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Shrine Analysis

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

03 Introduction

Chapter 1 | Shrine Analysis

05 Uyghur Shrines

15 Wayside Shrines

25 Ovoo Shrines

35 Cairns

45 Mexican Home Altars

55 Matrixes

Chapter 2 | Program Analysis

Architecture of the Every day

Chapter 3 | Site Analysis

The Bronx and The Grand Concourse

Network of Elements

INTRODUCTION

The idea of the shrine spans across many continents, ethnicities and belief systems. The definition of a shrine is closely tied to religion and spirituality as well as constructed objects, as it is a demarcation of a holy place through the use of a built structure. Shrines are used throughout different cultures to mark graves, sites of importance, and or events that may have occurred, and any number of things that may holds significance to an individual or a group of people. The interest in studying these constructs, however, comes from the shared aesthetic qualities that are utilized in many different families of shrines to create a sense of spirituality, or more specifically, to create a heightened awareness of an individual's understanding of him/her self. Architecture can learn from the vernacular of shrines in order to understand the inherent spirituality of a structure. This vernacular is composed of four major aspects: the importance of locality, the effect of object accretion, the power of user interaction, and the impact of the architectural icon within a landscape. By borrowing these concepts that are inherent in the construction of semi-architectural shrines, a reanimated and thought provoking architecture can be created.

The locality of shrines is a main component of the logic for the shrine. The demarcation of an event is tied to the location in which the event occurred. Shrines therefore are closely tied to a precise location. This feature stretches further, however, in the creation of an intrinsic network of related shrines. One example of this are the Mazars that litter the deserts of Uyghur China. Mazars are often built to mark the gravesites of pilgrims travelling to pilgrimage sites, thus many shrines are erected within a certain area. The aesthetic, programmatic and locational relationship of the shrines to one another creates an inherent network in which they exist. The importance of the locality of the shrine also becomes apparent in the materiality of the constructed object because shrines have a tendency to be composed of materials that are found in the surrounding landscape, thus creating an interesting dichotomy between the architectural object and the landscape that it is built from and within.

Another trend that becomes apparent in the construction and implication of shrines are the method in which they are created. One technique that is implemented is the aggregation of many small, related objects that are reorganized to create an object of interest. This object accretion (accretion being object accumulation over a period of time) creates a thick texturized object. If this idea of the texture created through the amassing of many related but dissimilar objects were to be utilized in the creating of an architectural surface, the structure would come alive and create a user interface that excites touching and exploration of the construction of the surface.

The operation of user interface in the construction of shrines is relatively straightforward, however, the employment of this concept in how it is related to architecture can vary drastically. The construction of many of the shrines typologies I studied (including Mazars, Ovoos, and Cairns) is done over a period of time by many unrelated shrine builders. While this aspect is intriguing it is nearly impossible to design with the expectation that users will interact the way that is expected of them. Instead, the idea of user interface being incorporated into architecture must be re-framed. The engagement of users may come through in the materiality or the use of the building instead of in the construction.

Lastly, we must consider the impact of the architectural icon within a landscape. Shrines are often presented as an

individual object that stands out from the vast landscape that it is set in. In translating the lessons of the shrines to an urban context, the landscape then becomes busier and more complex. The shrine becomes an architectural object and stands in contrast to the 'urban fabric'. This then relates back to the locality of the shrine in the effect of the surrounding landscape on the construction of the object. The creation of a shrine becomes the creation of an 'object building'

Shrines can inform design by reframing the importance of site, texture, interface, and the object. By combining these four aspects as they are utilized in building shrines, a richer, more 'spiritual' architecture can be achieved.

The implications of designing through the framework set up by an analysis of shrines must carefully consider scale, site and program. To many religious followers, shrines have become an everyday object of faith. They litter the streets of China and Taiwan, they pop-up in the streets of northern Italy, they are found at the top of many hiking excursions, and they greet the pilgrim on their journey. Shrines work to exaggerate and accentuate the everyday aspects of religion, as there is a ritual associated with them to remind the believer to practice their faith. In this understanding, in order to create an architectural object that is removed from religion and the rituals that are tied to that faith, it is logical to use the qualities of the shrine to accent the everyday ritual within an urban context.

I intend to utilize the lessons learned from shrines in order to animate the ritual of an urban dweller's everyday life by accenting the mundane and taken-for-granted aspects that are part of an urban routine. These aspects may include food trucks, subway entrances and exits, bus stations, and newsstands, all elements that a typical urban dweller interacts with but does not necessarily notice while performing their daily rituals of going to or returning from work, eating lunch and meeting people.

The Bronx in New York City is currently expected to undergo gentrification in the next few years as the last borough to see this change. However, there is an interesting difference between the Bronx and its similar counterpart, Brooklyn. Brooklyn has now been infiltrated with higher end residential towers and hotels, thus raising the cost of living within the borough and pushing out the lower income residents that once populated the area. The Bronx however, relies heavily on industry, thus it is expected that even when gentrification occurs, it may not be as drastic for two main reasons. First, because the local government has already begun implicating legislative change in order to protect the working wage people currently populating the area, and secondly, due to the limited space of New York City, there is nowhere for these industrial areas to move, thus forcing the workers to remain in the Bronx regardless of the change in the cost of living. Because of this, in the coming gentrification of the city, there will be an interesting dichotomy between the people infiltrating the area and the current population. This growing variation of demographics and the implications that are brought on because of it can be found within the corridor of the Grand Concourse, the main North-South artery of the Bronx. This avenue stretches 4.5 miles and holds much of the architectural history of the Bronx since its construction in 1907 due to its prominence. It is along this route that the shrines of the everyday will be employed, scattered, yet still linked, to create a narrative focused on representing the residents of the Bronx through their everyday lives.

SHRINE ANALYSIS



SHRINES



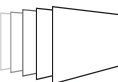
ICON



NON-ICON



ONE MATERIAL



TWO OR MORE



NATURAL



MIXED



MAN-MADE



COLLABORATIVE



SINGULAR

EXPERIENCE

This subset is in relation to the architectural ability of an object to be either an icon or a non-icon. 'Icons' stand out within their landscape where as 'non-icons' either act as fabric or are hidden from view.

OF MATERIALS

This category is defined by the number of different material types used to build one shrine. This is in close relation to the quality of the materials used in building the shrines.

QUALITY

This attribute examines the type of materiality that is used. Man-made defines materials that fabricated or of a plastic quality, while natural materials are those found in the surrounding area.

CONSTRUCTION

Shrines can be erected by a single shrine builder, in which the shrines are much more personal creations, or through a collaborative group. The collaborative subset can refer to a group of builders working together, or collaboration over a long period of time.

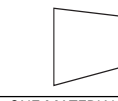
SHRINES



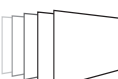
ICON



NON-ICON



ONE MATERIAL



TWO OR MORE



NATURAL



MIXED



MIXED



COLLABORATIVE



COLLABORATIVE



COLLABORATIVE



SINGULAR



SINGULAR



SINGULAR



CAIRN



TOTEM



MAZAR



OVOO



WAYSIDE



SPIRIT HOUSE



HOME ALTAR



BUDDHIST



NICHO

EXPERIENCE

OF MATERIALS

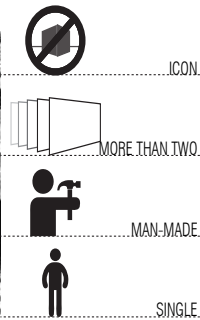
QUALITY

CONSTRUCTION

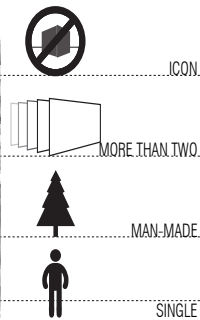
SHRINE ANALYSIS



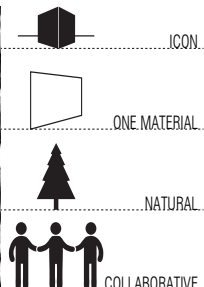
MEXICAN HOME ALTAR



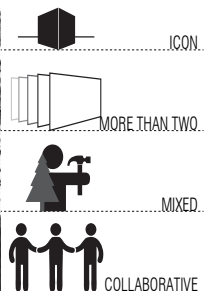
WAYSIDE SHRINE



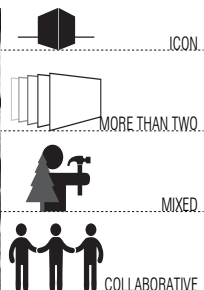
CAIRN



MAZAR



OVOOS SHRINE



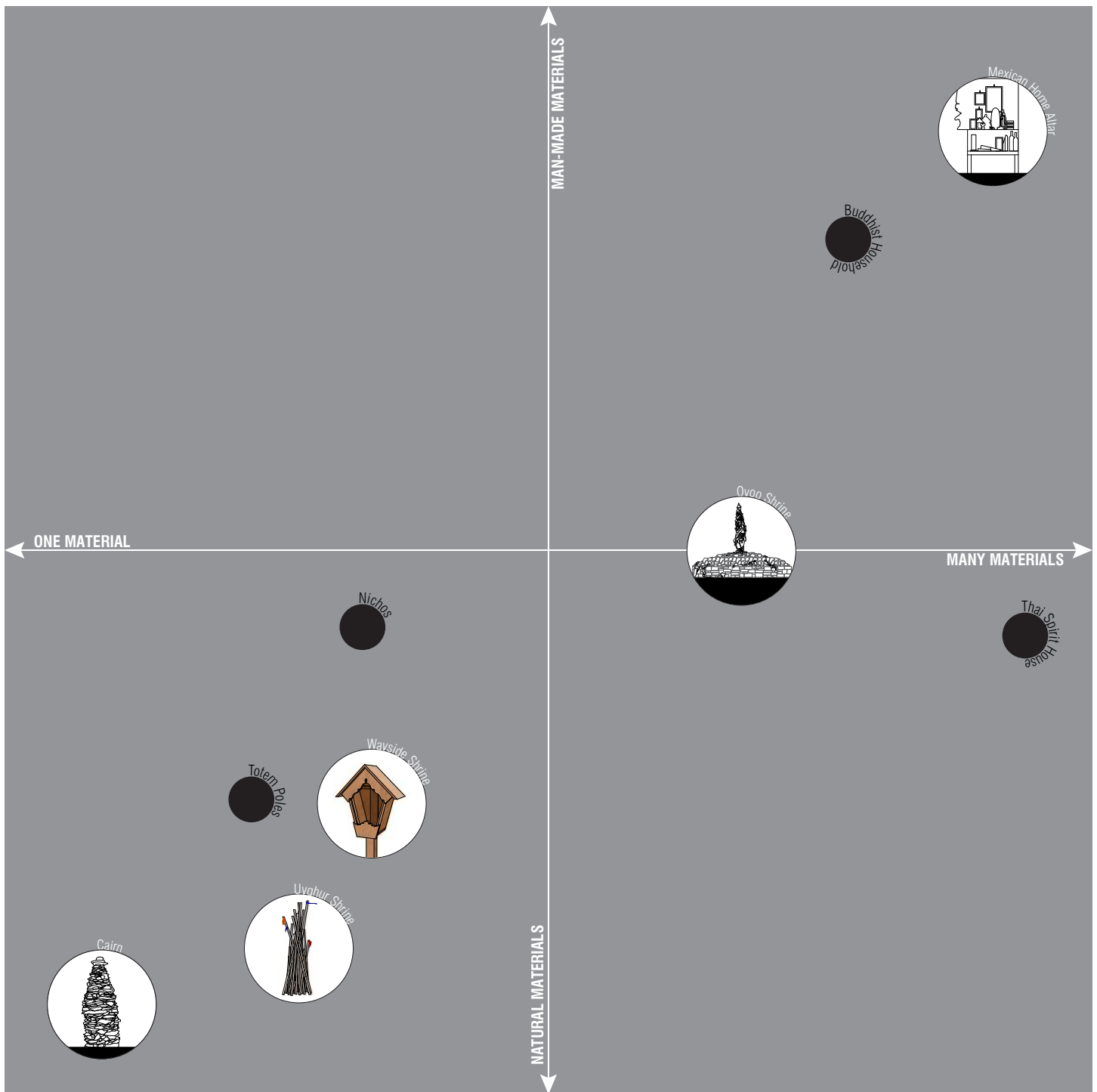
The classification of shrines can occur through many different lenses, however, my intention was to draw out architectural aspects from these semi-architectural objects. The term 'semi-architectural' implies here that the shrines have inherent architectural qualities in their form and construction, however, they are neither spatial nor designed. Through the utilization of a matrix, a clear classification can be made of each shrine, thus allowing for grouping according to aesthetic and technical qualities. The categories used to compare the objects were; experience, number of materials, quality of materials and method of construction. This system allowed for a comparison between shrine typologies in order to draw out qualities that resonate through many objects of spiritual architecture.

The experience of the shrine speaks to how the object is viewed and utilized. Two categories were given in this section, icon and non-icon. Shrines qualified as 'icon' are those shrines which have a clearly defined shape or material make up which causes them to be an icon for their represented ritual. The construction of Ovoos, for example, all utilize a number of blue scarves which represent the Eternal Blue Sky¹, thus making these objects composed of natural materials coated in a thick layer of blue scarves an icon of the worshipping rituals practiced around the shrine. On the other hand, 'non-icon' shrines are those that are constantly changing in form and aesthetic. The second category of comparison is number of materials, which is perhaps self-explanatory. What must be focused on here, however, is the difference of aesthetic between the use of a large number of materials and one single material.

The quality of materials is describing if the materials used to construct the shrine are natural, man-made or mixed. This category is important both because of the aesthetic qualities that the type of materials used accentuates, but also because of the locality of the materials. Typically, shrines that utilize all or mostly natural materials tend to use found materials from the surrounding landscape. This quality creates an interesting problem in creating an object that stands out from its surroundings when it is made of the materials of its surroundings. Mazars are a good example of this. While they are classified as using mixed materials, they are mostly composed of sticks found in the surrounding desert. What makes them stand out, aside from the colors of the flags, is their form, being mostly vertical in a horizontal landscape.

Lastly, the method of construction relates to the number of shrine builders. The collaborative classification can be referring to two different types of construction, first, a group of people that work together to build and erect the object, and second, the object being built up over time by many unrelated worshippers/shrine builders.

1 <http://eternal-landscapes.blogspot.com/2013/03/stones-sticks-and-scarves-mongolias.html>



MATRIX
NUMBER OF MATERIALS - QUALITY OF MATERIALS



MATRIS

EXPERIENCE - RITUAL



MAZAR
ISLAMIC
UYGHUR CHINA

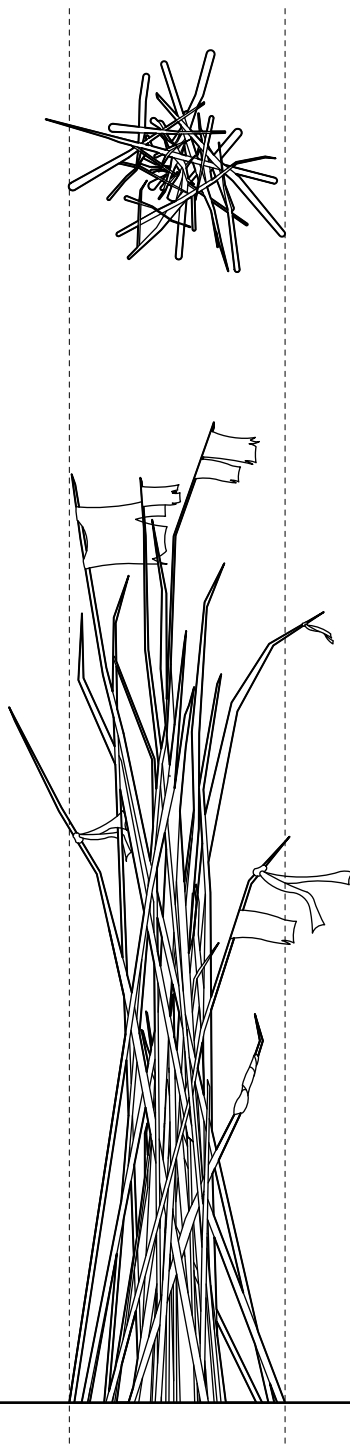
MAZAR

UYGHUR CHINA

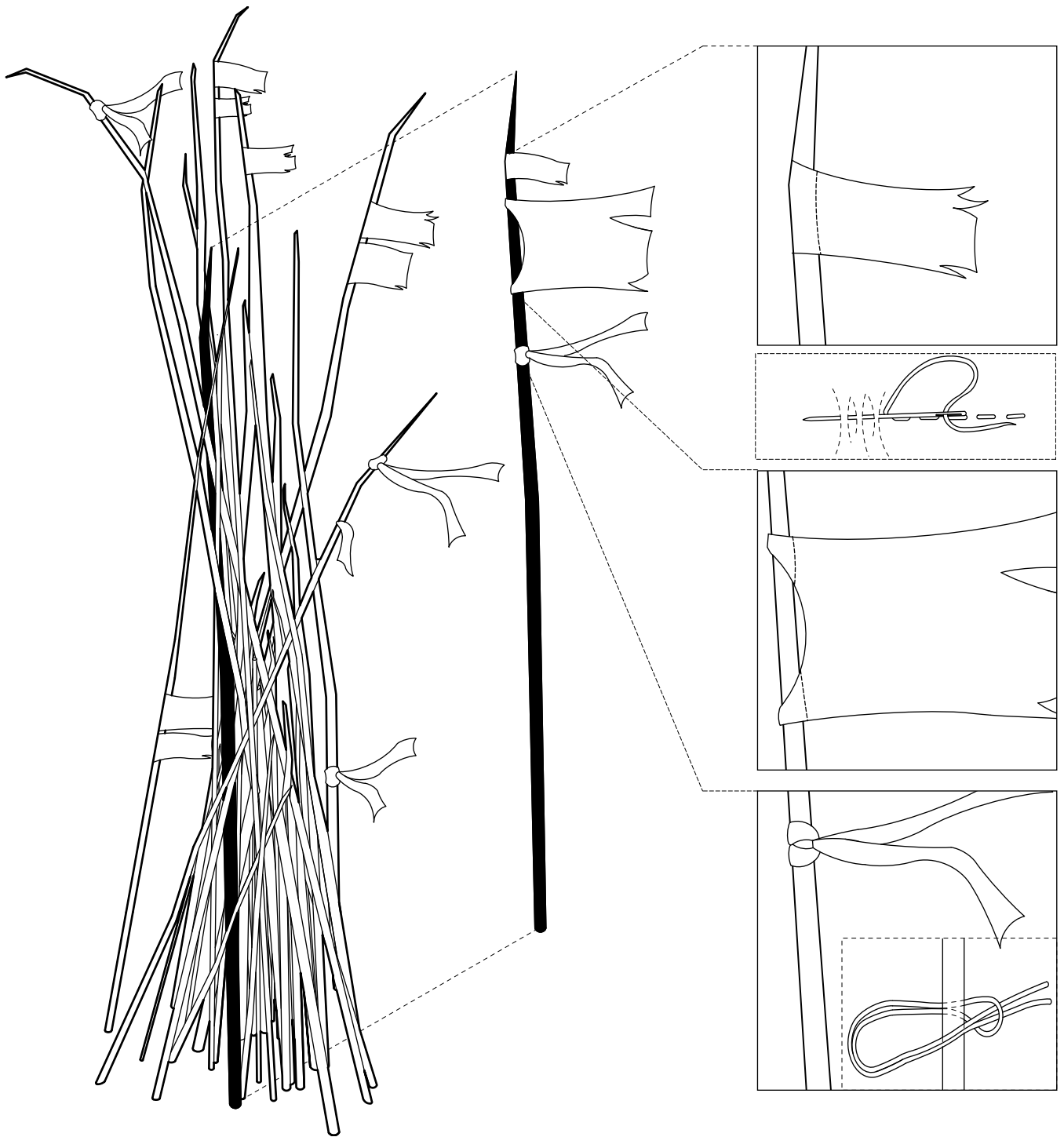
Mazars are a cousin of the Ovoo Shrines of Mongolia. They are often burial sites that are marked with ‘tugh’ long poplar sticks and branches, and ‘alam,’ the scarves tied to the ‘tugh’ that symbolize the evil spirits passing through and fleeing the site. “These mazars evoke a sacredness that resonates far beyond their religious affiliation or intended function – they reflect the essential, spiritual experience of wonder coupled with humility. In light of the challenges – there as well as ere – that this decade has brought, the mazars impress upon us the dual nature of their handmade humanity and the culture’s delicate fragility.” (119) The Mazars tend to be pilgrimage sites and are visited for any number of reasons, two of which include community affairs such as drought or agricultural needs, and personal purposes including infertility or health. The shrines stand as icons in the flat, desert landscape with the multi-colored flags that are tied to the sticks.

Similar to the Cairn, the Mazars tend to be constructed over time. More important shrines continue to have ‘tugh’ and ‘alam’ added to them as people add their own offerings to the spirits. People will also leave food offerings, animal skins, and animal skeletons as offerings. The accretion of objects creates an interesting architectural element, as the objects are similar in materiality; however, they take on many different colors and expressions from the specific ways that the scarves and flags get carefully tied to the sticks. While each shrine is composed of the same materials: poplar sticks and colored scarves, they take on different forms and stances through the way in which the sticks are stacked, the number and size of sticks used, and the variation in the number and variation of colors of the flags tied to the sticks. This brings up Jimenez Lai’s idea of “50 ways to aggregate.” Given similar objects, there is an innumerable amount of ways to organize the elements warranting a different outcome each time. Along these same lines, the build up of the shrine over time suggests a spirituality through the interaction with the shrine. By adding a piece to the shrine, an individual feels connected to every person who added to the shrine before them as well as every contributor who may come after them. The shrine makers are connected to each other through their shared interaction with the same shrine.

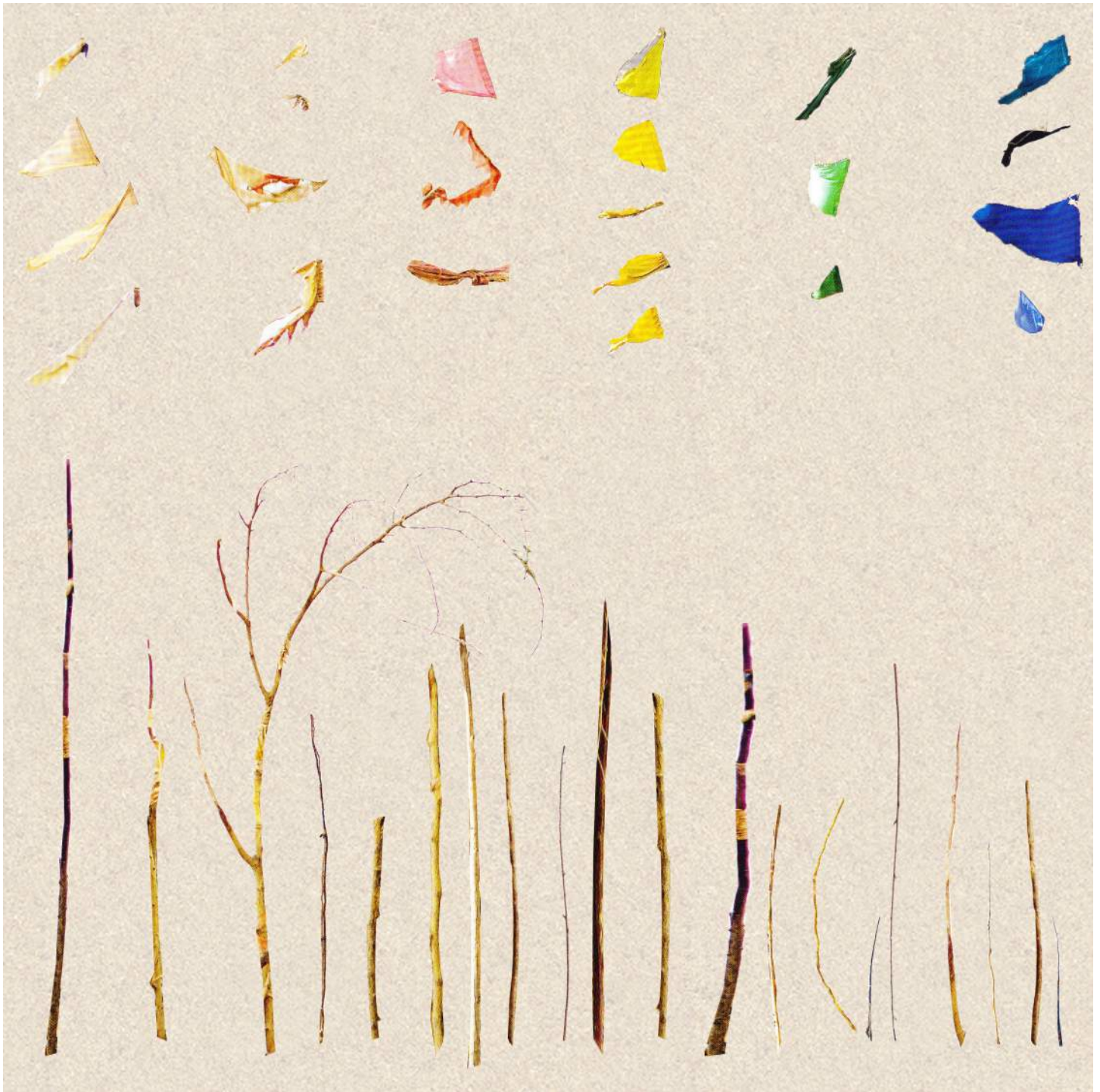
The Mazra also acts as an icon within the landscape to mark the burial grounds, or the important site. The sites are typically set within the desert and are either placed on a pilgrimage route or are a pilgrimage site themselves. Because of this they must be seen from a distance. Again, similar to the Cairns, a lesson can be taken from the Mazras ability to distinguish itself among a landscape that is very similar to it. In other words, the Mazra composed of poplar branches stands out in a landscape of a similar coloration to it.



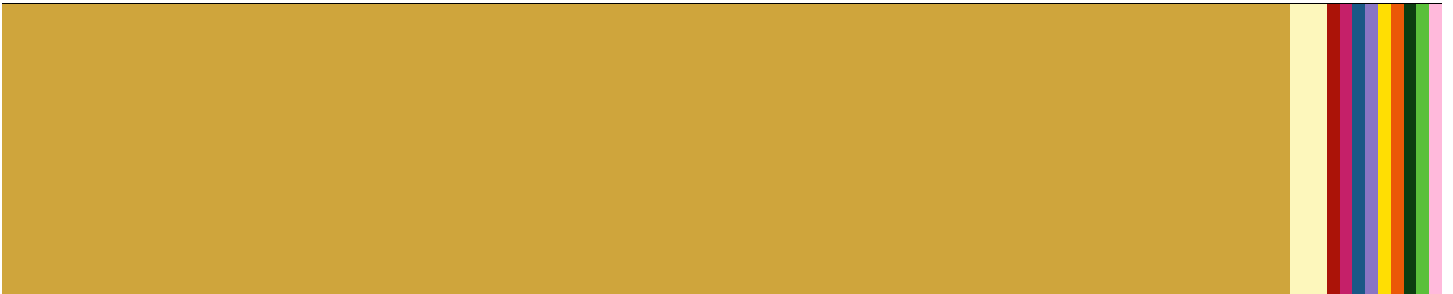
PLAN AND ELEVATION



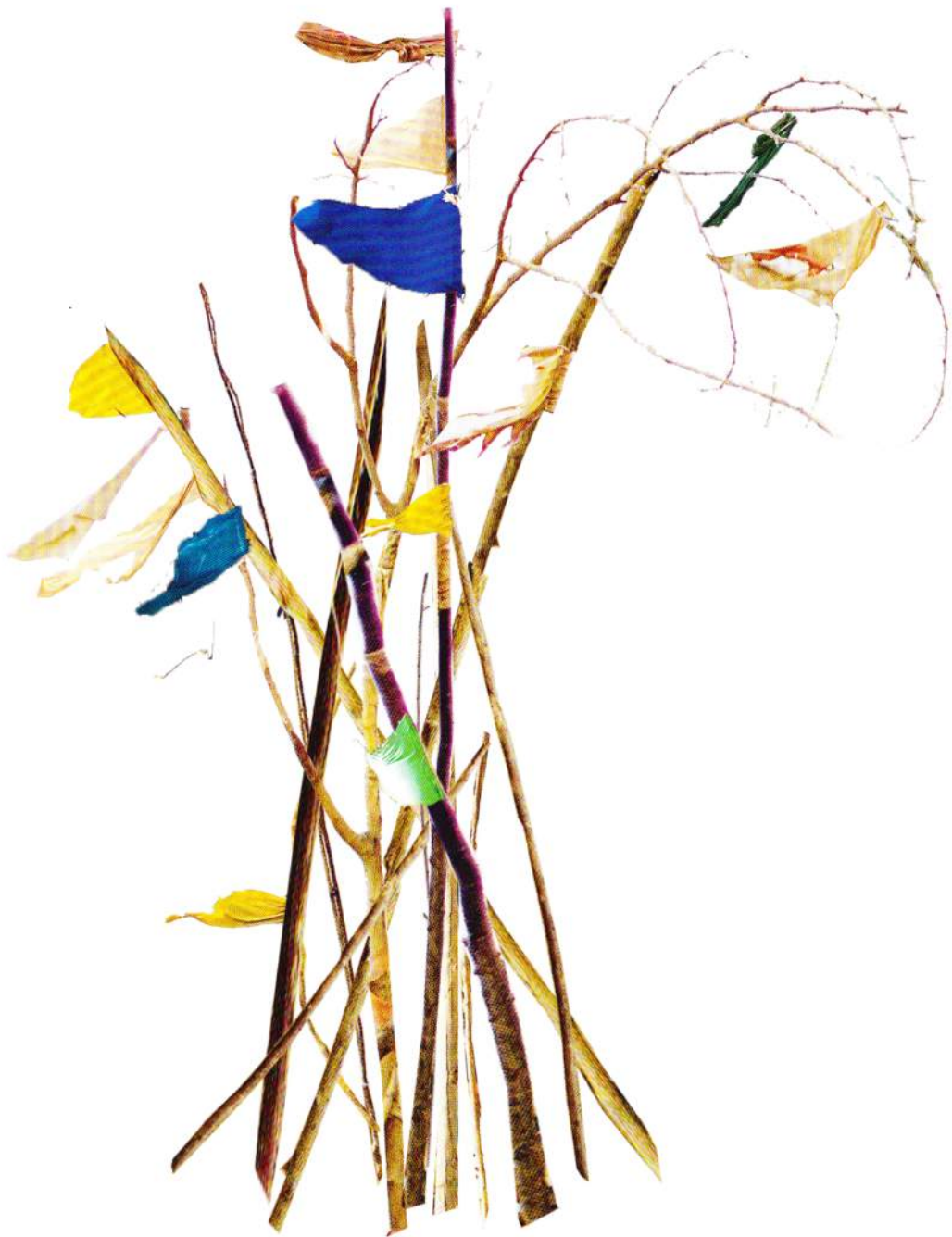
PARTS TO WHOLE



ISOLATED ELEMENTS



PROPORTIONAL COLOR STUDY



PROPORTIONAL MATERIALITY STUDY



GESTURAL DRAWING



EXPERIENCE



MEXICAN HOME ALTAR
CHRISTIANITY/CATHOLICISM
MEXICO

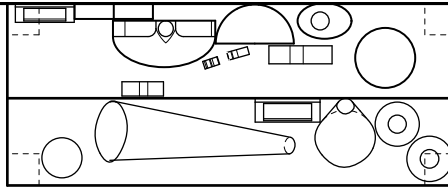
MEXICAN HOME ALTAR

MEXICO

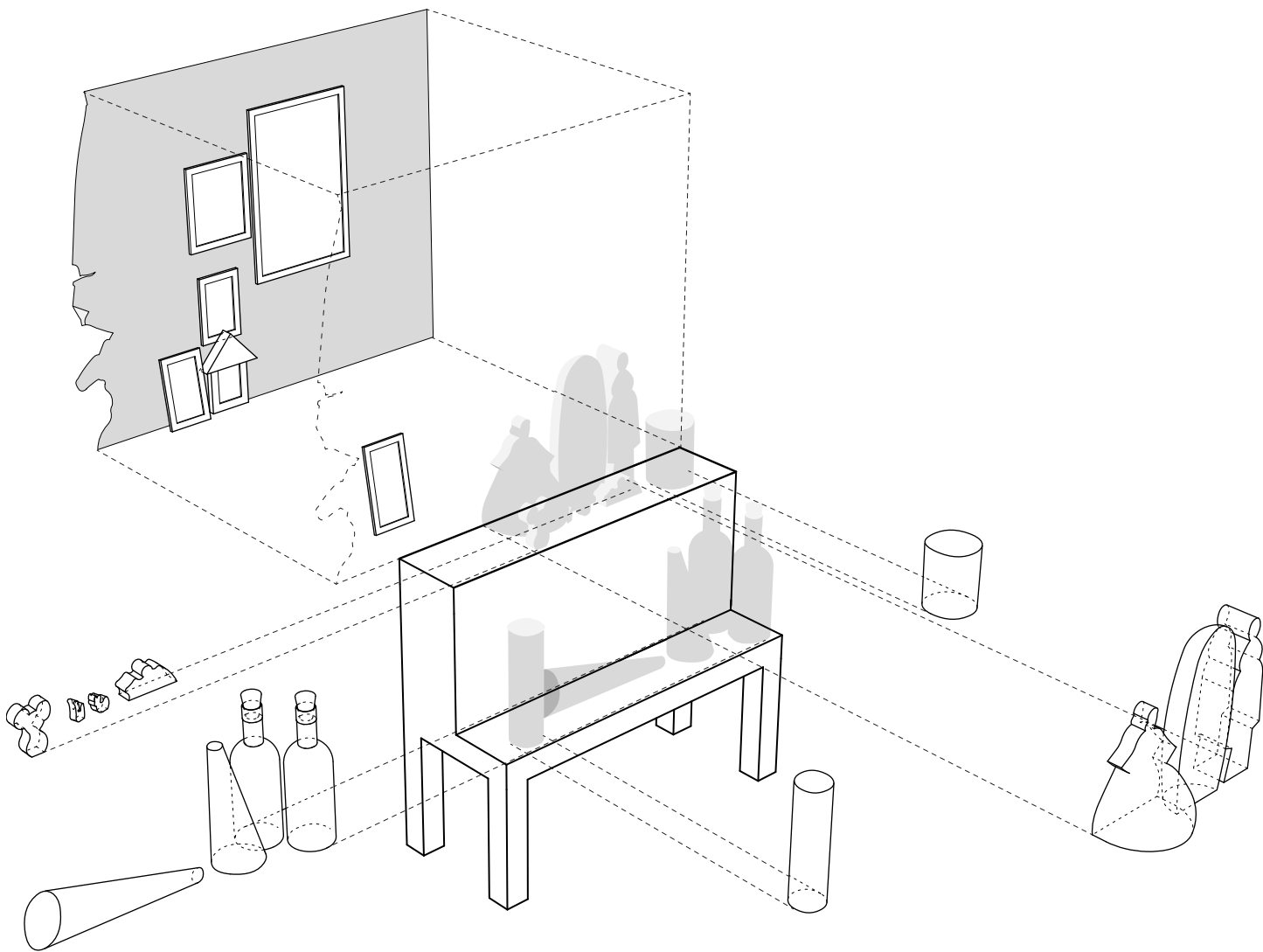
Acting as the religious sites of the rural peasantry of Mexico, the Home Altars take on many different forms and meanings. On a day-to-day basis, these shrines act as remembrance sites and connections to the cosmos; however, they take special significance on two days, Christmas day and the day of the dead, when they are decorated with symbols and offerings to the spirits. The focus of this analysis is on the day-to-day shrines, which are composed of important images, saints, icons, and figurines according to the maker of the shrine. The Mexican Home Altars occupy an important space within the home of religious shrine makers, as they allow the shrine maker to feel a close connection to the religious figures (such as saints, Jesus Christ, and the Virgin Mary) as well as with people who have passed (such as past generations and family members). In one example, the shrine is not only composed of religious imagery including paintings and figurines, but also dolls that may have had significance to the shrine maker, figurines of horses and other animals, sea shells, and images of family. It quickly becomes obvious that the objects are unrelated aside from their unexplained interest to the shrine maker, however they are composed in such a haptic additive way that they create a composition capable of bringing forth feelings of remembrance and spirituality.

The spiritual significance of the shrine is in the making, in the obtaining and organizing of objects of importance. The shrines allow for an almost camaraderie relationship with the religious icons that often feel removed in the practice of organized religion. It makes sense then, that majority of the altar makers are women who are trying to define their hybrid spirituality in a patriarchal religious system of Christianity. While the history behind the home altars is rich, there must be a focus on the architectural aspects of the creation of these personal sacred sites.

At its most reductive state, the home altars are merely tables filled with objects that occupy a space within a house. They often have backdrops of paper or tarp, to symbolize the beginning and end of the sacred space. The interest in relation to the other shrines analyzed is in the accretion and haptic organization of the unrelated objects as well as the build-up of the shrine over time. The spiritual aspect of the shrine is accentuated through the amount of objects, textures, colors, and materials that are presented on the table. Architecture is often focused on achieving beauty through the elegance of very few materials that work together coherently in order to create a desired effect, however these shrines strive for attention in the exact opposite manner. The unrelated objects become related and become a unit through their organization and relation to each other as an object within the shrine. The olio of materials and textures are framed by the background and thus can be read together. The lessons from this shrine point to a Frankenstein-ing architectural style, a style of accretion of elements that are immediately unrelated, but become a unit through their organization and connections.



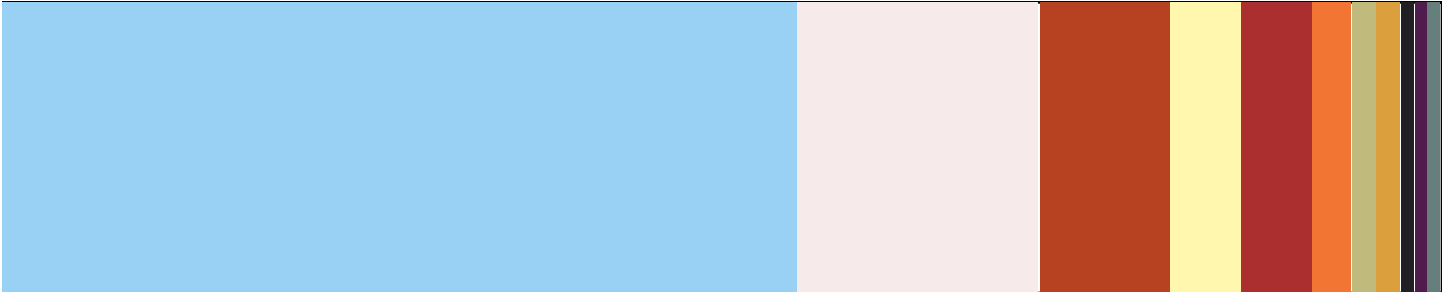
PLAN AND ELEVATION



PARTS TO WHOLE



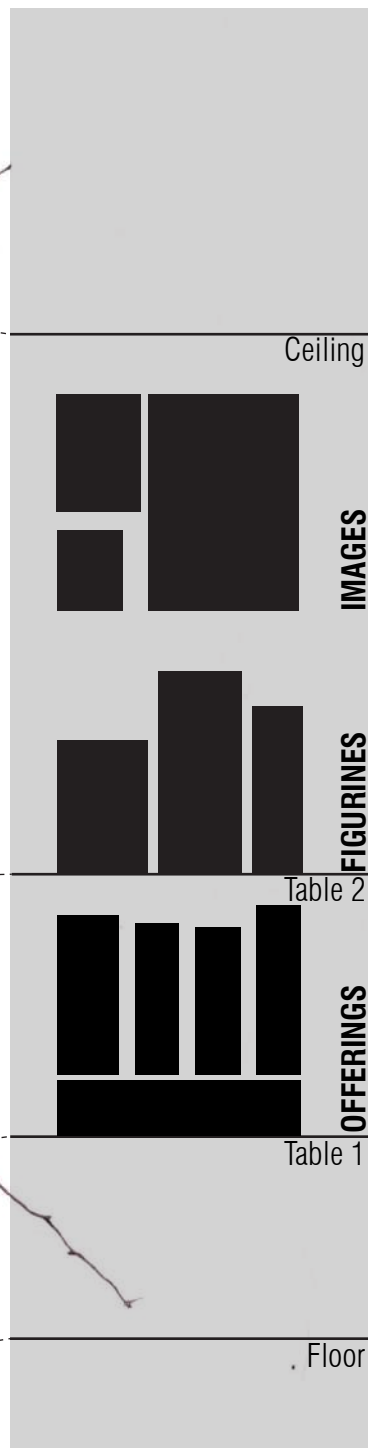
ISOLATED ELEMENTS



PROPORTIONAL COLOR STUDY



PROPORTIONAL MATERIALITY STUDY



GESTURAL DRAWING



EXPERIENCE



WAYSIDE SHRINE
CHRISTIANITY/CATHOLICISM
WESTERN EUROPE

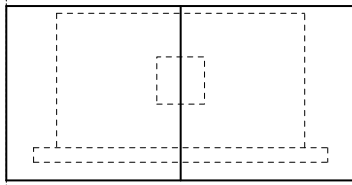
WAYSIDE SHRINE

WESTERN EUROPE

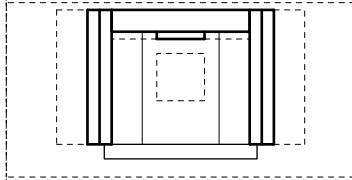
Wayside Shrines are scattered across Western Europe (including but not limited to Slovenia and northern Italy) and act as markers for important sites. The reason for the placement of these shrines ranges from marking the place where a person has died to marking a significant religious and sacred area. The aesthetics of these shrines are often borrowed directly from the vernacular of churches, as they tend to take the form of small, exaggerated, Christian temples. The shrines are composed of a roof and a niche, with an icon of a saint or Jesus Christ set within the niche. A strict symmetry is used to mimic the ideal form of the pentagon church, as well as to focus attention on the figurine within the niche, which outside of an architectural discussion of shrines may be the most important piece of the wayside shrine. Dissimilar to many of the other shrines studied within this exercise, the wayside shrines are built off site and set into the landscape afterward, thus creating somewhat of a disconnect between the materiality of the shrine to its surrounding landscape. The wayside shrine is often built of wood or stone, both very natural materials, however, the materials are not dependent upon the end location of the shrine, but where the shrine was built.

These shrines are often related to Christianity through the icons that are portrayed within them, however, contrary to typical worship sites of churches and cathedrals, the shrines are location based and thus are often removed from city centers. They tend to be located on rural roads and paths as these are the religious sites that are unrepresented by the churches that are located within cities and towns in order to give a place for worship to a group of people. The difference between the location of the churches to the location of the shrines is significant because the shrines are part of an almost haphazard networking systems that is removed from the logic of the location of town and city centers, or the settling logic that underlies every town and city. Instead, the shrines are composed and located based off of a logic of not where they are needed for the convenience of worshippers, but an internal logic specific to that shrine, of what needs to be marked. The wayside shrines that were placed to mark the path of the funerary procession of Queen Eleanor of Castile are an example of this network. This creates a sense of the unexpected for the traveller as they may pass a wayside shrine along a country road or path, thus reminding them of a significant event that may have occurred in that spot and causing them to reflect on their own spirituality.

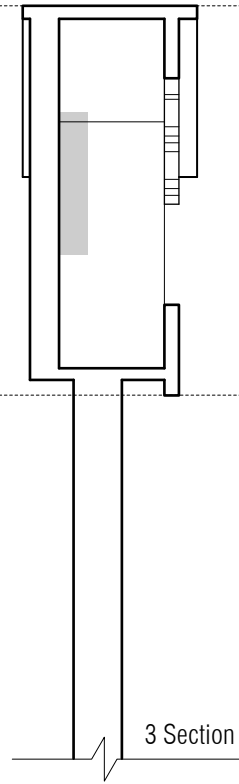
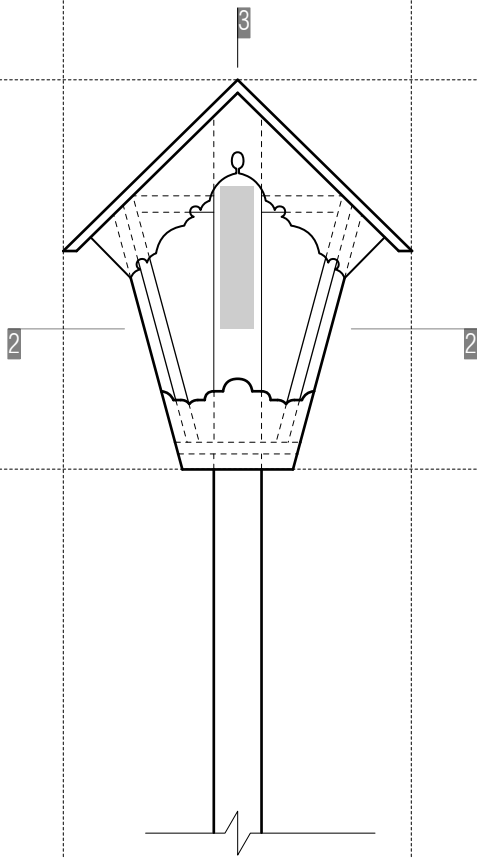
Wayside shrines have many characteristics that vary from the other shrines being studied within this analysis: they are whole formal objects, they are not composed of agglomerated objects, but instead are constructs shaped around the presentation of an icon. The intended take-away from this free standing, single perspectival object within a landscape is its inherent network between sites, and more importantly, its nature of being happened upon unexpectedly. Atop of this understanding of the unexpected encounter, is the ability of the shrine to create spiritual thoughts from an individual point of view, as opposed to the spirituality that arrives from masses experiencing a sermon within an organized religious meeting. This occurs not only through religious iconography that is featured within the wayside shrine, but also in the happenstance encounter with the shrine.



1 Roof Plan

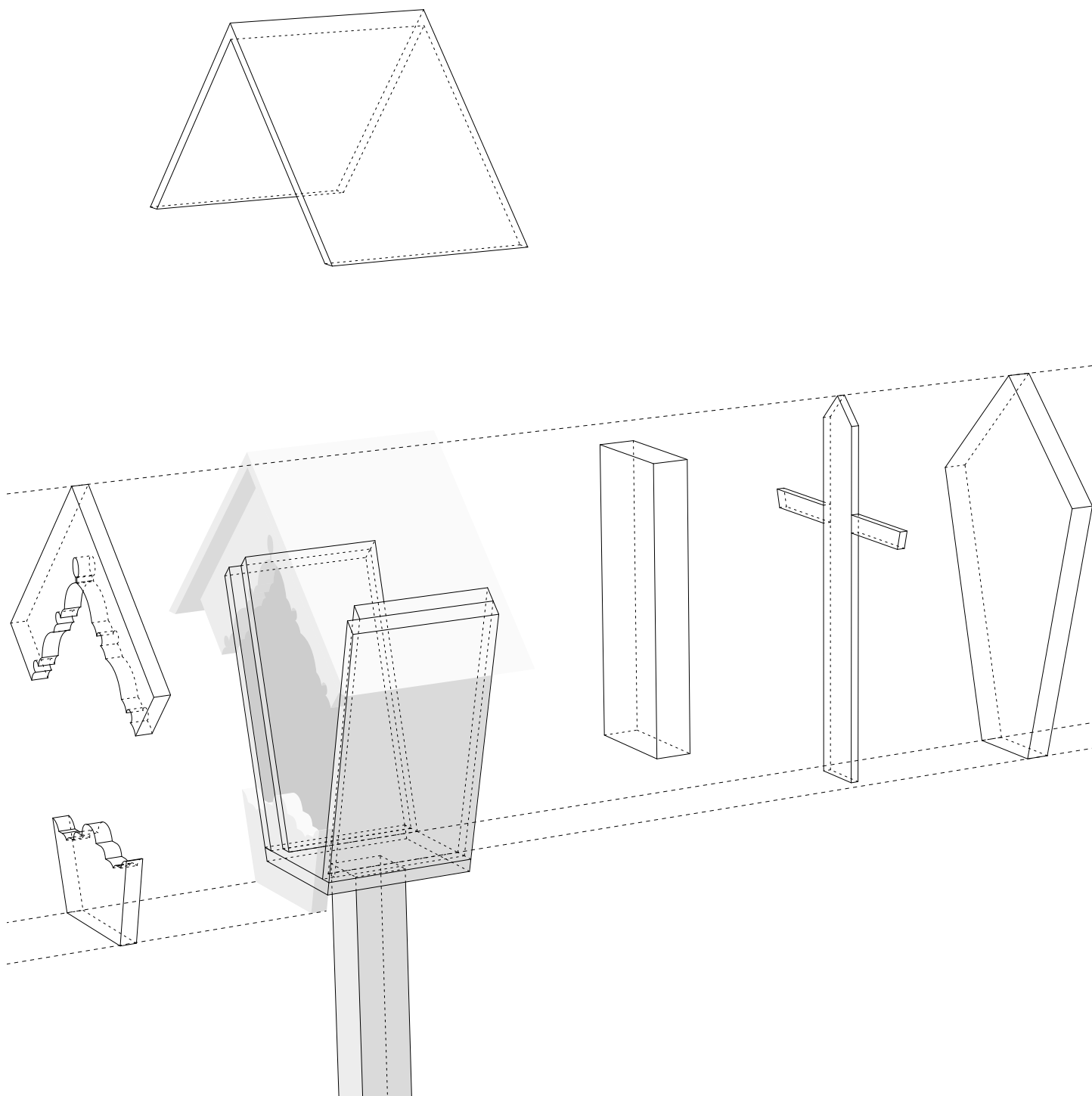


2 Plan

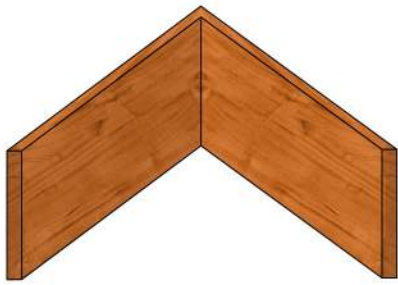


3 Section

PLAN AND ELEVATION



PARTS TO WHOLE



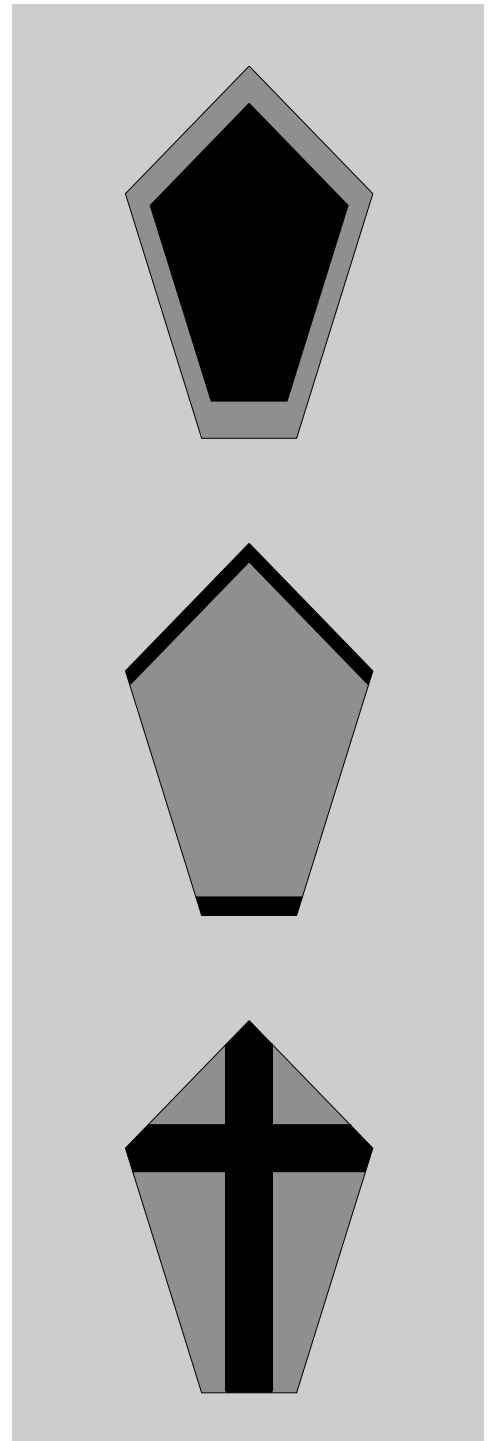
ISOLATED ELEMENTS



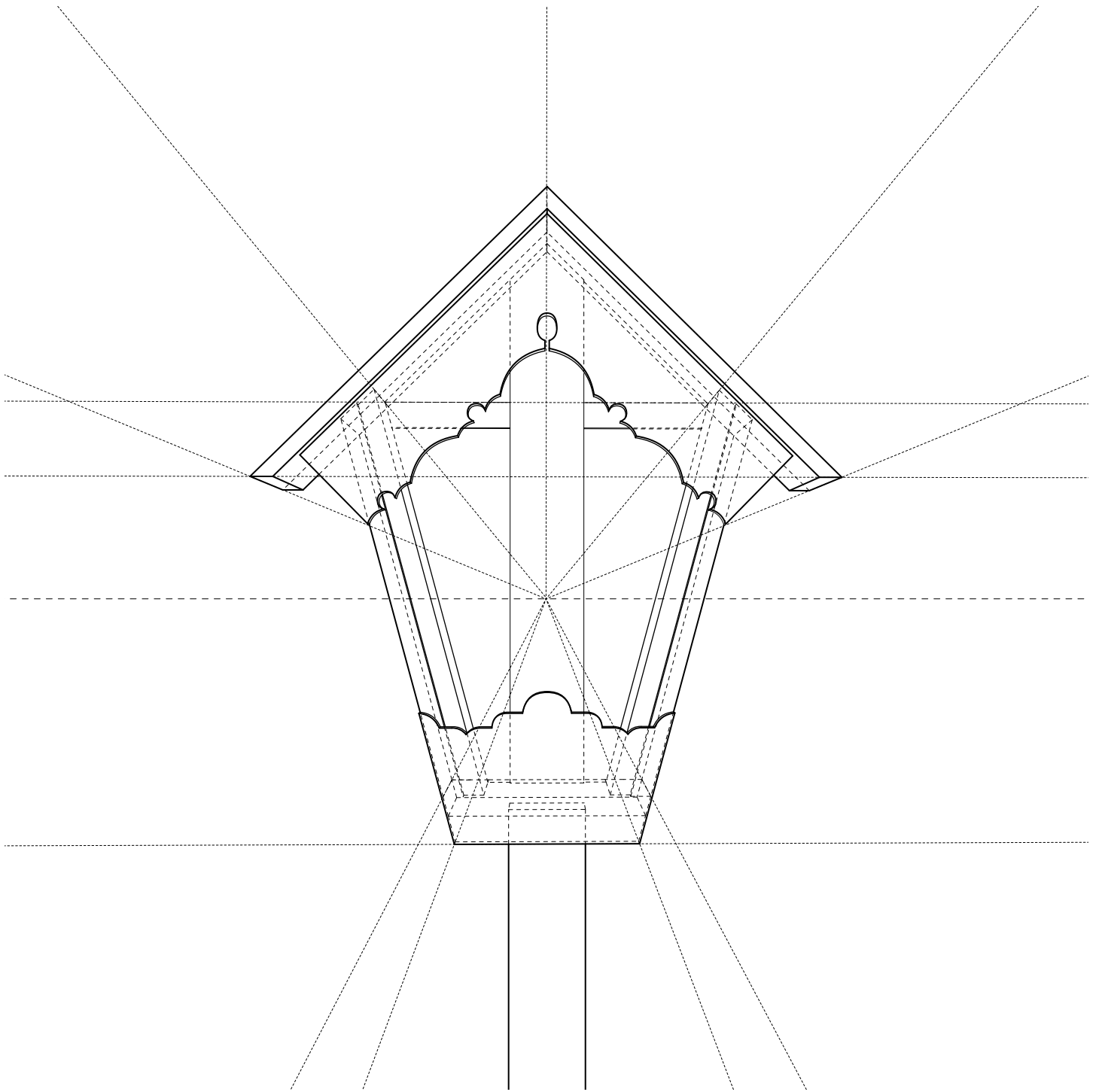
PROPORTIONAL COLOR STUDY



PROPORTIONAL MATERIALITY STUDY



GESTURAL DRAWING



EXPERIENCE



CAIRN
CHRISTIANITY/CATHOLICISM
SCOTLAND

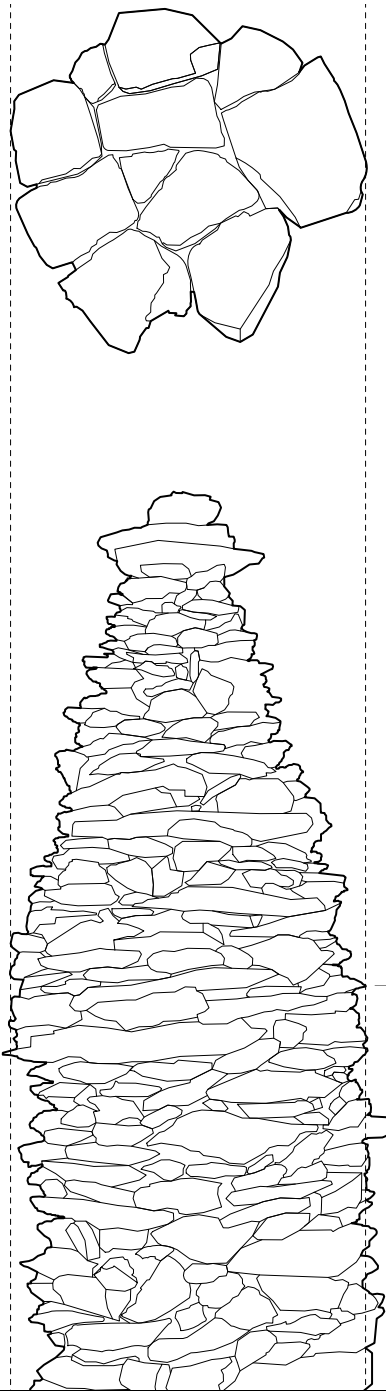
CAIRN

SCOTLAND

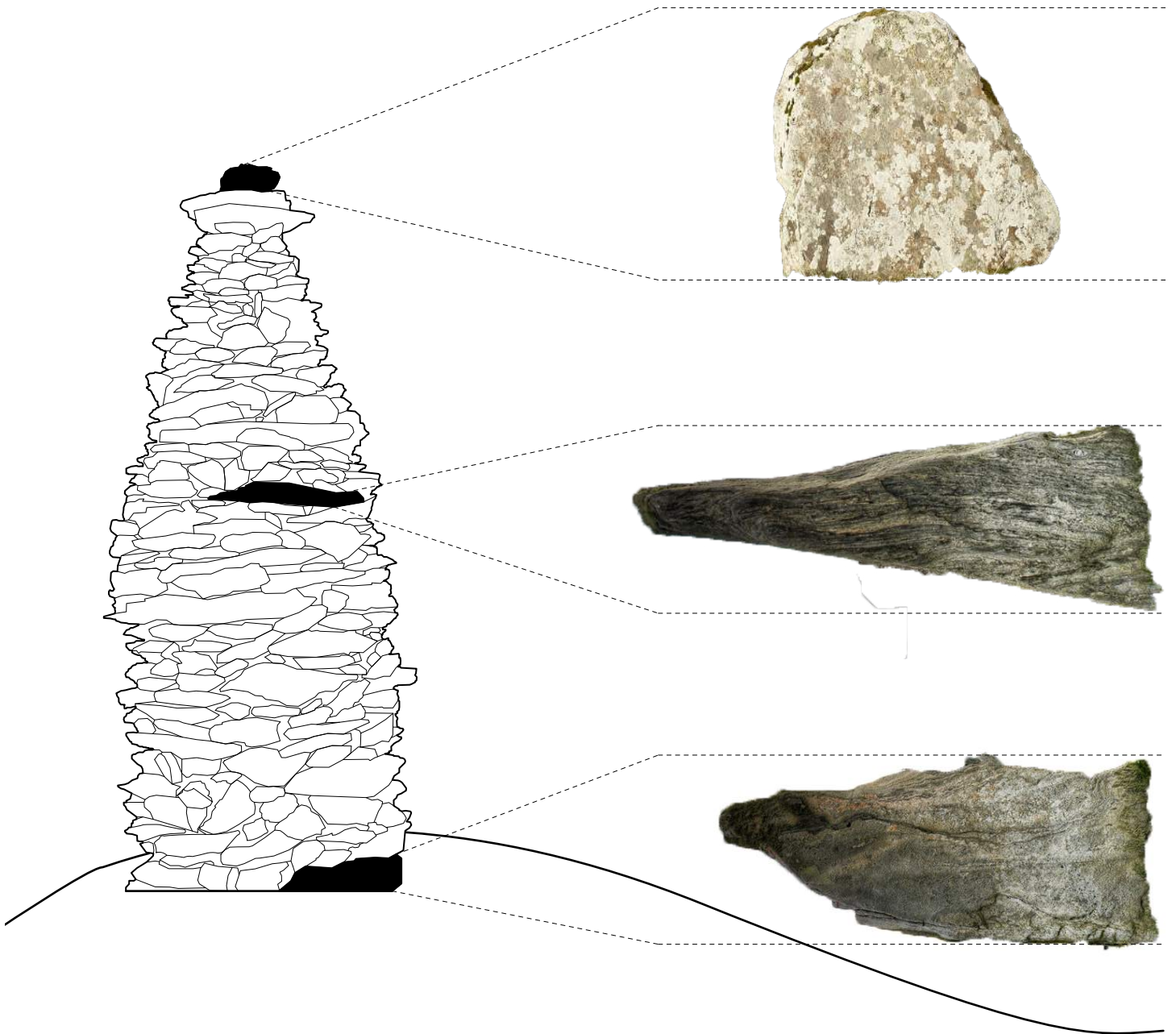
Located at the tops of rocky hills and at the peaks of hiking trails, Cairns are symbols of good luck for travellers. One ritual related to these stacked rock compositions precariously perched overlooking a deep valley, is that hikers will pick up a rock from the bottom of the trail and climb the mountain. When they arrive at the peak they add their rock to the stack, thus creating a shrine whose creation is due to the shared responsibility of hikers climbing the same mountain. Another variation of the shrine typology are the Cairns that are created by one person (artist or shrine maker) who collects and organizes rocks from the immediate area using the techniques of stone masons to create an icon along the peak of a mountain. With this understanding of the construction of these shrines, it becomes obvious that they can take on many different forms, of rocks merely thrown into a pile that holds much significance, to examples from Andy Goldsworthy of egg or cylinder shaped sculptural masonry.

The materiality of the Cairns is always local stones that are collected from the area in which the cairn is going to be built. This direct connection between building material and built objects is intriguing from an architectural stand point to look at not only the sustainability of the local materials, but more importantly (in a formal sense), the interest that comes from collection and organization of materials that blend with the surrounding area to create an icon within the landscape. When the rocks stand-alone on the ground, or are stacked in a manner in which the forms flow into the ground, the stones do not act as the iconic icon of the Cairn. This typology of shrine is dependent on being an icon within the natural landscape as a beacon for hikers to reach that specific spot along a mountain ridge. The Cairns act very similarly to Le Corbusier's Chapel of Notre Dame du Haut which, from a low vantage point acts as a beacon to religious pilgrims and while hides itself from view while being approached until the pilgrim has reached the peak of the mountain. The shrine then must be easily discernible from its surroundings even if it is made of the same material on which it stands.

The ritual of the shared construction of the Cairn speaks directly to the user-interaction that creates a sense of spirituality through drawing larger connections between the individual and the larger network of individuals who share in the same interest: hiking. This allows for an understanding of what is beyond the individual in the very personal sport of hiking. From an architectural standpoint, a lesson can be learned from this idea of spirituality through shared experiences. By creating a shared ritual among hikers, a heightened sense of the self within a larger network is exaggerated. Architecture can borrow this idea of user interaction and network to look beyond how a person might experience a space while occupying it to how an interaction with the space and the user having an effect on the spatial qualities of the space can create a deeper connection between user and architecture.



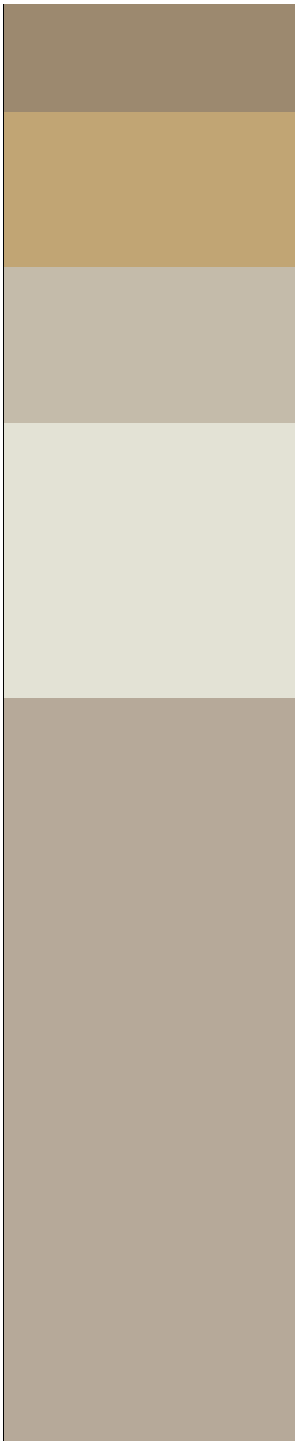
PLAN AND ELEVATION



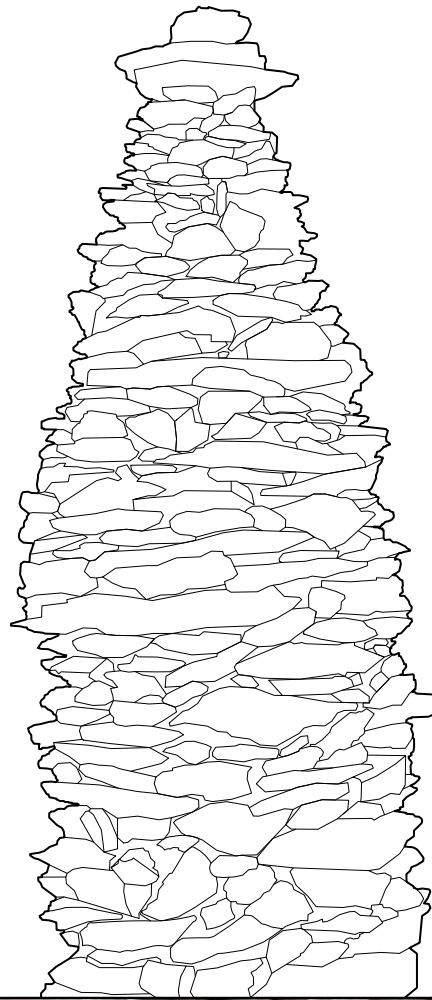
PARTS TO WHOLE



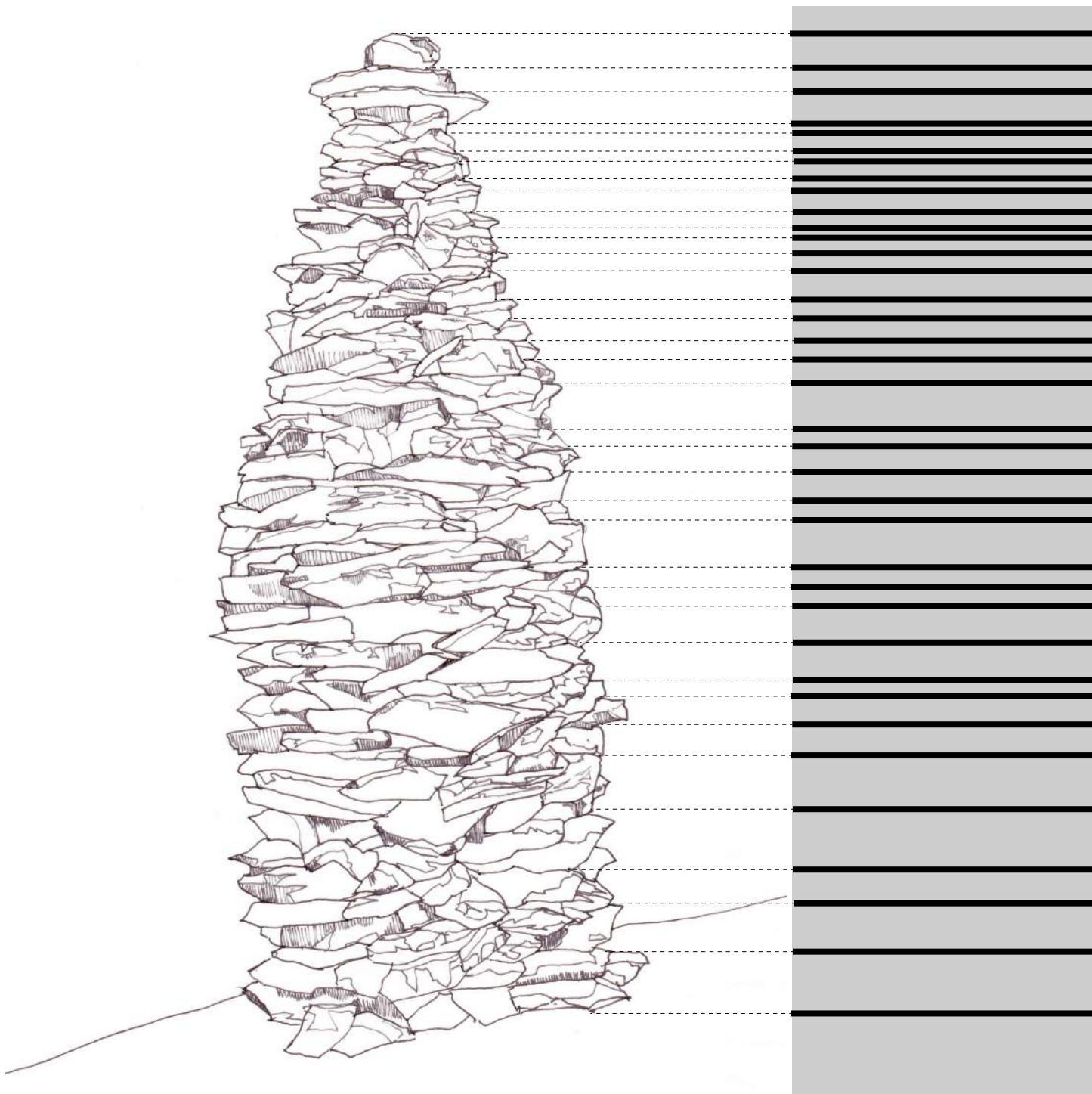
ISOLATED ELEMENTS



PROPORTIONAL COLOR STUDY



PROPORTIONAL MATERIALITY STUDY



GESTURAL DRAWING



EXPERIENCE



Ovoo SHRINE
TENGRIISM/BUDDHISM
MONGOLIA

Ovoo SHRINE

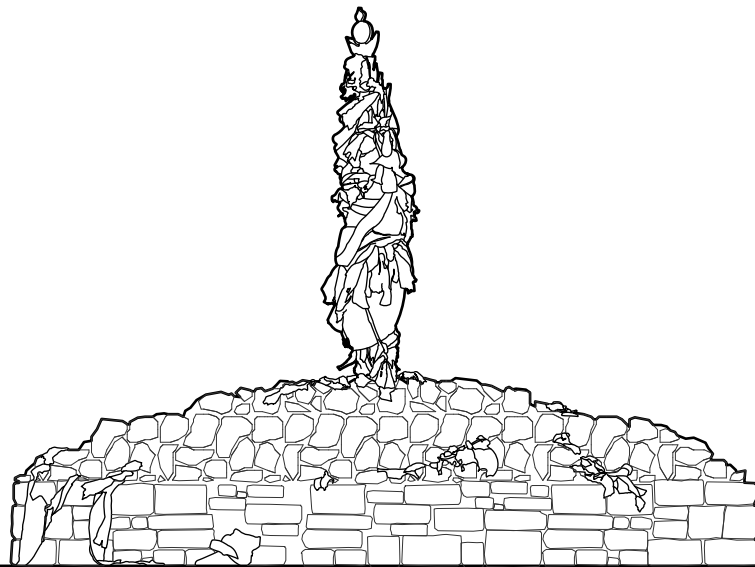
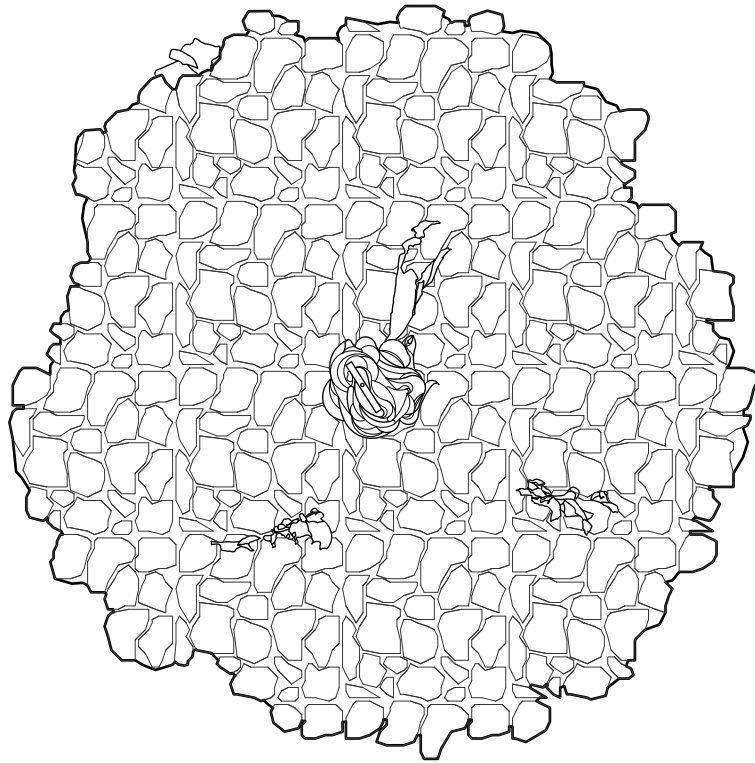
MONGOLIA

Located in the hills of Mongolia, these shrines are closely related to the Scottish Cairns as both are worshiped to ensure safe journeys. The traditions of the Mongolian Ovoos arose from Shamanistic rituals of worshipping the sky or “Tengir.” The shrines are built of stacked rocks and sticks and then are adorned with mainly blue flags or scarves, but also what seems to be trash, such as steering wheel covers, empty vodka bottles, and crutches. These items of garbage are offerings of thanks to the gods; for example, the steering wheel cover is a thank you for a safe journey while the crutches are an offering for good health. The blue flags take on special significance, as Mongolia is known as “The Land of the Eternal Blue Sky.” The blue represents the sky and is a direct offering to the sky god. The ritual of worshipping at these shrines often includes walking around the Ovoo three times in a clockwise direction and adding an offering that can include anything from a stone to a flag to an empty liquor bottle. While the ritual is to circle around the shrine three times before continuing a journey, in recent years with the popularity of the car, it is also okay to honk the cars horn while passing an Ovoo to show respect for the shrine and the gods associated with it. In the formation of these shrines, they become almost shrines of trash within a vast barren landscape.

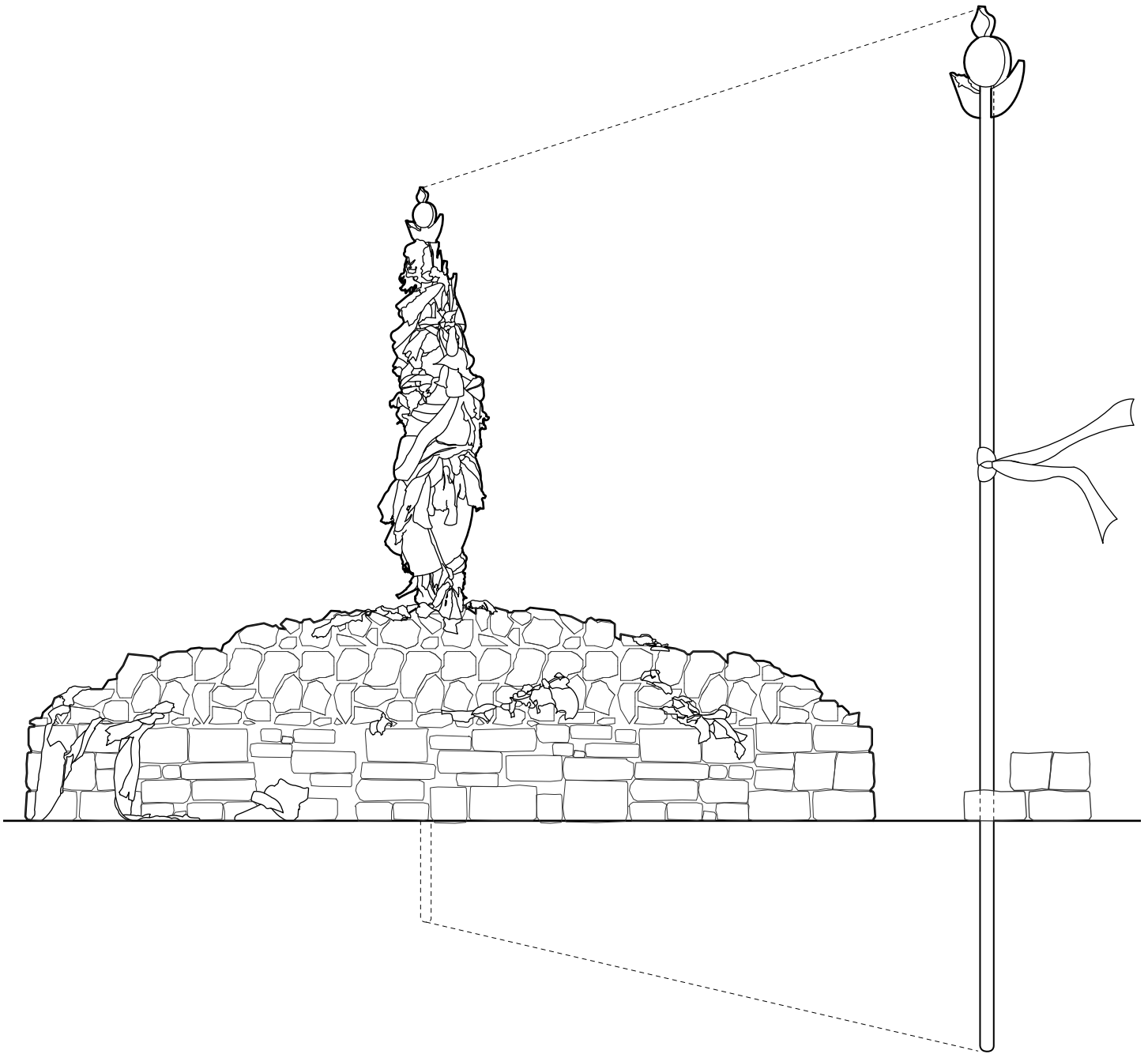
The Ovoo shrines of Mongolia hold many architectural qualities that make them important to analyze. In essence they are piles of trash, however, they still warrant a spiritual ritual and effect on the viewer or the worshipper. These shrines are the essence of ‘Frankenstein-ing’ as they are composed of many different objects and materials that typically would not be used together to create a structure, however, they work together to make a spiritual effect. This also relates back to the brick problem of architecture, where the bricks are no longer rectangles of uniform size, but stones, sticks, flags and trash that build up on one another to create a greater whole.

Similar to the Mazars of Uyghur China and the Cairns, the Mongolian Ovoo also has qualities of user interface, or more specifically of the interaction of the worshipper to create a more spiritual experience. By adding a stone or an offering to the shrine, the user feels connected to worshippers who have preceded him/her and who will follow. This understanding creates a feeling of a larger network, which can also be described as a greater understanding of the individual within a grander cosmological order. This idea of the user’s experience of changing the architecture of the shrine in order to create a feeling of a larger spanning network of people with shared interests can be borrowed and translated into an architectural understanding of the importance of user experience and interaction with a building.

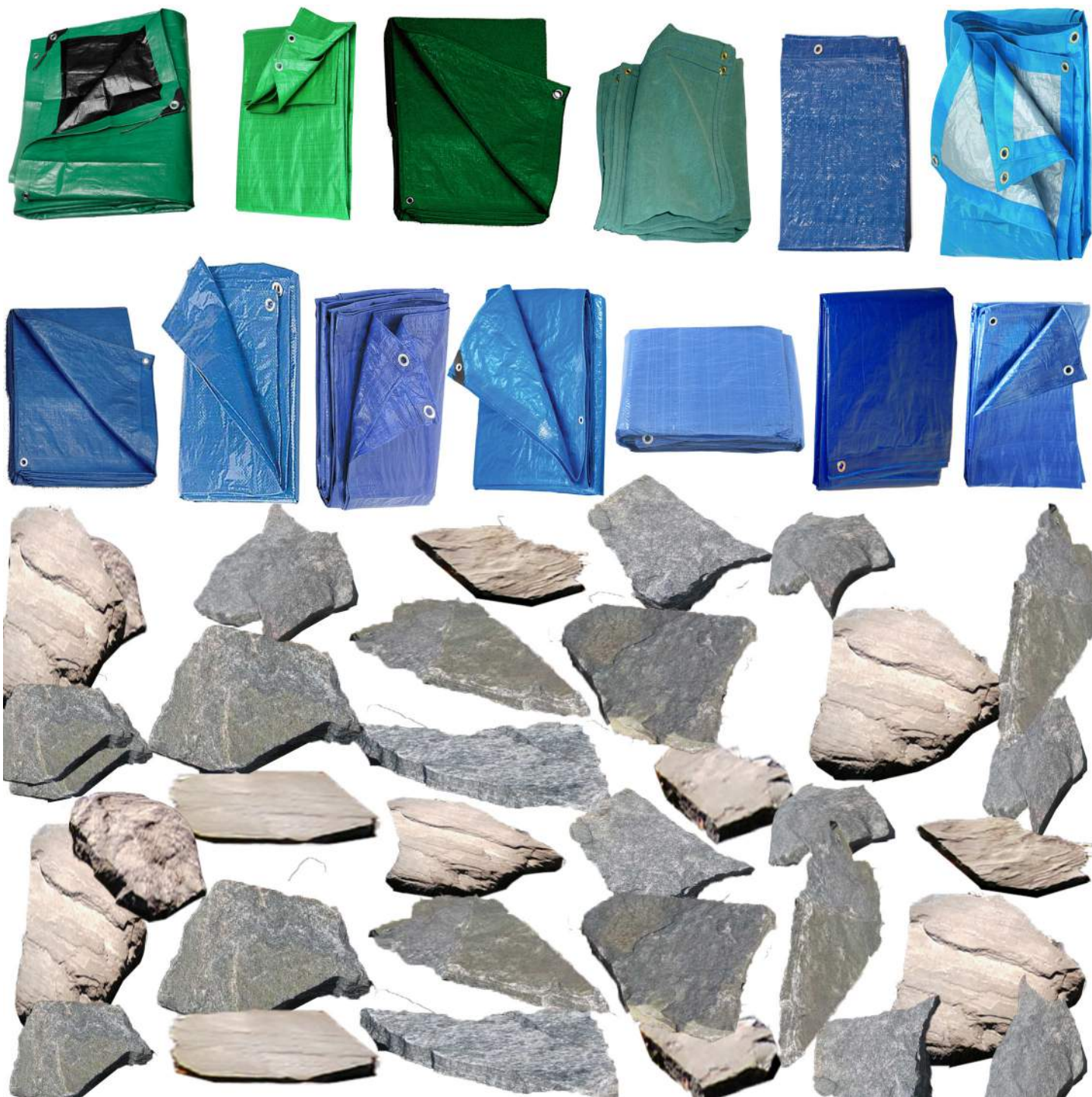
Lastly, the Ovoo is a Mongolian icon in a barren landscape. Ovoos are typically located atop of hills and in open stretches of landscape and thus become a beacon of spirituality. They grow out of the land and create a place for people to worship either in a group or individually. Much like some of the other shrines studied, the Ovoo must be an icon within the landscape in order to draw attention to it and to create the feeling of spirituality from afar as well as at a close distance.



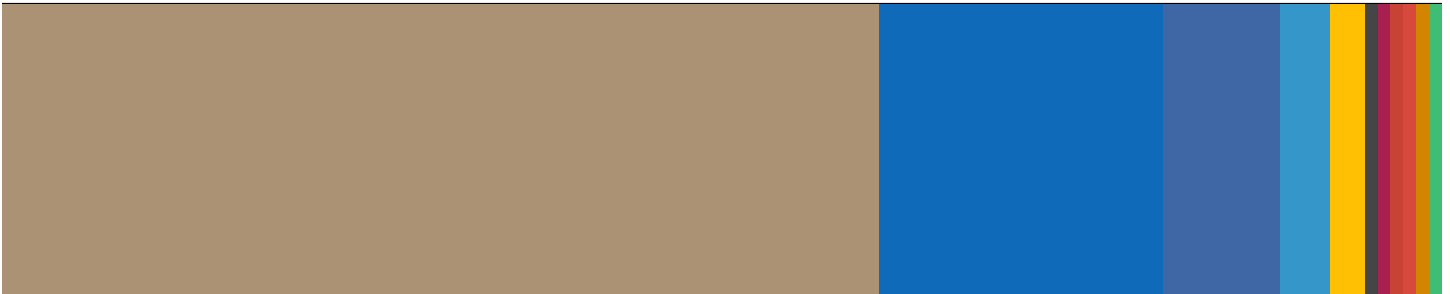
PLAN AND ELEVATION



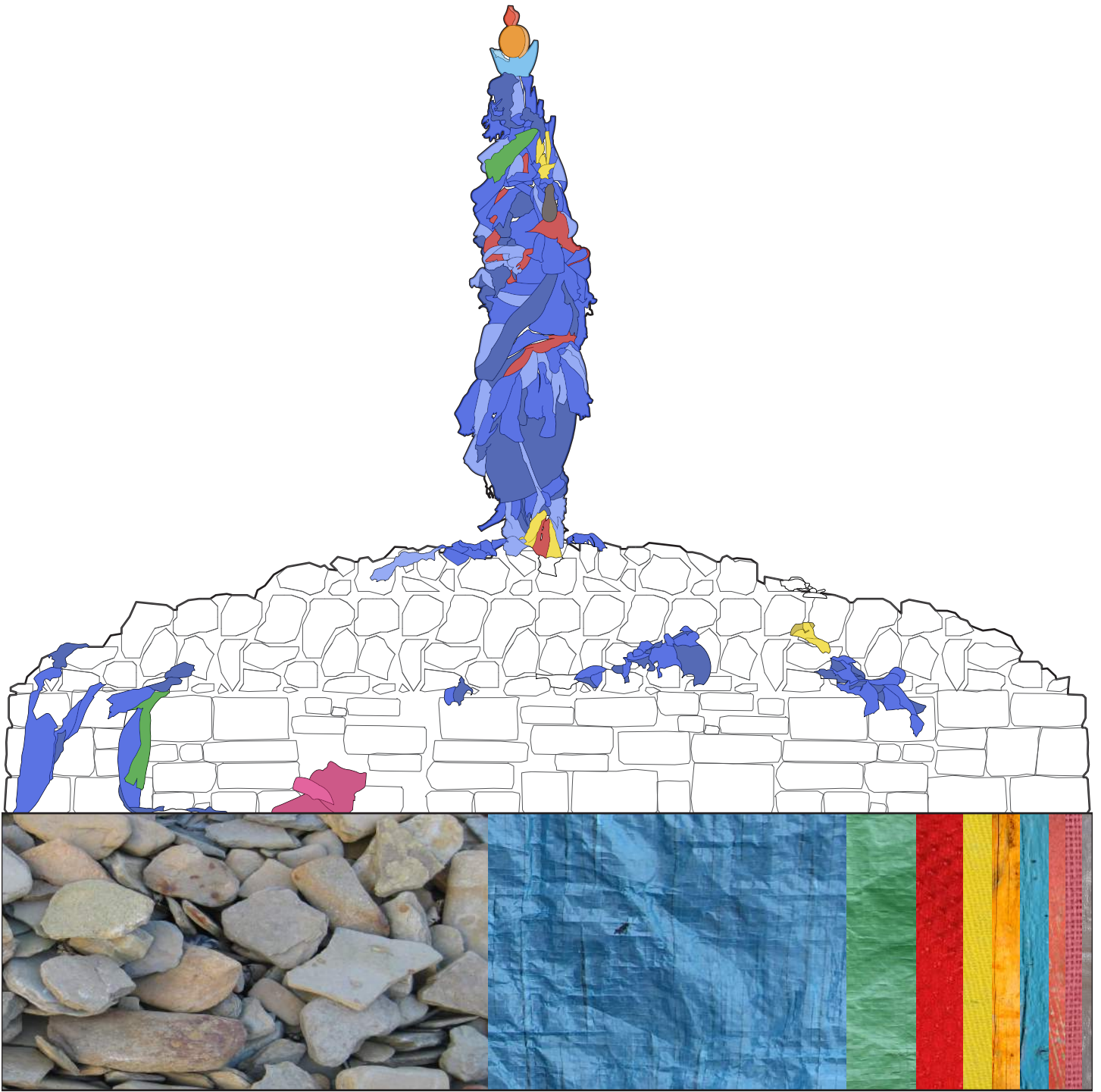
PARTS TO WHOLE



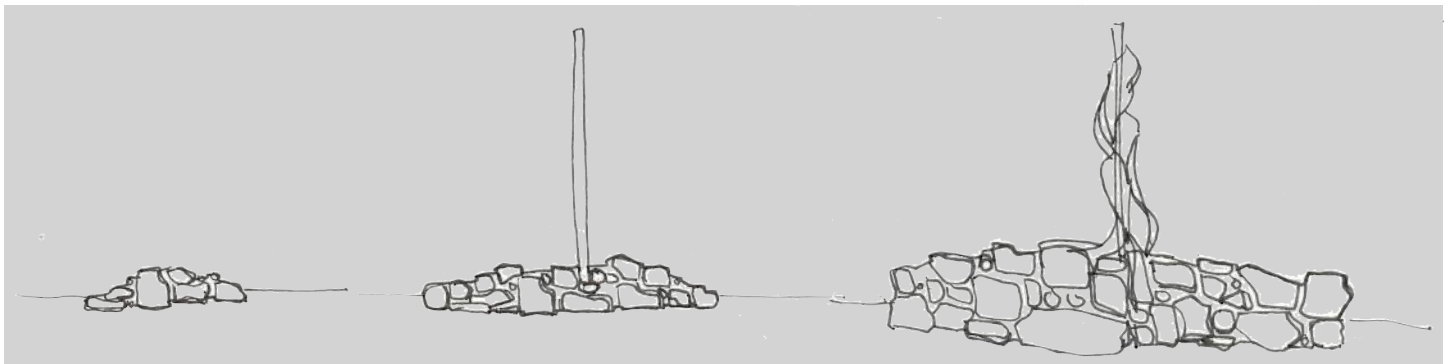
ISOLATED ELEMENTS



PROPORTIONAL COLOR STUDY



PROPORTIONAL MATERIALITY STUDY



GESTURAL DRAWING



EXPERIENCE

PROGRAM ANALYSIS

ARCHITECTURE OF THE EVERYDAY

ARCHITECTURE OF THE EVERYDAY

To many religious followers, shrines have become an everyday object of faith. It acts as a small-scale object that reminds one of their faith. There is inherent ritual within the shrines as they are related to specific religions, for example, if a Catholic approaches a shrine dedicated to the Virgin Mary, they may recite a prayer or say the rosary. In creating an architectural object that is removed from religion, it is logical to use the qualities of the shrine to accent the everyday ritual within an urban context. By utilizing lessons gained from studying shrines the everyday ritual can be accented within an urban context.

Aspects that may be considered in the realization of these objects are the food trucks, bodegas, subway entrances and exits, bus stations, and newsstands. These are all elements that a typical urban dweller interacts with but does not necessarily notice while performing their daily rituals of going to or returning from work, eating lunch and meeting people.



PERMANENT EVERYDAY



SEMI-PERMANENT EVERYDAY



TEMPORARY EVERYDAY

SITE ANALYSIS

THE GRAND CONCOURSE, BRONX



GENTRIFICATION

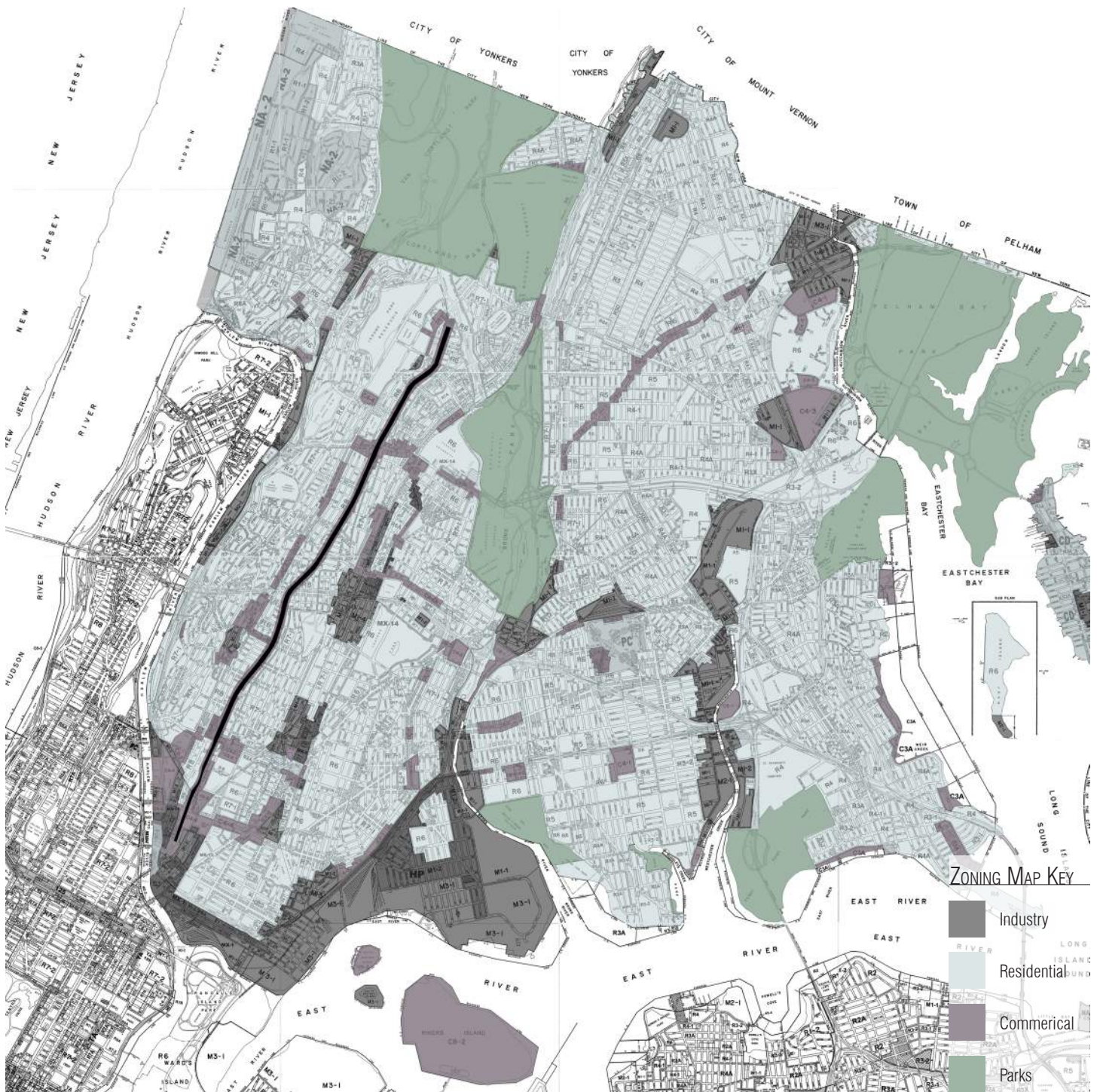
THE GRAND CONCOURSE

The Bronx is expected to undergo gentrification in the coming years because it is the last borough of New York City to be revitalized. While this may seem like a positive change for this seemingly run-down area of the City, there are, as always, two sides to the argument. The term 'gentrification' is often paired with a negative connotation. It is defined as "the process of renewal and rebuilding accompanying the influx of middle-class or affluent people into deteriorating areas that often displaces poorer residents."¹ This was seen in Brooklyn, as it has now been overrun with a demographic of young people who are unable to pay the high rents in Manhattan. Due to the infiltration of this group of higher income residents, rent was increased to reflect the growing demand on housing and the low-income residents that previously resided there were forced out to find cheaper living spaces.

Contrary to the borough of Brooklyn, the Bronx is heavily reliant on industry and manufacturing, which also services Manhattan and the other boroughs of New York City. This suggests that the low-income residents who work these industrial jobs cannot be forced out of the area, as they are needed to fill these positions. In order to create an environment that both fosters gentrification to aide in the regrowth of the borough while simultaneously keeping rents low to accommodate current residents, the city is implicating development plans that include fixed rent housing. There are already a few development plans underway; two in particular include a waterfront development in the South Bronx along the Hudson River, and the rezoning of the Cromwell-Jerome Area. This expected dichotomy between the incoming middle-class residents and the current lower-class residents is already creating much controversy and friction.

In considering this expected situation in the Bronx, the project can then begin to situate itself in bridging the gap between these two general demographics by focusing on the shared aspects of the everyday specific to the borough. By focusing on the rich history of the Bronx as well as the expected changes to come, a spiritual architecture can be created through the techniques learned from shrines that celebrates the ritual of the urban life in the Bronx.

¹ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/gentrification>



THE BRONX ZONING MAP

THE GRAND CONCOURSE

THE BRONX, NEW YORK CITY

The Bronx began as a retreat for middle to upper class Manhattan dwellers due to its large amounts of parks. In 1909, the Grand Concourse was built in order to create a major connector between Manhattan and the Bronx. Following its construction, the area surrounding the Concourse began to be developed and became an area for middle class people to escape Manhattan. It is in this time, the 1920s to the 1950s, that much of the architectural development of the Bronx occurred. The Grand Concourse was known as the “Park Avenue of middle-class Bronx residents.”¹ It is also in this time period that transportation increased to the area, including the expansion of the subway system and an elevated train line, thus encouraging the development.

The 1960s marked an era of deterioration for the Bronx. Due to slum clearance in Manhattan, many low-income residents were forced out of the main city and into the Bronx. At the same time, a majority of the middle-class residents relocated out of the area due to safety concerns and the changing demographic. In the 1970s alone, 30 percent of the residents left the borough.² This being said, this was also the period in which the culture of the Bronx flourishes, including hip-hop, graffiti and break dancing³.

Rebuilding of the Bronx began in the 1980s and continues to this day through various measures of building low-income housing and revitalizing neighborhoods.

¹ <http://wirednewyork.com/forum/showthread.php?t=9285>

² grandconcourse100.org/brief/history

³ grandconcourse100.org/brief/history



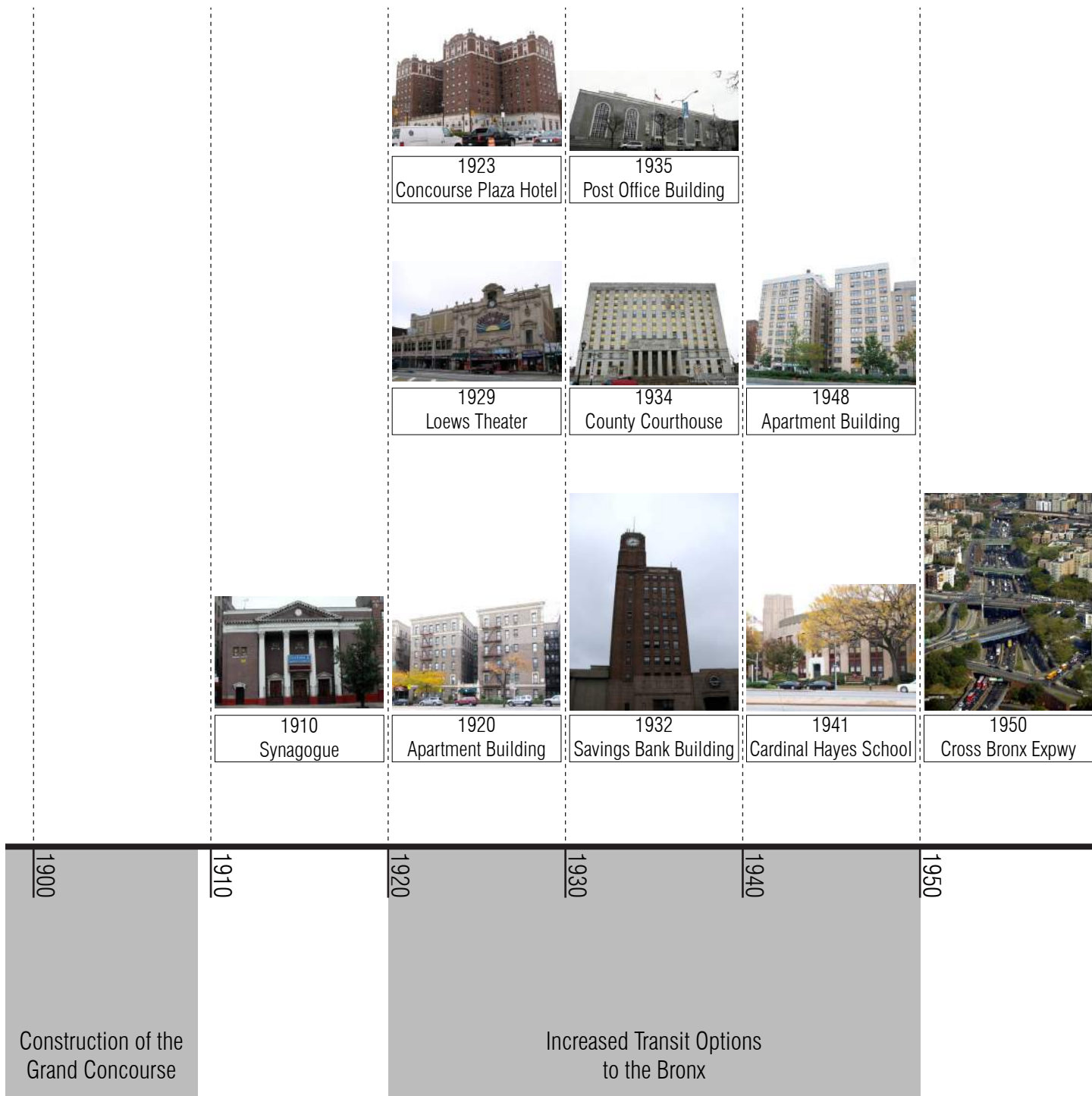
THE GRAND CONCOURSE



THE GRAND CONCOURSE

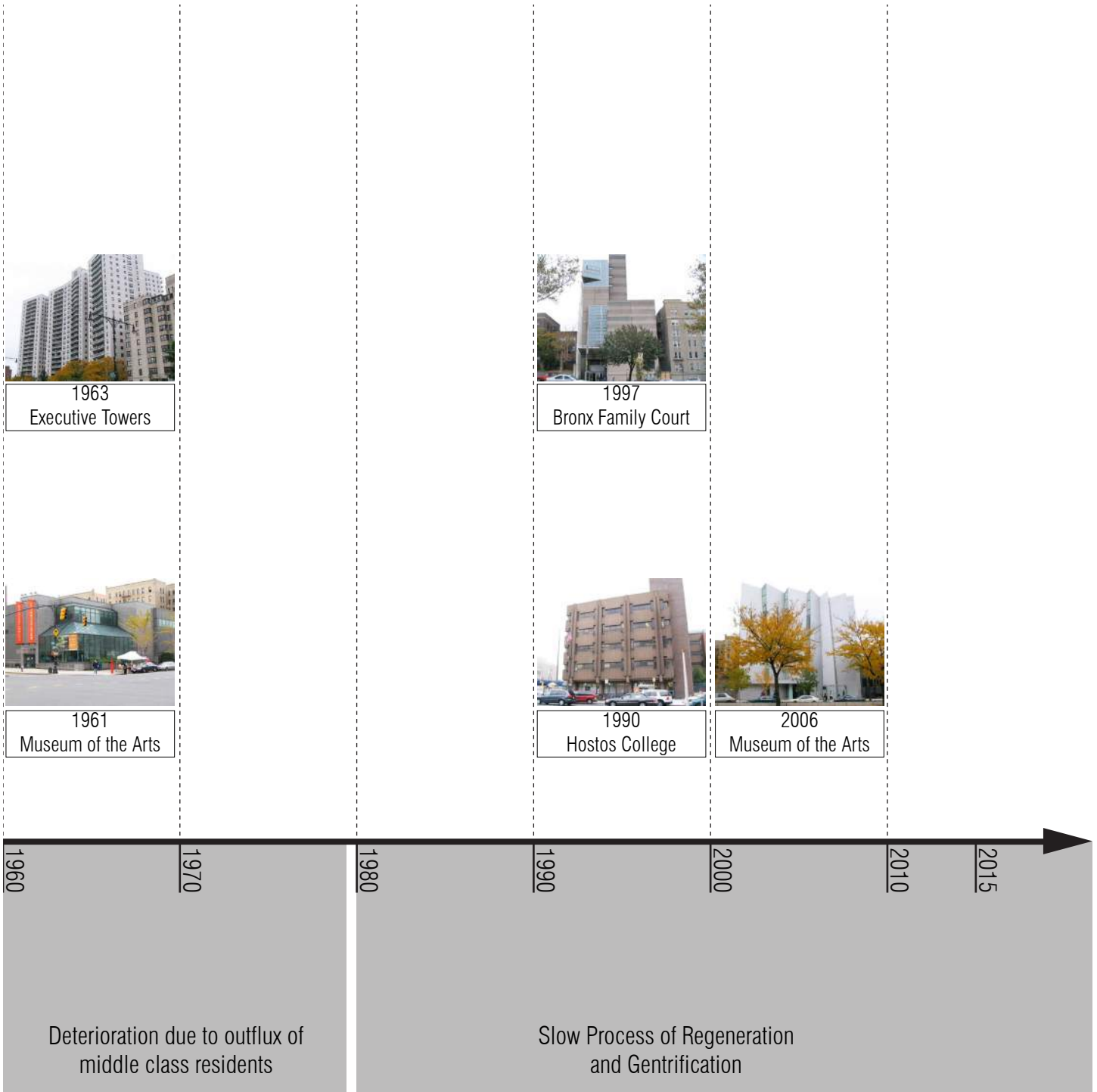
TOP: 'BRONX VORTEX' BY DANIEL HAUBEN

BOTTOM: CURRENT PICTURE



ARCHITECTURAL TIMELINE

THE GRAND CONCOURSE 1900-1960



ARCHITECTURAL TIMELINE

THE GRAND CONCOURSE
1960-TODAY

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