

Architecture for absence:

“Caravana de la muerte victims” Experiential Memorial.

“Even when feet step a thousand years on this site, they will not wipe the blood of those who here fell. And it will not extinguish the hour of your falling, even when a thousand voices go across this silence”...

Pablo Neruda. “Always”.

The project originates as an investigation referred to the role that architecture plays on the transcendence of events that took place in Chile’s recent history, and that have stained with blood the pages of history books and the collective memory of the country.

In the last years of the twentieth century, after the coup d’état in 1973 and during Augusto Pinochet’s military dictatorship, a great number of human rights violations happened. Thousands of people were tortured, exiled, and some even murdered under estate orders. The study case is known as “Caravana de la Muerte” (the Caravan of Death) which consisted of a military retinue that travelled through the country leaving almost a hundred victims. Their passing through Calama is remembered as the most violent part, where the Atacama Desert was witness to the murder and hiding of the bodies of the prisoners.

History has taught us that every harm made unjustly is prone to bring new conflicts, especially when this events go unpunished or when there’s no reparation for the victims or their families. To help establishing reconciliation in the country, it’s necessary to get to the truth and then build start a vindicating process in name of many who were unjustly charged, treated and killed.

With this objective in mind, the project tries to give light to an event that many have forgotten, but it’s still remembered painfully by the victims’ families. This is the first step for cicatrization of the wounds. Considering all this, the approximation to the project is made through a critic view of the facts, and an explorative way of the concepts.

The experiential memorial arises from the idea that architecture can establish a place of memory and experiences about the event, giving room to the atonement of the absence that is now present in the victims’ families. The primary objective is to create a vindicating place for the country’s collective memory. The memorial is thought in two different scales. The first one is territorial, and refers to the consolidation of a part of the Atacama Desert as a place for confirmation, interpretation, and memory. The second one is at human scale, and consists of the memorial space as a group of different experiences: the first three emulate the most crucial moments of the prisoners, and the last gives consolation to the families’ victims. They are the capture, the torture, the death and finally, the atonement.