

Dreaming Space:
Exploring the Transformative Power
of Immersive Art and Architecture

by
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A thesis
presented to the University of Waterloo
in fulfillment of the
thesis requirement for the degree of
Master of Architecture

Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, 2017

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I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners. I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

The role of art is to transform our experience of reality. This process often involves a quality of rupture; of breaking through the boundaries of our habitual, conditioned modes of perception in order to experience new and unexpected sensations.¹ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari write that architecture is the first of the arts. Art does not begin with the body but with the house; with the experience of space and light, and the constructed environments which mediate between our bodies and forces of the universe.²

This thesis follows the physical and affective journey of a group of artists over many years. This journey involves challenging forces of social and cultural conditioning; breaking through boundaries of fear and habit, as well as artistic and architectural convention. We have a need to explore aesthetics without limitation.

The *dreaming space* where this journey is taking place is a studio on a property in my hometown, Sarnia, Ontario. This is where I live and work with my uncle/mentor, and three companions. Both the studio and the experience of the participants are in a continuous state of transformation. The space has become an ever-evolving immersive collage of paintings, sculptures, architectural constructions, mirrors, video, projections, and compositions of magical objects. The expansive, dark, earthen, dream-like quality of the space is immediately affecting. It is a place for dreaming and composing; for channeling visions and exploring altered states of sensory awareness. We are exploring the possibilities of what art and architecture can do: specifically, how it can facilitate sensorial encounters which transform our experience of reality.

This thesis takes the form of a series of reflections on this *dreaming space*. It has a personal history with a cultural context. It has caves, grottos, and tunnels; ever-changing compositions and installations, surrounded by the underworld and built up over time. Within the *dreaming space* we are continuously exploring the incredible possibilities of the transformative power of art and architecture.

1 O'Sullivan, Simon. Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari: Thought beyond Representation. 2006. p. 1

2 Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. What Is Philosophy? 1994. p. 180, 182, 186

Acknowledgements

To my Supervisor Dereck Revington, thank you for your enthusiasm, support, and patience in helping me through the process of composing this thesis. Specifically, thank you for opening me up to a broader field of scholarly reference which lent this document a great deal of precision and discipline it would not have otherwise had.

To my Committee member John McMinn, thank you for your support and guidance during the early stages of developing this thesis; both as the coordinator of my M1 studio and as my supervisor for the first year of my Master's studies. Also thank you for your enthusiasm and support in the final stages of completion.

To my Committee member Robert Jan Van Pelt, thank you for your passionate interest in the work and the journey that I have been engaged in. Your insight and your support is greatly appreciated.

To my external reader Jonathan Tyrrell, thank you for your willingness to engage with the work. Your comments and reflections are genuinely appreciated. Thank you.

Brenda and Ray Robinson, our visit was an inspiration to this thesis. Thank you for your guidance, acceptance, and love.

Sue and Zoe Parkes, thank you for your unconditional love and support.

To the members of *The Incredible Shrinking Heads*, Jim Parkes, Sonny Parkes, Michael Lutz, Callan Wilson-Delafield, and Loren Hallstrom, thank you for your unconventional support, friendship, love and camaraderie.

Callan Wilson-Delafield, thank you for helping me through the difficult process of writing and editing this document.

For Brenda and Ray Robinson

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* Asterisk indicates that image is property of Jim Parkes and The Incredible Shrinking Heads. All rights reserved.

*Not only does the open house communicate with the landscape,
through a window or a mirror, but the most shut-up house opens onto
a universe.¹*

1 Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *What Is Philosophy?* 1994.
p. 180



Fig. 0.1 - *Untitled* Painting by Author, 2014

Prologue



Fig. 0.2 - *Untitled*, Painting By Author, 2016

This thesis is composed as an intertwining series of reflections on the *dreaming space* where I work my with uncle/mentor and three companions, along with other examples of immersive art and architecture, and a number of concepts from the world of contemporary philosophy. It is a journey through a number of transformative spaces and concepts. It is an exploration of the incredible transformative power of art and architecture.

Francis Bacon discusses the experience of ‘immediacy’ in visual art. He is interested in experiencing sensation as directly and intensely as possible, and capturing the impact of that experience on a canvas.¹ The impact is first and foremost physical. It is visceral and pre-cognitive, directly impacting the central nervous system. How might an architectural environment have this type of direct impact on our senses? How might it disrupt our habitual ways of experiencing reality; to transform our immediate sensory experience and open up new possibilities of thought and feeling?

For over fifteen years I have been involved in the ongoing development of an immersive architectural space within a studio on a property in Sarnia, Ontario. The space has become an ever evolving sensory laboratory. Within the darkened space, juxtapositions of material, light, color, line, texture, and reflection, are composed to produce a push and pull between physical and virtual space. The immersive environment within the studio is designed to shift a visitor out of their habitual modes of perception and feeling into a state of heightened sensory and emotional awareness, a state of conscious dreaming. Not only is it a space for dreaming; It is also a place where we are continuously engaged in the act of dreaming space: imagining and composing new environments in physical and virtual space, exploring new possibilities of sensorial transformation.

1 Francis Bacon Interview - BBC, 1971

By looking to pre-history we see that this type of intense aesthetic exploration within an immersive environment is not something new. In fact humans have engaged in these types of explorations since our origins. In reference to the pre-historic cave paintings at Lascaux, Georges Bataille asserts that artistic exploration is a breaking point in evolution. It is a critical factor in defining humans as a species.² Scholars, such as Mircea Eliade and more recently Jean Clottes and David Lewis-Williams, have stated that such cave paintings can not be reduced to a practical or technical achievement. They embody something much more profound: a shamanistic impulse - a need to journey beyond the boundaries of everyday life to the realm of the sacred; to connect with life forces beyond our understanding.^{3,4} These explorations, which involve ritual, dream, play, and imagination, are necessary to our cultural transformation.

This impulse towards exploring the power of art and architecture to transform our experience of reality is present throughout human history. In more recent history we see examples, such as the work of Kurt Schwitters, Anselm Kiefer and Peter Zumthor, that illustrate a human need to build inhabitable environments which facilitate profound sensory transformation, and pull viewers into a states of contemplation, imagination, and reverie.

2 Bataille, Georges. *Prehistoric Painting: Lascaux; Or, the Birth of Art*. 1955. p. 11

3 Eliade, Mircea. *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*. 1964. p. 503

4 Clottes, Jean, and Lewis-Williams, David. *The Shamans of Prehistory*. 1998. p. 9



Fig. 0.3 - *Figure in Transformation 1*, Painting By Author, 2014



Fig. 0.4 - *Figure in Transformation 2*, Painting By Author, 2014

1. Entry



Fig. 1.1 - *Entrance to the Studio*, 2016

From the outside the place first appears surprisingly normal. Elegant natural stone landscaping leads you to a brick walkway. To the side of the walkway is a single steel door, painted brown. On the door, however, are a number of hints that you are entering an unusual, primal, and possibly dangerous zone. The brown paint is intensely scratched, revealing steel underneath. At the center of the door is an image contained in a rough wood frame; its face lined with insect screen. The image portrays a series of cartoon figures: one with a third eye, another with horns; all wrapped with an illustration of the words 'I know what it gives; I know what it takes.' At the center of the frame is a heavy steel door knocker in the form of a bull's skull. There is a simple handle and a dead bolt lock. Above the frame there is a chalky, ghostly residue of the words: 'Hello Again'.



Fig. 1.2 - *Studio Door*, 2016

The threshold beyond the door contains an intermediate zone, which is implied by the presence of a 4-5 ft. high wall immediately to the right of the entrance. The wall blocks a significant portion of the room. But from here one is already likely to experience a degree of perceptual disorientation.

On the walls and ceiling there are various compositions of wood panels, mirrors, and screens which seem to be continuously moving; animated with light and video projection. Multiple shafts and caverns are continuously forming, unfolding and dissolving in periphery vision.

When a person enters into this space during the day time, opening the door lets in a swath of natural light. This is typically the only time the room is exposed to natural light. The composition of surfaces absorbs and animates the light like a subtle yet highly spatial peripheral kaleidoscope.

This intermediate zone is designed to accommodate the visitor; to give them a chance to turn back, or to observe from a point that still feels somewhat outside and safe. They may also choose to close the door behind them and enter into the *dreaming space*.



Fig. 1.3 - *Inside Entrance to the Studio*, 2016

Once a person enters into the space, they are engulfed in a sensorial immersion. Perception is captivated by the rich interplay, the push and pull, between surface and virtual depth throughout the various physical planes within the room. There is a multiplicity of visual layers, both real and virtual, which seem to be continuously moving and projecting in space.

In their work entitled, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari describe the elusive phenomenon of perceiving movement within a single moment, or a succession of moments.

Movement has an essential relation to the imperceptible; it is by nature imperceptible. Perception can grasp movement only as the displacement of a moving body or the development of a form. Movements, becomings, in other words, pure relations of speed and slowness, pure affects, are below and above the threshold of perception. Doubtless, thresholds of perception are relative; there is always a threshold capable of grasping what eludes another.¹

They go on to state that “movement also ‘must’ be perceived, it cannot but be perceived.”² Like viewing a still image which nonetheless produces a powerful sensation of movement, our perception shifts in order to grasp the invisible force acting through the objects that we perceive.

Within the studio, a visitor is saturated with the sensation of visual movement all around them. Immersed within such a space, the process of perception itself begins to shift and move.

1 Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. 1987. pp. 280-281

2 *Ibid* p. 281

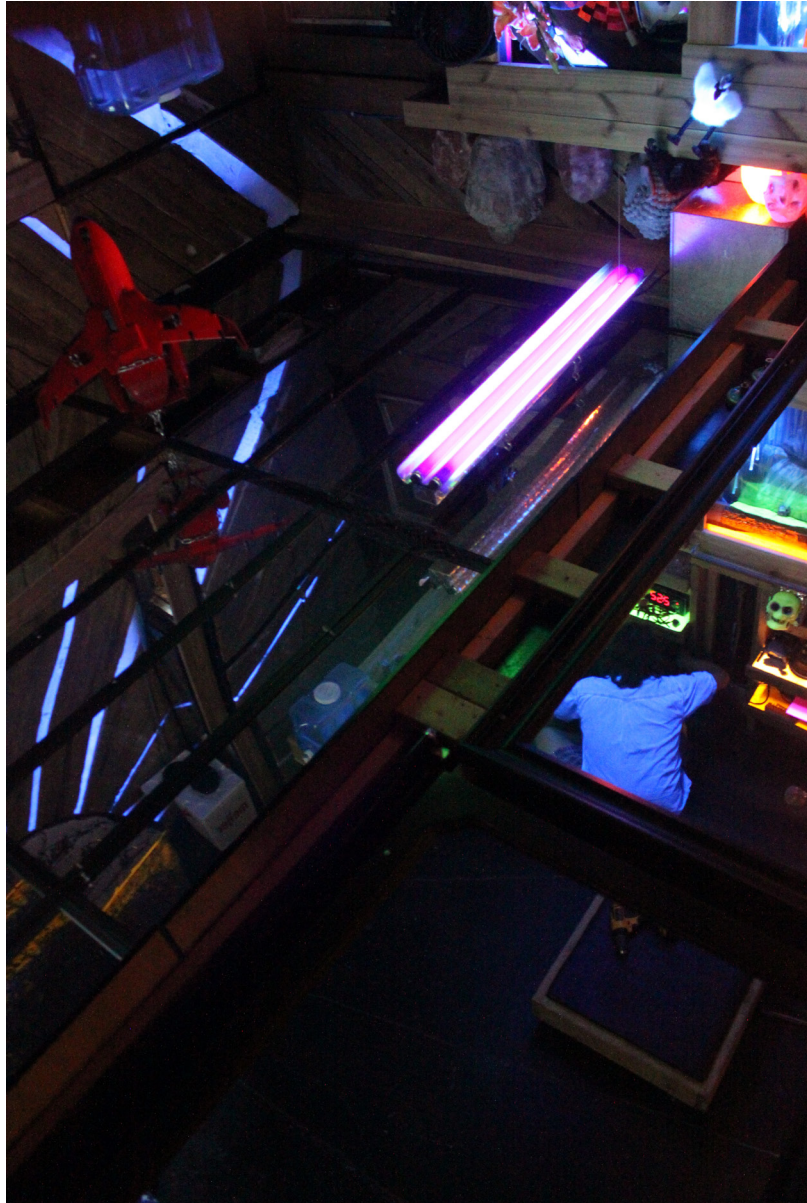


Fig. 1.4 - *Inside the Studio*, 2016

The physical space within the studio is divided into zones, though the purpose and demarcation of these zones is not immediately obvious. For example, there is a doorway in the middle of the room which leads into a narrow space with a drawing board, and a series of built-in shelves for lighting and storage. This small space opens onto another small space, which contains an infinite visual expanse.

A series of mirrors creates a visual multiplicity of spaces opening into multiple shafts and tunnels. Perspective and affect continuously change based on one's movement within the environment. A wood panel is mounted in front of the entrance to this room within a room. There is a black light mounted to the ceiling above and a single glowing word, hand-carved into the wood, which reads: "RABBITHOLE".



Fig. 1.5 - *Inside the Rabbit Hole*, 2016

The architectural divisions within the studio have the effect, in general, of producing an unidentifiable series of spaces, which are ever-changing, and which have indeterminate ends. There is always the possibility of space around a corner, or above or below the ceiling or floor. Peripheral vision dissolves into a fog of darkness, or a multiplicity of virtual spaces. Perspective points do not terminate. Rather they continue in different permutations and states of transformation. Changing light and video projection, both streaming and recorded, are intimately connected to the overall sensation of continuous movement and ever-evolving rhythm.

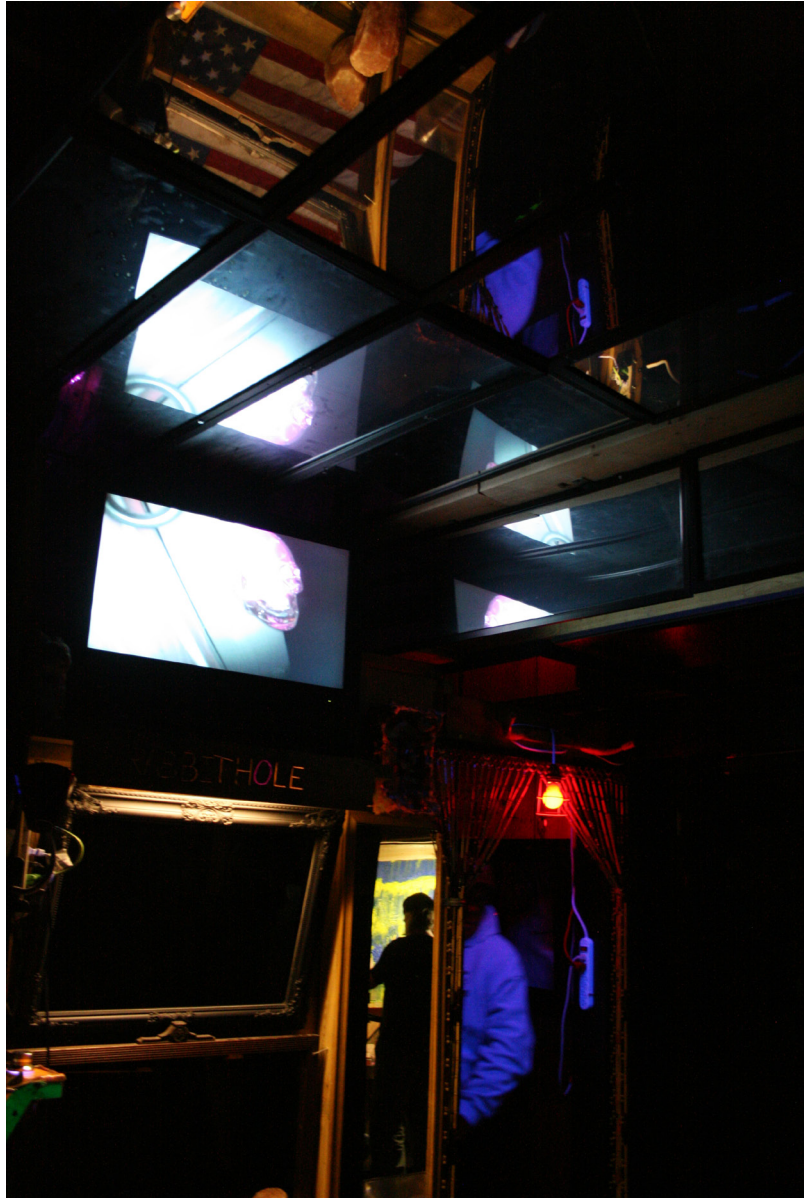


Fig. 1.6 - *Inside the Studio*, 2016

In his work on the paintings of Francis Bacon, Gilles Deleuze describes how Bacon creates the 'conditions for a catastrophe', as a means of breaking beyond the boundaries of habit, cliché, and predictability. Through the use of scrubbing, brushing, and even by throwing paint, Bacon opens up new and unexpected possibilities of sensation within his work.³ An outside viewer may even experience viewing Bacon's paintings as a catastrophe; a sensory encounter which disrupts their fixed cultural perspective or sense of emotional equilibrium.

The experience of this group and the *dreaming space* where we operate can certainly be related to Deleuze's concept of creating the 'conditions for a catastrophe'. In a state of sensorial disorientation and immersion, there is no stable reference point to maintain the illusion of a fixed state of being. Reality begins to shift and move. This experience, for many, including myself, can often become a catastrophe of emotion - a perceived attack on one's personal boundaries and understanding of reality. If a participant is suppressing or hiding fear and pain, it will likely come to the forefront inside the studio. The intent is not to dwell on fear and pain, and certainly not to indulge in it. Rather, the intent is to use perspective and external affirmation of what is real to dissolve unsubstantiated or irrational fear, and to face real fear, in order to move through it and beyond it. Such is a condition of any form of exploration.

3 Deleuze, Gilles. *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*. 2004. p. xxiv



Fig. 1.7 - *Inside the Studio*, 2015

This group is engaged in aesthetic exploration, in which we are continuously reaching beyond the boundaries of our habitual modes of perception. As stated by Georges Bataille, in his work on the cave paintings at Lascaux, such forms of aesthetic exploration are necessary to humanity's existence and cultural transformation.⁴ Humans have a need to explore sensation beyond our collective rationalization of reality.

Carlos Castaneda describes reality as infinite multitudes of worlds, arranged like the layers of an onion. The ability to access and perceive such worlds is limited to one's ability to navigate between these layers and to re-align systems of perception.⁵ It becomes the task of an artist to construct a circumstance and a life in which they are able to depart into such total sensorial immersions - and survive...

It is necessary to state a point of caution.

The intent here is not to recklessly obliterate reality and understanding in search of new sensation. Engaging in such explorations with caution and in small doses is of utmost importance. This group defines the art of discipline as the ability to responsibly shift between layers of reality, as necessary, without being destructive to one's self or others.

In the chapter entitled, "How do you make yourself a body without organs?", Deleuze and Guattari clearly state this point of caution. They refer to Carlos Castaneda and the concepts of the 'tonal' and the 'nagual'. In short, the tonal is everything within our understanding of reality. The nagual is all the forces outside our rationalization of reality - the infinite multiplicity of realities contained in other layers of the onion. The idea is not to destroy the tonal. "The tonal must be protected at all costs."⁶ Rather, the idea is to slowly shrink it, minimize it, clean it, and to cautiously and gradually engage with lines of flight into realms of the nagual.⁷

4 Bataille, Georges. *Lascaux; Or, The Birth of Art: Prehistoric Painting*. 1955. p. 18

5 Castaneda, Carlos. *The Art of Dreaming*. 1993. p. vii

6 Castaneda, Carlos. *Tales of Power*. 1974. p. 161

7 Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. 1987. p. 162

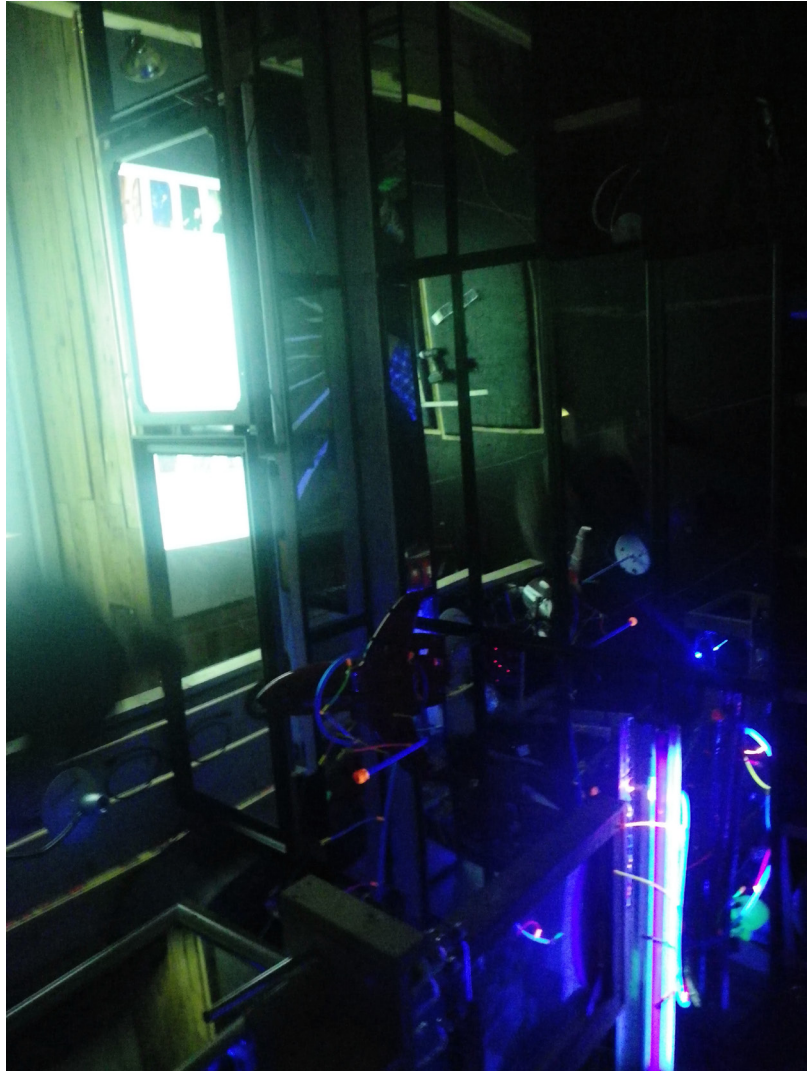


Fig. 1.8 - *Inside the Studio*, 2011

2. Initiation



Fig. 2.1 - *Untitled*, Painting By Author, 2014

The first memorable experience I had with my Uncle Jim's magical world was when I was roughly seven years old. We were at a family get-together at my grandparents' house in Sarnia, Ontario. It was summer time. In a conversation Jim proclaimed that he was an artist. I had always wondered what being an artist really meant. At that age I had already realized that Jim had a special vitality and exuberance. I asked him what it meant to be an artist. He said that he would show me.

I remember sitting at the bar-table in my grandparents' kitchen. We had paper and pencils there. He asked me to draw in front of him. I began to make an illustration, holding the pencil like a writing utensil. He stopped me and showed me how an *artist* holds a pencil. He held the pencil between all his fingers and his thumb, much looser and more horizontal, nearly lying flat on the page. I asked him to draw something for me. He asked what I wanted him to draw. I said that I wanted him to draw a flower.

I watched as he began to make marks and scratches all over the page which seemed incoherent, strange, and primal, yet obviously rhythmic, powerful, and beautiful. I felt confused but extremely intrigued as I watched a vibrant image of a blooming flower emerge on the paper. I felt a surge of emotion. I had never seen something like that in my life.



Fig. 2.2 - *Untitled*, Painting By Author, 2017

A few years later, when I was eleven or twelve years old, I had my first experience visiting Jim's art studio. At that time the studio was in a room in the basement of his house. I was very intrigued when I first entered the space. The room was closed off from natural light; dimly lit by a number of lamps and colored lights. There was a large thick painting laying face-up on the floor with bricks on top holding down various glued strips of fabric and paper. There were shelves around the room with many objects - candles, incense, sculptures, cans of paint, strips of cardboard, fabric, and fluorescent paper. The walls were collaged with various compositions in progress, as well as a number of statements written directly on the walls. I remember several of these statements and the intense impression that they left on me at that time:

Artists are like miners. We dig into the perceptual world and bring things back to the rational world.

'Fear never killed anyone, son.' 'Bull-shit, it's killing everyone, dad.'

When in doubt, run with it.

It is the only thing in the world that is real.

On one of the shelves there was a stack of circular pieces of paper with pin holes at the center. These papers had various radial compositions of fluorescent color that would glow under black light. One such composition was on the wall, mounted to a plastic plate which was attached to a small motor. Jim set the lights and some very loud music as he showed us how the motor would turn the plate to produce an intense optical illusion of projecting and receding circular space (much like the famous rotoreliefs by Marcel Duchamp.)

Little did I know at the time that this experience was the beginning of a departure for me. I was being pulled into a world of aesthetic wanderlust.



Fig. 2.3 - Marcel Duchamp -
Lanterne Chinoise (Chinese Lantern) disc, 1935

The real journey began a few years later, when I was around the age of fourteen, during the aftermath of my father's death. From my early childhood, my father was a domineering, controlling, emotionally abusive man. My mother was emotionally suppressed, under constant threat and pressure from my dad, just like us as kids.

When my dad died my mom had a complete break-down; she was alcoholic and suicidal, institutionalized on and off for a couple of years. For me everything that held together my world had fallen apart. I was destroyed. I had no way to cope with the emotional pain and confusion I felt. I found no emotional support in my family whatsoever (except a desperate, deep, and singular camaraderie with my older brother). I felt completely suppressed by my family. They lied to me about the circumstances my mother was in, and discouraged me from expressing my fear, anger, and emotional pain. This is where I learned to suppress emotional pain at any cost.

My Uncle Jim was the only one in our family that intervened. He talked to us, told us the truth of the catastrophe that we were facing, and encouraged us to feel and express the real emotional pain that everyone else was telling us to suppress. Most of our family hated him for it and still do to this day. Jim was the first person in my life that exposed us to a more honest perspective of the circumstances we needed to deal with. He chose to help us, despite the fact that the rest of our family condemned him for it.

The process began to develop when Jim invited my brother and I to start helping out at his art studio on Saturdays. Coming over to work in the studio was a way of bringing us into a space and a process where we could begin to open up our feelings. The process is based on openness, play, dreaming, and aesthetic exploration. We could participate within an open aesthetic environment and start to develop feelings that weren't controlled by conditioned fear. Before I knew it I was intimately involved. The excitement that I felt going to work in the studio each week didn't compare with anything else that I was experiencing. I was beginning a journey through which I would encounter many challenges and struggles, a journey which continues to this day.

When I first started coming over to work in the studio, the place was in a much different state than it is now. Jim had just recently renovated his old garage to make a new studio to work in. It was now insulated with the inside partially finished with white painted drywall. Three sides of the studio were lined with two strips of exposed lumber, used for mounting paintings that were being worked on.

There were a number of large paintings mounted on the walls that were in the early stages of development. One was an image of a tree collaged with many layers of partially painted corrugated cardboard. The tree expanded into a canopy at the top and a lateral root system at the bottom. On either side was a wildly painted vortex in bright orange, with accents of black, white, and red. The original wood backing of the painting had been attached to a series of larger wood panels in order to accommodate the growing composition. The root structure of the tree was just beginning to be collaged onto the outer panels, expanding laterally to build a much larger horizontal space. There was a second painting of a tightly and intensely drawn rectilinear tunnel in black and white. Again you could see that the drawing had begun on a much smaller wood panel that was then collaged onto a number of larger panels as the composition continued to expand.

Throughout the room were a number of work benches and carts on wheels that contained various tools and materials. There were stacks of lumber along the back wall that were being used to construct the basic framing for a structure of cabinets on the front wall, which also contained a large, insulated, two panel swinging garage door. There were a number of shelves and storage cabinets in other areas of the studio that were also being built or altered.

When I first began to take on tasks in the studio, the overall direction of the work seemed mysterious to me. It was clear that nothing was meant to be permanent, and the place as well as the direction of the work was in a continuous state of transformation. It seemed like we were continuously taking things apart and putting them back together in different ways. Yet, the vision of the environment and the work that was being developed was extremely expansive and exciting; it was always evolving.

The composition of the cabinets on the front wall of the studio became the first major task that I was involved in. By the time I first began working in the studio, the basic form of the cabinet structure was in place. There was a set of cabinets atop and on both sides of the garage door. We were experimenting with adding shelves, cabinet doors, and recesses which held lights, speakers, and storage spaces for various art and construction materials. The structure of the cabinets continued to slowly evolve as we moved towards the intricate radial composition of cladding that was to eventually cover the entire wall before expanding onto the floor, ceiling, and the other walls within the room. We refer to this radial composition as ‘the sunburst.’

At the centre of the sunburst is a wood semicircle at ground level which sits at the crack between the panels of the garage door. Eventually the semicircle was fitted with a fired clay tile with a thick black and white glaze. On the tile are a number of roughly drawn marks and cracks which give the impression of a primal image of a fish juxtaposed against a series of dark vertical and horizontal marks.

From a point behind this semicircle, a number of white lines radiate out in all directions, spreading across the wall of cabinets and other surfaces within the room. In the space around these lines are series of wooden planes that are composed to create the experience of depth, of *push and pull*, projection and recession, in virtual space.

In his essay, ‘The Search for The Real in the Visual Arts,’ Hans Hofmann describes the phenomenon of experiencing depth within a picture on a two-dimensional surface. He rejects the Renaissance doctrine of perspective and vanishing point. Rather, he emphasizes the tension, the *push and pull*, as he calls it, between planes within a visual field. A plane, as opposed to a line, is a “fragment in the architecture of space”.¹

1 Hofmann, Hans. Search for the Real, and Other Essays. 1948. p. 44



Fig. 2.4 - *Early Stages of the Sunburst Composition, 2002*

Like a series of walls that are placed within a physical space with real depth, visual planes exist in a picture. These visual planes oppose one another to create tension and the experience of depth. Hoffman states that “‘depth’ is not created on a flat surface as an illusion, but as plastic reality,”² a *real* transference of three-dimensional experience to a two-dimensional picture plane. The picture is *real* in the sense that it holds a *percept*, a distilled perception³, of energy and vitality; forces of movement and tension reacting within a visual field. Perceived space becomes “vital and active - a force impelled pictorial space, presented as a (...) unified entity, with a life of its own.”⁴

Further exploring the difference between line and plane, and how they react within a visual field, Hofmann goes on to state the following:

A line concept cannot control pictorial space absolutely. A line may flow freely in and out of space, but cannot independently create the phenomenon of *push and pull* necessary to plastic creation. *Push and pull* are expanding and contracting forces which are activated by carriers in visual motion. Planes are the most important carriers, lines and points less so.⁵

The composition of planes within the sunburst composition began with the assessment and organization of various types of weathered barn board that were collected from a friend's house on lake Huron outside of town. The barn board was already very aged and had a large amount of tonal and textural variation. It seemed that there were a few different types of boards which had similar tone and texture. We began to organize the boards according to these types.

2 Hofmann, Hans. Search for the Real, and Other Essays. 1948. p. 44

3 See Deleuze and Guattari's description of 'percept'.
Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. What Is Philosophy?
1994. p. 164

4 Hofmann, Hans. Search for the Real, and Other Essays. 1948. p. 72

5 Ibid p. 44



Fig. 2.5 - *Sunburst Composition in Development*, 2006

In the beginning this system was intuitive and somewhat crude. Eventually it became a refined system with its own verbal and sensorial language.

There are two general types of board which we call 'bones' and 'threads'. 'Bones' are generally smooth. Their front surface is weathered more evenly and they are often decayed at the edges as well. They have a greater tonal variation, more brown and golden color, and a much more organic, bone-like texture and form. 'Threads' are pieces on which the lines of the grain of the wood run parallel to the long edges of the board. The lines are deeply weathered creating a slightly varying striated texture. Threads have less tonal variation. They are generally more grey in color and have less decay at the edges. There are some panels in the composition that have qualities of both bone and thread.

Planes of bones and threads are built up, juxtaposed and combined to enhance the sense of visual depth, of *push and pull*, within the sunburst composition. Often a strong continuous line of bone will be used to form a boundary to a plane. Within each plane we play with the continuity or discontinuity of the lines, as well as gradients of tone, color, and texture all to enhance the virtual depth. Often within a set of planes there is a triangular space that terminates into two other radial planes. Within these spaces we would often use combinations of small and irregular pieces to juxtapose the strong planes and enhance the sense of movement and depth. We refer to these irregular triangular zones as 'log jambs'.

The process became much more fluid as we continued to tighten and expand the composition. When the composition of wood planes on the front wall had finally settled into place, finishing the white lines with a final coat of paint was an easy exercise in perceptual transformation and aesthetic enjoyment. The composition had become solidly defined and extremely expansive. From here the lines and virtual planes began to project onto other physical planes within the room. The walls, floor, and ceiling would all eventually be wrapped within the expanding sunburst composition. The push and pull evolved from the pictorial to the architectural.



Fig. 2.6 - *Sunburst Composition in Development*, 2007

Around the time that the first wall of the sunburst was completed, the room began to gradually transform into a very dark space. All of the walls of the room, as well as much of the framework of shelves and cabinets, were painted black. Most of the ceiling was fitted out with a series of black screen panels. The door and window were meticulously sealed so that when they were closed not even a crack of daylight would enter the room.

While darkness may be frightening, it also has a deeply sacred and magical quality. Writing on the pre-historic cave paintings at Lascaux, Georges Bataille states the following.

All (people) share an instinctive dread and awe of complete darkness. That terror is *sacred*, obscure light suggests what is religious: the Cavern's aspect intensified the impression of magical power, of penetration into an inaccessible domain.⁶

Along with transforming the room into a dark space sealed off from light, we began experimenting with lights which would sensitively respond to sound. An array of these lights was installed around both the inner wall and the cabinet wall of the sunburst composition. We would often play a sound-track, a composition by Steve Roach, entitled *The Dream Circle*, while sitting in the darkened space and meditating in front of the sunburst. The sound-track is designed to be played continuously on a 74 minute loop. The sound is extremely slow and spatial, consisting of a cycle of a single deep melodic wave, with shimmering metallic and organic sounds moving in and out, layering atop of one another within the sonic space. The lights that were installed responded very sensitively to these waves of sound, creating delicate washes of light which would range from barely visible flickers to bright shimmering bursts that would spread throughout the planes of the sunburst.

6 Bataille, Georges. *Lascaux; Or, The Birth of Art: Prehistoric Painting*. 1955. pp. 56-57



Fig. 2.7 - *Sunburst Composition in Development*, 2009

Sensorial experience remained the most important aspect of all of this exploration and experimentation. We were entering into a conscious dream; a slow, meditative space where the subtlest changes of light had a profound impact of sensorial transformation. The experience was soft and beautiful, but also very deep and powerful. The sunburst has an ancient, mystical, dream-like presence.

Around this time I began to often have the distinct feeling that my reality was transforming. Entering unfamiliar planes of reality and sensation was no longer just a concept, but a tangible experience that occurred frequently and continued to evolve. My idea of self, of a contained identity, and a rigid way of experiencing my environment began to come apart. Although I experienced a great deal of fear and anxiety, I also experienced a great deal of awe, beauty, and surrender. In order to appreciate the experience, it was necessary to let go of any level of control or emotional tension. Often the experience would be so overwhelming that all I could do was fall asleep.

The process of aesthetic exploration, to varying degrees, involves the deconstruction of a fixed perspective of the world around us. As Deleuze asserts, it involves creating the 'conditions for a catastrophe'; entering a circumstance in which our habitual modes of behavior are disrupted in order to experience real and unexpected sensation.⁷ It becomes necessary to let go of one's rigid way of experiencing reality, and in doing so we lose our sense of control, as well as our sense of self.

7 Deleuze, Gilles. *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*. 2004. p. xxiv

In his book *The Second Ring of Power* Carlos Castaneda writes about an experience with one powerful sorceress, La Gorda, who gives an account of the process of ‘losing one’s human form’.

She describes both the human mold and the human form. The human mold is what shapes a bundle of energy into the shape of a human. La Gorda states, The mold is “the source, the origin of man, since, without the mold to group together the force of life, there was no way for that force to assemble itself into the shape of man.”⁸ “Everything has a particular mold. Plants have molds, animals have molds, worms have molds.”⁹ The mold is what’s necessary to make the particular bundle of energy and force that is a human being.

The human form, however, is a force that holds the experience of reality for that human being in a particular rigid configuration. The human form is “a sticky force that makes us the people we are.” It is the force that binds us to our habitual ways of seeing and experiencing reality. It is what holds together our concept of self. Under normal circumstances, the human form remains permanently intact. It “possesses us during our lives and doesn’t leave us until we die.”¹⁰

It becomes the task of an artist to dismantle the human form in order to *see*; not to see reality through our habitual filters; but to truly *see*. “(We) must drop the human form to change, to really change. (...) Is is useless to think or hope that one can change one’s habits. One cannot change an iota as long as one holds on to the human form. (...) Everything has to be sifted through our human form. When we have no form, then nothing has form and yet everything is present.”¹¹

8 Castaneda, Carlos. *The Second Ring of Power*. 1977. p. 156

9 Ibid. p. 155

10 Ibid p. 158

11 Ibid. pp. 159-160

By looking to the history of indigenous spiritual practice we see that the process of de-constructing one's self and identity, of 'loosing one's human form' is not at all an isolated concept. In 1951 the religious historian Mircea Eliade published a book entitled *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, in which he summarizes a vast collection of research on the shamanic practices of many different indigenous cultures throughout the world. Eliade dispels the notion, held at that time, that shamanism is strictly a cultural phenomenon from a group of indigenous people in Siberia. Rather, he emphasizes the remarkable similarity between the practices of autonomous indigenous groups from many parts of the world, including Central and North Asia, the Americas, Oceania, Tibet, and China. While these groups exist independently of one another, their practices have a number of remarkable similarities. For example, they all engage in trance rituals in which they enter into alternate realities; they experience magical flight, and journeys to the underworld and the cosmos. Eliade broadly defines these shamanic practices as 'techniques of ecstasy.'¹² He emphasizes that many of these practices occur in Western culture as well, simultaneously with different forms of religion. He argues that these shamanic practices are more familiar than one might think. They point to something essential within human culture.¹³

Eliade devotes a chapter to 'Initiation Sickness and Dreams', emphasizing a number of experiences that are common to shamanic initiates all over the world. Many of these experiences include variations on the experience of having one's 'human form' or body destroyed, experiencing symbolic death, before being reassembled anew.

12 Eliade, Mircea. *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*. 1964. p. 4

13 Ibid p. 8



Fig. 2.8 *Untitled*, Painting By Author, 2014

For a shamanic initiate symbolic death and resurrection often occurs at maturity, and symbolizes one's initial entry into the shamanic vocation. Yet the initiation process, a period of instruction during which the initiate will be reformed many times over, will continue for many years after this.¹⁴

Such initiation practices, as well as shamanic practices in general, are very often associated with particular aesthetic qualities. Costumes, body paint, masks, and drums are very frequently used in shamanic trance rituals.¹⁵ Similarly, the architectural environment where these rituals take place is often of great importance. Eliade provides accounts of shamanic initiations in Siberia, Australia, as well as North and South America, which all involve rituals housed inside of darkened caves.¹⁶ More recently scholars have even argued that much of the Paleolithic cave art practices which took place in various caves throughout the world were early forms of shamanic ritual.¹⁷

The journey which I have embarked upon through the development of the studio can certainly be related to the experience of a shamanic initiation. It has been a continuous process of de-constructing my 'self'; breaking through boundaries of conditioned fear and emotional pain. We, the participants within the studio, are continuously dismantling our assumptions about the reality around us and the way that we experience it. We are consciously expanding and transforming our sensorial and emotional awareness. As the studio has developed over time, more and more it has become a place designed to facilitate this transformation. The architectural space encourages its inhabitants to question their assumed reality and habitual modes of perception. The place facilitates an ever-changing sensorial encounter.

14 Eliade, Mircea. *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*. 1964. p. 20

15 Eliade, Mircea. *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*. 1964. pp. 145 - 148

16 Ibid p. 41, 51, 101

17 Clottes, Jean and Lewis-Williams, David. *Paleolithic Art and Religion*. 2007. pp. 32-33



Fig. 2.9 - *Untitled*, Painting By Author, 2014

In his work entitled *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari*, Simon O’Sullivan writes about the experience of a genuine encounter.

With a genuine encounter (...) our typical ways of being in the world are challenged, our systems of knowledge disrupted. (...) The encounter then operates as a rupture in our habitual modes of being and thus in our habitual subjectivities.¹⁸

Normally people experience reality through a set of filters. We see only what we expect to see, based on what we have already seen. The role of art is to break us free from our conditioned ways of experiencing reality, to rupture our habits and subjectivities in order to see and feel something new and unexpected.¹⁹ O’Sullivan writes,

At stake here then is the initiation of practices and strategies that reveal this ‘other side’ to ourselves, which dismantle the molar aggregates of our subjectivity – modern rituals that imaginatively and pragmatically switch the register.²⁰

Powerful transformative art and architecture, such as the work explored in this thesis, is meant to do just that - to facilitate an encounter which switches the register and ruptures our habitual ways of experiencing reality. Experiences in the studio very often involve a powerful quality of rupture. We are continuously challenging and breaking through emotional and sensorial barriers. Our experience of reality as well as the sensory environment which we inhabit is in a perpetual state of transformation. We are continuously breaking through one world to discover another.

18 O’Sullivan, Simon. *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari: Thought beyond Representation*. 2006. p. 1

19 Ibid p. 47

20 Ibid p. 50

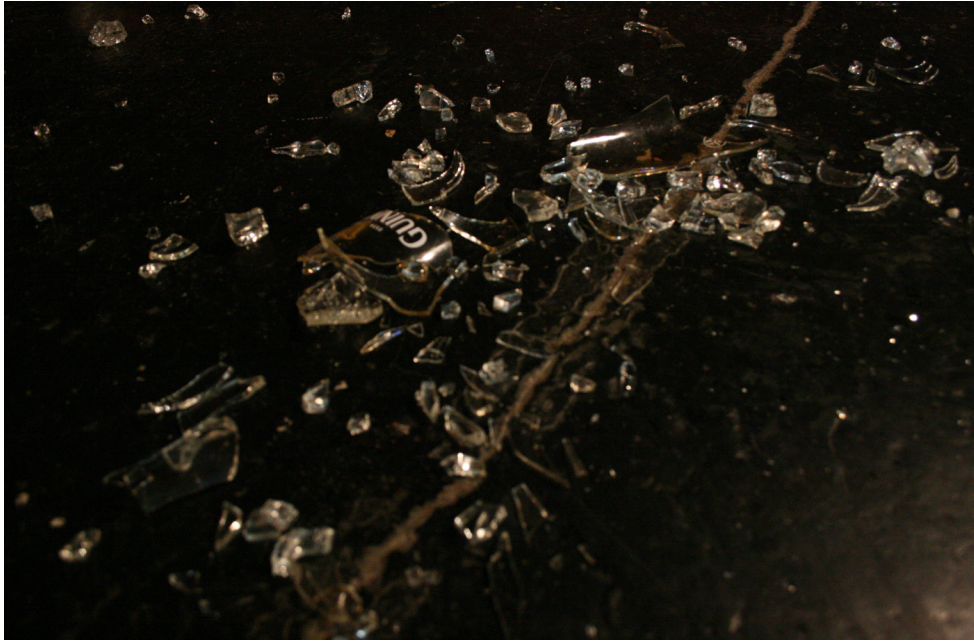


Fig. 2.10 - *Glass on Studio Floor*, 2014

3. Caves



Fig. 3.1 - *Hand Stencils at Pettakere Cave, Indonesia*



Fig. 3.2 - *Inside the Studio*, 2014



Fig. 3.3 - *Great Hall of the Bulls*, Lascaux Cave, France

3.1: Cave Painting

The first time it occurred to me that there was a strong parallel between prehistoric cave painting and my experience working in the studio was in an ‘Introduction to Architecture’ class in the first year of my undergraduate degree. The class was taught by Donald McKay. I remember Donald explaining how marvelous the cave paintings were, and that they expressed something absolutely essential to our human culture. As more caves and artifacts have been discovered over the past several decades, the dates of the ‘origins’ of art keep going back further and further into prehistory. Basically, humans have been producing works of art, of aesthetic expression and exploration, since their very origins. I remember sitting in class, and having a clear mental vision of the studio, even recalling the smell, the texture, and the light. To me, the primal, visceral aesthetic quality in the images of those cave paintings, the necessity of such forms of aesthetic exploration, and their parallel to my experience in the studio seemed obvious and profound.

One parallel is the experience of engaging in aesthetic explorations within an immersive environment in order to move beyond the boundaries of socialization and conditioned forms of perception. In the contemporary world, most of us rely heavily on our socialization; our shared filtration and rationalization of reality. We need this for our basic survival, to communicate with others on a common ground, and to maintain an apparent level of control over the chaos of the world that surrounds us. For most people, myself included, the bounds of our conditioning, our rigid ways of experiencing reality, are so strong that it is very difficult to move beyond them and engage in what Simon O’Sullivan calls a ‘genuine encounter’.¹ Within the studio we are engaged in processes of challenging the boundaries of our socialization, moving through the limits of our fear and conditioning, in order to explore new possibilities of sensorial transformation. The aesthetic environment within the studio, like the painted caves, is an immersive space that encourages and facilitates this transformation.

1 Refer to p. 48 of this document for a description of Simon O’Sullivan’s concept of a ‘genuine encounter’.

Georges Bataille, in his book on the prehistoric cave paintings at Lascaux, writes about cave painting as an act of 'transgression.' For Bataille, the term 'transgression' is not a description of criminality or violation of law. Rather, he is referring to the act of breaking beyond the cognitive boundaries that we impose on ourselves within our everyday lives; and moving into a world of dream, fantasy, sensorial immersion, and participation in nature and animality. This form of transgression, which occurs in art, in play, and in religion, has occurred since the dawn of humanity. It is necessary to our cultural transformation. Humans have overstepped the boundaries of our shared reality since the moment such boundaries were created.²

Bataille states that beginning with humans' knowledge of death, sex, and reproduction, we reacted by creating social and behavioral boundaries. He calls this 'prohibition.' This was the beginning of humanity's socialization and separation from our animal nature. We began to enter into a shared filtration and rationalization of reality. Yet, as Bataille states, prohibition is always accompanied by transgression, whether accepted or not within a given culture. We can filter our inner-animal, but we are never completely separate from it. Bacchanalea, feast, festival, sacrifice, and shamanic ritual have always existed as counter-parts to prohibition. Bataille argues that not only the paintings of Lascaux, but all art and true cultural expression, are part of this impulse towards transgression; towards breaking through the prohibitive boundaries that we impose on ourselves within our everyday lives.³

Bataille states that the cave paintings at Lascaux are in no way merely a triumph of logic or technique. The impulse behind them was not the desire for a successful hunt, or any kind of documentation. Rather, they were born from an impulse towards play, dream, exploration, and imagination.⁴ The prehistoric artists were engaged in rituals within an immersive aesthetic environment in order to move beyond the boundaries of everyday reality, to enter into a 'sacred' world where the walls of the caves come to life.

2 Bataille, Georges. *Lascaux; Or, The Birth of Art: Prehistoric Painting*. 1955. pp. 34-35

3 *Ibid* pp. 37-38

4 *Ibid* p. 63

As stated by Simon O'sullivan,

The practice of cave painting is specifically ritualistic, involving the creation of a sacred space. Indeed, art, for Bataille, is a mechanism for accessing a kind of immanent beyond to everyday experience. Here art operates as a form of play that takes the participant out of mundane consciousness, hence Bataille's understanding of the Lascaux cave paintings as specifically performative. This involves a switching of temporal modes, a move from 'work time' (to do with utility; with being human) to 'sacred time' (a transgression of this norm; a move 'into' the natural – cosmic – realm).⁵

This ritual transformation from everyday life to the realm of the sacred involves a powerful sense of play, dream, exploration, and imagination. The prehistoric artists were entering into a 'sacred space'; an immersive, transformative aesthetic environment where magical visions might begin to emerge. One example from Lascaux, which indicates this sense of imagination, is the so-called 'Unicorn' figure. This is the first figure a person sees when descending into the Cave. The 'Unicorn' does not represent an animal from the natural world; it looks something like the body of a bull or rhinoceros, with an undersized head and two straight horns which do not resemble the horns of any particular animal.⁶ Rather, it embodies the experience of play, dream, and imagination of the artists that produced it. As stated by Bataille, "It belongs to the sphere of fantasy, of dream, controlled by neither hunger or the real world. (...) We must view the 'Unicorn' as a supernatural creature born of religious imagination."⁷

5 O'Sullivan, Simon. *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari: Thought beyond Representation*. 2006. p. 48

6 Bataille, Georges. *Lascaux; Or, The Birth of Art: Prehistoric Painting*. 1955. pp. 62-63

7 Ibid



Fig. 3.4 - *Unicorn Panel*, Lascaux Cave, France

The prehistoric cave painters were immersed within an all-encompassing sensory environment; a powerful and sacred world. We can imagine that within the dim and continuously moving torch light, surrounded by the undulating rock surfaces within the cave, figures such as the 'Unicorn' were produced through a real experience, a magical vision that emerged within the space.

A second parallel between the experience of the prehistoric cave painters and the experience of participants within the studio is the exploration and expression of vital energy in virtual space; energy and force that seems to be alive and moving yet is physically inaccessible. Such forces, whether within the surface of a rock face, a wall, ceiling, or floor, are tapped into and rendered as visible expressions, as distilled percepts in virtual space.⁸

Jean Clottes and David Lewis-Williams have written a number of books and articles exploring the hypothesis that the creation of prehistoric cave paintings was part of an early form of shamanic ritual. They assert that the cave painters believed that behind the surface of certain cave walls were worlds of living spirits and vital energy. The cave painters engaged in trance rituals and ceremonies in order to connect with that energy. The various painted forms within the caves are rendered visions of such experiences.⁹

Like the prehistoric shamans; we, the participants within the studio, are also engaged in explorations of perception, processes of tapping into vital forces in order to render them as visible artifacts and spaces.

8 See Deleuze and Guattari's description of percept. Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *What Is Philosophy?* 1994. p. 164

9 Clottes, Jean and Lewis-Williams, David. *Palaeolithic Art and Religion*. 2007. p. 38



Fig. 3.5 - *Panel of Rhinos and Lions*, Chauvet Cave, France

One Saturday morning we were getting ready to do a routine cleaning of the studio. I had brought out a bucket of water to start mopping the floor. Jim saw something on the floor in front of the semi-circular tile at the center of the sunburst. He took the bucket of water and poured a small puddle on the floor directly in front of the tile. We gathered around to look at what he was seeing. The smooth surface of the water gave a clear reflection of the tile, as well as the white lines that project from behind it. Jim poured more water from the bucket, making a large puddle that slowly expanded across the surface of the floor. We all looked in amazement at the clear, deep reflection. We could see a sphere suspended in space with lines projecting up through the wall and also far below the surface of the floor. We were floating within a very deep space, with the radial lines of the sunburst projecting far above and below us. We turned off the main lights in the room, and set sound responsive lights onto the sunburst. We were all captivated as we watched washes of warm light flicker and spread across the wall and through the surface of the floor.

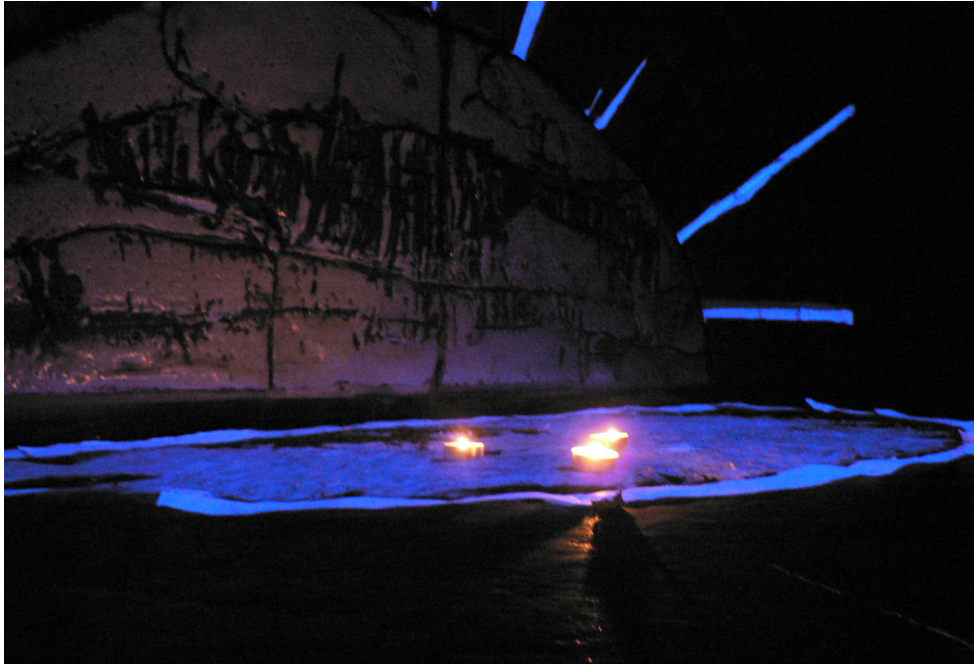


Fig. 3.6 - *Sunburst Composition in Development, 2009*

The expansion of lines throughout the other physical planes within the room began with the perception and tracking of visual projections emanating from the sunburst composition on the front wall. The sunburst was already projecting a perceivable geometry throughout the space before any marks were made on the other walls, the floor, or the ceiling. Gradually we began to trace these projections with other materials. Firstly I remember Jim illustrating the movement of lines by drawing through the air with a long stick. He encouraged me to do the same. I would make my way around the room, quickly carving lines through the air, feeling out the rhythm and movement of the projecting lines. Eventually we all began to feel the presence of a large cocoon-like frame in virtual space, stretching out to a deep perspective point on the back wall of the studio.



Fig. 3.7 - *Developing the Sunburst on the Back Wall of the Studio, 2009*

Slowly we began to mark out these projecting lines. At the same time we began to collage planes of wood within other areas of the room, similarly to the process of developing the planes of the sunburst. These collages were continuously altered and adjusted to enhance the sensation of push and pull in virtual space.

As the composition continued to develop, reflective surfaces came to take on an increasingly important role. More mirrors began to appear in the studio. We would move, adjust, and juxtapose these mirrors in a number of ways to see how the dynamics of the projecting lines and spatial planes within the room would change and evolve. A mirror produces a vital continuation, an expansion in virtual space which is continuously in flux as a person changes their position within the room. There is an added layer of movement of lines, visual planes, and light. More and more the composition of surfaces and planes within the studio began to expand and come to life.

After our experience with pouring water on the floor, we decided to paint the entire floor with high gloss reflective black. Now the quality of reflection we had seen was present throughout the entire room. The texture of the concrete gave the reflection a slight distortion. The impression was like a foggy, underwater space below the floor, continuously reflecting the interplay of lines, planes, and light interacting in the space above.

Once the floor was painted black we began to trace the projecting lines of the sunburst onto the surface of the floor. We began by using masking tape to sketch in the reflected semi-circle as well as a series of lines that radiate from it. We adjusted the lines to a point where they settled into place and felt solidly connected to the projecting lines and planes on the other walls of the room. We were then ready to define the lines in a more permanent way.

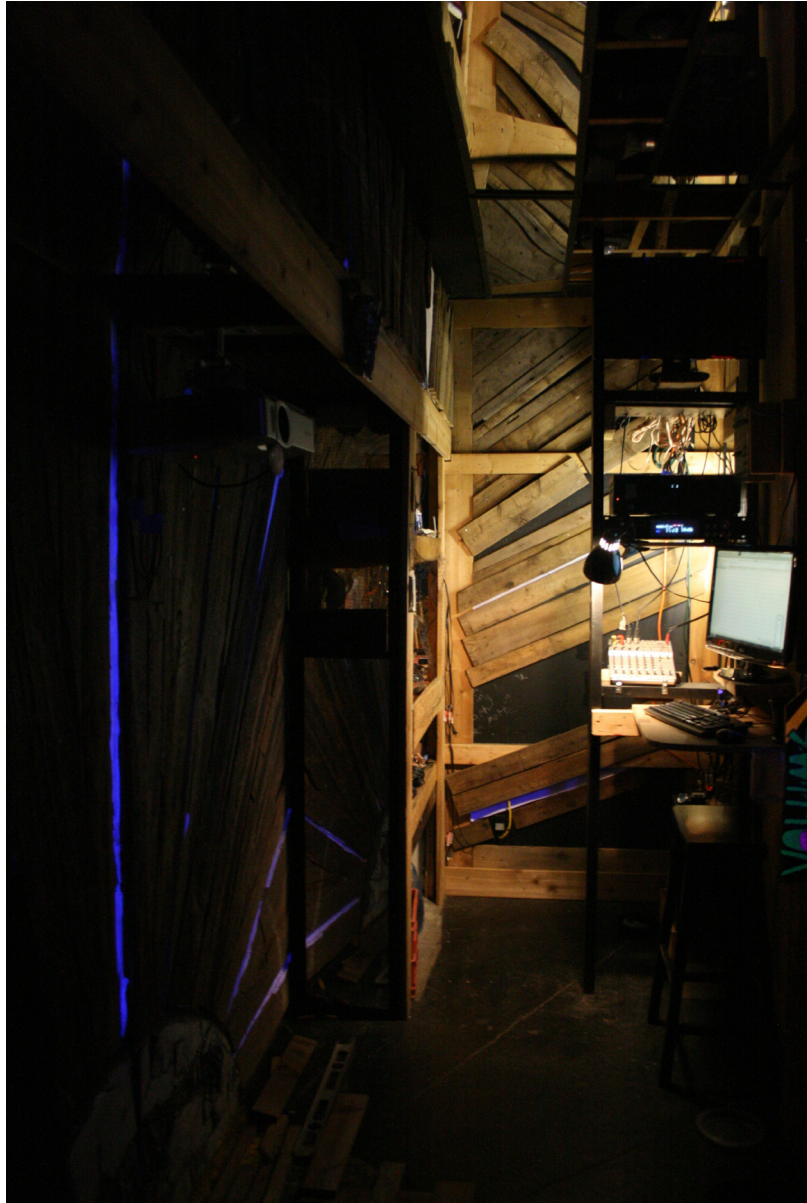


Fig. 3.8 - *Developing the Sunburst on the Side Wall of the Studio, 2014*

We decided to chip the lines in the floor by hand with a small chipping hammer. This way, we could determine the overall direction of the lines, but there was still a degree of variability and roughness. We constructed a small tent to contain the dust. Working within this tent, with a single light and a chipping hammer, I observed as the lines in the floor slowly appeared like cracks in the surface of a rock. For days I was immersed within this intense process. As I continued to work, gradually the lines spread out across the floor and connected directly with the lines on the walls and other planes within the room. Within each crack we sealed a tiny strip of white paper which would glow when the room was dark and lit only by black light.

Throughout all of this development, it was clear that the direction of the composition was coming from a continuously developing vision, an evolving perceptual experience which had a life and a direction of its own. We were tapping into pre-existing projecting forces within the space, feeling them, slowly marking them out and watching the composition evolve and grow.

Gilles Deleuze frequently refers to the experience in art of rendering visible the invisible forces that populate the world. He quotes the painter Paul Klee, who famously stated his formula, "Not to render the visible, but to render visible."¹⁰ Deleuze states that this is the primary aim in all art. "In art, (...) it is not a matter of reproducing or inventing forms, but of capturing forces."¹¹ Such forces are not invented by the artist. They already exist in the world. It is the task of the artist to see beyond the boundaries of filtered, conditioned perception, in order to experience the energy and vitality that already exists all around us. As Simon O'Sullivan states, "This world of affects, this universe of forces, is our own world seen without the spectacles of habitual subjectivity."¹²

10 Deleuze, Gilles. *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*. 2004. p. 56

11 Ibid p. 56

12 O'Sullivan, Simon. *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari: Thought beyond Representation*. 2006. p. 50

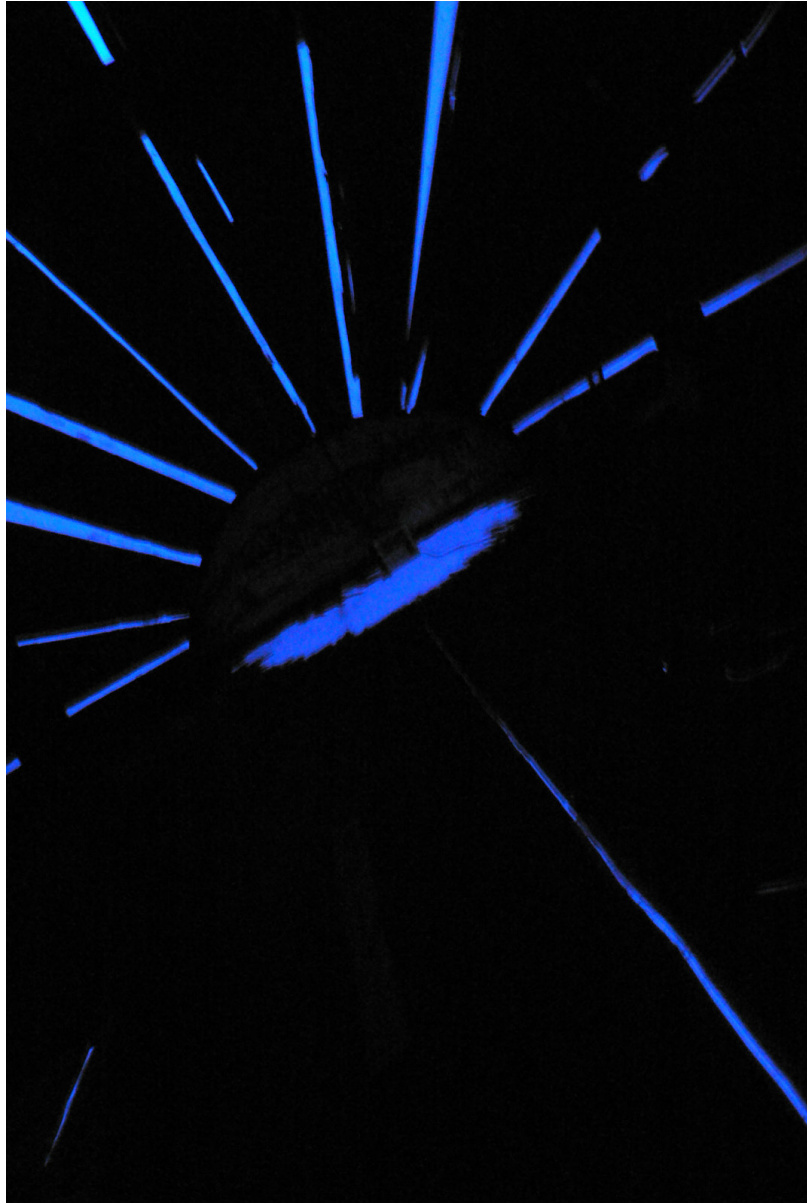


Fig. 3.9 - *Sunburst Composition in Development, 2009*

Like our experience developing the virtual space within the studio, the experience for prehistoric cave painters was also one of tapping into pre-existing forces in order to render them as visible expressions in virtual space. Jean Clottes and David Lewis-Williams have produced a number of in-depth analyses of cave paintings around the world, as well as surveys of the history of interpretations of scholars over the last few centuries. They cite a number of evidenced theories, and state that the theory that the paintings were made as part of a shamanic trance ritual is by far the most convincing.¹³ The Palaeolithic painters went deep into caves where no natural light could penetrate. Many of the paintings were made in such remote locations that it is difficult to reach them and often difficult to view them. This suggests that the ritual act of making them, of engaging in the transformative experience, deeply immersed within the sacred world of the cave, was of primary importance. The images are frequently superimposed and very often painted to make use of the natural undulations and contours in the rock's surface. The painters were acutely aware of the force of movement and vitality within the physical and virtual space of the cave. Clottes and Lewis-Williams suggest that they were engaged in shamanic trance rituals in order to experience these forces more potently. The painted images are rendered visions, experienced during such trances, meant to bring these forces of movement and vitality to the visible forefront.¹⁴

13 Clottes, Jean and Lewis-Williams, David. *Palaeolithic Art and Religion*. 2007. pp. 25-27

14 Ibid



Fig. 3.10 - *Portion of the Panel of Horses, Chauvet Cave, France*

The instances where cave painters made use of natural reliefs in a rock surface are numerous. For example, in a cave at Monte Castillo, located in Puente Viesgo, Spain, only a few shades of paint were added to a series of undulations in a rock wall which already suggested the form of a bison. The cave painters sensed the dynamic movement present within the rock wall. The mass of a body thrusting upward, as well as the suggestion of a tail and hind legs was already present within the natural form and contour of the rock's surface. The artists added shades of paint in order to render this form and force of movement more clearly visible.¹⁵

15 Clottes, Jean and Lewis-Williams, David. *The Shamans of Prehistory*. 1998. p. 86



Fig. 3.11 - *Vertical Bison*, Castillo Cave, Spain

Light and shadow also play a significant role in the emerging form of figures on a rock surface. As the paintings were most frequently made deep within caves where no natural light could penetrate, we can say for certain that the interplay of moving torch light and shadow had a significant role in the changing perception of the artists. There would have been a quality of continuous movement; of light and shadow animating the space. Forms, figures, and shadows would be continuously changing; appearing and disappearing. In the Cave of Niaux, in southwestern France, for example, there is an image of a bison whose dorsal line is formed by a shadow cast by a natural ridge in the surface of a rock wall. The cave painters added a head, legs, belly line, and tail to the rock wall so that when a torch is held in a particular position, the image of the bison becomes visible. By moving one's lamp the image can be made to appear and disappear.¹⁶

16 Clottes, Jean and Lewis-Williams, David. *Palaeolithic Art and Religion*. 2007. p. 37

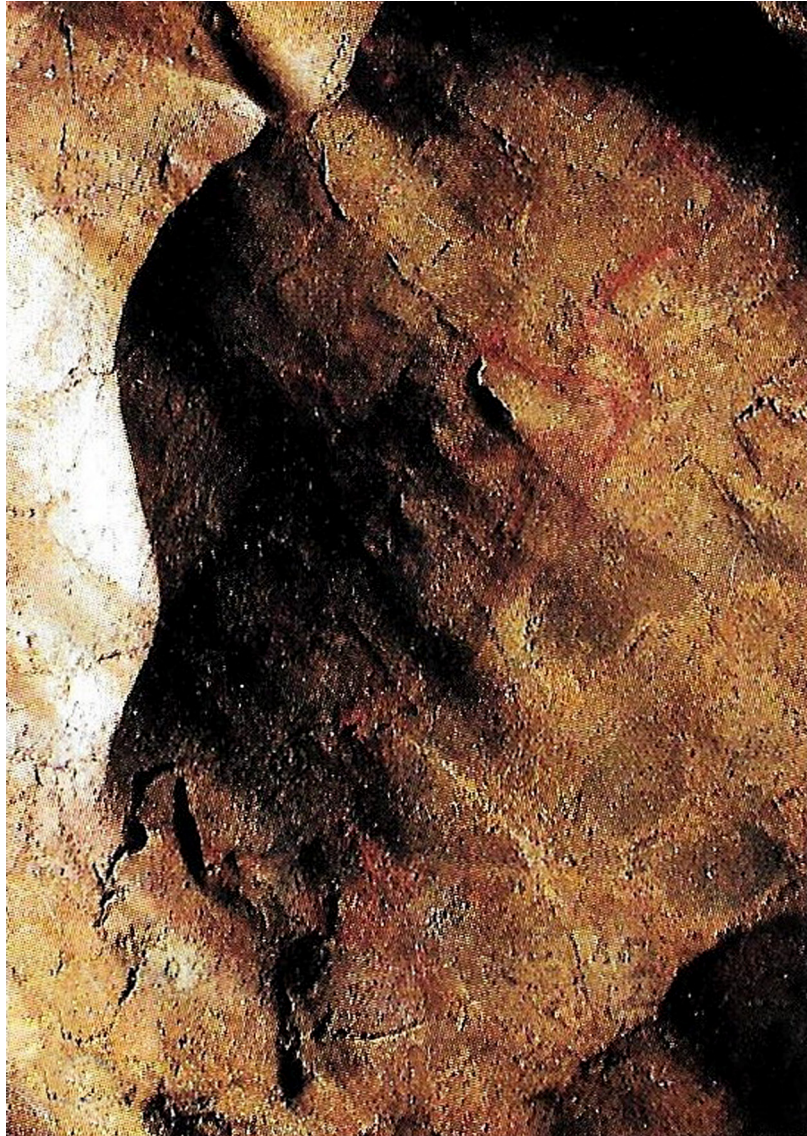


Fig. 3.12 *Shadow Bison*, Niaux Cave, France

For the palaeolithic painters, immersed within these deep caves, surrounded by the undulating surface of rock walls animated by light and shadow, we can imagine that the painted figures appeared very much alive and moving. There are numerous examples where images are superimposed clearly with the intention of producing a sensation of movement. Often the legs of a figure are intentionally blurred or repeated. There are also examples where a similar image is repeated in sequence to suggest a progression of movements, like stills from a video, such as with the famous panel of horses in Chauvet Cave. In his film on the paintings at Chauvet Cave, entitled *Cave of Forgotten Dreams*, Werner Herzog refers to these superimpositions as “a form of proto-cinema.” He goes on to state that, “for them, the animals perhaps appeared moving, living.”¹⁷

These powerful explorations of vitality and movement in virtual space point to something essential within human culture. We have a need to connect with life forces beyond a rational understanding of our physical environment; to engage in sensory experiences which pull us into a world of dreaming and transform our experience of reality.

17 *Cave of Forgotten Dreams*. Herzog, Werner. 2010. Film.



Fig. 3.13 - *Portion of Panel of Horses, Chauvet Cave, France*

Like the surfaces of the painted caves, the surfaces of the enclosure of the studio have also come to life. Gradually the projecting lines and planes of the sunburst have wrapped the entire enclosure of the room. The boundaries of the walls, floor, and ceiling are expanded into a vast virtual space imbued with a powerful quality of rhythm, movement, and vitality. More and more the space has become a place for dreaming and aesthetic exploration.

Within this space, various individual compositions are continuously being developed. The projecting wood planes of the sunburst provide a continuous backdrop on which we can mount, alter, and juxtapose these compositions, as well as mock up framing and lighting. More importantly, the virtual space of the studio becomes an 'aesthetic measuring tool', as Jim calls it. The rhythm, weight, presence, and quality of movement within the space becomes a field of reference for the development of other individual compositions. In order to hold up against the space of the studio itself, a composition needs to hold a certain weight and rhythm of its own. The studio pushes and pulls the individual compositions; and the individual compositions push and pull in relation the aesthetic environment that surrounds them.



Fig. 3.14 - *Inside the Studio*, 2014

Once the projecting lines and planes of the sunburst were built onto the back wall of the studio, the primary direction of the studio changed. Although there were always a number of different compositions in progress throughout the room, before our attention was primarily focused on the front wall of the sunburst. Now, the direction changed to the back wall and the direction of the work became more expansive and experimental. The back wall became a place where we could easily layer and move between a number of compositions in progress within a short period of time. We began to develop more paintings and collages of varying scale and media. The back wall of the studio has become a place of continuous transformation and aesthetic evolution.

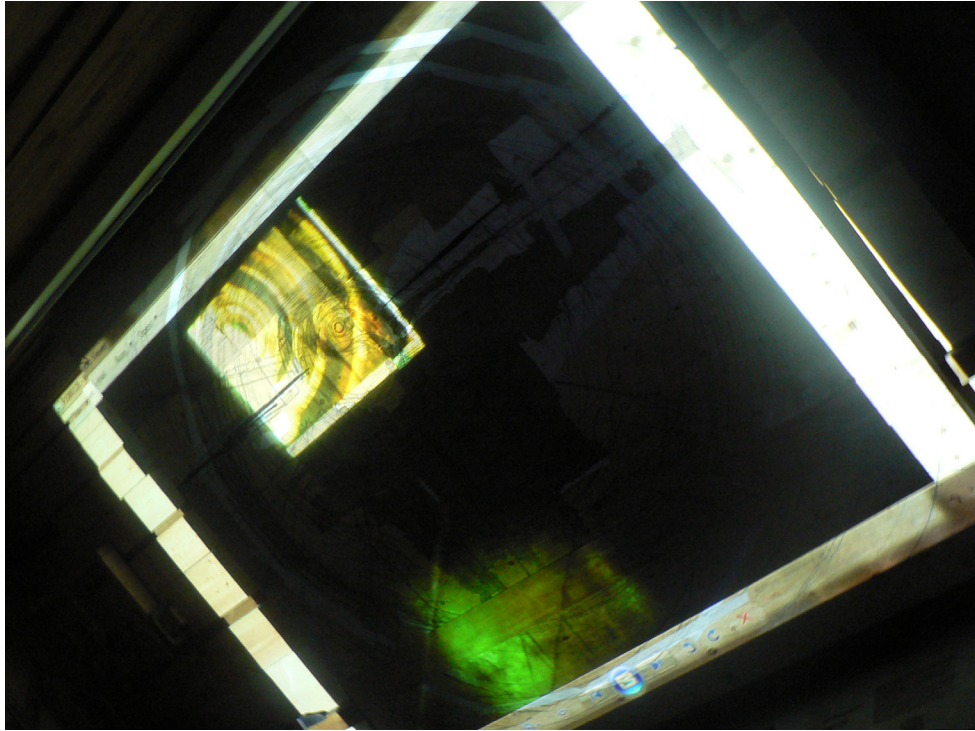


Fig. 3.15 - *Experiments on the Back Wall of the Studio*, 2011

Over time the use of modulating light and projected video have also come to take on a more significant role in the ongoing experimentations within the studio. Video and modulating light is intensely powerful in terms of producing visual movement and bringing a physical surface to life. We began to experiment with video more and more, not only by streaming on various screens throughout the space, but also by projecting within the physical environment of the studio; on paintings, on walls, and on various compositions of physical planes within the space. Video brought to the studio an added layer of movement, juxtaposition of space and light that remains infinitely expansive.

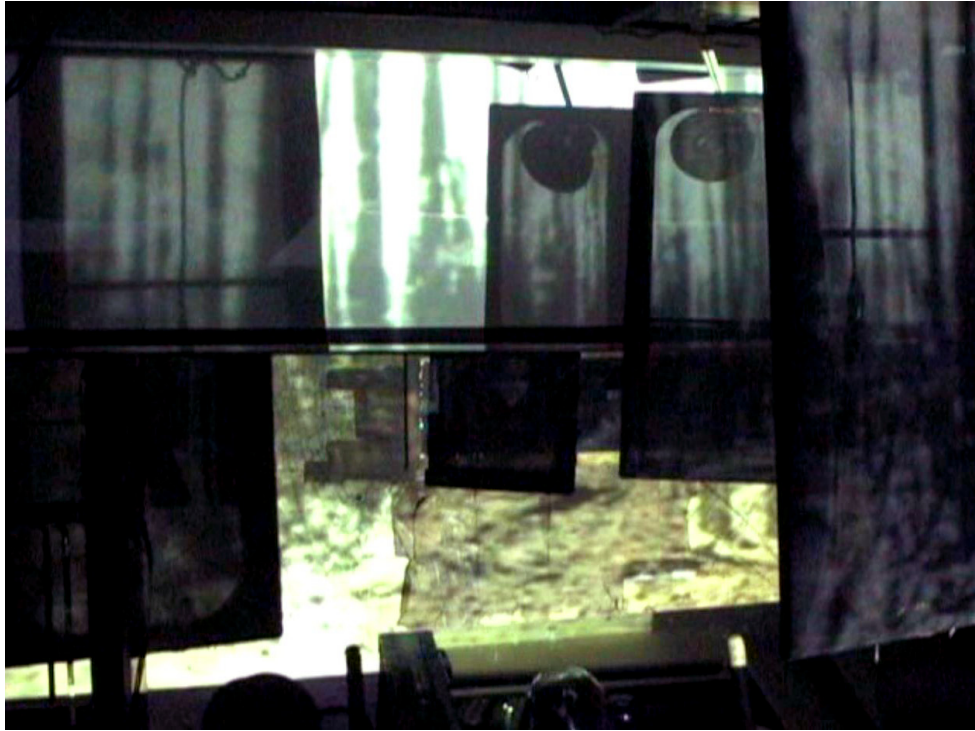


Fig. 3.16 - *Experiments on the Back Wall of the Studio*, 2011

3.2: Grottos

Within the last century of cultural history there are a number of artists and architects who have also been intensely exploring the transformative power of art and architecture within an immersive environment. Kurt Schwitters, for example, clearly encapsulates a powerful force of transformation in his art, in his architectural constructions, and also in his life. The self-defined philosophy that Schwitters propagated and lived by for most of his life, called *Merz*, is (loosely) defined as an expressive force of continuous material and conceptual transformation.¹⁸ Schwitters describes the origins of the concept during the aftermath of WWI in Germany.

I felt myself freed and had to shout my jubilation out to the world. Out of parsimony I took whatever I had to do this, because we were now a poor country. One can even shout out through refuse, and this is what I did, nailing and gluing it together. I called it 'Merz,' it was a prayer about the victorious end of the war, victorious as once again peace had won in the end; everything had broken down in any case and new things had to be made out of fragments: and this is Merz.¹⁹

18 Gamard, Elizabeth Burns. *Kurt Schwitters' Merzbau: The Cathedral of Erotic Misery*. p. 26

19 Ibid Citation: Translation from Schmalenbach, Kurt Schwitters, New York, p. 32 See Schwitters, "Kurt Schwitters," *Das Literarische Werk*, 5, p. 335



Fig. 3.17 - Kurt Schwitters -
The Holy Night by Antoni Allegri, known as Correggio, 1947

This force of continuous transformation, of material, concept, and sensory experience, is perhaps most powerfully expressed in Schwitters' ever-evolving architectural construction, the *Merzbau*. This was a project that developed outside the trajectory of Schwitters' career as a commercial artist. For an artist as self-promoting and frequently published as Schwitters, he was oddly quiet about this work to which he devoted a great deal of attention for well over a decade. It was firstly developed within his studio and a number of rooms in his apartment in Hanover which he shared with his wife and child. For many years there were relatively few visitors who were able to see it, and it was sparsely documented.²⁰

The origins of the work are still somewhat unclear. Early accounts are varied as Schwitters' studio itself was an ever-changing collage of all manner of objects continuously being dismantled and re-constructed. It is fairly certain, however, that the composition began with a 'column', which evolved "from a chaotic heap of various materials: wood, cardboard, scraps of iron, broken picture frames,"²¹ and began to develop in his studio between 1917 and 1919. The 'column' was continuously altered and built upon as the surrounding sculptural construction began to expand and take over entire sections of Schwitters' studio and apartment.

20 Gamard, Elizabeth Burns. *Kurt Schwitters' Merzbau: The Cathedral of Erotic Misery*. pp. 8-9

21 Ibid p. 88 - Citation: Steinitz, *Kurt Schwitters* p. 90

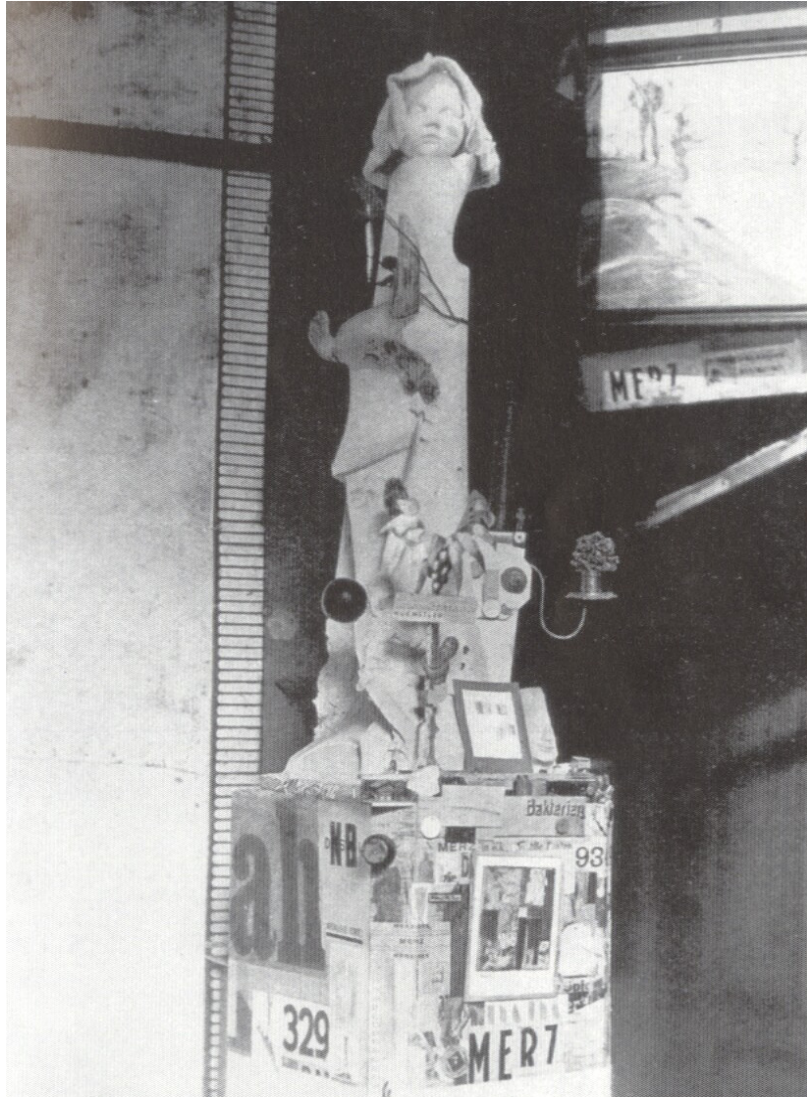


Fig. 3.18 - Kurt Schwitters - *Merz-Column*, 1923

The construction contained various openings and recesses which Schwitters referred to alternatively as grottos, caves, and rooms. These recesses contained allegorical and alchemical micro compositions. Objects such as locks of hair, nail clippings, pencils, and articles of clothing were collaged into the cavities in an attempt to transform these 'profane' objects into 'sacred' shrines.²² A number of recesses were dedicated to specific personal friends of Schwitters, and were called the 'Friendship Caves.' There were also a number of spaces which contained specific reference to cultural, social, and political events during the aftermath of WWI in Germany, such as the 'Cave of Lust-Murderers,' and the 'Cave of Deprecated Heros'.²³

Many of these recesses were continuously worked on, collaged over, and eventually filled-in. Layers of sculpted objects, found material, and plaster were continuously collaged and buried within the ever-evolving composition. The entire project continued to transform and grow, eventually taking over eight spaces within the house; including a balcony, two spaces in the cellar, a protrusion through a skylight in the attic ceiling to a rooftop platform, and a staircase down to water level through an old well that was discovered while excavating in the courtyard.²⁴

22 Gamard, Elizabeth Burns. *Kurt Schwitters' Merzbau: The Cathedral of Erotic Misery*. pp. 103-107

23 Ibid

24 Ibid pp. 7-8

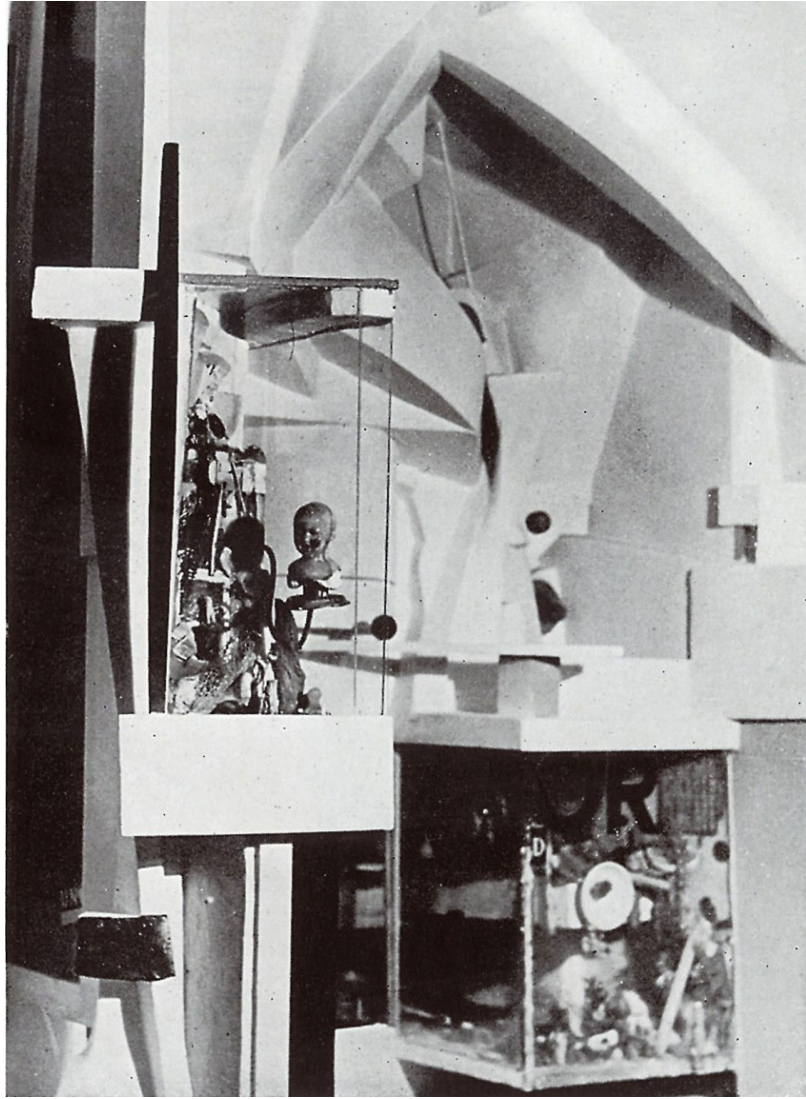


Fig. 3.19 - Kurt Schwitters - *Gold Grotto*, 1925

As John Elderfield writes,

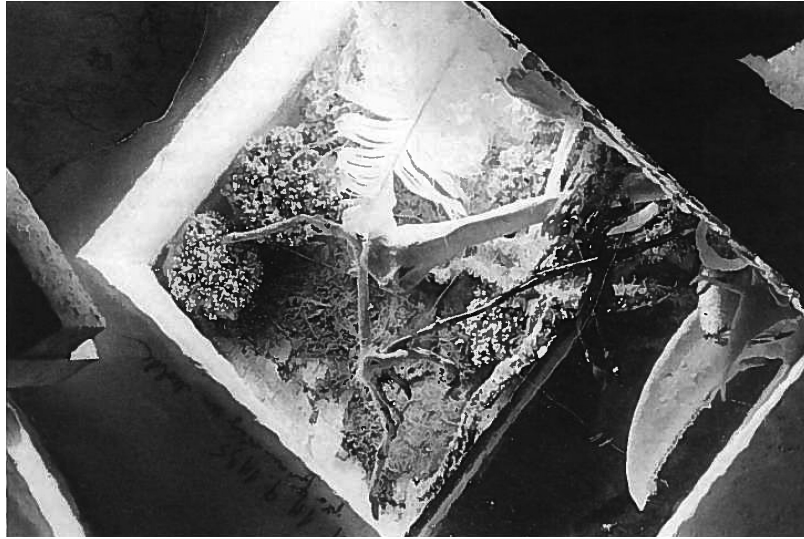
The principal sculptural motif of this final addition to the *Merzbau* was arrow-shaped, pointing down to the water, where it was reflected, to a point back upwards - thereby reminding visitors to this most astonishing structure that the *Merzbau* (...) did in fact stretch, after thirteen years of building, from the subterranean to the sky.²⁵

The language that Schwitters used to describe the project also transformed over time. He often referred to it as 'the column,' a title that he would use even in the later days to describe the entire immersive sculpture that had taken over several rooms in his apartment. In 1920, what is believed to be the column that is the origin of the project was published in 'magazine G' and referred to as *Der erste Tag Merz-säule (The First Day Merz-column)*. Alternatively, photographs were published in 1928 under the title *Die Kathedrale des erotischen Elends (The Theatre of Erotic Misery)*, and the anagram *KdeE* for short. It wasn't until 1933 that the project finally took on the name, by which it is mostly known today, *Merzbau*.²⁶

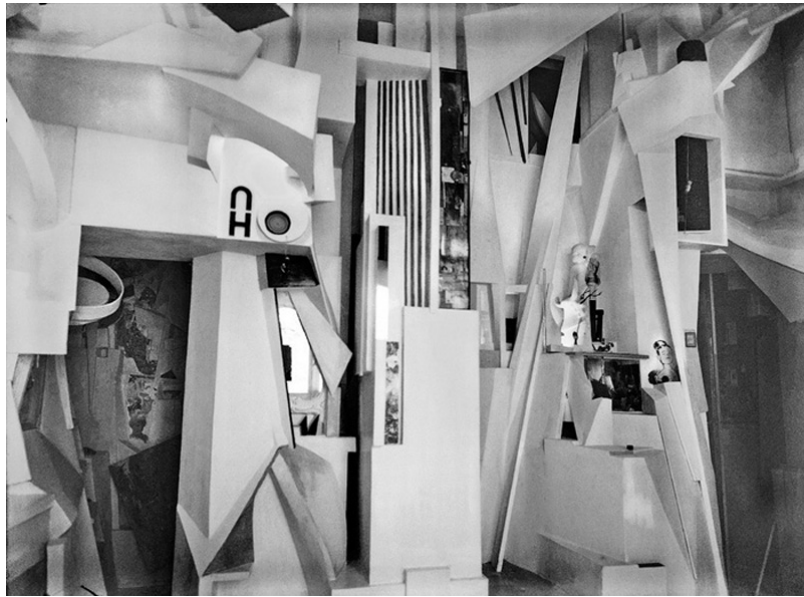
While the conceptual content and the evolving construction of the *Merzbau* certainly embody a process of continuous transformation, what is most important for Schwitters is the sensory impact the work has on its inhabitants. The work is designed to transform the perception of a viewer as they move through the architectural construction. Various sculptural forms project in space juxtaposing and framing one another. This produces a continuously changing rhythm in both physical and virtual space.

25 Elderfield, John, and Kurt Schwitters. *Kurt Schwitters*. 1985. p. 157

26 Gamard, Elizabeth Burns. *Kurt Schwitters' Merzbau: The Cathedral of Erotic Misery*. p. 87, 100



3.20



3.21

Fig. 3.20 - Kurt Schwitters - *Grotto in Memory of Mold*, 1935
Fig. 3.21 - Kurt Schwitters - *Merzbau*, 1933

Describing the composition in a letter in 1936, Schwitters writes,

I am building an abstract (cubist) sculpture into which people can go. From the direction of movements of the constructed surfaces, there emanate imaginary planes which act as directions and movements in space and which intersect in empty space. The suggestive impact of the sculpture is based on the fact that people themselves cross these imaginary planes as they go into the sculpture. It is the dynamic of the impact that is important to me. I am building a composition without boundaries, and each individual part is at the same time a frame for the neighboring parts; everything is reciprocal.²⁷

27 Cardinal, Roger - 'Kurt Schwitters' p. 73 Citation: Schwitters to Alfred H. Barr, Jr. November 23, 1936, collected files, Department of Painting and Sculpture, Museum of Modern Art, New York.

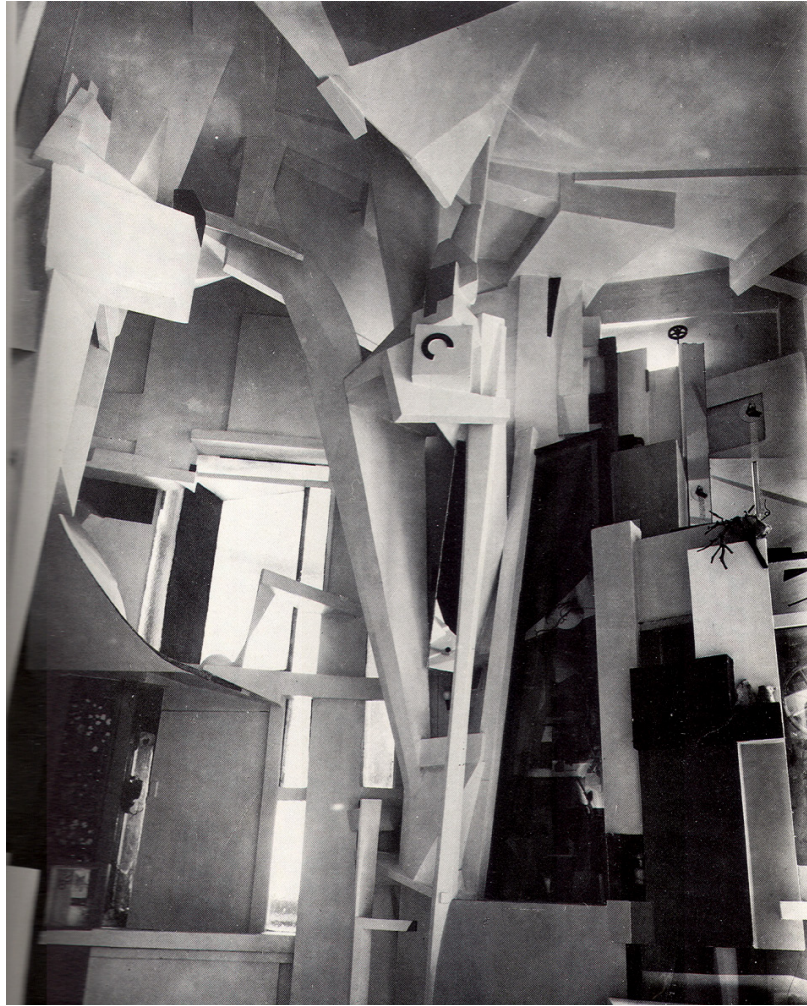


Fig. 3.22 - Kurt Schwitters - *Merzbau*, 1933

Like the interior of Schwitters' Merzbau, the interior of the studio is an immersive environment where physical and virtual planes are projecting in space, framing a series of reciprocal zones within the composition. Shelves, partial divisions, walls, and cabinets are composed as a series of frames within frames, which juxtapose one another and interact in physical and virtual space. Over time the space has become more and more cavernous, containing many small individual spaces which serve different aesthetic and functional purposes.

Part of this process began with the construction of a series of shelves along the north wall of the studio. There had always been some form of shelf or bench along that wall from the time I first started coming to work in the studio. Eventually the wall was developed into an intricate composition of shelves, cabinets, and recesses. Different sizes and configurations of frames juxtapose one another to build a rhythm of push and pull in virtual space. Within these individual frames are contained compositions of objects; religious statuettes, plants, bones, photographs, reproductions of paintings, as well as various combinations of lights and glowing materials. Each of these individual compositions is like a little universe unto itself, with its own life and purpose.

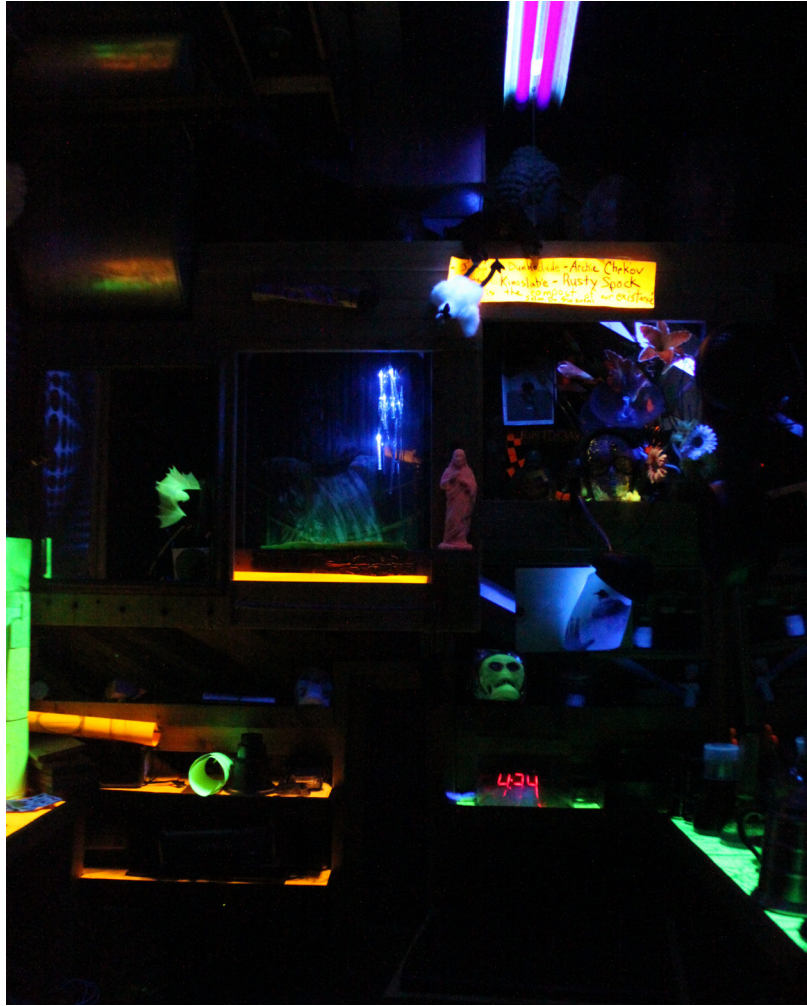


Fig. 3.23 - *Composition of Shelves on North Wall of the Studio, 2016*

The composition of shelves is also framed by a series of architectural elements that surround it. Upper shelves, shafts in the ceiling, mirrors, and partitions within the space build an even more expansive series of frames within frames. The result is an endless variety of spatial juxtapositions to be explored. The sensory world within the studio is continuously transforming; moving and changing as a participant moves their body and their attention within the space. The physical space itself is also transforming; continuously being altered and adjusted to meet the needs of the ever-evolving process of composition taking place within the studio.

A line of semi-permeable partitions was constructed as a form of a theatre frame for the back wall of the studio. These partitions are made of vertical panels of varying sized dimensional lumber, spaced slightly apart to allow a degree of permeability of air and light. The edge of these walls is framed with a painted black wood channel, designed to contain retractable semi-transparent curtains which provide a degree of separation between the two spaces when necessary. This strong architectural division produces a powerful sensation of framing space, much like a theatre stage. The zone beyond this frame is the primary place where we work on and view paintings and collages, mock up framing and lighting, and also experiment with and edit video compositions.

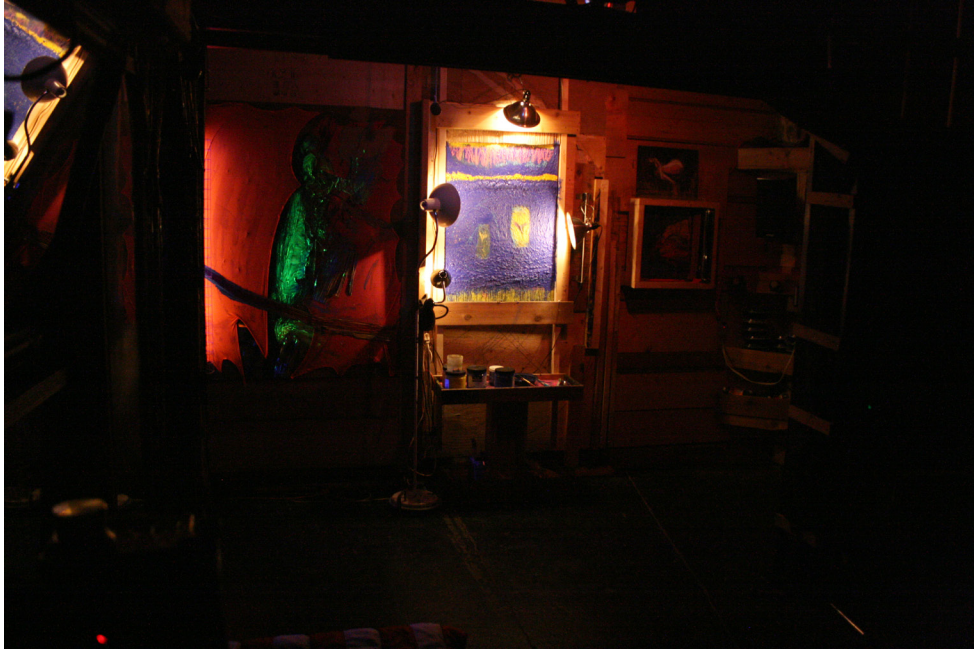


Fig. 3.24 - *Inside the Studio*, 2017

Another significant architectural division within the studio began with a vision of a small, self contained room that would be used as a space for human models to pose within. The space was gradually constructed with a series of vertical wood panels, similar to the theatre frame but with less permeability in order to provide a degree of privacy. Adjacent to this modelling stall is another small contained space that doubles as an entrance to the stall and as a place for drawing and painting. A large mirror was mounted on the wall within the modelling stall to provide a view for life drawing from the adjacent space. Over time we began to experiment more and more with combinations of mirrors and lights within the stall. We found that through the combination and layering of mirrors and frames within the space, a nearly infinite visual universe of shafts, and tunnels began to emerge.



Fig. 3.25 - *Inside the Rabbit Hole*, 2013

We continued to experiment with various combinations of frames and mirrors within the space and found that the subtlest adjustment to the angles of mirrors produces dramatic changes in the composition of shafts and tunnels. We also began to experiment with mirrors on hinges that can move in order to open, expand, or close certain shafts depending on the angle of view. Various objects and lights are mounted or hung within the stall to provide reference points within the virtual expanse.

A small camera is mounted within this space. A streaming video is played on a screen outside the stall, giving an obscure glance into the expansive virtual world within. This streaming view is altered dramatically by changing the positioning and angling of the camera, as well as through the movement of mirrors and figures within the space. We came to refer to this room of ever changing shafts and tunnels as 'The Rabbit Hole'.



Fig. 3.26 - *Inside the Studio*, 2016

3.3: Tunnels

The transformative sensory experience of seeing and moving through a tunnel is a phenomenon that has been explored by a number of theorists and historians, as well as by various artists and architects. In their book, entitled *Inside the Neolithic Mind*, David Lewis-Williams and David Pearce state that the perceptual experience of seeing and moving through a tunnel or vortex is an experience frequently associated with altered states of consciousness, both in western culture as well as in various indigenous cultures throughout the world. For example, shamans around the world frequently describe visions of ‘tunnels’, ‘vortexes’, and ‘holes into the earth’, experienced during shamanic trance rituals.²⁸ For Palaeolithic cave painters, tunnels into the earth were ritual passageways; transitional spaces between the every-day world of the outside and the sacred world within the darkened caves.²⁹ Jean Clottes and David Lewis-Williams explain that the sensory experience of moving through these tunnels very likely contributed to the cave painters’ transformation into altered states of consciousness.

The sensory deprivation of the utterly dark, silent passages may not only have replicated the vortex; it may also have contributed to the induction of an altered state. (...) For Upper Palaeolithic people, the underground passages and the neurological experience of the vortex may have become inextricably interwoven.³⁰

More broadly we might state that encountering powerful works of immersive art and architecture is also related to the experience of encountering a tunnel. In both cases a viewer enters a passage that facilitates sensorial transformation. As stated by Simon O’Sullivan, “art is (...) a portal, an ‘access point’, to another world of molecular becomings (our world experienced differently).”³¹

28 Lewis-Williams, David; Pearce, David. *Inside the Neolithic Mind*. 2005. p 52

29 Clottes, Jean and Lewis-Williams, David. *Palaeolithic Art and Religion*. 2007. p. 36

30 Ibid

31 O’Sullivan, Simon. *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari: Thought beyond Representation*. 2006. p. 50



Fig. 3.27 - *Untitled*, Painting by Author, 2014

Anselm Kiefer is an example of a contemporary artist who is fascinated with tunnels and also with the idea that art is a portal to a world of molecular and cosmic exploration. His work, both his paintings and his large scale sculptures / architectural constructions, frequently involves simultaneous spatial expansion deep into the earth and high into the heavens. For Kiefer, the interior of the earth and the celestial cosmos are connected to each other and also connected to our immediate sensory experience.³²

Kiefer states that in his work he is attempting to make images that are continuously moving and expanding in all directions. He works on his paintings from all sides, and often makes pictures in which the sky is reflected in the earth and vice versa.³³ Kiefer states that within his paintings there is no fixed differentiation between up and down, north, south, east or west. This idea also applies to time; Past, present, and future are all connected.³⁴ The concept of scale is also relative; Something that seems very large can also be very small in a different context. Likewise an infinite universe can be contained in something very small, like a small opening into the earth. Writing about his painting *Die Milchstrasse* (*The Milky Way*), Kiefer states the following:

When you dig in the ground you may find something - water, a buried meteorite, a piece of heaven. These kinds of pictures are always operating between the macrocosmic and the microcosmic. The lead strings reach to the sky and then converge down into the funnel, which dips into the puddle. The Milky Way, which has been observed for millenniums as a great and expansive constellation, is really a small thing in the cosmos. It is like a puddle in the cosmos. Establishing a heaven and earth is a way to try to orient ourselves, but cosmic space does not understand this. It is all relative. What is big can in fact be very small. What is up can be down.³⁵

32 Auping, Michael. Anselm Kiefer: Heaven and Earth. 2005. p. 171

33 Ibid p. 173

34 Ibid p. 165

35 Ibid pp. 173-174

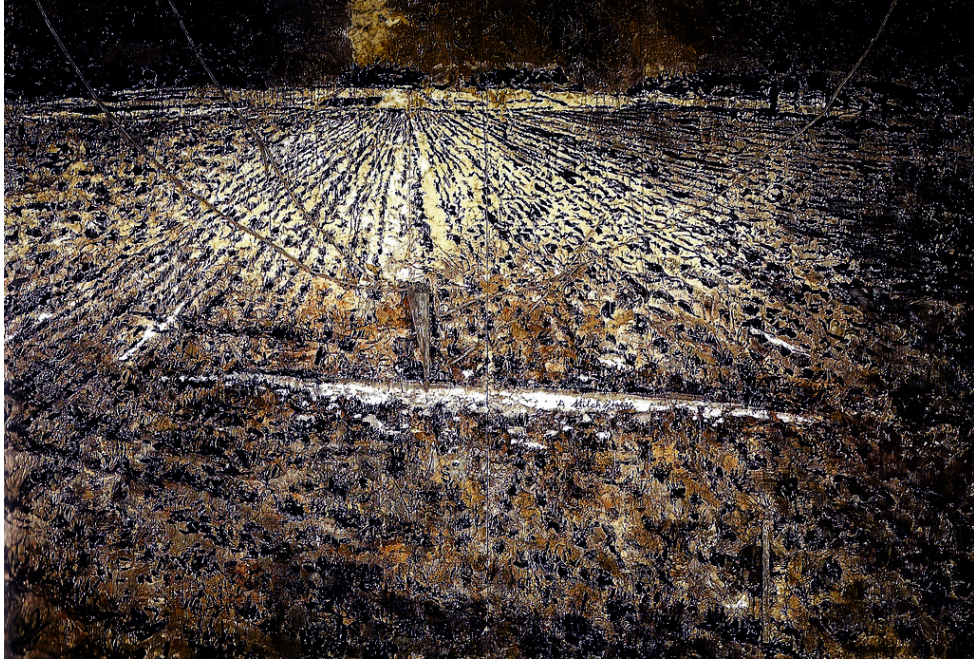


Fig. 3.28 - Anselm Kiefer - *Die Milchstrasse (The Milky Way)*, 1985-87

Kiefer's idea of art as a means of simultaneously expanding deep into the earth and high into the heavens is perhaps most profoundly expressed in his former home/studio, a 200 acre complex near Barjac, France, called 'La Ribaute'. The site was formerly the home of a derelict silk factory. Kiefer purchased the land in 1991. Beginning in 2000, he spent most of his time living and working there with his wife, two children, and a group of assistants and workers until 2008. He transformed the site into a sprawling complex of buildings, landscapes, and installations; which included a vast series of underground tunnels, multiple houses, a library, amphitheater, greenhouse, an artificial lake, bridges, and numerous buildings that contained various large scale paintings, sculptures and installations.^{36,37}

On the grounds of 'La Ribaute' there are a series of monumental towers, stacks of concrete rooms or 'palaces', made from concrete casts of shipping containers, that go up several storeys into the air. These leaning towers, which Kiefer calls 'the celestial towers' are speckled throughout the massive landscape which continues to grow and change with the forces of nature.³⁸

36 Excerpt from Foreward by Lia Rumma. Stefano, Sergio Di, and Charles Gute. Anselm Kiefer: Merkaba. 2006. pp. 15-16

37 Over Your Cities Grass Will Grow. Dir. Sophie Fiennes. 2010.

38 Ibid



Fig. 3.29 - Anselm Kiefer - *La Ribaute*, Barjac, France, 2000-2008

Below ‘the celestial towers’ is a vast labyrinth of underground tunnels connecting the complex of buildings above. These tunnels, dug into the red earth, connect to a series of underground chambers which contain various installations: lead rooms, stacks of books, palettes, broken vessels, and large boulders which Kiefer calls ‘meteorites.’³⁹ Within the tunnels one might find underground waterways, plumbing fixtures, unexpected lights, excavated foundations of the buildings above⁴⁰, or piles of earth soaked in lead.⁴¹

Kiefer states that the tunnels, the complex of buildings above, and ‘the celestial towers’ are directly connected as parts of the same composition. Often what happens in the buildings above is reflected below. For example, above the ‘meteorites’ within the tunnels is a house containing a large installation of shelves with books that is partially destroyed, as if the ‘meteorites’ fell from the sky, went through the shelves and books, and tumbled into the tunnels below.⁴² Exploration within the tunnels becomes an exploration of the interconnectedness of the underground, the earth, and the celestial cosmos.

While the complex at ‘La Ribaute’ and the contents within may first appear austere and dark, the space also has a powerful quality of mystery, beauty, and interconnectedness. Immersed within the space, sensory transformation gradually takes place and a viewer is pulled into an enchanting world of dreaming and imagination. Sophie Fiennes, the director of a documentary on ‘La Ribaute’, entitled *Over Your Cities Grass Will Grow*, states the following,

The longer you spend in the tunnels, the more they feel as if they’re sheltering you from the outside world. They even feel enchanting. As with any great visual art, you can’t reduce it to a one-liner. The more you look into it, the more you discover, and the more it grows.⁴³

39 Over Your Cities Grass Will Grow. Dir. Sophie Fiennes. 2010.

40 Excerpt from Foreword by Lia Rumma. Stefano, Sergio Di, and Charles Gute. Anselm Kiefer: Merkaba. 2006. p. 16

41 Over Your Cities Grass Will Grow. Dir. Sophie Fiennes. 2010.

42 Ibid

43 Sooke, Alastair. “Sophie Fiennes interview for Over Your Cities Grass Will Grow.” The Telegraph. 2010



Fig. 3.30 - Anselm Kiefer - *La Ribaute*, Barjac, France, 2000-2008

One composition from within the studio, which clearly embodies an impulse towards tunneling into the earth and exploring cosmic space, is a painting / immersive sculpture that has been in development for a number of years. We refer to this composition as *Enter the Dragon*, and alternatively as *The Mine-shaft*. The composition began very early on, before I was ever involved in the studio. It began as a small drawing of a spiraling tunnel that Jim made on his lap. By the time I started coming over to work in the studio, it had evolved into a much larger painting on a number of layers of wood that were mounted to the wall.

I remember some of my early experiences viewing the painting, and eventually helping to work on it, as being very intense and often overwhelming. We would turn off all the lights in the studio and set a single strobe light at an extremely slow frequency onto the painting. Within the total darkness, a single flash of light would illuminate a tunnel. Highly contrasting, roughly drawn planes of black and white would appear and disappear within the darkened room. Each flash of light was followed by optical trails that move and fade into darkness, only to be followed by another flash several moments later. This had an intense visceral affect of other-worldliness and disorientation, of fracturing space and time. I remember watching Jim working on the painting, moving fluidly through the total darkness, making intense movements, almost seeming to attack the painting. He seemed like a ghost as he would appear, disappear, and reappear in a different location with each flash of light. On one occasion I was so immersed in the intensity of the experience that I lost all sense of time and space and at some point fell asleep. I woke up some time later, sitting on the floor, leaned against the sunburst composition on the front wall of the studio.



Fig. 3.31 - *'Enter the Dragon' in Development*, 2005

We began to build out the physical form of the composition by fastening strands of wood to the surface of the painting, defining the tunnel in a more clear and physical way. I worked through this process of collaging for a number of months, continuously altering the planes of wood in order to amplify the sensation of a very deep tunnel, stretching and twisting into virtual space. Gradually the planes of wood developed into a precisely defined spiraling tunnel or mine-shaft, with a bridge going through it. The bridge and the mine-shaft seemed to project both inward and outward; deep within the virtual space of the picture, and also far outside into physical space, giving the impression that a viewer could climb inside of it. The bridge and the mine-shaft were gradually built out from the surface of the painting into a physically constructed forced perspective model which fills the viewers peripheral vision, immersing them within a tunnel continuously projecting and receding in virtual space.



Fig. 3.32 - *'Enter the Dragon' in Development, 2008*

We continued to build out the form of the composition until it could no longer be contained within the physical boundaries of the studio. It grew to a point where the bridge and the columns of the mine-shaft were nearly full scale and a viewer could now begin to walk inside the physical space between the columns.

For me, encountering this work gives a visceral shock to the senses, rupturing my habitual modes of perception. Standing within the columns, it is very difficult to distinguish between physical and virtual space. I feel as if I'm being pulled into a tunnel, a disorienting world of intense visceral sensation.

In his collection of essays entitled, 'The Theatre and its Double,' Antonin Artaud states that humanity is in great need of such immersive forms of art which break us free from our habitual ways of experiencing reality.⁴⁴ Humans in the modern world are trapped by their own subjectivities, their fixed forms of perception and the illusion of understanding of the world which they inhabit.⁴⁵ Artaud states that "we need above all a theater that wakes us up: nerves and heart; (... to give) the heart and the senses that kind of concrete bite which all true sensation requires(;) in the same way that our dreams have an effect upon us and reality has an effect upon our dreams."⁴⁶

44 Artaud, Antonin. *The Theatre and Its Double: Essays*. 1958. pp. 60-61

45 O'Sullivan, Simon. *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari: Thought beyond Representation*. 2006. p. 47

46 Artaud, Antonin. *The Theatre and Its Double: Essays*. 1958. pp. 60-61



Fig. 3.33 - *'Enter the Dragon' in Development*, 2008

The Bruder Klaus Chapel, by Peter Zumthor, is an example of a project by a contemporary architect that also has an intense, visceral, transformative, aesthetic quality. While the building may not be abruptly shocking or disorienting, it facilitates a powerful sensorial transformation; its immersive interior is an other-worldly space which pulls a visitor into a state of heightened sensory awareness, contemplation, and reverie.

The process of developing the chapel began in 1998 when Peter Zumthor was approached by a group of farmers who wanted to build a chapel in Mechernich, Germany, to honor Bruder Klaus, the patron saint of Switzerland and of agriculture who lived during the 15th century. Bruder Klaus was a family farmer, soldier, as well as local councillor and judge, before completely devoting the last twenty years of his life to living as a hermit and ascetic. Zumthor accepted the offer to design the chapel and agreed to work free of charge. He began on a journey of design and construction that would last nearly a decade. The chapel was complete in 2007.⁴⁷

47 Peter Zumthor, *Bruder Klaus Field Chapel*, 2007. 2008. *A+U: architecture and urbanism* (9) (09): p. 30



Fig. 3.34 - Peter Zumthor - *Bruder Klaus Field Chapel*, 2007
Interior Concrete Detail

Approaching the chapel from a series of pathways through the surrounding farm fields, the experience begins with an unfolding long view of a monument in the landscape. The building stands like a sandy beacon in the expansive farm field surrounded by tree-lines and low lying hills in the distance.⁴⁸ Walking along the narrow gravel pathway which leads to the entrance of the chapel, the approaching viewer experiences a strong sensation of a heavy, grounded, physical mass of a building, forged in and of the earth. The exterior of the building appears primal, archaic, and monastic. The building is horizontally striated by a series of 24 separately poured and manually rammed layers of concrete. Its surface has a continuous, sandy, almost smoky, tonal variation, achieved through the agglomeration of materials from the local landscape: river gravel, reddish yellow sand from the Rhiem pit in Erp, as well as white cement.⁴⁹ The vertical monumentality of the chapel is accentuated by the sharp, upward pointing, silver colored, triangular metal door at the focal point of the approaching pathway.

48 Pawson, John. *John Pawson visits Zumthor's Bruder Klaus chapel*
49 Peter Zumthor, *Bruder Klaus Field Chapel*, 2007. 2008. A+U: architecture and urbanism (9) (09): p. 30



Fig. 3.35 - Peter Zumthor - *Bruder Klaus Field Chapel*, 2007

Upon entering the chapel, a visitor walks into a curved, tunnel-like corridor. The entrance is designed such that a viewer cannot fully grasp the interior of the space until they pass through the tunnel. The curved corridor opens into the tall cave-like interior of the chapel. Immersed within this space, a viewer is captivated by the visceral affect of the thick, burnt, heavily textured concrete. This concrete was cast onto a wood teepee, made from 112 locally felled trees; The teepee was then set aflame and kept burning for 3 weeks, leaving this architectural void of charred concrete and residue of fire. The sense of heaviness, burning, and the self sacrifice of Brother Klaus, is further expressed through the heavily textured floor of tin-lead alloy, which was melted and manually ladled onto the entire interior base of the chapel.⁵⁰

50 Peter Zumthor, Bruder Klaus Field Chapel, 2007. 2008. A+U: architecture and urbanism (9) (09): p. 30



Fig. 3.36 - Peter Zumthor - *Bruder Klaus Field Chapel*, 2007
Entrance Corridor

The chapel is furnished only by a small built-in bench made of one solid piece of linden wood, a shelf with sand containers for candles, a bronze sculpture - the bust of Bruder Klaus on a thin concrete pedestal, and a bronze cast meditation wheel, modelled after the mediation wheel of Bruder Klaus, imbedded in the concrete wall.⁵¹ Immersed within this space; one feels a deep sense of solitude, quietness, earthen heaviness and monasticism. The space is at once dark and sheltered, like a cave, and also subtly changing through the selected implementation of natural light. Small mouth blown glass orbs plug each of the over 300 holes for the metal pipes which held together the concrete form-work and the teepee before the concrete was cast and the teepee burned.⁵² The glass plugs hold a mystical, crystalline, shimmering light; glistening and changing throughout the day and year, and as one moves and shifts their view through the space.

51 Peter Zumthor, Bruder Klaus Field Chapel, 2007. 2008. A+U: architecture and urbanism (9) (09): p. 30

52 Ibid

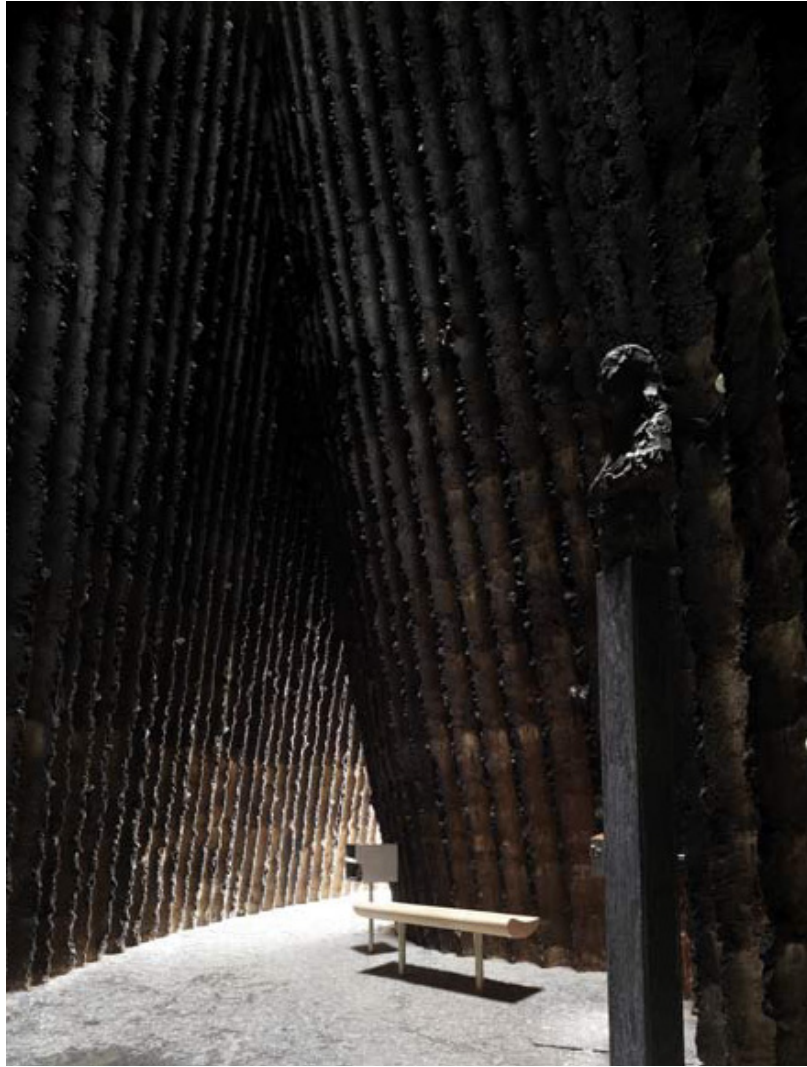


Fig. 3.37 - Peter Zumthor - *Bruder Klaus Field Chapel*, 2007

Within the shelter of the chapel, one's gaze is finally directed to the primary source of light, the oculus within the vast folded chimney above. This view reflects the mystical vision that Bruder Klaus reportedly experienced while still inside his mothers womb, of seeing a star that lit up the world.⁵³ The light from the oculus washes down through the chimney, across the burnt, textured surfaces of the concrete. A viewer is reminded of a greater connection to the outside world, the sky, and the cosmos.

Through the combination of rich materiality, texture, form, and light, the chapel facilitates a powerful sensorial transformation. Immersed within this other-worldly, dream-like space, a viewer is pulled into a experience of quietness, contemplation, and reverie.

53 Peter Zumthor: Bruder Klaus Field Chapel, 2007. Cement Concrete & Aggregates Australia, issue 07: 28-45. p. 16



Fig. 3.38 - Peter Zumthor - *Bruder Klaus Field Chapel*, 2007

Throughout all of these examples, from the world of palaeolithic cave painting to the world of contemporary art and architecture, we see that humans have a need to make and explore immersive spaces which facilitate sensorial transformation and pull us into a state of conscious dreaming. We have a need to experience ‘genuine encounters’⁵⁴; experiences which cause us to question our habitual modes of thinking, seeing, and feeling; in order to experience powerful and unexpected sensation. Such experiences are necessary to our cultural evolution.

As time goes on, more and more the studio is becoming an inhabitable dream; a place that facilitates an ever-changing sensory encounter. Explorations and experimentations within the studio continue to grow, expand, and evolve. We are continuously carving out new territory in physical and virtual space; exploring new sensations and openings within the composition. Through combinations of mirrors, light, video, frames, as well as drawing and painting, the virtual space within the studio continues to open up to new tunnels, shafts, and virtual passages. The layers of the composition are all connected; allowing you to move through them, discovering worlds within worlds. A viewer might find a universe within something very small, yet, stepping back and connecting with the larger composition, often these objects dissolve into the broader rhythm of the space.

The ongoing exploration and experimentation within the studio does not have a fixed end point. The process of composition, the experience of the participants, as well as the space itself are all part of a continuous process of transformation and evolution.

54 Refer to p. 48 of this document for a description of Simon O’Sullivan’s concept of a ‘genuine encounter’.



Fig. 3.39 - *Inside the Studio*, 2017



Fig. 3.40 - *Inside the Studio*, 2016



Fig. 3.41 - *Inside the Studio*, 2017



Fig. 3.42 - *Inside the Studio*, 2016



Fig. 3.43 - *Sunburst Composition in Development*, 2013



Fig. 3.44 - *Inside the Studio*, 2016

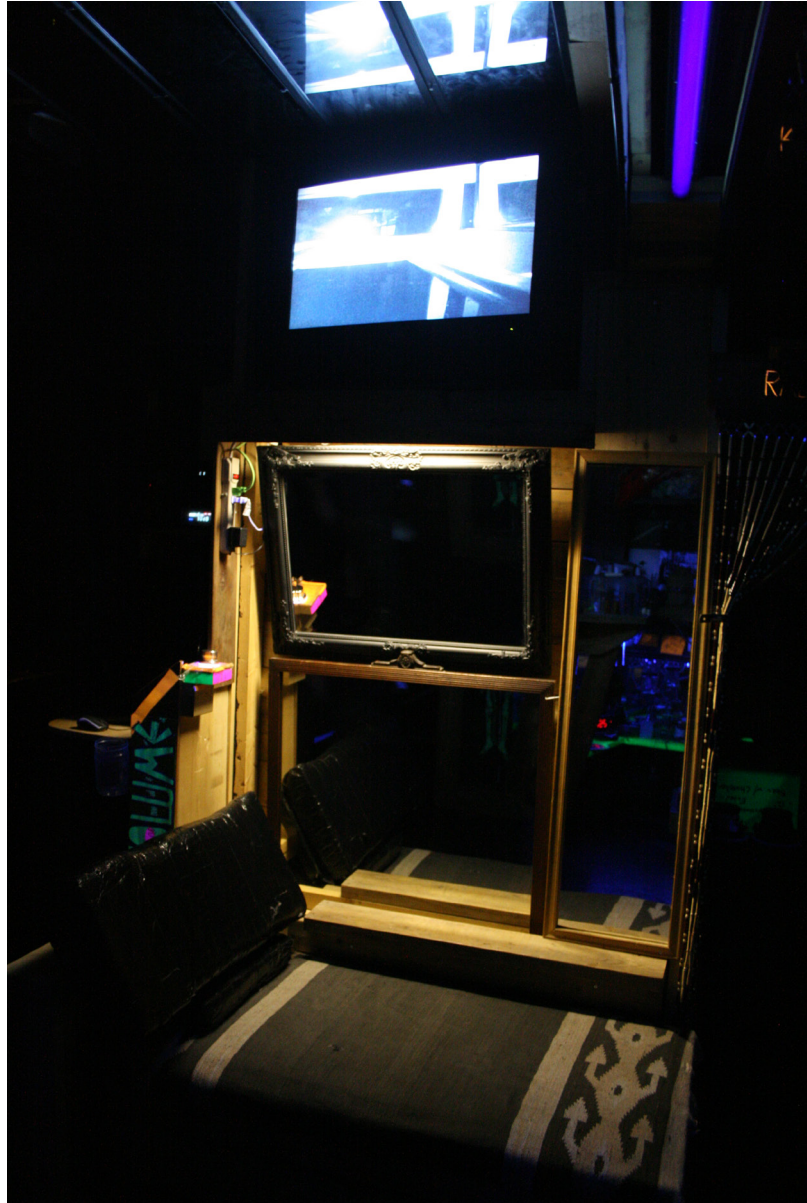


Fig. 3.45 - *Inside the Studio*, 2014



Fig. 3.46 - *Inside the Studio*, 2016



Fig. 3.47 - *Composition within the Studio*, 2013

Gradually the ever evolving series of compositions throughout the studio has saturated the entire space. These compositions continue to evolve and transform, and new compositions continue to emerge within the space of the studio and beyond.

The lines and planes of the sunburst have wrapped the entire room. The lines project deep into virtual space and converge at a point on the back wall of studio. Horizontal planes of wood are composed to enhance the affect of a very deep space beyond the surface of the wall. Through streaming video projection, a viewer is able to visually project through the wall and into the outdoor space beyond; the next zone of expansion for the continuous aesthetic exploration emerging from the studio.



Fig. 3.48 - *Projecting Through the Studio Wall*, 2011

Epilogue



Fig. 4.1 - *Untitled*, Painting By Author, 2016

I came into the studio one winter morning. Jim had suggested I start my day by spending some time looking at the sunburst composition and meditating while sitting on a mat on the floor. It was nine thirty in the morning and I was alone at the house feeling rather agitated, emotionally preoccupied and disconnected from my environment.

I set a sound-track and sound responsive lights onto the sunburst composition. I began to relax and started walking around the room, moving through the various smaller compositions: paintings and sculptural constructions positioned within different areas of the studio. I felt the tension in my body begin to dissipate as I had the peculiar sensation of large waves of energy entering my body from the ceiling and pulling tension out through my feet and into the concrete floor.

The waves were outside my physical body and occupied a specific part of the room. My feelings of physical and psychological tension quickly dissipated. A surge of childlike happiness and excitement came through me as I loosened the focus of my eyes and started jogging circles around the room.

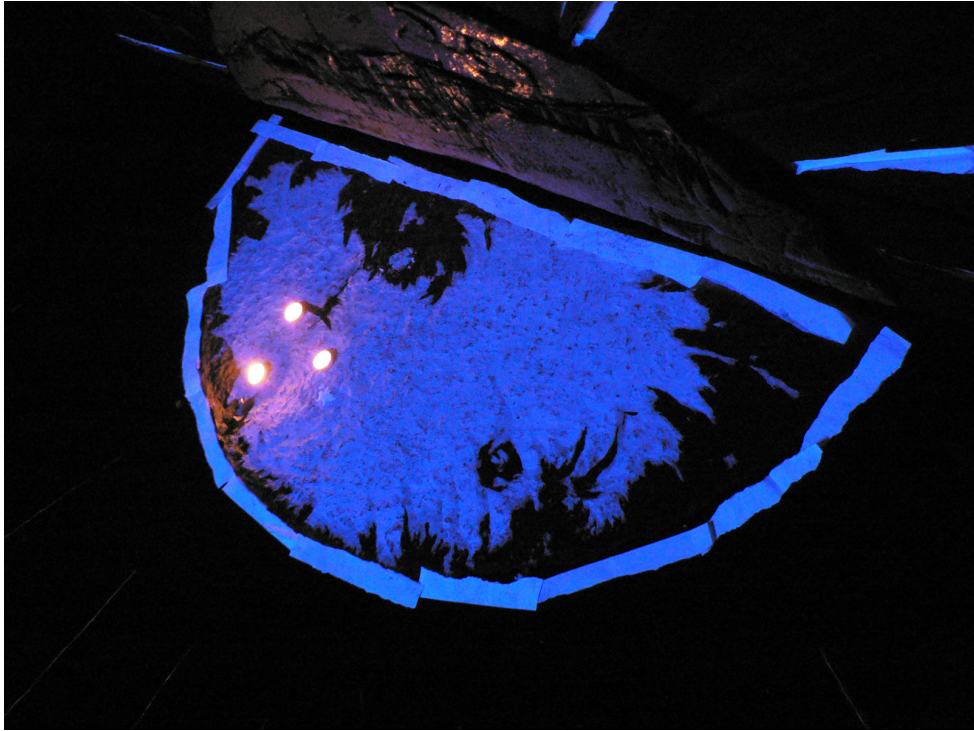


Fig. 4.2 - *Inside the Studio*, 2009

This simple story of one experience in the studio illustrates something profound for me: the incredible possibilities of the transformative power of art and architecture. The studio is a place that feels alive, imbued with its own rhythm and its own movement and vitality. Within this vital space it is impossible for me to feel ambivalent. The affect is undeniable. If I am trying to resist and hold on to my tension; whether it's frustration, anger, or fear; there is an undeniable dissonance that I feel when I am in the space. However, if I enter the space with the intention of opening up my feelings and my senses, the process of transformation will readily begin to take place, often very quickly. After a short time in the studio I will often find myself in a completely different state of becoming; opening up to lateral perspectives and aesthetic connections; engaged in a world of conscious dreaming.

Within such a state of conscious dreaming, the studio itself begins to open up, receiving and transmitting forces from the outside world. It is a common experience within the studio to have the feeling of something powerful and outside oneself, entering into the space with a specific rhythm, eliciting a specific sensation and emotional reaction. Jim often says that the human brain is like an antennae. It is a transmitter of sensorial information, capable of operating on a vast number of registers. Mostly this information is heavily filtered and controlled, holding our experience of reality in a specific and limited configuration. The studio is a space designed for switching the register of the antennae, amplifying its reach and also it's sensorial and emotional spectrum. It is a space designed to facilitate transformation within the experience of its' participants; from a state of normalcy, in my case most often a relative state of fear, and emotional suppression, into a state of becoming, exploration, and connection; broadening mine and other participants' sensorial and emotional awareness.

One purpose of this broadening of awareness is the search for new forms of aesthetic experience. We are exploring the possibilities of transformation, within ourselves and others, through the process of making art and architecture. But all of this points to something even more necessary to our experience as humans: connecting to something vast, powerful and outside of one's self; moving through the limits of our conditioning and fear in order to explore the far reaches of our sensorial and emotional awareness. Like the prehistoric cave painters, we are searching, moving through the boundaries of our day-to-day socialized reality, in order to explore the possibilities of connecting with powerful forces outside ourselves.

My specific experience, however, is in no way universal. There are many different ways in which a person can move through their habitual modes of perception and the boundaries of their fear and conditioning. I have merely tried to illustrate one journey and one response to a question that many people, artists and designers especially, face in one way or another: how can we move beyond the boundaries of our habits and conditioning in order to expand our sensorial and emotional awareness, to more readily engage in the expansive experience of life and aesthetic exploration?

My journey in the studio began by addressing an emotional catastrophe: my highly fear ridden, emotionally suppressed and controlled state of being, which came to the forefront within the wake of my father's death and the destruction of my dysfunctional and emotionally abusive family and home life. I was at a peak of emotional suppression and denial. I was so scared of my pain and my feelings that it was nearly impossible to open up and connect with anyone or anything. Working in the studio and engaging in aesthetic activities that connected me with a group and an experience that was open and expansive was a way to start to untangle these emotional and existential knots. The possibilities of my life slowly began to grow.

After more than fifteen years of working and dreaming within this context, I realize again and again that the process and the struggle are continuous. I have continued to struggle through these forces of conditioning through my entire life, to this day, even through the process of writing this thesis. I realize that my fear and my pain cannot be conquered, but only accepted and explored. This allows them to dissipate in order for me, once again, to open up to the possibilities of emotional and sensorial transformation. To get to a point of appreciation, even to write about such experiences with openness and clarity, for me often takes going through several layers of denial and fear. The space within the studio promotes, encourages, and facilitates this transformation and exploration.

All of this experience; my journey through the construction of the studio, the ongoing art and architecture practice I am engaged in, as well as the process of struggling to write this thesis; to explore my journey, to connect it with cultural and academic references in the outside world, to share it with my colleagues and the general public; all of this is about moving towards a broader connection and a broader exploration; connecting with forces outside myself in order to more fully experience the intensity and beauty of life: connection, exploration, transformation and dreaming. What is most important for me is the joy of transformation and exploration; the awe, beauty, and surrender I feel when fully engaged in the physical and emotional process of making art and architecture: building, connecting, seeing, drawing, and imagining. It is the act of dreaming space.

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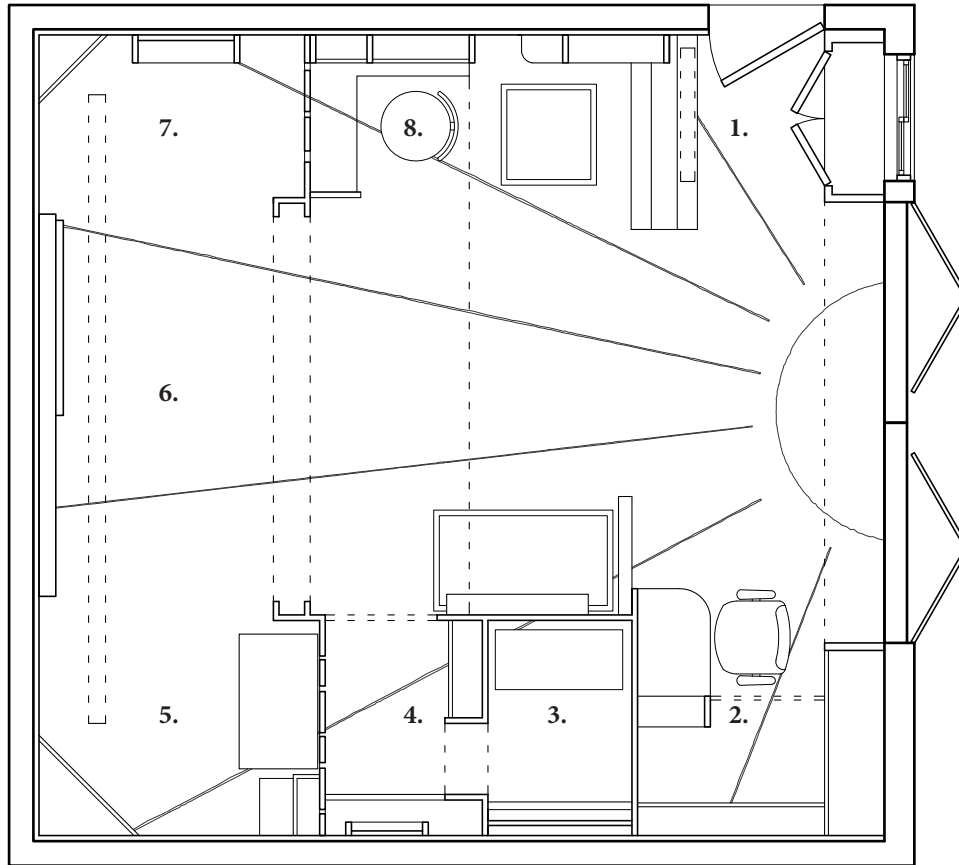
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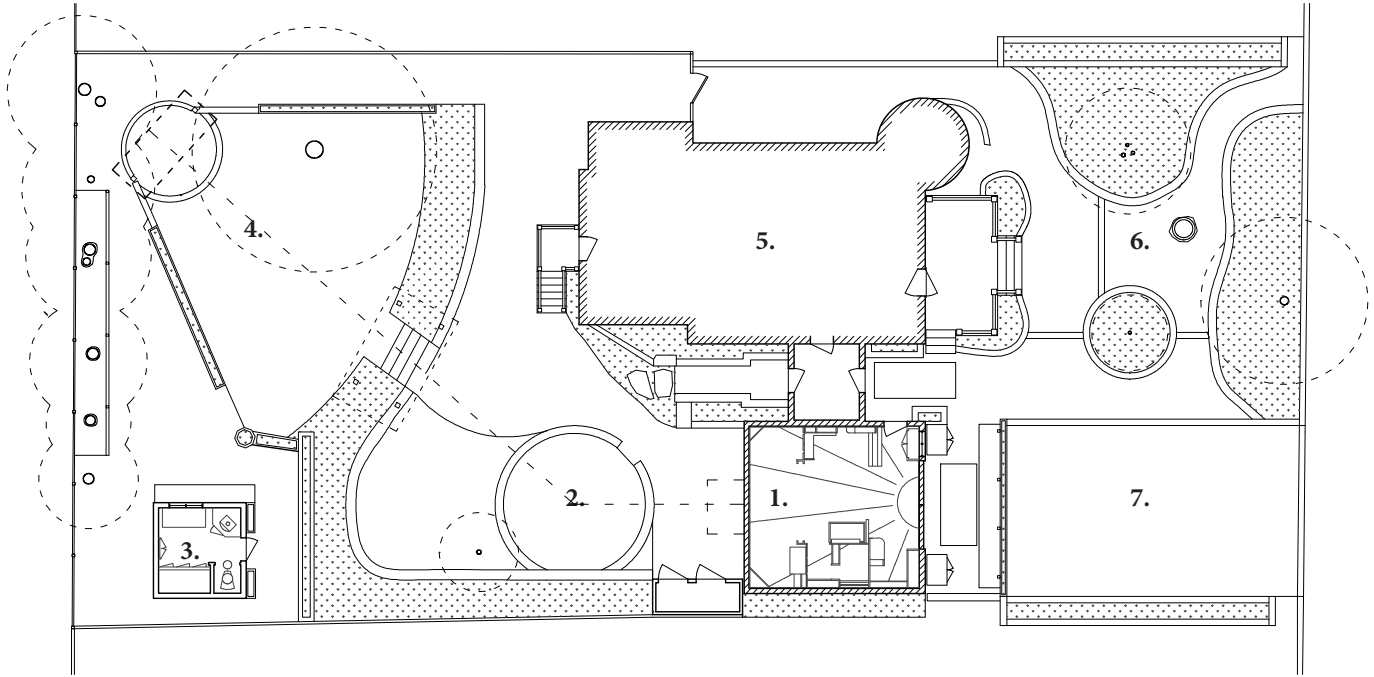
Appendix



- 1. Entrance
- 2. Media Composition
- 3. Modelling Stall
- 4. Drawing
- 5. Tool Crib
- 6. Primary Composition
- 7. Painting
- 8. Sound Composition



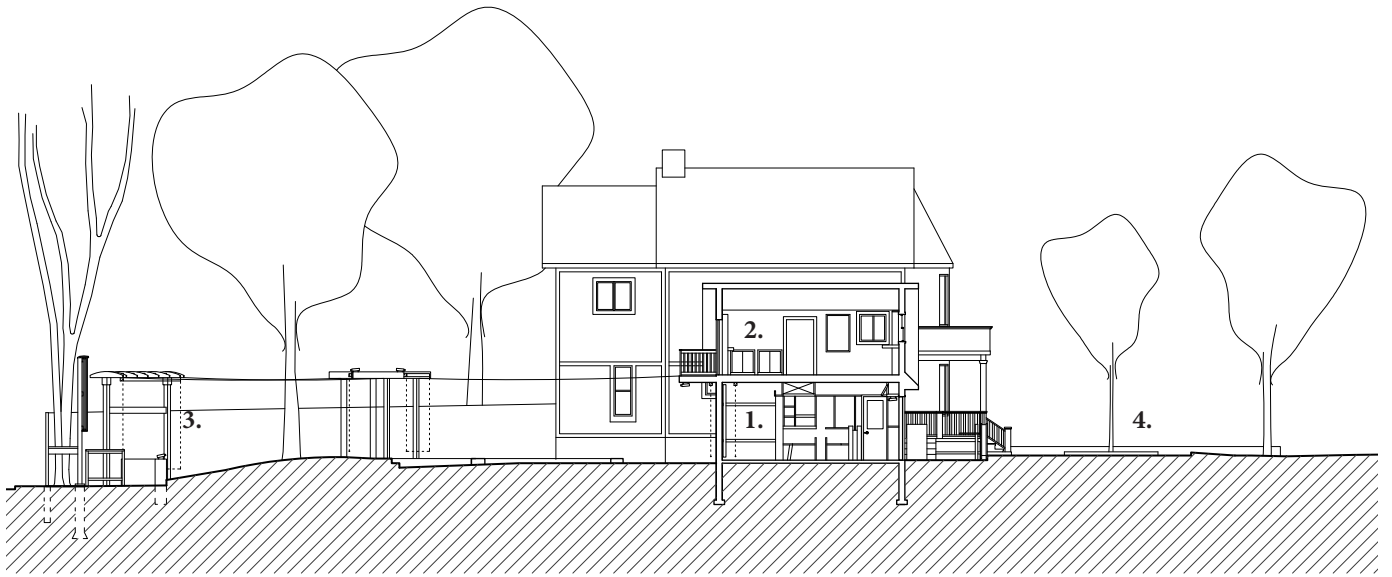
Fig. A.1 - Studio Floor Plan, Scale 1:50, 2017



- 1. The Studio
- 2. Back Yard Patio
- 3. Ceramics Studio
- 4. Outdoor Studio
- 5. House
- 6. Front Gardens
- 7. Driveway



Fig. A.2 - Site Plan, Scale 1:250



1. The Studio
2. Rec. Room / Media Studio
3. Outdoor Studio
4. Front Gardens

Fig. A.3 - Site Section, Scale 1:250