Ambiguous

Modern

Enigma

Mannerisms

Under the framework of mannerism, art historians and architectural critics of the last century have been provided with an alternative set of values to appreciate the ambiguous and contradictory qualities of art and architecture that, previously, had only been sources of frustration to others. It is this *mannerist* approach that provides a more accommodating framework for understanding the character of the Deichman Library at times when conventional codes and criteria fail to elicit engaging rewards.

For a term that frequently draws blanks, it comes as a surprise to discover the fundaments of mannerism casually, albeit sometimes unwittingly, employed throughout architectural discourse. The term, M(m)annerism, is comprised of two meanings, both of which were inventions of the early modern era with the second meaning being a subsequent derivation of the first. The term encompasses, on the one hand, an episode of artistic production from sixteenth century Italy and, on the other hand, a collection of qualities, identified, by turn of the twentieth century art historians, as characteristic of these sixteenth century Mannerist artworks and buildings.

The first application, denoted by Mannerism with a capital M, refers to a period that holds the likes of Michelangelo, Palladio and Bronzino as its heroes. The characteristically self-reflexive works of these artistic giants have been allocated the status of revolutionary within art and architectural history. This school of thought identified that Mannerist principles were a divergence from the deterministic ideologies governing the Renaissance prior and, also, that Mannerist expression was not codified in the service of Counter-Reformation rhetoric, which later became the case under the Baroque artists.[1]

The second application, mannerism with a little m, refers to the qualities of art and architecture that, for example, Rudolf Wittkower has aligned with conflict, Colin Rowe with *uneasy violence*, Robert Venturi with *contradiction* and Peter Eisenman with *disjunction*. These mannerist qualities have been extensively applied to works and individuals outside the original Mannerist period of sixteenth century Italy. For the architect Robert Venturi, traces of mannerism are evident in varying manifestations, ranging from the Hellenistic period in Classical art, the architecture of eighteenth-century England's Hawksmoor and Soane, nineteenth-century America's Sullivan, all the way to Le Corbusier, Aalto and Kahn of the Modern era.[2] The ongoing integration of mannerist principles in architecture

throughout the twentieth century, and continuing into the twenty-first century, has established a canon of architects and critics each of whom found, from its subversive disposition, a promising framework to counter the prevailing hegemonic readings of architecture.

Provocations

In her recent reassessment of the term baroque, the scholar Helen Hills suggested one should leverage the baroque as conceptual technology; as a framework, "to provoke new forms of historical conceptualisation and interpretation."[3] Following suit, implementing a conceptual framework based on the notion of mannerism can also provoke new and alternative evaluations to challenge established interpretations. The inherent flexibility of mannerist provocations is reflected by the subject's thematic diversity. Consider, for instance, the vast expanse that separates Nikolaus Pevsner's mannerist take on the English Elizabethan style from Bruno Zevi's pronouncement of Brutalism as a "Manneristic phenomenon."[4]

Colin Rowe's essay, "Mannerism and Modern Architecture," first arrived on the scene in the *Architectural Review* of 1950. As a provocation, Rowe's essay illustrated the rewards of transposing mannerist qualities onto misunderstood and canonically problematic buildings of the early twentieth century; buildings that he deemed in need of a different perspective. Here, one can find a reference case particularly pertinent to the issues faced today concerning the re-interpretation of the Deichman Library building in the lead-up to its future transformation.

Rowe's analysis of Le Corbusier's 1916 Villa Schwob, at La Chaux-de-Fonds, established that a Mannerist lens provides the, "most probable and certainly the most rewarding field of investigation," into the villa.[5] The problematic duality of Le Corbusier's villa, whereby it is a simultaneous expression of opposing principles, is resolved by Rowe through the implementation of a mannerist framework. According to Rowe, any appreciation of the villa that only considers its conventional motifs, a so-called, "appreciation in Neo-Classical terms," fails to account for much of the underlying complexity of the villa.[6] The handful of mannerist motifs present should demand equal appreciation not only for their precocious expression of a different logic system, but moreover as they provide an instrumental disruption to the conventional motifs. For instance, Le Corbusier's inclusion of a blank wall panel at the centre of the villa's street-side
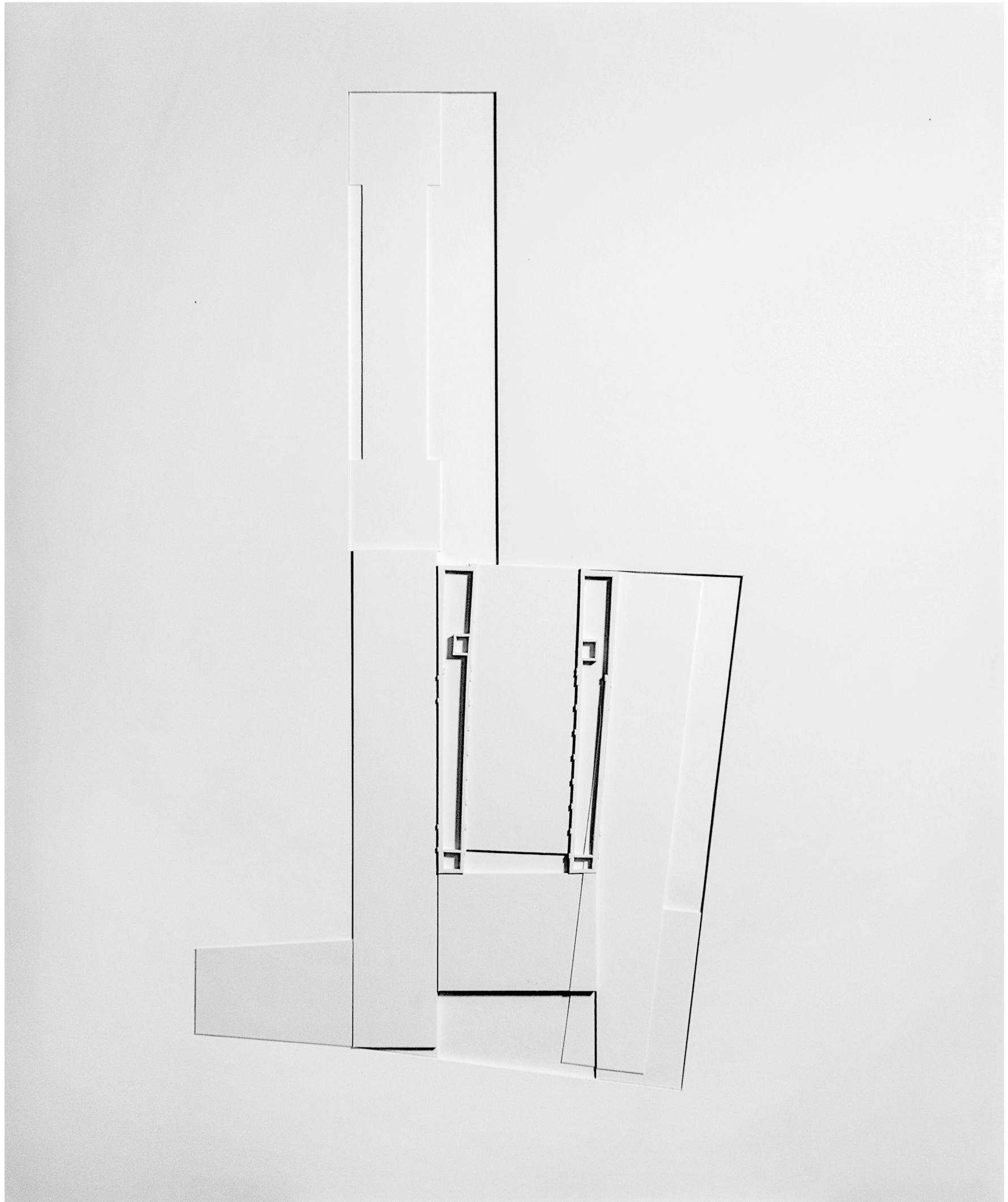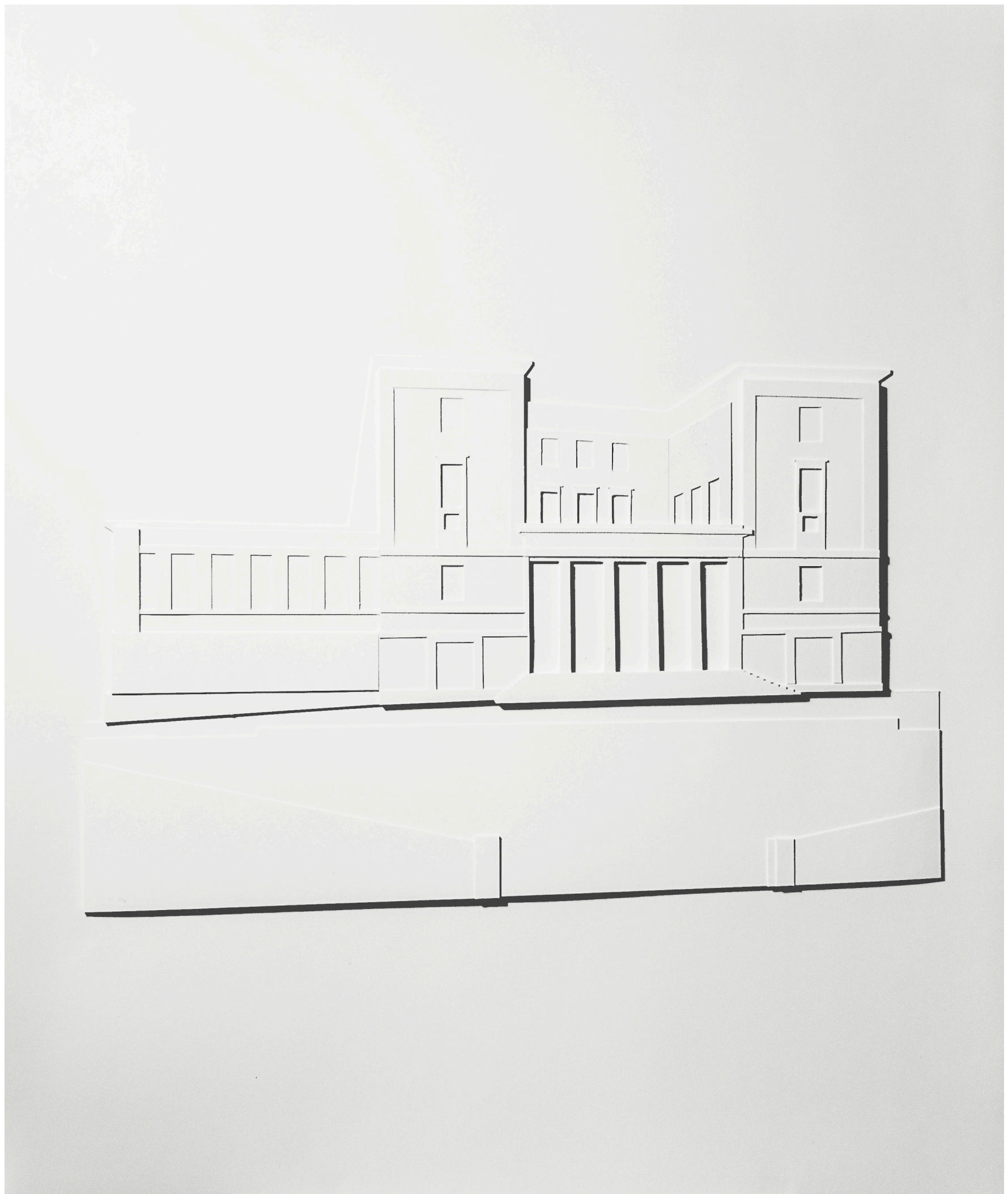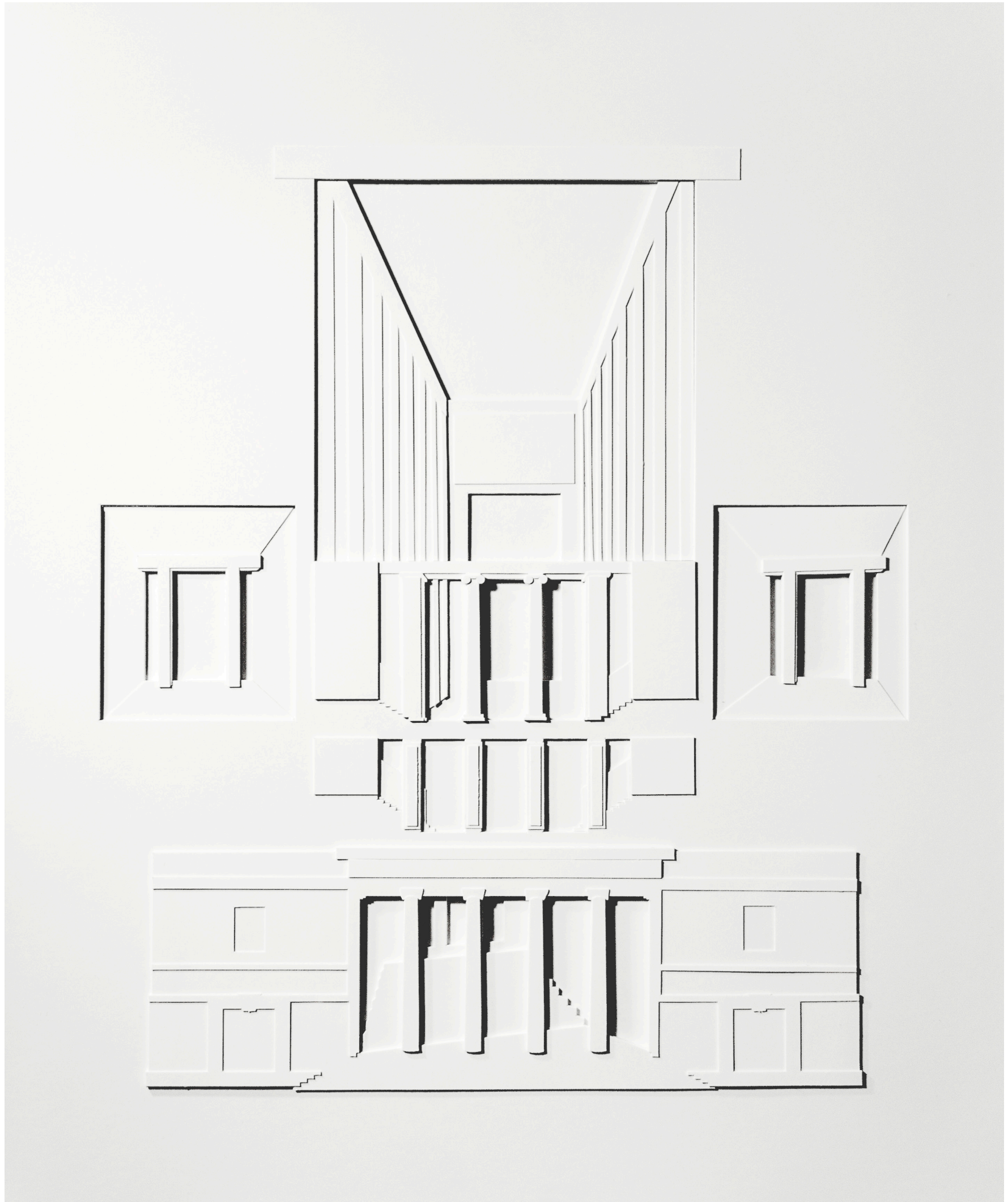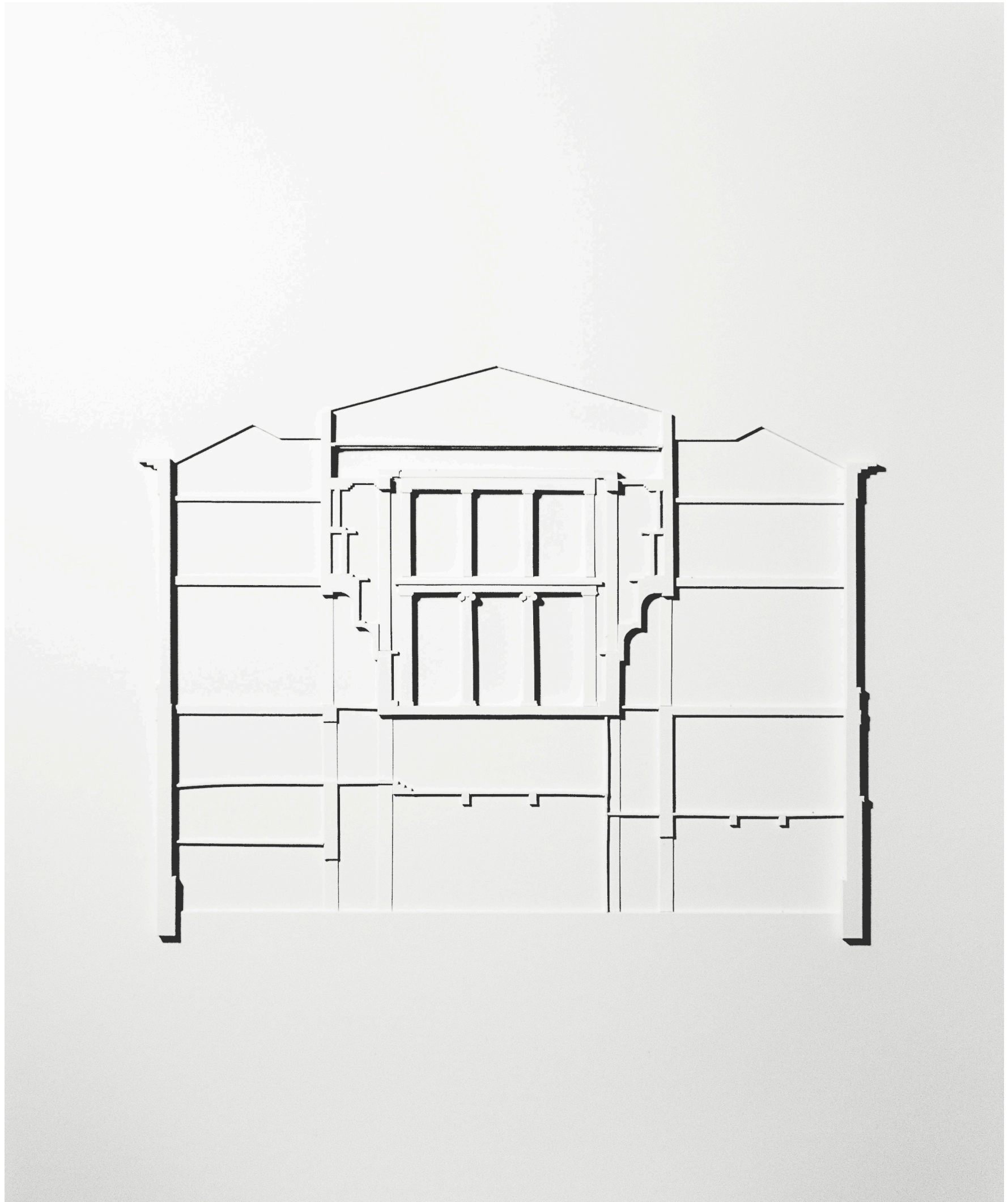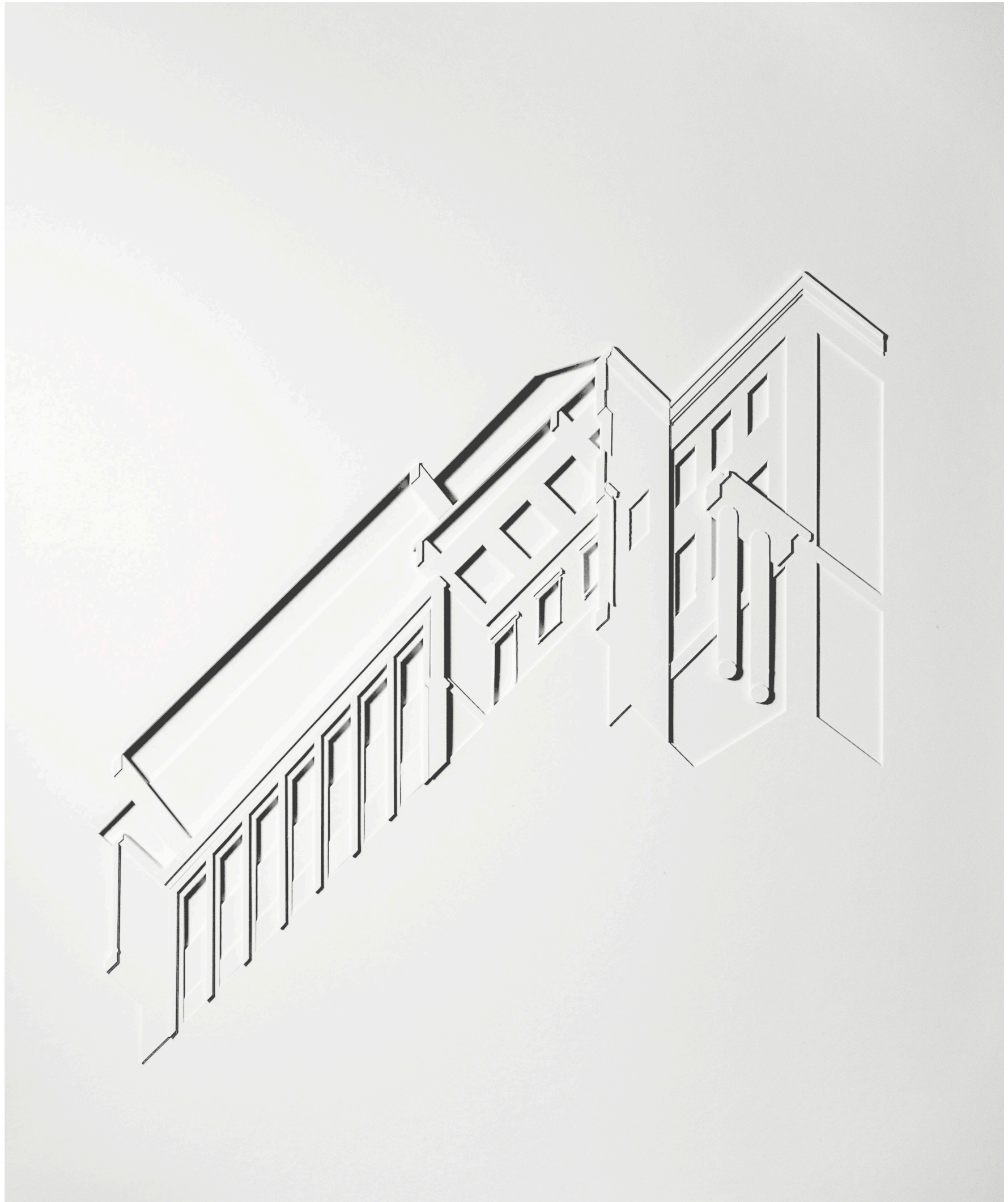
Book

Plate 1

Plate 2

Plate 3

Plate 4

Plate 5

Plate Detail

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