



# Thekla

FOREVER UNDER CONSTRUCTION,  
ELSJE BAKKER, 061995  
GAME ARCHITECTURE

THE SUN

The diagram shows a white line starting from the text 'THE SUN' and extending to the right, then turning downwards and then right again to end at a small white dot. The background is a dark, textured purple and blue.

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# | 01. Introduction and background

This production design document explains the visual style developed to transform a previously designed level into a digital picture book.

## Game Architecture 01

During the GA1 course a level suitable for a 4-player death-match in Unreal Tournament 3 was designed. For this assignment it was required to choose one of the stories from Italo Calvino's Invisible Cities.

The level-design is based on this story. The layout of the level is based on the constellation Cancer, and was designed with visibility in mind. This resulted in main paths following the constellation, and hidden paths underground connecting them.

## Thekla

The story that was chosen for this level design was: City & The Sky 3, it tells the tale of a city named Thekla. Thekla is a city that is eternally under construction as its inhabitants use the ever-changing position of the stars as a blueprint.

## Digital Picture Book

This level is intended to be a digital picture book. The goal is to make it look like a painted illustration, but to keep the 3-dimensionality of the level. When the user navigates through the level, he can read the story on screen while viewing the city.



# 102. **Visual Concept Summary**

The idea behind this visual style is to create a 3-dimensional picture book. The overall feeling of the level is wistful and reminiscent, and it depicts a city eternally under construction.

## **Unique Visual Identity**

The most outstanding part of this visual style is its inspiration borrowed from picture books and paintings. The level itself will look painted and basically any screenshot you'd make of the level would look like a picture that's right out of one of those books.

## **Description Visual Style**

Cartoony and young, but with a serious tone. Painting-like and with a wistful, dusty atmosphere. Inspired by picture book illustrators as well as Symbolist painters.

## **Short To The Point Description**

Construction site with different Greek building styles from through the ages. Picture book and painting inspired style. **Sunset and lonely abandoned streets to roam through. References to the stars.**

Example of a picture book that inspired this style  
From 'En Nu ga ik Slapen' by Geoffroy Dussart





# 103. Story

## Location

The story takes place in the city Thekla as it is described in Italo Calvino's Invisible Cities. Because Thekla is a Greek name, this interpretation of the city is also located in Greece.

## Time

This story takes place in the present time, but also in every time that has gone by. The city is stuck in the past, and constantly expands that past as time flows. So the architecture is very mixed, etc. The level takes place during sunset, which is the moment that divides the time between working and observing for Thekla's inhabitants.

## Environmental/Weather Conditions

There's a clear sky so the stars can be observed once they come out.

During the sunset the cancer constellation already shows in the darker part of the sky, as a nod to the level's lay-out.

The air itself should be dusty and dry, because the entire city is one big construction site.

### Characterization Of The Environment

- Wistful
- Comfortable
- Warm
- Lonely

### Personal Attitude Towards Story

Thekla likes being worked on and planned, but then it isn't sure how to deal with the actual finishing or how to live after the process is done. So it models itself after an unattainable goal, the stars. Since the stars will always change their position, Thekla has created the position in which it's impossible to ever complete itself. It's sabotaging itself from living up to its full potential and actually enjoy themselves with the end result.

I've been putting this project off for about 2,5 years now. Every time I add a slight change in my plan of approach. It's the last shared course I have to complete before I can graduate. Right now, instead of working on the artwork that's much needed to complete this document, I'm rewriting words I've already set on paper months ago.

For some reason, Thekla really did become like its story. And because of that, I honestly do love this project and its story and this book. But it's time to finally finish this, and put a stop on it. And I feel kind of sorry for Thekla, that it'll never be able to.

### Perceived By The Player

It's preferred if the player feels comfortable and relaxed while playing in this level. (Which is the polar opposite of the gameplay this was designed for.)

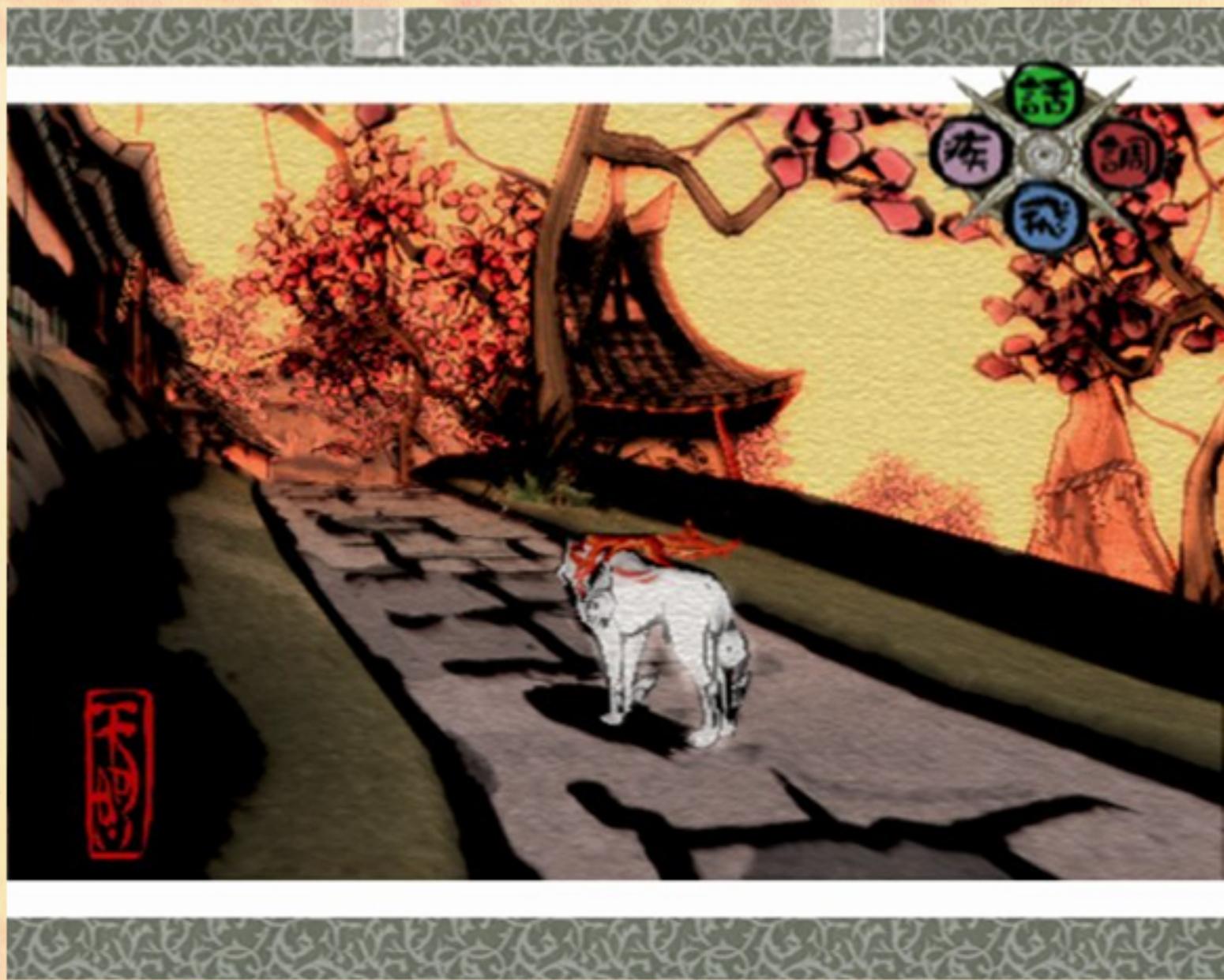
Thekla is about getting stuck in your comfort zone and I want the player not to feel the need to rush towards their goal, (or to the completion of Thekla,) but to just be and linger around.

### Metaphors/Analogies

The state of mind that I consider Thekla to be a metaphor for, is translated into the visual representation by the atmosphere and overall look and feel..

### Secondary Theme

The blueprint read in the stars. A constellation is also the blueprint for the actual level, and they are, aside from Construction Site, the main theme in the designs of buildings etc.



# 104. Inspiration

For this project there are some sources of inspiration that don't really have a lot in common with each other, but together they make this style to what it is. These pages will explain their relevance, and although none of these examples should be used literally, their inclusion in this document is necessary to provide insight in the look/feel that will be created in the level. Also: inspiration.

## Okami

Okami is an adventure game inspired by Ukiyo-e and Sumi-e, both Japanese styles of paintings/drawings. Although the designs are cartoony and quirky, unlike the the paintings themselves that are often stern-looking, it is easily recognized to resemble 'those Japanese paintings.' The game itself is 3D, but thanks to the cell shading and outlines that resemble brush-strokes, every in-game moment looks like a 2D painting. Making this is a great example of a 3D representation of a distinct 2D style. Since Thekla is made with the idea of a '3D picture book' in mind, a game like this is interesting to look at and see what they used to make the game look like a painting. The outlines, the paper texture that lays over the visuals, the way sprites actually enhance that 2d feeling, etcetera.



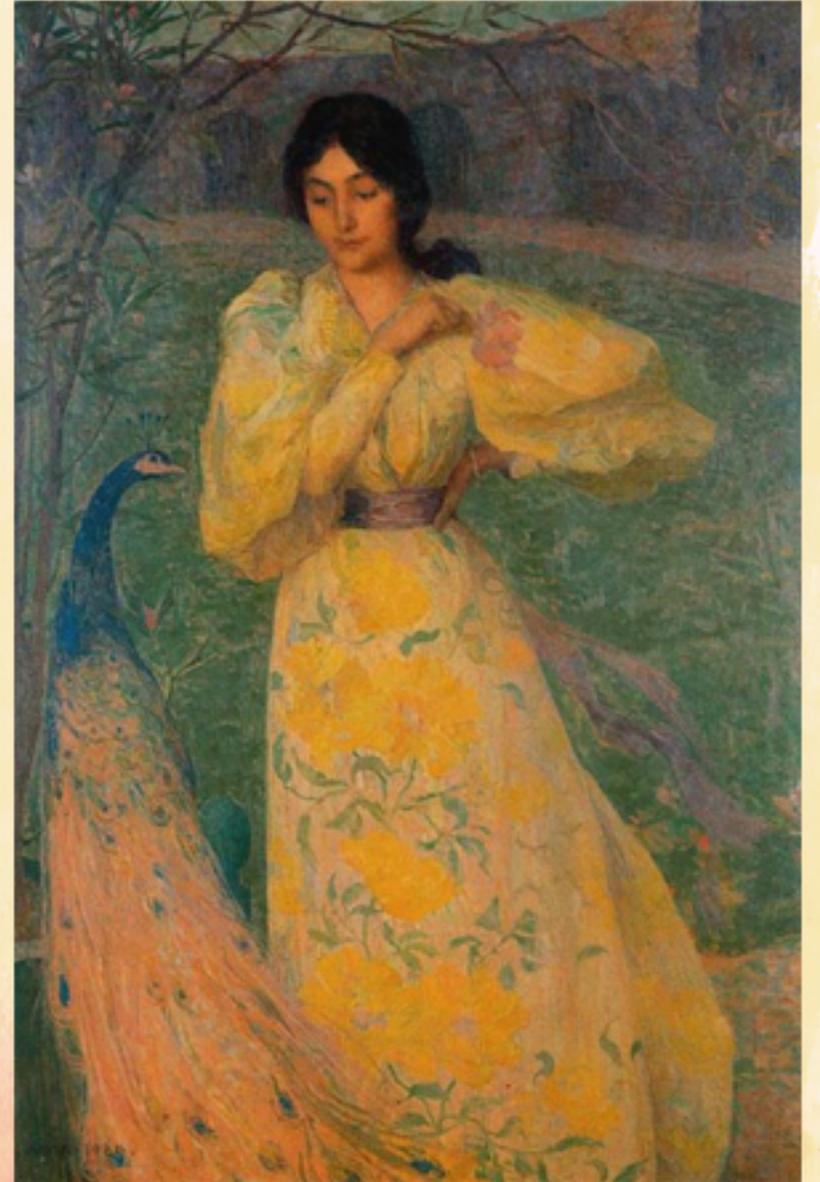
## Kingdom Hearts II

The reason for bringing up this game is very much based on a personal experience, and I'm mostly talking about this because of the situation I found myself in, and not so much because this game is to be used as a reference.

When you start playing Kingdom Hearts II, the game starts out with a boy who is just enjoying the last days of his summer vacation. He hangs out in a city with a group of his friends, and they play silly games and come up with stupid plans and ideas, that kind of thing. Although this was just the introduction to the game, I honestly found myself wishing those summer days would never end.

So when the rest of the game started, and I had to play the actual game, I always kept an extra save game at the start of that town, just so I could go back to when things were simple and when sea-salt ice cream was my biggest worry. The effect this town had on me always amazed me, because in reality this friendship-based silly adventures have little to do with the actual storyline. The character you play doesn't even actually exist in that world.

But that feeling of wanting to just stay there forever and not caring about Oh I have to hurry off to save the world? That's a feeling I would like to capture in this level too.



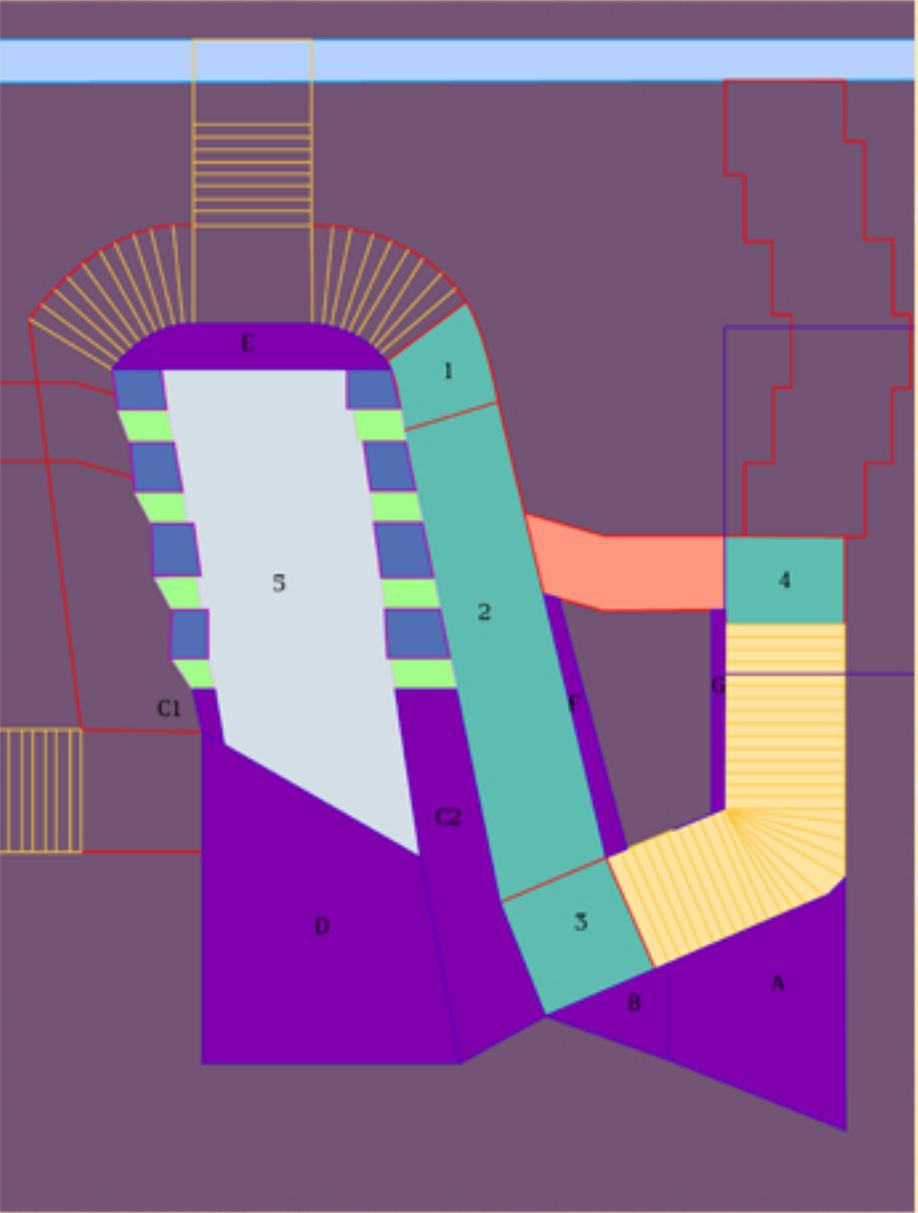
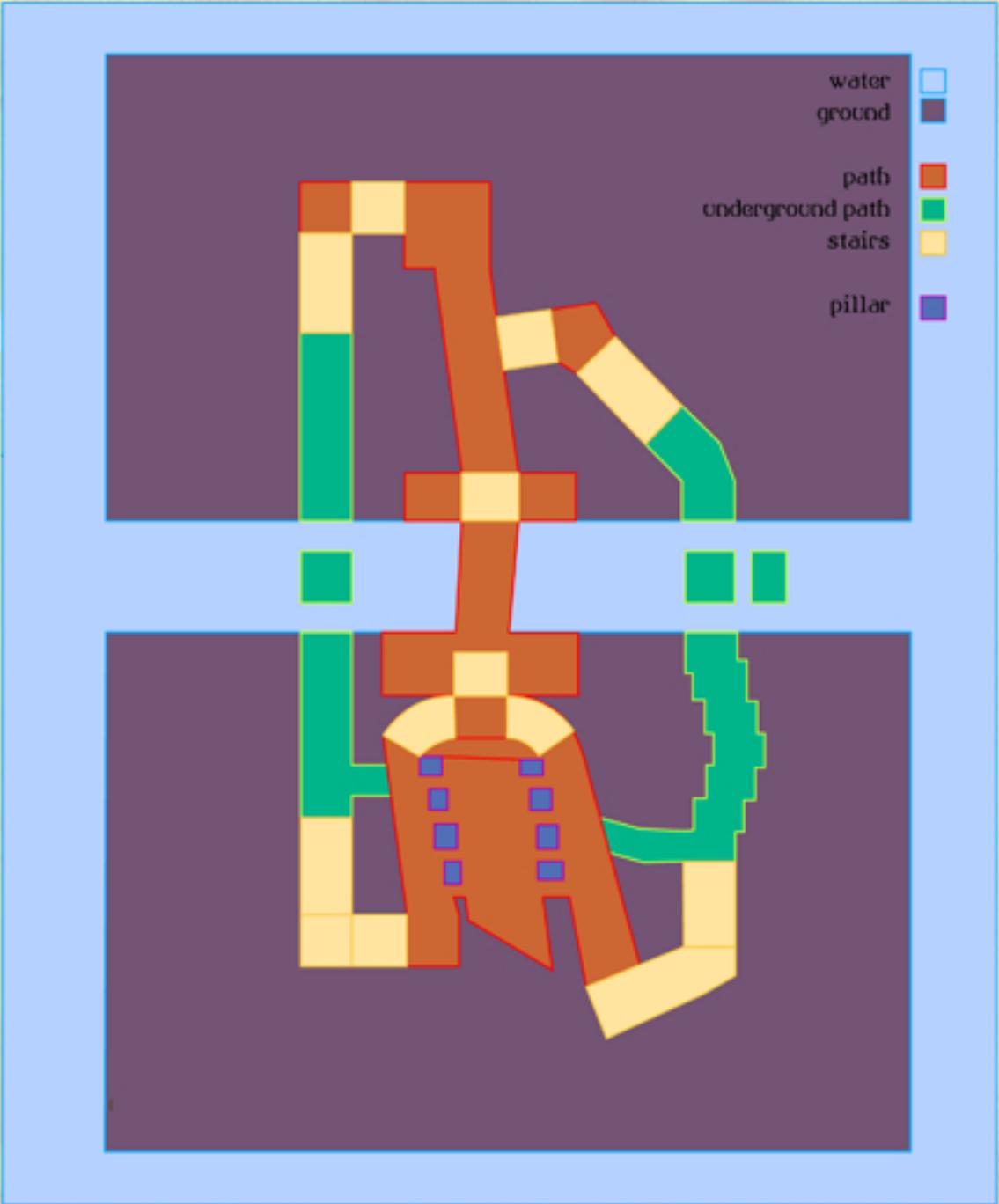
## Symbolism

Symbolism is an art movement to which the artists provide a variety of styles. They were mostly a rejection to Naturalism and Realism, and they let themselves be inspired by things like spirituality, dreams, and imagination. There are idealistic and utopian paintings, highly sexual ones, dark and cynical ones, and etc. However, it's a movement that was very widespread all over the world, with artists like Victor Borisov-Musatov in Russia, and Frida Kahlo in Mexico. The symbolism in their art wasn't based on set symbols, but are mostly personal, and as such obscure and ambiguous.

This mindset is perfect for the style of this level. Thekla is also in a dreamlike state, deluding itself that it's going for perfection and as such leaving itself in an always incomplete state. Plus, the very private feeling of the style is great because Thekla, even though it is a city, is really a person too.

Artists that are particularly inspiring, visual-wise, for this project:

- **Vittorio Zecchin** (And **Gustav Klimt**)'s use of geometric shapes to create textures and volume. As well as the serious stern tones despite using colorful and quirky patterns.
- **Edmond Aman-Jean** and **Mossa** both use rough brush-strokes but end up with surprisingly delicate looking art. This type of texture is also needed in the assets.
- **De Chirico**'s art looks warm with sunsets, and yet it always has a very lonely feeling surrounding it, which in turn makes it cold. That contrasting atmosphere is similar, albeit in a lesser extent, to the one needed in this project.



# 105. Level Lay-Out and Assets

## Asset List

This Asset List only applies to a portion of the level. Some of the elements can be used repeatedly for the other parts of the level, however, there extra unique elements will be necessary. Especially because the city is divided in two separate islands, and the second island will need something characteristic too.

### The City

- Eyecatch (Temple/pillars)
- Building I (Scaffold/pillars)
- Building II (Scaffold/pottery)
- Building III (Fence/stone)
- Building IV (Fence/plaster)
- Road I (Temple/Stairs)
- Road II (Scaffold/Sandroad)
- Road III (Temple/Floor)
- Road IV (Scaffold/Corner)
- Prop I (Cat)
- Prop II (Concrete Mixer)
- Prop III (Stepladder)
- Prop IV (Paintbucket)

### The Sewers

- Pipes I (Entrance)
- Pipes II (Inside)
- Bridge I (Wood)
- Bridge II (Unusable)
- Prop I (Lamp)
- Prop II (Stairs)



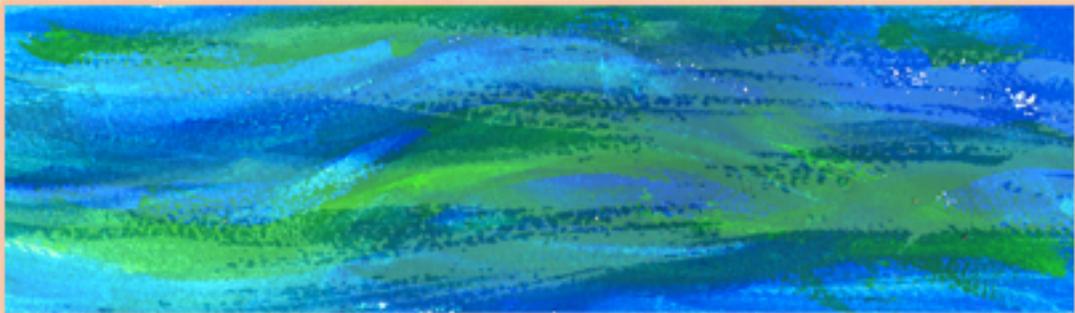
# 106. Lighting and SFX

## Intended Mood/Atmosphere + Time Of Day

The sunset is the base for the entire mood/atmosphere. To make it feel wistful, to create a warm, comfortable, but lonely place is very dependent on the lighting. By using warm light versus cold and harsh shadows, the light can create this contrast in mood.

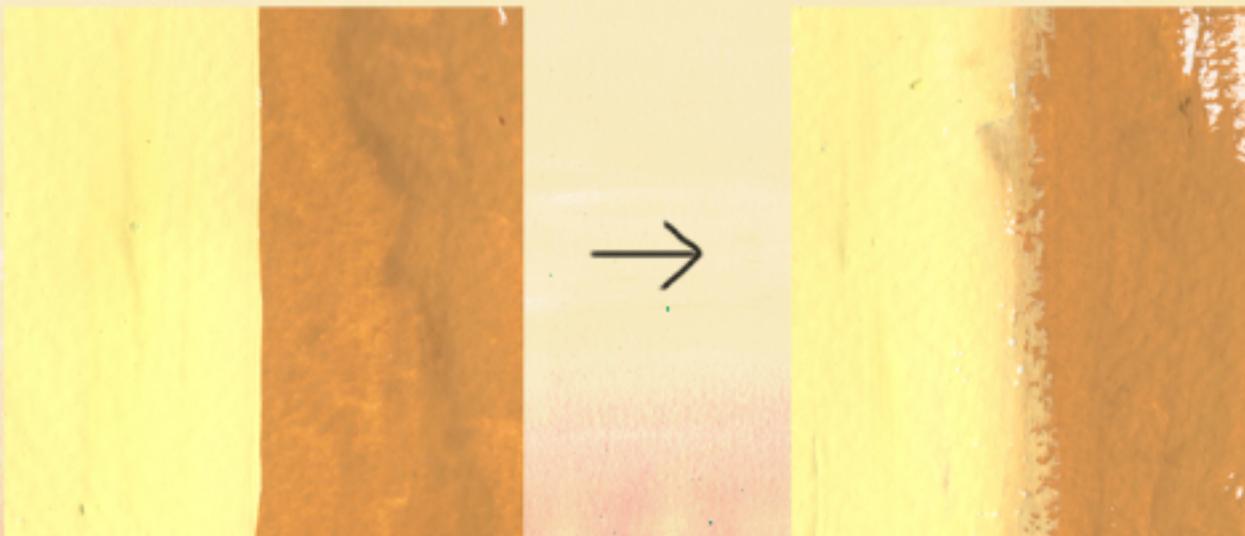
## Light Color

The light has to be a warm orange, and it should look glowing. The shadows have to be cold in contrast to it, so a dark (but saturated) purple/blue is the starting point.



## SFX

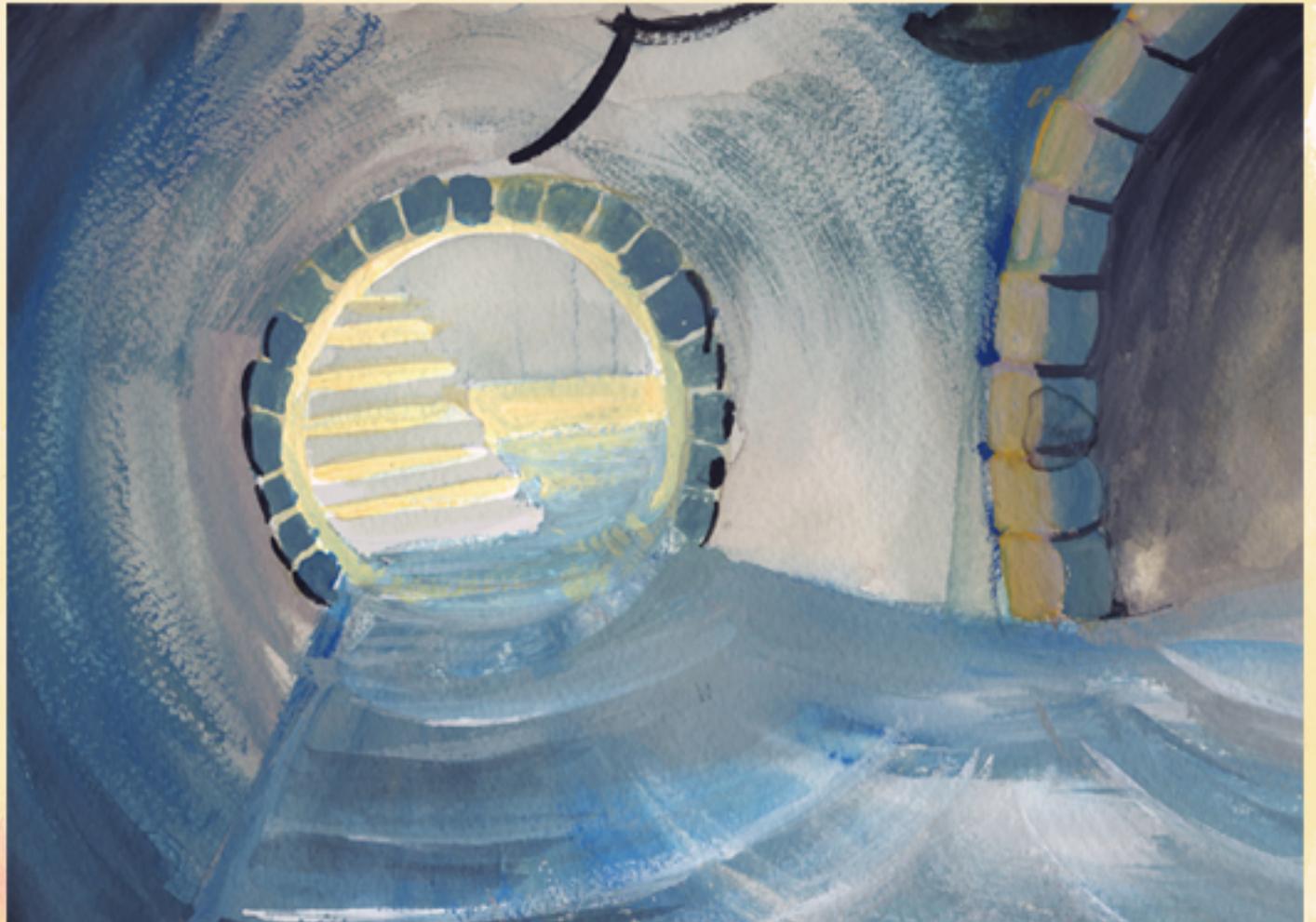
- Dust, for making it look like a construction site. Particles float around.
- Water is what surrounds this version of Thekla. The water should look like there's brush-strokes and have that same paint structure everything else has, but should move in several layers. A dark one for the deep water, a lighter one for the top... This way the water can keep the paint structure, but it'll move like actual water and as such will keep a liquid feel.
- Paper structure, that lays over the graphics the camera sees.
- Blending. The colors of the models and environment should kind of bleed into each other. The bleeding will have to fluctuate and enhance the feeling of paint, so they should take the colors from the object they're next to and have a structure resembling that of a brush-stroke.



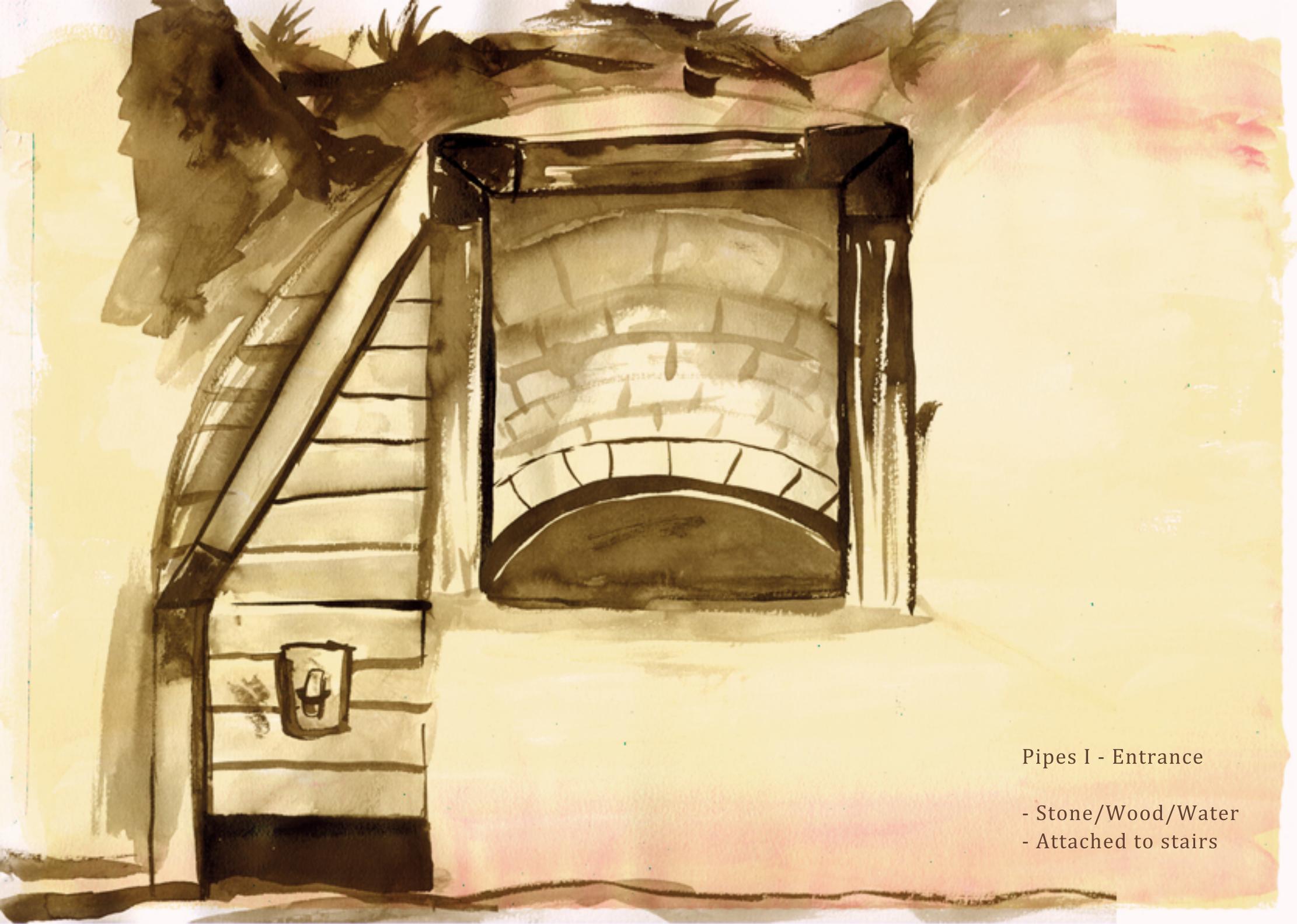
# 107. Art Elements and Requirements

This chapter holds concept art for some of the assets, as well as reference images and explanations so they can be used as inspiration for the design of other assets later on.

The level is divided in 3 different parts, The Sewers, The City and The Sky. Each part has its own elements and requirements.

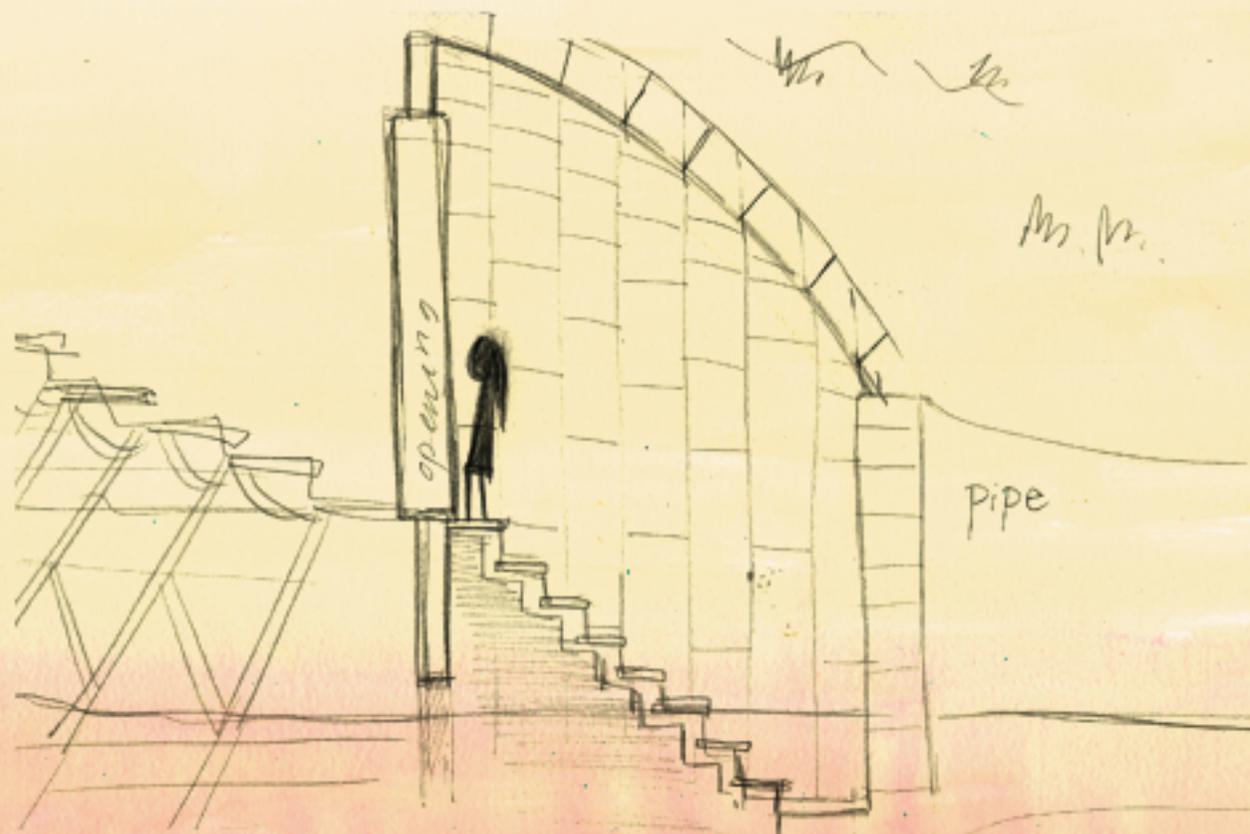
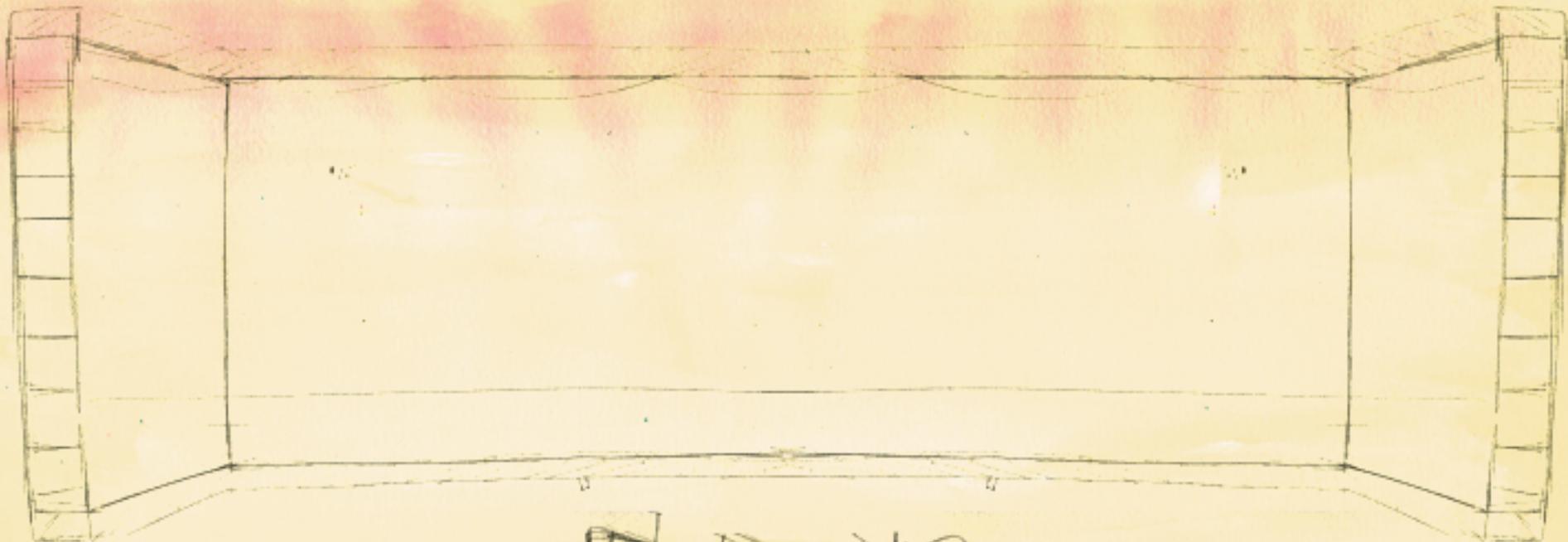


The Sewers



Pipes I - Entrance

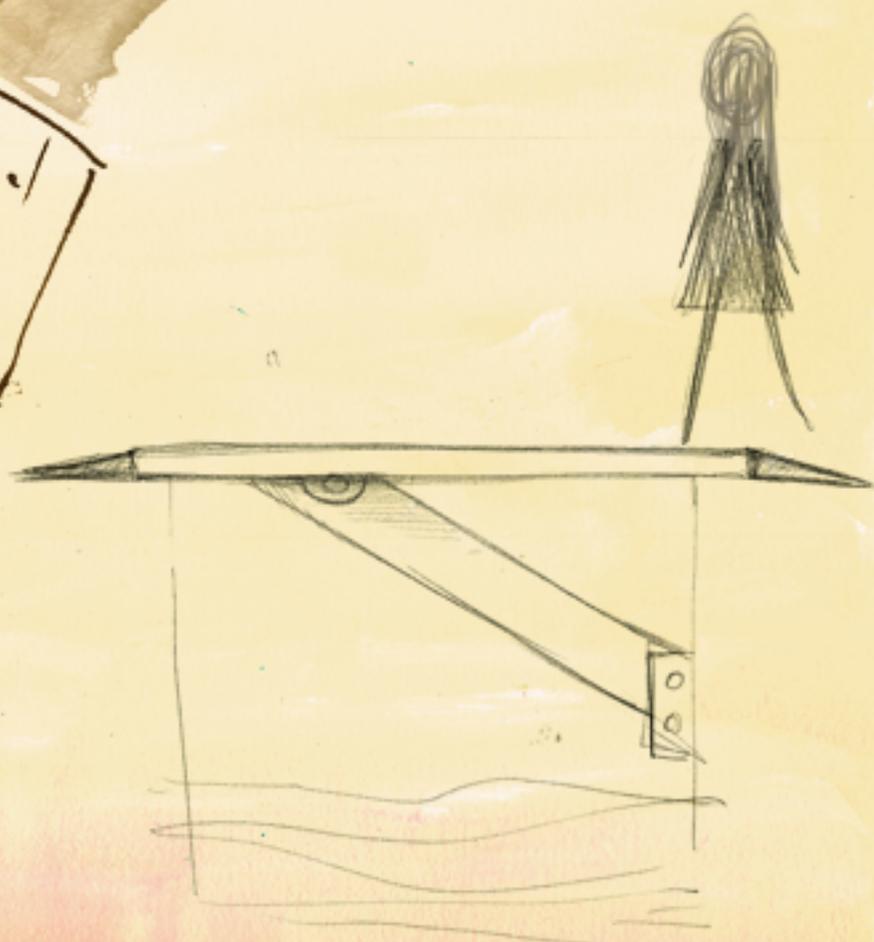
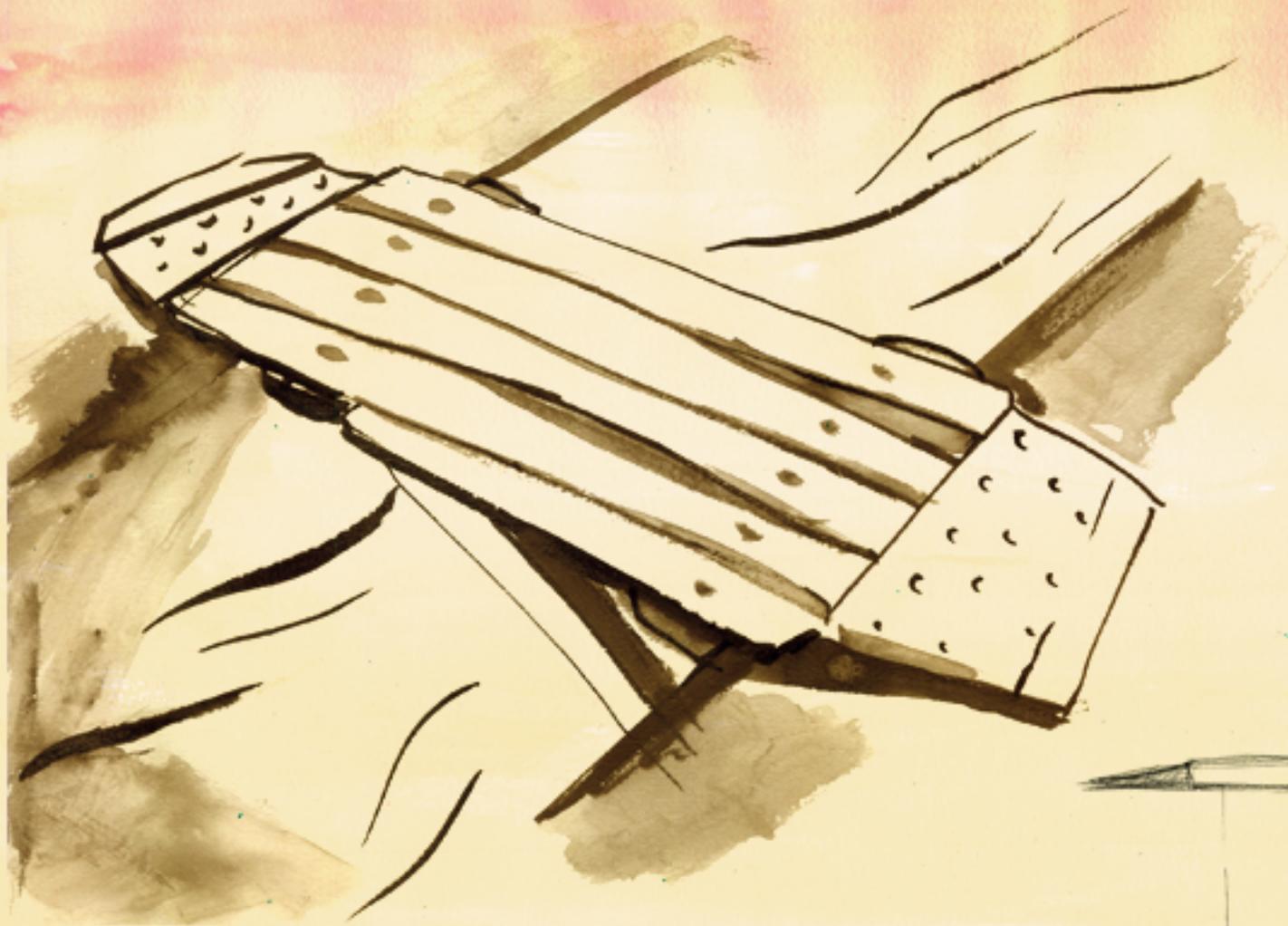
- Stone/Wood/Water
- Attached to stairs





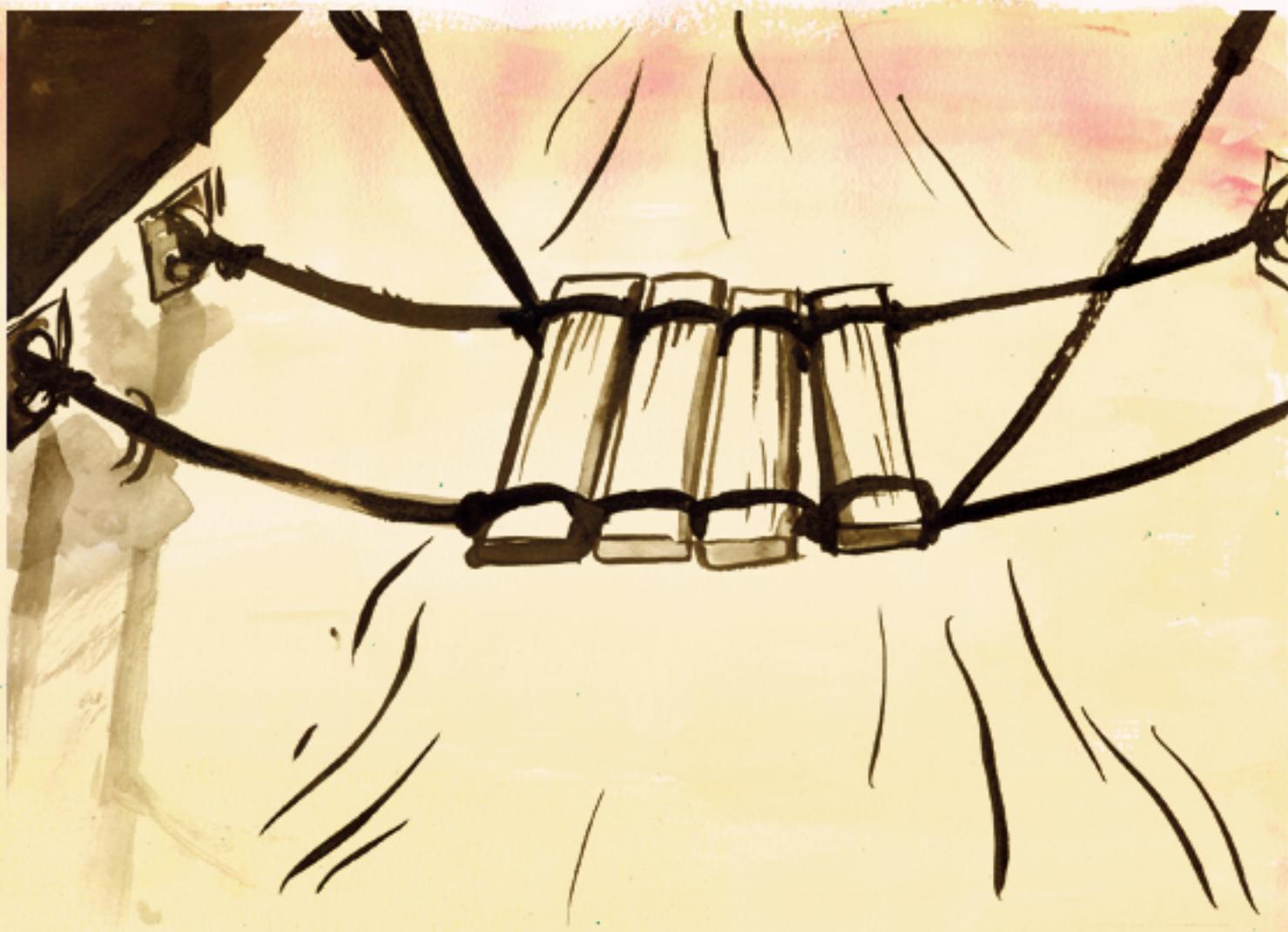
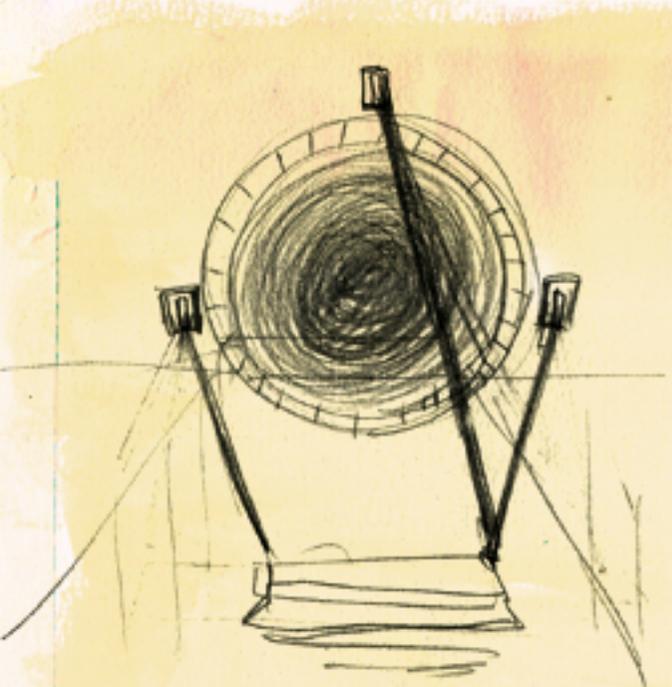
Pipes I - Inside

- Stone/Concrete/Water
- Grimy walls



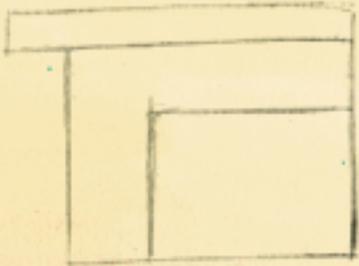
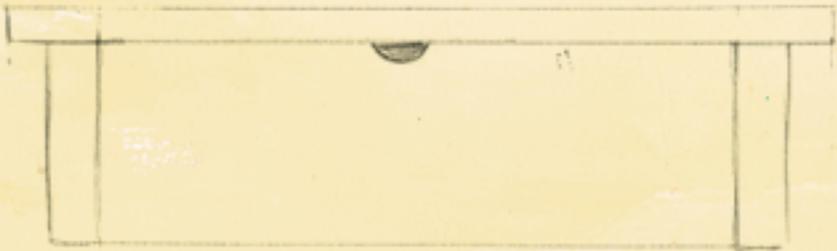
Bridge I - Wood

- Wood/Metal



Pipes 2 - Unusable

- Wood/Rope/Metal attachments
- Connects two sewer pipes



Props

- Stairs: Wood
- Lamps: Metal

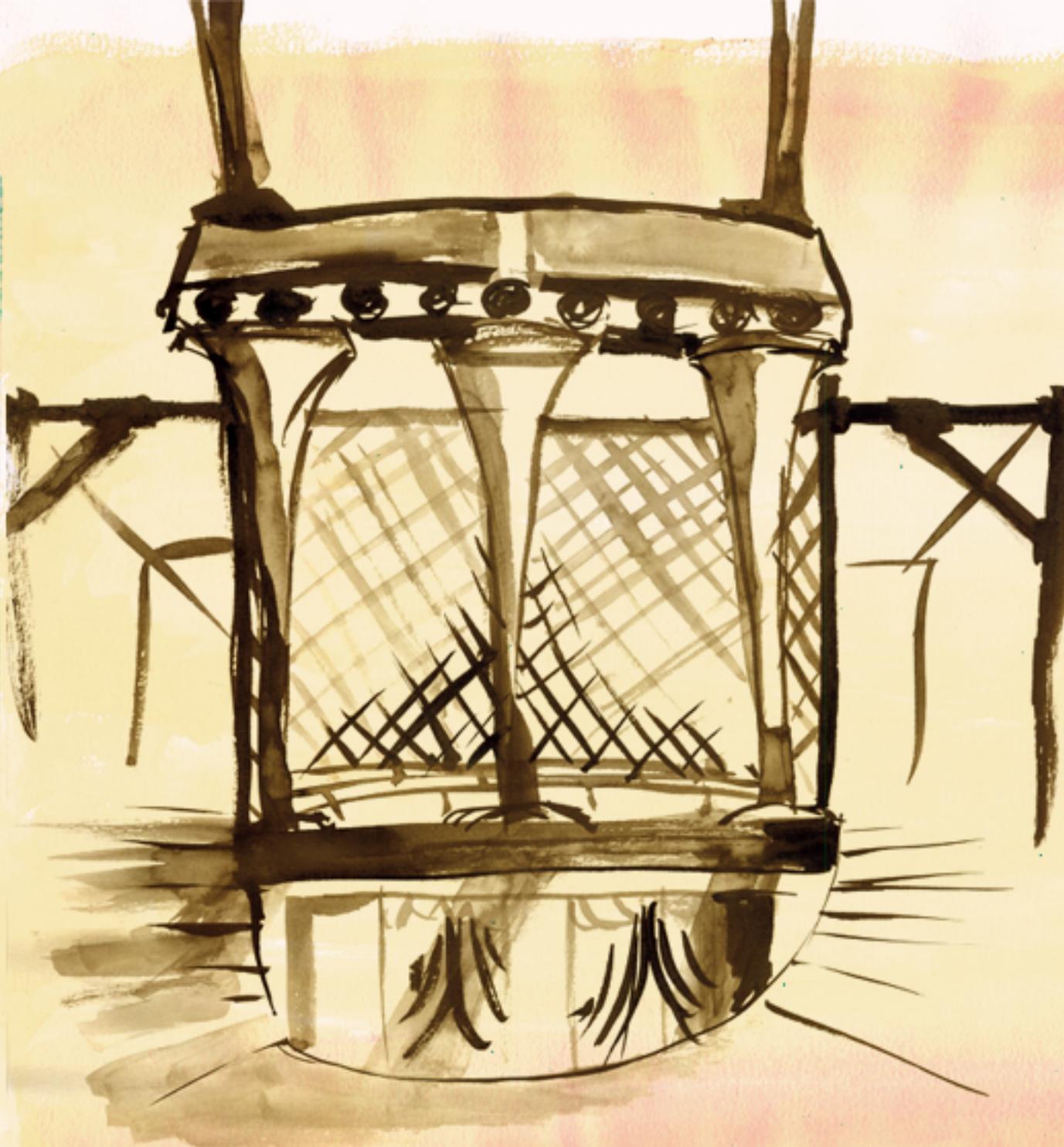
The City





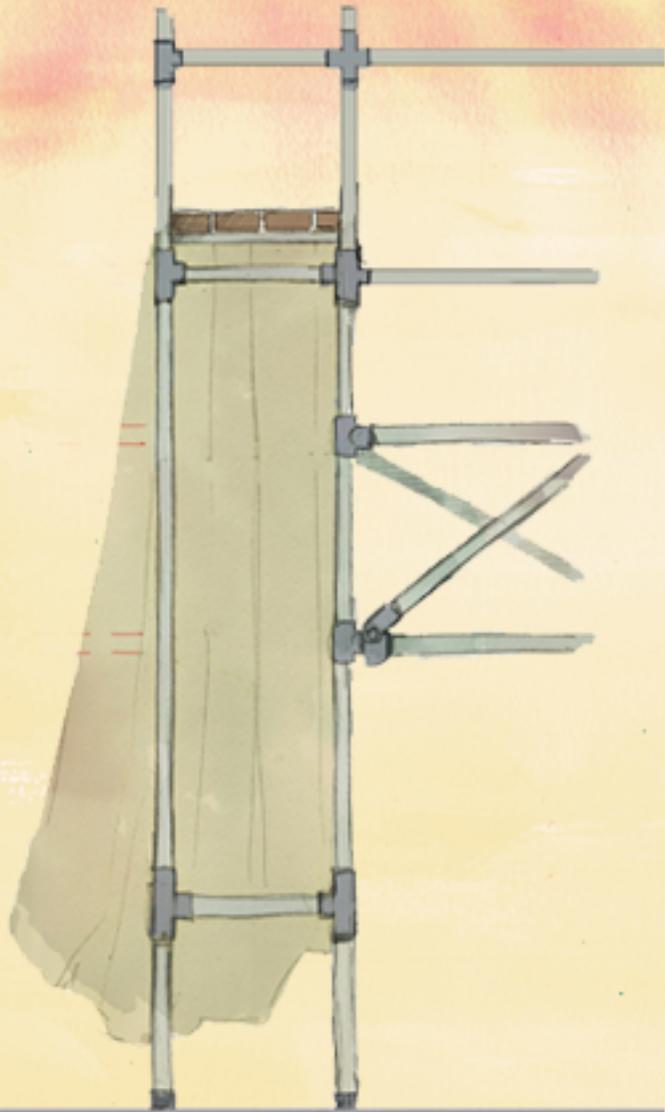
Road - Temple Stairs

- Stairs: Marble/Wood
- Scaffolds: Wood/Paper

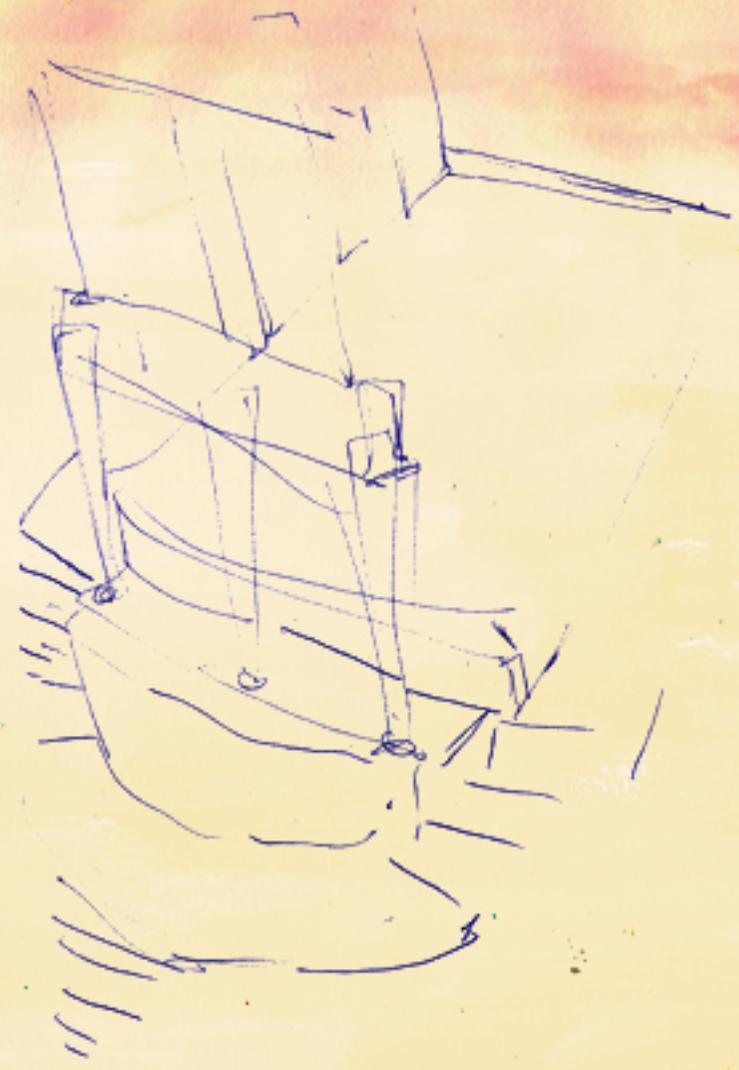
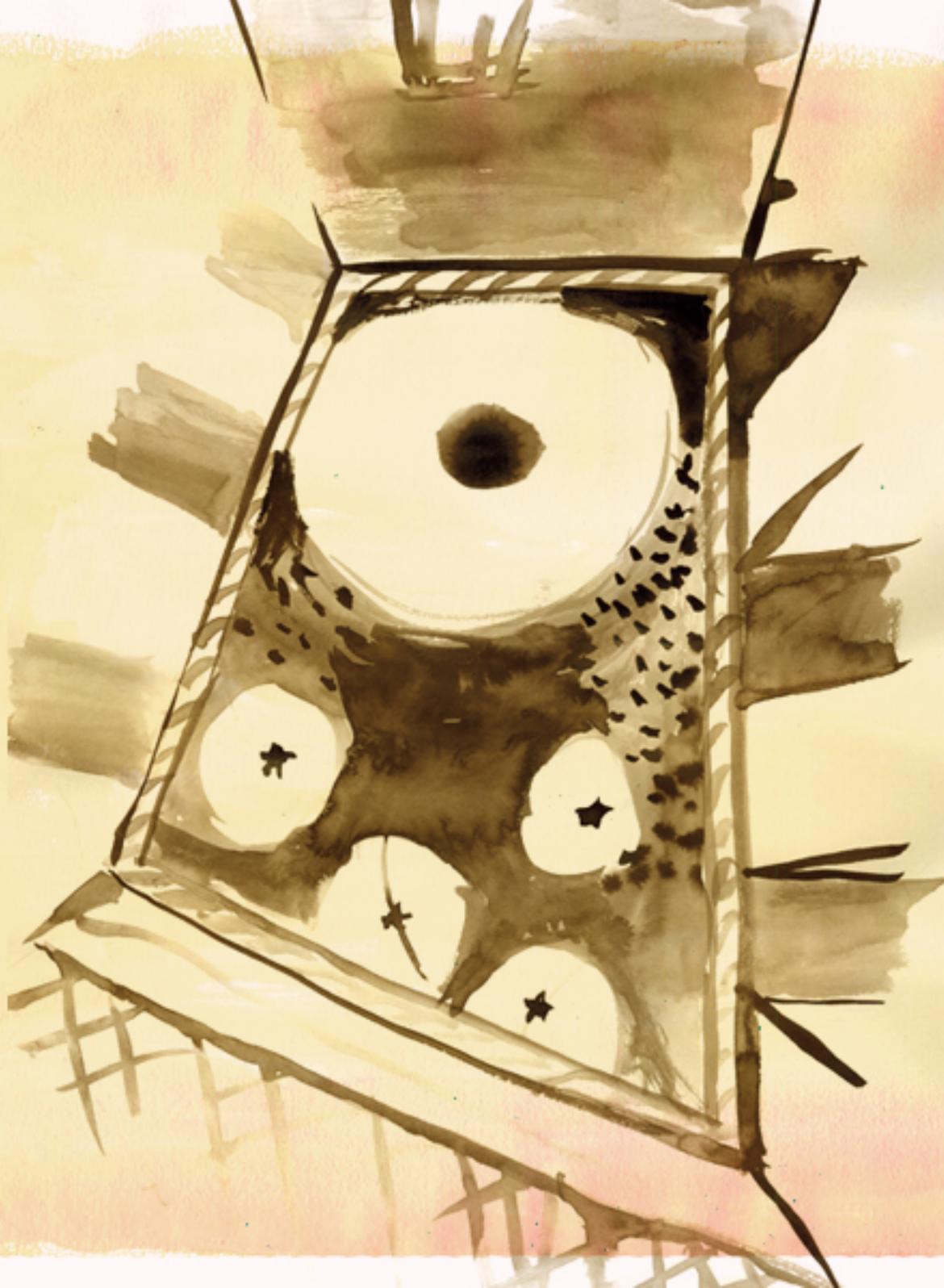


Eyecatch - Temple

Marble/ Minoan Inspired



Building  
Temple pillars  
Jute/Metal/Wood



Road  
Temple pillars

Mosaic



Road Corner  
Stone/Metal



Building Plaster  
Wood/Building  
Plans/Plaster/Metal

Sand Road

Sand/Wood/Metal

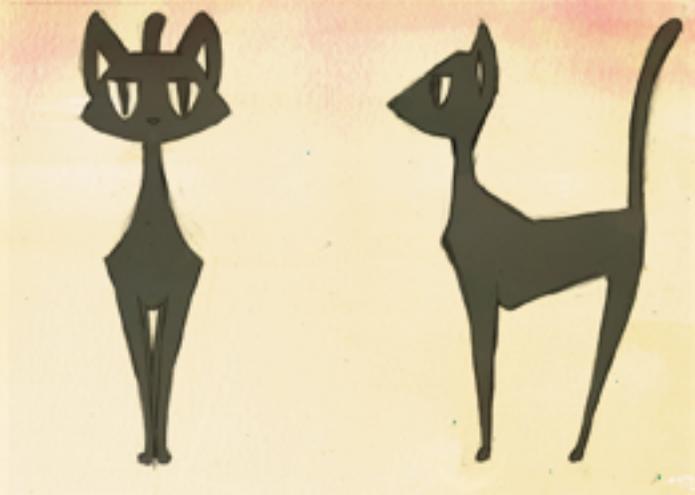




Building Pottery  
Stone/Jute/Metal/plaster



Building Stone  
Stone/Wood/Metal



Props  
Concrete Mixer  
Stepladder  
Cat  
Paintbucket





The Sky

## Cities & The Sky • 3

Those who arrive at Thekla can see little of the city, beyond the plank fences, the sackcloth screens, the scaffoldings, the metal armatures, the wooden catwalks hanging from ropes or supported by sawhorses, the ladders, the trestles. If you ask, "Why is Thekla's construction taking such a long time?" the inhabitants continue hoisting sacks, lowering leaded strings, moving long brushes up and down, as they answer, "So that its destruction cannot begin." And if asked whether they fear that, once the scaffoldings are removed, the city may begin to crumble and fall to pieces, they add hastily, in a whisper, "Not only the city."

If, dissatisfied with these answers, someone puts his eye to a crack in a fence, he sees cranes pulling up other cranes, scaffoldings that embrace other scaffoldings, beams that prop up other beams. "What meaning does your construction have?" he asks, "What is the aim of a city under construction unless it is a city? Where is the plan you are following, the blueprint?"

"We will show it to you as soon as the working day is over; we cannot interrupt our work now," they answer.

Work stops at sunset. Darkness falls over the building site. The sky is filled with stars. "There is the blueprint," they say.