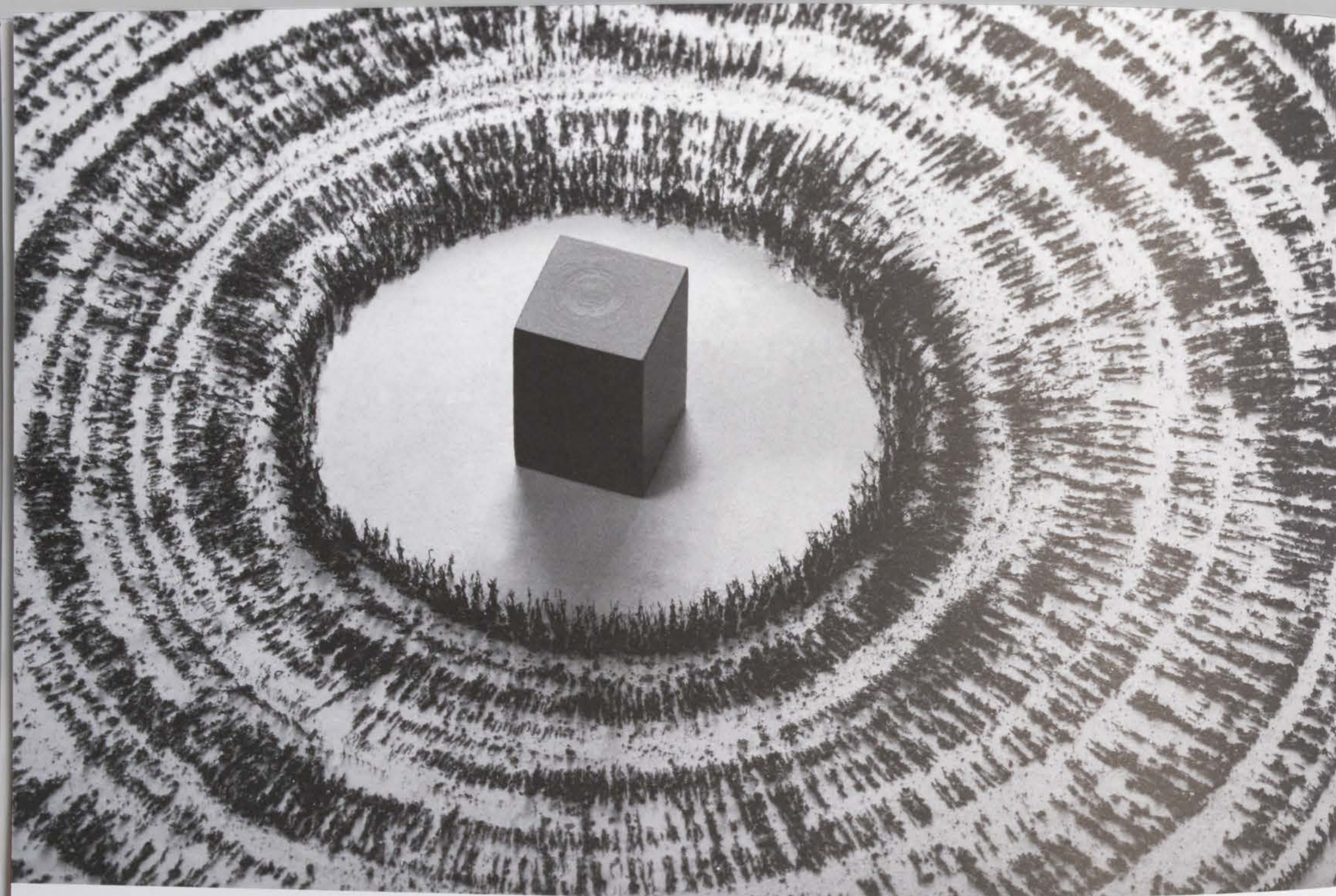


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L I B R I A



Magnetism (Photograuwe) I, 2012, Ahmed Mater

## CENTERS OF GRAVITY

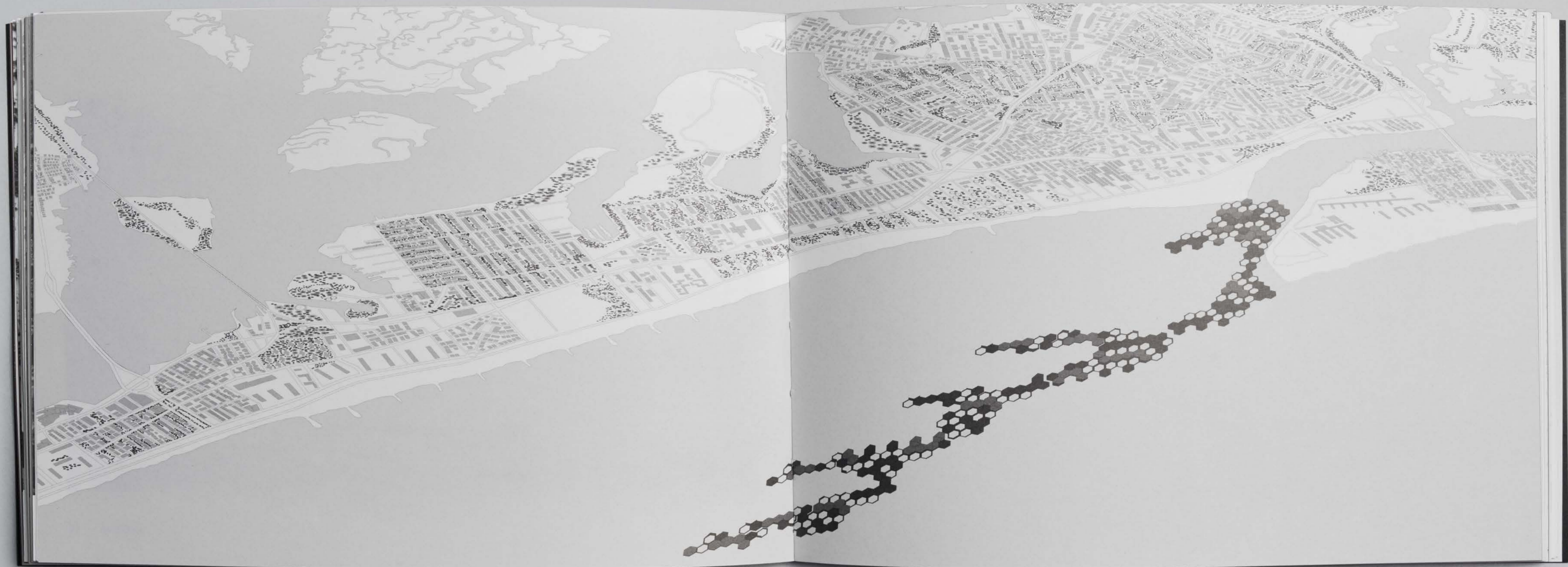
*"How can the past and future be, when the past no longer is, and the future is not yet? As for the present, if it were always present and never moved on to become the past, it would not be time, but eternity."<sup>1</sup>*

St. Augustine, Confessions

*Collapse* enables an intensified experience of space in a particular time interval. The design for the *Hungarian Museum of Architecture* and the *FotoMuzeum Budapest* evokes this condition through its internal circulation which defines the path of the visitors in relationship with the museums narrative. Their peculiar placement, at the border of the built urban fabric and the Varosliget Park, is creating and enhancing a center of gravity around the new gate to the park. The urban strategy creates a morphology of a continuous but porous boundary that redefines the site at the edge of one of the city's greatest green spaces. It activates the surroundings functionally and visually, even at night, as the museums glow like lanterns illuminating the plaza and the park. Both museums are inscribed in a pure rectangular geometry suspended on the ground floor by a fluid concrete structure, and clad in thick frosted cast glass.

## CENTRI DI GRAVITÀ

Il *collasso* temporale consente un'esperienza intensificata dello spazio in un intervallo di tempo specifico. Il progetto per il *Museo Ungherese di architettura* e per il *FotoMuzeum* di Budapest evoca questa condizione attraverso la circolazione interna che definisce il percorso dei visitatori in relazione alla narrazione museale. La loro peculiare posizione, al confine con il tessuto urbano costruito e il parco Varosliget, crea e rafforza il centro di gravità attorno alla nuova porta del parco. La strategia urbana crea una morfologia di un contorno continuo ma poroso che ridefinisce il sito ai margini di uno dei più grandi spazi verdi della città. I musei di notte si accendono come lanterne, illuminando la piazza e il parco retrostante, attivando funzionalmente e visivamente l'area circostante. Entrambi i musei inscritti in una pura geometria rettangolare, sospesa al piano terra a una fluida struttura in calcestruzzo, sono rivestiti di uno spesso vetro satinato colato in casseforme a sezione seghettata.





THE LANGUAGE OF THINGS:  
NOTES ON THE PRACTICE OF ARCHITENSIONS  
YEHUDA E. SAFFRAN

There is the lightness of a feather; there is the lightness of a bird diving in the air; a leaf drifting in the wind; and the lightness of Alessandro Orsini, his lightness is the lightness of touch. This quality is found in the way one material is positioned next to another or even the same material with a different shape forming a pattern to match.

In a certain sense so much depends on the way things are cut up and the way they are assembled or spliced together. The delicacy with which we do so determined much of our lives.

The greatest complexity lies in relatively simple elements that are coming together;

Rather often than not, in the most unexpected manners. Perhaps Lucio Fontana incisions in his canvas and Morandi endless small shifts in his compositions made of the same communicating vessels on extremely modest low table are

among the best examples that we carry in our mind. The very ordinary brick wall tells us the builder's story, here they have believed in transubstantiation – the course dividing and holding together one brick with another is relatively wide, and the threshold is raised, on another street, in another wall, in the same city, the builders believed evidently, in consubstantiation – the course dividing and holding the bricks together is reduced to minimum necessary and at the door, there is no raised threshold. What are we to do with all these clues? They are the evidence of ideas and thoughts we carry, invisibly in our mind, which exist nowhere else and yet completely determine our experience of everything else that exists visibly in our world.

Alessandro Orsini participated in my Advance Studio at the GSAPP Columbia University some ten years ago. His lightness of touch was already evident in these early studies for the *Aby Warburg Institute* on the Morning side edge.

It is with great pleasure that we are reviewing on this occasion the work of his office during the last five years.

Of course there are those who see the world as atomistically divided, where one set of circumstance need not be affected by another set. There are those who search for more holistic perspective, Alessandro Orsini clearly belong to the second category.

Never mechanically conceived, his approach to design is comparable to his mentor, Steven Holl. We could sum it up in nine points: *Light, Gravity, Rhyme, Rhythm, Colors, Letters, Numbers, Proportions* and *the Senses*. This can be seen clearly in one of his last projects, the design for the *Hungarian Museum*

of Architecture and the *FotoMuzeum Budapest*. It is instructive to follow the logic of the urban setting, next to the park, which suggested to Alessandro, configuration and circulation. Highly differentiated spaces offer exhibition spaces, which are distinct and inviting. Above all the program generates the conception of space to accommodate such distinct character of specific viewing requirements. As one can observe in the sections, the alteration of natural light from one volume and another, dramatize the difference and enrich the visitor's experience. The dialectic of light and gravity is one of the most important dramas in architecture. There is hardly any dialectic, which could inform our practice more profoundly. The geometry, the structure and the materials informing us on every step from the outside to the inside, from the ground floor to the roof. Could one ask for more? Could an architect do more? Hardly.

An architect preoccupation, in part, is always a conversation not only with his peer group, writers and artists but also with past architects, writers and artists. It is in this spirit that we find the pages with an illustration of *Hieronymus Bosch's The Garden of Earthly Delights* (1503) that inspire the idea of simultaneity as the co-existence of multiple planes of space, "each with its own rhythm of movement and perception of time."

Designing an expo pavilion in Korea the office proposed a massive curved glass next to the sea. Rich spatial experience is offered to the city and the visitors. In the invitation to contemplate such a fragment of a wave, one does invoke the idealized version of the sea, such as we see in Japanese prints.

Introducing the monument, *Cretto*, to the earthquake

in Gibellina, Sicily, by Alberto Burri, Alessandro Orsini transformed the disaster into an idea of *eruption of Growth* the inversion is completed in a series of upside-down distribution of program and public spaces as an urban proposal composed with multiple strata.

Finally, in the project for Bamiyan, Afghanistan – in the valley where the Taliban destroyed ancient colossal Buddha in 2001 – a place for visitors, study and research, Alessandro Orsini and his office are proposing almost a *Team X* like composition of pavilions with plain roofs but with series of arches and tall interiors, second to none. Of course the reflected light and the restricted views from inside-out contribute to the immensely attractive interiors.

Excellence is as rare as it is difficult, Alessandro Orsini and his office have achieved in five years of work, a quality and level of design that are exemplary. These projects are consistently drawing on the immense architecture culture to which we are entitled but not without overcoming obstacles and barriers of distance, in time language and culture. Making this heritage one's own is already a great achievement, being able to work with such rich material, to transform and refine the given, is no small undertaking. We can only congratulate Alessandro Orsini and his office for having done so much in such relatively little time.

Yehuda E. Safran New York 12.III.15