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Sofie De Caigny, Hülya Ertas,
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As Found. Experiments in Preservation is the catalogue of the exhibition *As Found*, held at the *De Singel* art centre in Antwerp, from September 2023 to March 2024. Curated by Sofie De Caigny, Hülya Ertas and Bie Plevoets, the exhibition is part of a broader program initiated by the Flanders Architecture Institute to promote the built heritage as both a design and a cultural resource. In a context such as Flanders, characterized by high building density, the issue of reuse takes on multiple dimensions, not only as an answer to ecological and economic demands but also as a structured reflection on the identity of places and communities. The volume does more than document the exhibition: it delves into its theoretical framework and highlights the concept of the so-called “as found,” a design approach that views architecture as a time machine, in which the various stages of a building’s life can overlap or alternate instead of following a rigid chronological order. The volume structure mirrors the exhibition layout: seven exemplary projects in Flanders and Brussels, each associated with a key spatial term: *Ensemble, Void, Reconfigura-*

tion, Inside Out, Traces, Mirror, and Nuances. Each topic is complemented by a critical essay and a visual essay aimed at setting up a dialogue between the selected works and international examples drawn from different historical periods. This move broadens the discourse beyond the Flemish context and offers not only a transnational but also a diachronic view of reuse. Among the contributions, Jonathan Hill describes architecture as “the art of remembering and forgetting” (p. 44), emphasizing the fluid nature of voids and ruins. On the other hand, Sally Stone examines the concept of *spolia* (p. 62), understood as the practice of dismantling and reintroducing architectural fragments into new contexts, redefining their historical and cultural meanings. Koenraad Van Cleempoel argues the necessity of “embracing traces” (p. 101) from a design perspective, suggesting that each pre-existing element constitutes a narrative possibility rather than an obstacle. The seven key themes offer a flexible interpretative framework for classifying and, at the same time, interrelating very different interventions. For instance, the notion of *void* refers to an unfinished space that, according to Hill, presents an opportunity to reconsider the relationship among construction, ruin, and memory, prompting reflection on the temporality of an architectural work. Likewise, the idea of *inside out* underscores the tension between exterior and interior, reopening the debate on “façadism” (p. 82) and urban porosity. In the final section of the book, the curators include the transcript of a round table among various actors in preservation and reuse to explore the theoretical implications and operational challenges of intervening in existing buildings. From this discussion, it emerges how the authorship of the project is being reassessed, with the architect becoming an intermediary between what already exists and the community that uses it, and how, today, almost every building could be considered heritage, and this broader outlook legitimises transformation interventions and encourages greater attention to the spirit of the place. In the book, built heritage is not a static entity but a continuously evolving palimpsest, onto which contemporary interventions layer additional meanings. The volume highlights the growing importance of an attitude

that rejects the *tabula rasa* in favour of a “reservoir of possibilities” (p. 103) that places inherited traces at the centre. This paradigm stands out in the present, shaped by post-industrial and postmodern challenges, in which the concept of *tabula scripta* (p. 103), a written tablet perpetually open to modifications, takes precedence over the idea of a newly built space, disconnected from temporal stratifications. The publication positions itself within the interdisciplinary debate on transforming the built heritage, showing how reuse and adaptation projects can provide strategic responses to contemporary challenges. The book highlights operational models capable of unlocking the potential of existing structures, from resource reuse to the construction of a collective identity to the coexistence of multiple temporal layers. This focus on historical stratification finds a key reference in the un-dialogue between John Ruskin, who celebrated the narrative potential of the existing building through the aesthetics of ruin and Eugène Viollet-le-Duc, promoter of interpretive restoration. The book underscores the need to regard every intervention as an act that reshapes a place’s memory and reconfigures its prospects: preservation thus moves beyond static protection to become a design approach capable of fostering urban diversity and enhancing quality of life. It also recalls that, already in the 1960s, Jane Jacobs stressed the importance of functional and temporal diversity in buildings, and that, a few decades later, Richard Sennett argued the most livable and sustainable cities are those that can be continuously “repaired.” As further evidence that the *as found* paradigm resurfaces repeatedly in design history, Koenraad Van Cleempoel’s contribution offers a brief yet incisive survey of its best-known post-war forms. The discussion opens with the concept of *weiterbauen* (p. 101), literally “building in continuity,” which urges architects to carry the work forward from the point where the past broke off, engaging in a critical dialogue that adds new layers of meaning. Along this trajectory is positioned Hans Döllgast’s *schöpferische wiederherstellung*, which treats restoration as an act of invention, Carlo Scarpa’s *restauro critico*, which transforms the building site into a laboratory where different epochs confront one another and Lina Bo

Bardi’s *historical present*, which regards heritage as living matter. Threading through these positions is Colin Rowe’s insight, expressed in a letter to Louis Kahn, that “architecture is an organism that grows over time.” In this discussion, the Flemish case becomes a privileged viewpoint for understanding the role of time in architecture: past, present, and future coexist in a continuum, rendering every design action an exercise in careful negotiation. *As Found. Experiments in Preservation* offers a multifaceted set of perspectives in which historians, theorists and designers contribute to constructing a debate on experimental reuse. The key projects and international case studies are valuable research tools for understanding the role of time, memory, and transformation in architectural practice. Accordingly, *As found* becomes an operational and theoretical paradigm of great importance, revealing how heritage can become a living and generative resource for shaping the present and looking toward the future.