

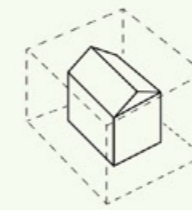
The History is Told by the Building

**An Investigation of the Building as a Medium
to Convey History and Experiences**

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Content

06 Abstract

09 The Context

- 10 The Peninsula Bygdøy
- 12 The Museum and Oscar II's Collection
- 14 Background Info

17 The Building

- 20 Vognhuset
- 26 The Surrounding Buildings
- 40 The Historical Context of the Building
- 42 A New Focus on Oscar II's Collection

45 The Intervention

- 46 Thesis Statement
- 48 Project Framing
- 50 The Building as an Object, a Sign and a Container
- 52 The Aspects of Surfaces

55 Relevance

- 57 Telling the Story of a Constructed Identity
- 58 The UN Sustainable Development Goals
- 59 The Relevant UN Goals

61 Process and Production

- 62 Method
- 64 Deliverables
- 66 Schedule

69 References

- 70 Sources and Literature
- 71 List of Illustrations

Abstract

This project revolves around buildings as a main medium in conveying history and experiences in a museum. The specific site for the project is a part of Norsk Folkemuseum (The Norwegian Museum of Cultural History) which is a museum with an open-air museum, located in Oslo. As an open-air museum an essential part of the exhibitions is the large outdoor areas with the collection of buildings. In this museum it is striking to see how architecture can have such a central role in a museum of cultural history. The buildings are used to shape the experience, but are also mainly there to inform the visitor and tell a story.

I am interested in spaces where something specific is supposed to be experienced and communicated. A program where an intended narrative and atmosphere is a part of the design and contributes in telling a story and communicating history.

When transforming and creating new experiences in an older existing context the interplay between the new intervention and the historical frames can work as a catalyst for the design, contributing in creating the ideal conditions for an interesting space. Simultaneously the historical building might have several layers of history embedded in the architecture. This is history that could be valuable to respect and preserve, and the history of the building could possibly contribute in shaping the new function and the new experiences.

As a part of the study of architecture in the context of an open-air museum, three main aspects will be defined: the building as an object, a sign, and a container. The interplay between these characteristics will be investigated in order to motivate the design of a new exhibition space and facilities at the museum.



The stave church at Norsk Folkemuseum is a showcased building that appears as an object with a distinct expression and narrative ill. 1



The Context

Bygdøy, Oslo

Norsk Folkemuseum is located on Bygdøy which is a peninsula situated on the western side of Oslo. It is a popular recreational area with parks, forests and beaches, and it is well connected to the city with busses as well as ferries in the summer. In addition to Norsk Folkemuseum there are also four other national museums located at Bygdøy, as well as a royal estate.



The site is located in Oslo, Norway

◀ ⌚ 1:500 000

The Museum

Norsk Folkemuseum is located in the center of the peninsula and is a museum showcasing Norwegian cultural history, mainly from after the Reformation and up to present time. The museum has a vast collection of artifacts as well as a large open-air museum with more than 150 buildings from all over the country.

Oscar II's Collection is considered the world's first open-air museum, established in 1881. It was later included as part of Norsk Folkemuseum and is found in the northern corner of the museum. It is a collection of four wooden buildings, which at the time when they were moved here, were considered to be good examples of historical vernacular architecture. The collection includes two storehouses (one from approx. 1300, and one from the 1750s), a farmhouse (from 1738) and a stave church, where the foundation is from the 13th century, but the rest of the building was constructed when the church was moved to its current location in the 19th century. The stave church with its characteristic design is a very popular attraction and is one of only 28 stave churches that still remain in Norway.



1:3000 / Oscar II's Collection located in the northern corner of the museum

ill. 3



1:250 000 / Norsk Folkemuseum's location on Bygdøy

Background Info

What is an Open-air Museum?

An Open-air museum is a type of museum showcasing a collection of buildings in an outdoor area. A significant difference from other types of museums is that you can walk around in an outdoor complex, in between buildings, and you can enter the ones that are open. The buildings and the interiors play a key role in the storytelling and create a comprehensive experience where the visitor moves around, and interacts with the exhibition in a different way than what you typically would do in a regular indoor gallery shaped exhibition.

The Visitors

According to Norsk Folkemuseum's own statistics they have about 300 000 visitors a year (2020 not included). Approximately 50% of the visitors are foreign tourists, while the second half are visitors coming from Norway, mainly people from the Oslo region. Surveys done by the museum also conclude that a main group of visitors are families with young children. Another main target group is adults who are interested in culture and history. About 10% of visits happen in relation to the Christmas market that takes place the two first weekends in December every year.

Internal goals for the museum state that they now want to focus more on local visitors as the travel industry is currently very unpredictable due to the pandemic situation, and the possibility of a decrease in foreign tourists visiting the museum has to be taken into account. Targeting local visitors could include focusing on an approach that considers and resonates with a larger part of the population.



The open-air museum in Norsk Fokemuseum ill. 4 ▶



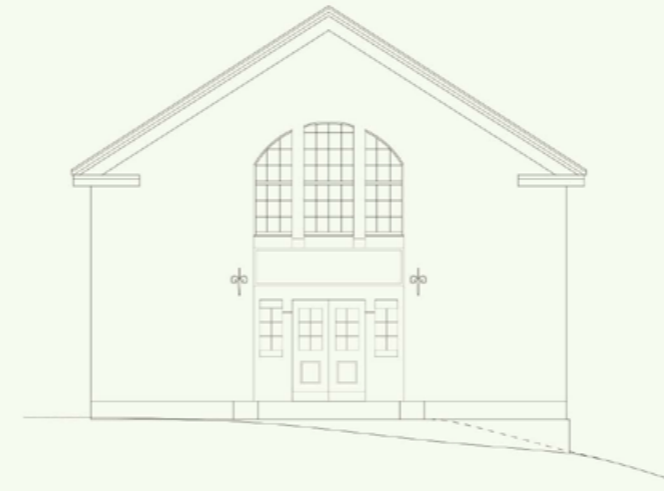
The Building



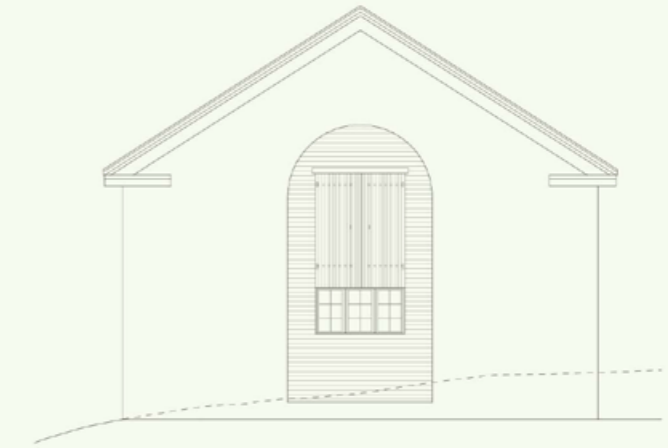
Vognhuset

The project is focused on a building located in the northern corner of the museum, close to Oscar II's Collection. This is a brick building from 1907, designed by architect Holger Sinding-Larsen. It has a facade rendered with plaster in pale light yellow with few elements of ornamentation. However the windows and the entrance have more details revealing the Nordic neo-baroque style of the building. The interior is simple, characterized by the wooden structure, the beams and columns, and a wooden staircase lined with wooden balustrades. The building has been used in a couple of different ways throughout the years but is currently just used for storage. Most of the buildings showcased in

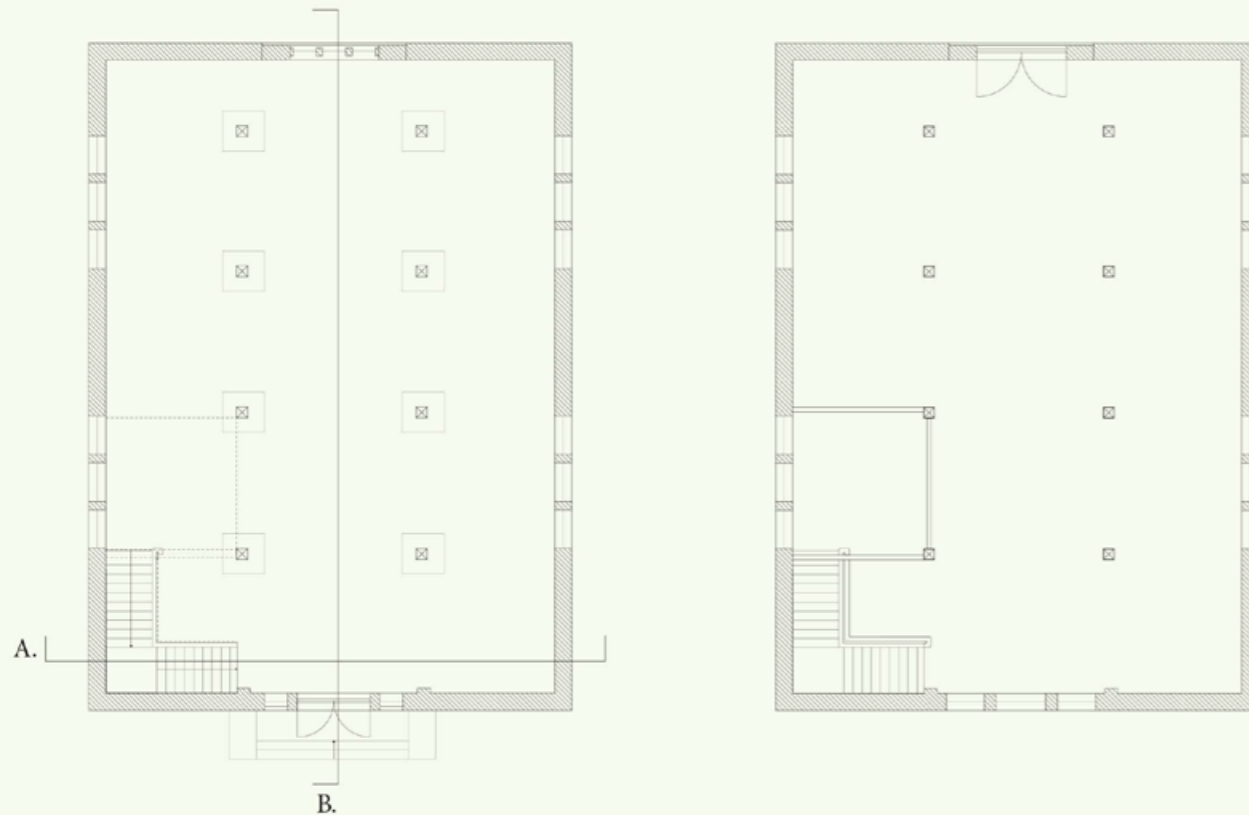
the museum are moved from different parts of the country, to show glimpses of cultural history from the entire nation. However, this building had a more practical function and was originally built as a space for an exhibition of objects, not to be an exhibited object itself. In that sense the building, which now is called Vognhuset, is not really considered a part of the museum's collection of buildings. Nevertheless, it was built more than a hundred years ago, and could now also be seen as a piece of history in itself, worth keeping. Having that said, the building is not listed, and can be changed and transformed to again take the role as an exhibition space suitable for a modern exhibition.



Facade facing north / the main entrance

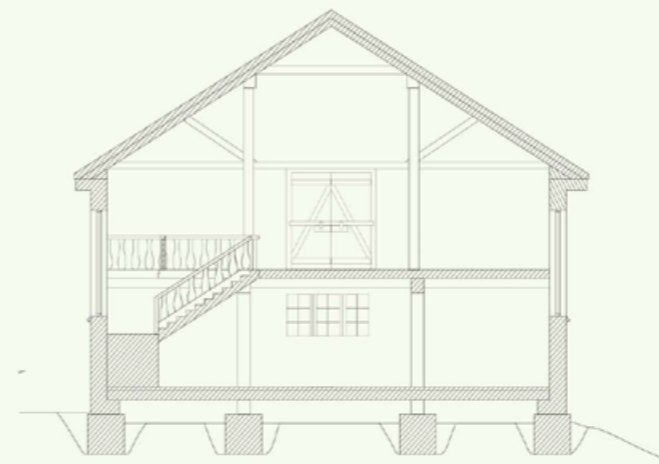


Facade facing south / doors on the 1st floor

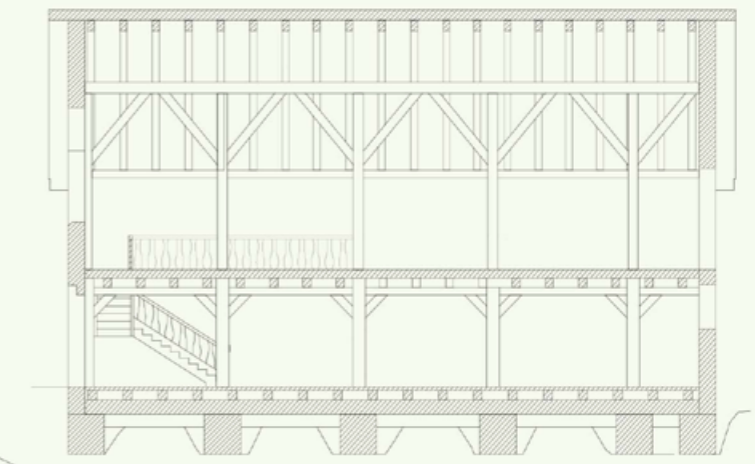


1:100 / Ground Floor

First Floor



Section A.



Section B.



The ground floor in Vognhuset which is currently used as an unorganized storage space



The staircase leading up to the 1st floor



Doors in the southern wall on the 1st floor, that can be opened to move bigger objects in and out of the space



The 1st floor

The Surrounding Buildings



1. Vognhuset



2. The gate



3. Building used for events



4. The street



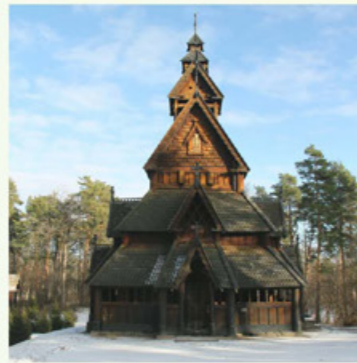
5. The pathway



6. Oscar II's Collection



7. The old gate



8. The Stave Church from Gol



9. Storehouse from Berdal



10. Farmhouse from Hove



11. Shed with technical room



12. Independent venue



1:500 / Vognhuset and the surrounding buildings

ill. 5



The northern facade of Vognhuset seen from the street



The gate seen from the street. This gate is currently it is not in use



This yellow wooden building in Swiss chalet style is located east of the gate, and is used for events



The intersection in front of the gate



The pathway leading up from the gate to Oscar II's Collection



The open area around Oscar II's Collection



The old gate which is a part of Oscar II's Collection



The Stave Church from Gol, the main attraction in Oscar II's Collection



Storehouse from Southern Berdal, Oscar II's Collection



Farmhouse from Hove, Oscar II's Collection



Shed with technical room



Gjestestue, an independent venue, separated from the museum

The Historical Context of the Building

In 1894 the organisation “Det kongelige Selskab for Norges Vel” (Royal Norwegian Society for Development) got to manage a small area at Bygdøy Royal Estate, right next to King Oscar II’s Collection. On this plot a wooden building in Swiss chalet style was first built, designed by architect Waldemar Hansteen. The purpose was to accommodate the company’s agricultural collection, which had been stored at Tøyen in Oslo until 1830. This was the beginning of the Agricultural Museum. In 1907 a new building was established, as the exhibition needed more space. This was a the brick building, later called Vognhuset. The Agricultural museum was then moved to this new building which was opened in 1909. Norsk Folkemuseum opened at Bygdøy in 1902 and was located right next to The Agricultural Museum and Oscar II’s Collection.

In 1922 The Agricultural Museum became a part of Norsk Folkemuseum, and the fence between the institutions was moved, and a new gate was built (Øvre Port). The Agricultural Exhibition stayed in the building until a new exhibition complex was built around the main square in the museum in 1936, where the exhibition was moved.

The building was then used for storage for the museum’s carriage collection, which gave it the nickname “Vognhuset” (The carriage house). Today the building is still used for storage and is easy to overlook as it is located at the fringes of the big museum, without a function of any importance. Currently there are no plans for the building.



The interior of The Agricultural Museum in 1924 ill. 6 ▶

A New Focus on Oscar II's Collection

There has been a discussion and an interest at Norsk Folkemuseum to direct more attention towards Oscar II's Collection and make it more into a separate attraction. It is an important part of the museum with its special history as the world's first open-air museum, as well as the stave church, which has become a Norwegian icon, and already attracts a lot of foreign tourists. Within the open-air museum, Oscar II's Collection is also situated quite far from the main entrance and the visitor's center. This part of the museum would be made more accessible by opening up the existing gate connected to the collection.

The museum's main concern is to communicate accurate history, and to avoid creating a fairytale or an image of the past which is not true. The current exhibition of Oscar II's Collection consists mainly of just four historical buildings arranged together with a couple of information boards that are easy to overlook. This is an exhibition that can easily be misunderstood as a glorification of Norwegian history and culture, which is unfortunate as the museum's intention always is to explain the history rather than putting it on a pedestal. Establishing a new exhibition space, dedicated to explaining the context of Oscar II's Collection could contribute in clarifying matters, bring new understanding of the past to a multicultural society, and dissect the collection as a symbol of Norwegian identity and culture.

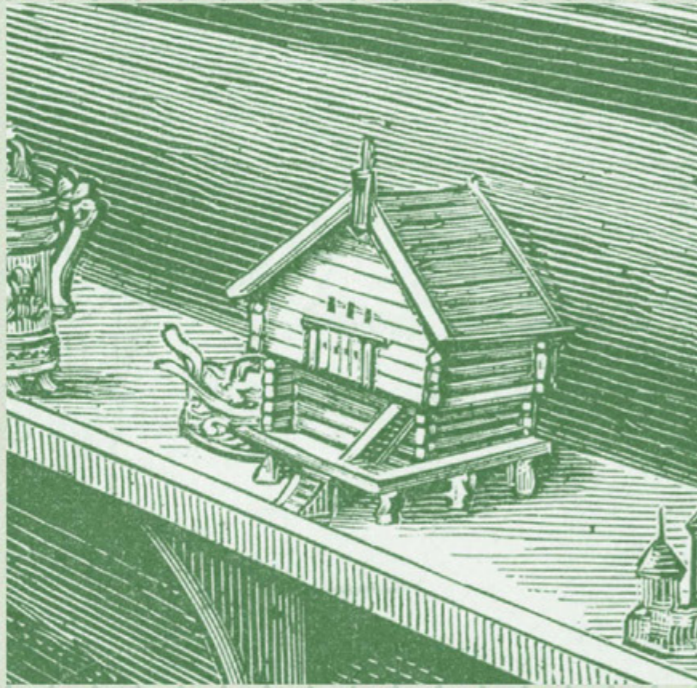


Bygninger fra Norges Middelalder paa Bygdø Kongsgaard.

Wood engraving from the original guide-book for Oscar II's Collection, 1888

ill. 7

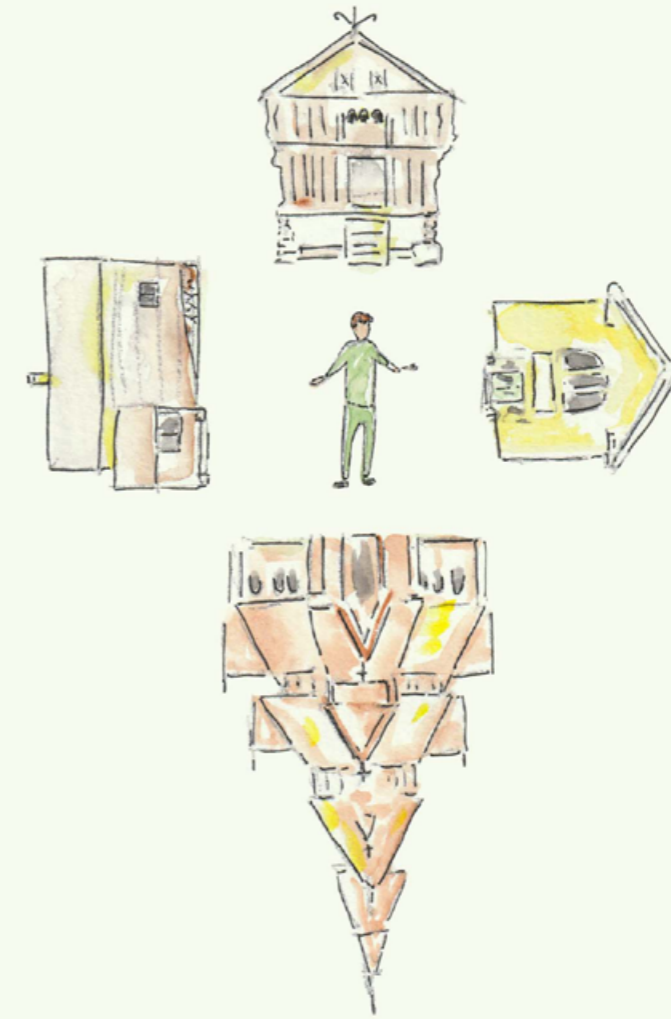




The Intervention

Thesis Statement

The project's main objective is to investigate the role of architecture in a museum context, and how it can be used to convey history. By understanding the impact the building has on the storytelling, and how architecture works as both information and an experience, a set of tools can be developed in order to shape a design. This will then be used in the design process when creating a proposal for new exhibition spaces and facilities at Norsk Folkemuseum. The information and history that is to be communicated in these spaces is an explanation and problematization of ideas concerning i.a. Norwegian identity. The architecture will ensure suitable conditions for this exhibition by relating to the historical context and the surroundings.

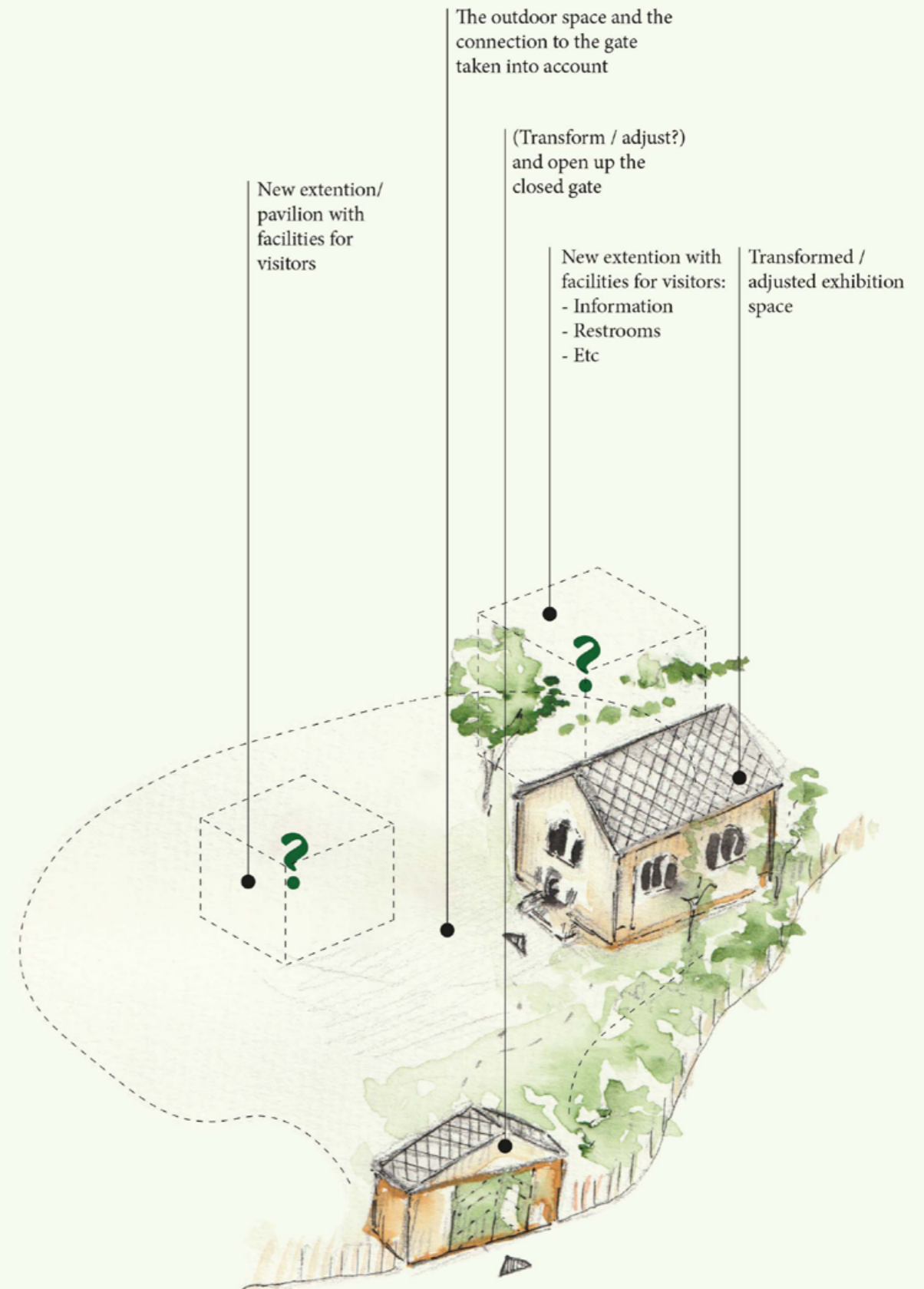


Project Framing

The Scope of the project is to open up the northern gate and to activate this corner of the museum, also creating an easier access to Oscar II's Collection. A main focus is working with "Vognhuset", to transform or adjust the building and reintroduce its original function as an exhibition space, but now telling the history and context of Oscar II's Collection. In connection to this a new extension is to be established housing visitor facilities including information, a museum shop and restrooms, in addition to other relevant functions. The goal will be to create a coherent experience connecting the interior of the exhibition space, the new extension, the gate and the outdoor areas which leads up to Oscar II's Collection.

Preliminary Inventory for new extension:

- Reception desk
- Small shop, possibly combined with the reception desk
- Staff room
- Restroom for staff
- Meeting point
- Two unisex restrooms
- One accessible restroom



The Building as an Object, a Sign and a Container

In the museum the building has a role as both an **object**, a **sign**, and a **container**. Vognhuset is a part of a museum, where most of the buildings constitute the actual collection, and take the role as the actual **objects** on display. The buildings are also there to tell a story and to inform the visitors and by this also appear as elements of **signage**. However, essentially the buildings are also elements of architecture,

creating rooms, pathways and other spatial relations. They are **containers**, both creating frames shaping an experience outdoors, as well actually containing interiors, exhibitions and artefacts. The new intervention should be shaped with this perspective in mind, adapting them to the new design and ensuring a comprehensive approach.



Wood engraving showing the original exhibition in the storehouse from Southern Berdal, 1888

ill. 9



Wood engraving showing the storehouse from Southern Berdal, Oscar II's Collection, 1888

ill. 10

The Aspects of Surfaces

The aspects of surfaces could be seen as having a central role, when working with the interplay between a new intervention and the historical context. In order to revitalize the space and the area it might be important to understand how the existing space relates to people in regards to its old purpose, in addition to understanding how the new function will work in the same space, and how the visitors now are supposed to respond.

According to Adolf Loos, it is the surfaces with their properties that people mainly respond to in relation to space. The structure provides frames for cladding, while the actual surface specifies the intended experience and encourages the appropriate response to the building.

Both Gottfried Semper (1803-1879) and later Adolf Loos (1870-1933) expressed ideas regarding the aspects of surfaces. These ideas revolved around Semper's concept of dressing the space, and how this could be seen as even more important in architecture than the actual structure. Semper's theories involved focusing on the wall not as a structural, weight-bearing element, but rather as a screen or partition. In *The Four Elements of Architecture* Semper defined four central elements for the origin of Architecture; the hearth, the roof, the enclosure and the mound, with the hearth as the social core of the space and where the element "enclosure" is a derivation of textile partitions, hanging carpets used by tribes for protection and visible boundaries to create space.

The element of enclosures, the screens or partitions, also relates to the idea of the building as both a container, and a sign, where the visible boundaries communicate information, history and an experience to the visitors.



1. Rendered wall inside



2. Wooden slat on wall inside



3. Painted wooden door



4. Wooden flooring



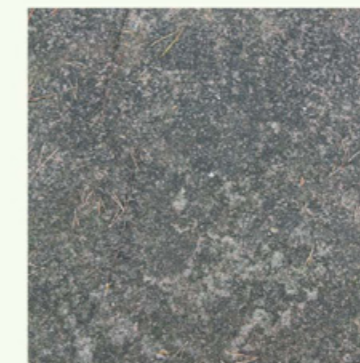
5. Wooden panels in ceiling



6. White/yellow wall



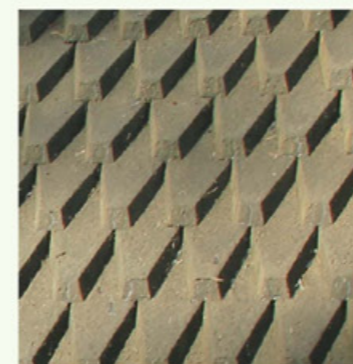
7. Rendered facade



8. Granite steps to front door



9. The yellow Swiss chalet



10. The roof of the stave church



11. The gate



12. Inside the portal of the gate



Relevance



Telling the Story of a Constructed Identity

The new exhibition in Vognhuset should set the Norwegian national romantic symbols in a perspective, and by this problematize the meaning and values they have represented until today. Oscar II's Collection was established in 1881 by King Oscar II of Sweden and Norway. Norway was at the time in a union with Sweden, and the King wanted the collection to show his warm interest in Norway and strengthen the relationship between the Swedish monarchy and Norway. Norway had gone from one union with Denmark, which had lasted for centuries, to a new union with Sweden in 1814. As a non-independent country, stuck between Danish and Swedish control, the focus on finding a distinct Norwegian identity became extremely important. Oscar II's Collection related to this strong wave of Norwegian national romanticism that was happening at the time. This movement had a fairly domestic orientation, praising the rural, and defining the Norwegian farmer as typical Norwegian. In other words, a national identity was created. These were motives and a mentality that might have been useful at the time in order to create a sense of unity for the Norwegian people. However, these ideas and symbols might not be relevant in the same way when seen in a modern context, where Norway is an independent country, the population is more diverse, and the idea of what is considered "Norwegian" is arguably rather complex.

There have been discussions in the Norwegian media in recent years where some people are concerned with the "Norwegian values" and how some Norwegians of different backgrounds do not necessarily share these values. When arguing for their opinions some keep referencing "typical Norwegian" symbols and motives, like the national romanticism and the stave church. However, this idea of what is considered "typically Norwegian" was actually an identity that was constructed in the 19th century. This constructed national identity, the symbols and values created at the time, could now be seen as something that is used in order to differentiate and split the Norwegian people rather than unifying them. As a museum Norsk Folkemuseum's role is to not substantiate misconceptions, but to present history in a way to create understanding of the past and insight into how it has contributed to the society of today. That is why the museum should tell the story of how "the Norwegian identity" was constructed, and how Oscar II's Collection was a part of this.

The UN Sustainable Development Goals

The Project is mainly focusing on three of the UN Sustainable Development Goals: The museum function is to a great extent connected to **Goal 4 (Quality Education)**, and **11(Sustainable cities and communities)**. The museum is an institution whose main focus is to protect, communicate, and document history and culture (**Goal 11, Target 11.4**). It is also a platform for learning and information, and by learning about our past we can better understand the present, and maybe also the future (**Goal 4, Target 4.7**). The investigation of architecture as a medium in conveying history could lead to an awareness which could be used to strengthen the institution and by that also the facilities they have and the services they offer. This would enhance the museum's educational aspects as well as their ability to preserve history.

In addition the new contribution to Oscar II's Collection is a project that closely relates to **Goal 10 (Reduce inequality)** as it handles the subject of "Norwegian identity", dissects the symbols, explains the context, and in that way could contribute in breaking down differences in the Norwegian society. The existing collection, which now appears almost like a glorification of Norwegian symbols, will with this project be turned into an exhibition explaining how an identity was constructed, and how the phenomenon can be understood differently in a modern context (**Goal 10, Target 10.2**).



Schoolchildren at Norsk Folkemuseum in 1950

ill. 13

The Relevant UN Goals:

Goal 4: Quality Education

Target 4.7: By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development



Goal 10: Reduce Inequality

Target 10.2: By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status



Goal 11: Sustainable cities and communities

Target 11.4: Strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage





Process and Production

Method

An investigation and understanding of the history and function of both the museum and the building would be essential for the project. By studying the history, I can better understand the circumstances and let the design respond to them. How can architecture be used in different ways in a museum context and how does it relate to the stated roles of the object, the sign and the container? In order to understand these phenomena it could be crucial to register existing conditions at the museum, as well as conducting studies of relevant references. In regard to the spatial investigations a diagrammatic approach could be applied for analysing the space and making a library or catalogue of different spatial aspects and ideas for different possible interventions. Work with both smaller sketch models as well as models in larger scales could also be used to study the spatial conditions. This could ensure that the exterior and the outdoor experience is considered as well as the design of the interior.

Some of the qualities of the phenomenon the object, the sign and the container could be used and reflected in the expression of the produced material. This could contribute in creating a coherent project, and would emphasize these central characteristics. For instance could a model be created in a way so it appears as an object and/or a container, which maybe again contains other elements that also appear as objects. Printed booklets could maybe relate to the models, taking the role as both objects, but also elements of signage together with other visual material. A sequence of elevations could be developed to investigate the relation between the different buildings, and to see how the new intervention is perceived from different angles. Drawings or diagrams should show the different levels of activities depending on the seasons.



Small sculpture of a stave church in a small box / The object and the container (From Norsk Folkemuseum's collection)

ill. 16

Deliverables

A Suggestion of what will be produced:

Booklets:

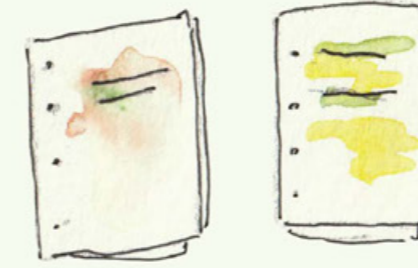
- Program
- Catalogue of diagrams/ registrations

Drawings:

- Photographs/registrations of context/site
- Diagrams
- Site plan
- Plans, sections and elevations of intervention
- Detail drawings
- Isometric drawing
- Visualisations

Models:

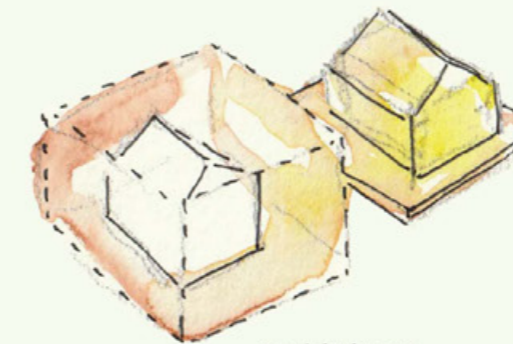
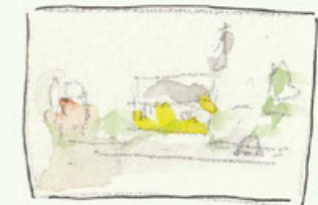
- Site model (1:200)
- Proposal model (1:50/1:20)
- Sketch models/process material



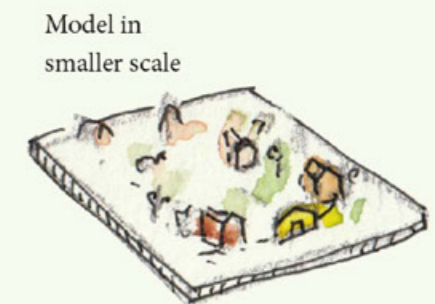
Booklets/object/
signage



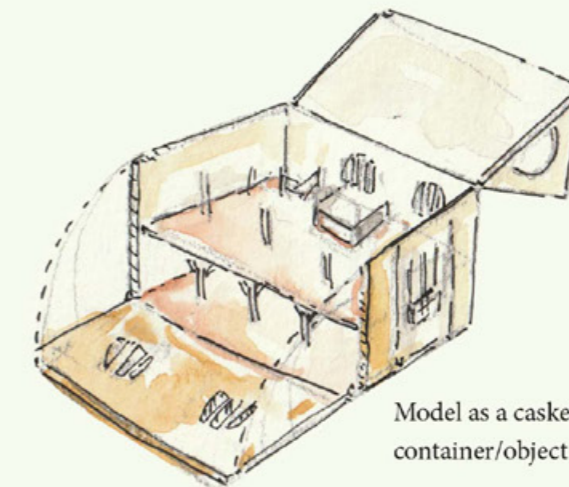
Drawings/
visual material/
signage



Model/object/
box/ container



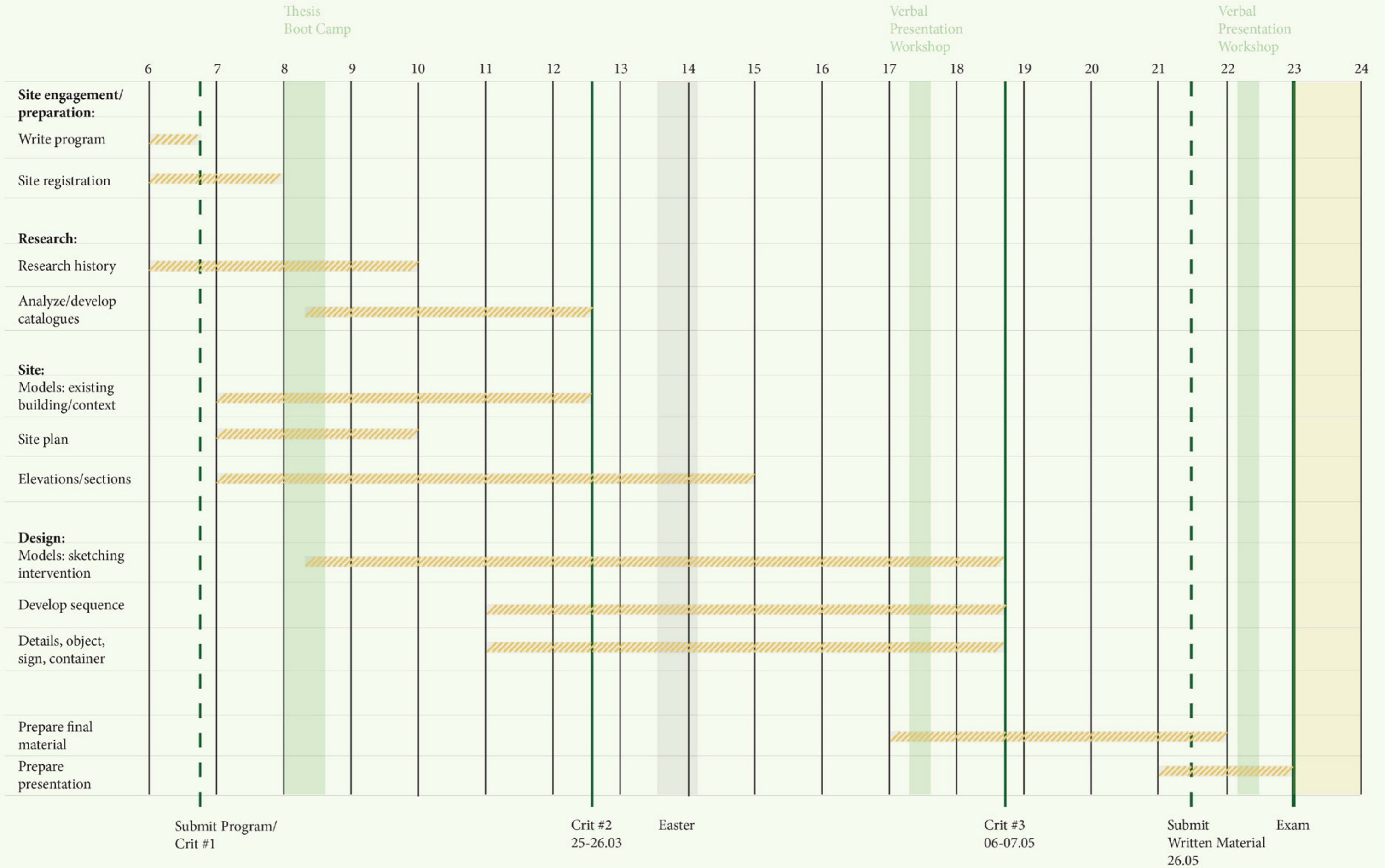
Model in
smaller scale



Model as a casket/
container/object

Sketches of ideas for material related to the object, the sign and the container

Schedule





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This is the literature and the sources that have been used to formulate the program, or that will be used in the development of the project.

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ill. 3 <https://www.norgebilder.no/> (downloaded 01.02.2021 and edited by author)

ill. 4 <https://digitaltmuseum.no/021018555577/friluftsmuseet-norsk-folkemuseum/media?slide=0> (downloaded 10.02.2021)

ill. 5 <https://www.norgebilder.no/> (downloaded 01.02.2021 and edited by author)

ill. 6 Norsk Folkemuseum's own database

ill. 7 *Bygninger fra Norges Middelalder Hvilke Hans Maj. Kong Oscar Den Anden Har Ladet Flytte Til Bygdøy Kongsgaard 1888*, Thronsen & Co.s Bogtrykkeri. Christiania 1888 (edited by author)

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All other illustrations are produced by the author

