E A R T H S C A P E S

## PAINTINGS OF THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT FROM ABOVE

I'm a painter and illustrator with a background in architecture, planning and engineering. Somewhere in college I developed a fascination with the rendered site plan....the big picture, the map, the mandala, the world view, that shows things that were, are, and might be in their proper perspective . . . figuratively, if not literally. Elevations (front and side views) show what we can see; plan views, which we normally can't see, show what we know, or think to be true about the world and our place in it.

In my line of work we would buy or commission aerial photography to establish our plans, or better yet, rent an airplane to take our own shots. Access to satellite imagery was limited to expensive coffee table books we could only drool over. When Google Earth appeared, it made the process infinitely more accessible. It went from an essential part of my work to something like recreation... almost therapeutic. Now I could travel, on a whim, anywhere in the world. Click on the whole Earth, give it a spin, and scroll in.

In 2009 it occurred to me that my virtual travel and exploration might make a valid subject for my paintings. I'd always been more interested in recording the built environment than the natural world, so that would continue to be my focus in the new work. It might start with something in the news, someplace I'd been or was going, or a book I was reading. I began saving images and categorizing them (nearly 10,000 images to date): cities, buildings, roads, racetracks,
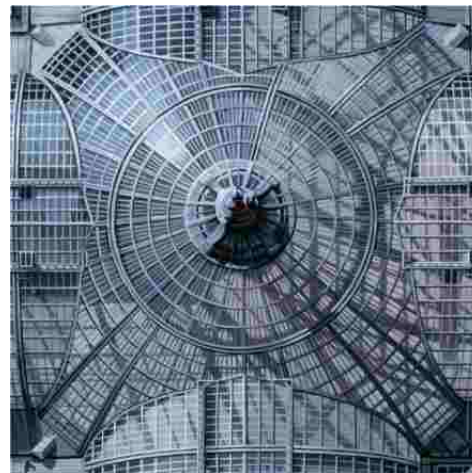
intersections, factories, mines, airports, train stations, farms, docks ... I'm drawn to the patterns of development and veins of movement, of growth and decay, and particularly to unselfconscious 'planning', indigenous archetypes, or architecture without architects.

The purist in me says the images I've created should be visually compelling enough to speak for themselves, and I quickly realized that the stories behind them could only be suggested, or referenced by the painting. And these are paintings: conceptual propositions, not archival photographs, so I felt a certain artistic license, if not obligation, to manipulate scale and content for composition.

At some point, some of the compositions became figurative; what I saw as a building and a tree became, upside down, a symbolic man; I called him drowning man. Then I looked back at the first of this series, and circuit city became peking man. That lead to the ziggurat man - original, civilized man.

I knew that Google was constantly updating their content, so went back to see if there was a better resolution image of the casting plant I'd wanted to paint. It was gone - nothing but a sea of asphalt. And the Moscow factory, painted a couple years earlier, was now a field of fresh dirt. The virtual earth, I realized, was constantly turning.

Lately I've been looking for ghosts of buildings - foundations, ephemeral, but literal footprints left in the earth - not just Chernobyl and Flint, but nearly everywhere.
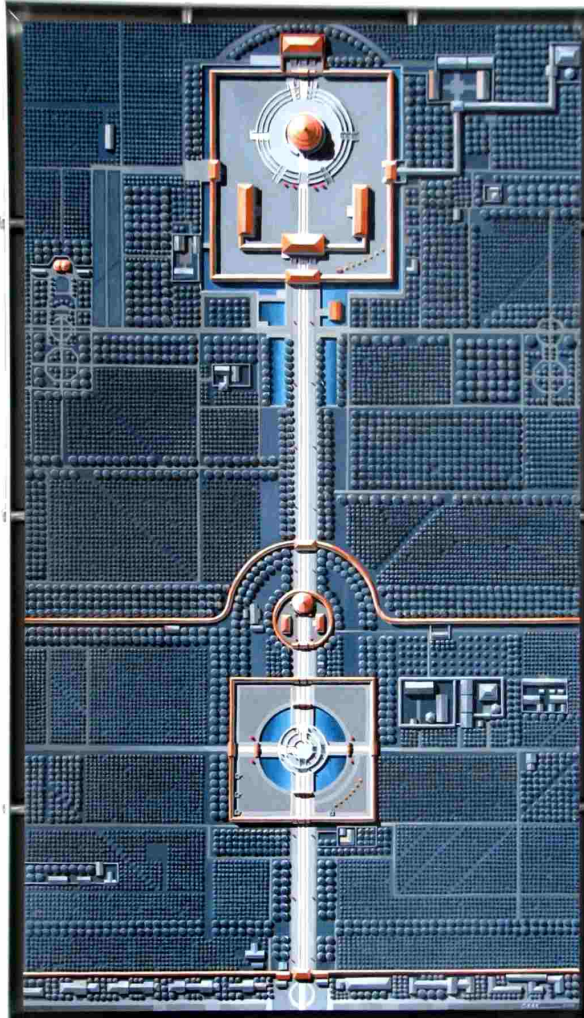
Or I might paint crop circles.

C. Michael Lewis

# C. MICHAEL LEWIS

3665'

5750'

CIRCUIT CITY
19" x 66" ACRYLIC ON BOARD 2009

Patterns of hierarchal architecture

The layout of these structures is based on 5000 year old archetypes, oriented to the invisible forces of the cosmos and tuned to the rhythms of the Ching by ancient geomancers.

The Temple of Heaven has been re-aligned over the horizon of the Forbidden City in this interpretation, supplanting Tiananmen Square as the axial counterpoint.
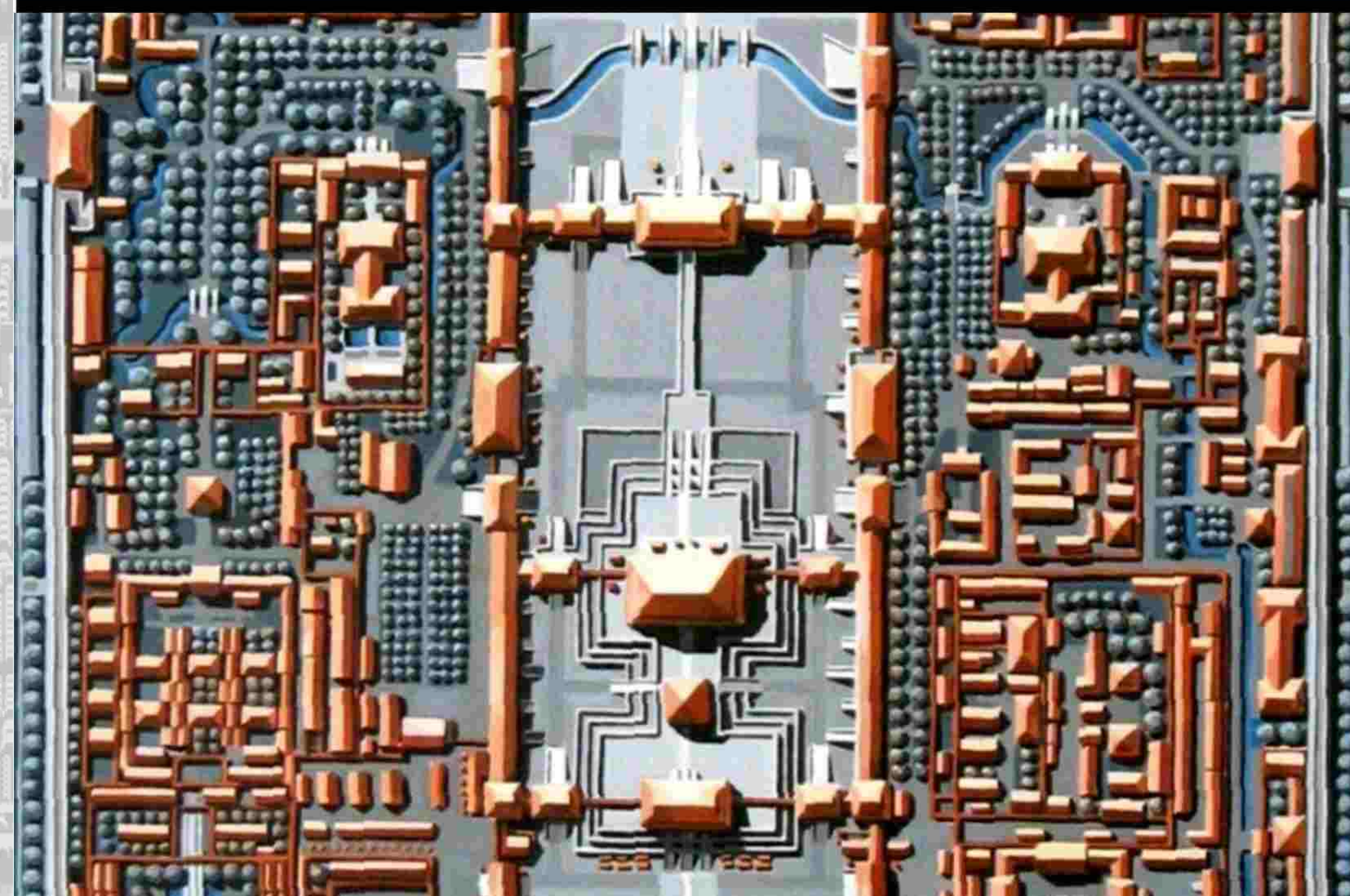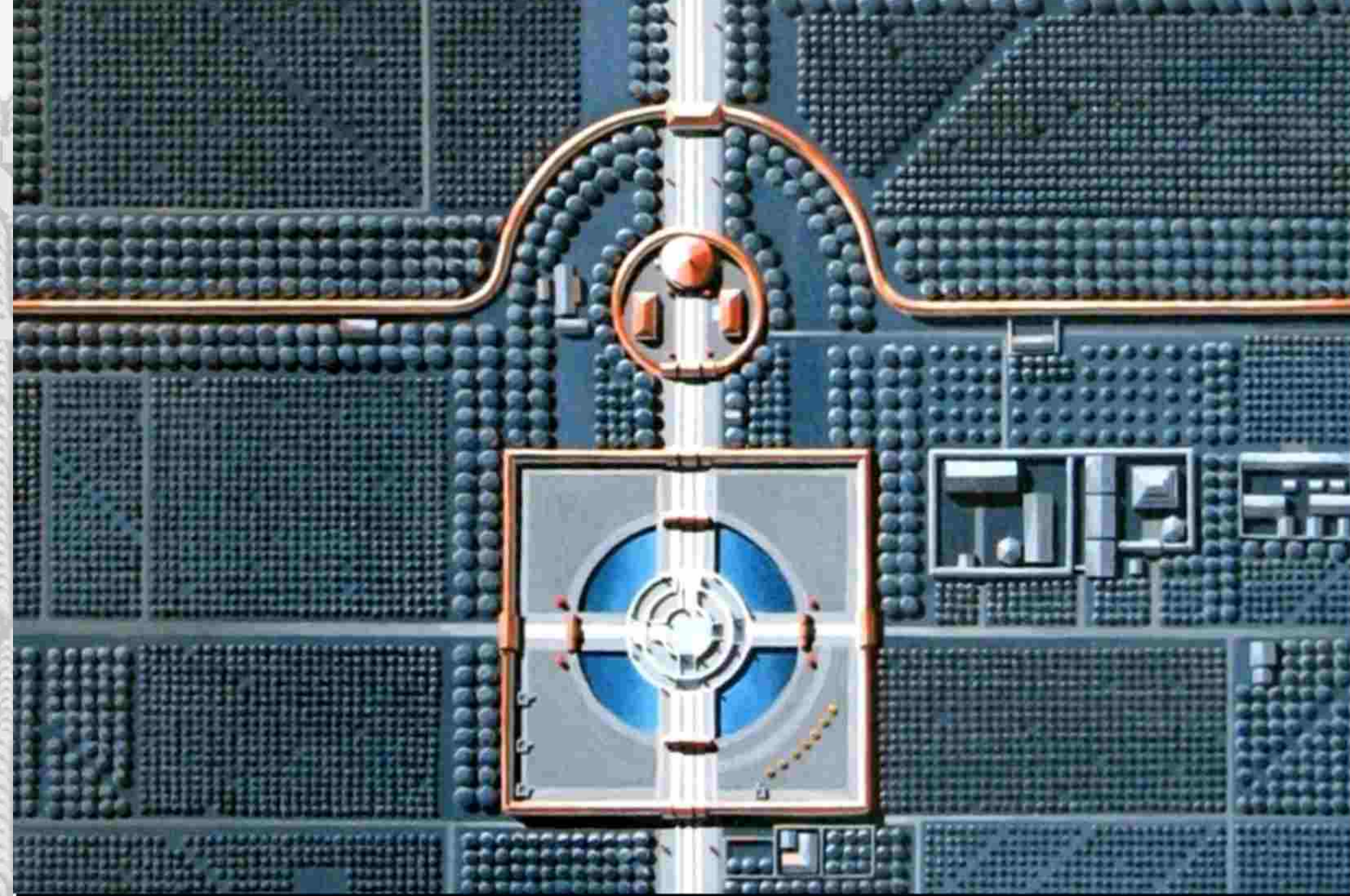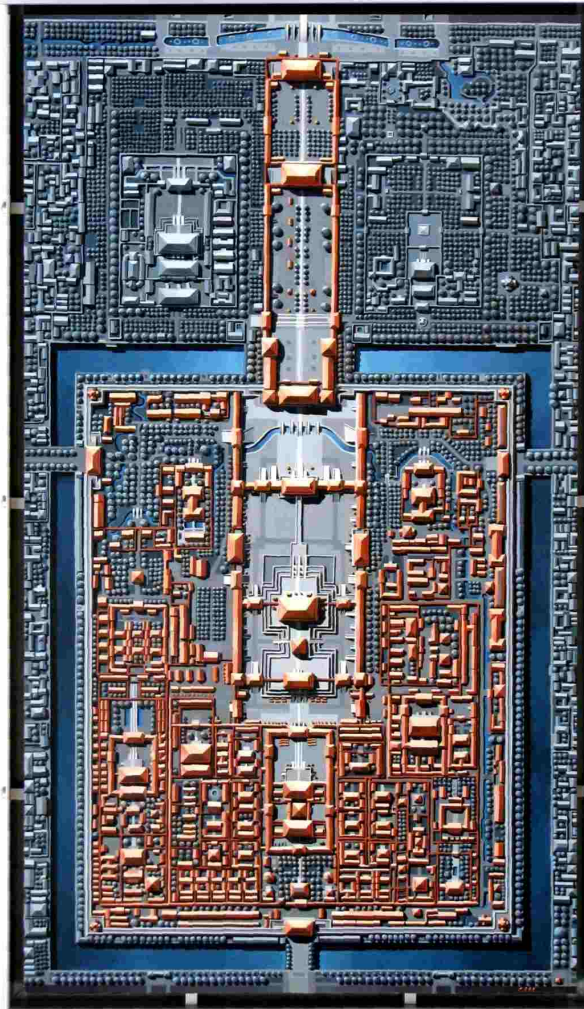
CITY OF GARBAGE
23" x 23" ACRYLIC ON BOARD 2012

2336'

CAIRO < EGYPT

Ancient labyrinth

A city of 20,000 grew in the rubble beneath the cliffs of the Mokattam quarries that built the pyramids. For the past hundred years the Coptic Zabaleens have gathered the city's trash and garbage and brought it here to sort, recycle and feed their pigs.

In 2009 Islamic pressure forced the government to outlaw the pigs, and 8000 tons of garbage a day began piling up in Cairo's streets, contributing, in no small way, to the Arab spring.

1740'

RIO DE JANEIRO < BRAZIL

RIO FAVELA
26" x 16" ACRYLIC ON BOARD 2010

These shanty towns grew illegally, hence organically, up the steep hillsides at the edges of the city, buildings piling one upon another without definable streets. Survival depended on creative infrastructure solutions, like the blue dots of water tanks and the tangle of impromptu electrical connections that light it with free electricity.

Poverty and isolation bred violence and drugs, but the tightness also fostered family and community. Police invaded in military style to forcibly evict the drug lords. The recent thinning evident was for large pylon buildings for a gondola system, but the next threat is gentrification...cheap prices, funky architecture, and spectacular views.
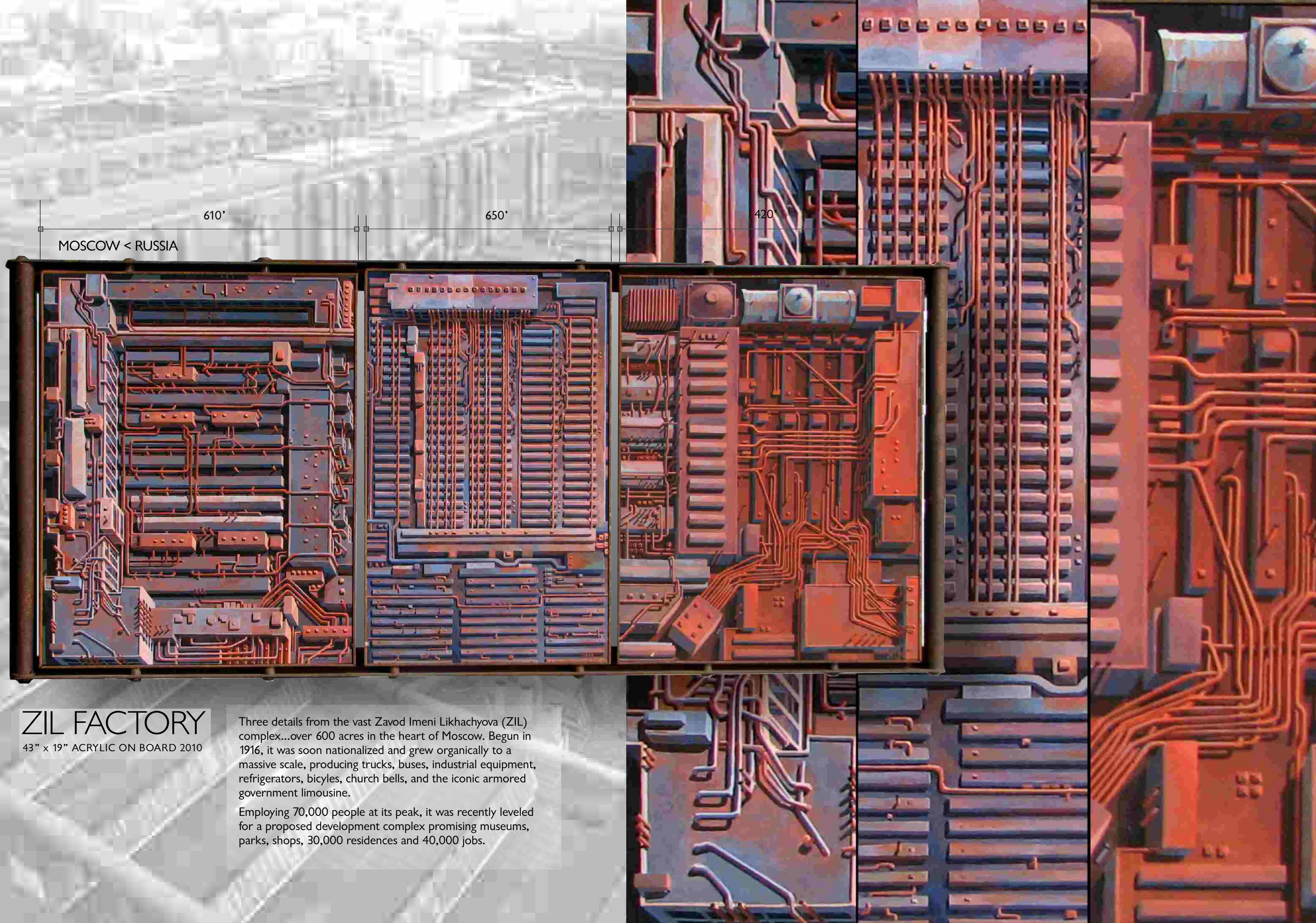
610' 650' 420'

MOSCOW < RUSSIA

ZIL FACTORY

43" x 19" ACRYLIC ON BOARD 2010

Three details from the vast Zavod Imeni Likhachyova (ZIL) complex...over 600 acres in the heart of Moscow. Begun in 1916, it was soon nationalized and grew organically to a massive scale, producing trucks, buses, industrial equipment, refrigerators, bicyles, church bells, and the iconic armored government limousine.

Employing 70,000 people at its peak, it was recently leveled for a proposed development complex promising museums, parks, shops, 30,000 residences and 40,000 jobs.

FORD WINDSOR

40" x 22" ACRYLIC ON BOARD 2016

The Ford Windsor Casting Plant began operations in 1934 and ended in 2007. The 500,000 s.f. facility was one of Canada's largest recyclers, melting down any form of scrap metal with iron in it, including other factories, and cast it into engine parts to be assembled next door.

In 2010 it was itself recycled. The lower half of the painting is now a parking lot.

WINDSOR < ONTARIO < CANADA

1200'
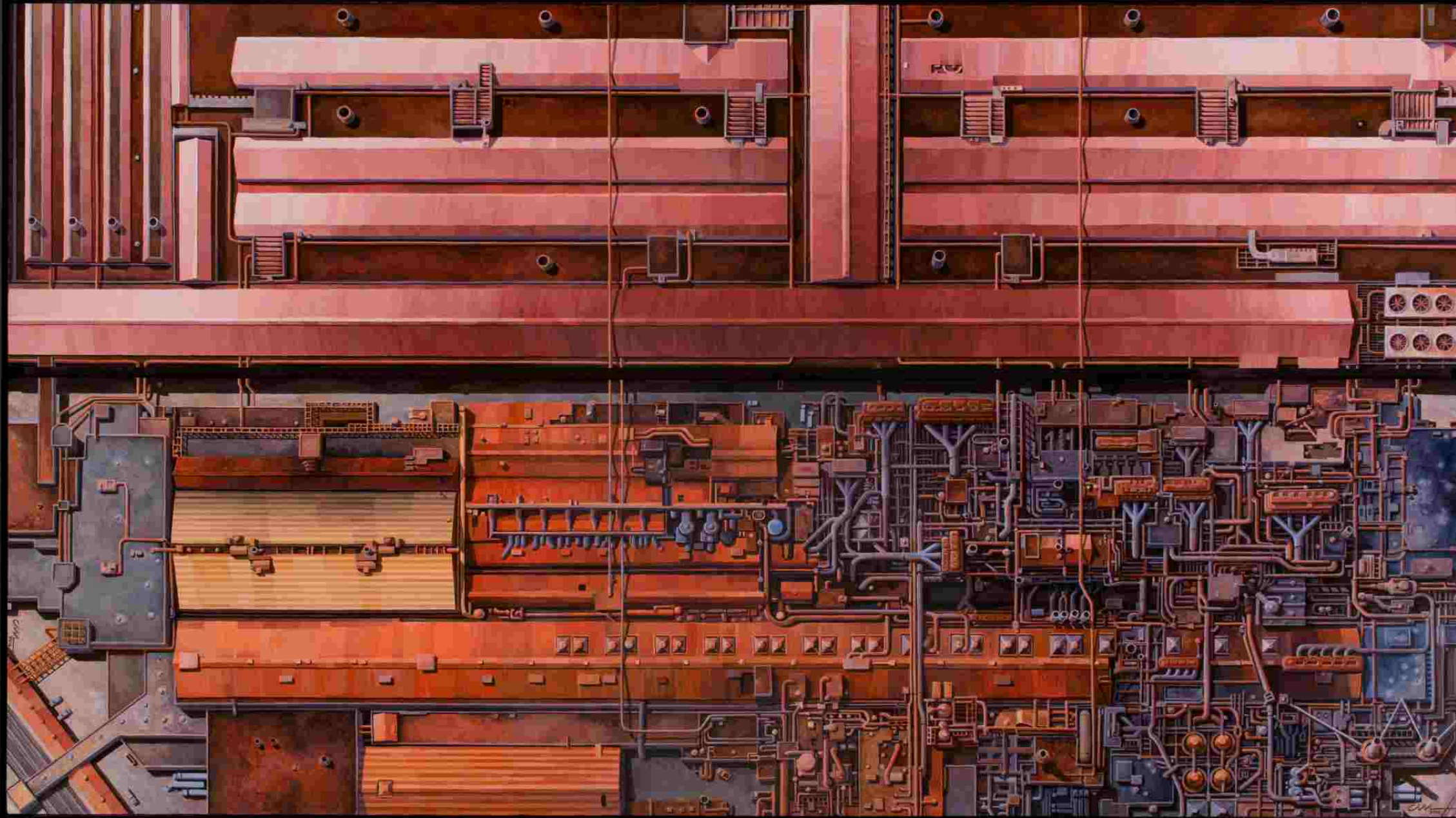
The ancient practice of smelting of rock into metal . . . iron ore into steel.

Steel is still the backbone of our industrial society, but these three giants of the rust belt are near the end of their useful lives, facing stiff competition from newer, more efficient facilities.

STEEL MILLS
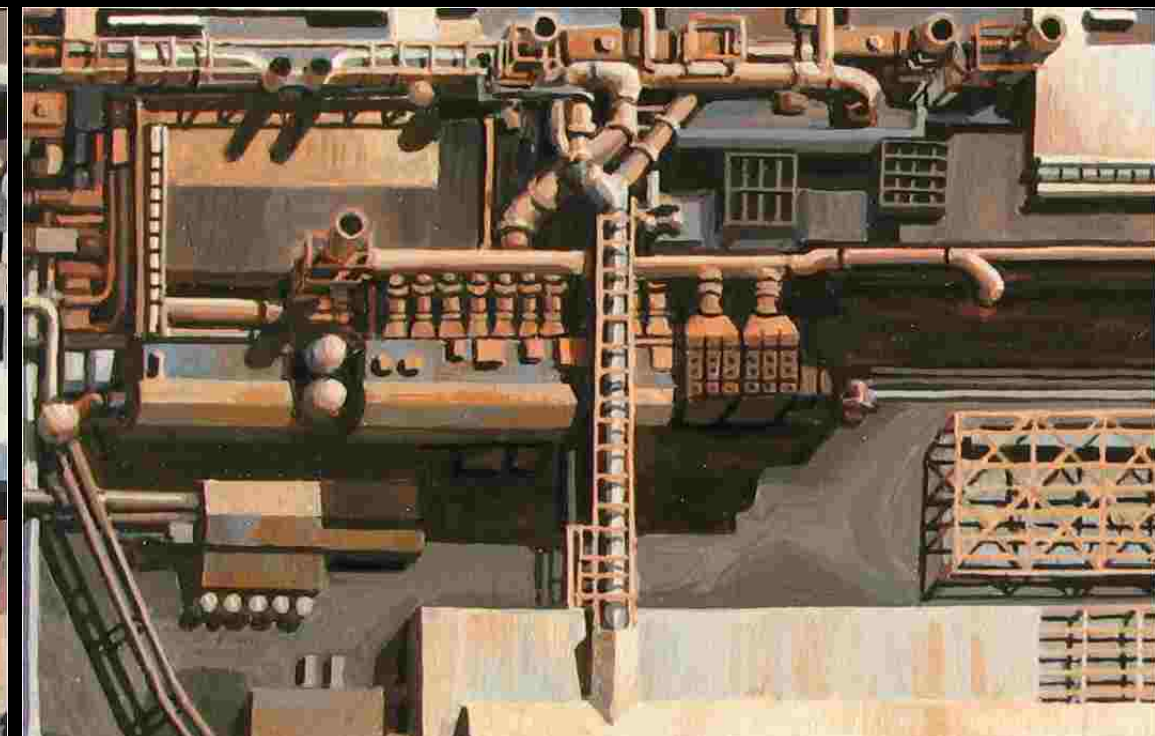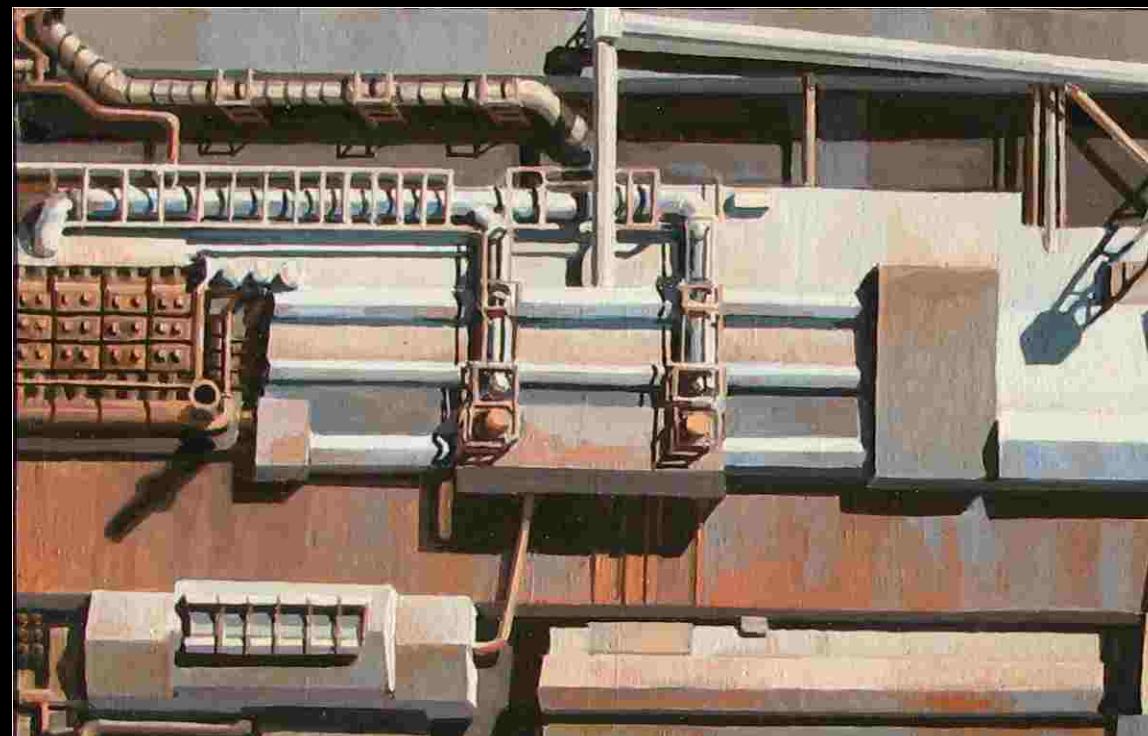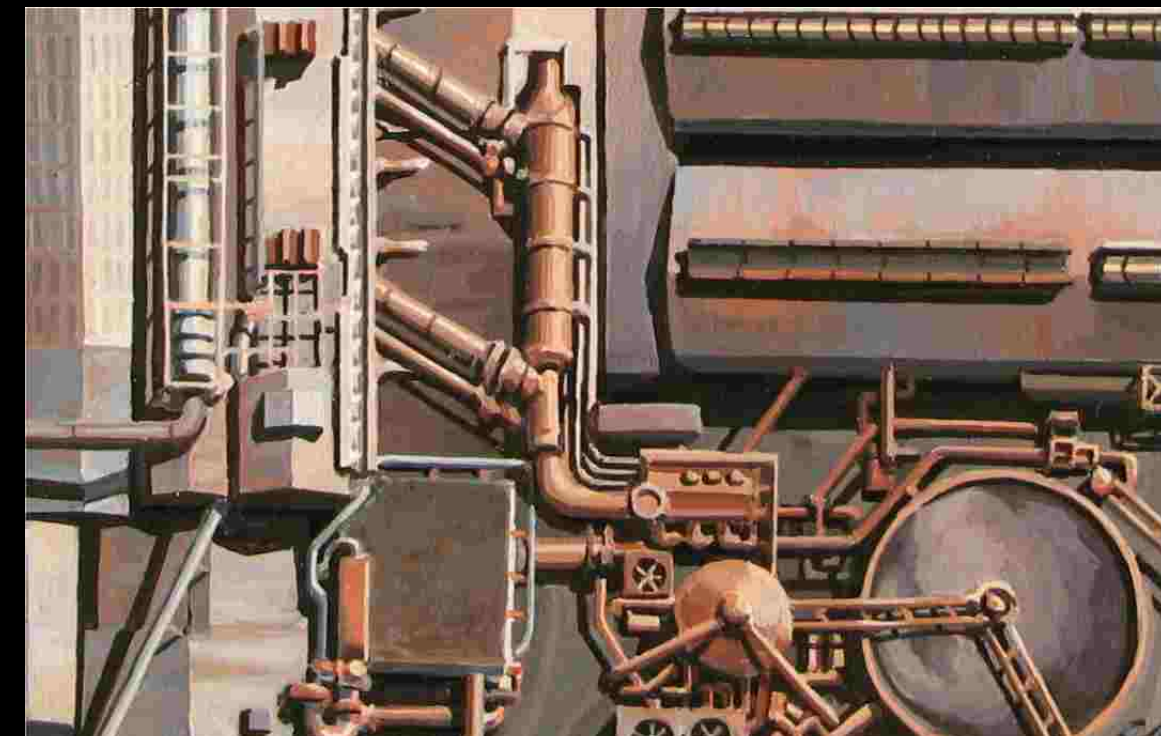52" x 11" ACRYLIC ON BOARD 2010

1085'   1560'   1370'

1720'
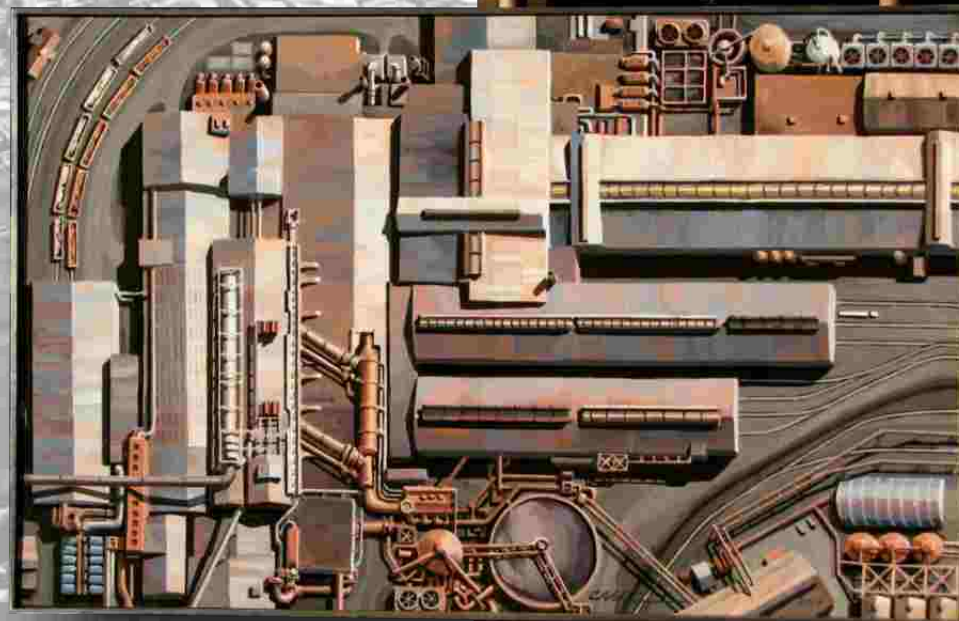
PITTSBURGH < PENNSYLVANIA   DETROIT < MICHIGAN   CLEVELAND < OHIO
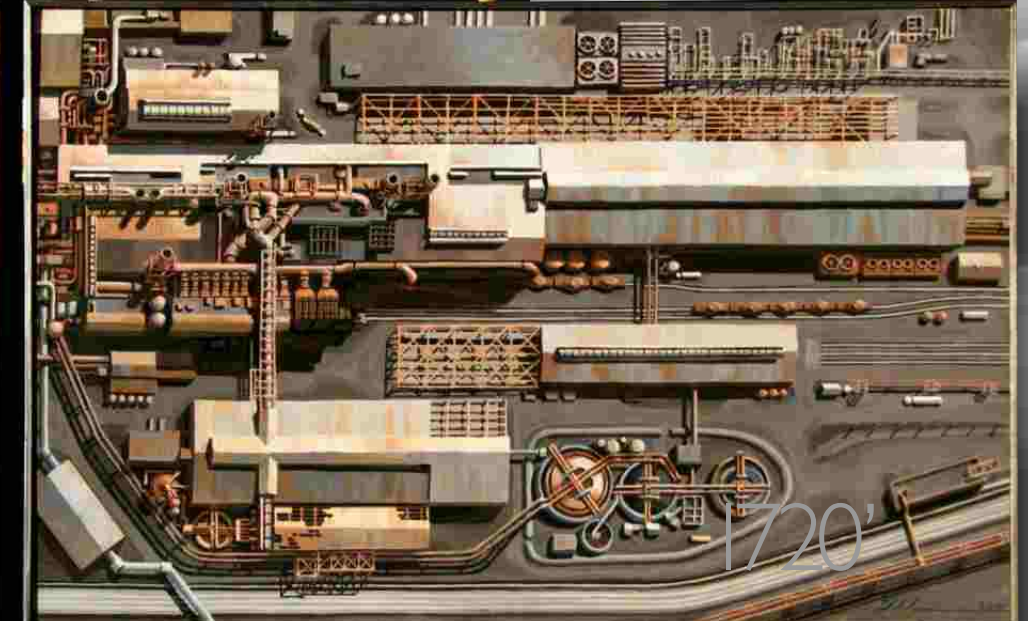
JAMSHEDPUR < INDIA

6500'

TATA
14" x 24" ACRYLIC ON BOARD 2020

Birthplace of Indian Steel

Jamshetji Tata spent the last years of the nineteenth century bringing to fruition his dream of the first steel mill in India. Although he died before production began in 1911, his sons continued and expanded the facility, and by 1939 it had become the largest steel plant in the British Empire.

Today it is still the largest in India, the heart of a global corporation, and the core of Jamshedpur, a planned industrial city of one million named after it's founder.
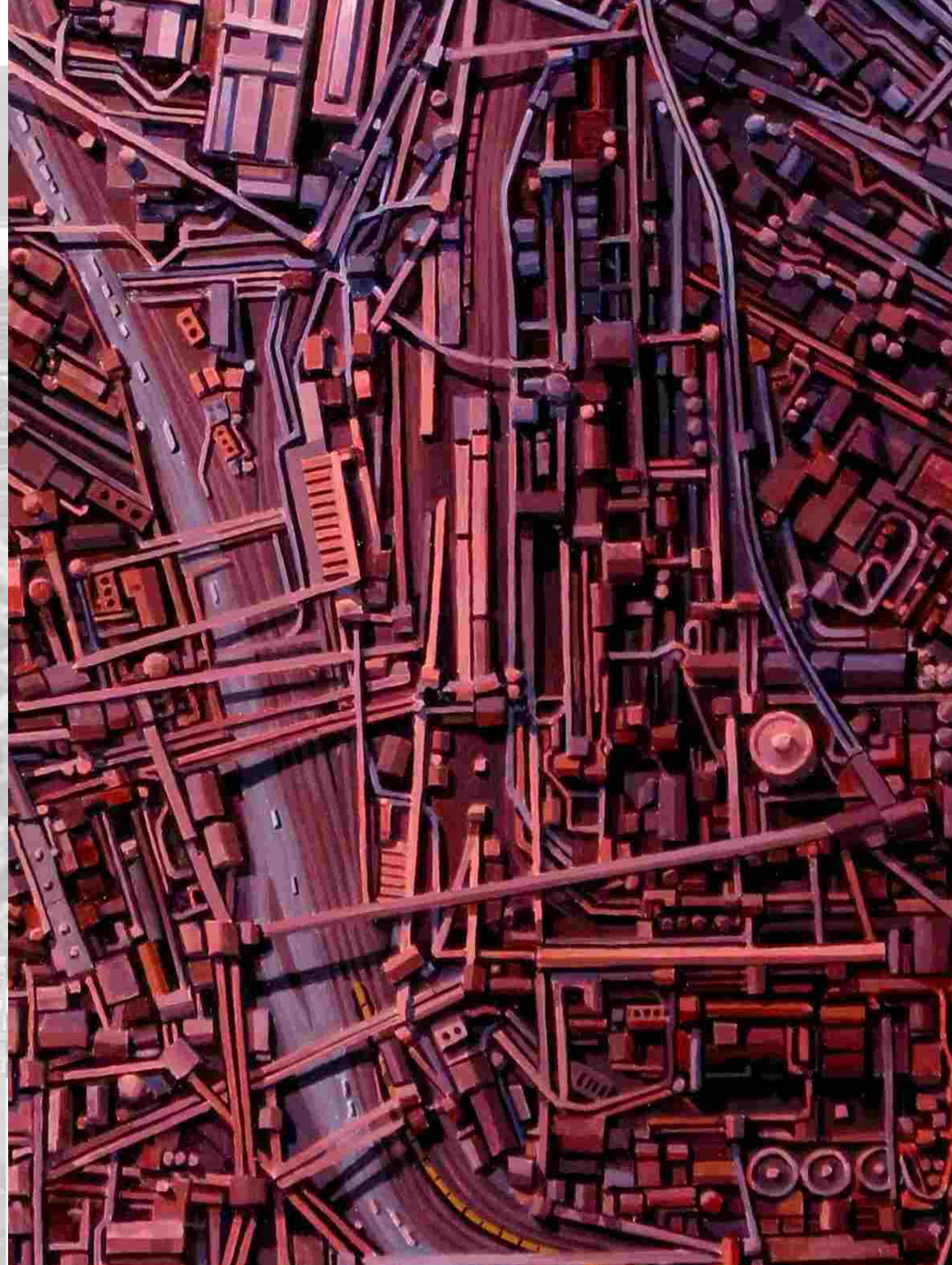
ZIGGARAT OF UR
16" x 48" ACRYLIC ON BOARD 2016

675'

23,700'

Cradle of Civilization

Inside the security perimeter of Tellil air base, the terminus of the allied advance in the first Gulf War, is the 4400 year old Ziggurat of Ur. This temple to the moon goddess Nanna was thoroughly excavated, studied and pillaged by British archeologists in the 1920's, then abandoned to desert wind and sand until 'renovated' by Saddam.

This general area is considered to be the birthplace of agriculture, cities, the wheel, writing, science, math, astrology, astronomy, government, law, religion (the birthplace of Abraham), the board game (Royal Game of Ur), and, ultimately... organized warfare.
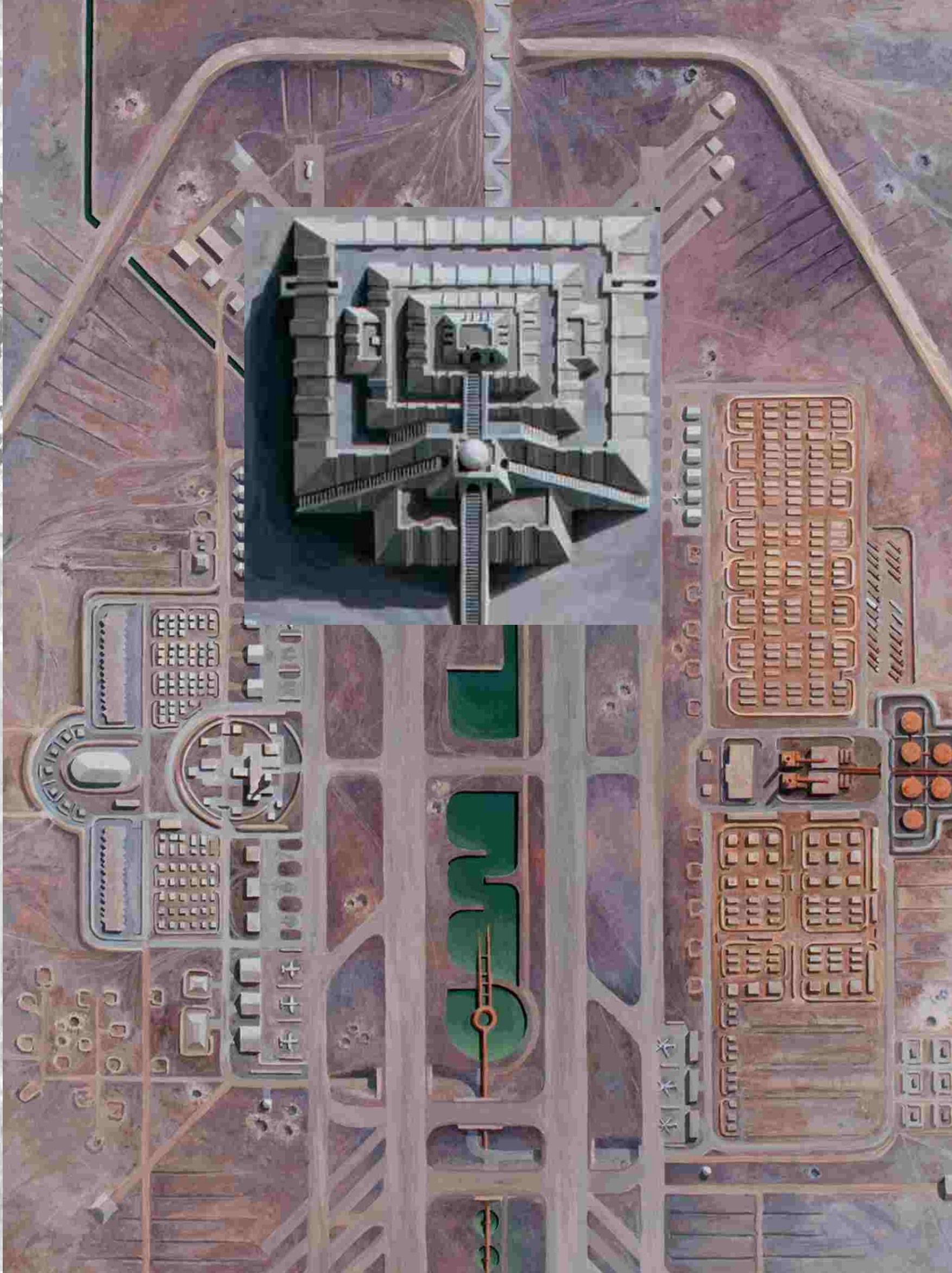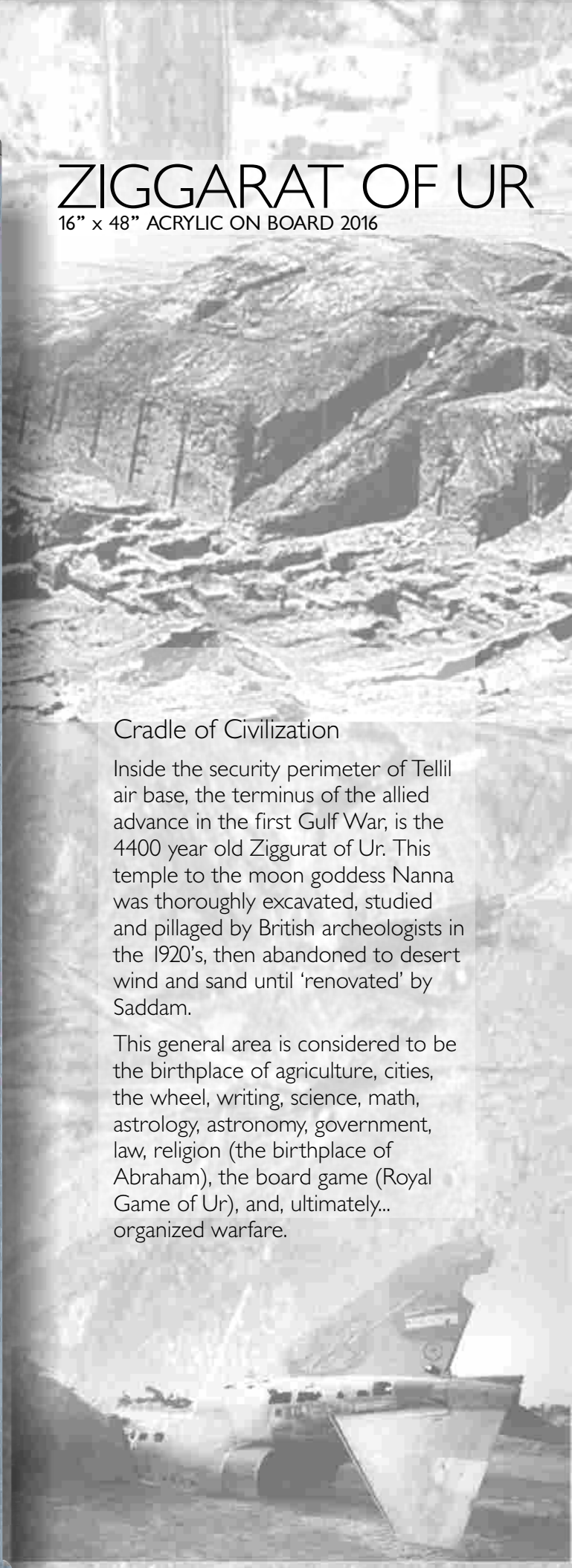
FERRY TERMINAL

18" x 29" ACRYLIC ON BOARD 2010

River traffic

The Sadarghat Laumnch Terminal in Dhaka is alive with the urgent chaos of the Buriganga River, a tributary of the Ganges and the lifeblood of Bangladesh. 50,000 people a day board the triple decker ferries and countless others traverse the murky, shallow water in small wooden boats.
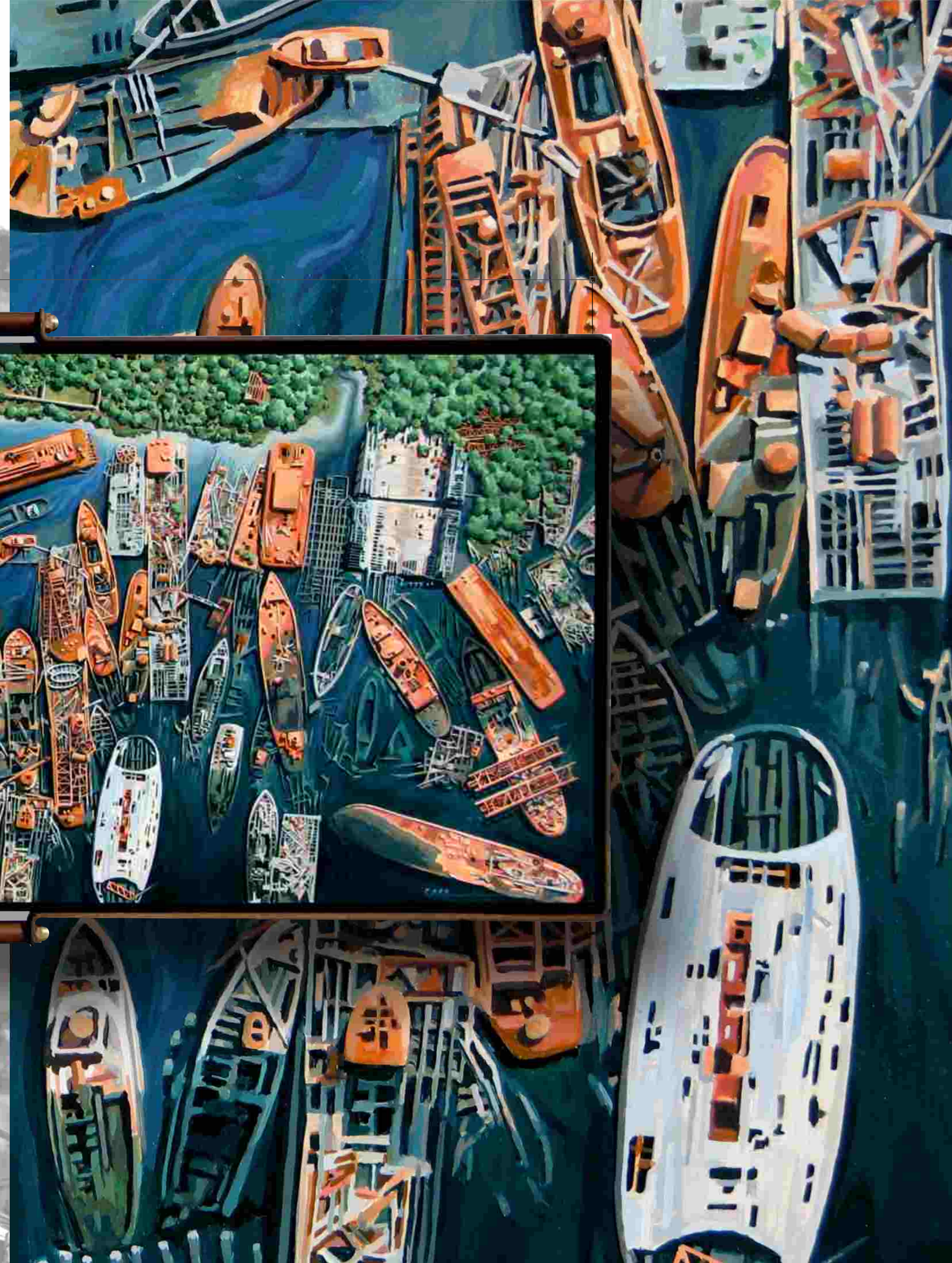
2070'

SHIP GRAVEYARD

Terminal destination

At the end of their useful lives, these ships were brought here to be stripped for parts then dismantled for their raw materials, but have somehow survived to become historic relics.

1650'

STATEN ISLAND < NEW YORK < USA

33" x 15" ACRYLIC ON BOARD 2013

2000'

3000'

MAKOKO/
OKOBABA

12" x 36" ACRYLIC ON BOARD 2016

Waterworld

A fishing village of wood shanties on stilts since the 18th century, Makoko has exploded...population estimates vary from 40,000 to 300,000. Nobody really knows, because they are all illegal squatters, wholly independent of the local authorities, who consider it an embarrassment and health risk, and have tried repeatedly to demolish it for redevelopment.
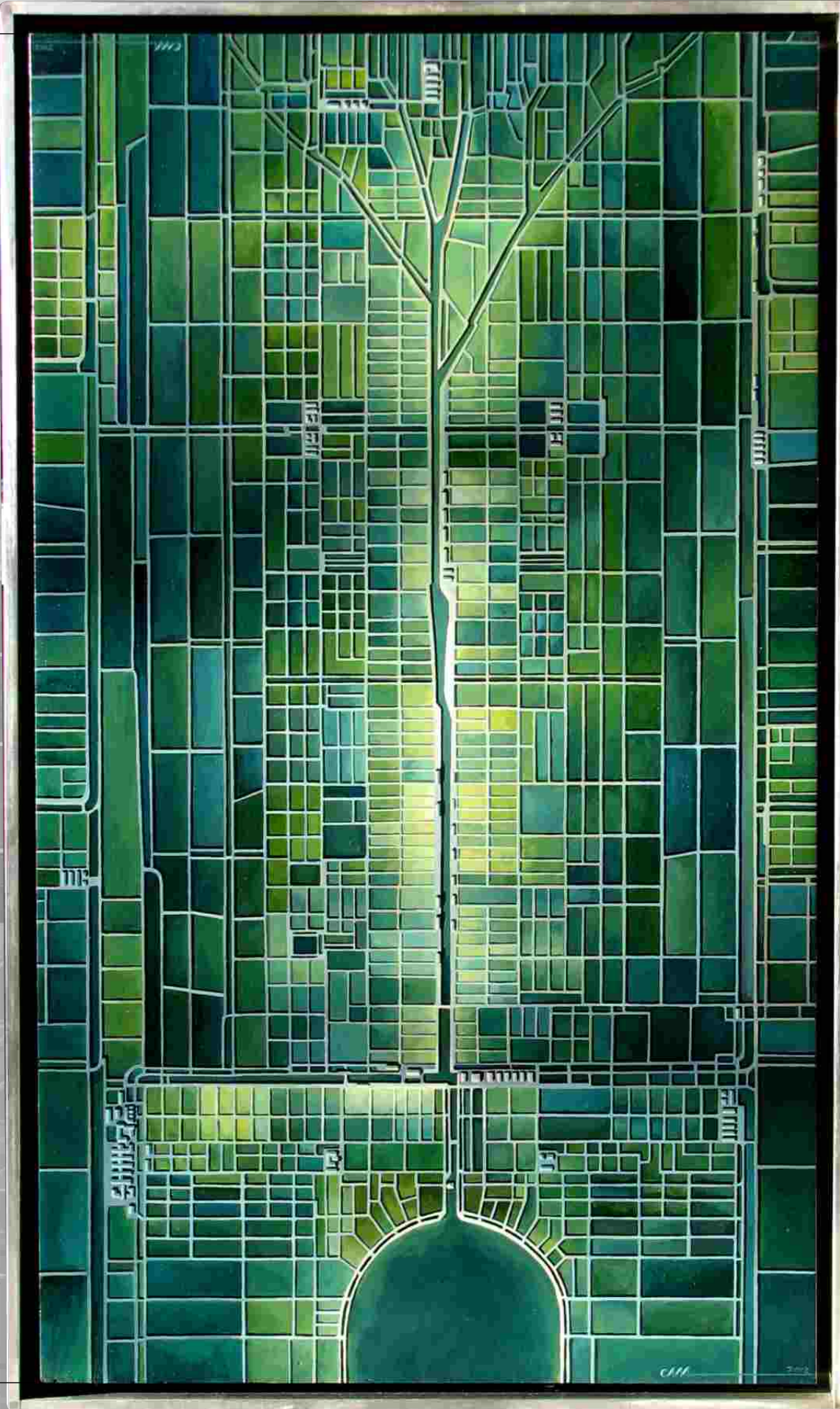
The community, though, has resisted and survived by developing its own unique tribal culture and infrastructure.

The nearby sawmills of Okobaba, though, have succumbed to external pressure, and agreed, in principal, to make way for new housing and parks.
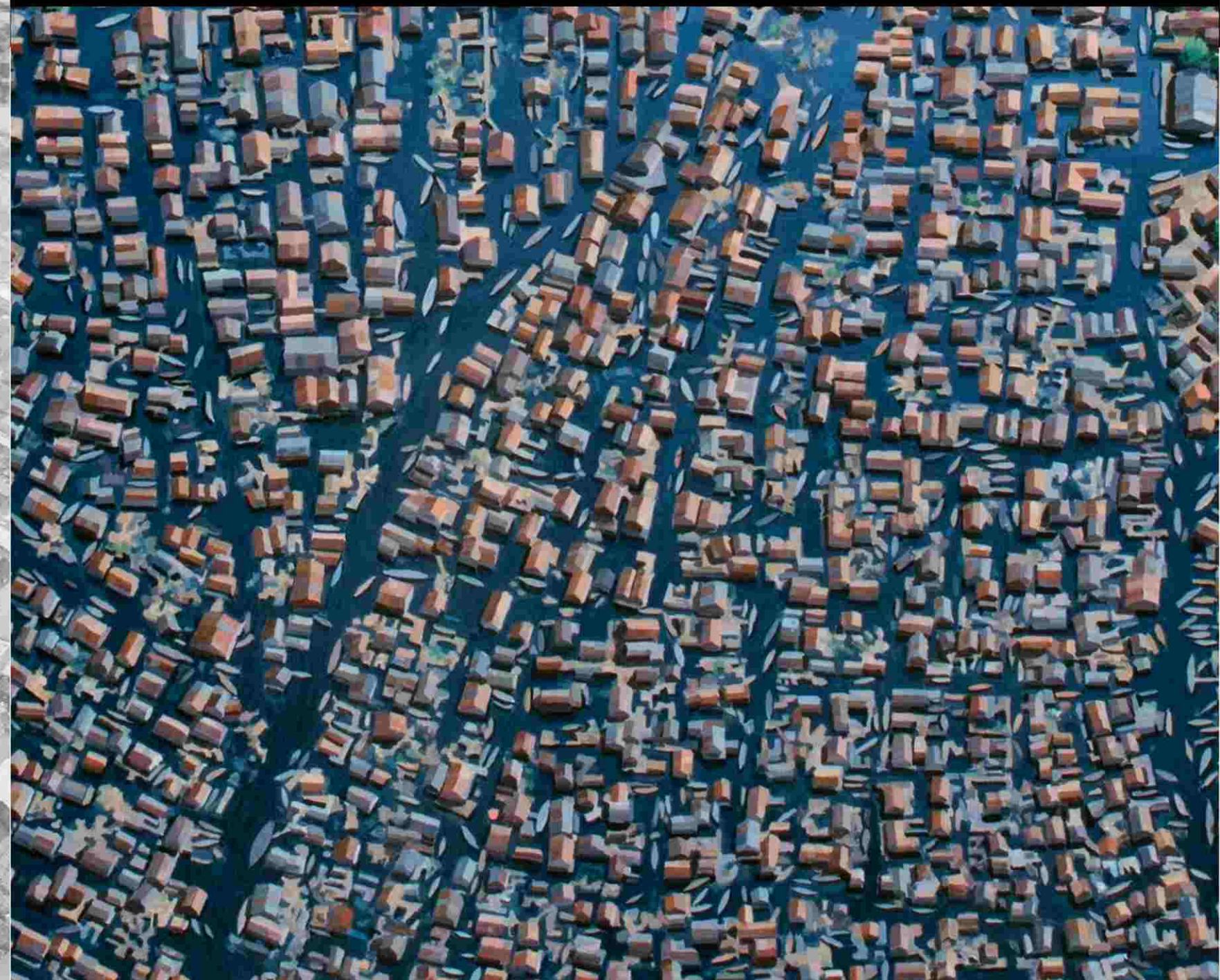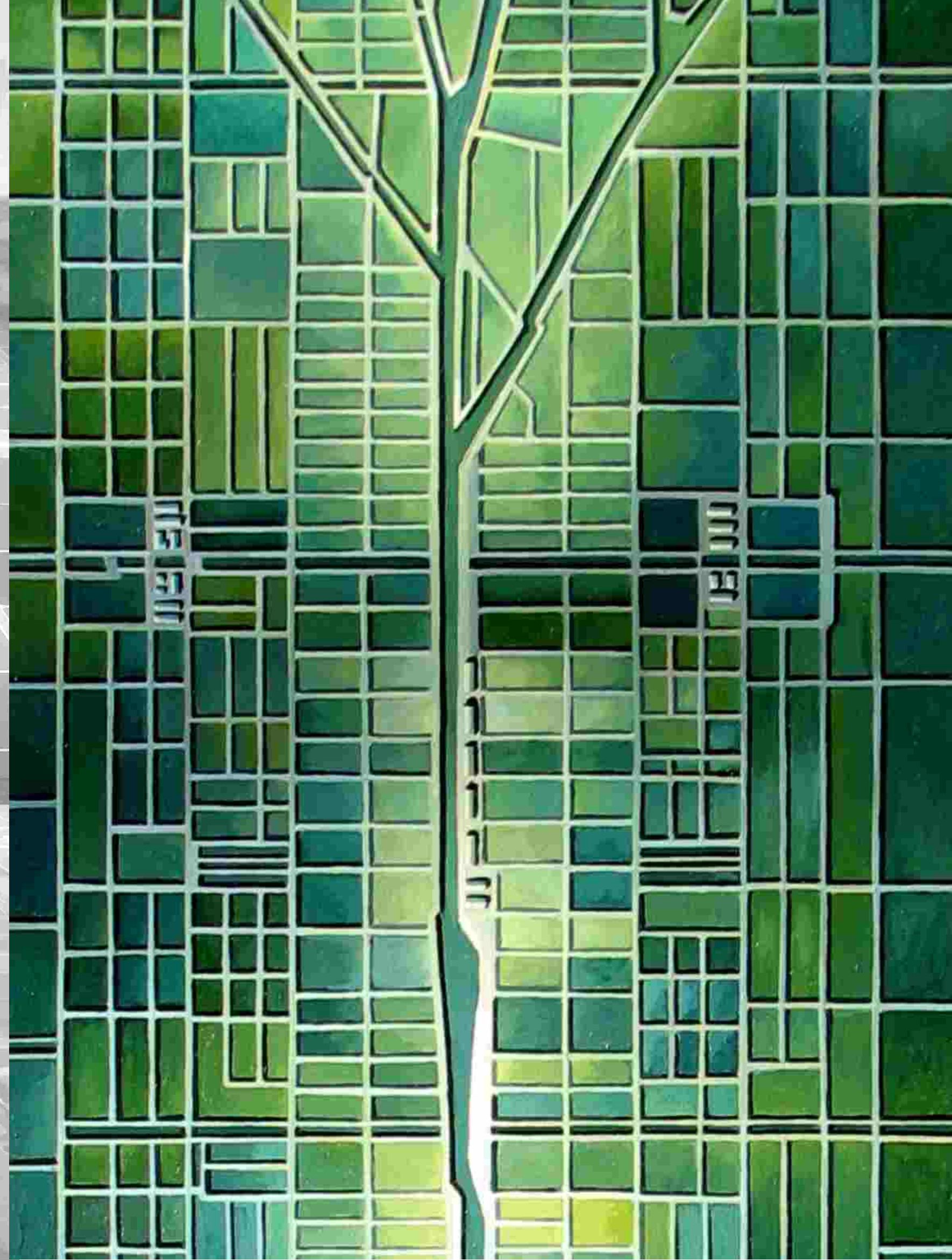
12,700'

LAGOONS
16" x 26" ACRYLIC ON BOARD
2012

Industrial lagoons, reservoirs, rice paddies, shrimp farms - redefining the natural surface flow of water through a rectilinear grid system of causeways, locks, gates, bridges and roadways.

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THREE FREQUENCIES OF HOLES IN LINES

54" x 18" ACRYLIC ON BOARD 2016

Across the vast wastelands between the Gobi and Taklamakan deserts, there are vehicle tracks in various repeating patterns, interwoven with what appear to be holes, grouped and spaced just randomly enough to suggest human activity. In this case, they extend for 33 miles in either direction
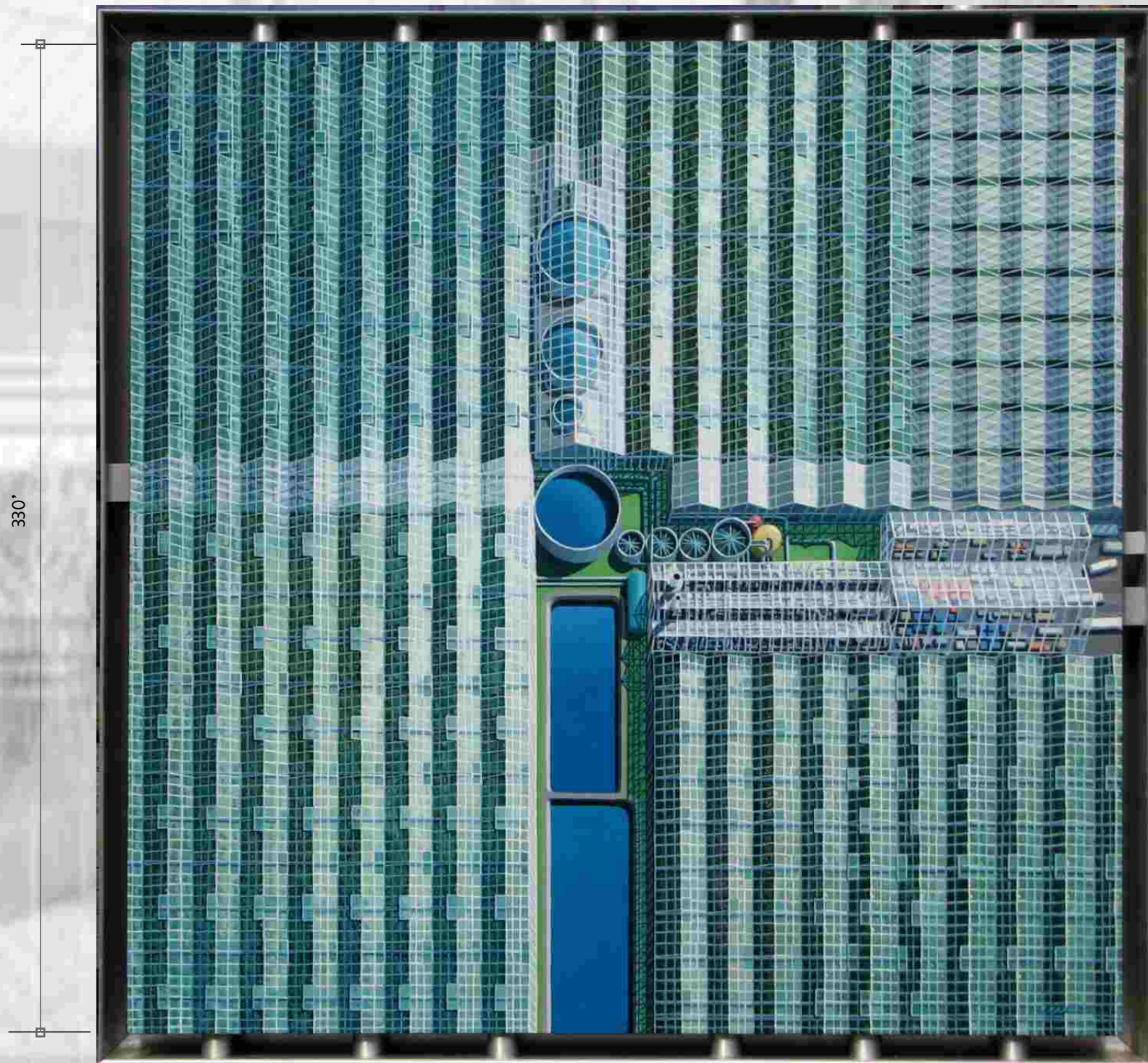
It appears that someone is looking for something.

11,700' 5500' 1500'

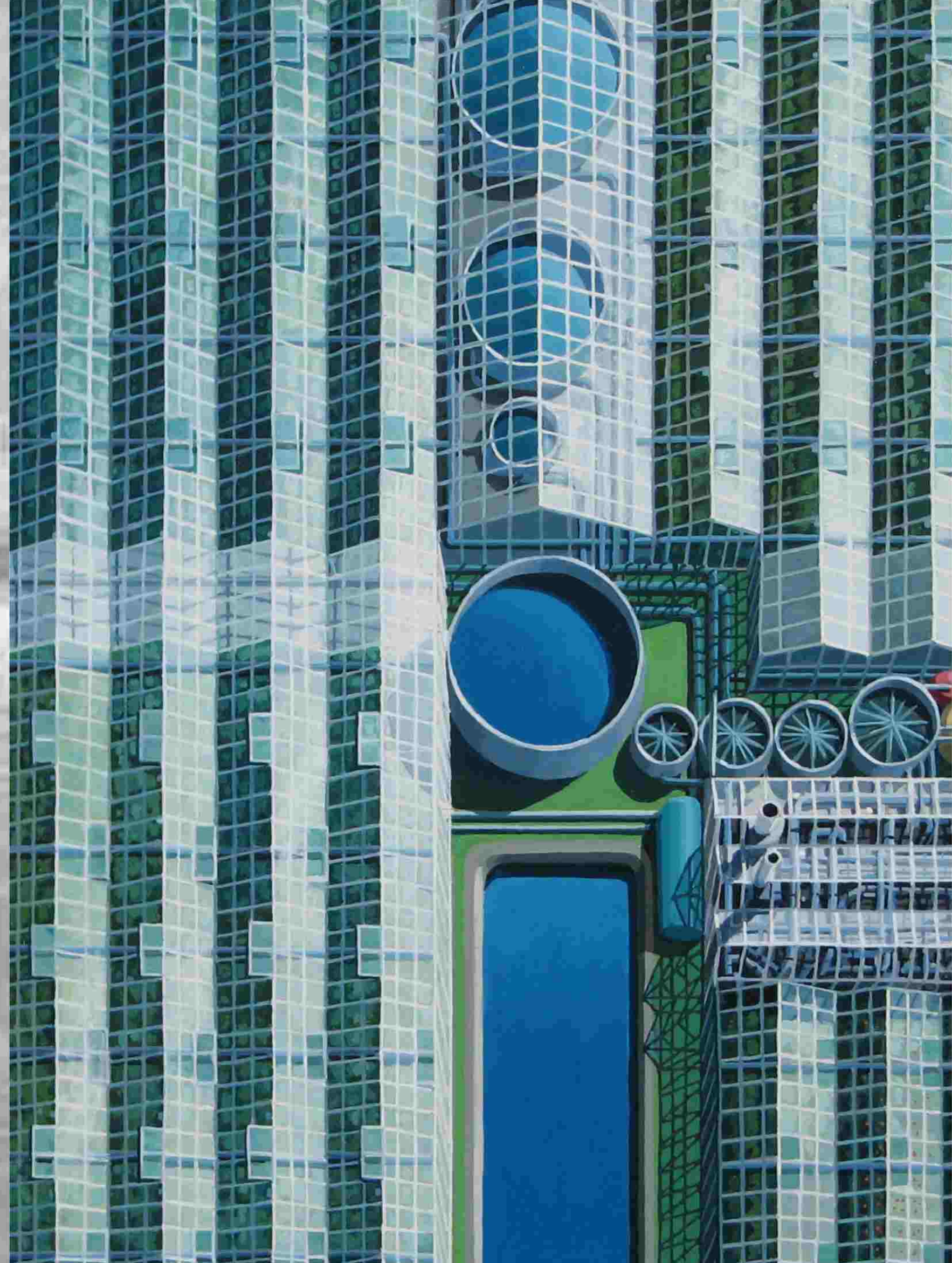Image © 2016 DigitalGlobe
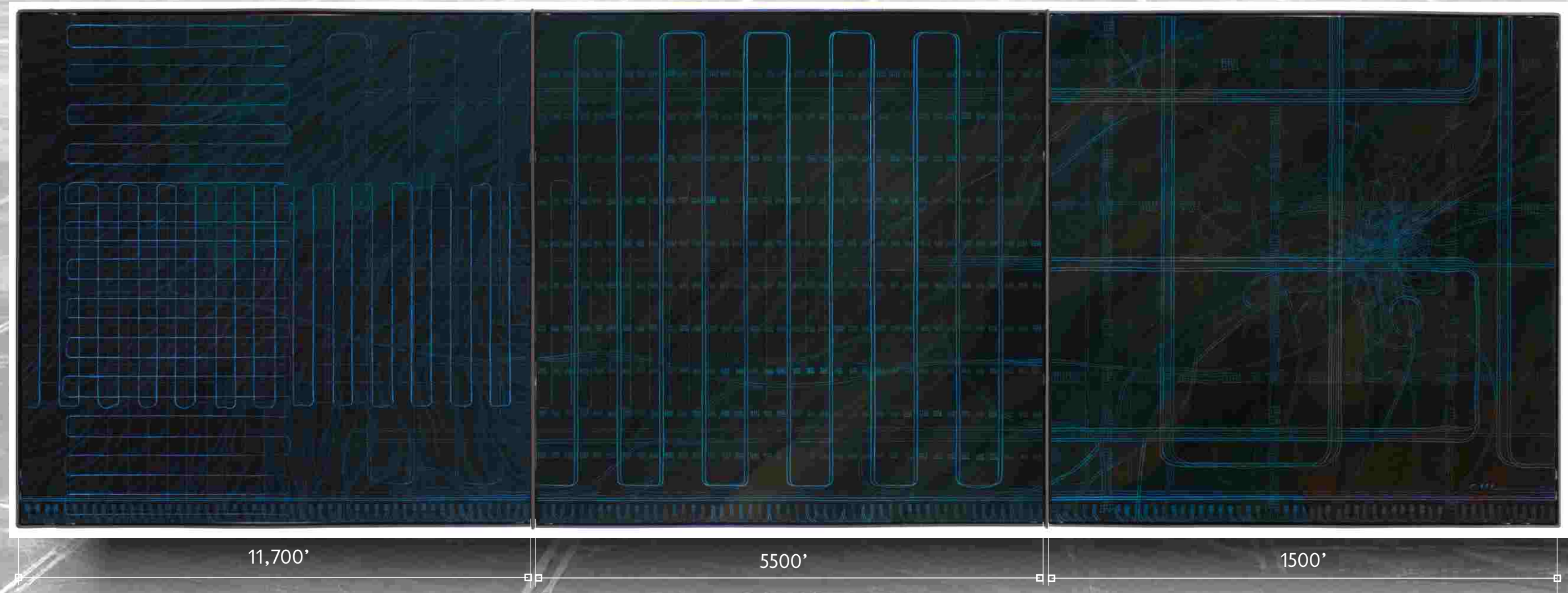
GREENHAUS

24" x 24" ACRYLIC ON BOARD 2010

ROTTERDAM < NETHERLANDS

330'

Bio factories... growing machines... Pumping nutrients, removing wastes, packing and shipping product.

There are 12,000 acres of greenhouses in Rotterdam growing fruit, vegetables and flowers, and sequestering some of the excess CO2 'greenhouse gas' from nearby refineries.

TRAIN SHED
23" x 35" ACRYLIC ON BOARD 2019

ST. LOUIS < MISSOURI < USA

1000'

When it opened in 1894, St. Louis' Union Station was the world's largest and busiest railroad station and its 11.5 acre trainshed was the largest roof span in the world. At its height, the station combined the services of 22 railroads, the most of any single terminal in the world, handling 100,000 passengers a day.

But the world changed. Interstate highways and modern airports reduced passenger rail to a nostalgic inconvenience, and in 1978 the last train left the station. After a decade of rusting neglect, the magnificent steel structure was reborn as the soaring canopy of a commercial mall with a lake, trees, theaters, restaurants, shops, a luxury hotel, and ultimately, an aquarium.

775'
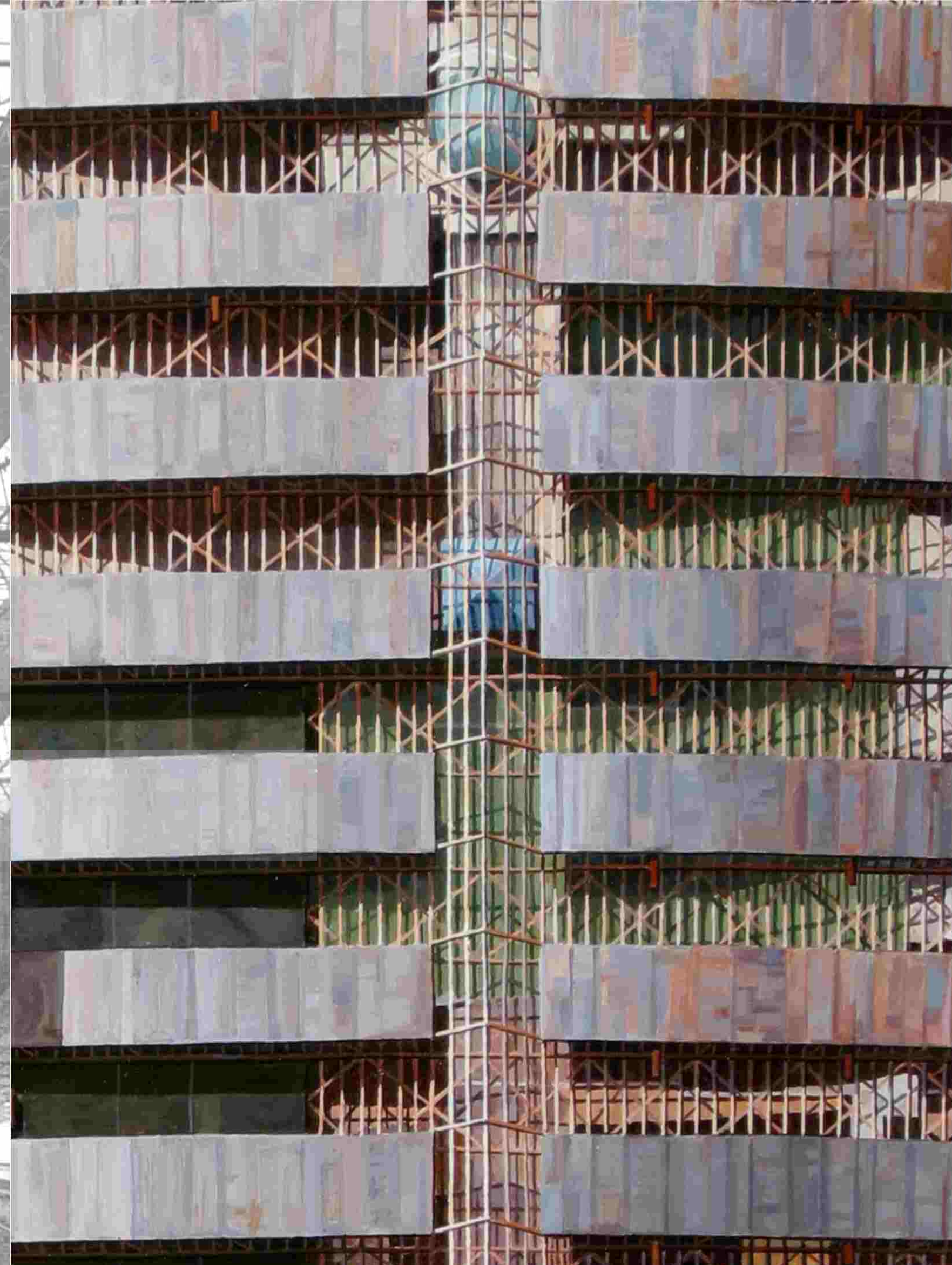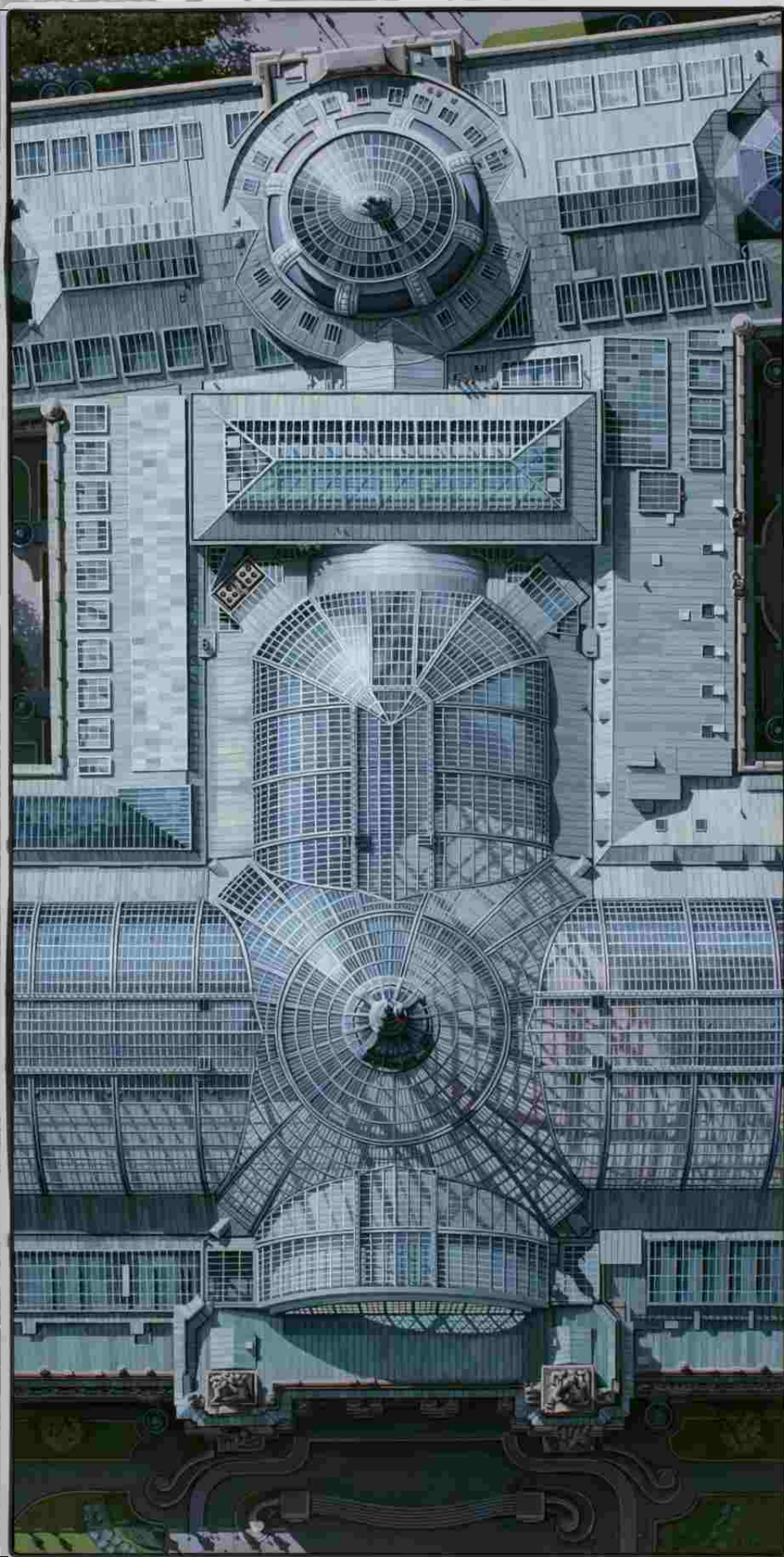
GRAND PALAIS
12" x 36" ACRYLIC ON BOARD 2017

Last of the great crystal palaces, this temple of art and technology was built for the 1900 Exposition Universelle 1nternationale in Paris. Considered a triumph of Art Nouveau, it bridged the 19th and 20th centuries, showcasing the work of Auguste Rodin, Henri Matisse, Rudolf Diesel and Ferdinand Porsche.

Extensive and ongoing restorations have enabled it to continue it's original mission, currently showing 140 exhibits a year.
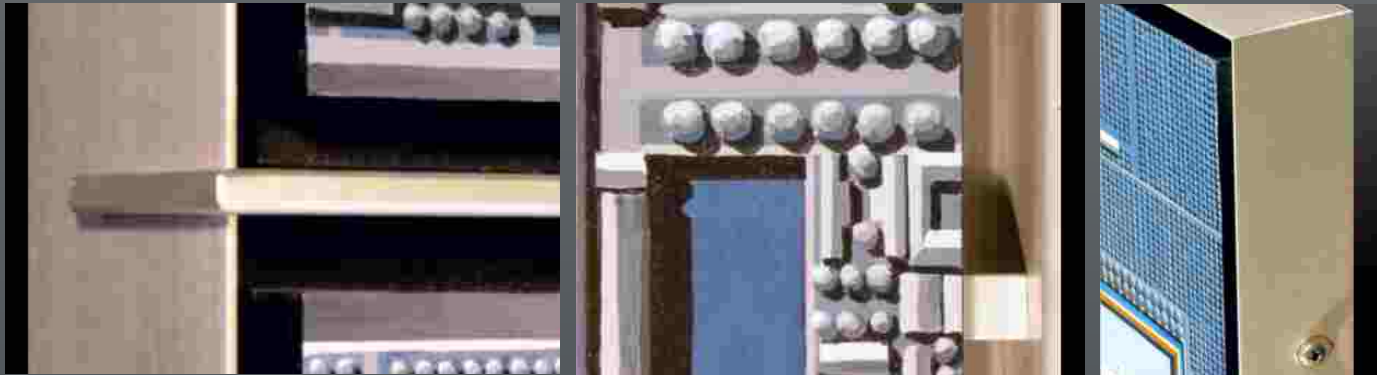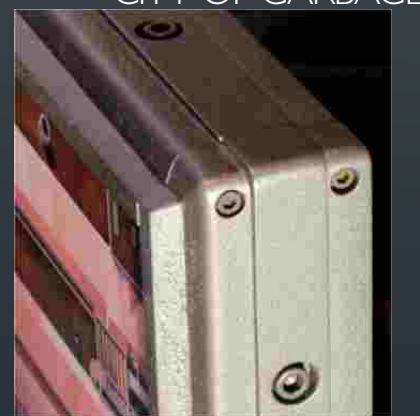
CIRCUIT CITY

RIO FAVELA

CITY OF GARBAGE

ZIL FACTORY

FORD WINDSOR

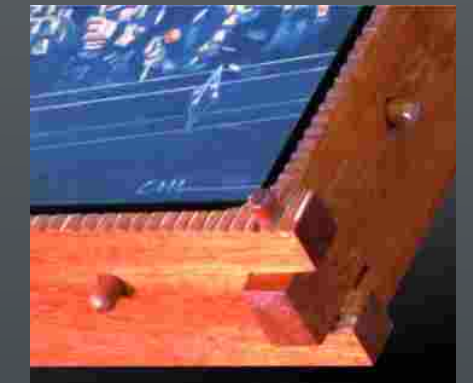STEEL MILLS
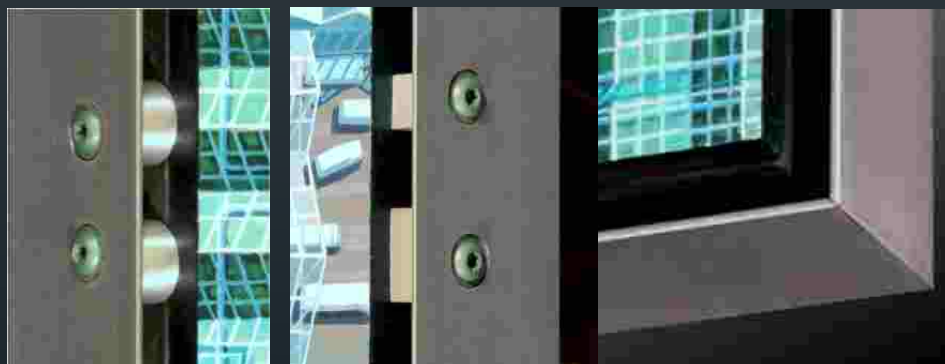
ZIGGARAT OF UR

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3 FREQUENCIES OF HOLES

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GRAND PALAIS