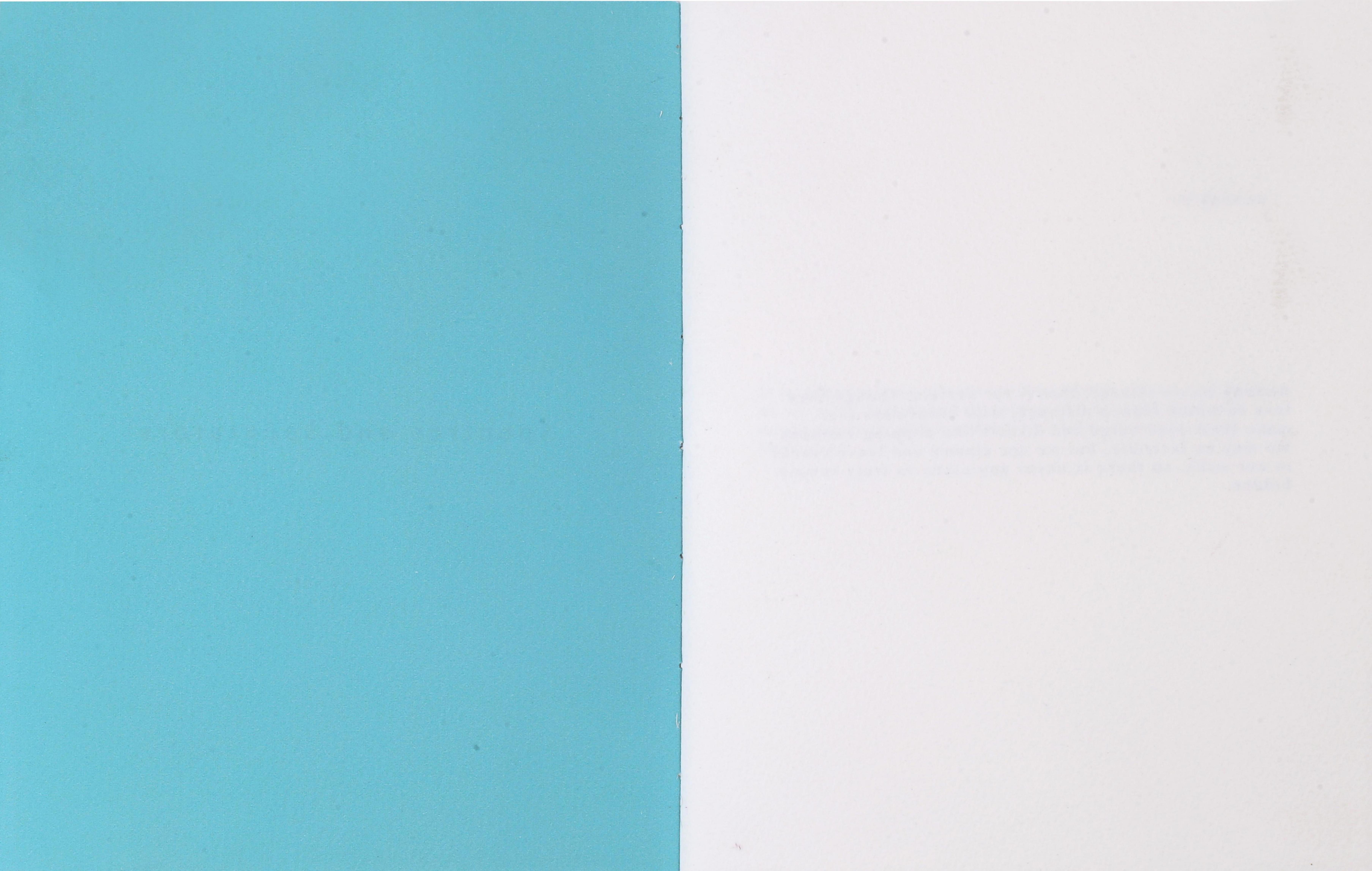
Spectres and Spectators



Nobody wants us near, that is for certain. Though they love to watch from a distance, with binoculars that make their eyes bulge and distort like popping balloons. We may be invisible, but we are clumsy and leave cracks in our wake, so there is never any place to truly remain hidden.

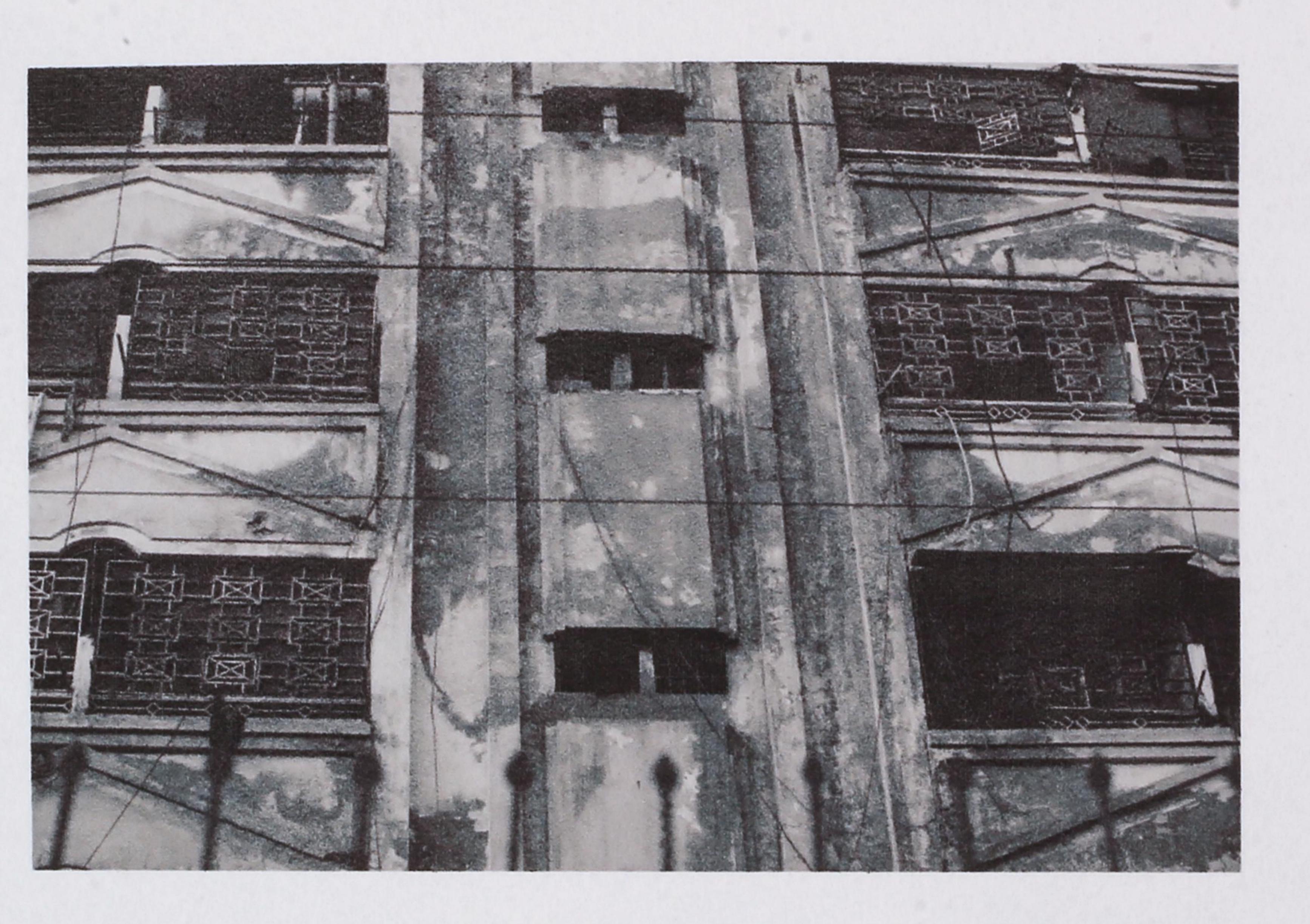
It is a monstrous existence. We cannot spring and leap as we wish, our hunched spines and bloated feet will never allow it, and besides, we suffer from so much back pain! Sometimes there is ease however, in hitching a ride.

We are vagrants, and travel by breath and trapped water. Our aerial voyages are like the great birds in the sky, the glorious screaming crows and the sweet and drowsy doves, though we have not our own wings.

Some of us can crawl through the fractures in the walls like house spiders and the termites who feed on the wood like toffee, though we have no taste for it. There is no pleasure in sustenance, desire for food holds no meaning. We feed on the glut of shadow and trauma, simply because they take up too much space and we cannot keep our small mouths closed forever.







Our bellies are bottomless and swell so round and plump that we thump against the walls and leave sticky stains. The indignant rain that smashes over our roof becomes our drink. They send frantic curses as they slip down our tongues and we cannot blame them! For imagine, after fleeing from the fussiness of the clouds and a dazzling romp in the sky, they soar through wind and tempest, only to hurtle to earth when the sky looks away. There is an explosion of glass droplets and then they are inside us. Their lustrous shapes and wishes of flight are erased from all memory, and it is then we realize that it is truly bad luck to fall over a city.

There is a small garden nearby, nestled between collapsed mansions. The rain is triumphant there, as it tumbles into the softness of the soil for a brief nap before being called home to the sky. How we envied the comfort of their cyclic trajectories! Our own journeys are never familiar. When they construct impassable, chemical blocks around us and when they hold their breath, we become stagnant and dissolve into wraiths (though we usually do come back to life!)

In any case, how will we ever decide where to go if we're only passengers, drifting at the will of other forces?

It would be wonderful to go left, but they move us backwards or yank us forward to the right.

We dream of the lucky dolphins who swim in open, shining waters, free from pathways, plaster, sneezes and stone.

Oh, the imagined merriment of darting around at whim! With a languid audience of blank faced fish, the sea is perhaps is the safest place to be. Some of us have actually visited the seaside! The poetry of sand is quieter than the poetry of cheap ice-cream cones and there is great pleasure in collecting words. The waves however, seem millions of light years away and try as we might, we can never reach the water.

Though we shrink behind the walls and float with shame, they will jeer at us with bright, piggish faces. We are pelted with sharp rocks, detergent and waterproof paint every time we are spotted. They feign disgust, as fear wars with wonder their eyes. At times we feel like hypnotic mirrors, covered with smut and grime. When they watch us in secret, and catch fragments of themselves in our few bright, sparkly bits, they preen themselves and glisten indulgently.

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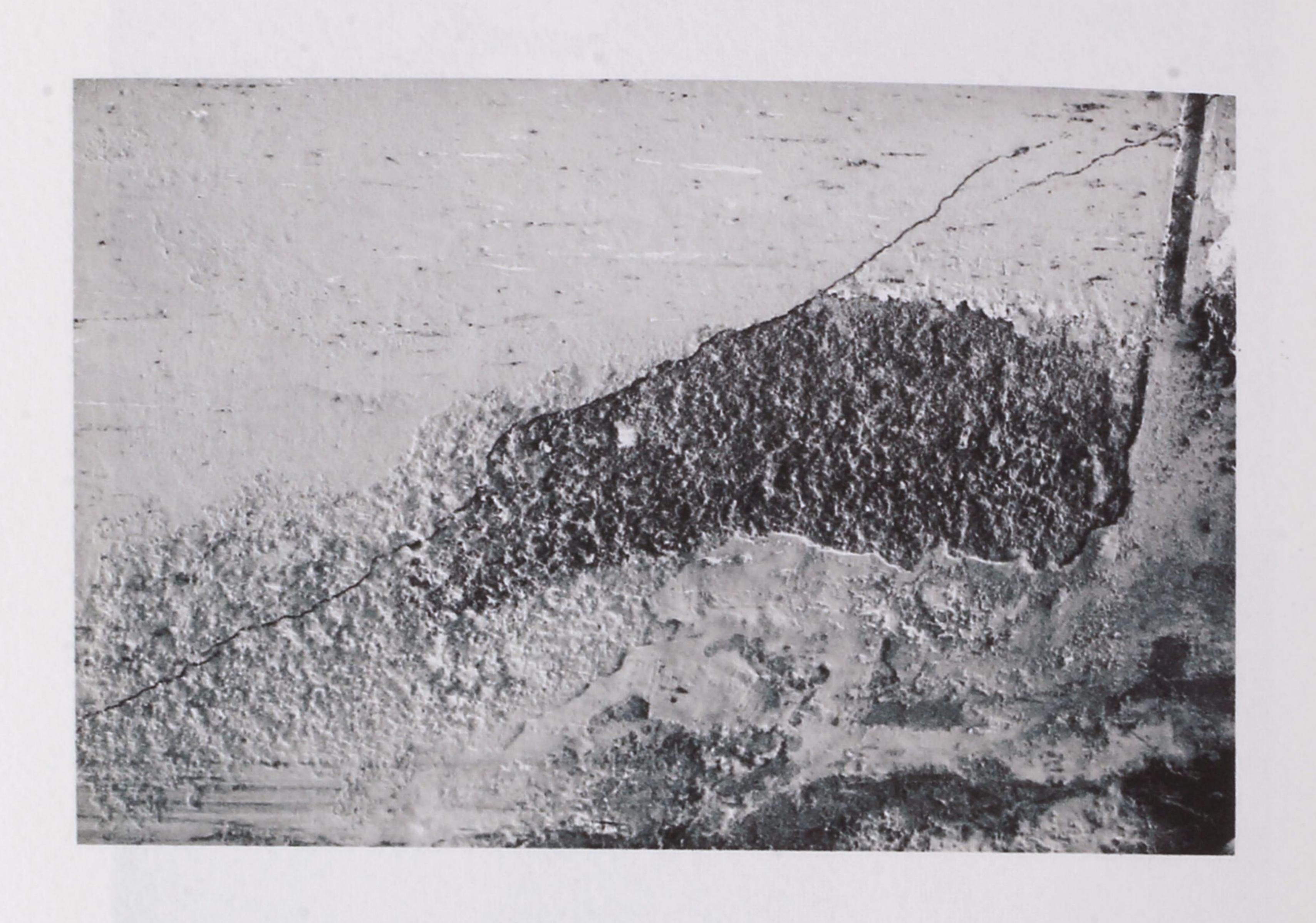


y down and drain themse.

We are the symptoms of a yearning city, ill at ease. Buildings get exhausted too, of loud noises and painful bumps. No one wants to stand forever. Eventually they will long to retire to the deep, cold greens of wild grasses, lay down and simply rest. It is then when they attempt to drain themselves of life.

We arrive, and try to push the people out of their homes and streets, conjuring frightening shapes out of thin air. Our attempts are flimsy though and we almost always fail as everyone fights back.







The lights in the ceiling and the sky fluctuate to the music of our agonized cracking and splitting. They cast shadows on the fragile homes that we invade but can never truly inhabit. There are so many places we wish to go, so many tranquil fish we would like to meet though it will never be possible.

And so, we stay crouched behind the walls, or we ride on feeble sighs in the streets. There is nothing else to do.





Vasl Artists' Association

This special edition publication has been produced by art writer in residence Rabia S. Akhtar under the support of Vasl Artists' Association for its program Taaza Tareen 12.

About the artist:

Rabia S. Akhtar is a Karachi based visual artist and writer. She received her BFA from the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture in 2015, majoring in traditional Miniature painting. Within her practice, Rabia cross-examines the psychic, nostalgic conditions around human-animal relationships. Bizarre universes are constructed, where zoomorphic beings and otherworldly beasts negotiate within an uneasy, symbolic coexistence.

About Vasl Artist's Association
Founded in 2001, Vasl Artists' Association is a not for profit contemporary arts organization, based in Karachi, Pakistan and is affiliated with the Triangle Network, UK. Vasl Artists' Association functions as a space and a platform for nurturing creativity and encouraging freedom to create experimental work, hosting artists' residencies, events, public and educational outreach, research and producing art publications.

In the past 19 years, more than 700 international and local artists have undertaken Vasl residencies, workshops and local projects of significance.