

Entering Matter

Drawing as Subtractive Incision in Speculative Architecture

Ephraim Joris / Monophorosis

The following is an edit of a longer essay for the purpose of the biennale text to provide an overview of underlying concepts of the drawing research presented at the exhibition.

ABSTRACT

This essay positions architectural drawing as a practice of incision, tracing a shift in drawing research from the Monolith Drawings to a more recent practice referred to as Monophorosis. To articulate this shift, the essay brings into relation two previously published texts: *Ex Uno Lapide: The Making Present of Absence*, published in *Interstices: Journal of Architecture and Related Arts* (Vol. 19, Issue *Presence*, 2019)¹, and *Territorial Inscription: Drawing as Incision in Speculative Architecture*, published in *Drawing: Research, Theory, Practice* by Intellect Books (Vol. 10, Issue *Territorial Inscription: Drawing Out Bodies*, 2025)².

The earlier text develops the Monolith Drawing as a subtractive practice in which architectural space is released from a single solid mass through acts of removal. Drawing here operates as a means of making absence present, allowing architecture to appear not as a constructed object but as something uncovered through subtraction³. The later text extends this logic into the body, proposing dissection as a speculative drawing operation in which the architectural section converges with anatomical and botanical exploration. Each text reflects on a specific body of drawings, revealing distinct but connected modes of exploring architecture through removal and incision.

By placing these two bodies of work in dialogue, the essay offers an overview of how a drawing practice has shifted over time, tracing how one logic gradually gives way to another. This shift emerges from internal questions about where architecture might reside and how it might be encountered through drawing. In reflecting on these transitions, the essay considers why operations of cutting and removal remain productive instruments of architectural thought, and how drawing can act as both a method and a site of research for uncovering latent architectural possibilities⁴.



Blind Mirror

DRAWING BY SUBTRACTION AND INCISION: RE-SITUATING TWO MOMENTS IN DRAWING PRACTICE

Ex Uno Lapide: The Making Present of Absence develops what is referred to as the Monolith Drawing: a subtractive drawing practice in which architectural space is not assembled through addition but released through removal. Emerging from years of working in architectural renovation, the Monolith Drawing translates a mode of spatial encounter, familiar to restoration practice as excavation, into a speculative drawing methodology. Rather than projecting a future building, the Monolith Drawing enacts an act of uncovering. Architecture appears as something latent within matter⁵. Each Monolith Drawing begins with a single, undifferentiated architectural mass, a monolith, that is mirrored, rotated, and intersected with itself following an iterative projection and subtraction protocol. Through successive iterations, the Monolith carves itself into being. Each moment of removal is part of a process of entering stone; penetrating matter itself. As these successive subtractions produce openings they also leave behind residual forms; recesses or embrasures, that accumulate around the cut. These residual geometries have an ornamental quality without depicting historical representational references. They function as inscriptions of the subtractive process itself. Ornament emerges here as a trace of removal: a narration of removal rather than a decorative addition⁶. Monolith Drawings resonate with architectural vocabularies drawn from multiple historical moments. The drawings do not stabilise these into recognisable typologies, nor do they reference a particular historical period. Instead, they perform multiple architectural histories at once, as objects displaced in time. This temporal ambiguity is central to the Monolith Drawing. Drawings do not operate as objects of memory or instruments of futurity, which is what architectural drawing often does. Each drawing sustains a condition of temporal entanglement, in which architectural form is encountered as something that was already there, yet new. The subtractive process of entering stone thus becomes an act of entering time: of working through history or various histories for that matter. The more recent drawing practice referred to as Monophorosis extends this subtractive logic beyond tectonic mass and into a corporeal register. Where the Monolith Drawings carve into stone, Monophorosis introduces dissection as a speculative architectural operation. Here, the architectural section converges with anatomical and botanical exploration. Bodies, human, animal, vegetal, mythological, and hybrid, become sites of incision. Architectural fragments emerge from avian hybrids or speculative floral arrangements. Drawings no longer cut exclusively through architectural matter, but through bodies understood as conceptually and historically charged. Monophorosis acknowledges the analytic precision of anatomical and botanical dissection yet extends this as a speculative

instrument. Dissection, in this context, is not deployed as a scientific act aimed at classification or empirical certainty. Each incision becomes a means of opening relations rather than stabilising knowledge⁷.



Bouquet as Monophoric Carrier

When a drawing enters a body, correspondences emerge between anatomy, myth and architecture. Architecture is no longer approached as a discrete object, but as something that can be discovered within bodies and materials preceding architecture's formal codification. Architecture is encountered in its earliest and most uncertain moment; as a becoming-architectural⁸. Read together, the

Monolith Drawings and Monophorosis trace a shift within an ongoing drawing research: from stone to flesh, from mass to body, from excavation to dissection. What remains across both practices is a commitment to drawing as an act of incision; an operation that cuts, removes, and exposes in order to think architecture otherwise. The essay positions this shift as a reflective movement driven by internal questions about where architecture might reside and how it might be encountered through drawing.

TERRITORIAL INSCRIPTION AND MONOPHOROSIS: FROM SUBTRACTIVE MASS TO INCISED BODIES

Territorial Inscription: Drawing as Incision in Speculative Architecture emerges from a drawing practice referred to as Monophorosis. The term derives from mono- (single), phor- (bearing), and -osis (transformation), and names a unity that bears the traces of its own transformation. Monophorosis is a practice in which drawing is not employed to stabilise architectural objects, but to expose the conditions under which architecture begins to appear. Central to this approach is the notion of the inarchitectural: a condition in which architecture withdraws from its representational mandate. Architecture is no longer depicted, projected, or resolved as a figure, but encountered through processes of exposure. In this sense, Monophorosis is a method of starting again: a search for architecture in its earliest, most uncertain beginnings; as a proto-architecture embedded in bodies, materials, and histories that precede any disciplinary separation.

It is within this context that dissection is introduced as a drawing operation. Monophorosis borrows explicitly from anatomical and botanical traditions in which cutting has historically served as a means of revealing hidden structures. Anatomical atlases, botanical cross-sections, and early scientific dissections inform the precision and orientation of the drawings. Yet where scientific dissection traditionally aims to stabilise knowledge through classification and naming, the Monophorosis drawings remain deliberately speculative. They do not seek to fix what is revealed, but to hold it open. Dissection here functions as a territorial inscription: a line drawn through matter that produces relations rather than boundaries. The cut produces a passage through heterogeneous systems; anatomical, architectural, botanical, mythological, allowing them to intersect without resolving them into a unified order. The incision becomes a site of negotiation, where different structural logics coexist.



Ceremonial Severance

This approach stands in productive tension with the earlier drawing practice as described in *Ex Uno Lapide: The Making Present of Absence*. There, the Monolith Drawing is theorised as emerging from architectural renovation; a field in which space is rarely encountered through construction alone, but through acts of removal. In renovation practice, architecture is revealed by subtracting layers, excavating through material accumulations of time. The Monolith Drawing translates this condition into a speculative protocol grounded in two historical principles of production. The first is *ex uno lapide*: an ancient sculptural principle in which form is released from a single block of stone⁹. The second is *stereotomy*, the art of cutting solids to generate complex spatial configurations through descriptive geometry. Historically associated with stone vaulting, arches, and stair systems, stereotomy performs its tectonic function redeployed as a speculative drawing instrument. Using both principles of production, space appears not as something assembled, but as something liberated from mass.

While the Monolith Drawing approaches architectural history through erosion rather than reconstruction, they nevertheless presuppose architecture as a predefined mass; something from which space could be carved. Over time, this presupposition became a point of pressure within the practice. The guiding question gradually shifted: what if architecture does not just reside in architectural matter? What if it lingers in bodies, in plants, in animals, in mythological figures; in formations that precede architecture as a discipline? It is at this threshold that the practice moves beyond its lithic core. Monophorosis complicates subtraction by introducing a mode of cutting that is no longer confined to the idea of architectural mass, but passes into flesh, fibre, bone, petals, organs, and hybrid morphologies. The architectural section meets the anatomical incision. What is revealed is no longer just interior space but proto-architectural formations embedded within matter as latent spatial constellations of structure, orientation, and tension.

Seen together, the Monolith Drawings and the Monophorosis drawings form a continuous inquiry into the generative potential of loss. Subtraction and incision operate as parallel strategies: one eroding mass, the other opening bodies. In both cases, drawing functions as a method for making visible what is otherwise withheld; architectural memory, mythic residue, and the latent continuity between organic and tectonic matter. The territorial line, whether carved into stone or cut into flesh, does not operate as a boundary, but as a threshold. It traces how structures fold into one another across domains of knowledge and scales of matter, allowing architecture to appear not as a fixed object, but as a continually unfolding field of relations.

Notes

¹ Ex Uno Lapide, *Interstices: Journal of Architecture and Related Arts*, Vol. 19, Issue Presence, 2019

² Territorial Inscription: Drawing as Incision in *Speculative Architecture*, *Drawing: Research, Theory, Practice*, Vol. 10, Issue Territorial Inscription: Drawing Out Bodies, 2025

³ Joris E. (2016a). On Longing: Rendering architecture through a consciousness of a collapse of time in space. In E. Joris (Ed.), *Social Sciences & Arts Conference Sgem Vienna Scientific Sessions: Book 4, Vol.2.*, 449-460

⁴ Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Félix (1987), *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (trans. B. Massumi), Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

⁵ Joris E. 2014, 'Drawing as a third party phenomena', *Architecture_MPS*; Ravensbourne; Woodbury University London: 01—03 April, 2014

⁶ Gottfried Semper, *Style*

⁷ Ephraim Joris, *Territorial Inscription: Drawing as Incision in Speculative Architecture*, *Drawing: Research, Theory, Practice* 10 (2025)

⁸ Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Félix (1987), *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (trans. B. Massumi), Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

⁹ Barry, F. (2013). *Ex Uno Lapide. The myth of the monolithic building in Antiquity*. In K. Buhagiar, G. Dreyfuss, J. Bruenslow (Eds.), *The Founding Myths of Architecture* (pp. 57-72). London, UK: Artifice Books

BIO:

Ephraim Joris is an architect, researcher, and educator whose interdisciplinary practice explores the entanglements of life, death, and architectural form. Founder of the research studio Monophorosis and lecturer at the Willem de Kooning Academy in Rotterdam, his work connects architectural theory with speculative drawing practices, focusing on the body as a site of architectural inquiry. Previously, he co-founded and directed an architecture practice specialising in renovation and restoration. He has taught at KU Leuven, RMIT University, and Westminster University. Ephraim holds a PhD by practice from RMIT, and his work has been published and exhibited internationally.

Monophorosis is a drawing practice that explores the body as a primordial site of architectural inscription. The drawings negotiate anatomies as both material and conceptual ground for spatial thinking. Through processes of transcription and transposition, they trace proto-architectures: latent formations that suggest how architecture might emerge from the body itself. In doing so, these drawings establish a condition in which architecture withdraws from its representational task; a condition referred to as the inarchitectural, which names a moment in which architecture is not depicted or modelled anymore, but found through a process of emergence. In this sense, monophorosis is a method of starting again: a search for architecture in its earliest, most uncertain beginnings. What these drawings offer is not a model or proposal, but an invitation to consider how architecture might be found in the bodies and materials that precede it.