



Annotated Architectures: Cycles of the Urban Still Life

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ANNOTATED ARCHITECTURES: CYCLES OF THE URBAN STILL LIFE

The city streets stretch out, one after another, lined with an extensive and interlinked web of buildings. Walls overlap and flow into one another, and the perception of the space as a whole is confounded by its dense complexity. In a perpetual state of change and becoming, standardized structures in the midst of cycles of development, deconstruction, reassembly, and reconfiguration reify the conceptual intangibility of a holistic understanding of the city. Following Rudolf Arnheim's declaration that architecture can never be viewed in its entirety¹, the urban milieu is a constantly buzzing entity that hangs like a curtain wall, partially transparent and creating an illusory overlap in the reflected surroundings. Relying on disparate sites, extensive supply chains, and histories of human ingenuity and building innovations, *Annotated Architectures: Cycles of the Urban Still Life* draws upon a collage sensibility to present the city not as a singular landscape, but as a hybrid space embodying change, decay, looming precarity, and hope.

The first room in the exhibition presents a composite version of the city developed from documentary photography of specific sites encountered along a pre-planned route.² Collaged together and presented as compressed, spatially contracted urban monoliths, the prints take on characteristics of the still life, depicting architecture as an accumulation of material objects and enabling it to perform in a (symbolic) role, providing commentary on the implications of built space. Constructed from a series of disparate sites and locations, the environments depicted in the etchings differ distinctly from direct landscapes or cityscapes; the landscape presents a view of a place from a single vantage point, with the objective being a facsimile, approximation, or interpretation of real space. The various works that make up *Annotated Architectures* are fabrications, pulling together elements of space and complicating our understanding of the cities that we occupy, rendering them from many viewpoints and from many instants in time. This process is borrowed from Dutch flower painting, which presents specimens from numerous geographies and blooming seasons as a means of alluding to contemporary cultural and economic trends. The precarity inherent in *So Much More to Take*, for instance, channels the same "... outstripping of necessity and limitation..." that Norman Bryson describes in analyzing the evolution of the still life genre.³

Still Life, constructed from cut paper, etchings, photogravures, tarps, Tyvek, and drywall, yields a vision of the city in microcosm. Intended to be read either from left to right or right to left, the work presents an abstracted narrative of site, moving from ambiguous space, through planning phases into completion, eventual decay, and a return to ambiguity. The

¹ Arnheim, Rudolf. *The Dynamics of Architecture*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977.

² The route taken was generated by designating the gallery wall on which the work would be hung, then layering a map of the gallery over a map of Edmonton. The streets along which the walls fell served as the source references for the artworks, creating an unusual dialogue between site and source.

³ Pg. 51-52, Bryson, Norman. *Looking at the Overlooked*. London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 1990.

work reframes architecture in all states as “process,” emphasizing the materiality and temporality⁴ concealed within structures.⁵

A series of photogravures depicting the site of *Windsor Terrace* capture a drawn-out process of development. The excavation, begun in the summer of 2019, encountered problems regarding its depth, passed through the hands of six different firms, and saw extensive redesigns before finally resuming at the end of 2021.⁶ As an illustrative case study, *Windsor Terrace* reveals the extent to which space is cast as commodity, the erosion and dilapidation that ensue when maintenance stalls, and the fragility of this mode of thought.

Attrition (Pharmacy Building) approaches the notion of temporality in architecture with a much more focused lens. The photogravure, flocked with brick dust and depicting a mortar and pestle, alludes to the steady wear that structures undergo as people interact with them over their life spans. Bricks serve to occupy a conceptual space that is both extraordinarily generic (as their history spans an international gamut of building sciences), while also being highly site-specific, typically cast from local clay.⁷ Hand-ground by the artist, the performative component of the artwork’s creation served as a deliberate embodiment and acceleration of the slow effects of ongoing participation in the architectural environment.

The final work in the exhibition, *Iterative City*, is an interactive projection, whereby the presence of viewers motivates the structures in the installation to move. The configuration of the imagined urban space, composed from an array of critical infrastructures (water treatment, electrical, and transportation) is constantly shifting, reorienting to reflect the conscious and unconscious processes by which occupants shape architecture, and vice versa. Drawing attention to the ambiguity of the nature of changes in urban space, the atmosphere of the work refutes the typical air of unbridled optimism that accompanies architectural proposals.

Motivated by the lopsided spiral of development practices (funneling parcels of land through a stream of discrete stages leading from a misconstrued “vacancy” through excavation, construction, and the slow attrition of decay), *Annotated Architectures: Cycles of the Urban Still Life* presents a dense impression of post-industrial space. The work gestures to the deeply interconnected and globalised networks that cities depend on to function, and implicates our collective involvement within the precarious systems that brought about contemporary North American life. Architecture serves to demarcate the era in which it was

⁴ David Morris’ reflections on Merleau-Ponty’s writing on time reflects on past knowledge and learning being embedded in the objects that we interact with, infusing every material with an extensive history. See Morris, David. “Spatiality, Temporality, and Architecture as a Place of Memory.” *Merleau-Ponty : Space, Place, Architecture*, edited by Patricia M. Locke, and Rachel McCann, Ohio University Press, 2016. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ualberta/detail.action?docID=4386510>.

⁵ Dwayne Donald’s writing on spatial re-writing is also significant, with regards to how space is reimagined with each occupant. Donald, Dwayne T. “Edmonton Pentimento: Re-Reading History in the Case of the Papaschase Cree.” *Journal of the Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies*, vol. 2 no. 1 Spring 2004.

⁶ For details regarding the development process, the community at Skyrise Edmonton has been critical in assisting the hunt for further resources. <https://edmonton.skyrisecities.com/map/>

⁷ For extensive detail regarding the history and regional variations of brick manufacture, Campbell’s volume presents a thorough and engaging survey. Campbell, James W.P. *Brick: A World History*. London; New York: Thames & Hudson, 2003.

constructed; the exhibition dwells in a place of anxiety and change, but finds a sliver of hope within the possibility that changes, while constant, are driven by the accumulated choices of their occupants. The various works that make up *Annotated Architectures* render the city from many viewpoints and from many instants in time. They become edges, peripheries, *surfaces*, collections of components that indicate the frameworks, the rough outlines that shape and reflect human behaviour within their confines.

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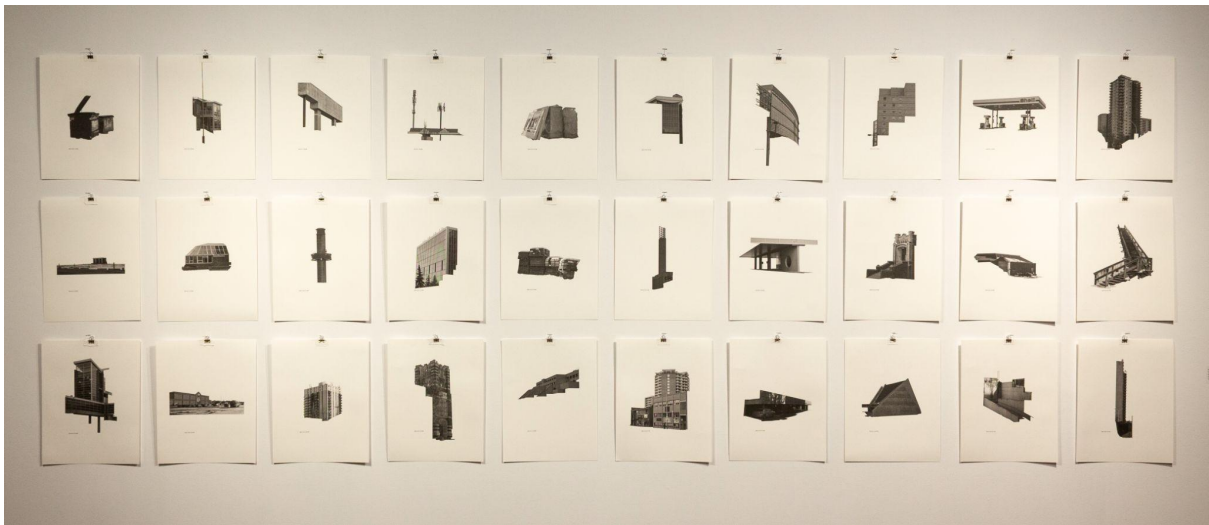
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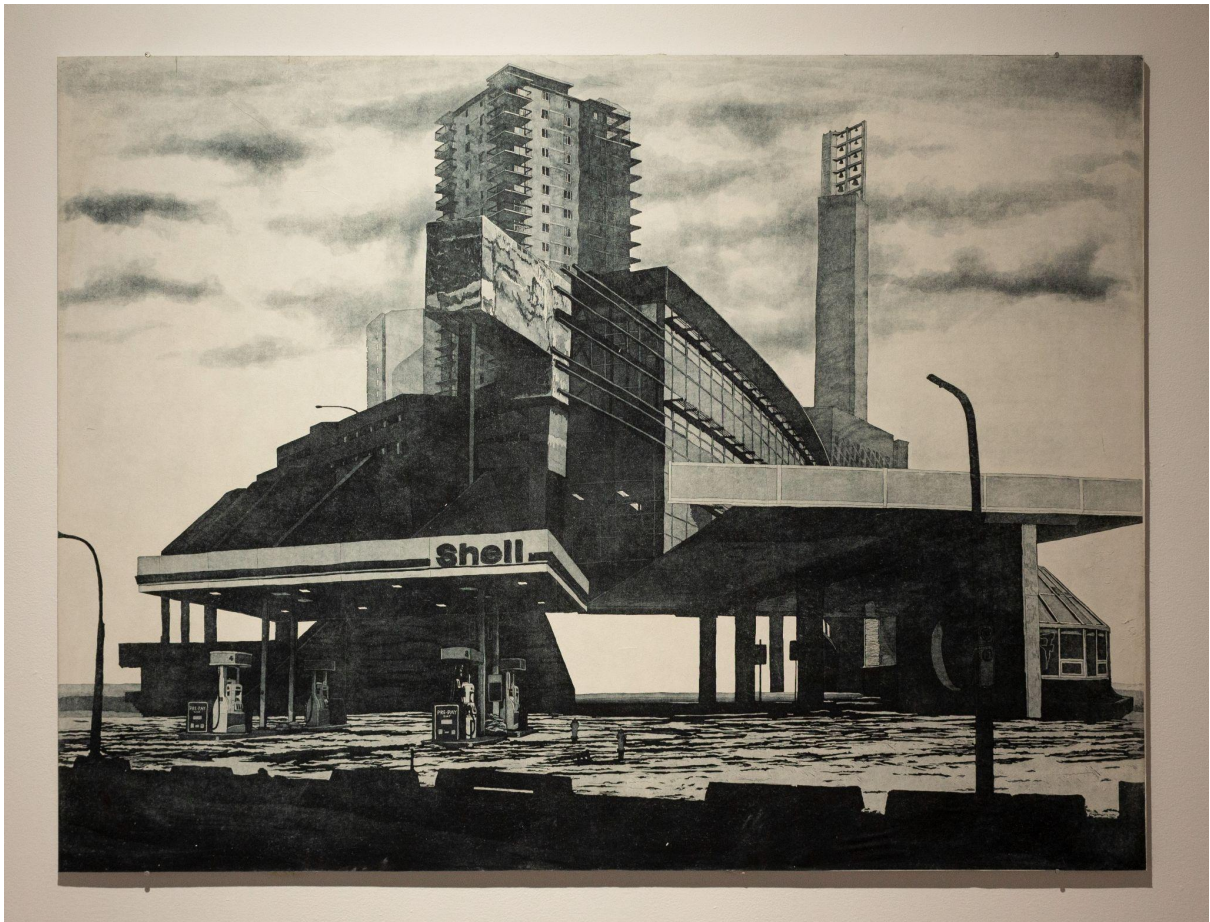
Preparatory documents. Inkjet. Each sheet 11" x 14", 2021



87 Avenue, 118 - 85 St NW. Etching, aquatint, mezzotint, drywall. 36" x 48" x .5", 2021



118 St NW, 87 - 104 Ave. Etching, aquatint, drywall. 36" x 48" x .5", 2021.



104 Avenue, 122 - 101 St NW. Etching, aquatint, drywall. 36" x 48" x .5", 2021



Attrition (Pharmacy Building). Photogravure, hand-ground brick dust, bricks. Print: 22" x 30.5", 2021.



Attrition (detail). Photogravure, hand-ground brick dust. 22" x 30", 2021



Still Life. Etching, aquatint, photogravure, drypoint, graphite, hand-ground brick dust, tarpaulin, Tyvek, graphite, silkscreen, relief, inkjet, pen and ink, tracing paper, drywall, t pins, concrete. 96" x 240", 2021



Still Life. Etching, aquatint, photogravure, drypoint, graphite, hand-ground brick dust, tarpaulin, Tyvek, graphite, silkscreen, relief, inkjet, pen and ink, tracing paper, drywall, t pins, concrete. 96" x 240", 2021



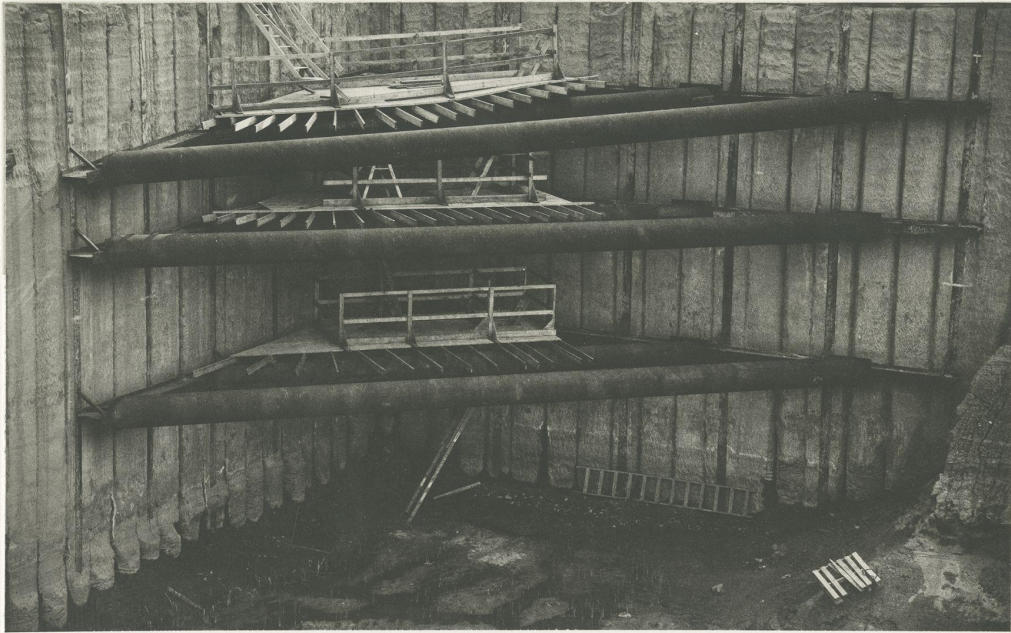
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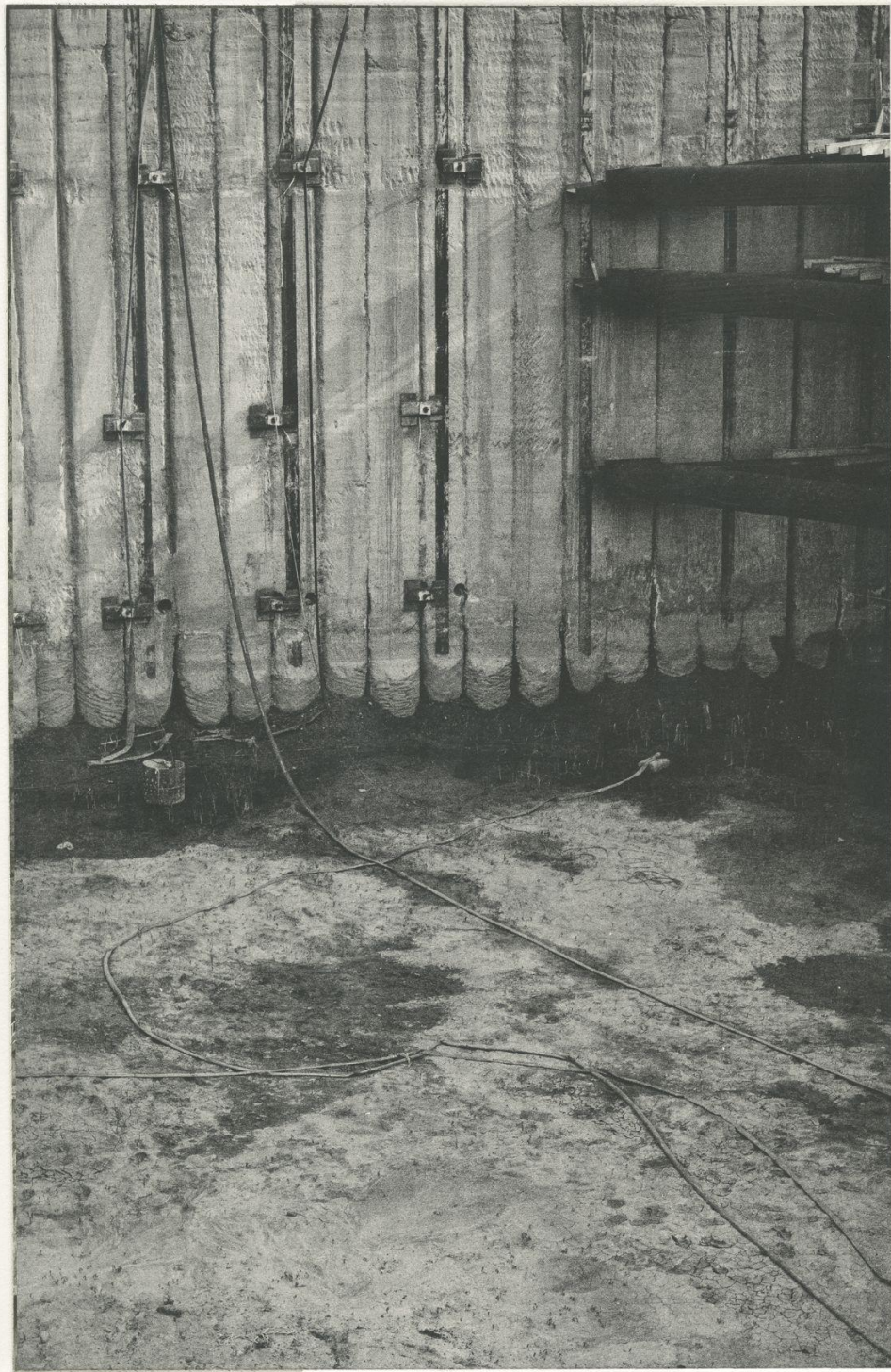
Windsor Terrace Suite. Photogravure. 2021



Windsor Terrace - Subside, October 8 2020. Photogravure. 18" x 23.125", 2021



Windsor Terrace - Corner, July 30, 2021. Photogravure. 16" x 17.75", 2021



Windsor Terrace, Morning Light, August 2021. Photogravure. 16.5" x 18.625", 2021



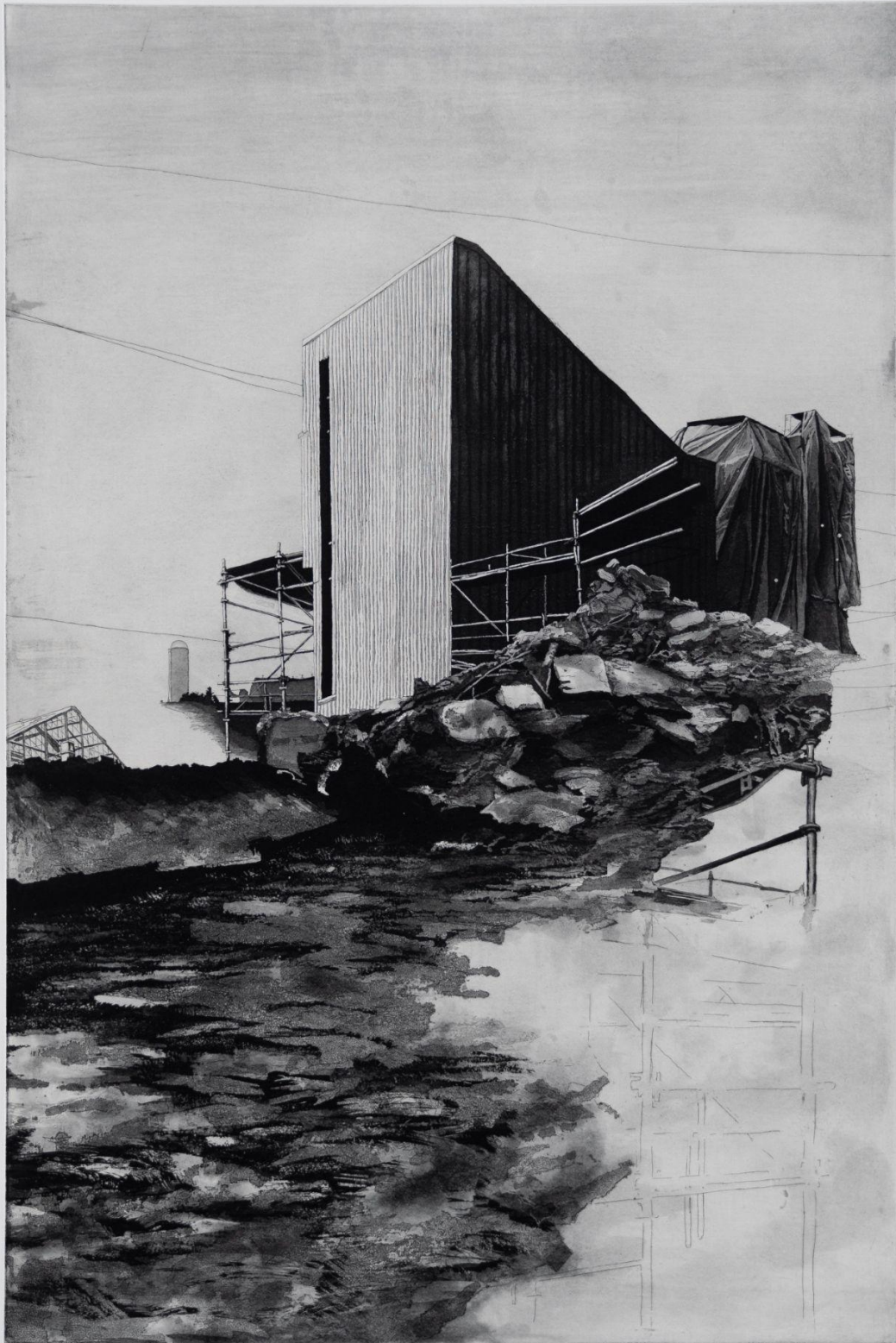
Annotated Architectures, installation. 2021



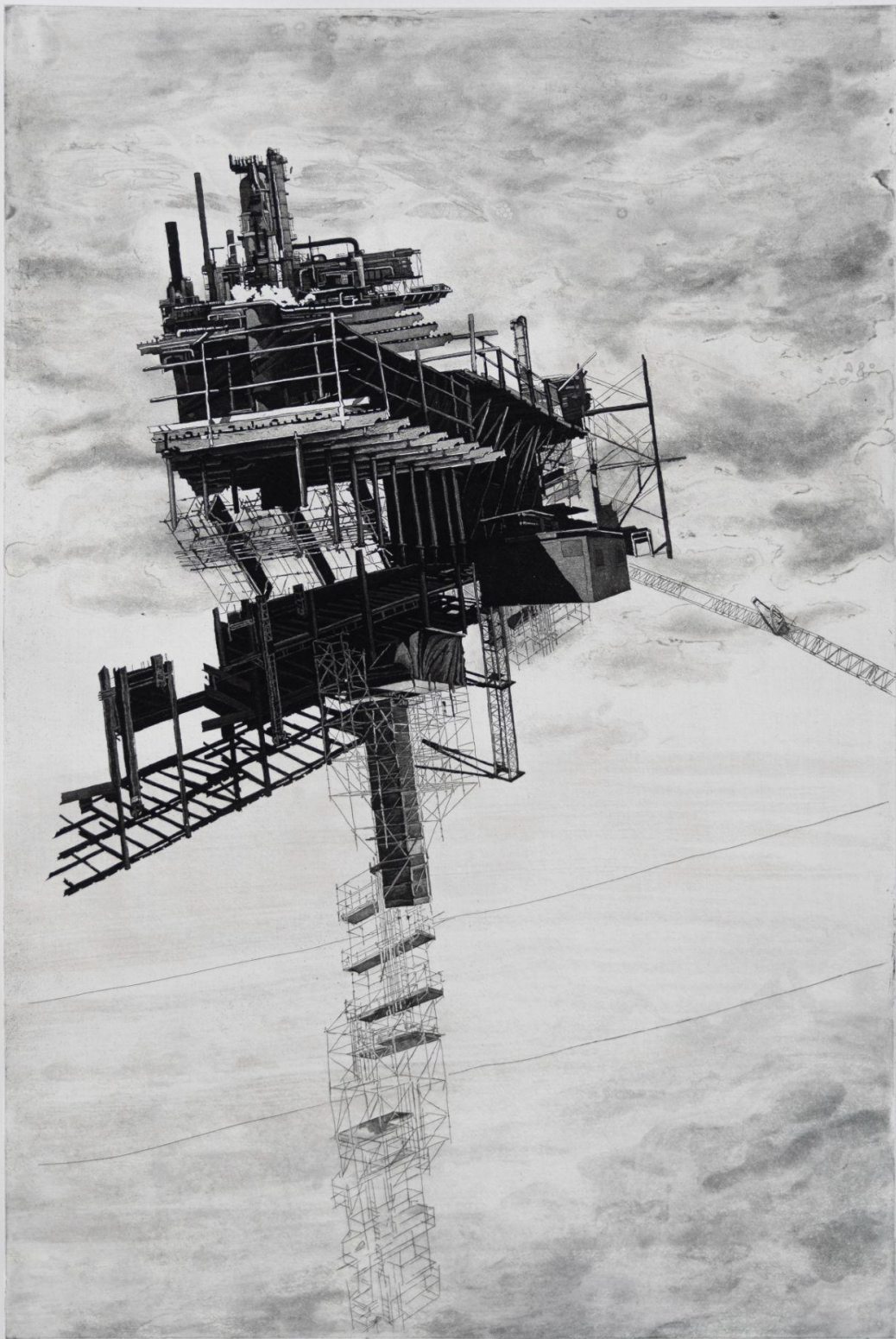
So Much More to Take Suite. Etching, aquatint, salt. Each 31" x 47.5", 2020/21



So Much More to Take I. Etching, aquatint. 31" x 47.5", 2020/21



So Much More to Take II. Etching, aquatint, salt. 31" x 47.5", 2020/21



So Much More to Take III. Etching, aquatint. 31" x 47.5", 2020/21



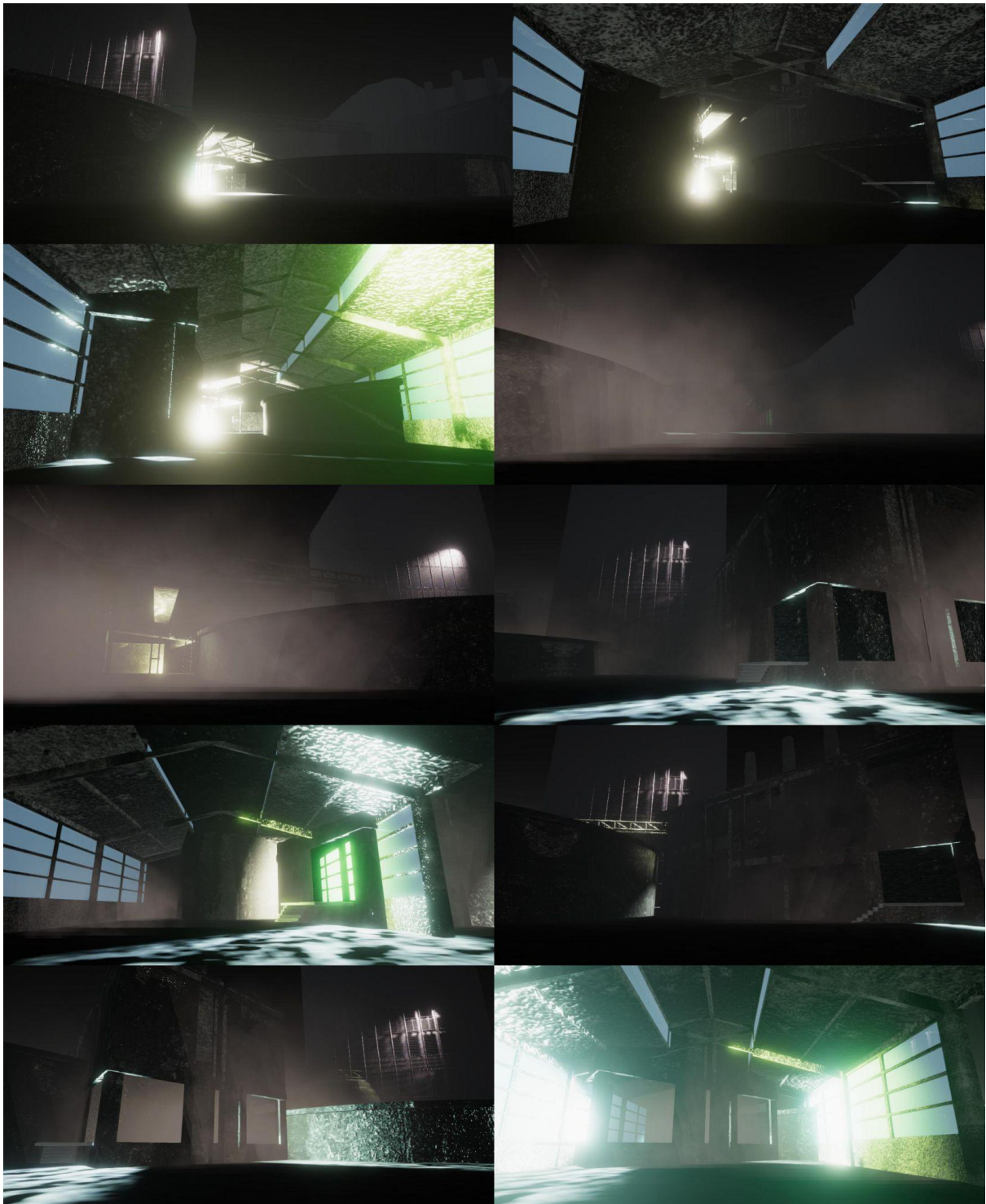
Preserve. Etching, aquatint. 22" x 30.5", 2020



City Block (Unfinished). Etching, aquatint, scraper, sandpaper. Each 22" x 30.5",
2020-ongoing



City Block (Unfinished). Etching, aquatint, scraper, sandpaper. Each 22" x 30.5", 2020-ongoing



Iterative City (stills). Interactive projection constructed in Unity engine. 2020-2021/ongoing

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