

Inez Chmura

creative statement

I consider myself an architect¹ of dialogue².

In my practice, this can take different forms³, but first and foremost, I use it as a method for opening up space for the reimagined.

The reimagined happens when experiences, perspectives, and visions are exchanged in dialogue.

My head and my hands are in constant conversation, making the creative process horizontal and respectful towards the entities I collaborate with.

This defines my role: to foster a sense of belonging and agency within the space of correlations.

1 *architect*: a person who translates imagined into substantial

2 *dialogue*: an intersection between different perceptions and aspects of reality

3 *forms of dialogue*: spaces, words, objects, images, processes, movements and changes

selected projects

1.	Faith and Belonging	hope in decay, exhibition space design	2025
2.	Prehention. Between agency, engagement and architecture.	intersectional research project on the Polish-Belarusian border, book	2024-ongoing
3.	Weaving spaces	line-movement-volume, reclaiming architecture by weaving	2025
4.	the <i>other</i> mirror	research on <i>self</i> , interactive installation with aluminum mirrors	2024
5.	<i>Care</i> ressurects architecture	signs of <i>care</i> in the urban landscape, experimental book design	2025
6.	Embody/Empower: Fluidity in Form	rhizomatic nature of communities, aluminum casting, concept development	2025



hope in decay

exhibition space design

2025

Faith and Belonging



Faith and Belonging

hope in decay

exhibition space design

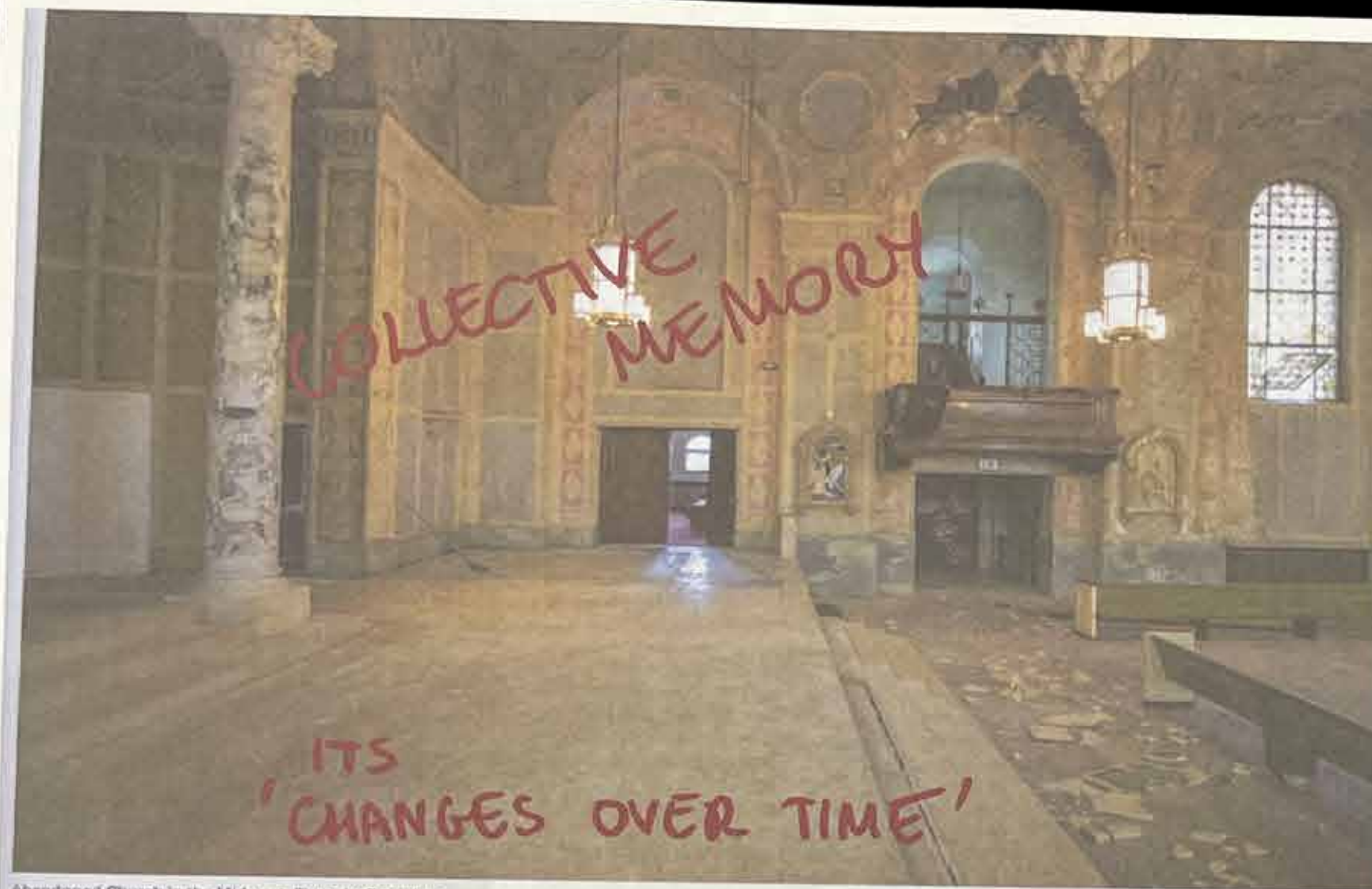
2025

Exhibition space design - proposal for Muzeum Catherijneconvent, Utrecht

Creating a sense of belonging and continuum in the exhibition setting by respurposing furniture from decaying churches and by curating exhibition objects into a dialogue between one another.

By transforming furnitures from decaying churches, the past is not cutten off but becomes something we draw from and adapt to what is relevant in the present. This is essentially how a sense of belonging is being created: when we know where we come from while simultaneously feeling the agency to move forward.

By placing exhibition objects in dialogue with each other, the underlaying story is revealed - one of transformation within Christianity. That raises a question for the viewer: Where are we now in this timeline, and what future are we building?



Abandoned Church in the Midwest. Photo by Zenurbex

Congregations change. They gather, create what they need, and eventually disperse. Although the descriptive phrase "sacred space" implies a stable reality, religious buildings are only as permanent as their communities. But change can be difficult for religious practitioners to reconcile, particularly those invested in the idea of the timeless truth of their belief system. As Christopher asks, if the building is not permanent, then what of the faith?

Church ruin photographs nudge those of us involved in creating or interpreting religious architecture toward developing a new historical understanding of the materiality of Christian worship that acknowledges its changes over time. This new history takes into account new periods of building and over-building grew out of religious exceptionalism and conflict. The American history of denominationalism, immigration, and the assumption that every congregation should have its own church home is an under-examined factor that we must add to the sociological analysis of the factors involved in abandonment. Theological and cultural exclusivism, often resulting in schisms among congregations, fueled the construction of innumerable buildings as groups of like-minded individuals sought to not only accommodate their worship and community activities but to also demonstrate their presence, legitimacy, and status to the public. The history grapples with the reality that, in architectural historian Andrea Longhi's words, "Churches were often essentially redundant from the time they were built."¹⁸ It interrogates the future of buildings before they are erected. Building this new history of the religious landscape that foregrounds change over time is one challenge that church ruin photos pose.

Church ruin photos confront us with the "end of worshipping," a time-oriented, inescapable reality. Churches, of course, are not alone in this. Longevity is a comparatively rare characteristic of architecture. The building we passed by yesterday is gone today, already forgotten. Ruin photography prompts us to remember.

As we write a new history of religious architecture, we should also consider the mutability of worshipping space and memory in formulating meaning across generations. In his essay on the philosophy of history, Benjamin argues it is the responsibility of the present to redeem the past through remembering. He calls this a "secret agreement between the present and the past."¹⁹ Seen in this light, church ruin photos preserve, if not the actual buildings, some collective memory about them. Our religious buildings won't last millennia, most won't last centuries.

These photographs, however, may extend our collective memory out a few generations and thus pay what homage we can to our forebearers' worshipping lives and the architecture that fostered them.

1. Rose Macaulay, *Pleasure of Ruins*, Thames & Hudson, 1984 [1953], pp. 453-54.

2. Brad Pogatzetz, *Brad Pogatzetz Photography*, <https://www.bradpogatzetz.com/> (Accessed 20th February 2025). For criticism of Urbex, see Richard Woodward, "Disaster Photography: When Is Documentary Exploitation?" *Art News*, February 8, 2013, <http://www.artnews.com/2013/02/08/the-debate-over-ruin-porn/> (Accessed 20th February 2025); and Siobhan Lyons, ed., *Ruin Porn and the Obsession with Decay*, Palgrave Macmillan and Springer International Publishing, 2018.

3. Brian Dillon, *Ruin Lust: Artists' Fascination with Ruins, from Turner to the Present Day*, Tate Museum, 2014, p. 5.

4. Susan A. Crane, "Take Nothing But Photos, Leave Nothing

March 2025]; See also Lawrence Joffe, *Abandoned Places*, Amber Books Ltd., 2019.

6. See, for example, Arthur Moore, *Detroit Dili: Photographs of Andrew Moore*, Akron Art Mus and Arthur Drooker, *American Ruins*, Merrell, 2019.

7. On reading ruins allegorically, see Susan S. Ruins Lesson: *Meaning and Material in Western*, The University of Chicago Press, 2020, pp. 151.

8. Matthew Christopher, *Abandoned America: Consequences*, *Abandoned America: The Age of Jon Glez*, 2015; and "Losing Our Religion: Abandonment at Abandoned America," <https://www.abandonedchurches.com/> (Accessed February 2025).

9. Dan Barasch, *Ruin and Redemption in Architecture*, Press, Ltd., 2019. On repurposing, see Jeanne Halgren Kilde (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Change in the American Religious*, OUP, 2022, pp. 85-99; and Andrea Longhi, "Dec and Reuse of Liturgical Architecture: Historical Temporal Dimensions" in Kilde (ed.), *The Oxford of Religious Space*, OUP, 2022.

10. Christopher, "Losing our Religion"; Brittany "Abandoning Property Taxes Assessed on Fallen Property," *University of Illinois Law Review*, 201.

11. Yves Marchand and Romain Meffre, *The Ruin*, Steidl, 2010; and Marchand Meffre <https://www.meffre.com/detroit> (Accessed 25 February 2025).

12. Justin Armstrong, "Everyday Afterlife: Walter the Politics of Abandonment in Saskatchewan," *Studies* 26, no. 3, May 2011, pp. 273-293.

13. Siobhan Lyons, "Introduction: Ruin Porn, Ca the Anthropocene," in Lyons (ed.), *Ruin Porn and with Decay*, p. 3, quoting Walter Benjamin, *The German Tragic Drama*, Verso Books, 1998, pp. 17.

14. Andrea Longhi in Kilde (ed.), "Decommission of Liturgical Architecture," 2022, pp. 89-90.

15. Ibid., p. 87.

16. Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory*, J. Dittus, Jr. and Vida Yazdi Dittus (trans.) Harper &

rapher found them, in a palpable state of neglect and deterioration. Damaged, empty pews are in disarray. Piles of trash, random lengths of lumber, and torn up carpeting may be seen. Vacant niches have lost their statues. Paint peels off walls. Water damage and graffiti are evident. A remarkable number of church ruin photos include one or more empty chairs, features that signal the absence of people even more strongly than empty pews. Even though repositioning objects violates another cardinal rule which is to not disturb the site, these chairs and other found objects are frequently repositioned for greater visual impact.⁴

The money shots, however, are those showing nature encroaching: moss crawling along the floors or climbing the walls, vines creeping in from broken windows, holes in the roof revealing blue sky, pools of water on the floor. Such features provide color contrast in the usually dark interiors as well as a sense of passing time. HDR (high dynamic range) heightens contrast and chiaroscuro to depict texture and enhance luminosity, and colors may be altered to emphasize greenery. Thus, these photos are far from the what-you-see-is-what-you-get representations of material reality. Using these and other techniques, experienced photographers show us how to look at abandoned churches, training us in a particular way of seeing.

ABANDONMENT CAUSES

Seeing an abandoned place can give you a sense of the fate of nations and peoples. —Lawrence Joffe, *Abandoned Sacred Places*⁵

These photos implicitly ask, why have these churches been abandoned? Processes of deindustrialization, in- and out-migration of various cultural groups, and ill-conceived urban policies predominate among the explanations offered by photographers themselves.⁶ Curiously, however, although ruins of religious buildings are popular, both now and historically, blame for their ruination has rarely been laid at the door of religious institutions; in fact, most causal interpretations have studiously avoided discussing the role of religion in church decay.

More recently, causal analyses pointing to the consequences of changes in religious and community life are being tentatively posed. Some commentators read material decay allegorically as a morality lesson, gently intimating that church ruins portend the fate of Christianity itself.⁷ Photographer Matthew Christopher asks about his church ruin images, "what remained of our faith?" and he emphasizes the theme in his *Abandoned America* podcast episode, "Losing Our Religion: Abandoned Churches."⁸ For Christopher, American church ruins are in part the result of the 21st century decline in Christian affiliation. Dan Barasch approaches ruination as a pseudo-religious process, framing his photographs in terms of lost or forgotten buildings that are "redeemed" through repurposing.⁹ Other religion-related causes are suggested as well. Christopher, for instance, also points to economic transformations, financial situations, and taxation policies that in some cases make church abandonment a practical solution to congregational problems.¹⁰

HISTORY AND TIME

late and landmarks

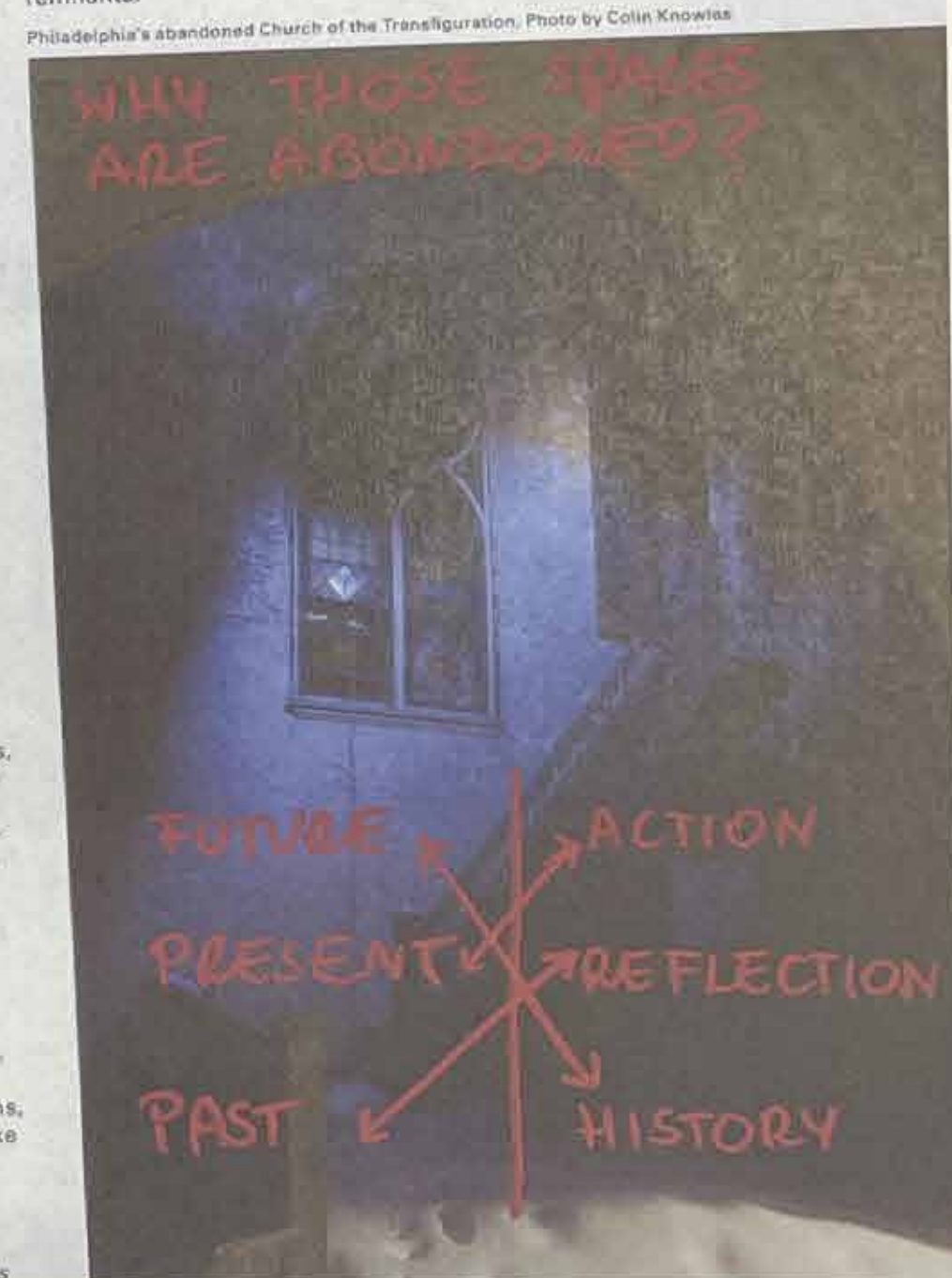
centuries, and contemporary discussions of Urbex photography echo earlier commentators who saw ruins and their depictions as symbols of bygone grandeur or piety, musings on mutability, evocative displays of nature's inexorable power, statements of the historical heritage of nations, commentary on a lack of custodianship, or illustrative of artistic merit.

As a historian of religion, however, I am particularly interested in what church ruin photos suggest about our historical understandings of religion and Christianity. One interpretation of secular ruin photos, that they are repositories of memory and history, points to a functional role for Urbex. Addressing this function, photographer Justin Armstrong is inspired by Walter Benjamin's situating of the history-making process within a built environment that is simultaneously evolving and decaying. In Benjamin's terms, history itself "is made visible in the process of decay," which signals the "historical shift from progress to entropy."¹¹ Siobhan Lyons similarly notes Benjamin's observation that "[i]n the ruin, history has physically merged into the setting . . . assum[ing] [not] the form of the process of eternal life so much as that of irresistible decay."¹² In this view, history, or, more specifically, change over time, emanates from these material remnants.

The unexpectedness of ruin photo viewers' perceptions of change over time and I believe this process has, or has significant bearing on how we think about the religious landscape and how we think about the history of Christianity and religion. Signaling both spatial and temporal dynamism of religions playing out over time, often forgotten.

Time is a fundamental component of religion. Internally, church buildings may signify a sacred season, locate humanity within a logical eschatology, and telescope past, present, and future through the ruin images relocate churches in time. The absence of the worshippers and resulting destruction of the building from these sacred chronicles relocating it in the material flow of time. Time compresses as the decay simultaneously signal the present and future. Viewing the photograph intuitively imagine the building's history by the community's faith and within the same time, we anticipate future.

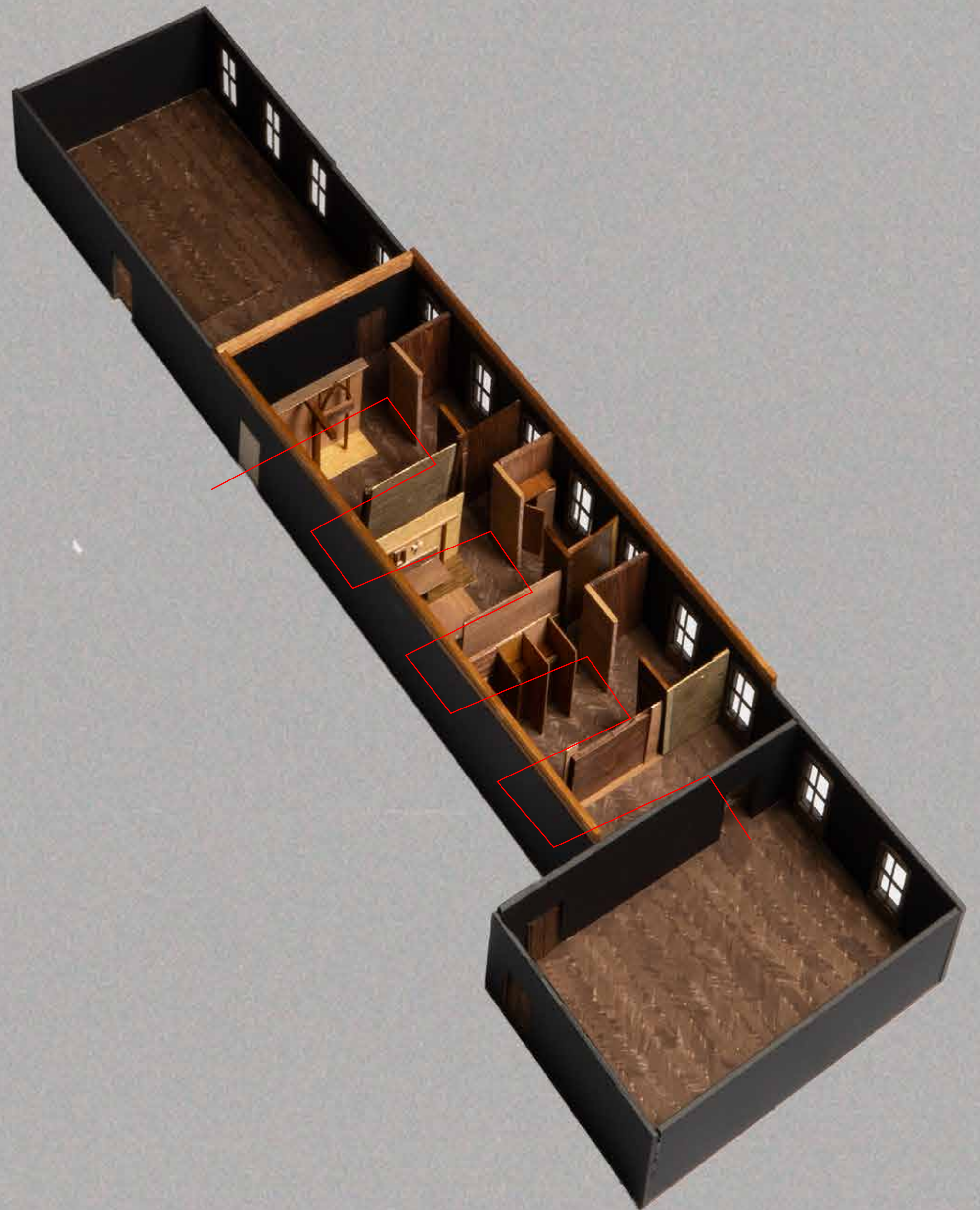
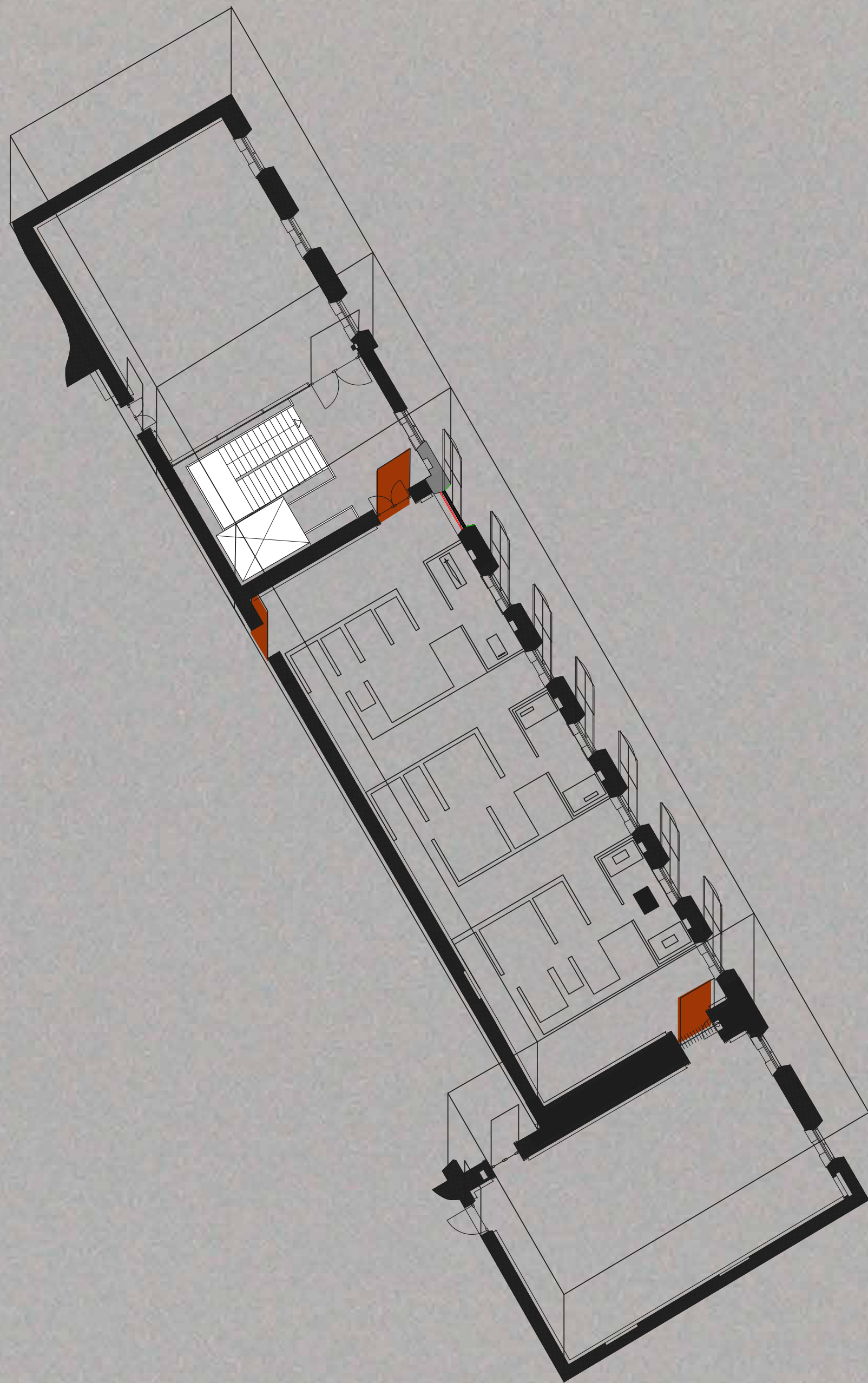
By linking space with time, ruin photography scores the changing nature of Christianity. Shipping is not static. Practices, tastes change and ornamental





/research

the wall unit from my aunt's room/ what does the space of faith look like?




/floorplan
analyzing the exhibition space and designing the movement within









intersectional research project on the Polish-Belarusian border

book

2024-ongoing

Prehention. Between agency, engagement and architecture.

Prehention. Between agency, engagement and architecture

intersectional research project on the Polish-Belarusian border

book

2024-ongoing

Research on agency and engagement in a space and time of crisis.

By taking the form of intersectional research, the role of architecture and space shifts from being merely a stage that facilitates actions to becoming an active entity in the so-called crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border.

Space is the grounding setting that makes the crisis tangeable and embodied.

Architecture is an embodied intention - its tangibility makes it a transparent translation of what a society is and what it aspires to become.

Architecture and space collaborates here with:
critical security studies and the history of political thought in the context of migration (dr Mateusz Krępa), antropology and humanitarian activism (Joanna Sarnecka), and feminist theory, field philosophy, environmental humanities, and border studies (dr Olga Cielemecka)



/space
picture from the border (Mateusz Krępa, 2025)

distance

monetary
ethics
politics.

- ability not to think about it.
- positioning and intentionality.
- symptoms = border walls.

borders are
broad and
not something
necessarily
materialised

featuring
spectacular
power
control

purpose of the border?

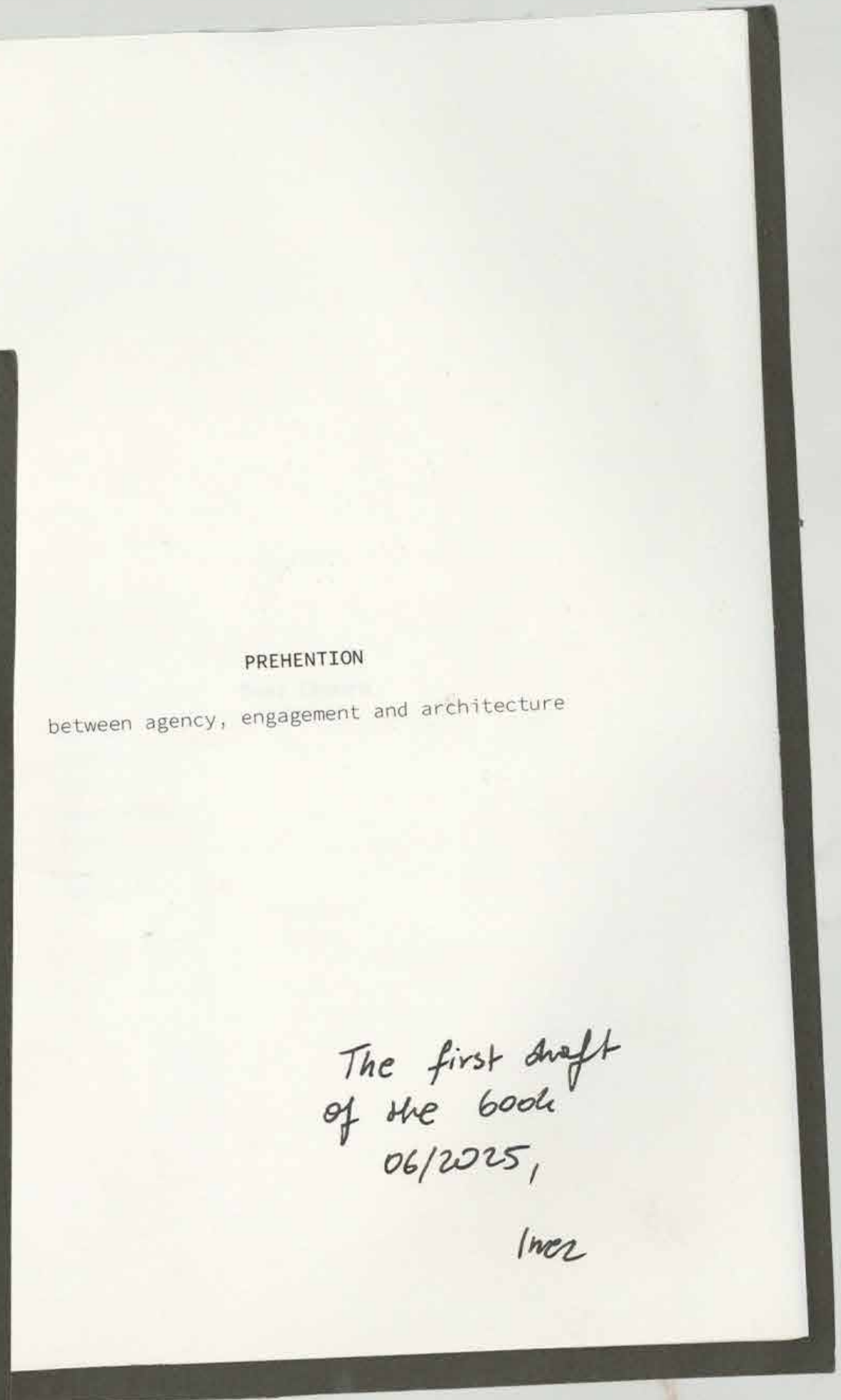
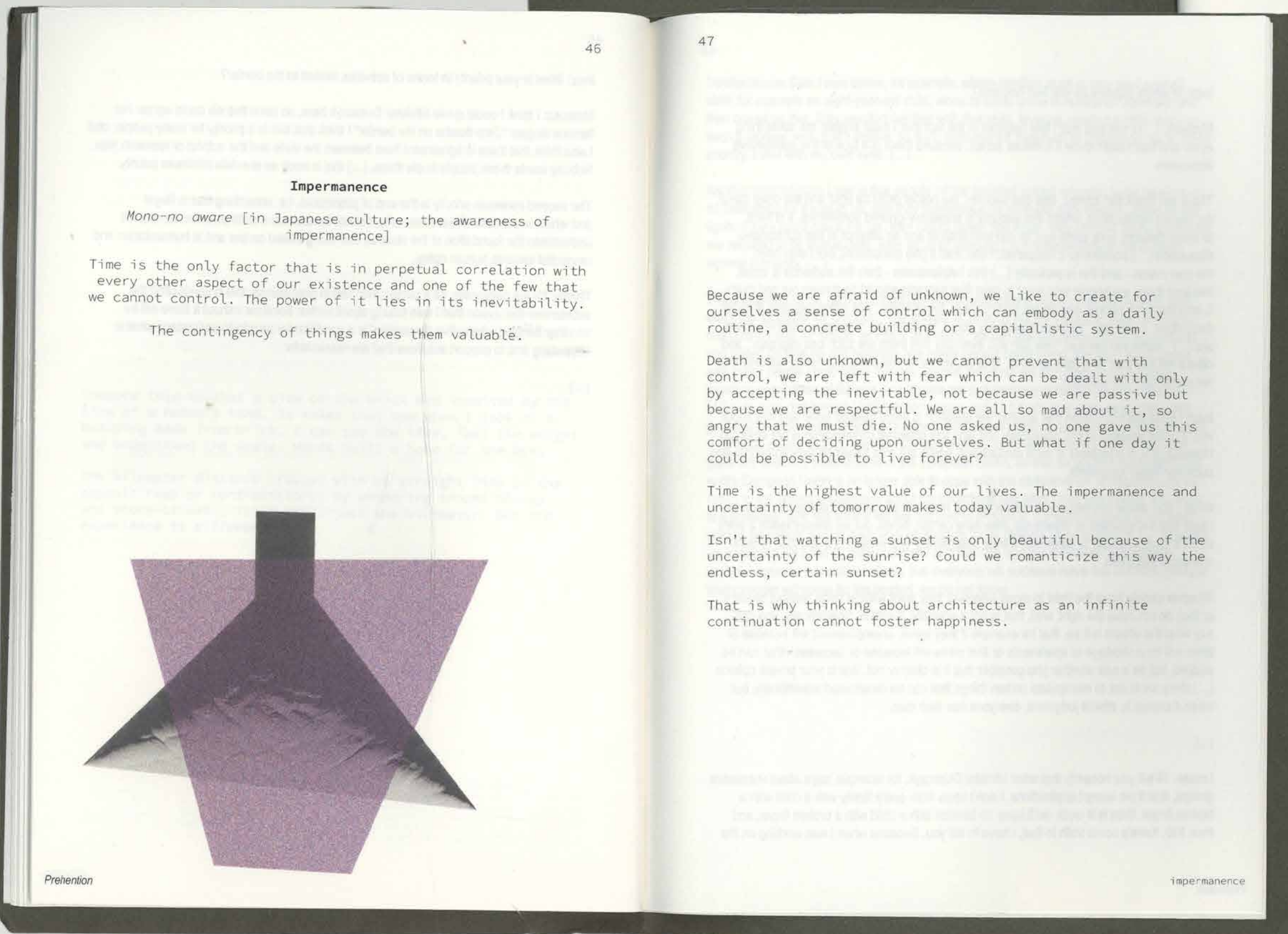
'if there is something
tangible we think it
should work'.

symbolism
visualizing of power / control.


'dalej się nie da,
koniec UE i NATO' } zdjąć

"MUR GRANICZNY" - film to watch.

- border as something
that injures people.
- STIGMATISATION on the body.



/form
first draft of the book

A photograph of a forest path. The path is covered in fallen leaves and leads into a dense forest of tall, thin trees. A white rectangular sign with a black border is mounted on a black post in the foreground. The sign contains text in Polish and English. The background shows a misty or foggy forest scene.

**OBSZAR OBJĘTY
ZAKAZEM PRZEBYWANIA
- WEJŚCIE ZABRONIONE**

“restricted area - entry prohibited”

research on *self*

interactive installation with aluminum mirrors

2024

the *other* mirror



the *other* mirror

research on *self*

interactive installation with aluminum mirrors

2024

A mirror is a liminal space, referring to Foucault. But what happens if we invite someone else into this liminality?

Reflective materials are quite metaphysical - perhaps because they appear so rarely in nature, or perhaps because they allow us to see at things we cannot access through ordinary eyesight.

Like our own faces.

Aluminum has a specific texture, somewhat similar to paper or to human skin. It also ages and physically responds to the passage of time, mapping its traces onto the metal's surface. Those qualities invite us to imagine mirrors that are not distant and detached, but responsive and vulnerable.

The mirrors we surround ourselves with are typically meant to show us our own reflection, but I wanted to challenge that functionality and allow the mirror to live alongside us.

What is the *self* when the reflection in the mirror becomes responsive?

5-6/12/2025 - exhibited at KunstBar, The Hague.



/reflection

the mirror's moderate reflectivity allows the image to
merge with the face on the other side



/skin of metal

aluminum ages similar to human skin, mapping the
passage of time onto metal's surface



/space

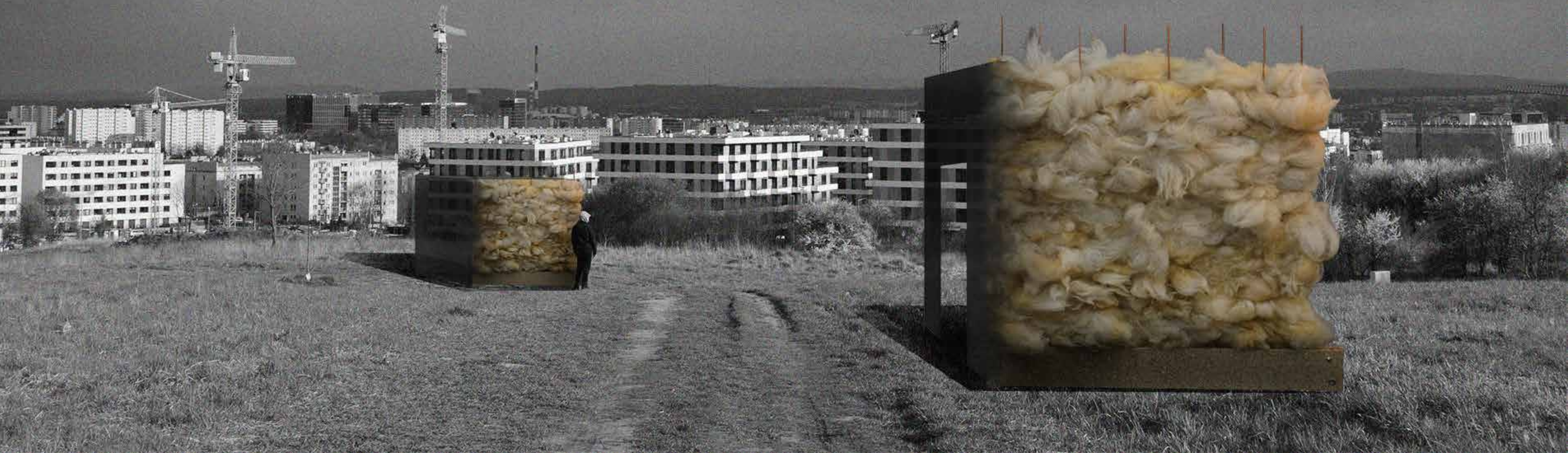
this small intervention in the space creates an opportunity to explore how
one can understand the *self* among others

line-movement-volume

reclaiming architecture by weaving

2025

weaving spaces



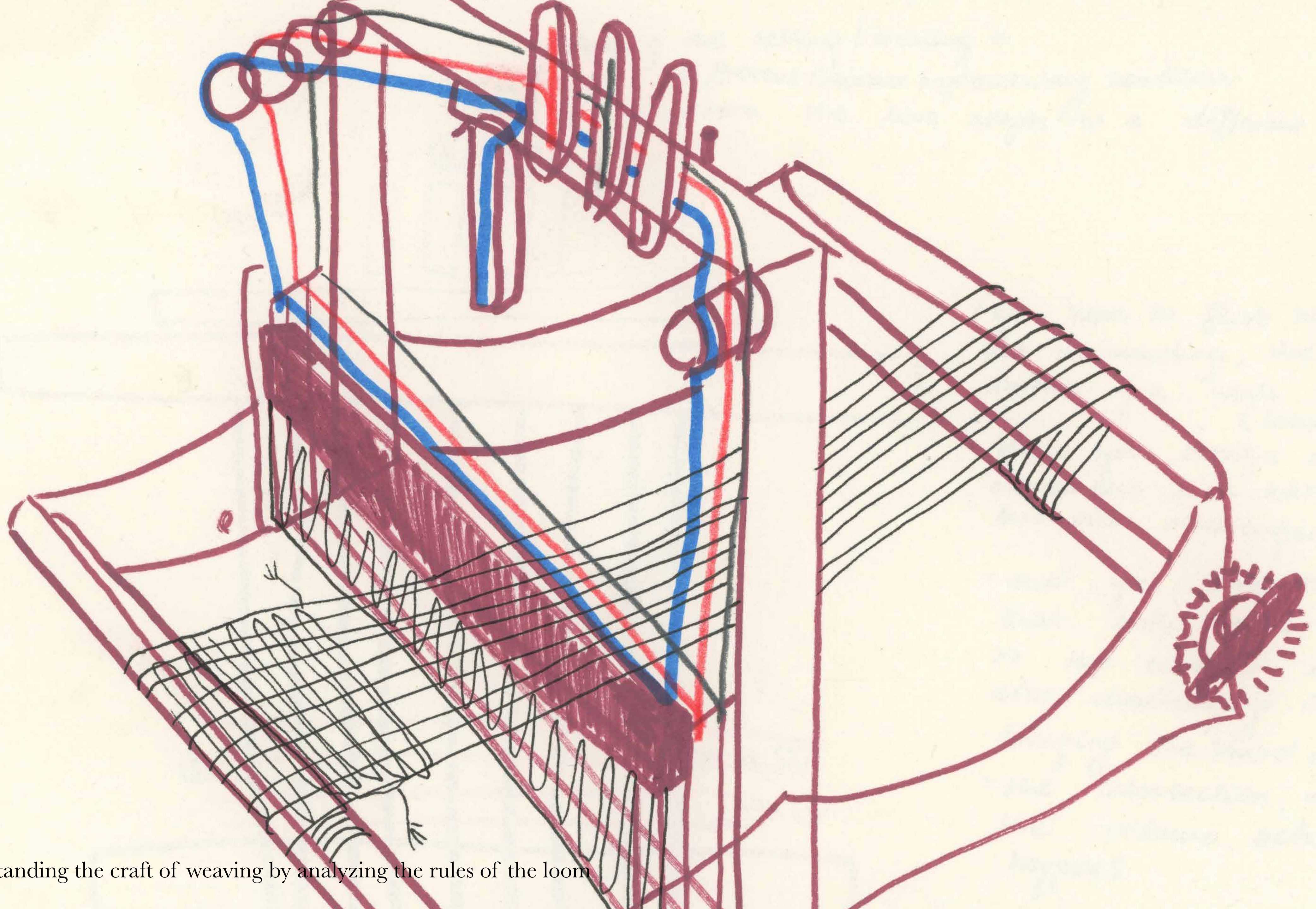
Line-movement-volume as a method for space creation.

Movement - although it may seem contradictory when juxtaposed with architecture - is the main driving force in the process of making. This idea challenges the common perception of buildings, and especially of walls, as merely silent shells.

Weaving, as a form of movement, carries a sense of hope for creating architecture that is feasible for everyone.

In this case, agency does not arise from universality or the relative affordability dictated by the privileged parts of the society, but from a form of agency rooted in locality - in the individuality of the terrain's features and its context.

Movement binds the capabilities of humans with the characteristics of the land, framing the void and shaping walls that foster belonging.



/loom

understanding the craft of weaving by analyzing the rules of the loom

listen. I want this process to be more of a dance, silent.
But not silent as passive but silent as understanding
each other without words needed. Take nothing for granted.

Today I would like to spend as much time as I have on
understanding materials and how they combine to create
something together. To explore the line that defines the
volume, and to experience this virtual method or choreography
of this movement. It is somehow this movement that
shapes the volume. If it's not the movement - there is only
the line, the thread, alone quite fragile. Weaving is like a
visualised, recorded materially - dance. The script of the movement

/reflecting and reimagining

by maintaining a dialogue between my hands and my head, I allowed myself to be
guided by the process and to experience the craft of weaving



/materiality
recreating my own loom for space-weaving, working only with scrap
materials



/space-loom

weaving the wall on the space-loom, using metal wires and raw wool



/woolen-wall
stabilizing the structure of the wall



/reimagined
visualising the hypothetical scenarios



signs of *care* in the urban landscape experimental book design 2025

care ressurects architecture

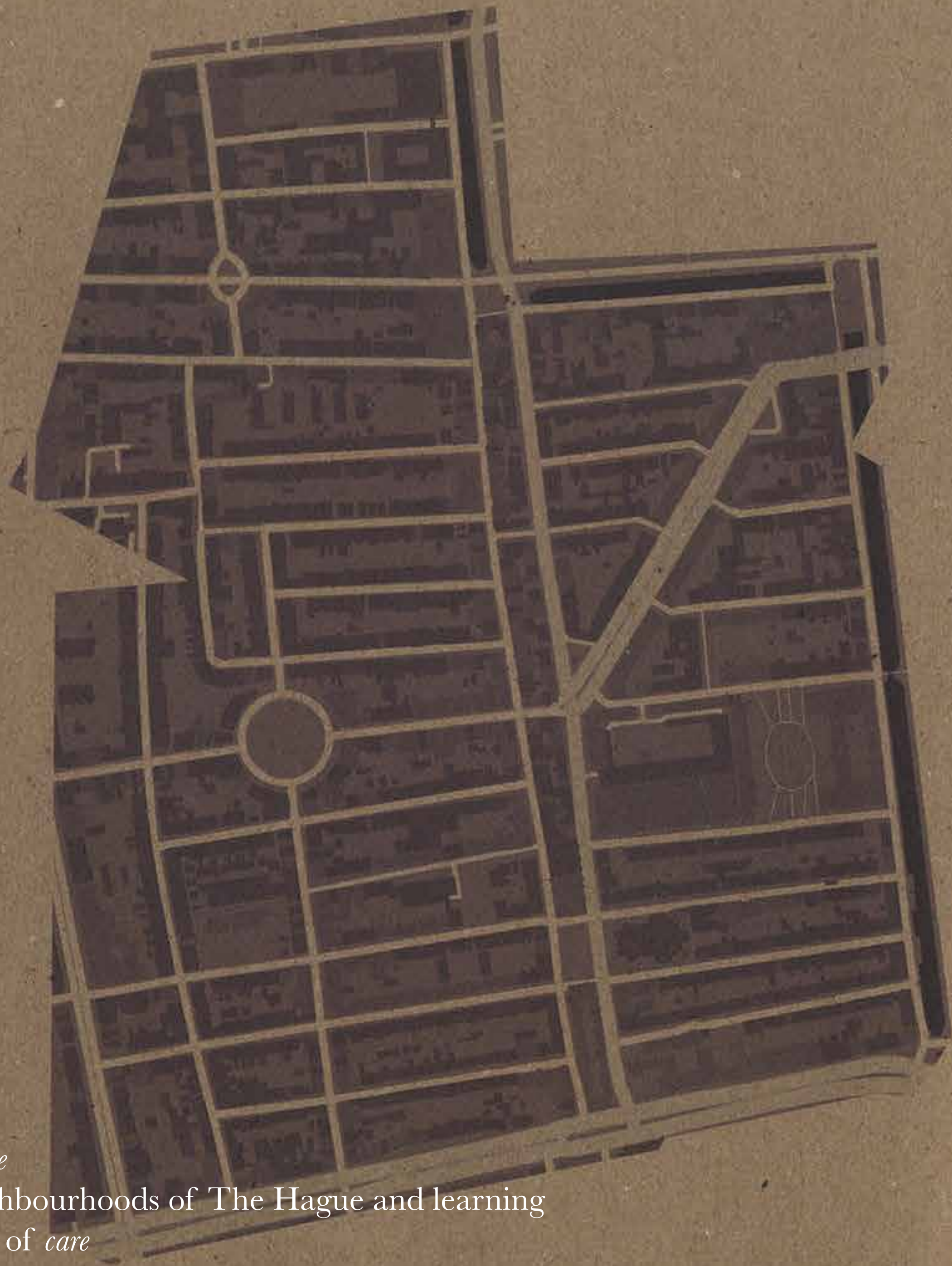
Searching for the meaning of *care* in the urban landscape.

Care manifests itself in various ways, but what all share is the intention to be part of the “public” - to visually express what is close to one’s heart.

Everyone should feel the responsibility and agency in shaping their own surrounding. In this context, architecture would need to take a step back, abandoning the starchitect’s ambition for over-designed spaces that foster disconnection.

When we design a space to be finite, we rather execute a death sentence on architecture than bringing it to life.

Do we want architecture that appears perfect but is dead by principle?



To Kindness

/urban landscape
exploring neighbourhoods of The Hague and learning
their language of *care*





/kindness

these objects could just as well face inward, toward the apartment,
yet someone chose to share them with those walking by



/defiance
stickers on trash bins and poles



/rusticity
people repairing or storing their stuff on pavements

Dear Defiance,

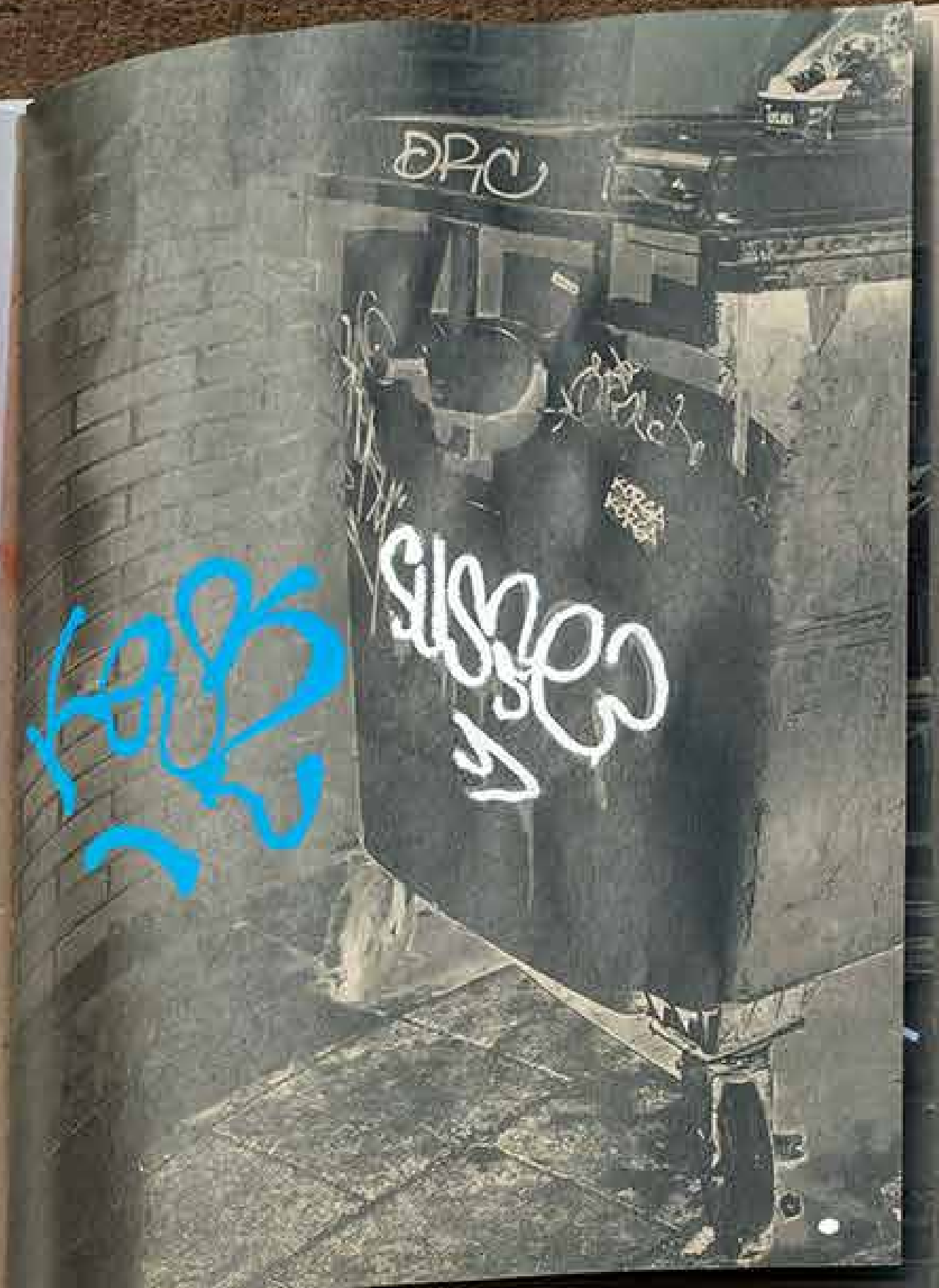
You like to expose yourself in not of a primal way. You know where is "home" (and you don't go there) and where is public. You are graffiti on lawns, gas tanks, and everywhere in 30m radio around the station.

Sometimes you try yourself on those big trash containers, at the back of grocery stores, then the paint trickles and you become, a sort of, Polka's brother.

You are devoted to your favorite football club. You are loyal, strict, wise. You make your territory.

I didn't feel welcomed by you when I was only a visitor to your community and needs to be either in or out. No strangers. You require a real commitment.

Later, Inc.



/defiance
expressions of frustration and visual resistance

KINDNESS

SELF-NURTURING

AUTHENTICITY

CARE

CONCERN

DEFIANCE

RUSTICITY

How a district's *Do-It-Yourself Urbanism* reflects it's residents' sense of



rhizomatic nature of communities

aluminum casting

concept development

2025

Embody/Empower: Fluidity in Form

Embody/Empower: Fluidity in Form

rhizomatic nature of communities

aluminum casting

concept development

2025

Designing The Jos Brink Award by emphasizing community as a space of interrelativity.

Guided by the rhizomatic structure and fluidity of the LGBTQIA+ community, we aimed to create a visual statement that highlights these qualities.

We are all responsible for maintaining solidarity by learning from and embracing the differences between us.

By combining aluminum casting with lava stone, we kept the process fluid, allowing the materials themselves to actively participate in the creative process.

We also invited people outside the academy to join the process, emphasizing the interconnections between us and fostering bonds through solidarity rooted in mutual respect.

Commissioned for The Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science.



/solidarity
gathering input from people wishing to contribute



/aluminum casting
making and preparing molds for casting



/aluminum casting
casting the award in separate pieces, which were
connected afterward



/the main award
the final design of the Jos Brink Award



/exhibition space

honorary statements were necessary for the main award to emerge, which is emphasized on by the exhibition setting (Kunstbar, The Hague)



/presentation

presenting the final outcome of honorary statements and The Jos Brink Award to
The Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science

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Languages

Polish [native]
English [fluent]
Dutch [beginner]

Education

2023 - 2027
BA Interior Architecture & Furniture Design
Royal Academy of Art (KABK)
The Hague, NL

2019 - 2023
Specialisation: Space Arrangement, Major: Exhibition Space Design
State High School of Fine Arts
Kraków, PL

Professional experience

2024 - ongoing
“Prehention. Between agency, engagement and architecture”
collaborative research project together with:
dr Mateusz Krępa, dr Olga Cielemecka,
Joanna Sarnecka
PL, NL

2025 - ongoing
“Winasera” Festival
visual identity designer
Sandomierz, PL

2021 - ongoing
Winnica Na Rozdrożu (private vineyard)
creative manager
PL

2021 - ongoing
EnoEdu (private language school)
brand identity designer
PL

Exhibitions & Publications

2025
Pop-up exhibition at KunstBar
Interactive installation - “the other mirror”
The Hague, NL

2025
Exhbiton at KunstBar
Together with Interior Architecture & Furniture Design, KABK
Collaborative design commision for Jos Brink Price 2026, for The Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science
The Hague, NL

2023
Palace of Art (*Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Sztuk Pięknych | Pałac Sztuki*)
Graduation exhibition - High School of Fine Arts
Kraków, PL

Softwares

Autocad,
SketchUp,
Illustrator,
Photoshop,
InDesign,
Blender,
Rhino,
Zbrush,
Lightroom,
Microsoft Excel

Workshop skills

Metal workshop
casting, welding

Wood workshop

Jewellery making
silver

Laser cutter
Riso printing
Film developing
Weaving
Embroidery
Sewing machine
Book binding
Plaster casting