

# PHILIP SPENCE

SELECTED WORKS

2023-24

M.S. Advanced Architectural Design, Columbia University

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## PREFACE:

You may have seen those charming old photographs of Einstein with his chalkboard: the ruffled genius standing before Greek letters which mean nothing to anyone but him, equations and chalk dust proving time is not linear and who knows what else.

A portfolio is a cleaned up chalkboard – the two differences here being that I am not Albert Einstein, and my work does not empirically prove anything. Rather, it gives viewers a glimpse into how I think.

I came to graduate school for two reasons. First, I wanted to gauge where the profession was at. I attended a traditional school of architecture and worked in a traditional firm for a total of seven years. I used to stare at new buildings, and wonder, “Who designed this? What was their design philosophy?” Now I understand that many were designed by BIM algorithms, not architects, and that a real design philosophy rooted in what it means to be human and serve society is rare. Philosophical terms are popular at Columbia but philosophy is not. There are no truths and there are no rules. I learned a tremendous amount from individual professors, and had freedom to choose them - something I’m truly grateful for. Now when I look at buildings I realize that it is individuals running the show. We’ve lost all commitment to guiding design principles, and architecture schools are to blame here. I hope to play a role in reversing this.

The second reason I came to grad school was to understand how the old and the new could relate. Every project in this portfolio centers on this. The first project, (titled *Form Found*), was unsuccessful in terms of design, but the other three offer solutions for taking what’s old and imbuing it with life. The final project, titled *Comfort*, was perhaps the most successful attempt at this. Set in a brutal tropical climate, the design examines how comfort can be achieved in the worst conditions. Other client factors (such as the need for easy disassemblage) played a role, but it was primarily the landscape, weather, and architectural context which shaped a design that many found boring: a traditional Thai house. This led to a discovery: what’s old is new, and what’s new is old. What matters is not the age of the building, but the approach one takes. Wariness of nostalgia is as blinding as unquestioned allegiance to novelty.

Thank you, Columbia, for providing the chalkboard. Thank you GSAPP for the chalk. Now I hand in my drawings. I hope you can gain something from them.

# 01

## "FORM FOUND"

Form Finding at the  
UrbanScale

PROJECT DATE  
STUDIO  
CRITIC  
PROJECT PARTNER  
PROJECT SITE

**SUMMER 2023**  
**STONE MATTERS**  
**ELIAS & YOUSEF ANASTAS**  
**CHUXI XIONG**  
**THE TIBER ISLAND ~ ROME**

CENTERED AROUND pushing the structural limits of load-bearing stone, this studio aimed to disrupt the usage of stone as a purely ornamental material, stuck on building facades like wallpaper.

Our site is located next to the oldest surviving fragment of a stone bridge in Rome: the Ponte Rotto. This amazing structure, which has sat in the Tiber for millenia, is overgrown with plants. Our concept was to connect the Tiber Island and the Ponte Rotto to the existing riverwalk and pedestrian/car bridge on the site with an entirely stone bridge. The underside of the stone bridge employs a rib system for lateral stability and funicular curvature to maximize compression forces.

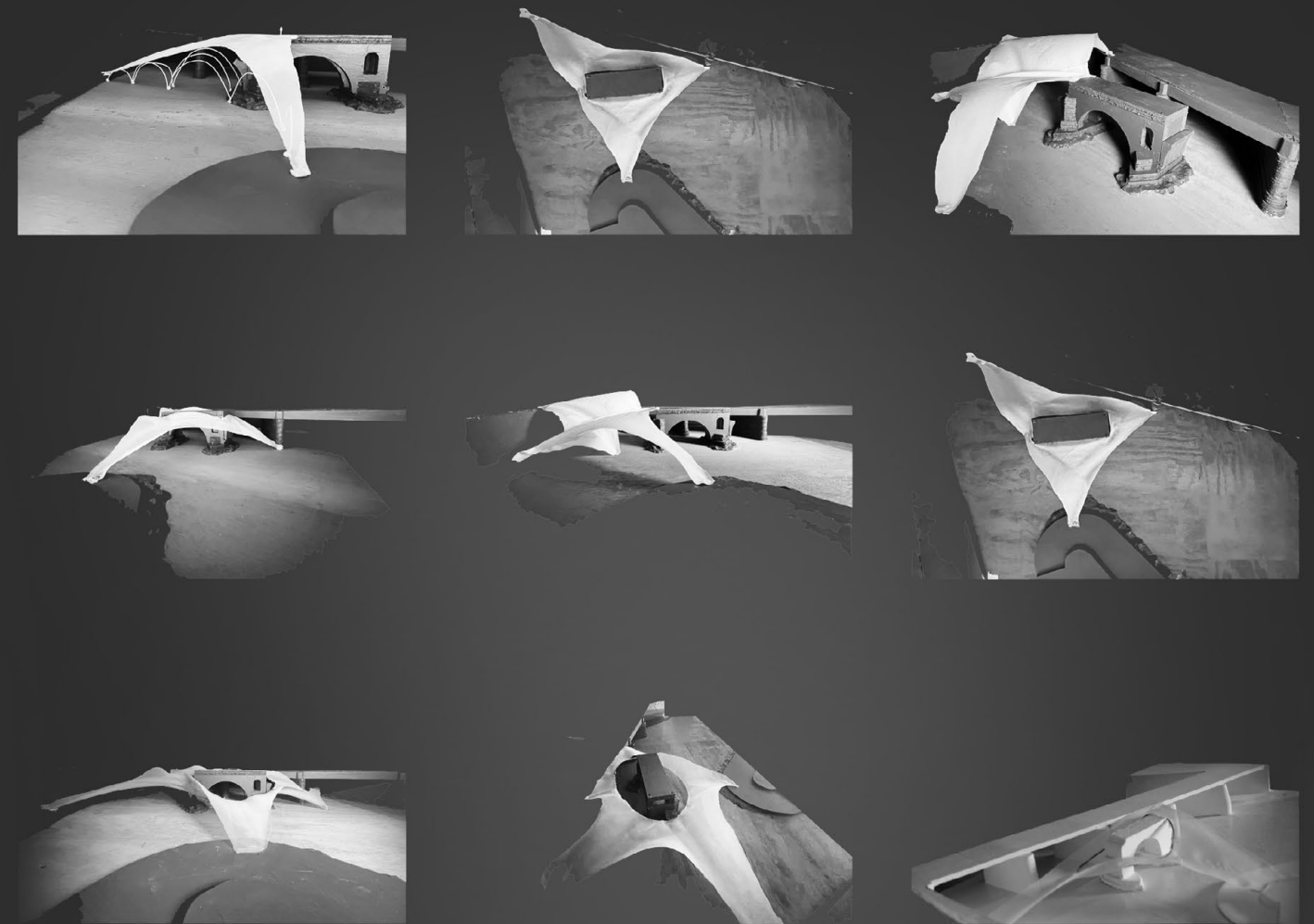


## THE PROCESS

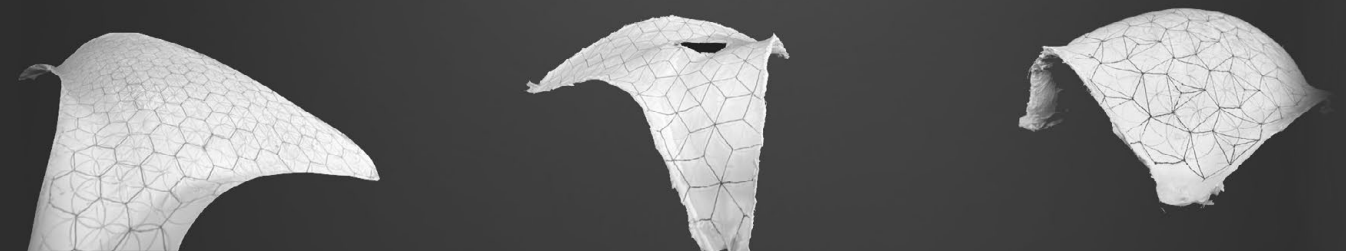


WE STARTED by creating a 1:100 physical model of our site, and then flipping it upside down. Placing a mirror beneath it, we began to design funicular (compression-only) structures made from hanging cloth and rope. Eventually we “froze” these iterations in plaster, turning them right-side-up.

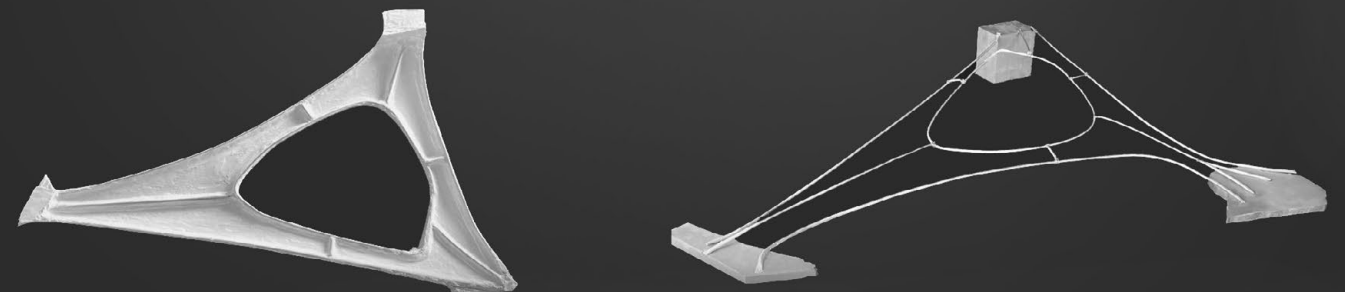
### DESIGN ITERATIONS



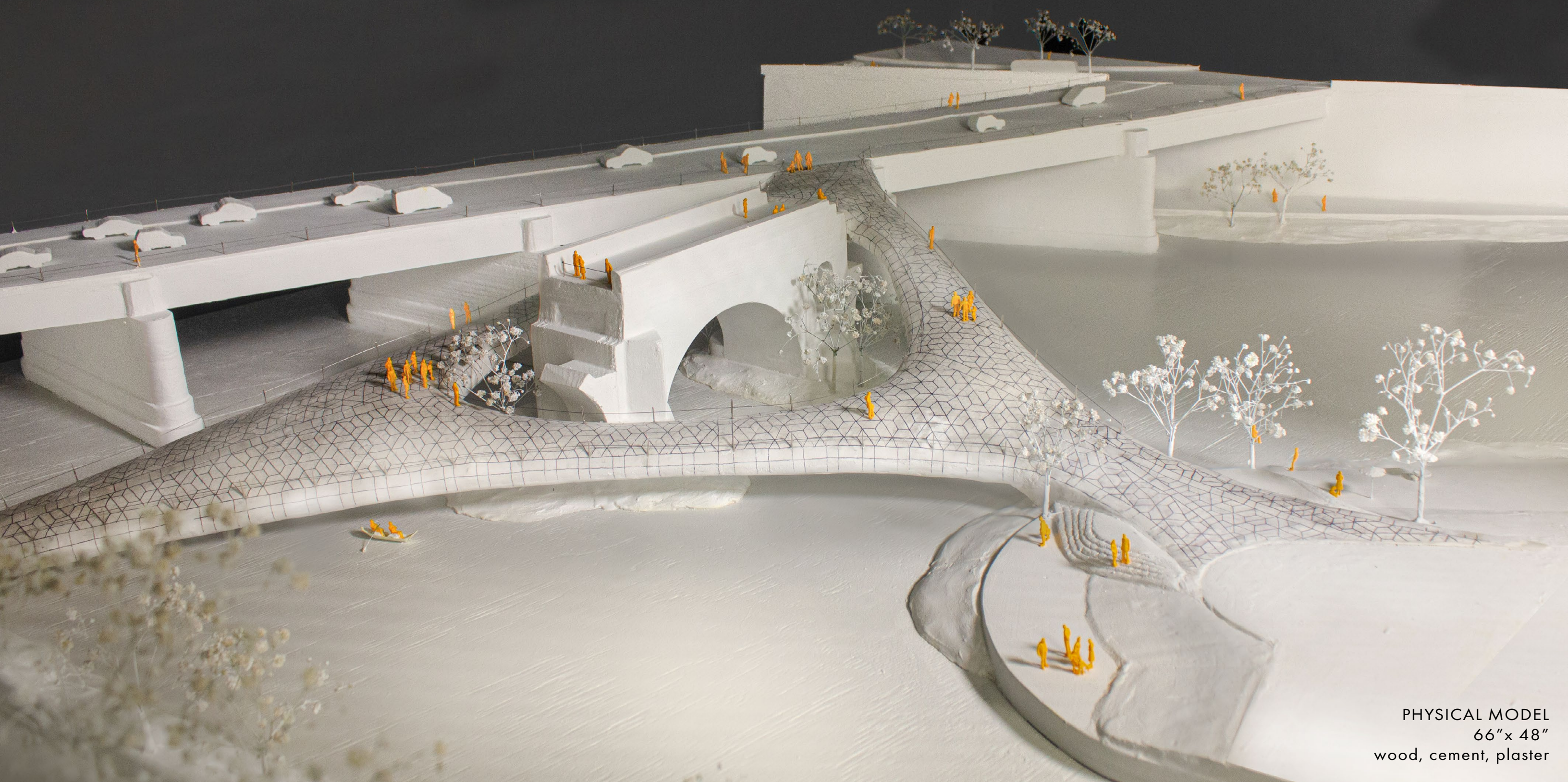
### STEREOMETRY STUDIES



### STRUCTURAL STUDIES



### MODELS: ITERATIVE DESIGN PROCESS

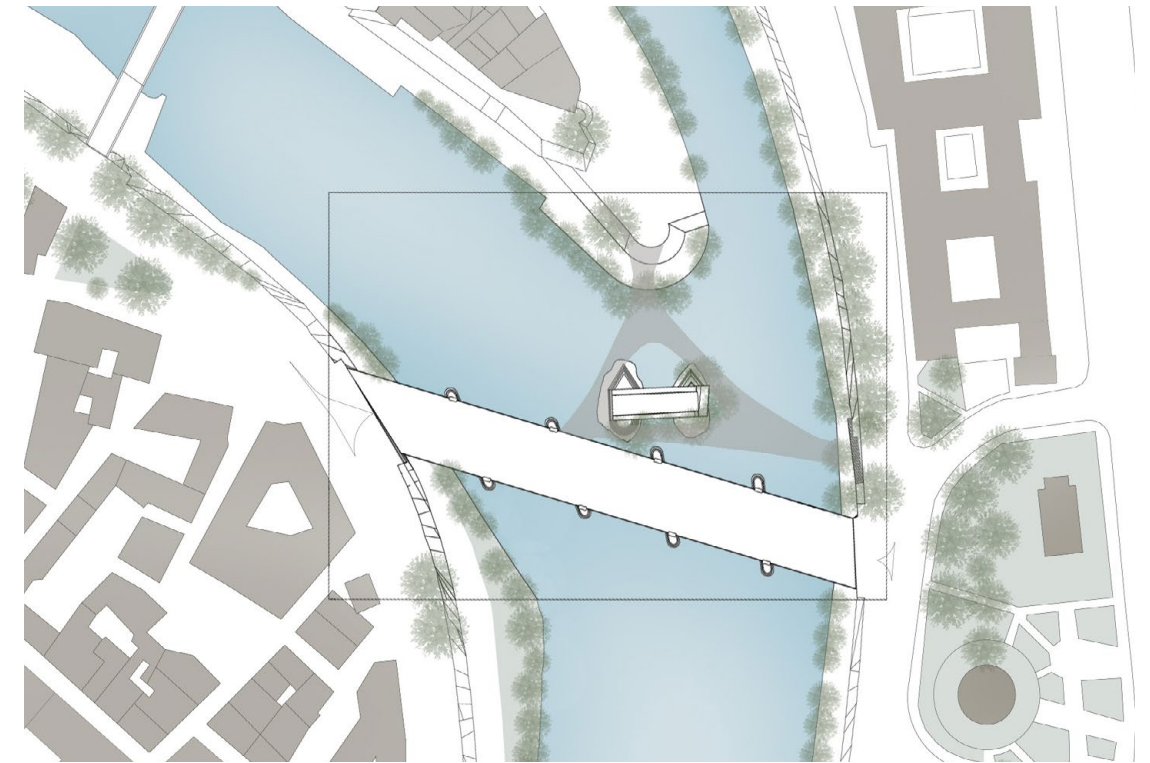


PHYSICAL MODEL  
66" x 48"  
wood, cement, plaster



PHYSICAL MODEL  
66" x 48"  
wood, cement, plaster

AERIAL VIEW



SITE PLAN



RIVERWALK

Our proposal connects three urban points on the site. The first is the riverwalk, located just above the level of the river, running its length.



BRIDGE / PONTE ROTTO

The second point connected is an existing bridge that spans the river, at an awkward angle adjacent to the Ponte Rotto. This connection allows visitors to walk out on to the top of the ruin.



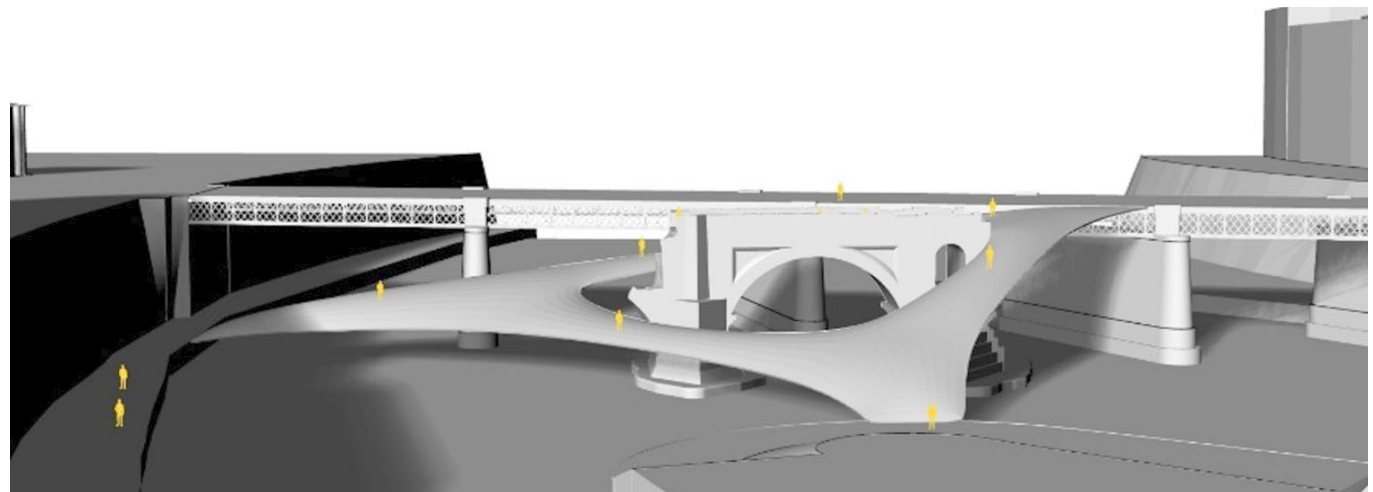
ISLAND

The third connection point is the southern end of the Tiber Island. This allows pedestrians to cross between the riverwalk and the island, a path much needed on this site.



VIEW BENEATH BRIDGE  
physical model  
wood, cement, plaster

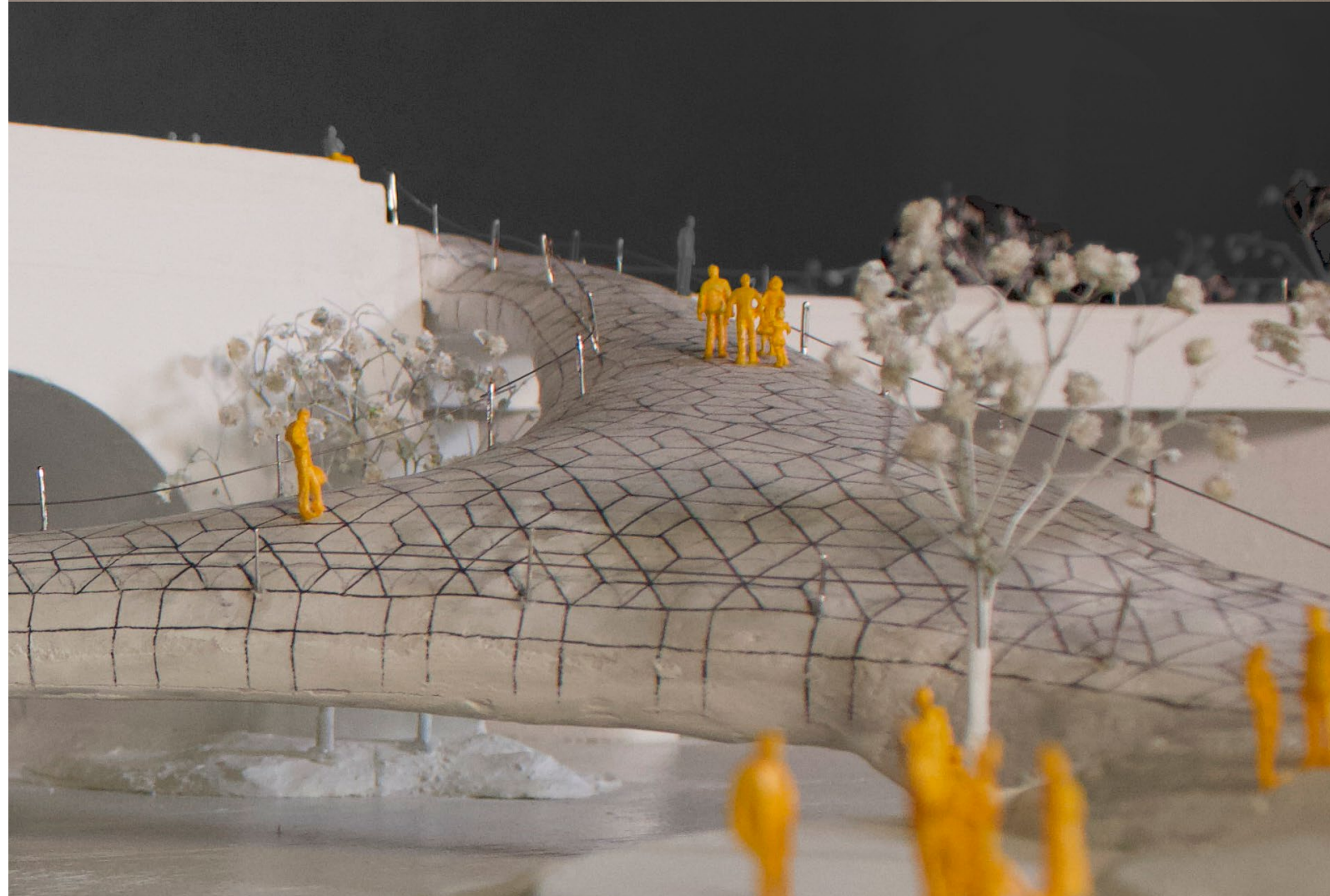




3D MODEL STUDY  
Rhino, Grasshopper, Kangaroo

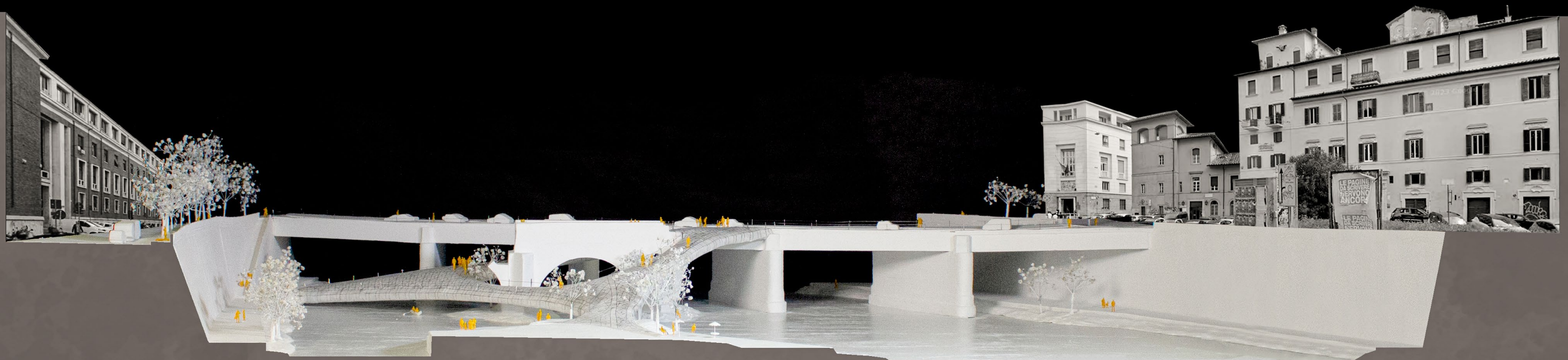


FINAL STEROMETRY MODEL  
Scale: 1:25; 12" x 14"



top right: PERSPECTIVE VIEW  
top left: PERSPECTIVE VIEW FROM ISLAND-  
physical model  
wood, cement, plaster

THE PATTERN design for the stone cuts (i.e. the stereometry) maximizes the number of repeatable stones and minimizes the number of 'slivers.' The bridge gives users a tactile experience of stone, a material so rarely used in contemporary construction for structural purposes. Kayakers, a common sight on this portion of the Tiber River, will move through both the old and the new, seeing different design aesthetics but timeless construction techniques.



# 02

## "THREADS"

The Kingsbridge Armory

PROJECT DATE  
STUDIO  
CRITIC  
PROJECT PARTNER\*  
PROJECT SITE

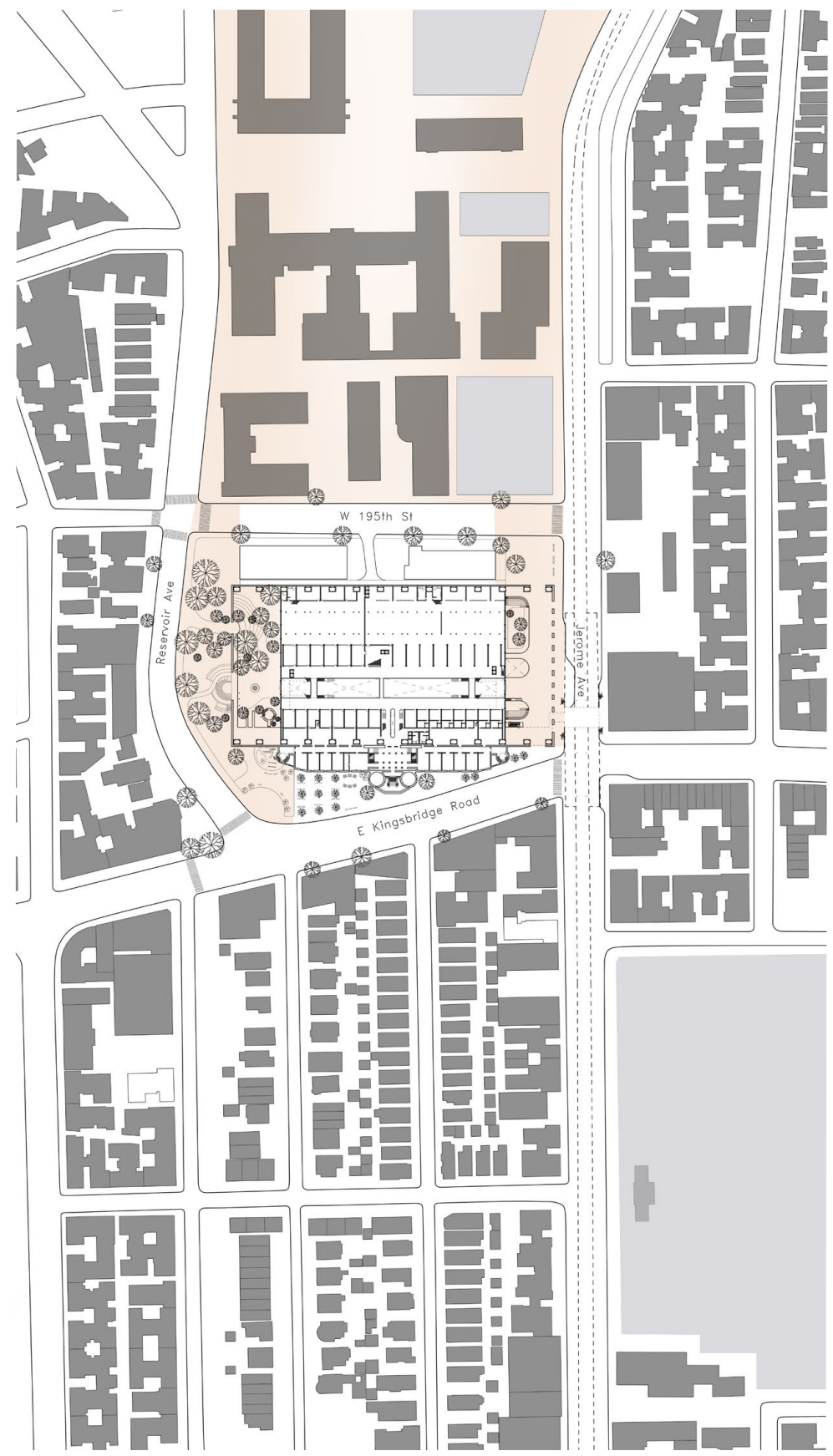
**FALL 2023**  
**EXTREME SCALE STUDIO**  
**WONNE ICKX**  
**YIMING XIONG**  
**THE BRONX - NYC**

THIS PAST SUMMER, New York City awarded a 200 million dollar grant to the Kingsbridge Armory, an abandoned historic structure in the Bronx. As an RFP was being prepared, our studio was tasked with designing an adaptive reuse of the armory. The title of the studio -- "Extreme Scale" -- points to the challenge of this project: the sheer size of the existing structure. To provide a sense of scale, four NFL football fields could fit on the floor of the main drill hall, an entirely column-free space.

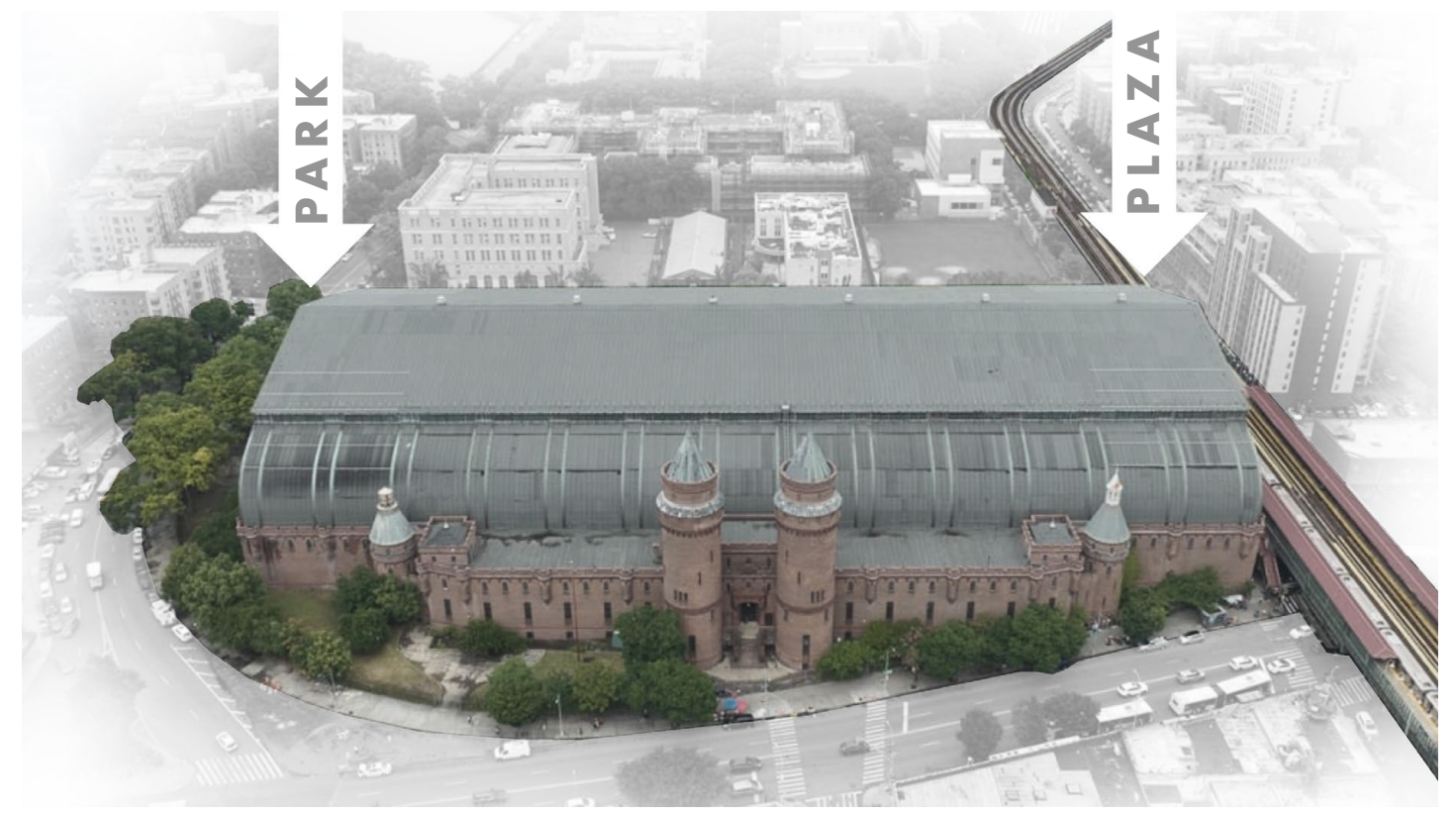
Located in a dense urban neighborhood, this armory has the potential to become a social and professional hub for the surrounding neighborhood, a visual identifier which everyone can connect with and use.



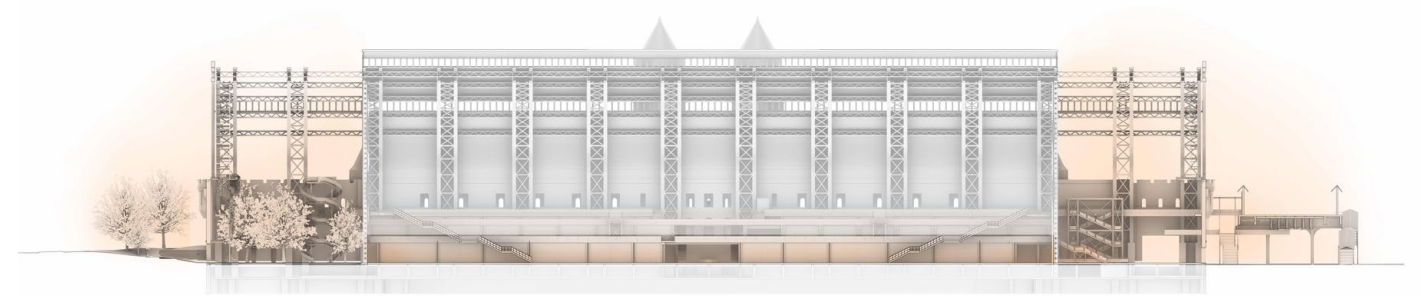
PERSPECTIVE OF PUBLIC PLAZA



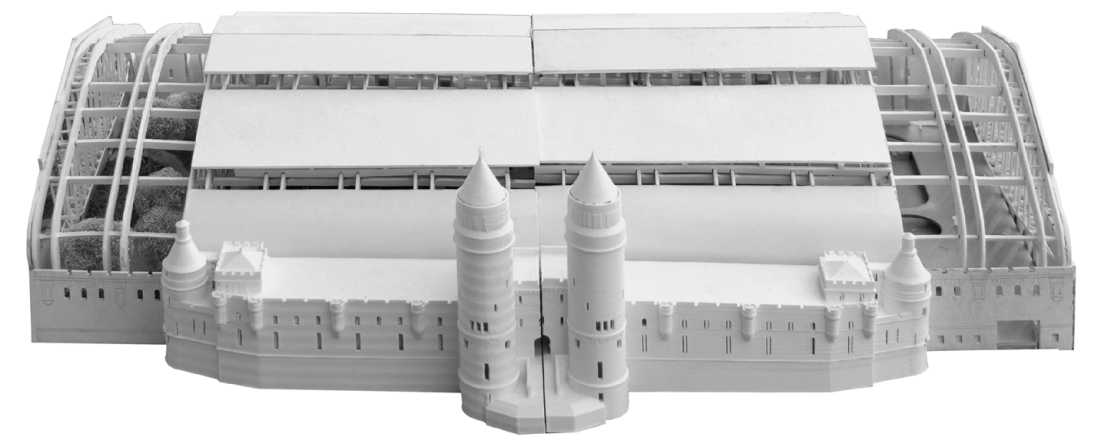
SITE PLAN



Intervention Concept: open up the two ends of the existing armory, forming a green park at one side and a public plaza at the other. Connect them with an interior street.



PARK MAIN STREET PLAZA



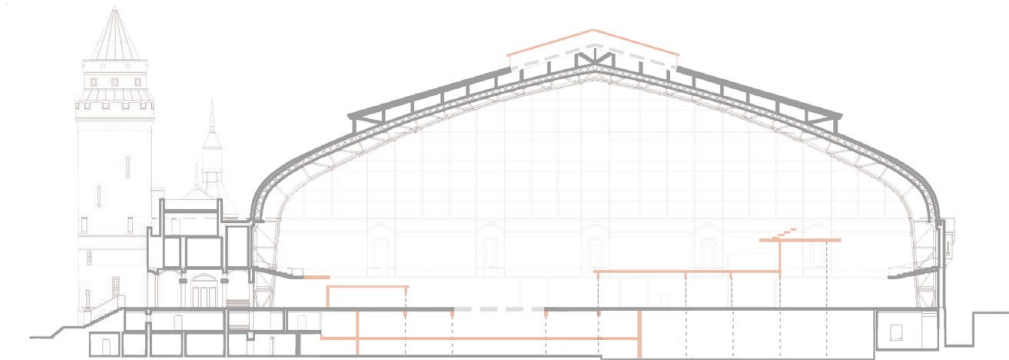
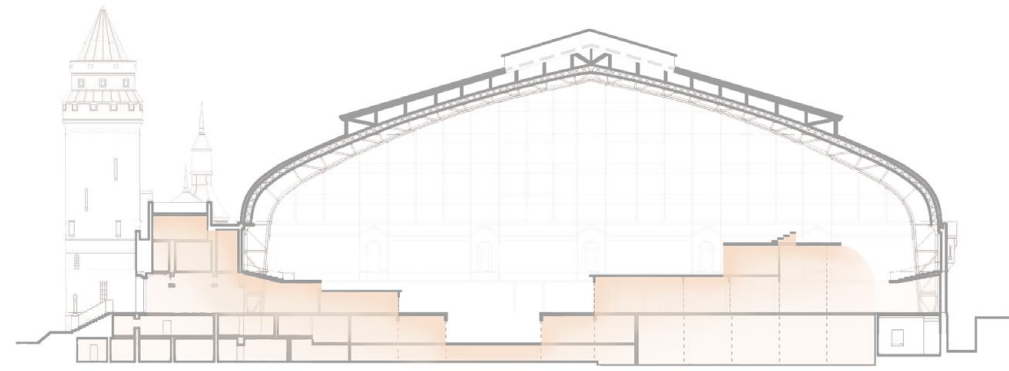
DESIGN CONCEPT



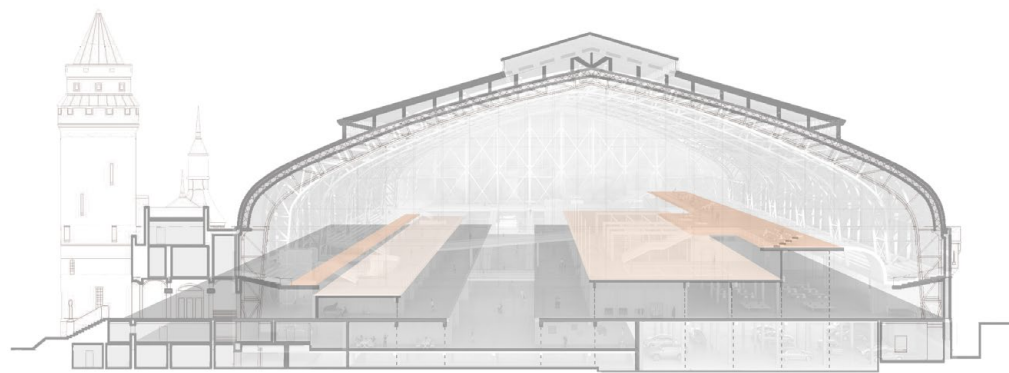
MAIN STREET



PARK



— ADDITIONS  
 - - - SUBTRACTIONS  
 ····· STRUCTURAL GRID

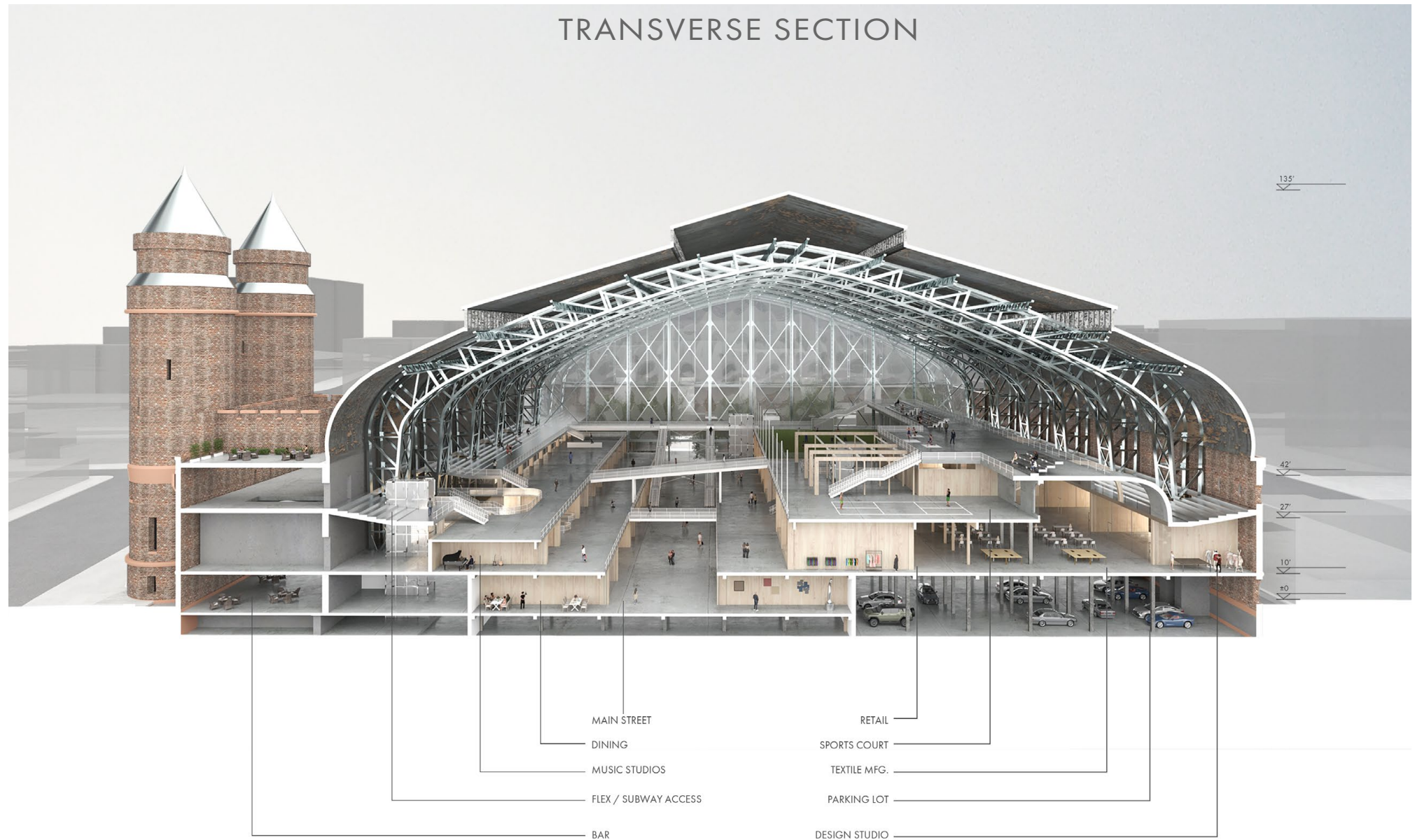


■ EXISTING "TRAIN PLATFORMS"  
 ■ NEW "TRAIN PLATFORMS"

DIAGRAMS

The top diagram shows the architectural canyon created, the middle shows our preservation of existing structure and floor slabs in the armory, and the bottom diagram shows the concept of terracing "train platforms" or urban streets to form spaces.

TRANSVERSE SECTION



PRECEDENT RESEARCH



Reading Railroad - Philadelphia - 1893



Union Station - Savannah - 1902

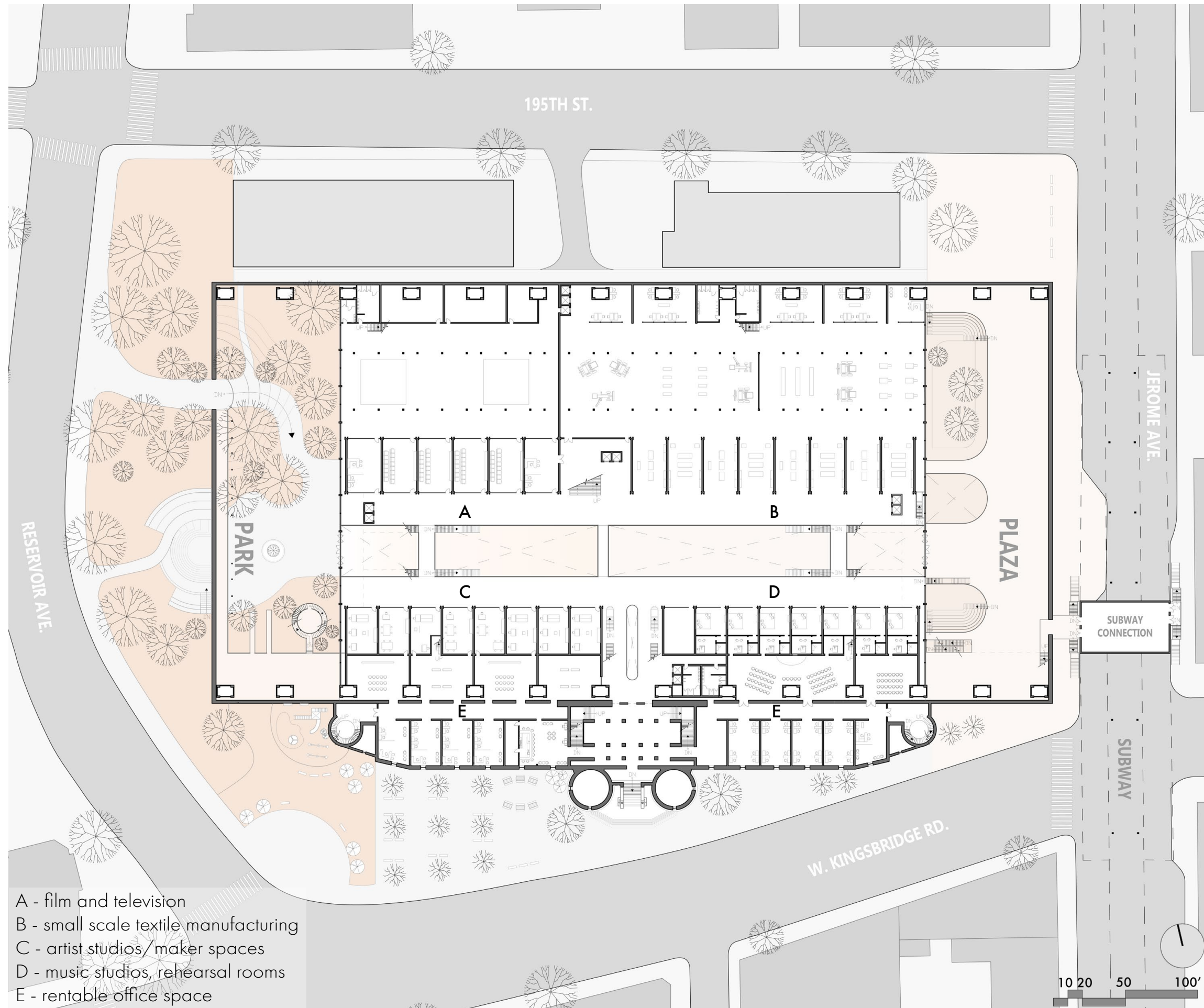


President Station - Baltimore - 1900



Green St. Station - Philadelphia - 1900

In our research, we discovered that the Kingsbridge Armory was directly modeled after train stations built around New York at the time of its construction. We took the concept of the train platform to solve the circulation of the enormous drill hall.



- A - film and television
- B - small scale textile manufacturing
- C - artist studios/maker spaces
- D - music studios, rehearsal rooms
- E - rentable office space

DRILL HALL PLAN

OUR PROPOSAL CONVERTS the east end of the armory into an urban plaza and the west into a public garden. Through this conversion we formed spaces which both reside in the armory and spill out into the surrounding context. Connecting these public spaces are linear streets, running the length of the drill hall. These terraced platforms capitalize on the “bigness” of the interior, simplify movement throughout, and stitch together the two ends of this behemoth structure, forming a cohesive fabric that can be knit into the urban context.

The perspective drawing below diagrams the transition from hardscape to green-park that occurs on the front of the armory.





MANUFACTURING SPACE

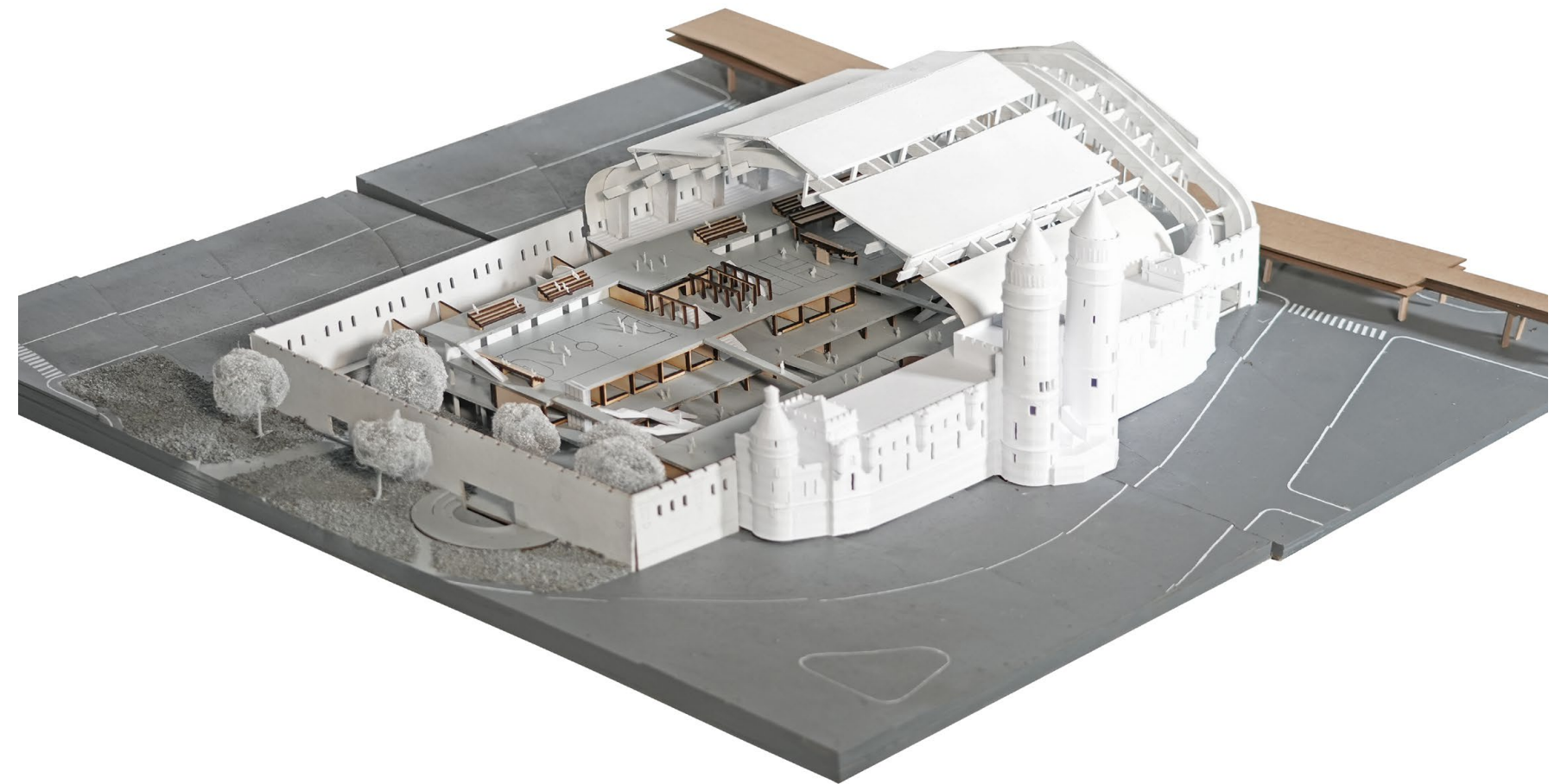
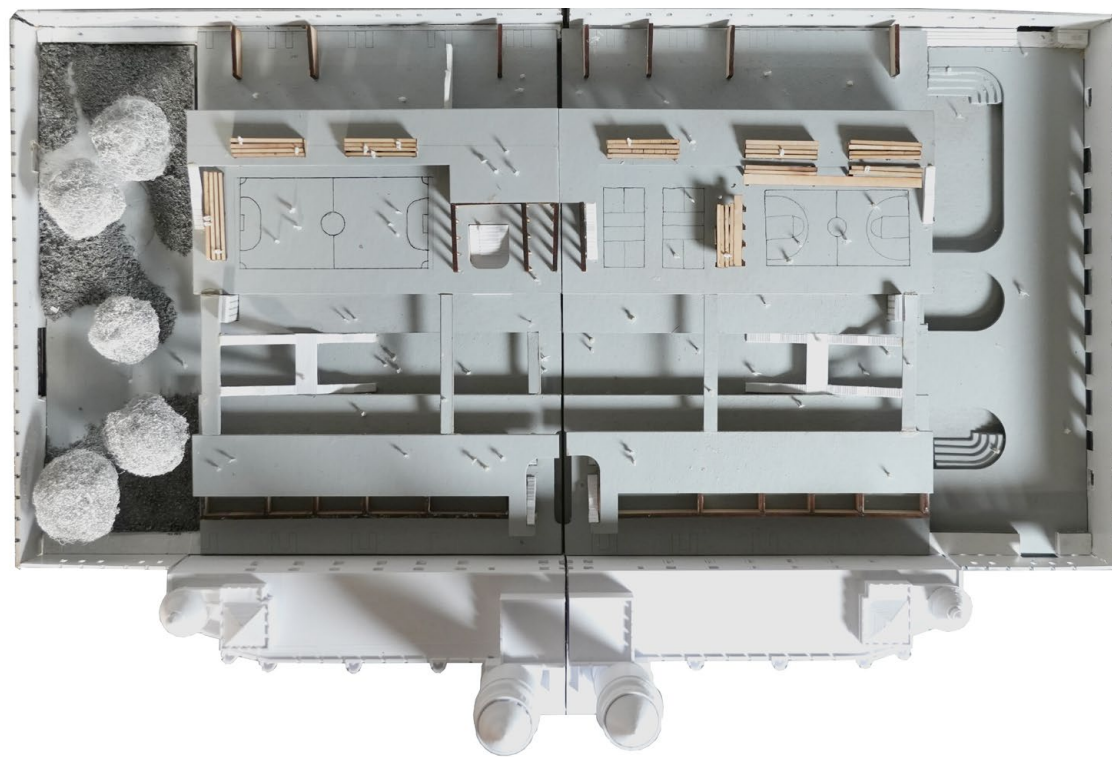
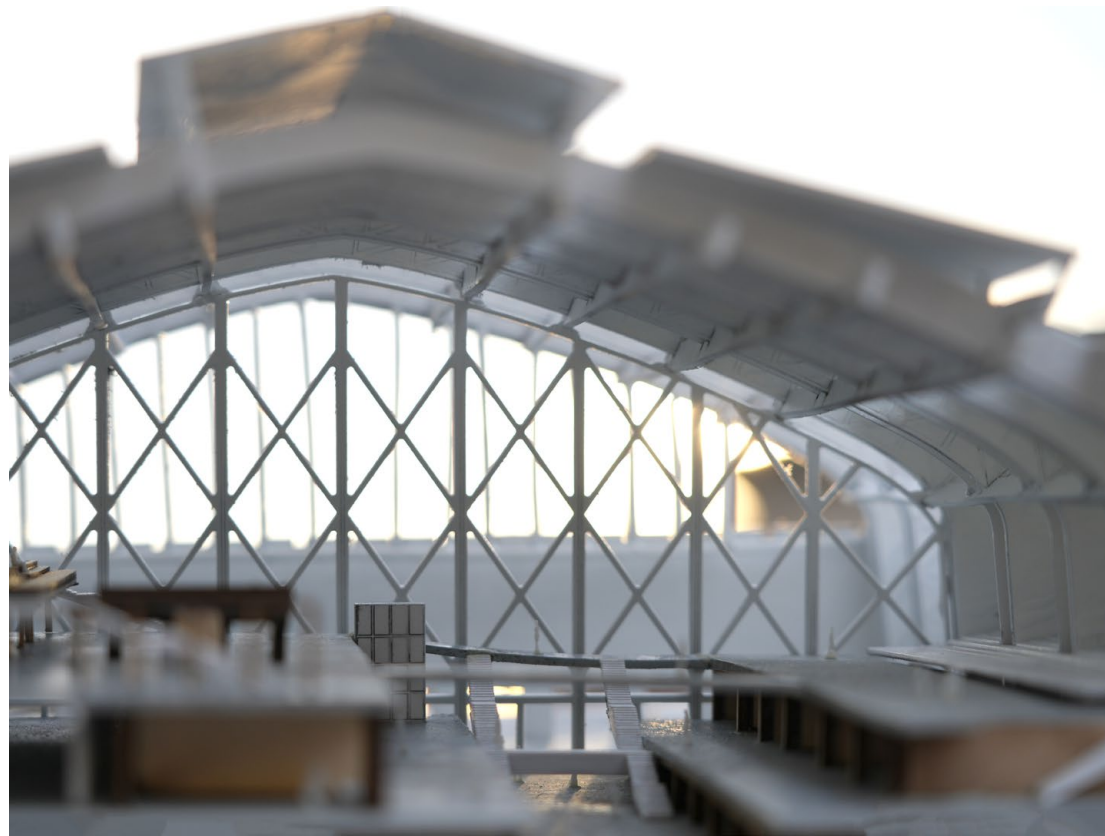
The perspective above shows the small scale textile manufacturing facility, which combines retail, production, and design into one space.

PLAZA ENTRANCE, SUBWAY CONNECTION

Watercolor rendering  
12" x 16"







### PHYSICAL MODEL

3D printed, laser cut cardboard, wood, and wire; 34" x 34"

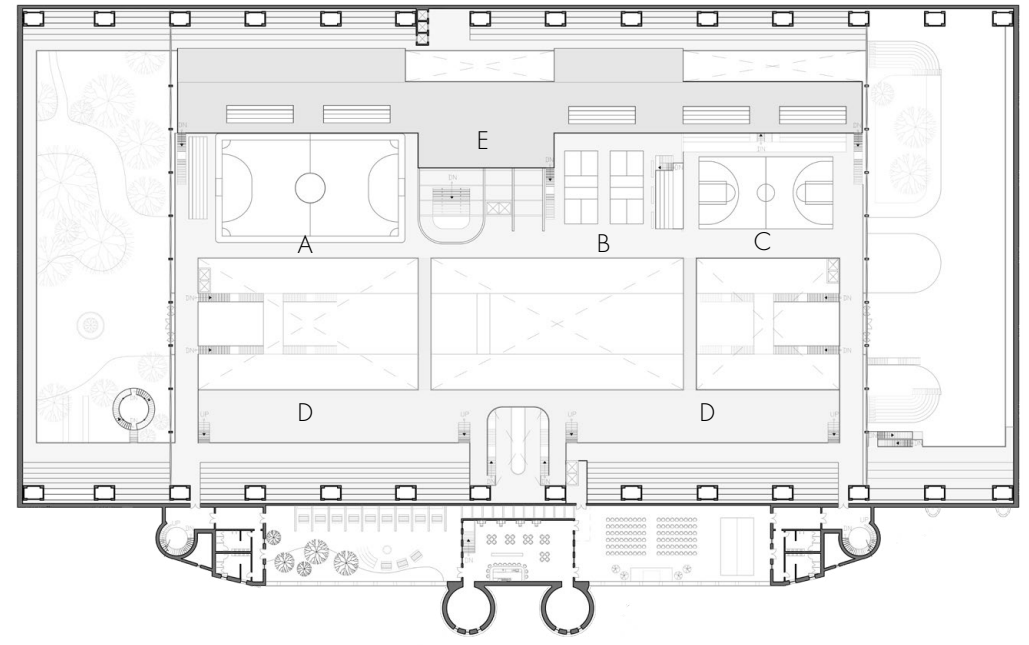


SECTION MODEL  
physical model  
17" x 34"



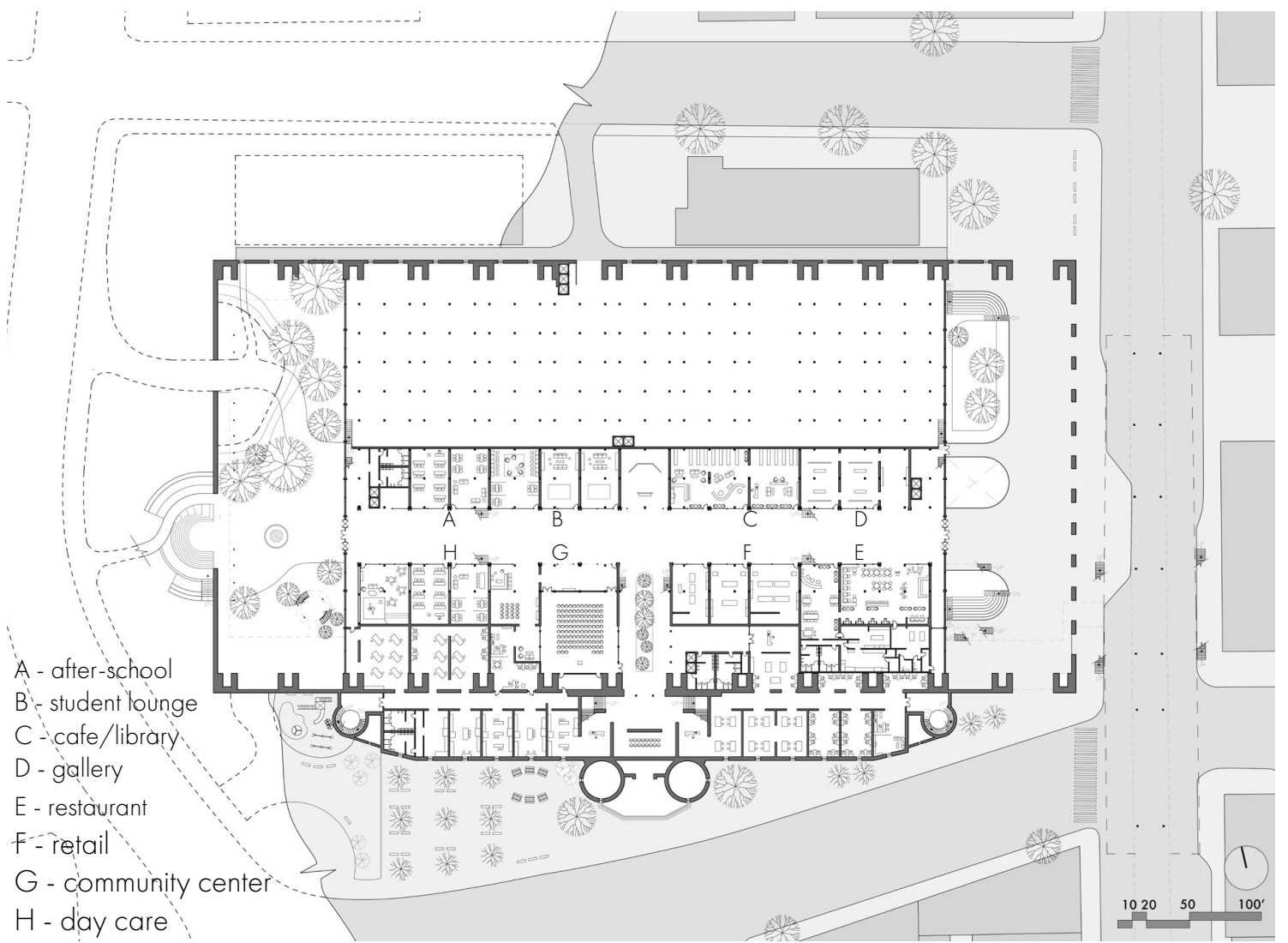
PERSPECTIVE FROM SUBWAY;  
PLAZA ROOF

watercolor rendering  
12" x 16"



- A - futsal court
- B - pickleball
- C - basketball
- D - flex space
- E - viewing deck

TOP PLAN



- A - after-school
- B - student lounge
- C - cafe/library
- D - gallery
- E - restaurant
- F - retail
- G - community center
- H - day care

PLAN AT MAIN STREET

# 03 "GET PUMPED"

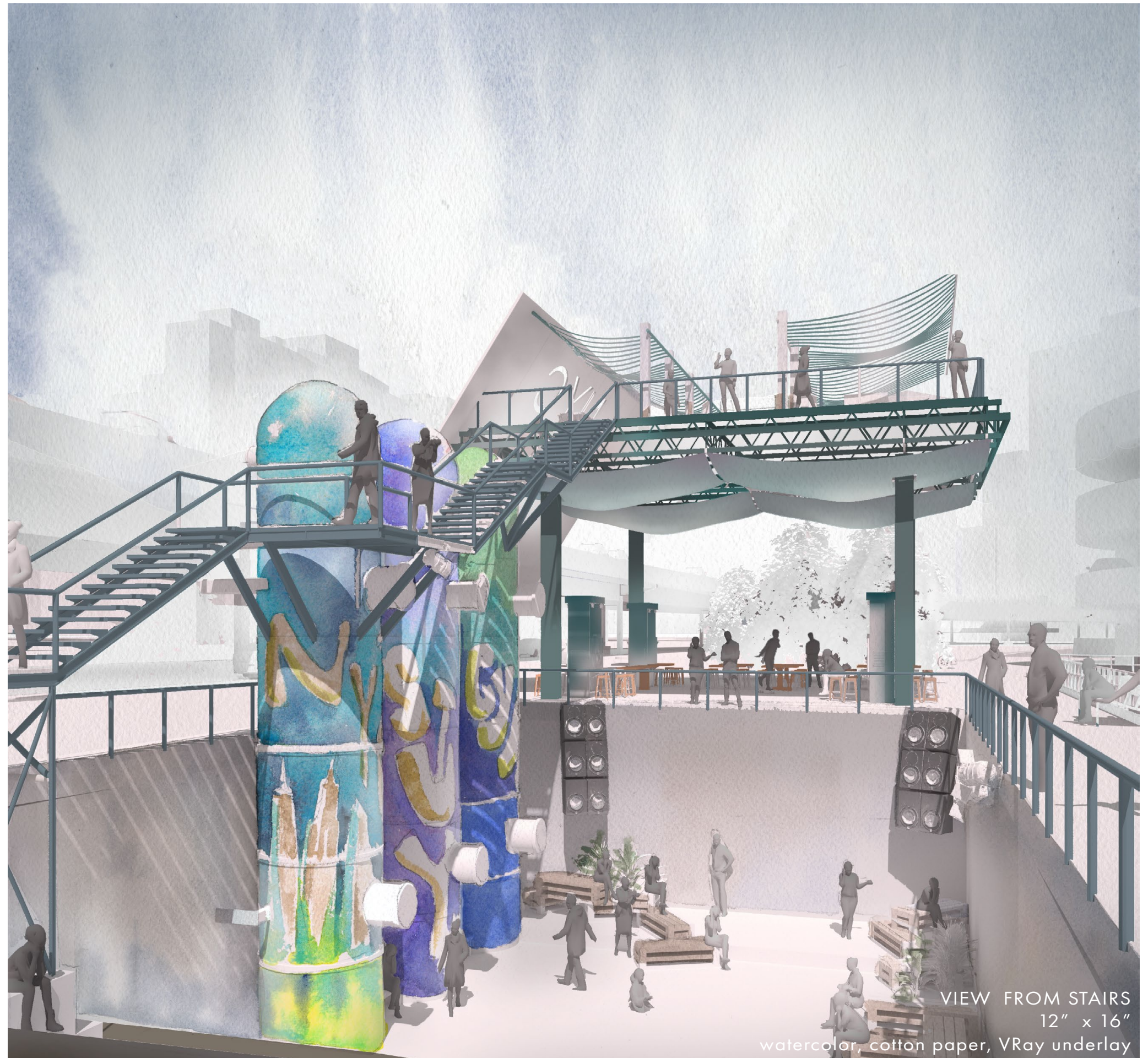
Adaptive reuse of a gas station in Manhattan

PROJECT DATE  
STUDIO  
CRITIC  
PROJECT SITE

**SPRING 2024**  
**PERMINANTLY IN PROGRESS**  
**RACHAPORN CHOOCHUEY**  
**MANHATTAN, NYC**

AS GAS STATIONS are pushed out of Manhattan due to tightening real estate and EV mandates, the question, "what do we do with these structures?" becomes urgent. Messy toxic entrails and leaky fuel tanks don't make answering it any easier. Yet gas stations are centrally located and perfectly poised for reuse as gateways to a community.

This privately owned BP station on the East River will no longer be dispensing gas in fifty years. Kids will point to the structure and fuel pumps and ask "what are those?". This project is not so much a nostalgic nod to gas powered cars, however, as it is an attempt to turn outdated infrastructure into something beautiful and public.

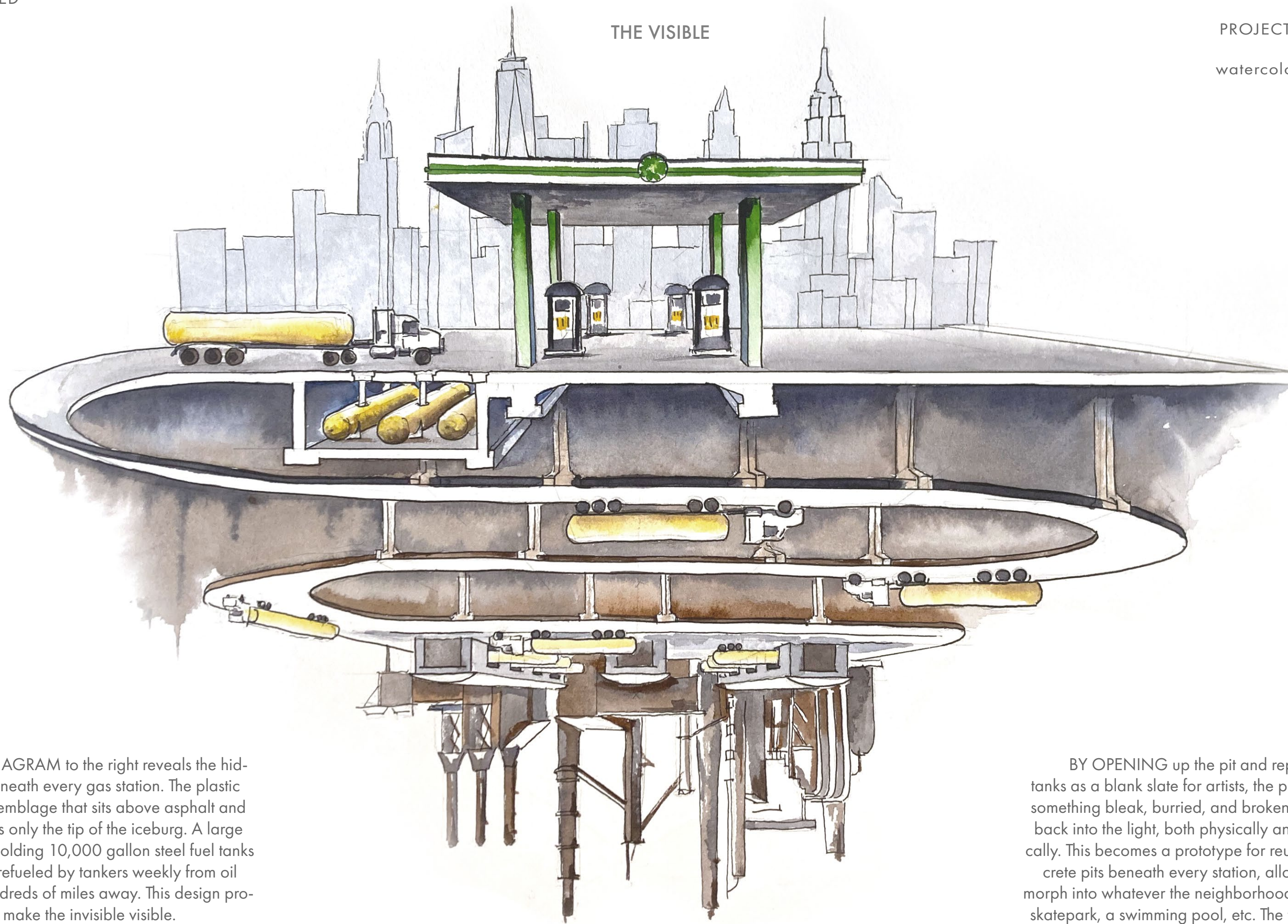


VIEW FROM STAIRS  
12" x 16"

watercolor, cotton paper, VRay underlay

## THE VISIBLE

PROJECT DIAGRAM  
14" x 24"  
watercolor on cotton



THE DIAGRAM to the right reveals the hidden world beneath every gas station. The plastic and steel assemblage that sits above asphalt and receives car is only the tip of the iceberg. A large concrete pit holding 10,000 gallon steel fuel tanks sits beneath, refueled by tankers weekly from oil refineries hundreds of miles away. This design proposal aims to make the invisible visible.

BY OPENING up the pit and repurposing the tanks as a blank slate for artists, the proposal takes something bleak, buried, and broken and brings it back into the light, both physically and metaphorically. This becomes a prototype for reusing the concrete pits beneath every station, allowing them to morph into whatever the neighborhood is missing: a skatepark, a swimming pool, etc. The floor is yours.

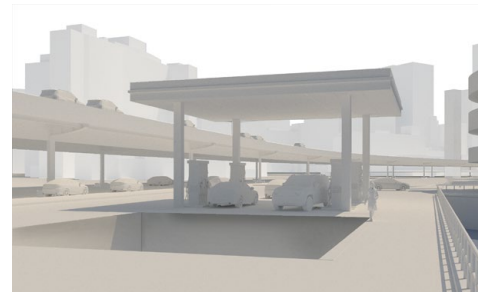
## THE INVISIBLE



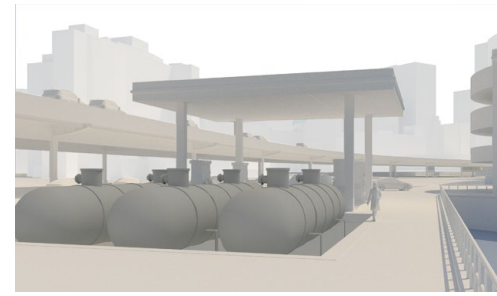
0. EXISTING CONDITION



1. DEMARKATE PIT



2. OPEN UP FUEL PIT



3. RAISE FUEL TANKS

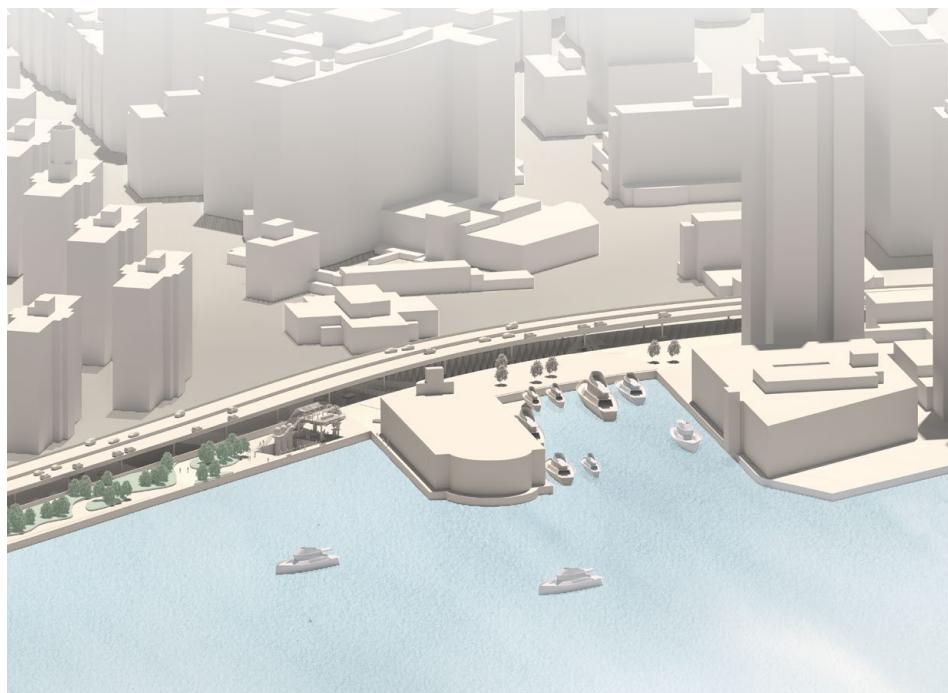


4. TAKE STRIP SHEATHING FROM ROOF FROM ROOF

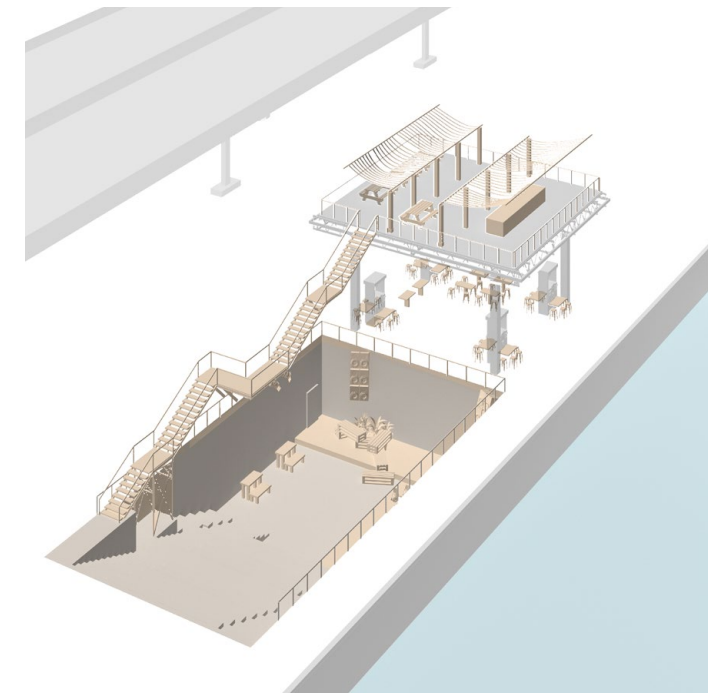


5. TURN BOTH VERTICAL

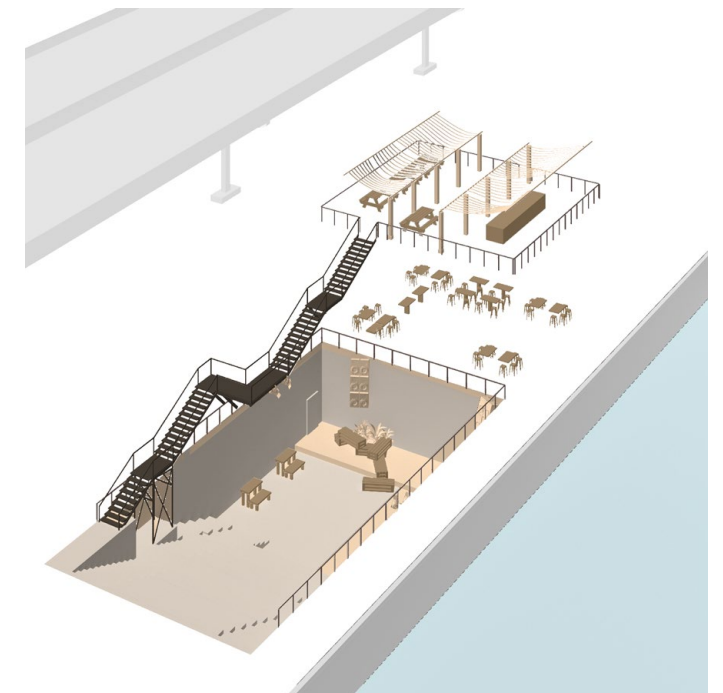
THE STATION currently sits between the FDR elevated highway and the East River. The strategy outlined above is simple: open up the fuel pit, removing the dirt around the tanks, drain the tanks, seal them, and then turn them vertically in the pit to make room. Stairs leading down from the East River Park (currently under construction) will draw the public down into the cool space in summer, and in winter it will be protected from the buffeting winds along the river. The only new infrastructure are the two staircases (one steel, one concrete) which run the length of the pit. Shipping crates, plants, and speakers turn the pit into a multi-function public outdoor space, while the fuel pumps above serve as tables for a small cafe, allowing visitors to "pay at the pump."



SITE PLAN  
URBAN ARMATURE: 23RD ST.  
AND RIVERWALK



EXISTING (light grey)

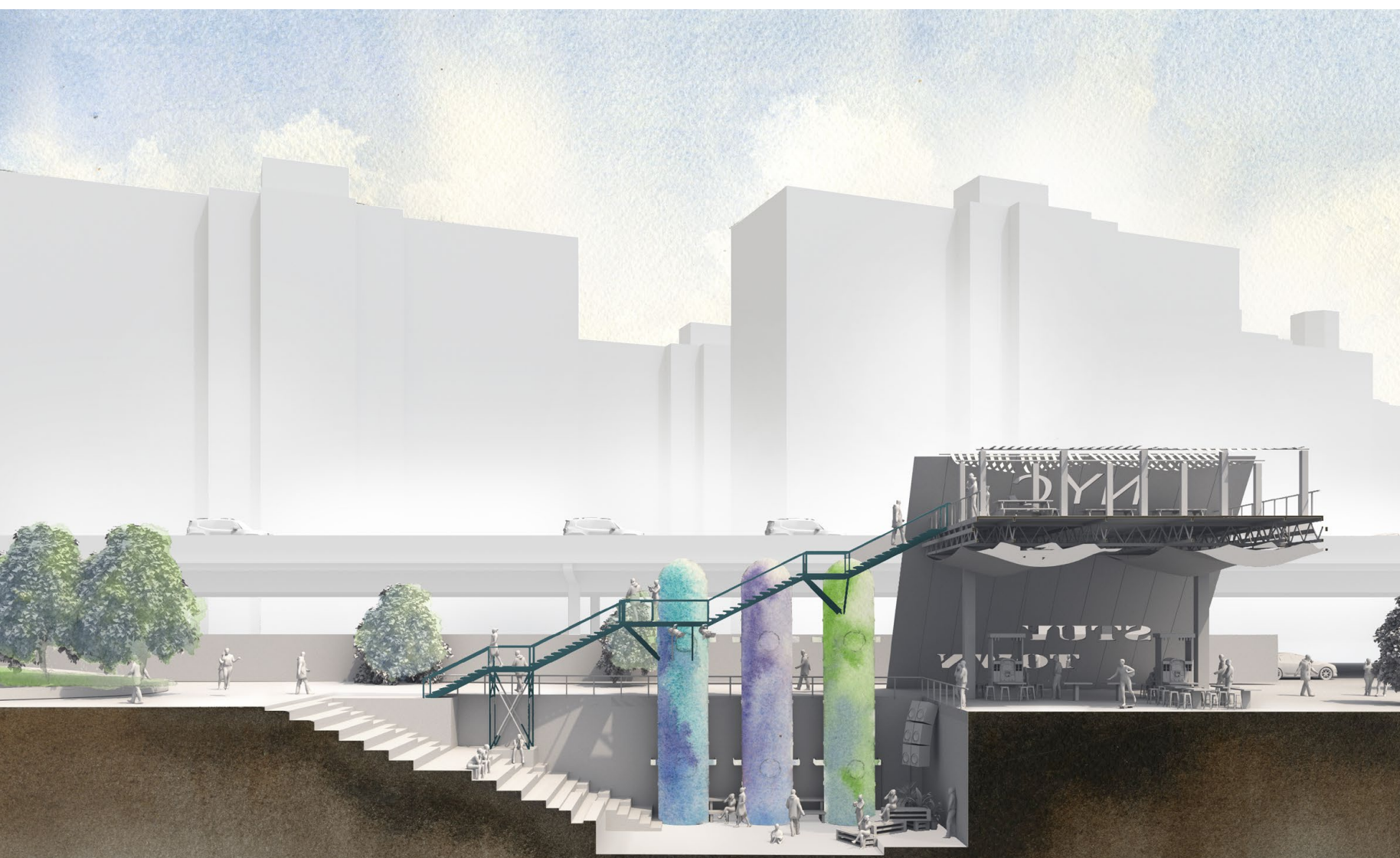


WHAT'S NEW

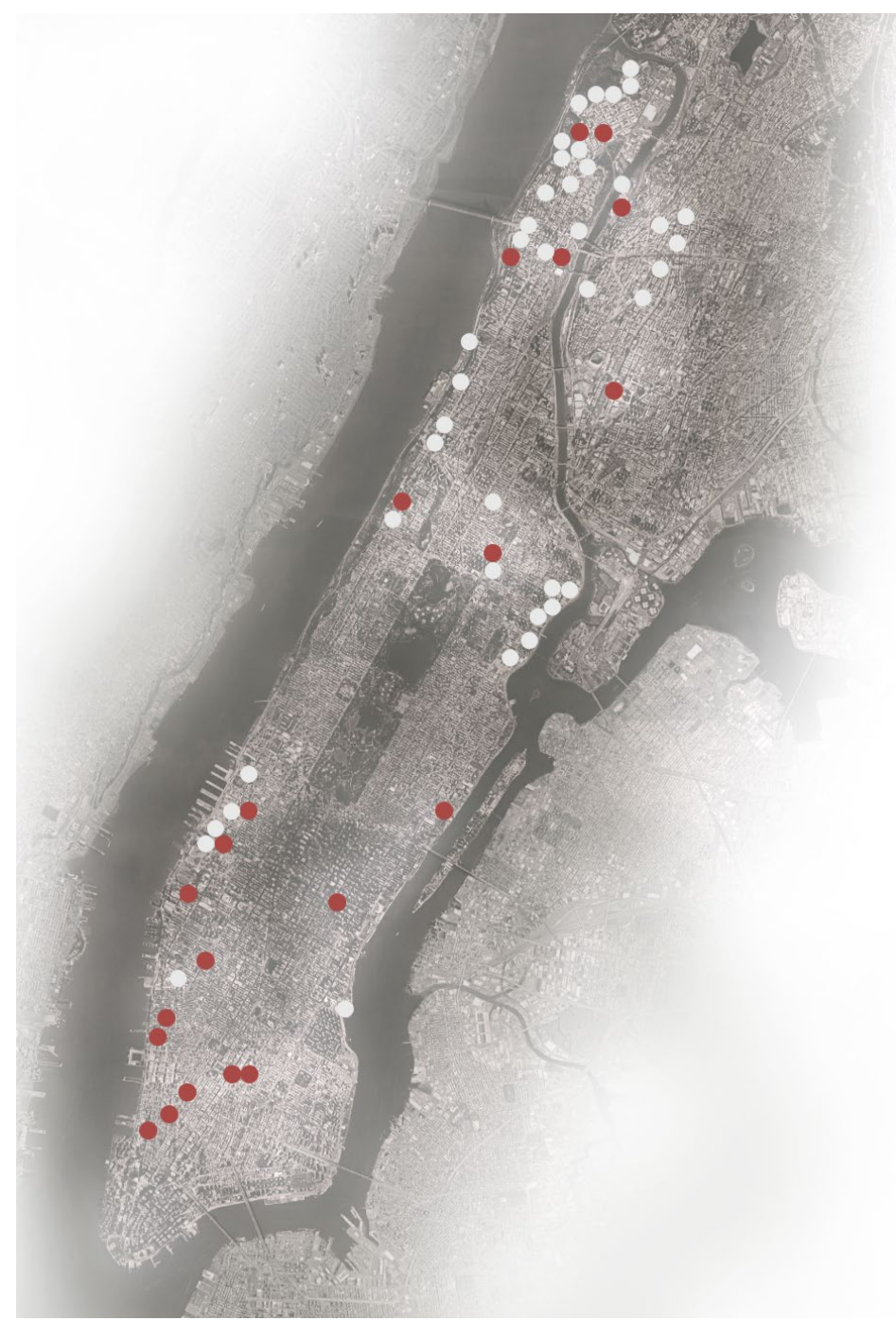


TRANSVERSE SECTION  
watercolor, cotton paper, V-Ray underlay

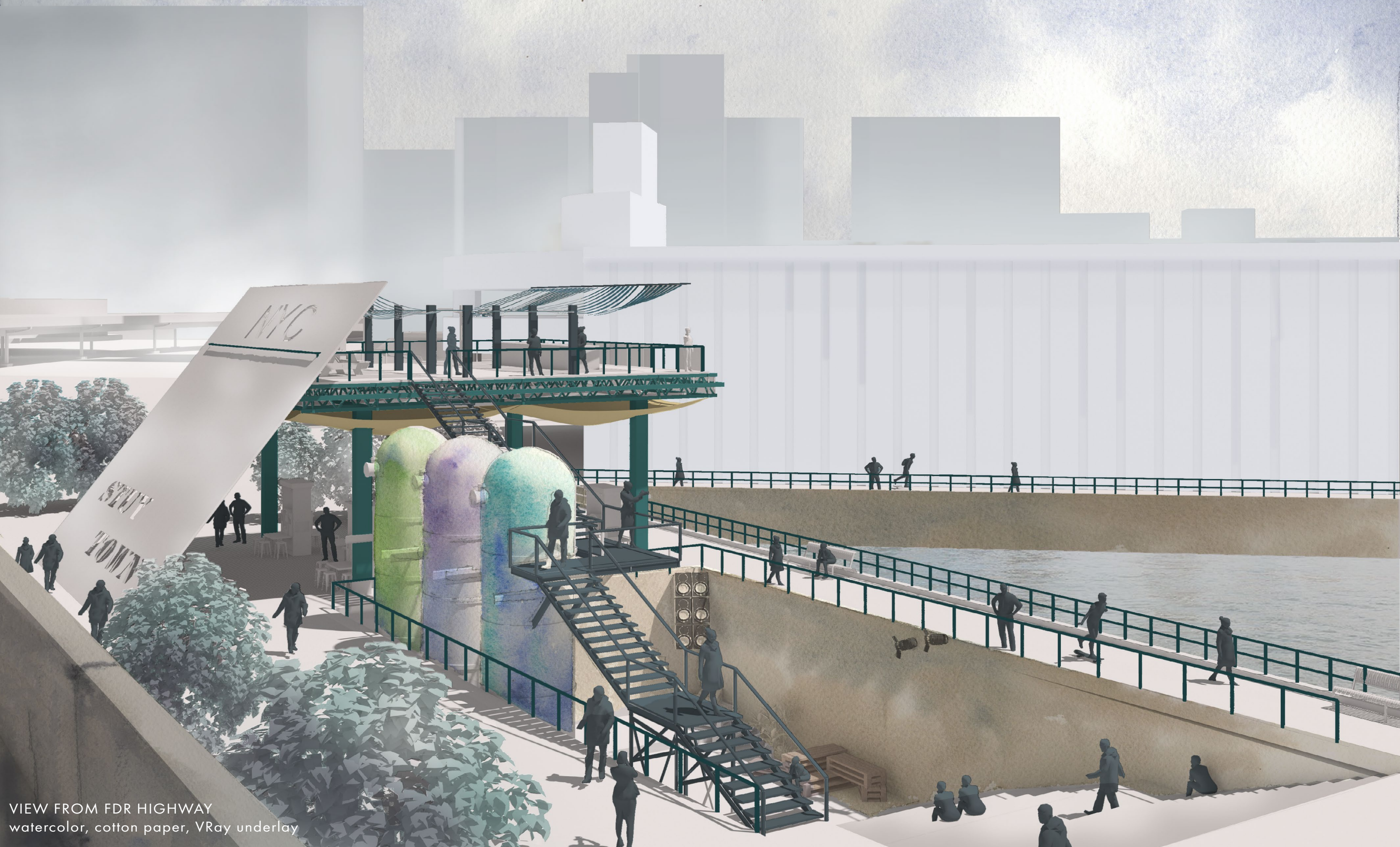




FINAL STEREOMETRY MODEL  
Scale: 1:25; 12" x 14"



EACH DOT above represents a gas station on Manhattan. The red dots are stations that have disappeared in the last fifteen years. The white dots are what's left.



VIEW FROM FDR HIGHWAY  
watercolor, cotton paper, V-Ray underlay

## 04

## "COMFORT"

Artist residences in Thailand

PROJECT DATE  
STUDIO  
CRITIC  
PROJECT PARTNER  
PROJECT SITE

**APRIL 2024**  
**PERMINANTLY IN PROGRESS**  
**RACHAPORN CHOOCHUEY**  
**YIMING XIONG**  
**THAILAND**

CENTERED AROUND pushing the structural limits of load-bearing stone, this studio aimed to disrupt the usage of stone as a purely ornamental material, stuck on building facades like wallpaper.

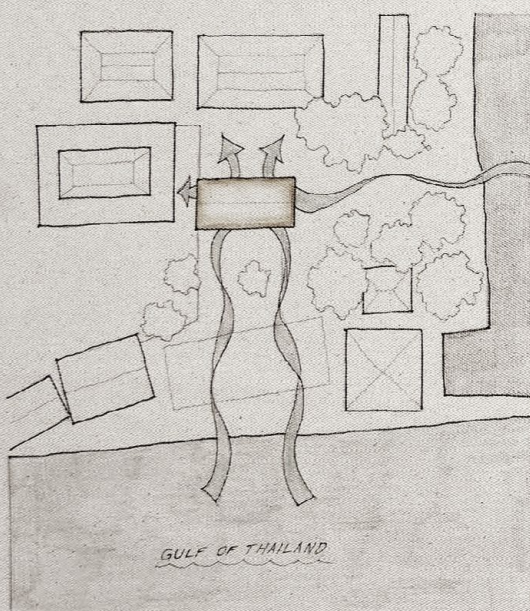
Our site is located next to the oldest surviving fragment of a stone bridge in Rome: the Ponte Rotto. This amazing structure, which has sat in the Tiber for millenia, is overgrown with plants. Our concept was to connect the Tiber Island and the Ponte Rotto to the existing riverwalk and pedestrian/car bridge on the site with an entirely stone bridge. The underside of the stone bridge employs a rib system for lateral stability and funicular curvature to maximize compression forces.



UNIT MODEL  
wood, metal  
18" x 24" x 14"

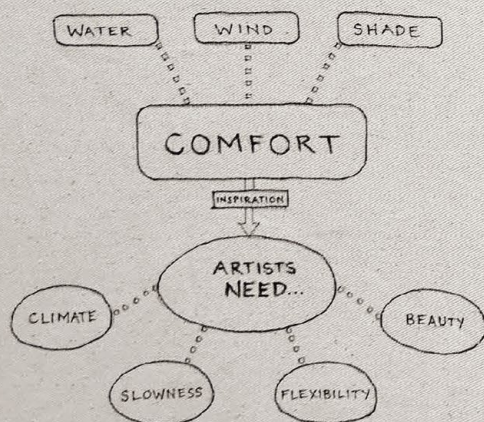
# PROCESS DIAGRAMS

THAILAND EXPERIENCE 3/2 - 3/9



TEMPLE OF SAMUT CHIN

LAT. 13.50702, LONG. 100.53092 ; SAMUT PRAKAN



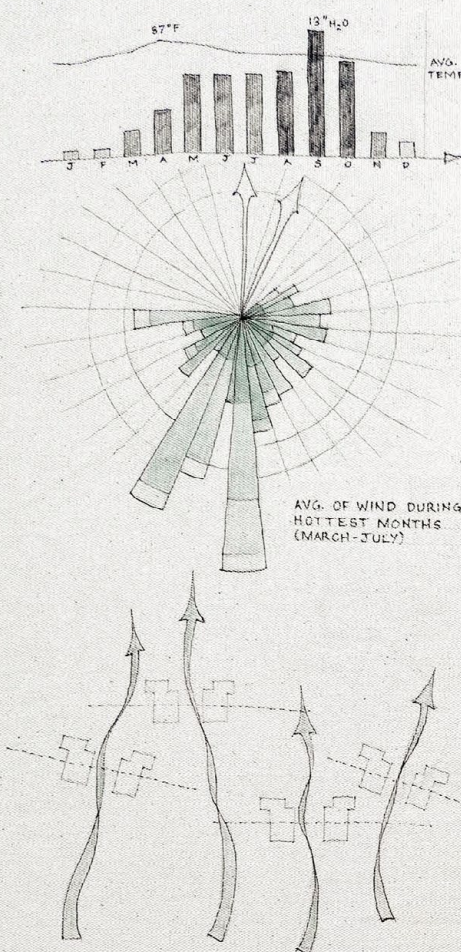
THE MAIN TAKE-AWAY from our travel to the project site in Thailand was that it was hot. Very very hot. The heat was overwhelming. Our proposal aimed to face this head-on, with simple, passively-cooled architecture that was easily adaptable, and could be taken apart without much trouble.

WHILE THERE, I was most comfortable while sitting inside a temple by the water. Passive ventilation, shading, evaporative cooling, and heat stacking all played their part resulting in an indoor temperature well within comfort range. Meanwhile outside it was 98 degrees Fahrenheit.

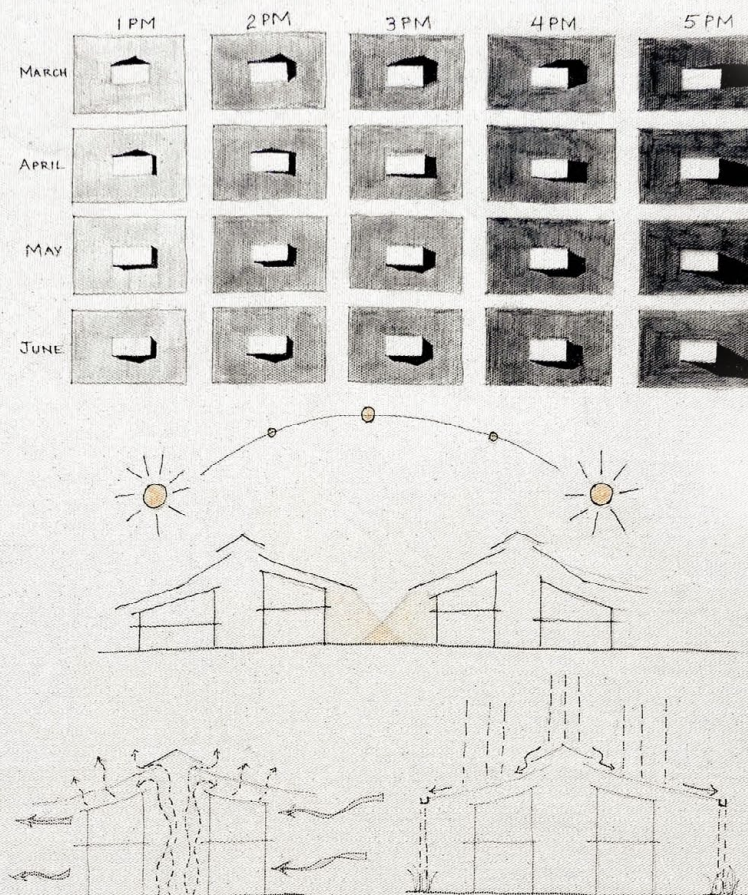
OUR PROJECT centers around providing artists with a comfortable environment where it is easy to produce art, where beauty is present, time slows down, and flexibility is not a luxury.

# CLIMATE

CLIMATE: WIND

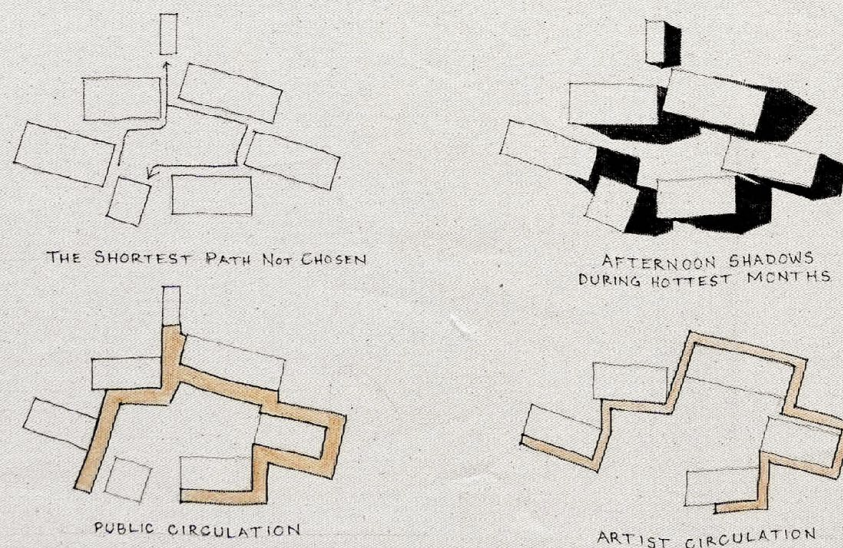


CLIMATE: SHADOW & SUN



WE SPECIFICALLY targeted the hottest months (March-June) and the hottest hours of the day in our climate research. This allowed us to customize our design to specifically temper the climate when most needed. Predominant winds, shadow patterns, and basic principles of passive cooling were all employed.

SLOWNESS AND CONNECTIVITY

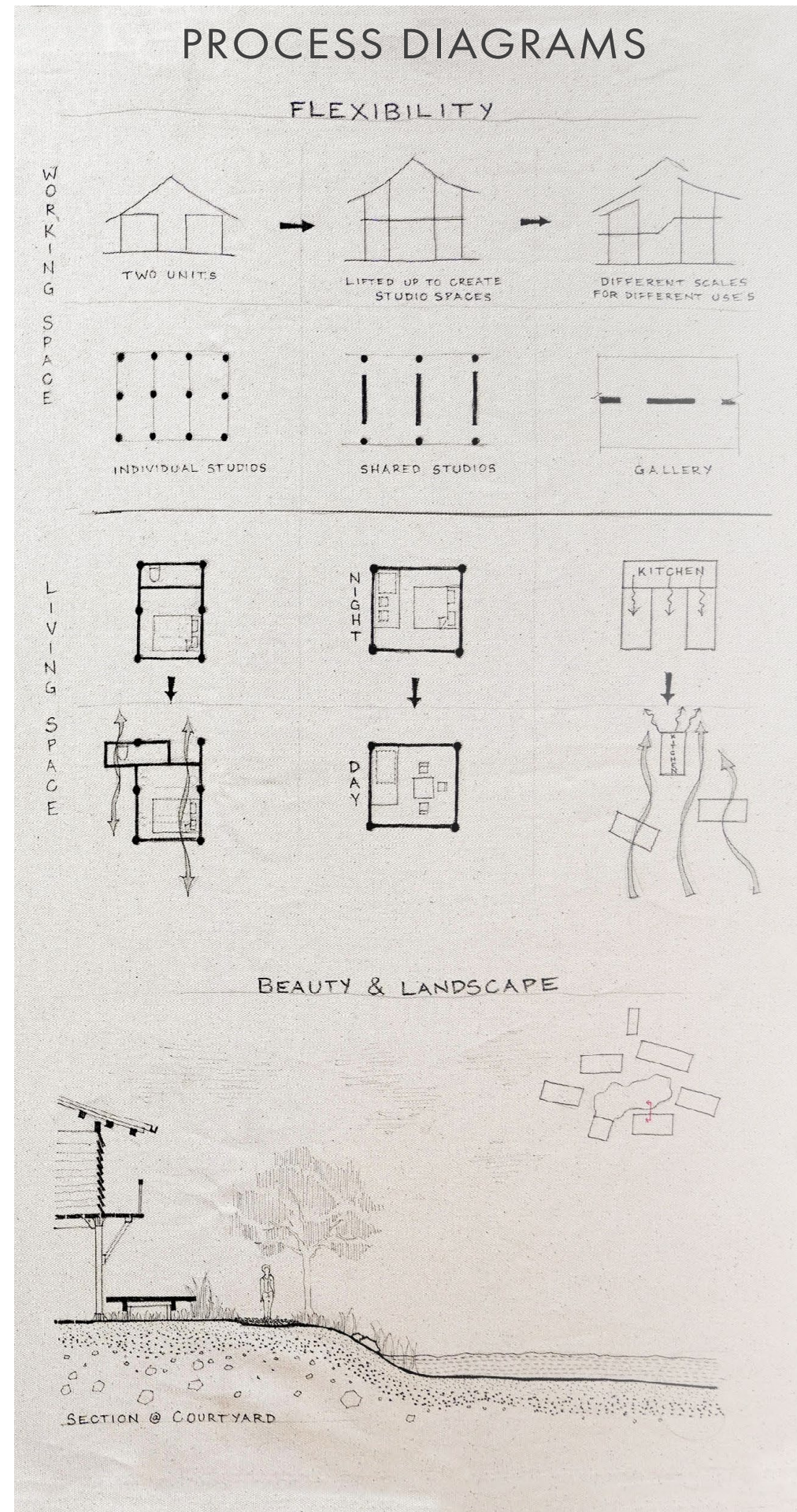


THE PLATFORMS which connect our buildings follow the the shadows created by our designs in the hot afternoons of the hottest months, resulting in a shaded outdoor experience while moving throughout the site.

DIAGRAMS SHEET  
canvas, ink, pencil  
26" x 42"



Site Photos  
Jim Thompson Farm  
Thailand

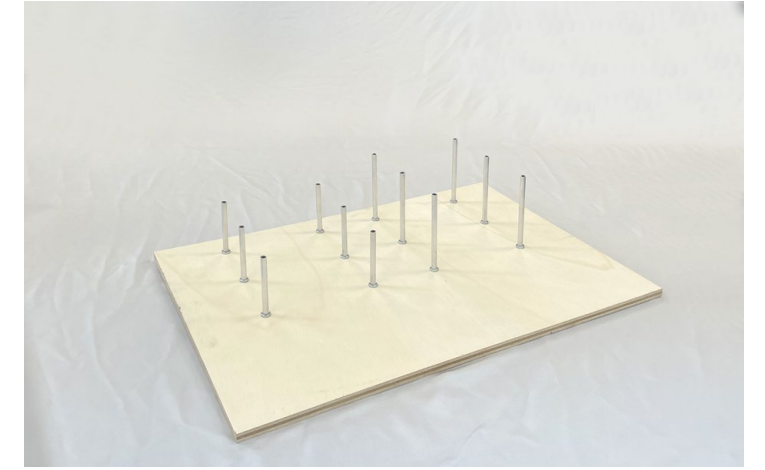
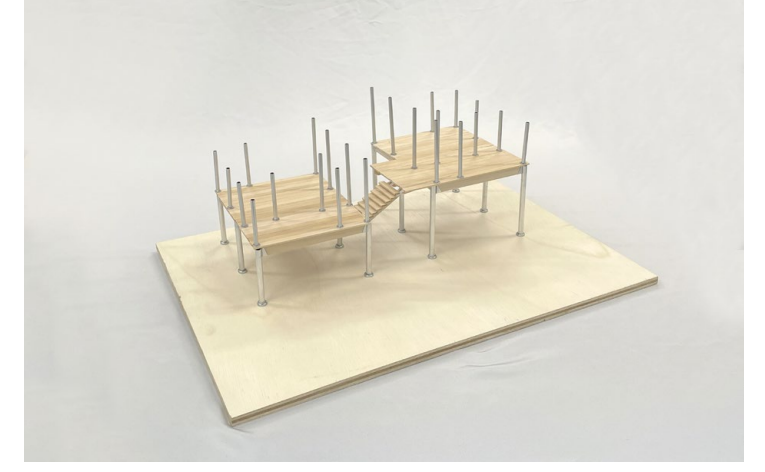


FLEXIBILITY in plan and section was employed both during the design process and imparted to future residents who will have the option to customize their living experience by means of open floor grids with movable furniture, wind screens, shades, etc.

BY SHIFTING elements of our plans horizontally and vertically while designing, we were able to maximize natural ventilation and provide more varied spaces for different art forms.

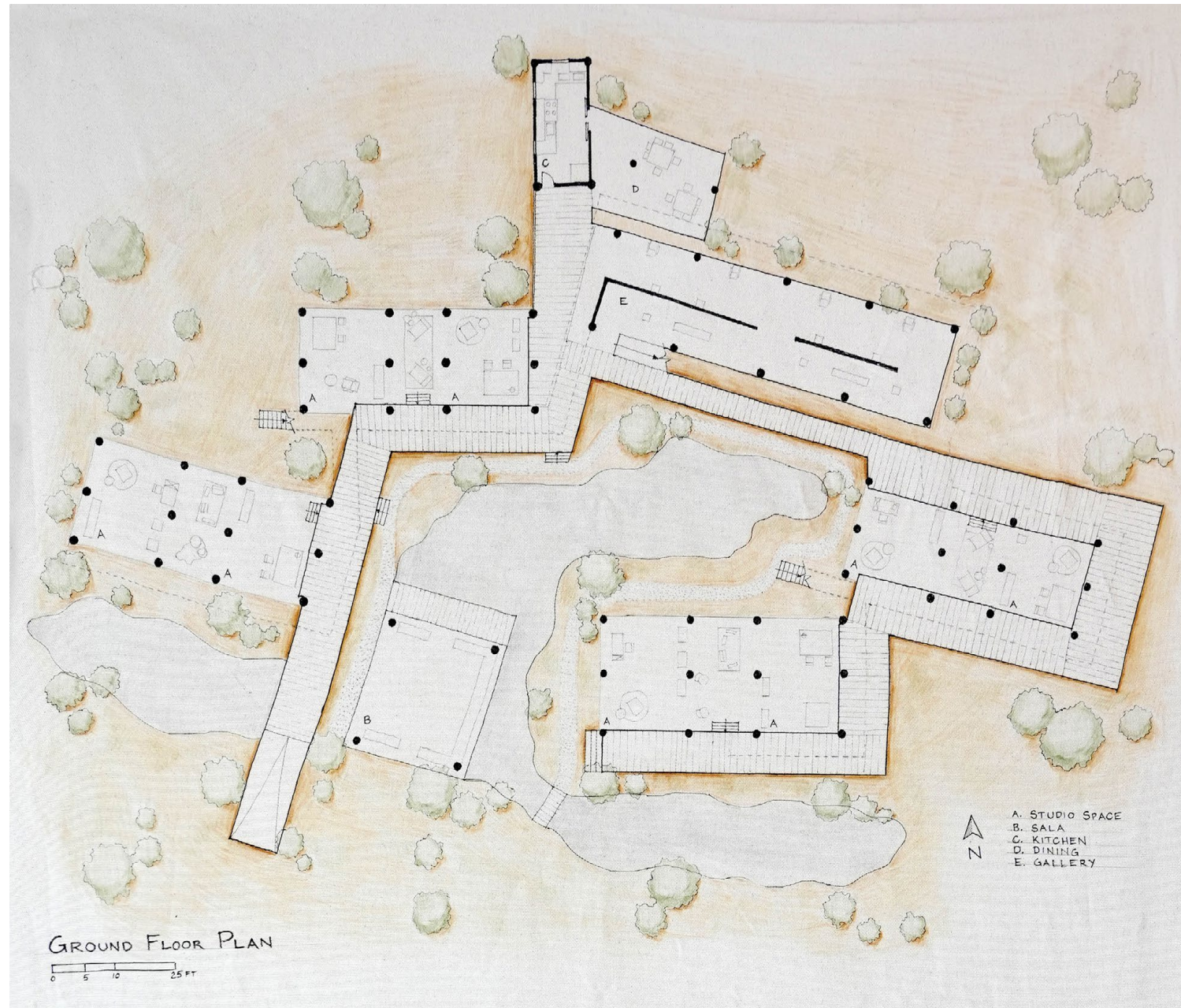
OUR PROJECT gives both artists and visitors a chance to slow down and enjoy the natural landscape already present on the site. Tall grasses, low trees, and abundant ground water pave the way for beautiful landscape design in the inner courtyard.

FLEXIBILITY AND ADAPTABILITY were both requirements for this project, as outlined by the client. In order to facilitate this, each unit is made primarily of impermanent joints, bolted connections, etc. The only concrete used is in the foundation of the 12 steel HSS posts on the ground floor. All other connections are removable. The model images to the right show how the building would be deconstructed, beginning with the removal of its bamboo roof down to its structural foundation.

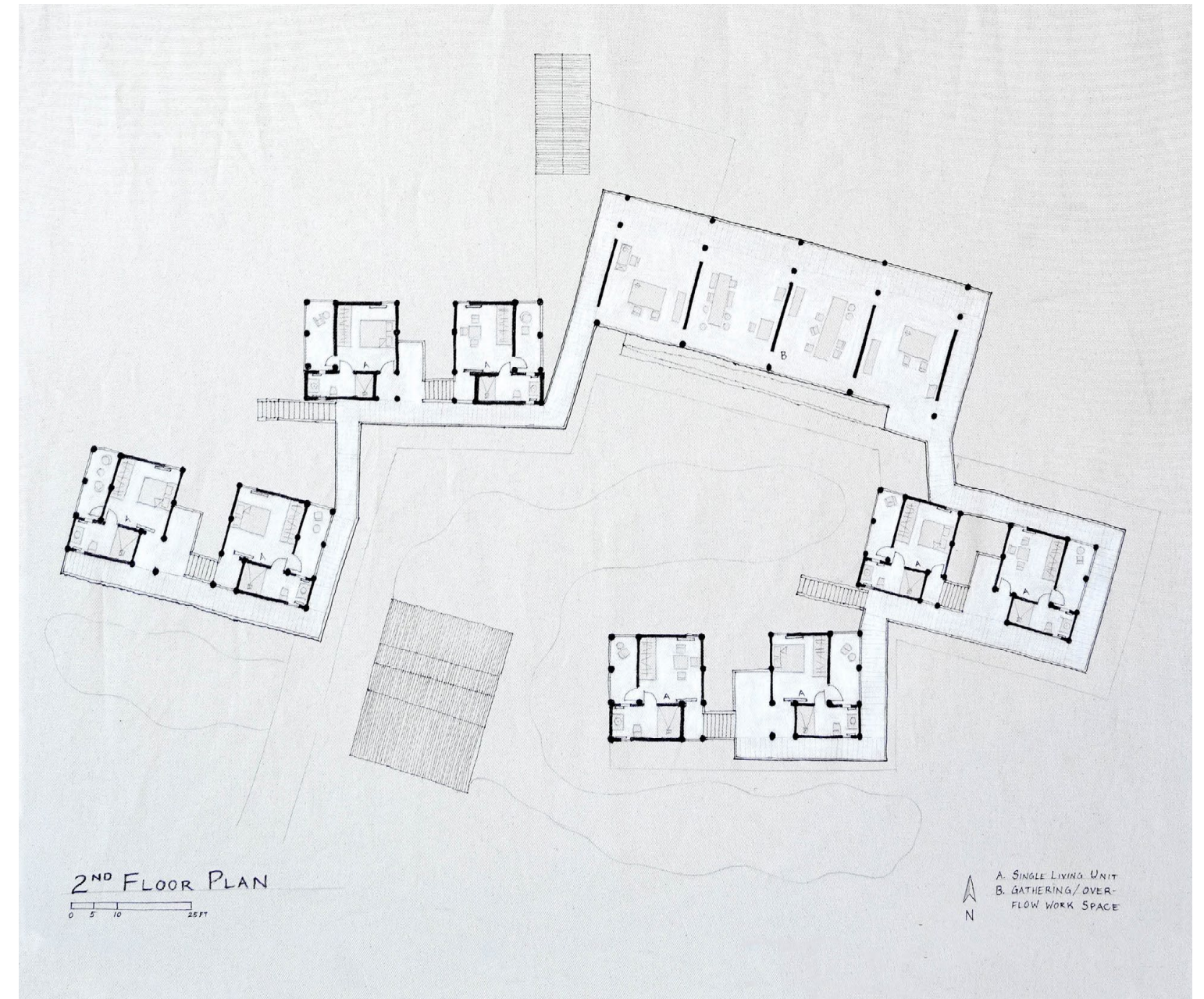


UNIT MODEL  
wood, metal  
18" x 24" x 14"

## FLOOR PLANS



THE SITE consists of a series of buildings all connected by a walking platform which winds between them. The ground level platform is for the public visitors and runs adjacent to the artist studios on the first floor of each unit, allowing visitors to view the artist's work and production spaces. The plans are oriented to receive maximum wind flow, a small pond is set in the inner courtyard allowing for evaporative cooling, and trees are strategically placed to funnel wind.



THE SECOND floor of each building consists of two residential units each with a bathroom, bedroom, and shared staircase. Overflow studio space is centrally located in the larger building above the gallery. A smaller walking platform, located above the public one, runs between the residences and is for residents only. Views throughout are provided of the courtyard.

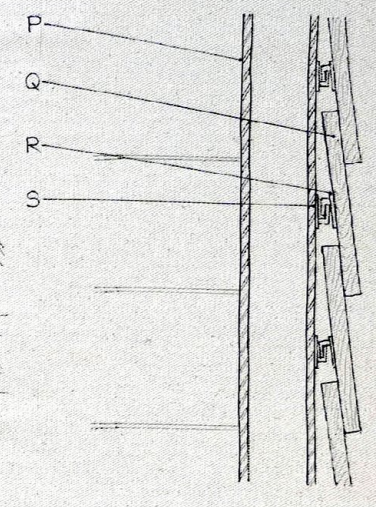
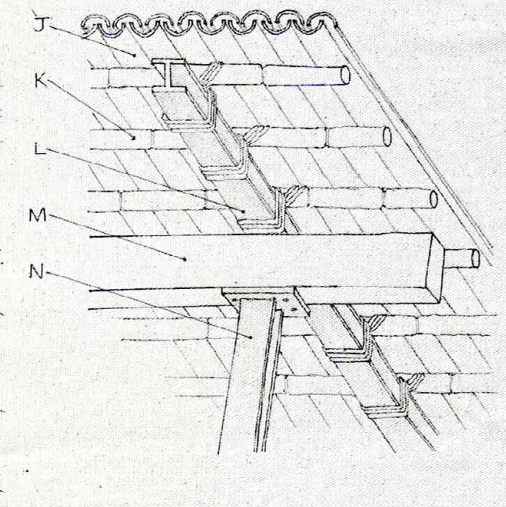
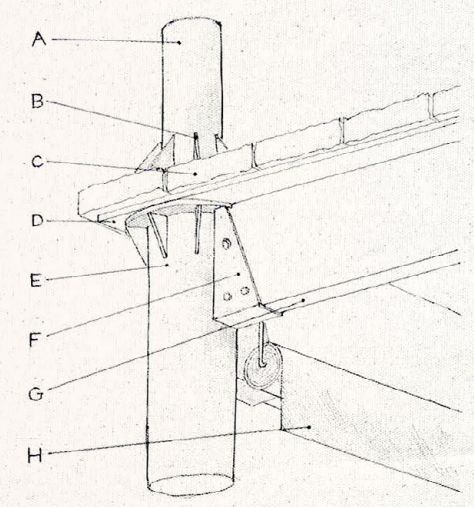
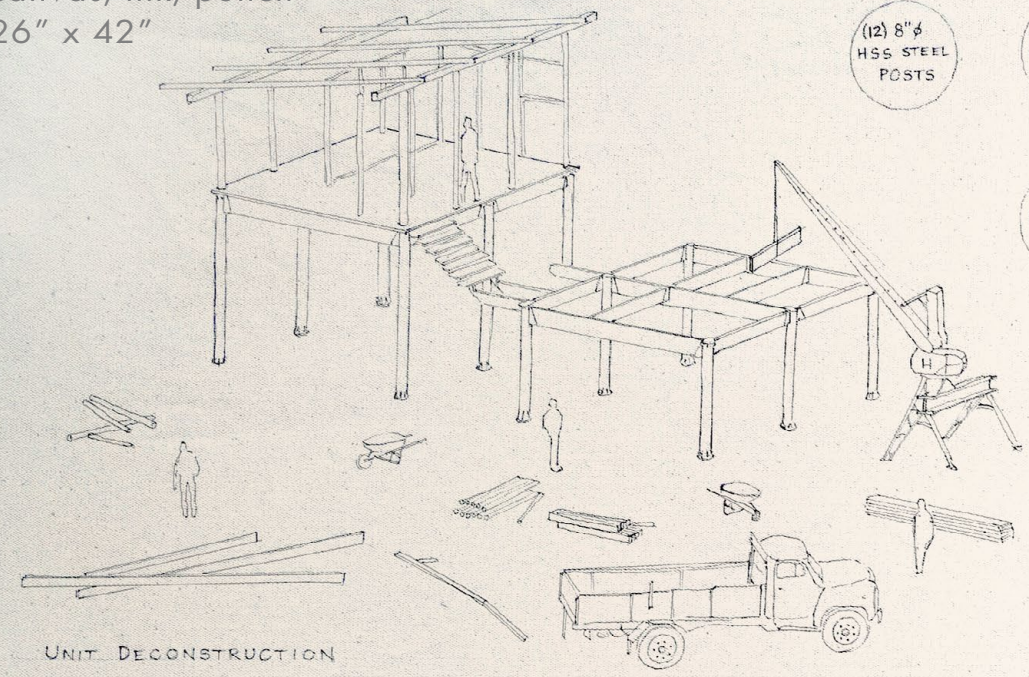
FLOOR PLANS SHEET  
canvas, ink, pencil  
26" x 42"

### CONSTRUCTION DETAILS

canvas, ink, pencil  
26" x 42"

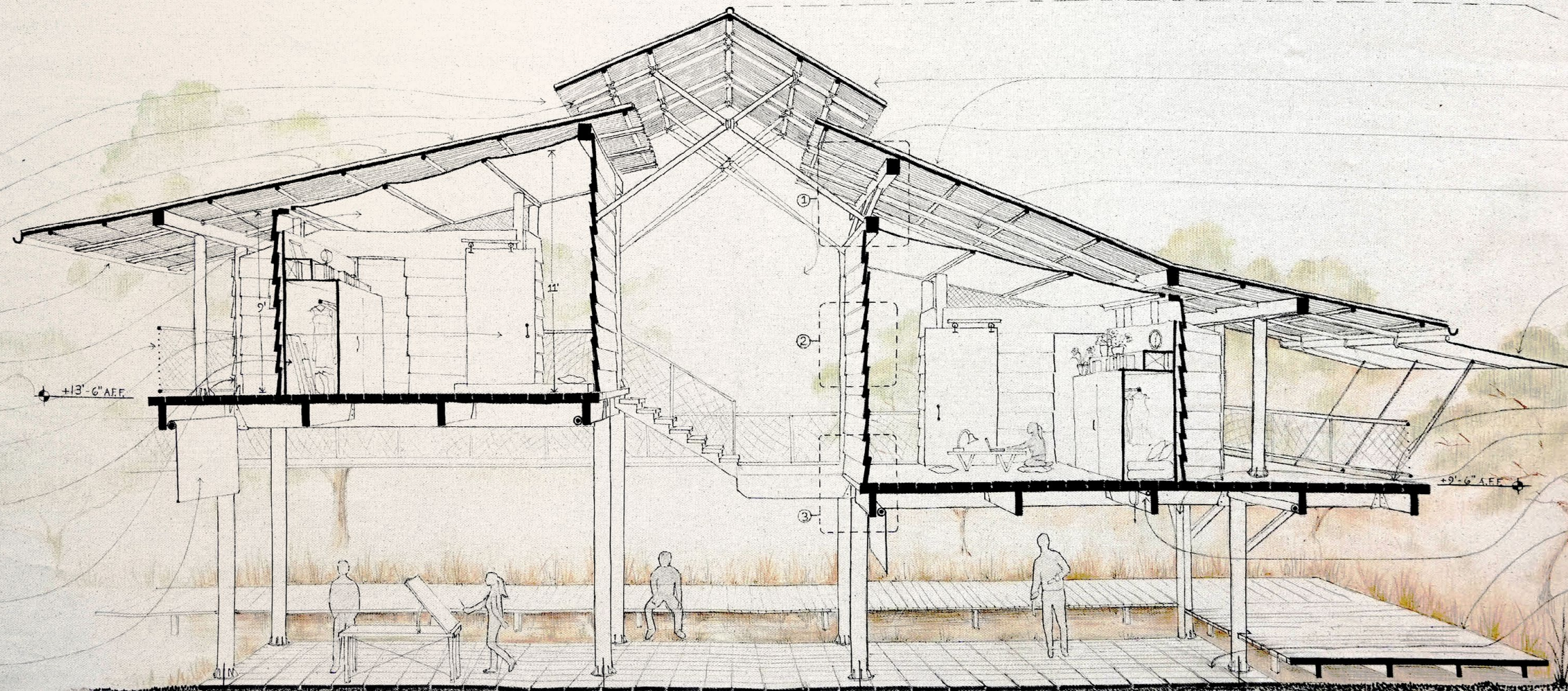
#### MATERIALS PER DOUBLE UNIT

- (12) 8"  $\phi$  HSS STEEL POSTS
- (24) 6"  $\phi$  HSS STEEL POSTS
- (43) STEEL L-BRACKET CONNECTION
- (26) TEAK BEAMS FOR FLOOR STRUCTURE
- (220) TEAK CLAPBOARDS
- $\pm$  (500) 8' SPLIT BAMBOO STALKS



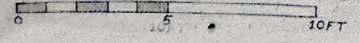
- A. 6"  $\phi$  PAINTED HSS STEEL POST
- B. TUBULAR BASE PLATE W/ STIFFENERS BOLTED TO FLOOR
- C. 2" x 8" TEAK FLOOR BOARDS
- D. 3/4" PLY SUBFLOOR W/ DOUBLE PINE TAR COAT
- E. 8"  $\phi$  HSS PAINTED STEEL POST
- F. BOLTED L-BRACKET STEEL CONNECTION
- G. 2" x 14" STRUCTURAL TEAK BEAM
- H. SEMI-TRANSPARENT POLYESTER MANUAL ROLL-DOWN SHADE
- J. 4"  $\phi$  SPLIT BAMBOO RODS TREATED W/ BORIC ACID, LASHED TOGETHER
- K. 3"  $\phi$  BAMBOO CROSS SUPPORTS NAILED TO UPPER LAYER
- L. 4.5" x 4" PAINTED STAINLESS STEEL H-BEAM
- M. 6" x 8" TEAK BEAM
- N. 4.5" x 4" PAINTED STAINLESS STEEL H-BEAM W/ BOLTED CONNECTION
- P. 6"  $\phi$  PAINTED STAINLESS STEEL H-BEAM HSS POST
- Q. 1.5" x 14" TEAK SIDING, TYR
- R. ALUMINUM L-CLIPS NAILED TO INSIDE FACE OF SIDING
- S. EXTRUDED ALUMINUM RAILS SCREWED TO HSS POSTS

- OPENING BETWEEN BAMBOO ROOFS TO FACILITATE CHIMNEY EFFECT IN SPACE BELOW
- LASHED BAMBOO STRUCTURE @ UPPER ROOF
- PUNCHED HOLES IN BAMBOO FORMING HEAT ESCAPE VENT ABOVE CLOTH ROOF BELOW
- 4" GALVANIZED STEEL GUTTER
- WOOL & POLYESTER BLEND LOWER ROOF ON ALUMINUM RAILS
- 1"  $\phi$  STEEL RAILING W/ WOVEN FIBER NETTING
- SLIDING DOORS @ ALL OPENINGS
- CLOSET FOR MATTRESS DURING DAY AND TABLE & CUSHIONS @ NIGHT
- TEAK WOOD CLIP-ON CLAPBOARD SIDING ATTACHED TO HSS STEEL POSTS & LIGHT WOOD FRAMING AT CERTAIN LOCATIONS
- ADJUSTABLE ROLL-DOWN SHADES @ ALL PERIMETER OPENINGS



- $\pm$  29'-0" A.F.F.
- WATERPROOF PITCHED BAMBOO ROOF TREATED W/ BORIC ACID
- DOUBLE HEIGHT COMMON SPACE ACTS AS WIND TUNNEL
- GAP BETWEEN WATERPROOF UPPER ROOF & FABRIC LOWER ROOF PREVENTS HEAT GAIN FROM SOLAR RADIATION
- CANVAS ROOF EXTENSION ON ADJUSTABLE METAL POLES FOR ADDITIONAL SHADE
- UPPER PLATFORM CONNECTING LIVING UNITS; ALLOWS FOR SEPARATE CIRCULATION OF RESIDENTS AND VISITORS
- PAINTED BLACK & GREY WATER PIPES FROM BATHROOM ABOVE
- ELECTRICAL METAL TUBING; FEEDS ELECTRICAL SUPPLY BELOW
- LOWER PLATFORM FOR VISITORS @ 18" ABOVE GROUND PLANE FOR SEATING PURPOSES
- SEMI-GLAZED TERRA COTTA FLOORING IN MUDSET OVER CRUSHED GRAVEL & SOIL

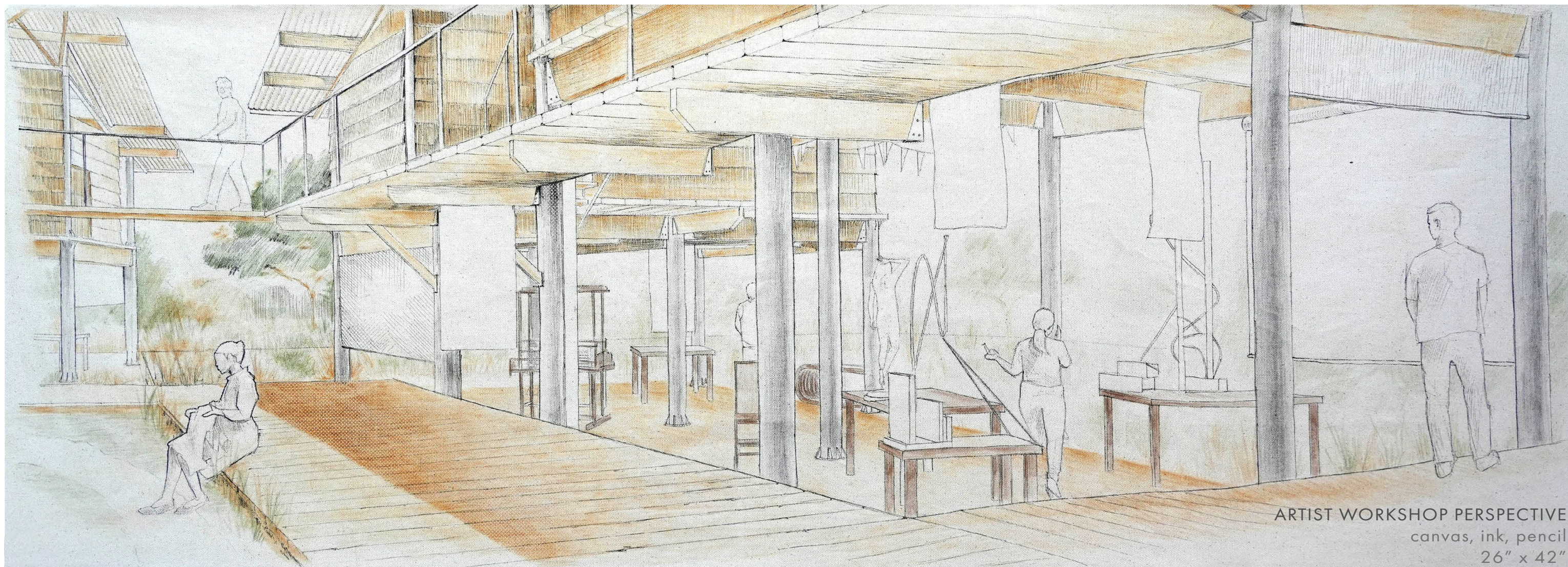
TRANSVERSE SECTION







THE PHOTOS of the model to the left showcase the simplicity of the structure and unit massing. The use of materials is limited to a handful of local materials (such as the bamboo and teak siding) and selective imported materials (such as the steel posts). The perspective below shows the relationship between the platforms at various levels and the artist work spaces. Circulation flow is achieved without disrupting the work of the artists. The perspective also shows how roll-down shades can be used to block hot breezes and direct sunlight. This is an essential measure for mitigating the intense late-afternoon heat.



ARTIST WORKSHOP PERSPECTIVE  
canvas, ink, pencil  
26" x 42"

## 05

"SELECTED  
WRITINGS"

DATE  
CLASS 1  
CRITIC 1  
CLASS 2  
CRITIC 2

**SUMMER 2023, SPRING 2024**  
**TRANSCALARITIES**  
**BART-JAN POLMAN**  
**THE CONTEMPORARY**  
**BERNARD TSCHUMI**

THE FOLLOWING is a selection of writings from two classes: Transcalarities, taught by Bart-Jan Polman and The Contemporary: 1968 - The Present, taught by Bernard Tschumi. The first piece centers on a design competition hosted by the design and architecture firm Superflux on the topic of surveillance. The second collection of writings centers on various topics from

## SURVEILLANCE SURVEILLED

Drone Aviary is an installation by the design firm Superflux featured in London's V&A Museum. At first glance it's unremarkable: from the ceiling of a room hang five motionless drones while a video plays on an adjacent wall. The video's cast of characters are the five objects hung above: flying protagonists in a hypothetical world set a few years from now. Each has a unique role: the largest of the five is an advertising drone, whose flashy LED panels display ads based on scans of onlookers below; age, sex, and clothing are all profiled. Another drone, angular and jet-black, specializes in surveillance, scanning the built environment while collecting data. A traffic drone, equipped with speed LIDAR and warning signs to ensure road safety, hangs in the middle of the flock. A fourth, a media drone, flaunts a speedy build and large camera to allow live-streaming of breaking news in real time. A fifth, the smallest and savviest of the lot, is a small plastic personal drone; users can stream personal footage to their smart phones and social media accounts with ease. It's an unlikely cast of heroines that promise safer roadways and streets, tailored advertising, instant news footage, and enhanced social connectivity. To most, this would sound too good to be true. And that's probably because it is.

The film hints at these characters' dark sides with varying degrees of subtlety: one scene shows an elderly gentleman who, spying a hovering ad drone above, shields his face with a folder, aware the cameras are rolling. The film's music score, an eerie high-pitched buzzing, acts as a predictive mechanism for the sonic pollution these aviaries would no doubt cause. No dramatic drone crashes are shown, no network failures, no chunks of metal falling from the sky – it's no Hollywood production. Rather, insinuated throughout is the fact that technology is never just technology. It's not a pill that society swallows and flourishes from. There's no "tech FDA" to ensure side-effects are minimal. Instagram, for example, a simple platform for friends to connect on, has become a leading vehicle for internet predators, a time-suck for billions, sparked international debates on mental health, and been linked to teen suicides – all unforeseen consequences of a playful platform.

Inserting millions of flying cameras into a complex, perhaps overly interconnected world is asking for trouble. The fact that privacy is already viewed as an elusive luxury does not help. Apple ads no longer flaunt camera pixel-count, but rather data privacy and encryption algorithms. If breaches to privacy occur online and within the aluminum walls of cellphones, extending this front to the entire atmosphere above is unwise and naïve at best.

"All Of This Belongs To You" is the title of the exhibition which this installation is part of. It's an understated and eerie warning to the tech fanatics, the idealists, the opportunists, the "Steve Jobs'" and "Zuckerberg's" of this world: be careful what you wish for

## Bernard Tschumi: The Contemporary - 1968 to the Present

“Currently, the world is dominated by cheap, banal structures, a sea in which the architectural object ceases to exist. This bifurcates the role of architecture. On the one hand, the interior becomes more important, and on the other, urbanism is brought to the fore.”

-Winy Maas, Towards An Urbanistic Architecture

Maas bluntly summarized something that most people experience on a daily basis: an encounter with buildings in which one wonders “how did this thing ever get built?” He refers to such buildings as a sea, implying both their ubiquity and homogeneity. Thanks to economic forces, developers prefer to focus on the interiors of these buildings. They are meant to be occupied (usually by rent) rather than looked at. There is certainly little attempt to relate them to surrounding context. And urbanism is brought to the fore for the same reason that immigration has been brought to the fore in politics: it’s in crisis.

“The elevator —with its potential to establish mechanical rather than architectural connections — and its family of related inventions render null and void the classical repertoire of architecture. Issues of composition, scale, proportion, detail are now moot.”

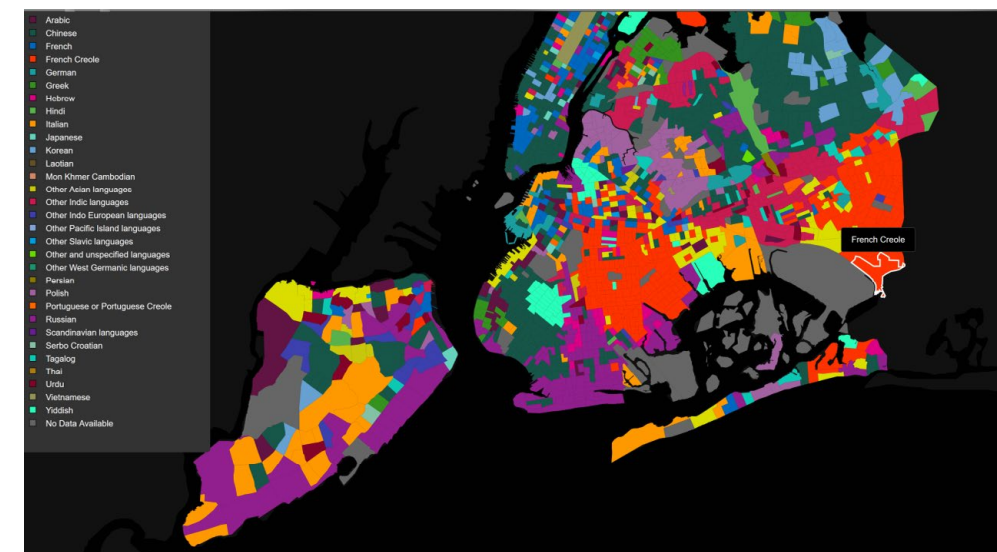
Rem Koolhaas, Bigness (quoting from Delirious New York)

This quote, in which Koolhaas quotes a maxim presented in Delirious New York, makes a claim that countless buildings in New York City physically refute. He states that the introduction of a mechanical means of movement (which replaces the staircase – an anchor in the organization of classical plans) renders composition, scale, proportion, and detail moot. But the connection between these classical principles and the staircase is not like the umbilical cord, which when cut precludes life. Nor is there some mysterious link between these principles and Smallness. True, these principles were developed when Bigness was not an option. But too many Big examples exist in which composition, scale, proportion, and detail are clearly still everything to the architect – the Woolworth Building, the Chrysler, the Flatiron, the Empire State to name a few – for this quote to bear its own weight.

In New York there is this double miracle: each of the great buildings and each of the ethnic groups dominates or has dominated the city – after its own fashion. Here crowdedness lends sparkle to each of the ingredients in the mix whereas elsewhere it tends to cancel out differences.”

- Baudrillard: The Beaubourg-Effect

The crowdedness of New York is not senseless. New York’s density has formed organically and coherently over the decades, pulsating as new pockets of people arrive to the city. It is a city of immigrants: some migrate daily, swarming the city like locusts at dawn, to be spat out again in the evening. Some migrate because they seek a new dawn, a fresh start. Commuters and dreamers alike give the city its restlessness. The language map above, whose confetti colors reflect the diversity of languages spoken, sparkles because each color has a boundary. It’s not a blend. Every painter knows that blending the colors on the palette yields a colorless black blob. But adjacencies of color, on the other hand, emphasize the pigments, beautifying them. The same happens in New York. There is a common canvas – the city itself – but the paints are not blended into a mush. Pockets, communities, bubbles: these make New York distinct and vibrant.



# 06

## "PHOTO- GRAPHY"

PROJECT DATE  
CLASS  
CRITIC

**FALL 2023**  
**ARCHITECTURAL PHOTOGRAPHY**  
**MICHAEL VAHRENWALD**

PHOTOGRAPHY IS MORE than a documentation device. It freezes moments in time and casts them against the present. Paired with architecture, this capability is particularly striking: buildings no longer are stagnant structures from the past, but have a life of their own in the present. People interact with them. So does light. And so does just about everything else. It's the lens' job to capture this.

RENZO PIANO'S JEROME  
GREENE SCIENCE CENTER  
New York, NY  
photograph





*clockwise from far left:*  
AVERY HALL, ROLL OF DRAWINGS, STAIRCASE  
New York, NY  
photographs

# PHILIP SPENCE

ARCHITECT

SELECTED WORKS

M.S.AAD Columbia University

The Chrysler at Night  
Plein Air Sketch  
5" x 12"

