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Path^3

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Recommended Citation

Ma, Yuexin, "Path^3" (2020). *Senior Projects Spring 2020*. 258.
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Bard

PATH^3

STUDIO ARTS SENIOR PROJECT

ADVISOR: ELLEN DRISCOLL

MA YUEXIN

2020 APRIL

Architectural space is political.

The project is composed of multiple paintings connected by a wooden scaffold built to resemble the urban landscape. The paintings depict quotidian architectural spaces, presenting the typology of functional public spaces, ranging from the zoo and the courthouse to the library, the church, and the bus stop. Their physical characteristics reflect the culture, values, and governmental tactics of modern states, functioning as control techniques to regulate our social actions within the realm of normality. For example, in the painting about the classroom, the even distribution of desks with the same size reveals that academic institutions' role of training students' mind to be relatively uniform; meanwhile, in the painting about the church, its symmetrical design with an extremely high ceiling displays the religious space's intention of constructing sacredness through creating impressive visual effects. Presenting those spaces in an abstract and minimalist form, I yearn to inspire audiences to interpret the spatial power dynamics in the paintings as they walk through the installation.

While each painting represents a specific space, my project concerns the urban, social, and political systems that uphold all those spaces. The wooden scaffold that connects all the paintings, on one hand, resembles the ubiquitous grid in urban planning, and, on the other hand, projects a field condition, which is defined by the urban theorist Stan Allen as "any formal or spatial matrix capable of unifying diverse elements while respecting the identity of each." This network of architectural space challenges audiences to view individual spaces in the context of a system, realizing the connections and relations among diverse elements and discursive agencies.

As I experienced the COVID-19 outbreak while I working on the project, I reviewed its theme as a response to this pandemic. The damage of COVID-19 is not only harming individuals or any specific social component, but it is also harming the whole system that concerns everyone and every social component, including our stock market, medical system, and academic institutions. The cause of this damage is the failure of international cooperation in planning a systematical response coming from different fields. The European Union's failure to help Italy at its beginning stages of contamination contributed to the unchecked spread of virus to the whole continent. The failure of many national governments to act upon scientists' warnings caused the later disaster. The lack of international cooperation for a general defense strategy when the WHO and China warned other countries the danger of COVID-19 allowed the global pandemic.

My project shares with the audience the value of viewing individual objects or events as parts of a system. For example, the actions that a single government or field take during the Covid-19 outbreaks can cause butterfly effects that affect many other states and fields, since they all connect to each other through a multidimensional system. Similarly, classrooms, libraries, and churches are not isolated places; instead, they exist within certain political structures and influence one another. As the audience views the paintings of various architectural typologies, they also see the structure and the joints that connect them all. Thus, we could mirror this way of perception to our political, cultural, and social realm to reveal the skeleton hidden under our knowledge.

This page showcases fragments of the texts, comments, and pictures of artists, philosophers, architects, etc. that influence my senior project.

Walter Benjamin

"Only dialectical images are genuinely historical that is, not archaic—images."

"World exhibitions glorify the exchange value of the commodity. They create a framework in which its use value recedes into the background. They open a phantasmagoria which a person enters in order to be distracted."

Situationist International

"In societies where modern conditions of production prevail, all of life presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles."

"City's psychogeography: they are meant to find signs of what Lettrist Ivan Chatcheglov called "forgotten desires"—images of play, eccentricity, secret rebellion, creativity, and negation."

Sarah Morris

Morris explains, "I'm more interested in strategies of architecture—how it makes the individual feel empowered, or plays with distraction or scale." Douglas Coupland, the writer of a catalogue essay on her next exhibition at London's White Cube gallery, writes that Morris' paintings have a "paradoxical suggestion that in reducing these systems of power, in simplifying them, she gestures towards what's left out of the picture—what, you wonder, is behind this after all?"

Sol Lewitt

"When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes a machine that makes the art."

Michel Foucalt

Governmentality—"The ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit complex form of power, which has as its target population, as its principal form of knowledge political economy, and as its essential technical means apparatuses of security."

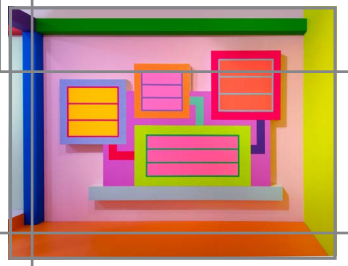
"In *Discipline and Punish* [by Foucault], we find deconstructed the great geometric orderings of industrial society. The omnipresent unfolding of geometric structures in cities, factories, and schools, in housing, transportation, and hospitals, is revealed as a novel mechanism by which action and movement (and all behavior) could be channeled, measured, and normalized, and a means by which the unprecedented population of the emerging industrial era could be controlled and its productivity maximized" (Peter Halley).

Forensic Architecture

"Forensic Architecture is an emerging academic field. It refers to the production and presentation of architectural evidence—relating to buildings, urban environments—within legal and political processes."

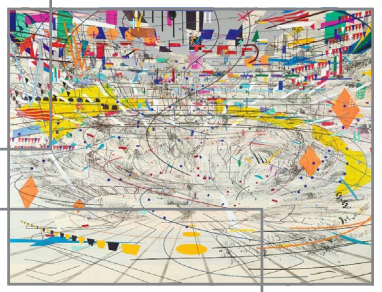
Peter Halley

"For, like these crises, the crisis of geometry is a crisis of the signified. It no longer seems possible to accept geometric form as either transcendental order, detached signifier, or as the basic gestalt of visual perception (as did Arnheim). We are launched instead into a structuralist search for the veiled signifieds that the geometric sign may yield."



Stan Allen

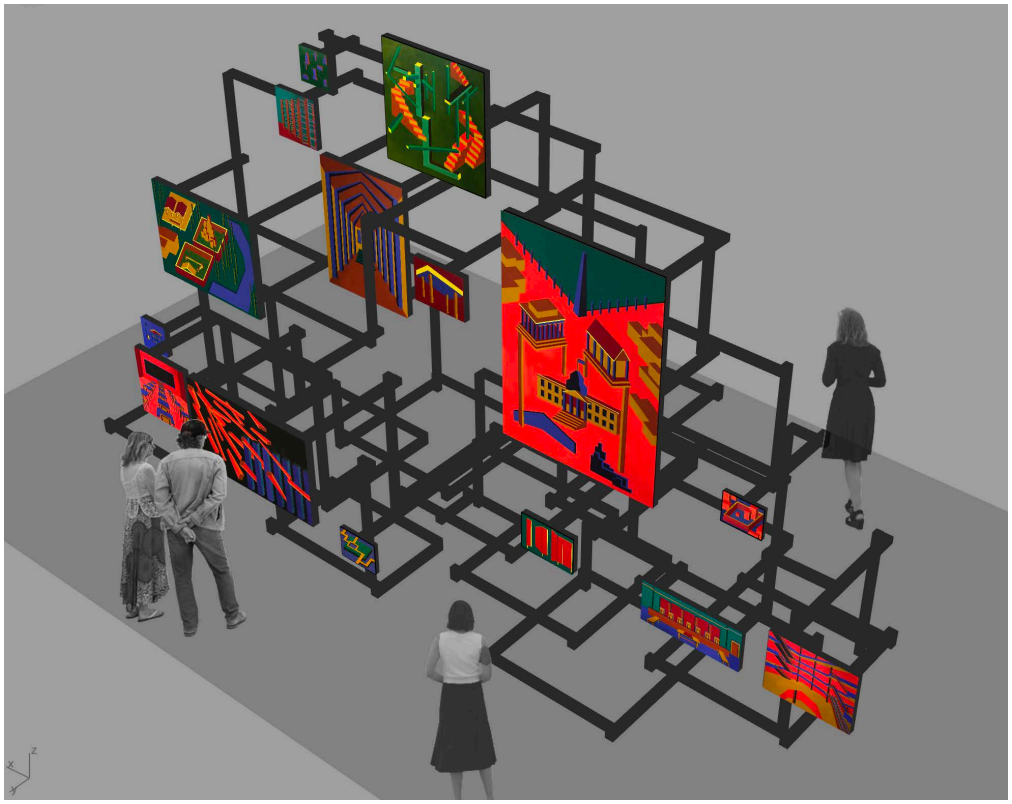
"All grids are fields, but not all fields are grids. One of the potentials of the field is to redefine the relation between figure and ground. If we think of the figure not as a demarcated object read against a stable field, but as an effect emerging from the field itself—as moments of intensity, as peaks or valley within a continuous field—than it might be possible to imagine figure and field as more closely allied."

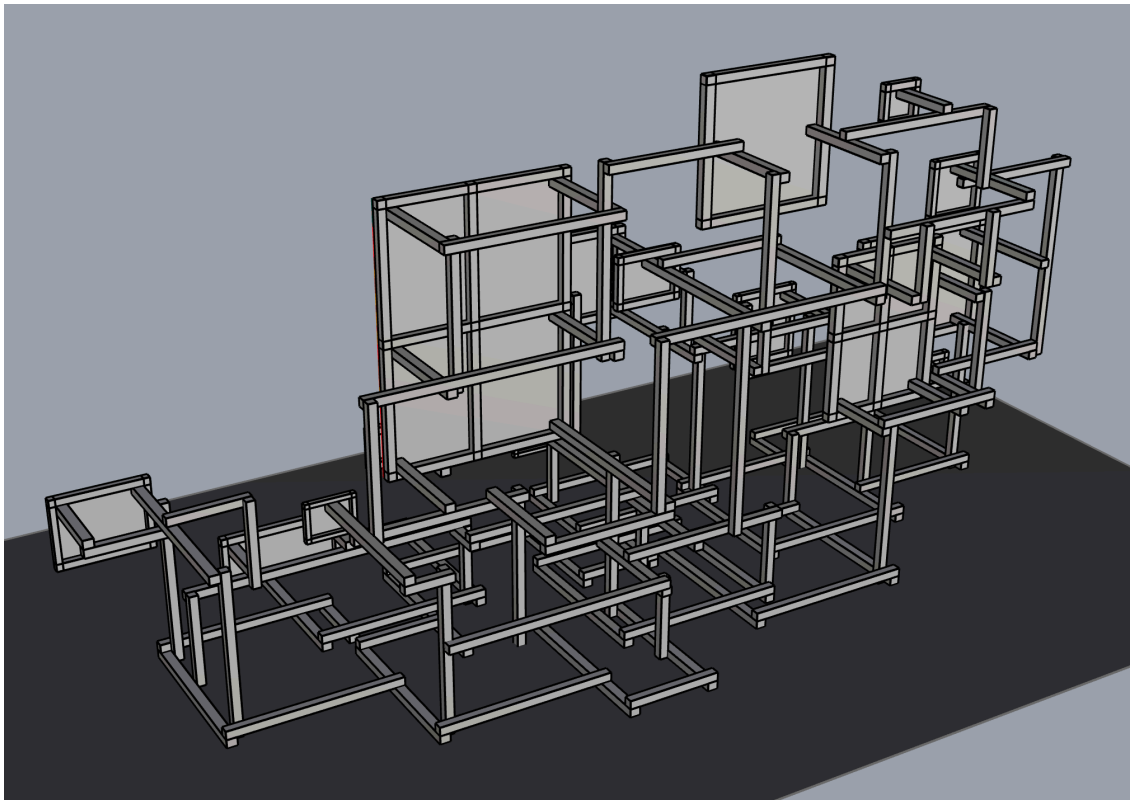


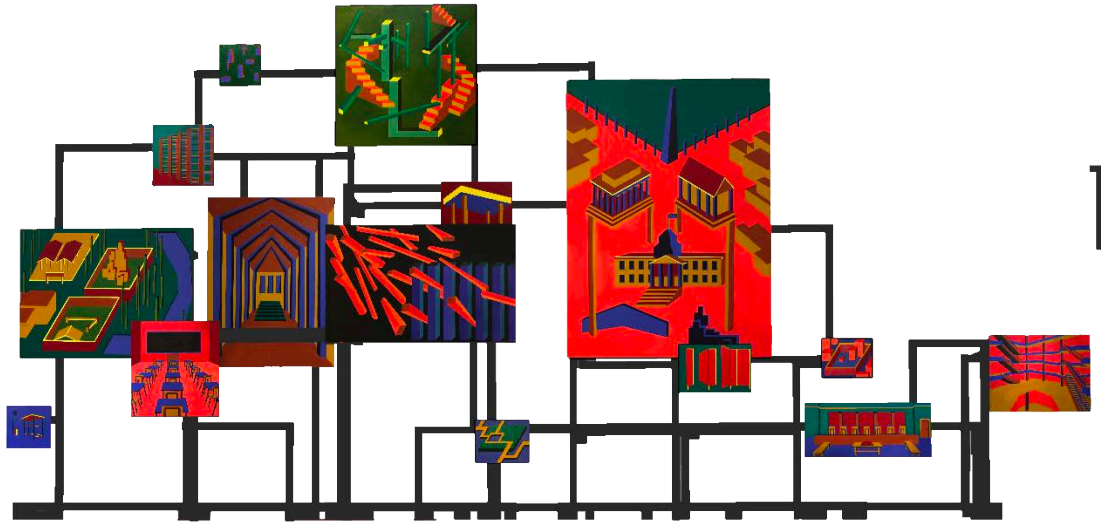
Julie Mehretu

"I think of my abstract mark-making as a type of sign lexicon, signifier, or language for characters that hold identity and have social agency. The characters in my maps plotted, journeyed, evolved, and built civilizations. I charted, analyzed, and mapped their experience and development: their cities, their suburbs, their conflicts, and their wars. The paintings occurred in an intangible no-place: a blank terrain, an abstracted map space. As I continued to work I needed a context for the marks, the characters. By combining many types of architectural plans and drawings I tried to create a metaphoric, tectonic view of structural history. I wanted to bring my drawing into time and place."

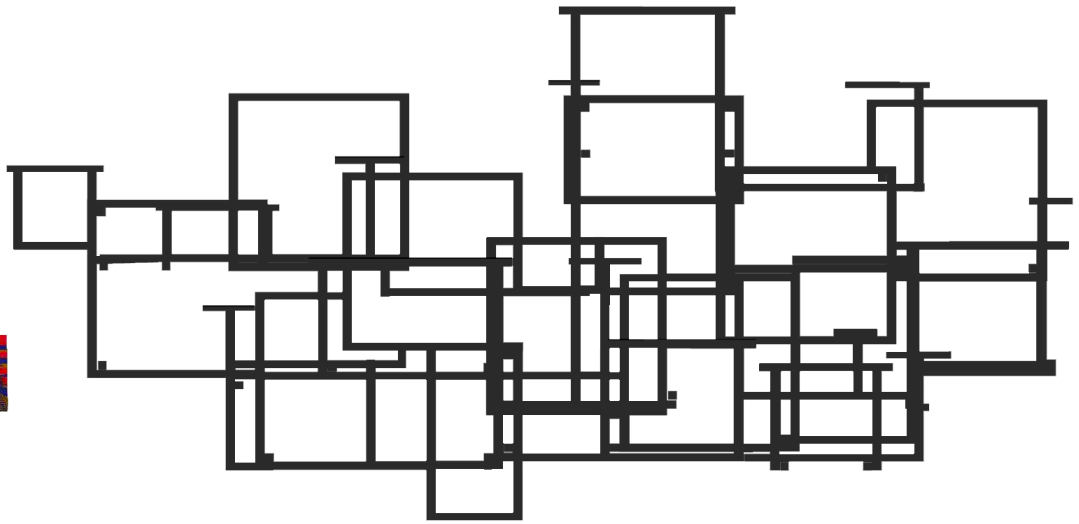
This picture was modelled and rendered on Rhino, and edited on Photoshop. As I am currently unable to actualize this installation due COVID-19, I demonstrated my idea digitally. The wooden scaffold that connect all the paintings would be covered with black paint, as in the image above.



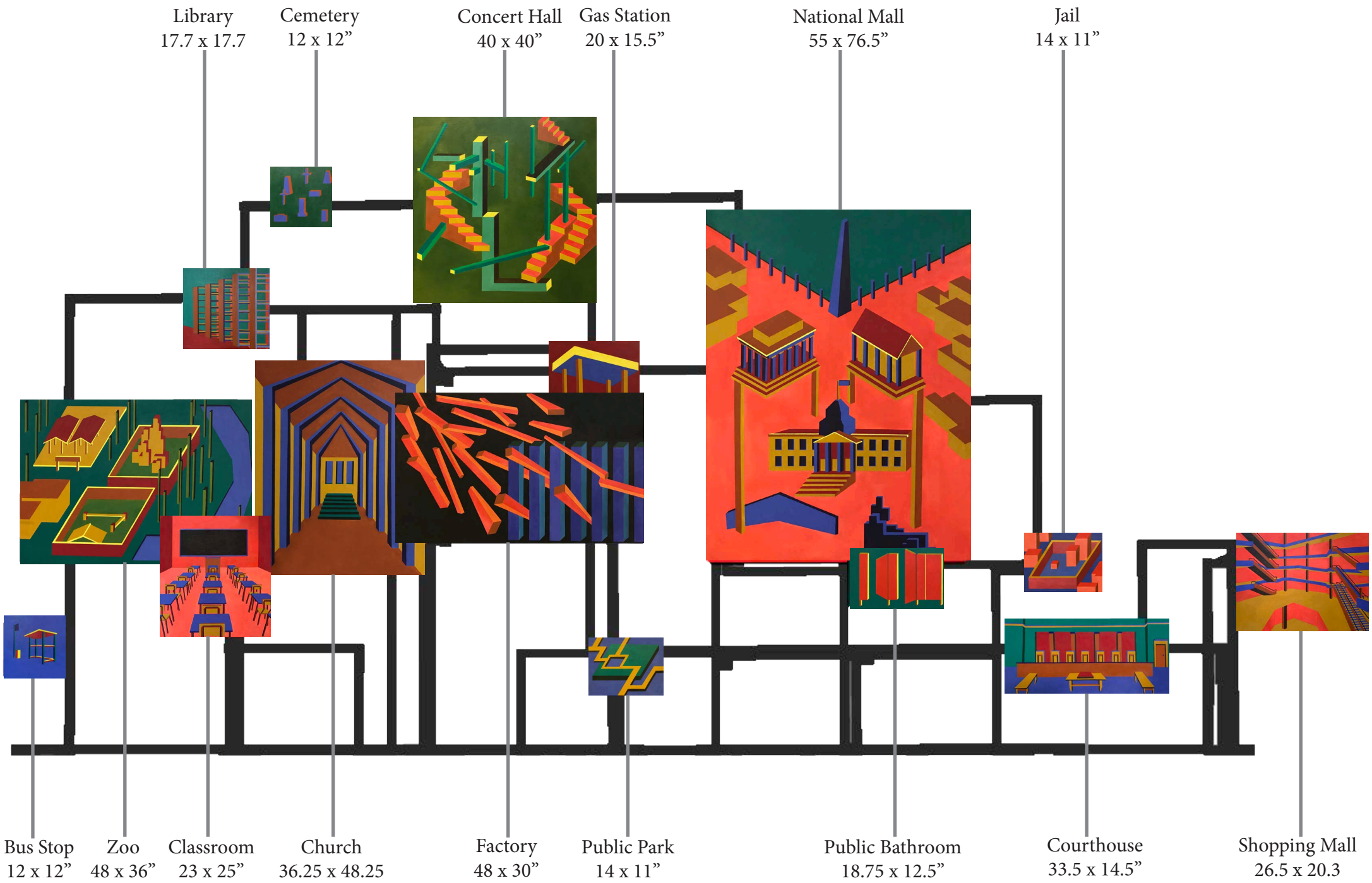


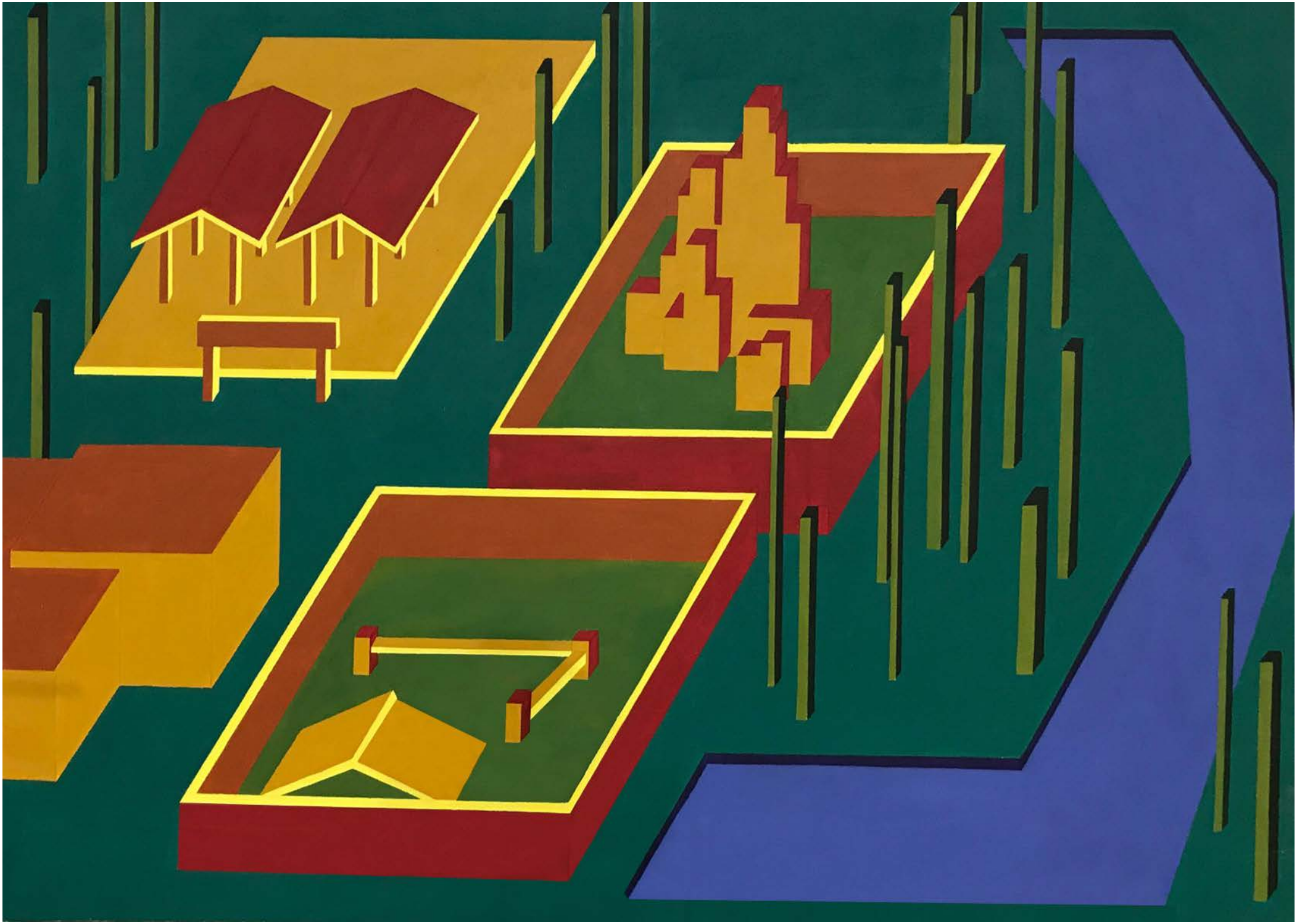


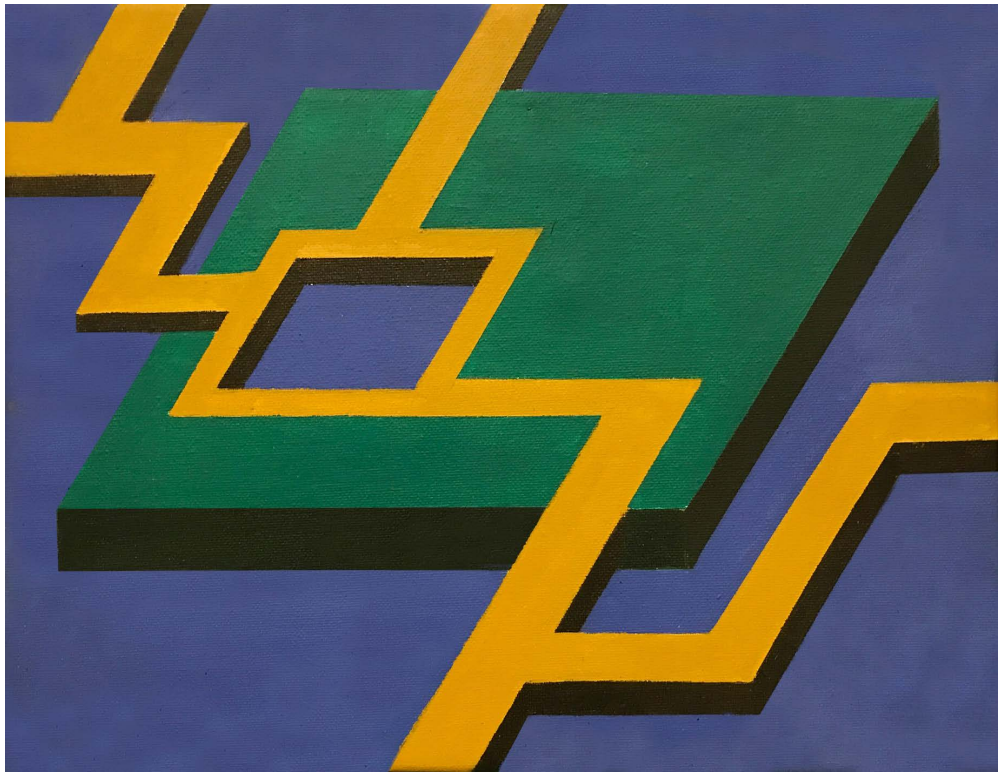
Elevation Drawing

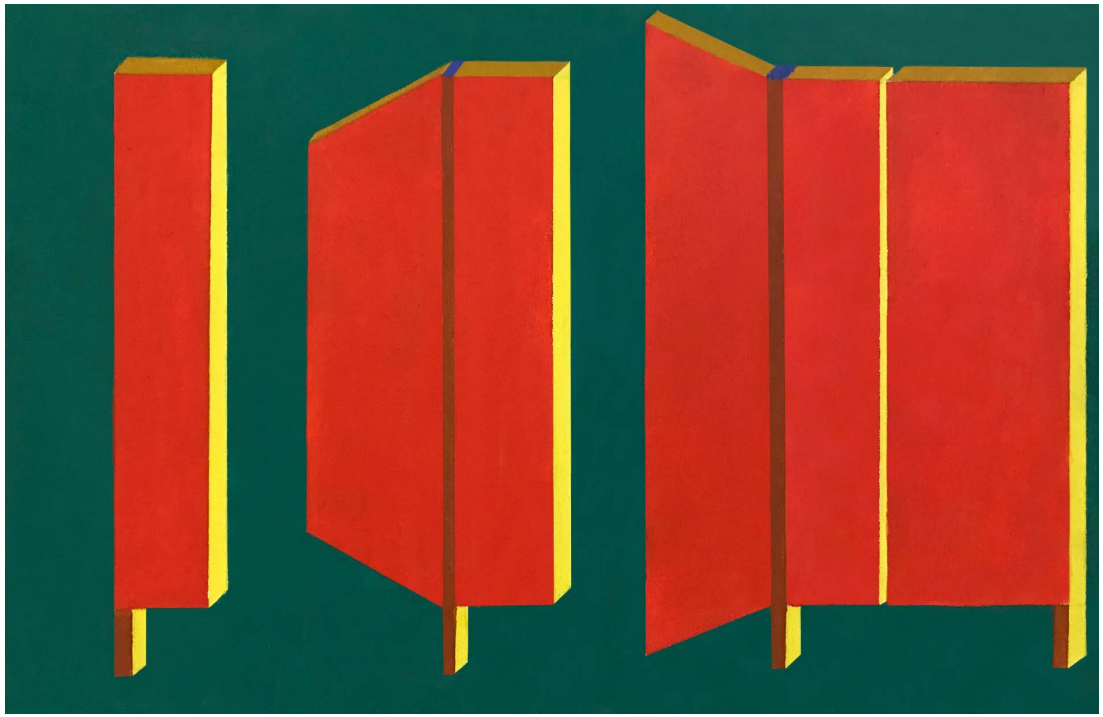


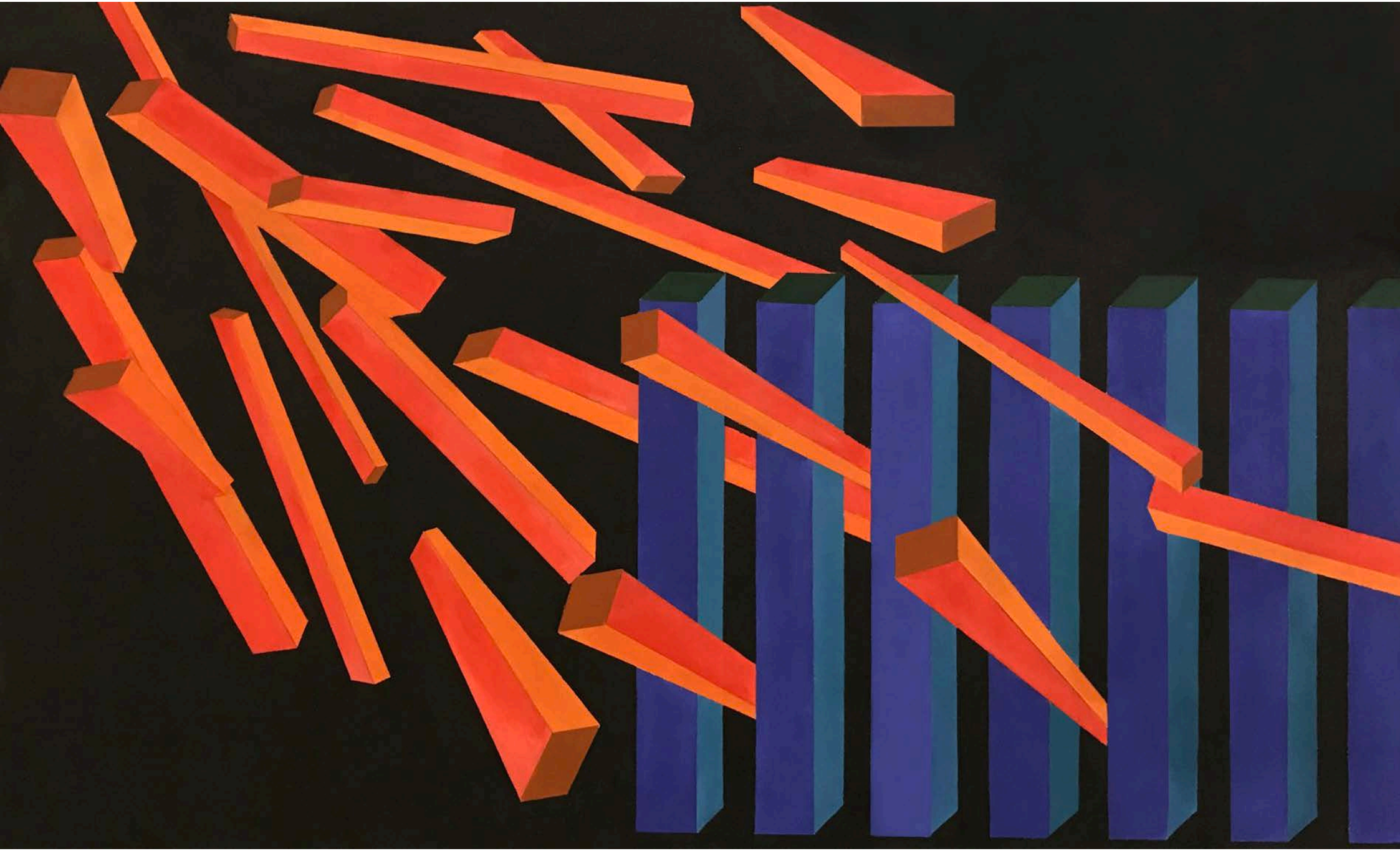
Plan Drawing

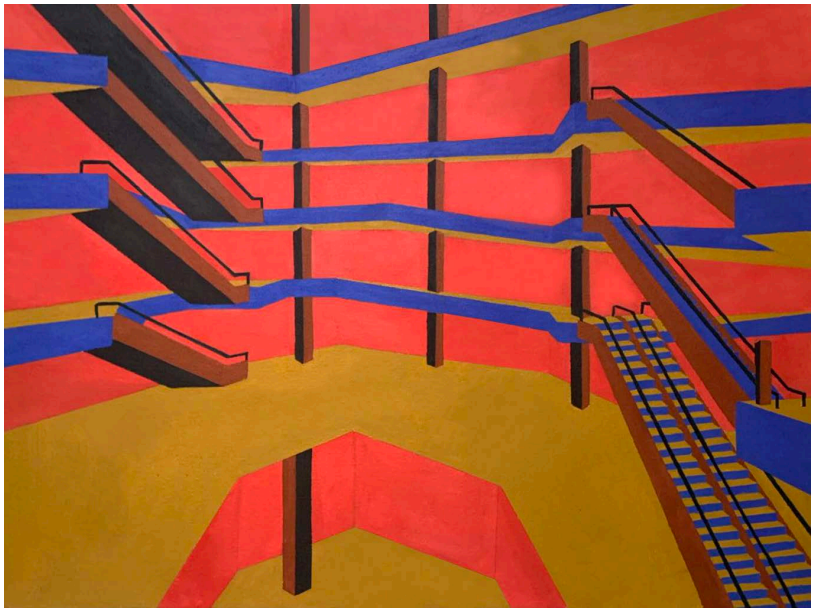

Library
17.7 x 17.7
Cemetery
12 x 12”
Concert Hall
40 x 40”
Gas Station
20 x 15.5”
National Mall
55 x 76.5”
Jail
14 x 11”
Bus Stop
12 x 12”
Zoo
48 x 36”
Classroom
23 x 25”
Church
36.25 x 48.25
Factory
48 x 30”
Public Park
14 x 11”
Public Bathroom
18.75 x 12.5”
Courthouse
33.5 x 14.5”
Shopping Mall
26.5 x 20.3

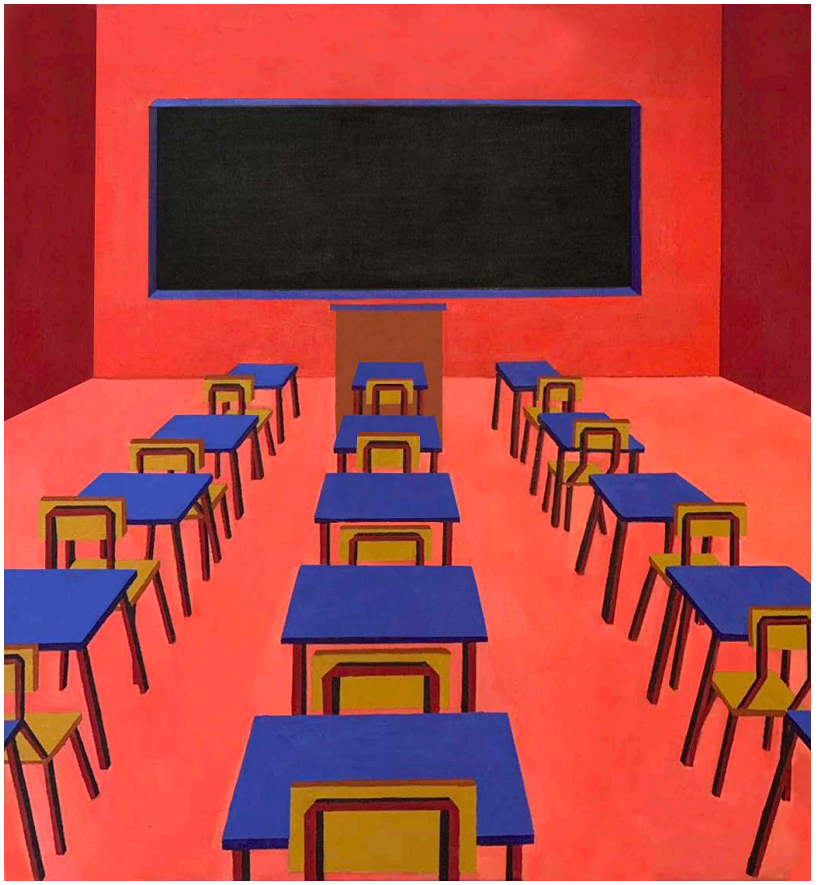












Work in progress before UBS COVID-19 shutdown.