I. City of Stone

Maastricht is located on both sides of the Maas River, at the point where the Jeker River joins in. To its west is the border of Netherlands and Belgium. Since the time of Roman settlement around 450, the city has been built out of natural stones, thanks to the rich resources in the Limburg area and a part of Belgium. From a Roman settlement, Maastricht grew into a Medieval religious center, a garrison town and an early industrial city. The practice of building with natural stone has never stopped.

Walking through the historical center of Maastricht, one may find himself under the impressions of massiveness, solidness, heaviness and endurance. Not only the monumental structures were built out of stone, the widely use of natural stone on the facades of domestic buildings and pavements also constantly reminds people of its very existence.

Besides the simple stacking of blocks, constructing frameworks with stone is very common. The stone grid are very basic self-carrying structure, and sometimes the wall was filled-in with other material such as brick. Unlike most other cities in Netherlands, around the doors and windows there are often a frame of stones.

When starting the architectural research, the question came forward: what is it that defines a “Maastricht building” in the context of a stone city?

II. Entrance

We started our research with the assignment of studying a few entrances in the historical building, which were made out of natural stones. Despite the common theme of material, there was more to take out of them in terms of construction, function and representation.

Our personal fascination was the “Approach”, the changing perception of the building during the sequence of space from outside to inside. In the painting of isolated tower by Minoru Nomata, there is a clear idea of going deeper and further into the layers of publicity and privacy, as the stairs going up and the tower becoming more open.

Among the first three entrances to research we find the Dinghuis and Conservatorium both share the character of having an semi-public/semi-private space, and finally decided to research further into the Conservatorium.

III. Conservatorium

Built in the 1960s, the Conservatorium is relatively more recent building than the other buildings in the research. At the first glance, its connection to the context seems to be rather weak, with a modern style in contrast with the historical city of Maastricht.

We focused ourselves on the process of approaching the building. Using the technique of Panorama box, we reconstructed three moments in perspective drawings: the exterior, the entrance and the interior. From the Panorama boxes, we analyzed the changing perception of the building. And the next step forward, we highlighted the specific material in those moments of transition - the natural stone in this case. By mapping them out we were able to identify the role of natural stone during the transition.

The facade of building was dominated by a stone “grid”, suggesting the structure in which the building was constructed. And in this grid the entrance appeared as an anomaly: taking two spans in the grid, the absence of a certain pillar gave away the secret behind the facade. The natural stone elements are merely cladding pieces.

Fitting right into the grid, the entrance was indicated by the gable stones above it and the small recession which created a little “welcoming” space.
IV. Gypsum Model

When making the gypsum model, the powder of Kunrader stone was introduced into the mixture. The casting of gypsum in itself was an act of re-using stone. In the model we reduced most of the structure around the entrance, so that more focus will be put on the various patterns and textures of natural stone. We ended up with a model that appeared to be a tunnel connecting two spaces, whose characters were defined by the different pavements on the ground. And the gable stone was the center piece of the model. It was cast separately and then cladding on the elevation, revealing the “construction honesty”.

V. Figure and Abstraction

During the workshop of the gypsum model, we found the essence of the entrance. To answer the question we had at the beginning, the conclusion will be that the Conservatorium is indeed a Maastricht building. If looked closely, the references to the domestic buildings were obvious. For example, the grid can be seen as an interpretation of the stone framework, yet in a much more abstracted way. The connections in the grid somehow reminded people of the load-bearing stone joints. The interior walls in the “tunnel” also mimics the stacking blocks in the common stone walls. The architect used natural stones here only as an extra layer added on the concrete structure, but the composition of the material can be read as abstractions of the most familiar figures in the everyday architecture, which we can find all around Maastricht.
Frog-eye View
Panorama
Entrance
Dinghuis
Composition
Stone as Cladding Element
GABLE STONE
Gable Stone
Elevation: Gable Stone
Gable Stones in Maastricht
CONTINUITY
Entrance
Section 1/50
THRESHOLD
Floor Plan: Pavements 1/50
Pavements
TYPOLOGY
Section: Conservatorium
Section: Brusselstraat 51
Interior
Elevation: Reflection of Grid
EXPLODED VIEW
Exterior
Entrance