



JENNIFER MARMAN & DANIEL BORINS:

# PROJECT FOR A NEW AMERICAN CENTURY



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AMERICAN  
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Curated by Emelie Chhangur & Philip Monk  
with an essay by Philip Monk

**agYU** ART GALLERY OF YORK UNIVERSITY

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
Project for a New American Century is a [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] its source in a little-known history.  
During the Spanish Civil War, [REDACTED]  
prisons using "psychotechnic" torture in [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
installation combining architecture, painting, [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] prison-like enclosure in the gallery :  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]  
conjecture in the first gallery with this aggressive architec-  
tural intrusion, the artists play out the aesthetic possibilities  
or consequences of this proposition with a series of paintings  
[REDACTED] As they write, "The founda-  
tions are set for a scenario wherein the artists act as players  
in the landscapes of political radicality both past and pres-  
[REDACTED]

own formalist devices. The socially [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] scenario that oversees the installation carries within  
its walls the clashes and harmonies of the ideologically charged  
art of the twentieth century interwar period, and the hollow-  
ing ideological clashes of the culture wars that have ensued  
since this period. [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

that in part has [redacted] a "what if" scenario  
[redacted] historical event.  
[redacted] anti-Franco anarchists operated  
[redacted] the form of "coloured  
cells" based on the principles of abstract and surrealist paint  
ing. In reference to this history, the Toronto collaborative  
team of **Daniel Borins** and **Jennifer Marman** have created an  
[redacted] and sculpture,  
building a monolithic [redacted]  
but updating it with reference to utopian brutalist architec-  
ture from the 1950s and 1960s (such as York University's Ross  
Building) and op art painting. Having established a historical  
[redacted] with this aggressive architec-  
[redacted]  
and sculpture in the second gallery. [redacted]  
[redacted]  
ent, while simultaneously imprisoning themselves within their  
[redacted] utopian brutalist architec-  
tural [redacted] the installation [redacted]  
[redacted] and the hollow  
[redacted] What better way to usher in this disil-  
lusioned century than to imprison us in the previous one."

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# **The Prisoner**

Philip Monk

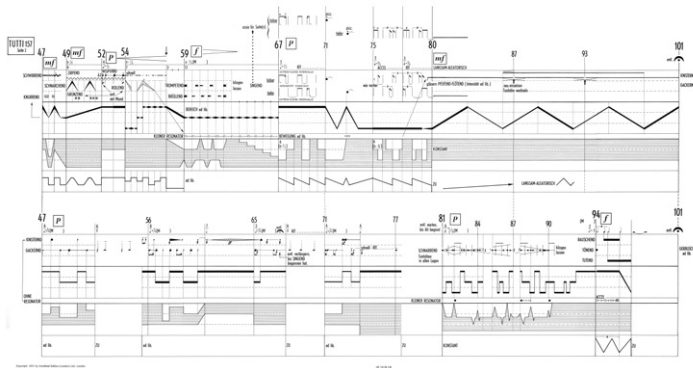


2.12 *In logic nothing is accidental: if a thing can occur in a state of affairs, the possibility of the state of affairs must be written into the thing itself.*

—Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921)

*Modern description, on the contrary, at least that of painting, arrests the viewer and releases the spectacle, adjusts it in several tenses to his vision; ... modern canvases leave the wall, they come to the spectator, oppress him with an aggressive space: the painting is no longer a "prospect," it is a "project."*

—Roland Barthes, “Objective Literature” (1954)



—Karlheinz Stockhausen, *Mikrophonie I* (1964–65)



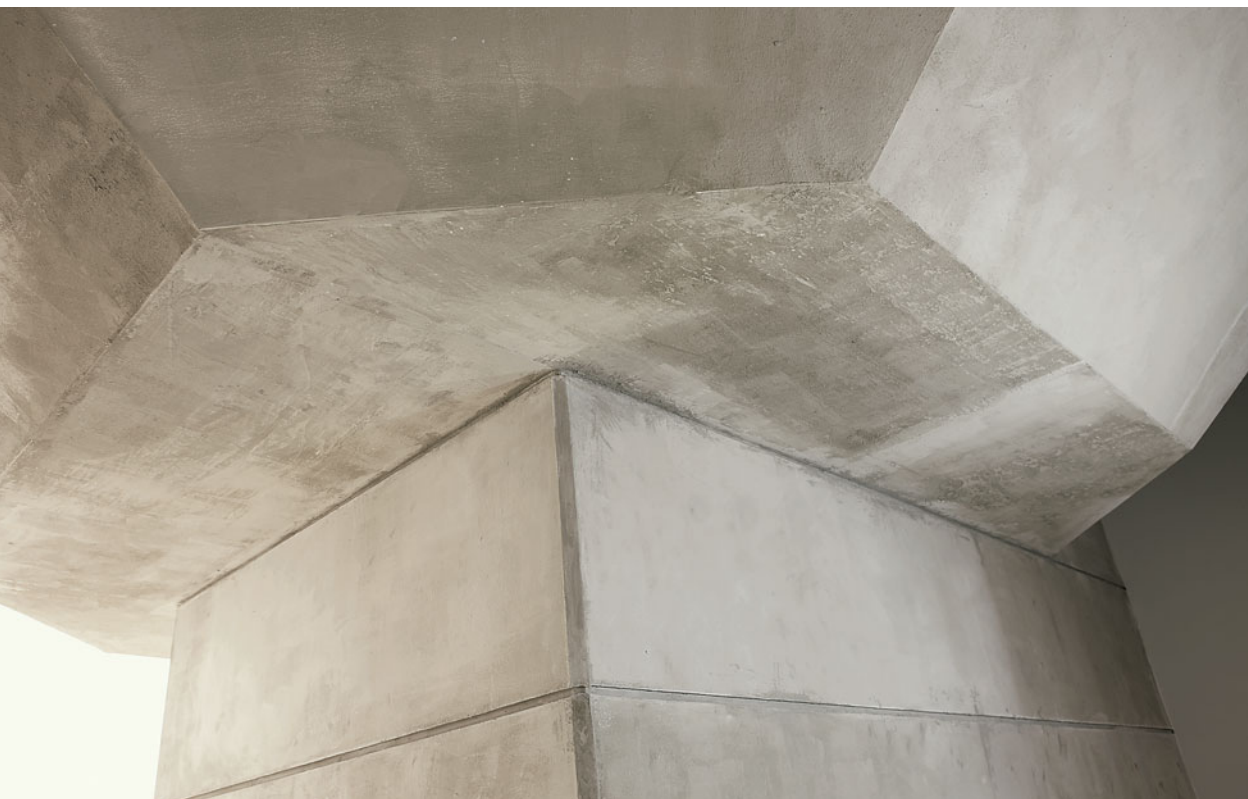
## Think Tank Scenario

1. I confess: I am starting this text *as if* I were writing a novel. *As if* I were writing a novel parallel to this exhibition, a novel divided by what is parallel within it. But only *as if* this writing were a conjecture on how to write about an exhibition—in other words, a *proposal* for writing on this exhibition.

2. For the exhibition itself is a proposal: *Project for a New American Century* it titles itself. The artists Jennifer Marman and Daniel Borins have not invented the title but, like all of us, inherited the effects, so to speak, from what it originally titled. Their title has been lifted from the mission of a think tank, which the artists, perhaps, want us to hear as if it were an avant-garde manifesto. “The Project for the New American Century (PNAC) was an American neoconservative think tank based in Washington, D.C. that lasted from early 1997 to 2006. It was co-founded as a non-profit educational organization by William Kristol and Robert Kagan. The PNAC’s stated goal was ‘to promote American global leadership.’ Fundamental to the PNAC were the view that ‘American leadership is both good for America and good for the world’ and support for ‘a Reaganite policy of military strength and moral clarity.’ Critics claimed that it exerted strong influence on high-level U.S. government officials in the administration of U.S. President George W. Bush and strongly affected the George Bush administration’s development of military and foreign policies, especially involving national security and the Iraq War.”<sup>1</sup> Signatories to its “Statement of Principles” were amongst [REDACTED]

2.1 [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]







2.12 Communicating this to you, I cannot say everything that I would like without fear of censorship. Fiction is a better model.

2.2 With its policies in disarray a mere ten years into the new century and its credibility crumbled after the fiasco of the Iraq War, restaged here *Project for a New American Century* points to another agenda. Hijacking a title, the artists engage in their own fiction—another think tank “what if?” scenario.

2.3 Not that this fiction does not have an historical basis. With its multiple references, the artists’ installation is nothing but historical. Marman and Borins add nothing of their own, it seems, in the sense of the progression of contemporary art working its way to its future as the next stylistic step. They repeat what is already historically given but bring it to view differently.

We must read into the word “project” the nuance of its forward-looking and looking-forward in order to see how one is implicated in the other: the projection of forecasting *and* the perspective of vision.

Prospective is perspective, but perspective is retrospective here, as well. The artists look at what is thrown forward by conjecturally casting a look back. They look backwards to an earlier point in time in order to chart a conjectural new path forward to the present as another narrative of it.

Casting back makes the past into something of a fiction, too.





The artists reconstruct the future of this past (our present) as a conjecture. That it appears to be what we know does not lessen its conjectural status.

2.4 The artists, however, do not want to give any of this away yet. They prefer to imprison and censor themselves, us too, in a particular historical and aesthetic determination. They would prefer that I do not leak what they have already written, that I cross it out instead. Covertly, I resist.

The foundations are set for a scenario wherein the artists act as players in the landscapes of political radicality both past and present, while simultaneously imprisoning themselves within their own formalist devices. The socially utopian brutalist architectural scenario that oversees the installation carries within its walls the clashes and harmonies of the ideologically charged art of the twentieth century interwar period, and the hollowing ideological clashes of the cultural wars that have ensued since this period. What better way to usher in this disillusioned century than to imprison us in the previous one.

2.5 The perspectives of logical progression, narrative points of view, stylistic trajectories, or historical determination all figure in what follows.



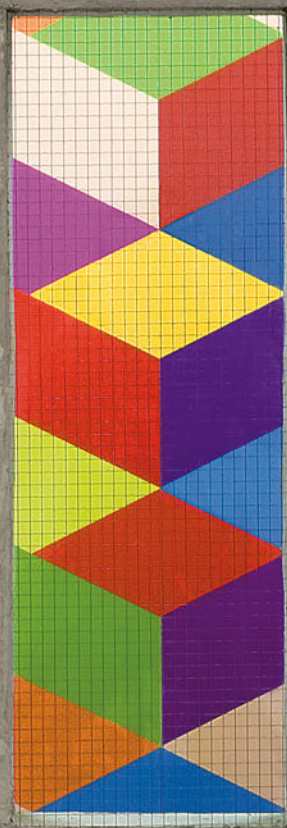
## The Cell

3. All of this does not come to sight immediately, though our vision will be guided. But first it is constrained architecturally. Architecture is the first presentation here. An intrusion into the gallery space, its structure also is means by which we are inserted into its vision.

3.1 The moment we walk through the gallery doors, our vision is directed, if only by an impasse. We enter a dark passageway lit by industrial lamps where we are confronted by a blank cement wall that nonetheless signifies, however brutishly: its surface almost painterly in its effects yet darkly oppressive. This wall also supports a weight as its plane balances or, rather, transforms into a polyhedron that cantilevers and encloses the space from above, pressing down ominously on us.

3.12 If architecture can insinuate itself in and as our vision, so too can a description direct our seeing. (Perception has its own history although it cannot be “visible” in its own time.) Ideally, my description here should be dated to the architecture itself by being produced in its era. How is this (return) possible? How could we recreate such a period description in the present in order to understand the contemporary effects of past architecture? My fiction would be to see through the eyes of the time. To do so here, I retrieve an analogous description, something contemporary though at a remove since it discusses fiction not architecture: that of the mid-1950s *nouveau roman*. I invite you to imagine walking through the gallery space guided by this description offered by one of the new novel’s very own practitioners, Alain Robbe-Grillet:

It is not rare, as a matter of fact, in these modern novels, to encounter a description that starts from nothing; it does not afford, first of all, a general view, it seems to derive from a tiny fragment without importance — what most resembles a



*point*—starting from which it invents lines, planes, an architecture; and such description particularly seems to be inventing its object when it suddenly contradicts, repeats, corrects itself, bifurcates, etc. Yet we begin to glimpse something, and we suppose that this something will now become clearer. But the lines of the drawing accumulate, grow heavier, cancel one another out, shift, so that the image is jeopardized as it is created. A few paragraphs more and, when the description comes to a end, we realize that it has left nothing behind it: it has instituted a double movement of creation and destruction which, moreover, we also find in the book on all levels and in particular in its total structure.<sup>2</sup>

4. We turn a corner and all, seemingly, is revealed in the faux brutalist architecture that dominates the gallery space, where inside is turned outside. A cantilevered concrete structure rises up from a cubic base as if it were thrusting through the ceiling of the gallery, imposing its authority on us. Disciplinary here, at one time in the mid-1950s and 1960s Brutalist architecture was utopian—the dominant style of the large-scale development of new university campuses built in the 1960s, such as Toronto’s York University. Now the style is associated with the failed urban policies of social housing, especially the estate housing of post-war Britain.

4.01 Filmmakers immediately recognized the dystopian character of these architectural environments and used them as locations in science fiction films. Stanley Kubrick’s *Clockwork Orange* (1971) was filmed in the new London housing estate of Thamesmead, while David Cronenberg’s *Stereo* (1969) was filmed at Toronto’s Scarborough College, designed by John Andrews and built in 1964. Marman and Borins elaborate another fiction, just as conjectural as science fiction, but, like this genre, fabricated from what already exists.





4.02 Brutalist architecture was intended to be, at a glance, both sculptural *and* signifying. In 1955, at the start of this stylistic phenomenon, British architectural critic, Rayner Banham, wrote:

This concept of *Image* is common to all aspects of The New Brutalism in England, but the manner in which it works out in architectural practice has some surprising twists to it. Basically, it requires that the building should be an immediately apprehensible visual entity, and that the form grasped by the eye should be confirmed by experience of the building in use. Further, that this form should be entirely proper to functions and materials of the building, in their entirety.<sup>3</sup>

4.03 While duplicating it at full architectural scale, Marman and Borins have returned brutalism to its sculptural form, where it signifies as well. Starting from lines and planes, they invent a fictional architecture, but as in Robbe-Grillet's description, as an object that contradicts itself.

4.1 The monolith is so dominant that its contrasting interior is nearly concealed—contradicting Banham's injunction of visible functionality. The interior is fully enclosed with one sealed aperture through whose safety glass we can only peer. Inside, there's a riot going on: a visual confusion of objects and images of blindingly bright colour patterns and optically conflicting geometric forms. Areas we cannot see are reflected back to us through a parabolic mirror that condenses and further distorts the space. The grey mass is belied by this vibrant enclosure from which there is no escape. There is no escaping its solitary confinement. Apparently.

Peering in, we realize that, on the outside, we still inhabit the domain of this architecture—within the perimeter of its prison yard. Below is the prison cell, above the cantilevered guard tower with two-way mirrors. The cell is secreted within this structure. So, too, are





observational points of view.

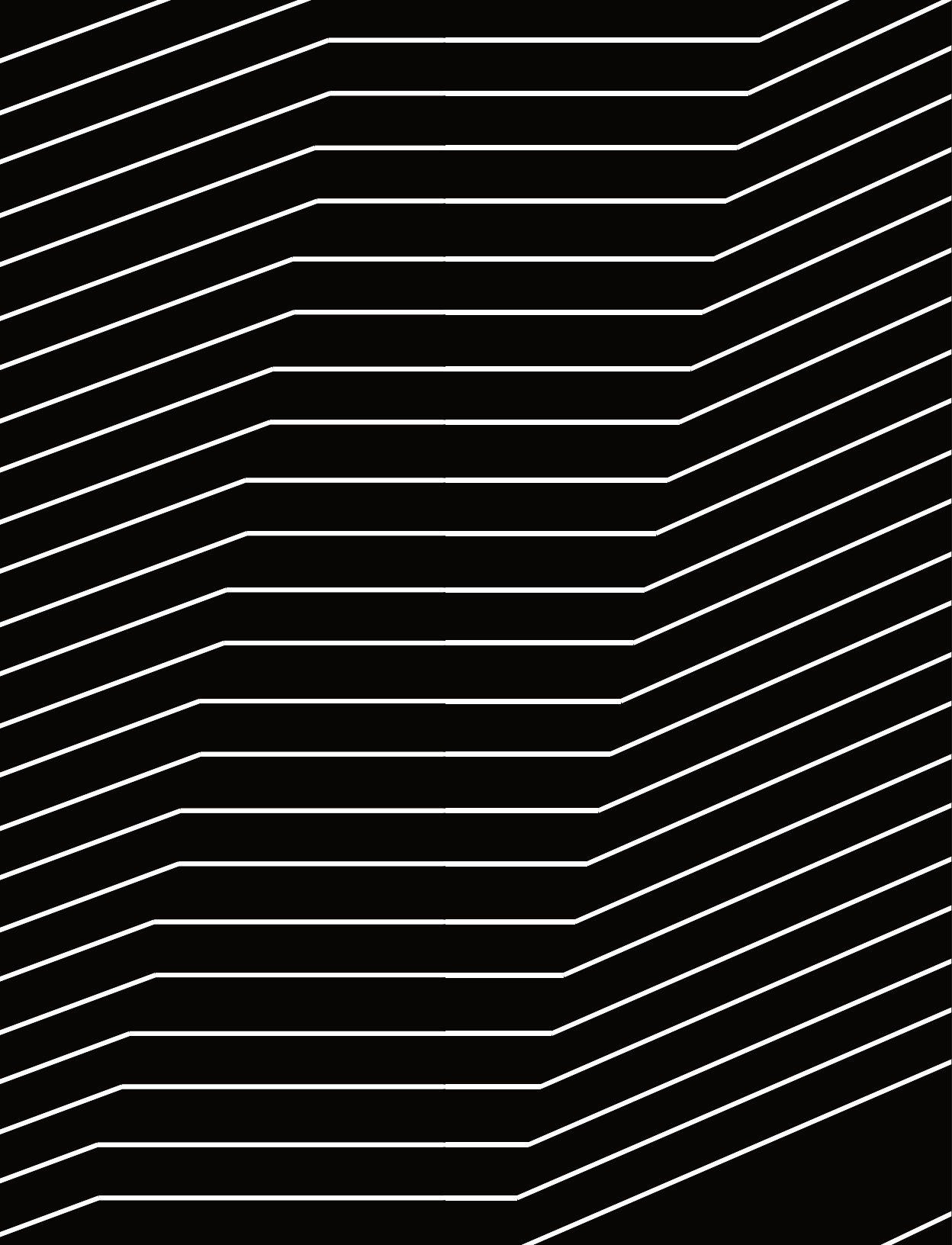
4.12 Within this disciplinary laboratory hidden from sight, not only the psychology and very subjecthood of the absent prisoner is at stake but space itself is under threat of dissolution. Both subject *and* space are tortured as means to an end. As if a continuum existed between space and consciousness, the cell anticipates its own effects on the prisoner: we can read the absent subject in the actuality of the cell itself. In this overconstructed and hyperreal space, which has been given the sheen of digital technology, the purpose is to deliberately confuse by a systematic exaggeration of *rational* coordinates.

The “tyrannical recourse to sight” is also parodic. It intends to “assassinate the classical object” and classical space with it. Analyzing Robbe-Grillet’s fictional techniques in 1954, Roland Barthes stated that the aim was:

to parody classical space, to disperse the concretion of substance, to dissolve it under the pressure of an overconstructed space. Robbe-Grillet’s many [directional] specifications, his obsession with topography, his entire demonstrative machinery has the effect of destroying the object’s unity by hypersituating it, so that initially substance is drowned under an accumulation of lines and orientations, and subsequently the abuse of planes, though endowed with classical denominations, explodes traditional space and substitutes for it a new space, furnished as we shall see with temporal depth.<sup>4</sup>

The recourse to parody in *Project for a New American Century* is not “one-off” as so easily could happen in contemporary art. Its projections, too, are temporal.

4.2 Merely looking in and not seeing ourselves reflected in the cell’s parabolic mirror, we are not necessarily exempt from the cell’s effects.



We do not fully know how we inhabit this disciplinary space divided between the upper and lower architectural registers of guard tower and prison cell, split between two regimes of vision. How do we reconcile their parallax vision? Where are we within this scenario? When are we imprisoned? When are we free?

4.21 Not seeing ourselves in the mirror: The mirror reveals a look seemingly without this look being seen, even by itself, whereas we (the subject of this look) are nothing but looked at in this installation.

5. Hidden from sight, the cell has a back-story, nonetheless. To tell the truth, I don't know whether this story is apocryphal or not.

5.1 In January 2003, the Madrid newspaper *El Pais* published an article, subsequently reported by *The Guardian*, that anti-fascist republican forces operated torture prisons in Barcelona during the Spanish Civil War. Here is *The Guardian* article in full:

ANARCHISTS AND THE FINE ART OF TORTURE

*Spanish art historian says they put enemies in disorienting cells*

Giles Tremlett in Madrid

*The Guardian*, Monday 27 January 2003 08.48 GMT

A Spanish art historian has uncovered what was alleged to be the first use of modern art as a deliberate form of torture, with the discovery that mind-bending prison cells were built by anarchist artists 65 years ago during the country's bloody civil war.

Bauhaus artists such as Kandinsky, Klee and Itten, as well as the surrealist filmmaker Luis Bunuel and his friend Salvador Dali, were said to be the inspiration behind a series of secret cells and torture centres built in Barcelona and elsewhere, yesterday's *El Pais* newspaper reported.



Most were the work of an enthusiastic French anarchist, Alphonse Laurencic, who invented a form of “psychotechnic” torture, according to the research of the historian Jose Milicua.

Mr Milicua’s information came from a written account of Laurencic’s trial before a Francoist military tribunal. That 1939 account was written by a man called R L Chacon who, like anybody allowed to publish by the newly installed dictatorship, could not have been expected to feel any sympathy for what Nazi Germany had already denounced as “degenerative art.”

Laurencic, who claimed to be a painter and conductor in civilian life, created his so-called “coloured cells” as a contribution to the fight against General Franco’s rightwing rebel forces.

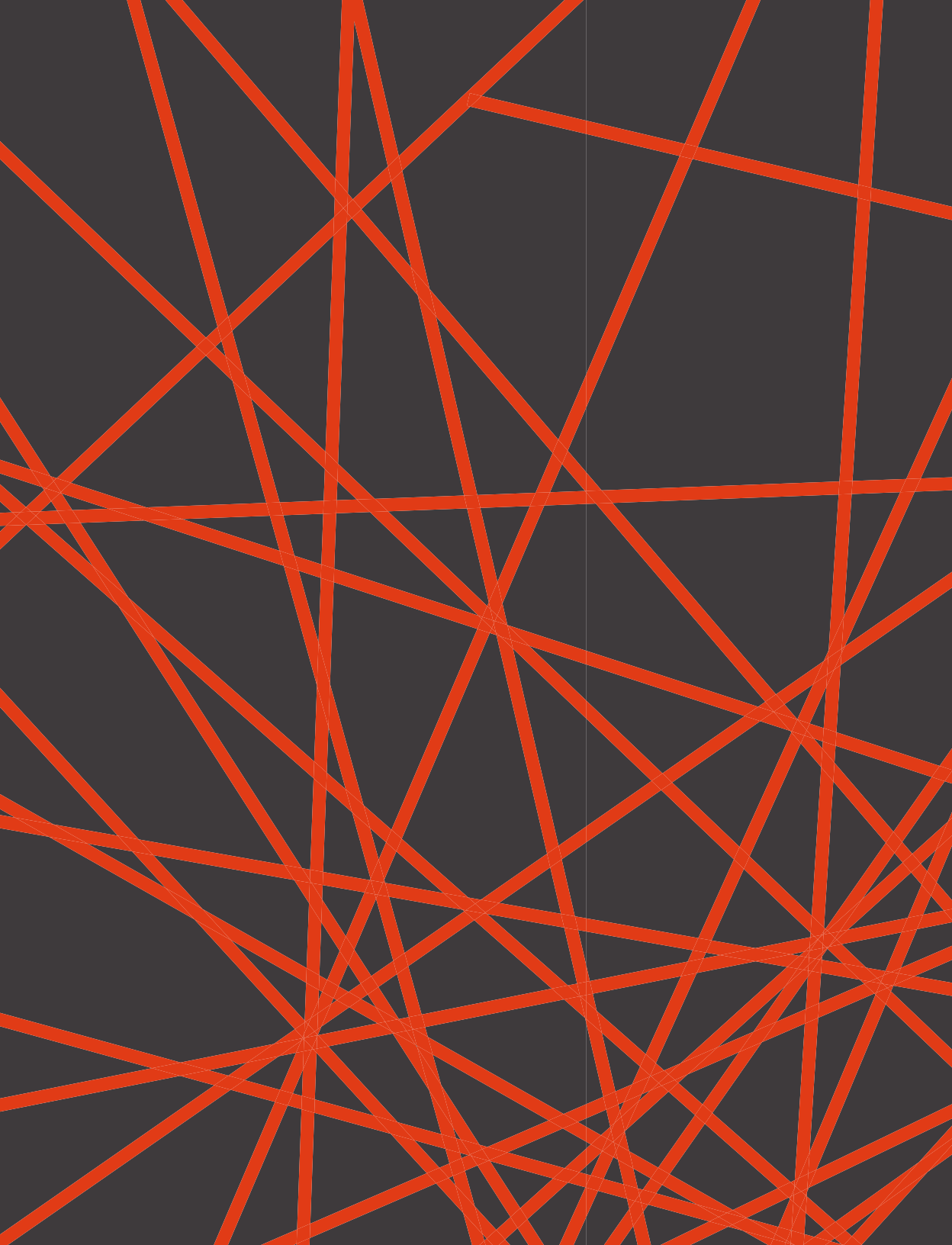
They may also have been used to house members of other leftwing factions battling for power with the anarchist National Confederation of Workers, to which Laurencic belonged.

The cells, built in 1938 and reportedly hidden from foreign journalists who visited the makeshift jails on Vallmajor and Saragossa streets, were as inspired by ideas of geometric abstraction and surrealism as they were by avant garde art theories on the psychological properties of colours.

Beds were placed at a 20 degree angle, making them near-impossible to sleep on, and the floors of the 6ft by 3ft cells was scattered with bricks and other geometric blocks to prevent prisoners from walking backwards and forwards, according to the account of Laurencic’s trial.

The only option left to prisoners was staring at the walls, which were curved and covered with mind-altering patterns of cubes, squares, straight lines and spirals which utilised tricks of colour, perspective and scale to cause mental confusion and distress.

Lighting effects gave the impression that the dizzying patterns on the wall were moving.



A stone bench was similarly designed to send a prisoner sliding to the floor when he or she sat down, Mr Milicua said. Some cells were painted with tar so that they would warm up in the sun and produce asphyxiating heat.

Laurencic told the military court that he had been commissioned to build the cells by an anarchist leader who had heard of similar ones used elsewhere in the republican zone during the civil war, possibly in Valencia.

Mr Milicua has claimed that Laurencic preferred to use the colour green because, according to his theory of the psychological effects of various colours, it produced melancholy and sadness in prisoners.

But it appears that Barcelona was not the only place where avant garde art was used to torture Franco's supporters.

According to the prosecutors who put Laurencic on trial in 1939, a jail in Murcia in south-east Spain forced prisoners to view the infamously disturbing scene from Dali and Bunuel's film *Un Chien Andalou*, in which an eyeball is sliced open.

*El Pais* commented: "The avant garde forms of the moment—surrealism and geometric abstraction—were thus used for the aim of committing psychological torture.

"The creators of such revolutionary and liberating [artistic] languages could never have imagined that they would be so intrinsically linked to repression."<sup>5</sup>

**5.12** Such a report of the avant garde's intrinsic link to repression upsets cultural expectations or expresses a contradiction—a blind spot—within them: the assumption that leftist or democratic culture is on the side of progress and incapable, for instance, of violating human rights. When we think of the left's response to the Spanish Civil War we picture Picasso's *Guernica*, not modernist decorated torture cells.

Culture, supposedly, is in no way compromised by politics, even by aberrations within democratic regimes. Recent scholarship,





however, has complicated the relationship between modernism and fascism. As Mark Antliff writes:

We now recognize that many of the paradigms that spawned the development of modernist aesthetics were also integral to the emergence of fascism, and that the internalization of these paradigms as operative assumptions was a stimulus for alliances between modernists and anti-Enlightenment ideologues throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>6</sup>

*Project for a New American Century* restages this dilemma for us.

5.2 For *Project for a New American Century*, the artists recreated Laurencic's cell while redecorating it at the same time, a means by which we are implicated as contemporary viewers. Having been reproduced in the present, there are differences: minimalism and Op art (brought up to date by the virtual reality of High Definition) replace constructivism and surrealism; the military prisons of Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay become the unavoidable political references.

5.21 If, as suggested by the architecture of Marman and Borins' brutalist prison, a structural homology exists between Laurencic's cell and those of Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay, then one exists as well, the artists further suggest, between the two artistic periods (1930s and 1960s—with the practices of the 1960s continuing to influence those of the present), implying moreover that both are primarily related by their compromise with politics, whether politics is stated as a principle of the art or not. As viewers, it is left to us to derive this implication.

5.22 The two artistic and two political periods are four faces of a structuralist figure from which we could derive a variety of implications. Together they construct their own architecture.



**5.23** Tracing a relationship between these two periods on the same “site,” our archaeological investigation is mediated by architecture, by its own contradictory form that is simultaneously utopian and repressive. Brutalist architecture is thus an aesthetic model for compromised political forms: for instance, democracies toppling a dictator in turn to torture in his prison cells.

**5.3** We are victims here of what Slavoj Žižek calls an “insurmountable parallax gap,” which he defines as “the confrontation of two closely linked perspectives between which no neutral common ground is possible.”<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the parallax gaps of this exhibition make us all parallax prisoners, although they are expressed firstly by the gap between the viewpoints or perspectives of tower and cell.



## The “Exhibition”

*By doctrinaire position is simply meant a new musical language, appropriate to the age, structurally coherent, abstract, objective, uncontaminated by nationalism, and offering unbounded creative potential.*

—Robin Maconie, *Other Planets: The Music of Karlheinz Stockhausen* (2005)

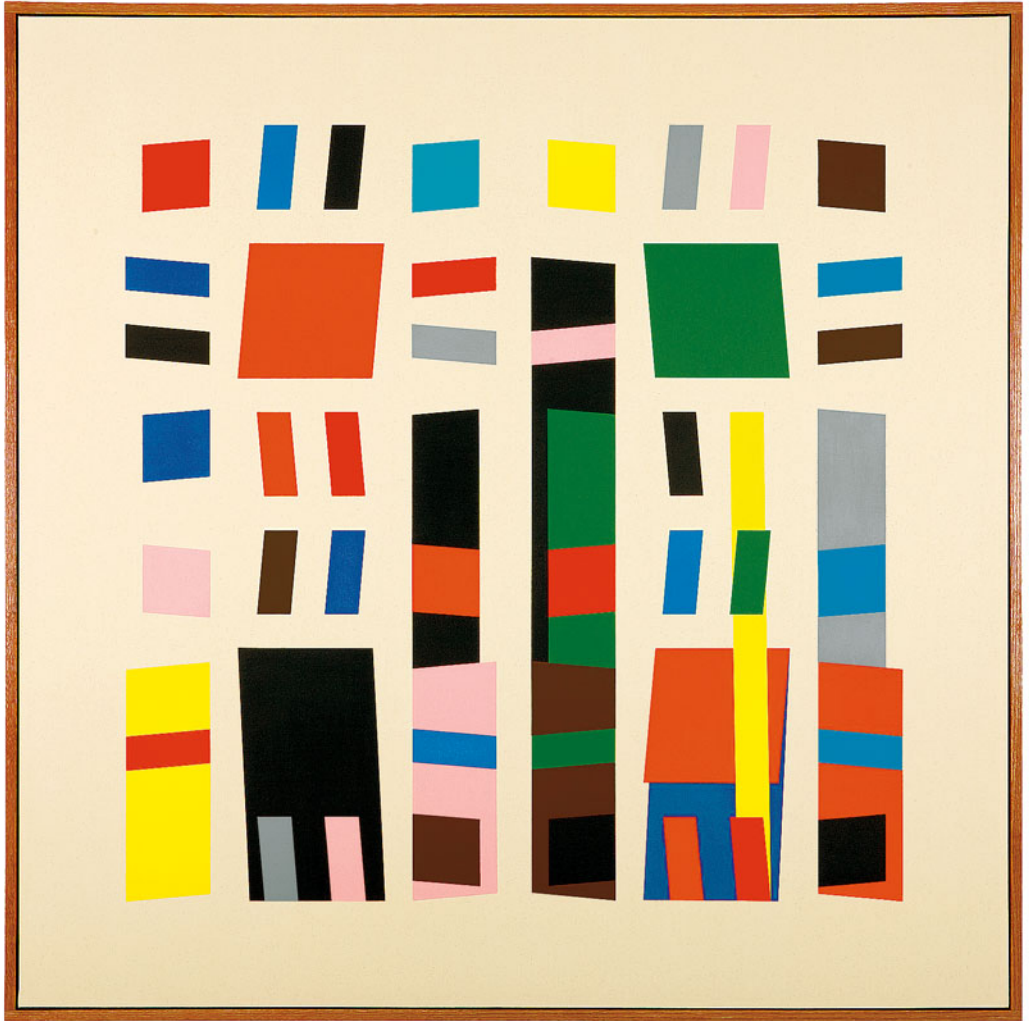
*Some day it will have to be told how anti-Stalinism which started out more or less as Trotskyism turned into art for art’s sake and thereby cleared the way, heroically, for what was to come.*

—Clement Greenberg, “The Late Thirties in New York” (1960)

*Never, in modern art, has such a “purist” enterprise been deployed without recourse to utopian or “futurist” justifications, and it was perhaps because of its very muteness on this point that color-field abstraction now seems to us, in terms of American self-imagery on the world scene, the stick behind the carrot.*

*The antiseptic surfacing, the compressed, two-dimensional designing, the optical brilliance, and the gigantism of this art’s scale, invoke a far more mundane awe than the sublime. And yet, no one can categorize the sources that stimulated this openness of space, or say of such painting that it refers to a concrete experience. Nothing interferes with the efficient plotting of its structure—in fact, efficiency itself now becomes its pervasive ideal. The strength, sometimes even the passion of this ideal, rescues the best of this work from the stigma of the decorative, but only to cause it all the more to seem the heraldry of managerial self-respect.*

—Max Kozloff, “American Painting During the Cold War” (1973)



6. Walking into the second gallery it is as if we were walking out the gates of a prison to our freedom—into the value-free realm of abstract contemporary art. But are we free there?

6.1 Clearly, a relation exists between the works on display and the décor of the prison cell. But what exactly is it?

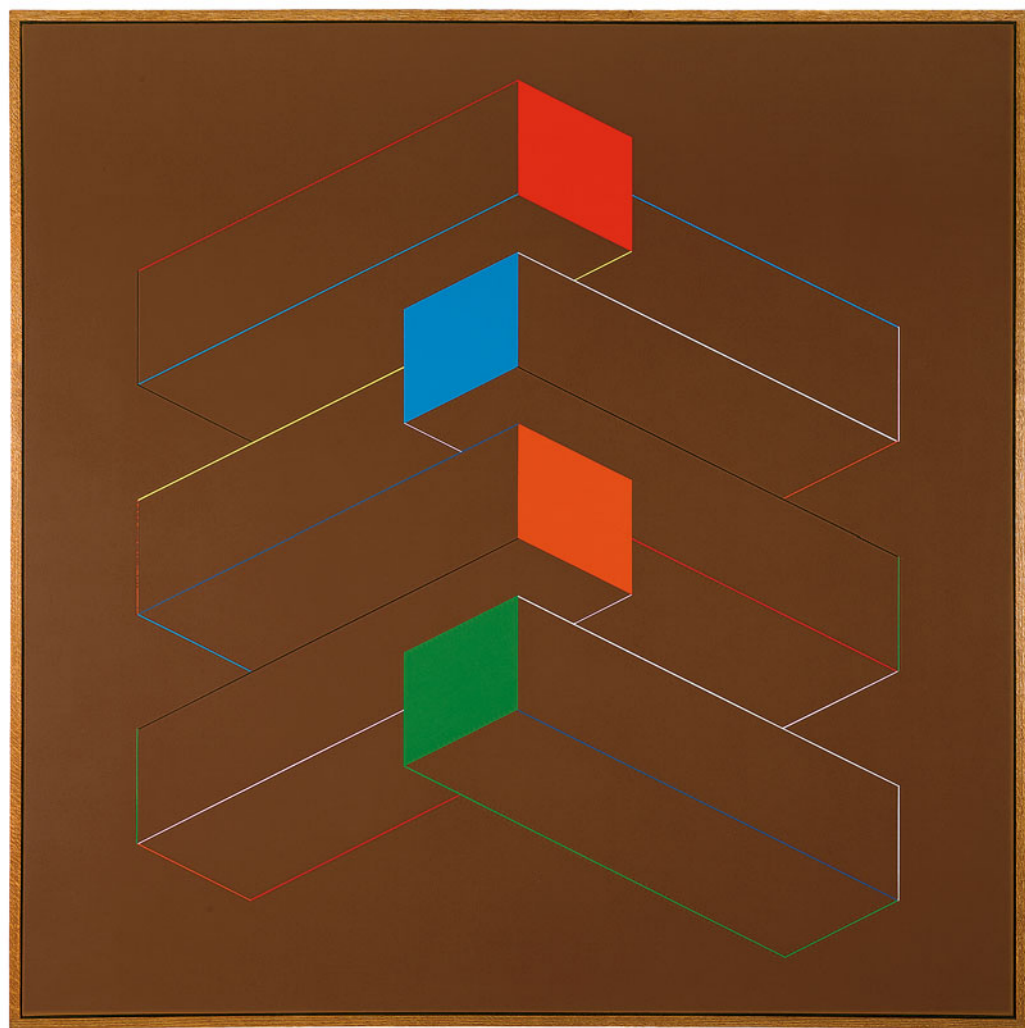
6.2 On an aesthetic level, the second gallery duplicates the *decorative* principles of the cell but as the elements of a contemporary art exhibition—a generic exhibition that we could place in the 1960s. Both painting and sculpture are exhibited respectively repeating the two- and three-dimensional elements of the prison cell.

6.21 On the one hand, the paintings pick up motifs from the prison cell produced in the style of hard-edge abstraction typical of the 1960s and 1970s (what Kozloff above more widely calls color-field abstraction). On the other hand, the floor-bound sculpture implies the strategies of a complementary 1960s minimalism. Yet, its composition actually seems no more than a basic inventory of forms found in the cell with the addition of some architectural elements molded in cement common to Brutalist buildings, such as ceiling coffers. Rather than following the strict, reductive logic of minimalism, these referential elements play a quasi-figurative role—theatrical indeed, *pace* Michael Fried.

6.22 The paintings, moreover, do not function simply as they appear. While they perfectly replicate the painting of the period, within their seamless appearance and surface cohesion they are divided. Surface and sign no longer are one as Annette Michelson claimed in 1969 of “abstraction’s single level of articulation” in “contemporary painting and sculpture, which resist the notion of any authority or model, any notion of code and message in their stubborn claim for autonomy, immediacy, and absoluteness.”<sup>8</sup>

In the present case, this is an *abstract* art that yet *depicts* what







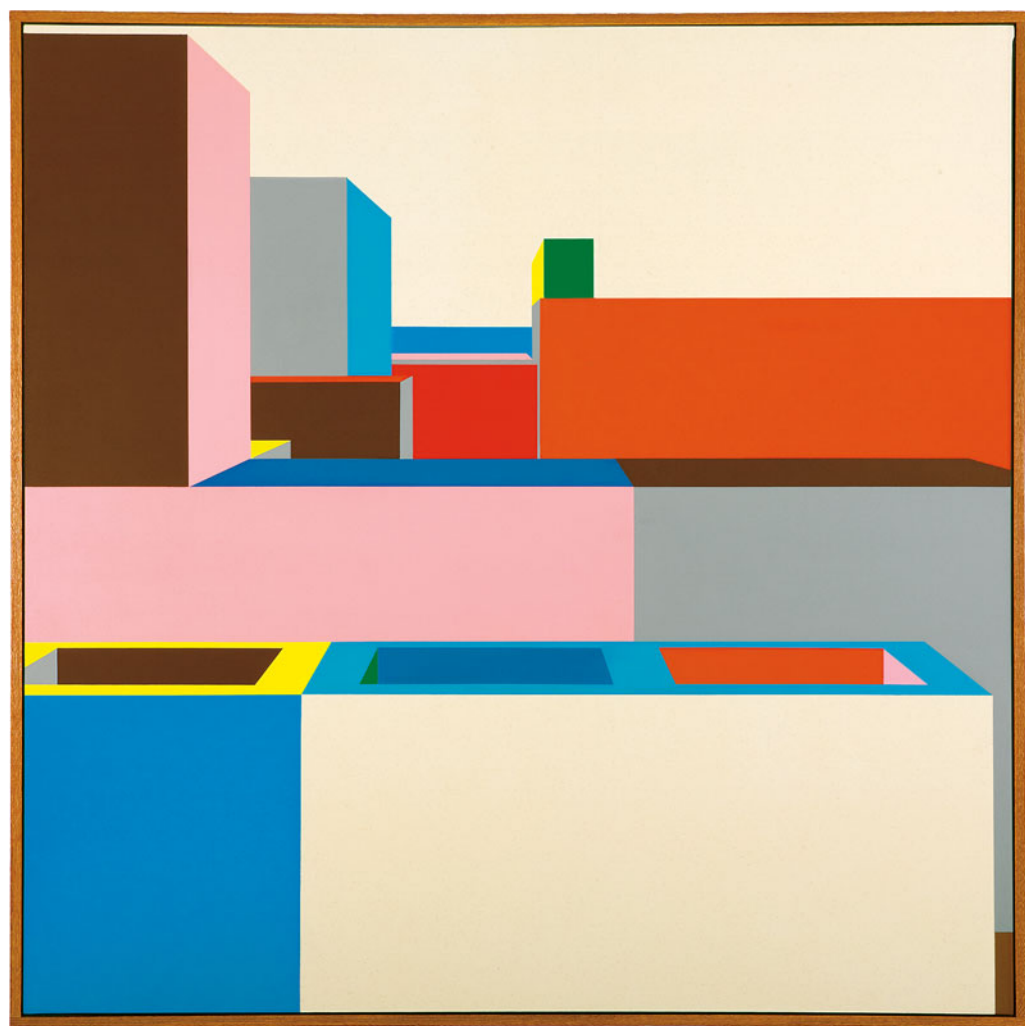
is in the cell while also functioning as a *type* of period painting, that is, standing secondarily for it.

Replicating the look of this art, does one reproduce its repressed ideology, presuming that this “purist” enterprise too was divided otherwise (by economics and politics)? How can this ideology be brought to visibility? Moreover, could it be any more visible than it was in its day when it was not seemingly apparent in the period’s abstract art? That is, are the minimum conditions of creating the look of this art today the minimum conditions for reproducing its accompanying ideology as well?

6.3 On closer inspection, these abstract paintings categorically contradict themselves by referring outside themselves. So doing, they create a narrative of looks. The push-pull of the first painting shows the positive-negative, see-through pattern of the “concrete” screen that separates—or mediates—the two galleries. The second painting simplifies our view into the cell, reducing the back wall to a few symmetrical figures. With its “compressed, two-dimensional designing,” the third painting departs from the cell to foreshorten our reverse view of the floor sculptures. The fourth painting recalls our view of the guard tower from below (while also suggesting the mushroom cloud of an atomic blast: *Guernica* to the  $n^{\text{th}}$  power—an implied but unstated totemic subject of the anxious, existentialist Abstract Expressionist paintings of the late 1940s and 1950s).

6.31 The paintings bring the space into order, visualizing it according to privileged sightlines, such as that from the window of the prison cell, from which the scattering of the sculpture inventory, for instance, is brought into line, foreshortened as if through the contrary devices of Renaissance single-point perspective painting.

6.4 This exhibition within an exhibition is, thus, a perfect rendition of past abstract painting. To what end do Marman and Borins



reproduce this style of painting that, in its time, was not just stylistic but possessed the ethical and aesthetic authority of both its moment and the progress of art?

6.41 The artists' strategy of mimicry differs from the postmodernism of the 1980s whose artists made symbolic recourse to the abstract painting of the 1960s, especially Op art, such as Peter Halley's simulacral synthesis of Michel Foucault and Frank Stella in his emblematic paintings of "prisons, cells, and walls"; or who made direct reference to preceding abstract expressionism, such as Philip Taaffe reproducing Barnett Newman's paintings with a decorative scroll replacing the metaphysical "zips." Such mundane decorative intrusion undermined the transcendental aims or illusions of the "heroic" period of American painting. Marman and Borins do not appropriate past masters in order to ironically comment, through an artbound critique, on their privileged aesthetic authority (*à la* Sherrie Levine). Nor is theirs postmodernist painting's mournful or gleeful endgame strategy.

Their art is purely quotational without referring to any artist directly. This logic of quotation, moreover, is a temporal disruption, a distortion that complicates art's relation to a history that is not just its own formal development. The "exhibition" quotes both the style *and* its larger context—not just the white cube of the commercial art gallery (and by extension the museum system) but also art's unacknowledged historical compromises. That this "exhibition" is projected from the prison cell is a condition that contaminates abstraction's "autonomy, immediacy, and absoluteness."

6.42 Coincidentally, the writers of this period questioned the "heroism" of the "triumph of American painting" and its value-free aesthetics, seeing it tied instead to Cold War machinations. An art that had willfully purified itself of political contents and effects was viewed as ripe for ideological appropriation to political ends—by covert



American government agencies such as the CIA acting through various cultural fronts such as the Museum of Modern Art.<sup>9</sup>

6.5 A secret iconography to modernism, this purist enterprise? What exactly are Marman and Borins implying, drawing a relationship between modernism and torture? I don't want to be Kozloff's "radical philistine [who] correctly senses systems support in American art, but reads its coded signals far too crassly as direct statement."<sup>10</sup> These are difficult questions that I am loath to answer here on behalf of the viewer: What are the aesthetic consequences of politics and the political consequences of aesthetics?

Nonetheless, we can partially answer this question by saying

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] to take an example of this "suspect" logic: purism and extermination in abstraction and Nazism operate according to the same principle.<sup>11</sup> [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]<sup>12</sup>

7. The aesthetic consequences of politics and the political consequences of aesthetics: Are these formally reversible statements? Is the predicate of one to be read in its absence within the other subject: politics in aesthetics, aesthetics in politics? Both structuralism and purist abstraction demand reversibility of their procedures. Structuralism



likewise demands a closed system, but the question here is whether abstraction is open to historical processes that exceed its formalist operations, especially as now played out in the narrative of our reception of *Project for a New American Century*.

7.1 Torture, like art, is an impure science. Rational input has an irrational outcome. Results cannot be determined ahead of time, nor are there quantifiable measures for each. In torture, ensuing statements can only partially be verified, although torturers believe confession is verification. In art, we can only read a logic backward not forward in time.

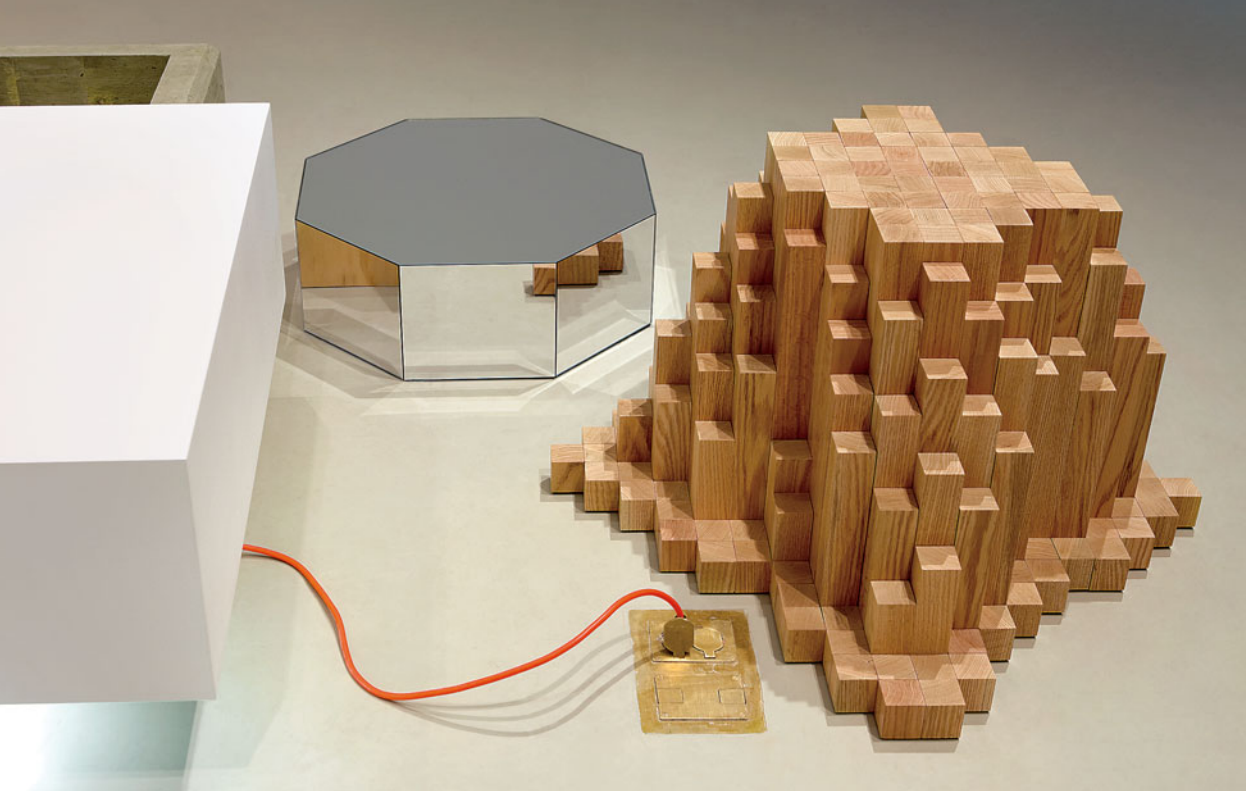
7.2 Is there a secret communication between the prison cell and the “exhibition” as there might be in time between these historical eras, transmitted by code as if telegraphically? The concrete screen between the two galleries functions perhaps as a filter to purify the noise (history’s contaminations), communicating these purist paintings as a result.

7.3 Communication might also be the tap, tap, tap of a prisoner’s message.

8. Consider another “what if” scenario. What if the “exhibition” in the second gallery is imagined by the prisoner and created out of the conditions of his or her cell?<sup>13</sup> From the point of view of the prisoner inside this cell, the consequent artwork would be imagined at a distance—both spatially and temporally. As viewers, however, we are free to wander amongst that future exhibition (which, at the same time, remember, is our past).

8.1 Not that we have no relation to this artist within his or her locked-in point of view. In the first gallery, we look through the cell window but in no seeming communication with its prisoner. Rather







our cross-gazes—or parallax views—play out in the second gallery “exhibition” in what we bring of the past to it (both what we recall from the cell and from actual history). We have a freedom there that the artist-prisoner does not possess but which, however, he or she supplies us *in time*—the narrative time of our viewing where we piece together the relation between the two galleries. Or, at least it is the contemporary artists, Jennifer Marman and Daniel Borins, who supply us both the time of their narrative and timeframe of their temporal inversions, which potentially collapse the separation of art and politics.

For the prisoner, perspective is determined in space and time by the constraints of the cell, whereas for us point of view is relative. Narrative point of view and perspective combine but relative both to that of the prisoner and what plays out in time in our perception of the “exhibition.” No longer is this necessarily a parallax gap. Interpretative possibilities are dependent on narrative point of view where parallax temporarily dissolves. Interpretative possibilities, however, are neither political nor aesthetic judgements or commitments.

**8.2** This gives us advantage over the guards, equally locked in their point of view as their prisoner, but with a difference. If the guards’ view is immediate and all seeing, ours—offered yet not fulfilled by the prisoner—plays out over time. One is panoptical, the other phenomenological.<sup>14</sup>

**8.21** In the master-slave relationship, to use the favoured Hegelian language of the 1930s, only the prisoner, through the surrogacy of our participation, overcomes reality, not the guards who, in the end, remain imprisoned in their point of view.



## Notes

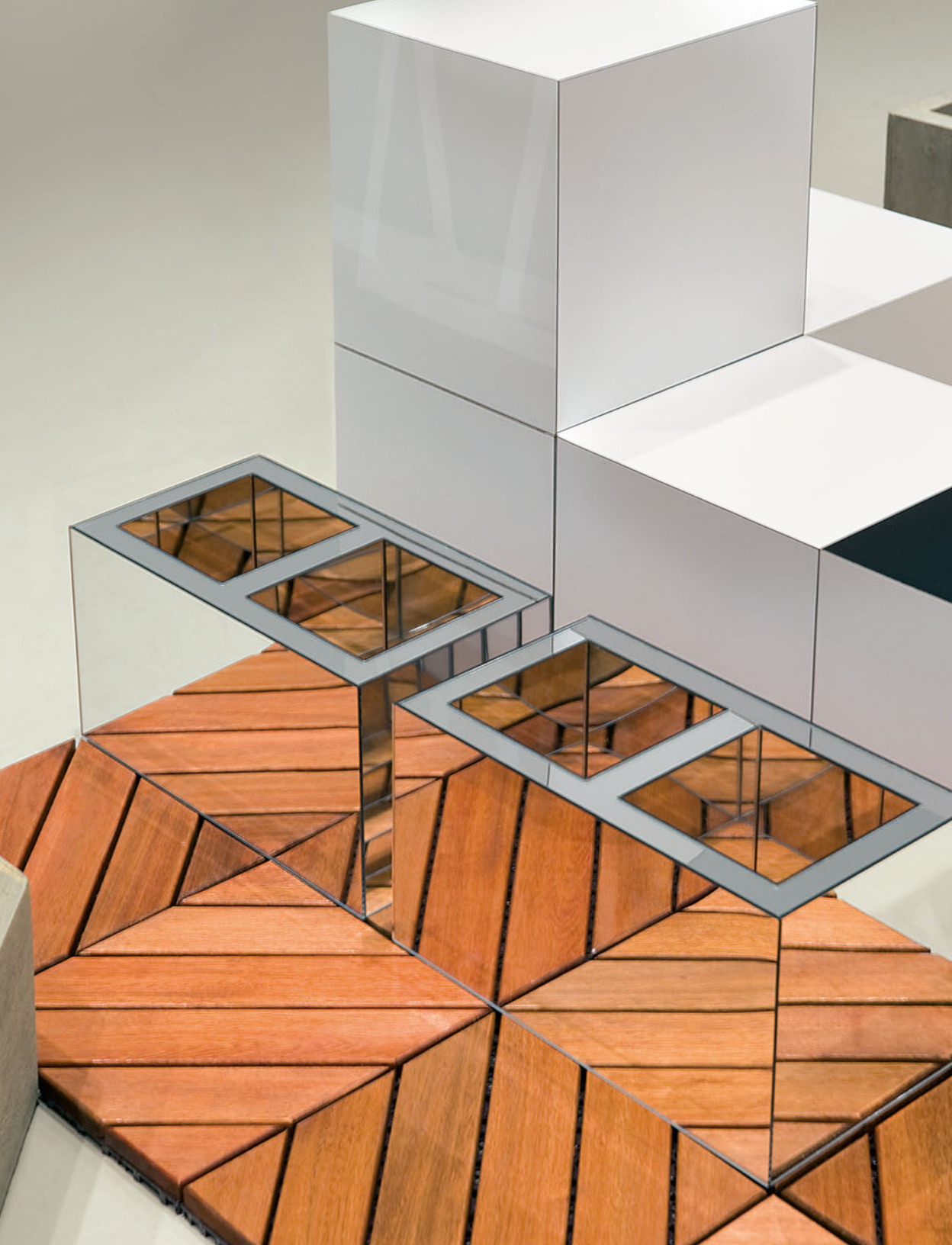
1. <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Project\\_for\\_a\\_New\\_American\\_Century](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Project_for_a_New_American_Century)>. Accessed 23 March 2009.
2. Robbe-Grillet continues: "The concern for precision which sometimes borders on the delirious (those notions so nonvisual as 'right' and 'left,' those calculations, those measurements, those geometric points of reference) does not manage to keep the world from moving even in its most material aspects, and even at the heart of its apparent immobility. It is no longer a question here of time passing, since gestures paradoxically are on the contrary shown only frozen in the moment. It is matter itself that is both solid and unstable, both present and imagined, alien to man and constantly being invented in his mind. The entire interest of the descriptive pages—that is, man's place in these pages—is therefore no longer in the thing described, but in the very movement of the description." Alain Robbe-Grillet, "Time and Description in Fiction Today (1963)," *For a New Novel*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Grove Press, 1965), 147-48. I refer the readers to descriptions in Robbe-Grillet's novels *The Voyeur* (1955) and *Jealousy* (1957).
3. Reyner Banham, "The New Brutalism." *Architectural Review* (December 1955), reproduced in David Robbins, ed., *The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty* (Cambridge, MA and London, England: The MIT Press, 1990), 172.
4. Roland Barthes, "Objective Literature" (1954), *Critical Essays*, trans. Richard Howard (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972), 16, 19.
5. "Anarchists and the fine art of torture," *The Guardian*, 27 January 2003; <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2003/jan/27/spain.arts/print>.
6. Mark Antliff, "Fascism, Modernism, and Modernity," *The Art Bulletin* 84:1 (March 2002), 149. The opposition between leftist and rightist notions of culture, allying aesthetics to politics, in fact, stems from this period. For instance, consider these two contemporary statements from 1936 and 1939 respectively: "This is the situation of politics which fascism is rendering aesthetic. Communism responds by politicizing art." (Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 242.) "Here, as in every other question today, it becomes necessary to quote Marx word for word. Today we no longer look toward socialism for a new culture—as inevitably as one will appear, once we do have socialism. Today we look to socialism *simply* for the preservation of whatever living culture we have right now." (Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," *Clement Greenberg*:



*The Collected Essays and Criticism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), I, 22.)

7. Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge, MA and London, England: The MIT Press, 2006), 4.
8. Annette Michelson, “Art and the Structuralist Perspective,” *On the Future of Art* (New York: The Viking Press, 1970), 56, 51.
9. While not delving into the CIA connection, Serge Guilbaut’s *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art* set the context for much of this debate. Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1983). A decade earlier, Eva Cockcroft dealt with the direct relationship. “Abstract Expressionism, Weapon of the Cold War,” *Artforum* 12:10 (June 1974), 39-41. Reprinted in Francis Francina, ed., *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), 125-33.
10. Max Kozloff, “American Painting During the Cold War,” in Francina, *Pollock and After*, 108. The original article appeared in *Artforum* 11:9 (May 1973), 43-54.
11. Compare Alain Badiou’s comments on the Moscow trials of the 1930s: “To cut short any anti-political interpretation of these dark deeds, bear in mind that, among other things, purging, or purification, was also an essential slogan for artistic activity. There was a desire for pure art, an art in which the only role of semblance would be to indicate the rawness of the real. There was also a call to purify—through axiomatics and formalism—the mathematical real, to purge it of the entire spatial or numerical imaginary of intuitions. And so forth. The idea that force is attained through the purging of form was by no means monopolized by Stalin.” *The Century*, trans. Alberto Toscano (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2007), 53. Consider as well Badiou’s comments on the twentieth century’s project of the creation of a new man shared by both communism and fascism: “Creating a new humanity always comes down to demanding that the old one be destroyed. A violent, unreconciled debate rages about the nature of this old humanity. But each and every time, the project is so radical that in the course of its realization the singularity of human lives is not taken into account. There is nothing there but a *material*. A little like the way in which, for practitioners of modern art, sounds and forms, torn away from their tonal or figurative harmony, were nothing but materials whose destination needed to be entirely recast.” *Ibid.*, 8.
12. I make this final statement with obvious reference to Benjamin Buchloh’s 1981 *October* article “Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression: Notes on the Return

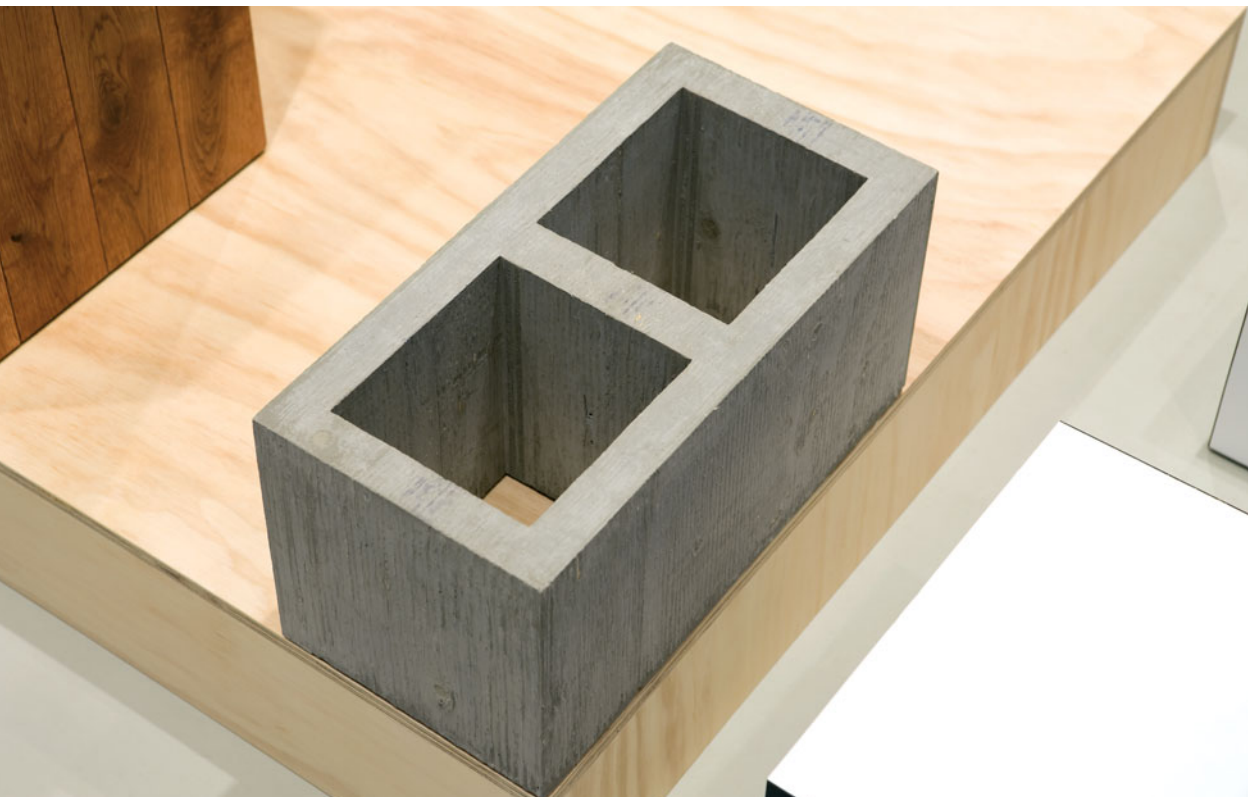




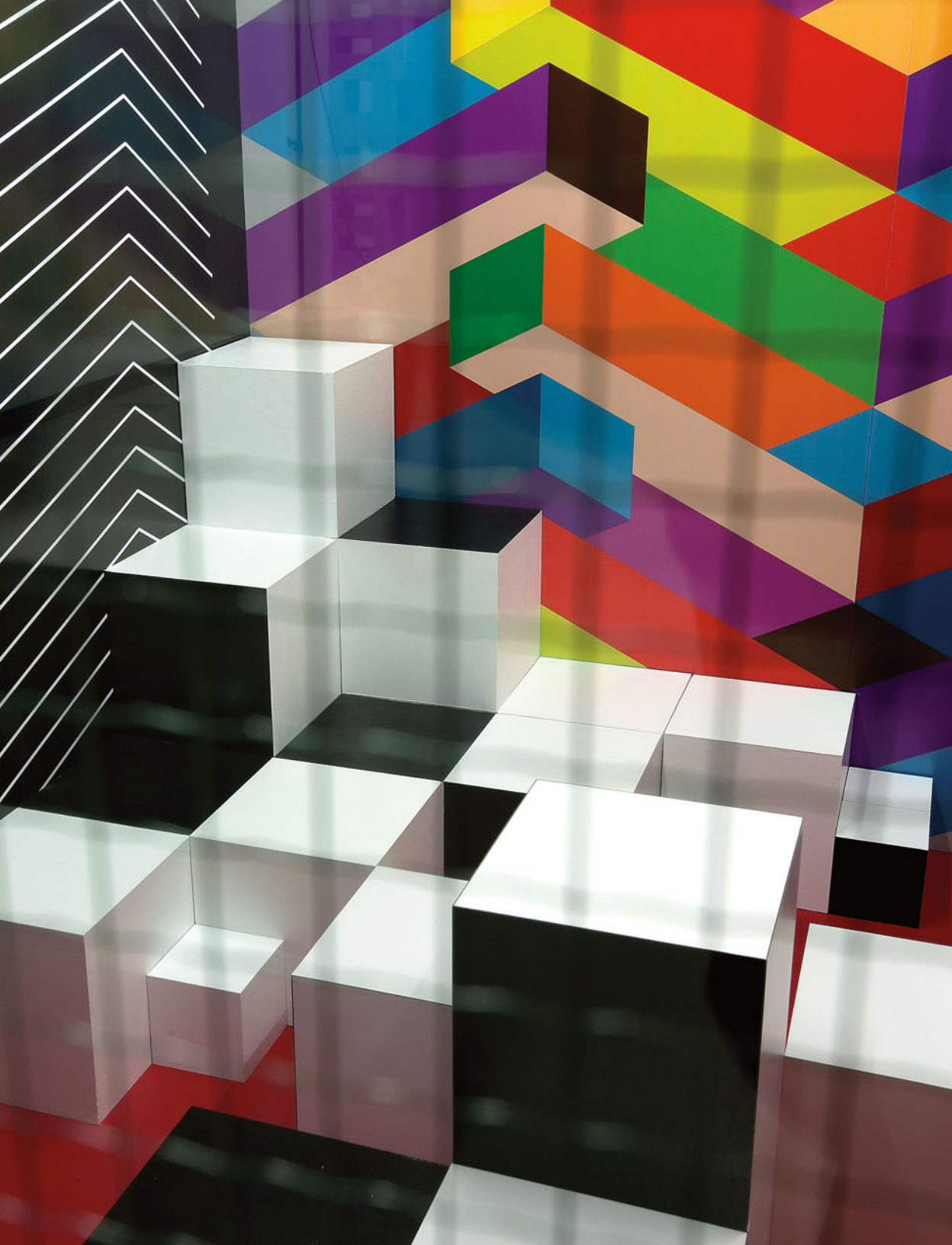
of Representation in European Painting.” We should be careful, however, of drawing political consequences from aesthetics, which was common during the 1980s, indeed, inaugurated by this article that could be said to have set off the internal postmodern culture wars modelled, not surprisingly, on the debates of the 1930s.

13. A man alone in a room writing was a literary conceit shared by existentialism and the *nouveau roman*. My fiction here: I would like my text read as if it were written as period art criticism of the “exhibition” in the second gallery and as if equally projected from a prison cell, perhaps this one. If the “exhibition” could be considered as projected by the prisoner of the cell, so could an art criticism of its production. Furthermore, I would like it read as if written by a fellow traveller of the 1950s and 1960s new novelists and electronic composers such as Karlheinz Stockhausen, written in a comparable formal or notational style, as if the writer also was a researcher in cybernetics and semiotics at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique in Paris.
14. The guards’ view could be likened to the dissolution and transformation of perception brought about by war technology, particularly evidenced by the aerial photography of World War I. “[Ernst] Junger argued that the camera’s cold and distanced view reflected the structure of the modern battlefield and that in turn human perception was changing and adapting to the view of the camera lens. In the process of an unlimited unfolding of modern technology on the battlefield, the anthropological condition of human apperception was changing.... The war killed the natural landscape and replaced it with a highly artificial and, within its own parameters, functional spatial arrangements. Aerial photography then, creating a metalevel of artificiality, further abstracted from the ‘reality’ of this artificial landscape.... The morphology of the landscape of destruction, photographed from a plane, is the visual order of an abstract pattern.” Bernd Hüppauf, “Experiences of Modern Warfare and the Crisis of Perception,” *New German Critique* 59 (Spring–Summer 1993), 42, 57.

















## **Jennifer Marman and Daniel Borins**

Jennifer Marman and Daniel Borins have practised sculpture, installation, and media art in Toronto since 2000. They both graduated from the Ontario College of Art and Design in 2001. Prior to that, Marman received a BA in Philosophy from the University of Western Ontario, and Borins received a BA in Art History from McGill University.

Their work is often intervention based—situating visual art within the context of everyday life while simultaneously referring to aspects of the history of twentieth century art. Marman and Borins fashion these interventions as propositions on the status of the contemporary avant-garde. Their projects identify tensions that arise in the politicization, historicization, and visibility of the artwork, often within the context of mass visual language, mass media, and consumerism with an eye towards the revisionism of certain issues pertaining to the historicization of twentieth century art. These tensions are presented as a confrontational platform, whereby the aesthetic and ideological perceptions of the viewer are challenged and the institutional role of the artwork is put under scrutiny. Marman and Borins utilize these platforms to implement an art practice that produces theoretical artwork in a persistently responsive and generative manner; hence, their body of work grows in response to the settings and modalities of producing their art for museum, gallery, and public contexts.



Recent examples of the artists' work abound in the museum, gallery, and public spheres. In 2009, Marman and Borins completed a commission for a large-scale interactive work for Toronto's Martin Prosperity Institute, headed by renowned urban theorist Richard Florida. In counterpoint to this permanent installation is their transitive experimental installation, *Massive Sale: YYY Mall at 401 Richmond*, exhibited at YYY Artists' Outlet fall 2009. In fall 2007 Marman and Borins exhibited *The Presence Meter* as part of *Dots, Pulses, and Loops* and in fall 2008 they participated in the group exhibition *Caught in the Act*, both at the National Gallery of Canada. These two projects exemplify a tendency of Marman and Borins to create interactive works that challenge the roles of viewership. Upcoming public projects include a sculpture commission for Toronto's Downsview Subway Station and a commission for an outdoor sculpture at a high-rise building by Toronto's waterfront. Marman and Borins' public works function within the context of the urban landscape in the twenty-first century, with themes that relate to ruminations on twentieth century utopianism and aspirations.

Marman and Borins' work is in the collection of the National Gallery of Canada. They are represented by Georgia Scherman Projects in Toronto.



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