

MEA HOUSE - THE INTERIOR CITY

MEA House reimagines one of the UK's first purpose-built office buildings as a contemporary co-living and creative workspace in response to urban vacancy and the housing crisis. Central to the project is a monumental theatrical wall inspired by George Ranalli, acting simultaneously as a threshold, stage set, and inhabitable structure. Separating private dwellings from collaborative workshop spaces, the wall choreographs moments of concealment, performance, and interaction, transforming circulation into a theatrical experience. Exploring the idea of the "interior city", the project blurs boundaries between domesticity and spectacle through adaptive reuse, creating an environment where collaboration, creative exchange, and communal living are embedded within the architecture itself.



SITE PLAN - MEA HOUSE

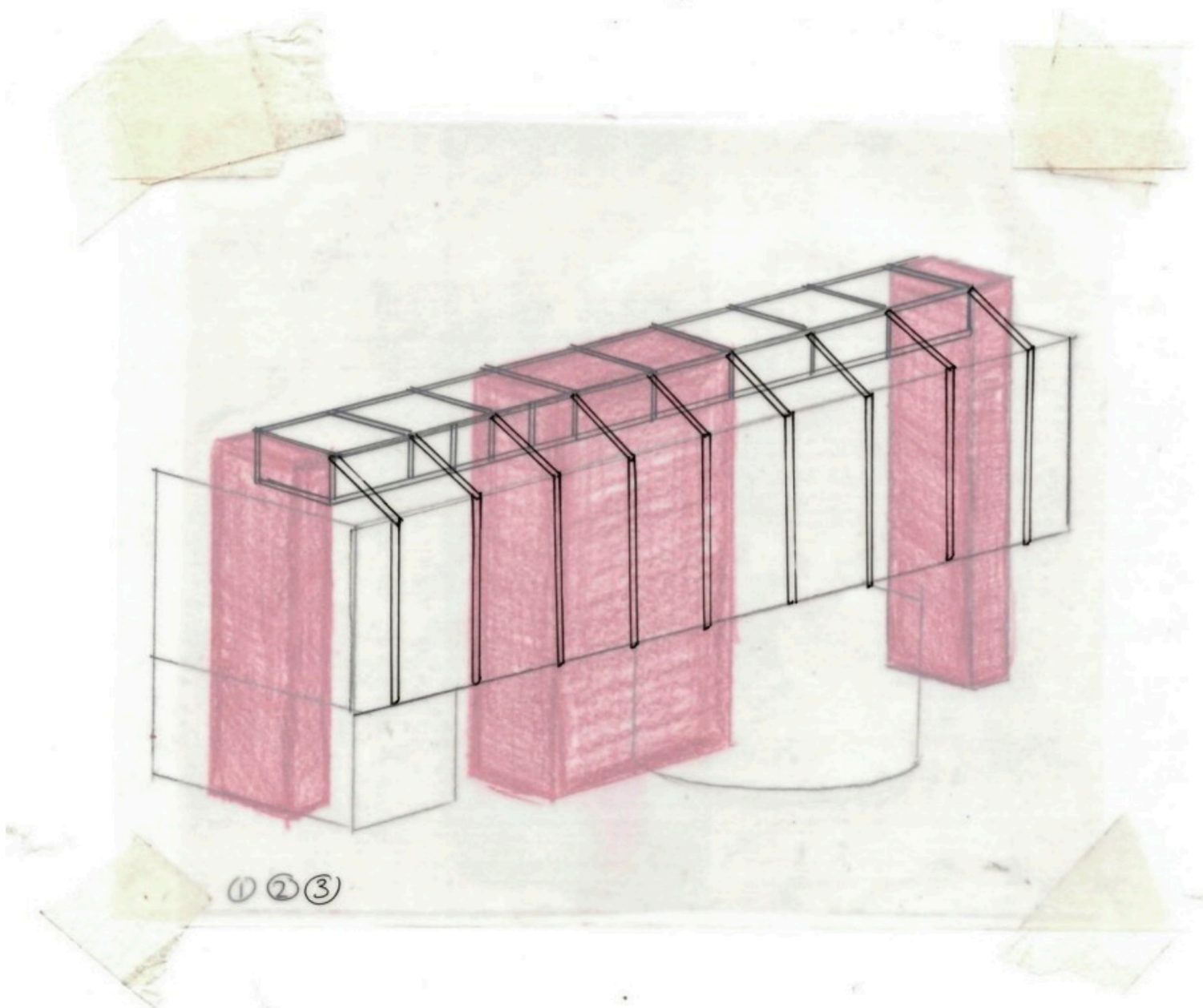
ROAD NETWORKS

ELEVATED WALKWAYS - BRASILIA OF THE NORTH

PUBLIC TRANSPORT NETWORKS

SUNPATH DIAGRAM - SUMMER

SUNPATH DIAGRAM - WINTER



EXISTING FABRIC

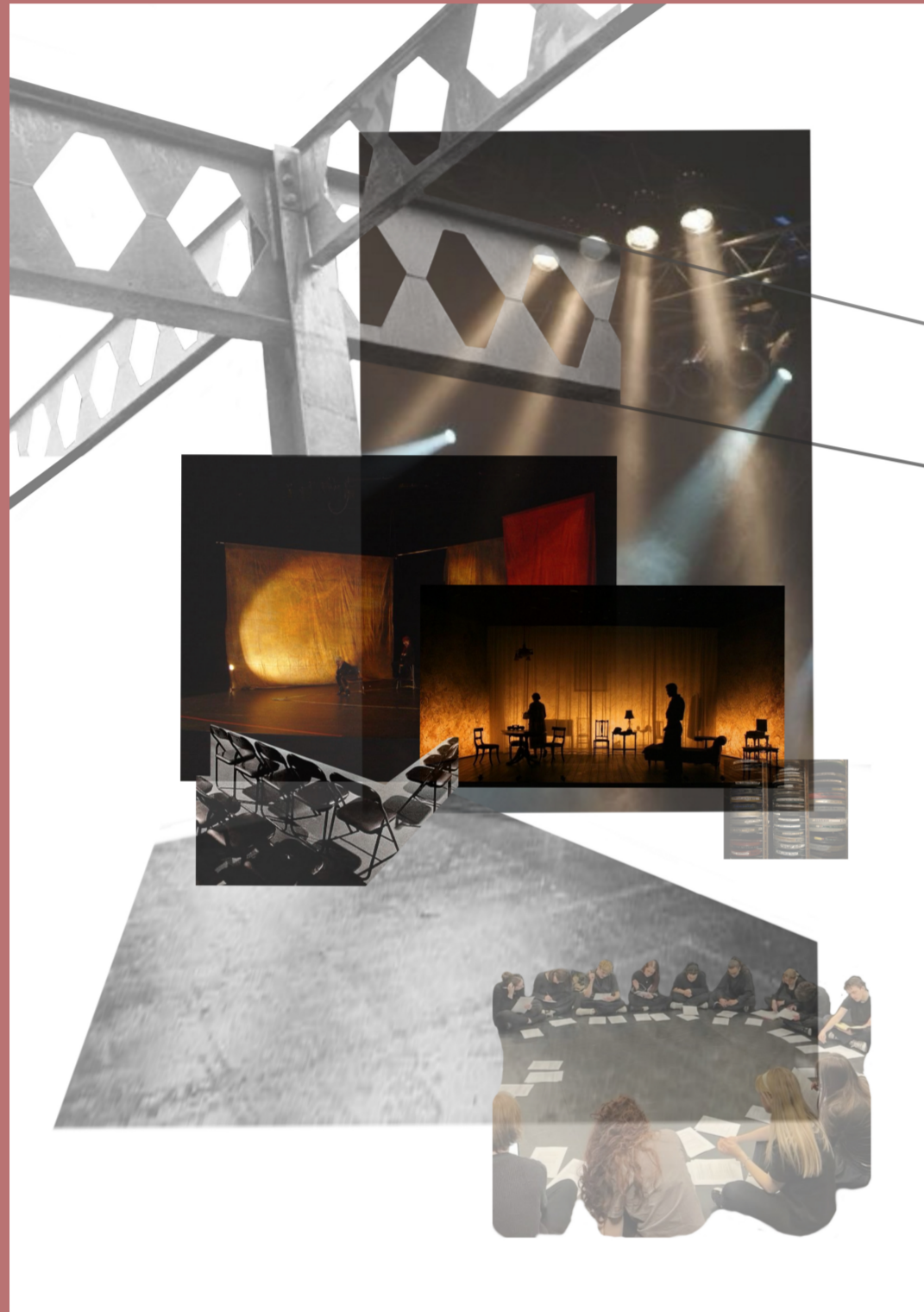
- Between 2021 and 2025, unused local-authority owned buildings have risen by **30%**
- These empty urban establishments could provide over **25,000** homes.
- This concept is part of wider masterplan, which will house local North-East residents within a system of simplex units, sitting alongside the central artist-in-residence unit, connected through the 'vibrant heart'.
- To achieve this, the existing fabric has to be re-used due to its Grade II listed nature. Therefore, no alterations can be made to its vierendeel truss, reinforced concrete cores and steel beams.

SITE CONTEXT



DEVELOPMENTAL PROCESS

ARTIST IN RESIDENCE - CLIENT PROFILES



COLLABORATIVE SPACES

REQUIREMENTS:

- THEATRICAL STAGE SPACE
- WORKSHOP
- MEETING/ TABLE READING SPACES
- EXHIBITION SPACE

VIBRANT HEART -

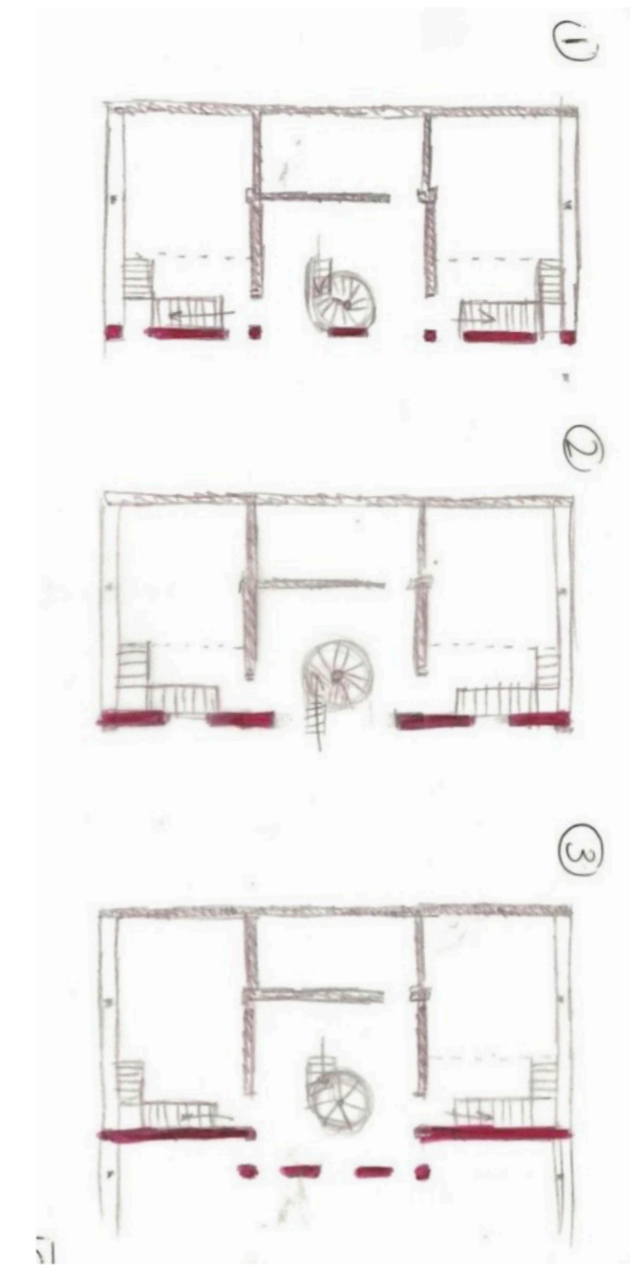
- NEW STAIRCASE
- STUDY SPACES
- ENRICHMENT/ INTERACTIVE SPACES



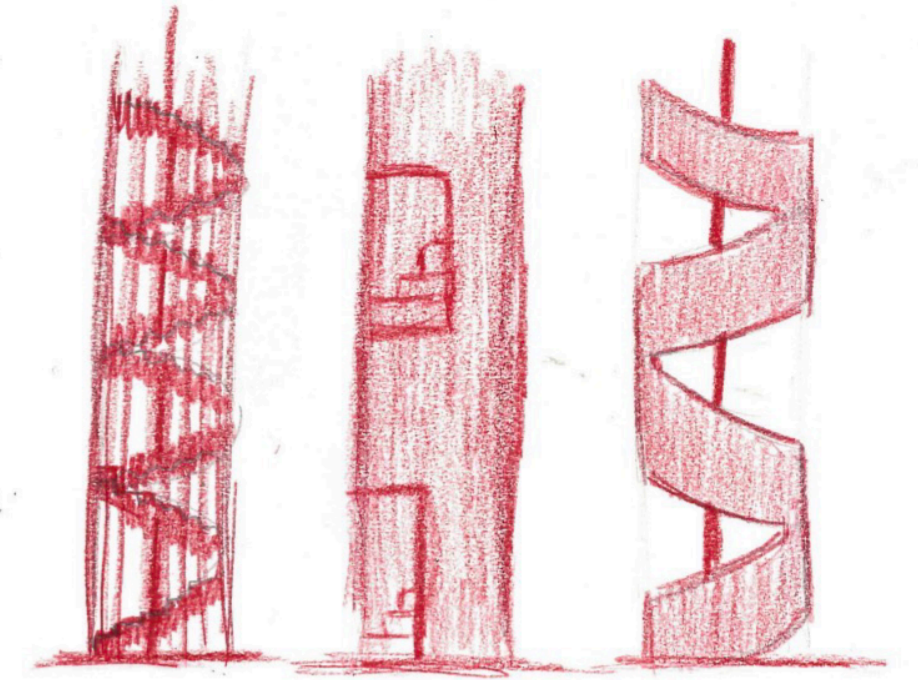
THEATRE DIRECTOR AND SET DESIGNER

REQUIREMENTS:

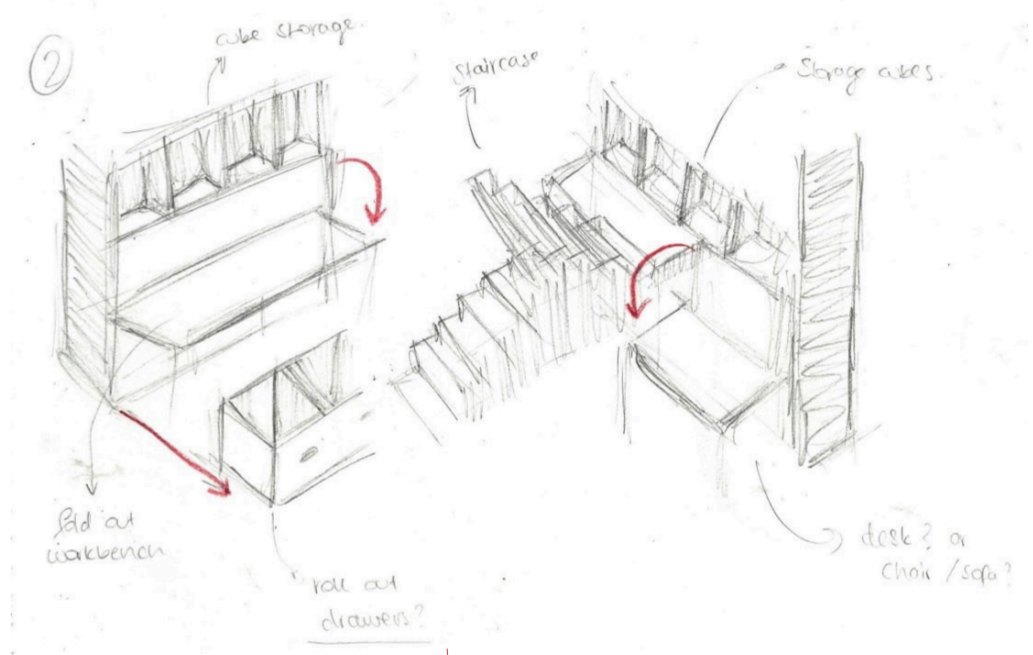
- INDIVIDUAL BEDROOMS
- INDIVIDUAL KITCHENETTE
- INDIVIDUAL BATHROOM
- INDIVIDUAL/ COMBINED STUDY SPACE
- COMBINED LIVING SPACE
- COMBINED KITCHEN/ DINING



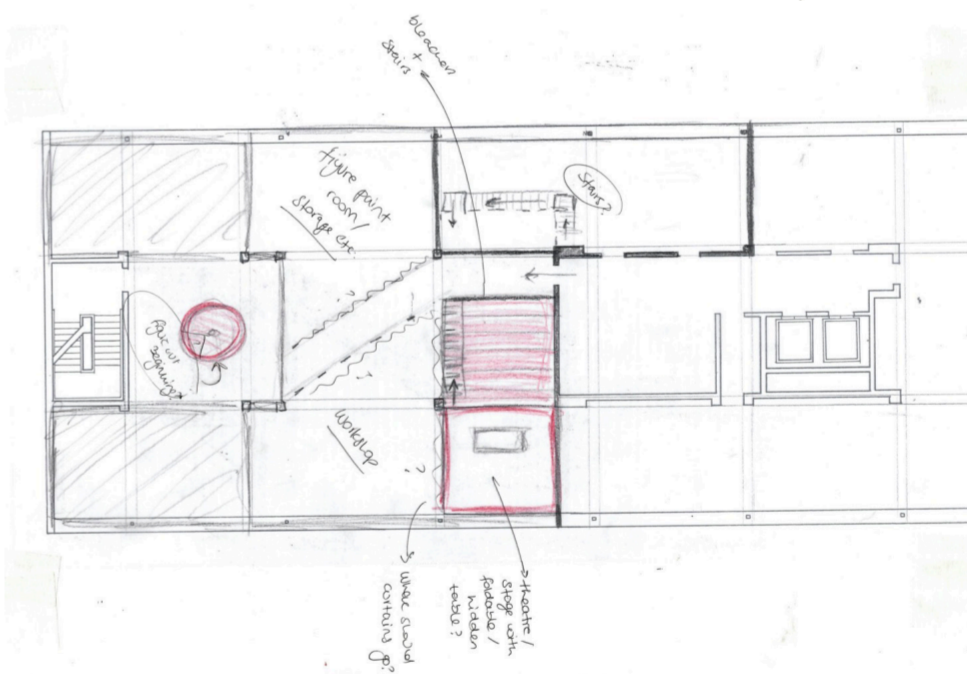
sketches exploring various 'ranalli' facades



sketches exploring variations of statement spiral staircase

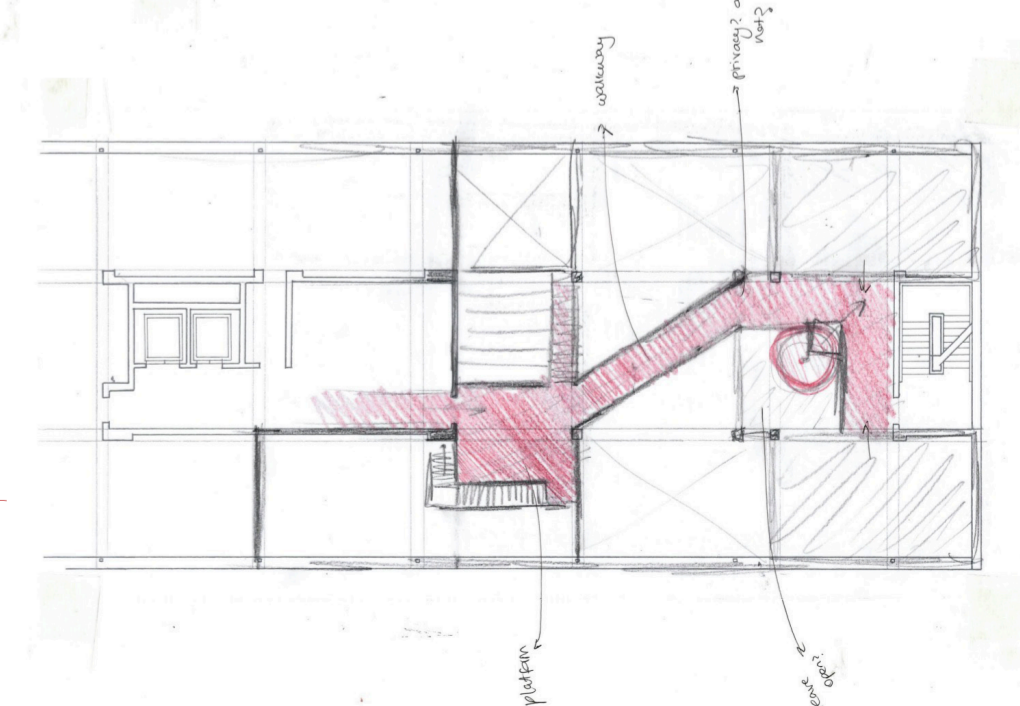


sketches exploring built-in structures

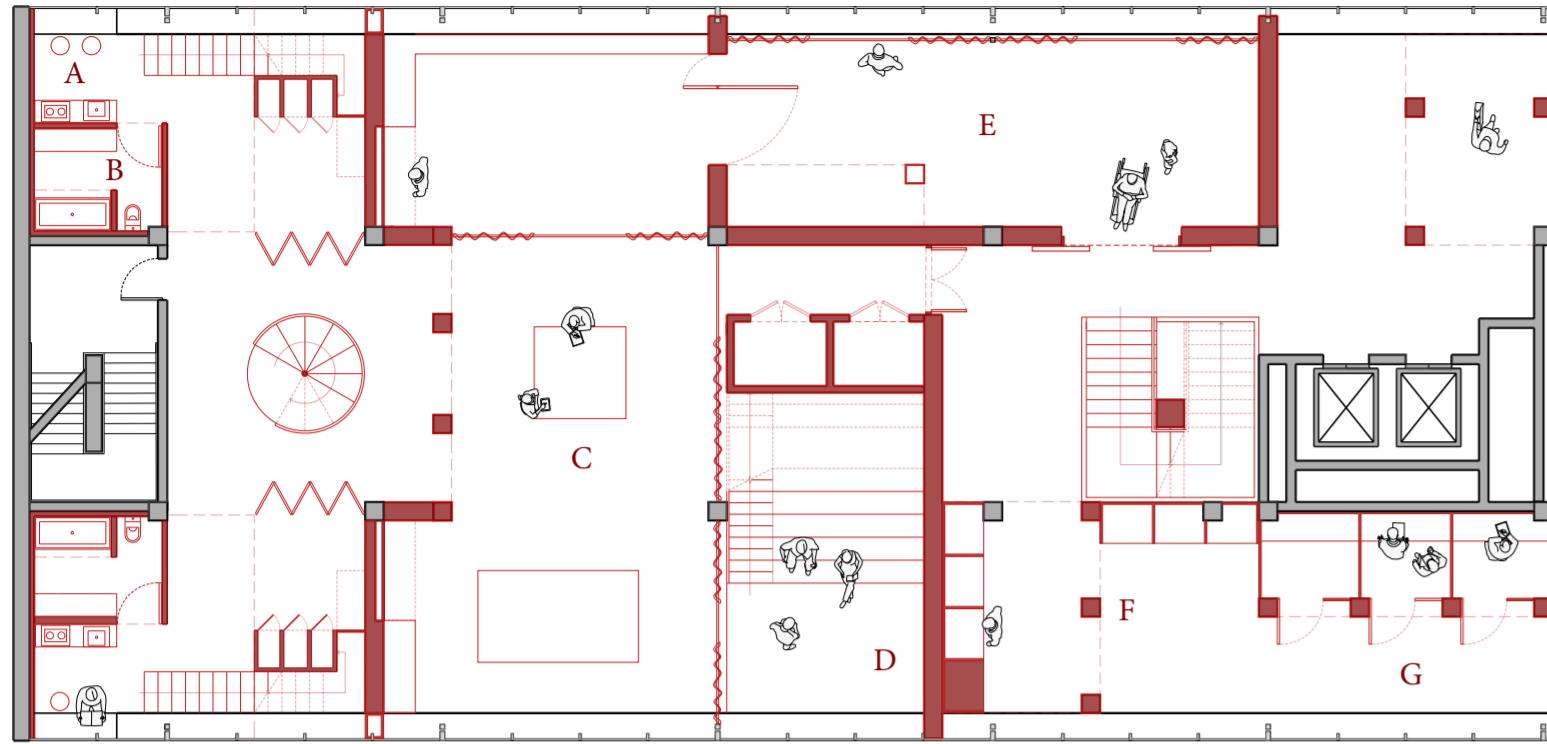


sketch exploration of third floor composition

sketch exploration of fourth floor composition

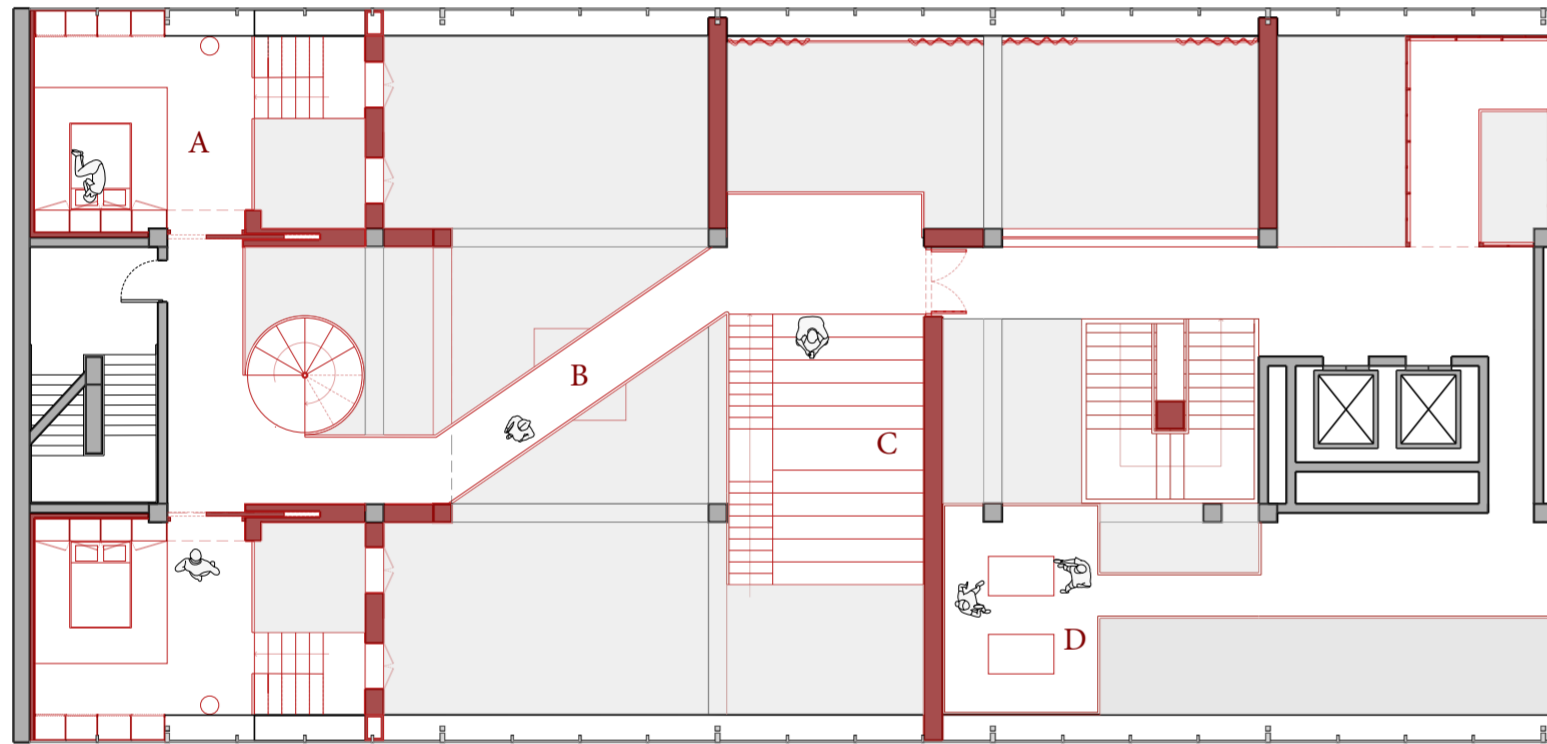


FINAL COMPOSITION



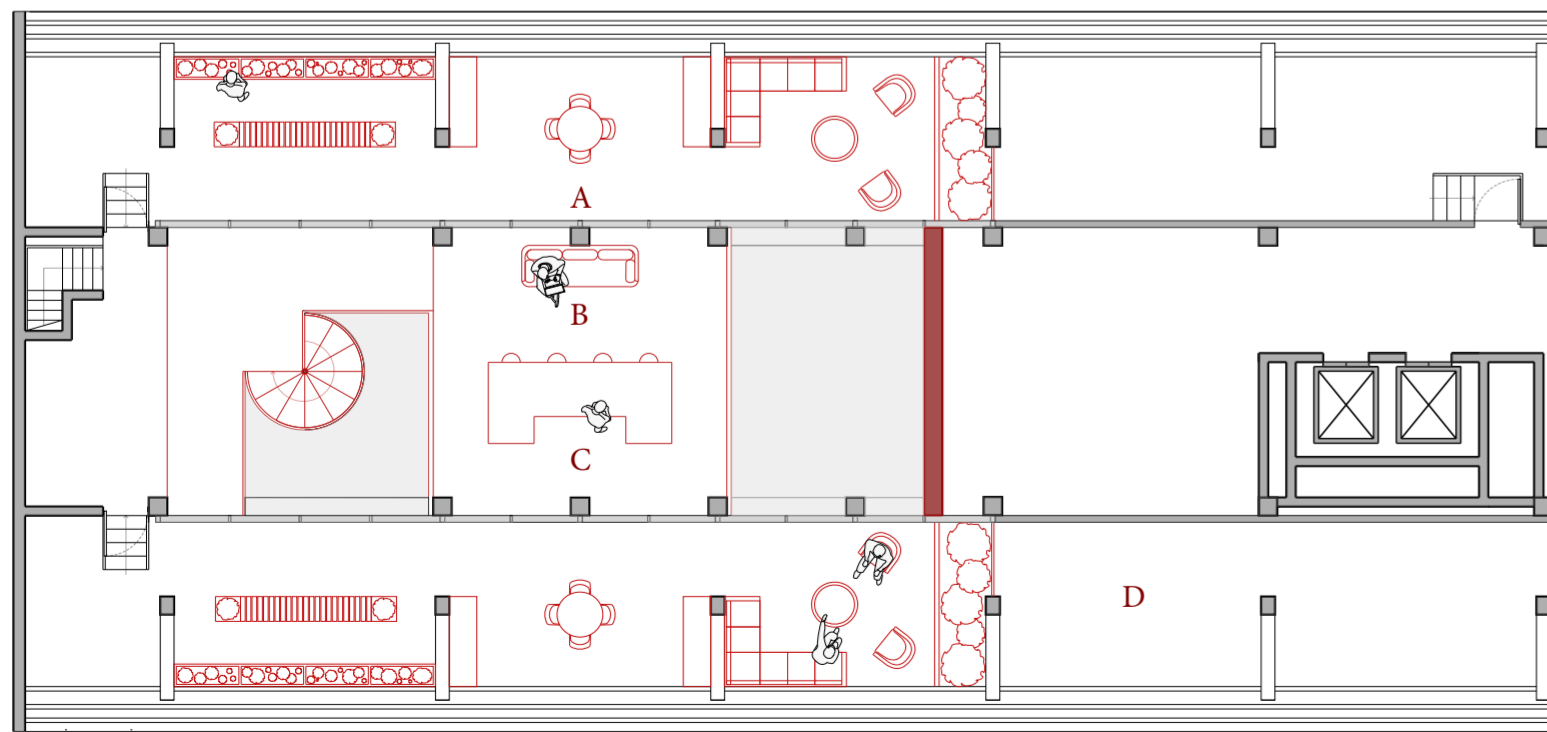
- A - KITCHENETTE
- B - BATHROOM
- C - WORKSHOP
- D - THEATRE
- E - EXHIBITION SPACE
- F - VIBRANT HEART - BOOK SWAP
- G - VIBRANT HEART - QUIET STUDY PODS

1:100 THIRD FLOOR



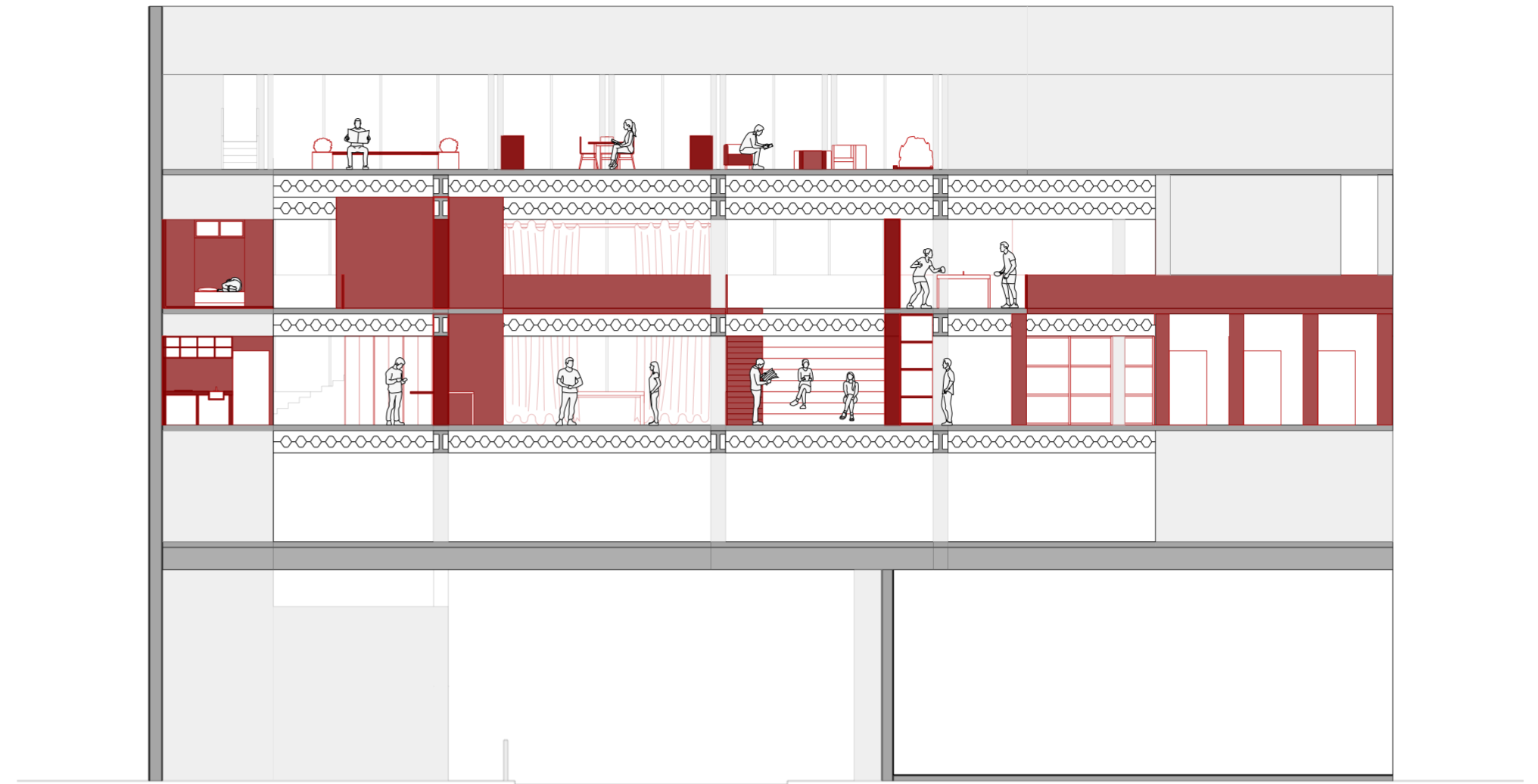
- A - BEDROOM
- B - WALKWAY
- C - BLEACHERS / MEETING SPACE
- D - VIBRANT HEART - PLAYING TABLES

1:100 FOURTH FLOOR

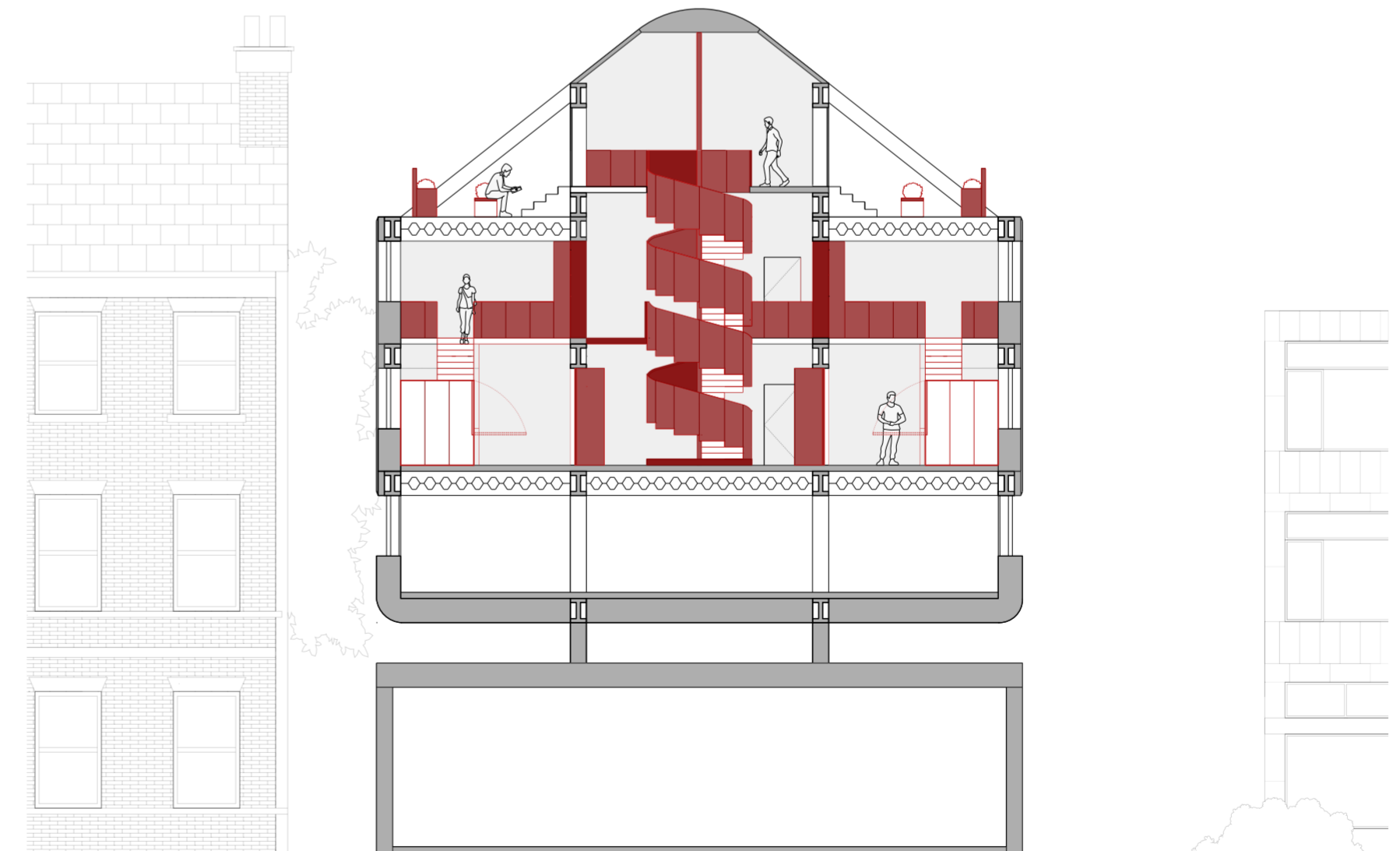


- A - PRIVATE ROOFTOP GARDEN
- B - LIVING AREA
- C - SHARED KITCHEN / DINING AREA
- D - COMMUNAL ROOFTOP GARDEN

1:100 FIFTH FLOOR



1:100 LONG SECTION



1:50 SHORT SECTION

USER EXPERIENCE

At the centre of the design proposal, is the connection between the residents and theatre.

Specific material use and the bold statement of red throughout guides viewers through elaborate thresholds connecting various programmes. This creates a playfulness towards exploring the residence, with the existing fabric becoming a stage for the artist-in-residence and the vibrant heart.

Human comfort is crucial alongside aesthetics. Therefore, thermal and acoustics properties are taken into account through material choice. Douglas fir has high thermal density, providing warmth and soft finish in contrast to more raw and industrial materials like steel.



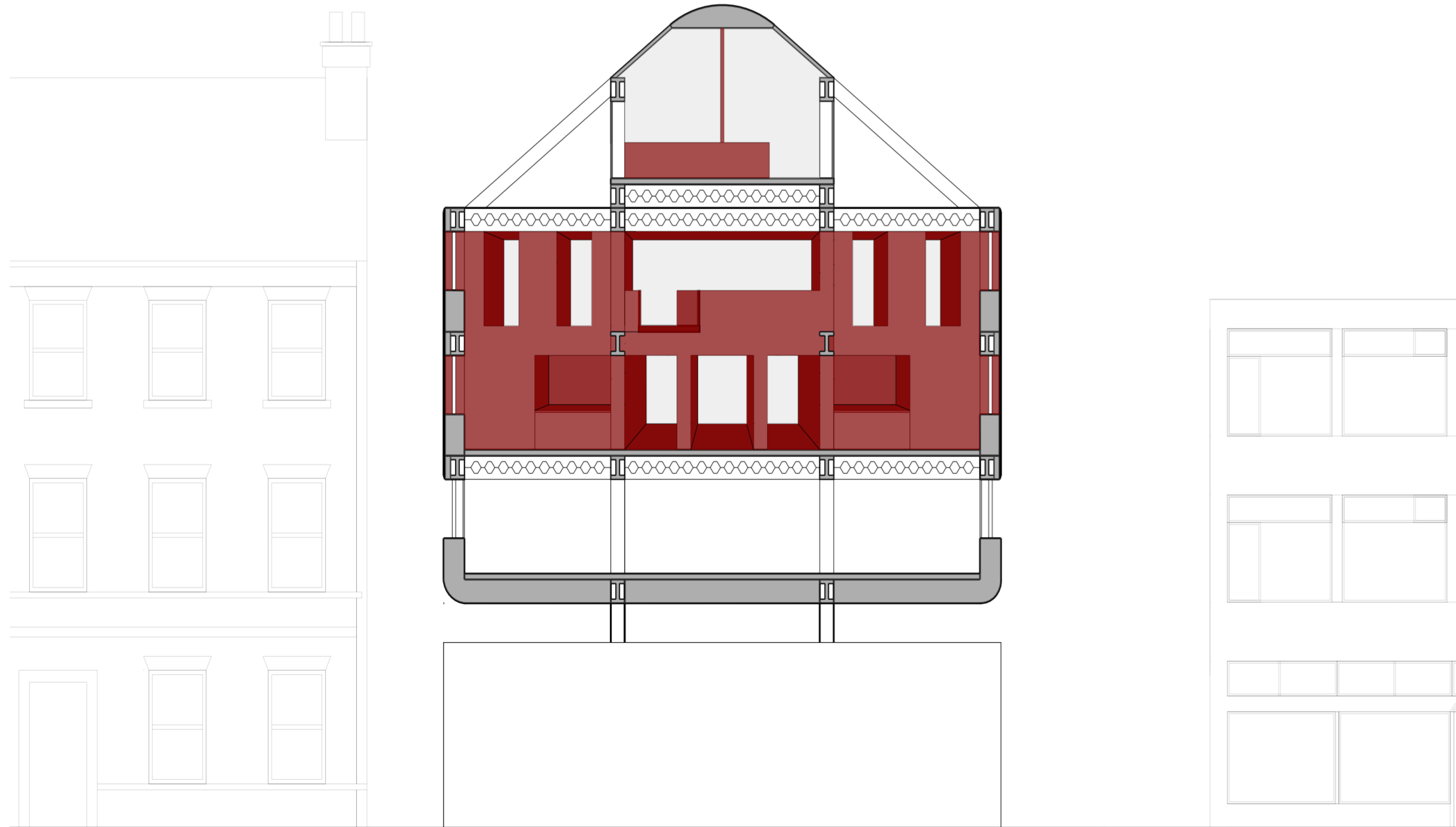
THEATRE/ MEETING SPACE



VIBRANT HEART - BOOK SWAP

RANALLI FACADE

The heart of the design is the theatrical facade towering across a double-height space, serving as a threshold between the private and public quarters of the residence. Inspired by George Ranalli's 'Callender School', Ranalli also took advantage of adaptive reuse through the insertion of obscure, multi-occupancy dwellings to form a complex puzzle-like geometry. The atypical design of these habitats shaped the research and the developmental process to create this bold insertion into the MEA house.



MATERIALITY

150 x 800 Douglas Fir Boards
Hardwax Oil Finish

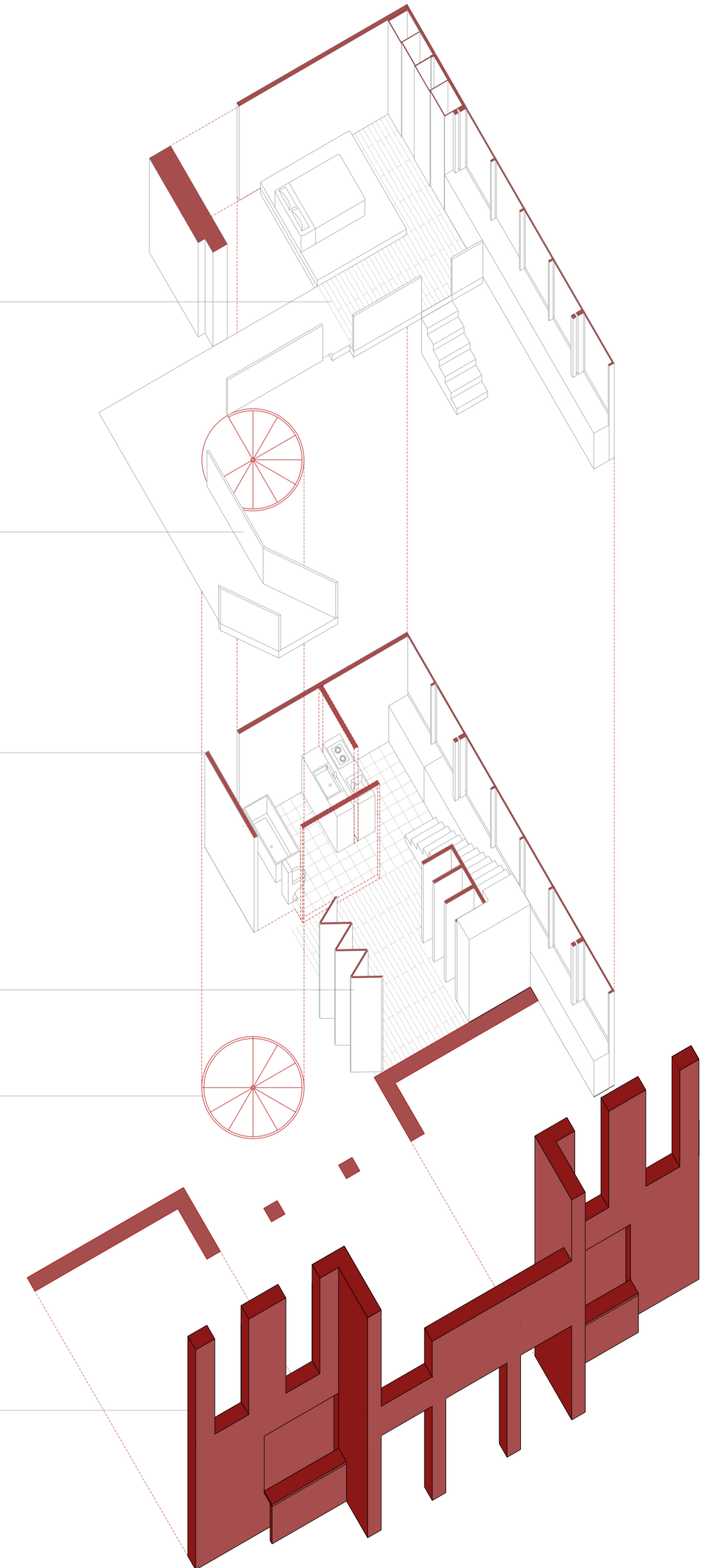
1.5m x 3m Mild Steel Sheets
Red Powder Coating

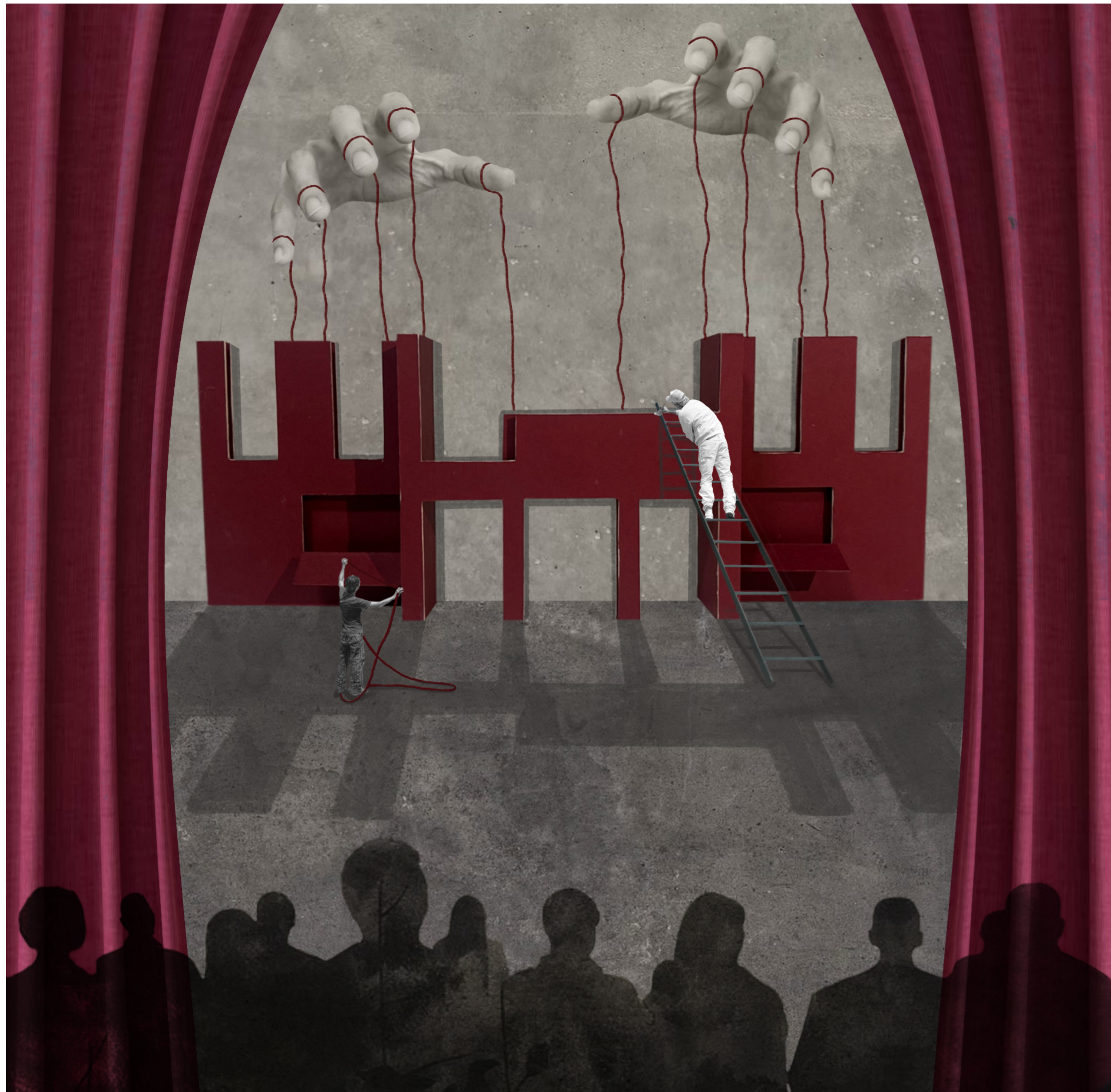
38 x 89 Timber Stud Wall
Sheep Wool Insulation
12mm Tile Backing Board
8mm Ceramic Tiles

Reclaimed Timber

50mm Steel Floorplate
100mm Steel Pole
Mild Steel Tread
Red Powder Coating

38 x 140 Timber Stud Wall
Sheep Wool Insulation
12.5mm Breathaboard
Plaster
Paint





RE-IMAGINING INTERIORS

Re-imagining interiors is a contemplative idea, exploring the relationship between human interaction and their interior environment. There is not only one interpretation of a space - the same concept can bring along a multitude of creative exploration for different users. In a world dominated with image saturation, the layers of the image begin to blur, hiding the true thoughts and the build-up of components which work together to form the final image revealed to the public. However, it is these tiny elements which compose the true journey.

MEA house effectively responds to this double-entendre by enabling the users to have an individualistic experience within the space. The 'Ranalli Wall' takes focus within this by setting the stage for the theatrical metaphor explored throughout the concept. It may be perceived as a mere wall, a division, a threshold. Or perhaps, its statement is so bold it forms the stage for the artist-in-residence. Or maybe, it is just a set prop as part of the wider 'play' unravelling within the MEA house fabric.

These interpretations transcend the boundaries of the user experience to simultaneously allow for the users to introspectively analyse the space. This furthers the metaphorical implications of the theatre design, as the MEA house embodies the role of the stage, and the inhabitants become actors to that stage.

