

The reflection for my graduation project “Roosenberg study centre” consists of six themes which triggered me to form the idea on what to build and how to build on the Roosenberg site.

the precedents on site

Monk architect Dom Hans van der Laan and his work Roosenberg Abbey, built in 1975, are the very important elements and background for the project. Together with the forest surroundings, they formed the site. Therefore, to understand the architect’s method and philosophy, in other words, his “plastic number” goes parallel with reading the environment.

Van der Laan uses his method of “plastic number” to control the design under one clear and continuous logic, defining the building from volumes, spaces, and dimensions. The proportion he used is established under his analysis from human perception. This proportion helps he to build the space that can be read clearly in different scale, and then the dimension of every scale is related.

Roosenberg Abbey, among the works of van der Laan, could be recognised soon for its not being rectangular outline. There are two geometries in the layout, which is an result of a overlapping of the inner order and the outer condition— it stands exactly towards north and south as a monastery, while it follows the edge of the road. Van der Laan himself responded to the surroundings by putting the double height volume on the edge and letting the chapel near the east forest side.

On the opposite to the entrance for the abbey is a dense woods which stay rather raw in the whole area. It provides a location to have an rather equal role towards the existing abbey, by facing the old abbey’s entrance, sharing the public entrance space, and holding the potential to enclosed an individual garden.

to build nature in

The vegetation in the area is not in a wild condition but in a sequence of inner court green, open field and than the dense woods in the east. Enclosed garden, which appears in the monastery type architecture has been a topic to start the project. Enclosed garden plays an heavy role in this area, as Roosenberg Abbey by van der Laan owns a typical “hortus contemplation”, and van der Laan had planed different type of enclosed garden in this area, but it was not executed. Therefore, enclosed garden can be understood as a part of nature.

transition of typology and program

A detailed program of the building is not given with the project. With an research seminar complied with the first semester, the program of the project was defined differently in the studio. A cultural context is built upon the reading and knowledge of religion, monastery, and

the relationship between the monastery and the city. The cultural context refers to a continuity in the transition from mediaeval monastery to university institution and now a place for study and living. The monastery since the mediaeval time, functioned as a complexity of living, studying and ritual activity. Therefore, the new-built part here is defined not as a single functioned, public study centre, but a small complex in the woods that serves for various purposes of living, learning and activities. Then poetry and literature are chosen as the theme for the building, which is related to the University Leuven, while keeping reading, talking, and gathering in various groups as behaviours in the building.

At the meantime, an research on the typology of monasteries and campus (college buildings) is done within the students in the studio, keeping the architectural sources in our mind. For van der Laan, the observation on European monasteries is also a step before his design. Organised around the courtyard, different spaces are fixed with certain ritual and their own destiny, so together the daily life of the monastery is presented in the architectural scale. In my project, the skeleton inherits the monastic typology of courtyard and cloister, than the fours wings claim themselves with their inner characteristics.

monumentality and everyday architecture

Rosenberg Abbey by van der Laan is full of monumentality as a monastic building. However, the role of the building is changing, as it is going to be transformed into a part of the academic institution. So the monumentality would stay in van der Laan's abbey by keeping the building's essence of darkness and silence.

Discussion of the definition of the new-extended part starts from the research seminar in the first semester, where Irene guided us to dig in the characters of a contemporary study space. Than I defines the new-built space close to everyday architecture, where different behaviours of studying are triggered by the richness and continuity of the building, and are situated comfortably in places.

dialogues with masterpieces

Dialogues with masterpieces happens between the new part and the van der Laan's abbey. Other references are taken to establish different rooms in the new building. The basics of a dialogue with van der Laan's abbey on site is built upon the same monastic typology of cloister and courtyard. However, the two buildings are no longer function as monastic but academic institution, so there is a need for a transitional dialogue. The conversation begins with the presence of the new building, which encloses the entrance space with white long wall with opening door near the corner to the forest. While van der Laan's cloister in the existing abbey is defined as rather closed and homogeneous space enclosing the garden, with the early references Asplund's Gothenburg Law Court extension and Aalto's Saynatsalo Town Hall, the new cloister is proposed to be different to identify itself. Among the four surfaces towards the inner court, one on the entrance side is open, and the one on the east street side (where the cafe is) is closed and reversed, so that the homogenous rhythm of the cloister is intervened. Therefore in the cloister every path has its clear direction where people can locate himself along the cloister. The first corner after entering the building to study space is guided by a stair with light casting from above, which is inherited from van der Laan's stairs and lights.

References are taken to defined rooms in the extension building besides van der Laan's abbeys. The publication bookshop is influenced by van der Laan's library in the extension abbey in Vaals, old-traditional library space in Oxford, and also library in FAUP by Siza. The workshop space shares its origin from the aligned desks in the library study space in Oxford and the repetition cells in van der Laan's abbey. In the seminar rooms part, the transition of the rooms appears, as an important image I got in Roosenberg Abbey. For the lecture hall, it is shaped as an dominating space for gathering, as references from church's space and the conference hall from Aalto's Saynatsalo Town Hall are taken.

technology on date

Designed and built on 1970's, Roosenberg Abbey bu van der Laan did not applied the thermal insulation as the architects do today. The building's load-bearing structure is brick, equipped with concrete beams in openings and wooden wall in secondary separation for rooms. Van der Laan covered the exterior and most of the interior surface with white plaster to keep the purity in the abbey.

Corroborated with the building technology tutor and consultants on climate and structure, systemised solution for heating environment, controlled air ventilation. And the main load-bearing for the proposed building is defined as concrete skeleton with brickwork surface which provides possibility flexibility for opening in different widths. The one floor height cloister facing the courtyard is purely supported by bricks. While the interior cloister is covered mainly by white brick, bricks in two colours of white and off-white is applied on surfaces facing the courtyard, indicating connection and transition.

conclusion

The process of the graduation design starts from research and ends in a elaborated project. With the large-scale model making, photo taking and writing, the sensual perception of van der Laan's building is kept in mind from which the design scheme is built. Theoretical reading on van der Laan and European monastery context construct the cultural background of the design well. And then the typological group research provides plenty of sources on the architectural language. Last but not the least, the professional experience of the tutors has been supporting throughout the research and design phrase.