

A New Edge for DeSingel

Graduation Reflection

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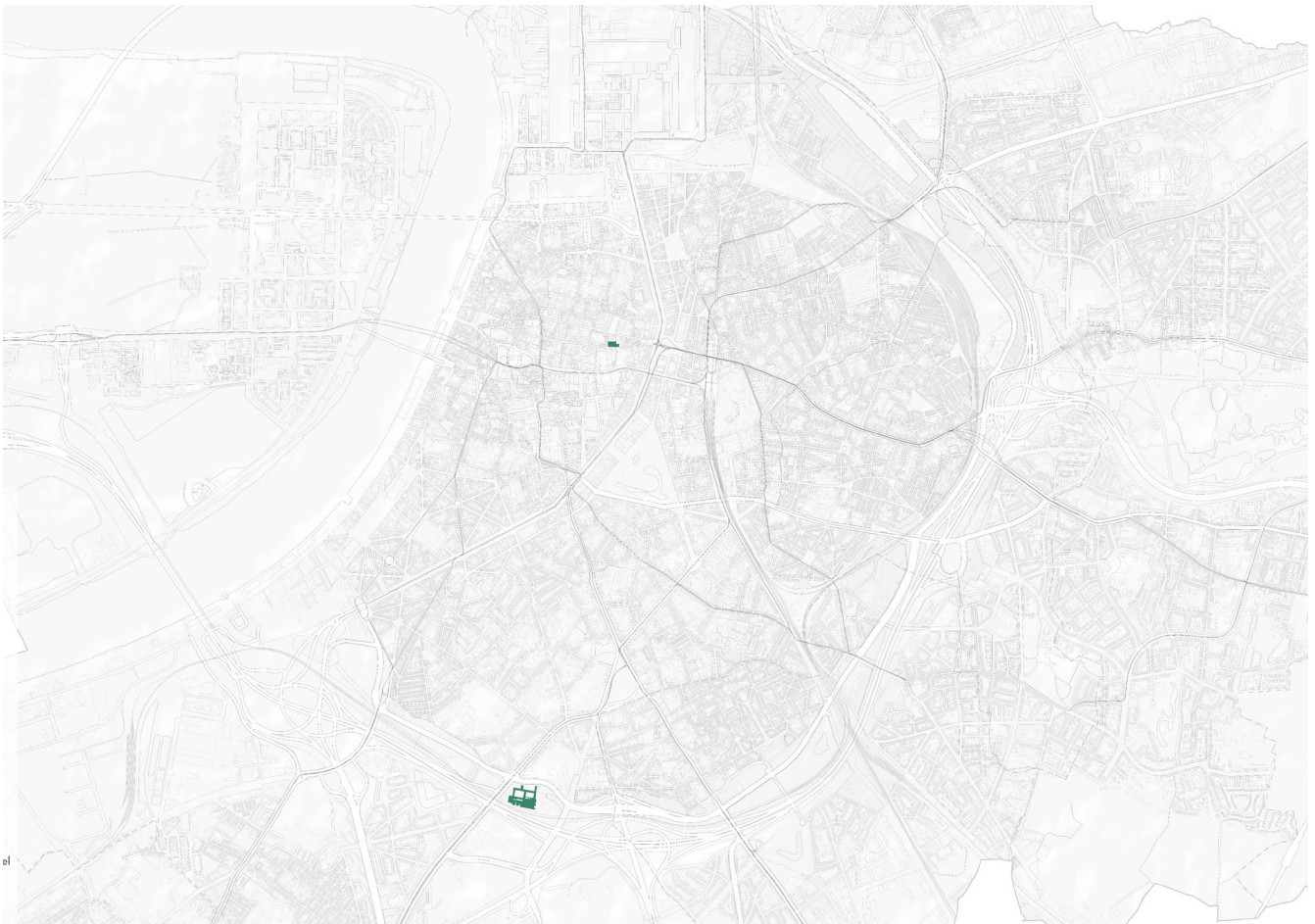
The Project Brief

What is the role of an archive in the city? Should it be an independent building or should it be part of a larger cultural centre? The VAI, the Flemish Architecture Institute, holds a significant identity within the architectural realm as the main architectural archive of Belgium. Its presence in Antwerp is, however, fragmented, with the depot at Parochiaansstraat 7 and the offices at DeSingel. This separation has complicated the institution's ability to establish a cohesive identity as an archive, making it less recognizable to those not directly involved in the architectural field. This identity issue, combined with the limited space of the depot, has led the institution to consider relocating to a site that is more integrated with the city and accessible to a broader audience.

However, this raises fundamental questions: How can an archive truly integrate into the urban fabric? What exactly defines an archive, and where should the boundary between public and private access lie?

Looking Carefully

Examining various archives, from the highly public to the strictly enclosed, reveals that multiple approaches are possible. Archives demand careful handling and strict regulations, making public integration challenging. A compelling example is the Canadian Centre for Architecture in Montreal, which maintains a strong identity within the city while carefully separating public and non-public functions.



1. Margaux Lomax, modified by Veronica Danesin, map of antwerp with the two VAI location, 2024

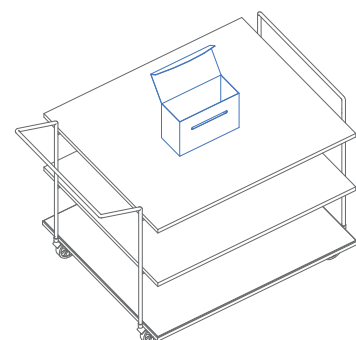
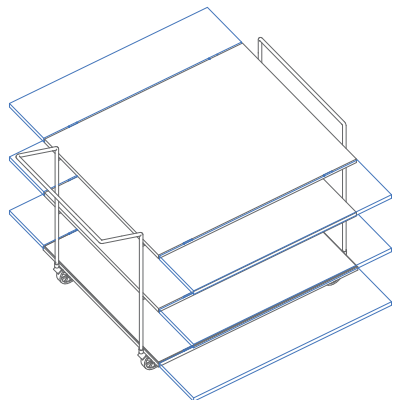
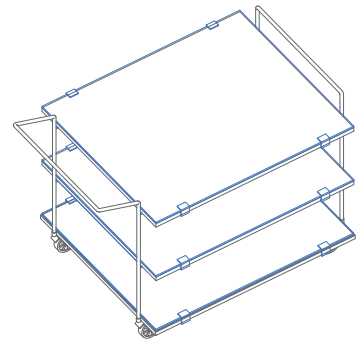
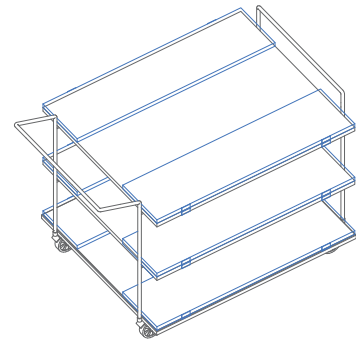
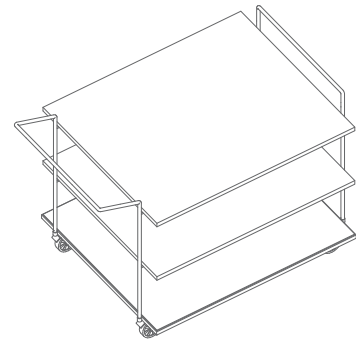
Here, the archival collections are stored in secure, climate-controlled spaces on the lower floors, detached from direct interaction with the outside world, while public spaces are thoughtfully curated above. This approach ensures the integrity of the archive while providing a clear, accessible narrative to visitors.

This model demonstrates how consolidating an archive within a single institution can enhance its visibility and relevance. By clearly defining its presence, even in typically hidden spaces, it can offer the public a tangible sense of the scale and importance of archival work, challenging the notion of archives as inaccessible, almost sacred entities.

Room for an Archive

In reflecting on the VAI's collection, it became evident that many documents and materials remain unseen, rarely requested by researchers, and often overlooked. These forgotten collections represent 'unknown architects' whose work deserves greater recognition. This insight led to the concept of creating a new, intermediate space that bridges the depot and the city, allowing for a more dynamic interaction with archival material.

The proposal envisions a flexible exhibition space that changes every two weeks, showcasing lesser-known collections in a more spontaneous and accessible format. Given budget constraints and the need for adaptive reuse, existing archive furniture, like trolleys, could be repurposed for this function. Simple modifications, like adding plexiglass panels, metal profiles, and wooden inserts, could transform these practical tools into flexible exhibition units, enhancing the visibility of the archive's hidden treasures.



The Site

DeSingel, a cultural center at the edge of the Antwerp ring road, offers a compelling location for this project. Originally designed by Stynen with a strong connection to its natural surroundings, the building's spatial coherence has been compromised by subsequent additions, like Beel's 2010 extension, which introduced unnecessary complexity. The resulting loss of connection between interior and exterior spaces, particularly at the first-floor terrace level, has further diluted the building's original intent.

The wall

The urban changes around the site have transformed this once fluid relationship into a fragmented façade facing the E34 highway. Noise pollution, air quality issues, and a disjointed urban plan have isolated the building from its landscape, challenging the experience of moving between interior and exterior.

After geolocating the historical maps of the Brialmont ramparts, it's clear how the 19th century ring passed right where DeSingel is located now. As a reaction to that the project proposes a boundary condition that similarly

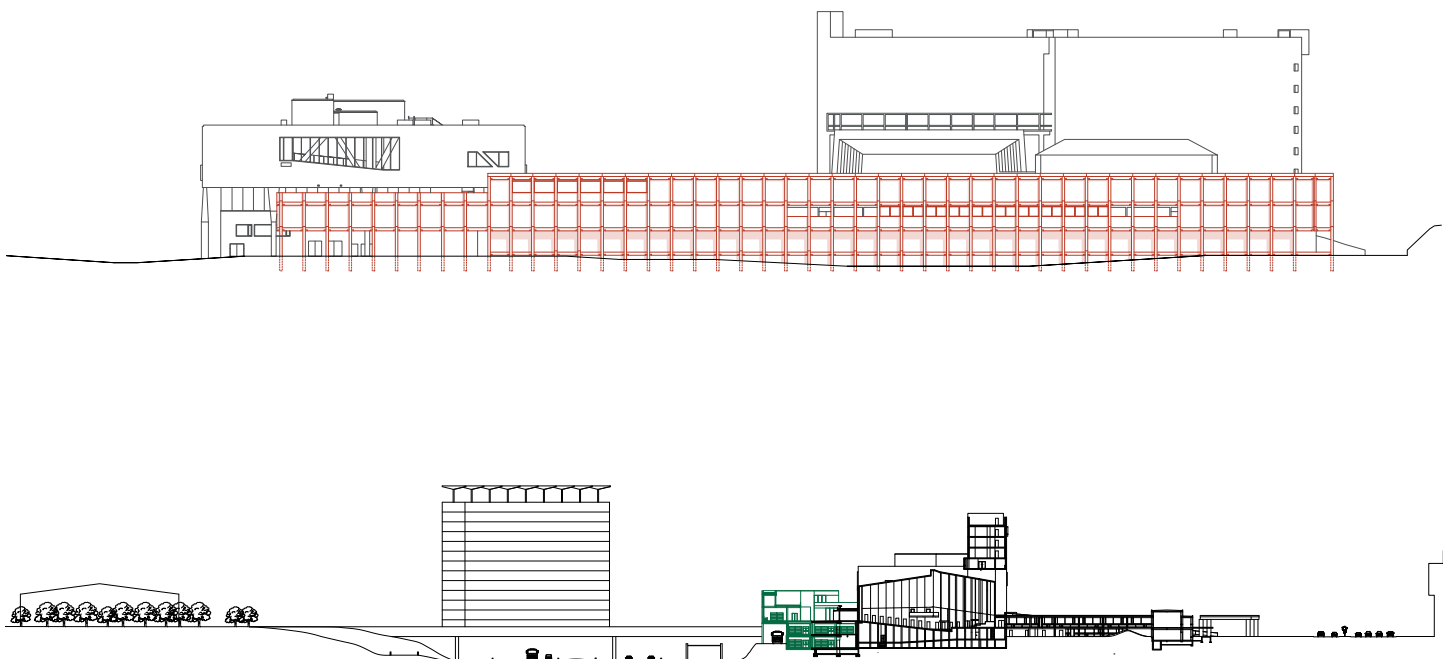
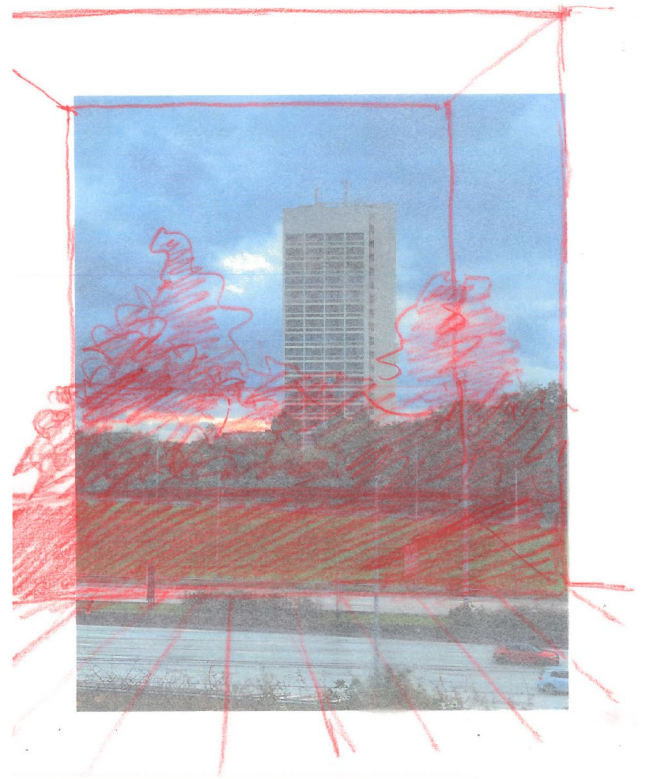


3. took by Veronica Danesin, DeSingel back facade on the highway E34, 2025

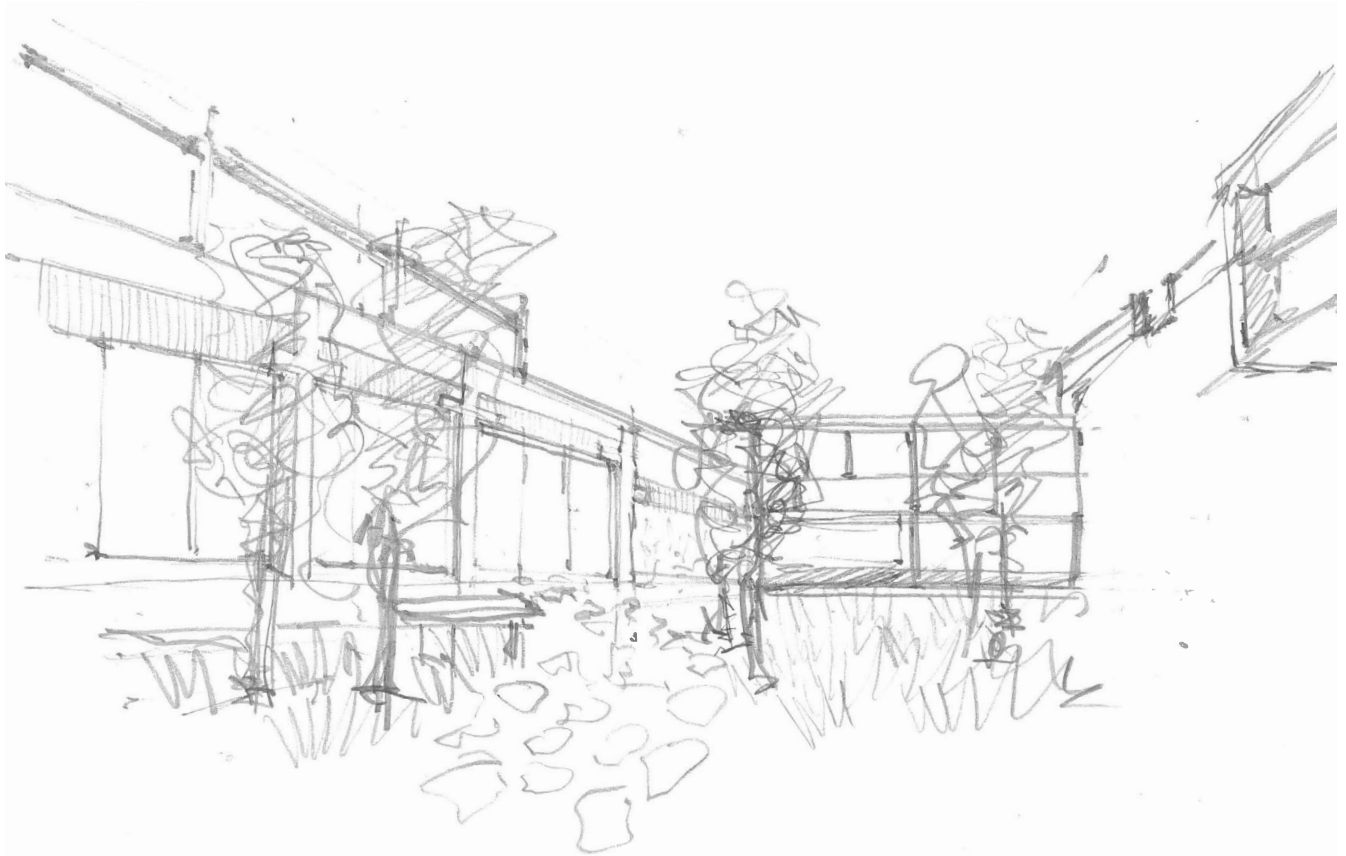
shelters the fragmented existing façade. The archive becomes a wall, defining a threshold between the bustling highway and the quieter, reflective spaces within. This approach creates new public zones, including courtyards and exhibition corridors, that restore the building's original openness and invite the public to engage with its hidden histories.

This project aims to reclaim these overlooked spaces, transforming them into vibrant, in-between zones that reconnect the archive to both the building and its broader context. By re-imagining the terraces as a layered, immersive landscape that frames views beyond the highway, the archive can serve as a protective wall, sheltering the building from the harsh external environment while enhancing the public's relationship with the institution.

In this way, the archive becomes not just a repository for architectural memory, but an active participant in the life of the city, a physical manifestation of its cultural depth and evolving identity.



4. Veronica Danesin, sketch on one of the framed moment in the terraces, 2024
5. Veronica Danesin, elevation on the highway, 2025
6. Veronica Danesin, section from the city to the highway, 2025



7. Veronica Danesin, drawing of the new courtyard, 2025



8. Veronica Danesin, drawing of the new conformation of the terraces, 2025