Exhibition

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The shelter of the ruins

From June 16 to September 3, 2023

EL BORN CCM

Ajuntament de Barcelona

'If we have power to make our human cry
Downwards, from here, to that region leap,
Let mine pierce the abyss, this dark steep,
That you might hear my voice from on high.
Three times circling beneath heaven's veil
In devotion, round your tombs, I hail
You, with loud summons; thrice on you I call:
And, while your ancient fury I invoke,
Here, as though I in sacred terror spoke,
I'll sing your glory, beauteous above all.'

(Joachim du Bellay: *Les antiquités de Rome.* Translation by A.S.Kline)

Why do we go to such great lengths to preserve ruins from the past as ruins, just as they are, barely rising from the ground, with all their wounds deliberately left bloody?

Might it be out of sadistic pleasure, acts of contrition, a perverse taste for something mutilated, a lesson in barbarity for future generations or just the assumed identification of the transience and brevity of human works conjured up by these ardent empires and anonymous communities?

"The shelter of the ruins" is an exhibition about modern and contemporary efforts to preserve the legacy of the past just as it appears when it is unearthed – regardless of intentions, confessable or otherwise, glowing or dark, educational or begrudging, and the artistic penchant that guides preservation and contemplation – the legacy of the past just as it appears when it is unearthed.

Preserving entails covering: building protective shells that keep alive the memory of what things used to be but in he exact state they reappear in today.

A selection of international architectural projects, built from the 1930s onwards and mostly in the twenty-first century, tackle the problem of erecting structures over ruins to protect them, maintaining the image of ruins and understanding them not as destroyed but rather as something which has taken on a new nature. Here, wounds form part of the personality and appeal of constructions that project a wholeness which might not stand out if they still stood in their entirety.

El Born CCM would appear to be just the place to reflect on our torturous relationship with the past, on the notion of the past itself (memorable).

The shelter of the ruins

LINES (OUTLINES)
Caring for ruins helps them evoke what they were, what time and human hands have torn down. Some restorations suggest, through fine lines that simple metal frameworks provide, the phantom outlines of vanished volumes without rebuilding them. The emptiness, which always permeates a ruin, continues to linger, which is the trace of what the buildings were before they disappeared.

RECUMBENT (HORIZONTAL PLANES)
Covering archaeological remains has usually been solved with tensioned tarpaulins and metal supports detached from the ruins, but they have not always matched them. They have solved a technical problem without addressing it from an architectural perspective. By contrast, the covering of the early Christian cemetery in Tarragona, by Emilio Pérez Piñero in the 1970s, combined lasting protection with the lightness that the interplay of vaults supported by slender pillars evokes, similar to thin clouds engulfing a cemetery populated by floating souls.

VOLUMES
Archaeological sites often miss an essential piece of information: the third dimension. Archaeological remains appear on the ground. They are traces inscribed in the earth. Their interpretation can be uncertain. In some cases, covers fill this gap. Containers produce the illusion that the remains have awoken. A clear boundary between the exterior and interior is once again marked. But these covers are not a carbon copy of the vanished constructions.

The interiors are seldom partitioned; only lightweight walkways float over the remains. Still, the third dimension introduced by the cover produces the illusion that the ruins have returned to life.

VERTICAL PLANES (WALLS AND ENCLOSURES)
We humans are fascinated by caves. We endow them with a sacred aura. Protecting archaeological remains deposited inside mountains is different from the previous examples. In these cases, verticality dominates. The covering becomes a wall that physically and visually protects the archaeological remains, taking care not to merge with them or to visually damage the surroundings, as if it were a patch.

Atelier Peter Zumthor: Covering of the ruins of Roman baths (Chur, Switzerland, 1985-1986)
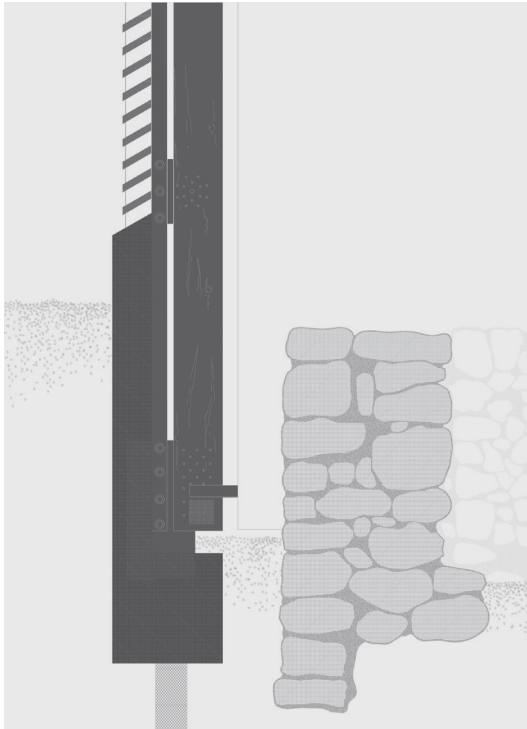

Switzerland is not a country known for its Roman sites, and the ruins of the modest Chur thermal baths (first century AD) would be no exception to this rule if it were not for their covering. Located in an industrial suburb, among architecturally unremarkable warehouses, it plays with the present and the past. The shell evokes a factory and a thermal bath building without being confused with either of them: both structures have no openings. But the light seeps in at night through the wooden slats and skylights. The covering, access stairs, walkways and interior metal stairs suspended from the ceiling and floating over the rooms barely rest on the ruins.

Carles Enrich Studio: Protection of the ruins of the castle of Jorba (Jorba, Catalonia, Spain, 2019-2020)

Archaeological sites face two problems: earth movements create a new landscape, and construction or decorative elements are scattered in new constructions. The protection of the walls of a classical chapel in the mediaeval castle of Jorba (tenth century) plays with these two realities. The excavated soil was used to create an entrance and a terrace, and the fallen stones were reused to pave it, incorporating the building's remains. A reversible translucent cover, supported by wooden beams resembling buttresses evoking a sacred space, protects the frescoes from the elements.
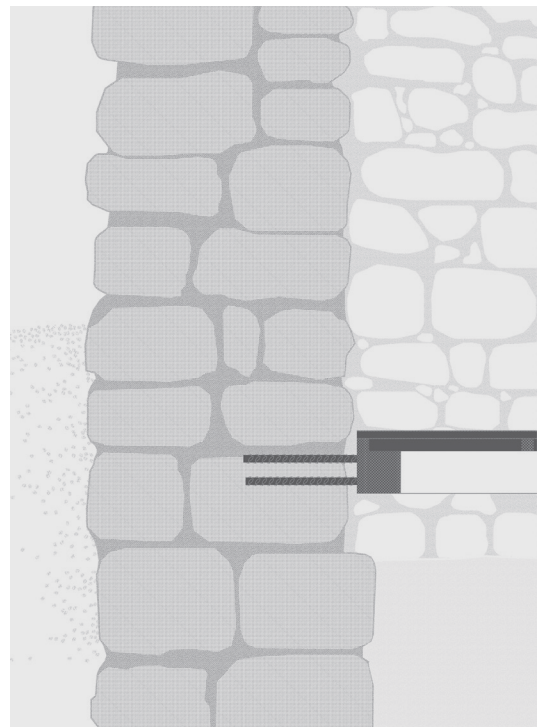
Dimitris Pikionis:
Walkways through the Acropolis and the Hill of the Muses
## (Athens, Greece, 1954-1958)
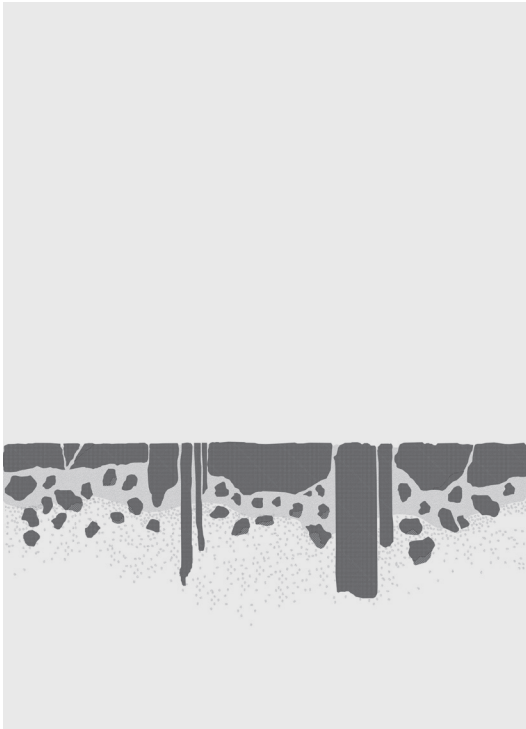
Stones do not have only one life. After buildings vanish due to the neglect of time or humans, the stones can be used in new constructions. They regain their purpose. The rehabilitation of the Acropolis (fifth century BC) and the Hill of the Muses in Athens required the demolition of modest neighbourhoods. The houses had been built with reused slabs and panels from ancient Greece and even Rome. The architect Dimitri Pikionis (1887-1968) created walkways with mosaics made of perfectly inlaid ancient stones, a marble carpet polished by time, restoring dignity to a ruined acropolis and neglected constructions.

Martino Pedrozzi and students of the Mendrisio Academy of Architecture: Recompositions
(Monte Luzzone, Switzerland, 2019)

Alpine valleys are seldom inhabited these days. The modest constructions on the mountain sides are in decay, their stones crumbling and their outlines becoming blurred. In the Malvaglia Valley (Switzerland), Martino Pedrozzi and his students gather the slabs and stones of the former buildings and recompose them inside the original perimeter of each structure, generating compact volumes of stone. Totems of a bygone age.

Savioz Fabrizzi Architects: Covering of the ruins of Saint-Maurice abbey
(Saint-Maurice, Switzerland, 2010)
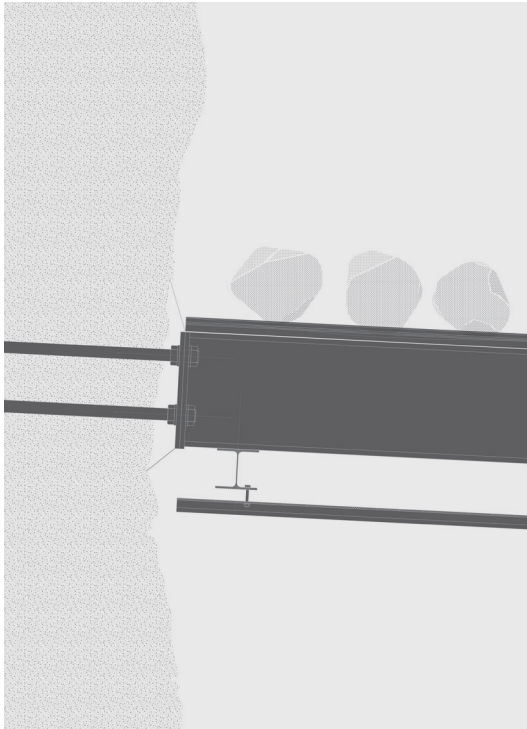
Protection is not only physical but also magical. Just as magic operates homoeopathically, causing something in advance just to neutralise it, the covering —whose purpose is to shelter the remains of the abbey, which was founded in the Late Roman Empire (sixth century AD) — to cover it from falling stones from the cliff at whose feet it is built, consists in a mesh peppered with rocks, through which light filters. The falling stones, which ruined the abbey, now protect it, reaffirming the sacred site's ability to overcome the curse. Stones raining down have often signified divine anger in the Old Testament. But an almost invisible filter effectively interferes in the execution of the fierce punishment.

Oton Jugovec:
Covering of the remains of the mediaeval church of Gutenwerth
(Otok Pri Dobravi, Slovenia, 1970-1971)

The ruins are invisible. Barely discernible traces outline the layout of the mediaeval church on a barren plain devoid of natural landmarks that could draw attention. The protection, which the Slovenian architect Jugovec (1921-1987) built, anchors the remains amidst cultivated fields and within the sightline of residents. A pitched roof with a wooden structure supported by two central cylindrical columns, also made of wood, obscures the view of the remains while simultaneously highlighting them. The roof blends with the nearby dwellings and barns, linking the church's ruins to them.
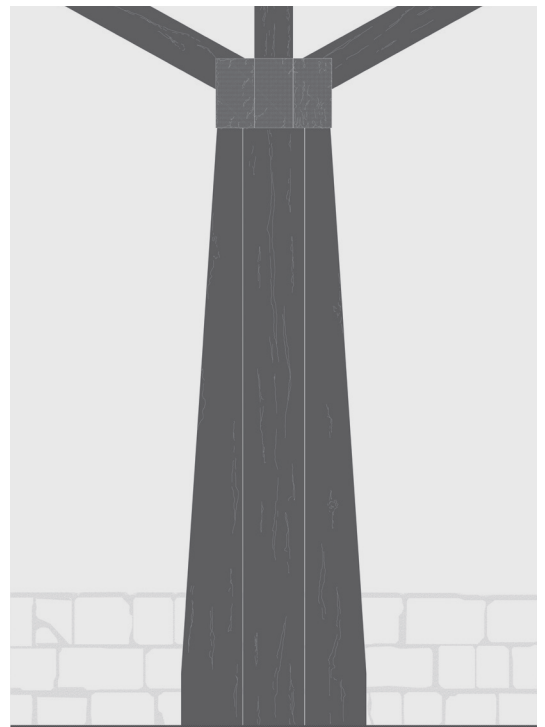
Emilio Pérez Piñero: Covering of the Palaeo-Christian Necropolis
of Tarragona (Tarragona, Catalonia, Spain, 1970-1973)
Completed by José María Pérez Piñero
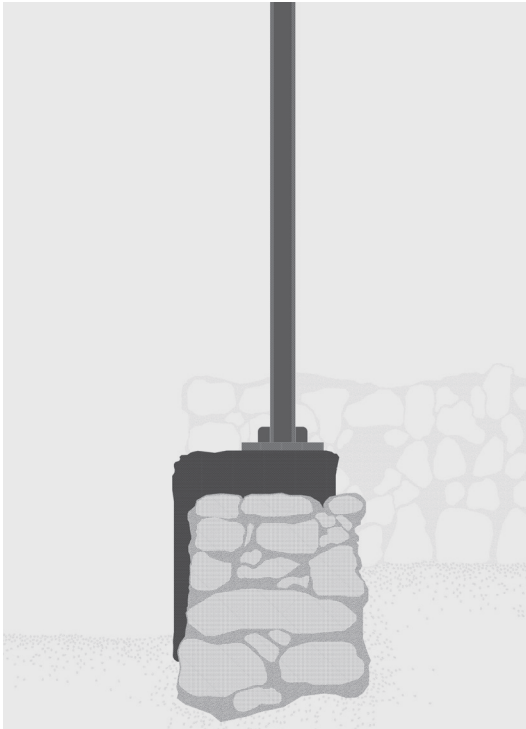
The groin vaults stem from the cross-section of a semi-sphere along four vertical planes supported on the sides of the square in which the circular base of the vault is nestled. The name 'sail dome' is more evocative: a membrane, almost a fabric —groin vaults are also known as 'handkerchief vaults'— tautened by the wind, a gust; the ship's sail of the last journey of the spirits in the necropolis. These vaults rest on four steel pillars supported by concrete pilasters that prevent the site from being partitioned and scarcely affect the graves. A fibrocement roof — replaced since then by a polycarbonate one — filters the light. Abandoned for decades, the site and its covering have now been refurbished.

A3GM:
Protection of the Roman site of Clunia
(Burgos, Spain, 2007)

A single, lightweight, flat, foldable element extends and ascends, defines, and defends the Roman site of Clunia (first century AD): wooden slats separated from each other like a vertical fence comprise a volume reminiscent of a Roman villa which houses a mosaic, allowing light to pass through and suggesting the room's opening to the outside (a garden). The slats then extend across the floor; opening up passageways; delimiting residential, commercial and sacred areas; and leading to the steps of the podium —rebuilt with reused stones from the site— of the city's main temple, turned into an overlook.
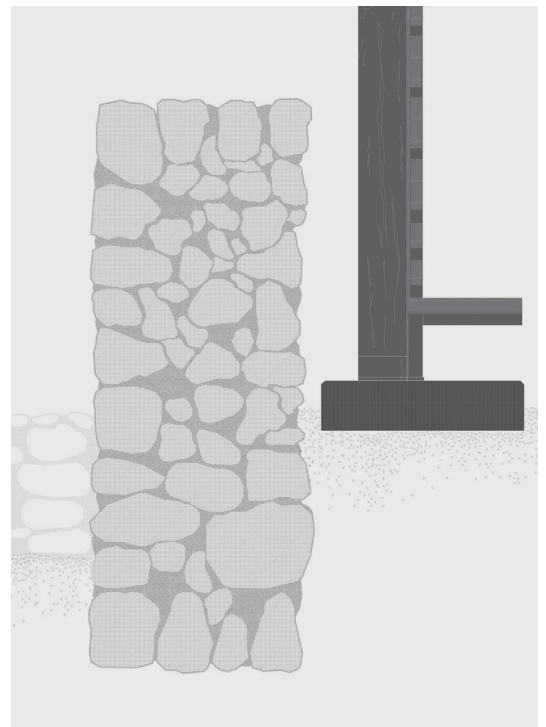
Frederick Law Olmsted Jr.:
Covering of the ruins of Casa Grande
(National Park, Arizona, EEUU, 1932)
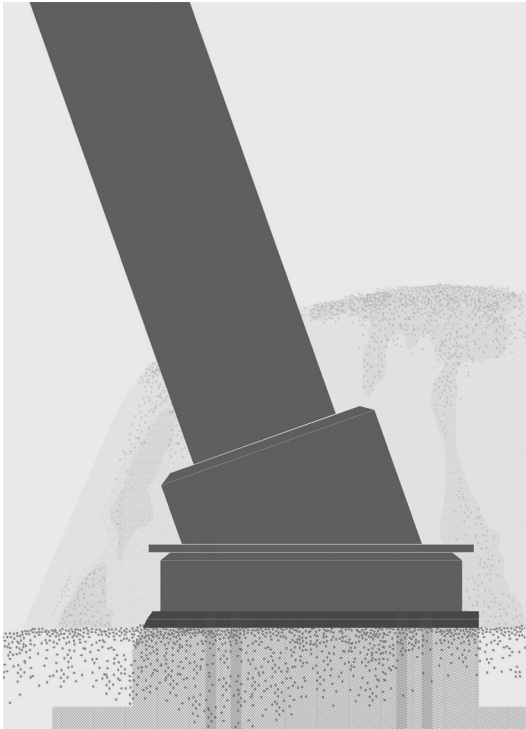
Thanks to its Spanish and French colonial past, the southern United States possesses the remains of native cultures that predated colonisation. Casa Grande is one of the best-known and emblematic ruins: a four-storey astronomical observatory from the thirteenth century used by different tribes in the Sonora desert (Arizona), oriented according to the cardinal points and pointing to the Orion constellation, through which the solstice and the equinox sun filters through openings high in the wall. It was heavily deteriorated due to the material (adobe), so the engineer Olmsted (1870-1957) sketched the roof, which still stands, replacing the initial one with a gabled roof. The protection was unpopular at the time due to its impact. Today, the ruins are hard to imagine without this unusual canopy crowning them, evoking an Amerindian pyramid.

Erik Thorkildsen (with Michael Dennis & Associates):
Covering of the Greeek Baths in Morgantina
(Morgantina, Italy, 2009)

A covering protects against the elements, oblivion and the inability to interpret the ruins. The covering of the Greek baths in Morgantina (fifth century BC), in Magna Graecia (Sicily) responds to this dual challenge. The planning and orientation of the city of Morgantina followed the line of the nearby mountain ranges. The baths, covered by a vault, were topped by a dome, all made of brick. Their protection, a gabled roof with a slight incline over which a higher central covering stands out, was inspired by the contours of the mountains and the orientation of the urban layout.
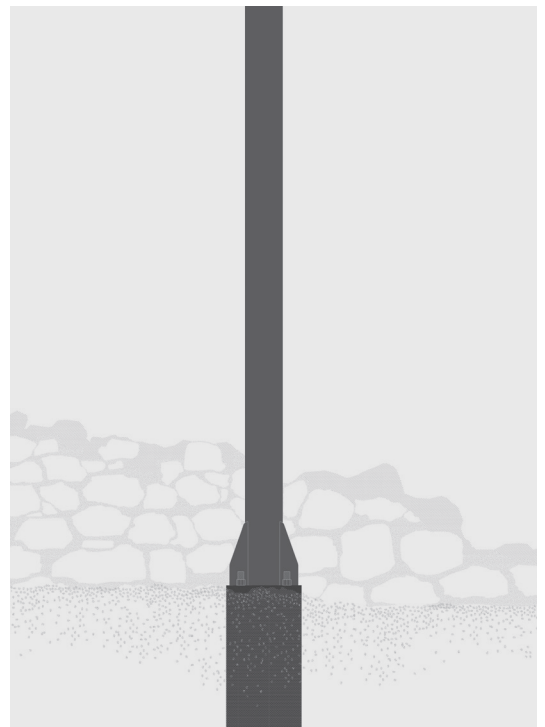
AIX Arkitekter: Covering of the ruins of the Viking church of Varhem-Kata Farm (Varhem, Sweden, 2017)
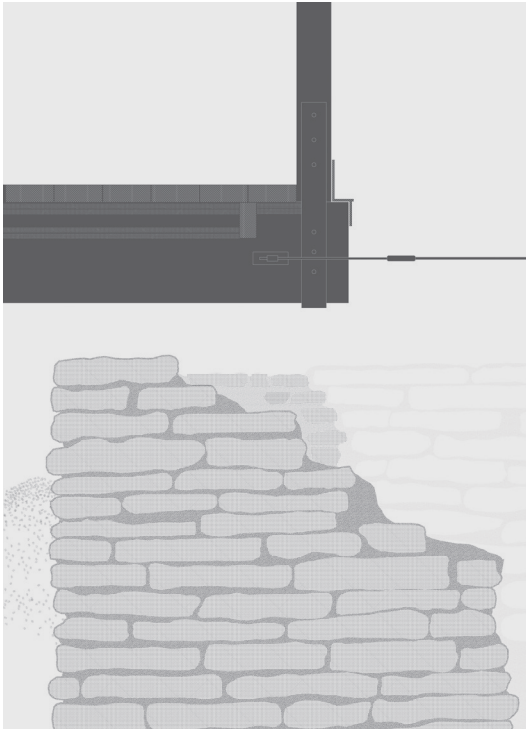

From a distance, a chapel stands out atop a hill in the middle of a forest, at whose base lie the extensive ruins of a mediaeval abbey (thirteenth century). As you draw nearer, the chapel is revealed to be a mere cover, almost suspended, supported on low wooden pillars protecting the early mediaeval crypt and one of the graves inside it. The steep-pitched roof and the complex interplay of wooden beams holding up the roof inside it summon the image of a Viking church. An elevated walkway around the ruins, punctuated by graphic and written information, helps visitors to understand the preserved traces.

LAB/PAB: Covering of the ruins of the Roman villa in El Vergel (San Pedro del Arroyo, Spain, 2019)

Visits to archaeological sites often lead to misunderstandings. The absence of roofs, the low height of the walls, the confusion between interior and exterior spaces, and the superimposed layers of occupation prevent visitors from gaining a coherent picture of what the ruins used to be. Protecting the ruins of the late-Roman villa in El Vergel (third to fourth century AD) solves this difficulty. Next to a walkway running around the site, around the belfry of a hermitage, two translucent parallelepipeds containing the mosaics abstractly recreate the scattered volumes that comprised the Roman estate, facilitating the perception of the interplay between indoor and outdoor spaces.
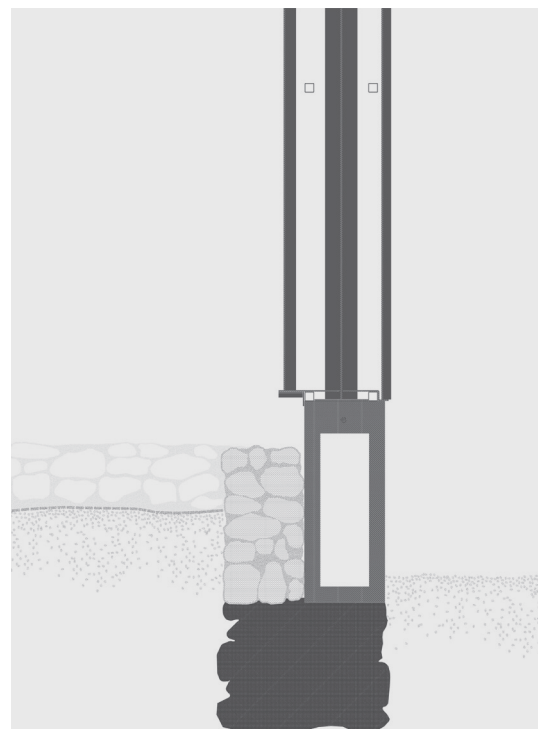
Carrilho de Graça Architects: Protection of the archaeological site of Praça Nova (Castillo de San Jorge, Lisbon, Portugal, 2010-2012)
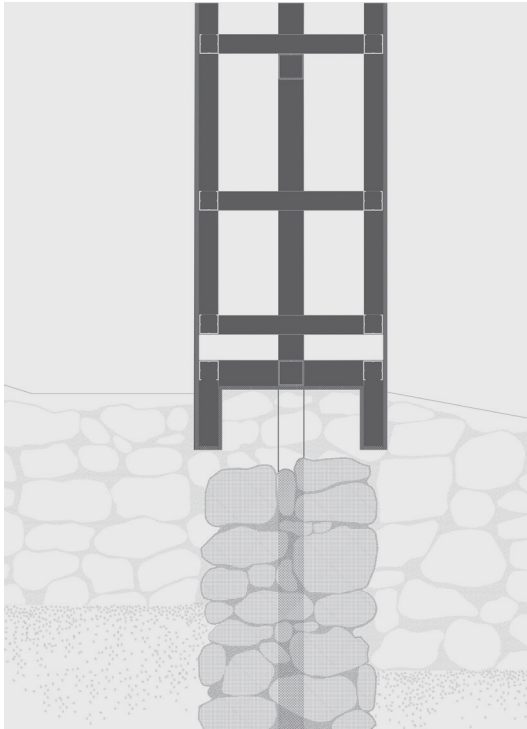

An archaeological site is a mosaic that integrates testimonies of settlements that overlap over time at different depths. The traces of the earliest settlements of Lisbon, from the Iron Age until the Arab presence (eighth century BC - eighth century AD), have been excavated atop the hill of São Jorge Castle. The preservation of the site and the covering of some remains reveal the superimposition of the different occupation levels. An elevated perimeter of weathered steel enables the site to be viewed. The remains of some Islamic houses are protected by a volume that evokes their shape, colour and internal organisation, yet it is barely resting on the original remains. Walkways and staircases, also made of steel, offer a journey through time and space.

Valerio Olgiati Architects: Entrance to the Pearling path (Muharraq, Bahrain, 2019)

Bahrain's initial wealth was based on the dangerous practice of pearl harvesting, which gave significance to the occupation of the space. This industry gave rise to different harvest, processing and trade sites, linked by the so-called Pearling Path (second - twentieth centuries AD), no longer in use today. A high concrete covering over a 'forest of columns', evoking something between an Egyptian temple and a mosque, inserted into the urban fabric, forms the monumental entrance to this path, which today has become a tourist attraction. The flat roof, through which light filters via openings in the concrete slab, provides shade and creates a shady and well-ventilated central public square in the city.
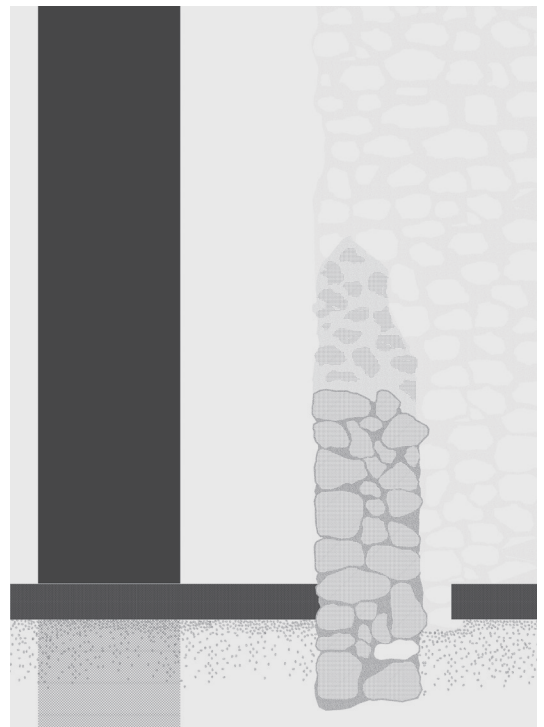
Toni Gironès:
Archaeology park of the Roman city of Iesso
## (Guissona, Catalonia, Spain, 2008-2011)
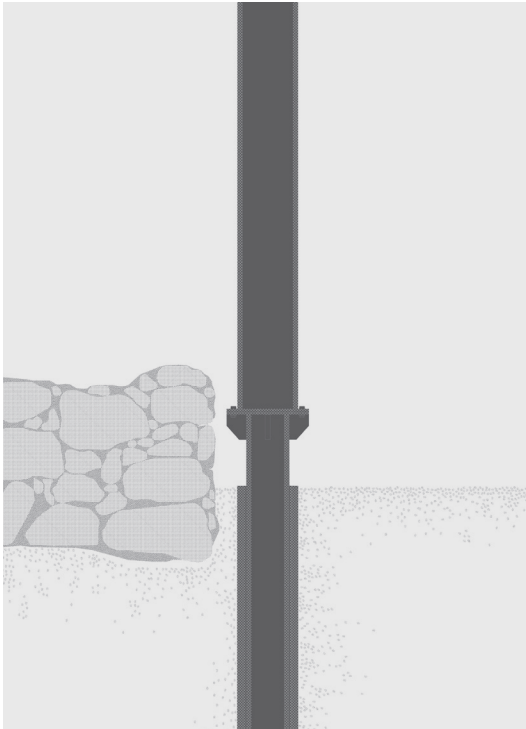
Archaeology sites aspire to be more than just a scattering of ruins. They want to be a city again, evoked through the coverings that introduce the third dimension and give volume to what are traces on the ground. Toni Gironès' intervention, however, wants the site to be perceived as what it is: a vast emptiness, the shadow of the nearby modern city. The elements introduced are minimal and highlight the absence of what once was, not the presence of what still is. Imperfect stakes mark the lost trace of a wall; metallic profiles outline a large cube that encapsulates a void and evokes the faded presence of a tower; and fabrics stretched over a metallic structure suggest a temporary camp.

Juan Pablo Rodríguez Frade:
Covering of ruins of the House of Hippolytus
(Acalá de Henares, Spain, 1999)

A covering is not only a functional volume. It can also act as a vehicle of time and as a creator or recreator of a lost world, only traces of which remain, facilitating the connection with current constructions. However, in this case the covering is designed to protect the ruins and shield visitors from the surrounding ugliness. Once they have crossed the threshold, they enter an orderly world. The cover forms a time capsule. Visitors walk above ruins on a walkway suspended from the ceiling. The ruins are not perceived as a jumble of stones; instead, vertical rods hang from the roof structure guiding and visually organising the site and allowing visitors to gauge its dimensions and make it their own.
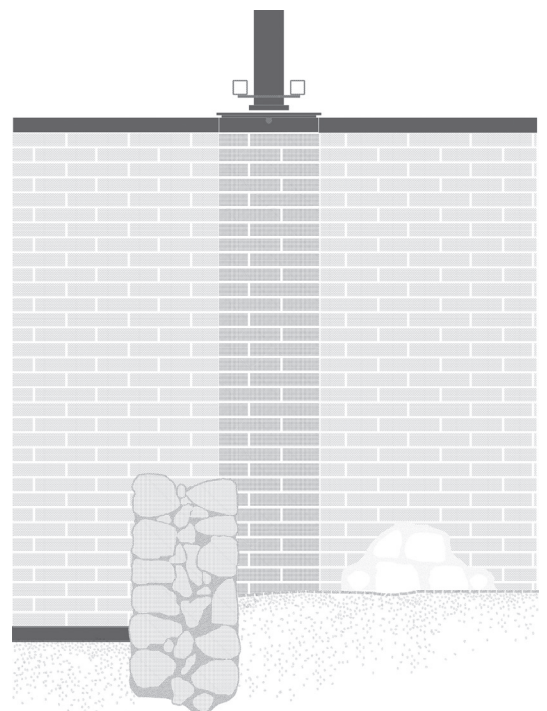
Franco Minissi:
## Covering of the Villa del Casale
(Piazza Armerina, Italy, 1960)
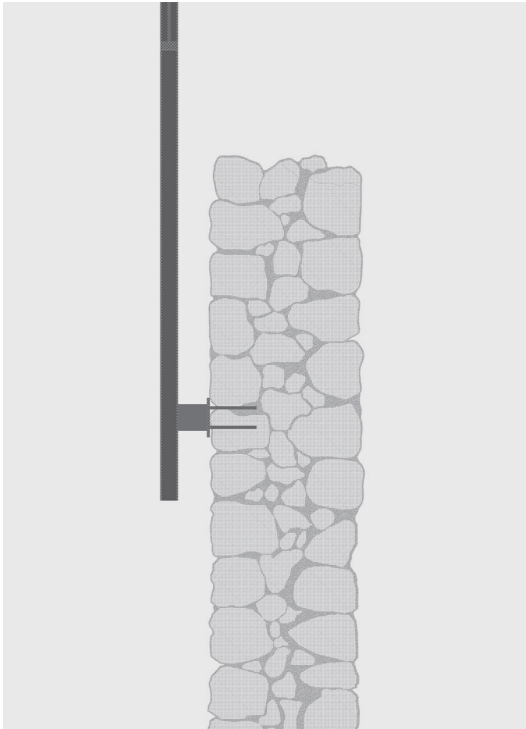
Restore or evoke the past: the Italian architect Franco Minissi (1919-1996) opted for evocation. Interventions in an archaeological site should elicit evocative images of the past and allow visitors to be aware of the passage of time. The mosaics in the imperial villa of Piazza Armerina (fourth century AD) in Sicily were protected by a transparent plastic covering supported by lightweight metallic structures which created a thin, almost evanescent envelope whose shapes evoke the solid forms of the original Roman villa and the loss of materiality. The mosaics were discovered from walkways, from which there was also a clear awareness of the surrounding landscape. Post-war materials and poor maintenance ruined the protection, which is greatly transformed today.

Pedrosa & Paredes:
Covering of the Roman Villa of la Olmeda
(Palencia, Spain, 2000-2009)

This site features some remarkably intact mosaics from a late imperial agricultural villa (fourth century AD) in good condition set amidst a landscape free of other constructions; mosaics devoid of the enclosure in which they were laid. Thanks to suspended wooden walkways and careful treatment of natural light filtered through a lattice enclosure with a variable pattern of openings, they can be viewed without damaging them, recreating an imperial villa. This is not only due to the solid exterior volume but also through the evocation of the complex spatial organisation of the villa. Suspended metallic mesh panels from the flat arches, supported by metallic pillars, structure the space and allow the mosaics in each room to be appreciated while understanding them as a whole.
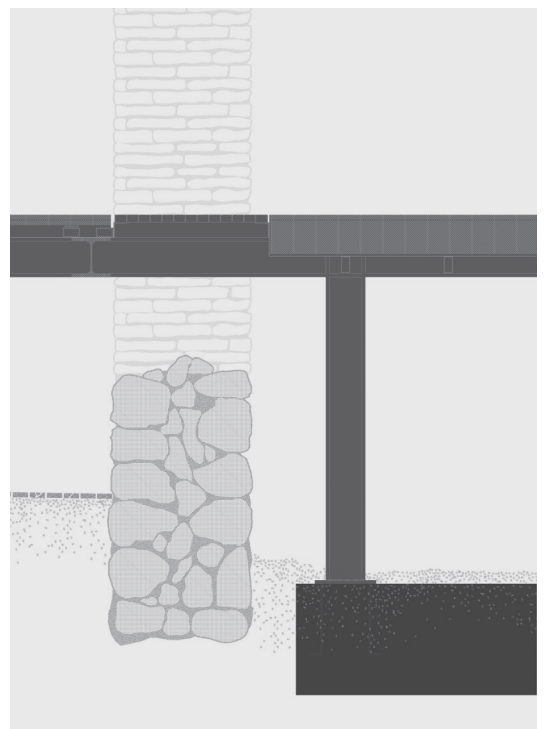
THAD (Tsinghua University Architectural Design and Research Institute): Protection of the Quianfoya cliff inscriptions (Guangyuan, China, 2014)
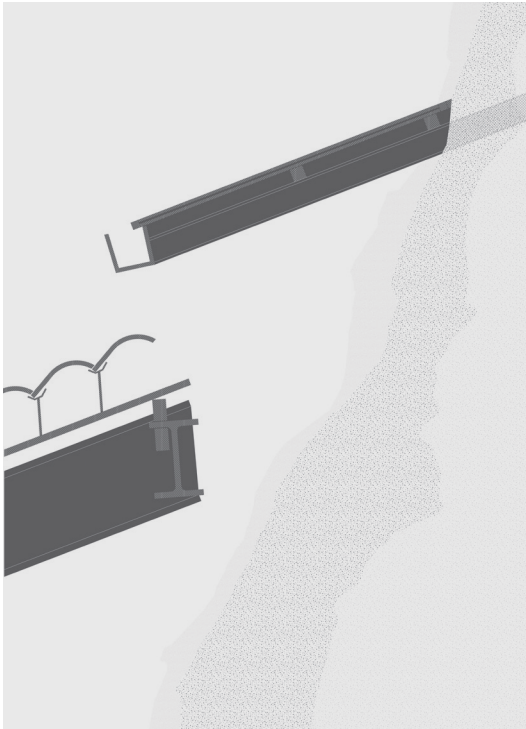

Archaeological sites tend to go deep into the earth. Sheer mountains also the conceal testimonies of the past, such as niches with sculptures and inscriptions from the Wei dynasty 1700 years ago (under whose rule northern China was unified and Buddhism was spread) (second to third centuries AD), on a rocky wall in central China. The deterioration of the carvings and inscriptions, caused by wind, humidity and sun exposure, necessitated their protection with a shell of black tiles —the colour of the rocks and shelters in the region, that time will cover with moss— blending in with the rocks stained by moisture. The covering, geometrically carved like the cliffs, creates a protected space with a walkway that facilitates contemplation.

José María Sánchez García: Refurbishment and protection of the Roman sanctuary of Diana (Mérida, Spain, 2011)

Protecting a site is not limited to preventing the ravages of time but also aims to restore its meaning to ensure that it does not become incomprehensible. Ruins no longer speak our language. They are so distant from us that their presence can cause disaffection. The protection of the sanctuary of the hunter goddess Diana (first century AD), who watched over the city of Emerita, addresses the disconnection between the ruins and the modern city. The intervention sheltering the ruins evokes the sanctuary and the forum where it was situated, and facilitates visits thanks to an elevated walkway and a continuous set of artificial stone facilities that incorporate local materials, which embrace the ruins and reintegrate them into the modern city.
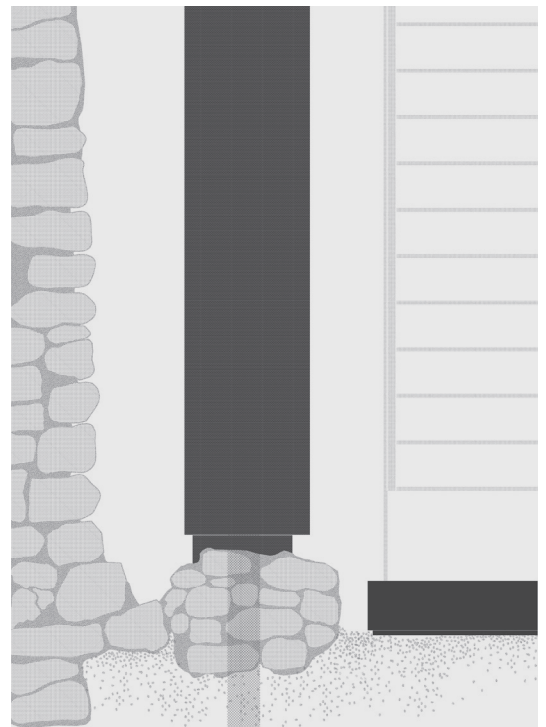
Malcotti & Roussey: Covering of the *Ecclesia*, Roman and mediaeval archeological site in Saint-Martin (Luxeuil-Les-Bains, France, 2020)
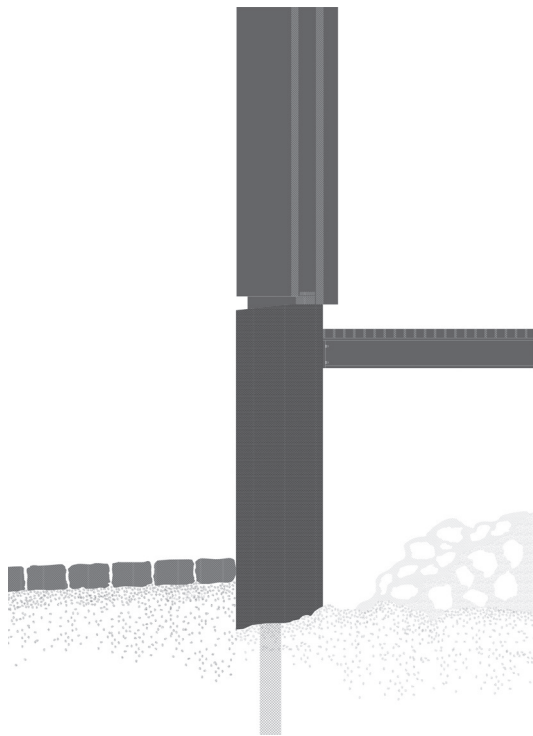
Luxeuil-les-Bains, today a small village in northeastern France, was the most important religious and cultural centre in Europe in the second half of the first millennium. The discovery of hundreds of well-preserved late ancient and early mediaeval stone sarcophagi (fourth to ninth centuries AD) in the village centre and traces of early Christian sanctuaries created an urban planning issue. The covering allows the ruins to be appreciated through walkways and overlooks, but most importantly, it prevents an open wound with no connection to the urban fabric. The enclosed box, a metal parallelepiped with a blind façade composed of wooden slats, allows for the organisation of public spaces —squares and boulevards— around it.

Enric Sòria & Rafael Cáceres: Museumisation of the archaeological site of el Born (Barcelona, Catalonia, Spain, 2014)

The past is a human invention, its most personal creation. Reality and fiction, imagination and observation, desire and repression, truth and lies are woven together to create a fable, simple or simplistic, accepted or imposed, which illuminates the present reality. The protection of archaeological sites stems from the human capacity for storytelling, giving us a more splendid past than the present tough conditions. The accidental discovery of part of the Ribera neighbourhood, bombarded in the early eighteenth century, under the ground of the old, abandoned Born Market —one of the earliest, most beautiful and complex iron structures from the nineteenth century by master builder Josep Fontseré, who also designed the nearby Ciutadella Park— led to the preservation of the ruins. The relationship between the covering and the ruins is inverse. First came the protective roof, which encourages us to reflect on our taste for the stories we tell of the past.
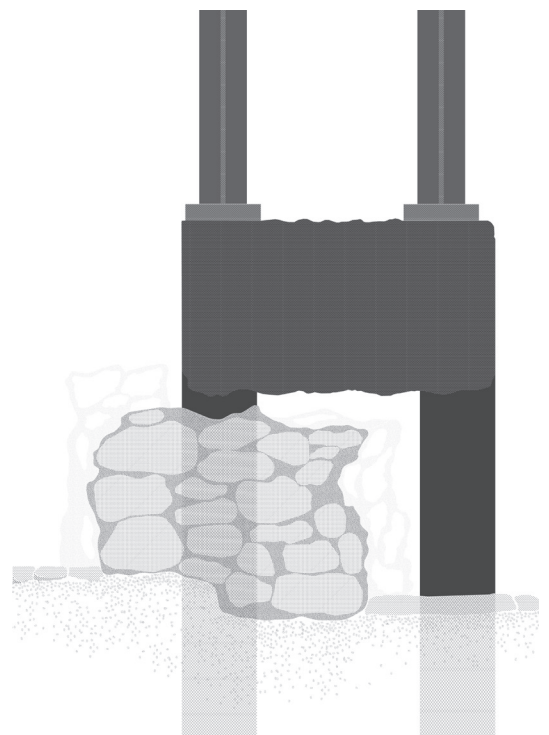
Amman, Cánovas & Maruri:
Covering of the Roman site in El Molinete (Cartagena, Spain, 2011)

El Molinete hill, in Cartagena, was where Syria, Carthage and Rome converged over time, leaving multiple strata which attest to the successive occupation levels. Until recently, the ruins were like a void in the city. The hill and the city, the ruins of the past and the homes of the present, the well-structured urban layout and lost planning from the past either clashed or were ignored. The covering of the site (third century BC) was designed as a tongue extending from the city to the more dispersed remains, endowing with a translucent form reminiscent of a complex topography like that of a hill. It connects past and present, nature and city, the living city and the silenced city, integrating the ruins into the city.
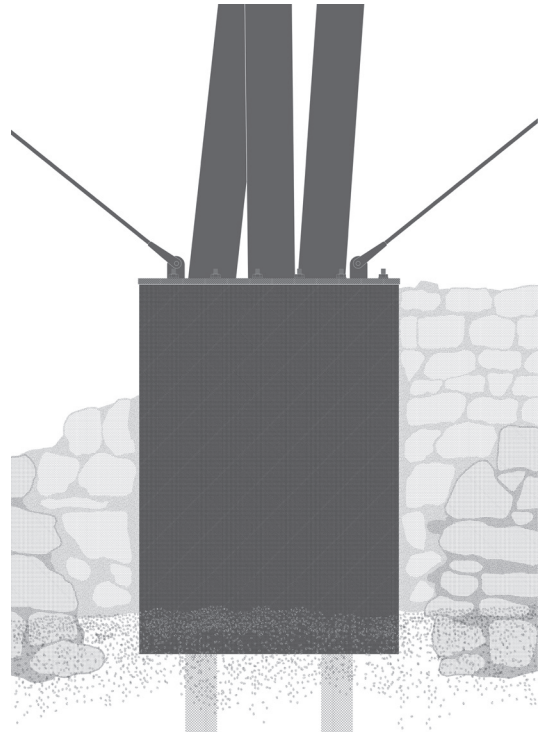
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