

Concrete

HYBRID

INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL OF ART, DESIGN, AND ARCHITECTURE

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Hybrid

Interdisciplinary Journal of Art, Design, and Architecture

The *Hybrid* is a thematic journal aimed at fostering a culture of research and writing at the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture and beyond. It is transdisciplinary in nature, and focuses primarily on those practices and researches that are interested in the application of any combination of art, design, architectural, and related genres, to issues of critical, cultural, political, and educational significance, inclusion, and social justice. It emphasises praxis by providing a forum for research into the creative practices that exist within urban, academic, developmental, and other milieus, especially in the national and regional contexts of Pakistan and South Asia. The *Hybrid* offers a platform for disseminating both completed as well as in-progress research, both established academic/practitioners' and students' research projects, as well as interview, photo essay, and portfolio sections. Its objective is to bring new and multiple perspectives, grounded in Pakistan and the region, to a local, regional, and international audience, and to further pertinent debates.

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We Who Were Our Own

Editorial

For its third issue, *Hybrid* explored concrete as a theme. We considered concrete in its various manifestations and meanings; as aligned with articulations, processes, desires of world-making, and modernity; as mechanism for the decimation of natural worlds and orders; as remnants and ruins that saturate cities in/of the Global South; as forms and images central to historical and contemporary spatial imaginations; as material, as a word, and as a way of thinking.

We were interested in exploring the place and use of concrete in architecture, and in investigating practices that have opened up new understandings of concrete as material, method, and metaphor. Tropical Modernism is one such example, where the inherent conflict that comes with using concrete is negated—although not entirely—with situating its materiality as *not* in direct opposition to nature; where the distinction between inside and outside becomes *less* concrete; where its raw surfaces age with every season, taking on different hues; where edges of built spaces become a little difficult to perform. Our interest for this issue was to also explore, and pose questions pertaining to, the use of concrete in contemporary art. How are artists calling upon concrete as a material to make visible their ideas?

The use of concrete, in modernity, engages with progress and development, but what do we make of its failure in collapsed projects? When monuments constructed with concrete fall, signalling collapse of power of totalitarian regimes, they bring forth counter-visualities; how are we to think of them? With the inevitable climate change, the rise in global temperatures, the desire to make world-class cities, how do we think about its use? The change in its materiality from beginning to end—transition from viscous to solid—also opens up room for metaphors. What is the relationship of gendered/racialised bodies to concrete as built form? What are some of the ways in which concrete participates in the partitioning and gendering of space? Further, how do we understand concrete without engaging with its relationship to the abstract? By not thinking of either as situated in isolation but concepts that work in tandem through a series of determinations—our understanding of the concrete is thus fluid, exploratory, situated as a point of departure, hence not the place where we end, negating its neutrality/*factum*.

In the age of "alternative facts", what does it then mean to desire the concrete? Is concrete evidence?

Our constellation of contributors made us privy to scenarios, notions, and ideas that were not

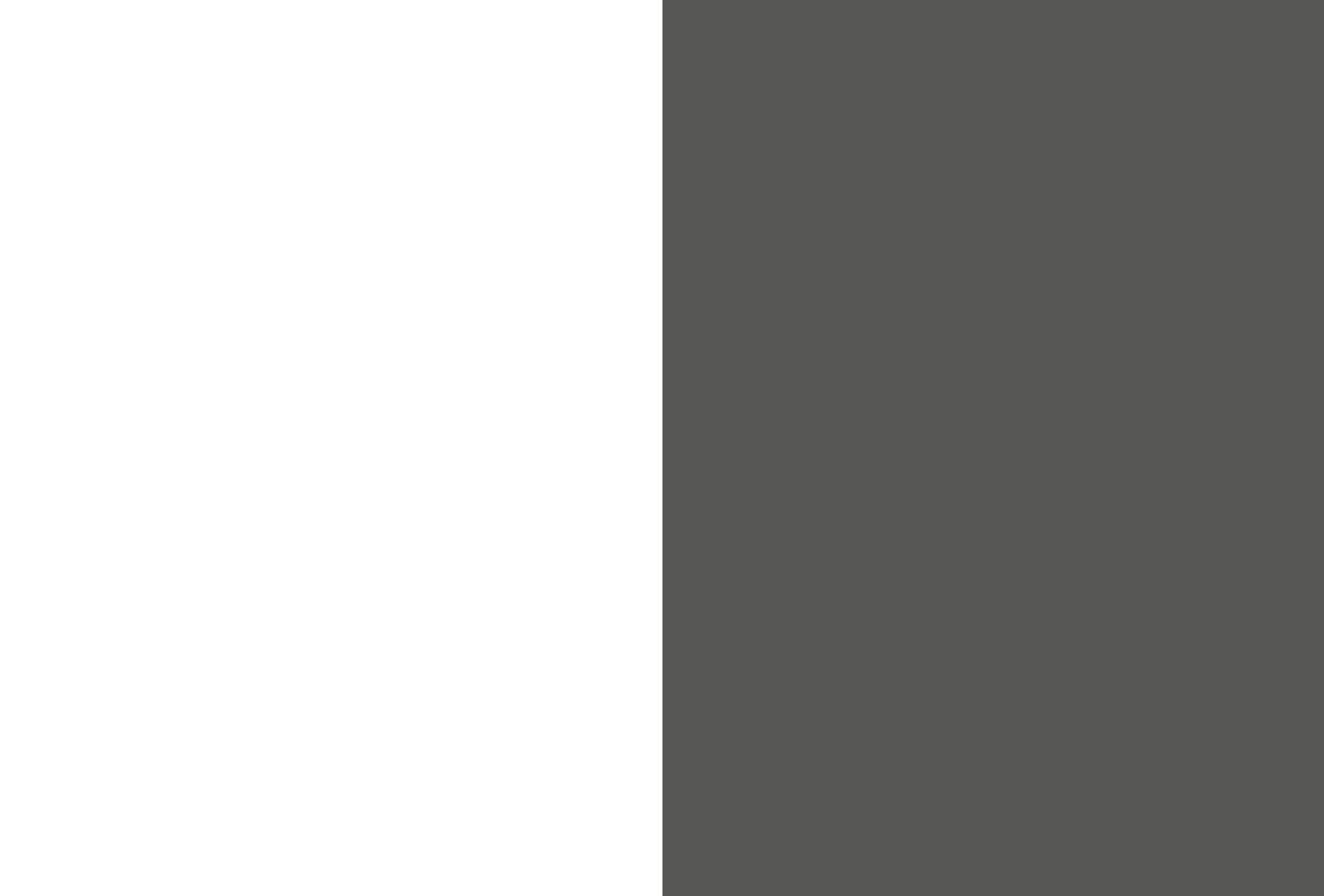
yet a part of our imaginaries, or that which were beyond our limits of thinking when we first conceptualised the framework.

Laurent Gayer, using Sohail Zuberi's work, situates us amidst the changing peripheries of Karachi's coastline, making visible "capital and coercion" colluding to accommodate more concrete, which accounts for, supports, and strengthens "death worlds"—of agricultural land, of ecological devastation of the ocean, of solidarities across class. Rahma Muhammad Mian and Zahra Malkani's conversation, pieced into four parts over email, takes us to the heart of neo-colonial universities whose *raison d'être* is that of masking putrefaction behind, under, and between their towering "walls" to preserve the facade of offering a world-class liberal education. These very walls, walls built with and on the promise of educating and nurturing all bodies, "crush" and are "crushing", repress and are repressing, silence and are silencing historically othered bodies. Seher Shah and Randhir Singh in the photo essay evoke a dialogue between "architectural scale and materiality", communicating in and with "architectural fragments" the fragmented experience of the landscape itself. Their work challenges the concreteness of architectural presence by showing us that which comes before: plans, elevations, blueprints—operating between what is intended and what actually is, between intention/intension and presence. By calling upon scale and monumentality, Ledelle Moe's work in the portfolio section delves into notions of belonging, of identity, and of being simultaneously from a place and placelessness. Concrete in her works is a repository of gestures and mediations: of welding, casting, modelling, and carving. Each piece serves as a holder of excavated sand from specific locales that render it as a marker of a place; not in its permanence or adherence to that place as it remains mobile and transportable by the nature of its construction, but to be *of* and *from* that place in memory, cured in/with time. Himali Singh Soin, in the craft section, refuses to distinguish "between the truth and the trace", which I interpret as a refusal to distinguish between concrete and not-concrete, between concrete and abstract, between what remains and what disappears in erasure poetry. Erasure as a beginning, a "renewal", a kind of "healing", a tool for inflection, a mechanism through which time becomes fluid and gets us to think of "freedom", of not necessarily existing *outside* of the "restrictions" that language imposes on us, but by claiming, re-authoring, with elisions and in fragments, making enough room *in* the process, to inhabit it differently from within.

As I draw this editorial to a close, I go back to the very beginning of my connection with *Hybrid* and the reason why I am a part of it: Saira Sheikh. Thank you for thinking of me as worthy of sitting in for you *here*—and that is all I have done, and will continue to do, till you take it back from me. I write and make every so often, but never without you and Madiha Aijaz. This is for both of you. Our three-person team, the Editorial Board of *Hybrid*, found kinship and alliance, intellectual and otherwise, in Dr. Asma Abbas, our Dean of Academics, and I thank her for her time and genuine interest in our work. I thank Samina Khan, our Executive Director,

for her continued support toward the *Hybrid* team. Our words, punctuation, and grammar found clarity and an ally in Sunara Nizami, and I want to thank her for her time, labour, and diligent copyediting skills. I will end this by thanking and staying with friends who have kept me afloat this past year, and played a major part in this publication, but their varied and many contributions remain somewhat obscured, if not entirely invisible: Shahana Rajani for always being there, reading, reviewing, editing, and listening as I worked on this; Shayan Rajani for recommending that we request Rahma Muhammad Mian and Zahra Malkani to contribute to the conversation section; Asma Mundrawala and Durreshahwar Alvi, members of the Editorial Board of *Hybrid*, for making intellectual space for me for the past three years—when academia became excruciatingly frustrating at times, it is with them that I had moments of immense intellectual growth; and Kiran Ahmad for being an excellent designer, for keeping up with our design-related requests, and holding *Hybrid* together, quite literally.

Omer Wasim
Editor, *Hybrid* 03



Of Disposable People and Discarded Things
A Commentary on Sohail Zuberi's *Archaeologies
of Tomorrow*¹

Laurent Gayer (CNRS/CERI-Sciences Po, Paris)



Where fishers used to seek the fish
the barren sand-dunes lie;
Fish-sellers ruined, the river dry;
and tax collector gone

—Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai²

Like every other city, Karachi is a palimpsest of overlapping histories and disjointed temporalities, where each new claim to ownership threatens to obliterate past voices under a pile of rubble. Here, the tyranny of the present might only be a bit more uninhibited than usual. Just ask the dead in their last abode—these coveted pieces of land arousing the envy of ruthless developers. Even the founding mother of the city and her brave sons are not safe from these acts of erasure. While, according to legend, Mai Kolachi lays in a small graveyard in the Boulton Market area, the tombs of the seven brothers are barely surfacing at the feet of a flyover in Gulbai Chowk, ready to be devoured at any time by a foe even more formidable than the one defeated by the valiant Mororo. A few years ago, the seven tombs were demolished to make way for the said flyover. Various protesters—Sindhi nationalists, PPP leaders, fishermen, and other residents of fisherfolk communities from Ibrahim Hyderi to Keamari—then gathered at the roundabout to protest this “conspiracy” against Sindh’s heritage. The mobilisation paid off and the graves were restored—a temporary respite until the next onslaught of developers erase all traces of the heroic fishermen.

The narrow stretch of beach where Karachi-based artist Sohail Zuberi has been collecting his “archaeological relics” over the past seven years is this palimpsest in miniature. Already a quasi-private space, earmarked for upscale urban “development” by the Defence Housing Authority (DHA), it is one of these sites where the triumphant narrative of the world-class city showcases itself on the ruins of dissenting life forms and pre-capitalist economies.

For Zuberi, what began as banal Sunday strolls gradually evolved into an inventory of the material and animal remains regurgitated by the sea, the leftovers of nocturnal libations, and other remnants of an urban civilisation choking on its own garbage. This process of weekly accumulation, initially haphazard and unsystematic, gradually became more ordered when he started classifying first the images taken with his cellphone, and later the found objects. This nomenclature of discarded things became the basis for his 2018 exhibition *Archaeologies of Tomorrow*, comprising photographs, artefacts, and installations organised around these classifications and thematic entries: pieces from capsized boats and snapshots of visiting crowds, alluding to the beach as a place of recreation and economic activity; liquor bottles, referring to the beach as a sanctuary for those escaping the stiff moral order of the city; images of religious texts, prayer caps, skulls of sacrificed cows and goats, talismans, Shia *alams*, pieces of silken cloth used to cover graves in shrines, *rehels* (wooden stands on which the Holy Quran is read), and other artefacts hinting at the importance of the sea as a burial site in Pakistani

society; pictures of dead turtles, dolphins, stingrays, or jellyfish, exploring a conception of the sea as a place of death and decay; and photographs of the copious amount of rubbish littering the beach on an everyday basis, serving as a reminder that the sea is also a major place of garbage disposal in this great port city.

Nostalgic fantasies of urban cleansing, which so often inform the relationship of Karachi’s elites with their city and its allegedly pristine past, are strikingly absent from Zuberi’s work. Neither does this “archaeological” project amount to a melancholic engagement with the frailty of all things. By collecting and photographing these remains while documenting the rapid transformation of Karachi’s coastal environment, Zuberi collapses temporalities, excavating the future of a lifeworld plagued by the sense of its own obsolescence. In Larissa Sansour’s 2015 video work, *In the Future they Ate from the Finest Porcelain*, which explores a similarly paradoxical grammar, the “narrative terrorist” proclaims that:

We are depositing facts in the ground for future archaeologists to excavate. These facts will confirm the existence of this people we are positing, and in turn support any descendants’ claims to the land, de facto creating a nation.³

In Zuberi’s work, the archaeological becoming of the present operates differently: tomorrow has a much more dystopian quality and garbage, as relic-in-the-making, anticipates the discarding and eventually the obliteration of entire populations unfit for the world-class city. This forensic archaeology of the future attests of an incipient death-world—a necropolitical order where the boundless violence of sovereignty encounters the power of erasure of capital to produce what Achille Mbembe describes as “a form of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of living dead.”⁴

The small-time fishermen setting their nets off Sahil Beach—most of them residents of Gizri—are already living on borrowed time. In days of waterfront redevelopment and industrial overfishing, they have been turned into an anachronism. During the past decade, the resources of the sea have been depleted by fishing trawlers sweeping the seabed with their wire nets and disrupting the marine food chain by trapping the smaller fish, which often ends up as poultry feed. Already, the *sua*, *mongra* and *surmaai*—local varieties of fish which used to be found in abundance in the waters of the Arabian Sea until recently—have nearly disappeared.⁵ In his famous take on the legend of Mai Kolachi, the great Sindhi poet Shah Abdul Latif envisions a bazaar without fish-smell, where the buyers return empty-handed and the fishermen face starvation. This nightmarish vision could soon become a permanent reality against a background of general indifference.

Through glimpses of the city yet to come, Sohail Zuberi alerts us to a catastrophe in the making.



Sohail Zuberi, 2 October 2016 (from the series *Archaeologies of Tomorrow*). (Photo by Sohail Zuberi)

(Page 17) Detail of *Seascope*, Koel Gallery, Karachi, Pakistan

Credit: Sohail Zuberi, 2018, found painted wood (2013–2018), glue, and plywood with wooden frame, 91cm H x 183cm L x 10cm W. (Photo by Omer Wasim)



Sohail Zuberi, 5 March 2017 (from the series *Archaeologies of Tomorrow*). (Photo by Sohail Zuberi)



Sohail Zuberi, 20 November 2016 (from the series *Archaeologies of Tomorrow*). (Photo by Sohail Zuberi)



Sohail Zuberi, 15 October 2017 (from the series *Archaeologies of Tomorrow*). (Photo by Sohail Zuberi)

This will be a city of concrete, built on the aggregation of capital and coercion—a deadly mix that will only harden over time, wreaking havoc over the city's fragile ecology and dispossessing the most vulnerable populations of their lands and livelihoods. In this chronicle of Sahil Beach's foretold destruction, concrete is both a tangible aggregate, binding materials together to produce (infra)structures, and a powerful metaphor of urban processes. This palpable engagement with abstraction, along with its collapsing of temporalities and tonalities, infuses Zuberi's work with a fruitful tension. While winding through documentary and reverie, it never loses track of its central theme: the catastrophic instantiation of Karachi's future.

Of Refuge and Refuse

Located in the DHA Phase 8 area, next to the popular Seaview, Sahil Beach receives few visitors for most of the year. The monsoon season, however, brings families searching for fresh air, distraction, and possibly to escape perpetual power failures in their respective neighbourhoods. For mostly lower-income families, the beach is a rare place of respite in a city where public recreational spaces have continuously shrunk, while the density of the habitat continues to climb at a staggering rate. These seasonal visitors sustain a small service economy, from the vendors usually setting up shop on the nearby Seaview Beach, to the young men offering camel or horse rides. In this joyous celebration of the city-by-the-sea, the ethnic and sectarian divides that continue to structure interactions elsewhere seem largely irrelevant.

At night, the beach becomes a refuge for merry-makers and lonely moonlight guzzlers searching for a bit of privacy under the cover of the dark. The empty bottles discarded by nightly visitors are another hint of the liminality of the *sahil*, a space between the sea and the land, neither here nor there, outside the reach of oppressive affiliations, legal prescriptions, and moral injunctions. The apparent predilection of these drinkers for foreign brews—as attested by the remains of their libations—also connects them to the history of ethylic cosmopolitanism tracing its roots to inebriated encounters with foreign sailors and hippies, now perpetuating itself through more discreet practices of consumption thriving on maritime smuggling networks. These distractions from the stifling atmosphere of the city seem doomed to disappear in the near future, though. Once the *kaccha* fence cedes the way to concrete walls dotted with barbed wire and glass shards, the purge will begin. There is another "Operation Clean-up" in the making here, which, as always, will invoke property laws and the abomination of "encroachments" to repel undesirable plebs and misfits.

A sanctuary for populations struggling to find a place in the new economic and moral order of the metropolis, this beach is fast turning into a place of refuse, where disposable people are waiting to be rejected beyond the walls of the safe and civilised city, and where discarded



Detail of *Ropes*, Koel Gallery, Karachi, Pakistan

Credit: Sohail Zuberi, 2018, found ropes (2013–2018), nails, and plywood with wooden frame, 81cm H x 244cm L x 10cm W. (Photo by Omer Wasim)



things are being spat out by the sea. That is what the sea has been doing for as long as men can remember: spitting back at them. In the West, the development of bathing resorts and seaside activities during the 20th century has largely obliterated the representations of the sea that used to prevail until then, where feelings of repulsion towards coastal landscapes were the rule. For Greek and Roman scholars rediscovered during the Renaissance and inspiring these representations, the seashore is the repository of marine excreta, where the sea purges itself and vomits its monsters.⁶ Thus, for the Roman Stoic philosopher Seneca, “[i]t is in the nature of the sea to reject on the seashore every secretion and impurity [...] and these purges do not only happen when the storm lifts up the waves but also when a deep calm reigns”.⁷ Seventeen centuries later, the British poet William Diaper (ca. 1688–1717) uses similar terms to describe the pollution of foul shores, where agonising dolphins come to rot so as to spare the pristine air and waters of the high sea.⁸ Even if these representations are informed by a peculiar history—and in particular by the tenets of neo-Hippocratic medicine, which remained prevalent until then and perceived the sea as an agent of putrefaction—there is something of that horror in the tale of Mororo, variations of which continue to be sung in the fishing communities of Karachi, especially in Lyari.

In those days, as the story goes, a monstrous creature plagued the sea and struck fear in the hearts of fishermen, preventing them from plying their trade. Mororo's brothers bravely overcame their fear of the mighty beast, never to return. With the help of fellow villagers, the physically challenged but cunning Mororo set out to trick the dreaded creature and recover the bodies of his brothers. The iron cage, in which he let himself be submerged, bristled with sharp blades, so when the monster tried to bite him, it impaled itself on the spikes. The villagers then pulled Mororo and the beast to the seashore. As a sign of gratitude, they made Mai Kolachi the head of the village, which was renamed in her honour. After all, her brave son had delivered the fishermen from the marine abomination, reviving the local economy in the process. In Shah Abdul Latif's rendering of the story, Mororo's ordeal is essentially an allegory of the spiritual struggle against the *nafs*, or lower impulsive self. In the words of Latif (rendered through Elsa Kazi's vivid translation),

Even the wise confounded got
and heroes lost their wits.
Those who went out to face the sea
were caught by current's plot;
Of 'Ebb and tide', they all forgot
what they had learnt before.

A power weird is in Kalach,
Lost is who enters there;

No one brings news who does ensnares
the nets and keeps them down.⁹

The young fisherman's descent into the whirlpool and his epic fight with the beast evoke the battle between reason (*'aql*) and desire, on the path to God's eternal truth. This spiritualism—which resonates with Sufi traditions from South Asia and beyond—does not deny documentary value to the poem, which provides vivid details on the gradual penetration of the market economy into these fishing communities in the first half of the 18th century. The return of Mororo and the subsequent extrication of his brothers' bodies from the belly of the beast also provides a striking image of those macabre excretions from the sea, which local fishermen have always been familiar with—the rotting flesh of stranded whales, the swollen bodies of the drowned, or the more allusive fragments of a boat's hull, signalling the probable loss of loved ones at sea.

Today, fragments of sunken boats occasionally wash ashore on Sahil Beach. It is those remains that set Zuberi's "archaeological" mission in motion as he tried to extract meaning from these seemingly unremarkable planks. This investigation eventually led him to Ibrahim Hyderi, Rehri Goth, and Lat Basti—fishing villages along the eastern coast of Karachi—where he talked with fishermen, taking along pieces of wood, ropes, and other objects in hopes of tallying them with actual boats. Soon enough, he came to realise that there was a tragedy behind each of these objects related to sea navigation which only wash up on the shore after a boat capsizes.

These days, however, what the sea most frequently spews out is untreated waste and industrial refuse. In 2001, the amount of municipal waste produced daily in Karachi was estimated between 6,000 and 7,000 tonnes—an amount almost double that of Delhi and among the highest in South Asian cities.¹⁰ Over the next 15 years, this amount has doubled,¹¹ and does not include industrial waste, which remains largely undocumented. As always in Karachi, this problem of public interest falls under the responsibility of various government agencies and private actors—a reminder that this city is also a palimpsest of legalities, feeding a splintered geography of discontinuous and overlapping sovereignties. Besides the Sindh Solid Waste Management Board (SSWMB), Karachi's waste management involves the Karachi Port Trust (KPT) and Port Qasim authorities that are responsible for the collection of their own waste, as well as the corporate bodies watching over industrial estates, which have been granted a large autonomy over the management of their waste. Thus, when officials of the SSWMB rejoice that—currently—“only” five percent of Karachi's waste would be dumped into the sea,¹² this includes neither the frequent discharge of oil from the ports nor the dumping of industrial refuse and solid waste from industrial areas.

Concrete No-futures

The construction frenzy affecting Karachi at large is only adding to these woes. In Sohail Zuberi's photographs, the towers of the Emaar complex looming in the background of Sahil Beach act as a powerful signifier of yet another disaster in the making, while emphasising the vulnerability of the life forms struggling for survival on that tiny stretch of sand and beyond.

With their promise of an imminent privatisation of the beach for the benefit of a more exclusive crowd, these upscale construction projects are threatening the source of income of fisherfolk communities as well as the largely subaltern gatherings occurring on the beach. Zuberi's work is not oblivious of its larger urban context, however, and he insists that Sahil Beach be seen as a microcosm of much larger transformations.¹³ Beyond the Seaview coastline, the entire Creek area has been sacrificed to upscale-yet-unplanned "development". Mangroves are fast disappearing while the flamingos that used to rest here during the winter months have already become a distant memory. The mushrooming of high-rise, ocean-front housing projects in DHA brings an additional burden on an already dilapidated environment. It increases the prospects of water pollution in the absence of any serious plan to treat sewage from newly constructed apartment blocks. It also threatens to weigh heavily on an already dramatically low water table.

These risks are well known to the powers-that-be. They have been extensively documented by environmentalists, town planners, and various members of the legal fraternity. This disaster-in-the-making is happening with full knowledge of the risks involved for the city at large. The preference for the present of all the "stakeholders" involved—and more prosaically their concern for fast and huge returns—has led them to consciously and deliberately ignore these warnings. Economic accumulation has its reasons, of which reason knows nothing.

In March 2017, the Supreme Court passed an interim order stopping the construction of buildings beyond ground-plus-two, after being convinced by environmental activists and town planners that high-rises were a heavy burden on the city's already dysfunctional water and sewerage system. This decision led to a mobilisation by the developers' lobby, represented by the Association of Builders and Developers of Pakistan (ABAD), which argued that the Court's decision was severely injurious to the construction industry. The counsel of the builders suggested, in particular, that newly commissioned high-rises would take at least two to three years to be completed and that by that time, the city's water and sewerage system would have improved significantly and would be ready to bear that additional burden.¹⁴ These arguments seem to have convinced the SC Bench—which was presided by Chief Justice Mian Saqib Nisar—whose members passed a new judgment in January 2018 granting permission to builders to raise construction up to six commercial/residential floors in addition to the floors raised for parking. This ruling failed to content builders, however, and in the following months they



Sohail Zuberi, 28 January 2018 (from the series *Archaeologies of Tomorrow*). (Photo by Sohail Zuberi)

(Pages 26–27) *Seascape*, Koel Gallery, Karachi, Pakistan

Credit: Sohail Zuberi, 2018, found painted wood (2013–2018), glue, and plywood with wooden frame, 91cm H x 183cm L x 10cm W. (Photo by Omer Wasim)

continued to lobby political and judicial authorities to obtain a complete lifting of the ban on high-rise constructions. This mobilisation paid off and in December 2018, the Supreme Court finally lifted its restrictions on new constructions across the city. Five hundred projects, which represented an investment worth Rs 1,000 billion, could resume in the metropolis. While passing this judgment, the Chief Justice of Pakistan seem to have primarily kept the interests of the builders and industrialists in mind as he emphasised that, "Along with the industry, Bahria Town will also benefit".¹⁵ The recommendations of the Water Commission mandated by the Supreme Court in 2016 were conveniently set aside on this occasion. Under the chairmanship of Justice Kalhoro, this commission had unambiguously concluded that:

Karachi is already witnessing shortage of potable water and suffering from deteriorating condition of sanitation. It is mockery therefore to allow more such buildings to come up without water to feed and a system to discharge sewage. If this situation is not timely checked, the problem may become unmanageable entirely. It is therefore proposed that a complete ban on the construction of high rise and multi-story buildings for the time being till the prevalent crisis-like situation is averted may be put in place.¹⁶

This construction frenzy is feeding a string of disasters across the city. While Sohail Zuberi warns us of the huge social and environmental costs of construction projects in the Creek area and around Seaview, this great concrete rush is leaving a much larger social and ecological footprint. This chain of disruptions is linking the city's more upscale localities with the unprivileged peripheries, which have provided the raw material for the emerging "world-class city" at a huge social and environmental cost. Much of this devastation can be traced to the emergence of a new alliance of capital and coercion, which operates as the brutal condition of possibility for upscale housing projects in the city's upcoming islets of wealth and privilege.

Besides land and water, sand and gravel are the crux of the ongoing battles for Karachi. For years, the so-called "*reti-bajri* mafia" (sand and gravel mafia) has been feeding the city's construction frenzy while sustaining a new nexus of capital and coercion, reshaping Karachi in its image—ruthless, utterly contemptuous of the ecological environment, and entirely oblivious to the rights of its most vulnerable populations. The city's new skyline, which casts such an ominous shadow over Sahil Beach and other fragile ecosystems in the larger Karachi Division, finds its roots in the devastated bed of the Malir River. While the *dhakkas* (excavation sites) of Malir have been primarily catering to the needs of emerging mega-gated communities in the area (such as Bahria Town Karachi and DHA City), they have also served myriad construction projects, including those currently reshaping the city's coastline.

During the first six decades of Independence, sixty billion cubic feet of sand and gravel were drained from the river, according to architect and town planner Arif Hasan.¹⁷ The pursuit of this illicit trade has led to the virtual destruction of Karachi's largest oasis. An area once known for its orchards and farmland—Malir, in Sindhi, translates as "green and fertile"—has been turned

into a barren wasteland. Unregulated excavation of sand and gravel has led to soil erosion and desertification, with afferent risks of flash floods during rains. As of 2007, 500,000 farmers had already been made jobless by this ecological disaster. Meanwhile, the lowering of the water table has been making the already grim situation in many parts of the district even more critical. Finally, sand-lifting activities threaten the supply of water to the entire city of Karachi by damaging water conduits—a risk which led the Water Commission of Justice Kalhoro to request the District Management Malir, Irrigation Department, and Karachi Water and Sewerage Board (KWSB) officials to take immediate measures to put a complete end to this illegal activity.¹⁸

This great concrete rush proceeds through the assemblage of bureaucratic and unlawful processes, state and non-state forces, capital and coercion—a highly heterogeneous mix that is in the process of crystalizing into a new economy of violence. Although the extraction of sand and gravel from the district was banned by the provincial government in 2010, it continued unabated as many actors of this lucrative business were influential political leaders. As often in Karachi, this illicit trade also benefited from the protection of the police. Until recently, each police station falling in SSP Malir's jurisdiction made Rs 400,000 to Rs 500,000 per night, with the SSP himself taking an even larger cut.¹⁹ From Malir to DHA, men in uniform have also helped the new land barons consolidate their fiefdoms.

Now that political parties have been deprived of their muscle power, it is the professionals of coercion who secure land deals and housing projects, when they don't supervise these projects themselves. No surprise, then, that members of the city's security establishment take pride in the spectacular increase of real estate prices in the city since the launching of the so-called "Karachi Operation".²⁰ The "pacification" of the city has unleashed a new movement of accumulation by dispossession, where violent entrepreneurs backed by the security state have been using their coercive resources to make way for major real-estate projects, for instance by intimidating landowners unwilling to give away their ancestral lands to real estate developers. *Jiski lathi, uski bhains* (the buffalo belongs to the baton-wielder). In the *goths* of Malir, where thousands of acres were allotted to Bahria Town and DHA at concessional rates over the past few years, villagers have literally been deprived of their livestock by armed men. As the provincial Board of Revenue (BoR) cancelled the leases of several villages in the surroundings of DCK (DHA City Karachi) and allotted the land to developers, DHA officials started taking over part of the land while walling-in these villages, thus depriving them from access to pastures. In 2017, a resident of one these villages lamented to *Dawn* that, "When there was a wedding or a death in our family, these people would provide a dozen goats to feed the guests. Now they don't even own a chicken".²¹

As emphasised by the central role of BoR in the expropriation of Malir villagers to the benefit of DHA and Bahria Town, this process of accumulation by dispossession—which is so central

to the current reshaping of Karachi—does not only involve collusive transactions between the wielders of force and the holders of capital. It also proceeds through multiple interventions by provincial and municipal authorities, whose illegalities are so systematic that they amount to a peculiar form of government in and of itself—an irregular governmentality, which does not negate the existence of legal norms altogether but either circumvents them or turns them to the advantage of the dominants. This is exemplified by the cancellation of 30-year agricultural leases in Malir: under Section 24 of the Colonisation of Government Lands Act 1912, tenants are provided with protection against undue expropriation—a right to property which was clearly violated by officials of BoR and their clients in the course of the great land grab that occurred in Malir over the past few years. Besides, the Land Acquisition Act 1984 specifies that government authorities may only acquire land (after due compensation) for a “public purpose”. This was clearly not the case in Malir, where the acquired land was transferred to private developers.²²

This propensity of most public agencies involved in the “development” of the city to navigate between legalism and illegalities—or between official and unofficial modes of action—serves as a reminder that “informality” is not the sole prerogative of subaltern lawbreakers. Political, economic, and security elites are equally prone to resort to unofficial means while engaging with the urban environment. Their structural advantage, however, lies in the fact that their illegalities are rarely sanctioned and even more rarely stigmatised as a (thug) way of life.

Every new legal commission tasked with examining the predicament of the city's denizens has revealed the extent of these illegalities. In front of the judicial commission appointed by the Supreme Court in 2016 to look into the supply of contaminated water to consumers in Sindh, for instance, officials of the KWSB accused the Sindh Building Control Authority (SBCA) of continuously approving thousands of multi-storied and high-rise buildings without obtaining mandatory NOCs from KWSB for ensured water supply—a charge that was probably less informed by a firm commitment to legalism than by pecuniary concerns, since the SBCA has also been reluctant to share the fees levied from builders for changes in land use brought to the city's Master Plan.²³ Officials of the KWSB, for their part, have been accused by builders of unofficially charging millions of rupees on under-construction buildings as well as on every new connection for high-rise buildings.²⁴

Necrocapitalism and the Risk (mis)Management State

The new arrangements of capital and coercion enabling this great concrete rush are not merely feeding corruptive practices at every level of the state machinery. Sohail Zuberi's forensic “archaeology” invites us to confront an even grimmer reality: the consolidation in Pakistan's major economic hub of a new brand of capitalism bringing both wealth and death to the

city—two forms of a gift that it distributes very unevenly across the social spectrum. With its upscale construction projects thriving on accumulation by dispossession, systematic violations of labour laws, and irreversible damage to the environment, this construction frenzy partakes in the formation of an unbridled regime of accumulation, sharing some attributes with the forms of “necrocapitalism” analysed by S. B. Banerjee. Drawing on Achille Mbembe's discussion of contemporary forms of “necropolitics”,²⁵ Banerjee defines necrocapitalism as “practices of organisational accumulation that involve violence, dispossession, and death”.²⁶ It refers to those political economies where the “sword of commerce” is creating death worlds—or “necrosapes”, in Mbembe's terminology—through the subjugation of life to the destructive impulses of capital. For Banerjee, this subjugation of accumulation processes to the power of death—the power to let die or expose to potentially lethal physical harm—proceeds through collusive transactions between states and corporations. While Banerjee locates the origins of this configuration in colonial extractive economies, he also sees it thriving in contemporary post-colonial contexts characterised by a “necrocapitalist privatisation of sovereignty”.

The social and ecological devastation documented by Zuberi on Sahil Beach may seem iconic of such practices of accumulation, which “deny people access to resources that are essential to their health and lifestyle, destroy livelihoods, and dispossess communities”. Moreover, in Karachi as in other economic death worlds, “race and class [...] determine who lives and who dies”.²⁷ An endangered sanctuary for various undesirable populations, Sahil Beach is already a place of death and decay. Sohail Zuberi's work poignantly demonstrates how human and industrial pollution has turned it into a graveyard for marine life, with dead turtles, dolphins, stingrays, and jellyfish regularly washing ashore. Banerjee's argument can be slightly misleading in the case of Karachi, though. Besides Mbembe's creative take on Foucault's discussion of modern power, it is heavily indebted to Agamben's paradigm of the state of exception as the new rule of contemporary politics and it suggests that these practices of economic accumulation “occur in spaces that seem to be immune from legal, juridical, and political intervention, resulting in a suspension of sovereignty”.²⁸ Let us recall that Agamben's conception of the state of exception draws on Carl Schmitt's definition of the sovereign as “he who decides on the state of exception”. Expanding Schmitt's theory of sovereignty through a critical appraisal of Foucault's notion of biopower, Agamben understands contemporary states of exception as “the original structure in which law encompasses living beings by means of its own suspension”—a “pure de facto rule” epitomised by the US Naval Station at Guantanamo Bay, and its detainees “entirely removed from the law and from judicial oversight”. As a juridical order resting on the suspension of the law, the state of exception constitutes its threshold or “limit concept”.²⁹ Agamben's paradigm is an essential point of reference for Banerjee and other proponents of “neoliberalism as exception”, who observe the formation of market-oriented spaces—such as export-processing zones—where state forces and transnational capital jointly experiment with new technologies of exclusion and optimisation.³⁰

At first sight, Agamben's argument does seem to resonate in a country like Pakistan, where the "doctrine of necessity" drawn from Hans Kelsen has served to legalise successive military regimes and where the politics of anti-terrorism have recently created enclaves of exception (such as military courts) within the juridical order. While space constraints do not allow me to enter further into this debate, let me only point out that this line of argument stands at odds with other trends in Pakistani legal and economic reforms of the past decades. Firstly, the attempts of both civilian and military elites to institutionalise a state of exception through political and legal reforms have to a large extent been thwarted by the judiciary, as exemplified by the fierce controversies of the 1990s around anti-terrorism and military courts.³¹ As far as Pakistan's neoliberal reforms are concerned, now, it is worth remembering that Special Economic Zones (SEZs) retain a marginal place in Pakistan's manufacturing economy to date—which comes in stark contrast with India's own process of economic liberalisation, although the validity of the "neoliberalism as exception" thesis has also been questioned in the context of Indian SEZs.³² While this might change in the context of CPEC and projected SEZs, for now Pakistan's economy and its society fit uneasily with theories of exceptionality (and, in fact, exhibit opposite trends in the case of FATA's recent political and juridical integration). In Karachi, both state and non-state forces remain accountable to legal conventions and judicial interventions, even if these are not consistent and constraining enough to qualify as a legal-rational set-up in the Weberian sense. And while large sections of Pakistani working classes have been deprived of labour rights through the generalisation of the so-called "third-party system" over the past decades, this process of disenfranchisement was not so much the outcome of legal reforms and sovereign decisions as it was the result of a largely unofficial process of casualisation, taking exception to the existing labour regime without suspending it altogether.³³ Last but not the least, the villagers of the city's peripheries, who have been robbed of their land at gunpoint, were not denizens formally stripped of juridical-political protections and, as such, condemned to "bare life".³⁴ Their actual capacity to exercise the rights conferred upon them by citizenship remains limited. Nonetheless, the sheer possibility of making such claims might prove critical for the future of those populations under threat of eviction from the world-class dream city.

This is not merely a matter of legal or philosophical niceties. On some occasions, Sindh's higher judiciary did provide support to disgruntled villagers who had seen their land leases cancelled by the provincial BoR. This has been the case, for instance, in Malir, where some of these villagers were able to retrieve their land after they filed a constitutional petition against DHA in the Sindh High Court, which ruled in their favour. Meanwhile, a series of industrial accidents and growing public awareness towards ecological or health hazards have inspired the formation of a risk management state aiming to document, measure and, whenever possible, prevent existential threats in the name of Karachi's citizenry. In conformity with the global risk culture, these public interventions at the initiative of civic, environmental or legal activists have been promoting the idea that measuring risks was already a way to contain threats.³⁵ These

interventions have also been supported by legal conventions focusing on the conservation of the environment and the prevention of ecological and health hazards, starting with the Sindh Environmental Protection Act, 2014.

This emerging risk culture is not specific to civic organisations and sections of the legal fraternity but has also taken root in the corporate world, particularly among entrepreneurs manufacturing sensitive commodities (medicine, food products, etc.) for foreign markets. The preference for the present informing the most unbridled practices of local entrepreneurs, as well as their apparent negligence for safety and environmental norms, are not all there is to see to Karachi's new regime of economic accumulation. The problem, here, lies less with the archaic nature of this economy (its inclination towards primitive forms of accumulation, in the Marxist sense) than with the incapacity of whistleblowers to inspire actual regulatory mechanisms. While judicial activists—including some judges themselves—have been documenting extensively the existential threats to Karachi's future, while identifying a series of immediate remedies, they lack an efficient implementation apparatus that would take to task economic, political, and military elites found in violation of existing laws. Moreover, there have been inconsistencies in legal interventions in the economic field. Besides, judicial commissions have a tendency of "dividing the anger all over the place", as a senior legal practitioner involved in the Baldia Factory Fire case once told me.³⁶ At first sight, these commissions of enquiry may seem to be taking a bold stand against the powers-that-be. By incriminating everyone—if not the "entire system of Karachi", as Justice Alavi did in the case of the Baldia Factory Fire³⁷—they make it difficult to locate one main culprit and prosecute him under Pakistani laws. The risk *m*ismanagement state that we see emerging in the city thus presents the following paradox: over the years, it has contributed to the promotion of a new risk culture thriving on well-identified, calculable threats; however, it has compromised its potential for reforms through a strategy of all-sided incrimination that holds everyone guilty and, thus, fails to hold anyone accountable in the long run.

Conclusion

Sohail Zuberi's *Archaeologies of Tomorrow* is a chronicle of loss. It points at the scale of dispossession and immiseration in a new era of land grabs and enclosures.³⁸ It also captures the last hurrah of a subaltern cosmopolitanism where members of the city's menial classes could intermingle and build solidarities across denominational divides, or at least momentarily pretend that divisions engineered by politicians were of little concern to the people. Finally, by documenting the levelling of this pluralistic world under tons of concrete, it offers a glimpse of the emergent city of Karachi—a city where political strife has ceded the way to more structural forms of violence brought by a new alliance of capital and coercion. Rather than a lawless society, what is emerging on these still-smouldering ruins is an irregular form of governmentality proceeding through a "dense interweaving of arms and law".³⁹ And rather than

focusing its interventions towards the maximisation of life, this new architecture of domination and the ideology of "development" that fosters it are manufacturing social and ecological death-worlds on a grand scale—as grand as the construction projects rising across the city's devastated coastline and shrinking green belt.

This trend has not gone unopposed and some sections of the higher judiciary have, in particular, been keen to provide redress to disgruntled villagers expropriated by developers and their political or military backers. More originally, some sections of the legal fraternity have been promoting a risk culture that aimed to curb this unbridled process of economic "development" while putting back the preservation and maximisation of life at the heart of the state's mandate. In his constitutional petition against the Government of Sindh, where he denounced the denial of the fundamental right of the people of Sindh to have access to drinkable water, environmental activist and practicing lawyer Shahab Usto thus prayed that the people of the province were provided with "clean drinking water, public sanitation, and a hygienic environment", so that they may lead "a healthy, productive, and dignified life".⁴⁰ The so-called "Water Commission" of Justice Kalhoro, for its part, put it even more succinctly: "water is life and access to unpolluted water is the fundamental right of every citizen".⁴¹ This attempt to preserve the right to life guaranteed by the Constitution of Pakistan (Article 9)—and more generally the biopolitical mandate of the state vs. the necropolitical proclivities of the market—has, however, been largely frustrated. More than by the frontal opposition of market forces, it has been emptied out of its reformist potential by the judiciary itself, which has so far avoided tackling the alliance of capital and coercion that sustains the production and expansion of these death-worlds.

Notes

1. A preliminary version of this essay was written to accompany Sohail Zuberi's show *Archaeologies of Tomorrow*, curated by Zarmeene Shah at Koel Gallery (Karachi) in May 2018. For further details and some visuals, see Rumana Husain, "Lost and Found," *The News on Sunday* (Lahore), 20 May 2018; Zehra Hamdani, "Time's push," *The Friday Times* (Lahore), 1 June 2018.
2. Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai, "Ghatu," in *Risalo of Shah Abdul Latif: Selections*, translated by Elsa Kazi (Hyderabad: Sindh Adabi Board), 1965.
3. *In the Future They Ate From the Finest Porcelain*, Directed by Larissa Sansour and Søren Lind, 2015 <<https://vimeo.com/groups/331203/videos/203117078>>.
4. Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," *Public Culture* 15 (1) (1 January 2003): pp. 11–40, <<https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-15-1-11>>.
5. Basil Andrews, "A Karachi Fisherman's Tale—In Search of Lobsters and Livelihood," *Dawn* (Karachi), 16 November 2015 <<https://www.dawn.com/news/1217456>>.
6. Alain Corbin, *Le territoire du vide. L'Occident et le désir de rivage* (Paris: Flammarion, 2018 (1988)), p. 24.
7. Pierre de Latil and Jean Rivoire, *A la recherche du monde marin* (Paris: Plon, 1954), p. 16.
8. Alain Corbin, *Le territoire du vide*, *op. cit.* p. 25.
9. Bhittai, "Ghatu," in *Risalo of Shah Abdul Latif: Selections*, translated by Elsa Kazi, *op. cit.*
10. Maaheen Ahmed, "Karachi," in *Encyclopedia of Consumption and Waste: The Social Science of Garbage*, Carl A. Zimring and William L. Rathje (eds.) (Thousand Oaks (Cal.): Sage Publications Inc, 2012), p. 458.
11. Zofeen T. Ebrahim, "Lifting 10 years of garbage in Karachi," *Dawn*, 5 April 2018.
12. *Ibid.*
13. Conversations with Sohail Zuberi, Karachi, July 2019.
14. Supreme Court Order, 14 January 2018, in response to CP n°38 of 2016, pp. 5–6.
15. Quoted in "Karachi high-rises: SC allows construction beyond six floors," *The News*, 12 December 2018.
16. Report of Commission of Inquiry, Justice Muhammad Iqbal Kalhoro, 25 February 2017, p. 57.
17. Quoted in "Malir River ruthlessly plundered," *The News*, 11 April 2007.
18. Report of Commission of Inquiry, Justice Muhammad Iqbal Kalhoro, *op. cit.*, p. 127.
19. Fahim Zaman and Naziha Syed Ali, "Gold sand racket," *Dawn*, 21 March 2018.
20. Interview with a top military officer, then heading one of the city's major law enforcement agencies, Karachi, July 2016.
21. Quoted in Fahim Zaman and Naziha Syed Ali, "The DHA City juggernaut rolls on in the name of development," *Dawn*, 19 December 2017.
22. *Ibid.*
23. Report of Commission of Inquiry, Justice Muhammad Iqbal Kalhoro, *op. cit.*, p. 21.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 57.
25. Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," art. quoted.
26. Subhabrata Bobby Banerjee, "Necrocapitalism," *Organization Studies*, 29 (12), 2008: p. 1,543.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 1,551.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 1,544.
29. Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), pp. 3–4.
30. Aihwa Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty* (Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2006); Ong is in fact much less indebted to Agamben's legalistic perspective than Banerjee. Her conception of neoliberalism as a series of biopolitical transformations "[creating] conditions for diverse claims of human value that do not fit into a conventional notion of citizenship" (p. 7) is more in tune with the line of argument defended here.
31. Charles H. Kennedy, "The Creation and Development of Pakistan's Anti-terrorist Regime, 1997–2002," in Satu Limaye et al (eds.), *Religious Radicalism and Security in South Asia* (Honolulu: Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, 2002), p. 388 sq.

32. Jamie Cross, "Neoliberalism as Unexceptional: Economic Zones and the Everyday Precariousness of Working Life in South India," *Critique of Anthropology*, 30 (4), 2010.
33. Obviously, the non-implementation of existing labour laws (especially viz. the illegal third-party system and the systematic use of "contract workers" for permanent tasks) is in itself a form of state intervention. This is clearly not the kind of governmentality that Agamben has in mind, however.
34. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer. Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).
35. Michael Power, *Organized Uncertainty: Designing a World of Risk Management* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).
36. Interview, Karachi, July 2017.
37. Tribunal's Report for Ascertaining the Circumstances and Cause Leading to the Fire and Subsequent Deaths and Injuries in the Incident That Took Place on 11.09.2012 in the Factory of M/S Ali Enterprises Located at Plot No. F-67 SITE Karachi, pp. 30–31.
38. For a critical discussion of David Harvey's concept of "accumulation by dispossession" in the light of current movements of land acquisition in South Asia, see Katy Gardner and Eva Gerharz, "Introduction: Land, 'Development' and 'Security' in India and Bangladesh," *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal* 13, 2016 <<https://journals.openedition.org/samaj/4141>>.
39. Michael Taussig, *Law in a Lawless Land: Diary of a Limpieza* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2003), p. 92.
40. Supreme Court Order, 16 March 2017 in response to CP n°38 of 2016, p. 2.
41. Report of Commission of Inquiry, Justice Muhammad Iqbal Kalhoro, *op. cit.*, p. 39. My emphasis.

Becoming A Problem¹

Rahma Muhammad Mian and Zahra Malkani

Dear Rahma,

In the past year or so, we, like so many other women at universities across Pakistan, have been engaged in multiple battles at our workplaces—against pervasive and unchecked institutionalised misogyny on one hand, and against the acceleration of surveillance and censorship on the other. We have spent so much time strategising, processing, reflecting, supporting each other as well as others—and though there is much processing and thinking and healing left to do still, I think we have learnt a lot: about the nature of power and resistance, about all the ways in which the neo-colonial university is an incredibly fraught and violent space, the ways in which it has been both a space of immense hope and deep connections, and yet a site of some very painful political becomings and unravellings. Sara Ahmed says that perhaps when we put these pieces back together, we are also putting back together ourselves. Or perhaps, a new self? As difficult as these lessons have been at times, I also believe that every lesson is a gift, and I am grateful to have had you and to have you still to do this learning work with. <3 <3 <3

Thinking through the theme of this volume, thinking about "concrete as material, method and metaphor", I immediately think of Sara Ahmed's writings on "institutional walls", "those hardenings of histories into barriers in the present, barriers that we experience as physical, barriers that are physical."² The wall is history made concrete. This invocation of a wall feels especially poignant to me not just as a metaphor for all the barriers we encounter in our attempts to transform the institution, but also as a reminder of the immensely securitised architecture of the university. We work in a space surrounded by literal walls that are over thirty feet high, covered in barbed wire and manned by dozens of armed guards. No one can see in from the outside and no one can see outside into the city from within. That the university is deeply entangled, invested, and complicit in the ongoing securitisation and militarisation of this city is so visibly inscribed into its form.³

We could spend forever thinking through and talking about what all these walls (visible and invisible) that we encounter at the neo-colonial university, look and feel like, how they work. One image I keep thinking of is from an artwork by Spanish artist Santiago Sierra. Sierra's work engages with the nature of labour in contemporary capitalist society, often to make visible invisible forms or conditions of labour. *THE WALL OF A GALLERY PULLED OUT, INCLINED 60 DEGREES FROM THE GROUND AND SUSTAINED BY 5 PEOPLE* was a work Sierra produced in

2000 at a gallery in Mexico City where five workers were paid to stand every day, for four days, holding up a gallery wall that had been pulled out and inclined at 60 degrees, to keep it from falling over. The work was an irreverent undoing of the pristine and perfect white-cube pretensions of the art gallery and an act of making visible the invisible and abject labour the gallery and the art world is built upon. It brought a sense of precarity and instability into the gallery space, highlighting the illusory nature of the clear edges and concrete walls of the white cube, of art institutions.

Which brings me to the precarious and unstable nature of the neo-colonial university, the aspirational world-class university in Pakistan. Its cold, hard, heavy walls held up by the constant labour of those who are treated worst by it—most often, women. How often it feels like that is all we are doing as university workers—putting everything we have into holding up these high, heavy walls that want to crush us, that are crushing us. Hard walls held up by soft bodies. And what if we let go, let it crumble and fall, let it shatter? Perhaps we could build something new, something beautiful in its place, from its remains. A feminist monument to the death of the university! What would that look like?

I'll stop at that thought for now!

<3

Dear Zahra,

Thank you. We have indeed built a beautiful friendship in difficult times. I am incredibly grateful for you, and for this opportunity to process in this way with you, to think through the walls we have both come up against.

In response to your question, the sad bit is that these walls will not crash and shatter because at its core the Pakistani neo-colonial university thrives on this brokenness. It is in the deception of appearing perfect, so modern, with its snazzy buildings held up by all kinds of exploited labour, that its power lies. It exists only to ensure that it appears functional; this fiction fuelled by insincerity and fear, driven by a base survival instinct. It will survive us leaving, just as it survived the departure of many before us who left. Just like all the other toxic workplaces I have already left. It will not collapse because it will and already has found other docile (mostly unmale) bodies to run it, hold the fiction aloft, and eventually those bodies will exhaust, and new bodies will be found. The cycle of (ab)use, exhaust, dispose, replace will repeat. In an email offering encouragement to students, a friend quoted Martin Luther King, Jr.—“the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice”—and it made me wonder about the use of hope. Wouldn't acceptance be a better ally here as we piece back ourselves? There is great power in acceptance. Accepting that what we are running up against is entrenched exploitation. The modern private university emerges from an incredibly patriarchal and racist past; and its world-class Pakistani extension can be no different. If anything, it makes for a unique twist: capital working in cahoots with forces that are powered by mediocrity, nepotism, and corruption. What is happening here is very much part of the global restructuring of higher education, which as pointed out by Mbembe is closely related to “transnationalization of elites and the reproduction of their hegemonic power”⁴.

It is almost as if there is a parallel structure to the securitised, barbed wire walls you speak of so beautifully, a skeletal frame of opaque, ghost walls. These invisible walls are what keep the modern institution standing, enabling it to stumble from crisis to crisis. Invisible walls we run into when we raise questions about the hyper-securitisation of the campus, about incidents of censorship and surveillance, are connected with the walls we come up against when negotiating the conditions of work here; how staff, students and faculty are treated; contracts, confidentiality clauses, student loan agreements and so on. We witnessed the way in which these invisible walls can suddenly become visible, concrete, when the institution is faced with resistance, a crisis.⁵ As complaints around gender and institutionalised misogyny start to seep through cracks, threatening to unravel the facade, the walls become harder, more apparent—making visible the invisible structure of exploitation at the heart of the neo-colonial world-class university project.

This visibility comes at great cost, not just for faculty who have battled institutional sexism but also for so many students who make themselves incredibly vulnerable, who put their pain out there for it to be met with "file a complaint" in broken systems, in lieu of sexual harassment processes and policies. The tears that were shed in each other's offices, and those of our other colleagues, the tears shed by students in our offices, in corridors—we all carry the pain of that, with the walls as our witness. Where the institution failed to support, we all found support in each other—beautiful connections formed in pain, because of the pain, and in spite of the pain. And we welcome that pain; opening up to our pain opens us up to so much insight, to equanimity and freedom.

Indeed, we have learnt a lot about power and resistance—like power, opportunities for resisting are also everywhere and there are many ways to resist. By walking in together to meeting rooms that are hostile, by speaking up when everyone else is silent and complicit in institutional *pardaposhi* and respectability politics,⁶ by writing killjoy⁷ emails pointing out inconsistencies and contradictions, demanding change and transparency even if its met with "who is she to ask for transparency?", refusing to serve on committees when the system is set up against victims, ultimately even by resigning. By refusing to be part of the structure of the institution, we refuse to be a part of that reproduction of power. The only way to succeed in the neo-colonial institution is to learn and know how to reproduce power, and we do not want that knowledge. To borrow from Audre Lorde: "your personal visions and connections, the shared experience is what has and will continue to lay the groundwork for our political action, for collective, transformative politics."⁸ Like true Millennials, "we found love in a hopeless place" and will continue to build this solidarity and connection outside the concreteness of institutions, where we can draw and redraw boundaries in collaboration and, importantly, with love and openness.

Love and peace,

Rahma

Dear Rahma,

Your last point, on refusal, reminded me of a quote from Jack Halberstam's introduction to Moten and Harney's *The Undercommons* that I really love. Halberstam writes: "The path to the wild beyond is paved with refusal."⁹ "The wild beyond", or what Moten and Harney call "the undercommons", is a site of connection and collusion for "the maroon community of the university". We connect and we collude, in struggle and in study. Against the alienation of work in the university, within and through the cracks in its walls even as they cave in, we find the thrill and pleasure of radical connection. I feel it was very much in this wild beyond that you and I came together! <3 Moten writes, "I believe in the world and want to be in it. I want to be in it all the way to the end of it because I believe in another world and I want to be in that."¹⁰ It was horrible, horrible to have to fight these battles, to struggle, to have to make incredibly difficult decisions. Of course, we broke. But Moten's words also make me think of the beauty in this break, the truthfulness of it, the beauty of an acceptance of and a commitment to this antagonism, the beauty and the thrill of the connections and care and collectivity that emerge from struggle, the thrill of inhabiting a space where their pervasive lies no longer hold: the wild beyond. :)

When we refuse to comply with the institution, we refuse to affirm—to uphold—the logic, the lies, the façade, the charade, the walls of the university. Halberstam writes "when we refuse, Moten and Harney suggest, we create dissonance and more importantly, we allow dissonance to continue."¹¹ Which reminds me of what Adrienne Rich says in her text *On Women and Honor*: "when a woman speaks the truth, she creates space for more truth around her."¹² I think also, as I write this, of Fanon, in *Black Skin White Masks*, writing, "these truths were a fire in me then. Now I can tell them without being burned."¹³ We know what it feels like to be burnt, to burn. To know, to tell the truth.

Which brings me to the multiplicity of lies and erasures upon which the façade (literal and metaphorical) of the neocolonial, world-class university is built. I find this new model of the world-class university in the third-world country very fascinating, even just in the visuality of it. Like Bahria Town, like DHA City, anywhere/everywhere identikit architectures, completely divorced from any local specificity, securitised, gated communities, global aspirations. As Paul Virilio argues in *City of Panic*, securitised enclaves and gated communities serve as a tactic to further immerse the city in a new militarised aesthetic and create forms and structures of living that divide, fragmenting any sense of an urban community fabric.¹⁴ Such transformations in the urban landscape serve to further entrench the city's populace in a state and sense of total war. This collusion in the militarisation of the city is of course extended through the discourse of the liberal arts university being committed to countering violent extremism through "liberal" education—thereby framing the university as a participant, weaponising the university in the

war on terror; placing the university at the service of the state, spreading panic, capitalising on war. The 30-foot-high wall encloses, covers, obscures us from seeing what lies within. But perhaps the walls are really all we need to know about the university; perhaps the most truthful account of the university lies in these outer architectures, these facades, and it is within these walls that we are all immersed in and enacting these lies, charades of liberalism and academic freedom. These walls, barriers, armed guards, barbed wire is the university at its most truthful about itself.

Lately we have seen again and again the ways in which the "liberal" private university in Pakistan frames itself as an endangered bastion of progressive thought under threat from conservative forces outside, and time and again deploys this narrative in order to censor and silence dissent within the institution—whether that is targeted at feminist students highlighting sexual harassment on campus or faculty organising lectures or conferences critical of the state. In the first case, it highlights the ways in which women are especially vulnerable with the increasing securitisation of the university, and how women are time and again called upon to make sacrifices, step back, and shut up for the sake of more noble/urgent/"progressive" causes (i.e. the university). The university is figured as a bulwark against the creeping ever-present threat of terror in the current everywhere war. The university is weaponised, at service of the Pakistani state in this war, and just like the state, it demands we make sacrifices and practice restraint during these unending "exceptional" times. In this imaginary, agitating campus, feminists are seen as being in cahoots with conservative forces, in the age-old spirit of identifying feminists fighting for safety as illiberal, prudes, killjoys etc. But we know the only one in cahoots with conservative forces is the private university colluding in the state's ubiquitous securitisation project.

Political becoming/becoming a problem: to fight pervasive misogyny, harassment, assault in the militarised, weaponised university, smack in the middle of a brutal, everywhere war. The stakes are so high. It feels almost unthinkable and yet women across campuses in Pakistan have been doing it: struggling, connecting, "staying with the trouble".¹⁵ As Donna Haraway puts it, a way of living (and dying) in these difficult times that embraces kinship and collectivity, and that is neither misguided by optimism nor paralysed by defeatism. "Our task," she writes, "is to make trouble, to stir up potent response to devastating events, as well as to settle troubled waters and rebuild quiet places."¹⁶

I can't help but think about the *naara* [slogan] '*girti hui deevan ko/ ek dhakka aur do*'; how powerful and yet how outdated it can sound in this moment where the walls we encounter are so layered, so fortified by multiplicities of boundaries and barriers, visible and invisible. It almost sounds like a relic from another time. I guess we need to come up with some new *naaras*?

Love <3

Dear Zahra,

*Yunhi hamesha ulajhti rahi hai zulm se khalq
Na in ki rasm nayi hai, na apni reet nayi
Yunhi hamesha khilaye hain hum ne aag main phool
Na un ki haar nayi hai na apni jeet nayi
—Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Nisar Main Teri Galiyon Ke...¹⁷*

I think that last line is beautiful; what do you think, can it be our new *naara*? I am always moved by how he manages to leave us with a deep, joy-giving hope in the most hopeless of contexts. He truly is the poet for the extreme despair of advanced capitalism, because maybe it is precisely in accepting, acknowledging, and allowing the pain that we emerge victorious. Or how about from the recent feminist, post-humanist anthem¹⁸ *Humsaye Maa Jaye*¹⁹ that the fantastic sisters Bushra Ansari, Asma Abbas, and Neelam Ahmad Bashir have given us:

*Aja dowain ataman nu chullay wich paiye,
Phatday phattakeyan te thumke chalaiye,
Ral gidda paaiye, ral gidda paaiye²⁰*

The poem emerges out of a short but intense almost-war that was fought as much on and for social media as it was fought IRL, in the air, and on land (and behind closed doors in USA, Saudi Arabia, Israel, Pakistan, and India). Released independently on her *YouTube* channel but in the context of intense state/military-led misinformation, the poem becomes an important signifier for post-humanist blurring of boundaries: not just transcending the obvious India–Pakistan break but also the important material–discourse, nature–human, human–nonhuman (the bomb) dualisms. Humans (unlike neighbours actually), birds, water, sun, air, atom bombs (science), discourse (*TV-alay kende ne te tu meri weeri aye*), materiality (the securitised wall/ border/ LOC with the shards of broken glass) all connected in a network, all of us becoming via intra-acting²¹ with one another. Rosi Braidotti says today when advanced capitalism is cognitive, life has become "the" capital and capitalism is all that lives.²² Then why do we expect resistance to it to be extraordinary, one big final victory when it is in the everyday, where we are all entangled, that we must and should resist. In the video, when Bushra Ansari finally articulates the very real fear—if the atom bomb were to go off, it will wipe the neighbours along with the birds and the crows—Asma Abbas responds with urgency—*taap* the wall and come to me—to which Ansari responds resignedly:

*Kinj tappa kandnu
Kinj tappa kandnu*

*Kand utay lagga sheesha sanu chub jaye ga,
Cheer dega dil, sada lahu wi wagaye ga*

*Kaash koi aa ke veri sheeshiyaan nu kadde
Dilaan diyan zakhma te phaaye koi rakh de²³*

And here Neelam and her sisters give us the respite we need: it is okay if we run into these walls (soft or hard, metaphorical or concrete, institutional or national). If we can't break them down or transcend them, if we can't scale them, get to the other side—it is okay. It is enough to love, to long, to show love, throw our *chunnis* over—an exchange that not only defeats the purpose of the wall, it transcends and confuses notions of ownership and honour (yours or mine or ours?), ideas of winning and losing, of success and, in true Cyborgian sense, take pleasure in this confusing.²⁴ Let's dance, let's rejoice...

*Hor kuj nai chal chunniyan wattaliye,
Mahiye tappay ga kay ral khushiyan manaliye²⁵*

"We live in a post-Aurat March 2019 Pakistan" read a story about the sexist *Facebook* group run by male students that prompted a protest at a private university.²⁶ I smiled at that thinking that Pakistan is very young—it has not even been a month since the Aurat March. But, clearly, we are finding ourselves in an alternate space-time because two days later, at least a hundred students showed up to protest. This visual is a powerful one: as an elite private university, this is a site of power, and of knowledge dripping in power—contesting here is contesting in the heart of the machinations of power. So today is a special day for me, for us, and for all young non-male students in private educational universities across the country. Even if "nothing big" comes of it, no normative indicators of success—policy change, due process being followed, punishment etc.—I take it as a win. That it happened is enough—it has set a precedent, it will always inspire, give us joy. As the Undercommoning Collective says,

The undercommons deserves to enjoy and reinvent all that it produces, which is to say everything. It is our collective labor and knowledge that university-as-such prepares, consumes, digests and uses to reproduce itself: we are mobilizing to reclaim that labor and knowledge, within, against and beyond the university-as-such, in the name of producing something monstrous.²⁷

What we and our friends across Pakistani campuses dealt with last year and continue to deal with today is trying to create this monstrous New. And we are not alone; this reclamation is part of a larger story, a story emerging from all corners of the world, of resistance, a rising tide because time's truly up. Of course it is, and it has been confusing and painful—we are in the eye of the storm. Yes, our pain in staging the resistance against institutional misogyny has come at a great cost. But what birth is pain-free? Creation and change are never easy, and we are

creating change. And of course we don't do this because it is easy; in fact, we do this precisely because it is painful, difficult work.

*Haan talkhi-e-ayyam abhi aur barhay gi
Haan ahl-e-sitam, mashq-e-sitam kartay raheinge
Manzoor ye talkhi, ye sitam hum ko gavaara
Dam hai to mudava-e-alam kartay raheinge²⁸
—Faiz Ahmed Faiz, *Loh-o-Qalam**

We will continue resisting in whatever ways we can. And when all else fails, we will dance and say to each other:

*Kehnde zamanay nu jo vi kuch kehna hay
Sada ek gawand sada saday liye gehna hay*

*Choti moti gal howay dil nu nai laidi
Tuayn meri maa jayi, meri hamsai n²⁹*

We are ready for this total war, this never-ending battle; hell—it is our home, and we are winning. Community is our asset in this; you, the feminist *sangha*, are the assets we need. And the acceptance that there is no one big battle that has to be fought. We fight millions every day; we win some we lose some but we keep going, together, as we walk away from the concrete walls of the neo-colonial university into the wild beyond.

Love and peace,

Rahma

—

Special thanks to Rabia Mehmood for helping with the Punjabi.

Notes

1. "When we give problems their names, we can become a problem for those who do not want to register that there is a problem (but who might, at another level, sense there is a problem). You can become a problem by naming a problem." See Sara Ahmed, "Introduction: Sexism - A Problem with a Name," *New Formations: A Journal of Culture, Theory & Politics* 86 (2015), p. 9.
2. Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), p. 136.
3. Something I have been exploring with my collaborator Shahana Rajani as part of our project Karachi LaJamia, and which we have written about here: "The Militarized University and The Everywhere War," *Karachi LaJamia*, 2018 <<http://karachilajamia.com/index.php/project/the-militarised-university/>>.
4. Achille Joseph Mbembe, "Decolonizing the University: New Directions," *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education* 15(1) (2016), p. 37.
5. I struggled with what to call and how to refer to the series of incidents we experienced, the struggles around institutionalised misogyny that led us into these conversations—and I ended up using "crisis" in the end despite Sara Ahmed's encouragement of the act of naming: "When we put a name to a problem, we are doing something. A name comes after an event. In *Sister Outsider*, Audre Lorde describes the words racism and sexism as 'grown-up words'. We encounter racism and sexism before we have the words that allow us to describe what we encounter. Sexism and racism: if they are problems we have given names, the names tend to lag behind the problems. To give a problem a name can change not only *how* we register an event but *whether* we register an event. To give the problem a name can be experienced as *magnifying the problem*; allowing something to acquire a social and physical density by gathering up what otherwise remain scattered experiences into a *tangible thing*. Making sexism and racism tangible is also a way of making them appear outside of oneself, as something that can be spoken of and addressed by and with others. It can be a relief to have something to point to, or a word to allow us to point to something that otherwise can make you feel alone or lost." See "Introduction: Sexism - A Problem with a Name" (2015), p. 9.
6. Writing an important piece about the critiques of Aurat March by feminists like Kishwar Naheed, Sadia Khatri warns against the "boundaries of respectability" and feminist gatekeeping. See Sadia Khatri, "Should Feminists Claim Aurat March's 'Vulgar' Posters? Yes, Absolutely," *DAWN.COM*, March 15, 2019 <<https://www.dawn.com/news/1469815>>.
7. Sara Ahmed, "Feminist Killjoys (And Other Willful Subjects) in Polyphonic Feminisms: Acting in Concert," *The Scholar and Feminist Online* 8.3 (Summer 2010) <http://sfonline.barnard.edu/polyphonic/ahmed_08.htm#end1>.
8. Audre Lorde, *The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House, Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press, 1984), p. 113.
9. Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Studies* (Wivenhoe: Autonomedia, 2013), p. 8.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
12. Adrienne Cecile Rich, *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose, 1966-1978* (London: Virago, 1980).
13. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (Pluto Press, 2008), p. 2.
14. Paul Virilio, *City of Panic* (Oxford: Berg, 2005).
15. Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham: Duke University Press), 2016.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 1.
17. In just this way has humanity tangled with tyranny always
Nor are their traditions new and nor are our beliefs new
In just this way always have we bloomed flowers from fire
Nor is their defeat new nor is our victory new.
Maniza Naqvi, "Expressing Fidelity Through Sorrow's Hope," *3quarksdaily.com*, February 21, 2011 <<https://www.3quarksdaily.com/3quarksdaily/2011/02/expressing-fidelity-through-sorrows-hope.html>>.
18. Bushra Ansari and Asma Abbas, "Humsaye Maa Jaye," *BushraAnsariOfficial YouTube*, accessed May 20, 2019 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IffLUlwY0AE>>.
19. Bushra Ansari, in an interview, says the title "Humsaye Maa Jaye" comes from the South Asian tradition of thinking of your neighbour as your sibling, as having the same mother—*HUM News*, "In Conversation With Bushra Ansari On Her New Song," accessed May 20, 2019 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ifmqLMJrhuh>>.
20. Come, let's throw these bombs into the stove
And when they explode, let's dance to the beat
Let's dance, let's dance.
21. Intra-acting instead of interacting. Feminist theorist and theoretical physicist Karen Barad in offering her agential realist framework uses the neologism to signify "the mutual constitution of entangled agencies": unlike interactions which assume that there are independently existing entities or agents that preexist their acting upon one another, intra-actions "queers the familiar sense of causality (where one or more causal agents precede and produce an effect), and more generally unsettles the metaphysics of individualism (the belief that there are individually constituted agents or entities, as well as times and places)". See Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), p. 33.
22. Rosi Braidotti, Keynote Lecture - Posthumanism and Society Conference, Program of Liberal Studies, New York University, Centre for the Humanities Utrecht University, *YouTube*, May 2015, accessed May 19, 2019 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3S3CulNbQ1M>>.
23. How do I climb this wall?
These shards of glass on the wall will cut me
Tear through my heart and make me bleed
I wish someone would come and take away these shards
Heal the wounds of the heart.
24. Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 150.
25. If nothing else, let's exchange our scarves
Sing our melodious songs and rejoice.
26. Ramsha Bhatti, "Guys At LUMS Are Being Called Out By Female Students For This Disgustingly Sexist Closed Group," *MangoBaaz*, April 6, 2019 <<https://www.mangobaaz.com/guys-at-lums-are-being-called-out-by-female-students-for-this-disgustingly-sexist-closed-group>>.
27. Undercommoning Collective, "Undercommoning within, against and beyond the University-as-Such," *ROAR Magazine*, June 5, 2016, accessed May 19, 2019 <<https://roarmag.org/essays/undercommoning-collective-university-education/>>.
28. Yes, the bitterness of time will keep on spawning,
just as the tyrants will persist in their cruelty.
Cheerfully I'll give in to bitterness, this tyranny too I'll endure
so long as there's breath, I'll seek ever new cures for torments.
Shiv K. Kumar, in "Poets About Poetry," *Ghazala's Weblog*, June 16, 2008 <<https://ghazala.wordpress.com/2008/06/16/poets-about-poetry/>>.
29. Let the world say what it wants
Our sweet neighbourhood is precious to us
Don't take this to heart
You are like my sister, my neighbour.



Studies in Form

Seher Shah and Randhir Singh

Studies in Form is a new collaborative body of work between artist Seher Shah and photographer Randhir Singh, exploring overlapping ideas in architecture, photography, drawing, and printmaking.

Over the past few years, we have worked within our independent practices as artist and photographer to create a space for collaboration. This space, which is based on our interests in art and architecture, has been built around our education as architects and explores methods of representing scale, materiality, and mass through relationships between drawing and the photograph. These relationships have manifested into different series over the years. *Mammoth: Aerial Landscape Proposals* is a print portfolio that uses aerial photography combined with black forms that partially block out the image of the landscape. The *Mammoth* prints are about this simultaneous gesture of erasure and construction, creating ambiguously scaled structures that respond to the repetitive patterns inherent in urban planning and architecture. In the pale grey drawing series titled *Brutalist Traces*, horizontal graphite lines are used to render portraits of specific buildings into ghostly after-images. These drawings, which are drawn from photographs, explore the contradictions between mass and lightness, permanence and the evanescent. In the *Machrie Moor* photographs, elemental stones that have been weathered over time are discovered in the landscape, their visceral presence a result of their stoic stance.

In these different works, we look to allow for several threads of inquiry to enter our collaborative space. Within this space we have tried to remain constant in our engagement with the relationship between the individual and the larger context. How do we represent an experiential nature of space around us that is in constant fragmentation?

Studies in Form, an ongoing series of cyanotype prints, builds on shared interests of architectural scale and materiality by mining our personal photographic archive of concrete architecture built across multiple cities in the 1960s–70s. From this archive, we focused on four unique buildings, extracting architectural fragments and drawing attention to the incomplete nature of the experience of landscape. Our interest in these buildings (which share aesthetic qualities including heavy massing, the sculptural use of concrete, and use of repetitive structural grids) also signalled the many aspirations and desires within each of their respective contexts. Grouped into chapters, the four buildings are:

Akbar Bhavan (Shivnath Prasad, New Delhi. 1969)
Barbican Estate (Chamberlin Powell and Bon, London. 1976)
Dentsu Head Office (Kenzo Tange, Tokyo. 1967)
Brownfield Estate (Ernő Goldfinger, London. 1970)

Alongside these four, two additional chapters offer varying perspectives. A series of cyanotype drawings, titled *Flatlands Blueprints*, explores notions of incompleteness and uncertainty as a counterpoint to determined architectural expression. The sculptural forms and massing found in the photographs is further explored in a series of wood cut-based prints, titled *Hewn Blueprints*. Working with architectural representational methods, such as the plan and elevation, these cyanotype prints function between the precise formalism of a blueprint and the intuitive nature of drawing.

Cyanotypes were one of the first photographic processes developed in the 19th century, emerging only a few years after the development of the daguerreotype. They were a precursor to the blueprint, which was an important reproduction method for architectural and engineering drawings well into the 20th century. For *Studies in Form*, we were drawn to cyanotypes as a means to engage with the fields of photography, architecture, drawing, and printmaking.

Studies in Form was exhibited at the Jameel Arts Centre, Dubai, in March–June 2019. Images courtesy the artists. Commissioned by the Samdani Art Foundation for the Dhaka Art Summit (2018).

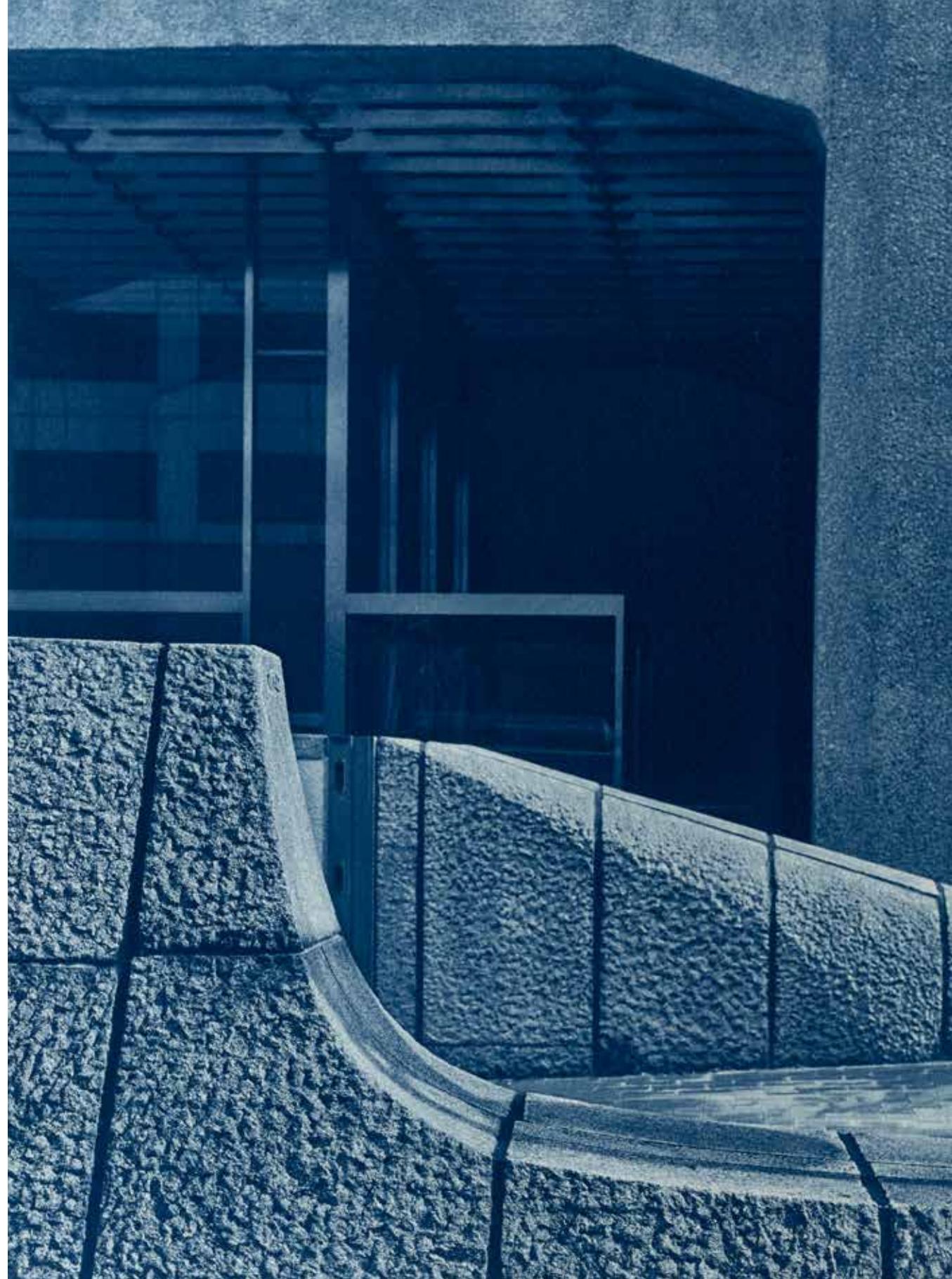
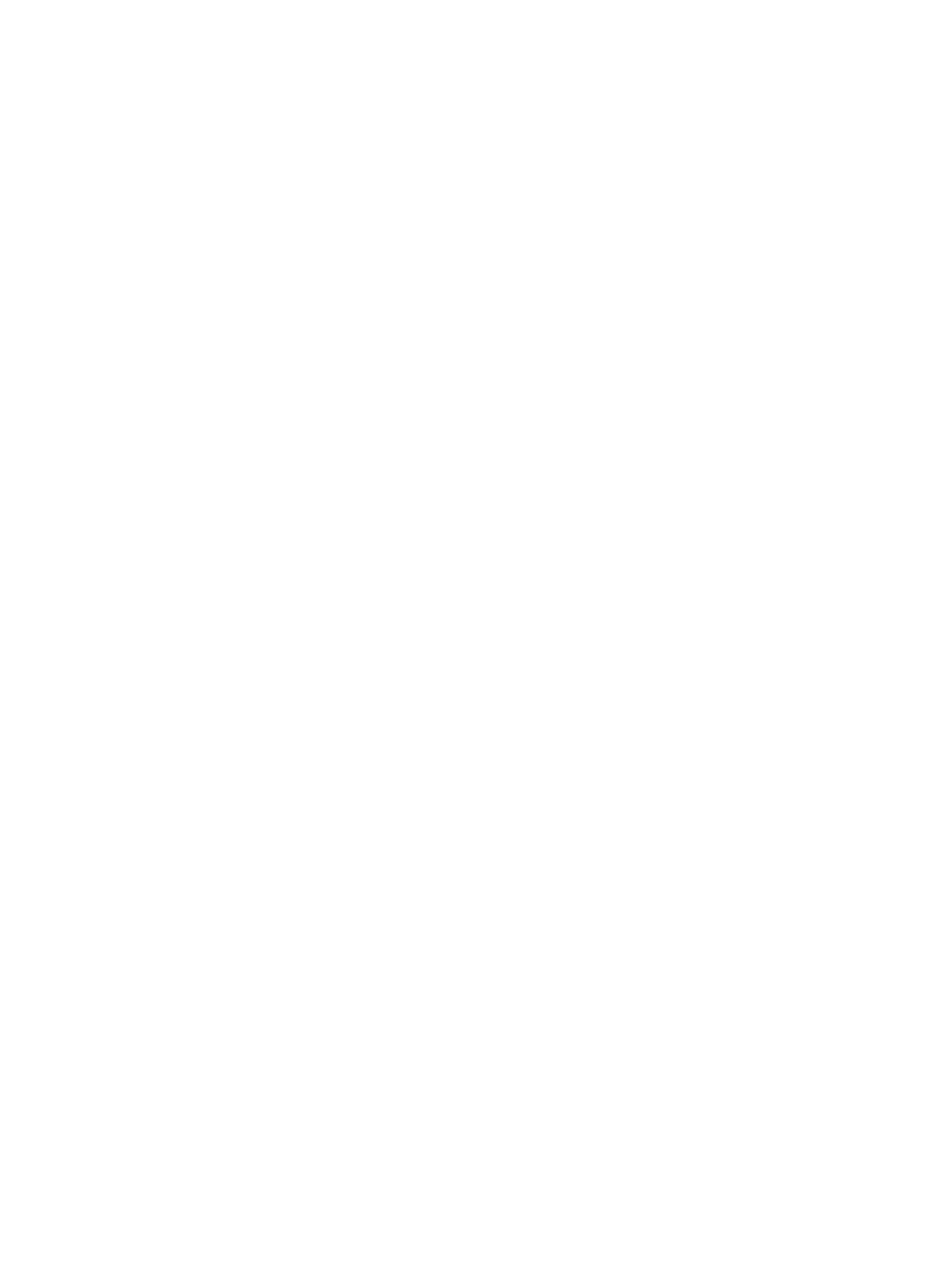






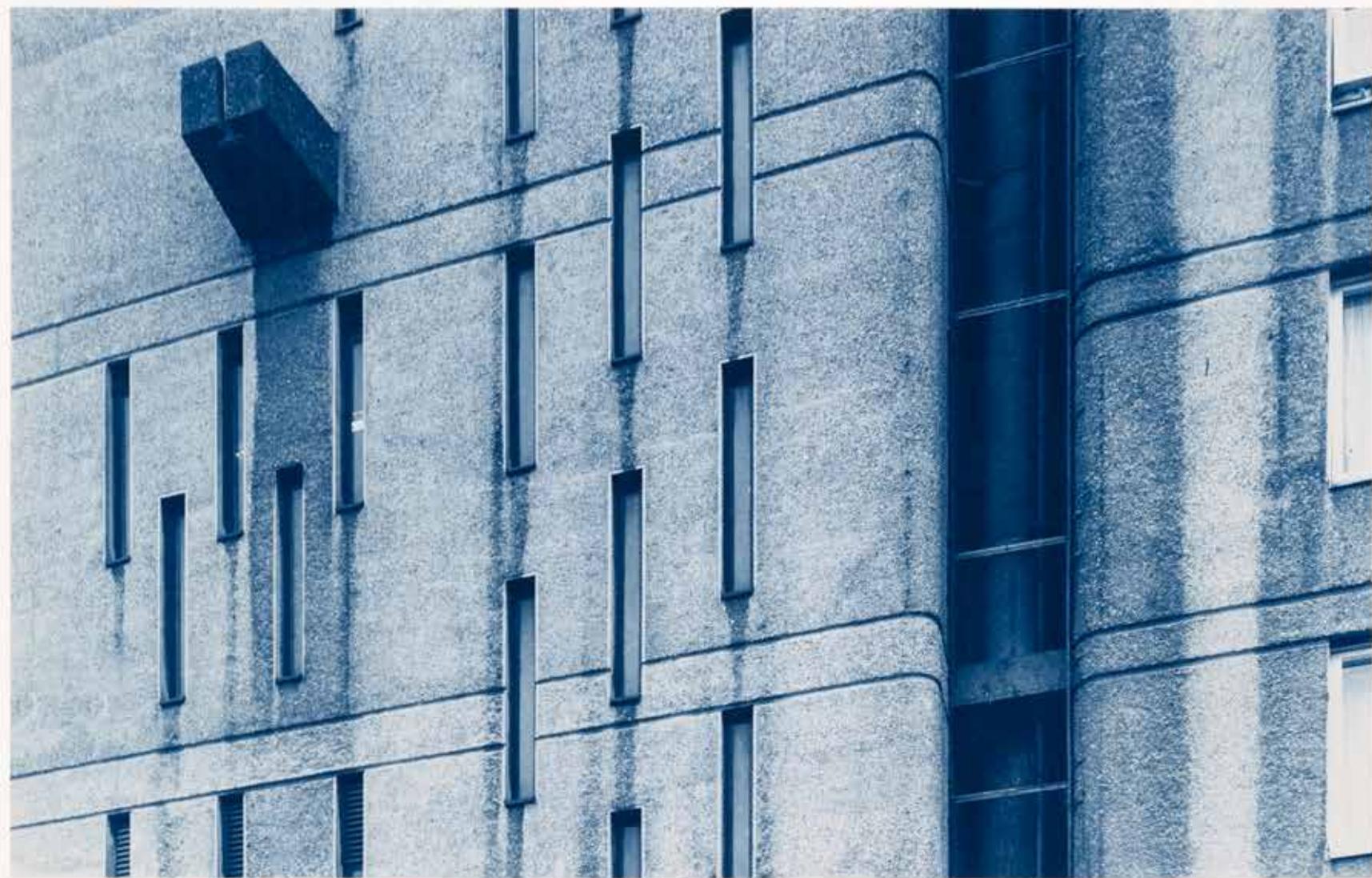




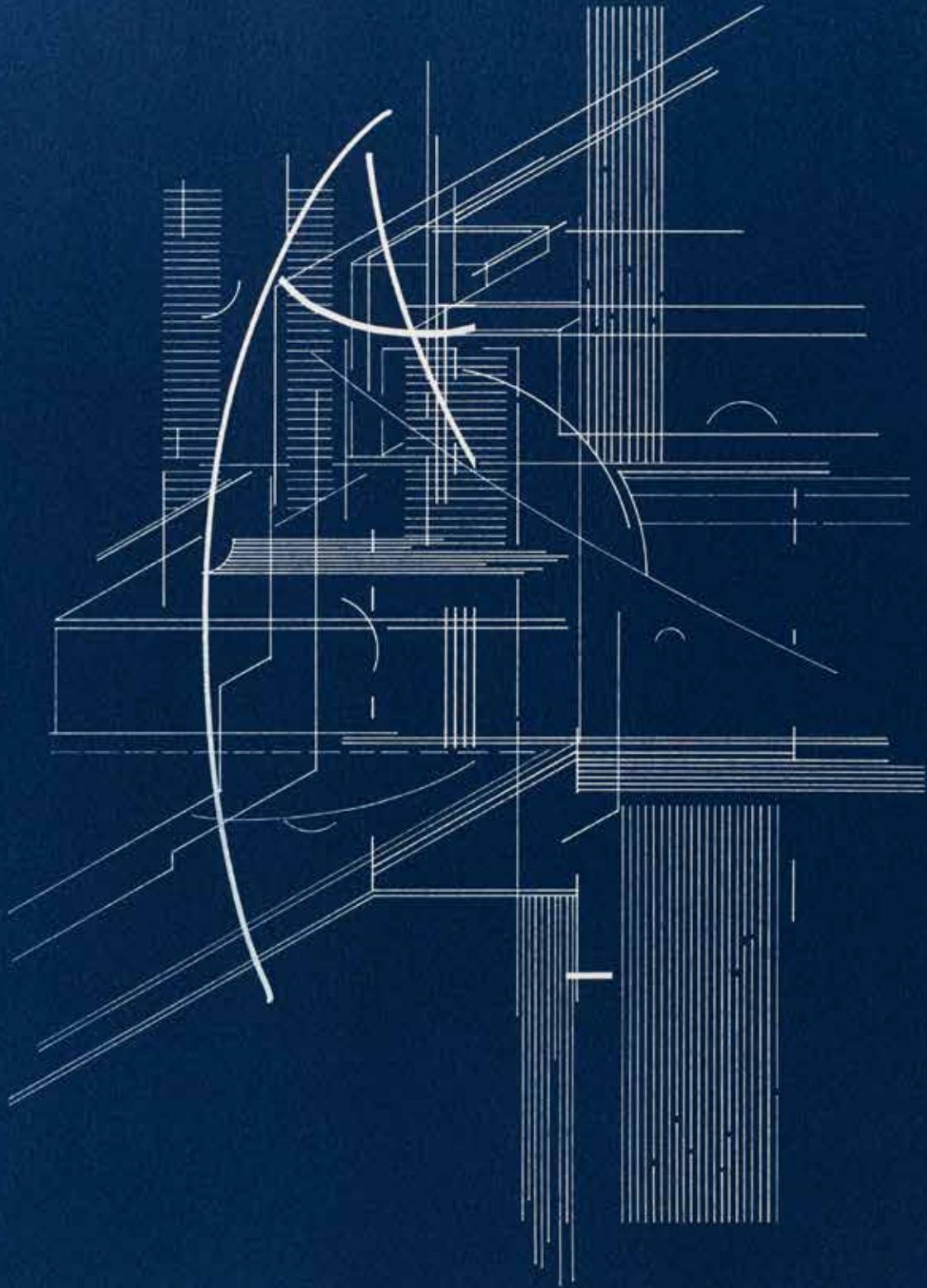




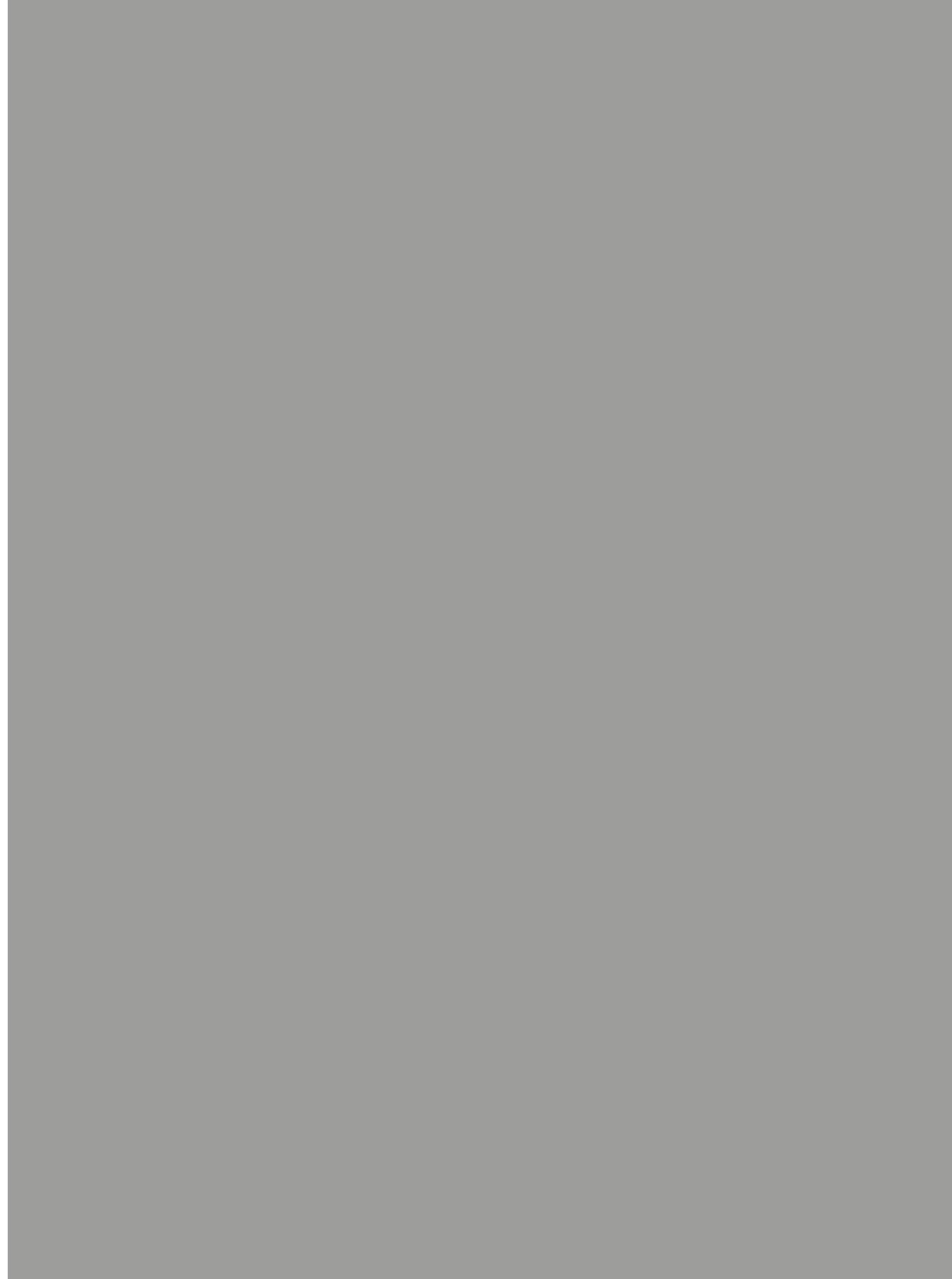
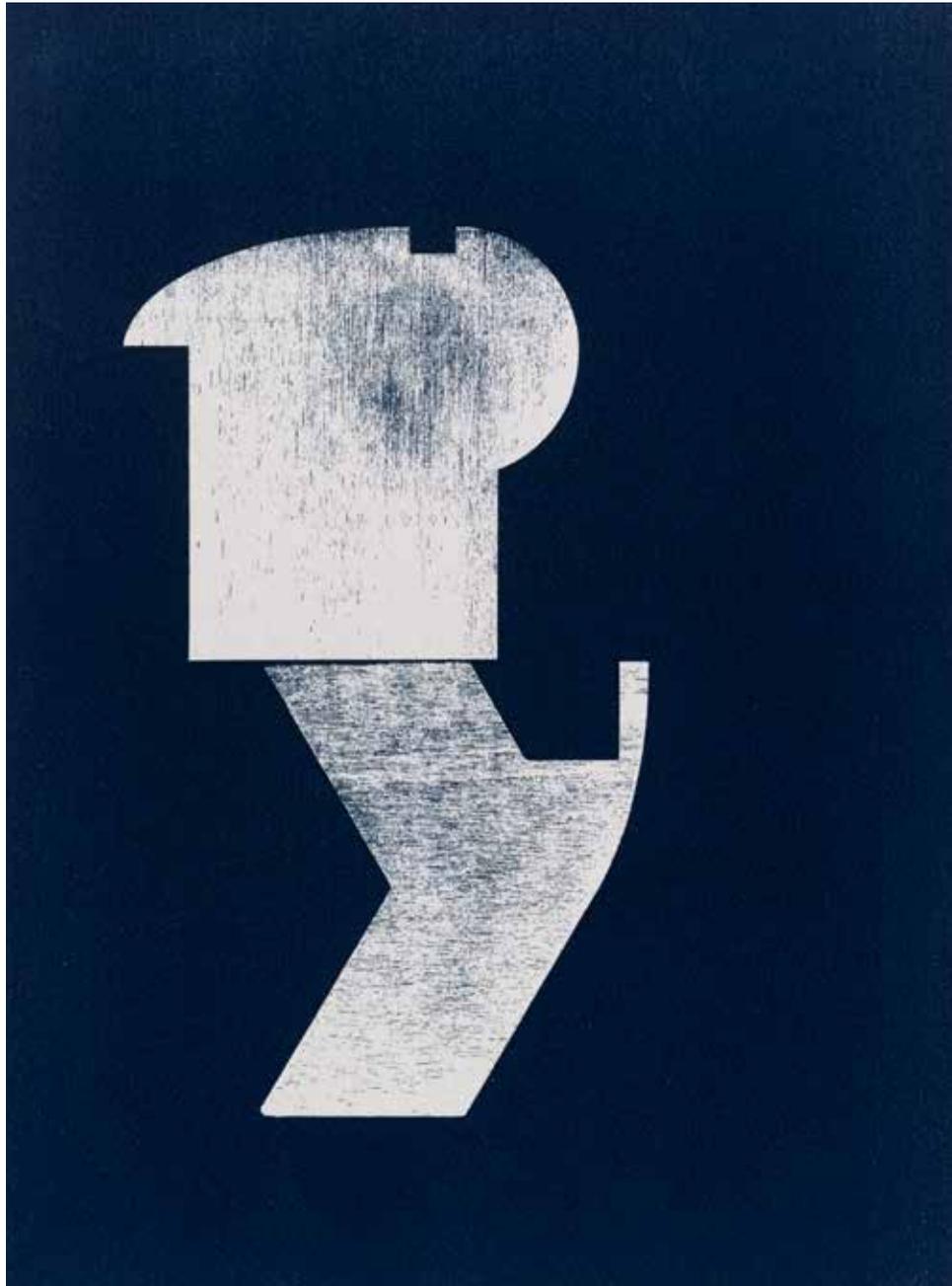












Portfolio

Ledelle Moe

murmur

(Page 87) Detail of *Study for Remain*, SMAC Gallery, South Africa

Credit: Ledelle Moe, 2018, concrete and steel, 270cm H x 260cm L x 152cm W. (Photo by Siemon Allen)





(Pages 88-89) Installation view of *Study for Remain*, SMAC Gallery, South Africa

Credit: Ledelle Moe, 2018, concrete and steel, 270cm H x 260cm L x 152cm W. (Photo by Siemon Allen)

slip





(Pages 92-93, 94-95, and 97) Installation view of *Transitions/Displacements*, Kirk Hopper Fine Art, Dallas, Texas

Credit: Ledelle Moe, 2012, concrete and steel, each piece approx.: 4ft W x 15ft L x 14ft H. (Photo by Ledelle Moe)



wait





(Pages 100-101) Detail of *Collapse V*, Smack Mellon Gallery, Brooklyn, New York

Credit: Ledelle Moe, 2007, concrete and steel, each piece approx: 10ft H x 11ft W x 12ft L. (Photo by Ledelle Moe)

(Pages 102-103) Installation view of *Collapse V*, Smack Mellon Gallery, Brooklyn, New York

Credit: Ledelle Moe, 2007, concrete and steel, each piece approx: 10ft H x 11ft W x 12ft L. (Photo by Ledelle Moe)

(Pages 106-107) *Findings*, Commune 1, Cape Town, South Africa

Credit: Ledelle Moe, 2007, concrete and steel, each piece approx: 25cm H x 18cm W x 13cm L. (Photo by Ledelle Moe)

reveal



recoil



Installation view of *Relief*, Crane Arts Gallery, Philadelphia, PA

Credit: Ledelle Moe, 2010, concrete and steel, 18ft L x 4ft H x 5ft W. (Photo by Ledelle Moe)



Installation view of *Relief*, Crane Arts Gallery, Philadelphia, PA

Credit: Ledelle Moe, 2010, concrete and steel, 28ft L x 15ft W x 10ft H, and 18ft L x 4ft H x 5ft W. (Photo by Ledelle Moe)

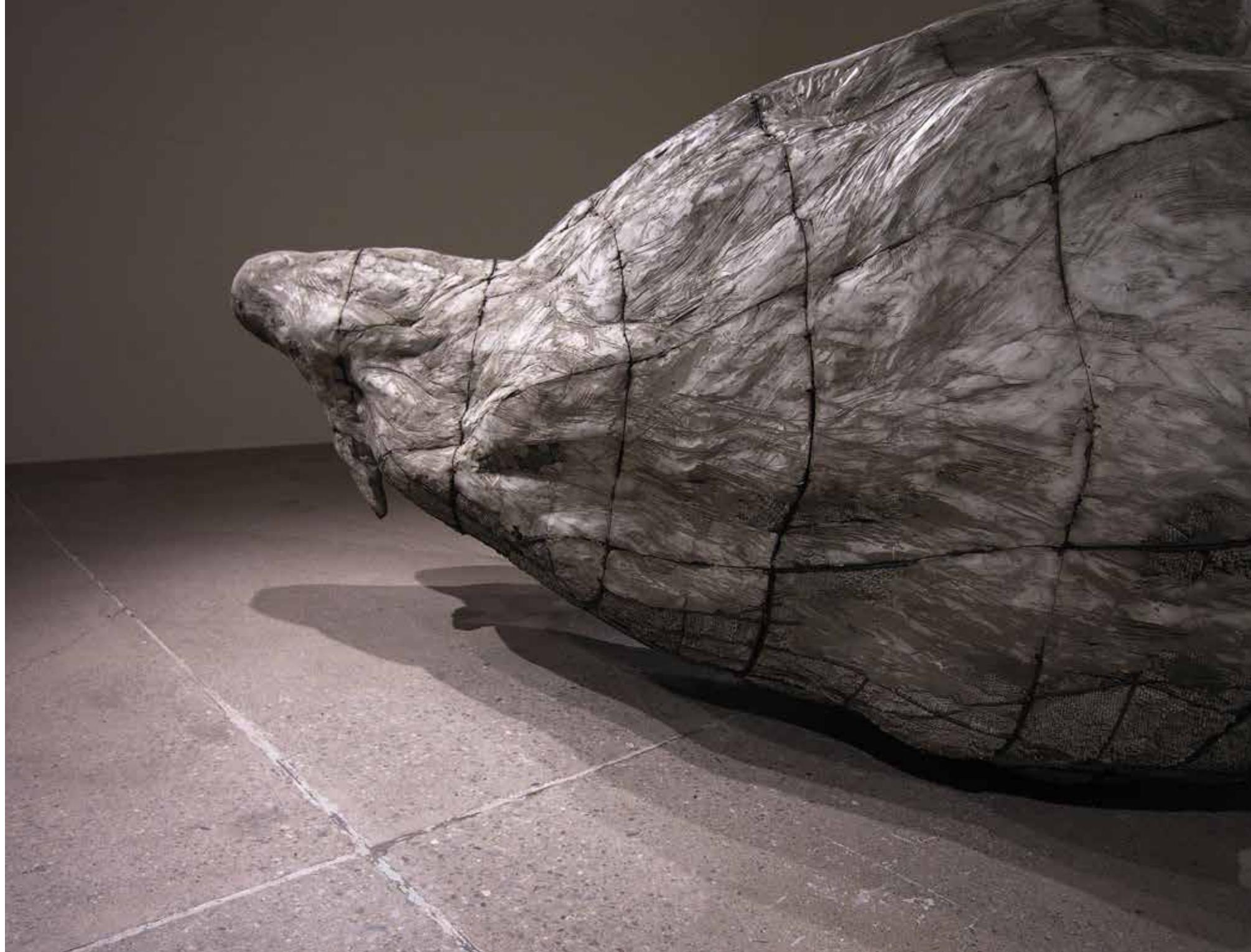


(Pages 112-113) Installation view of *Relief*, Crane Arts Gallery, Philadelphia, PA

Credit: Ledelle Moe, 2010, concrete and steel, 28ft L x 15ft W x 10ft H, and 18ft L x 4ft H x 5ft W. (Photo by Ledelle Moe)

(Pages 114-115 and 116-117) Detail of *Relief*, Crane Arts Gallery, Philadelphia, PA

Credit: Ledelle Moe, 2010, concrete and steel, 28ft L x 15ft W x 10ft H, and 18ft L x 4ft H x 5ft W. (Photo by Ledelle Moe)





B9

8

8

resist



(Pages 120 and 122-123) Detail of *Lament*, MoMo Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa

Credit: Ledelle Moe, 2016, concrete and steel, 270cm H x 260cm L x 152cm W. (Photo by Ledelle Moe)



Installation view of *Lament*, MoMo Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa

Credit: Ledelle Moe, 2016, concrete and steel, 270cm H x 260cm L x 152cm W. (Photo by Ledelle Moe)



Though Moe's anthropomorphic figures evoke an undeniable human element evolving out of an age-old tradition of figurative sculpture, they are also distinctly structural. Composed of concrete and steel, they stand firmly rooted in the present, though she notes that her essential medium, concrete, is equally an historical and industrial idiom. It is appropriate, then, for exploring innumerable paradoxes: monumentality and fragility, permanence and impermanence, as well as tenuous personal and political mythologies.

- Kinsey Katchka, PhD. Associate Curator of Modern & Contemporary Art, North Carolina Museum of Art

My work explores notions of monumentality and the human form through a series of sculpted figures. Created with a process that begins with the digging and gathering of sand from various locales and processes in the studio through such actions as welding, casting, modelling, and carving, I create these figures in order to open up narratives that speak through both image and materiality.

At the core of these works are reflections on place. Over the past few years, I have worked in various countries including Botswana, South Africa, Switzerland, Senegal, India, and the USA. In each location, I gathered sand and dirt and embedded samplings of the earth into cement sculptures of small forms¹ and large figures.² Experiencing the particular terrain of each site and creating work on that site was a way for me to engage intimately and physically with the very essence of a place. In digging into the ground and quite literally using it as raw material in making my cement forms, I was able to reflect on landscape as ground and literally draw from it. Perhaps this was rooted in some longing to better understand how political and personal histories are inherent in the ever-present awareness of place. Or how land, ground, sand, and earth reference a sense of belonging. Perhaps the very act of taking these samples of earth and including it in these works was a momentary act of appropriation of the land and ground.³ This small gesture, for me, spoke to a larger issue of land as identity. I was also conscious that in journeying to locales both familiar and unfamiliar, the works that I created were a very direct response to my tactile experiences of that site. For each work, I used the local sand from that place in an attempt to "mark" or reflect on that place and its history.

My most recent works, *Remain*, *Lament*, *Ruptures* and *Transition/Displacements*, are large, weighty forms that for me reference both, funerary statues and memorials. This work belongs to no specific place but is one that can be moved from site to site, displaced. The sculptures have weight and allude to solidity and structure yet are inherently modular and transient. In

some of the work, small sculptures swarm over, blanket, flow, or swirl, and partially obscure the body. During the process of creating each of these smaller sculptures, I reflected upon the movement of those creatures as driven by some unseen collective intelligence. Yet the repetitive act of creating each sculpture in various locations gave voice to the act of being in a place while considering the collective migratory patterns of creatures—of flocks, swarms, and interdependent organisms.⁴ The work embraces scale and alludes to a sense of monumentality while simultaneously evoking a certain set of paradoxes such as those of strength and vulnerability, permanence and impermanence, location and dislocation.

Notes

1. These small sculptures have taken various forms such as the collection of small birds in *Transitions/Displacements* and amorphous forms in *Remain*. These forms are created by casting cement blocks into the ground. Working with the material in its partially cured state, each one is individually carved into this "block" of cast cement and then left to cure completely. This process is reminiscent of miniature grave sites, places of disturbed earth and also one where debris, smells, and a closeness to the land is discovered.
2. The process of creating these large sculptures begins with a welded armature. The armature is created in a way to allow for the whole form to break down into individual fragments that are then bolted back together to create the entire form. The armature is covered in a fine mesh upon which the cement is applied. Once completed, the sculptures read as cavities and the seams and connecting points are revealed. In this sense the piece has the presence of being seemingly solid and whole; yet it is modular and fragmented. This technical component of the work dovetails into the core conceptual themes in the installations, namely those of strength and vulnerability, permanence and impermanence.
3. As I travelled to various places, taking the time to temporarily work in those spaces, people's narratives and testimonies reflected these issues of contested land ownership, migration, placement, and displacement. In using a small amount of this land in my work, I reflect on the temporal and long-lasting effects of our relationship with the landscape.
4. In *Transitions/Displacements*, *Lament*, and *Study for Remain*, I am exploring the singular body in relation to multiple bodies. Here, the singular body is conceived of as a dynamic porous site, a kind of assemblage of forces, in flux and in constant change. It speaks to the notion that a permanent monument can be understood as a "series of events", both in terms of its material, which is subject to the ravages of time—erosion, touch, accretions, chips and gashes, marks, and patina—as well as shifts in political meaning and context. Even location.

We Who Were Our Own

Himali Singh Soin

i. memory
was like the empty field
was like the desert
dying

ii. love,
that love
the world—
only I had believed.
one yours?
one but the one you?
So what.

I'd believed.
other than love.
me I went
again and again.
still:
other this world
other love.
love again.

iii. this life
your love
then eternity
Now

what Love left
you left

our time
of forgetting

my memory of love
my love
forgot
once again

iv. Someone! No, no one—
longing for,
erase
all memory.

No one, now no one.

v. waiting
is in search.

It passes
a thousand times

the wise fail
there is no lover

what
has come this time
when it saw nothing

vi. forgotten
memories
abandoned

one by one by one

abandoned
waiting
time elapse
longing
my memory
may forget

vii. An era has passed,

and Time is still stranded,
wait a little.

viii. We've freed ourselves, made Time irrelevant.

ix. speak of love
of return
of sheen
the moon

x. the moon stood
still
like a sheet.
stars fell from the moon's hands.
Some sank. Some rose to the surface,
That agony of separation.

Nothing in this world is asleep.

xi. We were
our final triumph
we did reach
and returned dying
lit up by
Love
by grace
still
only the heart felt
only it knew
only to itself
death
returned
carrying letters
to announce
that it will surely come

xii. arrange the
possible
in a corner

now softened.

a body
holds itself together
by the defeats and triumphs of the heart.

Nothing in this world is without.

xiii. In the festival of memory
you extinguished

I remember you

xiv. erasing itself by wiping out
the distance
the horizon to mist.
that mist.
in doubt.
cover of darkness
I may find you.

xv. pour
into the waiting
unlock
the promised

let her pass through
let at least for once
let it be
open it
it holds all

the one

its afterlife
still
waiting
in
nothing

nothing

xvi. We Who Were
words
kept clinging:
a witness of desire
of the distances of the world
our own
we who were

xvii. ruins
crumble
cracked
lost marks
smeared
worn

Time
to tear
to break
wake up.

xviii. the eye
is endless,
I see yesterday on the far, far horizon:

love again
I'll never see.

xix. they who
have left
no longer to be found

you left
departed
to find

Nothing's left
no possibility

and no way
no room
no margins
lost

Nowhere anymore
no one
what
who
they all have vanished

xx. it has come:
all perhaps some.

here: this may also

xxi. whatever may or may not be
who erases
who

xxii. nothing remains ahead.
the garden has ceased
and no one's left

nothing left to give.

xxiii. things were as they should be:
Now everything is your absence

the world—
Stay.
The world may become again.

xxiv. Be Near Me
You who me, you whom I
be near me
Remain near me
one
the other

Be near me
Be here
when nothing holds
be near me
be near me

xxv. softly,
softly.

softly.
softly.
softly.
softly.
softly.

xxvi. There's no sign of anywhere.
I've searched everywhere.
No sign of the edge

The ground has disappeared without leaving a trace
no no no no one

Unheard
No one had the time to listen, no one the desire
no witness
no trace.

xxvii. When you look
When you think
When you wait
When you look

you see no one.
No one.

xxviii. Black Out
I will complete the texts.

xxix. everything

at that exact moment
could be saved

remember nothing should be with no touch.

xxx. somewhere far off
was memory

it wasn't enough
it didn't wish to stay.

xxxi. How can I embellish
what's left
isn't enough
not enough to fill
the ages

xxxii. dust, piling up for years
now so clear

Everything at once was tangled
every image
crying out in longing.

Let there be a flood.

xxxiii. when this world permits
time to return.

xxxiv. a sweet, sweet message
to someone, to anyone,
of absolutely nothing

xxxv. You're doing it for nothing.

xxxvi. so relentless
those words after all else.

xxxvii. the abyss

still lost in the memory
of vanished page after page.

xxxviii. no word is found
no word for

xxxix. She
she she she
Yes.

xxxx. There's no
anywhere,
there's no
anywhere, not
not
not
Nowhere is there
And there's no anywhere.

there's no anywhere.
there's no anywhere.
longing for anywhere.

xxxxi. the field
is left
with margins

xxxii. we launched life
we would soon happen.

as you will,
as much as you want
still the same.
what
how
when we appear
we believed each word
we remembered any end, so many

as much as you will,
still the same.

we should heal these wounds.

Nothing's left.

Emptiness is made up of the same invisible atoms as is concrete. Our dreams and our waking life are equally filled with happenings. The world, comprised always of a dialectic, insists on a third argument, an extra eye. This is to say, everything is all things, as they are and as they are not. It is in our instinct to never cease exploration, to find possibilities even at the end. Writers, starkly conscious of both the breadth and banality of the lexicon, have always sought new methods, made new manifestos, for finding the infinitude of possibilities within the finite system of language, gnawing at our negative capabilities in order to excavate from oblivion a kind of extra-sensory knowing. To leave behind, without words, what we know to be true but which we cannot classify.

An erasure is one of these renewals. In a society of appropriation, an erasure utilises an existing text and makes it disappear in measures. What is left behind does not simply refer to what was; it comes to assume an identity of its own. It speaks about absence, about loss. Yet, it is held together by the attractive force between itself and its prior existence. The words are, we might say, held together by love. The process of making an erasure poem is one of gruelling repetition, repositioning, obverse censorship. Still, it does not attempt to simply be an analytic alienation of meaning, rather, a synthetic tendency in which feeling and sentiment are not denied in the irony of the process.

Erasing Faiz's *Rebel's Silhouette* (1991) was a laborious task that felt violent, anxious, tranquil, existential, transformational, and radical in turn. Making the choice of what to and not to erase spanned from arbitrary to justified, instinctual to cerebral. There is a self-reflexivity to the new poems left behind: they comment on the act of erasure. There is an emphasis on memory fading, much like the words on the page. There is an emphasis on pronouns in order to reflect on subjecthood and the blurring of boundaries between the poet, I; the eraser, me; the lover, you; and the reader, you. Importantly, in the poems that are left over, there is an emphasis on the discontinuity of time. Time is palimpsestic, accumulated, multiple, spiralling. The voice is at first hubristic, then hopes for healing. Healing as a collective, political renewal but also healing the text that has been torn apart. Each poem performs its own constraint produced via an artificial formula borne from the content of the poem. Using the metaphor of the prison, through whose bars Faiz looked out upon the moon and longed for his lovers, the poems find freedom within their linguistic restrictions. These poems are residues, renewals, simultaneous with the original poems. Faiz wrote these at the same time as they were erased by me. The erasures may have preceded the originals. There is no longer a distinction, or it is not useful to make a distinction, between the truth and the trace.

Language is made up of signs only; we must believe that it is free of its signifiers even as they

are inherent. Everything is an act of editing, finding the word in the whole, leaving behind a hole. Denying mutability means we are forcing the world to function as fallacy. An absence is the presence of itself. Darkness illuminated. This is self-conscious elision, an act of aesthetic violence that might reflect a larger, political act of violence. It is an act of rebellion; it is an act of parodying posterity. (It is simultaneously an act of reverence.) It questions author-ity, it offers that the reader—the subject—in her interpretation, might be the sovereign. What survives is not only a remnant, but a self-contained—albeit without an arc—story. The act of erasure loves the pen that can forget and still make memory mean.

Laurent Gayer is a senior research fellow at CERI-Sciences Po, Paris. He specialises in the social and political fabric of South Asian urban worlds, with a particular focus on Karachi. His latest book, *Karachi: Ordered Disorder and the Struggle for the City* (London: Hurst, 2014), is the result of extensive fieldwork in Karachi between 2001 and 2013, and defends the idea that in contrast to the "chaotic" and "anarchic" city portrayed in journalistic accounts, there is order of a kind in the city's condition of chronic civil strife. His forthcoming book extends this discussion by looking at the adjustment of the city's industrial capitalism to chronic uncertainty and insecurity, while questioning the forms of ordering that have emerged in the city's industrial estates over the past decades.

Zahra Malkani is an artist based in Karachi and an Assistant Professor of Practice at the Communication & Design Department at Habib University. Her research-based art practice spans multiple media and explores the politics of development and infrastructure in the city. She has previously taught at the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture and is a co-founder of the Karachi LaJamia, an experimental pedagogical project seeking to politicise art education and explore new radical pedagogies and art practices.

Rahma Muhammad Mian is trying to live a life of love and peace in the dystopia that is Karachi and, needless to say, it is quite a ride. She tries to make an honest living by teaching yoga, as well as undergraduate courses in science, technology and society (STS), media, communication, and cultural studies. She trained in classical hatha yoga in South India, and in Vipassana in Sri Lanka and Thailand. She also has a Master's in Media, Culture, and Communications from New York University, USA.

Ledelle Moe received an MFA from Virginia Commonwealth University's Sculpture Department in 1996, and soon after accepted a position to teach in the Interdisciplinary Sculpture Department at the Maryland Institute College of Art in Baltimore. Moe returned to live and work in South Africa in 2013, and currently teaches at Stellenbosch University. In 2002, she was the recipient of the Joan Mitchell Award, and in 2008, the Kreeger Museum Artist Award. Moe has exhibited in a number of venues including the Kulturhuset, International Sculpture Center, and American Academy of Arts and Letters, to name a few. Her projects include large-scale concrete installations at Socrates Park, Pratt Institute, and The African Museum of Art in Washington DC; other projects include installations in Salzburg, Brooklyn, Boston, Cape Town, India, the Biennale Internationale D'Art (Martinique), Perez Museum, the Biennale De Dakar, and an upcoming solo exhibition at MASS MoCA.

Seher Shah and Randhir Singh have collaborated on a number of projects over the past few years to explore relationships between drawing, photography, and architecture, furthering an ongoing interest into concepts of architectural scale and sculptural intent.

Shah's practice uses experiences from the field of art and architecture to question the rationale language of architectural drawing. Her works use drawing, printmaking, and sculpture to think about relationships between the individual, landscape, and architecture through the deconstruction and fragmenting of forms and structures. She received her Bachelor of Fine Arts and Bachelor of Architecture from the Rhode Island School of Design in 1998.

Singh is an architectural photographer who draws on his education as an architect with a focus on issues related to architecture and urbanism. His work explores relationships within the urban landscape such as housing typologies, waterways and hydraulic architecture, and industrial structures. He received his Bachelor of Architecture and Bachelor of Science degrees from the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in New York in 1999.

Himali Singh Soin works across text, performance, and moving image. She utilises metaphors from the natural environment to construct speculative cosmologies that manifest the non-linear entanglements between human and non-human life. Her poetic methodology explores myriad ways of knowing, from scientific to intuitional, indigenous, and alchemical epistemologies. Selected credits: Whitechapel Gallery, ICA, Serpentine Marathon and Park Nights, Art Licks, Art Night London (London); Kadist (San Francisco); the Dhaka Art Summit (Dhaka); Abrons Art Centre (NYC); Brick Bar (Riga); Serendipity Arts Festival (Goa); Khoj (New Delhi); OCA (Norway); Fabrika (Moscow); A Tale of a Tub (Rotterdam); Bucharest Art Week (Bucharest); Meet Factory (Prague) among others. Her writing appears regularly in *Artforum*, among others. She is the recipient of the 2019 Frieze Artist Award for her work on the poles and their uncanny bearing on the rest of the world.

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