Erasure: An Additive and Subtractive Act

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ERASURE: AN ADDITIVE + SUBTRACTIVE ACT

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2019 MFA, DESIGN + INTERIOR ENVIRONMENTS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of master of fine arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.
In dedication to

My parents for their constant love and support
My friends for providing solace and coffee in times of stress
My classmates for keeping me humble and grounded
My cat, Willow, for waking me up every morning
Roberto Ventura for keeping me honest and in line
Sara Reed for her constant kind words and encouragement
Camden Whitehead for reminding me that it is always okay to play
Christiana Lafanzani for keeping my spirits high and full of hope
& Emily Smith for inspiring me to seek adventure and knowledge wherever I may roam
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good design should be engaging, intimate, and available to everyone. The chief ideals of connectivity, functionality, sustainability, relativity, and beauty are imperative when approaching any design opportunity.

Materiality, light, and major design principles such as scale and harmony are integral components of these ideals.

Connectivity can refer to physical properties of design specific to materiality and joinery or it can be the philosophical connection to a place or an idea.

Functionality is directly linked to form, whether form meets function or function meets form. If a design doesn’t work properly it isn’t a good design. People need to be able to access a design and use it (even if its function is beauty).

Sustainability in design ensures the longevity of a building or object. It takes into account the need for design that promotes environmental awareness and the respect for the earth’s resources. Sustainability also refers to economic and social connotations.

Relativity to the site is often an important aspect when designing a building, using materials from the surrounding region and using forms and decision decisions that respond to the immediate surroundings render a design relative to a site. Relativity also speaks to a reference of time and whether or not a design is suitable for the present and future. It can also speak the appropriateness of a design when considering the program of a given space.

Beauty is relative and universal. Design that encapsulates the ephemeral or causes a pause to awe is a sign of beauty.

**ETHOS**

Design is a story told in a language that everyone can understand.
MOTIVATION
In the simplest form, a pencil mark on a page is removed by a traditional rubber eraser. However, the marks are often never fully removed, and the paper thins with each attempt to rub out an old idea. But how does one erase a chair? A pilaster? A room? A building?... More importantly, how does the subtractive act of erasing become an additive one? The historical fabric of a building is important; it is also imperative that it does not remain stagnant. Erasing is an opportunity to design an interior environment that both acknowledges the traces of the pencil marks and the eraser. It is an opportunity to learn from historic design strategies and thoughtfully transition into the present to create a living, breathing palimpsest (Plesch, 2015).

PROBLEM
Current preservation policies and landmarking tactics arguably contradict preservationists’ claims of promoting environmental, economic, and social growth within communities by exempting historical buildings from complying with codes and regulations which consequently use property that could be more sustainably employed. Historical preservation is largely based in social constructs; therefore, present policies should be reflective of societal changes. At times, the act of pressuring often removes these buildings from the possibility of a relevant and functional future by attempting to keep them wedged within historical restrictions (Avrami, 2016).

PRELIMINARY RESULTS
The approach to erasing the historical fabric of a building is largely dependent on the building itself. This is evident in Scarpa’s attention to the physical and metaphorical joinery of new and existing structures in his design of Palazzo Abatellis, Zumthor’s weaving of old and new brickwork at Kolumba, and Chipperfield’s use of exposed ruins in his design strategy for the Neues Museum (McCarter, 2013; Carrington, 2008; RYKWERT, 2009). The process of erasure within the realm of preservation is a constant and demonstrates how the act of erasing allows opportunities for the existence of something new (Katz, 2006).

CONCLUSION
Choosing to re-program and systematically erase a section of a historically significant but outdated medical tower as a collective art studio space would introduce the opportunity to design an “erased space” as an environment for post-graduate art students to produce creative work. This space would strengthen the growing bond between a school of the arts and a historic medical school while contributing to the culture of the surrounding neighborhoods and contribute to the rich tradition of art within the city.

METHOD
Research of precedent incidents of erasure with applications to concepts involving historical preservation and restoration in the fields of interior design and architecture will influence the design approach. These precedent studies will include works by Carlo Scarpa, Peter Zumthor, and David Chipperfield. To supplement these studies, other artistic disciplines and artists, including Robert Rauschenberg, will be researched to holistically comprehend approaches to the concept of erasing. The execution of explorations of erasing different objects and media to better understand the process of erasure will also be imperative. These experimentations will include the strategic erasing of pencil sketches and common objects to investigate how to best represent an object that has been erased.
Erasure happens at various scales and courses through the veins of multiple artistic disciplines including: drawing, painting, writing and design. The act of erasing not only has a sticky influence on what is seen and unseen in the realm of fine arts and literature, it also impacts the construction and deconstruction of our built environment and leaves a lasting physical impression on the spaces we regularly inhabit. However, the impact of erasure varies depending on the type of erasure and the degree to which an artwork, object, or building is erased.

Understanding the complexities of erasing an interior environment is best supported by understanding erasing at a more tangible scale such as literature, more specifically, erasure poetry. In his article, “Nothing is Left Out”: Kenneth Goldsmith’s Sports and Erasure Poetry, Brian Cooney describes the idea of erasure poetry as being based in the exploration of nothingness and simultaneously the acknowledgment of what already exists on the page. Supporting this notion, Cooney references composer John Cage’s statement, “Everything is an echo of nothing.”

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To emphasize the dictionality of existence and absence, of writing and erasing (as cited in Cage, 19(3), p. 131). Expanding on the underlying definition of erasure, he explicitly outlines two categories and labels them as “complete erasures” and “palimpsests” (2014, p.18).

A “complete erasure” fully eradicates the work while a “palimpsest” retains visible traces of the original without erasing out tool or other obscuring typographical operations (2014, p.18). In some cases, the composition of an overwhelming number of cross-outs can blur the work and act as a form of erasure as well. Unlike a complete erasure, a poem falling under the category of a palimpsest calls more attention to the denseness of layers rather than a sense of absence. In some instances, erasure poetry becomes a form of vandalism when dealing in the erasure of works that Cage categorizes as “eternal” or written works that are of a higher enduring caliber, such as Shakespeare (2014, p.19). To better understand erasure poetry and to gain a more holistic understanding of the act of erasing within the context of art and design, it is important to understand the work of Robert Rauschenberg and Erasure Poetry.

The poems on the facing page are three out of eight poems that form Collier Nogues series of erasure poetry entitled Dear Grace. A poem from the Department of Justice. Nogues uses the same written letter and selectively removes words and letters to compose varying messages which portray drastically different intents. These poems demonstrate how the erasure can create new ideas.
Robert Rauschenberg’s iconic Erased de Kooning Drawing is a performative work that demonstrates how the erasure of one thing can carve out space for something else to exist. Rauschenberg experimented with creating a drawing entirely from the act of erasing by asking permission from his friend and contemporary, Willem De Kooning, to take one of his completed drawings and try to erase it (Craft, 2012). This idea first started when he tried erasing his own works but was only fully realized when he erased the works of others; when he erased what he considered “one-hundred percent art” (Craft, 2012, p.178). The process of creating the Erased De Kooning Drawing involved weeks of erasing efforts and approximately forty erasures of fifteen different types. The collaborative spirit and co-authorship were furthered when Jasper Johns became responsible for the hand-lettered label at the base of the artwork (Craft, 2012). Rauschenberg’s other works such as his famous white works, in which he painted a series of canvases with only white paint, draw from his studies under Josef Albers who emphasized the necessity for art to be driven by an understanding of materiality. Much like his Erased De Kooning Drawing, the seemingly empty canvases are not empty at all; they are a meditation on material as subject matter. The seemingly blank or almost entirely removed works of art are examples of how negativity can be an invitation for positivity and further reinforces the physicality of erasure (Katz, 2006). Craft comments on the erasing involved in the Erased De Kooning Drawing by eloquently stating: “The Erased De Kooning Drawing is often spoken of as if De Kooning’s drawing had been destroyed, wiped out, obliterated. But this is not the case: a ghostly palimpsest of the drawing remains, its smudged traces tattooed into the paper’s surface. Rauschenberg’s erasure is thus not entirely successful, but then no erasure ever is. Every rubbing away, every pressure on the paper can only drive the drawing media deeper into the paper’s fibers” (2012, p. 183).

The erasure poems that are formed in Rauschenberg fashion are also in the vein of what Cooney deems “modernist” erasure that has little to do with challenging hierarchies which more properly aligns with the essence of Erased De Kooning since De Kooning gave permission (2014, p.22-23). There is a spirit of collaboration about the act of a modernist erasure poem and Rauschenberg’s erasure. The two concepts of challenging hierarchies and the act of erasing seem to go hand in hand. In many contexts erasing has a negative connotation, implying that there is a mistake that needs fixing or in the case of some graffiti, a message that needs to be sent or silenced. However, Cooney speaks to erasing in a different manner that echoes the idea of erasing as a collaboration or co-authorship.

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In an analysis of several renovation projects including the Universita Iuav du Venezia, Castelvecchio, the Kolumba Museum, and St. Peter’s Basilica, Federica Goffi echoes Cooney’s recognition of this collaborative spirit when fleshing out how erasure happens at a building scale. Goffi uses these renovation design efforts as primary examples of what she calls “built conservation” a means of restoration that recognizes the breadth of a building’s history while simultaneously considering its sustainability for the future (2016,p.27). This dual acknowledgment of the past and future is evident in the execution of the architectural drawings involved in the projects. For instance, Carlo Scarpa drew over photographs of the facade of the courtyard at Castelvecchio to design new openings just as Alfaro drew over Michelangelo’s plan for St. Peter’s Basilica. Both understood that this form of hybrid drawing, and multiple authorship welcomes the past into the present, thus bringing a fluidity to the building process that acknowledges the “historical fabric” of the building (2016,p.27).

These drawings and mode of designing emphasizes how the means of materiality and joinery are crucial elements involved in the proper conservation of a building which nods to the current structure, its physical history, and the projected design of the next phase of the building (Goffi, 2016).

Carlo Scarpa’s drawings and architectural designs are often intertwined with sites that are in a state of disrepair or ruin. In these instances, Scarpa embraces the opportunity to blend the past with the present both through his drawings and means of joinery. The drawings included in the Carlo Scarpa Architect: Intervening with History exhibition at the Canadian Centre for Architecture further illuminate how Scarpa’s marks often enveloped the entirety of the page and are as additive and subtractive as his architectural designs comprised of exposed layers of thought moments of erasing and rethinking. Barry Sampson describes Scarpa’s drawings as those “…of a builder, an artisan certainly, but more than that they describe human thought in motion” (1999, p.21). Scarpa’s drawing strategies directed correlate to how he handled building and designing within existing historical fabrics. Sampson describes Scarpa’s approach as, “He worked plastically, employing addition and subtraction like a sculptor, making cuts and incisions in solid volumes, layering bits and pieces to create the visual complexity of filigree” (1999, p.22).

Scarpa’s design strategies aligned with the ideas of modernism, but his distinctive design choices acknowledge “architecture as a discourse through time” and plays on the tension between old and new forms in many of his renovation efforts as well by using traditional techniques and materials that tie the past to the present (Sampson, 1999, p.22).

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The physical act of erasing can be subtle, or sculptural, such as in the case of Carlo Scarpa; however, the act of erasing can also be loud and simply too massive to ignore. Gordon Matta-Clark is known for his architectural operations resulting in large, brutal cut-outs through the structural elements of buildings (Alliez, 2016). These cut-outs are not as tame as the aforementioned Erased De Kooning Drawing, or even Jasper Johns’ Untitled (Cut, Tear, Scrape, Erase) which consisted of defined columns with such acts occurring under their respective titles (Droth, 2012). However, the content of Matta-Clark’s work is arguably comparable to paper erasures because he too challenges the popular notion that a drawing is defined by its marks rather than the paper substrate that supports the drawing matter.

By carving holes, cutting through corners, and dissecting buildings under the watch of the public eye and through the thorough documentation of his actions, he guides the viewer to understand what once existed by what is missing. His work is extreme and speaks to erasing as an act of demolition by systematically deconstructing the architecture which he acts upon. The perforations are arguably “architectural” in nature and are acts of “unbuilding” (Alliez, 2016, pp.317-318).

His acts of cutting and dissecting buildings which consequently expose the bones of the core structural elements are not only acts of erasing in themselves, in which something is removed to make room for something else, but often a better understanding of the strata of the building is gained in the process of his work. This is especially evident in his walls and floors series (Fig. 1, 2) which are removed from their original envelope to showcase their surfaces which contain remnants of the ebb and flow of mark making over the course of a building’s lifetime (Alliez, 2016).

These images of Matta-Clark’s work, Bronx Floor and Conical Intersect demonstrate his iconic cut-outs which rely on the contextualization of the built structure and guides the viewer towards a better understanding of an erasure as a celebration of what once was. These erasures specifically speak to a controlled state of demolition.

GORDON MATTA CLARK


Littlefield describes this form of erasure by erosion as “the presence of the absence,” as architectural poetry that is key to the “spirit of a place,” as described in the Quebec Declaration of 2008 (2016, p.18,p.11):

“Spirit of place is defined as the tangible (buildings, sites, landscapes, routes, objects) and the intangible elements (memories, narratives, written documents, rituals, festivals, traditional knowledges, values, textures, colors, odors, etc.), that is to say the physical and the spiritual elements that give meaning, value, emotion and mystery to a place. Rather than separate spirit from the place, the intangible from the tangible, and consider them as opposed to each other, we have investigated the many ways in which the two interact and mutually construct one another...Considered as a relational concept, spirit of place takes on a plural and dynamic character, capable of possessing multiple meanings and singularities, of changing through time, and of belonging to different groups” (as cited in ICOMOS, 2008, p.2).
Ruins are the transition from a building’s life into its afterlife, and according to Jeanette Bicknell, all buildings are fated to be ghosts. The journey to the afterlife is either purposeful or accidental demolition. The destruction of a building can be the result of various motivating factors of either a singular or collective nature and sometimes deemed necessary by the government. Regardless of the motives, architectural ghosts haunt the present built environment either physically, intellectually, or emotionally. Arguably the most haunting architectural ghosts are the ones that existed during the era of photography, such as the Crystal Palace, the Tacoma Narrows Bridge, Richard Serra’s Tilted Arc, and the World Trade Center. Like photography, specific structures link to cultural events, religious beliefs, or personal experiences. These relationships implicate the ghost into the fabric of history and affects the power of its memory; moreover, the strength of the appreciation for the building during its existence and after its demise affects the longevity of its haunt.

Bicknell discerns an “architectural ghost” from a ruin by the quantity of remnants left behind after a building is destroyed. If only an imprint in the ground or a pile of indiscernible rubble remains, and the only indicator of its former existence is a memorial plaque, then it is considered a ghost. However, if the remains are substantial enough to imagine the structure’s previous existence, then it is a ruin (2014, p. 435).

The adaptability of a building throughout time also largely accounts for its existence in the future; moreover, its adaptability is a pivotal deciding factor of the building’s demolition or continuation. To form an appreciation for architectural ghosts one should look to blueprints, photographs, paintings, and other recorded accounts to fill in the physical and historical void. This “imaginative work” is a gateway to understanding the standing architecture presently in existence as well as the fallen (Bicknell, 2014, p.437). Carolyn Korsmeyer speaks to similar ideas concerning ruins in her article The Triumph of Time: Romanticism Redux, published alongside Bicknell’s article in the Journal of Aesthetics & Art Criticism. She states that buildings in decline are often fated to be used as storage lockers, mined for useful building materials, and are commonly perceived as roadblocks to progress until they are eventually dismantled completely to make way for something new.

Contrastingly, ruins are revered for their temporalized mystery and value and consequently are left standing. Korsmeyer explores the defining features of a “ruin” in relation to buildings in states of disrepair and the passage of time. She carves ruins and damaged buildings into two different categories by stating that a ruin does not “swiftly repair” while damaged buildings often welcome restoration and a potential for reuse (2014, p.429). She also distinguishes a ruin from rubble by declaring that a ruin only becomes a ruin after time has passed therefore, a ruin cannot be the acute remains of a destructive act because it is defined by its continual existence long after the destruction has occurred.

She further builds on this idea by coupling an inherent historical and aesthetic value with the concept of ‘ruins’ (Korsmeyer, 2014, p.428). According to Korsmeyer, aesthetic value and historical value differ because a perceived aesthetic value is the result of “external properties of objects that appeal to the senses and the imagination” while historic value is defined by external facts including the ruin’s place within the context of social, artistic, and technological placement in relation to time and place. Aesthetic value is understood by the senses while historical value is only understood through learned knowledge (Korsmeyer, 2014, pp.429-430). Korsmeyer speaks to the romanticized notion of a ruin by commenting on aesthetic values rooted primarily in the senses of touch and sight as explained by art historian Alois Riegl. Riegl separates historical value from “age-value” which “stands itself directly through visual perception and appeals directly to our emotions” (as cited in Rieg, n.d., p.33). She further explains that the apprehension of a ruin is in direct relation to the imagination, and the mind’s tendency to want to fill the void of an absence.
One instance of a more modern take on how erasure happened at a building scale and within an interior environment is a series of buildings in Marfa, Texas designed by Donald Judd in the 1970s. Judd restored and converted the former Fort D. A. Russell, once used for military purposes during World War II, and a variety of other existing buildings into artistic studios with gallery spaces to house long-term installations of his own artwork and those of his contemporaries, as well as distinct eating, sleeping, and living quarters. Collectively, these buildings constitute what is known as the Chinati Foundation and offer an intersection of art and architecture with a nod to the historical fabric of the buildings involved.

Judd’s renovations speak directly to his understanding of objects, architecture, and interior design as both an architect and artist. The Chinati Foundation is consequently a unique opportunity for visitors to understand the direct link between artworks and the spaces they occupy. Based on his writings in Arts Magazine, Andrew Mead deduces that Judd’s intention was to create environments for viewing art that strayed from unfavorable museum installations, public displays, and gallery exhibitions. Instead, Judd aimed to create environments for contemporary art that were permanent and existed with “strict measure…Otherwise art is only show and monkey business” (Mead, 1997, p. 32). In his approach to the renovations Judd uses cues from existing architectural details. These details include replacing original garage door openings with “full height aluminum-framed windows (fig. 1), each exactly quartered by a single mullion and transom” (Mead, 1997, p. 33). With these existing details as a base, Judd tightened the design by employing a strong sense of symmetry coupled with a strong central and counter axis to move the viewer through the space.

Judd enacted large operations of change but did not fully erase the original buildings he operated on in Marfa, Texas. His tactics were both subtractive and additive. For instance, he removed slab roofs to build large barrel-vaulted ones correspondingly doubling the volume of the interior spaces (fig. 1). He also removed brick partition walls to exhibit his metallic box installations (fig. 3). However, he often left vestiges of the original buildings such as the case of the Arena building where Judd retained and worked around the existing strips of concrete that supported a wood floor when the building was used as a gymnasium before it was covered in sand to support the program of an indoor horse riding arena (fig. 3). He also left visible stains from where equipment once rested and markings from Germans when the sheds housed POWs during World War II.
According to an interview conducted by Richard Shiff with Jasper Johns in 2005 which discusses the defining differences between painting and drawing, Johns states, “The materials of painting usually allow one to cover what is on the canvas with more of those materials. But in drawing, a point is reached, beyond which no addition can correct what is present. An eraser, thought of in time, might have helped.” (2012, p.161)

This statement suggests that while a drawing is largely defined by its physical limitations. When thinking of erasure at the building scale, and more specifically with interior environments in mind, the approach to the physical material should be treated like drawing rather than a painting. Logistically, one can only fit so much in a space and eventually something must be lost in order for something else to be gained. This approach also aids in the prevention of the built environment from entering the afterlife as an architectural ghost. Erasing can lead to collaboration and elevate interior spaces to more relevant purposes for present and future use. Erasing isn’t always a subtractive act, it is a chance to move forward and build a better built environment. Erasing defines what is seen and unseen, and decides what is crucial to the story being told.

**CONCLUSIONS**

**fig. 1**  Clay repairs of the Cappella Palatina, Palermo, Italy. Photo courtesy of the author

**fig. 2** Peeling wallpaper in an abandoned house. [Credit: https://www.flickr.com/photos/brianmacd/3522882704/in/]

**fig. 3** Parquet flooring at the Accademia di Belle Arti Rosario, Siracusa, Italy. Photo courtesy of the author
These topics serve a dual purpose. They are discussed at length in my research and their relevance as prominent precedent studies are discussed in the following pages.
This iconic piece of art is the result of the erasure of a drawing originally composed by Willem de Kooning and erased by Robert Rauschenberg. After he was granted the explicit permission, Rauschenberg spent weeks and approximately forty erasers attempting to create a drawing entirely by the act of erasing. The result is the creation of both an authentic de Kooning and an authentic Rauschenberg. Rauschenberg’s Erased de Kooning Drawing speaks to ideas of intent, authenticity, authorship, and materiality. Although this concept of erasure happens at a drawing scale, its ideologies can be applied at multiple scales.

Rauschenberg’s Erased de Kooning Drawing has tangential ties to many disciplines and has been a constant in my research. It is the anchor in my thinking and perception towards the concept of erasure. According to Rauschenberg, one cannot erase one’s own work. This is applicable to erasure when dealing with interiors because during renovation, rehabilitation, adaptive reuse, and other conservation efforts the architect or interior designer is more often confronted with a structure or environment that was designed by someone else and then either erased to a certain degree by a separate party, a catastrophic event, or simply the passage of time.

Another important factor of erasure is intent, and Rauschenberg’s work directly addresses intent by the artists’ drive and forethought to create a drawing entirely by the act of erasing. This isn’t to say that erasure cannot happen naturally, but when intent is involved in the erasure process that indicates the involvement of people and conscious thought, therefore, Rauschenberg’s erasure is relative to erasing by the human hand and not by the hand of nature and time which lack intent. This erasure is crucial to visually defining the act of erasure within the realms of fine arts and design, and so I believe it to be necessary in understanding how to apply the principles of erasure to the design of an interior environment.
Gordon Matta-Clark dabbled in a wide range of conceptual and performative art during his short but impactful artistic career. Works such as "Conical Intersects" (fig. 4), involving extreme geometric perforations of a large sixteenth century building in Paris, "Walls/Wallspaper" which depicts remnants of interior walls exposed during demolition and illustrates Matta-Clark’s interest in the passage of time and expose the raw structure of the buildings. Another series like "Walls/Wallspaper" (fig. 2) is one of his first architectural interventions, "Bronx Floors" (fig. 3), which involved carving four-foot square cutouts from the floors of abandoned buildings in the Bronx which encapsulate the material from the finished floor to the boards and beams packaged below the finished floor. His work draws on the materiality of the site and the grandeur of architecture to challenge the viewers perception of the built environment. His aggressive gouging and cutting erases portions of buildings to reveal the bones of the structures he operates on (Smith, 2018).

This precedent is critical because it deals with multiple degrees of erasure, both additive and subtractive, within the built environment and speaks to how the process of demolition interacts with interior environments and engages the viewer.
The buildings that comprise Judd’s Chinati Foundation in Marfa, Texas are an intersection between the physical display of artwork and the portrayal of the physical history of the architecture they inhabit. Judd’s alteration to the existing artillery shed roof which called for the exchange of slab roof structure for a barrel vaulted roof (Fig. 1) speaks to the need to create larger volumes of space and light in his thesis building, the Virginia Commonwealth University West Hospital. As it exists now, the West Hospital is a stacked high rise building with ceiling heights consistently measuring at eight feet. In order to elevate the space and make it suitable for a large collective studio it is critical to cut through existing floors to form double volume spaces, similarly to how Judd doubled the ceiling height with the addition of vaulted ceiling construction.

This precedent also speaks to both the central programmatic needs of my thesis as a artist studio (Fig. 2, 3) as well as the conceptual ideas surrounding erasure. Judd’s attitude towards renovation as an implementation of strategies which support partial erasures rather than total demolition, or a complete erasures, also makes this a strong precedent to further support my thesis research. Rather than gutting my thesis building completely, my aim is to celebrate the physical remnants of the structures in a way that honors the physical story of the hospital while creating spaces that make the interior environment more relevant for both present and future use.
Anish Kapoor’s studio space consists of six South London industrial units in various states of repair. Kapoor brought on Caseyfierro to renovate the spaces to bring them up to code and make the interior environments more conducive for Kapoor’s tendency to work at a large scale. Therefore, distinct spaces were made for each activity of work and medium. During the renovations, Caseyfierro consciously incorporated the building’s industrial past as well as the narrative of Kapoor’s existence in the space over the span of two decades. By removing the saw-tooth roof of Studio IV–Studio VI, flattening the roof, and installing three-meter high Profilit glazing panels one can see the skeletal shadow of newly installed steel structural supports that serve as a means to suspend and move larger sculptural works behind the glass.

Caseyfierro made some drastic changes to meet the programmatic needs of housing large sculptural works, an entertaining and reception space, as well as working studios. For instance, in the renovation of one unit, a former dairy, half of the first level was removed to align with the clerestory windows and to create a nine-meter high gallery space. Other significant alterations made to suit Kapoor’s large-scale works included installing all light fixtures flush with the ceilings and soffits so to not hinder movement throughout the space and the reinforcement of partition walls to bear the load of heavier wall-hung artwork.

The approach to this studio renovation is of interest as a precedent due to the mindful nods to the past and the present physical history of the building and the direct parallel in program as a studio space. However, the most intriguing notion in the building are the wall cuts which provide views from the second level to the ground level (fig. 2). This exploration of watching others make while also working on one’s own creative work is something that speaks to both erasure and the process of making.
Malva Carnilivari designed the original building and in 1943 it fell victim to bombings which left the arcade and loggia on the south facing side of the courtyard. In the courtyard Scarpa employed joints inscribed in the plaster of three walls of the courtyard to organize the planes into large rectangular compartments to highlight the irregularities of the historic windows (fig. 1,3). This design decision both showcases a historic architectural moment and utilizes the methodology of modern design to emphatically point to the architectural elements as objects deserving of attention equal to the admiration given to the original paintings housed in the museum proper.

Scarpa handles the renovation of the Palazzo Abatellis similarly to his renovation at Castelvecchio. This precedent simply further articulates Scarpa’s mastery of materiality, joinery, and the marriage of old and new. Visiting the Palazzo Abatellis this past May was a pivotal point that sparked my personal interest and thought towards ruin, material layers within both the built environment and the world of fine art, gallery display, and most importantly my perception of erasure. The paintings on display visually encapsulate erasure just as much as the building structure. The axial organization of the art museum (fig. 4) and the viewer’s physical and visual movement in the space is also of interest to me when thinking of how to design gallery spaces within a building shaped like a Maltese cross pre-packaged with a strong sense of symmetry and axes. This precedent speaks to both the driving concept of erasure, organization of interiors, and the display of art.


fig. 2. Sketch of the courtyard at Palazzo Abatellis (left) and interior gallery space (right) Palermo, Sicily, 2018. Photo


Concept Statement

For something to be erased it must first be created. Consequently, physical erasures are narrative and often only recognizable when contextualized. Whether articulated by an act of subtraction or by an addition, the act of erasing does not negate but rather celebrates a process: a story.

Additive study
- pencil + newsprint

Subtractive study
- white color pencil + black paper

Text

ERASE

ERASE

ERASE

ERASE

ERASE

ERASE

ERASE

ERASE

ERASE

ERASE

ERASE

ERASE

ERASE

ERASE

ERASE

ERASE

ERASE
subtractive
erase - to rub or scrape out (something, such as written, painted, or engraved letters)

additive
palimpsest - writing material (such as a parchment or tablet) used one or more times after earlier writing has been erased
pentimento - a reappearance in a painting of an original drawn or painted element which was eventually painted over by the artist

subtractive study
basswood

additive study
marker + text by allen ginsberg

subtractive study
cardboard

additive study
magazine clippings, glue

subtractive study
wrapping paper, acetone

additive study
watercolor

subtractive study
cork, basswood, + ink
1. **INDIVIDUAL STUDIOS**

It’s important to provide a specific sense of place within a larger community, so these studio spaces provide semi-private with the ability to be fully private with the closing of a door. These individualized spaces promote a sense of authorship and belonging within the collective studio setting.

2. **COMMUNAL STUDIO**

This is where the collaboration and magic happens. The group studio space is a public space defined by large shared working surfaces, lockers for further storage needs that are not met in the individual studio. This collaborative space is where critique happens during the process of making. The larger more public work area also has the capacity to host visitors or to be used as an event space if the studio puts on a show or fundraising event.

3. **GALLERY SPACES**

This is where artists can have process or final pin-ups and installations to share their work with themselves, their peers, and the public. It is where formal and informal exhibitions and events occur to showcase the artists’ work.

4. **WOOD SHOP**

The artists in residence may be designers, photographers, painters, printmakers, or work with a range of mediums. Each discipline requires specific equipment. Although the studio will not come equipped with all of the necessary equipment for each artist’s needs, it will have the basic large equipment and hand tools to be shared amongst the artist collective.

5. **CAFE/PUBLIC STAIR**

A communal open-plan cafe will allow people to eat, talk, and collaborate in an environment separate but near the communal and individual studio spaces. It is a space for taking a break from making. The large public-stair at the center of the cafe is a prompt to both explore the other levels of the collective studio as well as sit and converse on the stairs. It should be full of natural daylight to help artists recharge their minds and bodies.

6. **SCRAP ROOM**

A space that gives uninhibited permission to destroy something is liberating and sometimes necessary. To design a room for the erasing or recycling of art seems natural. It manifests as a scrap pile that the whole studio has access to along with full consent to use what they find in the piles to incorporate into their own artwork. It becomes a recycle bin of ideas as well as materials.

7. **RETAIL**

A retail environment to showcase and sell selected works created by the artists who work within the collective studio space. This space provides another platform outside of a traditional gallery exhibition space to share the creative product of the studio.

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### CRITERIA MATRIX

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CRITERIA MATRIX + ADIACENCIES</th>
<th>INDIVIDUAL STUDIOS</th>
<th>COMMUNAL STUDIO</th>
<th>GALLERY SPACES</th>
<th>WOOD SHOP</th>
<th>CAFE/PUBLIC STAIR</th>
<th>SCRAP ROOM</th>
<th>RETAIL</th>
<th>ADMINISTRATION</th>
<th>RESTROOMS</th>
<th>HOUSEKEEPING</th>
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<td>Y</td>
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| **UTILITY SINKS**              | Y                   | Y               | Y             | Y         | Y                | Y          | Y     | Y              | Y        | Y           |
| **COMMUNAL EQUIP.**            |                     |                 |               |           |                  |            |       |                | Y        |             |
| **PROJECTOR**                  |                     |                 |               |           |                  |            |       |                | N        |             |
| **SAWS, DRILLS, SANDERS, ETC** |                     |                 |               |           |                  |            |       |                | Y        |             |
| **REF., MICROWAVE, TOASTER**   |                     |                 |               |           |                  |            |       |                | Y        |             |
| **CASH WRAP**                  |                     |                 |               |           |                  |            |       |                | Y        |             |
GRAPHIC PROGRAM

- Individual Studio
- Retail
- Cafe/Public Stair
- Communal Studio
- Scrap Room
- Wood Shop
- Gallery Space
- Reception
- Administration

25,538 SF
TOTAL NET

5,913 SF
2,520 SF
1,080 SF
1,775 SF
2,500 SF
3,375 SF
1,000 SF
600 SF
500 SF
500 SF
2,500 SF
500 SF
600 SF
500 SF
The introduction of a collective studio space in a building that was once a thriving medical treatment and teaching facility, but is now predominantly populated by office spaces, is an opportunity to embrace the identity of a university that is defined by an arts campus and a medical campus. The physical process of erasure is ingrained in the creative process, but it is also a common denominator of medical procedures. Whether it is taking an old painting and masking it with gesso to start fresh or replacing a failing organ with a new one to regain one’s health, the process of erasure is one of new beginnings. Physical erasure impacts buildings, bodies, and works of art.
VCU Health West Hospital is positioned in the heart of the Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) Medical College of Virginia (MCV) campus. It is also part of the downtown district defined by high-rise buildings, historic landmarks, and stone architecture. The neighboring districts include the arts district, business district, and the residential neighborhoods of Church Hill and Jackson Ward.

The boundaries of the building’s exterior are outlined by pedestrian walkways, an alley to the East that separates it from the neighboring high rise, 12th Street to the West, and E. Broad Street to the South; the defining path that creates a boundary line between the hospital and the Virginia State Capitol campus. Another important boundary to note is Interstate 95 which separates the hospital’s respective district from the neighborhood of Church Hill.

The defining paths pertinent to understanding the position of the hospital within the MCV campus and downtown are the pedestrian walkways, alleyways, and the wide span of E. Broad Street. It is also important to note its proximity to the entry ramp to I-95, the railway that circulates through the nearby Main Street Station, and the newly developed Pulse bus path.

The relevant exterior nodes include the ground level pedestrian plazas at the entrances. These plazas are formed by the voids of the overall rectangular footprint defined by the Maltese cross shaped plan.

Some notable landmarks include the nearby bus stops flanking E. Broad Street as well as the centralized median bus stops included in the downtown Pulse bus route. Other landmarks include City Hall and Monumental Church.
At one time considered “the most modern of its kind in America,” the Medical College of Virginia West Hospital, now VCU Health West Hospital, was originally used as a hospital and medical teaching facility (Kapsidelis, 2017). It is still owned and operated by Virginia Commonwealth University to the ends of office spaces, an Infectious Disease Clinic, a Nutrition Clinic, and Psychiatric floor. Its antiquated building type and state of disuse were cause for its inclusion in the demolition schedule for the 2004 VCU Master Plan; however, local preservationists fought to keep the medical tower standing due to its historical merit and the hospital is now included for use in the 2018 VCU Master Plan (Kapsidelis, 2017).

On October 5, 1938 Dr. W.T. Sanger, the President of the Virginia Medical College, ceremonially broke ground for the new construction. The building was built around an existing granite memorial erected in 1837 to commemorate the site of the ratification of the United States Constitution. At the time of its construction the West Hospital is noted as the “largest steel supported building in the state.” (Kapsidelis, 2017)
“REDLINES

The physical story of a building is a compilation of the original construction, periodic alterations, and its eventual demolition. It is an ongoing dialogue with the building and the people who inhabit it. This reactionary existence of creating and erasing parallels the design development process of creating architectural drawings. Multiple iterations of plans, elevations, and sections are made to tell the story of how the building should be built and this story is redlined (edited) until its construction. In this manner, the redlines become the language of erasure during the design process. The redlines used in these design drawings are reflective of this idea and are used to highlight the moments of erasure on the floors, walls, and ceilings.”
The communal studio on the fifteenth floor is a double height space made possible by a floor and ceiling cut made through the existing sixteenth floor. This cut promotes views from the communal studio to the balcony above and vice versa. The balcony parallels another set of individual studios and provides a breakup space for artists to collaborate and peer down into the communal studio. This visual fluidity in the space provides an opportunity for artists to watch other artists work in hopes that they can be motivational fuel and feed each other’s creative processes.
The wall that divides the individual studios from the neighboring communal studio space is an existing wall. During the new construction phase where strategic erasures were made, the existing wall was dropped to eight feet and 3form colored Varia Ethenesin panels were inserted to provide reveals which physically connect the individual and communal spaces. The Varia Ethenesin panels are strategically placed parallel to the windows and mirror the width of said windows to allow for more light in both spaces. These reveals are physically subtractive but additive because they allow for a greater influx of daylighting and visual connectivity.
There are fifteen individual studios available to rent within this studio collective ranging from private to semi-private. The studio layouts are catered towards creatives who work with a wide range of media and the variation in square footage and work surface real estate in each studio is reflective of that. For instance, the smaller more narrow studios that don’t allow for a large work table are catered toward graphic designers or artists who work at a smaller scale and don’t necessarily need as much space to create. In contrast, the larger studios that have the capacity to house a work bench, a large work surface, storage and seating options are catered towards artists who work at a larger scale. These larger spaces can be shared by creative duo’s or small groups that want to work within a larger collective but still have autonomy over their workspace.

The studios are all partitioned by existing walls, with erasures and alterations where necessary such as the dropped walls and strategic glazing. Each studio has access to direct daylight with high rise views of downtown Richmond. The studios that are semi-private due to the large interior glass windows, allow for additional views to public spaces within the studio collective, such as the communal studio where artists can work collaboratively and host workshops and events.
The public stair is situated at the center of the dining area. It is a grand gesture to welcomes all artists, visitors, and employees of the VCU West Hospital to connect. It is immediately visible when one enters the fifteenth level elevator lobby and prompts visitors to explore the remaining three floors of the collective studio.

The dining area encompasses a small café and grab ‘n’ go snacks. Although the program does not support a large kitchen, it still invites artists and guests to come to this wing to take a break from the studios and socialize in a more social and public setting.
The VCU West Hospital is structurally supported by a series of steel beams and columns. They act as the pilasters that both guide the user through the space and keep the building standing. By partially erasing the existing drywall which encases the I-beams, a reveal occurs which welcomes the user to interact with the bones of the building. This physical moment of erasure exposes what one could consider the original narrative of the building. The steel structure cannot be erased, but it can be celebrated. By transforming the columns into a light fixture that both sheds light at the reveal and extends the form of the I-beam as a pillar of light, the columns become more purposeful with the intent to guide the user through the space.
The communal wood shop houses large stationary equipment as well as smaller table mounted equipment which cater to a wide range of creative needs. There are large work surfaces and expansive work benches with pegboards canvasing the walls to store shared hand tools. The scrap room situated at the center of the wood shop is a space which allows for artists to donate unwanted materials and art. Artists are invited to use this scrap room as a recycle center and are welcomed to use other artists’ neglected items for their own creative endeavors.

Above the wood shop is a balcony gallery. This space provides an opportunity for guests to have an untraditional gallery experience where they can simultaneously view exhibitions in the gallery space and peer of the balcony’s edge to watch artists work in the wood shop. This architectural gesture is an echo of the idea of a surgical gallery where medical students can watch surgical procedures to further their understanding of surgical practices.
SECTION DETAIL 2 BALCONY GALLERY GLASS FLOOR REVEAL

LAMINATED GLASS, FLUSH WITH FLOOR

WOOD SHOP PEG WALL AND SCRAP ROOM
The entire seventeenth and eighteenth levels are dedicated to gallery space for the artists to showcase their work and curate public exhibitions. The partition walls in the galleries are existing walls that were strategically left standing. The treatment of the concrete floors reveal where walls were demolished during new construction. The balcony gallery on the sixteenth level follows these same rules with some exceptions. The balcony barrier is created by truncating existing walls to a height of three feet so that gallery patrons can also have a view to the artists working in the wood shop below. This is a play on the idea of a surgical gallery and challenges the concept of a traditional art gallery.