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Main Reef Opera and Choral Chamber
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Boksburg

Abstract

This dissertation is based on the notion of exploring the relationship between above and below surface,
in order to unlock their coexistence. By exploring these elements in conjunction, an uneasy tension emerges that evokes the uncanny.

The focus is to translate and articulate the state of suspension/tension in an architectural language.
Proposing a Choral and Opera chamber to accommodate cultural performances within a former mineshaft
in Boksburg is to set up an essential argument about the historical establishment of the Witwatersrand.

The mined landscape was developed and constructed by man with intense toil. The remnants on the surface leaves a haunting trail of deep, dark memories that recalls the discovery of gold and the extraction of ore
as the foundation up on which urban settlement is built on. The trademark of the Rand is soon to disappear and its manifestation will be left behind. Most of the portals into the complex mined underworld is sealed
and kept out of sight. New establishments are superseding the former without any recognition or reminiscence.

The landscape is scarred with gaps of possibilities and within the emptiness of a deceased landscape, lies something deeply imaginative and expressive. The challenge of this thesis is to make two ends coincide, where the high-end cultural world of choral and operatic is sunk into the local soil of an undermined mining network. Providing a place for remaking that still resonates with the everyday visitor, the churchgoer and ex-miner.

By bringing forward the mediation between landscape above, -below, solid and void; the proposal of a Choral Opera House, in an old mine shaft can challenge architectural possibilities in unconventional circumstances. Transforming the site into a meaningful memorable place to make the invisible visible and the inaccessible accessible is to add event of sound inside the space of the underground, through collapsing a part of the surface to expose the depleted Reef of the Witwatersrand. By dislocating the intervention outside the central city, amplify the meaning of its existence beneath the earth and descending down, creating sound beneath the earth, allowing for a performance of utmost purity.

The aim is to engage with a forgotten, mined, Boksburg landscape as new terrain to explore the possibilities of architecture within a landscape confronted by tunnels, upheaval and erosion. Through the collapse and exposure of the site's interior, the process of reconstruction is utilised to identify the historical presence of natural and man-made traces on the landscape. An opera chamber acts as an articulated architectural tool to identify and expose the site's presence and current condition.

In essence, by proposing a cultural architectural composition to connect the city above with the mines below is to engage with the ghosts of the mined underground and expose the public to the sounds in the underground. Every time they visit this place, they are reminded of the discovery of Witwatersrand gold and the extraction of ore as a foundation on which their urban lives are built.