

THE STAGE OF BEING

Reimagining Skäne Bastion

Kira Zeinstra

Willemijn Wilms Floet

Willie Vogel

Niels Tilanus / Pierre Jennen

Gilbert Koskamp

My project explores how architecture can create a space that invites children to spend time, play, and build a meaningful relationship with, what we commonly refer to as “nature.” Rather than attempting to mimic nature in a literal sense, the project introduces the idea of “supernature”: an enhanced, constructed environment that evokes the same emotional and sensory experiences as those found in forests, meadows, or other “natural” landscapes. Through careful attention to sensory design, sight, sound, smell, and touch, the project seeks to generate feelings of wonder, curiosity, and calm, typically associated with being immersed in “nature”.

The project began with a study of the park structure surrounding Tallinn’s historic city centre, focusing specifically on architectural elements, their purpose, placement, and contribution to the liveliness of these parks. It became evident that certain parks were more frequently used due to the presence of small-scale architectural interventions such as fountains, monuments, bridges, or insect hotels. These modest structures seemed to play a crucial role in shaping the experience of place.

Following the selection of the project site, the method Dialogue with the Voiceless was applied and expanded beyond its usual focus on trees. Fourteen different actors were considered, including trees, plants, organisms, children, and adults. The aim was to step into the perspectives of each and explore what constitutes a pleasant and supportive environment for them. This method proved to be highly productive and continues to inform the design development.

Additional methods were explored, such as constructing comparative collages to express

the experience of the site from an adult’s and a child’s perspective. However, this approach fell short of expectations. Although children aged 7 to 9 are smaller in scale, the visual differences represented in the collages were not significant enough to communicate their distinct spatial experience. Literature on embodied perception, particularly the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, revealed that spatial experience is not governed by vision alone, but by the entire body. This deeper understanding helped shift the methodological focus toward more embodied and multisensory strategies, rather than purely visual ones.

The choice of topic stems from a strong personal frustration with the current state of human behaviour, particularly the tendency toward egocentrism. Despite growing awareness of environmental degradation, there seems to be little genuine effort to respect or attend to the needs of other living beings. Rather than maintaining a human-centric worldview, this project seeks to promote a shared sense of place, where humans and non-humans are considered in the design process.

But why focus on children? From my research into biophilia, which suggests that every human being possesses an innate love for all living things. However, the nature–nurture dynamic plays a crucial role in the development of this affinity. Studies indicate that environmental activists often report having had meaningful and positive experiences with “nature” during childhood. These early encounters frequently result in the development of a biocentric worldview, one that recognises the importance of non-human life forms and acknowledges them as deserving of attention, care, or simply being left undisturbed.

In the specific context of Tallinn, local studies and observations have shown that children between the ages of 7 and 9 often feel overlooked in the design of public spaces. Playgrounds are generally aimed at younger children, while skate parks and other more autonomous zones cater to teenagers. This age group, curious, physically active, and socially developing, is frequently left without spaces that match their needs and desires. In response, particular attention has been paid to the integration of risk and perceived danger in the spatial and architectural language of the project. The design deliberately incorporates elements that feel bold, exciting, and slightly unpredictable, encouraging engagement through exploration and discovery. By doing so, the aim is to offer these children a sense of autonomy and belonging, and to spark moments of connection, not only with peers but also with the more-than-human world.

One clear way the research influenced the design was through biophilia. Early on, I became interested in how architecture can evoke the same kinds of feelings people have when walking through a forest or sitting by the sea, calm, curiosity, safety, even awe. That led me to look into biophilic design principles and explore how natural forms could inform the shape and experience of my building. I experimented with the golden ratio and implemented other biophilic design principles into the design.

At that point, the project still felt disconnected from the actual site. The shapes were there, but the building didn't really belong to the place. That became clear through feedback as well, the suggestion was to dive deeper into the location itself.

My graduation studio is called A Matter of

Scale. A studio that has its focus on different scales throughout the city of Tallinn. The project addresses the challenge of designing a space in the city that is both inclusive and sensitive to human proportions, especially those of children. By working on the Skone Bastion in Tallinn, I deal with a layered site that carries architectural, historical, and ecological dimensions, requiring design decisions that scale accurately and meaningfully across multiple levels, from underground bunker spaces to landscape interventions. The attention to sensory design directly aligns with the studio's ambition to cultivate architecture that resonates with embodied, human-scaled perception.

So instead of starting from theory, I started from experience: how it feels to walk through the woods, how you can see clearly low to the ground but the canopy above only lets in thin strips of light. That forest path became a new kind of reference, less about fixed proportions and more about how space is felt through the body.

One of the most transferable aspects of my project lies in the method of exploring the needs of both current and future actors, human and non-human, on site. By taking time to step into the world of each actor and attempting to understand their perspective through imagination and empathy, the design process becomes more grounded and site-specific. This approach encourages a kind of non-verbal dialogue, where the architect listens closely to what a place and its inhabitants might need, beyond spoken words or fixed programmes. I believe this mindset can be valuable in any context, because architects are never working with a blank canvas, but always with a place that already holds meaning, memory, and life.

What needs further development?

Up to P4, the focus has been on creating a site-specific building that enters into a strong dialogue with its surroundings. The experience of 'supernature' was central, with the design primarily shaped around human experience. Moving forward, I aim to more fully integrate non-human elements and explore how they can actively contribute to both the building and the surrounding landscape.

Where do I see the most personal growth?

I've seen a significant amount of personal growth in myself throughout this process. In the past, I often found comfort in hiding behind theories and literature research, which allowed me to avoid designing altogether. However, this year I was challenged by my tutors to quickly engage in form studies using materials like clay, paper, and things I had found outside. This shift has led me to trust my intuition more. Throughout the process, I've come to realize that while I'll always maintain a research-driven mindset, I sometimes get too caught up in trying to fully understand something. I tend to lose myself in the details, believing that everything is connected, and that can be difficult to step away from. It's still a challenge for me to let go of ideas that feel connected to my project, but as one of my previous tutors once said, "kill your darlings."