

# **Drawing from the Museum's Ruins**

By

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis project is based on an examination and critique of the cultural history museum's exhibition space, working outside of its traditional rules, functions and typologies. The imaginative process and potential of drawing is re-activated by a final installation based work in the physical exhibit space. Implicating the viewer within a possible future for the museum, this thesis project deconstructs assumptions of how we view and interpret the past in a normative and embodied museum experience.

Located within my interrelated practices as an exhibit designer and artist, this thesis project focuses on my art practice, with the concept of the ruin resonating as an aesthetic trope for re-imagining the museum exhibition space. My research functions within a related temporal and theoretical spiral, building the foundations for my thesis project from such diverse drawing and installation based art practices as Marcel Duchamp (1887 - 1968), Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720 - 1778), and Pablo Bronstein (1977).

I am redrawing fragments of established discourses and exhibit archetypes within the politicized and contested history that frames our habituated expectations of the museum as a cultural experience. Through the potentiality of ideas and propositions, my final drawing and installation based work use the blank space to re-imagine our blank relationship with the blank museum.

Both my thesis and art practice are an idiosyncratic response to the physical and ideological thresholds of the museum, rupturing a pictorial space within the conceptual ruin of the museological frame.

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## Chapter 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Thesis question

If the museum exhibition is a liminal space existing between the thresholds of the physical and conceptual past, how can a drawing and installation based art practice reflect the archetypes of the museum space as a unique and contested way to represent and interpret the past, present and future?

### 1.2 Thesis Project

Emerging as part of an interdisciplinary practice and body of work, my thesis project is informed by the established rules, typologies and limitations of the traditional museum exhibition space. I am working from the unique perspective of my position as both an artist and cultural institution based exhibit designer, to examine and observe the museum from parallax positions in order to question, explore and imagine broader ideas and possibilities surrounding the experience of our past, present and future.

In my thesis project, I query the meaning and archetypal forms of the modernist museum exhibit space within a shifting relationship to the present and subjective interpretations of our past. Using drawing as a process and medium to critique the place of the museum in a contemporary context, my thesis project incorporates and activates the drawings within a physical installation space to re-situate the museum's ideological and didactic traditions into an embodied space for alternative forms of knowledge creation and ideas.

I am using drawing and installation based works to inform and realize an imaginative deconstruction and exploration of the museum exhibition space, interconnected with my research, writing and museum exhibit design practice. Based on the museum's conceptual ruins as a visual potentiality, I am redrawing and reconstructing fragments of established discourses and exhibit archetypes on paper and within the physical space of an installation. My thesis project is a theoretical, conceptual and studio based strategy to suggest alternatives to our habituated expectations and experience of the museum's normative traditions.

The museum as a cultural institution is implicated, as political theorist Chantal Mouffe writes, where, “every order is predicated on the exclusion of other possibilities, but as the temporary and precarious articulation of contingent practices, each order is always the expression of a particular structure of power relations” (326).

My research is a survey back through the museum’s contested past, resulting in the deconstruction of its historically constituent parts. I examine the philosophy of the institution from the 18th century to present and use the museum’s conceptual ruins as an aesthetic trope to imagine the future museum space. From inside this temporal spiral, my art practice emerges to reconstruct and redraw the museum with the point of a pencil. My drawings and installations are interconnected and hopeful forms of aesthetic and spatial resistance, working with the museum space foregrounded against its content. I am revealing predetermined ideas and formal considerations embedded within the experience of a cultural institution by writing, drawing and constructing spaces, where the interpretation exists in the middle of different aesthetic and embodied engagements.

Within my art practice, the ruin is an allegorical process of destruction, reflecting and unraveling the traces and fragments of history, to be critically reread and rewoven in and through the experience of the present. “The representation in ruins actually clarifies the structure, its previous history, the traces of its past occupation and transformations” (Allen 76). Through the detritus and decay of time left from a tragic event in history, new relationships and juxtapositions in the museum are potentially revealed in my work, allowing for the emergence of new ideas and memories to be observed in the present and reconstructed as foundations for the future (Stead 11).



*Fig. 1 Jan Beringer. On the One Hand. 2012.*

On the one hand my art practice is guiding and informing my exhibit design practice, however, it remains unencumbered by any of the pragmatic responsibilities. Within this context, my thesis project is influenced by, but avoids, the restrictions and accountabilities that encompass developing a traditional museum exhibit, such as community and stakeholder engagement, conservation requirements, curatorial concerns, acquisitions, loans, budgets, timelines, marketing, fabrication, contracts, legalities or approvals within an organizational structure. These potentially contradictory yet ultimately interrelated positions as an artist and designer enable me to look at the museum beyond previous artists' notions of breaking out of, or being completely subsumed within its cultural frame.<sup>1</sup>

Within my thesis project, I am focusing on my art practice, where the supporting research and studio work uses the process of drawing from the allegorical ruins of the museum as a poetic and visual way of using the blank page and blank space to re-imagine the blank museum.

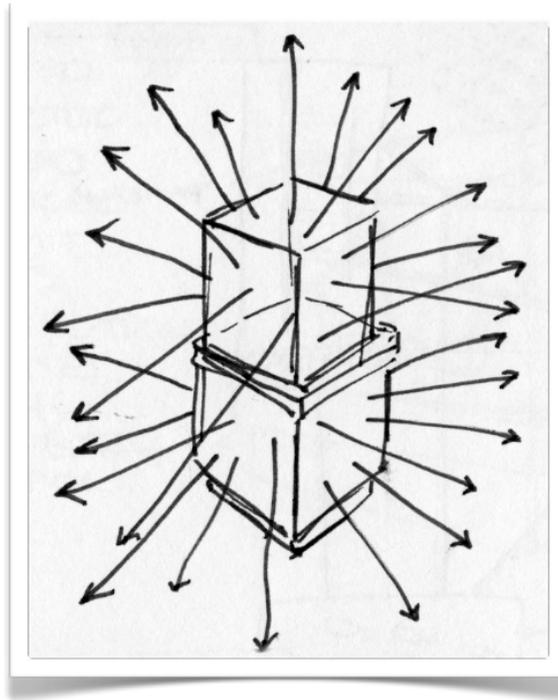
Virtual Studio: <http://lowresgradstudios.ecuad.ca/janberinger/>

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<sup>1</sup> The origins and phases of institutional critique as an art historical genre are examined further in Brian Holmes essay, "Extradisciplinary Investigations: Towards a New Critique of Institutions." from the book *Art and Contemporary Critical Practice: Reinventing Institutional Critique*. Ed. Raunig Gerald and Genes Ray.

## Chapter 2. RATIONALE

### 2.1 Overview



*Fig. 2 Jan Beringer. Out of the box. 2010.*

This section precedes my situated art practice, establishing a formal context for my thesis project with an overview of the museum's relevant history and traditions from the 18th century to the present.

The museum space is historically situated through a subjective interpretation and framing of our shared cultural beliefs, constructed within the dominant ideological structures of the past. Despite the ongoing spate of spectacular museum building around the world and blockbuster exhibitions being developed for a burgeoning interest in cultural tourism, the contemporary institution still incorporates and reinforces normative, contested, and traditional display practices.

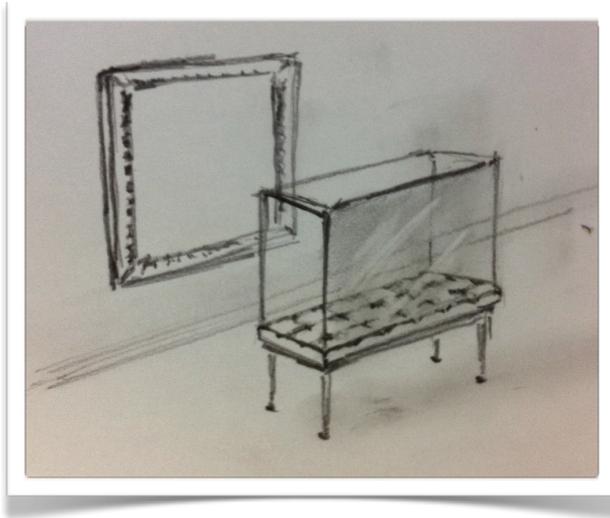
My thesis project considers the future museum space as a concept that reflects and responds to the realities of changing cultural ideologies, diverse histories, and new visitor demographics within a shifting economic and technological landscape.

## 2.2 The museum space, a brief history (18<sup>th</sup> century to present)

The museum space has been defined and experienced in very different ways since the 18<sup>th</sup> century in relationship to its role and place within contemporary society. The early Western European museums were conceived as privileged collections, period rooms or a 'cabinet of curiosities' for the royal and upper class citizen. They were constructed as presentations without the supporting didactics of objects that were typically acquired during colonial nation building (Coombes 64-65).

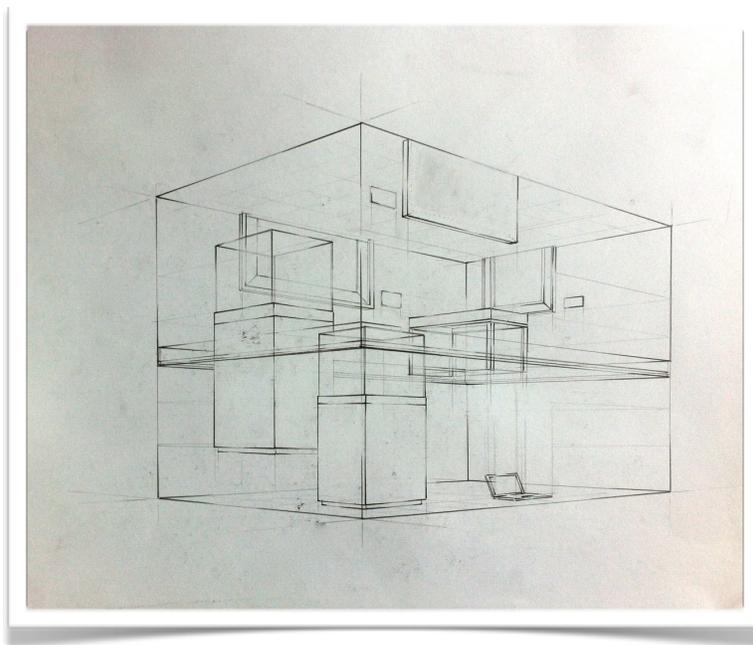
The Louvre Museum in Paris opened officially in 1793 as one of the first truly public museums, which coincided with Sir Charles Wilson Peale's public museum in the United States, established in 1786 as a 'School of Wisdom' (Stewart 33). Peale's museum, conceived under his own ideals, was a place where, "The study of natural history will aid us to escape from the prejudices of ignorance, and convince us that nothing was made in vain" (Peale qtd. in Friedl 5). At that time, the typical contents of the museum display case were subjectively organized into a system of classes to present the diversity and breadth of specimens representing the evolution of man and nature in relation to Western civilization. This is similar to Peale's own systems of taxonomies and classifications that were observed through the leading research and display methods of his time (Friedl 4). However, at the core of my practice is a critique of the fictional appearance of a progressive totality and natural order of history in the traditional museum that is still prevalent in contemporary exhibit spaces.

Professor of social and cultural theory, Tony Bennett, wrote about the exhibition as an event and space that had its significant cultural turn during the 1851 Great Exhibition held in Britain. This event established some of the lasting forms, techniques, and experiences of the museum exhibit that are utilized to this day (74). Obvious examples of these typologies include the physical display case, plinth, and curatorial label text within historically representative or immersive displays. However, I am working outside the utilitarian conservational requirements of these apparatuses used to protect and store objects or art from physical stress, light, humidity and theft. My thesis project looks to how Bennett establishes the museum space or complex as a cultural form of normalizing, ordering and placing the public itself on display as a cultural spectacle, where the entire world could be viewed in one place as a civilizing and regulating structure for a permanent display of state power (79).



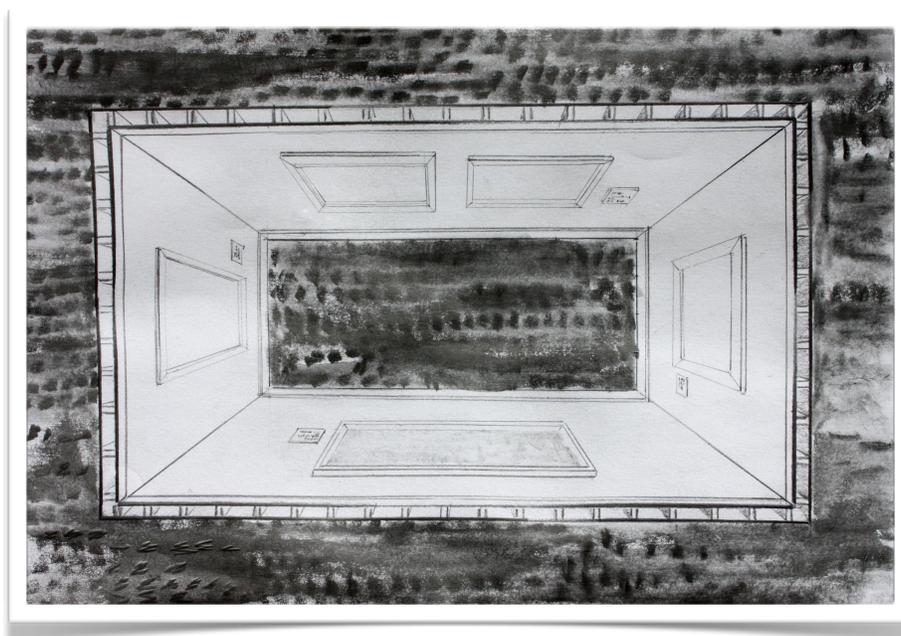
*Fig. 3 Jan Beringer. Are you looking at me? 2012.*

The resulting development of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century museum spaces in Western Europe was premised on the display and organization of a linear, progressive and now contested interpretation of history within the context of national identity and political ideologies. In this period, objects or artifacts were no longer mere curiosities but representations of the evolution of human and cultural development. The museum, “constituted a new space of representation concerned to depict the development of peoples, states, and civilizations through time conceived as a progressive series of developmental stages” (Bennett 89).



*Fig. 4 Jan Beringer. Time Lines. 2012.*

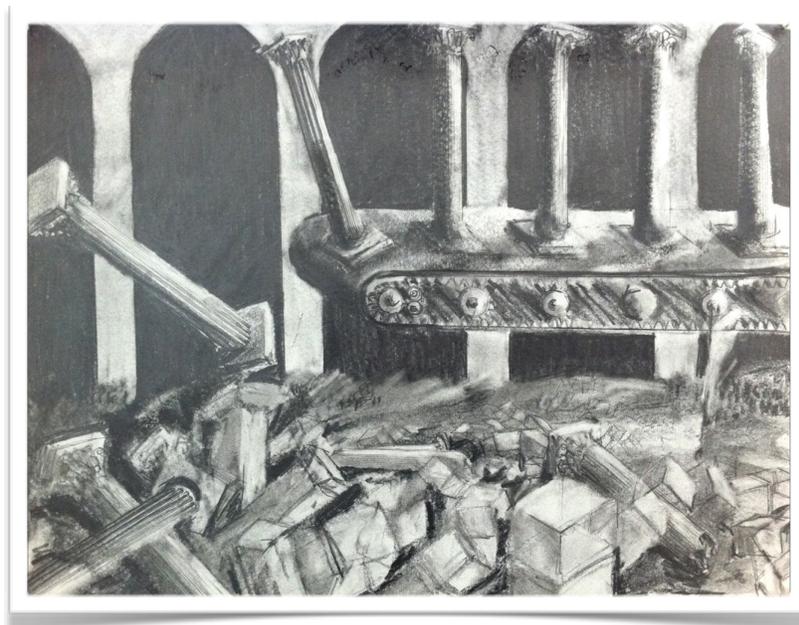
The contextualizing spaces, grand facades and classic architectural styles continued to define many of the late 19th and early 20th century museums. They were constructed as galleries of progress, period rooms and history collections according to a linear timeline of periods of history. These traditions were based on the systems, orders and principles of classification emerging in the academic fields of anthropology and evolutionary sciences, and were central to the museum's early ideological tenets (Bennett 71). They functioned as a utopian promise for the progression of culture in the future, establishing many of the institutional spaces we experience to this day (Bennett 74).



*Fig. 5 Jan Beringer. Inside and Outside the Frame. 2012.*

Brian O'Doherty's influential writing from the 1970's, "Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space", focused on the 20th century gallery and museum space as a closed system of formal aesthetic values that frame the objects within as art (14). The Modernist gallery was to become a highly regulated and politicized space, functioning parallel to the world around. It was an aesthetic ideal, mediating the pictorial frame as part of viewing, interpreting and contextualizing the objects on display (15). The contemporary cultural institution continues to use this neutral, 'white box', as a spatial norm for displaying and viewing objects as art.

The global development of museum spaces has continued seemingly unabated since the 1990's with significant capital investment in novel museum architecture as civic spectacle. The present museum complex has been further expanded as a cultural hub with open access to archives, educational programming, professional lecture series, external partnerships, retail, restaurants and public spaces. In addition to the exponential growth of virtual and online exhibition spaces, the radical transformations of the cultural institution have left the physical exhibit space as a potential corollary and supporting experience (Chan par. 3).



*Fig. 6 Jan Beringer. Manufacturing Authenticity. 2012.*

However, the onsite experience still remains physically intertwined with the architecture and content of the museum as a destination space. One of the core issues surrounding contemporary museology is the business case of authenticity within a cultural and experience-based commodity, which directly competes with other tourism, entertainment and retail economies for the public's attention (Pine and Gilmore 17).

Articulating the formal role of the museum space is The International Council of Museums, ICOM's universal and pragmatic definition:

“A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment.” (“ICOM 2007”)

Despite professional standards and corporate policies for the museum developed through organizations like ICOM, many contemporary museum spaces<sup>2</sup> are still developed using traditional and normative typologies of exhibition design. These conventional museum formats are spaces, which, separate from the content, are already politicized and controversial in their conception. Art history professor, Douglas Crimp, writes about knowledge discourse within the museum space as an attempt to construct and order meaning from a disparate collection of artifacts and historical assumptions (Crimp 49).

“The set of objects the Museum displays is sustained only by the fiction that they somehow constitute a coherent representational universe. The fiction is that a repeated metonymic displacement of fragment for totality, object to label, series of objects to series of labels, can still produce a representation which is somehow adequate to a nonlinguistic universe. Such a fiction is the result of an uncritical belief in the notion that ordering and classifying, that is to say, the spatial juxtaposition of fragments, can produce a representational understanding of the world.” (Donato qtd. in Crimp 50)

These traditions obscure and distort the interpretation and representation of content in the present by containing and imposing the organizing principles and ideologies of the museums own contested history.



*Fig. 7 Jan Beringer. History Marching On. 2012.*

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<sup>2</sup> According to the International Council of Museums, ICOM, De Gruyter Saur published a study, *Museums of the World*, in 2010 that documents 55,000 museums in over 202 countries. [www.icom.museum](http://www.icom.museum)

Shifting visitor demographics, altered political ideologies, volatile funding streams, and increasing competition for the public's time and support all point to the necessity for change in what defines the museum space. A process for change can be articulated in the contemporary art practice of Liam Gillick, through his "scenario thinking", as a way of envisaging future possibilities for the museum space with, "a tool to propose change, even while it is inherently linked to capitalism and the strategizing that goes with it" (Gillick qtd. in Bishop 61). Gillick uses a grounded and theoretical writing style in discourse around his work. However, it is through deferral and possibility that he situates the viewer in his work, trying to create future scenarios not as actualities but within a fiction as open-ended alternatives (Bishop 69).

While a comprehensive statistical analysis of the museum's historical transformations are outside the scope of this thesis, a few issues do bear relevance in support of my thesis project. The *Art Newspaper's, Exhibition and Museum Attendance Survey 2011* (35), shows the larger museums around the world with year to year increases in attendance, for example, the Louvre Museum in Paris tops the list at over 8.8 million visitors, and in the United States, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York saw over 6 million visitors. However, these statistics distort the bleak reality for the majority of museum institutions around the world, where "according to a 2000 RAND study, the top 5% of US visual art institutions control almost four-fifths of combined museum revenues, endowments, infrastructure and donations" (Szanto 2).



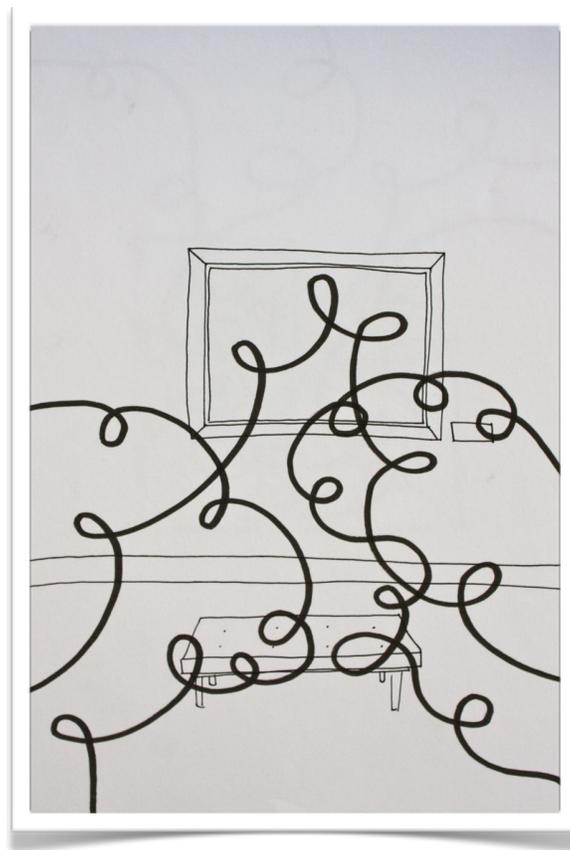
*Fig. 8 Jan Beringer. Dystopia. 2012.*

The Center for the Future of Museums released a report in 2008, *Museums and Society 2034: Trends and Potential Futures*, which outlines that the majority of museums are facing a potentially harsh reality within a radically changing global economy with rising infrastructure and operating expenses, and technological adaptation lagging behind other culture, tourism and entertainment based industries (10-17). Rapidly changing audience and demographic statistics within the United States reveals our present museums do not reflect or represent the diverse socioeconomic conditions they exist within. The changing demographics of age, gender, income, education and ethnicities in our various communities will influence how and what museums exhibit in the future (Farrell and Medvedeva 5).

As revealed in the writings of Pierre Bourdieu, the traditional idea of the museum visitor as an idealized subject or connoisseur reinforces and perpetuates the ideological and normative traditions that obstruct the ability to rethink and reassemble the museum exhibit space (Lang 436). These traditions maintain the nostalgic aura of the museum within certain cultural market segments, while reinforcing its isolation, remoteness and irrelevancy for others.

“The pure thinker, by taking as the subject of his reflection his own experience—the experience of a cultured person from a certain social milieu—but without focusing on the historicity of his reflection and the historicity of the object to which it is applied (and by considering it a pure experience of the work of art), unwittingly establishes this singular experience as a transhistorical norm for every aesthetic perception.” (Bourdieu qtd. in Lang 437)

The future museum space will have to redefine and re-imagine both theoretically and in practice how it presents, interprets and relates to history in order to remain relevant and engaged within contemporary culture. This emerging shift leaves a void for my interrelated art and design practices to work from as a place to explore, experiment and propose alternative concepts and readings of the museum. My thesis project is about working at the thresholds of the exhibition space, where, “notions of originality, authenticity, and presence, essential to the ordered discourse of the museum, are undermined” (Crimp 56).



*Fig. 9 Jan Beringer. Moving on the thresholds. 2012.*

### **Chapter 3. SITUATED PRACTICE**

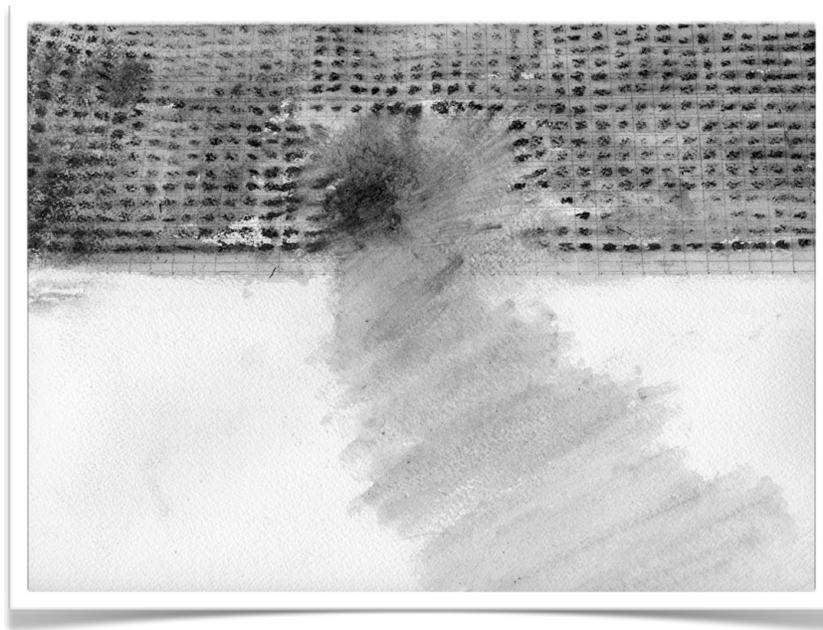
Within the process of situating my art practice, I am deliberately and critically reading through specific theory, philosophy, and art historical references in a non-linear manner. I build the foundations for my thesis project by choosing and reconstructing the theoretical and historical fragments from the museum's contested history articulated as conceptual ruins. My art practice emerges from these foundations through the process of drawing, outside the museum's past, without a predetermined outcome and situated in a unique struggle with my other, parallel, exhibit design practice. First I look back to the iconic practice of 20th century artist Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968), followed by a reflection on the 18th century to examine the drawings of artist and architect Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720-1778), and finally I step forwards to refocus on the 21st century with the works of contemporary artist Pablo Bronstein (1977). Within this temporal spiral I will integrate the relevant references, theory and philosophy that connects research and the museum as integral to my thesis project.

Building on the legacies of institutional critique, my thesis uses the conceptual ruins of the museum as an aesthetic trope to re-imagine the exhibit space. Within its various phases and interpretations since the 1960's, institutional critique can be articulated as an artistic oeuvre that critically examines and reflects on its own place alongside the ideological and cultural foundations of the museum and gallery. As will be demonstrated, I align the critical theory in my research with the process of drawing and installations based work, to look back through the conceptual ruins of the museum in order to experiment with the exhibition space as a spatial and historical experience in the present moment.

My thesis project draws on cultural theory alongside the art practices of Duchamp, Piranesi and Bronstein, to examine the established and contested space of the archetypical museum as a cultural institution. Within my research, the current phase of institutional critique is posited as a subjective and analytical critique for traversing and opening other structures, ideologies, disciplines and practices around the experience and interpretation of art within the museum. The emerging instituent and extra-disciplinary theories and practices of institutional critique situate the artist as antagonistic, self-reflexive and capable of betraying any established rules in order to work from and through the previous phases of critical practice (Raunig 11; Holmes 59).

“Facing them head on and as compensation, or rather, as both partner and adversary to the arts of governing, as an act of defiance, as a challenge, as a way of limiting these arts of governing and sizing them up, transforming them, of finding a way to escape from them or, in any case, a way to displace them, with a basic distrust ...” (Foucault qtd. in Raunig 4)

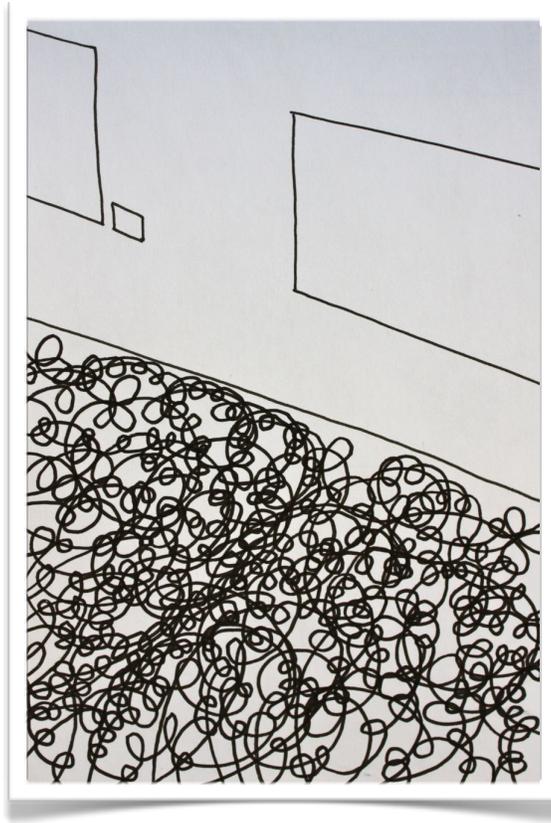
The contemporary ideas of exodus from the institution are put forward by cultural theorists such as Gerald Raunig and Brian Holmes amongst others as moving beyond the restricting declarations made by artist Andrea Fraser in 2005, to the effect that we can never escape the frame of the institution (Raunig 6). “With each attempt to evade the limits of institutional determination, to embrace an outside, we expand our frame and bring more of the world into it. But we never escape it” (Fraser qtd. in Raunig 6). Within my practice the museum space is not a predetermined, aesthetic and spatial trap to be broken out of, nor am I subsumed within an expanding institutional and cultural frame with no way out. My practice incorporates working as an exhibit designer for a cultural institution within my art practice, where I pull apart and unravel my work in the museum as an embedded and habituated construction of beliefs. This process reveals the exhibition space as a perceived fictional whole that attempts to provide cultural and historical stability.



*Fig. 10 Jan Beringer. Working Outside the Extant Space of the Museum. 2012.*

Within the scope of my thesis project, my art practice, which includes research, drawing and installations, deconstructs the normative and logical systems of knowledge and information construction in the museum while conflating time and space within a fragmented aesthetic. I will discuss this aesthetic based on the process and history of ruination as a trope in relation to the museum space. This process risks the loss of formal and spatial perspectival traditions and compositions in the re-imagining of the museum space. The methods in my thesis project are drawing from the fictional spaces of the museum's ruins, and are constructed as possibilities within a visual and spatial medium for re-reading the exhibition space.

Drawing is used as an experimental process to amalgamate my research and experience within a material and aesthetic frame using the theoretical, historical and visual language of the museum exhibit space. Without necessarily building dimensional or physical spaces, my drawings are reminiscent of the conceptual forms of paper architecture where speculation, imagination and the reality of the built environment are challenged, reworked and proposed as future possibilities. The two dimensional plane and threshold of the drawing surface lends itself historically and in contemporary practice to art, design and architecture; however, my drawings are to be considered final works and do not exist as a preparatory study in anticipation of a painting, object or architectural form. Within the final thesis exhibition, I incorporated the physical gallery space to activate and embody the drawings, reflecting my intertwined and parallax practices looking at the museum from different vantage points as both an artist and exhibit designer.



*Fig. 11 Jan Beringer. Outside the Pictorial Frame Inside the Museum. 2012.*

The crux of my research and the origins of institutional critique can be traced back to the early 20th century through the practice of artist Marcel Duchamp and his concerns with museological reception including what can and cannot enter the institutional space as art (Buskirk and Nixon 215). With spatial experiments still relevant today, some of the ideas that emerged in Duchamp's sculptures and installations have been incorporated within my methodology to redefine the concept and reception of art within the frame of the museum exhibit space.

Figure 12 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The image removed is of Marcel Duchamp's String Installation from the First Paper's of Surrealism show in 1942

*Fig. 12 Marcel Duchamp, Sixteen Miles of String, 1942.  
Image by John Schiff. 'First Papers of Surrealism' Gelatin silver print  
Philadelphia Museum of Art*

Exhibition design through the 1940's was premised on the utopian concept of aesthetic unity within the mediation of the museum space between the viewer and artwork. This is evidenced in the historical avant-garde artist and designer Frederick Kiesler's practice, who was working at

the same time as Duchamp. Through Kiesler's staging of the museum exhibit, the viewing of art or artifacts became part of the physical experience in a continually shifting interaction between the viewer and the space. However, Kiesler's exhibit design subjectively mediated connections between the art works and attempted to predetermine the viewer's actions both visually and physically, ultimately working against any intention to deconstruct or reveal the frame of the museum (Kraus and Shulz 10).



*Fig 13 Frederick Kiesler, Art of This Century Gallery, 1942.  
Photo by Berenice Abbott  
Courtesy of Austrian Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Private Foundation.*

Art history professors Martha Buskirk and Mignon Nixon, editors of the book, *The Duchamp Effect*, write that Duchamp's questioning practice can be seen as a response to the shifting context of the museum in the early 1900's, reflecting the cultural transformations of modernity (210), where "...he resituated his work over and over again in relation to a changing network of institutional structures" (215). More in accordance with my thesis project, Duchamp's experiential and iconoclastic practice also continued through the 1940's to consider the architectural frame in addition to the ideological and problematic narratives of the museum itself. Duchamp questioned and reacted to the framework of distribution and the context of the museum exhibition space through his various works including the installation *Sixteen Miles of*

*String for the First Papers of Surrealism* exhibition (1942), and the portable museum, *Boite-en-valise* (1938-1942).

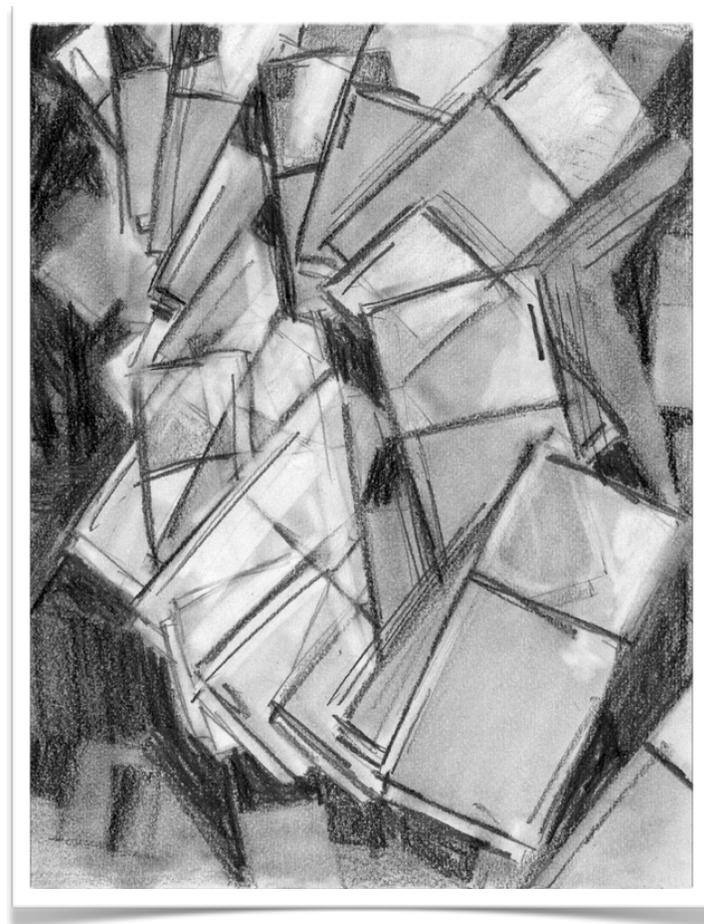
Installation art, with its roots in the practices of Duchamp and Kurt Schwitters, is typically located, art historically, in the 1960's as a spatial interrogation of medium specificity within art (Ran 73). However, these concerns with the medium's inscription on the exhibition space can be anticipated within Duchamp's earlier practice, interpreted as a reaction to post war geopolitical dislocation and the loss of home as a stable environment (Demos *Duchamp's Boîte-en-valise: Between Institutional Acculturation and Geopolitical Displacement* 7). The *Sixteen Miles of String* work literally displaced the viewer from the habituated exhibit experience as a response to his present sense of homelessness (Demos *Duchamp's Labyrinth* 98). However, more than a comment on cultural displacement or the Surrealist movement, this work was a reaction to the museums normative systems and rules of display for viewing objects in the exhibit space. By creating a physical barrier or labyrinth of string between the viewer and the art, curator and art critic Elena Filipovic writes that Duchamp brought critical awareness to the idea of corporeal vision within a traditional Cartesian space that held fixed systems, distances and placements as critical components of seeing in the museum (6).

Figure 14 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The image removed is of Marcel Duchamp's Box in a Valise

*Fig. 14 Marcel Duchamp, Boite-en-valise, 1938-1942.*  
*Duchamp, Marcel. The Box in a Valise. c1943.*  
*Tate Collection, UK. Tate.org.uk. Mixed Media. Web. 13 Apr. 2012.*  
*<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/duchamp-from-or-by-marcel-duchamp-or-rose-selavy-the-box-in-a-valise-l02092>*

In a parallel project, *Boite-en-valise* (1938-1942), Duchamp revealed a subversive response to the 'aura' surrounding classical museum traditions and formalities by challenging issues of authorship and authenticity within the ambiguities of creating a portable museum for his own works (Filipovic 7). This work explored the limitations and thresholds of the established museum exhibit space. It achieved this through an improvisational undermining of the museums normative systems, orders, language of classification, and institutional narratives used in exhibit text and labels. Through Duchamp's questioning and undermining of the status quo, which challenged both the public and the institution alike, he acknowledged that, "Knowledge is unstable; information is contradictory; logic is defied." (Filipovic 13). By examining and drawing

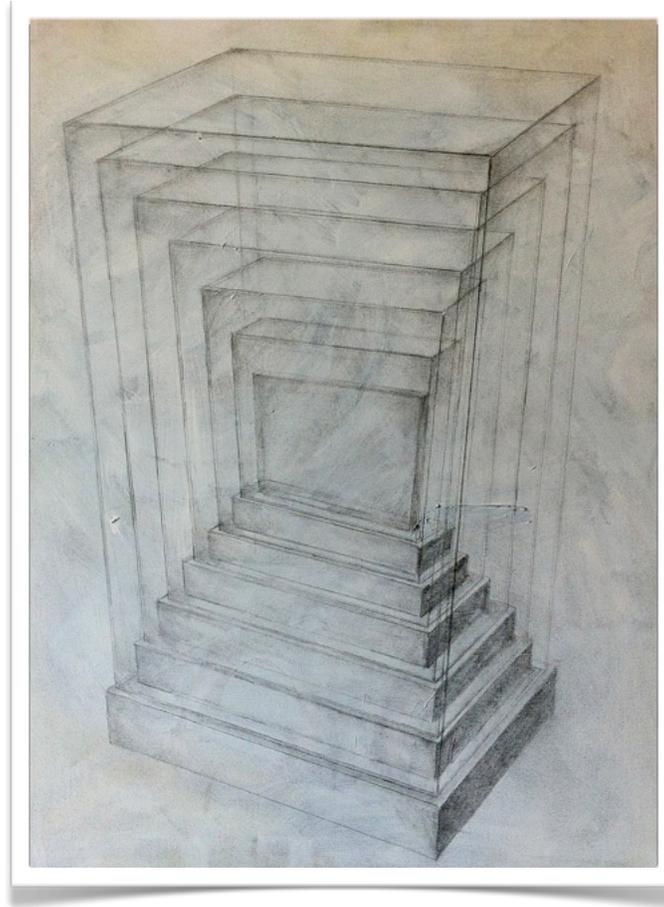
from Duchamp's practice, I am placing the museum exhibit space as a transitional threshold between the allegorical and shifting relationship of the viewer, institution and the objects on display.



*Fig. 15 Jan Beringer. Displaying Duchamp. 2012.*

Within my practice the exhibit space exists as a liminal space or encounter, simultaneously at and between the limits of cultural norms within the museum. Liminal is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as a transitional stage of a process, “Occupying a position at, or on both sides of a boundary or threshold” (“Liminal”). I refer to cultural anthropologist Victor Turner’s use of the term ‘liminal’ to describe the museum as a temporal and spatial experience or cultural ritual where the subject is located between the past, present and future both in and out of time (96). In this context, the museum contains the allegorical fragments of history to be reinterpreted, reordered and reconstructed with new meanings in my practice.

“The attributes of liminality or of liminal personae (“threshold people”) are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classification that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial.” (Turner 95)



*Fig. 16 Jan Beringer. Betwixt. 2012.*

“Duchamp orchestrates the destabilization of museal spaces and reorganization of display logics” (Filipovic 14). However, through the following years, his art works and ideas were subsumed within the traditional frame of the museum. By placing them on plinths, untouchable behind glass vitrines and re-labelled within the institutional norms of classification and interpretation, a theoretical space opened up for the future practices of institutional critique as an art historical genre attempting to break free from the institutional frame.

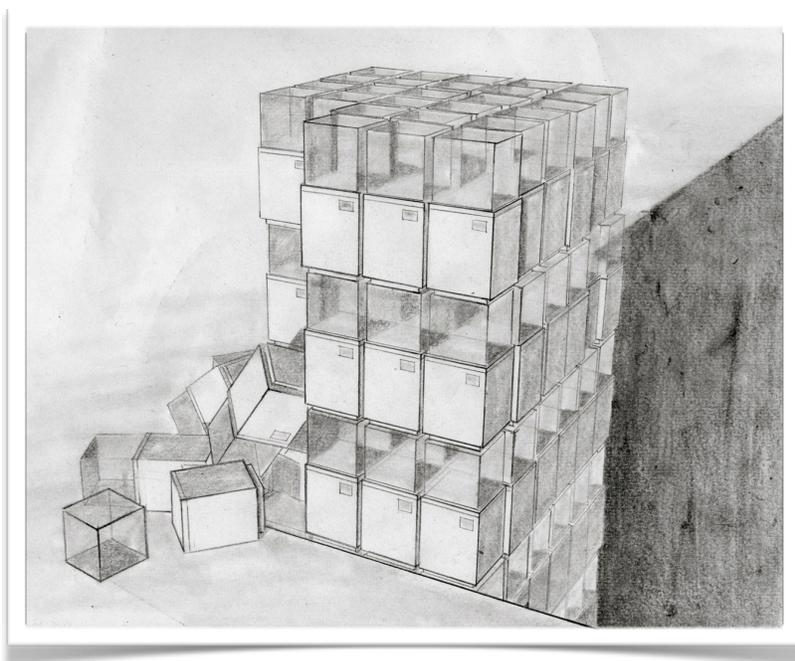
Duchamp’s influence and practice within Dada and Surrealism anticipated some of the ideas and concepts integrated later into the first art historical phase of institutional critique (Buskirk and

Nixon 20). This evolving critical art practice emerged in the 1960's and 70's through artists such as Hans Haacke, Daniel Buren, Michael Asher, Marcel Broodthauers and Martha Rosler. This is a genre of artistic practices defined by various attempts to break out of the institutional frame while still believing in the existence of the museum. These artists were concerned with the dialectical relationship between a theoretical ideal of the museum and the actual practice of the institution. The museum frame was perceived as a cultural medium, which reinforced the naturalization of history. In this context, the exhibition space implicated the institution in the representation and support of dominant social and ideological values inherent within specific class structures by occluding the embedded institutional processes behind the structure and space of its display (Alberro and Stimson 7).

The second phase of institutional critique that emerged in the 1980's is typically attributed to artists such as Louise Lawler, Fred Wilson and Andrea Fraser. These evolving practices were shifting away from previous attempts to break down or out of the museum by moving towards a process of working from inside the museum. They were redefining and exposing the museums embedded traditions in the production of normalizing social values within class, gender and race issues. In an attempt to alter the viewer's perspective, this second phase of critique established that theory and practice cannot exist outside of the aesthetic acculturation inherent within the institutional frame (Alberro and Stimson 11). This phase of critique still supported the institution as capable of change without preserving the ideologies that permeate the museum structure. In retrospect, the reality of these critical practices is that the institution appropriated them within its frame as an art historical genre that did not dismantle the museum but reinforced its values as an embodied cultural space in society.

Although influenced by the ideas and artists of institutional critique, my practice stands apart from their legacies, to avoid unintentionally reifying, promoting or being appropriated back into the museum. Through the process of drawing and constructing installations, I use a reflexive and theoretical approach to reveal and reread the historical archetypes embedded within the museum exhibit space, outside of the conventions, requirements and limitations within my exhibit design practice. My drawings are in a form that resists being implemented as plans by encompassing aspects of both production and destruction. Theorist Brian Holmes writes of the third phase of institutional critique as a present practice of intersubjective experimentation,

interfering with and enabling the ability to resist the traditional processes and limitations of the museum (55). Through the growth of capabilities and experimentation, my art practice focuses on the conceptual and melancholic ruins of the museum in an attempt to reconstruct and re-imagine, from the fragments, a possible future for the museum exhibit space. My drawings and installations are an idiosyncratic response or resistance to the thresholds of the museum, freed by the imagination and rupturing the pictorial space within the museological frame.

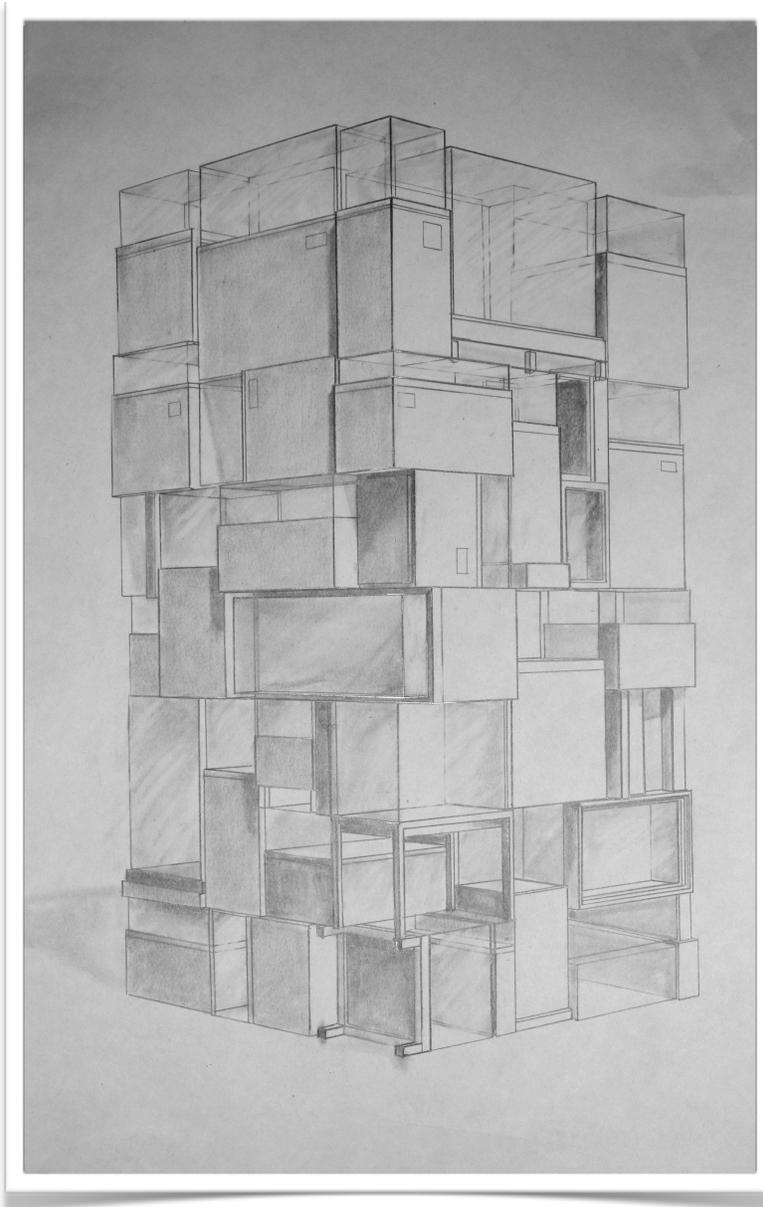


*Fig. 17 Jan Beringer. It All Falls Apart Outside the Frame. 2012.*

In the spiral back to the origins, fragments and ruins of the museum, I acknowledge within my practice that history and memory do not exist completely inside or outside the exhibit space, and that nothing can be reset to the beginning nor removed from its past. Contemporary philosopher Beth Lord writes that the architectural space of the museum exhibit is implicated in a field of contingent relations where history is recorded as the emergence of different interpretations of the past (Lord 5). The idea of a shifting and fragmented interpretation of history being represented within the museum space is mirrored in comparative literature professor Andreas Huyssen writing, where “Space and time are fundamental categories of human experience and perception, but far from being immutable, they are very much subject to historical change” (24).

French historian and philosopher Michel Foucault positioned the museum as a heterotopia or timeless space existing outside of its own environment, while accumulating and enclosing all other times, eras, histories and objects (Foucault *Different Spaces* 182). Lord places the museum as a space of difference, in direct relation to Foucault's notion of a heterotopic space, through its representation of the changing contexts of interpretation between objects and concepts. Within this idea, Lord situates the museum beyond the 19th century constraints of an immutable container for the collection, display and experience of historically contingent objects, narratives and memories (Lord 3). In this broader context a space opens up within my thesis project for the emergence of an art practice that will resist organizing itself into a new totality within the museum and remain autonomous to any perceived authority.

Through Lord's interpretation of the museum as a space of difference, based on Foucault's notion of the Post-modern critique as a historical investigation of discontinuities, I am incorporating the process of drawing as "a matter of reflecting upon our own conditions of possibility, upon the historically determined limits that are imposed upon us, and upon the possibility of transgressing those limits" (Lord 8).



*Fig. 18 Jan Beringer. Immutable museum display. 2012.*

My practice also looks further back to the 18th century drawings of artist and architect Giovanni Battista Piranesi by incorporating aspects of their aesthetic and theoretical origins within my research to reconstruct the fragments of the museum's past. I am looking through the (Postmodern) ruins of the Enlightenment, similar to how Piranesi critically looked back to the classical ruins of his present past.



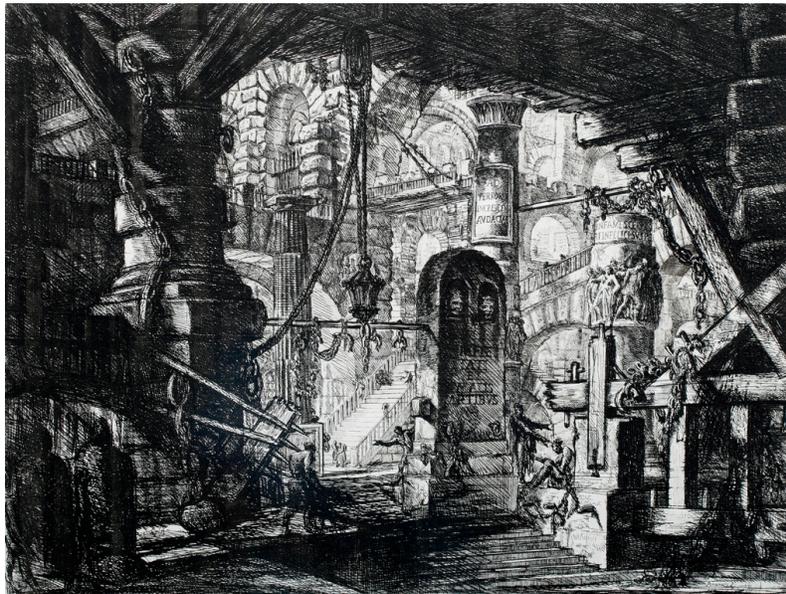
*Fig. 19 Giovanni Battista Piranesi, Via Appia Imaginaria, 1756.*  
Victoria and Albert Museum, UK. [Vam.ac.uk](http://www.vam.ac.uk). Print. Web. 13 Apr. 2012.  
[http://www.architecture.com/LibraryDrawingsAndPhotographs/  
OnlineWorkshops/RomingRome/09Piranesi.aspx](http://www.architecture.com/LibraryDrawingsAndPhotographs/OnlineWorkshops/RomingRome/09Piranesi.aspx)

Piranesi's work anticipates similar concerns to the subversive practice of Duchamp, both are embracing the dialectical relationship between subjectivity or chance and reason within science and technology (Allen 76-77). I am interpreting the dialectical as a reflexive cultural experience that reveals a truth within itself while working from a contradiction in our understanding of the world. This experience deconstructs the traditional philosophic models that separate the relationship between a viewer and the museum space. I suggest we consider the historical writings of German philosophers Georg Hegel and Theodor Adorno, to consider the dialectical relationship as the shifting space that exists between, and defines the subject and object in relationship to one another within the museum. Within this relationship, Piranesi's drawings can be seen to contain a constituent part of Duchamp's later practice, by working through theoretical projects where perspectival space resists the domination of a rational and habituated composition or aesthetic reception.

Although both Duchamp's and Piranesi's practices appear to defy being categorized or easily placed within the (art) historical context of a particular oeuvre, they were both critically engaged with questioning their own time and place in history. Piranesi's drawings deconstructed and reinterpreted the established perspectival and aesthetic traditions of his time, through "The simultaneous negation and affirmation of the value of history" (Allen 75). His prolific and diverse

practice of drawing has been interpreted as challenging the perspectival norms and boundaries embedded within his contemporaries classical and representational style of rendering landscapes or built environments (Allen 83).

Piranesi's 18th century drawings represent, anticipate and project the passage of time within a site or specific architectural space, however, his projects also displace the content or object from any sense of historical continuity and blur the memory of time. His use of the aesthetic sublime through fictional or projected traces, fragments and ruins represented in a state of decay and through altered perspectives is considered a formal strategy to distinguish his shifting concept of memory and time through drawing as unique from the popular picturesque romanticism of the period (Allen 74-76). In comparison to his peers' renderings of architectural spaces or landscapes, the subjects perspectival position and the objects scale are dramatically altered to implicate the viewer within the imposing depth of his compositions. Without idyllic settings or classical ideals, he also used dramatic chiaroscuro lighting and dark shadows in his drawings, evoking a feeling of the sublime (Ek and Sengal 23-26).



*Fig. 20 Giovanni Battista Piranesi, The Pier with Chains, plate XVI, circa 1749.  
Courtesy of Boca Raton Museum of Art, Florida.  
Exhibition Images\_Romanticism to Modernism:  
Graphic Masterpieces from Piranesi to Picasso.*

Piranesi interpreted German philosopher Immanuel Kant's writing on the sublime, while working as his contemporary, into a visual and spatial language of perspectival drawing. He focuses on the

disposition or capacity of the subject to perceive and be moved by the sublime. Kant's sublime is the initial sensory perception of a formless, vast and overwhelming space that is eventually recognized and transcended through reason as encompassing the idea of infinity. However, where the theoretical sublime positions the subject above nature, the experience of the ruin both reveals the past and situates the subject back into nature (Ek and Sengal 20). Piranesi perceived the sublime in a unique, contingent and shifting relationship to the ancient ruin as a break from the rules and norms of classicism and beauty in the 18th century (Ek and Sengal 27).

Piranesi's drawings reveal a subjective process of the reconstruction of form and site from the fragments and ruins of history, time and memory. His practice incorporates the ruin both to question and work through the history of a classical language of architectural form that is premised on repetition and regularity (Allen 29). The classical systems in Roman architecture, which Piranesi believed as evolving from the Egyptians, appear as ordered, however, his work incorporates the ruin as a visual language to reveal the fictional space that is the foundation of classicism, to be reread and reconfigured in the present (Allen 94). He established a critical and experimental way of thinking that resonates within the extra-disciplinary research and practices informing my thesis project.



*Fig. 21 Jan Beringer. Production and Destruction. 2012.*

Philosopher Walter Benjamin wrote about the 'dialectical image' in his unfinished work, *The Arcades Project* (1927-40), as a non-discursive mode of thinking that emerges through language,

where to understand the past means it was understood in the past (Friedlander 5). “It is the inherent tendency of dialectical experience to dissipate the semblance of eternal sameness, and even of repetition in history” (Benjamin *The Arcades Project* 473). The ruin is a phenomena or dialectical image in my practice, being that it refracts, and concentrates the expansive history and experience of the museum in a crash with the present, realizing a new potential reality, and recognizing that any historical truth is fleeting. Within the aesthetic trope of the museum’s ruins, my drawings are situated at a shifting point in tension between my two opposing practices and the history of the museum space.

The space of difference in the museum exhibition is further represented by the allegorical ruin in Benjamin’s philosophy of history, with new meaning and history emerging from the process of ruination. The ruin is situated through my thesis project, not as the symbolic effect of the 18th century romantic and picturesque aesthetic, but within a critical process to reveal historical truths through the reduction and reconfiguring of fragments of the past, in reference to Benjamin’s philosophy of the ruin as a counterpart to allegory (Stead 12). “Allegories are, in the realm of thoughts, what ruins are in the realm of things” (Benjamin 178).

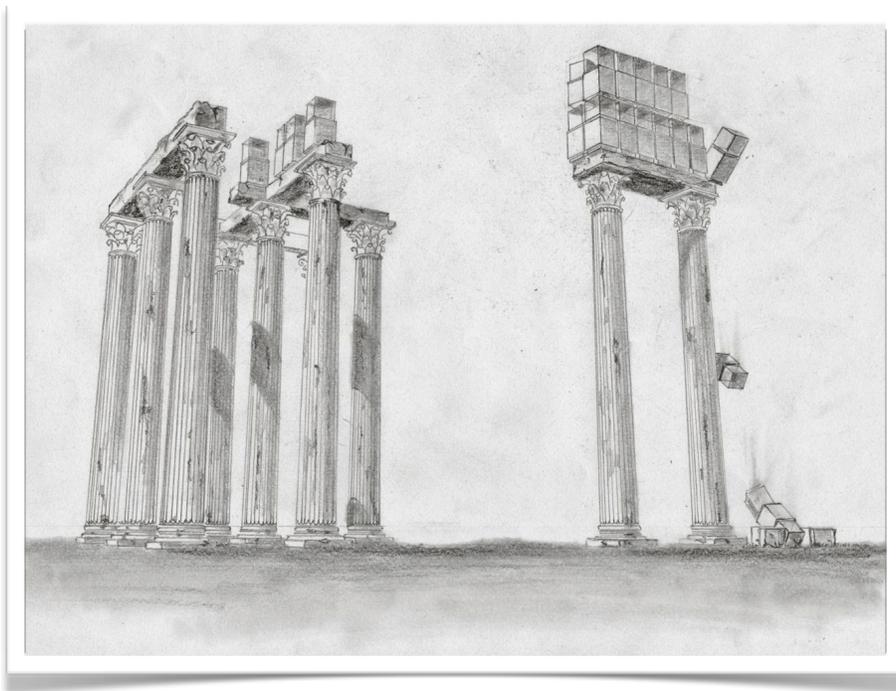


Fig. 22 Jan Beringer. *Noun and Verb*. 2012.

The ruin both collapses and reveals historical distance, while fragmenting and stripping away a continuous and ideal vision of history and reality (Allen 97). The process of ruination is an aesthetic and physical experience that situates the transient and temporal subject in the absence and incomprehensibility of the past through all its contingent political and cultural history, ideologies and memories. I am looking through the cultural layers of romantic and picturesque aesthetics associated with and evolving from the 18th century ruin obsession. My thesis project is focusing on the museum's ruins, while acknowledging the present fascination of modern ruins and dystopias, for example, the Second World War remains in Berlin, derelict industrial spaces in Detroit, latent housing development projects in Las Vegas, Brutalist architecture ruins in Scotland and nuclear disaster areas like Chernobyl. Within the conceptual ruin as an aesthetic trope, I have found a temporal, visual and spatial language that can conceptually situate, critique and examine the museum exhibit space in my thesis project.

A critical strategy in my practice looks at the postmodern in the dimensions of an aesthetic and historical experience that is in a constant state of flux and becoming, with "the endeavor to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently, instead of legitimating what is already known (Foucault *The Use of Pleasure* 9). Although the museum exhibit attempts to negotiate and present a collective idea or conception of the world, the experience of the museum will never meet that concept nor convey any complete knowledge of our shifting realities, hence, these conceived ideas are deemed unrepresentable (Lyotard 78). This is interrelated with French philosopher, Jean-François Lyotard's concept of the aesthetic sublime, as part of the postmodern condition, where our sensibility tries to put the unrepresentable into a sensible form, and is overwhelmed in the process (79). Similar to the museum space, Lyotard posits that modern art attempts to present and make visible the unrepresentable, he also asserts that for any work to be considered modern or new, it must first be considered postmodern, where the postmodern is in a constant state of becoming as a repetition of the modern condition (78-79). From this state, I am using the ruins of traditional exhibit typologies still existing within contemporary postmodern museum spaces, such as architect Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum in Berlin, to support the production of new ideas outside the rules and established thresholds of historical institutional norms.

The museum, similar to the ruin, cannot secure or preserve memory, its interpretation will always remain transitory and contingent on a contemporary time and culture (Huysen 28). Comparative literature professor and author, Andreas Huysen, posits that our contemporary memory culture embodies the fear of forgetting, revealed while trying to situate itself within an unstable and fragmented modern world (24). A memory culture is premised on the desire to anchor itself on the past as a place of stability and continuity, for fear of losing itself within an ever shrinking present that conflates the past, present and future within an indistinguishable boundary. “The museum compensates for this loss of stability by offering traditional forms of cultural identity to a destabilized modern subject” (Lubbe qtd. in Huysen 23). However, as Huysen argues, this is preserving a conservative and ideological concept of the museum that does not acknowledge the museum itself as a destabilized or ruined experience that offers no real security or cultural stability (24).

The contemporary foundation for situating my material practice emerges alongside artist Pablo Bronstein’s drawings and spatial activations of public spaces, such as museums, where the present condition always reveals a palimpsest of the past. Bronstein uses site-specific installations in combination with physical movement or dance to perform and activate the public’s embodied experience of viewing each other, art and artifacts within a museum space. A relationship to Bronstein’s contemporary practice can be seen in Duchamp’s century earlier installation of 1,200 dusty coal bags on the ceiling of an art exhibit at the 1938 International Surrealist Exhibition in Paris, where both artists are considering the architectural facade or frame of the museum as a sign of stability, rationality and power embedded within the thresholds of the exhibition space.



*Fig. 23 Bronstein, Pablo. Magnificent Plaza. 2007.  
India ink and wash on paper in artist' frame  
92.5 x 114.3 cm / 36.4 x 45 in. Image by Pablo Bronstein  
Courtesy Herald St, London.*

Bronstein's work reveals the prevailing ideologies, vanities, mediation, and gendered politics embedded and experienced within historical and present architectural facades, public spaces and the organization of museum exhibits. His drawings are visually reminiscent of 18<sup>th</sup> century classical ruins rendered as the Sublime in Piranesi's practice, and his activation of the frame of the institutional space can be traced back to Duchamp's Surrealist installations in the 1940's. Bronstein's practice draws on and integrates architectural styles from both the 18<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, revealing how the subject embodies or activates specific cultural values through the regulated ways of seeing and moving within architectural spaces. Working within the architecture of public spaces and facades, he raises the issue of how gender, politics, cultural ideologies and power are revealed and reinforced in the physicality and concept of built space as a historical language of dominant cultural codes (Bronstein and Mayer 44).



Fig. 24 Bronstein, Pablo.

*The Museum Nearing Completion as Seen from Fourth Avenue.* 2009.  
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY. [Metmuseum.org](http://images.metmuseum.org/CRDImages/ma/web-thumb/DP219709.jpg). Web. 13 Apr. 2012.  
<http://images.metmuseum.org/CRDImages/ma/web-thumb/DP219709.jpg>

Within Bronstein's 2009 exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York city, he used the language of computer aided architectural drafting to propose alternative and dystopic futures for the museum's development as a critique of the lofty aims and goals of the institution (Hull 3). "A couple of years ago, museums thought they would exist for 1,000 years. Now, nothing is certain" (Bronstein). His work is based on the concept of playing on and drawing from the field of architectural and cultural history, using the simulated classical ruin conflated with styles of Post-modern architecture as a response to the persistence of ideology, colonialism and power structures embedded and preserved through spaces such as the monument and museum facade.

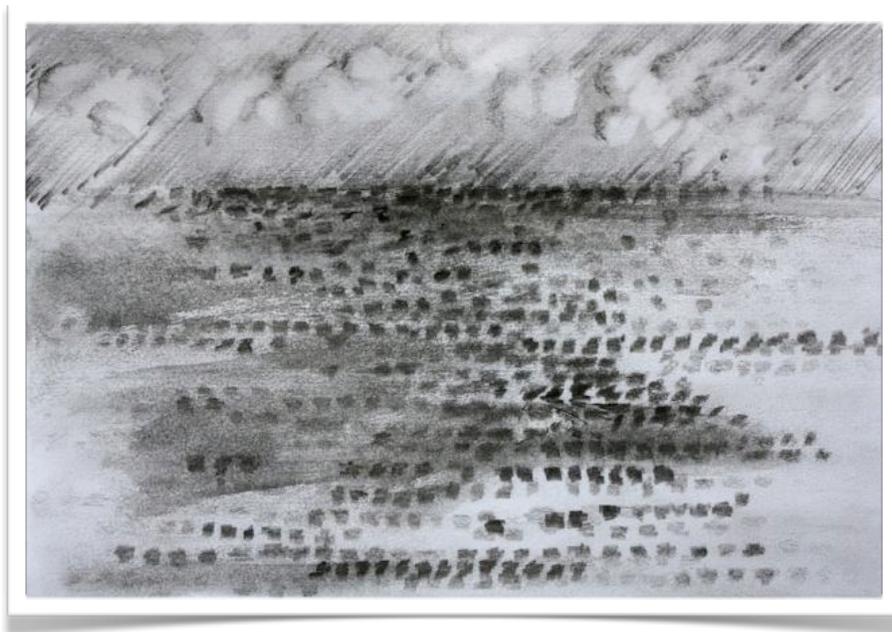


Fig. 25 Jan Beringer. *Out of the Museum's Ruins.* 2012.

My research and thesis project resonates with the early 20th century artistic practices of Duchamp, is informed theoretically through the 18<sup>th</sup> century drawings of Piranesi, and is situated with the critical works of contemporary artist Bronstein. I am placing the traditional museum display archetypes in a dialectical relationship between the abstract and shifting notions of history, represented within the fixed architectural space of the exhibit. Historian and anthropologist, James Clifford, places museums as 'contact zones', existing on the disputed borders of cultural, historical, political, and ideological relations (Clifford *Routes* 204).

My art practice works within this contested liminal space existing between the contingent, shifting interpretations and representations of the past. From this theoretical space, I am developing drawing experiments as a visual language for altered ways of experiencing and reading the exhibit space, working outside the traditional limits or thresholds. Within this visual language the ruin is used as an aestheticized space and trope in relation to the museum space. "Maybe only through a reactivation of memory of a circumstantial past can the official chronicles of history be opposed and, thus, new possibilities for the future imagined" (Arriola). The re-examination of established traditions, frames and systems within the museum allows for a process of discontinuity and transformation within my art practice, looking towards a hopeful, productive and meaningful future that remains interconnected and unresolved (Clifford *Traditional Futures* 165).

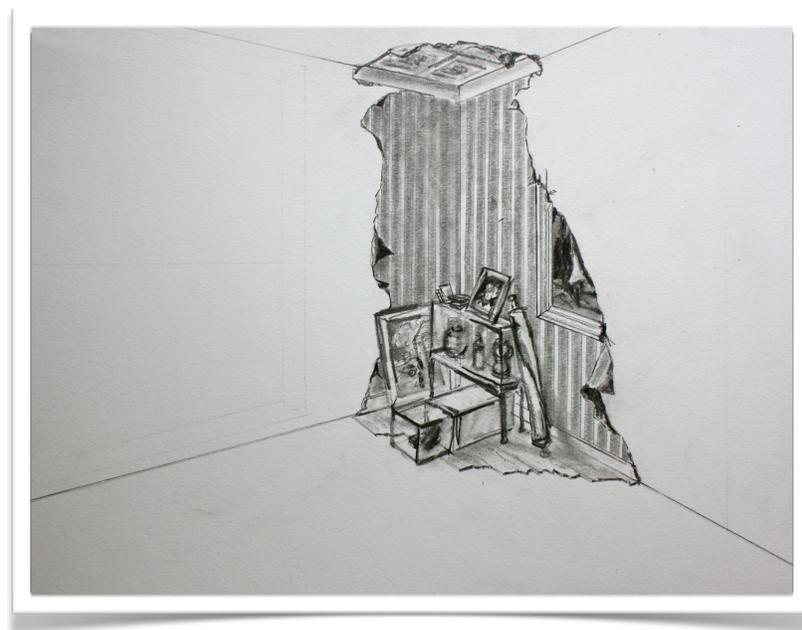


Fig. 26 Jan Beringer. Drawing *Other Spaces*. 2012.

## Chapter 4. METHOD

### 4.1 Overview

Within my thesis project, I am focusing on the process of drawing as part of a larger practice that critiques and works with the museological exhibit space. I am working without the constraints of my exhibit design practice, a practice that is defined by guiding, managing and producing anticipatory studies and fabrication plans for other spaces, within the framework and functional requirements defined by the institution, committee and exhibit content. The drawings in my art practice resist implementation or utility by revealing and destroying historical discontinuities, as a marked resistance against the traditional museum archetypes within our contemporary cultural institutions. I use this propositional and experimental form within my practice to critically mine the history of the museum space in order to suggest possible points of departure for discussion regarding its future.



*Fig. 27 Jan Beringer. Cultural Industry. 2012.*

### 4.2 Drawing and Space

My material practice has evolved and transformed within my thesis project, only to be fully

realized, alongside my research and writing, in the process of drawing and spatial installations. I have developed a visual language for my larger practice through the ongoing development of the ruin as an aesthetic trope for re-imagining the museum space. This process is working outside of a specific project-based mentality, by using a longer and discontinuous time frame to deconstruct and work through ideas about the museum's past, present and future.



*Fig. 28 Jan Beringer. Perspectival. 2012.*

I have experimented with various drawing mediums, materials, forms, styles, substrates and sizes in my initial drawings and sculptures. Initially, I incorporated traditional perspectival drawing techniques to reference familiar architectural styles and formal studies for conceptualizing a built space, with one sculptural object being realized from them for the summer MAA group show in 2011 at Emily Carr University. The work, *Museum Section*, consisted of a one to one scale section cut from a fictional museum space with the paintings, labels and architectural details mounted in place. The proportions of the corner are similar to an architectural design drawing callout, highlighting a specific or complex detail on a wall elevation. The construction methods bridged and represented a long history of museum architecture with one side covered in creosote and

rotten wood to represent an older decaying structure, and the other was constructed as a new white box gallery space addition. Proportionately, it was a corner of an untitled gallery with two sections of wall, 8' and 10' long, sliced at 24" high from the floor. The framed paintings of unknown origins or authorship were traumatically sliced through, and meant to be interpreted as a defamation or blatant assault on history and culture itself, challenging our preconceived notions of value and the museum's role in society. This L-shaped section was displayed tilted on its side within another gallery space to upset the pictorial and experiential space of the museum. On reflection, this sculpture was a way of opening up a space for drawing and form to communicate and activate aspects of my thesis project.



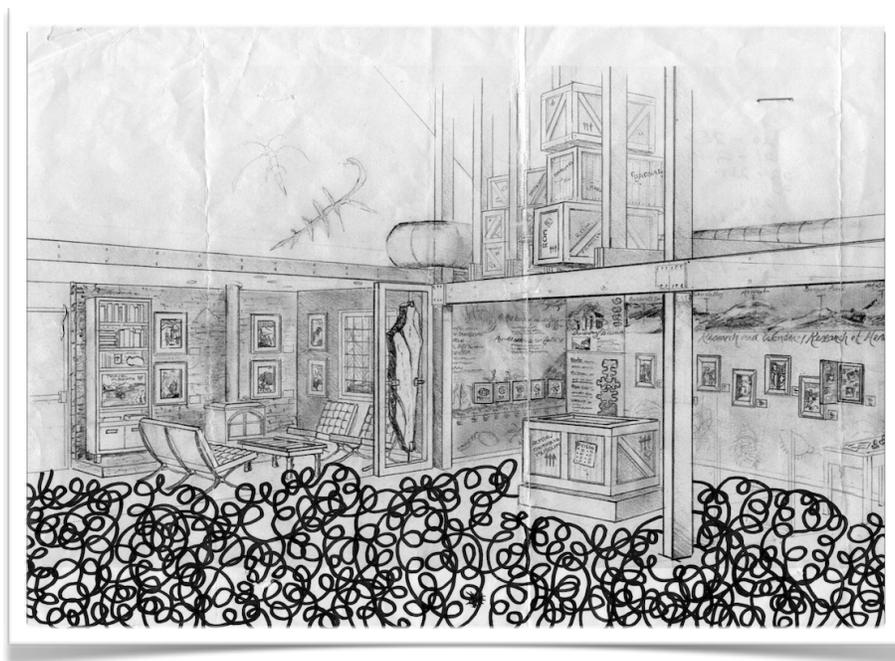
*Fig. 29 Jan Beringer. Museum Section. 2012.*

The preparatory drawings leading up to this sculpture also had critical potential to disrupt the historical norms of the museum space by anticipating the process of drawing as a key part of my thesis project. These drawings reflect my observations and experiences from working in various cultural institutions as an exhibit designer. However, they juxtapose familiar drawing techniques with unexpected or contradictory messages that simultaneously reveal and rupture traditions within the museum, as a way of constructing and deconstructing the exhibit space within the same image.

A following series of drawings used the idea of display cases at war or in the state of being

thrown away as a reflection or dialectical image of our attempts to interpret, discard and document the past. The drawings are intended to reveal the historical systems and forms of representing cultural identity in the museum as subjective, contested and discontinuous. I utilize the museum as both the subject and object of critique by incorporating historical narratives and abstractions in the form of a drawing.

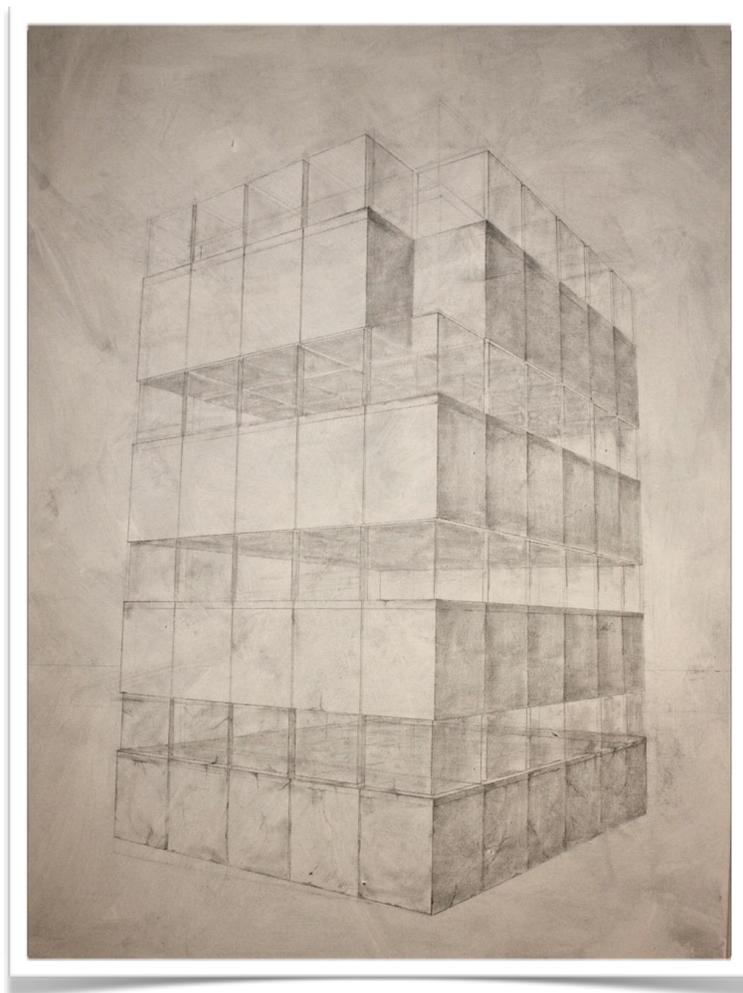
I place the objects and spaces in a struggle for the foreground, premised on an idea that the interpretation and representation of the space might be more significant or revealing than the content. Using imaginative scenarios such as the morphological study of Duchamp's 1912 work, *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2*, I am drawing an interruption of the logical ideal of the figure. The anthropomorphized museum display cases reveal the viewer and artifact as being in complicity with the historical museum space.



*Fig. 30 Jan Beringer. On Work. 2012.*

My recent drawings use simple, black pen line drawings to politicize and challenge the rituals and habituated ways of seeing and moving within the frame of the exhibit space. This form of casual and distracted drawing is being done at the office during my work as an exhibit designer. I use the process of doodling or sketching while I am supposed to be doing other things, physically drawing through, over and within my 'productive' design drawings. In the context of my thesis project, drawing acts as satire, humour and critique of the formal museum space. This process of

squiggling and mark making works against the thresholds of familiar forms and volumes defining its traditions and architecture. Within these works I am critiquing the cultural institution as a site for the normative viewing and creation of ideological values, where the museum is meant to be a neutral space.

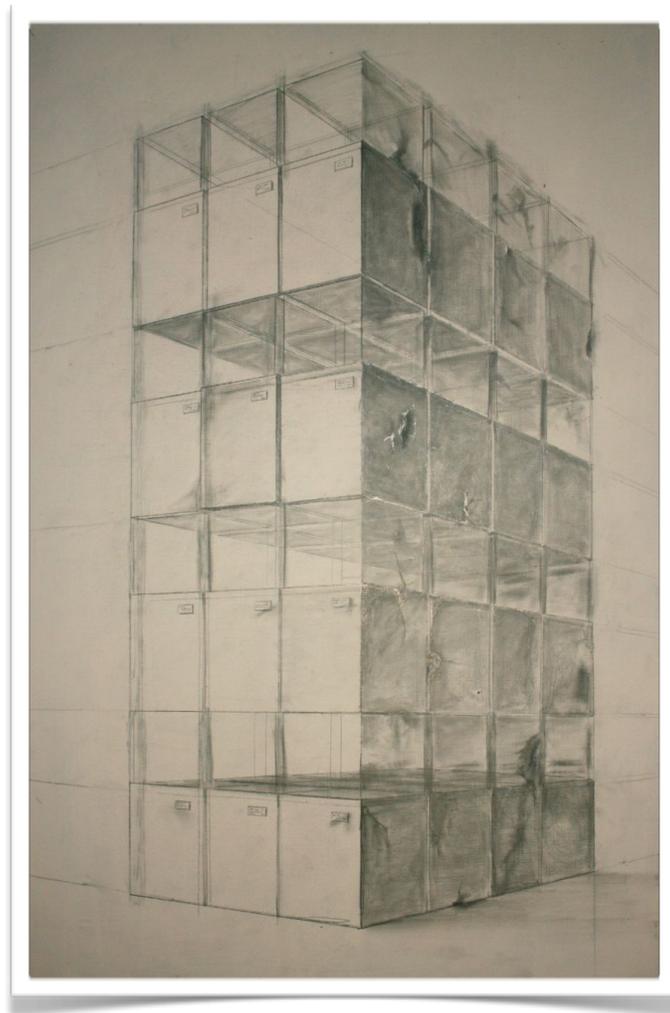


*Fig. 31 Jan Beringer. Modernist Museum Ruins I. 2012.*

In addition to these projects, my recent drawings incorporate the use of standard, disposable office computer paper for detailed and refined pencil sketches based on fictional narratives and ruin aesthetics that combine classical forms with contemporary critiques. These drawings reflect a commitment of time and skill that contrasts with the cheap, thin, and familiar letter, tabloid, and legal sized institutional printing substrate. Extending from this idea, I use existing paintings on canvas as foundations for my drawings, the canvases are painted over with a pure, cool white interior wall paint similar to that used in the contemporary gallery space. I draw on them with a

graphite medium as formal perspectival studies of traditional museum display typologies, revealing a subjective method of organizing, representing and interpreting historical objects.

As a group displayed together, these drawings can be interpreted on various levels of aesthetic engagement. The works are situated alongside and informed by my theoretical research and writing as part of a larger artistic practice working with the museum space. My studio work leading up to the final exhibition has been a critical response to the embedded traditions within the museum, using a contradictory visual language of established exhibition design processes and methods of drawing to deconstruct and suggest alternative scenarios for viewing and imagining the future museum.



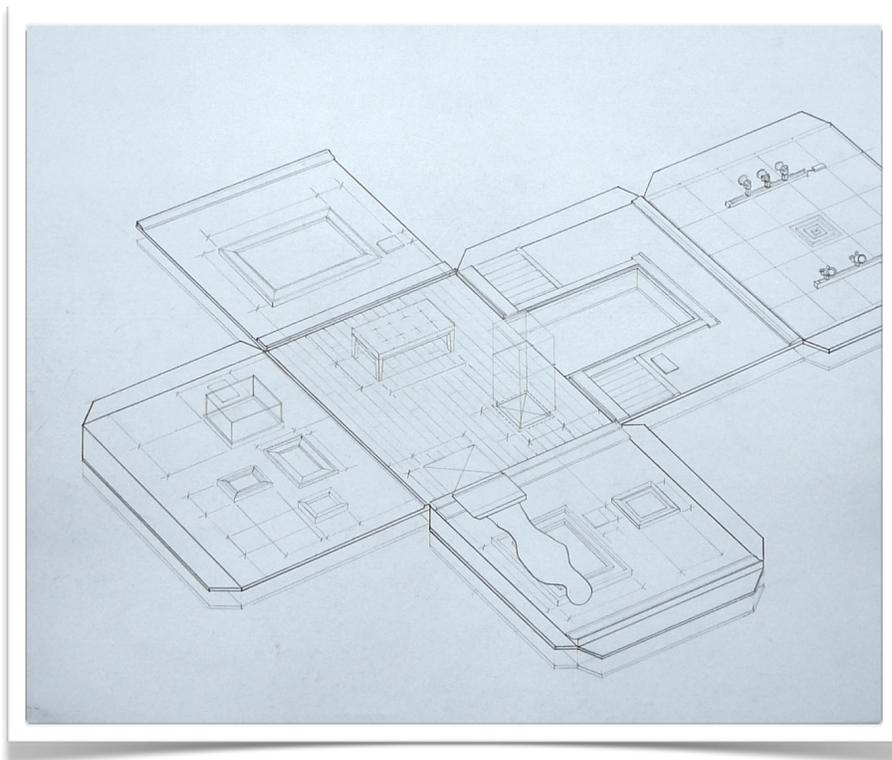
*Fig. 32 Jan Beringer. Modernist Museum Ruins II. 2012.*

## Chapter 5. THESIS PROJECT

### 5.1 Overview

My final thesis project was part of the exhibition, *Here + There*, which opened on July 19, 2012, at the Charles H. Scott Gallery on Granville Island in Vancouver, British Columbia. This group show consisted of nine artists, including myself, as part of the inaugural 2012 cohort's final exhibition in the Low Residency Masters of Applied Arts program at ECUAD.

My parallel profession as an exhibit designer inspired my efforts to assist in the early process of designing and laying out the gallery space. This familiar design process informed how my final thesis project would eventually evolve and respond to both the architecture of the gallery space, and the disparate works of the other artist's. My final work, *It's all over*, consisted of a sculptural form and architectural intervention to activate a previously developed series of diverse drawings. When viewed in its entirety from both inside and outside the gallery space, the work directly addressed the deconstruction of historical ideologies and archetypes embedded within the contemporary experience of the museum's physical exhibition space.



*Fig. 33 Jan Beringer. Boxes. 2012.*

Related to the research, writing and studio process within the MAA program, my final studio project referenced the immediacy of drawing as speculation or possibility with the seduction of form and materials. Drawing from the modernist museum archetype in ruin, the work, *It's all over*, used the blank space of the gallery corner with blank drywall and blank sheets of paper to re-imagine the blank museum.



*Fig. 34 Jan Beringer. It's All Over. 2012.*

## 5.2 'It's All Over'

The realization of my final installation based work, *It's all over*, was a direct response to the architecture of the Charles H Scott gallery, specifically the interior and exterior of the South West corner window. Utilizing the thresholds of the physical display space is inherently linked to my art practice and thesis project. I am examining the implications of embedded histories and complicities within fragments of the conceptual ruins of museological spaces.

This work was a response to the normative and inscribed rules of display by using the interior and exterior of the gallery space for the same work, and switching the subject and object relationship between the viewer and artwork. When the two sliding panels meant to occasionally cover the windows were left open by 1" on each side, it allowed for a small vertical split that would connect and conceal the exterior from the interior, leaving a bright splinter of natural light to slice through into the interior gallery space. My work incorporated the existing engraved lines on the concrete floor, the recessed interior window frame, the 20" depth between the windows and the sliding panels, the white painted walls and the verticality of the interior ceiling height. In addition, my work responded to the standard 56" center hanging height used for other works in the gallery including Galia Kwetny's large canvas painting, *Community*, directly to the left, and David Miller's 24' long photographic work, *Exits (Gas chamber and Crematoria, Auschwitz, July 2008)*, located to the right of my drywall sculpture. I recognized this corner of the gallery as a natural threshold, or liminal space to work from for a site-specific installation to support and activate my drawings.

I spent the week leading up to the show at the Home Depot warehouse on Terminal Avenue in Vancouver as my appropriated corporate studio space, to prepare the sculptural component of the final work. Within a delineated aisle space, under the buzzing metal halide commercial lamps, I used their knives and t-squares to cut, snap and stack ½" - 4' x 12' drywall panels into 112 - 16" x 56" panels. The final minimalist and anthropomorphic form was located within the interior gallery space demarcated by the recessed corner window and engraved lines in the floor. It consisted of a simple 56" high freestanding stack of these unfinished, interior drywall pieces, with an interruption of vertically stacked panels in the lower right corner, and the entire piece was floating off the ground at the same height as the gallery walls from the floor. The drywall material was exactly the same as that used to construct temporary walls within the exhibition space.

A blue chalk line was snapped 56" across the inside of the right sliding panel at the typical 56" high gallery standard center line for hanging artwork. This line acted as a drawn gesture both implicating and related to the proportions of the sculpture, the display and content of the drawings, the positioning of other artist's works in the show, and the viewer's average eye height.



*Fig. 35 Jan Beringer. It's All Over. 2012.*

The drawings were mounted and remained only visible on the outside of the two sliding panels that covered the corner window of the gallery. Acting as a hopeful form of resistance, the process of drawing remains free from the museum's contested past and existing without a predetermined outcome. Consisting of sketches, doodles, renderings, drafting plans, elevations, and dimensional models they exist in various states of completion and on various types of paper and drywall substrates. Based on and reflecting the layout on the wall in my studio, they were provisionally pinned and organized below 56" to disrupt the normative ideals of display by leading the audience to peer in awkwardly close to the glass, look around the window frames and bend or squat down on the paving bricks to see the drawings clearly and in their entirety.



*Fig. 36 Jan Beringer. It's All Over. 2012.*

The lighting of the installation was a combination of fixtures including overhead PAR-30 bulbs inside the gallery space, MR-16 bulbs in the enclosed window well tracks, and the ever changing natural sun light from outside. The drywall sculpture was lit from overhead and interrupted during the day by a vertical slice of natural light coming in from the gap between the sliding panels, the intense line of light moved across the form throughout the day and played off the textures, colour and location of the sculptural form. The drawings were intentionally lit from inside the window well with a wash of warm light from 10 bulbs on the track fixtures mounted above, in combination with the distracting glare, reflections, and changing intensity of natural sunlight on the window glass from outside.

### 5.3 Reflection

In relation to my thesis and research, this final installation used the gallery space and sculptural form to activate and embody the imaginary potential of the drawings. The location, materials and scale of the installation were idiosyncratic responses to the fixed systems and traditional archetypes of exhibition spaces, which are still used as the critical components of a normative and embodied museum experience.

French philosopher Gaston Bachelard wrote in his introduction to *'The Poetics of Space'*, that "By the swiftness of its actions, the imagination separates us from the past as well as reality; it faces the future" (XXXIV), referring to the imagination or 'unreality' as a significant part of human nature where "space calls for action, and before action, the imagination is at work" (12).



*Fig. 37 Jan Beringer. It's All Over. 2012.*

To avoid the drawings being read and interpreted by the viewer as familiar and precious art objects within the gallery space, I did not display a select few of the most resolved works. It was critical that they be seen as a theoretically-based visual commentary on the individual viewer's own normative expectations for the ideal exhibition experience. These expectations might have included mounting them in a linear series that were typically matted, framed and hung at 56" centers. Although the drawings were protected behind the corner glass window of the gallery, they were still directly exposed to the detrimental effects of direct sunlight and the possibility of water damage from water coming into the window well on the lower sections. Although the works were a critical part of the overall installation, they were removed and separated from the experience inside the gallery space by sliding the solid, temporary window cover panels almost closed to act as their physical support.

The interior drywall sculpture and blue chalk line were also a potentially separate and unique work from the drawings. However, the completeness of this work was dependent on the viewer's experience of its perceived inaccessibility from both inside and outside the gallery space. The layout was a challenge to the viewer to articulate the intent of the work by having to move between a public and institutional space, between a subject and object relationship, and between materiality and imagination. This liminal state of the work was a critical part of the experience, by opening or rupturing a physical and theoretical space between our present realities and habituated expectations, the work would reveal embedded histories and archetypes within the gallery space. The work implicates the viewer through the imagination of a possible future for the museum exhibition space by deconstructing our expectations of how we view, experience and interpret the past.

In a virtual presentation by the artist Carey Young during the final summer residency of the MAA program at ECUAD, she articulated her definition of an interesting and successful contemporary art practice as one that reflects on and responds to one of the worlds inherent ambiguities and paradoxes. An example of this can be seen in one of her earlier works from 2004/05, *Consideration*, looking at theories of social conditioning being manifested through social behavior, and specifically in this work through contractual law. Young stressed the importance of asking questions that elicit ongoing discussions instead of resolving definitive answers. By working to open up a space for dialogue around the history, experience and meaning of the museum

exhibition, I can propose alternative ways to rethink its future without having to make subjective judgements from a fixed ideological position.

Looking beyond my final thesis project, a possible trajectory for my art practice might incorporate projects from within the studio process and outside the gallery space, while continuing to reference and question the place of the exhibition within the theoretical foundations and changing facets of the museum as a cultural institutional.

A The traditional museum is a ~~non-profit~~ unprofitable, permanent institution in the service of ~~society~~ political ideologies and ~~its~~ their development, open to the public, which ~~acquires~~ appropriates, ~~conserves~~ sells, researches, ~~communicates~~ controls and ~~subjectively~~ exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of ~~education~~ habituation, ~~study~~ entertainment and ~~enjoyment~~ social conditioning.

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A museum is a ~~non-profit~~ profitable, impermanent ~~institution~~ space in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which ~~acquires~~, ~~conserves~~, researches, ~~communicates~~ discusses and exhibits the tangible ~~ideas~~ and intangible ~~heritage~~ imagination of humanity and its environments for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment.

*Fig. 38 Jan Beringer. Definitions. 2012.*

One of these works could potentially be video documentation of a performance piece, occurring within the appropriated Home Depot commercial studio space where I experimented with and built the final drywall based sculpture. In addition, the realization of building a monumental stack, in one to one scale, of display archetypes including cases, vitrines, benches, plinths, labels and frames would take the work in a more formal and architectural direction that questions its

own location, origins and intentions in context with the viewer in the future present. In relation to the research, writing and work developed for my thesis project based on the museum's exhibition space, the form and content of future related work could be reinterpreted and realized in various and unexpected places, contexts, mediums and processes.

## **Chapter 6. CONCLUSION**

The conceptual ruin of the museological space is used in my thesis project as an aesthetic trope, to redefine and redraw the museum's role and relevancy within changing societies. My research, writing and studio projects critically examine embedded ideologies and archetypes in order to deconstruct the monumentalizing, historicizing and normalizing traditions of the museum that persist in contemporary culture. Drawing from the archetypes of the modernist museum, I am re-imagining and reconstructing fragments of the institution's conceptual ruins. By placing the exhibit space as a transitional threshold between the allegorical and shifting relationship of the viewer, institution and objects on display, I intentionally obscure the content by foregrounding the viewer's position with the methods of display.

My drawings are informed by, but unrestricted by any institutional constraints or thresholds, and are used for the growth of both my own and the viewer's capabilities to subjectively resist, rupture and respond to the limiting traditions of museological space. The act of drawing is a visual language and process of potentiality in a constant state of flux and becoming, reflecting my intertwined and parallax practices looking at the museum from different vantage points as both an artist and exhibit designer.

Through drawing I can continuously select and reconstruct fragments from the museum's ruins to propose alternative concepts and scenarios for the future museum space. Where the museum, similar to the ruin, cannot secure or preserve memory, its interpretation will always remain transitory and contingent on a contemporary time and culture (Huysen 28). Although the drawings in themselves form a large and complete part of my thesis project, my artistic tendency to construct and manipulate physical space was realized in the final project. However, form was not the end result of the drawing process, it was used in reverse, as a way in to negotiate the

drawings and to engage the viewer in the experience of looking back at their own normative behaviors in the anticipation and engagement with the museum exhibition space.

My final work for the MAA thesis exhibition responded to and incorporated the gallery space within a sculptural installation, a process that acknowledged my interrelated art and design practices. The work was realized to activate a diverse series of drawings that situate the archetypal museum exhibition space as an unstable, contested and discontinuous cultural apparatus acting as a facade for the display of historical progress. Acknowledging that within my evolving art practice I have the freedom to question and re-imagine the thresholds of the museum beyond the scope of my work as an exhibit designer, a space is opened up for future works to be informed by the art historical, theoretical and physical museum space as a potential medium and corollary experience.

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