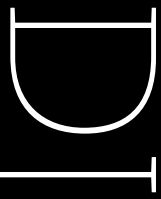

an exhibition by

Alec Shepley

&

John McClenaghen

There are many examples of a romance with the motif of ruin and its repeated melancholic depiction that can be cited in British art.[1] Examples of the depiction of ruins include Richard Wilson (1714-1782) 'Lake Avernus' c. 1765 and John Constable (1776-1837) 'Hadleigh Castle' 1829 to name but two. There are of course many more examples from European art, too numerous to list here, however the underlying theme of abandonment, the incomplete project or work in progress, provisionality or contingency, is analogous to much of contemporary art's pre-occupation with ruin and abandonment and in particular through recurrent motifs of the 'urban situation'.

UK artists Alec Shepley and John McClenaghen were invited to show at the National Academy of Art, Sofia as part of the Academia Gallery's curatorial policy to host exhibitions by established artists who are committed to an engagement with the wider cultural and academic community. The installation comprising assemblages and collages, photographs and drawings, formed a part of a much broader research project in which the two artists are investigating the presentation of the fragmented work and the 'unfinished' project.

Aspects of dilapidation, ruin and entropy are explored and much of the work in this exhibition focused on more positive interpretations of ruin – on a thing that might be coming into being as opposed to being left to decay.

The work resulting from the research project reveals a seemingly endless preoccupation with cutting, placing, re-cutting and re-placing, joining and unjoining, in the collages and assemblages (telescoping between making and un-making) and the eventual 'dis-assembly' or collapse of the outcome.

Developing on from the artwork as ruin, a more optimistic interpretation of an apparent artistic articulation of 'collapse' is examined within the works, reflecting the 'sensuality of the unfinished' and how this situates the project in an unattainable (and yet tantalizing) space[2] – on the threshold[3], delaying closure[4] and marking a shift in the 'fixity' of the relationship between artwork, location and viewer leading to ambiguity and uncertainty.[5] The impression of provisionality and unattainable space and referencing ruin as a verb as well as a noun indicates something in process and in the act of taking place, witnessed in the here and now. Any perceived expectation of engagement with a fixed notion of art or a one-for-one interpretation of the artefact would be fragmented, in a sense, 'ruined' – or at least 'disrupted'. Walter Benjamin drew a parallel between the ruin in the realm of things and the allegory in the realm of thoughts, for both ruin and allegory speak of a disruption in the relationship between form and meaning.[6]

These elements were both pictorial and 'real' and they crossed-over between the first and second frame but they also pointed to a gap or crack in the edifice of artistic convention to be 'prised open' leading to processes of fragmentation, dismantling and ruination.[7]

Futile and paradoxical attempts to 'frame' something that is meant to remain un-framed is at the heart of the project and begs the questions whether the (art) work itself is in a state of ruin – failing in a way to remain intact and opening up potential spaces for renewal.

Shelley Cape

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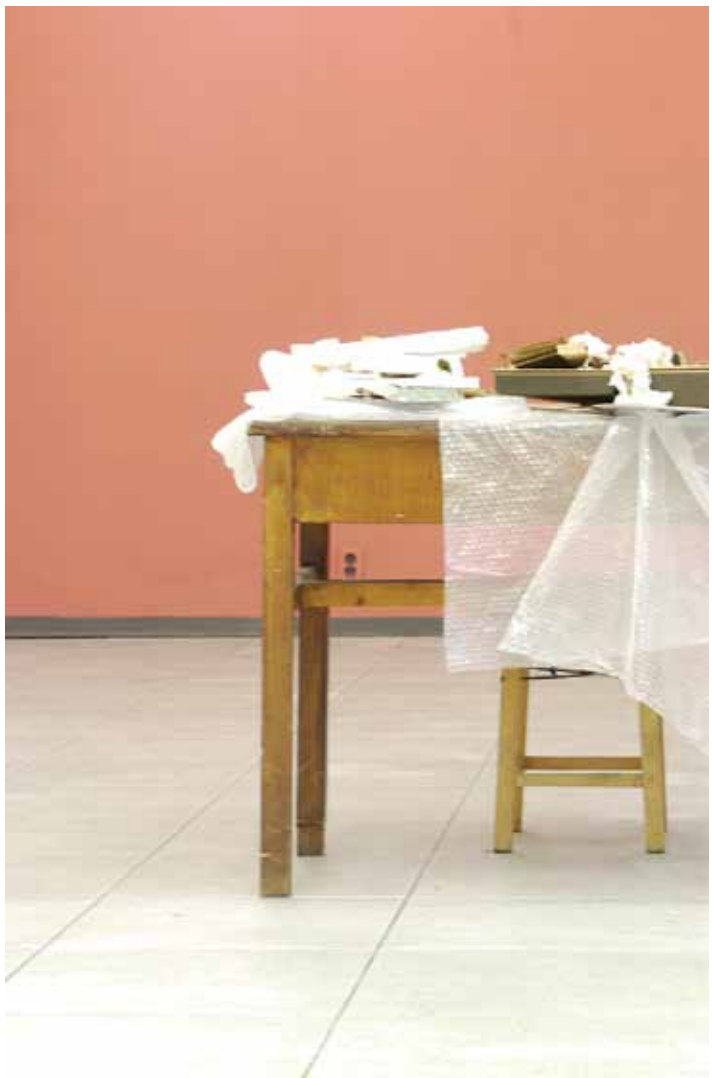
DISTANCE²

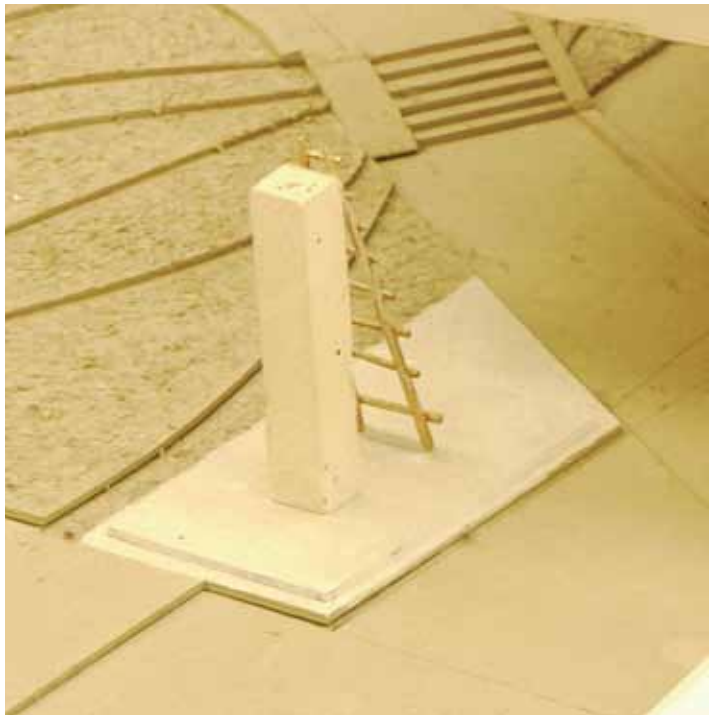
Alec Shepley

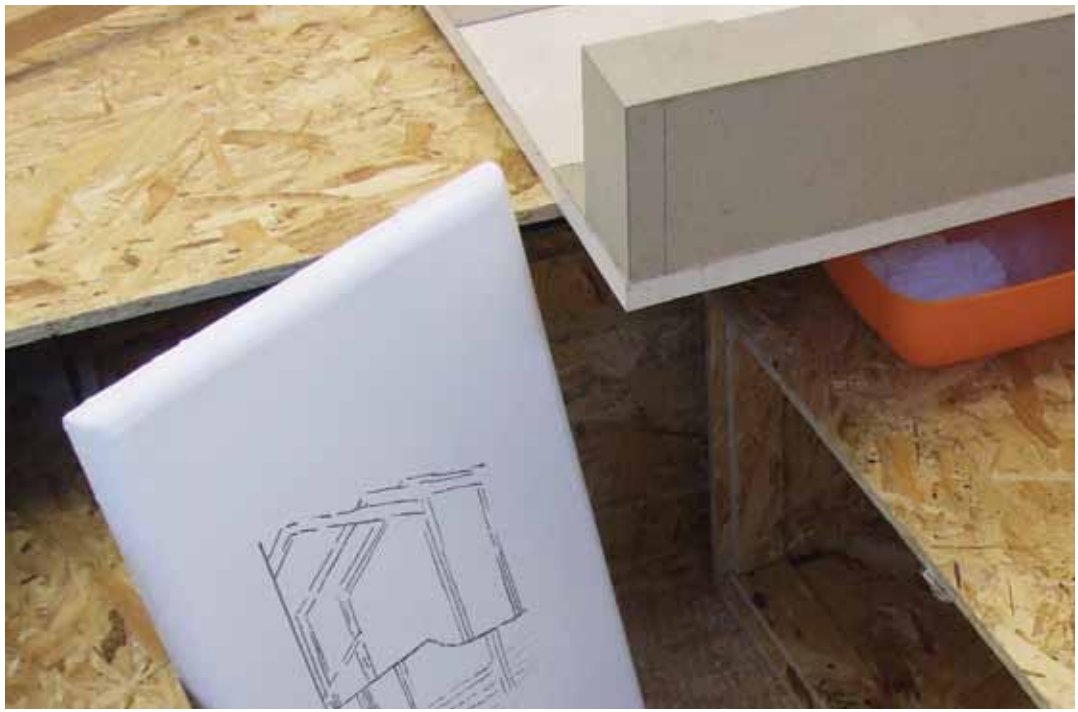
&

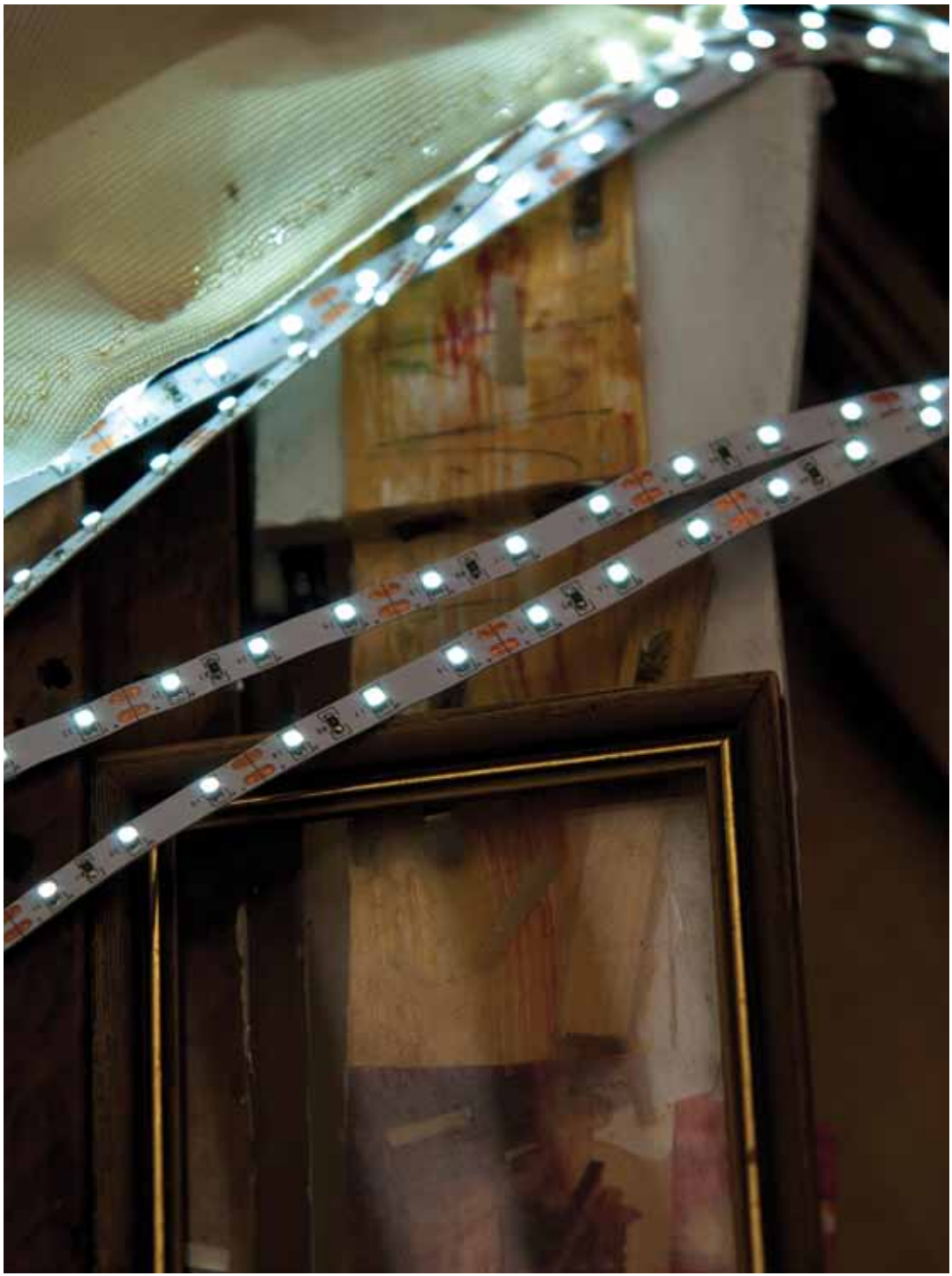
John McClenaghen

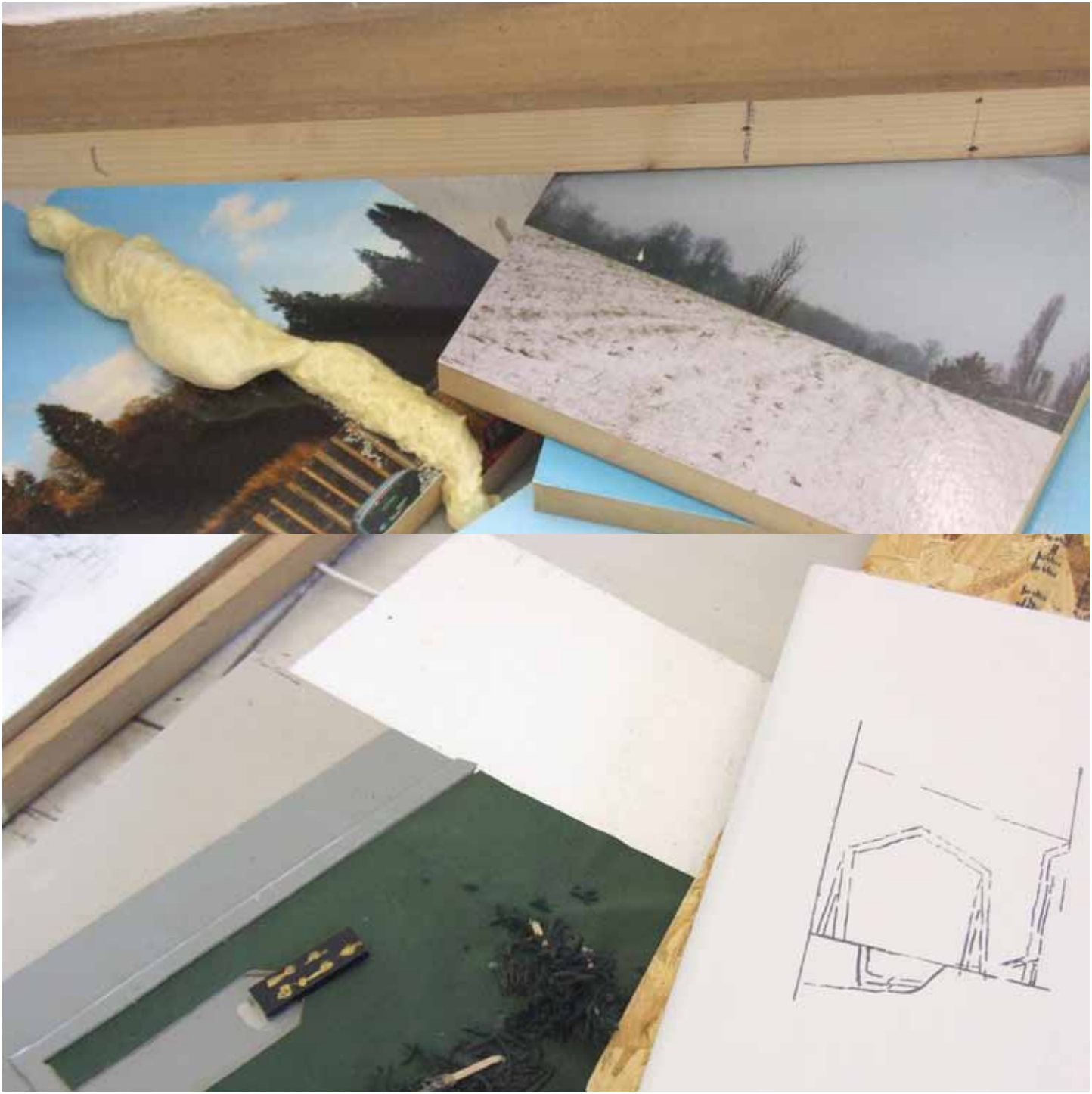
The exhibition Distance² took place in September, 2011 at the gallery of The National Academy of Art, Sofia

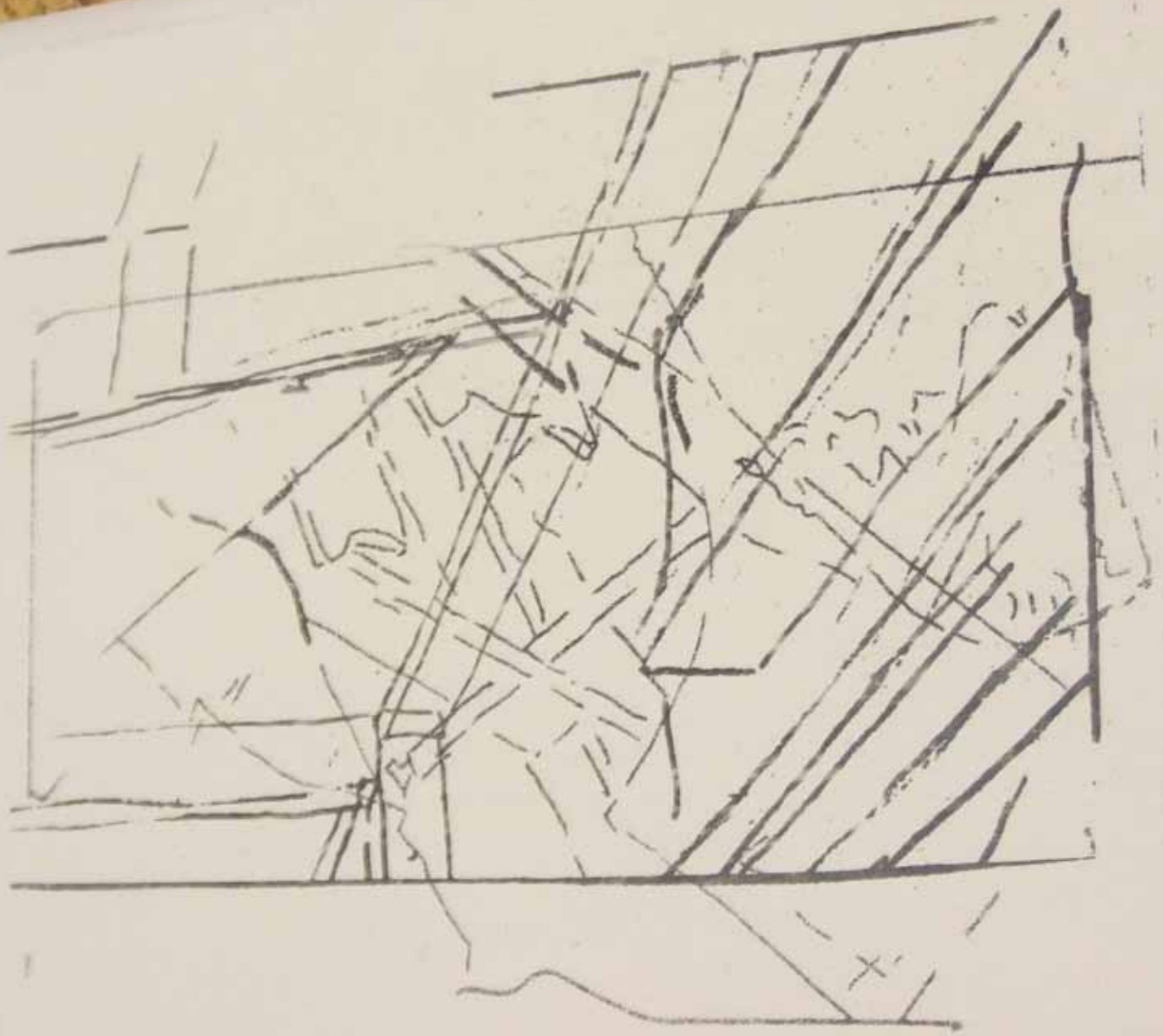












Alec Shepley
→

← John McClenaghen

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PERPLEXED AND UNCERTAIN AS TO HOW TO PROCEED [1]

All histories are in a state of flux, evolving and changing, reconfiguring our understanding of the world in which we live. A narrative is created of significant events, which act as personal markers that challenge our perceptions and preconceptions. [2] It is this uncertainty of it's taxonomic status that interests me, an uncertainty that is brought about by the project's engagement with issues pertaining to the relationship between art, site and audience. [3]

Ostensibly the creative act is a solitary endeavour. [4] I found myself with time to spare; it was like entering the gap between 'this and that' but not knowing what 'this and that' was. [5] Folding and unfolding the bus ticket as you make your way slowly through the rush hour traffic jam. [6]

Focusing on the materiality and geometry these readymade blocks of colour are cut into and polished, creating edges that define the geometry in much the same way as a line may delineate a shape. [7] One cannot get away from the fact that such practices operate within the existing hierarchical structures. [8]

The artist's hand is nowhere to be seen this – deceit (or is it conceit?) of the artist means that what is visible is not what it appears to be [9] so that the creation and mediation of the art is as a result of a series of exchanges that take place in the space occupied by the constituents of this relationship, an indeterminate and non-hierarchical space. [10] A fluid space whose constituents are the arbiters, individually and collectively, accepting or rejecting, admitting or denying, embracing or ignoring. [11]

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DISTANCE 2

Academia Gallery

National Academy of Art
Sofia, Bulgaria