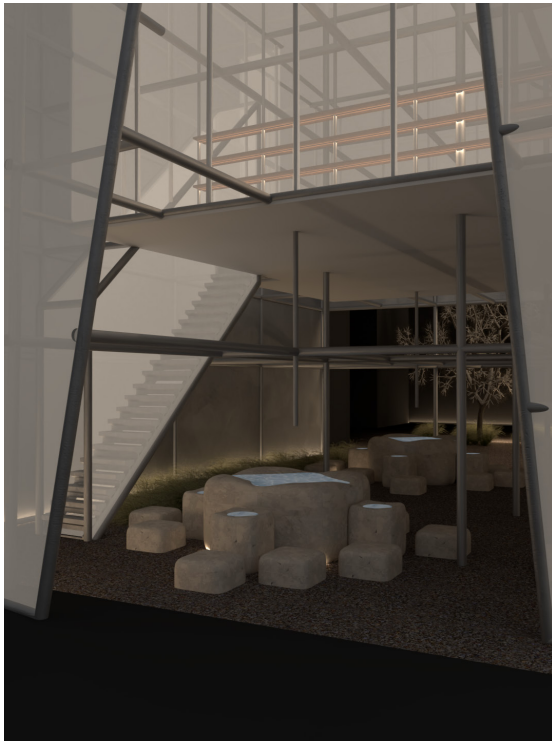


51 Park Place becomes a rainwater collection and ablution space, offering a small upstairs prayer room and quiet resting areas for workers.



25 Park Place, also stalled, serves as a central storage hub for scaffolding and equipment, enabling the waqf to expand to other denied or delayed sites.

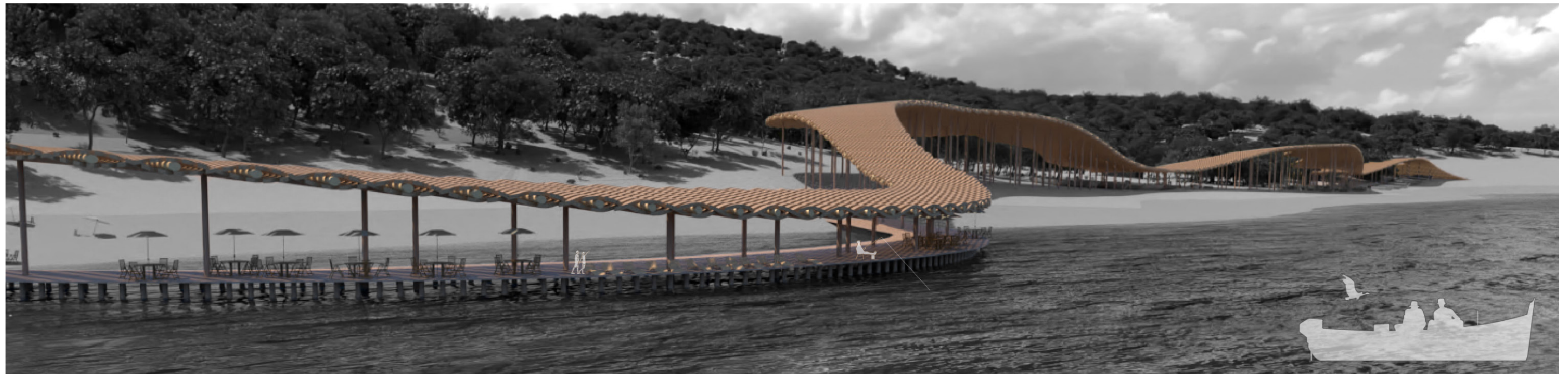




Right by the beach: Negotiating the shoreline

Where Shade Becomes Dialogue and Craft Becomes Architecture

Partner: Mariam Alothman





Within the shores of Punta Blanca, a close-knit fishing community gathers daily along the beach, not only for livelihood but for connection to each other, to the sea, and to cultural traditions rooted in their coastal environment. This way of life, however, is under threat. The increasing privatization of beachfront plots is disrupting access to the shoreline and endangering the rhythms of communal life. In response, a spatial intervention that reclaims the “first shoreline” the vital zone where ocean, sand, and forest meet by creating a shared structure that both protects and empowers the community.

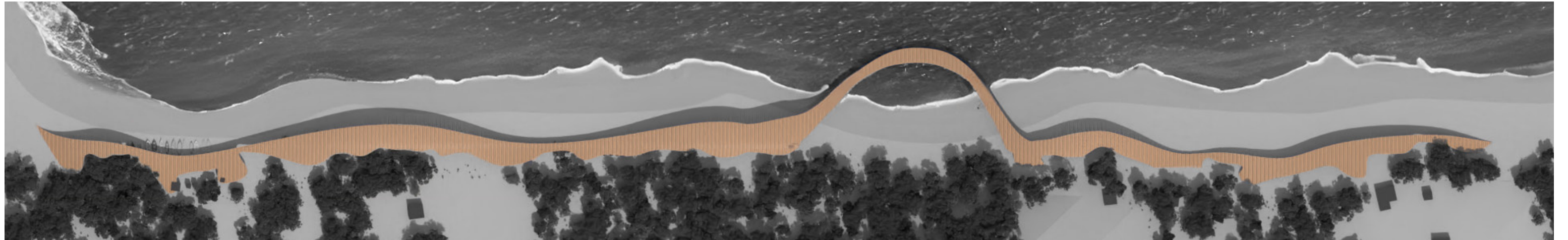
The design centers on a long woven canopy that stretches across the beachfront, creating a continuous shaded space where locals and landowners can gather, negotiate, trade, and celebrate. Constructed using palm straw and bamboo—materials that are locally sourced and culturally significant the canopy draws inspiration from the weaving techniques of Panama hats, a traditional Equadorian coastal craft known for its precision and symbolism of protection. By translating this intimate handcraft into an architectural scale, the structure becomes a communal roof that shelters not just bodies, but practices and stories.

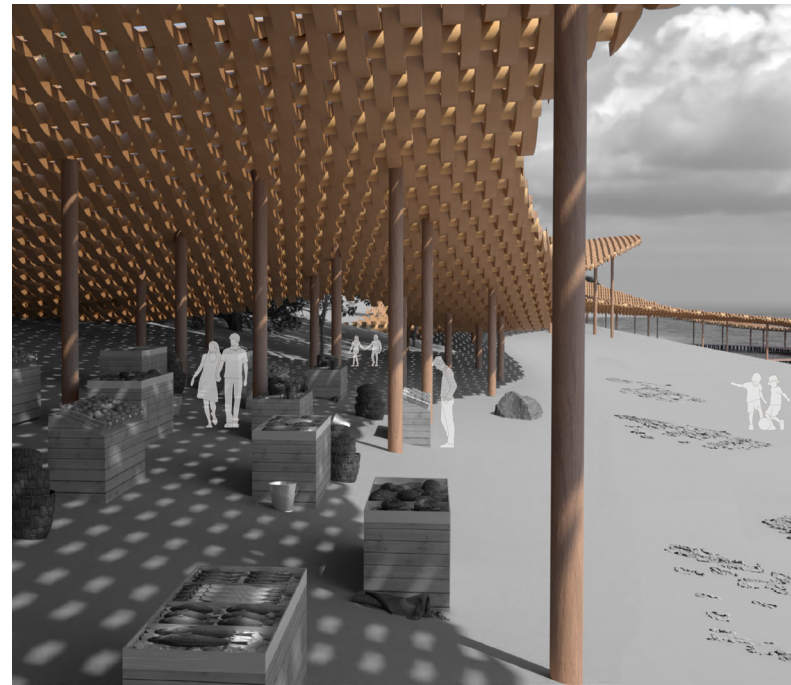
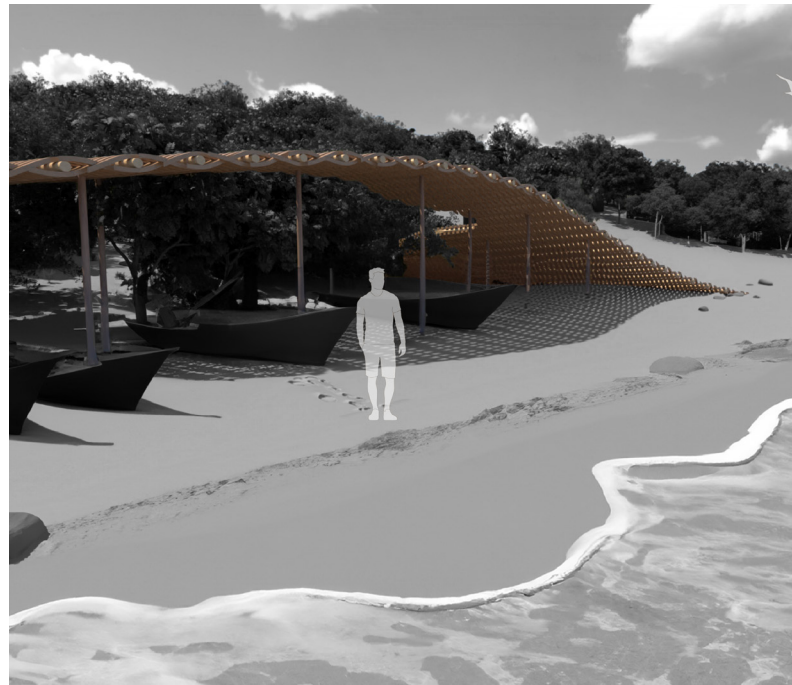
Beyond its material and cultural grounding, the shade adapts like a sundial its form shifts in width and density to respond to the sun’s path throughout the day and the surrounding vegetation and sand. This passive strategy controls light and temperature, naturally regulating how the space below is used. Underneath, a flexible platform emerges for fishing-related labor, informal markets, teaching workshops, or simply resting areas activities that mirror the fluidity of beach life and evolve with the needs of the community.

At its core, it is envisioned as a space of negotiation a physical and symbolic platform where landowners and the local community can come together to shape the future of the shoreline. Rather than imposing fixed programs, the design encourages collaborative decision-making about how the space is used. Sections of the shaded area can evolve into boat parking zones, temporary markets, communal parks, or gathering spaces, depending on what is negotiated between stakeholders. This flexibility is key: it allows the space to remain responsive to changing needs and ensures that both private interests and communal traditions have a voice. In doing so, the canopy becomes more than just shelter, it becomes a shared framework for coexistence, dialogue, and mutual benefit.

Preserving a way of life. It offers a model for how architecture can serve as a bridge connecting the private with the public, the landowner with the local, and the past with a shared future. Through woven shade, it reclaims not only space, but dignity, memory, and cultural continuity.

Material Acts: Tradition, Labor, and Space







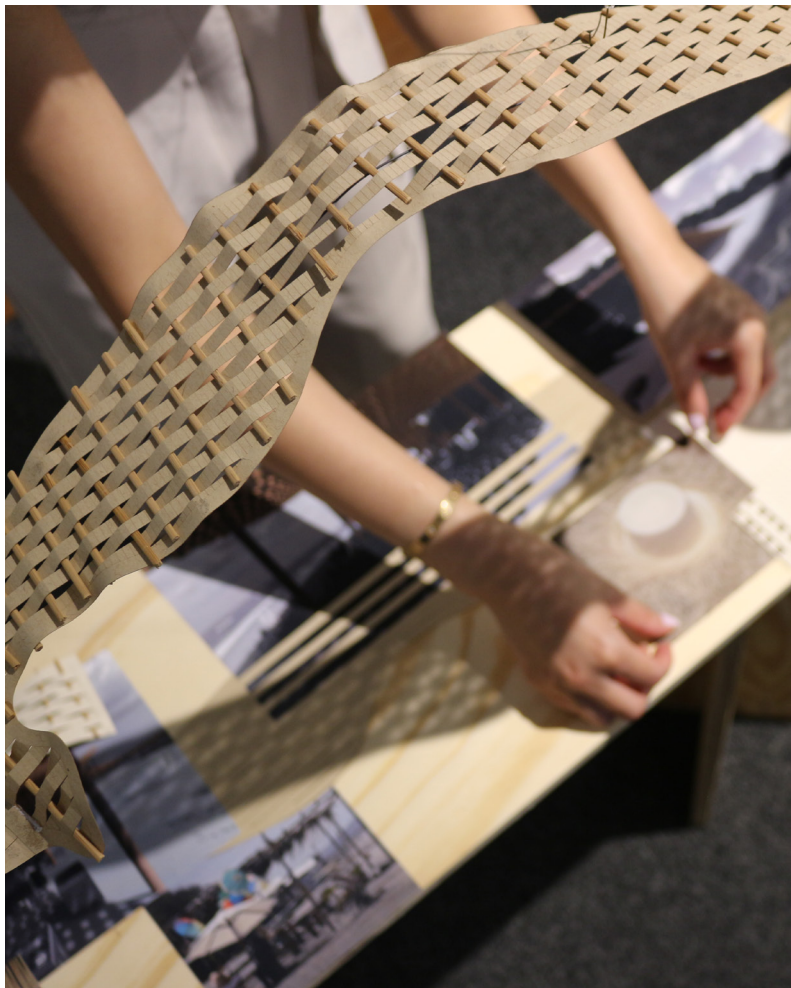
SHEREFAH ALHAMDAN

Design Studio/ David Barragán



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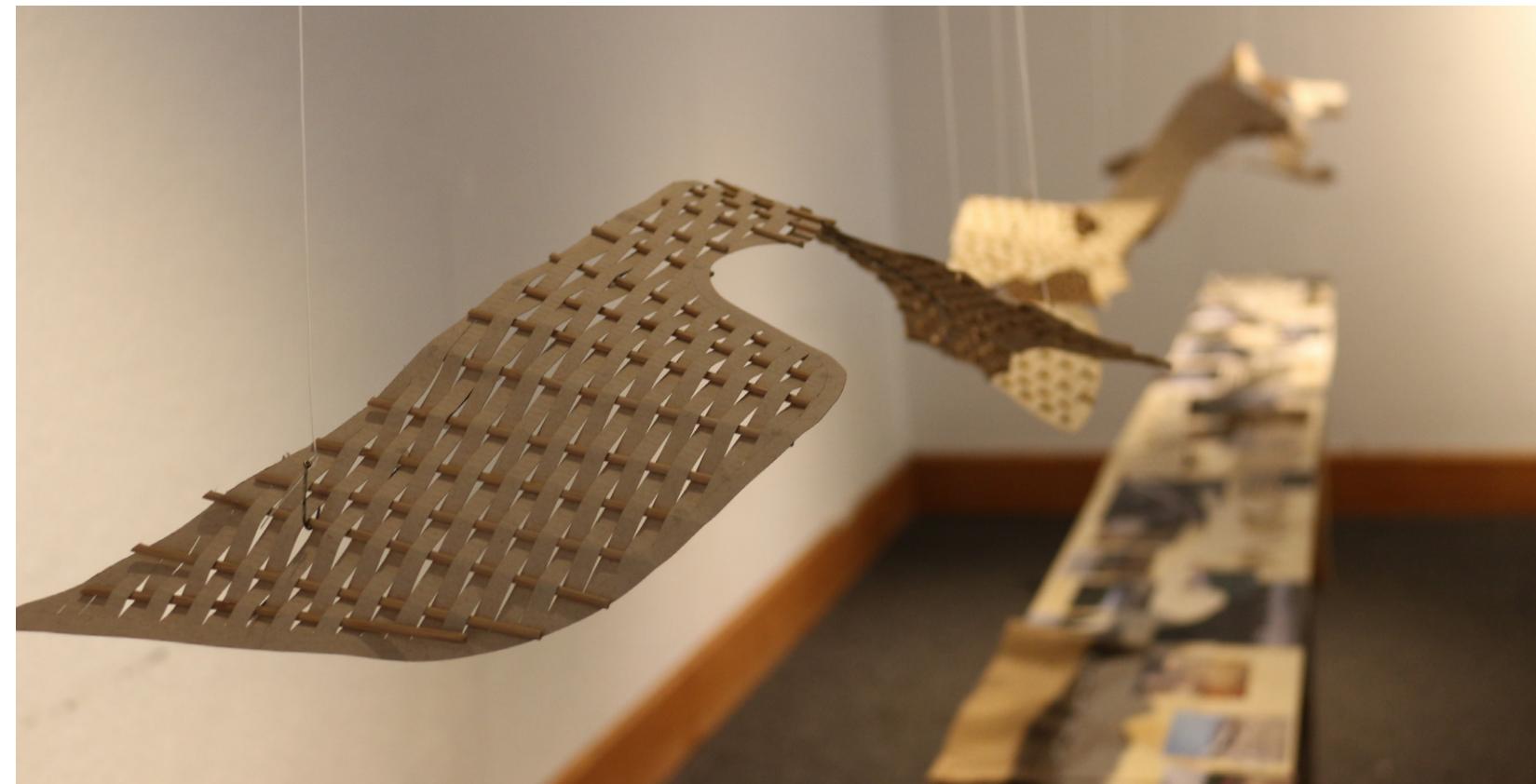


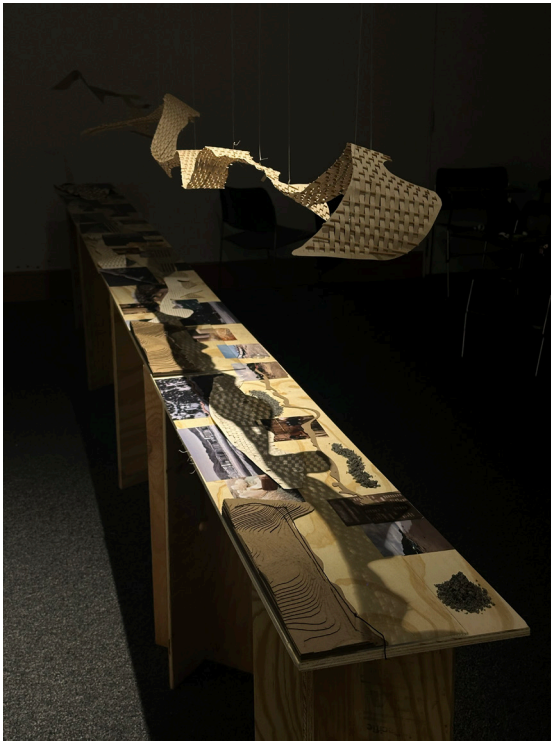
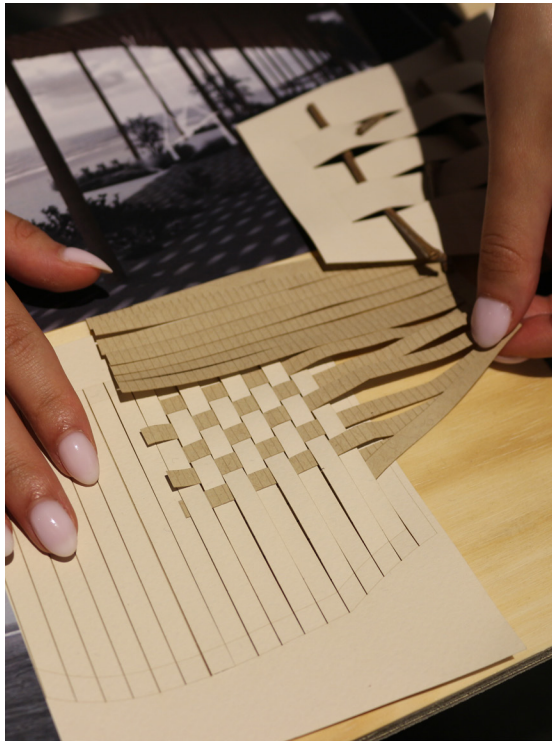
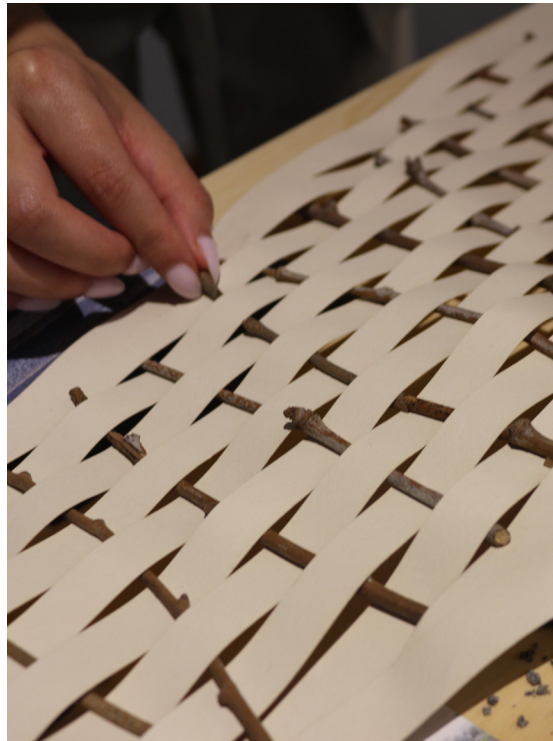
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SUM 24

Weaving, casting, and scaffolding three acts, three geographies, three methods each grounded in a shared purpose: to preserve memory, protect community, and reclaim space.

Architecture is not about building. It becomes a carrier of memory and negotiation, where material, tradition, and spatial absence become tools to recover what has been erased, privatized, or forgotten.

An act of resistance and remembrance, reweaving broken narratives and proposing new futures from overlooked fragments.

This work seeks to honor the stories embedded in land, labor, and material keeping them alive through space.

Material Acts in Tradition, Labor, and Space.

