

FRANK MULVEY

WRITTEN OBSERVATIONS AND PROCESS IMAGES: SELECTED WORKS

Updated April 10, 2022



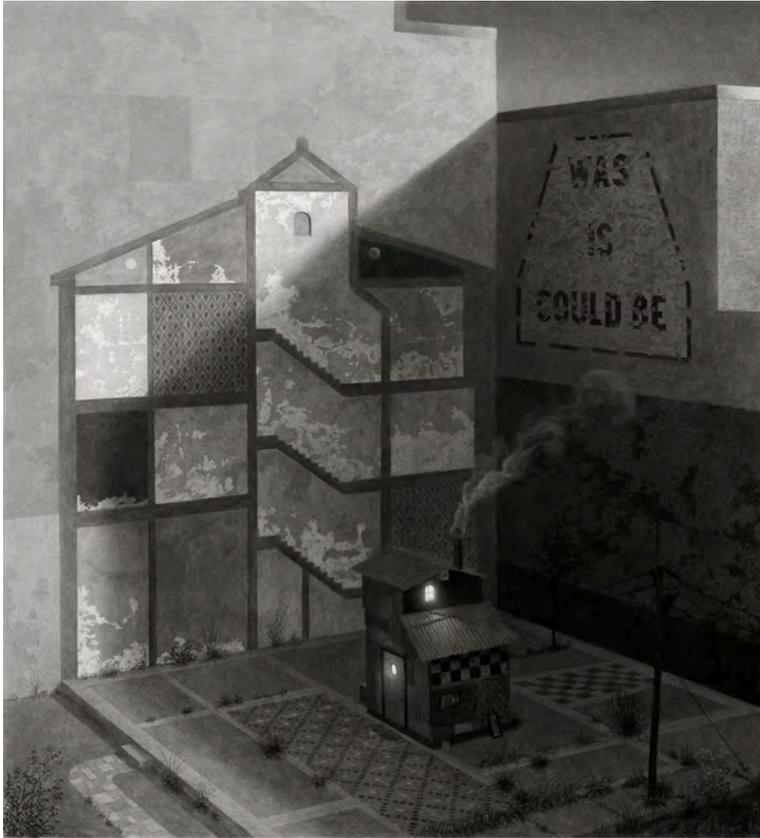
Photo by Nalo Bruce

I am a figurative artist who has worked primarily with charcoal on paper for more than three decades. I work in charcoal because carbon, its main ingredient, lends itself to a wide variety of light and dark effects. The generous range of this medium enables me to create convincing illusions of volume and depth. These visual gymnastics are what people refer to when they admire how the subject matter "looks real". Although there is something seductive in the art of making things appear round or far away, for me the real artistry is intuitively knowing where to tone down and where to illuminate, and how to interweave these qualities in a composition so that the presence of each makes the other more magical and compelling. The interplay of light and shadow on form is what has always most captured my imagination as an artist, and in its embrace a building or a person or any other subject can transcend its own properties and join the dazzling poetry of visual experience.

The genre most closely associated with my work is magic realism, which explores the strangeness and incongruities of conscious experience. It is not realism in the sense that everyday life is not the dominant focus, and neither is it surrealism because it generally does not present overtly irrational or dreamlike juxtapositions. My work is sometimes mistakenly viewed as illustrative, perhaps because of a misconception that realistic depictions with narrative elements are necessarily indicators of illustration. Additionally, my artwork does not serve or embellish pre-existing content, which illustration does. That said, narrative texts can be applied to the individual images, or sets of these images, but the texts become the illustrations in that they serve the image(s), and the artwork occupies the role normally associated with a text.

The subject matter in my drawings is a transformed reflection of the soulful, flawed and beautiful people I have met, and of the timeworn architecture in places I have lived or visited. Each drawing can be thought of as a flicker along the spectrum of human folly, struggle, redemption and transcendence. Some drawings sit closer to the dark portion of this spectrum; others reside in the more radiant portion, with the remaining ones inhabiting both.

The following pages consist of a selection of recent work accompanied by written observations that provide some perspective as to how each piece fits into the larger scheme of my current exploration. As well, batches of process images provide glimpses into the development of each drawing, including both traditional and digital sketching and problem solving.



LIEU, 2021
Charcoal on paper
135.9 cm x 126.0 cm
(frame included)

All places and experiences are transient, yet our minds are able to retain them through time, in a shifting configuration of memories and imaginings. This slippery puzzle of time, experience and place is what I play with when I draw.

In bilingual Montreal, where I live and work, the word "lieu" (chosen as the title for this drawing) carries layers of meaning. In English it is used in the phrase "in lieu of" (in the place of), and in French it is coupled with the use we assign to a certain place, such as a place to work or a place to live. I feel that it is well suited as the title of an artwork about the shifting nature of a place to inhabit that seeks reconciliation amongst the changing circumstances of its past, its present, and its future.

A short video about the thinking and process behind this drawing can be seen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JOwGgn0zUMA>

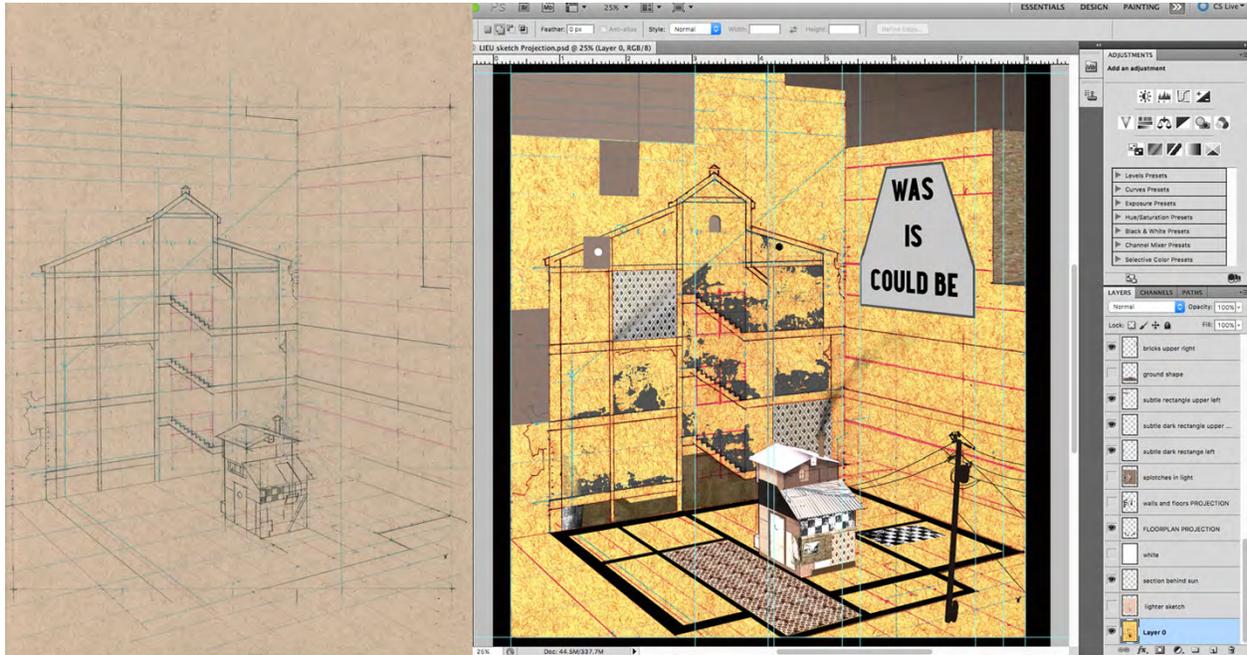
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LIEU (process)



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LIEU (process)



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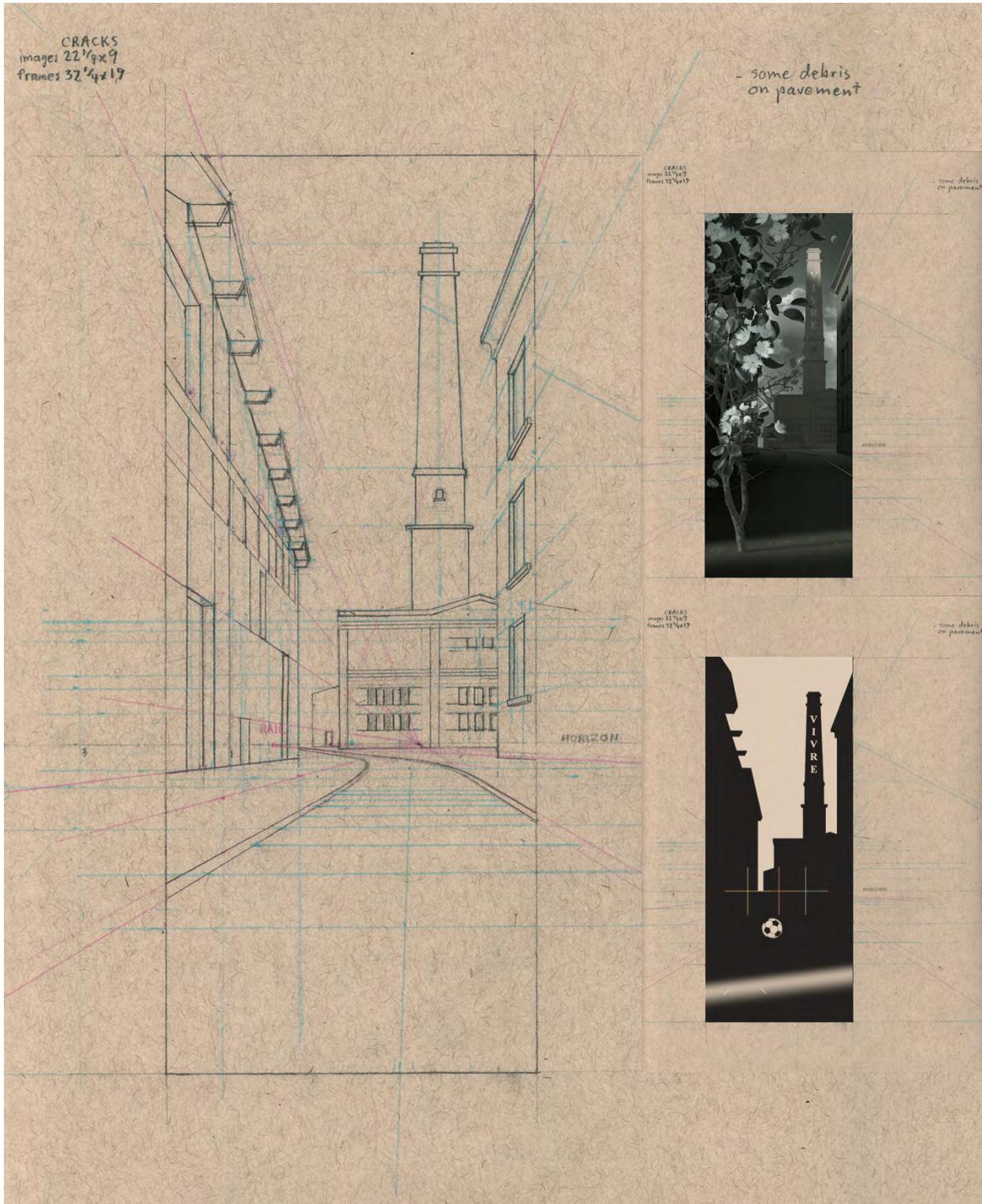
LIEU (process)





VIVRE, 2021
Charcoal on paper
81.3 cm x 48.3 cm
(frame included)

Plant life can exist without the presence of human beings, but human beings cannot exist without plant life. This may seem obvious, but the degree of reverence for that which is fundamental to our existence is quite vulnerable to the caprice of humanity. The plant kingdom watches and waits while we determine our destiny.



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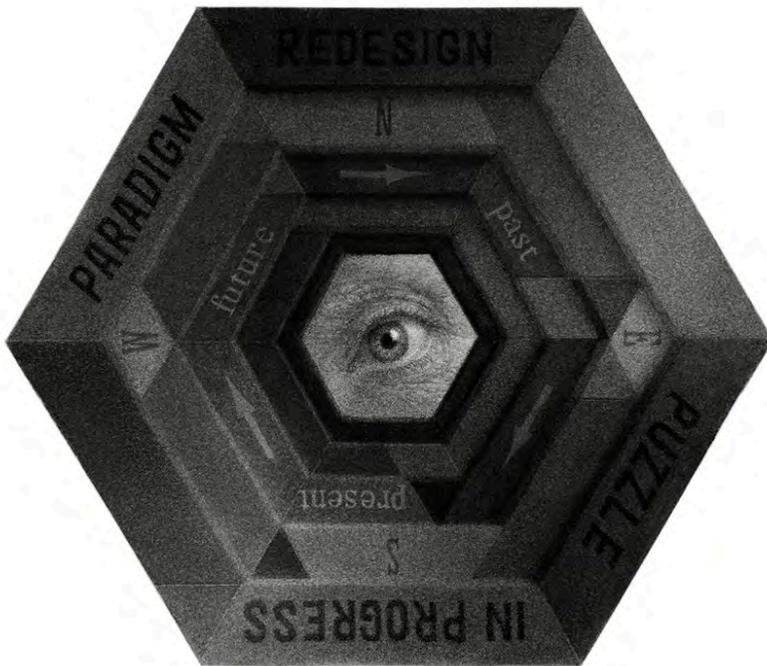
VIVRE (process)





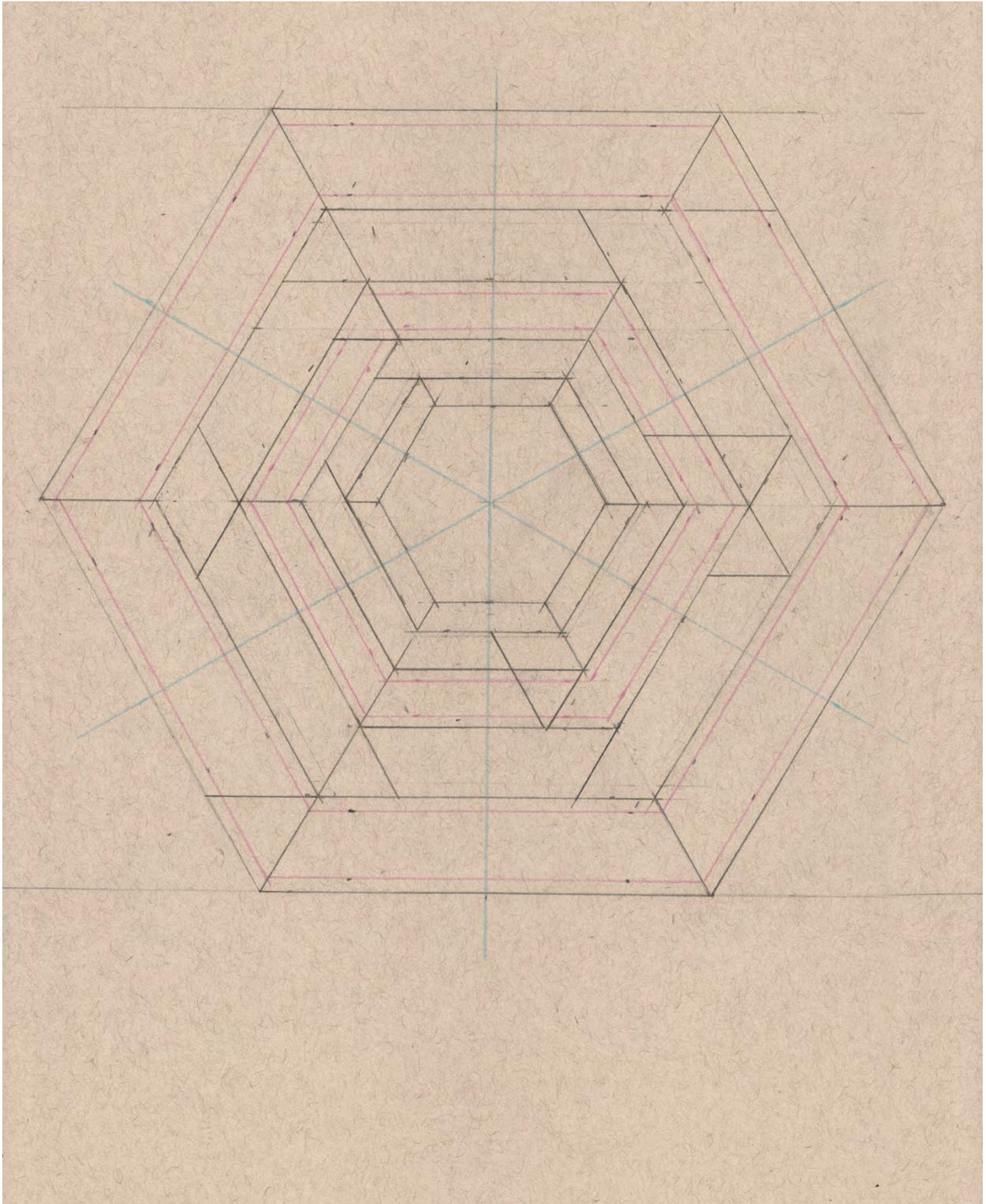
Trying to Foresee, 2022
Charcoal on paper
43.2 cm x 49.2 cm
(frame included)

As we observe the world, we each have our ideas about how to adapt to it and how it could be restructured to adapt to us. This results in a myriad of shifting arrangements between each individual and their surroundings. If our individual observations also take into account the observations of others, and if our individual adaptations are based on collective consideration, then together we create a future for all.



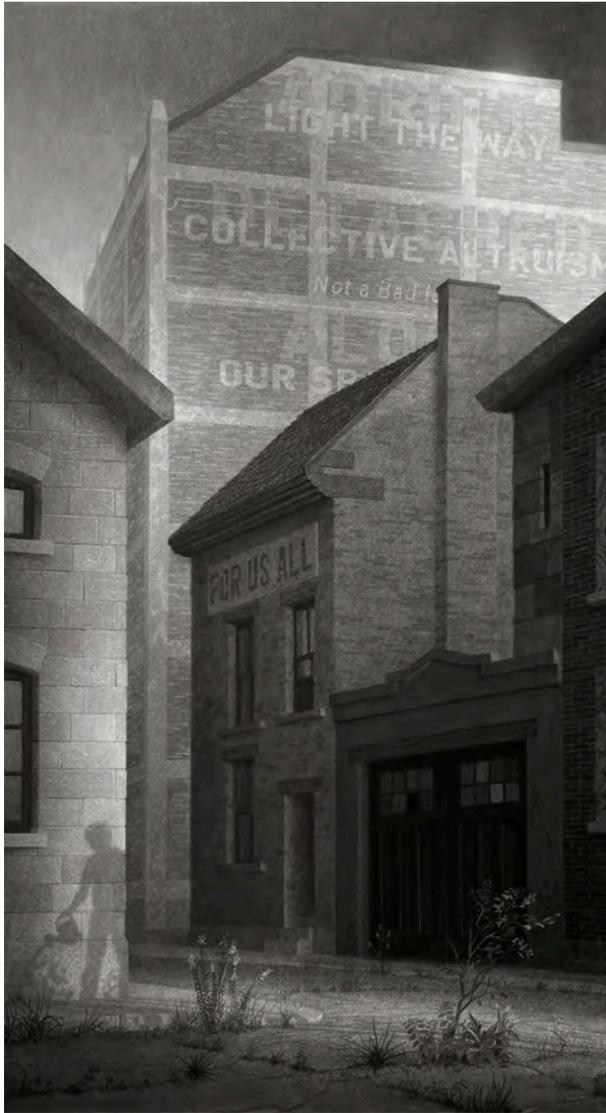
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TRYING TO FORESEE (process)



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LIGHT THE WAY (observations)



LIGHT THE WAY, 2022

Charcoal on paper
177.8 cm x 76.2 cm
(frame included)

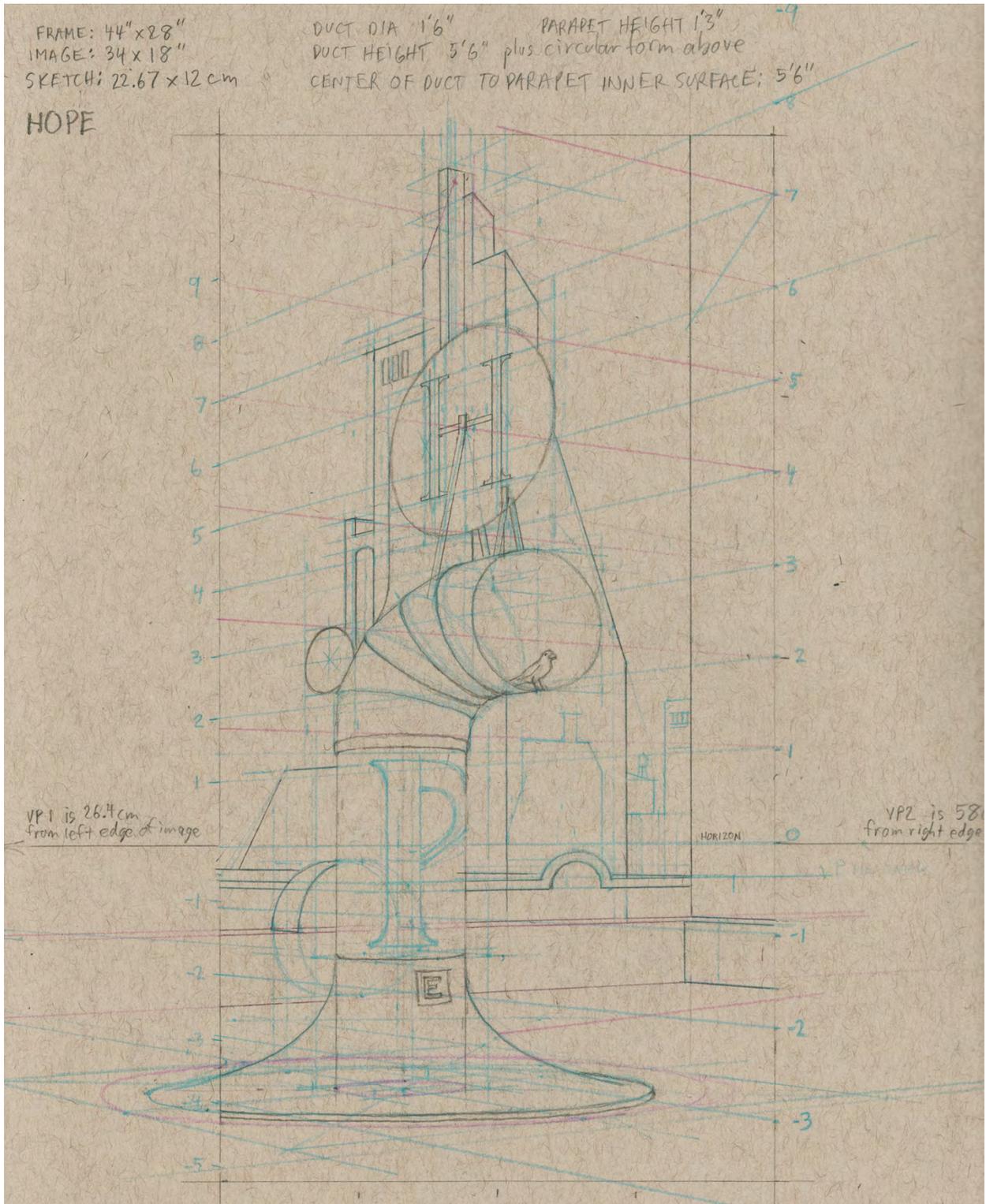
There are several buildings on St. Antoine Street on the edge of Old Montreal, near St. Lawrence Boulevard, that have sat empty for years. One of the buildings housing the Old Brewery Mission is nearby, with a brick wall boasting an old painted sign towering over the homeless people seeking comfort at the mission. The aging signs and boarded up facades speak of past realities. This charcoal drawing reconfigures this area, layering loss and hope into a resonance that to me feels appropriate for 2022.





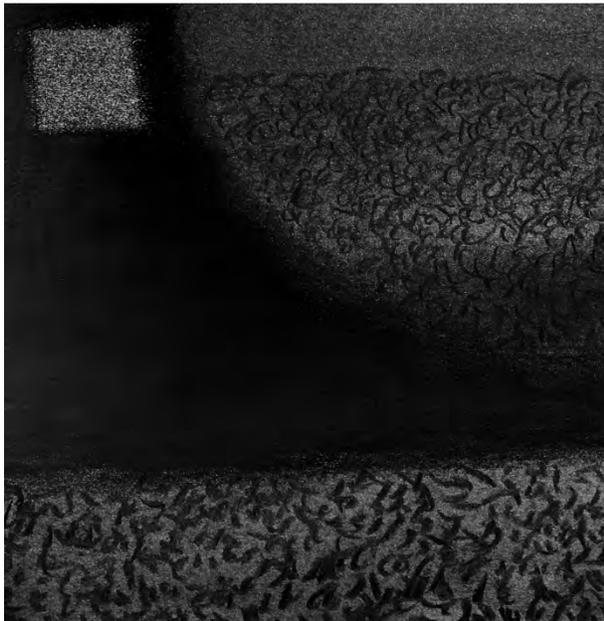
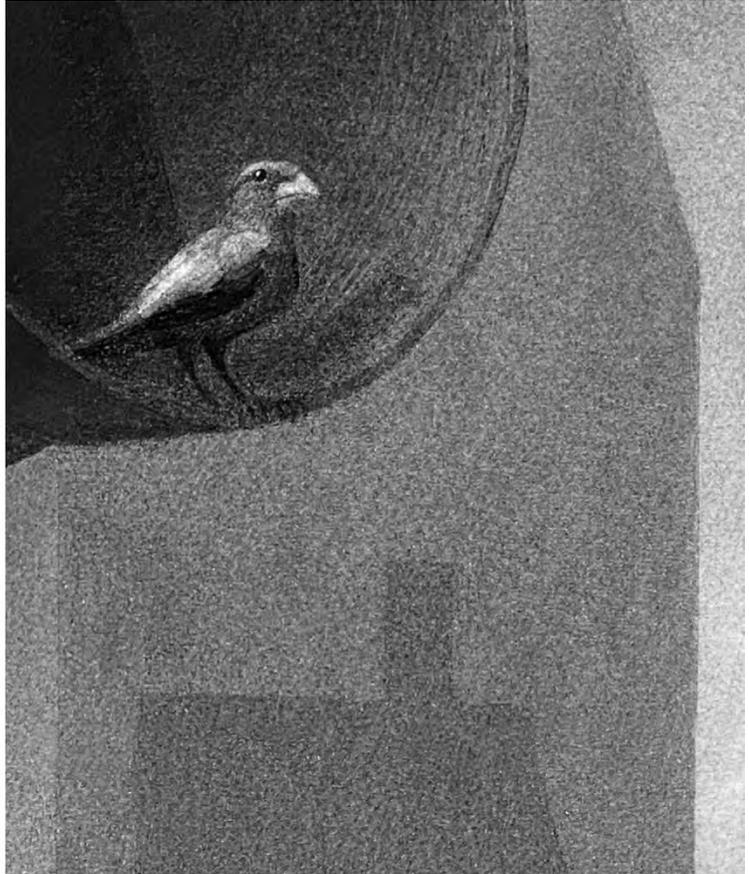
FUTURE PAST, 2021
Charcoal on paper
177.8 cm x 76.2 cm
(frame included)

Life adapts to change. Many of us are doing our best to reduce excessive waste, to reuse and recycle, and to repurpose materials, objects, and spaces. It occurred to me that the art of collage is conducive to this endeavor, which got me to thinking about the Dada collagists of the European Avant-Garde, struggling to reshape the world through their art. My head swam with image fragments and typographic elements, and thoughts of reassembling our current existence from deconstructed pieces of the past. Perhaps the puzzle of our lives can be rearranged in a more promising way, so that the pieces and spaces in between harmonize, and balance is more possible for all earthly creatures.



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FUTURE PAST (process)



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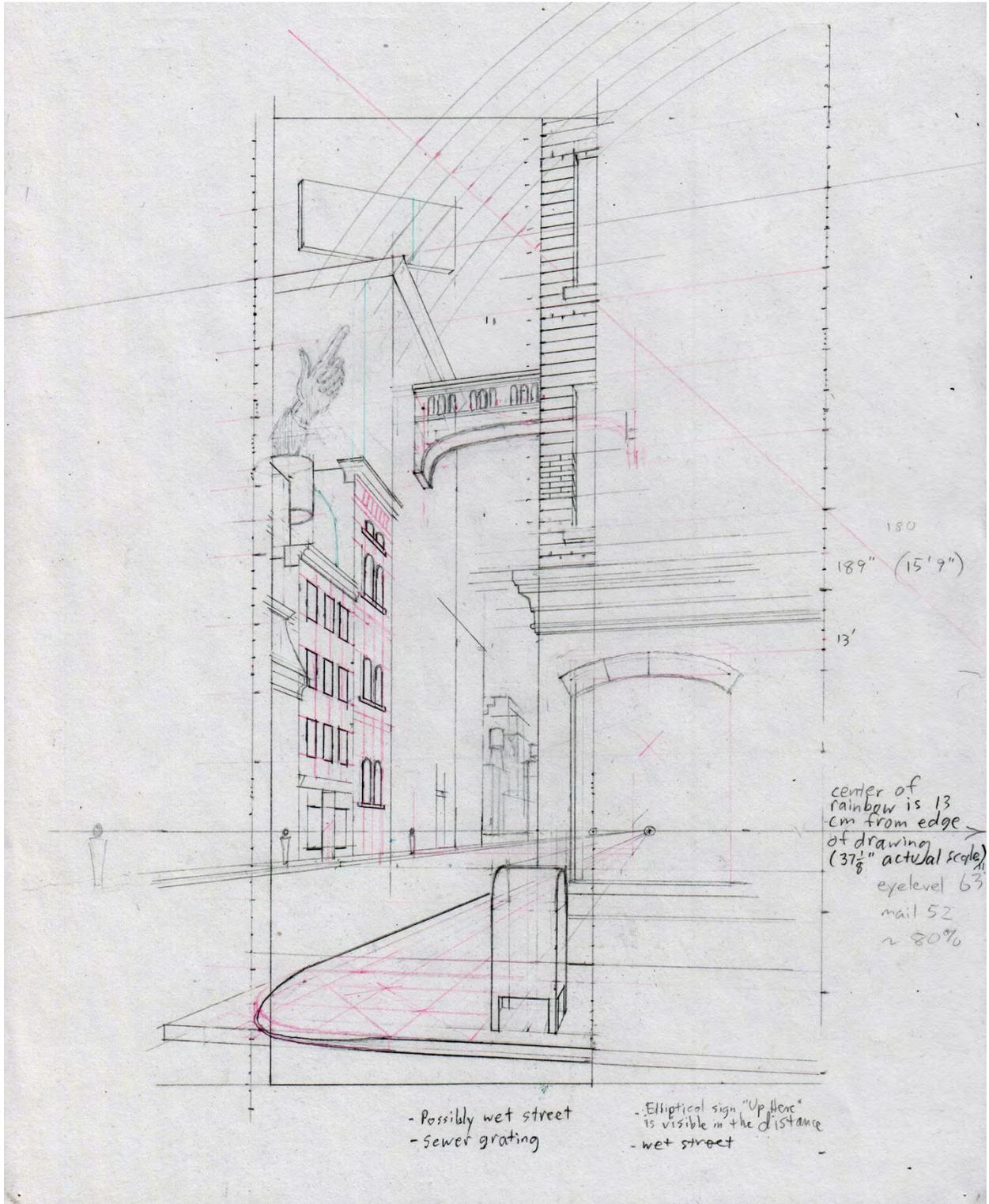
IN THE EARLY DAYS (observations)



IN THE EARLY DAYS, 2020

Charcoal on paper
177.8 cm x 76.2 cm
(frame included)

If most of us saw the world in shades of grey, found beauty in this, and knew nothing of colour, we might close ourselves to any talk about rainbows being more than glowing arcs. Our fear could be that seeing colour would propagate dangerous changes in people's outlooks. Allowing others to see differently than us would be risky. Perhaps we would try to fix them, even if they may not see themselves as needing to be fixed. "Fear not," they might say. "The dimension of colour does not obstruct the splendour of light and shadow, and can collaborate with it in perfect alliance." How would we proceed?



FRANK MULVEY

IN THE EARLY DAYS (process)



*BEYOND
LUMINANCE*

PRISM

**S
C
H
I
S
M**

TOWN HALL MEETING

Monday June 21 at Five O'Clock
Under the Grand Arch (Rain or Shine)

Black & White

*Could There be More
To See?*

- 1) *It is thought by some that there are dimensions of extraordinary beauty that go beyond notions of light and dark.*
 - 2) *It is believed that apprehending these dimensions can greatly improve one's demeanor.*
 - 3) *There is scientific evidence for the existence of these dimensions of beauty, and that the perception of these phenomena is possible if we adapt our way of looking at them.*
 - 4) *There are those who feel that misinformation on this subject lowers the chances of others making informed choices amongst modes of perception because they are unknowingly stuck in one or another mode. Some of these individuals, relying exclusively on misinformation, may consequently be blind to the choice before them.*
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-

FRANK MULVEY

IN THE EARLY DAYS (process)





RISE, 2020
Charcoal on paper
111.8 cm x 76.2 cm
(frame included)

Thankfully, humanity's precious folly is its capacity for hope that shines through the darkness of its circumstances.

The subject of this drawing lies outside the composition, with only its shadow appearing. Portraying this shadow helped me to express something of the hope for a better tomorrow, along with the elusiveness of that which we aspire to reach.

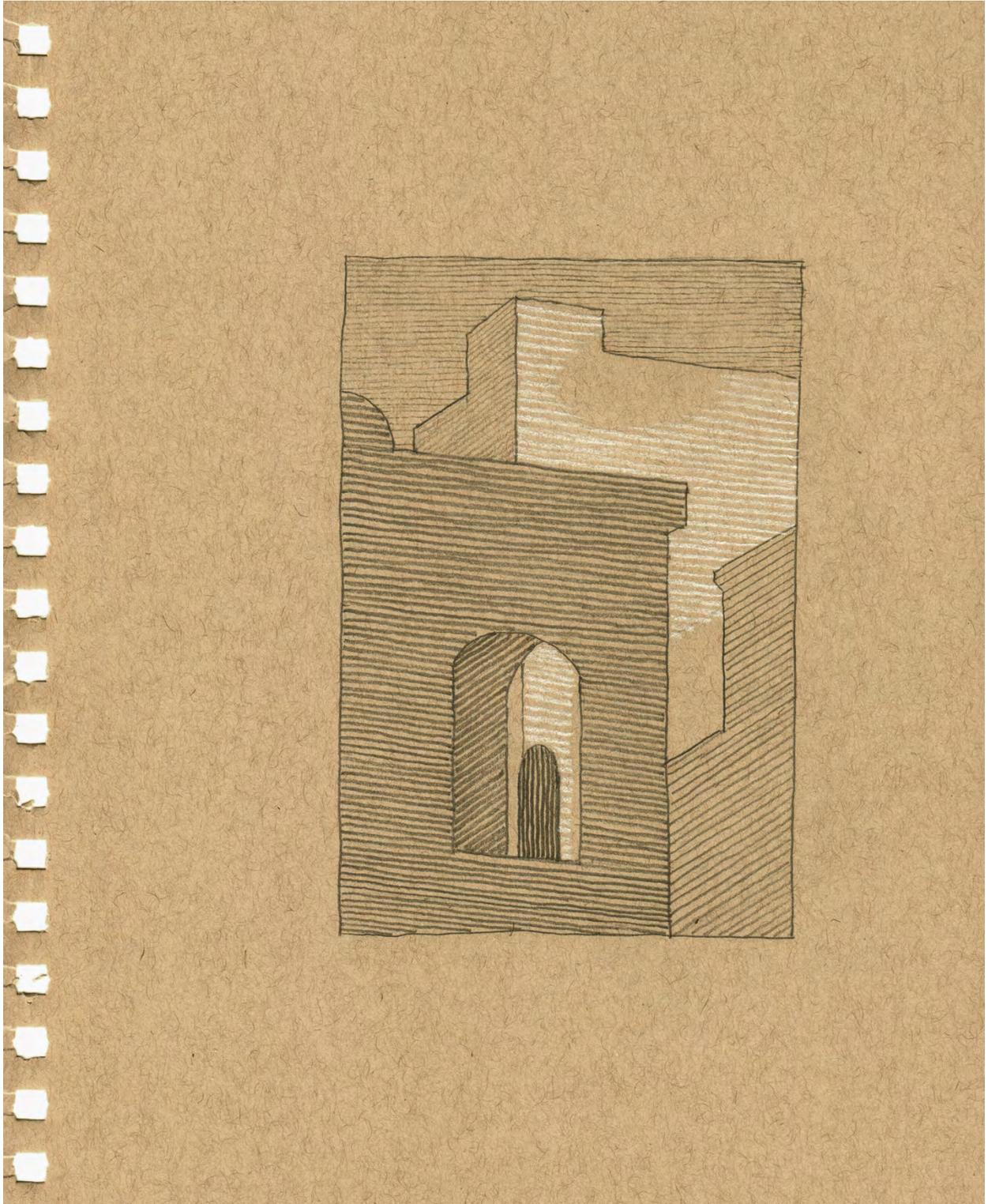
To express ideas fully, I often find myself reverse engineering a figurative image from explorations of abstract shapes. Architectural structures and recognizable subjects enrich the story, but the overarching theme is already foretold through the compositional arrangement. While viewers can identify the visual elements of a window, a person, a building,

and a shadow of a hot air balloon, underlying those representations are luminous and somber geometric abstractions. A sharply defined shape, surrounded by darkness, leads to a radiant space where an ephemeral shape beckons.



FRANK MULVEY

RISE (process)



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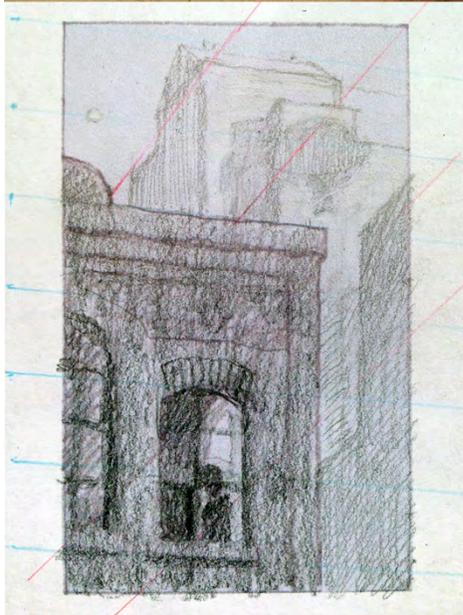
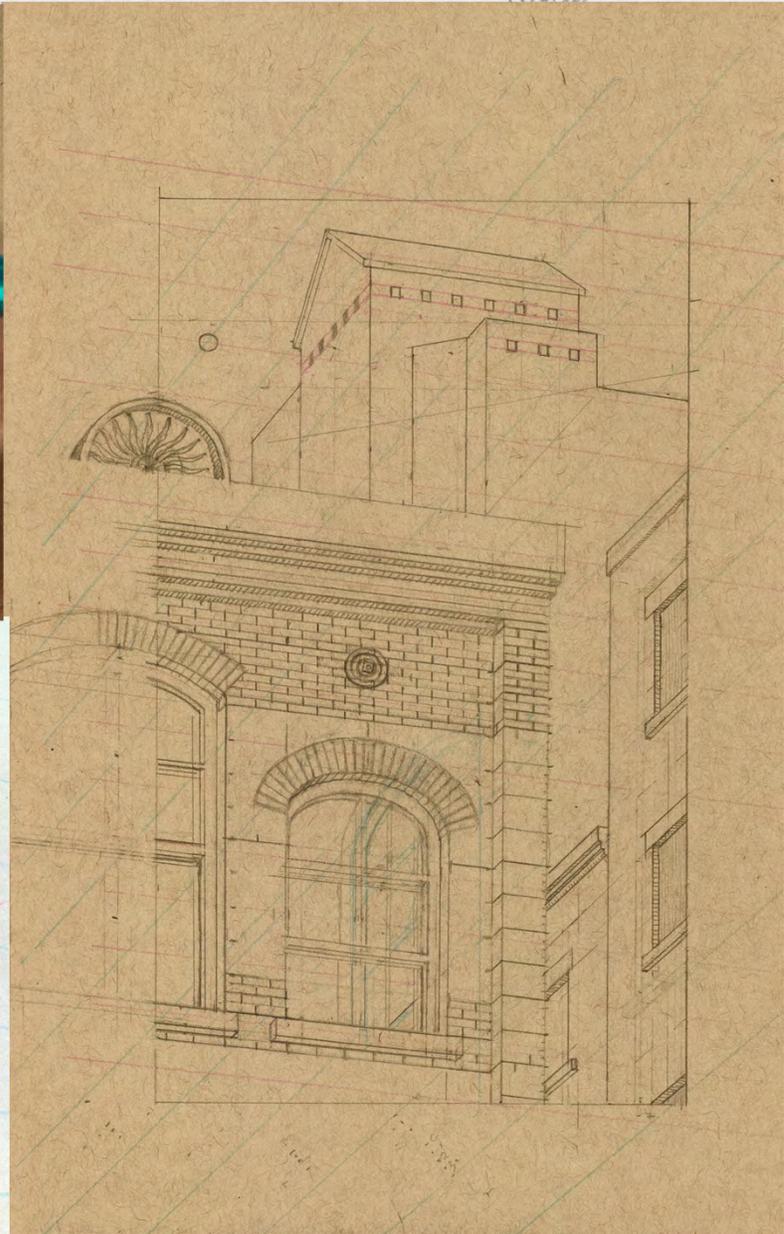
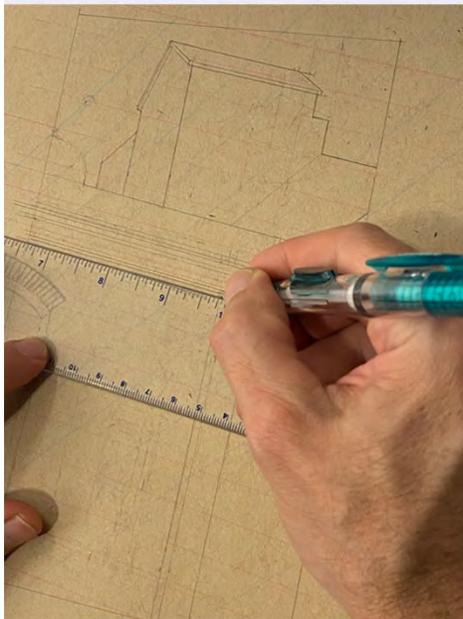
RISE (process)

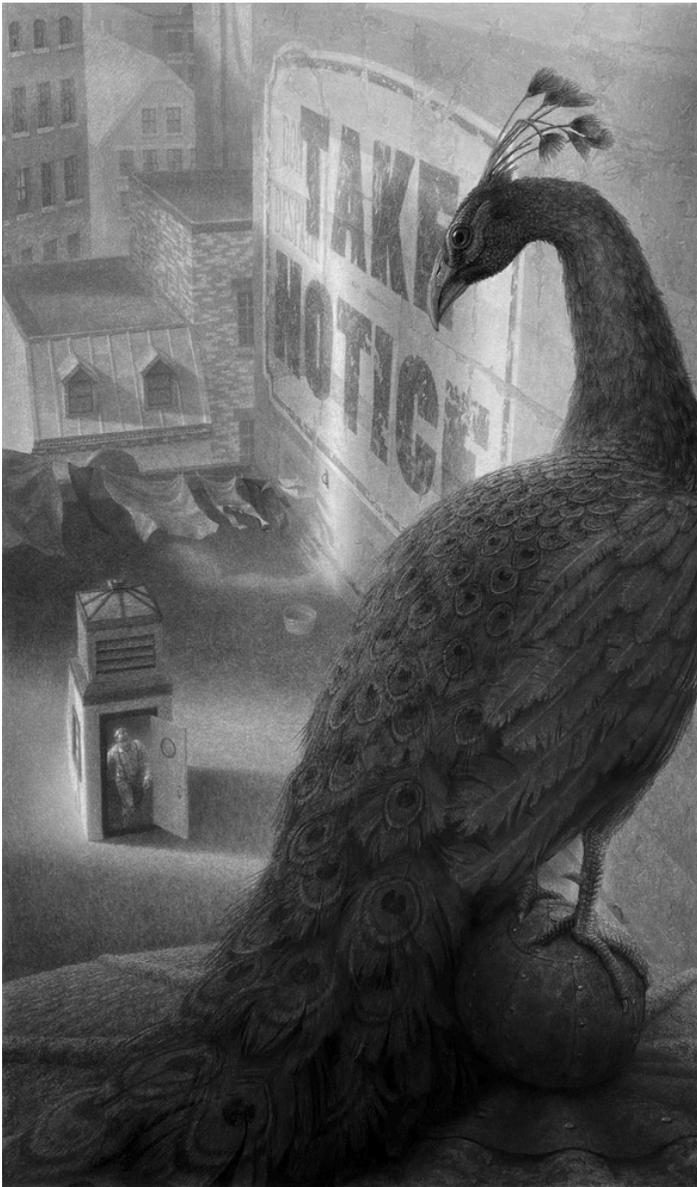
on wall: RISE
of drawing: AS ONE

- SOAR
- FORETOLD
- ONE CAN ASSUME
- FOREGONE

- CONNECTION
- AS ONE
- BEYOND
- TRACE
- REACH
- RISE

- QUIET
- FLY
- THOUGHT
- IMAGINE
- IMAGE
- IDEA





SIGN, 2020
Charcoal on paper
111.8 cm x 76.2 cm
(frame included)

Increasingly through the years, disequilibrium in ecosystems has instigated the displacement of specific forms of wildlife to areas not normally inhabited by those creatures. Global warming, forest clearing, wildfires and pollution have destroyed or displaced many species of wildlife. For people who do not consider themselves to be directly impacted, it's easy to minimize the urgency of this. But the signs are everywhere, and we are all affected. This drawing explores this issue, with a peacock as the harbinger. Since the inception of this drawing, new equilibriums are being established. As a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic, decreased traffic on the ground and in the air has lowered pollution levels and encouraged some shifts in wildlife habitats.



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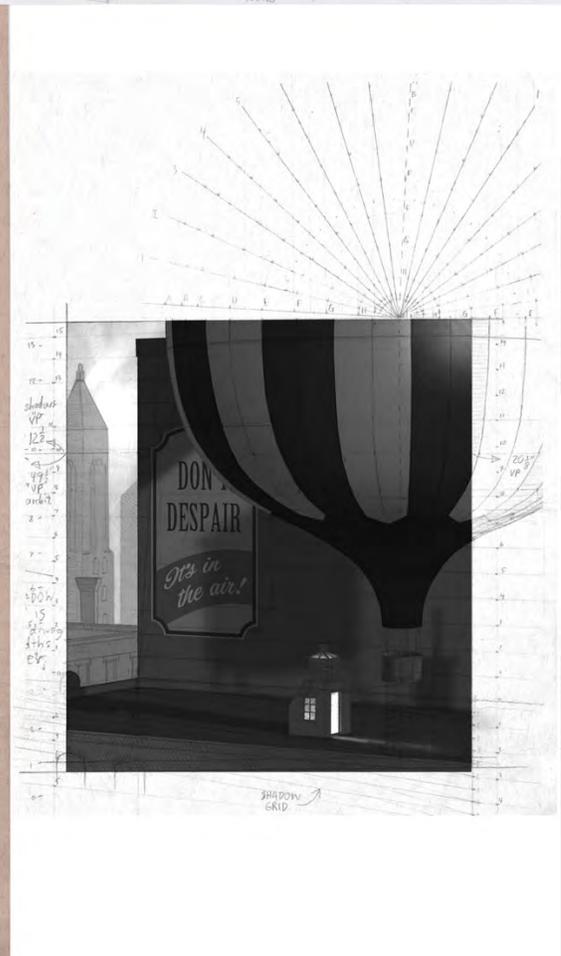
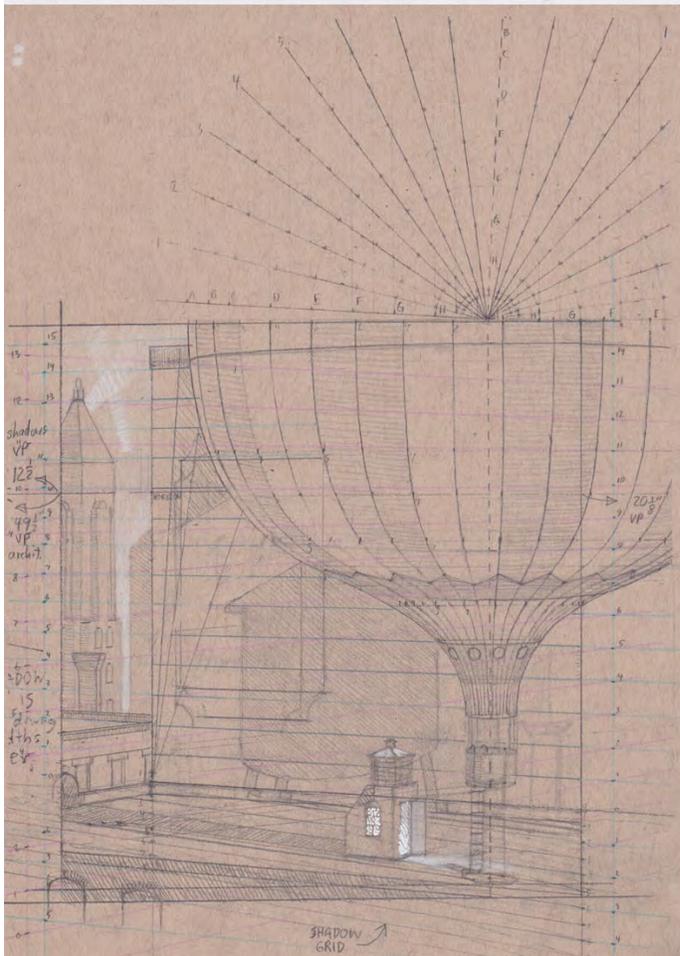
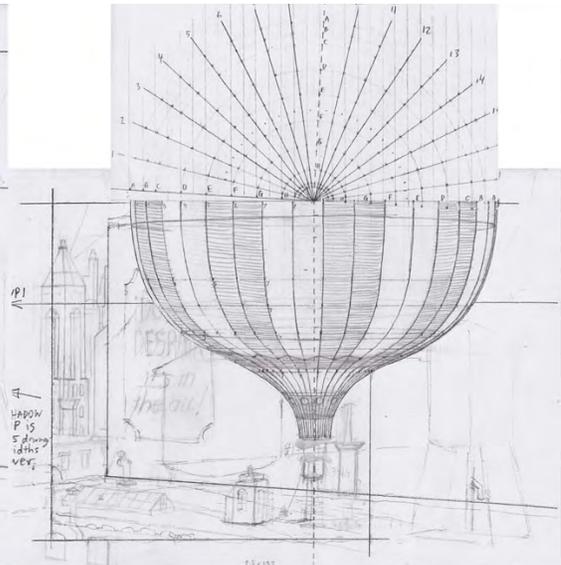
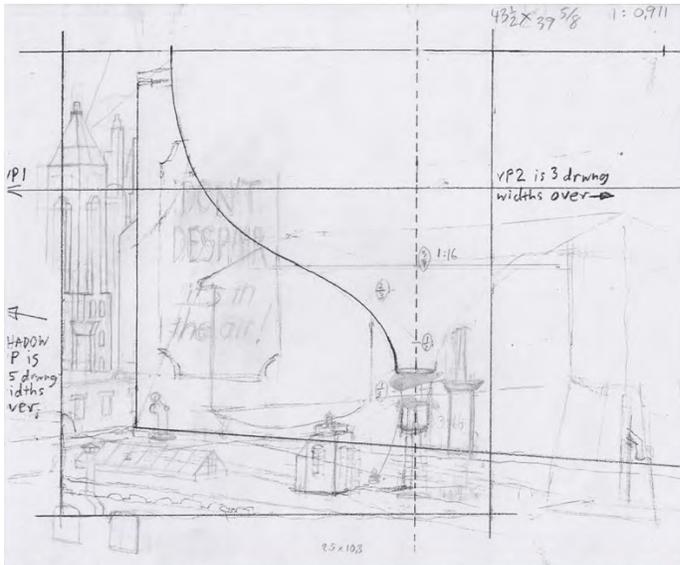
SIGN (process)





Rendez-vous, 2019
charcoal on paper
136.5 cm x 126.4 cm
(frame included)

Of late, an understated shade of retrofuturism has become an added feature in my work. I don't apply this with the sceptical amusement often associated with retrofuturist visions. Rather, I wish to reincarnate some trace of optimism about our future in echoes from the past. Through the idiom of old advertising slogans painted onto buildings, text elements appear in the drawings. Unlike their mid-twentieth century counterparts, they convey attitudes that are stripped of the consumerism with which they would customarily be linked. From one drawing to the next, certain iconographic elements (architecture, objects, people) recur as seen from different viewpoints, at different times, in interior and exterior settings. An open-ended story continuously unfolds in my mind with each new drawing, revealing subplots in orbit around an individual who feels hope for humanity, and through a series of observations and experiments, brings hope to others.



FRANK MULVEY

RENDEZ-VOUS (process)



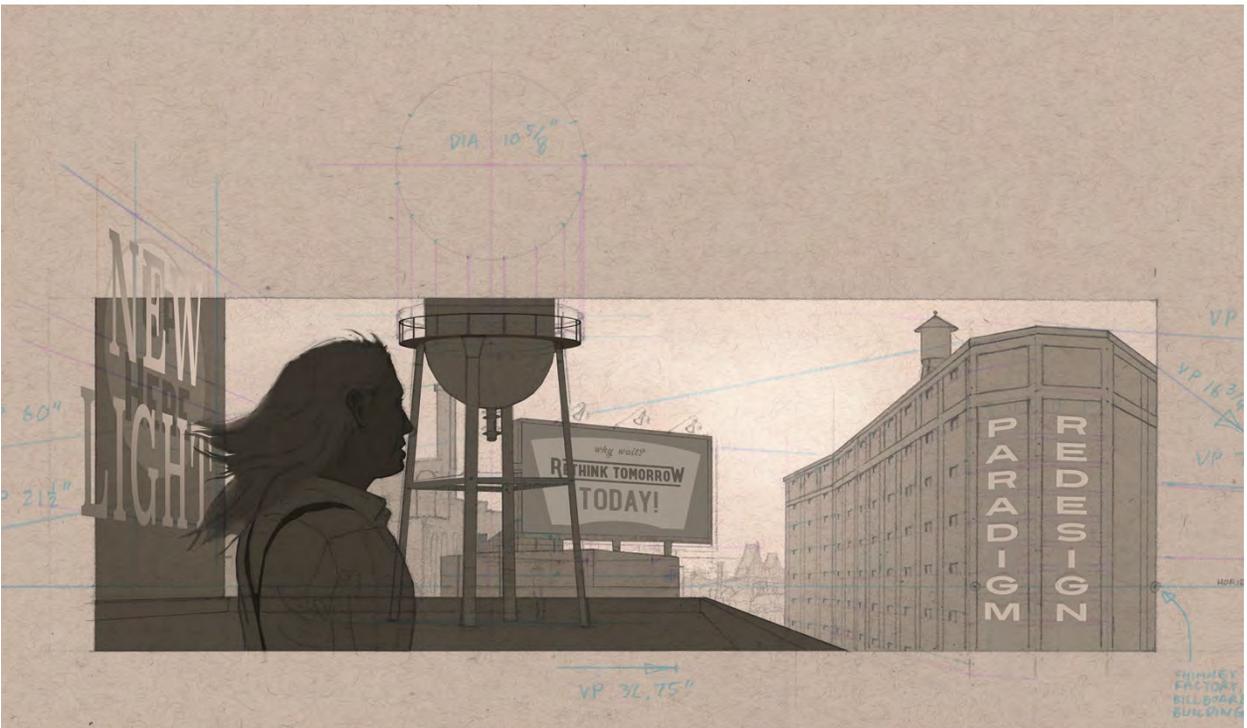
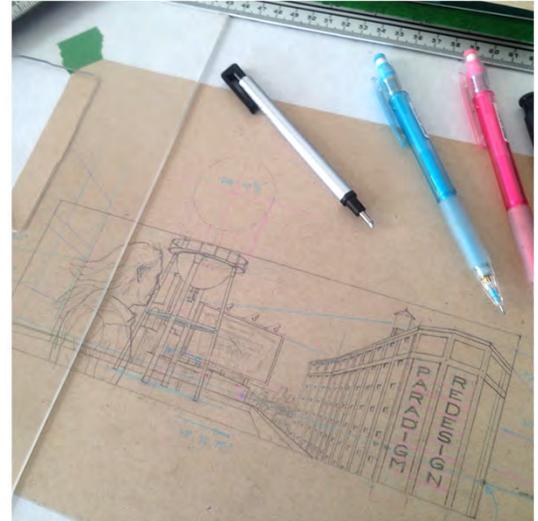
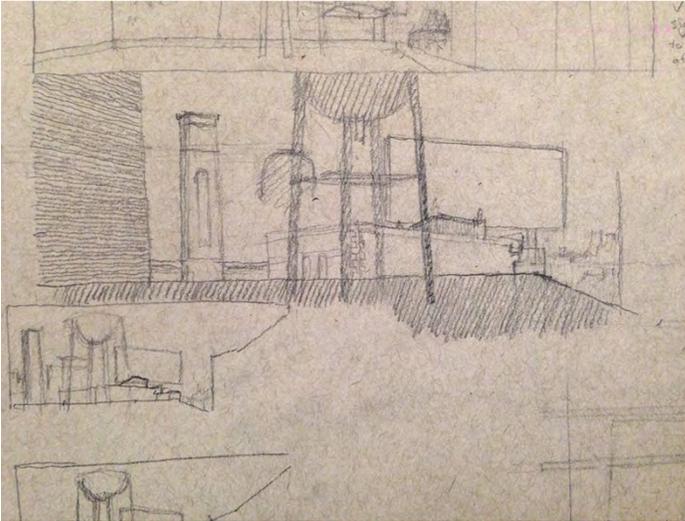


New Light, 2019, charcoal on paper, 76.2 cm x 177.8 cm (frame included)

This rooftop scene shares some common features with the rooftop portrayed in other drawings from different viewpoints, but additional elements are revealed. There were a number of options I considered here for creating a radiant and unusual skyscape. Eventually, I focused on the idea of crystalline forms, because the refractive properties of transparent crystal structures are in keeping with ideas to come in this series. Refraction involves the bending of pathways of light, and subsequent drawings will explore the idea of rearranging, bending and folding a variety of unlikely material and immaterial things to arrive at new ways of experiencing the world.

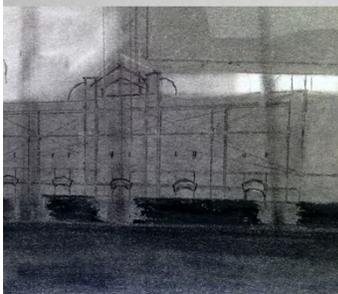
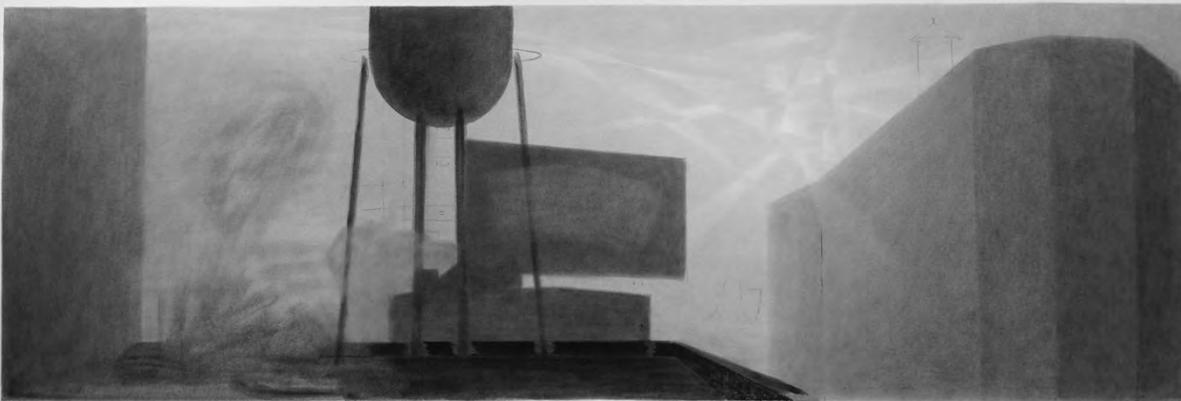
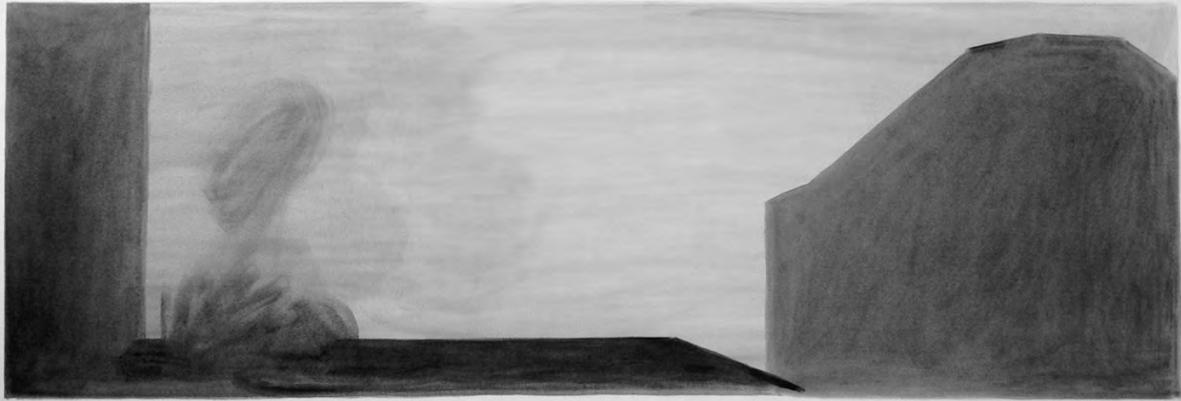
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NEW LIGHT (process)



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NEW LIGHT (process)



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SEEN BY ONE (observations)



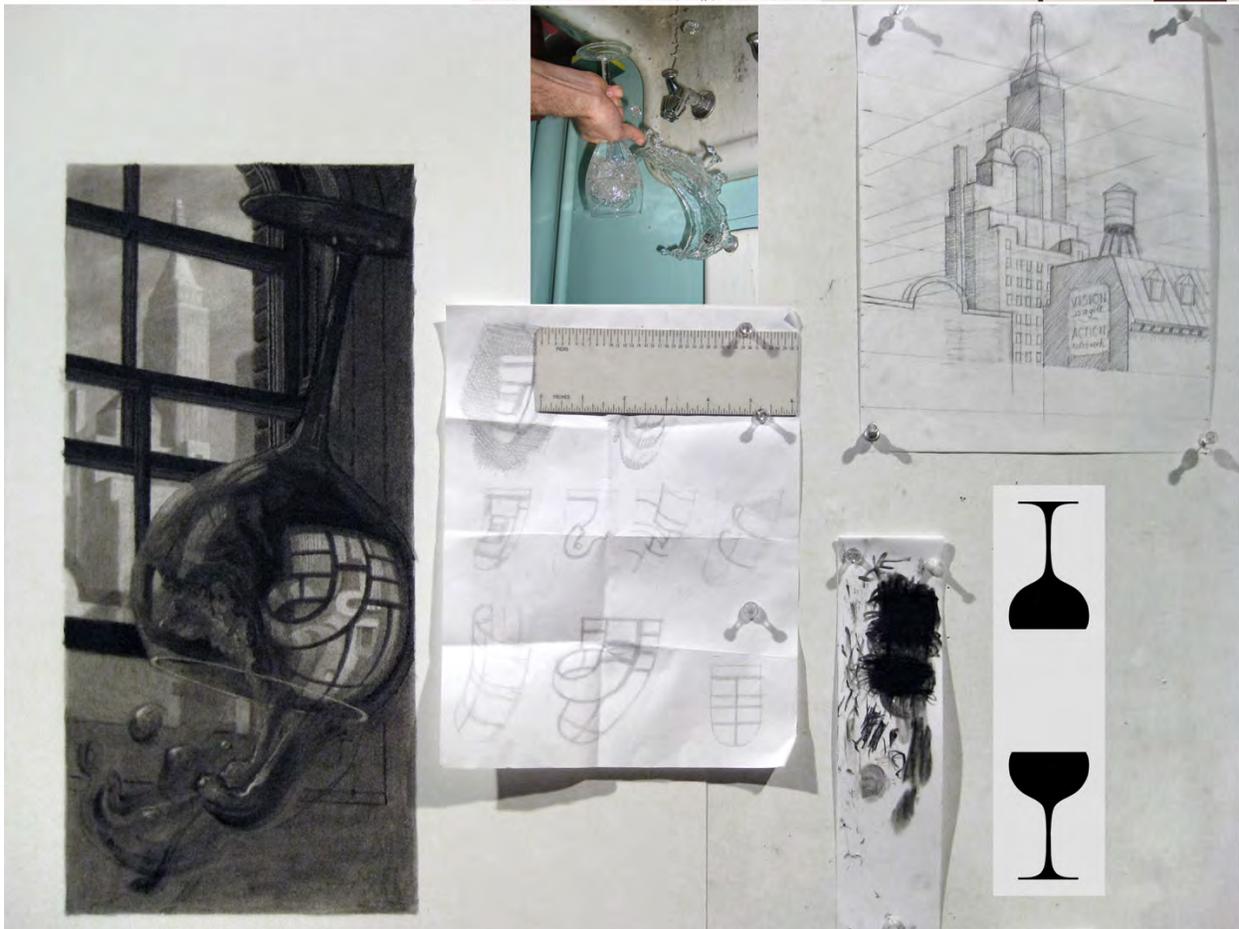
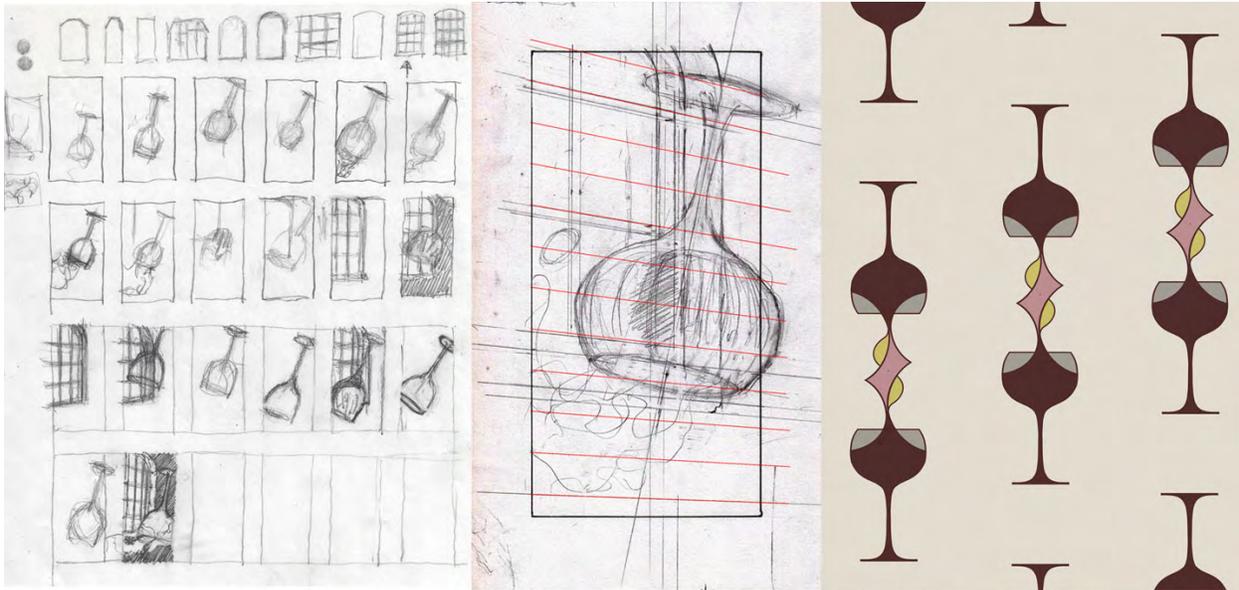
Seen by One, 2016, charcoal on paper,
71 cm x 58.3 cm (frame included)

A filled glass, the city beyond, and uncertain times.
One wrong move, the glass tips, the liquid spills.
For a second, the city sparkles and twists.
An unknown magic seen only by one.
In a city of thousands,
In a world of a thousand cities.

Inspiration is a fleeting vision that upsets the order
of what one knows. Visions are vulnerable,
unreliable and slippery. To express them presents
risk. To act on them can be dangerous, but the road
to enlightenment always is.

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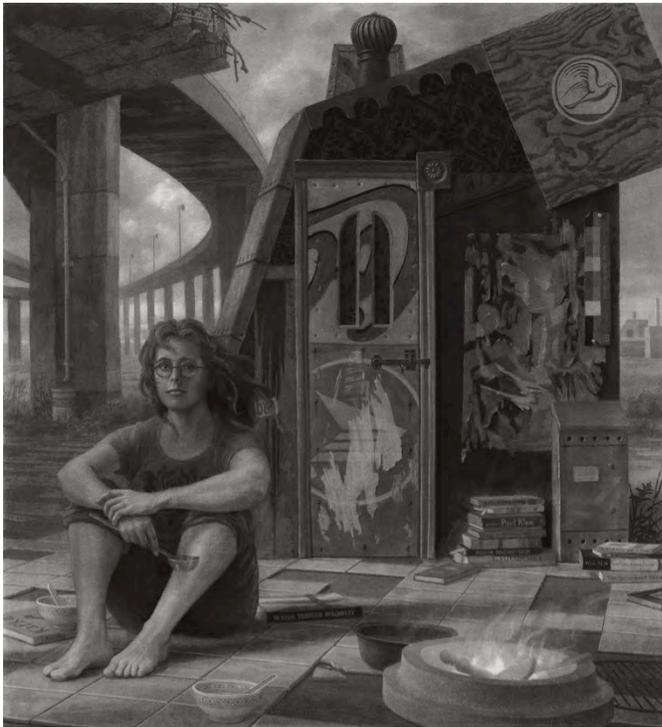
SEEN BY ONE (process)





Outsider, 2018, charcoal on paper,
123.5 cm x 71.4 cm (frame included)

A lone figure on a rooftop is cleansed by a cascade of water. This person's behavior does not fit societal norms. Whatever brought him to that moment is not evident, however it is reasonable to assume that he shares many of the same hopes and desires as others whose habits fit societal expectations. His actions may express a desire for connection, a wish to commune with something greater than himself, and a need to be free.



Dweller, 2016, Charcoal on paper
135.9 cm x 126.0 cm (frame included)

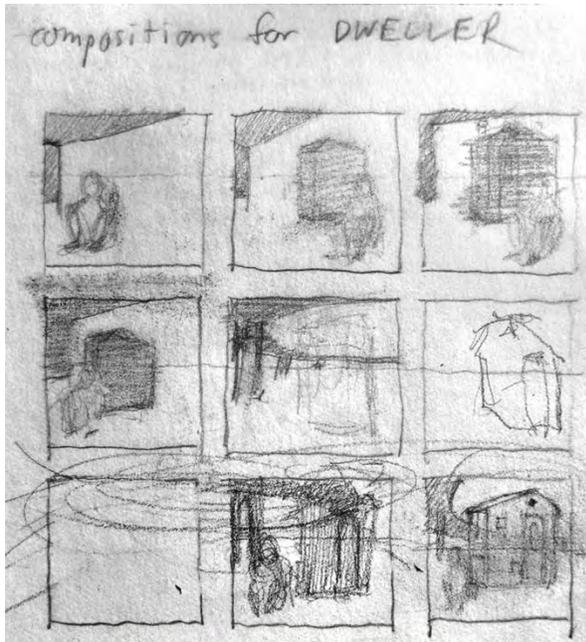
Found materials have been rearranged and collaged together to shape the structure of this woman's existence. She has acquired water, food and shelter despite a scarcity of means. However, the need for safety, love and belonging may not be satisfied. Psychologist Abraham Maslow's theory of the hierarchy of human needs suggests that the fulfillment of these states is prerequisite to higher requirements being addressed, such as the need

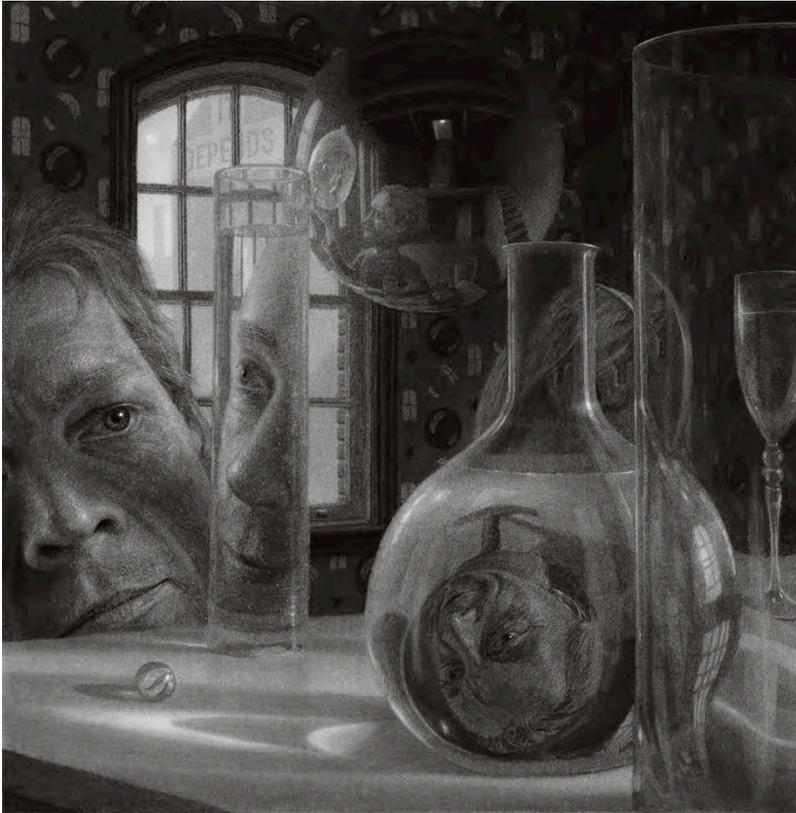
to express oneself creatively, the quest for intellectual enrichment or the transcendence of self through altruistic thoughts and actions.* The dweller in this drawing appears to have engaged with these latter processes, given her architectural invention, literary explorations and offering of an extra bowl of sustenance to the viewer. Perhaps this subversion of the hierarchy of needs is what it takes to thrive artistically and to achieve self-actualization and self-transcendence.

*Neel Burton. "Our Hierarchy of Needs: Why true freedom is a luxury of the mind." *Psychology Today*. Sussex Publishers. 23 May, 2012. Web. 19 Jan. 2016.

FRANK MULVEY

DWELLER (process)



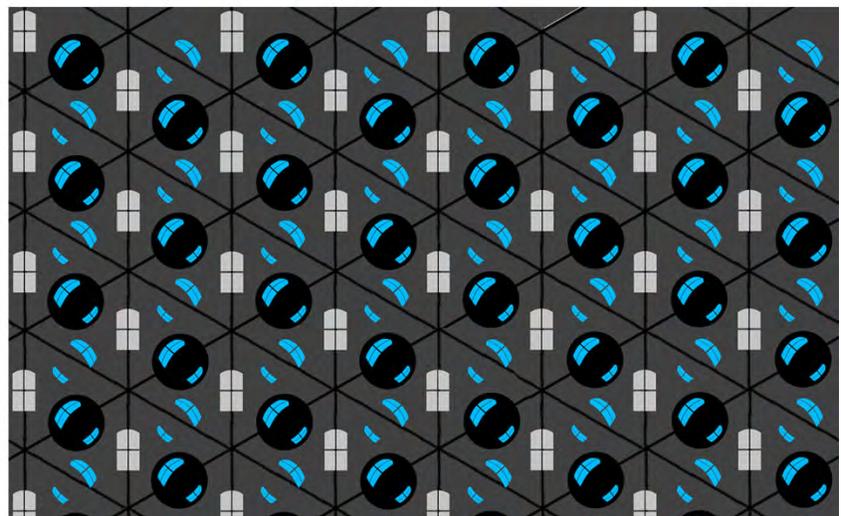
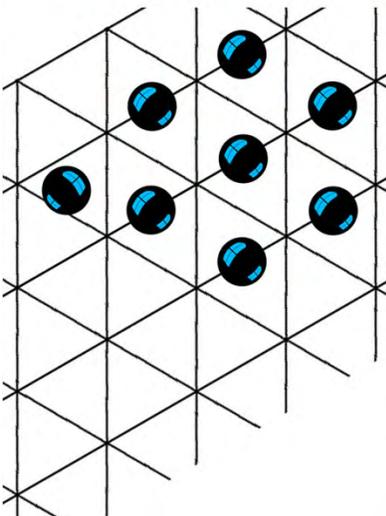
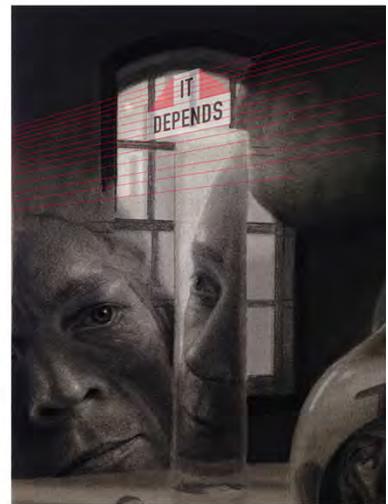
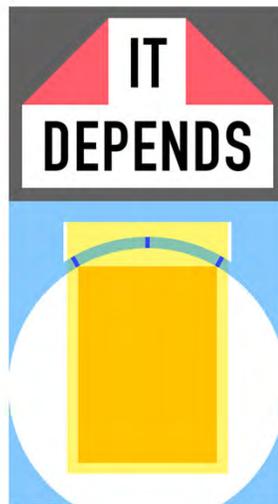
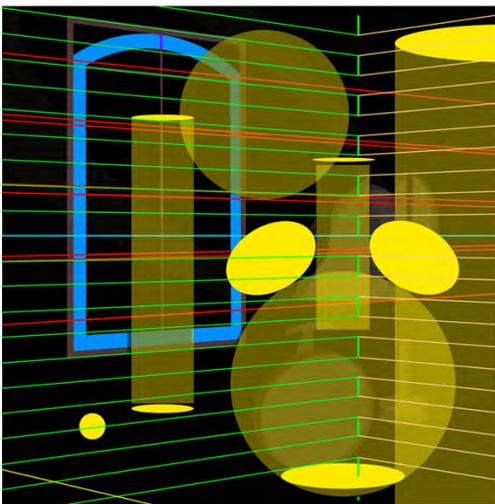


It Depends, 2019
Charcoal on paper
76.2 cm x 76.2 cm
(frame included)

Observation of the world is fuelled by a need to understand its complexity. Things are better grasped if seen from a variety of viewpoints and through many lenses, unrestricted by the limitations of a singular perspective. However, despite the wealth of information gathered in this way, insights derived from this process never guarantee a final and all-encompassing truth. Each lens offers a refracted variation on the subject, eliciting its own truth from the gemstone of visual experience.

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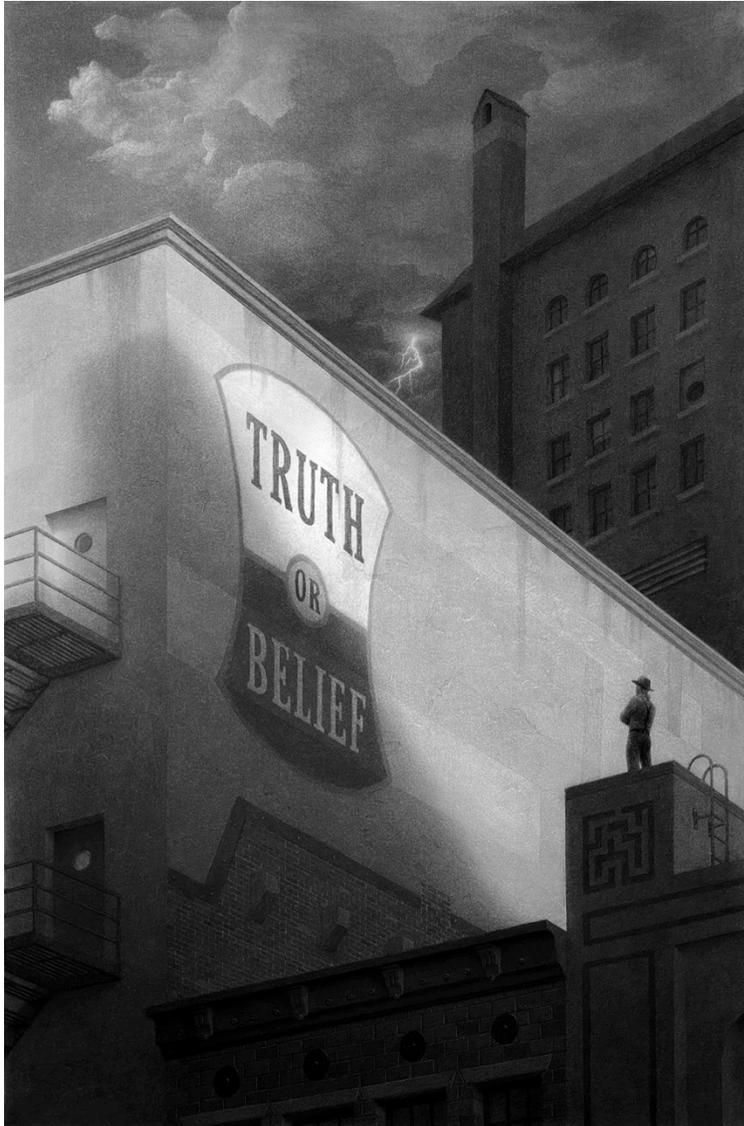
IT DEPENDS (process)



FRANK MULVEY

IT DEPENDS (process)





Truth or Belief, 2020
Charcoal on paper
126.7 cm x 92.1 cm
(frame included)

We can only believe what we consider to be true, but have we genuinely and thoroughly tested the truth of what we believe? My current work revolves around a fictitious individual who is grappling with the troubles of the world, wondering what meaningful and positive contributions he can make and what truths he can apply towards this end. With each subsequent drawing, an additional facet of this alternate world is revealed; derived from ours, but also perhaps serviceable as a template for reinventing our current reality.

At the dawn of the 2020s, we see much social unrest and lobbying for change. This is pushback against the oppression of civil liberties, and government policies rooted in greed and power. Radical change is seen by many as the key to a bright future for all. The destructive consequences of actions guided by short-term gain and selfish motivation are increasingly apparent in our social, political and economic systems. The dissonance between present circumstances and our altruistic potential sits uneasily in the psyche of humankind. Our destiny will be shaped by our acknowledgement of that dissonance and our actions to decrease it.

FRANK MULVEY

TRUTH OR BELIEF (process)

