

REFLECTION P5

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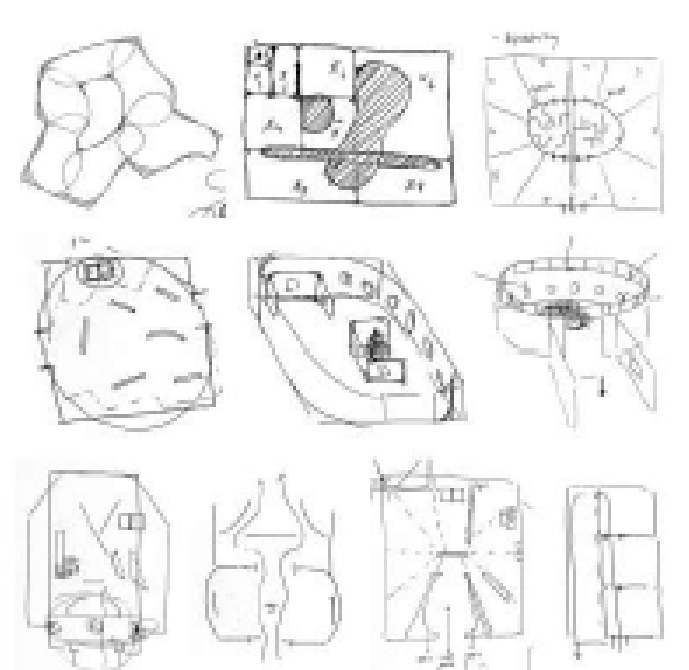
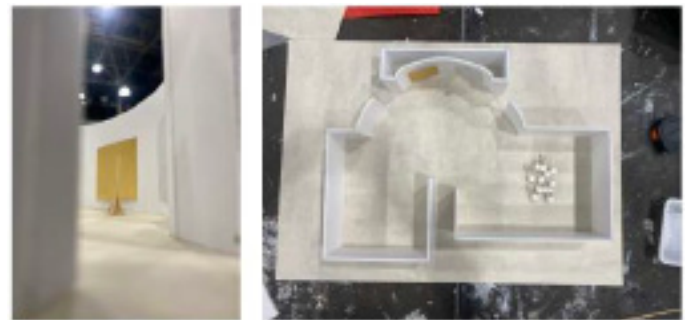
Interiors, Buildings & Cities Graduation Studio kicked off with a period of research. This research phase consisted of various exercises that got us to understand better the project we would eventually get our hands on; 'a new Flemish museum for contemporary art'.

In the first quartile we engaged with with creating a research framework and method that would serve us as a foundation to grasp the subject of a museum better. We were split into research groups and through the process of literature readings, open table talks and collaborative expressive writing, we were able to investigate what 'contemporary art' is, who an 'artist' is, what 'art' is, and how a museum serves as a constellation of spatial, functional and atmospherical body of organs to host these elements.

Each research group explored a different museum as a case study, and made their models. This was a first hands-on experience on discovering how the construction of these museums served for the function within, and a play of scale. An important take away was that the problems whilst making the model actually had their answers in the actual building and how it was built. Each group had different takeaways and way of solution finding that were shared in the final presentation.

We were encouraged to use this model making knowledge and research expertise on the next stage of 'Ensembles'. During this period I investigated the Belgian artist Philippe van Snick, and how his art should be displayed and exhibited. I collected a lot of knowledge concerning the positions of 'gallery', 'artist', 'art', and 'curation' in relation to one another; by reading literature on this subject, listening to interviews with artists, talking to curators, visiting museums and explored it architecturally by making various models of exhibition spaces.

This Ensembles phase taught me a lot, I made a lot of mistakes, and repeatedly questioned myself about the way I approached the subject. I had been very didactic and demanding from the exhibition space I was modeling, therefore I lost the room of flexibility and had a very rigid framework that limited me to target the right things. The way I was able to solve this was by visiting more and more museums and talking to my tutors about it. I learned that there was not 'one right way', and that it wasn't a scientific equation.



Sketch variations & studies on different exhibition rooms

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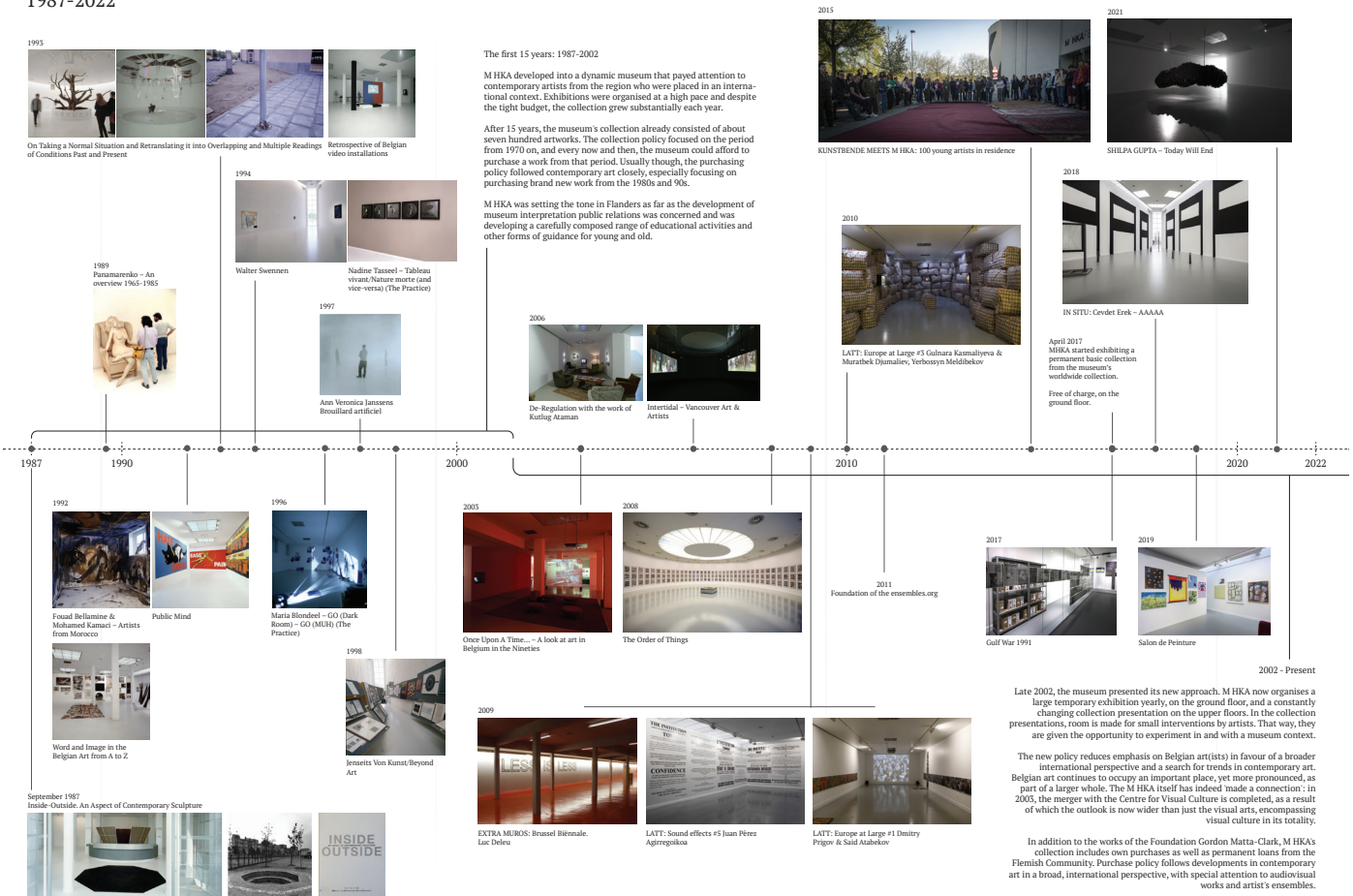
In the next stage we shifted our focus to the city of Antwerp. With MHKA (Museum of Contemporary Art in Antwerp) looking for an expansion, a brief was given to us as an instruction guide to critique and reference ourselves on. Visiting the city and experiencing the intimate places made us establish a connection and take a position towards our project brief in relation to the context. And after talking to the MHKA director, Bart De Baere, visiting the building itself and walking around the new site, it helped me initiate a narrative of what the new museum could do and could be for contemporary art, for the public, for the Flemish community, and for Antwerp.

Our knowledge from the precedent studies, ensembles and research played a critical role at this stage to question the brief and take a po-

sition towards it. Since the beginning, I wanted to progress and do this project as if it is actually going to be built. Therefore I took the brief's demands as strictly as possible. Eventually, I realized that this was fitting well with the research explorations I have been doing in terms of functional connections within the building and with the context..

Following the P2, it became visible that I was asking for too many things from the project, which therefore had created this visible framework of restrictive elements; of which some have failed to accomplish their desired goal. One of these was the visual connection to the park from the circulation within the building. I took the brief in a literal manner and wanted this museum to function as a unity, facilitating all the necessary amenities with the demanded

Exhibition Spaces & Performances in MHKA 1987-2022



Overview of investigated exhibition spaces and performances in MHKA 1987-2022

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square meters and heights, making the building a skyscraper, a vertical museum. Due to this tall mass, the idea of people circulating from 'public floor' to 'public floor' (floors 5 and 10) was disconnected from the practical reality of how the museum would be used because of lack of programming. . Also the intertwined spatial functions of the museum were not functioning as fluid as I hoped. Therefore after the P2 I have done a tailoring to the concept, refining what it is and what it does for the public. I was focused too much on the horizontal interactions of the building with its surroundings, after that I started researching the vertical connection of this building with the surroundings and within itself.

I learned to approach the project as an urban, monumental mass. With this in mind, the vertical narrative and what this urban entity does in context better became apparent.

Through P3 to P4, I had the opportunity to reflect and expand my evaluation of the project. Given the size of the museum and the list of goals to be accomplished were being completed one by one, nevertheless this change and development took more time than intended, leading to a no-go in the P4. After this moment it was a relief and realization that I now had the time to complete what was missing.

It helped me take a step back and reconstruct the ideas, the physical composition, what it stands for and the storyline of the museum. Over these weeks, I worked everyday, giving it all the attention and work that it needed, up till the second P4.

The project was eventually working in favor of all the goals it targeted. The outcome was fulfilling and complete.

The Research Methods

My choice of methods developed itself starting from the first week of studio, as I've learnt more about the studio and its content, I developed a daily eye to look at things differently, read differently and analyze everything I see to resonate with the studio. Alongside this daily habit that I've developed, my framework of research followed both a theoretical part and a practical part.

The theoretical part consisted of literature reads such as books, newspaper articles, magazines, photography journals and interviews; made by artists, curators, and architects. Books like "Making Space: Writing, Architecture, and the Construction of Culture" by Paul Carter helped me understand the literature knowledge that I've been collecting in relation to architecture and culture, and helped me juxtapose some ideas I had which I could not put on paper before and vice versa. The main theoretical research helped me shape the main narrative of my story, nevertheless some of the information eventually did not lead to anything or went background along the process. In that sense, I'm glad to have taken notes of the majority of my research, if not, everything. Although, it would have been much better if I had written more of this knowledge in a coherent structure altogether, so that this sum of information would be transferrable and cross referenced even after the project is finished. On the good side, the majority of this information if recorded with my Project Journal, which has been a critical, spinal product of my work.



Mass Studies in Context Model

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For the practical methods of research, I visited a lot of exhibitions, interviewed a lot of curators and artists, observed the built environment I'm surrounded by and actively took notes. Most of the visits were to contemporary galleries and modern museums. For instance, curators such as Tominga Hope O'Donnell from Munch Museum, Oslo; and various students studying curation were kind enough to guide me through their process of thoughts about exhibitions and answered some of the key questions I had in mind. These people, whom have explored the subject of 'displaying a work of art', 'how a museum functions' and 'what its societal role could be'; were very influential and informative to listen to.

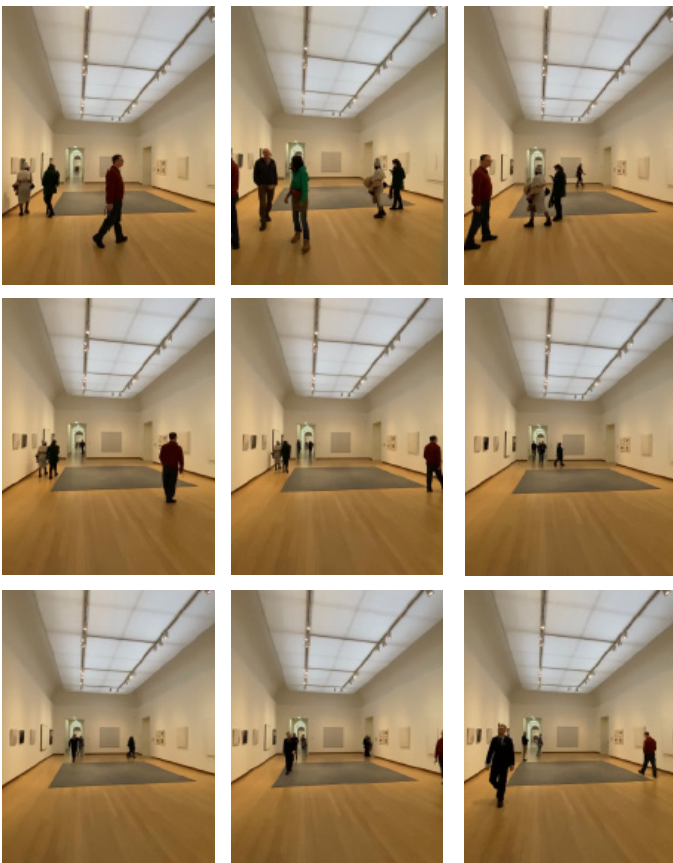
I have learnt that on-field research is essential when exploring the public's behavior, their interactions and approach to a public space & building. An eye opening investigation was to see how museums with extensions were functioning. For instance the Stedelijk Museum in

Amsterdam was a good case study for me to observe people's movement through space, navigation, and the relation between this movement and proximity to art. I recorded investigations like such, with time-lapses and photography. Explorations as such helped me incredibly, to understand how people behave in such gallery spaces and how they are confronted with art.

Gathering theoretical information and exploring its parallels to the actual situation in this case was very helpful in understanding how a museum would function better and better. It helped me take into consideration elements like; how much time should one spend to reach the first exhibition upon entering, how distant should the circulation be from the exhibition rooms, and how long could one tour exhibition spaces before they need a break.

The presentation we had from the MHKA's director, Bart De Baere, always came back to mind after making these practical observations, finding correspondences with what he said; sometimes as answers, and sometimes as points to consider better. I found his interview 'Art Museums and Democracy' with L'Internationale to be always refreshing and bringing me the gravity of his understanding of a museum and how it works in accordance to their responsibility towards the public. It gave me information about the societal and cultural potential of the art scene in Antwerp and Belgium.

Following the P2, my project was still seeking to find the right balance with all the things I was demanding from it. From form, to layout, to height, circulation and spatial quality; my mentors have given me very fruitful feedbacks upon how to develop it and target the right goal. By being in depths of each task I'm trying to achieve with this project, the weekly help from my mentors helped me back off and see the bigger picture. After their suggestions, I found the solution to be following the narrative of what the building already is and what it is doing right, and then looking at what could be improved. I did this



One of the time lapses I studied, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam

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through writing and sketching diagrams to remind myself of the character of the project and what it meant for the public visitors, how they connect to the city of Antwerp and what role this museum has in that connection from the perspective of contemporary art. My archive of photographic documentations played a crucial role in me exploring the public attractions more and more, looking back at the unconsciously captured details in each photograph, and how they are small pieces of a large puzzle of public activity and inclusivity; eventually building up the project past the P3 phase and giving it the final definitions.

Personal Project Framework

I started the project with an embedded framework embedded in my mind, I was simultaneously gathering theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge, and simultaneously producing content as time went. With the information that was gathering over time, I wanted to learn and discover and collect as much as I could, reach a high level of knowledge, create target questions and problems to solve for each one, and make the product work in the favor of all these problems seamlessly. At P1 and a couple of times after the P2 I realized that this complex web of problems was more of an unsolvable entanglement, rather than a well working system of solutions. There were a few moments where I could not progress because of being trapped in this entanglement and not being able to solve everything at once. Thanks to my tutors and personal efforts I was able to ask less, but more efficiently, from what the project is trying to be. My research influenced my design to ask for more in this sense, and I was able to solve this by balancing it out with; the design asking for more research. I learned that this was of working and attitude creates the best outcome.

Having gone through a lot research and design trials, some stand out more than the others eventually, and some maintain their value. I expanded my research topic sometimes to a far more detailed extent than necessary, and valued the quantity of resources as well as the quality. Taking notes of each one and analyzing, sometimes made me lose a lot of time and eventually lost value overtime. It led me to researching too much on trying to research the right thing. For instance, the interview I had with Tominga O'Donnell was very useful in the sense that I actually got to hear in the first place what are the things I'm concerned with, and what are actually necessary for me to think about. It helped me understand the importance of this by not only talking to a professional curator, but also by hearing about it from someone that is in the actual world and is experiencing this by herself. This was an academic point of view for me, that merged with the practicality of my research matter.

Project Assessment

Public buildings have constantly been reinterpreted and reappropriated through time and circumstance, therefore a question I look back and ask is; what is this project's role and responsibilities now and the ways in which it engages with both the contemporary city and its citizens? From a societal point of view, this project aims to act as a platform for dialogue, cultural exchange, and creative expression, fostering a sense of belonging and community pride. I aimed to create a project that has the potential to enrich the cultural landscape of Antwerp and attract diverse audiences, both locally and internationally.

From another point, I also asked myself the question of what the role of the architect is in such a project. By combining sustainability measures, design aspects, spatial requirements, and societal value, a coherent architectural vision was aimed to balance the demands of stakeholders, visitors, and the artistic expression. This involves integrating circular design elements, accommodating diverse art forms, and fostering inclusivity and community engagement. My ultimate goal was to synthesize these considerations into a compelling architectural story that serves as a platform for artistic exploration and inspiration.

Over the course of the project, not only focusing on creating a museum that suffices its own needs, but also becoming a project that holds academic and societal value carved the stance of this museum. Also, the research and design process undertaken for the project aims to provide insights and knowledge, contributing to the academic discourse on sustainable architecture, public inclusivity, and community-oriented cultural institutions.