

Stories of a Place in Time

Moomin Museum in Tampere, Finland

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In the 2017 spring term, the professional design studio of Public Building at Tampere University of Technology in Finland set a design task for a building that not only occupies and strengthens an urban place in Tampere but also presents imagined spaces: a museum for the stories, characters and places of the Moomin graphic novels by Finnish illustrator Tove Jansson. These graphic novels form the cultural and literary heart of many Finnish childhoods. For the design of such a cultural building, questions of place, landscape, the experience of spatial and material qualities are crucial.

The beauty arises from the unexpected. . . . And suddenly it was silence. The factory's interior courtyard has its own sound of silence. Beyond the brick walls the fuss of the city life does not enter, nor the sound of the rapids, nor the wind. It is a place out of time, out of space; it gives me shelter.

The project by Diana Rimniceanu begins with a museum in search of a place of its own in the city of Tampere. But it is no ordinary building . . . and

thus . . . no ordinary place. The intervention aspires to provide the framework for the imagined spaces created by Jansson. And the place? Old bare brick factory walls and a river, right in the heart of Tampere; each with its own story, building a strong and lively identity.

The museum extension aspires to express the Moomin stories through an architecture that is specific and autonomous, capable of preserving the richness and uniqueness of the place while revealing the unexpected landscapes that it hides; an architecture that grows gradually, scene by scene, creating encounters between the Moomin creatures, the historic industrial buildings and the new visitors. The intervention reveals through space a sequence of atmospheres rooted within the darkness and light of the Moomin stories, while balancing between the reality of things and imagination.

In the given context, the challenge remains to transcribe the atmosphere of the Moomin graphic novel into spatial configurations. The project does not mimic the setting of the stories – the landscape of rocks, forest and sea, the caves and huts – but references them in a way that goes beyond the literal, capturing the friendly, modest, daring, inviting, strange or stubborn personalities of the Moomin creatures, the essence of Jansson's graphic novels. The first glimpses of the Moomin characters are revealed progressively from the outside, popping out and accompanying the museum visitors and the city dwellers along their everyday routes. Regardless of the fact that most of the intervention is constructed underground, it was worth questioning the way it relates to the factory building, as what remains visible becomes important. In that sense, the museum embraces rhythms and forms from the past, addressing them in new ways, with different materials, opposing the roughness of the brick to the smoothness of the concrete. The historic building acts as a bridge between the new intervention holding the exhibition and the learning centre, from the interior courtyard.

. . . but as soon as I enter, I am trapped in-between two worlds. Two different realities. One hundred years old and something . . . something else

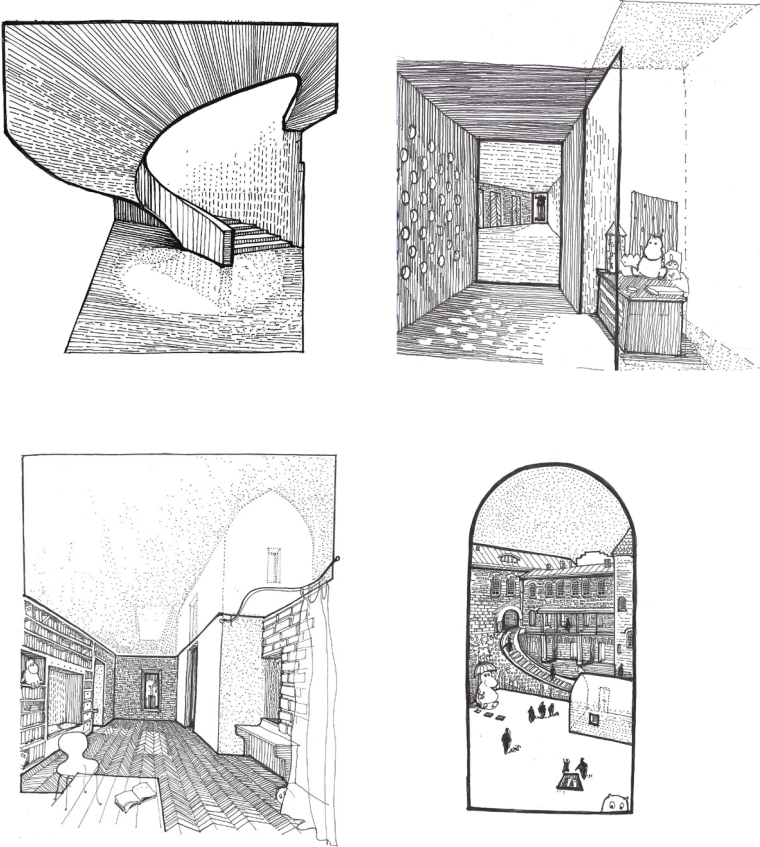


Fig. 1-4. Drawings by the author, Diana Rimniceanu.

there, outside, in the courtyard, unfamiliar but humble. Children play all around, witnessed by the factory walls. The courtyard seems to frame and restructure. It is 'the intimate', 'the silent', though sometimes loud, daring.

The story writes itself between two worlds, as the existing industrial factory building separates and unites, facilitates and prohibits two places of strong identities: the city's liveliness and the absolute silence of the interior courtyard, completely detached from the city's reality, which has its own rhythm. The factory dominates the place and somehow protects you, makes you fearless before the heavy rapids that are 'shouting' from behind the building. Having to mediate between delicate pieces of history and the new, the unknown, the challenge remains in the construction of the intertwining links between them. While the intervention should remain respectful to the past, it questions the quality of space in the attempt to reach for different proximities, encounters and atmospheres that bring light upon Janson's collection. This sequence of very different atmospheres creates rhythm and moments of pause throughout the museum and a rich layering of spaces that is the essence of the Moomin stories. The museum portrays the Moomin stories revolving around the idea of *framing*, capturing characters, people and movements, while strengthening the essential tension between the different spaces.

As I am going back inside and look through the window, I notice two different, new frames that are facing each other trying to tell something, having their own purpose and story. They articulate the spine of the museum, the path that holds everything together underneath. The two windows frame the exhibition and the learning centre, coming together from underground.

In between two worlds, the Moomin Museum aspires to deal with the intimate connection between literature and architecture, following Gaston Bachelard's reflections on the essential polarity between *the attic* and *the*

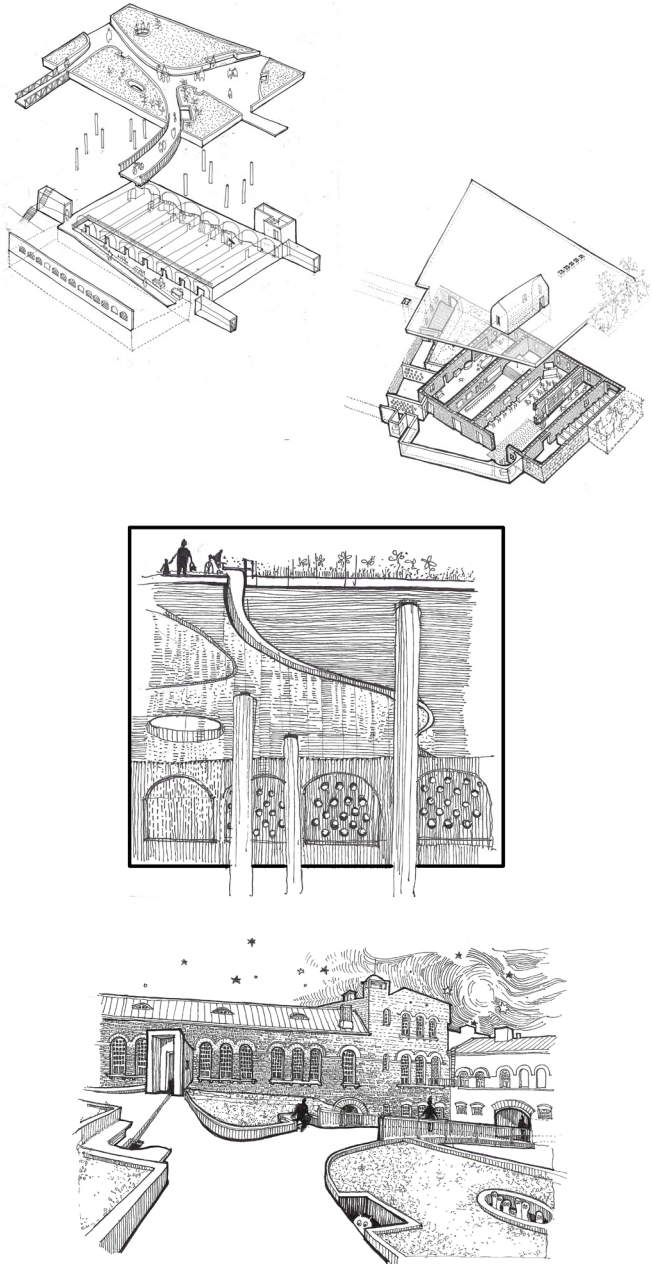


Fig.5-7. Drawings by the author, Diana Rimniceanu.

cellar. The intervention opposes the rationality of the roof to the irrationality of the cellar, playing with the different movements while shaping spaces where the visitors can freely wander, encouraging them to stay in a certain place or step towards another. The 'attic' resembles the symbolic storage of pleasant memories to which the dweller wants to return, and thus it becomes the entrance to but also the way out of the museum. It is the space that is imprinted first and last into one's memory. The naked structure of the roof inside shows its honesty decorating the high attic. It is the only space that simultaneously brings awareness of the two worlds: the silent courtyard and the city's fuss. The approach to the factory requires a careful and considered treatment, thus the intervention regenerates the space from within, reinforcing the structure with steel pillars and beams. The stairs that connect the 'attic' and the 'cellar', leading to the exhibition space, give a sense of tangibility, of intimacy. As the visitor descends the stairs, the smoothness of the concrete awakens the tactile sense and provokes tension with the nearby brick wall.

The staircase gives me a sense of nearness as I can touch it and feel its smoothness.

But wait! A piano is playing! In an instant, it brings me back to my childhood. The sound escapes from the main hall. As I go through the dark corridor I stop for a little while to see a fragment of the Moomin world lighted in the niche. Following the sound, I end up between the heavy brick walls. They are so fortunate, absorbing all the beauty of the melodies.

The 'cellar' is the hiding place where vaults shelter the Moomin Valley exhibit in darkness. Logical and sincere, the space is defined by its bearing walls, a series of diaphragms that cast deep shadows, dimming the sharpness of vision. The long series of caves is shattered and interrupted by small windows, revealing the thickness of the wall, fragments of spaces, atmospheres or people, emphasizing the permeability of the massive walls. The surprise plays against the anticipated, as captured in Jansson's graphic

novels. The punctuated light is drawing rhythms on the vaults, on the clear surfaces. Sometimes heavy, sometimes light, the curtains disclose the digital exhibition, with its all vibrant energetic colours, shapes and forms.

While entering the caves, a different atmosphere emerges. The light has turned into darkness, and the vaults shape mysterious shadows. The opacity of the heavy walls is shattered by the small windows. I can see miles away, glimpses of what is happening beyond the heavy thick concrete. But the sight is different. More concentrated, more punctuated. Long shadows are cast in front of me, dimming the sharpness of sight and calling for my unconscious peripheral vision. I touch the heavy caves. They reveal a sense of nearness and affection. As I pull the heavy curtain a combination of vibrant energetic colours, shapes and forms are moving around me. At the end of the tunnel, diving in light, are tiny models of the storytellers of the Moomin worlds imagined by Tove Jansson.