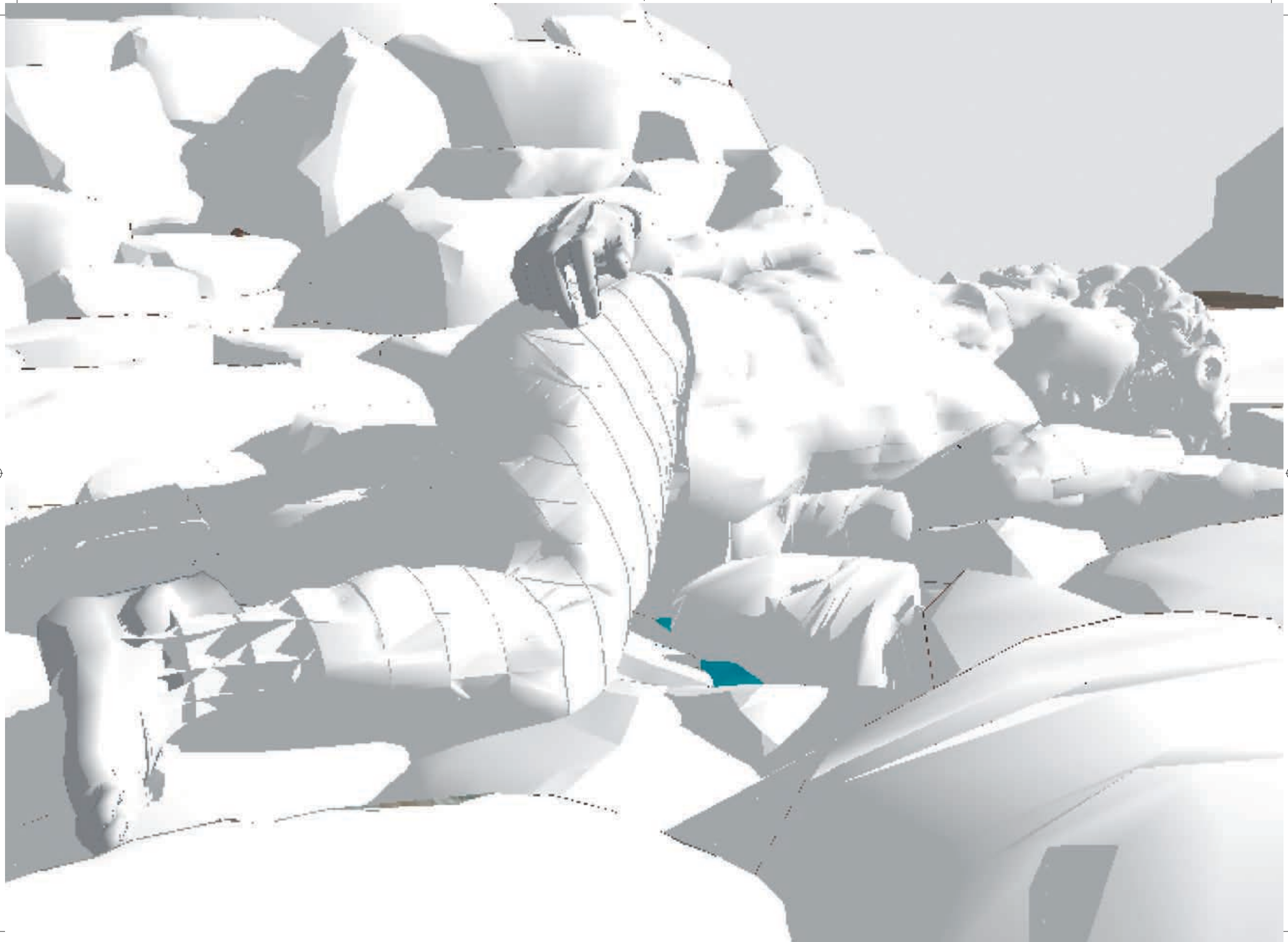


ADRIÁN VILLAR ROJAS



ADRIÁN
VILLAR
ROJAS

EDITED BY
Bryan Barcena

The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles

THE
THEATER
OF
DISAPPEARANCE



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Director's Foreword
Learning from the Artist

Considering the history of art and the history of exhibitions that have defined the field and the aesthetics of contemporary art, it is clear that whenever a project defied conventions of representation and presentation altogether, new leaves were turned. To name but a few pivotal exhibitions: *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme* (1938); *When Attitudes Become Form* (1969); *Dylaby* (1962); Paul Thek: *The Tomb—Death of a Hippie* (1967); Kara Walker: *A Subtlety or the Marvelous Sugar Baby* (2014); Walter De Maria: *The New York Earth Room* (1977); Roni Horn: *Library of Water* (2007); Nancy Holt: *Sun Tunnels* (1973–76); David Hammons: *Concerto in Black and Blue* (2002); *IM Spazio* (Germano Celant's first Arte Povera exhibition, 1967); *Xiamen Dada* (Huang Yong Ping Lin Jiahua, Jia Yaoming, Yu Xiaogang, and Xu Chengdo): *Dismantling—Destruction—Burning* (1986); Hélio Oiticica: *Tropicalia* (1967); Yoko Ono: *Cut Piece* (1964); Ian Wilson: *Discussions* (1968–); Lygia Clark: *Bicho* (1958); *First Gutai Art Exhibition* (1955); Mike Kelley: *The Uncanny* (2004). These exhibitions and works of art were true neologisms—most certainly beyond our understanding of what a work of art could be and could do—and shown in contexts that were beyond what an exhibition could be.

The curatorial profession was born of the dialogue between artists and their impresarios/facilitators, museum professionals who no longer trusted the ability of traditional art and institutions to accurately reflect the most advanced forms and ideas emanating from their times. They sought, through working with advanced artists, to invent something else, to redefine a field that could neither be contained by specialized extant knowledge nor by the

citadels that protectively held this knowledge to be established practice.

From the moment MOCA and Adrián Villar Rojas embarked on this project, the artist has vigorously encouraged us to look critically at The Geffen by pointing out what we could not (or would not) see about it—how this structure made of bricks and mortar reflects the intent, the negligence, the habits, the limits, the virtues of an institutional structure. From day one Villar Rojas had insisted that the material of his exhibition at MOCA must be found at MOCA, in The Geffen.

By stripping the building of its detritus and defunct systems from forty years of exhibitions and by relocating some of its functions, the artist has concluded that reimagining the role, the operation, the aesthetic, and the experience of a building that has embodied four decades of art and institutional history would be vital, not only to the artist and MOCA itself, but to viewers.

The work that he has conceived for the building will be a phenomenal experience carrying with it a narrative of decay and rebirth, a vision of instant archaeology, where literature, a cinematic ethos, a sense of dislocation, and an anachronistic relationship to the present moment will transform The Geffen Contemporary at MOCA into the site of an experience that goes beyond what we understand organized exhibitions to be. In *The Theater of Disappearance*, what disappears are the antiquated models of engagement with art and with artists that just might put the very idea of the museum at risk—Villar Rojas suggests this is the time to dispense with conventions.

MOCA was founded by artists, for artists. In 1983 Frank Gehry spoke with Michael

Asher and imagined a space dedicated to the art and artists of the time. Today, another artist, from another generation, is working with MOCA to improve what is ultimately a container, a vessel for presenting and commissioning artworks that embody our own moment in time.

I would like to extend my thanks first and foremost to Adrián Villar Rojas and his extraordinary team. They have activated the goals of this museum in the most intrinsic and extensive ways possible. I am indebted to Helen Molesworth, Chief Curator, who brought this monumental project to our institution and conducted an in-depth conversation with the artist for this book. My thanks to Bryan Barcena, Research Assistant for Latin American Art, who supervised the research and coordination of this exhibition, and contributed his excellent introduction to this volume. This exhibition benefited enormously from the efforts of Jill Davis, Director of Exhibition Management, and Patrick Weber, Director of Exhibition Production; I am grateful for their work.

The Theater of Disappearance would not have been possible without the support of the artist's galleries, specifically Mónica Manzutto of kurimanzutto in Mexico City, whose unyielding dedication to the artist suffused this project. Sincere thanks are also due to Jessie Washburne-Harris of Marian Goodman Gallery in New York for her support.

I wish to express my deep appreciation to the MOCA Board of Trustees for their embrace of new art and ideas and for their support of this exhibition. I am truly honored by the generosity of our funders for this exhibition.

The nature of this project is such that listing all the people involved here in this limited text would be nearly impossible; as

such, we have included a complete list of the individuals and organizations that have aided in its development and production at the end of this publication.

Philippe Vergne

Director, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles



Introduction

Adrián Villar Rojas: The Theater of Disappearance

When an institution invites Adrián Villar Rojas to create an installation there are a fixed set of obligatory ingredients: a crew of Argentines living on site in a house, hundreds of Skype calls, thousands of emails and WhatsApp messages, innumerable CAD renderings, inventories of exotic objects and materials, and the booking of many flights to far-flung locations. These realities are, in fact, the only things that are assured. At the onset, the final shape of these spectacular installations is completely mutable, shapeless, and without contours. They are formed over the course of the time that the artist is establishing and refining a very particular kind of relationship to the institution—parasitic in nature and function—while negotiating the terms of his engagement with a given space.

The interview in this volume describes, among other things, the extensive support work involved in Villar Rojas's projects and, more specifically, what such an endeavor asks of an institution. However, the broad scope of this "invisible" labor extends well beyond the walls of the museum. We must consider what such a project asks of its host city, of that city's inhabitants, and finally, how these human factors eventually come to fruition in every aspect of Rojas's project.

Research for *The Theater of Disappearance* required countless visits to wildly diverse locations around Los Angeles. Driving around the city and its environs, Adrián and I sought out individuals with specializations not typically associated with museum exhibition production, such as George Henderson at Legacy Rock and Waterscapes, who fabricates the faux rock work at Disneyland from twisted iron bars in Anaheim; Maria Percastegui at Milk Bakery, who creates thousands of confections and pastries each day in a tiny kitchen in Hollywood; Nick Reade at Paramount Studios, who for twenty-five years has vacuum formed vinyl wall textures which are then painted for television

and film sets; Rafael Portillo at Vuro Industries in Boyle Heights, who creates fantastic welded metal armatures for trade shows and festivals; and Eder Portillo and his gigantic crew at Olsen Graphics in Hawthorne, who manufacture and print thousands of Hollywood movie posters for billboards, street poles, and skyscrapers. Philip Castiglia, who toiled with sand, cement, and gravel, pushing thousands of tons of steaming material around a scorching-hot landscape at the edge of the San Fernando Valley. The women at 99 Ranch Market in the San Gabriel Valley and Seafood City in Eagle Rock who were all too happy to display exotic fruits, strange sea creatures, and unusual cuts of meat—staple ingredients served up daily on Korean, Filipino, and Chinese dining tables. The abundantly cheerful and enthusiastic Jessie Liu at Providence in Hollywood, who creates stunning and inventive works of molecular gastronomy. Older gentlemen in straw hats with sunbaked skin in Sun Valley who stack mountains of obsolete electronics at a robot graveyard called Apex Electronics. The veritable library of Babel that is HPR (the Hand Prop Room) in Culver City, where it seems as if one of every object on earth has been collected, inventoried, and displayed, waiting patiently to serve its purpose on screen.

This list comprises only a small sampling of the people and workplaces we visited while investigating the elements that would eventually make up *The Theater of Disappearance*. Throughout this exploratory period, it became clear that Adrián had no precise goals or preconceived notions of what he was seeking, nor any ideal object or objects in mind that he hoped to produce or fabricate. These visits were conducted with the express purpose of gathering knowledge and asking what became a set of very straightforward questions, along the lines of "How do you make what you make?" or "How do you do what you do every day?" and "How can I learn to do this?" In truth, Adrián himself does not actually know

how to make much of anything. He is not a sculptor, nor a painter, nor does he wield an encyclopedic knowledge of “artist” materials. Adrián’s practice is predicated on his ability to ask—to gather information and to set about manifesting his evolving plans.

Many, if not most, of these highly specialized laborers who were kind enough to share their knowledge with us are Mexican, Korean, Taiwanese, Guatemalan, Lebanese, and Armenian immigrants—first- and second-generation transplants to this vast, and at its best, extremely idiosyncratic metropolis, who have brought these amazing skills within their bodies across great distances from around the globe here to Los Angeles. Our access to this diffuse community was certainly predicated on our being representatives from a museum, and thus, perceived authority figures based on assumptions about position and status. But once inside, Adrián and I experienced a common understanding with many of our contacts that transcended our native Spanish language (he is Argentinian; I am Cuban), something deep and cultural based on the profound sense of displacement and rebirth that are endemic to peripatetic or diasporic identities.

This project reveals a stratum without hierarchy—an interconnected network of skill, technique, talent, and expertise belonging to Los Angeles. Propelled by his thirst for knowledge, Villar Rojas’s art cuts through actual and perceived institutional firewalls to debunk the idea that the work occurring in the artist’s studio, galleries, or institutions is rarified—or, worse yet, magical, spiritual, or transcendent—and posits that labor such as housekeeping, landscaping, cooking, and construction work is equally essential and intrinsic to the functions of artists and museums. As alien as these skills may seem to the white walls and contexts of contemporary art museums, these labors are part of each and every exhibition.

Working alongside Adrián is his team—itsself an amorphous and thirsty creature—assimilating, soaking in techniques, know-how, and facility with previously unfamiliar materials to use at the next site. The cabal of Argentine craftsmen and women that come to perform Adrián’s labor hail from the periphery of the world (Rosario, a major port city), yet become

global factotums, incorporating skill sets from each site into their now enormous lexicon, as they travel from Ushuaia to New York, Bregenz to Athens, Torino to Los Angeles, and so on. Although his crew did not start out as “artists,” they continue to acquire myriad skills along the way, during the protracted process of bringing Adrián’s exhibitions to life.

There is no “studio” where “art” objects are produced. As this publication hopes to suggest, Adrián’s practice happens within two parallel, somewhat oppositional spaces: sites of labor within cities and the digital realm of CAD. Each installment of Villar Rojas’s project requires new, site-specific knowledge, and this most recent iteration is but one from years of projects that have collectively stitched together an expansive global network of individuals and workplaces, each contributing to the repository of skills and experiences that are the foundation of this extraordinary series of exhibitions.

With this publication, we wish to share the methods by which Adrián Villar Rojas and his team of collaborators engages with the institutions that commission his projects. These dialogues almost always take the form of PDFs, diagrams, screen grabs, 3-D renderings, and images shuttled back and forth between the artist’s team and the institution. These documents operate as a lingua franca for the artist’s creative, diagnostic, logistical, and strategic methods of production. Covering five years of Villar Rojas’s peripatetic practice, the materials presented in this volume document the ever-evolving process of his uniquely twenty-first century form of artistic communication.

Here in Los Angeles, Adrián Villar Rojas’s MOCA project builds upon this immense human and spatial “database.” His spectacularly imagined, exhaustively researched built environment at The Geffen is indebted to the Angelenos who make up this powerful workforce and the often underpaid and underappreciated labor they perform in this city’s workplaces, which, by design, remain largely unseen.

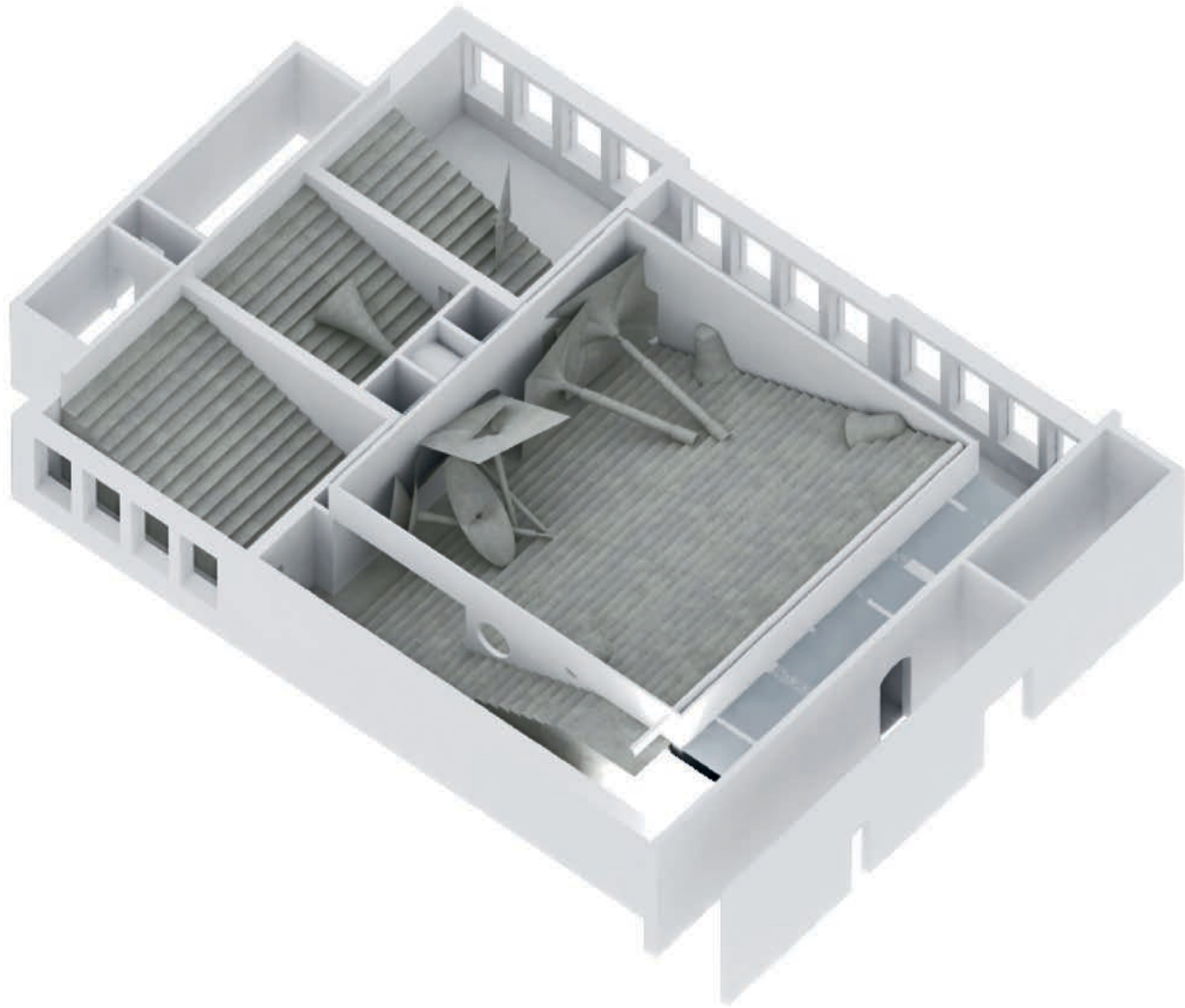
Bryan Barcena

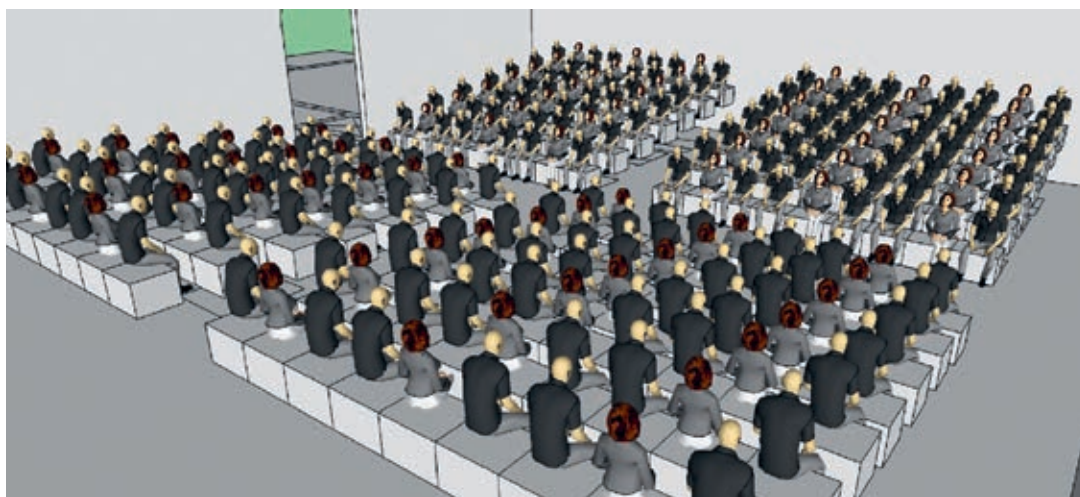
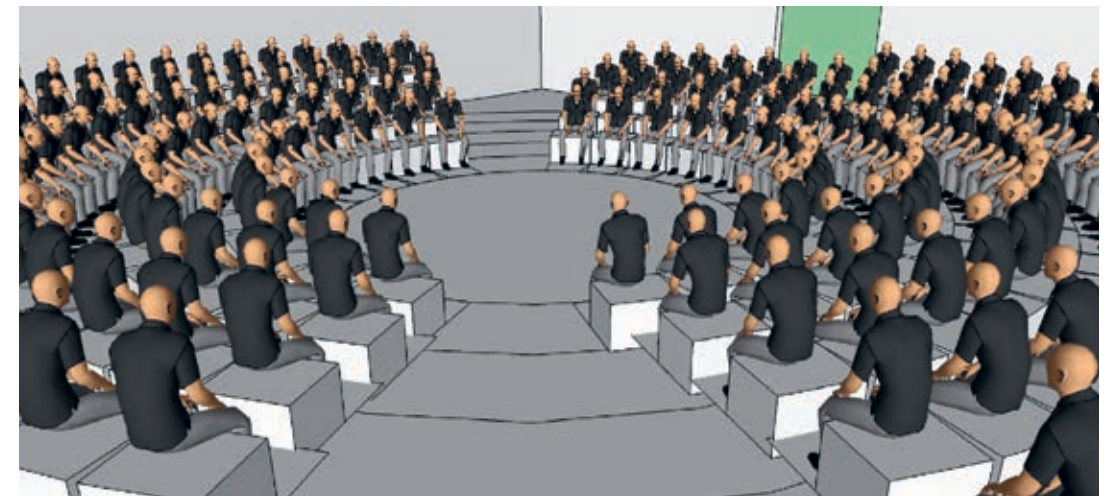
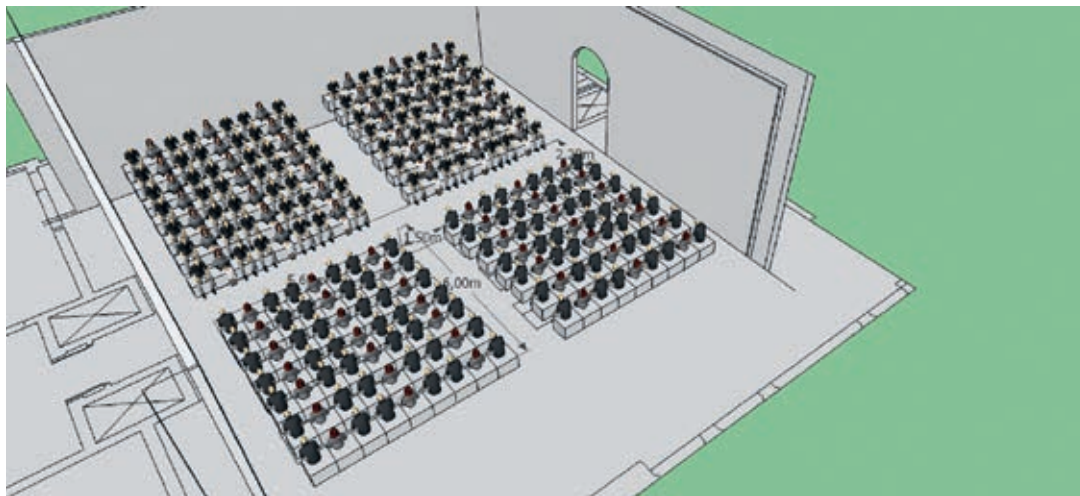
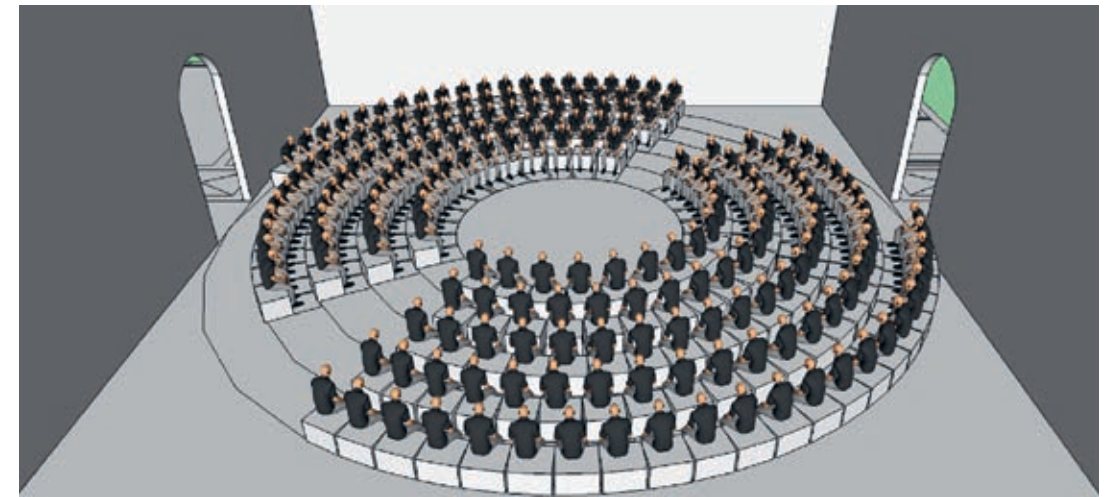
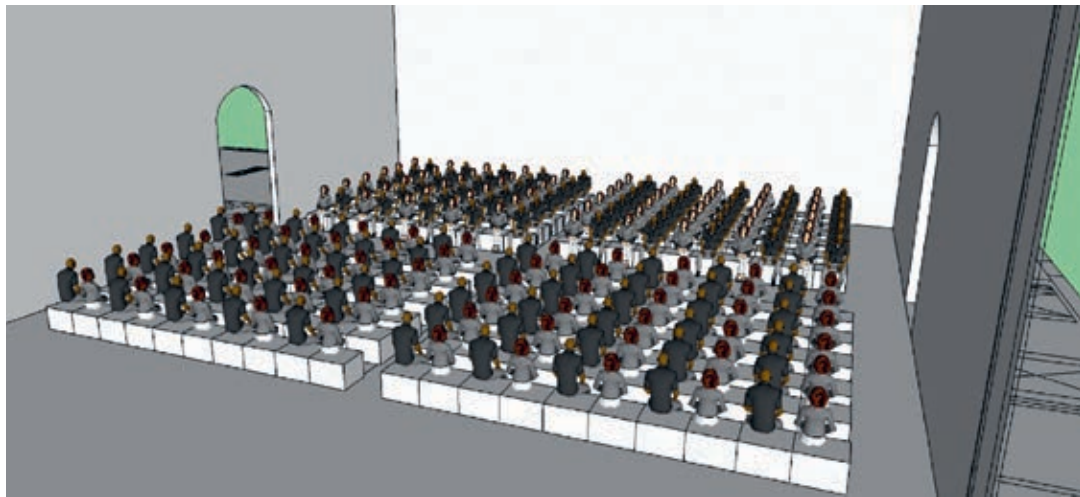
Research Assistant for Latin American Art
The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles

LA
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2013

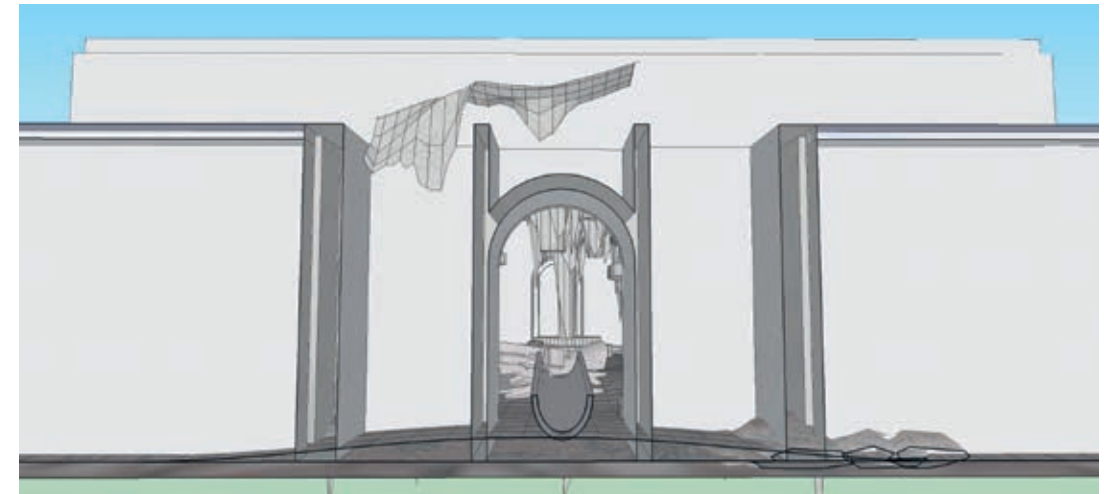
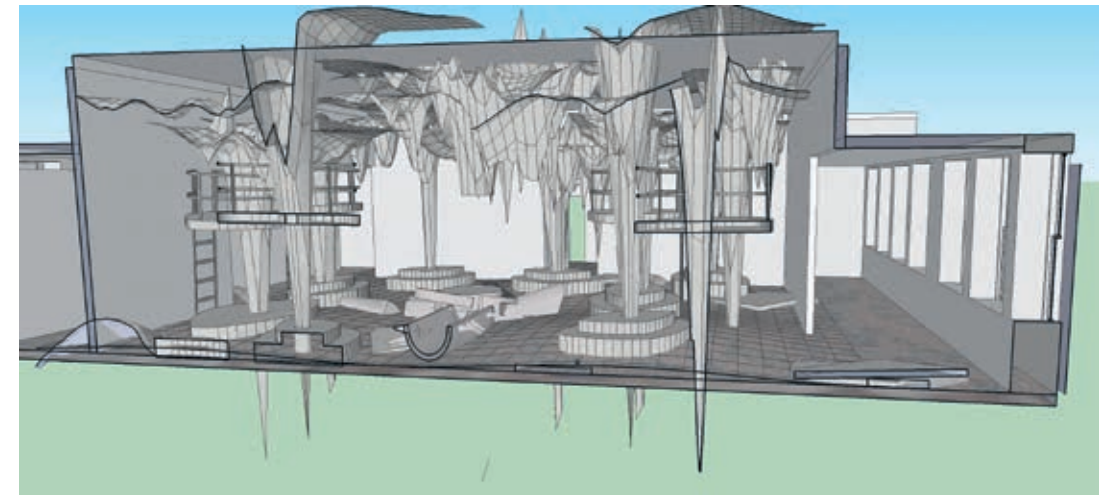
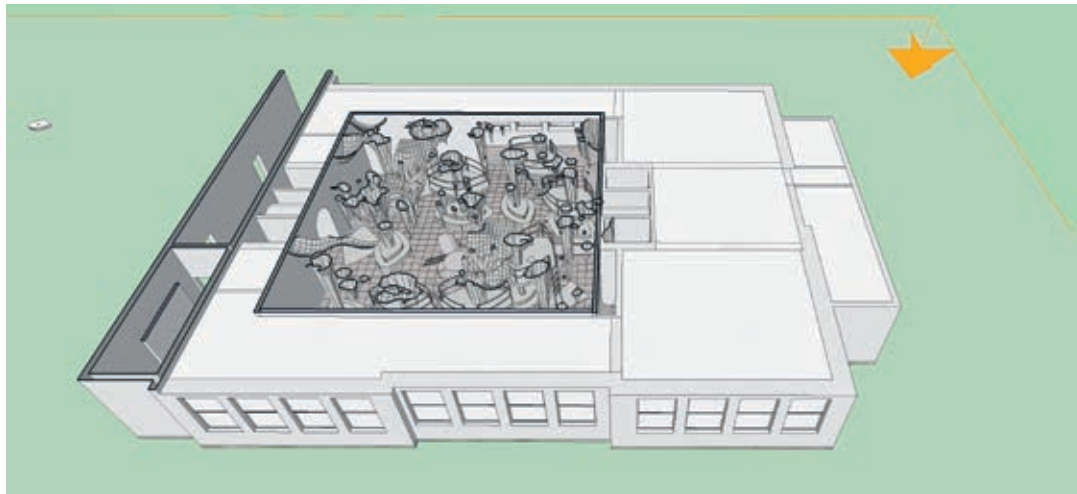
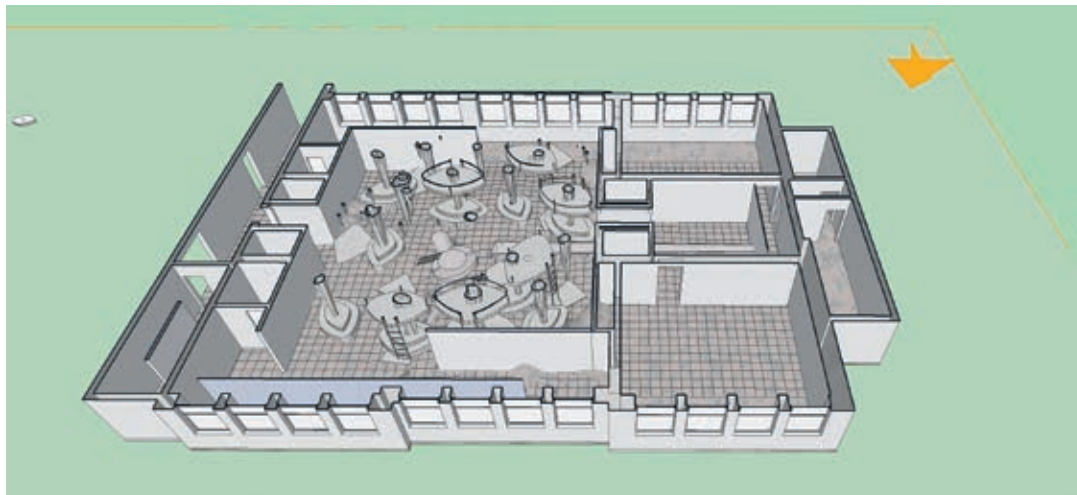
MOMA PS1, NEW YORK



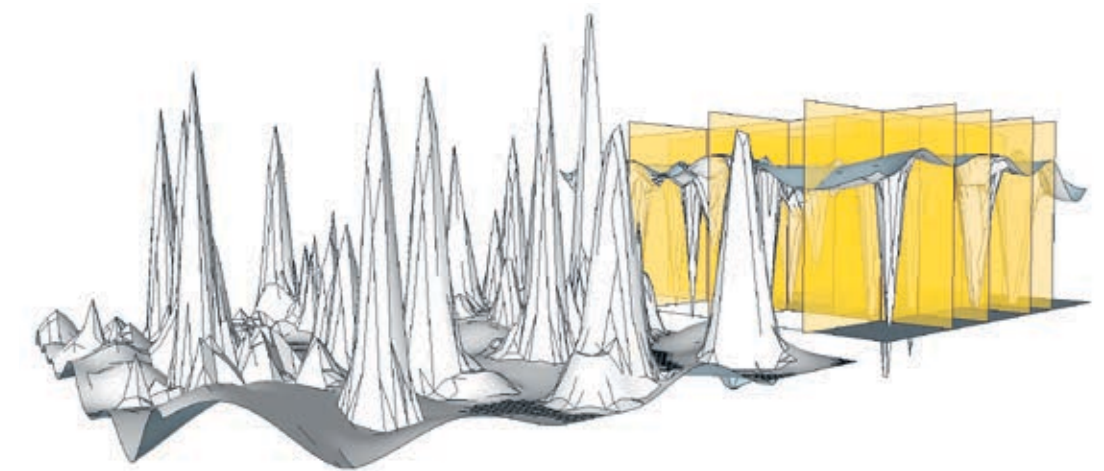


The transformation of one of the main galleries of MoMA PS1—a former public school turned contemporary art space in Long Island City, New York—into a functioning amphitheater began with a series of spatial experiments. Using computer software to calculate the ratio of viewers to the gallery’s spatial volume, the project developed as a sequence of investigative layouts examining varying configurations of audiences, dioramas of seats, and views that could occupy the gallery.





Explorations continued with a proposal to dissolve the traditional, binary relationship between a theatre's "stage" and "house," integrating these into a single, homogeneous space. Balconies branch out from a forest of canopied columns, whose delicate architecture pays homage to the Argentine modernist Amancio Williams. Each structure contains its own invisible audio system, allowing a lecturer's voice to be amplified to small, localized audiences. This idea evolved into a cave-like environment of exaggerated natural forms with stalactites descending from the ceiling and fragments from previous installations strewn across the floor. The lecturer roams around the room, while the floor becomes an open expanse with no central or core reference point for the audience.



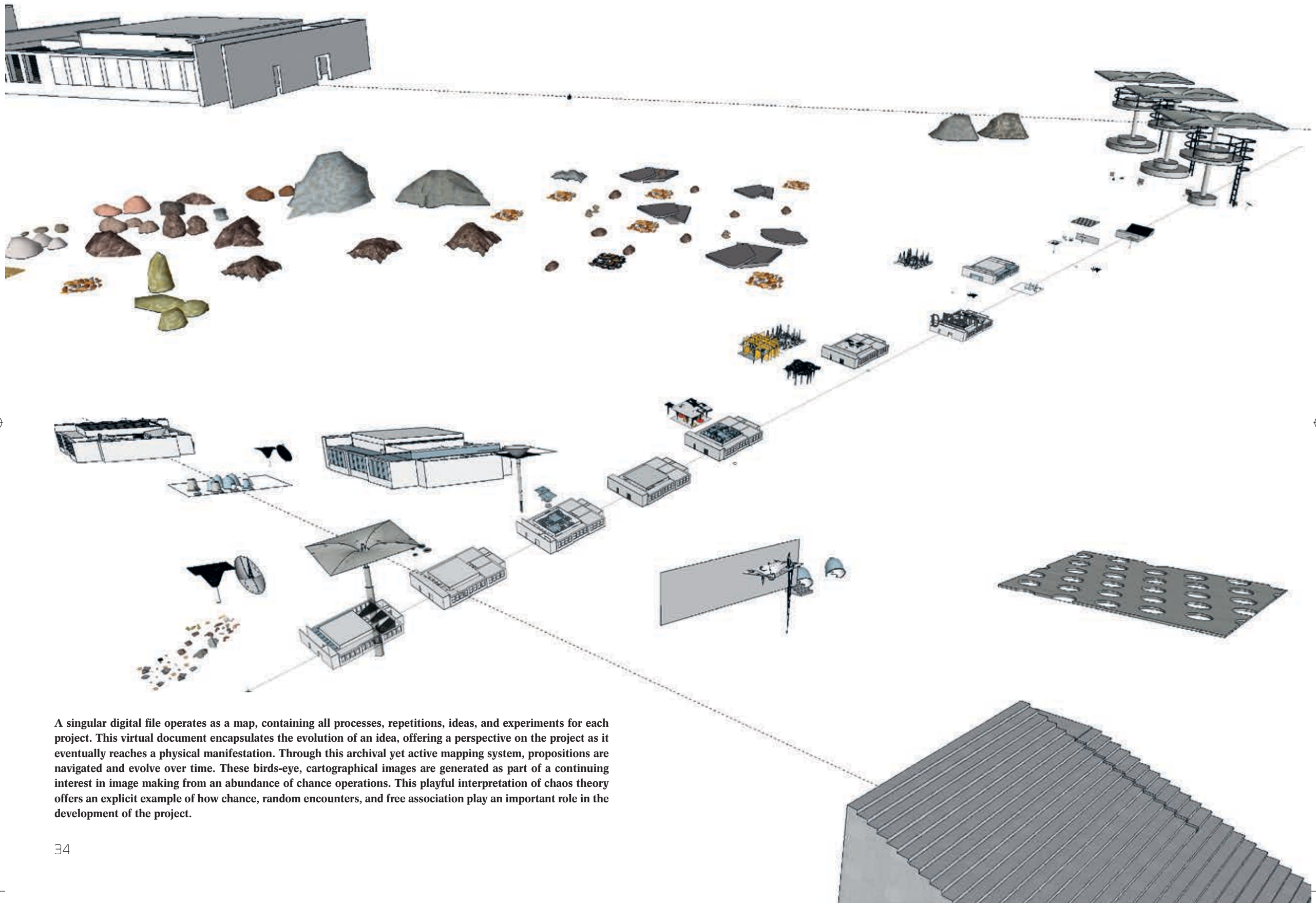




A near final design draft depicts a traditional Roman amphitheater constructed with cracked clay that emerges from its containing walls and flows through all three rooms. With no singular stage, the common “house” space is intended to create the spatial and architectural conditions for an alternative physical, emotional, psychic, aesthetic, and epistemological experience, both for the lecturer and the audience. At the base of the main room where steps met the floor, the installation was interrupted by a wall before rising again on the opposite side, colliding with the ceiling of the adjacent gallery.

As formal solutions changed and the realities of working within the context of an institution, a building, and a budget emerged, one continuous thread remained as a constant: the canopied structures. No longer functional balconies for an elevated audience, they tumbled to the bottom of the steps, buried under the surface. These nonfunctional, sculptural forms were arranged with other compacted fragments: a half-buried bell, a memento from the dOCUMENTA (13) installation *Return the World* (2012), along with other shapes chosen for their likeness to hyperboloid forms that are typically used to explain space-time events in quantum mechanics, such as wormholes or cosmological events.



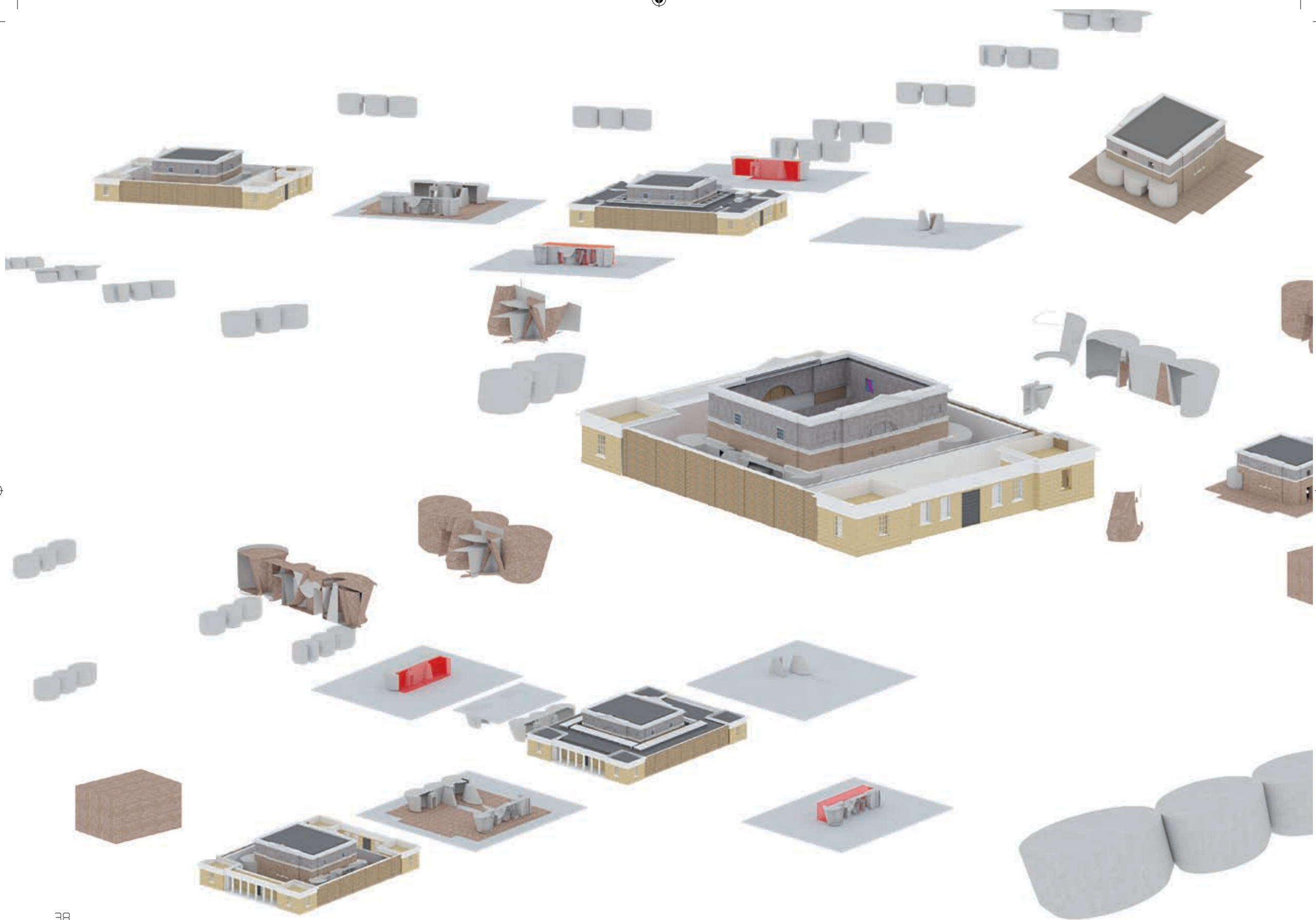


A singular digital file operates as a map, containing all processes, repetitions, ideas, and experiments for each project. This virtual document encapsulates the evolution of an idea, offering a perspective on the project as it eventually reaches a physical manifestation. Through this archival yet active mapping system, propositions are navigated and evolve over time. These birds-eye, cartographical images are generated as part of a continuing interest in image making from an abundance of chance operations. This playful interpretation of chaos theory offers an explicit example of how chance, random encounters, and free association play an important role in the development of the project.

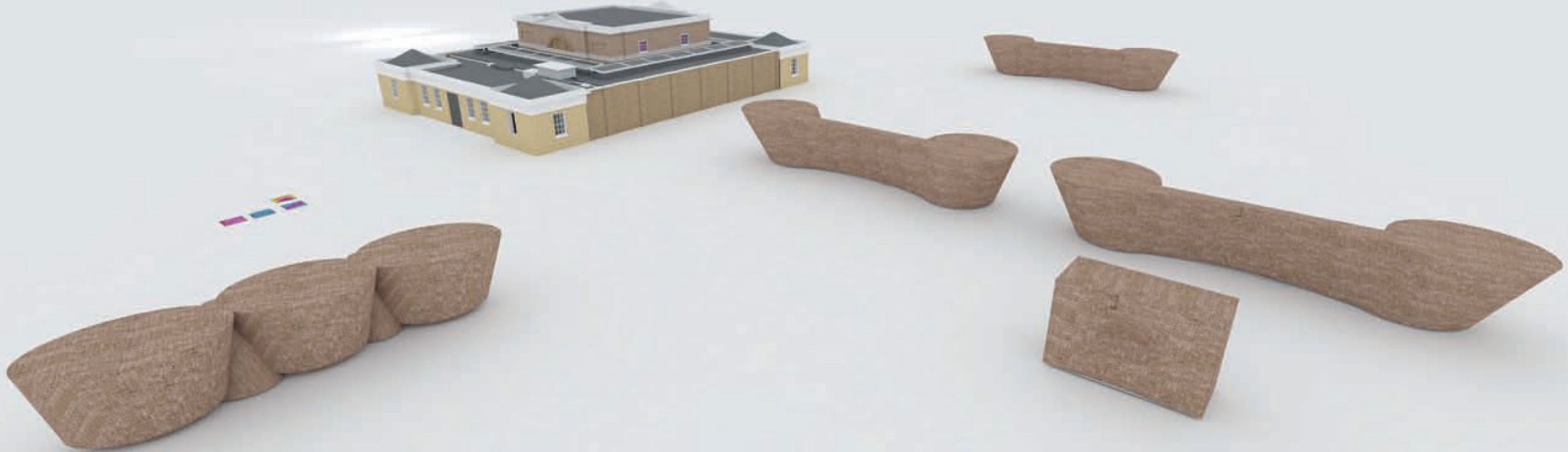
TODAY
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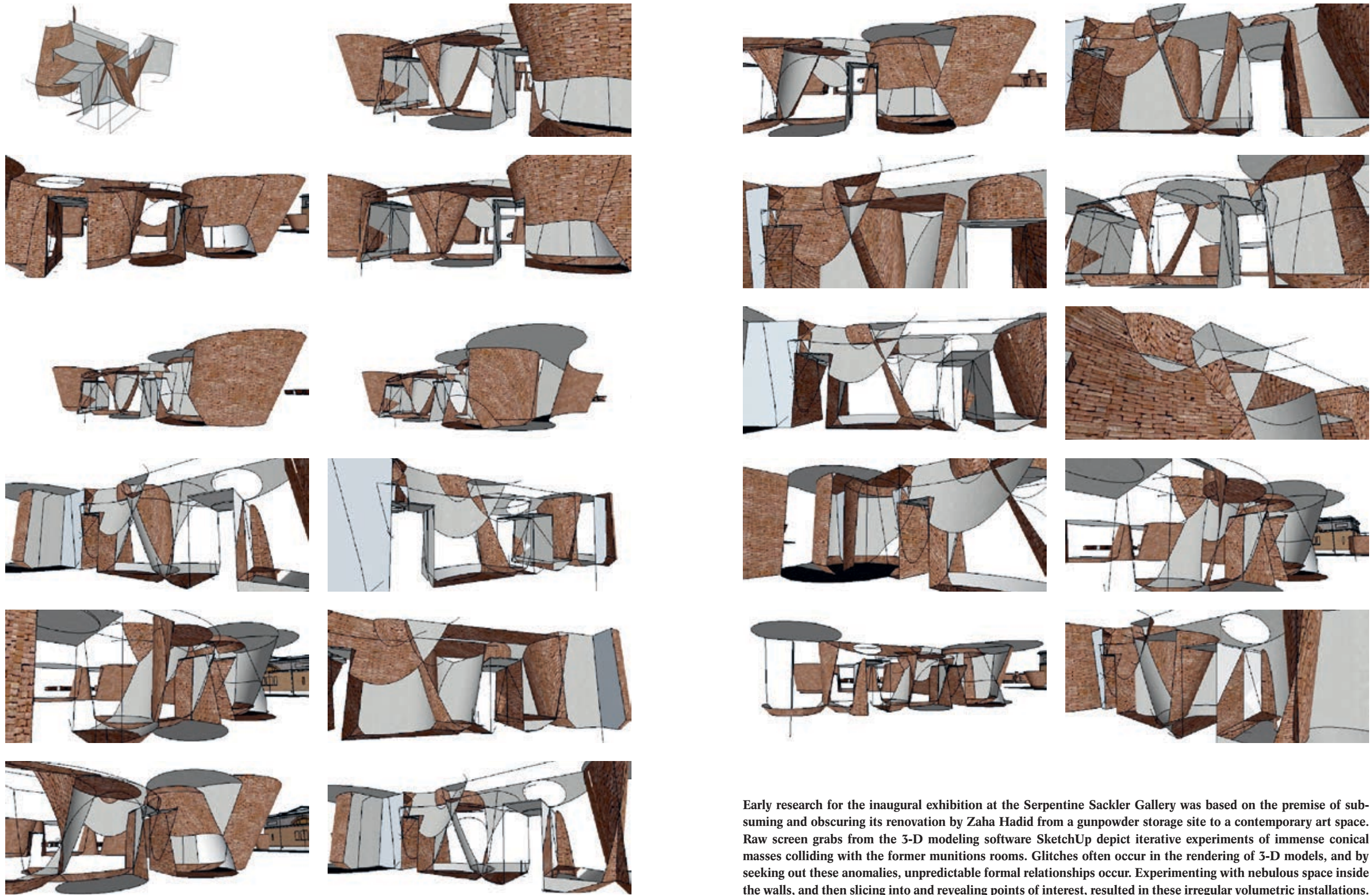
2013

SERPENTINE SACKLER GALLERY, LONDON



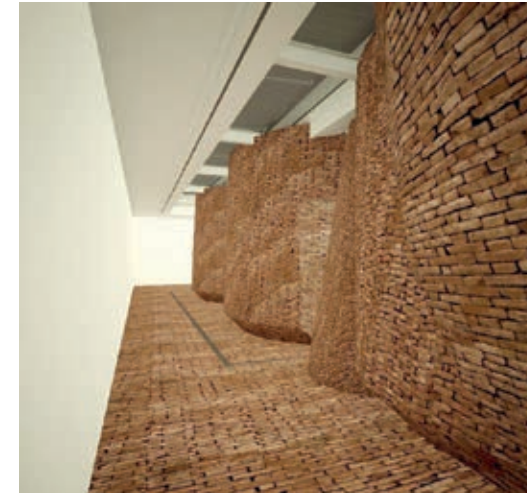






Early research for the inaugural exhibition at the Serpentine Sackler Gallery was based on the premise of subsuming and obscuring its renovation by Zaha Hadid from a gunpowder storage site to a contemporary art space. Raw screen grabs from the 3-D modeling software SketchUp depict iterative experiments of immense conical masses colliding with the former munitions rooms. Glitches often occur in the rendering of 3-D models, and by seeking out these anomalies, unpredictable formal relationships occur. Experimenting with nebulous space inside the walls, and then slicing into and revealing points of interest, resulted in these irregular volumetric installations.





Spatial experiments focus on the original brick barrel-vaulted rooms along with mutations of a cylindrical water tank, a recurring motif that was used in the artist's installation in Paris, *Poems for Earthlings* (2011) and *Ahora estaré con mi hijo, el asesino de tu herencia* (Now I will be with my Son, the Murderer of Your Heritage), (2011), shown at the Venice Biennale. Though the final version was cast in clay, the intention was to cover all visible surfaces using handmade bricks laid without mortar. Pages 50–61 illustrate the innermost interior space, the original gunpowder room, which was filled with ceramic sculptures recreated from photographs of the exhibition *Lo que el fuego me trajo*.

Pages 52–53 show a parade of animals carrying fragments, elements, and sculptural objects from an earlier proposal, in which the exhibition was to take place outside of the gallery space, where the exposed ribs of the decomposing body of a baby elephant form a small recreational space. Pages 54–55 show a proposed intervention for a pre-opening event that would have enveloped the facade entirely, obscuring the well-ordered, Victorian-era colonnade and replacing it with a minimal wall, leaving only a radically reduced entrance and the semblance of an architrave.



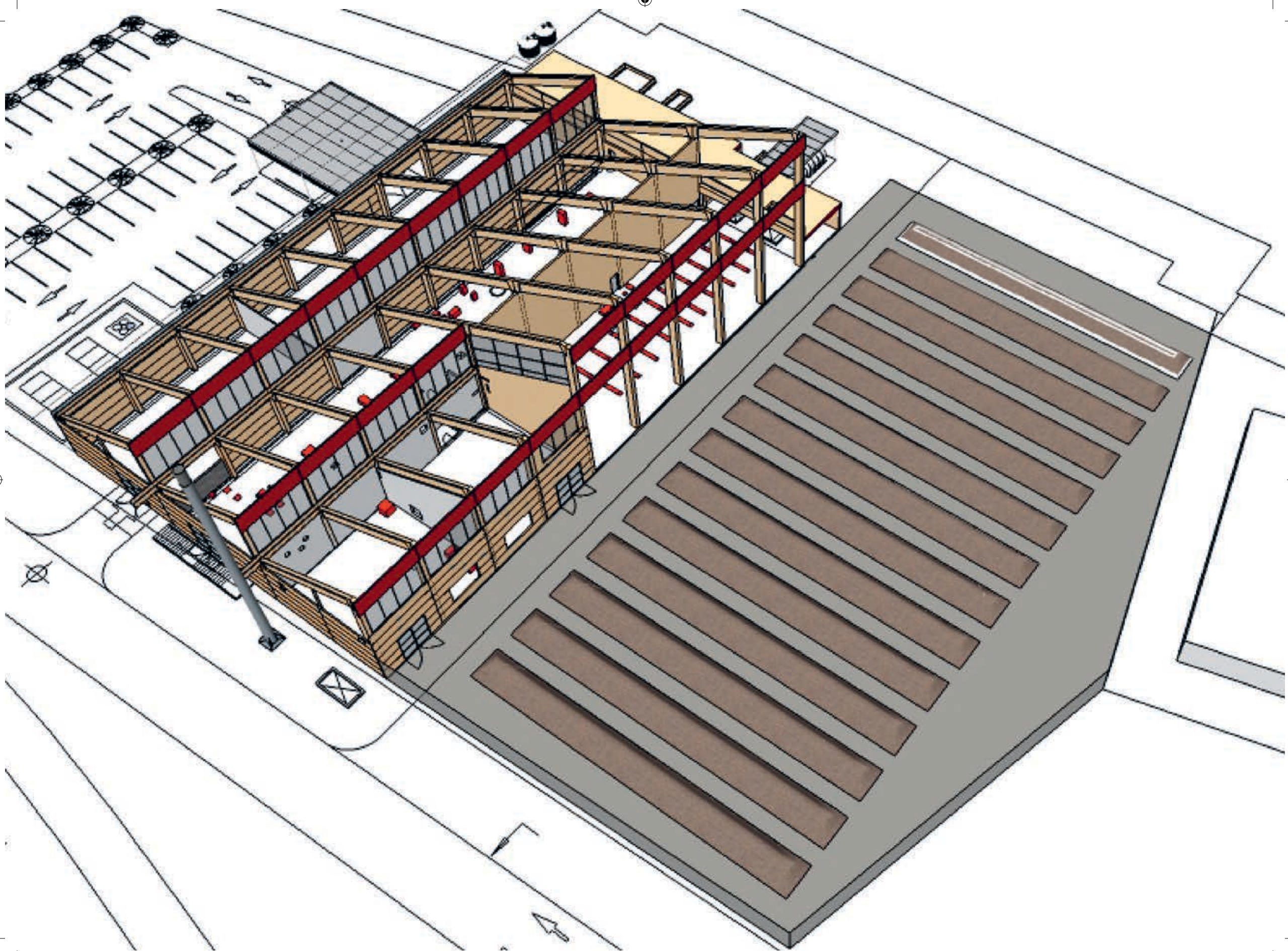


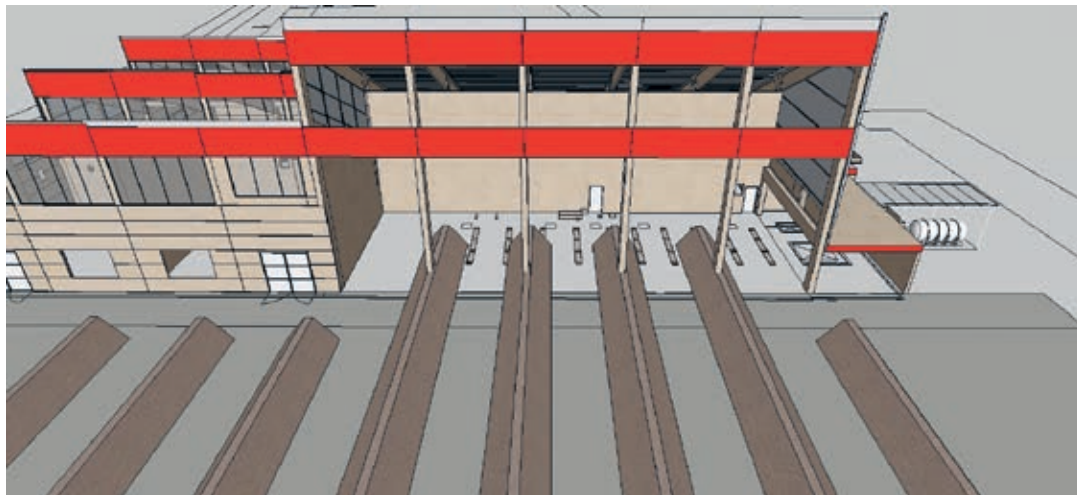


PLANETARIUM

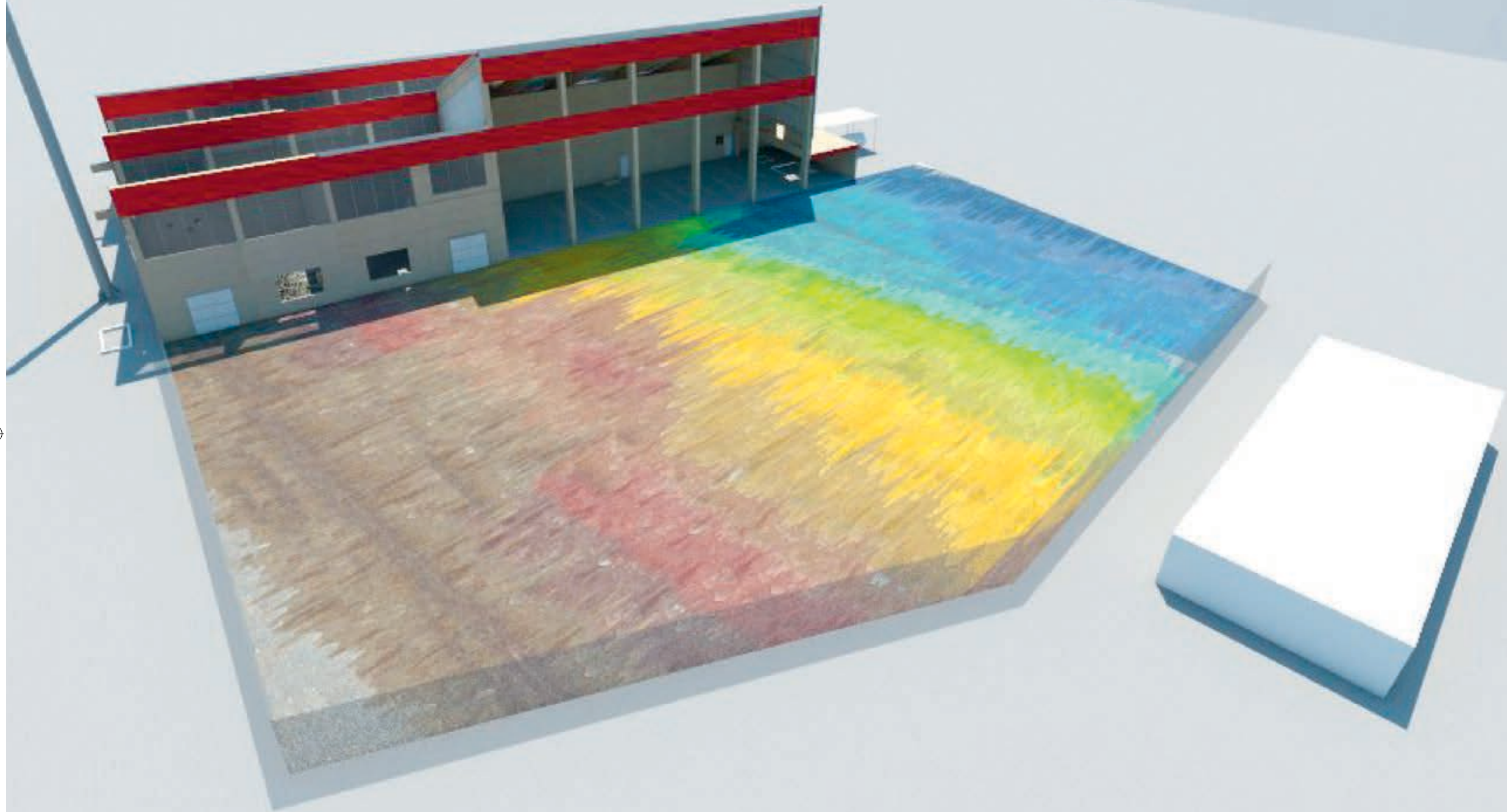
2015

SHARJAH BIENNIAL 12, KALBA, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES





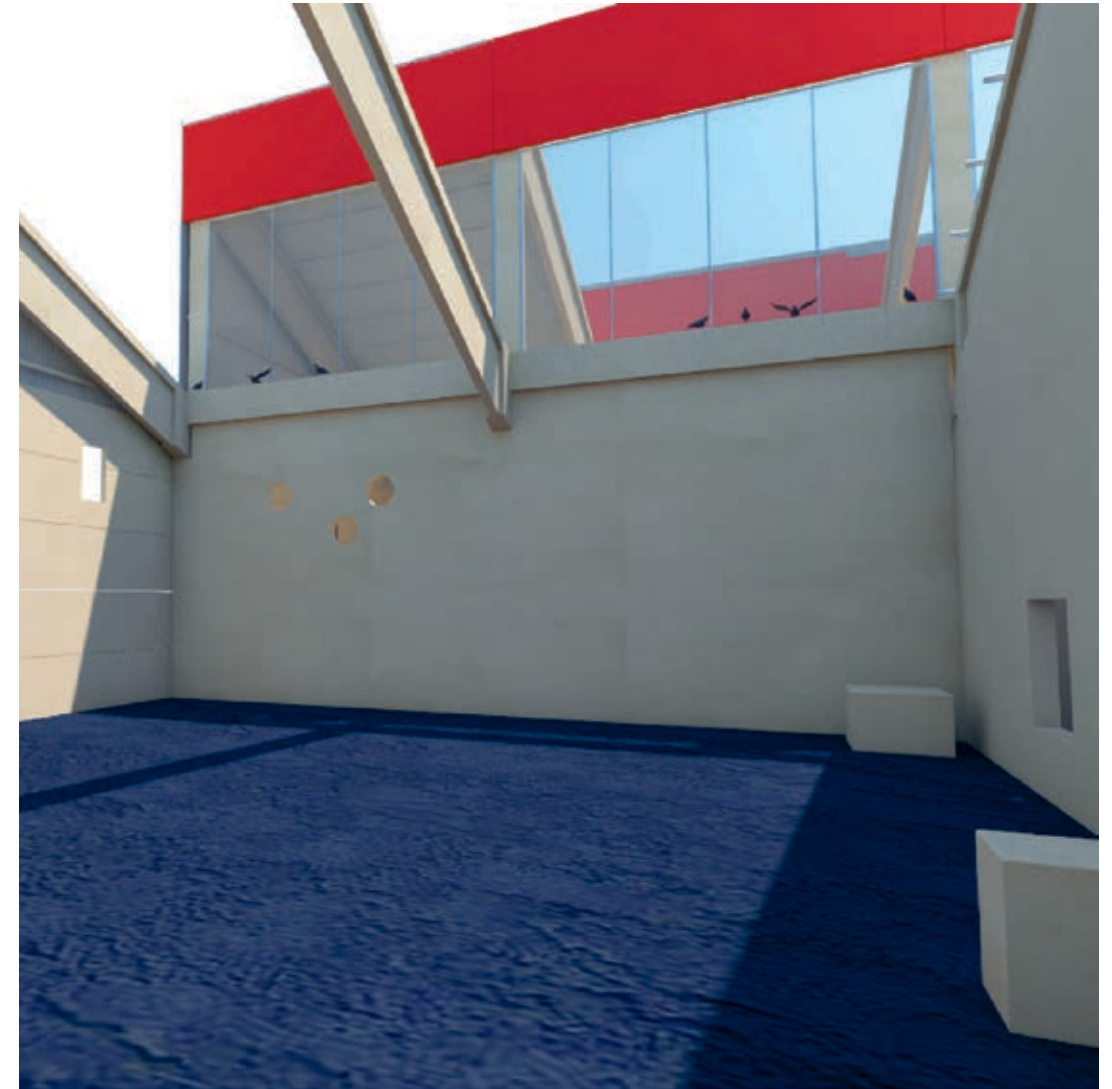
The previous page, as well as the top left image show models of the raw factory space designated by the Sharjah Biennial reveal early experiments and responses to the site. The top left image shows the first sketch of what would become several tons of fresh compost, a substance foreign to the desert region, placed in vast rows within the plaza of the factory. The drawings show a number of low cement protrusions that represent the substructure of the former ice factory's machinery. These bases are used as the foundation for the towering columns of multi-farious material strata and will travel to Los Angeles to become part of *The Theater of Disappearance* (2017) at MOCA. In the rendering above, the floors are covered with sand, and fishing nets hang from the ceiling above a conical element from the no longer extant installation *Now I Will Be With My Son, The Murderer of Your Heritage* (2011). No digital drawings existed of the conical element, thus a 3-D model was recreated digitally from photographs and inserted into the renderings.







Pages 62–63 illustrate an initial but ultimately abandoned proposal wherein the dirt field abutting the ice factory entrance would be dyed with pigments; the stratified color pattern was later manifested in the layers of the vertical cement columns. During the site visit it became clear that many local birds occupied the abandoned factory, which led to the idea of transforming the space into an aviary using film footage of a flock of pigeons outside the Pompidou Centre in Paris (pp. 64–65). The renders shown above illustrate how the floors of the factory were raised using blue pigmented cement, thus using the walls of two rooms of the building as a form and sculptural container.



In order to generate this type of detailed computer rendering, specific material and lighting information is required. In this case, the proposal to create the towers utilized textures, objects, organic and synthetic matter, and urban detritus gathered on-site, the layering of which was decided upon as they were being constructed. The following renderings (pp. 70–75) were designed to communicate the concept to the curators and institution, using images appropriated from photographs of the cylindrical living sculpture *Where The Slaves Live* (2014) to illustrate the look of the stratified columns.





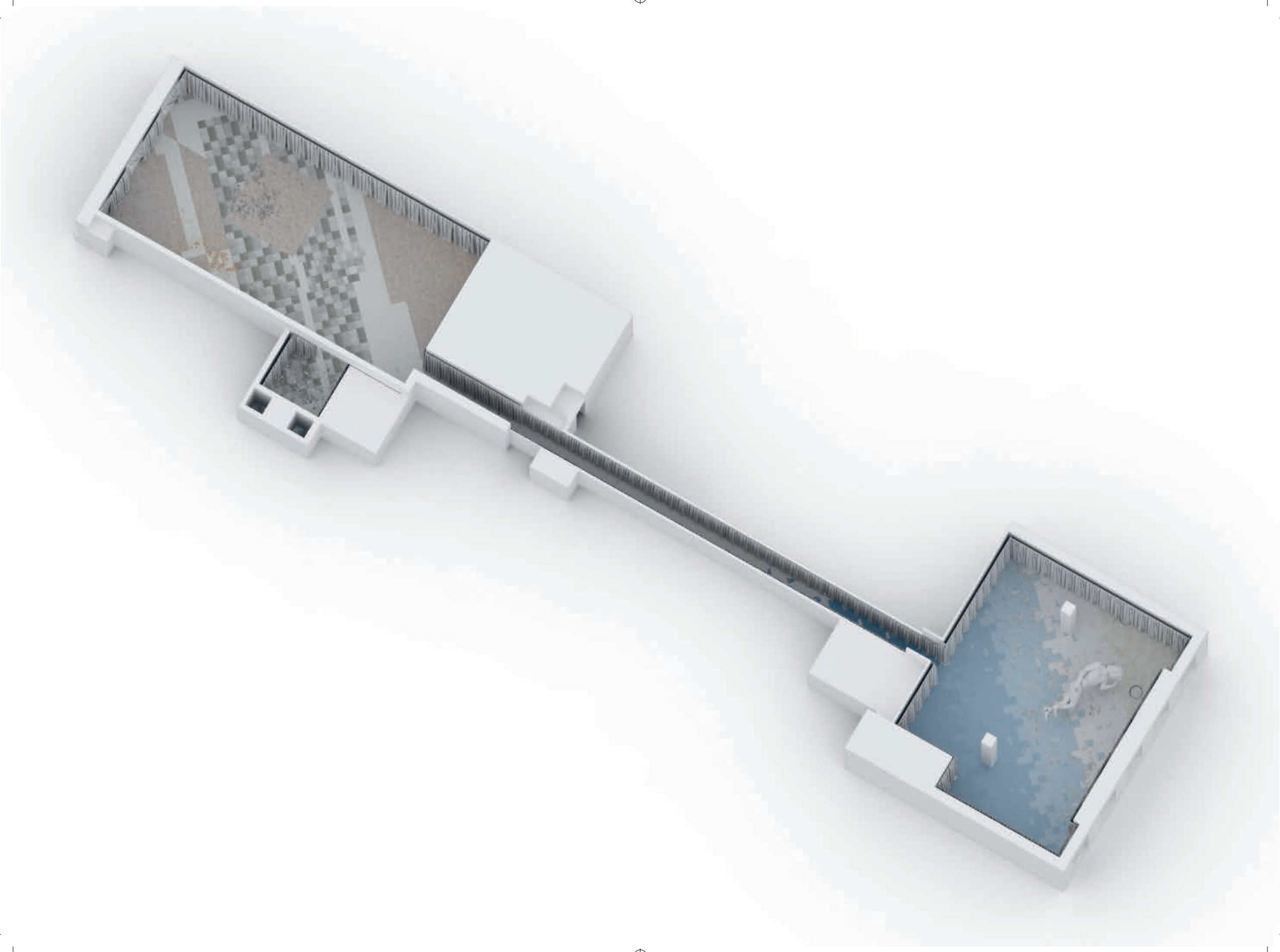


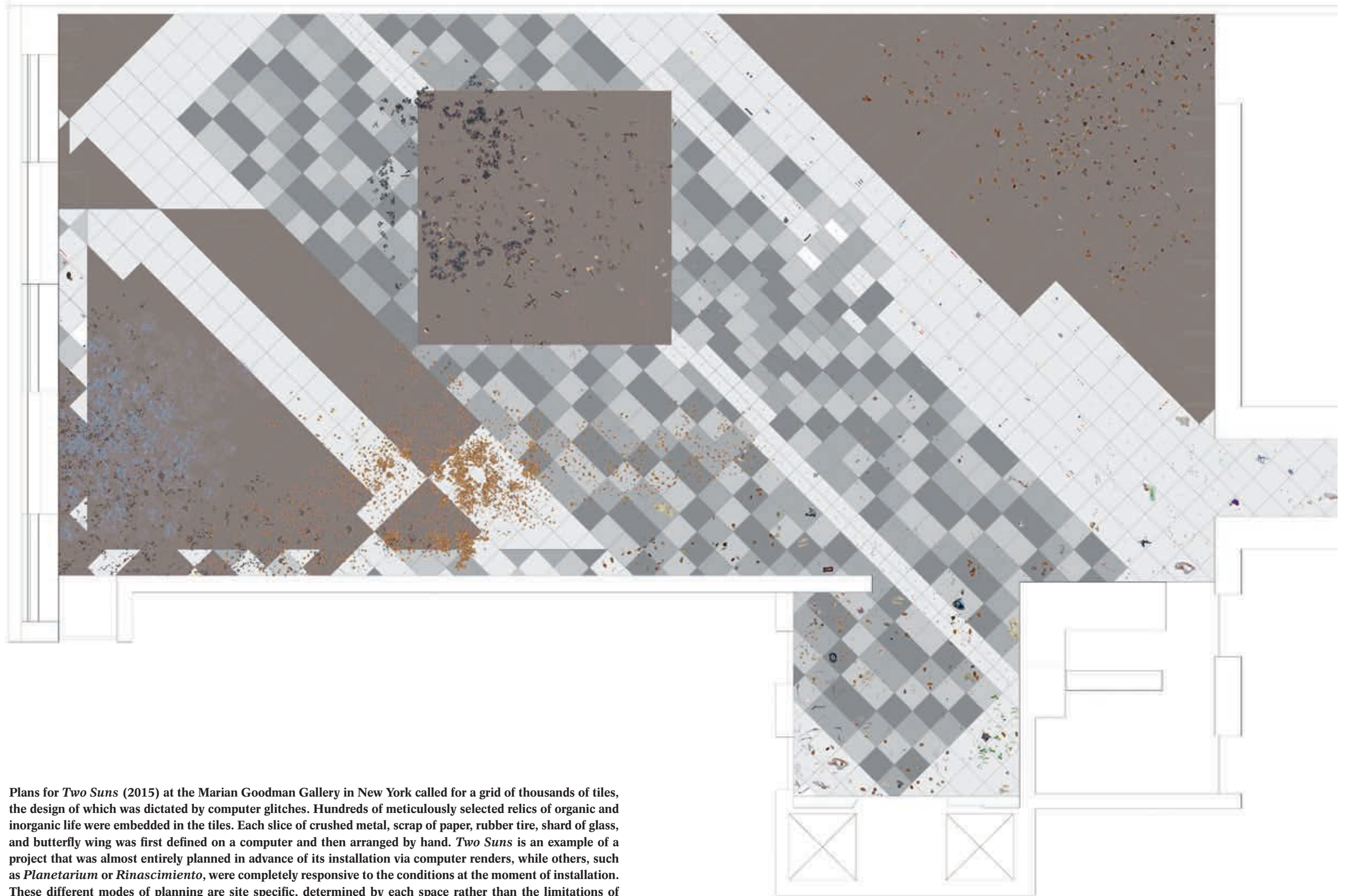


TWO
SUNS

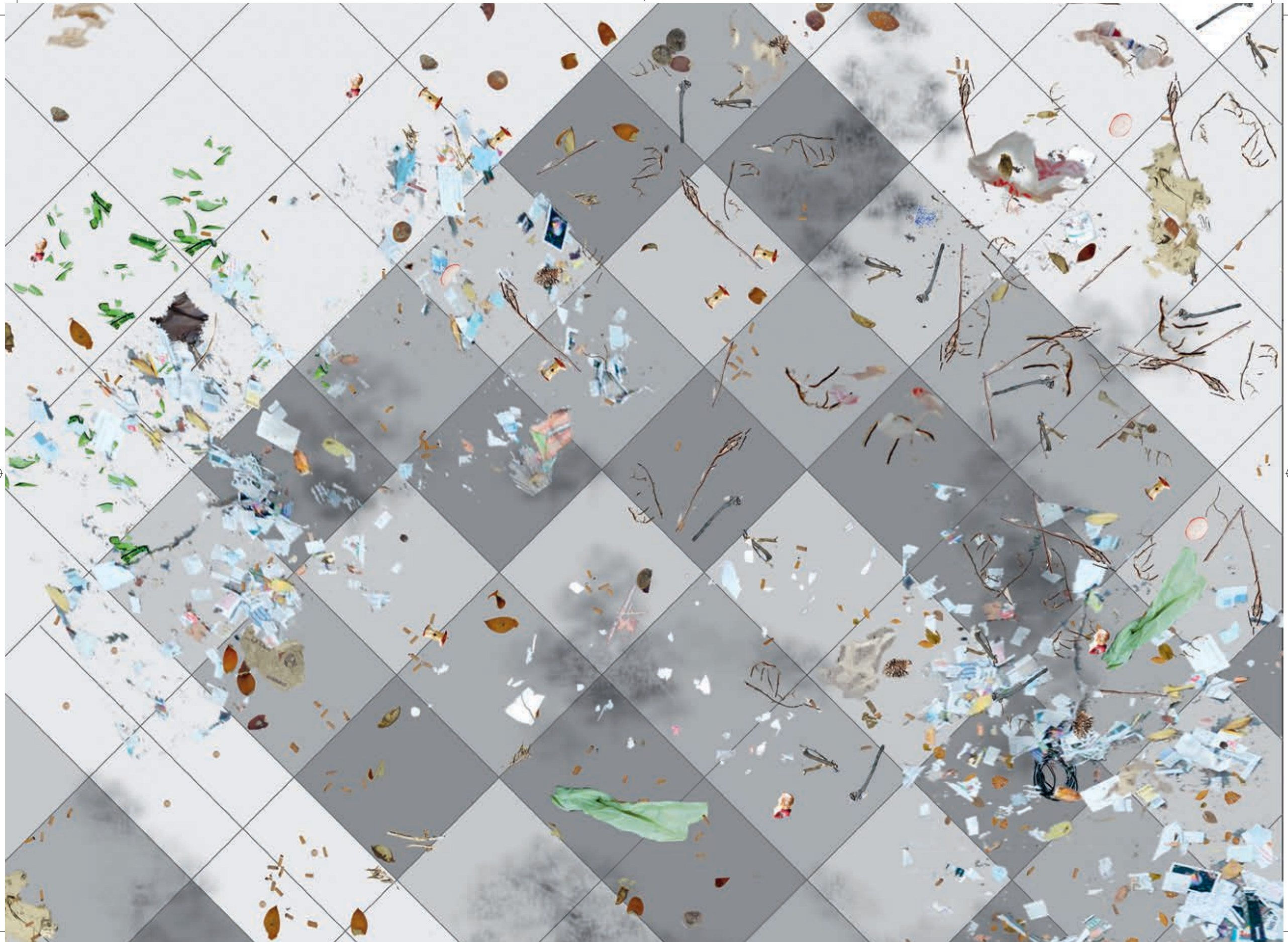
2015

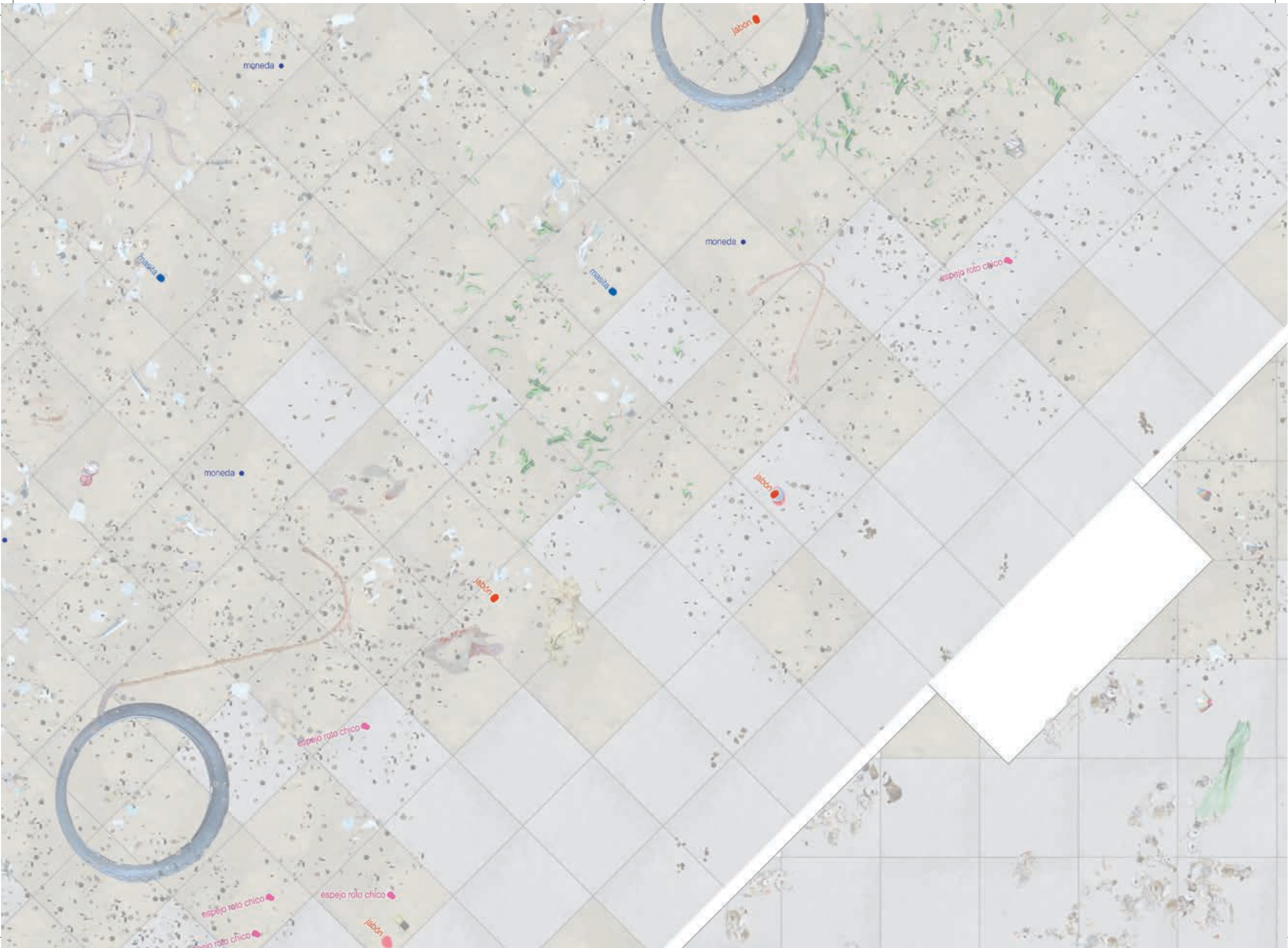
MARIAN GOODMAN GALLERY, NEW YORK





Plans for *Two Suns* (2015) at the Marian Goodman Gallery in New York called for a grid of thousands of tiles, the design of which was dictated by computer glitches. Hundreds of meticulously selected relics of organic and inorganic life were embedded in the tiles. Each slice of crushed metal, scrap of paper, rubber tire, shard of glass, and butterfly wing was first defined on a computer and then arranged by hand. *Two Suns* is an example of a project that was almost entirely planned in advance of its installation via computer renders, while others, such as *Planetarium* or *Rinascimento*, were completely responsive to the conditions at the moment of installation. These different modes of planning are site specific, determined by each space rather than the limitations of rendering technologies.





moneda ●

jabón ●

masa ●

moneda ●

espejo roto chico ●

moneda ●

jabón ●

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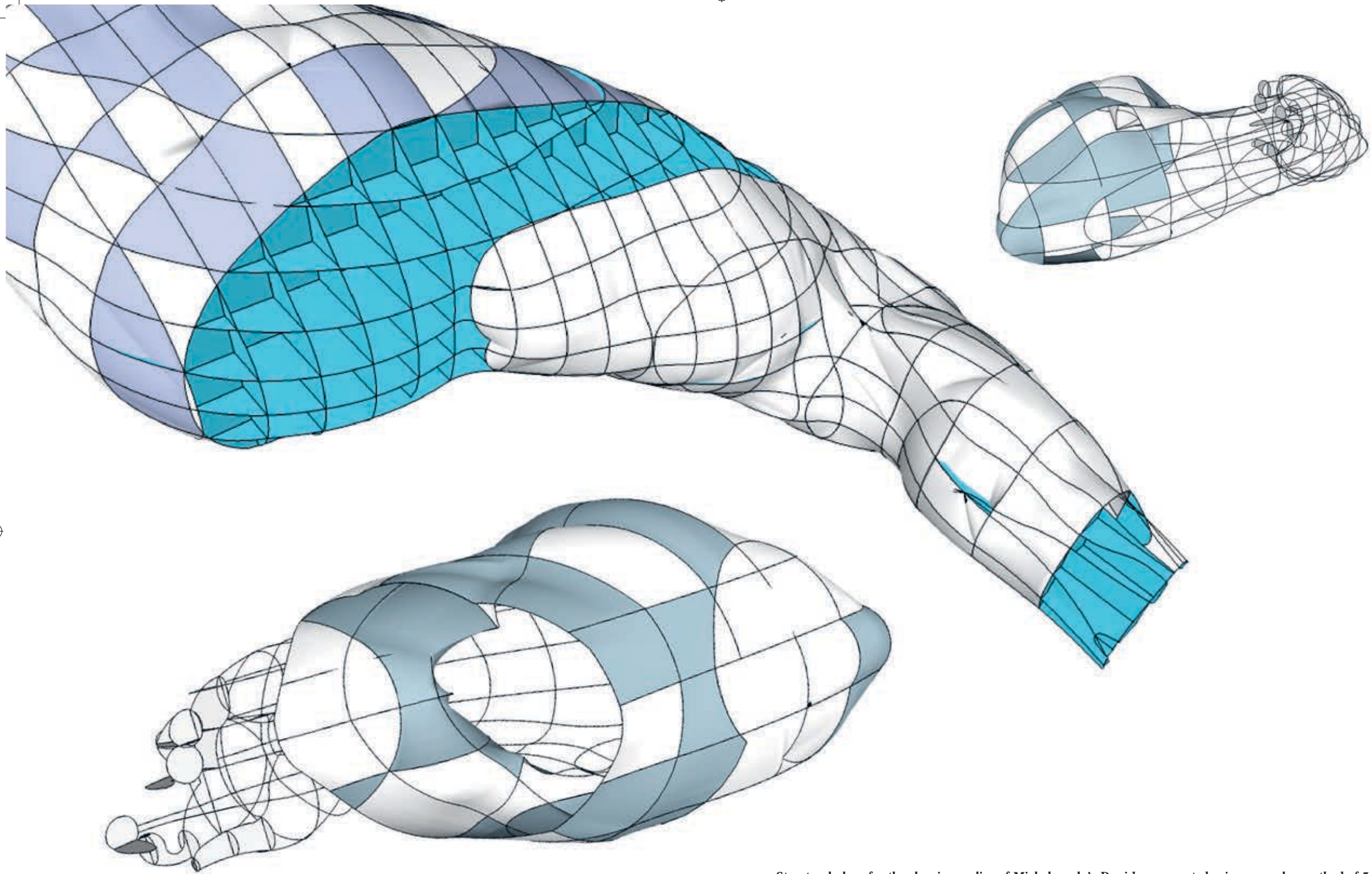
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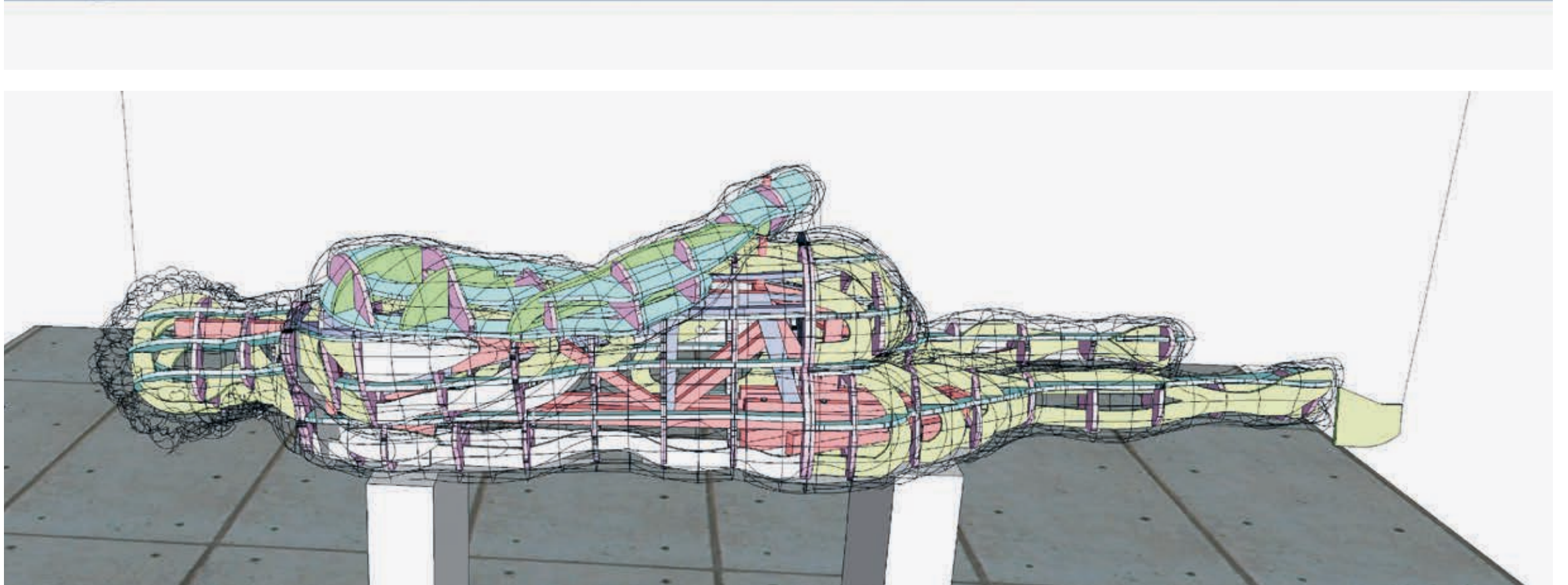
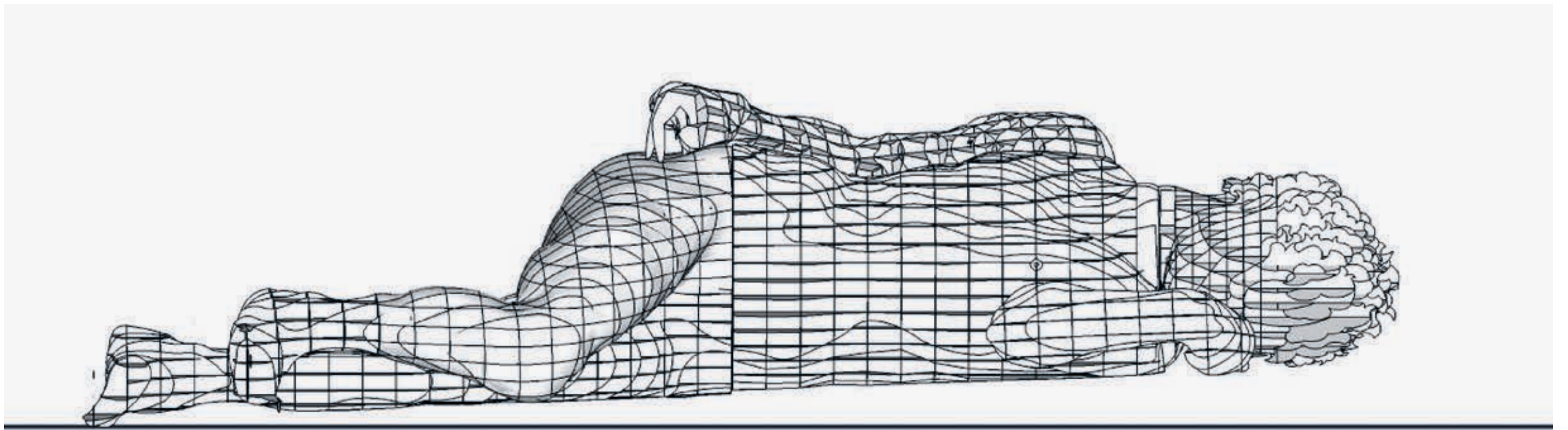
espejo roto chico ●







Structural plans for the sleeping replica of Michelangelo's *David* were created using an analog method of 3-D scanning. A small-scale maquette was sculpted in putty by hand using reference images, books, and online materials. Then, using a traditional sculptor's pointing technique, data from more than 1,000 locations marked on the model were transferred to a program to create a correlating digital cloud of scalable points and planes. These formed the 3-D model used for engineering and planning of the exhibition, and later generated the precise wooden structural skeleton of the David, seen here, that the clay and cement sculpture was layered on.







Housekeeping: A Conversation between Helen Molesworth and Adrián Villar Rojas

Adrián Villar Rojas: If I had to choose one word for us to discuss together—a word that has implicitly traversed our dialogue during these past two years—it would be “housekeeping.” We are going to do “housekeeping” at The Geffen: cleaning, renewing, and reorganizing the space. Then, boxes with materials and remains from previous projects that I have been accumulating for the last four years will be shipped from all over the world to the museum to be reused in this exhibition. On the one hand, there are materials that I (and my collaborators) have gathered from our travels—anything from seashells and stones to vegetables, fruits, and plants—that we have not used yet. On the other hand, there are leftovers of the “art” we have produced in previous projects, bits that have survived exhibition dismantling, that I have decided to keep for reuse. These leftovers will not be reinstalled but recycled in a kind of second life at MOCA, completing a journey from “art” to “prime matter” and then to art again. All of the things that we are bringing here have been kept in rented storage spaces in distant cities, such as Sharjah, Istanbul, Rosario, Berlin, Athens, and Turin, and will now “meet” one another in Los Angeles. So this is also a sort of housekeeping of my own archives. The other point I want to touch upon is your impressions about what happened when you received that first PDF with my proposal.

Helen Molesworth: Let’s start with housekeeping, because we’ve passed this word back and forth between us since we first met, and it’s a word that Bryan and I, who have worked together for several years now, also use a lot. It’s a word and a concept that I believe in. So maybe I can begin with how I use that word and what it means for me.

If the twentieth-century avant-garde’s desire was to broker an arrangement between art and life, then I have always been oddly more interested in the “life” part than the “art” part. What do we mean when we reference

life? And what do we mean when we refer to the everyday? How do we talk about the labor that structures the everyday lives of the vast majority of people on the planet? A lot of that labor takes the form of cleaning and cooking, so other labor can happen. So that more cleaning and cooking can happen, so still more labor can happen, etc. So, for me, housekeeping is very literal, and it comes from my political identity as a feminist and my personal life as a very domestic creature. As a feminist, I am interested in housekeeping because it’s an extraordinary arena of labor that has historically been performed by women. This labor has either been unpaid work by women in families or underpaid—and when it has been underpaid, it has traditionally been done by low-income, working-class people with brown skin. Certainly, in the West, wealthy white people and middle-class professionals hire poor brown people to do work that they do not want to do, or don’t have the time to do.

These forms of labor—the unpaid or undervalued labor that falls on the backs of working-class women, people of color, and the poor—has always been very interesting to me because it’s the kind of labor that is not seen if it’s done well. In fact, it is essential that it not be seen. Hence, housekeeping occupies absolutely no position of privilege in any narrative. Nobody wants to talk about cleaning up. No one wants to talk about the dust under the bed. So when I went to Sharjah to see *Planetarium*¹ (pp. 57–75), the thing I found so extraordinary was this extremely moving, transformative, beautiful, installation that possessed all of the mystical qualities of art—but what really got me was all of the housekeeping that had gone into that structure before the art thing happened. I knew you could have put those gorgeous, sedimentary, sculptural columns anywhere, and you could have put them in a dirty building. That, too, would have been a gesture. But you and your crew had prepared the space so that it was immaculate, and, further, you made it look like you hadn’t

¹
Planetarium,
Sharjah Biennial 12:
The Past, the Present,
the Possible (SB12),
Kalba, United Arab
Emirates, 2015.

done that work. This was the very powerful housekeeping gestalt that I got from the work.

When I met you and saw this work, I had just started working at MOCA, which as you know was a museum that—very literally—almost failed. And I had begun to consider that one of the reasons the museum had almost failed was because no one had done any housekeeping. Simply put, there was a lot of deferred maintenance at The Geffen.

There is an incredible history here in this space, especially as a place of great experimentation for both artists and curators. However, as a young artist of a new generation who had worked in many sites all over the world, you came in, and you didn't say, "Oh my God, this is amazing." You came in and said, "Oh my God, this place is filthy." And that was the frame within which we started to talk, largely because you were unwilling to accept the space as a given. You had a desire to change things about the space that might not be legible in the same way that housework, when done well, is not legible.

AVR: Your positions on housekeeping—from your perspective, as a feminist, on the problems of the social, economic, and political underestimation of housekeeping as a fundamental labor—make me think of how much anxiety this invisible aspect of my practice creates. And I wonder whether it should continue to be invisible or not. I know these gestures are important in their state of invisibility, but I also know what a headache they are for institutions, because the contract they have with their audiences is one of visibility. Even if they are attending a performance, or some extreme art world experiences, I think we have become very used to a factual, literal contract with our audience: they must see something.

HM: I couldn't agree more, and this brings me to your second question about the arrival of that first draft of your proposal. As much as I say I'm a feminist, and that I was interested in rethinking the spaces of The Geffen, and interested in this project with you in terms of housekeeping, the first PDF arrived (pp. 124–133), and it totally made me anxious. I thought: "I don't understand

how we're going to convince anybody about this project. How are we going to raise money? There's nothing there." Or there was the time we had a conversation in which you registered ambivalence about the spectacular nature of your work. I don't know if I ever told you this, but I remember thinking at a certain point, "That's great. I think that's incredible that you are rethinking your relationship to spectacle," and then the proposal showed up, and I was like, "Fuck, you can't rethink your relationship to spectacle! Not on my dime. You can do that on your next project!" (laughter)

AVR: "You're still young. You can do some others." (laughter)

HM: The first proposal was mostly about cleaning and light: opening skylights, cleaning windows, looking at the lighting tracks from the 1980s. You knew that it would not be visually possible to have that degree of old information in the space and have it read in a new way. While I can be very philosophical about this invisible labor, I think you are right to question what it means to either adhere to the labor as invisible or to make the invisible visible. Neither one of those gestures are clean solutions to the problem. They each then produce other problems to be thought through.

AVR: Over the years I think I've developed a conscious use of spectacle as a tool, one among many others. Simultaneously, the spectacularity of certain projects has its counterpoint in other projects that play the role of a deep criticism on certain aspects of my practice. This is the case, for example, of the *hornero* nests [mud nests of the Argentine national bird] that my team and I have been installing almost secretly all over the world. It's an extremely difficult project to perform, and virtually invisible, modest to the point of being undetectable by viewers. Therefore, the constant dialogue between spectacle and criticism of the spectacle is absolutely present and consciously developed. As in the MOCA project, it is present within large-scale projects themselves, which are surrounded by a series of invisible tasks whose completion implies decision making, consensus seeking, and limited resources to fulfill

“infinite desires.” This is what we could define as the “project politics,” which is a long process of negotiation within institutional contexts that can take years before spectacle shows up, even in its work-in-progress form. But there’s a question I keep coming back to: Is all this invisible process more relevant to me than the visible side of my work?

This question is a critical one, because it enables me to expand the so-called battlefield, to move towards a kind of negativity, a logic that pays less attention to things—objects—than to the conditions of possibility for those things to exist. In this regard, what I am asking myself in my work is, “Which mechanisms, within a concrete art experience, activate the boundaries between the art and the non-art inside a given exhibition space? Apart from praxis—identifying these mechanisms in a certain space and approaching them playfully or ironically—there is an answer that is more genealogical, historical, which then leads us to the problem of how this currently stabilized signifying system known as the field of art appeared and has been building and rebuilding its own internal and external boundaries (over centuries of political and symbolic struggle, within which a myriad of agents have mobilized their resources, developed their tactics and strategies, while gaining or losing power, gaining or losing influence, prevailing or decaying, signing peace, betraying deals, killing or dying, reaching consensus, and so on and so forth). Art, this art *world*, is very much a political battlefield, and somehow, this is what we “staged” during our two years of dialogue and negotiations.

Now, what I want to do is alienate the art experience. In the environments I’m generating, there is a system of values in which some elements are put into play to label themselves and be immediately perceived as art, to be a counterpoint for everything else, which is there to be perceived as the non-art, as the frame or context, being both poles—the *art* and the *non-art*—equally artificial and designed. And it’s funny how, in most cases, the non-art pole, the invisible frame, the silent context, is a thousand times more complex and difficult to produce than the art pole.

HM: I think that might be the logic of the spectacle, though.

AVR: For the spectacle to exist, you have to manipulate the invisible?

HM: I’m thinking out loud, but one of the most spectacular places in the West is the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles. However, this space can only be spectacular if it is immaculately clean. Someone has to dust and clean that hall every day. If there is a piece of paper on the floor in the hall of mirrors, if there’s dust on the frame of the mirror, if the paint on the trompe l’oeil ceiling is chipping, then the spectacle doesn’t work. Maybe that’s what is interesting: your work will let the housekeeping disappear, but only so far. Because the fact is, I *can* tell from the photographs of the new installation at the Kunsthau Bregenz² (even though I’m only seeing them online) how precise the gestures are; I know they are on point. Just as I was seduced by the dead bird in the columns at Sharjah (pp. 56–75), I was also really aware of the finish work of the paint on the floor. There wasn’t one tiny bit of paint out of place. The finish work was perfect. The dead bird is a kind of magic labor I don’t understand. Maybe that’s another way of talking about it: I totally understand the labor of the perfect paint job. I can’t do it, but I understand how someone did it. Someone supervised. Someone made a mistake. Someone fixed the mistake. Someone’s sense of self had to be bound up in making the paint job perfect. Does that make sense?

AVR: Yes, absolutely. I know that “housekeeping” is a term you’ve been using for many years. I was not using “housekeeping” as a way to talk about what I was doing. I was very aware that I was taking care of these places. And, as you said, in many different ways, I’ve been refusing spaces as they are. It is key to express it like this: refusal. It is a perfect word to define how I am feeling lately about exhibition spaces. I’ve been questioning myself a lot about why I cannot produce something that is one-on-one, tacit, nineteenth century, even, in the way it imagines the sculptural connection, the very traditional: “I am seeing something, and I have a connection with that thing, and I absorb the thing.” I’ve been wondering lately where this refusal of the space, this intention to always change and modify the space, will end. How far I will take this? Because it is a refusal, and it takes us back to something

2
The Theater of Disappearance,
 Kunsthau Bregenz,
 Austria, 2017.

I would love to discuss with you, which is the political agency of the housekeeping when I'm performing it.

For instance, for eighteen months we have had complex negotiations with MOCA—with you, Bryan, and everybody at the institution—about how we can make this housekeeping possible. And during this time this little phrase kept coming back to me: “The container generates meaning.” And ultimately, the “container” is actually people. It's not only the walls of this space or any space, because in order to achieve whatever you want to do with that dirty wall, you have to negotiate with people. This is part of the political agency of housekeeping, and it is part of what I call the sustained “host/parasite” relationship I develop with the institutions I work with. This sustained interaction with organizations is what allows me to create deep, transformative experiences that would otherwise be impossible. I try to understand the dynamics and structures of internal functioning of institutions by inserting myself as a parasite, thus producing my read of the psyche of the organization. After twelve months of exchanging ideas with The Geffen, I sent my proposal, explaining each position from which each problem could be managed, and this is what seemed to stun the institution. This exhaustive reading from a parasite that confronted the institution with a kind of mirror that it may not yet have been fully ready to face. Six months after receiving that proposal, we can finally say that the living body of the institution, the flesh, the human beings that inhabit MOCA, are now quite ready to face the challenge. And time is not a minor variable. We could also say that at first the organization—as any organism would—fought the parasite to ensure the status quo, but eventually a new host-parasite equilibrium develops that allows organizational change, as in the case of intestinal flora, that helps complex animals digest their food and improves nourishment. But first you have to contend with that conservative defense.

HM: Well, I think that's where our politics—in a real political way, *and* in a theoretical-political way, *and* in an institutional-political way—often really falter. We—people who are educated and culturally curious and of the twenty-first century—we have a kind of tacit understanding that meaning is contextual. Context

produces the meaning, and the same things have different meanings when they are placed in different contexts. But what about the ways in which we know this to be true but we don't actually believe it?

For instance, I don't really believe it about myself. If I'm in Sweden, I'm still me, and, for the most part, I don't experience my meaning as having changed. I think we are also a kind of “container,” and, blinded by ego, we don't apply the idea that meaning is contextual to the fullest degree—politically. Your work disallows the pretending that the context doesn't matter. One of the things that I think is deeply challenging and really interesting about your project—and I say project, because I feel like you don't make discrete objects that exist in the marketplace in a certain way, there is this quality of it having this epic arc of time—is that there isn't a way for you to make a thing, and then for me to take it and drop it down into another place (which is an essential curatorial act). For instance, I go to see a work of art in a collector's home, and it has a certain meaning there, and then I take it out of their home and I put it in a museum exhibition, and it has a new meaning. And yet... Truthfully, I think we still believe that a Rothko painting means what a Rothko means whether it hangs at MoMA, in your living room, or in the galleries at MOCA. Even though we say its meaning is based on context, we still kind of believe that the object is the same in all three places.

We allow it, in other words, to be like money, to maintain an equivalence of meaning. I think one of the things happening in your work is that this equivalence is disallowed. Yesterday, when you were talking about all of your 2017 projects—at The Met, Kunsthhaus Bregenz, the National Observatory of Athens, and MOCA, you said: “Yeah, everything's called *The Theater of Disappearance*, but it doesn't necessarily mean that the meaning that is being worked on in all of these four projects is even related to one another.” What I understood when you said that was that the context for each event is so different that it is not possible to migrate the meaning away from the location and travel effortlessly between the projects. It's not possible to pull the meaning and the context separate in your work, so you are working on the sacred myth that we tell ourselves: meaning exists within the object itself.

AVR: This is why dismantling any of my projects involves not only erasing all traces of it but also, more importantly, all relevant meaning of its existence. And this is also why theater is such an accurate epistemological metaphor. Theater is the most territorial, topological art form I can think of, not only because it is impossible to preserve—through documentation or registers (and is thus perpetually dealing with its own disappearance, every presentation being an accelerated cycle of birth, death, mourning, and rebirth, via the next staging)—but also because there is so much contextual meaning involved in any theater piece. Just think of any number of things that are taken for granted, language for example, that are required to effectively stage a play. Think about all of the local expressions, gestures, information, and all of the implicit ways of communicating subtleties that are completely missing if you are not of the local culture. But far from this being a tragedy or any big thing, I want to assume and embrace this radical topology as naturally as the theater does, as an everyday fact in my work, and to keep on exploring what cannot be perceived or preserved: this silent, invisible density that emerges from, remains in, and dies with context.

HM: I think one of the reasons that I'm interested in your practice is because I find it so profoundly challenging to my own ethical sense of what I am doing when I am acting as an institutional subject, when I am acting as a curator at a museum. I love the role of curator, and I love museums, but I find that your work allows me to register my ambivalence in a way that is very convenient for me on some level, because it means I don't have to take it on myself. I can use your work as an avatar to explore my own deep sense of foreboding about the museum and its function. If the core function of a museum, as imagined in its bifurcated inception as a colonialist project in terms of the creation of the *Kunstammer* and in the eighteenth century as part of a French revolutionary project, is to gather and present culture in the name of saving it as part of a national patrimony, then literally none of that is operative in your work. Rather, your generation, specifically the span of your working life, has arisen at exactly the moment of our culture's understanding of the Anthropocene.

Your work suggests that not only is it possible that the museum as an institution might not survive the twenty-first century, but the whole kit and caboodle—civilization, humanity, the Earth—are also on the wane. This puts me in a vexed position. It means I don't know how to be your curator. I know how to be a curator for someone who makes objects that, in my hubristic opinion, I deem worth saving, even if I feel the futility of that project on a daily level. I feel like I am at the end, that my generation is the last generation to even believe in this project of the museum, and that your project encounters this almost as an inevitable failure of the idea of the museum to move forward into the twenty-first century. We have to reimagine what the museum actually is in the twenty-first century, and while I sometimes do that publicly in a very aspirational manner, I know I'm full of shit. I'm just saying that because I have to keep going, because every day I wake up and decide that today I will live for others and myself.

I fell asleep last night thinking about the refrigerators you plan to use in your MOCA project, and when you said, "I want the one that makes frost." Of course, I thought, you want the one that makes frost because it looks like a glacier. It looks like the end of the Earth. It looks like entropy. The agent that you will use to save this sculpture made from food, the refrigerator, is also the agent that will kill the thing: frost. This is, of course, the relationship between capitalism and the environment. This helped me realize that your whole project here at MOCA was to take an enormous span of time and compress it into a spatial configuration. Of course, this is also what museums do. And yet, the Anthropocene is real: I know the waters are rising. I know that much of what I think I'm saving for the future won't exist. I also know that the future might not find it useful. And I know this because in every museum I've worked in, there's a basement filled with art that we don't think is useful anymore, that we don't show, yet we still take care of, even if we don't know why, and often we don't do it very well. What does that mean when the traditional curatorial role of caretaker is so compromised? When we talk about what the politics of the work are, that's it for me: One of the things I feel certain will survive in one hundred years, is that somebody is still gonna have to clean up.

AVR: All these museums have warehouses with things they don't show anymore, perhaps in five hundred years the cycle will totally change? I want to try and address these ideas with my use—and refusal—of space, because I'm interested in alienating the experience of art. You have articulated something important for me: what happens when housekeeping intersects with other issues that are also invisible, like the problem of the museum, or the Anthropocene?

Let's take the project I did at Marian Goodman Gallery in New York³ (pp. 77–97). What I had planned to play the role of “work of art” in the exhibition, a sort of alternate version of Michelangelo's *David*, was later reinstalled at the Marciano Foundation. This is one of the few works that has ever been reinstalled, and when this happens, I always make it clear that upon reinstallation, the “object” becomes a fragment—in the truest sense of this word—from something else. I create museological barriers around it, as if the museum expressed itself with its own codes over the object, as a parasite, as a virus infecting the piece. I'm keen on playing with meaning-structures, manipulating meaning with museum language. I want to show the amputation, I want to make it evident, and for this to happen, museology needs to appear when the work is asked to reappear. In many ways, the next installation of the work should deliberately say, “This thing is incomplete, useless.”

HM: When the work moves in time and space like that, it feels like it just belongs to your name, but the big installations clearly imply something else.

AVR: I've been thinking a lot about this. When I work with my collaborators, we have credit lines that appear; I have thought about how to credit people: my team, contractors, others that we work with. Unfortunately, I now have this situation way less under control than I did a few years ago. It's an interesting thing to consider, the name of the artist. I remember when I did the whale,⁴ that thing had no labels, and no one knew who I was. People could go inside this tiny forest and could either find or not find the whale. The whale could have been produced by who knows, some maniacs, or some huge ants, or some alien culture, or whatever.

3
Two Suns, Marian Goodman Gallery, New York, 2015.

4
Mi familia muerta, Intemperie, II Bienal del Fin del Mundo, Ushuaia, Argentina, 2009.

HM: It's so funny that you use the whale as an example. Because whenever people would tell me they didn't know who you were, I would pull out my phone and show them a picture of the whale as if to say: “It doesn't matter that you don't know who he is. He made this.”

AVR: In the early large-scale projects, I was obsessed with erasing my name from the “exhibition space.” I wanted people to find a “thing” without any chance of it being decoded as “art.” For instance, I wanted those who found the whale in the Yatana forest to do it almost by accident, completely free from any prejudice or preconception. This gesture of deleting myself continues to the present, but not as successfully as in those early years. In this sense, I think it is important to talk about another whale I made in San Juan [in the Cuyo region of Argentina] that was recently mistaken as a real fossil. This confusion, I think, closes a kind of conceptual circle. This second whale stopped working as “art” and was read as a truly prehistoric remain coming from who-knows-what re-emergent tectonic layer. The reader entered the scene, and when I say reader I mean the “discoverer” of that “lost” whale, who did not discover “art,” but something he could neither define nor place in a timeline. People were absolutely confused and, at first, did not have a clue. This whale is the sibling of the one I made in the deep south of Argentina, in the Yatana forest, at the outskirts of Ushuaia—the southernmost city in the world. That first “Patagonic” whale disappeared. It was slowly reabsorbed by the forest, but, as I said, we made another one in the northwest of Argentina which very few people know about. It is the opposite landscape, quite similar to the Joshua Tree National Park. It is a dry, deserted area. This whale doesn't have any labels either, there is nothing in situ to clarify its identity. It is lost in the middle of the desert, with rolling stone hills and mountains dominating the landscape. It has been there for more than five years, and a couple of weeks ago, a drone was flying over the area, making footage of it, and people were like, “A full sighting of a whale appearing in this desert out of nowhere.” “It's a species we don't know.” “What is that doing here?” This was on the news. I learned all this because some friends told me they had seen the news on Facebook. Of course, a couple days later the mystery

was unveiled, they found out the whale was a work of art by an artist named Adrián Villar Rojas, and so on and so forth, but I was gifted this twilight-zone moment, perhaps one of the best moments in my practice, because this “thing” I made was not having an art agency but had been integrated into other fictions and social myths, into other language games, with total independence of my agency. With no ego present, this “thing” became something made by an alien agency. I cannot imagine a better fate for something I do. I really have this problem with the ego. I know it is quite contradictory, for I am the one who plans these huge projects, and perhaps you need quite a big ego to carry them out, but this ego is nevertheless constantly put under deep criticism from inside my own practice. This may be the reason why I work with so many people. It is very difficult for me to trust in whatever I think. I want to have as many voices as possible, for I feel like it’s impossible to have only one opinion about things. I don’t trust my ego, in a way. Your job is quite difficult in that sense, because you are in the position where people expect you to say, “This is art. This is not art. This is no longer art, but in two years it may be art again.” I find this increasingly difficult to say. I was watching a documentary by Adam Curtis. He’s a filmmaker from the BBC.

HM: He did *HyperNormalisation*, right?

AVR: Yes, and there’s another one, *Bitter Lake*, about the United States and its interaction with Afghanistan, from the end of the Second World War up to now. And suddenly you see this art professor teaching art to pupils in an elementary school in post-Taliban, US military-occupied Afghanistan, perhaps in Kabul. She’s teaching contemporary art to these boys and girls who look really confused, showing them a picture of Duchamp’s Fountain. And the teacher says, “You girls probably don’t know what this is, but boys, do you know, what is this?” She doesn’t even say urinal, she says “toilet,” and explains this toilet [sic] is a work of art by a guy named Marcel Duchamp, who was a decisive artist in Western art history. The lessons are in poor English, and the moment is so perfect. It is like a forced transfusion of fast-food knowledge to turn these pupils into good Western citizens

within a few months. It was like, “How to become a Western white guy in ten lessons?” Adam Curtis is quite interested in the arts, and these documentaries are so beautiful, art forms in their own right. So you can tell he is trying to say something along the lines of, “Why do we think this is what we must teach to pupils in NATO-occupied Afghanistan? Why do we think that we must warn these Afghan pupils, in the middle of a devastating war, “OK, guys, after this guy named Marcel Duchamp and his so-called toilet, no more figurative painting, no more narration, is that clear?” It was so ridiculous—there were girls who hadn’t even seen a urinal in their entire life, maybe the boys either. They had just been militarily “returned to the stone age” by those who now were showing them “the future of art” if things began to work in Afghanistan and Afghan art took the Western path. The lesson ended with the teacher asserting something like, “From Duchamp on, the artist says what is art, and this is in some way an act of rebellion of the individual against authoritarianism and tyranny.” The conclusion was the teacher’s way of justifying why she was teaching that shit in a city that was being bombarded day and night. That moment in the film was like, “What the fuck?” Amazing.

HM: Amazing. The Duchamp thing is so interesting. The readymade has been so profoundly misunderstood. I think most people understand it to be exactly the simplistic gesture you describe where, if the artist says, “I say this is art,” then it’s art. They put it all with the ego of the artist, and I actually think what Duchamp did when he submitted it to the Independence Exhibition in 1917 is really, really important: he did so under a pseudonym because he knew if he had said, “I’m Duchamp, and I say this is art,” that everyone would have acquiesced to this idea of his ego. But if an anonymous person, R. Mutt, submits the work, then actually the problem is that the people who accept the submission have to articulate, “Is this art, or is this not art?”

I think what Duchamp understood that’s so brilliant is that the minute they say it’s not art, they’ve actually decided what is and is not art. They’ve been forced to admit that the whole category is actually not dependent on the artist, it’s utterly dependent on them

too. The artist is only one player in a network—to use a hip term from today—of individuals in institutional positions that decide, and that’s what I think is so profoundly interesting, because we’re back to the idea that meaning is contextual. Duchamp’s urinal becomes art the moment in which those people debate whether or not it is art. It is already doing that activity in that moment, and whether you decide it is art or isn’t art, almost doesn’t matter. It’s already started to have a meaning that is very different than the meaning it had in the showroom before he bought it.

AVR: I have to say that I never saw it in this way. In retrospect, it could be understood as a total deconstruction of the ego. When you think about the early twentieth century and the discovery of the real death of ego, it’s the moment that psychoanalysis appeared as a practice. In psychoanalytic therapy, the main thing you have to deal with is your ego. Your ego is your worst enemy.

HM: Hilton Als—who is a genius—wrote a book a couple of years ago called *White Girls*. My favorite sentence of the twenty-first century is a sentence he wrote: “The ego—what a racket.” I think the readymade is an attempt to obliterate this problem of the artist, and instead we perversely use it as a device to say that the artist is always right, which is also something we say institutionally. At MOCA we’re the “artists’ museum.”

I wonder if one byproduct of the Anthropocene, which is the death drive of human collectivity, is to foreground the ego more than ever? Does it help to create these egos that believe in themselves fully? For instance, the role of the curator in the Anthropocene seems to be to produce and stage a certain kind of spectacular event and surround it with talk of dialogue. The curator of the Anthropocene does not partake in caretaking, or housekeeping, or saving. He’s completely peripatetic and nomadic. She makes nothing. He generates experience. Her ego and the ego of the person she’s interviewing are always center stage, and it’s as if that’s all we will ultimately have in the end. There is something about this model that feels apposite to our times, but nevertheless it saddens me. I think: “Shit, man, so we’re not even

going to try and save anything? We’re not going to clean up? We’re not going to honor labor? We’re just gonna engage in the eternal return of the same?” It is such a complicated dynamic for me.

There’s something so deep in the materiality of your objects that without them these kinds of conversations actually can’t take place. There’s all this cleaning, and all this preparation, and all this “invisible labor,” in which the ego is not foregrounded, but the intensity of them as objects with material forms, with texture, with the energy of people’s labor, the entropy of making that allows us as viewers to think with you, to think through you. At a certain moment, it’s not Adrián. It is the object. But I’m old fashioned and romantic. I still believe that the object does a kind of work that the “purely” discursive doesn’t do.

AVR: They do different work. They manifest information in different ways. We relate to them in different ways. The erotics of the object is always connected to who’s behind its making. This is what I love about the making of things.

HM: What I love about your objects is deeply bound up with their texture. I assume that making a Jeff Koons *Balloon Dog* is just as complicated as making an Adrián Villar Rojas event. Yet the erasure of every trace of labor in the Koons piece means that I have no libidinal relationship to that object. When I think about your work and why as the curator I choose you and say, “Oh, no, there might not be anything to save, but it’s worth the time, and effort, and money, and labor to do this,” it’s because I think your work has never offered itself as complete with the answer. Part of why people love Jeff Koons is because he makes objects that behave as if all the questions have been answered. This means the viewer can feel very much in control of their own relationship to the spectacle, whereas when I’m with your work I feel like one of the things that happens is that I am keenly aware of how ambivalent all of the meaning structures are. They won’t settle down. They won’t rest.

AVR: I have one question: Being that I am a male artist who supposedly produces big gestures, big projects, big

exhibitions, and you being a curator who does not at all lean toward these kinds of artists or gestures, how do you understand or interpret your decision to relate to me and to this sort of male-centric situation we seem to have here?

HM: There's nothing more boring than being a feminist, because patriarchy is boring. Its power and perseverance are so boring. Being a feminist is like finding yourself swept up into a jetty. You're in a jetty, spinning around in the stagnant water saying, "I know when the tide comes in we'll get out," and then the tide comes in and goes out, and you're still jammed up at the jetty.

I'm going to use our simplistic language and say words like "men" and "women," and it's going to feel very essentialist, but I don't really mean it as strongly as all that. But, for the sake of brevity. . .

We live in a world, as we know, in which all of the terms we inherit—terms like *art*, *artist*, *freedom*, *museums*, *culture*—were all established within a white supremacist, patriarchal culture. Then the mid-twentieth century comes along, and people who are called women, and people who are called brown, and people who are called gay, decided: "We want in," but we wanted into a thing in which the contours and the definitions had already been laid down.

I feel like the very concept of "artist" imagines a subjectivity that is organized around the ego, authority, power, and the belief that one has the "right" to express oneself. Now, I believe in all of those fictions. But I also *don't* believe in them. Because I *also* think that if all we are doing when we perform a feminist critique is saying that we want to partake in exactly the same power structures that have created the ruthless hierarchies under which some people get some stuff and other people don't, then that is simply not interesting to me.

So back to The Geffen: It is certainly true that MOCA partakes in the phenomenon of turning over the largest amounts of space, money, and resources to predominantly male artists. That fact really does get me down. There's simply not an equal list of women artists one thinks of in this regard. Now when I say that folks usually say, "What about Louise Bourgeois? What about Kara Walker?" And I concur, they're awesome, and I support them, and we will do a big project with Kara.

But that doesn't change the fact that the whole goddamn function of creating spectacular experiences is born of patriarchal white supremacy. I don't get to say, "I refuse this system." And the truth is, I don't want to drop out and go and live in the woods with women. That's the last thing I want to do. I have an ego. I, too, am interested in a platform for what I do.

AVR: You feel like we males have this tendency more than women to become driven or attracted to these kinds of big gestures?

HM: This is sort of painful to say, because in this room, right here, right now—with you, me, and Bryan—I don't see you two as male and myself as female. Here and now we are just being together. That being said, I think the world is organized for the success of heterosexual men, and so you succeed because the world is organized for that to happen for you. It's not necessarily fair to deny you the success that the world is constructed to give you. Whenever feminism ends up discussing the individual, then the argument can feel too tight, regressive, even.

Part of the problem is how do we have a conversation about the patriarchy that is not actually about us as individuals, while still acknowledging that in every programming meeting I have ever been in, male names hit the table effortlessly, while I endlessly say: "We need a woman. You just put another male name on the table." That always ends up feeling like a personal dynamic, when in fact it's actually about the world at large. That's what's boring about being a feminist, it's about having to take this huge argument about how the world is constructed and bring it down to this interpersonal, small way that we actually work through the politics of the world.

This kind of institutional struggle is what the feminist slogan "the personal is political" means. On the one hand, it's great, because it allows you to be a really thoughtful consumer; you can recycle and only eat organic food. You can pretend that you have some kind of control, but it's much harder when you're within an institution to dismantle patriarchal conventions that privilege the people we call "men." Then what appears "personal" is, in fact, up against the reality

of the situation: the idea of the artist, as supported by monographic show, as produced by the museum—all that will get you a white boy program real fast.

You can have a female director, and a female chief curator, and lots of women and gay people on the curatorial staff, and still the boys' names just hit the table so easy, because that's what the system does. It produces them.

AVR: It produces the meaning. Do you think that two hundred years into the future we might generate some sort of new way of procreation? Imagine a way of rethinking...

HM: I have to, because otherwise it's too hard to go to work every day. I feel connected to a group of people and a group of artists that are part of a global network, in which we are all, slowly, in every small gesture we do, attempting to change the way this shit rolls out, to change the politics, to change the very structure of power. I think all you can do is pay into that big freedom tank.

Every day I try to make some gesture that changes something. My grandmother didn't get to graduate from high school because she was expected to take care of her siblings. I was able to get a Ph.D. and choose not to have children—these are the things that meant I could have this big, fabulous life. I say that because change does happen, and I believe in that. I also know I do a lot more housekeeping than my male colleagues, mostly because it's never expected of them, ever. I don't have a single male colleague that thinks about the problem of collection storage in the way that I do. There's part of me that thinks, "Why are you worried about it? Opt out, just do your own thing." But I can't, because my grandmother did a lot of ironing, and worked in the service industry, and I can't deny her existence and her labor. I have to carry it forward so it has meaning. It's huge.

AVR: Patriarchy and the condition of women as a sort of men's private property began like nine thousand years ago, with another three interwoven events: agriculture, sedentarism, and private property. When you had to know whose are these or those children in order to regulate inheritance in increasingly complex communities, women

were fucked up and reduced to patrimony. So, we could say that private property, which is still the core of our modern societies, is also at the core of male domination over women. My question would be, is there any potential future where you see this being reversed?

HM: I wear a popular cult T-shirt that says "THE FUTURE IS FEMALE." Yes, I have aspirational fantasies in this regard, but I also feel like the real task of feminism—and this is why it's so hard—is to ask: What is your relationship to power? Right now power is organized, in large measure, due to the mutually imbricated fantasies of gender with all other binary systems—white/black, North/South, rich/poor, etc.... The largest and most radical task of feminism as a methodology is to query how you will organize yourself and your institutions in relationship to those deeply historical organizations of power?

One of the things that's so interesting to me about the conversations we're having about cultural appropriation—who gets to make what kind of image—and who gets to say what it is that we can do or not do with an artwork (like burning one, for instance), is that it has made me very aware that the whole concept of "freedom of expression" emerged within a white, Western, patriarchal system that has privileged the voices and expressions of men for centuries while not thinking *at all* about anything that women or brown people had to say. So maybe this idea of the freedom of expression and the sanctity of the art object, maybe that's a white supremacist idea?

AVR: Absolutely.

HM: Maybe we need to rethink what that idea looks like if everyone is really and truly equal. And maybe then the idea doesn't work anymore. This is the scariest, most confusing thing I've thought in years.

AVR: I couldn't agree more. I think the most interesting aspect of my residence in Greece during 2016 was discovering that classical antiquity was systematically designed as a Western European and British political project of the nineteenth-century imperialist and proto-imperialist powers. What we have internalized since

childhood as Greek or classical antiquity—this mythic world whose visual center is the Parthenon, its heroes Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, its intellectual legacy Logos and philosophy, and its universal heritage Athenian democracy—is a political design carefully edited by the Greek state and its need to integrate into the Western world, led by the powers that developed archaeology in the area and that were also seeking to build their own “modern” past. Here is the fascinating part: this region of the planet is crucial in the discursive construction of the West, but to carry it out it was necessary to start designing ancient Greece itself.

But who is the designer? Obviously, the digger. And who is the digger? The American, British, French and German schools, whose respective national states were designing their own democratic, rationalist, and even supremacist “roots”—the legacy inherited straight from the ancient Greeks—during the last part of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. One single fact is enough to illustrate this idea: The largest and most ambitious archaeological venture in Athens—excavating a large portion of the city to discover the Stoa of the Athenians—was funded by Rockefeller. At the same time, all of these excavations erased the “undesirable” Ottoman past. The excavations were intended to recover—to design—this white, Western culture. And yet the Persian and Ottoman cultures crossed all over Greece and are so deep inside its history. This kind of deletion happens all the time, all over the world.

I do believe there’s a much more committed way of relating to and constructing our past than to just clean, reshape, and tell a partial story. We don’t have this distinction in the Spanish language between history and story. It’s very interesting to think that in Spanish it’s *historia*. *Historia* is storytelling and history. I always find it quite meaningful and confusing when I’m speaking in English. Is this history or story? Even on a personal level, do we say “our history together” or “our story together”?

HM: Right, and for any good white girl who goes to a liberal arts college, the first feminist thing you learn is that history is “his” story. So you start to understand that history is told from a point of view that is already gendered.

AVR: It’s gendered, and it’s also ethnic.

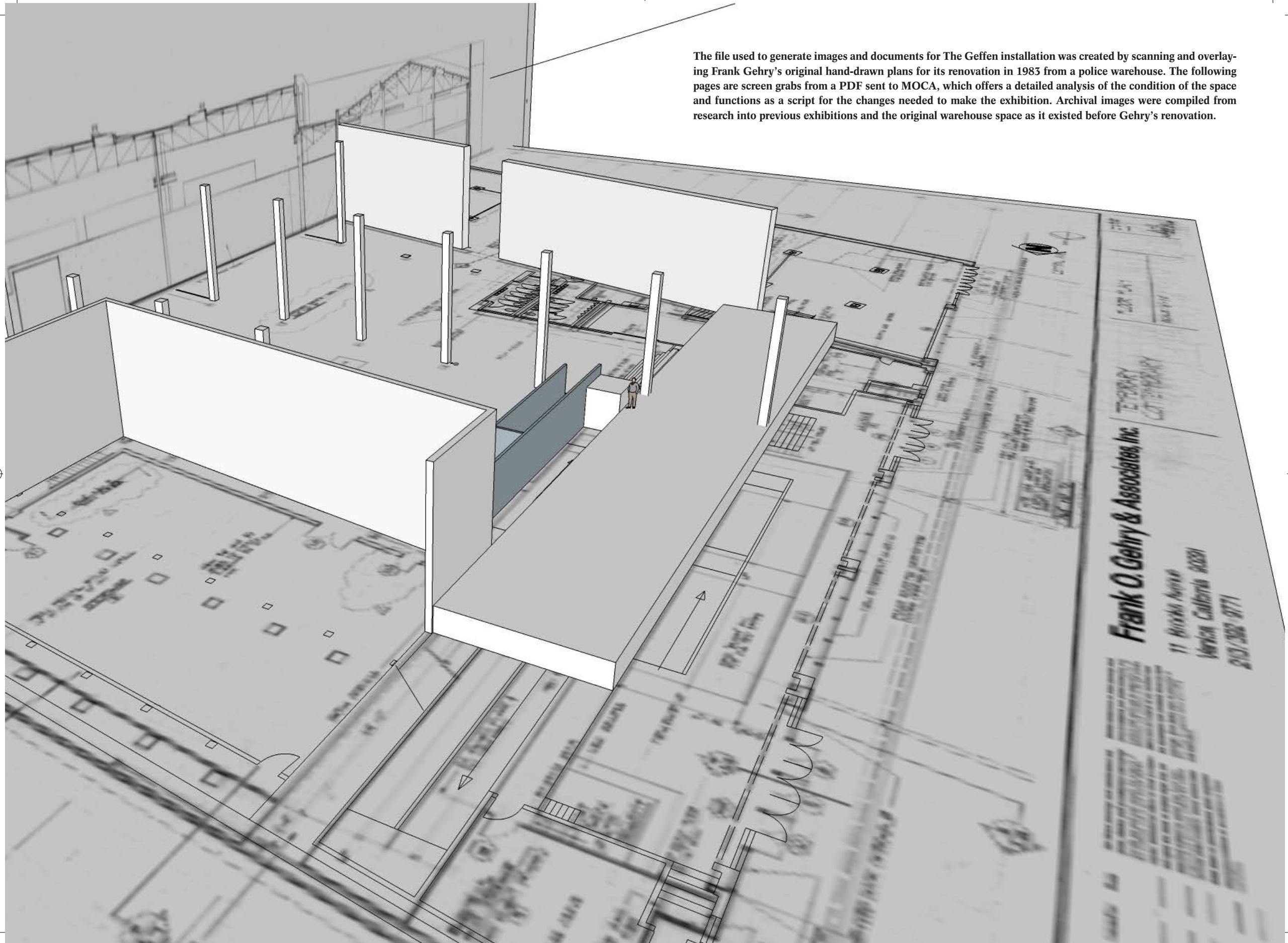
HM: Yes, I think this complexity is part of a recent realization. I think there’s a generation emerging now for whom the discourse of white supremacy will be what feminism was for my generation. It’s the key to unlocking the whole structure. We don’t really teach Marxism anymore, so you can’t do it through the problem of labor or, really, the problem of gender, because now most academically trained people are hip to the theory of intersectionality. White supremacy is the new way to try to articulate the enormity of the problem, to show how the frame is inescapable, because the frame is a white supremacist’s frame. You can’t get out of it.

THE
THEATER
OF
DISAPPEARANCE

2017

THE GEFFEN CONTEMPORARY AT MOCA, LOS ANGELES

The file used to generate images and documents for The Geffen installation was created by scanning and overlaying Frank Gehry's original hand-drawn plans for its renovation in 1983 from a police warehouse. The following pages are screen grabs from a PDF sent to MOCA, which offers a detailed analysis of the condition of the space and functions as a script for the changes needed to make the exhibition. Archival images were compiled from research into previous exhibitions and the original warehouse space as it existed before Gehry's renovation.



Proposed Renovations to The Geffen Contemporary at MOCA

(to be checked)

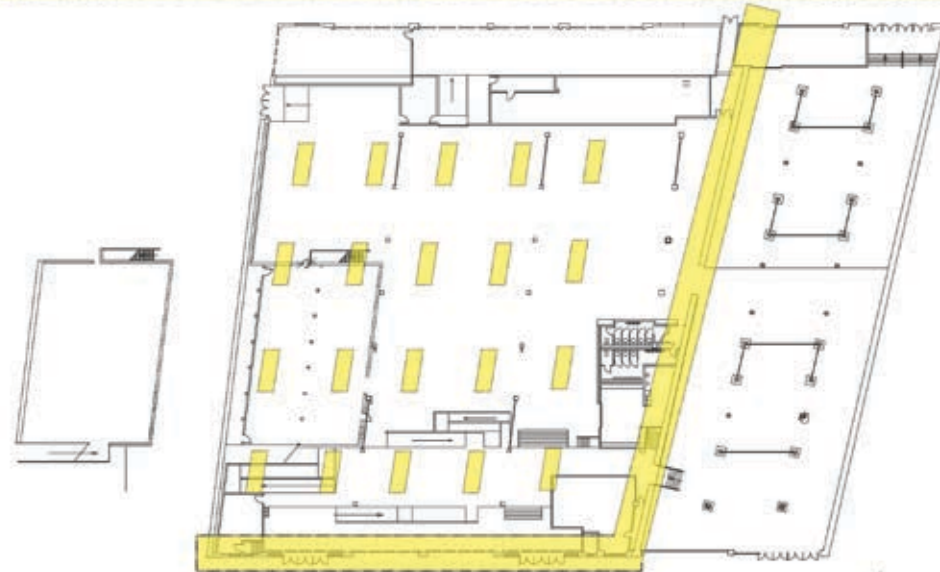
AVR

Proposed Renovations to The Geffen Contemporary at MOCA

PRINT ON A3 (DRAFT)

1 Removal of paint and cleaning windows on west and south sides of building (Note possible HVAC ramifications)

2 Removal of tarps covering skylights



AVR

Proposed Renovations to The Geffen Contemporary at MOCA

PRINT ON A3 (DRAFT)



AVR

Proposed Renovations to The Geffen Contemporary at MOCA

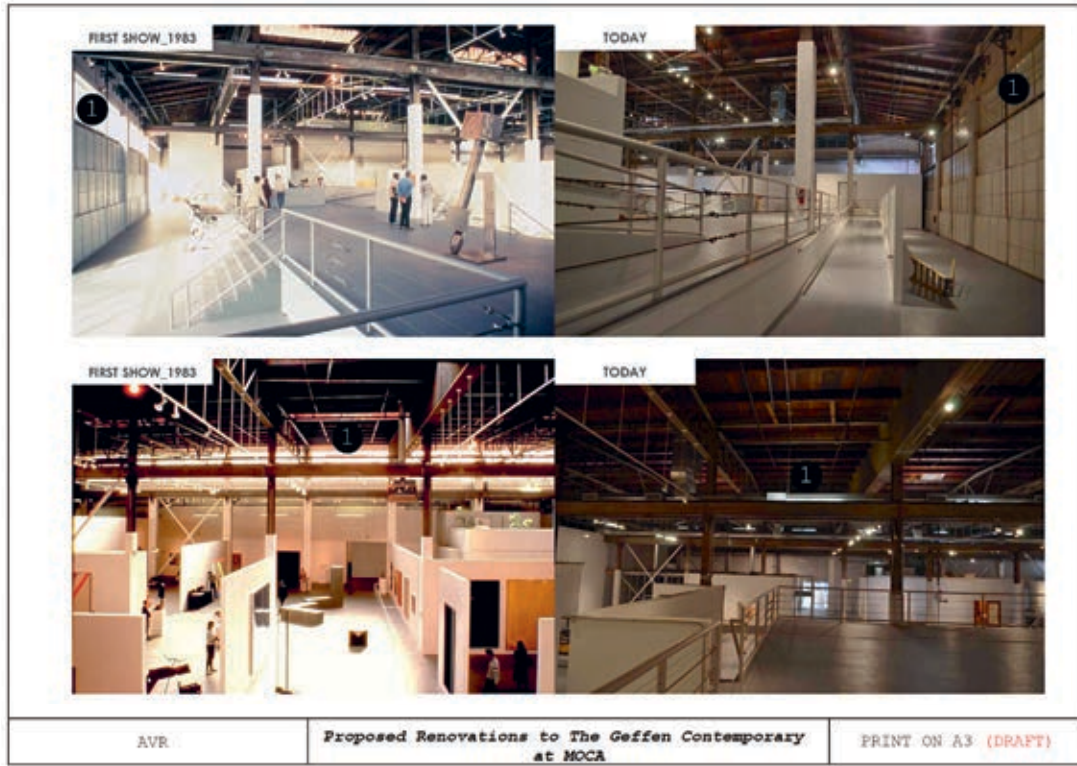
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AVR

Proposed Renovations to The Geffen Contemporary at MOCA

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AVR

Proposed Renovations to The Geffen Contemporary at MOCA

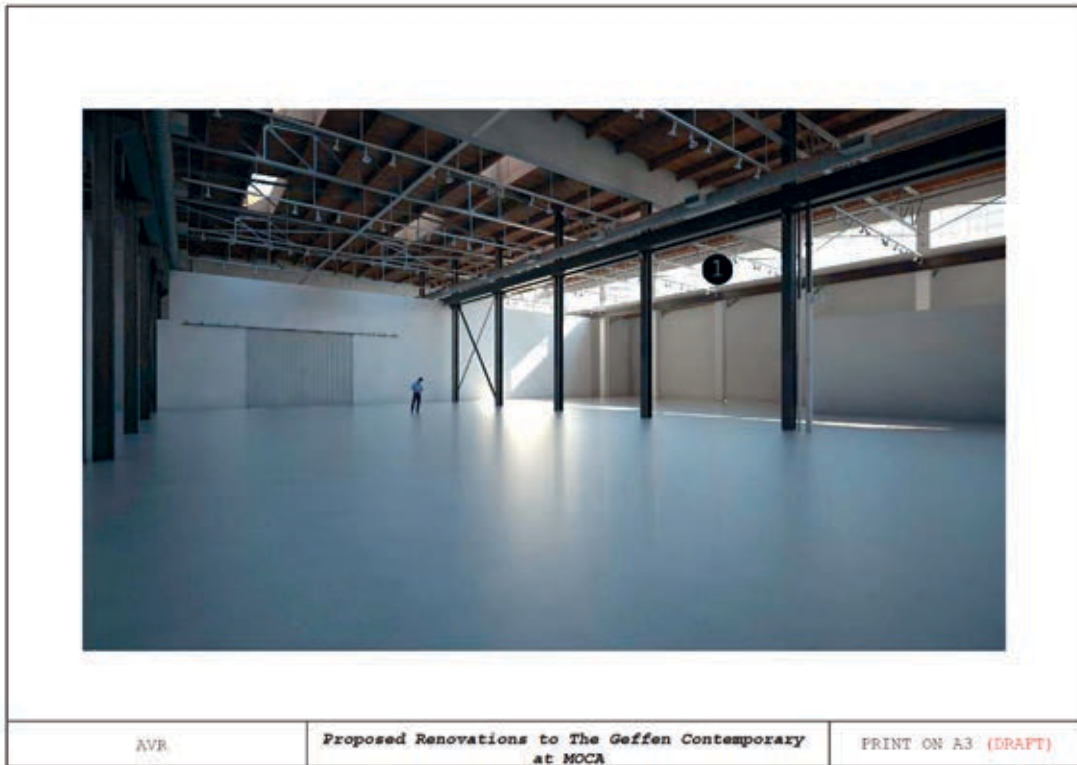
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Proposed Renovations to The Geffen Contemporary at MOCA

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AVR

Proposed Renovations to The Geffen Contemporary at MOCA

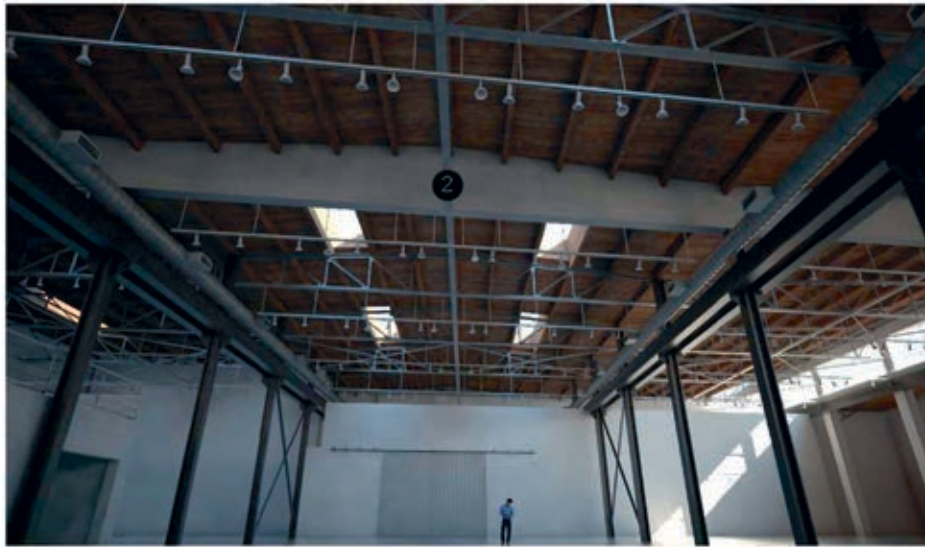
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AVR

Proposed Renovations to The Geffen Contemporary at MOCA

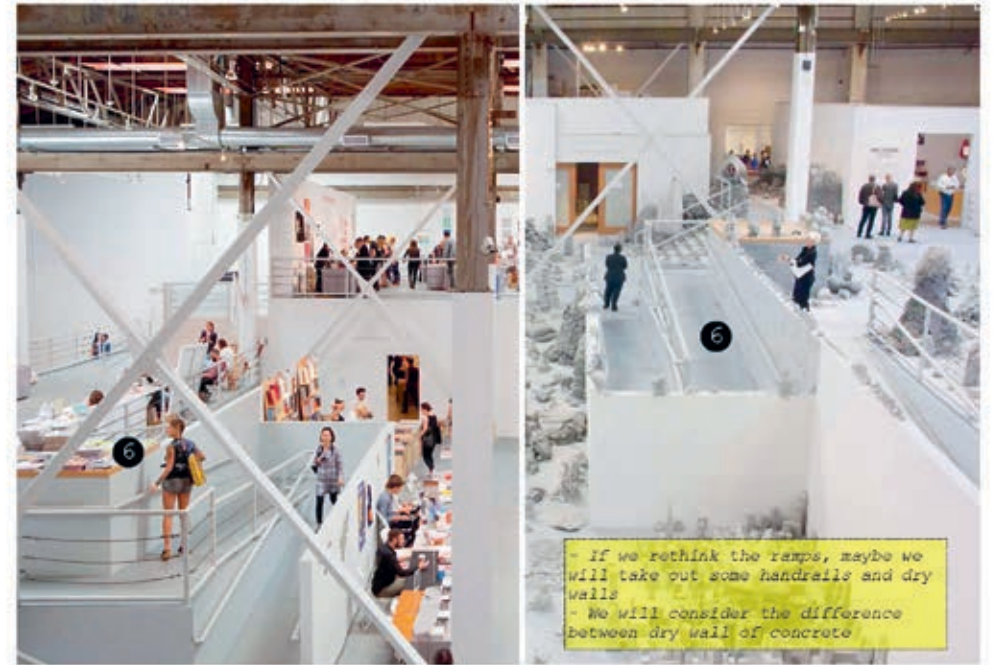
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AVR

Proposed Renovations to The Geffen Contemporary at MOCA

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AVR

Proposed Renovations to The Geffen Contemporary at MOCA

PRINT ON A3 (DRAFT)

- If we rethink the ramps, maybe we will take out some handrails and dry walls
 - We will consider the difference between dry wall of concrete



AVR

Proposed Renovations to The Geffen Contemporary at MOCA

PRINT ON A3 (DRAFT)

What could we do with the hand rails?
 Could we change or redesign it?

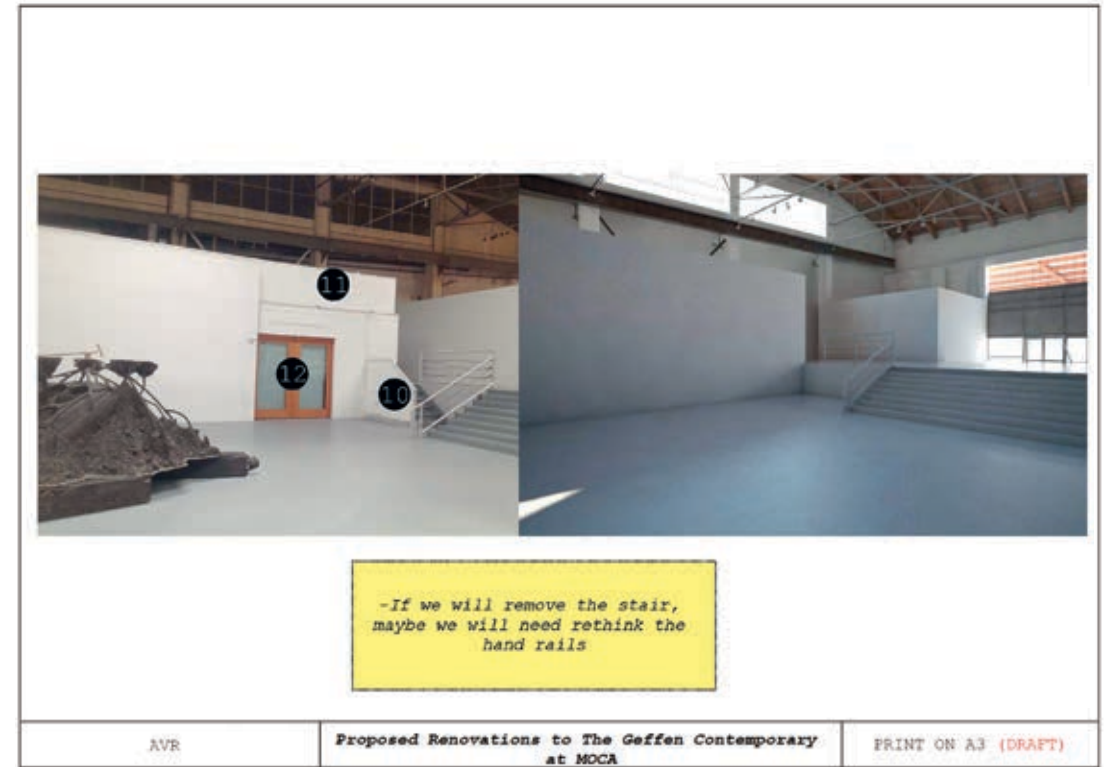
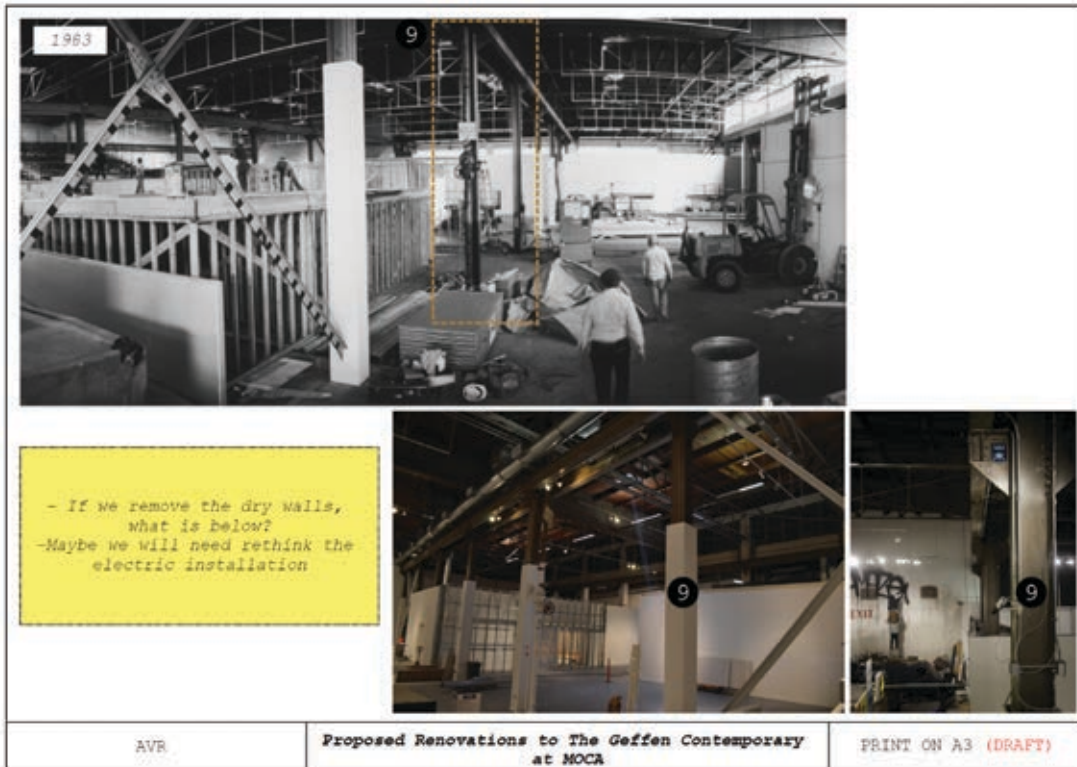
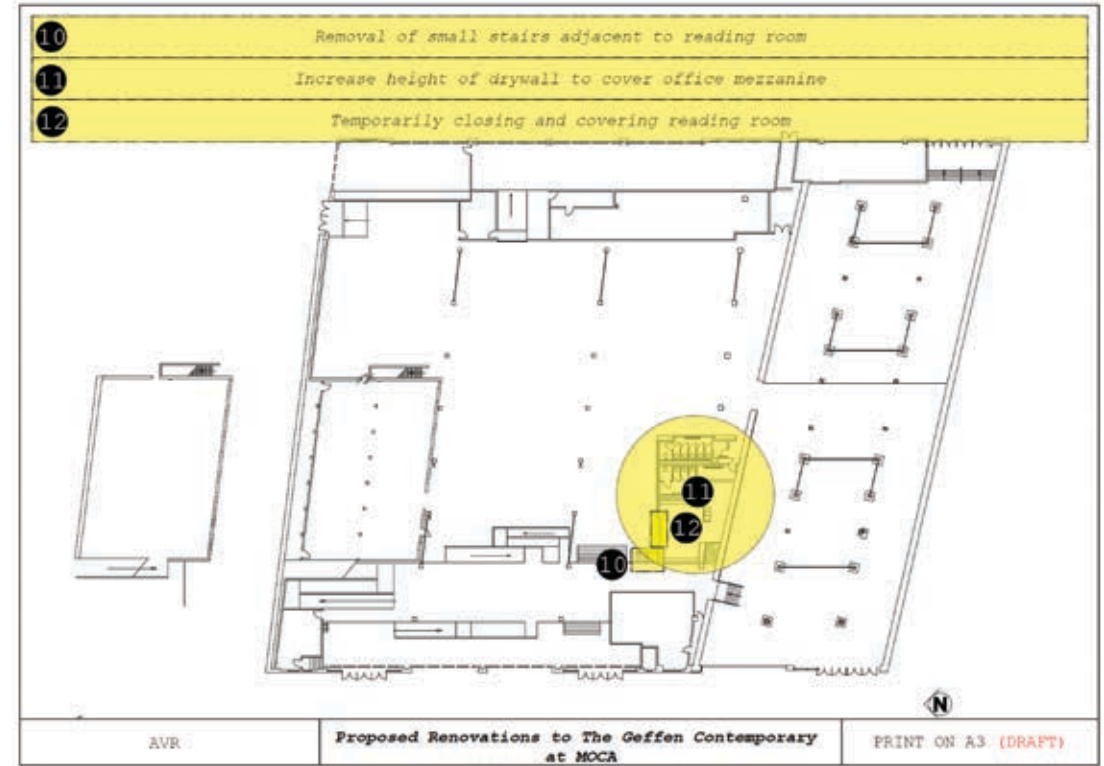
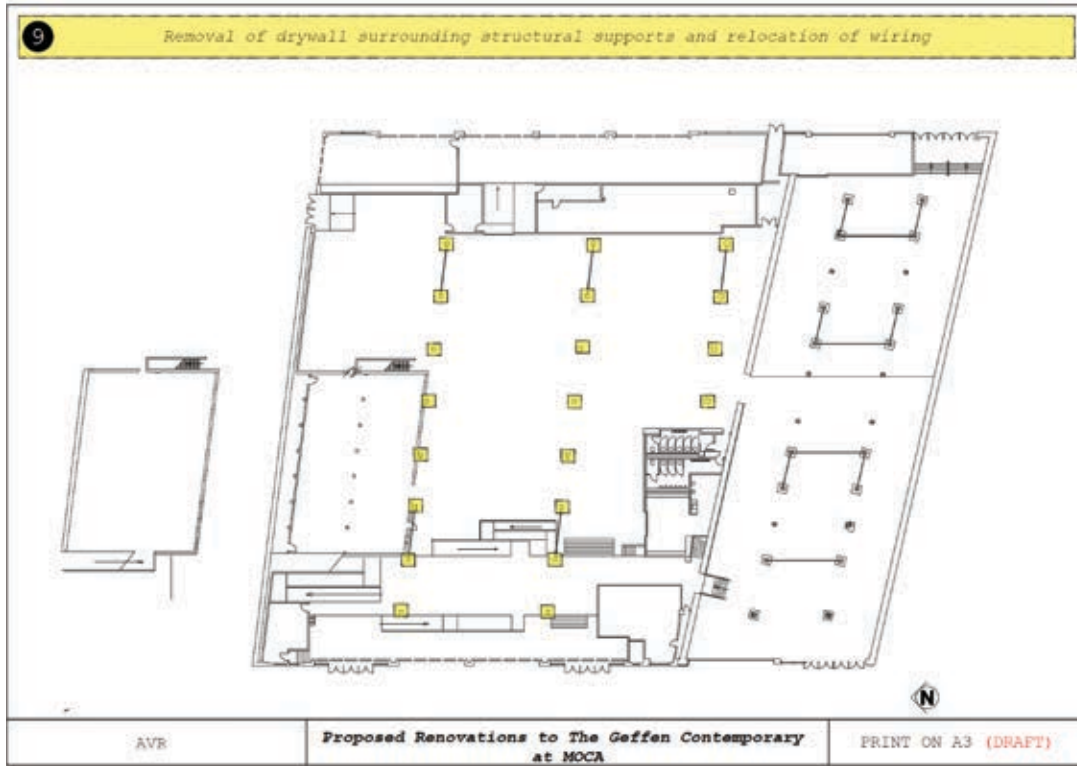


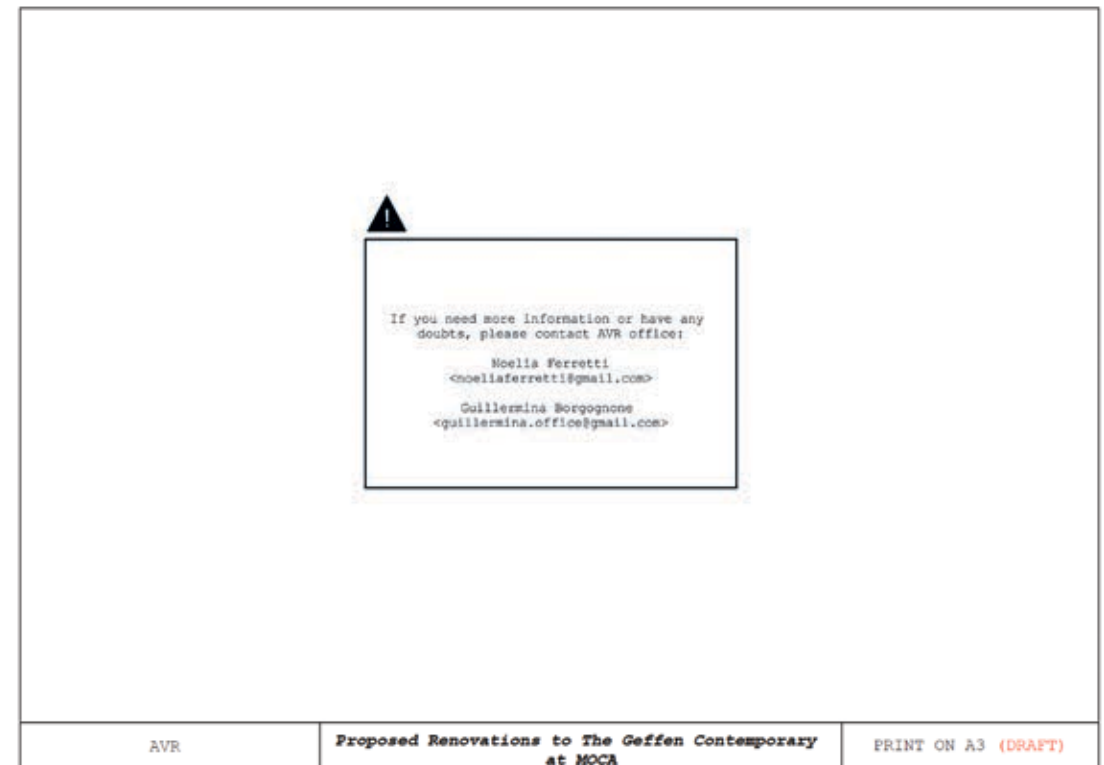
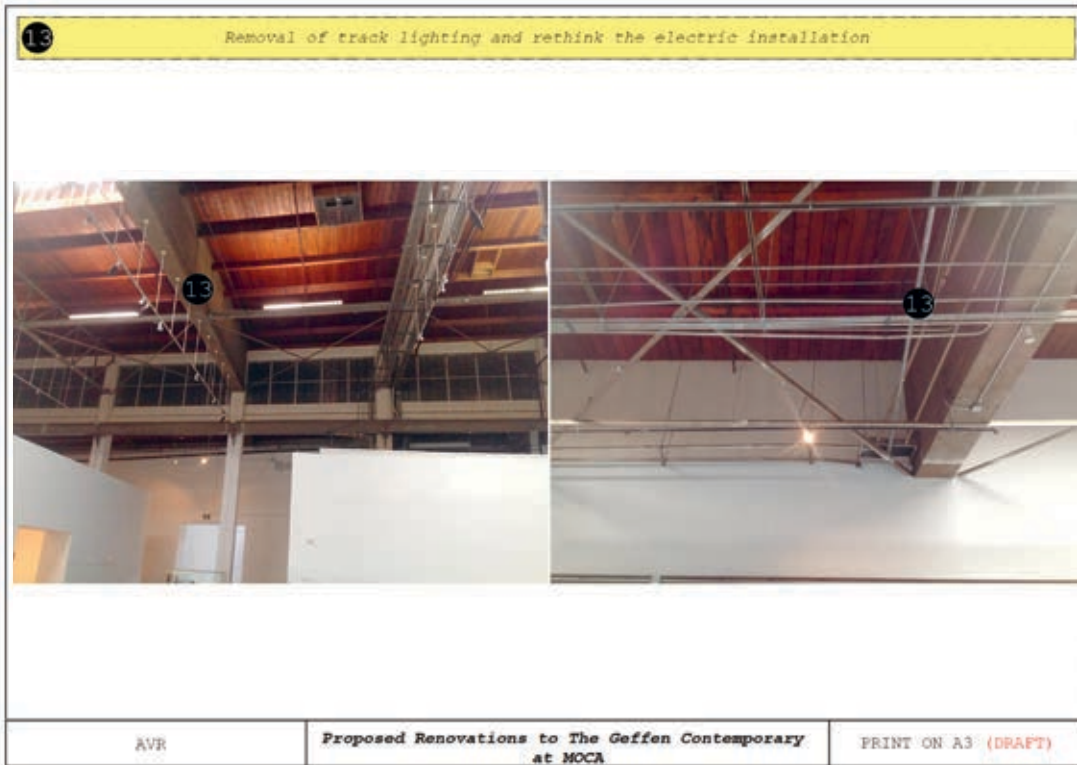
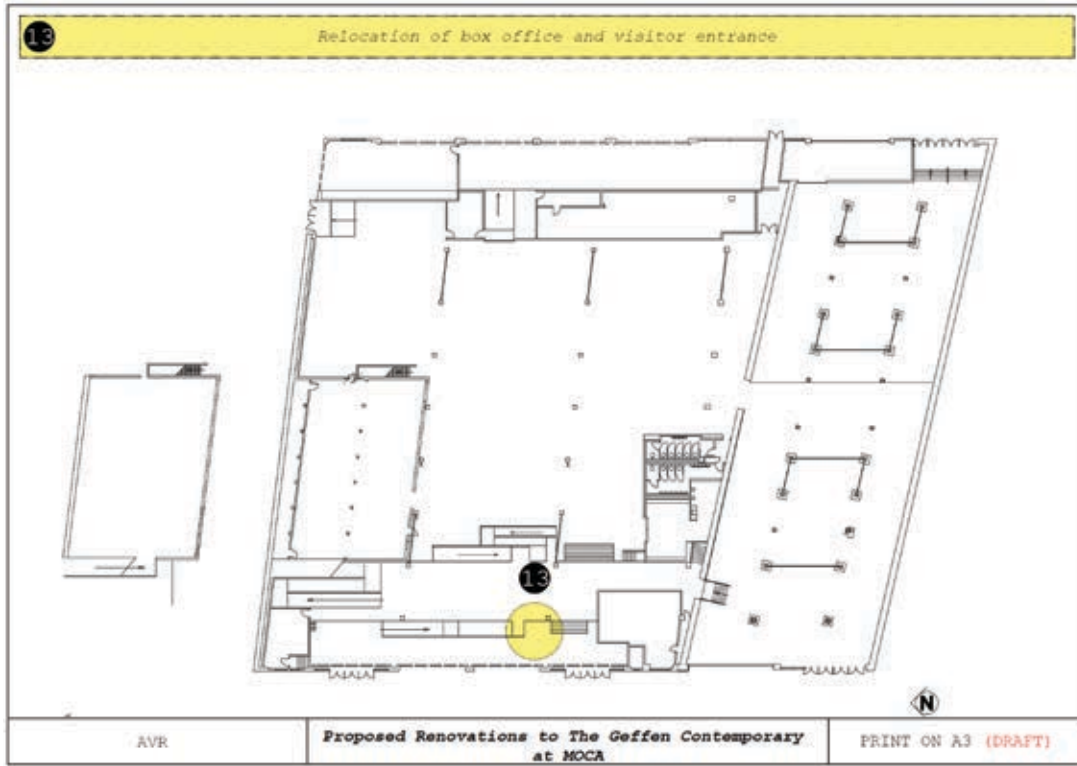
AVR

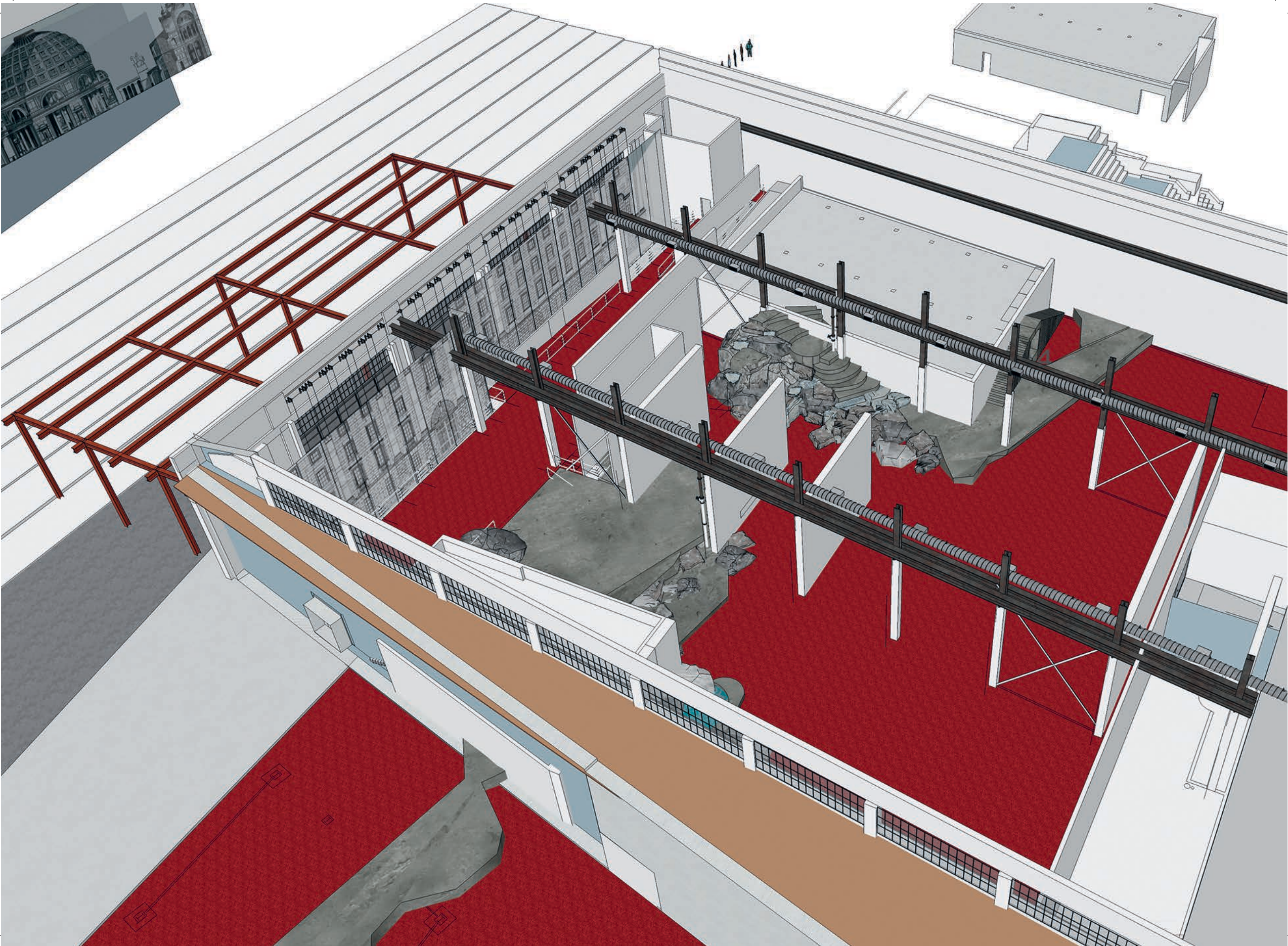
Proposed Renovations to The Geffen Contemporary at MOCA

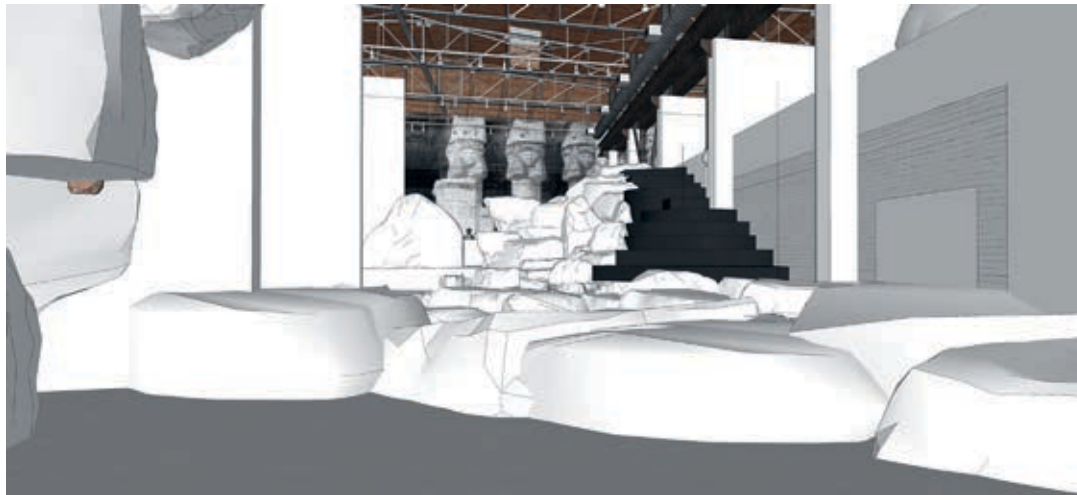
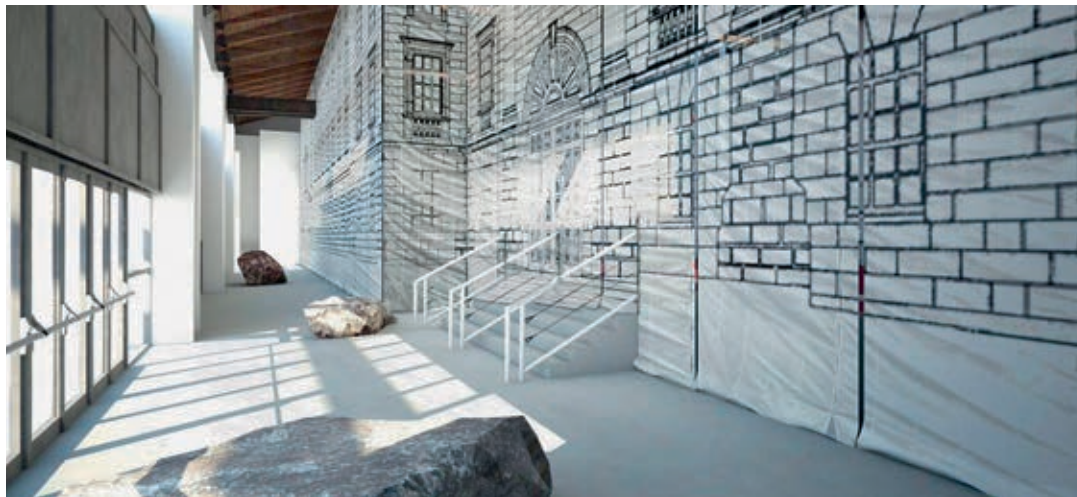
PRINT ON A3 (DRAFT)

- If we remove the wooden pedestal, what is below?
 - we will need rethink, keeping in mind, the dry walls and ramps

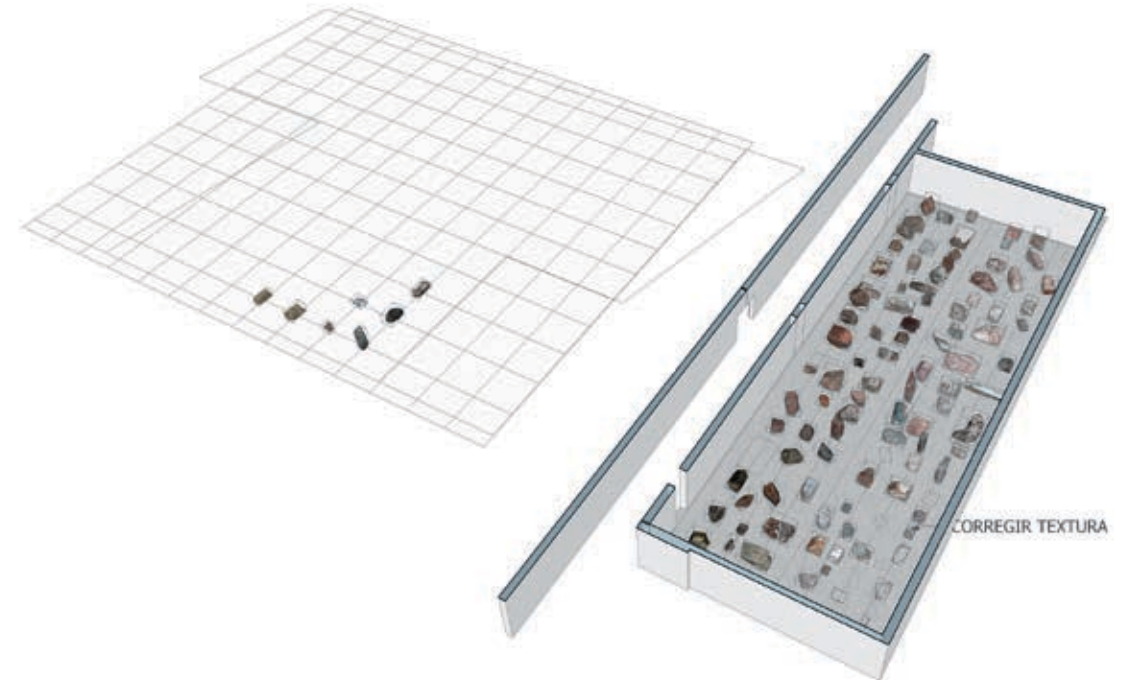
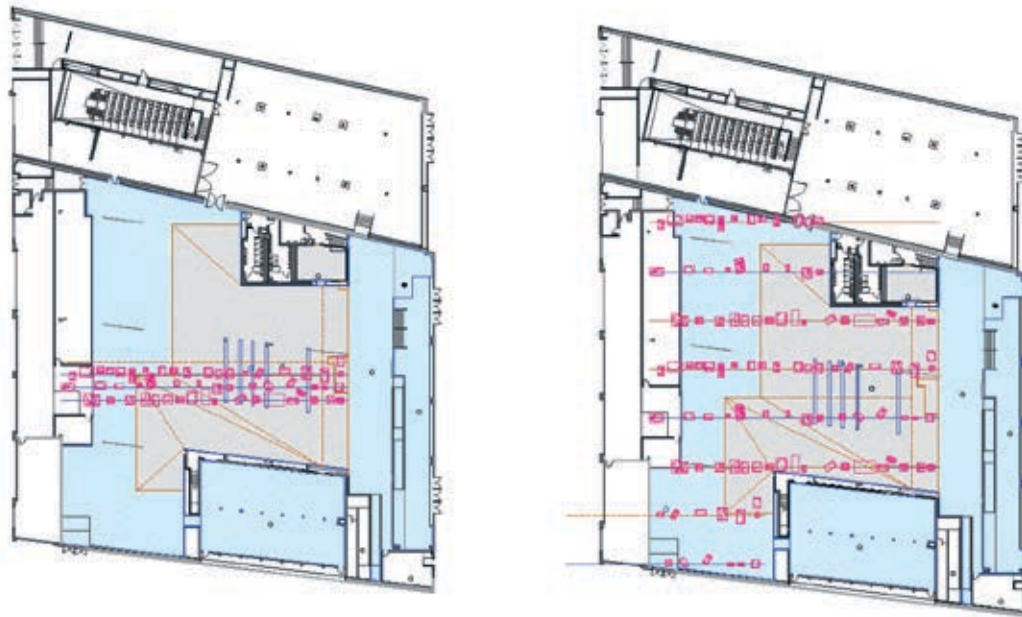
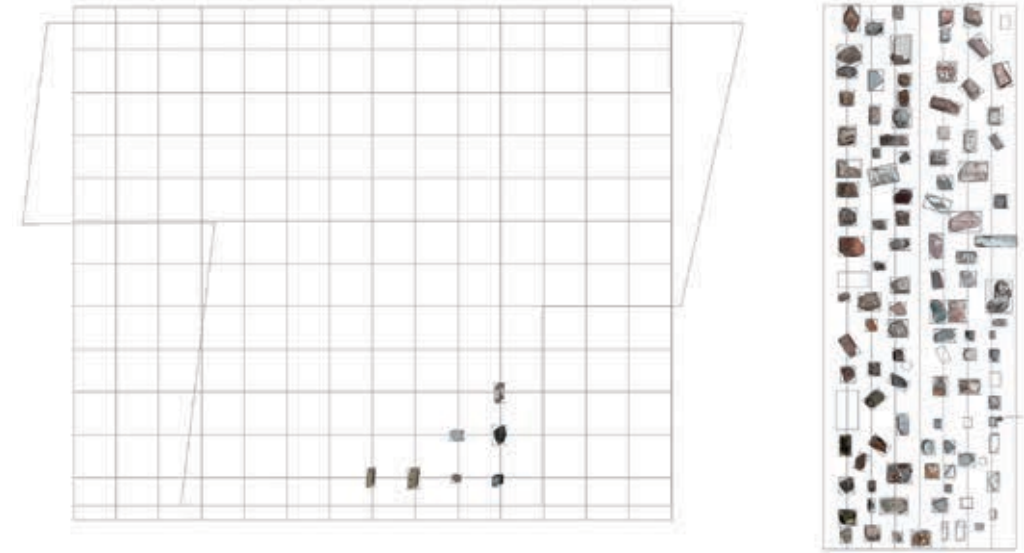




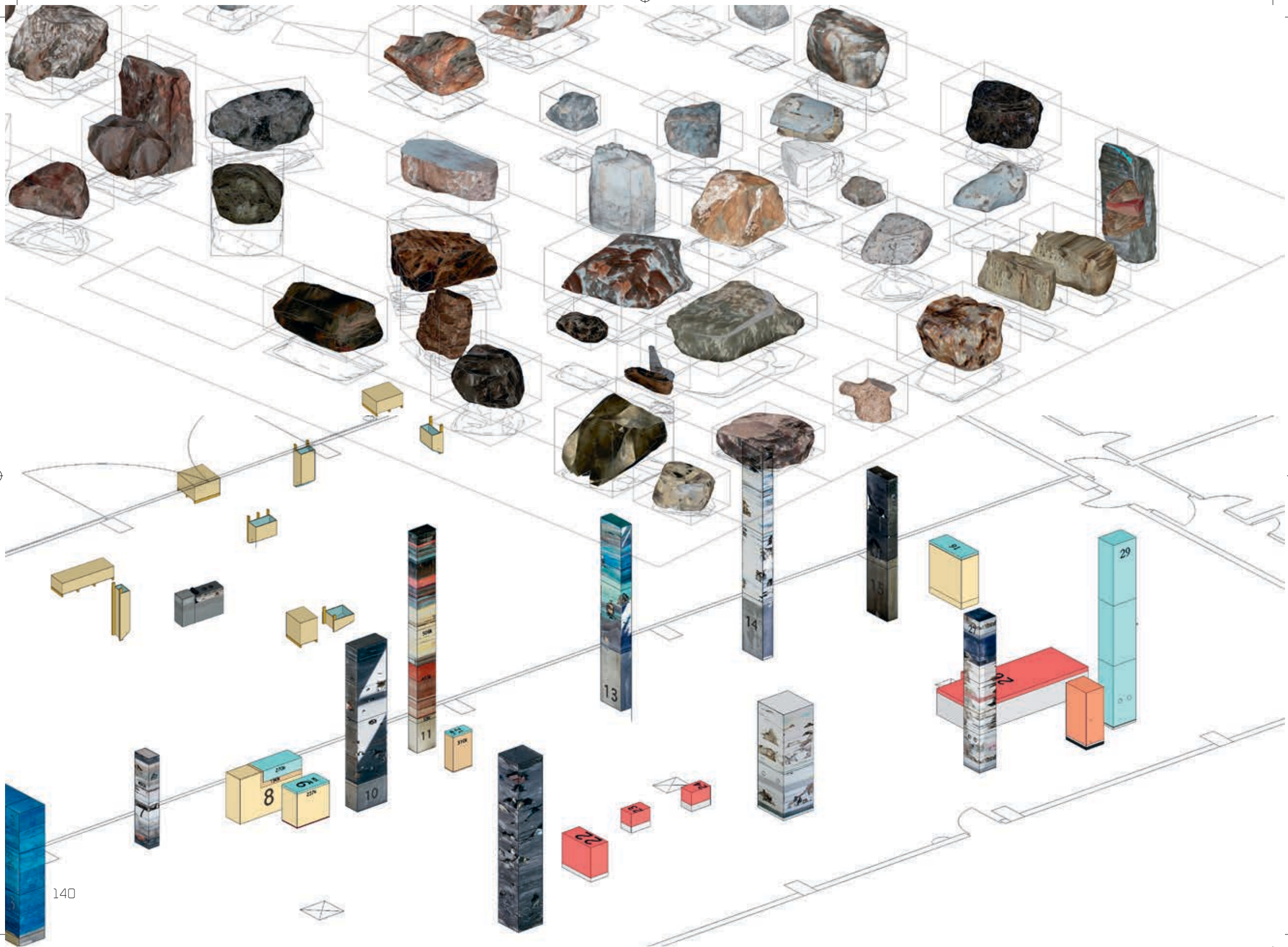




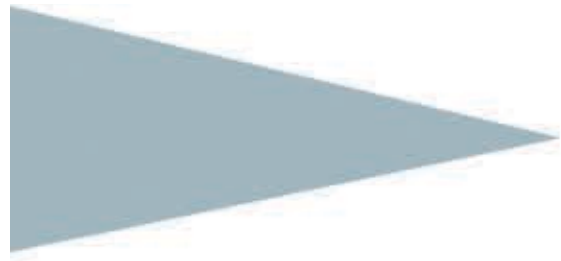
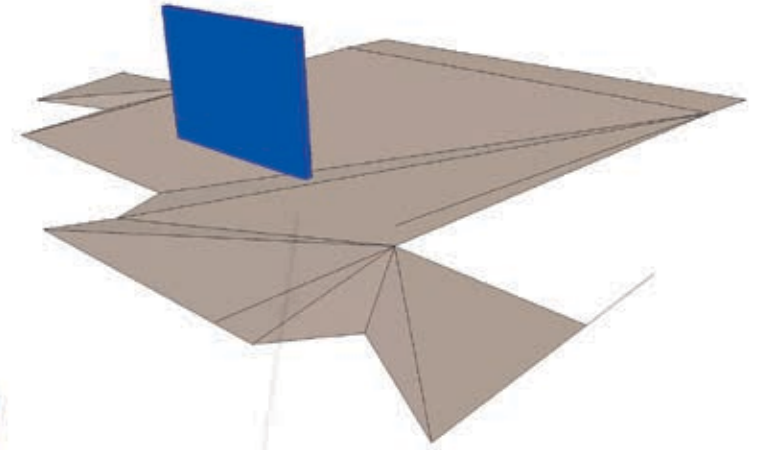
The concept of “housekeeping” emerged as a way to resolve the chaotic space within The Geffen Contemporary. The main exhibition space operates on multiple elevations, with walls and informal spaces cluttered with years of quotidian institutional paraphernalia. Here, a proposal for a rocky coastal landscape creates an expansive and gradually sloping floor, eliminating the two levels, as well as the ramps, handrails, and stairs needed to negotiate them, allowing visitors to experience the environment unencumbered. The formation seen here is a replica of the seashore from Leon Trotsky’s former house of exile on the Sea of Marmara and was repurposed from the Istanbul Biennial installation plans for *The Most Beautiful of All Mothers* (2015).

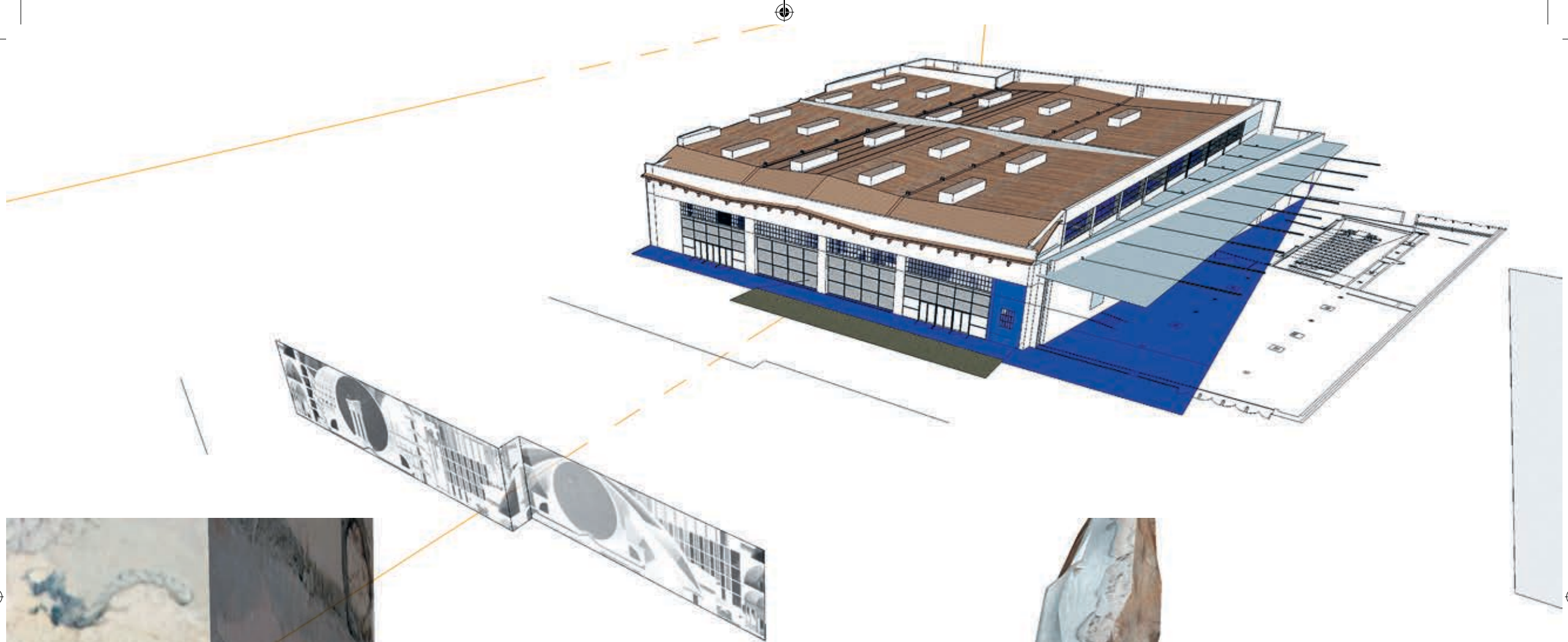


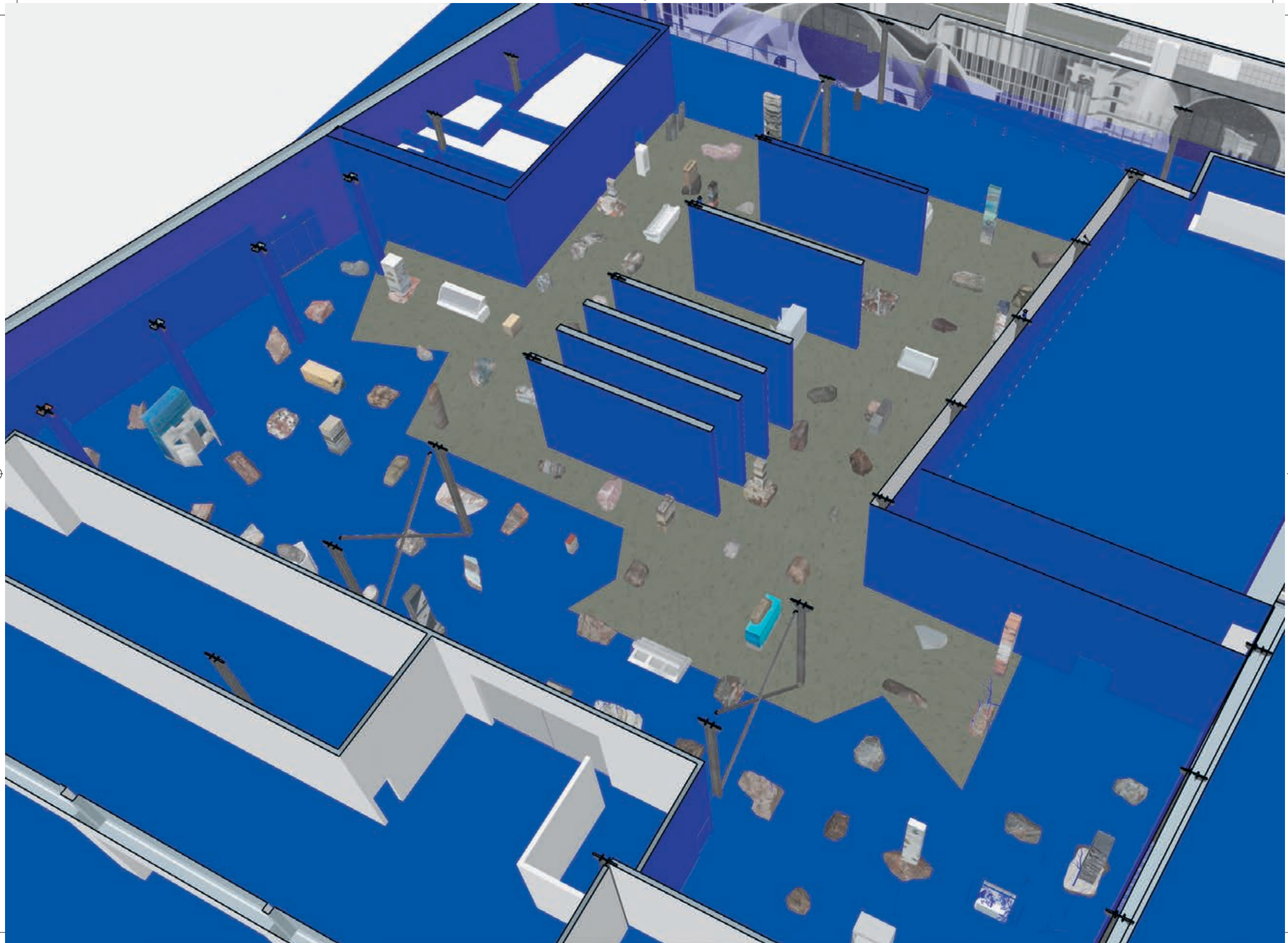
One hundred eleven volcanic rocks, chunks of marble, and petrified trees, as well as hundreds of organic materials—including the remains of birds, fish, decomposing meat, jewelry, boots, and glass, formed part of *Rinascimento* (2015), shown at the Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin, and will travel to Los Angeles to become part of *The Theater of Disappearance* (2017). The original work was installed using neither renderings nor preplanned locations; decisions were made based on considerations of the space and site. The final layout for *The Theater of Disappearance* was determined by analyzing photographs and applying a grid to systematize the placement of each element at The Geffen. Yet despite the outcome suggested by these plans and renders, the final installation benefits from innumerable chance operations that cannot be digitally prefigured.



140









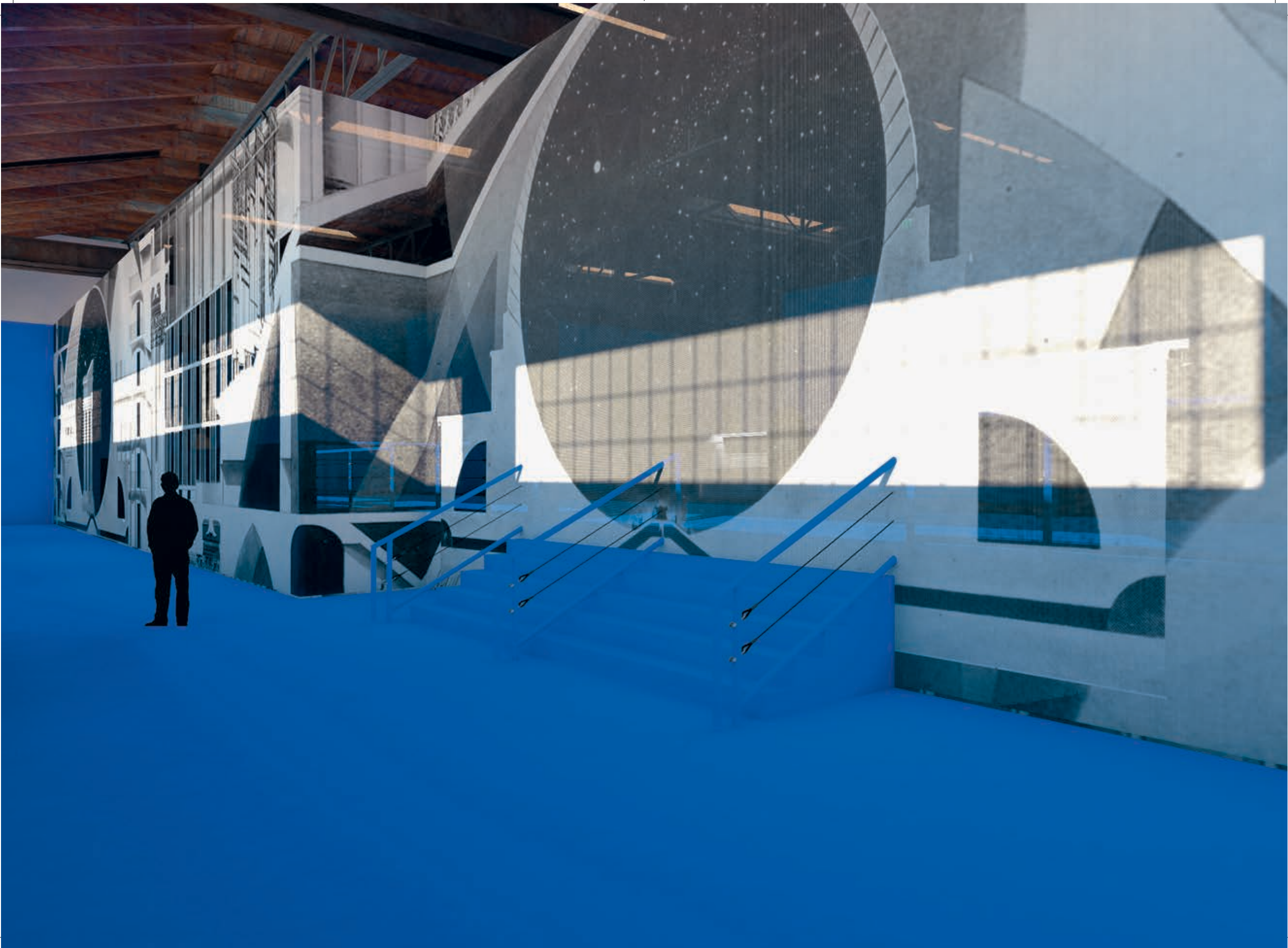
The previous pages illustrate how the field of compressed dirt and soil will form a new surface underfoot as it meets the walls and floors, further underlining instability in the perception of reality and illusion, object and surface, artificial and organic. Chroma-key blue will dominate the visual experience in *The Geffen*. This technically calibrated color, used primarily for visual effects, vacillates between flattening and radiating: crisply delineating foreground objects from the background, while incongruously bleeding blue light into the atmosphere. The unearthly yet tactile elements that will eventually occupy the space—towers of matter, volcanic rocks laden with feathers, masks and cakes, frozen spectacles inside refrigerators—present an optical illusion, a diorama of the presence of art.



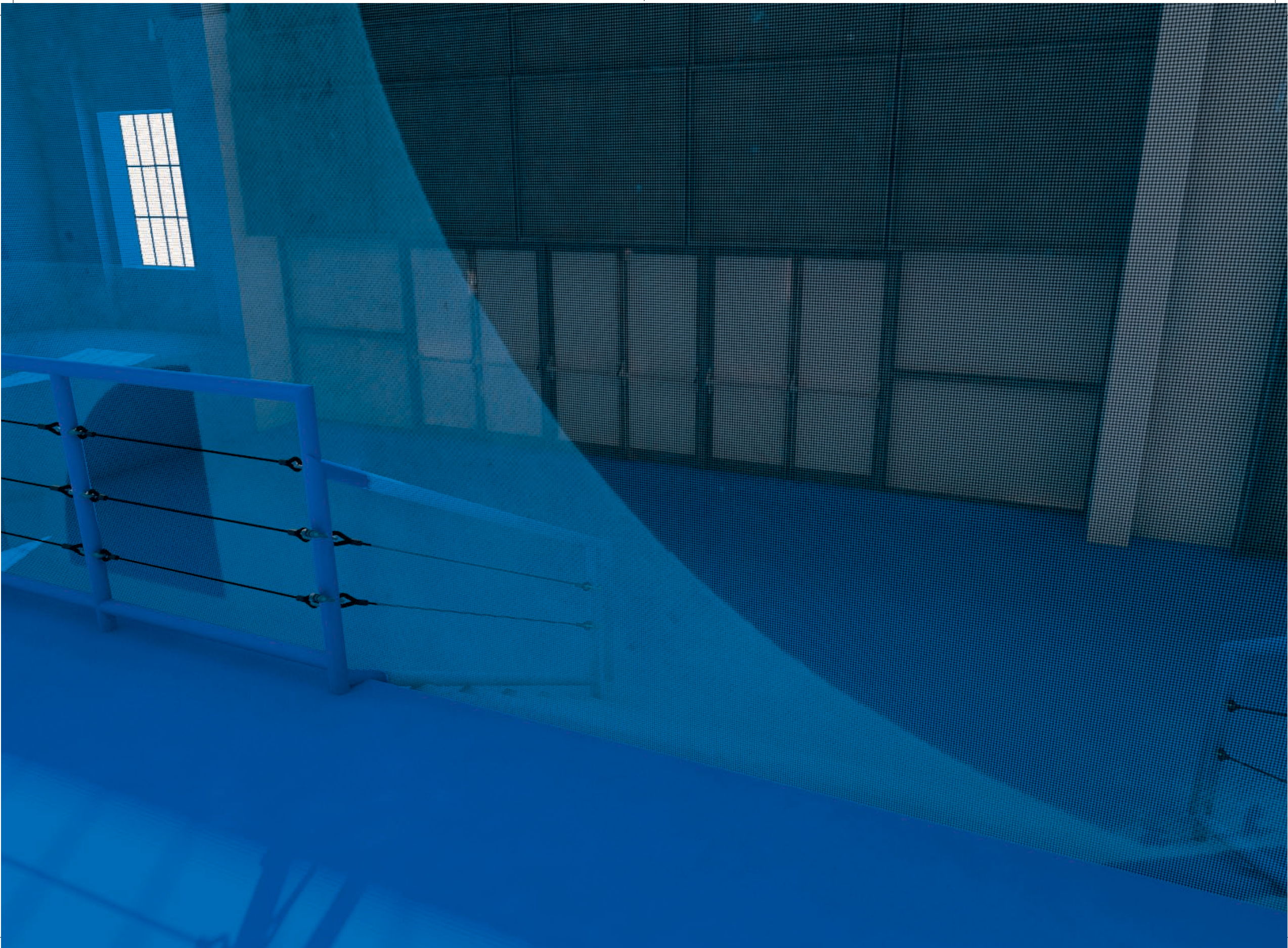


The synthetic environment at The Geffen responds to the universal digitization of myriad industries, of critical note in Los Angeles given the impact of the film industry. At once tactile and ephemeral, captivating, otherworldly, and touchingly human, the following pages show the remaining materials and surviving art objects from earlier projects that were produced across the globe and then recycled to form new art objects. Petrified wood from *Rinascimento*, stratified columns from *Planetarium*, and silicone molds from *The Most Beautiful of All Mothers* will not be reinstalled as they once were, but will have a second, unpredictable life. Led by the force of human labor no less than by time and chance, objects—matter—travelled from the realms of non-art to art, then to non-art again when stored as remains, and finally are reconstituted back into art as they are exhibited at MOCA.

A screen near the entrance presents a double facade, limiting visitors' range of view. The challenging nature of The Geffen's entrance, which requires the ascent and immediate descent of stairs, is further mediated as visitors traverse a semi-translucent, diaphanous screen through an almost-invisible split. The image on the screen is a composite of a number of eighteenth and nineteenth century architectural drawings including *Cénotaphe à Newton* by Étienne-Louis Boullée (1784). This feature suggests the painted backdrops used for film productions, as well as the ornamental facades of the historic movie palaces of downtown Los Angeles.































Adrián Villar Rojas

Born 1980 in Rosario, Argentina

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2017

From the Series The Theater of Disappearance, Marian Goodman Gallery, London
The Theater of Disappearance, Kunsthaus Bregenz, Austria
The Theater of Disappearance, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles
The Theater of Disappearance, The Roof Garden Commission, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
The Theater of Disappearance, NEON Foundation at Athens National Observatory (NOA), Greece

2015

Fantasma, Moderna Museet, Stockholm
Rinascimento, Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin
Two Suns, Marian Goodman Gallery, New York

2014

The Evolution of God, High Line at the Rail Yards, New York
Lo que el fuego me trajo: A Film by Adrián Villar Rojas, Galerie Marian Goodman, Paris
Los teatros de Saturno, kurimanzutto, Mexico DF

2013

Films Before Revolution, Zurich Art Prize, Museum Haus Konstruktiv, Zurich
Today We Reboot the Planet, Serpentine Sackler Gallery, London
The Work of the Ocean, Foundation de 11 Lijnen, Oudenburg, Brussels

2012

Before My Birth, The Ungovernables: New Museum Triennial, with Arts Brookfield, World Financial Center Plaza, New York

2011

Ahora estaré con mi hijo, el asesino de tu herencia, Argentine Pavilion, 54th International Art Exhibition, Venice Biennale, Italy
La moral de los inmortales, Luisa Strina Gallery, São Paulo
Poems for Earthlings, SAM Art Projects in collaboration with Musée du Louvre, Jardin des Tuileries, Paris

2010

Un beso infinito, Galería Casas Riegner, Bogotá
My Dead Grandfather, Akademie der Künste, Berlin

2008

Lo que el fuego me trajo, Ruth Benzacar Galería de Arte, Buenos Aires

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2017

Jerusalem Lives, The Palestinian Museum, Birzeit, Palestine
Unfinished Conversations: New Work from the Collection, The Museum of Modern Art, New York
Ungestalt, Kunsthalle Basel, Switzerland
Unpacking: The Marciano Collection, The Marciano Art Foundation, Los Angeles

2016

APAP 5: Anyang Public Art Project, South Korea
Towards a Larger World, Moderna Museet Malmö, Sweden
Marrakech Biennale 6: Not New Now, Morocco

2015

12 Bienal de La Habana, Cuba
14th Istanbul Biennial, Turkey
Sharjah Biennial 12: The Past, the Present, the Possible (SB12), Kalba, United Arab Emirates
Storylines: Contemporary Art at the Guggenheim, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
Une histoire. Art, architecture et design, des années 80 à aujourd'hui, Centre Pompidou, Paris

2014

REAL DMZ PROJECT 2014, Yangji-ri Village, South Korea
Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris

2013

5th Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art, Russia
EXPO 1: New York, MoMA PS1, New York

2012

9th Shanghai Biennale, Shanghai
dOCUMENTA (13), Bagh-e Babur, Queen's Palace, Kabul, Afghanistan.
dOCUMENTA (13), Kassel, Germany
The Ungovernables: The New Museum Triennial, New Museum, New York

2011

12th Istanbul Biennial, Turkey

2009

X Bienal de Cuenca. *Intersecciones: Memoria, realidad y nuevos tiempos*, Cuenca, Ecuador
Intemperie, II Bienal del Fin del Mundo, Ushuaia, Argentina

Project Collaborators

Juan Barbieratti (sculptor; AVR team since 2014) studied music and fine arts at the National University of Rosario. His artworks include street art installations and interventions, and he has participated in the multidisciplinary group *Dispositivo Multiplicador*. Barbieratti has also worked as a restorer, cinematographer, and video and book editor, and has written and published fanzines and comic books.

Guillermina Borgognone (architectural design manager; AVR team since 2013) received her degree in architecture from the National University of Rosario. She specializes in 3-D modeling and drafting, and in 2011—along with the architects Germán Rodríguez Labarre and **Ciro Radice**—she cofounded the architecture studio *Estudio Qo* (2014 “Parque de las Ciencias” National Contest of Ideas first prize recipient).

Georgina Bürgi (sculptor and fine arts restorer; AVR team since 2016) holds a degree in fine arts from the National University of Rosario, and is cofounder and member of *Grupo Basamento*, an Argentine conservation group. She currently works at the Institute for Research, Conservation, and Restoration of Modern and Contemporary Art (IICRAMC) at the Juan B. Castagnino Fine Arts Museum in Rosario.

Matías Chianea (builder and installer; AVR team since 2015) studied architecture, advertising, restoration, and fine arts at the National University of Rosario. His artworks have been exhibited in several solo and group exhibitions, and he has been involved with a number of historical building restorations in Rosario.

Noelia Ferretti (producer and studio manager; AVR team since 2010) studied fine arts at the National University of Rosario.

Matheus Frey (draftsman and sculptor; AVR team since 2009) received a degree in fine arts from Santa Marcelina University (FASM) in São Paulo. His work is focused on drawing, sculpture, documentary film production, human/animal relationships, and other research. His interest in comics, Japanese manga, science fiction, and philosophy were combined in his text “What is Expected from a Survivor,” for his 2011 exhibition at the Luisa Strina Gallery in São Paulo, *La moral de los inmortales*.

Andrés Gauna (sculptor and studio manager; AVR team since 2011) is a decorative painter and mason. He studied fine arts at the National University of Rosario. In 2007 he relocated to Rome to continue his training as a mason, specializing in the use of the trowel with fine materials.

Mauro Grosso (industrial designer, builder, and installer; AVR team since 2015) began designing for his family’s cooking equipment business at an early age. After receiving his degree in accounting at the Instituto Dr. Juan Bautista Alberdi in Rosario, he moved to Buenos Aires to work as a set and costume designer for theater, art installations, film, and television.

Javier Manoli (builder, installer, licensed gas and mechanical technician; AVR team since 2013) received a diploma in humanities from Escuela de Enseñanza Media para Adultos Garacotchea. Since 2007 he has worked in Rosario as a gas and refrigeration systems technician and an automotive bodywork, painting, and restoration specialist.

Mariano Marsicano (sculptor, builder, and installer; AVR team since 2009) is a goldsmith and carpenter. He established his jewelry workshop in Ushuaia, Argentina, and was engaged by the AVR team during the II Bienal del Fin del Mundo (2009), when Villar Rojas was recruiting specialized local collaborators.

César Martins (engineer, installer, studio manager, and carver/sculptor; AVR team since 2009) studied drawing and painting privately, prior to receiving his degree in human resource management from Escuela de Educación Media No. 8. In 2003 he moved to Ushuaia, Tierra del Fuego, Argentina, and was invited to participate in building Villar Rojas’s clay whale at the Yatana National Park during the II Bienal del Fin del Mundo (2009).

Araceli Navarro (sculptor and art restorer; AVR collaborator since 2011) received her degree in fine arts from the National University of Rosario. A specialist in conservation and restoration since 2004, she interned at the Museo Reina Sofía, Madrid (2010) and the Prado Museum, Madrid (2012). She is currently Head of Conservation at the Juan B. Castagnino Fine Arts Museum and the Museum of Contemporary Art (MACRO) in Rosario.

Martín Paziencia (sculptor, model maker, and musician; AVR team since 2011) began making models of anime and manga figurines as a teenager, studied fine arts at the National University of Rosario, and led the funk band *Los piter funk* (The Peter Funks). In 2013 he was awarded the Young Artist Prize by the Fundación Nuevo Banco de Santa Fe, and in 2015 he established AUCA Estudio for the design and production of his ceramics.

Matías Pepe (builder and installer; AVR team since 2012) holds a fine arts degree from the National University of Rosario, has worked on a broad range of exhibitions, cultural projects, and events, and has assisted a number of artists from Argentina and abroad. He was part of the installation team at Bloomberg space (London, 2010–12). A fourth generation cycling shop owner, Pepe opened his own store in 2012, simultaneously designing and building custom bicycle parts.

Gözde Robin (producer; AVR team since 2015) is based in Toulouse, France, and holds a Master of Arts degree from Boğaziçi University, Istanbul, with a focus on cultural policies of the European Union and the role of exhibitions in promoting European identity.

Germán Rodríguez Labarre (manager of architectural design, 3-D modeler, and drafts-person; AVR team since 2013) studied architecture at the National University of Rosario. He is a cofounder—with architects Guillermina Borgognone and **Ciro Radice**—of the architecture studio *Estudio Qo*. Since 2012 he has taught as part of the Faculty of Architecture, Planning and Design at National University of Rosario.

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Mariana Telleria (advisor)

Ariel Torti (builder, sculptor, and gardener; AVR team since 2011) has been featured in a number of solo and group exhibitions. He previously worked as a studio assistant under Roberto Echen at the School of Fine Arts while working toward his degree at the National University of Rosario.

Sebastián Villar Rojas (writer, playwright, and theater director; AVR collaborator since childhood) studied political science at the National University of Rosario, creative writing with Alma Maritano, drama with Oscar Medina, and participated in the Research Group in Psychoanalysis and Politics with philosopher Ernesto Laclau. He is currently studying playwriting at the University of Buenos Aires. He has written, directed, and produced more than a dozen plays and published novels, short stories, poems, and essays in books, anthologies, magazines, and fanzines.

Juan Pablo Wingeyer (sculptor, builder, technician and installer; AVR team since 2013) has worked as a decorative painter and restorer since 2010.

Ace Alexander, Bischoff's Taxidermy and Animal FX
Natalie Alfaro, Omar's Exotic Birds
Alberto Arango and Ramiro Guerrero, Cosmos
Nayla Audi, Milk Bakery
Benice Logistics
Bryan Barcena, MOCA
Fatima Calderon, GoMove USA
Philip Castiglia, Terra Form, Inc.
Eder Cetina, Olson Visual
Nestor Crespín, Raleigh Studios
Jill Davis, MOCA
Izzy de Paz, Raleigh Studios
John Dexter, Nant Studio
Kim Everett, The Perfect Parrot
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Beatrice Galilee, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
Pete Galindo, Civic Center Studios
Marian Goodman Gallery, New York, Paris, and London
Sara Greco, Strangelove
Jillian Griffith, MOCA
Tom Hart, Soil and Sod Depot
George D. Henderson, Legacy Rock and Waterscapes
Shelly Jennings, Worldwide Exotics, Inc.
Rudy Jimenez, MBS Media Campus
Ludwing Juarez, SPARANO + MOONEY ARCHITECTURE
José Kuri, kurimanzutto
Jessie Liu, Providence
Jenni Lopez, Strangelove
Gabriel Maese
James Maloof, Nant Studio
Mónica Manzutto, kurimanzutto
Eric Mason, Telemason
Hooman Nastrin, Nast Enterprises

NEON, Athens
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Bob Orewyler, Farmers Market Poultry
Maria A. Percastegui, Milk Bakery
Paolo Peroni
Conny Purtill, Purtill Family Business
Jeff Porter, Intensity Advisors
Rafael Portillo, VURO Industries
Sarah Rathbone, Dock to Dish
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Nick Reade, Paramount Studios
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