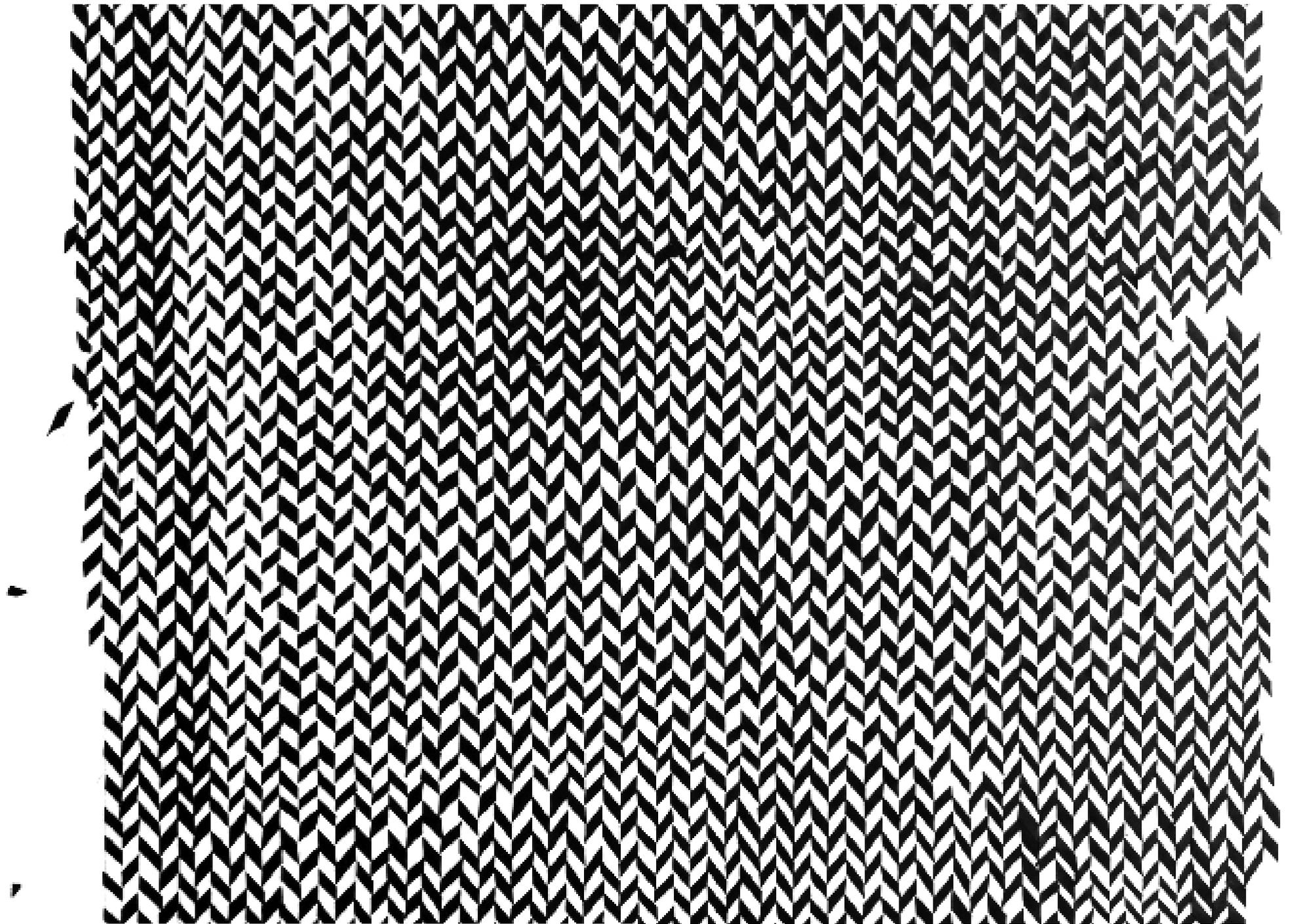


BENJAMIN BUCHANAN

THERE'S A GHOST IN MY HOUSE

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THERE'S A GHOST IN MY HOUSE

by Juan Rubén Reyes

The first thing he does is to cut the page from the spine. This is important. He then smooths wax along both cut edges before measuring the diagonal midway point of the page, marking it in wax and pencil. He lowers the blade already used to remove the page to cut the top of his left hand, three centimetres up the vein running between his middle and forth fingers; deep enough to draw blood. Holding the cut hand above the page palm facing up, he draws his right index finger across from left to right before sitting two small pieces of lead in the open palm. He holds his hand here until a drop of blood falls close enough to the pencil and wax mark (four drops fall before this happens). He concludes this gesture by spelling out loud the word *corner*.

With white cotton he marks out a rectangle on the page, using four pins to hold it in place. It runs vertically down the page (the rectangle looks like a window). He takes the knife and holding it within the frame, turns his eyes to the blood, tracing the circumference of each spot. His breath stops. Lowering the knife, he makes a quick, swift incision. He moves his gaze back to the rectangle. The incision is a centimetre and a half long. He removes the cotton, the knife, the pins, and looks. The page shows the interior of an old cruise liner cabin. He has never seen it before. The cut travels through the top of a small foldaway table that has been lowered for the photograph. Above it is a mirror.

Did you hear that? She asks.

When alone we spent days sitting together, pouring milk onto different areas of the carpet and studying it carefully. With our fingers we would push and scratch at it to try to make lines, or anything vaguely linear, before it was absorbed.

Corridor! She concluded, the second day pointing at the closed door that led into the kitchen. After lunch we reread the passage that had initially produced this study. *The best corridors and passages of all are those that have windows along an entire wall.*

In the mornings the smell was wonderful, like the sound of a crow married to the final seam of closing lift doors. Silver and pure, pure black but as familiar as simple geometry. There were eventual complaints but we didn't care. I remember the night before we left, we were sitting at the table, Sophia stood up so quickly the glass fell over (I think it was empty), her eyes bright as fear, saying, *I endure only because of the heart*. She spoke for hours, becoming visibly exhausted but always full beyond her gestures.

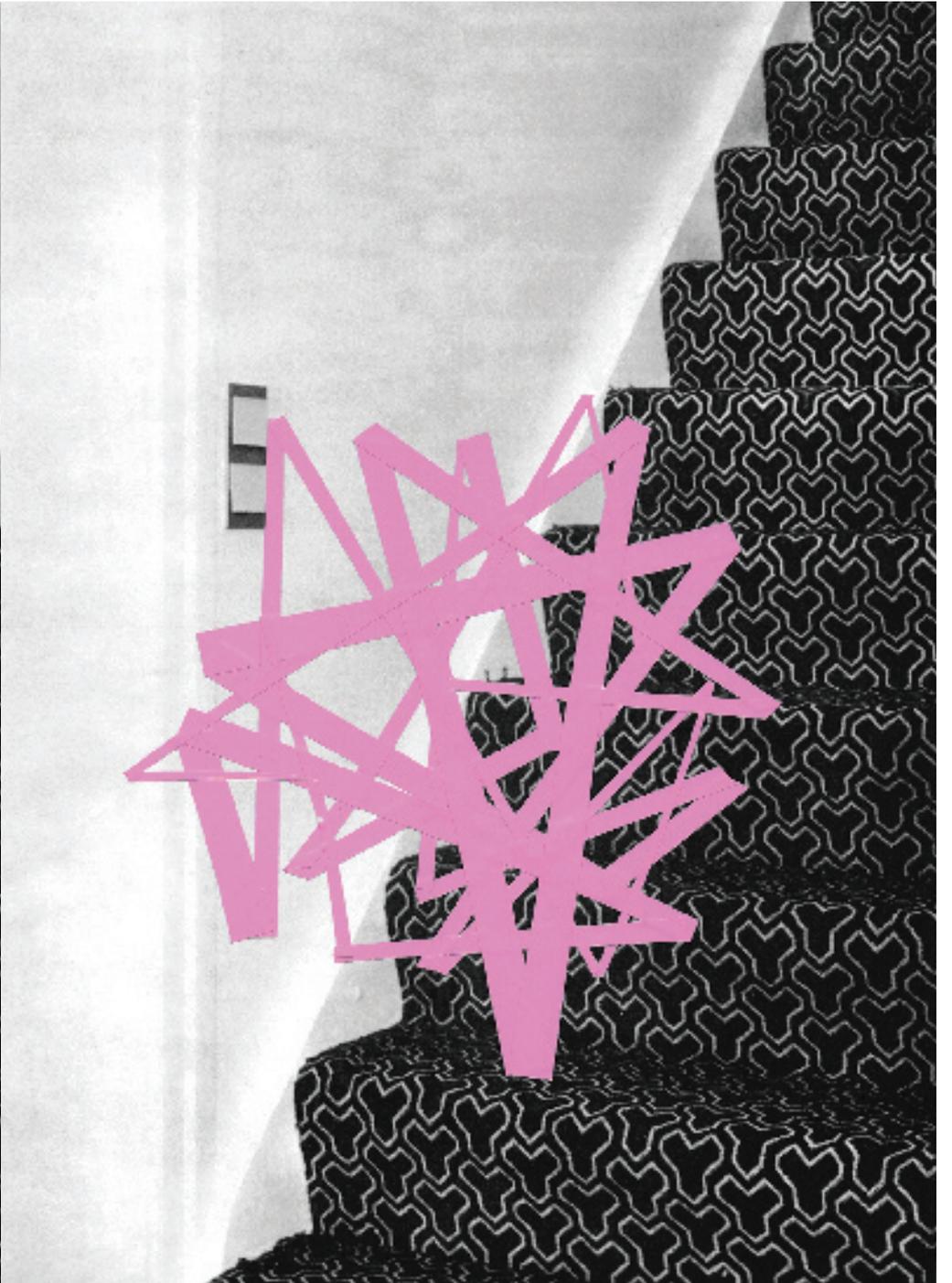
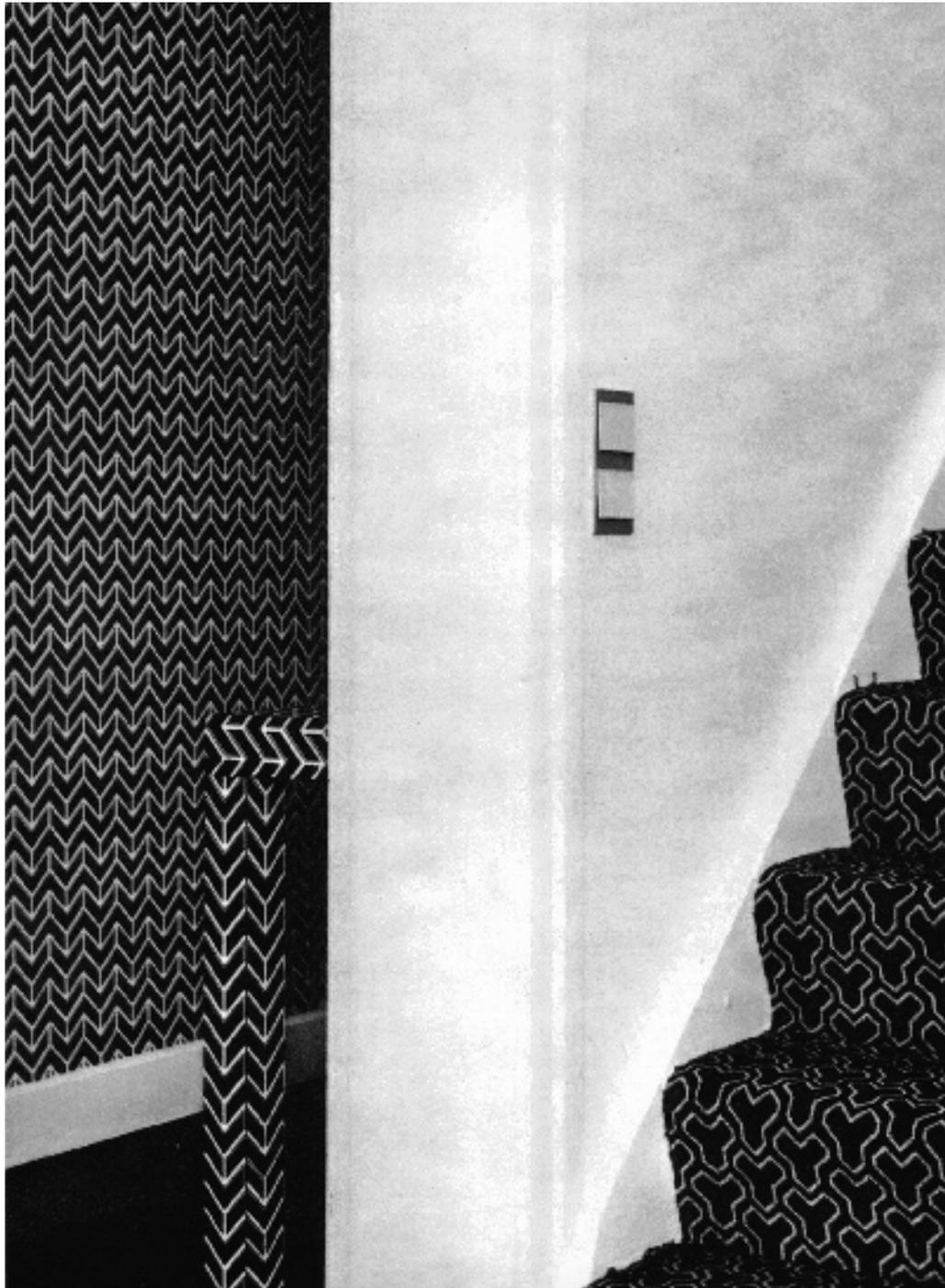
A child called out from the shore: *Look, the sun has exploded and fallen upon the surface of the ocean!*

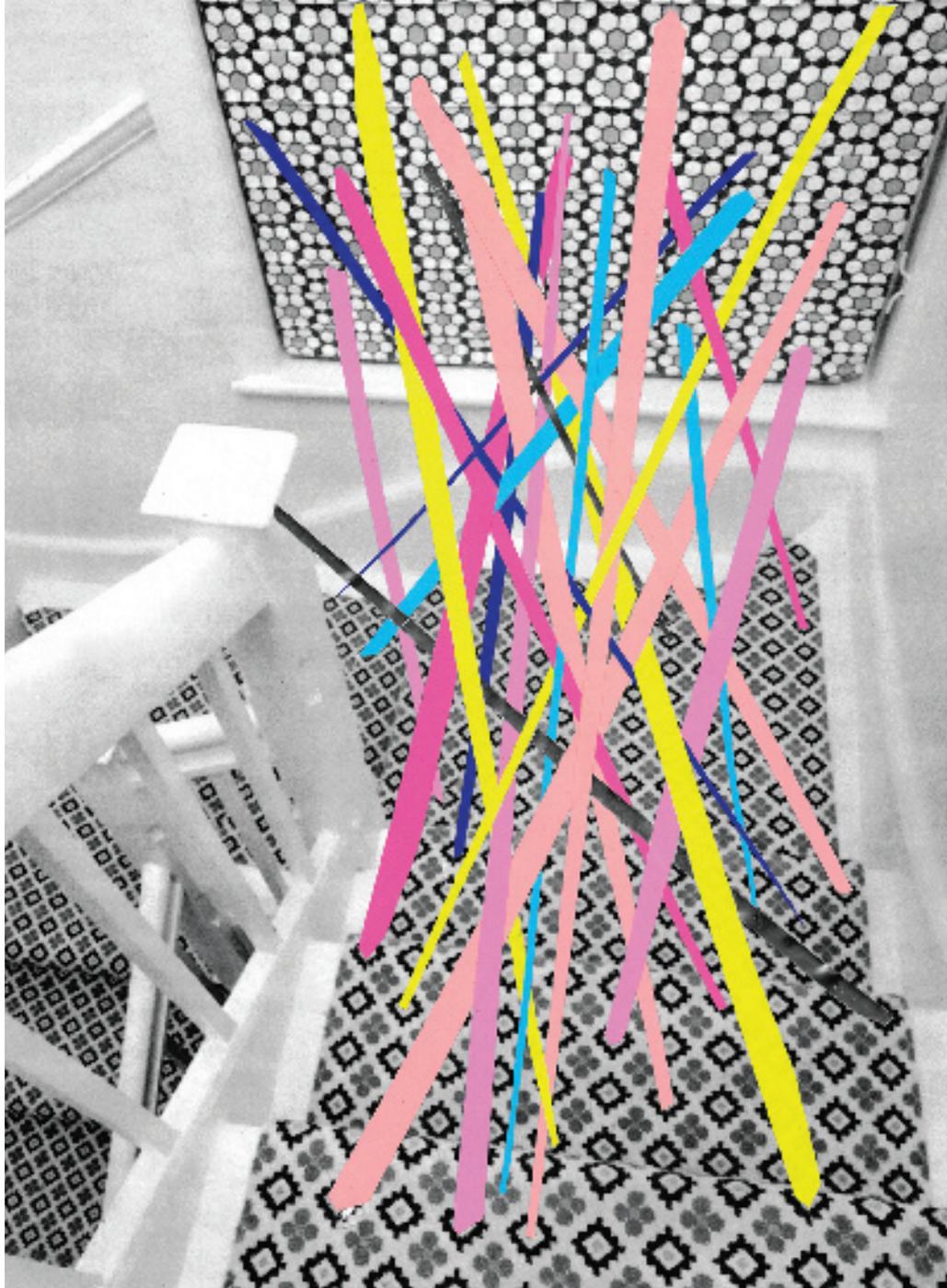
I continued to speak to her late into the night; questioning her, clarifying what was said, re-clarifying, saying whatever came into my mind, saying things before they had collected words to cloak themselves. Questions, statements, hypotheses about all the mysteries, the complexities, wrapped in large books and expensive pictures and long complicated pieces of music that really – when all taken together – look like a single crumpled page blown up against the side of a house. I asked about all of this. She mumbled and swore and words broke around her lips and at times she collected them back together while saliva dribbled constantly from her mouth. (I was sure I saw a perfect vertical line of it – a real line! – descend after she forced out in three syllables the word *mirror*. I watched it travel by gravity only to be stopped by the table top, the one where God sits watching the bits he can't put together muttering *it will be*).

She smelt animal, like an unwashed street farmed with dogs, but I listened intently, openly, hoping that she may just conceal something with some lie or misinformation in such a way to uncover something else. Like when lying in bed a sheet pulled up over the head reveals the feet.

Someone has said that where the lead touches, *that's* the ghost. He sits at a thousand tables simultaneously, white like spit, moaning *Logic! Logic! Logic!* Someone has said she knits.

Onwards!







LESS MIRROR THAN HE WAS USED TO: OTHER WAYS OF BODY

by Ruth Buchanan

The early morning serenity of Gossington Hally Street, home of Colonel and Dolly Bantry is shattered, when the housemaid Mary runs into the couple's bedroom and shouts hysterically "Oh ma'am there's a body in the library!" After first doubting her ears Dolly finally decides that yes, she has heard correctly. She has a rather difficult time convincing her husband of the news but when he finally staggers downstairs and pulls open the large doors leading to the library he sees that, there is indeed a body in the library.¹

Just like holding a mirror out in front of us, where we perceive the 'other version of ourselves' the same happens when we enter the space of the library, archive or collection. We often enter spaces such as these looking for a moment of recognition. Such a moment may offer the possibility to see our specific contexts and ourselves in relation to a complicated lattice of public histories, personal preferences and performed theatricalities.

These spaces of meeting meaning, or several meanings at one time ask those who enter: How does one experience the experience of inheritance?² What can it mean to surround yourself with signs, symbols and patterns that are at once familiar and distant, often produced not only outside our own life span but also potentially on the other side of the world?

I have been thinking about experiencing inheritance and receiving ideas a lot over the past year. In the realm of cultural production it can become difficult to get beyond the options propagated throughout modernity. These could be summarised as; reject and replace (often violently) and develop an obsessional relationship with progress and originality. Of course now we are encouraged to borrow, remix, replenish and basically do whatever the hell we like, but this too, I would suggest, can be difficult.

To be able to do this 'whatever' one is still required to delineate for themselves an agency that allows for another kind of value to come into play. A place where all those stories and histories you may not have concretely experienced, but somehow feel tied to, can meet with your *specific contemporary context* (favourite song, the weather, for and againsts, fears and loves etcetera). All these things infect and inflect what one feels able, or indeed, can be bothered to say and do.

So, what might this other power look like, this power that doesn't rely on rejection and replacement, the traditional Oedipal route of killing our fathers to install ourselves?

I would suggest, such a power or agency might reside in a lingering between, by taking a position of threshold dweller, between arrival and departure, absence and presence, destruction and construction, reference and the original. This in-between-ness is not about relinquishing power and replacing it with passiveness, but implicating the self in a *specific context* in alternative ways.

Think of the stand up comedian. A stage with lights, a curtain, a microphone, round tables with red and white gingham table cloths and a fake rose in the middle. The comedian taps the microphone, "Is this working?" He mutters under his breath as the sweat slides down his forehead. Although this is a calculated posture, it is a posture that reveals its own self or *uses impotency as a form of power, openness and availability*.

To use irony is to deflect from oneself, to take yourself out of the positioning and thus remain distant and unavailable. I would say, humour implicates the one making the gesture and reveals such a gesture of welcoming that allows for the entrance of another, that is sincere and beyond flirtation with such a gesture. An intimate engagement, love, believes in its own failure, impotencies and powerlessness and loves nonetheless.

Think of Herman Melville's famous Bartelby.³ The character works at a law office in a meticulous and productive manner until one day when asked to complete a task rather than saying yes or no he simply replies, "I would prefer not to". The situation escalates due to his inactivity. He starts living in the offices, preferring not to leave, he ceases to do anything, even eat. This leads to the entire office re-locating. The new tenants are faced with the same problem. Finally, Bartelby is forcibly removed and the story ends with his death. Despite the ending, Bartelby offers exactly the kind of alternative realm of power we were looking for. By choosing to live in a provocative state of suspense, dwelling between arrival and departure, action and inaction, he is able to produce an experience that is specific to his context by neither saying yes or no to that context.

Although this story is often used in discussions around politics,⁴ it seems a relevant and helpful for cultural producers as well. In what ways can we productively experience our inheritance in the present, without becoming agents for systems profoundly imbedded within that very history we were perhaps trying to escape, or claim, in the first place?

In his artwork, Benjamin Buchanan does precisely this. He holds a mirror out towards contemporary culture by addressing histories and language codes of abstract painting to develop a *personal* body, a library of references, abstract and public as well as private and esoteric. By engaging in a continuing and unfolding narrative of space, he not only builds a space for reflection on our canon as artists, but also reflects on what it means to create such a space. Buchanan's spatial language develops a choreography of repetition, mimicry, invention and joke telling.

The rhythmic pattern making he works with speaks equally of Tukuluku panelling, architecture, science fiction films, musical composition, painting and an acknowledgment of time itself passing.

As viewers we are asked to physically enter a place where time and space collapse into an intimate dissection of the public property of culture; highlighting how we consume it and also how we tell about that consumption.

However, I do not mean to explain the clearly evident references in Buchanan's work. I would rather consider how a practice can open up a space that is neither purely abstract nor purely representative of *someone else's abstraction* but develops a space of reflection for the individual artist (and the viewer) to reconsider what 'bodies in libraries' mean.

By creating families of references and gestures through his language of abstraction Buchanan reflects on his *individual* experience of a canon via the *collective* space of popular culture.

What is crucial in Buchanan's practice is that it evokes reflection through a particular engagement with the *act of doing*. This doing, which unfolds in a slightly lethargic and almost hypnotic manner, allows for a time that is *both*

reflective and productive by staging its own necessity. In developing this strategy, Buchanan offers a generous approach to abstract practice in the contemporary. By using humour he offers an alternative to the re-performing of the heroic role through exhausted self-pretension or such an engagement with those roles becoming purely ironic.

Always holding mirrors out and back towards, Buchanan evokes both personal and public histories. He delineates a space, or a *passage between*, that is welcoming. In doing so, the mirror he holds becomes both a conceptual and formal tool. In slow, and concentrated ways Buchanan uses the mirror to conjure space through a congeniality with abstraction.

The pleasure, the real intimacy evident in this engagement is located in a place on the edge of his table, on the edges of several histories, between one-liners and song lyrics you just can't catch. However, this place is experienced in a vividly direct way. This vivid directness, although it appears in ever changing constellations, is instantly recognisable and thus welcomes us. In showing us what we *think* we already know Buchanan shows us another way of knowing.

1. A summary of the opening pages from: Agatha Christie, *The Body in the Library*. First published 1942 (London: Harper-Collins, 2002).

2. Jacques Derrida, *The Spectres of Marx* (English translation), Oxon: Routledge, 1994).

3. Herman Melville, 'Bartelby the Scrivener' in *Putnam's Monthly* (United States: November and December 1853).

4. Giorgio Agamben 'Bartelby, or On Contingency' in *Potentialities – Collected Essays in Philosophy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

Benjamin Buchanan was born in New Plymouth in 1973 and is an artist and musician currently based in Wellington, New Zealand. Since graduating with a sculpture major from Otago Polytechnic in 1993, and gaining a Post Graduate Diploma in Fine Arts from Elam, Auckland in 1998, he has exhibited widely.

Inserting geometric abstract interventions into gallery spaces, Buchanan has made site-specific projects at Roger Williams Contemporary, Canary Gallery, rm103 and exhibited with Anna Bibby Gallery, Auckland and Gang Green artist's project in Wellington. Buchanan's most recent major exhibition in Wellington was a collaborative project with Mark Braunias at Show Gallery in 2005.

Benjamin Buchanan often employs humour to highlight his interest in pop culture clichés and this is evident not only in his abstract paintings and drawings but is also incorporated into his stage act. Buchanan is a member of the two-piece electro rap outfit, Coco Solid, with whom he recently toured to London, Berlin, Los Angeles and Austin Texas.

Juan Rubén Reyes was born in 1970 and is an artist and writer based in Sydney, Australia. Trained in philosophy & poetics, his work is concerned with language and the production of truth.

Ruth Buchanan (Te Ati Awa/Taranaki) was born in 1980 and is an artist currently based in The Netherlands. Since completing her MA (Fine Art) at Piet Zwart Institute, Rotterdam, 2007, she was a resident at Lothringer13, Munich, Germany. In early 2008 Ruth will begin as Fine Arts Researcher at Jan Van Eyck Academie, Maastricht, Netherlands.

This monograph was published on the occasion of Benjamin Buchanan's exhibition *There's a Ghost in my House* at Enjoy Public Art Gallery, 20 November – 15 December 2007

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