

# **'Cat Creep': A case study of Transitional Spaces**

Anna Chiandet  
BA (Hons) 3D Design and Craft





# Contents

Introduction	3 - 8
The project	3
Why Place?	4
Defining Place and Space	5
Initial Research	6-8
Finding a site	9 - 13
Site Analysis	14 - 26
About the site: thoughts and observations	14 - 19
Analysing the space	20 - 26
The Work	27 - 61
Archway	27 - 37
Small Growths	38 - 48
Handrails	49 - 60
Reflections	61
Bibliography	62



## The Project

Stemming from an interest in place and a want to understand my surroundings, I began this project simply wanting to work with a site. It became about exploring the spaces inbetween the places that make up the city. How these spaces, often over-looked, are in fact vital. The plan was to respond to this site with work on a large, architectural scale.

Alongside this main strand of research comes the drawing which, through this project, I have tried to make an integral part of my practice. I have used it as a tool for researching, planning and conveying ideas, important at every step of the process. Specifically focusing on understanding through drawing and the relationship of these drawings to my making. Therefore, my sketchbook has been the most important tool throughout this project, as it gives me space to explore ideas without commitment and without it needing to communicate to anyone but me.



Taking casts on site - Photo by Joseph Bulman.

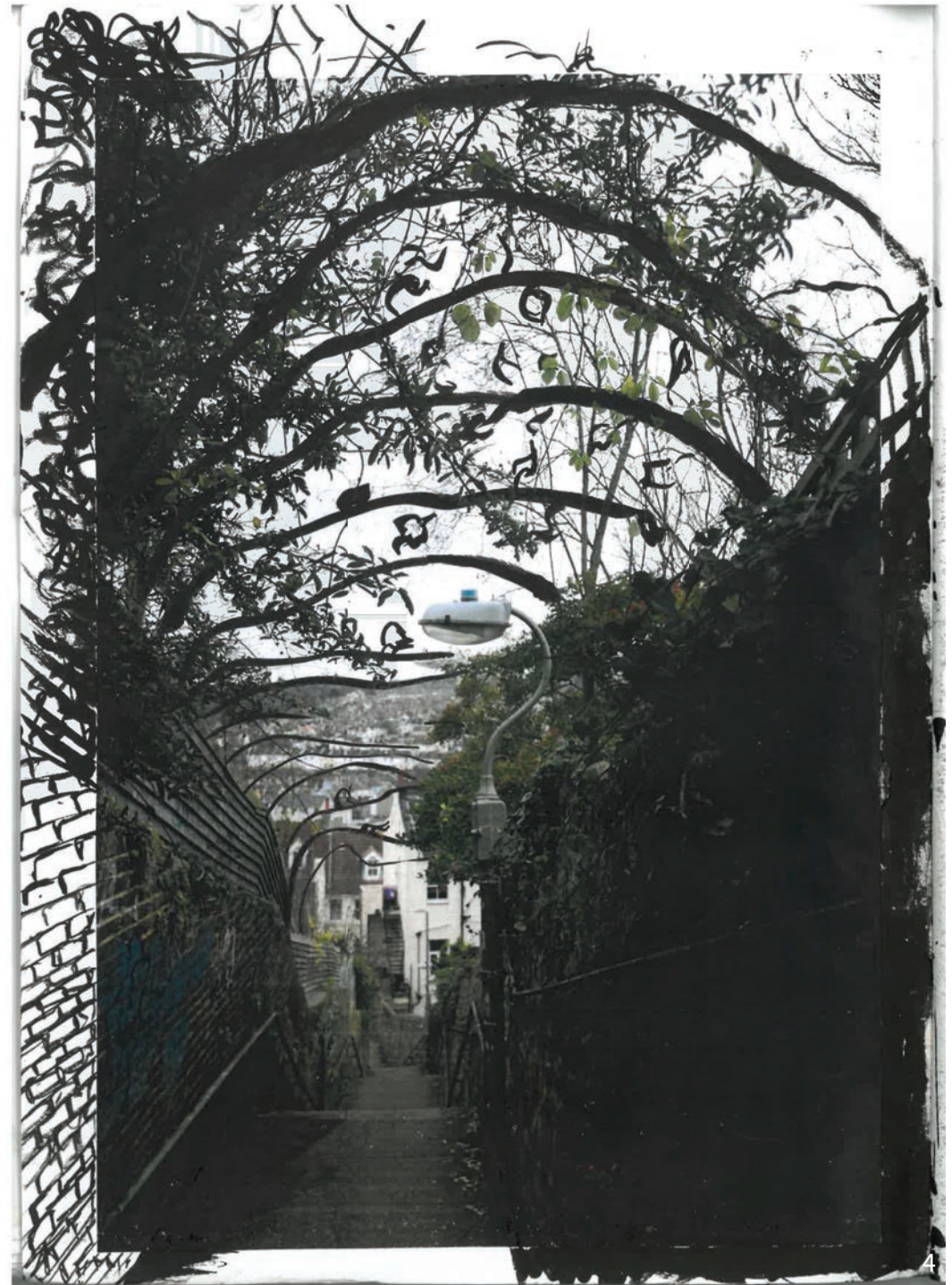


## Why Place?

I'm fascinated by the concept of place. It is a constant theme in my work.

For me place, specifically the one I live in, has always been temporary. It has been ephemeral, sometimes lasting just weeks and sometimes years. I have come to define these places by my experiences in them, from the mundane - daily routines - to the memorable events.

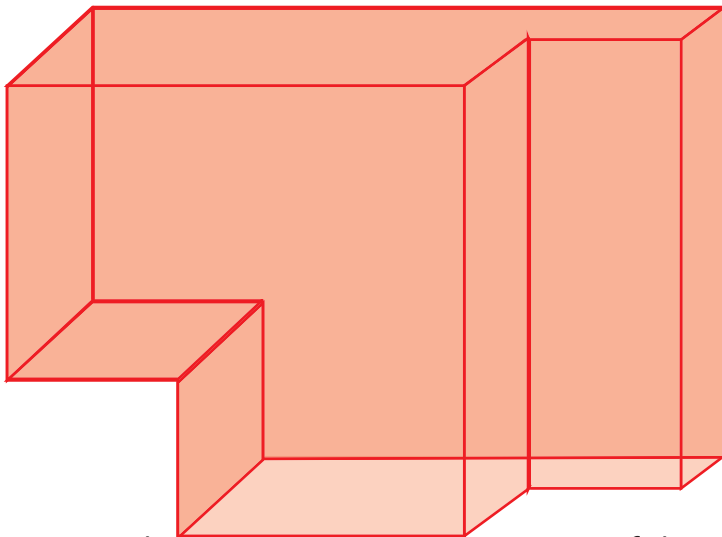
Therefore my projects, when they are about place, become tangible interpretation of these memories. A better way to remember.



Drawing in ink on a photo of site.



## Defining Place and Space



Diagrams through which I visualise the concepts of place and space.

*'Place is a special kind of object. It is a concretion of value, though not a valued thing that can be handled or carried about easily; it is an object in which one can dwell'*<sup>1</sup>

The value put on a place is given by those who use it, the community, through history, culture and identity.<sup>2</sup> Whether significant to an individual, such as the home or a national monument to a whole country, places have value to people. Which in turn defines space.

*'Hence spaces can be variously experienced as the relative location of objects or places, as the distances and expanses that separate or link places and - more abstractly - as they are defined by a network of places.'*<sup>3</sup>

I was drawn to this definition of place as it put into words, simply and clearly, how I considered those significant to me in a way I have never done. It also lead me to the definition of spaces as the volume between these places and the starting point of this project.

<sup>1</sup> Yi-Fu Tuan. Space and Place. pg 12

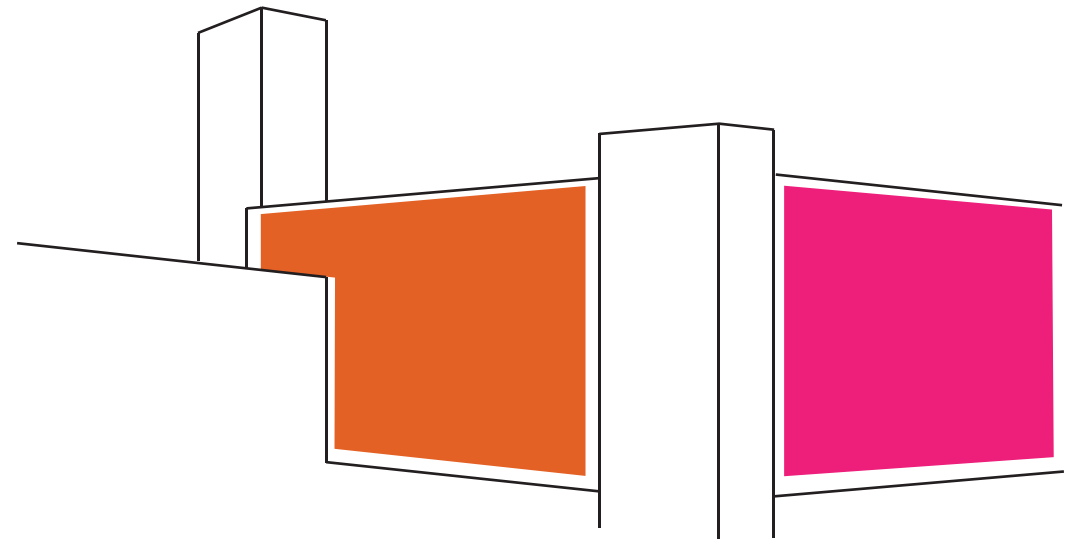
<sup>2</sup> Marc Auge. Non-places. pg 77

<sup>3</sup> Yi-Fu Tuan. Space and Place. pg 12



### Casa y Estudio Luis Barragán

This was the house and studio of Mexican architect Luis Barragán. While my work did not relate directly to this visit I did find it fascinating. Particularly his care over every space in the house. The hallways, staircases and entrances are as carefully considered as the habitable rooms. He places importance on these transitory spaces as they affect the impact that the rooms beyond them have on the viewer. Alongside this, his designs revolve around natural light and colour to delineate the spaces and these are elements I knew I was interested in playing with in my own work.



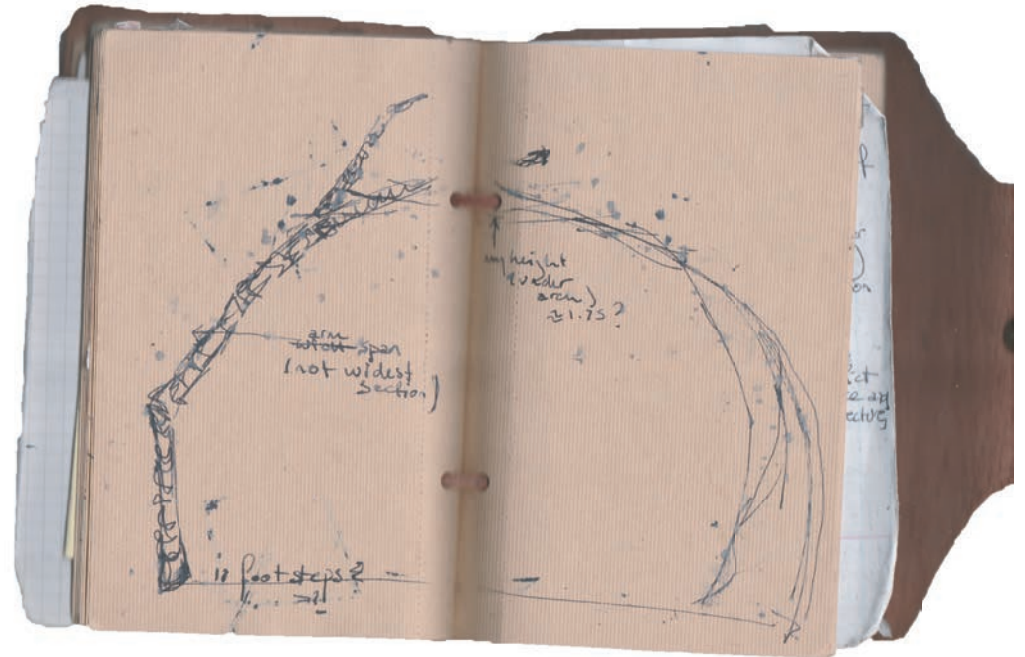
My own drawing of the terrace of the house.



## Slow Looking: Understanding, looking & inquiring through drawing. (Dr. Lucy Lyons)

This was an interesting lecture to understand the role of drawing in fields beyond art and design. Her research mainly focuses on the importance of drawing in the medical field.

It made me consider drawing more critically, as a tool, rather than just something I've always done as part of my process. She talked about the universality of drawing how, unlike language, it can be understood across cultures. Consequently making it an effective communication method. I started to reflect on what type of drawing I was doing and why it was useful for a certain purpose.



Sketch used to record a structure I built.



## Millimetre Studio

This studio often works on large, site specific projects, The sort of scale I aspire to work on. I found it to be a motivational visit. While it would be unrealistic to think I could complete work on the same scale working alone, on a budget and with little experience I took on their approach. This was to tackle the project in sections. Even with the larger and more complex instalations, they are often made up of a smaller repeated sections so it only requires to problem solve for a small section and then the whole thing can come together. Thinking about the project like this made it seem more manageable.



Central St. Martins Tables. Featherstone Young Furniture. 2014. Millimetre Studio postcard.



## Finding a site





## What am I looking for ?

To be accessible to me it had to be within walking distance. Therefore I took the distance from home to university which I do twice daily. Using the studio as a center point in the city I used this distance as the radius of the area I would search in.

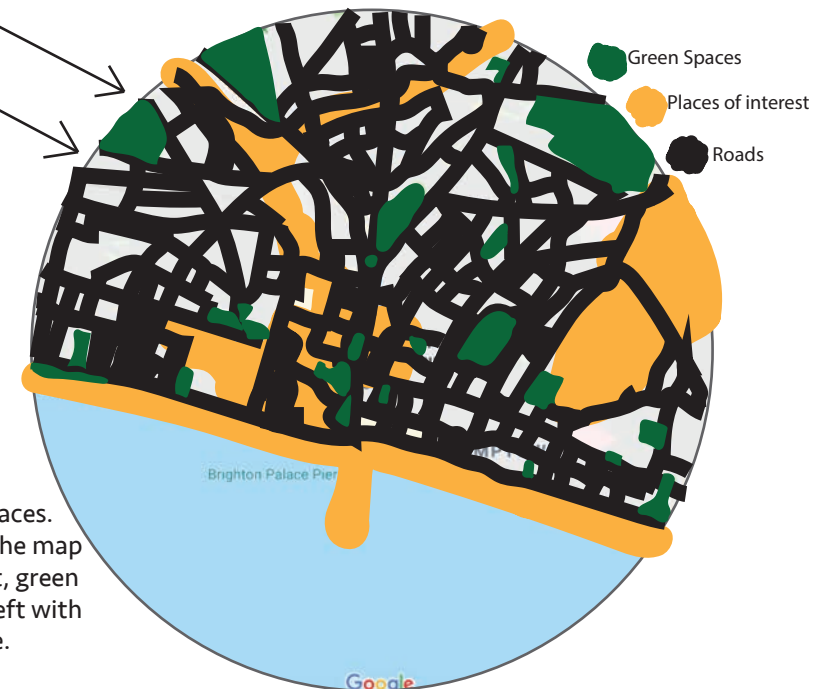
### Rules

1. A space rather than a place
2. A transitional space rather than a point of arrival or departure
3. Have interesting natural lighting.
4. Does not to be special or inspirational.
5. Does not need to be too big.
6. Needs to be accessible (to me).
7. Needs to be accessible at any time of day.
8. In an urban area rather than nature.
9. Somewhere I feel comfortable working in.



4.1 km diameter  
 $A = (\pi/40) \times d^2$   
Area 13.2 km<sup>2</sup>

Screenshots from google maps



Rules 1 and 2 ruled out very similar spaces. To fulfill these criteria I went back to the map and crossed out any places of interest, green spaces and major roads. What I was left with were the spaces inbetween to explore.

By avoiding the main roads I explored several potential sites.

**-nameless alleyways - tight spaces - shortcuts - back streets -**

I was rediscovering the spaces I knew were there and often use - but don't take notice of - as they are merely a means to arrive somewhere. On these trips they became my destinations.



Alleyway between St. Mary's Church and Somerset Centre



Alleyway behind NCP Car Park Brighton Theatre



Alleyway that connects Bond St. to Jew St.



Eastern Street



What I was looking at were **transitional spaces** - those spaces inbetween - whose function is only to take you from A to B.



Blenheim Place



Staircase that connects Jubilee St. and Regent St.



Staircase that connects Hampstead Road and Tivoli Crescent





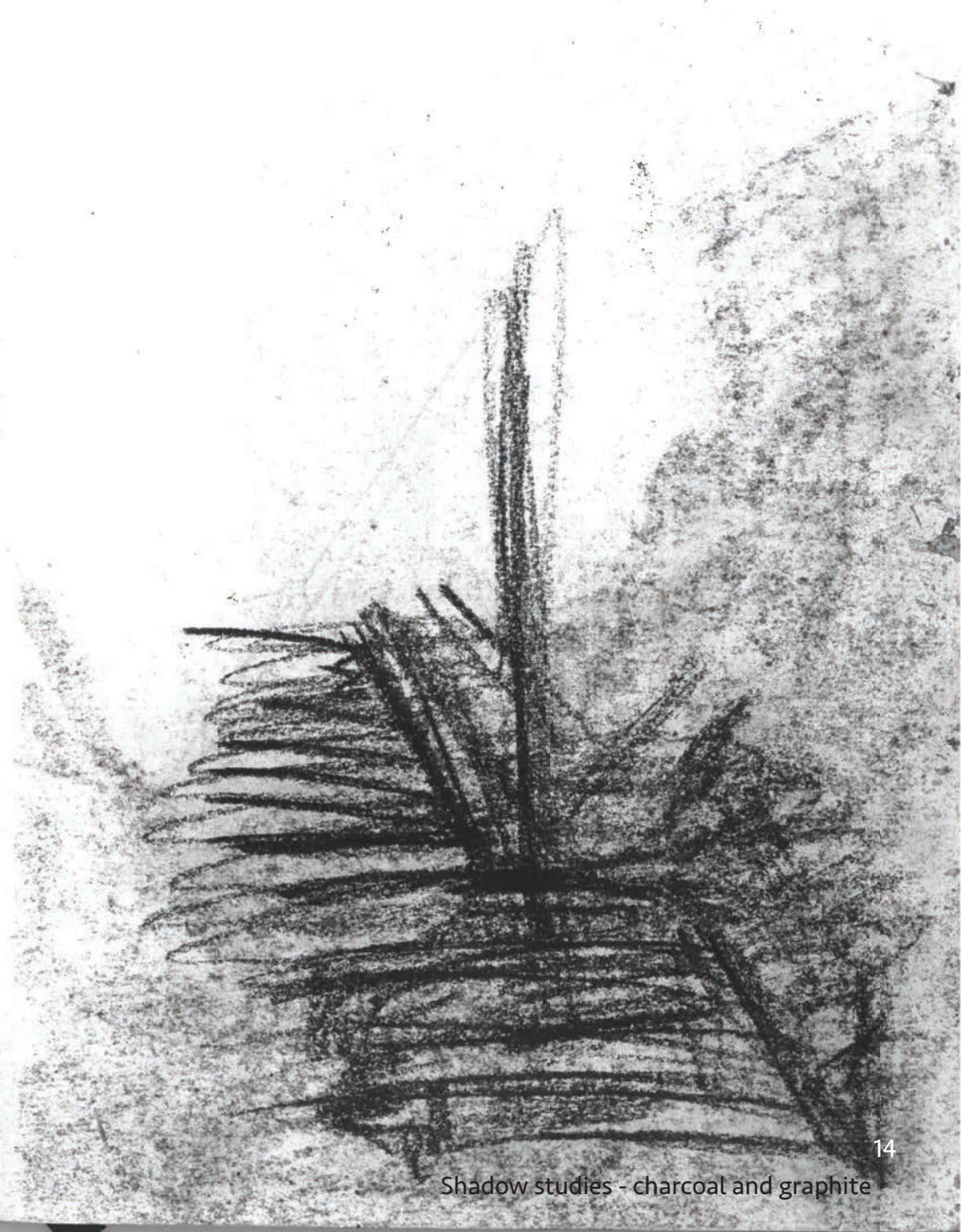
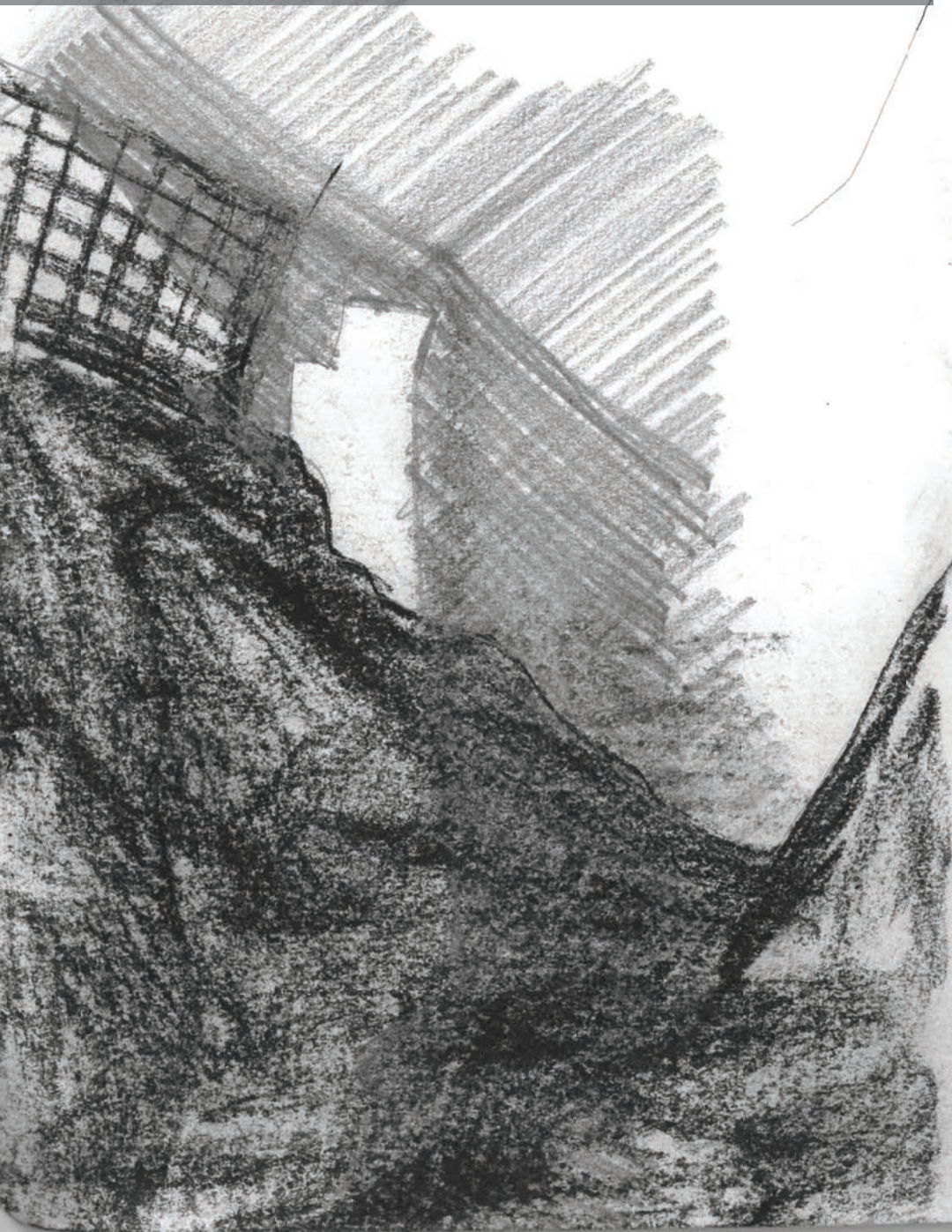
The site I chose was a 116-step staircase that from Wakefield Road leads to Roundhill Crescent. Unsurprisingly, of all the sites I visited, this was the one I was most familiar with, and yet did not immediately come to mind when searching for a site.



Staircase between Roundhill Crescent and Wakefield Road



About the site: thoughts and observations...





*'The stair is defined as  
'an ascending series' or 'flight' of steps leading  
from one level to another' <sup>4</sup>*

Stairs lead somewhere. This feature is what makes it a transitional space. The aim, when using a staircase, is to arrive somewhere.

*'Their form is so intrinsically linked to their  
function that over the centuries they have hardly  
experienced any modifications at all.'* <sup>5</sup>

This is another aspect that was so fascinating to me. Unlike many other spaces in the city, it isn't specific to Brighton. It wouldn't look out of place in another setting due to the universality of the staircase across cultures and time periods.

As a first step I spent time on site. With no particular plan other than to observe and record through drawing and notes.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Spens. Staircases. pg 6

<sup>5</sup> DAAR. Staircase Design. pg 4









## ... on sound

- Can't see but can hear main road (Lewes Road)
- Conversation from people in gardens. - Feels like eavesdropping/invading their private conversations that can be heard.
- Seagulls - wouldn't be Brighton without them?

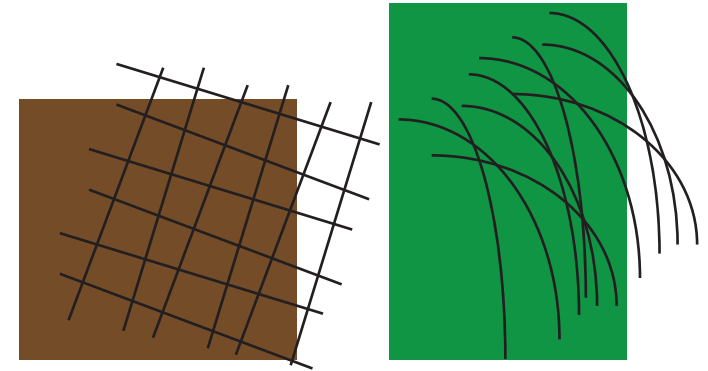


## ... on size

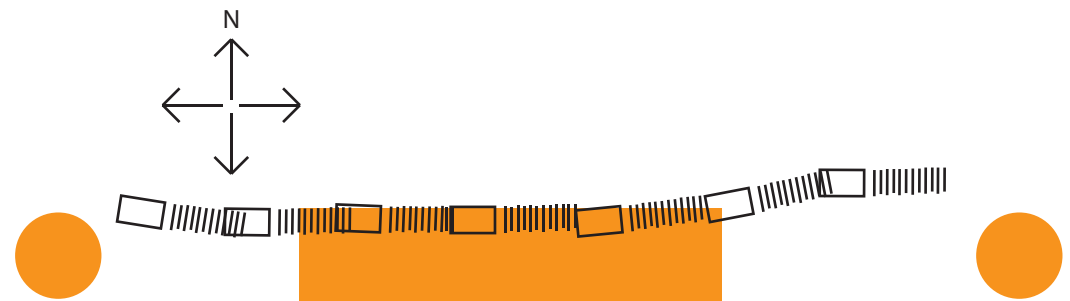
- Made up of set of stairs + landing = 7 sets
- Each at slight angle from previous = can't see beginning from end and vice versa.
- Boundaries defined by houses & gardens (north/south). Wakefield Road to the west and Roundhill Crescent to the east.

## ... on light and sight

- Contrast of lines



- Feels private - but overlooked by houses (wherever you are in the space) - and you can also see into the houses direct line of sight into windows. Not direct line of sight into gardens.
- Plants falling over wall and coming through cracks - taking over the space.
- Lots of light through most of it. Contrast with beginning and end flanked by high walls - much darker enclosed space



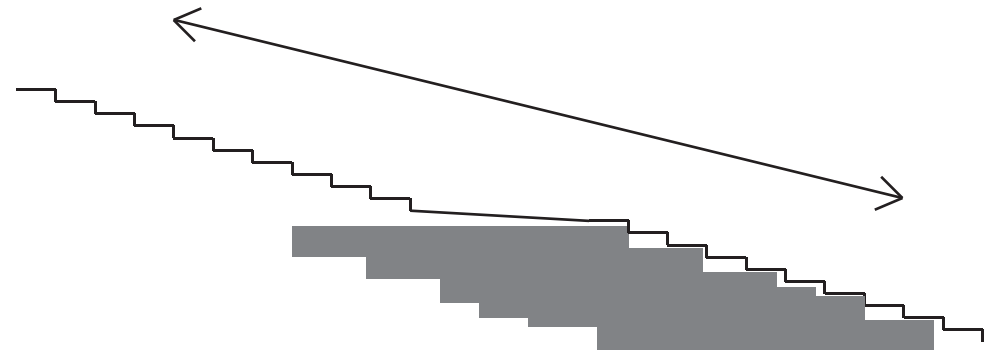


### ... on use

- Thoroughfare
  - Function = A shortcut
  - Overheard conversation - Discussion - not sure that it is shorter than main road but feels like it is = still take it (its habitual to walk down/ up it)
  - Function = entrance to some top floor flats - through garden and gate on staircase.
  - Has several gates to gardens - no signs of use?
  - Lampposts for use at night
- Conversation with a friend - not a space that is comfortable to use **alone** at night - dark, barking dog, empty, cant see the one end from the other.
- Traces of human use: grafitti, gum, cigarette butts, posters (missing cat), litter (some noticed after a particularly windy day - so not so much that people are dropping it purposefully but they aren't going out of their way to pick it up).
  - Feels a bit neglected - used but not looked after. There's a "Not my space" attitude.

### ... on movement

- Constant, but only when people are using the space. Very still when people aren't.
- There is a clear sense of direction - the space does the directing - you just follow. Also why people don't just hang out in this space - it demands you move through it.
- How are people moving through it?
  - Downwards - with a certain speed/ jog/ rhythm
  - Upwards - steady if not slow pace. Overheard conversation - debate whether it's less tiring to get all the steps done in one go at a constant pace. Or slow stopping and starting.



### ... on value

- Useful - everyday but overlooked - taken for granted?
- Conversation had with someone on site: she thought it had 'beautiful light', 'it's very brighton' and always imagined it with a row of photos running along the wall.
- Not necessarrily neglect but disinterest.

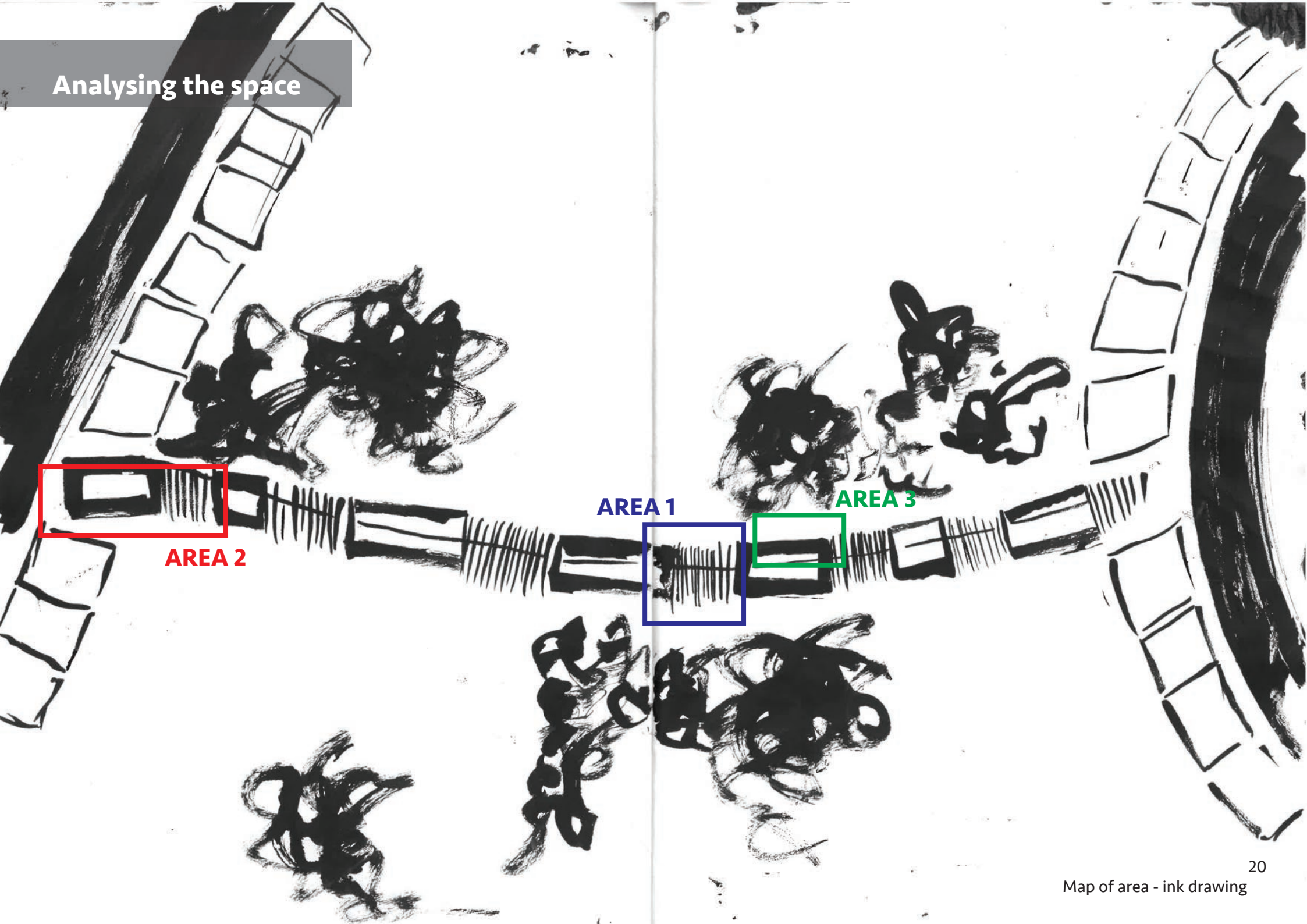




Taking casts of areas of the site.



## Analysing the space

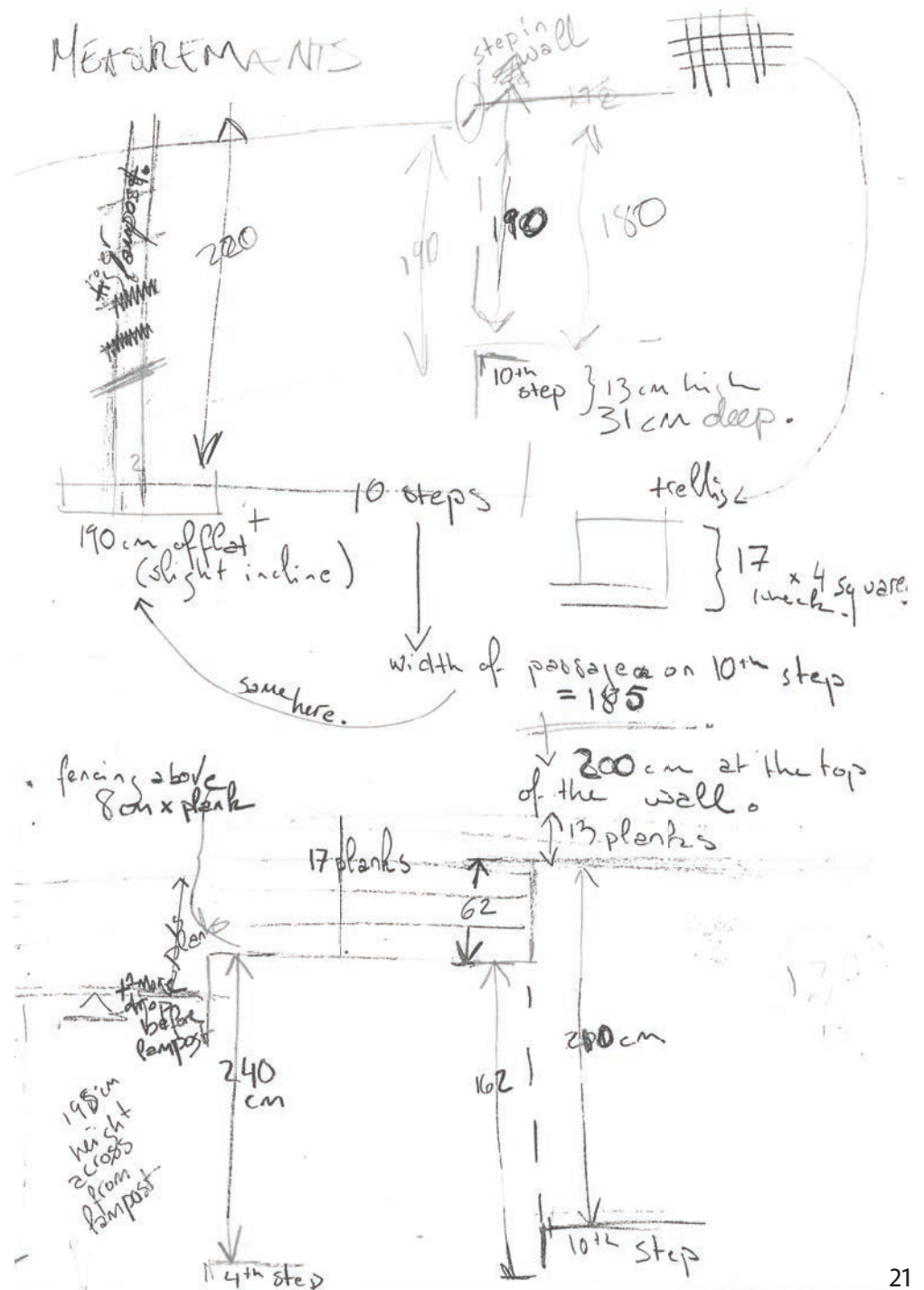




*'Consider space. As a geometrical unit (area or volume), it is a measurable and unambiguous quantity.'*<sup>6</sup>

With this in mind, my next approach to the site was more analytical. Having chosen the three areas of the site for the different pieces, I used architectural elevation drawings as a method to understand and communicate simply the dimensions I was working with. Due to the different sizes of the areas I worked on different scales so as to fit them onto an A2 sheet.

What this approach allowed me to achieve was an objective view of each of the areas by focusing purely on dimensions. Something that I rarely record accurately in my drawings.

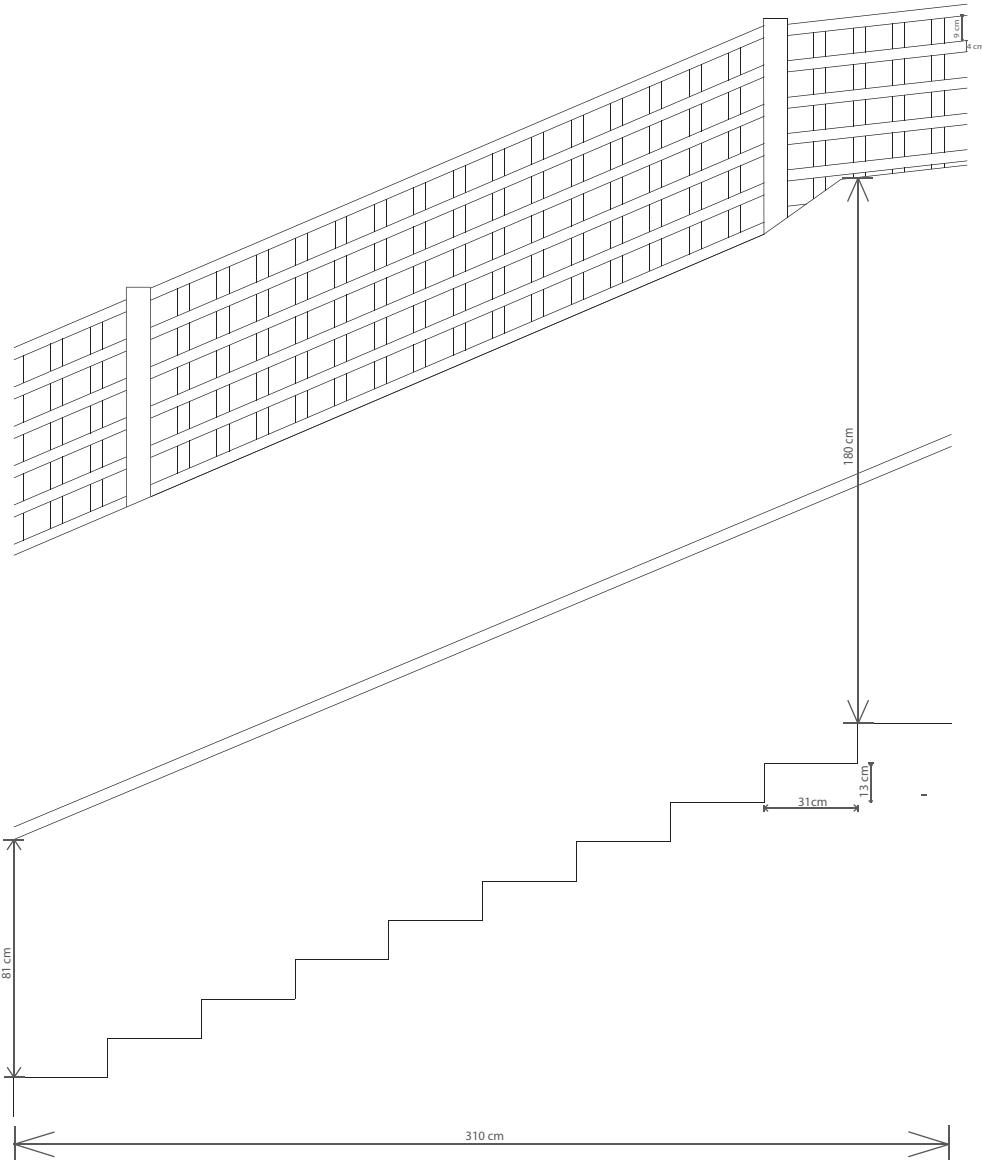


<sup>6</sup> Yi-Fu Tuan. Space and Place. pg 51

AREA 1

North Elevation

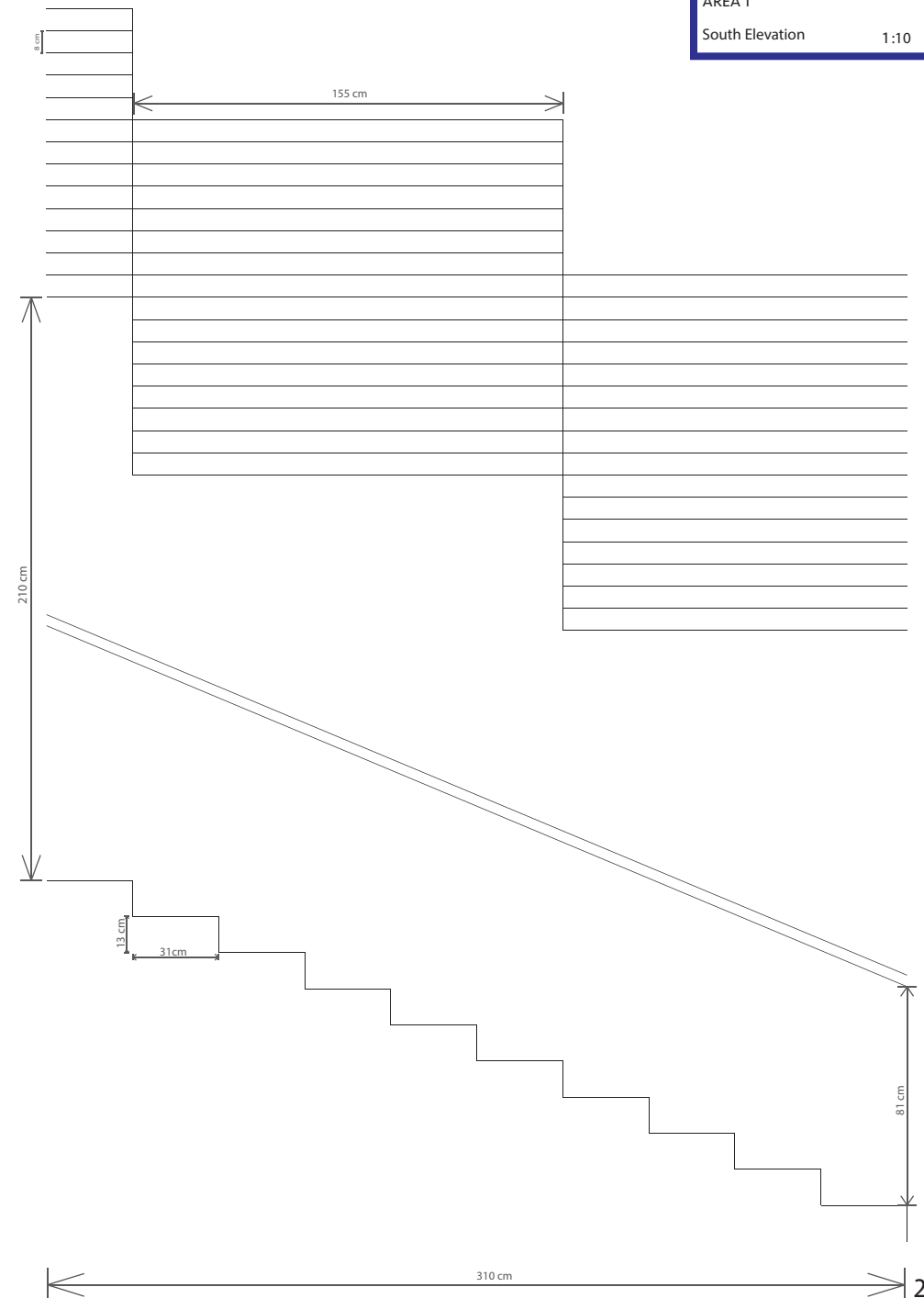
1:10



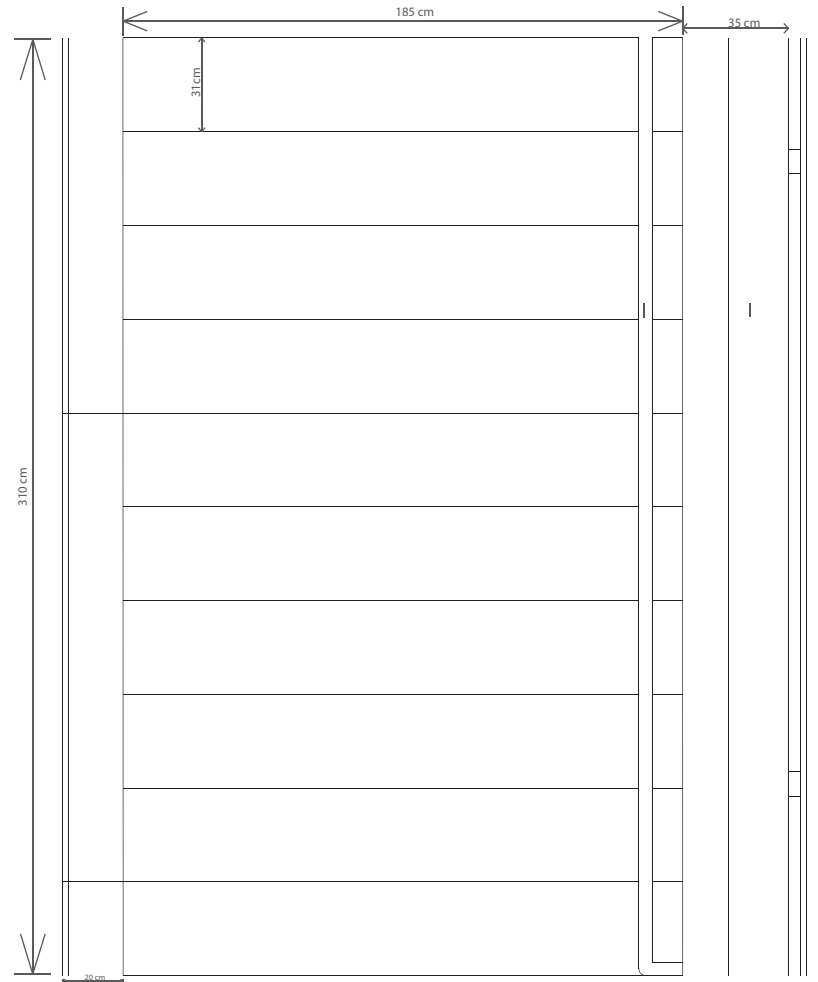
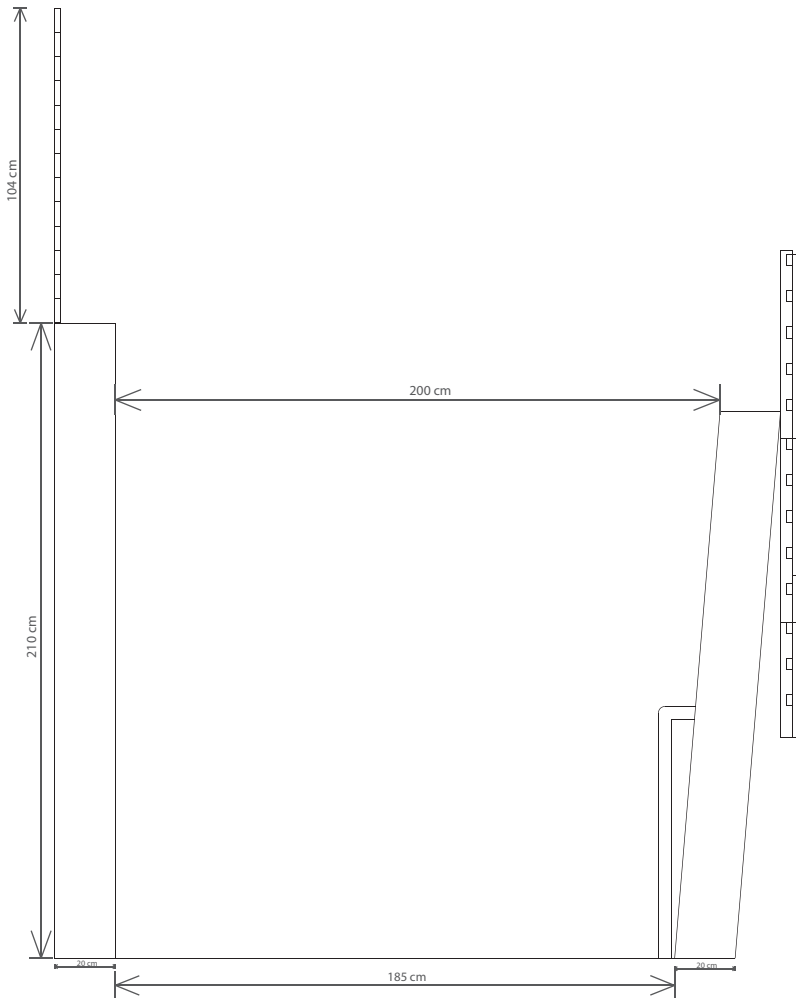
AREA 1

South Elevation

1:10

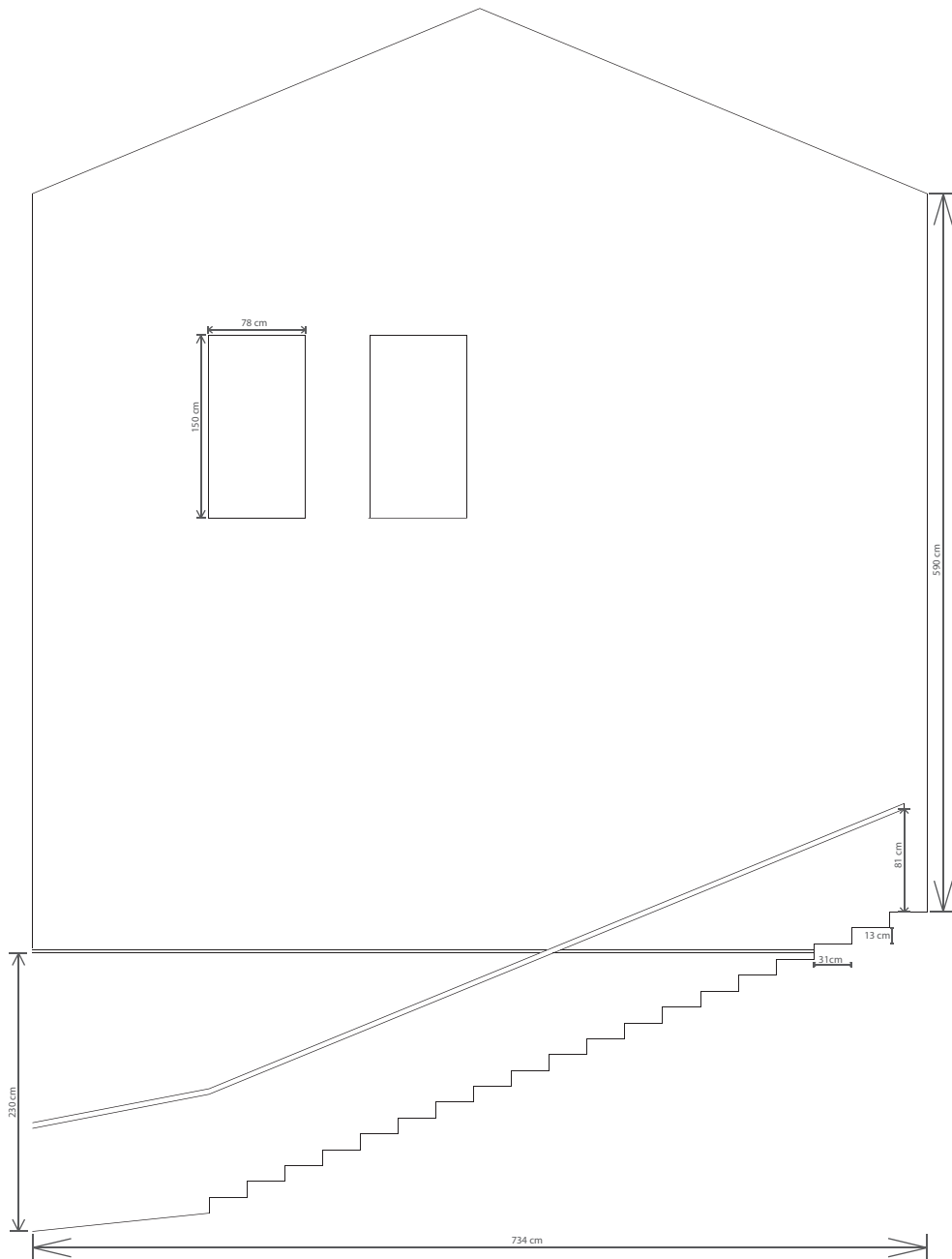




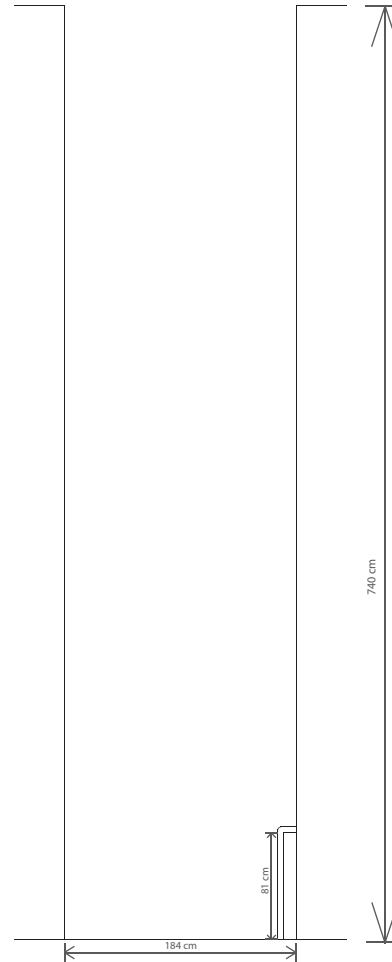




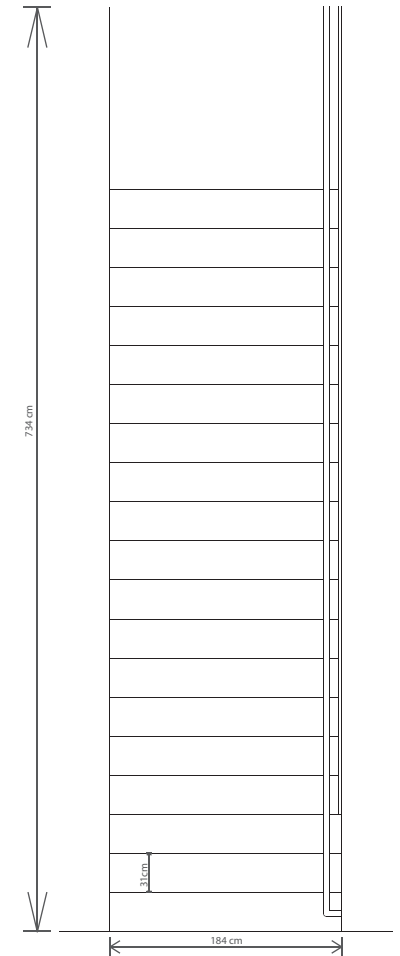
AREA 2  
North Elevation 1:20



AREA 2  
West Elevation 1:20

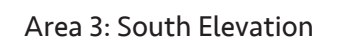


AREA 2  
Floor Plan 1:20





1:4

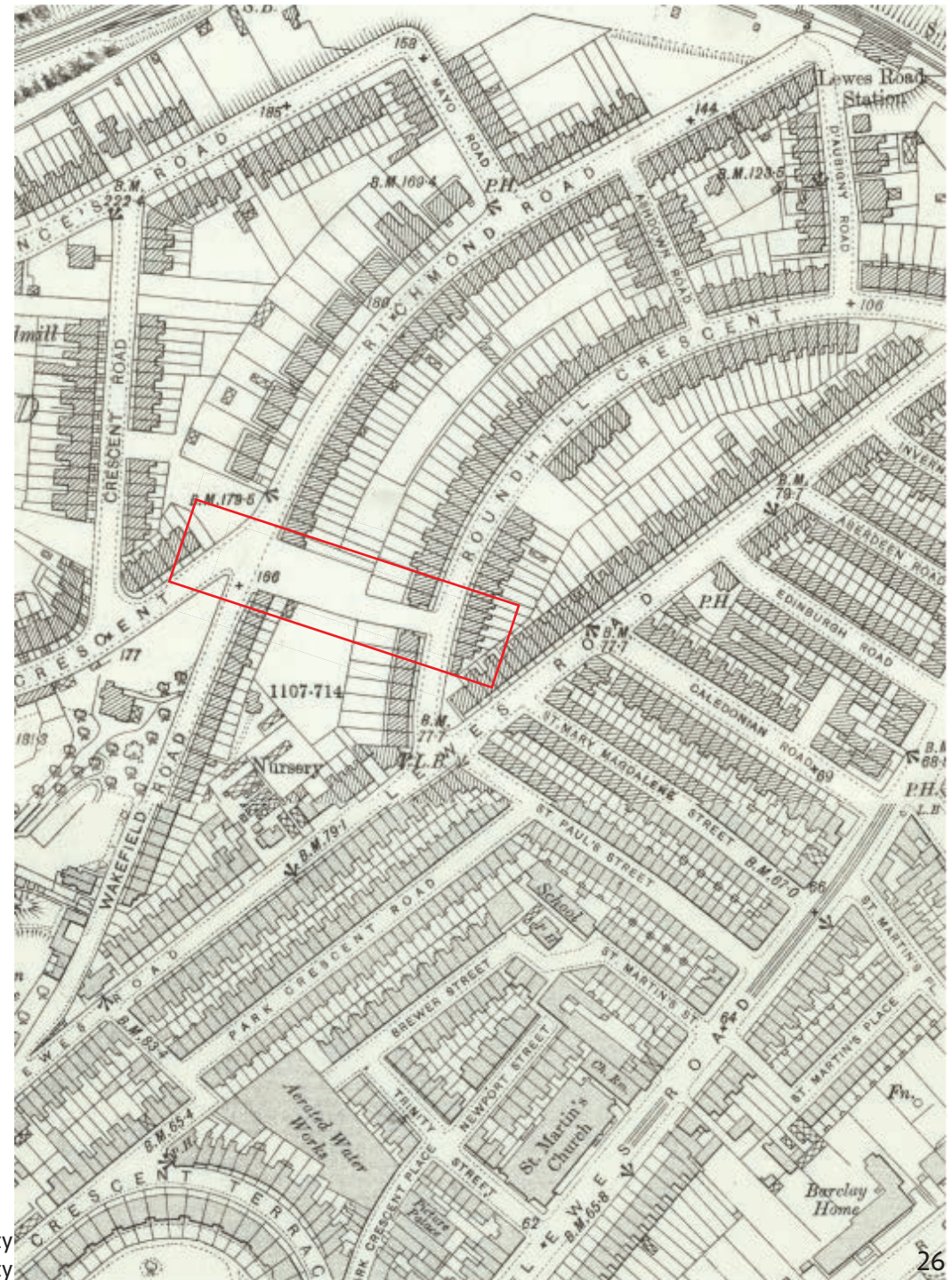


Through research it became apparent that the site was more of a place than I had first imagined it to be.

There is a history. Originally named Lennox Road, building plans were scrapped as it was too steep for houses and stairs were built around 1900.<sup>7</sup> Now nicknamed Cat Creep, it is the only road in the area without an official name.<sup>8</sup>

What is documented in the book; *Rosehill to Roundhill: A Brighton community* and The Roundhill Society website is the history and community members' personal memories of the stairs.

Therefore, considering the definition I began with of place having value, and this value being attributed by the community through history and identity, it is clear Cat Creep fits the definition. While I, as an outsider, could not have seen it from this perspective. Clearly place is very personal.

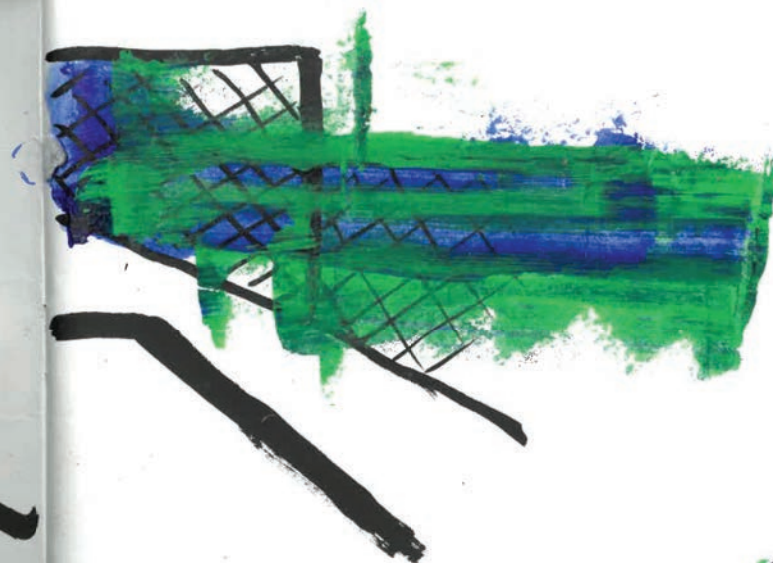
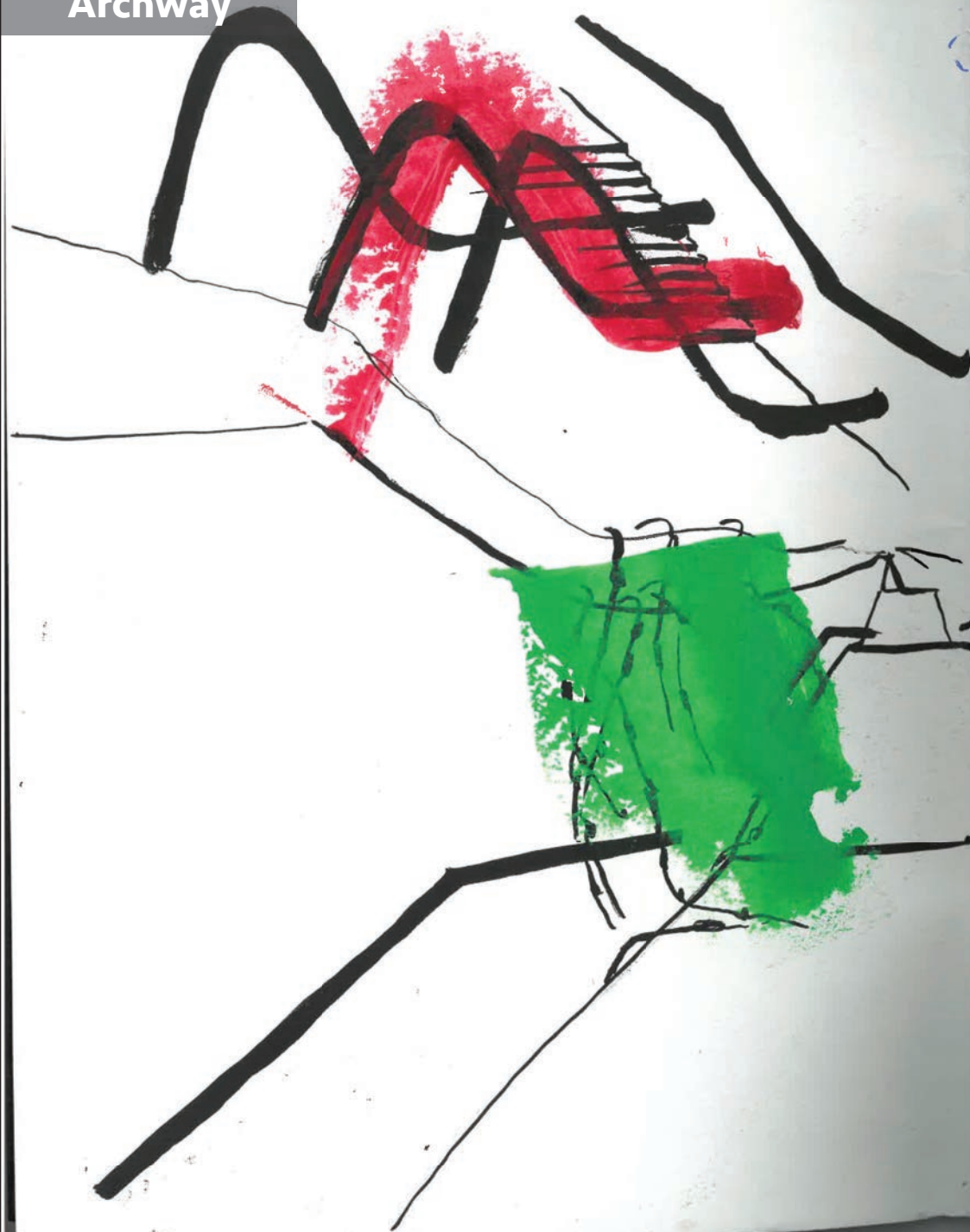


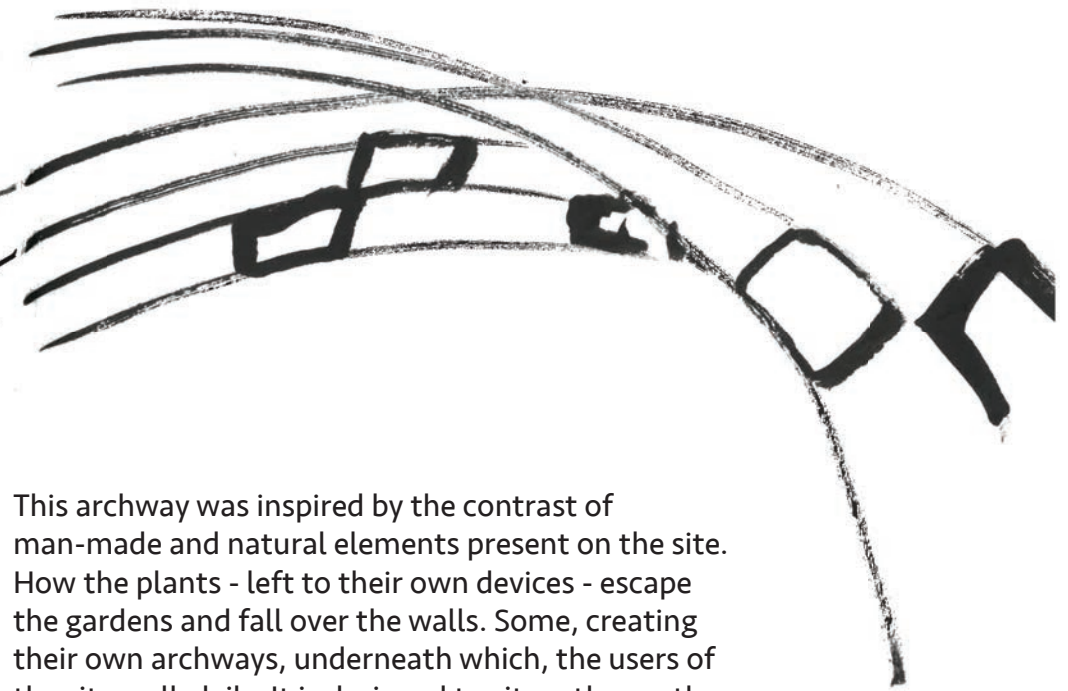
<sup>7</sup> The Roundhill Society

<sup>8</sup> The Roundhill Society



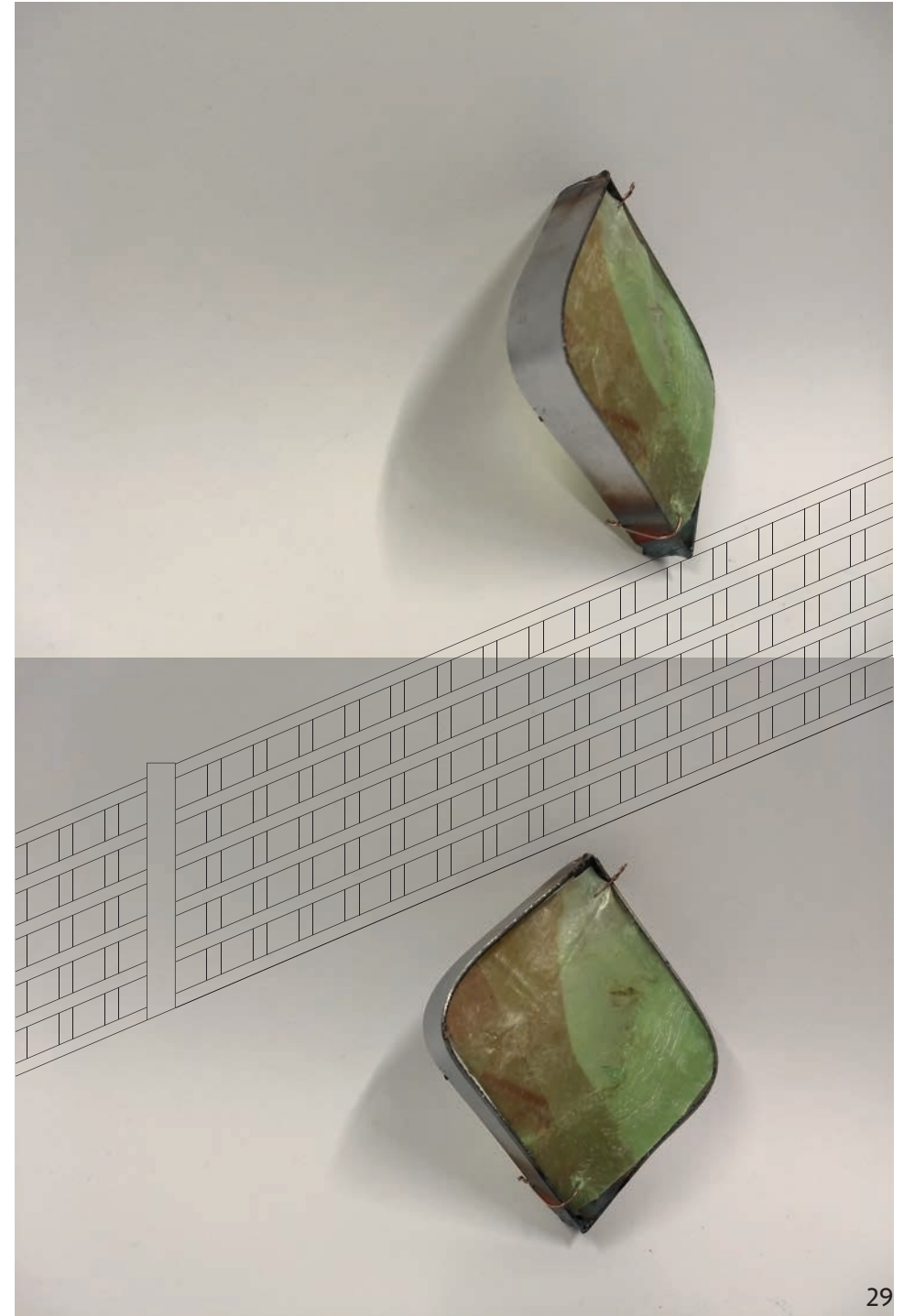
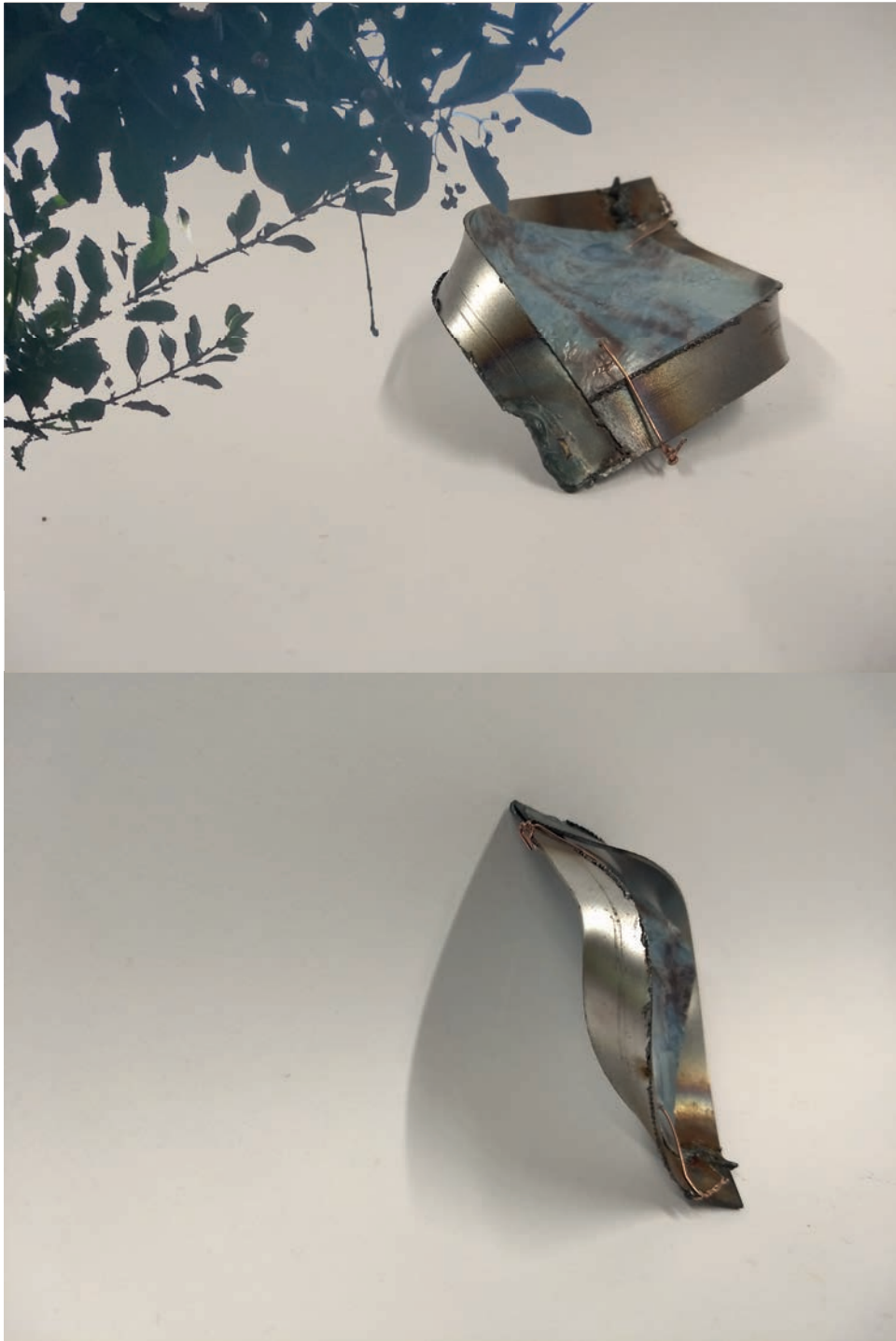
# Archway

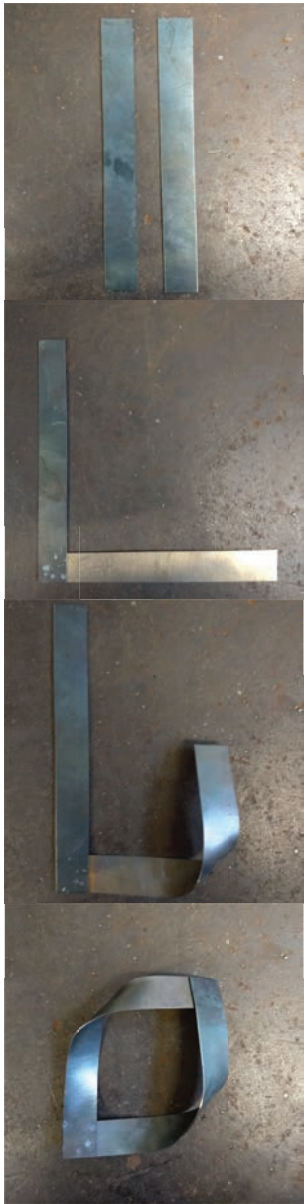




This archway was inspired by the contrast of man-made and natural elements present on the site. How the plants - left to their own devices - escape the gardens and fall over the walls. Some, creating their own archways, underneath which, the users of the site walk daily. It is designed to sit on the north facing wall in the middle of the site where the walls are lower and the sunlight during the day is not obstructed by the houses. Therefore it was the perfect piece to play with the transparency of the plastic and opaque framework.

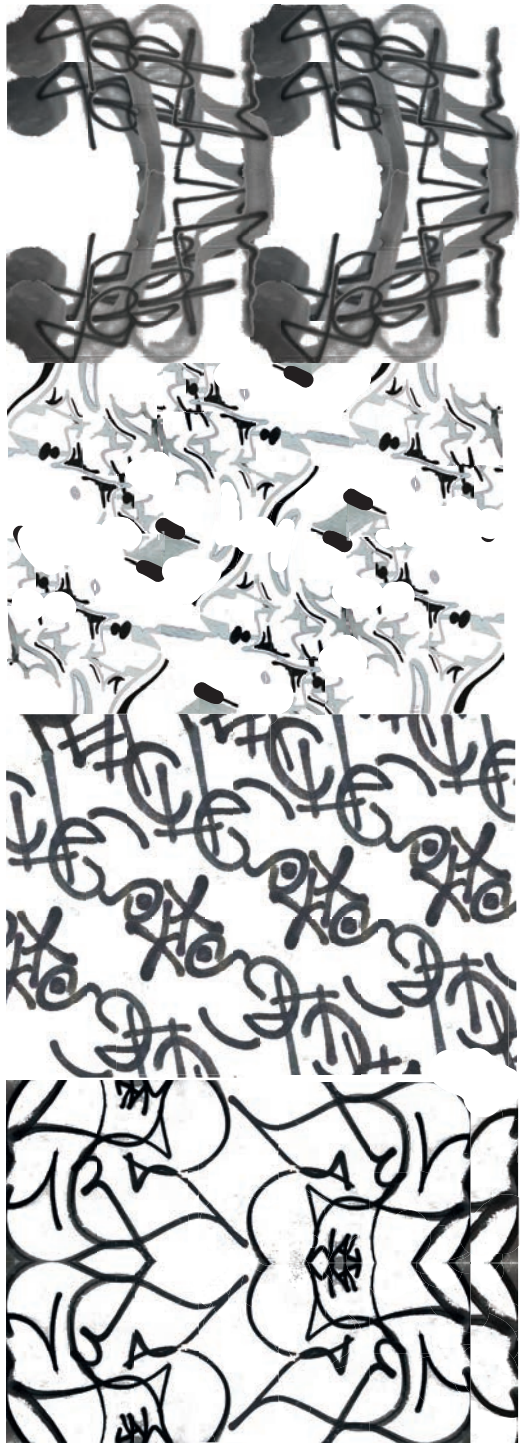






First cardboard model photoshopped on site.





The colours and patterns of the plastic were inspired by the graffiti on wall on site.





Process of making the plastic sheets

- sorting - cleaning - melting - dyeing - dye subbing - scrubbing -



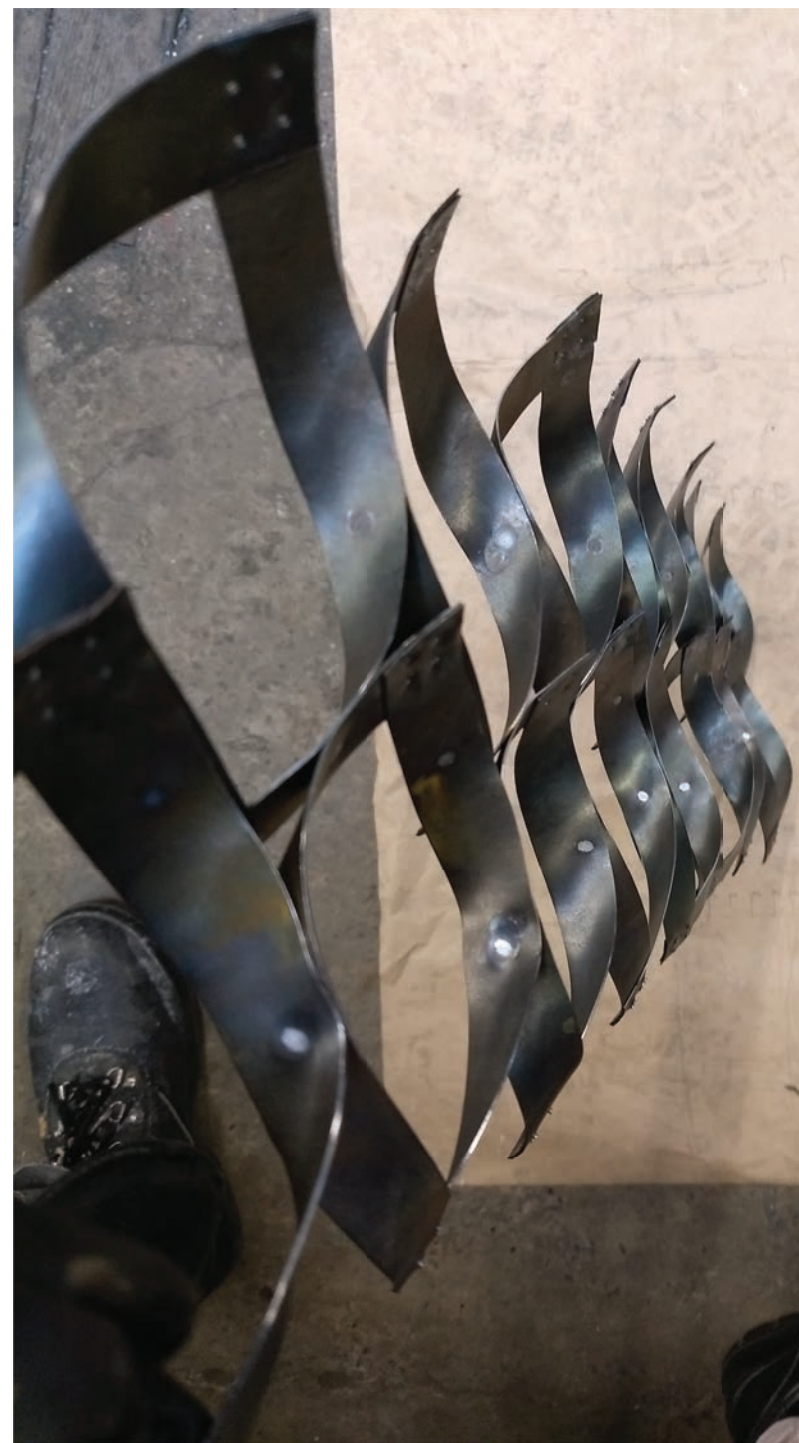
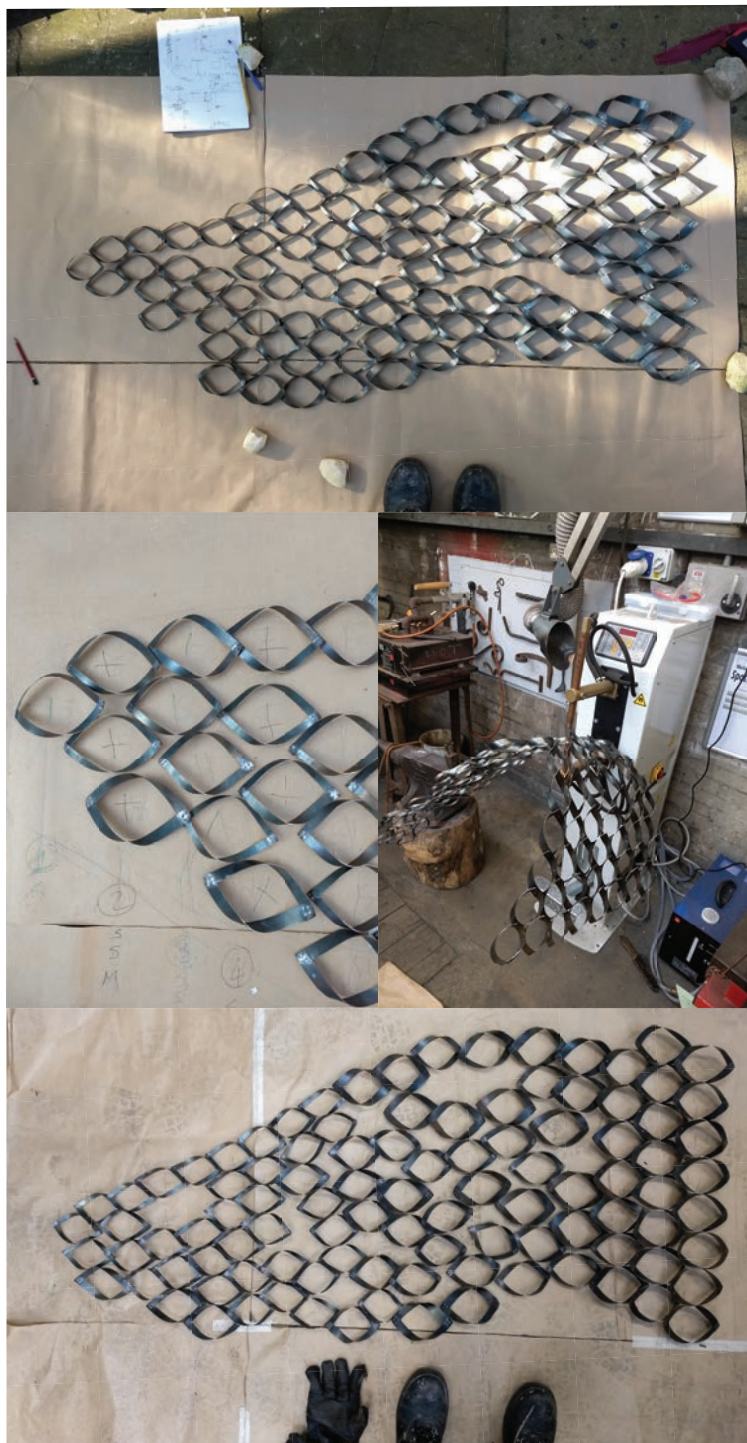




48-piece model in steel and plastic. Observing how it works with the light on site.







Working on the frame of the final piece. Spotwelding steel





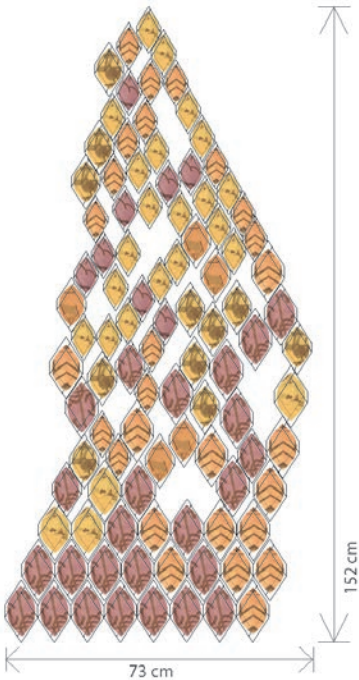
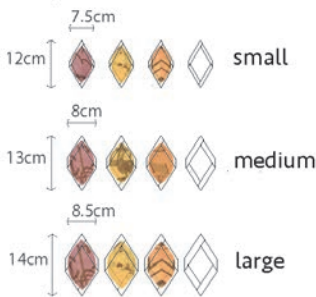
Sewing the plastic on to the frame. Photos by Joeseeph Bulman and Annie Lumby.



Archway Section

Plan View 1:10

Components



Plan drawing of final piece



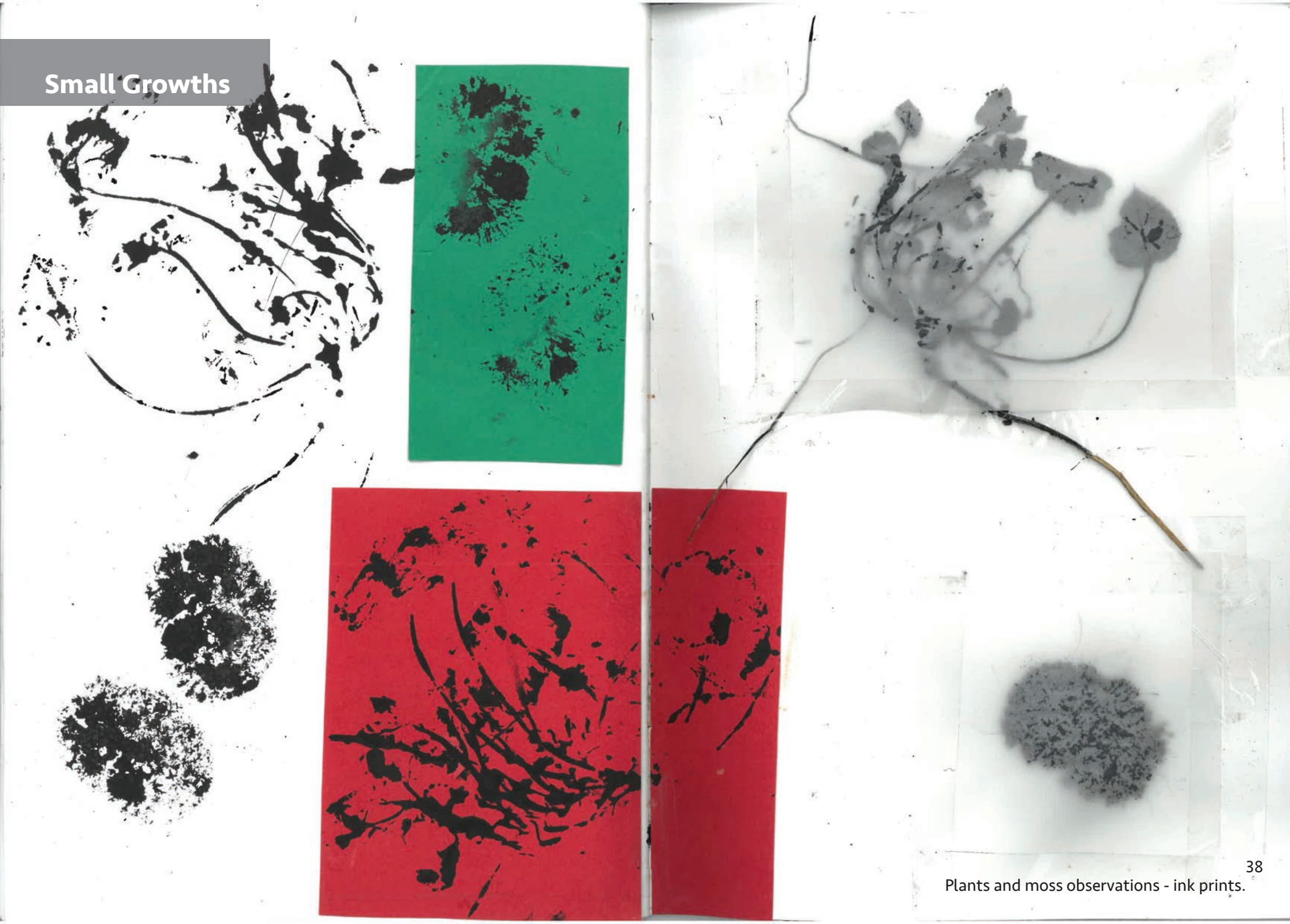
Final piece. 99-piece section of the archway.



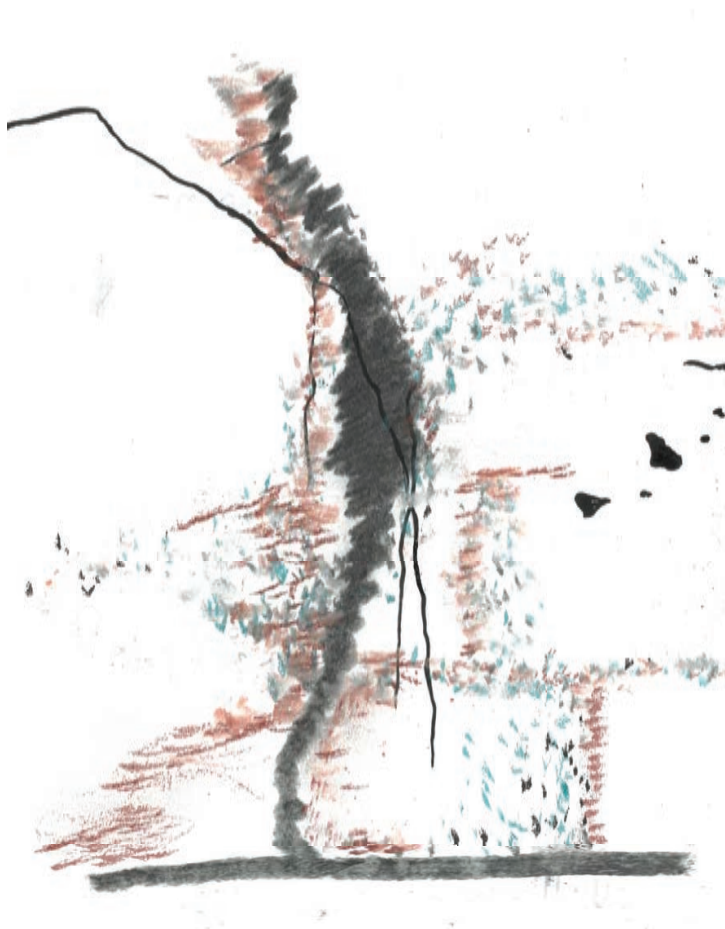




## Small Growths







This collection of pieces came about by noticing the small plants and mosses growing from the cracks in the walls. They, unlike the overarching branches of the trees, occupy this space more subtly. Individually, they are small, but cover a large area as a group. These pieces combine plastics, copper and silver, a choice made to reflect the contrasting values of site.







Taking casts of the cracks. Used to shape the pieces.





Using the heat gun and casts to form the plastic.



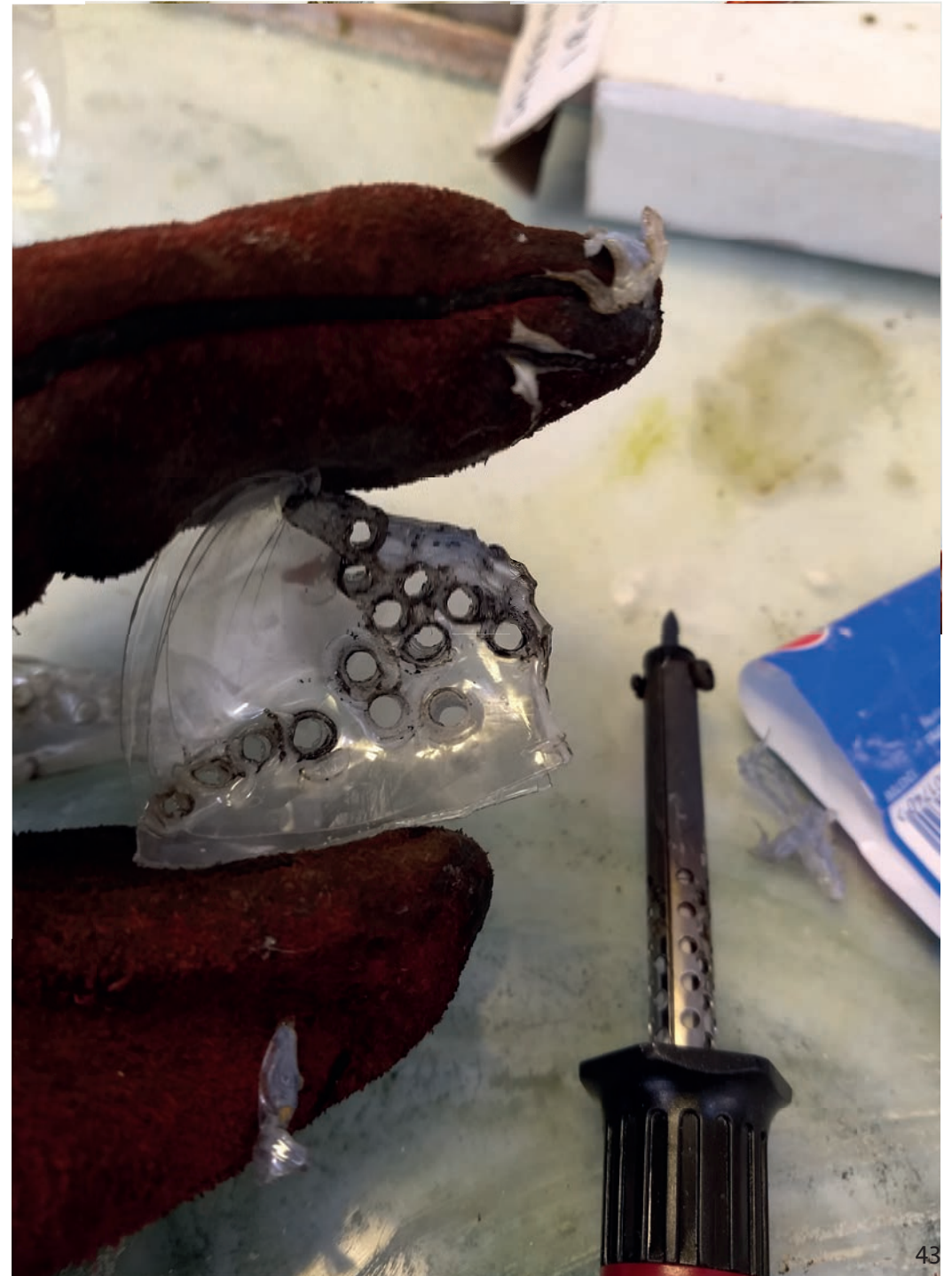


Testing the forms on site.

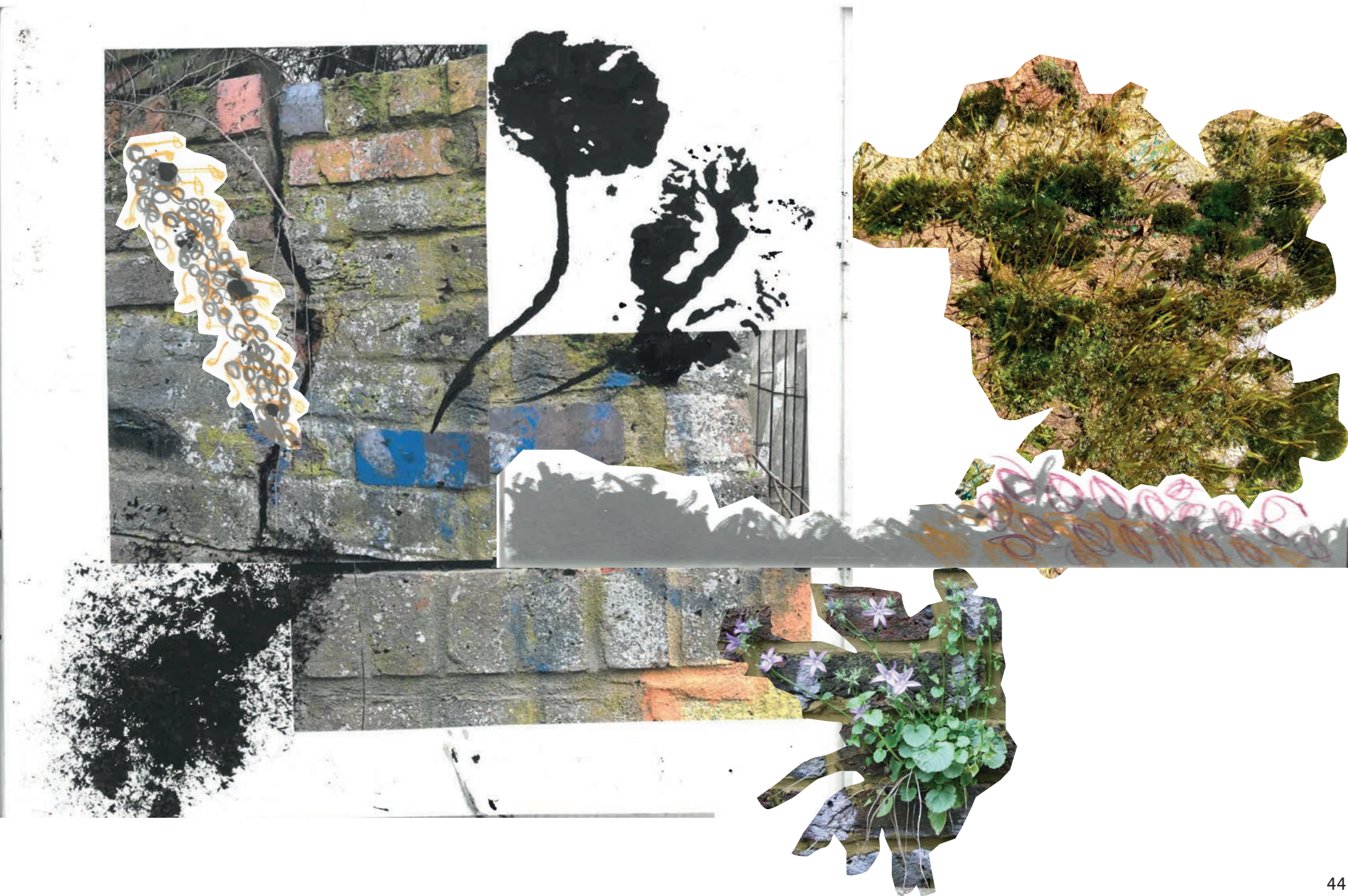




Using the soldering iron I added texture. Creating holes in the plastic made 'a bed' for the metal pieces to grow on, similar to what moss looks like.







Photographs, drawings and prints - collaged to give an impression of the site and inspiration for the metal components.



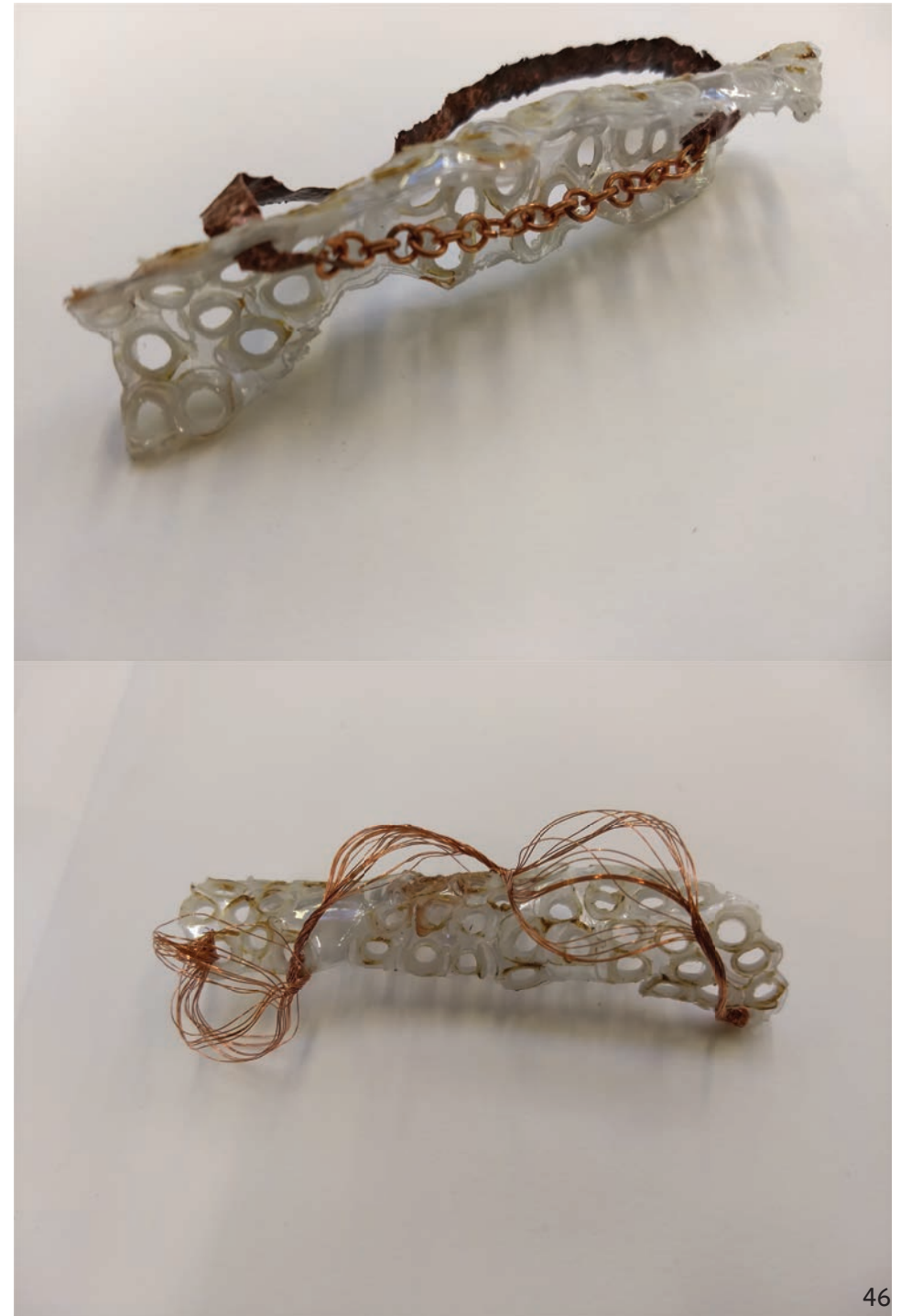


Replicating the lines and textures of the plants in copper and silver.





One of the challenges with combining metal and plastic is that they melt at vastly different temperatures. I prepared the materials separately and combined them once they were finished to avoid this issue. I used cold fixing including jump rings, riveting and sewing to achieve this.







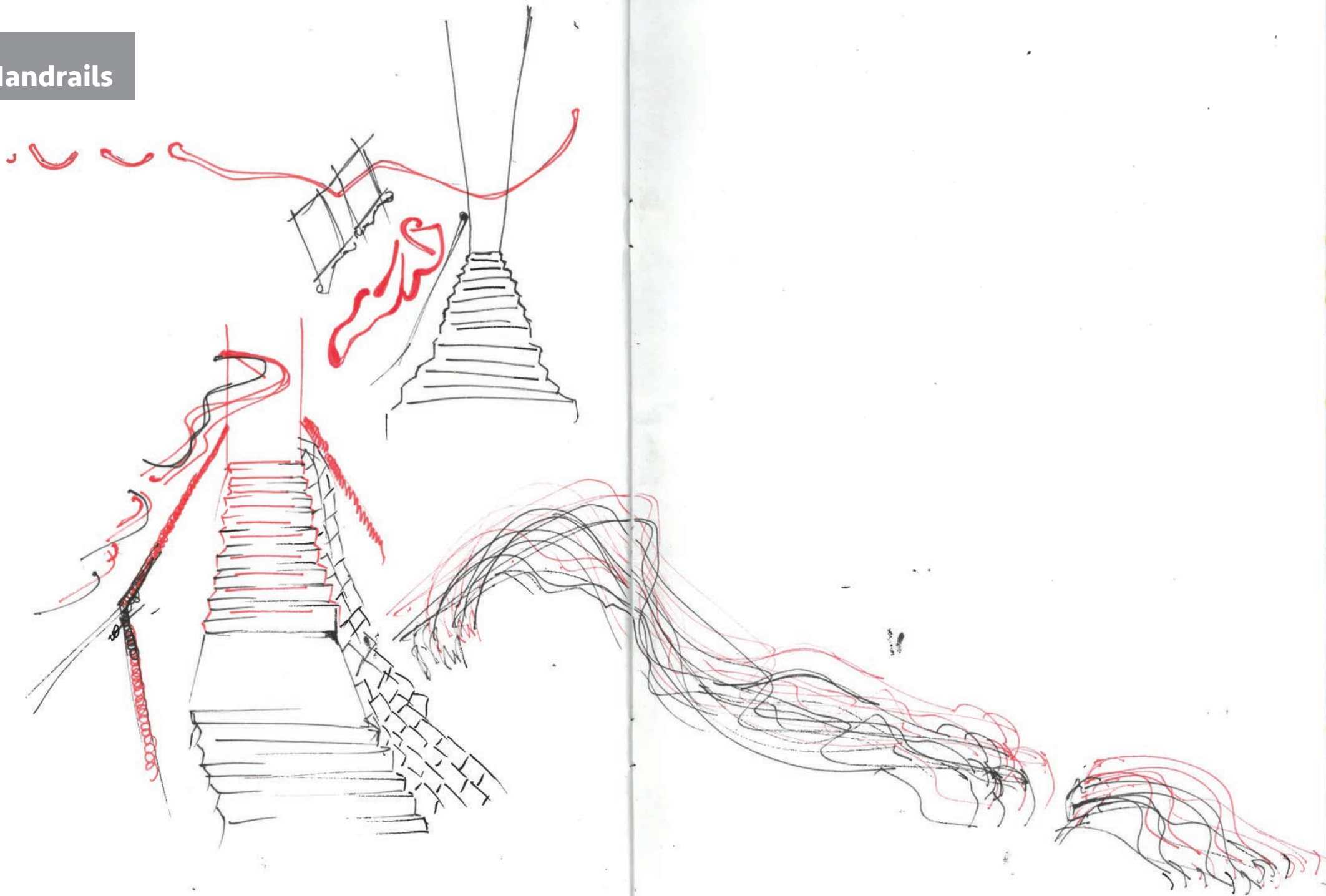
47  
Finished pieces.



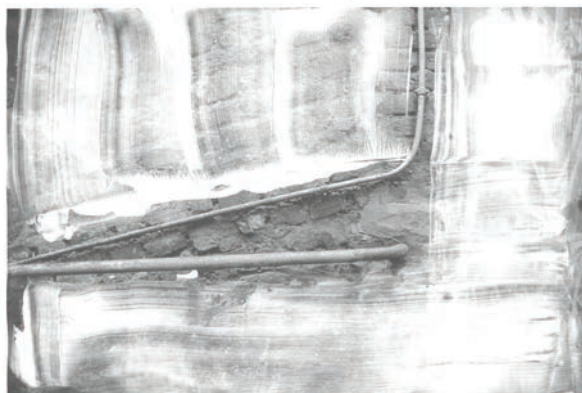
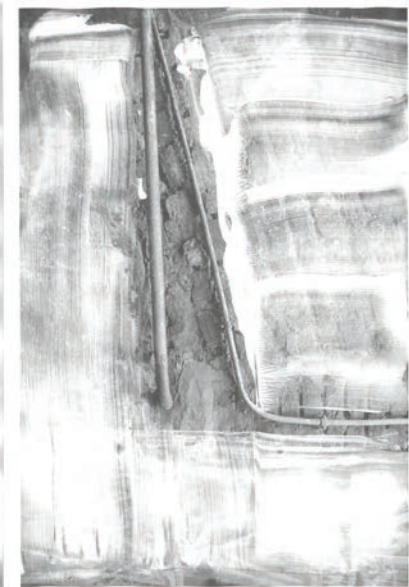
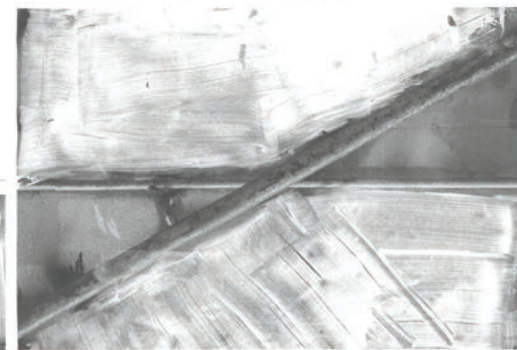
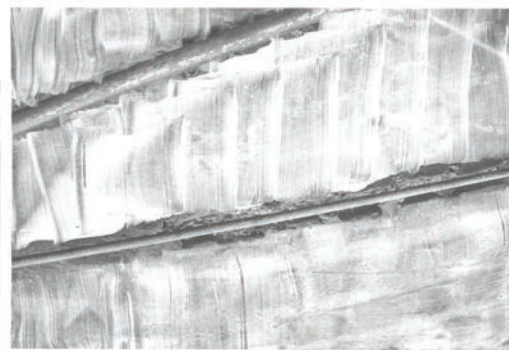
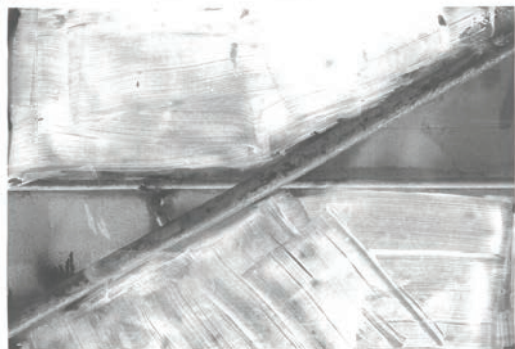
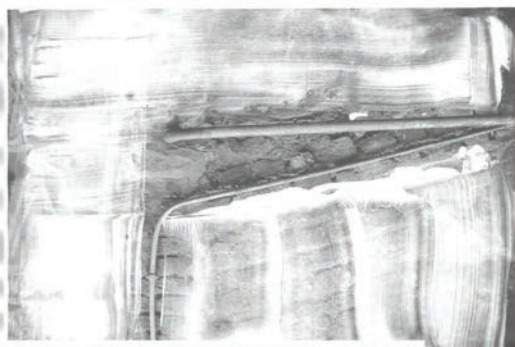




## Handrails







Experimenting with photo composition.

In terms of scale, this final piece is similar to the first. In terms of inspiration, it is very different from both. This piece introduces light into one of the darker areas of the site. It moves away from looking at how nature is appropriating the space and looks at a man-made element - the handrails. An element that could be considered part of the *'instructions for use'*<sup>7</sup> of the space.

<sup>7</sup> Marc Auge. Non-places. pg.96



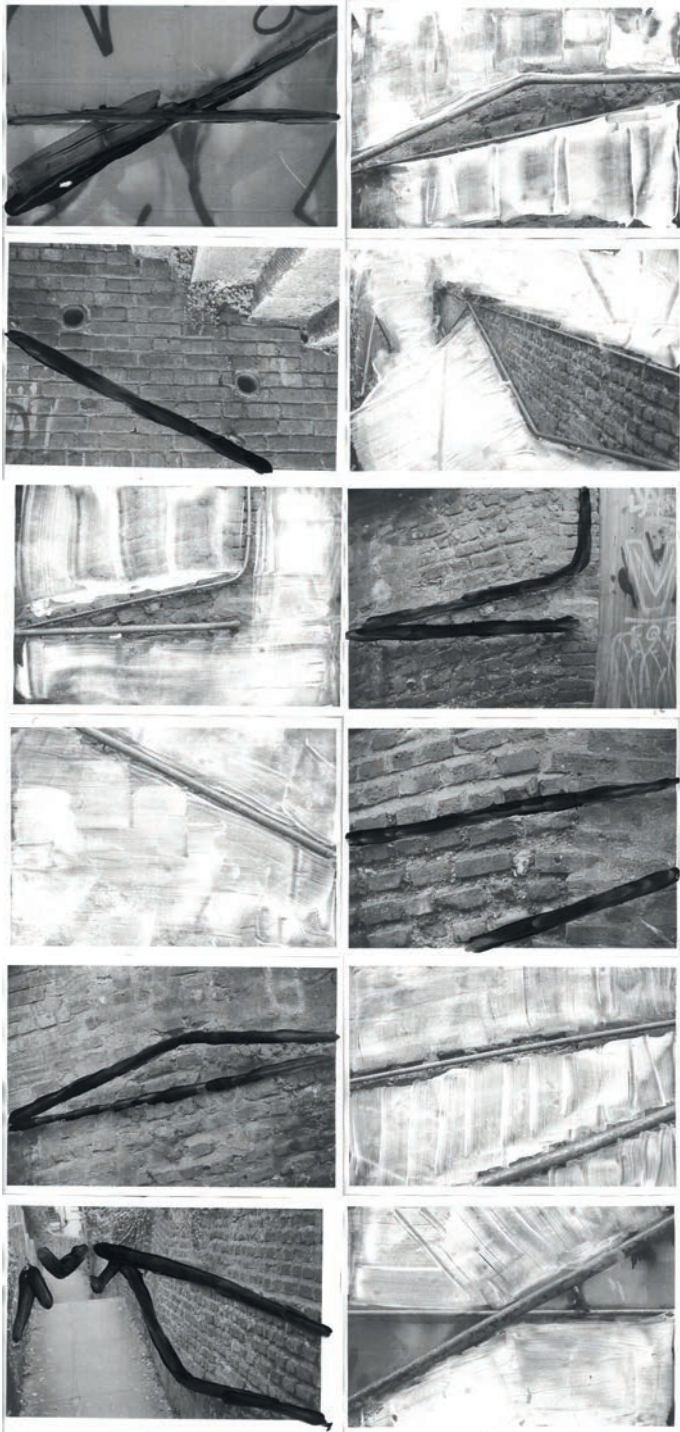


Shaping steel with oxypropane torch.



Shaping the steel with the tube bender.



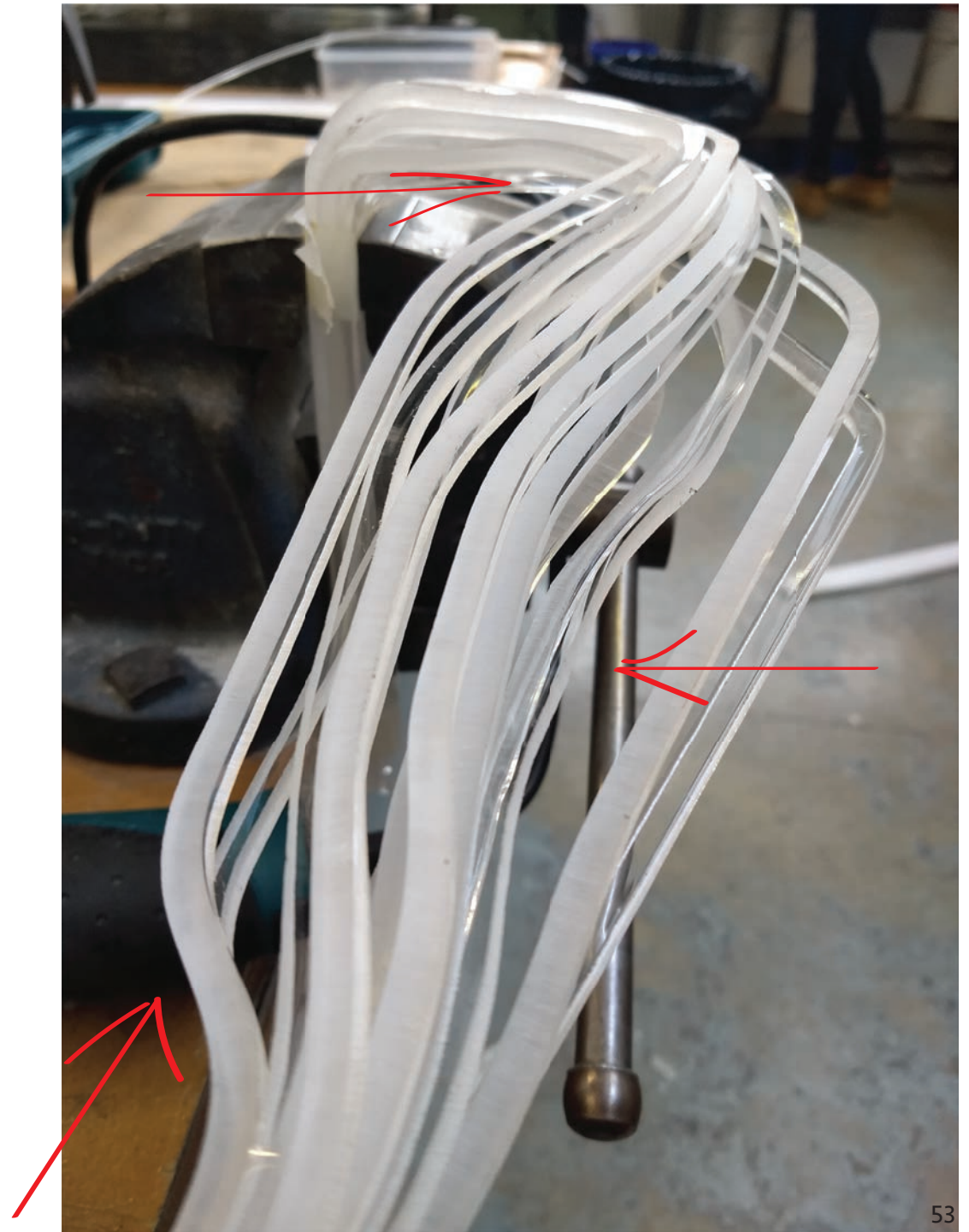


First model. Steel and Plaster.





The second set of models I experimented with acrylic. Using a heat gun to simultaneously shape a group of acrylic rods. Replicating the same dynamic directions of the handrails but multiplying it many times over.







Finished acrylic models.





Mock ups of what the models would look like on site.



Changing from steel to acrylic allowed for the addition of light to the piece. With strong enough lights it travels the whole length of the rods. Therefore my next step was to plan for a hollow base to accomodate 5V LED lights and a battery pack.

The addition of light works well. Both of the other pieces rely on natural light, while the area in which this one is set is flanked by high walls which allow little direct sunlight. This instalation would brighten up the space, especially at night, when it becomes uncomfortable to use alone.<sup>8</sup>

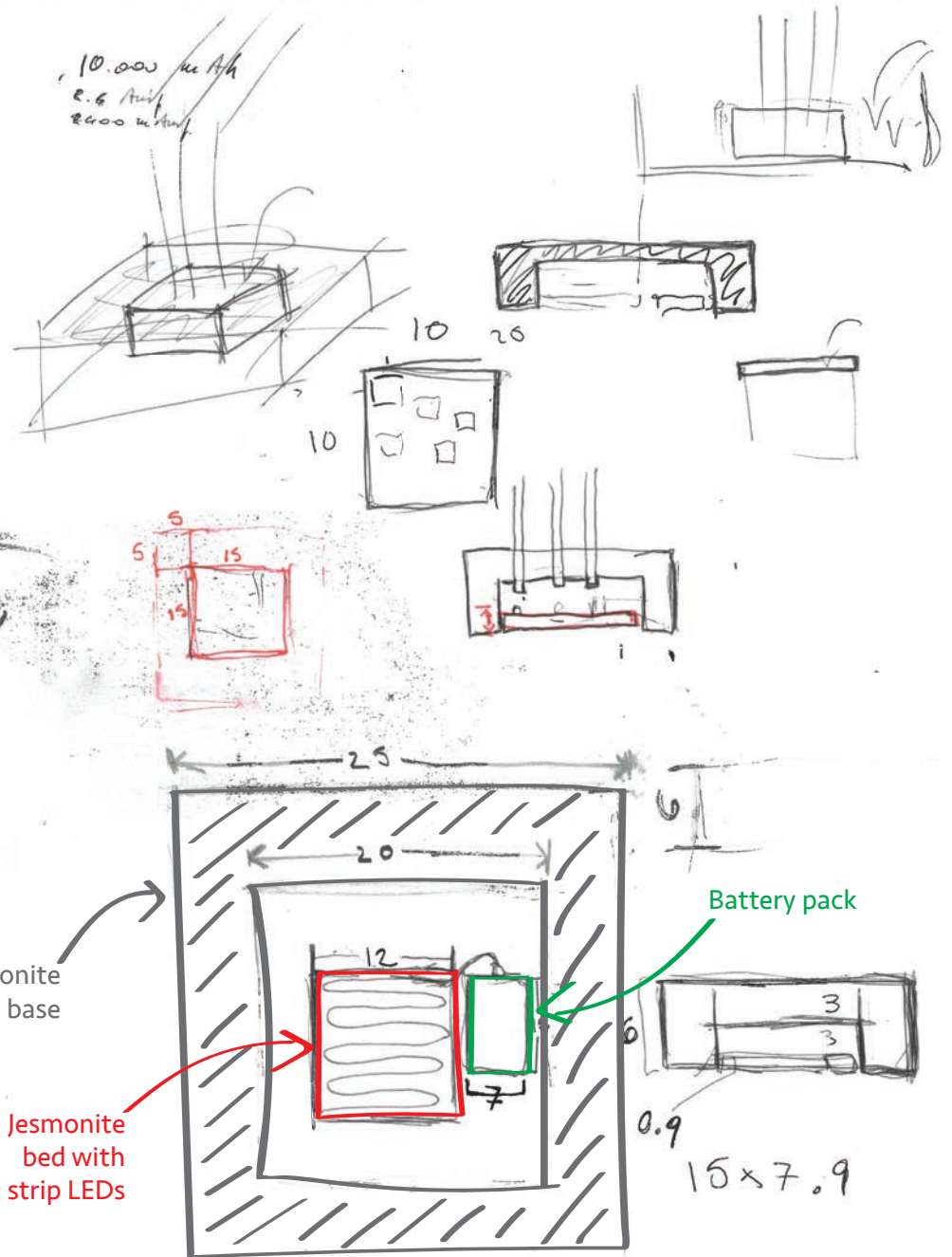
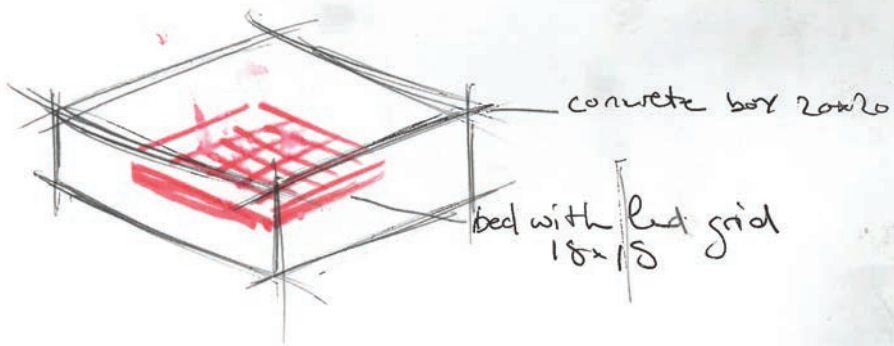
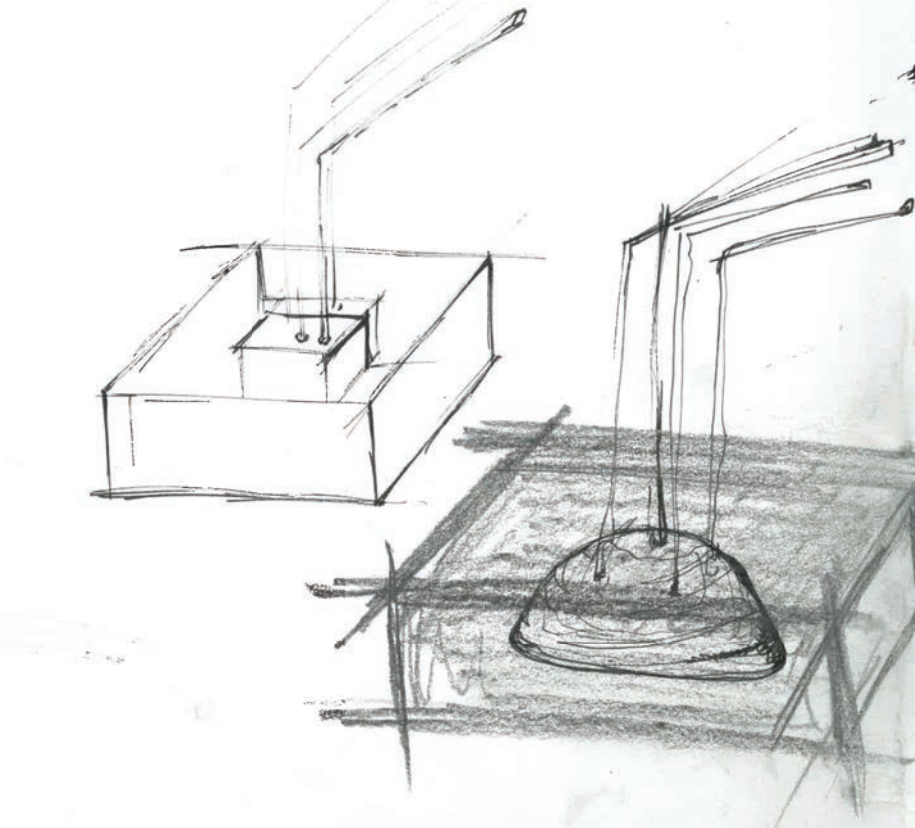


<sup>8</sup> As discussed with a friend who uses the site daily.  
Documented on pg.18







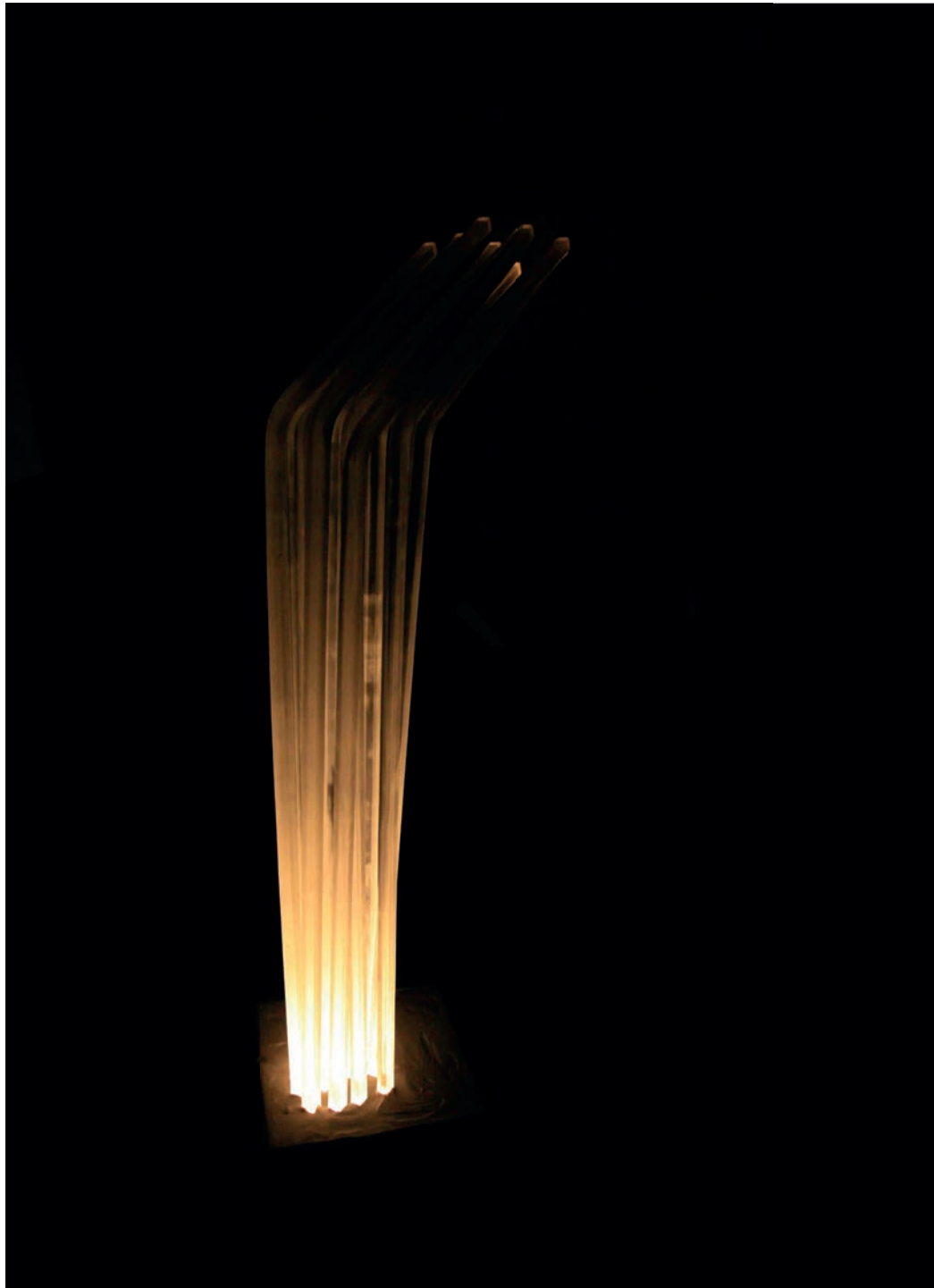






From the small acrylic models to the final piece the scale up was 10x (1mm to 10mm). Therefore the bending could not be as easily done by hand, it required a jig and clamps and for each rod to be done individually.







## Reflections

What this project has led to is three different propositions. Linked through the site they belong to and, broadly, the materials they use, they remain individual in idea, concept and purpose. Far from perfectly concluded ideas, these works are just beginnings. They show how, given the opportunity, I would intervene on site.

When it comes to place and space I've learnt that one cannot exist without the other. As I discovered from the historical research, what is a merely a space for an individual may be a place for another. The decision to not talk to the community was a conscious one as I wanted to continue to work on this site considering it as a space and not be influenced by their stories. However if I were to take this project forward, talking to the community about it would be the next step.

When it comes to drawing I've found it vital to the project from the beginning stages to the end presentation. By representing the site through architecture elevation drawings I have been able to present and communicate the space concisely. While photography and manipulation of images have allowed me to play with scale in models and visualise final pieces in context.



Drawing on site - Photo by Joseph Bulman



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