

AN ARTIST RETREAT ON THE EAST COAST OF FYN:

Cultivating new creative cultures within Denmark's residual rural infrastructure.



An architect should live as little in cities as a painter. Send him to our hills, and let him study there what nature understands by a buttress, and what by a dome.

John Ruskin

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ABSTRACT

The city has long been recognised as a nucleus for creative thought and production. However across many European cities we are beginning to recognise shared difficulties in stimulating this artistic presence. The emergence of successful creative cultures can often fuel rampant property speculation, leaving some individuals economically and creatively stranded due to unaffordable work space.* Even more recently the Covid19 pandemic has brought many important social aspects of the arts to a complete standstill and it is yet to be seen how it's physical presence will remerge.

Whilst these developing conditions are not irreversible and should absolutely not be seen as an end to the presence of art within the city. One could argue that the ever-expanding scale, intensity and precarity of cities across Europe is becoming increasingly suffocating for some artists and creatives to live and work within.

This project seeks to explore new models of rural artistic infrastructure that responds to the developing challenges found within the city. A new working space typology is proposed, one that is built upon notions of retreat, contemplation, interrogation and temporary residence in a removed location. The site chosen for this exploration is a former farm on the east coast of Fyn, Denmark. The scale, typology and context of the site contains some of the desired qualities for an artist retreat - whilst its proximity to Copenhagen retains a relationship to the city.

The farm is currently owned by artist Martin Skauen, providing an opportunity to architecturally respond to situated artistic needs, whilst also exploring how it can serve other artists looking for a working retreat from the city. The site also offers a relevant opportunity to experiment with retooling this commonly found typology in rural Denmark, as the Danish agricultural industry is faced with the rapid necessity for degrowth and to transition into more sustainable food production.

The resulting project is an open-ended piece of practice-based research that challenges the norms of where artistic practice takes place, in the hope of expanding our understanding of the creative capacity of the rural.

* Research conducted by the Greater London Authority found that London can expect to lose around 57 sites (24 per cent) in the next five years, accounting for around 1,000 workspaces and 1,450 artists. This equates to 21 per cent of artists' working from surveyed sites across London. The research also evidenced how workspaces are becoming more expensive. In 2014, 56 per cent of sites charged an average of £11+ per square foot. In 2017, this had risen to 79 per cent of sites.

INTRODUCTION

1.1 NEW APPETITES AND EXPERIENTIAL CHALLENGES OF CONTEMPORARY ART IN THE CITY

Along with the rising economic difficulties faced by practising artists, experiential challenges have emerged for contemporary art galleries situated within the city. Through the introduction of high-profile contemporaries during the late 1990's and early 2000s, the public's appetite for contemporary art increased heavily and subsequently introduced a globalised culture of art tourism.

As well as the challenge of exhibiting the ever-expanding mediums of contemporary art, large public galleries now face the infrastructural challenge of a rapid increase in visitors. In an interview with Art Forum in 2010, architect Rem Koolhaas discusses the challenges he has faced whilst attempting to synthesise large scale infrastructural requirements with the exhibition of art, he believes if not "thought out concertedly, the original mission of the museum, to enable a degree of contemplation and a degree of direct relationship with art, was suffering."

In early 2020, Koolhaas's firm OMA curated an exhibition at the Guggenheim museum in New York titled "Countryside: The Future." The show explores what Koolhaas describes as the "enormous deficit in understanding [of] what is happening in the countryside, which is where the truly radical changes are taking place."¹ Koolhaas, a practitioner who has spent the majority of his career operating within cities, exposes his own naivety to the subject through his revelations. Yet much of the strengths of this work comes through this approach, as it largely reflects the naivety of the creative industry he works within.

The exhibition draws on almost a decade of research conducted by AMO (the "think-tank of OMA") into 98% of the world's surface that is not occupied by cities. Through their research they began to recognise an enormous canvas on which any anything too large, complex or unsafe to blend with urban life takes place, as Koolhaas describes:

"A world formerly dictated by the seasons and the organisation of agriculture is now a toxic mix of genetic experiment, science, industrial nostalgia, seasonal immigration, territorial buying sprees, massive subsidies, incidental inhabitation, tax incentives, investment, political turmoil – in other words more volatile than the most accelerated city."²

While the design and architectural professions remained largely focused on the city - he argues a quiet and undisturbed revolution was developing in the global countryside. However it is important to remember that neither Koolhaas or OMA are recognised experts of rural history and the research was enthusiastically handpicked to be experientially consumed within an exhibition context. Therefore the resulting exhibition and research findings should be recognised as a subjective perspective on the state global rurality.

In response to the thoughts and fears of Koolhaas and others, there has been recent exploration into more distributed models of the contemporary art gallery. Smaller scale galleries such as Assemble's Goldsmiths CCA, 6a's South London Gallery and MK gallery are all interestingly

placed within suburban contexts and make aesthetic references to the historical artistic production of their local contexts. However none of the projects challenge the programmatic status quo of today's urban galleries, nor do they radically explore the potentials of galleries outside of the city.

In addition to an increasing interest with rurality, spatial practices have recently received more recognition from within the realms of contemporary art. The previously mentioned multidisciplinary architectural collective Assemble was awarded with the prestigious Turner Prize in 2018. The following year the multidisciplinary investigative collective, Forensic Architecture, was also nominated for the award. Both of these nominations were seen to be controversial, as many critics believed the two collectives, and their disciplines, to exist outside of the boundaries of contemporary art. These nominations suggest, however, that there is a developing appetite for multidisciplinary process-driven spatial practices within contemporary art culture.

Neither the work of Assemble or Forensic Architecture can be easily consumed through a single object or artwork. Their work needs to be understood through a material and visual engagement with their process, along with an awareness of the spatial context within which it was situated. Therefore these nominations raise interesting questions for the future of art galleries, regarding the experiences they curate along with the work they exhibit. Whilst the recent success of large public galleries should not be disregarded, new discourse from within the contemporary art establishment should inspire exploration into a diversity of models for the exhibition and production of art inside and outside of the city.

INTRODUCTION

1.2 RETOOLING AGRICULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE IN RURAL DENMARK - 12TH UN GOAL

The Danish mink crises of 2020 instigated major scrutiny towards the agricultural industry and related government policy. The country was left shocked after 15 million minks were illegally executed due to a COVID19 mutation detected amongst the species. Many citizens were previously unaware of the scale of production within the industry.

Denmark has a very large and successful agricultural industry due to the ideal conditions of plenty of rain, a flat landscape and fertile soils. The infrastructure is huge, with 61% of its total landmass cultivated and the average farm size being 77 ha. A large proportion of the farms produce livestock with the main industries being meat, fur and dairy products.³

Denmark has a population of 5.8 million inhabitants however it creates enough food to feed 15 million people. Due to the excess in production, most products are exported to Germany, Sweden, the UK and China. The biggest exports being pork, fish and dairy.⁴

A recent UN-backed climate report by the Chatham House think-tank, identified the global food system as the biggest driver of destruction of the natural world, and a shift to predominantly plant-based diets is crucial in halting the damage. In reforming the global food system, “the convergence of global food consumption around predominantly plant-based diets is the most crucial element”⁵, the report said.

In response to this, Denmark must radically engage with its agricultural industry, reducing its cultivation of livestock and the amount of food it exports. If the industry does go through a process of degrowth, then further radical thinking must also be applied to reappropriating redundant agricultural infrastructure. This project seeks to engage in exploring how some this infrastructure can be retooled by proposing new opportunities for creative industries previously confined to the city.

CONCEPT

2.1 AN ARTIST RETREAT

The concept of an 'artists retreat' is driven by the recognition that creative practitioners can benefit from a space to work away from their usual routines. Remote working environments can provide alternative spatial qualities for artists to work within, allowing them to enrich new patterns of thought and inspire fresh working methodologies. A 'retreat' also offers space and time to develop new perspectives on the contexts they have left, via new forms of creative contemplation and interrogation that may not have been possible within their usual daily routines.

The project seeks to understand what relationships new rural typologies can establish to the existing creative cultures of the city, through offering complementary typologies that respond to the city's challenges. It is important to not simply extract the existing creative cultures and working environments from the city, but explore how the qualities of different rural contexts can cultivate new ones.

An 'artist retreat' differentiates itself from an 'artists residency' through offering no binding principles in how visiting artists should think and where they should situate their work. A "retreat" offers space and time to explore one's own practice and their relationships to the world around them.

2.2 PRELIMINARY PROGRAM

The proposed working space will house two permanent practicing residents who oversee the retreats operation, with a residents studio that responds to their disciplines. The retreat will accommodate one artist (or group of artists) for up to a week, providing them with places to eat, sleep and relax, along with a large studio space and shared workshop facilities. The retreat will prominently be occupied by visiting artists from Copenhagen, due its proximity, however it will also be available to artists from other parts of Denmark and overseas.

2.3 SPECIFICS

The following is a suggestion of the spaces the proposed site will contain. Sizes and function of spaces may change throughout the project

Residents Studio ~ 200 m2

The resident studio will be housed within the same building as the visiting studio. However this space will functionally respond to the artists disciples of the permanent residents.

Visiting Studio ~ 200 m2

The visiting studio will be a large flexible space that can accommodate different artistic disciplines. It will have direct access to the shared workshop space.

Shared Workshop ~ 100 m2

The shared workshop will contain specialist tools and machinery, enabling artists to work with a range of different materials.

Guest bedrooms ~ 50 m2

The guest bedrooms will provide a space for 1-4 artists to sleep for up to one week.

Lounge ~ 50 m2

The lounge is a space for guests to take a break from their work, relax and hold conversations.

Kitchen ~ 20 m2

2.4 – INSEL HOMBROICH

“Hombroich is a museum and a place where artists live and work; a landscape; and a domain for both: architecture, and artistic, literary, philosophical and musical events. Conceived as a continuing ‘open experiment’ and born out of the personal commitment of private collectors alongside artists with a lasting association with Hombroich, the Stiftung Insel Hombroich, the foundation established in 1997, encompasses Museum Insel Hombroich, Raketenstation Hombroich and the Kirkeby-Feld. It has engendered a cultural space which continues to be broadened and enriched by independent partners — the Langen Foundation, the sculpture hall endowed by the Thomas Schütte Stiftung and the Feld-Haus - Museum für Populäre Druckgrafik. Stiftung Insel Hombroich and its partner institutions, organising exhibitions, symposia and concerts, each contribute in their own way to the evolution of the Hombroich Arts and Culture Site.”



2.4 – CAN LIS - JORN UTZON

“Can Lis was built in 1972. After Jørn Utzon left the Sydney Opera project in 1966, he decided to settle on Majorca. The family first bought land up in the mountains, where Can Feliz is now located, but in the first instance, the local authorities would not permit him to build on the attractive mountainside. So instead Jørn Utzon bought land near Porto Petro, situated on a steep cliff facing the sea. Can Lis could then become a reality.

The Utzon Foundation began a collaboration with the Danish Arts Foundation’s Committee for Architecture concerning the allocation of grants for residential stays at Can Lis.

A residential stay is a working visit, giving the opportunity to immerse oneself in a project under unique and inspiring conditions. It is a requirement that the project’s subject matter relates to architectural expression.”



2.4 – GRYMSDYKE FARM

“Grymsdyke Farm is a research facility, fabrication workshop and living-working space for architects, artists, designers and those interested in materials and processes of making. Based in the village of Lacey Green in Buckinghamshire, we run workshops, seminars and residencies with the aim of exploring the essential connections between processes of design, making and place. Our practice involves building relationships with other individuals who share a similar enthusiasm for making. Through this communal and collaborative approach, the Farm is a place where people can exchange ideas, working methods, interests and expertise.”



2.4 – BOTHY PROJECT

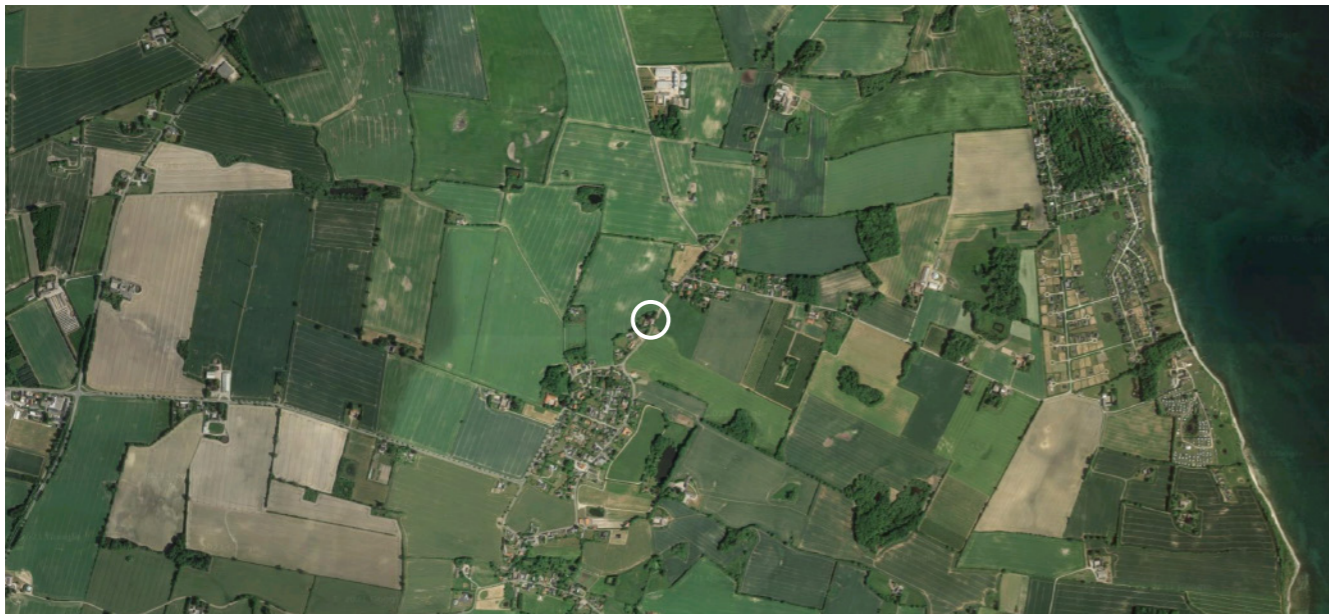
“Established in 2011 Bothy Project is a network of small-scale, off-grid art residency spaces in distinct and diverse locations around Scotland. Our objective is to create platforms for artists and researchers to journey and explore the history, landscape and people in the areas surrounding the bothies. These platforms are established through the creation of purpose built structures made in collaboration with artists, designers and makers to create a varied network of hand-crafted dwellings.”



SITE

3 SITE

The proposed Artist's Retreat is not restricted to any country or any particular geographical area, but its location should be carefully considered in a site which provides withdrawal from urban life, and a level of tranquillity. It's proximity to a city with an active creative culture should also be carefully considered.



3.1 KAJBJERGVEJ 7, 5871 FRØRUP

The selected site is on the east coast of Fyn, 11km south of the city of Nyborg. The site was built during the late 19th century and was functioning as a farm until the late 20th century. Much of the original timber construction is still standing, however the thatch roof has been replaced by tiles. Originally there were four buildings on the site, however one was demolished due to it's poor condition.

The site was chosen due it's agricultural heritage, scenic surroundings and current occupancy by two established artists. It was also chosen due to its specific proximity to Copenhagen. Nyborg can be reached from Copenhagen central station within 1 hour and 15 minutes. Whether travelling by car or train, you must cross the Storebælt bridge. Crossing the bridge from Copengagen encourages visiting artists to visually distance themselves from the environments they have left and further immerse themselves within their destination.

The past, present and future states of the site all have a direct relevance to the themes and concepts I am working with. The site's former agriculture condition provides the desired spatial

qualities for a working studio. It's historical context also provides an opportunity for the project to have a wider discussion regarding the future of Danish agriculture. Being currently owned by two practicing artists also allows the project to architecturally respond to situated case studies. The current state of the site also facilitates a very tangible relationship with the tectonics of the existing architectures. The current occupiers also have similar aspirations for the future use of the site. Therefore there will be encouragement for continued dialogue throughout the project.



3.2 SPECIFICS

The residents have recently refurbished their living space. As a result, the project will concentrate on the undeveloped adjacent buildings. There is a void on the site where an original building was demolished. The project will explore newly built structures within this area - in order to expand the working space capacity.

SITE



SITE



SITE



SITE



SITE



SITE



SITE



3.3 – STUDENT VILLAGE - LENSCHOW PHILMANN

“Student Village is a transformation, and addition to a 17th century timber farm, just outside of today’s Aarhus. The project consists of 56 new apartments, divided between both single room, and double room apartments for students, as well as common rooms and facilities. The new apartments follow and mimics the old farms’ layout, creating a series if intimate spaces and streets around it.”



3.3 – DRAWING MATTER ARCHIVE - HUGE STRANGE

“Located within a working Somerset farmyard, the new building provides an architecture archive for a private collector. Inside the remaining walls of an old barn, two timber structures have been inserted with a single new over-sailing roof. The building shell is constructed of a single layer of solid cross-laminated timber, without insulation, external cladding or internal lining, creating a stable internal environment for the archive drawings. In contrast to the engineered timber, the buildings are fit-out with Cedar, Ash and Beech using timber felled from the surrounding woodlands.”



3.3 – MASISON KEREMA - LACATON VESSEI



“The plot of land is situated behind a dune some tens of meters from the sea to the north. One does not see the sea but one is permanently aware of it because of the sound, the wind, the clouds. The house is inserted parallel to the northern and eastern edges of the plot, between a strip of woodland and a clearing. It consists of three separate buildings set out on the arc of a circle, convex face to the north, the bad weather, the wind; concave face to the south, thus creating a more intimate, protected and well-exposed external space.

The three volumes have the same size, surface, form and height, yet differ in their interior arrangement, the nature of their envelope, their way of being closed. When open, the sliding shutters closing off the façades connect the houses together, defining a different relationship between inside and outside.”



3.3 – HOUSE ON GOTLAND - ETAT



“This is a vacation house for a family of four, located south of Visby on the island Gotland. Situated in the Baltic sea the nature on the island is formed by a harsh climate and lime-filled soil, dominated by flowering meadows and low juniper bushes. The Gotlandic culture is deeply rooted in traditional sheep-herding and local handicraft, with a building tradition of plain and robust stone houses with strong material presence.

The vacation house was conceived as a distinctly contemporary building in dialogue with the surrounding nature and local building tradition. Building materials were chosen according to their material presence, durability and ability to age and weather in a beautiful manner. The building is oriented towards the west, facing a large flowering meadow to the west, and a field of grassing cattle to the north. To the south and east the site is surrounded by trees and low bushes, giving it a secluded character.

The interior is divided by semi-walls from the roof, defining each space and lending it a different character. The building is constructed in rendered light-weight concrete blocks and concrete, with a wooden roof, so called faltak. The interior consists of a concrete floor and rendered walls combined with wooden surfaces – and sliding doors – in ash. Windows, sliding windows and exterior doors are made in Swedish northern pine.”



3.3 – BOX IN A BARN - METTER LANGE

“Insulated workspace created inside a plywood cladded stucture inside an old barn.”



3.3 – VIGGSO - ARHOV FRICK

“A landscape of stone cliffs, wind bent pine trees, heather, and a forest floor of lichen and wild berries - this sparse yet rich site, coupled with a minimal budget, establishes the principles for this private residence at its origin. The house is located on the island of Viggso, in the Stockholm archipelago, and functions for a family of five. Both plan and section is ordered in three equal parts. Firstly, the entrance volume at the rear of the house containing the bathroom, bedroom, and kitchen; above, a loft for children and guests. Secondly, an airy, double height living room providing unobstructed views in three directions. Lastly, an open terrace facing the water, covered by a semi-transparent roof, concludes the house. Together, all three parts equate to a total area of approximately 80 square meters.”



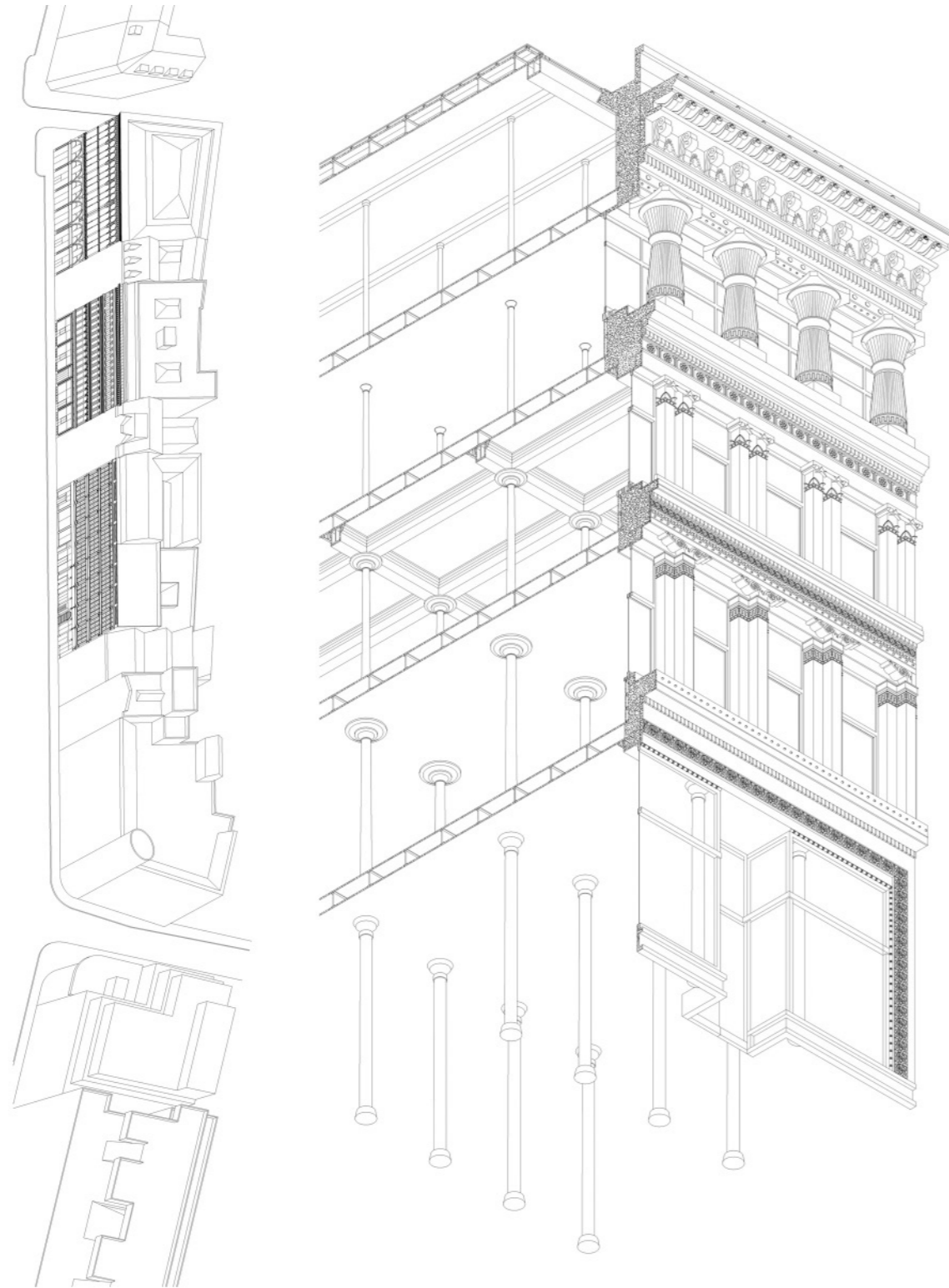
3.3 – RESEARCH STATION - JOHANSEN SKOVSTED



“The bird sanctuary at the tip of the peninsula in the southern part of Ringkøbing Fjord is, with its unique nature, an important stopping point for migratory birds and home to Europe’s oldest continuous bird counts. Previously, public access to the area has been very limited, but through establishing new facilities the area has now been opened to visitors. These facilities consist of simple instrument-like additions in the landscape: a bird hide, watch tower, workshop, walking routes and a conversion of the Tipper House research station. The new structures are imagined as free-standing objects in the landscape, each with distinctive characteristics and subtle mutual relationships to one another and their surroundings.

The existing Tipper House has been transformed into a visitor center and a research station. The building now hosts exhibitions, a multipurpose room, dining room and kitchen on the ground floor, a library with work space on the first floor and alcove sleeping areas in the gables. In order to retain the quality and character of the existing building, the renovation was realised through a number of subtle interventions. A new external ramp is the only visible alteration from the exterior, internally new beams and columns replace and reinforce the load-bearing walls, a specially designed table and benches feature in communal areas, red pipes, radiators and wind gauges draw attention to the research function of the building. Built-in furniture made from OSB among other things, forms a new archive for bird counts which has a textural quality reminiscent of the plants in the landscape and thatch of the roof.”

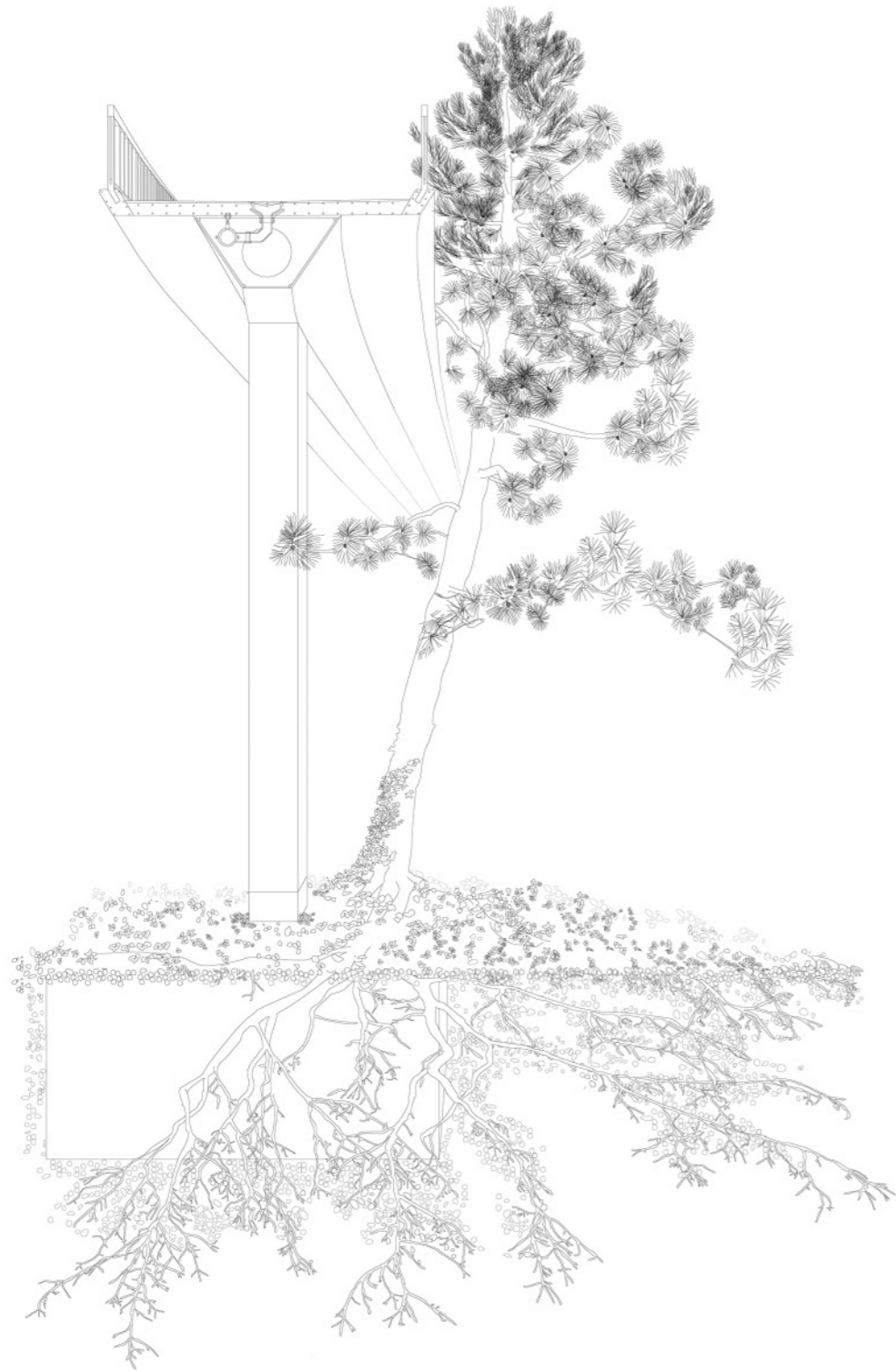




4 REGISTRATION

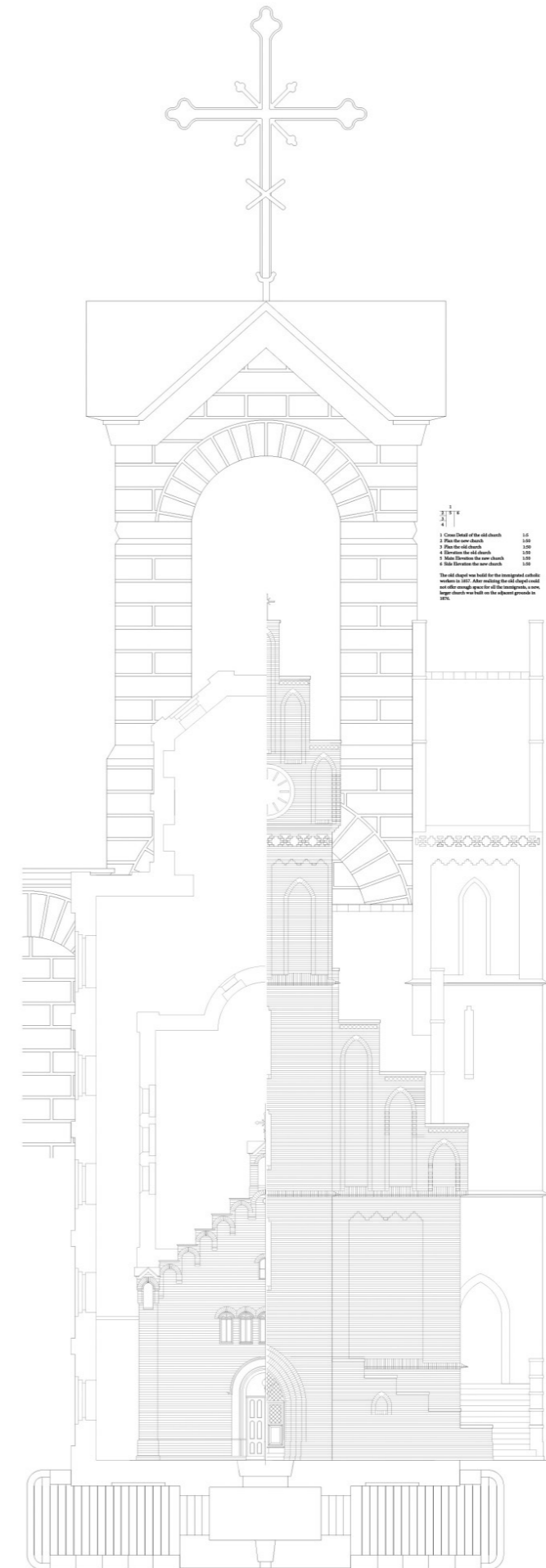
As the site is large and very detailed, the projects seeks to use registration as a process of creating contexts to design within. Similar to the work produced by Tom Emerson's Studio at ETH, the project will identify certain spatial elements to carefully detail. These details will be recorded using line drawings and section models.

METHOD REFERENCE



Garden, drawn by Athira Mlavil

Buchegg Atlas, 2014, ETH Zürich



- | | | |
|---|---------------------------------|-----|
| 1 | Concrete of the old church | 1:4 |
| 2 | New concrete church | 1:4 |
| 3 | New stone church | 1:4 |
| 4 | Structure of the old church | 1:4 |
| 5 | New structure of the old church | 1:4 |
| 6 | New structure of the old church | 1:4 |

The old church was built for the congregation of the village in 1877. After making the old church could not offer enough space for all the congregation, a new larger church was built on the adjacent ground in 1970.

Chris: Buildings and Structures, Catholic Church Stern Jura, drawn by Truong-Jung and Diego Li

Form Atlas, 2011, ETH Zürich, 042

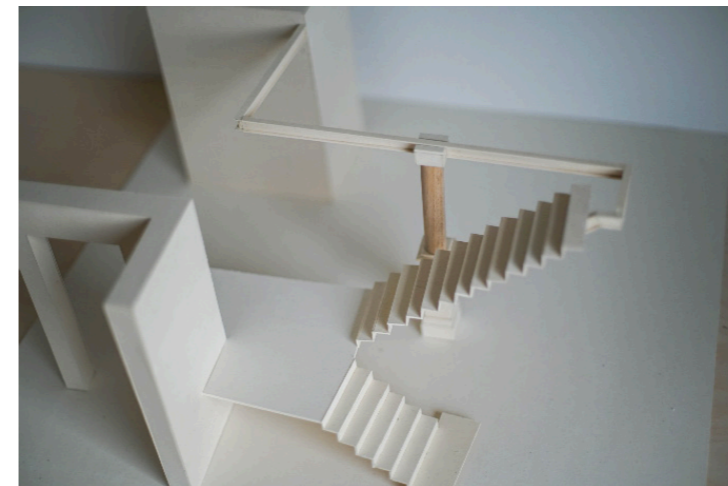
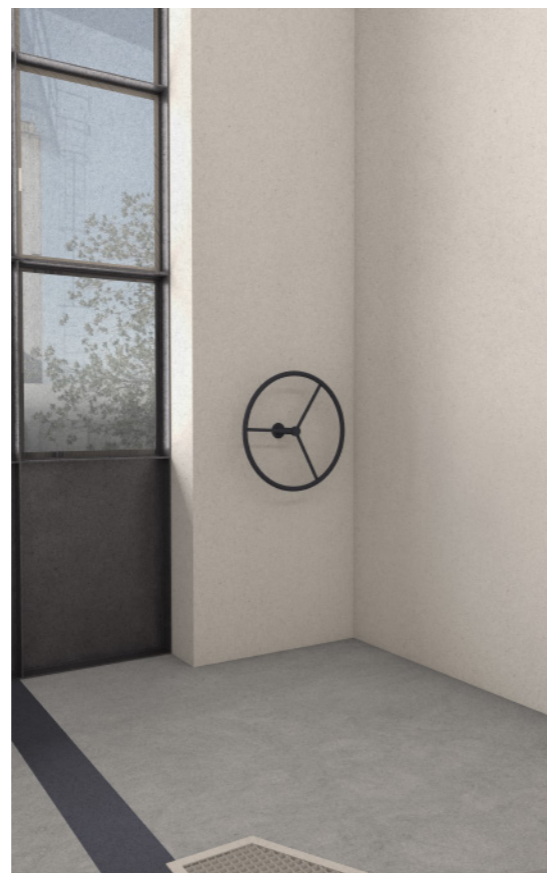
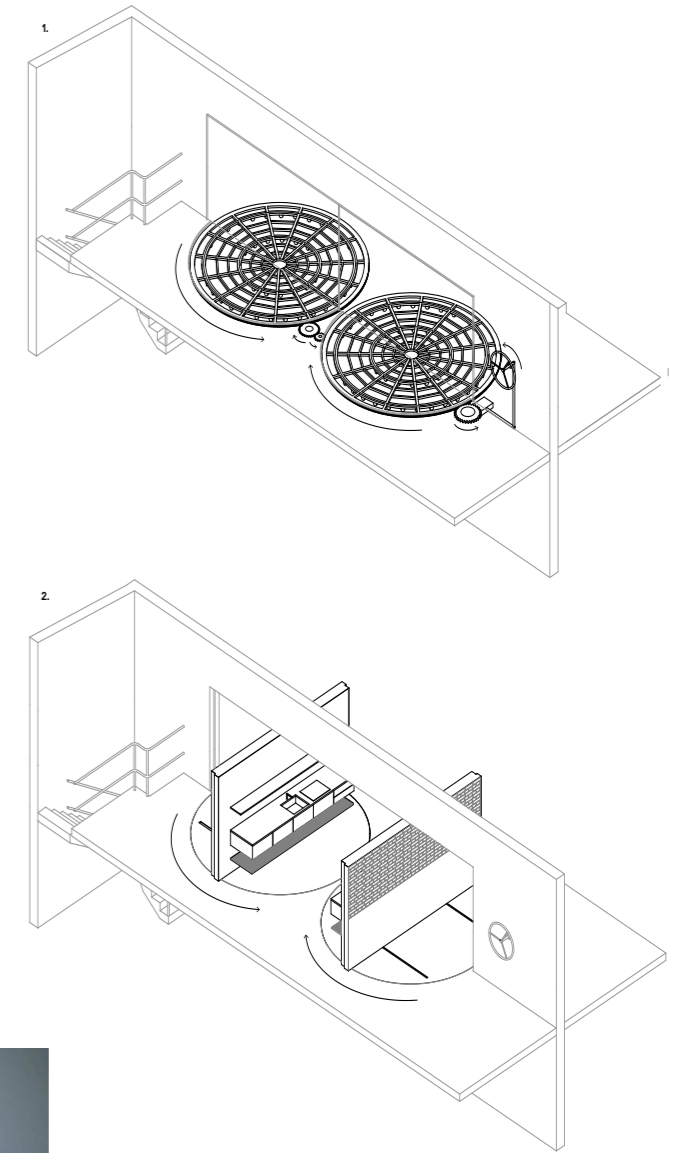
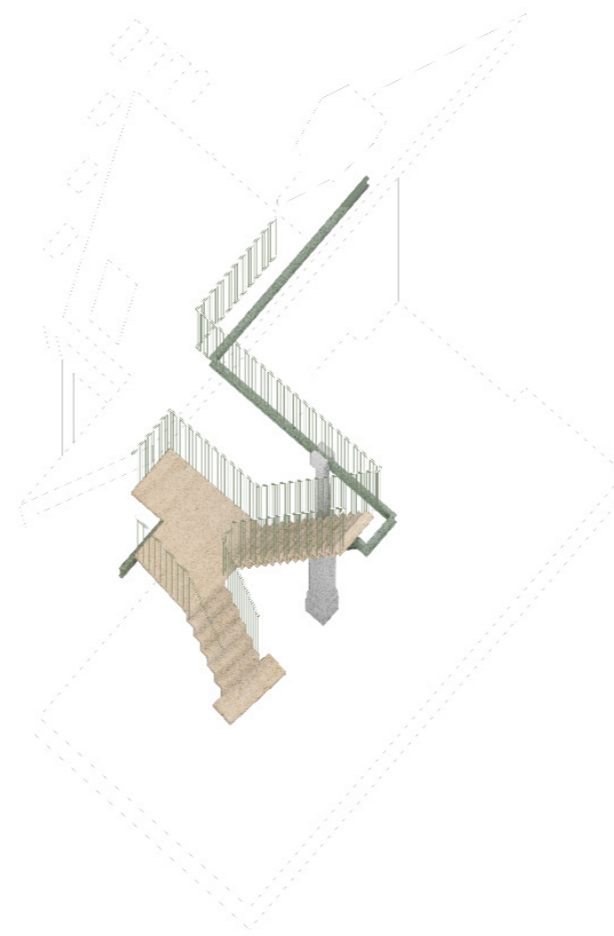
DELIVERABLES

5 DELIVERABLES

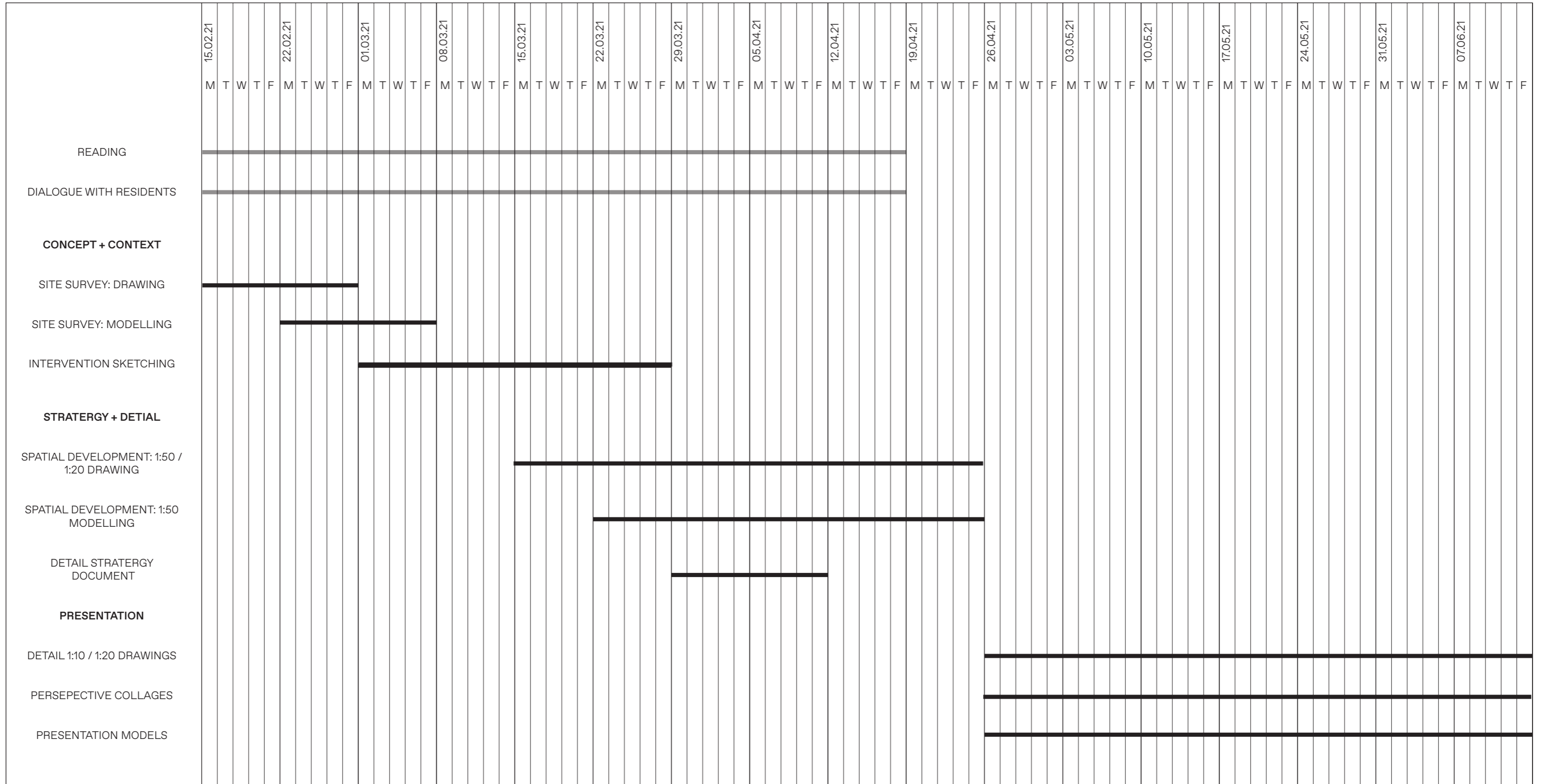
1:20 Existing section models - card
1:20 Existing details drawings
1:100 Existing site drawings
Line drawing collages of existing details

1:50 Proposed drawings
1:20 / 1:10 Detail drawings
1:20 Final presentation models
Perspective collages

A4 Process documentation



SCHEDULE



PAGE NOTES

- 1 Koolhaas, Rem. 2010. Art Forum Summer 2010, VOL. 48, NO. 10
- 2 “Countryside” (lecture, Amsterdam, Netherlands, Apr. 24, 2012), OMA, <https://oma.eu/lectures/countryside>
- 3 Danish Agriculture & Food Council | Denmark – a Food and Farming Country | Facts & Figures 2019
<https://agricultureandfood.dk/news-and-press/news/2020/facts-and-figures>
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Chatham House | Food system impacts on biodiversity loss | Three levers for food system transformation in support of nature
<https://www.chathamhouse.org/2021/02/food-system-impacts-biodiversity-loss>

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