Drawing by the Light of the Screen:
The transfiguration of virtual architecture

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ATTESTATION of AUTHORSHIP

“I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.”

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

For my family.

Sincere thanks also to my supervisors Dieneke Jansen and Sue Gallagher for their astute advice.

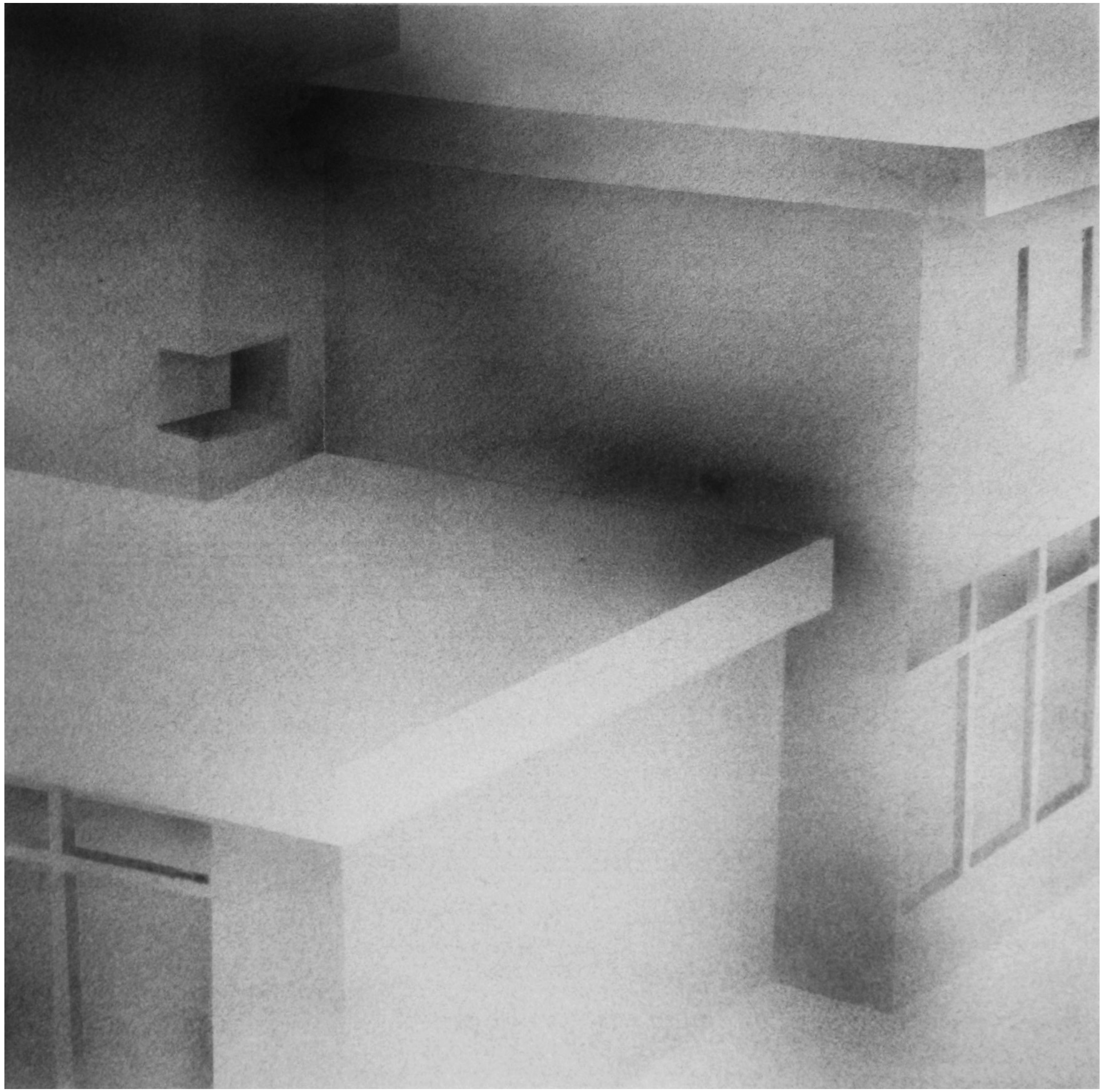

Figure 1
Anika Walker
Untitled (house), 2010
Liquid pencil on paper, 186 × 186 mm

ABSTRACT

This practice-led art project interrogates virtual architectural space and its impact upon spatial representation in traditional drawing.

Taking the virtual architectural model as subject, a drawing practice is developed through which an ontological examination of issues around spatiality, temporality and embodiment may be conducted. Drawing is posited as a surface in a mimetic relationship to the screen of technology, and the possibility that it may act as a locus for a dialogue around failure and underachievement in the handmade is explored. Consideration is also given to the idiosyncrasies of the virtual image and their translation into traditional drawing media, and to the possibility for drawing to generate an aporia between the virtual and the tangible.

This thesis is constituted 80% practice, 20% exegesis.

INTRODUCTION

I began this research project with two imperatives, that it would have drawing as its medium and architectural space as its subject. What was initially conceived as a project involving experimentation with the reversal of the archetypal depiction of the uncanny (that would posit the locus of the uncanny in light rather than dark), morphed into one concerned with the translation of virtual architectural space[1] into traditional drawing.[2] This shift was driven by a search for methodological cohesion in my practice, which from its inception had involved the use of downloaded images as source material from which to draw. The primary focus in this early stage was to understand the spatial and temporal qualities unique to three-dimensional virtual models and use this knowledge as a foundation to explore ways in which this virtual space might alter the conceptualisation of space in traditional drawing.

A further defining decision made early on in my project was to abandon the use of the pencil in favour of a liquid graphite medium and an airbrush. The use of the airbrush was a logical step to reduce human trace in the drawing (thus bringing it closer to the perfection of the virtual image), whilst the graphite was to be the element that betrayed the illusion of the virtual – that gave the work away as a drawing in the face of its digital aesthetic. Although I retained these tools through to the completion of my research, it was not because they allowed me to achieve the perfect surface. Rather, it was for their foibles, their inconsistencies and their unpredictability which gradually took centre stage in my practice and prompted its redefinition as an investigation not into the imitation of one thing by another (as had been my intention), but the failure in the attempt.

This purpose of this exegesis is to contextualise my practice by conducting an ontological examination of the virtual architectural model and its representation in traditional drawing. Because there is little existing literature dealing with these specific areas, my arguments will rely heavily on evidence gathered from research in surrounding fields. I will divide this examination into four open-ended discussions relating to perspective, reduction, the miniature and the punctum that will illuminate part of the territory in which my practice sits without necessarily drawing any hard and fast conclusions. Particular attention will also be paid to issues of temporality, spatiality and embodiment as these are key in analysing any architectural encounter.[3]

In the first chapter, the perspectival conventions relevant to the virtual architectural model will be discussed with particular attention paid to the ways in which they both situate and decentre the viewer. The second chapter will deal with the reduction of detail that occurs during the drawing process, and will examine the ways in which this lack puts the work in dialogue with utopian modernist architecture and the sublime. In the third chapter I discuss my practice in relation to the miniature and the associated subjects of the uncanny and the sublime, with a brief discussion on voyeurism. The fourth chapter is an analysis of the human error evident in my work and its relationship to the concept of the punctum. This discussion will be followed by a brief summary, then a selected chronological documentation of my practice in which key works will be discussed in terms of their reflexive impact within my project.

Notes

[1] Although the term ‘virtual’ is by no means specific to digital technologies, my use of it throughout this text will solely relate to cyberspace.

[2] I will use the term ‘traditional drawing’ to denote those drawing methods that are undertaken in real rather than virtual space.

[3] “Architecture, a predominantly non-objective art, is recognised through the rituals and actions it frames. By giving a human measure to time and space, by projecting a figure and rhythm, architecture has revealed the presence of the invisible in the world of the everyday.” Alberto Perez-Gomez and Louise Pelletier, *Architectural Representation and the Perspective Hinge.* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1997), 388.

PERSPECTIVE:

singularity and stasis

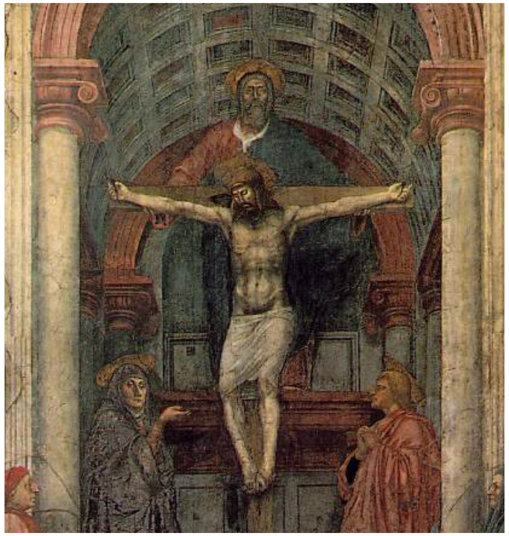

Figure 2
Masaccio
The Holy Trinity, with the Virgin and Saint John and donors, 1426-27
Fresco, 3170 x 6670 mm

“What is perspective?
A corpse with one eye closed.
The architect of the Middle Ages
Could build because
He could not draw descriptive
Geometry and perspective.”[1]

The relationship of linear perspective to architecture is an integral one, not just because of the perspectival conventions upon which architectural drawing is reliant, but also for the fact that architecture proper is the vehicle through which linear perspective is most clearly expressed.[2] In the virtual realm (so far as architectural models are concerned) this relationship persists, since virtual three-dimensional objects “…are still conceived and represented within all the three-dimensional conventions of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century practice.”[3]

Before discussing the conceptual implications of the perspective to which the virtual architectural model adheres, I will first briefly discuss one of the earliest works of art to employ linear perspective - Masaccio’s fresco *The Holy Trinity, with the Virgin and Saint John and donors* 1426-7 [Figure 2]. Linear perspective was applied in this work in the hope that:

> “…viewers would behold it ‘just like [the prophets] see God or his divine mysteries behind the images and likenesses of sensible things’, that is, as a mirror reflection literally of the ‘real Trinity in heaven’…”[4]

This seminal work not only forced the viewer into a fixed spatial relationship with its

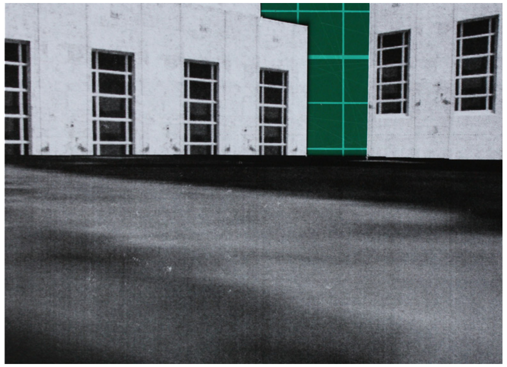

Figure 3
Anika Walker
Stencil cut from a black and white laser print, 2010
Digital file

surface, but the relationship (as alluded to in this quote) was also one of singularity in the conceptual sense. The painting offered one place from which to behold it, both for the eye and for the mind. This dualistic positioning of the viewer is also a general feature of architectural drawing because of its conformation to linear perspective, and the resistance to interpretation necessary to ensure the resulting structure is true to the intentions of the architect.[5] Although the virtual architectural model differs in purpose from the architectural drawing (as a tool for visualisation rather than construction), it is guilty of the same reduction to planes and facades that perpetuates architecture's delusion of objectivity.[6]

As self-consciously as the virtual architectural model situates the viewer, it also fails to do so in several vital ways. The first is a result of the blindness of the auto-generative computer program to the viewer's presence,[7] which is in conflict with the situatedness implied by the use of perspective. The second relates to the conceptual linearity - a directive relationship between image and viewer reduces the extent to which the viewer can participate in the construction of meaning as nothing is asked of them, only given. So whilst the linearity of concept suggests fixity, it simultaneously engenders alienation. The third relates to the perspective construction itself, which controls the spatial relationship between the viewer and the work but also disembodies through its denial of binocular visual contact. This is a result of the reliance of linear perspective upon a singular observing eye,[8] as illustrated in early schematic drawings illustrating the use of a fixed peephole to aid accurate observation.[9]

What happens to these features when the virtual architectural model is translated into a drawing? The term 'translated' is key – because the drawings are translated from source images rather than observed (in that stencils are cut directly from digital prints), the essence of the mathematical, monocular perspective redolent of virtual reality is preserved [Figure 3]. It is not so much the strictness in the application of perspective that is the tell-tale sign of the drawing's virtual origin (since it is simple enough to generate a perspectival drawing

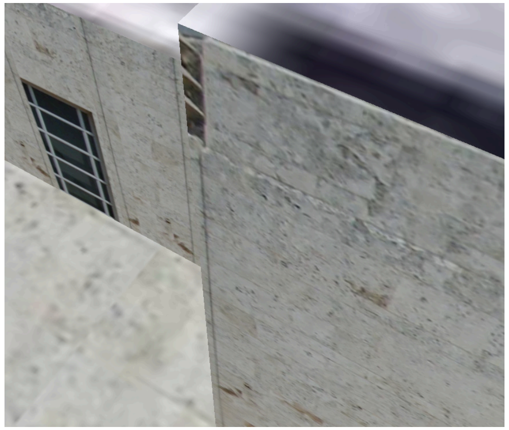

Figure 4
Anika Walker
Screenshot of a virtual architectural model, 2010
Digital file

with the help of a few vanishing points), but the decentred viewpoint, indifferent to any traditional sense of composition, that gives the game away. This decentred viewpoint arises out of the interactivity of the virtual architectural model – out of the fact that the viewer is able to freely manipulate it to gain any vantage point they choose. Although the viewer has some control over the way in which they view the model using rotation, zoom and panning tools (and is therefore located in relation to the image since it appears as they desire), during this interaction they will also encounter the model from viewpoints that are arbitrary, that are not aesthetically pleasing and that do not necessarily function as an image of an architectural model should (in the sense that they may convey little useful information about the structure as a whole). It is in these instances that the virtual architectural model becomes illustrative of the computer's blindness to the presence of the viewer - where the model is presented to us in a way that is ignorant of the desires of our vision and intellect, and thus decentres us [Figure 4].

Experimentation with the compositional features that convey this sense of being decentered in the face of the image has been an important activity in my practice. Most of this was done digitally, since little in the composition would change between source image and drawing. I used a screen capture application to 'photograph' various viewpoints of virtual architectural models, which I then analysed in order to select out those which defied the rules of good composition (particularly the rule of thirds and the use of horizontal and vertical lines for calm and stability). Through doing this I realised that even though architecture by its very nature suggests embodiment, this is not enough to engage a viewer when the image is ignorant of design fundamentals. The task of composing images thereafter became an intuitive balancing act between retaining a sense of incidental composition, whilst obeying enough compositional rules that the drawings remained appropriately accessible.

I also experimented with ways of communicating a sense of rotation across images in series – with whether, for example,

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Figure 5
Luisa Lambri
Untitled (Menil House #24), 2002
Laserchrome print, 840 × 713 mm

Figure 6
Luisa Lambri
Untitled (Menil House #25), 2002
Laserchrome print, 840 × 713 mm

it was necessary to use different viewpoints from the same building to convey this, and if so how ‘far apart’ each shot should be taken. The photographer Luisa Lambri has used this strategy of presenting two images of an architectural space that differ only slightly in viewpoint as a way to draw the viewer’s attention to her movement.[10] The reason *Untitled (Menil House #24)* 2002 [Figure 5] and *Untitled (Menil House #25)* 2002 [Figure 6] are so effective in bringing this motion to prominence is that the subtlety of the difference between viewpoints demands careful scrutiny to ascertain if and how the artist’s position has shifted. Whilst this is an effective photographic tool, the issue for drawing (especially with such a volatile medium as I have chosen) is that inevitable differences in tone and inflection speak a lot louder than a subtle change in composition and suppress the effect. With this in mind I examined other ways of working with movement across images in series. The most interesting question that arose from this activity concerned the differences between a series in which each frame followed logically from the previous one, and a series in which the relationship between each frame was more schizophrenic. A part-answer I would like to propose is that because the former mimics the way our bodies might move through a space a sense of embodiment (of an active body in space) is created, whereas with the latter being suggestive of an impossible physical feat, a static viewer apprehending an active image may be alluded to instead.

When working with drawings in series, it is also necessary to address the viewer’s movement through the gallery. Through my practice I have found that whilst a temporal experience of a body of work can be emphasised by close spacing of individual pieces (a device photographer Gavin Hipkins used in the installation of his work *The Homely* 1997-2000), by placing each work far enough apart the viewer’s movement can also be slowed. This seems to indicate that images close together compete for our attention more readily and thus have a tendency to entice us from one work to the next, so by placing adjacent images further apart the viewer may find it easier to remain with each individual piece. In the context of my practice this

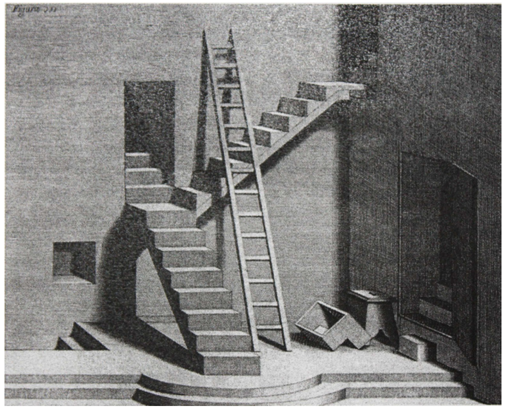

Figure 7
Andrea Pozzo
Prospettiva de' Pittori e Architetti, 1700 (detail)
Engraving

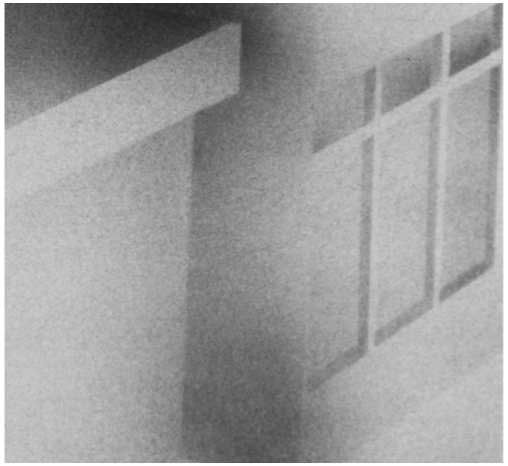

Figure 8
Anika Walker
Untitled (house), 2010 (detail)
Liquid pencil on paper, 186 x 186 mm

underlines the temporal immobility implied by linear perspective,[11] as it helps to hold the viewer in stasis in front of each drawing.

Another reason why stasis is so prominent in the experience of my work relates to the alliance between my practice and a close cousin of linear perspective - sciography. Sciography was an artistic tradition concerned with the simplistic representation of shadow within perspectival constructions [Figure 7]. In some ways I am acting as a sciographer in my practice, since like the sciographers I ignore surface texture and colour, and determine instead the level of shading across each plane by predicting shadow as though cast only by direct sunlight, taking into account its distortion only by perspective[12] and ignoring reflection and refraction altogether[13] [Figure 8]. I arrived at this method in part to keep the focus within the drawing on the construction of perspective, as well as to emulate the singular 'heavenly' light source commonly encountered in modelling software. I also found this system of determining tone a useful tool to help deceive the viewer in the initial stages of their experience with the work into believing they were encountering a space that made sense, to disguise those features that caused it to implode under scrutiny. Across the original illustrations of the sciographers, the virtual architectural model and my drawings "… we encounter unpeopled artefacts… an architecture without humanity… a world of silence."[14] This silence, which could also be thought of as a lack of narrative, is the way in which the stasis present in my work is reinforced.

A characteristic of the virtual architectural model that is lost during its translation into drawing is the linearity in concept, the brutal objectivity that prevents the viewer from engaging with the work. Whether created on paper or in the virtual realm, the architectural model has a directive relationship with the viewer because it has clear purpose – to accurately represent the intentions of the architect. When these models are decontextualised by being presented in the gallery setting as resolved works, they no longer operate in this objective manner. Instead, by being presented as endpoints in themselves rather than proposals for structures, an opportunity for dialogue around their purpose and meaning is opened up which allows for a more active engagement on the part of the viewer.

Notes

[1] Bruno Taut quoted in Alberto Perez-Gomez and Louise Pelletier, *Architectural Representation and the Perspective Hinge.* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1997), 298.

[2] John White, *The Birth and Rebirth of Pictorial Space.* (London: Faber and Faber, 1972), 190.

[3] Anthony Vidler, *Warped Space: Art, Architecture, and Anxiety in Modern Culture.* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2000), 7.

[4] Samuel Y. Edgerton, *The Mirror, The Window, and the Telescope: How Renaissance Linear Perspective Changed Our Vision of the Universe.* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2009), 78.

[5] Nat Chard, *Drawing Indeterminate Architecture, Indeterminate Drawings of Architecture.* (New York: Springer, 2005), 34.

[6] Henri Lefebvre, "The Production of Space (Extracts), " In *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory,* ed. Neil Leach. (London: Routledge, 1997), 144.

[7] Anthony Vidler, *Warped Space: Art, Architecture, and Anxiety in Modern Culture.* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2000), 8.

[8] Penelope Haralambidou, "The Stereoscopic Veil," *Architectural Research Quarterly 11,* no.1 (2007): 40, http://journals.cambridge.org.ezproxy.aut.ac.nz/action/displayFulltext?type=1&pdftype=1&fid=1293992&jid=ARQ&volumeId=11&issueId=&aid=1293988 (accessed August 20, 2010)

[9] John White, *The Birth and Rebirth of Pictorial Space.* (London: Faber and Faber, 1972), 192.

[10] T.J. Demos, *Vitamin Ph: New Perspectives in Photography.* (London: Phaidon, 2006), 150.

[11] "The painter David Hockney argues that the device of perspective originated out of artists' desire to paint the crucifixion. Of all forms, a crucifixion portrays a precise instant of time, in many cases the moment when Christ gives up the ghost." In F. David Peat, *From Certainty to Uncertainty: The Story of Science and Ideas in the Twentieth Century.* (Washington, D.C.: Joseph Henry Press, 2002), 102.

[12] Michael Baxandall, *Shadows and Enlightenment.* (London: Yale University Press, 1995), 88.

[13] Ibid., 86.

[14] Francis Pound, "Culbert as Sciographer," In *Lightworks: Bill Culbert,* ed. Lara Strongman. (Wellington: City Gallery Wellington, 1997), 54.

REDUCTION:

truth, blankness and spatial collapse

Figure 9
Anika Walker
Untitled, 2010 (detail)
Liquid pencil on paper, 100 x 100 mm

The capacity for drawing to address an essence, to indicate an underlying conceptual structure merely through tone and without colour or any real three-dimensionality,[1] is one of its defining features. An aesthetic of reduction of this kind not only calls forth an association with the architectural model, but it is suggestive of the model in the scientific sense in that the scientific model necessitates an idealistic conceptualisation of the real world where, for example, objects have smooth surfaces and travel in uniform motion, without friction or air resistance.[2] This conception of the scientific model as an idealised vehicle for the pursuit of truth echoes the idealism of Plato, for whom "… truth was embodied in the Eidos or Idea, which was like a visible form blanched of its colour."[3]

An emphasis on underlying structure is also an overt feature of my work - a consequence of the process of stencilling that does not readily accommodate fine detail. Because of the decision to cut stencils directly from digital prints the level of achievable detail was further reduced, owing partly to the practicalities of cutting into fine paper, and partly to the rapid buckling caused by application of a wet medium that caused fine lines to dissolve. Because of the small scale of the image and the relatively large spray pattern created by the airbrush (large because the stencils were too flimsy to withstand the blasts of air from close range), pigment across planes tended to be either uniform or gently graduated [Figure 9]. This contributed to the lack of surface detail characteristic of my work.

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Figure 10
Carlos Garaicoa
No Way Out, 2002
Wood table, wire and rice paper lamps,
1400 x 3300 x 3300 mm

Reduction of architectural form to an essence in the pursuit of truth points to the modernist movement, and the hygiene and transparency that was hoped "…would eradicate the domain of myth, suspicion, tyranny, and above all the irrational."[4] In a sense, the architectural model conforms to this ideology – hygienic for the fact it is completely uninhabited, and rational for its strict adherence to linear perspective and indifference to ornament. Whereas the virtual architectural model could be considered the epitome of this endeavour, the least contaminated by human presence for its construction in code, my drawings of such models self-consciously subvert this modernist ideal- the trace of the hand and the flaws in rendering speak of forever falling short. Although often working in three-dimensions, Carlos Garaicoa subverts the idealism of modernist architecture in a similar way, by constructing architectural models with little regard for precision. In a sense *No Way Out* 2002 [Figure 10] is an archetypal representation of modernist architecture for its near-monochrome palette and eradication of shadow, but its frail construction and mathematical error undermine the utopian project in much the same way my work does.

The whiteness in *No Way Out* 2002 is also a feature in my work (and in some cases a feature of virtual architectural models as well) and is another reason my practice is in dialogue with modernism. A distinction needs to be made here between the colour white and whiteness, the latter being a condition rather than a physical property of an object. Whiteness is a condition that David Batchelor related to Modernism using the example of the work of Le Corbusier, in which he saw the rhetoric of purity, order and truth as being so blinding "…that the discourse of modern architecture has almost entirely failed to notice that most of his buildings are actually coloured."[5] Whiteness not only manifests in my work in the aesthetic sense (since all surfaces are treated as white when representing shadow), but in the sense that it precedes and prefigures the drawing itself as a property of the paper. As part of my practice I tested the extent to which graphite pigment could be built up whilst a sense of whiteness still prevailed, and found that even with the white of the paper completely obscured whiteness remained dominant in the reading of the image.

Despite its association with rationalism and order (or possibly because of it), the experience of whiteness in the context of my work is not a comfortable one. This is perhaps best explained by Batchelor when he writes of an aggressive kind of white that repels everything inferior to it, people and the debris they bring with them included,[6] in a statement that alludes to the failure of the modernist utopia project. Utopianism is also directly relevant to my project for the fact that, like the virtual architectural models[7] and the drawings that reference them, utopias are arrangements that directly oppose the real space of society. [8] Jean Baudrillard also describes utopias as spaceless entities, but rather than this being the case because they can only exist as myths or hypotheses, he attributes this spacelessness to the fact that utopias, "…by realising themselves, expelled the reality out of reality and left us in a hyperreality devoid of sense…leaving as a residue only a *surface without depth*. [my emphasis]"[9] Perhaps this idea of utopia functioning as a surface without depth is a useful way to think of my work.

The presence of this modernist whiteness also suggests my work is in dialogue with the sublime, since the use of whiteness and illumination in modern architecture is representative not of the eradication of darkness but the presence of darkness within light.[10] The bait-and-switch[11] sublime, in which terror is concealed within beauty, is therefore particularly appropriate for discussing the unstable whiteness of modernity since it too conceals terror behind its apparent virtue.[12] Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe also describes blankness in terms of this singularity since it is beautiful for its resolution and completeness, and simultaneously sublime for its immanence, and association with the unformed.[13]

The blankness associated with technology can also be considered under the countersublime posited by Mark Dorrian. This sublime subverts traditional representations in which obscurity was the

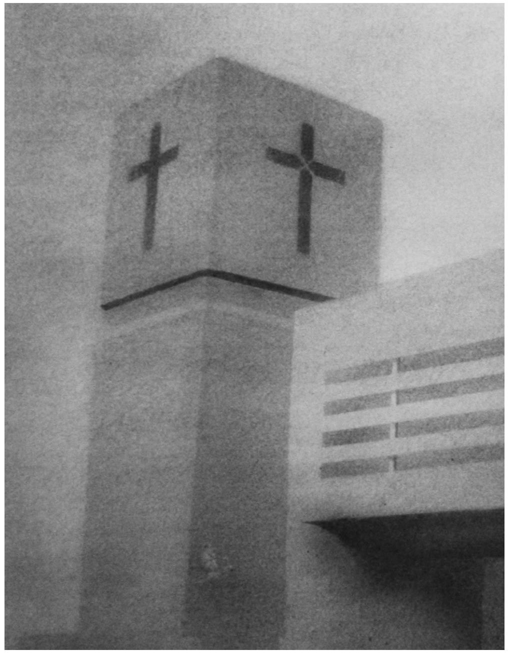


Figure 11
Anika Walker
Untitled (modern church), 2010 (detail)
Liquid pencil on paper, 265 × 190 mm

vehicle for terror again through a kind of oneness, however this time terror is concealed within the perfectly transmitted image, luminous, fully articulated and free from inflection.[14] The source images of virtual architectural models I have used in my practice strongly relate to this countersublime, but the act of drawing them reintroduces the very material inflection that it is defined against [Figure 11]. Thus there is a question opened up around whether my work can be suggestive of that countersublime despite failing to attain it. If by introducing material inflection and the trace of the human hand into the blank surfaces of the virtual image that countersublime reading is erased, then perhaps the blankness in my drawings is better considered as an abyss or cleft in meaning,[15] that has as its distant ancestor the inscrutability of the Burkean sublime. This however does not necessarily deny that the technological origin of the drawings fails to figure in the style of sublimity presented, since, as suggested by Gilbert-Rolfe, inscrutability now references technology instead of nature.[16]

So what of time and place in relation to blankness? Temporally, blankness in the virtual realm speaks of hyperacceleration, of the transmission of information occurring so quickly that its duration goes unnoticed.[17] When translated into drawing however, without the glistening of the ever-refreshing display to remind us of the speed of process, this hyperacceleration turns to stasis. Despite referencing the technological blankness perpetuated at the speed of light, the blankness in the drawing speaks only of a snapshot extracted from that process. The simultaneity and hyperacceleration of cyberspace succumbs to the death that Roland Barthes claims is the eidos of the photograph,[18] but which equally could be attributed to the fact that the drawing itself is experienced as a static object[19] despite the fact that it is inseparable from the process of its making (which speaks of eternal process and is therefore suggestive of the infinite),[20] and despite the fact that it has the power through composition to elicit movement in the eye of the viewer.

With regard to place, whilst the blankness

of the virtual image is representative of the placelessness[21] that is symptomatic of its autonomy, in the context of representations of architecture (both virtual and otherwise) it can also be considered a consequence of "… globalism's tendency towards unification and standardisation."[22] Even though the singular physical existence of the drawing counteracts this omnipresence, the drawing translated from this placeless image nonetheless retains that sense of ambiguity, partly because it is devoid of any architectural clue that might help us situate it, and partly because it retains other characteristics of its virtual origin (such as the decentered viewpoint discussed earlier).
If to placate means to appease space, to turn space into place,[23] then this is precisely where the drawings have failed. This spatial and temporal uncertainty that persists in the drawing translated from the virtual image brings it in line with the uncanny, as it too suggests ambiguity around time and place.
In the case of my work the uncanny unfolds slowly - the viewer moves from an initial experience of vague familiarity afforded by the generic aesthetic of the architecture to an experience of alienation, as the familiar turns on them and becomes derealised in the same bait-and-switch manoeuver employed by the sublime.

Notes

[1] Philip S. Rawson, *Drawing.* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 1.

[2] F. David Peat, *From Certainty to Uncertainty: The Story of Science and Ideas in the Twentieth Century.* (Washington, D.C.: Joseph Henry Press, 2002), 106.

[3] Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 26.

[4] Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely.* (Massachusetts: MIT Press , 1992), 168.

[5] David Batchelor, *Chromophobia.* (London: Reaktion Books, 2000), 45.

[6] Ibid., 10-11.

[7] "...virtual spaces are most often not true spaces but collections of separate objects. Or, to put this in a slogan: there is no space in cyberspace." Len Manovich quoted in Naren Barfield, "Spatial Ontology in Fine Art Practice," In *Thinking Through Art,* eds. Katy Macleod and Lin Holdridge. (London: Routledge, 2008), 111.

[8] Michel Foucault, "Panopticism (Extract)," In *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory,* ed. Neil Leach. (London: Routledge, 1997), 352.

[9] Jean Baudrillard, "Objects, Images, and the Possibilities of Aesthetic Illusion," In *Jean Baudrillard: Art and Artefact,* ed. Nicholas Zurbrugg. (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 13.

[10] Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely.* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1992), 173.

[11] Thomas McEvilley, "Turned Upside Down and Torn Apart," In *Sticky Sublime,* ed. Bill Beckley. (New York: Allworth Press, 2001), 77.

[12] David Batchelor, *Chromophobia.* (London: Reaktion Books, 2000), 16.

[13] Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, *Beauty and the Contemporary Sublime.* (New York: Allworth Press, 1999), 113.

[14] Mark Dorrian, “The Way the World Sees London: Thoughts on a Millenial Urban Spectacle.” In *Architecture: Between Spectacle and Use,* ed. Anthony Vidler. (Massachusetts: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 2008), 45.

[15] John Jervis, “Uncanny Presences,” In *Uncanny Modernity: Cultural Theories, Modern Anxieties,* eds. Jo Collins and John Jervis. (Hampshire, U.K.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 43.

[16] Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, *Beauty and the Contemporary Sublime.* (New York: Allworth Press, 1999), 113.

[17] Ibid., 109.

[18] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida,* trans. Richard Howard (London: Jonathan Cape, 1982), 15.

[19] Philip S. Rawson, *Drawing.* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 15.

[20] Emma Dexter, *Vitamin D: New Perspectives in Drawing* (London: Phaidon, 2005), 10.

[21] Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, *Beauty and the Contemporary Sublime.* (New York: Allworth Press, 1999), 119.

[22] T.J. Demos, *Vitamin Ph: New Perspectives in Photography* (London: Phaidon, 2006), 7.

[23] Andreas Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos, “Mapping Utopias: A Voyage to Placelessness,” *Law and Critique 12,* (2001): 142, http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1334699 (accessed October 17, 2010).

[24] Jo Collins and John Jervis, *Uncanny Modernity: Cultural Theories, Modern Anxieties.* (Hampshire, U.K.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 2.

[25] Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely.* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1992), 7.

OBJECT:
terror and immediacy in the miniature

My practice is in dialogue with the miniature for several reasons. The first is because the lack of detail discussed in the previous chapter creates an aesthetic affinity with the architectural model; the second is the physical scale of the work in relation to the vastness of the gallery; and the third is the use of perspective that places the viewer above the structure. Whilst this choice of viewpoint was a conscious decision to reference our experience of the small-scale model, the physical scale was initially influenced by the medium. Unlike vector drawings (such as virtual architectural models) that can be scaled without loss or distortion,[1] scaling my drawings up meant that the grain created by the spray application of the graphite medium (which is of a fixed scale) became less prominent in the reading of the work. The effect of this was that the drawings lost some of their affinity with the ‘screen’, as the grain is suggestive of inadequate resolution and imperfect transmission.

Add odds with the allusion to the drawing having undergone a process of transmission or translation is the miniature’s propensity to transcend the chain of signification, “…to bring historical events ‘to life’, to immediacy, and thereby to erase their history, to lose us within their presentness.”[2] Both states however bear a relationship to the uncanny. The allusion to a process of transmission points to a doubling akin to the déjà vu of the Freudian uncanny, that Sigmund Freud described using the analogy of wandering lost in the woods and unwittingly returning to the same place recognisable for a particular physical feature.[3]

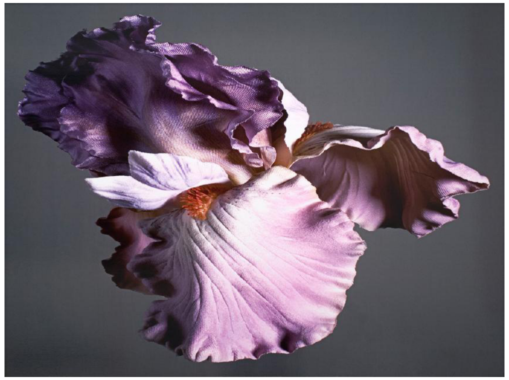


Figure 12
Boyd Webb
Iris, 2005
Photographic print, 1248 × 1648 mm

Temporal transcendence on the other hand relates to the fact that the mental space of the uncanny is one of spatial and temporal collapse, produced by a discontinuity with the past. Given that the uncanny can be considered illustrative of our desire to keep terror under control and confined to the limits of material security,[4] it also has an affinity with the miniature for the fact that miniaturisation too is an act of possession,[5] and therefore control.

The desire to keep terror under control is also an integral part of the sublime, so it relates to the miniature in a similar way as the uncanny. Gaston Bachelard describes the experience of the miniature, of seeing the large within the small (where not an exercise in geometry) as one that requires us to bypass logic.[6] This too points to a similarity with the sublime, as the sublime is reliant on a scenario in which "…the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other, nor by consequence reason on the object which employs it."[7] The Burkean sublime depended heavily on infinity, vastness and obscurity to quiet the rational mind, and Edmund Burke took great care to separate the sublime, which he associated almost exclusively with immense objects[8] from the beautiful, that he relegated to the small and pleasing.[9] As previously discussed this stark opposition has dissolved in post-modernity, the sublime now tending to deceive the viewer with a beautiful facade, only to double-cross them as that beauty gives way to something less gratifying.[10] Similarly, in my drawings the sublime is disguised by the beauty of their small scale and an agreeable aesthetic, to be revealed only when the artifice of the miniature (and other spatial inconsistencies) become apparent. This artifice is also employed by the photographer Boyd Webb, whose images of plastic flowers are staged in such a way as to have them momentarily appear as the real thing, again revealing the sublime to us only once we recognise the subjects as synthetic [Figure 12].

"And this is a universal law:
a living thing can be
healthy, strong, and fruitful
only when bounded by a horizon."[11]

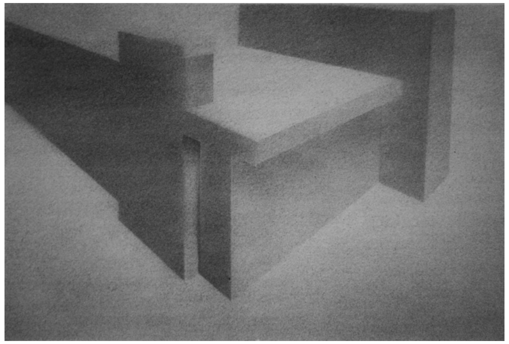


Figure 13
Anika Walker
Untitled, 2010
Liquid pencil on paper, 295 x 410 mm

One of the functions of the miniature is that it calls to our attention the total object.[12] This focus on objectness is the result of the spatial closure that occurs where the limits of the object are clearly perceptible by us. I would argue, however, that objectness is more readily associated with the three-dimensional miniature object that we can hold and manipulate (the polar opposite to the vastness and obscurity of the Burkean sublime), than with my work, partly because the subject is cropped so closely that its material limits are obscured and partly because the composition, free of new information close to the edge of the picture plane, is suggestive of the infinite [Figure 13]. Unlike the miniature, too, this cropping performs a role analogous to photography (unsurprising since it is achieved in the first instance using a 'screen shot' application that emulates a camera) in which the familiar, through its decontextualisation, is rendered strange.[13] In a sense this cropping does assist in evoking the miniature though, aided by the smallness of the drawing in relation to the paper on which it sits, and the sharp definition of the drawing's (rather than the subject's) material limits. One of the effects of miniaturisation is that the miniature is frozen in time – and comes to stand for both its singular instance, as well as a series of other instances.[14] It is through this temporal operation that my work shares part of its ontology with the miniature – as a drawing it depicts a singular instance, yet this drawing stands (through its association with the autonomy of the virtual) for a spectrum of others.

A product of the representation of the architectural miniature is a subtle sense of voyeurism. Although this is largely induced by the representation of architectural space in such a way that the viewer is required to peer into opaque windows and through cracks between walls, it is reinforced by the privacy implied by a small format (in the sense that it is the opposite of large-scale public advertising),[15] and the fact that in the gallery the small scale effectively forces the viewer into a one-to-one relationship with the work. The voyeuristic facet to my work is also enhanced by the decentred viewpoint discussed earlier, in that it imbues the image with the sense that it was not wholeheartedly created for the benefit of the viewer (despite being situated in a public gallery). The decision to test different ways of hanging work in order to enhance this sense of voyeurism came out of this analysis, and has involved examining what happens when works are hung slightly lower than expected (reinforcing the miniature by placing the viewer not just above the structure within the drawing but above the drawing itself), or in unlikely places such as in corners or on the floor (to create a slight sense of uncertainty over whether the works are there to be viewed).

Notes

[1] Naren Barfield, “Spatial Ontology in Fine Art Practice,” In *Thinking Through Art,* eds. Katy Macleod and Lin Holdridge. (London: Routledge, 2008), 117.

[2] Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection.* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 60.

[3] Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny,* trans. David McLintock. (London: Penguin, 2003), 144.

[4] Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely.* (Massachusetts: MIT Press , 1992), 4.

[5] Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space.* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 150.

[6] Ibid., 148-149.

[7] Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and tbe Beautiful,* ed. Adam Phillips. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 53

[8] Ibid., 103.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Thomas McEvilley, “Turned Upside Down and Torn Apart,” In *Sticky Sublime,* ed. Bill Beckley. (New York: Allworth Press, 2001), 77.

[11] Friedrich Nietzsche quoted in Alberto Perez-Gomez and Louise Pelletier, *Architectural Representation and the Perspective Hinge.* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1997), 317.

[12] Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection.* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 44.

[13] Christina Barton, “Uncanny Spaces,” *Art New Zealand 75*, 1995, 15.

[14] Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection.* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 48.

[15] Ibid., 58.

HUMAN ERROR:

silence and the punctum

> "The perfect crime would be to build a world-machine without defect, and to leave it without traces. But it never succeeds. We leave traces everywhere – viruses, lapses, germs, catastrophes – signs of defect, or imperfection, which are like our species' signature in the heart of an artificial world."[1]

I am going to propose that the best way to discuss human error within my project is in relation to the punctum. Roland Barthes used the term within photography to describe "…that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me.)"[2] Subsequently, Hal Foster used it in the context of superrealism (in painting), to describe accidents "…such as a slipping of register or a washing in colour…"[3] Both descriptions bear a strong relationship to the effect of the accidental pooling of pigment and incorrectly aligned masks in my drawings, which become the sticking points for the viewer and trigger the switch from comfort to discomfort: from homely to unhomely. Whereas Barthes treats the punctum as the source of the intense immobility[4] we experience in the face of the image, Jean Baudrillard attributes this immobility to the "…silence into which the image plunges the objects that it seizes wrenching them from the thunderous context of the real world."[5] In the case of my practice however this 'thunderous context' is not reality but the hyperacceleration described earlier in relation to the instantaneity of technological blankness.

I would also like to propose the punctum in my practice as a locus for the manifestation of that kind of uncanny that resides between the intentionality of the human and the unguided intentionality of the machine.[6]
To a degree it is this punctum that gives the game away – that betrays the mechanical (or rather virtual) in the drawing and allows us to instead understand it as handmade, and as an attempt to counter the repetition and inauthenticity of the virtual. If cyberspace can be conceptualised in terms of a division between mind and body,[7] (cyberspace of course being the domain of the mind) then this uncanny is the kind that resides between the known and the felt,[8] the known being that part of the work that alludes to cyberspace and its products, and the felt the embodiment of the drawing. This division between machine and hand is also uncanny for its representation of the other in the self[9] (the permeation of the handmade drawing by the likeness of the virtual) and its relationship to the idea of the body and its absence[10] where the embodiment of the drawing is pitted against the extreme hygiene of the architecture depicted.

An important activity in my project has been pushing this punctum to breaking point - trialling how much presence it can be afforded before the drawing loses its veneer of homeliness. Testing this has involved experimenting with varying degrees of offset (creating overlaps and gaps between stencils), as well as allowing varying amounts of inflection to creep in. I have realised that the drawing works best when it represents a genuine attempt to attain the perfection of the virtual model upon which it is based, i.e. when the errors that occur are representative of actual as opposed to emulated human error. Thus, rather than having absolute control over the outcome in each work, chance was afforded a greater role and image selection became a more dominant part of my practice. This involuntary failure to render a space accessible, complete in its illusion of three-dimensionality, calls into focus perhaps one of the most crucial problems that unites both the handmade drawing and the virtual image on the screen - the nexus between surface and depth that both must imply yet fail to deliver.[11]

Human error has been a concern in my practice from the outset, but its centrality was only recognised upon critical analysis of the work. A choice was made at that point over whether to embrace error or conquer it, but the conscious decision to work with error proved problematic. The temptation emerged to deliberately flaw the work during making to ensure it remained within the aims of the project, and reflexivity began to seem like an obstacle rather than a goal. To overcome this issue I made some specific decisions about the drawing process that ensured error would be inevitable, and thus genuine in the context of the making process. Rather than continuing to improve on technical aspects of the drawings by, for example, shifting to the use of transparent masking film to reduce tonal inconsistencies and further refining the medium to prevent irregularities during airbrushing, I would retain my older, cruder methods. The airbrush was conceived as a tool to help conquer the imperfections of the hand – its specificity for this task evidenced by its near obsolescence in the wake of digital media. Within my practice however it has become the tool that reintroduces human error to the picture, in a subterfuge against its digital outgrowth.

Notes

[1] Jean Baudrillard, "Objects, Images, and the Possibilities of Aesthetic Illusion," In *Jean Baudrillard: Art and Artefact,* ed. Nicholas Zurbrugg. (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 24.

[2] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida,* trans. Richard Howard (London: Jonathan Cape, 1982), 27.

[3] Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real.* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1996), 134.

[4] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida,* trans. Richard Howard (London: Jonathan Cape, 1982), 49.

[5] Jean Baudrillard, "Objects, Images, and the Possibilities of Aesthetic Illusion," In *Jean Baudrillard: Art and Artefact,* ed. Nicholas Zurbrugg. (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 31.

[6] Blake Stimson, "The Shimmer of Industrial Form," In *The Art of Rachel Whiteread,* ed. Chris Townsend. (London: Thames and Hudson, 2004), 152.

[7] Alberto Perez-Gomez and Louise Pelletier, *Architectural Representation and the Perspective Hinge.* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1997), 380.

[8] John Jervis, "Uncanny Presences," In *Uncanny Modernity: Cultural Theories, Modern Anxieties,* eds. Jo Collins and John Jervis. (Hampshire, U.K.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 44.

[9] Ibid., 12.

[10] Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely.* (Massachusetts: MIT Press , 1992), x.

[11] Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, *Beauty and the Contemporary Sublime.* (New York: Allworth Press, 1999), 38.

SUMMARY

The territory of this project was around the re-evaluation of the traditional drawing in relation to virtual space. However, as the project evolved the crux emerged in the flaws inherent to the handmade – it was the slips, gaps and inaccuracies that ultimately defined it. Attempts at replicating the pristine surface and mathematical precision of the virtual using traditional drawing media brought these failures to the fore, and became a foundation for discussion on new ways to address drawing in the digital age. Many inherent contradictions were discovered in this practice, and their resistance to reconcilliation created gaps within which meaning was generated. Specific issues that would warrant further practice-based exploration include the way the viewer is positioned in relation to the drawing that references the auto-generative image, and the translation of the idiosyncrasies of the virtual realm such as hyperacceleration, spatial and temporal collapse and the immaculate countersublime into traditional drawing media.

VISUAL DOCUMENTATION

The purpose of this section is to discuss key developmental works from the project in terms of their impact upon the overarching goals of the research and the specific decisions they prompted. Documentation of the final exhibition is pending, and will be included in the bound copies of this exegesis. To compensate for the loss of image quality inevitable in the printing process, a disc containing digital versions of the images presented here is included and can be found inside the back cover.

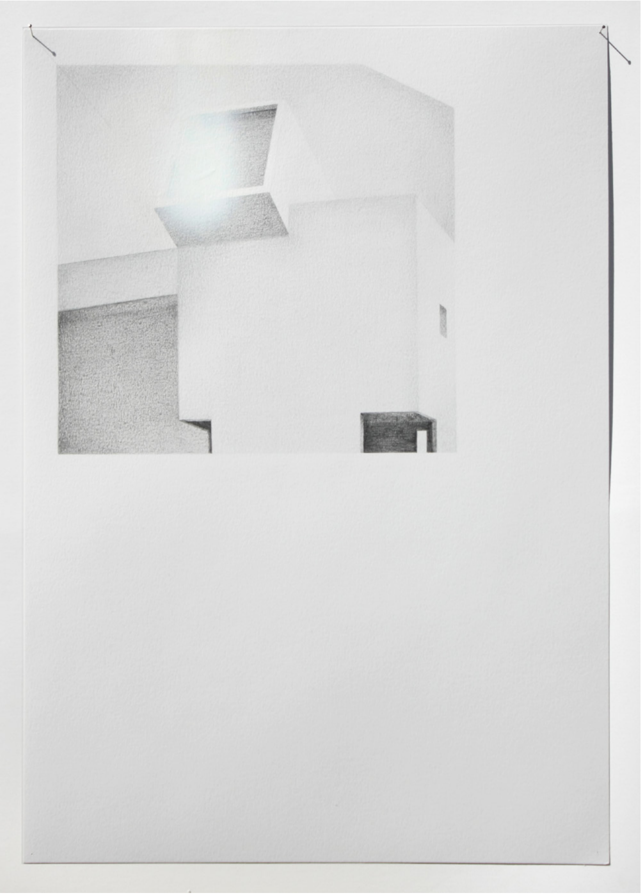


Figure 14
Anika Walker
Works from the war between the surface and the air, 2009 (detail)
Graphite and acrylic on paper, dimensions variable

This work, part of my final submission from the previous year, was created as part of an inquiry into the locus of the uncanny in modernity. I was interested in how the uncanny might have morphed as architecture had become more brightly lit - and specifically whether it could now be found in light instead of shadow. This concern became the foundation for my thesis, however it was quickly superseded.

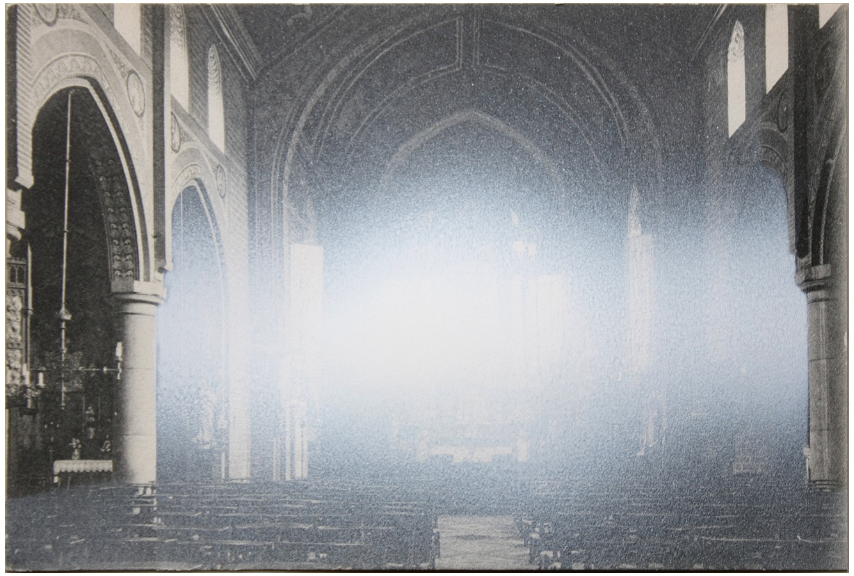


Figure 15
Anika Walker
Untitled (interior), 2010
Acrylic on postcard, 140 x 90 mm

This postcard work was one of several that formed an initial exploration into ideas around the uncanny in modern architecture, but was a departure from the previous work in that it dealt with the eradication of shadow from the architecture of the era in which shadow was embraced as a site of power (the previous work had been based on modernist architecture). Although I felt I had reached a conceptual dead-end at this point as far as the representation of light was concerned, I began to concentrate more on the spatial collapse it created - the tension between the three-dimensional illusion and the two-dimensional surface.

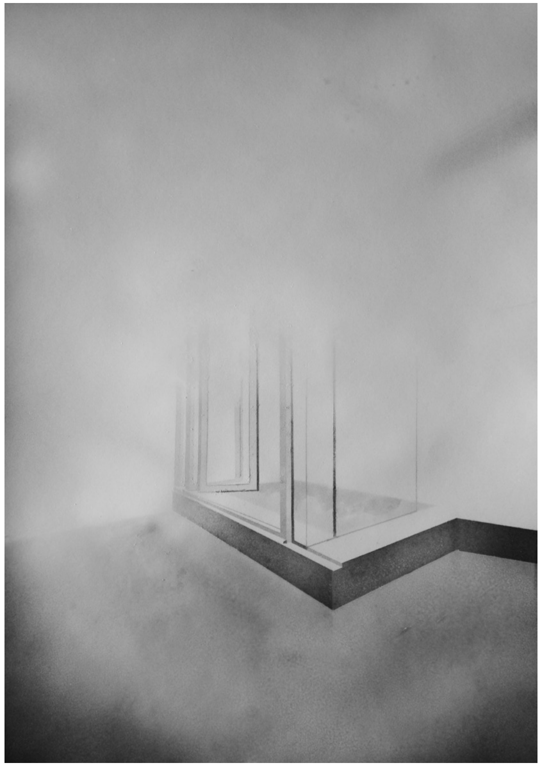


Figure 16
Anika Walker
Untitled (white interior), 2010
Ink on black paper, 320 x 450 mm

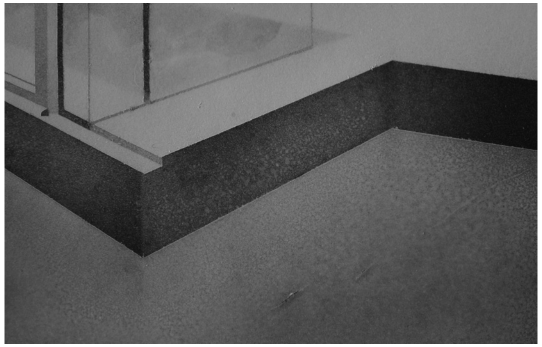


Figure 17
Anika Walker
Untitled (white interior), 2010 (detail)
Ink on black paper, 320 x 450 mm

To push the tension between the two- and three-dimensional further I worked in reverse, applying white pigment to black paper. The purpose was to find a different way of drawing attention to the surface using a similar technique of applying white, whilst being free from the constraints of using found image. This work was an important one in the development of the project in that it was the first in which the architecture represented was free from strong association with any particular period in architectural history, and free from clear cues as to the purpose of the space. The temporal ambiguity that resulted (coupled with critical evaluation of the process that had involved the use of a digital source image) lead to a re-evaluation of the aims of the project, steering it more toward ideas around the autonomy of the image in the digital realm and the impact this might have upon traditional drawing.

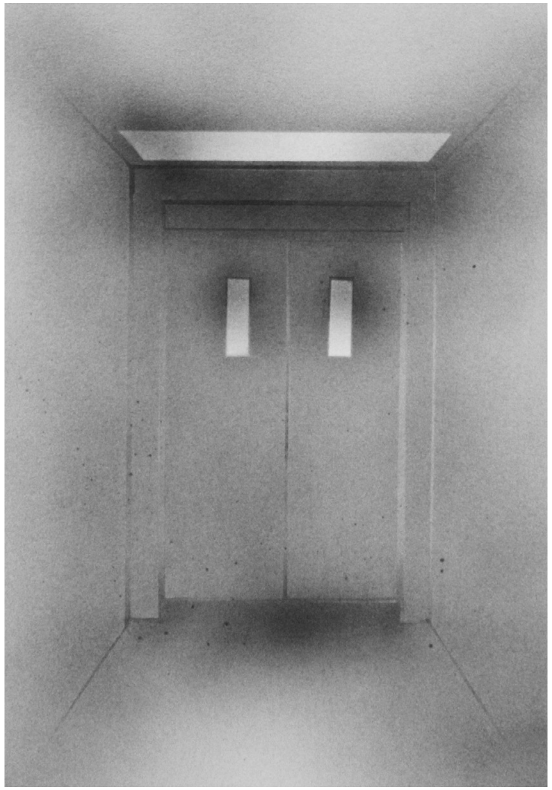


Figure 18
Anika Walker
Untitled (doors), 2010
Liquid pencil on paper, 200 x 280 mm

Experimentation with representing the digital image using traditional media led to the decision to trial using a liquid graphite medium and an airbrush. This decision was based on a desire to attempt to remove as much trace of the hand as possible from the work (thus bringing it more in line with the flawlessness of the digital), whilst still retaining a sense of the hand-made drawing. The reason for avoiding the use of ink at this point was due to an awareness that airbrushing had long been part of a dialogue around surpassing traditional drawing methods, and there was little, if anything, left to do. By working instead with graphite I was anticipating being able to make an image that appeared as a print or photocopy in the first instance, but would be uncovered as handmade once the distinctive sheen of the graphite was noticed.

This particular work was part of a series of initial experiments using the new medium. It was crudely masked using tape, and was still operating in the same vein as previous works that presented ambiguous spaces. By making this work I realised that whilst I had been concerned with the way in which the uncanny had morphed, the soft edges and blur characteristic of my work to date was perpetuating the obscurity of the original sublime/uncanny, even though the spaces depicted were relatively well lit. This led to a decision to try to delineate space in my work more clearly.

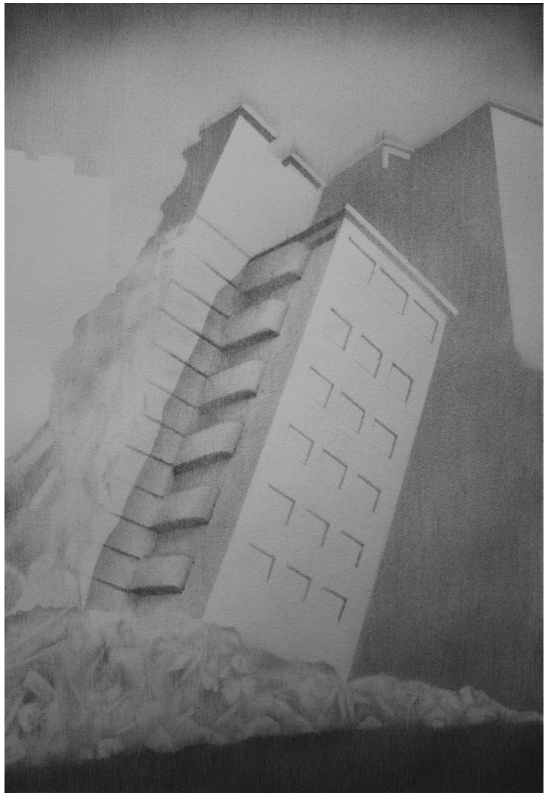


Figure 19
Anika Walker
Untitled (apartment block), 2010
Liquid pencil on paper, 210 x 295 mm

In this work I trialled a more clearly delineated space. It changed the direction of my project dramatically, as it was the first time the architectural model had featured. The fact that the work became about the model was coincidence - the ‘modelness’ of the building was a consequence of the use of a stencilling process that stripped detail from the image and was realised only upon evaluation of the work (the source image was a photograph of an actual building). Upon critical reflection I made the decision to continue exploring the way in which the method of making I had chosen created this sense of the miniature, however I also decided not to use source images such as this that depicted action (in this case a falling building), as it made the work read in relation to the film still and I was more interested in the digital.

The other feature that contributed to it reading as a film still was the subtle vertical inflection on the surface. Previous works had taught me that the surface needed to be ‘burnished’ as it was otherwise easily damaged, and in this case I had done so using short vertical strokes that created the effect of motion blur. After analysis I began working across the surface in horizontal rows to counter the ‘film’ reading, in such a manner that the pigment was not spread in the way it had been here, but a subtle horizontal inflection was created nonetheless.

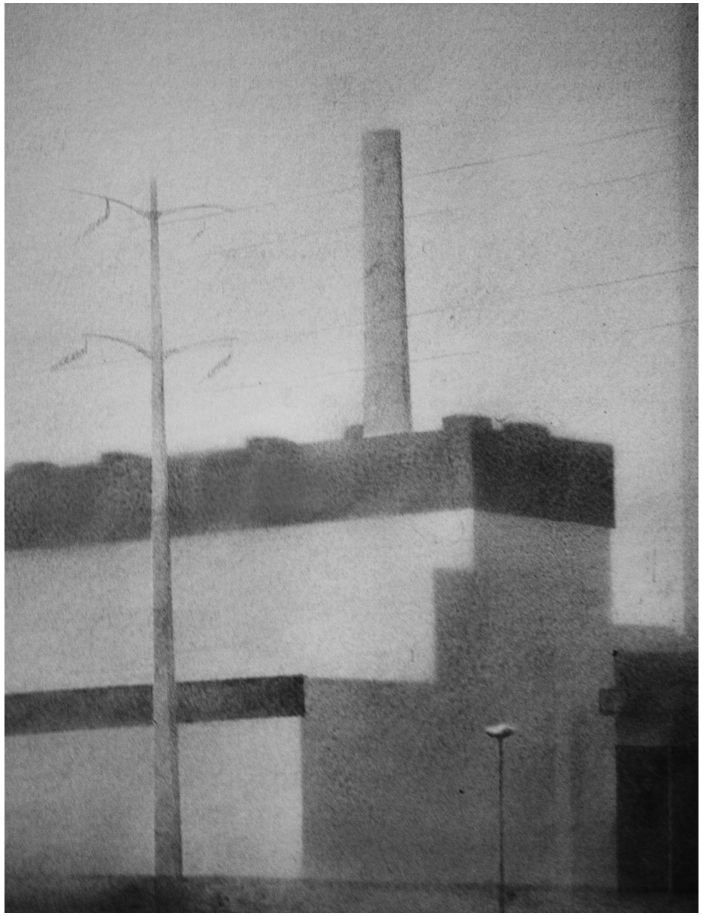


Figure 20
Anika Walker
Untitled (power station), 2010
Liquid pencil on paper, 160 x 200 mm

This work was part of a series drawn from photographs of buildings. The purpose was to experiment with images that did not depict movement, to see whether anything of interest would arise. The reason for working with an image of a power station in this instance was that I had been thinking of stillness in terms of apocalypse - a lack of narrative and human presence, and was interested in whether depicting sites normally associated with process in this way would enhance that sense of stasis. I tentatively decided at this point that I would try to achieve a strong sense of stasis without relying on this kind of recognisable architecture - a decision driven by a desire to keep the focus of the project squarely on the nature of space.

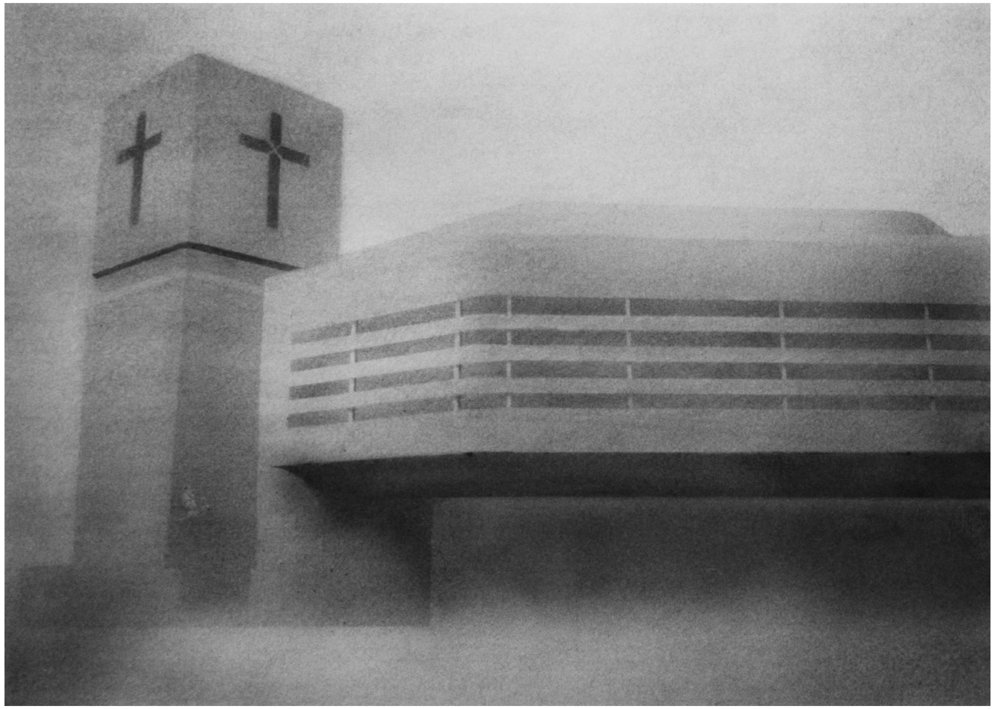


Figure 21
Anika Walker
Untitled (modern church), 2010
Liquid pencil on paper, 265 x 190 mm

The most important realisation to come out of making this work was the role that perspective played in the reading of the image - the photograph this drawing was made from was taken by a person standing at ground level, and this overtone of sightseeing persists in the drawing. This led me to consider whether there are viewpoints or perspectival conventions that are unique to the virtual realm that would carry through to the drawing in a similar way.

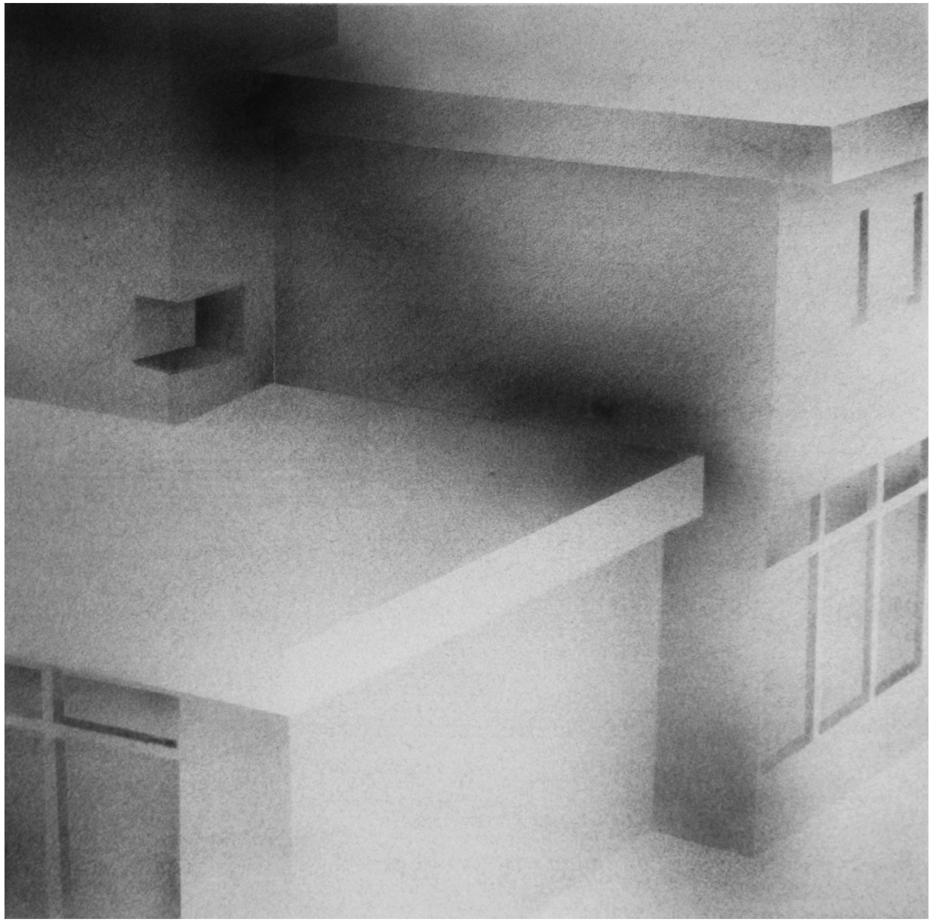
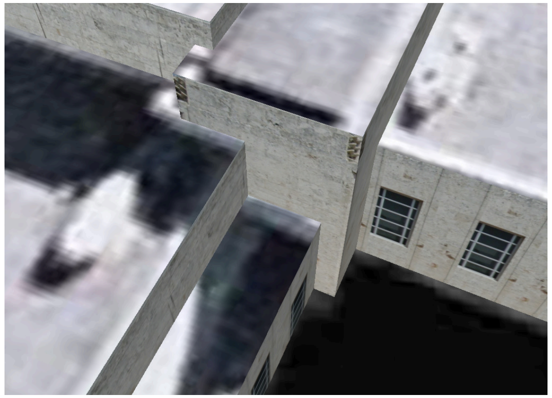
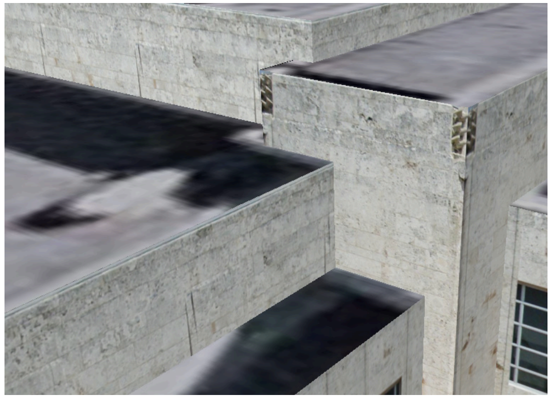


Figure 22
Anika Walker
Untitled (house), 2010
Liquid pencil on paper, 186 x 186 mm

This work is representative of a departure from the use of photographic source images in favour of the use of virtual architectural models. It was the beginnings of an investigation into the way we interact with objects in the virtual realm, and whether that kind of encounter can affect the way we think about traditional drawing. The vital part of the analysis of this work for my project was in the sense of being decentred as a viewer - previous work was made from a typically human viewpoint, but this work carried a sense of indifference that I found interesting enough to pursue. It was also in the analysis of this work that the importance of the errors became apparent - there are many instances of incorrect angles, overlaps and gaps, unnatural shading and lack of delineation that make the experience of the architecture unhomely.





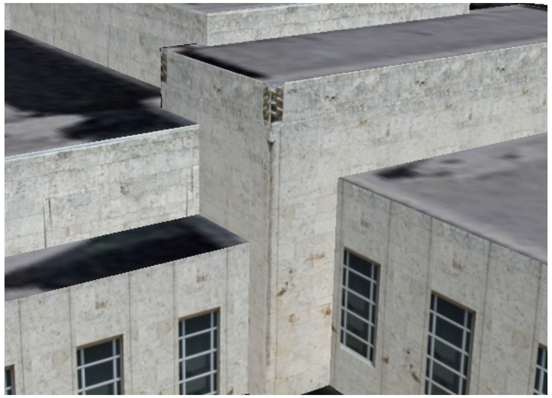


Figure 23
Anika Walker
Screen shots of a virtual architectural model, 2010
Digital file

These images were part of experimentation into the ways in which we experience virtual architectural models and ways those idiosyncrasies might translate into drawing. In this case it was the rotational viewpoint offered by the software that I was interested in, and whether that would be apparent once the images were drawn. As discussed in chapter “Perspective: singularity and stasis”, it was this experimentation that highlighted the way a sequence could activate either the viewer or the image depending on the relationship between frames.

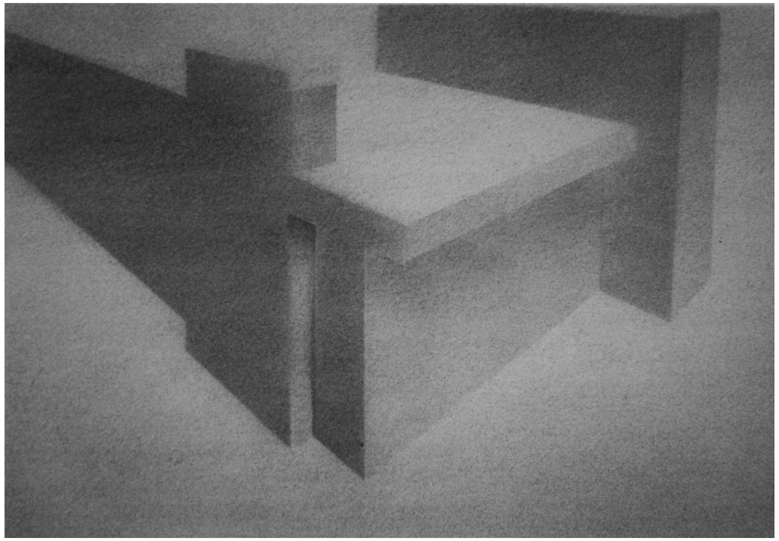


Figure 24
Anika Walker
Untitled, 2010
Liquid pencil on paper,
200 × 140 mm

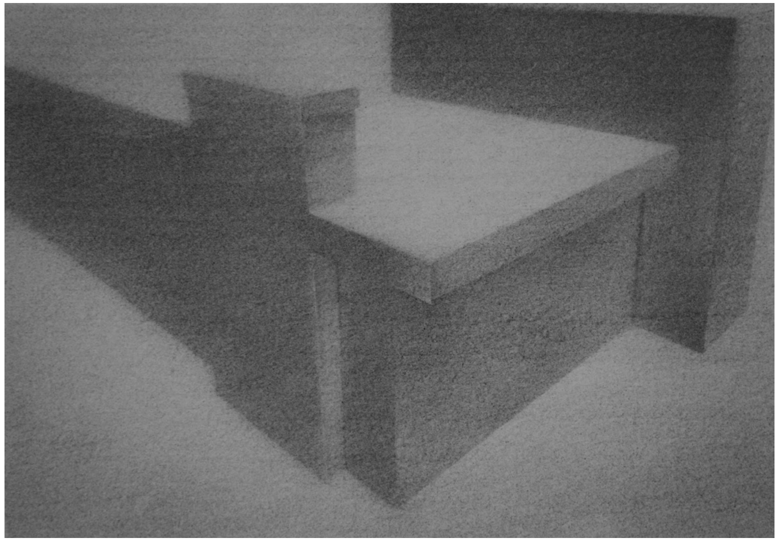


Figure 25
Anika Walker
Untitled, 2010
Liquid pencil on paper,
200 × 140 mm

In these drawings I was testing whether subtle movement in viewing angle would survive translation into drawing, or whether they would be drowned out by the other differences between the images such as tone and inflection. Although noticeable, the change in viewpoint is not as prominent in the finished work as I had anticipated - what did stand out was that the work had become far less about the position of the viewer and more about searching for differences between the two, which was not something I was interested in working with.

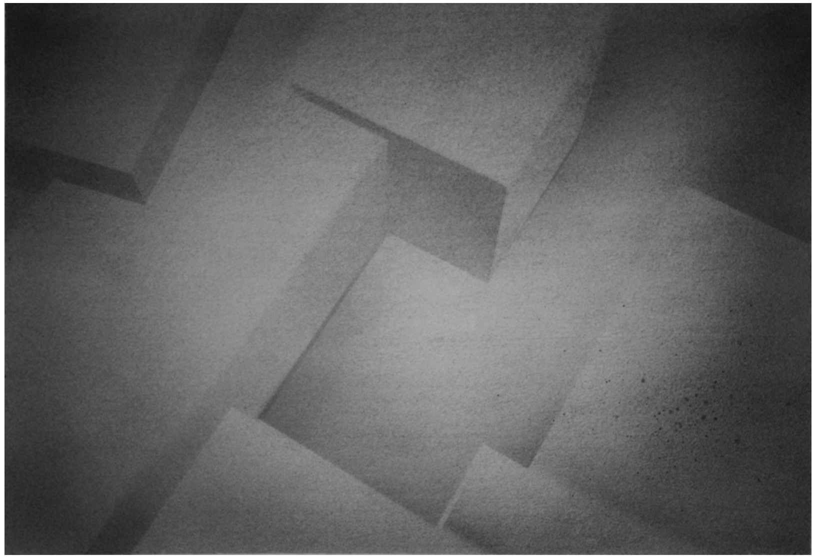


Figure 26
Anika Walker
Untitled (satellite), 2010
Liquid pencil on paper,
270 × 180 mm

The purpose of this work was to understand what effect placing the viewer almost directly above the structure would have on the reading of modelness within the work (I anticipated it would give a sense of the structures being smaller because the viewer is towering above them), however the reverse appeared to be true. I attributed this to an aesthetic affinity with satelite images (or perhaps the view from a plane), in which logic tells us that structures below are far larger than they appear.

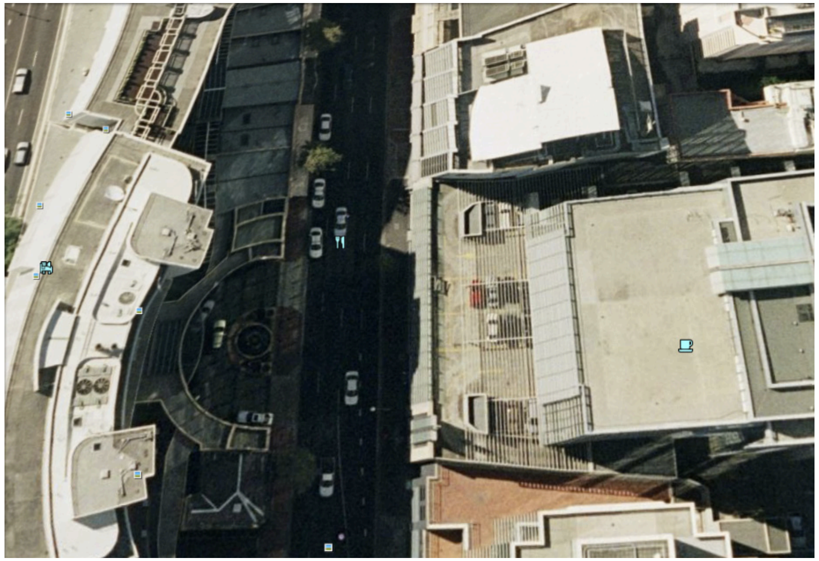


Figure 27
Anika Walker
Google earth screenshot, 2010
Digital file

Figure 28
Anika Walker
Untitled, 2010
Liquid pencil on paper, 205 × 150 mm

This work was part of a series that looked at the awkward viewpoints afforded by the virtual architectural model and the translation of those into drawings. I was interested in how much I could decentre the viewer before they ceased to engage with the drawing completely, and whether there was any merit to that idea. Although this drawing speaks strongly of the artist/viewer being in an abnormal spatial relationship with a structure, I didn't see any reason to push it this far. The danger with this type of drawing is that it loses its ability to ingratiate itself to the viewer in the first instance, which I realised would make for a more one-dimensional encounter than I thought desirable.

Taken out of context, a drawing such as this does not have the strong sense of the architectural model that previous works did because it offers so little information. This highlighted the need to consider the role of other works in series in terms of whether they would be conceptually interdependent or self-contained.

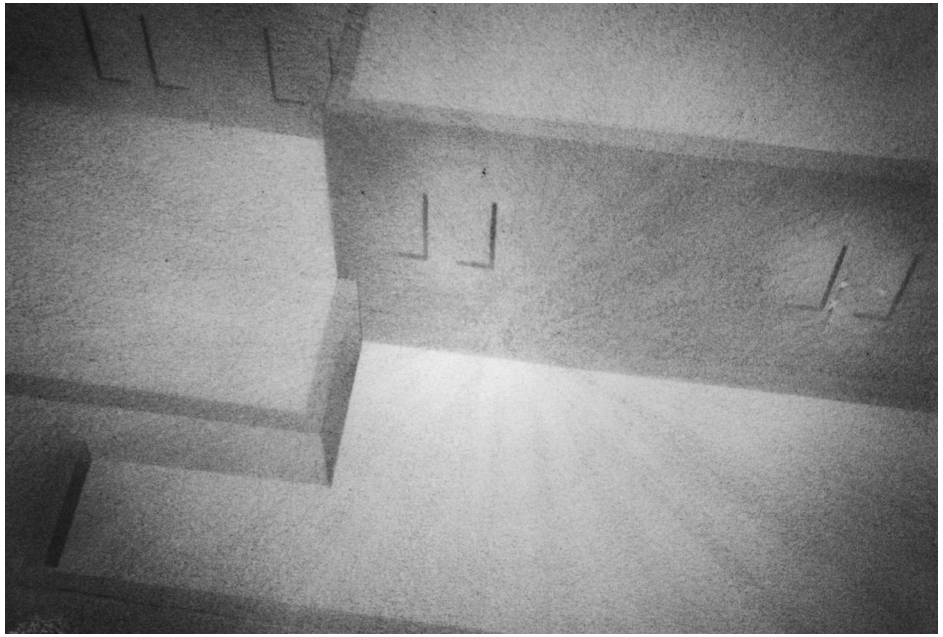


Figure 29
Anika Walker
Untitled (radial inflection), 2010
Liquid pencil on paper, 260 x 185 mm

In this drawing I was looking at an alternative way to use inflection - in previous drawings it tended to be horizontal, but here I was interested in the effect of it radiating from the centre. My rationale for trying this was that I anticipated it would help keep the viewer's eye central in the picture plane, creating a stong sense of stasis. Instead, a pronounced sense of motion (a feeling of falling or of zooming in) was created, which was undesirable.

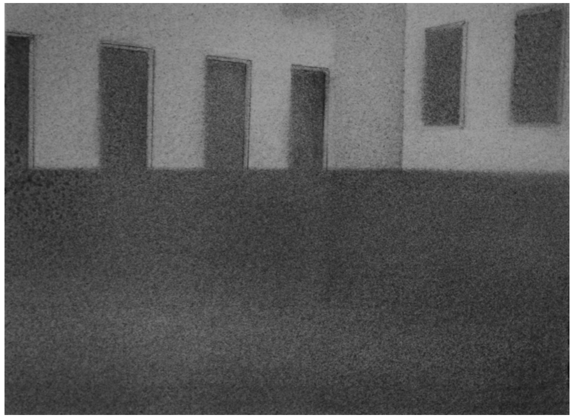


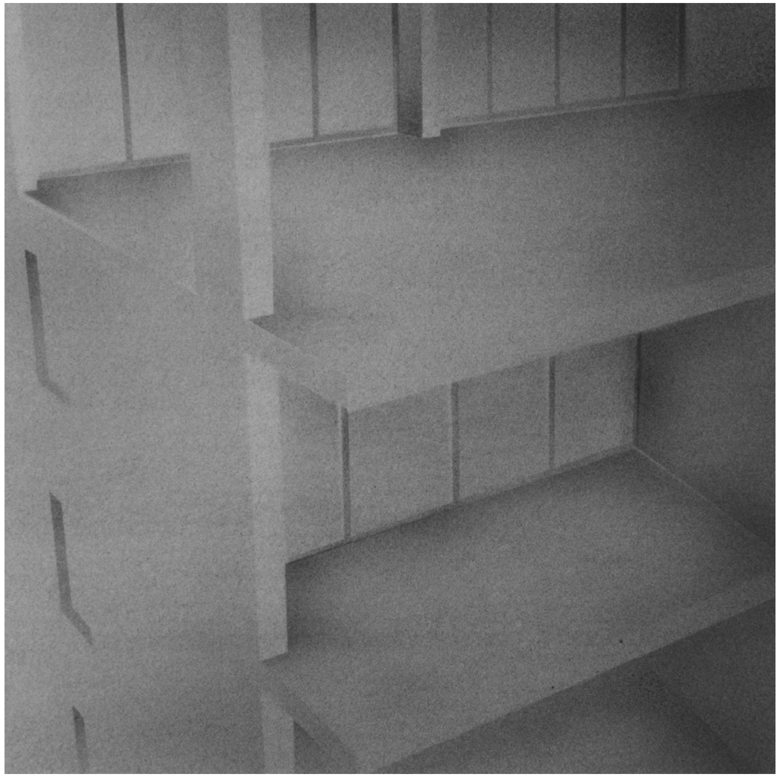
Figure 30
Anika Walker
Untitled, 2010
Liquid pencil on paper, 110 x 80 mm

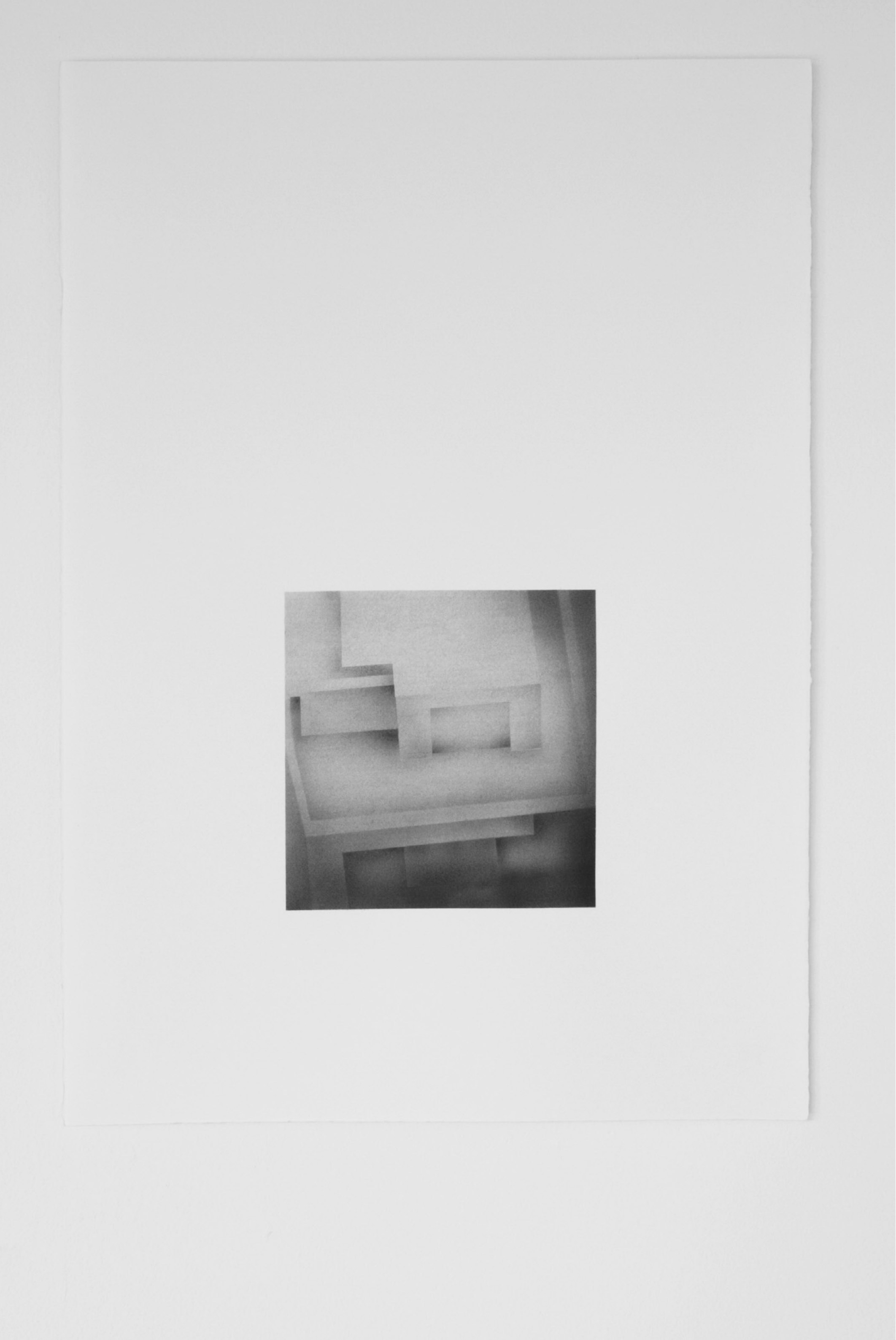
As part of an investigation into the effect of scale I made this work. The reason was to test the effect of going to a smaller format, both on the experience of the work once installed, and on the representation of the subject. With a far greater omission of detail than previous drawings this work reached a threshold - whilst speaking strongly of the miniature it was so pared back that it ceased to be engaging. I realised through reflecting on this that the scale of my work would need to be determined through a careful balancing of detail with blankness.

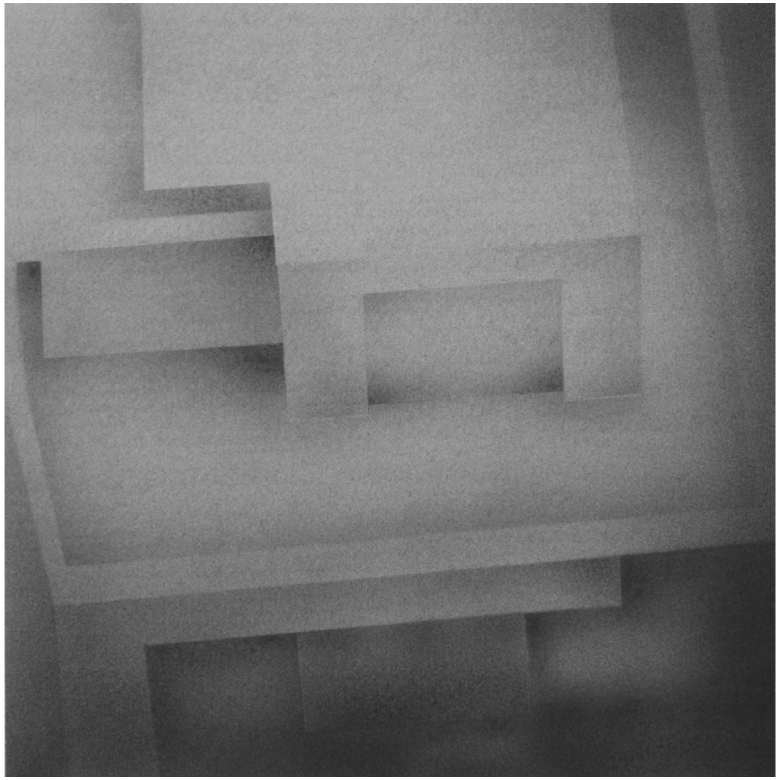
DOCUMENTATION of FINAL EXHIBITION

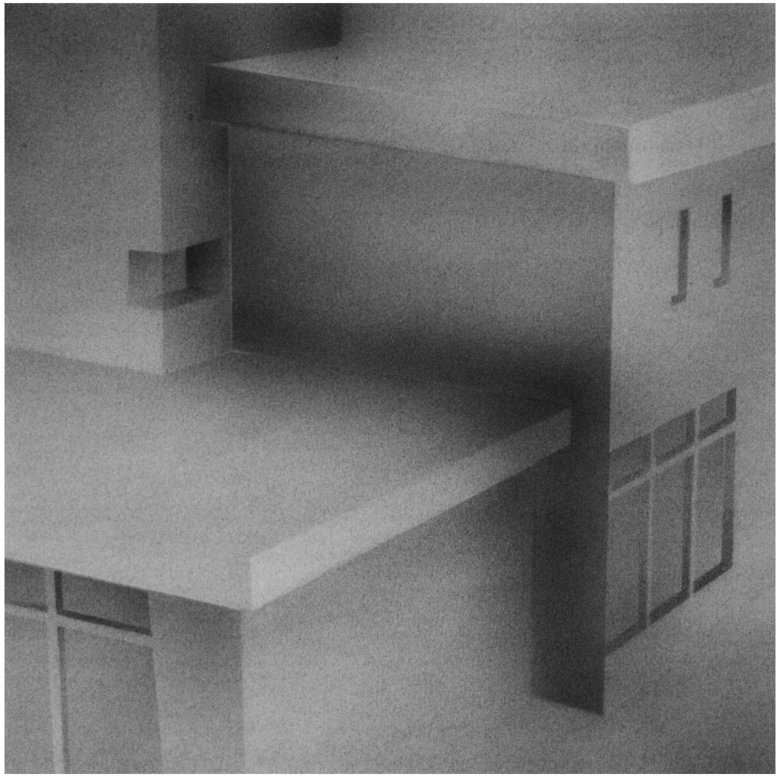
The Proper Use of Space

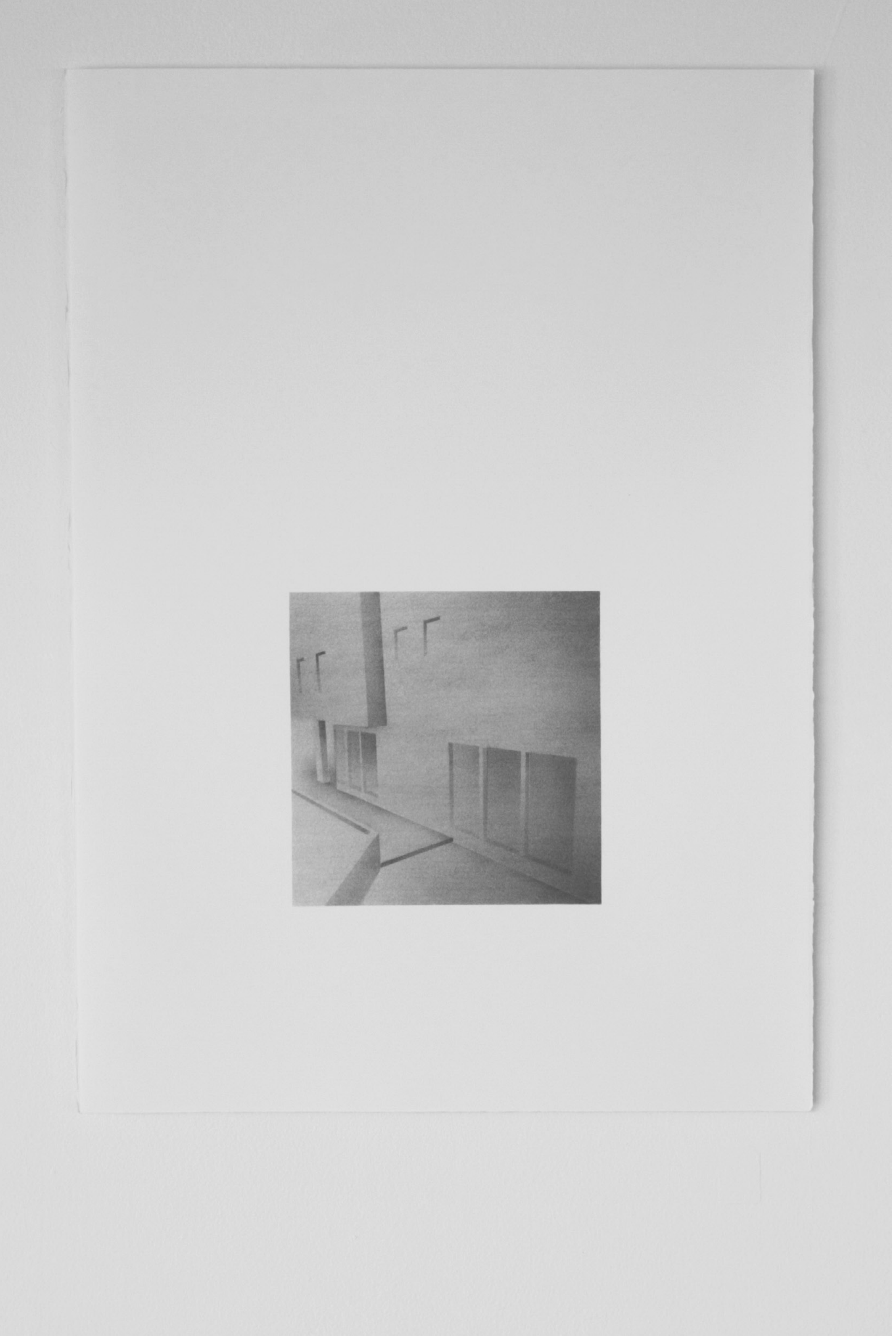
Fishbowl Gallery, November 2010

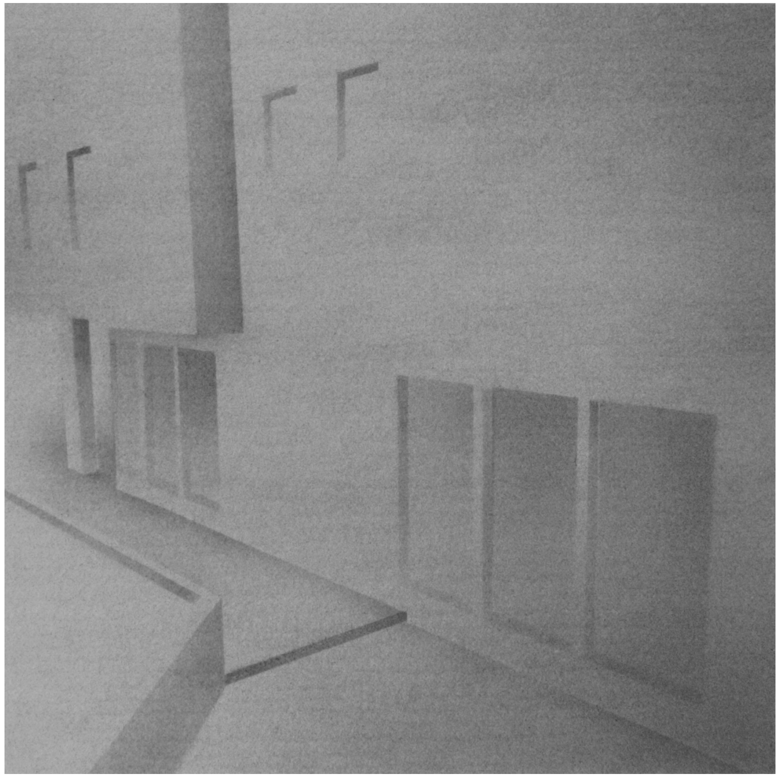


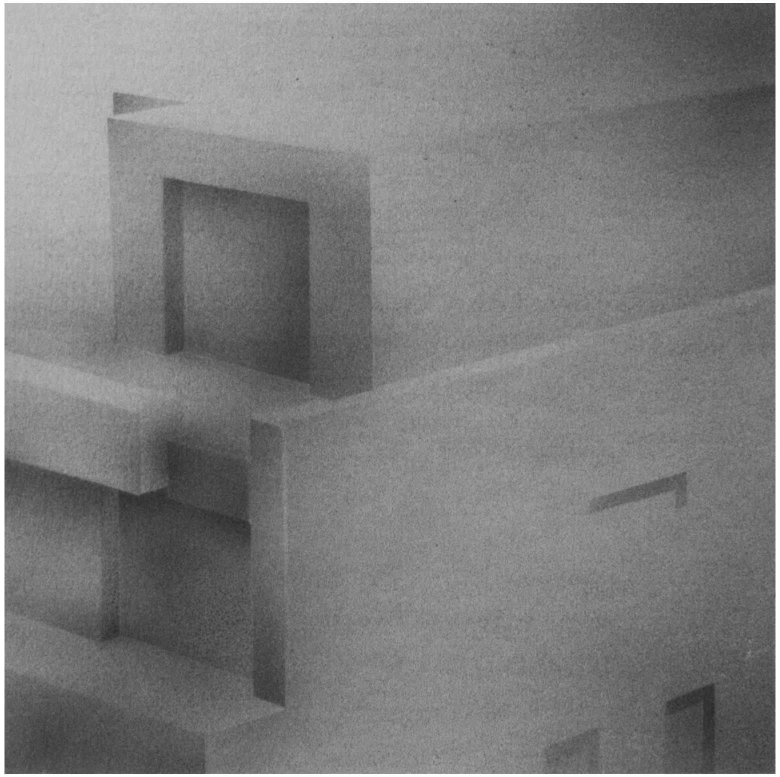


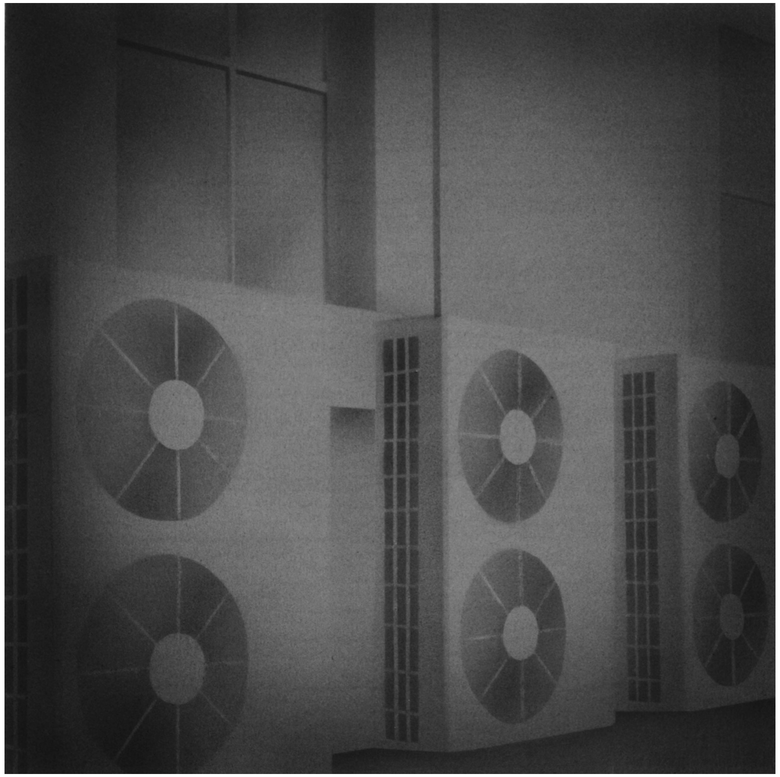












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