

poetics of

ERIN EMILY FREEMAN

MASTER OF ARCHITECTURE 2025

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE, PLANNING, AND PRESERVATION

To my younger self

The older I become, the more I hope to be like you

To my collaborators

This work is for you and because of you, thank you endlessly

poetics (n.) 1.b. The creative principles informing any literary, social, or cultural construction, or the theoretical study of these; a theory of form.

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poetics of water

the New York City drinking water system

CORE I (Fall 2022)
Professor: Christoph a. Kumpusch
TA: Taha Erdem Öztürk

The origin of this project is an obsession with the complexities and fantastical nature of water in the urban context. This project is grounded in a series of “how to” questions:

How to capture moments of water? How to represent the inconsistencies of water? How to illustrate the permeability and perforation of water? How to extract the invisible parts of the urban water system? How to depict the multiplicity and multi-scalar nature of the (largely invisible) urban water system? How to draw the poetics of water?

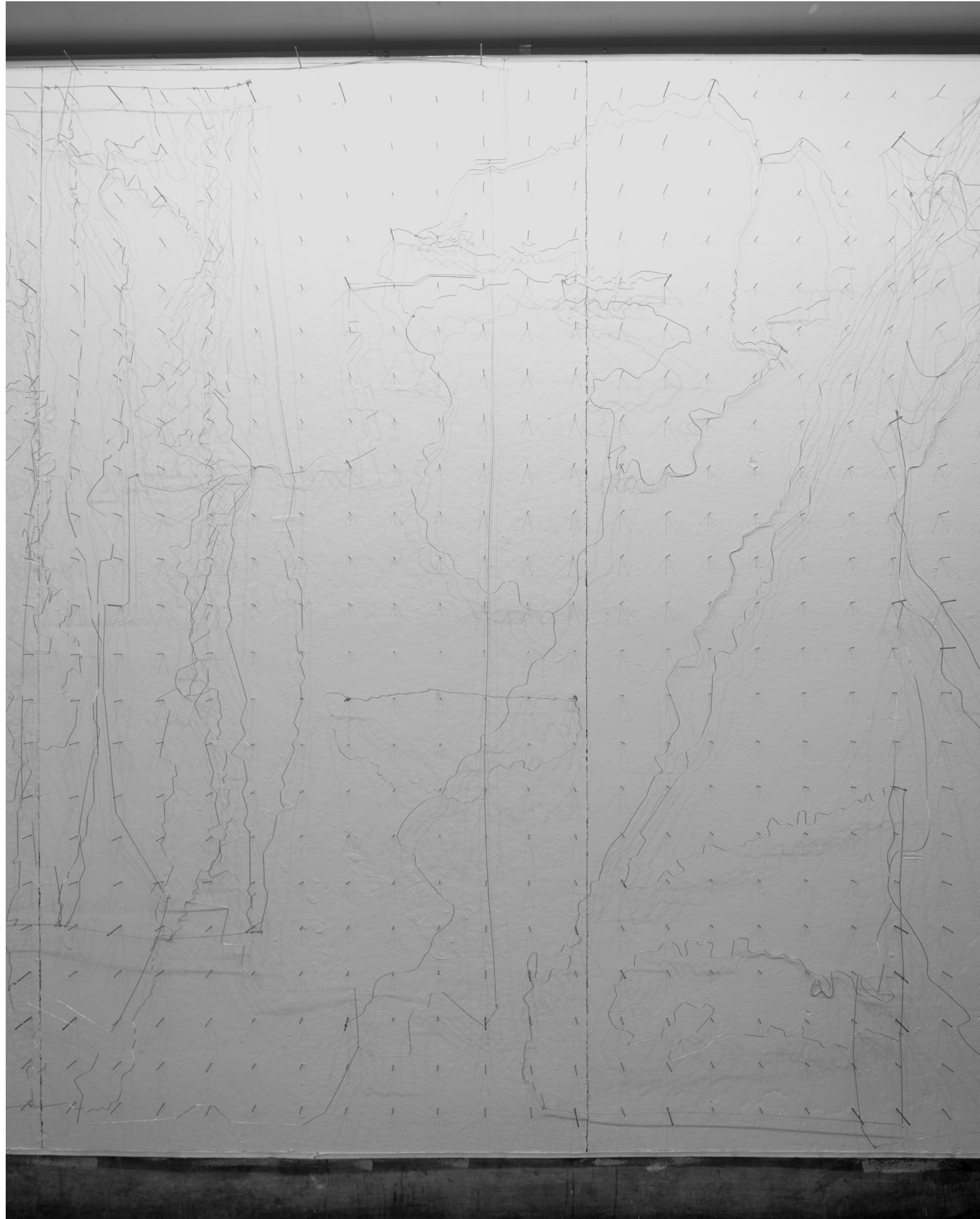
These questions ultimately highlight how humans work to control water and how disconnected humans are from water in the urban context. The most tangible source of life is somehow the most invisible.

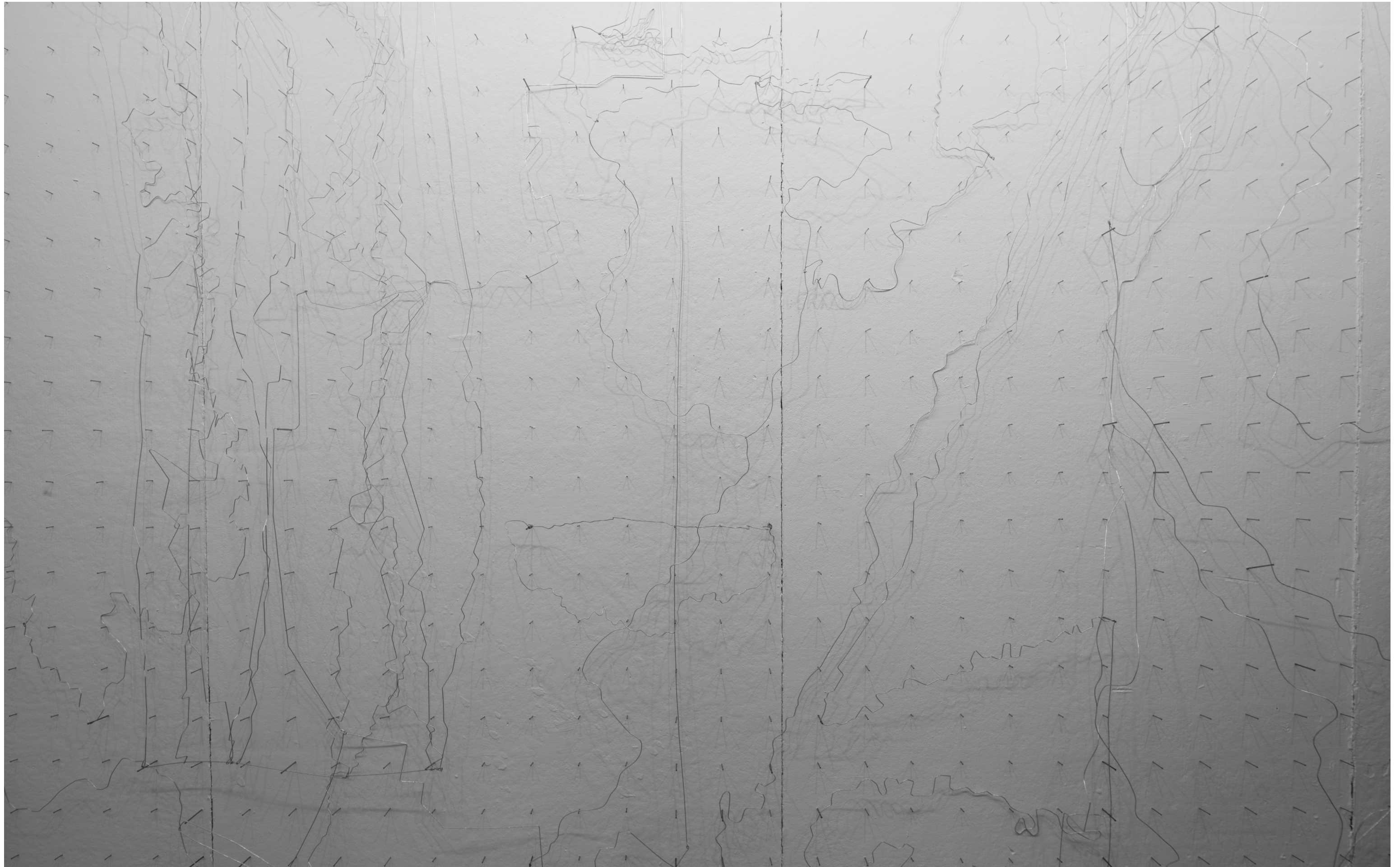
Water consists of just three atoms, one oxygen and two hydrogens, yet its complexities are countless.

Water is transparent, yet reflects light. Water is gentle and life-giving, yet destructive and life-taking. Water is natural and wild, yet ordinary and domesticated.

This project works to emphasize the human desire to control water, the simplicity and complexity of water, and the overwhelming realization of how interconnected water really is, and how sometimes, the most invisible truly becomes the most visible.







poetics of culture

cultural institutions damage

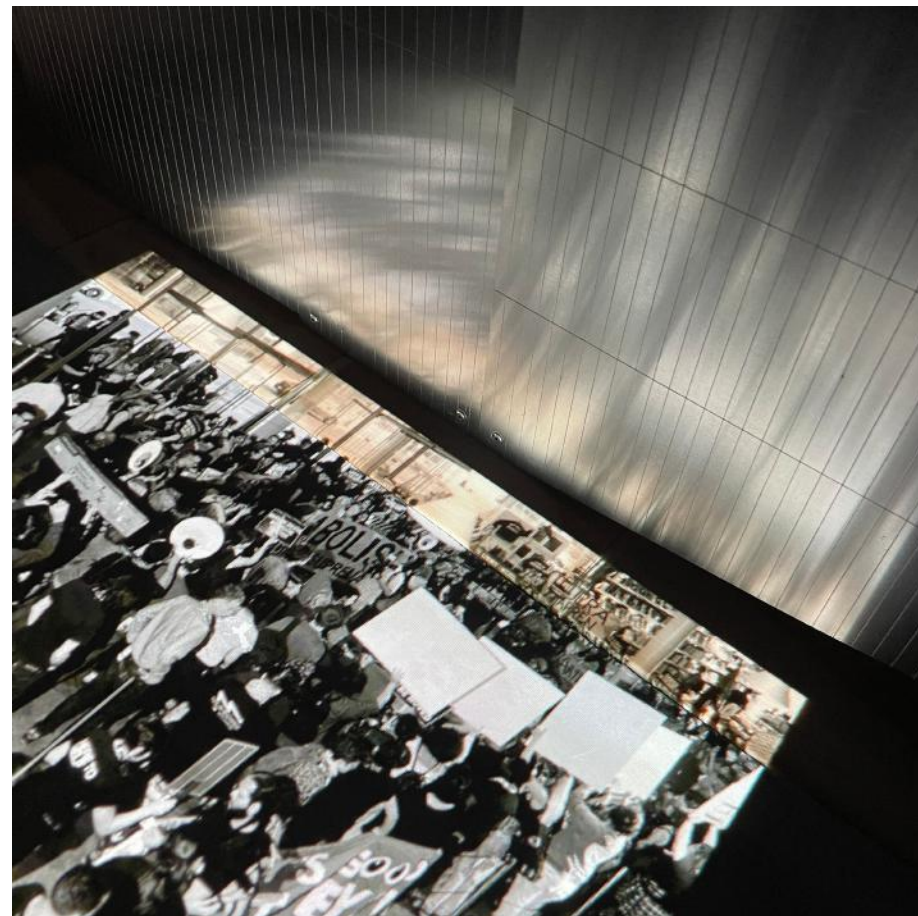
CORE II (Spring 2023)
Professor: Esteban de Backer
TA: David Zhang

This project investigates the damage control of The Whitney Museum of American Art as an architectural artifact and the protests at The Whitney that occurred in 2018 and 2019. These protests were a result of a report that was first published by Hyperallergic in November 2018 after a calamitous scene ensued at the US-Mexico border between Tijuana and San Diego, where US border agents discharged tear gas on hundreds of Central American asylum seekers, including children, and shut down the border to prevent entry. Multiple on-site reporters posted photos of the tear gas canisters, many of which were branded with “Safariland” and “Defense Technology” logos. As the report connected, both of these corporations were owned by Warren B. Kanders, at the time, the vice chairman of The Whitney.

This project catalogues artifacts of protest that were deployed over the course of more than eight months. What did the museum actually stand for? Who did it allow to represent itself on its board? What was considered worthy of exhibition in the museum? Who supports the museum? How fragile is the institution, really? To help express and understand these sentiments, this project includes a model depicting an elevation of The Whitney as a billboard and projection screen.

This project culminated in an intervention, a toolkit of four devices. These devices, like the artifacts of protest used at The Whitney, could be deployed in protest, as a sort of language for protest. The bubble pavilion is deployed to hijack public space for shelter, the projection screen is deployed to hijack private building space for projecting messages, the bags are deployed to hijack both steam and water to provide cooling mist and warming steam, and the inflatables are deployed to hijack public space for different configurations of sitting, standing, playing, and so on. Beyond being designed as devices for protest, these devices were also designed to be devices for daily use. The pavilion doubling as a comforter, the projection screen doubling as zippered picnic blankets, the bags doubling as planter bags, and the inflatables doubling as inflatable lounge chairs.

This project explores the irony of how cultural institutions collect and exhibit culture, the duality of humans to be both consumers and producers of culture, and the questions of whether space for contestation can be created and whether a decentralized toolkit, and architecture at an urban scale, work towards this?





HYPERALLERGIC

Membership

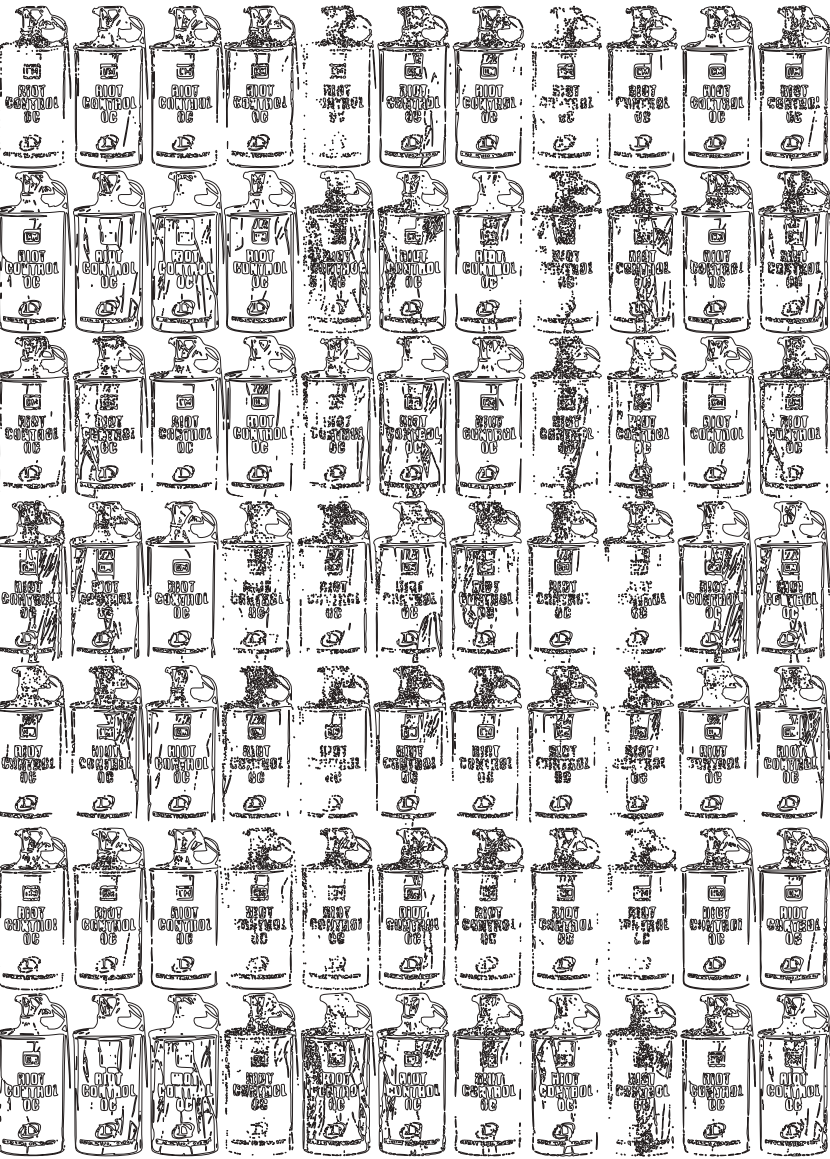
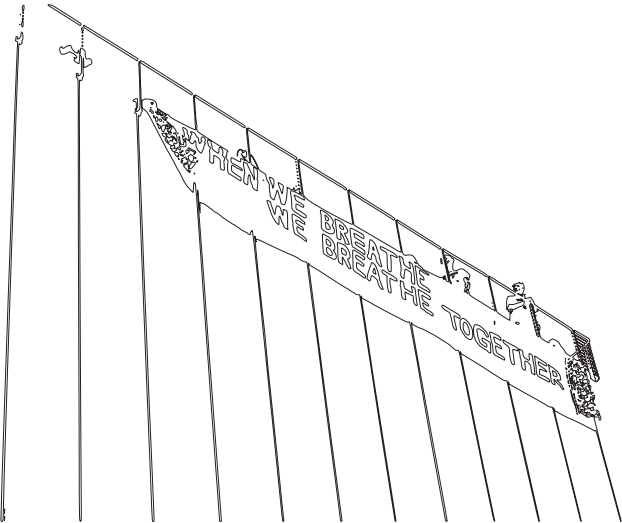


News

A Whitney Museum Vice Chairman Owns a Manufacturer Supplying Tear Gas at the Border

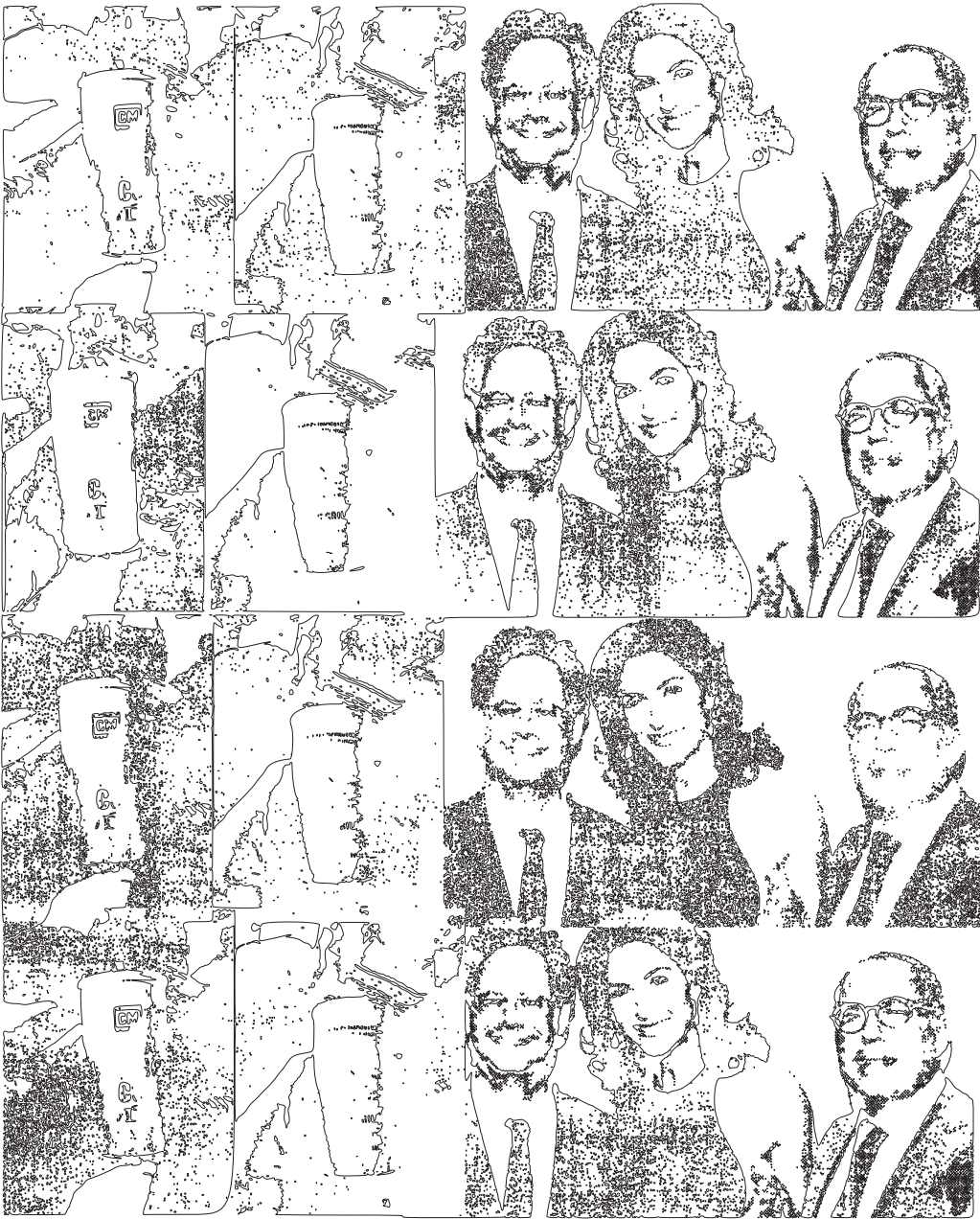
Warren B. Kanders, a vice chairman at the Whitney Museum of American Art, purchased defense manufacturer “Safariland” in 2012 for \$124 million.

 Jasmine Weber November 27, 2018

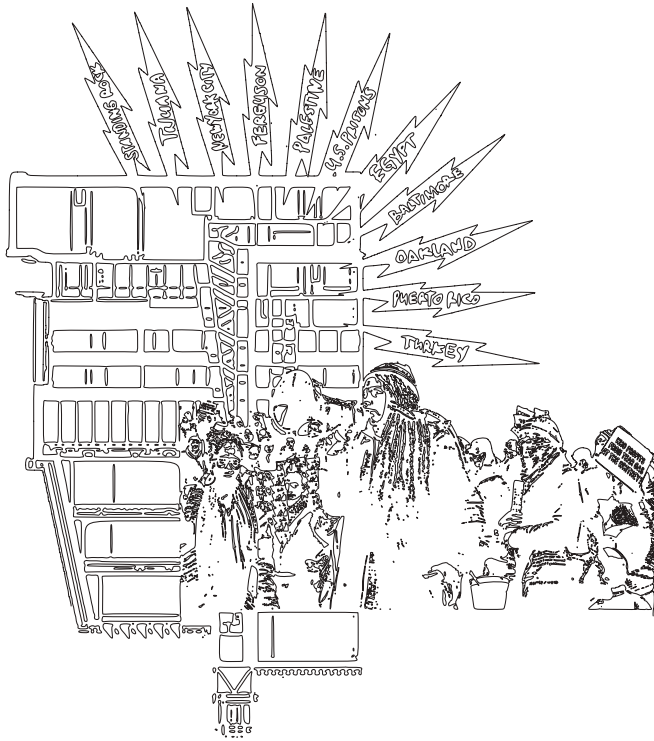


WHITNEY

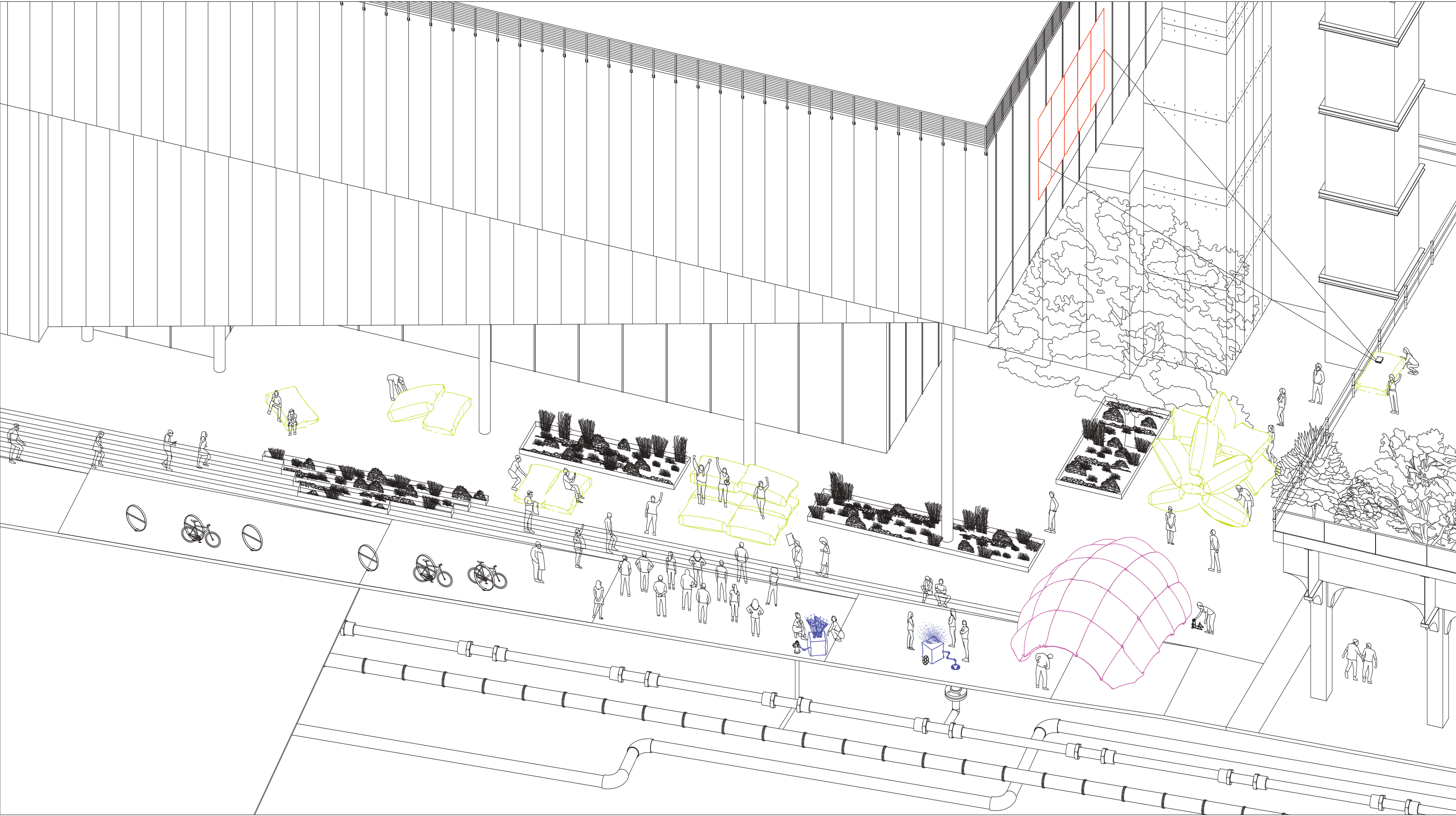
© Whitney Museum of American Art

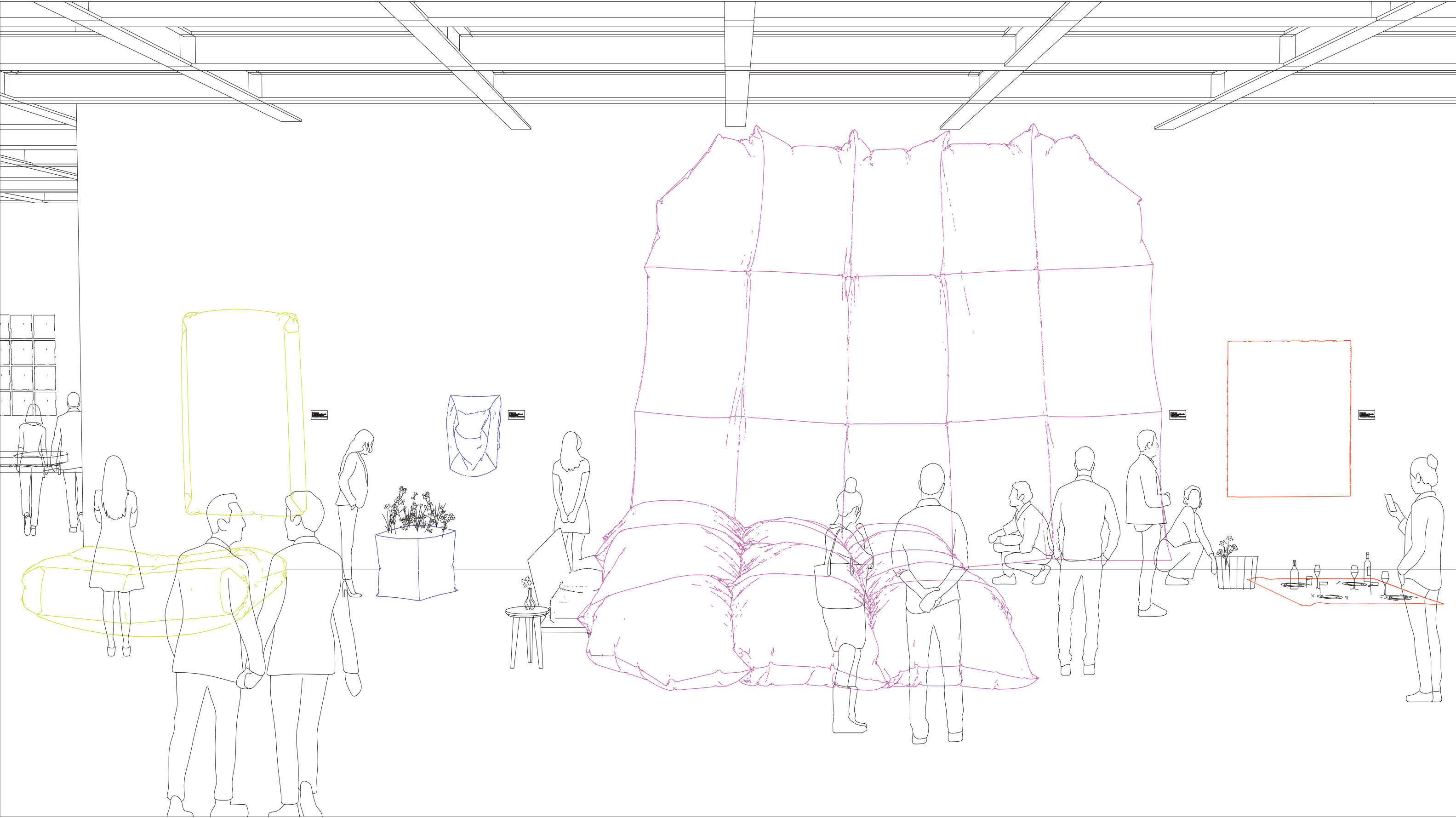


NO SAFE SPACE FOR PROFITEERS OF STATE VIOLENCE
THE CRISIS OF THE WHITNEY



WARREN B. KANDERS MUST GO
9 WEEKS OF ART AND ACTION





poetics of adaptive reuse

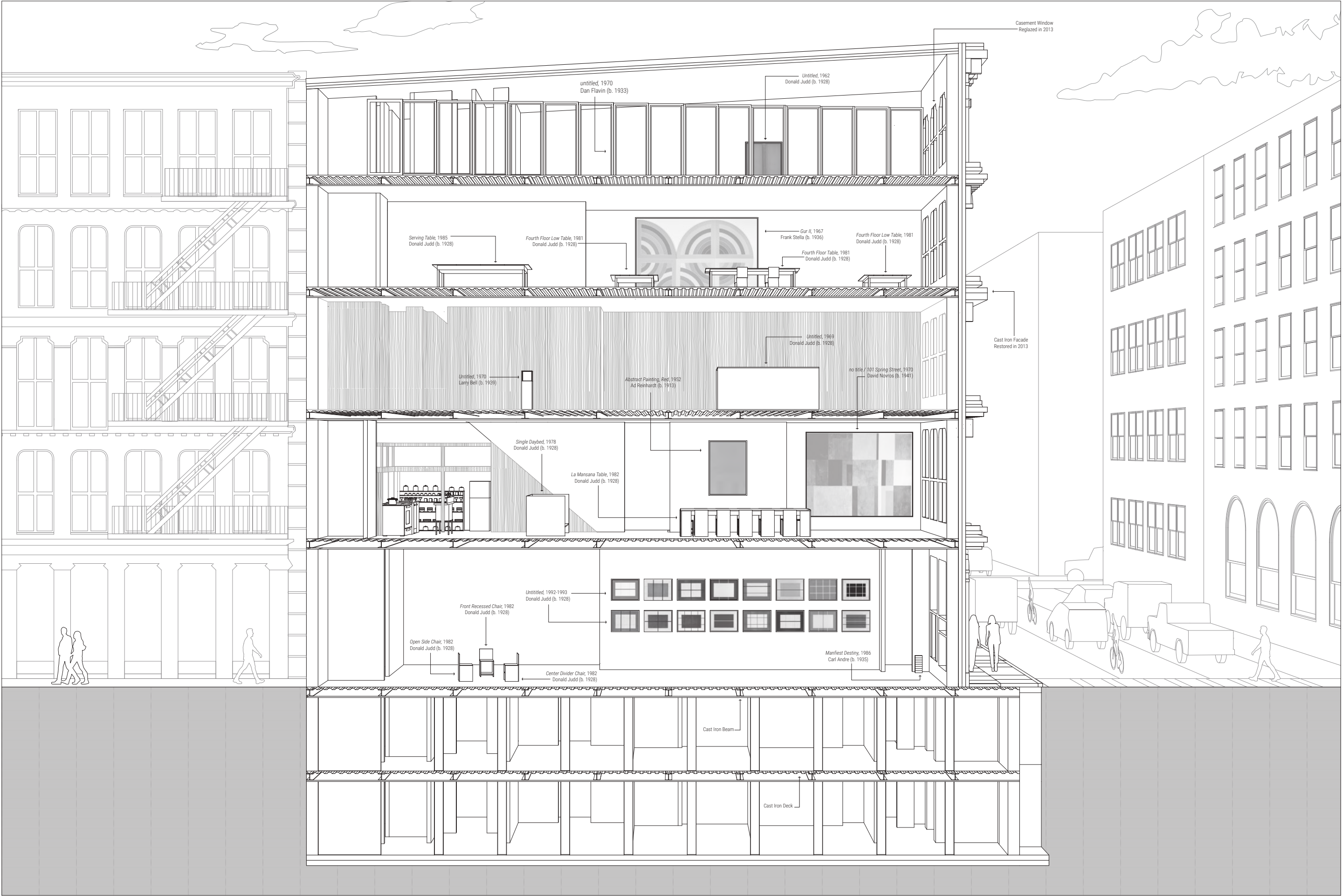
101 Spring Street

CORE III (Fall 2023)
Professor: Benjamin Cadena
Collaborator: khloe swanson

This project is an architecture archaeology of 101 Spring Street. Donald Judd was an artist working at the intersection of art, architecture, furniture design, and sculpture. In 1968, Judd purchased 101 Spring Street, a former factory and one of the last cast iron buildings in SoHo. Over the years, Judd cleared the factory and altered the space to become his studio and home for himself and his family. While living in 101 Spring Street, Judd was experimenting with the concept of making art for a permanent installation, which was ultimately the driver for the series of furniture he built for the space, as well as the art he collected from his friends and colleagues.

This project documents Judd’s furniture and sculptural interventions that ultimately created his home and annotates the pieces he created while placing equal importance on the art he collected from his friends and colleagues for the space.

This project emphasizes these pieces are the driver of Judd’s adaptive reuse of the building. What Judd utilizes to adaptively reuse this building is not specific to the building itself, but rather the furniture that Judd designs and places within the building. The furniture creates the space.



poetics of housing

inward and outward

CORE III (Fall 2023)
Professor: Benjamin Cadena
Collaborator: khloe swanson

This project is a proposal for a site situated between Manhattanville, Hamilton Heights, Morningside, and West Harlem. The site is located on a block of West 128th Street between Convent Avenue and Amsterdam Avenue. Exploring the convergence of housing, public space, and adaptive reuse as a platform for architecture innovation, community building, and the transformation of urban landscapes, this housing proposal takes a step back to reassess housing as a reflection of the home and as an intentional framework for daily lives in cities.

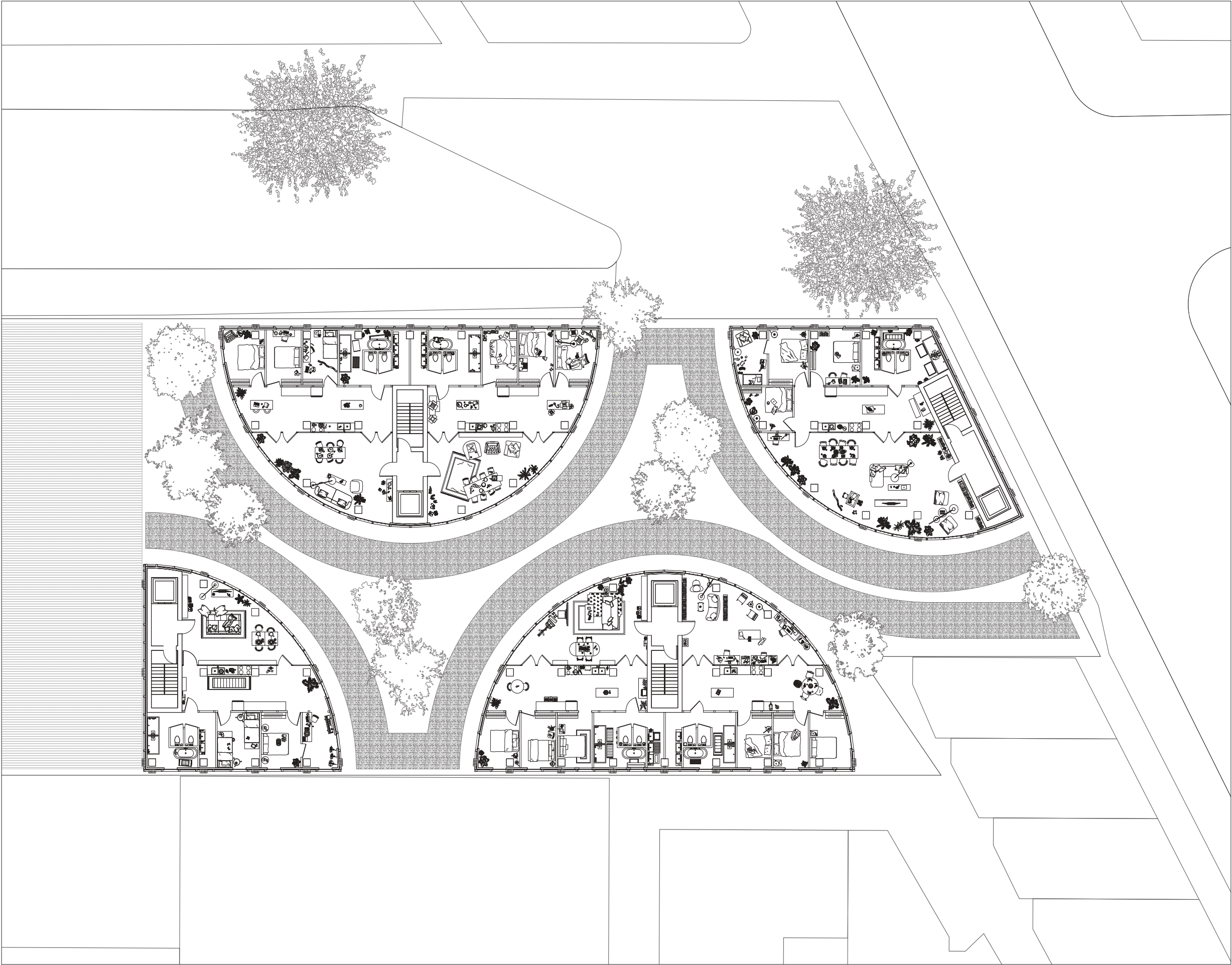
This project seeks to define a way of group living with an architectural response that can house and sustain group living over time. These design ambitions are demonstrated through the Inner Life, Common Life, and Urban Life. This project constructs a new domestic territory that explores the needs and potentials of group housing now and in the future.

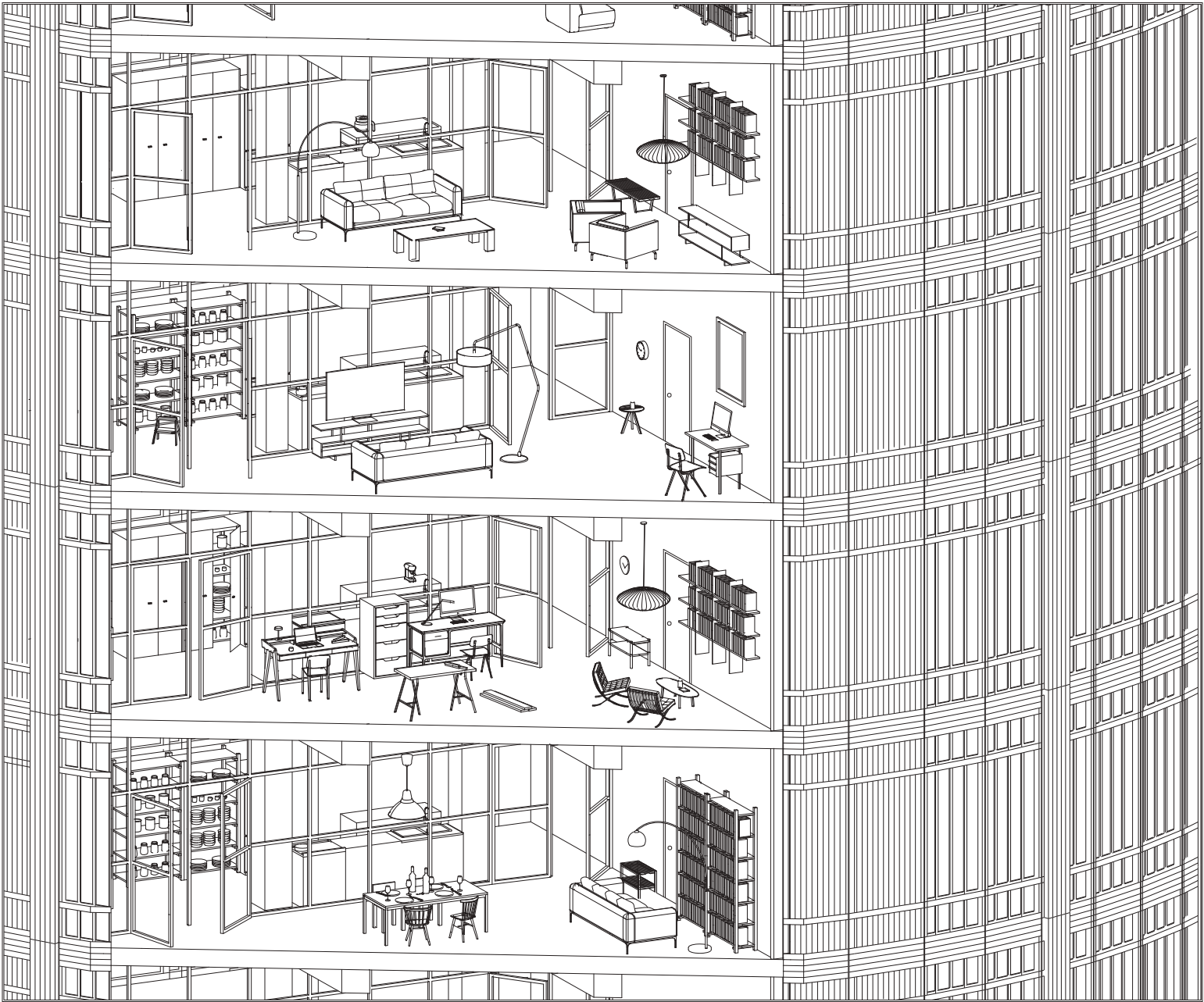
This project responds to its urban site by turning inward. The buildings respond to each other by turning outward. This mass timber project proposes small-scale architecture focusing on prioritizing housing for groups of people. Inward and outward give the possibility of scaled spaces that go from the most private to the most public. The simple volumes are articulated by the expression, repetition, and aggregation of wood shelving and framing. The wood shelving and framing are not simply logistical objects, but dynamic sculptures that thread through the buildings in careful calibration to the other spaces, both indoor and outdoor.

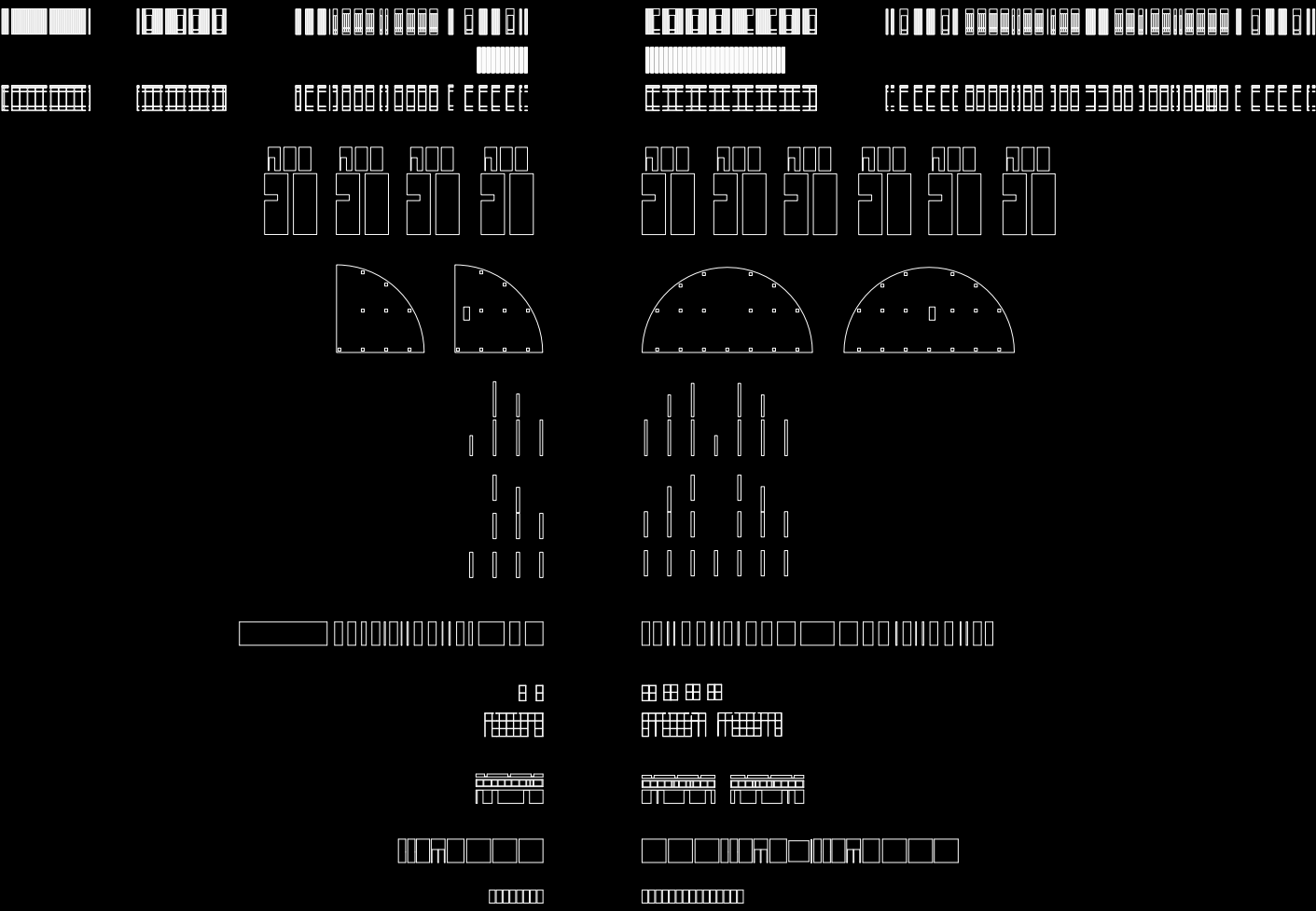
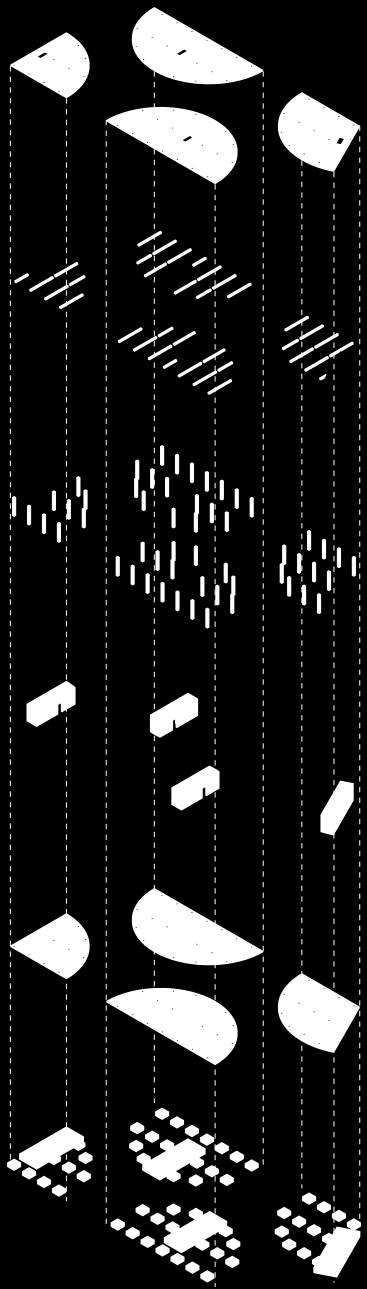


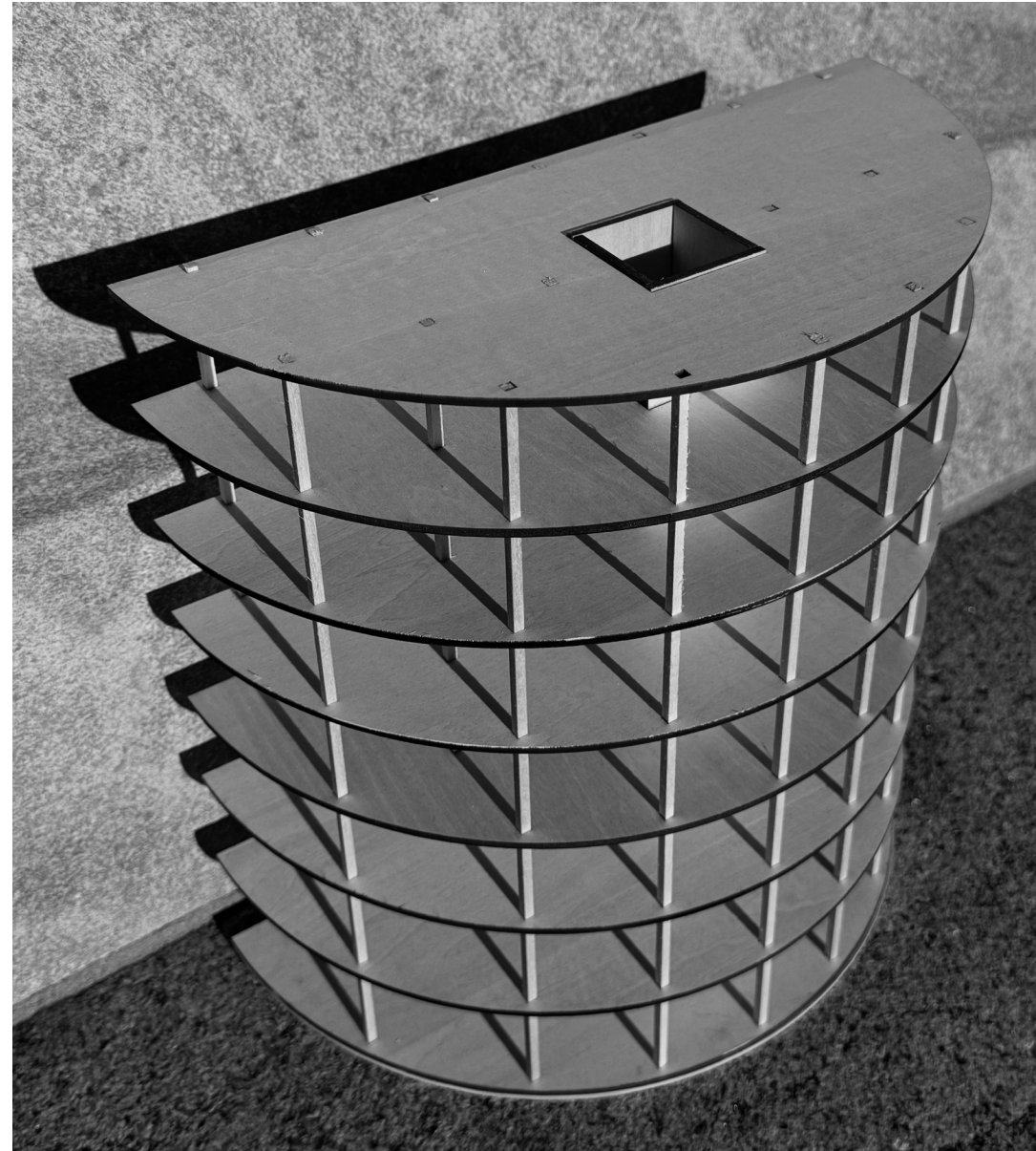
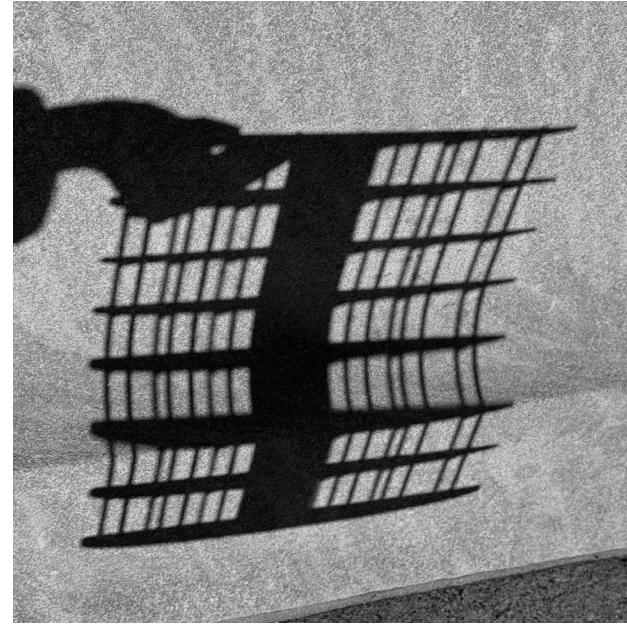












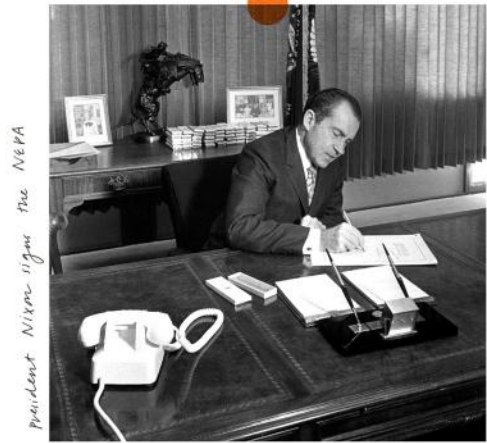
poetics of cartography

critical maps of the Ashokan Reservoir

ADV IV (Spring 2024)
Professor: Alessandro Orsini
Collaborator: Vickie (Xiaoxiao) Jiang

This project is a part of the studio Liquid Asset: From Land Dispossession to Mutual Care, which studies the water politics and relationship between the New York State upper territory and its dispossession, extraction, and subdivision processes that allowed New York City to create large voids, open spaces within the territory, to protect the reservoirs’ water quality. The city has used eminent domain and other forms of land appropriation to obtain this space for reservoir construction and provide drinking water to its urban environment via a surface infrastructural system that avoids the use and subsequent costs of water filtration. This system, through the years, has displaced communities and created environmental and financial instability throughout the Catskills/Delaware region of the watersheds.

This project begins with an intense research phase of the history of the New York City drinking water system, and more specifically, the Ashokan Reservoir, one of the reservoirs of the Catskills Water Supply System. This project continues with two critical cartographies of the Ashokan Reservoir. The first critical cartography depicts the irony of the Ashokan Reservoir and its “champagne of drinking water” surrounded by the many outdated and under-served private septic tanks. The second critical cartography maps the number of times “New York City” is mentioned in the 1997 New York City Watershed Memorandum of Agreement and locates the legal entities, and their geographic reach in relation to the Ashokan Reservoir, which signed the 1997 New York City Watershed Memorandum of Agreement.



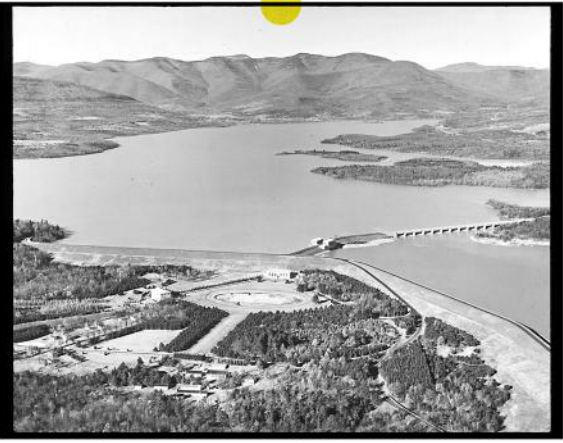
President Nixon signs the NEPA



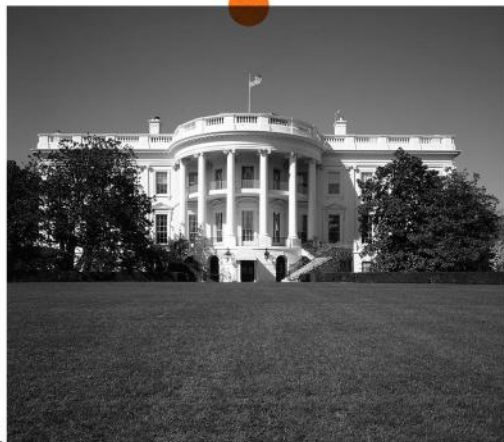
Brock Adams speaking at EPA hearing



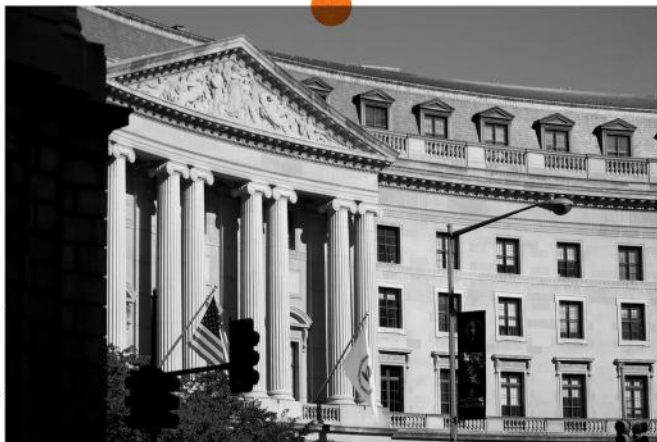
Nixon signing CWA



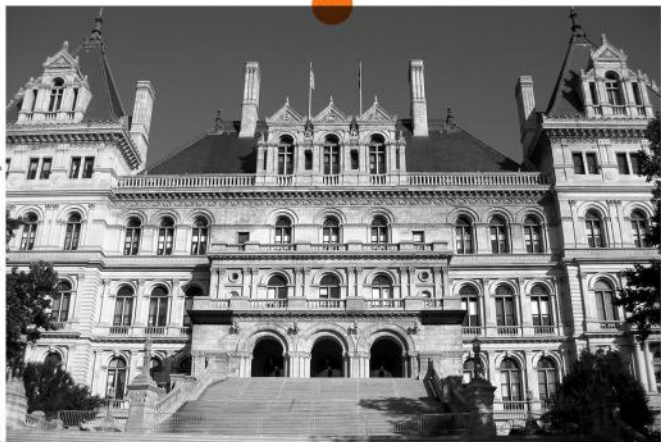
aerial view of Ankeny Reservoir



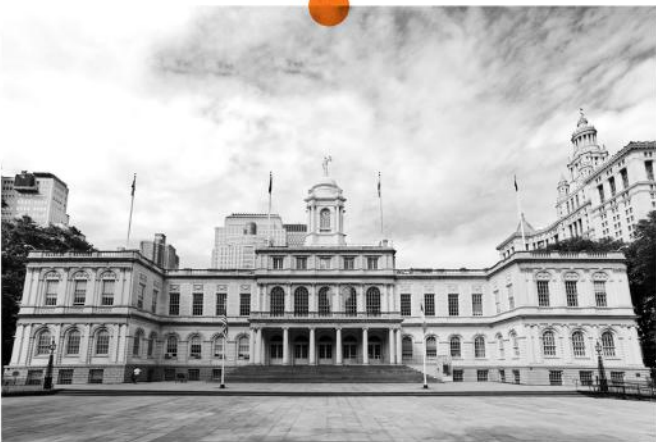
The White House



headquarters of the USEPA



New York State Capitol Albany



New York City Hall



Coalition of Watershed Towns Executive Committee



Executive Committee of Coalition of Watershed Towns



Signing of the NYC Watershed Memorandum of Agreement



Boy drinking from water fountain



Standard Plumbing Fixtures



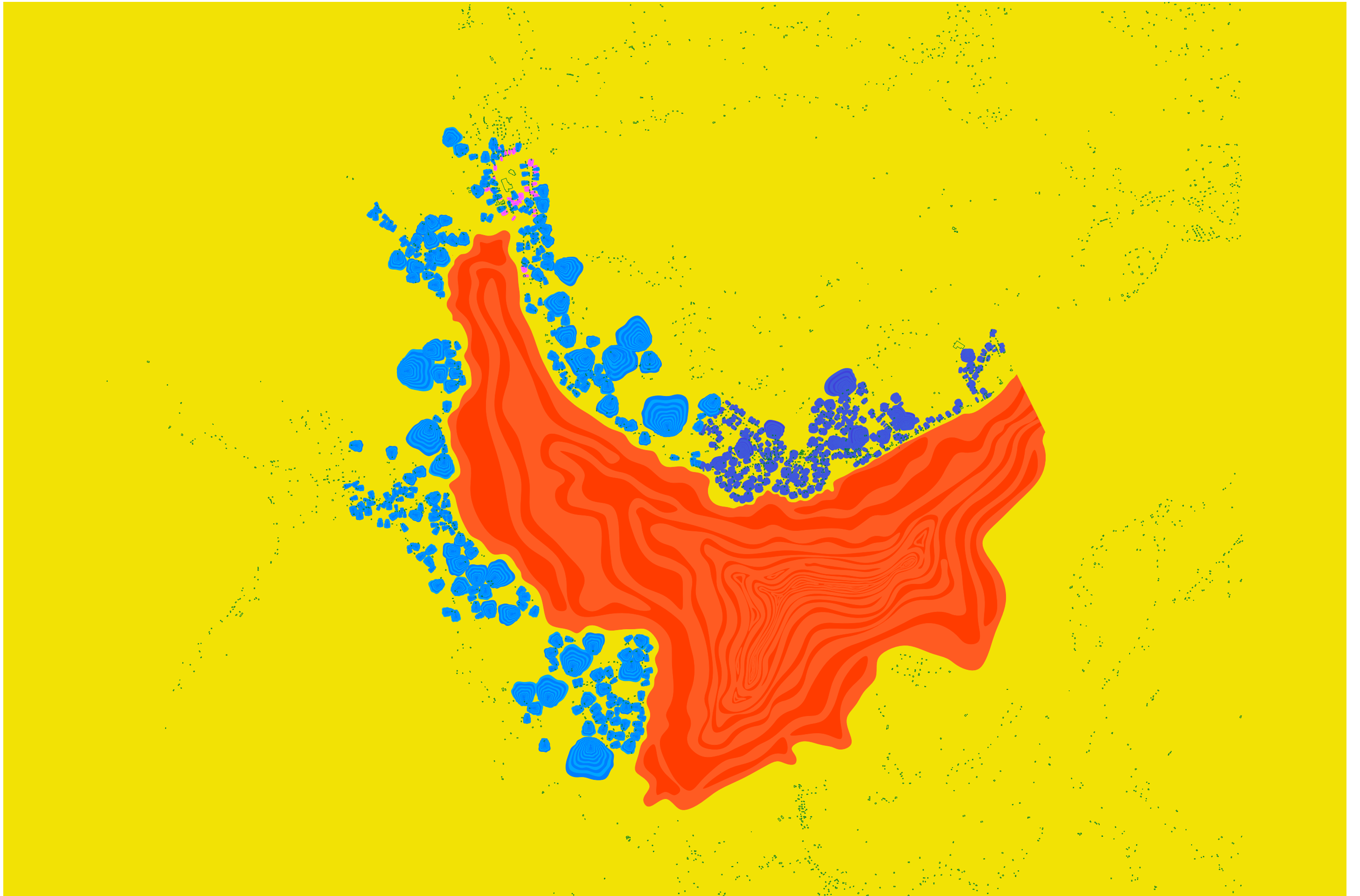
NYC Watershed Memorandum of Agreement

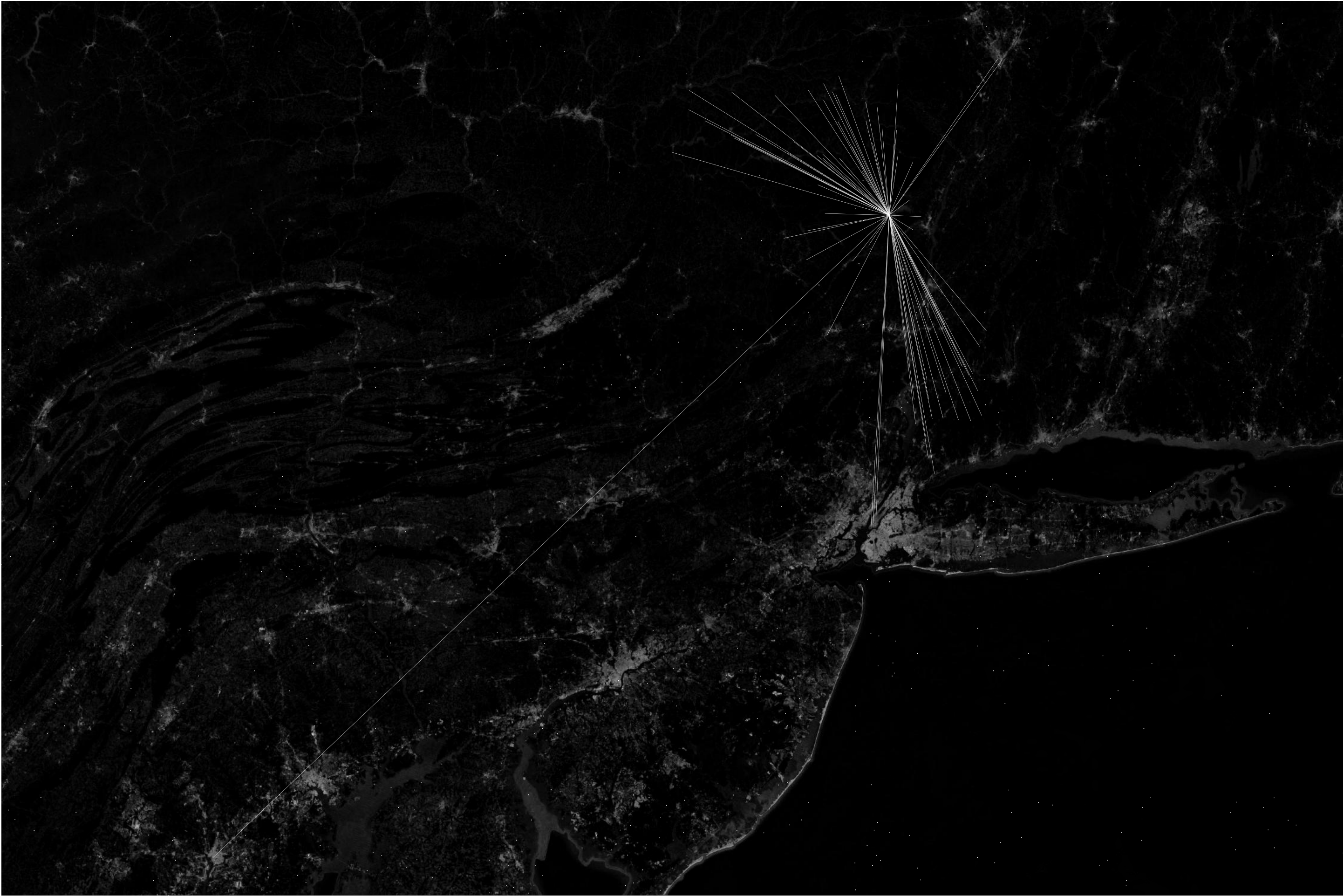
assemblage 01
assemblage 02



NYC DEP poster







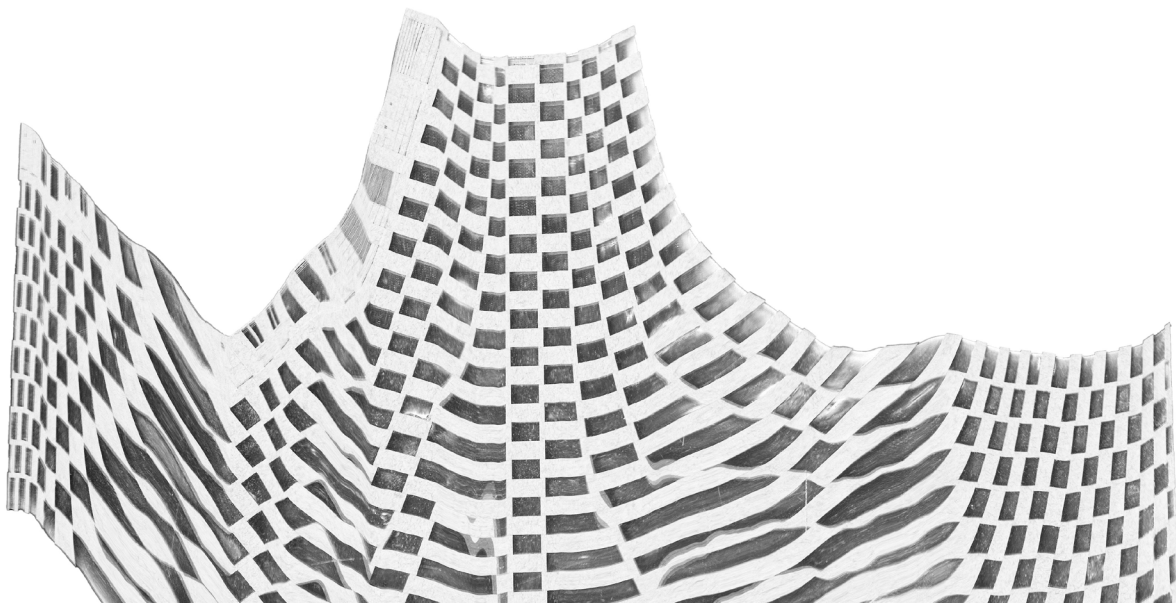
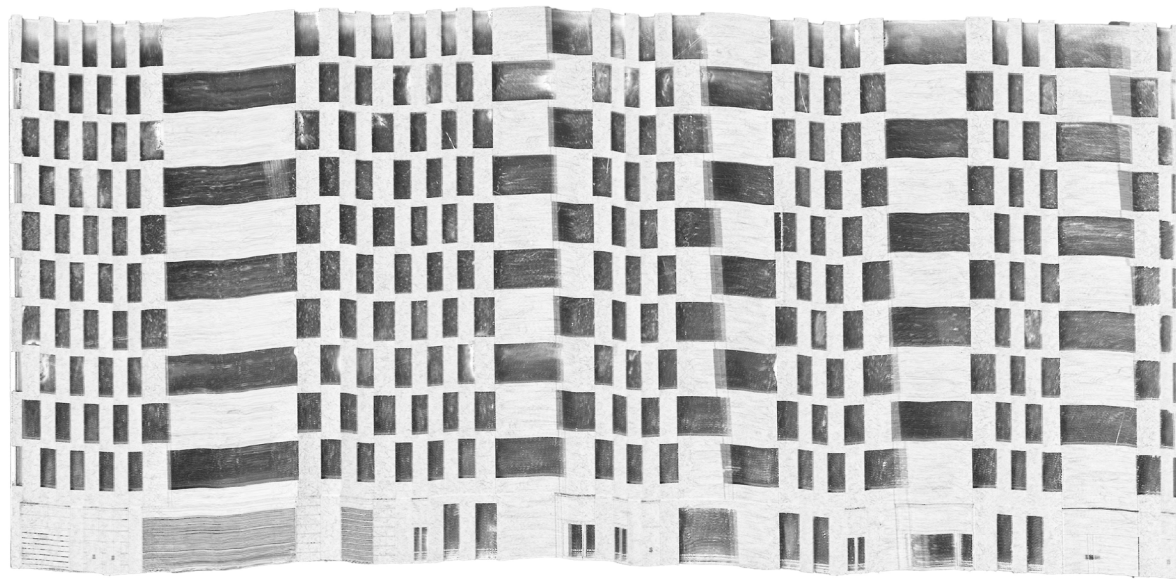
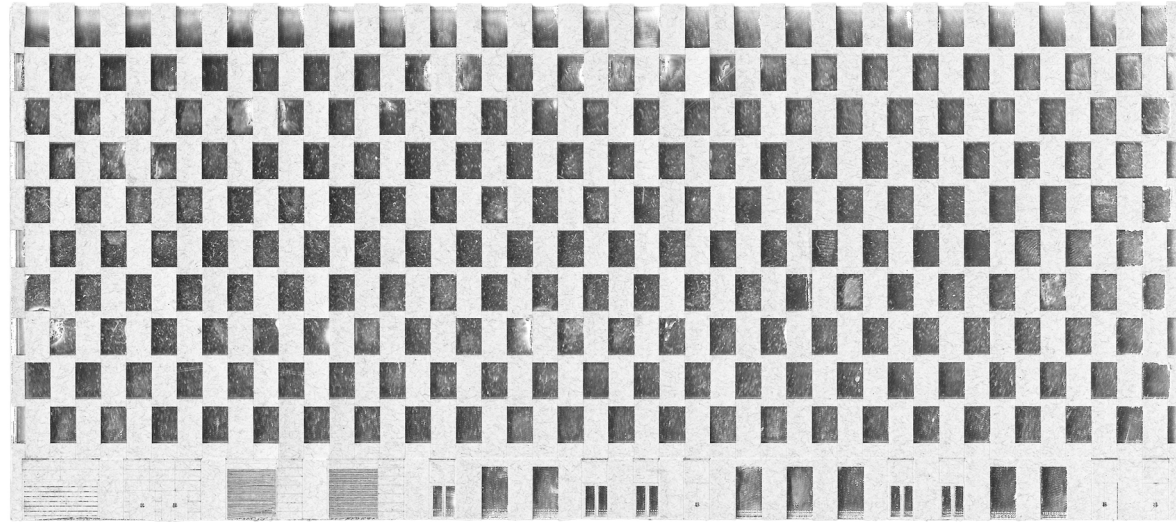
only words: an (un)building project

architecture after property

ADV V (Fall 2024)
Professor: Emanuel Admassu
Collaborator: khloe swanson

This project is a part of Animist Algorithm: Harlem After Property, a studio that fundamentally questions, how we can disentangle architecture from property? This studio acknowledges that property regimes are no longer limited to the built environment. Our digital interactions are also being policed, surveilled, and enclosed, with the same level of scrutiny as our racialized corporeal movements. Thus, this studio aims to identify temporal slippages, through aesthetic practices, that carve out moments of liberation from the limits of property.

This studio began with a development of collective intelligence through gathering samples from various cultural and political geographies, which then fueled experiments in unsettling the privatized enclosures of Harlem, New York. How can we design a region (with hopes of building a world) that is not tethered to individual land ownership, but instead, predicated on collective stewardship and a commitment to life as an open system? This studio analyzes image-making and space-making practices that operate against real estate and algorithmic speculation. How can we work to liberate architecture from its historical commitment to borderization through these imaging and animating practices that actively dismantle the cartesian frame of racial capitalism? As a gathering of conceptual interventions committed to imagining a different world, Animist Algorithm reframes the discipline of architecture in solidarity with contemporary movements of Black liberation, anti-coloniality, and mutuality; against ruthless policing, dispossession, displacement; and towards animist conceptions of Earth and algorithm.



This project is our vision of Harlem after property. Our site is The Smile, an 11-story, 233-unit, 260,000-square-foot rental residential building located in East Harlem. The samples that we used to establish frameworks for the production of alternative futures are the (1) Hammond organ, (2) rent parties, and (3) David Hammons: Body Prints, 1968-1979. Through our interrogations of this site and these samples, we believe architecture after property requires unbuilding with language. We also believe architecture after property also requires unbuilding with representation, especially representation of space, buildings, and people. In unbuilding The Smile, we are thinking about how to shift architectural representation from meaningless gestures and words that do not support people to representation that centers Black people and space. What would it mean for The Smile to continuously give itself away? What would it mean to incrementally unbuild The Smile?



APARTMENT LEASE

APARTMENT

2. USE OF APARTMENT

INSTRUMENT LEASE

[illegible]

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 Reporting Agency **NY 100-111111** **NY 100-111111** **NY 100-111111**
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ADVERTISING

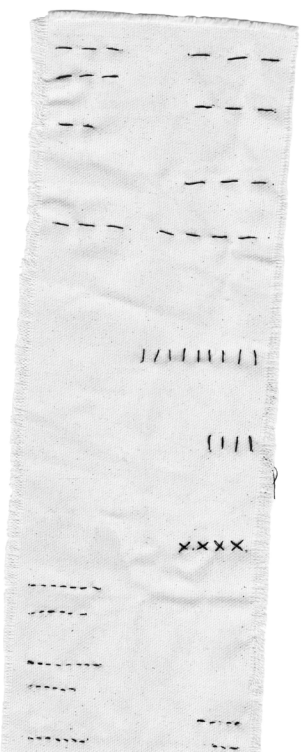
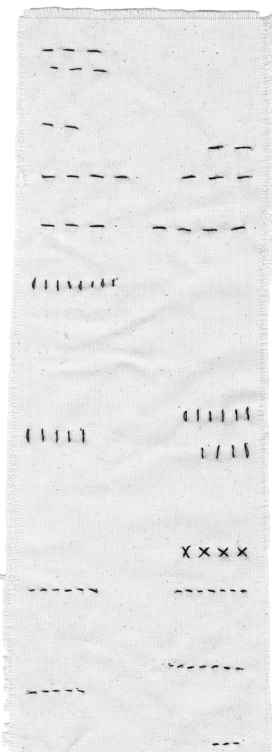
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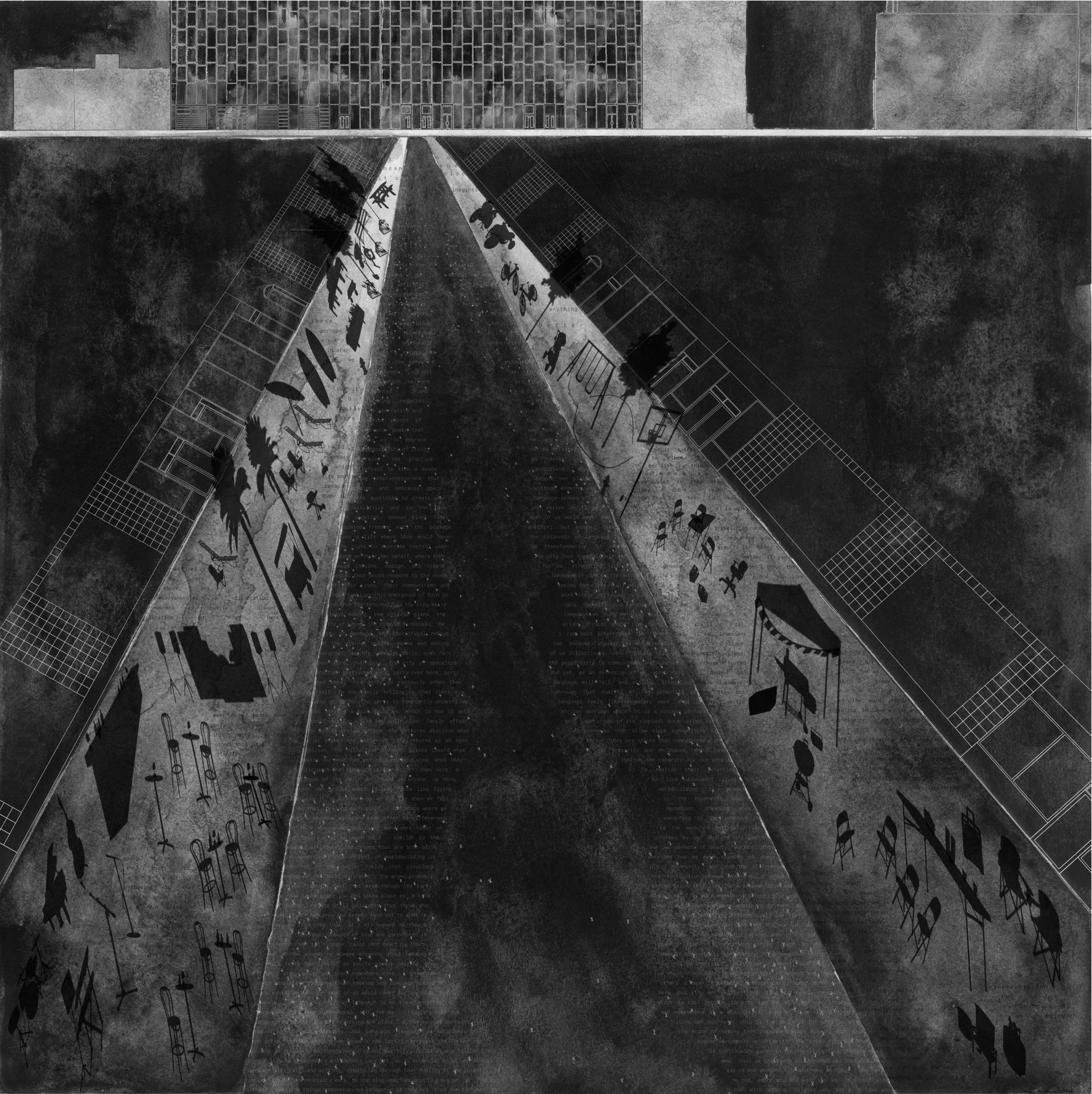
2. LINE OF APPROPRIATION

[illegible]



to let the smile
this will maintain to be
an evolving process
that is agreed upon marked
on, and learned from
a big room
this process begins as a series of
questions, thoughts, and ways of
living in order to let the smile
seed itself upon from
please respond to the
following series of questions
on circle your needs
what is important?
inclusive short term not-for-profit
diversity long term for-profit
livelihood stability life long
care collective
affordable
circular living mutual aid
unprogramed group living
cashless barter
see to grow grow upon space
building maintenance pet care
your programming
how do you want to live?
what makes a home?
gardening









MY BODY OF WATER

making, bookmaking, matters of identity

ADV VI (Spring 2025)
Professors: Ada Tolla and Giuseppe Lignano
TA: Ammar Rassai
Collaborators: Qizhen (Qi) Chen
Yung-Ju (Lulu) Chung
Jacqueline (Jackie) Lucy Danielyan
Lucy (Luci) Li
Giuseppe Lignano
Trella Isabel Lopez
Sewon Min
Samiha Tasnim
Emily Mei-Mei Taw
Ada Tolla
Burcu Yasemin Turkay
Wenyi Xu
Xiaoyu (Rayne) Zhu

This project is a part of the MAKERGRAPH / LOT-EK / MATTERS OF IDENTITY studio. This studio adapts a thesis-like sensibility into a committed sequence of highly structured, iterative, cumulative work. In parallel and mutual influence with this work, this studio creates visual, material, and verbal archives, feeds of our own preoccupations, and reflections from our life experiences within and beyond the design world.

MAKERGRAPH focuses on identity, as personal exploration and creative expression centered on each of our own life stories; as an investigation within, to dig, to learn, to uncover, and at the same time to question—our identity and our identifications, our memberships, or our default belongings. We explore our identity as a springboard for our imagination. This is a practice of freedom.

This studio asks from us to take risks, practice self-awareness, and become ever more concious of our own patterns of thought, and ever more critical of the educational, cultural, and other structural biases that may be shaping these patterns for us. MAKERGRAPH centers thinking-by-making; on material culture as an expression of our culture; on craft and digital craft; and on material practice.

The record of this studio work is the work. It accumulates into a sequence of constructions, pages, and spreads. This work becomes a reference, a commentary, and a conscience for your future self. This work is personal, non-compliant, and destabilizing. This work is inventive and imagines. This work is a practice of radical authenticity and creative courage.

This project is an investigation of my identity, of my personal, cultural, physical, and visual interests, biases, and legacies. In its form, this project is a meditation on shadows, reflections, refractions, and diffractions.

Shadows are a manifestation of the physical and the ephemeral. Shadows are fleeting, defiant to control and certainty.

Shadows are subject to the passing of time, possible only because the Moon orbits the Earth and the Earth orbits the Sun. Shadows exemplify the grandness of our universe and the hyper-specificity of a moment.

Shadows are earnest. Shadows yearn.

Shadows embody dualities. Shadows are present, and shadows are absent. Shadows are in motion, and shadows are still. Shadows are soft and diffuse, and shadows are strong and sharp.

I embody dualities. I am present, and I am absent. I am in motion, and I am still. I am soft and diffuse, and I am strong and sharp.

My dualities are the contents of my container and the container of my contents. My body, of dualities. Of dualities, my body.

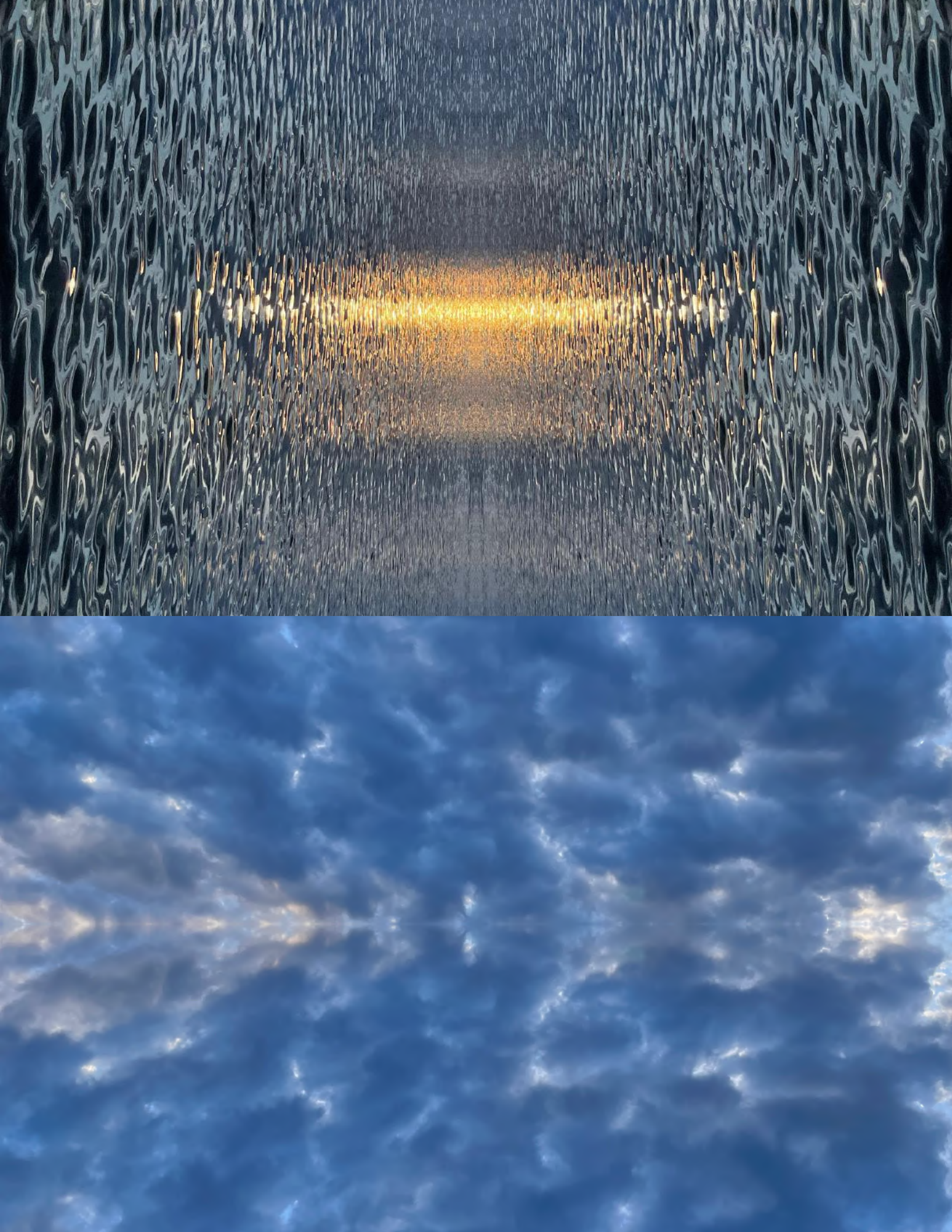
It is impossible for me to separate shadows from water, shadows from light, and light from water.

Shadows are created when light is blocked. Reflections are created when light hits a surface and bounces back. Refractions are created when light passes from one material into another, changes speed, and bends. Diffractions are created when light hits an obstacle or passes through an opening, bends, and spreads out.

Water hides behind its shadow. Water gives itself away through reflection. Water mirrors and bends to a refraction. Water projects itself beyond a diffraction.

I hide, I am a shadow. I give away, I am a reflection. I mirror, I am a refraction. I project, I am a diffraction.

My body, of water. Of water, my body.



My favorite place in the entire world is in the middle of Lake Wingra in Madison, Wisconsin. In many ways, I was born here.

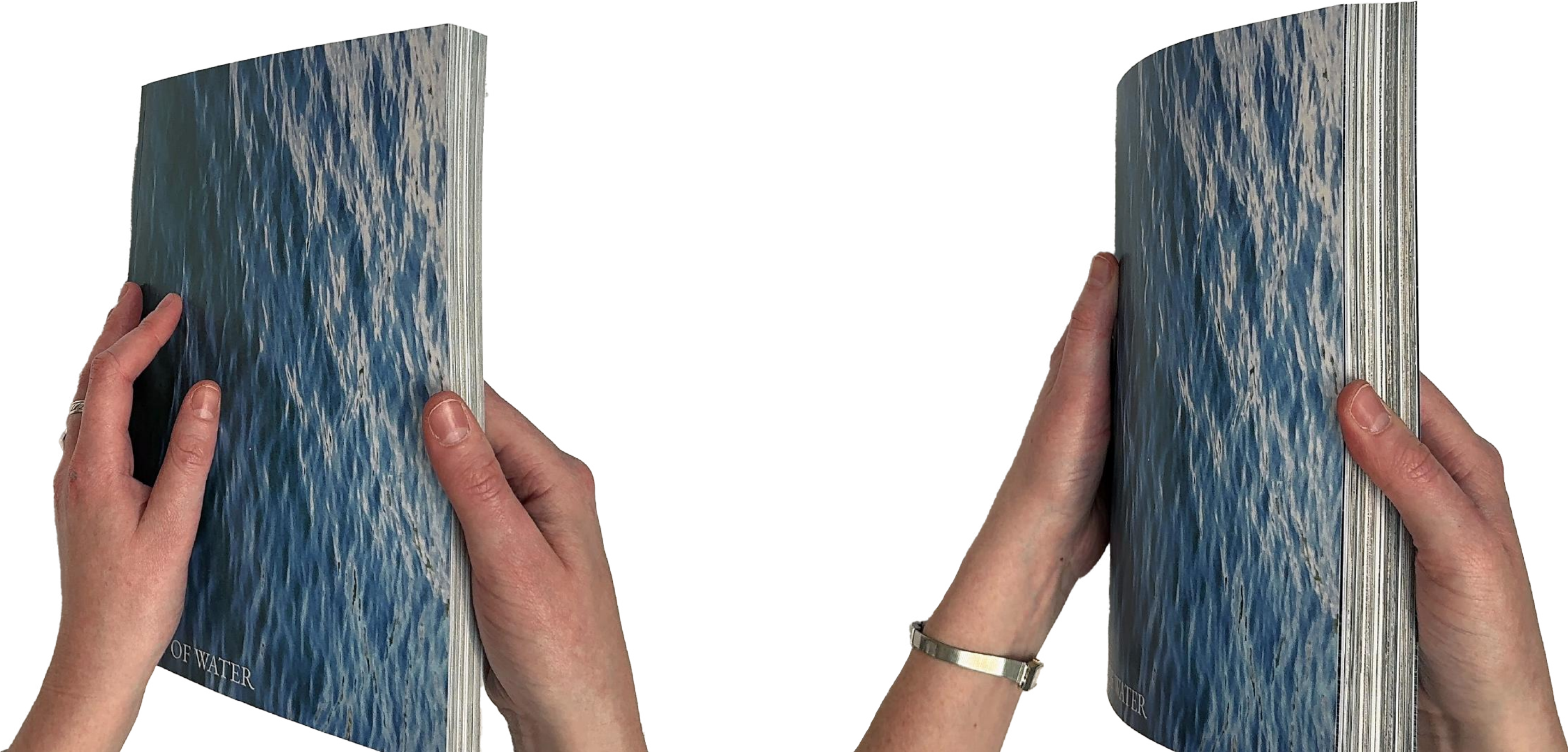
My Mom gave birth to me in a hospital room overlooking this lake. I had known love for this lake before I was even born; my Mom has always loved this lake; as did my Mom's Mom.

My sense of independence was born on this lake. I spent seven consecutive summers working at the boathouse on this lake, during some of my most formative years. I gained confidence. I lost confidence. I found myself. I lost myself. I learned love. I misunderstood love.

My most profound passions were born on this lake. I love the environment because of my love for this body of water and all its environmental entanglements and interactions. I love architecture because of my love for this body of water and all its built environment entanglements and interactions. I love shadows because of my love for this body of water and all its light entanglements and interactions.

I was young, although I cannot recall my exact age, but I remember I was young enough that I was exhilarated to be alone. I was paddling out into the middle of the lake on my paddle board. The sun was hot overhead, unfiltered on a cloudless day, the wind was strong, gusting relentlessly against my face, and the waves were audible, lapping over the sides of the board. I paused to look ahead and check on the gnarled willow tree, my north star to ensure I was heading towards the cold springs in the far corner of the lake. As I recentered myself, adjusting my feet on the board, I caught a glance of myself in a way I never had before. I saw my shadow cast out onto the rippling water. My shadow stood tall and strong, yet equally uneasy and wavering, as the water shapeshifted its form. The water sparkled in the direct sunlight, my shadow shimmering and twinkling. I felt a deep sense of comfort in this juxtaposition, the certainty of the existence of my shadow and the uncertainty of its shape. While the waves relentlessly changed the shape of my shadow, the light relentlessly illuminated it. I felt hope. I felt at ease in the uncertainty of who I would become. I felt at ease in the certainty that I had already become more than I had realized. I was grounded in this place, in this love, in this body of water.

To this day, my shadow captivates me. I am equally surprised and comforted when I catch a glimpse of myself this way. I have a momentary flashback to standing on my paddle board in the middle of Lake Wingra. I am reborn in my shadow of now.

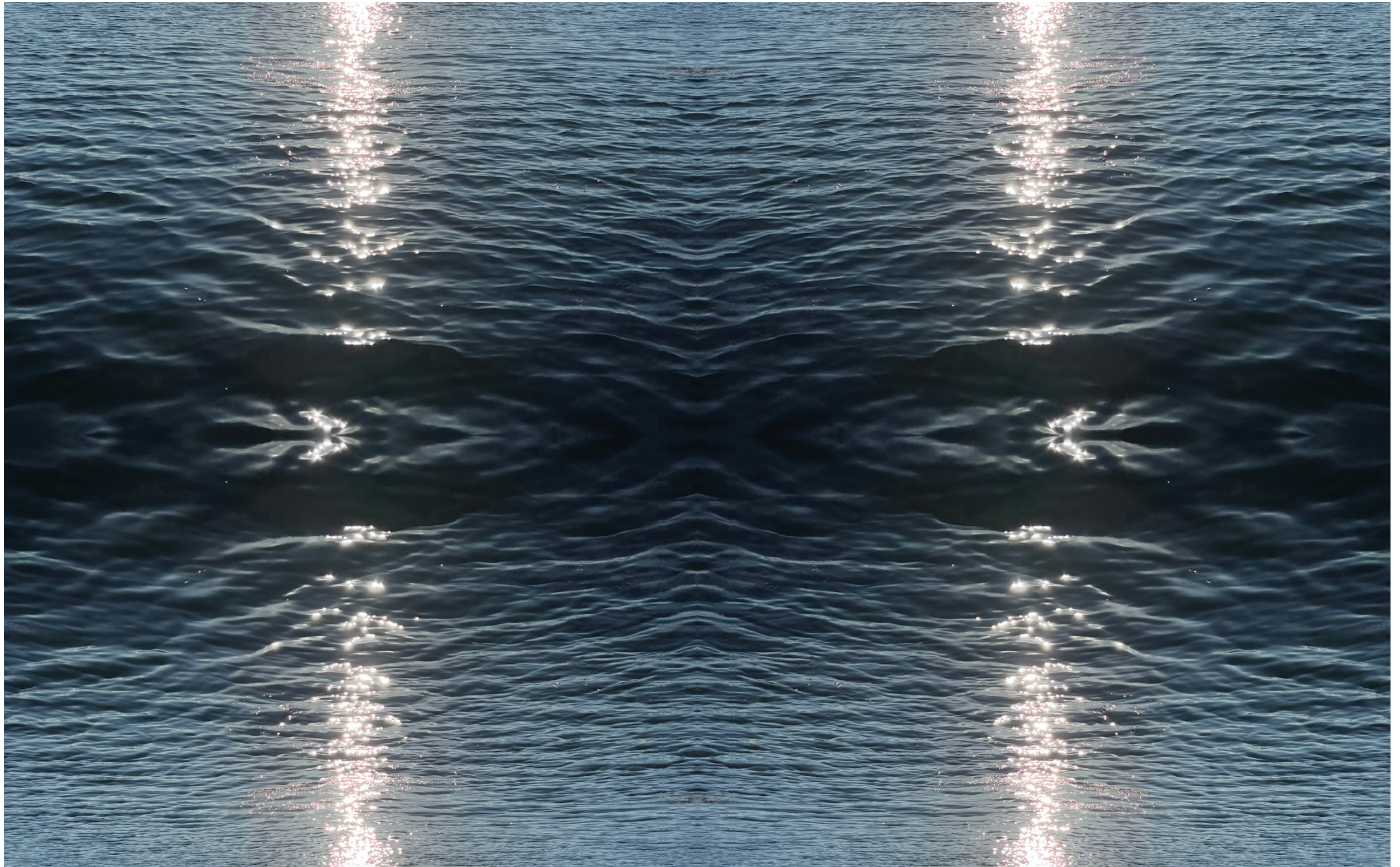


MY BODY OF WATER



MY BODY OF WATER

Erin Emily Freeman



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