

IN
MEMORY
OF

DESIGNING CONTEMPORARY MEMORIALS
SPENCER BAILEY

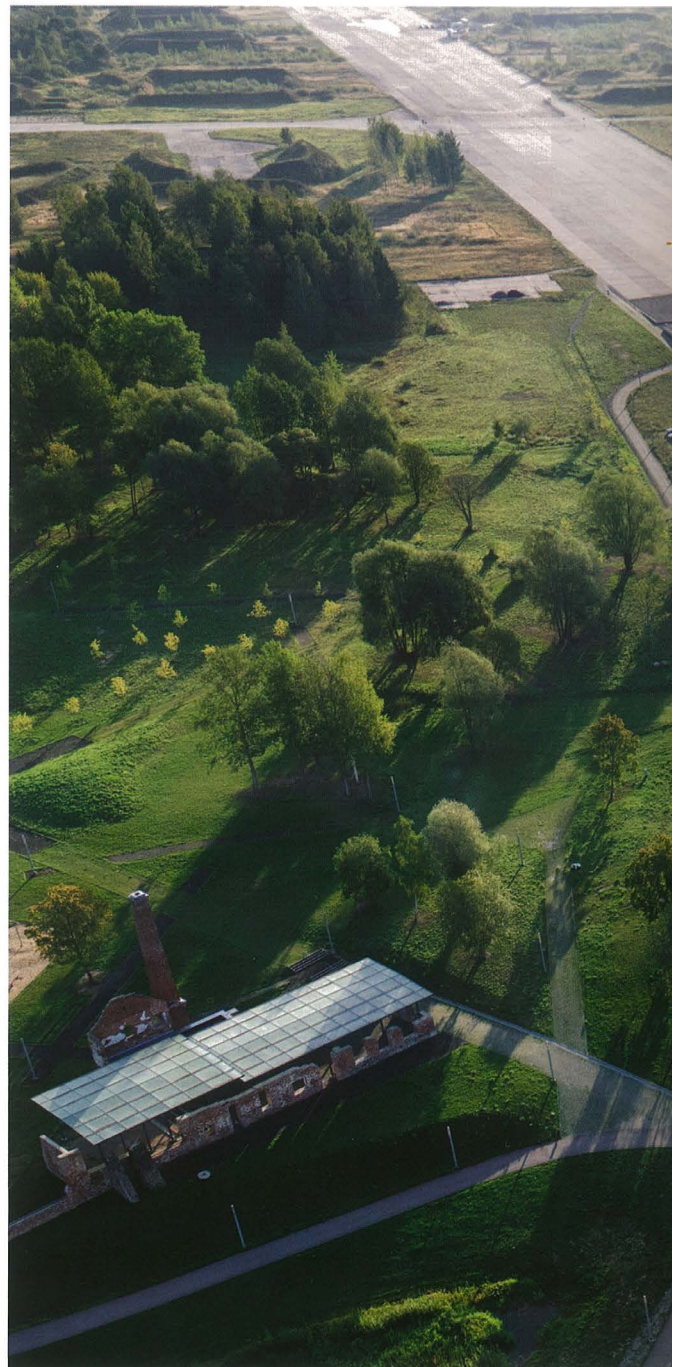
PHAIDON

ESTONIAN NATIONAL MUSEUM

When they won an international competition in 2005 to design the Estonian National Museum in Tartu, the architects Dan Dorell, Lina Ghotmeh, and Tsuyoshi Tane hadn't even formed their own firm yet. The design they submitted was completed during late nights and off-hours while working for the architects Jean Nouvel (Dorell, Ghotmeh) and David Adjaye (Tane). But soon after the announcement, the three moved to Paris and formed DGT Architects, to work on the Estonian museum project full-time. (Upon the building's completion, in 2016, DGT disbanded, with each partner forming their own firm.) While not explicitly a memorial, the museum was designed with memorialization in mind. Built on the former site of a Soviet airfield located 1.2 miles (2 kilometers) outside the city, the 1,165-foot-long (355-meter-long) structure is designed to symbolize the country emerging from its dark past. (Estonia gained its independence from Soviet rule in the 1920s, but after its parliament disbanded from 1934–38 it was annexed by the Soviet Union in 1940 and subsequently by the Third Reich. Reoccupied by the Soviet Union in 1944, Estonia didn't gain independence again until 1991. In 2004, after a period of rapid socioeconomic reform, it joined the European Union.)

Literally and figuratively coming out of this painful and precarious history, the sloping form of the 366,000-square-foot (34,000-square-meter) museum, which houses a collection of 140,000 objects, gradually increases from a height of 9.8 feet (3 meters) at the far end to 45 feet (14 meters) at its entrance. Creating an infinite horizon, the site also establishes, as the architects have described it, a “memory field.” Included inside are gallery spaces, a conference hall, a library, a café, offices, and an archive. Covering the triple-chamber glass panel facade is a printed abstract cornflower motif; referencing Estonia's national flower, it gives the glazing a frosted appearance while also reflecting the country's heritage.

RIGHT THE BUILDING'S HEIGHT GRADUALLY INCREASES FROM 9.8 FEET (3 METERS) AT ONE END TO 45 FEET (14 METERS) AT ITS ENTRANCE.



Tartu, Estonia. Dan Dorell, Lina Ghotmeh, and Tsuyoshi Tane (2016)





TOP THE STRUCTURE'S EVOCATIVE TALL ENTRANCE FEATURES A DRAMATIC, WELCOMING CANTILEVER.

OPPOSITE THE LIGHT AND AIRY INTERIOR INCLUDES GALLERY SPACES, A CONFERENCE HALL, A LIBRARY, A CAFÉ, OFFICES, AND AN ARCHIVE.



Built on the former site of a Soviet airfield, the Estonian National Museum literally and figuratively rises up out of the nation's painful and precarious past.