

A Tale of Lights

light as the visual construct of the ephemeral space

Alice M. Zhen

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Light and Form

Light as the visual construct of ephemeral space

A Thesis

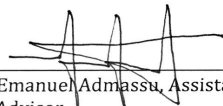
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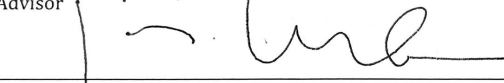
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I wanted the light to be the revelation. It has to do with what we value.
I want people to treasure.

-James Turrell

Buildings are designed for a specific purpose. A library has large open rooms to accommodate bookshelves, schools have classrooms and auditoriums for groups of students, businesses have offices and conference rooms, homes have bedrooms and living rooms, and so on. In each situation, conventional architecture would start by establishing the boundaries of the site, defining the 2 dimensional floor plan, and then introduce other secondary aspects, such as circulation & light, which eventually create a coherent and cohesive 3 dimensional space.

In my thesis I wanted to explore the reverse process to emphasize the importance of light. I wanted to define the space using light as a 3 dimensional medium, which would create the volumes for my programs.

Light is not as stationary as the established boundaries of a site. It's moves with time and changes intensity throughout the day and can be used as a tool to choreograph the user's ephemeral experience as they navigate through the site. Just as light adapts to different surfaces, this design methodology can be adapted to different sites.

Temporary (tem·po·rar·y)

adjective

1. lasting for only a limited period of time; not permanent.

Ephemeral (e·phem·er·al)

adjective

1. lasting for a very short time.

Sensory Adaptation (sen·so·ry ad·ap·ta·tion)

is defined as the diminished sensitivity to a stimulus as a consequence of constant exposure to that stimulus.

Perception (per·cep·tion)

noun

the ability to see, hear, or become aware of something through the senses.

Light

noun

1. the natural agent that stimulates sight and makes things visible.



A story of a Portugese Queen



The Queen stepping down quickly but cautiously as if worried she might be seen. She searches for a small door nestled between the bouldering terrain. Gently opening the door as if something might escape but to reveal only a hidden light tucked within.



Soft pulses of light guides her through a shallow tunnel that funnels her through this journey. The walls close in until all but emptiness has taken over. In the darkness of emptiness, a distant bright light is seen.



Stepping closer to the light, the walls begin to move; accentuating its natural curves. The light grows stronger with every curve, embracing the Queen and empowering her to feel its warmth pressing against her skin. She can hear just herself breathing. In this familiar moment that she once shared wrapped between her mother's arms listening to her own heartbeat. The Queen forgets who she is only to remember who she was.



Trickling light glistening beneath the Queen's gown as she moves right. The light playfully shimmers on the satin lace as she quickly descends down a narrow path. Afar, punctuating light tucked between the playful walls reveal two familiar scenes; a place she must call home and a place she must fall. She becomes completely illuminated as she arrives in a space where no one knows where she is but only herself.



Hidden beneath the people's walking footsteps she silently watches the world outside. Familiar faces yet unfamiliar actions, another side she is looking at. Curious to see more, no longer she steals glimpses from underneath. She rises above to fully see. She finds a seat between 2 boulders that reveal Saint Michael's Chapel.



Tiny strays of light glimmer through the pocket of earth to reveal a symbiotic relationship between her movements and the light. With every glimmer of light, the path becomes stronger and more secure for her to go forth.



Fading footsteps as she comes to see what is revealed beneath.
Peering out she silently breathes as to undisturb the divine scene.



Warm winds tousle her hair as she spins around to see the shadow of time; telling her that dusk is not near.



Drawn by trickling sounds that echoed in her ears, she follows the sounds back into the darkness of the earth to a cascading wall of running water. Within the water stood her reflection looking back at her. With every ripple dissipating into her own reflection, her troubles fade.

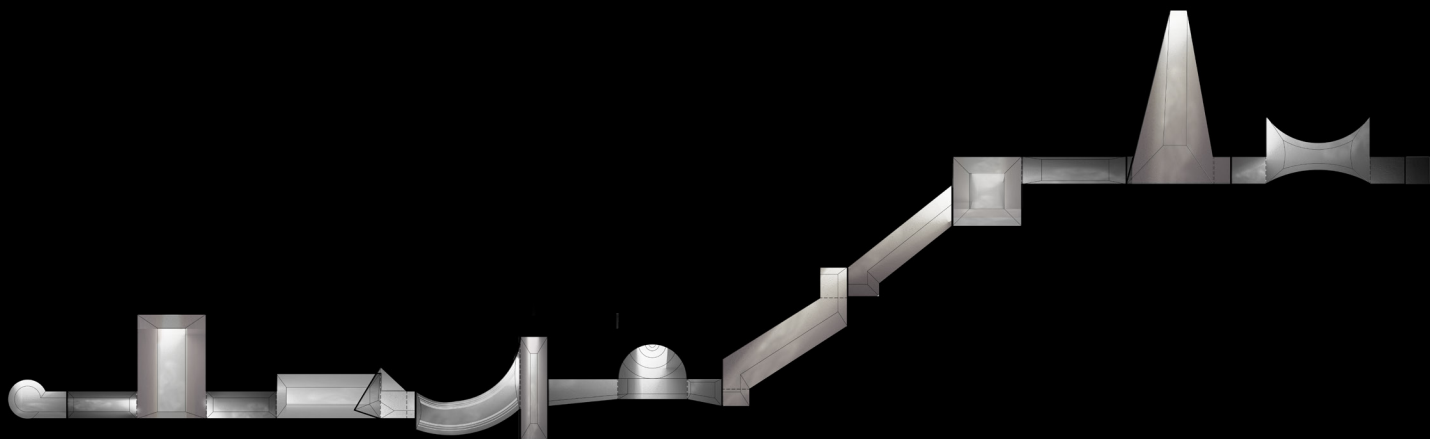


As her troubles wash away, she sees that she is no longer the one that began the journey. Unexpectedly, she came upon the revelation of self discovery. She enters her solitude to find silence.





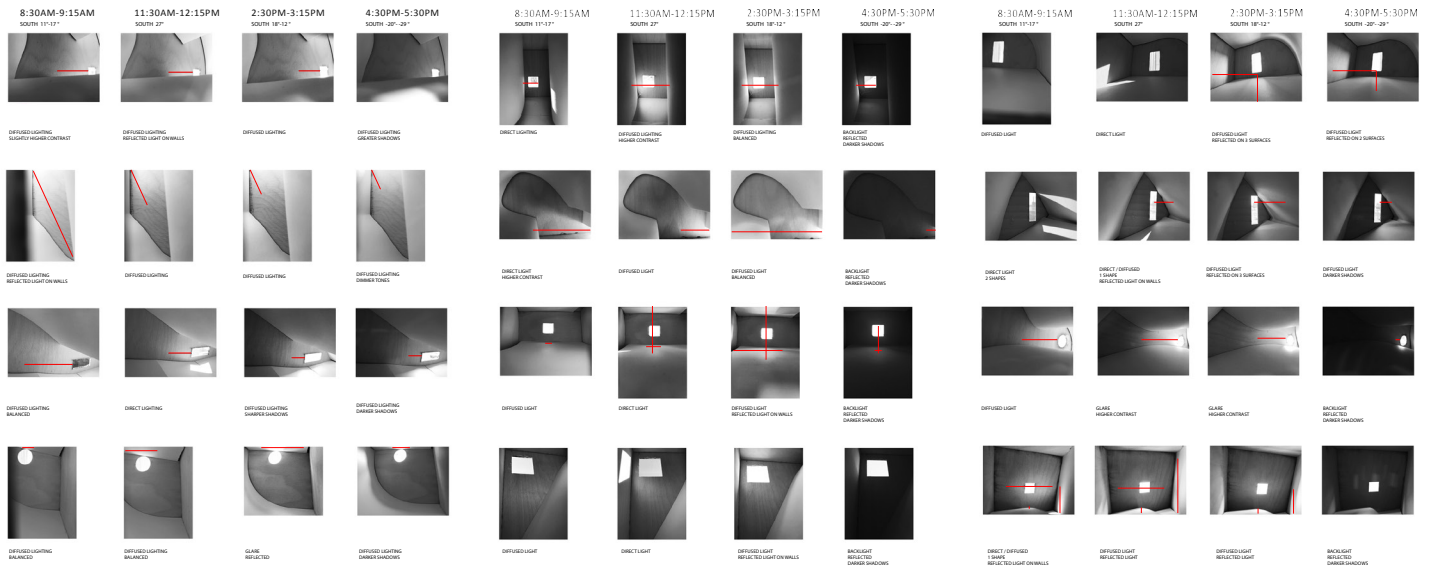
The Queen's Path



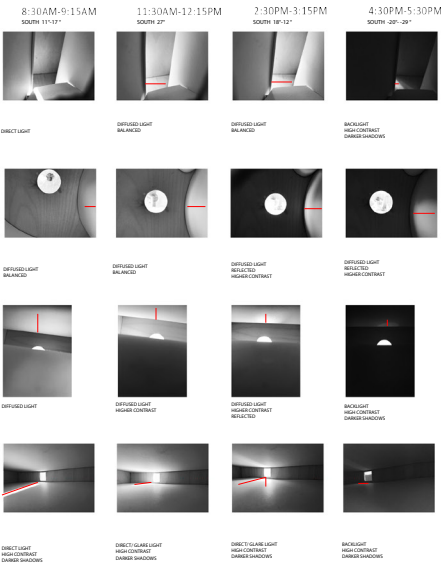
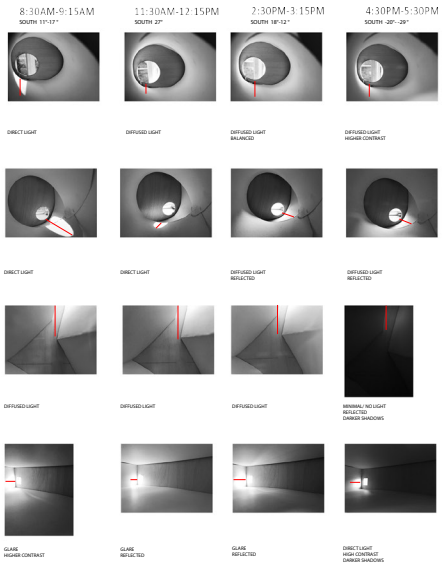
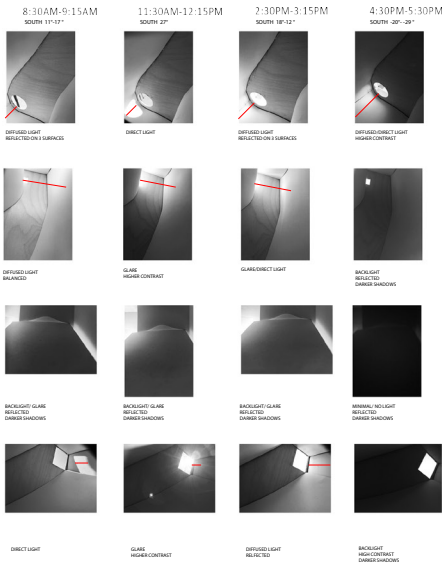
Reflections

The thesis started with an interest in light.
In the end it became the tool and program for developing architecture.

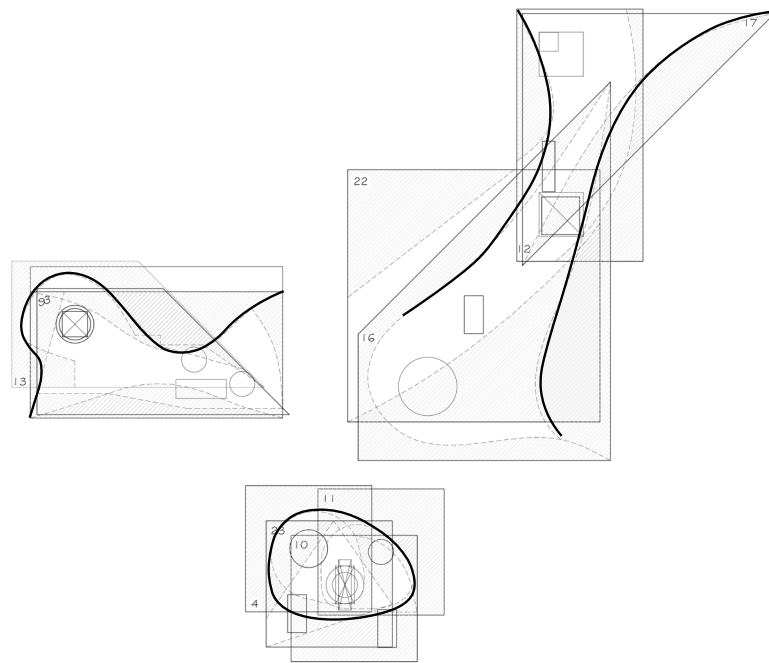




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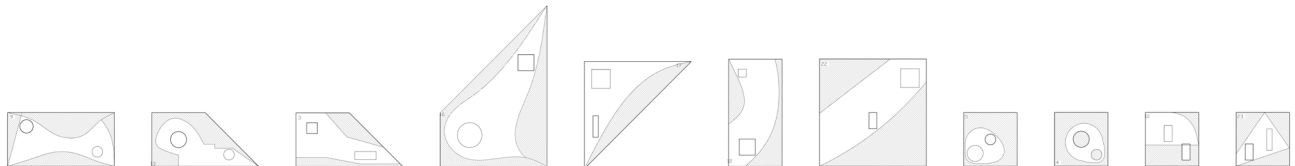


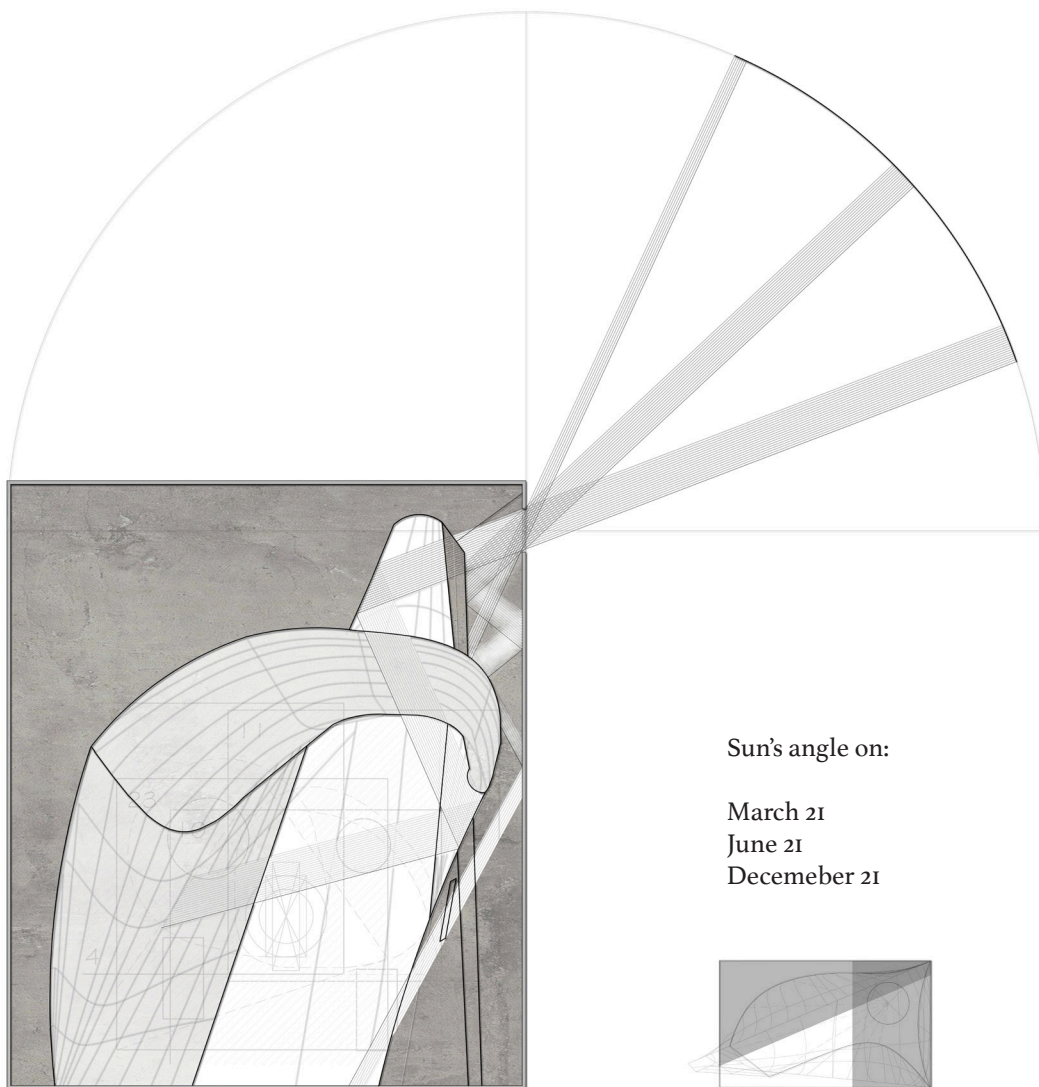
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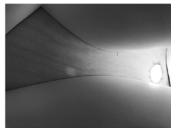
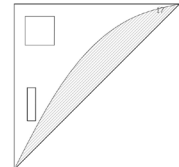
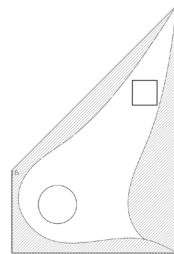
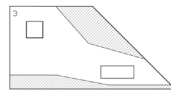
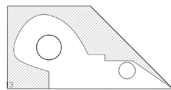


24 boxes were created to study and test how light transformed and change our perception of space.

Each vignette was categorized as a horizontal span, vertical span, diagonal space and central span. The different categories were overlayed on top of each other to create a new hybrid space.







Dawn/Dusk



Dawn/Dusk



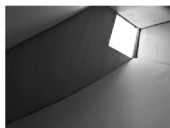
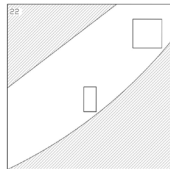
Dawn/Dusk



Afternoon



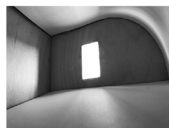
Afternoon



Morning



Night



Afternoon



Night



Night

Every critique I had I was consistently questioned:

What are you going to do with these light studies?

What's the purpose of the light?

Why light?

But why not? Why couldn't I spend this time to study light and how it creates an ephemeral space? When could I ever have the time again to study this?

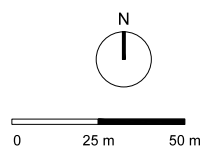


The Sanctuary is a place of memory and remembrance, an intimate space to celebrate the history and the sensitive experience and nature of place. The Sanctuary provides a space for quiet reflection and is a platform for meditation; a place for introspection to further intensify the connection between place, memory and profound tranquility.

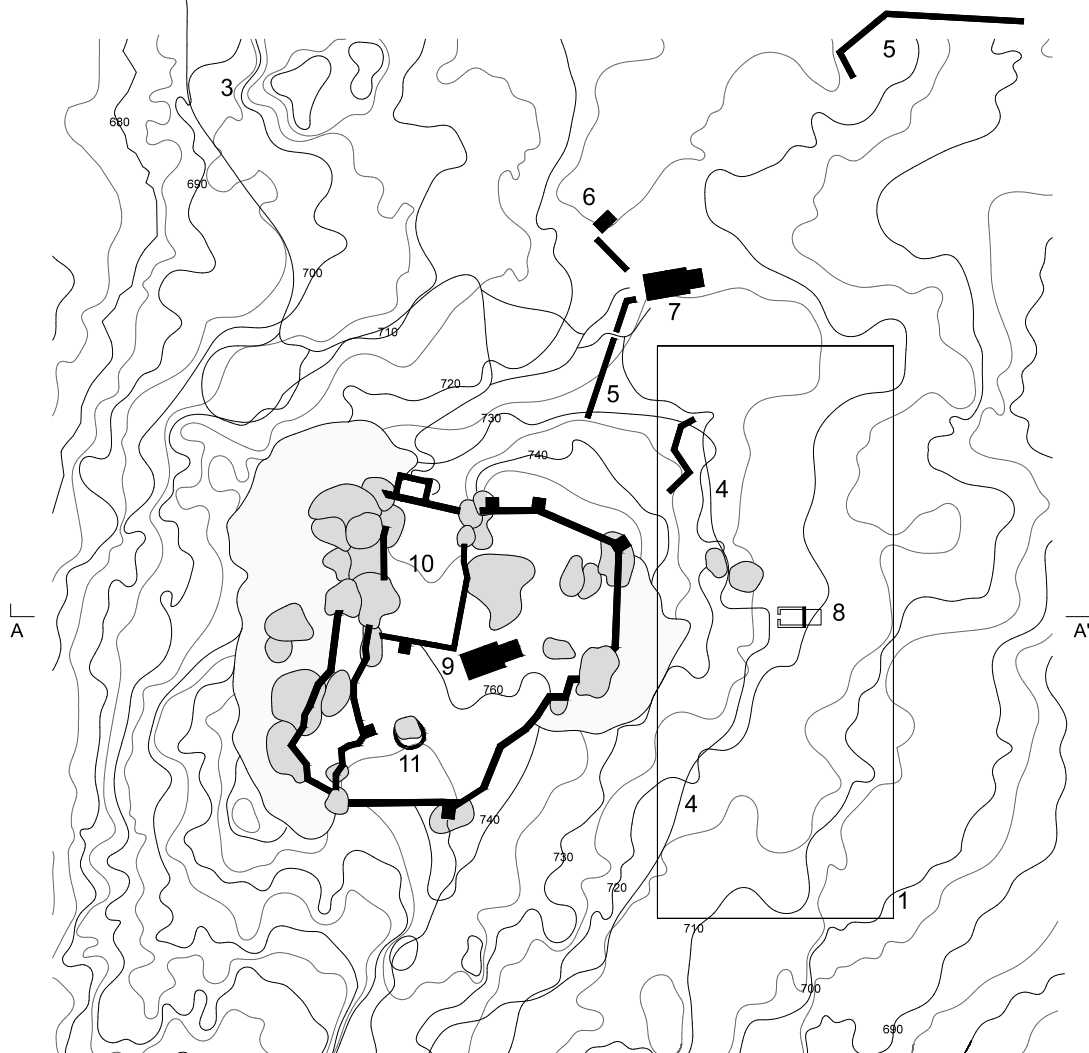
Thesis Site:
Monsanto, Portugal

Program:
Sanctuary

1. Intervention area
2. Historic village
3. Access path
4. Existing paths
5. Wall remains
6. Watchtower "Torre do Pião"
7. St. Michael's chapel
8. St. John's chapel
9. St. Mary's chapel
10. Castle of Monsanto
11. Cistern



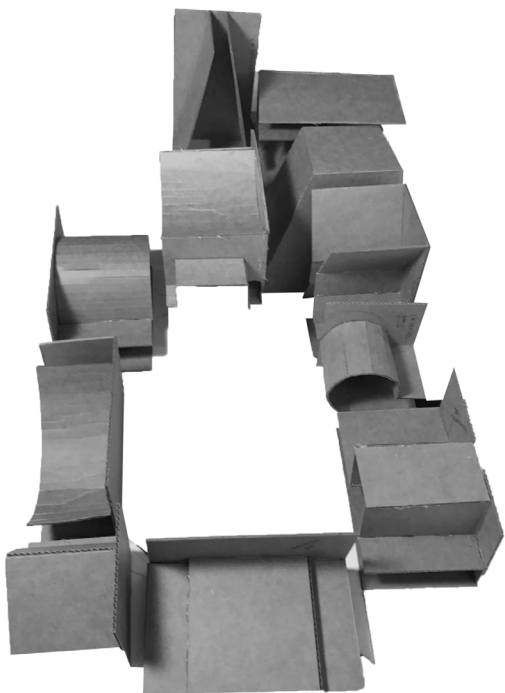
SITE PLAN



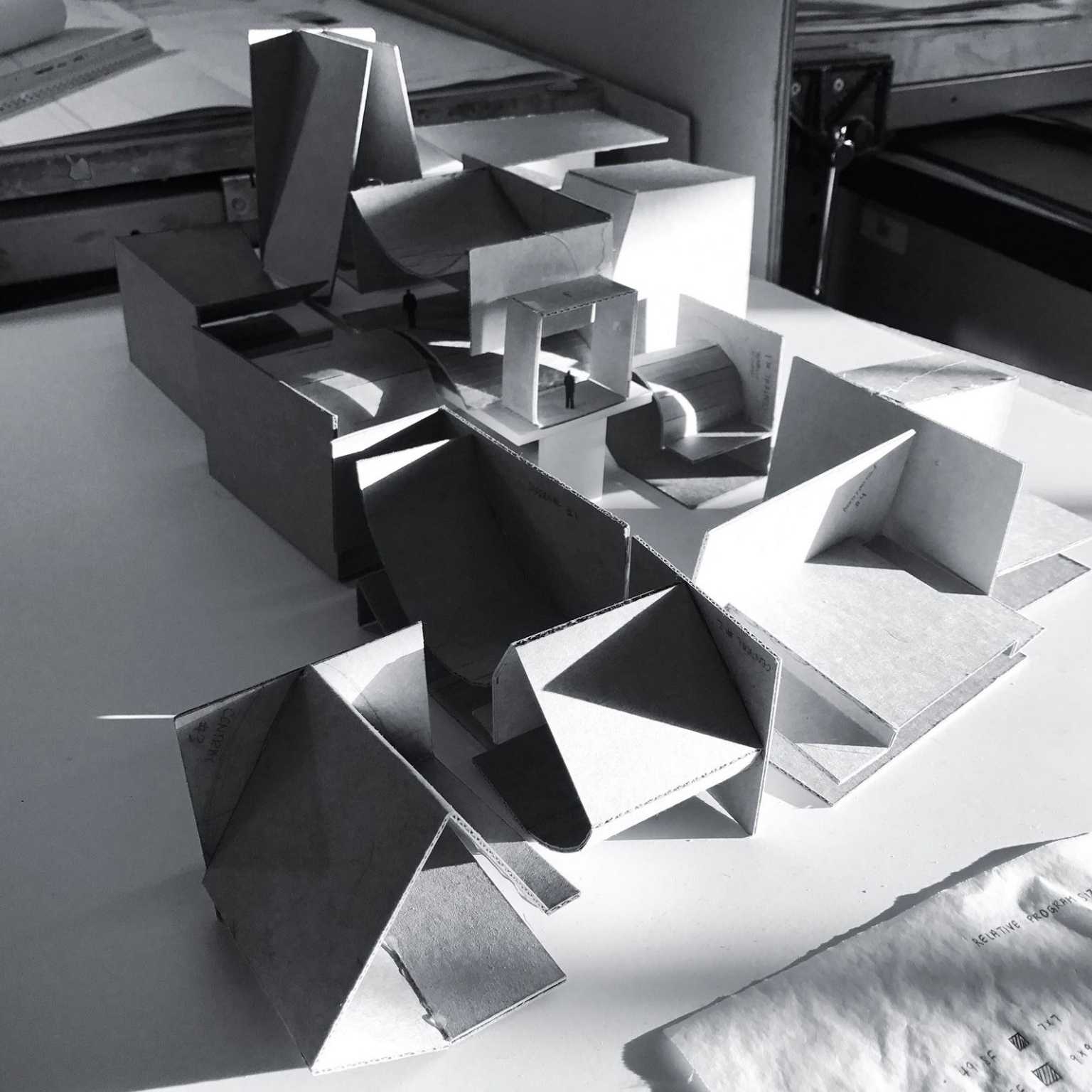
The site intervention is located on a steep mountain side of Monsanto, Portugal. The site is rich with history and existing ruins. Opposite side of the mountain lies the village of Monsanto. The town has been referenced as a living museum for it has not been changed since the medieval times.

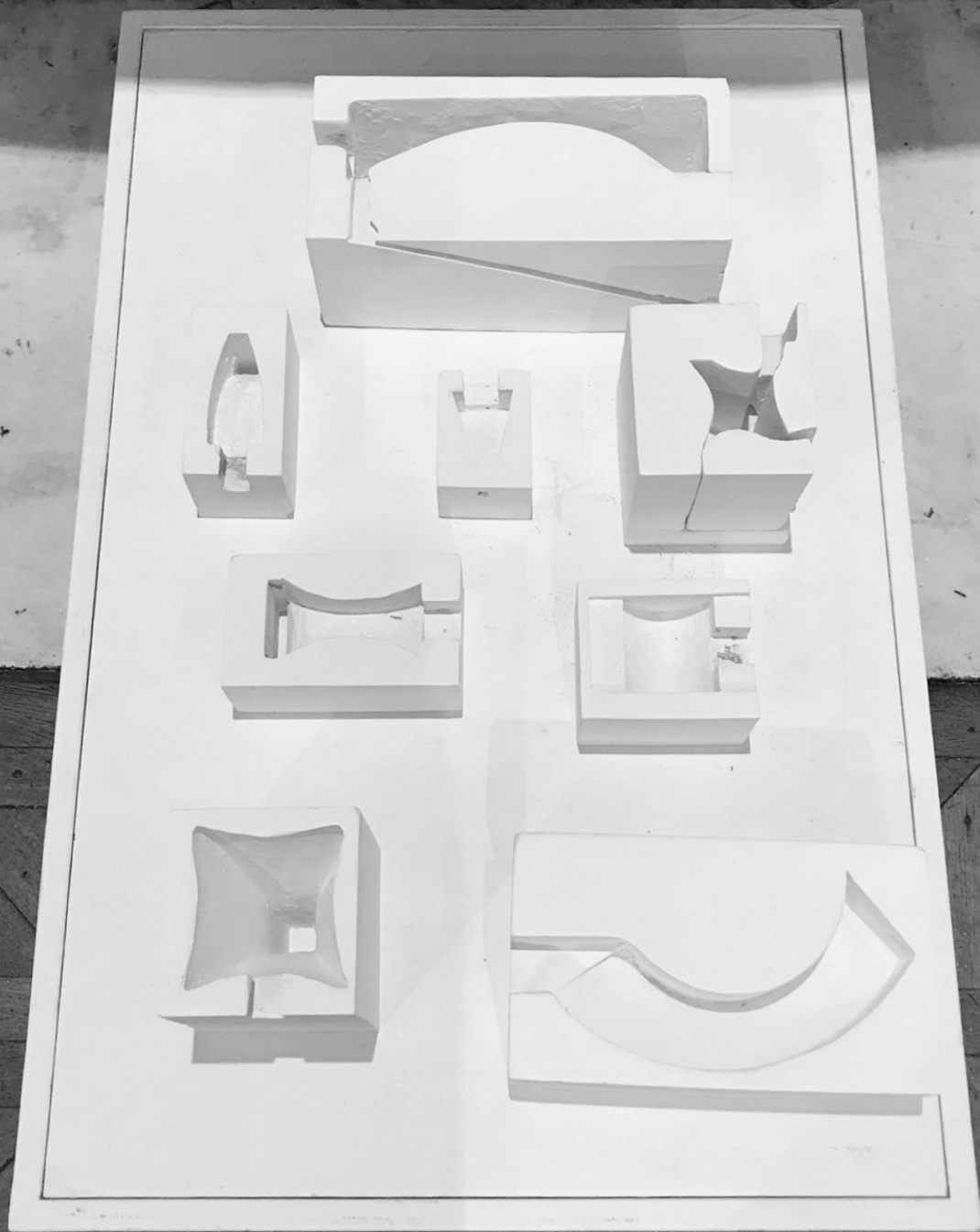
The people of Monsanto loved their young Portuguese Queen. They remained loyal to her when tension arose between Portugal and Spain.

Queen Beatrice, was the only surviving child of King Ferdinand I of Portugal and his wife, Leonor Teles, and would become Queen consort of Castile. She became Queen regnant of Portugal, but was forced to abdicate. During her early years, Beatrice was a pawn in the changing politics of alliances of her father, who negotiated successive marriages for her. She would eventually marry King John I of Castile, by which Beatrice became Queen consort of Castile.

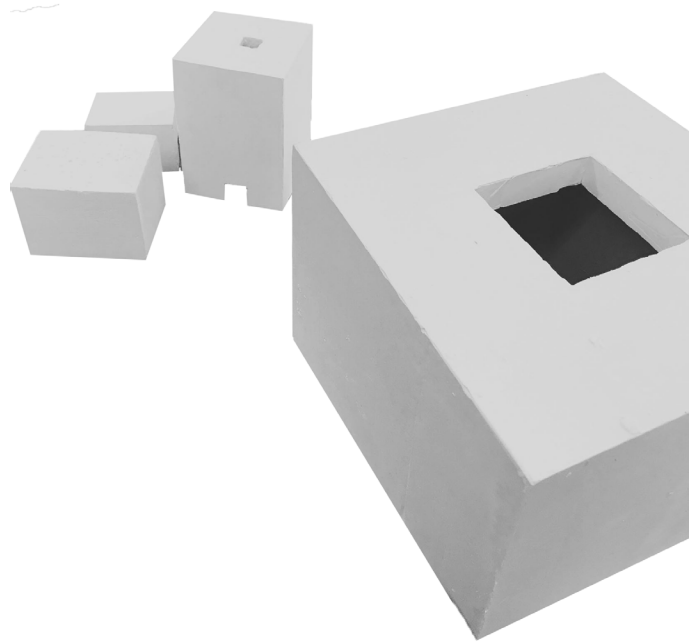


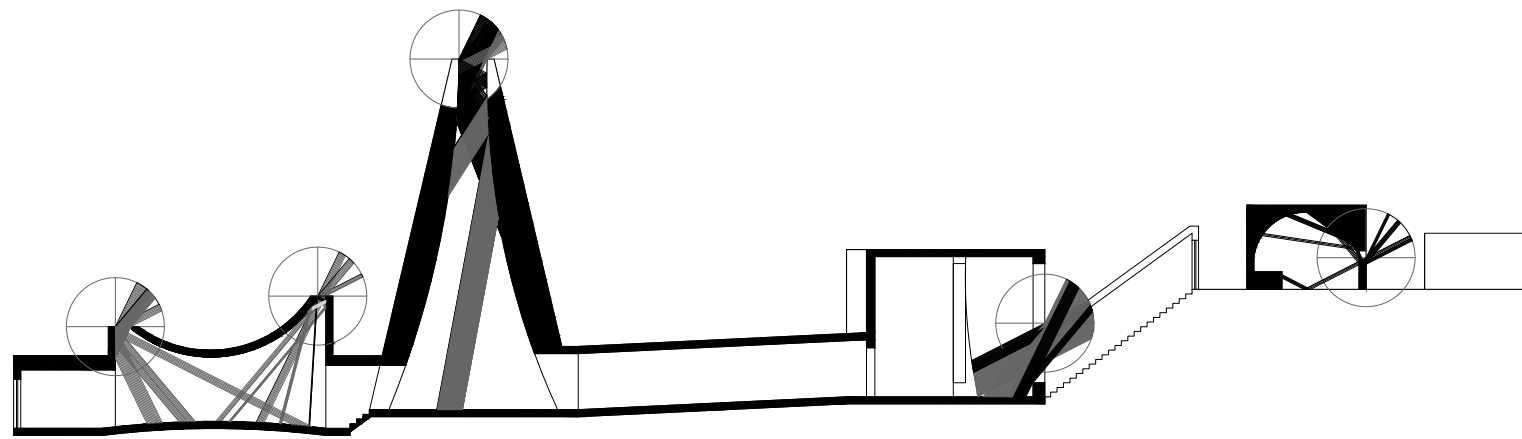
Each vingette becomes a piece of the sequence in the narrative. It was important to find a fluid transition from one point to the next but also to understand how the piece comes into contact with the ground.

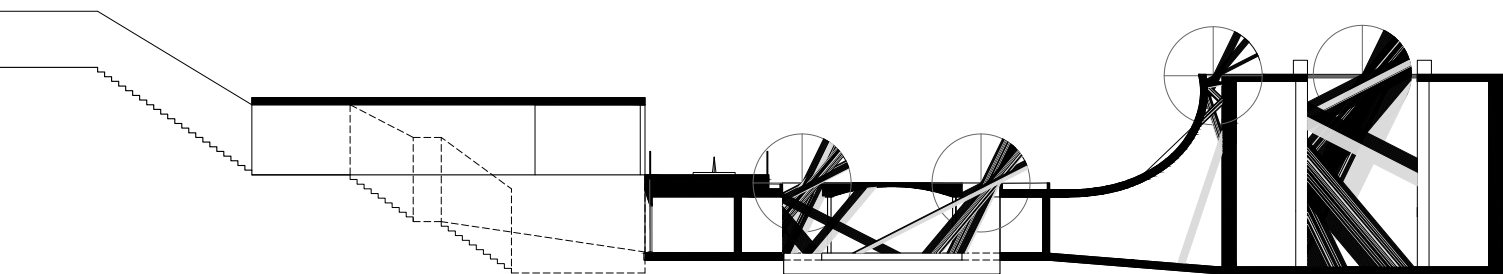




Carving out the light to
reveal the forms and to
understand the relationship of
solids to voids : light to earth.

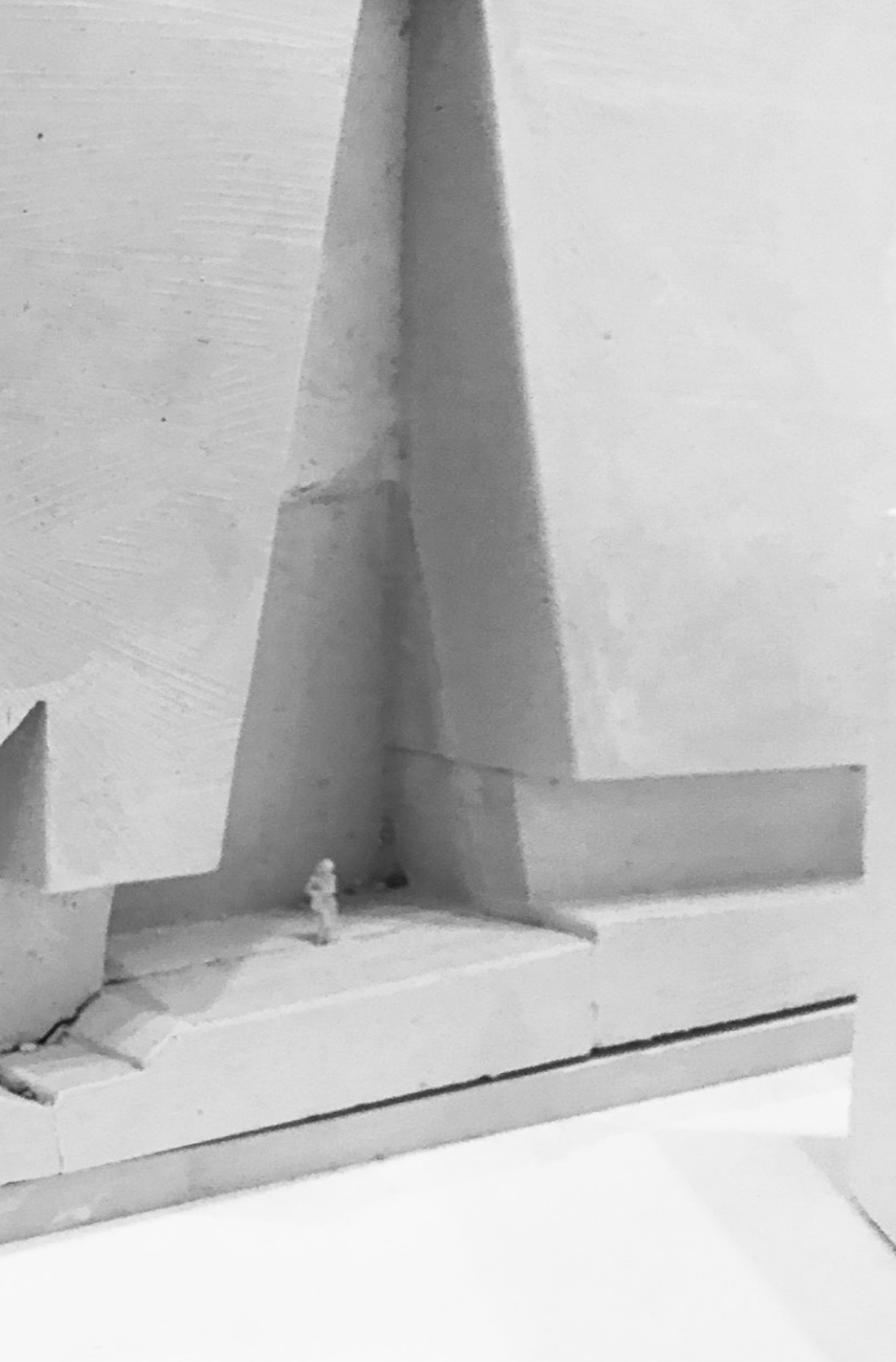


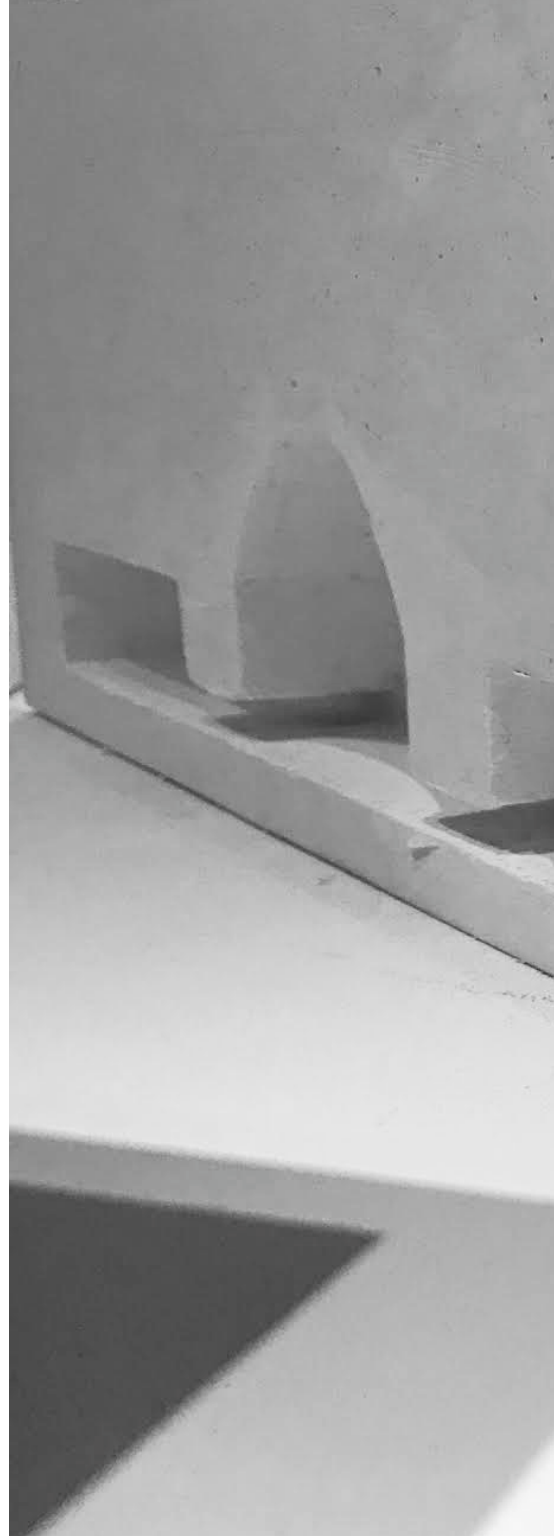




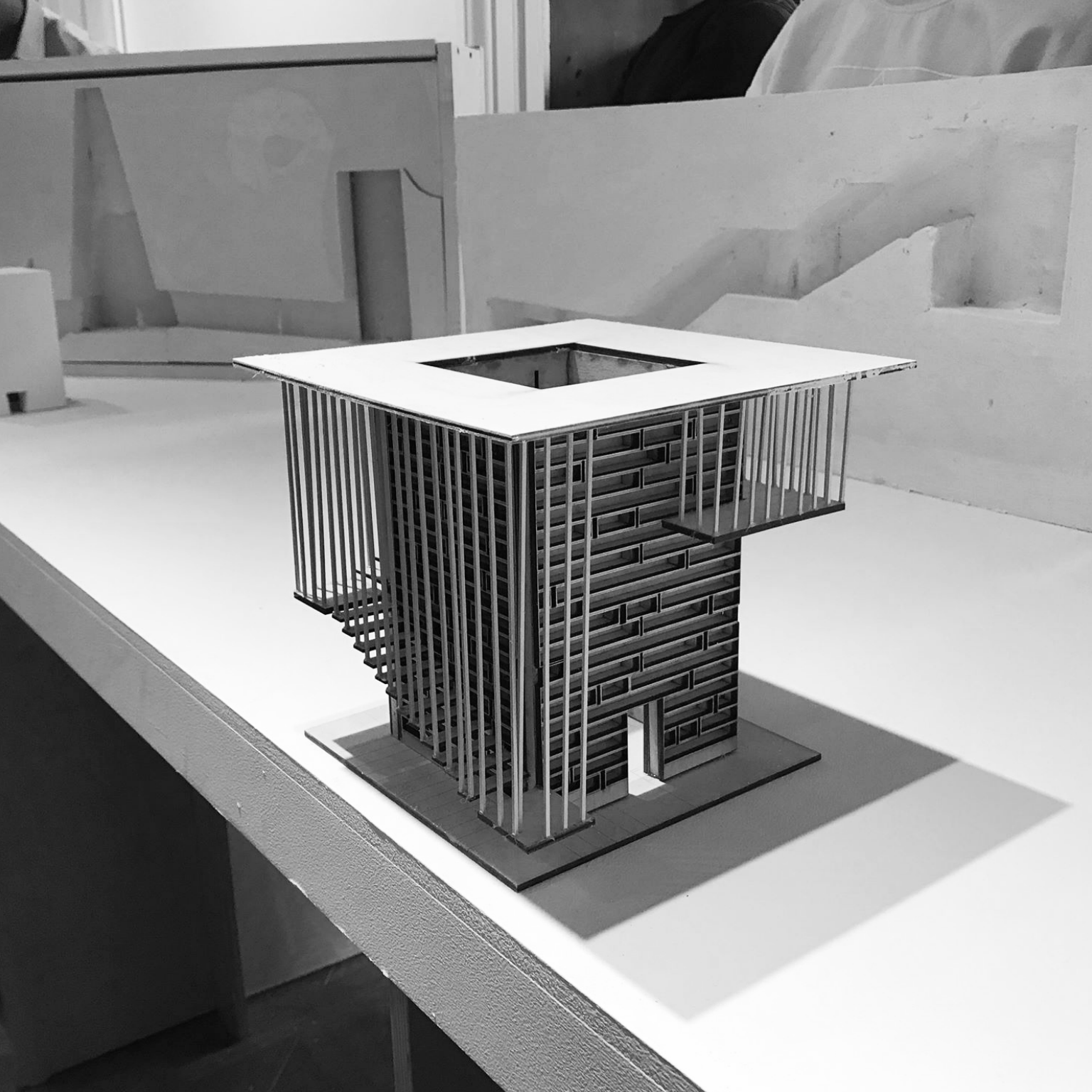
Unfolded section to reveal how light comes in contact with the solids.











The end of the Queen's journey, she comes to find solitude and absolute silence. It's reveal that she enters into the library. The library represents her past, present and future. The books become a metaphor where she will always find an adventure or escape from reality.

The light within the library is contained by the foundation of the existing chapel above. The direct light comes down and is filtered through the bookshelves to redistribute the light around the staircase.

