

Reflection Paper

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Graduation studio: Heritage & Architecture – Rotterdam Harbour Heritage

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Rotterdam Harbour Heritage.

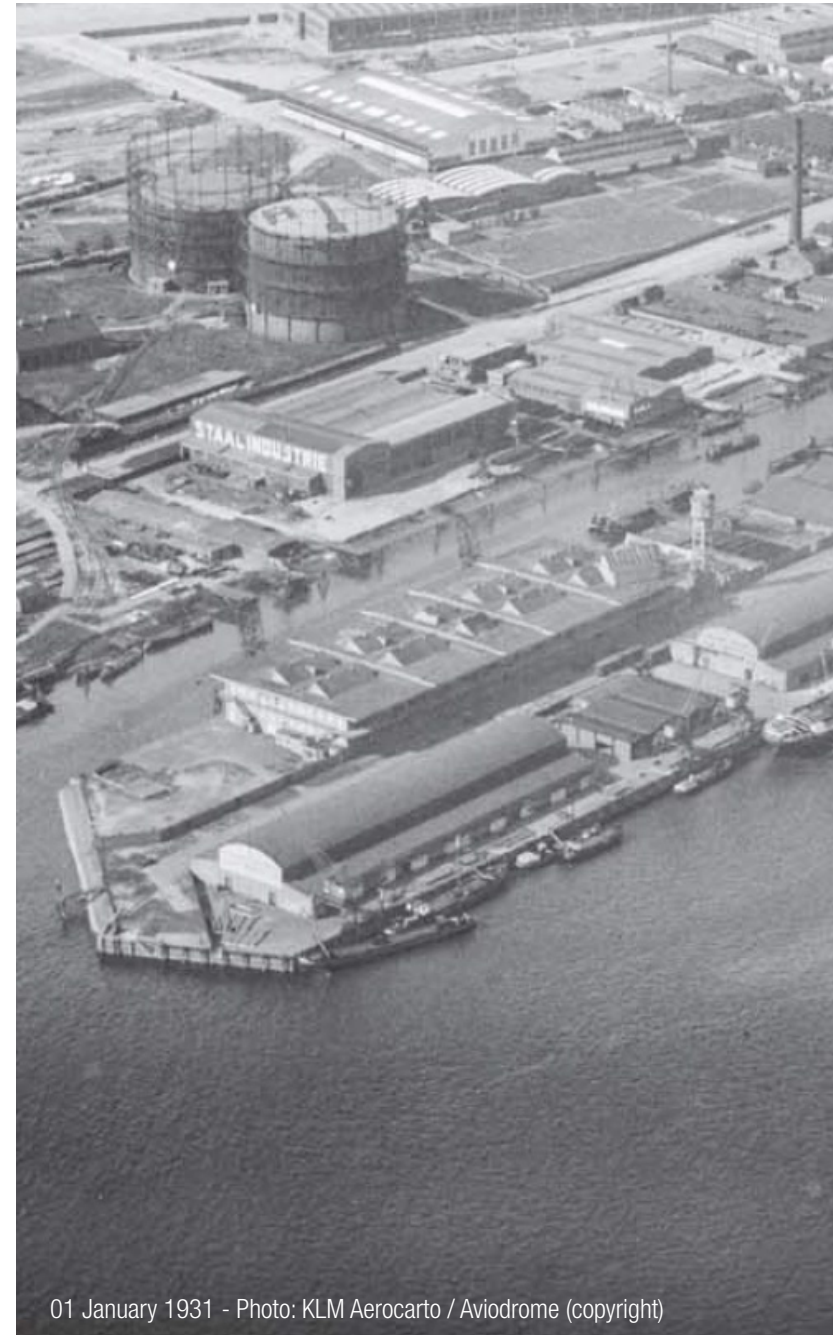
The Heritage & Architecture studio is concerned with the preservation and renewal of existing architecture. It deals with already existing buildings and tries to find an appropriate balance between the old and the new. In the case of the Rotterdam Harbour Heritage studio, the focus lies on smart designs for adaptive reuse of existing building complexes in the harbour areas of Rotterdam.

This reflection paper is a personal reflection about the design project of the Katoenveem, a former cotton storage warehouse from 1920, located on the Keilestraat in Rotterdam. It has been out of use as a cotton storage warehouse since 1964 and vacant since 2016. This reflection paper is based on the past three-quarters of the design studio and focusses on the relationships between the studio & the Katoenveem, between the research & the design, between the studio's methodology & chosen methods and between the Katoenveem & its social context.

Relationship between Heritage & Architecture, and the Katoenveem.

Because the studio Heritage & Architecture is concerned with the preservation and renewal of existing architecture, we always have to understand its past to be able to take what's valuable into the future. Knowing the story behind a historic building will provide an understanding why and how a building was built and whether it is important to preserve it. The Katoenveem for example, built in 1920, was specifically built for the import and storage of cotton bales. Its organization, spatial layout, technical details and appearance were all designed to optimize the process of storing the cotton bales. Knowing that the Katoenveem is the only building like this ever built in Rotterdam for this specific function, makes it a very unique building. This gives the building the extra values that are necessary to design with and which the studio of Heritage & Architecture focusses on.

Personally I have always been fascinated by the history of old buildings. I imagine how the buildings were used and the social values attached to them. I therefore think it is a shame when a building full of character and potential is left vacant, because it no longer has a useful function. The idea to re-create new life into an old building by giving it a new function is very motivating for me and is therefore the reason for choosing this studio.



01 January 1931 - Photo: KLM Aerocarto / Aviodrome (copyright)

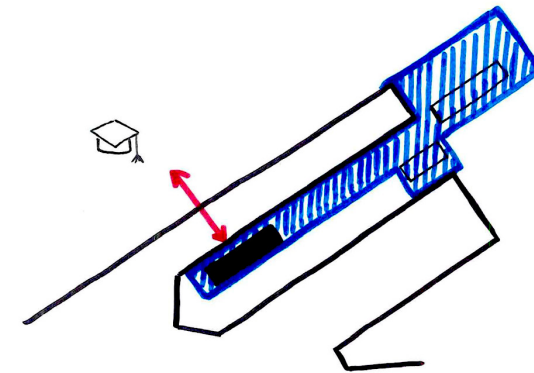
Relationship between research and design.

As already mentioned, the Heritage & Architecture studio is concerned with the preservation and renewal of existing architecture and tries to find an appropriate balance between the old and the new. To be able to design the new we have to first understand the old. This is done by critically questioning the documents of the past, the present and the future for aspects of cultural history, context, architecture and structure.

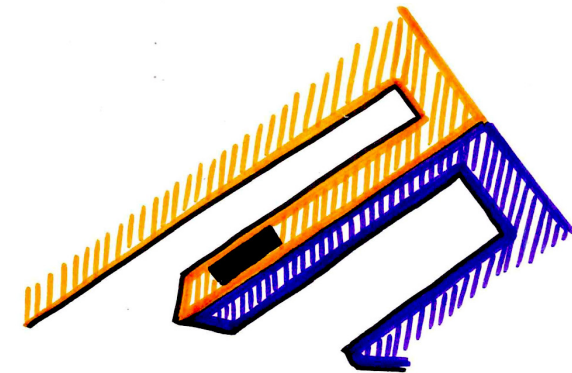
Taking this process in mind, I started off doing research about four aspects of the Katoenveem; its cultural history, context, architecture and structure in the three different time phases; the past, the present and the future. The research resulted in an analysis which gave me an understanding why the building is vacant and the challenges the building and its context are facing. This resulted in my main research question: How can the Katoenveem be reused to accommodate a new function and at the same time keep its identity? As well as three approaches to tackle the problem: 1. Connecting the Katoenveem to its surrounding area 2. Responding to the future developments in the area. 3. Maintaining the identity of the Katoenveem. The research helped me understand what was needed to be able to make the Katoenveem usable again, which formed the basis for the new program which then lead to the design approach.

When it comes to the design approach within the studio of Heritage & Architecture, it is important to know which position to take. During the design studio we had to position ourselves as an architect by writing a position paper. I wrote this paper about the influence of sociocultural values on heritage conservation. Conserving a building is not just about improving the technical aspects, but to properly conserve a historic building we need to understand its heritage values through its sociocultural values. This way we can preserve what we value most and prepare the building to function in the years to come. The position paper made me realize the importance of the characteristics of a historic building. Why we value them and why we want to preserve them. Therefore I took a continual design approach in which the characteristic values from the past are the basis for the new design for the Katoenveem.

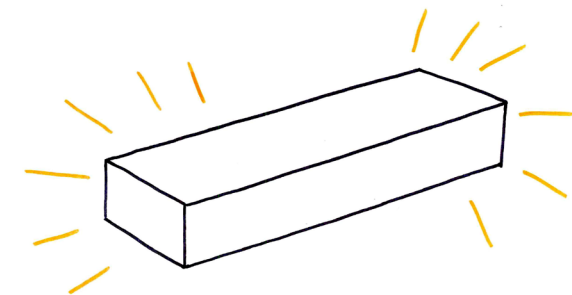
Furthermore, besides the research analysis, we also focussed on a research topic which fascinated us personally. As an extra research topic I focussed on the significance of the appearance of the Katoenveem by questioning: To what extent the architect of the Katoenveem combined the function of the concrete building with the aesthetics of exposed concrete architecture? During this research I found out that the Katoenveem has been aesthetically treated. The results, the aesthetic exterior appearance of the Katoenveem, determined a lot of my design choices as it is based on a personal fascination which I value as a great characteristic of the Katoenveem.



1. Connecting the Katoenveem to its surrounding area



2. Responding to the future developments in the area.



3. Maintaining the identity of the Katoenveem.

Relationship between the methodology of Heritage & Architecture, and the chosen methods.

The methodology of this studio is to take a research by design and design by research approach which focuses on the architectural and technical aspects and cultural significance involved in the conservation and transformation of buildings. The studio tries to question the significance and essence of the building's complex and its tolerance for change.

Trying to understand the tangible and intangible aspects of the complex starts by questioning every aspect of the building. Therefore the method that I choose was to analyse by questioning all the aspects of the Katoenveem's cultural history, context, architecture and structure. The answers to the analysis formed the basis for a transformation framework which determined six architectural starting points for my design (see image on next page). These six starting points are according to my analysis and personal opinion the six most characteristic aspects of the Katoenveem. With these six values I will always have a reason to explain why certain design choices are made as long as they refer back to these six starting points.

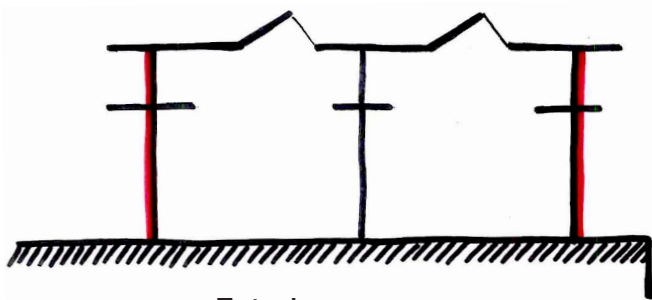
Relationship between the Katoenveem and the wider social context.

The main reason to transform a building is because its current or previous use or function is no longer compatible with the building. When looking for the reason why, we don't only have to look at the building itself, but also its urban and social context. Reintroducing a new function and connecting the Katoenveem to its surrounding area is beneficial for the entire area. At the moment the Katoenveem is situated at the end of a pier and can be labelled as a dead-end destination. Connecting it to the surrounding area's by making physical and functional connections will result in more activity taking place at the end of the pier. Transforming the dead-end zone which the Katoenveem is currently situated in, into a location with a destination.

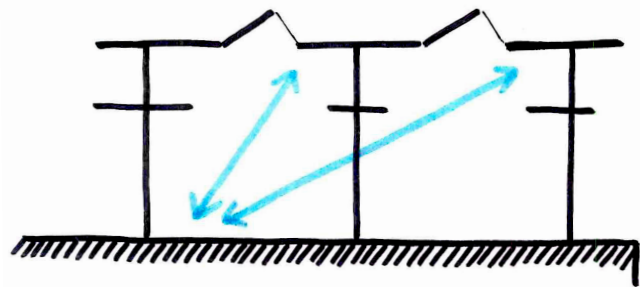
Within this studio it is also relevant to look at the social relevance of the complex. The social value relates to the 'place attachment' aspects of heritage value. It refers to a feeling of attachment to a place, object or building. This value ensures 'our heritage' which are the aspects of our past which we want to keep. The question why I need the Katoenveem for my design is therefore frequently asked. The social value is one of the reasons why the Katoenveem adds a surplus value to the context. It allows people to identify themselves and say that they work or live in the 'Katoenveem' and not just at the end of the pier.



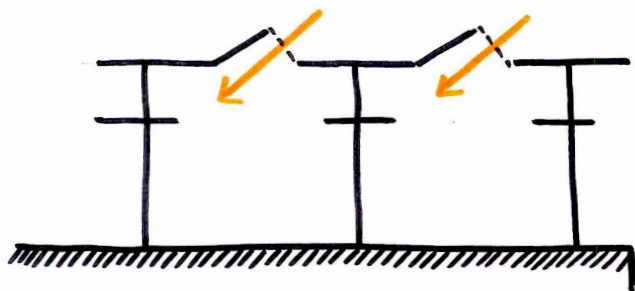
The Katoenveem on the Keilestraat, Fototechnische Dienst Rotterdam (Gemeentewerken, Openbare Werken), 1919, Rotterdam Stadsarchief.



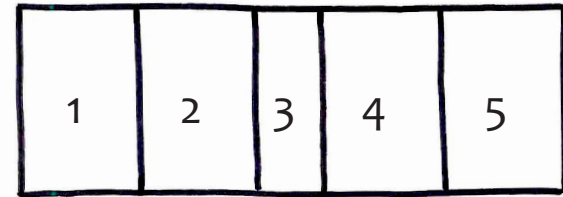
Exterior appearance



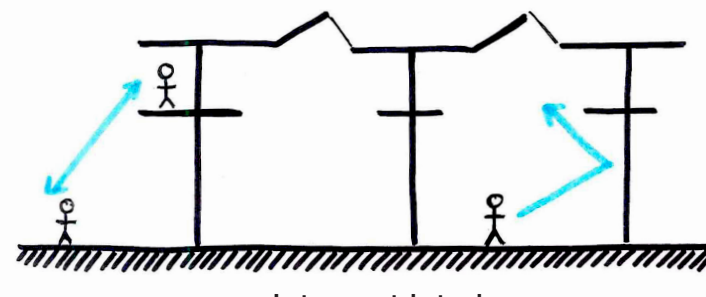
Spatial layout



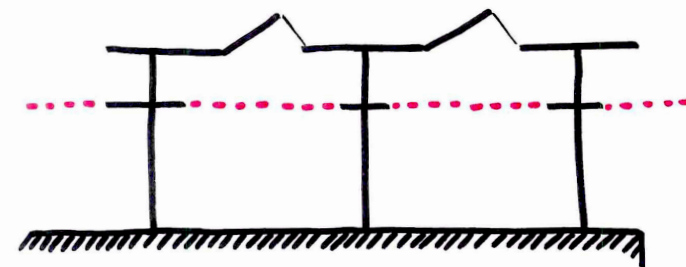
Light from above



Compartments



Introvert interior vs.
Extrovert balconies



Division between floors