

# A Sculpture Garden

Proposal for the Slovak Pavilion, Venice 2012

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# A Sculpture Garden

If you study the original plans for the Slovak National Gallery by Vladimír Dedeček, you find that even in the earliest sketches several areas were laid out for sculpture gardens for the collection of international and Slovak modern sculpture.

One was to be placed behind the open air theatre, and to extend into a space under the administration building. The garden would consist of terraced containers similar to the ones in front of the museum, although simpler in their construction. Another was to be found on the roof of the large car park behind the administration building, which was supposed to rise in several terraced storeys. The spaces were connected to form pathways through the complex of buildings for the visitor.

For financial reasons none of these were ever realised. Behind the projection screen in the open air theatre you can see some of the terraces which were to contain the sculptures, today simply scrub. Under the administration building, in a space that is now used for storage, you can still find the completed terraces, but they were never in use. The passage between the two spaces is closed.

The remains of the garden in the open air theatre can be viewed through the white semitransparent wall to the theatre. This wall comprises the second important element in our proposal. The wall itself is interesting. It is typical for its time, but at the same time it evokes the feeling of another climate, another continent. It suggests a relation to modern architecture in Latin America or Africa. We are interested in this international aspect of the architecture, and the general capacity of architecture to allow associations to somewhere else.

## A section

Our proposal for the Slovak pavilion in the Venice Giardini concentrates on these gardens, on the promises that you connect with such an idea, the inaccessibility of these spaces and the failure to really understand what they were meant to be, even more for us as foreigners.

What art should it contain? Who would have chosen it? What kind of generous flowing spaces could have been reality here in the middle of Bratislava? What could such a space have generated in the Museum and the city?

In our proposal a section of the garden and the wall is rebuilt in the pavilion in 1:1, replicating the material as accurate as possible. The volumes of the terraces are reconstructed and filled with earth, but does not contain any plants or sculptures. The space will be filled with the rising volumes and the steps leading up and then down again behind the volumes. The quite elegant character of the volumes and the space they generate becomes visible.

The audience cannot enter through the main entrance, but views the space through the perforated brick wall. Only through the back door you can enter the space. However this must not be announced publicly, and the guards should be instructed not to tell the audience. Only who goes to look and tries on his own to enter, or the ones who might hear a rumour that this is possible, will find the door open. When people see other visitors through the wall, they will also try to find the entrance, when the space is empty many will not even try to enter.

In a way you could say that the terraces stay empty as a projection screen for whatever one could have imagined them to contain. The display becomes a minimal sculpture itself. The installation of the perforated brick wall and the terraces put the visitor in relation to both objects. The brick wall becomes a metaphor for inaccessibility of the sculpture garden, which exists only on the plan. It is at once a wall, a screen, the paper of the plan, a metaphor for the time which lies between the original idea and us.

As an integral part of the project we would like to publish a small publication about the background of the project and the architecture it addresses.

## A museum

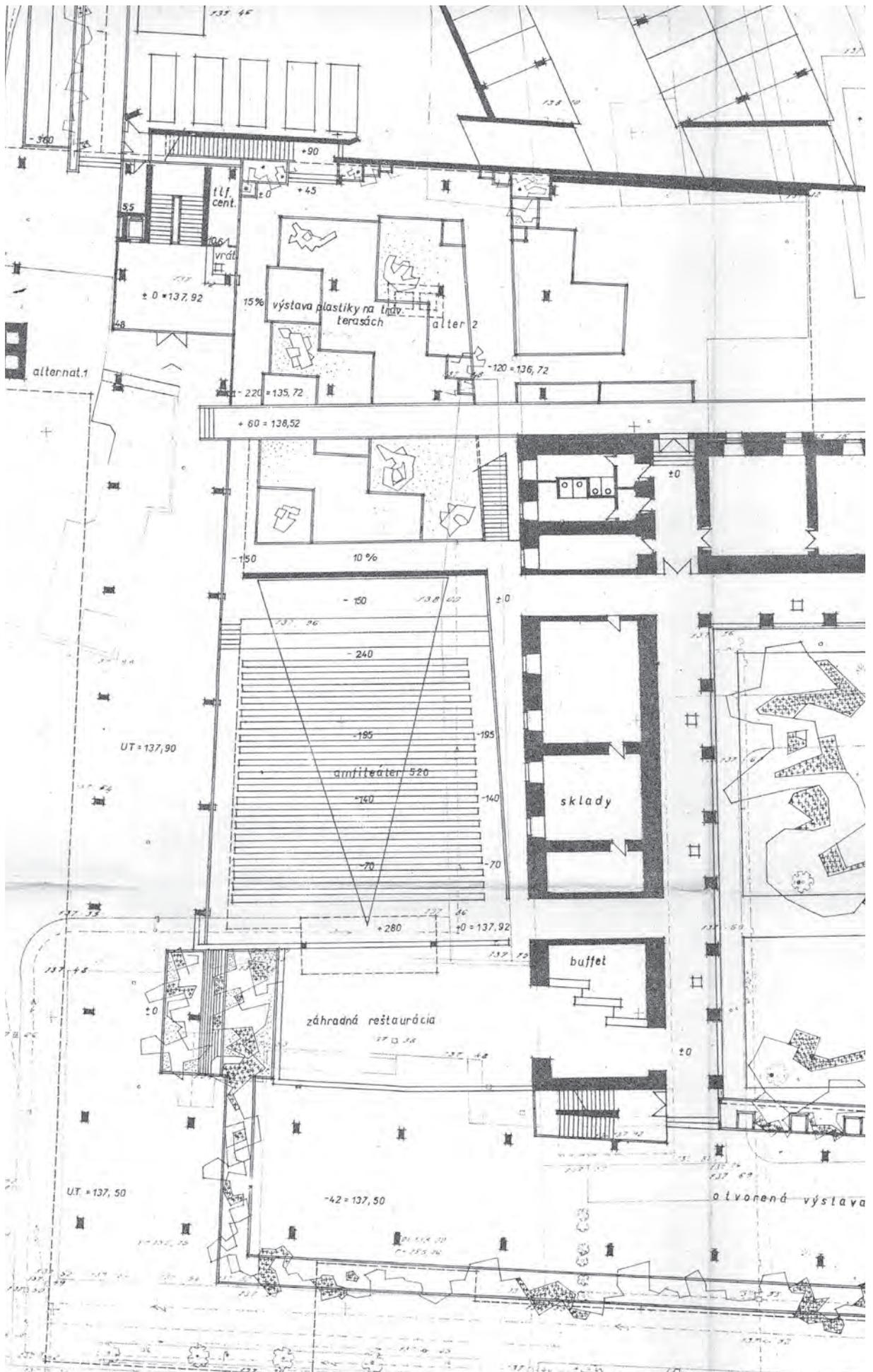
Large parts of the SNG were not built, and even in the reduced form it was and still is a controversial building. Grand gestures of the original project drowned in pragmatism of planning and constructing and perhaps the failure to make the sculpture gardens a reality can be seen as symbolic for this general amputation of the building.

A sculpture garden or patio is a typical part of a modern museum, most prominent probably the sculpture garden of MOMA New York. Also here it is relevant to think about what happened to the idea of the modern museum, what kind of reality did it have in a communist society, and what has happened to this kind of idea (and museum) in our contemporary thinking about the museum as site?

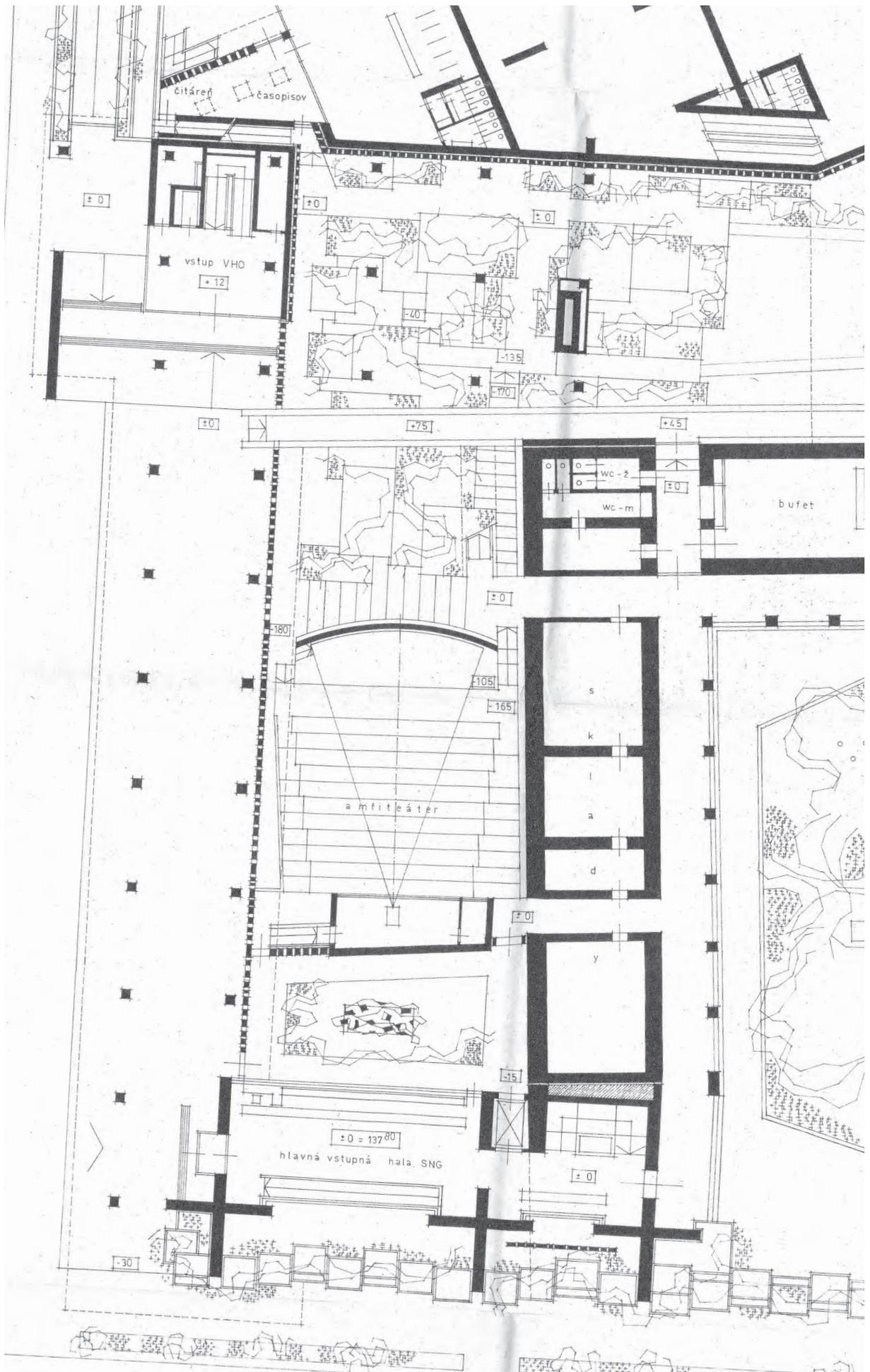
The context of an actual garden for art, the Giardini in the Venice Biennial, obviously also plays a part. We find that presenting this little section of uncompleted Slovak architectural history in the conglomerate of national representations particularly interesting, and we think that the quality of Vladimír Dedeček's work deserves some attention, beyond the idea of a particularly eastern modernism.

The SNG will hopefully be renovated soon. By then the unfulfilled (utopic) spaces of the open air theatre and the traces of the sculpture garden will most probably be erased to make space for the actual needs of a contemporary museum. But while this process is taking place, we find it important to consider what these spaces were actually meant to have been and what kind of ideas they were connected to.

Sofie Thorsen & Walter Kräutler  
January 2012

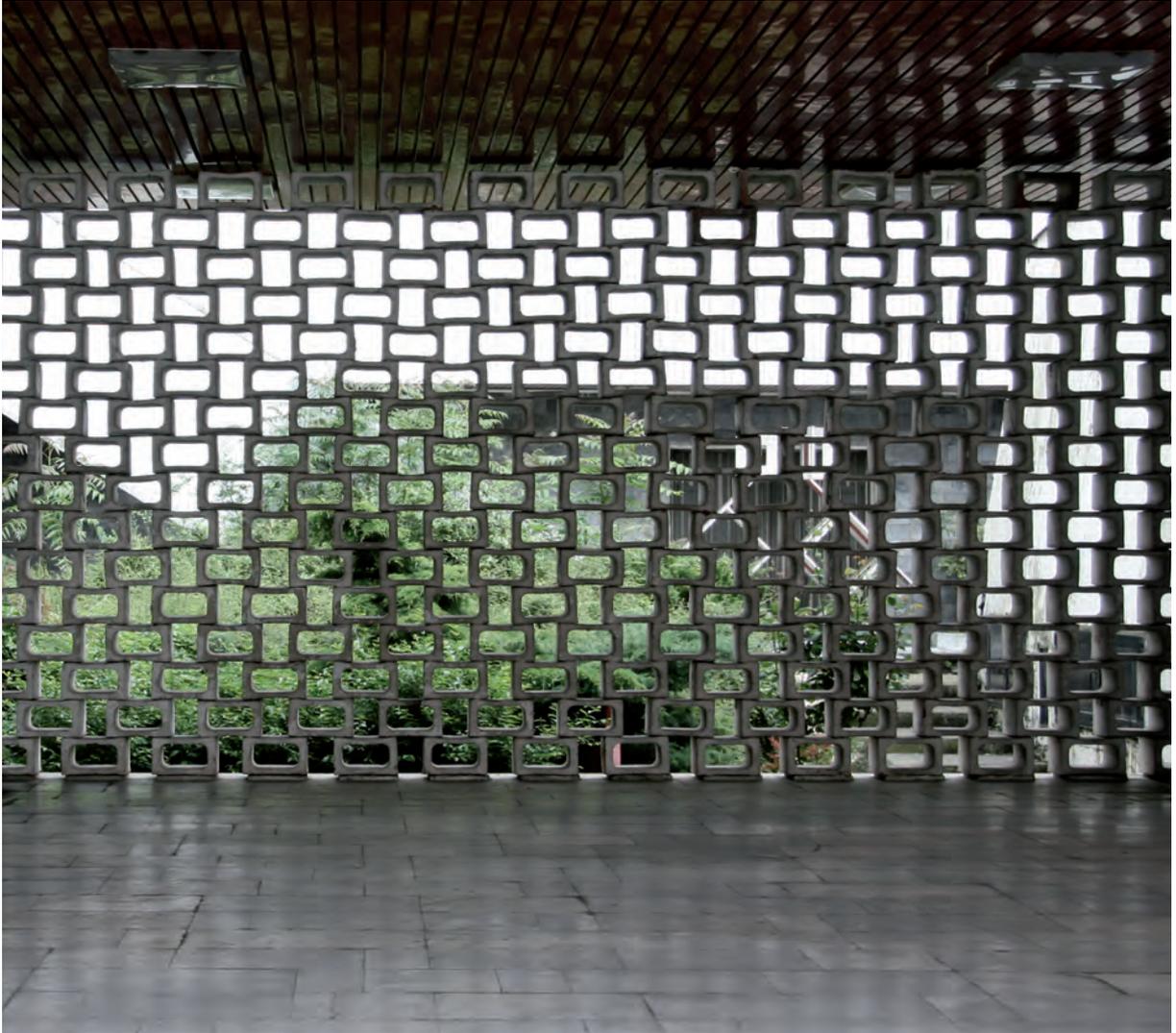


Floorplan  
Project from 63-64, plan dated 1967



Floorplan  
project from 1967 (plan dated 1979)

Current situation



View from the street at the wall



Closeup of the wall, view to the open air theatre



The openair site for the planned sculpture garden, behind the projection screen



Actual situation  
closeup of terraces



The garden was planned to continue into the space under the administration building under the „bridge“ or „corridor“ which is here seen with the red panels. The wall in the left of the picture was constructed when it became clear that there would not be enough funding to complete the sculpture garden.



The terraces under the administration building, today used for storage.  
The perforated wall is the continuation of the wall between the street and the open air theatre.



Closeup of the terraces.

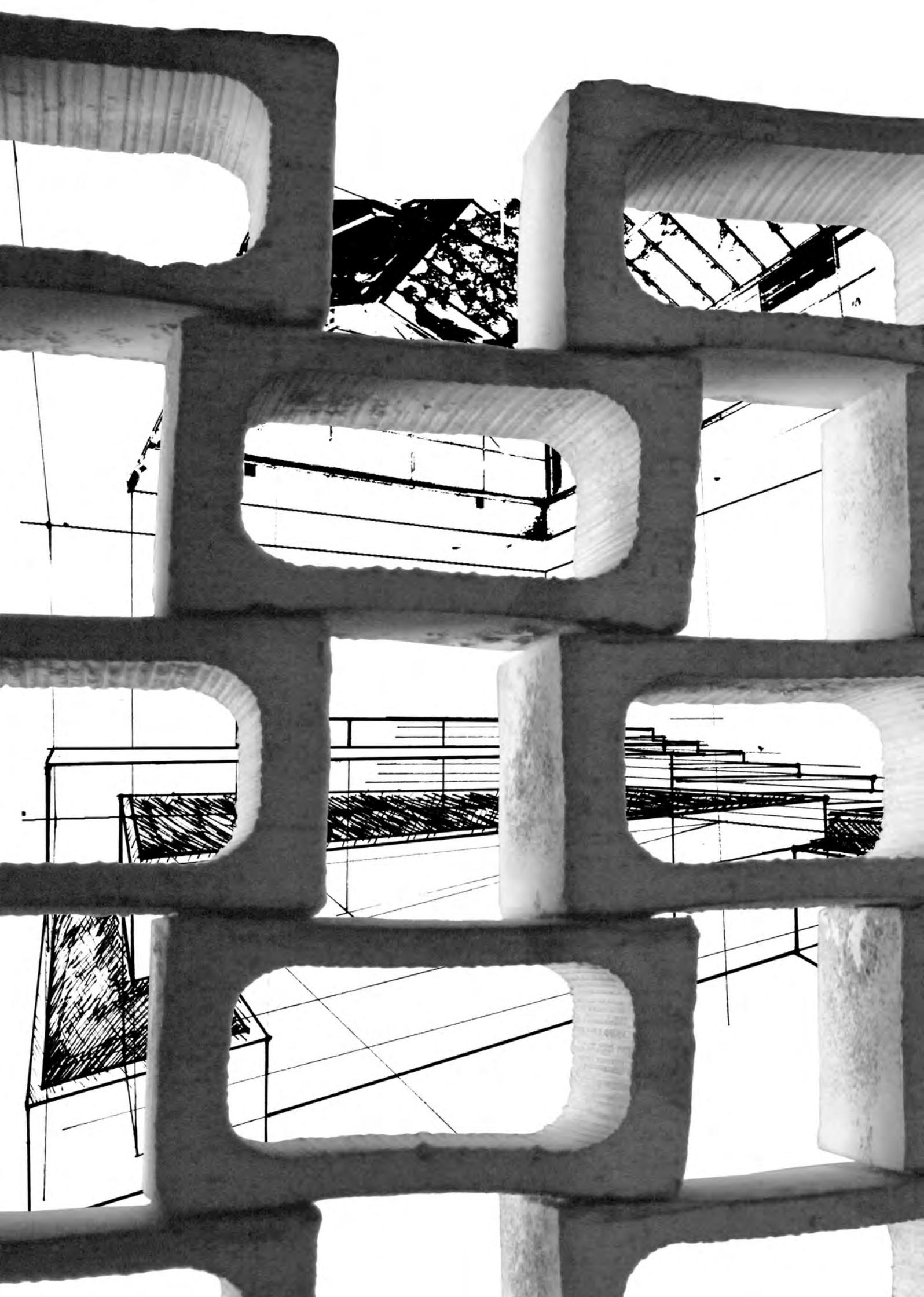


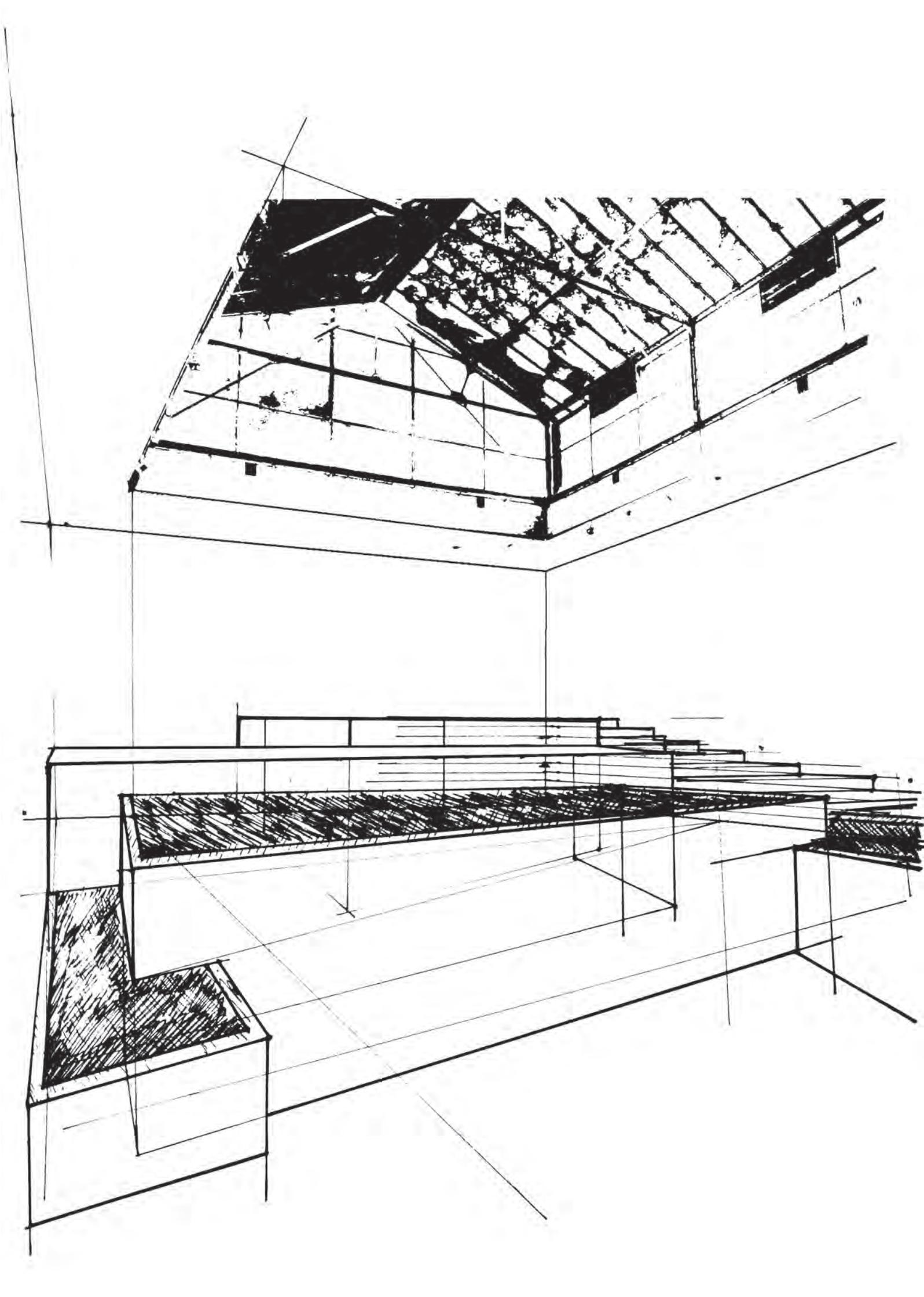
The constructed terraces under the administration building, today used for storage

# Project Proposal

# A Sculpture Garden

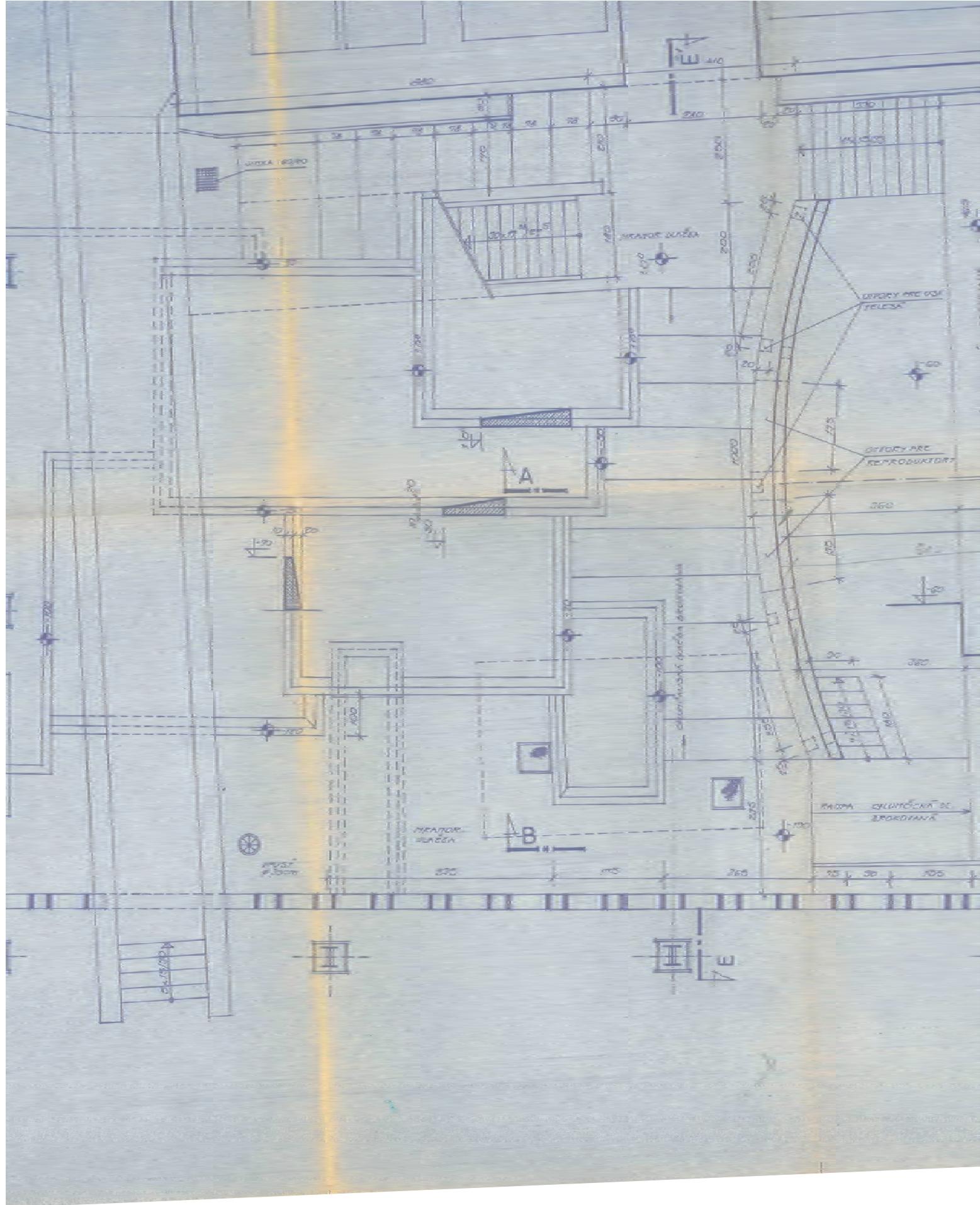
perspective

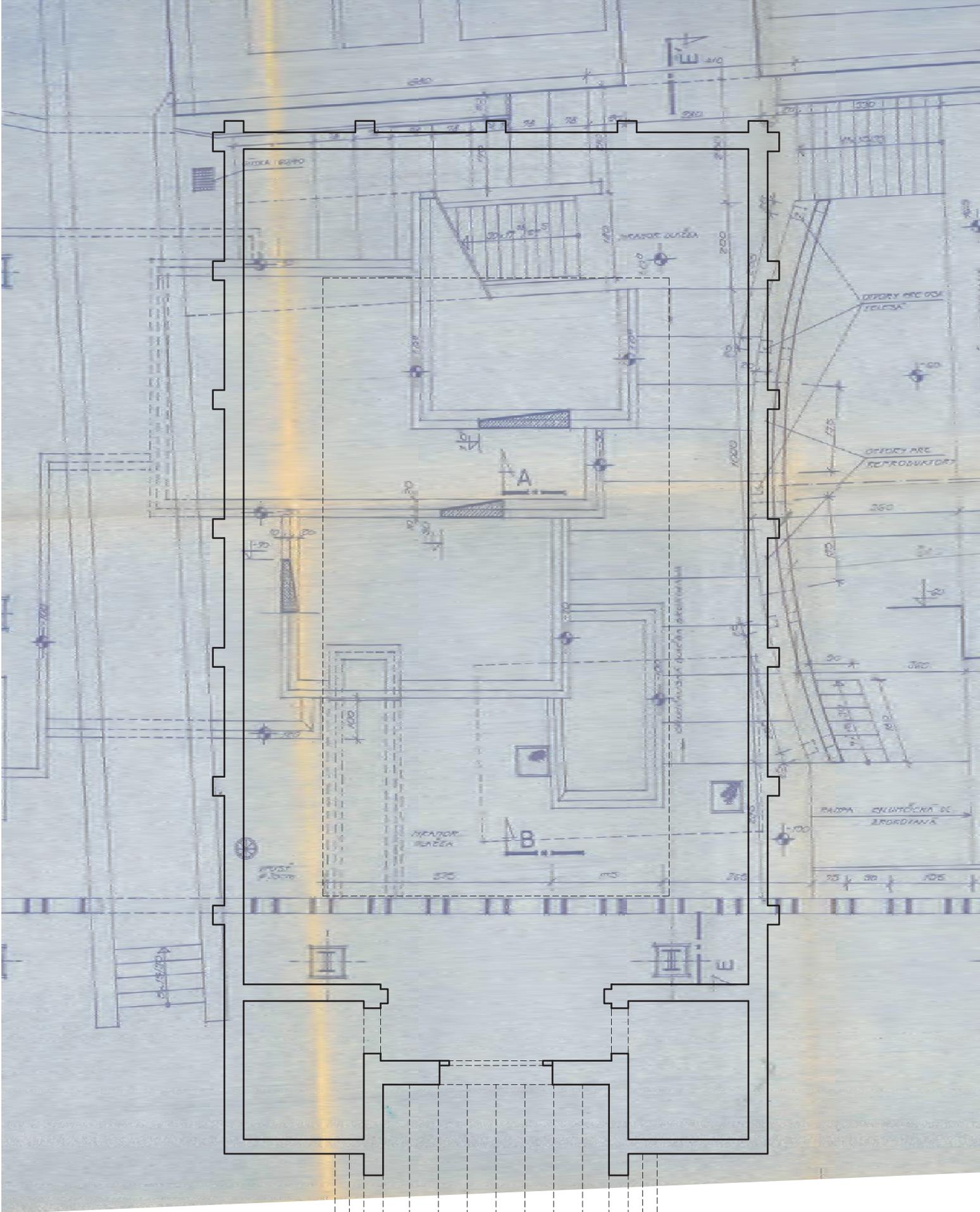


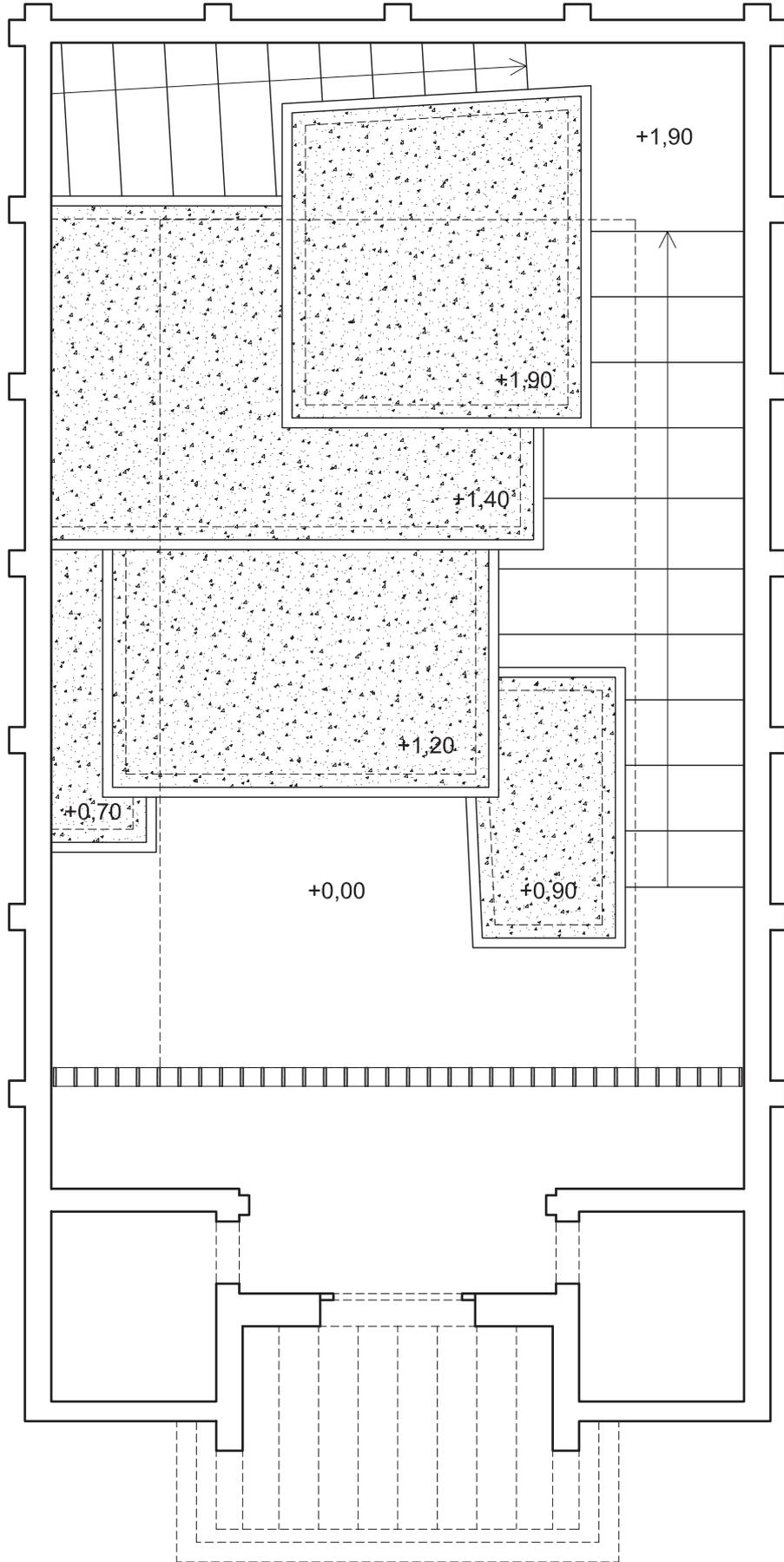


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## Floor plan



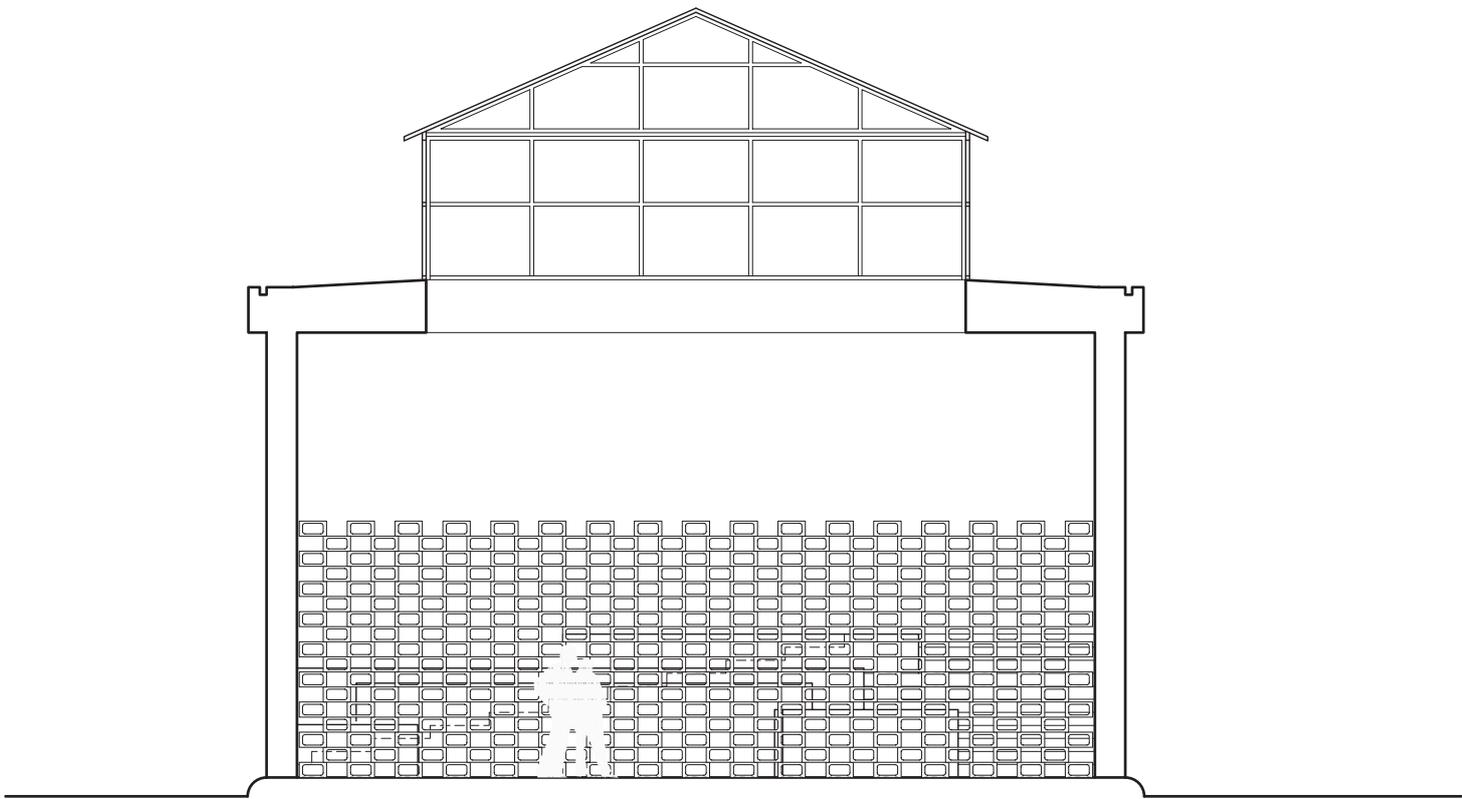


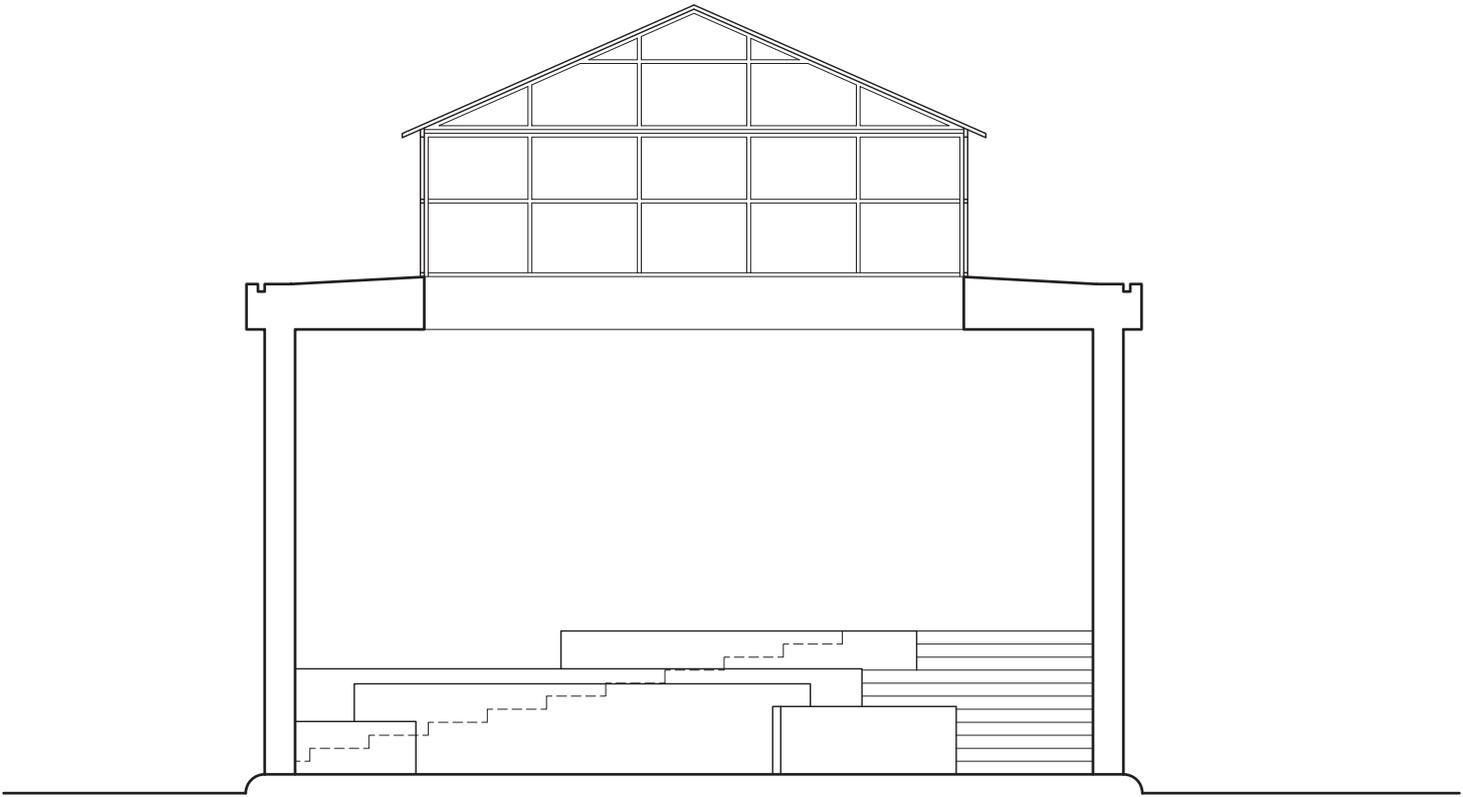


# A Sculpture Garden

Cross section







# A Sculpture Garden

Longitudinal section

