

Sano Collective

Map of Memory : Dushanbe

مکان
MAKÒN

a place

Nº 1
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“MAKÒN” Zine

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Map of Memory : Dushanbe
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MAP OF MEMORY DUSHANBE

: about the project

- a mental mirror of the city
- an archive assembled from memories, legends, and urban stories
- an online map preserving what has vanished, the impossible, the precious
- a collection of artworks that celebrate and document Dushanbe

[LINK TO THE MAP](#)

The aim of our project is to build a working infrastructure for gathering, preserving, and maintaining open access to an archive of testimonies about city life.

Sano Collective — a group of artists and researchers who initiated the project — acts first and foremost as a mediator, shaping the archive's infrastructure: we try not to regulate the archive's content and to publish every testimony that reaches us.

In our work on the archive we follow these principles:

1. we welcome any testimony about life in Dushanbe – episodes from official history, little-known details, personal memories, urban legends, precious tips, favorite stories from neighbors, teachers, taxi drivers, scholars, artists, etc.
2. it is the witnesses themselves who decide what they can share with us and what the archive will ultimately consist of
3. we do not verify information and do not set ourselves that goal, since the Map of Memory is not a sociological or cultural-studies project, but an archive reflecting a subjective image of the city
4. we attach testimonies to specific locations on the map of Dushanbe; this is the main navigation interface of the archive
5. we welcome testimonies from those who live in Dushanbe, who once lived here, or who were just passing through – anyone can fill out our questionnaire so that their story appears on the Map of Memory

QUESTIONNAIRE

We conceived this zine as a space to document the ongoing research behind the Map of Memory, analyze the archive's contents, and publish the works of art connected to the collective memory of Dushanbe. The editorial team aims to explore the theoretical dimensions of an archive of memories, and open up a discussion on its methodologies and practices.

If you have no memory of Dushanbe but do have comments on our work, write to us!

Inside, the zine is organized as follows:

- at the very beginning we have placed a theoretical text by the zine's editor and project curator Catherine Chernova
- then we publish works by artists who turn to memories or to contemporary images of Dushanbe – among them the women of Sano Collective and invited authors Oyat Shukurov, Semen Moldaver, and Firdavs Sharifov
- at the very end we analyze the first submissions to the archive

Hyperlinks throughout this issue are marked with the following symbol:



THEORETICAL REVIEW

INVISIBLE MEMORIES: ON THE PROPERTIES OF ARCHIVES AND THEIR COMPILERS

There are many ways to approach the preservation and study of the past, and the conceptual distinction between "History" and "Memory." One of the most widespread approaches¹ can be described as follows: *historical culture* is academic, critical, and firmly bound to institutions (archives, libraries, museums, universities), while *memory culture* dwells beyond the shelves and walls, in a far wider cultural cosmos stretching from cinematic allusions to family photo albums.

Yet, these very different models of a person's relationship with the past still presuppose one and the same past. The professional attention of the academic historian can be directed at events on the scale of states, or at the fate of an individual who possessed no privilege, no power, no dizzying talent. Memory culture, meanwhile, can pass down the history of a hometown from generation to generation – or cultivate megalomaniacal narratives about the origins, heritage, or mission of an enormous group of people (such narratives are often called "monumentalized memory"). Thus "History" and "Memory" can work together on a past of national scale, or, just as well, on reconstructing the family tree of one perfectly average household.

Keeping the concepts of "History" and "Memory" apart, in this essay we will consider the different scales of past events and how those scales shape our relations with our own memory. We will analyze some experimental work with memory culture in contemporary art,

paying particular attention to artists' work with archives. In this way we will immerse ourselves in the epistemological context of the Map of Memory of Dushanbe – that is, we will examine the cognitive mechanisms at work in this project.

¹ This is how the French theorist Pierre Nora distinguishes "History" and "Memory" in his programmatic text on "lieux de mémoire".

Aleida Assmann, one of the leading scholars of the twenty-first century, describes a similar dichotomy but shifts the emphasis considerably, speaking of identity formation through memory as a rather personal mode of relating to the past (academic history, accordingly, is called upon to maintain a critical distance).

Gonzalo Pasamar. On the relationship between history and memory. Aleida Assmann, Cultural Memory and Western Civilization. Functions, Media, Archives. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011, 410 pp.



The Map of Memory grows with whatever information the residents or visitors of Dushanbe consider important. We are not writing a monumental history of the city; what matters to us is preserving testimonies of how people make their lives in it, how they find and cherish precious inconspicuous corners, the ghosts of the past, memories.

In its most neutral and restrained form, monumentalized memory performs a number of functions. The infrastructure of historical scholarship rests on the shoulders of grand historical narratives; the national and state past is its skeleton. Such institutions shape not only the image "façade" of cultures – the description on a Wikipedia page, the contents of a tourist brochure – but also the internal systems of research, preservation, and daily practice. Moreover, history written in the broadest of brushstrokes offers the novice a simple, accessible entry into an enormous system of knowledge – a kind of navigation that lets you find your bearings in the terrain and even make tiny discoveries of your own. Acting as a kind of circulatory system of historical memory, easing access to the cosmos of the past through well-established infrastructure, monumental narratives nevertheless constrain the researcher, the traveler, the artist, offering them ready-made routes.

The polysemous concept of "Memory," however, is an endless spectrum of possible relations with the past. If at one end Memory preserves (and sometimes distorts) monumental history, at the other extreme it is a kind of virtual individual container – a left-luggage locker holding the private history of a life, the POV of a single human biography.

Turning to such forms of memory is also part of the work of researchers engaged in rigorous, critical, academic history: over the past hundred years, entire scholarly schools have formed around the world whose object of

interest lies far closer to this private memory than to grand collective historical narratives. Such, for example, is the "microhistorical" approach, one of whose founders, Carlo Ginzburg, wrote a full-fledged academic monograph² based on the materials of a single trial documented in the sixteenth century: the accused was a miller who permitted himself to interpret religious dogma and thereby brought down upon himself the terrible wrath of the Inquisition. Ginzburg worked inductively: starting from one specific court record, he analyzed the broad sociocultural context of the era, rethinking a private story as an absolutely priceless testimony. There are many such examples.

Historians of everyday life work with a similarly pinpoint focus – with one important difference: they are interested not in discrete events but in long processes hidden behind monumental events. Two works by Robert Darnton serve as examples: he studied subjects such as the institution of censorship in colonial India and the lives of French print-shop workers, in which the preconditions for great cruelty took root.³

Many European studies in the history of everyday life and microhistory became possible thanks to early bureaucratization. In the urban centers of Central Asia this process was set in motion much later, and, moreover, it bore pronounced colonial characteristics (Anton Ikhsanov discusses this in his lecture on colonial archives in Central Asia⁴). Yet the historical records that do exist hold great potential, and

over the past thirty years researchers such as Colette Harris and Andrei Dörre have been working with them actively.⁵

Extending the navigation analogy, we might say that this microscopic, inductive relationship with the past resembles moving cross-country far more than following the city's ready-made transit routes offered by deductive monumental history. But the inductive approach has its shortcomings. Just as it is impossible to count the stars in the sky with the naked eye, it is impossible to record, archive, and systematize all the memories of all people (and let us add: taking into account all the variations and possible distortions in which the mechanisms of memory abound).

² Carlo Ginzburg. *The Cheese and The Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth Century Miller*. – Einaudi, 1976.

³ Robert Darnton. *Censors at Work: How States Shaped Literature*. – WW Norton, 2014.
Robert Darnton. *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History*. – US: Basic Books, 1984.

⁴ Anton Ikhsanov. *Colonial Archives on the History of Central Asia: Learning to Read Between the Lines*. (Lecture notes) →

⁵ Colette Harris. *Coping with daily life in post-Soviet Tajikistan: The Gharimi villages of Khatlon Province*.

Andrei Dörre. *Local knowledge-based water management and irrigation in the Western Pamirs*.



Memories, urban legends, and private stories are what grand history often misses by virtue of how it is organized. Yet for the history of the future, and for understanding the city now, small testimonies are no less important than the dates and heroes of the most large-scale events.

There is a consensus that monumental research and pinpoint, ultra-narrow research are of equal value. In practice, however, monumental history and monumentalizing memory enjoy privileges. Let us try to list the main ones:

→ 1. Institutions formed within the framework of monumental history tend to enjoy greater financial stability – because they produce stable monumental historical memory, their funding can be long-term and substantial. (This stability of funding is mutually dependent on the fact that the source of funding is often the state, which both needs long-term budget plans and provides them.⁶)

→ 2. Large historical narratives enjoy greater visibility – they are written about more, talked about more; people know more about them and remember them better. Within the attention economy, that is the key to success.⁷

→ 3. Research focused on grand historical narratives has a broader and richer methodological and archival base – that same ready-made infrastructure that can be used instead of exhausting wanderings through the chaotic cosmos of personal testimonies, memories, records, diaries, private letters, and the fates of "little people".

All of the above are examples of the unequal distribution of resources between different scales of history, different approaches to studying and preserving it, and different

representations. The researchers Maria Babinska and Laurent Licata describe this situation through an asymmetrical model of memory and identity⁸: testimonies that are small but important for historical scholarship and historical memory are often crowded out by the hegemony of monumental collective memory, by history's metanarratives.⁹

⁶ Elisabetta Lazzaro. Digital Funding and Financing in Museums and Cultural Heritage. / Cultural Funding and Financing: A Guide to New and Traditional Models in Arts and Culture - Palgrave Macmillan Cham, 2026.

⁷ The main principles of the attention economy are described here: Michael H. Goldhaber. The attention economy and the Net. First Monday, 2(4). 1997.

⁸ Maria Babińska, Laurent Licata. Mnemonic asymmetries: How collective memory shapes and reflects intergroup relations. / Current Opinion in Psychology. February 2026.

⁹ Reine Rydén. National archives, national memory? How national archives describe themselves and their mission. Arch Sci 23, 297–326 (2023).



Not every archive requires the triangulated verification of testimonies, because not every archive is aimed at working with objective information.

Within the inductive approach to history, researchers often run up against the problem of the legitimacy and verification of testimonies. This applies especially to oral history. Human memory is so unreliable, after all! Who knows whether people really did what they remember doing? Did they really feel what they say they felt (for even if they are telling the truth, their memory may have warped over the long years¹⁰)? A person is an unreliable custodian of information, prone to exaggerating, forgetting, romanticizing their own past or an inherited one.

In the twentieth century, however, researchers articulated the value of memory's distortions. The pioneer here was Alessandro Portelli: seizing the opportunity to compare documented facts with the accounts of eyewitnesses to recent history, he noticed a total mismatch and set out to analyze its causes¹¹.

Small stories and private testimonies are no less important to academic scholarship than monumental narratives. Possible errors, the fruit of cognitive biases, are not grounds for excluding testimonies from archives, but grounds for studying them with special attention to the circumstances of their formation, to the experience of their keeping, to their emotional shadings. Personal testimonies, the material of oral history, even unverified, serve as an important counterweight to grand metanarratives – they help keep historical knowledge in balance and guard the past against dogmatization.

In recent years, contemporary art has been actively engaged in preserving such testimonies – under no obligation to verify information, artists convey the tension and the emotions that saturate oral testimonies, memories, microhistories, and histories of everyday life.

¹⁰ Modern neuroscience and psychology have identified numerous cognitive biases, some of which relate specifically to the workings of memory.

¹¹ Portelli analyzed the collective memory of the death of the worker Luigi Trastulli in the city of Terni: contemporaries remembered him dying during protests in 1949 or 1953, when in fact Trastulli was killed by police during a demonstration in 1949 – his death took on symbolic meaning and merged, in the townspeople's memory, with other important milestones of history. Alessandro Portelli's article is openly available in English: Alessandro Portelli. [The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History](#). The primary methods used to verify information in oral history are outlined here: Paul Thompson. [The Voice of the Past: Oral History](#). – Oxford University Press, 1978.



The most important function of an archive is the choice of what will be included in it.

Historically, art stood in the service of metanarratives, and artists were quite literally engaged in the monumentalization of memory, painting palaces and erecting statues.¹² Contemporary art, however, lays claim to a far freer engagement with History and Memory – artists often genuinely have the ability to decide for themselves what they can preserve and show to the world. Let us consider a few telling examples of choosing in favor of microhistory, the everyday, or oral testimonies.

One of the most consistent artists working with the archiving of such material is Susan Hiller. In her works she often turns to the study of testimonies of paranormal phenomena; in 2000, for example, she assembled an archive of UFO testimonies – she made no attempt to verify the information;

what mattered to her was preserving the very form of the testimony, the way people tell their memory. But Hiller does not always work with paranormal testimonies. Among her documentary works there is one truly poetic video piece with no visual imagery at all: in it the artist gathered audio recordings of voices speaking the world's disappearing languages. The black screen is empty; the recordings are accompanied only by text captions (date, place, sometimes a translation of the spoken phrase). This entire assembly of lost, slipping-away presence the artist christened *The Last Silent Movie* – a nod toward the asymmetrical attention economy that exalts some and plunges others into oblivion.¹³ The work was first shown at the Berlin Biennale in 2008 and has become a classic of archival art.

SOUTHERN SAMI
(seriously endangered)

...Our ancestors withstood cruel
aggression in old days.



Susan Hiller's "The Last Silent Movie," (2007). Documentation by Guy L'Heureux.

Source: Cheyanne Turions



The artist Akram Zaatari is one of the founders of the Arab Image Foundation, which is in essence an example of an institutional foundation for working with microhistory, oral history, and the history of everyday life. We said above that institutionalization is more often the privilege of monumental memory – yet the proponents of the inductive, pinpoint approach to working with the past (and to archiving the present, which will become the past) have institutions of their own. The Arab Image Foundation is based in Beirut; its work is devoted to preserving testimonies and private stories of people from North Africa and the Arab diaspora worldwide.

One of Zaatari's artistic projects is the archive of the photographer Hashem el Madani, who worked in Saida from the 1940s

onward. In the photographer's lens: the events of everyday life, weddings, family portraits – in short, everything that looks "insignificant" to the builders of monumental history. But Zaatari shows the opposite (following the inductive logic we described above in the example of Carlo Ginzburg's classic study): heritage can take many forms, including the form of small testimonies about urban topography, about what cars looked like, what people's everyday clothes were like in the past, how people interacted with one another.

Upon meeting Hashem el Madani, the artist saw the immense value of his photographic archive and, with the author's consent, gave these photographs a new life, joining them with witnesses' accounts and the distinctive poetics of the video essay.



Hashem el Madani, Itinerary – Abdel-Ghani el-Attal next to his grocery shop in Haret el Keshek, Saïda, 1949, 2008. © the artist. Courtesy Hashem el Madani and Arab Image Foundation, Beirut



Another important example of how an artistic archive can work is the practice of Emily Jacir, who researches and preserves the stories of forcibly displaced people – exiles who have lost their homes. Her best-known work is *Where We Come From*, a project from 2001–2003 and one of the classic examples of documentary storytelling in contemporary art. The project's framework is simple and conceptually sharp. The artist approached people who had been forced to leave their homes in Palestine and asked them what they would want to do if they could return – one dreamed of seeing their old house, another wanted to deliver a letter that had never arrived, another simply to drink coffee at a favorite café. But none of these people could go home, and so the artist carried out their wishes herself – delivering the letter, or drinking that one very specific cup of coffee.

Unable to give these people their homes back, Jacir saw documentary and artistic value in their thoughts of home. Assembling an entire archive of small everyday acts that had become unattainable – and all the more longed-for – for the displaced, the artist recognized the value of these wishes for the archive, singled them out among all others, and made the decision that they had to be preserved.

Thus, in assembling an archive, we endow its contents with categories of value – by working with certain testimonies, with information or objects, we grant them importance. In this choice of what to archive lies the power of the archivist, for it is the archivist who decides what image the present will have in the future.

*Text by Catherine Chernova
2026*



Emily Jacir, Where We Come From, 2001-2003 detail (Omayma). American passport, 30 texts, 32 c-prints and 1 video. Photo: John Sherman. © Emily Jacir, courtesy Alexander and Bonin, New York

¹² There are dedicated studies on this subject: Kristina Kleutghen. *Imperial Illusions: Crossing Pictorial Boundaries in the Qing Palaces*. University of Washington Press, 2015. Partha Mitter. *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India, 1850-1922: Occidental Orientations*. Cambridge University Press, 1994.

¹³ The advent of sound cinema in its day proved a tragedy and a career-ending blow for many silent-film actors – those unable to adapt and learn to work with their voices (this image underlies the plot of the 2011 film *The Artist*). A similarly dramatic oblivion can befall entire linguistic cultures – and that is precisely what Susan Hiller's work demonstrates.

THE ART OF MEMORY

In this section of the zine we have gathered works by artists and architects who engage with Dushanbe's culture of memory – with their own personal recollections and with urban legends.

Published here are works by the women of Sano Collective, alongside works by invited authors – architect Oyat Shukurov, artist Semen Moldaver, and photographer Firdavs Sharifov.



SHAIMA GULBEKOVA

Artist, architect, jeweler. Works with themes of nostalgia, personal and collective memory.



“THE ASHTRAY HOUSE”

2026. Model

This remarkable building holds private stories, episodes from the past, dreams. City residents have a long-standing tradition of arranging to meet here.

The artist assembles the image of this panoramic building as a dreamy vista from a past life: in her youth she dreamed of buying an apartment there and stepping out onto the balcony in the evenings to smoke an unhurried cigarette. Years later, the building has become the emblem of a memory of a future that never happened – and, most likely, never will.

32 Rudaki Avenue

38.56908, 68.7925

“WINDOW INTO THE PAST”

[window frame, glass, curtains] // 38.59243, 68.79011

2026

A window removed from the utilitarian structure of a house is transformed into a symbolic image of memory. It becomes a portal into the past, into childhood - through the grandfather's gaze, through his habit of watching passersby from the window.

“A HOUSE IN THE HEAVENS”

2025 [photograph in the exhibition Home Sweet Home]

// 38.59248, 68.7901

The house was built by my great-grandfather, and several generations grew up here. It was a place full of hospitality and warmth, where art and science crossed paths. Stepping into the courtyard, you instantly felt the coolness of the trees and greenery. The walls were covered in ivy, grapevines hung overhead, and a majestic mulberry tree stood in the middle of the courtyard.

But in a single moment all of it sank into oblivion, as if none of it had ever existed, as if the memories had simply been erased...

This little plaque is the last surviving piece of the house – it warms my heart and carries me back to the place I come from.



NASIBA KARIMOVA

artist

NARGIS ABDULNAZAROVA

radio host, journalist, amateur
photographer

ZARINA FATULLAEVA

artist



“THE OLD MAN AND THE SHE-BEAR”

2026 [wood, fabric, LED garlands]

This work reflects a true story about a man named Talabsho, who sheltered a she-bear and appeared everywhere in her company. This extraordinary image, almost like a mirage, became an unofficial symbol of the city and is now immortalized as a constellation, as if Talabsho and the she-bear Masha continue their walk.





OYAT SHUKUROV

– an architectural and artistic practitioner. Shaped by his experience in Moscow, Dushanbe and London, his practice operates at the intersection of architecture, interior design, landscape, architectural representation and research-led spatial projects. At the centre of his work are concepts of memory, the image of a place and architecture as a form of narrative.

[texts and images are provided by the author]

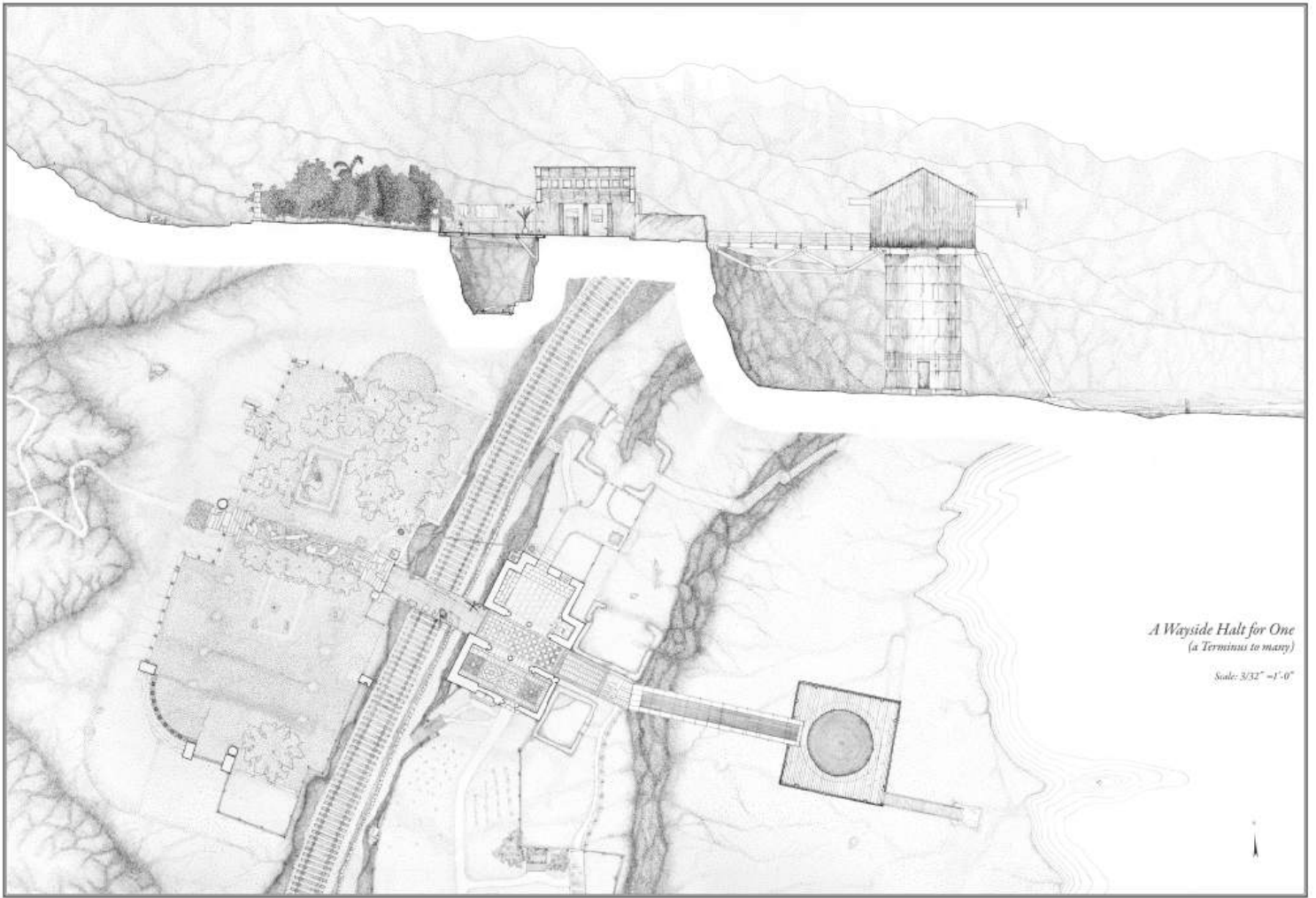


I.

This work is an attempt at existentialist architectural speculation. Architecture is not merely an art of building, but an art of life — an art of organising time within space, and space within time. The space shown in the plan and the semi-perspective section is a product of imagination. Time here is uncertain and depends upon the visitor. As in life, it is not entirely clear how one arrives. Some spend only minutes here, and some millennia, as in a very deep dream. Equally unpredictable is the manner of departure.

The drawing imagines an inland rural railway halt set among mountains beside a reservoir. The ensemble is composed of a garden, a plateau with a small station building, and a silo by the water's edge. In the garden, one can make out the remains of a teahouse, a two-screen cinema, and a stone mosaic panel dedicated to an old musical style.





A Wayside Halt for One
(a Terminus to many)

Scale: 3/32" = 1'-0"

II.

I had been walking for quite some time. The sun had already slipped behind the hills at my back, and there was not much time left before nightfall. The land sloped downward ahead of me. On the horizon, a flat expanse caught the last light of the sky. I took it for a reservoir. Most likely, I would be able to spend the night somewhere on its shore.

I followed the path, and with every step it grew clearer. This was encouraging. Soon a dark band opened up between the nearest slope and the pale surface on the horizon. It looked suspiciously like trees. A few minutes later, not far ahead, I noticed a small trembling light with a reddish tint. When I came closer, I saw a small candle inside a red glass cylinder, sheltered from the wind. Had someone really left it here? I felt encouraged and uneasy at the same time.





III.

So there was a grove ahead after all, and beyond it a plateau with several buildings whose outlines I could barely make out. A dim light spilled from the nearest one. The water on the horizon had almost disappeared from view. I descended towards the grove. Along its edge lay large pale blocks of marble, like bones. To the right, the grove thinned out noticeably; further off, I could make out several ruined structures.

Roughly where I had come down, a solitary column stood. It had clearly been plastered many times. Its surface had sagged and softened, and the whole thing looked slightly awkward. It stood at the edge of a small platform, also paved with pale stone, probably marble. The pieces varied in shape and size, yet fitted together rather well; it was skilful work. From this platform the path continued under the trees, towards the building from which the dim light was coming.



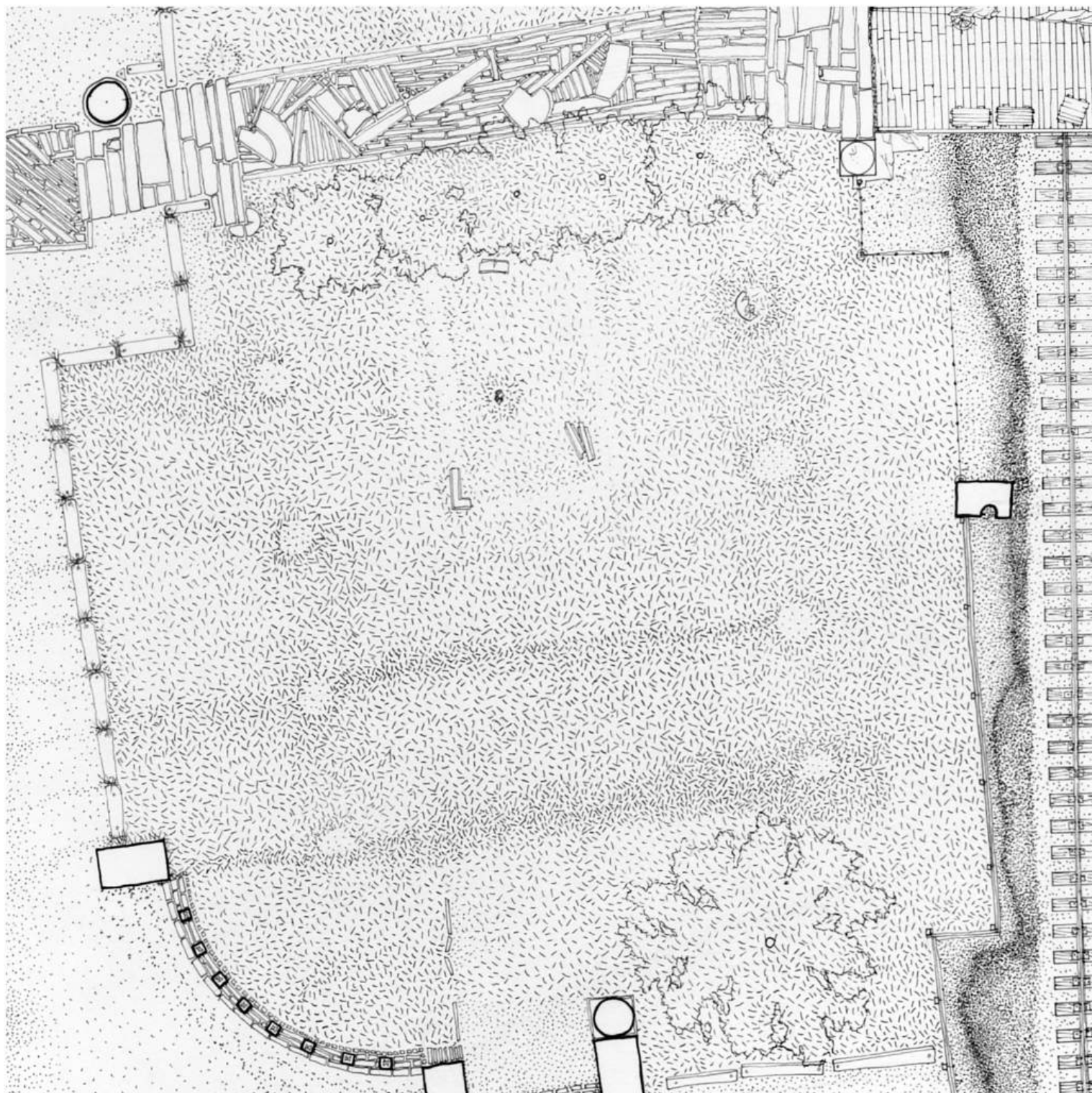


IV.

I took a few steps and saw, to the right of the path, a broken round stone, as if it were a fragment of a column. It interested me. For some reason I did not understand, I felt no anxiety at all. I knew there was no one here.

I went on. The light from the building barely reached the path, but my eyes had already grown used to the dark. The stone gave way to a creaking plank. There was a smell of fried onions and creosote. I nearly stumbled; stone lay underfoot again, but this time it was much more even. To the left and right there were walls, with openings in them and columns set in the middle. I could not tell where the light was coming from, but the space around me was lit. Beyond the point where the walls ended, however, everything was pitch black. I thought this was quite logical.



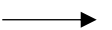


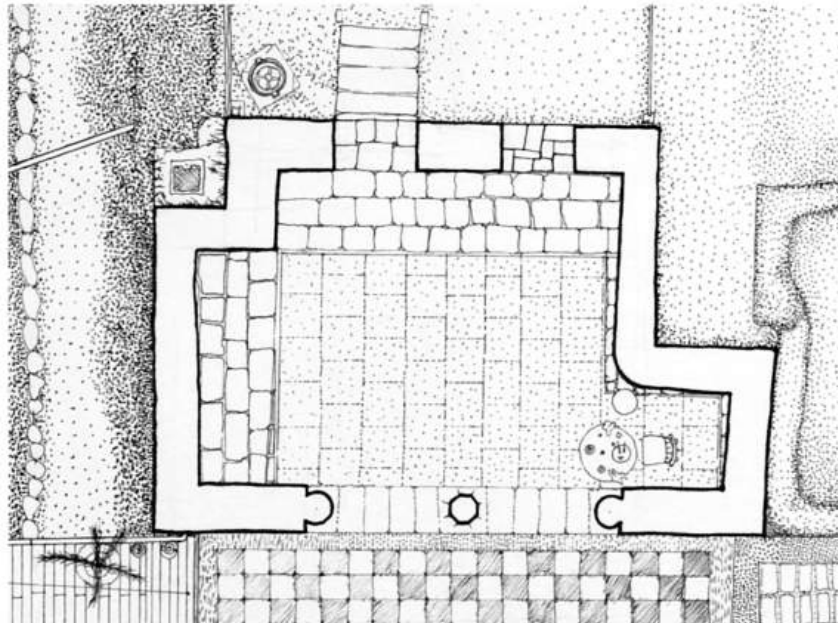
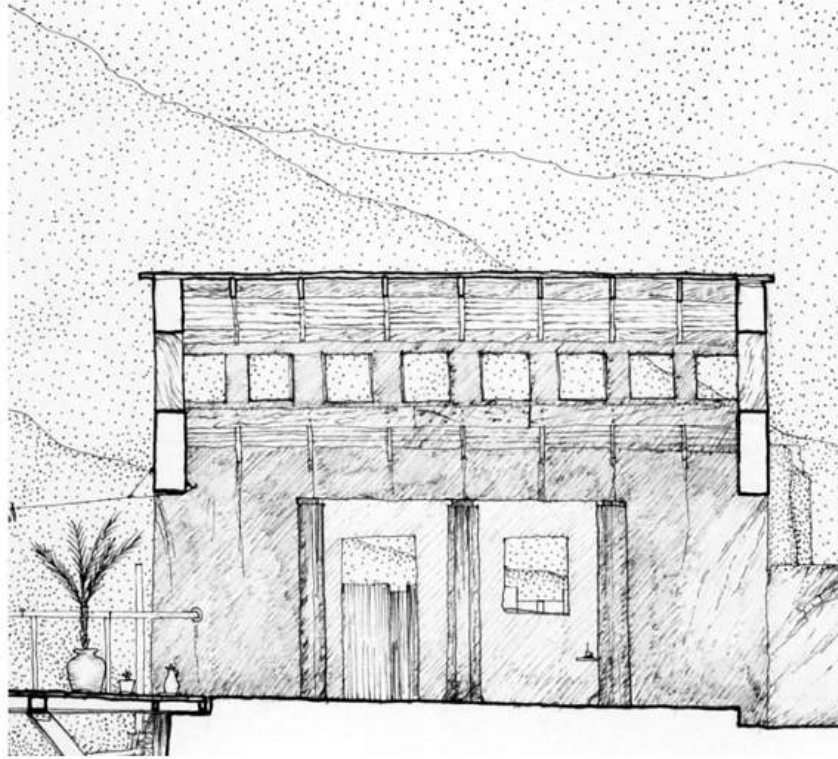
V.

Morning. The sun is shining. I can hear the sound of a light aircraft. I am sitting and eating fried eggs with tomatoes, walnuts, and bread. A cup of black instant coffee stands before me on a round table of dark brown wood. The coffee is not bad. There is a good cotton napkin. Old, but clean. Heavy silver cutlery, though it has not been polished for a long time.

To my left there is an opening with a column in the middle, and two pilasters on either side. A short corridor, with the same arrangement at the other side. When I finish eating, I light a filtered cigarette. There is an ashtray here too. Large, crystal.

Birds are chirping. At the end of the corridor I can see a small wooden bridge and a little garden. On the table there is also a beautiful green stone. It has veins of gold. I do not want to touch it, but it is very interesting to look at. I put out the cigarette in the crystal ashtray. Smoke gets into my eyes; it stings a little.

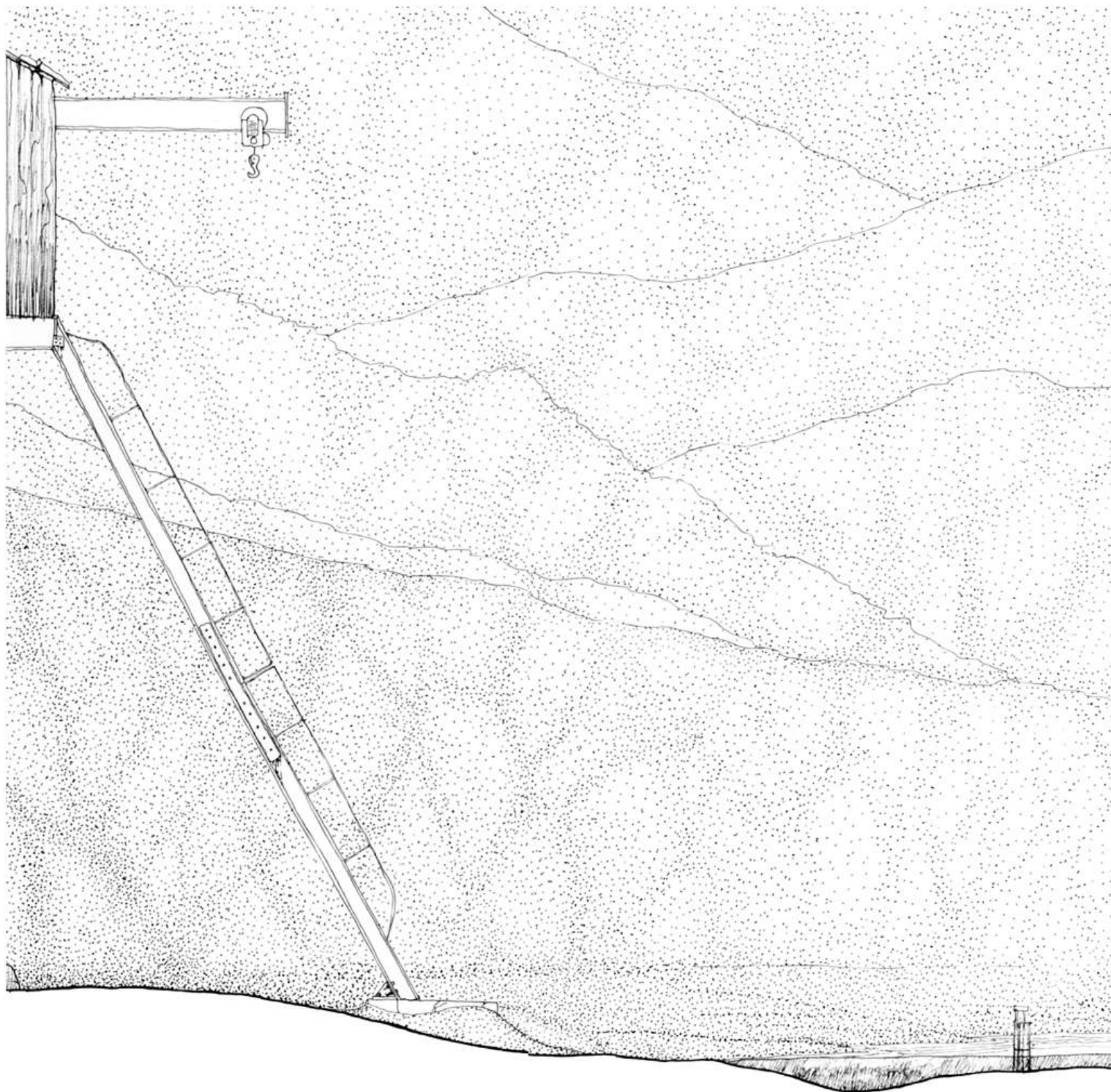




VI.

Evening dusk. I had been rowing for quite some time. Ahead, on the shore, I could make out a silo tower...







SEMEN MOLDAVER

– architect and graphic artist, born in Dushanbe, graduate of the Architecture Faculty of the Tajik Polytechnic Institute. Son of the journalist Vladimir Moldaver and the archaeologist Erkinoi Gulyamova. Semen Moldaver left Dushanbe in 1990, but carefully keeps his memories of his hometown and transfers them into finely detailed monochrome drawings.

“In every city I have had the chance to visit, I involuntarily look for a resemblance to my own city – and I find it, now in Lisbon, now in Khabarovsk. Before my eyes float buildings with lancet arches, Stalin-era apartment blocks with Oriental motifs – some of them no longer standing – and the endless central avenue with its boulevard and its camouflage of sunlit and shaded patches”.

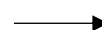


"The pictures make no claim to accuracy or precision in their details. I wanted to convey the atmosphere, the 'observations of light and shadow'; to some extent these are drawings from memory – though, I confess, I did use photographs."

*[матнҳо аз ҷониби муаллиф
пешниҳод шудаанд; тарҷумаи
ҳайати таҳрир]*

From the album
“Where We Are Not
(Khurramabad)”

A dedication to the city that lives
on in the artist's memories.





“Openings, Gaps, and Torn Sails”

Location: residential building on the corner of Rudaki Avenue (formerly Lenin Avenue) and Shotemur Street (formerly Kommunisticheskaya Street); since demolished

The central avenue – if you rode it north to south, from Ayni Park toward the railway station on the number 1 trolleybus – began to take on the look of a capital roughly six stops in, somewhere around the Medical Institute. Before that, the buildings were unassuming, low-rise, and loosely scattered, with occasional ensembles like the Agricultural Institute with its Rudaki monument, and with numerous gaps opening views onto the Hissar Range. From about the Medical Institute onward, the sidewalks grew wider, buildings appeared with columns, arches, and porticoes – like the 8 March cinema or the Pedagogical Institute. Everything built toward a crescendo until the central avenue crossed Kommunisticheskaya Street. After that, all the way to the central square – which bore the same name as the avenue – there was one more large gap in the streetscape: the city park, with the Farogat teahouse standing deep inside it and a shashlik joint that provoked outright rejection with its unjustifiably high prices and its clientele, made up mostly of out-of-towners who had decided to live it up in the capital without quite having the means. The whole park was a kind of shrunken copy of itself, with a minimal set of attractions – rowboats and carousels – and a wide main alley that ran into the back of the Officers' House, where they occasionally showed films like Mikhail Romm's *And Still I Believe* and held concerts by the Dobry Molodtsy vocal-instrumental ensemble, who had drifted into the mountain republic, nobody quite knew how. The park ended at the central square, after which the central avenue was transformed, becoming a boulevard with several rows of plane trees. People called this central alley the "Pyatak"; it was where the hip young crowd usually hung out. But that deserves a story of its own someday – too vast a subject.

Opposite the park, stretching nearly the length of a whole trolleybus stop from TsUM (the Central Department Store) to the Jami cinema, stood an ensemble of three-story residential buildings with wrought-iron gates and semicircular arches uncharacteristic of Dushanbe. The arches were slightly recessed and richly decorated; the capitals, distantly reminiscent of Corinthian ones, were vertically flattened yet still elegant. The ensemble consisted of three buildings with shops on the ground floor; the gaps between them were filled by wrought-iron gates rising almost the full height of the buildings. At the very end of the row, toward the center, there was a gap occupied by a summer café under awnings, known among the people as the "Torn Sails." I loved the combination of richly decorated ensemble architecture on one side of the street and its complete absence on the other. It seemed those buildings had stood there forever, like the trees and the mountains. Later I learned that the complex had been designed by Nikolai Baranov, the chief architect of Leningrad.



Kucha ("Street" in Tajik)

This is the most ordinary Dushanbe street. There were many like it in Dushanbe – Kirov Street (now Husseinzoda), Ordzhonikidze (now Bokhtar), Pushkin, Kommunalnaya (now Rahimi Jalili), Ostrovsky (now Khusrav Dehlavi), where I lived for several years.

Two-story Stalin-era buildings with enclosed loggias, wonderful floor plans (as I now understand), and high ceilings formed the frontage of the city center's block development. The trees softened the ugliness of the air conditioners, the mismatch of window grilles and frames. The shadows made impressionist patches that at night took on a mysterious Gothic tinge.

You could step into a courtyard, sit on a bench with friends and drink some port wine – or go behind the garages and drink it there, so as not to provoke the grandmothers on the bench by the entrance. Or you could skip all that and wander aimlessly, peering into back alleys and passageways, discovering the manifestations of other people's lives in the form of overheard conversations and glimpsed pantomimes. But mostly, the life of the provincial capital flowed, relaxed and unhurried, right there in the streets. I mentioned in the album's opening post that I find a resemblance to this city everywhere I have managed to go. Which is probably why I was never drawn to the landmarks and iconic buildings worn out by so many gazes, photographs, and news reports – everything sayable about them said long ago. What still pulls me in are the ordinary streets and the shabby buildings which, if you look closely, can tell you a heap of stories.



The Gastronom by the Opera House

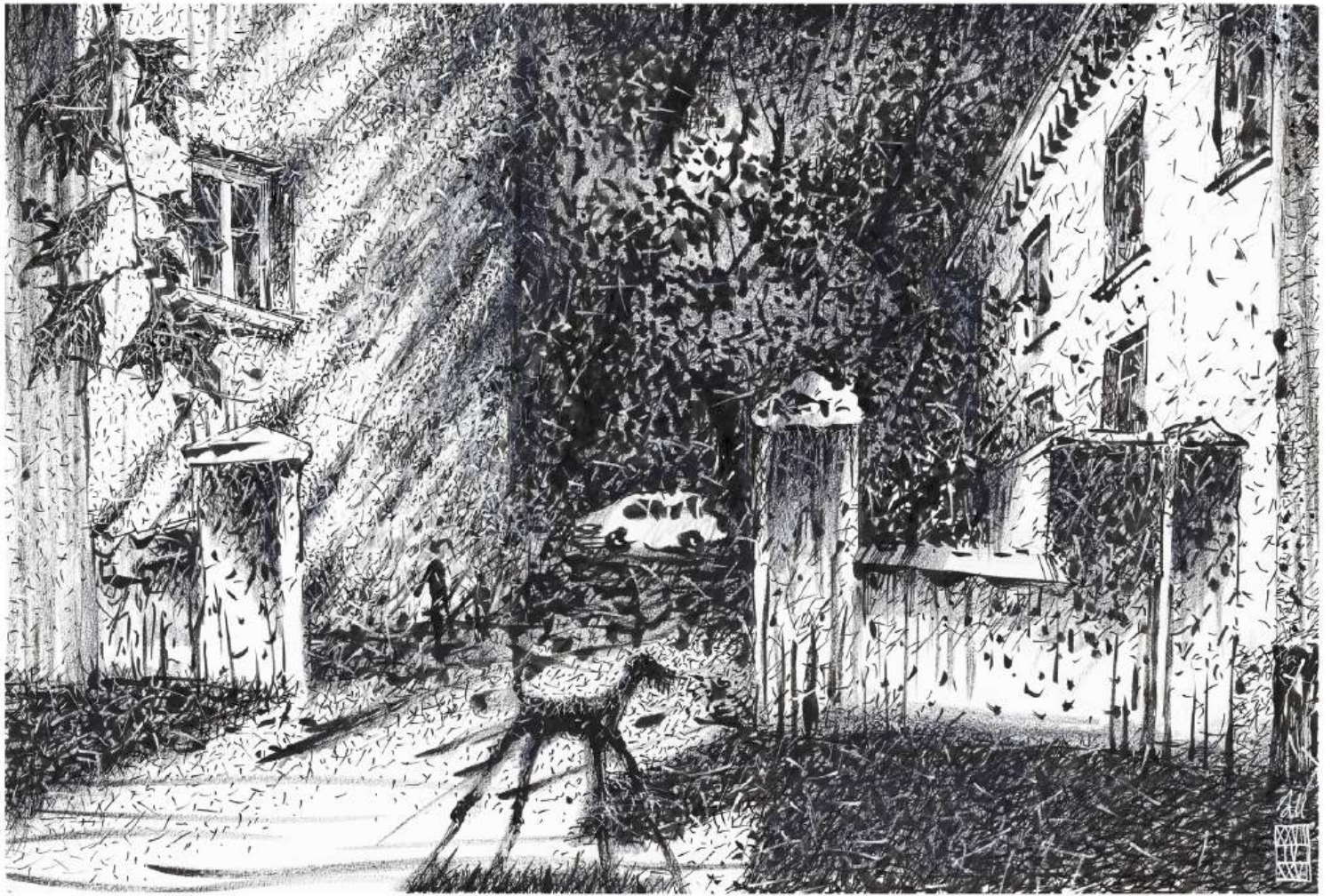
Location: residential building on the corner of Rudaki Avenue and the Square of the 800th Anniversary of Moscow (30 Rudaki Avenue)

Old Dushanbe natives called Gastronom No. 1 – the city's flagship grocery – by the name of its first director, the Great Patriotic War veteran Boris Ivanovich. That is literally how people spoke: "I bought the sausage at Boris Ivanovich's." Boris Ivanovich Vanshtein became famous through his successful directorship of the Gastronom from 1950 to 1972. He proved himself, as we would say today, a brilliant top manager – but in the end he was sent to prison for some kind of fraud. And for a long time afterward the shop was still called "Boris Ivanovich's Store"...

...Rumor had it that it wasn't fraud he went down for, but for the neon Stars of David – the mogendovids – with which he had ordered the Gastronom sign decorated..

The Gastronom truly was a cult institution. The wine section didn't exactly stagger the imagination, but it always pleased the eye in anticipation of the pleasant agonies of choice. On the ground floor of this building lived good friends of mine – for a while even relatives – at whose window people often knocked to ask if they could borrow a glass.

I have written before about that special, tipsy view of the city and of life as a whole – one that adorned both existence and consciousness, and gave rise to a cult of drinking local spirits in various places. In part it resembled a cult of wind and current – we forded the currents of alcohol, swimming into the wind of change. The Gastronom by the opera house was something like a temple where the objects of the cult were acquired.



Entrance to a Courtyard

Location: residential building on the corner of Ayni Street and A. Adhamov Street (formerly Popov Street); the courtyard adjoined the Institute of Economics; the building has since been demolished

My notion of beauty has changed many times over a lifetime, at moments diametrically – and I think that is only natural. It would be foolish and strange if one's convictions and tastes remained unchanged against the backdrop of the inevitable, logical changes in the life around us. To me that would speak of stubbornness, of an unwillingness to see things as they are.

These days I consider beautiful anything that is interesting to draw, including stains on a table and splashes on a sidewalk. That goes for architecture too. And yet, for some reason, images from Dushanbe life in the early eighties keep coming back to me. I was living between two homes then; one of them was on Ostrovsky Street, across from the Green Bazaar. In the evenings I would often walk home after seeing friends, along Kirov, Istaravshan, Kuibyshev, Ordzhonikidze, Bofanda Streets...

Low plastered fences, sagging with age, abutted the ends of the buildings, with square support pillars at their centers, each crowned with a small pyramid. Originally, it seems, there had been doors or gates between the pillars, but by the early eighties none of that remained – the walkway, or sometimes the driveway, into the courtyard stood open. The courtyards lived a life of their own: someone playing guitar; unhurried conversations flowing over backgammon or chess on the raised wooden platforms beneath the grapevines; flowerbeds and vegetable patches being watered from hoses; the smell of wet dust and coolness.

With very few exceptions, the architecture was background architecture – unassuming two- and three-story buildings, almost without stucco moldings, with simple dentils along the cornice and modest ornament. They were transfigured by the wear and shabbiness of the plaster, by the dust in the recesses; the plain façades came alive and began to breathe. On summer evenings the houses and fences, drenched in moonlight, and the camouflage-blurred shadows of the trees created a magical atmosphere. The days, the evenings, the months seemed endless – and were.

In those years, the entire architectural environment of Dushanbe seemed to me familiar, faceless, and dreary. There was a feeling that all of it would stand for at least another hundred years unchanged, except for the inevitable decay. So there was no desire and no impulse to sketch anything, with very rare exceptions. To grasp the beauty contained in those places and in that time – a beauty not visible to everyone – I had to go very far away, for a very long time.



There Are Always Two of Them

Location: residential building on the corner of Ayni Street and Ahmadi Donish Street

What some see, and what others see.

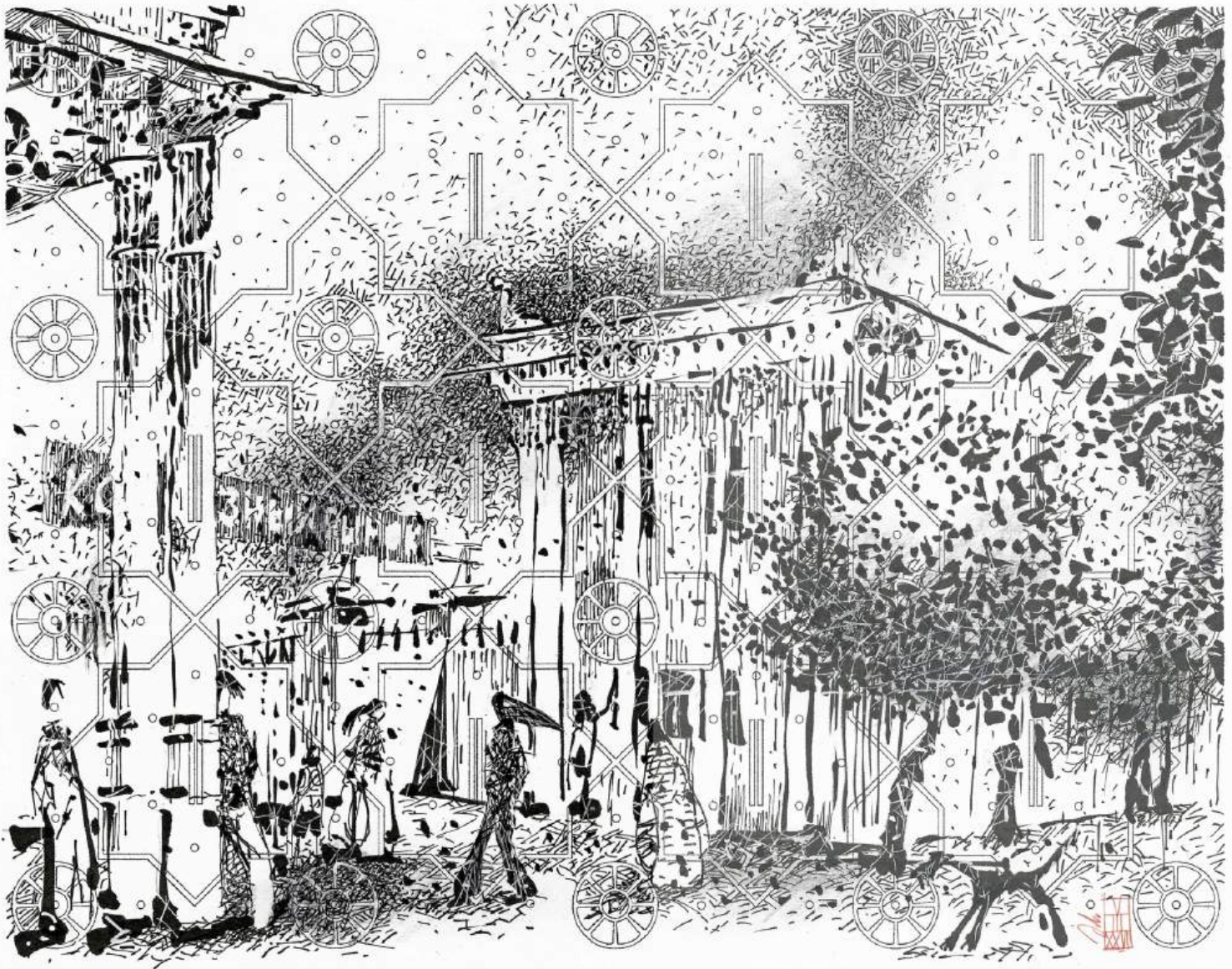
Some say: O my city! Crushed beneath high-rise new builds, stripped of the coziness of its shady lanes and courtyards, its old buildings pulled out like teeth – and in their place, hideous, hypertrophied fillings and implants of new construction hung with garlands of decoration, senseless and merciless, that grate on the eye! A city of dust storms, of water and power cuts, suffocating under the mass of newcomers.

Others say: O my city! Bright, alive, and warm, despite all the architectural amputations and implants. With its rare – and all the more precious for it – worthy new buildings. With its surviving network of one-story lanes climbing the hills two steps from the center, with the familiar arcade of plane trees along the central alley, with its heap of transformed and brand-new parks and flowerbeds, cafés and restaurants, with its wonderful-looking young people, and with the smell of fresh flatbread from the tandoor that never fails to drive you out of your mind.

Most likely both are right. But I find the second sort more endearing somehow – even though there are far fewer of them.

From the album “Scenes from the Life of Contemporary Khuttal”

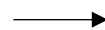
Graphic compositions based on old photographs of Dushanbe are drawn over ornamental underlays which the artist, architect, friend, and teacher of the author, Vladimir Bazhutin, made from reconstructions of the carved alabaster panels of the ancient settlements of Hulbuk and Sayod. Excavations of these monuments of the medieval state of Khuttal were led for many years by the author's mother, the archaeologist Erkinoi Gulyamova.



Entrance to the Green Bazaar

Composition after a photograph by Bakhtiyor Sharipov.

Location: the Green Bazaar, Lahuti Street between Nos. 8 and 16; since demolished.



An architect I know, B., was fascinated by Sufism. He detected Sufi influences everywhere, and quotations from Rumi and Khayyam turned up in his speech more often than the word *blya* – that staple of any architect's vocabulary. Somehow – most likely through me – he came across the reconstructions of Hulbuk's carved alabaster panels and instantly discovered Sufi roots in them. (For those not in the know: Hulbuk is a monument of the 9th–11th centuries, the capital of ancient Khuttal – also known as Khuttalyan, also known as Khatlon – in southern Tajikistan. My mother, Erkinoi Gulyamova, spent many years excavating it; there is a separate album about this on my Facebook page.)

In those years B. was an in-demand Moscow architect, and he immediately instructed his draftsman to render some of the ornaments in vector graphics. The result was an album of twelve duplicated ornamental sheets (plates), which B. printed, called a coloring book, and furnished with a preface. I won't quote the whole preface; here is a short excerpt:

"In the book presented for your attention, the role of information carrier is performed by ornaments, presented in the form of twelve plates... ..Since the plates are present in two copies, they must be colored in diametrically opposed states: depression, and a positive surge of emotion. The two pictures of your mood, placed within the structure of the ornament, together reveal not an emotional plane but a cosmic one, related more to the aquatic element of the human being than to matter. Having colored the two identical plates, you have obtained two antipodes, two essences. Placed side by side on the wall, these plates will show, by their union, your womb-state, or zero point of reference. Bon voyage..."

B. gave me one copy as a gift. I leafed through it and promptly forgot about it – but recently, while digging through heaps of old crap, I found it in perfect, pristine condition. The ornaments are printed on good heavy paper that it would be a sin not to ruin. The ready-made ornamental underlay helped me overcome the fear of the blank page. As for subject matter, I decided to take whatever about Dushanbe first caught my eye. The first thing that did was a charming photograph of the entrance to the Green Bazaar on Bakhtiyor Sharipov's page. I immediately transferred it onto an ornament that seemed to me suitable, slightly changing the angle, removing the vintage cars, and adding some staffage in the form of hippie-ish characters in the foreground.

In this way I partially fulfilled architect B.'s design, coloring the ornament in black and white. The antipodes, admittedly, didn't quite work out – but time will tell. The album's title may not be entirely correct geographically; I have no idea whether the territory on which Dushanbe stands was ever part of Khuttal. But for reasons I don't yet understand, I would very much like it to have been.



The Aeroflot Ticket Office

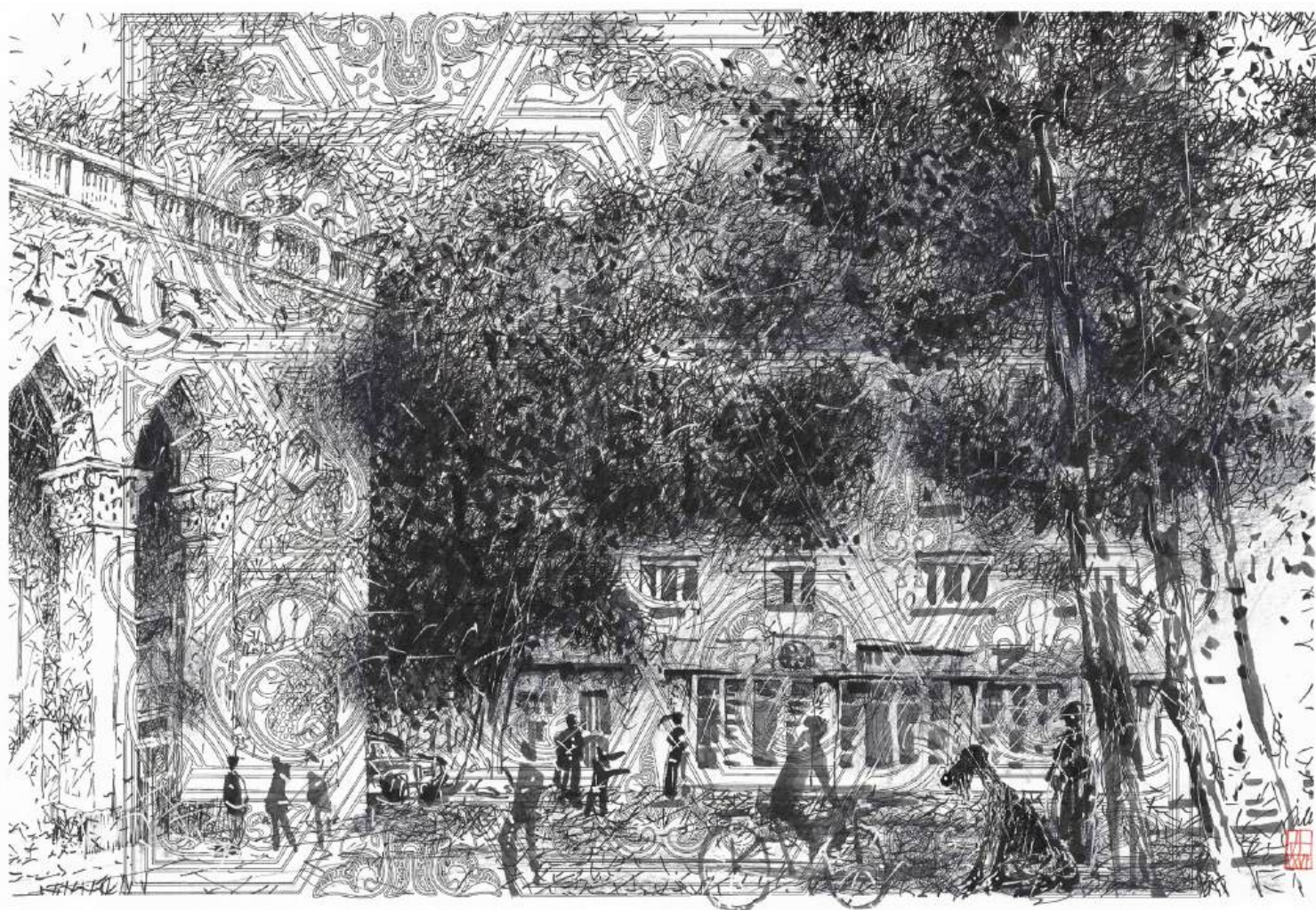
After a photograph from the archive of Zoya Khalturina (Photographs of old Dushanbe, 1951. Photo / Vitaly Khalturin).

Location: now the Turkish Embassy; corner of Rudaki Avenue (formerly Lenin Avenue) and Valamatzoda Street (formerly Mazayev Street)

This building on the corner of Lenin Avenue and Mazayev Street is best described in a comment left under one of my old pictures:

"In front of it stood plaster sculptures of a pilot and a woman parachutist – as if they had stepped out of a painting by Deineka or Samokhvalov. I walked past them to school every day. In the eighties, Muscovites in town for a conference froze before them in joyful rapture – masterpieces like these had barely survived in the metropole. That was when I, too, looked at 'the uncle and the auntie' with new eyes."

The uncle and the auntie were taken away long ago, but the building still stands – it now houses the Turkish Embassy. The former Mazayev Street, though, has been shaved bald: all the trees have vanished somewhere.



Fragment of the Façade of the Vatan Cinema

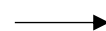
Composition after a photograph found online; I could not identify the author.

Location: Vatan Cinema, 11 Rudaki Avenue

Only on the fifth sheet of this series did I notice that all the buildings jut out in pieces against lush vegetation, or end up as fragments peeking from behind the trees. Not one building fits onto the sheet whole; every façade is depicted only in part.

In Dushanbe, for most of the year, that is exactly how things were. Thanks to the riotous greenery, trees occupied no less than half of the notional picture plane, which shifted constantly as you moved. Of the remaining half, roughly a quarter went to the sky and the mountains, and about ten percent to the horizontal planes of roads and sidewalks, perceived in foreshortening. The remaining fifteen percent or so fell to the façades. I am not speaking now of a frontal view of one of the architectural ensembles of the time – I mean perception in motion. The streets have remained in my memory as something "billowing," where trees dissolve into shadows, and shadows into the planes of buildings and their ornaments, so that without squinting you cannot make out what is where. Something like an Irish stew of classicist and modernist façade fragments floating in abundant greenery and contrasting shadows. In winter, when the leaves were gone, branches and their shadows turned the façades into a curvilinear puzzle, interrupted by the cylinders of tree trunks and their relatively orthogonal shadows. But in winter the sky and the light were muted, and the façades in those days were painted in pastel tones, so all of that, too, somehow merged and ran together, blurring the boundaries. Such an effect is hard to convey in monochrome drawing – which is why, intuitively, almost all the pictures from that first Dushanbe life come out belonging to summer, or at least to the "leafy" season.

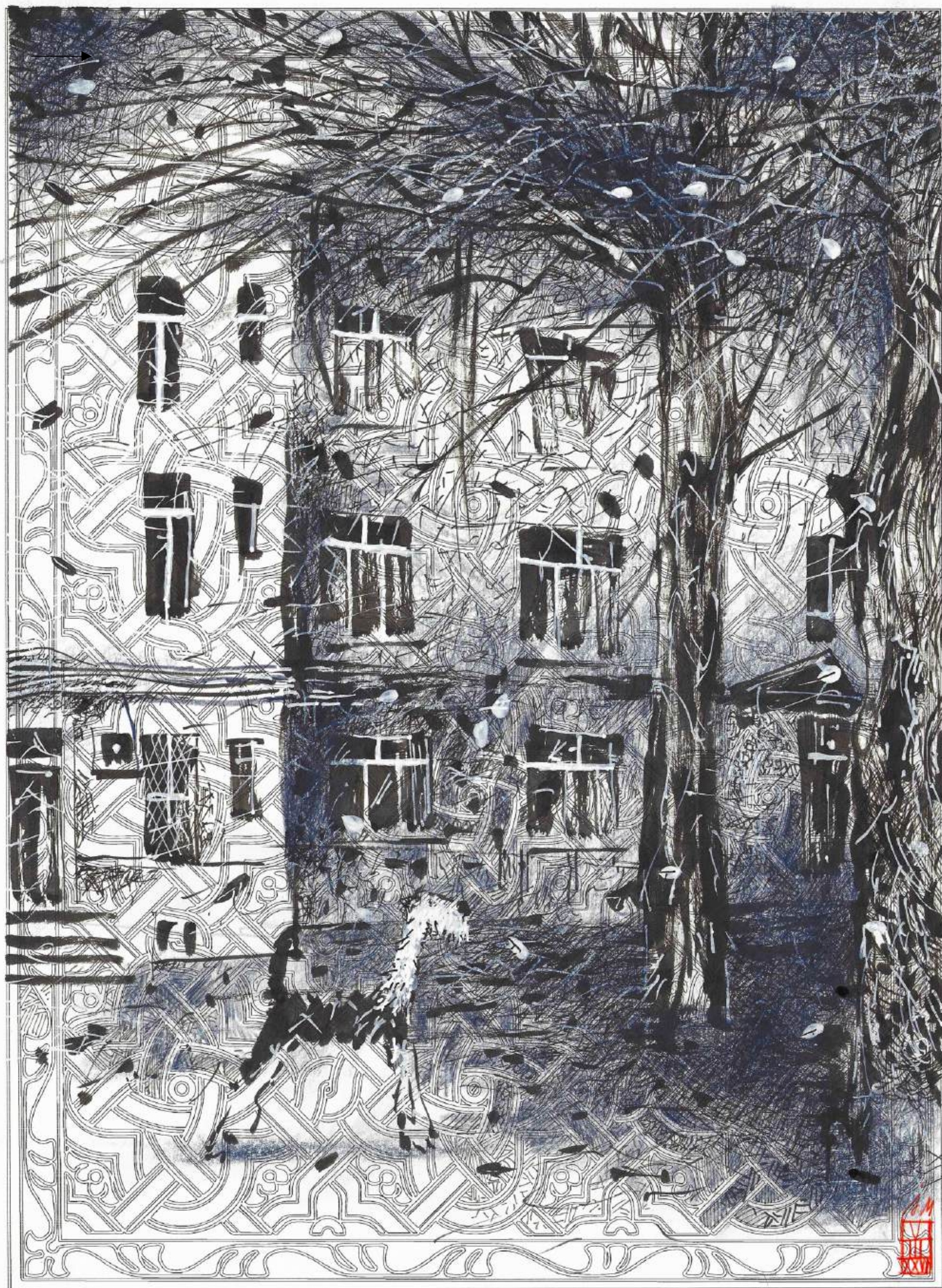
The pieces of the cinema and of the neighboring building – whose ground floor housed the Lola café – present a picture typical of the era: the peaceful coexistence of Oriental eclecticism and the dry modernism of the sixties.



A Courtyard in Dushanbe

Composition after a photograph by Nodira Isoeva on Instagram.

Location: residential building at 35 Rudaki Avenue



FIRDAVS SHARIFOV

A cartographer by training, he worked for a construction company in Dushanbe and took part in the construction of the Vatan Building, buildings on Ayni Street, and the Malika Sabirova School.

He has been seriously engaged in photography since 2020. A Dushanbe native, he knows and understands the city, observes its transformation, and documents the Dushanbe aesthetic in his photographs. Firdavs pays particular attention to cinematic urban landscapes, to the search for unusual angles and color combinations that reveal something new, poetic, and curious along familiar routes. His lens often captures the city's older architecture – cozy, human-scaled buildings with elements of handmade decoration. Turning to the housing blocks of new Dushanbe as well, he finds visually intriguing details in the everyday urban landscape.

"It seems to me that this kind of architecture creates a more comfortable urban environment. Walking along such streets, you feel yourself part of the space. Contemporary high-rise development solves its own problems, but it often makes an entirely different impression and doesn't give you that feeling of coziness the old neighborhoods have."

[photos provided by the author]

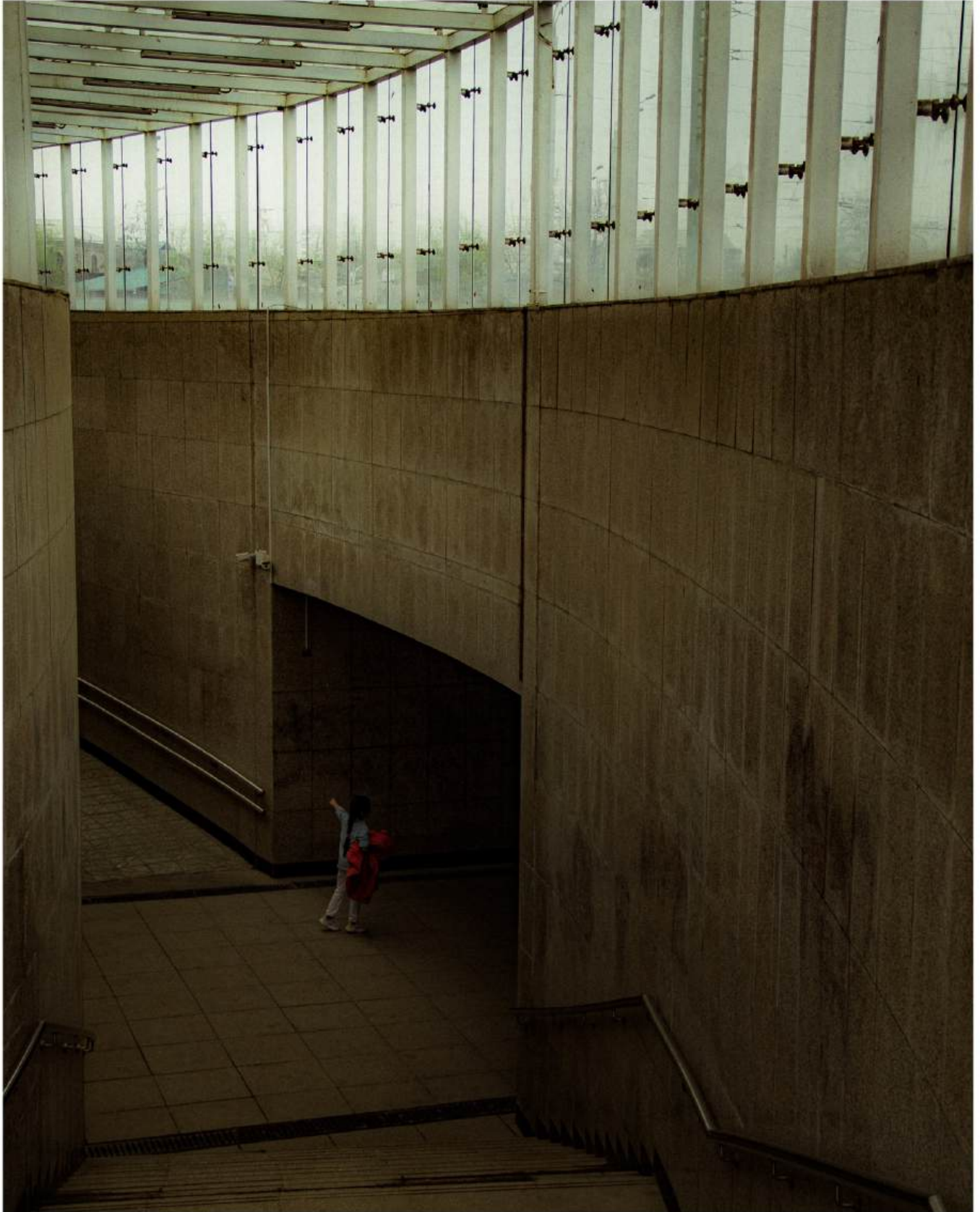




Silhouette of a Lonely Man
| Underpass near Qariyai Bolo



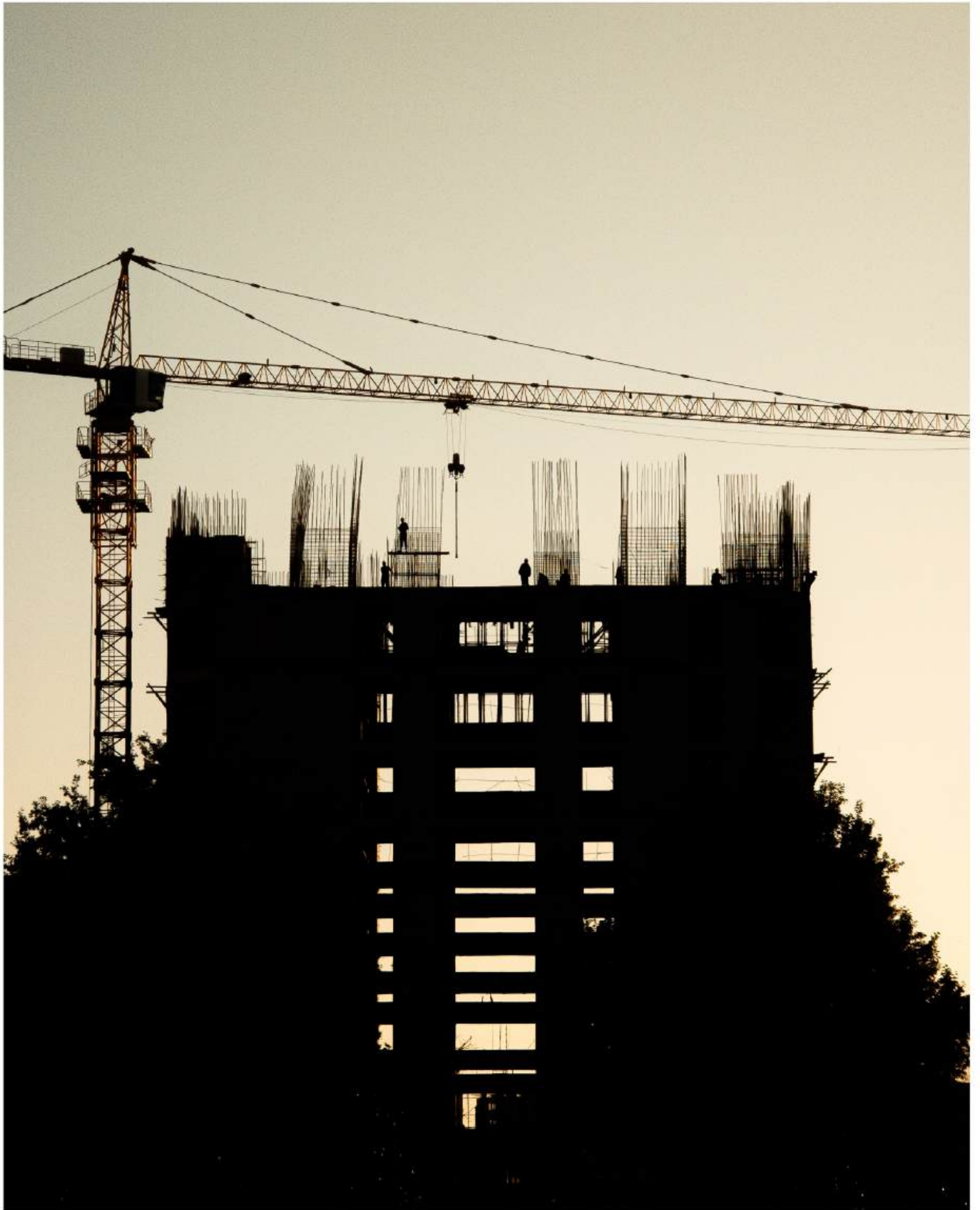
Tidings of Spring
| M34 Highway, at the intersection with I. Somoni Avenue



A Girl Has Found Her Way Out of the Underground Labyrinths
| Pamir Highway underpass near Qariyai Bolo



Childhood Among the New Builds
| 16a Nusratullo Makhsum Avenue



Sunset of the Old City
| Jalol Ikromi Street, view from Dusti Square



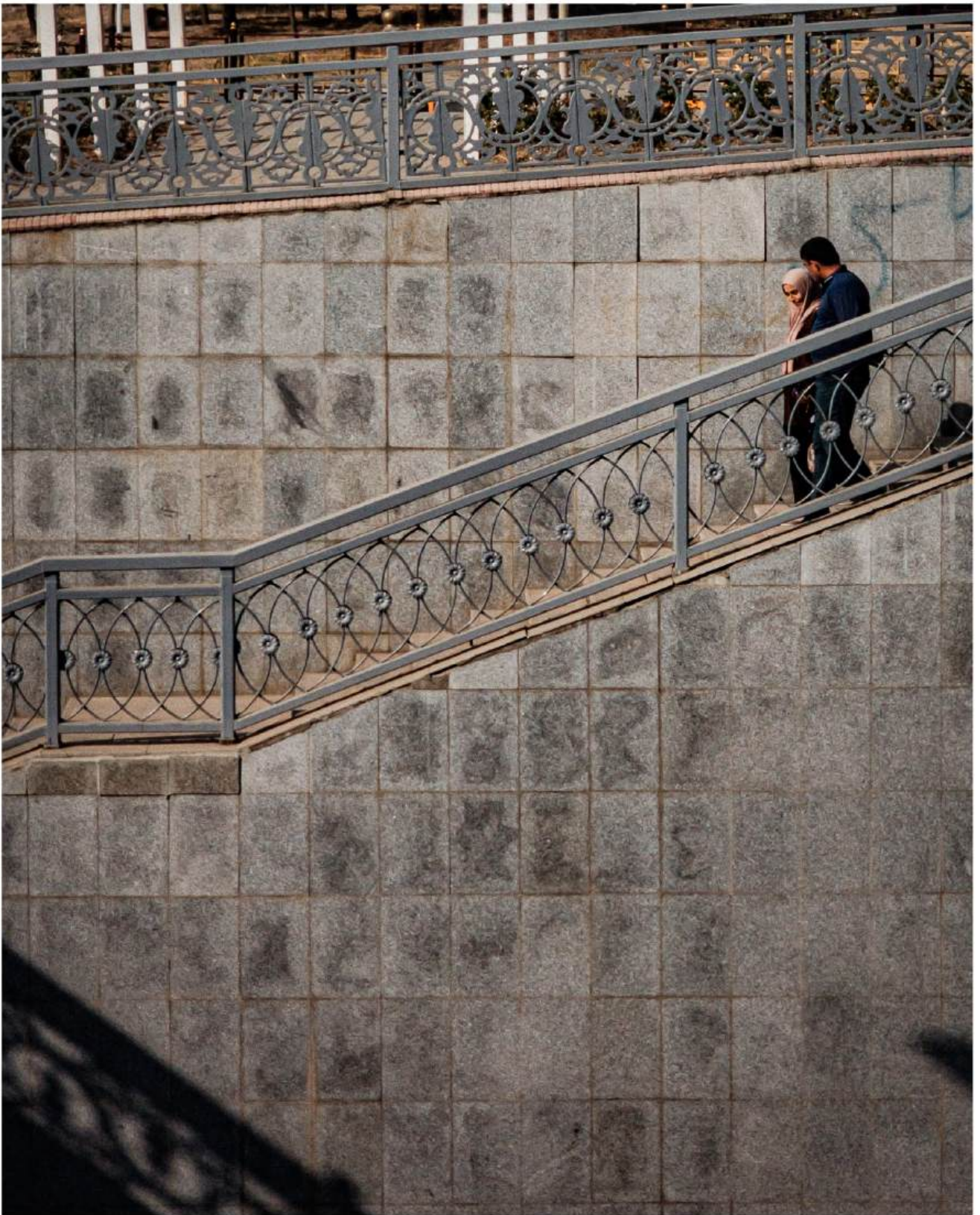
The Notorious Buildings
| 16a Nusratullo Makhsum Avenue



A Moment of Calm in the Shade of the Plane Trees
| 30 Rudaki Avenue



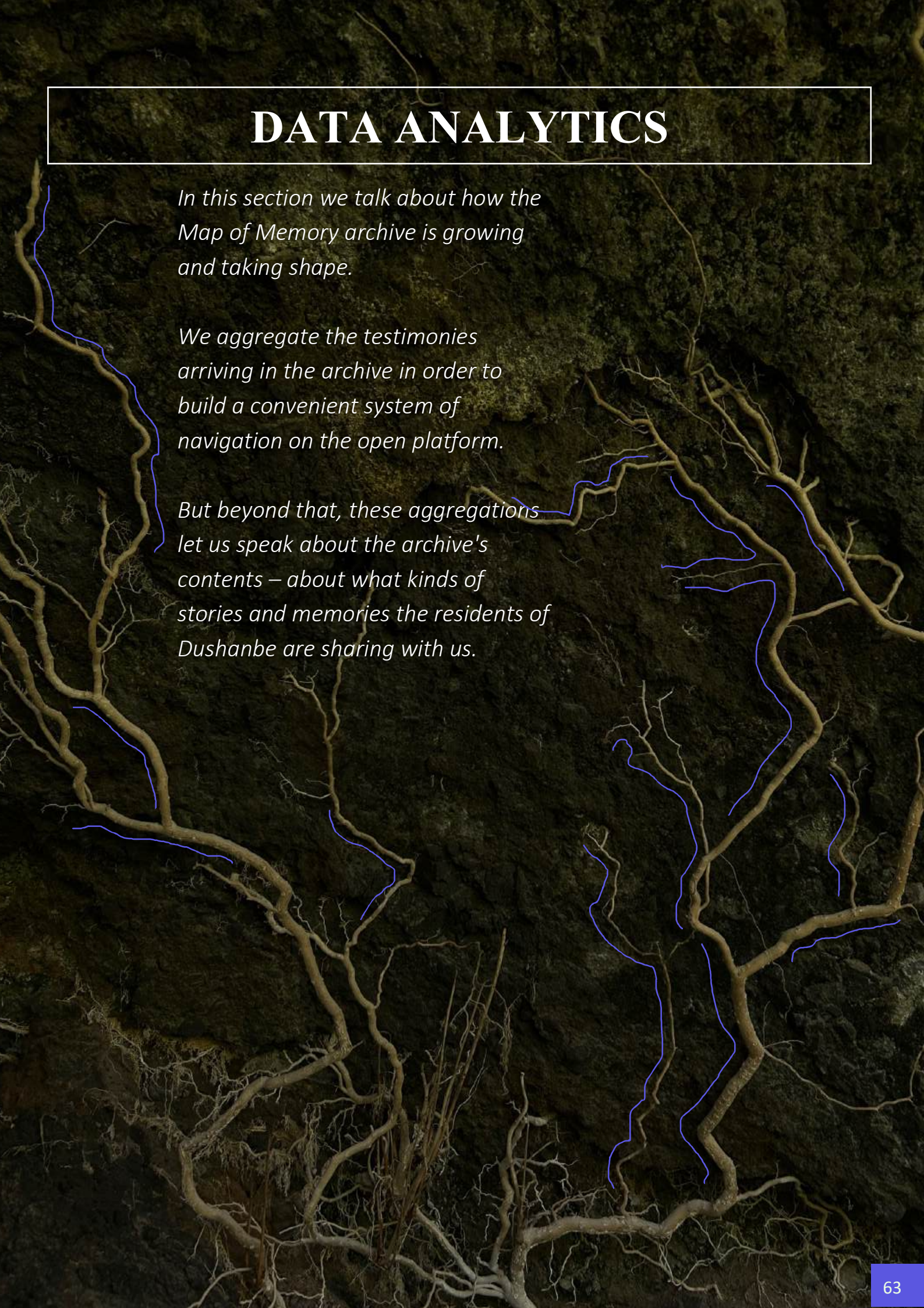
Panel Housing Blocks
| 22/7 Zarafshon Street



One Can Be Happy for Them
| 72/3 Nusratullo Makhsum Avenue, Sino District, Dushanbe



A Young Couple
| Intersection of I. Somoni Avenue and Bagautdinov Street



DATA ANALYTICS

In this section we talk about how the Map of Memory archive is growing and taking shape.

We aggregate the testimonies arriving in the archive in order to build a convenient system of navigation on the open platform.

But beyond that, these aggregations let us speak about the archive's contents – about what kinds of stories and memories the residents of Dushanbe are sharing with us.

What has been published so far?

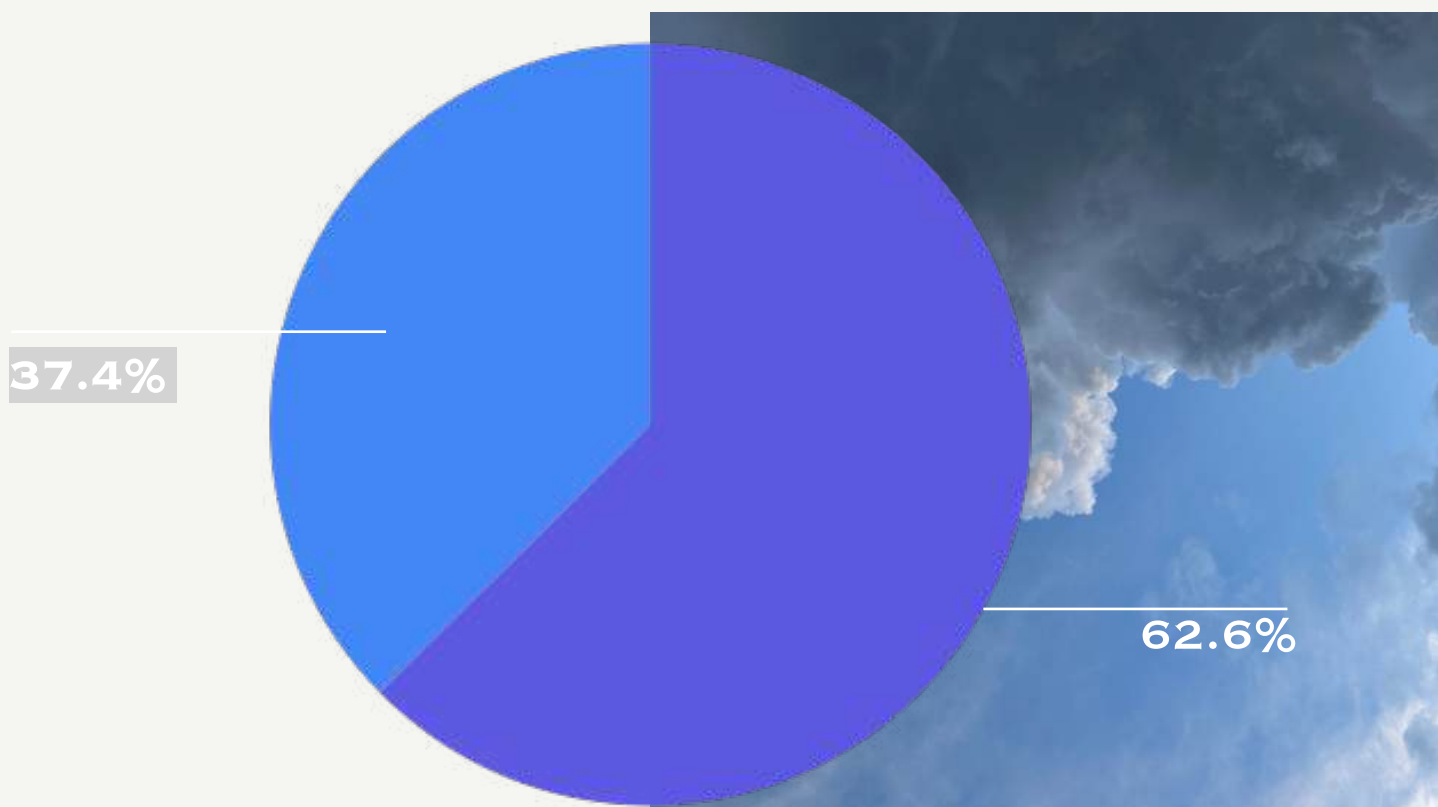
A map is one of the most vivid formats for presenting an archive: it makes it possible to display certain aspects of its content visually, without any loss. The larger the archive grows, the more useful such visualizations become for its users.

Our archive already holds 118 testimonies, which we accept from current or former residents of Dushanbe. We strive to geolocate every testimony. This is not always possible, however, and so our archive is divided into two parts:

1. testimonies that have been geolocated and placed on the memory map;
2. stories not tied to a specific place in the city.

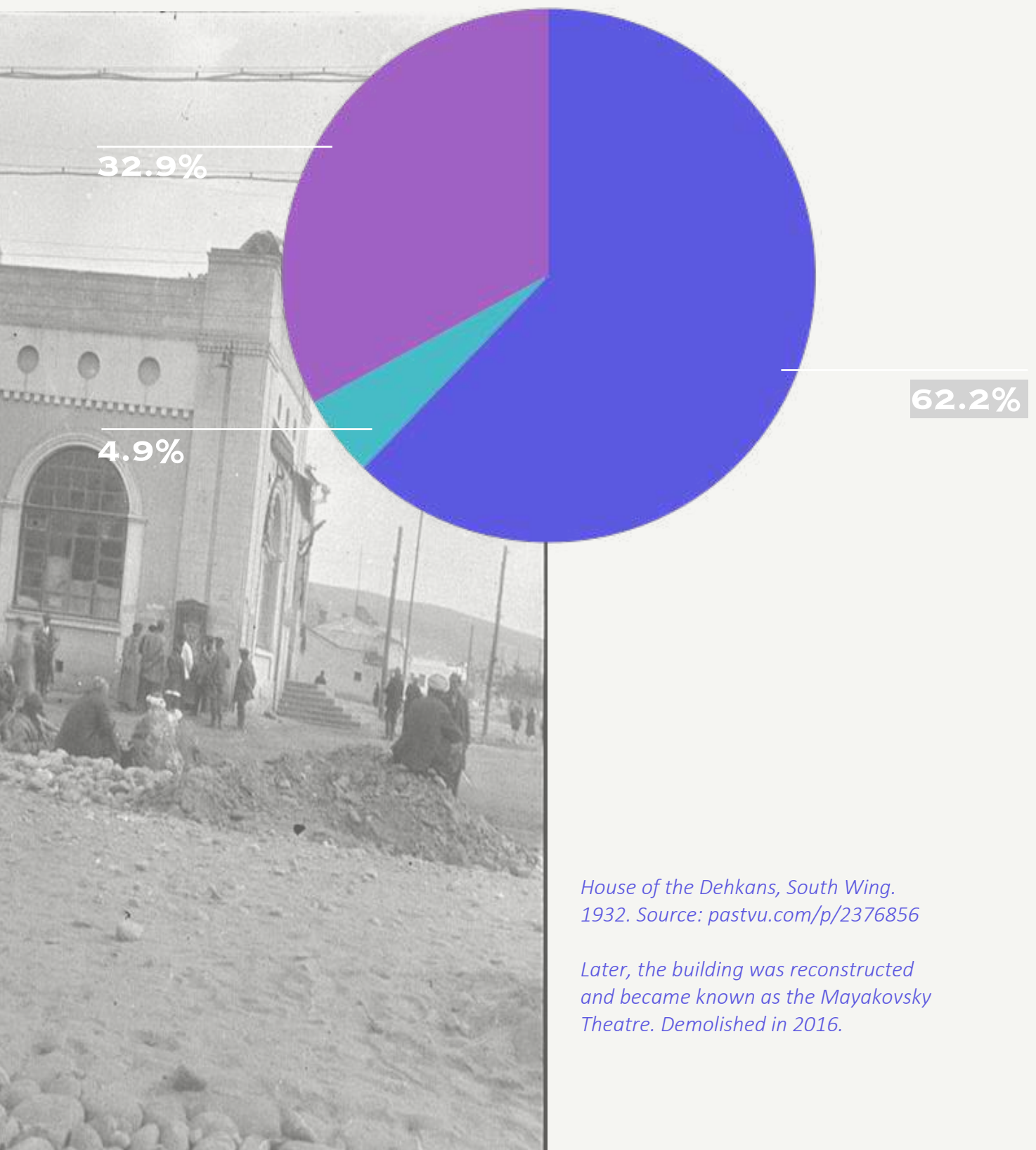
The memories in both parts of the archive are equally valuable. That said, we were unable to geolocate more than a third of all testimonies (37.4%) – some of them are accounts of everyday or festive customs, while others were submitted by respondents without a location.

We plan to publish these testimonies soon in a parallel structure of the archive, one not tied to the map of Dushanbe. In the meantime, most of the stories and memories are already available on the memory map online.



Surviving and lost locations

Among the geolocated testimonies, a third (32.9%) relate to lost places (three testimonies at once, for example, tell of the Rokhat Teahouse). A very small share (4.9%) relate to partially surviving places – such as the abandoned Tajikistan cinema. The remaining testimonies (62.2%) are tied to buildings, parks, gardens, and intersections that survive today.



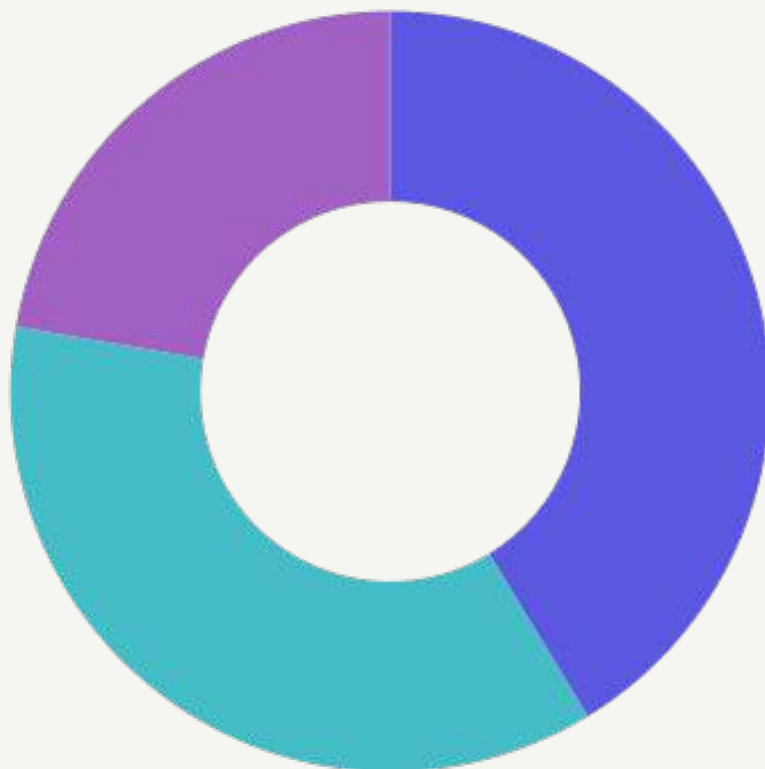
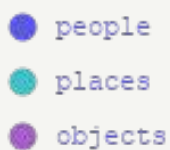
What do the people of Dushanbe talk about?

We devised several categories for aggregation, taking great care to avoid value judgments.

1.

The archive's specific format is the map, so many respondents' testimonies contain memories of places – descriptions of buildings, streets, and parks, recollections of lost structures. In practice, however, respondents talk less about places and more about people – about recurring practices and deeds.

Far more rarely do objects figure in the accounts of Dushanbe residents, émigrés, and passersby – mosaics, for example, or books, or dishes of food.

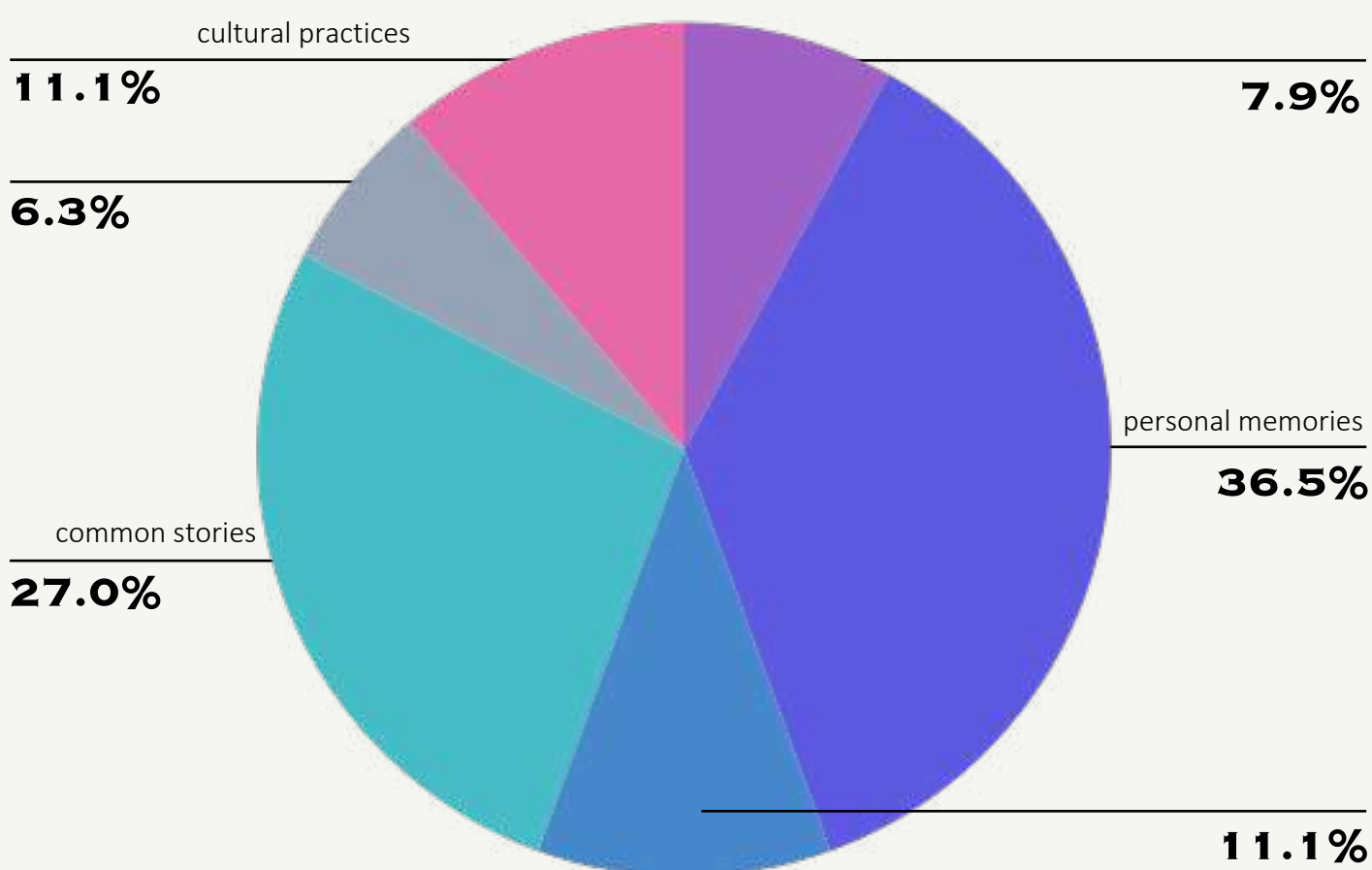


2.

Most often, the memory map is replenished with personal memories proper – 36.5% of the testimonies. People talk about their childhood, their youth, about how they saw their city five, ten, or thirty years ago.

Shared stories known to many residents of Dushanbe also figure frequently among the testimonies. Some of these are simple facts from the city's history that the respondents did not witness themselves (the famous story of Dushanbe's founding, for example) – these make up 6.3%; but more often they are memories of large processes and events witnessed by a great many people, respondents included (the story of Nikita Khrushchev's visit to the city, for example) – such stories make up 11.1%.

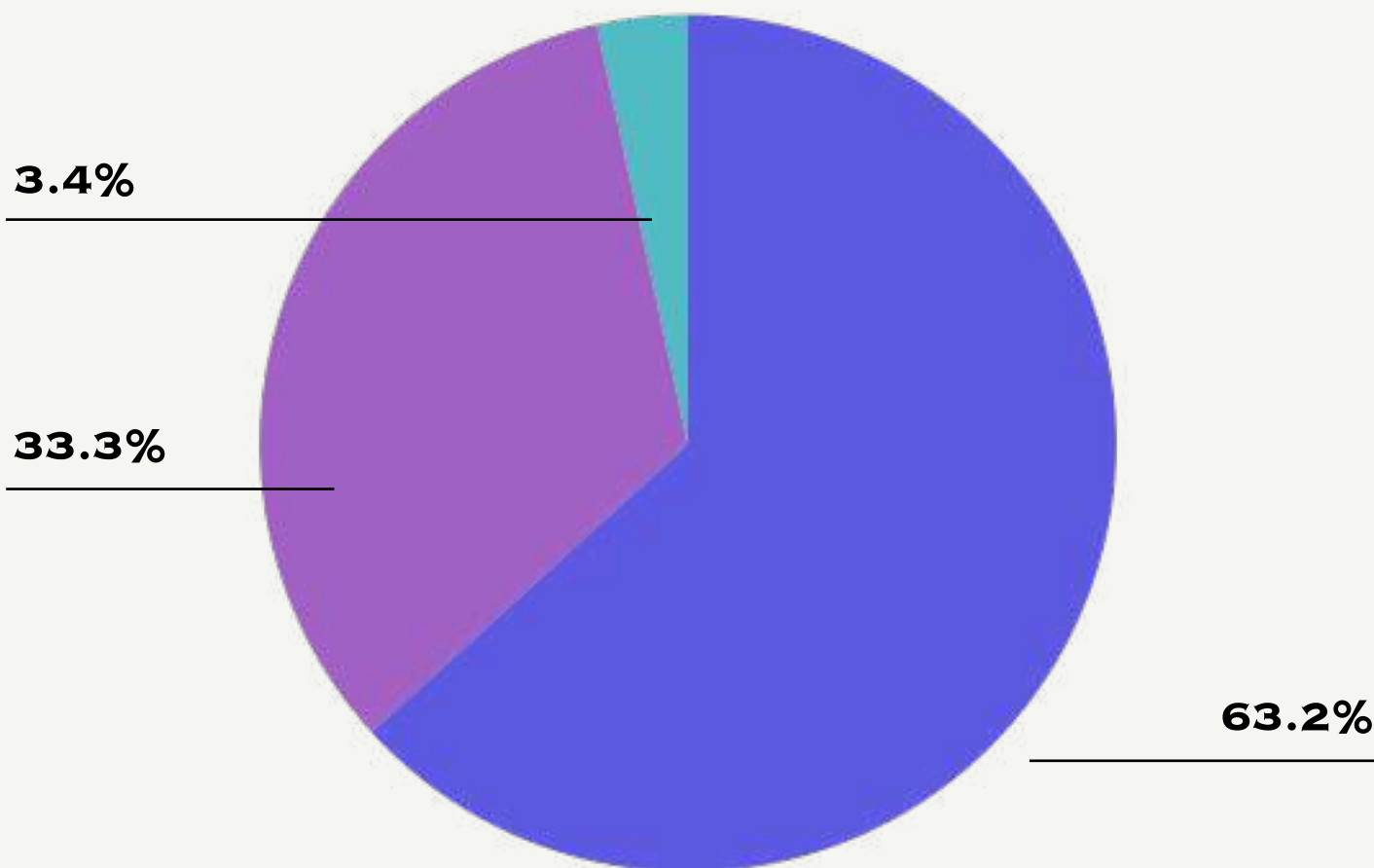
Sometimes the testimonies describe cultural practices – we were told, for example, about wedding customs, and about how many fountains the city had in Soviet times. It is precisely these testimonies that are most often impossible to geolocate, yet they are of great value (from the standpoint of the history of everyday life, which we discussed above in the theoretical essay).



3.

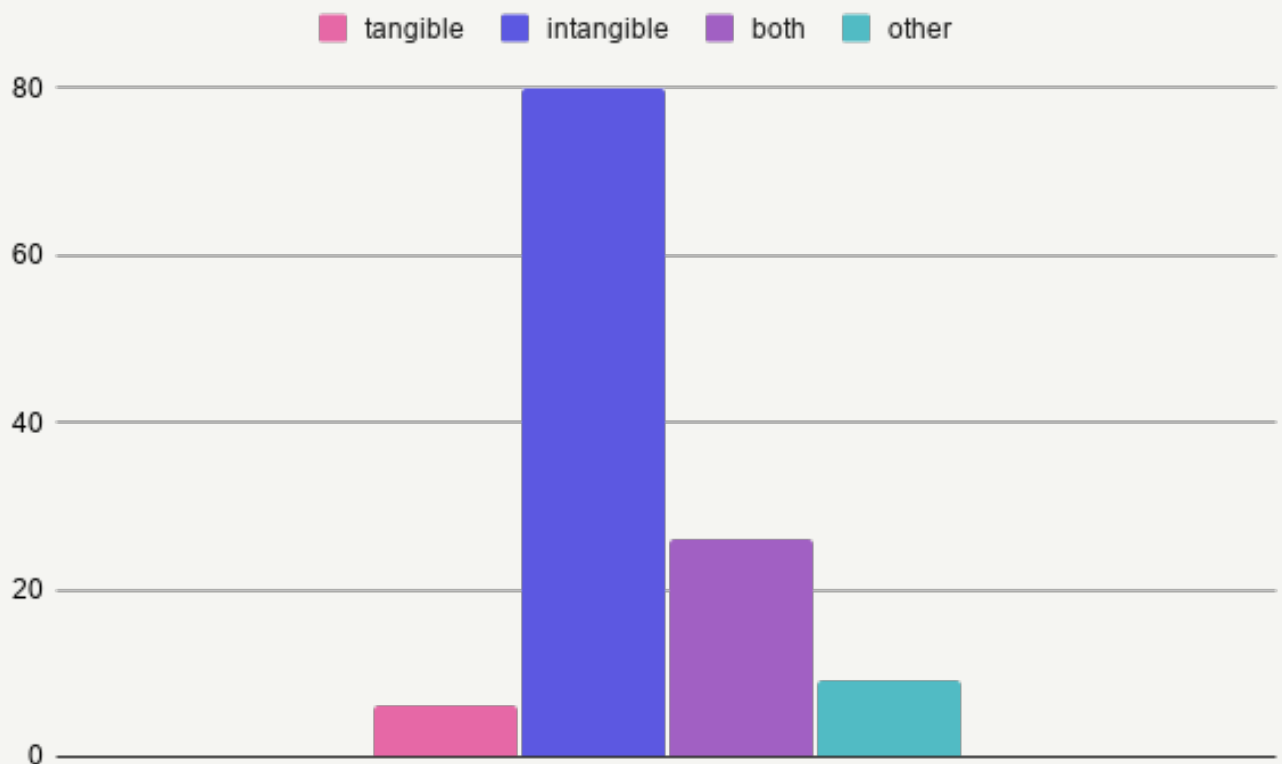
Among all the testimonies, personal memories predominate (63.2%) – people's own recollections of events they witnessed. But there are also those that fall into the category of postmemory – 33.3% – inherited or absorbed memories that respondents drew from books or heard from other people. These are not their own memories but stories passed down from generation to generation.

There is also a small percentage of dry historical facts in the respondents' accounts – our archive holds few such testimonies, just 3.4%. In truth, the archive is full of historical testimony, but most of it is colored by the respondents' emotional experience and personal attitude; most of it looks nothing like lines from a textbook.



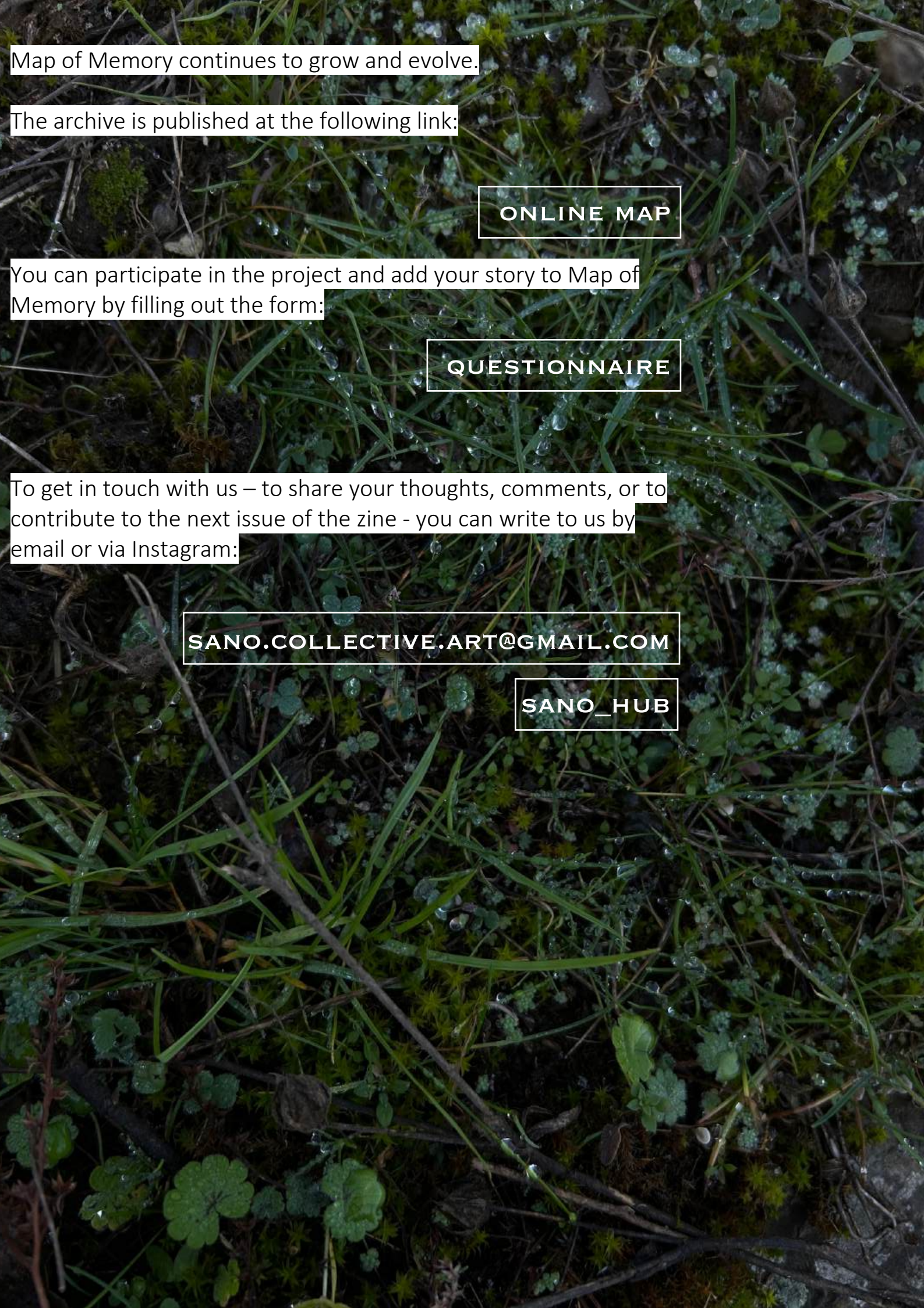
4.

Finally, most respondents tell of events or processes that left no material evidence (at least none publicly accessible – their traces cannot be found in the city itself). Only a small share of the testimonies are tied to objects or buildings that can be found in the city right now – often these stories unfolded in a place or building that still exists, but left no material traces of their own.



1987. The square with a fountain at the intersection of V. Lenin Street and N. Sviridenko Street (now Rudaki Avenue and Bukhoro Street). The square has since disappeared; the Dushanbe Plaza Business Center now stands on its site

Source: pastvu.com/p/1991348



Map of Memory continues to grow and evolve.

The archive is published at the following link:

[ONLINE MAP](#)

You can participate in the project and add your story to Map of Memory by filling out the form:

[QUESTIONNAIRE](#)

To get in touch with us – to share your thoughts, comments, or to contribute to the next issue of the zine - you can write to us by email or via Instagram:

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[SANO_HUB](#)

