THE BEAUTY OF THE WORLD HAS TWO EDGES
A Rare Books Library & Reading Garden

Elisabeth J. Kim
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Thesis submitted to the faculty of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Architecture in Architecture

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Abstract

A library for rare books and a reading garden, the following project emerged from an attempt to better understand the idea of an autonomous architecture. Framing architectural questions as a choice between opposing alternatives of perceived relevance (e.g., geometric construction versus geometric composition, self referential versus self governing, singular versus universal) the project, which at its beginning was a simple exercise in geometric constructive technique, evolved as it was viewed through the lenses of those dualities.
 Acknowledgments

Bill Galloway
Thank you for helping me see through these and other walls with uncommon patience and generosity.

Steve Thompson
“A lover of wisdom, which is to say, Truth.” Thank you for imparting your words of wisdom with care, humor, and understanding.

Kay Edge
Thank you for your enthusiasm for the mysterious and ephemeral beginning of things, and for emboldening me by your example to value and enjoy them.

Virginia Pinzon
Thank you for inspiring me to pursue a path I would not have ventured on had it not been for the awakening I felt in your studio.

Family
My parents, sisters, and Elly, thank you for your unwavering confidence in my potential.

Studiomates
Thank you for three years of kindhearted and thoughtful rapport; I am so grateful I went through this experience in your good company.

Gabe Oliver
Thank you for encouraging me to accept nothing less than my best effort.
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FOREWORD

“But the beginning of things, of a world especially, is necessarily vague, tangled, chaotic, and exceedingly disturbing. How few of us ever emerge from such beginning! How many souls perish in its tumult!”

-Kate Chopin
The Awakening, p. 34, Avon Books (1972)
SKETCH OF COURTYARD
Foreword
CHAPTER 1

Originating Geometry: Invention of a Constructive Device
CONSTRUCTIVE DEVICES
Originating Geometry
GARDEN ENTRANCE WITH CONSTRUCTIVE DEVICE
Originating Geometry
CHAPTER 2
Embodied Geometry: Imposition of a Material Existence
Concrete: inherent potential, elegant plainness, patiently enduring.
Bronze: burnished, glowing, gracefully aging, powdery patina.
Honed Stone: soft, smooth, warm, invites touch.
Gravel: murmured stride, soft underfoot.
EARLY SECTION PERSPECTIVE OF GARDEN ENTRANCE
Embodied Geometry
AXONOMETRIC PROJECTION OF GARDEN ENTRANCE
Embodied Geometry
CHAPTER 3
Emergence of the Whole: Illuminating Patterns Come Into View
“Leaving behind the babble of the plaza, I enter the Library.
I feel, almost physically, the gravitation of the books, the enveloping serenity of order,
time magically desiccated and preserved.”

-Jorge Luis Borges
Dreamtigers, p. 21, University of Texas Press (1964)
TRANSVERSE SECTION THROUGH GARDEN & ENTRANCE
Emergence of the Whole
TRANVERSE SECTION THROUGH GARDEN & WALKING PATHS
Emergence of the Whole
CHAPTER 4

An Insular Architecture: A Garden & Room of One’s Own
“...Consider them both, the sea and the land; and do you not find a strange analogy to something in yourself? For as this appalling ocean surrounds the verdant land, so in the soul of man there lies one insular Tahiti, full of peace and joy, but encompassed by all the horrors of the half-known life. God keep thee! Push not off from that isle!”

-Herman Melville

ELEVATION, PLAN & ROOF PLAN OF READING ROOMS
An Insular Architecture
LONGITUDINAL SECTION THROUGH LIBRARY VAULT
An Insular Architecture
EARLY TRANSVERSE SECTION PERSPECTIVE OF LIBRARY VAULT
An Insular Architecture
“Perhaps that’s what I feel, an outside and an inside and me in the middle, perhaps that’s what I am, the thing that divides the world in two, on the one side the outside, on the other the inside, that can be as thin as foil, I’m neither one side nor the other, I’m in the middle, I’m the partition, I’ve two surfaces and no thickness, perhaps that’s what I feel, myself vibrating, I’m the tympanum, on the one hand the mind, on the other the world, I don’t belong to either.”

—Samuel Beckett
The Unnamable, p. 91, Grove Press (1978)
## List of Drawings

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<th>Title</th>
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<td>Early Plan</td>
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<td>graphite pencil, colored pencil &amp; ink on tracing paper</td>
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<td>Schematic Plan with Constructive Device</td>
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<td>Garden Entrance with Constructive Device</td>
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<td>graphite pencil, colored pencil &amp; ink on vellum, composited in Photoshop</td>
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<td>Early Transverse Section Perspective of Library Vault</td>
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All images were made by the author
Works Cited

WORKS OF INFLUENCE


-Samuel Beckett
Worstward Ho, Grove Press (1984)