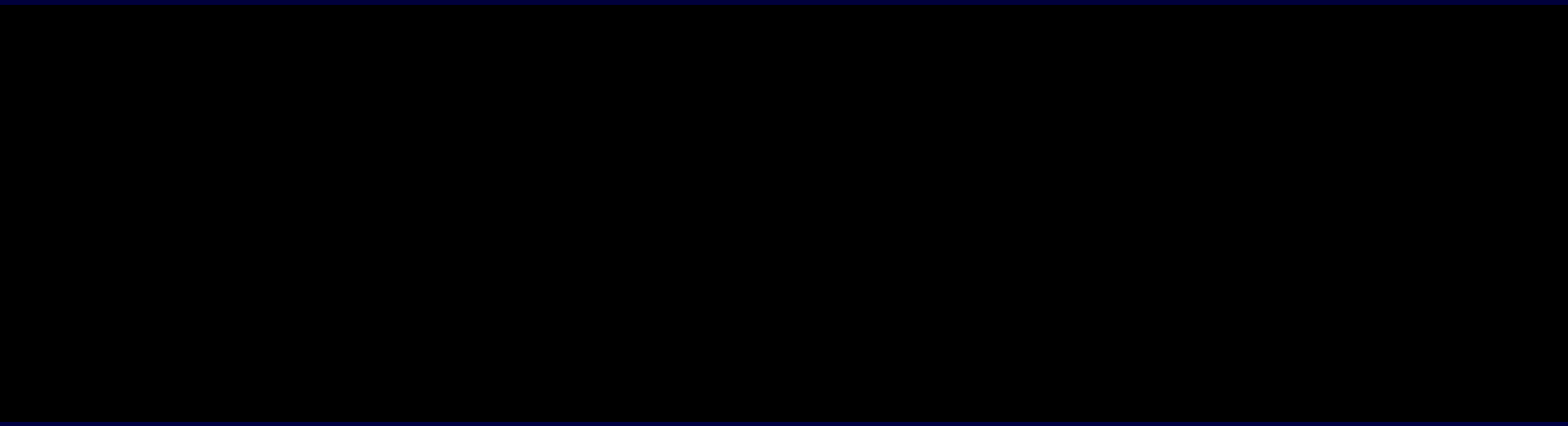
Narrative, Sense and Space: Cultural Interpretation Centre, Mahé

Semester Five Studio 2019-2020

Studio Team: Dr/Architect Anuradha Chatterjee, Ar. Meenakshi Dubey, Ar. Shyam Gandhi, Ar. Vinod CP, Ar. Vinod Cyriac

Studio Abstract



The Semester Five Project will have students design a Cultural Interpretation Centre at Mahe. The studio brief expects students to understand the complexities in the cultural history of Mahe, consolidate oral histories and memories, and construct a narrative that is shared and meaningful. It is expected that this narrative will be realized through the spatial and tectonic design and material detailing of the Cultural Interpretation Centre, which is a mixed-use public building in a significant location in the vicinity of the Mahe waterfront. Designs produced by students should not only be functional, but they should also have evocative spatial qualities appropriate to an experiential project like the Cultural Interpretation Centre. Furthermore, a very significant aspect of this project is Inclusive Design (designing for the differently abled) as an embedded philosophy and not as a compliance driven approach, so as have positive social impact and be able to provide an experience that is accessible to all.

City, History, Fiction

City, History, Fiction

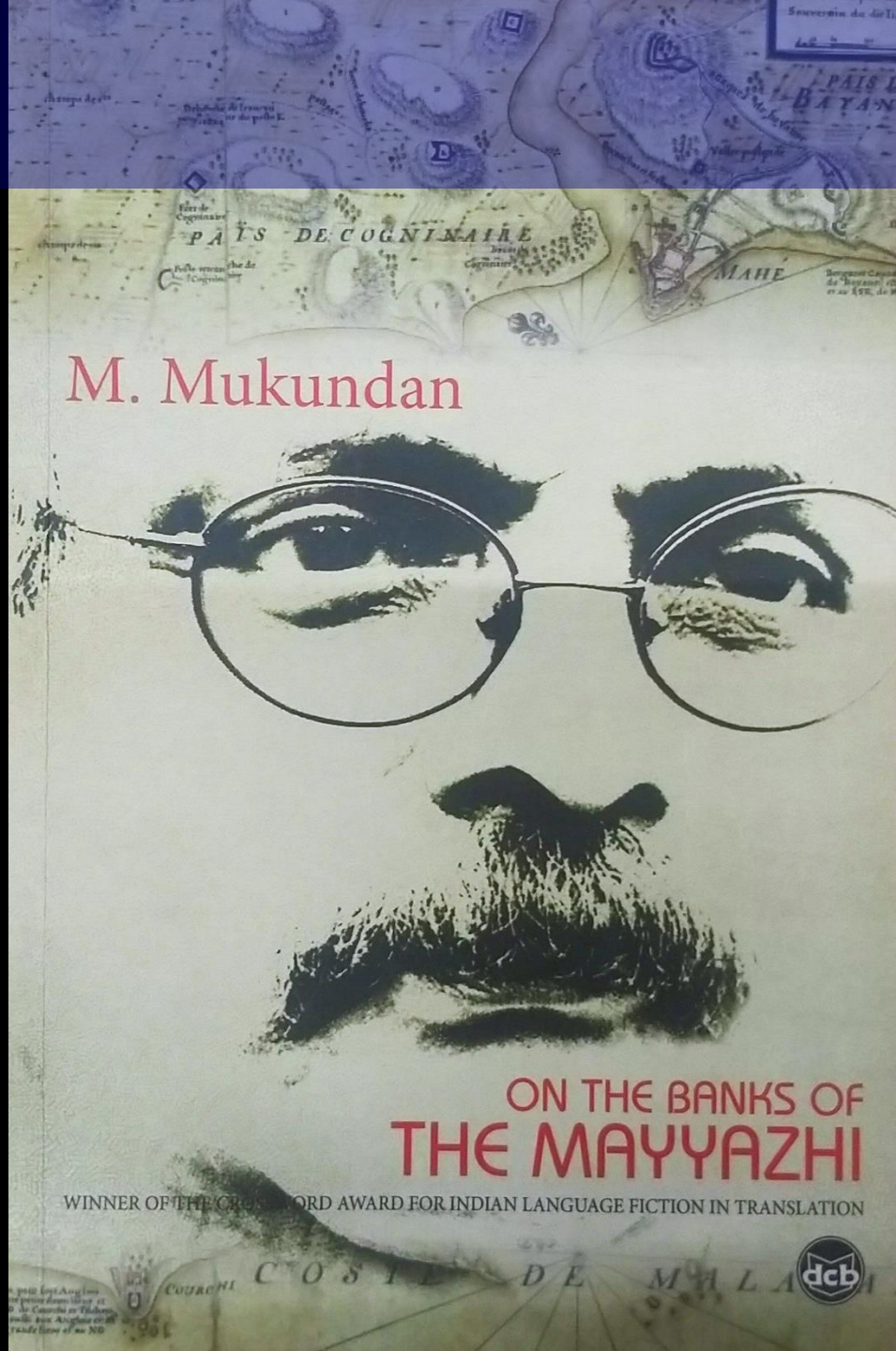
City, History, Fiction

Swapna Gopinath argues

“Mukundan's novels on Mayyazhi are perfect examples…of history in fiction. The novels are shaped with the history of Mahe as the backdrop and the changes that take place in the small principality become the canvas on which the characters are painted with a touch of humaneness”

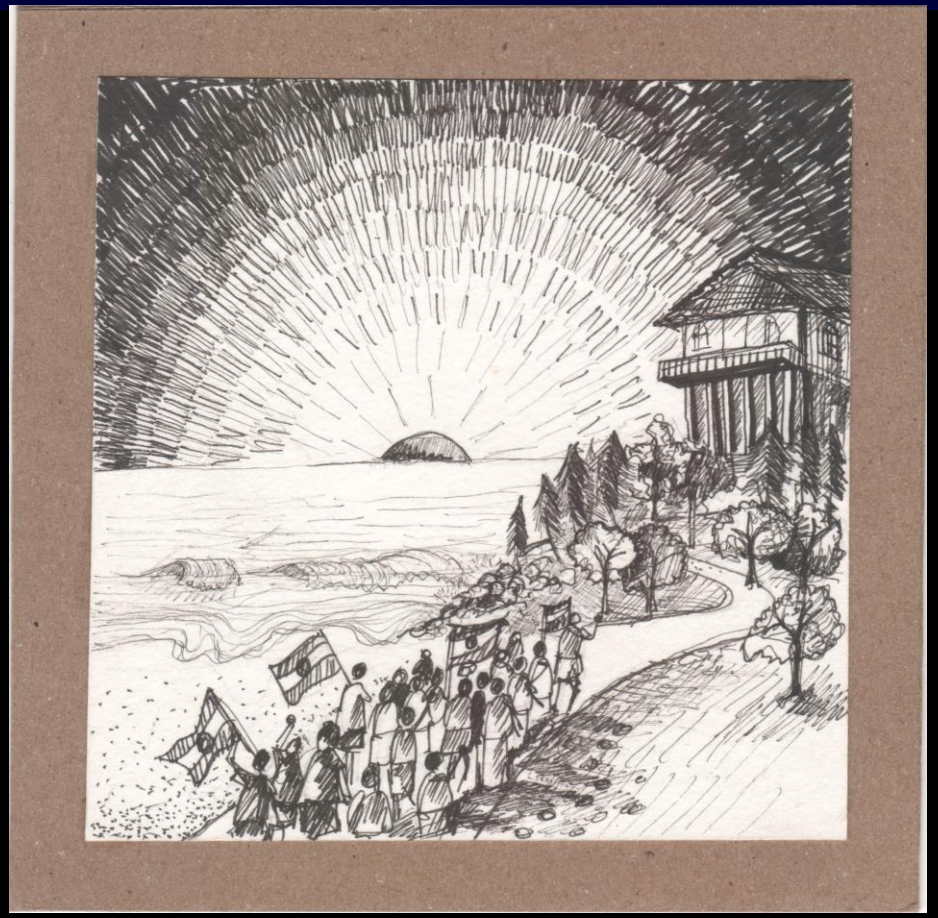
“On the Banks of the Mayyazhi is a fictional record - often with a strong factual basis - of the struggles and travails of a people caught in the trauma of transition that catches them unawares, pleases, baffles and horrifies them at the same time.”

Swapna Gopinath, The dialectic of historicity in modernist fiction A Comparative Study Based on the Select Works of James Joyce Franz Kafka O V Vijayan and M Mukundan, PhD Dissertation, 2006, University of Kerala



City, History, Fiction

Fictive-Material City/Space in the Novel



The specific methodology for the studio is that it deliberately starts with M. Mukundan's novel Mayyazhippuzhayude Theerangalil, translated into English as On the Banks of the Mayyazhi, as an entry into Mahe as a place. Instead of diving into site and context study, we wanted to the students to inhabit the fictive-material space of Mahe in the novel, and understand that the characters of the novel may be as real as the people who lived or live in Mahe.

Fictive-Material City/Space in the Novel

Each chapter generated 4-5 tiles, with each tile being a spatial vignette with three attributes a) event b) spatial quality or setting; c) emotion or atmosphere. The space, event, emotion triad must represent significant episodes in the novel.

Fictive-Material City/Space in the Novel

The fictive space is made manifest as a graphic novel installation. The process was one of collaborative reading and rereading, and perhaps even subtly transforming the novel itself.

Fictive-Material City/Space in the Novel

Lived/Real City Space

St. Teresa's Shrine, Railway Station, Puttalam Temple, Kallappally Mosque, and the French Government Cemetery

This fictive-material space of the novel is then made tangible with the context study of Mahe. Students combined physical study of the city with deep listening, consolidating oral histories to amplify their understanding of the city (as the client).

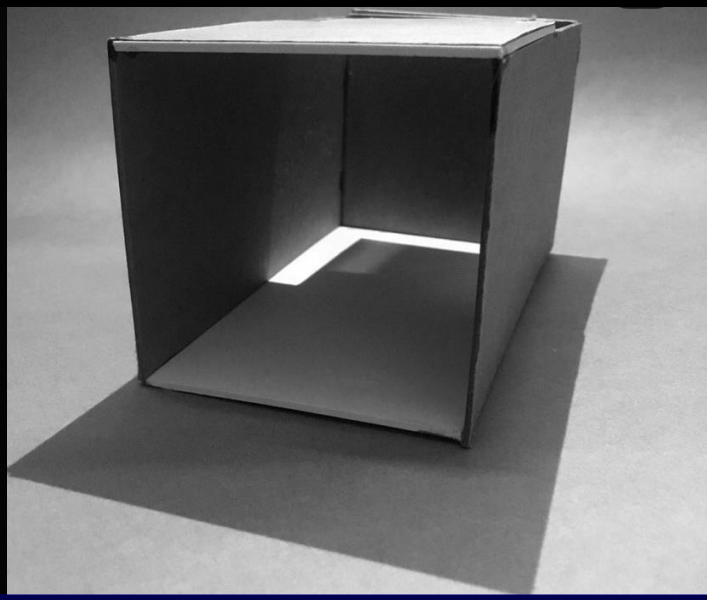
Lived/Real City Space

Students developed a deep understanding of Mahe as fiction and reality, as past and present, and tangible and intangible. They should have a solid sense of what Mahe wants and needs and how to position the Cultural Interpretation Centre as a local, regional, national destination.

Lived/Real City Space

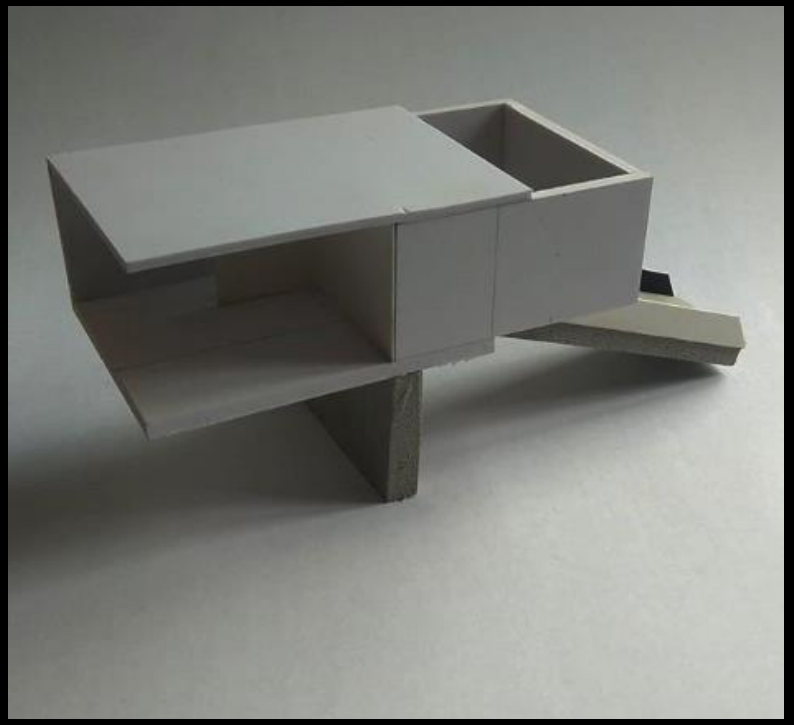
The study focused on understanding the transformation of the urban and cultural landscape of Mahe, looking for signs of continuities as well as disruptions of memories, myths, legends, stories, identities, rituals and practices, ways of living, and important sites and buildings. This informed the students' statement of culture that would form the foundation for the programme of the Cultural Interpretation Centre.

Chapters | Architectonics of Emotion

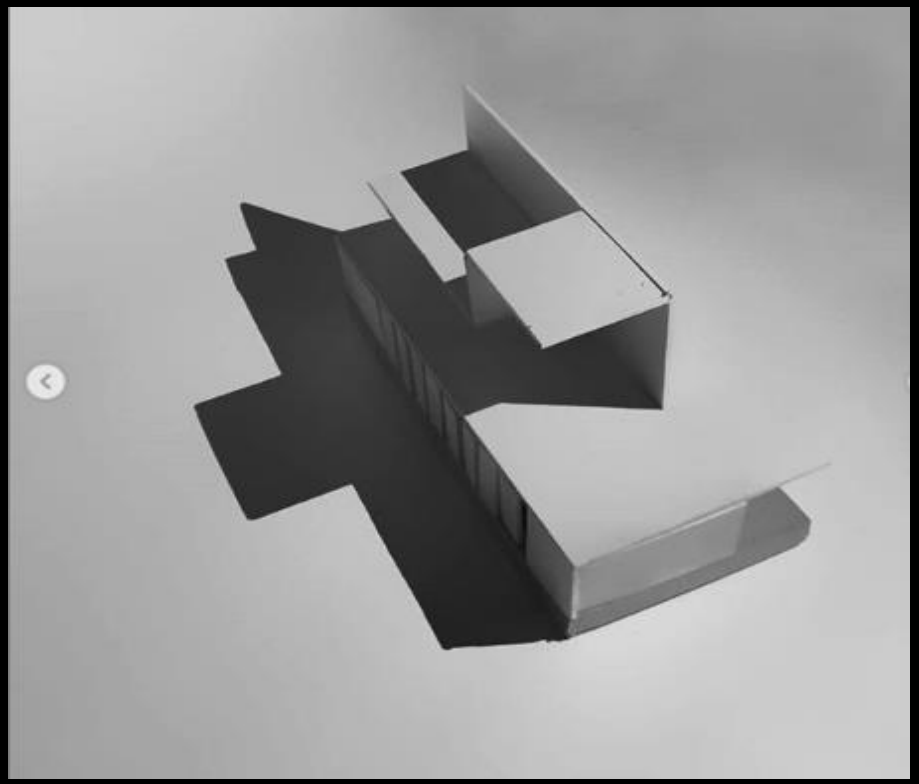


Students convert each tile into a distinct material-spatial volume at a scale of roughly 1:100, which are set of six to eight loosely connected volumes that are spatially distinct and capable of being combined.

Chapters | Architectonics of Emotion

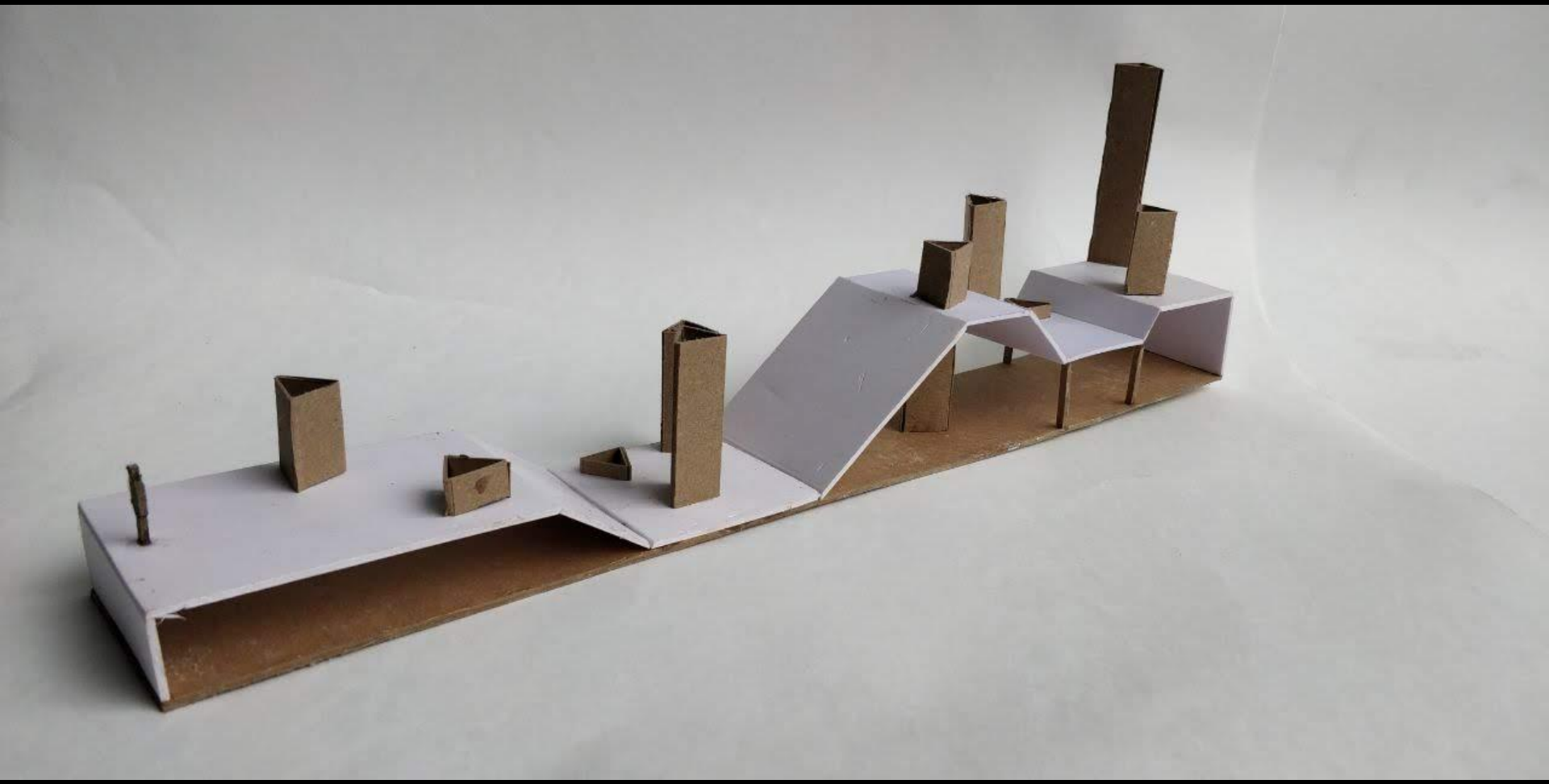


Chapters | Architectonics of Emotion



Chapters | Architectonics of Emotion

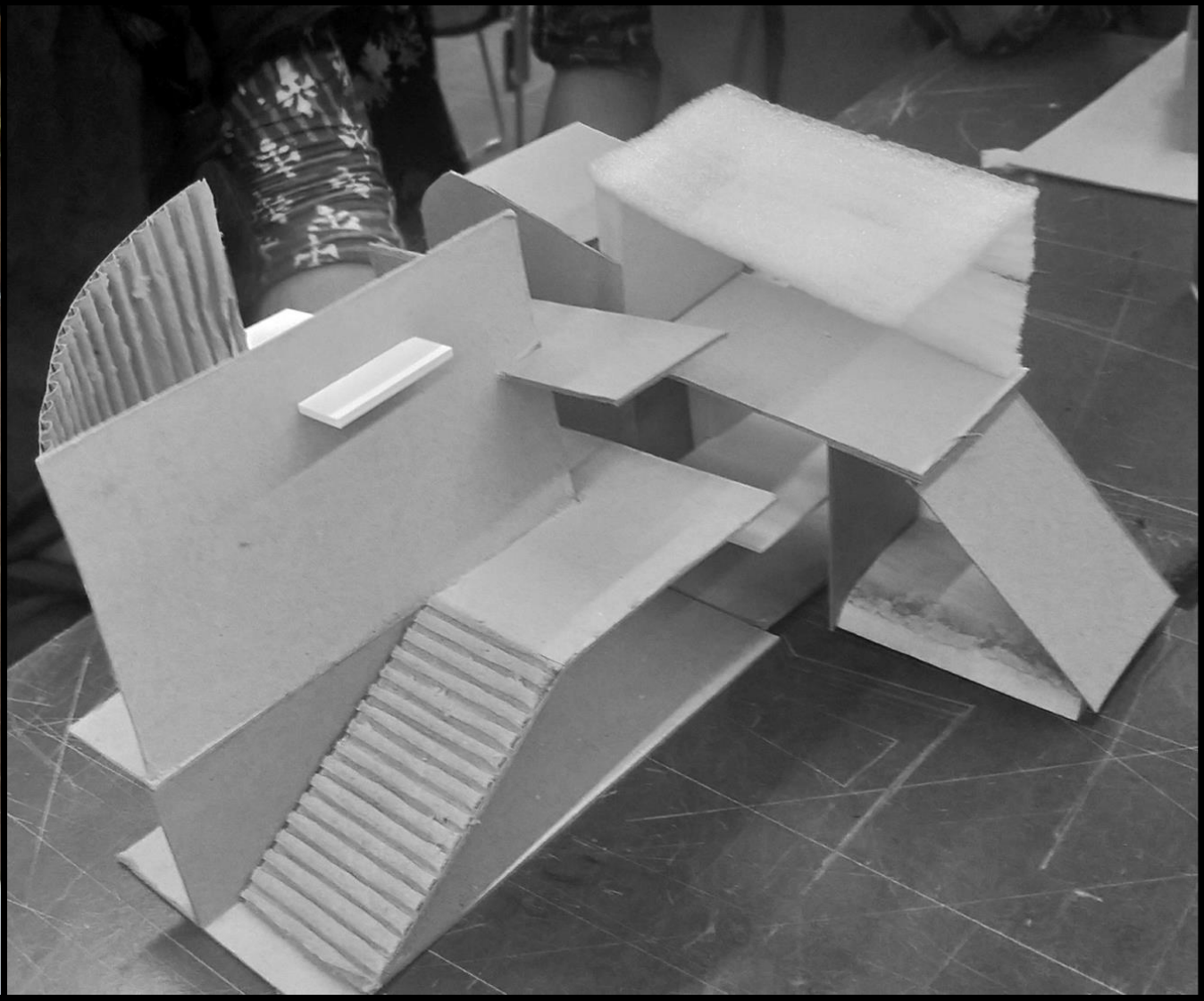
Chapters | Architectonics of Emotion



Threads | Stories within Stories

The student will select certain key events or episodes (to eventually translate them into spatial/ three-dimensional framework/sequence). It is a kind of bubble diagram but here the graphic map has the narrative function, not the architectural function

Narratives and Assemblages

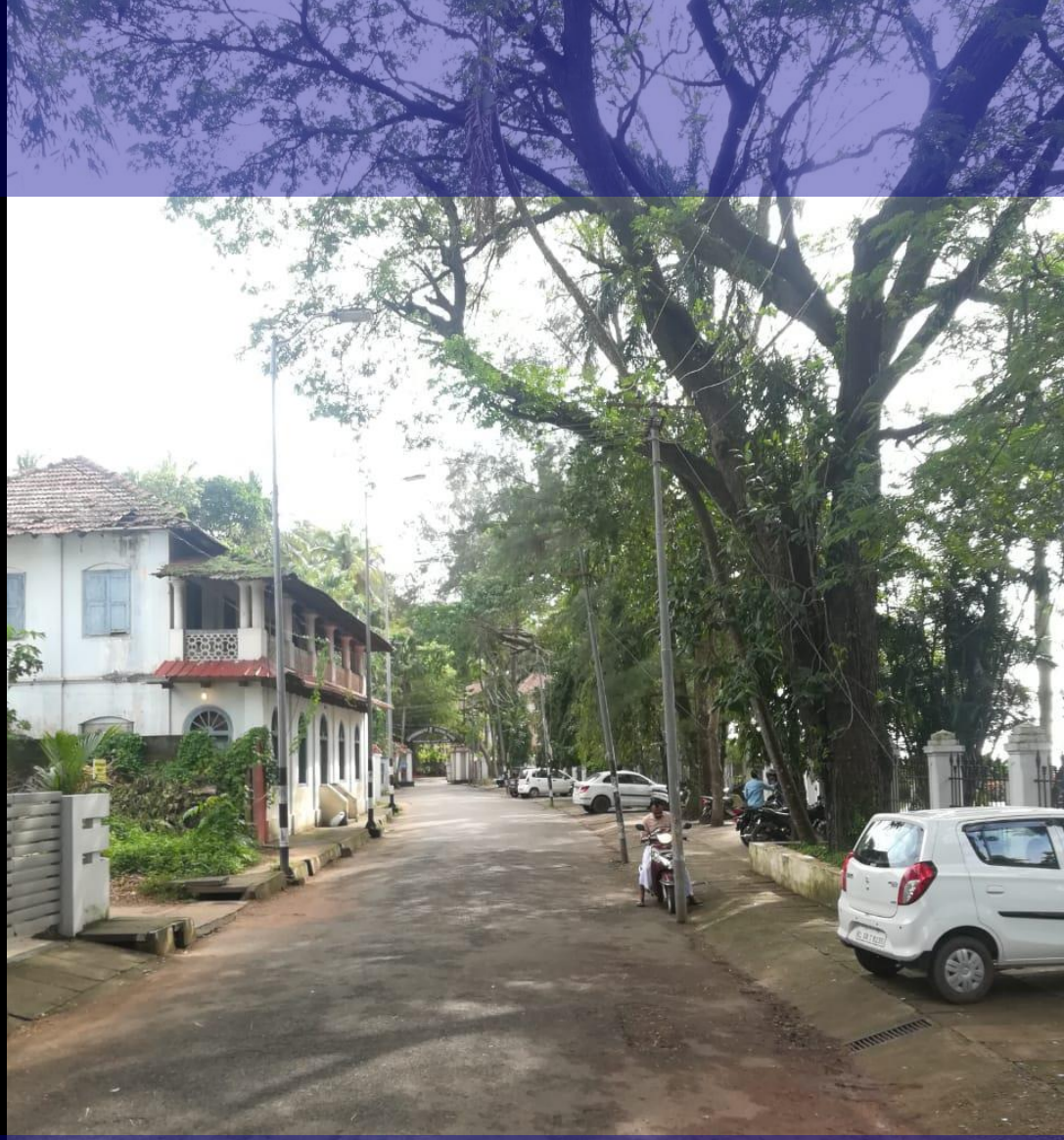


Narratives and Assemblages

Siting, Grounding

Siting, Grounding

Siting, Grounding



The site is a corner site on Collectorate Road, in front of Tagore Park (high historical, cultural and social significance), and in the vicinity of important institutions like the Government House. The site also has an intact historic house, which is being adapted for use in the proposed Cultural Interpretation Centre.

Siting, Grounding

It is an important urban realm and a politically charged one because of being near the Regional Administrator’s office. It is important that any proposed scheme have a sympathetic response to the streetscape, and address the adjacency to important civic buildings and public open space.

Siting, Grounding

An important site condition is the view to the park and a view across Tagore Park to the Mahe River. The historic house bifurcates the site and requires the proposed schemes to work around, behind it.

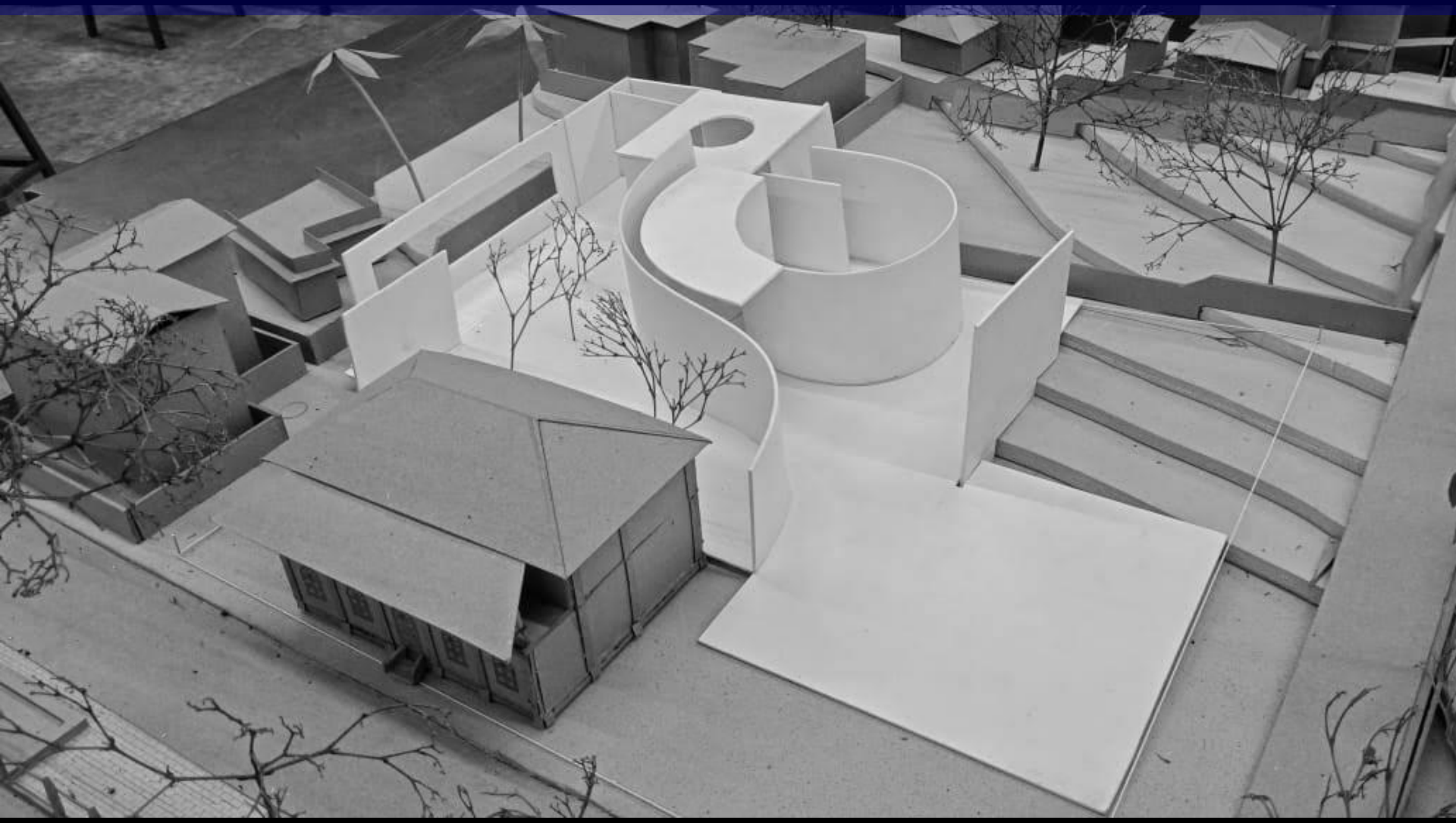
Sited Fantasies

These models were then assembled, arrayed, and amalgamated, as well as sited, tested, remade, and retested to arrive at a precinct plan that combines narrative sequence with urban gesture and strategy.

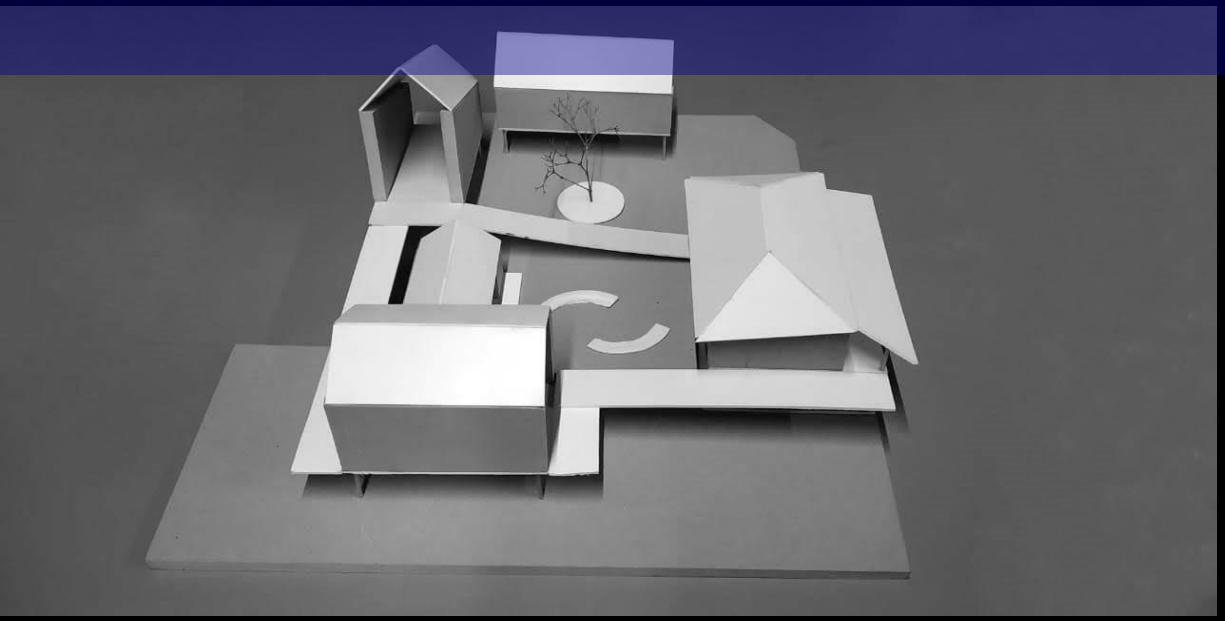
Sited Fantasies

Sited Fantasies

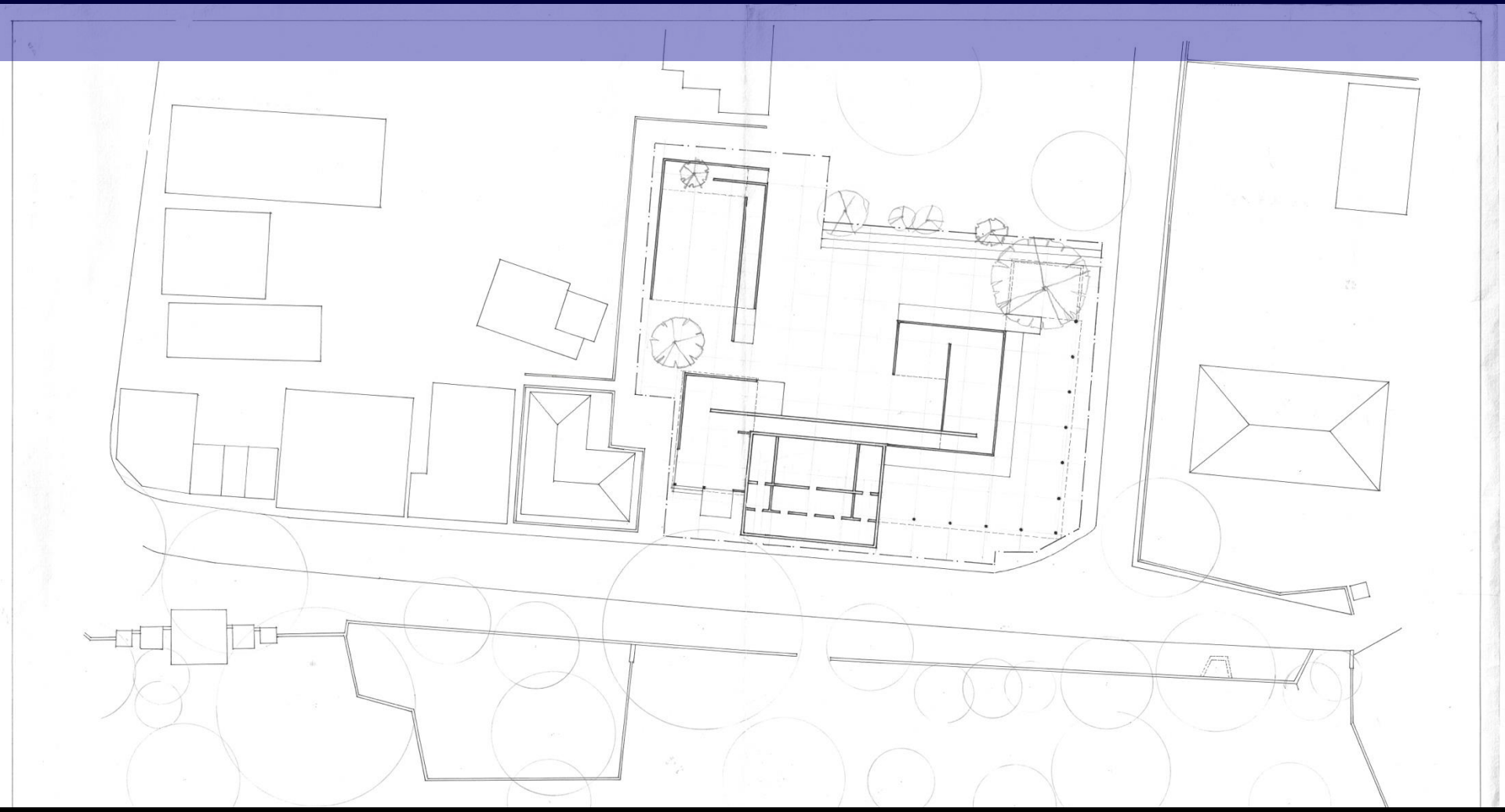
Sited Fantasies



Sited Fantasies

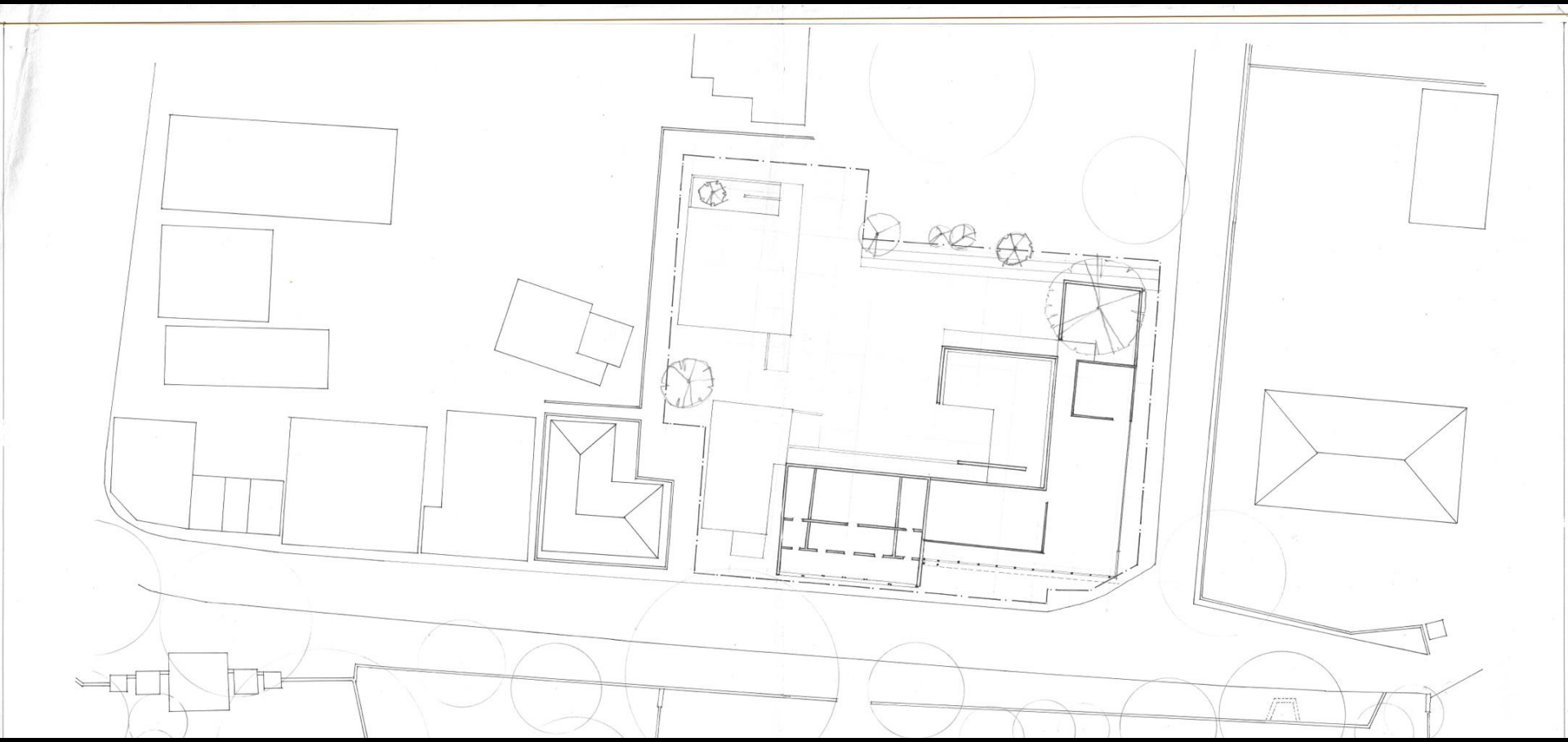


Architectural Becomings – I



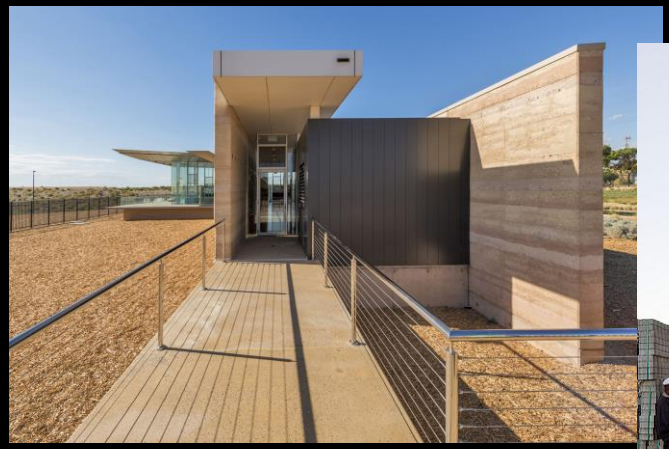
The architectural programme was negotiated into that, which required students to move from the three dimensional/ spatial/sensorial to the planar/organizational approach to accomodate functions/ movements. The students also developed their own architectural programme and area statement for a maximum built up area of 1500 sqm.

Architectural Becomings – I

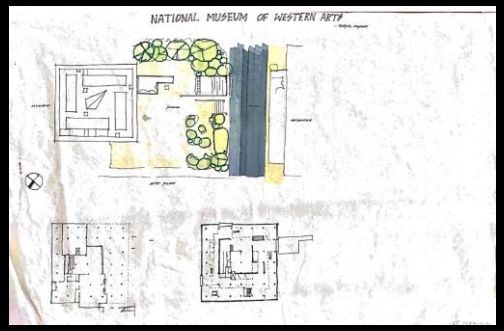


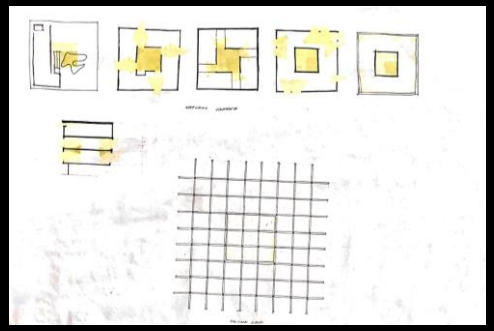
Architectural Becomings – I

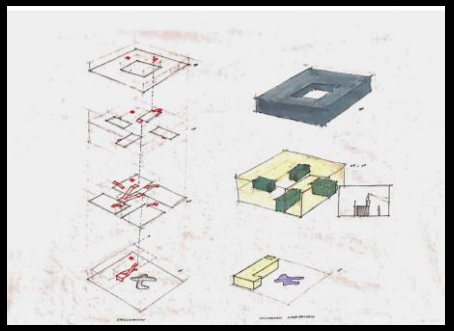
Precedents

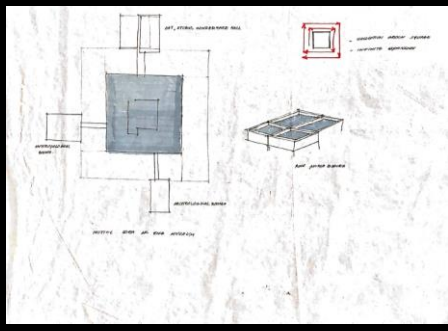


Precedents





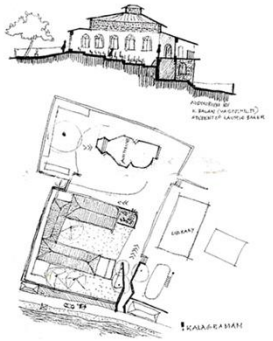




Architectural Becomings – II

CHANGE TO THE SPOILED IMAGE OF DRINKING MAHE_ ALCOHOL IS ITS CULTURE

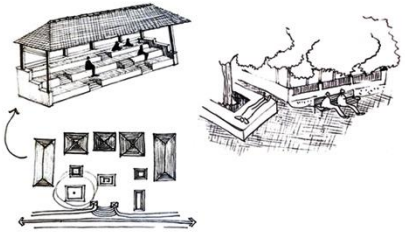
Not only for cheap alcohol, but Mahe can potray its history of drinking culture. Can a research on learning and making of wine also serve to be an employment for the peole of Mahe ?



RESPONDING TO THE OTHER EDGE THROUGH ART _ AN EXTENSION OF KALAGRAMAM.

Is there a way to break the discontinuity in the minds of people on both sides of Mayyazhi River. Can art bring them together? Can we make Mahe to a cultural hub through such initiation? Will an active center for arts be engaging for tourist in Mahe, the people who are here trying to find Mahe in Mukkundan's novel ?

അഗശാല



THE RESTING PLACE_ AN EXTENSION OF THE PARK AND ITS AMENITIES

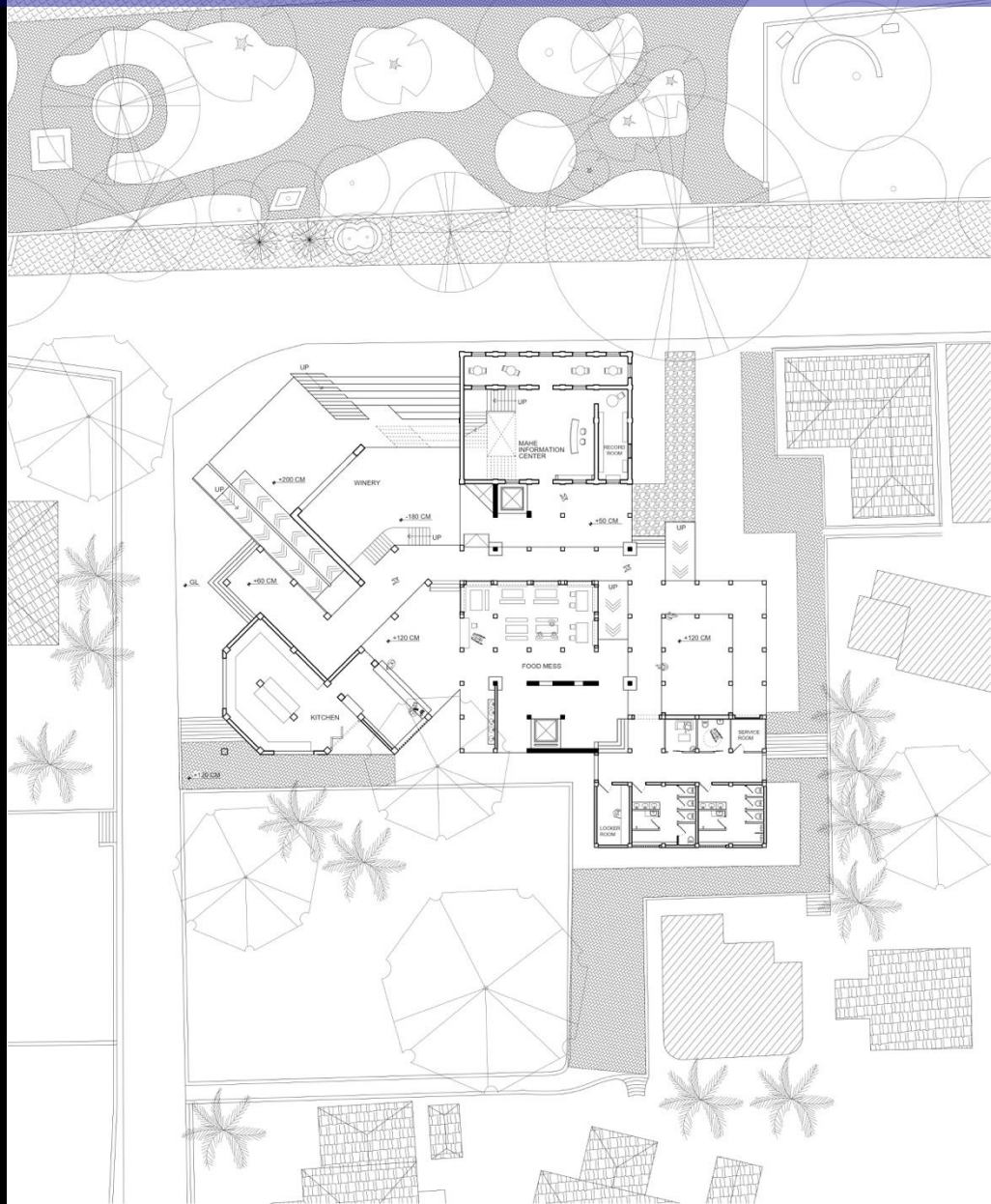
Tracing patterns from the daily activities occuring in the park. The park being a rest place for the visitors of mahe, working class who come in the noon times. The park being the recreational core of Mahe in the weekends. Can there be utilities for these people_ to wash themselves, put ther luggaes in safe locker, to lay down in shade, or may be a space for ventors ?

REVIVING KALYANI AMMA'S MESS

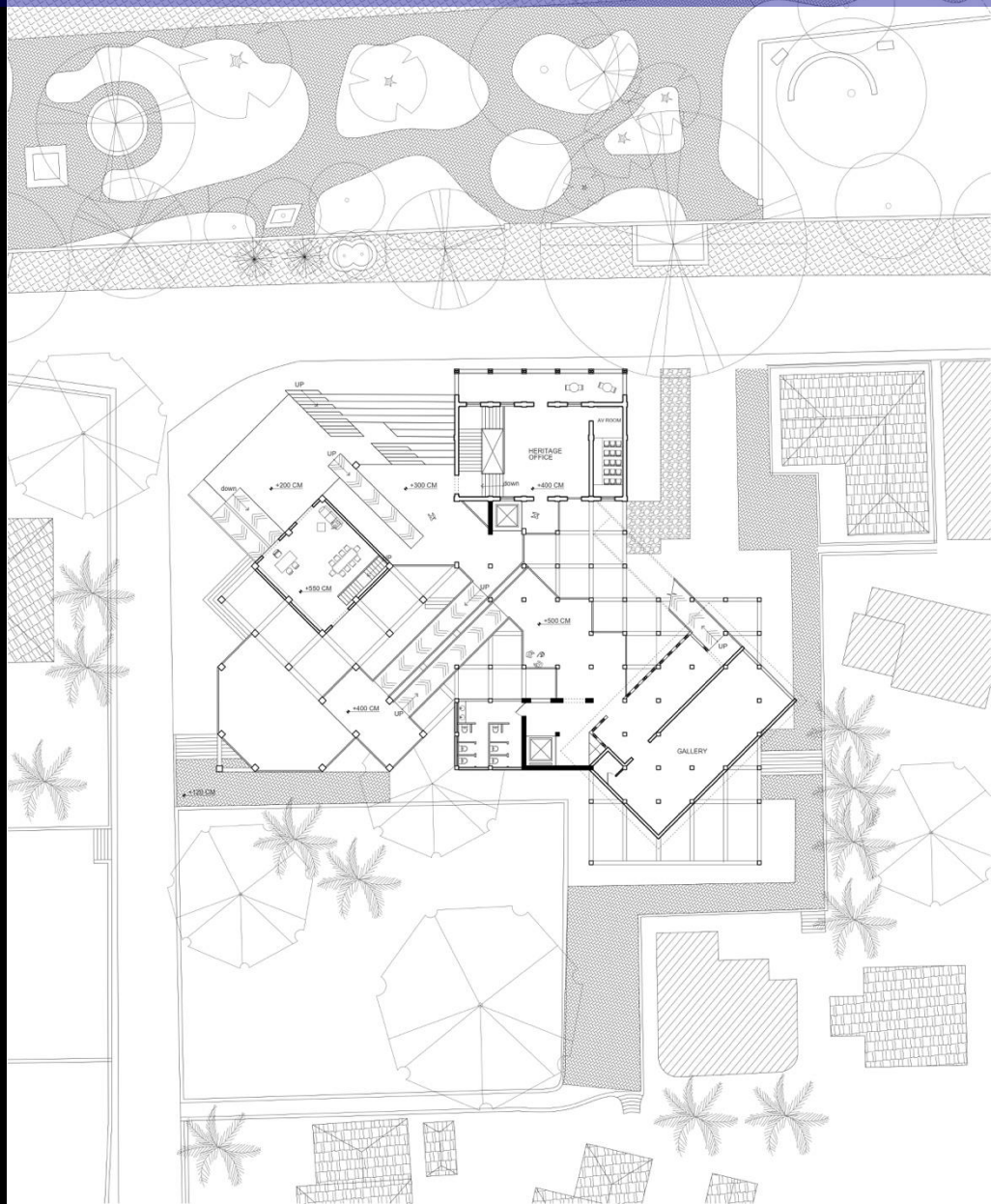
Kalyani Amma's mess, famous for its tasty food, used to be one of the important social nodes of the past, mainly for the working-class people.
Their history is associated with Portuguese and French cuisine. How do you bring back a fading culinary culture? Can Kalyaniamma's mess be a food court extending from the park, beside the Mayyazhi River? Can it still serve the working class and allow a community lunch during their lunch and tea? Tracing patterns from the architecture of the old mess to revive it as a communally active food place.

TRACING PATTERNS

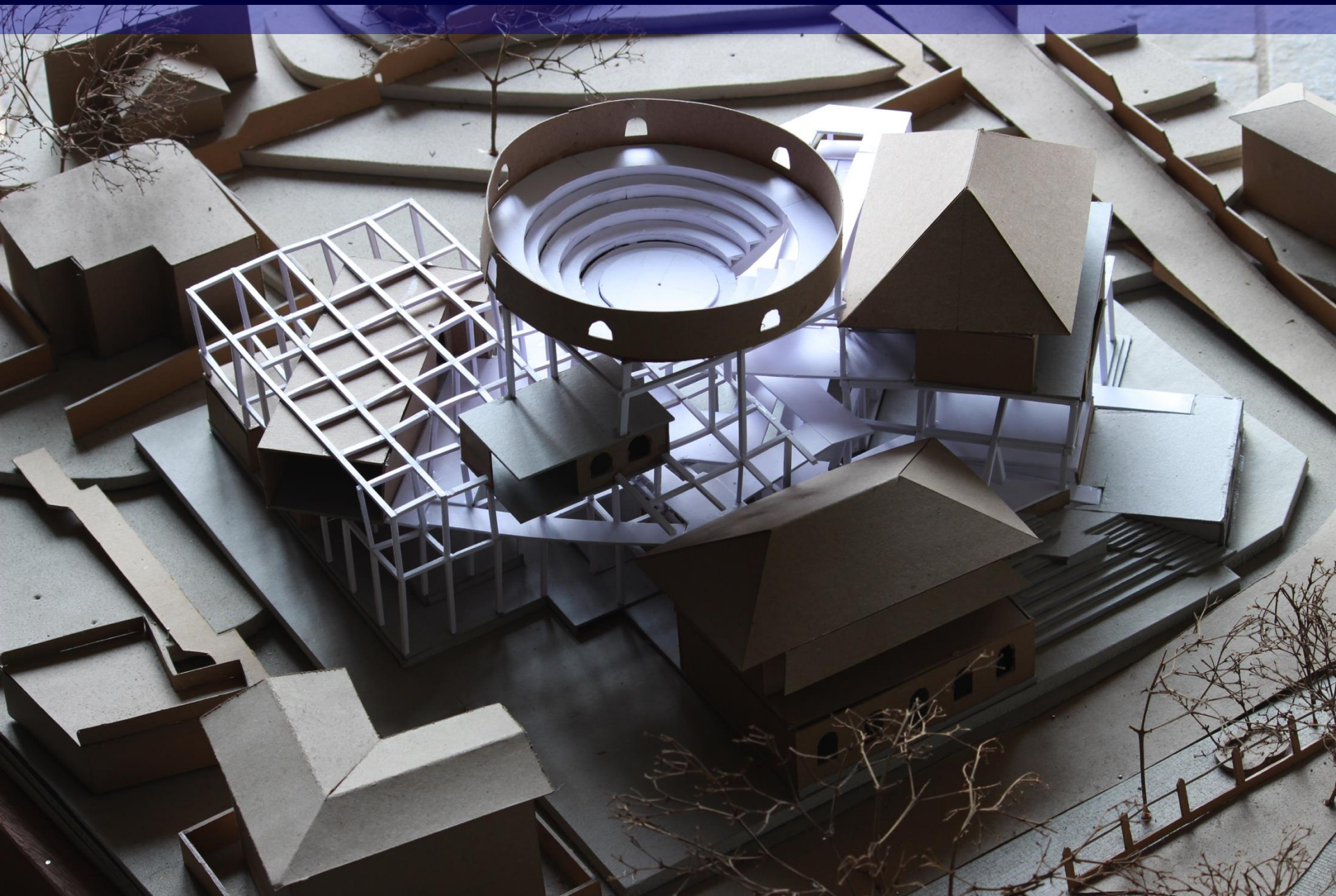
Architectural Becomings – II



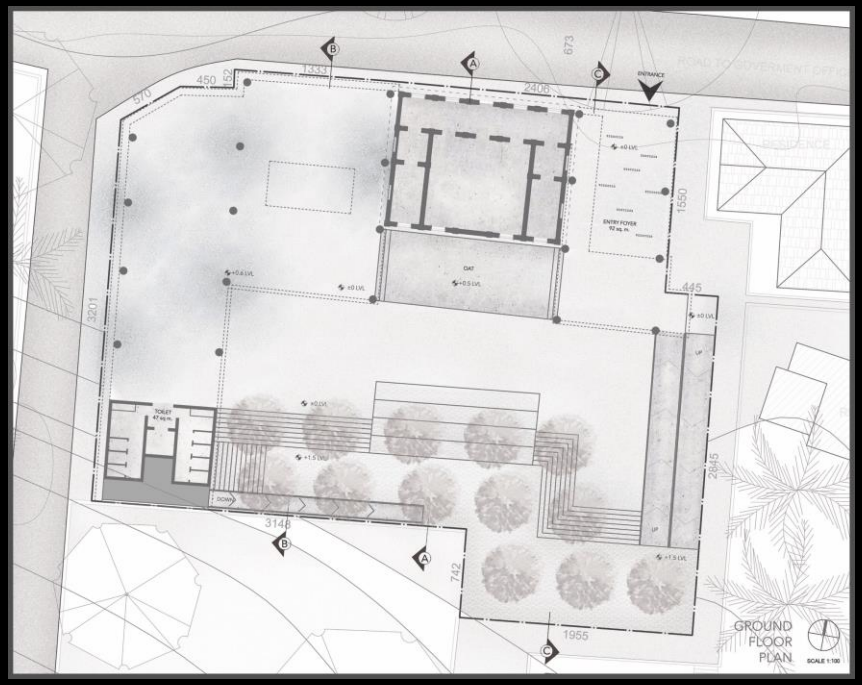
Architectural Becomings – II

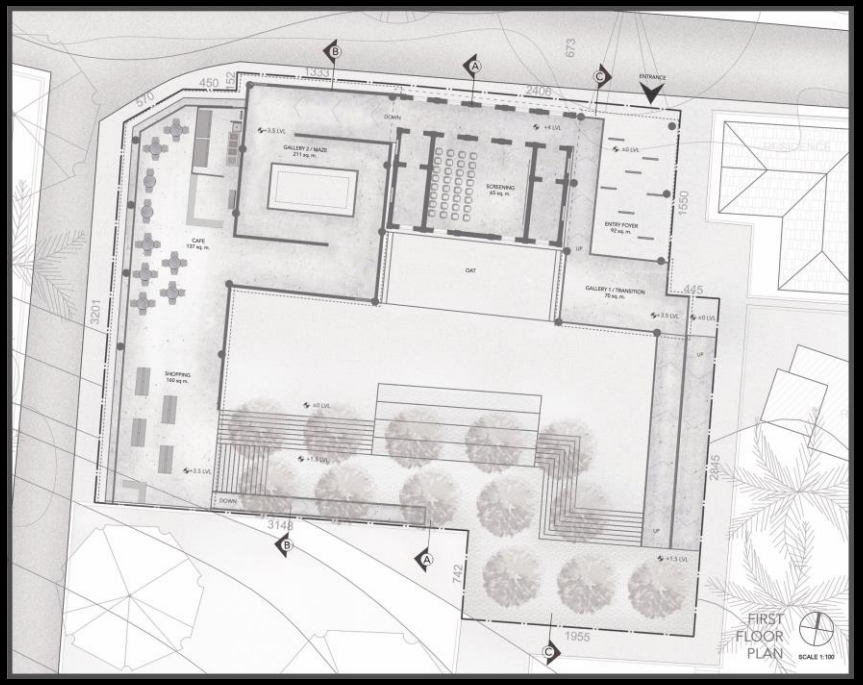


Architectural Becomings – II



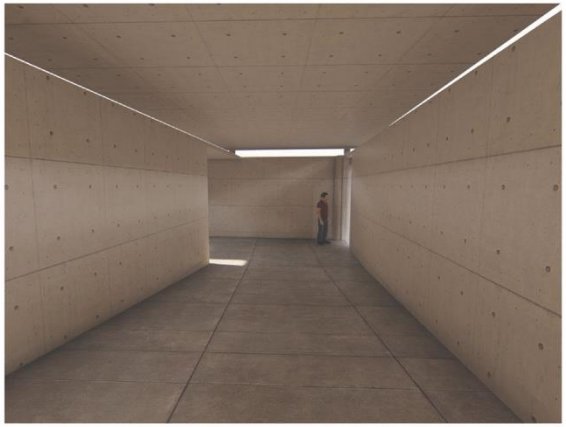
Architectural Becomings – II



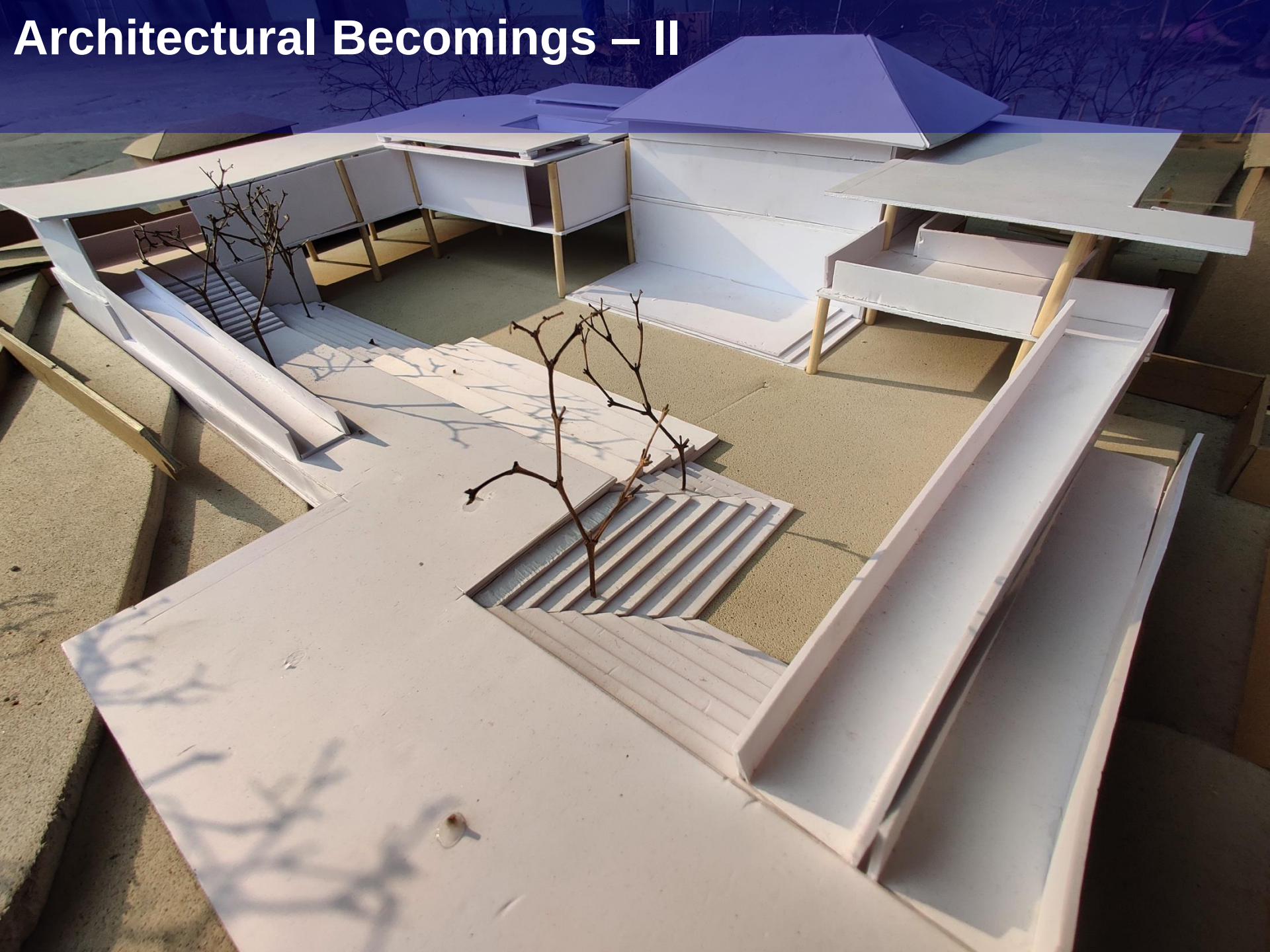


Architectural Becomings – II

VIEWS



Architectural Becomings – II



Architectural Becomings – II

ARCHITECTURAL PROGRAMME

Mahe being a very culturally rich small town south of India with strong french influences, Much of the heritage is now being lost and forgotten.
A cultural Interpretation center in the heart of the city will reinforce the unique heritage value of the city.
The center should be Interact with its users through all the five senses, through the architectural quality of the spaces. Proposed center is aimed at both the Indigenous people of Mahe, and also the visitors of Mahe; as it is a primary attraction in the region due to its french roots. The former will be reminded of their fading heritage and reinforce them, while the latter will be introduced to the unknown value of the exquisite city.
The program includes an Interpretation centre with multiple functional spaces. One of the primary space being the two exhibition galleries, to display art and crafts of the indigenous people of Mahe, And also to display the artifacts and other valuable objects.
A screening space is also provided inside the existing heritage building, for the users to visually experience the heritage through a documentary/film made for the same purpose.
Cafe space is provided for the users to extensively use the center for meetups over a coffee, or for more casual visits.
Towards the end, Souvenir/ Misc. shopping area is provided for providing the users something for them to remember the visit and about Mahe itself.
Gathering in public space is currently done extensively by localites as well as the visitors in areas around Mahe, Tagore park being one of the prime spot. This social aspect is further fortified by providing a large stepped area which covers a major portion of site in ground floor, which also is in reponse with the contour of the site. This provides amble space for people to casually sit and relax in the premises of the center.
The space around the piloti is multi functional. Slopy grass is given on ground plane for people to use it as an Interactive public space when off peak season. When events or festivals occur, this area can be transformed to desirable spaces with good interface with the public, and connects the center and the street surrounding it.

AREA STATEMENT

GALLERY 1 / TRANSITION

Peak users at a given time 16
Low retention of users;
Area per user 3 sq. m.
Total Area ~48 sq. m.

SCREENING SPACE

Peak users at a given time 32
Includes gap between seats and screen
Area per user 2 sq. m.
Total Area ~64 sq. m.

SHOPPING

Peak users at a given time 32
3 sq. m. per user
Extra 33.3% area for circulation route
~127 sq. m.

RAMPS / STAIRS

3 Ramps, 18m long flights, 1:12 slope,
widths: 2.5m for main, 1.5m for exit
Area taken by ramps 109 sq. m.
Stair thread 40cm for sitting, riser 18cm
Area taken by stairs 135 sq. m.

GALLERY 2 / MAZE

Peak users at a given time 32
High retention due to exhibits
Area per user 6 sq. m.
Total Area ~192 sq. m.

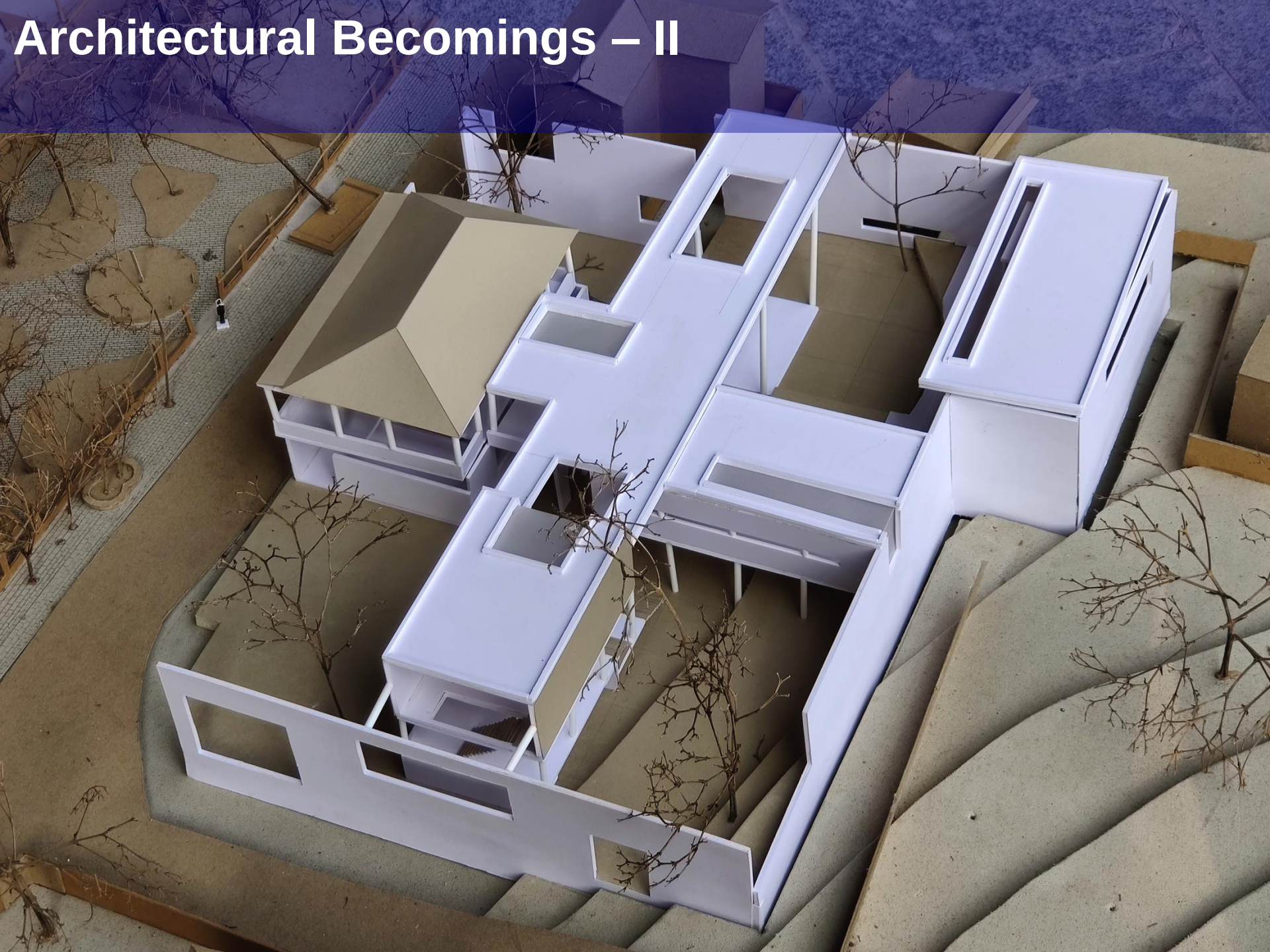
CAFETERIA

Peak users at a given time 32
Optimal: 60% seating, 40% cooking
Area per user 2.5 sq. m. (incl. circulation)
~80 sq. m. for seating
Hence, ~40 sq. m. for cooking

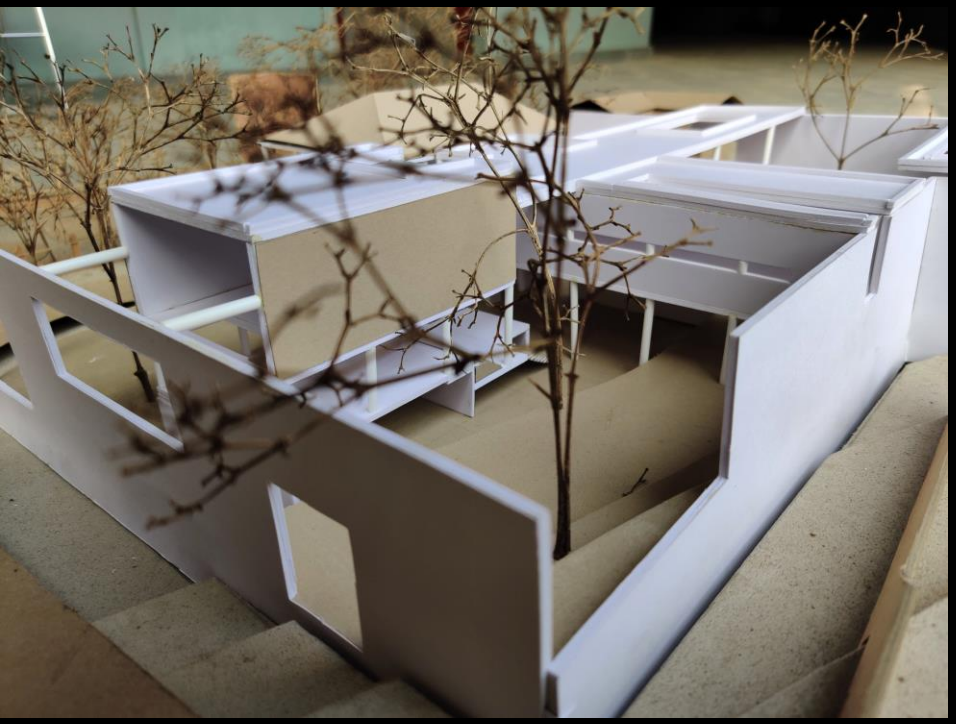
RESTROOM

4 cubicals for Female,
3 cubicals for male + 2 Urinal
1 Accessible restroom
Optimal size:
cubical - 1.1m x 1.5m
accessible toilet - 2.4 x 2.1m
Total Area ~45 sq. m.

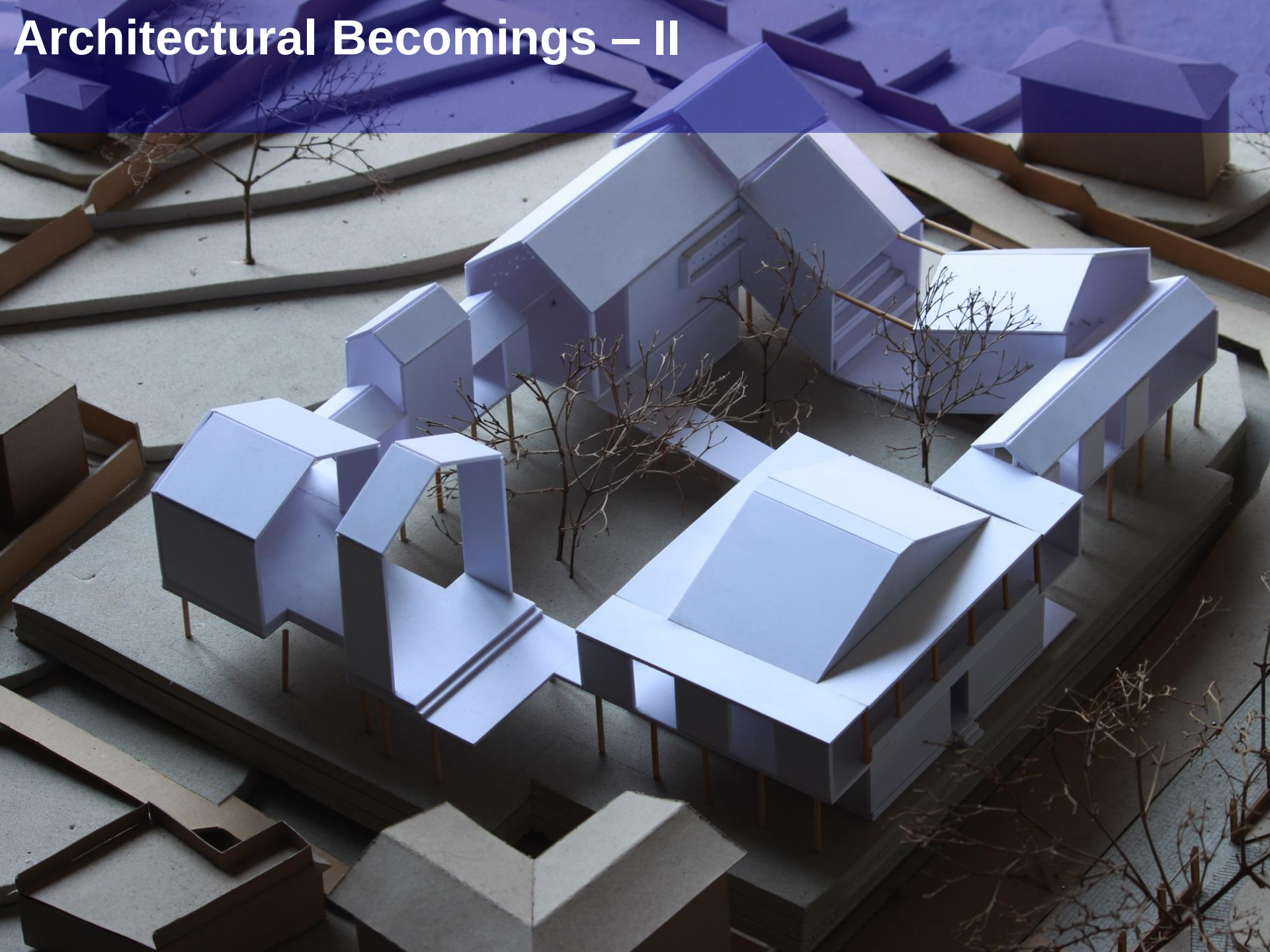
Architectural Becomings – II



Architectural Becomings – II



Architectural Becomings – II



Architectural Becomings – II

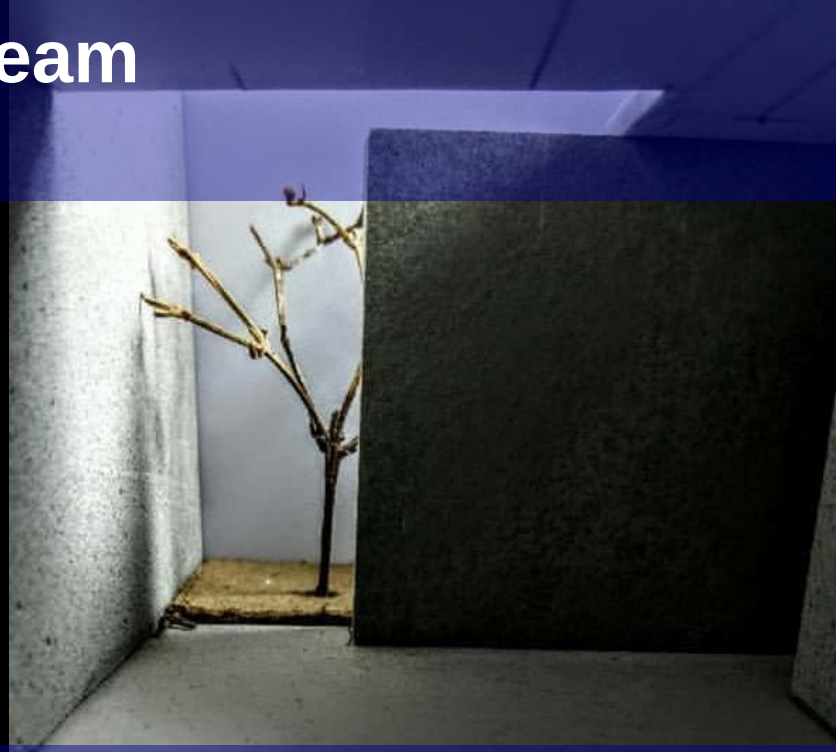
Architectural Becomings – II

Review, Reflections | Peer Review

“The most interesting aspect of the studio methodology that I observed was the way in which, at every stage, different mediums were used to abstract experiential qualities, oral histories, understanding of socio-cultural fabric and sensual data into tangible architectural language. The exercise of close reading Mukundan’s novel and then converting this deeply personal interpretation into graphic tiles seemed like a good way to generate interest in the project. The tiles becoming interfaces for the students to imaginatively inhabit the spaces in Mahe that are studied in real life added depth to their preliminary design stage. This, I feel, creates a good bridge between the studio space and the larger city space that they are analyzing.”

Peer Reviewer, Reshma Mathew

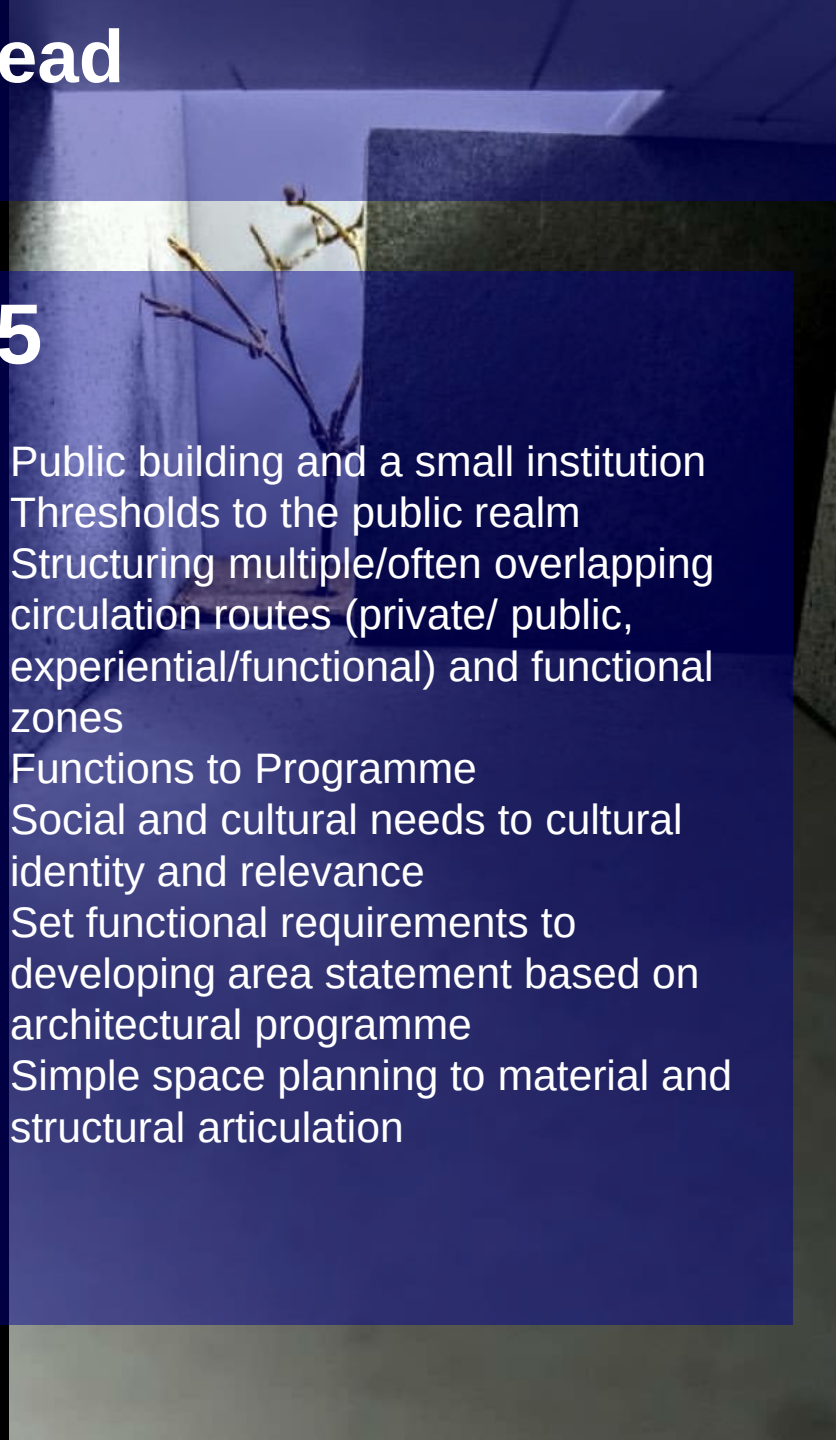
Review, Reflections | Studio Team



Narrative was simplified and not complexified and the interpretation tended to become too dependent on the novel; students selected the threads visually and textually and they were not hundred percent successful in uncovering the smaller stories; students did not understand volume, which was often viewed as an exterior mass/shape; in built scalar thinking of the architect as drawing/making at 1:100 was not always evidenced; statements of cultural significance were promising; representational palette was flat; students not able to sustain volumetric thinking where using a framed construction; site and urban conditions and opportunities (urban, heritage) were not grasped even though they were self evident; statement of architectural programme and work on area statement was good; social programme good.

Studio Team

Review, Reflections | Studio Lead



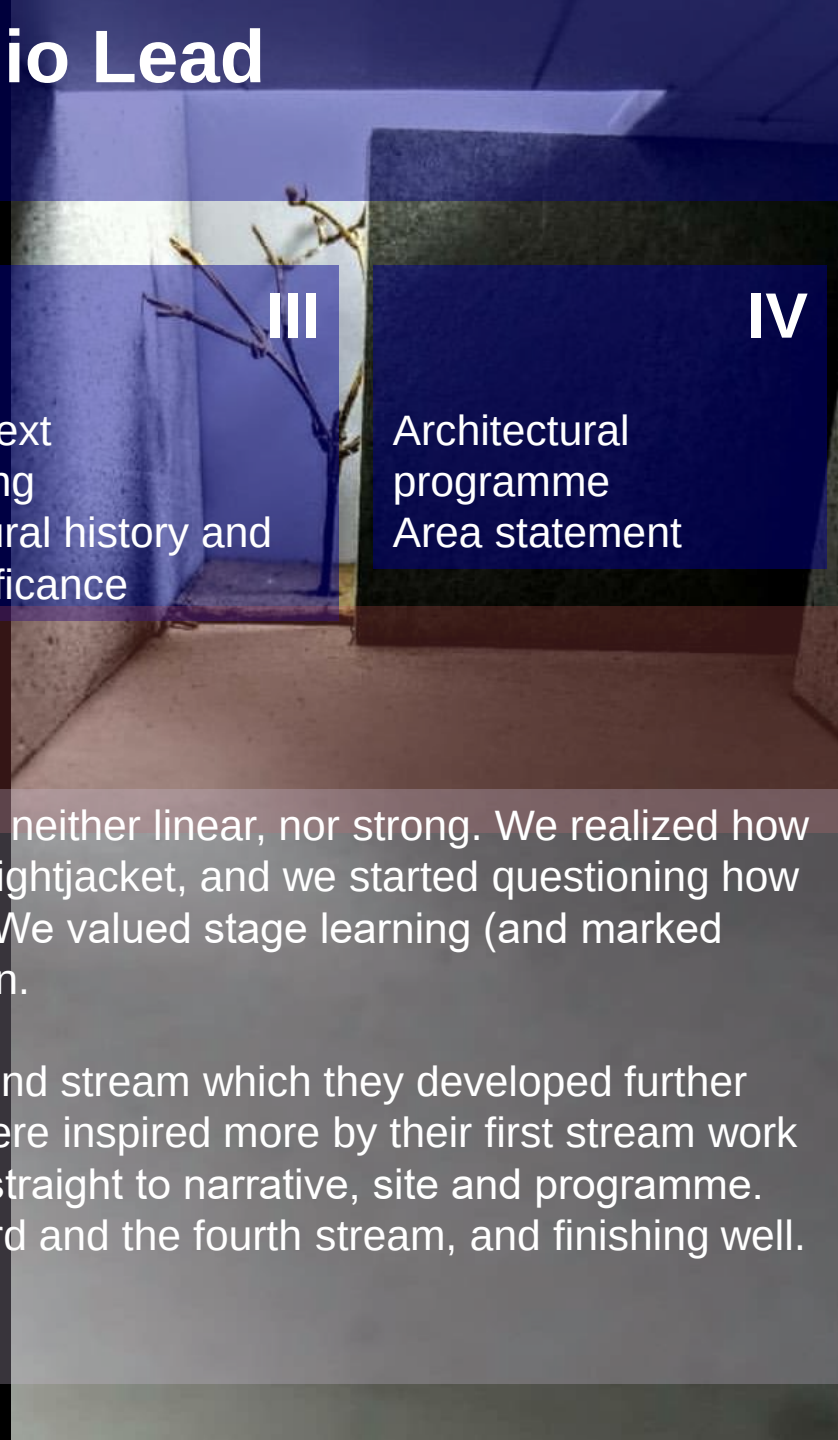
S4

1) Housing 1) for multiple stakeholders, and users; 2) competing needs of users from different backgrounds; and 3) which is incremental
2) Architecture as form, space, order to Architecture as systems and infrastructure
3) Collective inhabitation and building community
4) Elementary design to designing with constraints (site topography, cost, area)

S5

1) Public building and a small institution
2) Thresholds to the public realm
3) Structuring multiple/often overlapping circulation routes (private/ public, experiential/functional) and functional zones
4) Functions to Programme
5) Social and cultural needs to cultural identity and relevance
6) Set functional requirements to developing area statement based on architectural programme
7) Simple space planning to material and structural articulation

Methods of Meandering | Studio Lead



I

Novel
Graphic tile
Micronarratives

II

Architectonic model
Assemblages
Sited assemblages

III

Site
Context
Zoning
Cultural history and significance

IV

Architectural programme
Area statement

Preliminary Design
Pre final
Final

Steps were sequential but the creative methodology was neither linear, nor strong. We realized how students have a way of subverting anything that is a straightjacket, and we started questioning how much one should really ‘drive’ a particular methodology. We valued stage learning (and marked them as such) instead of rewarding the linear progression.

Hence, while some students had an affinity for their second stream which they developed further with the help of the third and the fourth stream, others were inspired more by their first stream work (narratives), ‘skipped’ the architectonic stage, and went straight to narrative, site and programme. Others found greater safety is starting again from the third and the fourth stream, and finishing well.

Review, Reflections | Students

“The essence of a place is its people and their culture. Giving a physical interpretation of it is a challenging and interesting task. The Semester 5 studio was about understanding, processing and analyzing a place. The studio was explorative and directive starting from exploring the spatial quality of the tectonic models to the final design looking into the finest details.” Jahana

“S5 Studio was new way of learning and doing things. Very much explorative in nature in both conceptual/architectonic stage and design stage where we could make our own programs and statements to it as an 'interpretation center'. I personally learnt to look at the things from a different perspective from the initial stage of architectonic models, i.e reading and making which then developed into the final design.” Azad

"We had an exploration based studio looking more into developing an understanding on space and tectonics. It was first time we were doing a public space of this scale.The Cultural Interpretation Centre for a place like Mahe, unwraping the embeded layers of Mahe's past and present, culminating into something fruitful, to bring a sense of identity and ownership to the place and people was an interesting journey. Eventhough could'nt develop completely at the end or get more into its layers of detail, the learning has happened in all aspects which I believe will get reflected along my way forward.” Zayan

Studio (Dream) Team