

**UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON SYSTEM
SYSTEM WIDE ART ACQUISITION COMMITTEE
AGENDA ITEM**

ITEM: Approve accepting the Sculpture “Grotto for Meditation” by Frank Kiesler into the University of Houston System Public Art Collection

DATE PREVIOUSLY SUBMITTED:

SUMMARY:

Approval is sought for accepting the sculpture “Grotto for Meditation” by Frank Kiesler into the University of Houston System Public Art Collection.

The University Of Houston College Of Architecture worked with art and architecture critics to realize an unbuilt concept by avant-garde architect/artist Frank Kiesler for his proposed work “Grotto for Meditation”. The project was constructed utilizing funding and labor from the College and from the UH department of Plant Operations. Additional landscaping and site enhancements are still planned and will be implemented over the next year.

The donor for the project, the College of Architecture and Plant Operations wish to have the sculpture accepted into the UH System Public Art Collection. Acceptance in the collection would be a recognition of the worth of the work and an acknowledgement of its artistic, architectural and academic importance to the UH campus. It would also insure that it receives publicity and that it is conserved appropriately.

SUPPORTING

DOCUMENTATION: Artwork Description, site, photos

FISCAL NOTE: NA

**RECOMMENDATION/
ACTION REQUESTED:** Approve

COMPONENT: University of Houston

Cave of the New Being

Over two years ago we curated an exhibition at the University of Houston Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture dedicated to the town of New Harmony, Indiana and the cultural patronage of Mrs. Jane Blaffer Owen. Among the work and documents exhibited was an enigmatic bronze model of a project that she commissioned in 1963 called the Grotto for Meditation. The model was made by the hands of a famous avant-garde architect named Frederick Kiesler and is one of two in existence.

The presence of the model at the College initiated a project that is ongoing and has reached a point of high resolution. A group of our unique students and faculty were paired with Ben Nicholson in the spring of 2008 in our Visiting Critics Studio to study the Grotto. Ben, as you might know, began his illustrious career in conceptual architectural speculation and theory here in Houston before going on to his current position as a leading architectural critic living and working in Chicago and New Harmony. He came to us with the provocation to imagine how the Grotto might be built today using new parametric design and digital fabrication technologies. He also asked how a project of such spiritual gravity could be thought of in a different context since it was never realized in New Harmony.

The group met this challenge with the proposal that it be built right here in Houston next to the UH Architecture Building. This decision opened up a series of parallel relationships between New Harmony and Houston that grounded the project in a way that could not have been foreseen and could not happen anywhere else. The fact that Mrs. Jane Blaffer Owen, who has given so much to the cultural life of Houston and New Harmony makes these two places inextricably connected. She commissioned Philip Johnson's Roofless Church in New Harmony next to the site where the Grotto was proposed to be built. We have taken the opportunity to realize the reimaged project next to another Philip Johnson building, our College here in Houston.

In addition to this exploration in design research a project of scholarship was undertaken culminating into a book called "Forms of Spirituality: Modern Architecture and Landscape" edited by Ben Nicholson and Michelangelo Sabatino which is currently under review at University of Chicago Press.

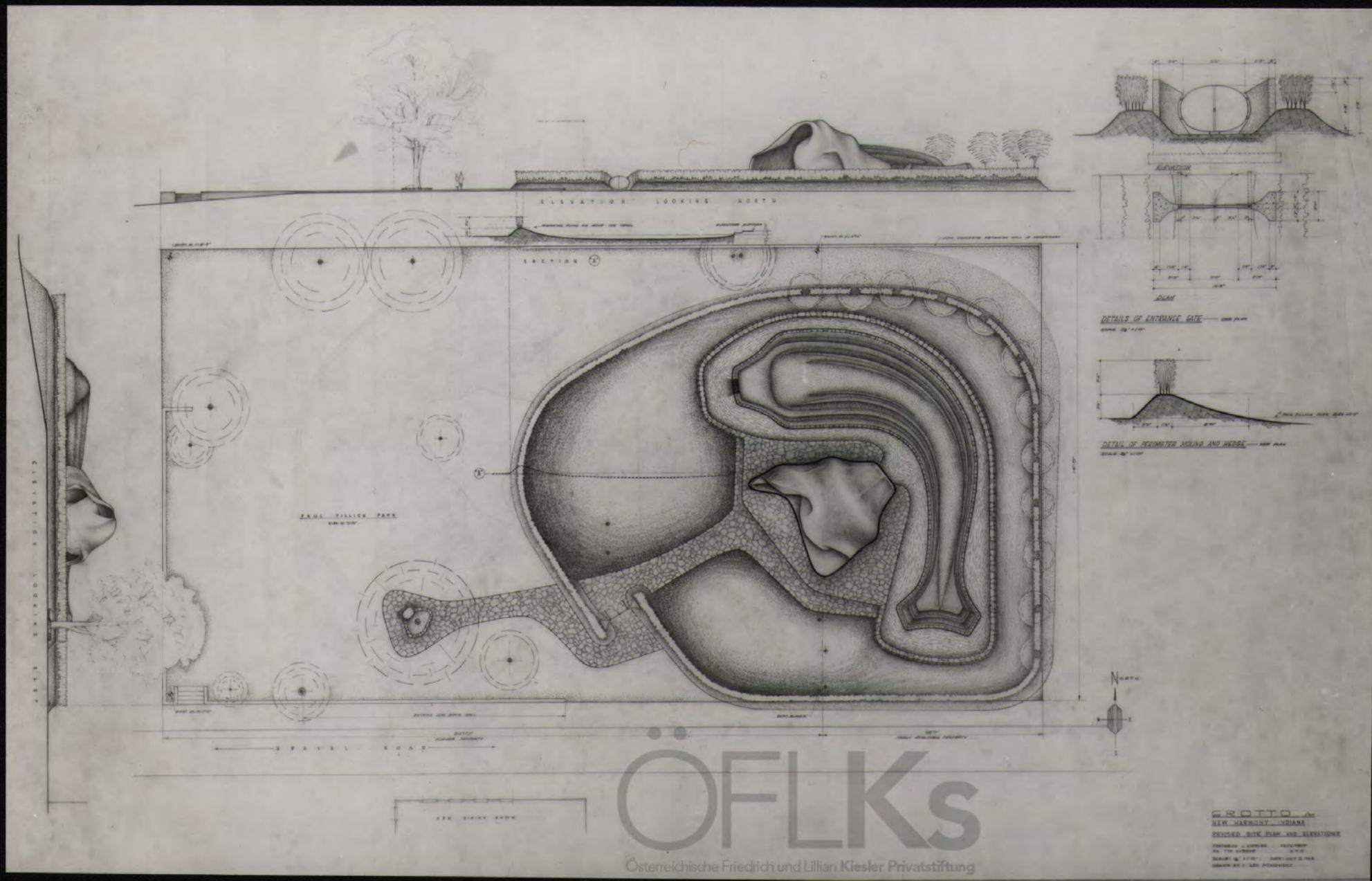
The University has already commenced work on a garden landscape and pond that will become the setting for our new open air structure and a place of rest and reflection for the campus community. Sustainable technologies such as computer fabricated and locally sourced materials will address the College's commitment to develop and prototype Green Building Components with Houston manufacturers. This document provides insight into the process that has been ongoing and points to the aspirations of the group to make the Cave of the New Being an enduring landmark to the spirit and patronage of Mrs. Jane Blaffer Owen.

Patricia Belton Oliver FAIA, Dean UHCoA
Joe Mashburn FAIA, Professor and Former Dean UHCoA
Ben Nicholson, Visiting Critic UHCoA, Associate Professor SAIC
Andrew Vrana AIA, Visiting Assistant Professor UHCoA
Joe Meppelink, Adjunct Assistant Professor and Director of Applied Research UHCoA
Michelangelo Sabatino, Assistant Professor UHCoA
Student Design Team: Juan Deleon, Rosalia Covarrubias, Lee Kelly, Mihn Nguyen, Y-lihn Nguyen, Travis Eidson, Michael Gonzales, Travis McCarra, Justin Garret, Agustin Prebisch, Armando Arteaga, Lori Matthews, Jasleen Sarai, Preetal Shah





Frederick Kiesler's original bronze model of the project from Blaffer Foundation archives in New Harmony. Built in 1963

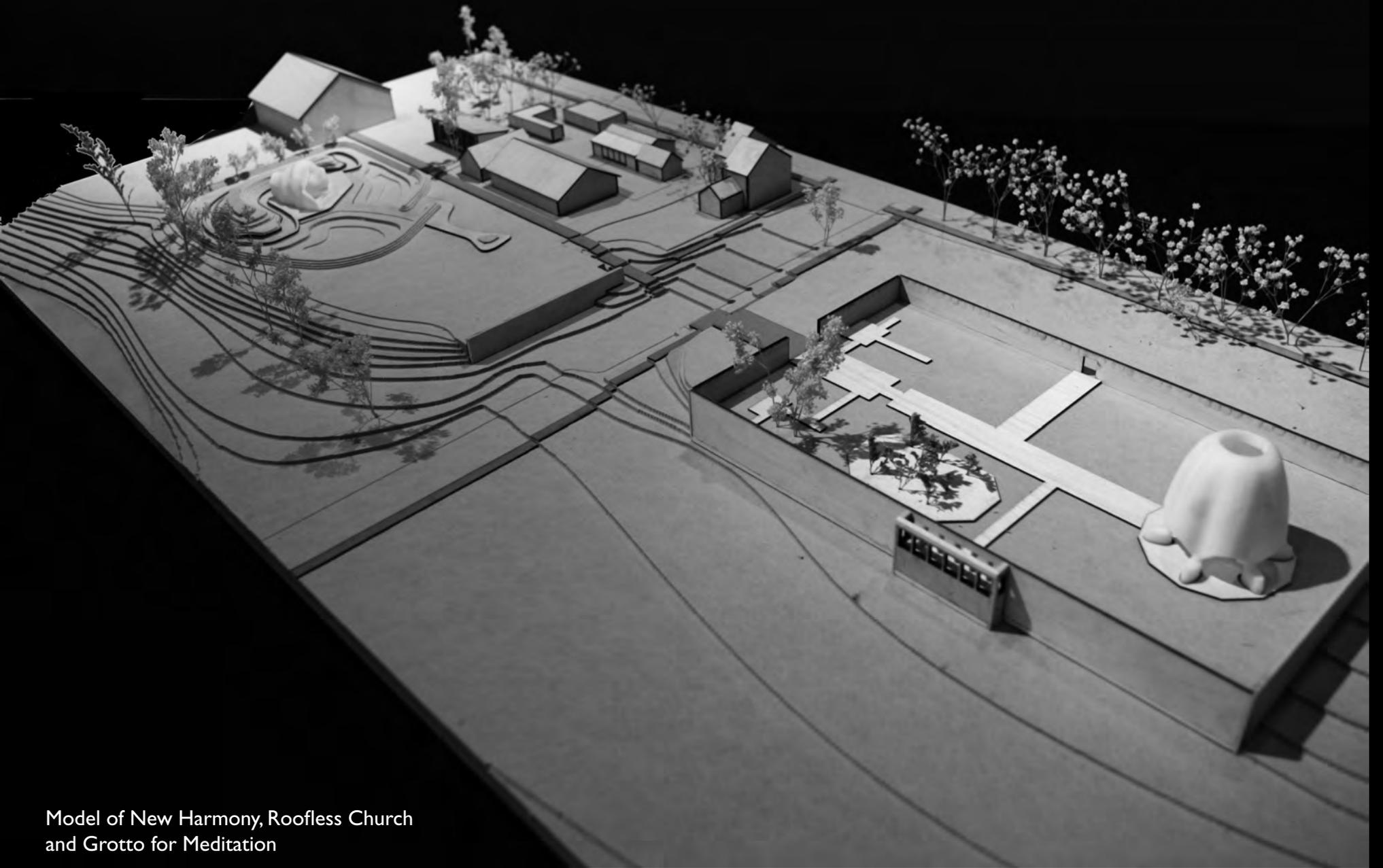


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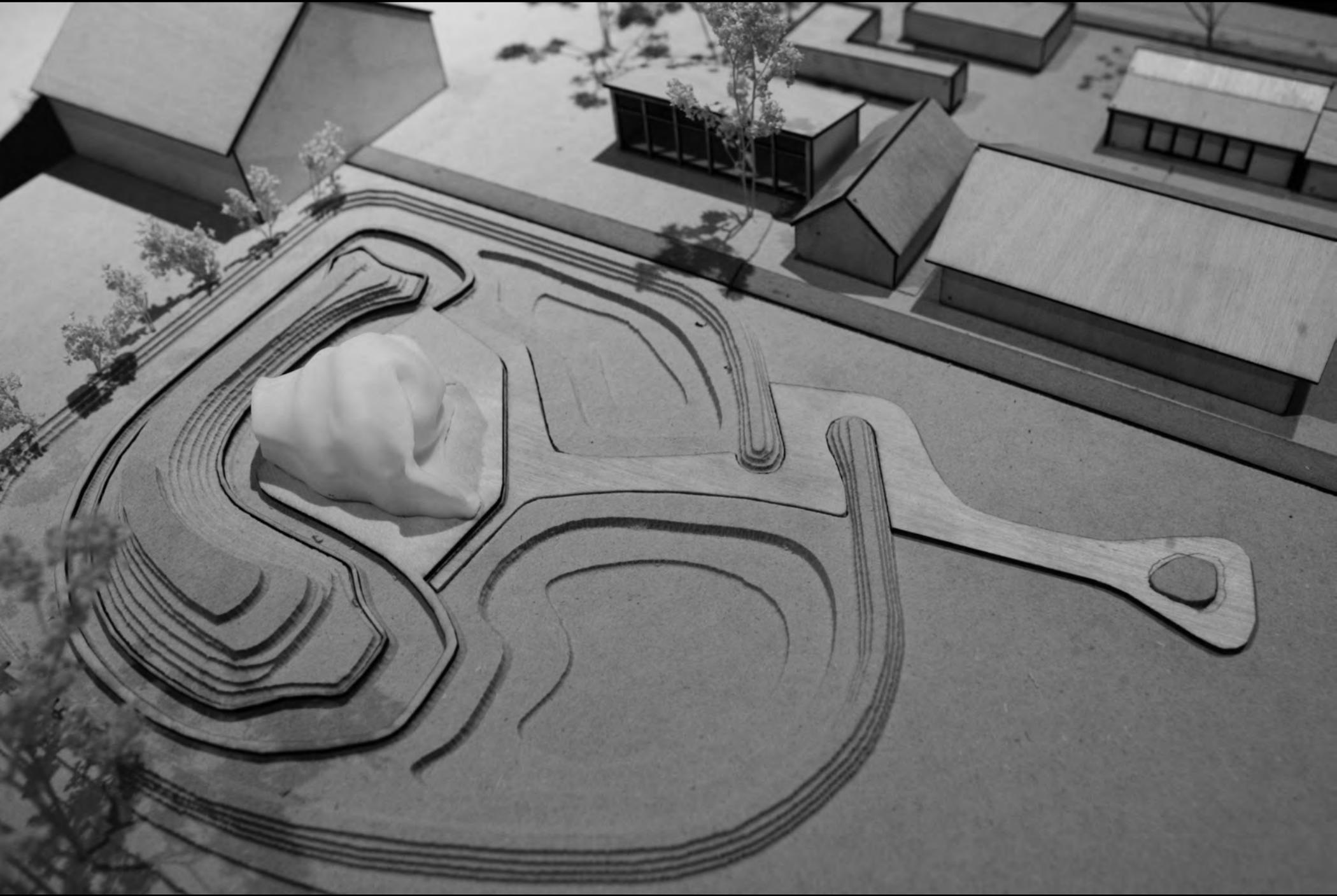
Österreichische Friedrich und Lillian Kiesler Privatstiftung

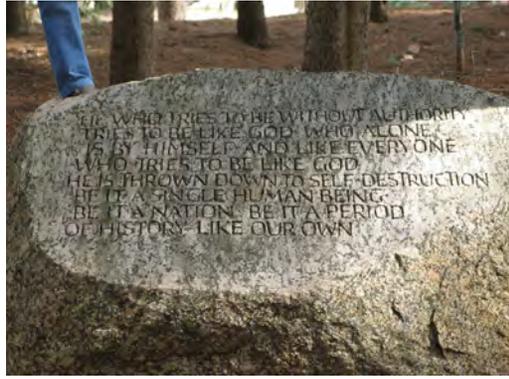
GROTTO
 NEW HARMONY, INDIANA
 REVISED SITE PLAN AND ELEVATIONS
 DRAWING NO. 1-107 - 1963
 DRAWN BY: F. KIESLER

Frederick Kiesler's site plan for the project from the Kiesler Foundation Collection in Vienna, drawn in 1963



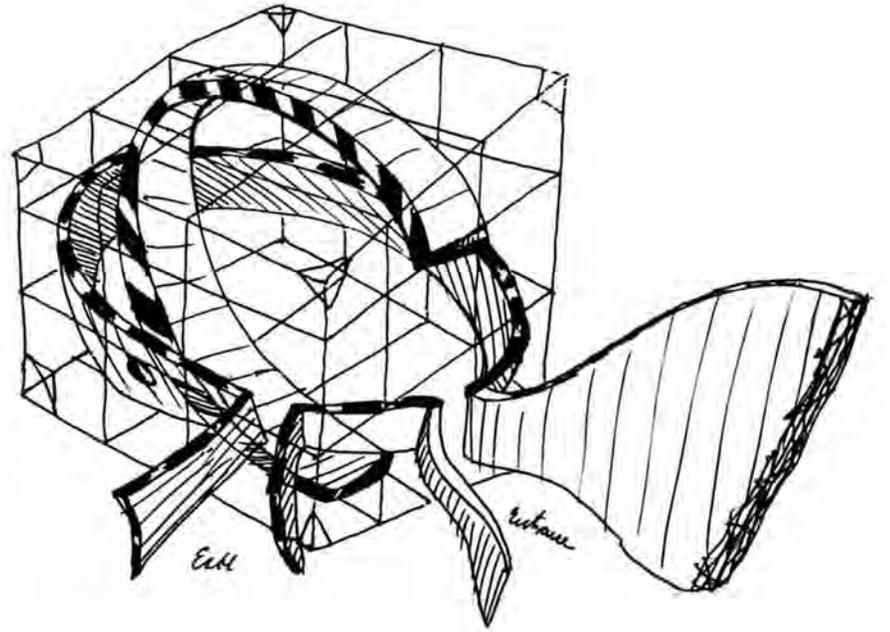
Model of New Harmony, Roofless Church
and Grotto for Meditation



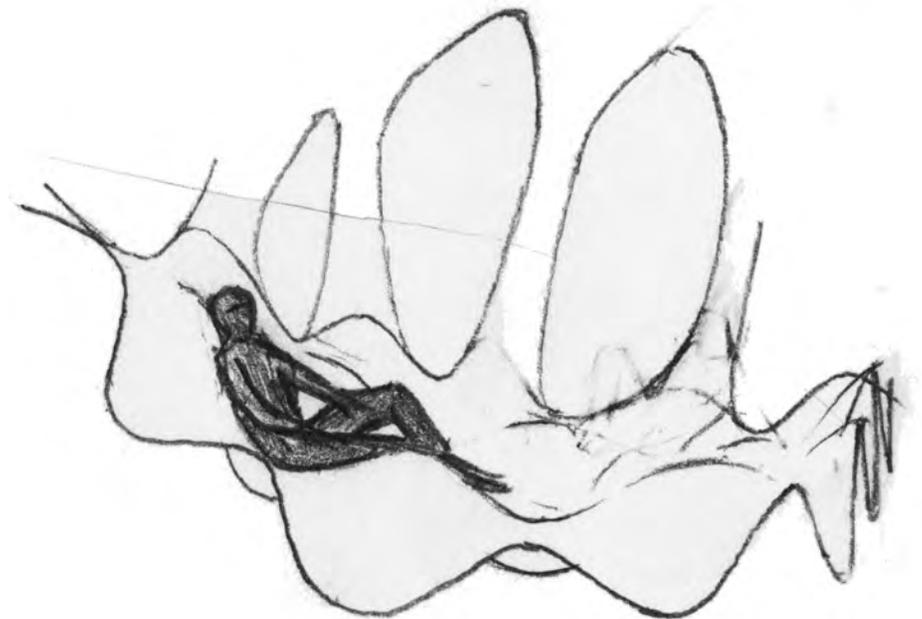
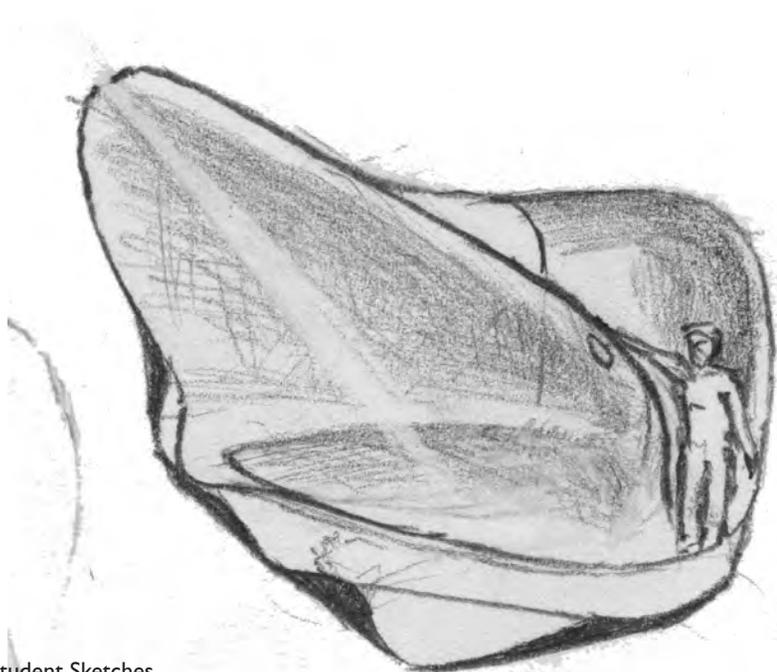




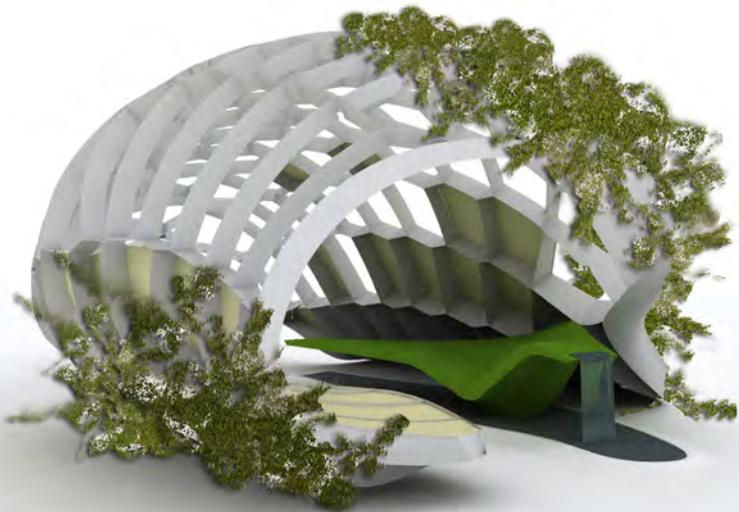
Students visit New Harmony and tour site dedicated to Paul Tillich with Ben Nicholson



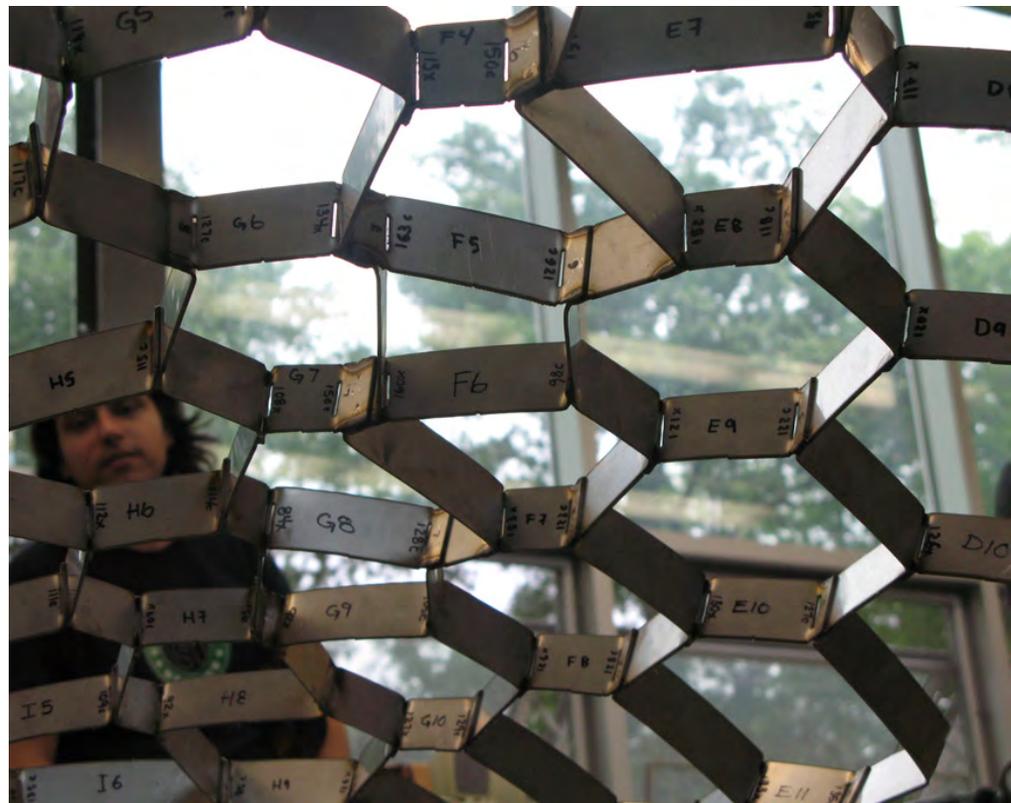
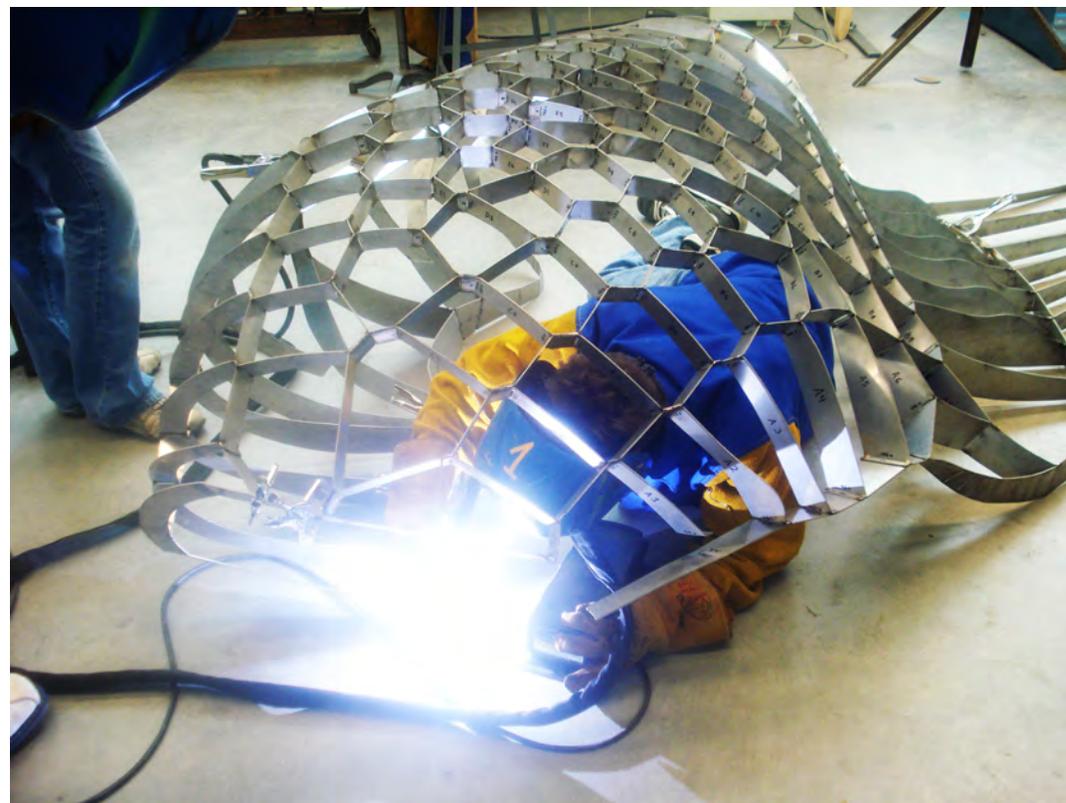
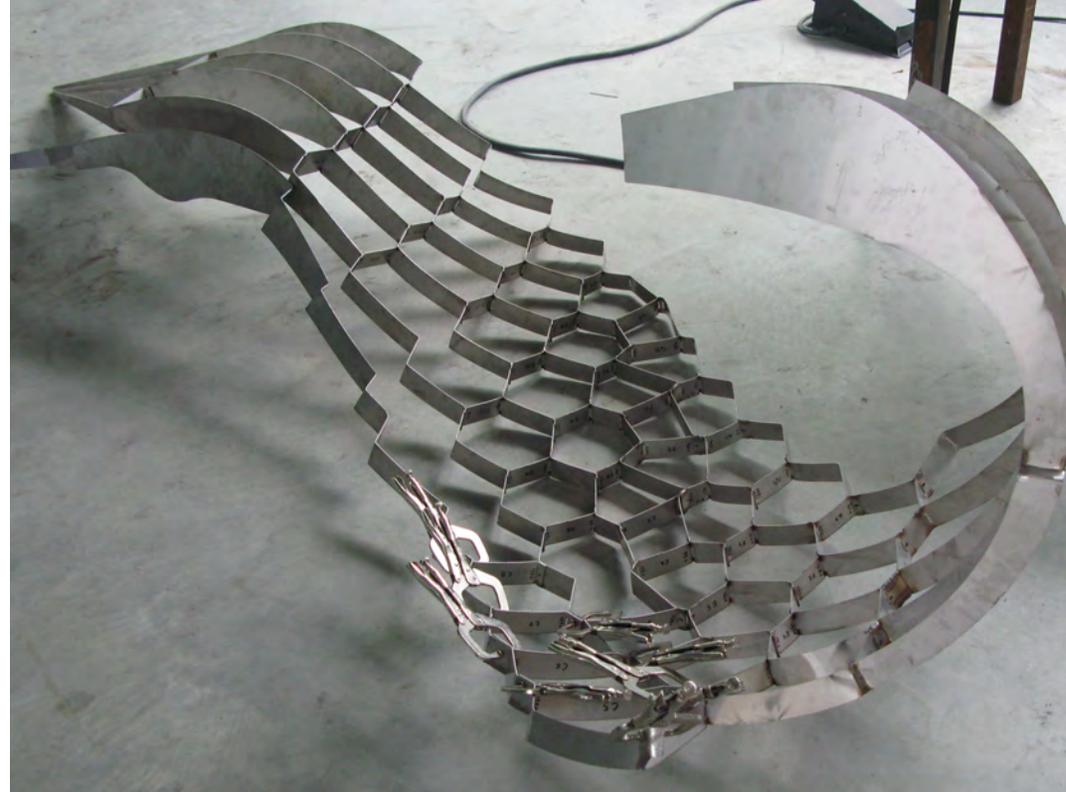
Fredrick Kiesler's original sketches

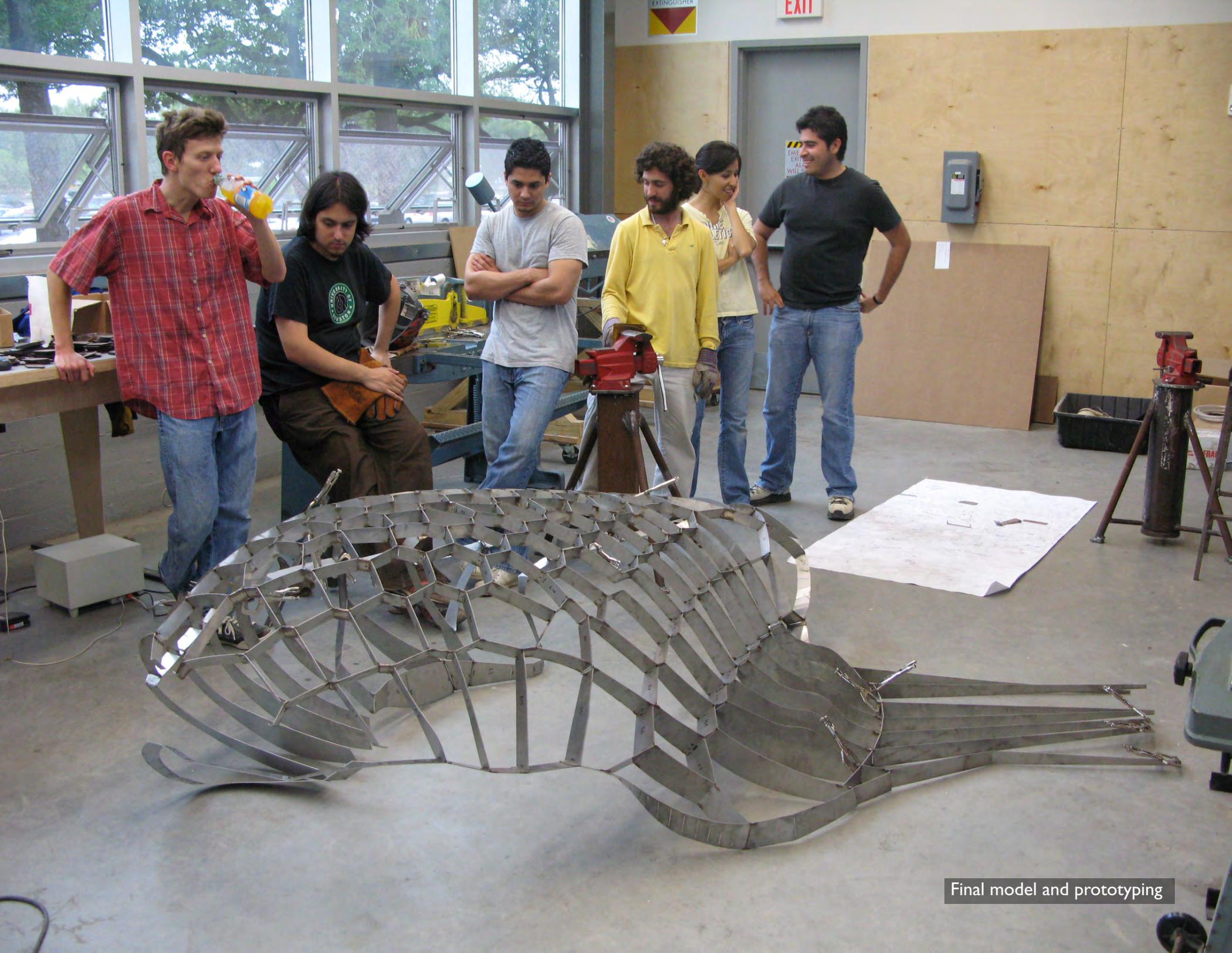


Student Sketches

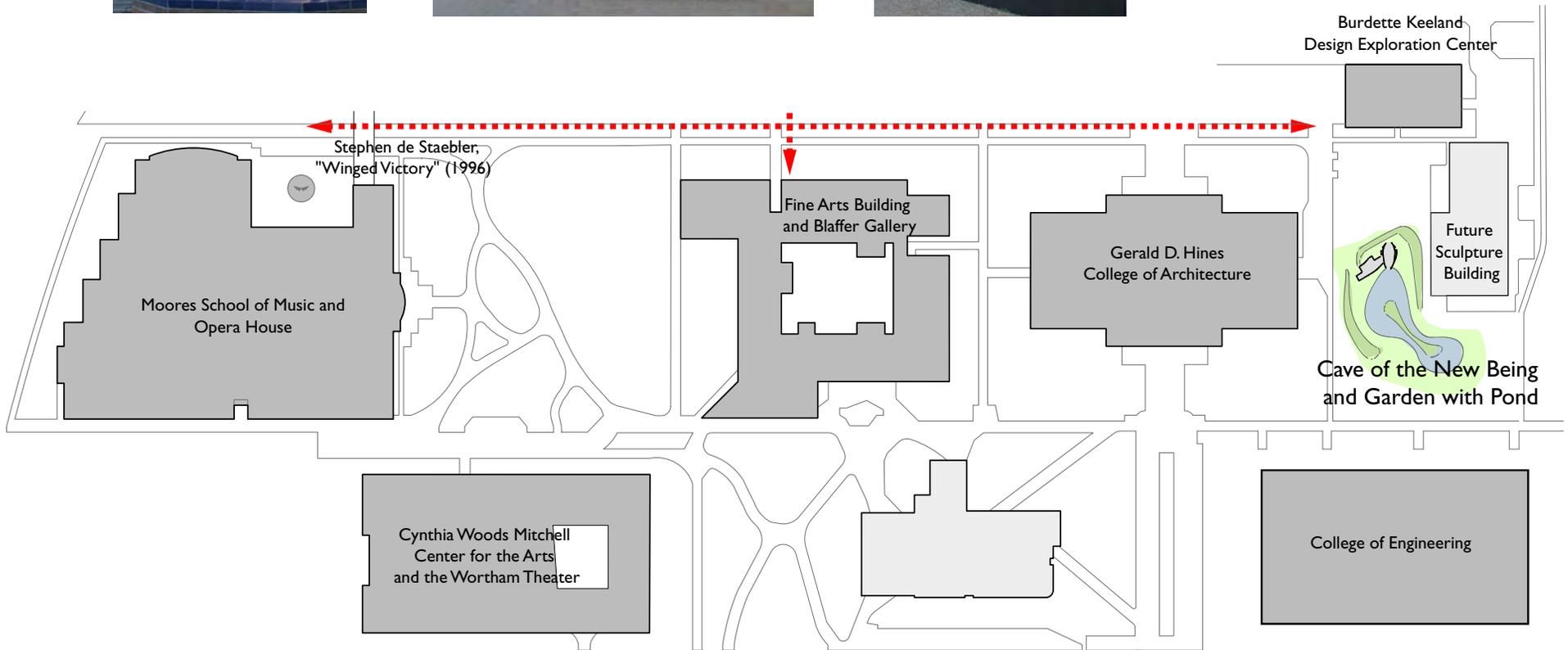


Design process and review of work

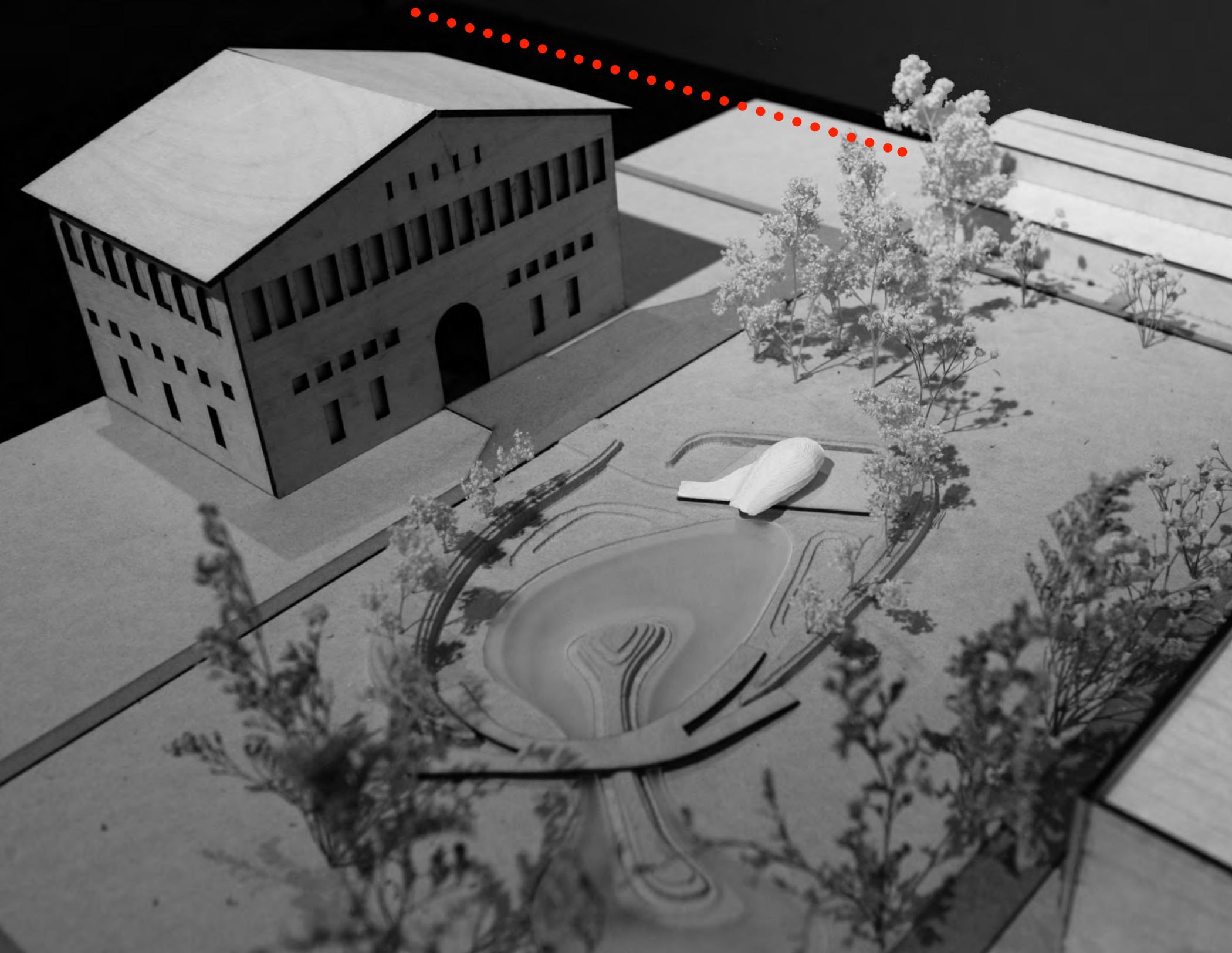


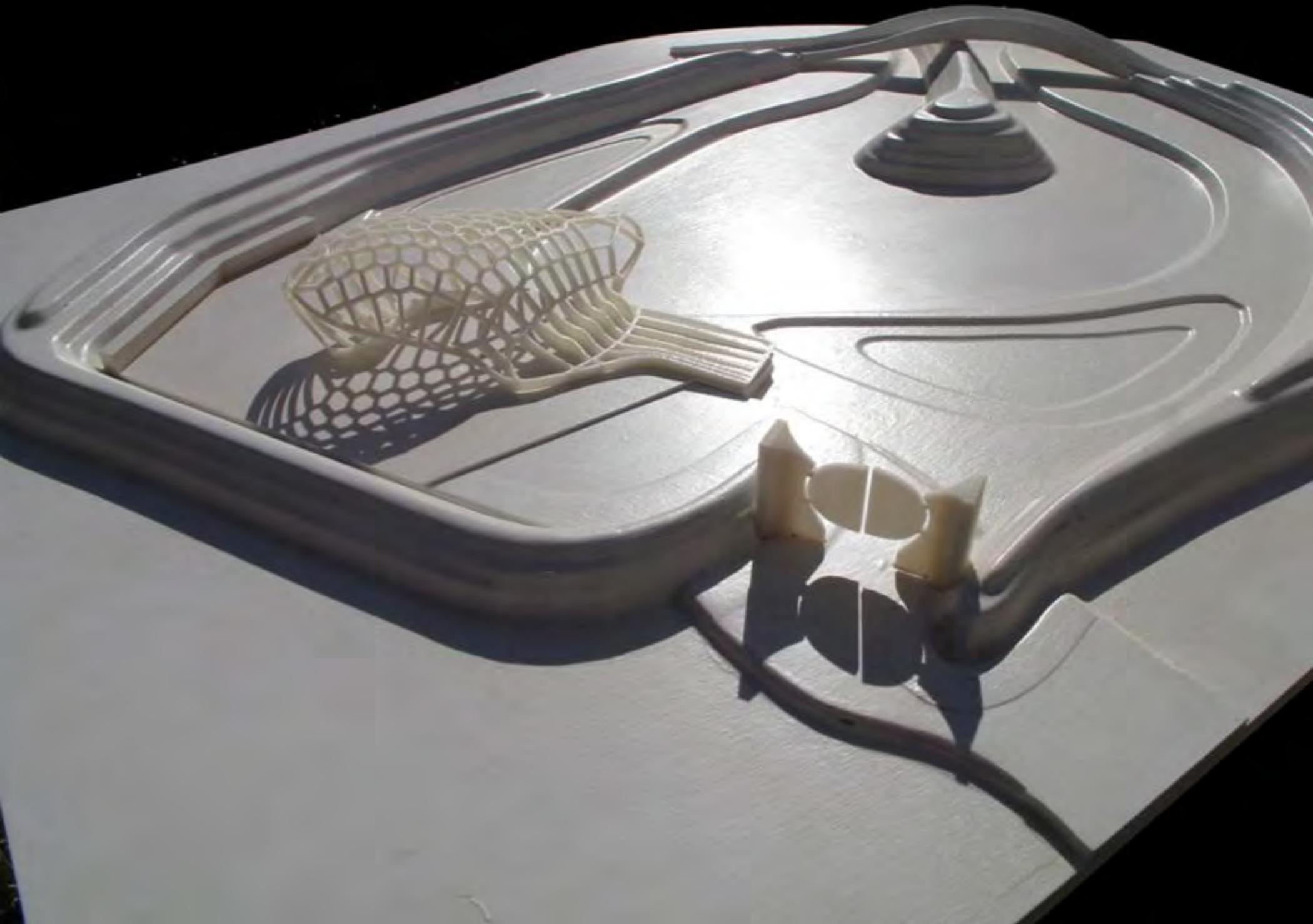


Final model and prototyping



University of Houston Master Plan Arts Precinct







Site Plan

1. Cave of the New Being
2. Kiesler's Gate as originally designed for New Harmony
3. Footbridge
4. Earth berms
5. Pond
6. Green Zone
7. New Garden





Full-scale Cave under construction in the Burdette Keeland Design Exploration Center, February 2010



Cave unveiling event, January 26th, 2010

Left to right:

Joe Meppelink, Adjunct Assistant Professor, UHCoA

Joe Mashburn, Professor, UHCoA

Renu Khator, Chancellor and President

Mrs. Jane Blaffer Owen

Ben Nicholson, Associate Professor, School of the Art Institute of Chicago

Beatriz Colomina, Professor, Princeton School of Architecture

Andrew Vrana, Visiting Assistant Professor, UHCoA

Patricia Oliver, Dean, UHCoA

Michelangelo Sabatino, Assistant Professor, UHCoA

Frederick Kiesler – From New Harmony to Houston

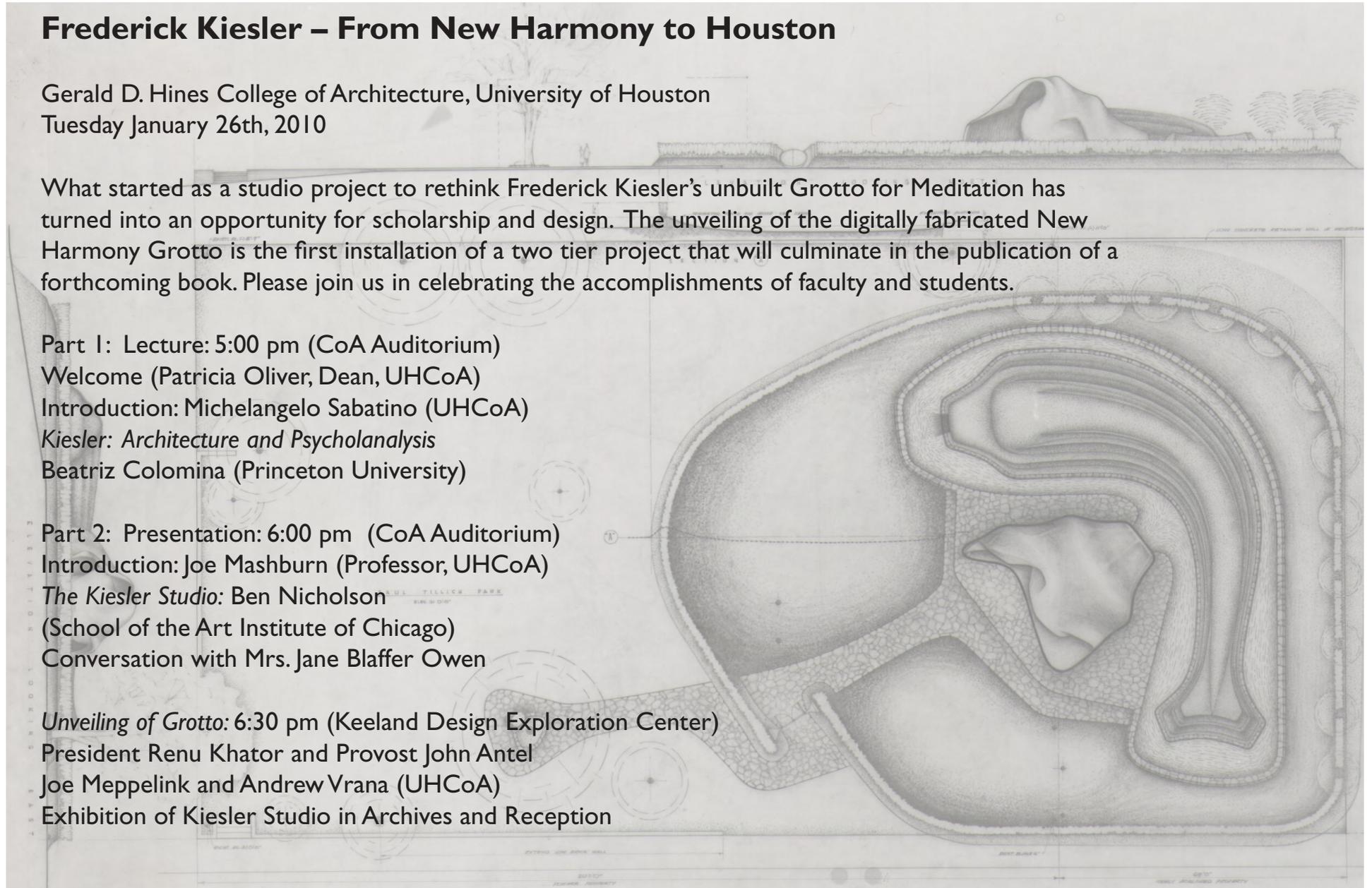
Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture, University of Houston
Tuesday January 26th, 2010

What started as a studio project to rethink Frederick Kiesler's unbuilt Grotto for Meditation has turned into an opportunity for scholarship and design. The unveiling of the digitally fabricated New Harmony Grotto is the first installation of a two tier project that will culminate in the publication of a forthcoming book. Please join us in celebrating the accomplishments of faculty and students.

Part 1: Lecture: 5:00 pm (CoA Auditorium)
Welcome (Patricia Oliver, Dean, UHCoA)
Introduction: Michelangelo Sabatino (UHCoA)
Kiesler: Architecture and Psycholanalysis
Beatriz Colomina (Princeton University)

Part 2: Presentation: 6:00 pm (CoA Auditorium)
Introduction: Joe Mashburn (Professor, UHCoA)
The Kiesler Studio: Ben Nicholson
(School of the Art Institute of Chicago)
Conversation with Mrs. Jane Blaffer Owen

Unveiling of Grotto: 6:30 pm (Keeland Design Exploration Center)
President Renu Khator and Provost John Antel
Joe Meppelink and Andrew Vrana (UHCoA)
Exhibition of Kiesler Studio in Archives and Reception





Cave of the New Being installed on its permanent site next to the UH College of Architecture building, May 2010



















