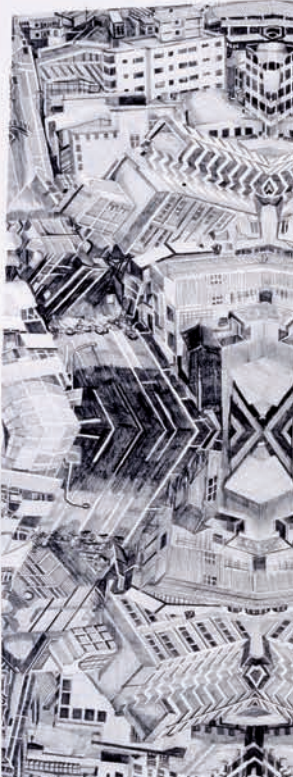
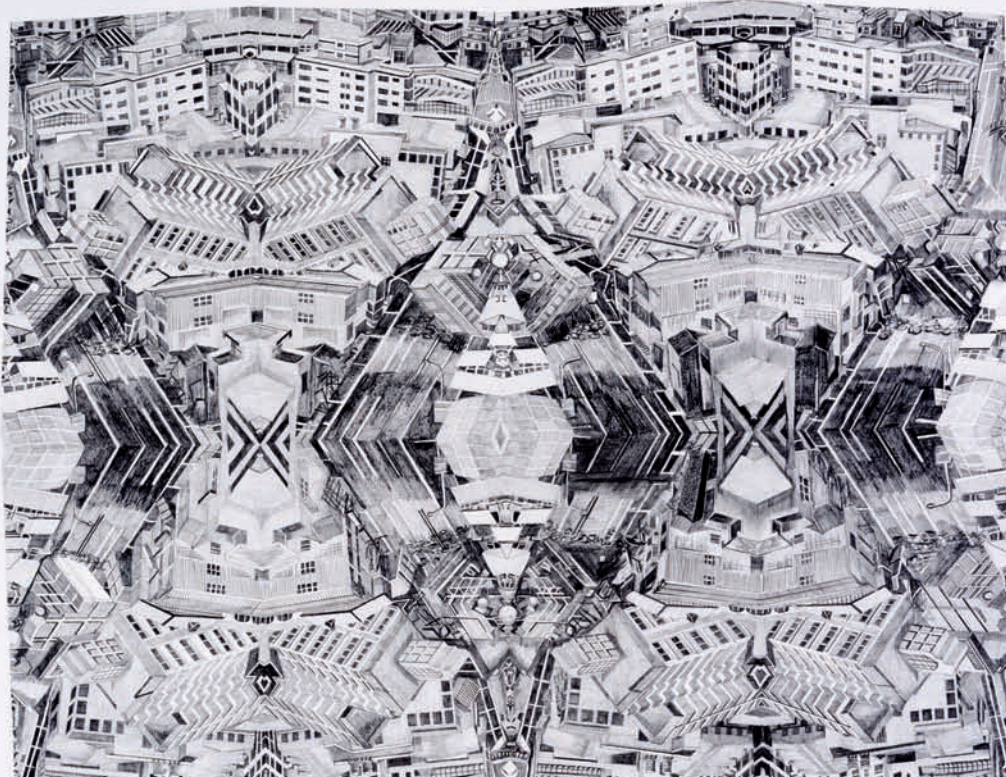
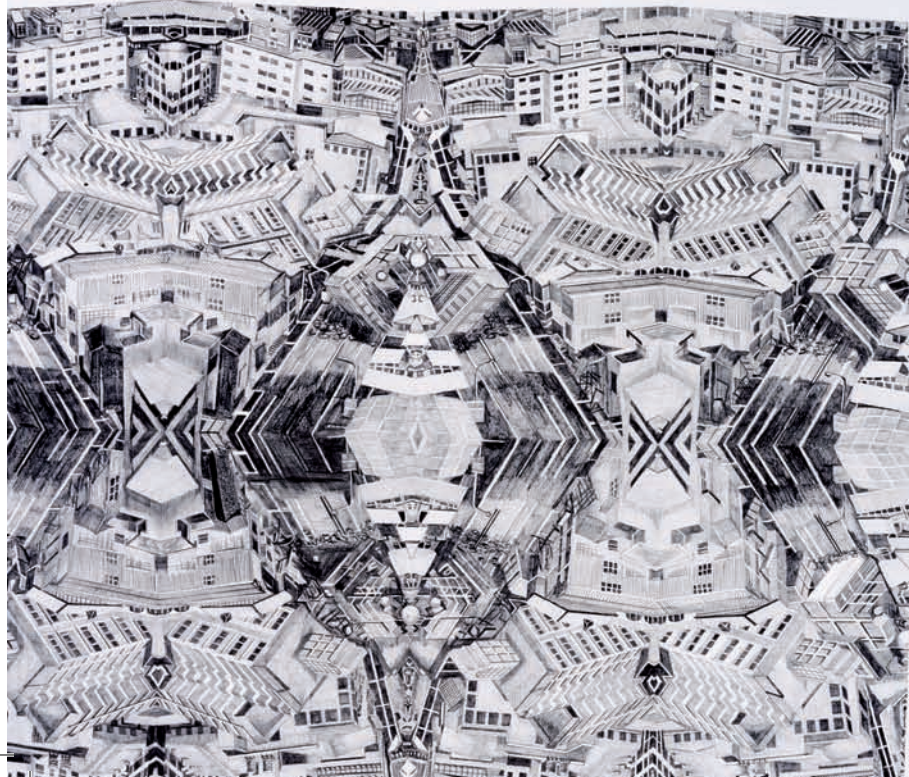
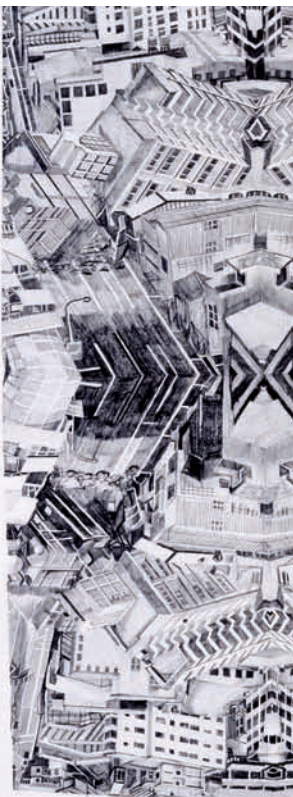
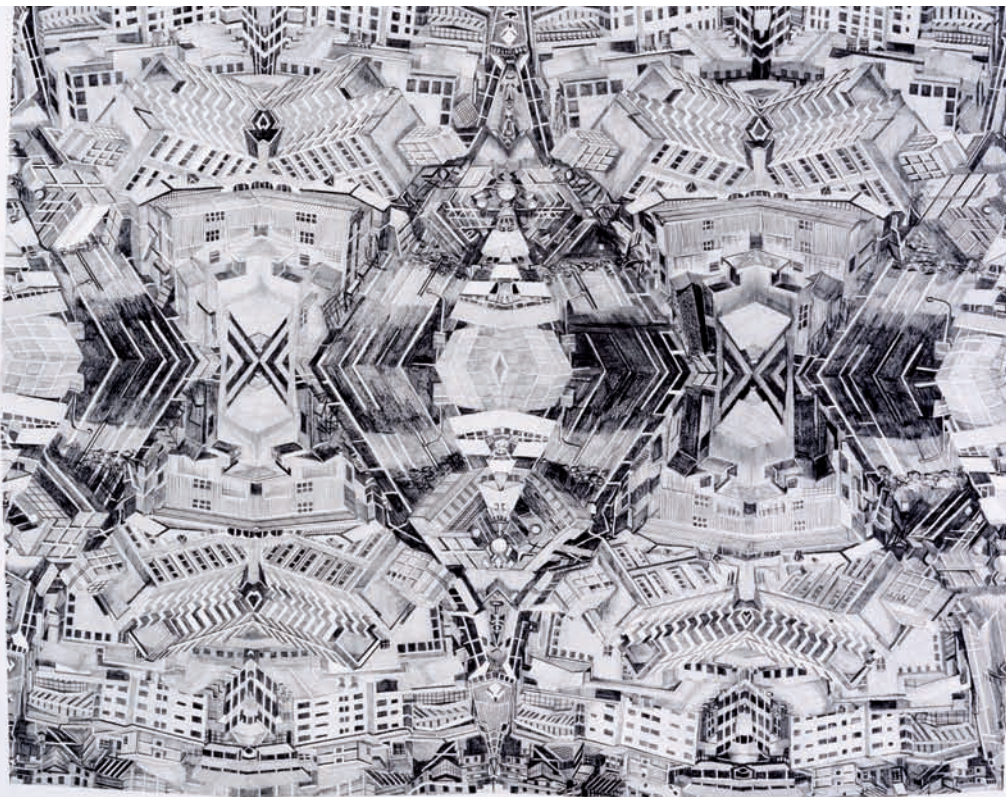
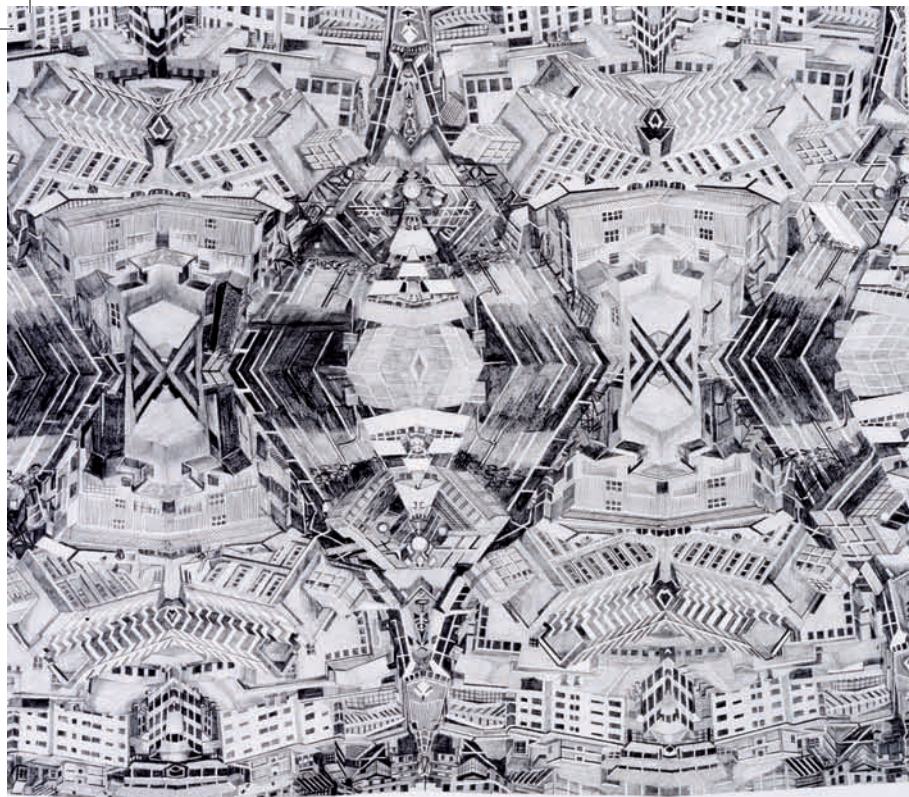




I Have Seen The Enemy And It Is Eye







Kanishka Raja I Have Seen The Enemy And It Is Eye

February 4 – March 12, 2009

GALERIE MIRCHANDANI + STEINRUECKE

Inside front and back cover:
Nine/Ten wallpaper, *detail*

Terminal Present

For more than two millennia, ships served as the great vehicles of diaspora – of both the voluntary and involuntary sort. Long before the rise of modern nation states, sailing vessels connected and imperiled the boundaries of kingdoms, continents, and enclaves. Histories of the trade and military routes these ships traversed reveal gradual shifts in empire from the Mediterranean to Asia to Europe to North America and – in the twenty-first century – back to Asia again. These routes also illuminate the cross-cultural exchanges that occurred long before globalization became one of today's pressing concerns. In a current time of warring cultures and fundamentalisms, it's helpful to be reminded that all civilizations – East and West – are products of this sharing.

In its self-contained quality, a ship can function as a microcosm for entire societies – a floating world. In Greek mythology, ships were a symbol for the soul, while in ancient Egypt and other cultures boats facilitated travel to the afterlife. In the closing decades of the twentieth century, airplanes replaced ships as the most visible mode of global movement. Although every year innumerable refugees – from war, famine, and other conflicts – flee across borders by foot and small vehicles, airplanes and airports most vividly represent travel in the postmodern age. They also play important roles in the event of a major catastrophe. At these moments airports become crucial nodes for coordinating relief efforts and the transport of people and materials.

For these reasons and more, airports are nerve centers of societies. They quite literally respond to what's in the air around them. This is also part of what artists do. Over the past decade, the apparatus of air travel has assumed an increasingly prominent place in Kanishka Raja's paintings: runways, airplanes, control towers, and especially terminals. While each is indicative of liminal spaces, airport terminals in particular function as semi-inhabited zones of dislocation and uncertain passage. Thus, it's never clear in Raja's work whether the unseen travelers are arriving or departing; in the same way, a shift in view shades immigration into emigration and vice versa. Along with portraying unceasing passage, Raja embeds a feeling of stasis in his paintings. A number of them are filled with rows of cots or tents, which may signify accommodations for a canceled flight or shelter from a much larger disaster. The discourse of postmodernity is one of indeterminacy, openness, and flexible accumulation, and yet the political economics beneath it

aren't always quite so giving. The last century's massive transfers of rural populations into urban environments weren't always by choice, but instead frequently resulted from economic policies made far away from the populations affected by them. What may appear as freedom of movement is oftentimes a mask for dispossession – a dynamic at the core of Raja's work.

For instance, the personal items seen along the right edge of *Everything Closer Than Everything Else* (all work 2008 unless otherwise indicated) may be the meager portable belongings used to fashion a temporary residence, but in *Escalate (Grey Stripes)* it seems just as likely that they've been abandoned in a hurry. This constant potential for displacement is the dark side to globalization's cosmopolitan sheen, and Raja paints it as the uncanny. In *Escalate (Grey Stripes)*, tents, suitcases, clothes, and slabs of raw meat float away like ghosts toward the back of the canvas. As in all of Raja's work, the human figure has been removed. Instead, its spectral occupation of airport terminals and shopping complexes is signaled by what has been left behind or what awaits – past and future are collapsed into an uncertain present.

Raja has for years painted in a style that combines an interest in Western linear perspective with South Asian textile design and a vernacular visual language of hand-painted shop signage and movie billboards, comic books, educational charts, etc., that he grew up with in Calcutta. The result is an intricate combination of flatness and depth. The painting *Double Duty* (2007; not in the exhibition) beautifully captures this. It contains a number of familiar motifs: an airport interior, rows of cots, consumer goods, and a tile floor pattern derived from a window grill at the



Double Duty, 2007
Oil on canvas
183 x 244 cm / 72 x 96 inches

Babri Masjid, a 16th-century mosque demolished by Hindu militants in 1992. The painting is dominated by a spectrum of rich blues. Yet perhaps the most striking aspect of the work is its fractured perspective, a fissure running down the center of the work that foreshortens the horizon and all that it traditionally signifies – temporally, historically, existentially.

In other words, Raja incorporates dislocation into the work's formal composition. In most of the paintings included in *I Have Seen The Enemy And It Is Eye*, he's realigned their perspective in order to involve and implicate viewers more directly. This notion of complicity extends to the exhibition title itself. In *Descent (Road Stripes)*, the viewer looks down the barrel of a machine gun pointed out of an airplane window at a cityscape below, much the way a military aircraft or helicopter flies low over a city scanning for targets. Raja's paintings sometimes adapt images he's collected from various media sources, and this one comes from a U.S. helicopter patrolling the skies over Baghdad. The rusting, half-sunken ships in the painting *In-Flight* originate in a screen grab from a documentary film.

Raja's evolving effort to engage viewers more explicitly has led him to experiment with installation-based work. The image initially greeting visitors to *I Have Seen The Enemy And It Is Eye* is of an enormous chandelier made of gold leaf applied to a painted black wall (*Opening Ceremony* 2009). A wallpaper (2009) created from the drawing *Nine/Ten* (2007) surrounds a doorway separating two rooms of the gallery. The drawing itself is a detailed collage of buildings destroyed in various terrorist attacks around the world from 12 March, 1993 (the date of a series of deadly bombings in Bombay in response to the destruction of the Babri Masjid and its aftermath of communal violence) to 10 September, 2001. Nearby is the sculptural installation *Where Were You In 92?* It's a title that obviously seeks to provoke dialogue, specifically in reference to the Babri Masjid, and more generally in relation to new brands of nationalism and fundamentalism accompanying globalization's uneven development.

This striking wall sculpture fuses the mosque's window grill patterning with reflective surfaces and shards of images – pieces of which have fallen to the floor – to create a visual and conceptual entanglement with history that at the same time doesn't allow for a completed picture. Raja's work may be political, but it's never strident or doctrinaire. Rather it's concerned with networks of dependency and colonization produced by the flow of power through larger economic and political structures. An airport's control tower may be invisible in Raja's most recent suite of paintings, but it nonetheless casts a long shadow over the landscape. It's the eye behind the artist's as well as the viewer's eye/I, and bears more than a passing resemblance to Raja's ravishing, yet slightly ominous, gold chandelier.

Similarly, the microphones in the United Nations General Assembly Hall featured in *Address (Brown Stripes)* stand ready to issue commands. This interrelated set of imagery is paralleled narratively as well. The banded image from *In-Flight* is echoed in monitors on the plane in *Cruise (Green Stripes)* out of which the previously mentioned machine gun is pointed at the landscape in *Address (Brown Stripes)* that contains the playing field and tents in *Everything Closer Than Everything Else* with its columns and descending escalators also found in *Escalate (Grey Stripes)* which are washed away in the thickly brushstroked blue waves of *Ascent (Gold Stripes)* whose shimmering gold tents return the narrative to *Opening Ceremony*'s chandelier and its smaller *Study* on paper. These are contemporary history painting's personal and collective stories waiting to be told.

The result is more cinematic than novelistic, with the notion of "in-between" folded into a keener awareness of displacement. Raja's paintings are oriented around a process of looking out and looking in. Monitors and stadiums — transmitters of spectacle — infuse this act of looking. The shopping complex in *Everything Closer Than Everything Else* is contained within a sports stadium where green tents line the infield. The blues in this painting evoke the ones in *Double Duty*, referencing the sea as much as the sky — the mirrored terrains of diaspora. The detailed rows of consumer goods in both works again remind viewers that there's an economics underlying these seductive surfaces and the rapid conveyance of people, information, culture, and commodities.



Memory Pattern, 2005 – 2007
Oil on canvas over 18 panels
33 x 40.6 cm / 13 x 16 inches each

There's nothing abstract about these modes of transit, rooted as they are in longing and loss. In *Memory Pattern* (2005–7; not in the exhibition), each of the eighteen paintings arranged in a grid aims to reproduce successively, and without consulting the previous version, the image of what might be a waiting room captured in a destroyed photograph. Here, remembrance compounds the experience of exile. The gold tents floating toward an unearthly sun in *Ascent (Gold Stripes)* seem ready to cast off terrestrial bonds altogether. Yet this is only one of many flight patterns and trajectories of desire in *I Have Seen The Enemy And It Is Eye*. The sleekly surging lines of color in much of the exhibition's work render movement ineluctable. Raja's art asks that viewers find their own place – and perhaps even a provisional home – within this flux.

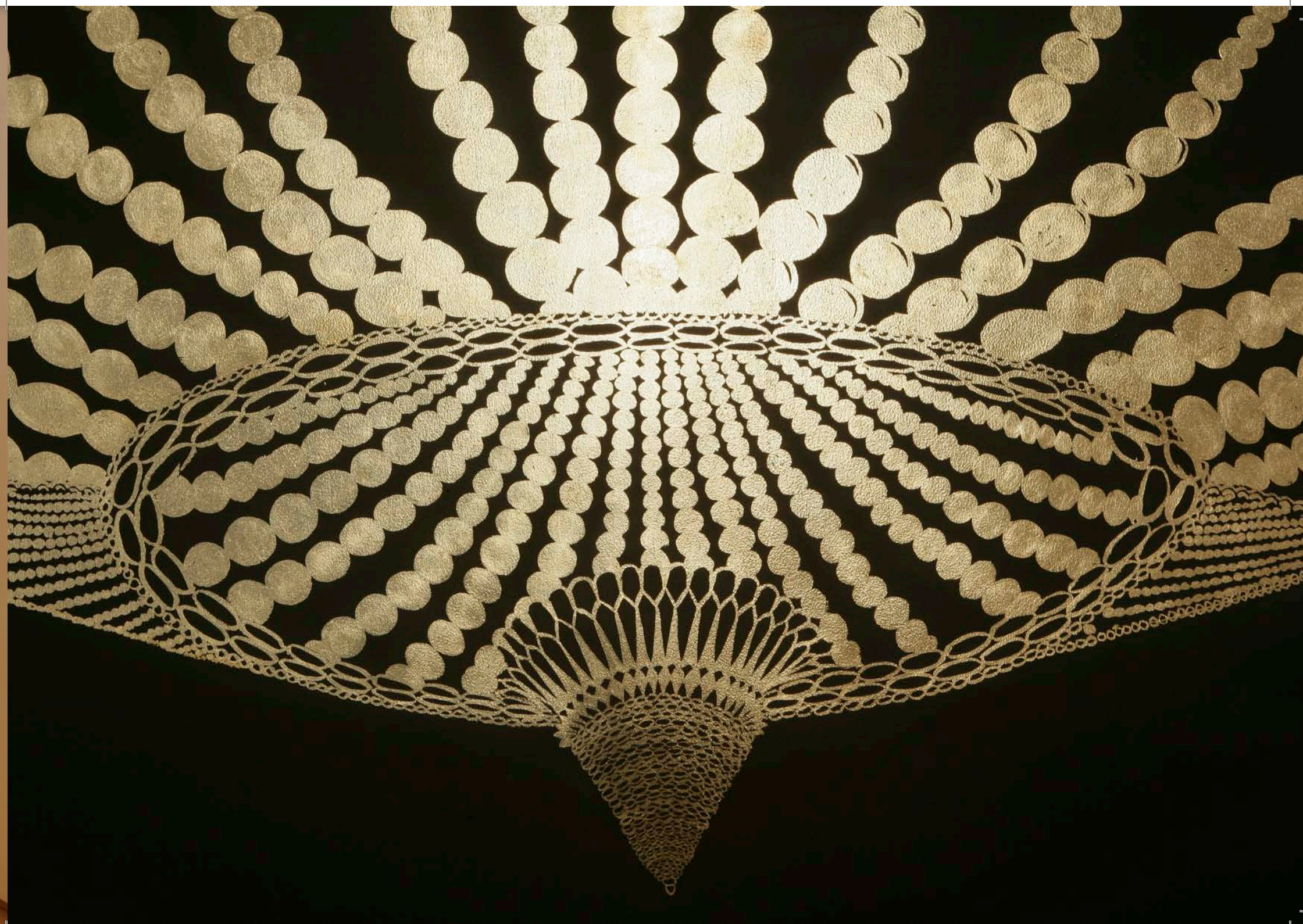
Alan Gilbert

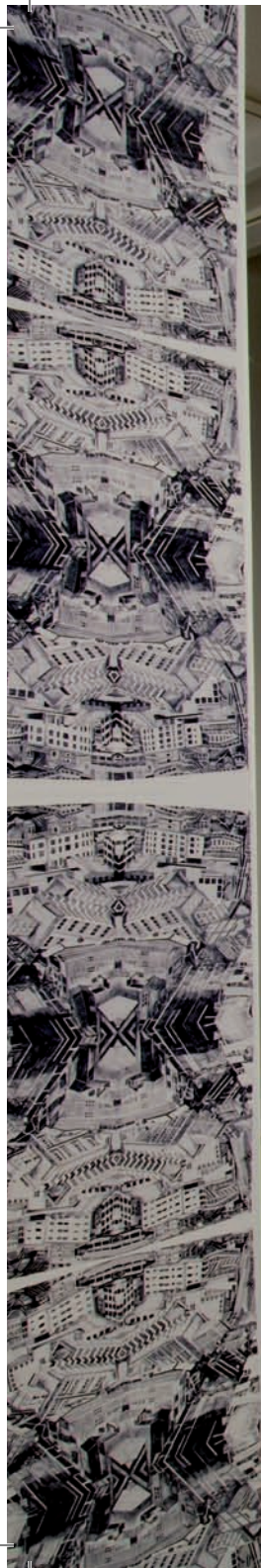
*Alan Gilbert is the author of Another Future: Poetry and Art in a Postmodern Twilight.
His writings on art, poetry, culture, and politics have appeared in a variety of publications.
He is also a widely published poet.
He lives in New York City.*



I Have Seen The Enemy And It Is Eye







1.
Opening Ceremony, 2009
Gold leaf on painted wall
Site-specific installation
Edition of 3 + AP

2.
Opening Ceremony, *detail*

3.
Installation View



In - Flight, 2008
Oil on canvas over panel
60.9 x 91.4 cm / 24 x 36 inches



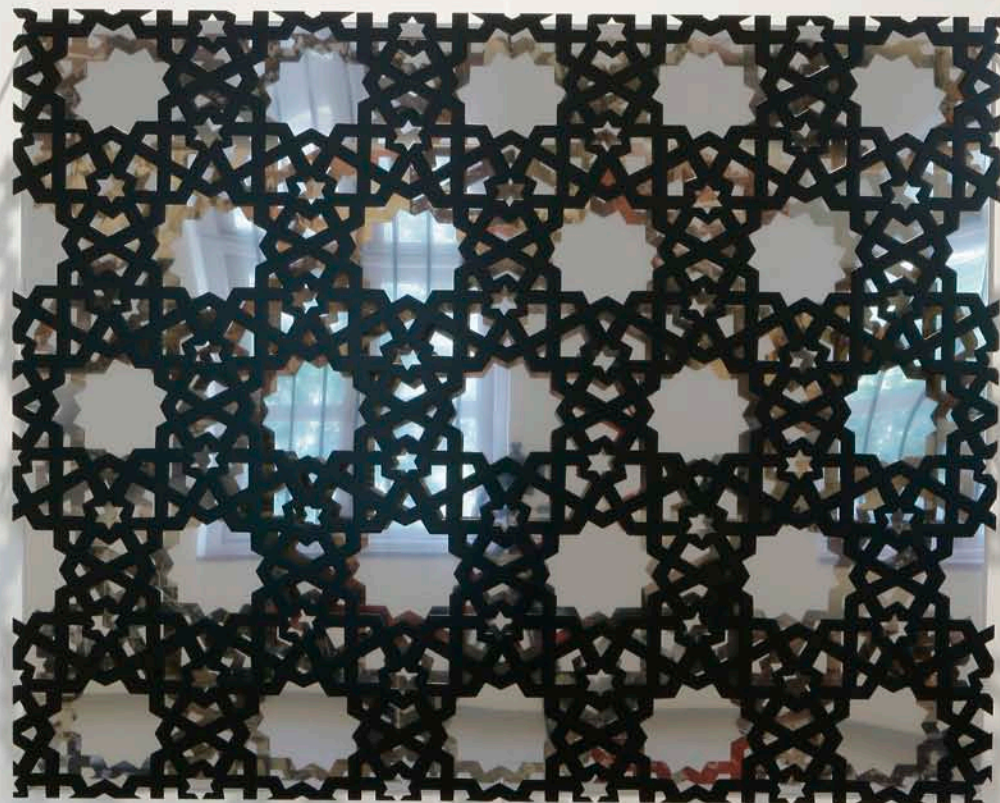
Cruise (Green Stripes), 2008
Oil on canvas
152 x 213 cm / 60 x 84 inches

Descent (Road Stripes), 2008
Oil on canvas
213 x 152 cm / 84 x 60 inches





Address (Brown Stripes), 2008
Oil and gold leaf on canvas
213 x 152 cm / 84 x 60 inches



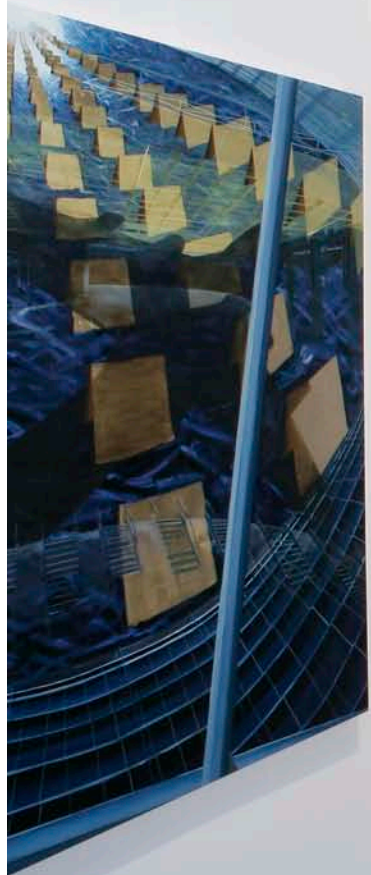
Where Were You in 92?, 2008
Painted aluminum, dye sublimated
print and stainless steel
122 x 152 x 13 cm / 48 x 60 x 5 inches
Edition of 3 + AP

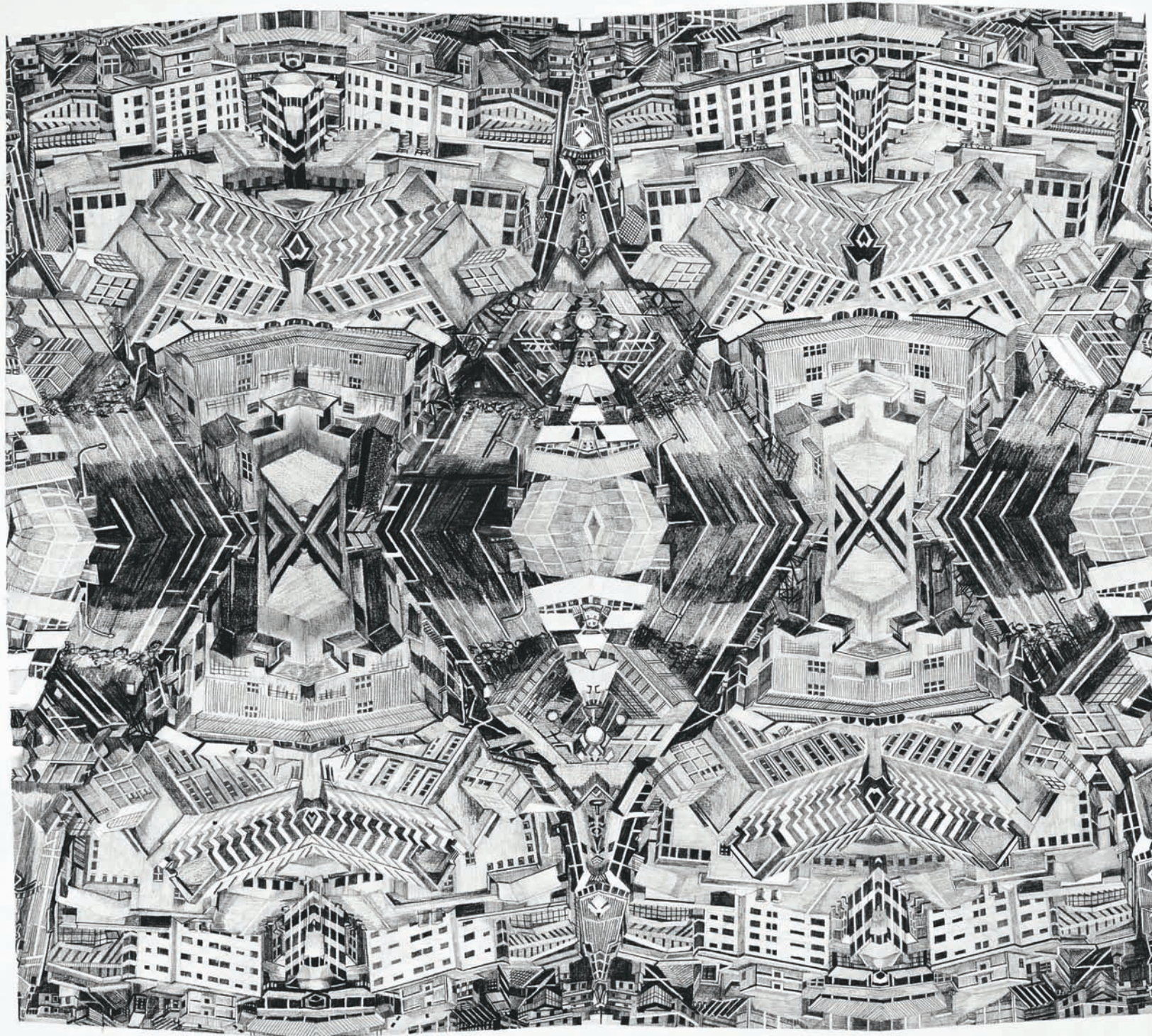
Where Were You in 92?



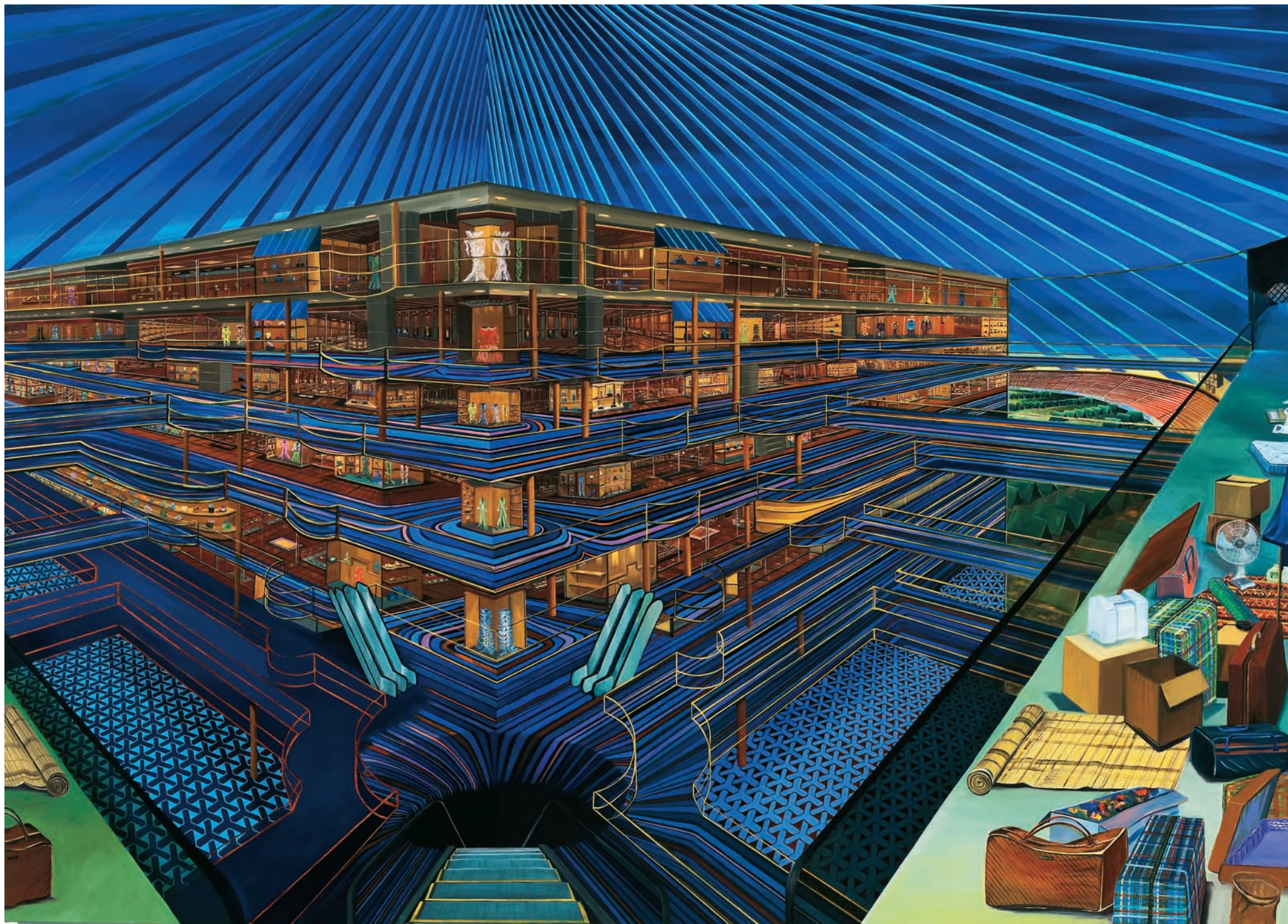
Where Were You in 92?, *detail*





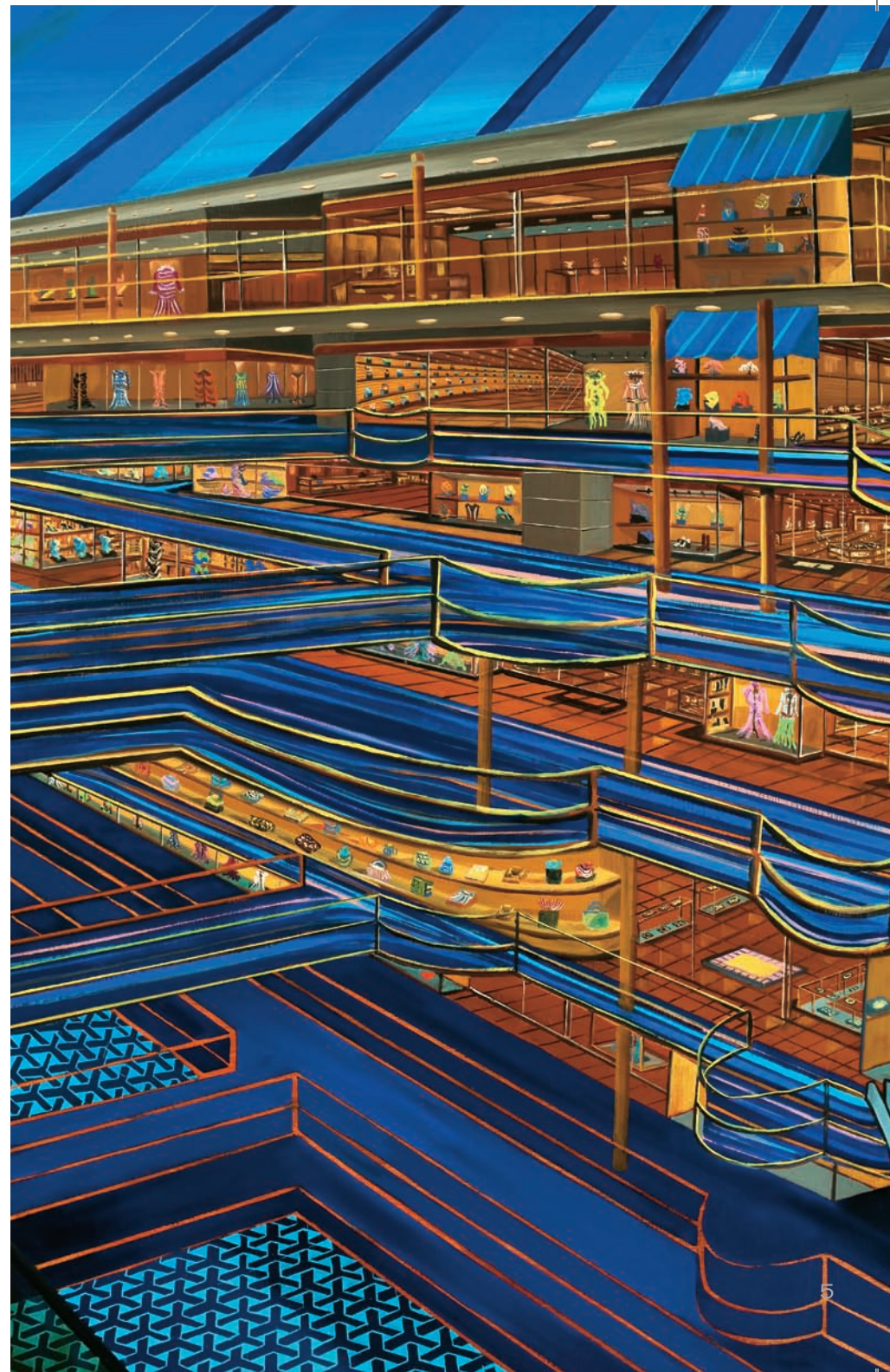


Nine/Ten, 2007
Pencil on paper
109 x 127 cm / 41 x 50 inches



Everything Closer Than Everything Else, 2008
Oil on canvas
152 x 213 cm / 60 x 84 inches

Everything Closer Than Everything Else, detail







Escalate (Grey Stripes), 2008
Oil on canvas
152 x 213 cm / 60 x 84 inches

Ascent (Gold Stripes), 2008
Oil and gold leaf on canvas
152 x 213 cm / 60 x 84 inches







Kanishka Raja

1970 Born in Calcutta
2000 Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, Skowhegan, ME, USA
1995 MFA Southern Methodist University, Dallas, TX, USA
1992 BA Hampshire College, Amherst, MA, USA
Lives and works in New York

AWARDS

2004 ICA/Digitas Artist Prize, Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston.

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2009 *I Have Seen The Enemy And It Is Eye* Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke, Mumbai (catalogue)
2008 *Indian Yellow* Envoy, New York
2007 *In The Future No One Will Have A Past pt. 1* Envoy, New York
In The Future No One Will Have A Past pt. 2 Jack Tilton Gallery, New York
2005 *I.M. Pure* Envoy, New York
Momentum3: Kanishka Raja Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston (catalogue)
2004 *Birth Of An Earth* Allston Skirt Gallery, Boston
2002 *Paintings* Allston Skirt Gallery, Boston
1999 *Embrace The Schmaltz* Brandeis University, Waltham, MA

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2009 *Master Of Reality: Francesca DiMattio, Angela Dufresne, Chie Fukei, Matthew Day Jackson and Kanishka Raja*, Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, Waltham, MA
Joseph Wardwell, curator
- 2007 *Counterparts: Emerging Painters & Their Influences* Contemporary Art Center, Virginia Beach, VA (catalogue)
Ragan Cole-Cunningham, curator
True Faith Greenberg Van Doren Gallery, New York
Paul Brainard, curator
- 2006 *Fables: Christopher Myers, Wanda Raimundi-Ortiz, Kanishka Raja, Kara Walker* Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia, PA (catalogue)
Naomi Beckwith, curator
Never Mind the Bollocks, Here's Amanda Lear Envoy, New York
Paramnesiac Landscapes New York Center for Arts + Media Studies, New York
Robin Reisenfeld, curator
Mike Ladd: Domestica (set design for a collaborative performance)
The Kitchen, New York
Howie Chen, curator
- 2004 *The Ludovico Treatment* MüllerDeChiara Gallery, Berlin
David Hunt, curator
Masala: Diversity and Democracy in South Asian Art
Benton Museum of Art, University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT
Kathryn Myers, Siona Benjamin, Annu Matthew, curators

- 2003 *Pantone* Massimo Audiello Gallery, New York
David Hunt, curator
- 2002 *Proper Villains* Untitled Space, New Haven, CT (catalogue)
David Hunt, curator
- 2001 *Augusto Arbizu, Mala Iqbal, Kanishka Raja* Bellwether, New York
Becky Smith, curator
Boomerang: Collector's Choice 2 Exit Art, New York
Ken Freed, curator
Hybrid IDs Mills Gallery, Boston Center for the Arts, Boston (catalogue)
Robin Reisenfeld, curator
- 2000 *Pure: Morgan Cohen, Kanishka Raja, Joe Wardwell*
The Gallery@Green Street, Boston
James Hull, curator
Snapshots Contemporary Museum, Baltimore, MD

RESIDENCIES

- 2006 International Studio & Curatorial Program (ISCP), New York
Civitella Ranieri Foundation, Umbertide, Italy
- 2005 Lower Manhattan Cultural Council (LMCC) Workspace
Program: 120 Broadway, New York

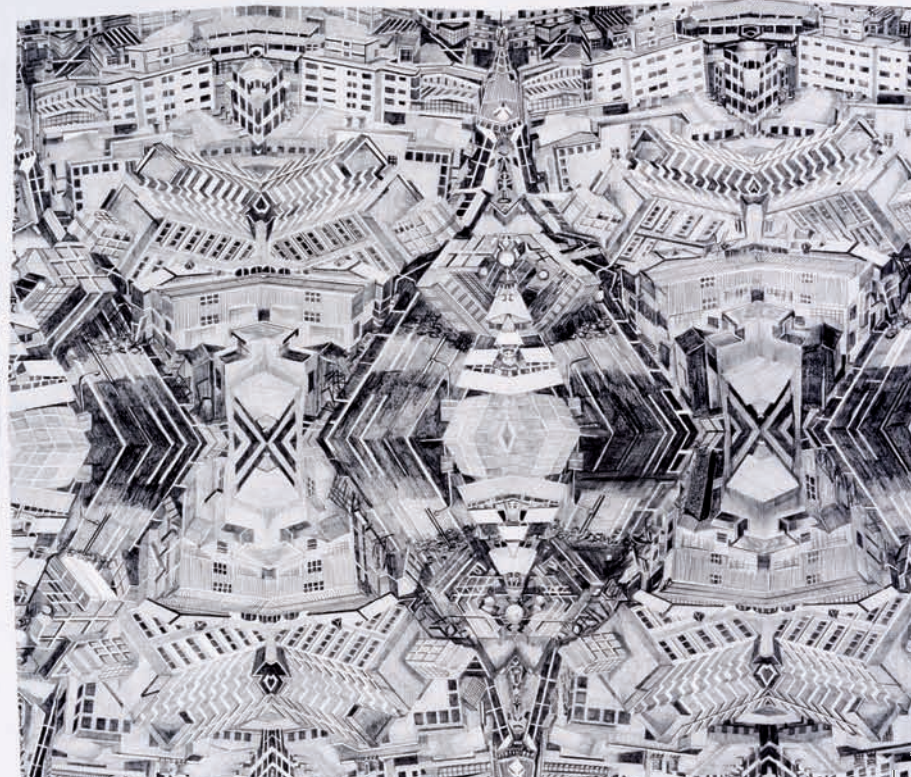
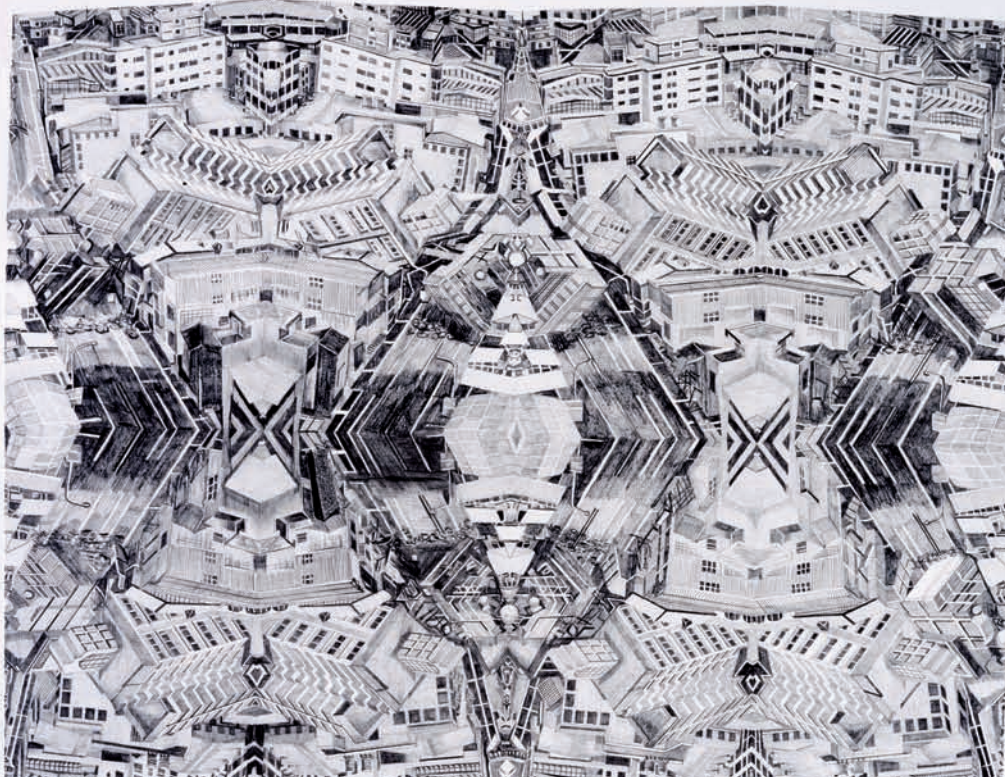
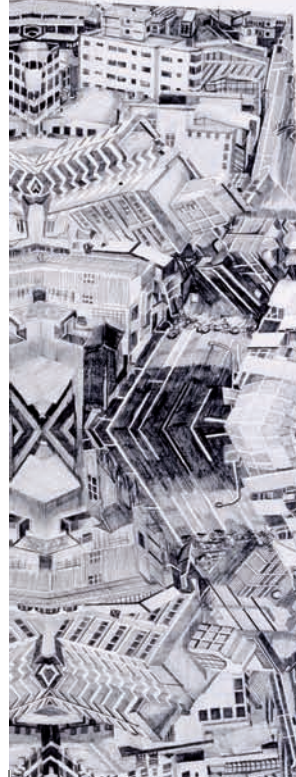
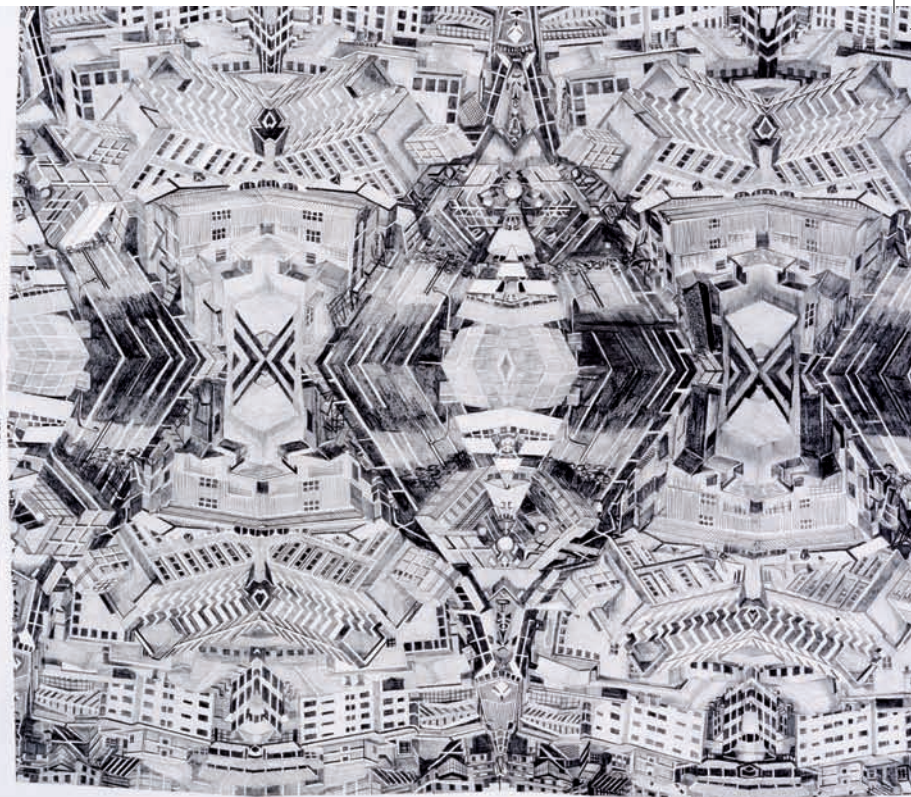
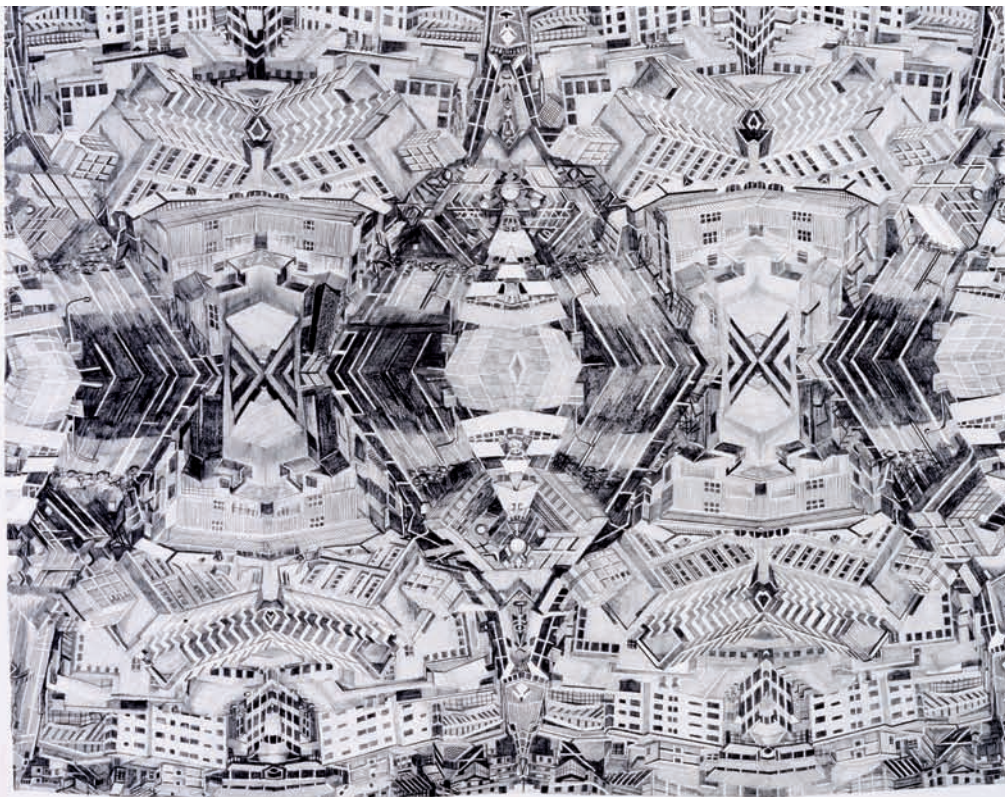
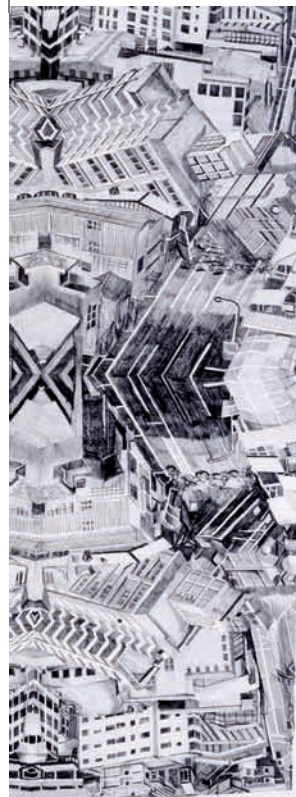
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