

[UN]FINISHED

Complex R



Thank you

## Abstract

[Un]finished is the story of a project about a bunker landscape, part of the Atlantic wall (1942). On such a contested site, the bunker complex Rijksdorp near The Hague, tensions between opposing forces are put on display. Is it a nature reserve only? Is it cultural heritage? Is it war architecture?

The main intention is to reveal the hidden realities of these bunkers and their landscape. The site becomes a dynamic gesture, cultivating a cultural identity of openness and curiosity.

As a memorial, this landscape wants to offer an experience of sensing the relationship between lightness and horror, chaos and order. As a meditative “journey of awareness” in a memory landscape. Themes of time, light and dark, pain and death, are evoked and experienced. Coherence is achieved by accentuating a new center in the complex devoted to a new ritual of disposing human and non-human bodies. As artistic expression, this ritual about the transient nature of physical bodies marks itself as the transformative heart of the site.

This challenge is a timely one. The war ruins of the Atlantikwall need more attention than they have received until now. As a complex heritage they represent spaces of anxiety, and trauma. Yet, they are often denied full understanding of this meaning as we are not able, nor willing to look trauma into its eyes. The central questions then are: how may these objects be brought to speak? How may the past serve the now?

Should we not aim to activate personal engagement, instead of showing history as a passive image? How to reveal the vital, living character of such places that transcends their history? Such negated sites present ‘intervals of possibility’, a ‘healing memorial’.

The starting point is the belief that architecture may come into being out of its own specific place in the same way nature creates its own habitat from its own internal growth. Another one is the urgency for concrete stories about the co-existence of architecture, history, humans, animals, plants, and insects. Healing means: architecture, place, and stories are intimately connected, helping to understand and accept the cycle of life.

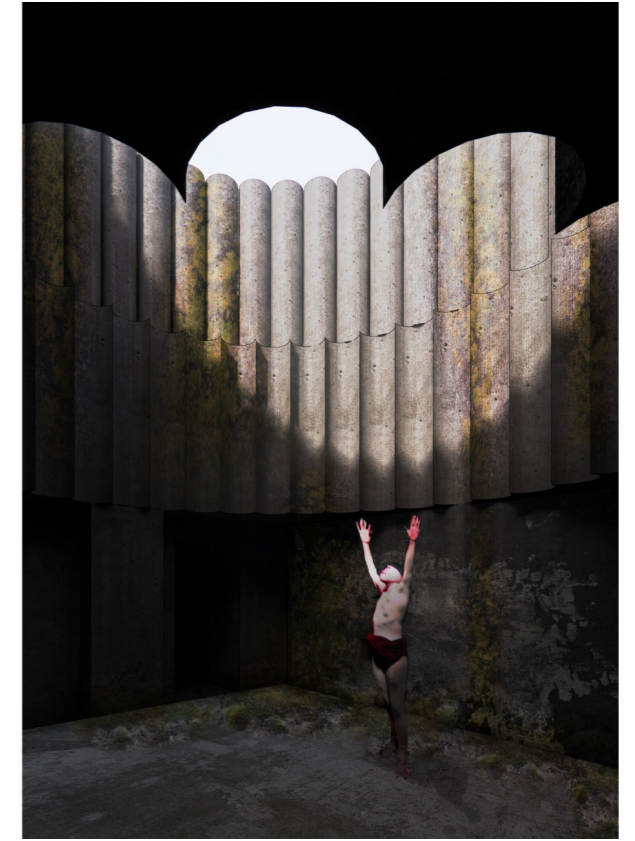
No new architecture was needed, as everything was already there. The main approach is to deal with the site as a three-layered composition that consists of landscape, architecture, and program. Tools used are: Removing, drilling holes in both the bunkers and the landscape. Replacing, often material removed will be reused. Connecting, walks will link the different parts as a narrative together. The different bunkers and their inner rooms will find a connection with each other and the landscape. Minimal adding, this will enhance the role of the architectonic object.

The project concentrates on creating a coherent whole, where the visitor may follow a narrative or easily create his own. The project intends to bring different rituals under one roof, such as artistic, mournful, festive, and educational events.

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RAvB  
Saeed Jarrous  
12-05-2023, Rotterdam



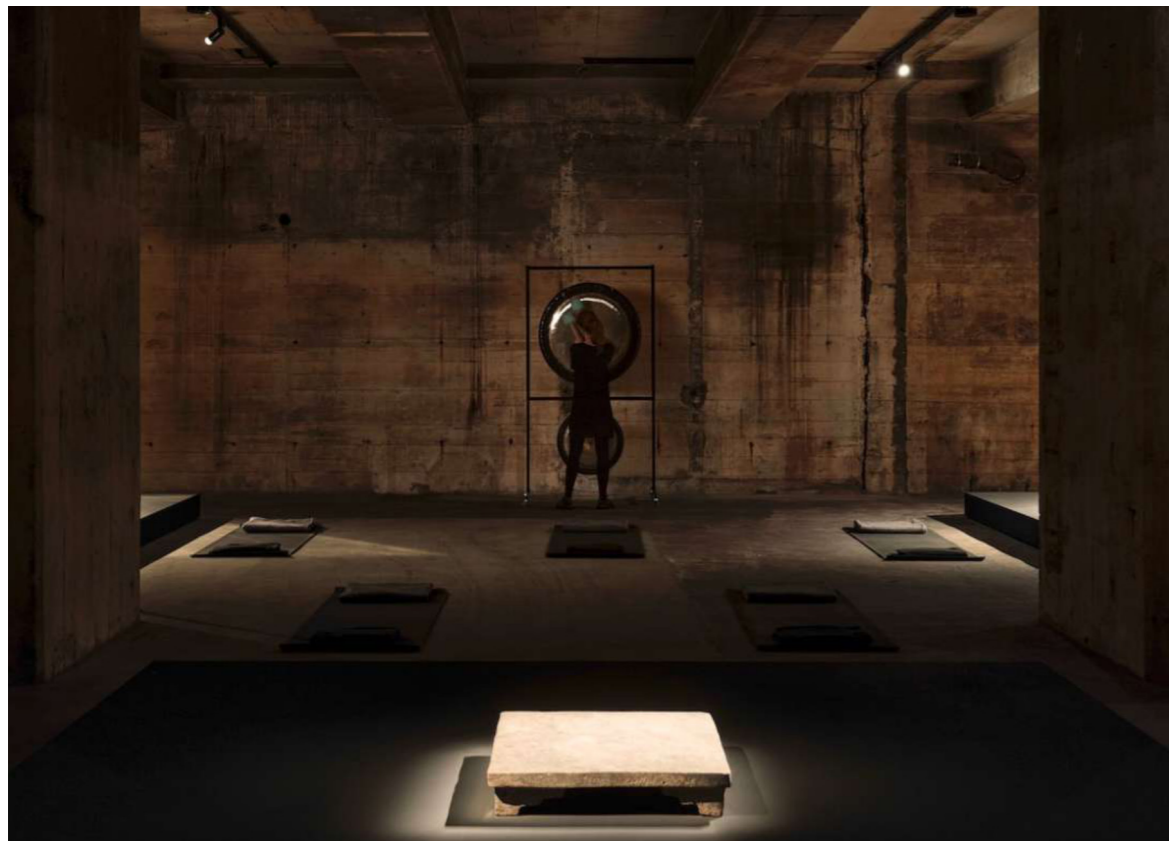
## Opening

In 2008 I graduated as an architect in Syria, followed by seven years of practice in Syria and Iraq. The war in the Middle East and moving to Europe as a refugee were enough to drag me into an existential crisis. The inner and outer journey of finding answers had and still plays a significant role in positioning myself within the field of architecture. The intention therefore is to focus on what could bring about profound insights regarding physical and mental equilibrium.

The war in Syria left me with a profound sensibility for how sites may radically be transformed. At the Feurele Foundation in Berlin, a bunker from WW2, I became fascinated by how a bunker of a totalitarian regime, was transformed into a house of art, a playful interplay between old and new. A place that has the capacity to invent itself endlessly. Artifacts without labels, a precise play of light and darkness, and a very impressive haptic environment. Quite unexpectedly I experienced this place as a healing site. Meaning, an interval of endless possibilities. Here I made an important discovery: architecture can help us move through different layers of reality.

With these experiences I recognized the possibility of transforming one of the Atlantikwall locations in the Netherlands. Thus, the intention arose to have my chosen site function as a “healing memorial”. As a meditative “journey of awareness”. This journey of awareness is intended to offer the visitor a memory landscape in which set of themes is evoked and experienced. As passages through time, light and dark, through pain and death, by purification and a merging with earth, water, trees and animals.

Usually, we think of a memorial in general terms: a statue or structure established to evoke with people the memory of a person, craft or event. A suspended reality that relates to a specific time and culture, bearing the responsibility to dictate an emotional or intellectual lesson or maybe both. But what if the memory is a universally experienced human quality? That paradoxically and ultimately has nothing to dictate but wants us simply to become aware.



Berlin, Feuerle Foundation

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Homs, Syria



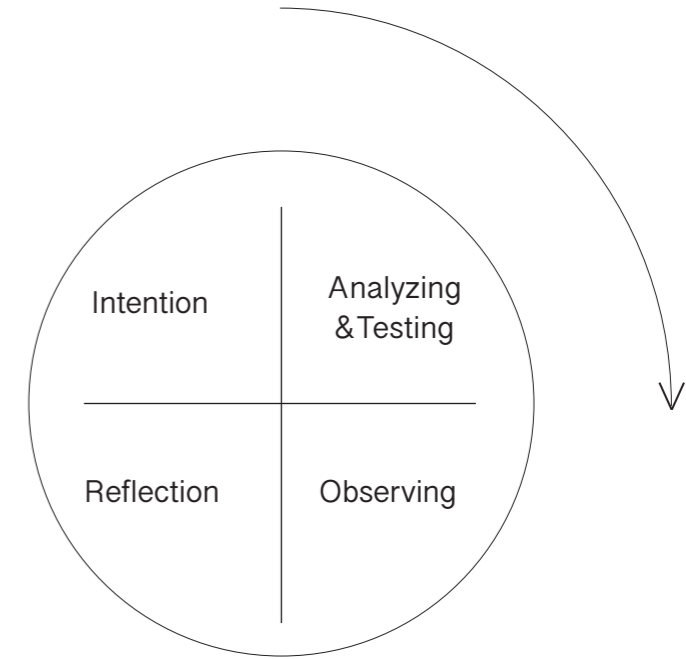
Rijksdorp, Atlantikwall

## A reflection

Learning to consciously go through what I would call “a cycle of creation” as many times as necessary to bring forth a mature design, is a great gift.

Such a cycle plays itself out at three main levels: at the whole design process, at each of the six design-stages, and at the level of any design decision.

The cycle starts with intention, then an act of analyzing and testing spatially and/or lyrically, then looking closely at the results, do they meet the intention? Are they clear and simple? How to improve? The results sometimes are final, and at other times are not, in that case they form the beginning of a new cycle.



# Assignment

## Seeking answers

The challenge is to find an answer to how the past may serve the now. Here we should aim to activate personal engagement, instead of showing history as a passive staged image. It is important that architectural sites establish a dialogue between past and present. This concerns especially architecture like buildings serving political power, defense systems, warzones, created during times of political upheaval. They often represent spaces of anxiety, and trauma. But they are often denied full understanding of this meaning as we are not able, nor wanting to look trauma into its eyes. Instead of escaping this confrontation, there lays great value in discovering the collective understanding of this type of architecture, its spaces and their intersection with landscape and its ecology.

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Battery Lindemann, key visual of the Atlantikwall-Myth



# Questions

Here several questions arise:

How can existing context be re-read, understood, valued and further developed? How to reveal the vital, living character of such places that transcends their history? How could architecture set the needed conditions for moral revolutions? How can the care for heritage and new developments go hand in hand? Are such sites not testing grounds where different methodologies, strategies and ideals could be implemented? Are places of trauma not sites where human and non-human can meet and coexist? Where life and death are one, where past, present and future collide? How to interpret such negated sites as 'healing sites', as 'intervals of possibility' where we seek an integral approach of design?



## Inclusivity of nature and man

This suggests creating architecture that doesn't have one singular meaning or function, rather a very specific atmosphere that answers the urgent need for meaning, reflection and interaction. This asks for an integrality and inclusivity of nature and man, history and the now, culture and ecology. And an expression of our deep longing of transcending the interactions of the mundane. A place where spectators might find peace in the tragedies.

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Hibernating bats in the bunkers



Excursions

## Testing ground

Theory forms the ground that will be tested by a location, which in turn may enrich theory. As a testing ground, the remains of the Atlantikwall offer a good opportunity for such an endeavor. The associative poetic properties of the site fosters the concept of creating a space as an ideal that helps understand and accept the cycle of life. The project intends to bring different rituals under one roof, such as artistic, mournful, festive, and educational events.

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Rich space

## Site

The chosen site, COMPLEX R, lays at the heart of the metropolitan landscape of the western Netherlands as part of the Atlantic wall. West of the site sits the national park Hollandsche Duinen, to the east lays the villapark Rijksdorp. This national park extends from Hoek van Holland to Katwijk aan Zee.

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Location



## Design question

To summarize: the design question is an investigation into the role of (contested) heritage in the development of our present environment. The answer tries to draw attention to such a category by transforming it into a defined collective healing memorial. A dynamic gesture that cultivates a cultural identity of openness and curiosity.

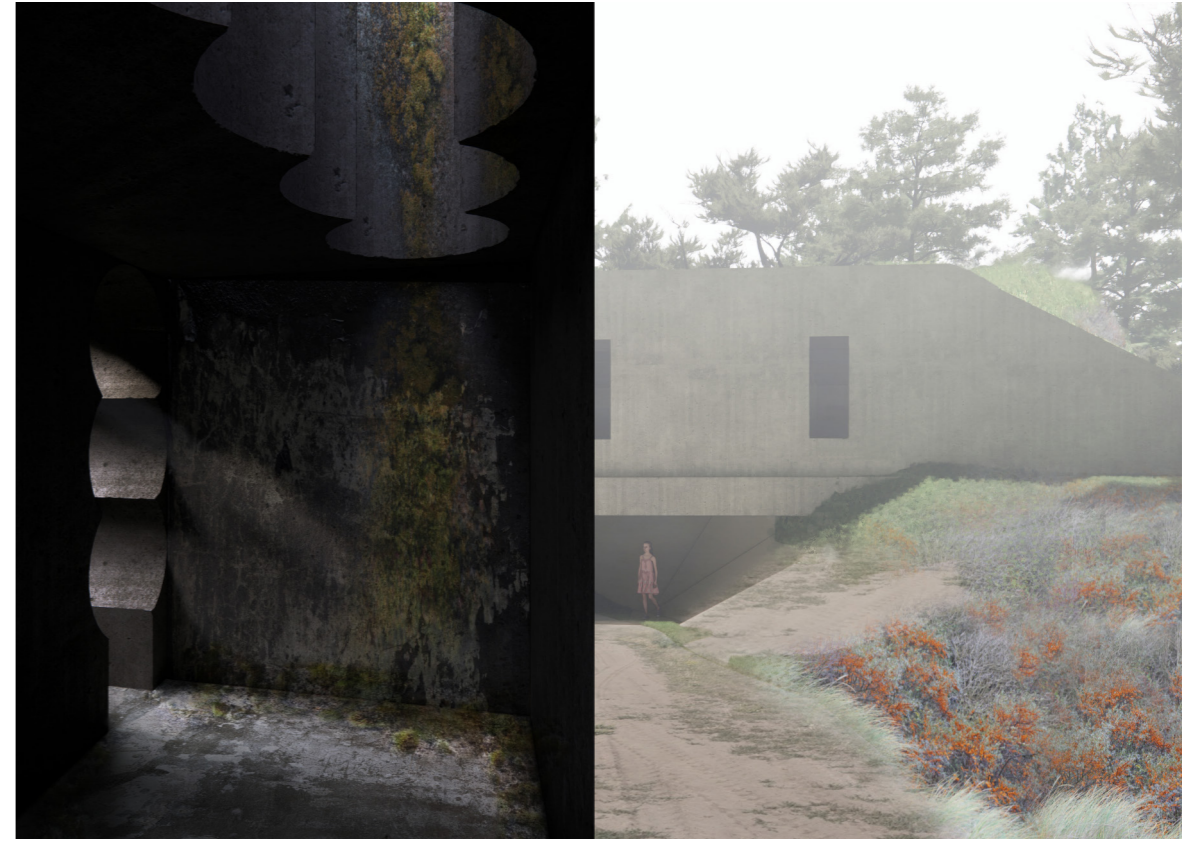
This challenge is a timely one. There is a growing interest in sites of the Atlantic Wall. The question remains: how these objects may speak for themselves?

I see the site as a meditative “journey of awareness”. This journey of awareness is intended to offer the visitor a memory landscape in which set of themes are evoked and experienced. As passages through time, light and dark, through pain and death, by purification and a merging with earth, water and trees and animals.

In an everyday reality where human attention is increasingly affected, a “remembrance by unharmed practice” of “becoming aware”, of “becoming aware of our true nature” may sound as an urgent call.

The core experience here is about practicing being at once attentive and at ease in the middle of drama and find healing.

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Design intention, revealing the vital living character of the space

# Analysis & Research

## Three layers

From the beginning, the main intention has been to open a dialogue with the hidden realities of the bunkers, as gems that await discovery. The main approach is to deal with the site as a three-layered composition that consists of topography/landscape, architecture, and program.

The base of such layered composition consists mainly of two elements: 1. my belief that architecture may come into being out of its own specific place in the same way nature creates a habitat out of its own internal growth. 2. the urgency for concrete stories about an interconnected architecture, history, and future on the one hand and the co-existence of humans, animals, plants, and insects on the other hand. Architecture, place, and stories are intimately connected.

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Hidden inner mazes



Emergence of around 50 new types of mosses

## Land property

Going back in time, the site was a land property to some large family in Rijksdorp. A villa once stood on the property, now demolished. The only element is a historical iron gate, now unsued and forgotten.

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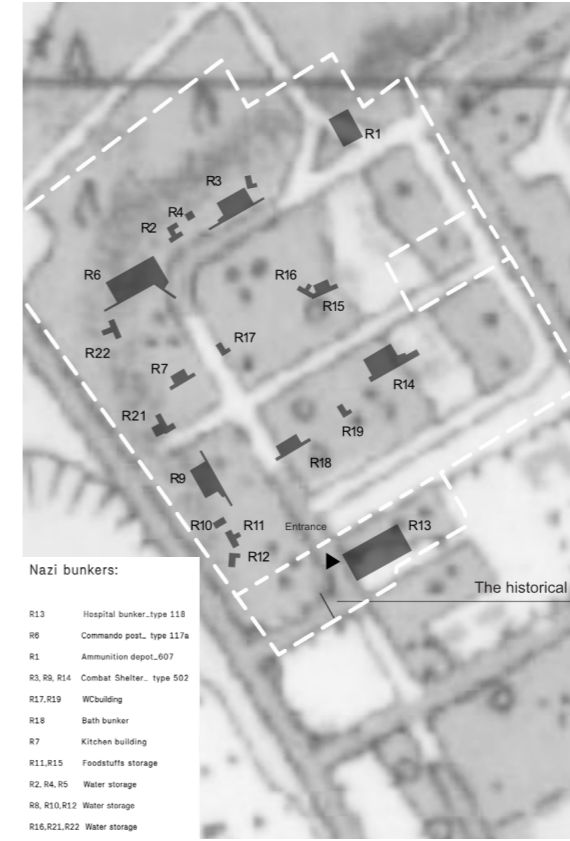
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Site, 1875

# Bunker Complex Rijksdorp

The Bunker Complex Rijksdorp near The Hague, was realized by Nazi-Germany as part of the Atlantikwall. It was reused during the Cold War by the Dutch Luchtmacht to fulfill the same function as its previous predecessor, a command and connection center. The site was opened to the public for the first time in 1994. As a result, till the present-day, the site has been marked by its enclosed character. This works in our advantage in fostering the idea of sacred space awaiting discovery.



Site, 1942



Site, today



## Dune forest

A plan from the Arcadis report of 2017 shows healthy forests in green, and less healthy forests in red. Complex R is a combination of these two.

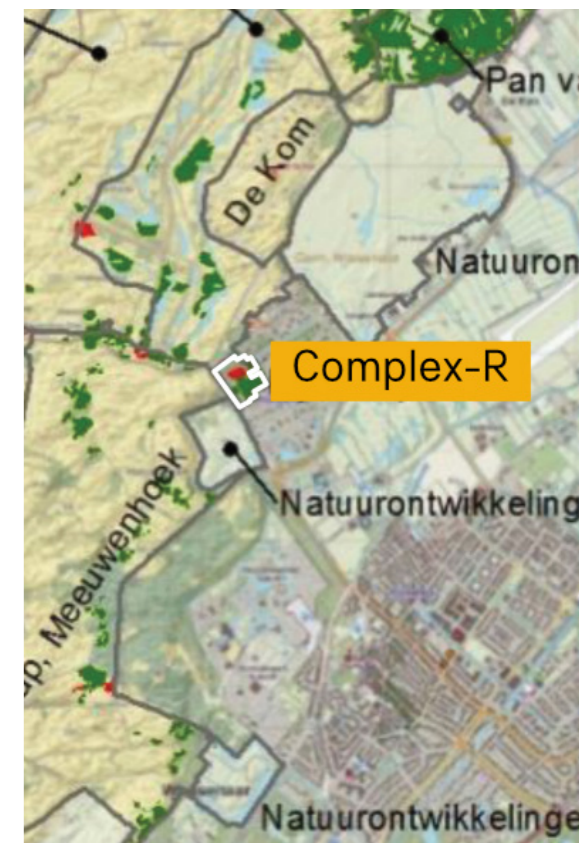
\* Beheerplan bijzondere natuurwaarden Meijendel & Berkheide 2016 - 2022

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Good (green) and bad (red) forest quality, Arcadis report \*



## Park forest

Zooming in, the central area, marked in red, is less healthy forest. This contradicts the unique status as a park forest. According to the Arcadis Report, the essence of a park forest is its open, closed and cared for space.

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Site, bad forest quality



# Bats

I discovered that the area is famous for being populated by different types of bats. My design efforts concentrate on bunkers free from them.

My first step towards spatial analysis was exploring the site. By creating a collage, I tried to recompose the different landscapes, spaces and ecologies, more in particular the way the site is experienced. Through that I discovered the richness of stories embedded in the topography and started understanding the qualities of the site as something to preserve and work with. As we all know, nature takes over eventually. Nature does not have a human agenda. It seeks a habitat, a place where to stay, to thrive, to multiply and to eventually die. It creates a habitat out of its own internal growth and so architecture may come into being out of its own specific place.



Numbers of hibernating bats

Soort	jan	feb	mrt	apr	mei	jun	jul	aug	sept	okt	nov	dec
Baardvleermuis	■	■	■	■	■			■	■	■	■	■
Franjestaart	■	■	■	■	■			■	■	■	■	■
Gw grootoorvleermuis	■	■	■	■	■			■	■	■	■	■
Watervleermuis	■	■	■	■	■			■	■	■	■	■

## Guidelines

Clarity and simplicity became the main guidelines for my project. I wanted to foster the beauty and spontaneity of the site in relation to its surrounding nature so they may be discovered by the potential visitor.

It required visiting the site often and seeing all the bunkers. While walking, I discovered how landscape took over, making this place a ruin of the past, a ruin of our own beliefs, a memory of the absurd, all this generated concrete stories. I also discovered the potential of this landscape to sense the relationships between lightness and horror, chaos and order, these became important themes for me.



## Strategy and tools

There are four important architectural features: 1. the Commando bunker 2. the Hospital bunker 3. the Bath Bunker and 4. the Combat shelter. Inside, spaces are left behind, untouched, and unused. Some buildings keep the original details in its interior, like spaces for cleaning and showering of the wounded soldiers. Forgotten activities and obligations, all passed away in time but important as invisible stories.

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Hospital bunker



Bath bunker



Combat Shelter

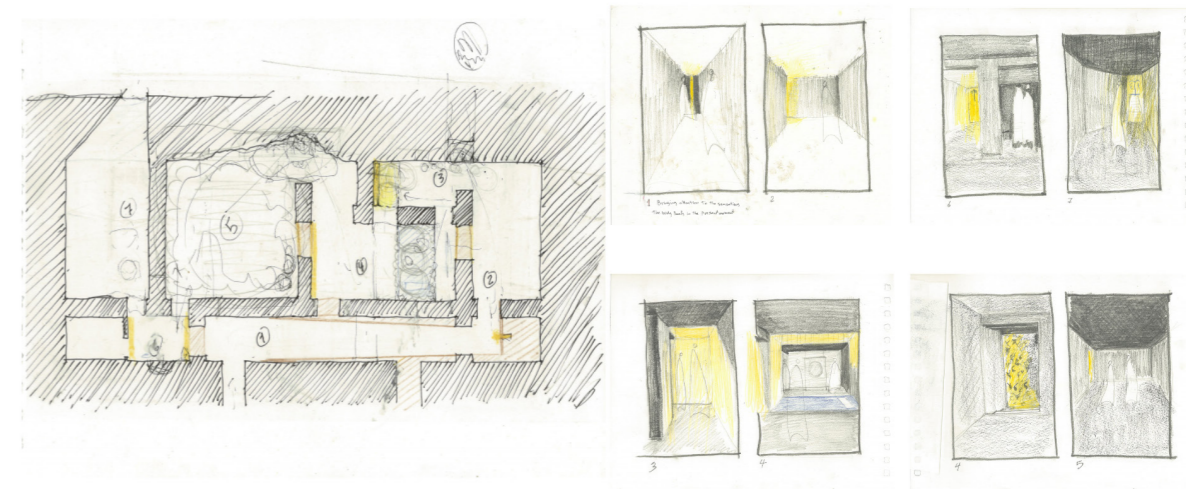


Commando bunker

## Redrawing&Sketching

After collecting materials from the archives, I started redrawing the buildings and sketching out possible scenarios. How to intervene in such conditions? How to operate with such difficult history? I concluded that no new architectural additions were needed. Everything was in front of me, in the forms of nature, concrete and material and immaterial layers upon layers of human activities, experiences, and stories.

I started therefore by playing, by removing and liberating the stiff plans from their forced layout. I also started thinking of ways to integrate light and nature in the buildings, to interlock the hidden inside to the outside.



## Toolbox

After the first attempts at defining a strategy, I decided to set in concrete what would become the three suitable actions for my design.

## Remove

The first one is removal: I believe removal is not just demolition, but an attentive action of analysis, observation and care. Removal appears at different scales: the bunkers will be opened to allow light and nature to enter. On site, removal means soil will be excavated to reveal architecture. To remove is to reveal, to remove is to eradicate, to remove is to take a position.



## Replace

The second method is replacing. Often material removed will be reused. This rubble will be instrumental in creating new objects and spaces.





## Connect

The third method is to connect. Walks will link the different parts together. The different bunkers and their inner rooms will find a connection with each other and the landscape.



Add

The last one is minimal addition; it will enhance the role of the architectonic object. It is perhaps the most invisible of the four.

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AI

Lastly, to get a grip on stories and experiential embodiment, I began playing with the atmospheres I wanted to evoke. This was done with the help of the ingenuity and randomness of Artificial Intelligence programs. Processing words and images, spaces and emotions in this way, started to give me results that I did not expect. On that basis, I introduced the idea of offering a memory landscape in which themes are evoked and experienced. Passages through time. Light and dark, pain and death, the transitory, purification, the experience of earth, water, animals, and trees. To commemorate. As ritual.

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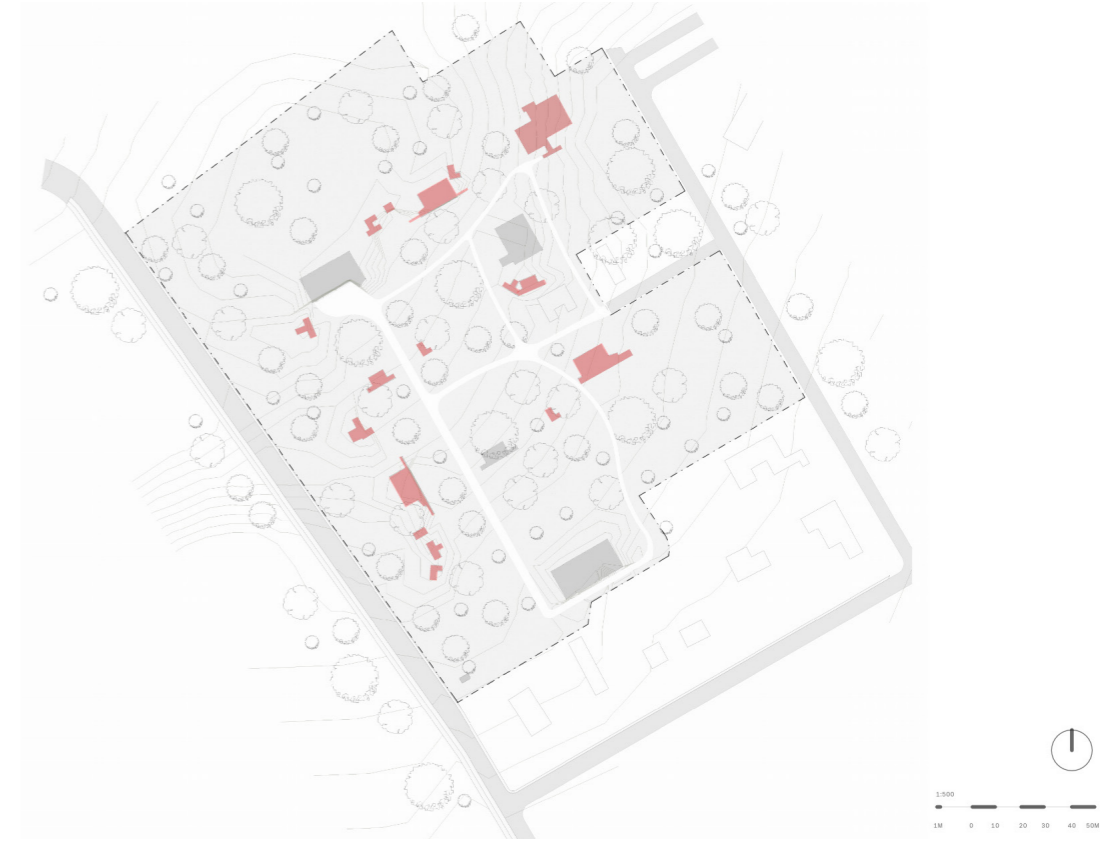
# Design Description

## Coexistence

On site bunkers co-exist in the landscape with its own ecology. The first design act in this project is to preserve and secure the presence of all living inhabitants on the site: bats, frogs, insects, birds, trees and other plants. The bats, for example, will keep on living in the bunkers where they already nest. Additionally, two more bunkers are going to accommodate more bats during winter. The exposed concrete of the bunkers are important hosts for a varied number of lichens and mosses.

The way my design is organized, wants to be in sync with the behavior patterns of other creatures extending a continuous invitation to the visitor to become aware of our human position.

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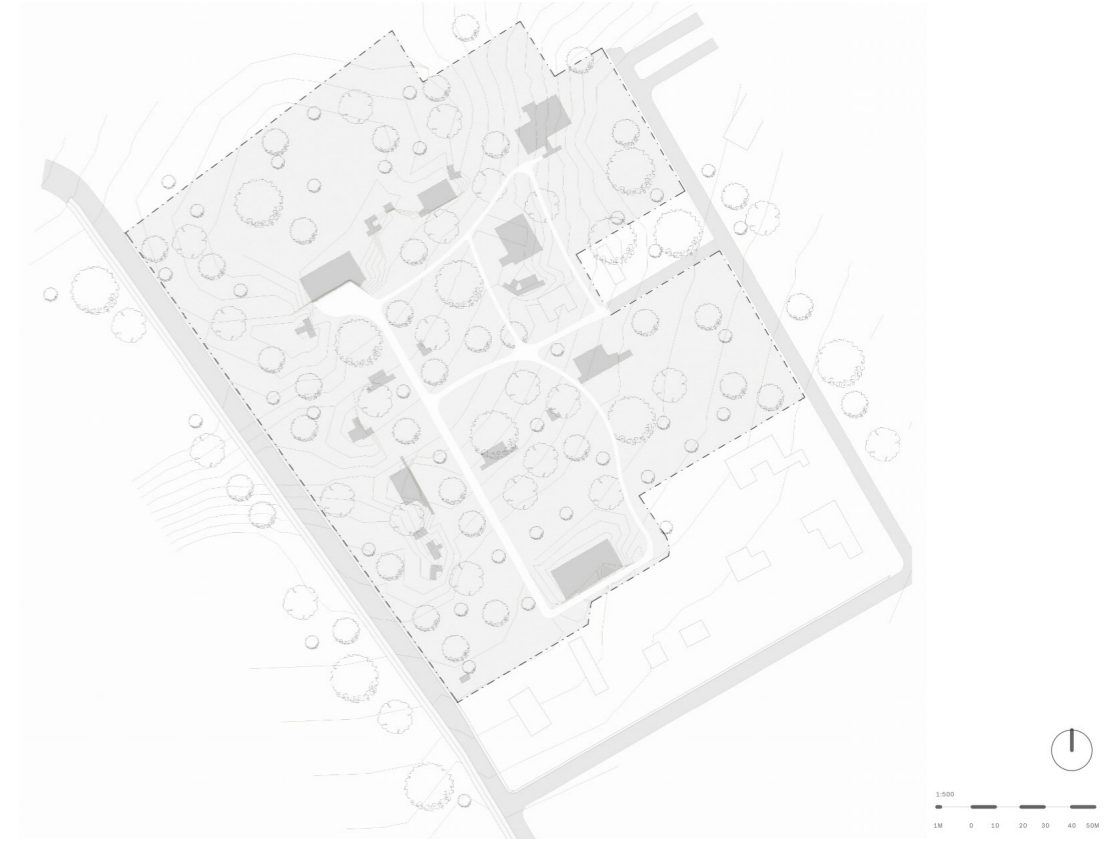
Bats bunkers

## Coherent whole

When looking at the site in its present configuration it appears unorganized. The volumes are scattered around the site without a clear hierarchy or orientation. My intention is to create a coherent whole, where the visitor may follow a narrative or easily create his own.

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## New center

As a first step I selected 5 moments in the site, and I decided to create a route including them. Their sequence is: Historical Gate, Hospital Bunker, Bath Bunker, Combat Shelter, and Commando Bunker.

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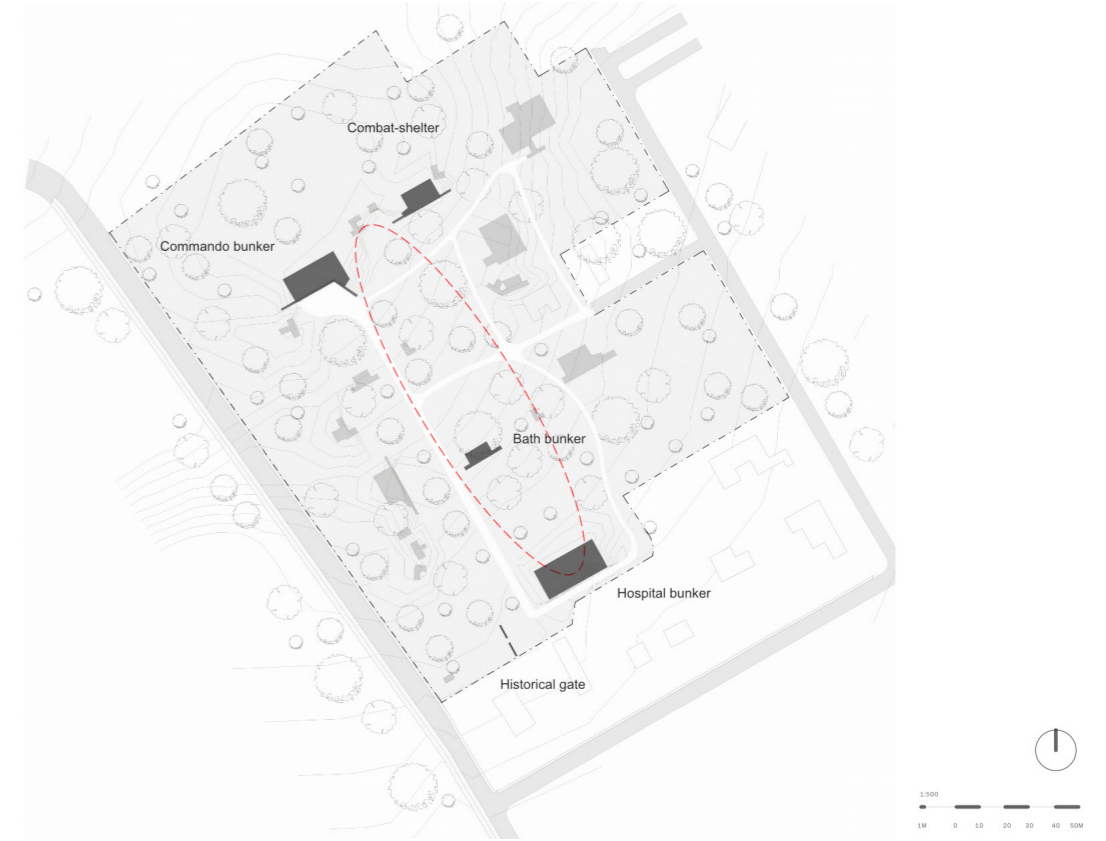


## New center

Coherence is achieved by exposing and accentuating a new center in the complex. This center coincides with the place in the forest where conditions are not optimal. The first step is to take out trees in the central area. Small trees will be replanted. This decision may seem dramatic but is in line with the proposals by Arcadis regarding the health of the site.

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## New center

Together with the trees, some of the soil around the bunkers will be removed.

This will allow us to read their hidden geometries, scale, materials, and construction methods.

Reflecting on the bunkers as objects, it will detach them from their historical significance, and give them new meanings. Exposing the concrete, will allow water and other elements to interact, and to create new ecologies.





## New center

The soil from the various removals will be collected to remodel the central area. This is a strategy to create new morphologies and new experiences in the space. The whole site slopes down from the commando bunker to the hospital bunker. This new topography will allow new perspectives and modify the old ones.

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## New rhythm

The new design will create a new rhythm in the site. Three well defined areas are recognizable:

- entrance and hospital bunker,
- center and bath bunker
- the northern area where the commando bunker and hill are.

These three areas are now linked by a designed series of walks.

The loop is a system that allows the discovery of a specific experiential story, that I will now introduce to you.

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## Historical gate

The first encounter is through the historical gate. Presently, the access to the site is located in another area. I want to bring the visitors back through the historical route. But I also want people to experience the gate as an always closed element. An obstacle right at the beginning.

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## Hospital bunker

The hospital bunker is the first encounter with the bunkers on the site. This first station is intended to work as a reset tool for the visitor. The anticipation and the emotions carry the viewer in a new space where materiality, acoustics, light, smell, proportion of space are of a different kind.



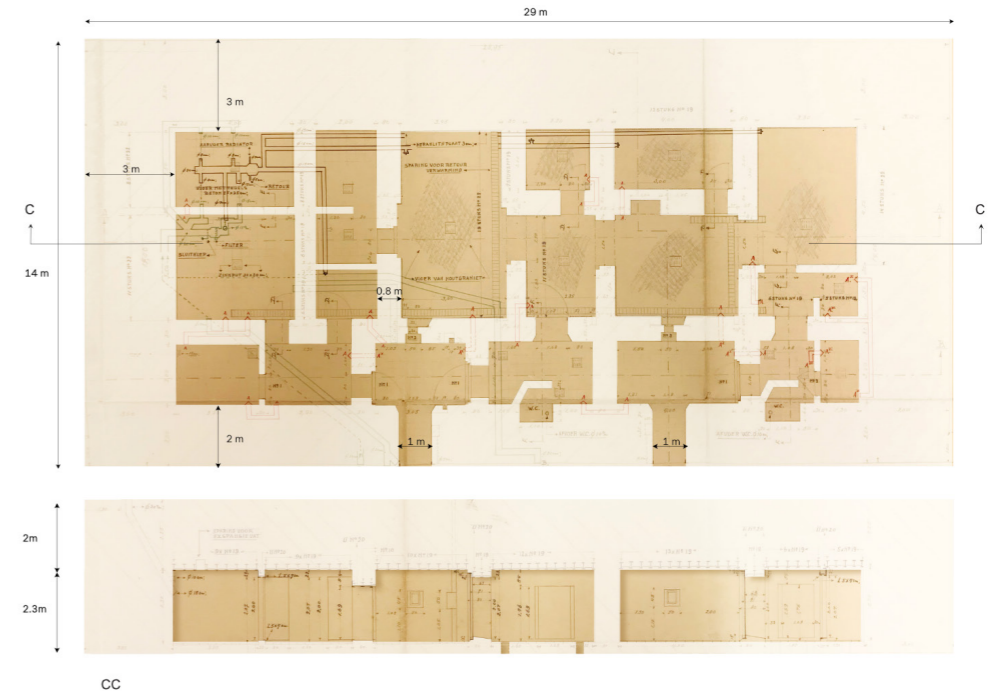
## Hospital bunker, the emotions of a wounded soldier

This building was built around efficiency, speed, and organization. The emotions of a wounded soldier were not part of this scheme. But what is it like to be on the edge of life? What does it feel like to be dying, to go from light to darkness? To be dragged into the narrow dark alleys of the underground? I was fascinated by personal stories now lost. But they are still there, one can almost feel the warmth, the fear, the thoughts, the panic, and the silence. I want to evoke some of these sensations through my design.



## Hospital bunker, muted experience

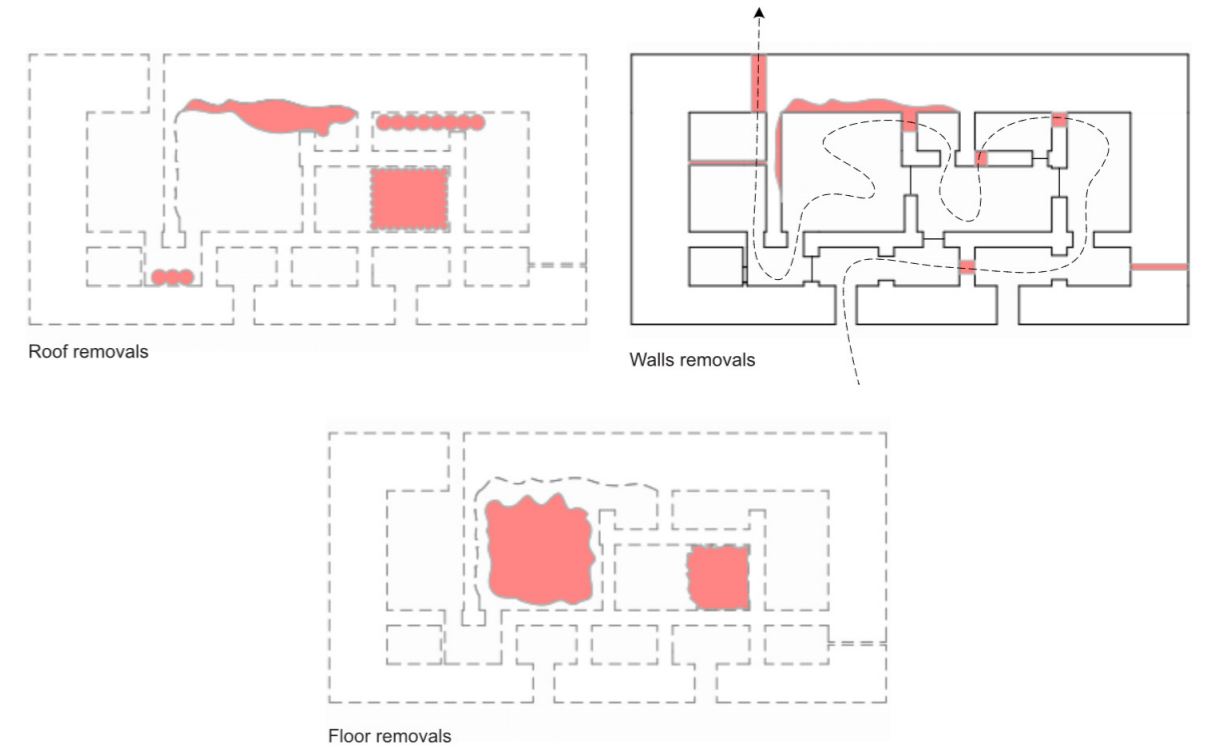
In the current situation the bunker presents itself as a closed box, an organized and muted experience. Its flow is arranged on the flow of the hospital efficiency.



## Hospital bunker, removal strategies

I started experimenting with different removal strategies. Removing part of the roof allows the staging of different effects of dark and light, and more specifically a structure of horizontal and vertical beams of light. Wall removal serves the construction of a fluid internal walk. It also connects the interior with the exterior. Floor removals serve the accommodation of vegetation and will allow deep, cave-like acoustics.

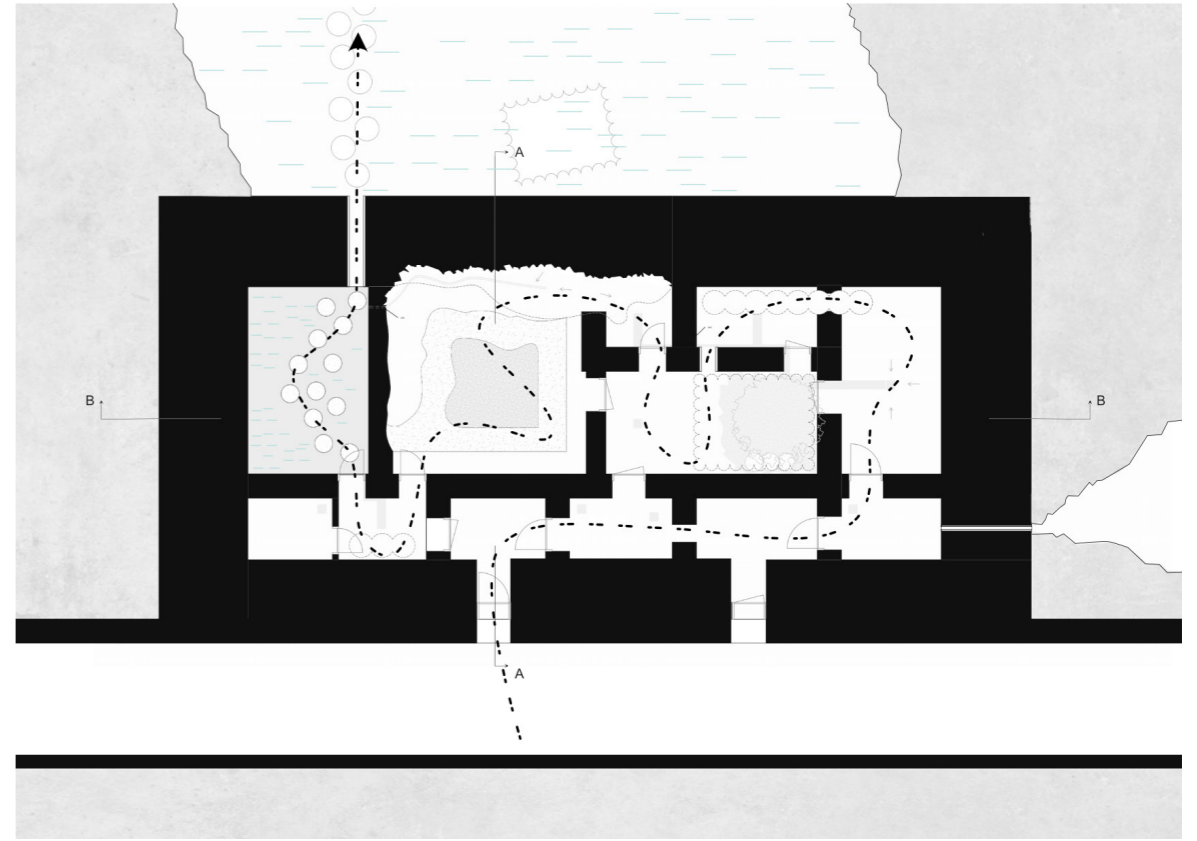
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## Hospital bunker, fluid walk

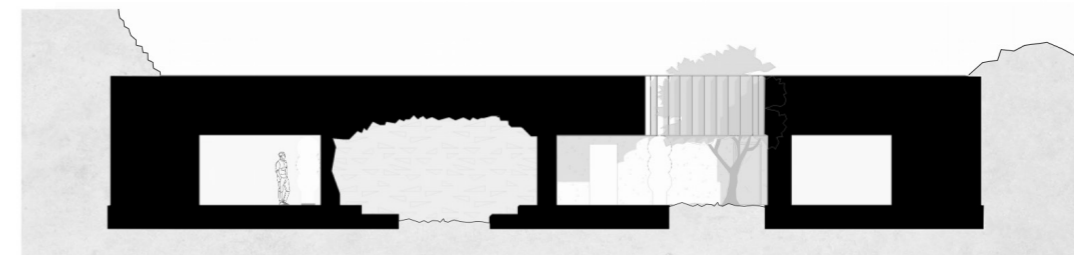
Here we see how the creation of the fluid walk consists of two elements: the wall removals, and the opening and the shutting down of the existing doorways. We also see the intended effect of breaking down the solidity of walls. The solidity of the building is further dissolved during the last part of the walk. In the last room, filled with water, the visitor moves over stepping stones. They lead him to a waterbody outside.



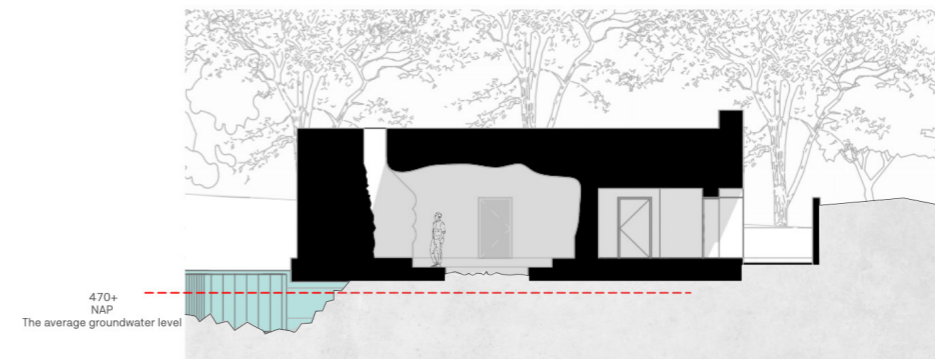


## Hospital bunker, new atmosphere

All three strategies of removal support each-other to create a new atmosphere. Allowing the visitor to land in the world of his own mental, emotional and physical knowings.



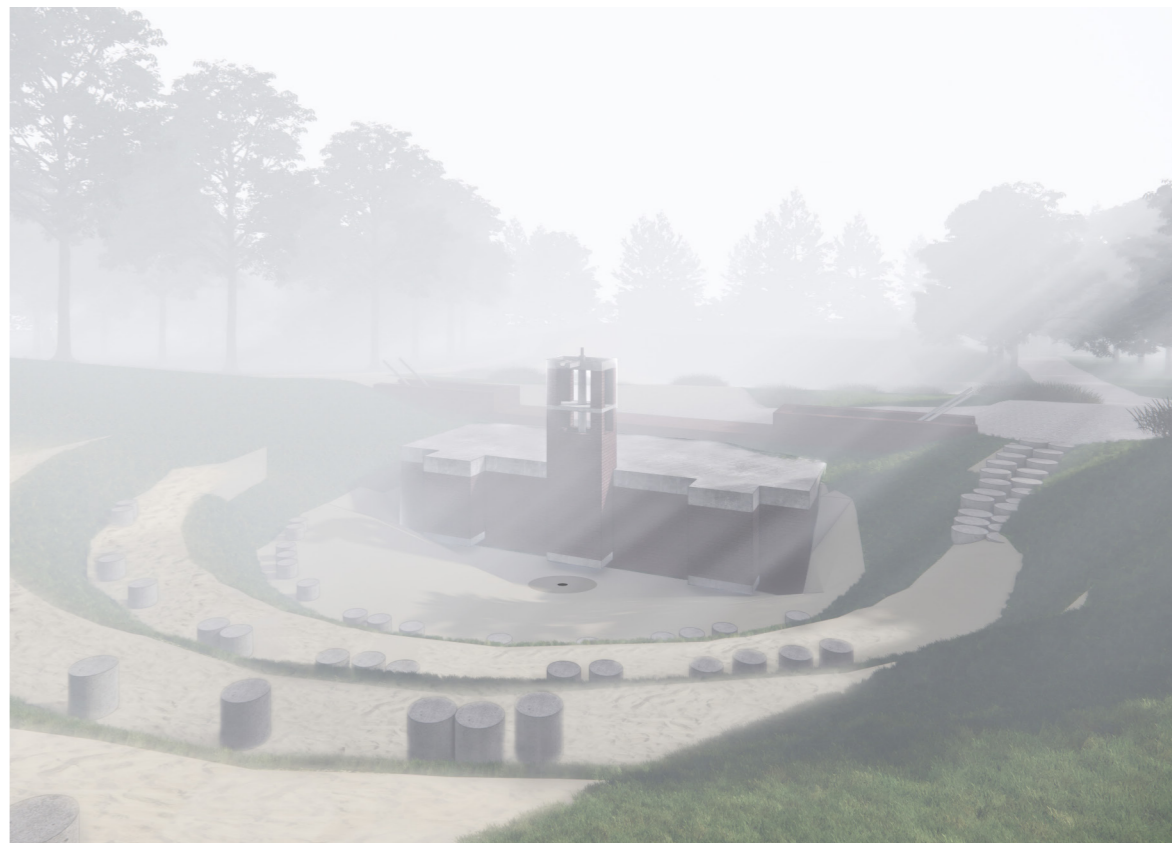
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## Bath bunker, location

The bath bunker is located in the geographical center of the site. After experiencing the reset of the hospital bunker the visitor is led towards the bath building. As I mentioned before, part of the soil has been removed around the building to reveal its geometry. This location is the only one with a clear function. Here I want to give the possibility to have ceremonies, to celebrate life and death together.



## Bath bunker, the transient nature of the physical body

The ceremonies that I want to host, concern the disposing of deceased human and non-human bodies. Instead of cremation, which is not carbon neutral, I propose to use water cremation. It is a new technology that can reduce the body of the deceased into liquid. I want to introduce this program in the heart of the site because I want to challenge the western taboo of death. Other cultures embrace death as a something normal, something that is part of our everyday.

Rituals of death are not only about the feelings of the deceased but also about the spiritual development of his loved ones. It is about distancing from one's genetic memory by witnessing the definite disillusion of the physical body.

Living bodies and bunkers are the embodiment of their own history, the outcome of an ongoing process of their becomings. This becoming includes their ending. Bunkers have the pretention to be solid and may seem to have an extended lifespan. Yet, their material presence and original functions and meanings must in fact be understood as transient in nature as a human and non-human body.

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85 Aquamation machine

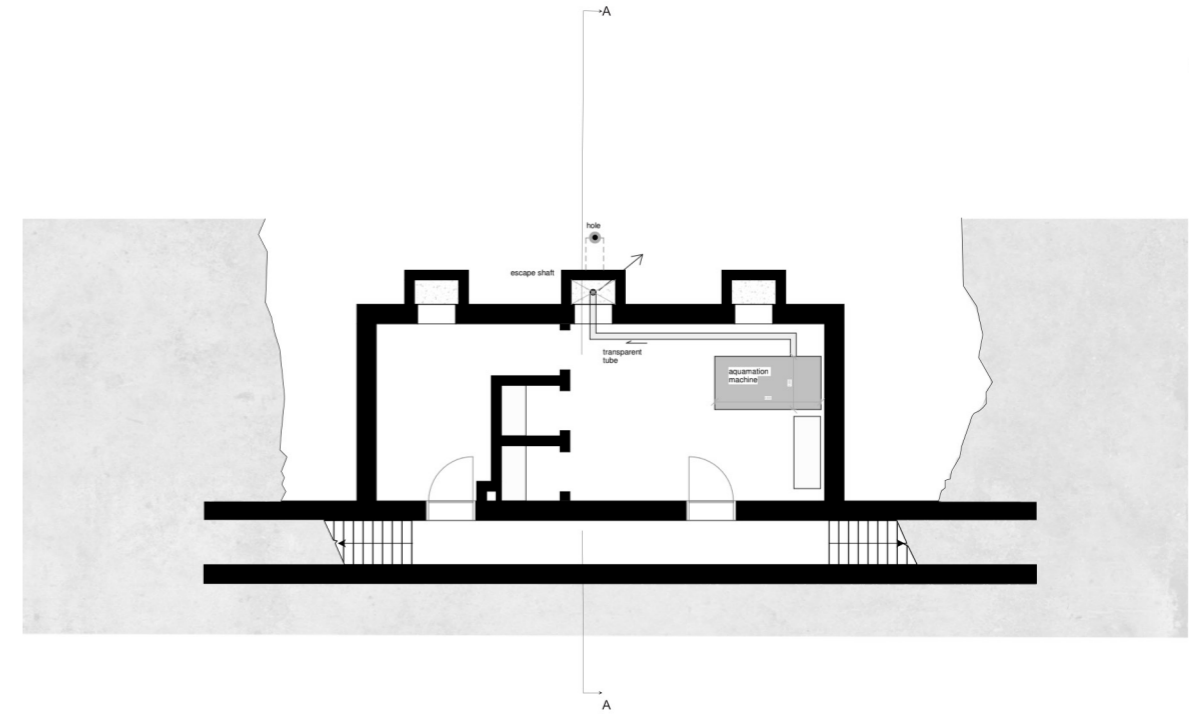


Fire cremation, Nepal

## Bath bunker, the ritual in plan

In plan, bodies are brought down over narrow stairs to the chamber below. Once the machine is turned on, and the body is positioned inside, the ritual can begin. Aquamation means, the machine, using water, heat, and pressure, dissolves the body into brownish, odorous liquid.

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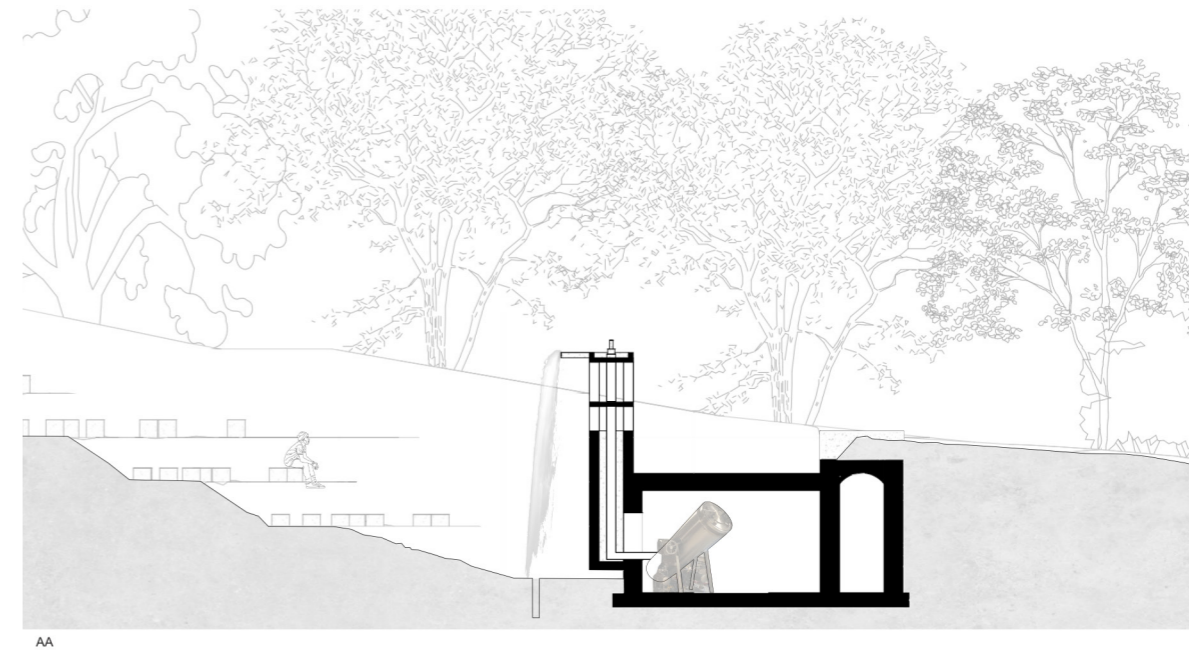


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## Bath bunker, the ritual in section

People sitting in the arena in front of the bunker witness the brownish liquid being released from the escape shaft, as part of the ceremony. This escape shaft becomes a beacon, a symbol of opposing forces and meanings in the site. To create orientation and marking the importance of such disposition, I extended the escape shaft with one meter extension block, using recycled materials from the removals. Here, people witness the bath bunker as a place once connected to water, to life, to abundance and vitality. It now becomes associated with the deeper reality of the cyclical nature of death.

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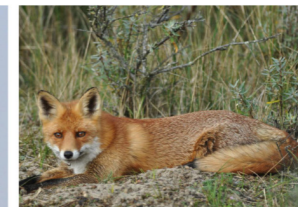
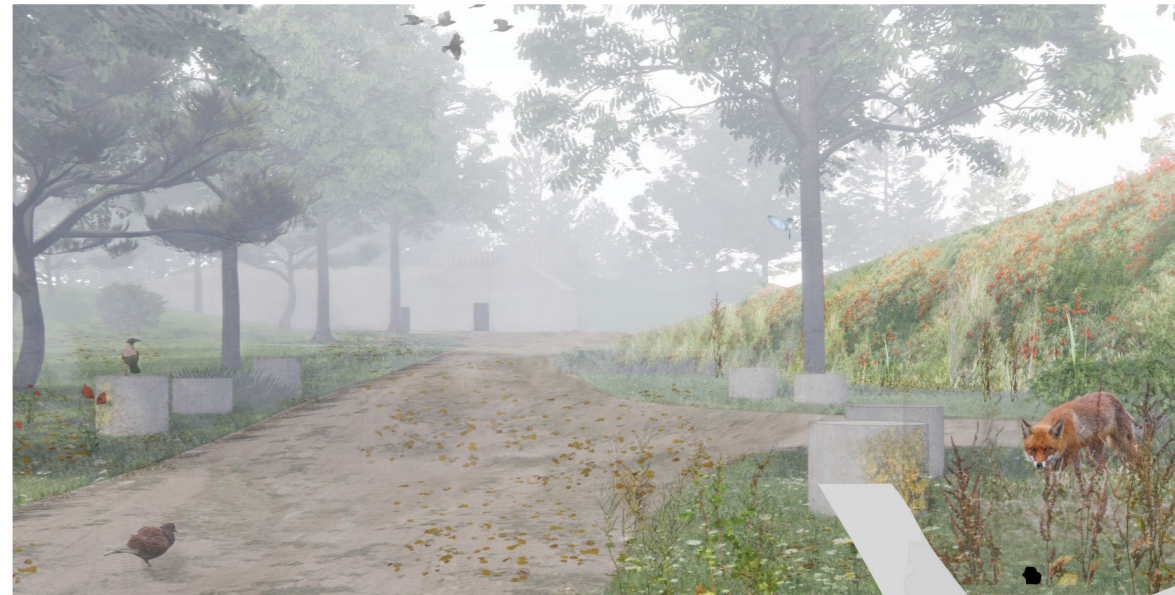
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## Invitation to reflect

The heart of the site allows the visitor to walk, pause, and look around. A configuration of crossing paths and seats invites explicitly to reflect on the co-existence of all living inhabitants on the site.

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Nightingale

Bluethroat

Stonechat

fox



## Invitation to reflect

The same could happen at another spot. On a path crossing a grove of trees, where a bunch of concrete blocks, removed from the bunkers, are scattered around.



Aeshna  
isoceles



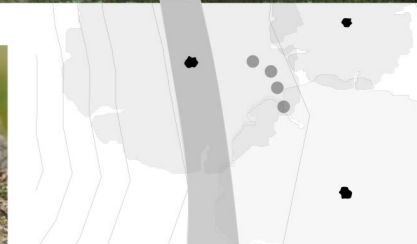
Tree frog



Map (butterfly)



Natterjack



## Combat shelter

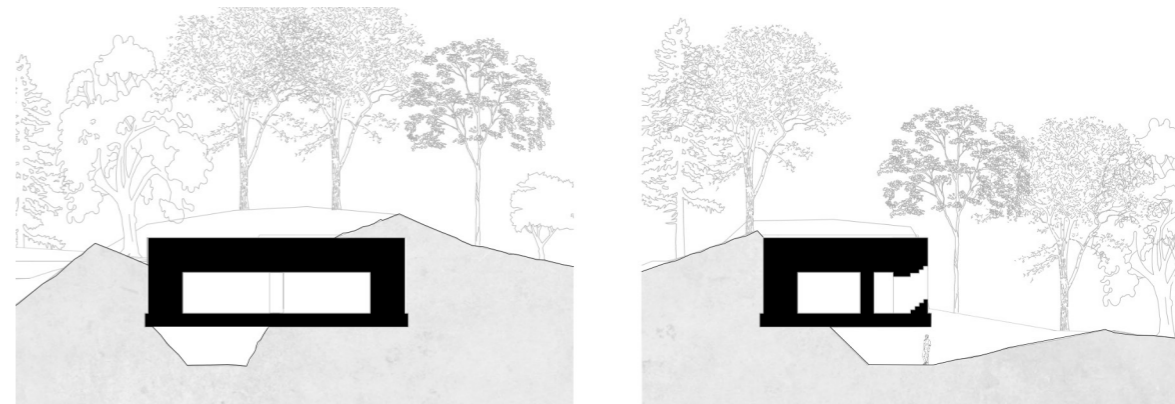
Wandering further, trying to catch a possible route, one encounters the combat shelter. What is supposed to be just a building, now becomes a completely different experience. The visitor is confronted with the weight of the bunker, with its scale and inner secrets.



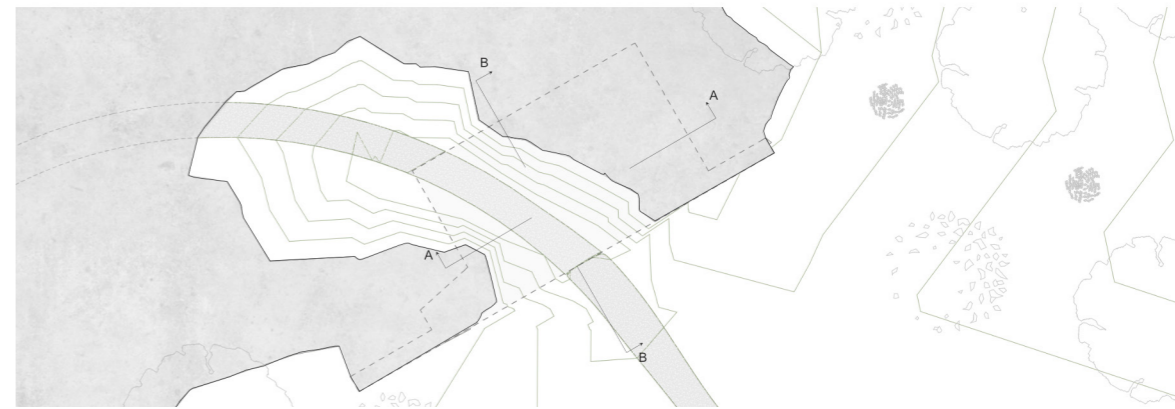


## Combat shelter, passage

A passage is excavated from underneath. The bunker is presented as an abstract form, a gate, a tunnel from light to dark to light again. The path may be moist, muddy. Our steps echo from the bare, exposed concrete.



BB



## Combat shelter, absurdity

The visitor is now confronted with the idea of absurdity: what is this object doing? What is the meaning of this monolith? What does it feel to be underground?



## Commando bunker, abstract shapes emerge from a platform

Our fifth and last bunker is the commando bunker, the former military center of operation. Here messages and updates arrived, decisions were made. We approach the bunker from the back and therefore we don't see or experience its total presence. The bunker appears as a platform, soil covering the building was removed. Now abstract shapes emerge from it.

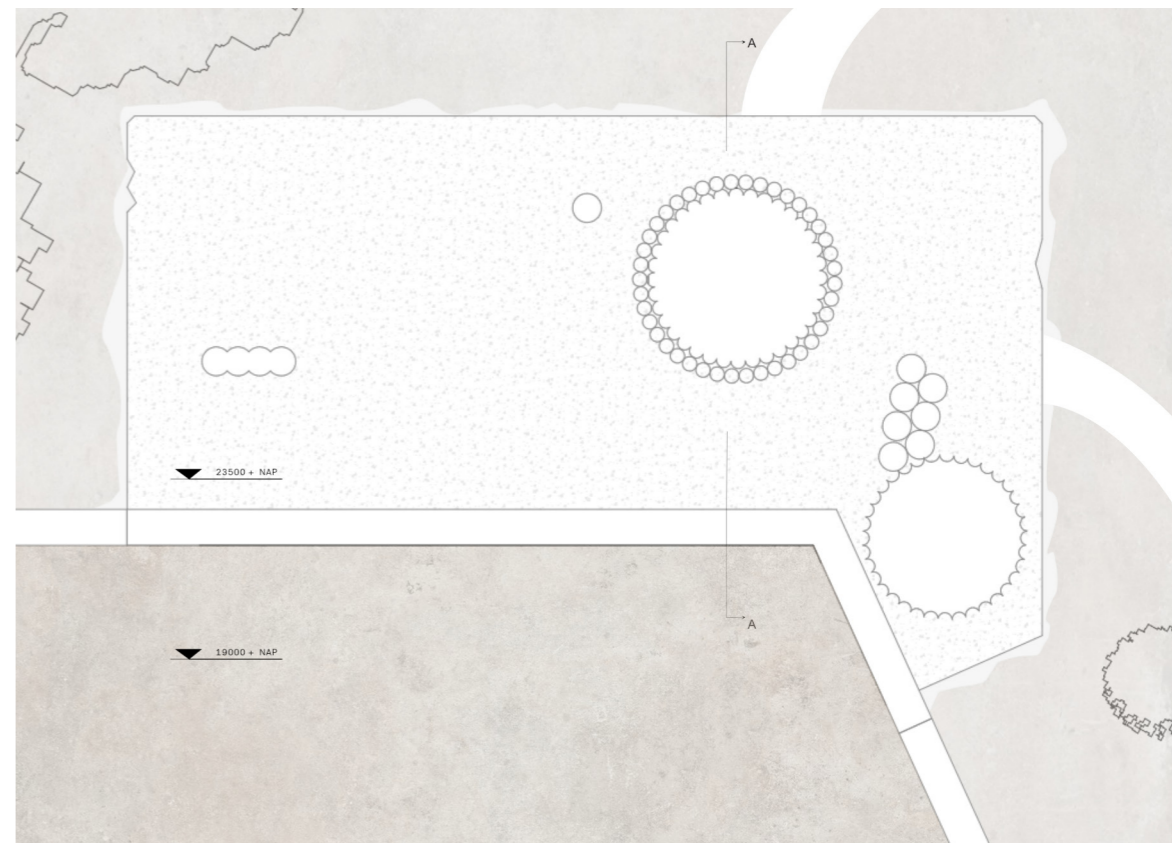


## Commando bunker, threshold

The platform is a threshold to another reality. The commando bunker is just a memory, a maze of different stories forgotten in time. Here messages were once exchanged with different parts of the Reich.

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## Commando bunker, existing plan

When reaching the lower floor, this bunker, as the hospital and combat bunker, shows its facade intact. Entering, we find a rigid and somewhat symmetrical plan.

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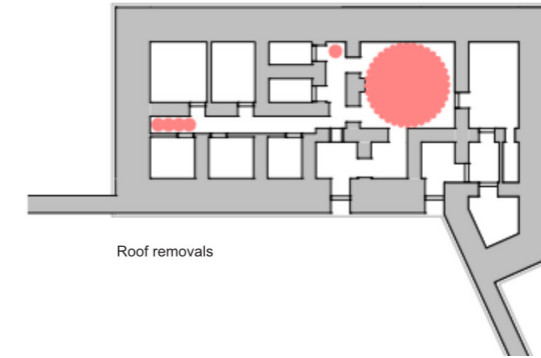
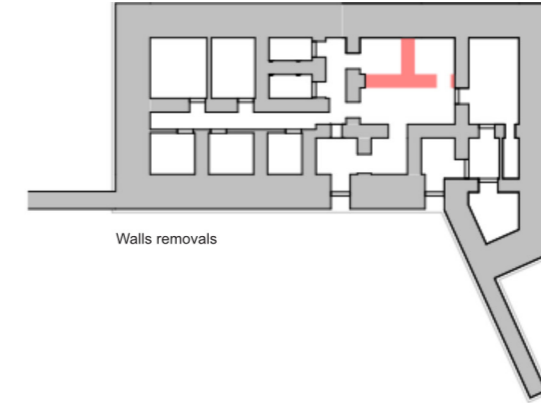
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## Commando bunker, a new center

My first design steps here were to remove the walls of the commander's office. By doing so, I created a new center within the bureaucratic maze: a large circular room with a pierced roof.

On two other points in the bunker parts of the roofs are also pierced to create orientation and direction.

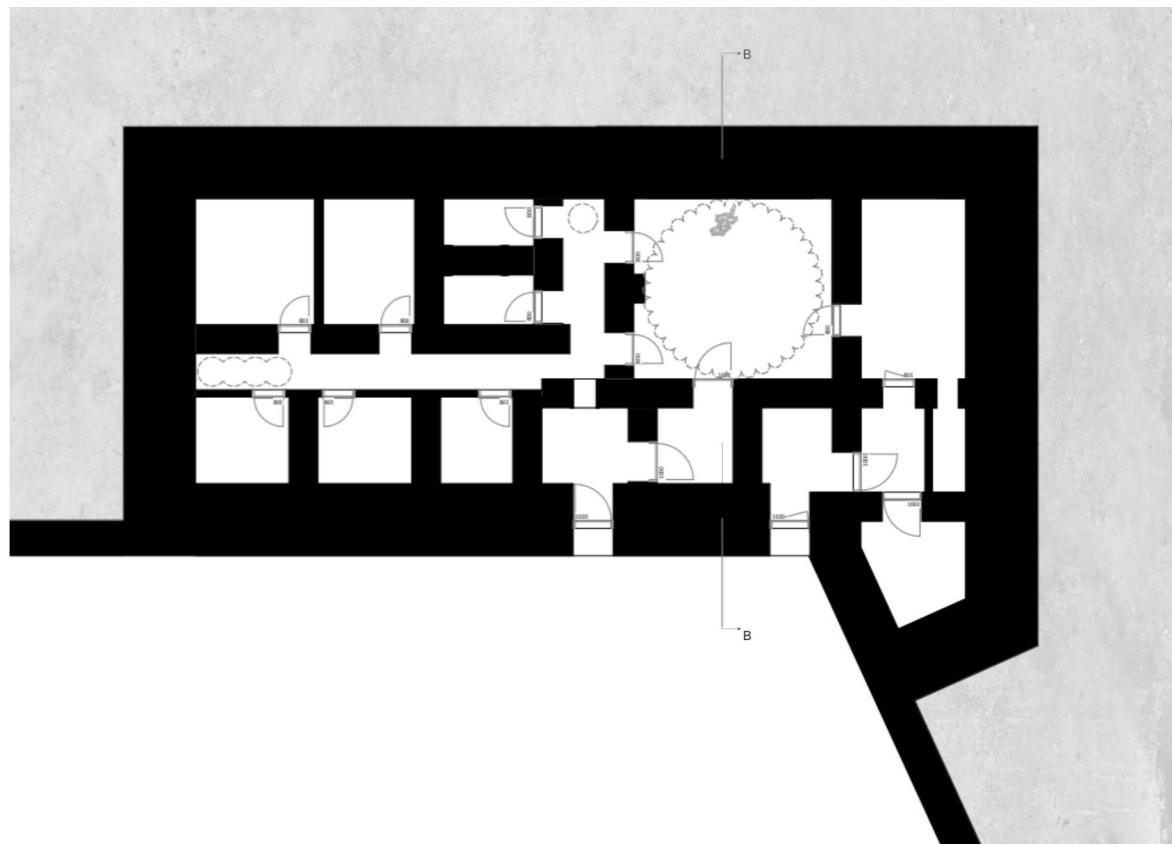


## Commando bunker, wandering freely

The visitor finds open doors through which to wander freely in an otherwise rigid planning. The experience of small, oppressive rooms contrasts with the light, open and airy circular room.

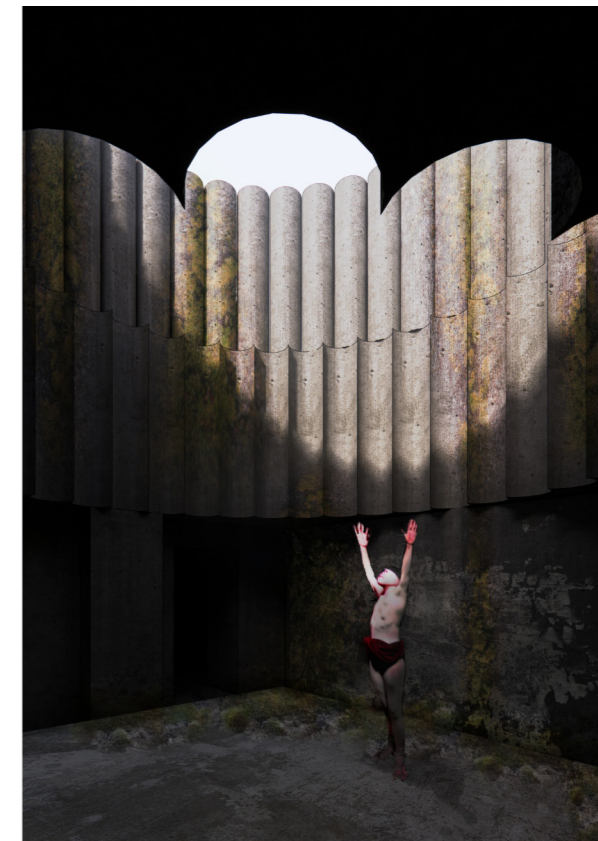
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## Commando bunker, a vertical space

This cylindrical space is a vertical space that connects ground to sky, boundness to freedom, a sacred space. In this room, visitors exist together with the sky, the elements now appropriating the walls and the bunker, the bats and the birds and the insects. Together in one circle.

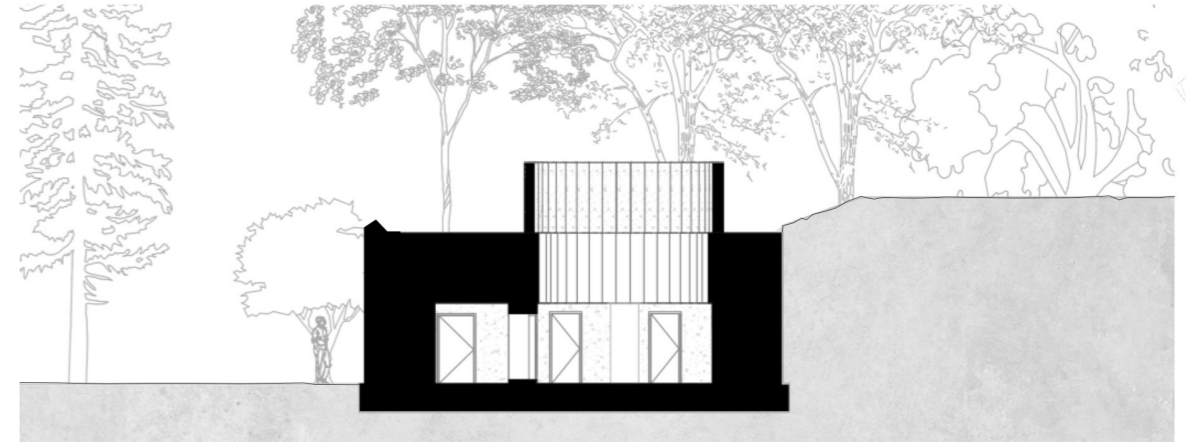




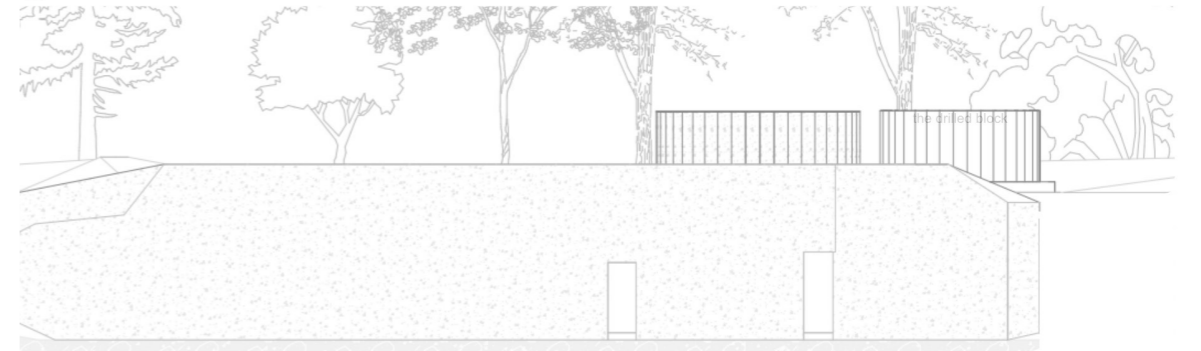
## Commando bunker, the circular room

The circular room is constructed by superimposing the drilled circular blocks, each 2 meters long, on the edge of the pierced void. The massive block freed from the center by drilling, is positioned on the roof as an outlook post.

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Preserving the original facade

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Preserving the original facade

## Hill, a panorama

Here ends our walk, we are offered a panorama over my whole design from the hill towards the south-east. Turning around, we discover a view over the dunes towards the sea in the north-west.

