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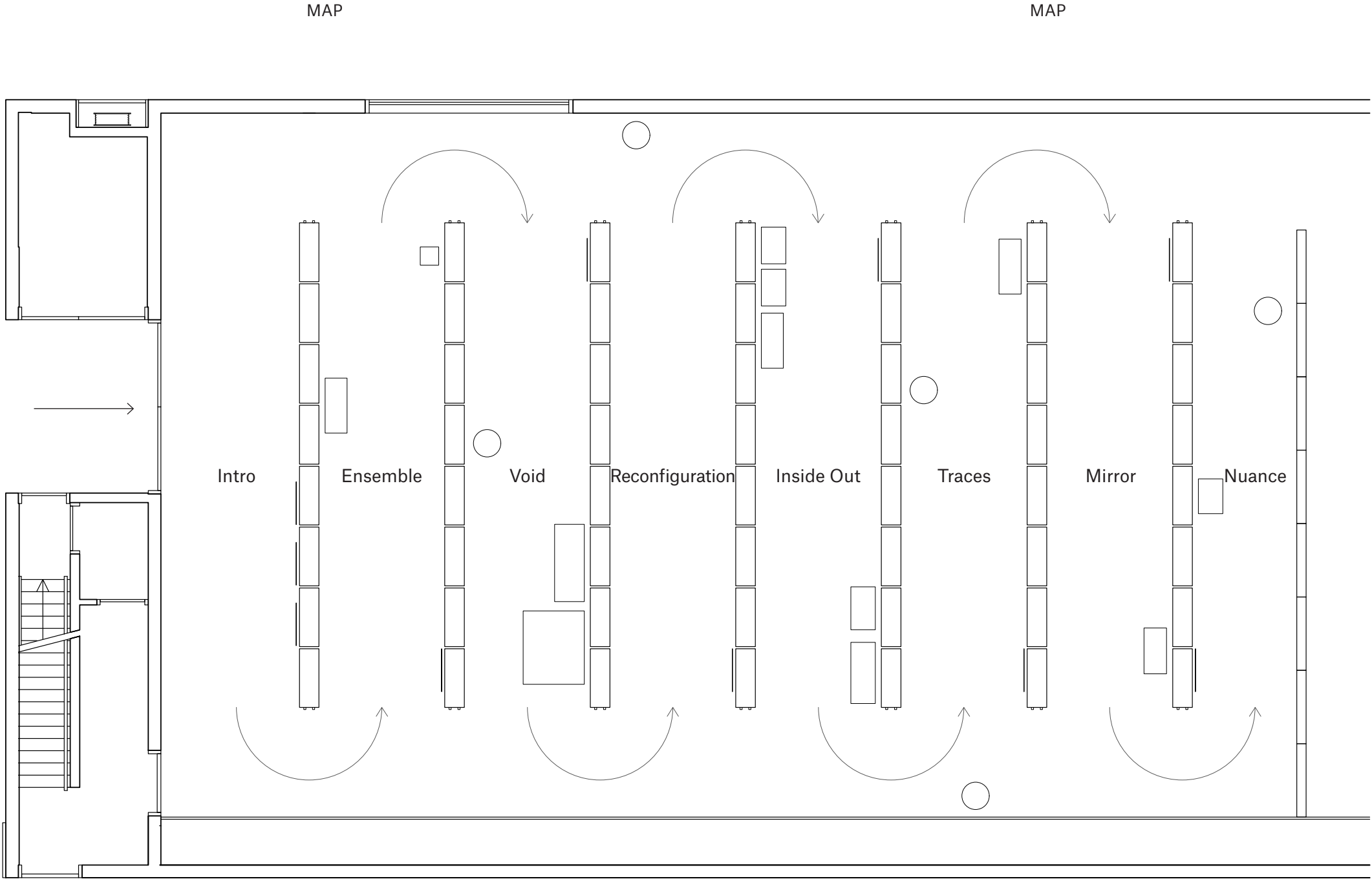
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As Found Experiments in Preservation

As a society we need to treat our built environment with care. Buildings and places bear traces of collective and individual stories. They can play a role in dealing with the challenges of climate change, migration, globalization and social inclusion. The existing built environment not only reflects the accumulated knowledge of the past but also looks towards the future for new uses and technologies.

A range of architectural experiments become possible by taking the storylines found in the existing as inspiration for or contrast to contemporary interventions. These experiments can produce exciting and sometimes surprising interactions between past, present and future. They go beyond a functional approach to architecture, challenge the difference between listed monuments and other existing buildings, and allow for doubt and adjustment. Determining which parts of buildings are to be preserved and meticulously restored and which can rather be cut away is addressed from various angles, such as collective memory, sustainability and contested heritage.

In this exhibition, we identify seven experimental approaches in intervening in existing buildings and spaces. We deliberately named these experiments with clear spatial terms: ensemble, void, reconfiguration, inside out, traces, mirror and nuance. Seven transformation projects, realized by architects from Flanders and Brussels, are narrated through the lens of a particular experiment. They play the main role in the exhibition while a visual cloud of reference projects accompanies them. Together they show how similar experiments have been carried out in the past or are being implemented internationally today.

The exhibition design by FELT architecture & design follows the principles of the exhibition and explores the potentials of this exhibition hall in its ‘as found’ state. By using the existing wooden floor planks and the suspended ceiling panels in the hall, they create the corridors for the seven experiments.

Ensemble

Sometimes the contemporary situation of a building or site may seem out of place or incomplete. The materials, formal idiom or scale of the different parts may be mismatched or the narrative being told incomplete. By adding new elements to an existing building or cityscape, the building or site can become a whole and its history can be enriched.



© Kim Zwarts

Het Steen

Het Steen is often described as Antwerp's oldest building. It was constructed in the thirteenth century as one of the city gates, raised on the remains of the early medieval fortification wall. Due to various restorations, conversions and extensions, Het Steen lacked a sense of unity. The design by noAarchitecten replaced the modest, functional extension of the 1950s with a new wing.

The new volume adopts the castle's formal idiom, but in a more abstract and robust way. The architects drew inspiration from Edwin Lutyens' design for Drogo Castle, which was built at the beginning of the twentieth century on the principles of a medieval castle. With this intervention, Het Steen once more becomes an ensemble, with the different building phases forming

a unity although still clearly recognizable individually.

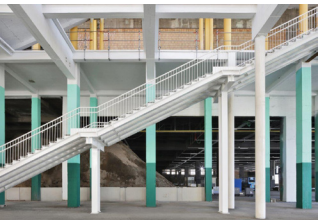
Design: noAarchitecten, UTIL Struktuurstudies, hp engineers, Daidalos Peutz

Void

Architecture is often associated with the creation of space by building structures and adding shapes and materials. Contrary to this convention, architecture can also be realized by removing materials. 'Removal' thus becomes a method for 'preserving' heritage. The notion of functional space is called into question by building on the meaning of void as spatial experience.

Chapex

Chapex is an enormous building of more than 60,000 m² raised to house conventions and conferences in Charleroi. In 2015 the city authorities organized an open competition to refurbish the building with public functions requiring little energy use. The architecture team responded by reducing the interior volumes and limiting the size of climate-controlled spaces.



© Filip Dujardin

They created a void in the middle axis by stripping the building of its façade and walls peeking towards the inner garden. The once indoor space becomes an exterior under a single roof. This seemingly simple act

of unbuilding generates a series of potentials. The open volume becomes a semi-public space connecting the city centre to the post-industrial landscape on the lower side of the slope. It also becomes the circulation hub of the building between the conference and expo halls and the multipurpose car park stacked on two sides of the inner garden.

Design: AjdvivgwA: AM architecten jan de vylder inge vinck – AgwA

Reconfiguration

The reconfiguration of architectural fragments can be a way of introducing a critical reading of the past. Rearranging building parts and reusing materials and architectural elements is becoming a frequent practice at a time when (raw) materials are becoming scarcer. At the same time, building with fragments can transcend purely ecological motivations and give meaning to architecture.

Open-Air Storage for the Art in the City-Collection

The open-air storage for the Art in the City collection in Antwerp is located in the Middelheim Museum, a former castle park where sculptures have been exhibited since 1950. The sculptures stored in the depot were originally located elsewhere in the city but were removed from the streetscape. Architect Aslı Çiçek experiments with reconfiguration on several levels.

Pedestals found in the depot were reused while some new concrete ones were added. She took sculptures down from their original pedestals and formed new configurations. By doing so, she created

fresh relations among the sculptures and between the sculptures and the viewers, generating new narratives. Most sculptures were originally on tall, monumental pedestals and towered over passers-by. Now the sculptures are on low pedestals, often at the eye level of visitors.

Design: Aslı Çiçek



© Tom Cornille

Inside Out

According to modernist thinking, the façade is the expression of the building's interior. This has been challenged by interventions in the existing for some time. Today, there are various fresh design attitudes for the interplay between inside and out: among others, double façades, transitional spaces between city and interior, and adaptation of the interior according to the façades.



© Filip Dujardin

Mortsel Town Hall

In 2016 the authorities of Mortsel decided that a new town hall was to become the vibrant heart of the local community. It would house a library, a café and a foyer

with a multipurpose hall in addition to municipal services. Eagles of Architecture won the architecture competition with a design that turned the existing town hall inside out.

In the transformation process, the architects chose to retain the shell of the existing 1960s building. Within the existing façades, they duplicated the front façade along almost the entire length, except for the two spaces at the ends. They then integrated two transverse volumes housing the stairs and sanitary facilities. The size and position of these volumes determined the further elaboration of the building. By copying the windows in the new walls following the rhythm of the façade, they generated visual connections between inside and out. In cases when making openings in the walls were impossible, they duplicated the windows as imprints of the façades in the interior.

Design: Eagles of Architecture

Traces

The history of a building can be read in the traces or scars visible in its architecture. Restoration in the traditional sense attempts to return a building to a historical state and therefore inevitably erases some of these traces. We can choose to let the different historical layers coexist and overlap or let them engage in dialogue with each other.

Het Predikheren

The Dominican monastery in Mechelen was constructed in the seventeenth century and transformed several times in the course of time. As the monastery had been abandoned for a long time, its interior and exterior had suffered substantial degradation.

The team of architects decided not to restore the building to the condition of its heyday. Instead, they consolidated the building and its interiors 'as found' and preserved the traces of the building's turbulent past.

All layers of the building are treated on an equal footing. In the interior, the different layers of paint on the walls and vaulted ceilings were preserved alongside one another. Where repairs were necessary, old bricks were used. To repair larger areas, a new brick was produced that resembles the original monastery brick but, due to its different texture, is clearly recognizable as new. The restoration juxtaposes different layers of time, based on aesthetic instead of historic judgements.

Design: Korteknie Stuhlmacher Architecten, Callebaut Architecten, Bureau Bouwtechniek



© Luuk Kramer

Mirror

In the visual arts, literature and music, mirroring old masters within a contemporary context is often equated with creating original work. The value of the 'architectural quotation' is often underestimated in contemporary architecture. Today, the action of mirroring architectural heritage can be a way of generating meaningful interventions in the urban fabric, adding meaning to the collective memory of the community.

Boekentoren / State Archives

While working on the restoration and expansion of the Boekentoren (originally designed by Henry van de Velde), Robbrecht en Daem architecten also won the competition to design the State Archives in Ghent. The two buildings are not only located close by but also house similar functions.



© Kristien Daem



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This made it possible for the architects to further develop in the State Archives several spatial and organizational elements they learned from Van de Velde. Inspired by the master, they placed the massive white storage tower prominently on the street corner. Mirroring the Boekentoren, the sturdy repository of the State Archives contrasts with the horizontal volume of the reading rooms, which are fitted with elongated windows. These reading rooms also feature sidelights and skylights. In both buildings, the designers split up the need for storerooms across the tower and the underground floors.

Design Boekentoren: Robbrecht en Daem architecten

Design State Archives: Robbrecht en Daem architecten with Arch & Teco Architecture & Planning

Nuance

Renovating or repurposing buildings is often part of ambitious and large-scale

projects where the new intervention makes an expressive gesture towards the existing. The quality and ingenuity of a project often lie in its simplicity and its ability to have an impact with modest means. This may involve a change in the use of the building, but also a change in meaning.

Malibran

Malibran is a youth centre in the Brussels municipality of Elsene, a stone's throw from Flageyplein. The nuanced interventions by Carton123 architecten ensure that the new youth centre doesn't stand out as a stranger in the existing urban pattern but rather blends in smoothly. They transformed the interiors of a formerly domestic space into a youth centre, adding a new volume towards the plot at the back of the building.

The interventions in the existing façade reveal an ambiguous stance between old and new, which also guides the design of the added volume. The colour of the bricks and the pattern of bricklaying are carried into the new volume with oversized terracotta-coloured concrete panels. Placed at the connecting axis between the old building and the new addition, the kitchen, together with the barbecue in the inner courtyard, is the social hub of the centre.

Design: Carton123 architecten



Séverin Malaud
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