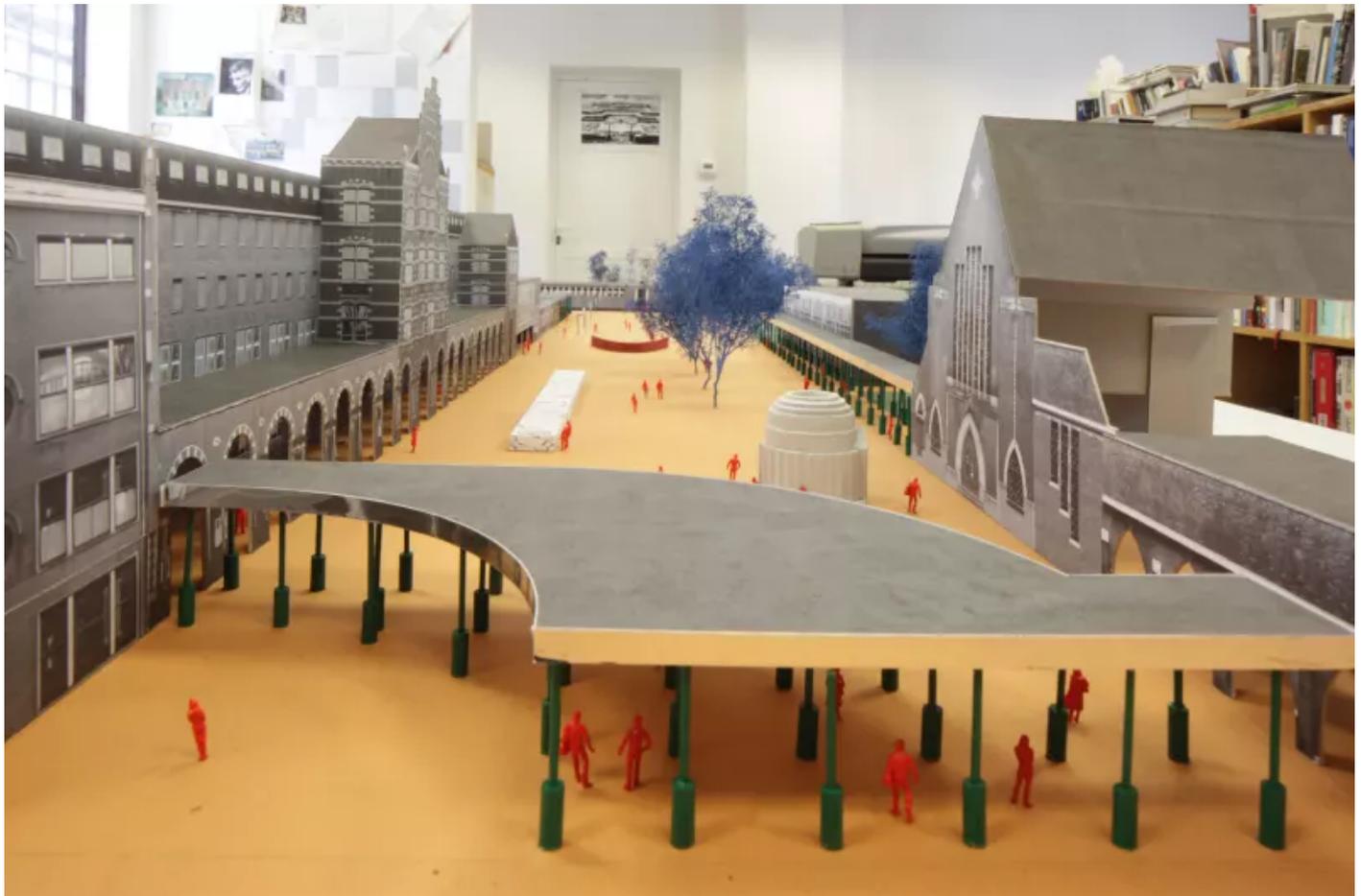


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RENOVATION OF HOOGSTRATEN KLEIN SEMINARIE

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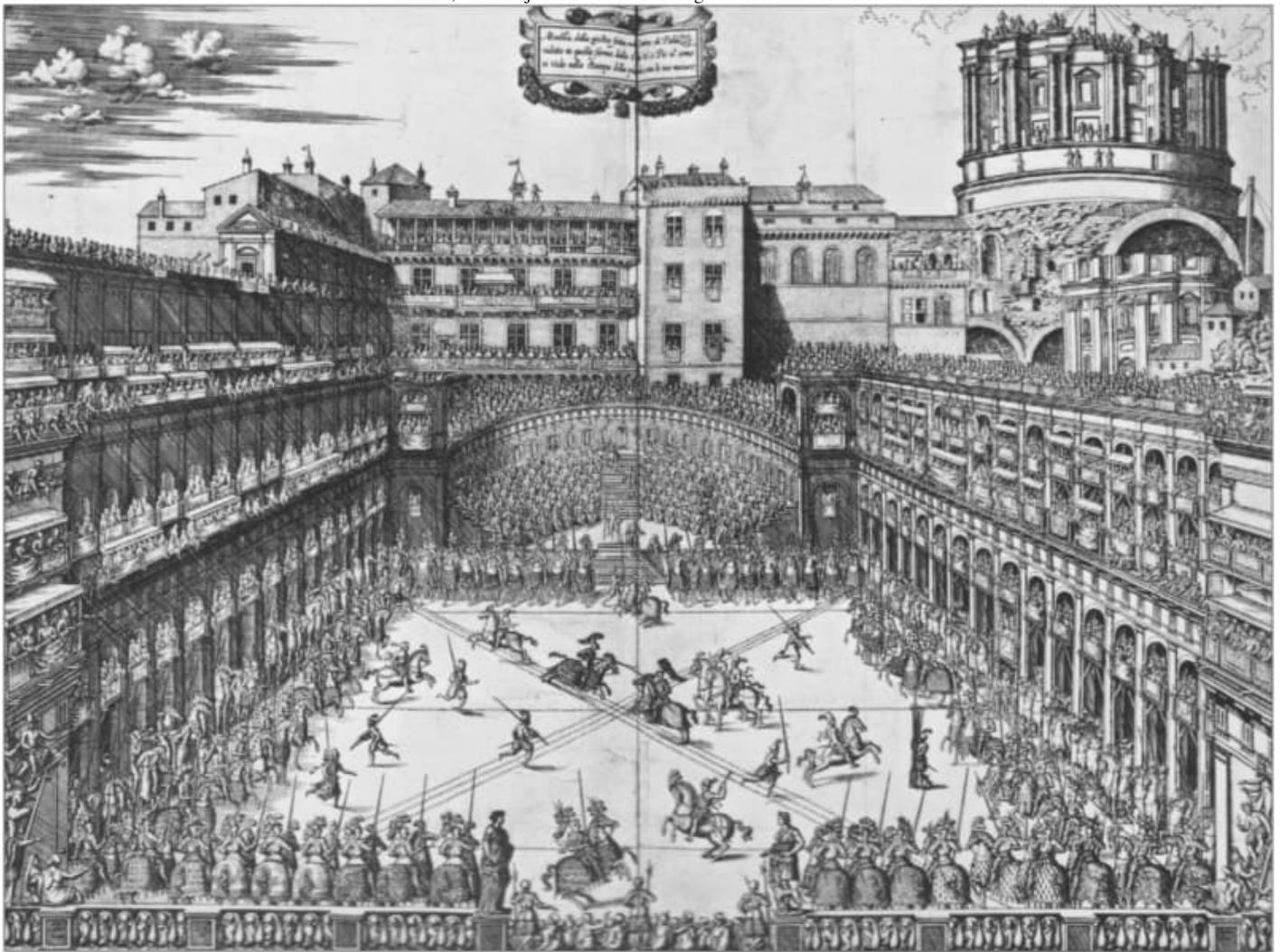
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Task

The Seminar School is a complex institution made of several components combined into a single urban field. This system should grow according to a general strategy, capable of defining common goals as well as attentive to respect the different needs of the various parts of the complex.

The transformation of the Seminar School needs to be understood not as an architectural task, but as a urban task, defining a general strategy that could be implemented in stages, that could react to different possible future scenarios and that could combine a plurality of needs and a multitude of populations inside a shared figure. As a consequence, our proposal tries to imagine a method of intervention to be developed through different actions, defining a clear (and clearly communicable) method of intervention aiming at the production of a precise, unified urban scene as the result of an intense participation process.

We propose to realize the minimum amount of transformations that are necessary to modify the organization and the atmosphere of the Seminar School. We propose a clear and pragmatic design operating through several different interventions contributing to a single strategy. As such, the various interventions can individually adapt to changes happening during the process without endangering the general strategy.



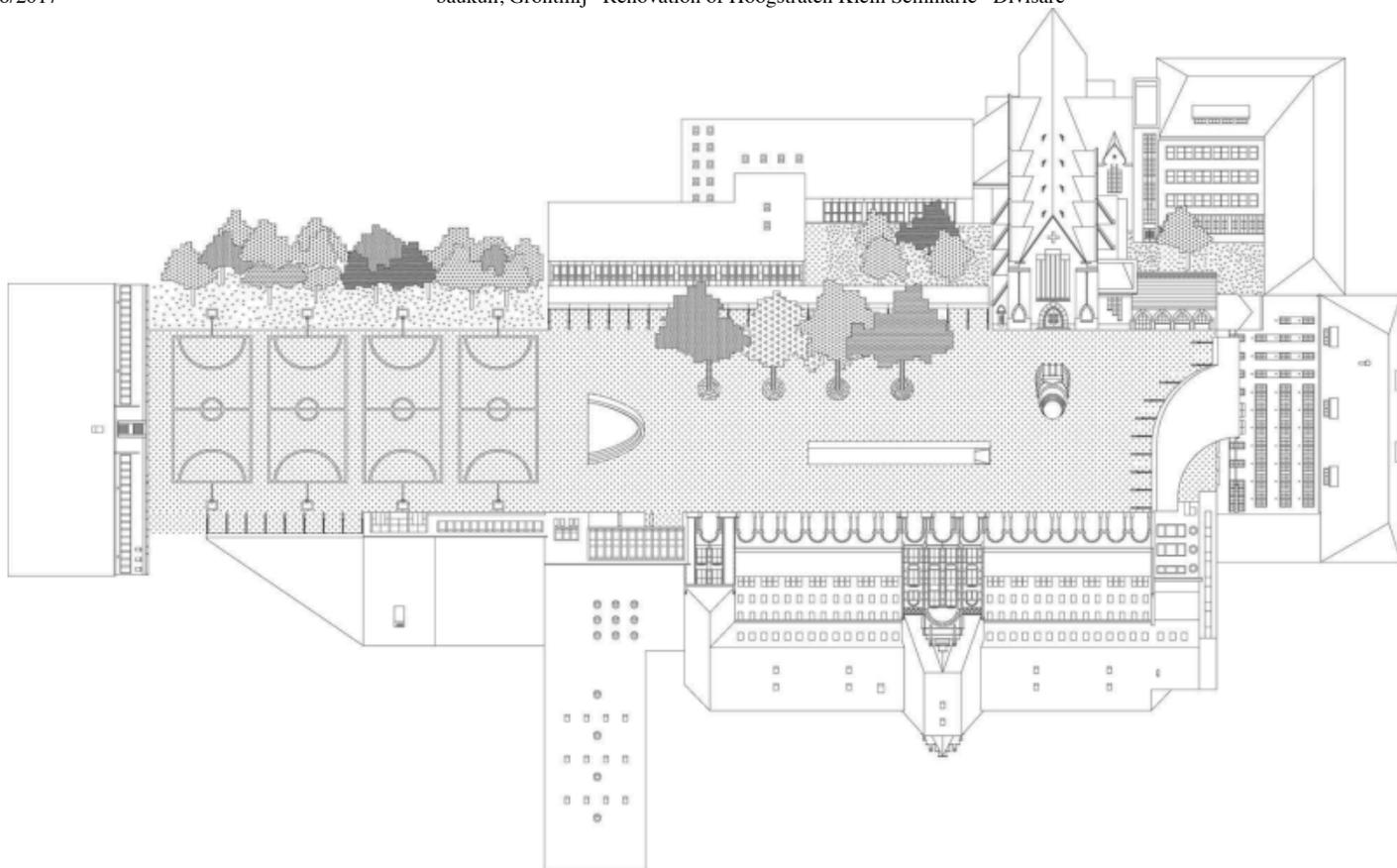
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Urban strategy

Hoogstraten is a small city in the north of Flanders, entirely structured along its north-south main street, the Vrijheid. Along this axis, several significant urban entities are aligned, including the towering St Catharina church and the articulated complex of the Begijnhof. The Kleine Seminar might play an important role in the overall structure of the city itself, just enhancing its already existing main features, primarily the extremely generous courtyard and the English park. In order to reactivate these assets, the complex has to open up to the city, accordingly to the needs for protection that any school should retain. This newfound openness would be able to create a win-win situation for both the school and the city. The specific strategies that the project applies in order to achieve such a result are subtle and respectful modifications to the thresholds of the complex, as the redefinition of the socle of the Voorbouw toward the Vrijheid, the demolition of the existing bike storage and the related expansion of the English park (as such becoming an asset of the city itself), the redefinition of the main courtyard as a proper urban forum. The transformation of the Seminar School into an explicitly urban element will be crucial in this respect, contributing to the creation of a diverse, multi-layered urban landscape in which different elements contribute to the life of the city.



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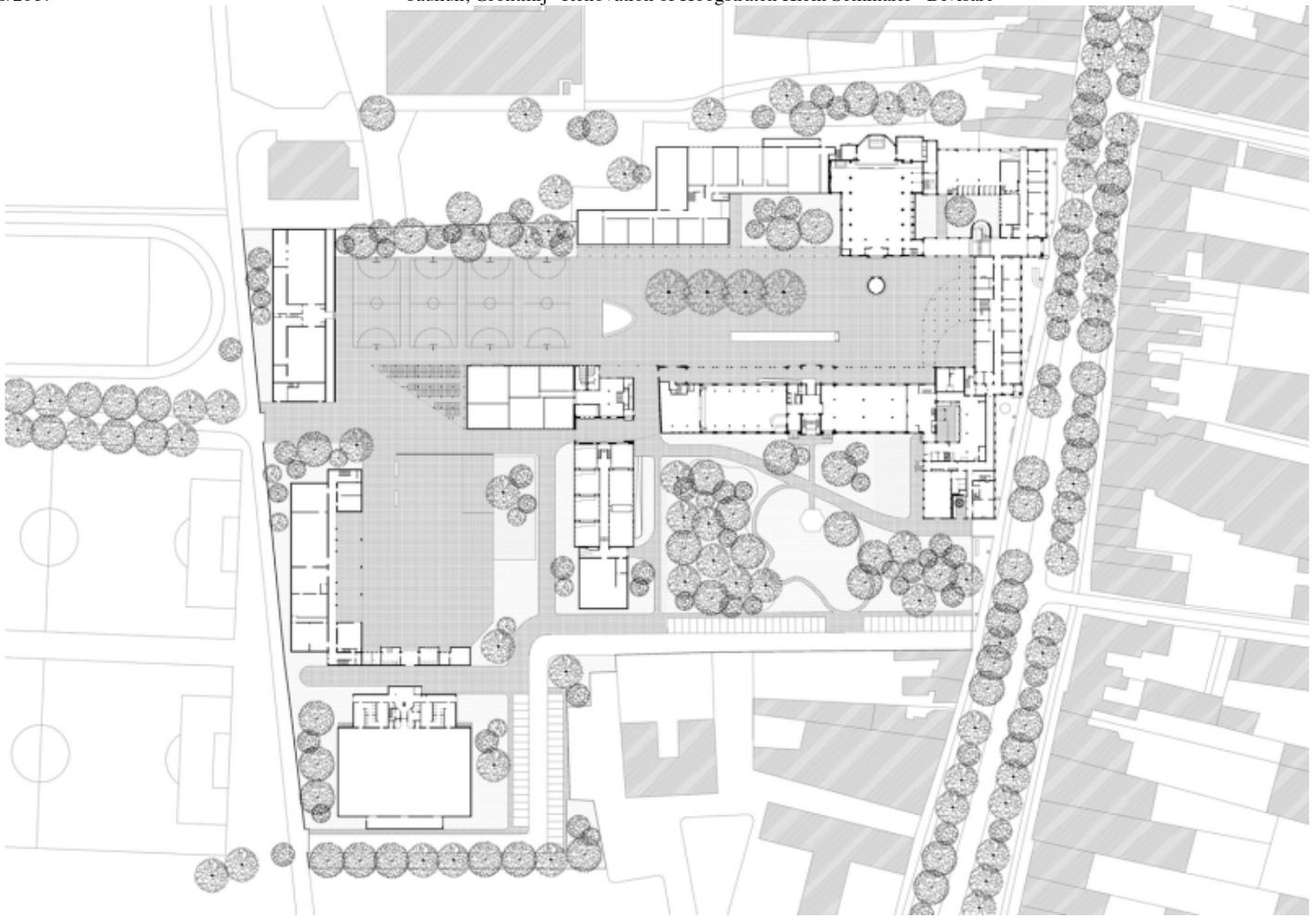
Forum

The main asset of the Seminar School is its large courtyard. All facilities are accessible from the courtyard, yet, at the moment, this is simply a logistic feature of the complex.

The courtyard gives access to all facilities but it is not the real centre of the complex.

The main scope of our – extremely simple – proposal is to turn the logistic platform into an urban scene, using all circulation paths converging on the courtyard as an opportunity for the production of urbanity. A few architectural decisions are sufficient to turn the courtyard into a forum. Indeed it is possible to re-activate the old main gate as the principal pedestrian entrance, making it disabled-people-friendly through redefining the socle of the Voorbouw. At the same time, the demolition of the existing bicycle stalls and the extension of the English park creates the opportunity to reach the courtyard by bike or feet from the Vrijheid through an intense sequence: from the main street, biking through the educated nature of the park, passing by an enlarged gallery under the Lensgebouw, finally reaching the forum in its middle section. The bikes storages can be relocated in the space of the existing swimming pool and in a new facility close to the back entrance. By doing this, all movements and actions, all events and gestures, all meetings and departures will happen in the courtyard, immediately activating its urban potential and turning it into a place of encounters, conversations, lies, loves, irritations, in short a urban space, a forum. The Seminar School will not be inhabited by new events, only the old ones will not be hidden anymore, the humble gestures of the everyday will be part of an explicitly urban choreography, inside of a clearly measured and formalized architectural frame.

The potential for urbanity of the Seminar School is already there; the measures of the elongated courtyard are indeed quite promising (the courtyard is roughly 35 x 200 m, while the Forum of Pompeii, for instance, is roughly 35 x 235 m), our proposal simply exposes a potential that is already there.



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Architecture

In order to frame the courtyard as an explicitly urban stage, we propose to realize three portions of porches (one on the eastern side along the Voorgebouw, one on the northern side, west of the church and in front of the Ostgebouw and one on the southern side, west of Lensgebouw), defining the borders of the large rectangle and providing a clear background for the multitude of objects and events appearing on the field. The porch is a simple sequence of tiled green columns (inspired by the existing church pillars) supporting a metal roof. Accordingly, we propose to repave the forum with a homogenous material, to enhance the unity of its space: a layer of coloured nature concrete would perfectly suit the needs of both the playground and the sportfields. The very simple external frame encircling the open space allows the forum to be populated with a variety of elements producing an articulated urban geography, to be determined by means of a participation process. The forum continues to host the sports field at the western end plus possibly a stage, four trees, a large outdoor table including a fountain and a small chapel in front of the church, to be used as an everyday place for individual worship. All these elements combined, and all the different rhythms associated with their uses both collective and cyclic and individual and unpredictable, contribute to the activation of a complex metropolitan environment. The urban complexity of the forum also suggests innovative uses, opening up the possibility to host exceptional events open to all the students and also open to the citizens of Hoogstraten. A new, complex calendar connecting everyday and exceptional moments will inhabit the Seminar School.

The new interventions in the rest of the complex are extremely limited and always respectful of the existing assets.

Along the Vrijheid a new socle defines a series of small squares where the students can wait before entering the school; as such the existing facade is closer to the street while still being visually supported by a monumental base. The socle itself might act as a discrete but visible billboard for the school, sporting as an inscription the

name of the complex.

The English park is expanded towards the Vrijheid, through the demolition of the existing bike storages and the redefinition of the border in visual continuity with the new base of the Voorbouw. As such the park will become an asset not only for the school but even for the entire city of Hoogstraten to the extent that it might be thinkable to open it to citizens during the day.

In the coming years, according to the availability of financial resources and to a scheme of shared priorities, the entire complex might be repaved, making easily readable the clear separation of the different fluxes.

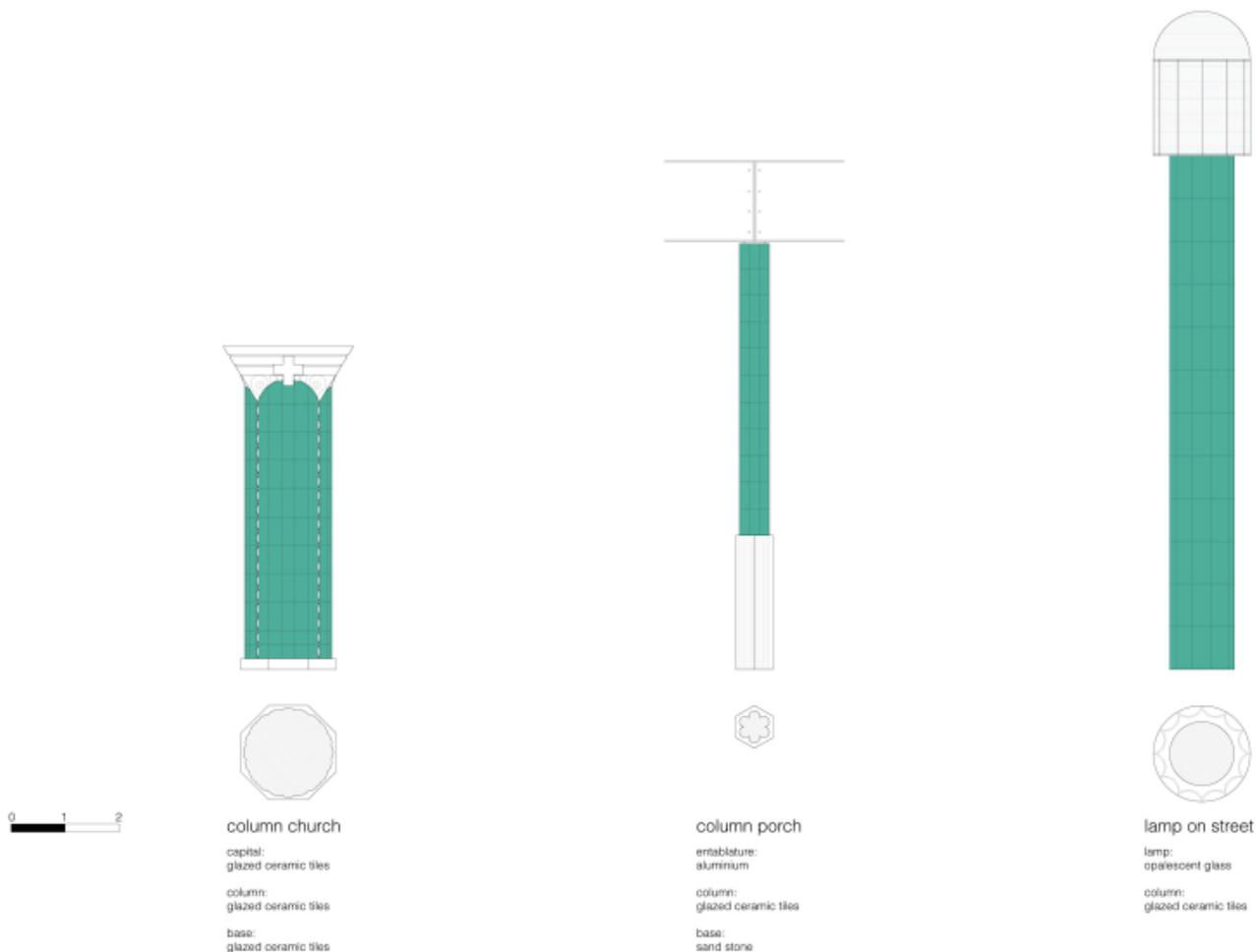
The system of entrances in the back of the complex has to be rationalized as well, making a clear distinction between the pedestrian and bike entrance and the vehicular one.



Energy

The project proposes to calculate the energetic balance with respect to the entire complex. Adopting this approach, that balances more vulnerable and energy-consuming old parts of the complex with more efficient new ones, it is possible to imagine relatively light interventions on the parts of the complex that need to be preserved.

This attention to the global energetic balance of the complex allows to evaluate the different needs of the program and the energetic requirements of the various building inside of a wider frame. This approach lets new possibilities arise. For instance, it is possible to use different strategies of interventions related to the different architectural quality of the existing buildings, for example as adding a new layer of exterior insulation only when the outer façade of a building allows it. For instance, in the case of the church, the counter-intuitive decision of building a new small chapel allows to separate everyday use from ceremonial use of the sacred spaces. The small, new, low-consuming chapel allows not to waste energy heating the old, large, dispersive church, that will be used only in particular dates of the year. The definition of a more attentive energetic balance does not turn into a desacralization of the sacred spaces and into a loss of religious identity for the Seminar School.



Materials

All the materials used in the renovation of the Seminar School are hard-wearing and easy to maintain.

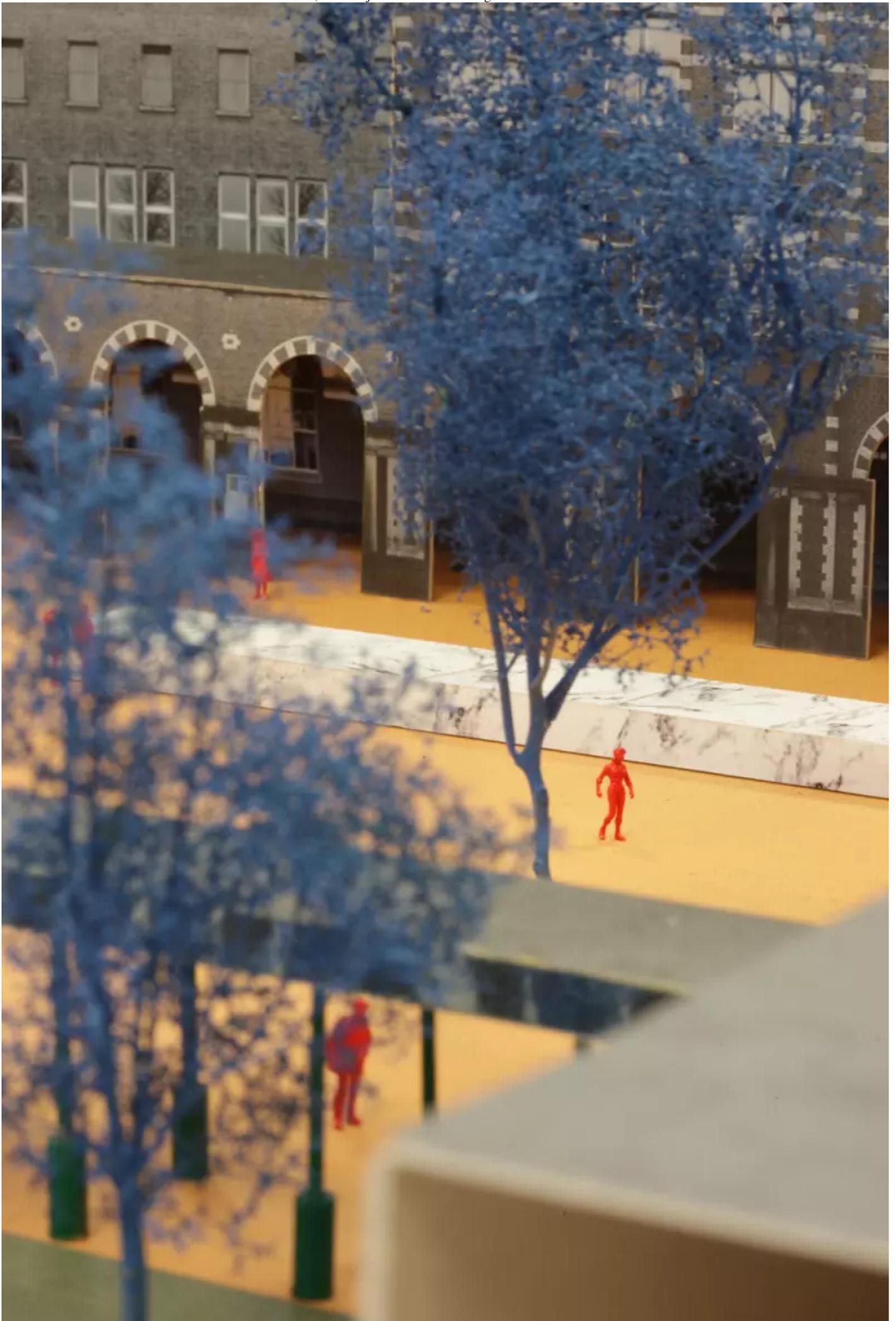
The species of plants have been chosen considering their maintenance. In any case, taking care of the greenery should be interpreted as a didactical moment, effectively involving the users of the new community centre in the cultivation of a shared landscape.



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LOCATION

BELGIUM - HOOGSTRATEN

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PROJECT YEAR

2014

PROJECT FACTS

INFO

- CLIENT DIM ANTWERPEN - HOOGSTATEN KLEIN SEMINARIE
- ADDITIONAL NOTES 1ST PRIZE

ATLAS OF ARCHITECTURE

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