1. Hey everyone, and welcome to my graduation presentation! Thank you so much for coming to support me today. I am excited to show you my graduation project, **The Crossing**. At its heart, this project is an exploration of the contemporary purpose of sacred architecture, specifically, **how we can use the architectural qualities of sacred architecture to create reconnection on sites of traumatic disconnect**.
2. The story starts with a site visit to Tallinn, the capital of Estonia. Here we spent two weeks exploring the city, trying to find a **meaningful problem to solve** with architecture.
3. While we were there, I noticed something interesting about the culture. On paper, Estonia is known as one of the least religious countries in the world. But over half the population still believes in something deeply personal and spiritual. An example of this is the "sacred groves" spread throughout the country, one of which I visited. These are sacred spots in nature where people go to leave small offerings and tie red ribbons around the trees, physically connecting themselves to the land.
4. I wanted to know: ***How does architecture create that spiritual feeling?*** We have all felt it before. Imagine walking into a massive, ancient cathedral or a beautiful stone church, like this one in Copenhagen. **The way the light falls into the room, the way the thick stone walls block out the city sounds, and the high ceilings** are all designed to connect the individual to something greater than themselves.
5. I found the core of this experience in the Latin origin of the word *religion*: ***religare***, which literally means **to re-bind or to reconnect**. This definition has been my guiding light throughout the entire project.
6. To bring these ideas back into design**, I studied historical architecture**. I will highlight the two most influential case studies now.
7. First, I looked into historical religious architecture—churches, mosques, and temples across time—to understand what physical qualities make a space feel sacred. I made a whole booklet about this, which you can pass around, but I boiled it down to three main ingredients:
8. The first is a sequence of **compression and expansion** (moving from tight, cozy spaces into big, open ones). Second is a **clear hierarchy of scale** between intimate and grand spaces. And third is **clear geometry with strong focal points**. These design tools are not tied to any specific religion, yet they universally create a sacred feeling.
9. My second case study was the architect and monk, **Dom Hans van der Laan**. He developed an architectural theory based on how humans naturally perceive size and space. It is centered on what he calls the **plastic number**, which uses a **3-to-4 ratio**—the smallest difference in size that the human eye can clearly notice. Based on this ratio, he designed a strict mathematical system that he used for everything in his buildings, from a tiny window to a whole room.
10. I analyzed this theory and **how it got implemented in his designs**, for example, this monastery in Valls, which I visited, to truly understand these qualities. This is just the tip of the iceberg, but I could spend 15 minutes talking about him, so let's not do that. All of this is summarized in the following booklet, which you can look through.
11. Armed with these architectural case studies, I proceeded with the development of my design assignment.
12. **I wanted to bring this feeling of 'reconnection' to a place that desperately needs it**: the Patarei Prison. During the Soviet occupation, this prison was used to lock up and silence anyone who spoke out against the regime. It was a machine designed **to isolate people from their beliefs and the outside world.**

13. Today, it is being turned into an international museum for the victims of communism. While the museum does a great job of documenting this painful history, it creates an emotionally heavy experience for visitors, leaving them feeling heavy and disconnected. My goal with **The Crossing** is to build a companion piece right next door. It will host the exit route of the museum, a space that helps the visitors transition out of that darkness, back into hope, through personal and contextual reconnection.
14. The project sits on a plot right next to the prison, which is currently occupied by an abandoned bread factory that used to supply bread to the prison complex. With my project, I want to reuse the main historic building, as you can see on the right, to ground my design in the real history of the site.
15. Now, the big question was: *How do we translate this emotional story into a physical building?*
16. Previously, I talked about how the prison **suppressed people's beliefs and isolated them from the context**; with this building, I want to do the exact **opposite.** I translated this into two concepts: personal reconnection, where visitors can process the experience in peace. And contextual reconnection, where people will reconnect with the world around them. For this, I used two architectural typologies, without getting two architectural, these are the patio, an inward-looking structure, for personal reconnection. And the pavilion, and outward-looking structure for contextual reconnection.
17. I will now walk you through how these ideas fit onto the site, starting with the current situation, where I propose to keep the main historic factory building.
18. In this main building, the thick, existing limestone walls completely **shield the visitor** from the outside noise. This makes it the perfect home for our quiet, **inward-looking Patio spaces**, featuring rooms that open up straight to the sky.
19. The open, outward-looking Pavilion is placed at the back of the existing structure. Because this part of the site sits quite a bit higher than its surroundings, it offers **beautiful, uninterrupted views of the sea and the prison**. These views will be beautifully framed by two long, covered walkways, or colonnades.
20. And lastly, to turn this area into a lively public plaza by the sea, I **introduced vibrant public functions** into the design.
21. Here, you can see how this concept looks on the main floor plan. On one side, two spaces—a brick dome and an open courtyard—provide a private place for personal reconnection. Perpendicular to them are two visual pathways designed as open walkways, **leading your eyes directly to viewpoints** overlooking the prison and the sea. On the left, we have a restaurant with windows on all sides and an open kitchen to keep the **views completely clear**. On the right, an open-air theater creates a space for community gatherings and events, with the **sea as a backdrop.**
22. On the lower level, a **cozy café** sits right at the level of the seashore. On this floor, all the **supporting service areas**—like restrooms and wardrobes—are tucked away so they don't block the beautiful views.
23. This diagram shows how a visitor would experience the building as the museum's exit route: moving out of the prison's darkness and stepping into the building's light, guided by a rhythm of **tight thresholds and big, open spaces.**
24. But apart from the museum route, the building can also be enjoyed freely by the public as an open pavilion, as seen here.
25. To explain the building further, I want to take you on a quick journey through three different scales, starting from the big picture and slowly **zooming in like a camera**.

26. On the **urban scale**, the project sits as a modest**, humble** volume that is grounded in the site. Compared to the massive, intimidating size of the Patarei Prison complex, my building intentionally takes a respectful, humble position.
27. Here, you can also clearly see how the colonnades align with **two clear visual pathways**: on the left is the view coming from the local Kalamaja street, and on the right is the view coming from the city center.
28. Now, let's zoom in closer to the **building scale**. The contrast between the inward-focused, personal reconnection zones and the open contextual reconnection zones becomes very clear. Let's look at the personal reconnection zones first.
29. Upon entering the old bread factory, all the noise fades away and your focus is directed completely inward. **The thick walls protect** you from the outside world, while the spaces open up directly to the **sky above.**
30. Let's zoom into the **dome** on the left.
31. As you walk in, the tight circulation spaces open up into **a grand brick dome**, where a beam of light plays the starring role. The light enters through a single round opening in the roof, an oculus, and reflects perfectly into a quiet pool of water below, creating a beautiful focal point. Surrounding the dome are benches where visitors can sit down, look up, and rest.
32. Now let's take a look at the courtyard.
33. The courtyard sequence moves from an **intimate walkway** into a **open air courtyard**. In the courtyard, a path slowly **slopes downward**, immersing the visitor into the landscape and leading to a sunken seating area, with a central tree as a focus point, here the visitors are surrounded by quiet reflection pools that reflect the sky. The walls are lined with warm wooden benches, giving you a comfortable place to sit and take in the environment. This entire gallery is built along the old limestone walls, grounding the space in the history of the site.
34. Now let's look at the contextual reconnection, which is organized around these colonnades. Here you can see how the space **is compressed** in the colonnades, and **expands towards the focal point** of the viewing points.
35. Let's zoom in on how these walkways frame the sea.
36. Because the land sits high up, the columns create a frame that **directs your eyes** straight to the horizon, making the **open sea** the absolute focal point.
37. This same principle is applied to the Patarei.
38. Here, the pathway slopes down into a **grounded viewing platform** that looks back at the Patarei Prison, leading to a **single bench**. This allows visitors to look at the old prison from a safe, peaceful distance, placing a dark memory in a **completely new, hopeful light**.
39. Next to these walkways are the lively community spaces: the restaurant on the left centered around its **open kitchen**, and the open-air theater nestled into a naturally sloping part of the terrain.
40. Let's zoom into the Restaurant.
41. Here, you can see how the open kitchen concept keeps the **room feeling light and spacious**, allowing diners to either watch the chefs at work or look out at the beautiful sea.
42. All of these spaces eventually **lead down to the seafront**. This drawing of the front view shows how completely open and welcoming the building is to the public boulevard.
43. Here you can see a **monumental staircase** slowly winding down towards the boulevard, as well as the open-air theatre that **opens up towards the seashore**. This public front invites people to enter the building and, in doing so, turns this once disconnected area into a vibrant urban plaza for the community.

44. The last scale I want to cover is the **fragment scale**. In architecture, we use close-up drawings to show exactly how a building is put together and constructed.
45. Let's start with the detail of the new public pavilion. Here, the **mathematical proportion system by Dom Hans van der Laa**n is applied in **its purest form**. Because the proportions are so balanced, I kept the detailing very **clean and simple**: large limestone blocks joined by a minimal T-shaped profile inside the columns. The pattern of the floor tiles and the grid of the ceiling perfectly match this system—you could literally count the tiles to see the proportional logic of the building. **The proportion itself *is* the decoration**.
46. This clean approach is very different from the courtyard detail. In the quiet courtyard, the materials are much **more textured, rough, and warm**, especially in the seating areas, to make the spaces feel incredibly **tactile and comfortable**. Furthermore, as you can see in these models, this new courtyard façade acts as **a physical bridge**, connecting the rough, historic walls of the old factory with the clean, modern geometry of our new pavilion.
47. To conclude, this project has been a **deep and rewarding exploration** of what makes architecture feel sacred. By boiling these big spiritual ideas down into concrete design tools—**like light, proportion, geometry and scale**—they become universal. They prove that we can build sacred architecture that doesn't belong to any single religion, but belongs to all of humanity. And shows how this typology could **serve a new purpose** in our contemporary age. Thank you so much for listening, and I would love to take any questions you might have!