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Binnie, Neil A. (2021) *Urban construct: visualising space in Townsville's built environment*. Masters (Research) Thesis, James Cook University.

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Urban Construct
Visualising Space in Townsville's Built Environment

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March 2021

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the support of James Cook University and the College of Arts, Society and Education during my candidature. I also extend my gratitude and appreciation for the support, guidance and feedback from my primary advisor Professor Ryan Daniel, and secondary advisor Professor Stephen Naylor. My thanks also extend to the JCU library staff for their kind assistance, particularly Alice Luetchford and from JCU Special Collections, Bronwyn McBurnie.

Among the many people that supported my studies, I thank the staff of Umbrella Studio Contemporary Arts and appreciate the exhibition going ahead after the challenges of early 2020. I also extend special thanks to Dr Bob Preston for being generous with his time and his continued support, advice, feedback and constructive critique. I am deeply grateful for his active interest in my work and the positive effect our many conversations have had on my practice. I also thank Charmaine for her enduring support and encouragement of my artistic and research endeavours.

I recognise that the urban landscape under investigation is representative of Townsville as a result of evolving from the nineteenth through to the twenty-first centuries. I acknowledge the urban objects realised from representations of space have been developed over Indigenous Bindal and Wulgurukaba landscapes.

STATEMENT OF THE CONTRIBUTION OF OTHERS

Nature of Assistance	Contribution	Names, Titles and Affiliations of Co-Contributors
Intellectual support - exegesis	Exegesis critique, review and editorial assistance	Professor Ryan Daniel, JCU Professor Stephen Naylor, JCU
Intellectual and practical support - artwork	Critique of work in progress and exegesis review Review of artwork	Dr Bob Preston Ron McBurnie
Use of facilities external to JCU	Exhibition space	Umbrella Studio Contemporary Arts
Financial support	Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship Minimum Resource Funding	The Australian Government James Cook University and the College of Arts, Society and Education

ABSTRACT

This practice-based research aims to investigate in what ways space and perception as lived experience in the urban setting can be represented visually. Seminal theories are applied to initiate a phenomenological investigation into spatial arrangement, influences on perception and critical observation in the urban environment. The research seeks to understand the evolving nature of space in a regional city, in particular the local urban issues regarding the city centre. The research culminated in an exhibition of artworks at Umbrella Studio Contemporary Arts in 2020, and this accompanying exegesis.

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CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION

On May 11, 2019 a five-page feature published in the Townsville Bulletin cast a light on the Townsville Central Business District (CBD). In recent years the city centre has been subjected to public criticism for being lifeless, having poorly maintained buildings and a high number of vacant shopfronts. The seven published articles covered these issues and more, including topics about new construction for public transport, commentary from local and state politicians and social media comments regarding the poor condition of buildings in the city's main thoroughfare, Flinders St (Raggatt, 2019a, 2019b; Warburton, 2019). The articles within the feature provided multiple facts regarding the condition of the city along with a number of opinions discussing how, why and where improvements to the city's urban landscape might be made. Photographs of people associated with the text included local councillors, state politicians and business owners, along with images of the city's most dilapidated buildings sent in from readers at the paper's request. In addition, an editorial piece summed up the feature by taking a broad look into the issues of the CBD and its many and varied challenges ("Time to put lots of heart into our CBD," 2019). Titled *Restart the Heart*, the articles highlighted physical, political and social factors involved in urban evolution and also illuminated spatial considerations of urban reality, conceptual representations and lived experience.

Highlighting spatial considerations of urban reality, conceptual representations, and lived experience in a regional city is open to investigation in seeking to visualise evolving space. Overt aspects of physical change such as demolition or new construction are common observations; however, visualising should not be confined to just objects. With direct engagement through lived experience, consideration can also be given to perception of an object and how it might be influenced by personal beliefs, knowledge and expectations. Alongside the personal, once an urban object has been observed other influences arise such as how the built object engages with its surroundings, its relationship to immediate neighbours or what the form represents and conveys about public policy, culture, the economy or community. In addition, journalistic reporting of urban

developments and subsequent public discourse might also be a consideration with regard to social use or meaning. One way to accomplish visualisation of space in the urban setting through direct observation and perception is to employ spatial theory as part of research methodology.

Townsville has a history of public and political conversation surrounding the CBD and on previous occasions, the condition of the inner city has been in the spotlight. Two examples of major change were enclosing Victoria Bridge in the late 1980s, only to have it removed in 2001; and closing part of Flinders St to vehicles in 1979-80 to construct a pedestrian mall, subsequently removed and the roadway restored in 2010. These changes appear appropriate to a given era, and with a life span of 15 to 30 years, might be considered an uncomplicated fact of urban evolution in the twenty-first century where urban infrastructure and amenities change to suit contemporary social demands. Throughout 2019 and 2020 Townsville has undergone significant urban change again, predominately related to construction of the new Queensland Country Bank Stadium (hereafter known as the Stadium). From its inception, a steady flow of local published commentary has been linking this new urban object to the city's future prosperity (Raggatt & McCormack, 2019; Silvester, 2019; "Stadium is grounds for future prosperity," 2020; "Stadium to act like CBD cash magnet," 2020), while questions are raised as to whether Flinders St and the remaining CBD will evolve to complement it.

An evolving urban landscape in the city centre is not unique to Townsville, nor is the reporting of urban issues through local news providers. Other Australian regional cities such as Cairns and Geelong have also had their central city areas illuminated in a similar fashion (Calcino, 2019a, 2019b; Crane, 2014), and for similar reasons of high vacancy fronting the main streets and lack of human activity. Local publication of these issues generated comments from business owners, local politicians and the local community, which at times was unfavourable (Eastaughffe, 2019; McCormack, 2019b).

This research is about investigating the ways space as lived experience in the urban landscape can be visualised through a series of artworks. Seminal theories by Lefebvre (1991) and

van Manen (2007) are applied to initiate a phenomenological investigation into areas of the city which represent the evolving nature of space through political, social and physical means. Flinders St, the Flinders Lane development and construction of a new Stadium fulfil this as separate sites of interest in the city. Over the course of the research these sites displayed properties of evolution through either physical change or public discussion indicative of social meaning. The sites act as focal points and contribute to developing an understanding of the city's space and evolving nature. As the understanding develops, the documentation and memory from experience was then utilised in the studio for artwork production. The research can be further introduced by looking into the three key areas of space, lived experience and visualisation.

1.1 SPACE

Henri Lefebvre's (1991) three part spatial theory provides a platform to investigating space in terms suited to the urban landscape and the city. This is due to his overarching philosophy regarding the production of space and subsequent suggestion that space has taken on its own type of reality and means of production (p. 26). Lefebvre's conceptual triad consists of *spatial practice*, *representations of space* and *representational space*, or in another way; perceived space, conceived space and lived space (p. 40). He suggests all three contribute to the production of space according to their qualities and attributes, the society in question and the period of time in historical terms. Their relationship is therefore applicable to this research given the urban landscape is specific to the inner city of Townsville during 2019 and 2020. However, their contribution to spatiality is not weighted equally, but rather in terms of how spatial information is interpreted and translated. Specifically, on each part of his conceptual triad Lefebvre (1991) states:

- **Spatial practice:** ... embraces production and reproduction, and the particular locations and spatial sets characteristic of each social formation. Spatial practice ensures continuity and some degree of cohesion (p. 33). It embodies a close association with perceived space, between daily reality (daily routine) and urban reality (the routes and networks which link up the places set aside for work 'private' life and leisure) (p. 38). As for spatial practice, it is

observed, described and analysed on a wide range of levels: in architecture, in city planning or 'urbanism' (a term borrowed from official pronouncements), in the actual design of routes and localities ('town and country planning'), in the organisation of everyday life, and, naturally, in urban reality (pp. 413-414).

- **Representations of space:** conceptualised space [governed by rules of representation, for example perspective or technical drawing], the space of scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers, as of a certain type of artist with a scientific bent – all of whom identify what is lived and what is perceived and what is conceived. This is the dominant space in any society (or mode of production). Conceptions of space tend, with certain exceptions..., towards a system of verbal (and therefore intellectually worked out) signs (pp. 38-39).
- **Representational space:** space as directly *lived* through its associated images, [memories] and symbols, and hence the space of 'inhabitants' and 'users', but also of some artists and perhaps of those, such as a few writers and philosophers, who *describe* and aspire to do no more than describe. This is the dominated – and hence passively experienced – space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate. It overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects. Thus representational spaces may be said, though again with certain exceptions, to tend towards more or less coherent systems of non-verbal symbols and signs (pp. 38-39)

In a somewhat less complicated illustration, Elden (2004) summarises Lefebvre's thoughts as establishing our perception of space (the concrete, material and physical) and our conception of space (the abstract, mental and geometric) with a third term of lived space, which sees a unity between physical, mental and social space (pp. 189-190). Elden suggests the first takes space as physical form, space that is generated and used; space as *real*. The second is the space of knowledge, logic, maps and mathematics; space as *imagined*. Finally, the third sees space as produced and modified over time and through its use, space invested with symbolism and meaning; space as *real and imagined* (p. 190).

Additionally, by adopting a similar line of enquiry to Kirsch (1995), the evolving nature of Flinders St offers an example of spatial thinking summed up thus: Flinders St in the CBD of

Townsville can be *conceived*, designed and produced through labour, technology and various institutions. But that space itself, and the meaning of that space, is adapted and transformed as it is *perceived* and *lived* by social groups. Whether Flinders St becomes an ensemble of empty and dilapidated buildings or is the clean, friendly hub of law-abiding social activity for which it was planned, depends on the ability of how those who produced (and reproduce) Flinders St attempt to control it. This example is one line of thought to one urban ensemble, and it provides a platform to understanding space and its relationship to an evolving urban landscape in the city through physical, mental and social means.

1.2 LIVED EXPERIENCE

Lived experience of day-to-day actions and routines via personal interaction is fundamental to seeking an understanding of space in the city. Lived experience occurs during fieldwork, via pedestrian travel through the urban landscape in a non-destination type of navigation because the experience along the journey is foremost in mind, rather than a specific destination. Pedestrian travel is undertaken with a purpose to gain meaningful insight into the city and understand urban arrangement. Not just in dimensions and physical properties, but spatially in terms of relationships or atmospheric and felt aspects (van Manen, 2007). Phenomenology is closely related to this type of insight by its application as reflection on lived experience. Having identified the evolving nature of urban areas as a unique phenomenon, this can then be lived through and provide the starting point of phenomenological research (van Manen, 2016). Consequently, research seeks to be descriptive and explanatory rather than analytical and is investigated through artistic practice, culminating in an exhibition.

1.3 VISUALISATION

Visualisation is a component of this research undertaken to translate that which is seen and sensed into marks on a two-dimensional surface. Visualising space as lived experience means to

produce artefacts in the studio environment derived from literature, documents and memories from fieldwork. Documents include photographs and notes in a visual diary such as text or drawing. Memory or recollection is more akin to an echo and rarely identical to the original experience, enabling translation to occur from the reality of experience to artistic endeavor. Studio practice refers to all types of creative processes completed in the studio whether investigative, experimental, intuitive or methodical. This practice is continuous over the course of research, parallel to fieldwork to capture the evolving nature of space over time.

Developing ideas in the studio from fieldwork is a process commonly used by artists. American painter Brice Marden is one example where rather than work *en plein air*, he took notes, sketches and studies to develop ideas and translate observations into paintings or drawings. One example is his series of five paintings known as the *Grove Group* from the 1970s, which were completed in his New York studio from notes of his observations and experience of olive groves in Greece (Costello, 2013). Similarly, this research takes on a process where observation and experience of the Townsville CBD, with a focus on specific sites of interest, leads to new findings in the studio.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTION AND AIMS

The purpose of completing this Master of Philosophy research is to gain an understanding of the evolving nature of space in a regional city. This research represents a local application of Lefebvre's spatial theory which originally referred to mid-twentieth century post war urbanisation in France (Stanek, 2011), and has been part of investigations into large cities such as Los Angeles (Soja, 1989). An opportunity therefore exists for an approach which extends in another direction, by investigating a city of significantly smaller population in a geographically isolated regional location. Townsville is well placed for this investigation given the declining CBD and its status as the largest city in regional Queensland located outside the more densely populated southeast corner of the

state (Townsville City Council, 2020a). Equally important to an application of spatial theory is the practice-based research adopted approach from an artistic perspective.

Townsville's geographic location holds a lure for artists through the natural landscape of the dry tropics providing inspirational subject matter. In contrast, the urban setting and its forms might be perceived as less interesting. However, this is not to say the urban environment is unrepresented. John Brack and Sali Herman are examples of nationally known artists who have used lived experience within the urban landscape as a source for their work. Smith (1948) frames Herman's work as a result of searching the inner suburbs of Sydney sketching all types of urban objects such as buildings, parks, ferries or wharves. Smith additionally suggests Herman paints the city because he lives in it and notes that at the time, the majority of Australian painters lived in either Sydney or Melbourne and it seemed strange they did not choose to seek out their local surroundings for source material (p. 175). Herman is one example of an artist who experienced and visualised the urban landscape when visiting North Queensland, and in particular Townsville, Charters Towers and Collinsville in the late 1960s (Art Gallery of New South Wales, 1981).

From a local position, Townsville based artist Anneke Silver (2010) has undertaken studio reflection with direct engagement of the urban setting. Occupying a studio in the city in 2003, Silver mentions the wealth of imagery outside the studio door such as geometric shadows, tropical light and a demolition site which seemed to change colour depending on the time of day. She notes many of the buildings will be demolished with the development of a rapidly changing skyline, indicative of the artist's broader consideration of an evolving urban landscape. Taking a close look at the local urban setting in the city with patience and purpose from an artist's point of view involving space, perception and lived experience via a practice-based approach is therefore timely. In light of this, a statement of research is defined as the following:

- This research seeks to investigate the evolution of urban space in Townsville through social, political and physical means.

In addition, this research seeks to investigate and develop a response to the following overarching research question:

- In what ways can space, as lived experience, in the urban environment of Townsville be represented visually?

Therefore, the aims of research are to:

- Examine literature regarding spatial theory related to the urban setting.
- Develop a methodology and model suitable to practice-based research.
- Explore creative processes for visualising space as lived experience through studio practice.
- Exhibit artworks in a public gallery space.
- Reflect on what the artist as researcher has developed in relation to theory and concepts.

1.5 EXEGESIS ORGANISATION

This exegesis follows the APA Seventh Edition style with discussion of literature, methodology, findings and reflection arranged coherently in separate chapters. Chapter Two contains a literature review with a focus on the theoretical framework comprising space, perception and observation. The first section of chapter two reviews space and includes seminal texts by Henri Lefebvre which are central to understanding his spatial triad specific to the urban setting. Although written in the context of mid twentieth century Europe, Lefebvre's writings are pertinent to contemporary discussion of space. Equally important is to review and have an understanding of the different contexts in which contemporary scholars interpret and expand on Lefebvre's theory. These provide diverse commentary relevant to their particular line of enquiry and are beneficial to understanding the complexities surrounding space as a theoretical concept. The second section covers texts regarding perception. These are examined for the purpose of gaining a critical understanding of perception and its relationship with phenomenology. Among others, authors such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Rudolf Arnheim offer theories on perception through lived

experience and creative thinking respectively, while contemporary texts on phenomenology and lived experience from Max van Manen offer further discussion. The third section discusses observation and relationships between observer, object and method of seeing. Contemporary texts are reviewed in the context of pedestrian travel as method and how it allows an opportunity to see all available sides of urban forms. From a practice perspective, these contemporary texts include those which discuss observation and context, and the artist's translation into their own visual language.

Research methodology and creative processes are detailed in Chapter Three and are arranged into four sections. Section one explains overall research design with an explanation of the model followed. This research adopts a model where each major part has subsections containing interdependent methods; each with associated inputs and outcomes. The overarching approach is practice-based, with a theoretical framework encompassing space, perception and observation. A conceptual framework has been drawn from the theoretical to narrow focus to a particular spatial theory. Additionally, the research has two separate and reciprocal categories of fieldwork and studio practice with exchanges taking place between the two.

Section two describes the location of investigation in the city and why it has been selected. Section three discusses the fieldwork part of methodology and its role as data collection. Subsequently, the arrangement of data collection methods, and the nature of lived experience, perception and observation are discussed. Finally, section four covers creative synthesis as method for data analysis in the studio, along with creative processes and studio practice in addition to methods used to complete a cohesive series of new artworks. Overall, this chapter describes and explains the design of research, the location travelled, methods of data collection and subsequent data analysis.

Chapter Four highlights findings from fieldwork, discoveries from investigations and reflection during creative synthesis. This chapter has three sections with the first discussing the

concept of reading space whilst in the urban setting. The second section discusses findings from fieldwork in ways of material or measurable space and space as experienced. The third section details investigations and subsequent discoveries in the studio in addition to further discussion of artistic outcomes. Studio investigations include those of a monotonal nature and those which explore local colour and light through collage studies.

Chapter Five concludes the research by detailing the exhibition process along with curatorial and collaborative aspects of working with the gallery. This chapter reflects on how the research question has been addressed and answered, along with new understandings reached and the possibility of new directions for extending research. The appendices following Chapter Five contain published material and a local news article from the exhibition, the catalogue essay, and a list of all resolved artworks exhibited. All artworks, images of artworks and photographs of Townsville's urban landscape in this exegesis are the work of the author.

Confirmation of the city's evolving nature and spatial change is often seen through concepts of new urban design, demolition of the old and construction of the new for changing social needs. An artist's personal interaction with this regional city environment provides a way to visually translate findings. This is therefore an opportune time for inquiry into the urban with a systematic research method of processes realised in a written text and series of artworks. This exegesis represents investigations and discoveries over the course of research in 2019 and 2020. It is a summary of reviewed texts and literature, experiences in the city and practice in the studio. In seeking and acknowledging what is known and has been previously written about space, lived experience and the urban setting, this research extends in a new direction towards the regional city, unearthing unique spatial considerations. This exegesis describes working through creative processes in the studio from an artistic point of view and illuminating the occasionally strained relationship between theory and creative practice. Before fieldwork and studio practice details can

be uncovered, the following literature review discusses the theoretical framework to focus, contextualise and lead the research.

CHAPTER TWO – LITERATURE REVIEW

By adopting novel interpretation, an opportunity exists to visualise space as experienced in the CBD of Townsville, a regional city located in the dry tropics of North Queensland. The natural landscape of the tropics has provided a place of creative inspiration for artists (Millington, 1987; National Gallery of Victoria, 2002) while the accompanying built environment and urban components are often overlooked. The built environment refers to any physical alteration of the natural landscape through human activity. It includes built forms created by humans and classified by building type, along with spaces that are defined and bounded but not necessarily enclosed, such as parks or streets (Lawrence & Low, 1990). Visualising this type of subject matter is often resolved as leaning more towards figurative representation rather than conceptual representation. The direction of this research is for a theoretical framework to lead with abstract concepts of space, perception and observation.

The concept of space on its own is complex and difficult to define, as it is not easily measured and is not a tangible object. However, the spatial qualities of an object can be described visually in combination with an experience of perception and observation. Phenomenology is implemented to theorise in what ways an object can be perceived and to describe essential factors of the urban experience including those that might influence perception. Reasoned observation is performed from the pedestrian point of view, with all manner of the built environment available to interact with, via static or dynamic ways of seeing. This literature review is arranged to discuss in further detail the three key theoretical areas of space, perception and observation.

2.1 SPACE

Many contemporary texts (Jeyasingham, 2014; Suitner et al., 2017; Vicdan & Hong, 2018) which explore the concept of space align with current social issues such as sustainable living, social work and gender equality. For the most part, literature concerned specifically with space and the

built environment is concentrated in the latter half of the twentieth century. The nature of spatiality in the context of an urban setting has been demonstrated through the seminal work by French philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre (Lefebvre, 1991, 2003). Lefebvre's interpretation of space in the context of the urban environment covers both explicit and implied space with a view of social space as product of economic and social interaction. In *The Urban Revolution* (2003), Lefebvre maintains that production at one time was represented by an object in space. However, the commercial exchange of parts of space meant that space itself became a product.

Lefebvre's text of 1974 titled *The Production of Space*, has been considered both intellectually significant, for successfully integrating most aspects of spatiality, yet unsuccessful for not clarifying the key areas of his dialectics of space (Shields, 1999). Shields' reasoning for this appears to be drawn from each of Lefebvre's three dialectics of space (*spatial practice*, *representations of space* and *representational space*) being in a relationship with the other two. All three can be latent or ideological and may reinforce or contradict each other, introducing much confusion to the reader who is "never sure which foray into defining his three-part dialectic is the definitive one" (p. 161). This confirms the complexity surrounding discussion of space as measurable object and space as lived experience. There is, however, evidence of authors offering a more modern discussion of space in specific contexts.

Lefebvre's multiple texts on space have influenced much of the subsequent literature and a number of scholars build on and offer further discussion of his extensive writing. Research shows a number of contemporary scholars (Alzeer, 2018; Lapintie, 2007; Watkins, 2005) utilise Lefebvre's spatial theory to investigate contemporary applications. For example, Watkins (2005) discusses an application of Lefebvre's spatial triad to organisational space by providing analysis of a specific organisational event such as a performance piece of theatre. Another example is Lapintie (2007), who notes that Lefebvre's spatial triad involves both space and society, but sought to question whether we were any closer to a holistic understanding of space. To answer this, he turns to modal

logic as a way to inform and “work out a new theoretical approach to urban space” (p. 36). To give context to Lefebvre’s work, there is contemporary argument that his texts regarding the concept of space as socially produced and productive are directly related to his studies of dwellings and housing estates. The constructed estates were part of French post war urbanisation and the emerging consumption society of the era (Stanek, 2011). It is difficult to ignore this as an influence on his work as a person witnessing first-hand the boom of urbanisation, the economic factors of post-war rebuilding and the resulting social transformation.

Karl Popper’s (1978) invitational lecture discussing his *Three Worlds* provides additional evidence of defining the lived world into distinct areas. His first world concerned physical objects and physical energy while the second referred to a world of mental or psychological experience. Finally, the third world consisted of engineered or constructed products of the human mind. These have been referred to in a contemporary manner as physical material, subjective experience and abstract form (Lapintie, 2007). In a similar way to Lefebvre, all three can be individual or coexisting components of the arrangement of urban space. They deliver structure to discussion for the reason that urban space is not organised randomly, in addition to acknowledging spatial expression by elements of economics, politics and ideology (Castells, 1977), which are fundamental to urban development.

Spatial qualities can also be viewed as an interdependent relationship of economic factors of production, consumption, exchange and administration (Castells, 1977). This is more aligned with a consumption driven contemporary society and reveals the possibility to seek an understanding of the evolution of space as produced and consumed specific to the urban environment of Townsville. In some ways these terms, related to a Marxist reading of capitalism, are retrieved in Lefebvre’s theory of the production of space by his use of terms such as production and reproduction, and continuity and cohesion (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 33).

2.2 PERCEPTION

Edmund Husserl's seminal texts regarding phenomenology and perception are critiqued and discussed regularly in contemporary literature (Bower, 2017; Mazijk, 2016; Suojanen, 2018).

Husserl's theory of perception has been described as notable due to an ability to distinguish the properties of the act of consciousness from the properties of the object perceived (Hopp, 2008, p. 219). Husserl's ideas are further interpreted and continued by Maurice Merleau-Ponty in his influential text *Phenomenology of Perception* (2012). It is reasonable to suggest, as Merleau-Ponty does, that phenomenology is still far from resolved after Husserl's work and that it involves describing, not explaining or analysing (pp. xx - xxi).

With an understanding of phenomenology as an investigation into the lived world by way of revealing its essential structures, it follows then to suggest perception as an activity directed at objects in the lived world, which could be sensed from the person's environment (Romdenh-Romluc, 2010). Romdenh-Romluc suggests perception involves our recognition, or at least registering the presence of objects in a figure-ground relationship. This means the figure commands our attention and focus, while the background is perceived as indeterminate. Both figure and background make a contribution to perception, but our overall awareness of each is not equal (p. 165). Nevertheless, perception involves presentation of something to consciousness and these presentations are "of interest to phenomenology, whether the object is real or imagined, empirically measurable or subjectively felt" (van Manen, 2016, p. 9).

The two key aspects here are the lived experience and perception of what is sensed during the experience via thought. Rudolf Arnheim (1969) suggests vision is the primary medium of thought and the cognitive operation called thinking is essential to perception, where cognition takes in mental operations that receive, store and process information including memory, which is a form of recollection of experience and perceptions after the fact. Phenomenology is preoccupied with what is concrete and essential to lived experience (van Manen, 2016). A lived experience can be defined

as a determinate, first-person sensory engagement of a physical object or event. How these experiences are perceived is influenced by a variety of factors and include an individual's beliefs, knowledge and expectations.

Perception means different things to different people. Mid twentieth century discussion held a view that perception went beyond senses and that it was dependent on a contribution by the viewer, which involved their past experience and varied from one person to another (Gibson, 1950). While this position can be accepted, the surrounding environment is fundamental to perception of an object in the urban landscape and can assist in understanding how a person gives meaning to and classifies objects. In the urban setting this is useful to differentiating built form as object in itself and built form as what it means to a person. For example, the social or economic impact of a form, or what one might expect if the object is not able to be viewed in its entirety from a single position. Perception can be disrupted if no time is taken to be in the same space as the object and to observe from first-person engagement.

2.3 OBSERVATION

To observe built space, it is fundamental to be in the same space it occupies to apply empirical support for creative response. When actively being in the same space, notes in various form can be taken for the experience to be documented. Artistic practice adopting written notes from observation of an environment is evident in contemporary literature, along with an intention of translating observation records into creative work (Costello, 2013). Critical observation includes a written inquiry into meaning and elements such as spatial arrangement or human movement. Berger (1972) suggests we are never looking at one thing because we are continually looking at relationships between things and ourselves (p. 9). Writing down these relationships when observing in the urban setting reinforces research and the creative position. However, these records require more than descriptive artistic content such as form, colour or texture.

Objects and human activity are a constant for observation when researching lived experience in the built environment. Arrangement of human activity around particular building types provide the observer with additional visual information to understand meaning. For example, dwellings, institutions and public space offer meanings about “inclusion and exclusion, hierarchy and equality and ownership” (Emmison et al., 2012, p. 162). Investigating the meaning of urban objects via social use or activity is best completed by first-person observation and the most appropriate way to achieve this is by pedestrian travel. This is both a method for visual research and an aspect of urban design by cities engaged in adopting accessibility measures for the pedestrian. Generally known as walkability, this has been identified as a key element of liveability and a foundation to sustainable cities (Forsyth & Southworth, 2008; Stratford et al., 2019). Walking the city means having a personal connection and if the pedestrian experience is ignored, close interaction with urban form and activity is lost.

In understanding perception of the environment through walking, Ingold (2004) suggests that with our feet in contact with the ground, we are most fundamentally and continually in touch with our surroundings (p. 330). Walking takes on dual roles in the case of this research. Firstly, the knowledge and experience to be gained by traversing on foot from point A to point B. Secondly, between point A and point B of a journey, stopping at particular intervals to observe and experience the surrounding space. Further supporting evidence for pedestrian motion is provided by acknowledging that objects are perceived by walking around them, not from a single vantage point and additionally, how we perceive depends on our type of mobility (Ingold, 2004). The action of pedestrian means an ability to walk around defined and bounded forms, enabling continuous perceptibility and ways of seeing.

Artists interpreting objects of the urban setting from first-person observation is abundant in existing literature. Creative observation in this research is drawn from examples such as hypothetical constructs, reductive representation or removing objects from context (Dujardin et al., 2016;

Frampton, 1994; Paik, 2015). Further evidence is provided from discussion that compositions within the picture plane might also contain spatial relationships which reflect space the observer finds themselves (Harrison, 1994; Luke, 2018). John Brack, Tom Carment and Sali Herman are pertinent examples of visually describing this space through observation and lived experience in large capital cities such as Sydney and Melbourne (McCaughey, 1987; Ryan, 2014; Thomas, 1971). These figurative artists reveal examples where representation and likeness of urban form and activity is achieved through individual style. A gap is therefore available for an artist to explore a regional city through contemporary practice of an abstract nature.

2.4 CONCLUSION

This research has a unique position of traversing three salient elements of personal participation in the urban setting. Discussion of spatial, perceptive and observational theories addresses a gap in knowledge through application to the urban environment of Townsville and its position as a regional city in the tropics. Understanding Townsville's visual evidence of its urban landscape evolving at a social, political and physical level is open to exploration. As Lefebvre informed his spatial dialectic primarily from urban challenges of the post war era in large European cities, there is sufficient evidence of thought-provoking urban change for a localised investigation. Complementing research is the employment of phenomenology to provide descriptive accounts of perception in the urban setting. Additionally, making use of first-person observation to gain an understanding of lived experience throughout the course of urban interactions marks another component. Existing literature provides the basis to extend discussion of these theories into new avenues specific to Townsville. The following chapter examines the methodology and processes used as a platform for investigating the visualisation of space as lived experience in the city.

CHAPTER THREE - METHODOLOGY

The research process began with a literature review and theoretical grounding; and culminated in an exhibition of new artworks in a public gallery. The original line of enquiry stemmed from an interest in the urban landscape and human intervention through perpetual development of the urban ensemble. In an almost contradictory position to the city-based landscape artist actively venturing into natural landscapes before returning to the city to create artworks, a crucial element of the creative process was to actively undertake journeys throughout the city to collect information from the source material before returning to the studio. The type of information I was looking for was varied and can be described as essential to my interpretation of urban space in conceptual and perceived ways.

The methodology involved collecting visual data and records of urban objects and associated infrastructure together with key architectural features. It also involved data collection of an experiential and perceptual nature from the urban environment. This collected data was then synthesised in the studio with artistic materials and creative processes. Each venture into the city formed a building block in the process of experiencing space; each journey being different in terms of human activity and vehicular traffic. There were also temporal differences. For example, the time of day or day of the week, or additionally a change of season, which took into account the weather or atmospheric conditions. It was important therefore that the methodology be both structured and have a degree of flexibility. Having a clear systematic approach in terms of the design and location of research was important; while also being open to multiple avenues of information gathering. This was to accommodate the circumstances by which information destined for creative use would be gathered and subsequently utilised in the studio.

The methodology was based on a Four-Part Process (Punch, 2016) suitably modified to better reflect inputs and outcomes specific to this research. A broad range of areas can be investigated through the original four parts titled Strategy and Design, Sample, Data Collection and

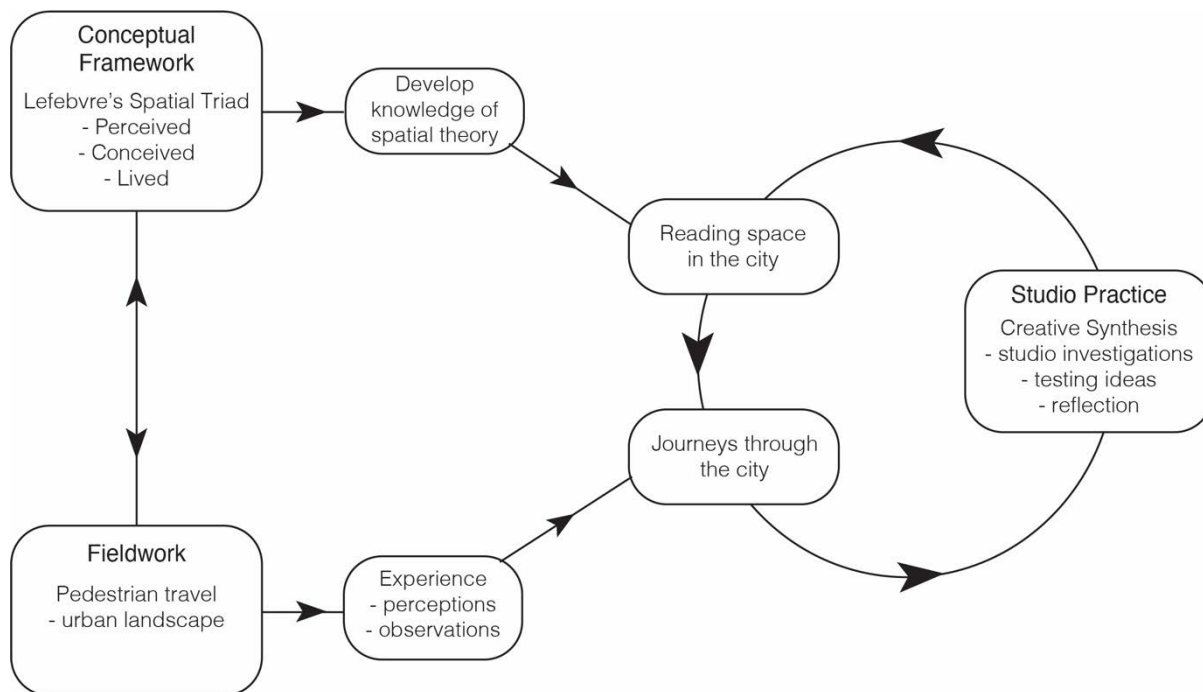
Data Analysis. Reflecting on this research, the titles Research Design, Location, Fieldwork and Creative Synthesis were applied as more appropriate terminologies. This change reduced quantitative tone and established structure with a qualitative and empirical foundation. The overall strategy for this study was practice-based research, where outcomes of practice are involved in an original investigation closely related to existing practice (Candy & Edmonds, 2018). Practice in the context of this research means visual artistic practice predominately undertaken in a studio environment, though it also extends to photography and drawing directly from urban forms. This research is qualitative in nature and aims to emphasise descriptively rather than directly measure or analyse (Kumar, 1999). This chapter discusses each part of the methodology in further detail.

3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

Research design had a dynamic approach where both inputs and outcomes occurred at multiple points and for various purposes. The model shown in Figure 3.1 displays key points of the research process and the connections between theory and practice.

Figure 3.1

Research design model created by the author, 2020



There are three key areas in the design process diagram. First, the conceptual framework which stems from the theoretical underpinning and is specific to this research (Kumar, 1999). The conceptual framework is where an understanding of spatial theory is gained, developing new knowledge which then transfers into an input by application to data collection. The conceptual framework was focussed on Lefebvre's spatial triad and informed my thinking as research progressed in a process which has been labelled reading space.

The second key area is fieldwork, where data collection consisted of gathering information from the urban landscape via pedestrian travel. Fieldwork included undertaking a lived experience in the city and documenting perceptions and observations. The method of pedestrian travel was best suited to this methodology as it allowed time for thought and observation; stopping when photographs or notetaking was required. It also allowed for participation in the urban environment

via spatial practice, discovering representations of space and investigating representational space. Fieldwork had a number of outcomes across the timeline of the research including photographs, which occurred at various times. Fieldwork was predominately qualitative in nature via observation and followed an unstructured path.

To enable a broad range of experience fieldwork was arranged and completed at various times and on various days over the course of research. Thirty-eight fieldwork journeys were undertaken between May 2019 and May 2020 which were documented by photographs. Motivations for these journeys included lived experience among people, vehicles and social movement. Further motivations were to take notice of changes to the city related to time, such as the sun's movement and casting shadows, or the progress of an urban object's demolition or construction. These occasions of lived experience were for the most part, undertaken during daylight hours and each provided different results from reading space for use in the studio.

The third key area is Studio Practice, where creative synthesis occurred through investigations, the testing of ideas and reflection on experience in the studio environment. Creative synthesis was the method by which artworks were produced; from memory, fieldwork documentation, textual resources in the studio such as books, other useful information available online and digital software as required. While photographs were an outcome of fieldwork, they also formed a useful tool for generating alternative creative outcomes in the studio. Decisions on their creative use or otherwise was determined as investigations progressed.

Engaging with public commentary on the key sites of the city was a supporting component of lived experience. This type of data collection was complimentary to the research as it is related to the concept of representational space. Publicly available commentary included print media such as the local newspaper, and also extended to printed signs related to urban objects and development. Signs and printed materials located in the urban space have specific contexts related to experience

and are considered to possess attributes which influence perception. Attributes include conceptual depictions of how an object and its space might be represented when completed.

The research design assembled and connected the various interdependent methods to foreground the way in which they collectively responded to the research statement and answered the research question (Punch, 2016). The research design had a continuous cycle of creative synthesis in the studio and gathering source material from reading space and journeys through the city. Both fieldwork and studio practice were recurring, continuous processes over the timeline of research rather than having a defined beginning and end.

3.2 LOCATION

Defining the site was based on selected criteria to preserve focus on the central city and to provide a reference unique to Townsville. Figure 3.2 shows Townsville's location in northern Queensland, Australia. It is situated in the tropics, on the coast approximately thirteen hundred kilometres north of the Queensland state capital, Brisbane. As shown in Figure 3.3, the specific location for this research comprises Flinders St, Ogden St and a section of Stanley St from Flinders St heading south across Lowths Bridge to where the Stadium is located on the corner of Saunders St and Rooney St. This area is an accurate reflection of the city and encompasses three sites representative of the evolving urban landscape.

Figure 3.2

Location map of Townsville



Note: Additional localities on the original version of this map have been removed to show only relevant cities. Adapted from *d-maps.com* > *Oceania* > *Queensland* > *boundaries, main cities, names (white)*, 2021 (https://d-maps.com/carte.php?num_car=63911&lang=en) and *d-maps.com* > *Oceania* > *Australia* > *boundaries (white)*, 2021 (https://d-maps.com/carte.php?num_car=3297&lang=en)

buildings in the area are mainly in small clusters with names reflective of their location such as *Urban Quarter* and *Central Village*. Criteria for the research location are listed below.

The location is within the central area of the city or CBD as it is known locally. Flinders St is widely regarded as being the central street of the city. The Flinders Lane development links Flinders St and Ogden St where the city's major public transport hub is located. The stadium is located on the southern side of Ross Creek and in walking distance to Ogden St and Flinders St.

The location is representative of diverse urban arrangement. The area selected contains broad uses consistent with the expectations of a regional city. The area has a variety of building types including single level and multi-story, heritage listed and contemporary architecture of both residential and commercial applications. Residential takes the form of apartment type accommodation while business includes retail outlets, offices, hotels, bars and cafés. The streets selected are part of what is locally known as the CBD and therefore collectively present an accurate reflection of human movement, vehicular traffic and overall urban ensemble.

The selected area is part of local political and public conversation related to the urban environment. Flinders St has a history of social and political commentary associated with aesthetics, lack of social activity, large number of vacant shopfronts and general poor condition. Ogden St is less in the public domain but relevant because it is soon to be a link for trade and social activity via the Flinders Lane development, designed to foster social gatherings at times of people moving to and from Stadium events. Since 2015 the stadium has been a public talking point in Townsville. As one of the largest objects of public expenditure built in the city, and for reasons of the activity and trade it may support, the Stadium continued to be part of public conversation throughout 2019 and into early 2020.

The area is appropriate for traversing via pedestrian travel within the research timeframe. At approximately 3.4 kilometres in overall length the streets were traversed a number of times throughout the course of research. Flinders St is approximately 2.3 kilometres in total length and

research covered the entire street. Although the western end could be considered outside the CBD it has been included because it is positioned within the Townsville City Waterfront Priority Development Area (Townsville City Council, 2018), a key component for local council when planning the city's future (Townsville City Council, n.d.-a).

3.3 FIELDWORK AS DATA COLLECTION

Fieldwork involved first person contact with the urban landscape to experience the urban phenomena. Included in the urban phenomena are all materials or tangible objects be they human designed and fabricated, part of human intervention over natural terrain (for example, plants, trees planted on footpaths and so forth) or human beings themselves. The method employed was pedestrian travel and throughout the research it was arranged in such a way as to broadly cover the urban environment of the city. The selected area was traversed on multiple occasions during 2019 and 2020 and the day-to-day routine experienced and perceived in person. This type of travel can be described as having no specific destination because it was the experience on the journey that was the focus. For example, walking the length of Flinders St in the afternoon because there was a need to experience Flinders St at that particular time. The intention for each journey was data collection, gathering experiences and observations in the form of photographs, drawings and notes.

Journeys were arranged and implemented in a structured or unstructured manner. An example of a more structured journey was when I planned to be in the city for events of large social gathering such as weekend markets on Flinders St or the annual Pop-Up North Queensland Festival. Similarly, observing the progress of new construction such as the Stadium or Flinders Lane on a regular basis is another example. Undertaking these journeys for the purpose of seeing physical change as it occurred was at times planned in advance and therefore considered structured.

In an unstructured journey, walking provided the means to be close to urban objects and activity during times of what can be described as urban banality or routine, where daily life may be

observed without planned observation. Data collection of an unstructured nature often revealed discoveries that might not have occurred whilst undertaking a structured journey. For example, noticing the way in which light falls across buildings and the shapes of shadows. These sights are serendipitous, occurring at a point of coincidence and at times, noticed only after several journeys to the same area. These occasions of travel additionally allowed time for ruminating and reading the space within an area as there was little distraction, unlike focussing on physical change during planned journeys. Physical changes to the city tend to be noticed because of their overt nature and being performed in view of the public, albeit behind safety fencing or barriers. Changes to the urban in a social or political manner tend to be of a more clandestine nature and open to the possibility of interpretation rather than observation. For example, many areas of the urban are under political control through rules, regulations and laws.

Data was collected by sight and of two types. First, data was collected and documented by drawing or photograph, both of which are direct and accurate representations. Second, by abstract documentation from memory derived from sight, which is similar to an original experience though not necessarily accurate. Both methods are subjective forms of data collection suitable for investigation in the studio. Memory relies on an individual's evidence from senses and may be understood as an abstract form of recollecting information; drawn directly from the mind to support visualisation of spatial experience.

Photographs were taken as an extension of the experience and carried out from a standing position as travel was undertaken within the environment. Photographs have spatial properties and can be considered as both representations of space and a reflection of the space in which experience occurred. They also form a temporal record, which factors in that they were able to capture a specific point in time. Additionally, photographs represent a method of removing the physical presence of form from an observed context. In contrast to a person experiencing space and form in real life, the viewer of a photograph experiences an abstract representation of space

determined by the photographer. The viewer is withdrawn from perceiving the content in complete context with surrounding forms and is coerced into seeing the artists interpretation of their observation bounded by a frame. Mattens (2011) suggests a photograph of an object is fundamentally different from direct perceptual experience of the same object as it leaves out the spatial views of an object's surroundings. He suggests that photography captures, frames and disconnects objects from their spatial context (Mattens, 2011, p. 111).

Removing elements from an experience of form such as ambient sound, movement, social dialogue and the surrounding built forms, leaves the photograph as a collection of forms, shapes and tones available for examination by the viewer. Photography in this way interferes with the viewer's perceptions concerning relationships between objects and their spatial relatedness when transferred to a two-dimensional plane. Spatial concepts within the frame are therefore considered differently to the spatial elements of a form experienced in person and discovering the city regularly in a personal way has enabled close exploration of urban form. However, this research required more than the planes and geometry of urban structure; I also needed to gain an understanding of representational space.

Sourcing information through the local newspaper for development updates, public commentary and political statements gave an insight into the type of information considered newsworthy. On the one hand, the local community was informed about how the city is dead (Garvey, 2019; Mosch, 2019), bringing to light declining social use; and on the other, the newspaper provided positive discussion of potential urban renewal (McCormack, 2019a) or temporarily opening urban areas to social use (Elder, 2019; McCormack, 2019c). This type of data collection was useful information for understanding representational space and increasing knowledge regarding the city's developments and local community interest.

3.4 CREATIVE SYNTHESIS AS DATA ANALYSIS

Creative synthesis in this research refers to the integration of information and processes comprising the studio practice and its direction towards the production of artworks. It includes information of a visual nature, for example sketches, drawings or photographs, together with written notes in studio or fieldwork journals. Visual information also included material which functions as a continuous reference, examples being a colour matrix or tonal value scale. Written information includes books of an informative or instructional nature such as those written by artists concerning spatial conventions or colour theory. Processes are defined as a sequence of thoughts and actions comprising the production of original and valuable work over a period of time with a beginning and an end (Lubart, 2018, p. 3). A process which is creative in the context of this research may produce an outcome at any point along a sequence of thoughts and actions, at the end of the sequence or a combination of both. When a creative outcome is realised, the originality and value may be determined as novel and appreciated by the practitioner; not necessarily by other people (Lubart, 2018).

Methods undertaken in the studio followed logical, investigative techniques whilst investigating the visualisation of space. Methods typically utilised a single or series of reductive or deconstructive steps to find essential abstract components. Creative processes were aligned with mediums such as painting or drawing and followed stages of pre-composition, composition and execution. The term pre-composition identifies a stage in which all visual material was assembled and examined in the studio subsequent to the fieldwork, though it precedes the compositional aspects and execution of a work (Preston, 2005). In this stage decisions and discoveries were made regarding initial ideas and strategies, establishing the colour range or the shapes and forms which might be included in the work. For most of the work in this series, it was achieved by removing elements of representation and isolating elements associated with visualising space. This stage was specifically focussed on developing the format or frame for the work. For example, deliberating on

the size and configuration, such as a single panel or diptych and whether the bounding edges of the work will form a square, rectangle or curve.

The decisions concerning format were also part of the compositional stage. At this point key elements of the composition were determined, allowing for decisions and discoveries to continue with pictorial arrangement. The various parts of the composition were arranged and rearranged to find a structure either by design through drawings or by the physical arrangement of material in the form of collage. The execution stage included a finalising set of processes where the composition was realised as a fully resolved work. In this stage decisions were mostly intuitive and as a result, relationships between the multiple compositional elements were discovered. Intuitive investigation followed an unknown or unformulated path and was related to making decisions as work progressed. For example, changing colour or size of a form or shape for reasons known only when engaged in the work. Processes used in these stages were at times of a methodical nature, which meant making decisions based on known values. Examples include colour relationships such as cool-warm temperature, light-dark tonal value, or chromatic qualities and so forth. These aspects can be investigated methodically through processes such as colour matrices to assist with decision making through creating an outcome of a formal nature which can then be continually referenced or applied to multiple situations.

Photographs in the studio were used in the pre-compositional stage where they have moved from existing as a digital file captured during fieldwork to a printed representation of space. Photographs were also objects to be examined and explored from any angle or distance, and used in the studio to find essential structures in an abstract sense rather than a representative one. Examples and further discussion on the type of structures I was looking for are in the following chapter, together with findings from fieldwork and discoveries made from investigations in the studio during the creative synthesis stage.

CHAPTER FOUR – FROM READING SPACE TO REPRESENTATIONS OF SPACE

In what ways can space, as lived experience in the urban environment of Townsville, be represented visually? This overarching research question sought to visualise an abstract concept of no physical properties, though can be sensed and described. Consequently, a sub-question asks; what does one look for when seeking to visualise an intangible concept in the context of the city? My approach was to first look for the formal basis of the urban, the organised structure beneath the animated and dynamic movement, or in other words, the static structure of the urban landscape rather than the overlaying representational space. While this research was seeking to understand space via the conceptual framework, practice sought to translate observations and experience of space into a visual description, which includes developing a method of reading space. This method is discussed further in this chapter, followed by discussion of findings during fieldwork and discoveries from investigations in the studio.

4.1 READING SPACE

Lefebvre (1991) suggests space which has been produced can be read (p. 17) however, on the question of whether it makes sense to read space, he suggests reasons both for and against. Yes, if reading space implies deciphering or decoding; and no, because social space is incomparable to something as elementary as a page with an anonymous message. Lefebvre additionally notes that space was not produced to be read, but to be lived (p. 142). Elden (2004) suggests Lefebvre misses a key point, which is that reading space is not like reading a book, but is “more like *critically* reading a book, understanding intent, power relations and context” (p. 192). Elden additionally makes a valid suggestion that reading a space can be helpful to understand those we live in, and that space still needs to be understood whether it be via reading or the more quantitative term, analysing (Elden, 2004, pp. 192-193). To this end, my approach to reading space was as a visual activity and a method of seeing in the context of a particular spatial theory and the objects or situations under observation.

With feet on the ground and seeing from first-person perspective, reading space involved sight, sounds, individual perception and individual opinion. It is difficult to ignore personal opinion of the urban in Townsville, where the central city has been under scrutiny for many years. Reading space occurred during journeys through the city, it was part of fieldwork and involved seeing in a spatial context, followed by translating the observations into text, drawing or photograph. Although forms and planes appear to be the most effective way to construct a visual description of spatiality in the urban landscape, text is also useful because it can be used to describe that which is intangible. Once reading space became an acceptable method of collecting data, another question surfaced; how might space be read in terms of Lefebvre's spatial triad?

Reading spatial practice, or Townsville's perceived space was reading space in physical terms. This examines urban reality and concrete urban evolution such as the Flinders Lane development and the Stadium. It can also be seen as reading urban form; the boundaries or limits of buildings, the area of planes, or volume of built objects (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 148). This is where fieldwork documents the urban as a likeness via photographs or figurative drawings of planes and shapes. This part of the triad was the space that can be observed felt and touched. It is the space of limits and limitations, defined by edges and boundaries; urban reality as perceived and empirically observable (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 413). Reading spatial practice involved seeing the routine and activity that is continuous in the city. Examples include vehicle and pedestrian traffic and movement of shadows across built forms.

Reading representations of space or Townsville's conceived space was seeking to understand abstract conceptual depictions in the city. These include knowledge and planning documents such as the *Townsville City Waterfront Priority Development Area* (Townsville City Council, 2018) and the *Townsville 2020 Masterplan* (Townsville City Council, n.d.-b). The 2020 Masterplan includes subsections of specific developments such as Flinders Lane and the Stadium Precinct. These are often disseminated publicly via the local council website, advertising or print

media and have a political connection through regulations or compliance processes. Processes include approvals for development, changes to local laws (Townsville City Council, 2020b), or permission to have buildings demolished and removed if they are an obstacle to new development. This space is likely to generate public commentary and community discourse.

Reading representational space, or Townsville's lived space, seeks to understand local use and meaning. This was reading space in social terms, seeing traces or marks from the course of daily urban routine. This space is closely aligned with Flinders St as an ensemble of urban objects with a history, unlike the Stadium and Flinders Lane development. In the city this is reading highly contrasting spaces. The rundown and derelict buildings of Flinders St as a sign of a city in decline, and the Stadium, which signals a new era for Townsville yet to be realised. This was reading how locals live through urban space and passively experience that which is established for them by authority (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 43).

The intention was to read space and visualise as an abstract concept, rather than reproduce a figurative likeness of urban objects which *reside in space*. Working in an abstract style does have challenges, as there is little by way of figurative elements for a viewer to recognise immediately. This places more weight on the compositional elements to achieve pictorial balance or harmony (Aristides, 2016). An artist often reads the space they wish to represent via their own decisions as they go about producing an artwork. When reading space there was an intention to visualise certain properties of objects in space, rather than the object itself. Reading space therefore required making decisions in sorting what was relevant from unnecessary, or what I wish to emphasise or suppress (Aristides, 2006). A link was then established between lived experience in the city and my translation of that experience; or alternatively, a translation of that which *I imagine to be* visualised from reading space. A connection is also maintained between the conceptual framework leading research, walking the city and studio practice. The following is my account of venturing into the urban environment for the purpose of reading space and gathering information to use during studio

practice for artwork production. Fieldwork highlights key findings from the three sites of interest in the city and is followed by creative synthesis, which discusses discoveries in the studio.

4.2 FIELDWORK

Findings during the fieldwork confirm there was little human interaction in the city on a daily basis. Townsville's urban and suburban spatial organisation, at least in physical development terms, appeared to be close to a metropolitan model, defined as a high-density central city surrounded by lower density suburban development (Soja, 2013). I use the term close because while it is often the case for a city to have a higher density of residents than suburbs, this is not the case in Townsville. In 2019, the population density of the Townsville City – North Ward area was lower than some suburban areas (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2020). A finding from this was a polycentric effect had developed, where a small number of suburban shopping centres became hubs for trade and socialisation, contributing to the diminishing number of reasons for people to travel to the city. The CBD was no longer a focal point for retail, commerce and social activity, the city and Flinders St appeared disparate and tired looking.

4.2.1 FLINDERS ST

Walking Flinders St heading east from the far western end in the afternoon during December 2019, it was quiet with limited pedestrians. On arrival to the corner of Flinders St and Stanley St (see Figure 4.1), the CBD felt like activity had increased, though only from the intermittent ambient noise of traffic. Even though multi-story buildings such as offices, hotels and apartments can be seen, it was found to be conspicuous that a missing element is people. With the exception of short-term events, pedestrian experience in the city presented remarkably low social interaction. City vibrancy and life was determined quickly by pedestrian travel, and it was found that while people do visit the city in large numbers for events or regular weekend evenings in the Flinders St East nightclub area, few materialise on a daily basis. This type of finding created a perception that

although traffic moved people through the city, the personally interacting or pedestrian type was far less common.

Figure 4.1

View of Flinders St in December 2019



Note: This image shows a typical view of limited pedestrians and vehicle movement in the city, consistent with most journeys during research.

During research Flinders St was absorbed into public commentary regarding dilapidated buildings (see Figure 4.2) and high vacancy. These issues were held responsible for keeping people away and holding the city back and subsequently, revitalisation became a key term for planning documents, developers and local councillors. The appearance of some buildings on Flinders St combined with a message of revitalising and bringing people back to the city evolved from disparate

comments to common public conversation, disseminating through local print media particularly throughout 2019. The Queensland State Government's North Queensland Regional Plan (2020) also emphasised revitalisation and evolution of the CBD to recognise its role as a focal point of North Queensland. It was found during the study that this conversation is not new. In 2002, Townsville's CBD Taskforce at the time offered to revitalise the inner city by implementing the Townsville CBD Masterplan through a number of proposals, objectives and strategies. Of the six objectives listed, one was to "Correct urban decay in the Townsville inner city" (Townsville City Council, 2002). Subsequently in 2010, a paper in the *Australasian Journal of Regional Studies* suggested the Townsville CBD was going through a substantial transformation to return Flinders St to a historical position as the high street, which would revitalise retail activity (Tyrell et al., 2010). Findings during 2019 and 2020 indicate these predictions of Flinders St have yet to materialise.

Figure 4.2

View of an empty and rundown building on Flinders St in Townsville, 2019



As journeys continued, some inconsistent physical configurations were discovered on Flinders St. One was that the many vacant shopfronts followed little pattern or logic, vacancies existed in different building types and of varying condition, from old and rundown to almost new. Neither the quality of the building nor its location appeared to have a bearing on vacancy. Another inconsistency, and one particularly noticed as a pedestrian, was the multiple arrangements of pavement on footpaths and walkways. At first a seemingly banal observation, yet one that introduced thoughts of geometry and inconsistency. In some areas of the eastern end of Flinders St, the paving is orderly and uniform but as I travelled west it descended into a cracked, uneven and disorganised arrangement with small areas of exposed bare earth. This finding promoted the initial thoughts of visualising multiple shapes to consolidate a composition.

Not all findings are identified on a single journey. At times it took many journeys over several months to notice or see something of interest. I walked along Flinders St approximately thirty-five times before discovering the type of light captured for the paintings. This is shown in Figure 4.3, a photograph taken in 2019 of the buildings on the northern side of Flinders St in summer, showing a high tonal range of colour in morning sunlight. This type of discovery was a highlight of reading space because it meant I had the information required to generate further possibilities in the studio. Findings such as these were not regarded as important at the time however, when reflected on later in the studio it was realised as significant.

Figure 4.3

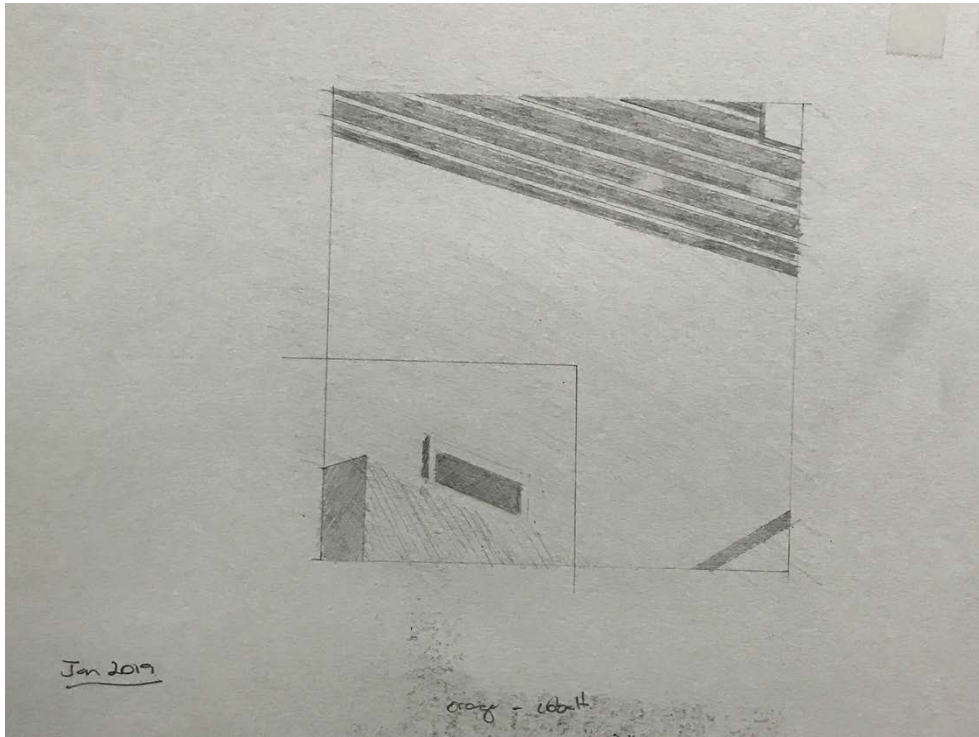
View of Flinders St East in Townsville, 2019



At times findings were translated directly from observations into abstract arrangements. I was looking for spatial relationships such as light and shade or deconstructing the space into simplified lines and shapes. There were occasions when these discoveries began as figurative drawings, although later in the studio they evolved into abstract depictions. An example of this type of drawing is shown in Figure 4.4, a small sketch of the urban landscape in a line and block format. Another example is shown in Figure 4.5 which shows a small line drawing of the Flinders Lane development viewed from Ogden St during demolition.

Figure 4.4

Visual diary drawing, 2019



any case, having read the same space multiple times over months the small protrusion evolved from casual observation to significant discovery.

Figure 4.6

View of buildings on Flinders St (East), 2019



4.2.2 FLINDERS LANE DEVELOPMENT

The Flinders Lane development was planned as a connecting space between Ogden St and Flinders St. An opportunity which was taken to replace old architecture with contemporary, whilst simultaneously replacing a banal retail experience with a combination of hospitality and retail to activate the site socially. As shown in Figure 4.7, demolition exposes the rigid, legal boundaries of urban ensemble however, on this occasion two sites merged as the boundary between them was declared redundant. Much of the boundary wall was later removed (see Figure 4.8). It appeared to

be clear that nobody wanted enclosed space; everything should be open, social, liveable and aesthetically pleasing to attract wealth and movement. The walls with cut out sections and the resulting positive-negative relationships was another key finding of evolving space.

Figure 4.7

View of Flinders Lane development from the Flinders St side during demolition, 2019



Figure 4.8

View of Flinders Lane development from the Ogden St side while under construction, 2019



On the footpath during construction old tiles were exposed alongside new, highlighting the repetitive nature of the built environment. At the time this space was observed, thoughts of deconstruction and the removal or addition of form were in mind. This discovery was documented as a photograph (see Figure 4.9) and the features of the tiles noted for further investigation later in the studio.

Figure 4.9

View of new tiles over old on Flinders St, 2019



When the façade facing Ogden St was removed and the space cleaned out of all demolition debris, I was able to clearly visualise an underlying geometry. I associate this type of geometry with vertical and horizontal straight lines of stability (Aristides, 2006), a finding which would later dominate studio thoughts and processes. As shown in Figure 4.10, there were serendipitous discoveries such as geometric fields of light and shade, providing findings of a temporal nature while also displaying overt angled lines. My visual diary at this time included noting that when the

demolition was complete, almost the entire inside space was made of products related to grey colours of limited variation and which appeared neutral in tone. This discovery prefigured how the tone would be achieved later in the studio and subsequently greys were found to be best achieved using complementary contrasting colours.

Figure 4.10

Urban Intervention #3 2019



4.2.3 THE STADIUM

Unlike Flinders St, the Stadium is a new urban object with no history. When it was first encountered the sounds of construction almost overpowered the visual elements. The sounds of construction are unique, all manner of tools were being used to grind, drill or weld steel. The sounds of diesel engines humming could be heard as work platforms were being elevated or lowered, along with distorted human voices over radios giving instructions. With these sounds comes the visual interest of vertical and angled lines of both the Stadium and the machines being used to assemble it as they transform a space which was vacant for years. Documented with photographs in Figures 4.11 and 4.12, these observations were concerned with the combination of lines rather than form or light and shade. The discovery of angled lines combined with the stability of vertical provided further evidence of urban repetition.

Figure 4.11

View of the Stadium under construction, 2019



Figure 4.12

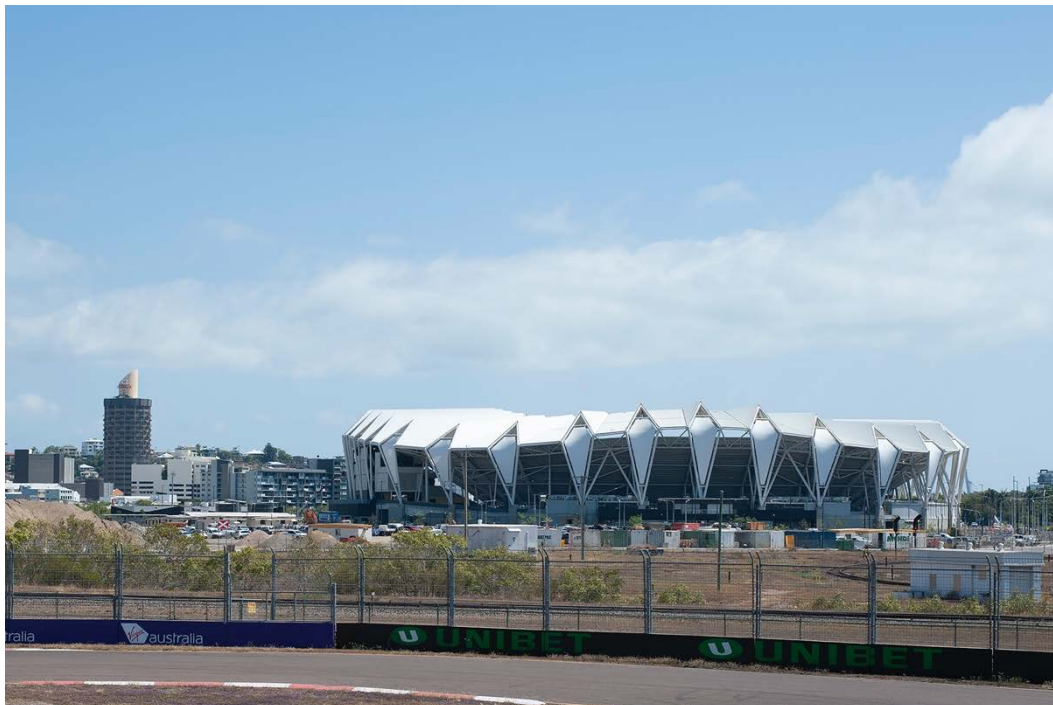
View of the Stadium under construction, 2019



As construction of the Stadium continued, it took on a number of spatial perceptions which were dependant on direction of viewing. As shown in Figure 4.13, when observed from the south-western side it appeared to be out of place, colossus in nature and consuming vast space. It was perceived as a deviation from the regular urban fabric of the city, a type of anomalous protrusion. This finding was documented as evidence of physical change, progress and evolution of urban space. A note about this finding in my visual diary at the time stated it looked like something abnormal had been dropped onto the site. I also noted that it was a significant visual contrast of space. On the one hand, concrete and steel greys under construction slowly consuming space; and on the other, the water and natural foliage on the edge of Ross Creek immediately beside maintaining a sense of open and natural space.

Figure 4.13

Urban Construct Boundary St #1, 2019



In contrast, when viewed post-construction from the eastern side in early 2020, it was well hidden behind trees from the pedestrian point of view. As shown in Figure 4.14, it appeared to blend with surrounding natural terrain. At this point the sounds of construction are gone and the site had been finalised, the grass had been laid and trees planted. The mass of concrete and steel was existing in silence waiting for humans to activate and energise the form. Though in the early stages of its life, evidence suggests urban objects such as this will eventually require substantial refurbishment much like the Flinders Lane development. At a yet to be determined point in the future this object may take on the current tired and rundown look of Flinders St, and discussion may again centre on possible destruction and whether the space occupied can be put to better use. Though for now, the object has moved from a representation of space and entered the cycle of urban reality and evolution.

Figure 4.14

Stadium view from the eastern side, 2020



4.3 CREATIVE SYNTHESIS

In terms of methodology, studio practice is located in a cycle with reading space and journeys through the city. Once sufficient fieldwork and journeys had been completed, more time was allocated to the studio and journeys taken less often. Although creative practice occurred in this cycle throughout the entire research timeline, completing the artworks was prioritised in late 2019 to meet upcoming deadlines for the exhibition. Creative synthesis was seeking to resolve the ways visualisation of space could occur through artworks which are essentially representations of space, planned to be positioned in a gallery for public view, discussion and feedback.

Working in an abstract style had challenges, as there is little information for a viewer to immediately recognise. The composition itself, including any conventions or principles being considered, required thoughtful investigation and experimentation. Principles such as lines implying chaos or stability, positive and negative relationships or cool and warm colours are just a few of the many available to give the viewer clues as to the ideas or meanings of the work. It is through these principles that I can most effectively articulate and visualise space, as lived experience. The following sub-sections titled drawing and painting discuss key processes undertaken in the studio and identify discoveries made as artwork progressed. The terms pre-composition, composition and execution are used to assist with identifying which stage of processes are being discussed.

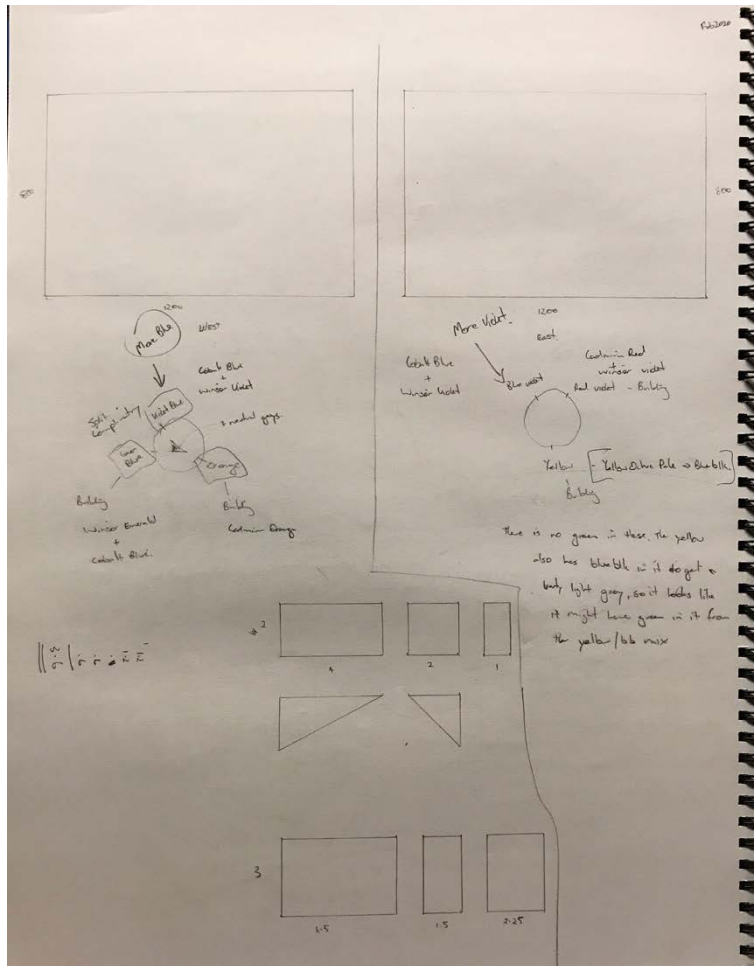
4.3.1 PAINTING

4.3.1.1 PRE-COMPOSITION

The paintings *Summer Morning, Flinders St (East)* and *Summer Morning Flinders St (West)* originate from journeys along Flinders St. Initial ideas began generating when reflecting on geometric arrangement and the shapes and patterns of floor tiles at the Flinders Lane development (see Figure 4.9 and 4.10). At this stage, thoughts involved removing elements from their representation and reconstructing them as blocks of colour. Thoughts started an investigation into how geometry in the composition would appear to be random but have an underlying spatial structure. I began the pre-composition stage with investigations into geometric shapes that could be divided into related portions such as halves, quarters or thirds vertically and horizontally, shown as originally sketched in Figure 4.15 below. The page also contains written notes on colour decisions, and how colour conventions could potentially be used when the colour studies began.

Figure 4.15

Visual diary page from 2019



Forms were limited in these works in keeping with the observation. The edges of the forms were confined to vertical and horizontal. An orderly and stable aspect of geometry in space rather than dynamic was found, as diagonal lines tend to give a sense of movement and energy (Aristides, 2006). A key discovery from this was finding geometrically related shapes by mathematical division. The intention of composition design was to have a structured, planned appearance that on initial viewing appears random.

Colours were also investigated and found during the pre-composition stage. For the work *Summer Morning, Flinders St (East)*, colour ideas were discovered from the Queens Buildings 1887 as shown in the previous Figure 4.6. These were used in addition to colours observed on the side of buildings towards the eastern end of Flinders St shown in Figure 4.16. The introduction of further colour options assisted to complete a split complementary triad colour range, which is an extension of an established colour theory also known as complimentary contrast (de Saussure, 1964). De Saussure discusses this among nine other categories which influence the sense of space exclusively through colour (pp. 117-126). Theories such as these are not absolute and other factors which determine colour or tone choice require investigation, such as observation and experience (Matisse, 2003). These types of theories do offer guidance from a known point, though were not relied upon to the exclusion of decision making based on personal intuitive investigation as work progressed.

Figure 4.16

View of buildings located on the Eastern end of Flinders St, 2019



The light and close tone appearance of buildings on Flinders St was influential and it was also discovered that the selected colours similar to urban reality at the time worked together visually. Reflection turned to the narrow range of light tone on building exteriors. The tone is representative of ambient and reflected light from buildings on the northern side of Flinders St, in the morning during summer which is hot, humid and a sign of living in the dry tropics. In a somewhat serendipitous discovery, the colours achieved by completing a formal investigation via colour matrix (see Figure 4.17) provided a range of chromatic neutral greys, realised only as investigations with colour in the studio progressed. These greys were important because they were similar to the collective appearance of buildings viewed in the morning light.

Figure 4.17

Studio colour matrix investigation, 2019



4.3.1.2 COMPOSITION

Process then moved to the composition stage and collage was implemented to investigate how the forms and colour might work in a composition. Spatial conventions of form, tone and colour perspective were considered as each individual form of a work has a relationship to the form immediately adjacent, influencing how the overall composition is perceived. It was found that geometrically related shapes worked better when arranged with spatial consideration that produced inconsistency between forms; though also interaction between colours to achieve balance. This discovery was important because it would hold the abstract nature of the composition together, given there was no representative information for a viewer. Another finding from the process of creating the collage was that space can be defined without the use of figurative forms. Boundaries are instead perceived via the interaction of colour and tone.

A number of collage colour studies were completed before painting began, to visualise how the design structure and composition would appear. These are shown in Figures 4.18 and 4.19. Collage is a method of working which assists to focus the seemingly infinite possibilities during the composition stage. Collage is used as a method for investigating compositional structure and arrangement and is a significant part of my studio practice and creative process. Historically, the roots of collage can be placed in modern art, particularly Cubism (Janis & Blesh, 1962). In the mid twentieth century collage continued in studio practice through Abstract Expressionists (Haxall, 2007) which aligns more closely with my methods. In contemporary scholarship, collage remains a valid method integrating into studio practice via arts-based and practice-led research (Vaughan, 2005).

Figure 4.18

Collage Study #5 for Summer Morning Flinders St (East), 2020

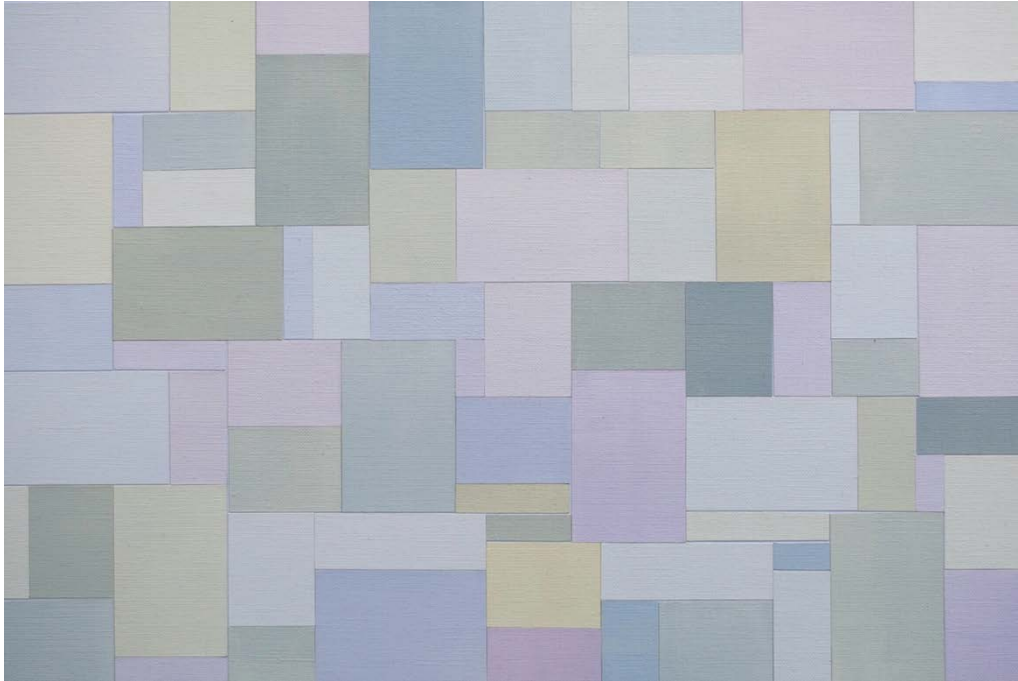


Figure 4.19

Collage Study #6 for Summer Morning Flinders St (West), 2020



Collage also has the ability to place components of a work in a new context, revealing unforeseen relationships when moved within the picture plane (de Sausmarez, 1964). With adequate preparation of materials this method was a quick way to perceive whether a composition will be workable and determining if studies are kept for future reference. As a method of construction, collage represented inquiry into design principals, composition and colour or tonal relationships at the same time, with individual parts having their own spatial energy. In some ways collage was read like a plan, though working from it required flexibility because during the execution stage the work changed as it progressed.

4.3.1.3 EXECUTION

Having completed the colour studies, my process turned to painting. The major difference with investigations from this point is that the colour study was perceived as a reference. The execution stage was following an established composition where the pictorial arrangement had been maintained; not as an object of colours to replicate, rather as a guide to narrow and limit decisions while the work progressed. Changes did indeed occur in the blocks of colour as work progressed because the execution process is one of building up thin layers of paint in each block individually. The most challenging aspect of working this way is that each time paint is applied to a single block, it changes the perceived relationship of that block to all surrounding forms. This means it was an intuitive process of making changes incrementally which resulted in periods of highlight, where the work was coming together and periods of frustration, where the work was perceived to be showing no improvement. The finished paintings *Summer Morning, Flinders St (East)* and *Summer Morning, Flinders St (West)* are shown in Figures 4.20 and 4.21.

Figure 4.20

Summer Morning, Flinders St (East), 2020



Figure 4.21

Summer Morning, Flinders St (West), 2020

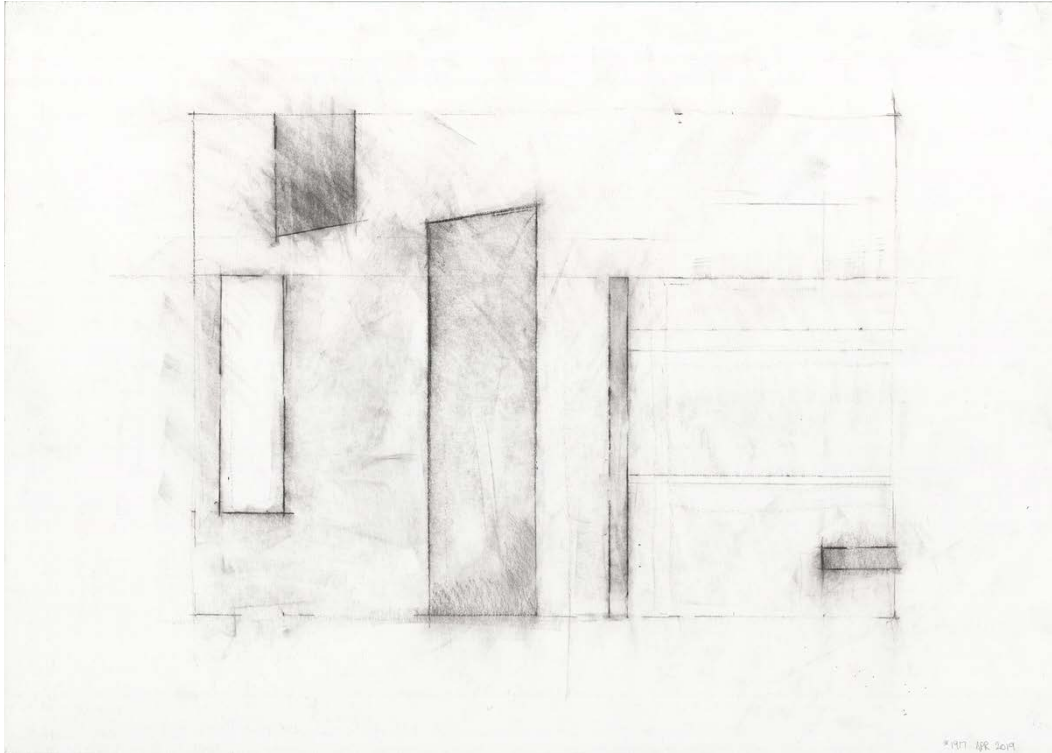


Visual diary notes made during the execution stage of these paintings revealed occasions where the piece refused to cooperate with my intentions. One reason was due to paint tone, resulting in many more layers to correct; while another reason was perception related, where areas became conspicuous or uneven. Both took time to correct because of the nature of painting in thin layers and light tone. These were challenges rather than failures and as frustrating as they were, overcome with persistence and critique. It was important that no centre of interest be revealed as painting progressed. I found the composition to work best if there was no prominent element such as a single form significantly opposing neighbouring forms, to reflect the discovery of anonymity in the city.

4.3.2 DRAWING

4.3.2.1 DRAWING STUDIES

The drawing study *Flinders St #1917* (see Figure 4.22) was completed in April 2019 during the early stages of fieldwork and creative synthesis. The drawing was an initial step towards understanding ways to visualise space and accomplished around the same time as media attention to the poor condition of the city was gaining momentum in the Townsville Bulletin (Editor, 2019; Tagliabue, 2019).

Figure 4.22*Flinders St #1917, 2019*

The drawing originated from an observation when I was standing on the eastern end of Ogden St and looking through a gap between two buildings (see Figure 4.23). The buildings went through to Flinders St and therefore from where I was positioned, buildings on the opposite side of Flinders St could be seen through the narrow space. This generated ideas of physical space between urban forms in contrast with the open space experienced as a pedestrian on the footpath. The observation was also an anomaly, the gap occurred when almost all structures in the vicinity of Flinders St had adjoining contact with their immediate neighbour, or in other words, no space between forms.

Figure 4.23

View from Ogden St through to Flinders St, 2019



In the pre-composition stage, memory of this observation and the figure-background convention generated thoughts of spatial relationships between planes and geometric features seen from a distance. As the drawing evolved however, it became less about the linear perspective of space and more about surface space between forms. In other words, perspectival space became redundant while positive and negative spatial relationships became more overt. On reflection, the process of how *Flinders St #1917* came to be realised showed an integration of visual finding via

fieldwork followed by discovery from investigation in the studio. This drawing study is a common aspect of my practice where thoughts are explored and expanded into a larger visual format. A work that is original, closely related to existing practice and is more description of experience rather than a copied formal analysis. A work which has traces of space and has been subjected to reflection and investigation in the studio, resulting in a visualised experience unidentical to the original (Delahunty, 2015).

4.3.2.2 LINE DRAWINGS

Not all studio investigations had a direct link to observations or perceptions. Some were a result of discoveries extending in alternate directions and taking reductive steps. The two drawings shown in Figures 4.24 and 4.25 titled *Flinders St (East)* and *Flinders St (West)* respectively, are examples. At the pre-composition stage I reflected on memory of pedestrian travel and walking past built objects with a sense of perception that the surface of the object facing the street remained static, while the view of the object changed depending on where I was positioned. This finding led to using the same action in the studio, with a painting or collage as an object, instead of built form, effectively making the studio process akin to still life drawing, where the object of focus was an artwork. At the composition stage it was more a case of recreating a visualisation of space via an existing representation of space. Therefore, composing was not a method of new forms, rather discovering a new way to visualise existing forms. Akin to redeveloping existing structures in the urban landscape. These drawings were additionally intended to be a representation of multiple perceptions from changes of direction and distance while maintaining the objects essential nature.

Figure 4.24

Flinders St (East), 2020

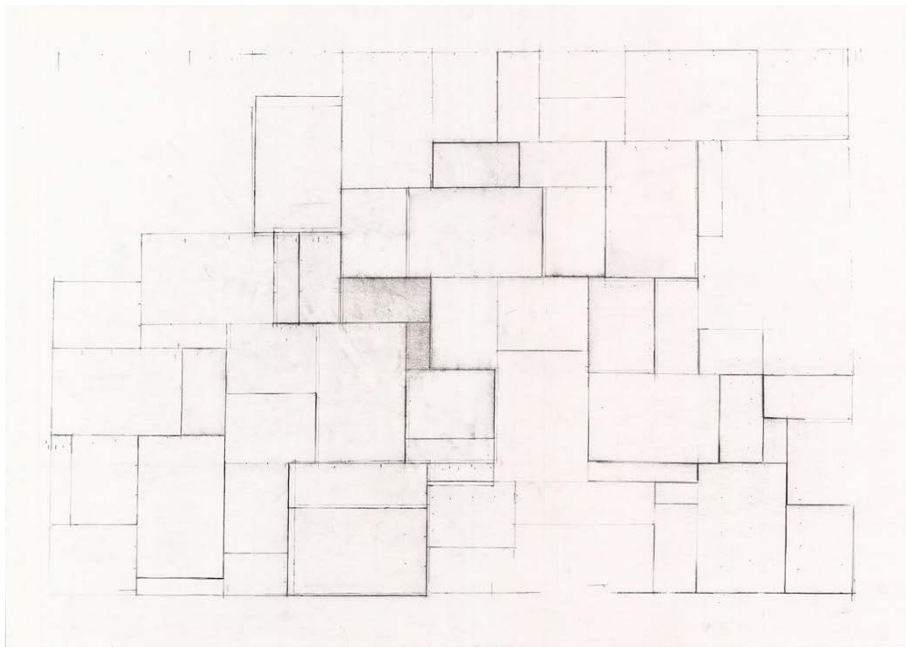
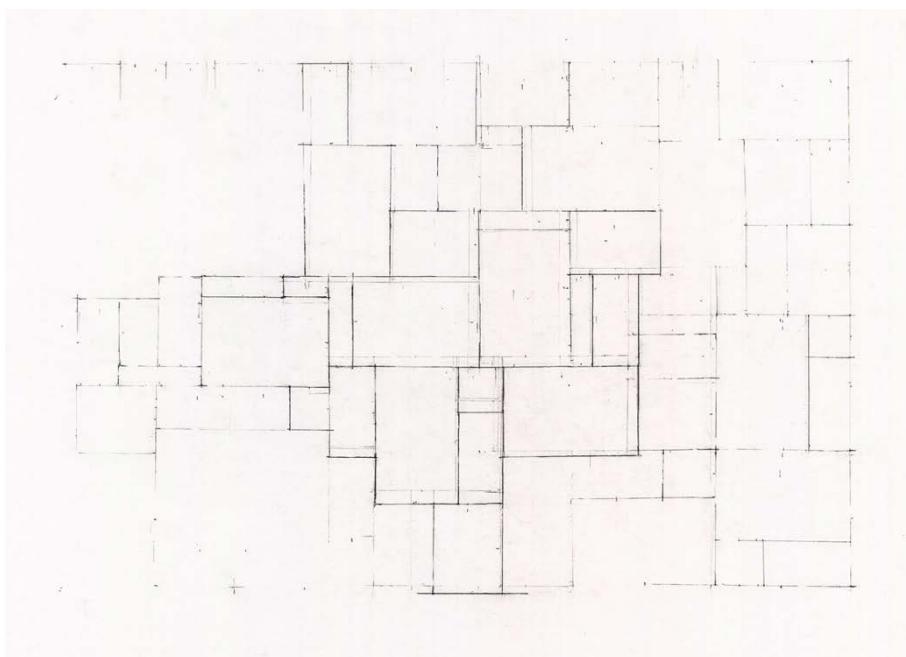


Figure 4.25

Flinders St (West), 2020

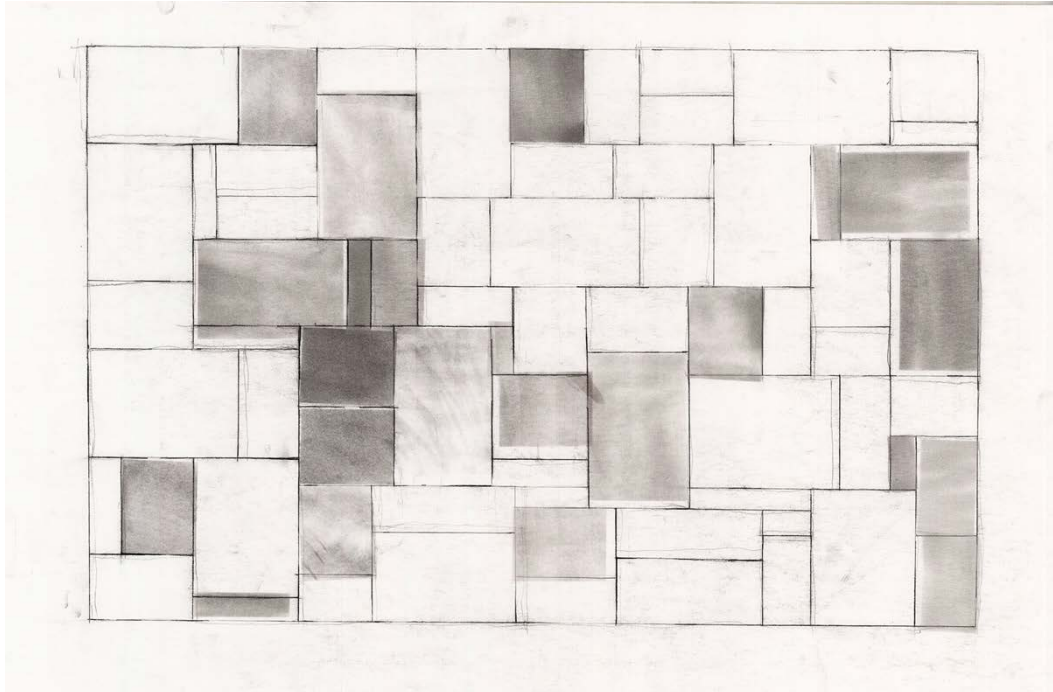


The works show that space can be defined by abstract figurative depiction, albeit not from the original source, rather a representation of the source. A key finding from these is that space can be visualised more in line with a plan or representation of space rather than directly from urban reality. The energy of the drawings is not from a regular spatial convention such as linear perspective. Rather, it develops from varying weights of line, contrast of line and boundaries or divisions. Maurice de Saumarez (1964) suggests spatial forces are operative as soon as any mark is seen, and suggests several spatial forces which can become more apparent as we experience elements within the picture plane.

These drawings contain the element of repetition as recalled from the urban setting, however, whilst the paintings display repetitive blocks, the drawings contain a line representing a block. The use of a template for shaded areas in the work *Line Drawing #9 (Flinders St)* as shown in Figure 4.26 was not considered during the original composition stage. Rather, the shaded areas were discovered during the execution stage and signal an alternate visualisation method combining lines with blocks of monochromatic tone. As this was an intuitive intervention to the lines, finding a balance to the spatial configuration of the composition became the focus. As the drawing progressed it revealed areas of their own identity, a type of formal contradiction to the measured marks.

Figure 4.26

Line Drawing Study #9 (Flinders St), 2020



Line drawing Study #9 (Flinders St) is another example of serendipitous discovery, there was no plan in the pre-composition and composition stages that the work would evolve into a line and block drawing. Only while recalling observations and perceptions from fieldwork, and the disparate spatial nature of Townsville's city did the work evolve from testing ideas during the execution stage.

4.3.2.3 LINE AND BLOCK DRAWINGS

Charcoal drawings *Stanley St #1922*, *Stanley St #1931* and *Stanley St #1932* (see Figures 4.27, 4.28 and 4.29) are essentially figurative works. Ideas during the pre-composition stage centred on creating minimalist abstract work reflecting the social isolation experienced at times during fieldwork. Another idea was to work directly from an object in the studio, that is, a photographic representation of observation. These drawings have been reduced in the studio with a framing

device during the composition stage, which was another method of gaining reduction to discover the essential nature of perceived space. Reduction can be achieved in a number of ways. However, the method I employed with these drawings is to remove the observations from their original context. Some of the early works of American artist Ellsworth Kelly were inspired by objects found in the real world, with specific lines or forms of interest lifted from their original surroundings, thereby decontextualising them into abstract shapes. As he eliminates the traits of what the object is, he removes context and places the composition in an unconventional place (Paik, 2015).

Figure 4.27

Stanley St #1922, 2019

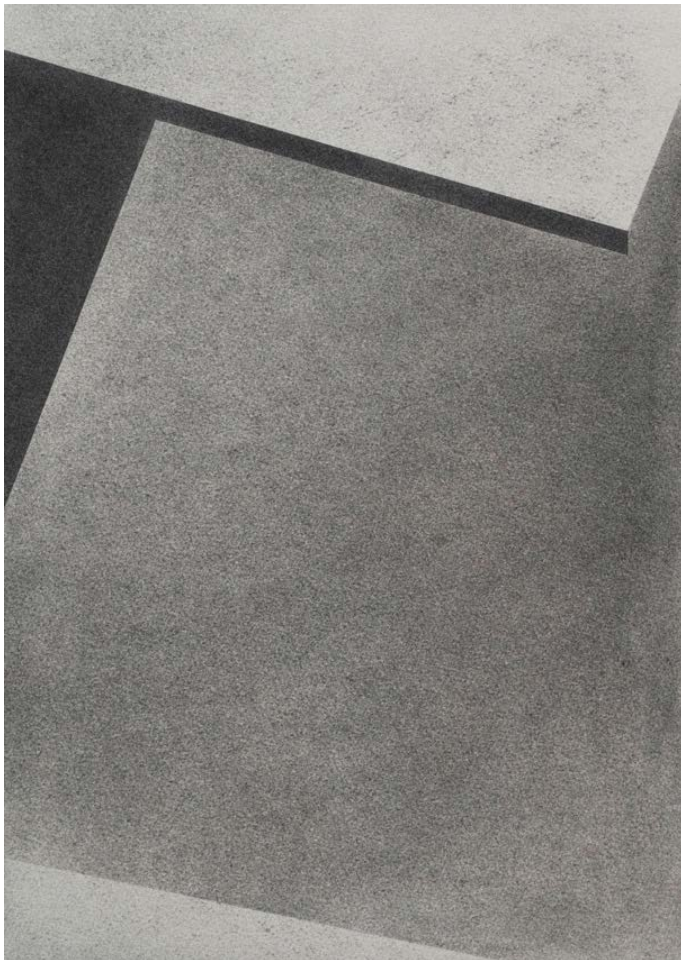


Figure 4.28

Stanley St #1931, 2019

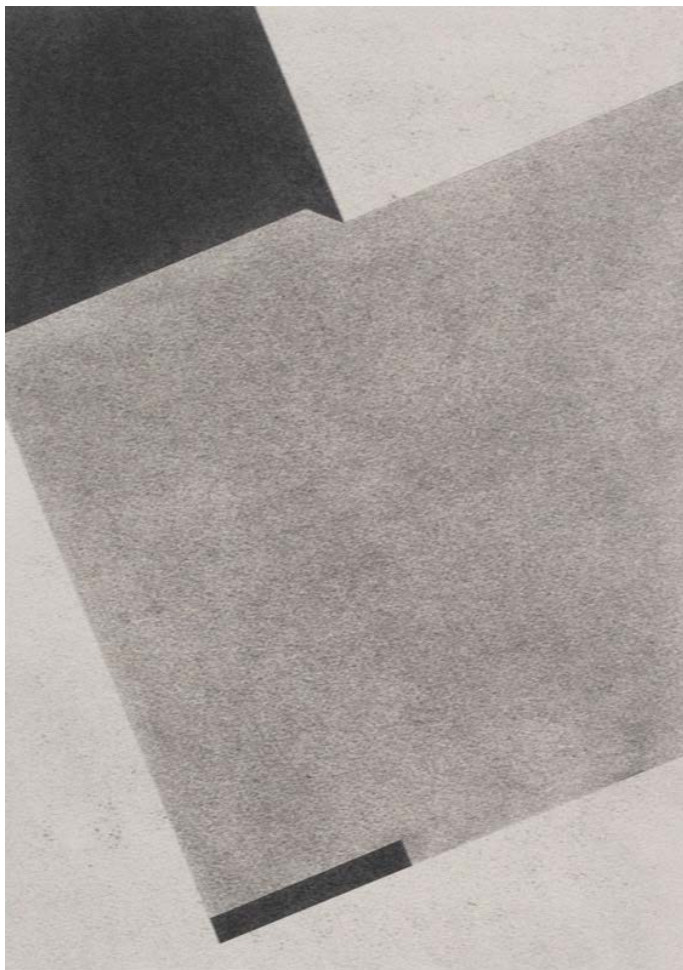
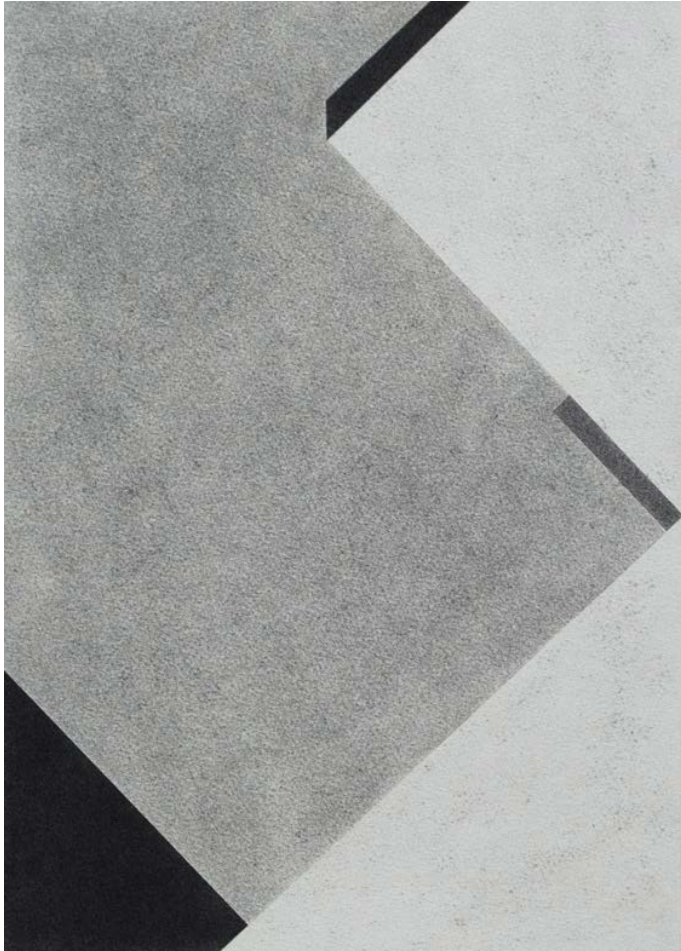


Figure 4.29*Stanley St #1932, 2019*

This method involved flattening the observation by use of a photograph followed by reducing the two-dimensional plane further with a framing device such as a paper template with a cut-out window acting as a frame, excluding unnecessary information outside the boundary. Continuous investigation in this way can lead to compositions representative of the original experience. In the case of these works, the composition has visualised space almost entirely via tonal relationships, devoid of superfluous marks or movement in the picture plane, similar to large expanses of concrete rendered walls visible along Stanley St. These works extend investigations beyond the limitation of vertical and horizontal, a deliberate change derived from a finding during

the composition stage, where the template is moved over the object into any position.

Consequently, any observed vertical line can be altered to a dynamic diagonal. This finding is a studio-based application of framing a representation of the urban landscape, followed by removing the observation inside the frame.

Working through challenges is part of studio practice, and there have been a number during investigations. One example was working with different media on studies that are not generating visual interest. Unsuccessful processes appeared to be those which were less formalised or hard-edged in execution and involved mixed media. A number of drawings were completed in this method, and though these works were self-critiqued as failures and not workable into a resolved composition, they were retained for reference as they may lead to ideas in future.

CHAPTER FIVE – EXHIBITION, REFLECTION AND CONCLUSION

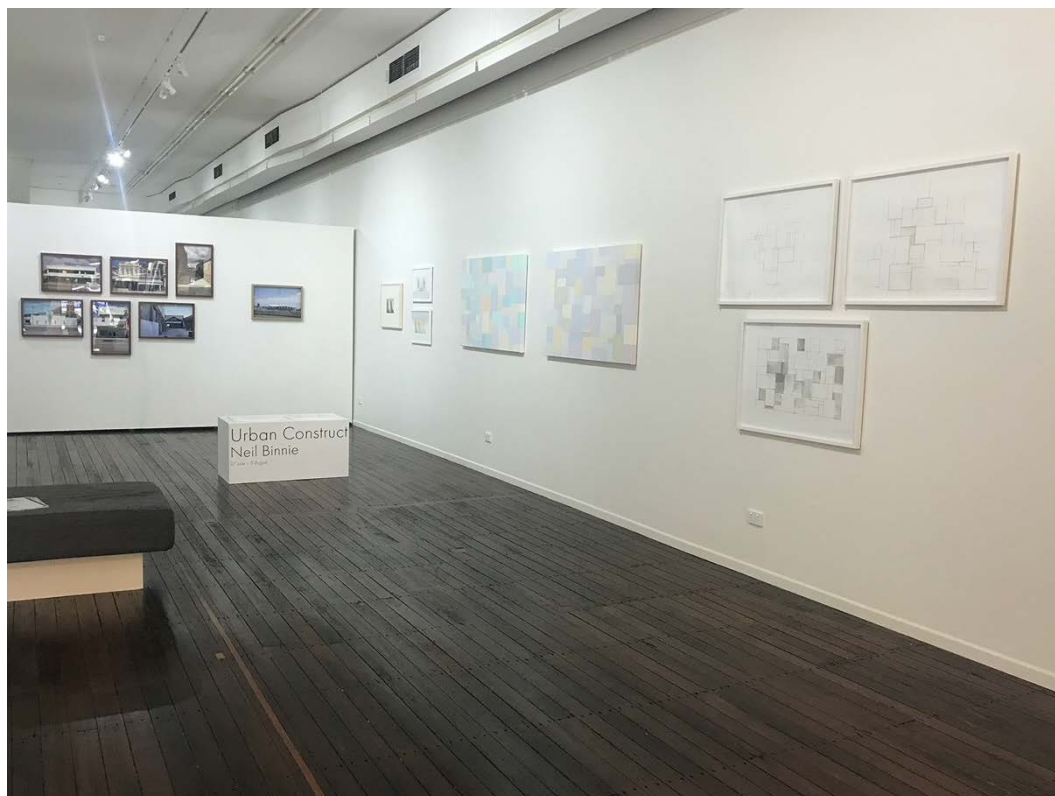
The exhibition outcome achieved through this research was accomplished via a systematic research process. The exhibition placed the works in public, displaying a translation of space conceived to be a reflection on and subsequent visualising of space as perceived and experienced, rather than a likeness of the urban landscape. Having gathered material from fieldwork and followed processes synthesising alternative types of material in the studio, a series of artworks had been resolved and were ready to be displayed. This chapter discusses the exhibition and feedback, reflections on the research questions and aims, and concludes with discussion of practice developments.

5.1 URBAN CONSTRUCT

The exhibition was originally scheduled for April 2020 however, as the Covid-19 situation evolved during March of 2020 the gallery temporarily closed. During this time options for how an online exhibition might be arranged and implemented if required were discussed with gallery staff. As restrictions on the community eased, confirmation the exhibition would go ahead in the gallery was received and subsequently, the exhibition *Urban Construct* opened at Umbrella Studio Contemporary Arts, Townsville in late June 2020 (see Figure 5.1). A number of meetings were held with the Gallery Director and the Gallery and Media Coordinator leading up to the exhibition. Discussions included finalising details such as invitation content, catalogue design and the types of work being completed to gain an understanding of how the installation would be designed.

Figure 5.1

Urban Construct exhibition installation view, 2020



Part of having the work prepared for exhibition was having it critically reviewed and curated. There were two key reasons for this. Firstly, to verify the quality of the work is of an acceptable standard for gallery presentation. Secondly, to determine if the work is an accurate reflection of artistic intention. A critique was an opportunity to explain the work to an experienced and knowledgeable viewer before it was displayed in public. In these critique sessions I was able to raise questions with experienced artists about the work and receive feedback as they put forward their thoughts about particular pieces. For this exhibition I arranged a number of studio visits and critique by Dr Bob Preston during 2019 and 2020, one visit of which was also attended by Ron McBurnie in 2019. Both have many years of experience as artists and tertiary educators and as such are well qualified for critiquing this type of work.

Discussion included suggestions and feedback on practical matters such as how to achieve a particular result I was looking for, such as the flat and even surface of the paintings. Exploring ideas as a series such as the three Stanley St drawings (shown in Chapter Four as Figures 4.27, 4.28 and 4.29) was influenced from Dr Preston's feedback, as was the compositional elements of the line drawings and paintings; specifically, structure with the drawings and evenness with the paintings. Critique and discussion of pictorial arrangement was important as this area of practice was continuously developing. Additionally, the Gallery Director visited the studio to view works in person which presented another opportunity to hold conversations about my processes and the work before being framed. A consequence of this discussion was additional works were uncovered, and conversations resulted in some drawing studies selected for exhibition that otherwise might not have been. Overall, curatorial aspects and selection of works was achieved in collaboration with the Gallery Director and the Gallery and Media Coordinator.

The exhibition layout made reference to methods of my practice. Works were hung in small groups with each in a geometric formation (see Figure 5.2). The photographs were positioned as a group on a wall opposite the gallery entry. On the wall to the right of the photographs were the colour studies and a related charcoal drawing. Further to the right the paintings were placed and to the right of the paintings were the line drawings, strengthening their connection to the paintings. On the left side wall opposite the line drawings, unframed drawing studies were placed in close arrangement and immediately to their right were the Ogden St drawings followed by the remaining charcoal drawings (see Figure 5.3). Overall, the design and layout complimented the geometric nature of the work.

Figure 5.2

Urban Construct exhibition installation view, 2020

**Figure 5.3**

Urban Construct exhibition installation view, 2020



5.1.1 RESPONSE TO THE WORK

The exhibition presented an opportunity to talk to viewers about the work, testing my ideas on space and the city in public, and feedback from attendees at the launch event was positive. A number of conversations were engaged in with attendees showing genuine interest in the work. Conversations about the paintings and drawings revealed most viewers had an understanding of the concepts however, most of the interest appeared to be in the photographs. Many attendees spoke about the photographs, and how they provided a representation of Townville's city at this time. Some were long-time residents of Townsville and had remarkable historical knowledge about the buildings in the photographs, such as detailed knowledge of previous ownership and use from as far back as the 1980s. People also shared opinions regarding the new Stadium, their perceptions of the condition of the city and how it came to be in its current position aesthetically, providing evidence of viewers engaging with the work.

Approximately two weeks after the opening an artist talk was held at the gallery in conjunction with another exhibiting artist. The format was similar to a floor talk where attendees walked around the exhibition as I provided insights into practice and how the works came to be from experience in the city. Comments from the gallery visitors book included suggesting that the artworks were an elegant and effective analysis of space, while another posed a question that the works challenge what urban means. In another response to the works, Dr Bob Preston wrote an essay for the catalogue (see Appendix C), discussing my work in the context of ideas from preceding artists and literature. Preston draws attention to a number of points about the work such as the abstract and hard-edge nature, the methodology of gathering source material from the urban via examination of details and the isolation of specific elements (Preston, 2020).

5.2 REFLECTION ON THE AIMS OF RESEARCH

Along with two primary outcomes of an exhibition in a public gallery and a written exegesis, five aims were set at the beginning of research. The first aim was to gain an understanding of spatial theory related to the urban setting. Through a literature review, knowledge was gained not just concerning space, but also perception, phenomenology and lived experience. Each had a role in fieldwork and the studio through direct engagement with objects and materials, or memory and reflection post-experience. It is reasonable to suggest that achieving this understanding had a positive impact on creative processes, though new theoretical and philosophical knowledge had the most impact via the concept of reading space during city travels.

Developing a methodology suitable for practice-based research was the second aim. This aim was achieved by initially implementing a conceptual framework to underpin the study. Placing a division in research between fieldwork and studio practice established clarity for separate sections of practice; one for gathering the visual information from personal engagement, and another for investigating that information in the studio. Methodology articulated the design, scope and location for research. An advantageous feature of this methodology was that if, for some reason, ideas stalled in the studio, the city could be revisited to gain supplementary visual and experiential material as required. Continuously transitioning from reading space as an observer-participant to visualising space as artist became an oscillating activity interrupted only when extended periods were spent in the studio as the exhibition drew closer.

The third aim was to explore creative processes for visualising space as lived experience through studio practice. This aim involved grappling with how to deal with observations and experience from fieldwork in the studio and adopting processes which are investigative though not always rewarding. Successful processes included photography, collage, drawing and painting. These were investigated, tested and developed in various forms, including where one type of process informs another to achieve the desired result, such as employing collage in the composition stage

with a view to execute a painting, which was then employed as object to execute a drawing. Artistic conventions explored among the processes included spatial interaction of colour, tone, line and form within the picture plane. Space has been visualised via memory of physical properties, reflection on lived experience, referring to representations of space created from lived experience and in an abstract style from reductive steps as revealed during studio investigations.

The fourth aim was to exhibit selected works in a public gallery space. Effective planning, communication and collaborating with gallery staff and resolving sufficient work in a timely manner all contributed to achieving this aim. Finally, the fifth aim was to reflect on what the artist as researcher has developed in relation to understanding theory and practice relationships. By investigating their interdependency, I was able to achieve this aim and better understand how theory is positioned in practice.

5.3 REFLECTION ON THE RESEARCH QUESTION

Research sought to investigate in what ways space, as lived experience in Townsville, could be visualised. The research question has been addressed by visualising space in terms of both a theoretical and a practice-based nature. Findings during fieldwork were consistent with reading space in the city of Townsville, not only discovering abstract forms to visualise an abstract concept, but also translating the perception of space through light and the geometric nature of the urban. The space as lived experience concept compelled me to look at visualising space from a theory with origins in the urban context and seminal revelations regarding social space.

From a practice perspective, research moved into the investigative laboratory of the studio to synthesise findings and follow processes which delivered discoveries consistent with visualising space. Figurative, linear perspective in photographic prints clearly depicting foreground-background relationships were found to be one way to visualise space via realistic likeness of observations through digital capture of accurate light, shade and colour. Though a valid method of enquiry, the

photographs were more than an elementary depiction; when printed they also acted as an object available for deconstruction when looking for visual combinations of line and form. As these combinations were discovered, they provided another visualisation through differentiation of shape, colour and tone arranged in a composition representative of space as experienced. Other compositions found of a similar nature were monochromatic arrangements of positive and negative space representing the muted nature of many city journeys. While some of the methods derived from direct observations, others were indirectly influenced via reductive steps. In terms of exhibited artwork, these conclusions have been drawn from a combination of personal and professional artist critique, curatorial conversations and public feedback.

5.4 REFLECTION ON KEY DEVELOPMENTS

5.4.1 THEORY VERSUS PRACTICE

During the initial stages of research, it was apparent that a concept of visualising space could become remarkably convoluted without some degree of containment. There is a large volume of complex literature about space. This literature multiplies when explored as a practice-based method with multiple conventions of spatial forces to consider in the picture plane. Although the conceptual framework helped to focus on Lefebvre's (1991) spatial theory and existing practice kept visualisation within the parameters of two-dimensional work, there were still challenges in getting theory to unite with the creative. Connecting spatial theory to a practice of visualising space has been a continuous case of discovery. Understanding Lefebvre's spatial triad provided a solid starting point to thinking in spatial terms however, it was important not to allow the at times convoluted writings to dominate thought processes in the studio; these needed to consider artistic intent rather than simply reflect a theory. As an artist and researcher, it would be unrealistic to conclude that Lefebvre's theory on space can be visualised in concrete or absolute terms. This research does

however, demonstrate that with a defined scope, location and time frame, it is possible to visualise space and therefore connect creative practice with theoretical thought.

At times, theory can be the antithesis of creative practice, an opposing voice of dry intellect to the rich and tangible practice of making art (Carter, 1993). While this was occasionally the case in the studio, there are theories which integrate positively into practice because they are concerned with the structural elements contained within the picture plane. On reflection, Lefebvre's (1991) spatial triad of perceived, conceived and lived space permits a structure for organising spatial theory, which subsequently compliments my approach to practice; structured and (for the most part) theory-based. Though the theory-practice relationship was complementary in this way, it also caused overthinking at times with persistent questioning as to whether artistic intention was adequately captured, hence the importance of conversations and critique with experienced artists. For example, reading space as part of fieldwork is derived from theory though also a pivotal connection to practice. As fieldwork continued and studio work progressed, an awareness of thinking spatially evolved to have an increased significance which impacted practice. Through the regular testing of ideas in the studio, awareness of a spatially evolving picture plane became acute.

5.5 CONCLUSION

This research and series of artworks represent a new contribution to knowledge and a record which visualises space in Townsville's CBD. Outcomes have been realised through understanding space from a theoretical and conceptual position and then applied to a geographically isolated regional city. Research has a replicable model for investigation of spatial theory and the urban landscape and can be applied to other urban sites of any given location or population size. It has potential to be applied to larger cities, small rural centres or selected groups of regional cities. For example, a researcher might extend into rural sites, potentially connecting

urban intervention and spatiality with issues such as drought, conservation and environment.

Alternatively, research might combine coastal regional cities of a given area.

Researching the visualising of space meant undertaking many journeys through the urban landscape as space evolved in the city. Each journey became a building block of experience, exploring connections between the journey, the information space provides and studio practice. Walking the city regularly has increased awareness of object and perception. That is, understanding the urban ensemble in space, and lived experience as pedestrian within the same space. Having feet on the ground in the field and tactile processes in the studio proved to be the impetus for discovering a visualisation of space.

This study has developed and consolidated my research and practice knowledge however, there remains alternative areas of investigation which could supplement the principles of the research design model. I am interested in further research into the built environment of significantly less populated rural and remote towns of north west Queensland, stepping into a more geographically isolated landscape than the regional city. Continuing the theory, fieldwork and studio practice cycle as model for artwork production in new directions of practice-based research will allow closer exploration of the at times opposing, though also complimentary relationships between theory and practice, while working towards holding exhibitions of contemporary non-figurative artwork in the future.

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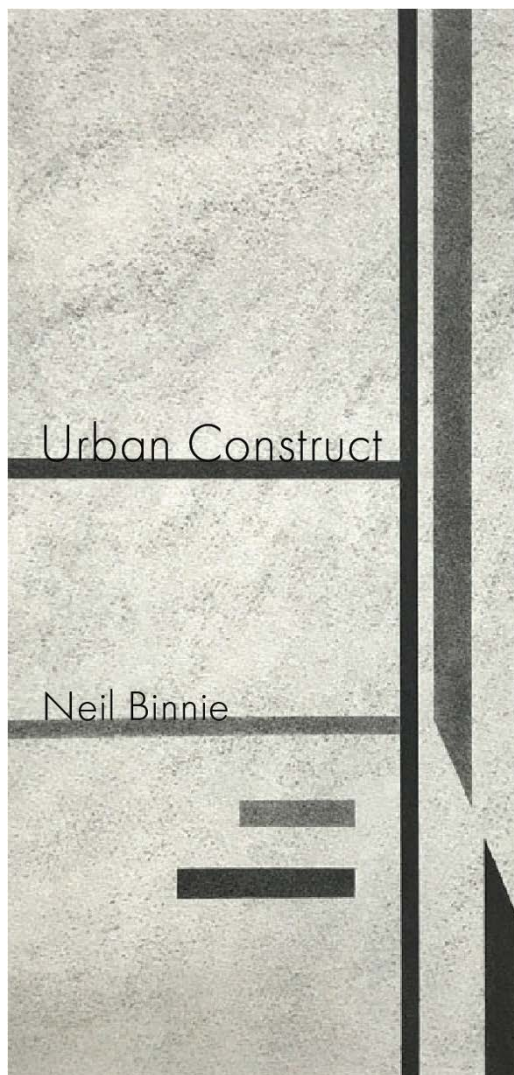
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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A – EXHIBITION PUBLICATIONS

Exhibition Invitation



You are invited to:

Urban Construct Neil Binnie

EXHIBITION: * 27 June - 9 August 2020
LAUNCH: ** 6pm Friday 10 July 2020

Urban Construct is an investigation into visualising space as lived experience within Townsville's evolving urban landscape. Traversing the city as a pedestrian allows for a sensory and spatial experience. It encourages listening to the sounds of human activity, observing colour and perceiving changes of light and shade on built geometric objects over time. In parallel to developing ways to visualise this space, this exhibition explores spatial theory in varying contexts of urban reality, conceptual representations and lived experience.

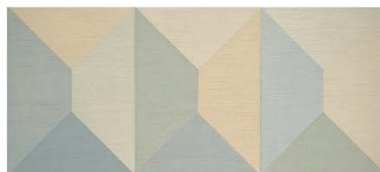


Fig. 2. Neil Binnie, *Colour Study (Flinders St East #2)* (detail), 2020, Oil on paper, collage, 14 x 31.5cm.

* Until 9 July - 20 people limit in the gallery at a time.
 ** From 10 July - 100 people limit in the gallery at a time

While Umbrella has been able to reopen, the gallery, staff and visitors must comply with Qld Government regulations pertaining to the coronavirus. See our dedicated webpage for updates and our COVID-Safe plan:
www.umbrella.org.au/covid-19

Fig. 1. (front): Neil Binnie, *Ogden Street #1911* (detail), 2019, Charcoal on paper, 35 x 25cm

Umbrella Studio Contemporary Arts

408 Flinders St, Townsville | 4772 7109 | www.umbrella.org.au
 Open Monday - Friday 9am-5pm | Saturday - Sunday 9am-1pm

Umbrella Studio is supported by the Queensland Government through Arts Queensland & the Visual Arts and Craft Strategy, an initiative of the Australian, state and territory governments.




Link to Exhibition Catalogue

https://umbrella.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Urban-Construct_Exhibition-Catalogue_spreads.pdf

APPENDIX B – EXHIBITION NEWS ARTICLE

06 NEWS FRIDAY JULY 17 2020 TOWNSVILLEBULLETIN.COM.AU



FRESH LOOK: Artist Neil Binnie with part of his exhibition Urban Construct at Umbrella Studio. Picture: EVAN MORGAN

Artist makes CBD the star

KEAGAN ELDER

THE city's contrast of new buildings mixed with derelict and abandoned ones has inspired a local artist.

Neil Binnie pounded the walkways around the city throughout 2019 and at the start of this year, capturing Townsville's buildings, using photos, drawings and paintings.

Some people find the derelict buildings in the CBD an eyesore, so much so that Townsville City Council endorsed a new local law in which landlords could face fines of up to \$26,000 for failing to clean up their dilapidated buildings.

But to Binnie the city's urban landscape is fascinating.

"I enjoy it, because it's geometric," he said. "I work in an abstract nature, it gives me a lot of options. I use colours and shapes from the buildings."

Binnie captured photos of old and new buildings, including the Queensland Country Bank Stadium.

Focused on the regular lines and shapes of the city's buildings around Flinders, Ogden and Stanley streets, Binnie's work reflects many of the sharp edges of the city.

He said his exhibition Urban Construct, on show at Umbrella Studio, was an investigation into visualising space as a lived experience.

The exhibition opening last Friday was the first launch at the gallery since the COVID-19 pandemic.

Gallery business manager Alan Marlowe said the launch was booked out.

APPENDIX C – EXHIBITION CATALOGUE ESSAY

Note: The following essay text is reproduced here as found in the exhibition catalogue. Footnotes referring to figures have been adapted to reflect the title of the work for easier reference. Images of the works can be seen in Appendix D – List of Exhibited Works.

Even to the casual observer Neil Binnie’s work could easily be categorised as both *abstract* and *hard edge*. Before venturing further, it would be helpful to consider briefly what is meant by both ‘abstraction’ in the visual arts canon and where the term ‘hard edge’ originated.

The terms *abstract* and *abstraction* possess a variety of interpretations within different disciplines, which can in itself be a cause of considerable confusion. However, at a basic level abstraction means to remove one thing from another - An activity which happens to be a crucial element in Binnie’s practice. In an overview of abstract art, the Tate Gallery (n.d.), London, provides the following definition; “art that does not attempt to represent an accurate depiction of a visual reality, but instead uses shapes, colours, forms and gestural marks to achieve its [visual] effect”.¹ The Tate also notes that the term may be applied to art that employs figures, objects or landscape “where forms have either been simplified or schematised”. The term *hard edge* was coined during the 1960s² and referred specifically to a genre of painting generally included under the umbrella of *Post-painterly Abstraction*. Certainly not unique to the 1960s and 70s, this form of abstraction can be traced back to its origins almost a century ago. From that time to the present, abstract art has formed a central stream of modern art³.

¹ Tate Gallery, ‘Abstract Art’, in *Art Terms* n.d., viewed on 30 June 2020, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/a/abstract-art>

² H.H. Arnason, *A History of Modern Art: Painting, Sculpture and Architecture*, (rev.ed.), Thames and Hudson, New York, 1977, p.677.

³ Arnason, pp.678-679.

The basic premise of abstraction is that the formal and / or factual qualities of the work are as, if not more, important than any concerns regarding literal representation or “mimetic perspectival considerations”⁴. The philosophical justifications for appreciating the value of a work of arts’ formal qualities is nothing new and was advanced in antiquity by the Greek philosopher Plato (via Socrates), in his dialogues (Philebus) who asserted that “... straight lines and circles are not only beautiful but eternally and absolutely beautiful”⁵. Plato was simply stating that non-naturalistic images – lines, circles, triangles, squares etc... – are in themselves possessed of an absolute unchanging beauty. In making his assertion Plato had, among other visual forms, architecture firmly in mind.

Having reached this point, it is worthwhile pointing out that the essential components of Binnie’s work have been directly concerned with the creation of non-naturalistic works. In addition, he strives to distil the essence of his mutating source material and through it attempts to seek out something of that absolute unchanging beauty.

Some discussion of Binnie’s methodology and how it relates to his overall practice might prove to be both instructive and illuminating. The artist has already identified in his statement the significance of his perambulations through the city streets, the evolution of the urban landscape and the mutable and transformative nature of the built environment. In tandem with his walks, Binnie has not only created a comprehensive photographic record of sites visited within a bracketed timeframe, but also the changes that have occurred there. Further, the collected material has been used as a primary source for planning and executing the finished works. The collection of this material greatly assisted with the reflective process on his return to the studio. From a phenomenological standpoint, Max van Manen⁶ (2007) maintains that this process is one of “sober

⁴ M Carter, *Framing Art: Introducing Theory and the Visual Image*, Hale and Iremonger, Sydney, 1993.

⁵ A.R. Garcia-Rivera, *The Community of the Beautiful*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, 1999.

⁶ Max van Manen, (1942-) is Professor Emeritus – University of Alberta and has written extensively on phenomenology and pedagogy research, see www.maxvanmanen.com

reflection on the lived experience ... sober, in the sense that reflecting on experience must be thoughtful, and as much as possible, free from theoretical, prejudicial and suppositional intoxications".⁷

Van Manen's observations concerning recollection and reflection mirror Binnie's own approach to both his methods of work and trains of visual thought. Related to this is his close examination and isolation of details of particular visual interest, for example, the fall of light across the façade of a building and the shadows created as it rakes across decorative cornices⁸, pipes, cables and other eccentric projections⁹. The passage of natural light is of course, married to the passage of time and the transient nature of the exact appearance of objects subjected to it.

Important developmental steps in the investigation of such phenomena have been the two-fold activities of collage and drawing. Both undertakings were entirely interdependent, one informing the other in whatever order the work dictated. An important accessory to the collages and a prerequisite to the finished works are Binnie's meticulous colour studies. In some measure these have been dictated by the original source material and in another by the mechanics of creating colour mixtures through the production of matrices. In passing it should be noted that the drawings fall into two categories: the first being finished pieces in their own right and the second drawings made from collage.

Whilst discussing the drawings it is noteworthy that all the source material (i.e. the disparate elements comprising the urban environment) began life themselves as drawings in the form of site plans, architectural sketches, visuals or renderings, and by their very nature were, mathematical, geometric and abstract.

⁷ M. van Manen, 'Phenomenology of Practice' in *Phenomenology & Practice*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2007, pp11-30, viewed on 30 June 2020, <http://www.maxvanmanen.com/files/2014/03/Max-Phenomenology-of-Practice1.pdf>

⁸ See *Colour Study – (Flinders St East #1) 2020* and *Colour Study (Flinders St East #2) 2020*.

⁹ See *Flinders St Façade #1940 2019* and *Flinders St Façade #1941 2019*.

A number of drawings have their origins in the collages and indeed have been carefully transcribed from them in the form of measured drawings¹⁰. It is through these that Binnie has investigated compositional structure without the distraction of colour. The drawings together with the accompanying collages and paintings¹¹ represent a further development in his work.

According to the artist's own account, the idea for these works first originated whilst visiting the site of a demolished building in the remains of which were floors of jumbled tiles. Carrying the observation forward towards the paintings he arrived at a compositional arrangement in which the length and breadth of the paintings determined the proportions of the tile-like elements within them. A number of these small rectangular units remain unchanged whereas others have been further divided by proportional subdivisions. The high key of the work and the close-tone colouration also represents a more recent development in Binnie's practice.

He has explained that his palette was prompted in the first instance by the narrow range of local colour on the façades of the buildings in Flinders St and in the second, the bleaching and flattening effect on them produced by the intensity of summer sunlight. The fabrication of the painted surface demanded a careful application and juxtaposition of colour to produce the small chromatic and tonal shifts whilst maintaining the notion of the flatness of the painted surface in keeping with its source.

In conclusion, a quote from Henri Lefebvre¹² concerning the urban environment would seem most appropriate. The urban environment, he states, is:

¹⁰ See *Flinders St (East) 2020* and *Flinders St (West) 2020*.

¹¹ See *Summer Morning Flinders St (East) 2020* and *Summer Morning Flinders St (West) 2020*

¹² Henri Lefebvre (1901-1991) was a French philosopher, sociologist and author. Key texts (with English translation) include *The Critique of Everyday Life*, *The Urban Revolution* and *The Production of Space*, which introduced the concept of the social production of space.

pure form... This form has no specific content, but is a centre of attraction and life. It is an abstraction, but unlike a metaphysical entity, the urban is a concrete abstraction... It is associated with mathematical form ... calculable [and] quantifiable...¹³

Dr Bob Preston, Professional arts educator and practicing artist.

¹³ H. Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution* (R. Bononno, Trans. 2003), University of Minnesota Press, Minnesota, 1970, pp.118-119.

APPENDIX D – LIST OF EXHIBITED WORKS – URBAN CONSTRUCT



Urban Construct Flinders St #1 2019

Archival Inkjet print on Ilford Galerie Smooth Cotton Rag, 310gsm

37 x 56cm



Urban Construct Flinders St #2 2019

Archival Inkjet print on Ilford Galerie Smooth Cotton Rag, 310gsm

37 x 56cm



Urban Construct Flinders St #3 2019

Archival Inkjet print on Ilford Galerie Smooth Cotton Rag, 310gsm

56 x 37cm



Urban Construct Flinders St #5 2019

Archival Inkjet print on Ilford Galerie Smooth Cotton Rag, 310gsm

37 x 56cm



Urban Intervention #2 2019

Archival Inkjet print on Ilford Galerie Smooth Cotton Rag, 310gsm

37 x 56cm



Urban Intervention #3 2019

Archival Inkjet print on Ilford Galerie Smooth Cotton Rag, 310gsm

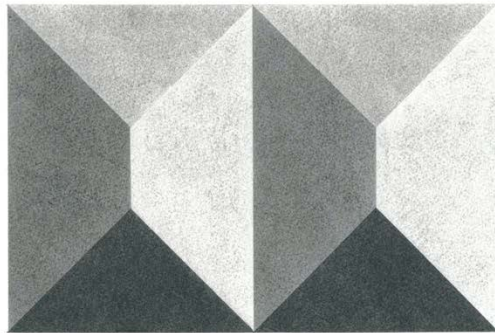
56 x 37cm



Urban Construct Boundary St #1 2019

Archival Inkjet print on Ilford Galerie Smooth Cotton Rag, 310gsm

37 x 56cm



Untitled Study (Flinders St East #1) 2020

Charcoal on paper

16 x 24cm



Colour Study (Flinders St East #1) 2020

Oil on paper, collage

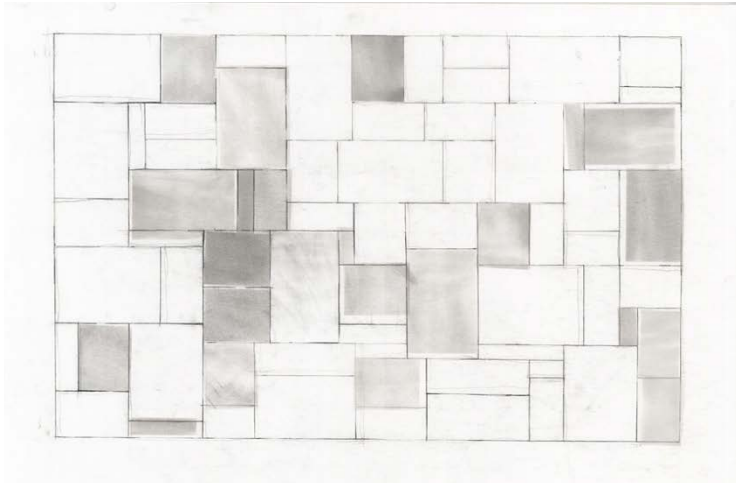
14 x 31.5cm



Colour Study (Flinders St East #2) 2020

Oil on paper, collage

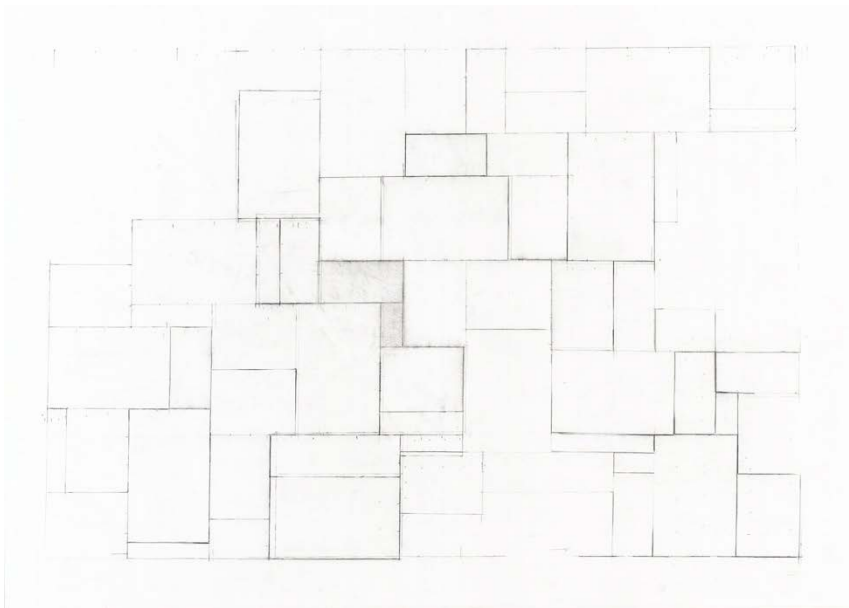
14 x 31.5cm



Line Drawing #9 (Flinders St) 2020

Charcoal on paper

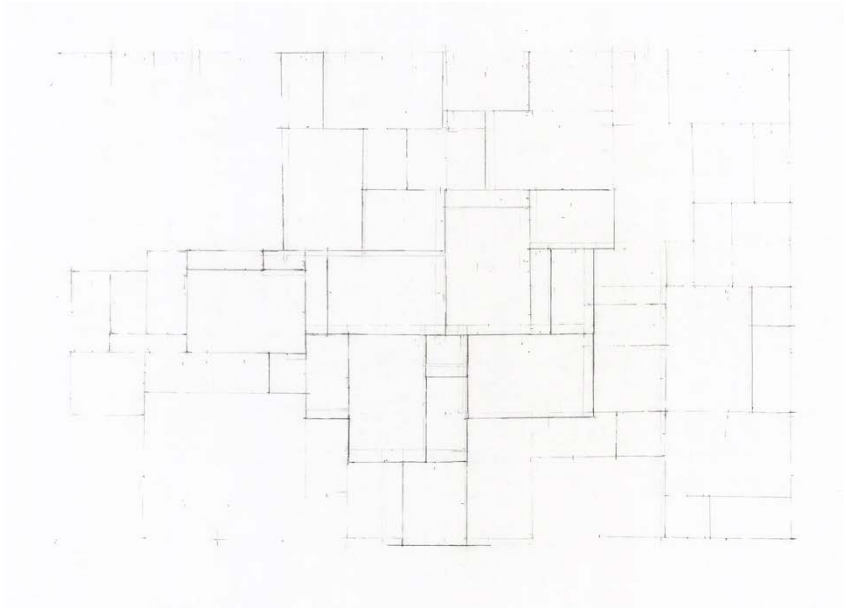
49 x 72.5cm



Flinders St (East) 2020

Charcoal on paper

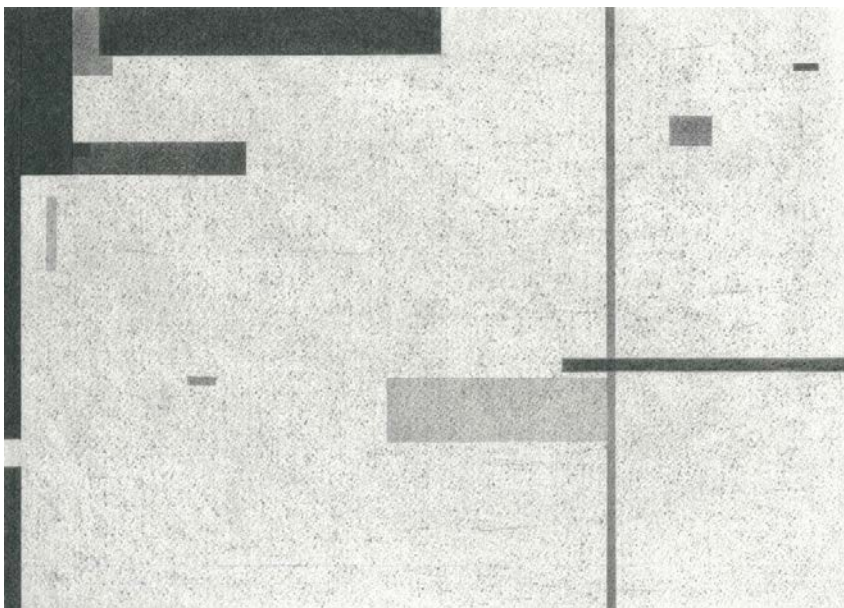
59 x 84cm



Flinders St (West) 2020

Charcoal on paper

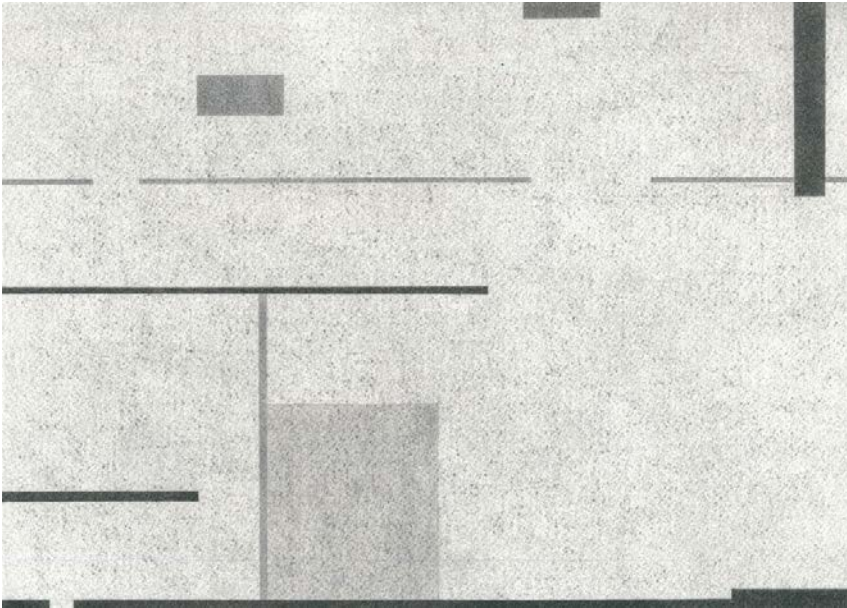
59 x 84cm



Flinders St Façade #1940 2019

Charcoal on paper

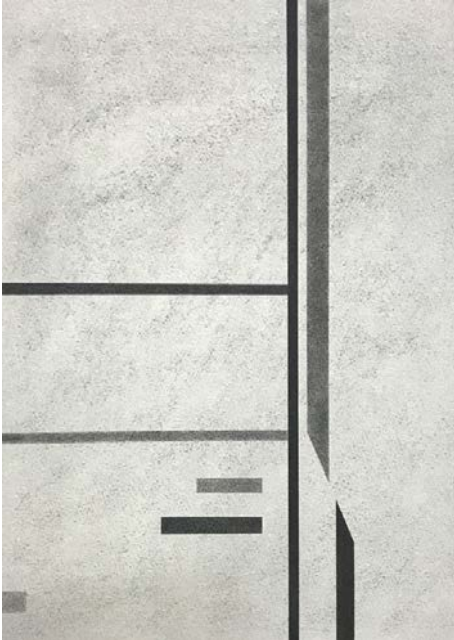
25 x 35cm



Flinders St Façade #1941 2019

Charcoal on paper

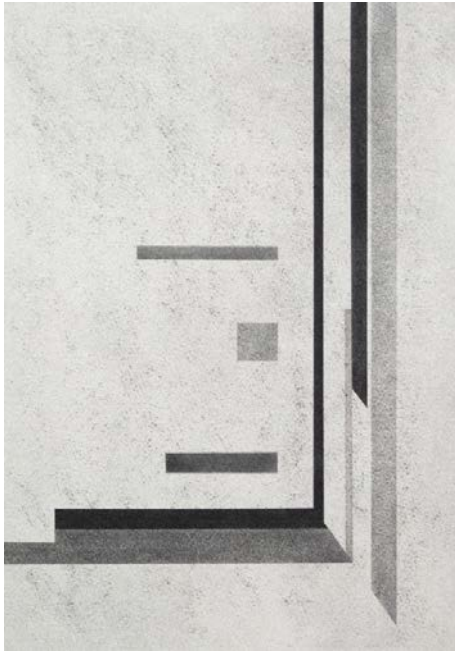
25 x 35cm



Ogden St #1911 2019

Charcoal on paper

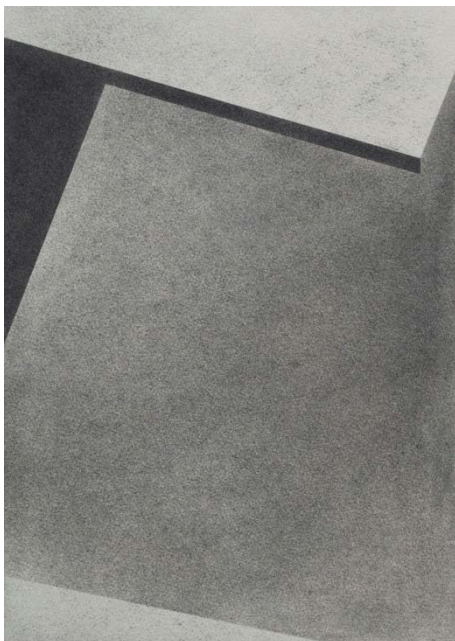
35 x 25cm



Ogden St #1918 2019

Charcoal on paper

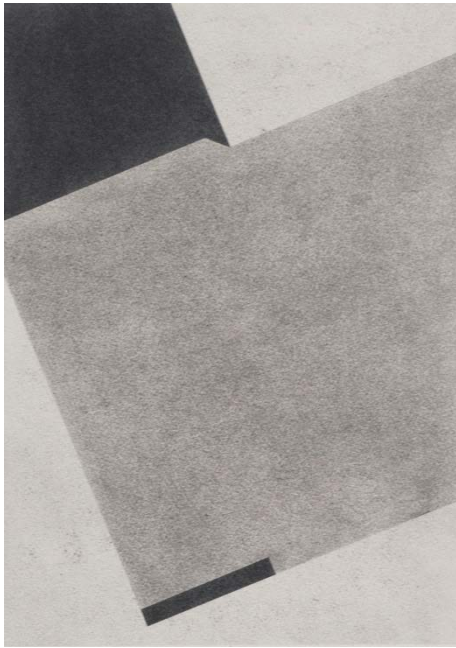
35 x 25cm



Stanley St #1922 2019

Charcoal on paper

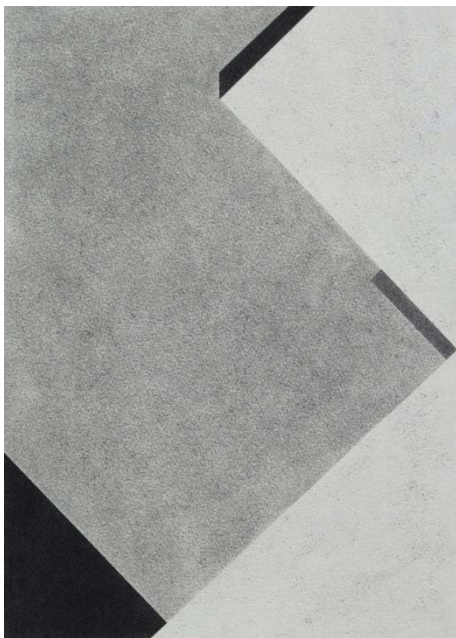
35 x 25cm



Stanley St #1931 2019

Charcoal on paper

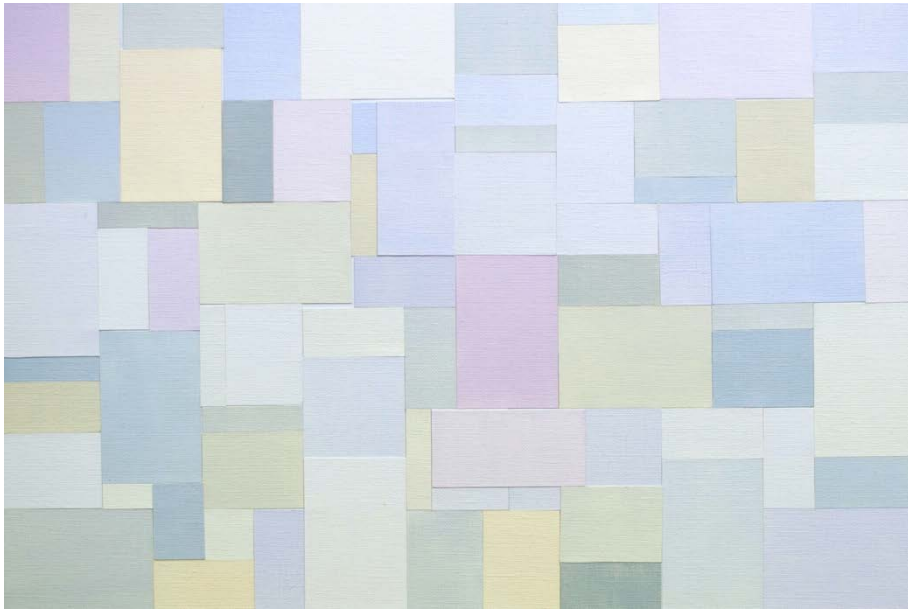
35 x 25cm



Stanley St #1932 2019

Charcoal on paper

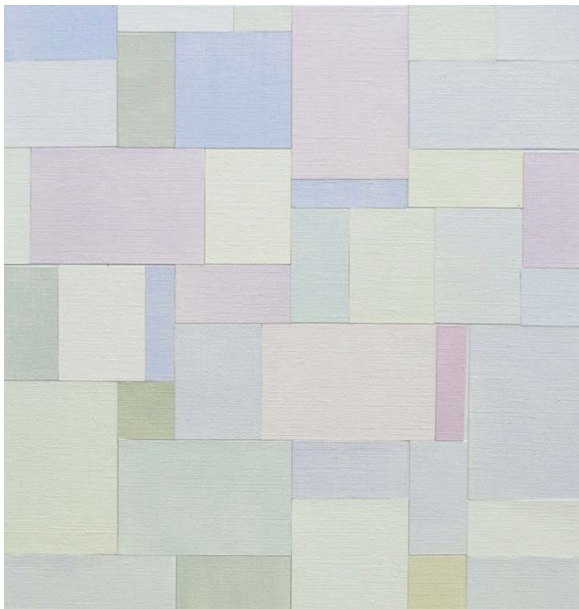
35 x 25cm



Study #4 for Summer Morning Flinders St (East) 2020

Oil on paper, collage

24 x 36cm



Study #7 for Summer Morning Flinders St (East) 2020

Oil on paper, collage

21 x 20cm



Summer Morning, Flinders St (East) 2020

Oil on linen

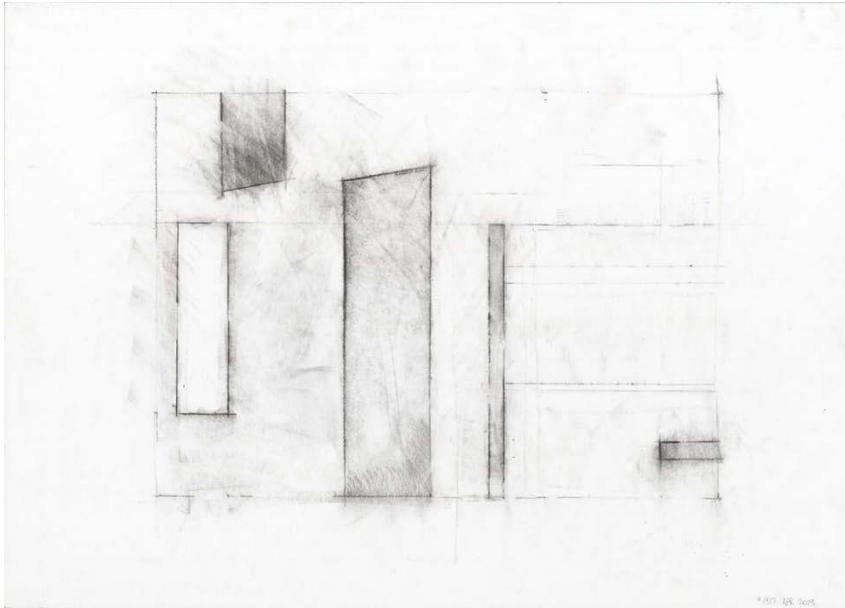
80 x 120cm



Summer Morning, Flinders St (West) 2020

Oil on linen

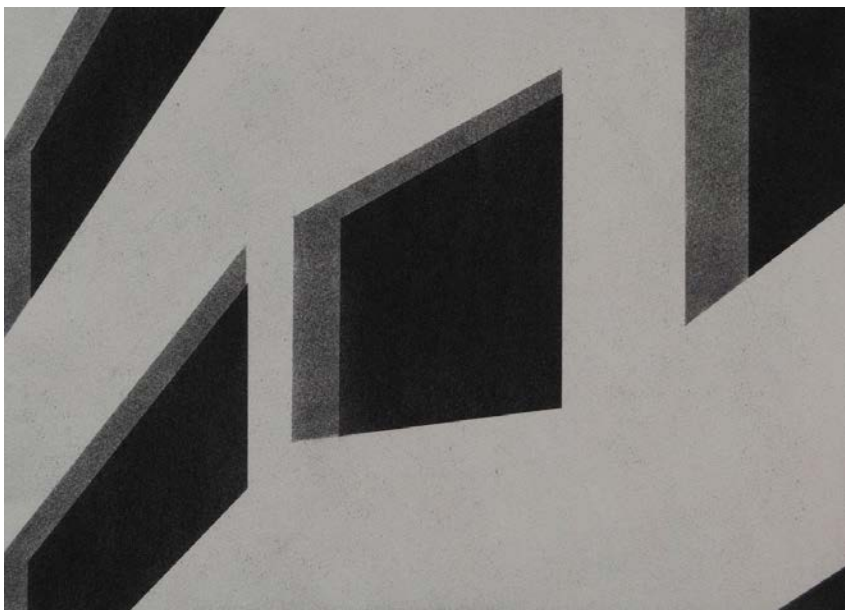
80 x 120cm



Flinders St #1917 2019

Charcoal on paper

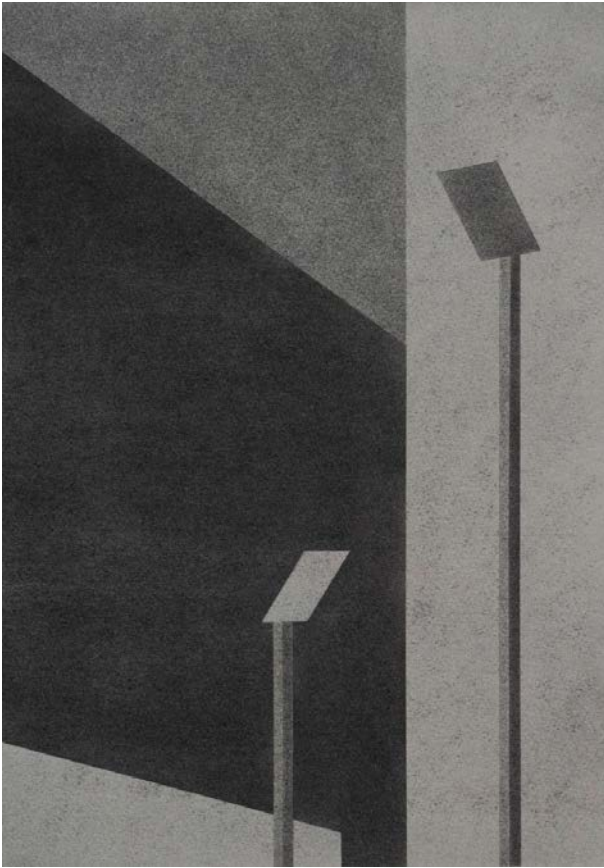
42 x 59cm



Fraley Lane #1927 2019

Charcoal on paper

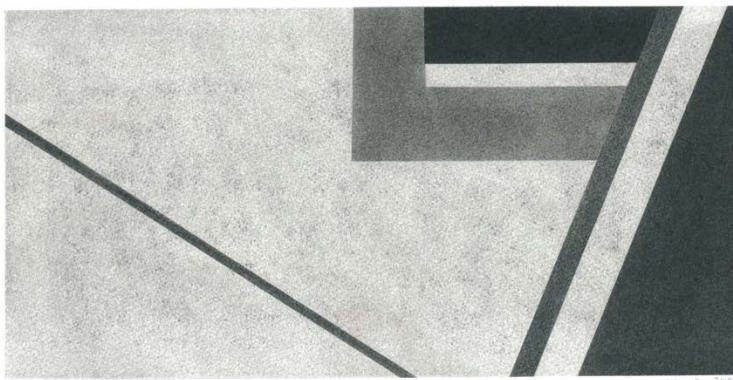
25 x 35cm



Hanran St #1921 2019

Charcoal on paper

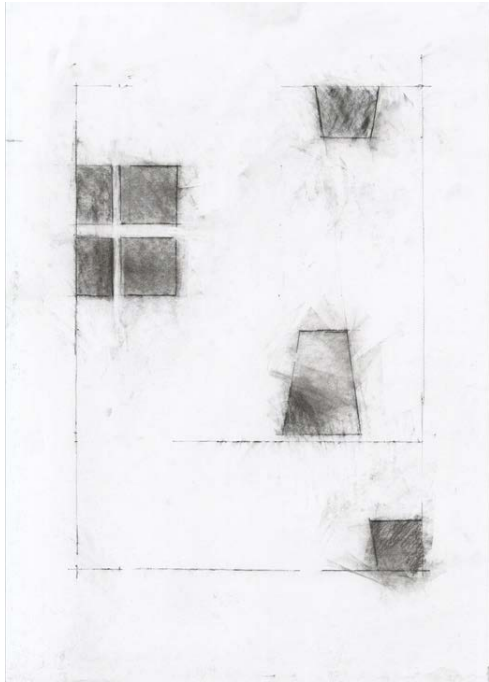
35 x 25cm



Sturt St #1925 2019

Charcoal on paper

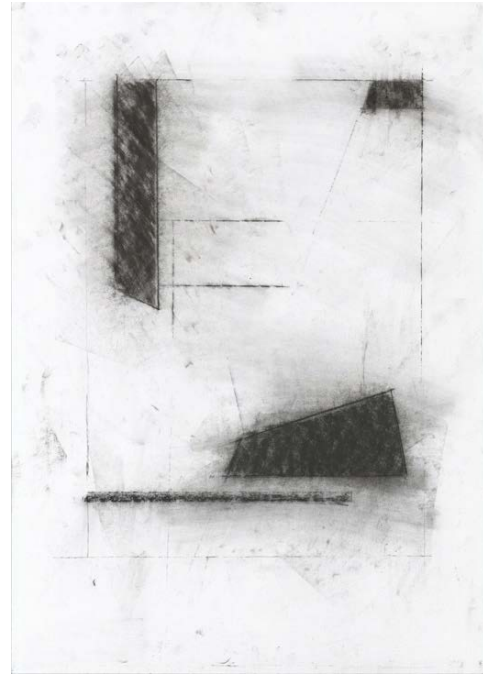
18 x 36cm



Untitled Study (Flinders St #1) 2020

Charcoal on paper

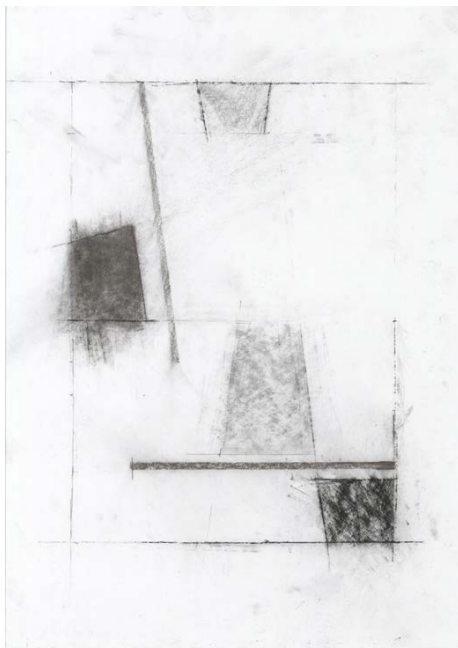
59 x 42cm



Untitled Study (Flinders St #2) 2020

Charcoal on paper

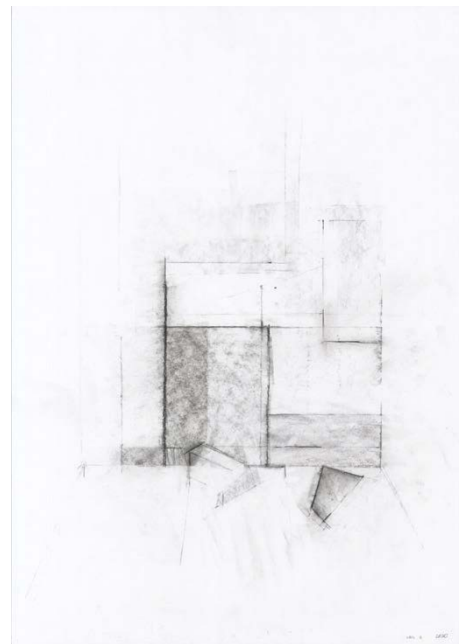
59 x 42cm



Untitled Study (Flinders St #3) 2020

Charcoal on paper

59 x 42cm



Untitled Still Life #3 2020

Charcoal on paper

59 x 42cm