(Un)stable Architecture as Deconstructed Meaning

By

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Abstract

How often do we notice the buildings that we work in, play in and live in? The architecture that we construct is specially geared to our human proportions, and shelters and accommodates us. It can be seen as a metaphor for the body, the self, and systems of social control that we have created. When the structure of this architecture is compromised, either literally or metaphorically, we experience instability and vertigo.

My practical submission, *Vertigo* is concerned with architecture, perspective, deconstruction, instability, vertigo, scale and the body. *Vertigo* consists of paintings, ranging in scale from the size of a brick to the height of a single storey house. Utilizing a highly representational style as well as working with abstract sign systems and technical plan drawings, I destabilize firstly, our sense of certainty in the architecture that surrounds us, and secondly, prompts us to question the assumed fixity of ourselves and our social systems, through the convergence and collision of architecture and painting.

This supporting document, *(Un)stable Architecture as Deconstructed Meaning,* considers the key conceptual concerns informing my practical submission. In chapter one of this mini-thesis: *Deconstructivist Architecture, Instability and Impermanence* I look at *Deconstructivist Architecture* which challenges traditional values of order, stability, harmony and unity of architecture. I position my work in relation to architecture projects on the *Deconstructivist Architecture* show in relation to their intent of undoing, shifting and destabilizing structure and what architecture is traditionally valued for. I also look at the shifting meaning and symbolism of architecture and skyscrapers.

In the second chapter: *Vertiginous Point of View and Shifted Perspectives* I engage with vertigo, perspective, scale and the bodily analogy in architecture. I look at how Julie Mehretu destabilises built space and architecture in a painterly way, depicting multiple perspectives which are subjected to multiple interpretations.

In chapter Three: *Painting a Building and Building a Painting: Process, Scale and the Body,* I discuss and engage with my practical submission, *Vertigo,* in relation to my process, scale, the body, vertigo, deconstruction, instability and perspective.

Declaration of Originality

I declare that this thesis is my own work and that all the sources I have used have been acknowledged by complete bibliographic references. This thesis is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for Master of Fine Art at Rhodes University. I declare that is has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at another university.

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Introduction

At the end of 2012, prior to the identification of a defined practical or theoretical field of research regarding my Masters submission, I travelled from my home town, Grahamstown, South Africa to Dubai, United Arab Emirates. I travelled to Dubai to visit family as well as to 'see the sights' in the city. Having grown up in a small town like Grahamstown, where the tallest building one will find is the Cathedral in the centre of town, I walked through Dubai, which houses the record-breaking tallest skyscraper in the world, the Burj Khalifa and other huge architectural structures.

In the modern city we are surrounded by an environment that has been built by humans and moulded to accommodate us as human beings. The built environment has held an enduring fascination for me because my father is a building contractor. As a child, I saw how building works and experienced the process from the basic building blocks; from the raw materials to plan drawings, to visiting building sites. While architecture is often valued for its provision of stability, structure, form and order, I became aware not only of how easily buildings could be made but how easily buildings could be 'unmade'; that buildings are not solid, lasting or permanent and that they shift.

Chapter One, *Deconstructivist Architecture, Instability and Impermanence* examines the notion of Deconstructivist architecture, instability and permanence. The theory of deconstruction, introduced by Jacques Derrida (1968), proposes that 'text has no fixed meaning'. It emphasises the role of the reader in the production of meaning and is based on the idea that language is inherently unstable and shifting. Deconstructivist architects challenge traditional ideals of order and rationality; their projects undermine basic assumptions about buildings.

Opened on the 4th of January 2010, the Burj Khalifa is one of Dubai's most iconic tourist destinations and a 'must see' in Dubai. Situated in Downtown Dubai, the Burj Khalifa is the world's tallest skyscraper and the tallest artificial manmade structure standing at 829.8 meters. So I visited the tallest building in the world and it was an extremely vertiginous experience, while looking up from the bottom of the building, as well as looking down from the highest outdoor observation deck, situated 555 meters from the ground. The experience allows the viewer to explore the city from a unique perspective. Experiencing vertigo is a

distressing phenomenon that is part of the personal experience of nearly every human being especially in the modern city, because of all the skyscrapers (Brandt 2003).

In Chapter Two, *Tilted Point of View and Vertiginous Perspectives,* I explore the visual anxiety of the modern subject caught in a spatial system beyond his or her control. What my own physical experience of vertigo has taught me is not only the impossibility of finding words that adequately explain the experience, but also the sheer force of vertigo as a metaphor for loss of control and loss of self. When experiencing vertigo human beings tend to feel unsteady and destabilized and the world appears to spin. While we generally believe that we, as subjects, are the controlling centre of our world, choosing where to look, how closely to focus and what to relate to what, when experiencing vertigo we are subjected to the world as an unstoppable, destructive force collapsing in upon us. Christopher Green, Professor of History of Art at the Courtauld Institute (2005:39) suggests 'Vertigo can be many things; in every case it destabilizes where there is also stability, and force is generated not by vertigo alone, but by vertigo put in play with architecture'. One of our basic needs as human beings is the desire for personal control, thus being able to generate desired or avoid undesired outcomes. The collapse of the World Trade Centre on September 11th 2001 shocked and horrified the United States. In the weeks and months to follow the attack, people in the United States faced a heightened awareness of their vulnerability and lack of control over the outcomes in their lives (Schuster et el. 2001).

There is a built-in, oscillating relationship between instability and stability. My focus is on the force created by the oscillating interaction between vertigo and architecture when they are brought into proximity. Experiencing vertigo puts the viewer in a world that appears to rush towards a vanishing point. I expand on what Elkins (1994) and Grootenboer (2005) say about perspective. From the beginning of the 20th century, the apparently fixed laws of perspective has been transformed, transgressed, ignored, and the distorting of the 'normal,' in the search to represent the space of modern identity and seek to reveal, if not critique, the conditions of a less then settled everyday life (Vidler 2000). Perspective directs our eyes and orders our thoughts and accounts for our subjectivity. Perspective remains 'thinking in painting' a formal apparatus given to the artist similar to that of the sentence in language (Vidler 2000: 9).

Architecture is the creator of space (Vidler 2000). Spatial dimensions rapidly became a central preoccupation for those interested in architecture, and art that, while received visually,

is experienced in space (Vidler 2000:3). The modern preoccupation with space is thus founded on the understanding that the relationship between the viewer and a work of art was based on a shifting 'point of view' determined by a moving body (Vidler 2000:3). Vidler explores the way in which a number of contemporary artist and architects, preoccupied with the relations of space to bodies, psyches and objects, have responded to the present conditions with work... [that brings]... the assumed stability of the viewer into question (Vidler 2000: 10).

In Chapter 3, *Painting a Building and Building a Painting: Process, Scale and the Body* I examine how the scale of a building or the scale of the representation of architecture influences our perspective or our response to a building or painting. Skyscrapers are large in the physical environment, but they can also appear to be small depending on your point of view, your distance from the building and depending on the scale of representation. 'The encounter of any work of art implies a bodily interaction, understanding architectural scale implies the unconscious measuring of an object or a building with one's body, and projecting one's bodily scheme on the space in question' (Holl 2006: 36). How do we respond to the scale of architecture in relation to our physical bodies, and what impact does it have on the self, physically or emotionally?

What I am intuitively drawn to and fascinated by, is geometry, linear perspective, buildings, the built environment, surfaces, lines, constructed spaces, composition and the process of painting. While this is partly because my father is a building contractor, it is also reflecting my need for structure, order and control in my life, and the need to lessen my personal anxiety because of my own personal feeling of imbalance and instability, emotionally, psychologically and physically. A sense of control is also a robust predictor of an individual's psychological and physical health (Abramson, Seligman and Teasdale 1978; Rodin 1986). I always seek a sense of structure in my environment in order to feel that 'thing are under control' versus random and chaotic (Cutright 2012).

I produce large-scale works and have experienced vertigo whilst working as a painter on scaffolding and whilst in Dubai taking photographs of buildings and looking up as well as when visiting the Burj Khalifa. My aim is to create a similar experience for viewers when they are confronted with my large scale 3x 4m works (Series 1).

I create art with the convergence and collision of architectural and artistic media which produced unique forms of spatial warping with the aim to interrupt the viewer. I create an

encounter and situation with architecture which might make you think differently about the world; to see the world differently, to change or question the way the viewer thinks, sees or imagines the world. I want my exhibition and my works to affect the viewer, to create moments of hesitation, reflection and contemplation. I aim to provide an unusual encounter with architecture so that it is viewed as unstable rather than solid, lasting or permanent.

What I aim to achieve with my practical submission, with the use of architecture, perspective, vertigo and scale is to challenge the value of stability, harmony and unity. With paintings and by pictorial means, I want to destabilise structure and apparently stable, strong, unified ideas.

Throughout my mini-thesis I seek to examine the idea of stability and fixedness in relation to structure, perspective and architecture. I create an exhibition space that confronts the viewer with works that produce the conditions for an over-the-edge physical experience of vertigo. *Vertigo* also produces an encounter that makes the viewer aware of the scale of her/his own body in relation to the scale of architecture

This thesis is connected to my studio practice work. Central to my research is the notion of deconstruction, architecture, instability and, by extension, vertigo and fear, perspective, scale and body. The goals of this thesis are to: interrogate Deconstructivism in architecture and painting, analysing architecture's resistance to instability by questioning the relationship between stability and instability; to investigate the use of perspective in representations of architecture, and interrogate the different views of fragmentary conceptualisations of perspective in relation to my own practice; to analyse scale in relation to architecture, painting and the body; and to relate theoretical concerns to my own practice and the work of Julie Mehretu

The goals of my visual research are to: provide an unusual encounter with architecture so that it is viewed as unstable rather than solid, lasting, or permanent; to create an exhibition space that confronts the viewer with works that produce the conditions for an over-the-edge physical experience of vertigo; to produce an encounter that makes the viewer aware of the scale of her/his own body in relation to the scale of architecture.

Chapter 1

Deconstructivist Architecture, Instability and Impermanence

Ex-centric, dis-integration, dis-located, dis- juncted, deconstructed, dismantled,
disassociated, discontinuous, deregulated ... de-, dis-, ex-. These are the prefixes of today
(Tschumi 1996: 225)

We walk through the city, surrounded by an environment that has been moulded to accommodate us. We navigate streets through canyons of artificial stone and look up dwarfed by the walls built around us. It is surprising how little we notice. We live our lives surrounded by a manufactured world but take little interest in how it looks or how it feels. This is a thesis about looking up and noticing the details of the canyon walls. I create art with the use of architecture with the intention to disrupt the viewer's preconceptions. I create an encounter and situation with architecture which might make one think differently about the way one thinks, sees or imagines the world. I want my exhibition and my works to affect the viewer, to create moments of hesitation, reflection and contemplation and to provide an unusual encounter with architecture, so that it is viewed as unstable rather than solid, lasting or permanent.

Central to my research and what I will explore and investigate in this chapter is the notion of Deconstructivist architecture, instability and permanence. While architecture is often valued for its apparent provision of stability and order, Deconstructivist architecture challenges the values of stability, harmony and unity.

1.1 Deconstructivist Architecture

'The hallmark of deconstructivist architecture is its apparent instability' (Johnson and Wigley 1988:3). Though structurally sound, such projects seem to be in states of explosion or collapse and gain force 'by challenging the very values of harmony, unity, and stability, proposing instead that flaws are intrinsic to the structure' (Johnson and Wigley 1988:3).

The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) held an exhibition in 1988 titled *Deconstructivist Architecture* curated by Philip Johnson and Mark Wigley. In 2013, on the 25th anniversary of the exhibition, MoMA curator Barry Bergdoll hosted *Deconstructivism: Retrospective Views and Actuality,* an informal conversation and reflection on the seminal show with Peter Eisenman, Bernard Tschumi, and Mark Wigley. The recent event prompted a reconsideration of Deconstructivist Architecture.

The *Deconstructivist Architecture* exhibition was on display in three galleries at MoMA from June 23 to August 30, 1988. In Johnson's preface to the *Deconstructivist Architecture* catalogue, he asserts that he and Wigley were not attempting to define a style, as he did in 1932 in the influential *International Exhibition of Modern Architecture* (Hill 2013:1). Though looking back from 2014, it seems as if they did or one could argue that they did.

In the press release for the exhibition written by Johnson and Wigley, they explain their thinking behind the *Deconstructivist Architecture* exhibition. Deconstructivist architecture challenges traditional ideals of order and rationality; the projects undermine basic assumptions about buildings. Deconstructivist architecture explores the relationship between instability and the stability of High Modernism (Johnson and Wigley 1988: 2), and its power comes from its ability to shock and disorient. The exhibition's intent was to examine the developing trends and radical architecture at the time. Despite the architecture's radical appearance, the projects in the exhibition were essentially traditional forms that had been subverted and displaced (Johnson and Wigley 1988:3). The exhibition included drawings and models by seven architects, namely Frank Gehry, Zaha Hadid, Rem Koolhaas, Coop Himmelblau, Peter Eisenman, Daniel Libeskind, and Bernard Tschumi. Their projects undermined basic assumptions about buildings and Modernism.

Modernism roughly spans the time between World War I and early 1970s and only gained mass popularity after World War II. Modernist architecture, as a style, is not as easy to define as one might think as its boundaries are looser than many other movements, for example, Classicism. In architecture the "International Style" is the first movement in Modern architecture and became the dominant tendency in American architecture. Although it seldom became popular for family residential buildings, the International Style was especially suited to skyscraper architecture. The pioneers of Modern architecture were architects such as Frank Lloyd Wright, Le Corbusier, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, and Walter Gropius (Bose 2008:1). These Modernist architects were intrigued by the emerging technologies and materials

(reinforced concrete, glass and steel) of the time and embraced and incorporated these advancements in their designs and buildings. The use of glass, steel and concrete in their designs allowed them the opportunity to create buildings of radical design for the time, such as the skyscraper which would not have been possible were it not for these materials. The Modernists believed in purity of form and design for a better world. Rowe says that: 'The phrase "form follows function" is often used when discussing the principles of Modernism' (Rowe 2011: 1). This means that forms should be simplified and that the architectural design should contain no more ornament than is necessary for it to function and that the form of the building should follow the intended function of the building. Therefore "less is more", and function dictates form. In Paul Greenhalgh's introduction to *Modernism in Design,* he outlined key features in modernist design including function, progress, anti-historicism and social morality (Greenhalgh 1990).

The International style is the first movement in modern architecture that embraced functionality, simple form, clean lines and open spaces. It was called the International Style because it didn't reflect an established cultural history; it did not look German, it did not look French, but rather it crossed borders. A building in the International Style would look the same if it were in Dubai or Hong Kong. The movement strived for an architecture based on Utopian aspirations of an equal society, in which class distinctions within the built environment were minimized. The International Style was especially suited to skyscraper architecture, where its sleek modern look, absent of decoration and use of steel and glass, became synonymous with corporate modernism.

The stylistic characteristics of the International Style are as follows. There is an emphasis on rectilinear forms as well as horizontal and vertical lines. Materials are often used in well-defined planes. There is a lack of decoration and the ornamental gives way to a clean, clear simplistic aesthetic that registers the idea that "less is more". There was a "truth" to materials; the architecture represented the materials the building was made of. A description often used to depict the modern International Style high rise, is a very clean, sleek, unified "glass box". The modernist high-rise buildings had become in most instances monolithic, rejecting the concept of a stack of varied design elements and opting for a single vocabulary from ground level to the very top. This can be seen, for example, in Henry Cobb's, *Hancock Tower* (Figure 1) and in Mies van der Rohe and Philip Johnson's, *The Seagram Building* (Figure 2) as well as Minoru Yamasaki's *World Trade Centre* (Figure 4).

Fig 1: Henry N. Cobb. (1972). *Hancock Tower.* **Photograph of Hancock Tower: Modernist Skyscraper. Boston.** *http://ad009cdnb.archdaily.net/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/1303507605-2196317966-3b76dcaed5.jpg*

Fig 2: Mies van der Rohe and Philip Johnson, (1954-1958), *The Seagram Building,* **New York City. https://beckchris.files.wordpress.com/2013/08/seagram_building.jpg**

These principles can be found in many key realisations of the modernist dream. Many projects of the modernist era were initially successful, and the public came to associate this strong aesthetic with prosperity and progress. World War II was a watershed event in America—it launched the country into a new industrial economy, and people moved to the cities for manufacturing jobs. This was an optimistic period, where being "modern" meant looking forward, rather than back. The pioneers of the modernist movement held a firm belief that in creating a better architecture, a better world would follow (Henket 2002). We could argue that they were a little ambitious in hoping to change the world with their design principles. There is no doubt that a new architecture would improve cities, towns and the living and working conditions of many, however to assume that it could improve the world as a whole seems idealistic. Perhaps the reason the modernist utopia is so often cited as a failure is that its ambitions were ultimately unrealistic.

Many people regarded modern buildings as soulless and bland, overly simplistic, abstract and boring. The public felt the buildings were unwelcoming and the "meaning" communicated by the buildings was ambiguous. By the 1970's, the International Style was so dominant that innovation was dead. Because of the dominance of the International Style, if you stepped off an aeroplane in the 1970's, you wouldn't know where you were; it could easily be New York or Hong Kong.

The public largely lost faith in the Modernist movement when the weaknesses and short cuts in Ronan Point's tower were exposed after a gas explosion and one side of the tower collapsed dramatically in 1968 (Figure 3). The public was shocked at the structural weaknesses and immediately questioned the stability of other high rise blocks which were defining the landscape.

Built in the modernist International Style, designed by Minoru Yamasaki, the World Trade Centre was completed on December 23rd, 1970. The dramatic collapse of the World Trade Centre on September the 11^{th,} 2001 (Figure 5 and 6) and the enormous amount of media coverage of the number of lives lost, concretised an image of structural collapse and its associated threat, danger and death in the minds of many, making people question, once more, the stability and structure of the skyscraper.

Fig 3: Ronan Point, *Tower,* **(1968), Photograph of Tower collapse, London.**
http://www.highrise.eca.ed.ac.uk/images/collapse_plate1.jpg

Fig 4: Minoru Yamasaki, *World Trade centre,* **Photograph of the original World Trade**
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Fig 5: Minoru Yamasaki, *World Trade Centre: Twin Towers*, **Photograph of the World trade Centre Attacks on September 11 2001. New York City. http://mcclatchy.remembers911.com/media/remembers911/img/articles/towers_on_fire. jpg.420x700_q85_upscale.jpg**

Architecture is supposed to allow the viewer to notice and understand the tension between permanence and change (Pallasmaa 2005), and should allow viewers 'to place themselves in the continuum of culture and time' (Pallasmaa 2005:71). The Modernist movement was based on Utopian aspirations, striving towards ageless perfection and unity. There has been a shift in the appearance of architecture; Modernist architecture was now merely scaffolding supporting glass, shifting the symbolic "solid" characteristic of architecture. The sensation of weightlessness and flotation are central themes in modern architecture (Pallasmaa 2005).

Pallasmaa writes about the immaterial quality in Modernist buildings and its effect on the viewer.

> ... [T]he machine-made materials...-scale less sheets of glass, enamelled metals and synthetic plastics- tend to present their unyielding surfaces to the eye without conveying their material essence or age. Buildings of this technological age usually deliberately aim at ageless perfection, and they do not incorporate the dimensions of time, or the unavoidable and mentally significant processes of aging. The increasing use of reflective glass in architecture reinforces the dreamlike sense of unreality and alienation. The contradictory opaque transparency of these buildings reflect the gaze back unaffected and unmoved... architectural mirror, that returns our gaze and doubles the world, is an enigmatic and frightening device. This fear of the traces of wear and age is related to out fear of death (Pallasmaa 2005:31; 32; 67).

Modernist architecture had become increasingly immaterial and created the sense of weightlessness undermining the symbolic nature of architecture which is valued for its solidity; this becomes another form of destabilising of the viewers assumptions and perspectives. The destabilisation of the foundations of Modernist movement, materially and conceptually and its false certainties propagated by its architecture based on unrealistic utopian aspirations of unity and perfection and is a kind of vertigo in itself and suggests a shift in perspective away from Modernism to Post-Modernism.

In the catalogue essay accompanying the *Deconstructivist Architecture* exhibition, Wigley (1988:1) writes:

> Architecture has always been a central cultural institution valued above all for its provision of stability and order. These qualities are seen to arise from the geometric purity of its formal composition... The projects in this exhibition mark a different sensibility, one in which the dream of pure form has been disturbed. Form had become contaminated. The dream has become a kind of nightmare.

In 2013, on the 25th anniversary of the exhibition, MoMA hosted *Deconstructivism: Retrospective Views and Actuality,* an informal conversation and reflection on the 1988 exhibition, *Deconstructivist Architecture.*

In his opening address, Barry Bergdoll spoke about the exhibition and said that the seven architects on the show recognised the imperfectness and flaws of the modern world and sought to address the pleasures of unease: '...architecture is tied to the cultural and mental reality of its time' (Pallasmaa 2005:34). The modern individual wants an architecture that reflects the imperfection of reality, its flaws, and the disjunctions that characterize our time. One inhabits a fractured space, made of accidents, where figures and forms disintegrate. One has moved away from the sensibility of the appearance of a stability and permanence (balance, equilibrium, harmony, unity). The idea of permanence and solidity has come to an end due to technology and the collapse of distance as a time factor which confuses and shifts our sense of reality (Tschumi 1996). Today we favour a sense of instability, fragmentation, atomization and unstable images that reflects the fractured space we inhabit, and 'recently (among a few architects) disjunctions, dislocations [and] deconstructions' (Tschumi 1996:217). How then can architecture maintain some solidity, some degree of certainty? It seems impossible today- unless one decides that the accident or the explosion is to be called the rule. The projects on *Deconstructivist Architecture* show experimented with structure, form, the traditional value of harmony, unity and clarity and were displaced by disharmony,

fracturing and mystery (Hill 2013). Wigley, Eisenman and Tschumi formed the panel to discuss the impact of the exhibition and the changes in architecture in the last 25 years.

According to Wigley, a series of different architects, doing very different things were made to seem as if they were saying the same thing. He explained that the exhibition made the fragmented form of architecture, used by the seven architects, which came after the International Style digestible to a wider audience.

What complicates the interpretation of the *Deconstructivist Architecture* exhibition is its name and the role of Jacques Derrida's philosophy of "deconstruction," which was mentioned by Wigley in the catalogue accompanying the exhibition. The theory of deconstruction, introduced by Jacques Derrida (1968), proposes that 'text has no fixed meaning'. It emphasises the role of the reader in the production of meaning and is based on the idea that language is inherently unstable and shifting. Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) questioned phenomenology and the ability of philosophy to arrive at truth. He questioned the relationship, between structure and language, by de-structuring the text which then shifted the focus of meaning from some universal conception of truth to more open interpretation.

At the event Wigley addressed the issue which the exhibition title raised. There is an enormous gap between "deconstruction" and "deconstructivist", nothing can be more or less deconstructive than anything else (Wigley 2013). Derrida's theory of Deconstruction is a structural condition, it is a way of thinking about the condition of structure, and it is a reflection upon the nature of structure (Wigley 2013). Further, he writes:

> The architecture on the exhibition raises questions about structure. This is the kind of work you would be interested in if you are interested in the theory of deconstruction. The work on the exhibition is not deconstructive theory at work, but it is the kind of thing that deconstruction is curious about, hence the very blurred label of the exhibition (Wigley 2013).

The name of the exhibition actually reveals the ambivalence in defining what the seven architects where doing. Bernard Tschumi (2013) suggested that deconstruction is used by philosophers and that it speaks to oppositions and binaries, passive/active, signifier/signified, and perceived/conceived. Derrida states that one term always dominated its binary and that the aim of deconstruction is is to reverse these hierarchies. 'Ultimately it meant creating new concepts to establish different interactions' (Tschumi 2013). 'Deconstruction is a critique of binary thought.' 'The binaries that exist in architectural theory, solid/void, figure/ground,

vertical/horizontal, inside/outside, presence/absence, form/function and so on' (Tschumi 2013). Using deconstruction as a spring board, architects could question the implied hierarchies between these terms.

Eisenman (2001:70) said that 'many people on the show had nothing to do with deconstruction and still don't,' 'they elaborated on ideas put forward by the theory.' He also asserted that 'the deconstructivist show focused on undoing and going against the ideologies of modernism' (Eisenman 2001:70).

Deconstructivist architects challenged the idea of a single unified set of images, the idea of certainty and the idea of an identifiable language. A selection of architectural projects from the *Deconstructivist Architecture* exhibition can be seen below in relation to my four series of works that make up my practical submission *Vertigo*. As you will see there is an aesthetic and visual relationship between my own works and the different architects on the *Deconstructivist Architecture* exhibition. There is no single unified visual language between my four series, but they are brought together by their intent, an undoing, a shifting and destabilising of structure, like the works in the *Deconstructivist Architecture* exhibition.

Coop Himmelblau' s Rooftop modelling (1985) (Figures 6,7 and 8) and Frank O. Gehry's Santa Monica Residence (1978) (Figures 10 and 11) both displace, warp and fragment the original form of their original structures. They have subverted the values of harmony, unity, solidity, fixedness and clarity and have embraced disharmony, fracturing, movement and instability. Coop Himmelblau (Figures 6,7 and 8) does this because it appears as if he cut up and undid the original architecture of the roof and put it together in a haphazard way creating twisted volumes, shifted planes, clashing lines and dynamic diagonals. Frank O. Gehry's achieves this because it appears as if he has cut pieces out and has punctures the solid form and structure of the house replacing it with angular and non-rectilinear glass allowing us to see into the structure. In my work, Figures 12 and 13, I too cut up and undo the original forms and structures of the Modernist skyscrapers I photographed. With these deconstructed pieces I reconstruct a new disharmonious, fractured chaotic and unstable space in which the solidity and rationality of skyscrapers has been disturbed. The unfocused areas in these paintings, (Figures 12 and 13) deconstruct the solidity and structure of architecture even further.

Figure 9 is visually and aesthetically very similar to Figure 6; Figure 9 with its clashing diagonals and transparent structural rendering creates a visual dynamism, instability and thus undermines the solidity, fixedness and stability of structure.

Fig. 6: Coop Himmelblau, *Rooftop modelling*, (1985), Architectural drawing. http://educ.jmu.edu/~tatewl/coop.himmelblau/coop.rooftop.sect.jpg

Fig. 7: Coop Himmelblau, *Rooftop modelling*, (1985), Architectural Model. https://labinteriors.files.wordpress.com/2013/11/rooftop-remodelling.jpg

Fig 8: Coop Himmelblau, *Rooftop modelling,* **(1985), Photograph of completed project, Vienna.** http://www.coop-himmelblau.at/uploads/made/uploads/images/Projects/8401_Falke/P_8401_F3_GZ_109 7_1377_90.jpg

Fig 9: Lindi Lombard, Series 2 (one of eight), 2013/2014, (65x85cm), Oil paint and permanent marker on canvas. Photo: Lindi Lombard

Fig 10: Frank O. Gehry, Gehry House Santa Monica Residence, (1978), Architectural Model for the rebuilding of his residence, Wood, metal, acrylic glass. http://www.mak.at/en/collection/permanent_collection/halls?article_id=1341408469434

Fig 11: Frank O. Gehry, *Gehry House,* (1978-88), Photograph of completed building, Santa Monica. https://aedesign.files.wordpress.com/2009/08/gehry-house1.jpg

Fig 12: Lindi Lombard, Series 4 (one of two), 2015, (2x 1.5m), Oil paint on canvas. Photo: Lindi Lombard

Fig 13: Lindi Lombard, Series 4 (one of two), 2015, (2x 1.5m), Oil paint on canvas. Photo: Lindi Lombard

Coop Himmelblau,'s *Apartment Building* (Figure 14) seems to be a frozen moment of a building in the state of collapse. When you compare it to Figure 5, the image of the World Trade Centre, the frozen moment in which the building is in the process of collapsing, visually they are very similar. In both images the Modernist form and skyscraper's structure is bending, in Figure 5 the skyscraper is in the process of collapsing and about to explode and in Figure 14 the skyscraper is designed to look unstable, imbalance and warped. In Figure 14, one can see the distortion of the Modernist skyscraper, its stability now replaced by instability and fracturing of structure and form. In my own work (Figure 15), I use the Modernist skyscraper and shift its perspective and point of view, so that it appears to be in the process of collapsing, rendering the skyscraper unstable. Another point of view of Figure 15 is that the skyscraper appears to float, and be suspending in mid-air which undermines the basic assumption of the weight and solidity of architecture. Figures 14 and 15 undermine the basic rationality of architecture and gain it force from its ability to shock and disorientate what we expect. Their radical appearance is a result of the subversion and displacement of the Modernist architectural form.

Fig. 14: Coop Himmelblau, *Apartment Building*, (1986), Photograph of completed building, Vienna.
http://www.laufen.com/wps/wcm/connect/4e019b804bbf3c15a144a59b65639356/050102_
Gasometer_LBox450x750.jpg?MOD=AJPERES&CACHEID=4e019b804bbf3c15a144a
59b65639356

Figure 15, Lindi Lombard, *Vertigo #1*, Series 1 (one of two), 2013/2014, (4x3m), Oil paint on canvas. Photo: Lindi Lombard

Bernard Tschumi, who was born in 1944 and was first known as a theorist, drew attention to his innovative architectural practice in 1983 when he won a prestigious competition for his Parc de La Villette (Figures 16 and 17), a 125-acre cultural park based on activities as much as nature (Hill 2013). Tschumi's Parc de la Villette superimposes three systems so that they distort one another and clash into each other. Paths intersect buildings, ramps and steps are cut off. The superimposition encourages conflict over synthesis and fragmentation over unity. Superimposition became a key devise, by using three autonomous systems, the "system of lines", the "system of surfaces" and the "system of points" (Figure 16) (Tschumi 1996). Each system represents a different and autonomous system, by superimposing these three autonomous systems, points, lines and surface it rejects the totalizing synthesis of the image (Tschumi 1996). Tschumi (1996:199) writes:

Superimposing these autonomous and completely logical structures meant questioning their conceptual status as ordering machines: the superimposition of three coherent structures can never result in a super-coherent mega-structure, but in something un-decidable, something that is opposite of totality.

The independence of the three structures thus avoids all attempts to homogenise into a whole; their superimposition and thus disjunction is incompatible with the static, autonomous and harmonious structural Modernist view of architecture. This is similar to Series 3 (Figure 18) in which I also used three autonomous systems, the "system of lines", the "system of surfaces" and the "system of points". I drew lines in pencil, created a surface with the liquin I poured on top of the lines which then spread where it wanted, on top of which I made point in ink, which worked its way into the surface of the liquin. In other works in the series I also created a surface with graph paper. I used these three autonomous systems as well as different independent artistic mediums on the same surface to evade a homogenised image or a totalising synthesis.
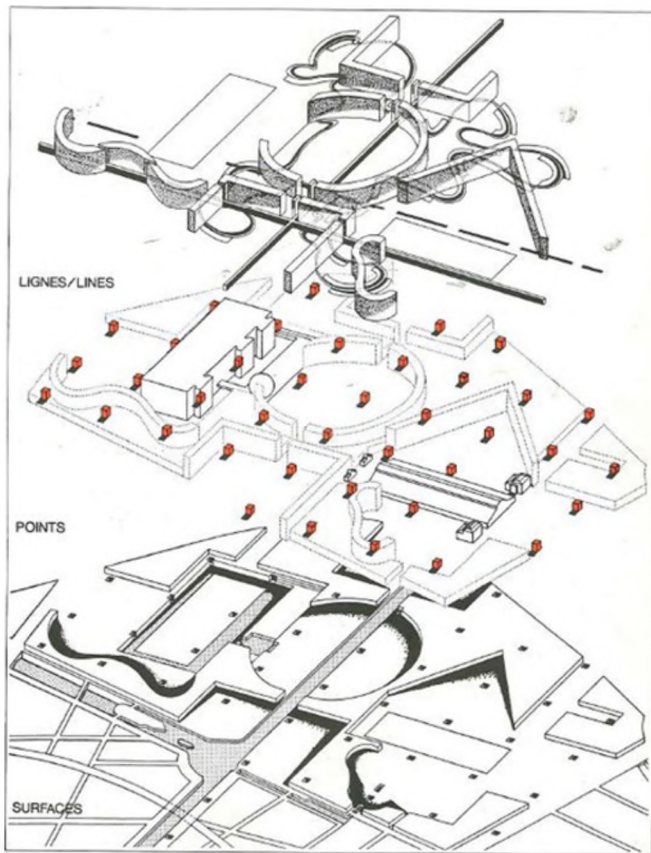
Fig 16: Bernard Tschumi, *Parc de la Villette*, Architectural plan drawing, Paris, 1982. Architecture and Disjuntion, Tschumi.

Fig 17: Bernard Tschumi, *Parc de la Villete* **, Architectural plan drawing, Paris, 1982. Architecture and Disjuntion, Tschumi.**
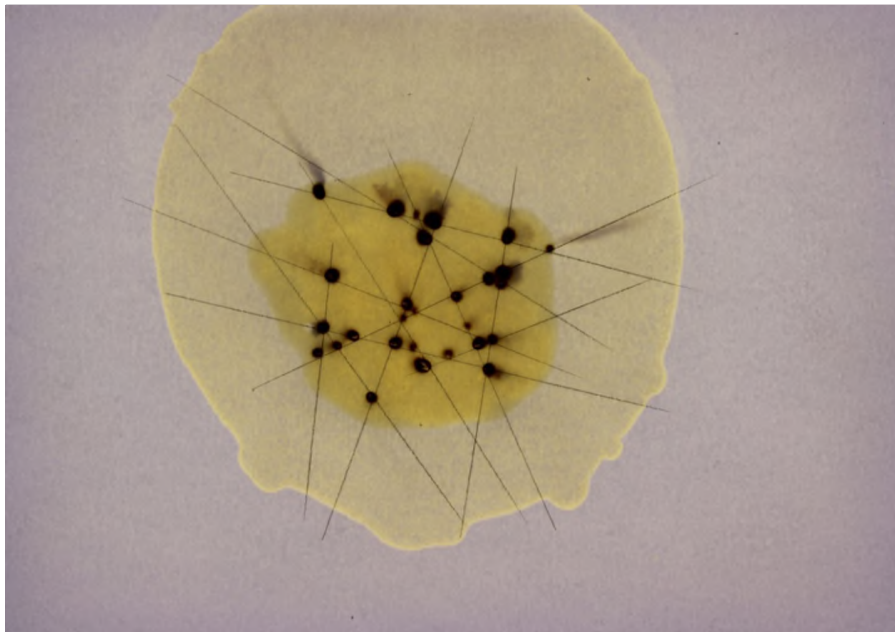
Fig 18: Lindi Lombard, Series 3 (one of thirty seven), 2013/2014, (22x15.5cm), Ink, pencil, water, graph paper and liquin on paper. Photo: Lindi Lombard
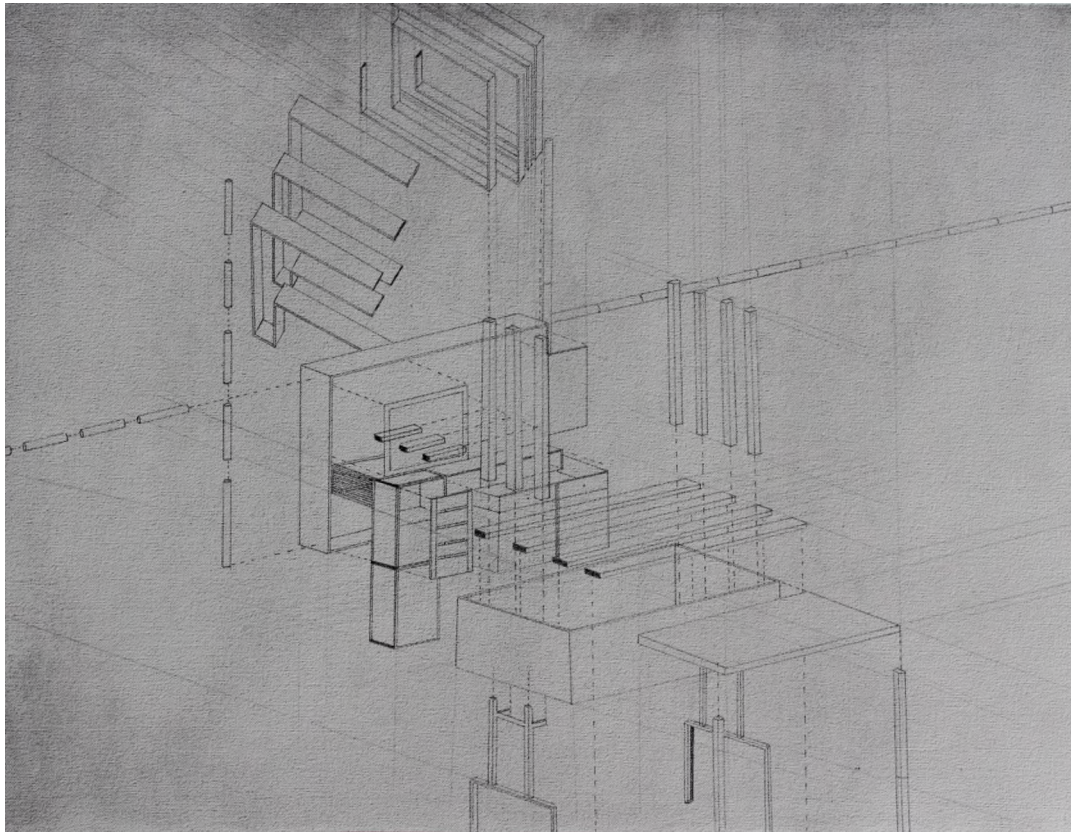
Fig 19: Lindi Lombard, Series 2 (one of eight), 2013/2014, (65x85cm), Oil paint and permanent marker on canvas. Photo: Lindi Lombard
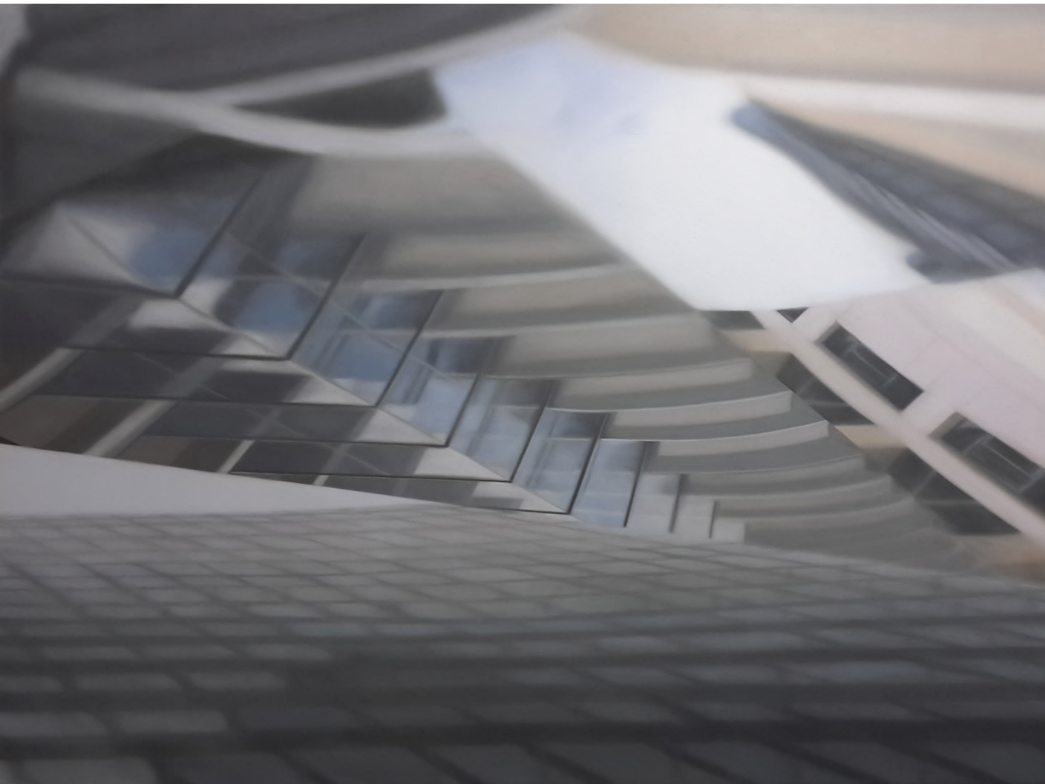
Figure 19 has a visual correlation to Figure 16, in Figure 16 it shows the three autonomous systems that are superimposed on top of one another and that together to form the *Parc de la Villette*, it shows how the structure is made up by taking it apart, by taking it apart it also creates an undoing, a deconstruction of structure which appears to be in a state of explosion. One can also see the taking apart or undoing of structure in Figure 19, but it also appears to be fall apart but coming together and at the same time, both deconstruction and construction simultaneously.

So while each of the seven architects had divergent theories and methods influencing their architectural projects, keeping with Johnson's emphasis on form, they embraced the chaotic, the incomplete, the fragmented, and the imbalanced (Hill 2013).

Tschumi (1996:212) writes:

> [R]uptures always occur within an old fabric that is constantly dismantled and dislocated in such a way that its ruptures lead to new concepts or structures... In

architecture such disjunction implies that at no moment can any part become a synthesis or self-sufficient totality; each part leads to another, and every construction is off balance, constituted by the traces of another construction

The *Deconstructivist Architecture* exhibition and the architectural designs moved away from stability and order and underlined the basic assumptions of buildings, and moved towards destabilisation in a similar manner to my own work. The different interpretations that multiple architects gave to deconstruction became as varied or perhaps even more varied than the theory of deconstruction could have hoped for. For one architect it had to do with dissimulation; for another, with fragmentation; for another, with displacement. As Friedrich Nietzsche wrote: 'there are no facts, only an infinity of interpretations' (Nietzsche cited in Jacobse 2001:1).

By deconstructing and destabilising the basic assumptions off architectural structures it opens up a space for new subjective perspectives, a space to question these structures, and/or new ways of seeing.

1.2 (Un)stable Meaning in Architecture

Pallasmaa (2005:41) writes that architecture gives both material and conceptual structure to social institutions and everyday life:

> [Architecture] is not an isolated and self sufficient artefact; it directs our attention and existential experience to wider horizons. Architecture also gives a conceptual and material structure to social institutions, as well as to the conditions of daily life.

Further, as Tschumi (1996:23) suggests:

> We should remember that there is no social or political change without the movements and programs that transgress supposedly stable institutionality, architectural or otherwise; that there is no architecture without everyday life, movement, and action; and that it is the most dynamic aspects of their disjunctions that suggest a new definition of architecture.

'There is some kind of symbolism that architecture applies to the material with which it works, and that symbolism expresses not only a psychological, intellectual state of mind but also a social system' (Gottmann 1966: 196).

'... [I]n traditional symbolic relations, things have meaning' (Tschumi 1996:219). Very often the symbolic value is disconnected from the utilitarian one. The Bauhaus tried to bring together the two into a new functional pair of signifier and signified (form follows function) - a great synthesis. Tschumi (1996:220) expands:

> This functionality, this synthesis of form and function, tried to turn the whole world into a homogeneous signifier, objectified as an element of signification: for every form, every signifier, there is an objective signified a function. By focusing on denotation it eliminated connotation.

The mission of architecture according to dominant history has been to invest shelter with a given meaning, some message, some signified. This illusion seems to have vanished according to Tschumi (1996:221):

> The instability, the ephemerality of both signifier and signified, form and function, form and meaning could only stress the obvious, what Jaques Lacan had pointed to years before: That there is no cause-and-effect relationship between signifier and signified, between word and intended concept. The signifier does not have to answer for its existence in the name of some hypothetical signification. As in literature and psychoanalysis, the architectural signifier does not represent the signified. Doric columns and pediments suggest too many interpretations to justify any single one.

Again, there is no cause-and-effect relationship between an architectural sign and its possible interpretation. The ever-changing use of very large buildings like warehouses and skyscrapers is also the same of small constructions. There is no longer a fixed relationship between buildings and their content, use and their meaning. Buildings can mean different things to different people; they can also mean different things to the same person. Architecture is constantly subject to reinterpretation. In no way can architecture claim permanence of meaning. 'Churches are turned into movie houses, banks into yuppie restaurants, hat factories into artists' studios, subway tunnels into nightclubs, and sometimes nightclubs into churches' (Tschumi 1996:217). The supposed cause-and-effect relationship between function and form ('form follows function') was forever condemned the day function became transient.

> When the philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard speaks about the crisis of the grand narrative of Modernity... it only prefigures the crisis of any narrative, any discourse, any mode of representation. The crisis of these grand narratives, their coherent totality, is also the crisis of limits (Tschumi 1996:217).

Tschumi (1996:21) writes:

> Space and its usage are two opposed notions that exclude one another, generating an endless array of uncertainties.... Here we see disorder, collisions, and unpredictability's entering the field of architecture

Architecture is constantly on the verge of change and in a state of instability, because of the inbuilt and inevitable disconnection between space and use. Though three thousand years of architectural ideology have tried to emphasise the very opposite: that architecture is about stability, solidity and foundation (Tschumi 1996).

Tschumi (1996) claims that architecture was used against and despite itself, as society tried to employ it as a means to stabilize, to institutionalize, to establish permanence. It is in this state of architectural uncertainty, disorder, and impermanence where the development in architecture resides.

'Not only are linguistic signs arbitrary... but interpretation is itself open to constant questioning' (Tschumi 1996: 222). Every interpretation can be the object of interpretation, and that new interpretation can in turn be interpreted, until every interpretation erases the previous one. The dominant history of architecture, which is a history of the signified, has to be revised, at a time when there is no longer a normative rule, a cause-and-effect relationship between a form and a function, between a signifier and its signified: only meaning free of regulation (Tschumi 1996).

The meaning of skyscrapers also goes beyond its architecture, skyscrapers with their reflective glass, reflect our thoughts back to the world and towards our sense of self and being in the world. Buildings make us question our sense of self in the world; they force us to confront our own mortality and to engage with the metaphysical questions of life and death because most if not all buildings surpass our individual lives. Architecture allows us to notice and understand permanence and change because they allow us to see the passing of time.

1.3 Skyscrapers

The skyscraper has become a global phenomenon, it has emerged as a significant genre in architecture in a time of industrialisation and urbanisation and is one of the most recognisable uses of urban land. As the skyscraper has spread all over the world, one must wonder whether it still has the same meaning and function it had in the beginning (Gottmann 1966).

The skyscrapers were first conceived not as symbols, but as solutions to a space problem in urban cities. At the most basic level, the skyscraper is a 'machine that makes the land pay.' That is to say, building height is a solution to an economic problem; how to maximize the returns from a given piece of land. 'The Industrial Revolution made skyscrapers possible' (Mitchell 1997:112) and satisfied industrial capitalism's growing need to bring armies of office workers together in one location (Mitchell 1997). 'Since the tower of Babel, height has been seen both as a symbol of power and as a way to provide more space on a fixed amount of land' (Glaeser 2011:2).

Skyscrapers quickly became symbols of economic might, especially in Chicago and New York towards the end of the 19th century. And even today they are symbols of 'American might' and domination to many citizens and certainly to those who carried out the September 11 attack. Prior to 1990, the United States was home to all of the world's top ten tallest buildings. By 2011, only four of the 25 highest buildings in the world are located in America.

'There has,.., been an ongoing century-long race for height' (Mitchell 1997:112). (In places such as Dubai where they have built the world's tallest building, the Burj Khalifa, it stands at a height of 828 meters or 2717 feet, and was completed in 2010). It was built as a trophy rather than for economic viability. Skyscrapers serve to advertise the city and the architect who designed it and the builders who construct them. Skyscrapers are enormous and are built with the intention of drawing attention them to themselves. Exceptionally tall buildings-those that really push the envelope, like the Burj Khalifa- have always been expensive to build, rare and conspicuous (Mitchell 1997). 'Countries, companies and individuals frequently find this worthwhile, even when it does not make much immediate practical or economical sense' Mitchel (1997: 112). The meaning and use of skyscrapers has shifted and has also become status symbols for individuals and companies. (Mitchell 1997: 113) writes

A visit to a fancy bar high atop Hong Kong's Prestigious Peninsula Hotel will confirm. Here the washroom urinals are set against the clear plate-glass windows so that 'powerful men' can gaze down on the city while they relieve themselves.

Obviously this gesture would not have such a satisfying effect on the ground floor. Mitchell (1997: 113) expands:

> In the 21st century, there will undoubtedly be taller and taller buildings, built at great effort and often without real economic justification; because the rich and powerful will still sometimes find satisfaction in traditional ways of demonstrating that they're on top of the heap.

To summarise the skyscraper first, it stands for a specific formula of land use and reflects a certain type of economic activity, with economic and social connotations (Gottmann 1966). They are found mainly in large urban cities and are distinctive landmarks. The skyscraper has become a global phenomenon that has spread all over the world which is built for prestige, status and show of power and is a preferred symbol of belonging to the modern, global world.

1.4 Skyscrapers: The Collapse of the World Trade Centre

Ironically, the architect of the World Trade Center, Minoru Yamasaki, was slightly acrophobic (that is, he had a fear of heights), which is one reason that the windows were so narrow (Subramanian 2002).

The World Trade Centre failure and collapse showed the vulnerability of super tall structures as targets for terrorist attacks because they are stable, highly visible and monolithic. Even though 9/11 has highlighted their vulnerability, this has not put a stop to the construction of skyscrapers. Skyscrapers will continue to be built because of human ego and practical real estate demands. For example, the Burj Khalifa construction started in 2004 and it was opened in 2010. The debate about the significance of skyscrapers has started again due to this collapse of the World Trade Centre (Subramanian 2002).

The most fundamental impact of 9/11 is the sense of permanent vulnerability and instability and the sense that one can never be absolutely secure (Ó hÉochaidh 2011). The attacks were a reminder that societies are vulnerable to sudden change (Siegal 2011). This heightened a sense of societal, individual and structural vulnerability and a changing relationship to

structures and served as a reminder that we need to learn to live with the sense of vulnerability.

In this chapter I introducing my theory through discussing the 1988 MOMA exhibition *Deconstructivist Architecture* which showcase the hall mark characteristics of Deconstructivist architecture, which were instability and impermanence- a direct challenging of the Modernist architectural values of stability, unity and permanence and as a way of exploring my own interest in a kind of architecture that challenges notions conventionally associated with architectural structures- stability, harmony, solidity and unity-thus an architecture which takes as formal queue the disintegrated and collapsing of architectural structures. I aim to place these conceptual concerns in a political and historical context - the 99/11 attacks on the World Trade Centre, New York City and the collapse of part of the Tower building, London in 1968.

Chapter 2

Vertiginous Point of View and Shifted Perspectives

I travelled from my home town Grahamstown, South Africa, the city I was born in and have lived in all my 26 years of life, to Dubai in the United Arab Emirates at the end of 2012, before the commencement of my Masters in Fine Art degree and before I had identified my practical or theoretical field of research.

While I was in Dubai, my enduring fascination with building and architecture was sparked, and I realised that Dubai was a perfect place for me to take photographs of amazing skyscrapers which don't exist in my home town. Standing below these monolithic buildings, looking up through my viewfinder, I had an unusual sense of destabilisation. I had taken photographs of buildings before, but had not felt the destabilising sense of vertigo before. It felt as if I was about to fall over when I looked through the viewfinder to take a photograph of the building. From my point of view, vertigo was only experienced when one stands at the very top of a building, looking down, from a high altitude; not looking up. My subjective opinion was skewed and immediately started to shift. Experiencing the disorientating and destabilising sensation of vertigo, which I had not really experienced in Grahamstown, made me start to question and look at new ways of seeing and new perspectives.

Art, in my opinion, should present the viewer with new ways of seeing, and new perspectives and points of view. It should construct a framework which allows the viewer to question, re-examine, and maybe shift his or her perspective of supposedly stable, monolithic structures. No radical perspectival change is possible without the real threat of things falling apart. Vertigo and instability are integral components to a shift in perspective as it has shifted mine.

In my work I look at architecture and skyscrapers and use them as metaphors for systems, social and political structures, institutions and the self. Destabilising architecture and the viewer, and by shifting perspective, I encourage the viewer to start to question structures and systems in his or her own life and to interrogate his or her own perspectives.

The modern city is no longer small, intimate and human-scaled and it tends to present a threat to our perceived sense of control because of its enormous increase in scale. Due to the spatial conditions of the modern city, with its enormous skyscrapers, and vast open spaces, it creates

a new possibility for destailising its inhabitants because of this growth in scale in relation to its human inhabitants.

From the beginning of the twentieth century, the apparently fixed laws of drawn perspective have been transformed, transgressed, ignored and distorted in the search to represent a space of modern identity (Vidler 2000). These are issues which I interrogate in this chapter through the exploration of vertigo, instability, perspective, scale and the body which forms the theoretical underpinnings in this chapter, as well as my analysis of three works by Julie Mehretu, a New York based artist. The works I focus on are *Dispersion* (2008-2009), *Believer's Palace* (2008-2009) and *Mogamma* (2012). I examine how Mehretu deconstructs the city and architecture visually, using multiple perspectives in combination with gestural and abstract mark-making and sign systems which opens the works up to multiple interpretations and conceptualisations. I consider how she expresses her subjective perspective on identity, current situations (political or social) and how this informs her visual thinking through painting and where she positions herself. I examine how she brings the assumed stability of the viewer and architectural structures into question with the convergence and collision of architectural and artistic media and imagery which produces unique forms of spatial warping.

2.1 Height 'Distance' Vertigo

What my own physical experience of vertigo has taught me is not only the impossibility of finding words that adequately explain the experience, but also the sheer force of vertigo as a metaphor for loss of control and loss of self. When experiencing physical vertigo, human beings tend to feel unsteady and destabilised and the world appears to spin. While we generally believe that we, as subjects, are the controlling centre of our world, choosing where to look, how closely to focus and what to relate to what, when experiencing vertigo we are subjected to the world as an unstoppable, destructive force collapsing in upon us.

There is a premise that human beings need order and control. This argument is rooted in control theory, which posits that individuals have a basic need to perceive the world as orderly and structured (Friesen 2014). Personal and external sources of control are capable of satisfying this need because both serve the comforting belief that the world operates in an orderly fashion (Friesen 2014).

Christopher Green (2005:39), Professor of History of Art at the Courtauld Institute suggests that 'Vertigo can be many things; in every case it destabilizes where there is also stability, and force is generated not by vertigo alone, but by vertigo put in play with architecture'. Vertigo can be the destabilisation of structure or the viewer by pictorial means, or the point at which structure seems to disintegrate as it spins. Further, it could be when images destabilise apparently stable, strong, unified ideas. There is a built-in, oscillating relationship between instability and stability. My focus is on the force created by the oscillating interaction between vertigo and architecture when they are brought into proximity.

Experiencing vertigo puts the viewer in a world that appears to rush towards a vanishing point. When I talk about vertigo I refer to height- or distance-induced vertigo. Height vertigo is visually induced and commonly experienced when one stands on top of high structures such as skyscrapers, and the destabilisation of balance is induced through vision when the distance between the subject's eye and the nearest visible surroundings becomes exceedingly large (Brandt 2003). Height vertigo is also called 'distance vertigo' because of this distance. This distressing phenomenon is part of the personal experience of nearly every human being (Brandt 2003). Distance vertigo can also be induced on the ground when the head is tilted upwards and when peripheral vision provides less information about nearby stationary objects (Brandt 2003). A viewer has an increased chance of experiencing height vertigo when they are standing upright at a high altitude looking down without a framework to hold on to, in order to keep them balanced and upright or to protect them from falling, as well as when the viewer cannot see stationary objects in their peripheral visual field. In addition, if the viewer stares at moving objects, such as clouds, this increases the danger of falling, because this visually induces motion which causes additional destabilisation of the viewer. Looking down the side of a building from a high altitude for a long time also increases a viewer's chance of experiencing vertigo because it usually takes three to five seconds to develop distance vertigo. Lastly, extreme head tilt and unstable footing also increases the chance of experiencing height vertigo.

Experiencing the sensation of vertigo is a warning signal. The inability to remain standing and dizziness are often associated with the sensation of vertigo and the inability to control one's body. Personal control is considered to be a basic human need (Kelly 1955; Lefcourt 1973), referring to the extent to which an individual can intentionally produce desired outcomes and prevent undesired ones (Skinner, Chapman and Baltes 1988). When we lose personal control over our bodies and think we are moving when we are not (when standing on

the edge of an extremely high skyscraper, for example), it is extremely distressing because we feel we cannot control the undesirable outcome of death. Our perspectives, both what we perceive subjectively and objectively, are inseparable. According to Tschumi (1996: 208):

> In its disruptions and disjunctions, its characteristic fragmentation and dissociation, today's cultural circumstances suggest the need to discard established categories of meaning and contextual histories. It might be worthwhile, therefore, to abandon any notion of a postmodern architecture in favour a of 'posthumanist' architecture, one that would stress not only the dispersion of the subject and the force of social regulation, but also the effect of such decentring on the entire notion of unified, coherent architectural form. It also seems important to think, not in terms of principles of formal composition, but rather of questioning structures- that is, the order, techniques, and procedures that are entailed by any architectural work.

Further Pallasmaa (2005:41) writes:

> [Architecture] is not an isolated and self sufficient artefact; it directs our attention and existential experience to wider horizons. Architecture also gives a conceptual and material structure to social institutions, as well as to the conditions of daily life.

Consider two examples; the symbolism of the architectural collapse of the World Trade Centre in New York City on September 11th 2001 and Apartheid architecture.

Buildings have meaning and are often symbols for values, attitudes, institutions and ways of life and they stand for and give structure to something. Buildings are more than a pile of bricks, steel and glass that have been put together. Architecture is a symbol for and gives structure to systems of social regulation and social institutions as well as acting as metaphor for the self, both psychologically and physically building as body. The shifting of architecture, its destruction or destabilisation, thus shifts or destabilises the way we see this meaning or symbolic value attached to architecture and allows space for question, re-examination and a shift in perspective. In light of this, what was the significance of the attack on the World Trade Centres and their subsequent collapse? Was it more than just two buildings collapsing?

I associated the skyscraper with the United States of America, because the first time that I saw a skyscraper was when I was twelve and viewed on television the broadcasting of the 9/11 attack. At the time, I was too young to understand what was happening- from my point of view, two buildings simply collapsed; I had a very limited understanding and perspective. Growing up, however, my perspective shifted.

The attack on, and collapse of the World Trade Centre in New York City on September 11th 2001 shocked and horrified the United States. The slender, crystalline World Trade Centre in New York made of glass and steel reaches into the sky, their ethereal surfaces reflect the changing mood of New York, the architecture of the Twin Towers was a symbol of global finance, economic power, of American culture and commerce for America. For those who viewed the USA with disdain, the World Trade Centre was also a symbol of America's invasive culture and economic take-over and domination.

The images of the collapsing towers and the large scale coverage of the attack, travelled the world and has entered the memories of many. In some ways it could be argued that the image of the collapsing towers has altered perceptions of building itself. Buildings have largely been associated with and seen as places of shelter, yet on September 11th 2001, televisions across the world showed people jumping out of skyscrapers. Those trapped on the top floors of the towers because of fires that had spread throughout the building, saw only one way out and that was to jump. The Twin Towers were not just symbols, but symbols filled with many people.

The attacks destroyed more than just buildings; it destroyed meaning and destabilised what the World Trade Centre stood for, for America and those who viewed America with disdain. The deepest damage may also be to America's confidence, its sense of control and sense of self as a nation. The attack was an assault on what these buildings expressed about America to the rest of the world. In the weeks and months to follow the attack, people in the United States faced a heightened awareness of their vulnerability and lack of control over the outcomes in their lives. After the 9/11 attacks on the twin towers, the skyscrapers' symbolism shifted; they now also symbolise destruction, instability, vulnerability and fragility.

Another example is the architecture of Apartheid, and its social and political structures. At the end of this system of governance, massive changes in its political and social structures and its constitution had to take place as well as deep psychological shifts in communities and individuals. Violence, food hording and vicious bouts of racism, occurred as South Africa lead up to the first Democratic Elections in 1994.

With the shift of the metaphorical architecture and social and political structures of Apartheid, this destabilised many perspectives and individuals because these structures that were built and internalised became part of their identity, and were now shifting.

We still live with people today trying to change and those resistant to it, still holding on to the structures and frameworks of the Apartheid structural system, afraid and too resistant to change. Twenty one years later, some individuals still have not shifted their perspectives and still look at things from the same point of view as before the 'end' of Apartheid, and refuse to shift their perspectives.

Personal vertigo, the loss of self, and shifting the structures one has built one's identity on, is the 'worst' kind of vertigo because the structures and views the individual based their identity and self on, their decision and their actions on, letting go of these structures like the edge of a building, might just mean that everything falls apart, or might mean the end and a complete loss of self and control.

So how do human beings cope when life events that seem to stretch beyond their personal and external control? Research shows that human beings seek greater structure and a sense that everything is in its designated place (Cutright 2012). When one's personal control or stability is threatened, humans prefer environments that are explicitly or implicitly bounded and seek a sense of structure in their environment in order to feel that 'things are under control' versus being random and chaotic (Cutright 2012). Feeling a sense of personal control reduces my anxiety, my feelings of randomness, instability and chaos which I feel constantly. Psychiatric research suggests that some people prefer thicker boundaries to contain the body; such individuals are also thought to have a strong desire for order and structure (Cutright 2012).

2.2 Perspective

As an artist who is interested in architecture, depth and space, perspective is key. Some aspects of perspective can be worked out mathematically and through measurement, but many artists reach a similar result through intuition. Perspective is the most geometric of the theories applied to painting (Elkins 1994: 1). Viewpoint is the position from which both myself, as the artist and the spectator/ viewer looks at the painting, for this has a bearing on perspective as well.

Perspective is a technique used by artists, particularly painters to represent three-dimensional objects or to set objects in an abstract pictorial space on a two dimensional flat surface, like a canvas or a piece of paper. Perspective is a geometrical method which is designed to render

pictorial space; it promises a truthful- even scientific representation of reality; it remains a tool for creating a true image of reality, 'a truth in painting' (Grootenboer 2005:4).

The use of perspective gives the viewer a sense of the object's height, width, depth and position within an abstract pictorial space or gives the viewer a sense of the dimensions of the space 'within/ behind' the canvas. Perspective creates space on a flat surface and the illusion of depth and distance; it presents the viewer with a way 'into' the images, it creates a 'window' to look through. A perfect painting is like a mirror of nature which makes things which do not actually exist, appear to exist, on the otherside of a window, and this deceives us (Grootenboer 2005). Antony Vidler (2000: 9) an architect with a doctorate in History and Theory, and a historian and critic of modern and contemporary architecture says 'Perspective [as a method] remains 'thinking in painting' a formal apparatus given to the artist similar to that of the sentence in language'.

There is another viewpoint on perspective, that is, perspective as metaphor. It is the way we see something, our particular attitude, our subjective point of view. '*Perspectiva,* [the Latin word for perspective] mean[s] "looking through" or "perceive"' (Elkins 1994: 45). All the meanings of perspective have something to do with vision. 'Perspective...control[s] not only what I see-it sets the conditions of visibility- how I see and how I describe the way I see' (Elkins 1994: 272).

2.2.1 Dual Perspectives

James Elkins (1994: xii), art historian and art critic refers to the "partly rational, partly poetic nature of perspective". He provides two descriptions of our modern understanding of perspective. 'The first perspective is a meaningless perspective, it 'means' equations, points, lines, angles, lines meeting at a vanishing point and geometric operations' (Elkins 1994: 6). This 'perspective is a cold, mathematical endeavour'; it is 'dissonant, uneasy, remote and harsh' (Elkins 1994: 2; 7). 'The second perspective, a metaphorical perspective... is "our" perspective' or point of view (Elkins 1994: 6). Elkins distinguishes between two distinct conceptions of perspective: perspective as method/space and perspective as metaphor/ point of view. Even though there are two distinct conceptions of perspective, 'the idea of perspective is inseparable from active thought so that to conceive one is to think through the other' (Elkins 1994: 30). Perspective directs our eyes and orders our thoughts and accounts

for our subjectivity. Elkins has observed a gradual transformation from the twentieth century, which has led to a rift that today separates those who understand perspective as a formal property of images and a technique for constructing images and those who see it as a linguistic, cognitive, epistemological metaphor, a metaphor for subjectivity, vision, pluralism and states of mind (Elkins 1994).

This possibility is different from conceiving a pictorial analogy of seeing through a window, and it is different from assigning particular meanings to parts of perspective pictures. 'In Renaissance [paintings]..., the vanishing point might mean heaven or death, and perspective might be employed for any number of expressive ends' (Elkins 1994: 16). Perspective as a metaphorical object is seen in many ways, it can 'expresses a culture,' or it is considered 'a language of art' or as 'one of many languages' artists can use to express emotion (Elkins 1994: 16; 17). Perspective has moved from a method of representing the world to 'a way of "envisioning" it', or perspective can be 'a way of thinking about observation' (Elkins 1994: 17). Perspective is no longer just a strategy for constructing images; it is 'a sign signifying a mental state, a culture, or an expressive language' (Elkins 1994: 17), or 'perspective is precisely what it claims to be, a method of representing buildings or any scene as it would be seen from a particular vantage point' (Elkins 1994: 17).

'Perspective as a method, technique and strategy for picture making, has gone largely unexamined, and has become virtually invisible' (Elkins 1994: 29; 179). 'In thinking about metaphor, we have largely forgotten perspective as a practice- and that forgetting is not without consequence for our understanding of... modern paintings' (Elkins 1994: xi). Elkins studies the various historical accounts of perspective and demonstrates the dissonant, unclear, and disjointed conception and use of perspective, he shows that perspective as a discipline has never been unified and our 'insistence on the monolithic unity of perspective...is part of how we perceive modernism itself' (Elkins 1994: 180).

2.2.2 Perspective as Convincing Language

Artists have often deployed perspective to convince the viewer of a painting's realism, but also to create images so life like that they fool the eye, challenging our vision. According to Hanneke Grootenboer (2005), professor of History of Art and Head of the Ruskin School of Art, painting is essentially, a form of thinking, and perspective actually functions as the

rhetoric of the image. Paintings in perspective can both question the status of representation and how it explores our perception.

If realism born as an effect of perspective, if we assume it is, then perspective can be understood as laying out the conditions for the reproduction of the real in painting. Perspective has become invisible, because we are looking constantly "through" it and the window it creates, rather that "at" it. As Grootenboer (2005: 4) writes:

> Perspective provides a view of that which it shows. Through that which it shows, which is what we see, it makes the picture plane transparent, and hence, renders itself invisible

In my work I want to enable the viewer to "see" the operations of perspective, to look "at" it as well as "through" it. A realistically executed painting in which the distinction between reality and representation is beyond our perception, at least for a split second, tends to take us by surprise; the painting provokes our eye to the point of insult and of doubt: the painting deceives and undermines our reliance on vision and perception (Grootenboer 2005). '[W]e enter a realm of illusion that forces itself upon us as a truth, whose artificiality we detect belatedly' (Grootenboer 2005: 4). Depth perception, and by extension distance can thus be deceived by highly realistically painted images. Paintings in perspective are thus capable of making the complexities of depth perception visible, which remain invisible in our perceptual field (Grootenboer 2005).

Grootenboer suggests that perspective is a mode of thought as much as a system of persuasion and that perspective serves as rhetoric (2005). 'The rhetoric of perspective convinces us of that which the painting shows, while it provides a method for that which the painting "thinks"' (Grootenboer 2005: 10).

Grootenboer (2005: 18) suggest that 'the development of perspective in still-life painting points to a truth in painting that falls beyond the paintings frame, and even beyond our perception.' This truth which we find behind the paintings frame cannot be found by employing interpretive methods that search for meaning, but instead calls for a different mode of looking, one that questions the nature of paintings employing perspective as representation tool, which then leads the viewer, not to interpretation but to a state that is most thought provoking, namely, thinking (Grootenboer 2005). Perspective remains 'thinking in painting' a formal apparatus given to the artist similar to that of the sentence in

language (Vidler 2000: 9). Perspective is both that which pushes the eye through paintings and that which pushes the viewer to think when they think about that pushing.

Even though Grootenboer writes about perspective in relation to still-life paintings, I think her argument is very relevant to my work.

2.3 Scale and the Bodily Analogy in Architecture

2.3.1 Scale

Architecture is first the art of measurement and proportion (Tschumi 1996). 'We cannot judge distance and ... [height], depth and width the way a ruler ... can' (Elkins 1994:26). Historically the human body and its scale were used to provide the basis for older systems of measurement and length which featured units based directly on the dimensions of the body. What we measure now as one to two meters, is three to six foot, or our arms reach, a stride or our height. 'Primitive man used his own body as the dimensioning and proportioning system of his constructions' (Pallasmaa 2005: 60). Pallasmaa (2005:67) writes:

> Understanding architectural scale implies the unconscious measuring of the object or the building with one's body, and of projecting one's body scheme into the space in question. We feel pleasure and protection when the body discovers it's resonance in space.

The starting point of our perception of a building's scale is the building's size in relation to the size of our own bodies (The American Institute of Architects 2014). If we perceive a building as monumental, small or somewhere in-between it has a direct correlation to how we understand the building in relation to the scale of our own body. A building or a room that is really large or very small can make us uncomfortable. Giving a space or building 'human proportions' increases the likelihood that we will find the space comfortable, because we interact with our environment based on our physical dimensions and capabilities.

The spacial conditions of the modern city have shifted, with its enormous skyscrapers, and vast open spaces and its growth in scale. In relation to its human inhaitants, the modern city is no longer small, intimate and human-scaled. Therefore skyscrapers, with their monumental scale, often induce feelings of anxiety and discomfort because of their large scale in relation to the body. We experience the destabilizing sensation of vertigo which is a physical reaction

of the bodies; this happens because of the combination of our relatively small size in relation to a very large structure, the gravitation pull of our bodies towards the earth, and the position of our body in relation to the building. Skyscrapers are large in the physical environment, but they can also appear to be small, at the scale of a digital image on a computer screen or if seen from a distance, from the view point of an aeroplane. Our point of view influences the perceived scale of architecture.

We experience the world through our bodily existence; we remember those experiences because they have affected our bodies; for example, my bodily and physical experience of distance vertigo when I was in Dubai. Encountering the skyscrapers in Dubai, I unconsciously projected the scale of my body onto the buildings, measuring its scale in relation to the scale of my body, sensing its vertiginous height. Because of the large scale of the skyscraper in relation to my body, it created an environment for the experience of distance vertigo. The scale of the structures or buildings in our environment can destabilise the viewer's sense of control when the structures in our environment becomes much larger than one's body and thus too immense to handle or control.

2.3.2 Bodily Analogy in Architecture

There has been a long history of the bodily analogy in architecture: 'we tend to interpret a building as an analogue to our body, and *vice versa*' (Pallasmaa 2005:38) and architecture as an embodiment and/or abstract representation of the human body.

There are three points of view of the bodily analogy in architecture. There has been a gradual extension of the body metaphor, from the corporeal to the psychological. We detect in the later years of the twentieth century a shift away from the almost tactile projection of the body in all of its biological forces to one of projecting states of the body, physical and mental onto the building (Vidler 1992).

The first was 'the notion that building is a body of some kind' (Vidler 1992: 70). The building derived its proportion and composition from the body and in a way the building then acted to confirm and establish the body- socially and individually in the world (Vidler 1992). The origins of proportion of the Greek canons of bodily mathematics were to be incorporated by the architect in the column and in the relations of the different parts of the order to the

whole (Vidler 1992). If a building is seen as a body, like bodies, buildings may fall ill: a building may become hazarded, become sick and die (Vidler 1992).

The second point of view was 'the idea that the building embodies states of the body or, more importantly, states of mind based on bodily sensation' (Vidler 1992: 70) and projection.

The building no longer simply represented a part or whole of the body but was rather seen as 'objectifying the various states of the body, physical and mental... described building not so much in terms of their fixed attributes of beauty but rather in their capacities to evoke emotions of terror and fear' (Vidler 1992: 72).

Wölfflin writes in his thesis 1886, Prolegomena to a Psychology of Architecture:

> We judge every object by analogy with our own bodies. The object-even if completely dissimilar to ourselves- will not only transform itself immediately into a creature, with head and foot, back and front: and not only are we convinced that this creature must feel ill at ease if it does not stand upright and seems about to fall over, but we go so far as to experience, to a highly sensitive degree, the spiritual condition and contentment or discontent expressed by any configuration, however different from ourselves (Wölfflin cited Vidler 1992: 73).

The third perspective is an even more generalized work of projection 'the sense that the environment as a whole is endowed with bodily or at least organic characteristics' (Vidler 1992: 70). This final extension of the body outside itself in which buildings are seen as generating a whole range of psychological responses which depends on one's ability to project onto the building states of mind and body (Vidler 1992).

2.4 Julie Mehretu's Multiple Perspectives

My interpretation of the built environment connects with the work of contemporary artist, Julie Mehretu, an Ethiopian-born, New York-based artist. Her large, detailed paintings show architectural renderings of buildings and cities that have seen social and political uprising and therefore social and political instability. She destabilises the built space and architecture in a painterly form, depicting multiple perspectives and vanishing points and are subjected to multiple interpretations and conceptualisations. In Mehretu's paintings, we encounter an 'un-building' of built space depicting buildings, and sometimes entire cities, in various states of undoing. In her works, the precise structural rendering of multiple architectural structures and perspectival mapping provides the foundation for abstract gestural marks, giving rise to the

sense of an unstable and unfixed urban space (Demos 2013) constantly on the verge of change. While architecture is often valued for its provision of stability and order, Deconstructivist architecture challenges the value of stability, harmony and unity and so does Mehretu's work. Because of the densely layered and monumental scale of Mehretu's works, it references the scale of architecture, which encloses the viewer in its vertical and horizontal span and so do her works, because of this her works they are experienced in an urban way.

I explore the way in which Mehretu has responded to the present conditions in the modern city in her work. Her work brings the assumed stability of the viewer and architecture into question. I am especially concerned with how the convergence and collision of architectural and artistic media and imagery has produced unique renderings of spatial disjunction and instability in her work.

In an interview with Lawrence Chua from BOMB magazine, Mehretu explained that before the Bush Administration and September 11th all her works had a clear and specific meaning, but this all changed (Chua 2005). She questioned if she could continue to make work in this way given her shifting perspectives and response to the world (Chua 2005).

> Of course it sounds naive, but before the Bush Administration and September 11, there was this underlying feeling that the world was progressing in a particular way and different cities were developing and morphing into this kind of unified pseudo-capitalist dream, or something. It was easy to go back to certain utopian ideas about the way that things could develop, even though it was obvious that there were so many obstacles, intense violence, and injustices, that this was not a true reality: the American economy being so huge and doing so well, the development of the EU, the rapid growth of the Chinese economy, the quickly changing economy and development of India, the democratization of Nigeria, air flights going back and forth everywhere. That false perspective and weird hope just was crushed in the last few years. The way the US has responded, especially with the war in Iraq, has put the world into a different place. ... I'm still trying to understand it myself (Mehretu cited in Chua 2005: 3).

Fig 20: Julie Mehretu, *Dispersion.* **(2002), (2,286 x3,657m). Collection of Nicolas Rohatyn and Jeanne Greenberg Rohatyn .Photo by Erma Estwick. Courtesy of Marian Goodman Gallery.**

Fig 21: Julie Mehretu, *Dispersion (Detail).* **(2002), (2,286 x3,657m). Collection of Nicolas Rohatyn and Jeanne Greenberg Rohatyn .Photo by Erma Estwick. Courtesy of Marian Goodman Gallery.**

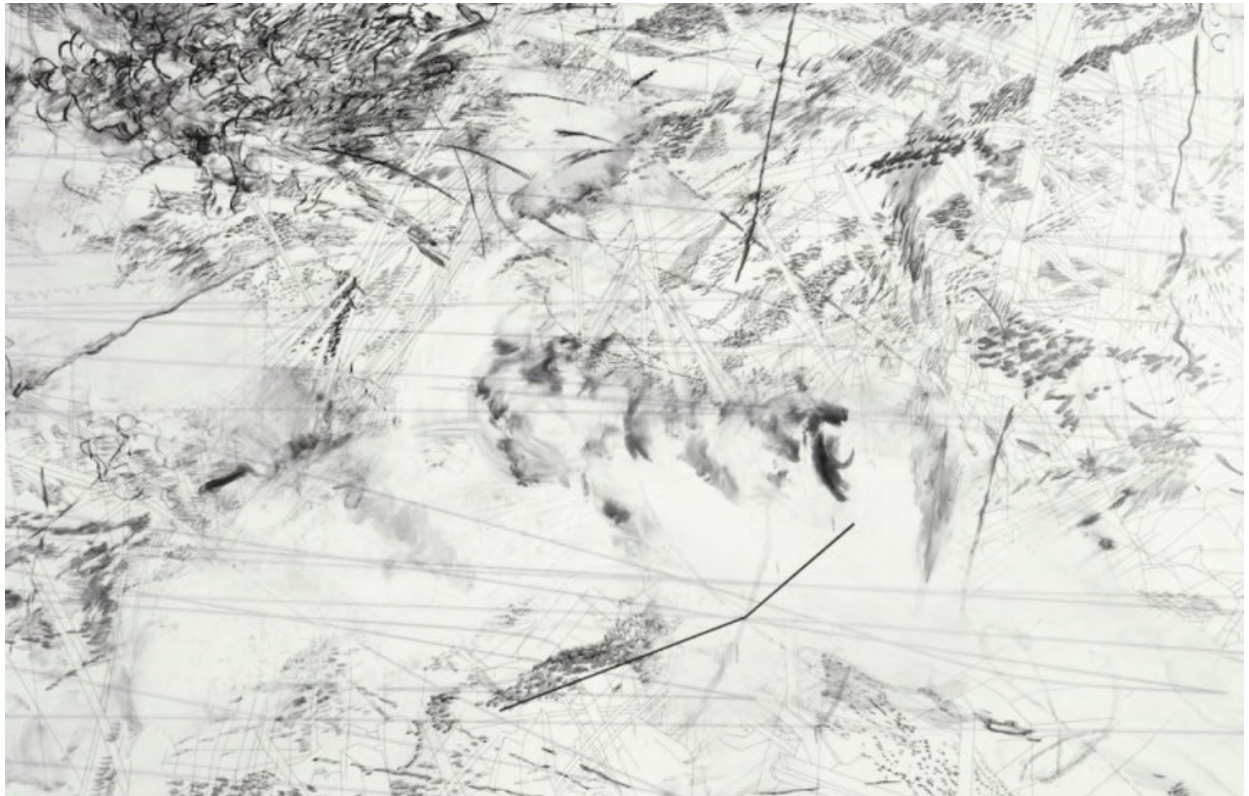**Fig 22: Julie Mehretu, *Believer's Palace.* 2008-2009, (3,022 x 4,254 m), Ink and Acrylic on canvas. Commissioned by Deutsche Bank AG in consultation with the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation for the Deutsche Guggenheim. Photo: Julie Mehretu**

Fig 23: Julie Mehretu, *Believer's Palace (Detail)*. 2008-2009, (3,022 x 4,254 m), Ink and Acrylic on canvas. Commissioned by Deutsche Bank AG in consultation with the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation for the Deutsche Guggenheim. Photo: Julie Mehretu

Mehretu's paintings are filled with architectural fragments, multiple perspectives, swirling storms of abstract gestural marks, swooping vectors, dots, daubs and dashes and multiple layers, and seem to come together but simultaneously fall apart, suggesting a world in which construction and destruction, whether caused by nature or man, cannot be contained. *Dispersion* (2008-2009) (Figure 20) is a work that was produced in response to the destruction of the World Trade Centre. The work describes an exploding force outward from the centre of the painting. *Believer's Palace* (2008-2009) (Figure 22) focuses on the war in Iraq. It references the partially destroyed palace in Baghdad, that sat on top of and as served as camouflage for Saddam Hussein's bunker which Hussein built in the 1980's (as well as the remainder of the facade of the World Trade Centre after the 9/11 attacks). These works deal with violent structural transformations and devastation which have taken place at the hands of human beings, but *Believer's Palace* also includes another form of devastation, nature. The painting references the San Francisco Earthquake in 1906 and its disastrous consequences to the city and its buildings. The paintings are able to invoke energies unleashed by human

actions or the powerful force of nature, but the paintings are completely devoid of the human form.

The structure, the architecture and the visual imagery Mehretu uses in her works change in relation to what is going on in the world. Her world speaks to a state of uncertainty, a condition in which something is not clearly defined or impossible to define.

> I don't look at the paintings necessarily as critique. In fact, I'm not so interested in being critical. What I'm interested in, in painting at least, is our current situation, whether it be political, historical or social, and how it informs me and my context and my past. I am trying to locate myself and my perspective within and between all of it (Mehretu cited in Chua 2005:8).

When you look at Mehretu's history growing up, simultaneously outside and inside of things, living between continents, nations, cities, houses, languages and cultures (Chua 2005). Where does she situate herself?

> I come from two different realities and I'm trying to locate myself. That was the point of departure in all the work, trying to make sense of the version of history and reality that my whole family in Ethiopia is living in, and another one that exists here with my parents and my grandmother and yet another one that I experience (Mehretu cited in Chua 2005:11).

The above quote, give us sense of her feeling of uncertainty, instability and ambivalence towards her identity and the tidiness of its space. Maybe it is that disjunction, unease and ambivalence that is being lived out in her works and that we pick up on as she tries to make sense of her world, her history or the current situation, whether it be political, historical or social, as we try to make sense of the works and realise our own sense of unease and ambivalence and instability. Her works articulate the disjunctions of life as it is lived today, the shifting realities and shifting perspectives.

Fig 24: Julie Mehretu, Mogamma (A Painting in Four Parts), 2012, (each part is 4 x 3m), Ink and Acrylic on canvas, Photo: Haupt and Binder

Fig 25: Julie Mehretu, *Mogamma* (A Painting in Four Parts), 2012, (each part is 4 x 3m), Ink and Acrylic on canvas, Photo: Haupt and Binder. Installation view

Mehretu's recent works are in response to the political, economic and social instability in the Middle East and other Arab Countries, the Arab Spring revolutions and more specifically the Egypt uprisings. *Mogamma* (2012) (Figure 25), a large-scale painting in four parts (each part is 4,5 x 3 meters), refers to the scale of architecture and the urban environment. The painting is built up through layers of acrylic paint, pencil, pen, and ink on canvas. The works were created around the time of the Arab Spring revolutions, and the painting is named after the very large Al Mogamma government building in Tahrir square, Cairo. The Tahrir Square and the Al Mogamma were at the heart of the Egyptian uprisings and protests which erupted on the 25th of January 2011.

After eighteen days of protests that occupied Cairo's Tahrir square President Hosni Mubarak stepped down. The protests were fuelled by years of governmental corruption, military repression, grinding poverty and the stifling of free expression and democratic practices. The protests eventually brought down the regime of Hosni Mubarak, only to democratically elect another power hungry leader. The new president was sworn in on the 30th of June 2012, in the year Mehretu completed the *Mogamma.* Egypy was in a situation that promised new possibilities. On the 25th of January 2013 on the two year anniversary of Mubarak's overthrow, hundreds of thousands of people gathered again in Tharir Square to protest against their new power hungry president, Mohammed Morsi's abuse of power. Egypt has seen much unrest, instability, violence and death. It remains a space of instability and its future is still uncertain.

The Arab Spring which began on the 18th of December 2010 is a revolutionary wave of a series of anti-government protests (both violent and non-violent), uprisings, armed rebellions, riots and demonstrations that spread across the Middle East and other Arab countries. Every revolution turns out differently, some end without resolution and some have not yet ended. At the core of the Arab Spring protest movement was the expression of a deep seated resentment against the long standing dictatorships in the Arab nations. The people took to the streets demanding political freedom and democracy and social justice. There was a longing for a sense of control from the people, so that they may have a say in their lives. Within the revolutionary impulse there typically exists idealism and a desire for the impossible. Countries undergoing political transitions occupy a state of chronic instability in the time after the revolution. Rather than a single event, the Arab Spring can be seen as a catalyst for long term change and whose final outcome is yet to be seen and remains ambivalent.

Although the Al Mogamma building and the other buildings that occupy Tharir square are the core focus of *Mogamma* in terms of the architectural drawings in the work. The work refers to other city squares that have seen social and political uprisings. The governmental building, Al Mogamma, became a symbol for the inefficient government, governmental bureaucracy and corruption. Mehretu uses the Al Mogamma building and Tharir square which symbolise a space of unrest and instability and the way she represents the Al Mogamma and the buildings in the square, using multiple perspectives, elements and signs creates an image that is unstable and in a state of turbulence just like the square in Cairo. If a building symbolises the government and its political structures, but the government and its political structures is the cause of unrest and instability in the country, then the meaning and the power of that building shifts, and its stability it is taken away. It starts to become a metaphor for an unstable country and government.
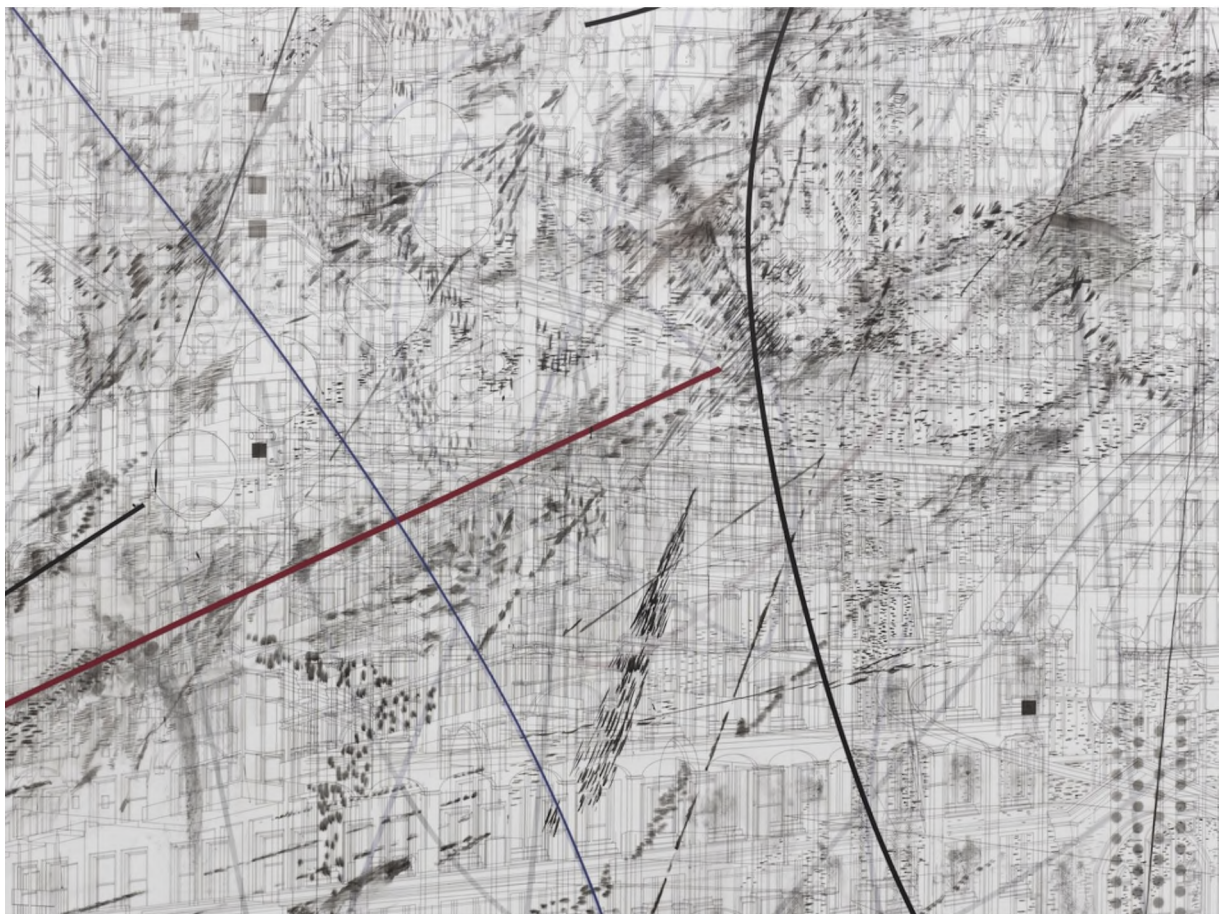
Fig 26: Julie Mehretu, Mogamma (Part 2)(detail), 2012, (4 x 3m), Ink and Acrylic on canvas, Photo: Haupt and Binder

Discussing her use of architecture in her paintings, Mehretu says:

> I think architecture reflects the machinations of politics, and that's why I am interested in it as a metaphor for those institutions. I don't think of architectural language as just a metaphor about space, but about spaces of power, and ideas of power (Mehretu cited in Alderson 2013:2).

Demos (2013:57) writes about how Mehretu's painterly intervention shifts the structural stability and symbolic power of Al Mogamma:

> The structural stability and symbolic power of the Mogamma building is consequently undone from within, if the buildings symbolic gravity and massive scale suggest a mode of architectural determinism, Mehretu's painterly intervention draws alternate potentialities out of the edifice.

Each 3 by 4 meter section of *Mogamma* is approximately the height of a single storey house. Because of the large scale of the works in combination with the intricate details of the structural rendering of the architecture and the multiple layers on the surface of the canvas, when viewed from any single location in the gallery, what we see is always incomplete. The whole painting is too large and there is a lot of detail across the entire surface of the canvas which cannot be taken in at once, or even after looking at the painting for a long time, suggesting that our perspective or what we understand or know can never be complete. This is also suggested in the "unfinished" areas of the painting. When one encounters the painting in the gallery, one might try to comprehend or understanding or 'take it all in' the viewer might look closely to see the intricate details, then might move backwards to see the whole image, one might move from one side of the painting to the other, constantly shifting perspectives, which might give rise to multiple viewpoints of the same work, which might allow the painting to be seen differently from different angles and viewpoints.

Mehretu constructs her large scale paintings using a variety of visual registers or styles. She draws intricate, precise outlines of architecture that allow the viewer to look through the architecture. The architectural drawings form the foundation of the painting. Because architecture is often valued for its stability and order one would expect the use of architecture would lay a stable and solid foundation, but the foundation is not as stable as one would expect. She draws the architecture using a multiplicity of view points, one point perspective, birds-eye perspective, upside-down, aerial, cross sections and isometric as well as using architecture from different geographies and times and combines these in a single picture plane. No single geographical space brings together the composition creating a disjunctive

and unstable foundation and space. The architecture seems to float on the canvas surface and combined with its transparent representation undermines the solidity, weight, gravity and symbolic power of the architecture. The architecture and the "foundation" of the painting becomes, un-concrete, unstable and unfixed in time or geography, it creates a space of ambiguity and a space that is inbetween. The stability and power of the architecture is undone. On top of the architectural drawings she superimposes smudges, abstract coloured shapes, scribbles, vectors, gestural marks blocks and dots. As Heartney (2008: 150) writes,

> Her work resembles an arbitrary sign system- not unlike Google maps, urban planning grids and architectural blueprints [plan drawings]- whose vocabulary is invented rather than, as believed by early abstractionists, found in the world .


Sharp edged black outlines of architecture structures are very accurately drawn on the white canvas, making reference to the aesthetics of an architectural plan drawing. Architectural plan drawings are used for a number of purposes; to develop a design idea into a coherent proposal, to communicate ideas and concepts, to enable a building contractor to construct it. If one takes the plan drawing of the Al Mogamma building as the proposed communication of ideas and concepts and implied understanding of the Al Mogamma building and its political function, Mehretu's painting *Mogamma* deconstructs this and destabilizes these implicit structures. When she does this she opens up other and new ways of seeing. The painting does not present answers or conclusions to the current situations we find ourselves in, whether political, geographical, historical or social, which she references or refers to by extension, like identity. We can see this in the "unfinished" and open areas at the bottom of the each part of *Mogamma* as well as on the right hand side of the canvas of Part 1 (Figure 30) and the left hand side of Part 4 (Figure 33), as if the "conclusion" or ending is still to be written or formed in these open space in the time to come and alludes to the open ended possibilities of the uprisings or the shift in meaning of a building over time or the shift in perspective or identity.

Mahretu draws large coloured opaque shapes over the detailed architectural drawing foundation; in *Mogamma* (Part 1) (Figure 30)-you can see a red and a green trapezoid as well as thin orange and red rectangles, in (Part 4) (Figure 33)-a light green circle, in (Part 3) (Figure 32) a yellow triangle. These shapes attract a lot of attention because of the scale, colour and opacity in relation to the other elements on the canvas.
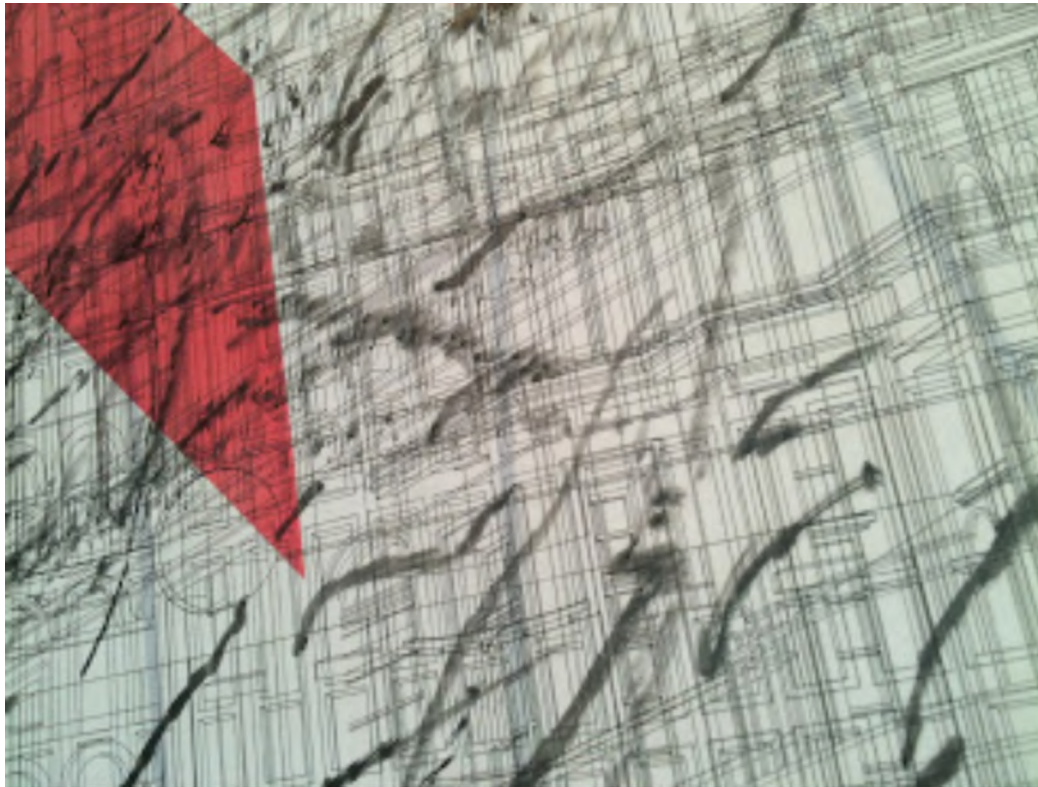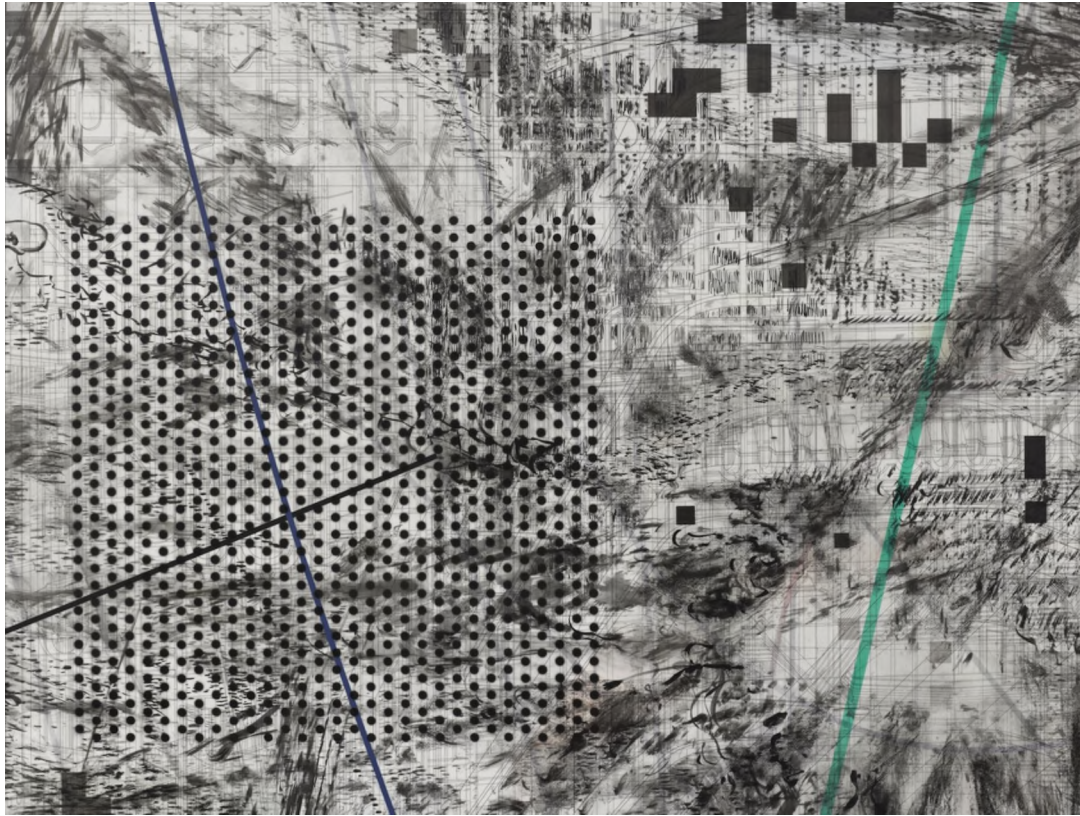
Fig 27: Julie Mehretu, Mogamma (Part 1)(detail), 2012, (4 x 3m), Ink and Acrylic on canvas, Photo: Haupt and Binder
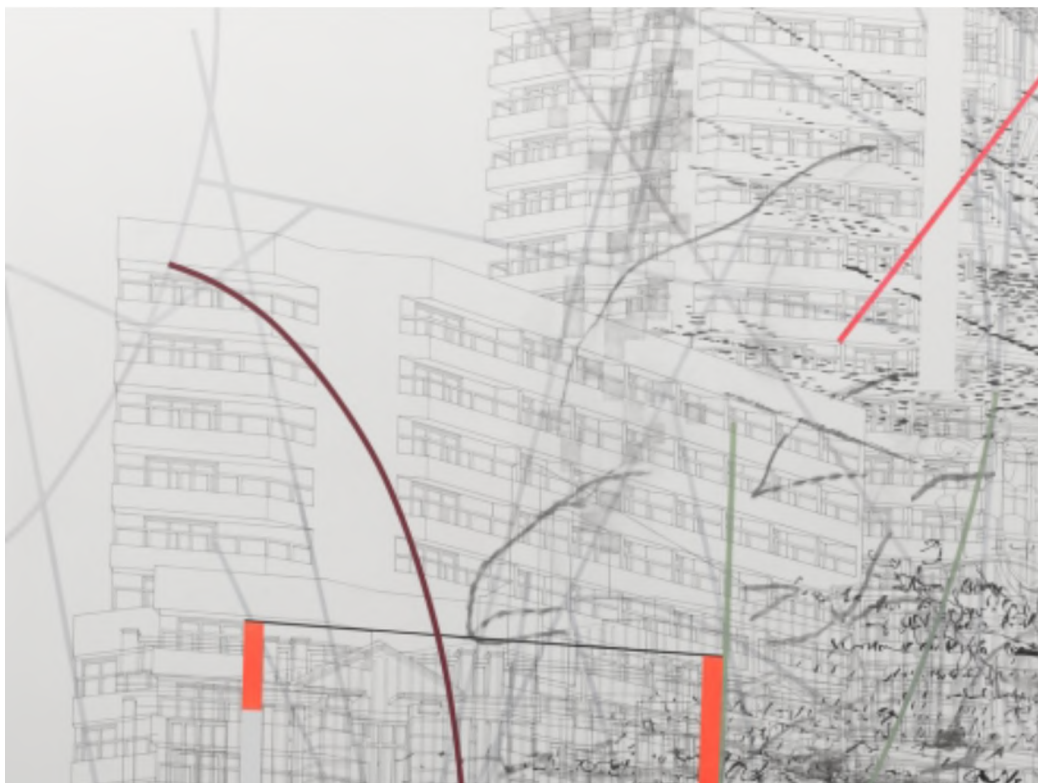
Fig 28: Julie Mehretu, Mogamma (Part 1)(detail), 2012, (4 x 3m), Ink and Acrylic on canvas, Photo: Haupt and Binder

Fig 29: Julie Mehretu, Mogamma (Part 2)(detail), 2012, (4 x 3m), Ink and Acrylic on canvas, Photo: Haupt and Binder

She also uses coloured vectors in maroon, red, purple, blue, black, orange and brown that move off in different directions. The vectors allude to topographical maps that show features such as roads, buildings, boundaries, borders, and urban developments. They create dynamism and a sense of movement in the paintings and also look like someone exploded a perspective drawing shattering the lines and sending them in all directions on the canvas. In addition, she also overlays gestural marks, such as daubs, smudges and a variety of abstract mark-making, and all these individual gestural marks come together disturbing the architecture that lies beneath it. When you look at aerial photographs of the uprising in Tharir square, the individual marks start to reference the crowds of individual people coming together in the square, demanding change in the power structures of the government and its architecture. Furthermore she uses configurations of small black blocks and as well as black dots, this can be seen in the top left of *Mogamma* (Parts 2) (Figure 31), which could reference the sign used on topographical maps for buildings or cities and towns respectively.

The various elements and registers or styles in Mehretu's paintings co-exist on one picture plane, and multiple things happen at once. The elements remain discontinuous and

fragmentary; the relationship between the elements remains unstable and uncertain, leaving the interpretation open to the subjective perspective of the viewer which is informed by his or her context and situation. It unleashes an uprising in aesthetic terms; it does not offer an image of coherence. The different elements collide on the picture plane, what the viewer sees is not the broken pieces of a total language but the pieces that make up the language; they seem to come together but simultaneously fall apart.

This opens up the interpretation of the work even further and directs our attention to the fact that the meaning is not as fixed or stable as we might think. 'Their resolution remains a future potential but a present impossibility' (Demos 2013: 60). Much like the uprisings in the present their outcome remains ambivalent and in a state of uncertainty.

Mehretu's work stages a visual relationship between the structural and the social, the gestural and the mechanical, body movement and architecture, chaos and order, change and stasis, the imagined and the real, and instability and stability, abstraction and representation. It's not just one or the other, the painting is both at the same time creating a collision which creates something else in the process, a shift, new possibilities and perspectives.

 In the world, there is always some kind of construction and deconstruction by humans and nature, a constant shifting of some kind. Mehretu's paintings are filled with a sense of uncertainty, disjunction, and movement.

> Mehretu's paintings reflect a world where the governing principle is perpetual uncertainty. As systems pile on top of other systems and then suddenly disintegrate, there seems to be no definitive authority or final goal. Instead, in the words of Marx, 'all that is solid melts into air." For her [abstraction], ... expresses not some ultimate truth or underlying order but the more terrifying thought that the only constant pattern is continual chaos (Heartney 2008: 150).

Before 9/11, Mehretu made paintings with a clear and specific meaning, but it appears as if this has shifted. Mehretu deconstructs the city and architecture visually, by doing this she asserts her way of visual thinking as well as her subjective perspective on identity, our current situation (political, historical and social) and how it informs her, her context and her past and where she positions herself within and between this.
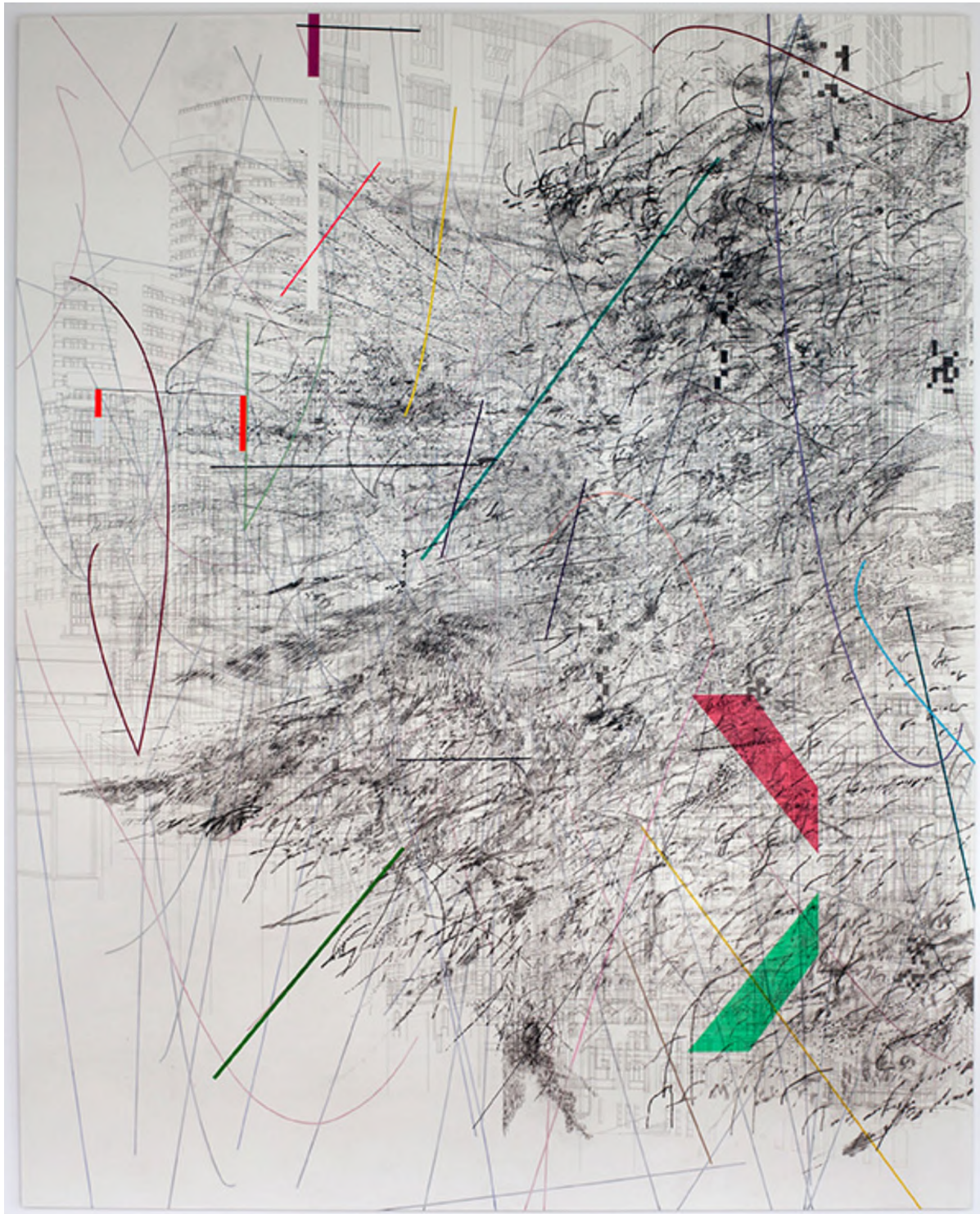
Fig 30: Julie Mehretu, Mogamma (Part 1), 2012, (4 x 3m), Ink and Acrylic on canvas, Photo: Haupt and Binder
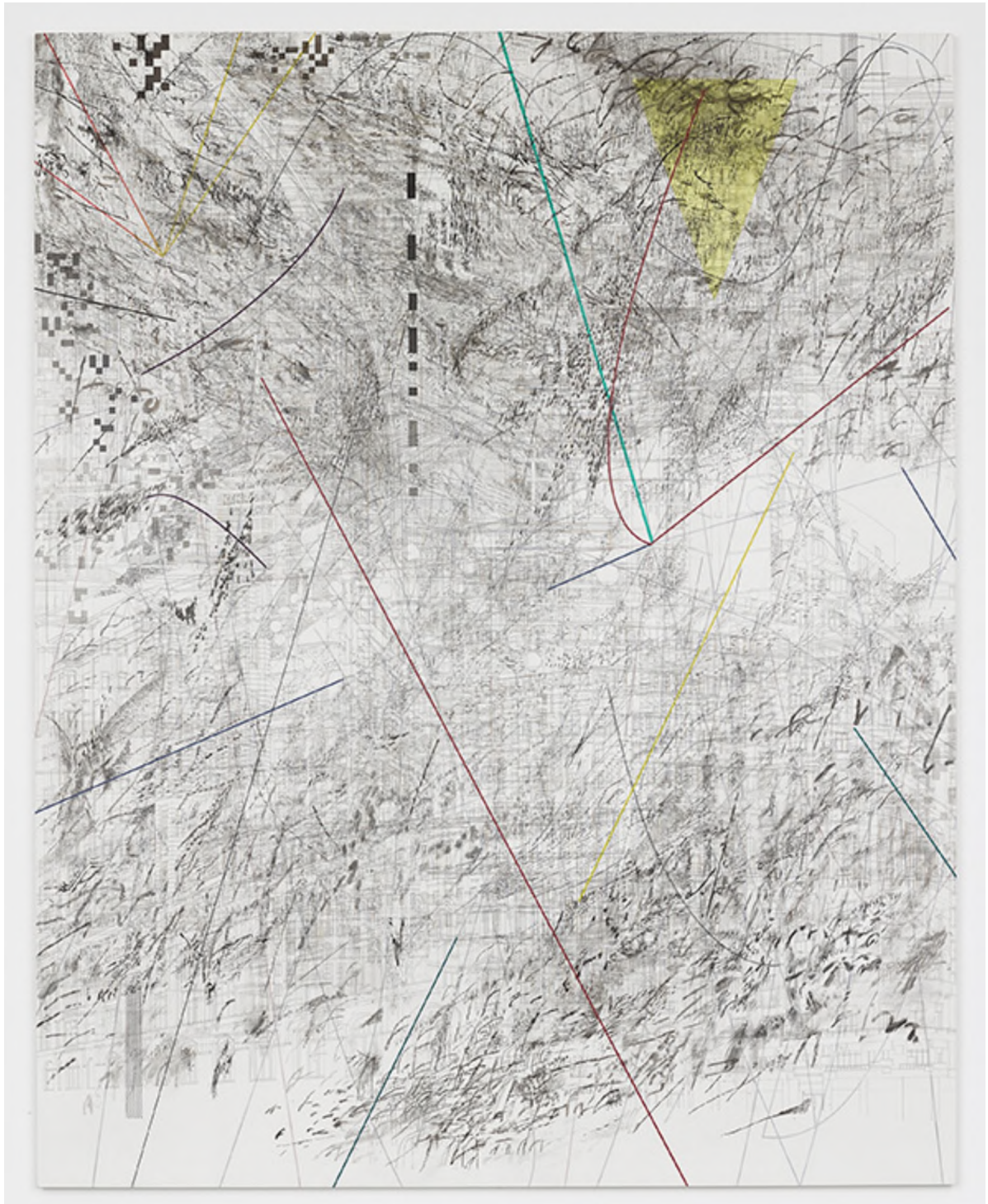
Fig 31: Julie Mehretu, Mogamma (Part 2), 2012, (4 x 3m), Ink and Acrylic on canvas, Photo: Haupt and Binder

Fig 32: Julie Mehretu, Mogamma (Part 3), 2012, (4 x 3m), Ink and Acrylic on canvas, Photo: Haupt and Binder

Fig 33: Julie Mehretu, Mogamma (Part 4), 2012, (4 x 3m), Ink and Acrylic on canvas, Photo: Haupt and Binder

Chapter two has moved the discussion to the way architectural structures, and in this chapter I introduced the idea of perspective in painting, I researched the formal qualities of the painting process which we take for granted, such as perspective and multiple perspectives, in order to expose the underlying thought mechanisms behind them, where perspective in painting acts as metaphor, thus signifying systems, in relation to human experiences as emotional and political being. I explore the important relationship of scale that exists between the human body and architectural structures. In this way I establish a clear link between architecture and the body; a theme very present in *Vertigo*. I move to the work of the Mehretu and how all the concepts outlined thus far are visually explored in the work of this artist. I situate Mehretu's work firmly in the political context of its creation. Through the analysis of work by Julie Mehretu, I introduce in more detail the idea of the analogy of architecture to cultural systems and to the idea of specific buildings as cultural symbols and emblems of power. This chapter also details my personal context in relation to the world events of my childhood, most notably the end of the Nationalist government in South Africa and the terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre in New York City and my perspective on how I understood these events at the time.

Chapter 3

Painting a Building and Building a Painting:

Process, Scale and the Body

To represent construction or to construct representation' (Virilio): this is the new question of our time. As Albert Einstein said, 'There is no scientific truth, only temporary representation, ever-acceleration sequences of representation

Tschumi 1996: 223

In Chapter one I looked at the visual and aesthetic relationship between architectural projects of the *Deconstructivist Architecture* exhibition and briefly mentioned the relational qualities of this to my own work. The four series of works that together make up my Master of Fine art practical submission, *Vertigo*, vary in their combination of architectural imagery, artistic media and visual language.

In *Series 1*, which consists of two large-scale works (4x3m) that are approximately the height of a single storey house, in which I utilize a highly representational painting style, I play with perspective by turning skyscrapers onto their sides, and I angle them in such a way that the viewer likely experiences vertigo and instability. *Series 2* is made up of eight works; I reduce architecture to diagrammatic disassembled or fragmented buildings. Each work is 65x85cm, the scale of a standard printed building plan. I use thin washes of oil paint as the foundation for these works, on top of which I draw with pencil and permanent marker. In *Series 3*, of thirty seven works, I use a variety of mediums and architecture is deconstructed into fundamental elements of form, perspective, surface, line, points and three-dimensional form. These works are 22x15.5cm; each work is displayed individually on a light box and is the approximate size of a building brick. In my last series of works, *Series 4*, which consists of two 2x1.5m paintings - approximately the size of a large domestic window or sliding door - I also utilize a highly representational painting style (not unlike *Series 1*, in the sense that I represent my reference image accurately). In *Series 4*, I constructed my reference image by deconstructing and physically cut up photographs I took of skyscrapers in Dubai and Hong Kong and constructed a 'new' disjunctive structure consisting of multiple perspectives, view points, various architectural scales and numerous architectural structures from two different geographical spaces and times. This disjunctive structure was then photographed from several

angles, further deconstructing the structure, as the camera only kept a small area on the image 'in focus' which produced unique images of spatial warping, disjunction and instability.

The works are brought together, as mentioned before, by their aim to shift perspectives and destabilise the viewer. I am looking at architecture and skyscrapers and suggesting that they could read as analogous to systems, social and political structures, institutions and the self. I deconstruct and destabilise physical architecture, and shift perspectives in my work, presenting the viewer with new ways of seeing, new perspectives and points of view, encouraging the viewer to start to question structures and systems in their own lives and to interrogate their own perspectives.

The enormous scale of the works in *Series 1* directly references the scale of architecture structures, as opposed to the smaller scaled works in Series 3, which reference the architectural building block, rather than the constructed object itself. This shift brought to light my systems of self, how I am psychologically constructed and my need for structure and order in my environment. My process started mirroring that of a building process and my painting that of a construction site and started becoming analogous to the idea of paint as a construction and deconstruction medium (Figure 34).

Through the examination of my own works in this chapter and my painting process in relation to the process of building, I hope to show how I bring the assumed stability of the viewer and of architectural structures into question with a combination of architectural and artistic media and imagery as well as the inference of vertigo, instability, perspective and scale. Vertigo and instability are central components to a shift in perspective.

Fig 34: Lindi Lombard, Work Space, 2014, Photograph, Photo: Nigel Mullins

3.1 Reverse Perspective: *Series 1*

The enormous scale that I planned for the paintings in *Series 1* demanded a different method of working because of the scale of my body in relation to the scale of the works; I am 1,7m tall and the works are 3m high. My relatively small scale in relation to the work made it physically impossible to paint the paintings just standing on the ground or to move the painting's position on the easel to make it comfortable for me and my body to paint, as I had always done before (and as I had done with the other three series of works in *Vertigo).* Usually the painting was moved around, up and down on an easel to find the right position and height, so I could paint an area of the painting in a comfortable position. With the large-scale of Series 1, this was not a possibility. The two canvasses (1.5x4m each, to allow them to be moved through doorways) were placed one on top of another and fastened together, placed on the easels, and fastened in one position to make sure that they do not collapse fall over or fall forward on top of me while I painted. The painting became a fixed construction site and my body had to move around it. 'The painter takes his/[her] body with him; indeed we cannot imagine how a mind could paint' (Pallasmaa 2005:45). The paintings were deconstructed and taken apart when they were finished in the studio space and had to be reconstructed again in the gallery space for my Masters of Fine Art submission *Vertigo,* and will have to be deconstructed again at the end. There is a constant oscillating between building and un-building of the physical painting because of its scale in relation to the space it occupies.

Growing up with a Master Builder, building contractor Father and always visiting building sites, I became not only aware of the building process and how buildings are constructed but also how easily buildings could be taken apart and de-constructed.

When I was twelve years old, the house we lived in at the time was deconstructed while we were still living in it, the building process happened in reverse. I still remember my Father taking out the window in my room, building it closed with raw bricks and leaving one brick space open for air and light. My father un-built our houses, piece by piece, to construct our new house, this process took place over a few months, a simultaneous construction and deconstruction happening at the same time. All that remains of the house I once lived in is a tree from our garden, which is now situated outside the PEP store, in the Pepper Grove Mall in Grahamstown. This is a constant reminder of how easily buildings can be made and how

easily buildings could be "unmade"; that buildings are not solid, lasting or permanent and that they shift.

When this shift happened, I was twelve years old. In that year, what is known as 9/11, the terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon unfolded. I was too young at the time to understand what really happened; my limited understanding was that two buildings collapsed. As the scale of my body changed as I grew up, so did how I saw and understood structures- physical, social, political and the self, so with my change in scale came a shifted points of view.

In the process of designing, or constructing a building, writing about architecture or painting architecture, is a way of thinking, questioning, investigating and exploring through the process of doing. In this way, it is sometimes hard to know if the theoretical concept came before or after the process of thinking and exploration through doing. Tschumi (1996: 18;19) writes about this thinking through architecture:

> Whether texts, drawings, or buildings, each mode of working provided further means of exploration. This is indeed one of the great characteristic of architectural work: you can also think through it... In architecture, concepts can either precede or follow projects or buildings. In other words, a theoretical concept may be either applied to a project or derived from it. Quite often this distinction cannot be made so clearly.

This is linked to the way James Elkins (1994:30) speaks about thinking through perspective, 'the idea of perspective is inseparable from active thought so that to conceive one is to think through the other' (1994:30). Whilst painting these large-scale painting, working on scaffolding, utilising techniques such as perspective, I simultaneously engaged in a reverse perspective. Thinking through, engaging, questioning how I am personally constructed and my systems of self and being in the world, these then influence how and why I paint the way I paint and why I paint the subject matter I paint. As Pallasmaa (2005:12) writes:

> A wise architect works with his/her entire body and sense of self. While working on a building or an object, the architect is simultaneously engaged in a reverse perspective, his/her self-image- or more precisely, existential experience.

3.1.2 Perfect Perspective *Series 1*

I respond most strongly to architecture imagery, drawn intuitively to these structures that are valued for order, unity, permanence, structure and stability. The increase in scale of the painting I paint (*Series 1*) puts a magnifying glass on my process of working as well as on myself. I became explicitly aware and conscious of the personal structures that dictate my life that I have often ignored.

I started questioning way and why I respond to structure, my physical environment, and as a result the way I do things. For example, the way I feel I have to order, number and structure my paint on my palette, they way I feel I have to make sure that the paint colour I apply to the canvas is the exact colour as that on the image. How I feel I have to structure and organise the space and environment that I paint in or I become extremely anxious and destabilised.

My work has enabled me to question and become aware of my internal systems of self. This shift in perspective, making visible, magnifying and enlarging my personal structures with the increase in scale of my work, has shifted my understanding and perspective of my identity.

I realised that I am a perfectionist, something I had always ignored but which has subsequently shifted my perspective of myself. Being a perfectionist is not about being perfect, it is about thinking that the person I am is not good enough and being plagued with a core internal belief that my value comes from being perfect and that I have to constantly earn my place as 'good' in the world and vigilantly pursue this. Perfectionism grows from a point of feeling imperfect and deeply flawed and having to constantly re-prove and re-earn my worth- even to myself. Emotionally for me it means that I live my life on a continual treadmill, plagued by constant anxiety, stress and feelings of instability and chasing the elusive feeling that everything in my life needs to be 'right.' I have an intrinsic need to make everything in my environment organised and structured which in turn makes me feel less anxious and stressed on the inside. I try to control and structure my environment, in my attempt to get away from the disorganised feeling inside of me that are messy, painful and disorganised, feelings that are difficult to articulate, define and resolve immediately. As a result I live my in a continuous state of anxiety, exhaustion, and sometimes even depression

and this results in an increased need for control, order and structure to lessen these messy and disorganised feelings.

I do not open up to people about my emotions, about myself or my feelings easily or who I really am. Writing the above paragraph about who I am, even though it is "abstract", gives me extreme feelings of personal vertigo. However, I do this in order to explain why I paint what I paint, and paint in the way I paint.

I did not realize how much this internal structure was affecting my life until I really became aware of it, started questioning it and how it was and still is affecting my life. I have an unconscious and now conscious desire to change and shift and let go of this intrinsic need for structure, order, balance and control my life and to destabilise this governing structure and system of control within me. A conscious desire because I chose to paint in such a large scale in order to destabilise myself and to not work in my "comfort zone" through the structural and yet vertiginous visual images I chose to paint that I gravitated towards intuitively.

3.1.3 Painting as Building: the Building Process

Whilst working on my large scale painting I started seeing many similarities between my painting process and the process of building.

Builders dig foundations so that buildings will be stable. The raw materials, huge mounds of sand (they were like mountains to me as a child), and brick are delivered to the building site. The sand that is mixed with cement powder and water on a flat piece of ground to form concrete reflects the process of mixing paint on a palette. A trowel, a small hand tool with a short handle and a flat, usually pointed blade used for spreading, shaping, and smoothing plaster, cement, or mortar, is much like a palette knife. It is used to put an unformed blob of concrete on a brick, and the brick is then placed on top of another brick to 'glue' the two surfaces together in order to build the walls of the building. As the walls get taller than the height of the builders, they start using scaffolding to build the rest of the wall all the way to the roof. A building has a fixed site of construction; it is built into the ground (foundations) so it is stable and fixed and thus cannot be easily moved. A building, however, cannot be

moved wholesale, as it were, but would entail a process of deconstructing it, or demolishing it and starting again.

Building is a slow process, sometime taking months or even years to complete, because of the scale of the project, building brick by brick, and the accuracy required, making sure everything is level, and are the right measurements, and to make a building stand up and resist gravity and thus not fall over. Building a building is a very physical process and labour intensive, mixing cement, pushing huge amounts of cement around in wheelbarrows to where it is needed, carrying and moving bricks around the site and climbing up and down scaffolding.

A builder uses drawings of the project/building, drawn by an architect, to construct the building. From the plan he gets the exact measurements and dimensions of the building. He takes the two dimensional drawings and scales it up to construct a three dimensional building; the plans are brought to life. He does this very accurately through measurement, and calculations and builders tools, much like when I use my reference image to create my large scale 4x 3m paintings.

3.1.3.2 Building as Painting: the Painting Process *Series 1*

I stretch my canvas over my frames and prime my canvas, forming my stable foundation. I mix huge mounds of paint before starting my painting; the paint is my raw material (Figure 35). Pigment is mixed with linseed oil to form the oil paint we buy in the tubes; I mix my oil paint with more linseed oil and sometimes Liquin to get a glossy rich paint. I mix my paint on a flat glass surface with a pallet knife. I mix my paint in a very 'scientific' way. I place a square piece of white paper with a small hole cut out of the centre of the paper and place this on my reference image, with the hole over the colour I want to mix. The colour becomes isolated from the colours surrounding it allowing one to see the colour accurately. I mix the paints on my palette until I know I have the right colour; I place the paint on the white piece of paper next to the hole with the isolated colour. If the colour is incorrect I then start to shift it till it is an exact match. Because of the scale of the painting I was painting, I had to mix a large amount of paint to be able to cover that large surface of the canvas. I would paint blocks on my palette and number each block which would correspond to a number on my reference

image where the colour was isolated. I would then place the large amount of paint in the numbered block, forming mounds of paint on my palette which I organise in a numbered grid system.

Because of the scale of *Series 1*, I had to construct scaffolding in front of my painting. To reach the top of my canvas, I climb onto a chair, then onto a table, I climb onto the scaffolding and then I climb onto another chair that is placed on top off the scaffolding in order to reach the very top on the canvas. Sometimes I have to sit on the floor and paint, in order to paint the bottom of the canvas. There were many times when I lost sight of the edge of the scaffolding—my vision was so fixed on the painting that I lost sight of the edge. Experiencing the over-the-edge sense of vertigo time and time again, and just when I thought I was 'comfortable,' I would become vertiginously aware of the edge again and the destabilisation would happen again.

My painting process was very slow, and the 3 x 4m paintings took months to paint and complete. Painting a dead straight vertical line, 3m in length, takes me approximately two hours to paint.

First I set up a laser leveller, to project the straight line, making sure the angle is correct. I trace the line with pencil. I proceed to use a one meter ruler to draw a single line and masking tape along that line. I measure from that masking-taped line the thickness of the line (Figure 36) for example 2mm. I make a mark at the two millimetre mark every 10cm from the top of the canvas to the bottom. I then use a 1m long ruler to draw another pencil line along the pencil marks I made at the 2mm distance, ensure the thickness of the line is the same all the way down the canvas and that it is straight. I then marking-tape on that pencil line I have just drawn, (Figure 37) then lie on the floor and look up along the line to make sure it is dead straight as well as standing on the chair on top of the scaffolding and look down, to check that the line is perfectly straight, (Figure 38 and 39). I then proceed to paint the line; removing the masking tape when I am done painting the line, after that fixing any areas on the line where the paint may have seeped under the masking tape, thus distorting the straight line.

When measuring or drawing a single pencil line from the top of the canvas to the bottom, I start at the very top of the canvas. I stand on the chair on top of the scaffolding (Figure 40), as I move down the canvas I get off the chair and stand upright on the scaffolding, As I proceed further down- bending over, then squatting, then sitting on the scaffolding. I now have to get

off the scaffolding, pull the scaffolding away from the canvas, standing on the floor in front of the canvas and proceed further down, standing up right, bending over, then squatting, then sitting on the floor. Unlike in building where there is a team of builders, I work alone which makes my painting very slow and labour intensive. I climb up and down the scaffolding about ten times to draw, measure and paint one 3m line as well as having to move the scaffolding back and forth about seven to ten times to draw, measure and paint the one line of which there are 56 in Figure 43. I slowly build the skyscraper line by line, millimetre by millimetre in a very labour intensive, physically exhaustive and time demanding way.

I took photographs of skyscrapers in Dubai and Hong Kong, and I then print an A3 reference image to work from. The 3 x 4m painting is ten times the size of the A3 image. I then measured the thickness of the lines on the A3 image and times that by ten to get the thickness of the line on the painting. I do this for all the lines, the spaces in between and the angles and write this onto the A3 image (Figure 41), just like my father used to write on his plan drawings. The A3 printed photograph become my plan drawing. I used both size 00 brushes as well as industrial size brushes to paint these painting (Figure 42).

To summarise, I found a lot of similarities between the building process and my painting process. When painting my large-scale painting it often felt like I was literally building a painting and not just painting a building.

I am the builder and the painter of *Series 1*. My bodily and mental constitution can be argued to have become the site of the works. The works are an outward reflection of my physical experience of vertigo while working on the scaffolding to paint these large scale works and of the physical unease of painting these works and my sense of self, my continuous sense of anxiety and instability. Pallasmaa (2005:67; 12) writes:

> ...the architect [artist/painter] gradually internalises... his/her conceived building: movement, balance and scale are felt unconsciously through the body as tensions in the muscular system and in the positions of the skeleton and inner organs. As the work interacts with the body of the observer, the experience mirrors the bodily sensations of the maker [artist/painter].... In a creative work, a powerful identification and projection takes place; the entire body and mental constitution of the maker becomes the site of the work. Consequently, architecture is communication from the body of the architect directly to the body of the person who encounters the work.

This is one point of view why the viewer might feel destabilised when encountering my work: they encounter my body and mental constitution in the work.

Fig 35: Lindi Lombard, Paint on palette, 2014, Photograph, Photo: Lindi Lombard

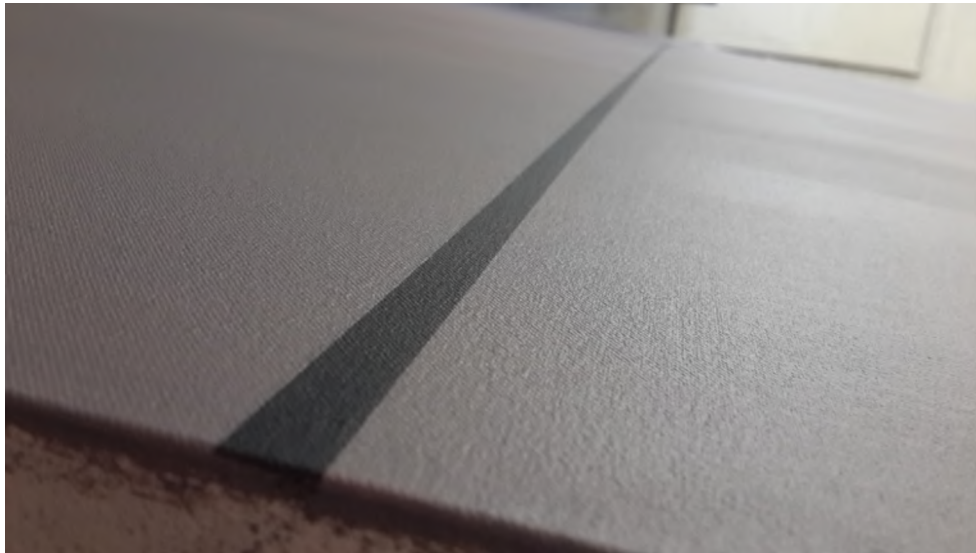**Fig 36: Lindi Lombard, Process, 2014, Photograph, Photo: Lindi Lombard**

Fig 37: Lindi Lombard, Process, 2014, Photograph, Photo: Lindi Lombard

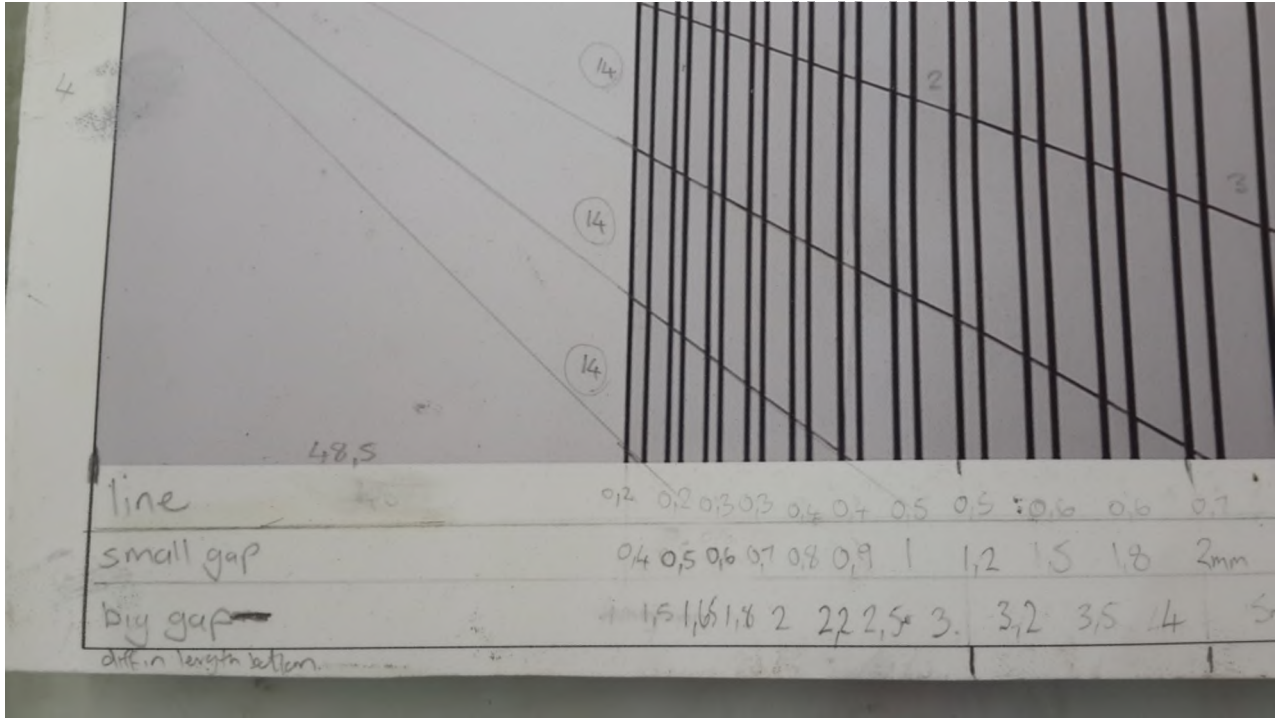**Fig 38: Lindi Lombard, Process, 2014, Photograph, Photo: Lindi Lombard**

Fig 39: Lindi Lombard, Process, 2014, Photograph, Photo: Lindi Lombard

Fig: 40: Lindi Lombard, Process, 2014, Photograph, Photo: Matthew Hazel

Fig 41: Lindi Lombard, Reference image, 2014, Photograph, Photo: Lindi Lombard

Fig 42: Lindi Lombard, Brushes, 2014, Photograph, Photo: Lindi Lombard

3.2 Unstable Architecture and Shifted Perspectives

Architecture can be seen as a metaphor for the body, the self, and systems of social control that we have created. When the structure of this architecture is compromised, either literally or metaphorically, we experience instability and vertigo. I destabilize firstly, built space and architecture in a painterly form, and secondly, our sense of certainty in the architecture that surrounds us. I hope to prompt or provoke the viewer to question the assumed fixity of our selves and our social systems.

In *Series 1* (Figure 15 and 36), these paintings create a sense of discomfort because of the unusual shift in perspective; I angle the skyscrapers in such a way that the viewer is likely to experience vertigo, fear and instability. Their monolithic scale references the scale of architecture, which surrounds the viewer in its vertical and horizontal span; they are thus likely to be experienced in an urban way. These paintings bring the assumed stability of the viewer and architecture into question, because of their large scale in relation to the viewer's body and their unusual shift in perspective as well as their individual installation aspects which creates the conditions for an over-the-edge sensation of vertigo.

Fig 15: Lindi Lombard, *Series 1* **(one of two), 2013/2014, (4x3m), Oil paint on canvas. Photo: Lindi Lombard**

Fig 43: Lindi Lombard, *Vertigo #2, Series 1* (one of two), 2013/2014, (4x3m), Oil paint on canvas. Photo: Lindi Lombard

I installed these works very specifically. Vertigo #1 is installed at the very end of a lengthy gallery, and off centre (Figure 44). As the viewer approaches, one sees that mirror have been placed in front of and underneath the painting, and that the bottom of the painting is touching the floor, where it directly meets the mirrors (Figure 45). Looking down into the mirrors, (Figure 46) one can see not only the painting reflected (and therefore appearing as double in size) but also the architecture of the ceiling of the gallery, including the skylights, through which one can faintly see the unending sky. The sensation provoked by this is instability and vertigo as intended.

Fig. 44: Lindi Lombard, *Vertigo #1, Series 1* (one of two), Installation view, 2013/2014, (4x3m), Oil paint on canvas. Photo: Monique Pelser

Fig 45: Lindi Lombard, *Vertigo #1, Series 1* (one of two), Installation view, 2013/2014, (4x3m), Oil paint on canvas. Photo: Monique Pelser
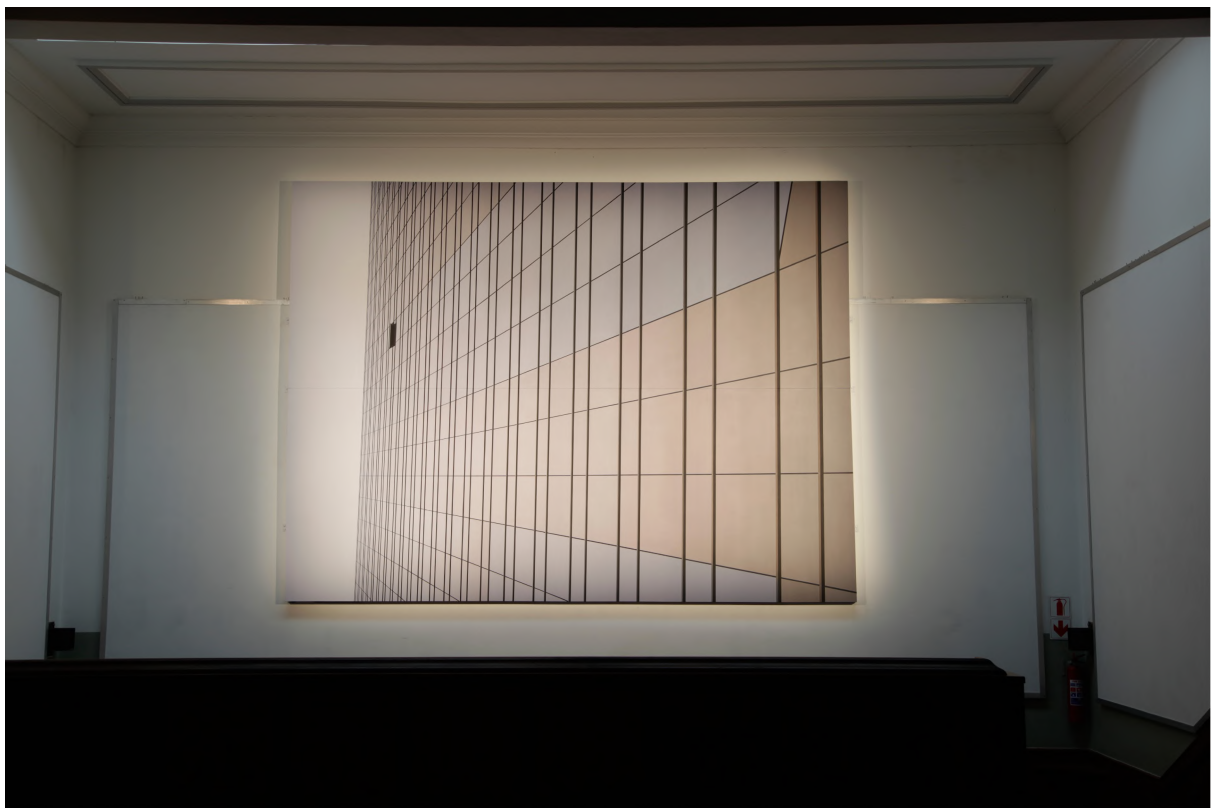
Fig 46: Lindi Lombard, *Vertigo #1, Series 1* (one of two), Installation view, 2013/2014, (4x3m), Oil paint on canvas. Photo: Monique Pelser

I installed Vertigo #2 in a double volume stairwell, so that not only is the experience of looking up at it (Figure 47) (as one climbs the stairs) vertiginous, but one is also afforded the experience of being able to view the painting from multiple viewpoints, including the balcony of the museum (Figure 48 and 49), where there is a drop of 4 meters between the viewer and the painting, again inducing a certain amount of vertigo for the viewer.

Fig 47: Lindi Lombard, *Vertigo #2, Series 1* **(one of two), Installation view, 2013/2014, (4x3m), Oil paint on canvas. Photo: Monique Pelser**

Fig 48: Lindi Lombard, *Vertigo #2, Series 1* **(one of two), Installation view, 2013/2014, (4x3m), Oil paint on canvas. Photo: Monique Pelser**
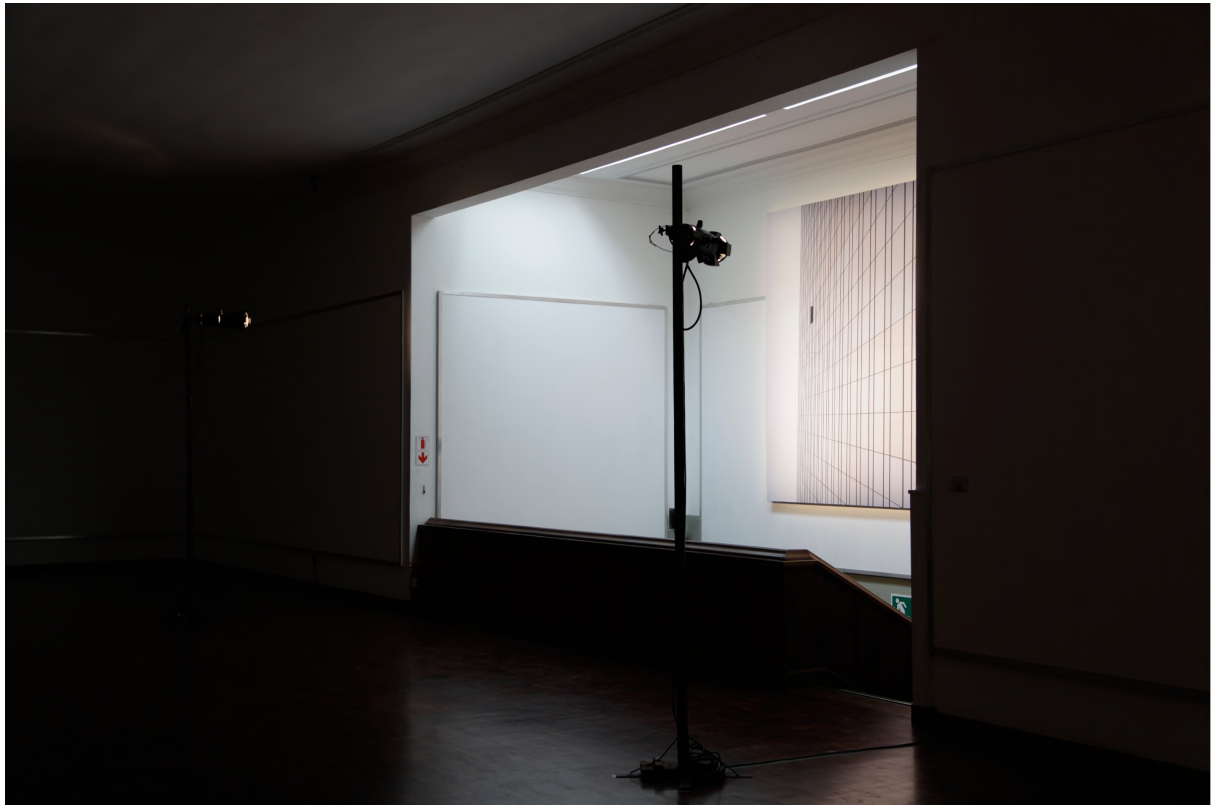
Fig 49: Lindi Lombard, *Vertigo #2, Series 1* (one of two), Installation view, 2013/2014, (4x3m), Oil paint on canvas. Photo: Monique Pelser

The works in Figures 15 and 43 take as their subject two enormous International Style Modernist skyscrapers located in Hong Kong (Figure 43) and Dubai (Figure 15), with their sleek Modern look and emphasis on rectilinear forms and clean lines. With these works I destabilise the viewer in four ways. I use the technique of perspective to create the illusion of reality and the three dimensional form of a skyscrapers on the two dimensional surface of the canvas. By using the technique of perspective I create the illusion of depth and distance, looking through the picture plane rather than at it, persuading the viewer with this representation tool that they are looking at an actual skyscraper tricking the eye for a second, undermining our confidence in trusting and accepting what we see. As Grootenboer (2005:4) writes,

> Perspective provides a view of that which it shows. Through that which it shows, which is what we see, it makes the picture plane transparent, and hence, renders itself invisible.

This is fundamental in creating the over-the-edge sensation of vertigo in the viewer. This destabilises the viewer physically and affects his or her sense of control and sense of self.

Whilst taking the photographs of the buildings and visiting the Burj Khalifa in Dubai, I personally experienced the same destabilising, over-the-edge sensation of vertigo as when I painted these paintings on the scaffolding in the studio. Much of what (I hope) the viewer feels and encounters in these two paintings, mirrors my personal experience physically, cognitively and emotionally- my instability, my shift in perspective, my shift in the way I see things and myself, my fear and anxiety, my loss of control and self.

Pallasmaa (2005: 67) explains this as follows:

> A wise architect [artist] works with his/her entire body and sense of self. While working on a building or an object, the architect is simultaneously engaged in a reverse perspective, his/her self-image- or more precisely, existential experience. In a creative work, a powerful identification and projection takes place; the entire body and mental constitution of the maker becomes the site of the work.

Using the technique of perspective I lay out the conditions for the reproduction of the real in painting. For a moment the painting tricks the eye to the point of doubt: the painting deceives and undermines our reliance on vision. This makes us question what we see and by extension how we see it, thus the painting calls for a different form of looking, one which queries the nature of paintings using the technique of perspective as representational tool. This questioning leads the viewer not to interpretation and a search for meaning but to a state of thinking. Elkins (1994: 30) explains "the idea of perspective is inseparable from active thought so that to conceive one is to think through the other". Vidler (2000: 9) also explains that perspective remains 'thinking in painting' a formal apparatus given to the artist similar to that of the sentence in language.

In these two large-scale works, I take another perspective on skyscrapers. I shift the perspective and as a result of this shifting, the buildings move away from the way you would ordinarily see or expect or assume to see skyscrapers. A horizon line crosses through the vanishing point (which is normally a horizontal line on your page or canvas). The horizon line creates a flat stable horizontal 'floor' for the viewer to mentally enter into the image on a stable surface. The horizon line is shifted in these paintings and becomes a vertical line. The shift from the horizontal to the vertical, takes away that 'floor' and the shift creates the illusion of a floating, lightweight building suspended in mid air, or even a frozen moment in which the skyscraper is in the process of falling. Architecture is generally valued for its stability, solidity, weight, balance and order, but by shifting the perspective, we see the

structure in a new way and start questioning what architecture is valued for and our assumptions about structures. Because of this shift in the way we see the structure and the skyscraper it also shifts the meaning and symbolism of architecture, creating a shifted point of view.

I hope to induce vertigo in the viewer by the shift in this horizon line, in the same way that a swaying ship can induce nausea. By extension, I hope to prompt the analogy, for the viewer, of an unstable world and to have them question themselves and their points of view on apparently stable, strong, unified ideas.

When I enter a social space, I feel extremely uncomfortable, uneasy and unsettled; it has been that way since school when I was bullied. My response as a child was thinking that if I am perfect, this would not happen and they will like me. I think I adapted to this by trying to be perfect so people would like me. I have been conditioned to associate and react to people in social spaces with unease, scared they will realize, meet or see my 'true' self who is messy: that they will see that I am not 'perfect' and this will result in rejection. I wanted the viewer to encounter my sense of unease and instability and discomfort in the work and to have them feel what and how I feel daily.

While I do not open up to people easily (and most of the time not at all), my art allows people to meet me in the work in a way I feel comfortable with - from a 'safe distance' and non-threatening in a way where I still feel in control of my emotions. Another perspective is that the viewer also meets themselves in the works. My paintings are the outward reflection of inward feelings that I feel when I encounter someone.

> [My] work of art functions as another person, with whom one unconsciously converses. When confronting a work of art we project our emotions and feelings on to the work. A curious exchange takes place; we lend the work our emotions, whereas the work lends us its authority and aura. Eventually we meet ourselves in the work. Melanie Klein's notion of 'projective identification' suggests that, in fact, all human interaction implies projection of fragments of the self on to the other person (Pallasmaa 2005:66).

Figure 43 is hung in the gallery space above a flight of stairs, which allows one to have a steep angle view of the painting from the bottom of the stair looking up which induces vertigo [I will add in Installation shots]. As one ascends the stairs, one's viewpoint changes. Because of the positioning of the painting one isn't able to get a close view of the work, only

a small piece is able to be seen up close. Once at the top of the stairs one is able to get a frontal view of the work, but as one tries to get closer, one is looking over the edge on the first floor looking down at the ground level, a particularly vertiginous experience. The viewer looks at the work and again, vertigo is induced. Every time the viewers stabilize themselves, they are destabilized again. It creates an oscillating state of stability and instability within the viewer. Figure 15 is hung in a 'normal' gallery space. The viewer is initially destabilized by the scale and the angled perspective of the image, but then regains stability as the eyes and body naturalise to the odd perspective. As one approaches the work, however, to look at the details of the surface, one sees that mirrors are placed directly in front of and below the painting. These mirrors reflect the work upwards, and as one looks down into the mirrors, the illusion is created that you are looking down from the top of a large skyscraper. This also places the viewer's reflection 'inside' the work, again creating the sensation of vertigo. Installing the works above the stair case and placing mirrors in front of the painting allows multiple view points of Figure 15 and 43 and, by extension, multiple ways of seeing and interpreting the works. The positioning of the works in the exhibition space also does not allow viewers to get too close to the works with their bodies, always keeping viewers at a distance.

3.2.1 Organic and Structural *Series 3*

The process that I used in making these light-box works was considerably more subconscious, intuitive and unstructured compared to the larger-scale works. I had no plan or specific outcome for how they would look - which is not in my nature to do. I did these works while I was working on the big work as an escape from the anxiety that the large works were creating. I would just start drawing abstract lines, perspective and forms and pour Liquin, ink or water on the paper. The Liquin structurally weakens the paper and when light is shone through it, it becomes semi-transparent, which I hope invokes in the viewer a sense of the ephemerality of structure. Each work is displayed on an individual light box (Figure 50), and in a straight line in the gallery space they start reading like lit windows in a skyscraper (Figure 51, 52 and 53). I use perspective and line but they do not go anywhere, or lead anywhere. These works do not create a rational space. These works are small in relation to the large space work and highlight the scale of the large-scale paintings; these works are

more intimate and draws the viewer in close. I use an abstract sign system, and have no fixed meaning, it is up to the viewer to look and draw conclusions.

In *Series 3* (Figure 54 and 55), many of the works look like the inside of a petri dish, which is a cylindrical glass or plastic dish that biologists use to culture cells, bacteria or mosses and are then looked at through a magnifying glass. It speaks to our constant shifting and growth and to our need to examine things closely, even the things we cannot see with the naked eye - like the invisible social or cognitive architecture that structures our environment.
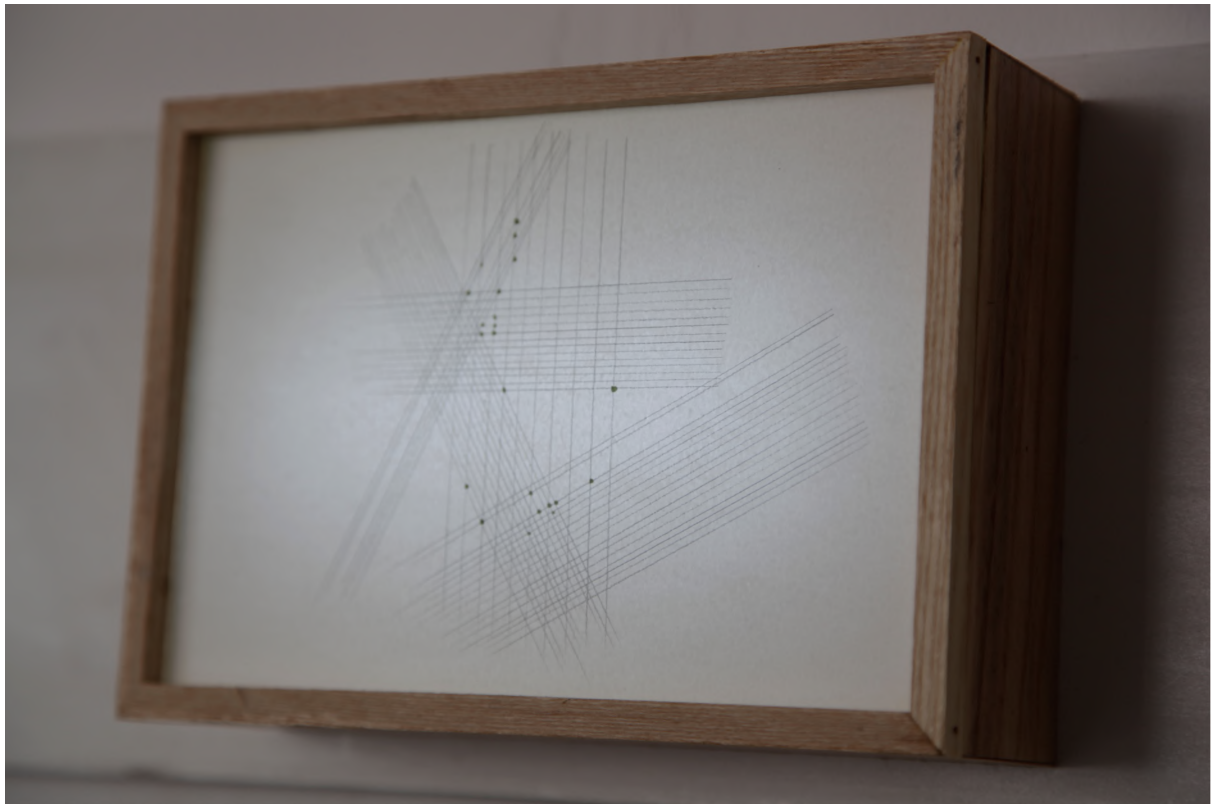
Fig 50: Lindi Lombard, *Series 3* (one of thirty seven), Installation view 2013/2014, (22x15.5cm), Ink, Pencil, Water and Liquin on Paper placed on an individual light box. Photo: Monique Pelser

Fig 51: Lindi Lombard, *Series 3* **(one of thirty seven), Installation view 2013/2014, (22x15.5cm), Ink, Pencil, Water and Liquin on Paper placed on an individual light box. Photo: Monique Pelser**
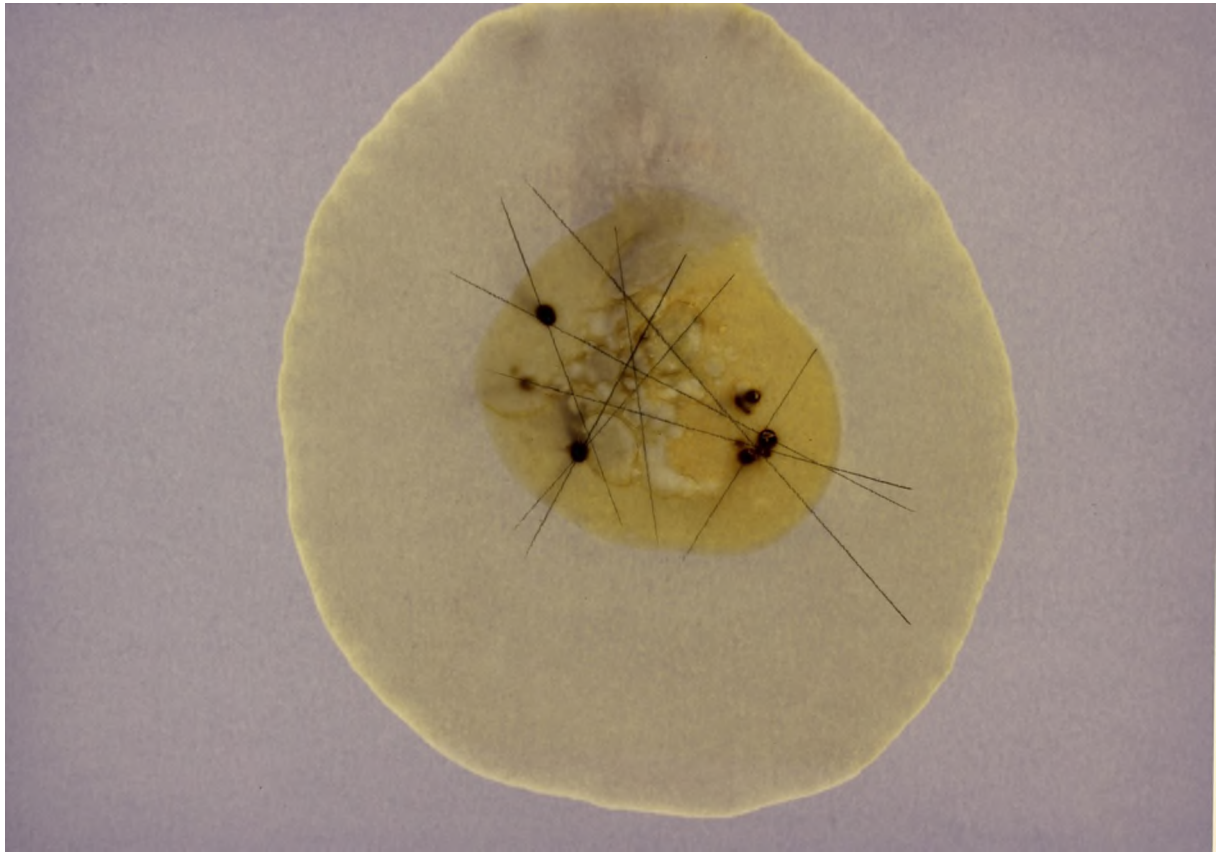
Fig 52: Lindi Lombard, *Series 3* (one of thirty seven), Installation view 2013/2014, (22x15.5cm), Ink, Pencil, Water and Liquin on Paper placed on an individual light box. Photo: Monique Pelser
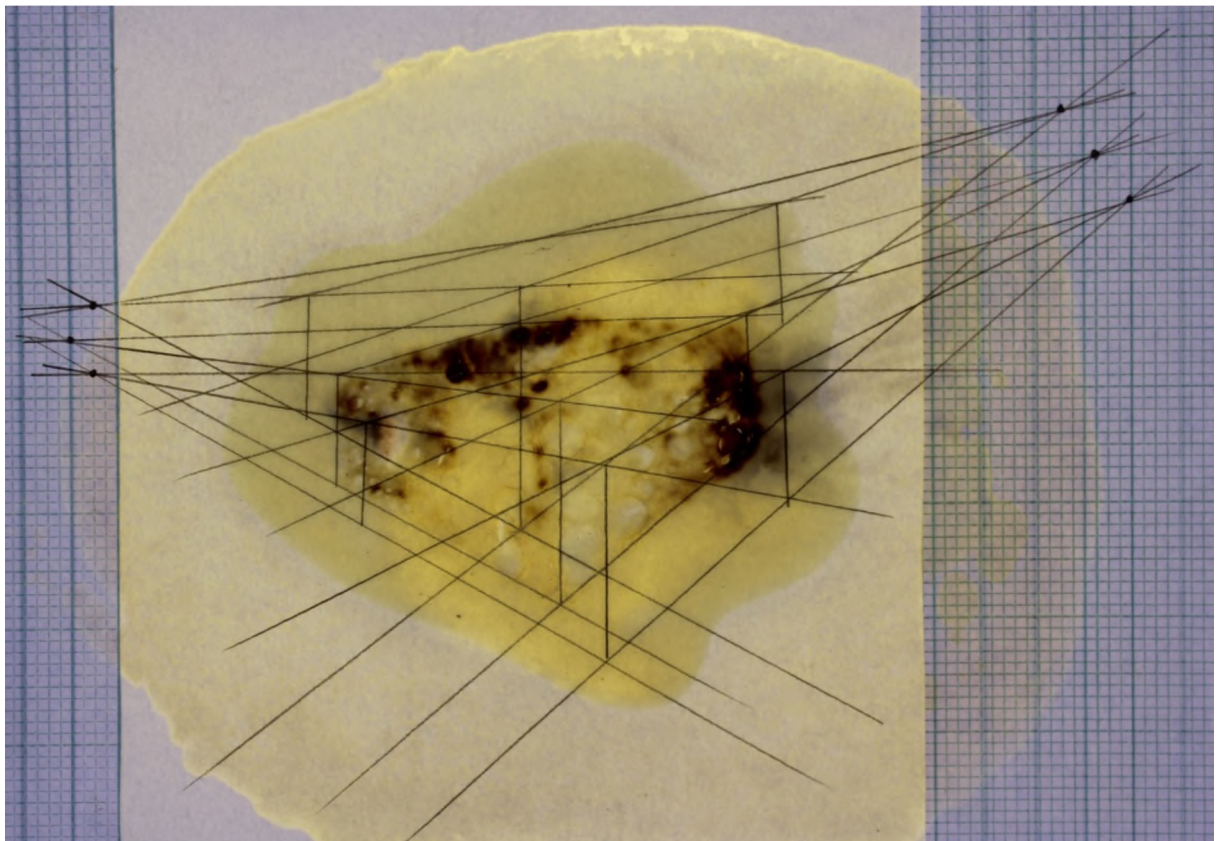

Fig 53: Lindi Lombard, *Series 3* (one of thirty seven), Installation view 2013/2014, (22x15.5cm), Ink, Pencil, Water and Liquin on Paper placed on an individual light box. Photo: Monique Pelser

Fig 54: Lindi Lombard, *Series 3* (one of thirty seven), 2013/2014, (22x15.5cm), Ink, Pencil, Water and Liquin on Paper placed on an individual light box. Photo: Lindi Lombard

Figure 55: Lindi Lombard, *Series 3* (one of thirty seven), 2013/2014, (22x15.5cm), Ink, pencil, water, graph paper and Liquin on paper. Photo: Lindi Lombard

3.2.2 Deconstructed Plan Drawings *Series 2*

In Figure 57 the canvas was placed on the floor and I poured turpentine and oil paint on the canvas and let it dry, allowing the paint to do what it wanted, relinquishing control. The paint is translucent and not solid or opaque and gives the impression (in combination with the line drawings of an explosion) (figure 57) or the dirtying of paper as you draw, or a dirty window. On top of this layer I drew deconstructed structures in permanent marker and pencil. These technical drawings are plotted in such a way that the viewer can look through them and see into the structure, as if the walls are invisible, which exposes the underlying architectural framework and undermines the solidity and unity and balance of structure. When one takes something apart to see what is inside, and understand what it is made up of and how it works, one weakens it structurally. As can be seen in Figure 56 and 57, the pieces seem to come together but also fall apart—it is in a process of construction and deconstruction, stability and instability. Plan drawings are traditionally drawn for the construction of a building; these are plan drawings for taking something apart.

These works offer a different perspective of structure; they are not done in a realistic way, and open up interpretation in relation to the diagrammatical, abstract sign system. These works are a visual deconstruction and a questioning of rational, architectural structure.
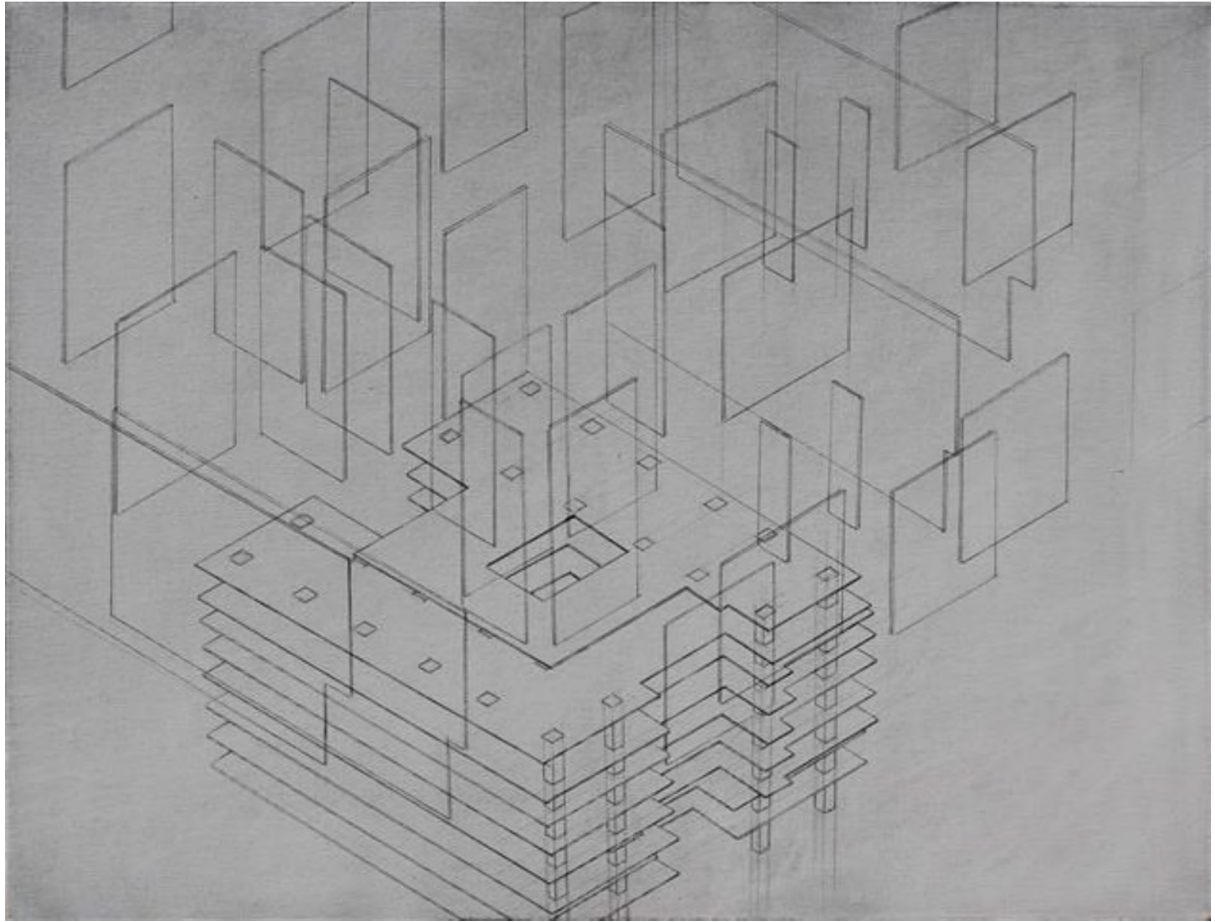
Fig: 56, Lindi Lombard, *Series 2* (one of eight), 2013/2014, (65x85cm), Oil paint and permanent marker on canvas. Photo: Lindi Lombard
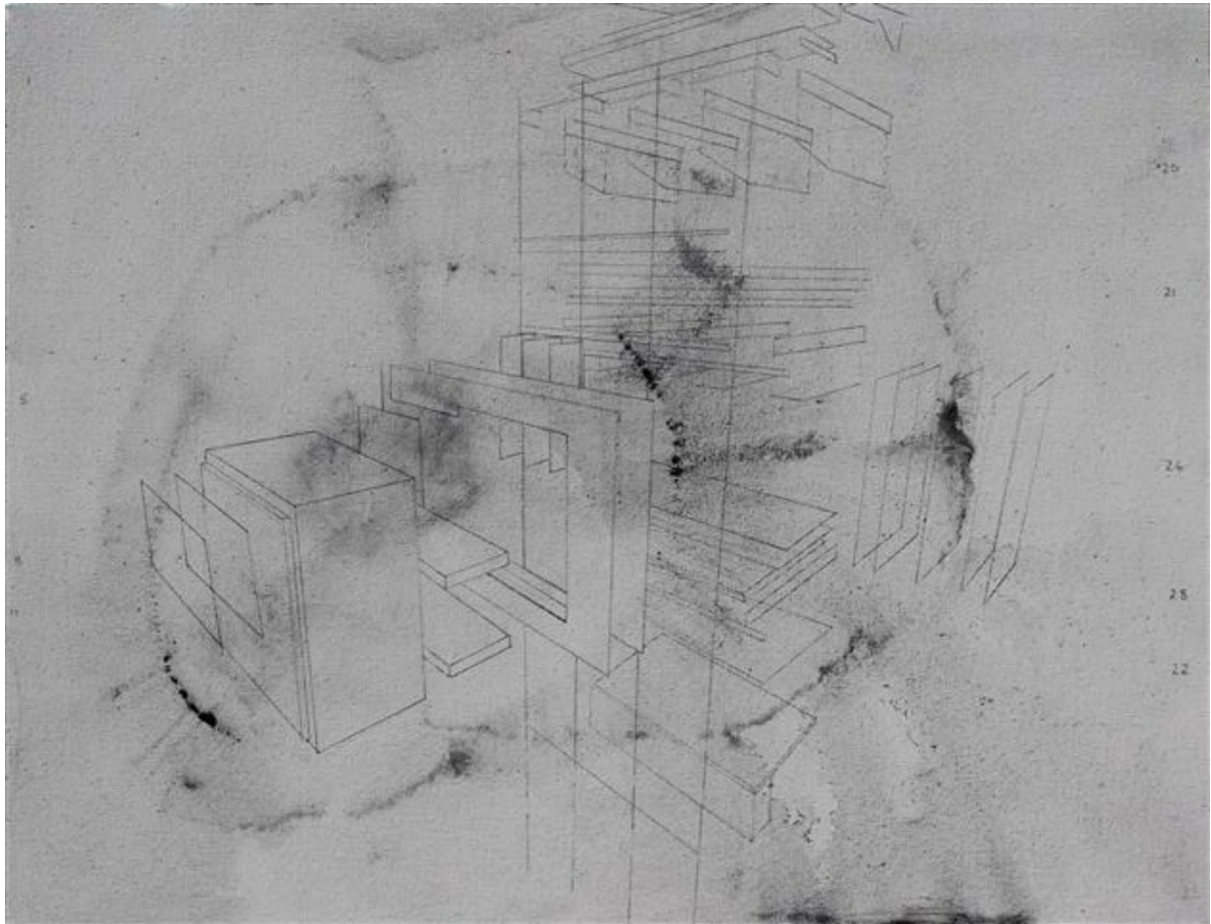
Fig 57: Lindi Lombard, *Series 2* (one of eight), 2013/2014, (65x85cm), Oil paint and permanent marker on canvas. Photo: Lindi Lombard

3.2.3 Multiple Viewpoints *Series 4*

In constructing my reference images for these works, I took all of the photographs that I shot of skyscrapers in Dubai and Hong Kong, printed each one and cut it up. I took these pieces and started constructing new structures made up of different pieces of buildings from different spaces and times (Figure 58), destabilizing the integrity and mechanisms of the buildings and the space they occupy. I spent some time looking and composing composites from this scattered heap of architecture, focussing on different areas, from different viewpoints and at different distances from the collage to either increase or decrease the scale of the buildings. The collage became a new perspective, made up of many other perspectives, taking the pieces, the deconstruction of different views and forming my own structure; it became a form of reasoning of unreason, or of making aesthetic sense of architectural disorder and chaos. Reasoning itself is a form of construction; we 'build' arguments for its

foundations, make sure it is 'concrete' and 'demolish' or 'deconstruct' the arguments of others.


Fig 58: Lindi Lombard, Process, 2014, Photograph, Photo: Lindi Lombard

We generally believe that we are the controlling centre of our world, choosing how closely to focus, and choosing where to look. When we experience the destabilising physical sensation of vertigo, there is a loss of control. Whilst taking the photographs of the newly constructed reality, made up of multiple viewpoints I thought I was in control of the images, choosing what to focus on, choosing what to include into the image, but this was not so. Depending on the point of view and the angle at which I was taking the photograph, the automatic focus function on the camera allowed for specific areas to be sharp and for other areas, depending on the depth of field, to be unclear, and I allowed this as an uncontrolled part of my process rather than switching to manual focus (Figure 12 and 13).

Through this process, the architectural structures depicted in the cut up photos started deconstructing in a different way. The hard edges and clean lines became unclear and uncertain. Through a shift in perspective, distance and focus, the structures started to
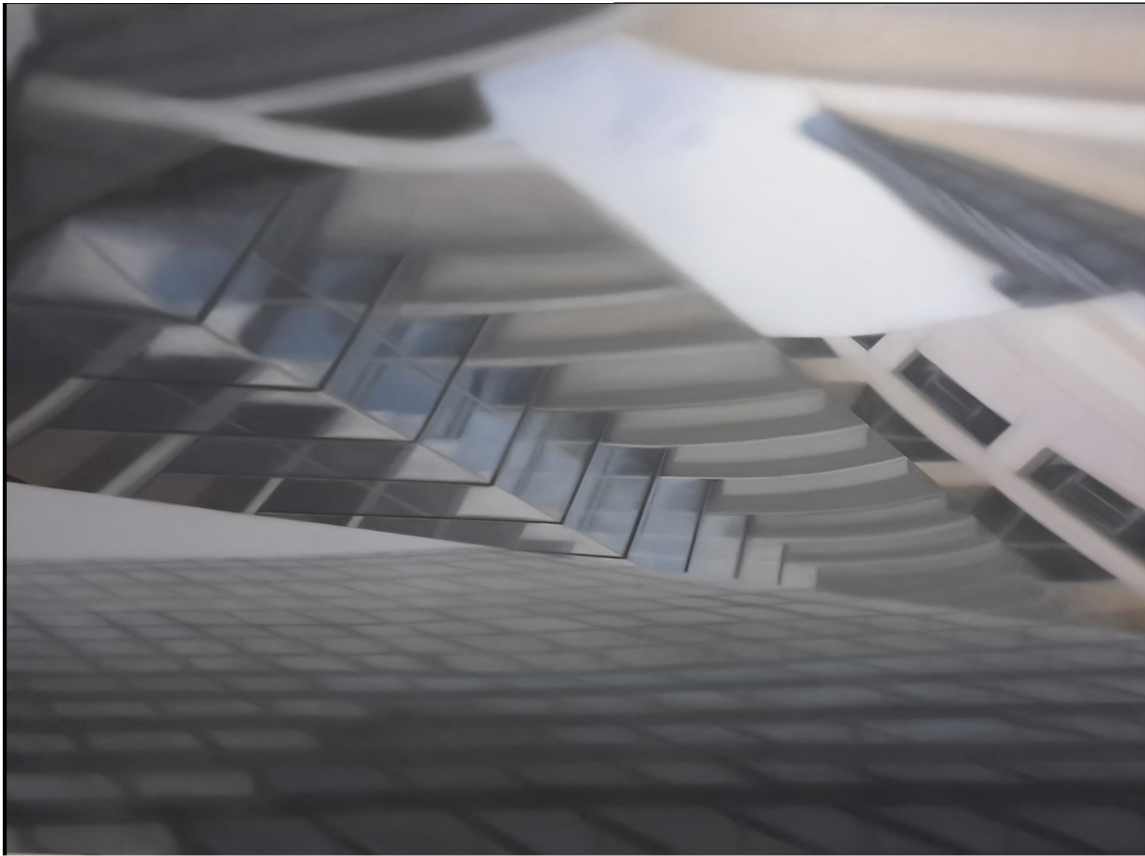
disintegrate and lose their permanence and fixedness and became blurry. I found that this was a useful visual device to deny the viewer a holistic and single-point perspective on the image.
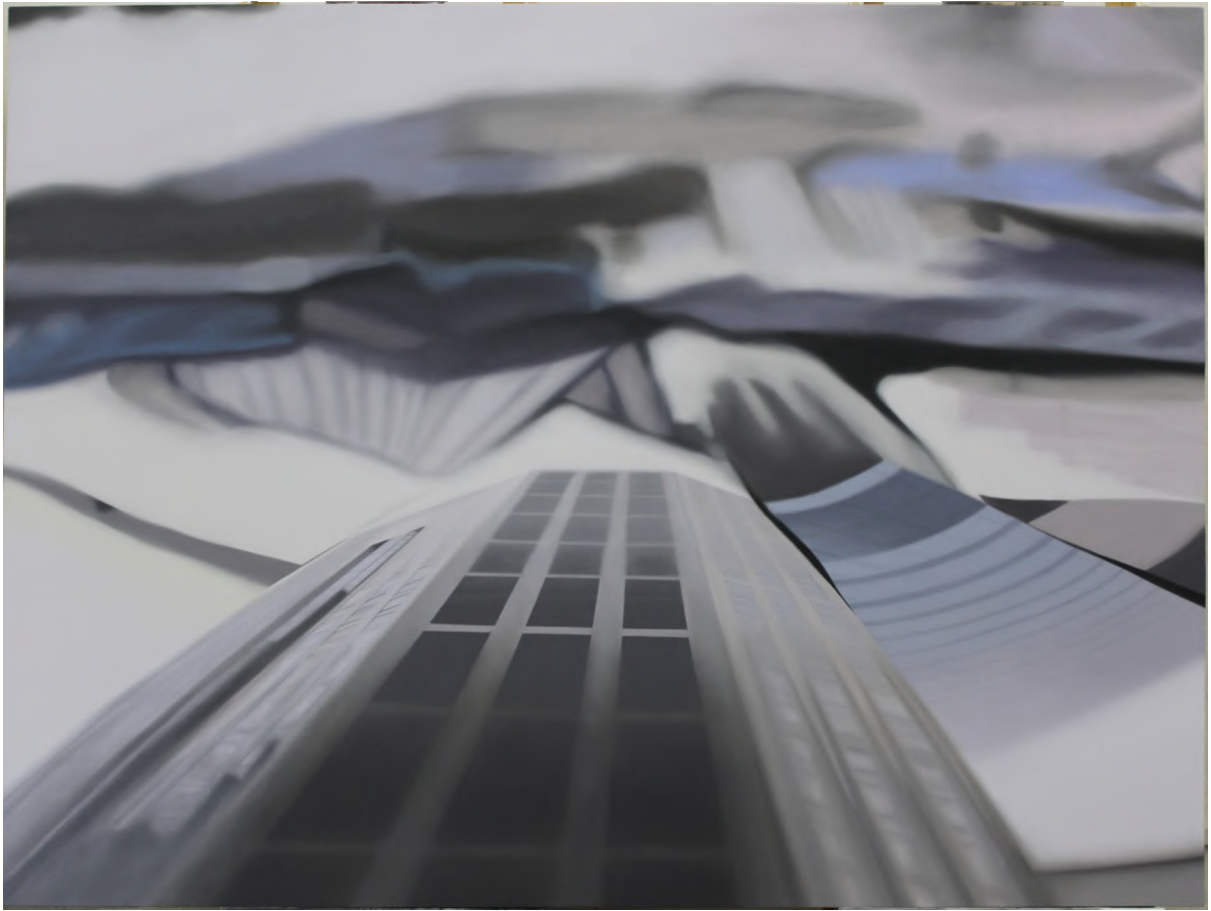
Fig 12: Lindi Lombard, *Series 4* (one of two), 2015, (2x 1.5m), Oil paint on canvas. Photo: Lindi Lombard

Fig 13: Lindi Lombard, *Series 4* (one of two), 2015, (2x 1.5m), Oil paint on canvas. Photo: Lindi Lombard

In chapter 3 I hoped to bring together the ideas researched and analysed in chapter 1 and 2, I theorised my own body of work within the theoretical framework I have outlined in this mini-thesis and to a more narrowly focussed idea of self, particularly, self in relation to art-marking and thinking process. In my discussion of my work I discuss the emotional currents which drive my practice, borne from my childhood experiences of architectural structures transforming and buildings collapsing. I discussed my emotional make-up in relation to my choice of materials and working processes. In this way my mini-thesis not only places my practical body of work in a theoretical context, but also allows the viewer an extremely personal account of the emotional currents driving my practice. This final chapter also pays close attention to how I go about constructing my work and my images as a metaphor for her conceptual concerns; it speaks to the entangled relationship between thinking and making.

Conclusion

Perspective (and thus a shift in perspective) makes us see in new ways the very world in which we have lived all our lives. Things are not as they seem and reality has many layers of meaning and the shifting and discovery of new layers, perspectives and understanding changes the perception of the whole. How much of structures (personal, social, physical and political) and perspectives in our lives go unexamined, because of our assumption, our lack of questioning and looking? Change and transformation is part of the process of life; change is inevitable but it requires questioning, a shift in perspectives and structures which we assume are fixed, true and stable and thus go unexamined. 'The unexamined life is not worth living for a human being' (Socrates cited in Rudebusch 2011: 110). Socrates believed that the purpose of human life was personal and spiritual growth and that we are unable to grow towards greater understanding of our true nature unless we take time to examine, question and reflect upon our lives. Examining our life reveals patterns of behaviour and yields understanding of the subconscious structures and mental architecture that runs our lives. Unless we examine these patterns, much of our lives become an unconscious repetition.

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