

Drawing Out Collapse

Valletta Gate

A project between artist and architect where ideas of the construction and collapse of space are explored through drawing, stencil and projection.



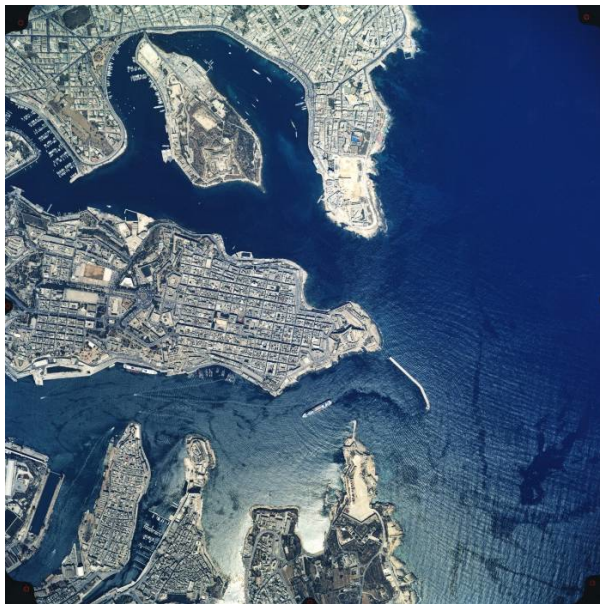
Riet Eeckhout and Jon Tarry met at the RMIT Research Conference (GRC) in Melbourne in 2009. Following a brief conversation which brought to light a common interest in the spatial representation of demolition and decay, a collaboration exploiting the overlap between our two points of departure, that of the artist and that of the architect, began to show exciting potential. There followed a long trail of email and phone communications between two work stations one in London and one in Perth.

The separate studies which emerged from this exchange share a concern with spatial configuration. The applications of the varying outcomes, however, differ. Jon Tarry is an artist exploring sculptural construction whereas as an architect, I am particularly interested in the architecture of the built and un-built environment. In spite of these different ambitions, for both the artist and the architect a common affinity with the drawing process, and how this translates the subject chosen for study, forms a common ground of visual communication.

Drawing is making marks on a surface, it is a way to describe, inscribe and create a knowledge, that is a way to investigate as a method of understanding notions of spatiality. As a result of this act, unexpected considerations emerge and are revealed that give value to the dynamics taking place in the activation, interpretation and misinterpretation of concepts relating to context and contemporary thought.

For Henri Matisse, drawing was taking a line for a walk while Daniel Libeskind approaches a drawing as a structural overlay of single straight lines. Both positions are ways of spatial and descriptive representation. Yet one is applied to the representation of interiors that effectively enclose a world by means of a metaphorical lasso, while the other constructs and expands outwards into the world. One approach is continuous and holds in, while the other is a release that is partial and fragmentary.

In order to come to terms with, and represent, our contemporary environment that changes and unravels at great and unpredictable speed, resisting the exclusion of one of these divergent positions is imperative. To acknowledge the condition of dynamic acceleration of change, the moment of drawing needs to encapsulate both the process of construction as that of breaking down. The process of construction is being continually developed and refined while breaking down, falling, undoing, collapse, is less so. This lacuna in our tradition of representation, we felt, is worth examining further.



Valletta aerial view.

Our project, entitled 'Drawing Out Collapse', aims precisely to investigate generative methodologies of spatial construction derived from the destruction process, as well as their physical and conceptual collapse. The methodology we use is that of drawing, a form of expression that combines the act of drawing with the written word. This medium allows the mind to collect, register and formulate an analysis in different modes alternatively: the more spontaneous and intuitive mode in search of logic between pieces of information and the more linguistic, and

therefore analytical and cultivated operation mode we use to rationalize life; the activity that takes place on the left side and the right side of the brain respectively.

The combination of these two operational thinking modes allows the analytical mind to collect and process information in a lateral way, moving the mind further away from familiar patterns of thinking. To annotate literally means to furnish with critical commentary or explanatory notes. Words, written next to the drawn line, supply additional information and serve to shift the thinking into a more articulated, richer and more meaningful direction.



Valletta streetscape, archive.

We used this methodology to represent the evolution of a fragile urban area like that of the entrance into Valletta, the city built by the Knights of the Order of St John of Jerusalem. Here, a discontinuous transformation of the physical fabric has taken place throughout the centuries, marked by the unpredictable rise and fall of architectural and functional ambitions of the area. Historical continuity is guaranteed by the continuation over the years of interventions that mark time but do not necessarily blend seamlessly one into another. The interface between one phase and another, characterized by the intervention itself, the demolition of the old and the construction of the new, contains a wealth of information relating to the cultural, economic and technological context that generated it. But it remains often uncharted and unrecorded.

In 2011 the demolition process and rebuilding of the City Gate was presented as a transcendent condition of change to a public area and arrive at the new and desired situation. When a society builds, demolishes and rebuilds, it is mainly interested in the transformation, the discarding of the old in favour of the new, regardless of the process necessary to achieve this or the intermediary, transient condition that is an irrevocable part of the process. This is due to the traditionally irrelevant character of the latter, to its existence merely as a means to an end. As a result, the history of an urban area is conventionally narrated through a series of defined episodes or projects. The overlap of

these fragmented narratives which relates about the moments of transition is, however, often ignored. Yet these are precious time zones that get closest to the heart of the story.

This research is based on observing, recording and expressing the process of demolition of the Gate itself, by means of drawings, in an attempt to absorb this transient milestone in the historic transformation of the area. The method chosen to do this is to incisively map the smashed debris of a once ordered cornice, for example, unchanging element of a once static and undisputed structure being demolished. The void space is defined using open lines, while solid materials are defined by closed line forms and dotted lines indicate trajectories. The moment of collapse is thus shifted, the lines and planes creating a systemised annotative drawing whose function extends beyond mere representation.



Valletta gate demolition, photo Riet Eeckhout.

How through drawing to examine this moment of collapse? One method chosen was to use lines to trace falling fragments in the mode of stop animation. A still of one frame of 18 per second was used. The analysis maps the path and shapes of falling debris, halts the sense of motion, time is stilled and locked. Similar to the moments recorded by Edward Muybridge of galloping horses and people walking, this still motion captures and contains the subject for examination.

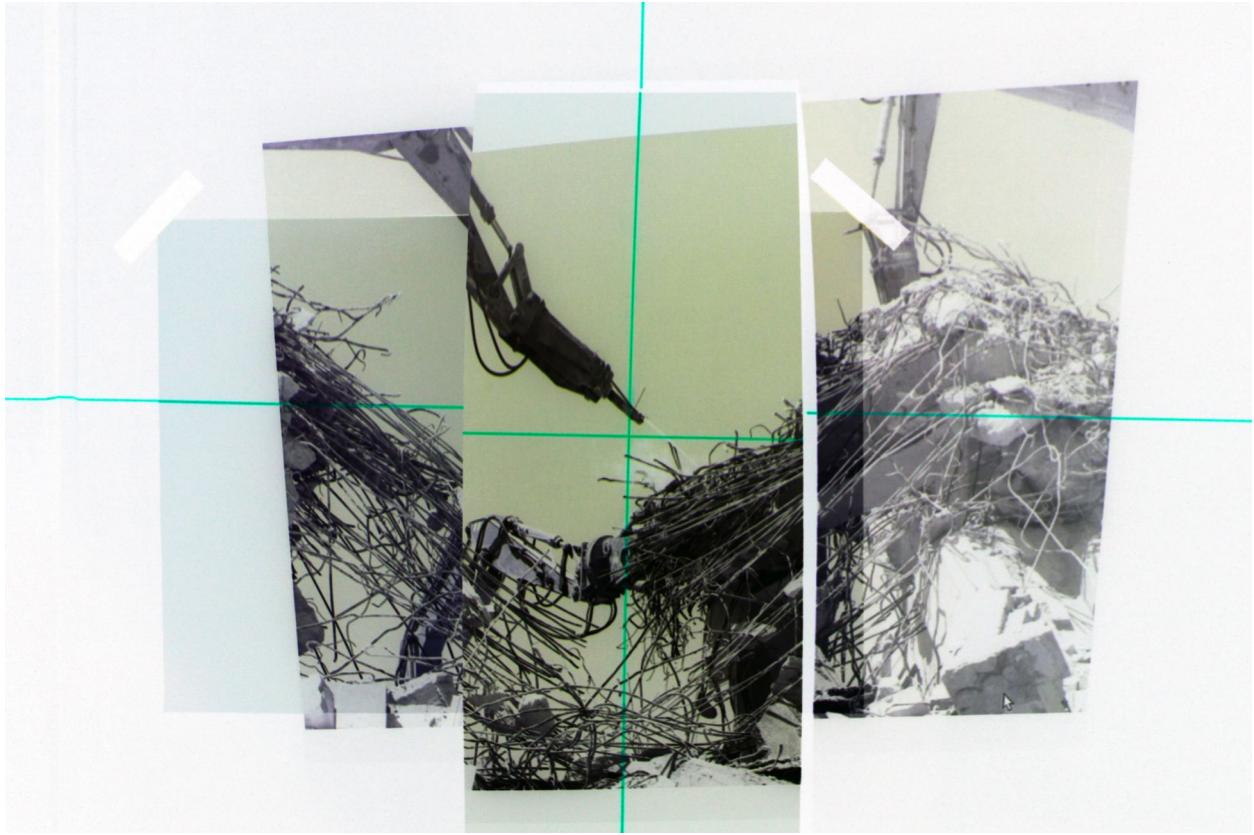
Lines fall into each other, are broken and reformed again as fragmentary order. A reframing of free space is observed and arrested. Once a drawing has started to take shape on the basis of agreed information, a process of entropy is irreversibly set in motion. This set up tended to progress in the direction of increasing the desired entropy - in this

case the continuous breaking down and reshaping of order.

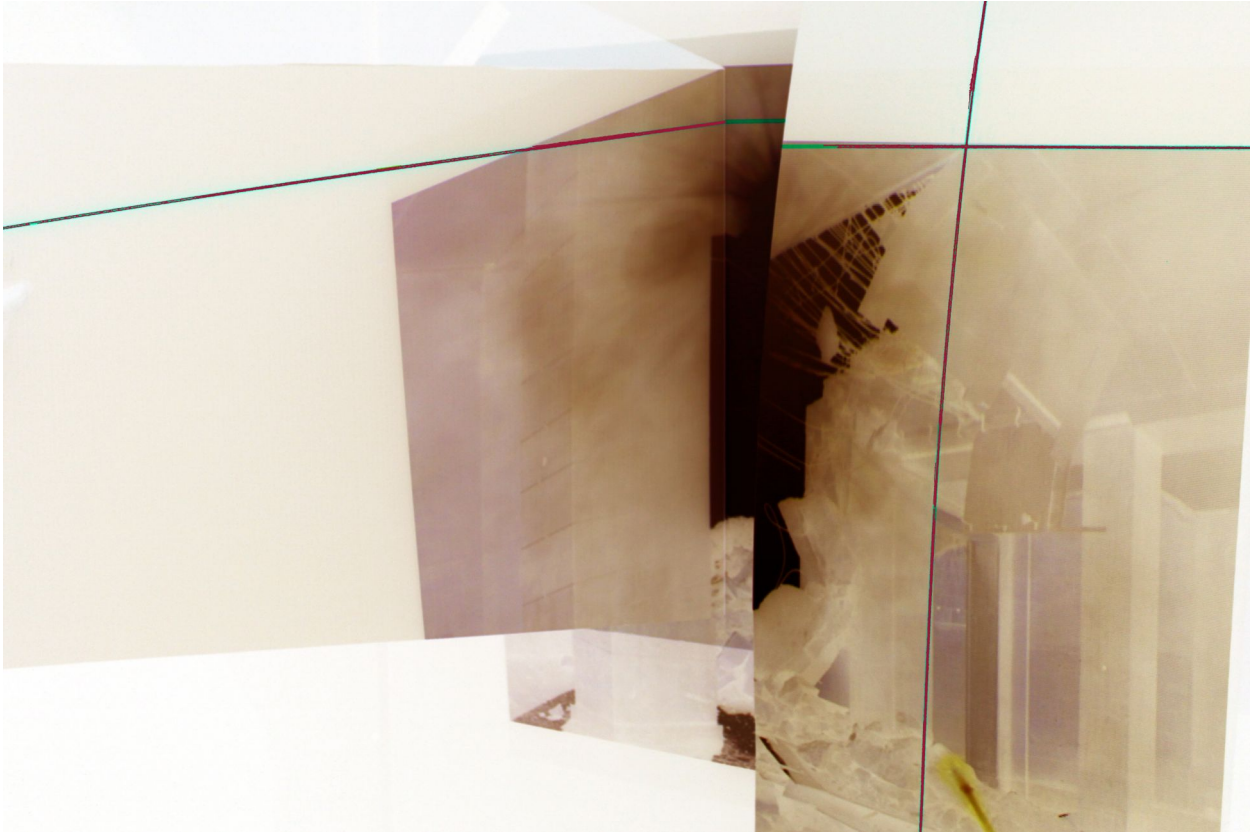
In between the debris are spaces that may be unseen, yet is it this invisible space that drawing inverts in order to mediate. What is seen in the world through observation, action, idea, interrogation and conveyance? When drawing collapses it is creating this new space of (observational) possibility. So how does one work in this collapsing space? How does one work within an unknowable space? Then begins the heuristic picking apart once the crash has taken place and all is still.



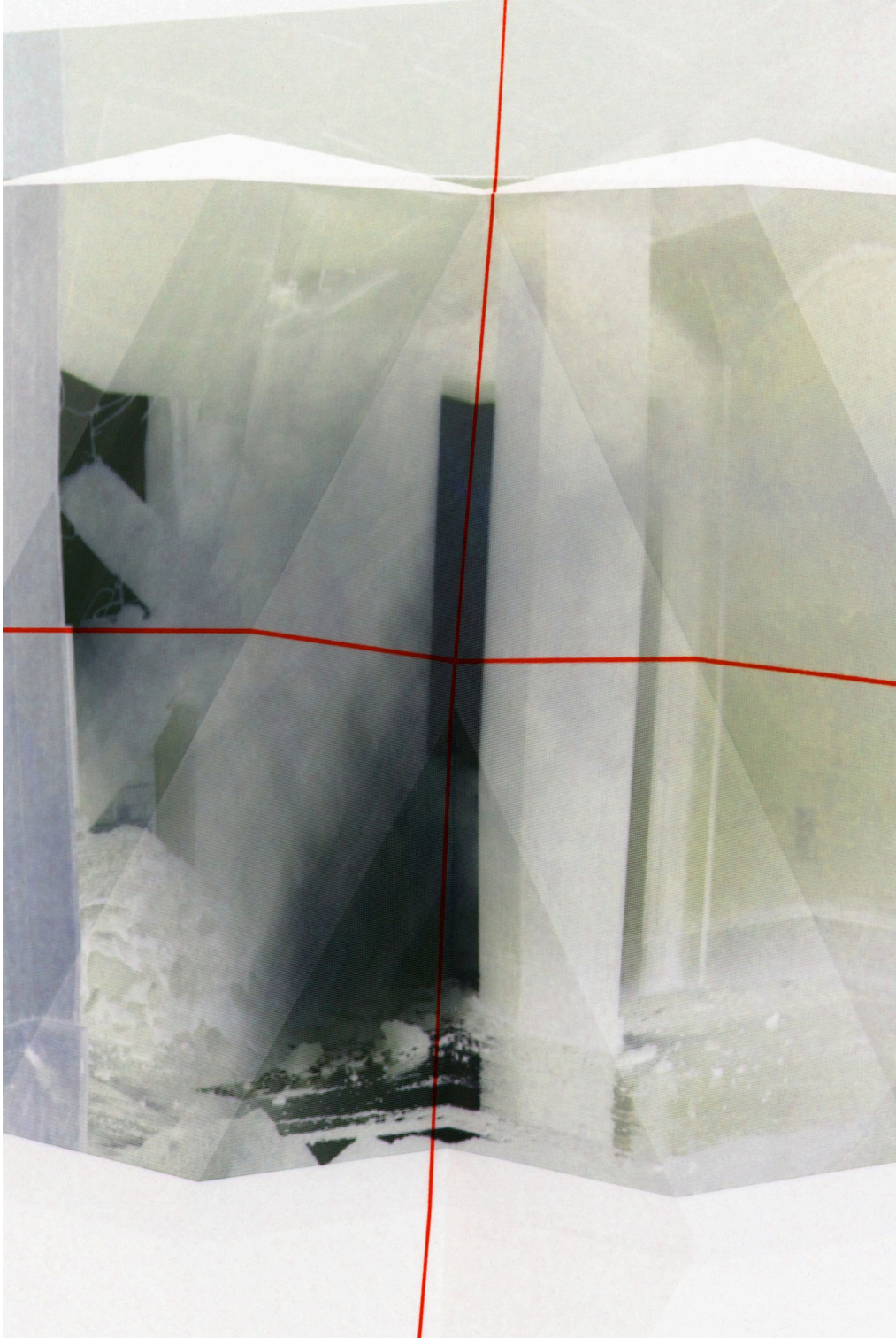
Tarry Eeckhout



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Jon Tarry Riet Eeckhout.



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Extracts from the drawing process of 'Drawing Out Collapse'.

Jon Tarry is artist who predominant makes sculptures.

Riet Eeckhout is an Architect Principle of Architecture Project.