



HOUSE OF THE MUSES

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Architecture & Textile Practices

Explorelab - TU Delft

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HOUSE OF THE MUSES

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Detail of Patchwork Site Model (Scale 1:2000)

House of the Muses as Feminist Post-Museum

Welcome to House of the Muses

In this booklet, I will tell you a story, and we will travel together to an imaginary place where existing power structures, such as white male supremacy, which are currently leading the world into devastating directions, can be dismantled.

So I hope you will be able to get rid of all preconceptions of what an architectural project can be, and come along with me into the House of the Muses, with no expectations but a sense of wonder.

House of the Muses is a place where you might get lost, but we will help you to find yourself again. House of the Muses is a place of care, and by addressing historical and still existing harm, we can take responsibility for it and imagine a new possible future.

A sense of Protest

One year ago, when graduation started, we were asked to share our fascination to be transformed into an

architectural project. To be honest, my beginnings were not a fascination, but a sense of protest towards the power structures existing in museums and the art world, as a reflection of the society we live in.

Personally, I started visiting art museums from a very young age with my family and school, and as I grew older, I became very passionate about them. However, in the past few years, during my MA in Museum Studies and Art History, I started looking at them more critically.

To me, growing up in a white upper-middle-class family in Milan, Italy, with my father a university professor and my mother a graphic designer, visiting museums was taken for granted, but maybe it was not something that everyone would do. Today, museums claim to be accessible and open to all, but are museums actually as inclusive as they claim to be? In their target audiences, in their systems of collecting and exhibiting, but also in the treatment towards contemporary artists within these art

RESEARCH

institutions?

Such as schools, museums are “discursive institutions,” as Foucault calls them, educational institutions that share a narrative of the people in power. Since knowledge and power are strictly connected, museums are nothing else than a result of these power structures.

In my research, I argue that as we live in a patriarchal, colonial, and elitist society, museums reflect these values too.

Museum Genealogy

Jumping back in time to its history, the term museum was coined by Alexander the Great, who founded the “Alexandrina Library” in the 3rd century BC. The etymology of the word comes from the ancient Greek “Museion,” meaning the location of the Muses, inspiring goddesses of the arts. The Library of Alexandria was among the first institutions to claim the collection of universal and objective knowledge: an assumption I seek to critically question.

However, the first examples of collections as we know them now were the “Wunderkammern” or “Cabinets of curiosities”, which appeared in European private homes during the 15th and 16th centuries. In these places,

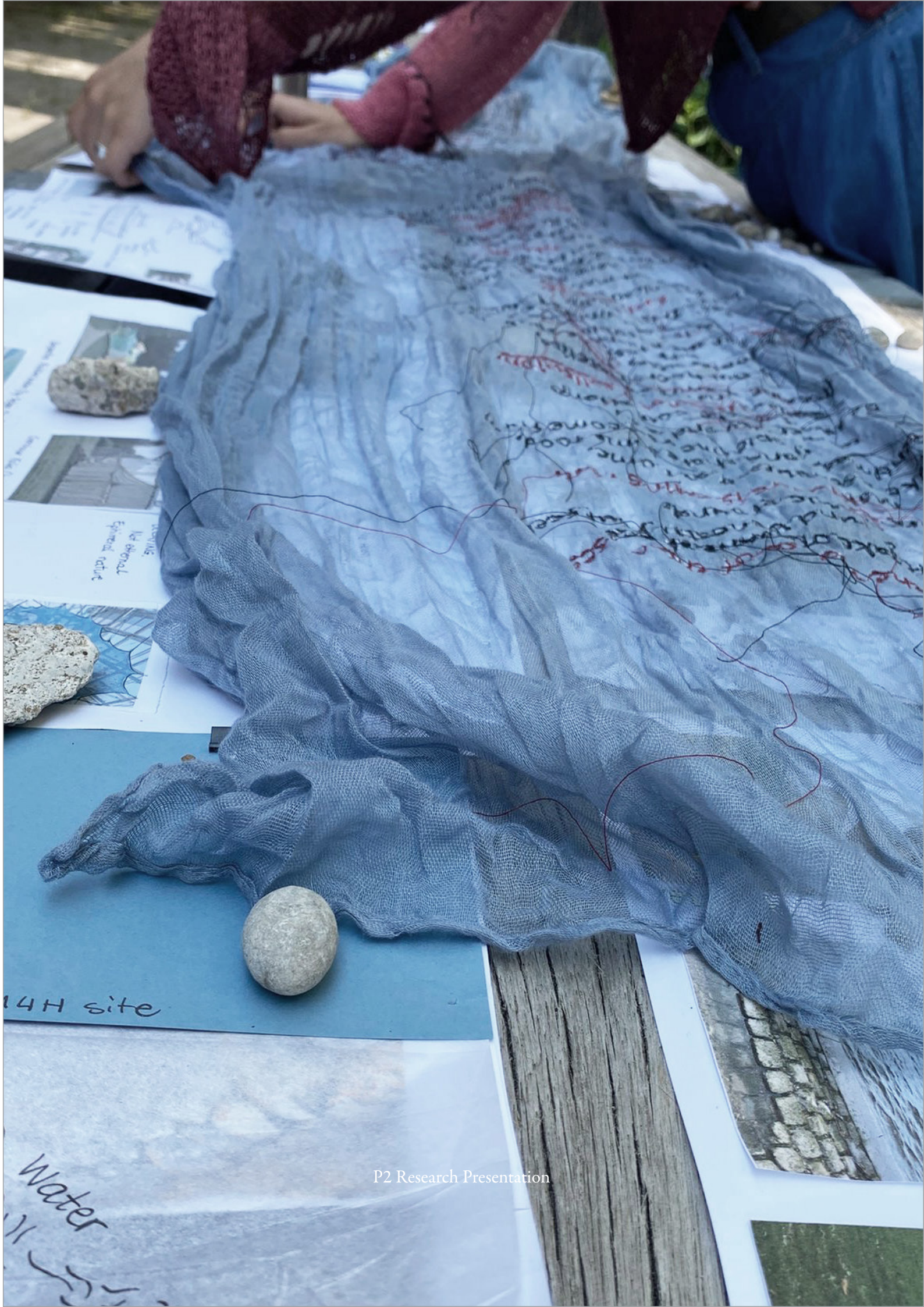
elite men would collect objects taken from their original locations and display them as symbols of power. They would invite other men from the elite to visit and showcase their wealth.

Each collection was a space run by men, in which women were often not allowed or were deemed passive, not capable of having opinions or contributing to this knowledge.

To be collected were objects of daily use, spiritual objects, plants, and sometimes even people, taken from their original home to be put on show.

In the 17th century, the first “public” museum was opened, but was it really public? It kept the same values, and this is also visible in the architecture of imposing facades of the museums, which discourage so many people from getting inside, or the sterile white-box interiors, where one feels required to conform to certain behaviors or come prepared with specific knowledge.

Despite all the effort made by cultural workers and artists, the museum will never be “public” until its foundations, as well as the practices of collecting, exhibiting, and archiving knowledge, are displaced.



Handwritten notes on a white sheet of paper, partially obscured by the net.



No external
structural nature



14H site

Water

Proposing a Feminist Alternative to the Traditional Art Museum

In front of this, I propose a post-museum logic, in which House of the Muses becomes a place of hope that imagines an alternative system against oppression and exploitation, a logic and a system based on the feminist values of care.

My research is based on feminist literature, in which feminism is not to be mistaken as only addressing gender inequalities, but is an intersectional system of thinking that addresses systems of oppression against under-represented identities. And a place of care is not a “safe space,” which is a term that is very popular nowadays. This safety often means control, and a place that feels safe for some might be threatening for most. Care is about sustaining relationships within tension and contradiction, about “Staying with the Trouble”, as Donna Haraway writes.

Reclaiming the Muse

Drawing back to the etymology of the museum, as the location of the Muses, I reclaim the muse, which is a figure that has been oppressed and rendered passive and object of the gaze of men’s creators. I want to reclaim the muse, as I believe that a muse can be both a source of inspiration and a creator at the same time.

I reject the dualities between inspiration and expression, as well as between tradition and contemporary practices, and instead embrace the cyclical nature of creativity and art.

Opening my eyes to the Muses, I started finding them everywhere, while also being intentional about the people that I want to get inspired by. The booklet of Conversations incorporates some of the conversations with my muses, such as artists, architects, and cultural workers in the field, who shared their experiences and opinions about the limitation of museums, but also gave me a sense of collective hope.

Curatorial Practice

During the year, I also had the opportunity to curate and work at several exhibitions and spaces that aimed to question the preexisting notions and practices collecting art. At the Van Eesteren Museum of Architecture and Urbanism in Amsterdam, I curated an exhibition on the stories of plants and people living in the Nieuw-West neighborhood. With our curatorial collective, Pillow Fighters, we organised an exhibition and a storytelling performance based on reclaiming softness as a powerful strength that can move society. And during my time in the Philippines, with the Museum of Contemporary Art and Design in Metro Ma-

RESEARCH

nila, I worked on the exhibition of Chinese-Filipino artist Elisa Tan, who expressed through her art and writings the problematics of being a Southeast Asian diasporic artist living and practicing in Europe.

The Manifestations

During my research semester, I learned so much that I didn't know where to start to express all of my discoveries.

So one day, I decided to sit down with my sewing machine for three days and stitch the Manifestations.

This cloth is not a rigid manifesto, but a piece in constant becoming, where my muses and I ask:

What happens when the museum becomes a home,
Where collecting becomes hosting,
Where archiving becomes sharing,
When art and architecture become processes, and labour is rendered visible?

What happens in a place where each and every one has an agency, and we become muses to one another?

Where tradition and contemporary production coexist, and creativity becomes cyclical?



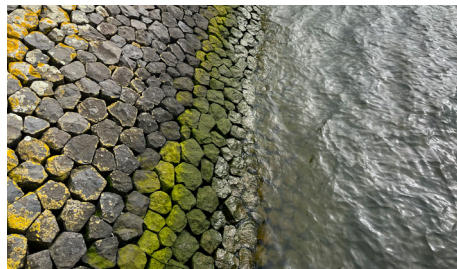
MANIFESTATIONS



MANIFESTATIONS



LISTENING TO THE MUSES



M4H, PORT OF ROTTERDAM



The Site

When it came to choosing a site for my House of the Muses, I looked for a place that would hold and embrace layers of transformation and connection. I found the harbour of Rotterdam to be a great example of how temporalities and agencies meet and coexist: the water, the flora and fauna, the industrial landscape, and the people living and working in the area.

When mapping, my main focus is not on the rigidity of the city and the way it is mapped to claim objectivity, but on the constant flow of human and non-human agencies, and how different temporary states come together. As shown in the site map, I interpret the city as a patchwork, where the so-called in-between spaces between the buildings are not secondary but have crucial value. They are the places where connections happen and where I can find endless muses.

The area of M4H, Merwe Vierhaven, used to be a polder, a piece of land reclaimed from the sea, and later some water was introduced again to

become a harbour. In recent years, due to the port's westward transition away from the city, the area has started to be populated by new groups. Here you can see the Voedseltuin, a community garden project, and another park nearby. Some of the port warehouses are now starting to get used as exhibition spaces, office spaces, or art spaces, which are transforming Keilewerf into an emerging cultural district, speeding up the process of gentrification. According to current plans, this area will sooner or later be developed, in ways that will hardly benefit the lower-income communities living in the surroundings, such as in Delfshaven and Schiedam. Represented in red is our building, situated between an empty plot and the food mensa. In front of it, a new city beach has recently been created.

During my visits, the Katoenhuis instantly caught my attention, both for its appearance and its name, refer-

RESEARCH

ring to cotton. When I found out its history, I immediately knew it was a powerful reflection of the patriarchal, colonial, and capitalist values that I aim to criticize.

Katoenhuis History

For a brief overview of its history, the Katoenhuis was built in 1951 by Mr. Van Bennekum, who owned a cotton trade business. Cotton could obviously not grow in the Netherlands, which already suggests an exploitation of colonial land. The bales coming from South America by boat would be stored in the building, which served as a storage and testing center where mostly women were working and being exploited.

In the early 2000s, Van Bennekum sold the building, and for some years it was used as a rave location and a squatted creative space.

In 2007, Opticool, an exotic fruit storage company, moved into the building and transformed it into a refrigerator.

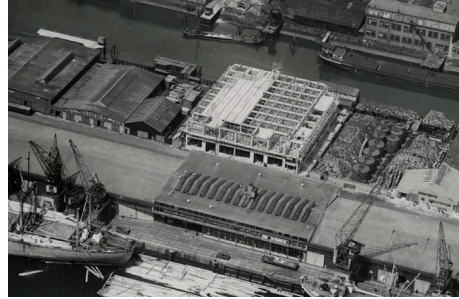
Today, you can still see the insulated walls of the refrigerator and its ventilation system, while it is being used as an immersive art, events, and conference space.

The building, with its completely closed-off architecture, very few

windows, and imposing façade, is a strong representation of this patriarchal and colonial power.

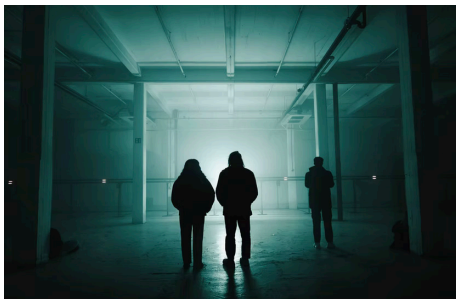
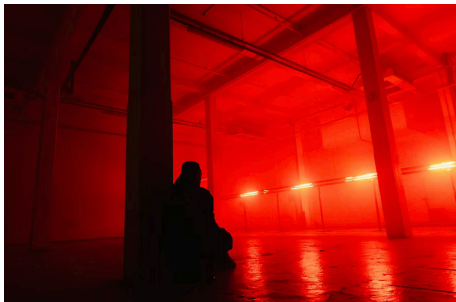
However, my aim is not to reject this history, but to acknowledge it and imagine a continuation, a possible future that is no longer sterile and exploitative, as it used to be for both people and goods from the colonies and for the women working in the factory, but that transforms the Katoenhuis into an organism that creates together with the community.

HISTORICAL IMAGES



1951-2000s: Katoenloods Van Bennekum's Havenbedrijf

KATOENHUIS



[Top] Early 2000s: Music Club, [Second top] 2007-2023: Exotic Fruits Cooling House, [First and Second Bottom] 2025: Concrete Culture “Hub for immersive experiences and technology”

From Textile Practices to Architecture

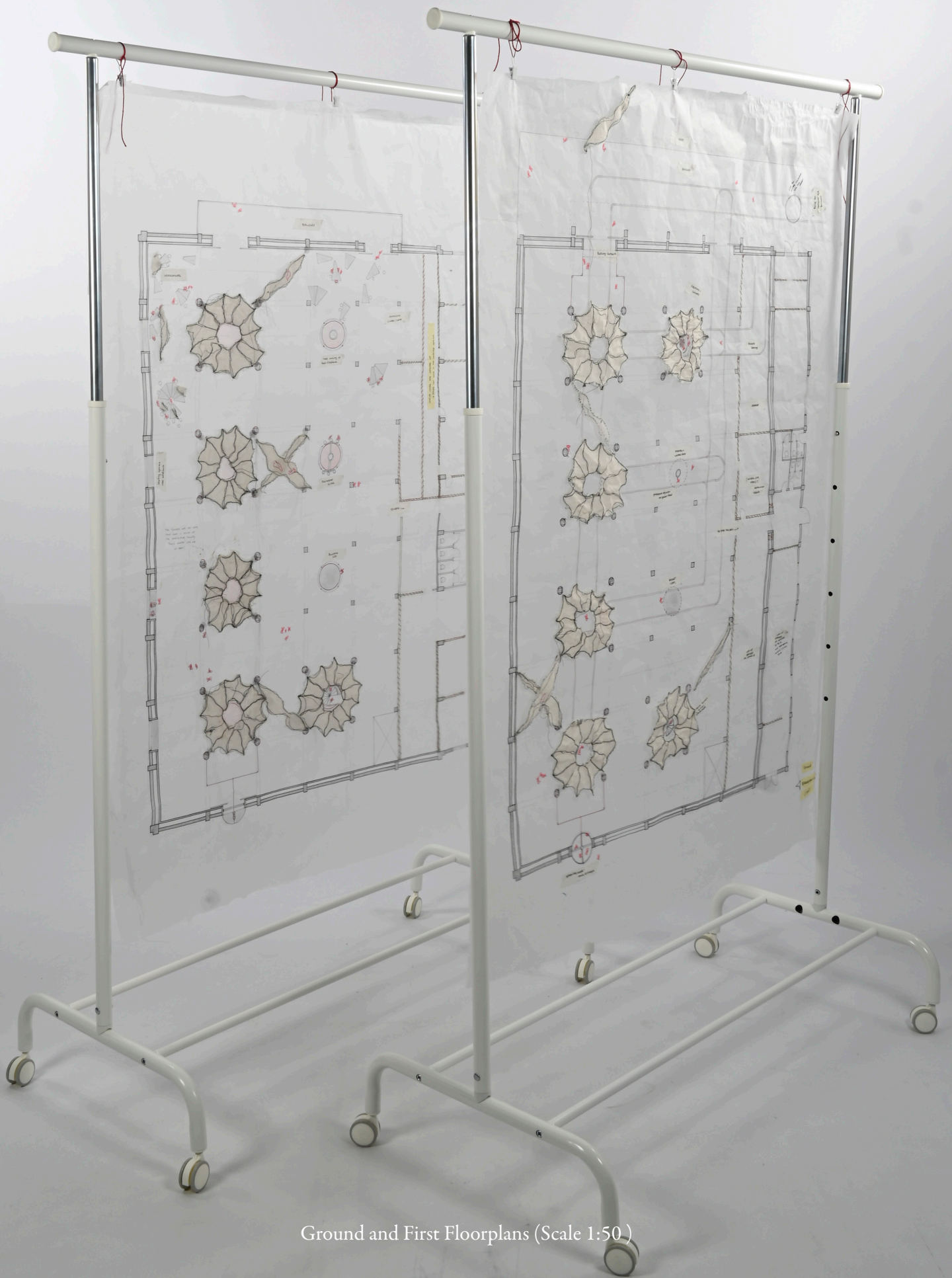
Reclaiming Textile as an Architectural Medium

In order to do so, I chose to use an alternative medium for making architecture by reclaiming textiles. Textile is a medium that has been passed on to me by my grandmother and is very dear to me, but it is also something that every culture in the world has in common, and is based on community effort and traditions. However, it has been deemed secondary because of its gendered nature. While reclaiming the muses in my post-museum, I also aim to reclaim this medium as a collective feminist practice of making space that is not rigid but transitional and adaptable to different and evolving needs.

For this reason, I also engage with the history of the Katoenhuis as a cotton storage. From its original purpose, I follow the process of making textile from raw material to the creation of cloth, starting from spinning, the act of making thread, to weaving, creating the textile cloth, to stitching elements together, and finally to dyeing colors using natural pigments that

carry local as well as global exchange histories.

House of the Muses is an experiment in how these textile practices can be in dialogue with architectural making, and how building can be imagined otherwise.



Ground and First Floorplans (Scale 1:50)

Weaving: the Building as a Machine

At the beginning of the design phase, I found myself in front of a closed-off, imposing building, with brick facades, very few openings, almost no daylight coming in, and cold interiors with six-meter industrial ceilings and white refrigerator-insulated walls.

Although I found it a challenging place to transform into a home, this grid-like structure became an opportunity for my design to weave into its rigid skeleton.

For those who are not familiar with the loom, it is the frame used for weaving. Weaving is one of the primary ways of making cloth. The principles are simple. The vertical threads are called the warp, and they serve as the structure, while the weft is the thread that moves horizontally and brings creativity, patterns, and life into the grid.

After months of experimenting with weaving (using different types of looms) and reflecting on how to integrate it with architecture, I realised that many architectural elements can

be considered as a loom as well.

When looking at historical pictures of the Katoenhuis during construction, one can see the regular grid of columns and beams, as well as the steel reinforcement in place before pouring the concrete slabs. In the House of the Muses, the building becomes a loom, a rigid structure where creativity can take place. The building becomes a machine for creating.

The architectural materialization of the House of the Muses is not a fixed object, but a process and a system of relations, a machine.

When I talk of a machine, I do not intend a machine as an instrument of domination, extraction, and pure efficiency, as the Katoenhuis building was built for. Instead, it is a poietic machine, where poietic comes from the concept of creation, poiesis. Different from the Greek word *techne*, which refers to knowledge of how things are made, poiesis is about creating something that did not exist before, about questioning what tools

DESIGN

can do, about generating and organizing affects.

In this case, textile processes become technologies, and the House of the Muses is a site where these technologies are materialized and translated into space.

My machine is a system of relations, a site of care that operates through the interdependencies of warp and weft, like in a loom. This system is never finished and never the same; it is in constant becoming. The properties of textiles allow the House of the Muses to breathe, stretch, filter, and gather, becoming a multisensorial experience of the place in terms of lighting, touch and embodiment, sound, smell, temperature, and more.

As visible in the floorplans, the building is transformed into a loom by penetrating the structure with circular, symmetrical holes and windows. The holes extend from the skylights, where light can come in from above, all the way down to the ground floor. Textile is installed inside in a continuous thread that goes from the main entrance door to the entrance from the water side, creating a continuous connection from one side to the other, through the first and second floors. I call the elements going through these holes funnels or double funnels, as their diameter becomes smaller through the hole and expands towards the ground floor and the

roof.

They appear as blossoms from both sides, creating shelters on the ground floor, rising and opening up through the first floor. In-between the blossoms, connecting them, are the hammocks, attached through the same hooks on the columns, which also influence their movement, as we will see later in more detail. These metal hoops with hooks become a crucial part of the machine, but they also create a strong aesthetic value, a constellation of loops within the factory space at different heights.

This machine does not work on its own, and it needs humans and also non-humans to function, and they become part of it. It makes labour visible instead of hiding it.

TEXTILE PRACTICES

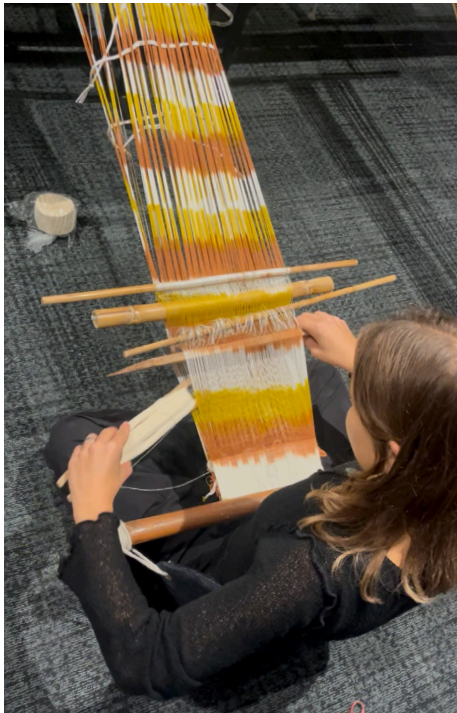


Persian Kilim Hand-weaving, Workshop by Kilimatique, Rotterdam



Heddle loom weaving, Workshop at Oli Makati, Metro Manila, PH

WEAVING



Backstrap Loom Weaving , baguio City, PH



Rafia Pedal Loom, Puerto Princesa, PH



Ground Floorplan (Scale 1:50)



First Floorplan (Scale 1:50)

Spinning: a System activated from the Entrance

The Spinning Door as a First Driver of the Mechanism

Our journey into the House of the Muses starts from the entrance, a revolving door that becomes a driver mechanism for the whole building. The name Spinning Door is inspired by the process of spinning, which is actually the first thing you do when you prepare raw cotton fibers: you test their quality and then start making thread. Here is the spindle; spinning used to be done by hand, then the spinning wheel, and later the spinning jenny, which had a huge impact on the Industrial Revolution.

Again, a process that was once meditative—people used to gather in communities to spin, and originally it was the men doing the spinning so that women could make garments for the family—became a tool for exploiting women in factories.

As visible in historical pictures, the two imposing doors on the street were used to transport the cotton bales into storage. The door func-

tioned as the place where people and raw materials entered the building, to be stored and used as resources for the capitalist system. An entrance that was once closed off and imposing becomes a threshold that relies on presence and agency.

By pushing on the door handle, people can be the first driving force to activate this system inside the building, even without knowing. So when you enter this space, with tall ceilings, 6 m high, without noticing, you are pulling the pulley system up and down, causing a movement of the funnel within this huge space of the factory building.

This impacts the space and the atmosphere, the way the lighting passes through the hole in the ceiling from the skylight above, as well as the people that are already inside, they can notice that someone new is coming in. The textile stretches down and up in different ways, and creates a new space every time. But the textile movement does not end here, but continues throughout the space, activated in many different ways by

the people inside the house of the muses.

The Ground Floor : Atmospheres

The ground floor appears as an open atmospheric space, where one can experience the different qualities created by the textile funnels: the daylight light coming through the ceiling opening and filtered by the textile, but also the electric lighting effects in the evening. The sounds of people's chatters, the wind, and the seagulls coming from the skylights are more or less muffled by the textile, the air of the ventilation pipes coming in and out and moving the textile, the heat, for example, created by the fireplace, and where one can find shelter during the cold months underneath the funnels.

The First Floor : Workshops

To be able to see the funnel from a different perspective and go up to the first floor, one can take the spiral staircase near the entrance, and go up to the floor where most functions are taking place. I introduced some round window openings on the west façade for more light to come in, and the skylights illuminate the space during the day.

The spaces that were once designated for the offices are stripped of their walls partially, and serve as a storage

or open material library where the visitors can learn about the material and processes happening in the House of the Muses.

The first floor becomes an open workspace, where tables can be moved on wheels, and people can work collectively, in-between the funnels that can act as shading and filtering of light in case of need. Electricity cables and plugs run through the structure on some rails, making the space very flexible and adapting to the industrial aesthetic of the building.

Anyone can come to read and work in the spaces upstairs, and part of it is also designated for a textile workshop, accessible to people, where the funnels are produced. The workshops are open to a variety of participants, connecting with local initiatives such as the textile workshop for children in Delfshaven, which lacks a dedicated space. The workshops introduce different textile methods and serve as a communal meeting point, inviting collaboration and exchange. The House of the Muses thus operates as a living organism, engaging with its surroundings.

Mechanism

The spinning door is not the only way to move the textile, but the loops on the columns can be moved in different ways: manually, by pulling the strap systems, or with gravity force, when one sits on the hammocks.

Through force of gravity, people can affect the movement by simply lying down on the hammocks and pulling the textile down. From a state of tension and stretching, the funnels fall down as a moment of release, like a breathing movement activated by the guests of House of the Muses.



Detail of Spinning Door and Mechanism (Scale 1:20)

Stitching: Shaping the Patchwork

Blurring the Boundaries between Functionality and Aesthetics

Zooming into how the patterns are made, the funnels are a result of some experimentation with some fashion design patterns, as you can see in the several mock-ups that I am showing in the exhibition. In the end, I opted for a mirrored double-funnel shape, each funnel cut into slices connected to each other, that runs from the ground floor to the ceiling. Being such huge installations, the process of production had to be taken into consideration. It would be very pricey and hard to find such big pieces or slices of the funnel.

Therefore, I found in the patchwork the best method to patch pieces of cotton together and create the desired shape with minimum waste. The leftover patches would be used to make the hammocks as well.

Also the shape of the modular tables, very handy to be moved around and arranged in different combinations depending on single use, or groups

and workshops, depends on the pattern. To find the correct angle of the slices, which are so big that it would be very hard to measure, one can use the table to check where to cut and stitch pieces together.

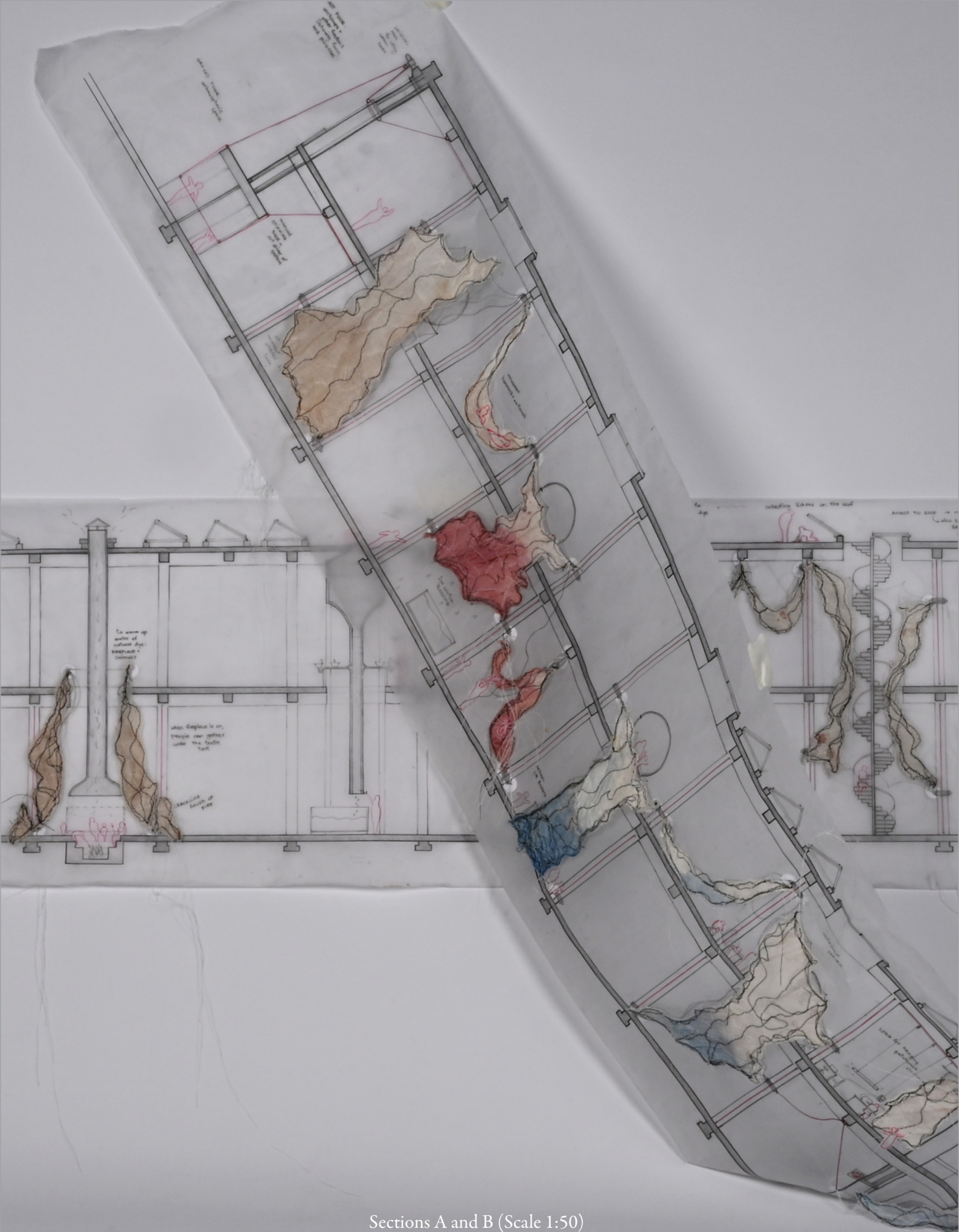
Traditionally, the practice of stitching can be divided into two groups: sewing, which is functional, and embroidery, which is decorative. In the case of the funnels, the stitched patchwork becomes both functional and decorative, blurring the boundaries between aesthetic and functionality. As you can see in the funnel that I am wearing, which is on a 1-6 scale, which is not a typical scale used for architecture (but no one has ever built with a scale of a small Italian girl) the light is more or less filtered by the stitched part, and creates a playful lighting effect, which breaks the symmetry of the original funnel patterns, and adds some variation and creativity.

House of the Muses becomes a place where dualities such as form and function are rejected, and where

DESIGN

there is no division of spaces, but transitions become smoother and more opaque. Also here, spaces and in-between spaces become blurred, and in constant transition, and the bodies of the visitors and the architecture of the building are put in contact thanks to the textile.

Thanks to this collaborative practices of making, House of the muses is not an educational institution in which already existing knowledge is imposed, but where everyone can create and learn from one another, and the people, the materials and their material histories become muses to one another.



Sections A and B (Scale 1:50)

24/7 DYEING WORKSHOP



“AND WE DYED, EVERYDAY, FOR A WEEK”



Natural Dyeing as site-specific practice

Natural Dyeing as Spatial Practice

Another process in which these materials influence and muses reveal themselves is the natural dyeing process.

Natural dyeing is a textile practice rooted in specific local contexts, yet shaped over time by complex layers of global exchange. Historically, colors were derived from local materials, and this contributed to the heritage and color palettes of specific regions. In the House of the Muses, I aim to reclaim this site-specificity, framing natural dyeing as a bridge between the building and its surroundings.

Through these processes, human and non-human agencies leave traces on the textile, producing colors that are both strong and delicate, and enriching the expression of the patchwork. The natural dyes used in the House of the Muses can be sourced locally, such as madder root, indigo leaves, and black oak.

Each of these materials carries a rich and complex history, revealing how

colors are embedded in social systems and dynamics of power. Within the building, dyeing becomes a critical part of the architectural machine.

Architectural Translations of the Dyeing Process

Each stage of the process is spatially organized: collection points, rainwater tanks or funnels, a fireplace to heat the dyes, and an elevator that moves buckets up and down to prepare dyes or recycle leftovers for workshops.

The process begins with foraging. Buckets are transported along rails or lifted to the roof to gather plant materials, lichens, or food remnants such as onion peels, coffee grounds, and tea leaves from the building's café and community garden.

Then, water needs to be collected for simmering the pigments. Rainwater is collected through a funnel and tank system. This same water supply is extended to sinks on the first floor, allowing workshop participants to

DESIGN

clean their hands without disturbing office areas. Historically, a mordant (often a mineral or natural agent) was added to the water to speed up the process of coloring and make the color more durable. Women sometimes used rusty pans, as rust functions as a natural mordant. By collecting water into the rusty funnel, no additive to the water is necessary. The funnel, tank, and pipes integrate seamlessly into the industrial aesthetic of the Katoenhuis, along with the fireplace, elevator, and staircase.

Once the dye materials and water are collected, heat is applied to allow pigments to penetrate the textile.

In the House of the Muses, buckets of dye are heated over the fireplace on the ground floor, creating both a functional process and a warm, inviting microclimate. Textiles draped nearby form a tent-like shelter, reflecting light from the fire and casting shadows of the people working around it. The warmth rises, influencing the café and community kitchen below, while the first floor maintains a more regulated temperature. When not used for the dyeing process, the fireplace can be used to warm up or cook food, too.

Ventilation System

The aroma of natural dyes is strong, especially at the scale of the House

of the Muses, and requires proper ventilation. This system of pipes softens the smell, transforming it into a subtle and pleasant olfactory experience that complements the sensory environment. Moreover, the air coming through the wholes in the space also creates a movement of the textile due to the air flow, embracing the transformational and malleable qualities of the textile, reacting to the movement of humans and things.

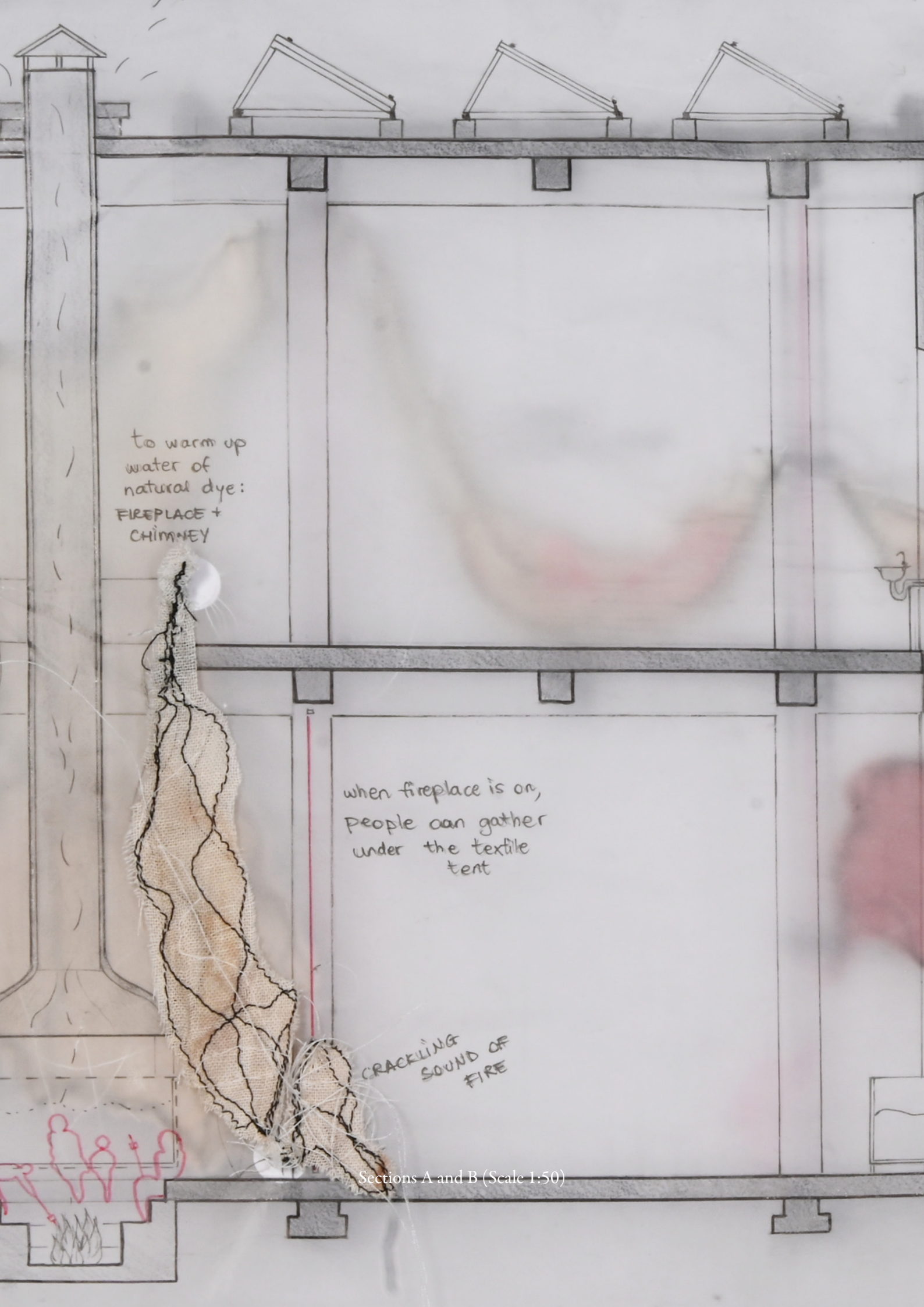
Bleeding processes

When the dyes are ready, the textile is removed from its hoops on the ground floor and submerged in the buckets. The length and curvature of the funnels allow the liquid to permeate the fabric fully. After several hours, or preferably overnight, the textile is lifted, wrung, and rehung onto the first-floor loops. As the funnels release excess liquid, some color inevitably drips onto the rough concrete floors, forming patterns that further enrich the immersive environment. Rotating rails on the first floor allow participants to wring out the textile collectively, transforming the act into a collaborative performance.

The resulting patchwork and dyed textiles exhibit strong, vivid, yet delicate tones. Downstairs, the effects are most visible, creating an atmospheric and immersive experience, while upstairs, variations in textile positioning

DESIGN

during soaking and wringing produce subtle differences in color and even “bleeding” onto the floor, forming unique, ephemeral patterns.



to warm up
water of
natural dye:
FIREPLACE +
CHIMNEY

when fireplace is on,
People can gather
under the textile
tent

CRACKLING
SOUND OF
FIRE

Sections A and B (Scale 1:50)

RAIN-WATER TANK
(for natural dye buckets)



SINKS

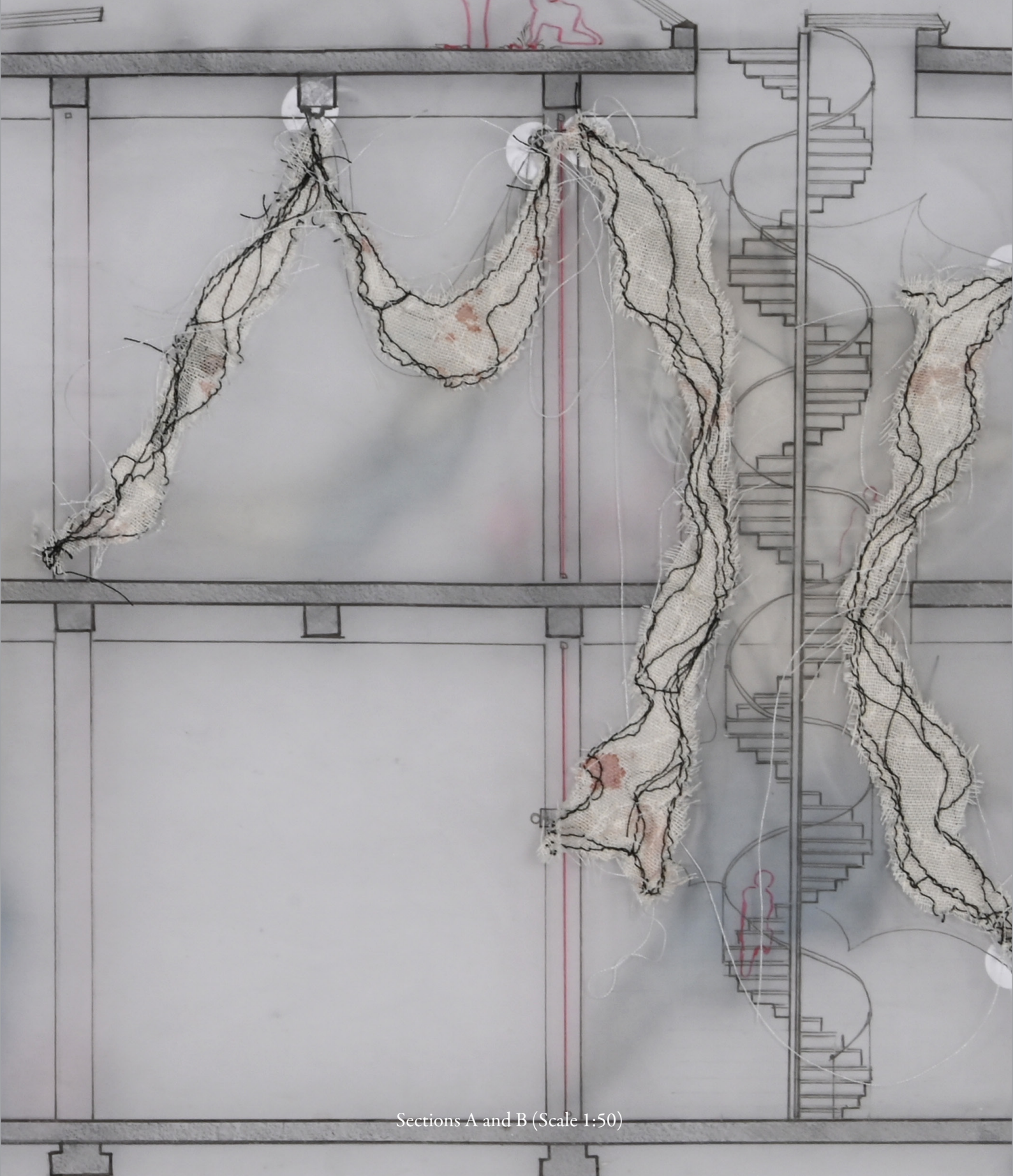
for people
in the workshops

50 cm d

use LICHENS for natural dye

collecting lichens on the roof

ACCESS TO R



Sections A and B (Scale 1:50)

Conclusions

The natural dyeing process completes the circle of exchange. Leftover pigments can be reused in workshops, and both dyed and undyed textiles can return to the natural environment. Fermented or rusty organic materials, along with natural fibers, enrich the land and even function as fertilizers. What is gifted by the surroundings is returned, transformed through human and non-human agency, creating a participatory, responsive, generative, and transformative cycle.

If you are reading this booklet, you have, at some point in my life, been one of my Muses. Thank you for inspiring me and for sharing this journey with me. This project is only at its beginning, and I will always carry it with me, like a “Carrier Bag”, guiding me and helping me discover new muses every day. I wish the same for you, with all of my heart.