

THE PAST AS FOUNDATION FOR A NEW MEMORY

Meeting place, cultural centre and memorial

BUILDING FOR THE PUBLIC - A PLACE FOR DISCOVERY

Raising the awareness of history and embedding the past in the present and thus the future is one of the urgent challenges of our time. Architecture can constitute a powerful bridge with the past. A building for the public is proposed, to strengthen the memory of the past while connecting with the present in Prague. Recent political turmoil once again demonstrates the great significance of history and emphasises the necessity of constructing an edifice on a location which has the burden of the past.

HISTORY, REMEMBRANCE AND PRESENT

The site is located just across the Staré Mesto (Old Town), on the top of a hill in the Letná Park, verdant, quiet and offers a magnificent view of Prague, with world-famous structures like Karlov Most (Charles Bridge) and Pražský Hrad (Prague Castle). The construction is on the remains, foundation and pedestal, of the former colossal Stalin statue. It is one of the very few remaining locations where the recent past of the communist era is still noticeable and tangible. A potential stark allusion to traumatic collective experiences, a reminiscence of an irreversible period of history. A place that can evoke the past of suffering and shame, and concomitantly a vibrant urban venue in a modern and sparkling city.

The site challenges us to ponder the function and perspective of contemporary architecture in connecting to or establishing of collective memories; in this particular case to understand the way of expressing dealing with the communist past. And this is complicated, once more repeated, by the fact that the number of edifices from the communist years is very marginal. Because of this absence, the past is jeopardized to become invisible too, to be forgotten altogether. The challenge is to connect collective memory and the present in an open way – an architectonic construction that can provide a public sphere, a place for remembrance.

History is a continuous process and the past can be immensely absent in the presence. But constructions are concrete and present. The remnants are a physical and undeniable concrete manifestation of history. But even then a narrative is required, just as attention and interest are necessary.

Awareness of the sensitivity towards the reminiscence of history, and meanwhile the importance of facing the past in order to embed the past in the present and therefore the future. Hannah Arendt advocates the irrefutable importance of the public sphere in order to prevent totalitarianism from thriving. The public is characterized by its opposition to 'the private'. One is deprived in private of the pleasure and fullness of life experience that can only exist in the public world among one's associates. The public sphere is where one makes one's appearance explicitly through speech and action. The site can function as such, as a concrete public sphere, as a vivid memory of different times.

PLATFORM AND FOUNDATION

The platform, with its unusual form and enormity, and immediate vicinity are nowadays a favourite place to meet, to encounter, and to enjoy the many concerts and festivals.

The building design combines the natural attractiveness of the location with the remains – the massive base and the foundation, of the statue. Respecting the existing provisions for leisure, new facilities are added. These include a library, a climbing wall, an auditorium, a theatre, an inner garden, an exhibition space, a cantina, and a big event hall for concerts, festivals and exhibitions. According to Francine Houben, the role of libraries in the digital age is as central to society as cathedrals once were, public places where people met. Peter Zumthor's Serpentine Pavilion, a contemplative room, a garden within a garden, and his Museum Kolumba in Cologne in which he integrated the Roman foundation in the new building, are the inspiration of the design. An important aspect of the designed structure is about expanding and invigorating an already existing attractive public sphere.

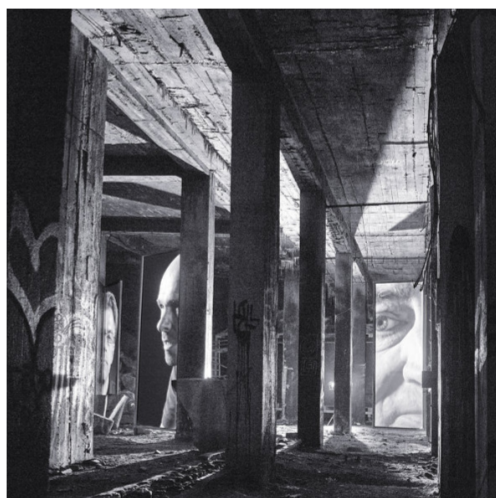
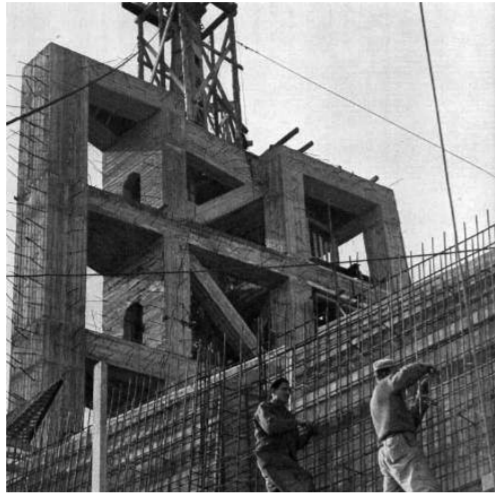
To provide light and contrast in the dark and shadowy catacombesque foundation, cavities are made in the roof of the foundation, which will create a cathedral-like atmosphere through the impressive, almost holy light from the ceiling. The cavities will be so designed that the projection on the floor will give a part of the city map. The Lucerne Arcade was chosen as the model for this design because of the distinctive Prague typology of passageways and arcades, and because, during the communist era, it was a place of a certain artistic freedom. Besides the functionality of letting in daylight, the design evokes the concept of heaven, and turns the space into a sort of courtyard.

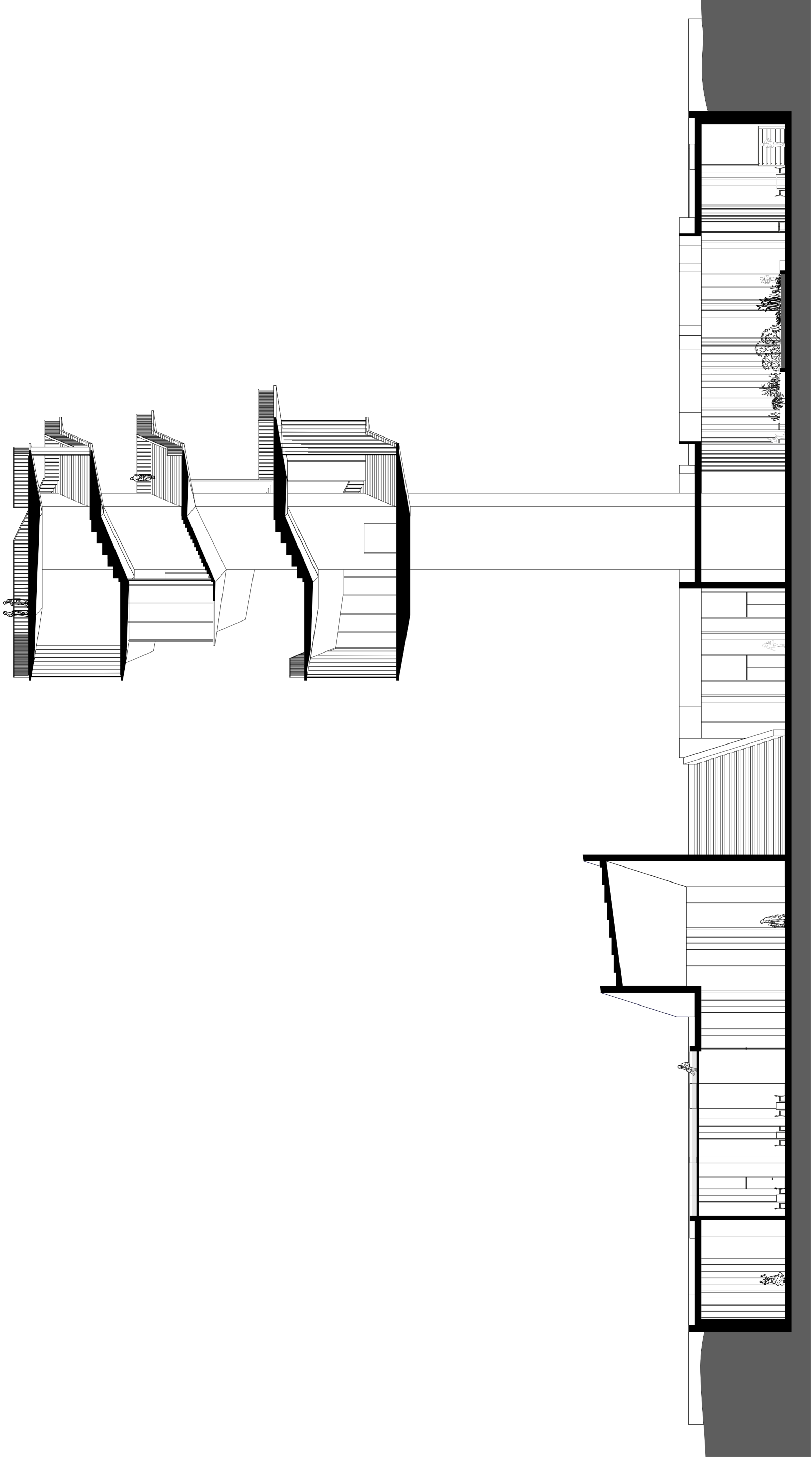
STAIRCASE

Staircases have symbolic, even epic, stature. Many staircases symbolize the rise of the light and the path towards the gods. In this design, the staircase represents the absence of the statue of Stalin. The staircase offers a different perspective, a different view, and could function as a place of contemplation. To magnify the effect of a changing perspective the staircase is partially walled with coloured glass windows.

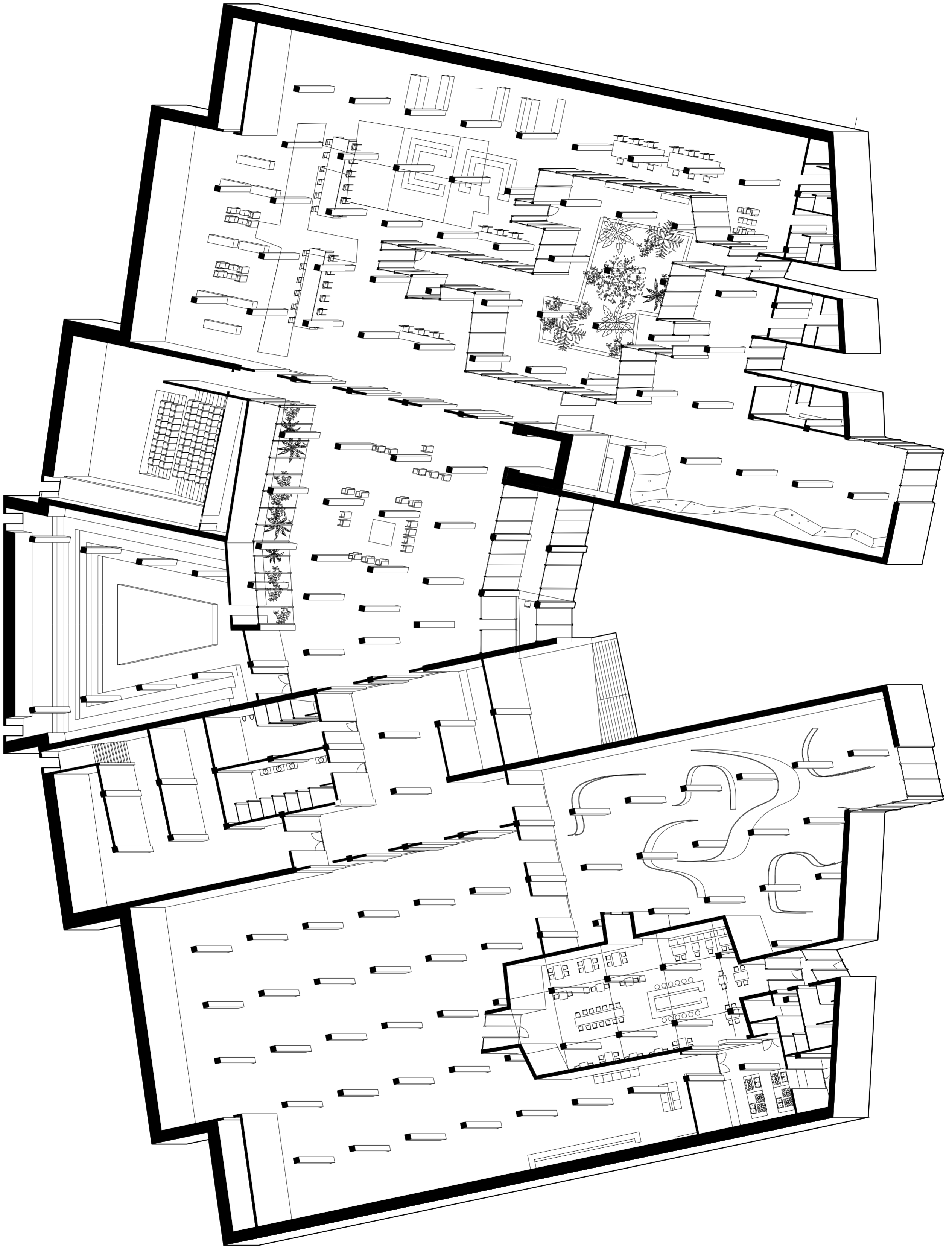
Inspired by the omnipresence of stained glass windows in Prague, made with the famous Bohemian glass of the Czech Republic, and the changing atmosphere in a space due to the reflection of colours on walls and stairs, the projection of a painting by the Czech artist František Kupka on glass is created.

A building for remembering the past and living the present

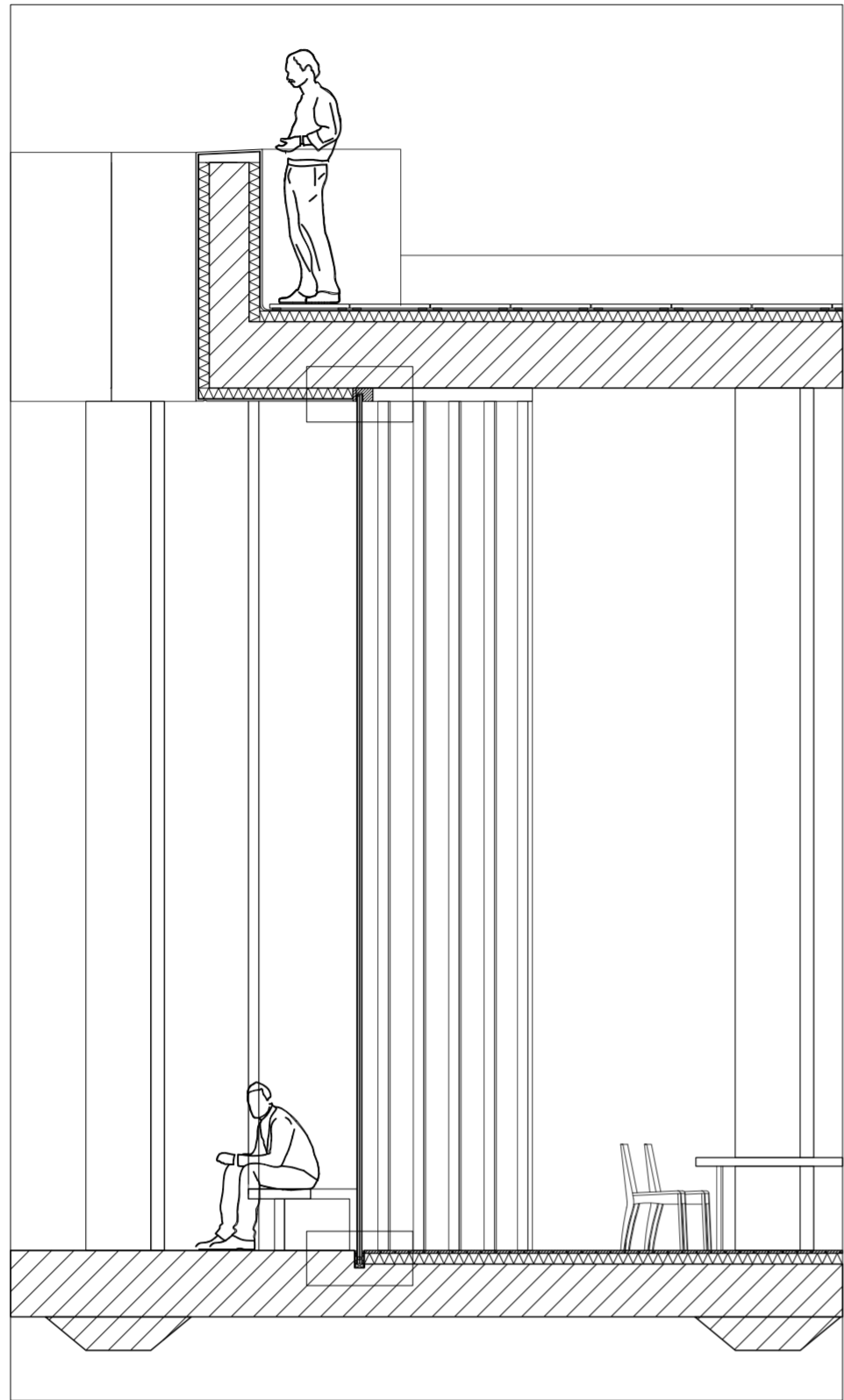




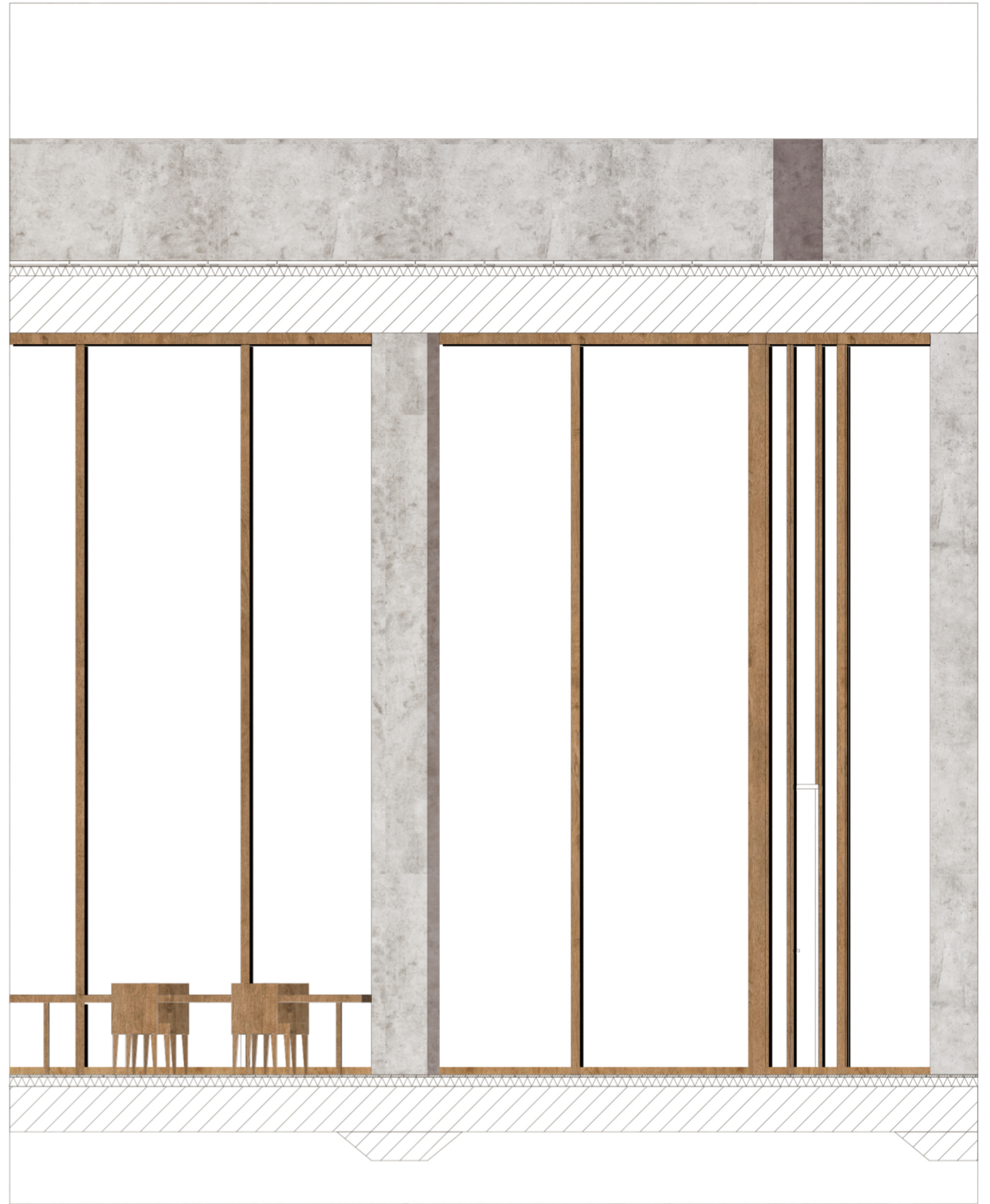
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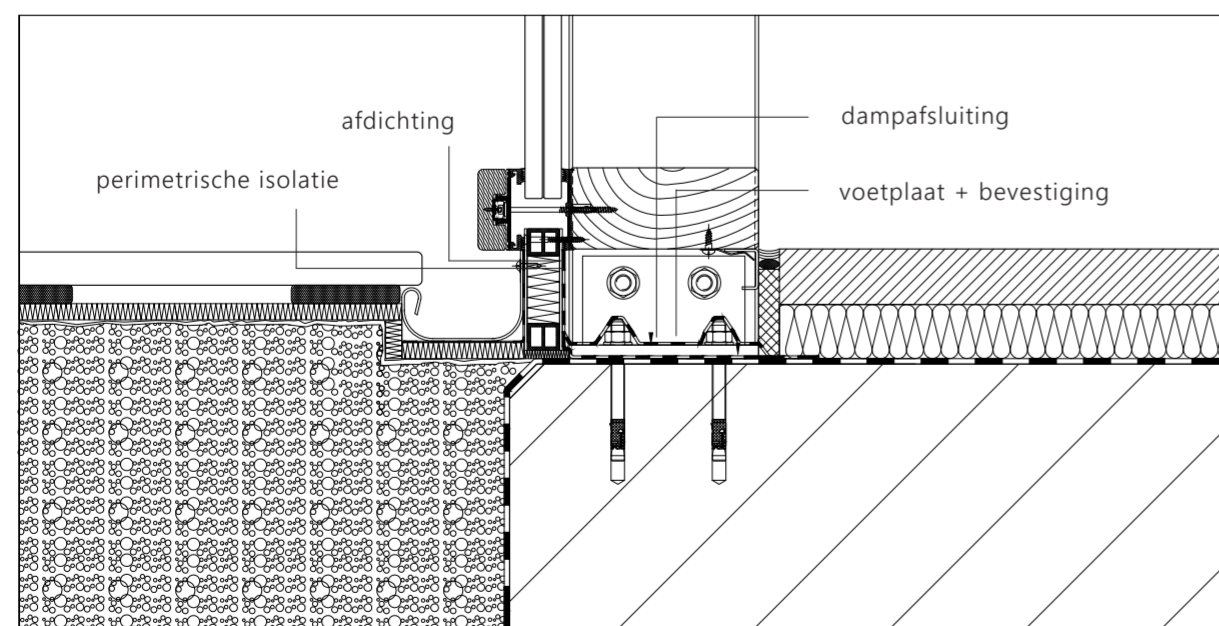
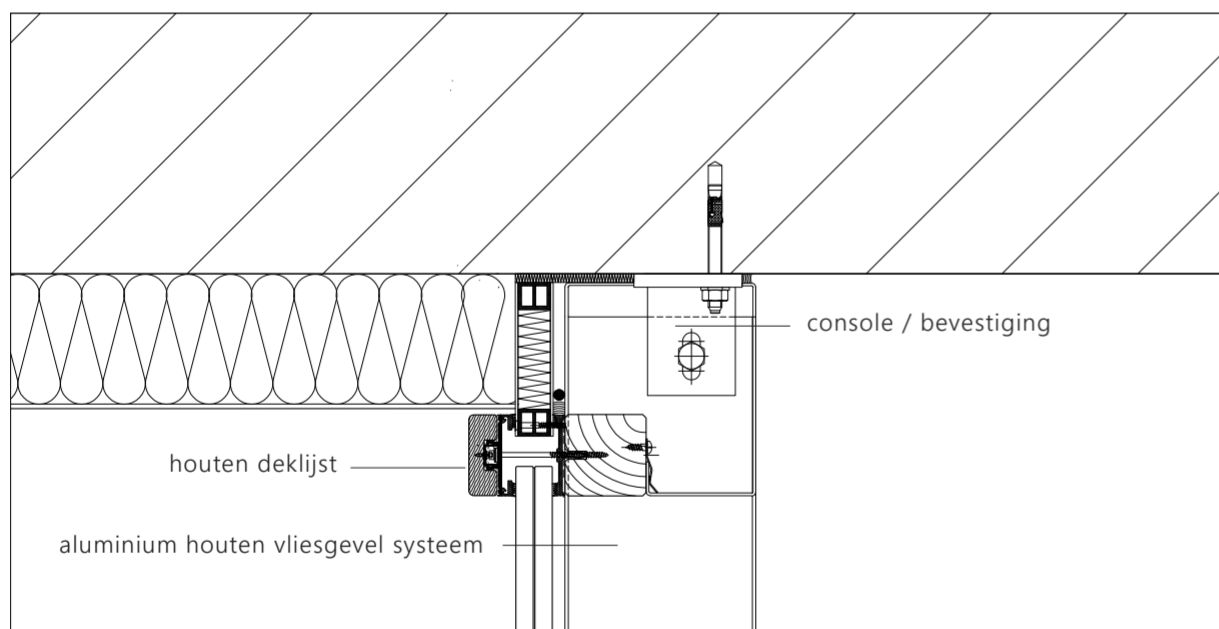




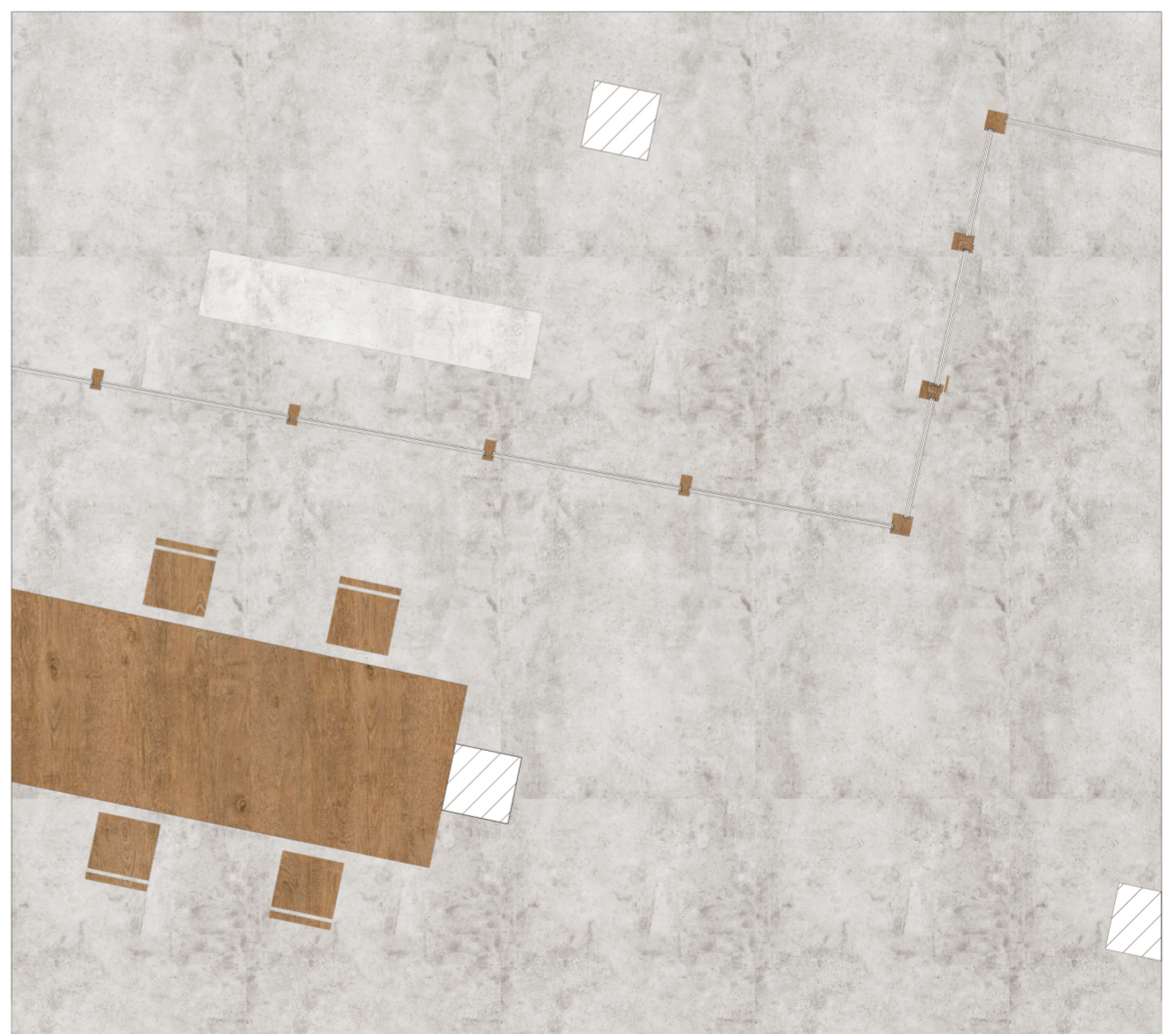
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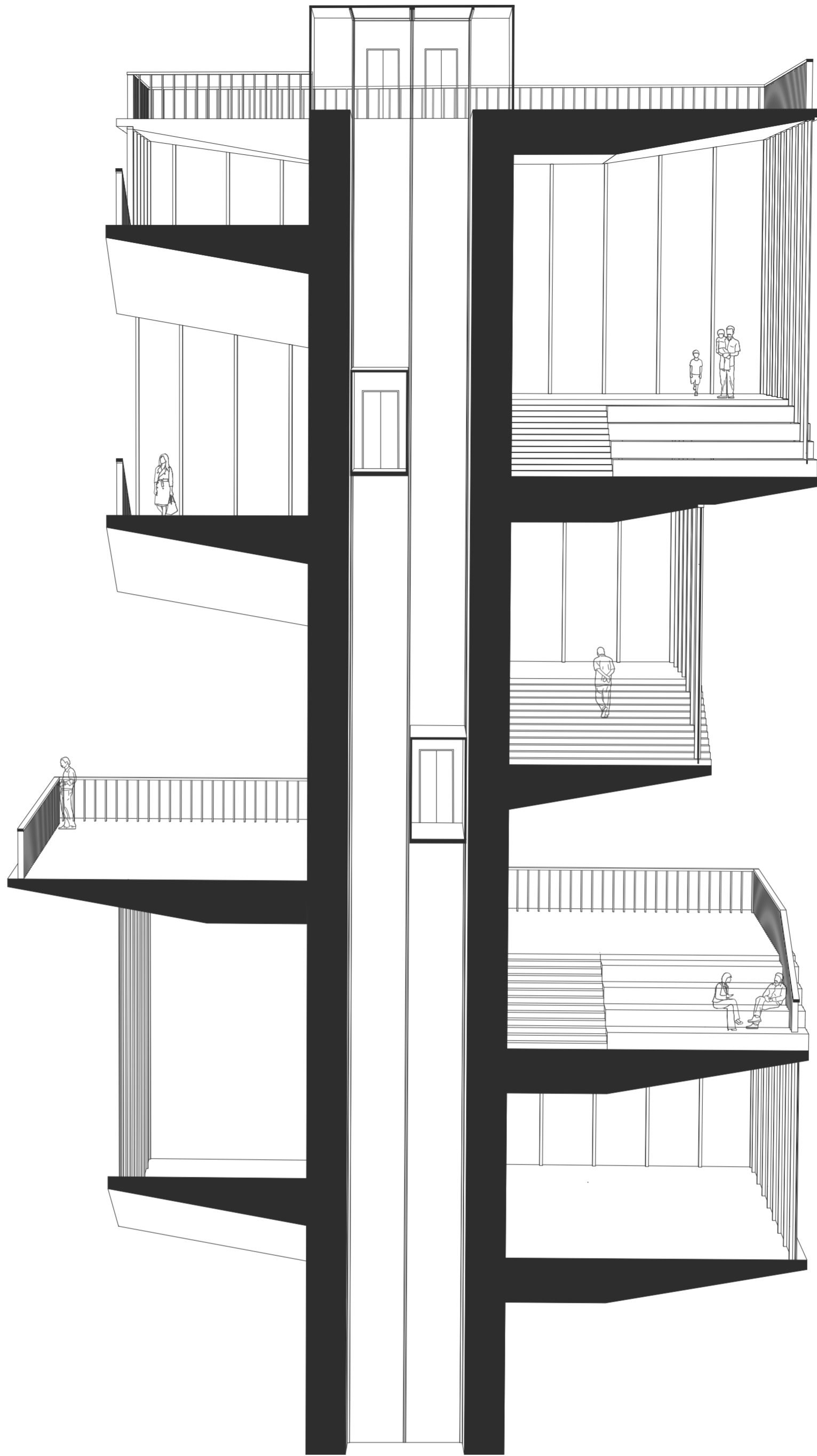
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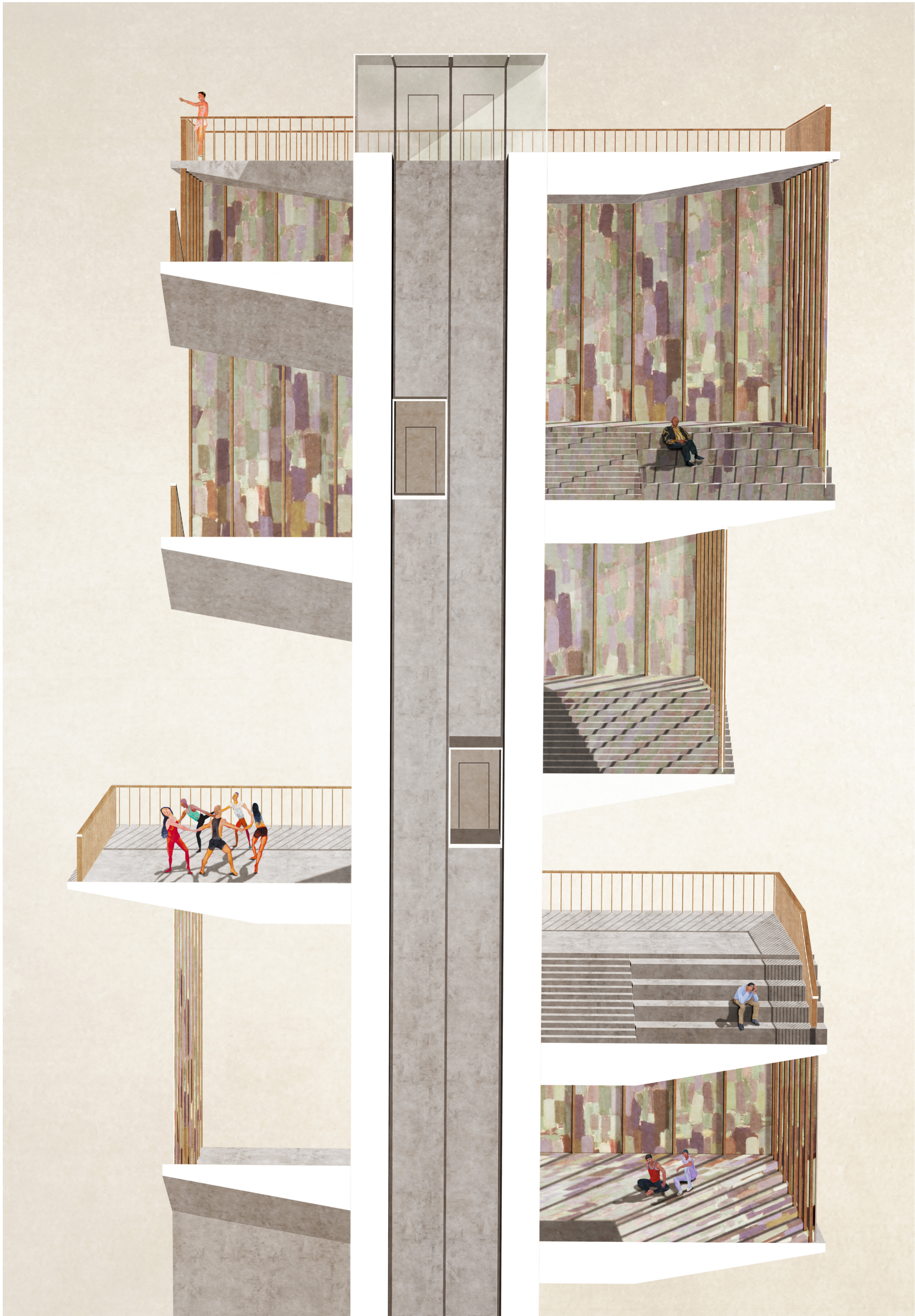


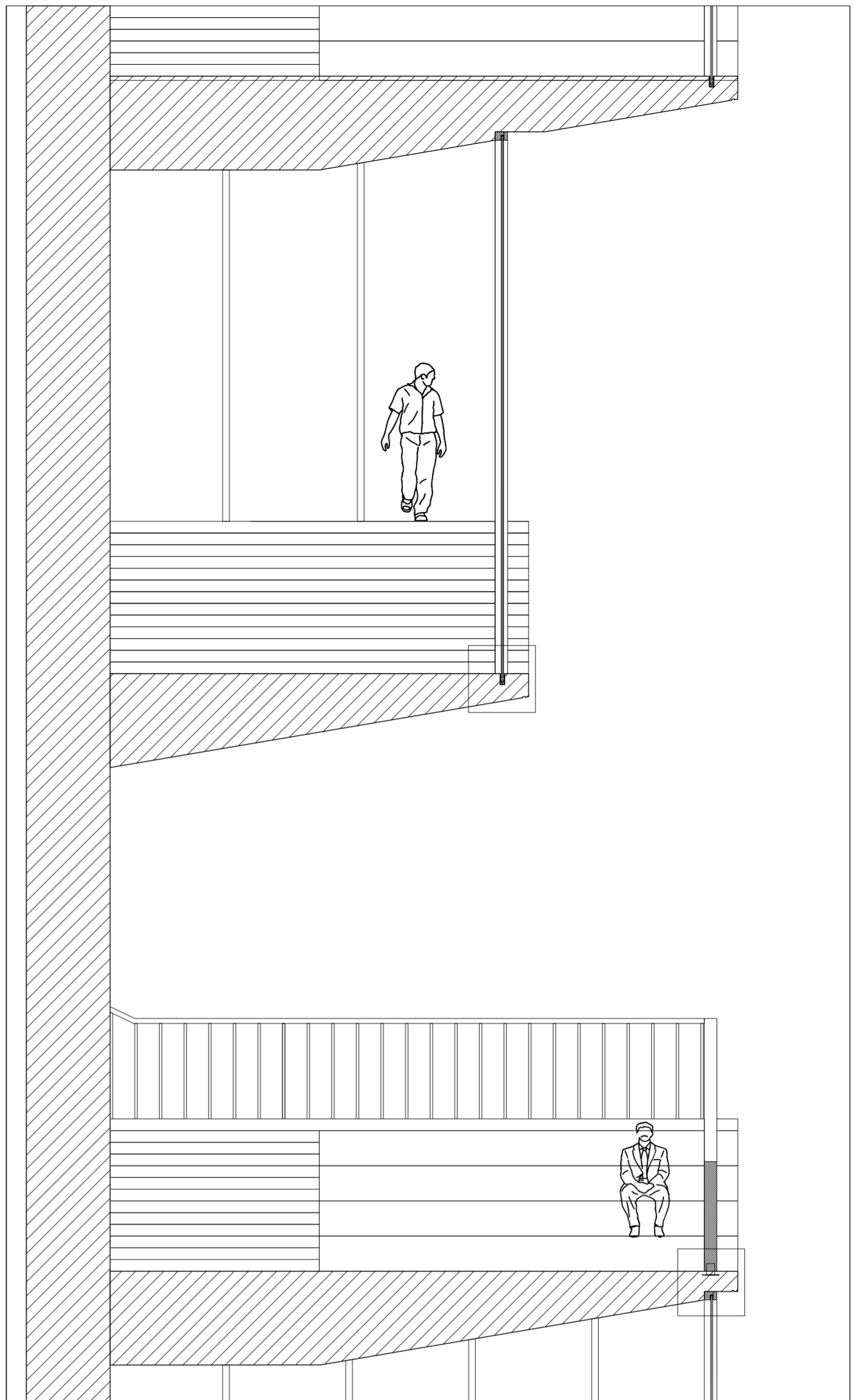
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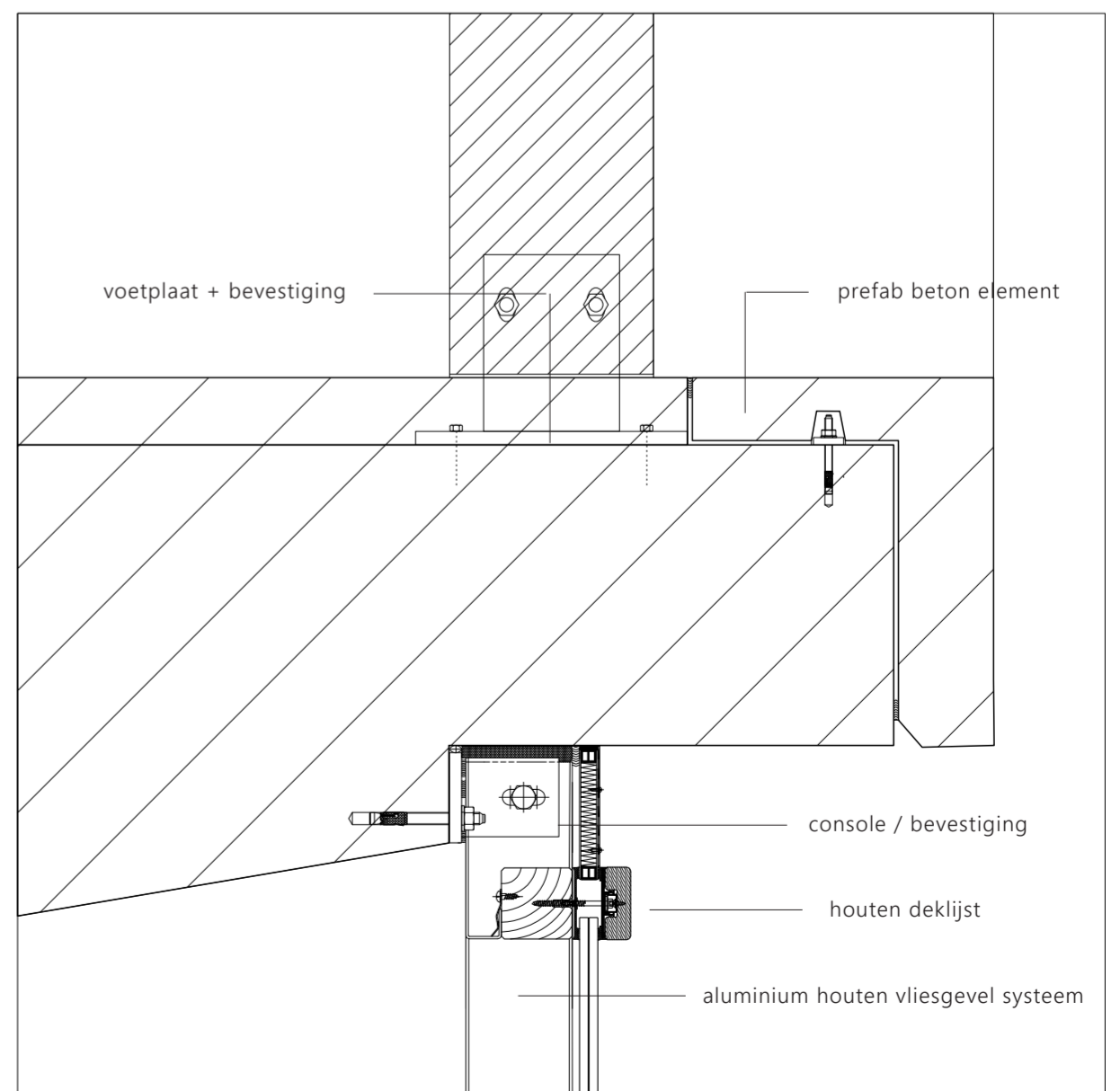
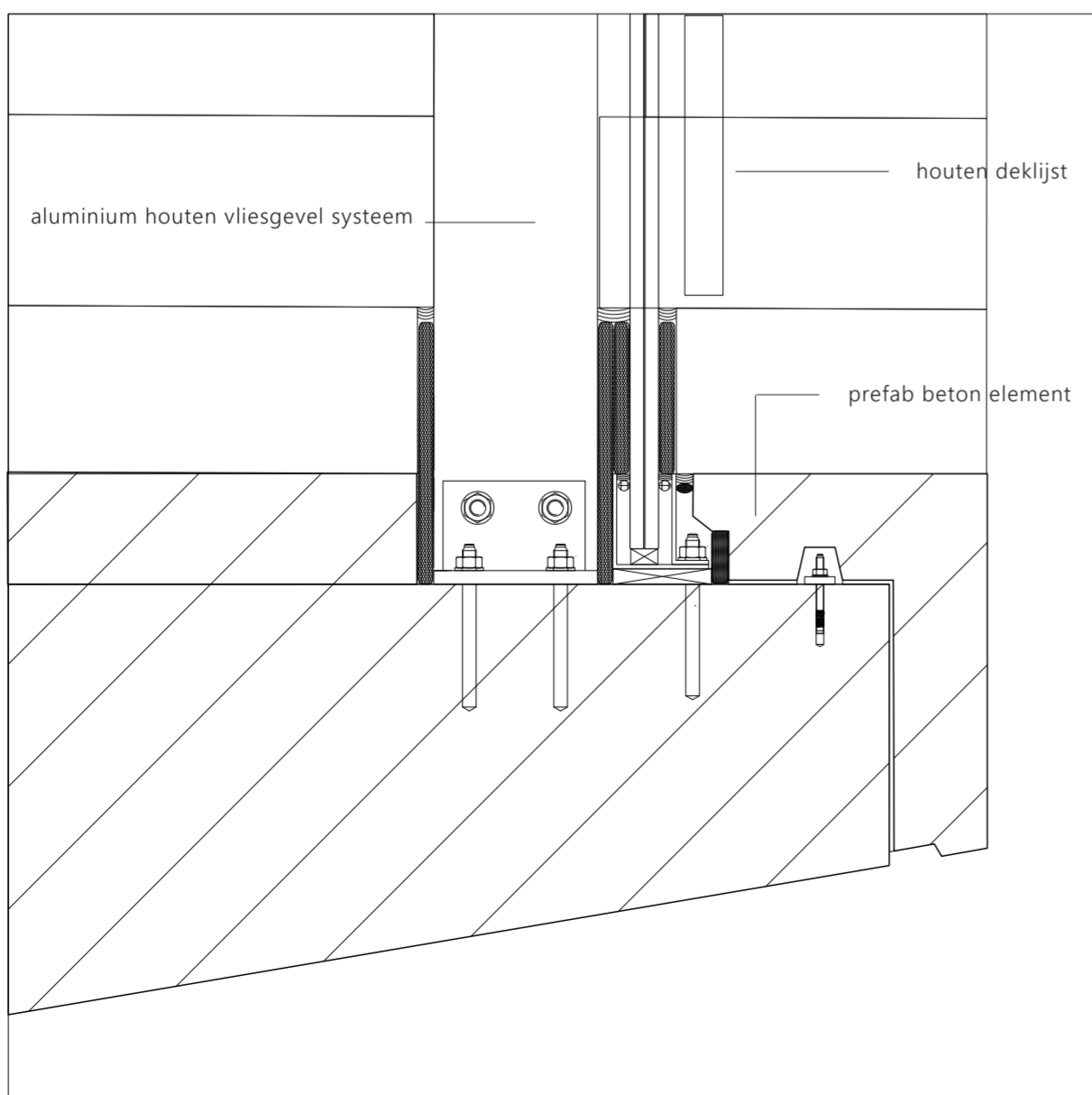
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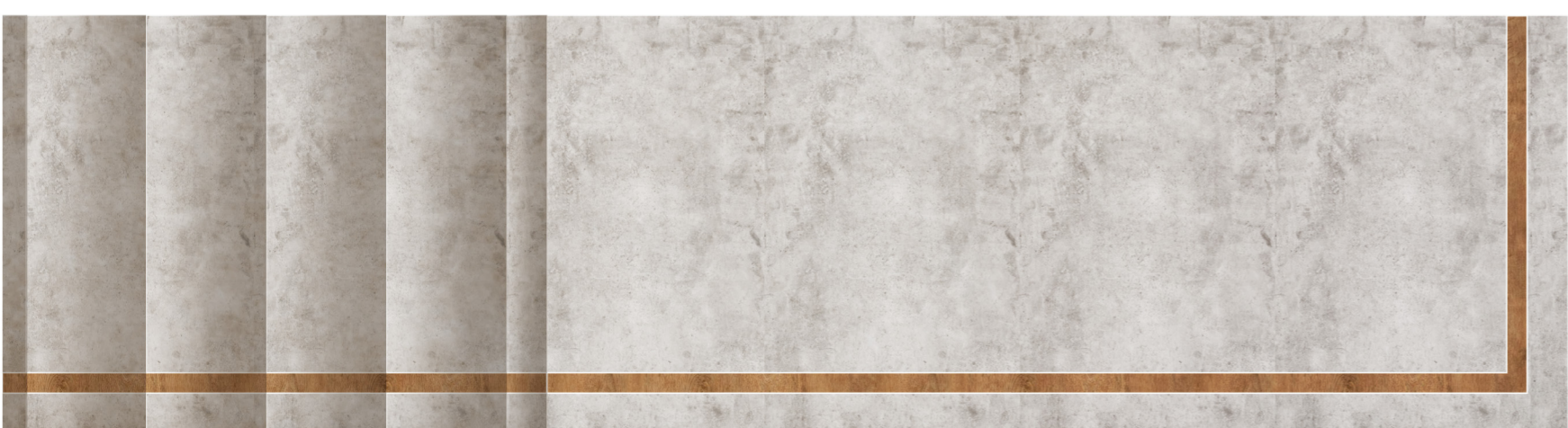
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