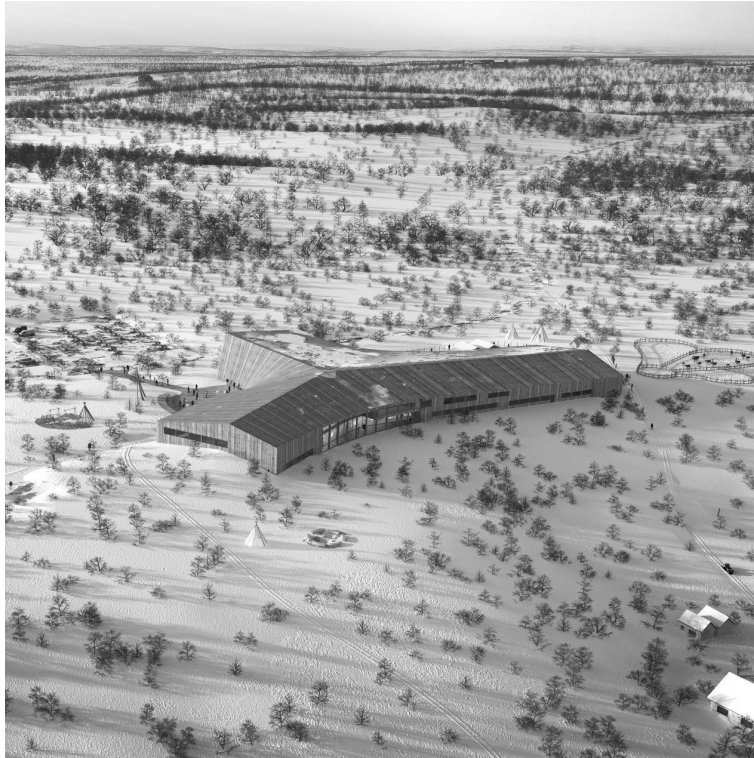


ACE360  
THEME  
2025

NORDIC ARCHITECTURE  
**SÁMI ARCHITECTURE**  
CHALMERS



# ČOARVEMÁTTA

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IS ČOARVEMÁTTA SAMI ARCHITECTURE?



# INTRODUCTION

## HISTORY

Kautokeino (or Guovdageaidnu) lies at a crossroads of Sámi paths, between the settlements of Alta, Muonio, and Karesuando. This key location has made it a trading and meeting hub, making it an important center for northern Sámi culture. Today, it is one of the few places where Sámi is the majority language.

However, it has also been a center for the exercise of power by the Norwegian state. In the 1800s, the state tried to establish firmer control over the area known as “Finnmarksvidda” through colonization. These processes disrupted the way of life for many Sámi, especially with the increased consumption of

alcohol. The Laestadian Christian revival movement inspired many Sámi people to turn against the sale of alcohol, specifically, and against the colonizing forces in general. As part of this conflict, an uprising occurred in Kautokeino in 1852, where the trader Carl Johan Ruth and the sheriff Lars Johan Buch were killed. These uprisings were seen as major events and provoked backlash against the Sámi communities from the Norwegian state.



Lavvu in Kautokeino



## INSTITUTIONS WITHIN ČOARVEMÁTTA

One of the institutions is the Beaivváš Sámi Nasunàlateáther, a Sámi language theatre company originally established in 1981 as an independent group, but which since has gotten public funding from both the Norwegian central government and the Sámi Parliament. Beaivváš is seen as part of the movement of “Sámi awakening” during the 1970s and 80s and is the only Nordic theatre institution with Sámi as the performing language.

The other institution is the Sámi High School and Reindeer Herding School which was established in 1953 to help young Sámi people on the Norwegian

side of the border to prepare for a professional future as reindeer herders, but has since evolved to “prepare Sámi youth for the challenges of functioning and thriving in local, national and international contexts. The school wants to contribute to develop and strengthen identity, language and culture among our Sámi youth”. They have two specialized programs focused on Sámi handicraft and reindeer husbandry respectively. These are open to students from all of Norway as well as students from the Swedish, Finnish, and Russian side of Sapmi.



ARCHITECTS

JOAR NANGO

/

SNØHETTA

/

70°N ARKITEKTUR

## JOAR NANGO

Joar Nango, born in 1979, is a Sámi architect and artist based in Tromsø, Norway. His work explores the intersection of architecture, Indigenous identity, and self-sufficiency, drawing from his Sámi heritage and the nomadic traditions of reindeer herders in Sápmi.

Rooted in Sámi building traditions, Nango's practice reflects the resourcefulness required by Arctic life, using Indigenous knowledge and do-it-yourself solutions to challenge Western ideas of permanence in architecture.

Through installations, publications, and collaborations, Nango highlights

the adaptability of Sámi architecture, creating light, mobile structures that respect the landscape. His work blends art, architecture, and cultural activism, redefining Indigenous spatial practices.

Recently, he has explored the effects of urbanization on Indigenous communities, fostering cross-cultural dialogues that question how modern cities can accommodate nomadic ways of living.



Joar Nango

## SNØHETTA

Snøhetta is a renowned transdisciplinary architecture firm known for blending architecture, landscape, interior design, and art. Founded over 35 years ago in Oslo, the firm gained global recognition with its revival of Egypt's ancient Bibliotheca Alexandrina, establishing its holistic, context-sensitive design philosophy.

Their diverse portfolio includes iconic projects like the Norwegian National Opera and Ballet in Oslo and the National September 11 Memorial Museum Pavilion in New York City. Snøhetta's designs emphasize a deep connection between people, nature, and culture.

Committed to sustainability, the firm draws inspiration from the Brundtland Commission's focus on environmental responsibility, creating buildings that minimize climate impact and respect social and cultural contexts.

With over 320 employees across eight global studios, Snøhetta continues to push design boundaries while championing sustainability, dialogue, and diversity, earning numerous international awards for its innovative, human-centered architecture.

## 70°N ARKITEKTUR

70°N Arkitektur is an innovative architectural firm based in Tromsø, Norway, known for its experimental approach and commitment to continuous development. Their projects range from small object design to housing, urban planning, and sustainable development, shaped by a reflective engagement with architectural competitions.

Founded after winning two major national competitions, the culture park on Tøyen in Oslo and the National Political Centre in Eidsvoll, 70°N pushes boundaries in architecture, often focusing on the challenges of northern regions and the Arctic.

With expertise in architecture, landscape design, and historic building rehabilitation, they also lead academic initiatives like Emerging Arctic Landscapes at Bergen Architecture School. Their influence spans Scandinavia, including projects like Øresundsvisioner 2040 and urban development in Copenhagen's Nordhavnen.

Through their diverse work, 70°N develops architectural solutions that reflect cultural and environmental contexts, remaining a key voice in contemporary architecture.





## SITE

The project is located in Kautokeino, a municipality in the heart of Finnmark, Norway, central to Sámi culture. Despite being Norway's largest municipality by area, it has a population of just under 3,000. The town serves as a hub for Sámi traditions and cultural institutions, playing a vital role in preserving and promoting the Sámi way of life. The surrounding Finnmarksvidda plateau is known for its vast open spaces and harsh yet beautiful subarctic climate.

Kautokeino is a focal point for Sámi cultural activities, with a rich tradition of music, performing arts, and visual art. Institutions like the International Sámi

Film Institute and Beaivváš Sámi Theatre are based here, alongside annual events such as the Sámi Grand Prix and reindeer racing, which attract visitors from across Sápmi.

The project site lies near the village, bordered by a large river that serves as a natural boundary. The design harmonizes with the surrounding hills and elevations, ensuring the building's proportions complement the landscape. With deep respect for local traditions, culture, and environment, this project pays tribute to the Sámi people's rich heritage and their enduring connection to the land.





## COMPETITION

After the Norwegian Storting had decided on the colocalization of the institutions of the Sámi national theatre Beaivváš and the reindeer herding school, the governmental developer Statsbygg announced a competition for the construction of new premises. The competition was for a “total enterprise,” where the winning team of companies would design, develop, and build the building. The government emphasized the requirement for an actor with “proven experience of successful completion of projects of this scale,” in effect limiting the possible actors to a handful of large construction companies with their chosen architectural partners.

The final decision was based on a ranking of the proposal, based 60% on the cost and 40% on the evaluated quality of the proposals. The competition was subsequently won by Econor of Tromsø and their architectural team consisting of Snøhetta, 70°N arkitektur, and Joar Nango.



## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

## CONCEPT

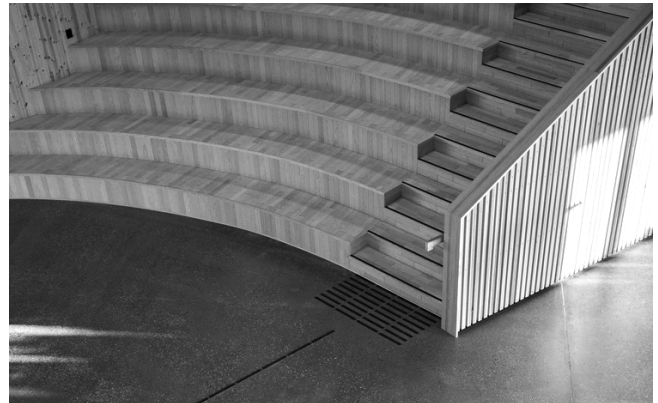
The winning proposal was called Çoarvematta, which has since gone on to become the generally accepted name of the building. The word comes from the northern Sámi word for the root of the reindeer antler, whose shape inspired the general shape of the building. The curved form emphasizes the equal importance of all sides of the building, overlooking the reindeer herding lands of the Finnmarksvidda on one side and the built-up area of Kautokeino on the other. The architect's idea of low height but a wide footprint is meant to mirror the horizontal character of the landscape. The three directions of the building each house one of the three functions: the

Sámi national theatre Beaivváš, the high school and reindeer herding school's educational spaces, and its faculty spaces. Inside the main entrance of the building, there is a large open foyer, from which the three wings are reached. This foyer acts as the symbolic core of the building and is characterized by wood and warm shades of red inspired by Sámi duodji, or craft, and is meant to be a sort of metaphor for the warm fire, which is the central feature of a Sámi lavvú.





Entrance hall



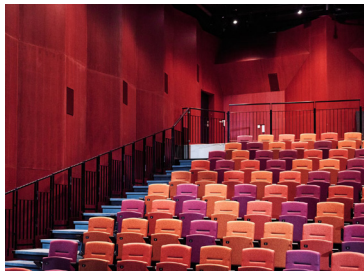
Entrance stair



Roof skylight









Exterior artwork





## DRAWINGS

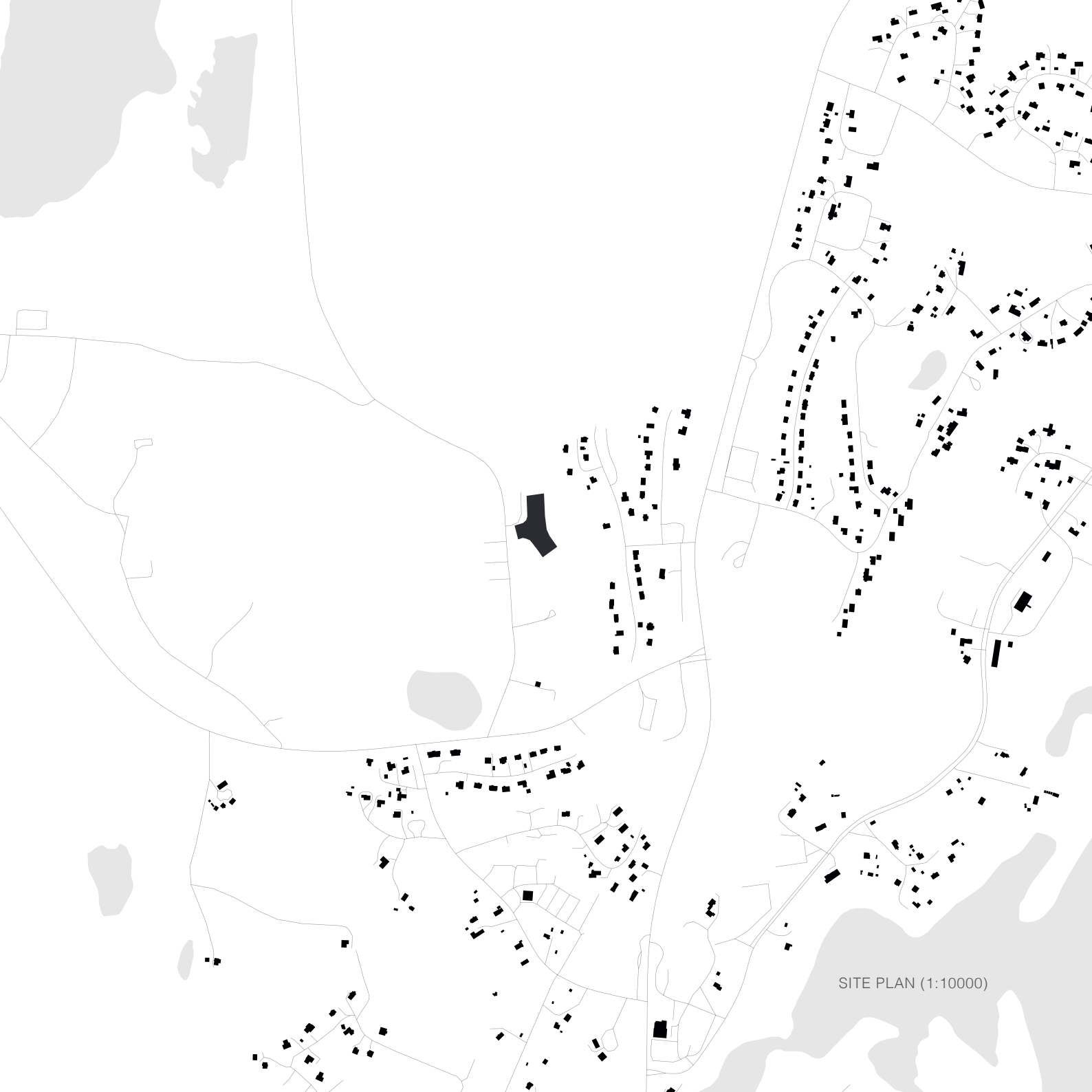
SITE PLAN

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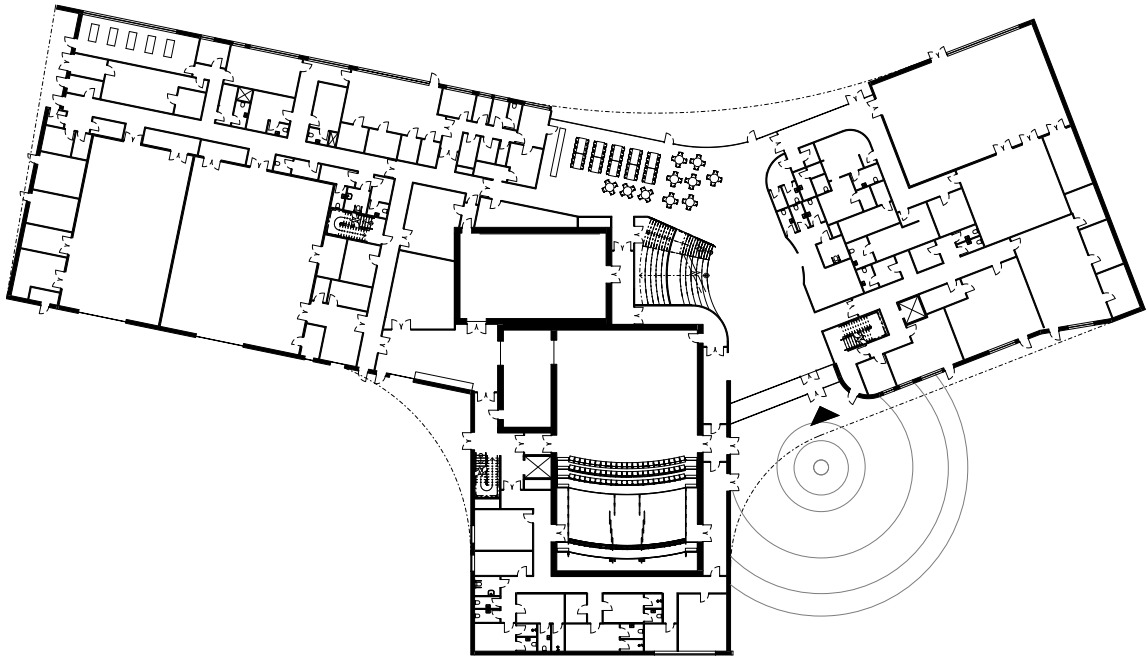
FLOOR PLAN

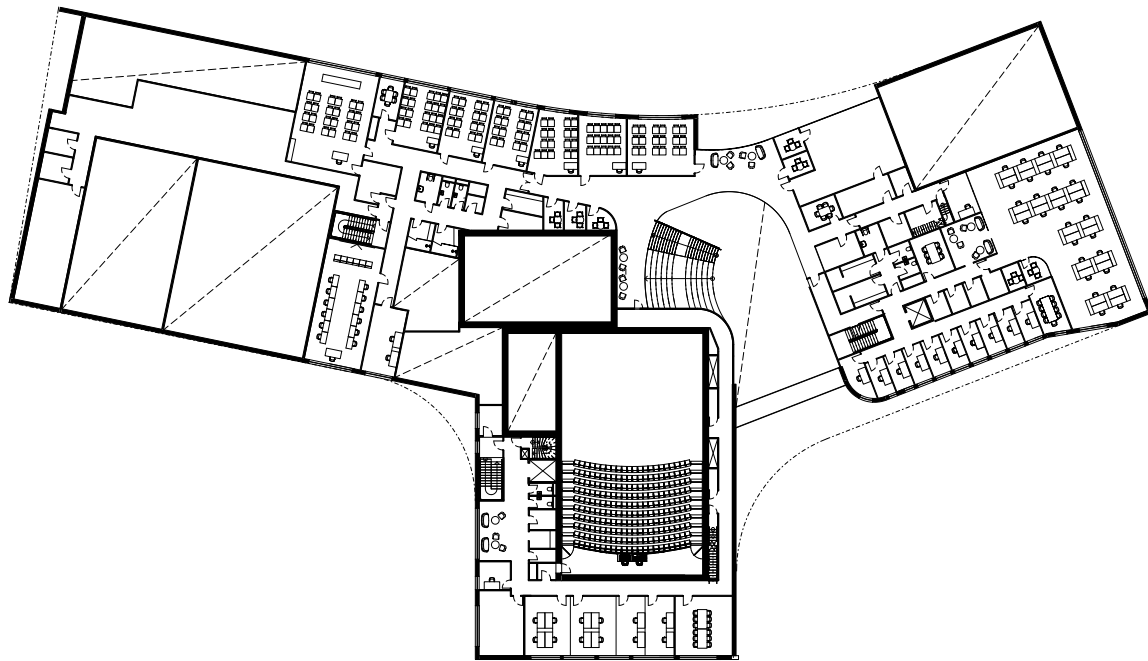
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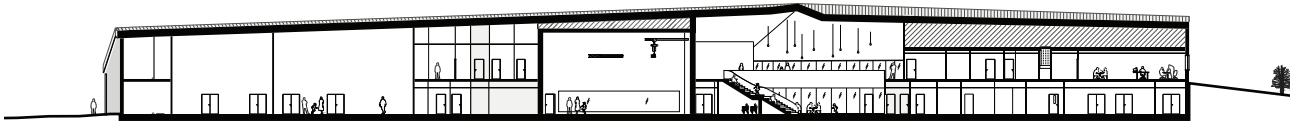
SECTIONS



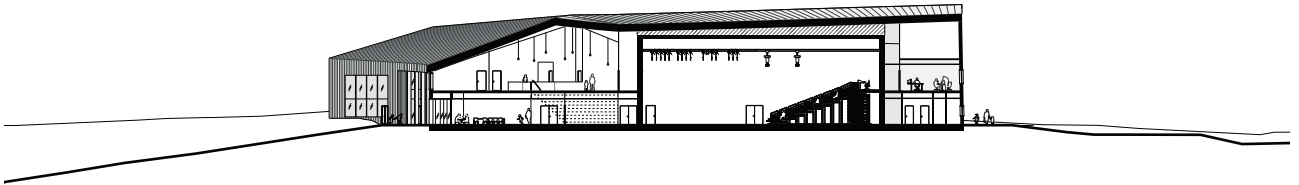
SITE PLAN (1:10000)



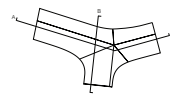




A-A



B-B



## ARTWORK AND RELATION TO SAMI CULTURE

A competition was held for the artistic embellishment of the building, with Sámi artists selected by a jury headed by, among others, Joar Nango. Several artists were selected from a diverse geographical and cultural spread around Sapmi. Marèt Ánne Sara was commissioned to design the theatre curtain and Brita Marakatt Labba was commissioned to do a monumental textile piece for the main foyer. Two existing artworks by influential Sámi artists Iver Jåks and Aage Gaup were also moved to the new building.



GAPMU  
MÁRET ÁNNE SARA



MIN DUODDARAT  
BRITTA MARAKATT-LABBA



ŠIELLA  
ELLE VALKEAPÄÄ



BEAIVVÁŠ JA BIEGGA  
IVER JÅKS



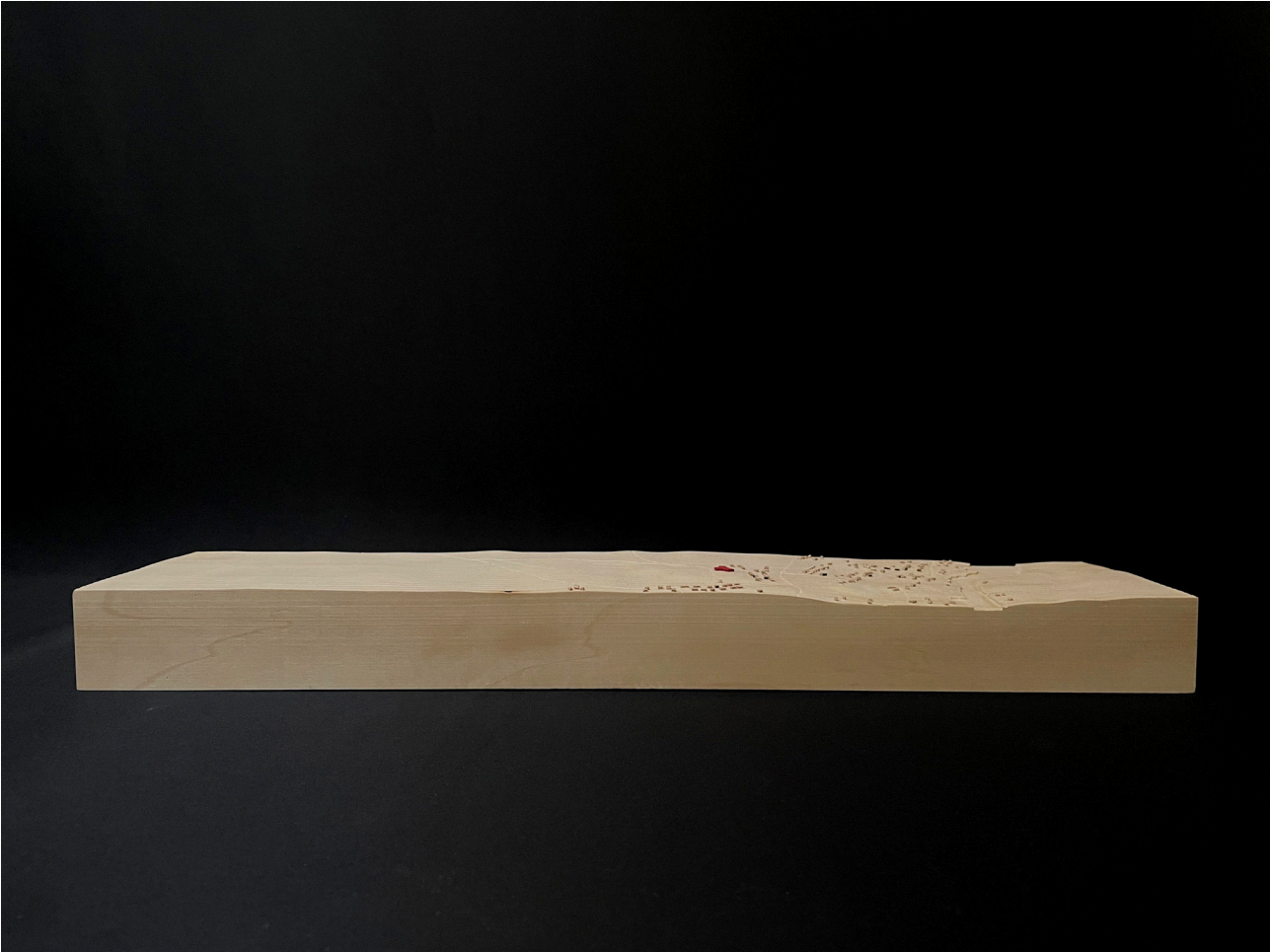
MODELS

## MAIN IDEAS

For the concept model, we wanted to display one of the key ideas behind the design: the open, warm core connecting the three wings. This central core echoes the central fire in the traditional Lavvú, and that reference is highlighted in the warm red colors of the materials, as it is in the warm red light.

The landscape model's purpose is to show the placement of the building, both in relation to the built-up area of Kautokeino and to the vast plateau, which is reindeer herding lands. The small sliver format was chosen to highlight this relationship. The placement of the building is interesting, as the idea of a monumental, cultural building placed in

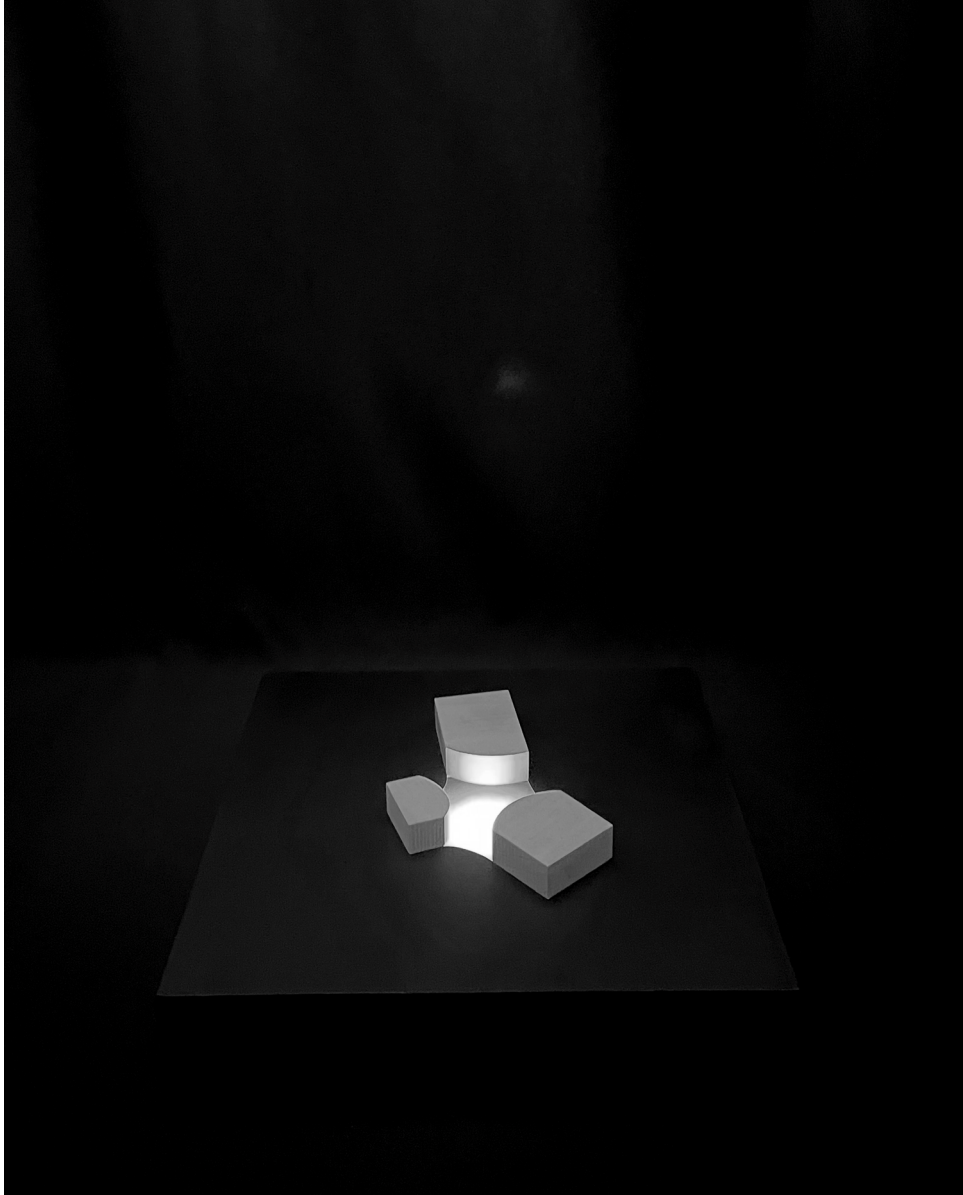
such a non-urban way is unusual. For the main model, we wanted to show what we perceive as the three main architectural features: the complex curved shape and wooden materiality of the roof, the large open foyer, and the theatre black box. We also wanted to highlight the artwork by Iver Jåks in the foyer and the large theatre curtain by Marèt Anne Sara. This led us to choose to make a portion of the building in a scale of 1:100, where details and materials are visible, rather than making the entire thing in a smaller scale. The model is complemented by a model in scale 1:1000 in order to explain the volume in its entirety.

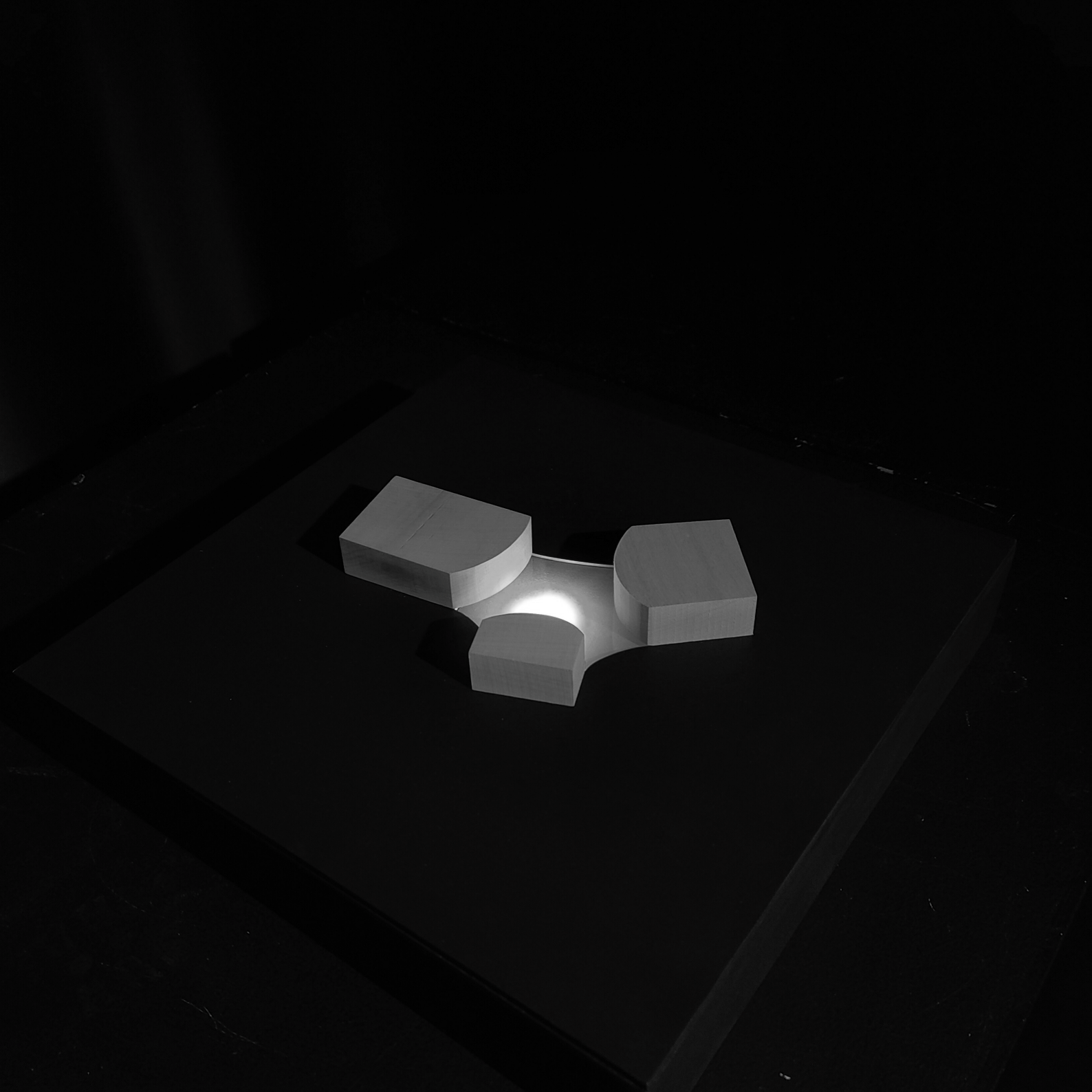


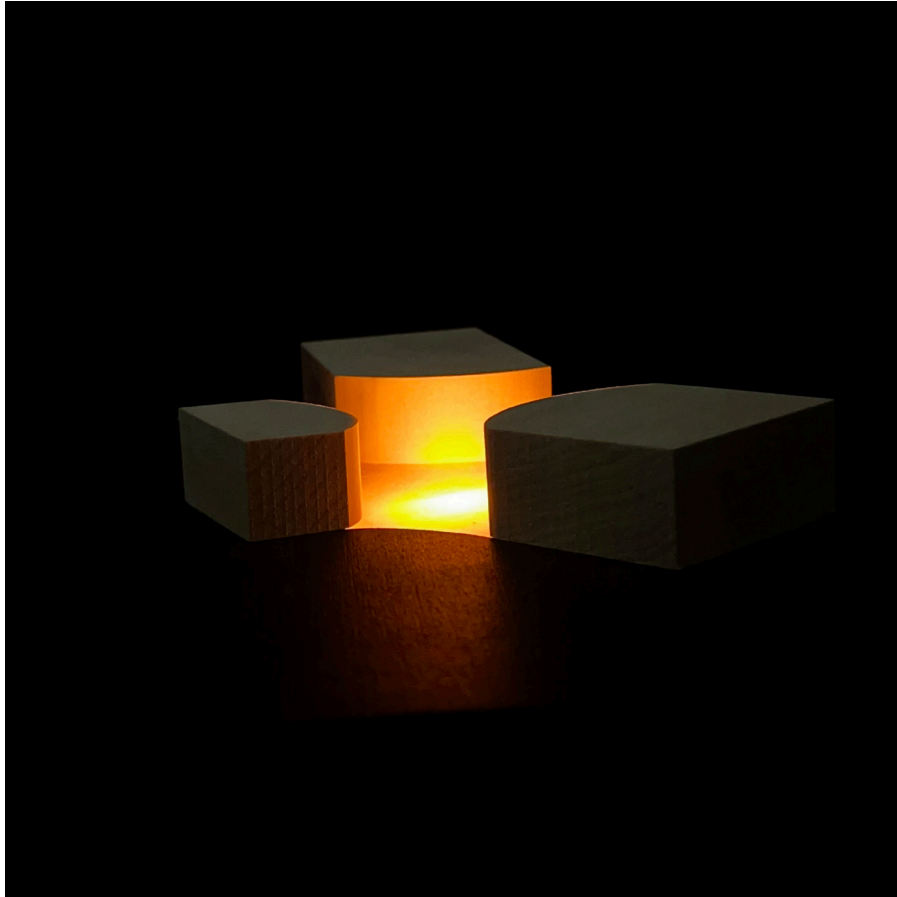
Landscape model

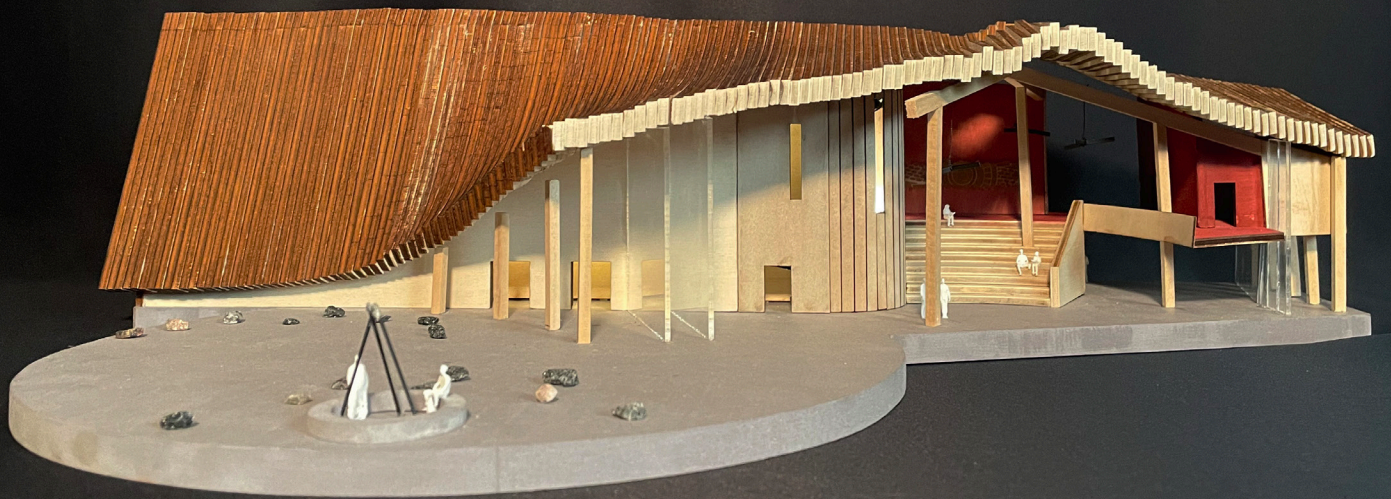


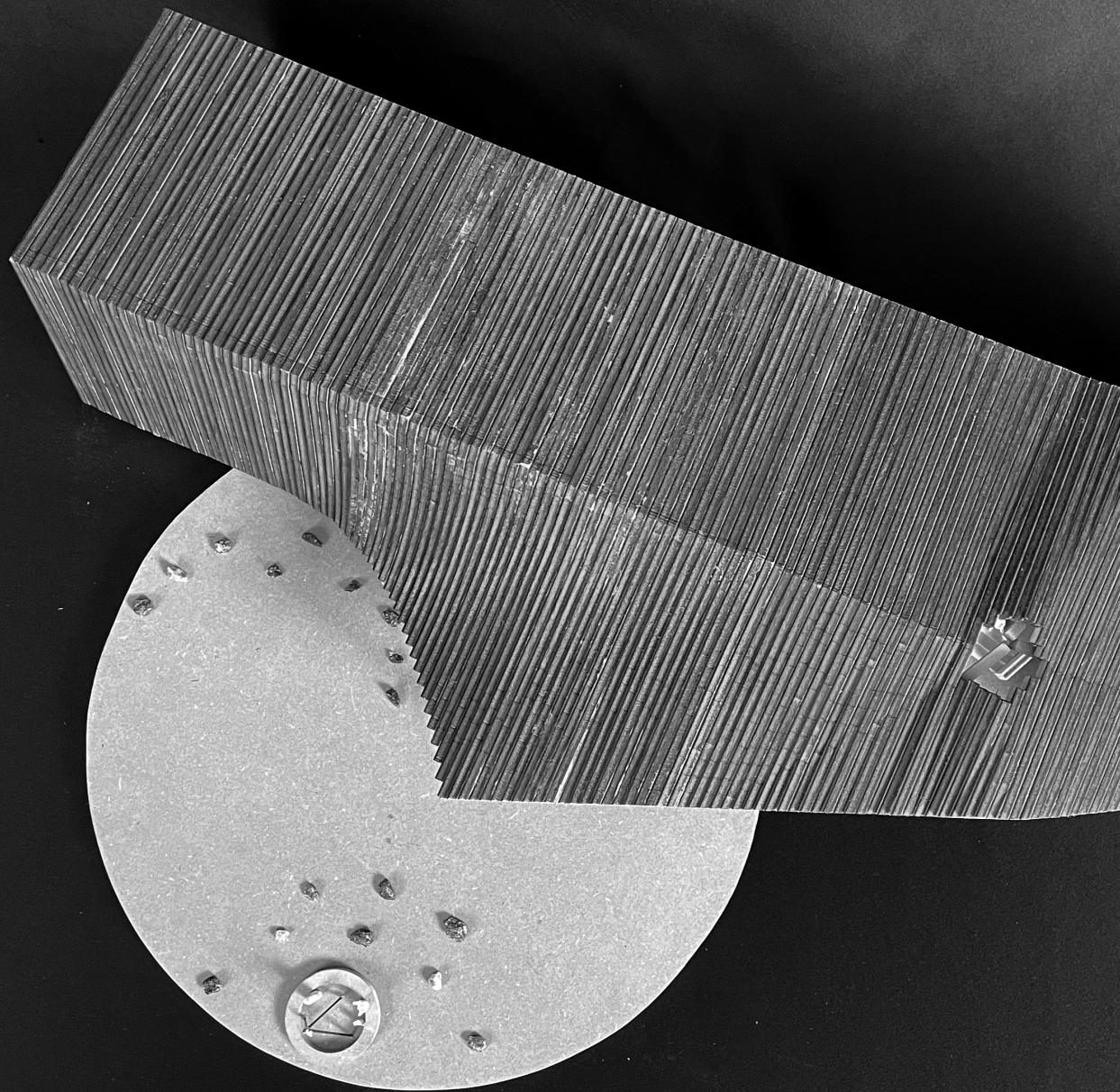


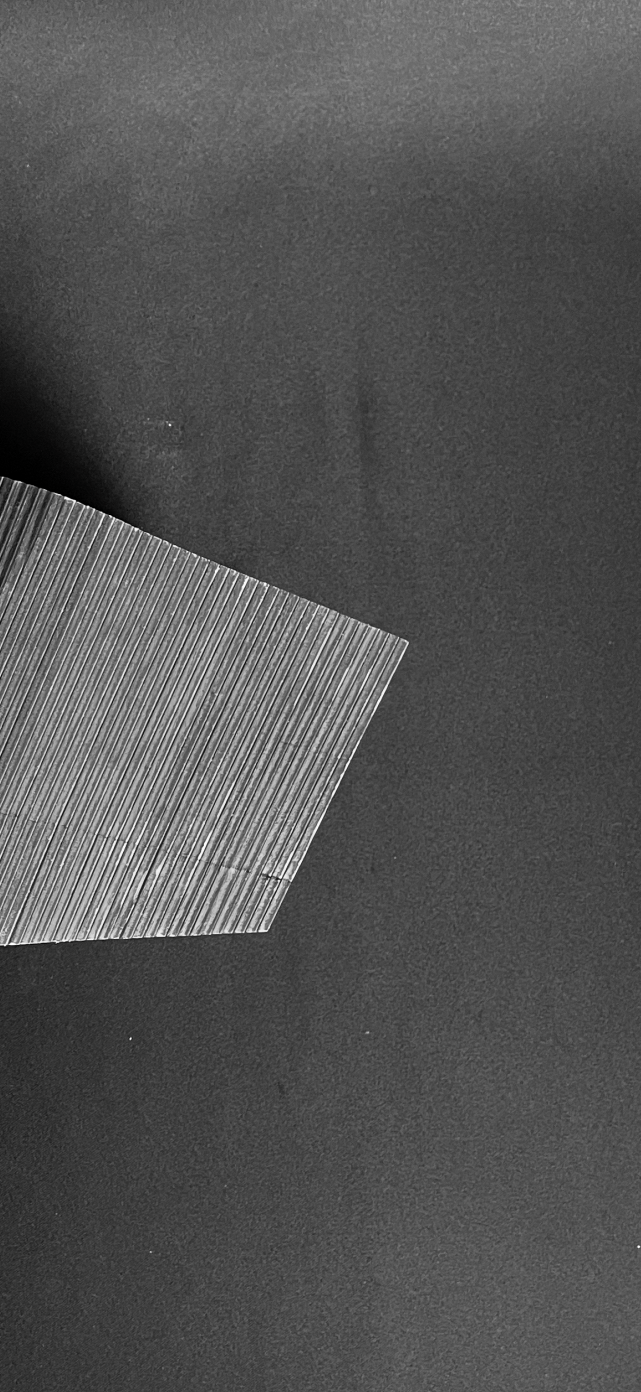


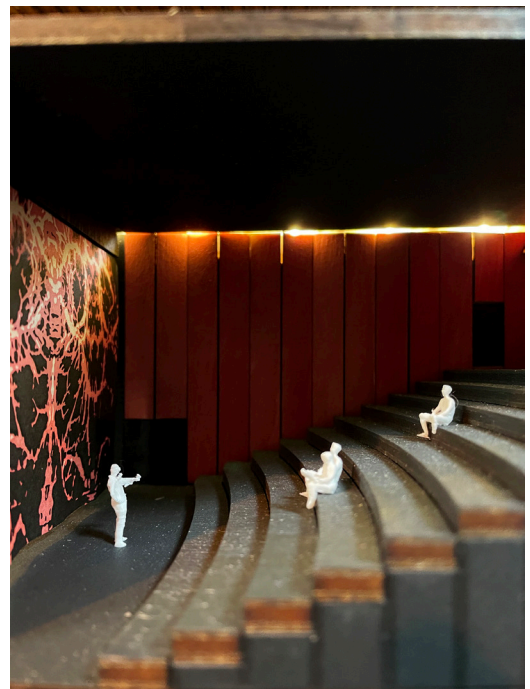






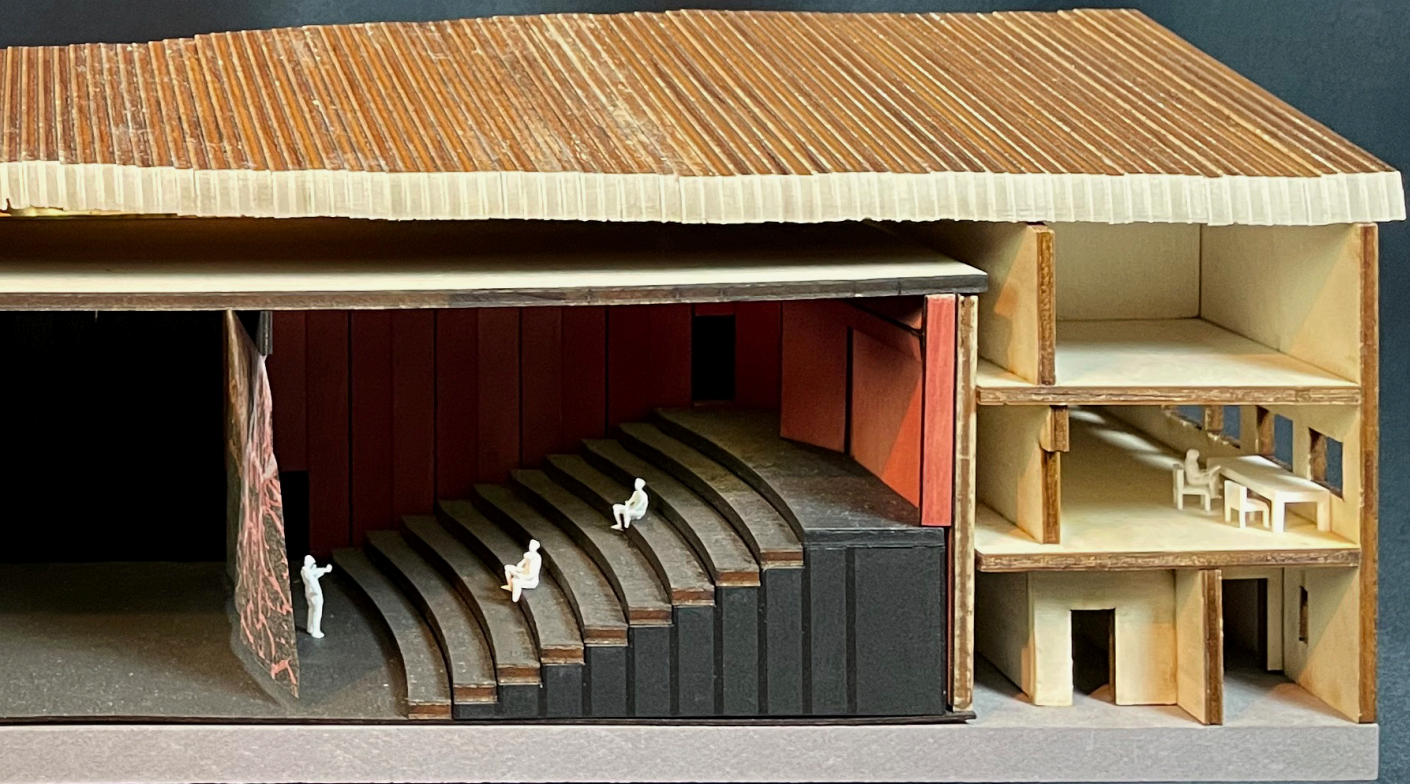












## IS ČOARVEMÁTTA SAMI ARCHITECTURE?

“Čoarvematta is an amazing piece of western architecture,” says Eve Sarapää, Sámi-Finnish architect. She points to the fact that even though the project has a lot of Sámi symbolism, there is no Sámi tradition of building at this scale. In her opinion, the essence of Sámi architecture is not defined by materials, or even craft tradition, but by a material culture or philosophy all about using what is available and leaving a minimal trace. The employment of large construction companies and globally famous “southern” architects is in opposition to that.

On the other hand, the building seems to be beloved by the community in Kautokeino and is a platform for celebrating the very best of Sámi culture. The building, while not inherently Sámi in its construction or typology, is Sámi in its programmatic content and its visual expression through the cooperation of Sámi artists and designers like Joar Nango. The question of whether there is such a thing as an essential “Sámi architecture” depends on how one understands “Sámi culture” in general. Is it as the heritage of pre-colonial traditions, as a philosophy or method, or as a diverse and evolving material culture?



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