

P4 Reflection
Rethinking Roosenberg
GARDENS' TRIO OF ROOSENBERG
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1. The relation between the theme of the graduation lab and the subject

Rethinking Roosenberg is the topic for the studio of the Architecture Interior and we are supposed to change the Roosenberg abbey to a study center. Roosenberg abbey is designed by Dutch monk architect, Van de Laan. This project is located in a remote forest of Waasmunster, a small village in Belgium.

From my point of view, Roosenberg abbey is a nice project to react the relationship between human and architecture. In this building, Van de Laan tries to separate human and nature in order to make people feel themselves. In order to achieve this, he developed his own plastic number system. The proportion system was applied to every detail in this building. The proportion of space, wall, and even the size of window was designed to let people feel the space.

This idea is also shown in the structure and material. Roosenberg is a minimal space constructed of heavy brick and concrete beams. The use of simple finishing materials, wood, paint or rough-cast plaster (kalei), makes the space tangible. The concrete elements show the pattern of the wooden casting. All these material is measurable and people can feel the dimension. The relationship between architecture and human is very clear to read by those material.

The building is solidly seated against the Ortegat forest and its side rest against the Lovinfosse forest. It offers a private view of the side garden on the east side. And when we zoom in the east side, it is not homogenous. There are a big grass field next to the Lovinfosse forest and many short bushes in the forest.

2. The relationship between research and design

The research is about three phases. The first one is finding the target group and the behavior of individuals. The second one is finding the essence of Roosenberg and monastery. The third one is about structure and material.

For the program, I proposed it as a study and retreat center which hold by psychology faculty in KU Leuven. Roosenberg abbey is indeed quite far from main cities. For instance, from Antwerp to this abbey, you have to take train for 1.5 hours. But thanks to this, it is a silent and remote place for effective intense study and deep relaxing with avoiding burn-out.

Generally, architecture shows its clear position in nature. But with the different life style and program, nature gradually invade to architecture and change the position. The research for this graduation project has largely focused on tracing the changes of religious facility in the history, both in terms of its user group and in its physical form. A large part of this research has suggested that the abbey and its courtyard, an introverted nature, have a narrow group target and function. It is difficult to directly change to another facility. But the organization is an important starting point. When the monastery facility gone, the relic is just a cloister organization.

By checking many monastery, I find that garden is an important setting in this architectural type. The garden and cloister help monastery to grow from the existing part. In this site, there are existing three different gardens. The first one is the enclosed garden in the abbey. The second one is the extroverted grass filed. And the third one is the wild forest.

Actually, the buildings in these different natural environments show the development of human attitude toward nature. In 'the Enclosed garden', Rob describes the changing idea of paradise from a closed garden to an open field. At beginning, the wild nature is too dangerous for human. The monastery cloister originally represents this idea. And gradually, people are braver to keep in touch with a tamed nature. Finally, nowadays, biophilic design is popular which represent a humble and confident attitude to nature.

The rethinking of the Roosenberg speaks exactly the same. The site itself is an example for these three natures.

For the structure and material, Roosenberg is made by brick as structure and interior wall. The beam is concrete which is casted by wood. The concrete slab is decorated by colorful wooden ceiling.

He wants to focus the relationship between human and architecture. By doing this, he tried to separate human, architecture and nature. Brick here doesn't show the texture itself. It is painted by white kalei (a traditional plaster surface technique of Belgium). The white rough surface comes from the kalei instead of the material

itself. Wood here is not a natural material which shows the natural pattern and color. It is an artificial colorful ruler to define the space.

My new building is a critical thinking of Roosenberg in typology, structure and material way. Not like Roosenberg abbey which is separate from the nature, my two extensions are very close to two different natural environments. Material doesn't show the separation between human and nature by fake treatment. They will tell the truth of themselves in the un-artificial site.

Roosenberg provides the fruitful resource of material for these three gardens. My general idea is to show the authenticity of these material in different site. It looks like Roosenberg takes off its cloth and show its different phase gradually.

My first extension is a concrete structure with brick cladding on the facade. The white brick here is not painted or kaleied. They are shown their won color in order to represent the façade of Roosenberg and generate a continuous façade in the grass filed. The concrete (same material and texture with Roosenberg abbey, but it is casted by the wood in a brick dimension) is not only the structure but also an exposed texture for inner wall. It could be read as 'the brick façade shows the authenticity and expose the concrete material directly'. It is an answer to the open grass filed and also a mediation between Van de Laan's brick building and the wooden building in the forest.

The last building is totally a wooden CLT building in structure and material. In the architectural history, people start to build wooden primitive hut in forest. It is sustainable material and directly indicate the surrounding wooden situation. So, wood actually shows the authenticity in forest. This is the meaning of the material in this site.

3. The relationship between the methodical line of approach and the graduation lab

My general method is about finding element in the site and trying to use them in the new extension.

The beginning of the design is always related to the observations followed with analysis of the site. I tried to find the subtle different quality of the site (which is three gardens) and finding out the meaning of these differences to architecture.

The second method I used is the study of existing typology for different garden. I don't want to translate these languages literally, but they give me the different thinking of garden in the historical view.

For testing the space quality, I use different types and scales of modeling. This is the main method in my design. All the methodical line of my project is not a linear process. It is always about zooming in and out in scale and rethinking the concept I proposed.

4. The relationship between the project and the wider social context

The project is more than a simple user-orientated design. In this project, I try to explore more on the relationship of the public and private in different kind of natural environment. I continue questioning myself what is academic architecture. What is the relationship between an academic building and a monastery? What could nature intervene in this process? And what could architecture express themselves in different environment?

My project answers part of the questions by making decision of two different building in two different natural environments. This project tried to create a continuous path which link the old and new, the enclosed garden and the open forest, the silent study atmosphere and the deep relaxing atmosphere. The project is also a reply to the post-religious monastery which the religious function is gone.

It offers strategy to extension building to a wild environment which could also be applied in a wider context.