

## INTRODUCTION

This project is originated in a fascination for the alternative field of design; fashion. Starting with a research and resulting in an architectural proposal for an area located in the natural environment of the Amsterdam forest

During the process, a dialogue between research results and the natural environment of the location gradually developed into an unanimous voice, translated into an architectural proposal. This proposal involves a route through a landscape design closely related to the existing natural environment. On top of the experience of the route itself, an ensemble of smaller structures is introduced that functions as a possible further extension of the experience . The proposal reveals an experience between a walk in the forest and a moment of grieve and commemoration.

The research project started with a wide scope exploration to create a proper overview and understanding of the fashion field of design. Gradually certain patterns presented themselves and as a result of overlapping these patterns, the final research report explores several aspects of fashion design. Identity in fashion design, the persuasiveness of the experience, and the possibility to relive trough the product. The research outcomes resulted into three specific subjects; The individual in relation to the collective, the user experience addressing several senses and the ability to relive.

During the second phase of the project, I explored how these main subjects could be translated into architectural terms and a design brief. Additionally, I investigated both physically and digitally the nature of the site The Amsterdam Forest. A natural environment that is created in the 30's with the initial aim to provide the people of Amsterdam with work during the crisis. The Forest has a diverse natural identity that function as an outdoor space for the people of Amsterdam and its visitors. It is a place for culture and social gathering, but it also offers the possibility to escape the city and relax or reflect in nature.

The design proposal embraces the existing identity and qualities of the site and integrates these aspects in the further creation of the design. All with the aim to facilitate the sensation of relaxation, the development of a conversation, the initiation of a reflection or the process of grieve.

## WHY

The why for this project exists on three different levels;

1. The importance of the 'daily escape' from the increasing tempo and high demands in society.
2. The transformation of society: both cultural and ethical.
3. The process of grieve.

### 1. The daily escape

The number of impulses during the day has increased incredibly over the past few years. Working days are getting longer, digitalisation is everywhere and due to the increased competition for good education, professional requirements and demands are enormous. Moreover, expectations in relationships have changed. People have become more socially independent and are not settling any longer for less than the best. This new lifestyle resulted in a craving for always better and more. The problem is that the human body doesn't have an endless supply of energy and we do need love and confirmation from people surrounding us. In order to avoid a crisis such as a burn-out, a depression or serious experiences of loneliness, it is important to take a break from time to time and to clear your mind, alone or in good company. A walk in nature, away from daily demands, offers an ideal contextual environment to relax, reflect or focus on a good conversation with a beloved one. The design proposal facilitates a long walk with a friend, parent or beloved one, to enjoy a casual or deep conversation, accompanied by your dog or not. Not only is there the social aspect of such a walk, it also stimulates alternative senses and has a relaxing and pleasing effect on the human body and its mental health. As the digital world mainly addresses the senses sight and hearing, the stimulation of different senses like smell and touch present a welcome change. Also, the physical exercise is positive for the physical health.

### 2. The cultural transition

The diversity of society is on the increase and cultures and origins are mixing. Foreign religions are settling in, and the general devotion to the church is fading. Along with these transitions also desires and traditions are changing. Especially when it comes to the key events in life; welcoming a new person into the world or saying goodbye to someone. The later involves a process of grieve. In the Netherlands it is a tradition to have a commemoration and afterwards to bury or cremate the deceased one. Later, the remaining persons can relive and commemorate the person by returning to the grave or the place where the ashes are spread. As

the overall influence and importance of the church is generally decreasing, the traditional desires are changing. Some desires are becoming more and more common; a commemoration and burial in a natural environment; the so called 'natuurbegraafplaatsen'. Attending the transition of the body when going into the oven and staying close during the cremation itself. Celebrate the deceased person's life instead of grieving his or hers passing away. Sharing and exchanging stories and anecdotes in order to make the person once more alive. Having a small residue of the ashes and wearing it closely to the body, for example in jewellery. All these new desires are to be taken seriously and need to be seen an important part of dealing with a process of loss.

### 3. The process of grieve

What to do when you lose a beloved one. The world falls apart and nothing seems to matter anymore. There is personal grieve, valuable memories and habits you have shared with just the two of you. Never again the "who laughs the loudest", no more strange food combinations, no more dancing together, no more good or inappropriate conversations. No more soft touches when you don't expect it. No more hugs and taking a deep breath of his or her smell. No more sound of her or his voice that calm you. These moments have turned into memories and are only possible to revive in one's imagination.

Every relationship is different and most of the time every person behaves slightly different in every relationship. The chemistry, the interaction, it all differs from one's personality, from one's physical appearance, from the moment the event takes place. It is a convergence of circumstances that creates the unexpected and a unique memory which reaches way further then the conversational context. In a relationship between two persons, all the senses are involved. This makes that sometimes you don't want to talk at all. All you desire is to feel warm, protected and comfortable and deal with your personal grieve, revive your version of the deceased person.

The process of grieve involves five stages; denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. Off-course the process isn't cast in stone and differs from person to person and situation to situation. But often people are together in this process. Not only is it important to be surrounded by loved ones and feel warm and protected, also dealing with something like the pain from a lost person together rather than alone is very helpful and comforting. Therefor the process of grieve demands the possibility for a personal experience in the common grieve. It is custom to speak at a commemoration and share some moments and character traits of the

deceased person. As a sequence for the ceremony itself, people often come together and continue conversations sharing memories and anecdotes. For a moment the person is there again and laughing with you. It may also be that the other person in grief didn't lose the same beloved one as you did but sharing similar experiences might be very pleasant and helpful. Sometimes it can be even better or enjoyable because you don't have to adapt your version of the deceased one as the other person is mourning about somebody else.

Sometimes you want to share grief without talking, maybe because you are more introverted or because the two of you want to deal with your personal grief. Communication through another sense, like a touch or having a similar sensory experience, for example a smell, helps to feel connected and to deal with the process.

The beautiful aspect of grief is that it has the ability to bring people closer to each other.

To answer to all these different desires, it is important to not force people into a specific process of grief. Therefore the design proposal is very flexible and open to leave sufficient space for personal interpretation. Yet if the person wants to have a specific more defined experience, the proposal will give them guidance. It involves:

- The ability to prepare for death, possibly making some last memories together.
- The ability for the ceremony itself, fulfilling as well personal as common desires.
- The ability for personal reflection as well as convergence.
- The ability for conversation as well as silence.
- The ability for the revival of the deceased one in memory, smells and touch.

With the aim to embody the spatial qualities as well as its natural atmosphere, the project is an extension of the site. The structures of earth, wood and natural stone represent the nature of the Amsterdam forest and the process of grief. The concrete slabs are providing shelter and help to define space. The volumes are concentrations of functions. The black wooden facades create the transition between nature and structure. And steel structures facilitate the usage of the design and define interventions.

## **RELATION WITH THE STUDIO AND MASTER TRACK**

The studio Explore lab offers the possibility to explore a personal interest. It is an exceptional and unique chance to broaden and deepen yourself into a certain subject or field of expertise. It also enables transition through scale and fields of study directions. The combination of these

aspects made it possible for me to explore and define my own restrictions. although this freedom was very challenging from time to time, it also allowed me to create this specific project. Designing an experience as well as the transition in scale, going from folly to the scale of a building and then to the integration of landscape design, was very interesting and highly valuable.

For me the master of AUBS is a nice mix of academics and art. To be able to combine both is certainly not easy as it implies scientifically justifying matters that sometimes feel all but scientific. Therefore the master track thought me a lot about the importance of academic outcomes and the ability to understand and communicate design choices.

## **RESEARCH IN RELATION TO DESIGN**

- The research process

The research project started with a wide scope exploration of all aspects relevant in fashion design. As I have always had a weak spot for this expertise, I had the conviction that so many aspects were worth researching. For this reason, I had quite some difficulties in narrowing the subject down, which resulted in a rather broad field of research. As my final framework involved multiple types of information, I had a lot to examine and discover. This was certainly valuable but, from time to time, I also longed for some more guidance and restriction. My wide interest and curiosity had the overhand and thanks to the solid help of my research mentor, I managed to keep the overview. (Even though it sometimes didn't feel like that.) During the research I started to recognise patterns and better understand the way fashion design works. In architecture the 'transition in scale' and the 'user experience' are two major interests of mine. These two aspects are also very present and relevant in fashion design. As it is all about the transition in scale, between product and senses and the user experience; the event to wear or use it. I wanted to understand the mechanics. How can fashion be so persuasive, why is it so important for the position of the individual in society, how does the high turnaround work, why do people want to experience something similar but at the same time unique and innovative. Why do people have a personal perfume from a favourite brand, but at the same time want to experience something extraordinary and live the illusion.

During the research I learned a lot about the experience and how it worked through the different scales and fields of fashion design.

As a research result, I focussed on the following three aspects:

- 1.The relation between the collective and the individual.
- 2.The persuasiveness of a comprehensive user experience, addressing multiple senses.
- 3.The ability to revive and represent.

- The design process

According to the track of the studio, the design project is part of the process from the start. As research was dominating in the beginning of the project, the design process was more an architectural translation of wild ideas related to certain research outcomes. At the time of the P2 presentation, I knew that my project would be about identity in architecture. Important for me was the collective versus the individual and the integration of an experience touching multiple senses. I started with four locations close to Amsterdam that were all representing a different sense in relation to specific function. Soon I figured that this was way too ambitious so I started focussing on two locations; The Amsterdam Forrest and the Waterleidingduinen. Both locations were natural environments that had a certain ambiguity . The location of the Waterleidingduinen had the beach versus the dunes and the Amsterdam Forrest had the forest versus the open field. The Waterleidingduinen had the function of bathing and for the Amsterdam forest grieve was the main subject. Eventually I developed one project carefully: the Amsterdam Forest.

During the process I explored how to translate my research findings into the architectural language.

- The result:

- 1.The public versus the private.

In architecture scale often helps to define and classify a project to a certain category of architecture. As architecture is very wide and involves many aspects, it is a guide to be able to focus and communicate about it. Nevertheless, it is the transition between those different scales that is essential in making good architecture and creating a pleasant environment. To be able to relate a project to its context, it is necessary to carefully study it. While studying my location in the Amsterdam forest I learned how minor interventions can have a great impact. The possibilities of slightly adapting existing structures and natural elements, reintegrating natural materials and reinterpreting gestures from artists already present. As it is a public forest, I

learned how to merge the person taking a walk with the one that lost a beloved into one location. I figured how you can slightly manipulate a person's route or how to make them aware of a changing environment to make them adapt their behaviour.

## 2.The experience, stimulating the senses.

An important aspect of the user experience in architecture is to make the person aware of themselves in relation to space they are in. Aspects such as light, dimensions, and routing are common tools to do so. Often it is the manipulation of these elements and the fact that the body has to adjust itself, that creates an experience differing from the usual and therefore becoming explicit and noticed. In architecture it is less usual to consciously implement the stimulation of alternative senses others than sight, although the other senses do play a role in a spatial environment.

Every space has specific smell, due to function, materialisation, weather conditions,....

Every space has another touch cold, warm, a heavy door a soft facade.

Every space appeals to the hearing in a different manner; little sound due to walls with a lot of mass, a strong acoustic capability of absorption capability , the sound of shoes walking on the floor.

Every space has another taste, though that is the less likely to be experienced but the combination of air present in a space in relation to the smell might give a dry mouth or not or have a sour atmosphere because of the lack of fresh air.

During the design, I started realising that taking a walk in nature is so much more than just the exercise and the sight of nature. It is the smell of the trees, the grass, the earth, the animals, the weather, the plants, the humidity,.... It is the sound of the wind through the trees and the leaves, the sound of the birds,... It is the touch; the softness of the flowers, the softness of cane blowing in the wind, the roughness of the tree trunks, the cooling of fresh water, ....

I learned how these natural sensory perceptions could be appreciated and implemented in architecture in order to enable and create user experiences on top of the more usual tools we have.

## 3.The ability to relive.

The number of times that we have experienced a certain spatial environment is of great influence on our user experience. The first time versus the thousandth is an enormous difference. The first time, everything is exciting. You have to learn how to move through the space, how you have to use it, see what it has to offer and adapt you to the atmosphere. The

thousandth time you may feel very comfortable, move without looking and enjoy it for certain reasons you don't even notice anymore. The repetition is a very influential aspect. Every experience creates a specific moment and therefore a memory, even though you do the action everyday it or you don't even remember the moment. The perception through the sensory organs have the power to stimulate the brain to remember and even to revive relive? a certain moment in time and space.

## **PERSONAL REFLECTION**

Reflecting on the entire process, I notice that I have learned a lot. Not only about my subject and architecture but also about myself and how to handle such a project. For me the freedom that came along with explore lab was both the most exciting as well as the most difficult aspect. I would have never been able to create this kind of project if it wasn't for explore lab, and I truly enjoyed it. I enjoyed being able to spend time researching my field of interest - fashion - but I also enjoyed the freedom to create an experience and a point of view. In a way this project is an entirely new world that has come into existence.

But the extend of freedom was also a challenge. Throughout this project I have learned even more that I am not in the first place a structured person and that my mind doesn't work in a linear way. I have always had difficulties in defining an order in matters as I consider every detail to be important. In some cases, that might be very valuable as you are able to notice things others might miss or choose not to see, but it also made it hard for me not too loose myself and stay focussed in order to get things done. It was a process with a lot of ups but also some downs.

This personal process definitely reflected on the project itself. I needed some time to process my research and fully understand what I had done. As the research results could have resulted in so many different architectural translations, I felt insecure and feared that no translation would be good enough and would fully represent what I intended to communicate. Eventually it was time pressure that pushed me to make certain choices and at the end everything fell into place and started to make sense. During this project I have learned the value of reflection and how important it is to truly understand what you are doing in order to make progress. It definitely strengthens the result.