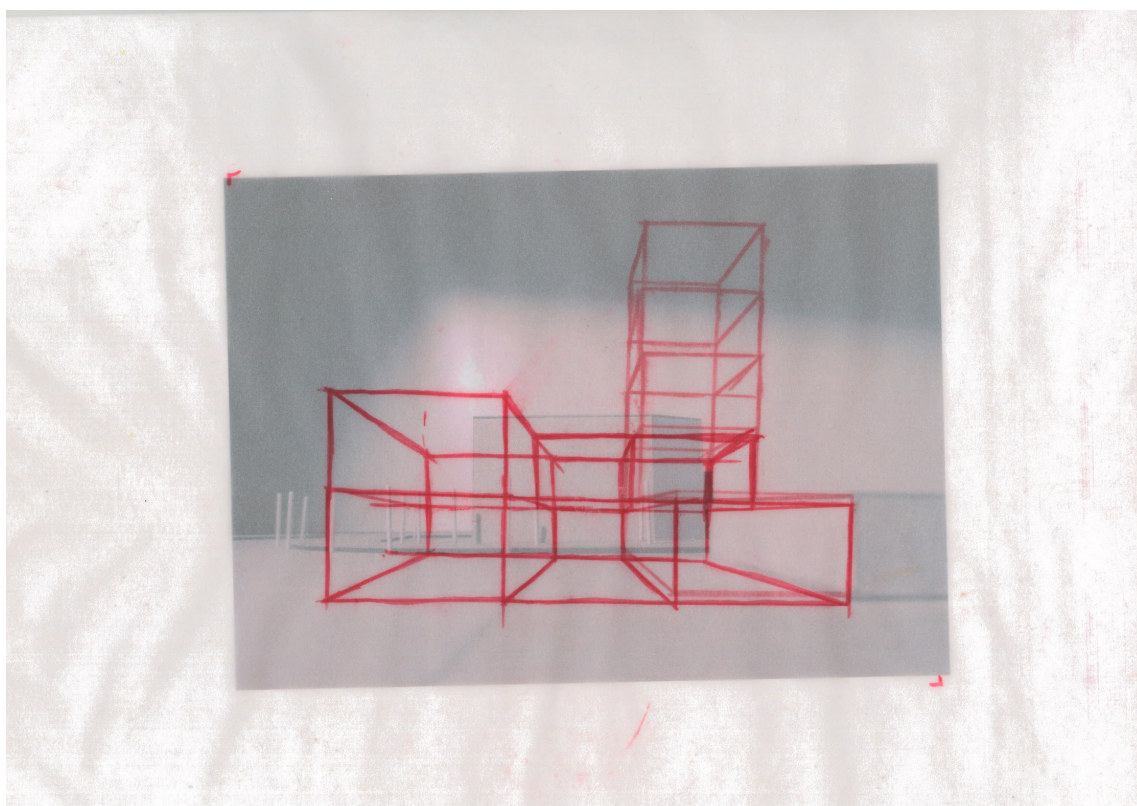




Reflection
Graduation studio Urban Architecture

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Project relation with studio

This year's graduate studio Urban Architecture focuses on the city of Liège, a city of scars, as the studio's theme indicates. The sharp tools we used as humans to shape Liège; resulted in problematic urban locations that we, as UA studio, seek to heal with architectural impact.

In addition to Liège's urban landscape, its residents are a vital part of the city's social and physical appearance. Liège has been shaped by the fusion of different ethnicities, which is evident in the selected Bressoux and Droixhe project site. Notable are the characteristics of industrial history and the desire for a sense of community. The built environment consists of working-class housing, old - and new industrial buildings and many vacant buildings. Many current residents carry a "backpack" and have little structure in their lives. Most of the residents are emigrants, making it a neighbourhood where people settle but also leave. So in the studio, the issue is raised about how we could address the abandoned (industrial) structures due to innovation and changing social cohesion, which calls for adaptability.

To explore this development, as a group we first approached the city in an experimental way by considering it as 'A Room with a View.' We tried to look at the city from a different way, through the lens of 'rooms' and 'views'. As a group initiative, we tried to answer the question through a film: What do the rooms and views tell us about Liège? Capturing the 'views' in different 'rooms' in Liège was based on a visual and intuitive approach. The research plan was not based on archives, the internet - or literature findings but on experimental and perceptual encounters with Liège. This led to a journey of discovery in which I learned to look, read and think beyond the obvious. This process was encouraged by group discussions that eventually resulted in individual interests. For me, it opened the door to dive deeper into intuitive thinking and design.

My personal interest and inspiration for the additional research of this project came from the discussions, but also from the routes we walked (with A Room with a View). I opened my intuitive side and looked for perceptual encounters within urban structures. I was inspired by observing and noting the many open spaces and interstices - which I initially called 'Fluid Spaces' - and the interactions that took place between locals, emigrants and tourists. It inspired me how to respond as an architect and design a spatial intervention that integrates and does not alienate the project site.

The research on 'Finding Forms' is a compilation of my personal interest in art, literature and reliance on an intuitive approach in architecture. Art and literature are forms that have no boundaries and often find a way to live on forever and inspire people. I consider architecture to be such a form as well. Architectural objects that fit harmoniously into their surroundings often find a way to house something or someone. However, there are also architectural objects that initially serve a functional role but over time lose their function and cannot change.

The intuitive approach to the project allowed me to let my initial thinking flow from form rather than function. This contrasts with contemporary building methods, where a function is often built out of necessity. The form defines the building, and so the function of the building is translated into a temporary interior without a defined function. The starting point was to use the building for several functions without numerous modifications. The design brief of this project was formed by combined lines of thought that together form the main theme of adaptability. The main challenge is to integrate the form of the building into the environment and let the form of the interior be shaped by the user.

Process of the design

The decision for the specific project location of the design (experiment) was not obvious; it was finally decided as a group. After observing and admiring the complex situation, the existing spatial qualities emerged. The presence of train-, tram- and car tracks had an indelible influence on the spatial sequences of the grid, structure and technological decisions in designing the building. This added important elements to the design thread.

Regular visits to the project site and contact with construction workers on site resulted in the decision to mimic the site in the form of a model. This accelerated the experimentation process and provided a more neutral design site. Mimicking the site helped with understanding scale and context, after which I could move forward with developing the Finding Forms experiments. Finding Forms experiments were conducted using (methods) drawing, photography, modeling. Trusting my intuition more was a personal experiment where I tried these different methods to give my intuition free rein. It allowed me to better read and understand the location and eventually translate it into an elaboration. It also brought difficulties, such as transferring the subjective outcomes to design.

Originally, the goal was to visually represent the qualities of the interspaces through drawing, photography and modelling. In retrospect, this mode of execution is subjective, given that the translations in the design are limited to my personal observations and notes. Nonetheless, the overall concept of Finding Forms, an academic exploration for the fields of architecture and art in which this concept is rooted, shows an inspiration for further academic research into the grounding and thinking of the intuitive formation of architecture.

In my opinion, the project has demonstrated that the study of Finding Forms and the abandonment of assigned functions for buildings has led to a refinement of architectural design specific to the site. At the same time, the project raises questions about contemporary problems in architecture, such as sustainability and the dominant practice of function-based construction. The results of Finding Forms experiments - influence, grid and scale studies - resulted mainly in testing intuitions, which were then translated into design after a reflection. Material and technical requirements influenced intuitive forms at a later stage. This posed the project's greatest challenge: maintaining sight of the experiments despite the guidelines of material and technical requirements and keeping choices constantly reflecting with intuition.

After the second presentation, the studio's focus slowly shifted to architecture and building technology, making it difficult to make enough time for reflection and repeating experiments to make design choices.

After the third presentation, it seemed like the floor plans needed to be finalized. To me, however, there was still an exciting dialogue between architecture and building technology and form versus adaptability.

The final phase introduced detailing and materialization. At this stage, I felt tension because decisions had to be made continuously about the spatial and atmospheric aspects of the building, which caused friction between the logical and intuitive. Nevertheless, I also experienced that the design choices emerged from the experiments and that the building technology translated into an architectural object with solutions to the previously discussed challenges, which gave me a feeling of fulfilment.

Future phase

Currently, the focus of the project is mainly on the conceptual position and its translation into the architectural design, including the spatial layout, design, materialization and construction method of the grid, and the adaptability of the spaces.

In the final design phase, there is still a terrain to be explored towards P5, mainly involving the ethical completion of the surrounding exterior and interior, as well as the completion of the research in the form of concluding drawings and flipbook videos. In addition, the translation of the design choices will be visible in a maquette.