

CASTLES IN THE SKY



CASTLES^{IN} THE SKY

Fantasy Architecture in Contemporary Art

Lehman College Art Gallery City University of New York



30

*artists create
impractical, enchanting, and inspiring
unbuilt (and unbuildable) designs*



This catalog is published on the occasion of the exhibition
Castles in the Sky: Fantasy Architecture in Contemporary Art
at Lehman College Art Gallery, City University of New York
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Director's Foreword

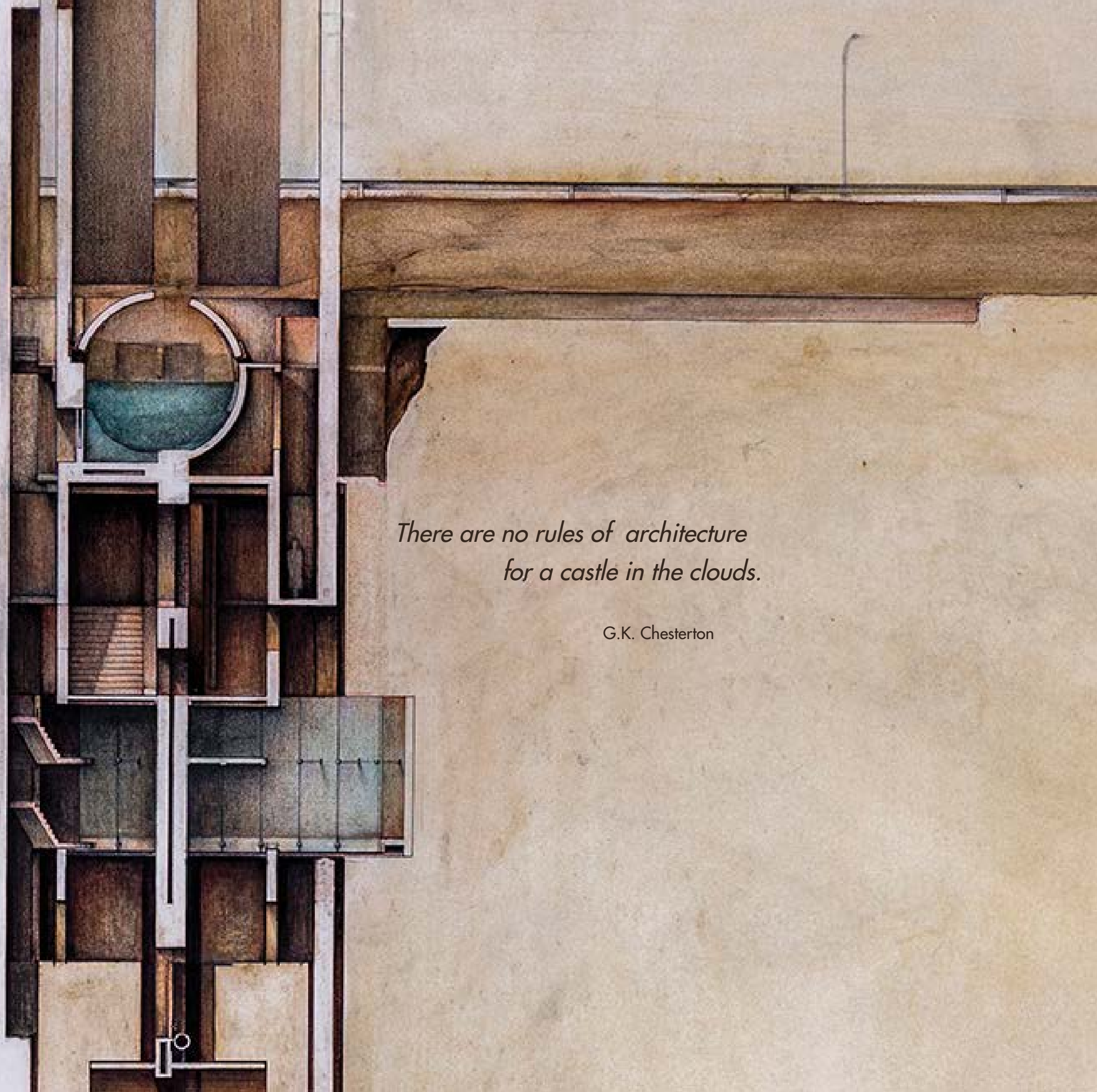
The genesis for *Castles in the Sky* occurred a dozen years ago on a rainy day visit to my favorite museum in this country — the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. I spent that afternoon contemplating Thomas Cole's magnificent four-painting series *The Voyage of Life*. Much reproduced at the time of its creation in the 19th century, Cole's cycle shows a journey along a river through the stage's of a person's life, which invariably leads to contemplating one's own life journey. What struck me on that visit, though, was the building at the painting's center that rises as a misty mirage — a castle in the sky — and is the symbol of youthful hopes and dreams. Cole's castle has stayed with me. Combined with an ongoing interest in the work of 18th-century Italian artist Giovanni Battista Piranesi's haunting illusions of a prison, these two artists gave form to the organizing idea of this exhibition — to highlight contemporary fantasy structures created by artists who, though not architects, embrace the architectural imagination.

Many people assisted to create this exhibition. First, I tip my hat to the artists whose unceasing creativity never fails to amaze me. Within Lehman College, I am particularly grateful to President José Luis Cruz, who has recognized the importance of the Gallery, and offered so much gracious support for our ongoing public mission. Susan Ebersole, Vice President for Institutional Advancement and Executive Director of the Lehman College Foundation, has been a great champion of the arts at Lehman College, and has provided enthusiasm and thoughtful advice for the Gallery's development. Before his untimely death, the late Vincent W. Clark, Vice President for Administration and Finance, provided the Gallery with invaluable resources and guidance, for which I am most grateful. Each member of our dedicated and collegial board of directors, chaired by Dr. Cecilia Mandrile, has helped further the mission of the Gallery.

I am lucky to have such a wonderful staff at the Art Gallery. Deborah Yasinsky, Curator of Education, organized the accompanying education programs for the exhibition and Mary Ann Siano, Grants Associate, worked to acquire the funding that allows us to undertake such ambitious programming. Laura De Riggi, Curatorial Assistant, organized a myriad of loan details and shipping arrangements, and served a curatorial role as the editor of a burgeoning list of artworks assembled for this show. As on many of our publications, Alex Stevovich did a fine and careful job with our elegant catalog design. I owe a special debt of gratitude to Linda Locke, my longtime collaborator and editor — she is a creative perfectionist who oversaw every detail of this publication. Finally, I owe my deepest appreciation to Kevin Ritter, my curatorial sounding board for each artist and idea. Thank you always for your love and support.

I hope this catalog, *Castles in the Sky*, will feed your own imagination and dreams.

Bartholomew F. Bland



*There are no rules of architecture
for a castle in the clouds.*

G.K. Chesterton

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Castles in the Sky: Fantasy Architecture in Contemporary Art
was organized by Lehman College Art Gallery and curated
by Bartholomew F. Bland, Executive Director

CASTLES IN THE SKY FANTASY ARCHITECTURE IN CONTEMPORARY ART

The buildings in our mind's eye are limitless. In our dreams, we unlock doors to unknown passages and climb unending stairs into the darkness of rooms never seen before. Not tied to the reality of bricks and mortar or ground and gravity, we imagine any structure — the American “dream home” on a coveted suburban cul-de-sac beyond our reach, or the wild acid-trip floating balloon palace of a magical unicorn.

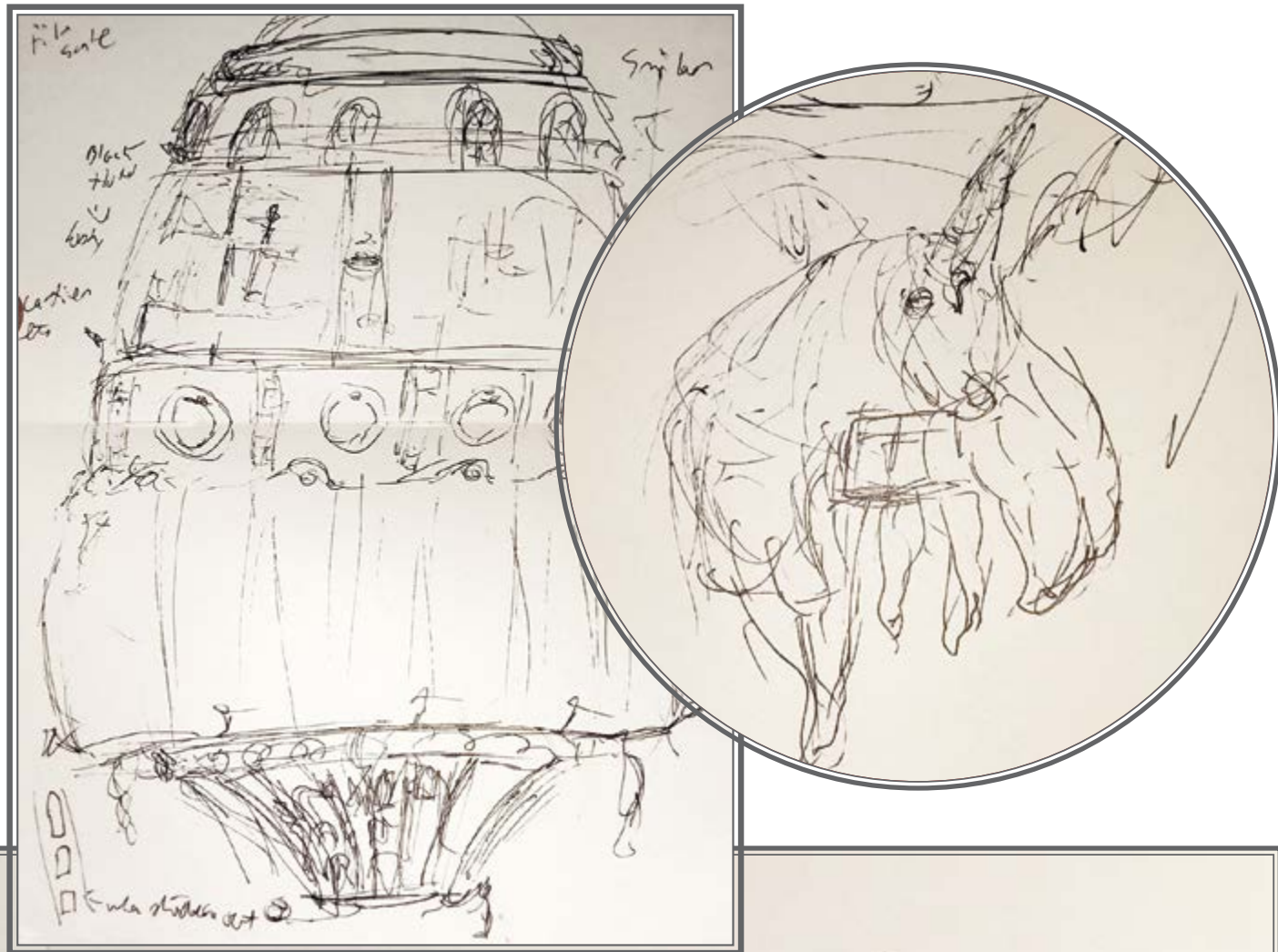
Jarring the laws of actual architecture, the imagined palace functions as very real foundation, buttress, and pillar for *Castles in the Sky*. From Claes Oldenburg's proposal to replace the Washington Monument with a gigantic scissors to Laurie Simmons' photograph of candy castles atop a cake weathering a blizzard of confectionery snow, the 30 artists in this exhibition develop bizarre, impractical, enchanting, and inspiring unbuilt (and likely unbuildable) designs, and gather inspiration from famous sources.

Lothar Osterberg draws from the etchings of 18th-century Italian artist Giovanni Battista Piranesi, the creator of images of dark and cavernous spaces — the nightmarish side of the architectural dream. Will Cotton's candy castle shows a fantasy continuum of the art of 19th-century American landscape painter Thomas Cole, who, in *Youth* (1842), pictures a man rushing towards the mirage of a castle in the sky, the locus of all his youthful dreams. In Salvador Dali's *Gala's Castle* (1974) an elephant on attenuated legs tiptoes across a castle crenellation in Surrealist activity, which we spy, again, today, in Adrien Broom's improbable scene of a Victorian woman standing in her drawing room open to the sky and filled with a wandering zebra.

Castles in the Sky plays tribute to the ceaseless meanderings of the human imagination and the creative fantasy the hovers in the recesses of every artist's mind.

Above, Jonathan Monaghan. *Disco Beast #1 and #3*. Ink drawings on paper, 2016

Below, Thomas Doyle. *Subsidence (Cobble Hill)*. Pencil drawing, 2007. Collections of the artists



ADD RED HOOK LANE?

10.10.07



Exhibition
Catalog

Gustavo Acosta

Eclipse, 2017

Acrylic on canvas, 57 x 94 inches

Courtesy of the artist and 532 Thomas Jaeckel Gallery

Acosta's buildings take on the dream-like quality of distant memories. Looming towers soar to the sky — mammoth hulks, which with their blocky bulks might symbolize the entrance to a castle, fortress, or a nightmarish prison. Architecture is one of Acosta's preoccupations, and he is interested in the way it is a representative symbol of government, bureaucratic, or institutional power. *Eclipse*, the title of Acosta's painting, signals declining power represented by the collapse or the dismantling of the structure. Born in Havana, Cuba, Acosta makes his painting a metaphor for Communist power, or, more literally, a representative of the decaying infrastructure on the island. This artist's work also leads to a nearly universal rumination on the cycle of decline that is part of the life of every building. One critic poetically claimed Acosta's cities as "being stalked by the shadow of death." During his career this artist has portrayed the cities where he lived, showing the decay he saw when there, and the decay that followed his leaving.





Diane Arbus

A Castle in Disneyland, Cal, 1962

Photographs, prints and multiples

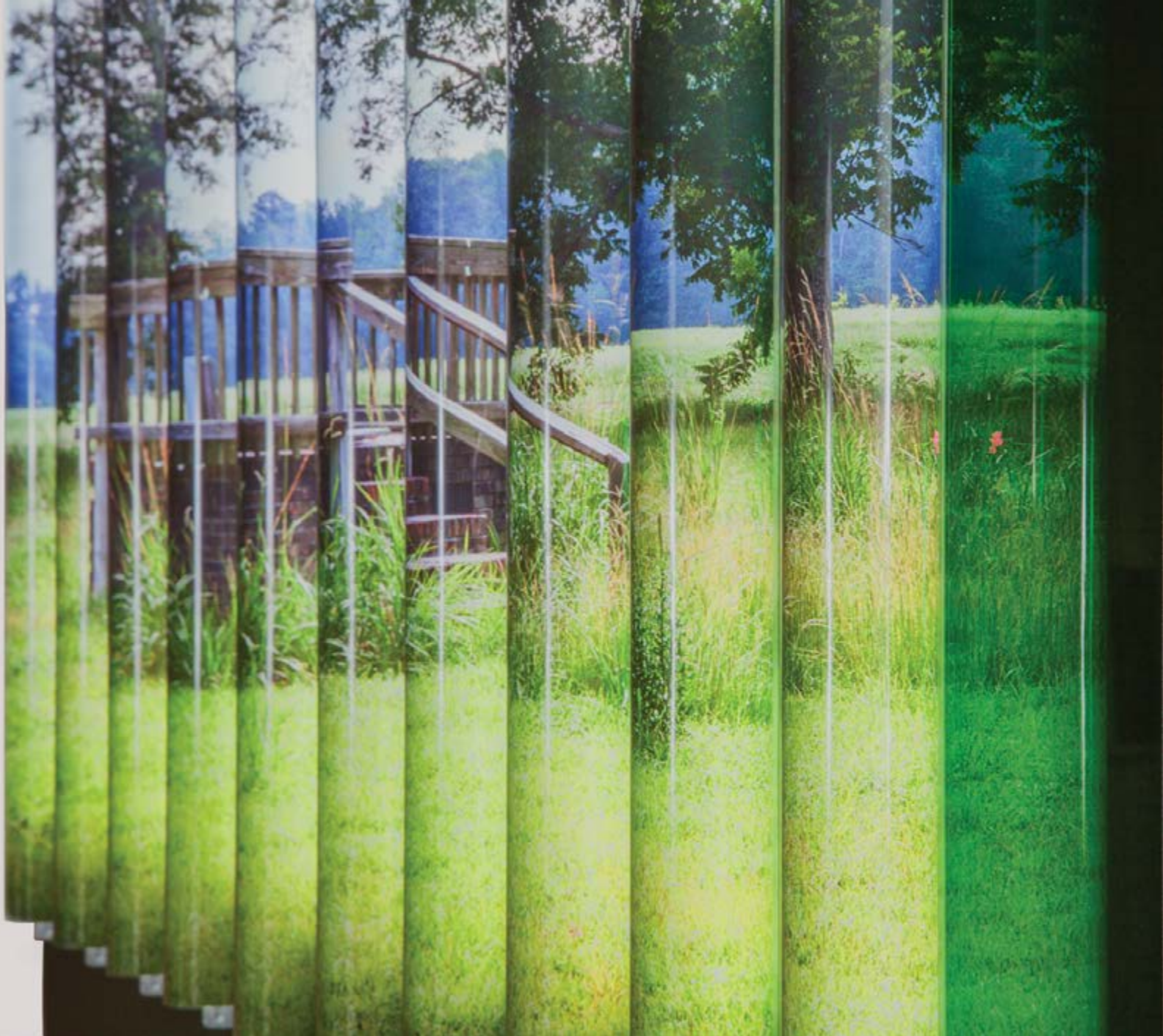
Gelatin silver print, 20 x 16 inches

Courtesy of Cheim & Read

Arbus is known for the marginalized people whom she portrays on the streets of New York, where she finds empathy with the city's circus entertainers, sex workers, and assorted characters who are outside society's mainstream. This photographer famously conjures the disturbing, even within "normal" subjects, probing the unnerving aspects of everyday life. In *A Castle in Disneyland, Cal*, she finds the nightmarish shadow folded into the dreams of middle-class America. Instead of the jolly beacon of wonder Walt Disney created to welcome customers, Sleeping Beauty's Castle (originally known as Snow White's Castle) is transformed from the cheerful pastiche of Disneyland architecture familiar to parkgoers into something disturbing. Arbus revels in the irony that a theme park dedicated to the relentless pursuit of being "the happiest place on earth" should appear so forbidding. Even the elegant swan floating in its moat cannot relieve the atmosphere of gloom.

*Why should we strive,
with cynic frown,
to knock their fairy castles down?*

Eliza Cook



Clint Baclawski

Greener Pastures, 2018

Green-mirrored Plexiglas, Dibond, Archival Pigment Backlight prints, clear polycarbonate tubes, 2' LED light bulbs, oak, toggle switch, concrete, green bucket, Stinger cable, 84 x 40 x 12 inches
Collection of the artist

The railed wooden platform that sits alone in an open field suggests the porch of a long-vanished house. The rickety structure appears a small outlook onto empty fields, and the platform itself is ephemeral – perhaps it, too, will vanish at a moment's notice, the final disappearing wisp of a ghostly architectural presence. Baclawski has created a series of large-scale photographic light bulb installations. Here his glowing beacon buried in a cement bucket rises on a pole and contrasts its solid, weighted base with the ethereal image hovering above. Baclawski remembers that his signature bulb installations began as he was “wiring a light box, a piece of photographic backlight film fell off the table and onto one of the bulbs, and I haven’t looked back.” In Baclawski’s work the bulb is both the medium and the subject. His images appear now as a series of fragmented pieces – daubs of color for a palette spectrum or a sequence of notes in a melody. Walking around *Greener Pastures*, the viewer is impressed by a shifting, rolling structure, adding to the perception of grounded instability.





John Bowman

Ascent, 2017

Erased graphite on gessoed wood panel
60 x 36 inches

Highrise, 2017 (Following page, left)

Erased graphite on gessoed wood panel
60 x 36 inches

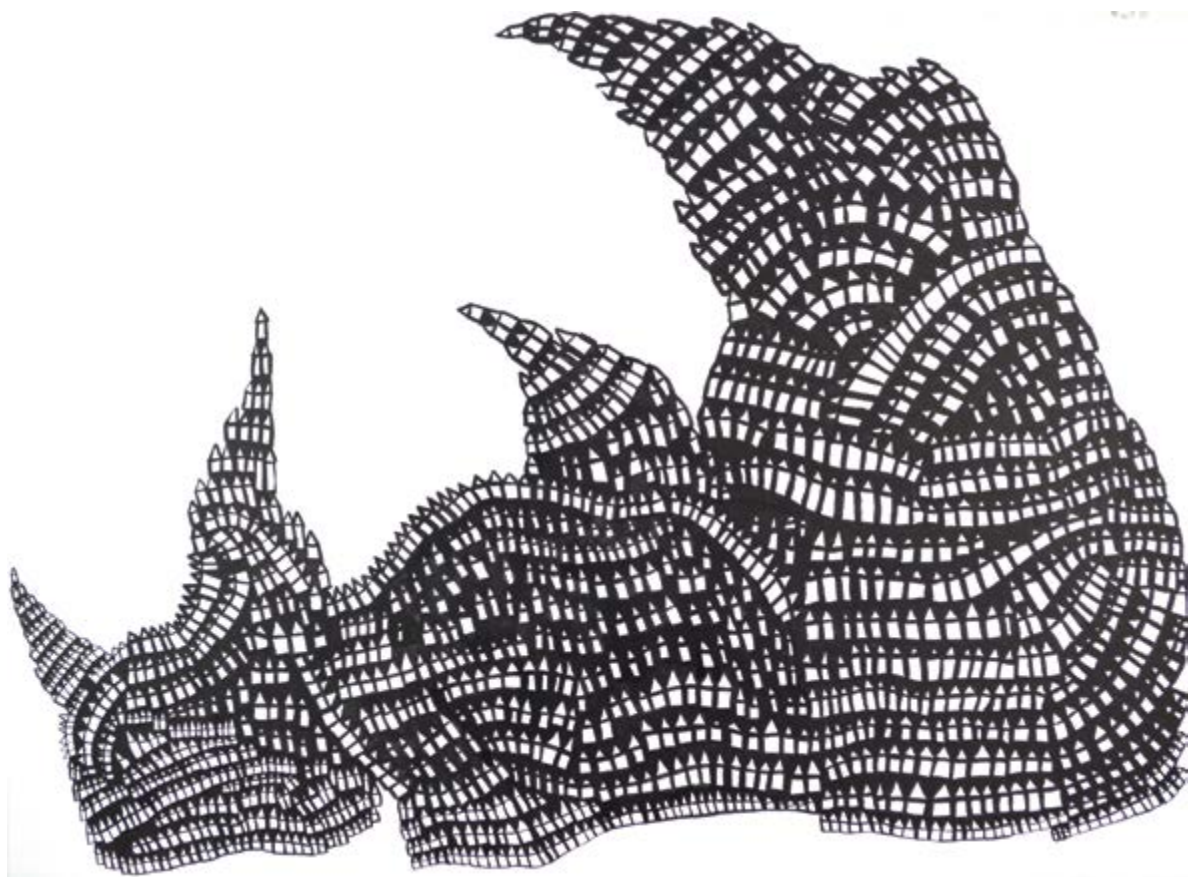
Keep, 2017 (Following page, right)

Erased graphite on gessoed wood panel
36 x 20 inches

Courtesy of Winston Wächter Fine Art

Dominating the ballroom of a glamorous if imaginary world, Bowman's chandeliers are both object and symbol to provoke fantasy-filled reveries of lives charmed by gracious entertaining and grandiose wealth. His graphite, monochromatic drawings of this most romantic of fixtures to display light, the chandelier, play with scale. Without the context of rooms as backdrops, the viewer is uncertain if the tiny buildings are perched on ordinary chandeliers, ordinary-sized buildings, or on immense hanging structures. This artist's "castles in the sky" suggest floating satellites, each a self-contained miniature planet. Although the hangings are weighted by their buildings, there is airiness in their construction, and each is subtly different. *Ascent* presents a classically pyramidal structure of traditional buildings – turreted, mini-castles, while *Highrise* appears denser, a more modernly massive aggregation, in which the structural element of the chandelier is subsumed by a growing forest of buildings. While the chandelier as a form suggests the accumulation of wealth, Bowman creates his distinctive "erased" drawings through a subtractive method. Like a sculptor, he removes the top-coated layer of applied graphite to reveal the image hidden beneath.





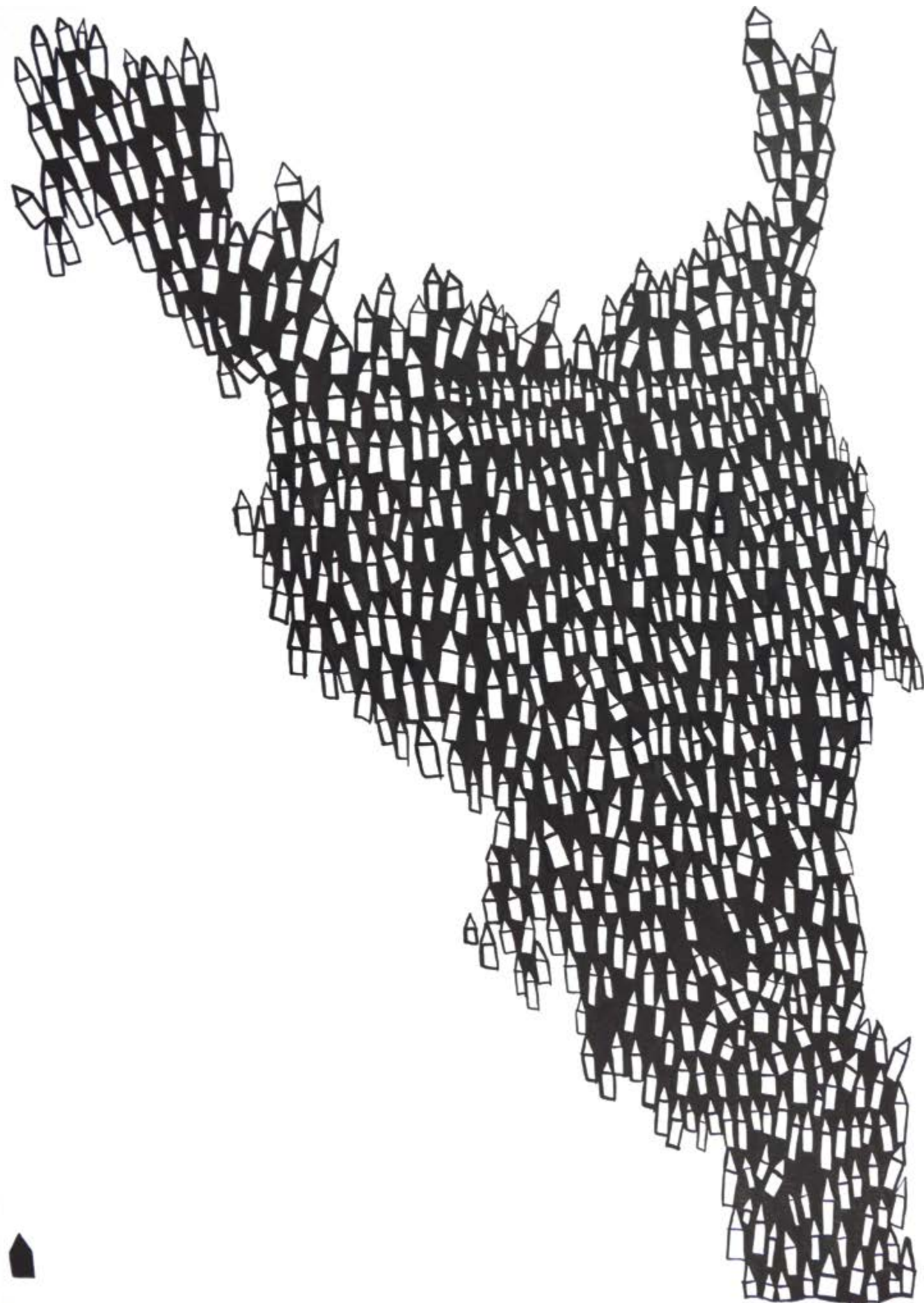
Hannah Raine Brenner-Leonard

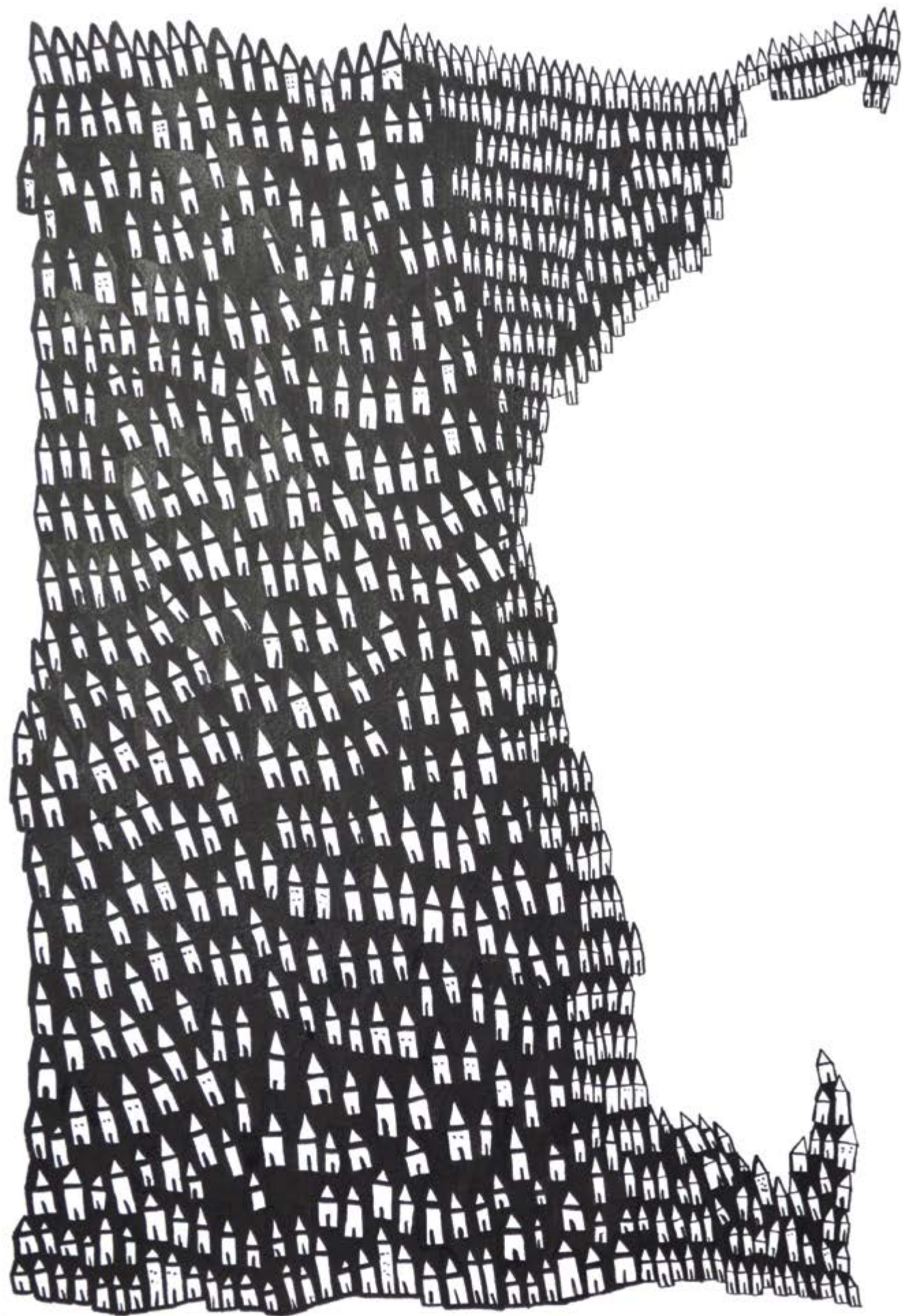
Four Mountains, 2012 (Above)
23 x 30 inches, Sumi Ink, Rives BFK

Cloak, 2013 (Opposite)
Sumi Ink, Rives BFK, 30 x 23 inches

Canyon, 2013 (Following page)
Sumi Ink, Rives BFK, 23 x 30 inches
Collection of the artist

Each of Brenner-Leonard's drawings reveals itself differently to the viewer, whether up close or at a distance. From across the gallery, her works appear geologic — craggy mountains or stalagmites, curled, and ready to topple. Convulsive and coiled with energy, each form is a plethora of tiny houses, minutely different, and carefully built by the artist's hand. Brenner-Leonard plays with uniqueness and tweaks the old trope that "a man's home is his castle." Her works question the idea of the exclusiveness in the mass produced, similar constructions of the modern home dweller. And yet, in each small variance between the houses the artist suggests the power of a singular narrative. The houses look similar, as would the houses on a suburban block, but their similarity is deceptive. As she notes, "each one has been witness to the unique stories that have unfolded within its walls."







Michele Brody

North 119th Street, November 2013 Harlem Roots series, 2013-2016

Dyed handmade papers, watermarking, and light fixture, dimensions variable

Collection of the artist

Brody's art evokes memory. The softly glowing townhouses of her sculpture integrate the vernacular of Harlem's late 19th-century brick and brownstone architecture with a ghostly feeling of a vanished city block. In keeping with this gaze to the past, Brody's technique in making her sculptures is informed by watermarking, the historic process used to embed symbols within the actual fibers of the printed papers. In her art, stencils of Harlem brownstones are laid out in the papermaking mold to offset the pulp fibers. She makes her final pieces from multiple layers of dyed watermarked and handmade sheets of paper and embeds them with sprouted seeds, which when set aglow by light illuminate images of the architecture — a representation of the layers of constructed history that slowly build in every neighborhood. Her work becomes a *pentimento* — a shadowy trace of earlier history made visible in the light. Brody's neighborhood has the layered history of a place that over time has experienced cycles of gentrification and decay.

Adrien Broom

11th Hour, 2011

Sublimated metal art print, 40 x 60 inches

Collection of the artist

Photographic stills from production of *11th Hour*, 2011
(Following page)

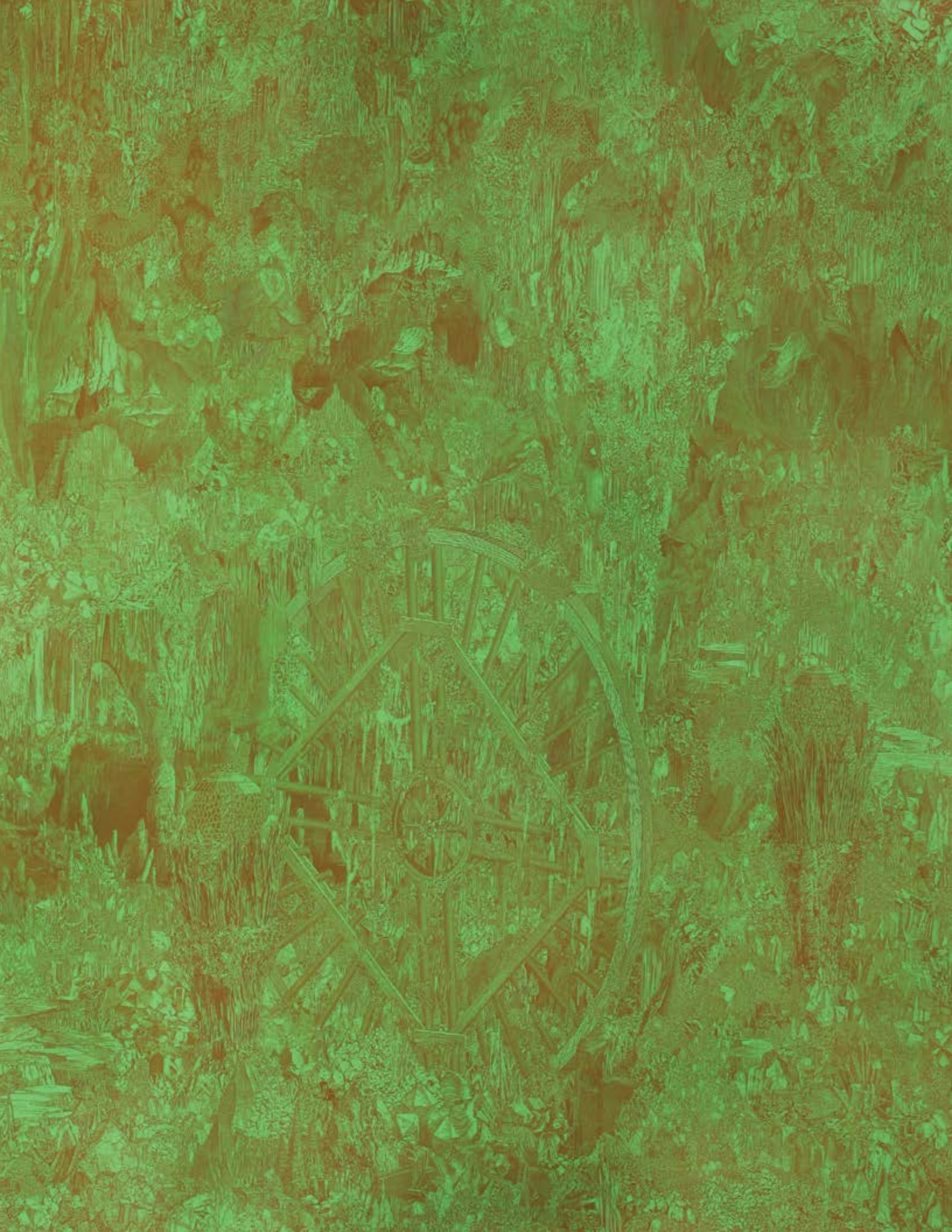
Adrien Broom - Behind the Scenes, 2011

Video by Nick Stefani



A young woman dressed in mourning black holds a rabbit and stares deadpan at an intruding zebra entering the façade of her drawing room deep in the woods. Broom is a specialist in neo-Surrealist imagery, and her title for this work, *11th Hour*, can only indicate that something dramatic is about to happen – a deadline fast approaches. Broom suggests that the corseted constraints of this woman's existence are about to be set free. Her civilized and constructed reality is literally breaking down around her, as the primeval nature of the forest and of untamed beasts enter her domicile. Broom's architecture reflects the stage-set quality of refinement giving way to something more urgent. Perhaps soon the protagonist of this drama will take down her hair. Broom constructed the set for *11th Hour* in the woods at Ray of Light Farm in East Haddam, Connecticut, and she utilized the farm's rescue animals, including a "zonkey" (half zebra, half donkey) for her photograph. While the photograph props were taken away at the end of the shoot, the architectural structure was left for the local children. Broom says, "I've been told they turned it into a fort." A prescient adaptation?





Dean Byington

Wheel 3, 2010

Oil on linen, 52 x 42 inches

Detail (Right)

Reconstruction (New Eiffel), 2015

(Following page)

Ink, tape, pencil and toner on paper, 10 x 13 inches

Courtesy of Leslie Tonkonow Artworks + Projects

Byington's canvases are quiet cacophonies of bridges and scaffolding, castles, and cottages. A claustrophobic cave drips with strange details that unveil a hidden world of architectural wonder. Byington's monochrome images are crammed with detail that signal a horror vacui – the fear of empty space in artistic compositions. The blue or green tones Byington chooses for these “underground” paintings are the very tones, dim and phosphorescent, that emanate from caves. As he says, “In my mind, the color green signifies underground.” Here, as in most caves, strange inhabited stalagmites and stalactites rise up from the floor and drop down from the ceiling. Byington paints with a single color, drawing the eye to the minute lines of his imagery – so subtle and exquisitely detailed that they are impossible to photograph with satisfaction. In this canvas, a huge central wheel looms, dwarfing everything around it. The wheel appears a structure that augers the changing fortunes of a whole metropolis of cave-dwellers. Their Byzantine city half-constructed, half-organic, feels at once primitive, and strangely futuristic – perhaps a necessary result of some catastrophic climate change.





James Casebere

Landscape with Houses (Dutchess County, NY) #9, 2010

Framed digital chromogenic print, mounted to Dibond paper

44 x 55 1/2 inches

Courtesy Sean Kelly Gallery

INV# JC-222

Casebere is one of the leading artists using constructed photography in his images. Without the aid of computer graphics or digital intervention, he created *Landscape with Houses* from the physical model of a suburban subdivision. Though his art depicts the suburbs in comforting familiarity, it springs purely from his imagination. This landscape portrays a lineup of miniature houses without the presence of human life, an ideal or a horror, depending on your point of view. The life of these houses is drained away, although they remain perfect examples of familiar suburban architecture. At the same time, they are stifling and airless, created in a vacuum that does not allow for the messiness of human life. Casebere's choice of a Hudson Valley locale links his work to the majesty of 19th-century Hudson River School landscape painting, while also suggesting that historic landscape was transformed through development. Inspired by the growing exurbs of New York City, and created in the immediate aftermath of the last foreclosure crisis, the sports field in #9 sits empty, a void at the middle of the composition. One has the feeling that its empty bleachers will never be filled.





Laurent Chéhère

Dr. Pierre, from Flying Houses series, 2017

35 1/2 x 35 1/2 inches

Limited Edition of 7

Cabaret, from Flying Houses series, 2017 (Following page)

35 1/2 x 35 1/2 inches

Limited Edition of 7

Courtesy of the Muriel Guepin Gallery

The townhouses of Paris float upward to the sky, leaving below their confinement in the crowded, multicultural Ménilmontant district of Paris, the neighborhood that is this artist's primary source of inspiration. In his *Flying Houses* series, the houses are fantastical visions of working-class Paris, as well as inspired by fantasy elements in books such as *Around the World in 80 Days* (1873), the 19th-century prototype by French author Jules Verne. In *Dr. Pierre* the tone is ethereal, while *Cabaret* (following page) skirts the fine line between jolly and scary, as the huge mouth of the doorway stands ready to devour airborne residents. The metaphor of this home leaving the earth, becoming literally and emotionally unmoored, is energizing. Chéhère, drawing from an encyclopedia of visual references collected in his neighborhood, photomontages hundreds of different architectural elements — cornices, doors, balconies, turrets, windows, chimneys, antennas, and decorative graffiti. Thus, the artist recombines bits of buildings into whimsical structures, both retaining their scruffy appearance, while emphasizing their magical aura.

Castles in the air -

they are so easy to take refuge in.

And so easy to build too

Henrik Ibsen



Thomas Cole

The Voyage of Life: Youth, 1850

James Smillie (engraver)

Engraving in black on wove paper

Image: 15 3/16 x 22 7/8 inches

Sheet (trimmed to plate): 19 15/16 x 26 9/16 inches

Collection of the Hudson River Museum

The fantasy palace that dominates Thomas Cole's original painting *The Voyage of Life: Youth* (1842), inspired this exhibition. An important and frequently reproduced work by 19th-century America's most significant landscape painter, Thomas Cole, *The Voyage of Life* (now in the collection of the National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.) is set along a symbolic river. Its four canvases represent man's journey: Childhood, Youth, Manhood, and Old Age. Immensely popular, these paintings were reproduced as a series of etchings. In the second of the four scenes, the young protagonist, overconfident in the opportunities life offers and in his ability to take them on, leaves his protective guardian angel to chase dreams of grandeur that take form in a misty palace rising like a vision on the horizon. The youth's ambition is symbolized by the castle Cole paints as an orientalist mirage, tipping his hat to the then perceived extravagant exoticism of structures such as the palace of the Taj Mahal. Cole's castle is both an architectural folly and a metaphor for the folly of youthful dreams.





Béatrice Coron

Mad Growth, 2010

Cut Tyvek 45 x 45 inches

Edition of 4

My House is Greener Than Yours, 2011

(Following page, left)

Cut Tyvek, 44 x 44 inches

Detail (Following page, bottom left)

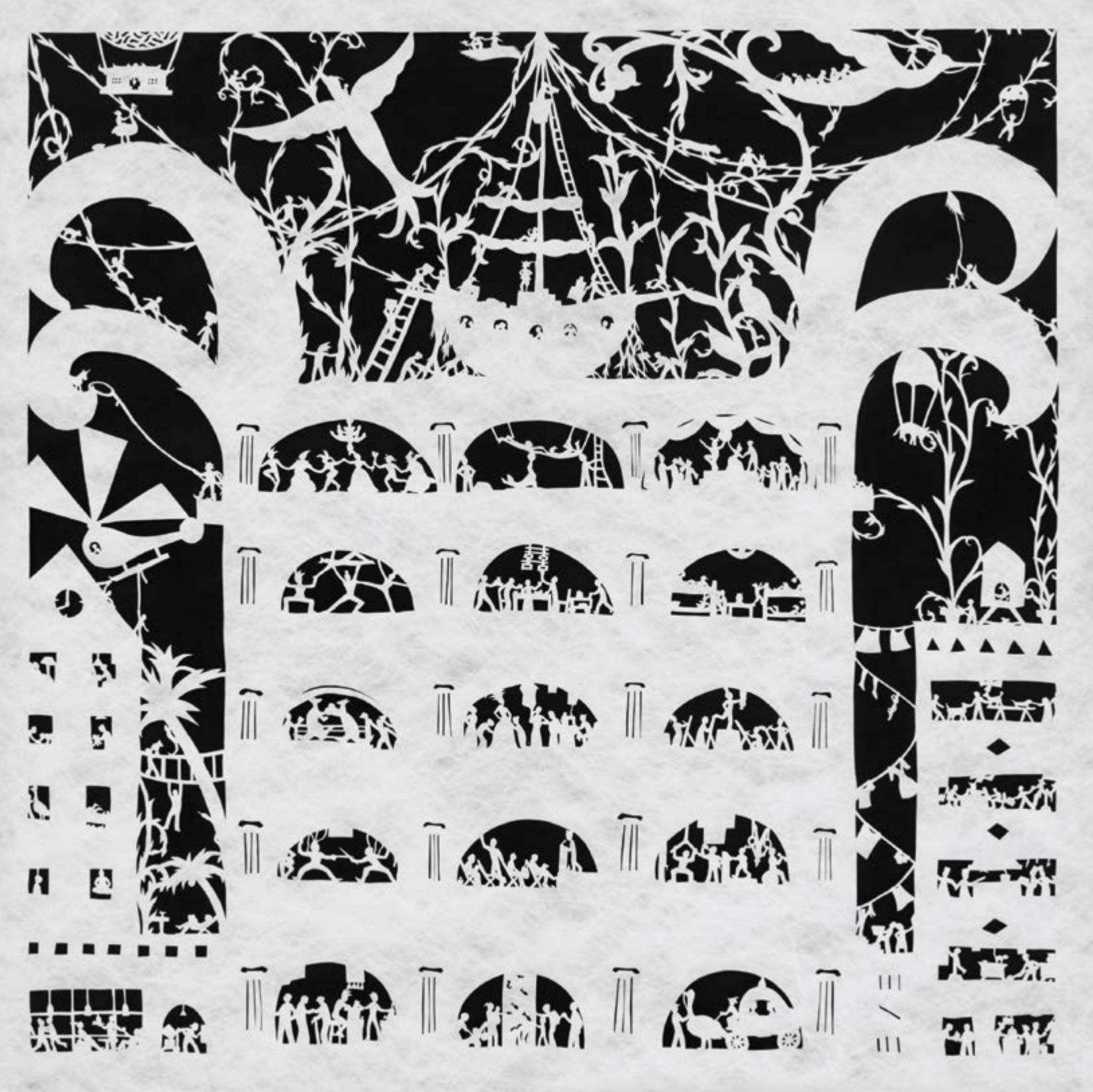
Lilliland, 2014 (Following page, right)

Cut Tyvek, 31 x 51 inches

Edition of 4

Collection of the artist

Crammed with curves and curlicues, Coron creates a vision of a fantasy world brimming with overpopulation that forces an architectural design alternative. In *Mad Growth* (2010), and *My House is Greener Than Yours* (2011), she shows us cities and crowds cut in delicate silhouettes that burst from trees transformed into dwellings. In *Lilliland* (2014), a multitude of balloons ascend, each trailing an airship that mingles and flies with birds of the air. At root is her desire to create stories from her cut art that compel us to engage our own fantasies. She says the story is always "the bait, the cure and the hope." Coron's frenetic works are a triumph of line that manage to be both off-kilter and charming. A native of France, she has lived in Egypt, Mexico, and China, as well as New York, and knows teeming city life. Her invented cities are a mélange of her memories, associations, and observations, as she seeks to create archetypal stories we are able to identify but which are not records of particular times or places.





Will Cotton

The Consummation of Empire, 2008

Oil on linen, 84 x 56 inches

Courtesy of the artist and Mary Boone Gallery

Cotton's castle of cake, candy, and ice cream cones derives its weighty name from a famous painting series by 19th-century American artist Thomas Cole — *The Course of Empire*, 1833-1836 — which proposed a relentless cycle of history, where powerful nations built towards empire, then violently destruct. Cotton's work becomes a tribute to the peak moment of an empire's impermanence, the splendor before the fall. The soft twilight of "the violet hour" over the frosting-covered castle and its pale reflection in a sugary moat tells of fading strength. Like a sand castle, this candy castle is impermanent. Rot may set within the castle walls, even as we admire the confectionery sheen of its exterior. The artist's rococo aesthetic draws on the work of 18th-century artists like François Boucher, Jean-Honoré Fragonard, and Giambattista Tiepolo. Cotton's work, like theirs, is certainly the definition of pretty. He manages, though, to impart the holiday cheer of the gingerbread house, while conjuring the darker story of the witch's alluring abode in "Hansel and Gretel." The black licorice window of his castle's tower is an ominous blank amidst a sea of pacific pastel.

*This castle hath a pleasant seat; the air
Nimbly and sweetly recommends itself
Unto our gentle senses.*

William Shakespeare

William Richard Crutchfield

Beached City, 1972

Screen print on paper

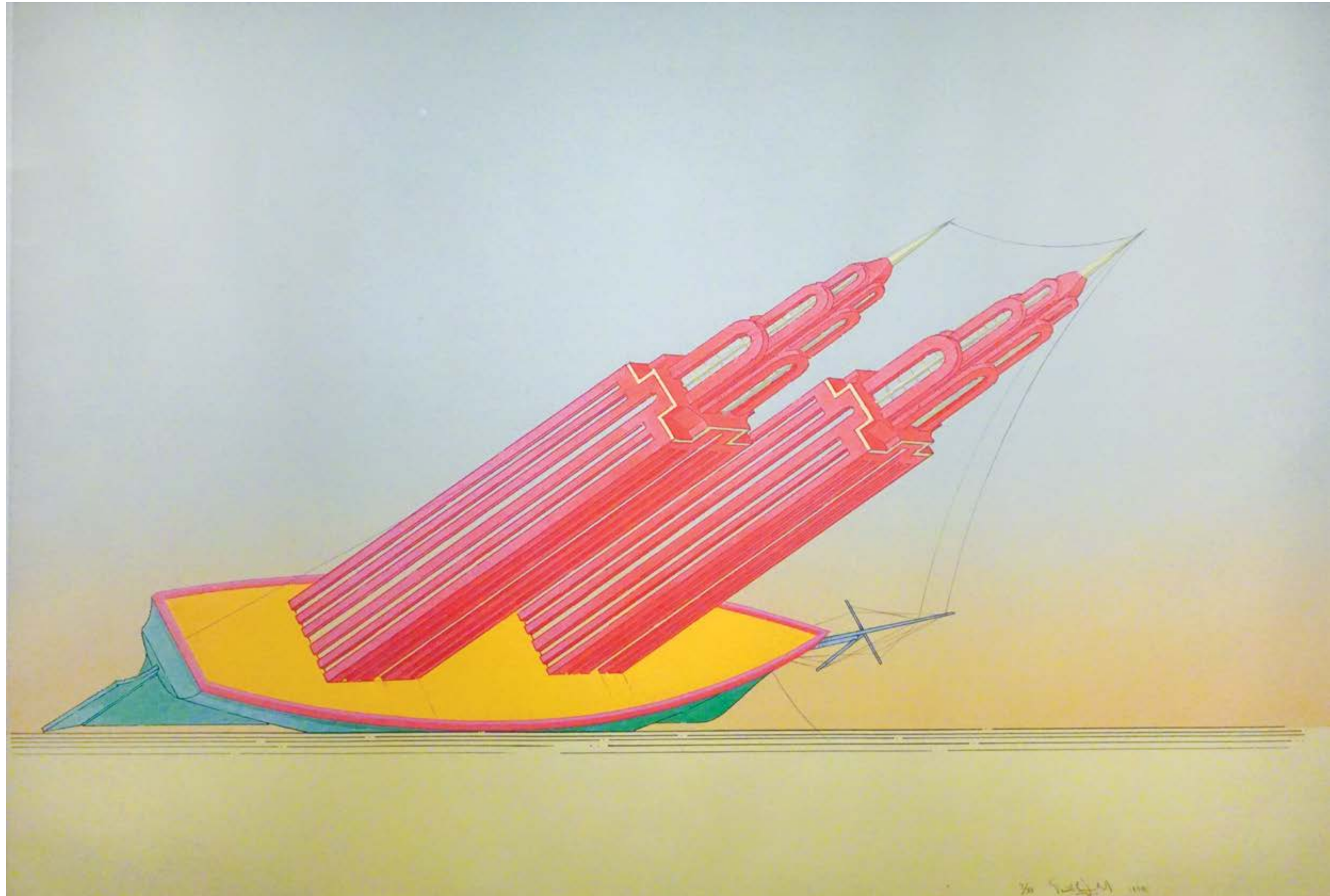
27 1/4 x 39 7/8 inches

Edition 7/35

Collection of the Staten Island Museum

Gift of Abraham Tannenbaum A1974.29.13

Beached City is a simplified and boldly graphic design imbued with poetic sadness. Crutchfield morphs a “ship of state” from a ship and two pink “masts” that resemble the Empire State Building. The ship is hobbled by the outsize nature of its “masts,” which are gradually capsizing and far too large to be supported by the small hull on which they stand. Angled, they appear phallic or missile-like — a danger — even as their own existence is threatened by submersion. The artist gives his work an eerie calm: not a ripple breaks the water, not a cloud breaks the sky. *Beached City* is thematically related to a 13-lithograph series created by the artist, entitled *Air Land Sea*, of dislocated ships and trains, but here the artist makes little differentiation between the sky and the sea, save for a gradually changing spectrum of light. It is tempting, given the creation of this work in the early 1970s, to view it as a fantastical metaphor for declining cities during this time of America’s urban crisis.





Linda L. Cunningham

Ta Prohm II, 2009

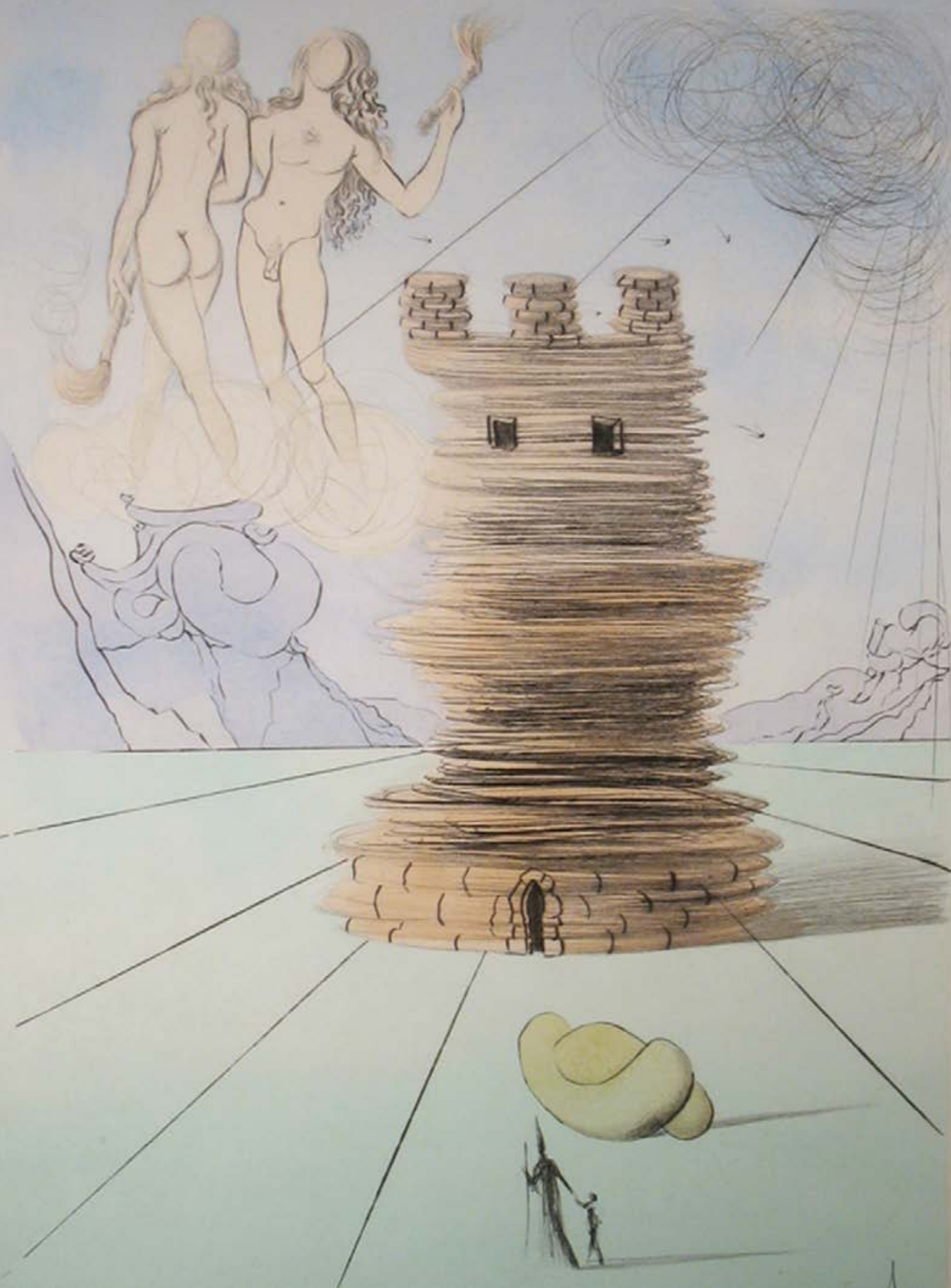
Pastel, ink, collage, 43 x 44 inches

Courtesy of the artist

Cunningham's building is being slowly devoured. A resident of the New York City borough of the Bronx, a place that encapsulates both architectural destruction and renewal, often side by side, Cunningham is drawn to the remnants of the architectural elements of semi-destroyed structures. This artist embraces the idea that organic forms of nature will invariably triumph over buildings created by human beings. Here, enormous tree roots dwarf and strangle an ancient temple of Angkor. The roots appear as a giant, crushing hand that forces the temple roof to knuckle under to a greater power. Cunningham uses torn edges of paper and broken forms to refer to the wartorn history of Cambodia. Although she bases her compositions on actual structures, they transcend the documentary to become metaphors for Time's relentless progress. Ancient ruins cause us to reflect on the "poetry of decay," as well as on our own speeded-up cycle of change and destruction in the 21st-century world.

You make kingdoms and castles on your own.

Stephan Jenkins



Salvador Dalí

Simon, 1972

From: *Twelve Tribes of Israel* series

Drypoint with stenciled coloring

33 x 27 1/4 inches

Gala's Castle, 1974 (Right)

From: *After 50 Years of Surrealism* series

Drypoint engraving with hand coloring

33 x 29 inches

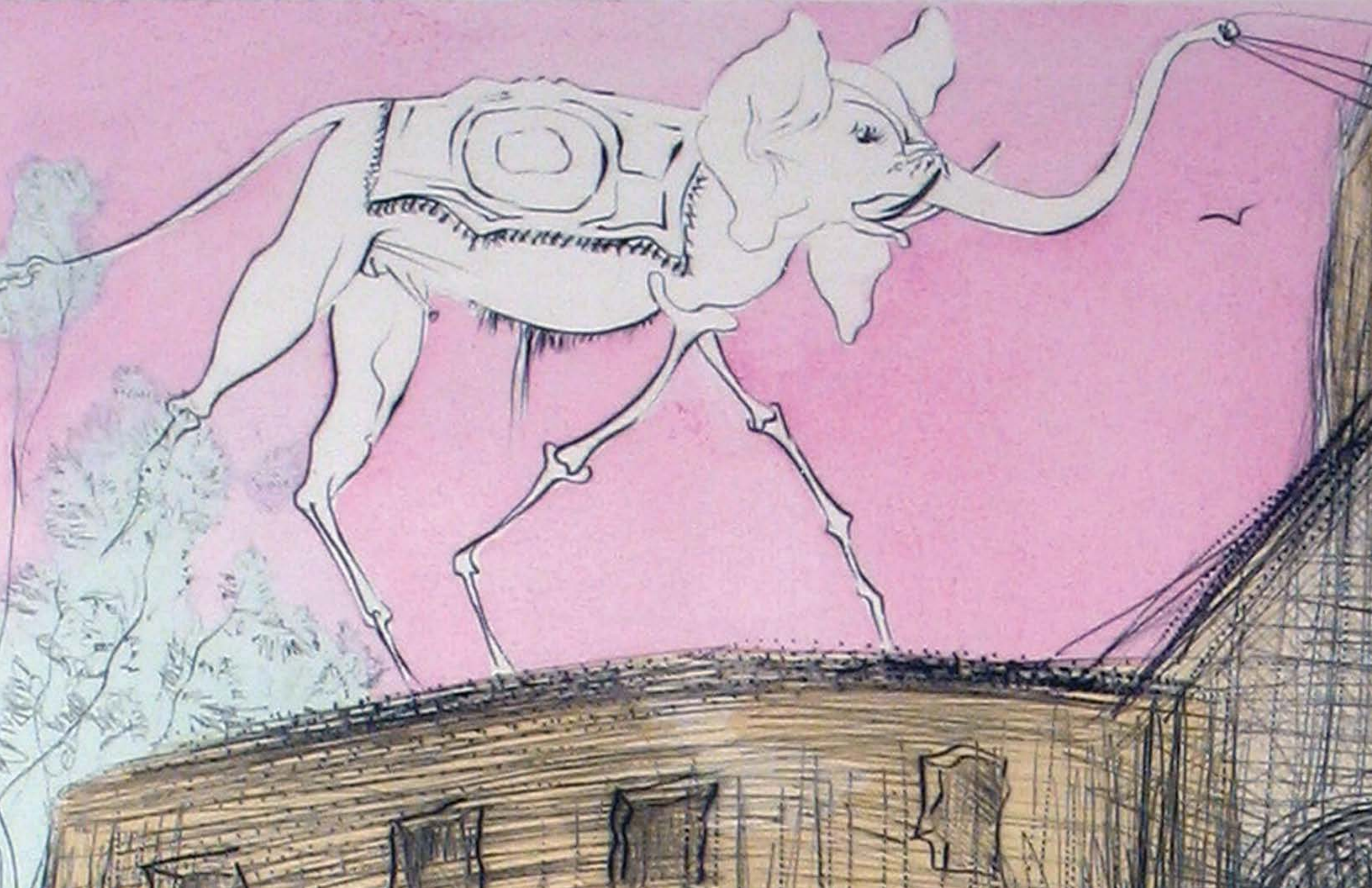
Edition: XXXV

Detail (Following page)

Courtesy of DTR Modern Galleries



A white elephant on spindly legs makes its way, ballet-like, along a castle's roof. This spider-legged pachyderm is a recurring motif in Dalí's work that references the early Dadaist influence on Surrealist art. Famous for his melting clocks and bizarre imagery inspired by dreams, Spaniard Salvador Dalí was one of the most famous artists of the 20th century, and a key figure in the Surrealist movement of the 1920s and 30s. He based imagery around the unconscious, and often included unusual architectural forms, such as the two distinctly different castles on view. *Gala's Castle* is part of the artist's portfolio *50 Years After Surrealism*, created to commemorate the anniversary of Surrealism in art. It shows the medieval building that Dalí purchased for his wife Gala, and which eventually served as her final resting place. *Simon* is from a series of etchings commemorating the 25th anniversary of the State of Israel's independence. Each etching in this series represents one of the 12 Tribes of Israel. Simon was the second of the twelve sons of Jacob, each of whom leading a tribe.





Thomas Doyle

Subsidence (Cobble Hill), 2007

Mixed media, 18 x 18 x 18 inches

Collection of the artist

[Detail \(Following page\)](#)

Stretching his work across time and space, Doyle presents a mysterious and partially buried row of Brooklyn townhouses. His exquisitely rendered houses were inspired by historic Cobble Hill. George Washington, 300 years ago, stood on this hill, which rose nearly 80 feet high, to watch the Battle of Brooklyn lost and his troops flee across the Hudson River to the island of Manhattan. The British leveled Cobble Hill, and never again was it a place for them to fear. Doyle, fascinated by the disappearance of the Hill, saw its leveling as an extreme example of the reshaping of a terrain. *Subsidence* is his fantasy version of Cobble Hill, where he superimposes some of the buildings standing on this spot today to emphasize the theme of burial and reemergence. Doyle says, "it is as if the past has reckoned with the present to produce a liminal world."





Peter Hamlin

Living Matrix Palace

Oil on canvas, 40 x 40 inches

Courtesy of Kenise Barnes Fine Art

A wild bouquet of buildings, birds, flowers, robotics, and a frisky big-eyed wolf rise through a sky of hot pink acrylic and iridescence. Hamlin's painting is fun and fantastical, and it is informed by his research of historical architectural styles from the ancient world through the speculative future he imagines. A graduate of Lehman College, this artist's trademark humor and playfulness makes his sometimes disturbing themes palatable, as he explores the technologies that are fast changing how we experience the world. *Living Matrix Palace* shows technology that blurs the boundaries between the real and the imagined, and Hamlin portrays an architecture designing and building (or destroying) itself. The palace floats on, "nanofolk" move about, and tiny insects smudge the line between biological and artificial life.

*If you have built castles in the air,
your work need not be lost;
that is where they should be.
Now put the foundations under them.*

Henry David Thoreau

Cameron Hayes

Orphanages Make the Best Skyscrapers, 2011

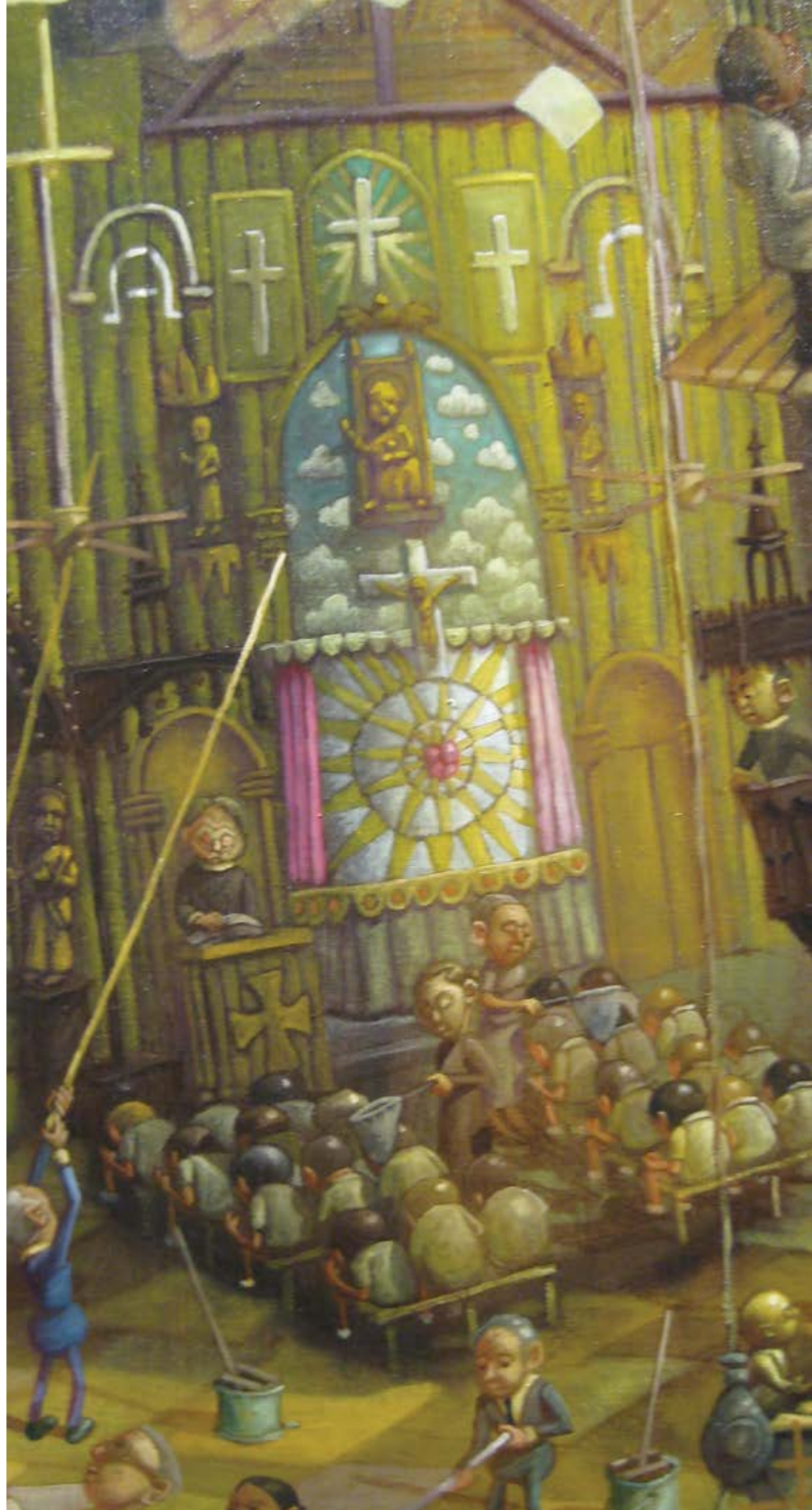
Oil on linen, 78 x 100 inches

Courtesy of Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, Inc.

Details (Following page)

Hayes draws visual inspiration for his grandly scaled canvas from the work of 16th - century Dutch artists Hieronymus Bosch and Pieter Bruegel the Elder, particularly Bruegel's famous paintings of the Tower of Babel. Behind his unusual title and the rapidly rising constructions that cram his composition, Hayes makes a specific point: "Orphans make up the best corporations because so many of the people who work in them, especially investment bankers, lawyers, and management consultants, need to win the approval of older men in suits. The more neglected a child is, especially as a boy by his father, the harder he will work as an adult for the corporation. . . .The Human Resource departments of big companies see a generation of needy workers unconsciously drawn to being patted on the head by rich old white men in suits. . . . In these skyscrapers the elevators only go up. Not to strive to the top through work is to freefall to the bottom. Many workers carry their chalk drawings in their brief cases, and many psychiatrists are sent straight to the top of the skyscrapers to wait for the most successful workers." In Hayes' worldview, striving becomes a kind of mental illness, and the world's most impressive edifices are symptomatic of the disease.







Robert Hite

Black Willow Tower #1, 2015 (Following page, center)

Wood, 110 inches x 32 inches x 24 inches

Courtesy of the artist and Carrie Haddad Gallery

Detail (Left)

Black Willow Tower #2, 2015-2016 (Following page, left)

Wood, 105 inches x 24 inches x 28 inches

Courtesy of the artist and Carrie Haddad Gallery

River Tower, 2007 (Following page, far right)

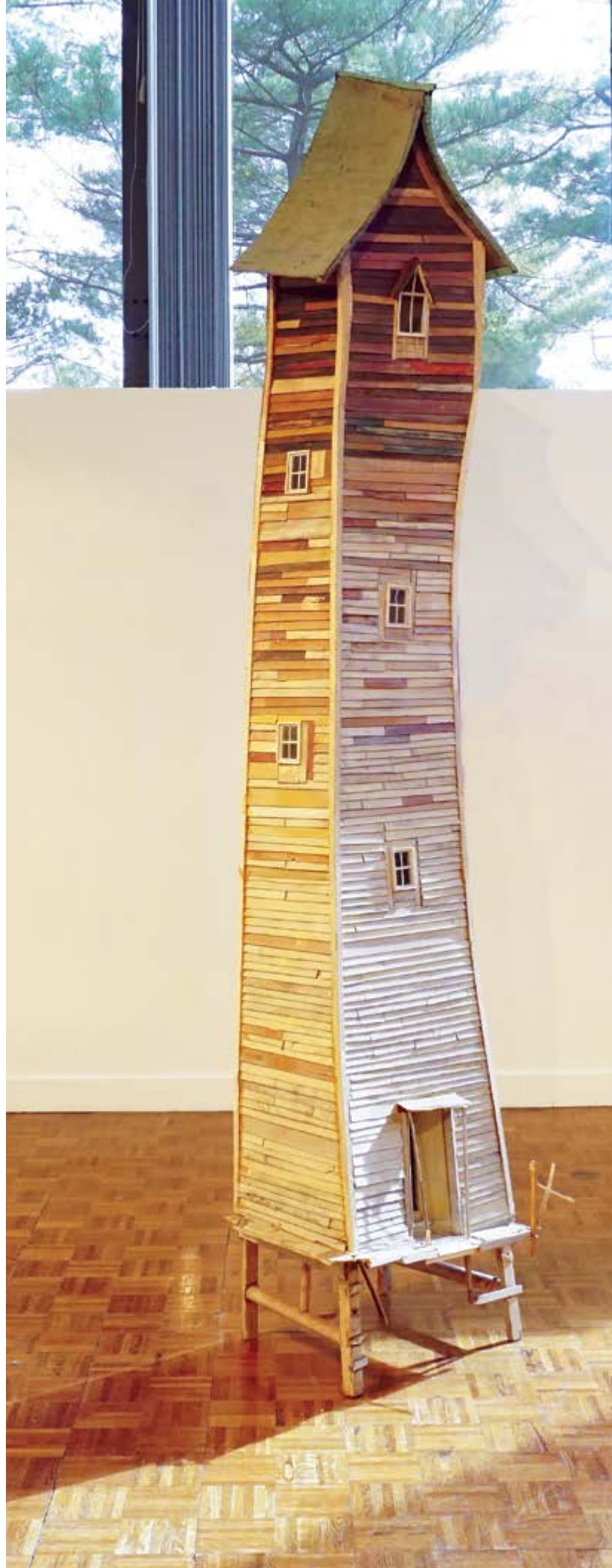
Wood, 123 inches x 28 inches x 22 inches

Collection of Robert and Tanya Murray

In our time of unrelenting hurricanes, Hite's tilted towers seem particularly uneasy structures. Many of his buildings resemble the tumbledown homes of his native South, where he says: "There was a thread of violence or oppression or suppression – an undertone that wasn't benign." Hite calls his sculptures "an homage to people with lives that don't get noticed so much." Fragile and precarious, his constructions of small stilted legs, peaked roofs, and shabby, weathered siding are reminders of a life, which progress and end happen quick and fast, outside our control. But in their visual wobbliness, these towers are filled with insouciant charm and have an energetic fairy-tale character. Imagine your delight coming across these structures along a river bank. Are they birdhouses on steroids or shelters for the poor? *River Tower* might be the place a witch would lock Rapunzel. Although Hite acknowledges that there is whimsy in these pieces, he notes "their pathos and an ominous quality." The artist walks a delicate line, seeking to capture beauty, photographing his structures in the natural settings where they appear at home, but also desiring to "somehow have a dialogue with the underbelly of who we are."

Living in a castle is objectively romantic.

Lev Grossman





David LaChapelle

Burning Down the House, 1996

Photograph, 30 x 40 inches

Collection of David LaChapelle Studio, Inc.

Detail (Following page)

The castle is in flames and the marauders are gleeful! LaChapelle gained prominence as a photographer when his early work was noticed by Pop Artist Andy Warhol and he was recruited to work at Warhol's *Interview* magazine. LaChapelle became known for his portraits of celebrities and models in the most extreme settings. *Burning Down the House* is a prime example from this period of his career, and portrays the iconic fashion designer Alexander McQueen and the British magazine editor, Isabella Blow, McQueen's muse. McQueen was 27 and had just begun his relationship with the fashion house Givenchy when LaChapelle took this photograph, and he is shown wearing one of his own gowns. The burning castle is a symbol of authority for LaChapelle and a metaphor for the entrenched stronghold of the more conservative factions of the fashion industry that McQueen was determined to overthrow. The photographer presents McQueen and Blow as wild, anarchical figures and exaggerates their rowdy, manic energy. The price of rebellion takes a psychic toll: Blow killed herself by ingesting poison at the age of 48 in 2007, and McQueen committed suicide by hanging at the age of 40 in 2010.





Julie Langsam

Gropius Landscape (Director's Residence), 2012

Oil on canvas, 42 x 42 inches



Gropius Landscape (Master's House Kandinsky / Klee), 2014 (Opposite)

Oil on canvas, 63 x 63 inches

Courtesy of 532 Gallery Thomas Jaeckel

Langsam combines classic Modernist art and architecture on her canvases, presenting a study in contrasts. In her *Gropius* landscapes, she places "portraits" of some of Modernism's best known architecture, painting its severe lines and pristine whiteness against highly colored abstract forms and romantically stormy skies. Each canvas shows a house designed by Walter Gropius, a founder of the Bauhaus School known for arts and crafts design and architecture. Langsam isolates the houses among dark clouds that partially obscure the sunset, and below paints reproductions of abstract paintings that resemble those by Modernist painters Josef Albers, Ellsworth Kelly, Ad Reinhardt, and Brice Marden. In her paintings Langsam creates a reverential space for these Modernist structures, a very different feeling from the omnipresence of Modernism in the mass market we visit every day and she returns a glamorous promise of tomorrow to the high-Modern architecture receding into the historical past.



Armando Marino

Revolution in the House of Colors, 2011-2012

Oil on canvas, 84 x 84 inches

Courtesy of 532 Gallery Thomas Jaeckel

On a dark and stormy night, a house aglow with vivid colors is ready to fly apart at the seams. Strong color and bold brushwork give this painting a spectral beauty that makes the tragedy this artist is about to unfold doubly painful. Marino conveys the danger of violent revolution in his huge painting, where a building's structure appears flimsy and provisional, its squares of color akin to a patchwork quilt burnt and frayed, rather than a construction of solid bricks and mortar. Not noticeable at first glance, two shadowy figures are silhouetted atop the roof. With horned heads and without facial features, they appear demonic like the black crows they mutely watch. Do they see coming destruction, or are they the cause? This artist's flimsy house of colors is a metaphor for the problems found in Communist Cuba, a "Potemkin village," constructed to deceive others to think a situation better than it is. Marino says he often tries to "confuse the spectator with a beautiful image where the essential element is very often exactly what we cannot see."

*If you are going to build something in the air
it is always better to build castles
than houses of cards*

Georg C. Lichtenberg



Jonathan Monaghan

Disco Beast, 2016

Video (color, sound), media player, screen or projector,
dimensions variable, landscape orientation; 18-minute loop

Edition of 3, 1 AP

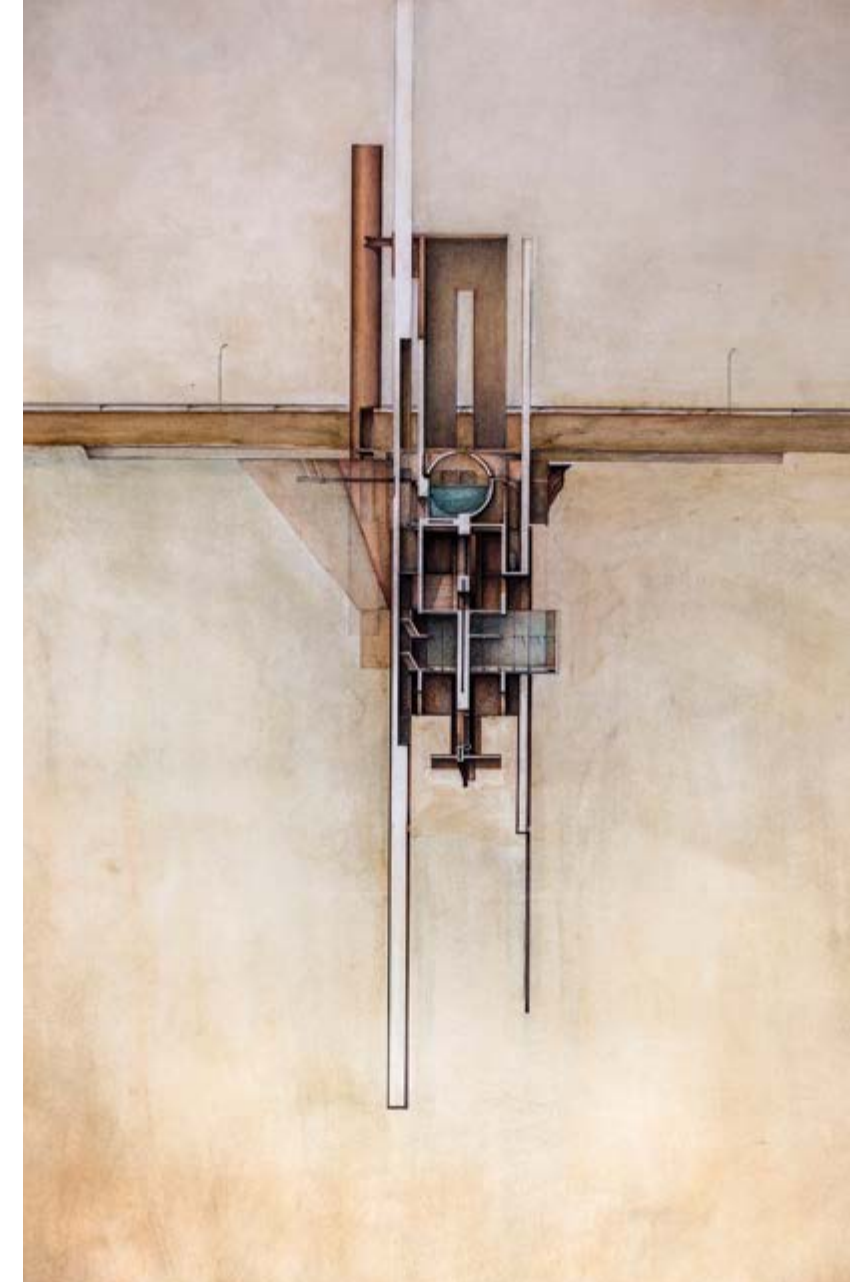
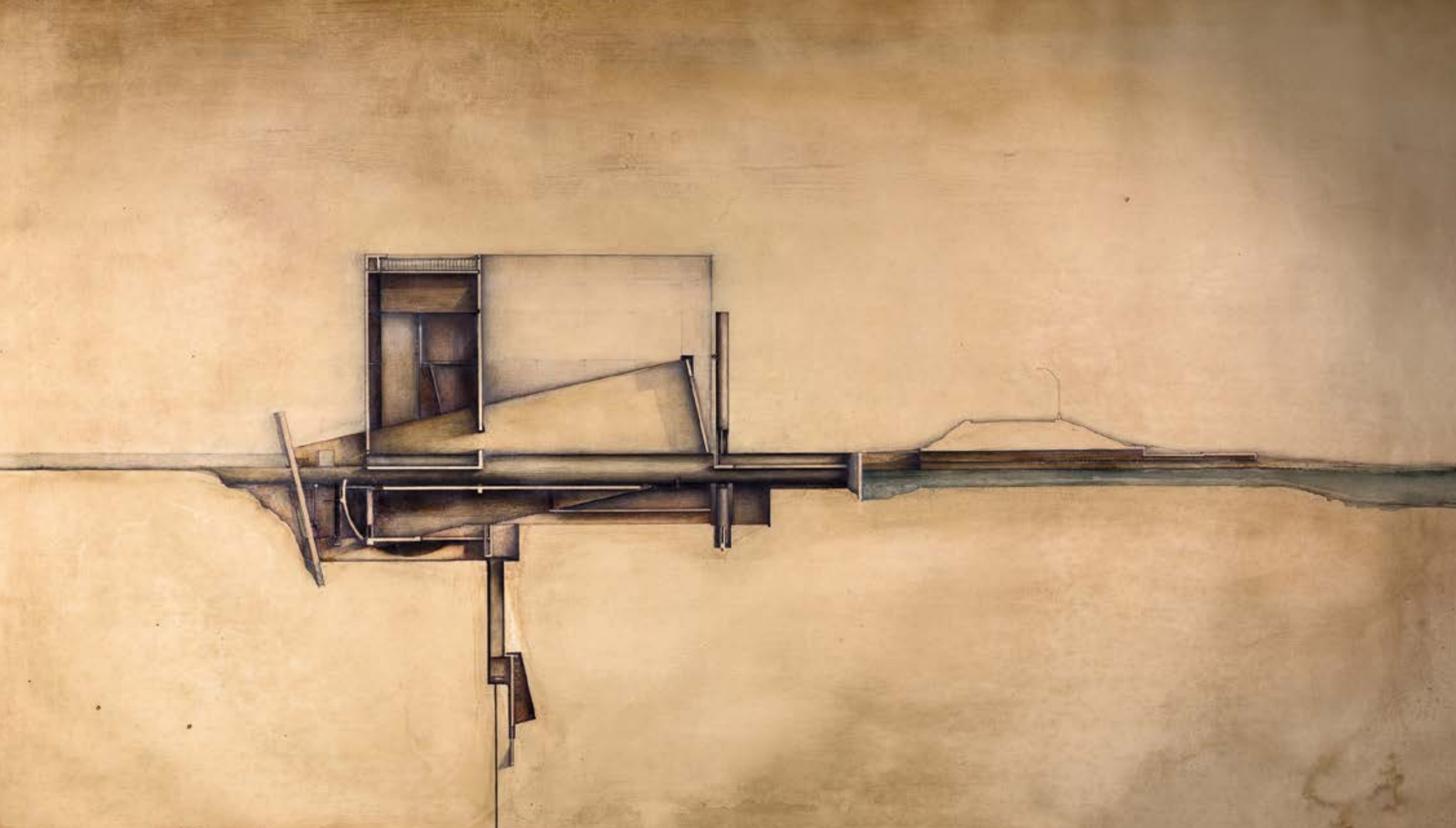
Music by Furniteur

Detail (Following page)

Courtesy of bitforms gallery, New York

In Monaghan's mesmerizing video, a white unicorn journeys from a Starbucks-like interior to a Fabergé egg-like palace floating through the sky. Monaghan creates a triumph of kitsch in the rainbow colors coursing through the unicorn's horn and the sublime sight of a unicorn-topped palace rising to a thumping disco beat. Without spoken word, and scored with low club music, the "disco beast" evolves and transforms, as it silently moves through spaces that open out like the layers of a Russian nesting doll. The "belly of the beast" is literally transformed into architecture. What allows Monaghan's work to rise above his motifs is the deadpan way, filled with religious solemnity, in which he presents his animal. In an endless loop, the unicorn's journey is turned into a sacrifice, a rite of passage. His mixing of architectural elements from generic coffee shop Modern to wedding cake Baroque, strangely serves to "create a coherent reality or a narrative where these absurd manifestations of power interact with actual power structures."





Juan Garcia-Nunez

Longitudinal Section, 1986

From: *Cenotaph for the Unclaimed Dead of NYC*

Oil washes, ink, color pencil on vellum

30 x 54 inches

Cross Section, 1986 (Right)

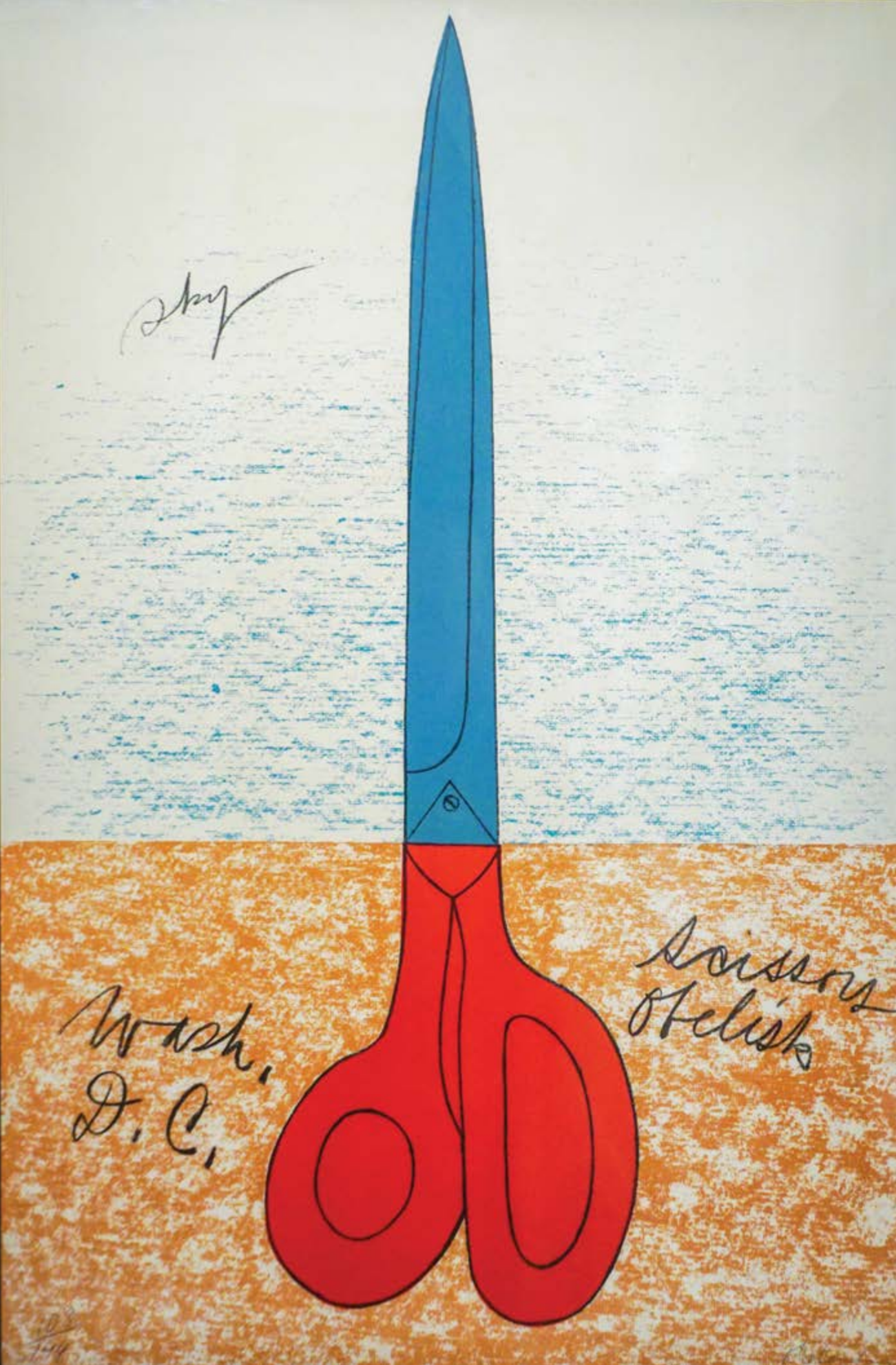
From: *Cenotaph for the Unclaimed Dead of NYC*

Oil washes, ink, color pencil on vellum

54 x 36 inches

Courtesy of Carrie Haddad Gallery

Rendered in rich browns and ochres, and depicted with Precisionist, geometric detail, Garcia-Nunez's work is a proposal for a never built monument to the dead. The artist was inspired by the history of Hart Island, which is part of New York City's Bronx borough. The island has a solemn story — it is the cemetery for the City's unclaimed dead, and more than a million people are buried here. Garcia-Nunez proposes a monument that would serve as a crematorium but at a site in Queens, away from Hart Island, to detach commemoration from the overwhelming melancholy of the island, and to encourage cremation instead of burial. At last Hart Island, a potter's field since the Civil War, could gradually return to nature. This building is monumental architecture, with a polished concrete slab piercing the horizon to serve as marker, tomb, and crematorium that also functions as a cylinder to contain the shore's waters, allowing the rhythm of the tide to symbolically and physically dictate the time when a barge with coffins could enter the building.



Claes Oldenburg

Washington Monument, 1968

Lithograph on paper, 30 x 20 inches

Collection of the Staten Island Museum

Oldenburg is one of the most famous artists associated with the Pop Art movement of the 1960s and is best known for his gigantic soft sculptures of everyday household objects. He has long played with ideas of fantasy for his public art proposals — whether renderings of island-sized slices of blueberry pie or plans to replace the Washington Monument with a gigantic pair of scissors. Oldenburg's print of the Washington Monument was created in 1968 at the height of social turmoil, and while the proposal was illusory, even absurd on its surface, the scissors were aligned with Oldenburg's ongoing concept of this monument as a kind of obstacle or disruption within an urban area. Washington Monument was part of a series of "anti-memorials" designed by Oldenburg that were exercises in paradox. They underscored the idea of commemorating a place or event for its negative impact, rather than celebration and that a monument can somehow be "against" a city and its overall image. Groundbreaking in their day, these prints are of renewed artistic relevance in our own era, where the idea of who and what is being commemorated in the public square is increasingly contested.

Lothar Osterburg

Piranesi (State 2), 2008

Photogravure with scraping, drypoint, aquatint spit bite, and line etching, tea stained on Somerset soft white, 22 x 16 inches on 27 x 20 inches

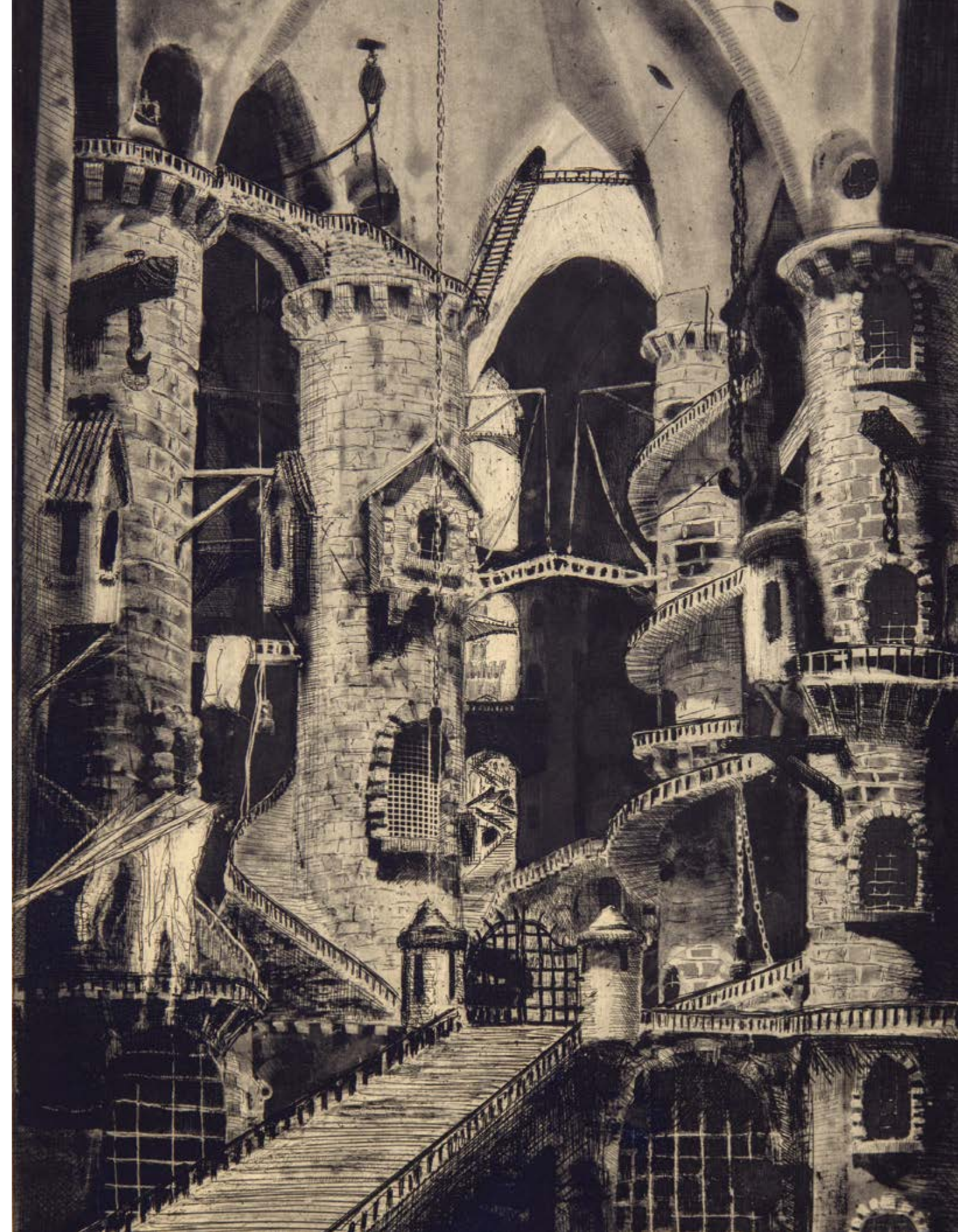
Vaulted Trailer Park (State 1), 2010 (Following page)

Photogravure with color aquatint and scraping on Somerset white, 32 x 23 inches
Edition of 7

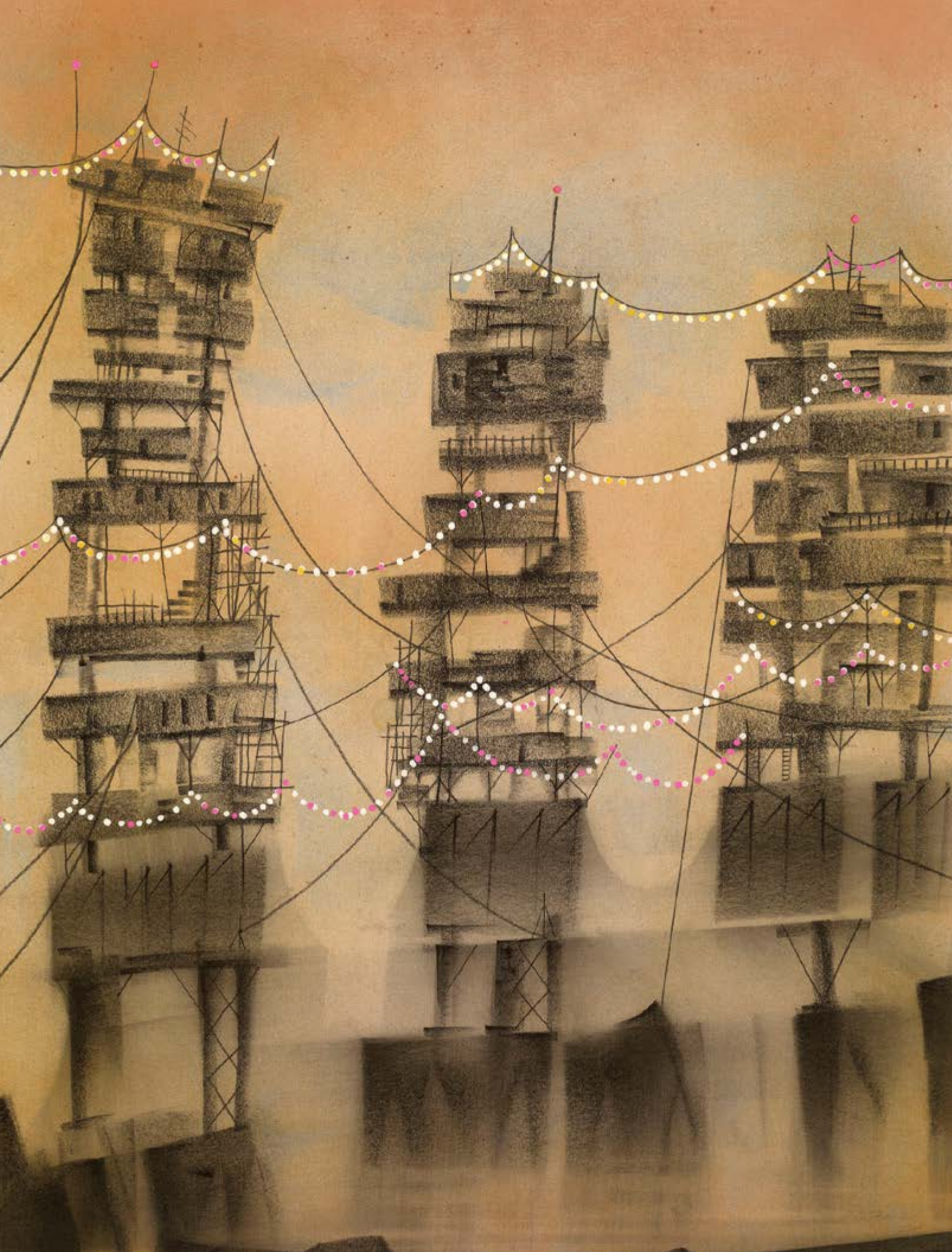
Detail (Following page)

Courtesy of Lesley Heller Gallery

Among the pillars and archways of a dark and cavernous space (following page) perch miniature mobile homes — a vertical trailer park in a hell that embodies the tenuous nature of existence. Osterburg's recent work is based on the 18th-century Italian artist Giovanni Battista Piranesi's *Carceri d'invenzione* (*Imaginary Prisons*) (1761), a series of etchings depicting enormous subterranean vaults with stairs and towering machines. Osterburg employs the 19th-century technique of photogravure, transferring an image from a photographic negative to a metal plate to etch it. Working from his memory of Piranesi's prints without following them detail for detail, he bases his images on photographing a three-dimensional model inspired by Piranesi's work. When making the model, Osterburg said, "I take memories, and recreate them after some time, so they are cleared of superfluous, emotional detail and try to boil them down to the essence." This artist works through multiple "states" of the etching plate, altering the details before reprinting. He also reworks original models to create variations in the series. The result is a combination of historical detail shifted by memory.







Kevin M. Paulsen

Untitled (Outskirts 7), 2014

Charcoal and chalk on paper, 24 x 18 inches

Last Man Standing in the Last Bastion, 2015 (Following page)

Acrylic and pigmented plaster on cotton, velvet mounted on panel, 37 3/4 x 41 inches

Courtesy of Kenise Barnes Fine Art

Detail (following page, left)

Paulsen's whimsical tiered pavilions could be nestled on the enchanting grounds of a pleasure palace or in one of the more vaguely "exotic" lands of Disney's EPCOT Center. The initial impression is at odds with the title *Last Man Standing in the Last Bastion (following page)*, which signals a darker reading of the work. Paulsen suggests that the decorative blue-and-white fence encircling the enclosure may not be enough to keep out danger. Perhaps this is a distant colonial outpost of a collapsing empire, the final holdout of a defeated war, as the carefully regimented trees surrounding the grove suggest a level of remaining care. Paulsen plays with notions of high and low culture and the stereotype of bad paintings on velvet. The artist uses pigmented plaster to simulate a fresco-like surface on theatrical velvet, and the method and finish recall paintings of antiquity and the itinerant "primitive" paintings of the American Colonial era. Paulsen's mystical compositions tell a timeless tale of the life cycle of civilizations, his subjects metaphorically describing the aspirations, achievements and frailties of human existence.

*A pleasing land of drowsy head it was,
dreams that wave before the half-shut eye;
And of gay castles in the clouds that pass,
For ever flushing round a summer sky.*

James Thomson





Laurie Simmons

Three Castles, 1998

Cibachrome print

53 x 65 inches

Collection of Dr. Patricia Wexler

Flags aflutter, a cheerful turreted castle, flanked by two small sister structures, greets us. The structures have all of the toy box charm that belong to the castles of “Mad” King Ludwig II of Bavaria, the unbalanced 19th-century king who built himself three suitably fairy-tale structures. These castles for a king who was a grudging constitutional monarch were the shining stone replicas of his daydreams about a medieval Germany filled with knights and dragons. The capricious architecture, in turn, inspired 1950s fantasies of the romantic past when Walt Disney used its illusory design for his own at Disneyland theme parks. While Diane Arbus found the creepy side of Disney’s faux-Romantic architecture, Simmons leans into the toy castle’s blatant artificiality. Her model appears as though it might come from a cheap snow globe, or a 99-cent birthday cake topper. Nevertheless, Simmons’ dramatically lit castle glows with a gorgeous and intense light, creating a nobility that shines through its cheap plastic roof. Sometimes effect is all.

Rachel Sydlowski

Cobalt Arcadia, 2018

Mixed media,

Site-specific installation, 33 feet diameter

Collection of the artist

Detail (Following page)

Like the 18th-century Italian artist Giovanni Battista Piranesi, Sydlowski understands the poetry of architecture. The Rotunda in the Gallery's space is transformed by her site-specific installation *Cobalt Arcadia* that represents a pagan mythological Eden. The artist has layered screen-printed architectural elements juxtaposed with flora to envelop the curving walls and central column of the space. These printed elements adapt to Marcel Breuer's existing architecture in the Rotunda, layering traditional Roman arches into a Modernist space, transforming the it into a giant three-dimensional collage. The dark blue ink used throughout the installation directly refers to cobalt, a ceramic colorant and the dye color indigo, a natural, dark blue, plant-based dye, and the color associated with dreams and intuition. Commonly applied to transferware, cobalt is used in ceramics to obtain a wide range of blues. Transferware is traditionally decorated with bucolic landscapes, architectural follies often set among gentle hills spotted with grazing sheep. The Rotunda's circular interior becomes a transitory space where visitors themselves are figures on the landscape of a giant round vessel turned inside out.







Eric Wesley

The Bell, Mannahatta, 2018

Wood, faux brick, metal piping, acrylic paint

156 x 192 x 192 inches

Courtesy of Bortolami Gallery

EW8564

Wesley's fantasy structure comprises the stylized intersecting facades of Taco Bell and Pizza Hut that form a *cruz*, or cross. The imaginary structure is topped by a Kentucky Fried Chicken bucket-shaped "bell." The three fast food chains are subtly linked, because, although they have distinct identities, they are part of the "Yum! Brands" Corporation. Wesley's sculpture springs from his fascination with the reuse of the thousands of empty, formerly fast food restaurants, marooned in strip-malls — the victims of so-called "mall glut" now blanketing the nation, as retail habits change. Business ingenuity and necessity turn former Pizza Huts into funeral parlors and Taco Bells into beauty salons. *The Bell, Mannahatta* refracts the elements of its suburban origins, relocated to New York City. The piece is also a commentary on the rapid "suburbanization" of New York's dining options as international chains increasingly consolidate their hold on pricey Manhattan real estate. Wesley's investigation into the structures of fast food distill them from banal, cookie cutter landmarks into distinct archetypal forms.



Xing, Danwen

Urban Fiction 19, 2006

C-print, face-mounted on museum board, 31 x 41 inches

Edition of 8

Detail (Right)

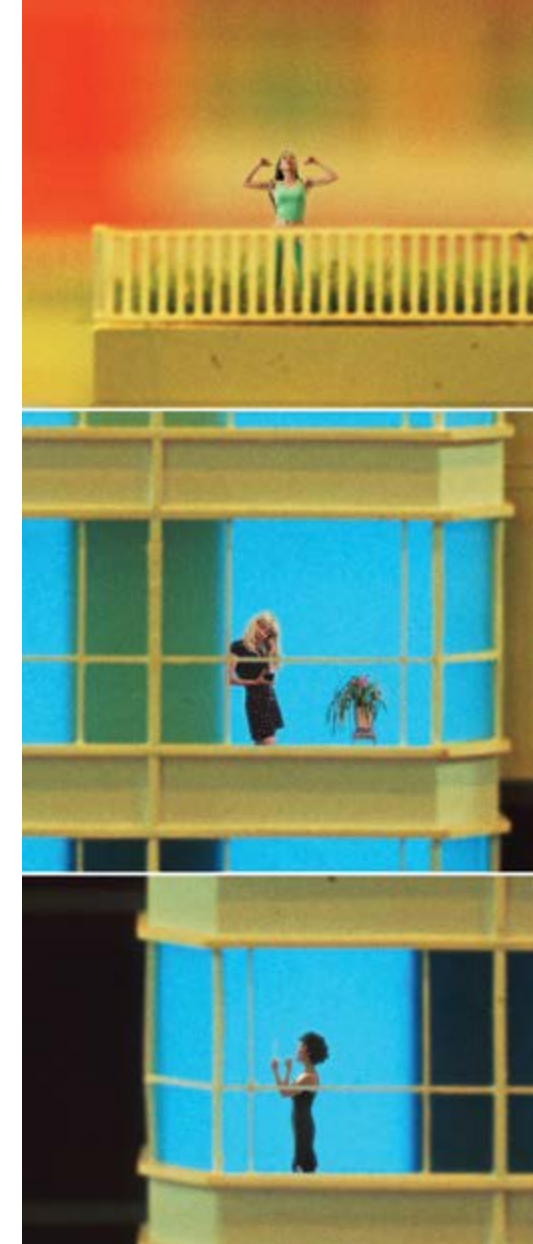
Urban Fiction 26, 2006 (Following page)

C-print, face-mounted on museum board, 31 x 41 inches

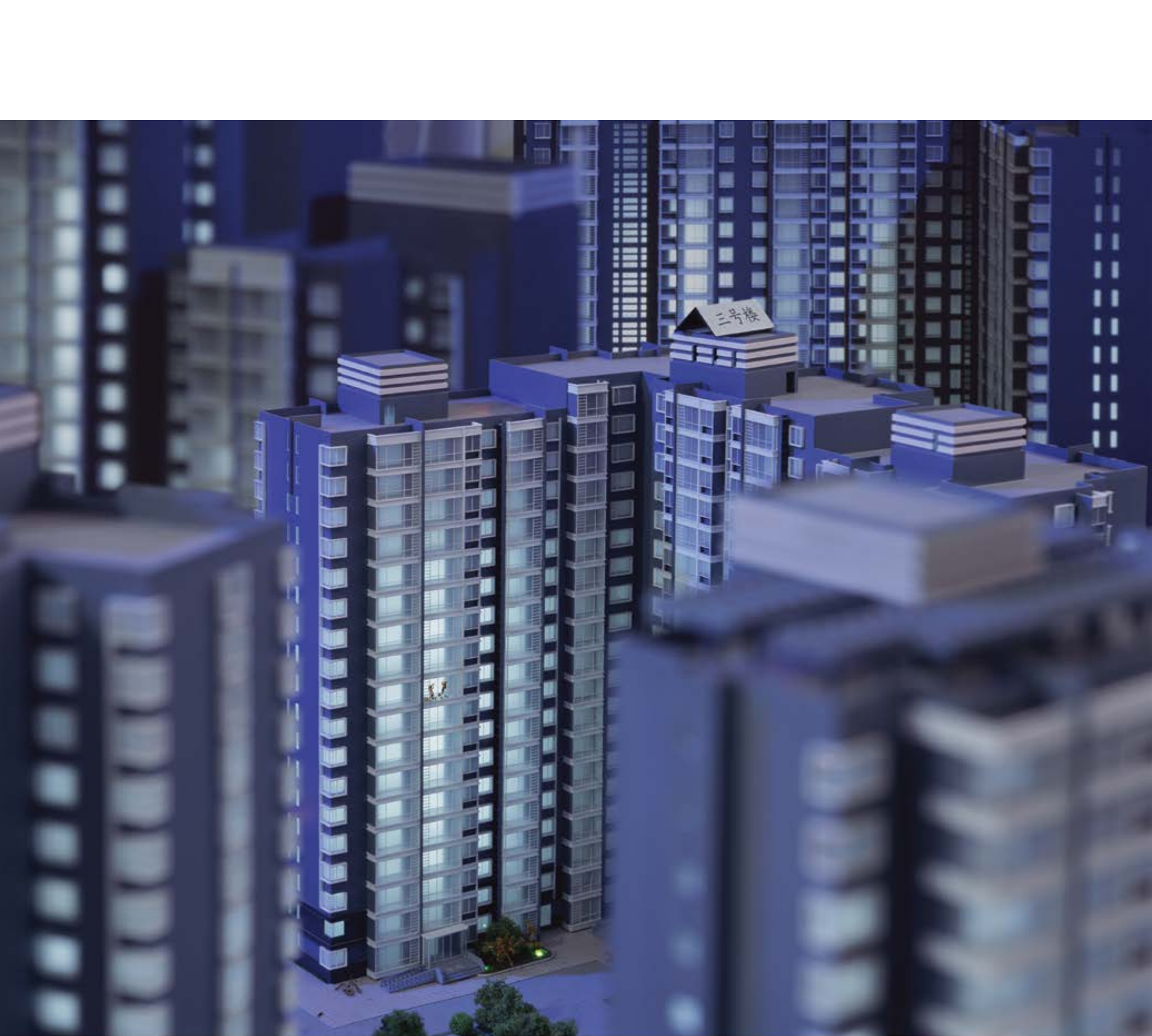
Edition of 8

Detail (Following page, right)

Courtesy of Boers-Li Gallery



Xing's *Urban Fiction* series hovers between reality and fantasy. Each of her constructed images is a maquette created for a building under construction for a real estate company. The maquette is a kind of fakery, but as the artist notes, "We are talking about reality, because sooner or later this little maquette becomes a real building in the city." The transformation and the line between "real" and "unreal" is blurred by the artist. At first glance, the urban space in her photographs is unreal, synthetic, and devoid of inhabitants. Upon careful examination, we realize that there are a few people who appear tiny in comparison to the vast buildings, as they go about their lives in an otherwise empty metropolis. The artist inserts theatrical scenes, which are based on the promotional flyers used by real estate companies to see property. She uses herself as the main actor, and these enlivenments compensate for the sense of emptiness in the great city.





Lehman College Art Gallery

Always free to the public, Lehman College Art Gallery has been serving the interests of our diverse audience from the Bronx and New York City since 1984. The gallery specializes in thematic group exhibitions that bring together famous artists with emerging talents. Education is an integral component of the Gallery’s programming and provides the basis of community outreach—from young students to senior citizens.

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