

### **Project Description:**

My project is an adaptive reuse architectural project of an existing warehouse supermarket into a film production house sited in Lasnamäe, the Soviet built district of Tallinn, Estonia. The design encompasses all programs necessary for the complete film making process, including a 2164 sq.m soundstage with a clear height of 14m. Besides being an infrastructure, one third of the building area is dedicated to the public with programs such as a winter garden, exhibition spaces, café and restaurant. The Southern façade of the building also acts as a cinema screen for a drive-in theatre in its expansive car parking area.

### **Reflection:**

Films have the ability to produce and reproduce the image of a city, curating an experience for both domestic and international audiences. The established style of Estonian cinema as described by Estonian director Ilmar Ragg is slow and complicated, defined by imageries of "someone dragging a dead dog across sand dunes" or "a man with a wrinkled face sitting in a dusky room staring at a window for what felt like an eternity while rain drops pattered on the pane" (*Ragg, 2020*).

It felt difficult to work with this persisting image of Tallinn, it is not the conventional perception that most would like their homeland to be imagined. Nonetheless, my fascination with the city's image only grew upon visiting Lasnamäe, the district that epitomizes the barren and desolate vision of typical Estonian productions. I found the Soviet blocs reminiscent of the high-rise public housing I am accustomed to seeing in Hong Kong, while the massive commercial warehouses with bold signages along the Laagna Tee reminded me of urban sprawl situations in North America. This combination of dense and monotonic housing contrasted with the boldly colorful and sprawling qualities of the post-Soviet commercial establishments. This, for me, raised the question of how a third type of architecture, non-housing and non-commercial, will be recognized in this surrealist neighborhood.

Upon deciding to work with an existing warehouse structure for a film studio in Lasnamäe, I began design by researching layout and requirements of filmmaking infrastructure as well as its supporting facilities. Traditionally soundstages are long span structures of sturdy construction with a high ceiling height, often transformed from factories or airplane hangars. To transform the existing Prisma warehouse into a film town that can support a soundstage, structural alterations regarding raising the roof became an obvious structural challenge of the project.

Besides the programmatic requirements of a soundstage and its auxiliary programs, I found myself in need of a grounding idea in deciding a formal layout. I set out to design with the humble goal of generating density at least within the plot of land I am working on.

Despite the high population density of Lasnamae, the barrenness of the land and the lack of human scale, especially in structures built in post-Soviet era, gave me the feeling of being in the middle of nowhere everywhere. It was a surreal sensation, not necessarily a bad one, I could certainly imagine art school creatives referring to the aesthetic as barren-chic.

To break down a large building into smaller blocks that felt accessible by foot. I moved back in time, away from post-war modernism and dove into spatial arrangements of medieval Tallin as inspiration. It was the alluring image and tale of a stone-grey castle perched on a hill, surrounded by a moat with crocodiles that mercilessly chomp up intruders that held my attention. To have a castle, there must be a fort, and beyond the fort, there must be a village with villagers working tirelessly to provide for the castle.

The entire warehouse is programmatically sectioned into three parts, conceptualized according to a metaphor of the classic medieval city, with a village (filmmaking facilities), a castle (the soundstage), and a garden (public programs). The sections have the corresponding material character of wood, stone and glass. The garden serves as the public entrance of the building, facing the residential neighborhood of Mustakivi, providing programs such as a café, restaurant, winter garden and exhibits.

In the interior layout of the film “town” I envisioned a townscape where each building block would serve the many different processes of filmmaking. I revisited urban planning strategy of Saarinen, the Finnish architect originally commissioned to design Lasnamäe and the plans of the Soviet and applied a similar logic of a central avenue with “city centers” located along it, with avenues emerging axially from the soundstage, breaking up the orthogonal column grid of the existing.

Retrospectively, the moves and decisions I have made in these months can only be described as an enjoyably playful process. A non-linear aggregation of ideas grounded only by imagination, metaphors, and intangible elements within unbuilt history, all inspired by the surrealist character of the existing urban landscape of Lasnamäe. Ultimately, this has become a strange project in many ways that I have thoroughly enjoyed working on, I could only hope it be interpreted as playfully serious or vice versa.