

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.



[cmichaellewis.com](http://cmichaellewis.com)


# EARTHS CAPES

PAINTINGS OF OUR BUILT ENVIRONMENT FROM ABOVE



C. MICHAEL LEWIS



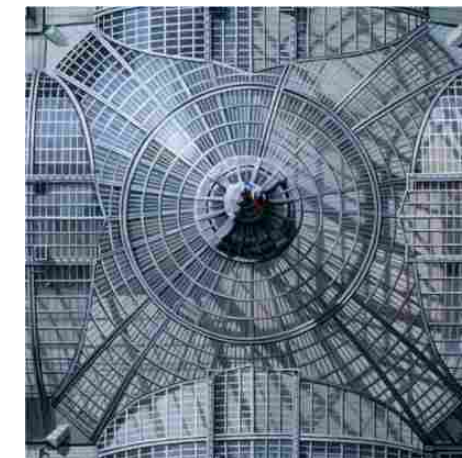


I'm a painter and illustrator with a background in architecture, planning and engineering. Somewhere in college I developed a fascination with the rendered site plan....the big picture, the map, the mandala, the world view, that shows things that were, are, and might be in their proper perspective . . . 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 14,000 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



# CIRCUIT CITY

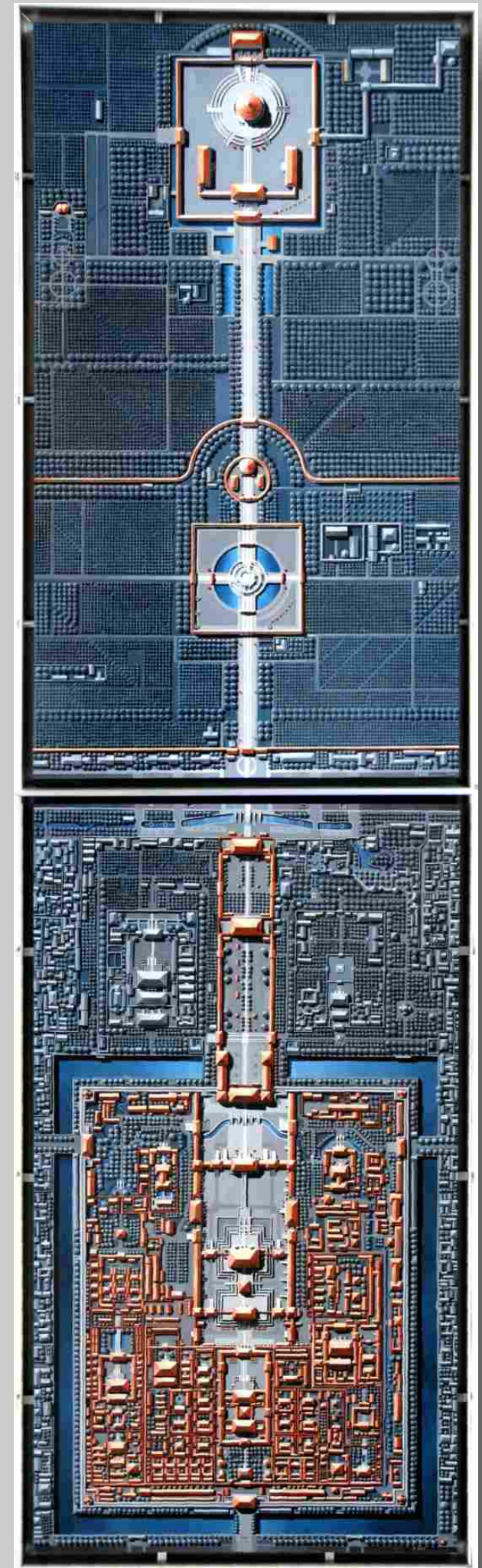
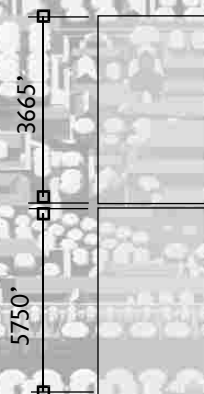
19" x 66" ACRYLIC ON BOARD 2009

BEIJING < CHINA

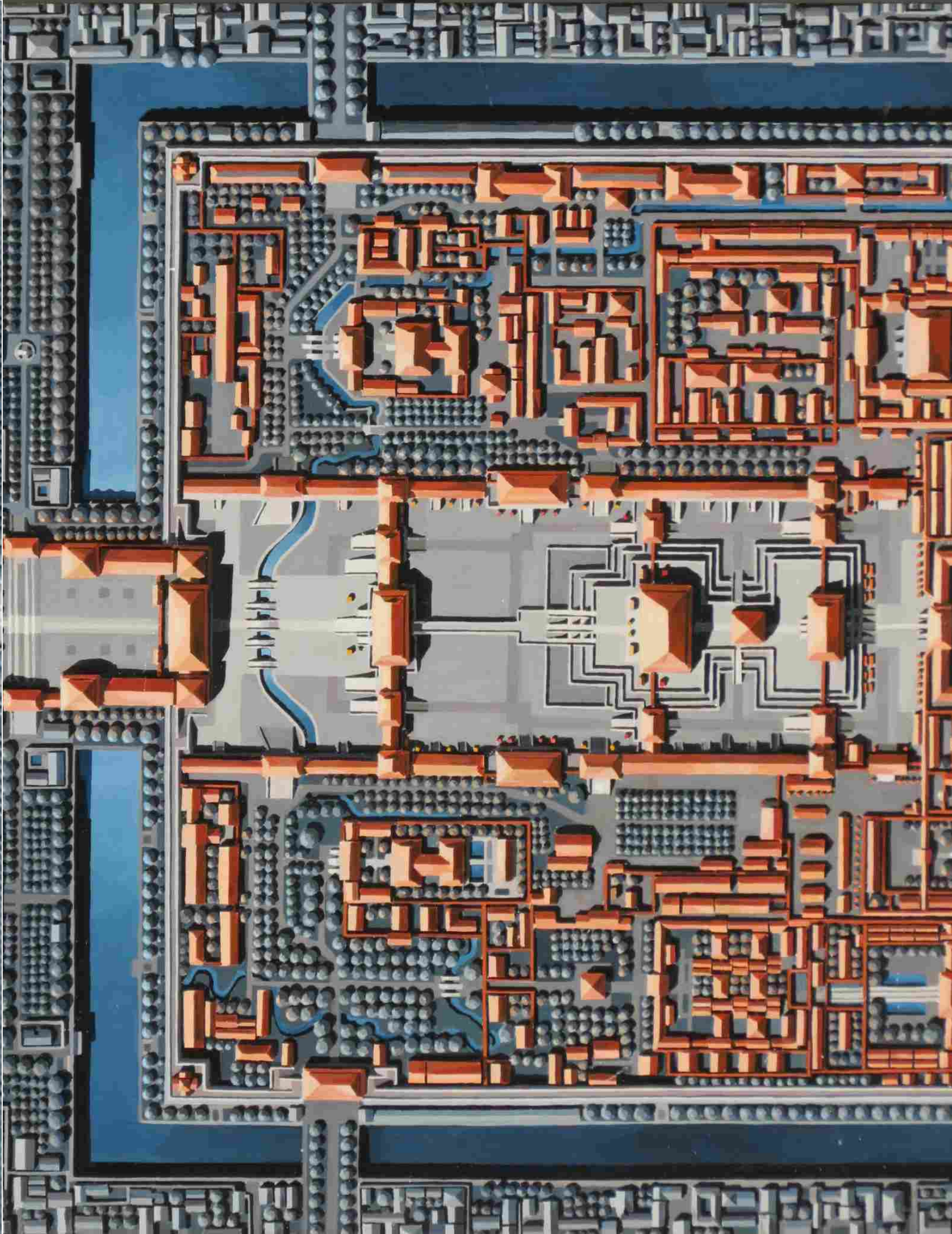
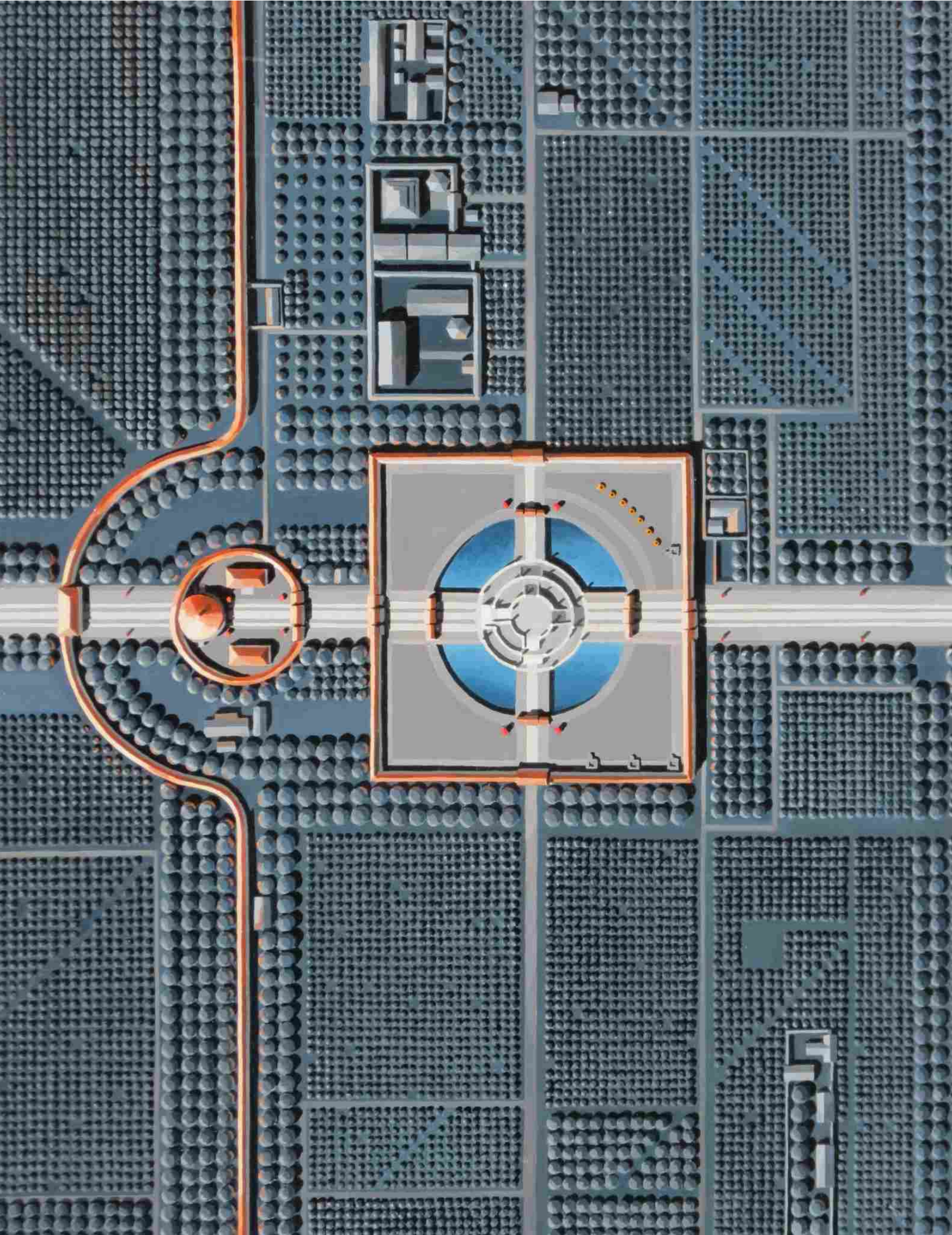
Patterns of hierarchal architecture

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

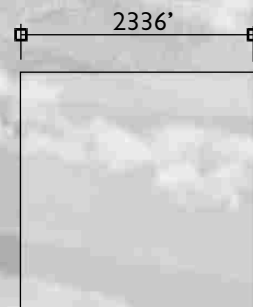
23" x 23" ACRYLIC  
ON BOARD 2012

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.









# RIO FAVELA

26" x 16" ACRYLIC ON BOARD 2010

RIO DE JANEIRO < BRAZIL

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.









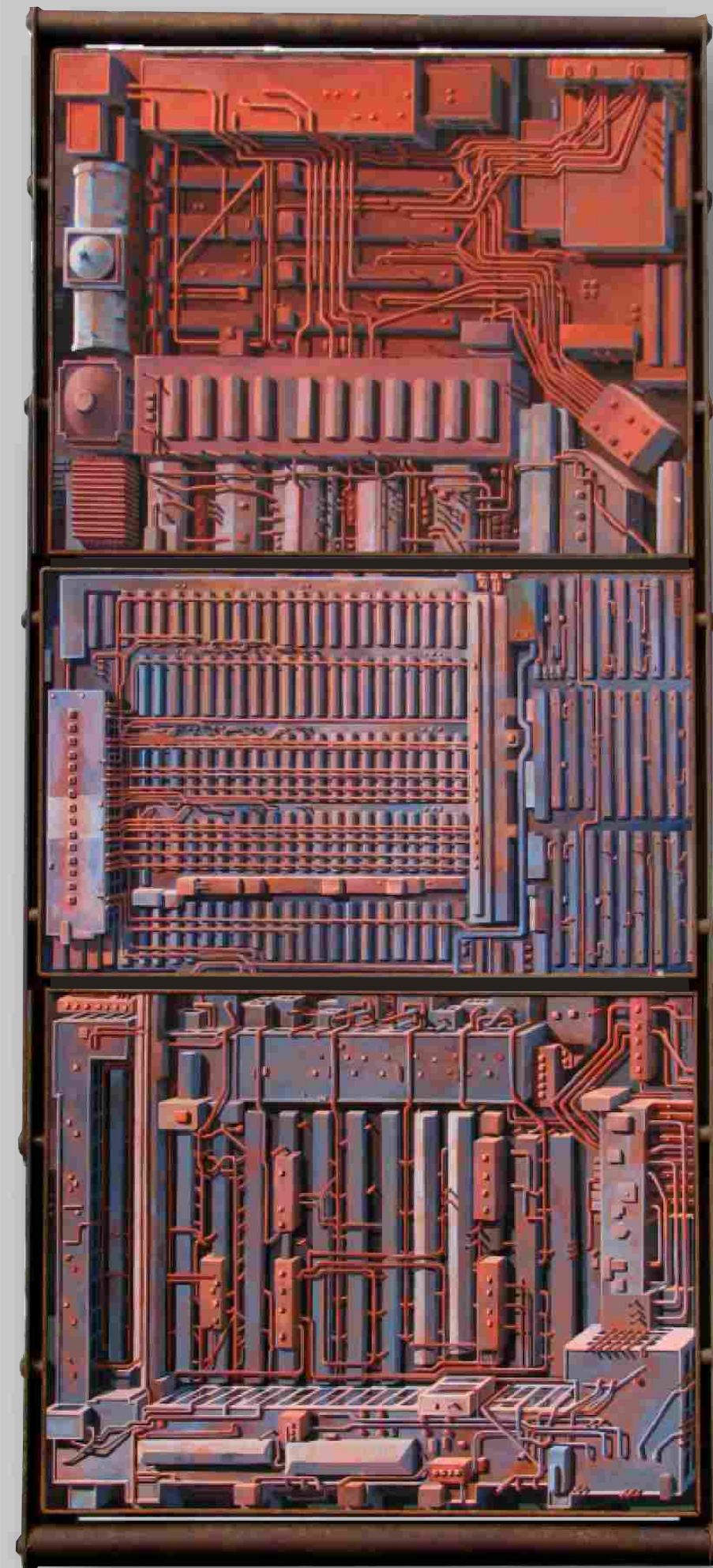
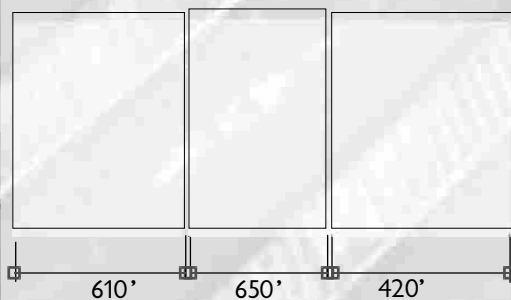
# ZIL FACTORY

43" x 19" ACRYLIC ON BOARD 2010

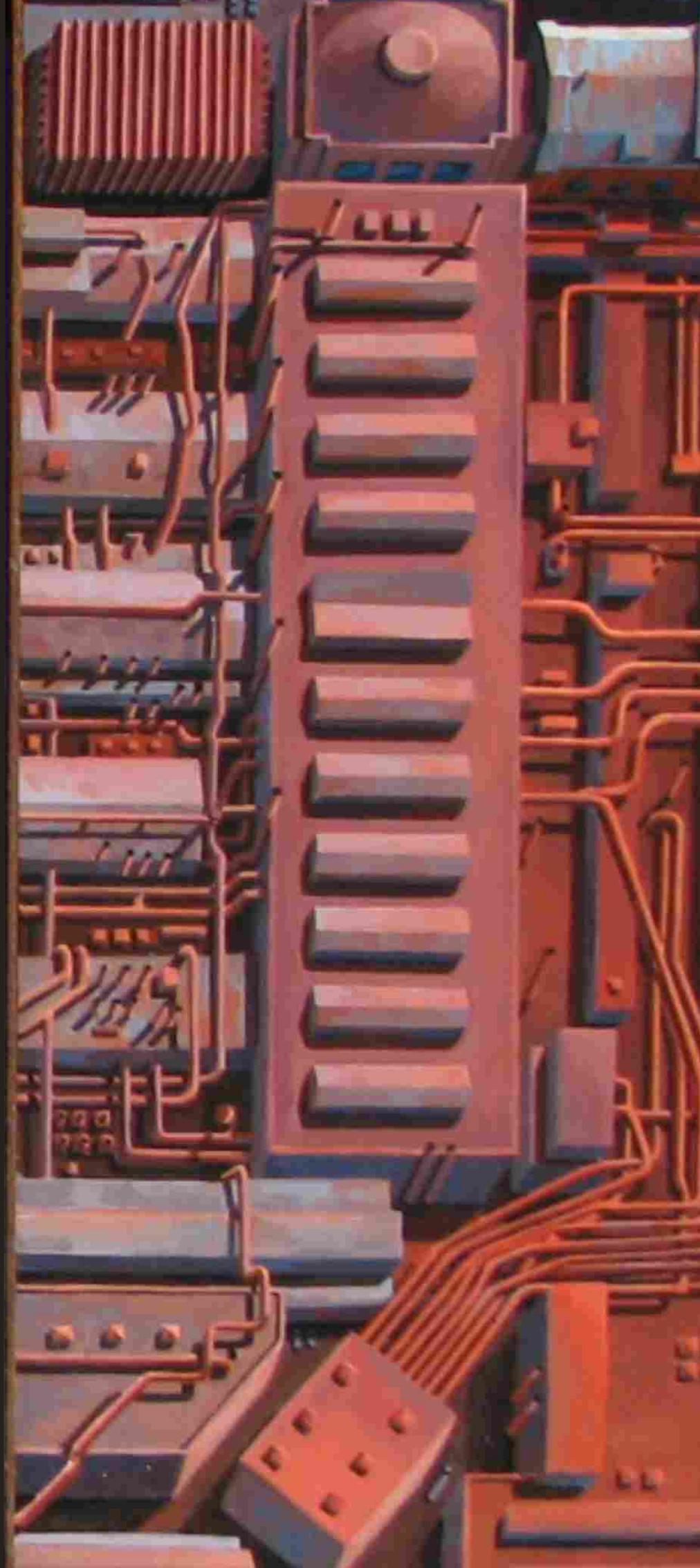
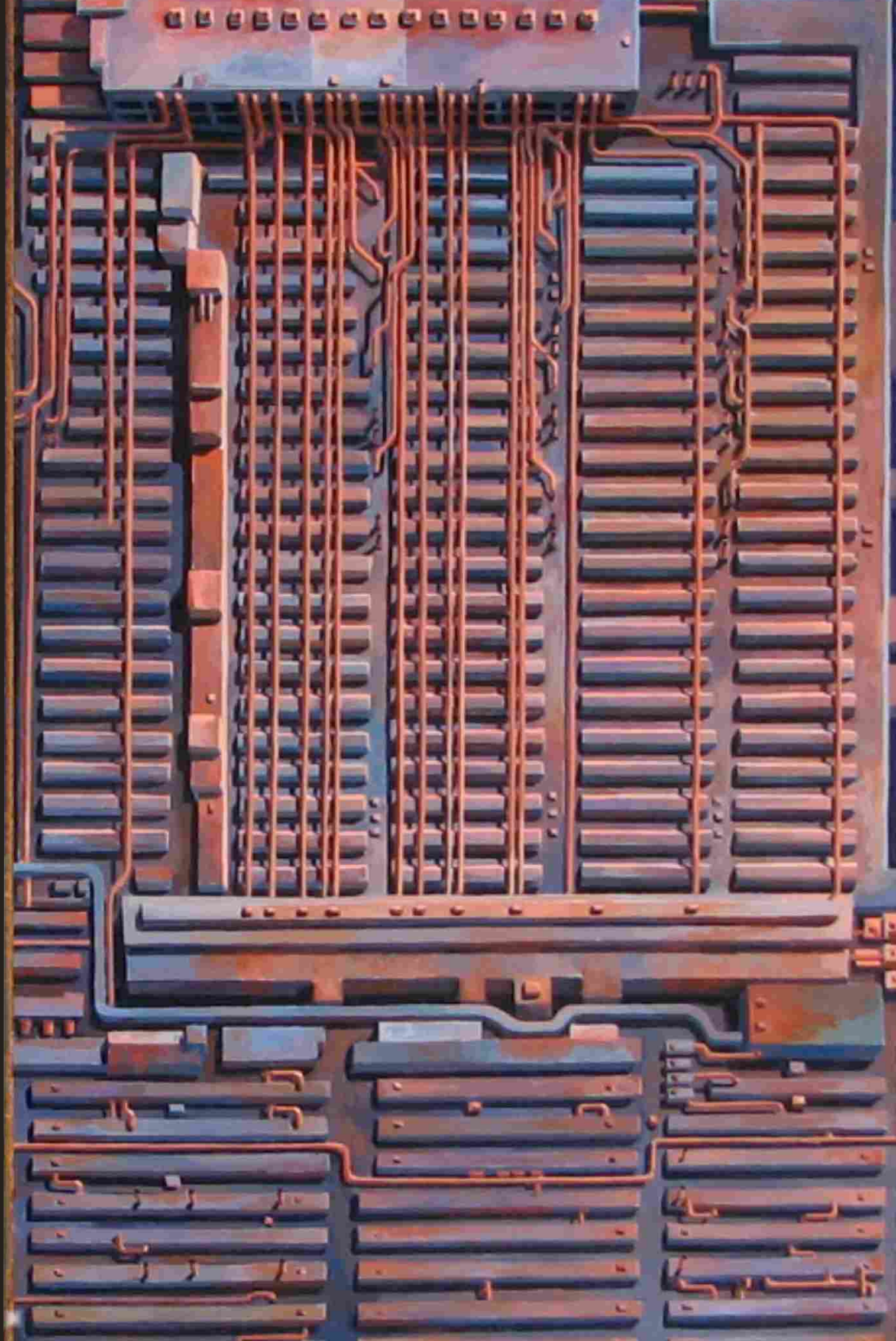
MOSCOW < RUSSIA

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, bicycles, 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.









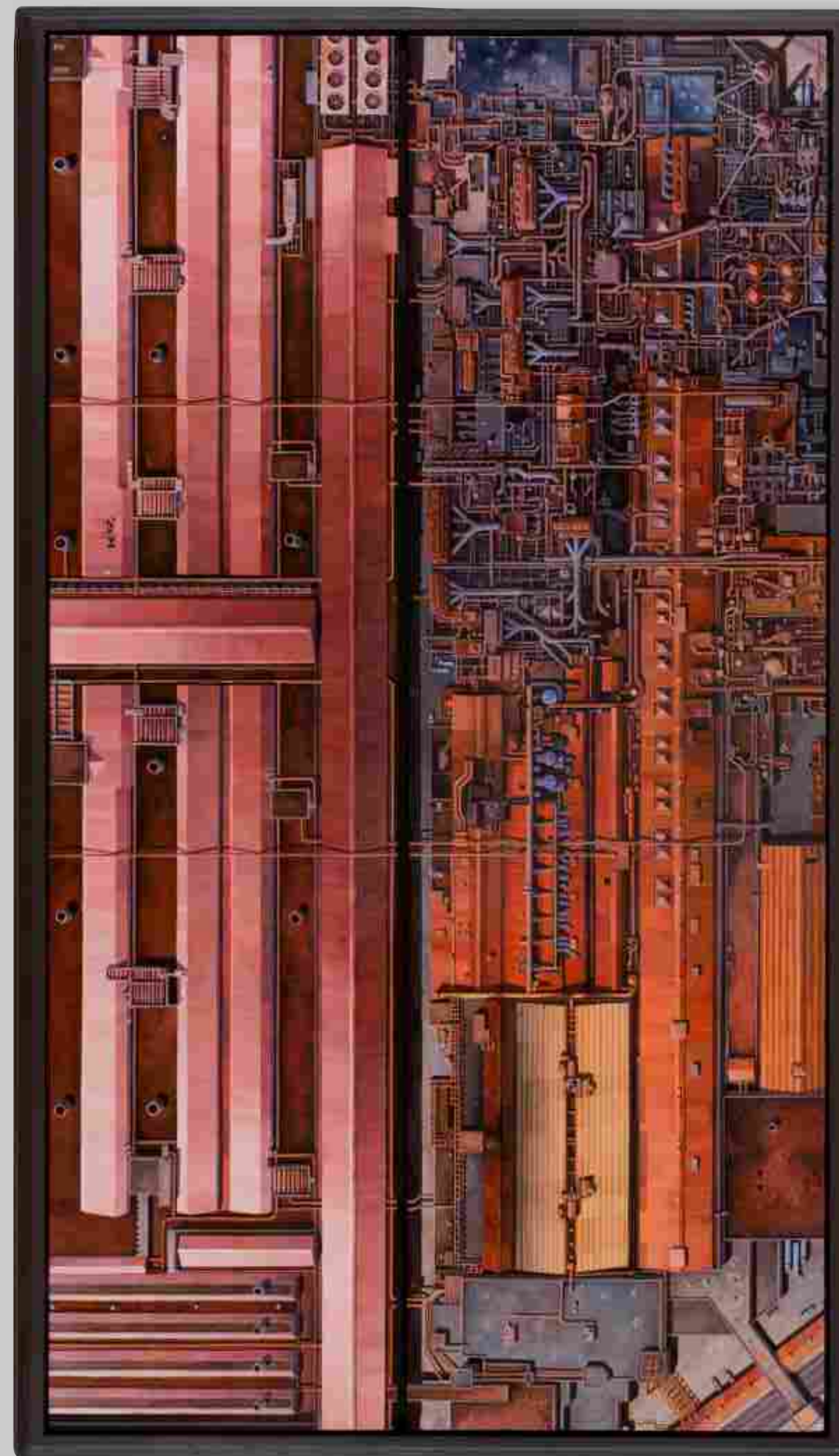
# FORD WINDSOR

40" x 22" ACRYLIC ON BOARD 2016

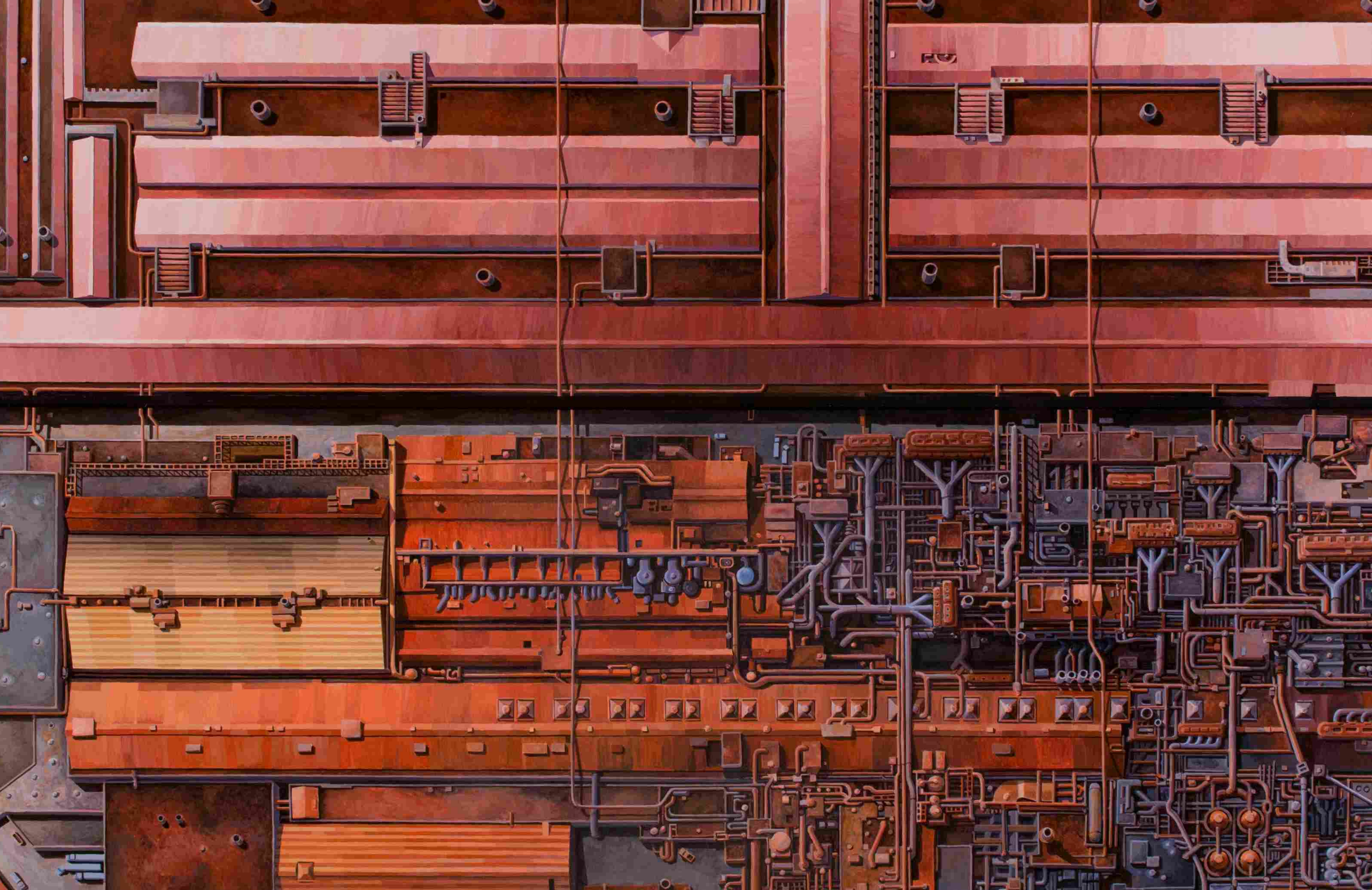
WINDSOR < ONTARIO < CANADA

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.







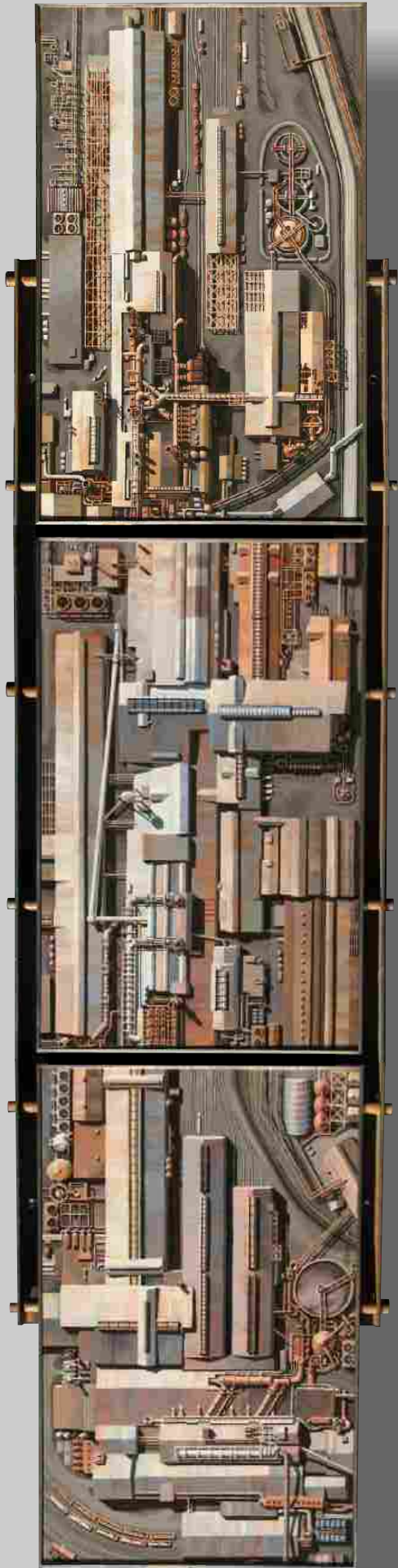


# STEEL MILLS

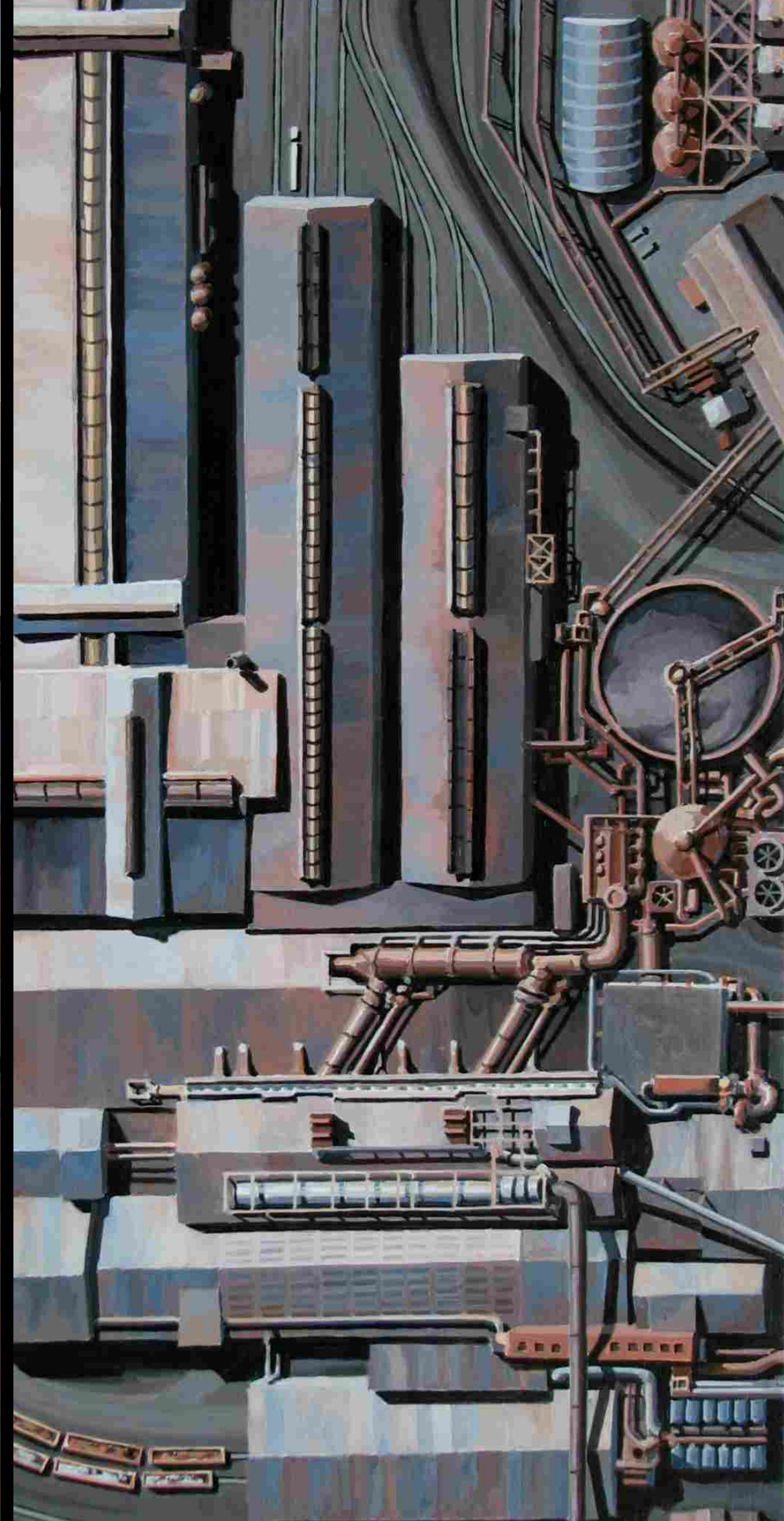
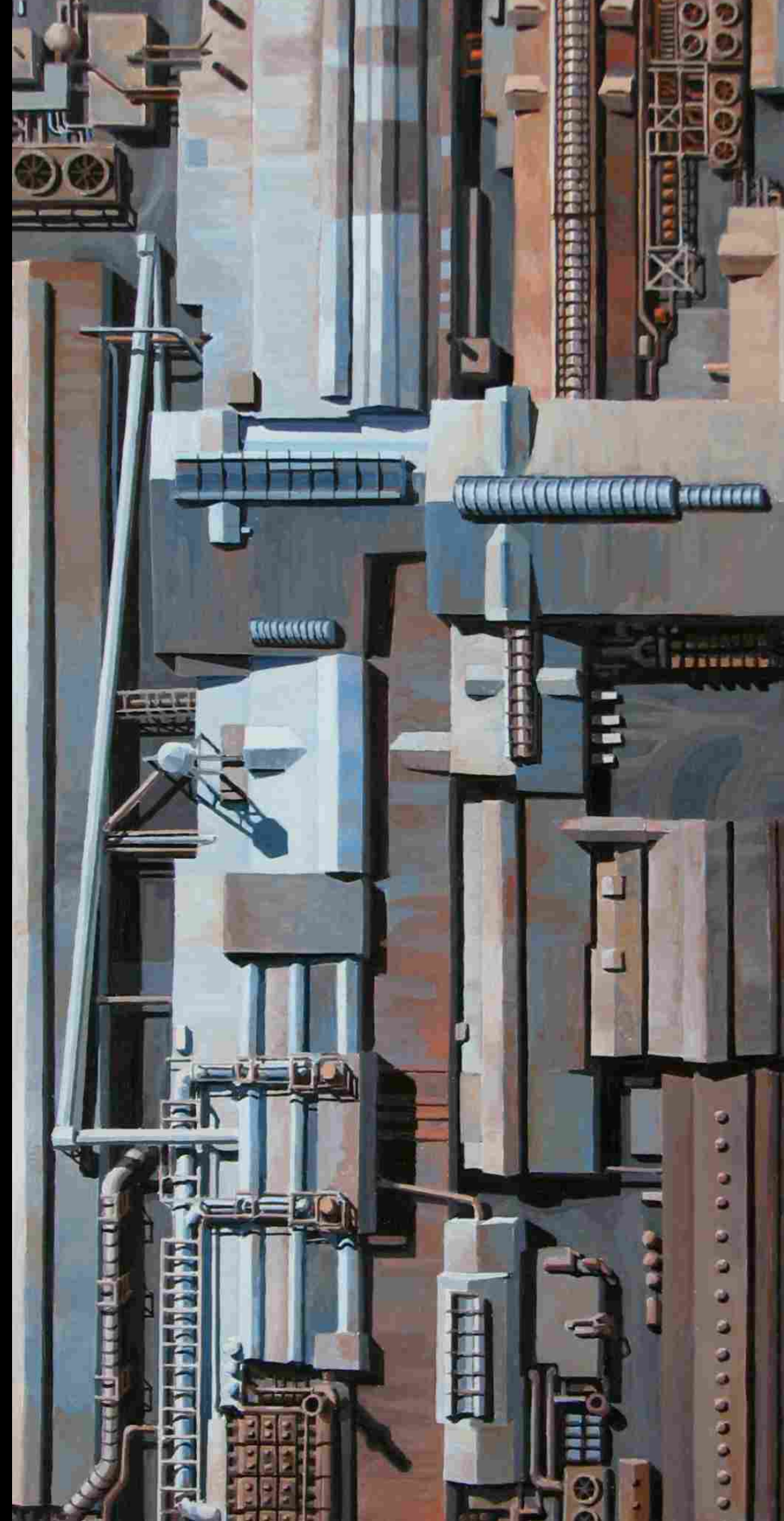
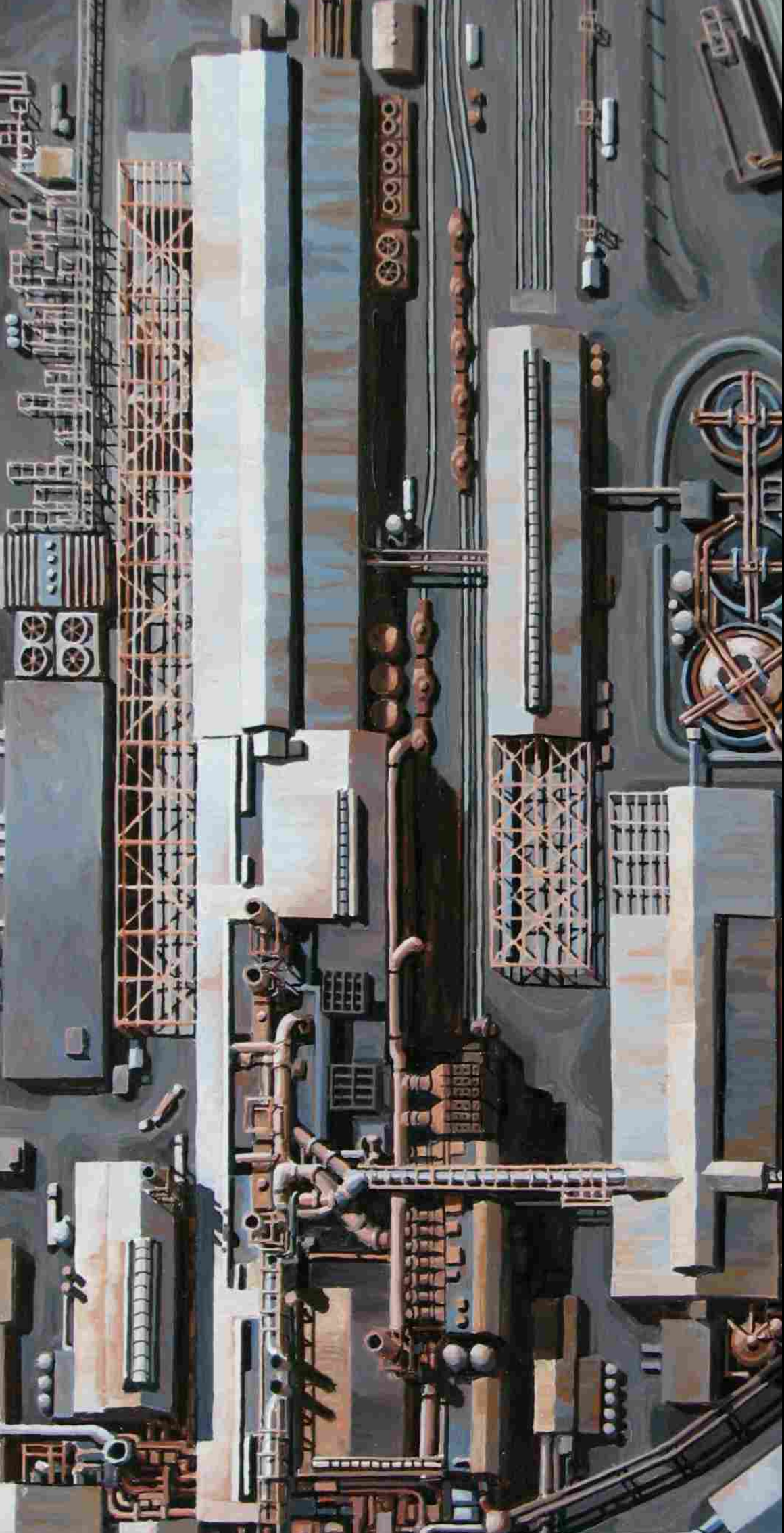
52" x 11" ACRYLIC ON BOARD 2010

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.









# TATA

14" x 24" ACRYLIC ON BOARD 2020

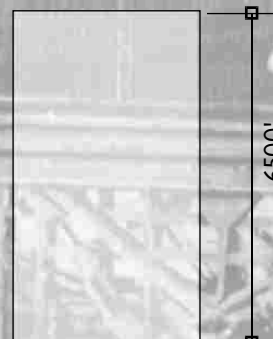
## JAMSHEDPUR < INDIA

### 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.









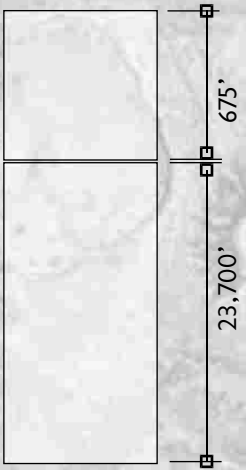
# ZIGGURAT OF UR

16" x 48" ACRYLIC ON BOARD 2016  
NASIRIYAH < IRAQ

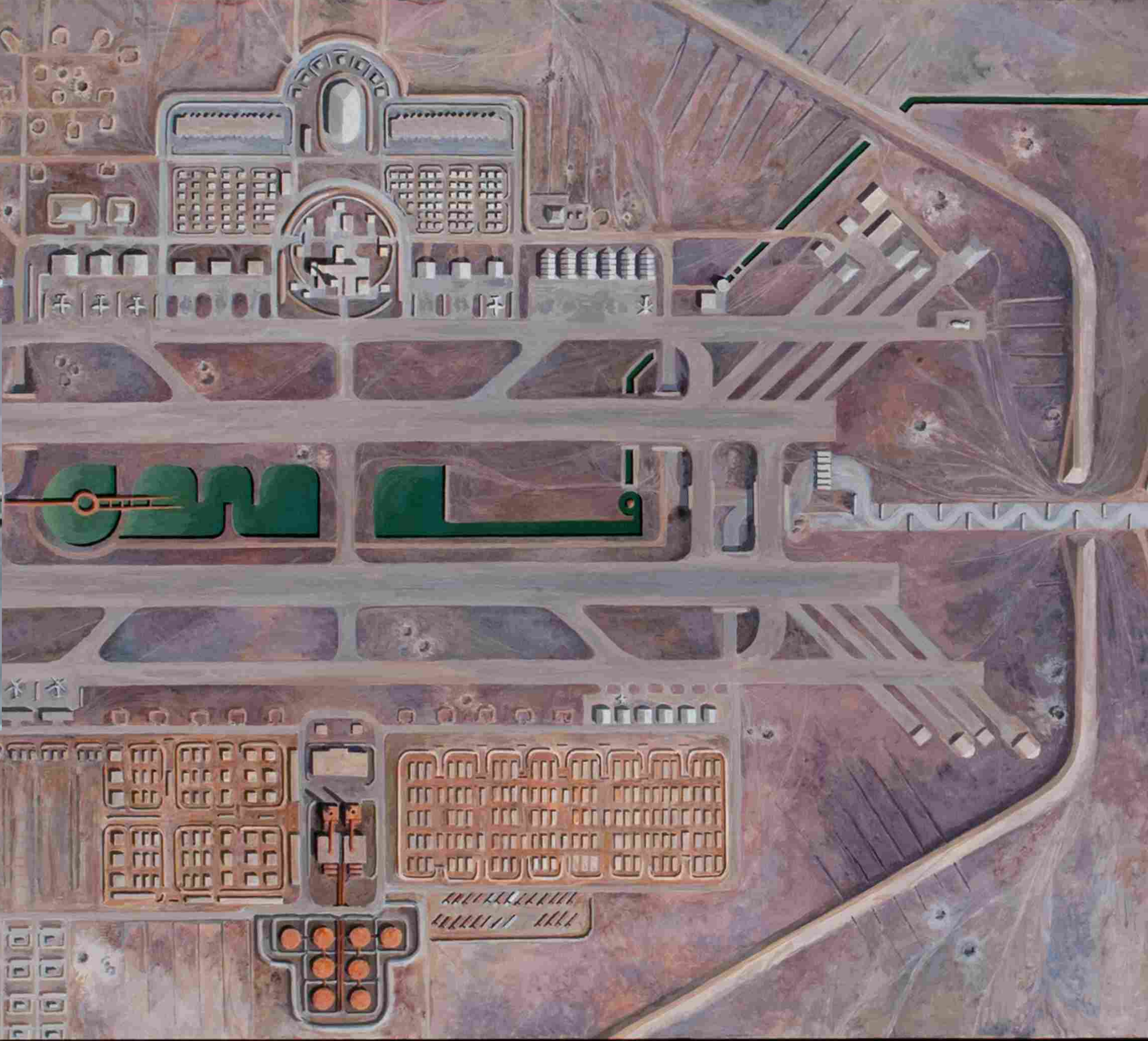
## Cradle of Civilization

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.









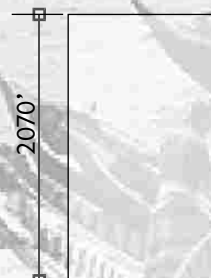
# FERRY TERMINAL

18" x 29" ACRYLIC  
ON BOARD 2010

DHAKA < BANGLADESH

River traffic

The Sadarghat (city wharf) Launch Terminal in the heart of 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

33" x 15" ACRYLIC ON BOARD 2013

STATEN ISLAND < NEW YORK < USA

## 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'









# MAKOKO/ OKOBABA

12" x 36" ACRYLIC  
ON BOARD 2016

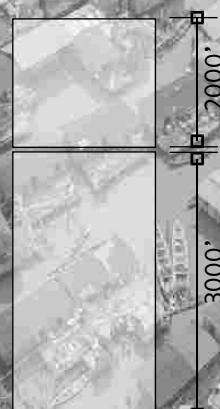
LAGOS < NIGERIA

## Waterworld

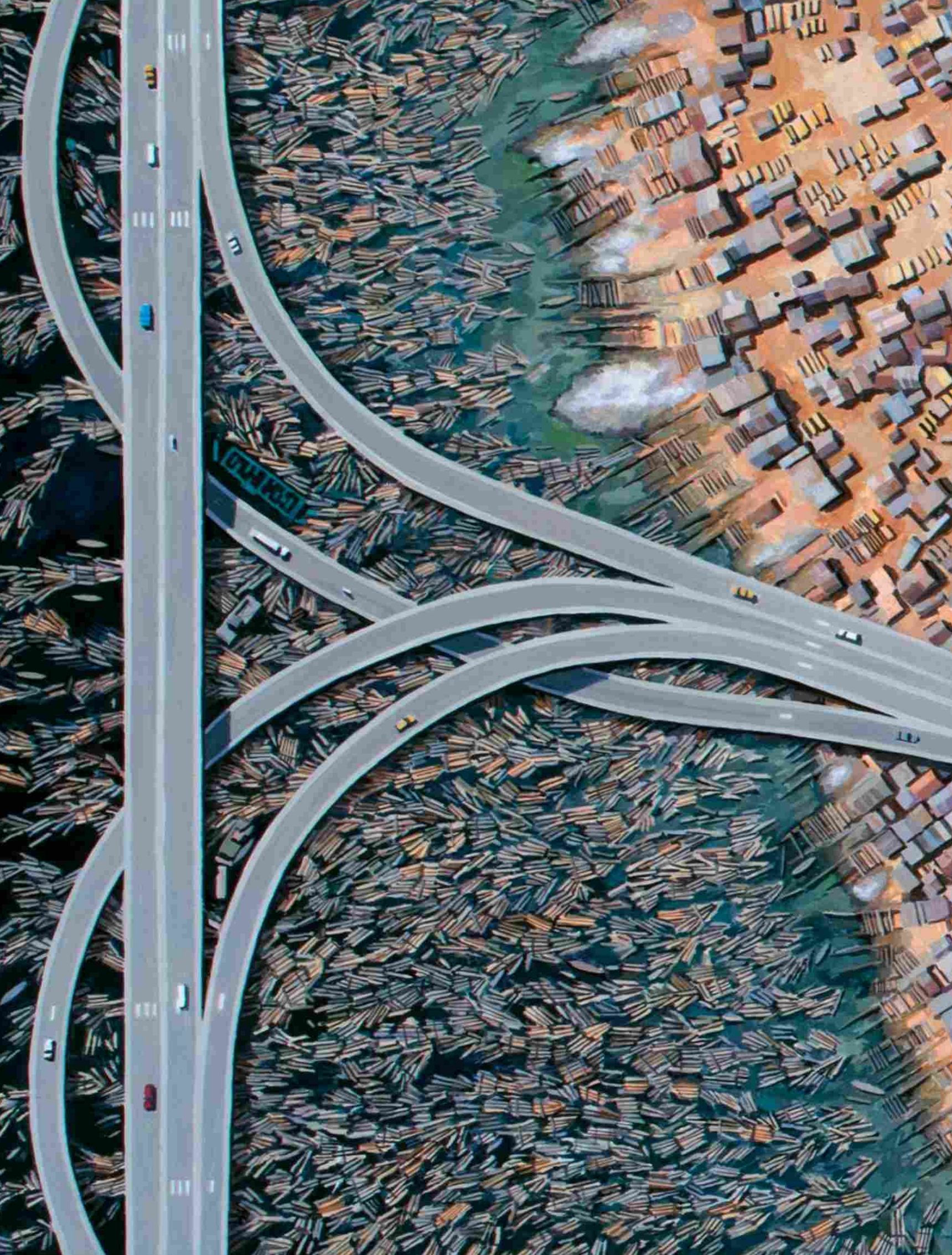
A fishing village of wood shanties on stilts since the 18th century, Makoko has exploded... population estimates vary from 40,000 to 300,000. Nobody really knows, because they are all illegal squatters, wholly independent of the local authorities, who consider it an embarrassment and health risk, and 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.







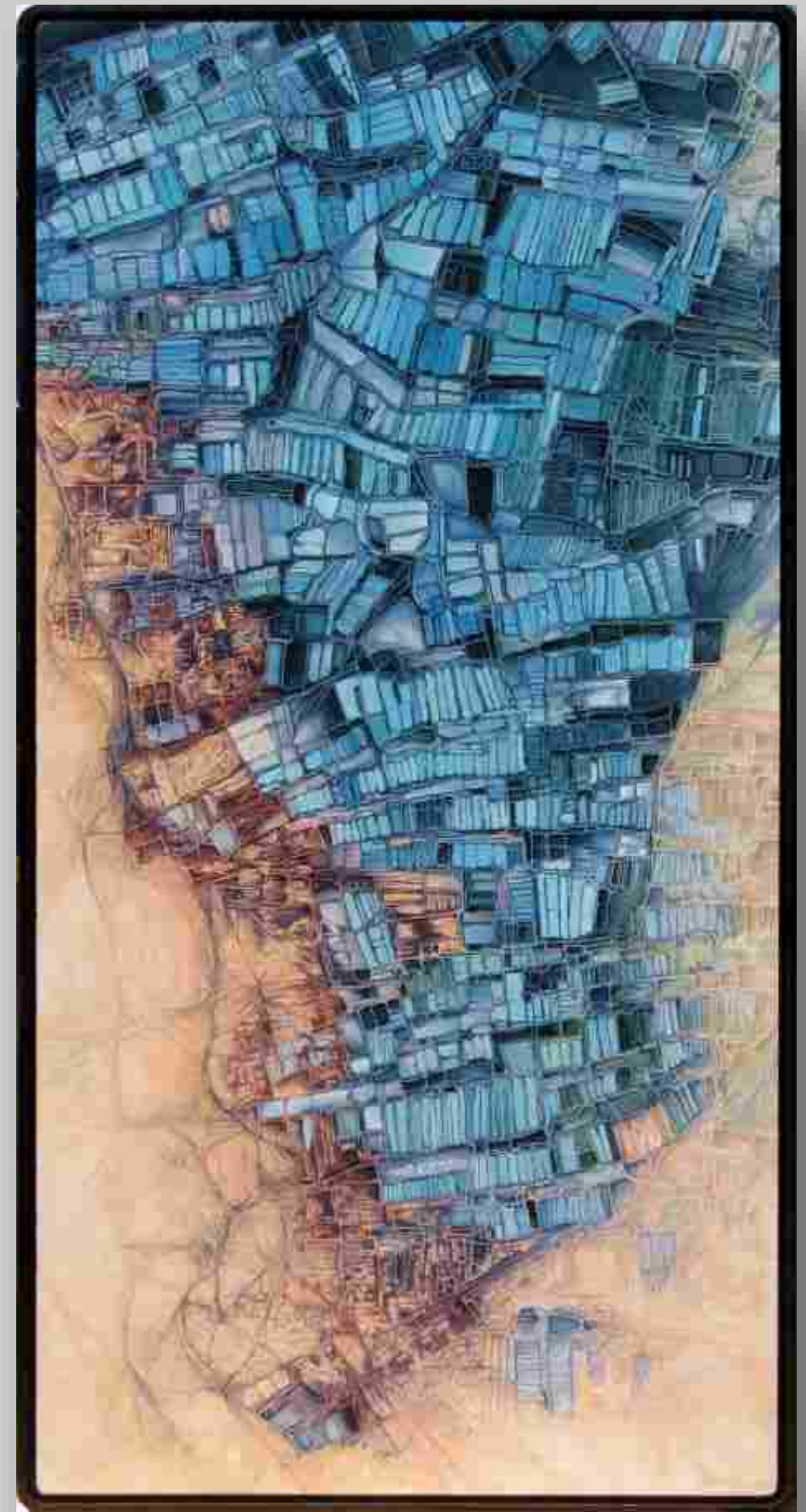
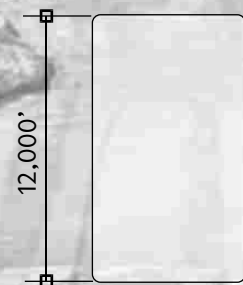


# SALT PONDS

21" x 42" ACRYLIC ON BOARD 2020

PALMYRA < HOMS < SYRIA

The waters of Sabkhat al Muh, a salt lake southeast of the ancient oasis city of Palmyra, Syria, flow through an elaborate system of raked mud ponds. In this timeless procedure, salt is harvested when the water evaporates.







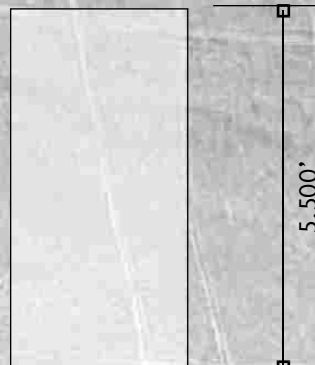


# SALT FLATS

35.5" x 17" ACRYLIC ON  
BOARD 2022

SALAR DE ASCOTÁN  
< OLLAGUE < CHILE

Salar de Ascotan, a 20 mile long salt lake at 12,500' in the Chilean Antiplano, is surrounded by 19,000' volcanoes. Despite being 40 miles from the nearest settlement, the single dirt road in this absolutely barren landscape is crisscrossed by seemingly random vehicle tracks.









# ENTERING THE SALT

17"x35.5" ACRYLIC ON BOARD 2022

BONNEVILLE SALT FLATS  
< UTAH < USA

24 September 2008

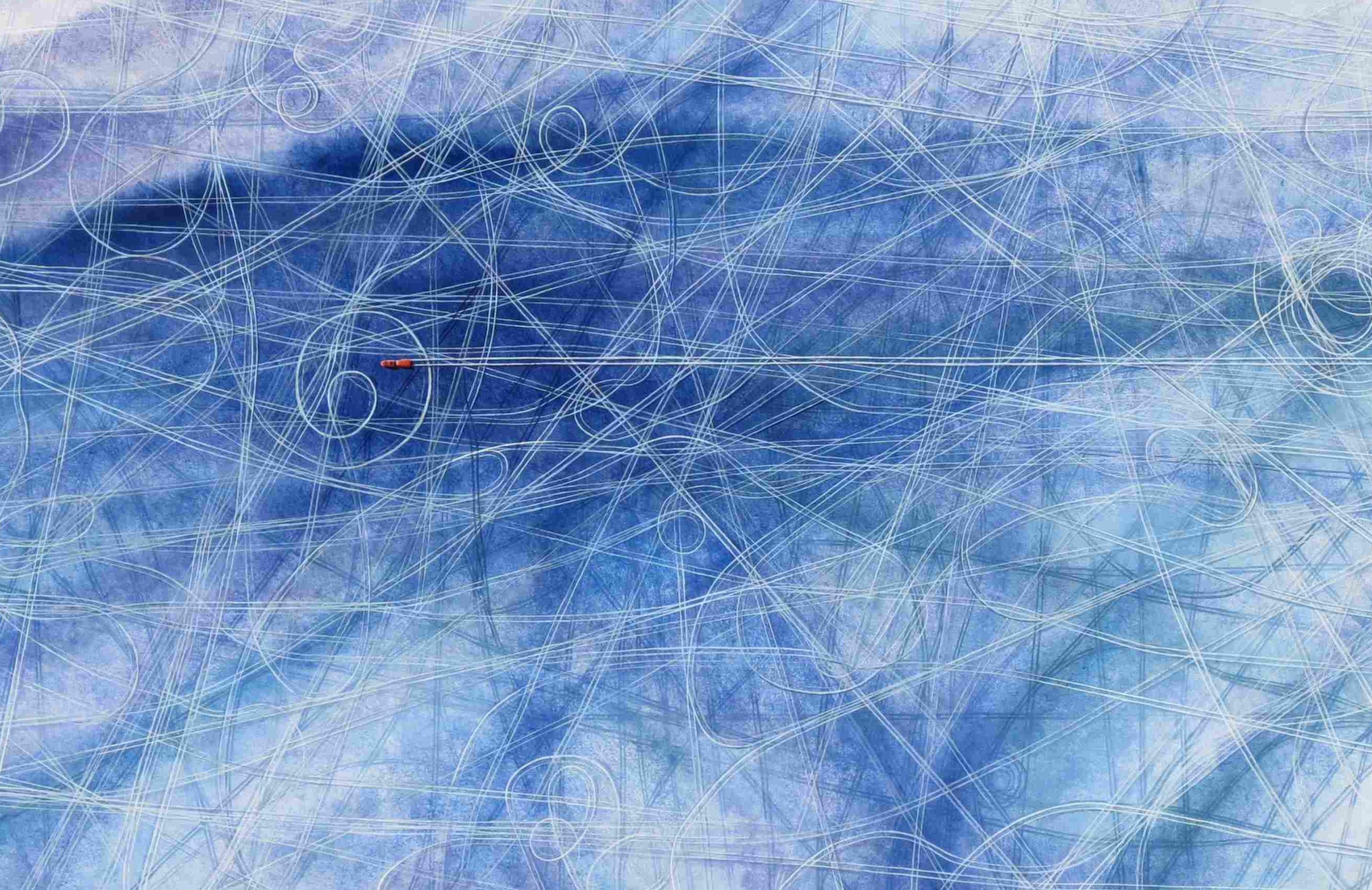
The artist and his engineer leave I-80 and head north to the staging area, ecstatic to be entering the most hallowed ground in the world of speed, a little intimidated by it's vast whiteness, and not without some trepidation of the possible risks that come with unrestricted velocity.

The Bonneville Salt Flats are 12 miles long with a crust up to 5 feet thick, scoured with the vehicle tracks laid down over a hundred years of land speed record activity. Rains flood the surface to various degrees every year, causing great fluctuations in the quality of the salt.

But they say this year is the best in 25 years... hard, smooth and dry.









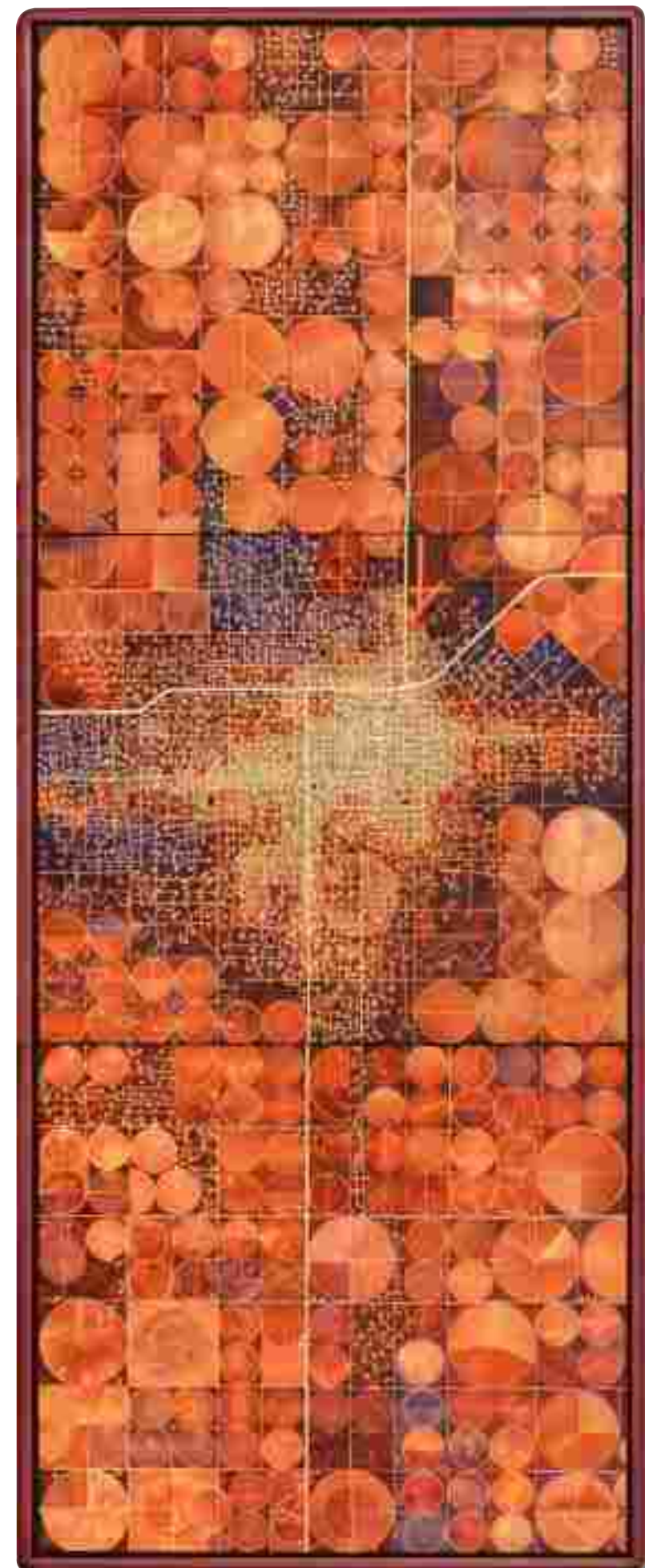
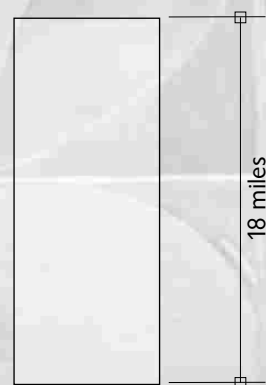
# MIDLANDS

17" x 35.5" ACRYLIC ON BOARD 2022

WEST TEXAS < USA

This capriccio is a composite of the lands around Midland, TX. The circles are center pivot irrigation fields growing mostly cotton, with a bit of peanuts and rye. The small circles are about a half mile in diameter, the larger about a mile. They are fed by the Ogallala Aquifer, flowing 50' to 200' below the surface here, but since major groundwater pumping began in the late 1940's it is at risk of over-extraction and pollution. The little white squares are one acre patches of cleared desert, each with an oil or gas well reaching down from 1 to 4 miles into the Permian Basin, a shale deposit that now provides over 40 % of America's oil and 15% of its natural gas, with a legitimate claim to being the world's most productive field. Increased fracking is threatening the agricultural water supply, and drilling extends into farmland because mineral rights are often different than surface rights.

Somewhere in this grid of circles and squares there is an abandoned private test track: Rattlesnake Raceway, where a Texas oil man created America's most innovative, beautiful, and successful race cars and inspired the artist as a young man to, among other things, build his own electric race cars.









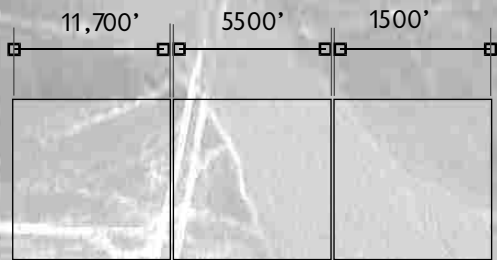
# THREE FREQUENCIES OF HOLES IN LINES

54" x 18" ACRYLIC ON BOARD 2016

## NORTHERN CHINA

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 was looking for something.







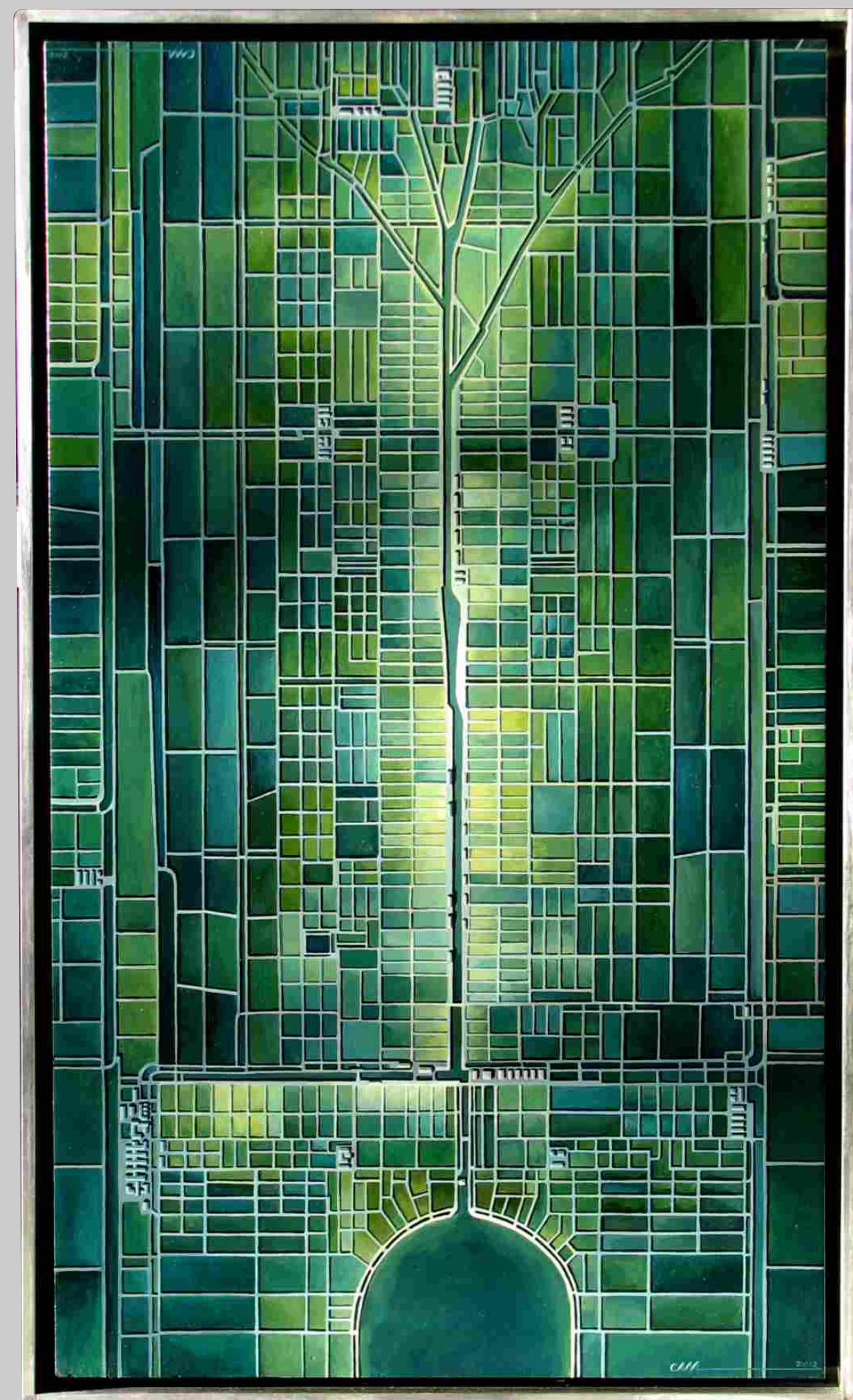
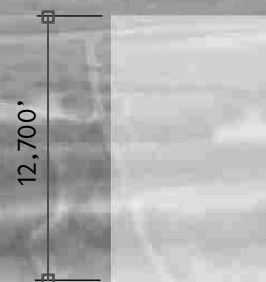


# LAGOONS

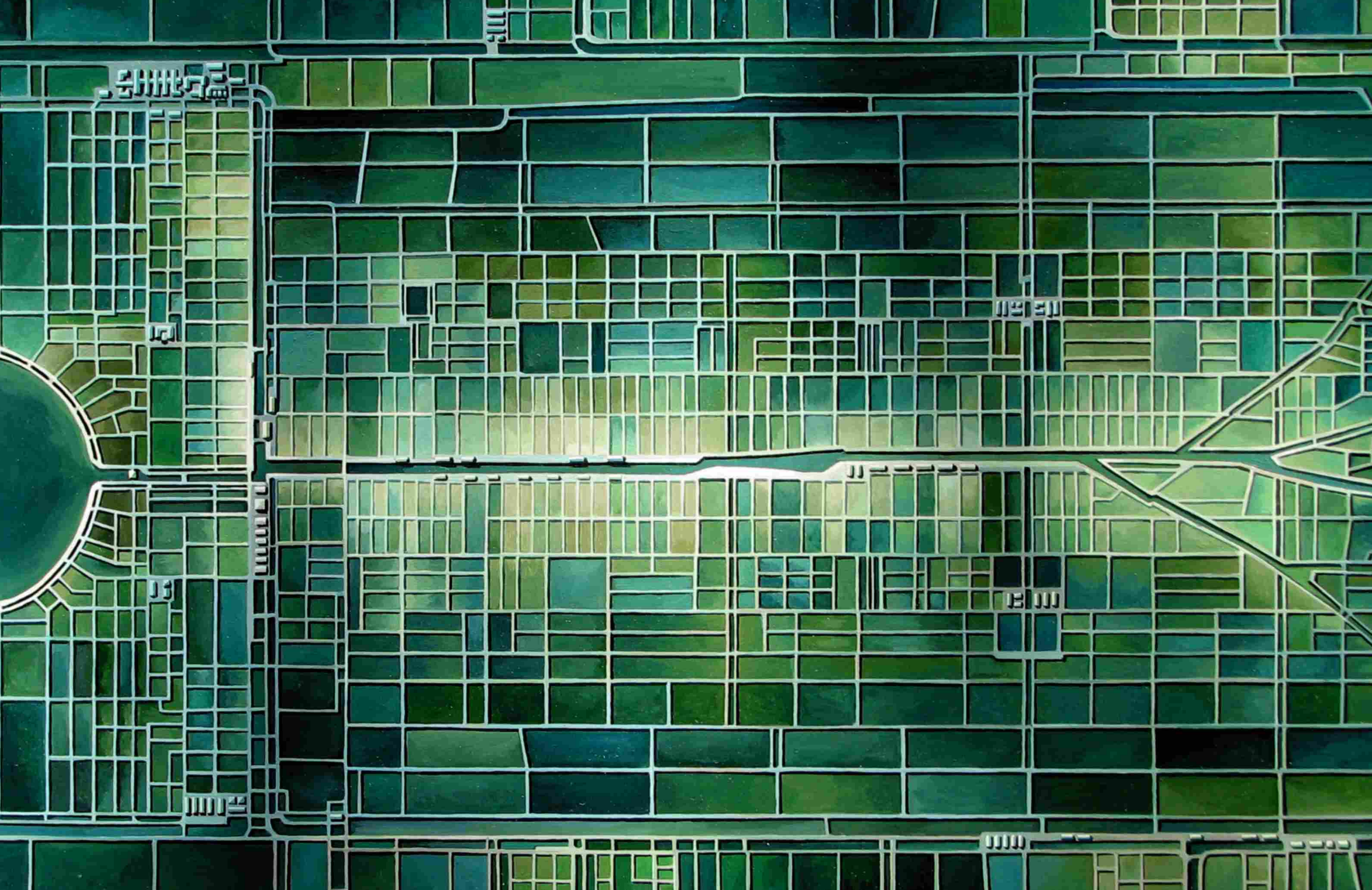
16" x 26" ACRYLIC ON BOARD  
2012

## COASTAL CHINA

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.









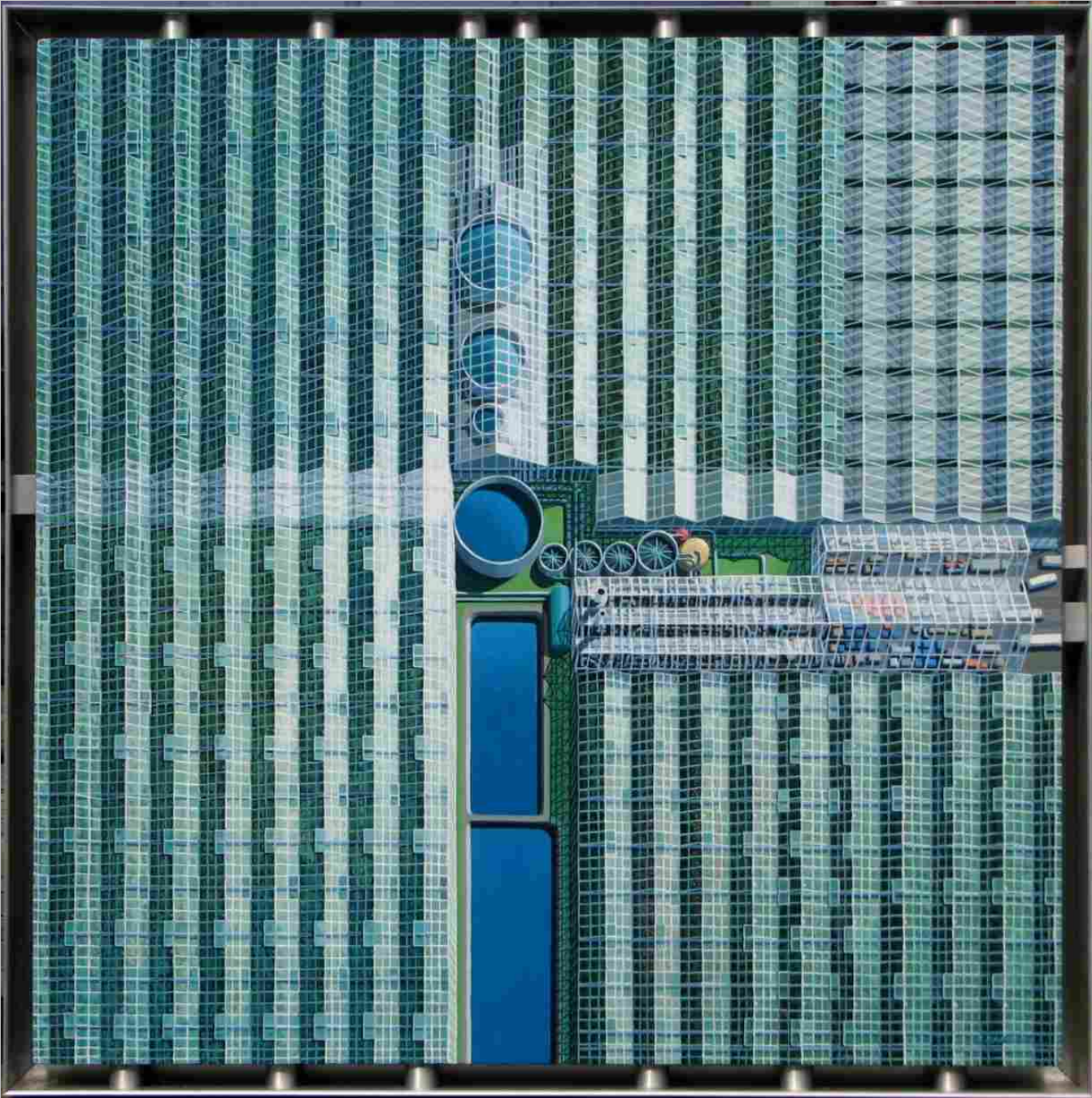
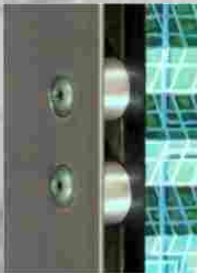
# GREENHAUS

24" x 24" ACRYLIC  
ON BOARD 2010

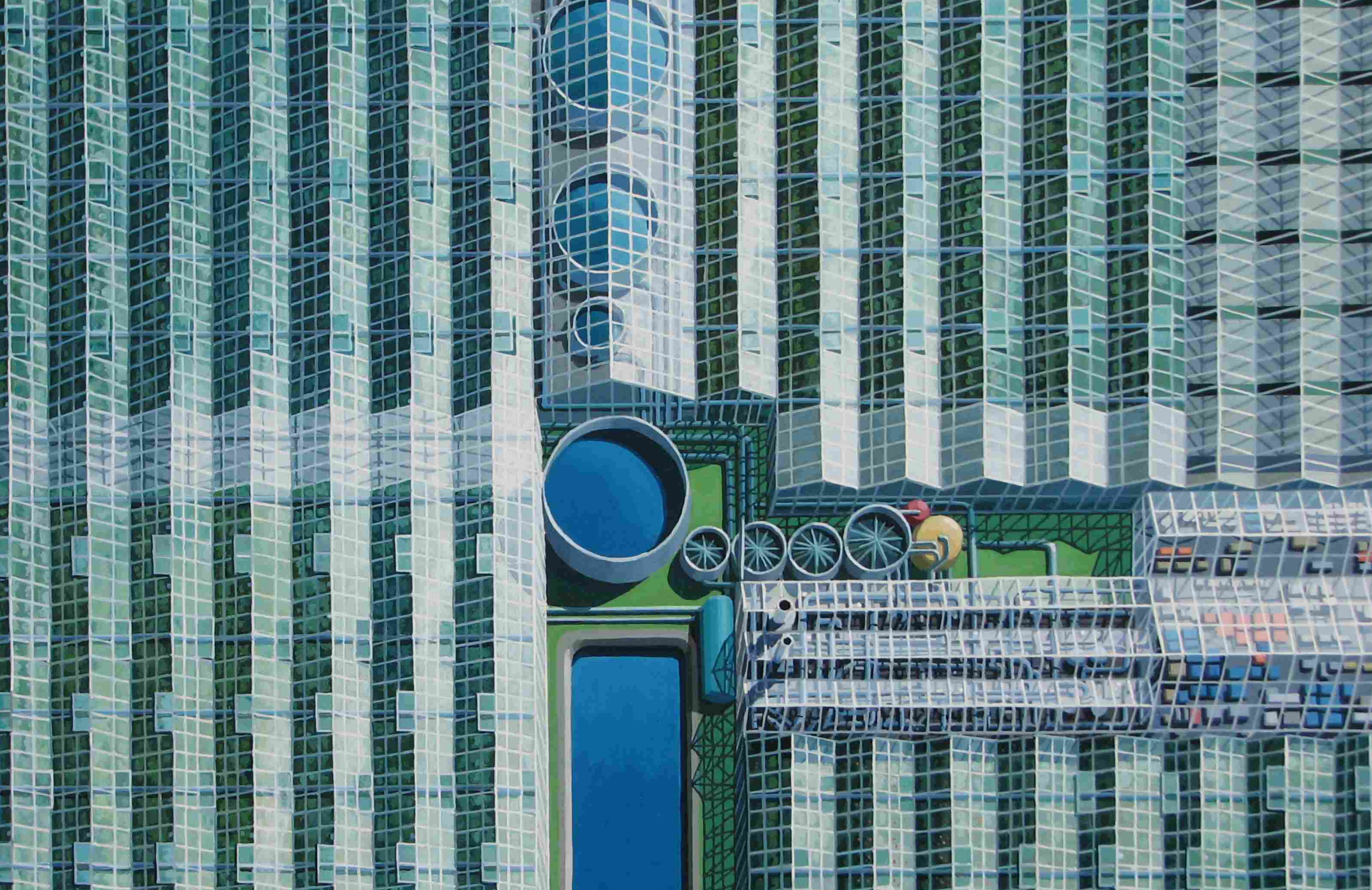
## ROTTERDAM < NETHERLANDS

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

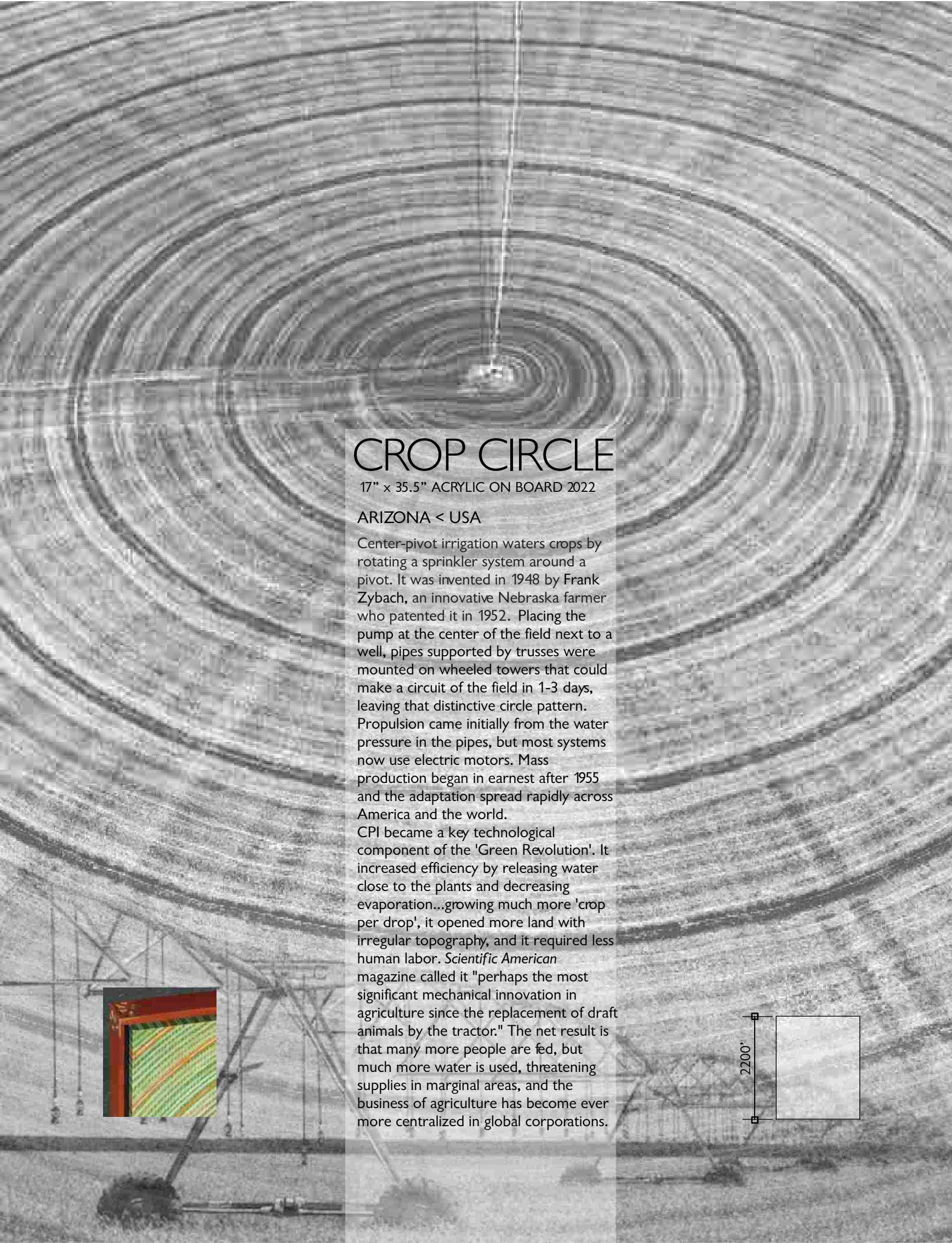
There are 12,000 acres of greenhouses in Rotterdam growing fruit, vegetables and flowers, and sequestering some of the excess CO2 'greenhouse gas' from nearby refineries.









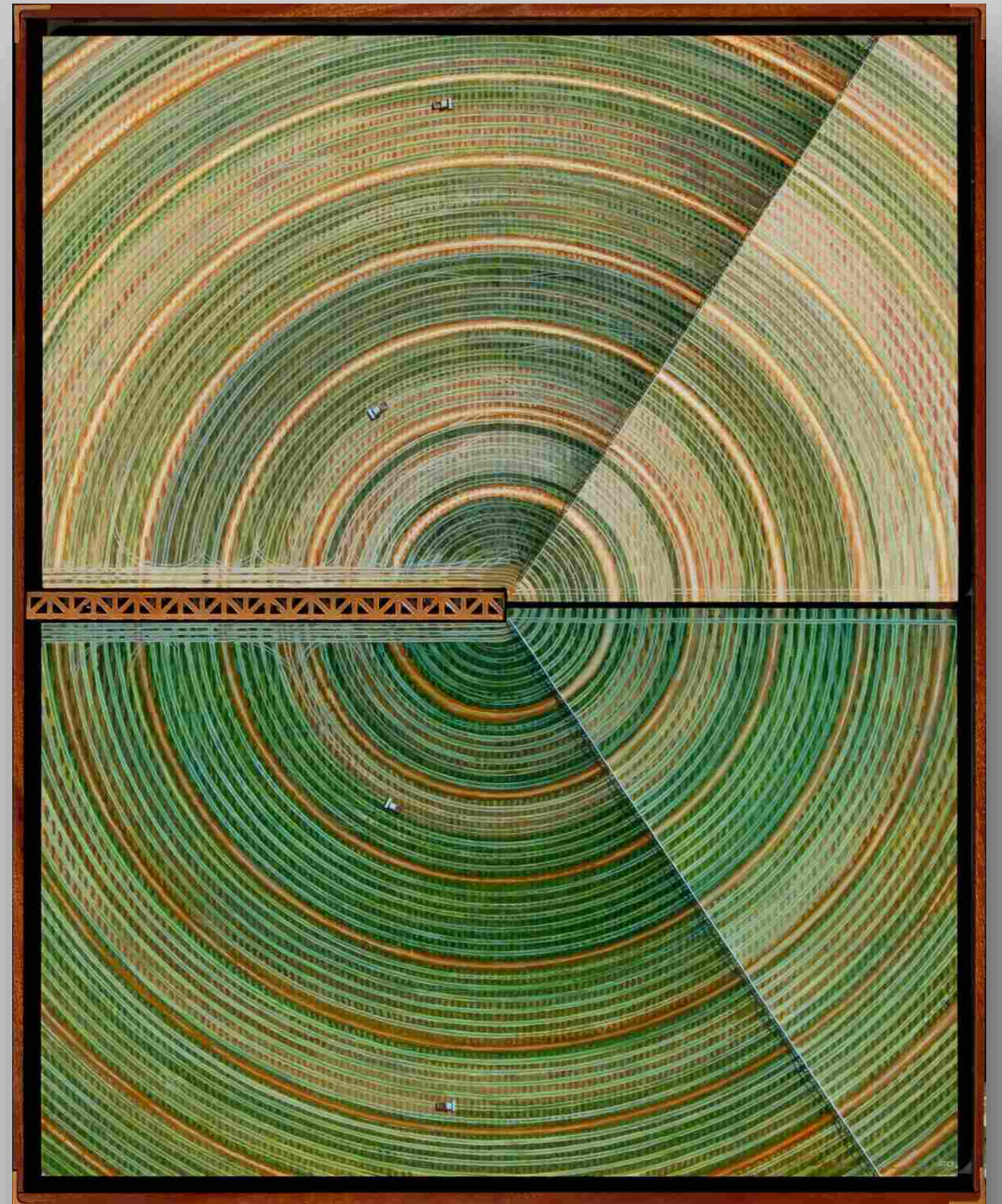
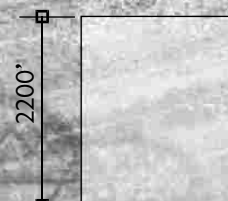


# CROP CIRCLE

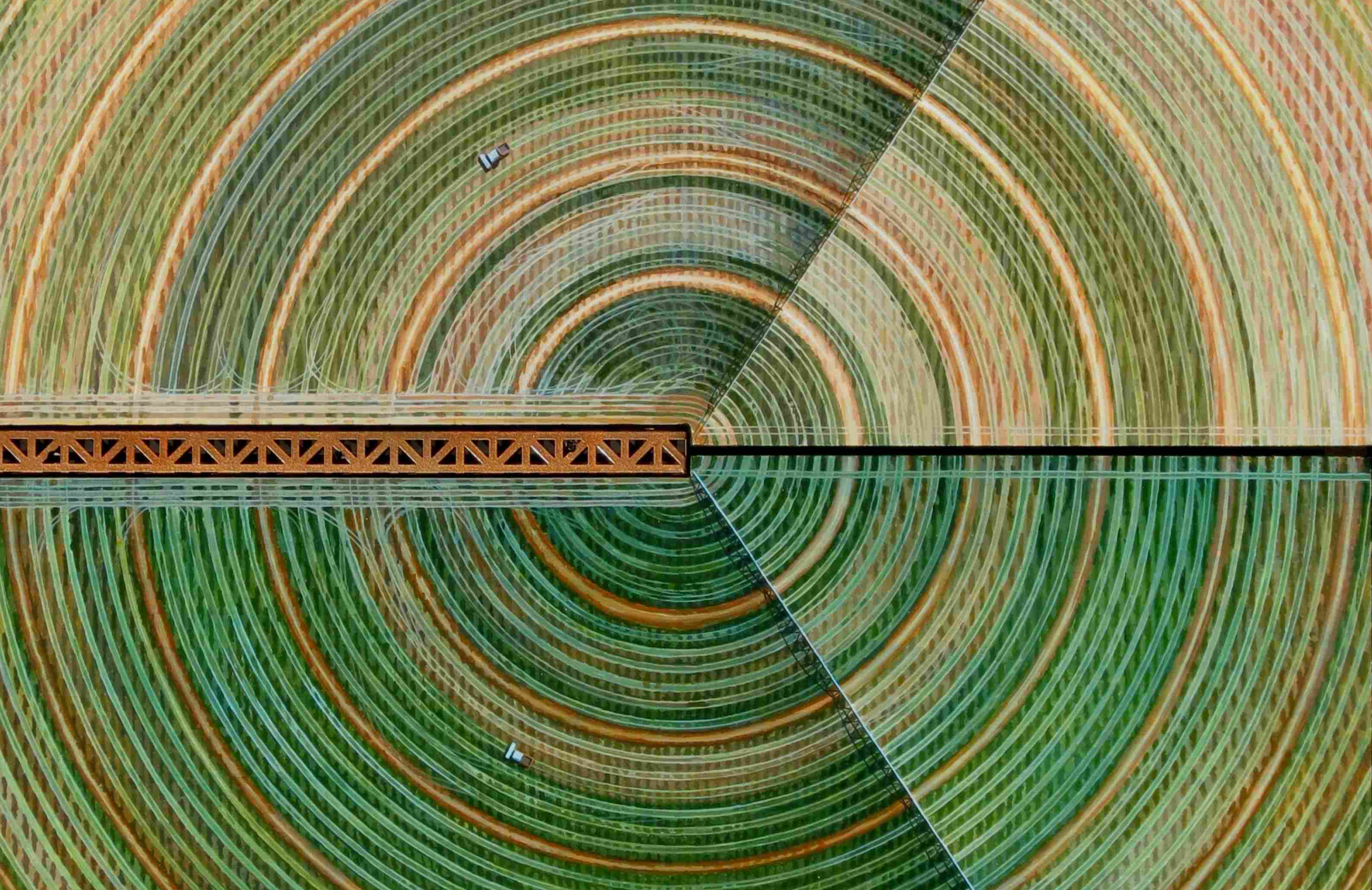
17" x 35.5" ACRYLIC ON BOARD 2022

ARIZONA < USA

Center-pivot irrigation waters crops by rotating a sprinkler system around a pivot. It was invented in 1948 by Frank Zybach, an innovative Nebraska farmer who patented it in 1952. Placing the pump at the center of the field next to a well, pipes supported by trusses were mounted on wheeled towers that could make a circuit of the field in 1-3 days, leaving that distinctive circle pattern. Propulsion came initially from the water pressure in the pipes, but most systems now use electric motors. Mass production began in earnest after 1955 and the adaptation spread rapidly across America and the world. CPI became a key technological component of the 'Green Revolution'. It increased efficiency by releasing water close to the plants and decreasing evaporation...growing much more 'crop per drop', it opened more land with irregular topography, and it required less human labor. *Scientific American* magazine called it "perhaps the most significant mechanical innovation in agriculture since the replacement of draft animals by the tractor." The net result is that many more people are fed, but much more water is used, threatening supplies in marginal areas, and the business of agriculture has become ever more centralized in global corporations.









# TRAIN SHED

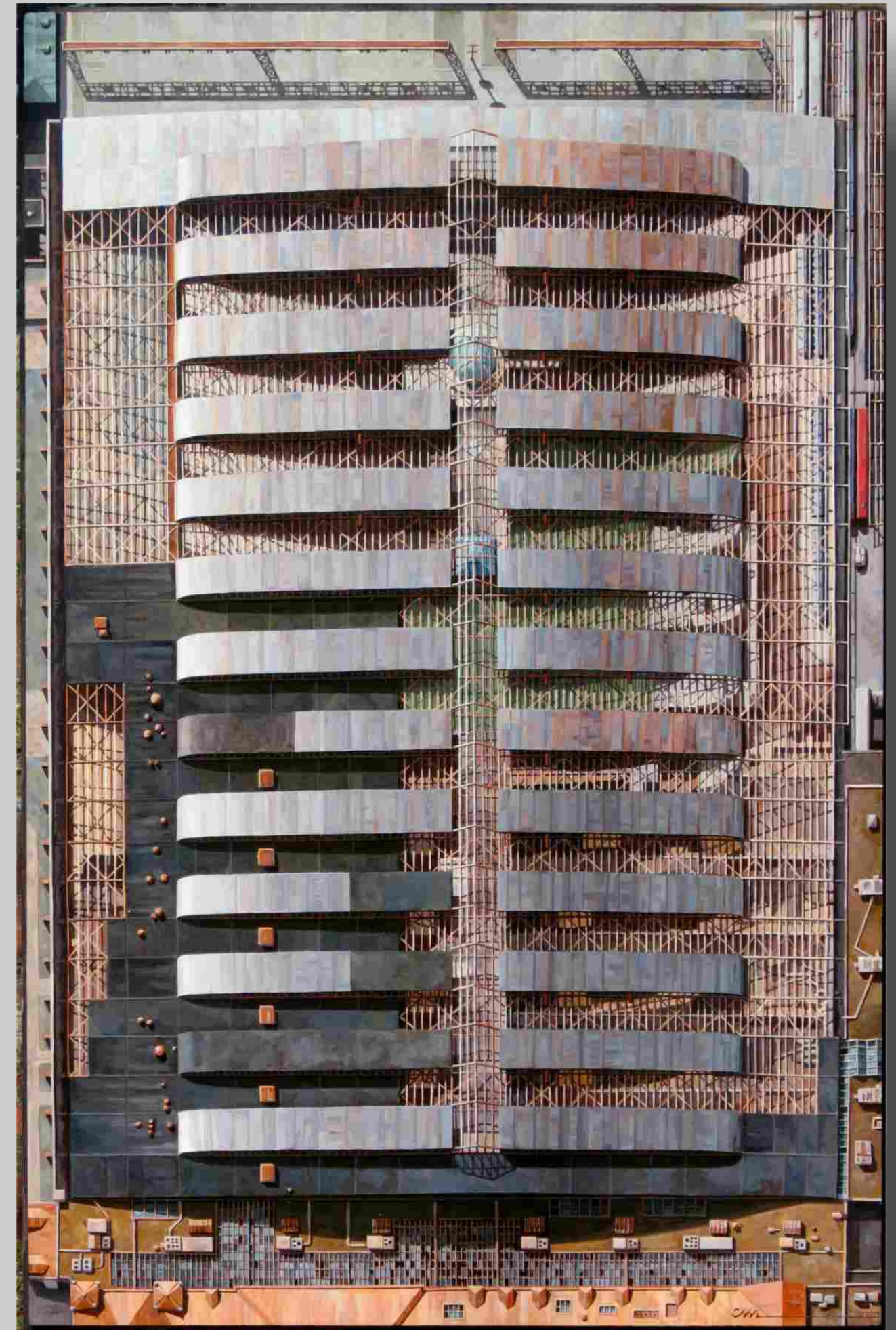
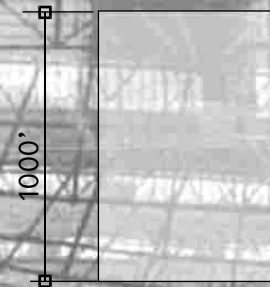
23" x 35" ACRYLIC ON BOARD 2019

ST. LOUIS < MISSOURI < USA

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.









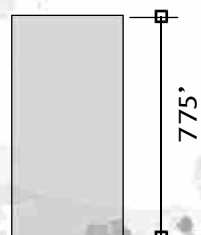
# GRAND PALAIS

12" x 36" ACRYLIC  
ON BOARD 2017

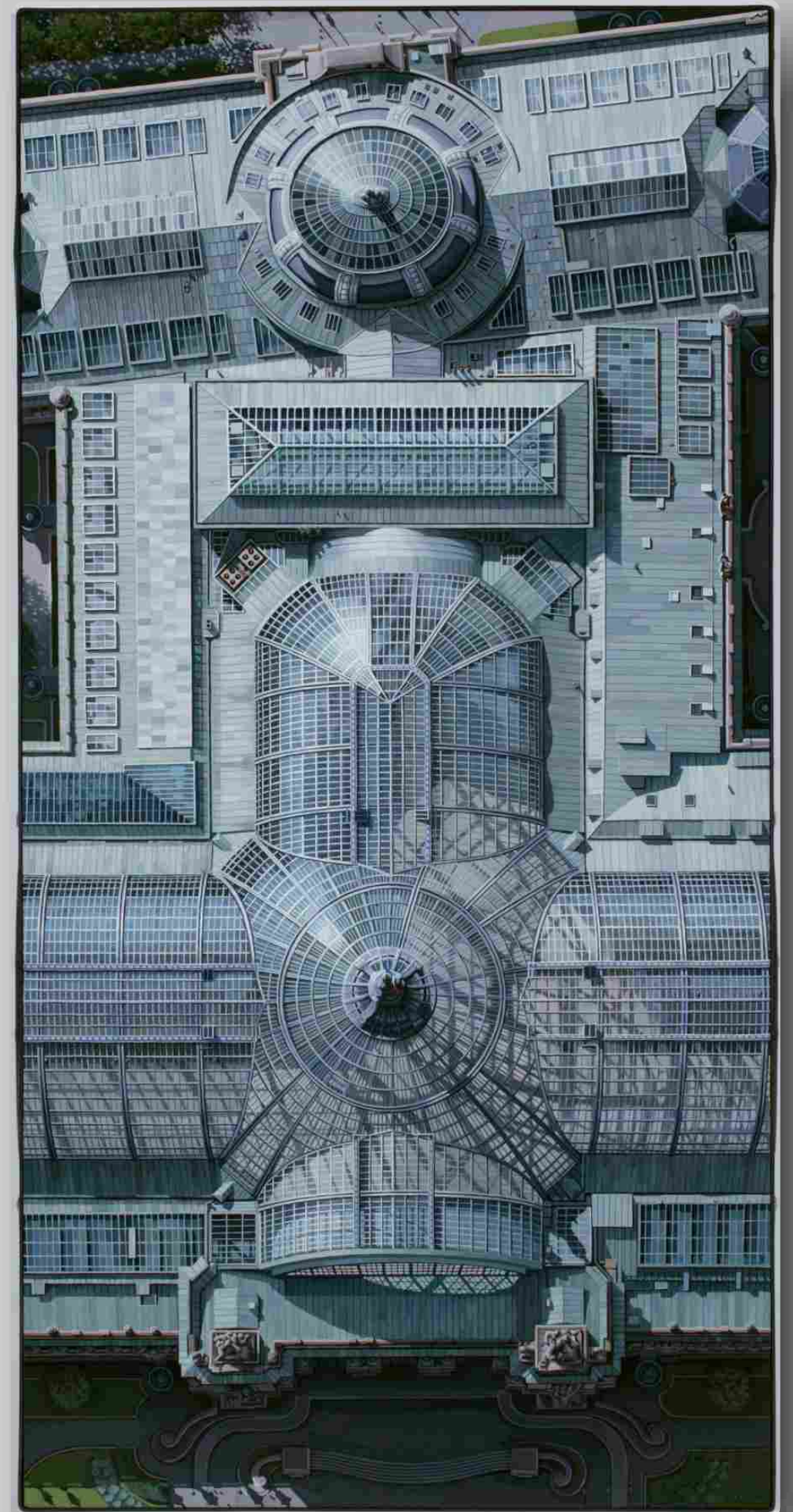
## PARIS > FRANCE

Last of the great crystal palaces, this temple of art and technology was built for the 1900 Exposition Universelle Internationale. 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.

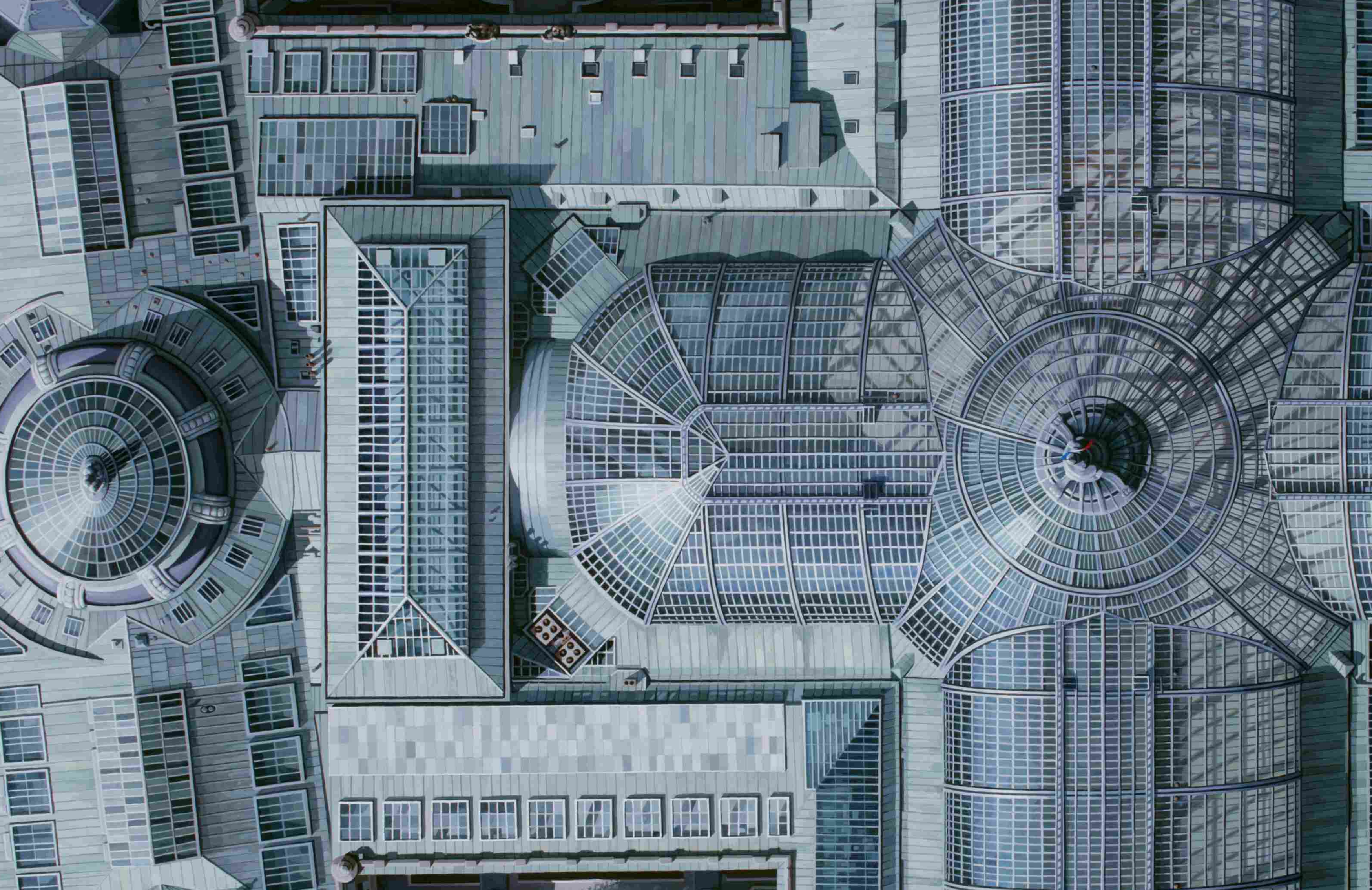
Extensive and ongoing restorations have enabled it to continue it's original mission, currently showing 140 exhibits a year.



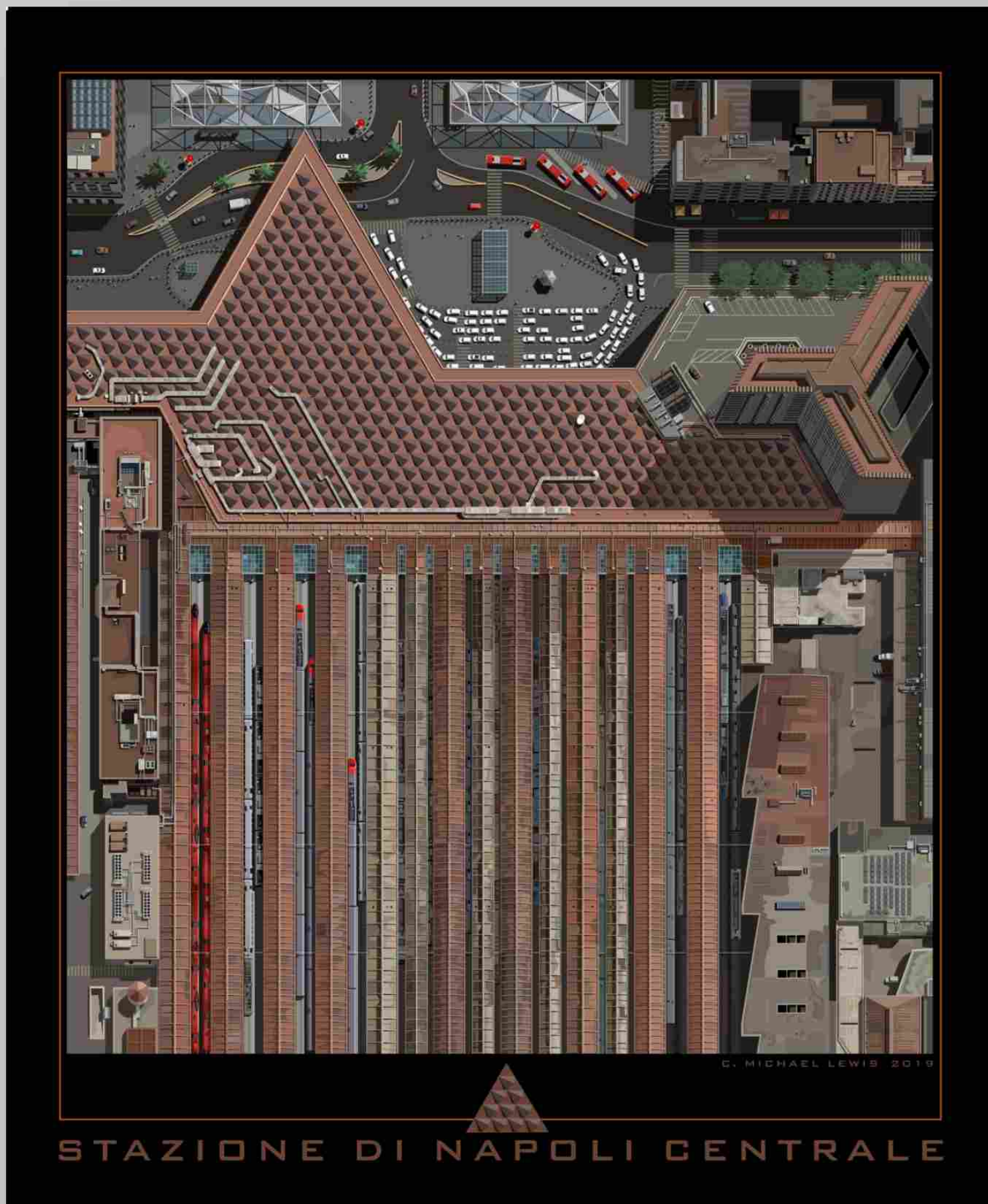
775'



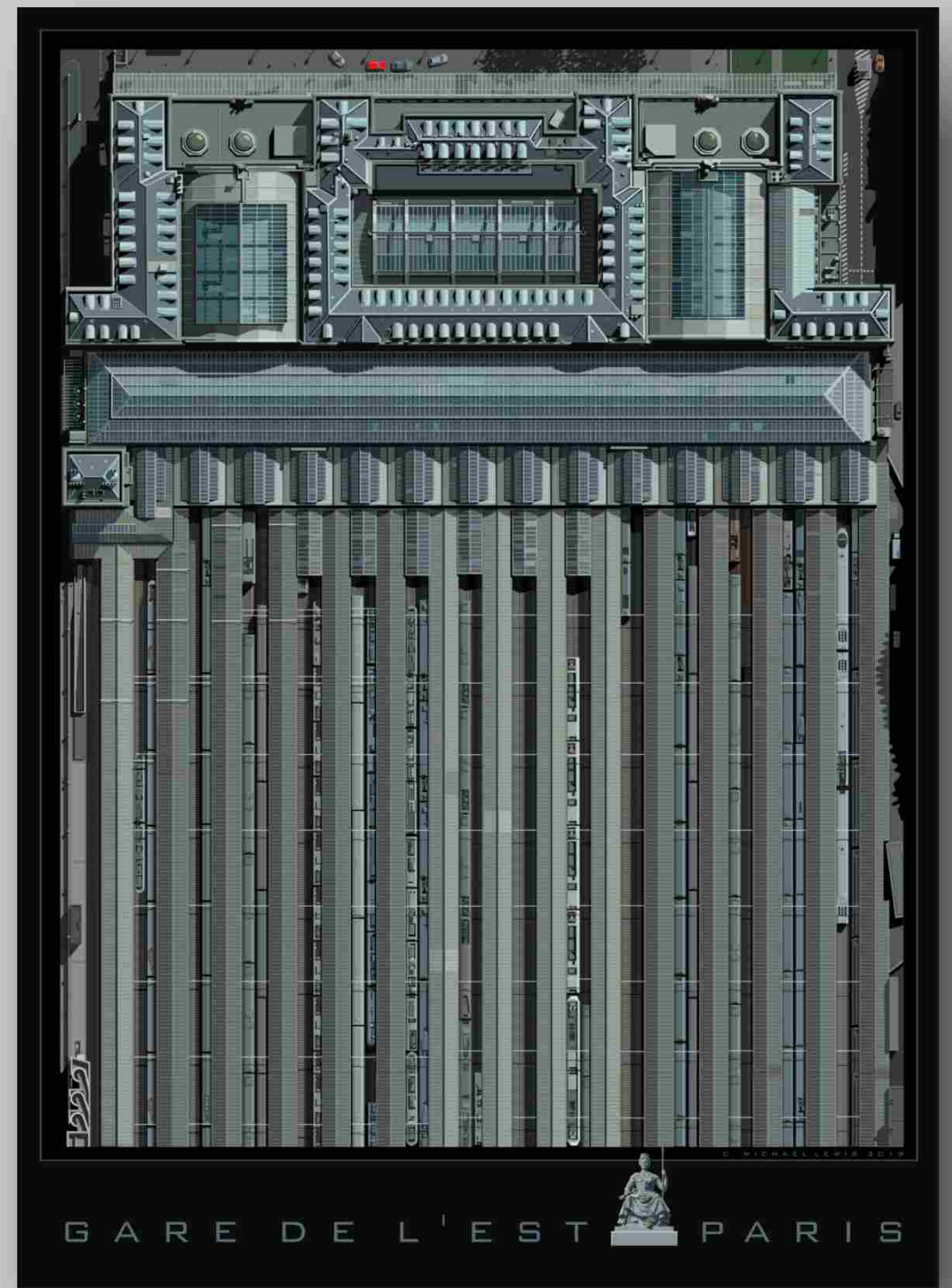






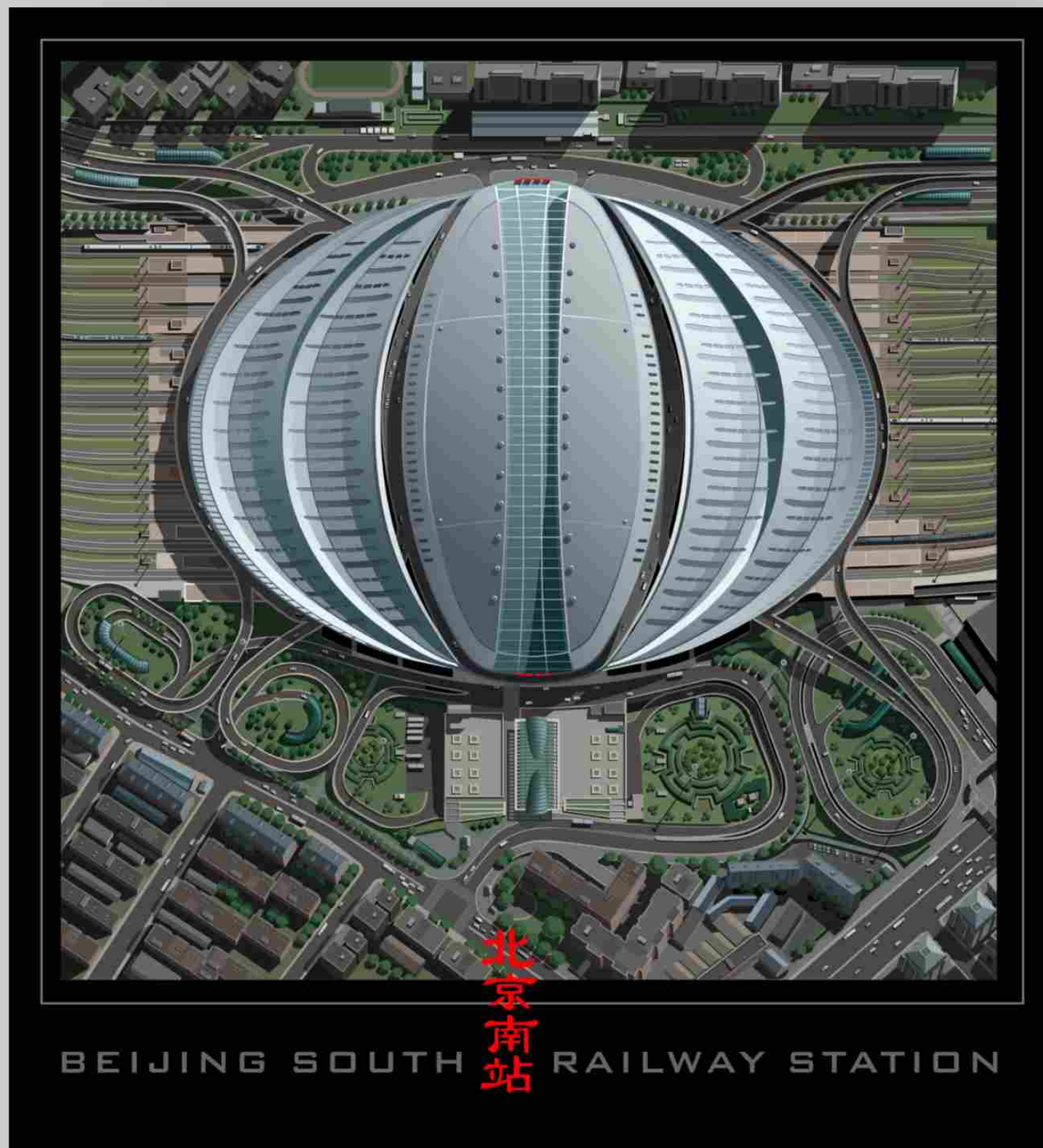


StAZIONE DI NAPOLI CENTRALE - digital vector illustration 2019



GARE DE L'EST digital vector illustration 2019





BEIJING SOUTH RAILWAY STATION - digital vector illustration 2019



BERLIN HAUPTBAHNHOF - digital vector illustration 2019