

# URBAN PALIMPSEST: AN ENQUIRY INTO THE LAYERING OF HISTORY WITHIN THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

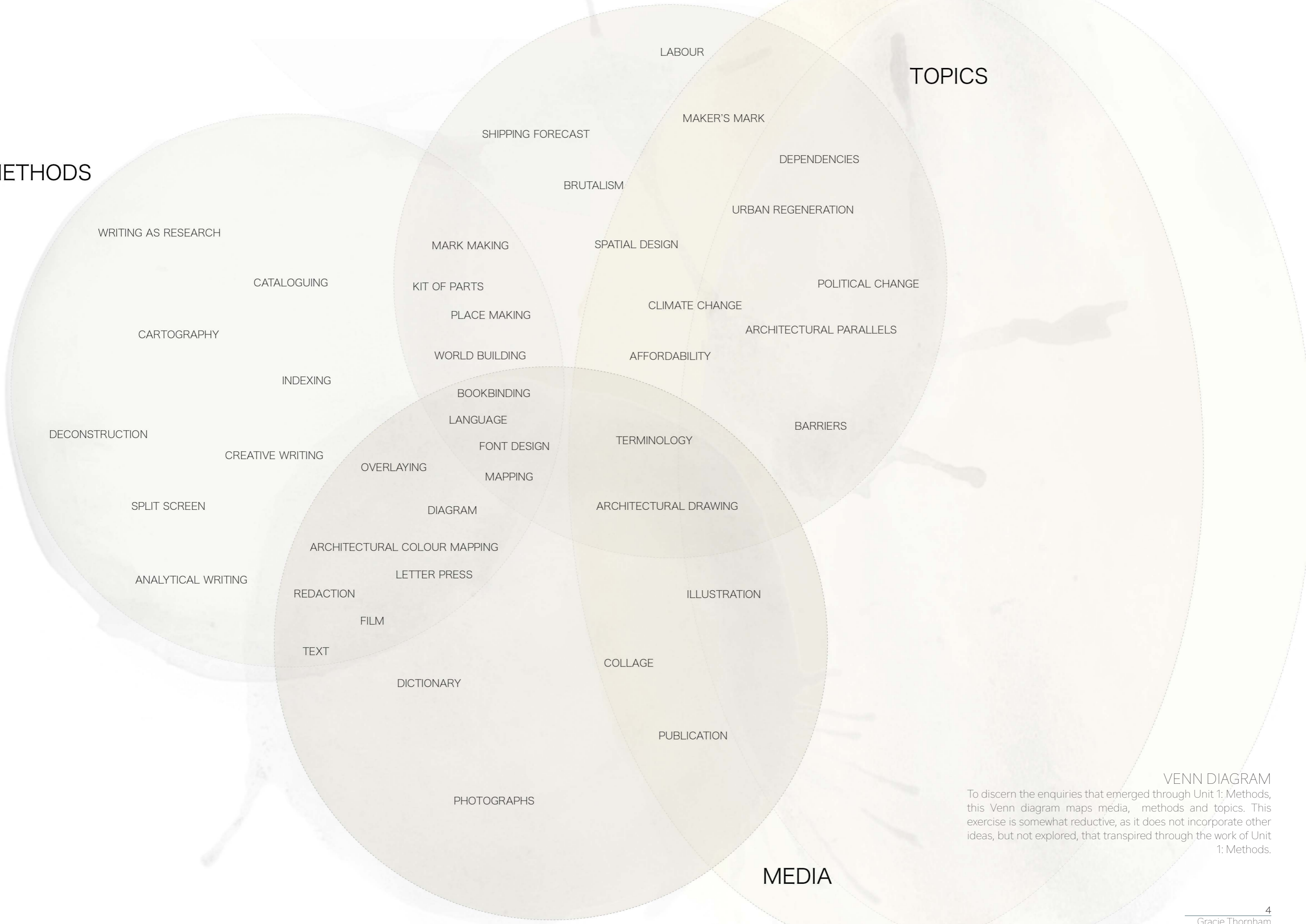
POSITIONS: POSITIONS THROUGH ITERATING  
Gracie Thornham | 25012768

The position (location) of this project starts in Somers Town, London, and subsequently resituates itself in Easkey, the rural west coast of Ireland. Image-manipulation is utilised as a key method in the latter section of the body of work to explore the tension between the degradation of the image and the degradation of the building. This informs the position (attitude) of the investigations, which champion image-making as a form of research. Through a series of iterations, the research frames the question: 'Can palimpsest (as a subject matter and method) be applied to the built environment to glean insight into the history of the place?'

SNIPPET

# METHODS

# TOPICS



## VENN DIAGRAM

To discern the enquiries that emerged through Unit 1: Methods, this Venn diagram maps media, methods and topics. This exercise is somewhat reductive, as it does not incorporate other ideas, but not explored, that transpired through the work of Unit 1: Methods.

FORM  
 FORMAL  
 FORMULAIC

TYPOGRAPHY  
 TYPOLOGY

PALIMCEST

POLITICS OF OTHERNESS

BINDING  
 ECOLOGIES

LAY OF THE LAND  
 LINES IN THE LAND

COLLECTIVE MEMORY

SURVEILLANCE

LONGING  
 TO LONG  
 TOO LONG

INDIGENOUS  
 KNOWLEDGE

RECAP  
 RECAP

UNCOVERING TEXTURES OF THE CITY

GHOSTS OF BUILDINGS

BOOK OF TECHNIQUES

PSYCHOGEOGRAPHY

SUBPLANTATION

INTERSTITIAL

JURISDICTION

A LIVING DOCUMENT  
 A LIVING ARCHIVE

SYNTEXT

MISINFORMATION

COLOUR GRADING

FONT

MENU DESIGN

ARCHIVING

ART DIRECTION

TOUCH DESIGNER

MEDIA PIPE

EMBROIDERY

PUBLICATION INTO  
 ARCH MODEL

POINT CLOUD

PROCESSING - PS

WEBSITE ON CARGO

ART INSTAGRAM

HORST COMPETITION

ILLUSTRATE TEXT

PRINTING KIT

BITMAPPED IMAGES

FIGMA

BUSINESS CARDS

CLUB POSTERS

DESIGN JOBS BOARD

JOBS.AC.UK

ARTS. (VAL ARTS TEMPS)

DEFUNCT

RHYZE

FORENSIC ARCHITECTURE

RICHARD LONG

CHRIS WEIR

LARISSA FASSLER

HARUN FAROCKI

JOHN CAGLE

ALI QADEER

DAVID HARVEY - a spatial fix

DOREEN MASSEY - a global sense  
 of place

HELMO STUDIO

BAS JACOBS

HITO STEYERL - in free fall

SITTERWERK CATALOGUE

LIBRARY OF BABEL

TREVOR PAGLEN

HITO STEYERL - in defense of the  
 poor image

METAHAVEN

ARIELLA AZOULAY - potential

HOW TO LIE WITH MAPS history

KARL NAWROT - BREV

LANAIRE ADEREMI - RECORD FOUND  
 HERE

BRUEE NOW - an incomplete  
 manifesto for growth

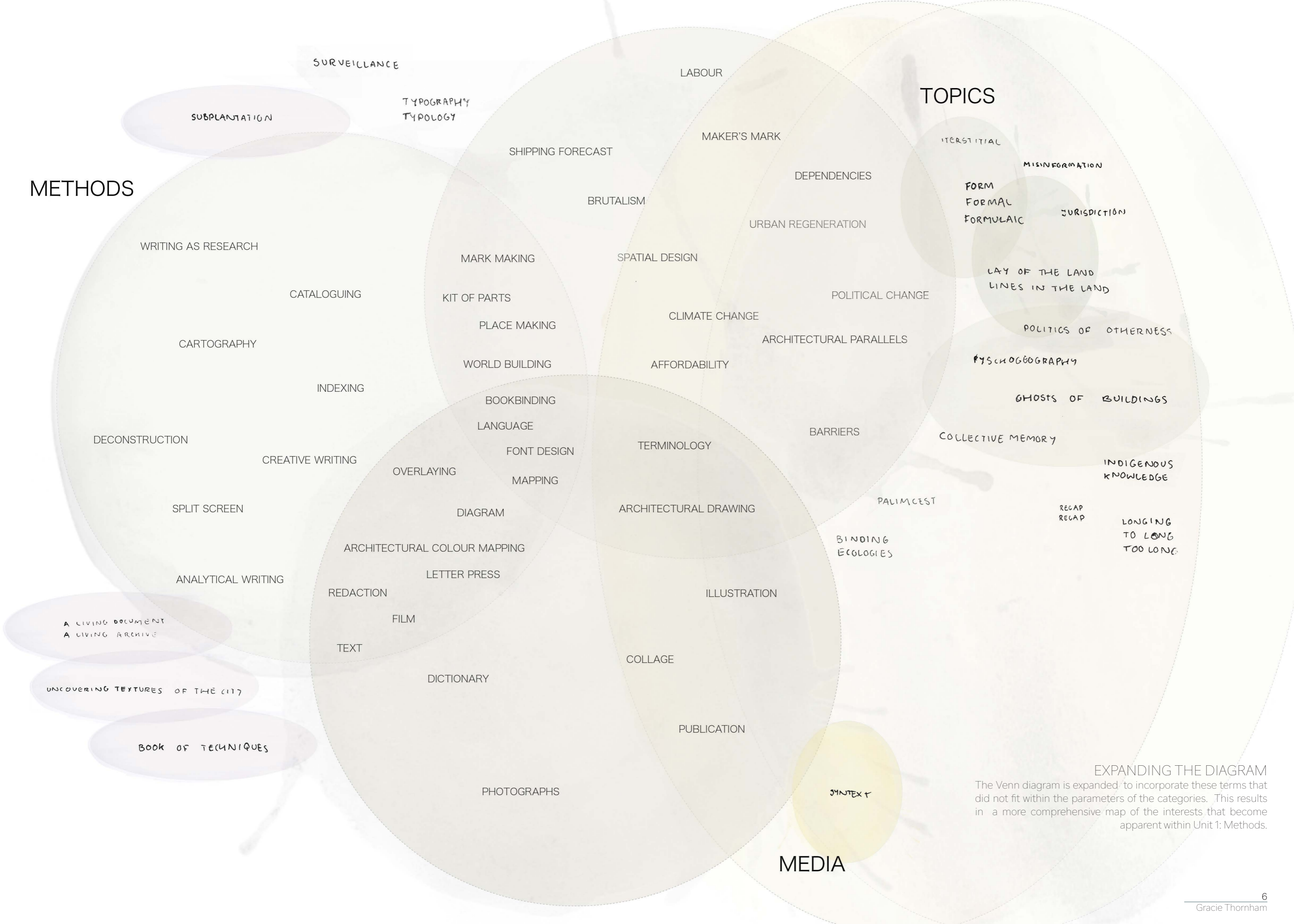
## COLLECTING INSPIRATION

Throughout Unit 1: Methods, a catalogue of terminology, references, ideas and processes were periodically collected. The majority of these are ideas that did not fit within the five Methods briefs, but could potentially inform future projects.

# METHODS

# TOPICS

# MEDIA

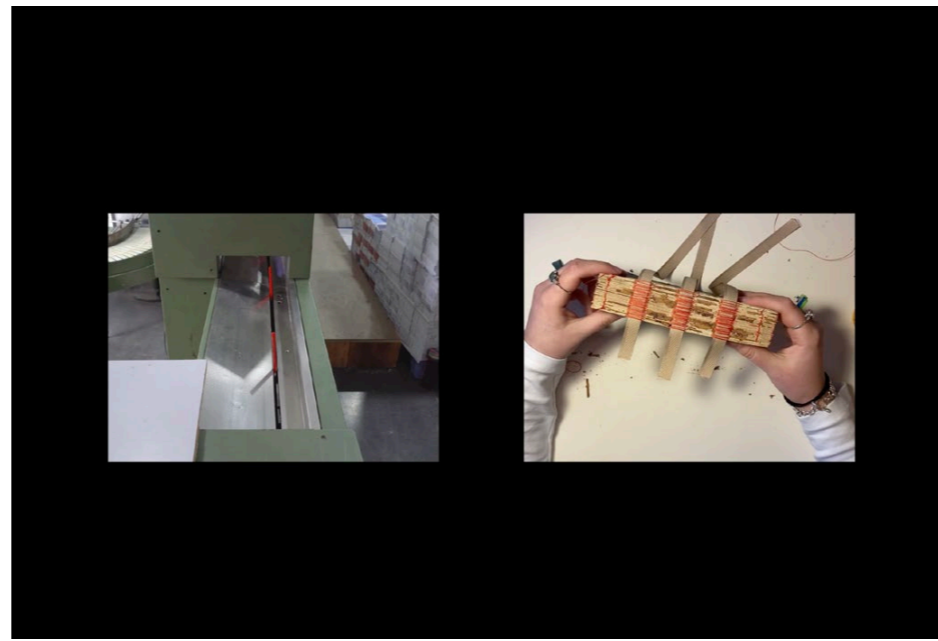


## EXPANDING THE DIAGRAM

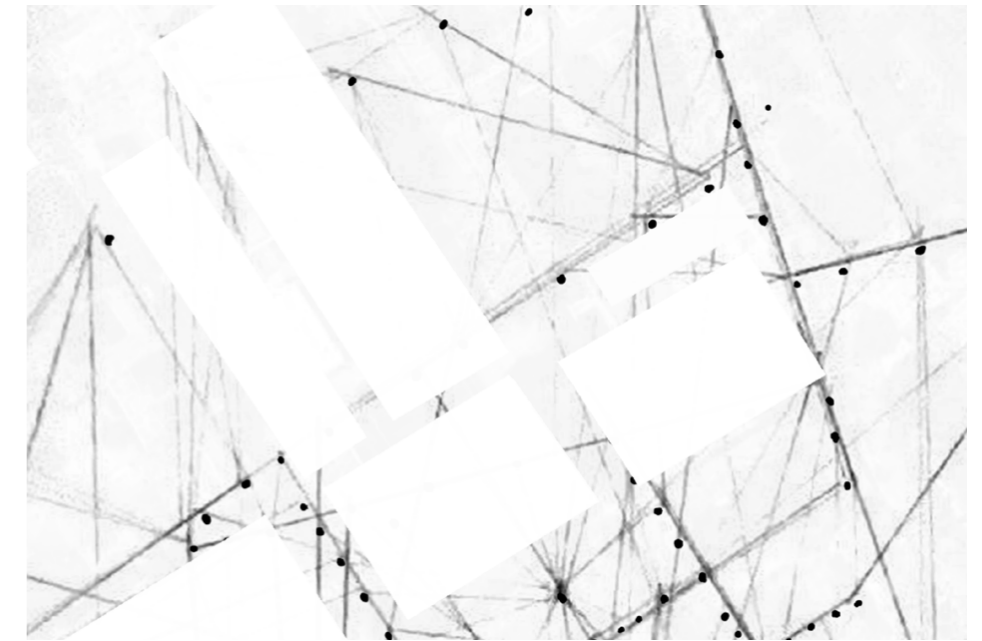
The Venn diagram is expanded to incorporate these terms that did not fit within the parameters of the categories. This results in a more comprehensive map of the interests that become apparent within Unit 1: Methods.



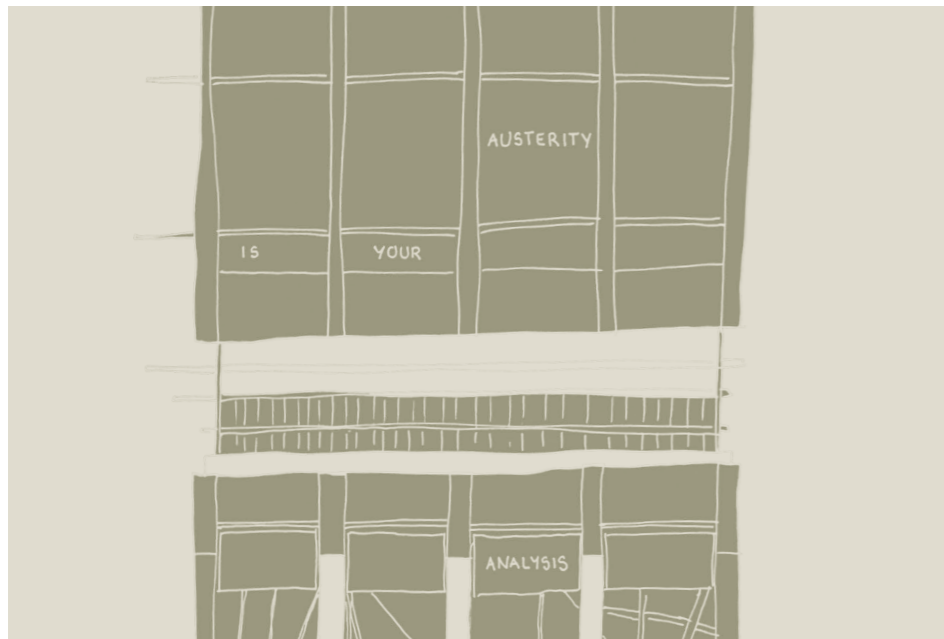
Affordability



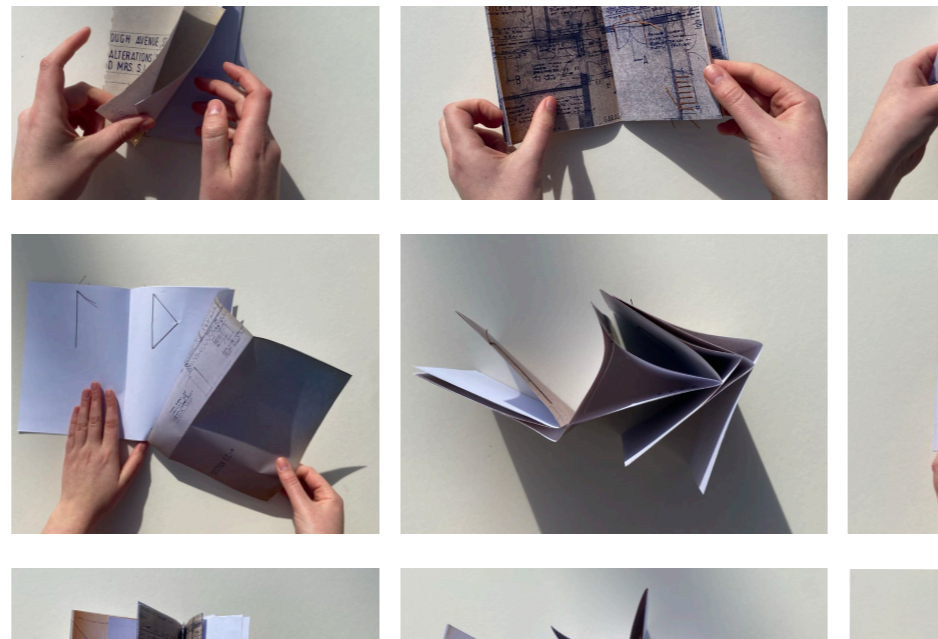
Comparison of Labour



Maker's Mark



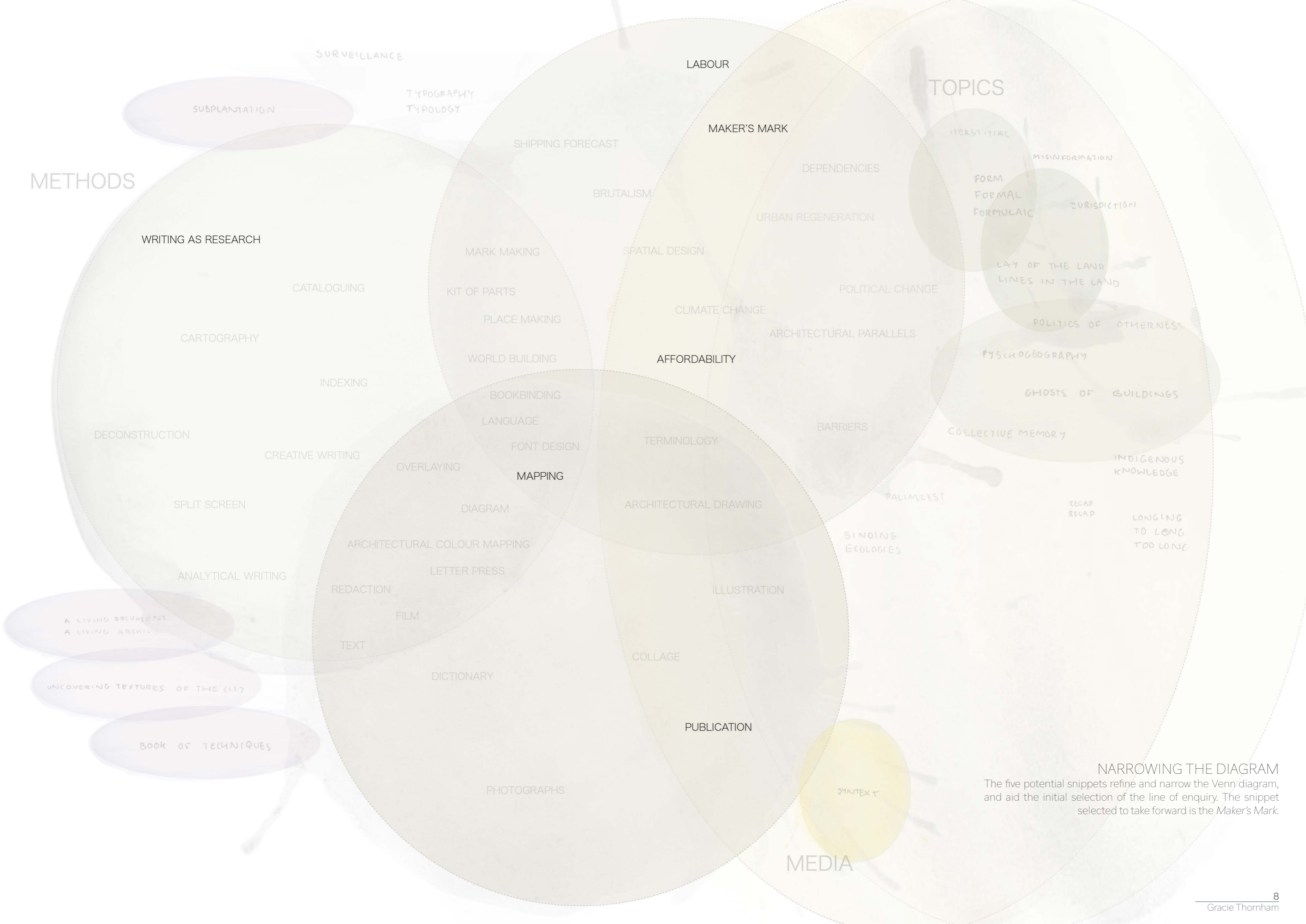
Manifesto



Publication Design

REFINING POTENTIAL SNIPPETS  
 Upon reflecting on the questions listed in the brief, in conjunction with reviewing the work from the previous two semesters, five snippets are identified as potential inspiration for the Positions through Iterating project.

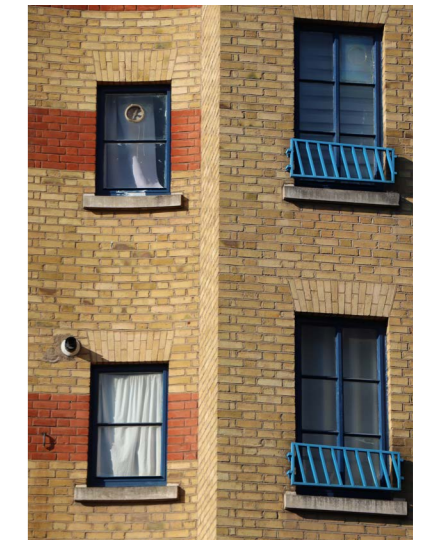
# METHODS



## NARROWING THE DIAGRAM

The five potential snippets refine and narrow the Venn diagram, and aid the initial selection of the line of enquiry. The snippet selected to take forward is the *Maker's Mark*.

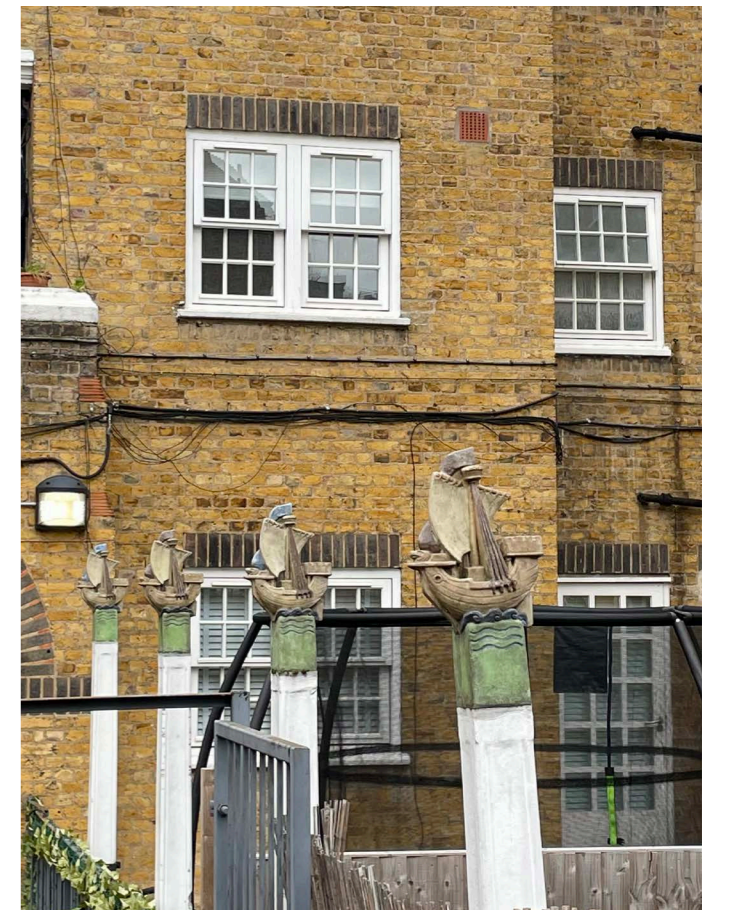
# URBAN PALIMPSEST



### SELECTING A SNIPPET

The selected snippet is the initial collection of *Maker's Marks* within Somers Town. Within the context of the Methods of Investigating studio brief, *The Maker's Mark* was defined as an architectural feature that has a human-made quality to it, and displays a level of craftsmanship that is often overlooked in contemporary building practice.

The system of collecting and documenting *Maker's Marks* during Unit 1: Methods was not methodical and thorough, therefore returning to the site to complete this task was essential.



#1 1 CHARLTON STREET AUGUST ALARMS, ADT ALARM	#2 3-9 CHARLTON STREET WOODEN STRAPPING	#15 CHURCHWAY GRAFFITI IN BLUE, BLACK & WHITE	#16 CHURCHWAY BOARDED UP WINDOWS	#29 PHEONIX ROAD WALKER HOUSE SIGN	#36 OSSULTON STREET COMMUNITY CAFE MOSAIC	#43 36-37 CHARRINGTON STREET METAL STAMP ON PAVEMENT	#44 34-35 CHARRINGTON STREET METAL STAMP ON PAVEMENT
#3 15 CHARLTON STREET NATHAN PASS, BLUE PLAQUE	#4 17 CHARLTON STREET WOODEN STRAPPING	#17 CHURCHWAY ORNAMENTAL ARCHITRAVE	#18 66 CHURCHWAY ROSE CORNICE	#31 OSSULTON STREET AIR VENT	#32 POLYGON ROAD BARBED WIRE FENCING	#45 32-33 CHARRINGTON STREET METAL STAMP ON PAVEMENT	#46 32-33 CHARRINGTON STREET METAL STAMP ON PAVEMENT
#5 25 CHARLTON STREET STONE ORNAMENTATION 'H'	#6 29 CHARLTON STREET BUZZERS & STICKERS	#19 66A CHURCHWAY MOSAIC ABOVE WINDOWS	#20 64 CHURCHWAY STRING COURSE IN ZIGZAG	#33 CHENIES PLACE GLASS BRICK	#34 1 PORCHMERE STREET STRING COURSE	#47 PLATT STREET BOARDED WINDOWS WITH BRICK	#48 PLATT STREET SERVICE BOX
#7 35 CHARLTON STREET WEATHERING ON BRICK	#8 37 CHARLTON STREET 1837-1901 56N	#21 71 CHARLTON STREET RED BRICK STRING COURSE	#22 CHARLTON HOUSE BUILDING NAME PLAQUE	#35 COLDINGTON STREET ROAD NAME SIGNAGE	#36 28 COLDINGTON STREET ORNAMENTAL WINDOW FRAME	#49 1-3 CHARRINGTON STREET STEP IN BRICK WORK	#50 1 CHARRINGTON STREET EXPOSED BUILDING EDGE
#9 39 CHARLTON STREET GRANE PULLEY SYSTEM	#10 41 CHARLTON STREET PEDESTAL ORNEMENTATION	#23 68 CHARLTON STREET HAND PAINTED SIGNAGE	#24 90 CHARLTON STREET BUILDING NUMBER	#37 18 MEDBURN STREET PLANT HOOK	#38 24 MEDBURN STREET ORNAMENTAL RAILING	#51 PLOT 10 NEON SIGNAGE	#52 128 CHALTON STREET SCENE & HEARD SIGNAGE
#11 45 CHARLTON STREET HAND PAINTED SIGNAGE	#12 53-65 CHARLTON STREET SCAFFOLDING	#25 92-94 CHARLTON STREET MOSAIC UNDER WINDOW	#26 50 PHEONIX ROAD WOODEN STRAPPING	#39 28 MEDBURN STREET CRACK IN BRICKWORK	#40 30 MEDBURN STREET COUNCIL SIGNAGE	#53 113 CHALTON STREET ORNAMENTAL GATE	#54 130 CHALTON STREET PUB SIGNAGE
#13 57 CHARLTON STREET MOSAIC & ORNAMENTAL BRICK	#14 63 CHARLTON STREET ORNAMENTATION	#27 52 PHEONIX STREET GRAFFITI OF PEOPLE	#28 54-56 PHEONIX ROAD CIRCULAR ORNAMENTATION	#41 MEDBURN STREET BOARDED WINDOWS WITH BRICK	#42 40-41 CHARRINGTON STREET WINDOW PEDESTAL	#55 ST ANTHONYS FLATS MOSAIC ABOVE WINDOW	#56 ST ANTHONYS FLATS ORNAMENTAL GATE
#67 ST ANTHONYS FLATS SCULPTURE	#58 29-34 CHALTON STREET RED, ORANGE, YELLOW BRICK	#71 WERRINGTON STREET BASIL JELlicoe BLUE PLAQUE	#72 WERRINGTON STREET SCHOOL MOSAIC	#85 CHALTON STREET WEATHERING ON BRICK	#86 CHALTON STREET BUILDING NAME SIGNAGE	#99 CHAMBERLAIN HOUSE BUILDING NAME SIGNAGE	#100 CHAMBERLAIN HOUSE SPATIAL MAP OF AREA
#59 ST GEORGES HOUSE RED STAIRWELL	#60 BRIDGEWAY STREET MOSAIC ABOVE WINDOW	#73 ALDENHAM STREET STAINED GLASS WINDOW	#74 ALDENHAM STREET SCAFFOLDING	#87 PHEONIX ROAD MURAL	#88 PHEONIX ROAD MURAL		
#61 WERRINGTON STREET MOSAIC ABOVE WINDOW	#62 ST NICHOLAS FLATS MOSAIC ABOVE WINDOW	#75 ALDENHAM STREET GRAFFITI, EVENT POSTERS	#76 130 EVERS Holt STREET SIGNAGE	#89 PHEONIX ROAD MURAL	#90 PHEONIX ROAD MURAL		
#63 ST NICHOLAS FLATS ORNAMENTAL GATE	#64 ST NICHOLAS FLATS MOSAIC ABOVE WINDOW	#77 130 EVERS Holt STREET BOARDED WINDOWS	#78 POLYGON STREET IRENE BARCLAY BLUE PLAQUE	#91 PHEONIX ROAD SQUIRREL SCULPTURE	#92 PHEONIX ROAD WEATHERING ON BRICK		
#65 ST NICHOLAS FLATS SCULPTURE ON WASHING POLE	#66 WERRINGTON STREET SCHOOL ILLUSTRATIONS	#79 POLYGON STREET EXPOSED BUILDING EDGE	#80 POLYGON STREET THE JUBILEE SIGNAGE	#93 PHEONIX ROAD WHALE SCULPTURE	#94 PHEONIX ROAD BIRD SCULPTURE		
#67 ALDENHAM STREET RELIGIOUS STATUE	#68 ALDENHAM STREET RELIGIOUS STATUE	#81 POLYGON STREET PUB SIGNAGE	#82 WERRINGTON STREET MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT PLAQUE	#95 CHALTON STREET COCK TAVERN	#96 CHALTON STREET COCK TAVERN		
#69 ALDENHAM STREET RELIGIOUS STATUE	#70 ALDENHAM STREET SCHOOL PLAQUE	#83 POLYGON ROAD FISH MOSAIC	#84 POLYGON ROAD LARGE PAINTED MURAL	#97 100 CHALTON STREET BUILDING NAME SIGNAGE	#98 CHAMBERLAIN HOUSE WRITTEN MURAL		

## DOCUMENTING PALIMPSEST

During the site visit, it became apparent that these *Maker's Marks* are in fact instances where layers of history within the city are embedded within the urban environment. During *Methods of Iterating*, the line of enquiry centred around the relationship between urban regeneration and the regeneration of *Maker's Marks*. The notion of *The Maker's Mark* had already been explored in some depth. To expand the scope of the investigation, the discourse pivots towards the theme of urban palimpsest.

SIGNAGE  
ORNAMENTATION  
BRICKWORK  
METALWORK  
MURAL  
ADDITION  
FIXING

#### INDEX SYSTEM

Photographs and corresponding descriptions of moments of urban palimpsest within Somers Town are collected here. Here, urban palimpsest is defined as architectural features or materials that display the layered history of the place whilst still bearing visible traces of its earlier form. To further understand these phenomena, they are categorised into an index system. This informs the design of the subsequent publication which illustrates 100 examples of layers of the city within Somers Town.



SOMERS TOWN  
LAYERS OF THE CITY





# RE-POSITIONING



RURAL WEST COAST OF IRELAND  
Somers Town is an important location as it provided the starting point for the Positions through Iterating investigation. Although a robust foundational understanding of palimpsest within the urban environment was created, the exploration was limited to building facades. To understand urban palimpsest in more depth, a repositioning of the line of enquiry is required. The rural west coast of Ireland holds significant personal value, whilst also displaying a number of enterable derelict homestead dwellings.



POSITION (LOCATION)

To narrow and refine the enquiry, one derelict cottage is selected as the site of investigation. This is the position (location). This homestead is particularly interesting as it is enterable and displays remnants of human inhabitation. The layers of history are upfront and discernible, and palimpsest within the built structure is highly tangible.

The position is ethnographic despite the locational personal sentiment.

Palimpsest is a lens to view the history of place.

Amplifying the degradation of the stone cottages to illustrate the layers of history embedded within the built environment.

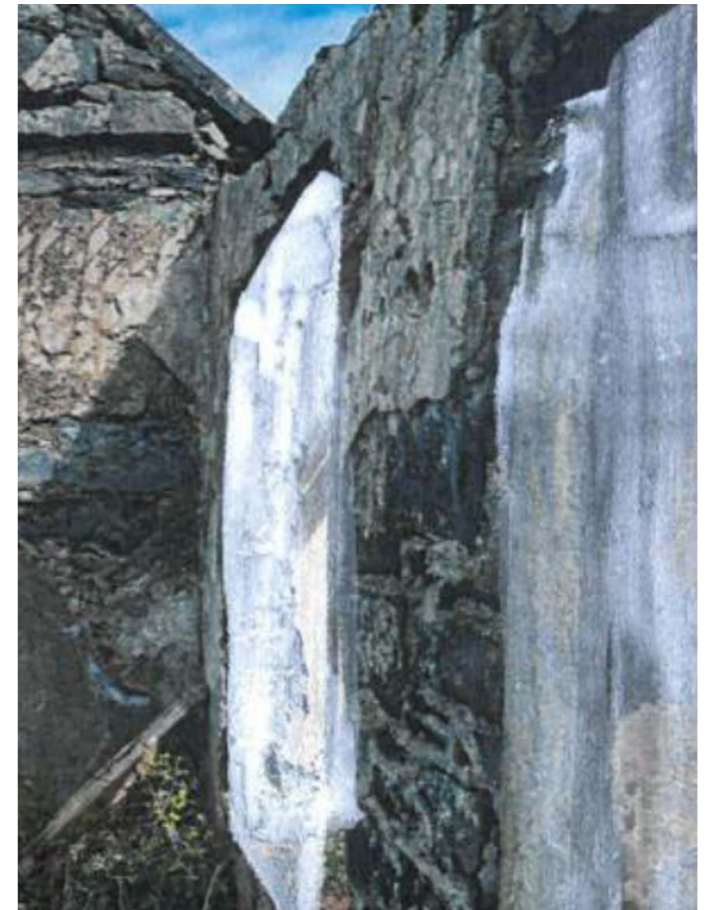
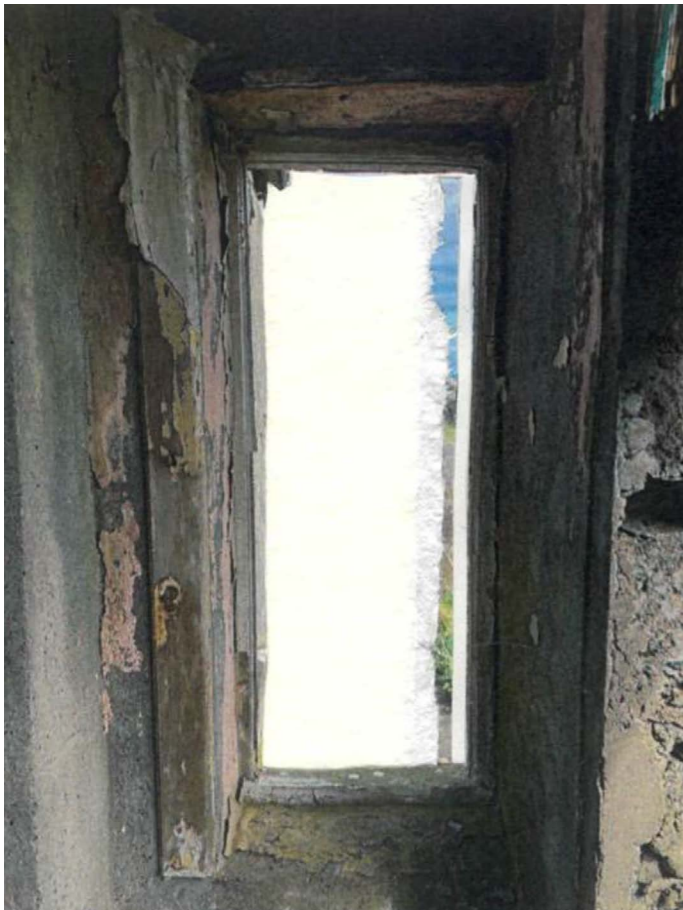
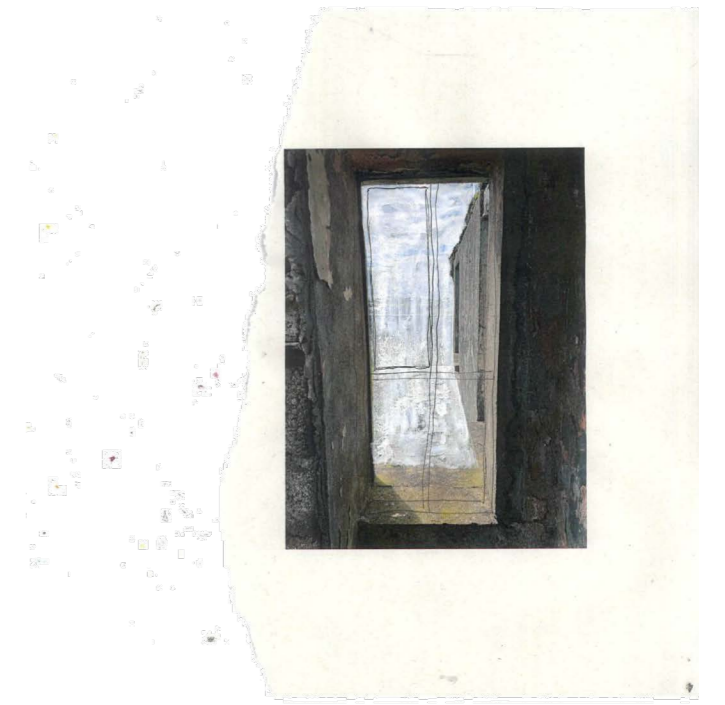
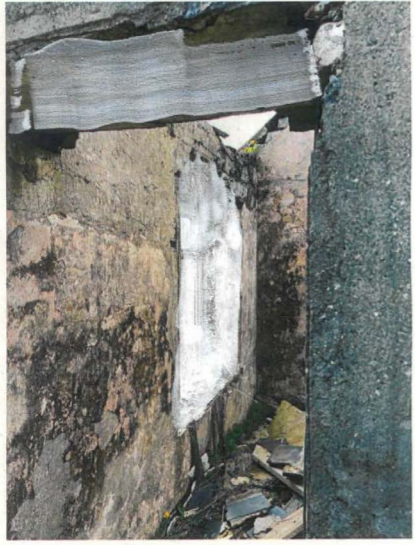
#### POSITION (ATTITUDE)

A position (attitude) towards the investigation is adopted. The impetus to uncover the layers of history embedded within the structure makes the subsequent work intentional and directed.



#### IMAGE-MAKING AS RESEARCH

Drawing inspiration from Rachel Whiteread and Gordon Matta-Clark, image-making is used as a form of research. Collage, overlaying, and image-manipulation is employed to alter photographs of the selected homestead structure. This investigation speculatively comments on the past and future of the building, whilst still celebrating the form that it currently exists in.









#### APPLYING THE INDEX SYSTEM

The initial experimentation created a collection of image-manipulation techniques. These moves are arbitrary and somewhat random, and do not glean rich insight into the past, present and future of the stone homestead structures of rural Ireland. To create a more rigorous and meaningful set of iterations, the system created to index palimpsest across Somers Town is applied to the image-manipulation techniques to degrade the photographs of the derelict cottages.

# SIGNAGE

ORNAMENTATION

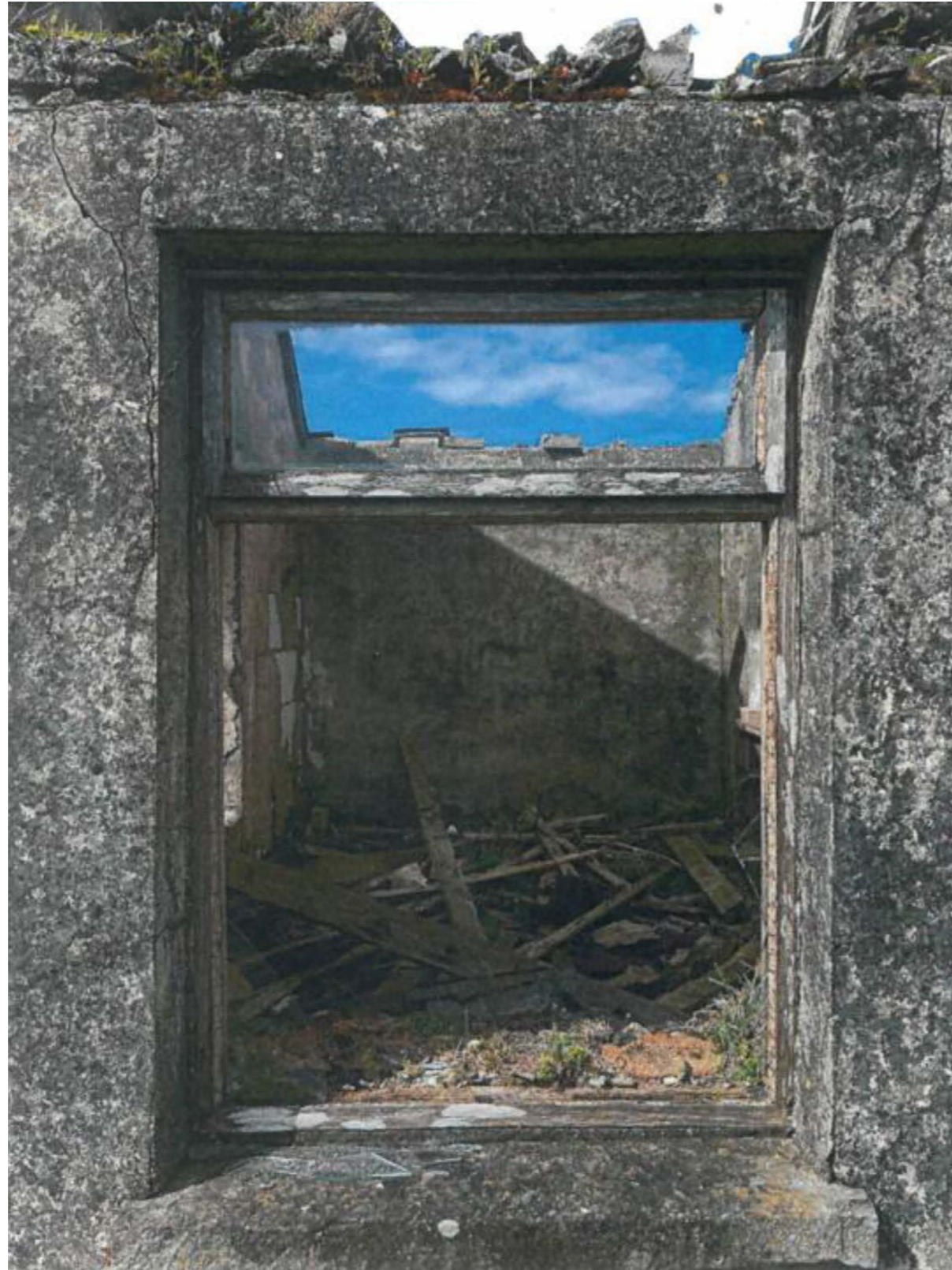
BRICKWORK

METALWORK

MURAL

ADDITION

FIXING

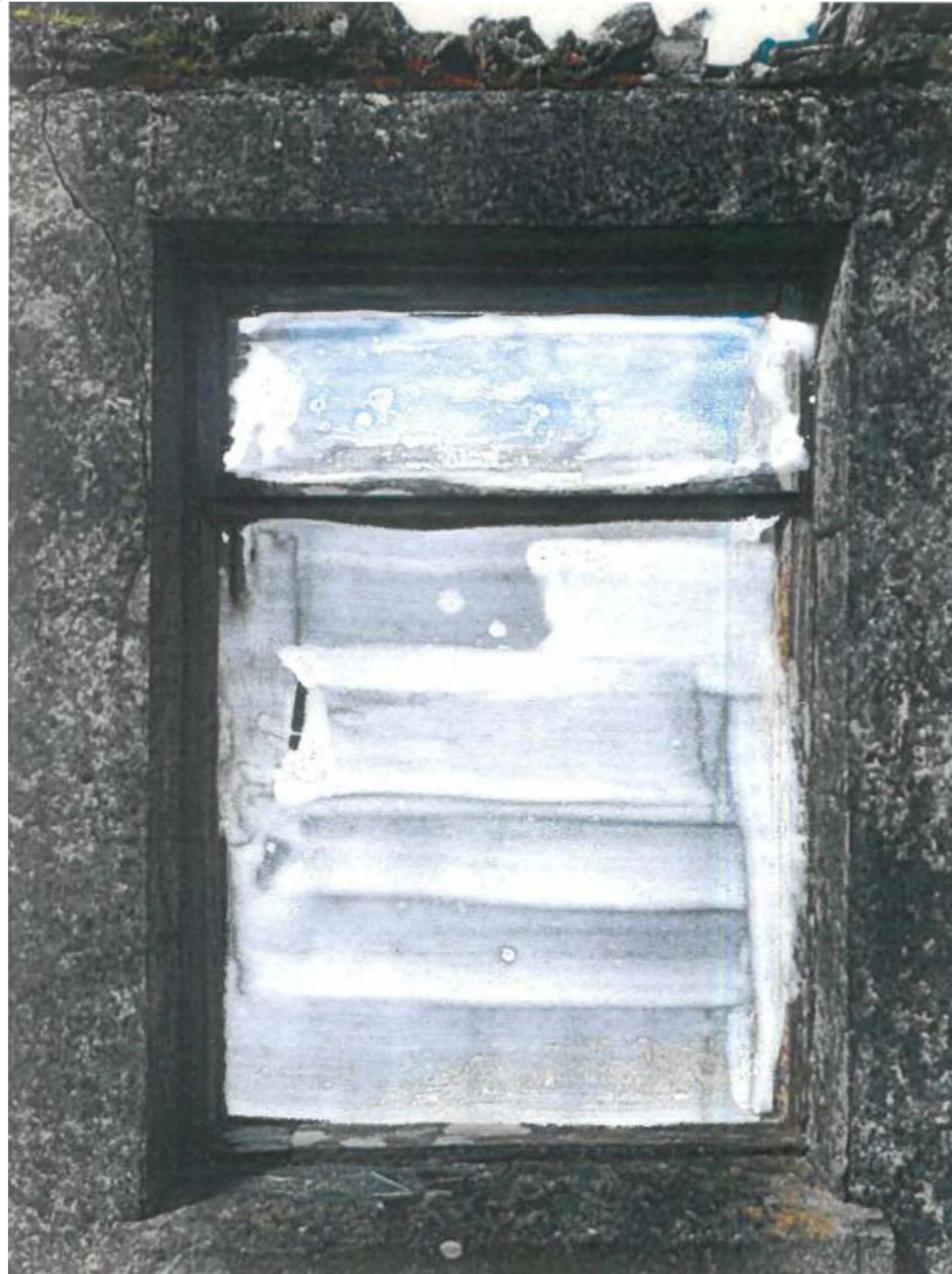


## SIGNAGE

As signage is not a theme directly relevant within the stone cottage structures of the rural west coast of Ireland, it demands a re-imagination of the term. In the context of this experiment, signage is interpreted as a move to signal the area of interest within the image through a process of slicing and removing a part of the photograph. During each stage of the iterative process, the image is scanned and reprinted.

SIGNAGE  
ORNAMENTATION

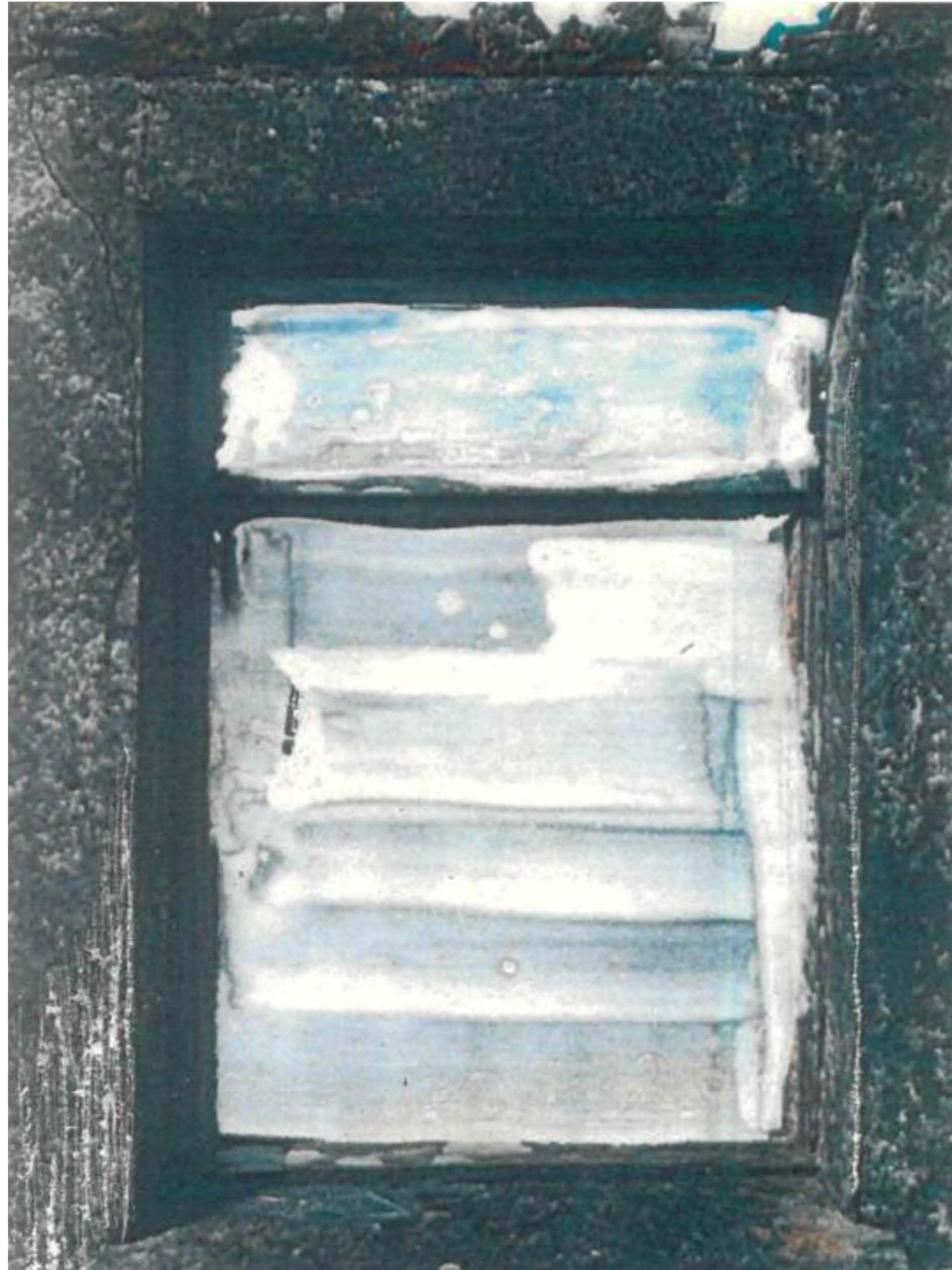
BRICKWORK  
METALWORK  
MURAL  
ADDITION  
FIXING



#### ORNAMENTATION

This stage of the iterative process utilises correction fluid to obscure portions of the building where ornamentation is apparent. This includes the fireplace, tiling and window frames. Where ornamentation is not present, the correction focuses on removing parts of the image that pull focus away from the stone structure.

SIGNAGE  
ORNAMENTATION  
**BRICKWORK**  
METALWORK  
MURAL  
ADDITION  
FIXING



#### BRICKWORK

The brickwork iteration reflects traditional palimpsest techniques, where scrolls were scrubbed to partially erase the script allowing for the parchment to be reused. The photographs are scratched to deteriorate fragments of the image where the brickwork of the homestead has also deteriorated.

SIGNAGE  
ORNAMENTATION  
BRICKWORK  
**METALWORK**  
MURAL  
ADDITION  
FIXING



#### METALWORK

During this step, further segments of the image are removed, highlighting metalwork within the building. This directly contrasts the location of the metalwork when the building was inhabited.

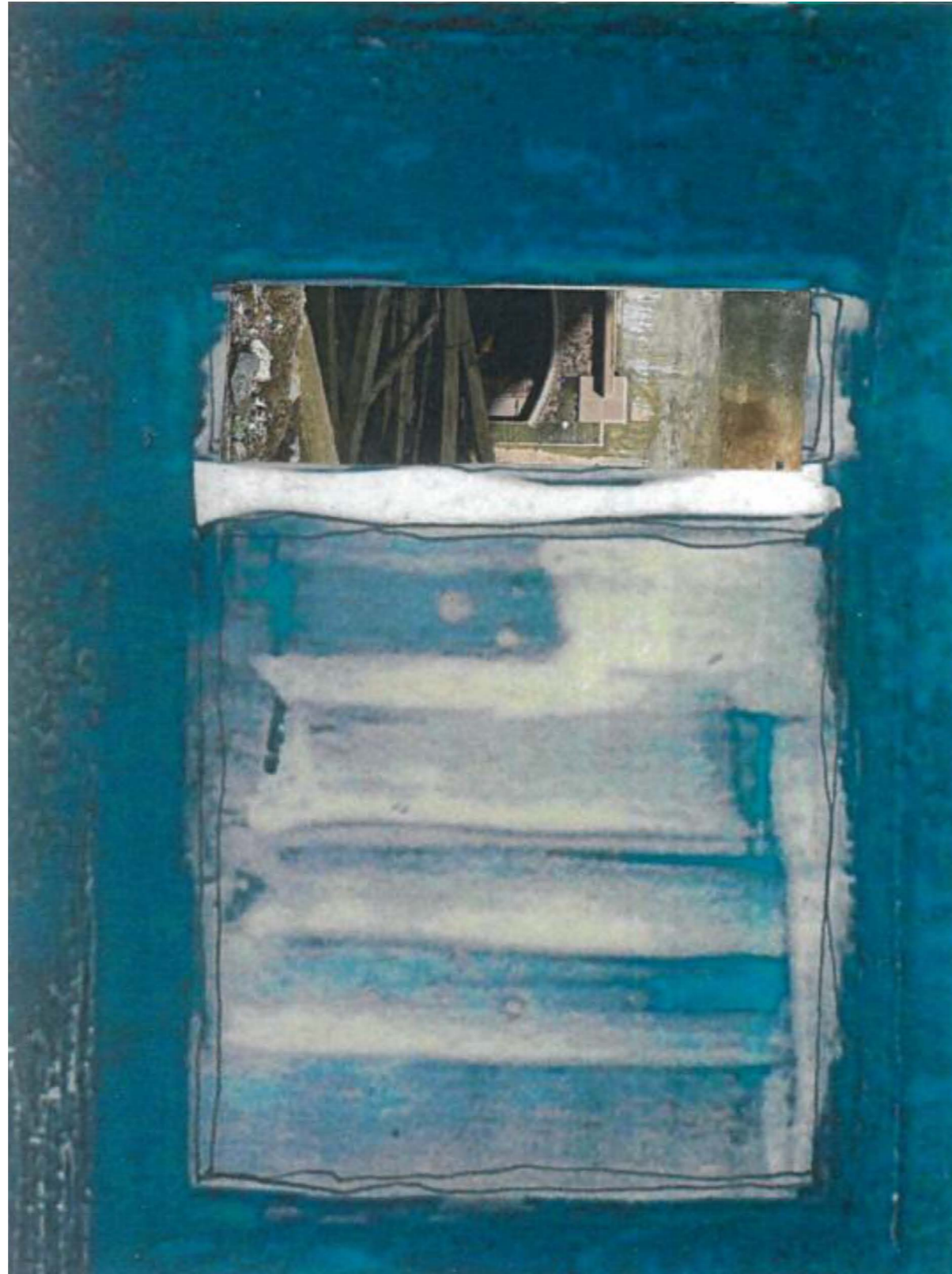
SIGNAGE  
ORNAMENTATION  
BRICKWORK  
METALWORK  
**MURAL**  
ADDITION  
FIXING



#### MURAL

Pen drawing is used to reestablish the form of the building which was beginning to become indeterminate through both the degradation of the building and the image. This process constitutes the mural stage of the experiment and harks back to the examples of hand drawing and painting that were observed within Somers Town in London.

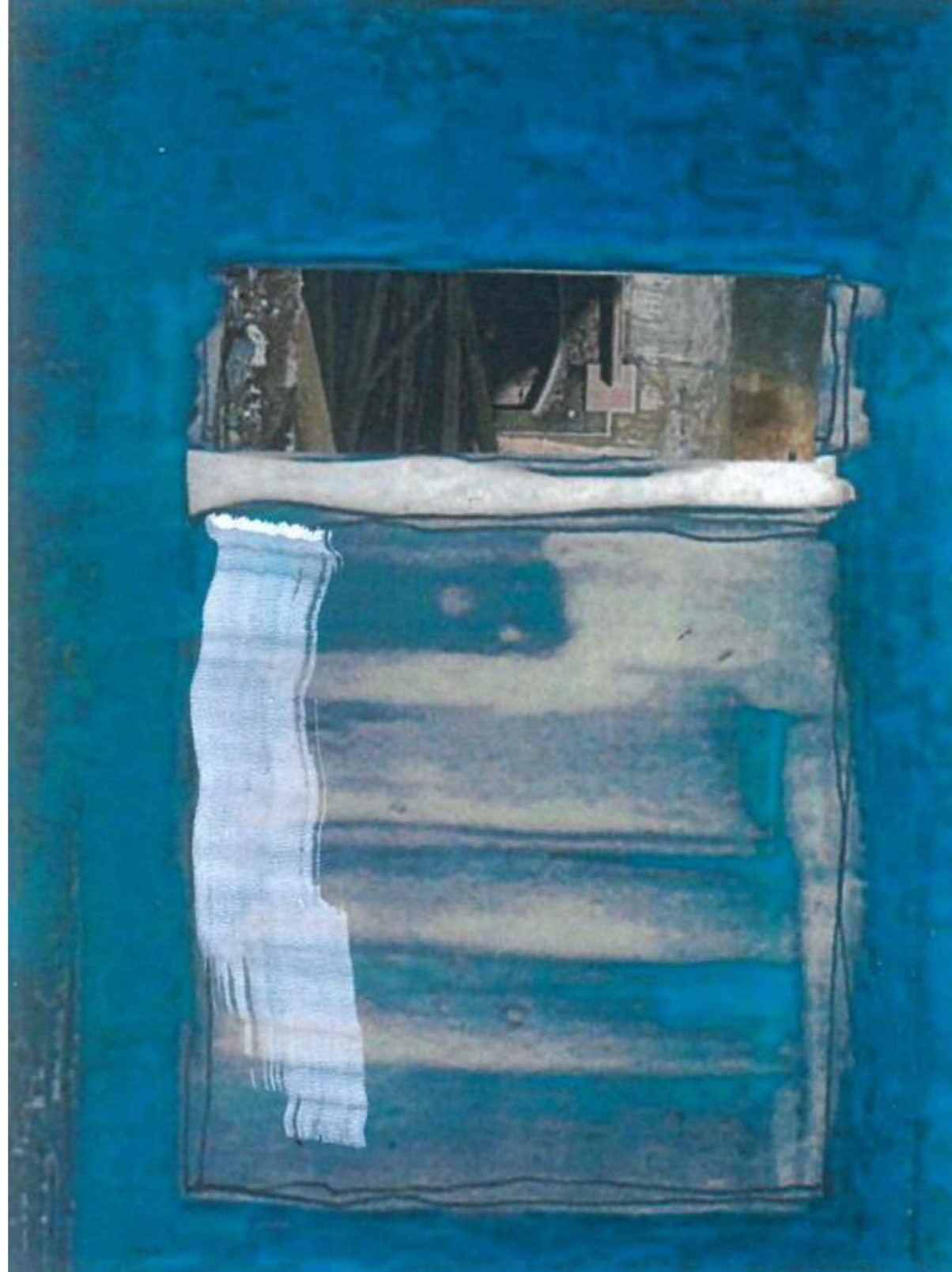
SIGNAGE  
ORNAMENTATION  
BRICKWORK  
METALWORK  
MURAL  
**ADDITION**  
FIXING



ADDITION

During this iteration, unaltered images are added to the collage. Some of the experiments reintroduce parts of the original photograph, whereas others affix contrasting imagery.

SIGNAGE  
ORNAMENTATION  
BRICKWORK  
METALWORK  
MURAL  
ADDITION  
**FIXING**



#### FIXING

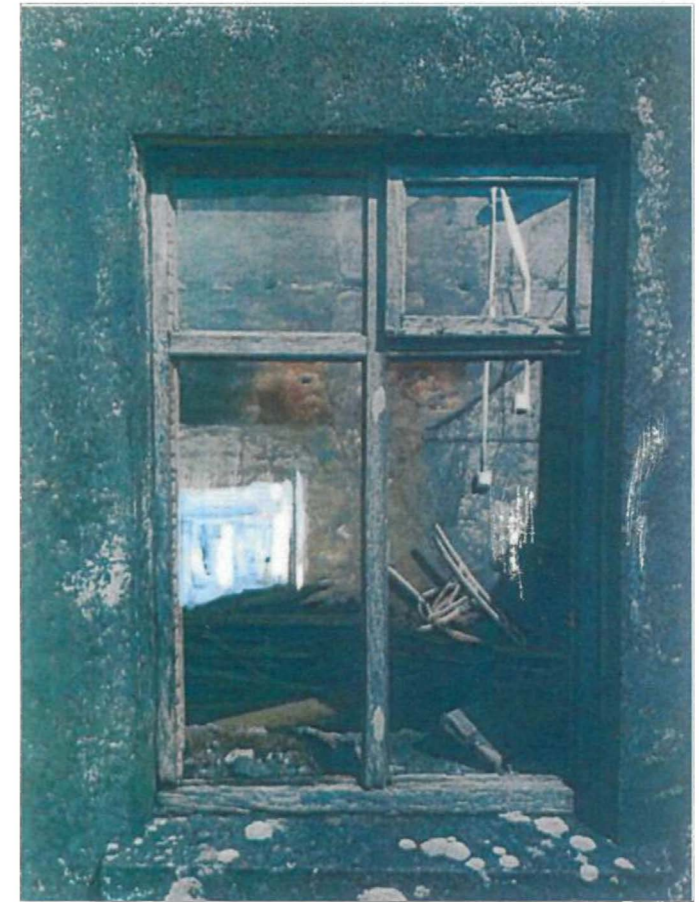
The final stage of the degradation of the images reintroduces a technique previously used in the earlier six iterative steps to fix or enhance aspects of the form of the structure.

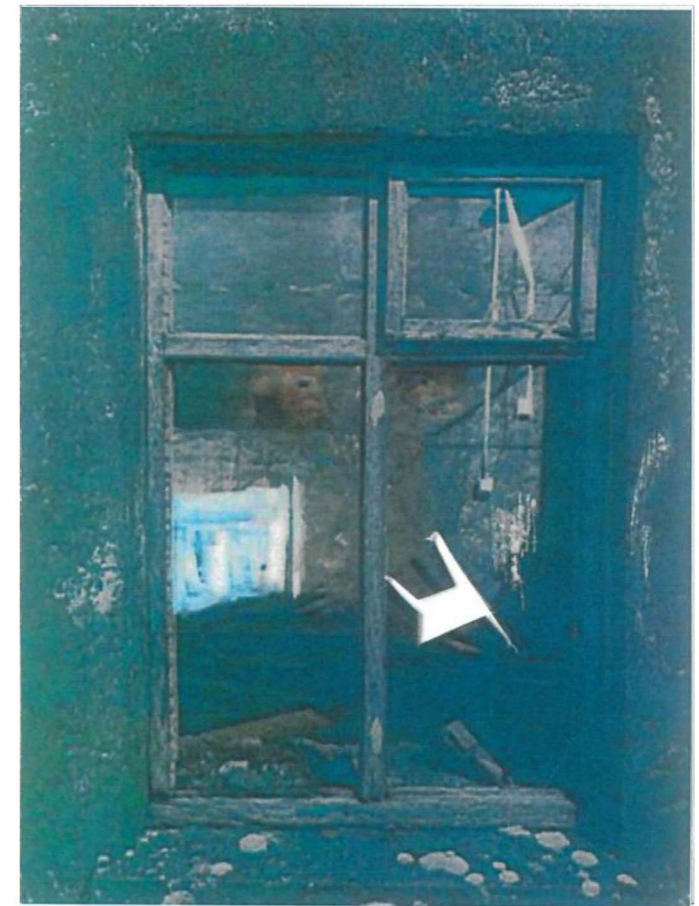
This process is repeated on seven different images to create a total of 49 iterations. These are shown in the subsequent spreads of this document.



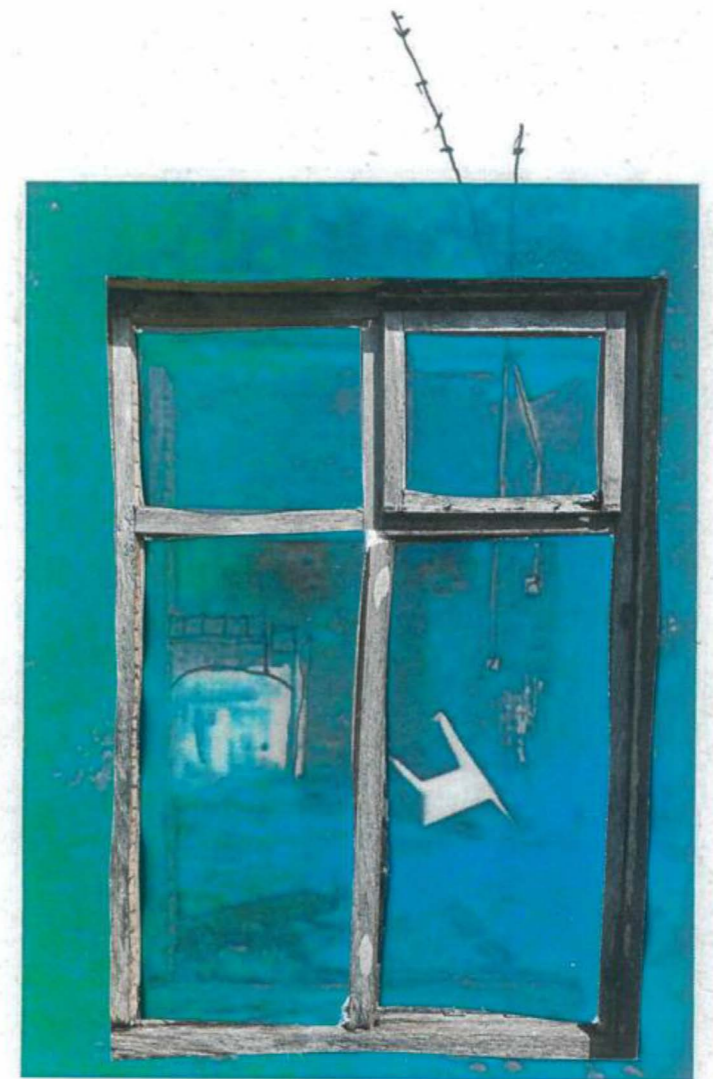


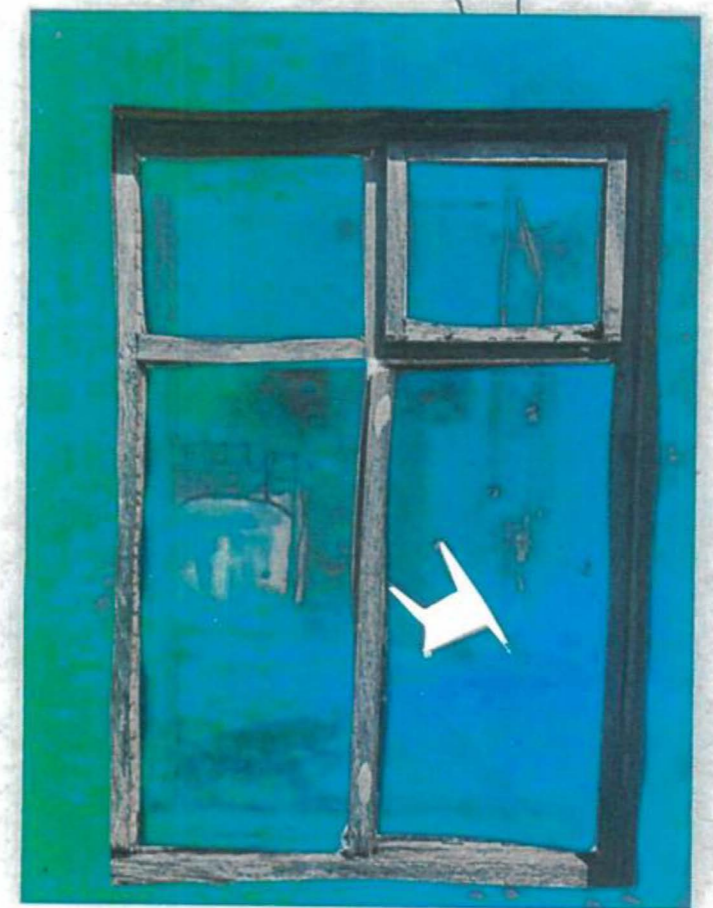




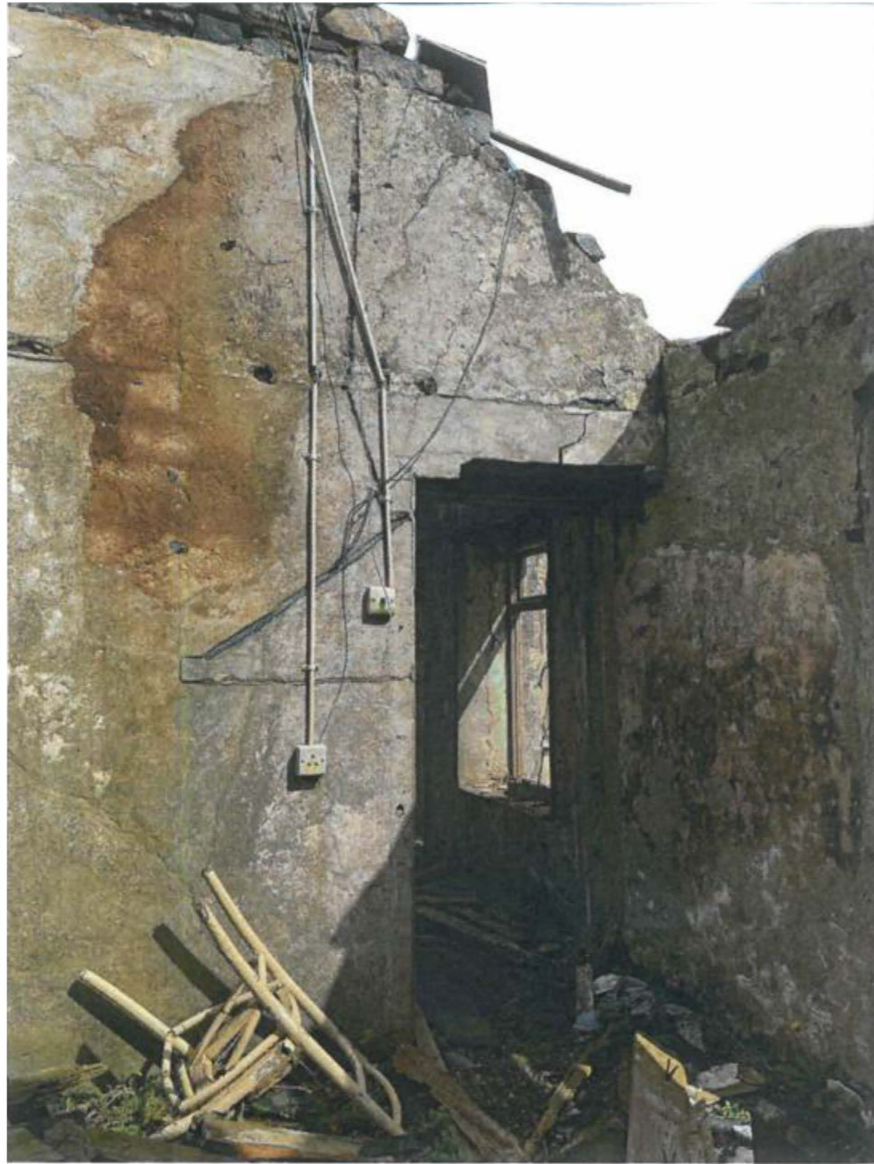




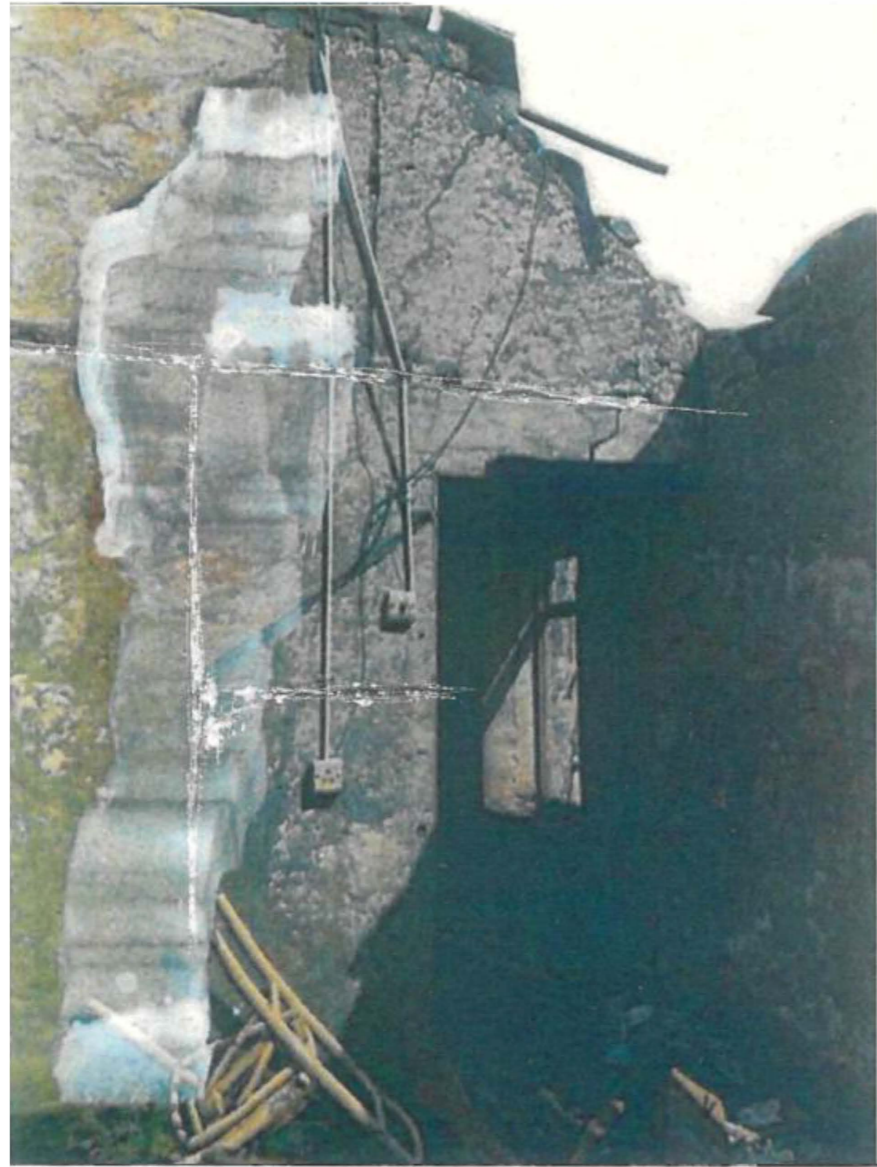


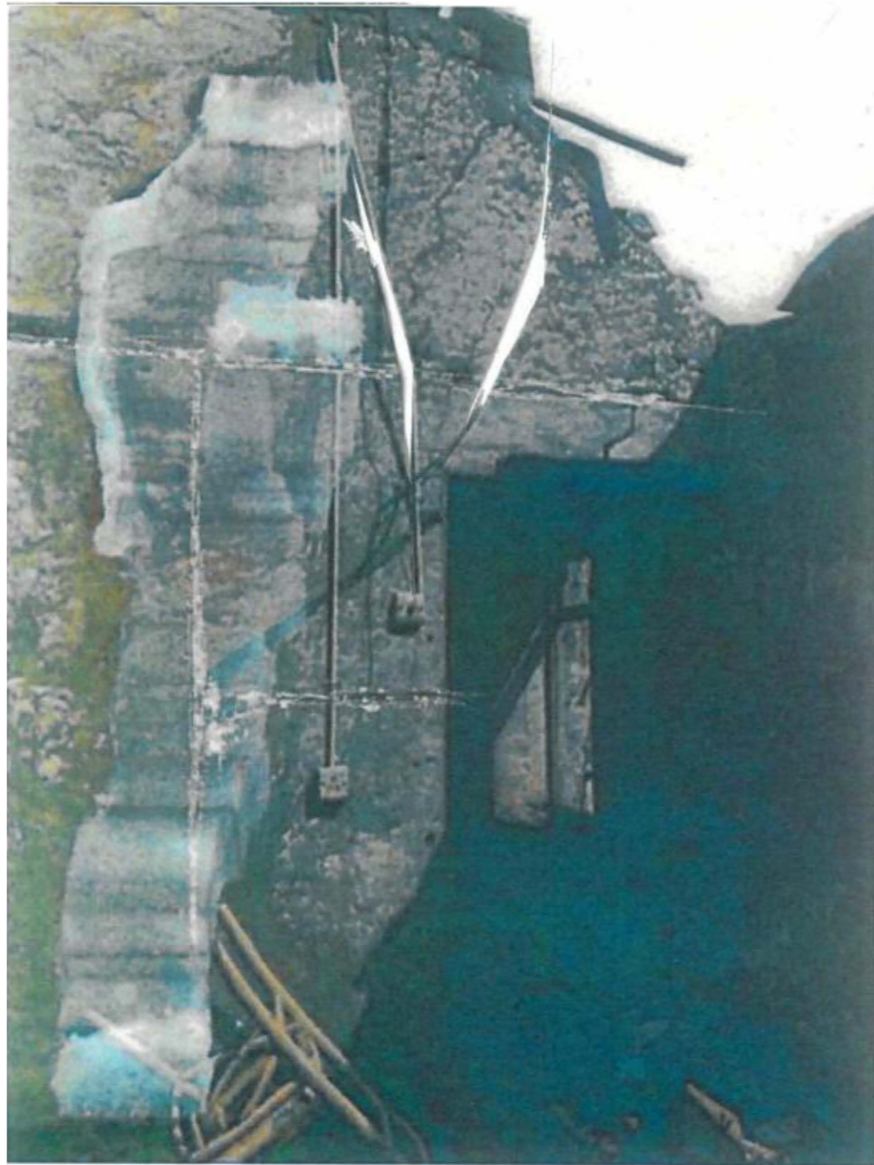










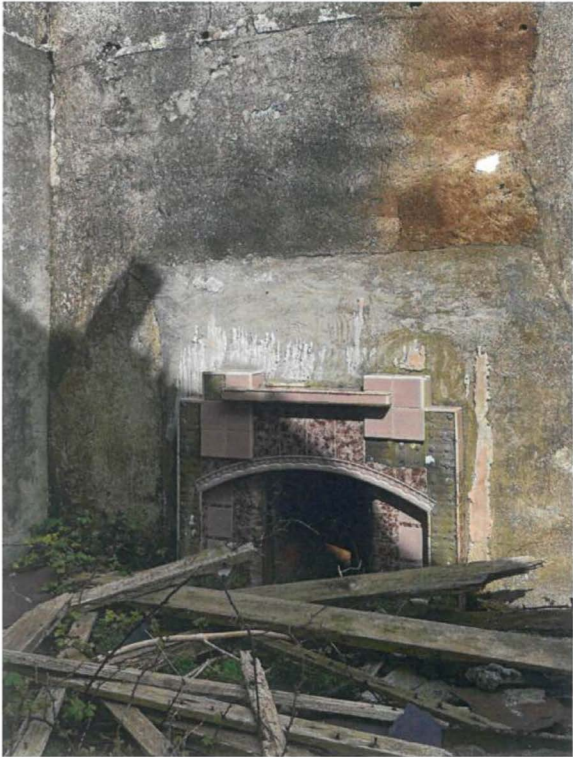




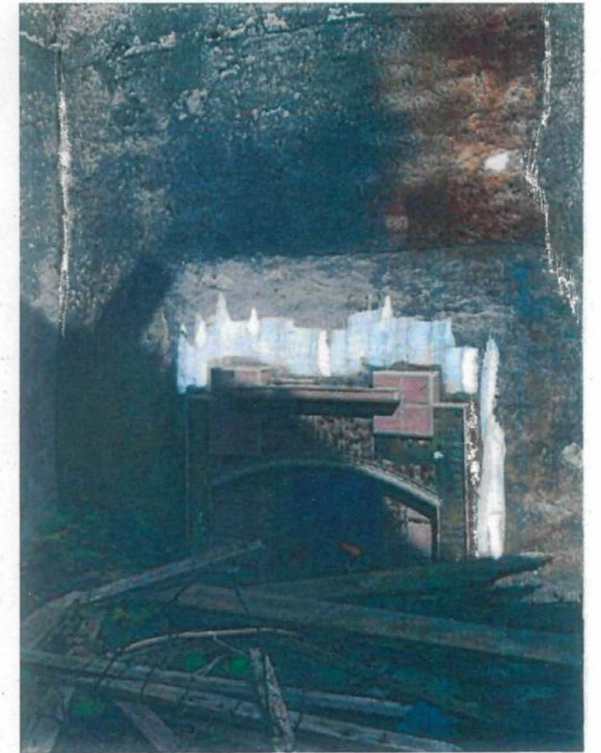
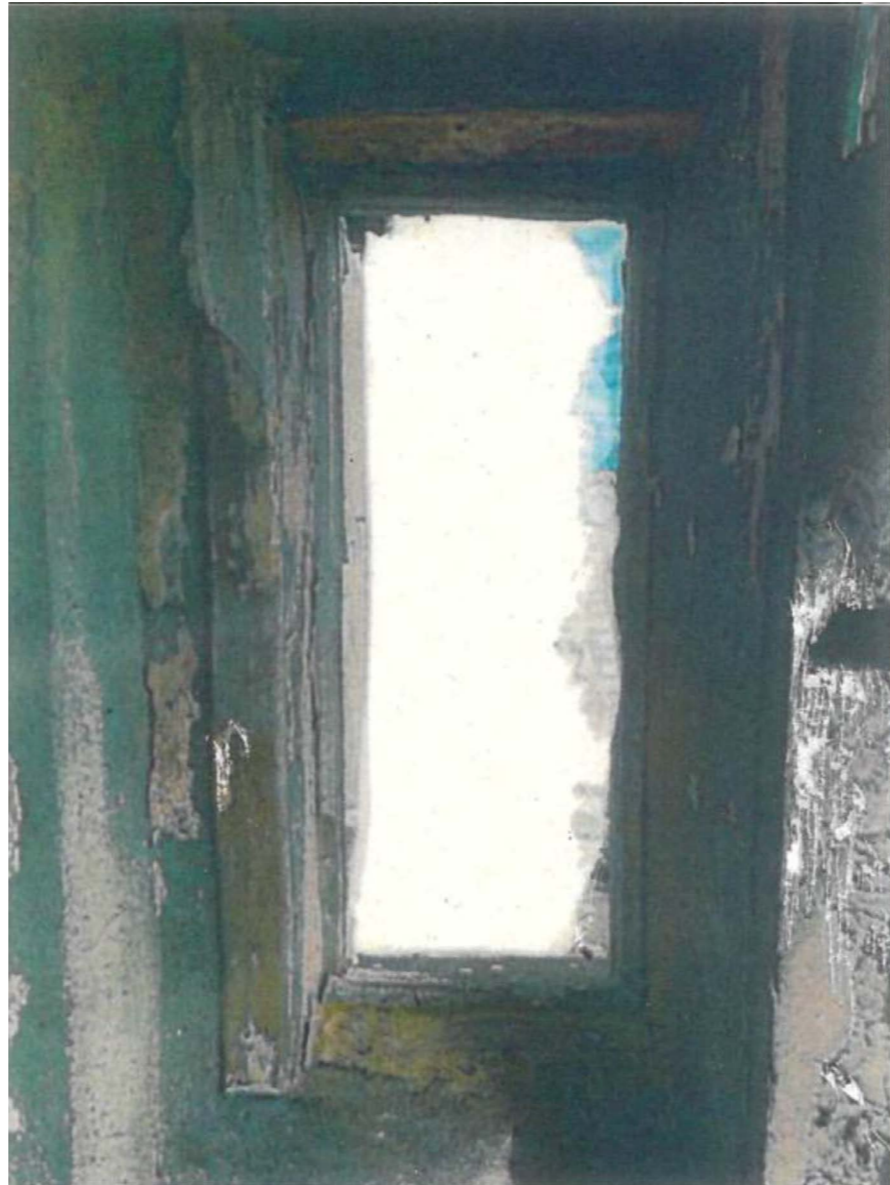




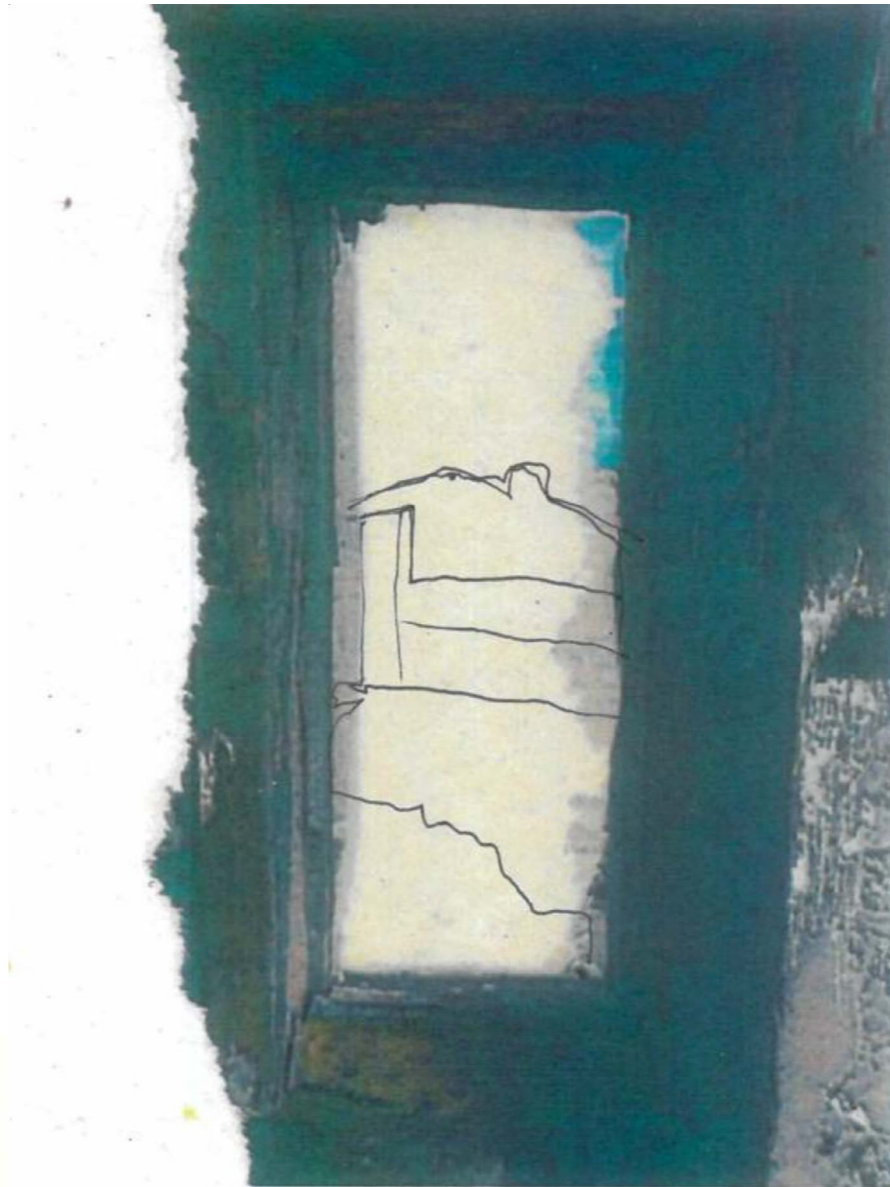
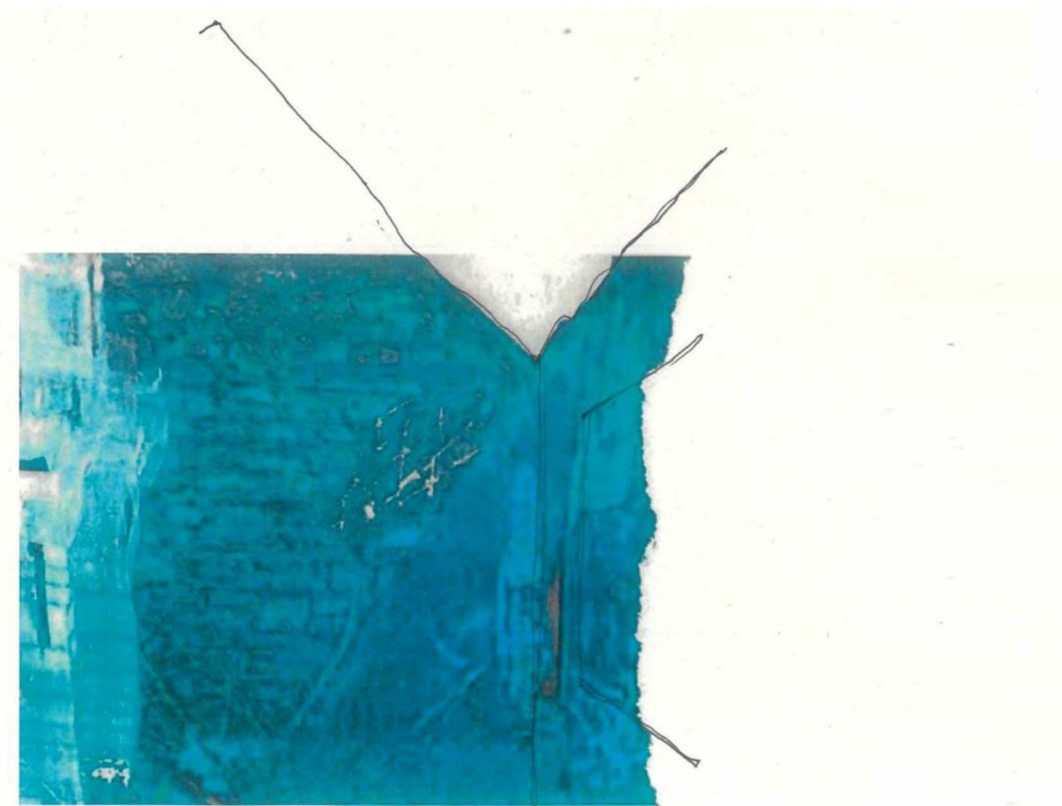


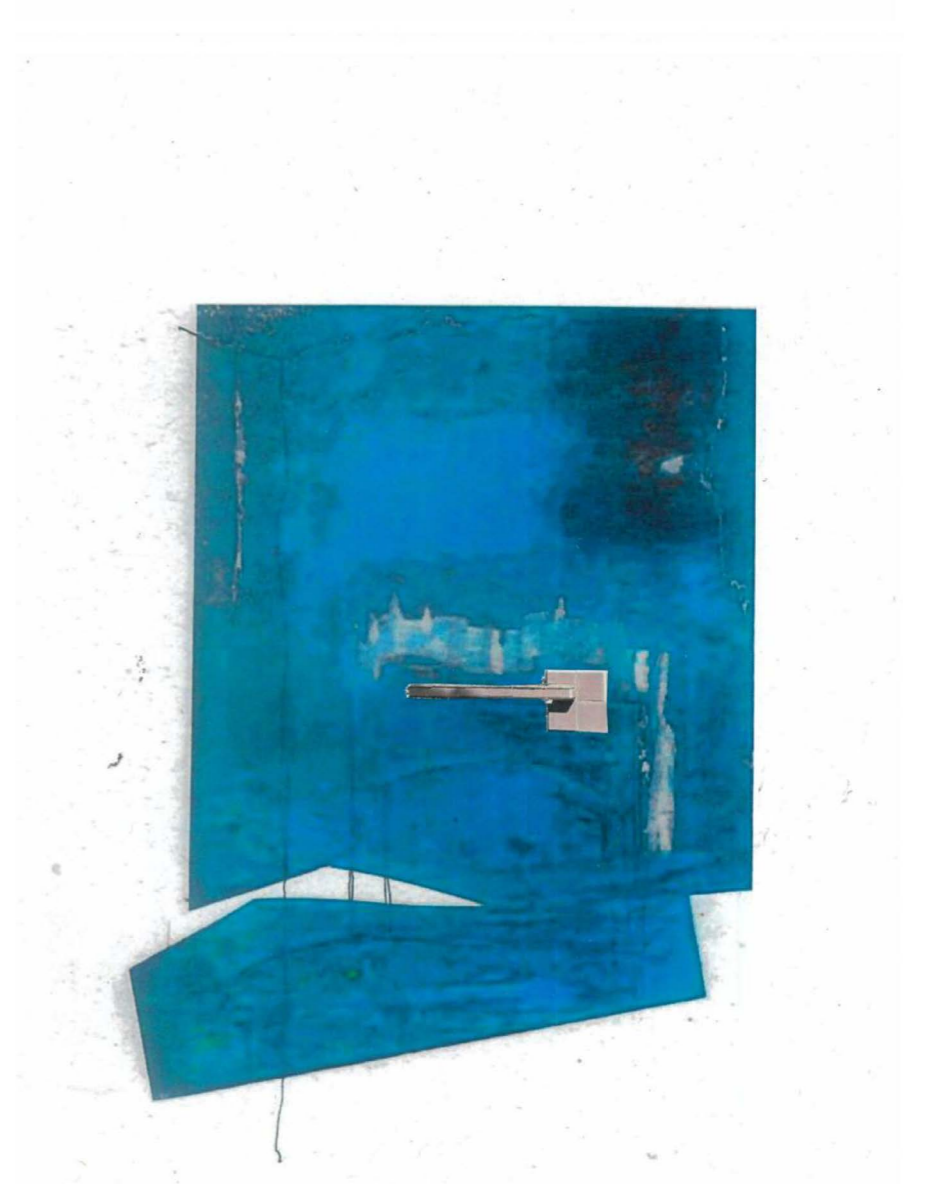
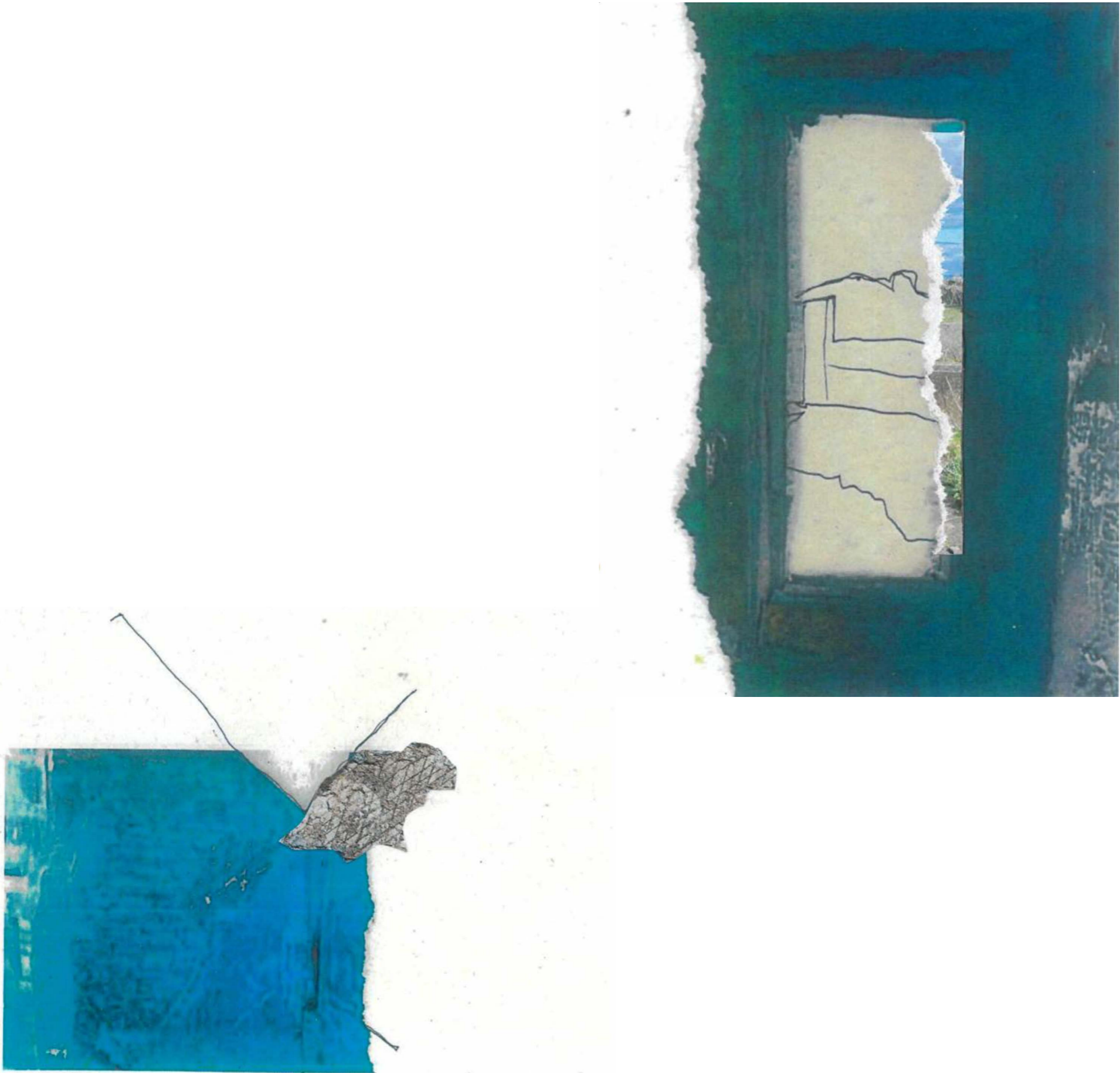


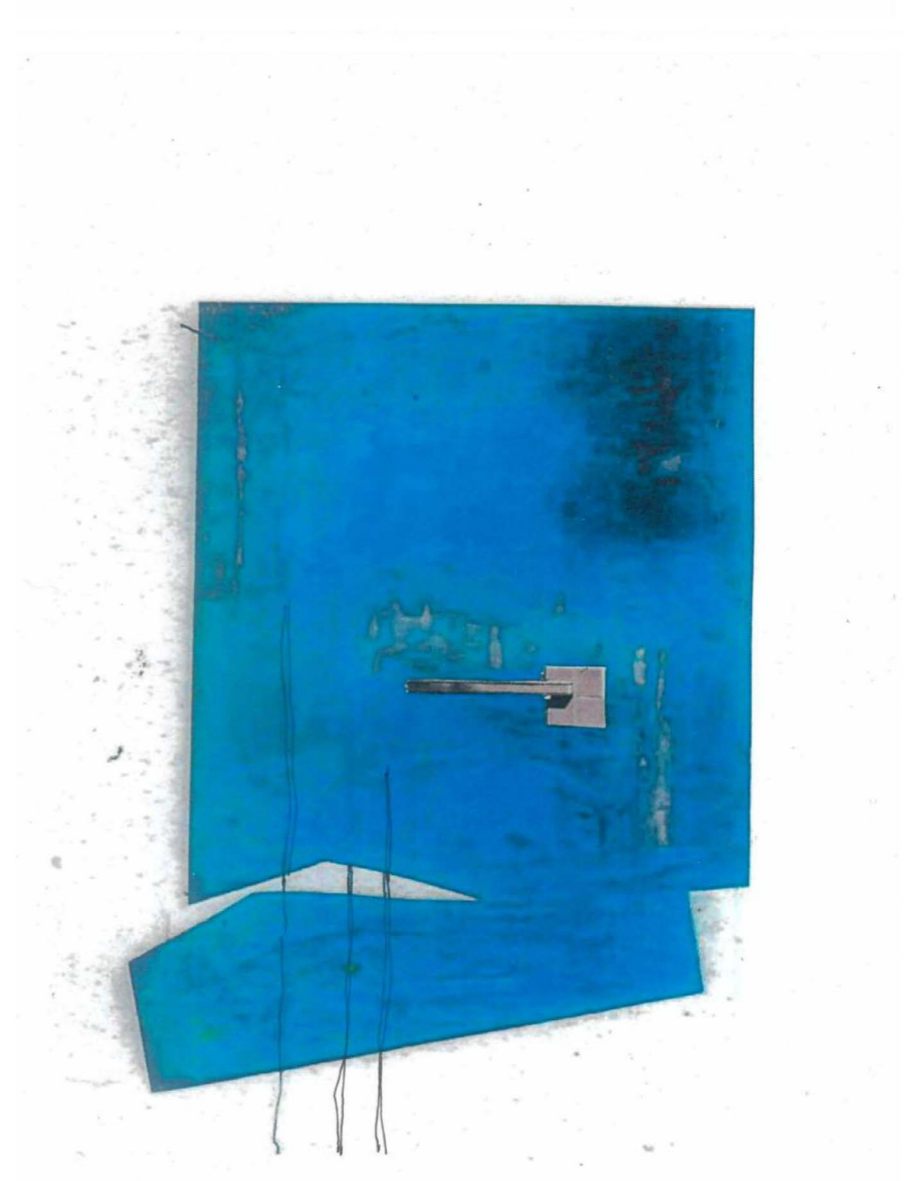
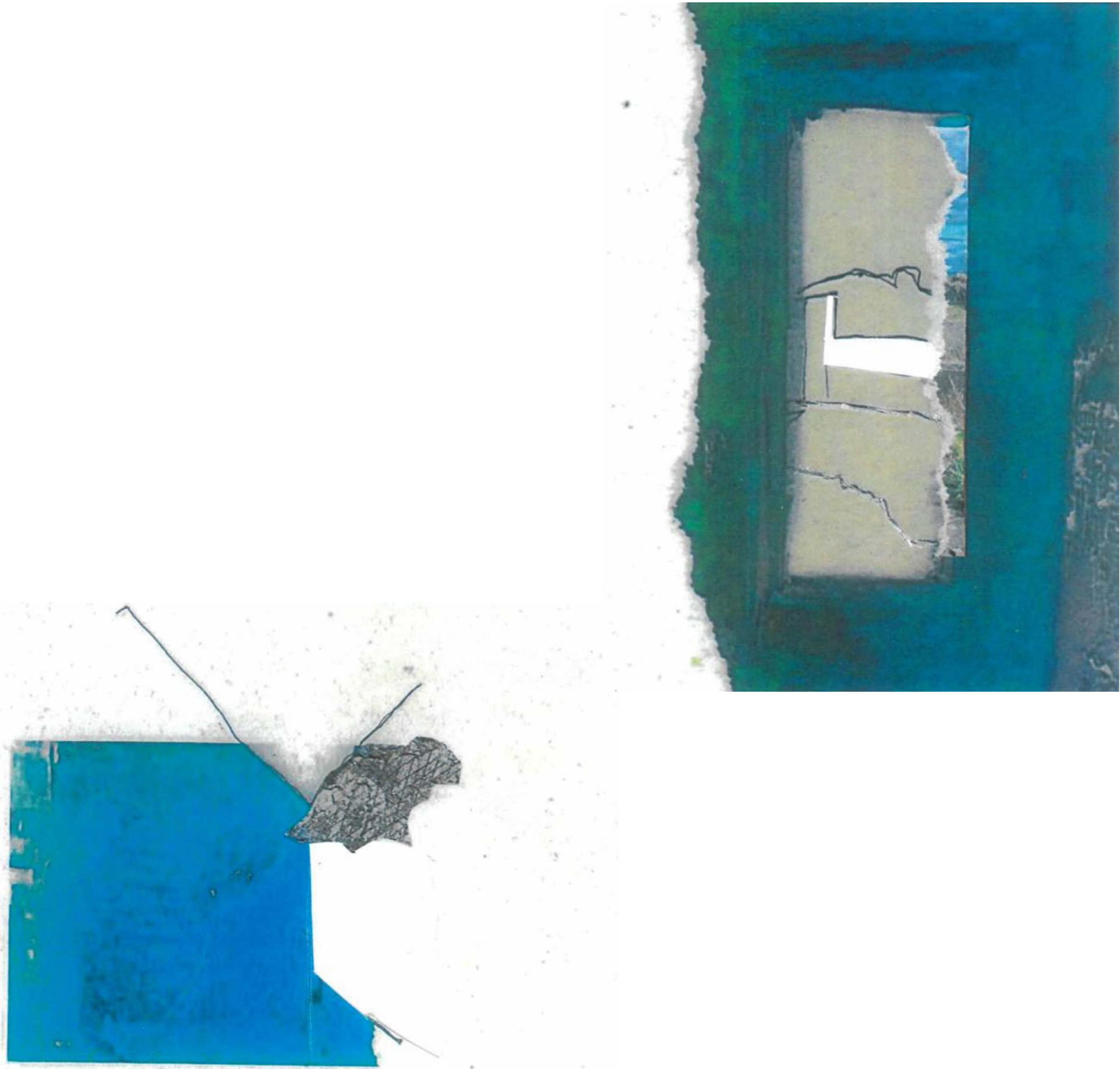


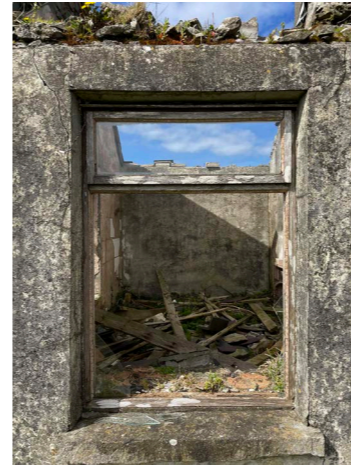






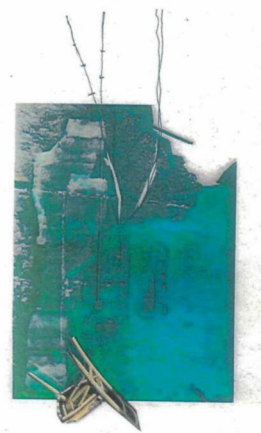
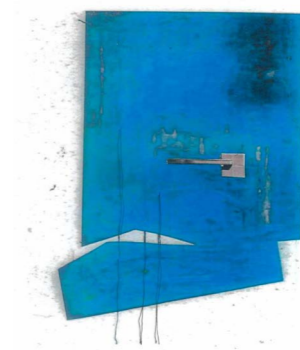
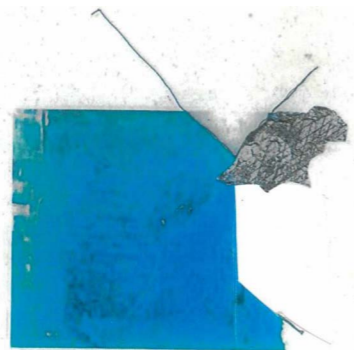
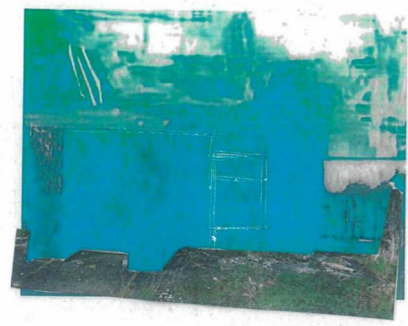






## THE STRUCTURE RETURNS TO THE LANDSCAPE

The process of degrading the images mirrors the degradation of the building; the resolution reduces and the colours of the stone structure morph into a textured landscape. This reaffirms the notion that the derelict homestead buildings of the west coast of Ireland are exposed to contingency and are slowly returning to the land.



## A LANDSCAPE OF PALIMPSEST

During the Positions through Iterating studio brief, a line of enquiry began to emerge. This initial research explores the tension between the degradation of the image and the degradation of the building. During the next project, palimpsest in the built environment will be further investigated; both as a subject matter and a method to uncover the layers of history embedded within our urban fabric.