

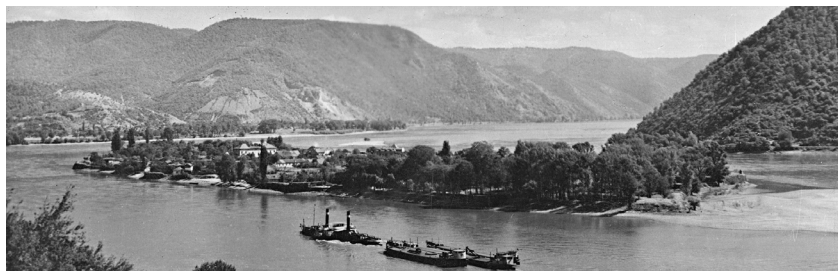
the enchanted gardens
of
ADA KALEH

abstract

History has always been a tool of power and a reflection of the prevailing political climate. Authoritarian regimes are the most impressive curators of historical accuracies, selecting and erasing information, reordering facts and carefully changing semantics in order impose a single truth.

In 1964, the communist governments of Romania and Yugoslavia decided to build a large dam and hydroelectric power station on the border that Danube draws between them.

In order to do that, they demanded the displacement of a small Turkish community situated in a remarkable geographic context - Ada Kaleh.



Source: Google Images

Ada Kaleh was a fortified island on the Danube, with a centuries old history of continuous occupation. It was described as a lush common garden where people lived in harmony. In 1970, after brutal demolitions and shy intentions of the academia to partially preserve some elements, it vanished 40 meters under water.

For reasons easy to understand, the island did not fulfill the standards in order to become culturally relevant for the nationalist-communist agenda at that time.

The decision to demolish it was taken under unfair terms, before Romania's adherence to UNESCO or any other organizations for heritage protection.

Does this make Ada Kaleh any less relevant from a cultural standpoint?

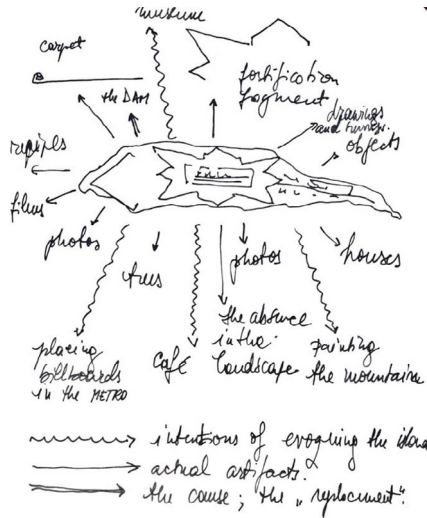
The project aims to (re)assess the value and relevance of Ada Kaleh as a cultural landscape while finding the means to showcase it as a cultural construct.

The study begins with collecting and interpreting archival material gathered from a large palette of sources - from photographs, scientific data and official state documents to arguable or even nostalgic press articles. All these different angles contribute to a detailed and nuanced portrait of the island.

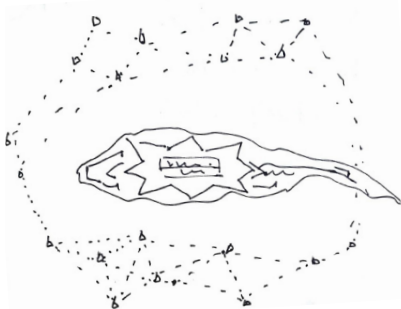
The first goal of the project is to visually translate this portrait into the image of the island: a large map at a scale of 1:500 that aims to become the most complete representation of Ada Kaleh.

In this dispersed landscape, besides the theoretical knowledge, there are some physical artifacts that migrated when the island was submerged. They can be considered diasporic objects - the island outside itself.

These artifacts were almost assimilated by their new backgrounds and they are unable to speak of their origins.



dispersed landscape



The second goal of the project is to reveal the diasporic objects, infusing their current locations with various aspects from the island.

A series of gardens act as tools to dignify and showcase the artifacts.

A specific atmosphere is constructed for each garden, in tight relation with the story of its respective object.

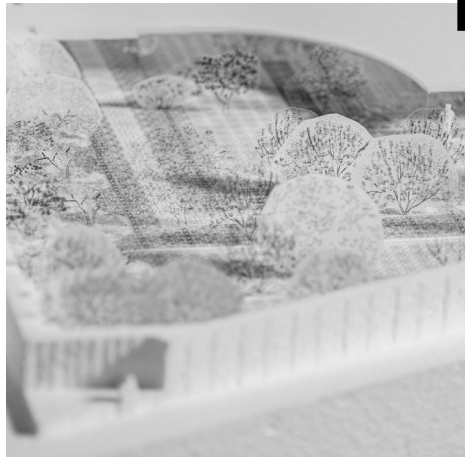
These gardens should be read as an itinerary that, together with the image of the island, create a landscape in a different way.



Source: Google Images

The 200 years old carpet was moved from the mosque on Ada Kaleh to the Great Mosque in Constanta, where it doesn't fit, so it has been sitting half folded ever since.

the carpet that doesn't fit



the embroidered garden of delights

Situated in front of the Great Mosque, in Constanta, it is designed to exhibit the carpet, which is such a strong piece that the entire garden grows from it. Filled with fruit trees native from Ada Kaleh, this garden shows the most picturesque and romantic atmosphere related to the island.



Source: Google Maps

Several teams from various academic fields gathered and surveyed the island in an attempt to relocate the fortress and the households to Simian - an island 6 km downstream; but Simian had its own history that was disrupted by the only element they managed to relocate: a fortification fragment. Today, this fragment blends in so well, that people mistake Simian for Ada Kaleh.

the fortress that they moved



the garden of deceit

This garden, sited on Simian, works with the relocated material.

A large grid of poles sits in the landscape, raising doubt about the authenticity of the fortification. This whimsical garden, filled with trees that come up only in the most exaggerated stories about the island, aims to correct the perception that people have of the ruin.

Source: Google Images



On the shores of Danube, right next to where Ada Kaleh used to be, there was the wharf - a small beach where the wooden boats used to lay, waiting for tourists.

where the old wharf was

3

the water garden



This garden relates to the old wharf. It encloses its approximated position with a tall concrete wall. Inside the enclosure, one can sit and observe the variation of the water level, swim in a small pool, walk through a drift wood exhibition or reach the covered space that can host projections of old movies filmed on Ada Kaleh.

Along the tall wall, there is a narrow promenade that allows one to look towards the river and acknowledge the absence of the island.

Source: Google Images



The void in the river has no meaning for those who have not known the island. Its silhouette had been obsessively evoked by writers, painters and simple tourists in their travel journals.

the silhouette of the island

4

the garden of the giants



This intervention plays again with the rumors created around Ada Kaleh. This time, it is about people's fascination with cypress trees. In truth, there were only 2 rather small cypress trees in the island. The garden of the giants envisions the journey of 3 cypress trees brought on the water from Turkey. The result is a semi-circular space that stands out in the landscape, right across the Garden of the Water.

The reciprocal visual relationship between these two gardens embrace the absence of the island.