



Mind your P's & Q's

Redefining creative protection: Leeds Industrial Museum

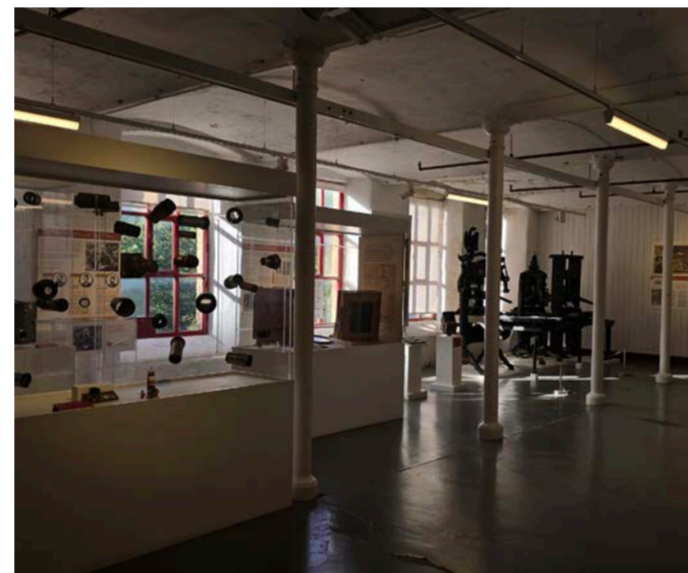
Caitlin Bucktrout

Introduction to the site



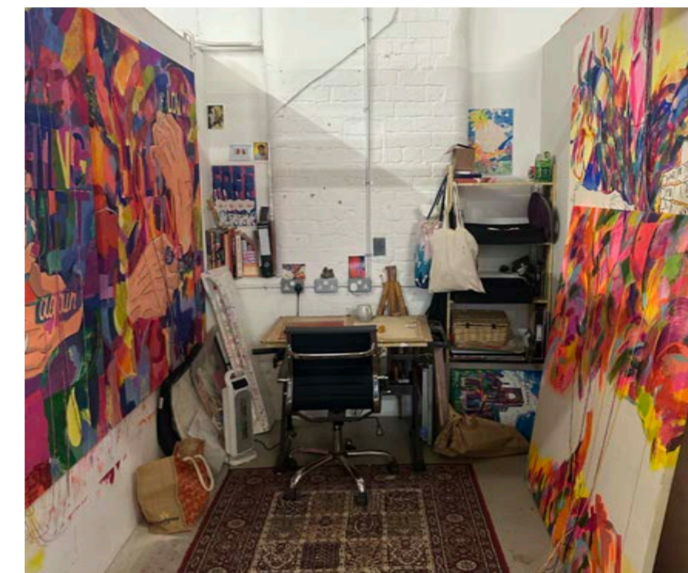
The Industrial Museum is a science and industry museum celebrating local industrial heritage, operated by the council-run Museum & Galleries trust within Armley Mills. The building itself offers a rich history of production, with its original purpose as a corn and fulling mill, later becoming a purpose-built Woollen Mill, the largest of its kind within the period. Situated between the Leeds-Liverpool Canal and River Aire, the site offers an interesting assortment of buildings, located on an island surrounded by the waterways.

The Grade II listed main mill building houses the majority of the museum with multiple engine shed and storage buildings alongside a series of cottages previously housing workers. The museum is a popular location for families, school groups and industrial enthusiasts with its large collection of machinery and transport technology.



The interior of Armley Mills retains many of its features gained from decades of heavy manufacturing. Supported by an intricate iron framework and traditional column structure, the building remains stable after centuries of use and occasional improvement interventions.

Flood damage from a series of intense periods of rain caused destruction across the lower floors of the main building leaving the building in disrepair. Slowly the trust has begun repair works to revive the lost spaces and plans to continue to renovate surrounding buildings over the coming years.

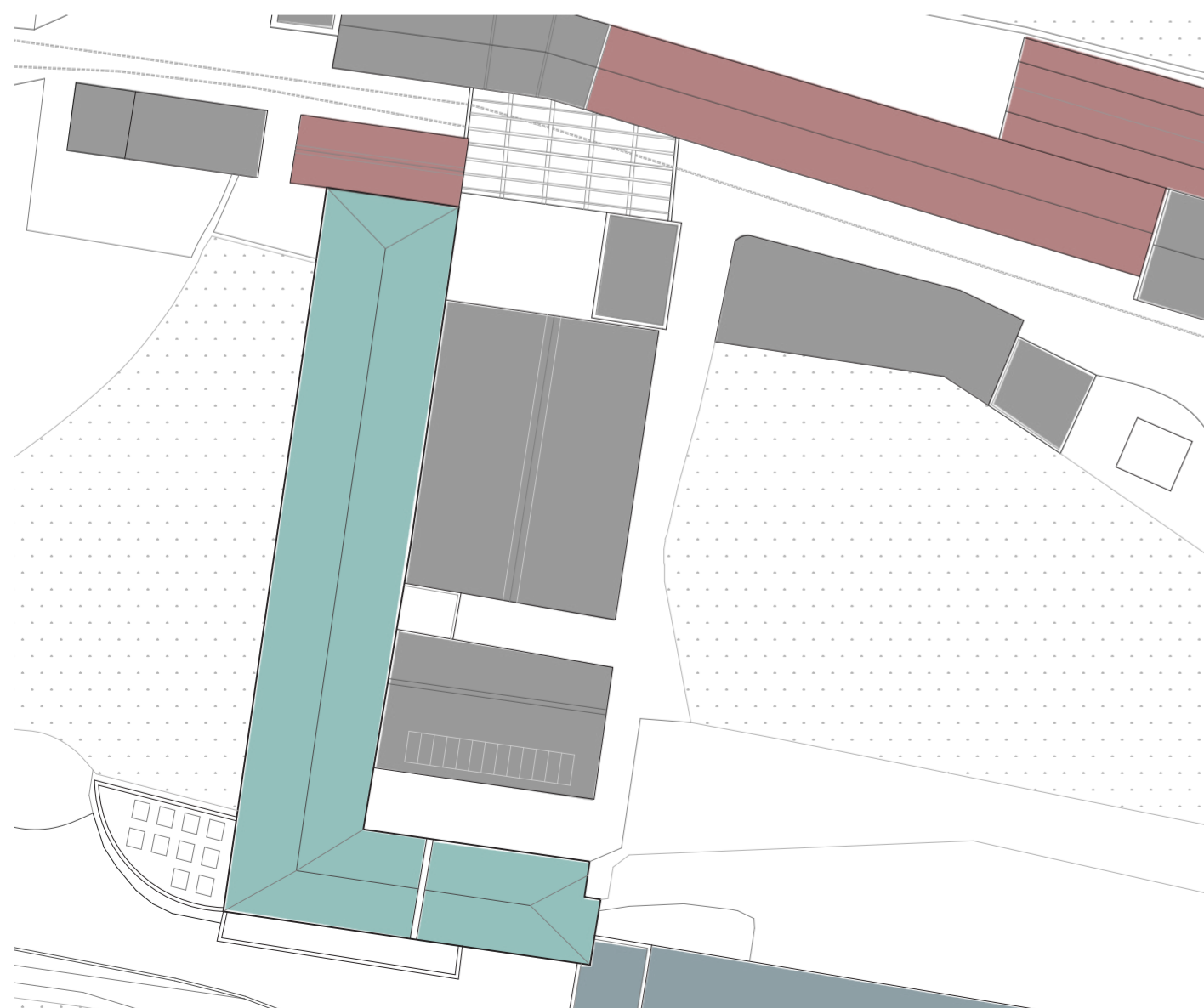
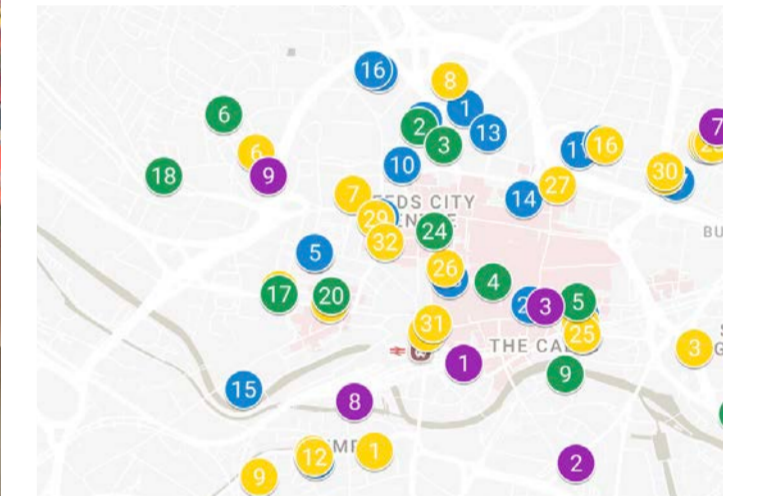


Leeds' disappearing creativity

The Leeds district has increasingly lost spaces that support independent artists, reflecting a broader decline in accessible creative infrastructure. Aire Place Studios, once a hub for shared artistic practice, closed in 2024 due to funding loss, displacing artists and highlighting ongoing sector instability and limited institutional support.

Aire Street Workshop faced similar pressures, with a 2024 eviction threat linked to redevelopment. Although purchased in 2025 to remain a studio space, rising costs continue to challenge affordability and access for artists. The closure of venues such as The Tetley, now redeveloped into hospitality, further demonstrates the erosion of cultural and creative environments across the city.

No Space Left to Play responds to the loss of creative venues and reduced arts funding. It maps closed and at-risk spaces, making visible the shrinking opportunities for creative practice, community engagement, and inclusive cultural participation across Leeds.



Site plan - 1:500 scale

- Restoration in progress
- Common areas
- Additional usable space
- Existing exhibition space
- Storage facilities

Project brief

Within the Leeds district, art communities have been slowly pushed out over recent years. From a lack of protection and support to inconceivable rental prices, the complex issues faced by independent organisations are having a dramatic impact.

Considering the underutilised space within Armley Mill, a proposal to offer a haven for creative independents could be considered. It's museum contents condensed into usable areas, with a repurposing approach that utilises the other areas as a zone for creativity.

Focusing on a prominent charitable collaborative, Leeds Print Workshop, the suggestion is to utilise the space as premises for both independent-focused print working alongside larger group-working and learning zones. The location offers a chance for Leeds council to revive, enhance, and protect a deep-rooted creative practice.

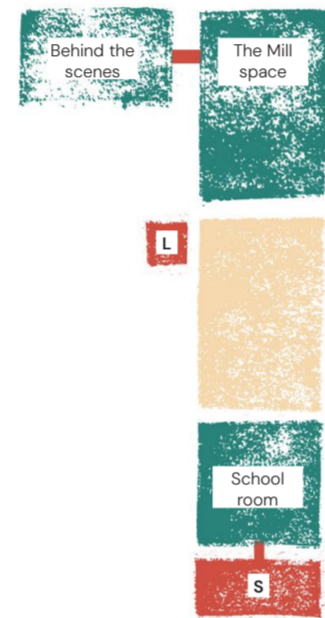
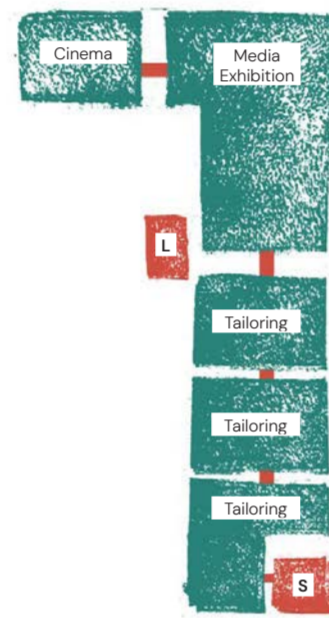
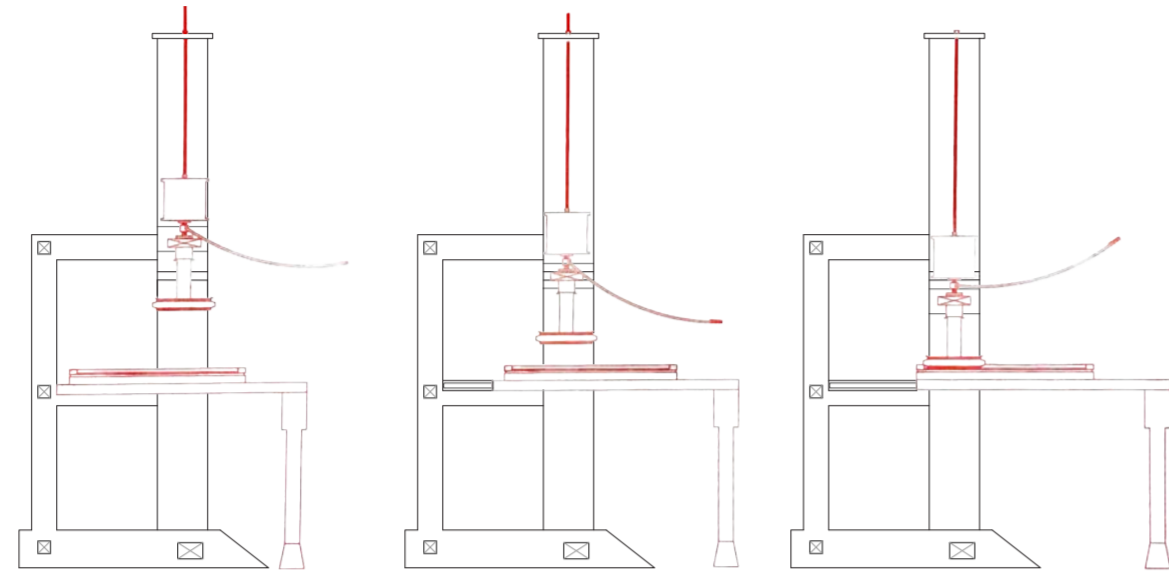
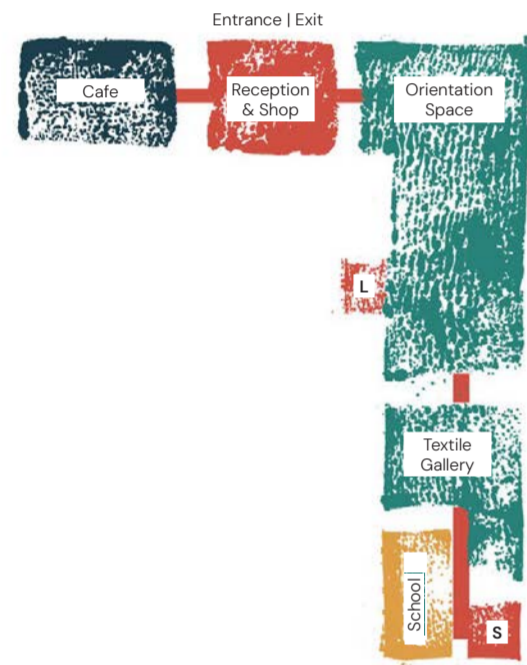
Key actions

- Effectively re-integrate ground and first floor spaces
- Develop a sustainable revenue-generating infrastructure to support creatives
- Improve circulation, accessibility and connect existing program to new inserted elements
- Retain and celebrate historic fabric
- Introduce a modular, grid-based studio system to facilitate independent creativity and group activity

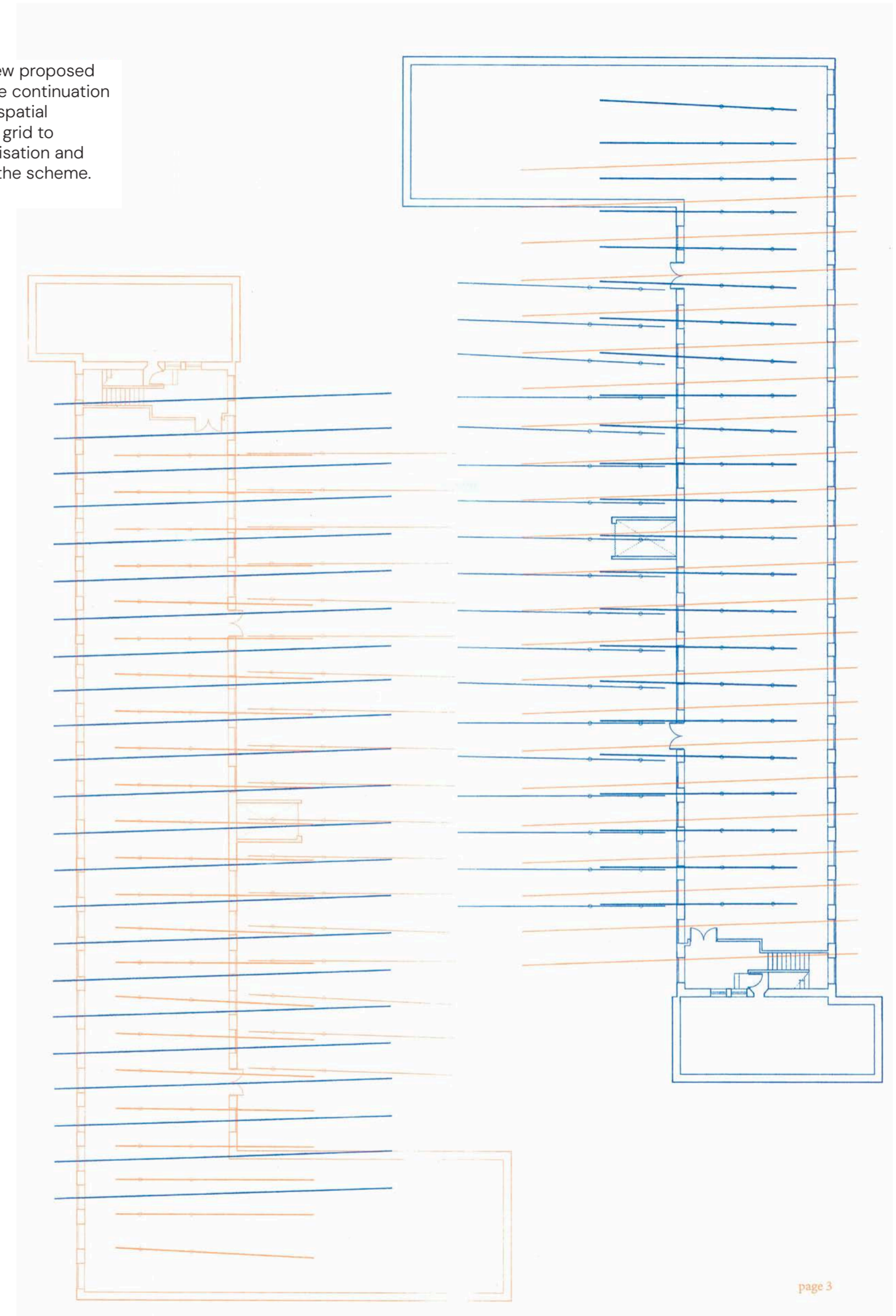
Connection to exhibition elements

Assessing the museum exhibition elements highlighted the focus on machinery. The existing printing press informed early design thinking, introducing ideas of movement, process, and interaction within a rigid structure

Below depicts the current space usage, formatted exhibition spaces and navigation throughout.

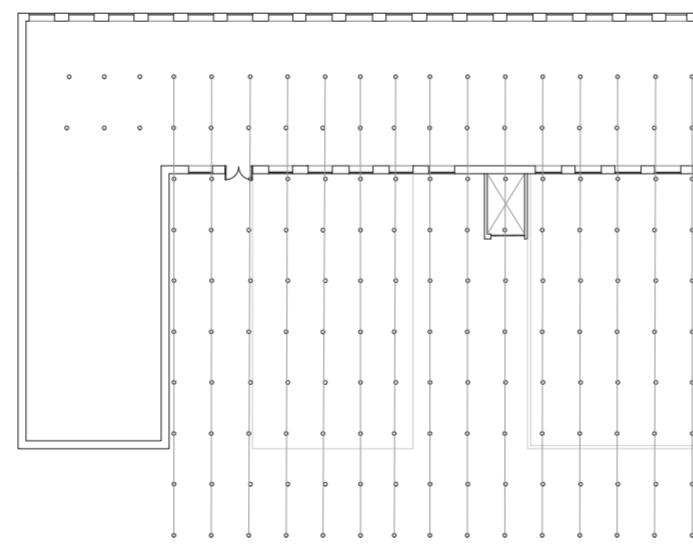
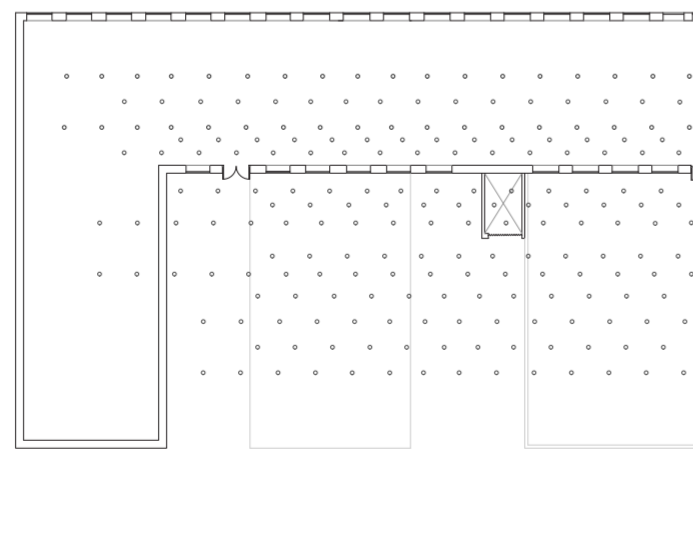
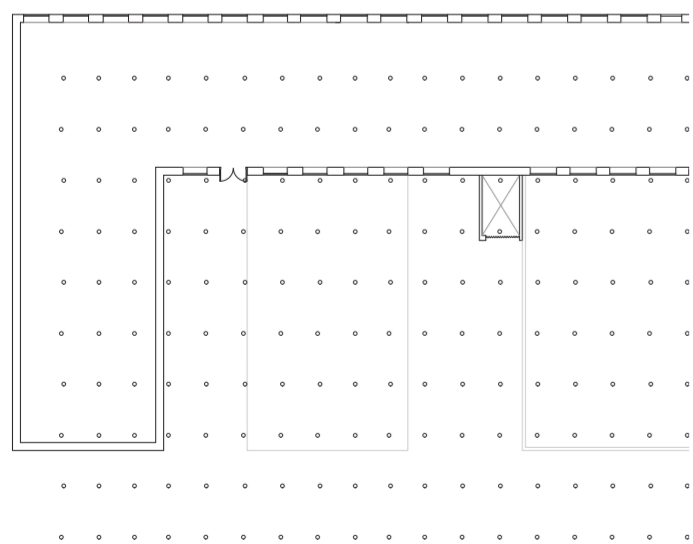


Connecting the existing with new proposed pattern elements to present the continuation and changes between the two spatial areas. Using a 20 degree offset grid to define circulation, spatial organisation and programme placement across the scheme.



Developing the existing

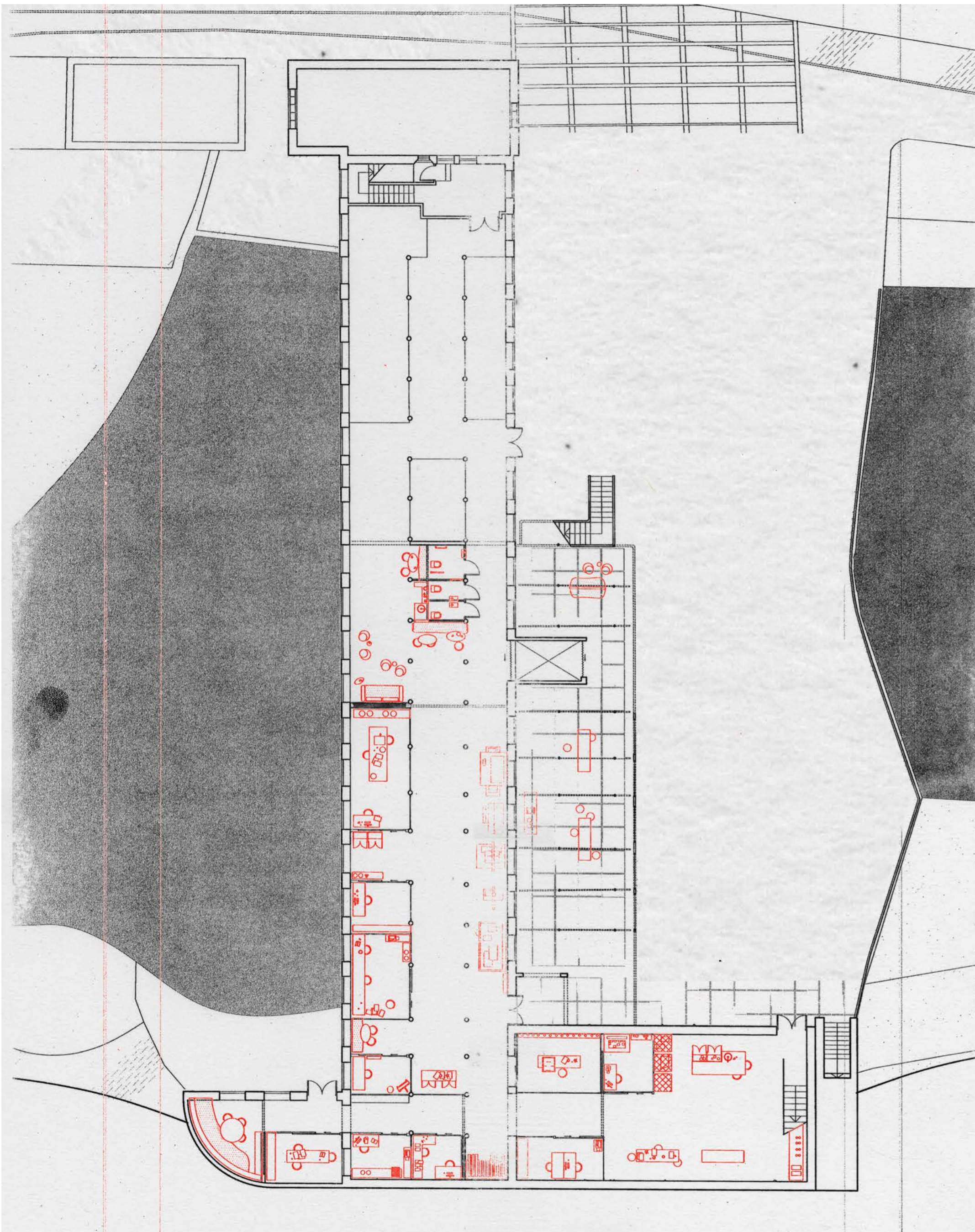
After investigating the grid and spatial narrative, the structured internal framework became a key focus. Using print investigations, methods and misalignment to disrupt the existing format and suggest a new spatial framework.



1 Straight duplication maintaining existing pattern and spacing.

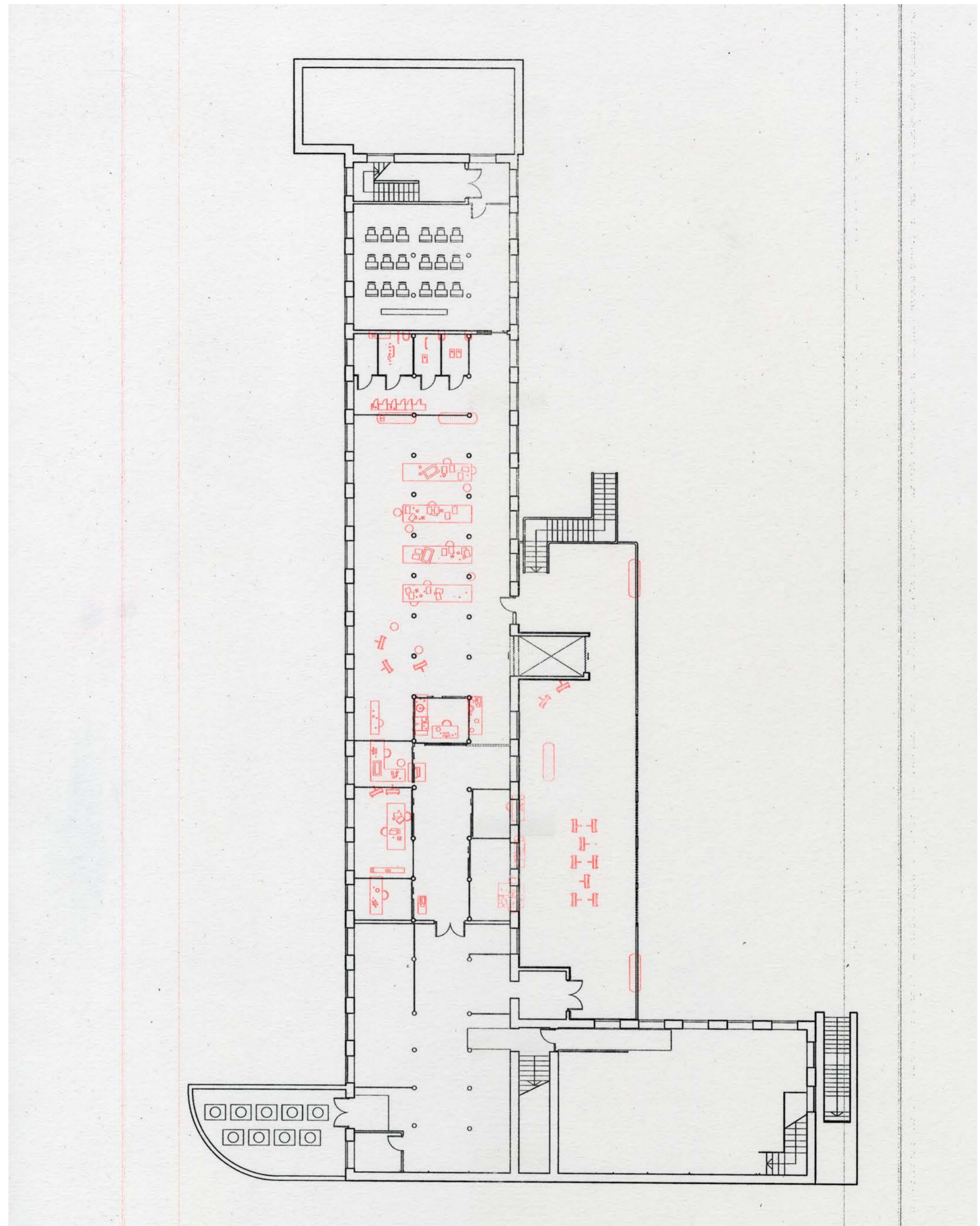
2 Duplication at 20 degree angle with offset multiples at three intervening points.

3 Straight duplication with vertical line connecting.



Proposed ground floor plan with activity & populating elements

Using a series of dividing walls to create individual studio segments to facilitate a collection of artists, printmakers and other creatives. Increasing the facilities for both new program users and existing museum guests through a flexible use of sliding doors and access systems. Reopening circulation both inside and on the rediscovered exterior level.



Proposed first floor plan with current activity & populating elements

Connecting the two currently separate exhibitions with a flexible use space and additional office/studio pods. With an intended purpose as a group activity space, the large open area can be changed to suit whatever purpose required. With a new connection to the exterior platform area offering an exhibition space and calm zones for visitors.



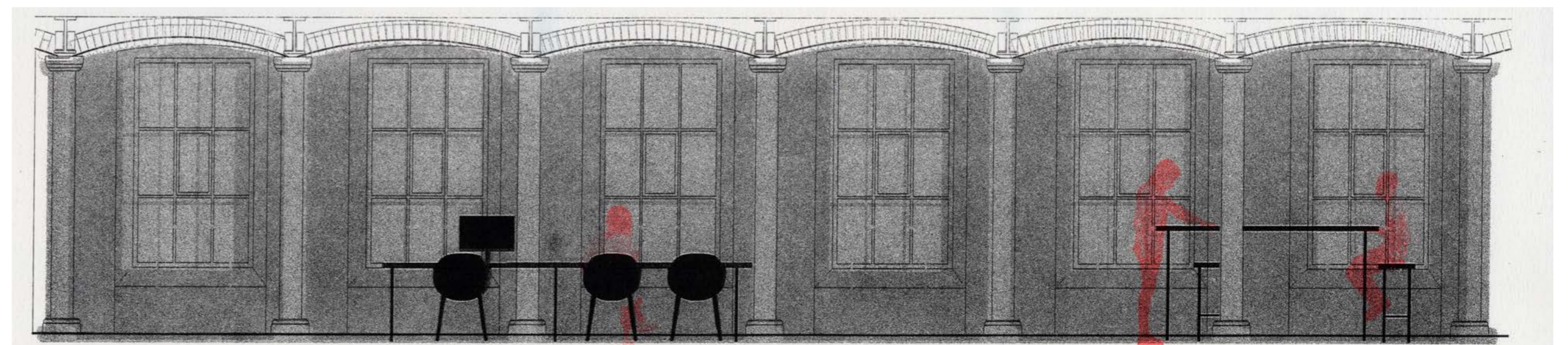
Risograph printed technical drawings

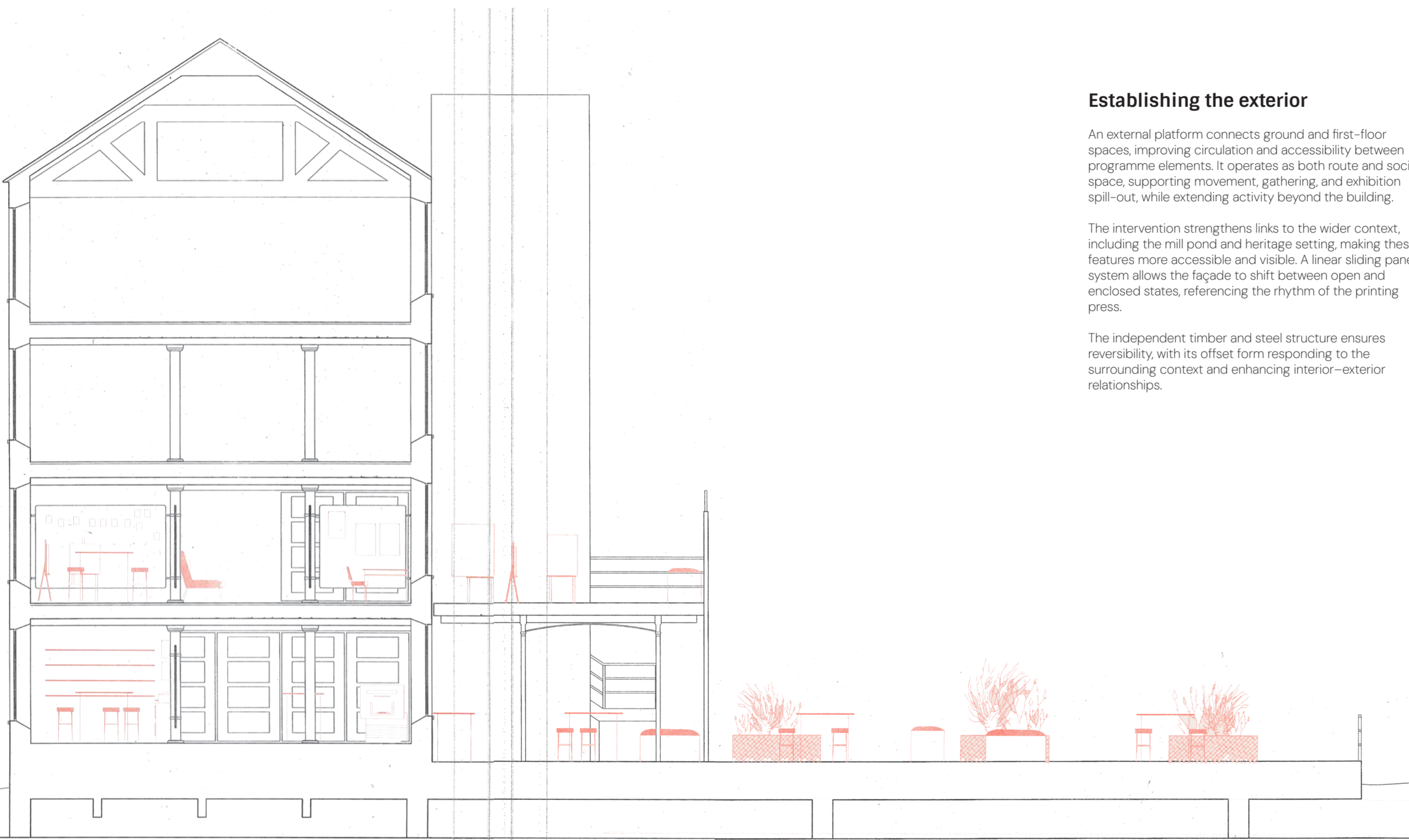
Spatial reconnection

The studio interiors work with the existing structure, using the column grid to define spaces without permanent alteration. Suspended cork partitions provide flexible, reversible zoning while improving acoustics and introducing a softer material contrast.

Studios are customisable through a catalogue of furniture and fittings, supporting diverse user needs. Sliding doors allow spaces to shift between privacy and collaboration, referencing the linear movement of the printing press while enabling adaptable use.

Open layouts maximise natural light, with supplementary lighting ensuring consistent conditions. Shared areas incorporate ventilation and integrated storage, prioritising comfort, clarity, and usability.





The proposal reconfigures circulation to create clearer, more cohesive routes between existing and new spaces. Calm zones and pause points are introduced to support varied user needs, alongside improved guest facilities.

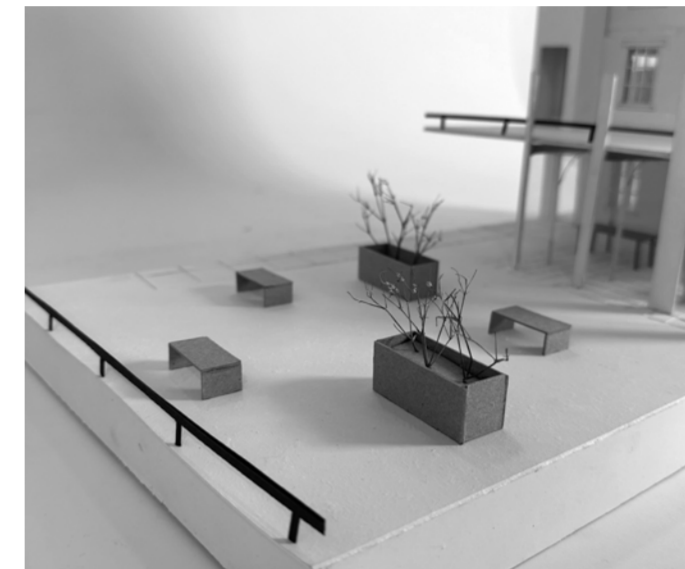
Accessibility is enhanced through reopening a staircase, adding a new entry point, and improving ground-floor access, enabling more inclusive and intuitive movement. The design strengthens connections between new and existing narratives, integrating accessible routes, lift access, and reduced spatial confusion to support a wider range of users.

Establishing the exterior

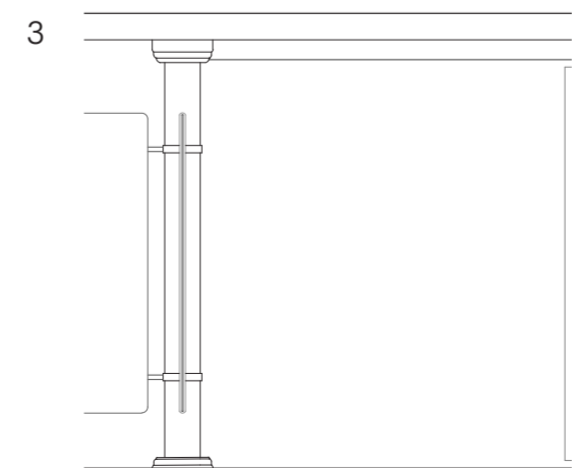
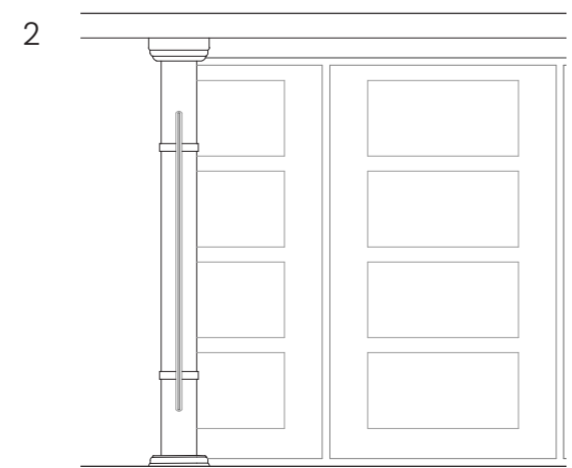
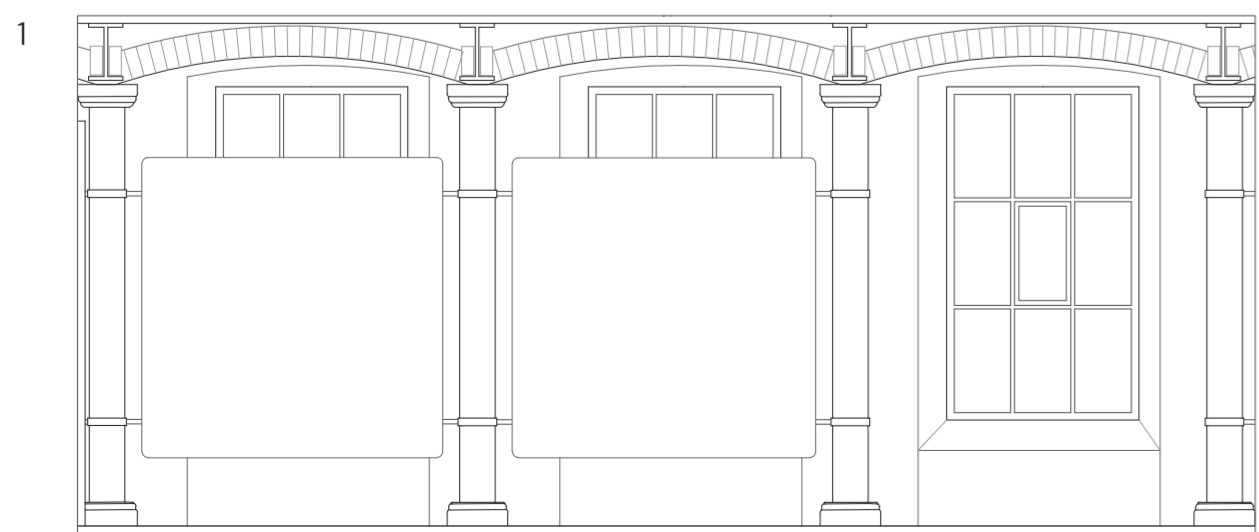
An external platform connects ground and first-floor spaces, improving circulation and accessibility between programme elements. It operates as both route and social space, supporting movement, gathering, and exhibition spill-out, while extending activity beyond the building.

The intervention strengthens links to the wider context, including the mill pond and heritage setting, making these features more accessible and visible. A linear sliding panel system allows the façade to shift between open and enclosed states, referencing the rhythm of the printing press.

The independent timber and steel structure ensures reversibility, with its offset form responding to the surrounding context and enhancing interior-exterior relationships.



Risograph printed technical drawings



- 1 Central section detailing cork partitions and attachment to existing column grid structure.
- 2 A series of sliding doors provide a flexible approach to defining spaces.
- 3 With limited attachment and minimal interaction with the existing buildings material, each added element works to offer a functional option within the designated spaces.

Material choices prioritise locally sourced, renewable resources, reinforcing the site's industrial heritage while supporting ethical, accessible design. Steel and cork elements are regionally produced, connecting the project to local manufacturing.