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Master of Science program in
Architecture for sustainable design

Master's thesis

Title:

Museum of Emotions

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Abstract:

This research investigates how architects can deepen their understanding of spatial perception and experiential spaces through the design of an “Emotion Museum” that engages all five human senses. Conducted within the framework of a competition that banned text, the project embraced phenomenology and drew inspiration from thinkers like Juhani Pallasmaa, emphasizing light and materiality in architecture as primary means of nonverbal communication. The design approach was deliberately conceptual and sensory, challenging the architect to convey meaning purely through form and space. Ultimately, this work underscores the importance of emotional design in museum design, cultivating the architect’s responsibility to shape spaces that consciously influence human emotions and perception.

Dedicated to that gentle soul who, in the roar of this horrible world, heard the sound of a falling leaf and reminded me of a feeling of home which I never had.

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1. Introduction:

The *Museum of Emotions* is an international architectural competition organized by Buildner, challenging designers to create a museum that evokes distinct emotions through spatial experience alone. In a unique “silent” format, participants must communicate their ideas visually without using any text. Competition emphasizes the emotional and psychological dimensions of architecture, encouraging designers to explore how space can shape human perception and feeling. Inspired by this concept, I decided to present my master’s thesis project within this competition to further explore the emotional power of architectural design. I participated in the Museum of Emotions Edition 6 in collaboration with **HAFEZKHAN MOHAMMADMEHDI**, and we engaged with this challenge by designing intertwined spaces.

What is The Museum of Emotions competition and what are its key features?

The Museum of Emotions is an annual international architecture competition that asks participants to design a museum capable of evoking specific emotions in visitors through architectural elements. In this competition, designers must create two separate exhibition halls: one to evoke positive emotions and the other to evoke negative emotions. An interesting aspect of the competition is its "silent" format, meaning all ideas and designs must be communicated solely through images, without any text, numbers, or written descriptions. Participants are only allowed to upload one A2-sized board that visually presents their design. The competition is hosted by the Buildner platform, and participants have the freedom to choose which emotions to evoke and the location of the museum. I participated in the Museum of Emotions Edition 6 along with one of my friends, and we tried to address this challenge by designing two designing intertwined spaces.

2. History and Context of the Museum of Emotions Competition

The Museum of Emotions competition was initiated by Buildner (formerly Bee Breeders), an organization known for running innovative international architecture competitions. The competition first launched in 2020.

The concept originated from the growing interest in how architecture affects human psychology and emotional experience. While architecture has traditionally focused on form, function, and aesthetics, this competition was designed to push boundaries by explicitly exploring how spaces can evoke distinct emotional states.

The idea was to create a platform where designers could experiment with architectural elements like scale, light, materiality, and spatial organization to evoke contrasting feelings such as joy, sadness, anxiety, or calmness. By requiring a museum design with two contrasting exhibition halls (positive vs. negative emotions), the competition invites architects to interpret and visualize emotion through spatial experience.

Who Conceptualized and Launched the Competition?

- The competition concept was developed internally by Buildner's team (Bee Breeders before rebranding), an organization dedicated to pushing architectural creativity through thematic and conceptual challenges.
- Buildner is known for framing architectural competitions that emphasize conceptual depth and innovation.
- The silent format where designs must be communicated solely by visuals—was conceived to challenge participants to rely on architectural expression without explanatory text, underlining the universality of spatial emotions beyond language.

3. What Were the Reasons Behind Starting the Competition?

- To explore and highlight the emotional dimension of architecture which is often overlooked in traditional design competitions.
- To foster new design thinking around how built environments influence mood and perception.
- To offer a global platform encouraging architects and students worldwide to engage with the psychological impacts of architecture.
- To create a visual dialogue among designers, jurors, and audiences about the power of architecture beyond function or aesthetics.

4. Timeline of the Previous Museum of Emotions Competitions:

- 1st Edition (2020): The competition was launched and held for the first time.
- 2nd Edition (2021): The second edition continued the concept with more global participation.
- 3rd Edition (2022): The competition grew in popularity and diversity of design approaches.
- 4th Edition (2023): Continued exploration of emotional spatial experiences.
- 5th Edition (2024): Further development of concepts and increasing recognition.
- 6th Edition (2025): The latest edition is scheduled for 2025.

Having previously participated in various architectural competitions in my country, these experiences gave me additional motivation and energy to present my master's thesis project in this international competition as well. Moreover, the limitations defined by the competition were both exciting and challenging for me, helping to further develop my skills.

5. Theoretical Foundations:

The theme of the competition, which emphasizes the importance of human perception and emotional response to space, in my opinion, is one of the fundamental and vital principles of architecture. Unfortunately, this aspect is often overlooked or only superficially addressed in many contemporary architectural projects.

In this case Jacques Bernoulli eloquently expressed the significance of architectural space:

You can turn off a radio you don't like, avoid watching a film you dislike, or stop listening to music that displeases you, but you cannot close your eyes to the buildings you see in the city.

(Source: Bernoulli, Jacques. *The Impact of Architecture on Human Perception*, 2014)

Bernoulli also highlights the crucial role architects play in shaping the thoughts and feelings of a city's inhabitants, how architects influence people's sense of belonging or even aversion toward their environment and the key role the buildings we design have in this process.

Similarly, Le Corbusier famously stated:

If you feel comfortable in your home, it was built by an engineer; but if you carry your soul with you when you leave, it was designed by an architect.

(Source: Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, 1923)

This quote beautifully illustrates that the role of the architect goes beyond mere aesthetic design or engineering requirements this distinction is what separates an architect from an engineer.

I have always held two statements close to my heart: the widely accepted principle that **Architecture is the art of creating space**, and the famous quote by German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche:

Art may not fill your stomach, but it fills your soul.

(Source: Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Human, All Too Human*, 1878)

These statements serve as guidance for all architects and architecture students regarding their role and responsibility in life.

We, as students of architecture or architects, should not only build shelters that withstand earthquakes or fires, but what truly makes a space enduring is the life and spirit that the architect breathes into it. Just as we can still feel the power in the ancient palaces of Rome and Greece, or the belief in the afterlife in the monumental temples, pyramids, and tombs of ancient Egypt, this enduring sense is a legacy an architect can create one that does not fade with time. This is the most sustainable architecture of all.

Peter Zumthor also expresses this idea succinctly:

Atmospheres are the reality that architecture must create

(Source: Zumthor, Peter. *Atmospheres: Architectural Environments – Surrounding Objects.*, 2006)

This means architecture must craft a specific mood or feeling beyond the building's physical form, offering a unique sensory and emotional experience to visitors. For me, this underscores the importance of designing spaces that evoke distinct emotions—exactly what the Museum of Emotions competition seeks: to design spaces that engage visitors in diverse emotional experiences and invite them into a deep, multi-dimensional interaction with space.

These perspectives from renowned architects emphasize the importance of focusing on human experience and creating emotionally charged spaces—core themes of the Museum of Emotions competition. Participating in this competition offers me the opportunity to go beyond mere design and delve deeper into concepts such as sensory perception, the atmosphere of space, and its impact on the user, thus gaining a better understanding of the relationship between humans and the built environment.

One of the key reasons I was motivated to participate in this competition is its focus on architectural expression through visual means and prohibition of using text. This limitation encourages a deeper engagement with the space and design, pushing us to communicate ideas through drawing and creativity.

Architecture always begins with lines and imagination. Using text can sometimes limit our ability to fully express architectural concepts, especially since these ideas ultimately need to be transformed into physical forms within the city. By repeatedly sketching and exploring the design from different viewpoints, we build a stronger connection with the project and gain a better understanding of its essence.

This emphasis on pure architectural expression and visual storytelling was a major inspiration for me to enter the Museum of Emotions competition.

6. Paper Architecture: Visions Beyond Construction

Throughout history, paper architecture has emerged in times of cultural or technological crisis as a way for architects to **imagine, critique, and provoke**. These unbuilt projects are more than formal studies: they explore architectural theory, atmosphere, and the emotional experience of space, freed from the limits of construction and site.

In the competition we are entering, titled *Museum of Emotions*, this same approach is evident. The jury clearly values *architectural thinking* and *creative problem-solving* over purely technical solutions. Looking at previous winners, it is clear that the competition prioritizes strong ideas and conceptual clarity even if the proposal is not fully buildable or lacks detailed construction drawings. By examining these **visionary works**, we gain insight into architecture as a conceptual and cultural practice one that shapes how we think about **space, society, and the role of the architect**.

7. Precedents and Analytical Case Studies

This section offers a curated collection of such projects a series of “postcards” that reveal how unbuilt architecture expands our understanding of design, theory, and the *feeling* of space.

7-1. Filarete – Ideal Buildings (Sforzinda)

Within his *Trattato di Architettura* (c. 1460), Filarete proposes Sforzinda a perfectly symmetrical, star-shaped ideal city. Grounded in Renaissance humanism, this design unites geometry, symbolism, and urban harmony. As historian Francesco Caglioti notes, “the form becomes a manifesto of rational control over nature” (Caglioti, 2005).

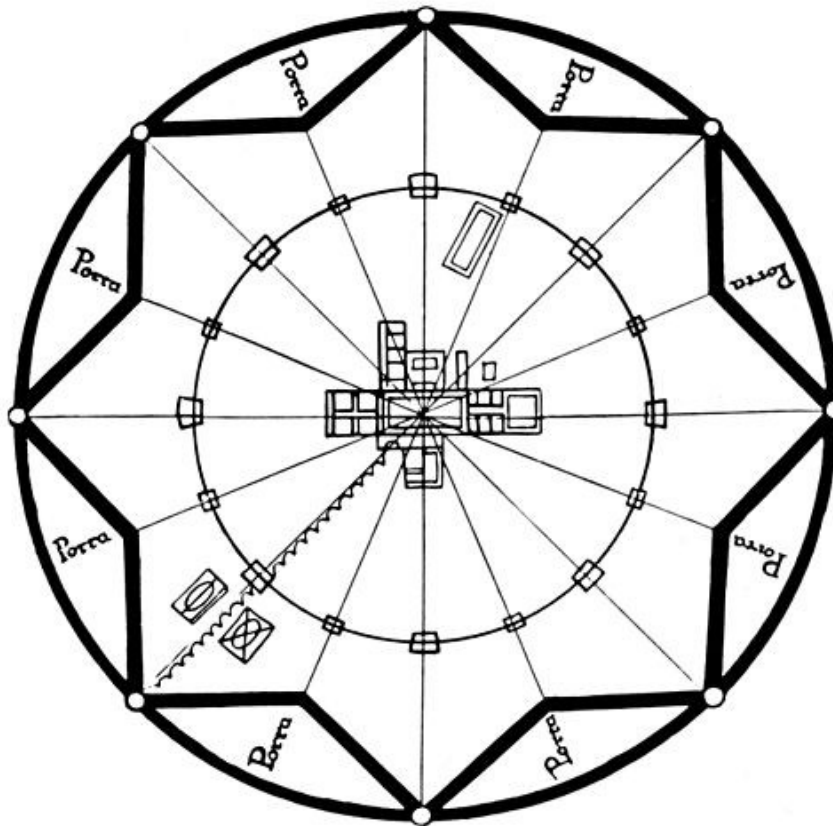


Figure4. Filarete. *Plan of Sforzinda*. Image from Wikimedia Commons. Public domain.
Available at: [<https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Idealstadt.jpg>].

Connection to our Project:

Our triangular concrete form draws on this symbolic geometry to shape the visitor's sensory journey. Like Filarete's ideal plan, our design uses form as a language to evoke emotion—inviting curiosity and guiding structured exploration, rather than serving purely functional needs.



Figure 5. 3D render of the Sensory Rift project, competition for the Museum of Emotions (2025, by the author)

7-2. Francesco di Giorgio Martini – Ideal City

The late-15th-century (1480–1490) treatises of Francesco di Giorgio Martini conceive fortified ideal cities grounded in symmetry, military logic, and civic pride. His analysis of spatial perception of how people feel within walls or open piazzas foreshadows later phenomenological thinking (Sauer, 2002).

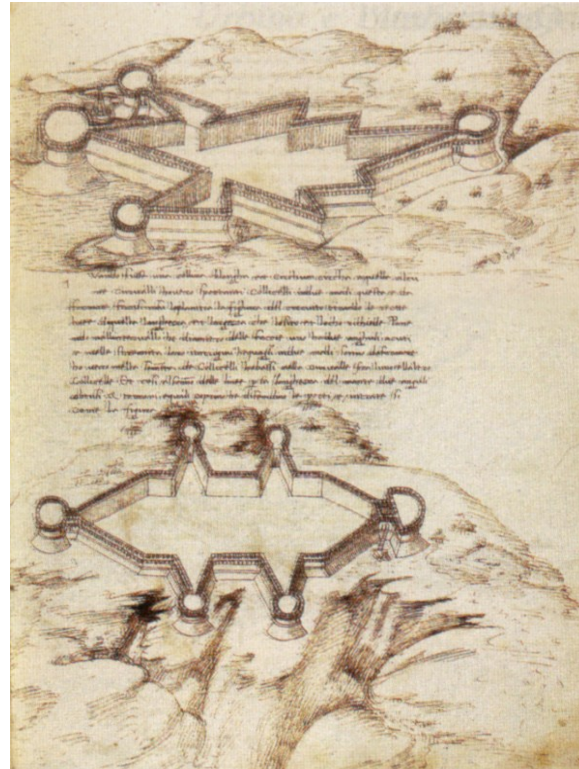


Figure 6. Francesco di Giorgio Martini. *Disegno di fortezza*, from *Trattato di Architettura*, seconda metà del XV secolo, Codice Magliabechiano II, Firenze BNCF. Image from Wikimedia Commons. Public domain. Available at: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/a5/Francesco_di_giorgio_martini%2C_trattato_di_architettura%2C_disegno_di_fortezza%2C_seconda_met%C3%A0_XV_sec.%2C_cod_magliabechiano_II%2C_l_141%2C_f.58_r%2C_Firenze_BNCF.jpg

Connection to our Project:

Our project's strategic use of primal human instincts fear of darkness, attraction to water, the tactile pleasure of coolness underfoot reflects di Giorgio's conviction that spatial organization is a tool for shaping human experience and emotion. By juxtaposing a stark, imposing exterior with carefully crafted, intimate underground chambers suffused with filtered light and sensory contrasts, our museum becomes a psychological landscape. Like di Giorgio's ideal cities, it is designed not merely for circulation or defense but for emotional choreography: guiding visitors through thresholds of tension and release, danger and refuge, and cultivating an embodied, multisensory awareness of space as a medium of meaning.

7-3. Etienne Louis Boullée's Cenotaph for Newton

Etienne-Louis Boullée's Cenotaph for Newton (1784) is an unbuilt visionary monument designed to honor Isaac Newton, whose scientific discoveries Boullée deeply admired. Boullée saw Newton as the embodiment of reason and the Enlightenment spirit, deserving of a structure that would inspire awe equal to his intellectual legacy. The design is a colossal sphere, 150 meters in diameter, resting on a cylindrical base a pure geometric form chosen to symbolize cosmic perfection and universal order. Inside, Boullée used dramatic contrasts of light and darkness to create an immersive, emotional experience: by day, tiny perforations in the sphere's surface mimic a star-filled night sky; by night, a massive central lamp simulates the sun. The cenotaph was not meant to be built, but to provoke contemplation about scale, infinity, and humanity's place in the universe through the abstract power of form and light.

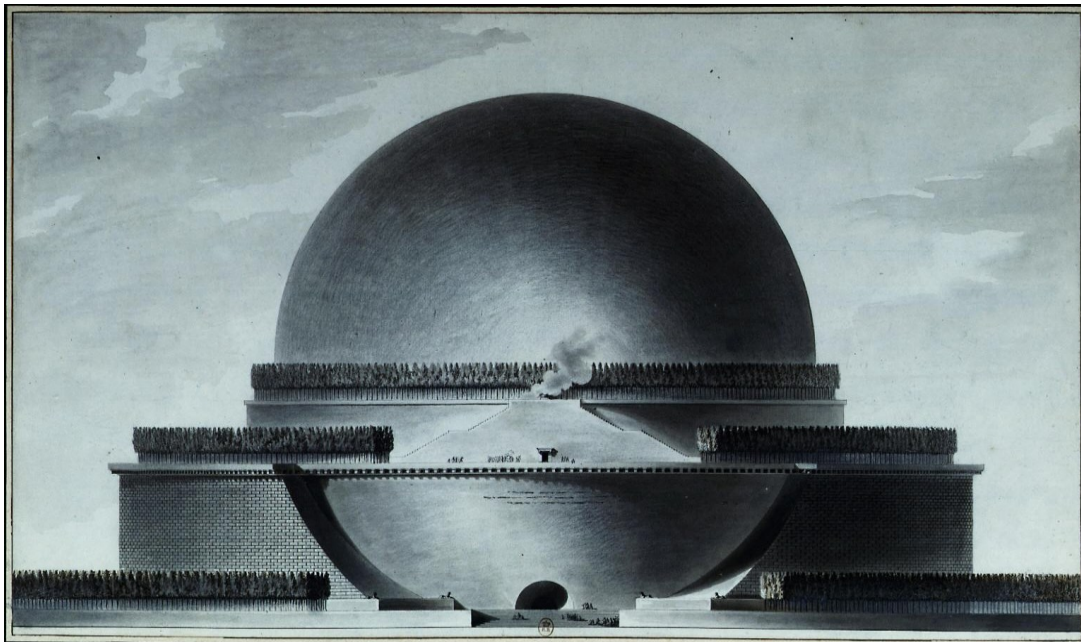


Figure 1. ArchDaily (n.d.). *Cenotaph for Newton / Etienne-Louis Boullée – Exterior View*. Retrieved July 8, 2025, from <https://www.archdaily.com/544946>

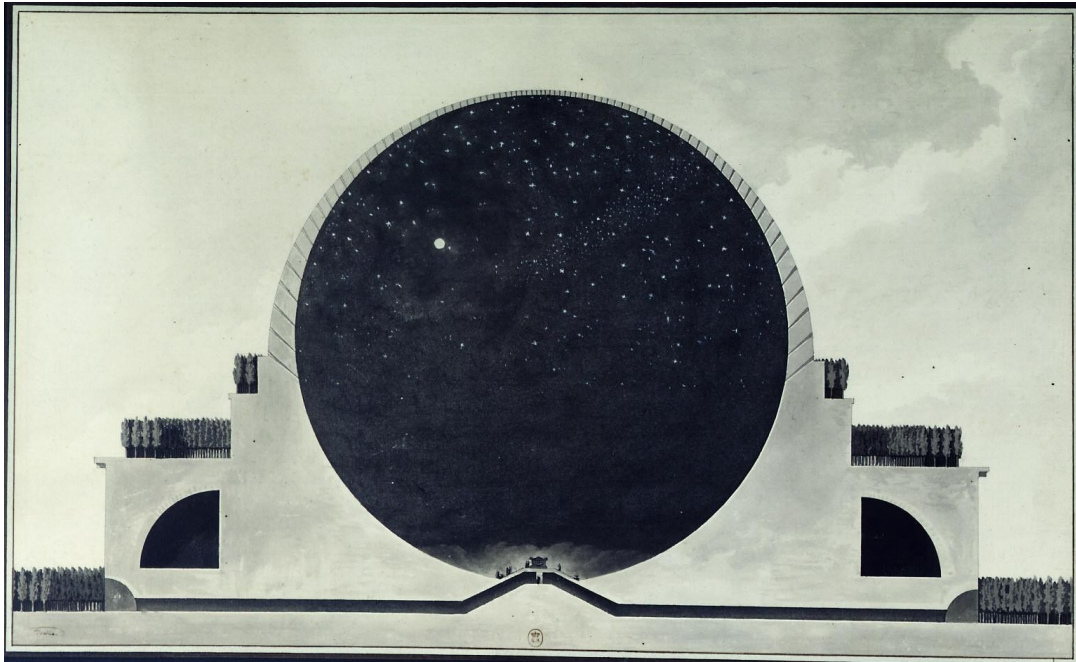


Figure 2. ArchDaily (n.d.). *Cenotaph for Newton / Etienne-Louis Boullée*. Retrieved July 8, 2025, from <https://www.archdaily.com/544946>

Connection to Our Project:

Boullée's Cenotaph for Newton and our project both use elemental geometry and controlled light to create powerful, emotional experiences beyond function. The Cenotaph's vast spherical form stands as an abstract, timeless monument in the landscape, much like our monolithic triangular concrete structure in the desert asserts a stark human order against natural chaos.

Both designs rely on dramatic contrasts between exterior and interior. Boullée's austere, monumental exterior conceals an immersive interior that transforms darkness into a star-filled cosmos, inviting awe and contemplation. Similarly, our project guides visitors from the harsh, blinding desert into cool, dim underground spaces where light enters through narrow openings, creating mystery and encouraging exploration.

Light in both projects is an intentional design tool to shape perception and atmosphere. Boullée uses it to evoke the infinite, while our design crafts sensory richness through reflected light on water, shifting shadows, and tactile materials like sand and concrete.

Both approaches aim to heighten awareness of human scale, vulnerability, and emotion, transforming architecture into a medium for introspection and universal sensory experience.



Figure3. 3D render of the Sensory Rift project, competition for the Museum of Emotions (2025, by the author)

7-4. Alexander Brodsky - Paper Architecture

In the 1980s Soviet Union Many young, creative designers escaped the stifling constraints of official practice by turning to paper architecture. Figures like Alexander Brodsky and Ilya Utkin used international competitions to showcase their visionary work. Over time, these unbuilt, often radical projects earned them and their circle of friends the label “paper architects,” originally meant as an insult for avant-garde designers who kept pushing boundaries even after Socialist Realism had crushed architectural experimentation in the 1930s.

Brodsky, Utkin, and their peers responded to a bleak professional environment where only uninspired, bureaucratically approved buildings, poorly designed, badly built with cheap materials by unskilled labor could be realized. Their drawings became a form of graphic critique, an escape from imagination that confronted the sicknesses of physical and social reality and suggested alternative ways they might be healed.

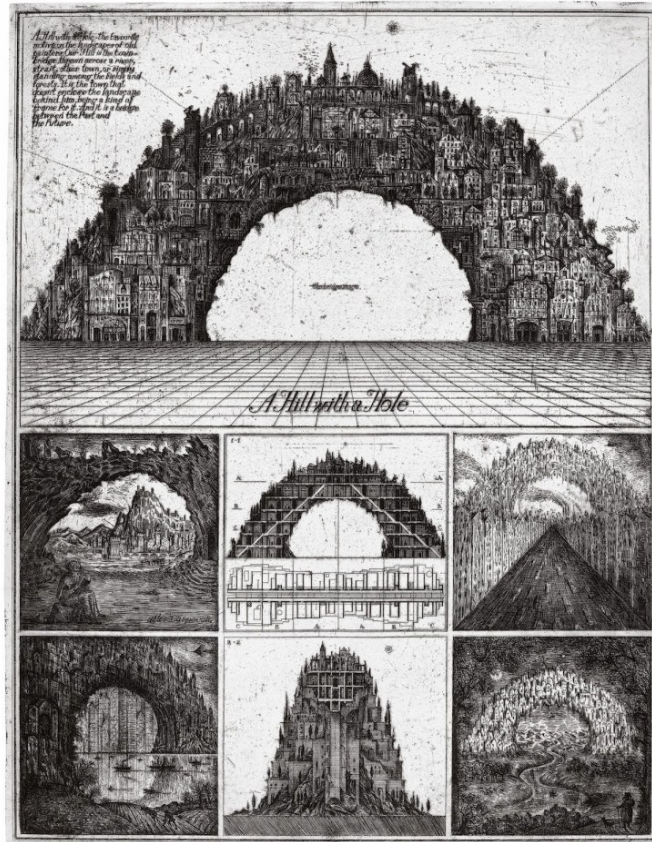


Figure7. Alexander Brodsky and Ilya Utkin, "Hill with a Hole" (1919) (courtesy of Ronald Feldman Fine Arts Inc)

Connection to our project:

Like Brodsky and Utkin, our project uses design as critique and imagination, creating an architectural narrative that engages human perception and emotion beyond pure function. While they used fantastical, layered drawings to expose the failures of Soviet construction, we explore contrasts of light, material, and sensory experience to question the desert's harshness and conventional ideas of space. This approach aligns with the competition's goal and jury expectations: to move beyond technical constraints and create spaces that truly engage the senses, provoke curiosity, and invite critical reflection. Both our work and theirs treat architecture as storytelling, critique, and the creation of rich, layered atmospheres.

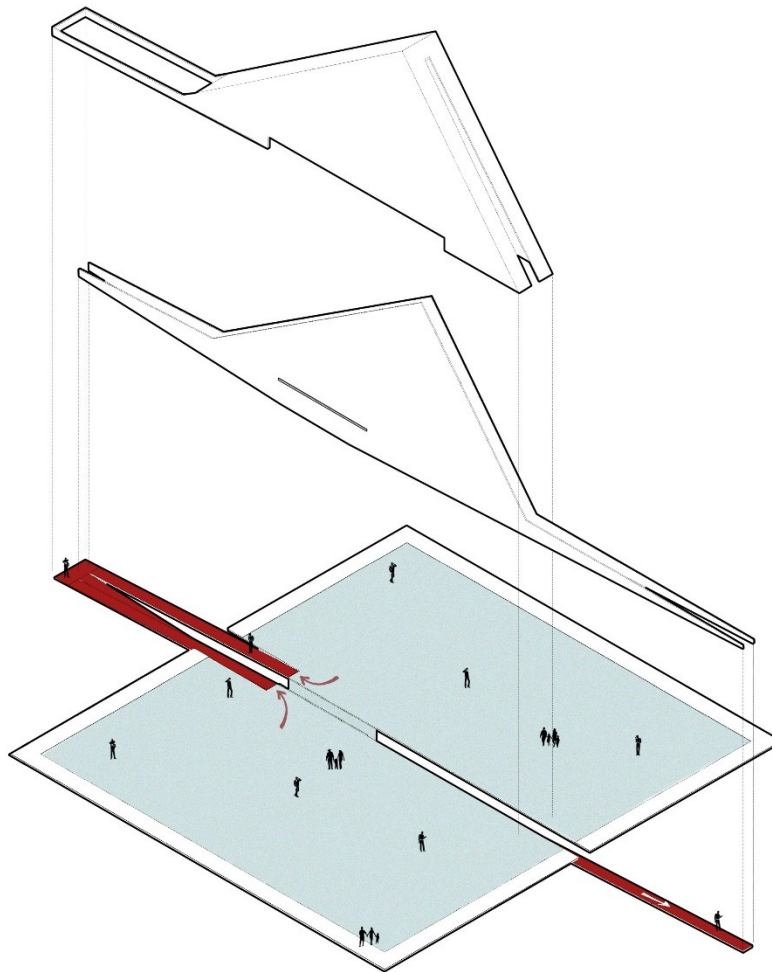


Figure 8. Layers and formation of the Sensory Rift project, competition for the Museum of Emotions (2025, by the author)

8. Design process:

8-1. Analysis of the Competition Brief and Initial Design Process

We began our design journey with a comprehensive and critical analysis of the competition brief and its specific requirements. Our goal was to thoroughly understand the objectives set by the organizers, the spatial program, and the underlying conceptual expectations. We systematically broke down the brief to identify not only the functional demands but also the thematic intentions behind the competition — particularly the idea of designing a “Museum of Emotions” that meaningfully engages visitors at both experiential and intellectual levels.

This initial phase was essential in defining the boundaries and opportunities of our design problem. It allowed us to frame our approach within the competition’s explicit goals while also leaving room for creative interpretation and innovation. We investigated the language of the brief, its programmatic divisions, the user experience it envisaged, and the evaluative criteria suggested by the jury.

8-2. Key Conceptual Challenge in Our Design Process:

- **What spatial and architectural elements can generate negative emotions in users, and which can evoke positive emotions?**
- **How can these elements be both conceptually meaningful and broadly understandable by the general public?**
- **Finally, which emotions and elements should define the layered spatial experience of our museum and lead us toward our design goals?**

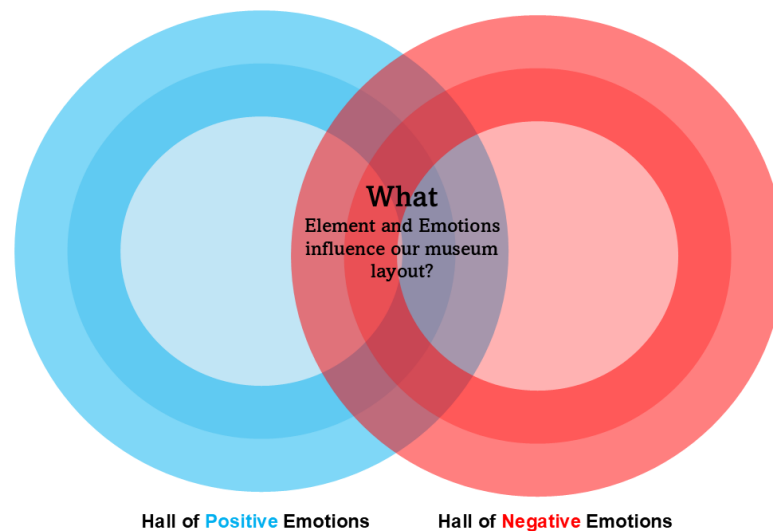


Figure 9. Layers and formation of the Sensory Rift project, competition for the Museum of Emotions (2025, by the author)

This central question emerged as the core design problem we sought to address. Since the competition specifically required our museum to include *two distinct yet interconnected halls* one evoking negative emotions and the other positive emotions we needed to devise a clear strategy for articulating these emotional polarities architecturally. The challenge lay in ensuring that the two halls would remain recognizably separate in atmosphere while maintaining a conceptual and physical connection that reflects the complexity of human emotional experience.

To answer this question, we sought to identify architectural elements and spatial strategies capable of evoking these emotions. We asked ourselves how light, materiality, scale, proportion, circulation, sound, and sensory cues might be deployed to communicate emotional content in a way that is both accessible to visitors and conceptually robust.

9. Learning from Precedents and Past Competition Winners

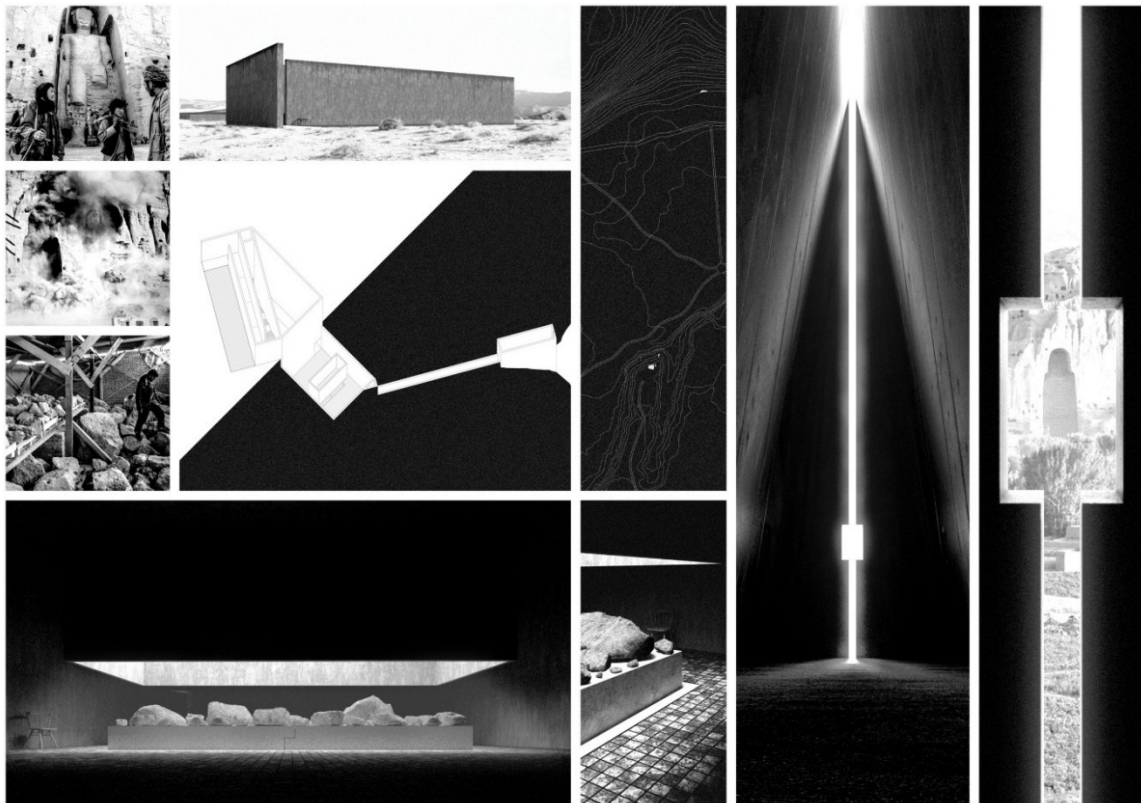
Before developing our own design solutions, we decided to study in depth the winning entries from previous years of the same competition. Our intention was not to imitate these projects but to critically analyze their strengths, conceptual clarity, and the qualities that led the jury to select them over other submissions.

By examining these precedents, we aimed to:

- Discover how past winners successfully translated competition themes into spatial experiences.
- Identify recurring design strategies that resonated with jurors.
- Understand the jury's evaluative criteria and how they prioritized originality, clarity of concept, user experience, and architectural quality.
- Learn from both the strengths and limitations of previous approaches.

In the following section, we will present and discuss some of the most important insights gained from this precedent analysis.

Project name: The Buddhas of Bamiyan



- ✓ Based on Story
- ✓ Contrast of Darkness and Light
- ✓ Space as a Cave
- ✓ Having a Concern
- ✓ Paying attention to Views
- ✓ Movement hierarchy in space

10-2. Museum of Emotions #3 ,

1st Prize Winner

Architects: Jiaxun Song, Xinyue Dong, Zehong Zhang

Project name: The Memorial of the Tree



Key Points:

- ✓ Based on Story
- ✓ Contrast of Darkness and Light
- ✓ Natural elements
- ✓ Space as a Cave
- ✓ Having a Concern
- ✓ Interaction defines the project
- ✓ Being Timeless

10-3. Museum of Emotions #4,

1st Prize Winner

Architects: Deimjanas Gološčiapovas, Rimgaudas Prašmutas

Project name: Open Secret



Key Points:

- ✓ Contrast of Darkness and Light
- ✓ Contrast of Unlimited and Limited Perspective
- ✓ Space as a Cave
- ✓ Having a Concern (Global)
- ✓ Interaction defines the project
- ✓ Being Timeless

10-4. Museum of Emotions #5,

3rd Prize Winner

Architects: Thomas Tovar, Samantha Rodriguez

Project name: WITH (IN)



Key Points:

- ✓ Contrast of Darkness and Light
- ✓ Contrast of Unlimited and Limited Perspective
- ✓ Space as a Cave
- ✓ Water and Trees
- ✓ Natural Elements

10-5. Museum of Emotions #5,

1st Prize Winner

Architects: Minseok Choi, Jang Doyeong

Project name: Beautifully Cruel



Key Points:

- ✓ Contrast of Darkness and Light
- ✓ Contrast of Unlimited and Limited Perspective
- ✓ Space as a Cave
- ✓ Being Timeless
- ✓ Natural Elements

11. Water as a Main Element

11-1. Natural Element: Innate Bond with Humanity

Our analysis led us to recognize the power of *natural elements* in shaping emotional experiences that are both immediate and universally resonant. Among these, water emerged as a particularly compelling medium. It is not merely a material or environmental feature; it represents a fundamental, innate bond between humanity and the natural world. From the earliest stages of evolution, all living organisms — and by extension, humans — have depended on water for survival. This primal relationship has become deeply encoded in our collective memory and cultural consciousness, making water a uniquely effective tool for evoking shared emotional responses.



Figure 10. Pinterest. Image. Available at: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/412290540876665303/>

11-2. Evoking Life and Survival

What makes water extraordinary as a design element is its universal familiarity, yet cultural and climatic specificity. Every human being, regardless of geographic location, has some personal or cultural narrative about water. This recognition was pivotal in our design process: we were searching for an element capable of eliciting emotions that visitors from diverse backgrounds could understand and connect with on a visceral level.

For example, someone from Scandinavia or northern Europe might associate direct contact with water with coldness, discomfort, or even pain evoking emotions of unease or aversion. In stark contrast, for those from arid, desert regions, water is life-giving, restorative, and deeply cherished, symbolizing survival, relief, and hope.

Even in temperate or ideal climates, water's perception can vary dramatically depending on cultural context and personal experience. For example, water at 24°C might feel warm to someone from northern latitudes, while being perceived as cool or refreshing to those accustomed to hot, tropical environments. This subtle variability allows water to function as a nuanced medium capable of carrying a wide emotional spectrum.

11-3. Expressing Dual Emotions Through Environmental Contrast

Water also offers remarkable flexibility for expressing emotional duality through environmental contrast — a requirement explicitly central to our design brief. We needed to design two distinct but connected halls: one evoking negative emotions and one positive emotions, while maintaining an overall conceptual unity.

Water can achieve this duality seamlessly:

- **Still water** can evoke feelings of silence, calm, introspection, even melancholy.
- **Flowing water** may suggest joy, liveliness, or gentle movement.
- **Flooding or turbulent water** can introduce fear, anxiety, and a sense of threat.
- **Scarcity of water** may signify desolation, fragility, and longing.
- **Abundant water** can represent generosity, life, and celebration.

This extraordinary expressive range makes water not only an aesthetic element but a powerful experiential and narrative device in architectural design.

11-4. Water as a Common Language

Ultimately, our research into past competition winners showed us the value of grounding conceptual design in elements that are both meaningful and universally legible. Water, with its deep evolutionary roots, cultural significance, and sensory richness, provides precisely the **Common Language** we were seeking. It allows us to craft spaces that can speak to visitors from vastly different backgrounds while remaining architecturally coherent and thematically unified. This discovery became the foundation for developing the layered, emotion-driven experience at the core of our museum proposal.



Figure 11. Acutrans. Top 10 Most Commonly Spoken Languages in the World. Available at: <https://acutrans.com/top-10-most-commonly-spoken-languages-in-the-world/>

12. How is it experienced?

Perception of touch..... Sensing through the soles, face, and hands.

Perception of hearing..... Profound silence against the roar of the waterfall.

Perception of sight..... Restricted view vs. a perspective limited by walls.

Environmental perception..... Restricted view vs. a perspective limited by walls.

Perception of smell..... Awakening the sense of smell through the interaction of water and soil, and the symbolic essence of rain's scent.



Figure 12. PNGTree. Kids Swimming and Playing in Waterpool [Image].
Available at: https://pngtree.com/freepng/kids-swimming-and-playing-in-waterpool_16009058.html

12-1. Perception of touch

Sensing water through the face and hands can evoke positive feelings of refreshment, calm, and playful delight. But it can also bring negative emotions like discomfort, coldness, or vulnerability, depending on the intensity and context of the experience.



Figure 13. Instagram. Aqualily Padau. Available at:
<https://www.instagram.com/aqualilypadau/p/B7XnmM-g14w/>

Sensing through the soles activates the highly sensitive nerves of the feet, making even subtle changes in temperature, texture, and movement vividly perceptible.

This experience can feel essential and grounding, heightening awareness of balance and connection to the environment while evoking emotions that range from soothing relaxation to sudden alertness or discomfort.



Figure 14. RFA Institute. *Drop foot Frederick*.
Available at: <https://rfainstitute.com/tag/drop-foot-frederick/page/3/>

Figure 15. Shutterstock, no date. *Foot nerves – Stock photo search page*.
Available at: <https://www.shutterstock.com/search/foot-nerves> (Accessed: 11 July 2025).

12-2. Perception of hearing

Perception of hearing profound silence against the roar of the waterfall shapes how people experience architectural space, defining zones of calm or intensity. This awareness is vital, as controlling sound can soothe, focus, or energize occupants, deeply affecting mood and well-being.

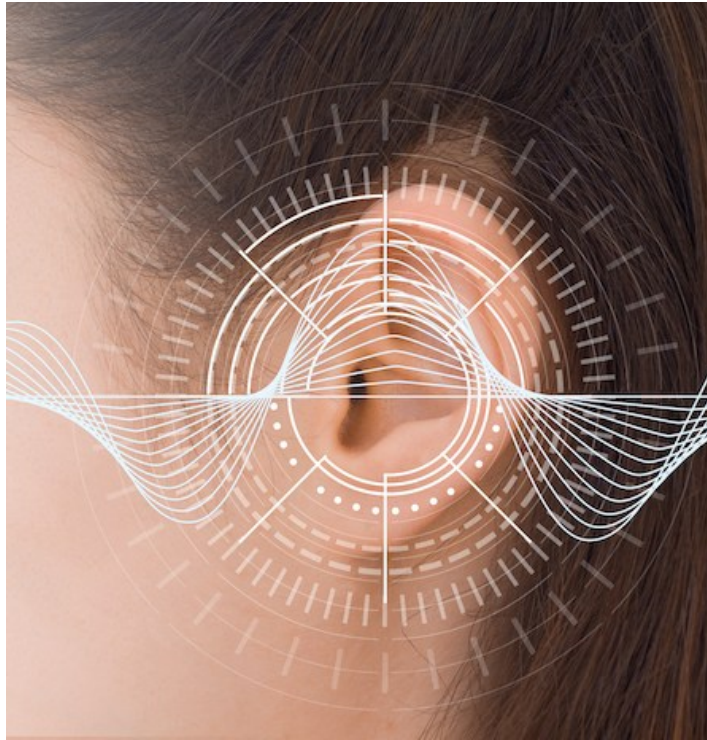


Figure 16. Audiology Associates, no date. *Is tinnitus a sign of hearing loss or a different condition?*
Available at: <https://www.audiologyassociates-sr.com/tinnitus/is-tinnitus-a-sign-of-hearing-loss-or-a-different-condition/>

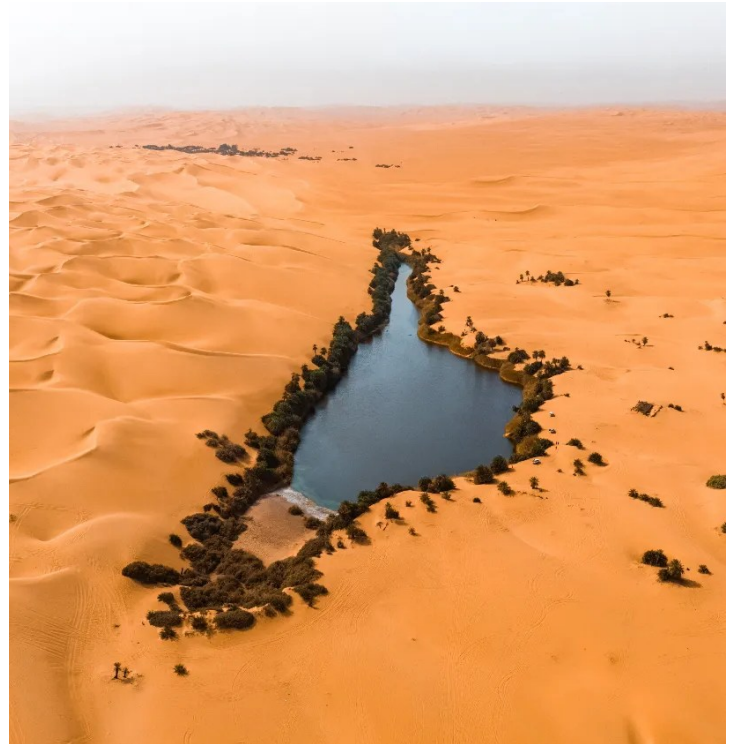


Figure 17. Wild Man Life. Ubari Lakes, Libya's fascinating Desert Oases in the Sahar

Available at: <https://wildmanlife.com/the-ubari-lakes-libya-desert-oases/>

Figure 18. Pexels, 2025. Mare della Groenlandia [online]. Available at:

<https://www.pexels.com/it-it/cerca/mare%20della%20groenlandia/>

12-3. Perception of sight

Perception of sight restricted view vs. a perspective limited by walls shapes how space feels open or confined. This contrast is crucial in design, as controlling sightlines can create intimacy, direct focus, or evoke freedom, deeply influencing emotional response and spatial experience.



Figure 19. 43 Blue Doors, 2023. Sahara Desert [online]. Available at: <https://43bluedoors.com/2023/04/20/sahara-desert/>



Figure 20. Petzl, 2018. Explore the World's Largest Cave [online]. Available at: <https://www.petzl.com/US/en/Sport/News/2018-11-12/Explore-The-World-s-Largest-Cave>

12-4. Environmental perception

It can evoke feelings of security and intimacy when views are limited yet may also cause a sense of confinement or isolation if overused. Thoughtful modulation of these boundaries allows architects to guide emotional responses, fostering either focused calm or expansive openness within a space. This balance is essential in architectural design to shape emotional responses and spa comfort.



Figure 21. GamesDB LaunchBox, no date. Colossal Cave [online]. Available at: <https://gamesdb.launchbox-app.com/games/details/389144-colossal-cave>



Figure 22. Adobe Stock, no date. Underground Cavern [online]. Available at: <https://stock.adobe.com/search?k=underground+cavern>

12-5. Perception of Smell

The sense of smell plays a subtle but vital role in architecture, as scents like rain and wet earth can trigger strong emotional and psychological responses. Incorporating natural aromas enhances the immersive quality of space, promoting comfort, memory recall, and a deeper connection between people and their environment.

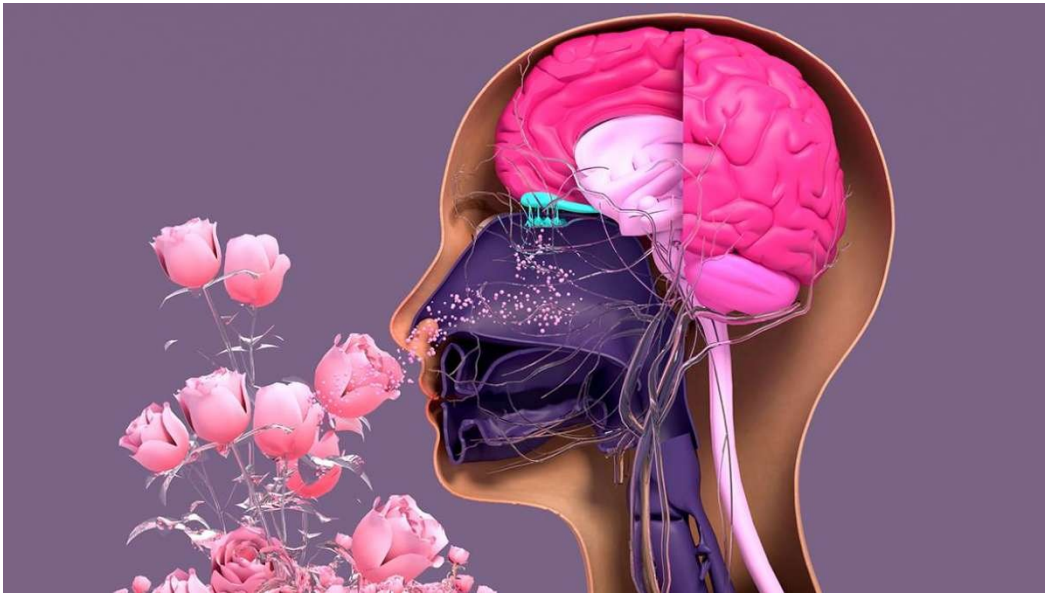


Figure 23. UCLA Health, no date. Why your sense of smell is important to your health [online]. Available at: <https://www.uclahealth.org/news/article/why-your-sense-of-smell-is-important-to-your-health>



Figure 24. Thairath, no date. ภัยแล้งแสนสาหัส [online]. Available at: <https://www.thairath.co.th/tags/ภัยแล้งแสนสาหัส>

13. Conceptual and Contextual Site Selection for a Global Concern

In designing this museum, since the competition allowed participants to choose their own site, for us the choice was never just a geographic or climatic decision. Instead, it was an **opportunity to connect our concept to a meaningful context**. Rather than selecting a random site or focusing only on weather conditions, we decided to link the site choice to a **Global Issue**. Today, many environmental challenges are no longer limited by national borders they are shared, **Global Concerns**. That is why we aimed to choose a problem that all people can relate to emotionally. Creating this emotional connection was one of our core goals from the earliest stages of our design analysis.

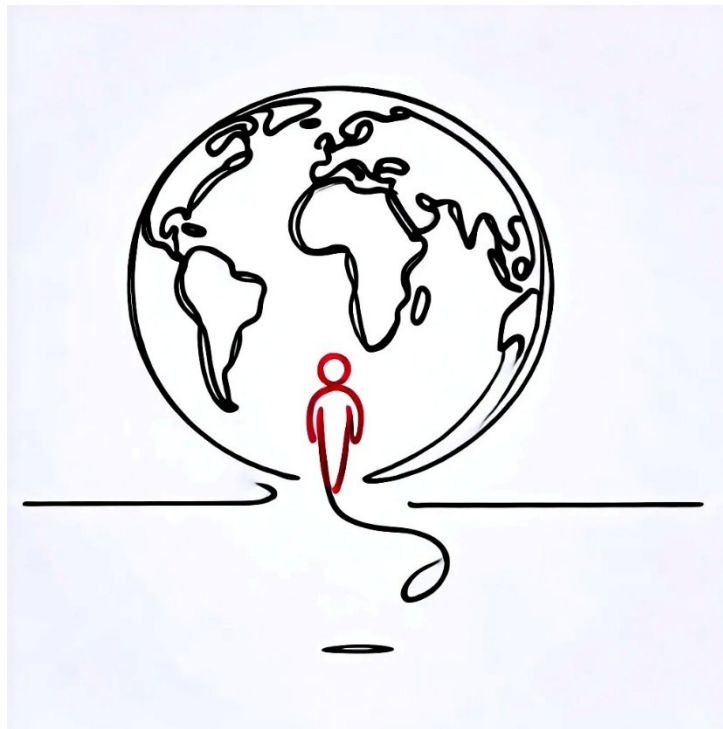


Figure 25. Krantz, S. (2024) Illustration from "Individualising World Order". [Image] Website, no date. Available at: <https://www.sophiekrantz.com/p/individualising-world-order>

A museum is not only a place for storing objects; it is also a medium for dialogue, raising awareness, and shifting perspectives. By choosing a site shaped around a global concern, we enable a stronger narrative and more lasting impact on visitors. For this reason, we focused on the overuse of groundwater that, in many parts of the world, has led to severe land cracks and deep faults. This became the **conceptual and physical foundation** of our project.

14. The Concept of Water and Desert Contrast

Water has always **symbolized life, hope, and renewal** in human culture, while the desert **evokes dryness, scarcity, and sometimes despair**. This **fundamental contrast** between water and desert offered us a powerful conceptual basis that also matched the competition's requirements for spaces with both positive and negative emotional qualities. Placing water in the heart of the desert creates not only a striking visual and conceptual contrast but also offers layers of experience for visitors. Feeling warm sand underfoot, walking among cracked rock formations and sediment layers, and then encountering clear water evokes a dual sense of loss and hope.



Figure 26. Pxfuel (n.d.) *Desert landscape wallpaper*. [Image] Pxfuel.
Available at: <https://www.pxfuel.com/en/desktop-wallpaper-0aebs> (Accessed: 15 July 2025).

This contrast invites reflection on how we live today and how we use natural resources. In our design, the tension between water and desert is not merely an aesthetic or symbolic choice, it is an invitation to reconsider our values and responsibilities.



Figure 27. Adobe Stock (n.d.) *Stock image of water in the desert.* [Image] Adobe Stock. Available at: <https://stock.adobe.com/search?k=water+in+the+desert>

15. Establishing a Desert Site with Faults and Cracks:

A Critique of Human Behavior

We chose a desert site not only because of its naturally dry climate, but also because of the human-induced damage it has suffered through excessive groundwater extraction, resulting in deep cracks and faults. This phenomenon, seen in many places around the world, is a direct, physical record of irresponsible human actions. In many ways, these cracks and land subsidence areas are natural museums of the damage we've done to the environment. We want to give this context a voice through our design. By selecting a site that itself "tells" the story of a water crisis and human interference, we invite visitors not only to see exhibits but

also to understand the deeper environmental challenges at play. Designing the museum within these fault lines, interpreting the fractured landscape through architecture, becomes both a critique of human greed and a call for responsibility. This choice is not tied to one country or region but responds to a truly global problem in which we all share responsibility.



Figure 28. NRC (2017) *Thumbnail image from YouTube video "Nuclear Reactor Start Up"*.
[Image] YouTube, 19 September. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NRCgmbHDSyQ>

Figure 29. Maruf, H. (2017) *Photo of Somali security forces*. [Image] X (formerly Twitter), 27 May. Available at: <https://x.com/HarunMaruf/status/868617002642018304> (Accessed: 15 July 2025).

16. Spatial Experience and Emotional Contrast in the Museum

Our goal for this museum is to create a human-centered, sensory, and thought-provoking experience. Architecture should not be neutral; it should be capable of awakening complex emotions. Moving through deep earth fissures, passing through dark, compressed spaces that evoke anxiety or sadness, and then entering light-filled areas with clear water that suggest hope and calm, creates an emotional journey for visitors. This contrast in design reflects the contradictions of our time: our power to create and destroy, our capacity for hope and crisis. Using local materials, showcasing sand and soil, exposing sediment layers, and playing with humidity and evaporation can make the experience more real and tangible. Feeling cracked earth, hearing the crunch of sand, and seeing reflections on water elevate the museum beyond a purely visual experience, engaging all the senses. In this way, even without displaying traditional artifacts, the museum itself becomes a living, dynamic exhibit that confronts visitors with an uncomfortable but necessary reality.

17. A Human-Centered Approach and Raising Awareness

Ultimately, our aim with this choice and design is to create a human centered space that communicates the global crisis of groundwater overuse and its consequences, such as land subsidence and even earthquakes. The museum should offer visitors the chance to face these challenges and ask questions about the future. Choosing a desert site marked by cracks and faults gives us an opportunity to tell a story that expresses both the grief and destruction caused by environmental damage, as well as the possibility of hope, awareness, and change. This human-centered approach places visitors of all ages from children to adults at the heart of the experience, encouraging them to touch, observe, listen, and think. We believe architecture can be a medium for change, creating spaces that awaken conflicting emotions and remind us of our shared human responsibility. This museum is an attempt to reconcile humanity and nature, to renew our understanding of precious resources, and to invite us toward a more sustainable and conscious future.

18. Design Layout and Form Development

In our design, the volumetric organization and circulation are shaped by multiple layers or shells that metaphorically stitch together the land's existing faults and cracks. This approach creates a flowing, continuous path for visitors, guiding them through different elevation levels that evoke varied emotions and perceptions. Moving within tall walls carved by these fractures offers a strong sense of scale, depth, and the vulnerability of the earth itself. This is exactly what we aim for in this project: to create a renewed connection between humans and the wounded natural landscape, encouraging reflection on our relationship with and responsibility toward the environment.

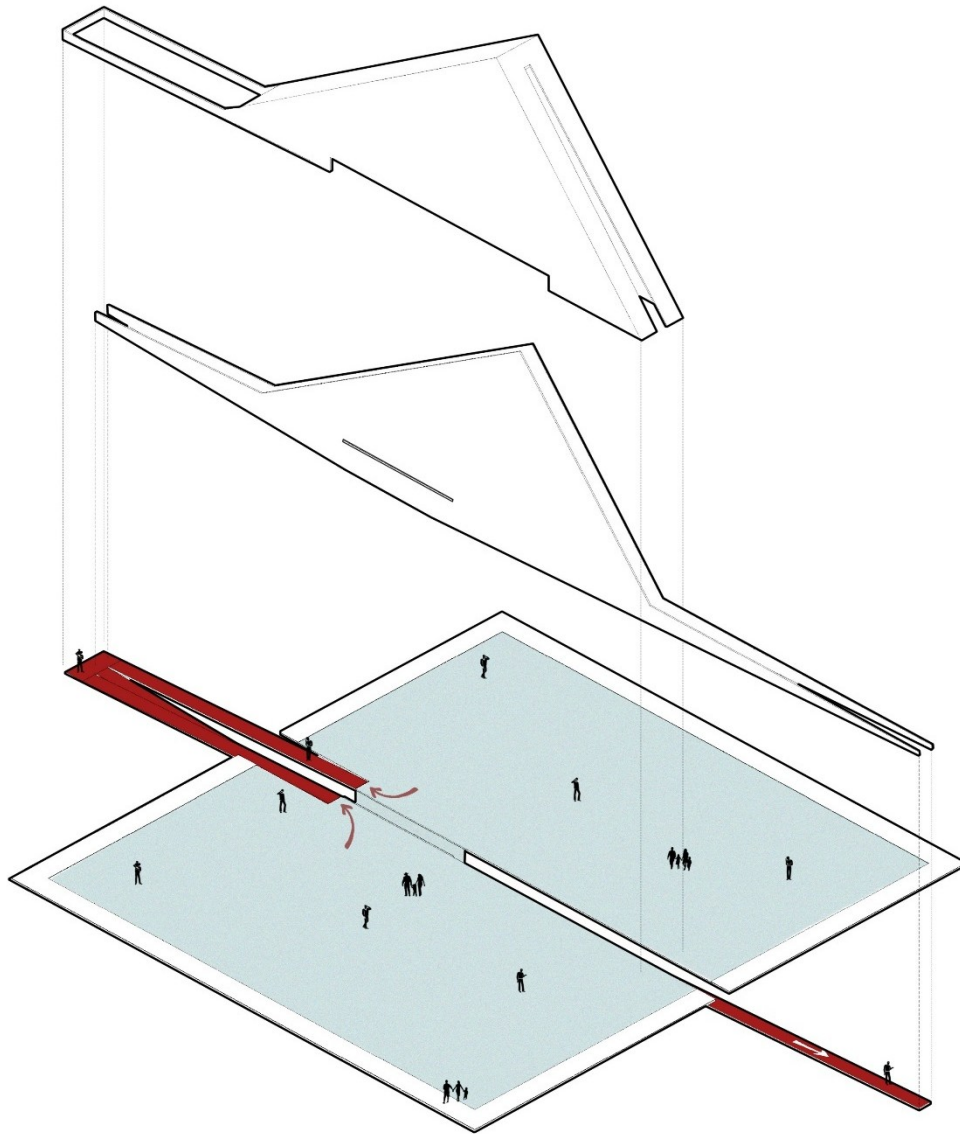


Figure 30. Layers and access design of the Sensory Rift project, competition for the Museum of Emotions (2025, by the author).

From a **bird's perspective**, the building and the water basin lie gently upon the cracks in the earth and resemble a **soothing balm** over the **wounds of the desert**, fractured by land subsidence.



Figure 31. Bird's-eye perspective of the Sensory Rift project, competition for the Museum of Emotions (2025, by the author).

When viewed from a distance, a visitor might first think of a **mirage** something usually unreachable and unreal. But here, there is an important difference: this water and this mirage are real and can be reached. This **contrast between illusion and reality** creates a strong **emotional gap** in the viewer, a space that brings both hope and a reminder of loss and damage. Next to this, the solid, triangular shape of the building reminds us of the mysterious **Egyptian pyramids**, as if they are hidden deep inside the earth a symbol of mystery, history, and a deep connection to the land. Together, these elements invite us to think deeply about our relationship with nature, the mix of feelings we have, and the line between what is real and what is imagined.



Figure 32. Elevation view and design of the Sensory Rift project, competition for the Museum of Emotions (2025, by the author).

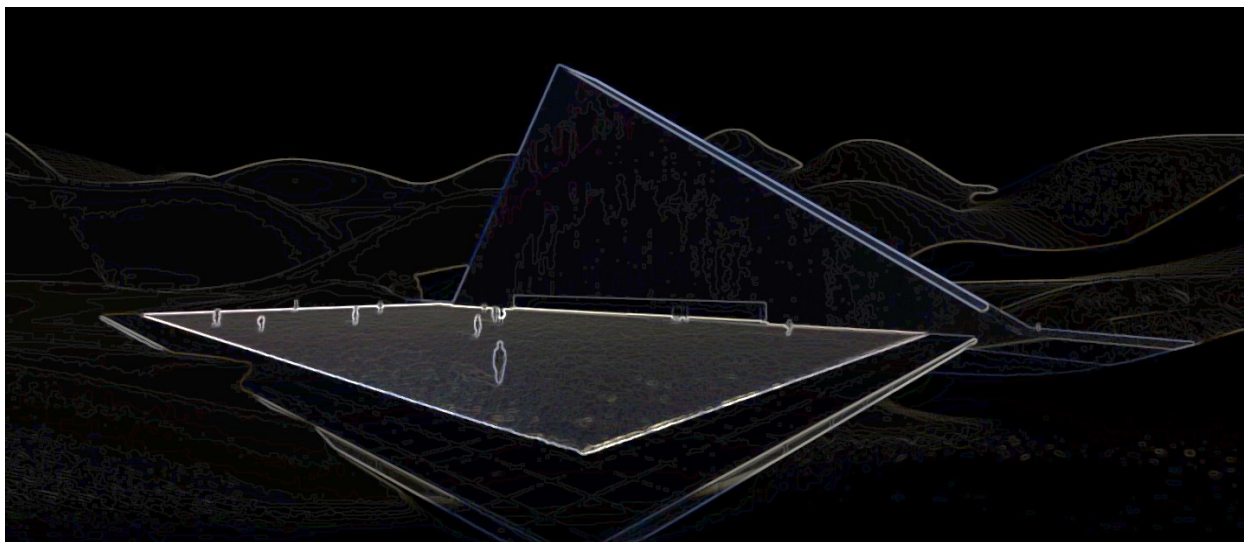


Figure 33. Graphical view and design of the Sensory Rift project, competition for the Museum of Emotions (2025, by the author)

As the visitor approaches the entrance, they will be met with a **spatial shock**, an experience shaped by contrasts. On one side stretches the desert, with its uneven sands and curved horizon; on the other, a solid vertical mass of concrete rises with a powerful presence. Part of the space feels bright, open, and expansive, while another becomes dark, compressed, and directs the visitor through narrow corridors. At the same time, the body senses the burning heat and intense sunlight, while beneath the feet lies the refreshing coolness of water. These contrasts define the separation between positive and negative spaces, yet they remain connected, creating a continuous spatial dialogue.



Figure 34. Entrance view and design of the Sensory Rift project, competition for the Museum of Emotions (2025, by the author)

Sensory Rift

The project is called **Sensory Rift** because the **Rift** represents the spatial and emotional divides, while the adjective **Sensory** highlights how these contrasts are experienced through touch, movement, light, and temperature, creating a continuous interaction between opposing forces.

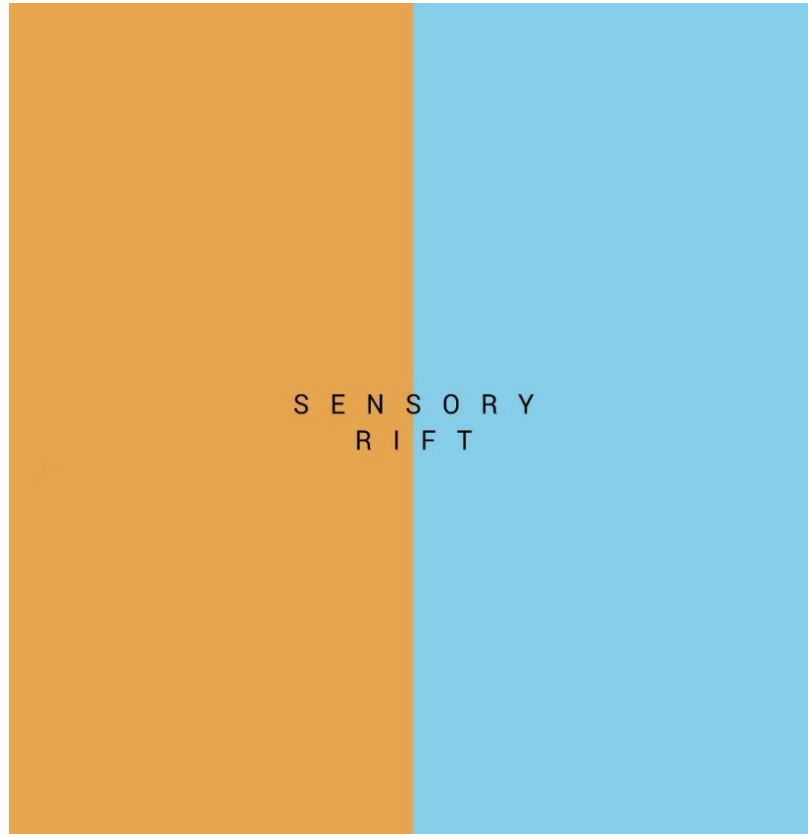


Figure 35. Sensory Rift project, competition for the Museum of Emotions (2025, by the author)

This contrast and tension can be seen and felt throughout the entire museum, and visitors would experience it in various ways.

Upon entering the museum, visitors will be guided by ramps from both directions toward the central fissure the fault line. Along these paths, they can observe the geological layers and the interaction between the soil strata and the architectural structure from various elevation levels, allowing for a closer examination of the site's composition.

This experience could be exciting and engaging for children, while for older visitors it could serve as a thought-provoking reflection on environmental disasters. Thus, every individual, depending on their own perspective and mindset, interprets the contrast between the rough, irregular textures of stone and earth and the smooth, precise concrete surfaces in their own way.

This is precisely what the architect aims to achieve to present an issue along with its consequences, leaving it to the visitors themselves to interpret and draw their own conclusions.



Figure 36. Interior perspective of the Sensory Rift project, competition for the Museum of Emotions (2025, by the author)

In the next picture you can obviously see how the clean, rigid form of the museum sits within the broken terrain, creating a striking contrast between structure and soil. Yet the fault line seems to cradle the building rather than resist it as if nature itself were speaking back.

But why?

Maybe this is the architect's silent question, conveyed through imagination turned into form, and through spaces that allow us to feel what cannot be said.



Figure 37. 3D render of the Sensory Rift project, competition for the Museum of Emotions (2025, by the author)

All visitors would be unconsciously and almost inevitably guided toward the central ramp, a space defined by tall walls rising up to 44 meters and a faint light at the end of the path. Instinctively, every visitor would move from darkness toward light, encountering an unexpected sensory experience: the water that previously cooled their feet at the upper level now would flows down the walls into the passage, producing warmth instead of coolness. Why? Because the environment has changed the corridor, shielded from direct sunlight, is cooler than the water itself.



Figure 38. Interior perspective of the Sensory Rift project, competition for the Museum of Emotions (2025, by the author)

With this spatial shift, the visitor now would sense the water not only through their feet but also through fine droplets touching their skin, the humidity they breathe, and the subtle movement of moisture across the materials while a gentle mist circulates in the air. The light at the end naturally leads them toward the exit, without the need for any signs or written guidance. Between these high, dark walls, the contrast between the refreshing flow of water and the escape from the external heat surrounds the visitor, immersing them in a dual experience of pleasure and unease, joy and restraint. This is precisely the architect's intention: to place the user within a field of contrasts, just as life itself is filled with contradictions and it is up to each individual to decide whether to find delight or to suffer within them.



Figure 39. Exterior perspective of the Sensory Rift project, competition for the Museum of Emotions (2025, by the author)

Finally, the visitor would be gently guided by the ramp back to the same desert level. At this point, a question would arise in their mind how did I get here? They begin to recall the paths, memories, and sensory experiences they have just gone through. Here, a visual illusion takes place: the fissure seen from outside appears triangular, while from within, the same opening is perceived as a regular, rectangular form.

Conclusion:

The Sensory Rift project seeks to transform natural contrasts into spatial experiences that engage both body and mind. The central design element, water, is used to demonstrate how a single material and its temperature could evoke opposite sensations and respond to both positive and negative emotions.

This exploration reflects the idea that human perception and emotion are never fixed; they shift according to our behavior, our surroundings, our ages, and even the places and beliefs we are born into. Without words or explanations, the project aims to communicate these transformations through pure spatial experience allowing architecture itself to speak.



Figure 40. Final board of the Sensory Rift project, competition for the Museum of Emotions (2025, by the author)

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