

**Author:** Christine Hawley  
**Research Output 4:** *Material Fragments*

**Output Type:** Design

**Design and Production of Artefact for Exhibition:** *Material  
Fragments*

**Location:** Alte Meine Gasse Gallery, Frankfurt

**Date:** 2003

## 300 Word Summary

### Questions/Aims/Objectives

(1) To reference context through the evidence of physical incident rather than mass and form, deliberately ignoring contextual planning convention and referring instead to traces of occupation as an expression of social attitude.

(2) To develop an architectural language through the collection and collation of evidence from a small site, using drawing and assemblage as the primary tool references.

### Context

This design project used a series of site-specific assemblages incorporating 'objects trouvés' and abandoned fragments. Objects, material and marks suggesting occupation and activity were physically incorporated into a drawing/assemblage, becoming a determining factor of the final proposal.

### Methods

A derelict site in south-east London (a former Victorian Boarding School abandoned for twenty years) was chosen, surveyed and used. The area was observed over 48 hours to enable two cycles of daily activity to be chronicled alongside the archaeological evidence. Socio-economic data and photographic evidence defining a diverse community (ethnic, social and economic) was gathered. Photographic evidence was collected of both institutional and private buildings with signs of indeterminate occupation and showing evidence of various levels of decay in the form of discarded material, surface texture, colour and traces of occupation. The statistical data and photographic and material evidence was used as both reference for, and the base template of, the subsequent design.

The proposal suggests an enclosure developed through a parasitic relationship to the existing structural shell and utilizing or referencing material and images on site. Both the frame and the panelling system make specific reference to individual incidents – discarded, decayed material or the remains of activity depicted by urban graphics. The photographs, physical material and drawings are part of an empirical process in which logical relationships are abandoned.

### Dissemination/ Esteem

Publications: Christine Hawley, 'Material Fragments', *Ideal Architecture*, 121 (2002), pp. 44–47.

Exhibitions: Alte Meine Gasse Gallery, Frankfurt (2003).

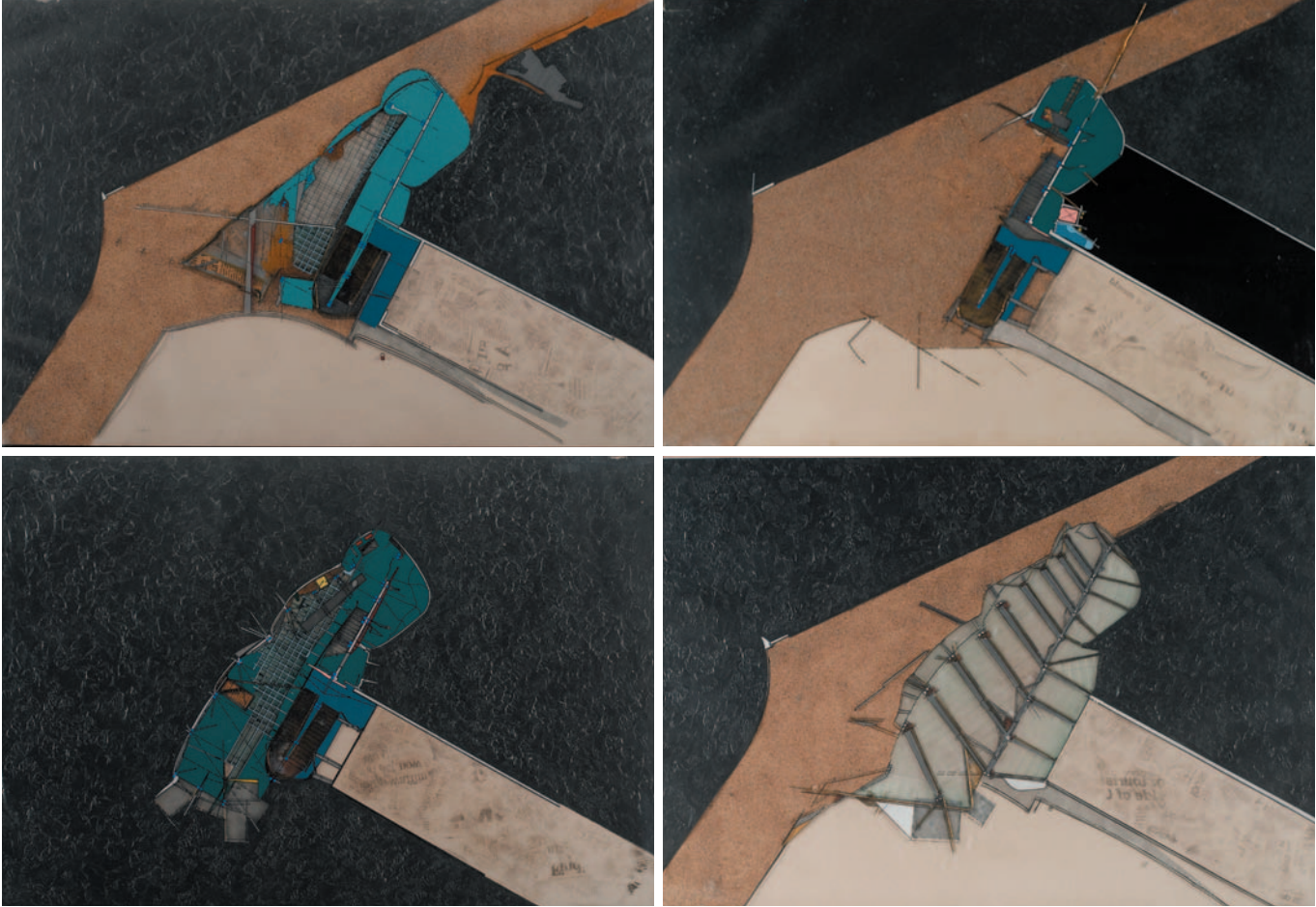


Image 1  
Plans

## General Description

The project is a self-determined investigation that examines the impact of an empirical exercise on an evolutionary response to a site. Conventionally the architect approaches a project with a pre-determined brief, influenced by functional demand, economic and technical constraints, historic precedent and a plethora of legislative and regulatory controls. This project examines how one might challenge the latter of these conventions.

The project is essentially a shelter but also adopts the delineated conventions of domestic space. The structure has a parasitic relationship with the existing ruin (it is not an extension) and relies on being occasionally 'propped up'. In this sense there is a deliberate indeterminacy: the project is a proposal for enclosure, a commentary on context rather than a structure designed to last for a predicted life span.

The drawing method and sequence of assembly are critical to the design. Conventionally the architect uses a limited range of mediums, ink, paper, pencil and latterly the computer. As these mediums are understood as methods of representation their accuracy can be pre-determined.

The project deliberately rejects conventional methods of representation and therefore accepts the consequences of the materials as found and their limits (or potential) in the assembly. The project's drawing process has therefore little of the precision of the conventional representation. In this sense the process of physical assembly has a significant effect on sequential decisions and the final outcome.

Equally important is the pursuit of contextual information through social activity and occupation. Again this challenges the formalised package of references supported by planners and conservation groups. Within a conventional framework designers will determine or pre-determine how space will be used. In reality, prediction is unreliable and the physical design often fails to anticipate ad hoc colonisation, utilisation or expression.

The site chosen in south-east London has few of the governance and regulatory constraints that preserve a historic quarter. In some senses these areas are liberated (or subject to unchallenged alteration) and in that sense are a 'blackboard' that records activity.

Time is also crucial in the way in which evidence is gathered. Any form of occupation is transitory and the only evidence is fragmentary deposits. The exercise does not witness the event, it connects the traces of historic occupational activity.

The process of collecting evidence and the subsequent use of this material is fundamental to the outcome and differs substantially from the conventional system that is function and logic led.

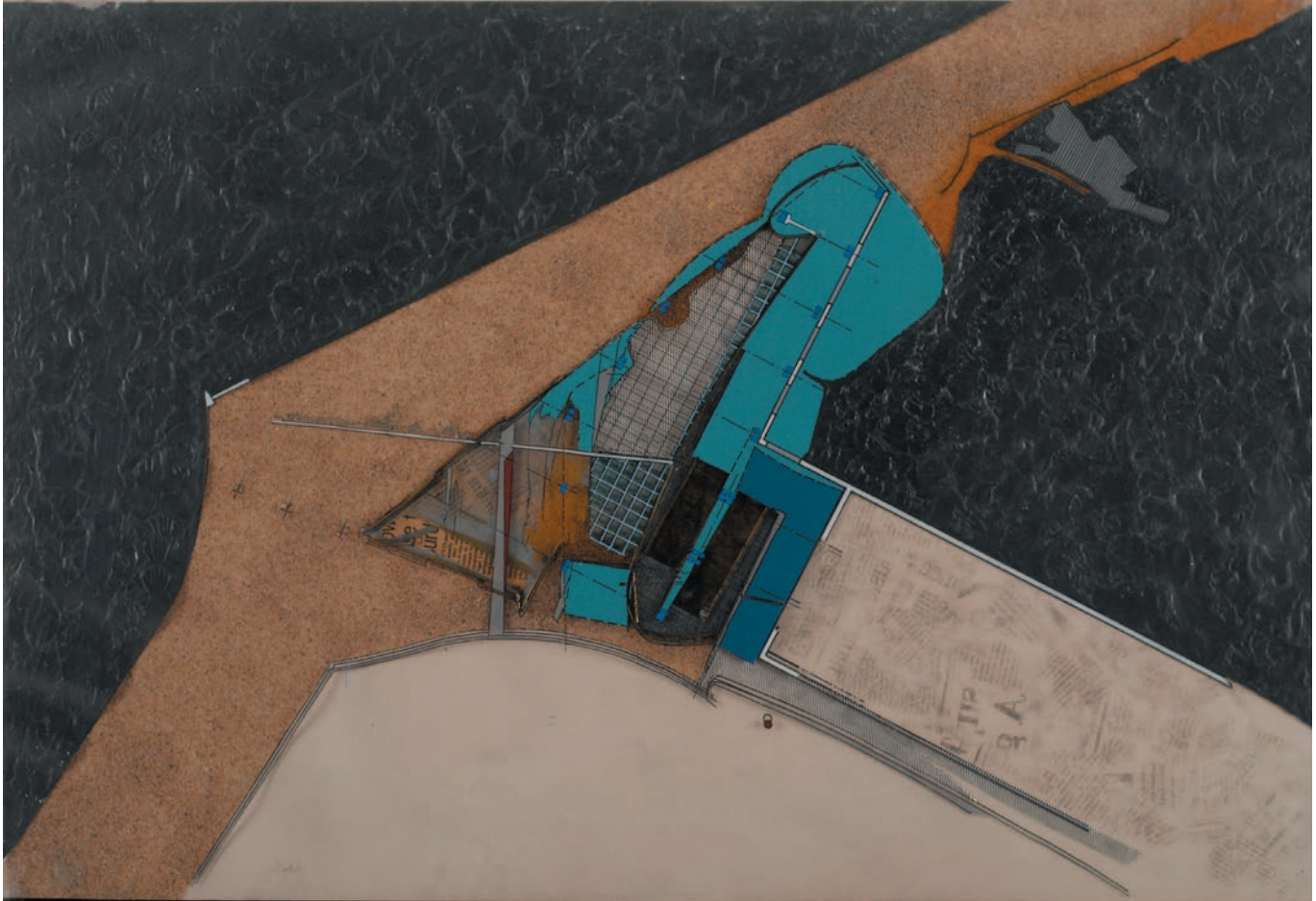


Image 2  
Ground floor plan.

## Research Questions/Aims/Objectives

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(2) To develop an architectural language through the collection and collation of evidence from a small site, using drawing and assemblage as the primary tool references.





Image 3  
First floor plan.

## Research Context

This design project used a series of site-specific assemblages incorporating *objects trouvés* and abandoned fragments. Objects, material and marks suggesting occupation and activity were physically incorporated into a drawing/assemblage, and therefore became determining factors in the final proposal.



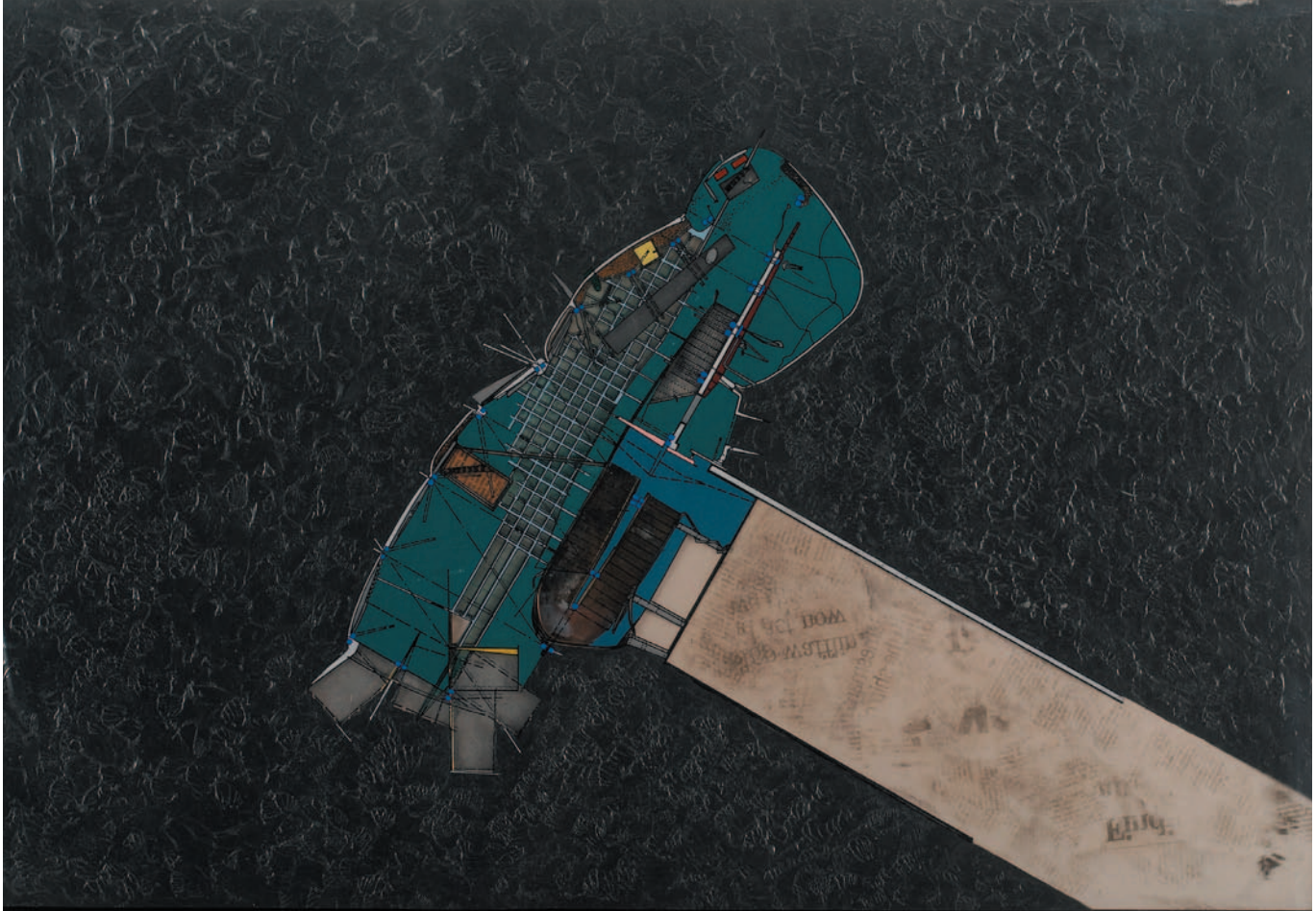


Image 4  
Second floor plan.

## Research Methods

### Time and Space

In addition to the detailed 48-hour survey undertaken, the site and its wider context were also photographed for six months. These time-scales along with broader contextual commentary were used to inform design decision-making. Observations were made about the dynamic of place, and how space, including public space, is used differently over a period of time. The diurnal and seasonal cycles allow for changing functions. The character and function of a space whether as shelter, for social interaction, or simply left empty, is dependent on time and season.

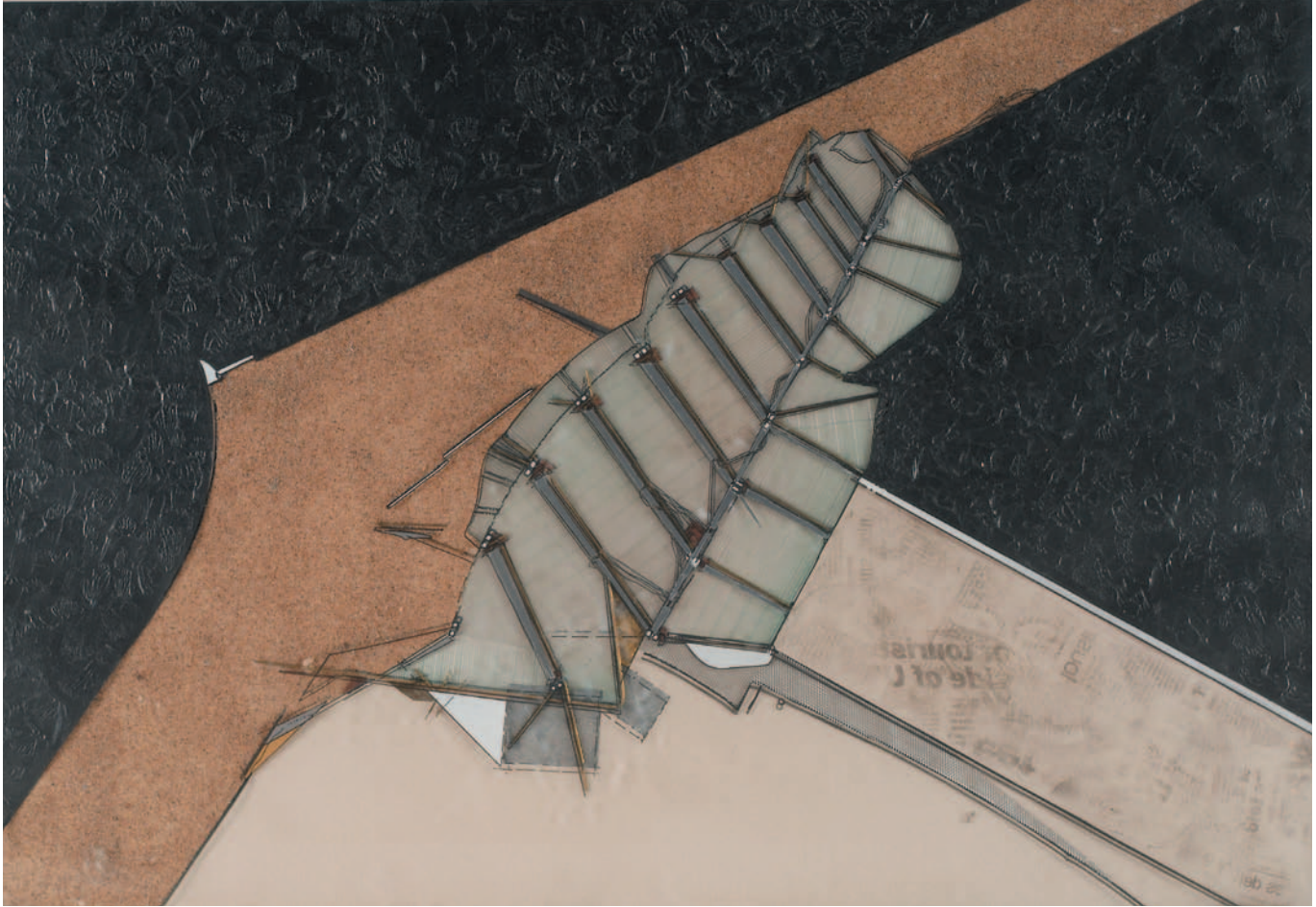


Image 5  
Roof plan.

### **Urban Graphics**

The urban graphics found in a site are both indicative of social expression and temporality and when considered in terms of conventional urban protocols are usually understood as forms of vandalism. Legitimate or otherwise, urban graphics are forms of expression, which have an obtrusive (and changing) visual presence. The scale and quality of the graphic image ranges from the desultory to 'guerilla' art and its sustained presence legitimizes it as a source of reference for exploring the contextual qualities of a site. In this part of south-east London, the graphic image both commercial and personally stylized has a dominant presence.





Image 6  
Long section.

### **Material Degradation**

Observation of the materials in the area over real time revealed marked elements of decay. The nature of occupation, function and ownership of the site were determining factors in whether property and objects were restored or left to deteriorate. Time and environment have an irreversible impact on organic material and the effects of degradation are usually a reflection of economic poverty and social apathy. The nature and appearance of material affected by time and environmental exposure showed dramatic changes to the point where colour, texture and structural integrity collapsed.





Image 7  
Short section.

### **The Site as an Archaeological Shell**

The site, containing the remains of a Victorian Board School, was semi-derelict. The School had burnt down in the early 1960s and was left as a remain beyond repair whose archaeological shell had transformed into a wildlife haven, a playground, and a space for a range of legitimate and illegitimate activities. Reading the site as a piece of archeology allowed the material remnants to disclose information about the occupation of the space over a period of time.



Image 8  
Screen wall.

### **The Assemblage as a Material Drawing Process**

The method used to construct the drawings became an integral part of the design in that the latter was largely influenced by both development and technique. The drawing process combined observation and reference to local contextual icons with the mechanical assembly of *objet trouvé* and site-specific materials. These techniques were integrated with an orthodox spatial understanding of domestic space.

However the method used to construct the drawings had limitations. In particular the materials used for both the background (for example, earth, sand and metal) and linear outlines (for example, wire) were less pliable and less able to be precisely manipulated than those used in conventional graphic representation (for example, pen, pencil and paper). However, these materials used simply and in combination provided a textural quality to the drawings that was unique and referenced the site more directly than conventional forms of architectural representation.

The drawings demonstrate a process where spatial enclosure makes particular reference to material surface qualities, to the effects of time and human intervention (or lack of it). The assemblage components attempt to capture this quality and through their incorporation produce an image that is uniquely modified.



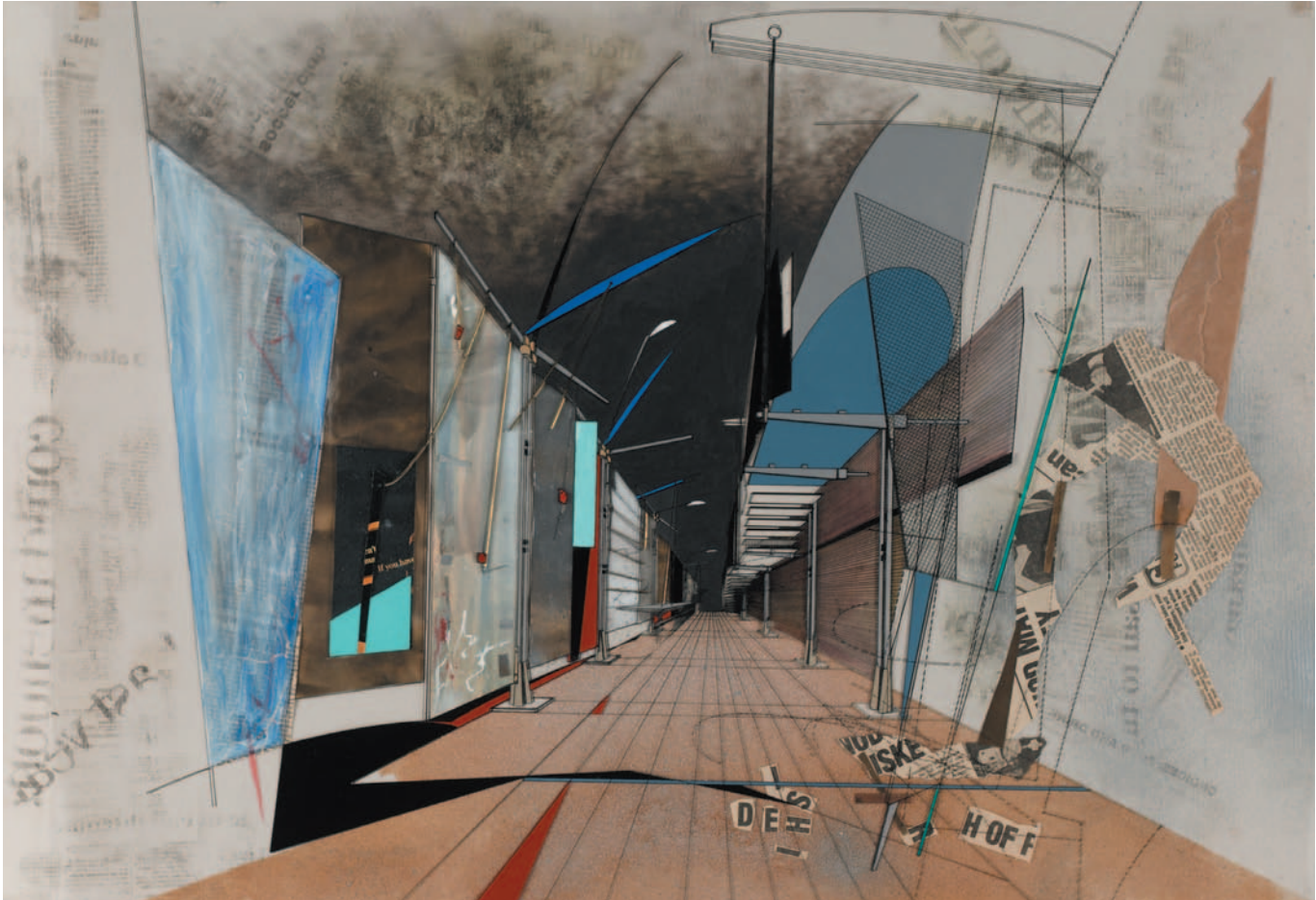


Image 9  
Interior view along panel/screen  
wall.

## Dissemination/ Esteem

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## Appendix 1: Related Articles by Christine Hawley

(1.1) Christine Hawley, 'Material Fragments', *Ideal Architecture*, 121 (2002), pp. 44–47.

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