

DEN HELDER, NETHERLANDS.



2023.6

INCOMPLETED
MEMORY

community void
container

daily memory
deconstruction
Den Helder

exhibition

framer

grand memory

historical leftover

movement lens

palimpsest

symbol lens

trace lens

urban decay & shrinking

reading guide



stage

undefined places

community void

The communities in Den Helder have persevered through the devastating effects of war, and to this day, they bear witness to the resilience of the past with numerous weathered pre-war buildings. Although these structures have fallen into disrepair, they encapsulate a treasure trove of historical significance. Recognizing the challenges posed by urban decline and population loss, the government took action in 2000 to revitalize the pre-war buildings, particularly in the city center.

During this revitalization process, as the old buildings are being demolished and reconstructed, temporary abandoned spaces known as "voids" emerge. These voids are often enclosed by sturdy fences and can be found filled with construction materials or overtaken by unruly vegetation, left unattended for the time being.





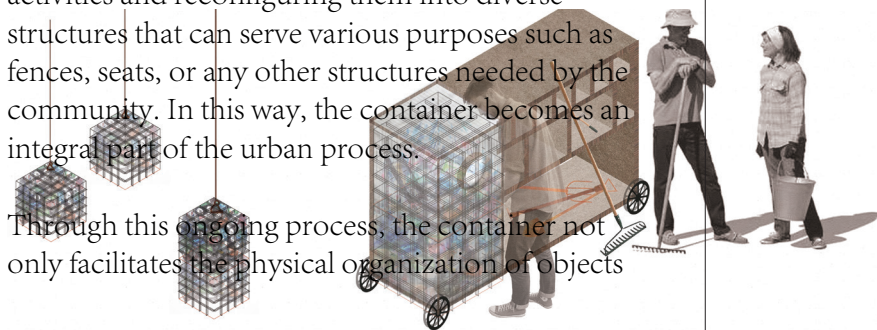
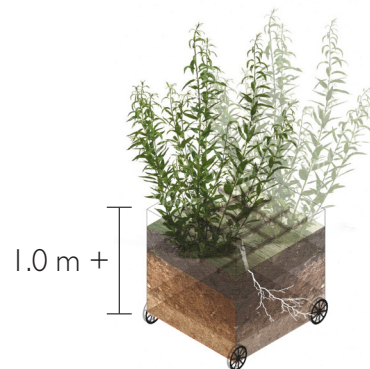
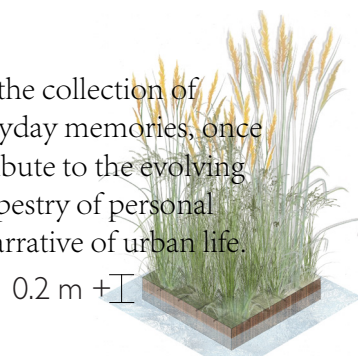
container

In every urban neighborhood, a continuous flow of residents and their associated human activities shapes the fabric of daily life. These neglected corners serve as a poignant reflection of this process. People have grown accustomed to discarding objects of their daily existence in these spaces. I find value in salvaging these discarded objects and repurposing them into unified installations, highlighting the profound influence of everyday life and the passage of time on the collective memory of the city.

This process is one of accumulation, as the site undergoes transformation, giving rise to an ever-increasing array of activities. Each new activity leaves its imprint, leaving behind traces of life. The container, acting as a meta-component, assumes the role of gathering objects generated by people's activities and reconfiguring them into diverse structures that can serve various purposes such as fences, seats, or any other structures needed by the community. In this way, the container becomes an integral part of the urban process.

Through this ongoing process, the container not only facilitates the physical organization of objects

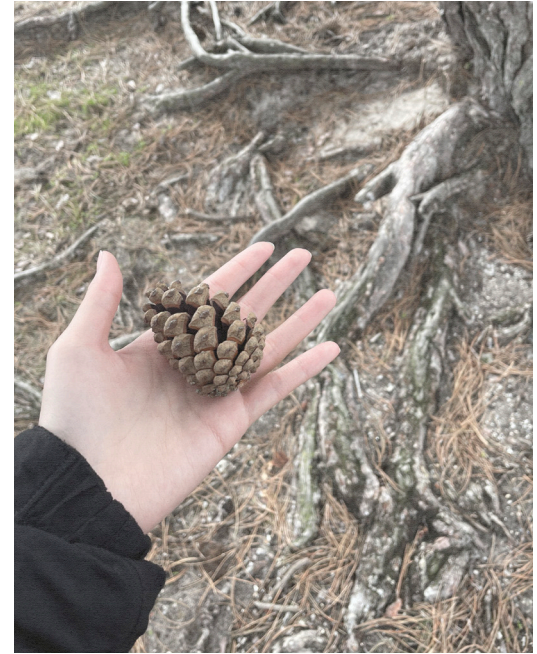
but also serves as a conduit for the collection of personal memories. These everyday memories, once collected and integrated, contribute to the evolving history of the city, weaving a tapestry of personal experiences into the broader narrative of urban life.



daily memory & behaviour

The current historical narrative in Den Helder fails to integrate with local memory practices, thereby disregarding the value of everyday life in commemorating the city's heritage. Historical sites themselves are often overlooked and rarely acknowledged in day-to-day activities. Moreover, the transformed historic locations tend to erase any remnants of the old, making it challenging to establish a personal connection between the users and these sites. Within these historical narratives, individuals are not merely passive recipients of history but also witness the effects of transformation.

A person's attachment to a site heavily relies on the memories shaped by their activities and experiences within that place. The design initiative seeks to capture and promote users' daily interactions with undefined spaces, seamlessly integrating them into their everyday lives. By incorporating these spaces as an integral part of their routines, the aim is to foster a stronger sense of connection and engagement with Den Helder's history.



deconstruction

Within the uncharted spaces of Den Helder, the remnants of the past offer an opportunity for reorganization and reuse. Through the novel arrangement of materials, unconventional activities come to life, potentially disrupting established notions of meaning and behavior. This invites audiences with diverse needs to explore and discover new functions within these interstitial spaces. Simultaneously, through the resonance with personal backgrounds, individuals have the chance to leave their own imprint, adding a personal palimpsest to the collective memory.

In these undefined places, the past finds a renewed purpose as materials are repurposed and reconstructed. The resulting amalgamation of elements sparks unique and unexpected activities, breaking free from traditional constraints. This dynamic interplay between materials and individuals generates an environment where personal expression and reinterpretation thrive.

As audiences engage with these spaces, each person brings their distinct perspectives and experiences.

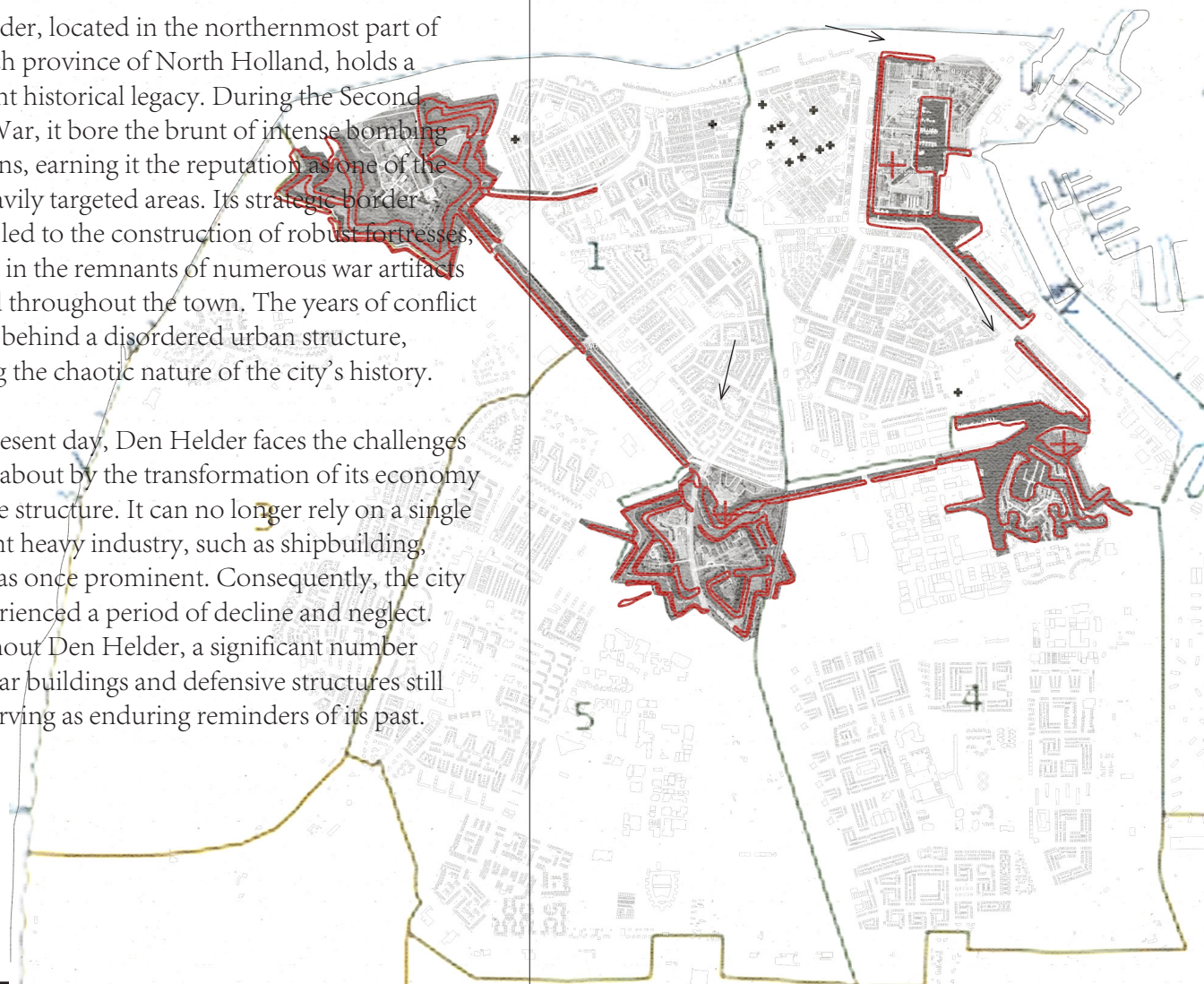
Their individual backgrounds intersect with the collective memory, infusing it with fresh layers of meaning and significance. Through this interaction, the interstices become a canvas for personal narratives, enriching the tapestry of shared remembrance.

In Den Helder's undefined places, the past becomes a catalyst for exploration, as the reorganization and reuse of materials create a fertile ground for transformative experiences. It is within these liminal spaces that individuals can transcend the boundaries of the familiar, leaving their indelible mark on the collective memory, and forging new connections between the past, present, and future.

Den Helder

Den Helder, located in the northernmost part of the Dutch province of North Holland, holds a significant historical legacy. During the Second World War, it bore the brunt of intense bombing campaigns, earning it the reputation as one of the most heavily targeted areas. Its strategic border position led to the construction of robust fortresses, resulting in the remnants of numerous war artifacts scattered throughout the town. The years of conflict have left behind a disordered urban structure, reflecting the chaotic nature of the city's history.

In the present day, Den Helder faces the challenges brought about by the transformation of its economy and trade structure. It can no longer rely on a single dominant heavy industry, such as shipbuilding, which was once prominent. Consequently, the city has experienced a period of decline and neglect. Throughout Den Helder, a significant number of pre-war buildings and defensive structures still stand, serving as enduring reminders of its past.



exhibition

The exhibition showcasing containers and framers in Willemsoord is an integral part of the design concept. It involves creating a series of open spaces demarcated by borders, where these movable spatial components are intentionally left in position for an extended duration.

The exhibition serves a dual purpose: it presents the spatial components themselves and preserves traces of their usage, while also serving as a catalyst for action. It encourages increased engagement and participation, making users conscious of the impact their everyday actions have on the space and how even small personal gestures are interconnected with the city's development. By incorporating these movable spatial components, the previously undefined places are brought to life, temporarily acquiring a distinct definition. Importantly, this definition is shaped by each individual's interpretation and engagement.

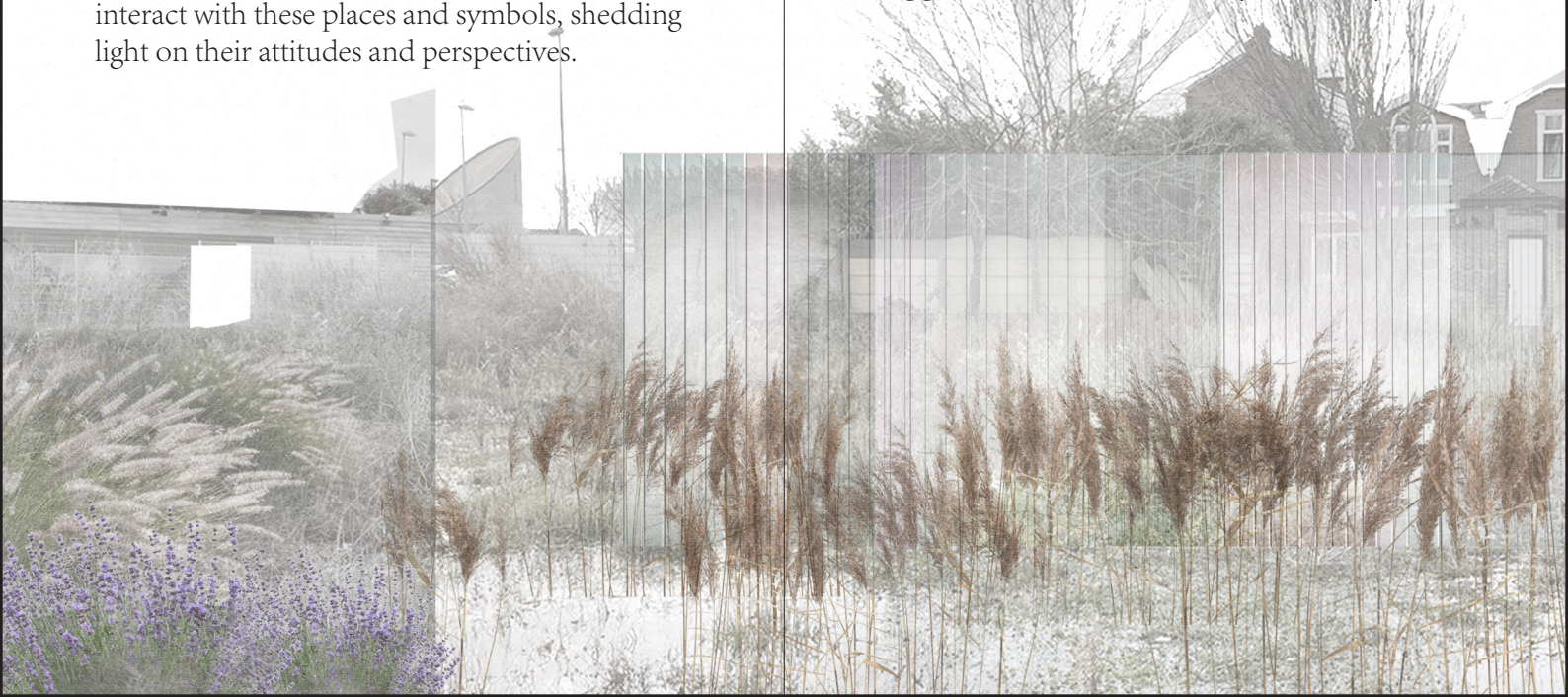


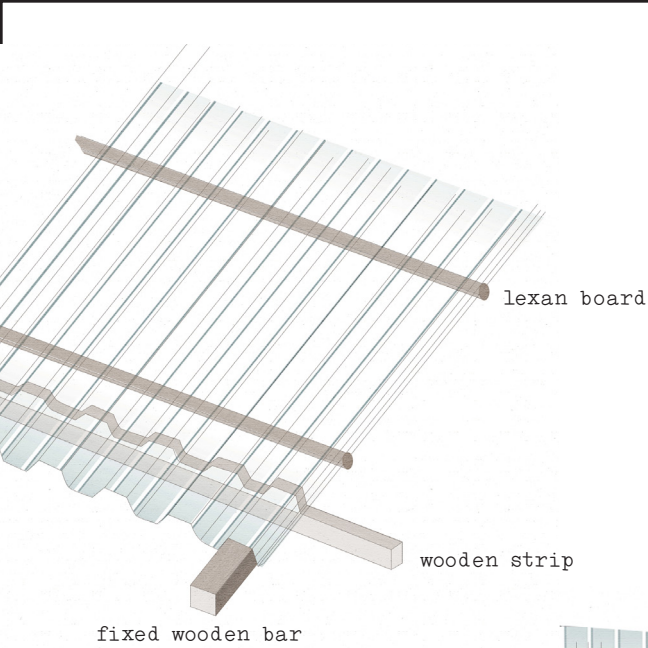
Historic buildings and the rich tapestry of the past hold profound symbolic significance, serving as poignant reminders of the broader historical narrative. The framer concept is specifically designed to accentuate these symbols and allow them to stand out prominently within the urban landscape. Each framer structure is uniquely crafted, taking into account the distinct characteristics of its surroundings, and employs diverse forms and materials to achieve its purpose. By highlighting specific spaces or angles, these structures offer observers a fresh and captivating perspective, drawing attention to the presence and evolution of these symbolic representations. This, in turn, fosters a heightened awareness of the ongoing development within the city.

Moreover, the framer concept serves as an experimental platform, documenting the activities of individuals in and around these structures and capturing the essence of the heritage they represent. These traces of human engagement contribute to a deeper understanding of how users perceive and interact with these places and symbols, shedding light on their attitudes and perspectives.

framer

To ensure that the framer structures seamlessly blend with the existing atmosphere of the site, lightweight and easily transportable materials are utilized. In this experimental endeavor, lexan has been chosen as the material for the framer structures. Its properties allow for a delicate balance, ensuring that the framer does not disrupt or overshadow the inherent ambiance of the surroundings, while still creating a striking visual impact and enhancing the appreciation of the historic symbols they frame.



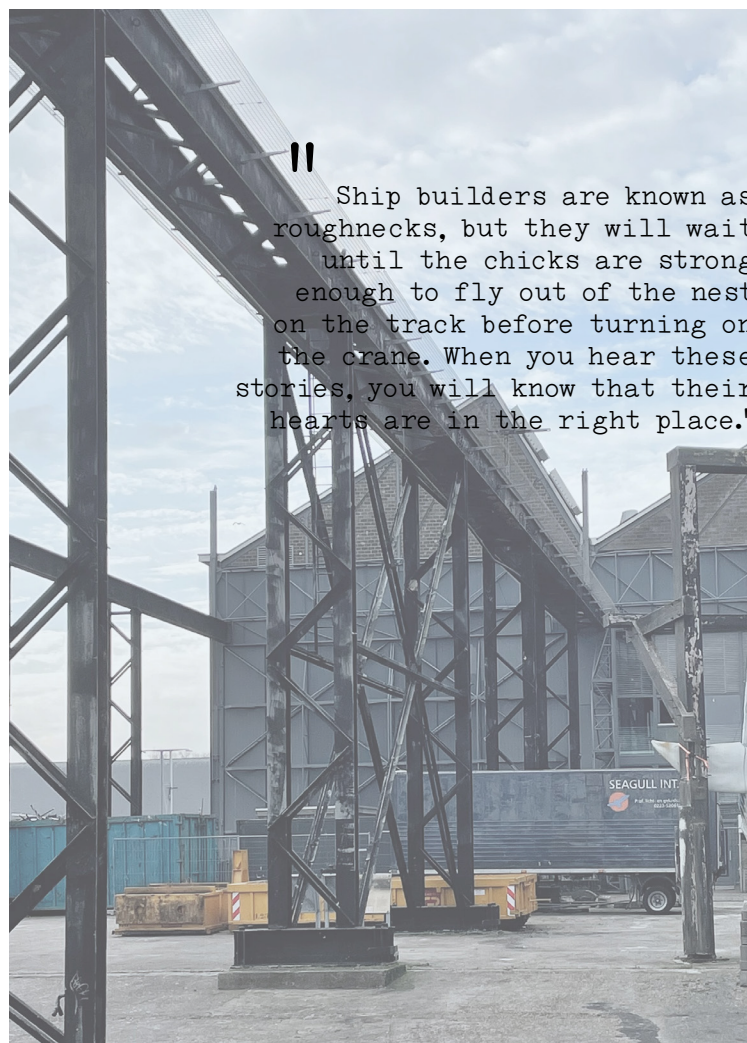


grand memory

From a historical perspective, Den Helder has been profoundly affected by past wars and maritime economies that have left indelible traces in the city. The enduring Stirling Line, the remains of the Atlantic Wall, and other historical artifacts are concrete manifestations of this grand memory.

At the same time, Den Helder finds itself undergoing an urban economic transition that has led to urban decay and a shrinking population - a phenomenon that adds new layers to the city's grand formal memory. We must recognize this ongoing process and prevent the separation of residents from the city's rich history through the introduction of new urban functions and structures.

Our goal should be to promote continuity and connection between past and present, ensuring that residents maintain their connection to Den Helder's history, even as the city grows. By embracing this dual perspective, we can navigate the city's changes while preserving the historic fabric and promoting a vibrant and inclusive urban environment.



“ Ship builders are known as roughnecks, but they will wait until the chicks are strong enough to fly out of the nest on the track before turning on the crane. When you hear these stories, you will know that their hearts are in the right place.”

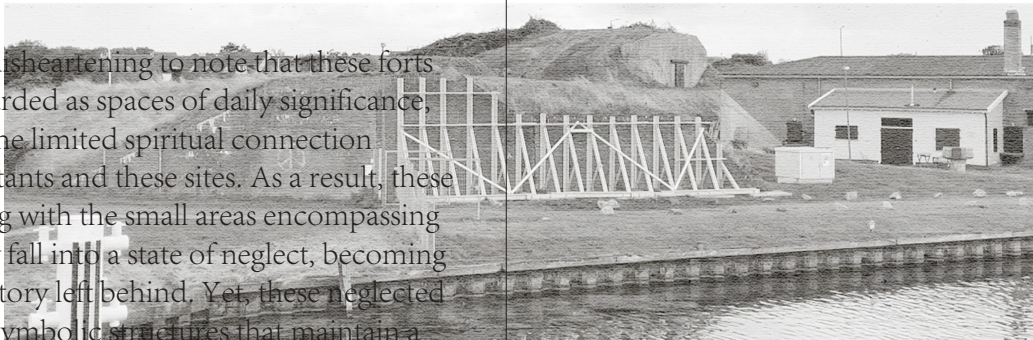
historical leftover

The Stelling Den Helder has transformed into a green belt structure that meanders through the city, revealing remnants of fortress structures from various historical periods. During my urban research, I have observed intriguing developments along this path. Some sites have undergone conversion into small-scale urban agricultural spaces and factories, breathing new life into their surroundings. Others, considered landscape heritage, are diligently preserved and protected by dedicated volunteers.

However, it is disheartening to note that these forts are seldom regarded as spaces of daily significance, mainly due to the limited spiritual connection between inhabitants and these sites. As a result, these structures, along with the small areas encompassing them, gradually fall into a state of neglect, becoming remnants of history left behind. Yet, these neglected spaces possess symbolic structures that maintain a profound connection to grand memories, imbuing them with inherent value and significance.

It is crucial to recognize the memory value embedded within these spaces. They serve as tangible reminders of the historical narrative and

evoke a collective sense of heritage. By revitalizing the spiritual connection to these symbolic structures, we can ensure that their memory value is not lost but embraced as an essential part of the city's identity.



movement lens



This lens adopts a spatial design approach aimed at fostering spontaneous user participation in the transformation of undefined places. By incorporating the user's engagement as an integral part of the site's evolution, this lens seeks to address the paradox inherent in transforming these spaces.

Emphasizing the grand memory carries the risk of compromising the aesthetic ambiguity that characterizes these sites and imposing a unilateral memory onto the user.

To navigate this delicate balance, the design endeavors to create opportunities for participant activity. This is achieved by providing accessible materials, open spaces, and establishing small-scale enclosures in the form of frames or structures. These elements encourage users to actively shape and contribute to the site's transformation, thus enabling the creation of personal memories through their engaged actions. Simultaneously, the indeterminate nature of these user activities reinforces and preserves the site's inherent ambiguity, ensuring it remains open to interpretation and exploration.

By incorporating this approach, users become co-creators of the site's narrative, actively shaping

its meaning through their interactions. This design philosophy empowers individuals to forge their own connections and memories within these undefined places while respecting the diverse perspectives and interpretations that may emerge. It fosters an environment where the transformation of these spaces becomes a collective endeavor, enriched by the multiplicity of experiences and narratives contributed by the users.



'...although the true site's evolution is still developing, not a closed one (space waiting to be transformed), gesture towards a quite different kind of action: inherent in transformation. For the space becomes for them a space of emerging and dissensual possibilities...'



' In 2023, my father and I embarked on a memorable endeavor of transporting a stack of bricks, which we ingeniously repurposed as seating in the coffeeshop void . Today, this transformed space has become a cherished spot for me to enjoy leisurely afternoon tea with my friends.



Ik was verrast toen ik deze stapel bakstenen hier zag liggen

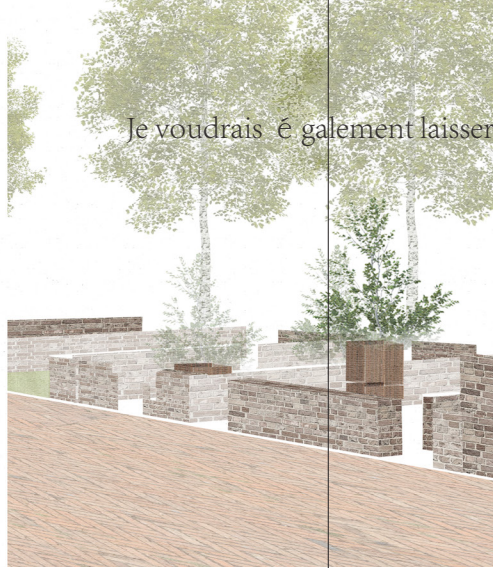


' As a couple traveling to Den Helder, we stumbled upon these fascinating bricks that captivated our attention. Intrigued by their unique charm, we decided to leave our signatures in one corner as a meaningful souvenir. We were informed that the small brick wall originated from a community in Koningstraat. It's truly remarkable to imagine that such quaint building materials were utilized in that area three decades ago. It serves as a testament to the enduring legacy and rich history of Den Helder.

这是个让我们了解荷兰居住区历史的好地方

ある街の歴史が...。これが何年後かにみんなの手で超高層ビルになるのだろうか。

Je voudrais é galement laisser une brique de mon cru... Bien que je ne vive pas ici



We carefully arranged the brick walls salvaged from the old buildings within the community. Since then, these accumulated layers of bricks have become guardians of the city's evolving history, preserving it for generations to come.

Amidst the brick garden, echoes of the past can still be heard, bursting forth with each passing moment. Traces of time are steadily amassed, layer upon layer, weaving a palimpsest of memories—our memories, your memories, and the memories of all who have shared a connection with this place.

Here, in this intertwined palimpsest of history, the memories ascend, reaching ever higher...

symbol lens

Within and surrounding undefined places, various environmental elements, icons, and motivational materials coalesce to form powerful symbols. These symbols serve as gateways through which one can explore and decipher not only the history of the specific space but also gain insights into the broader urban history it represents. They offer a lens through which to navigate and understand the interconnectedness between different locations.

These symbols encapsulate the essence of the environment, embodying the spirit and character of the place. They carry within them the stories, memories, and collective experiences of the past, intertwining with the fabric of the urban landscape. By engaging with these symbols, one embarks on a journey that unveils layers of history, both personal and shared.

These powerful symbols also act as guiding beacons, providing a sense of direction and purpose as one traverse within and between different places. They serve as navigational markers, leading individuals on a path of discovery and connection. Through these symbols, one can forge a meaningful and informed exploration, unlocking the hidden narratives that

shape the urban tapestry.



By recognizing and interpreting the symbols within and around undefined places, individuals gain a deeper appreciation for the intricacies of their surroundings. These symbols become conduits for storytelling and understanding, inviting travelers to embark on a rich and transformative journey through the history and urban fabric of the spaces they encounter.

trace lens

In undefined places, one can encounter scattered and disordered structures. These may consist of haphazardly discarded garbage, construction waste, or even the remains of deceased animals. Despite their seemingly chaotic nature, these structures serve as tangible traces, connecting the site and the diverse human and non-human beings that inhabit it. Through these traces, the exhibition finds inspiration for its constituent materials.

Moreover, the undefined places offer a unique opportunity for anyone who visits to contribute and leave behind new traces. By doing so, individuals cultivate a new personal connection with the site, actively engaging with its evolution. These new traces act as catalysts for the continuous updating and transformation of undefined places.

This process of interaction and trace-making fosters a dynamic relationship between individuals and the site. It empowers visitors to forge their own personal connections and narratives within undefined places, leaving a tangible mark that contributes to its ongoing evolution. As a result, the places become a living, ever-changing canvas shaped by the collective traces of those who engage with them.



*'...The unique quality of place is its power to spatially order and focus **human intention, experience, and action**...Our understanding of space is related to the places we inhabit, which in turn derive meaning from their spatial context...'*

COLLECTION

urban decay & shrinking

Den Helder is grappling with urban decay resulting from de-industrialization. Over the past two decades since the 1980s, the city has experienced a population decline of approximately 4,000 people. Projections indicate that this shrinkage will persist for many years to come.

One contributing factor to this decline is the lack of an active and enthusiastic urban mindset among the local population, coupled with the outmigration of the working-age population (20-65 years old) from the city. In the past, Den Helder boasted around 30,000 marine jobs, but that number has now dwindled to approximately 10,000. Furthermore, the city is not perceived as an attractive destination for new residents due to a negative perception held by the foreign population. Den Helder is often seen as a gray city with dilapidated post-World War II buildings and constant strong winds blowing through its streets.

Nonetheless, it's important to recognize that urban decay and shrinking should not be viewed solely as negative processes. Rather, they represent inevitable stages in the urban transformation of Den Helder. Through my research, I have discovered that this

decline has given rise to unique spaces—undefined places—that serve as symbols of the city's history and continue to narrate its story. This experiment aims to bring attention to urban decay, enabling people to confront this process and discover a different form of beauty in this extraordinary period. Specifically, the undefined places provide a landscape that evokes a sense of connection with the city's past.

While the open-ended design approach I employ may not provide a complete solution to the problem, it allows individuals to approach the urban process in a positive manner, finding joy and a spiritual connection with the city.





INCOMPLETED MEMORY is an experiment. I explored how public, community, and grand formal memories are REVIEWED, COMPOSED, and CUMULATED by daily life.