The unit of the Masters’ degree in Ephemeral Architecture and Temporary Spaces (MEATS) of ELISAVA led by Stella Rahola Matutes and Roger Paez proposes ‘site specifics’ with the aim of questioning ourselves about materials, about the use we make of them, the value they have and their cultural and affective connotations.

The Beautiful Failures intervention presented in the German Pavilion designed by Lilly Reich and Mies van der Rohe works on fragility, detecting the two most delicate materials in its construction: the glass and the travertine paving. Glass is the paradigmatic material of the Pavilion, with its constant games of reflection and transparency, while the travertine paving is one of the most identifiable elements of Mies van der Rohe’s architecture. Consequently, the Beautiful Failures installation proposal is based on a fundamental material order that makes it possible to revisit this apparently polished, perfect and safe architecture from its most vulnerable side.

From the formal point of view, the resolution of the installation consists of 17 raised travertine slabs that reveal the under-space resulting from a construction system that diverges from the solution of the original Pavilion. These 17 holes contain defective pieces of glass, originally from artisan workshops in the city of Barcelona. The glass pieces correspond to the collection made by the students of more than 2,000 units discarded by craftsmen’s workshops. They are made of borosilicate glass of German origin, which cannot be recycled in our country. The ruins and discarded pieces make it possible to establish a link with the Pavilion’s past history, while raising questions of sustainability for the present at the same time.

The new landscape resulting from the partial lifting of the pavement and the relationship with the pieces of glass finds analogies with a stratigraphic excavation using a grid system, commonly used in archaeology. The proposal is a ceremonial action that rides between the discovery and the funerary act, between that which is mortuary and that which is revealed to us. The temporary intervention in the Pavilion is understood simultaneously as a rite of discovery and burial. And in this cycle of birth, death and rebirth, all the elements play an important role, from the history of the Pavilion itself, implicit in the actions with the travertine, to the life accumulated in each of the pieces of glass.

Beautiful Failures also wants to be a reflection on the nature of a Pavilion that is no longer just a replica but a living entity that is no longer limited to projecting an identical image of the mythical original. Through multiple artistic interventions, from 1996 to the present day, the characteristic temporality of the 1929 Pavilion has been reinterpreted as a sensorial temporality, turning the current Pavilion into a multiform and organic space capable of reflecting on its spatial, material and historical qualities through constant change. A valuable lesson in an enriched understanding of identity.