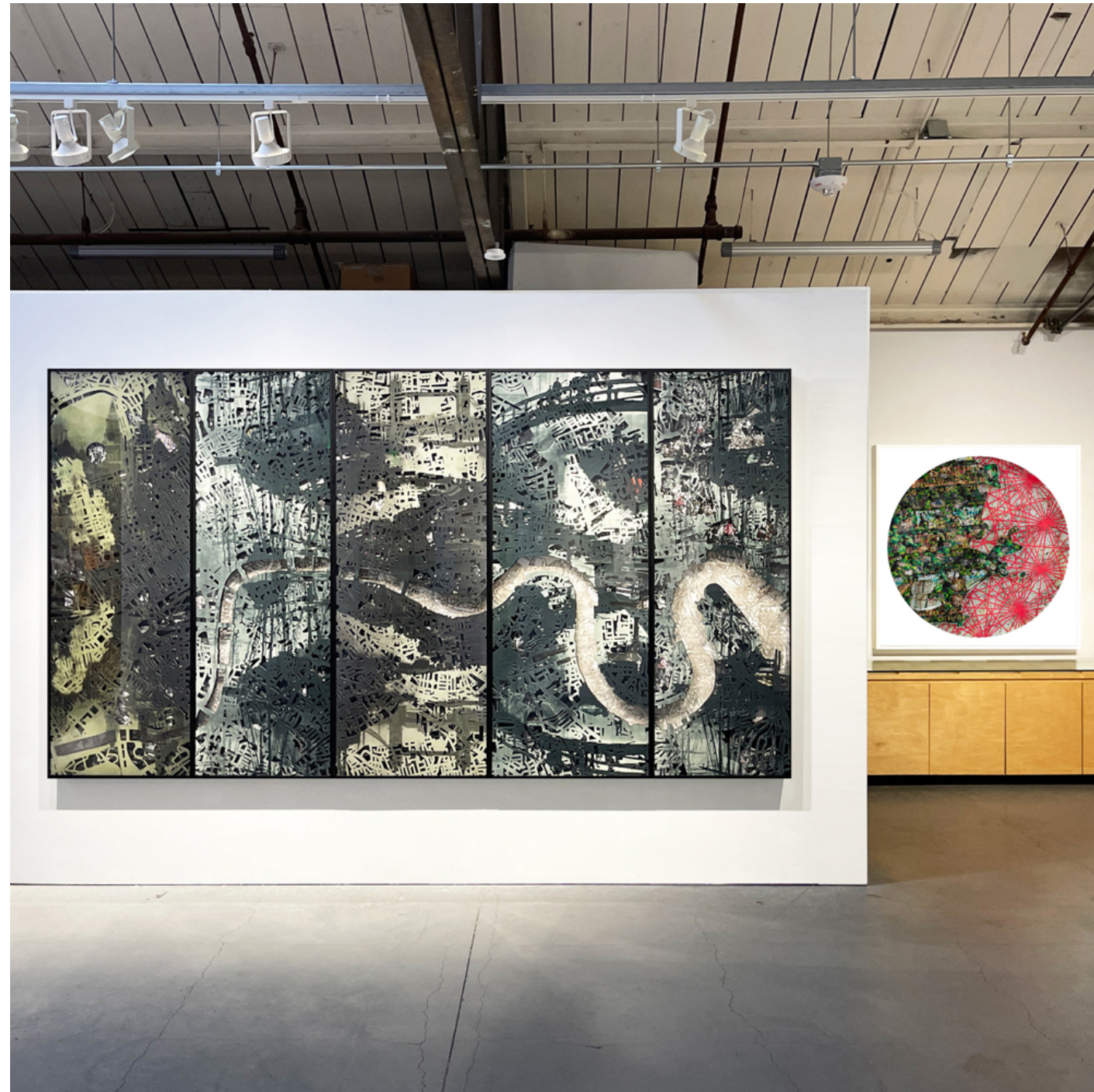


Matthew Picton

A Seeker's Paradise

Nancy Toomey Fine Art | 1275 Minnesota Street, San Francisco
Exhibition Catalog | February 1 to March 16, 2024





In the exhibition *A Seeker's Paradise*, a collection of exquisitely layered and hand-cut mixed media works, artist Matthew Picton traces the evolution of cities and empires through an approach that integrates history and politics with art and architecture. Picton creates an awareness of historical patterns and repetitions through pieces that reference and mirror each other. The legendary descent into the splendid decadence of Ancient Rome is juxtaposed with the equally excessive later years of the commercial empires of Venice and London. And the shorter lived worlds of Mobutu Sese Seko's Zaire are placed next to the extravagance of the self-exiled Portuguese royal court in Rio de Janeiro. The show also includes works that reference Vatican City and Mecca, two of the world's most significant religious power centers and pilgrimage sites that are the spiritual focal points for billions of people seeking a connection with the eternal.

Through his highly original visual narrative, Picton explores how leaders and their followers often seek to establish some sort of paradise on earth but often end up in disillusionment, leaving room for the next generation. The artist makes connections between how rulers seek to embellish and demonstrate their magnificence through art, costume, ceremony, and flamboyant parade. He aims to present how power is made visible and architecture bears witness and provides the symbols of the afterlife, authority, paradise, and the keys to eternity. Picton delves into the history of a multitude of charismatic visionaries, prophets, conquerors, ideologues, and leaders attempting to either fulfill a personal quest or to organize others to create their dream. His works reference patriarchal figures who had imagined themselves to have a connection with the destiny of history and thought themselves in charge of the betterment of their nation or humankind.





“The greatest and most sublime creations of religious architecture contain both the aspirations for the divine and have also been associated with repression and control,” says Picton. “Human contemplation of the divine has produced works of art that have the transcendent harmony of Michelangelo and Bernini’s Saint Peter’s Basilica in Rome, and the sublime perfection of the great ceiling of the Sheik Lotfollah mosque in Isfahan designed by Sheikh Bahai. In the art of these places there existed a harmony in contrast to the discordant nature of human society.”

Matthew Picton studied politics and history at the London School of Economics at the end of the 1970s. Picton has been a full time artist since 1996 and has exhibited his work since 1998. He has had numerous solo shows in San Francisco, Los Angeles, London, New York, Portland, and Miami. His work is included in the collections of The Jordan Schnitzer Museum, Crocker Art Museum in Sacramento, The De Young Museum, The Portland Art Museum, The Herbert Art Museum in Coventry, UK, and the Stadt Museum, Dresden. His commissioned artworks are in the collections of Facebook in Seattle, Google in Redwood City, The Chan Zuckerberg Foundation, The Address Hotel in Dubai, and The Schnitzer Collection in Portland, among others. He has also been the recipient of the Jurors Grand prize in The Portland Biennial and was awarded a Henry Moore purchase grant. His work has been reviewed in a great many publications, such as Artforum, Art Week, Art News, ARTillery, San Francisco Chronicle, and Los Angeles Times. Matthew Picton lives and works with his wife, fellow British artist, Claire Burbridge in Ashland, Oregon.

A Seeker's Paradise is Matthew Picton's second solo exhibition at Nancy Toomey Fine Art.





Matthew Picton

St. Peter's Basilica, 2023

Archival digital photographs, Yupo paper, pins

80 x 60 x 3 inches (framed)

St. Peter's Basilica is considered one of the greatest buildings of the Renaissance and one of the holiest sites for 1.3 billion Catholics, and has resonated as a place of spiritual power for the last 15 centuries. Matthew Picton has greatly enlarged an architectural drawing by Paul Letarouilly from the early 1800s and combined it with religious figures from Durer's woodcuts created around 1500. Picton has cut through this template an archival photograph of St. Peter's viewed from the Tiber river. At the rear of the piece are the enlarged figures of actors Anita Ekberg and Marcello Mastroianni whose illuminated forms were projected upon the Trevi Fountain from the Fellini film *La Dolce Vita*. At one point in the film Marcello's character pursues the unattainable Ekberg up inside the dome of St. Peter's. The film illustrates, in some ways, the changing relation of modern Italy to religion, the film stars looming larger and supplanting old identifications.



Matthew Picton

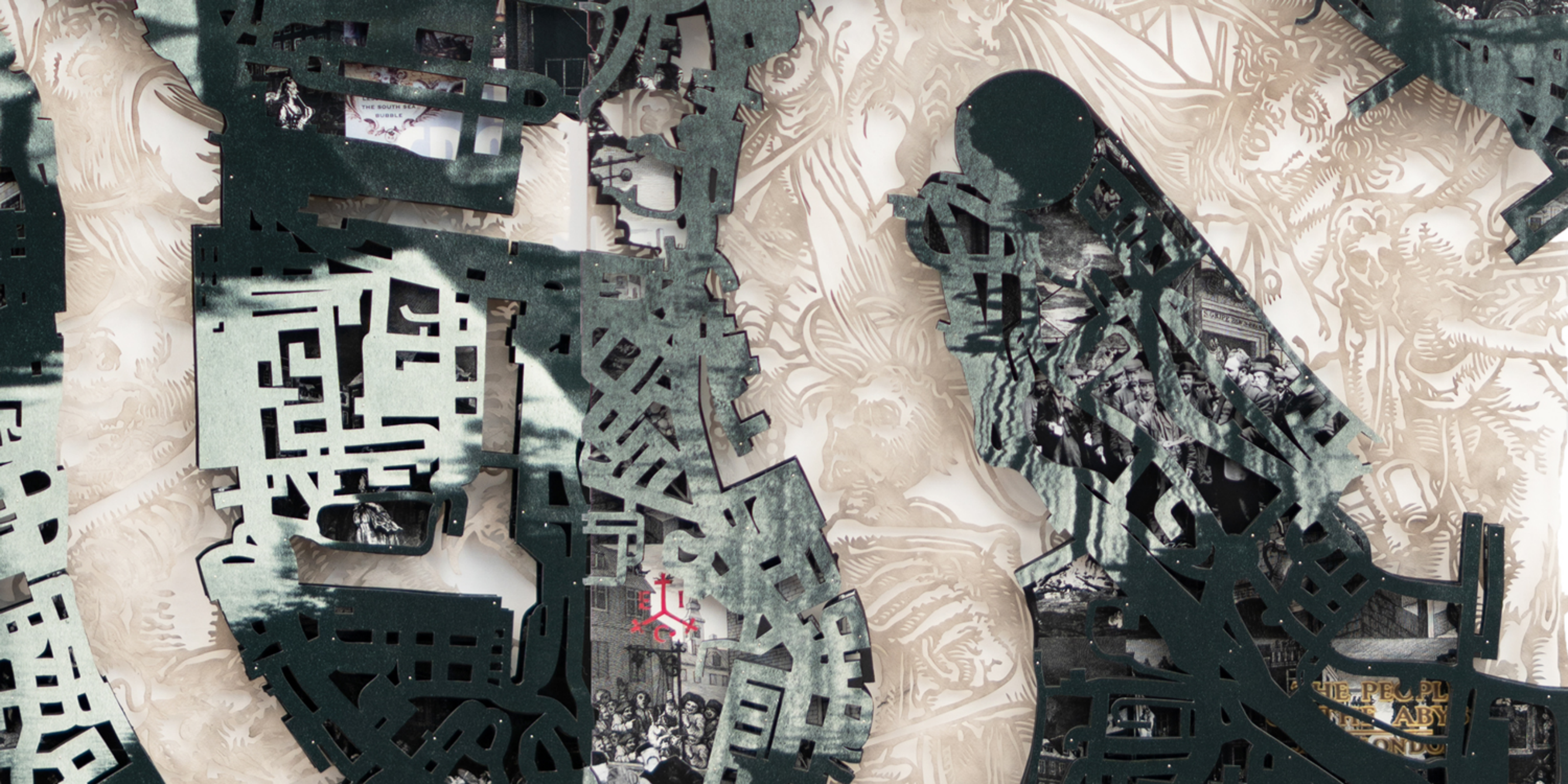
The City of London (1700 to 1900), 2020

Archival photographs, cut paper, pins, foam board

72 x 137 x 3 inches (framed)



In this work Matthew Picton draws inspiration partly from William Dalrymple's book *The Anarchy* (2019), a history of British India and the East India Company in the 18th and 19th centuries. A century ago, the River Thames served as a polluted conduit for the British Empire's naval and commercial exploits. Long after the abolition of the slave and opium trade, the City of London was financing the nation. Perhaps Joseph Conrad's real *Heart of Darkness* lay there in the city, not the Congolese jungle of his 1899 novel. London's East India Company, led by Robert Clive, caused the Bengal famine of 1770, repeated under Winston Churchill in 1943. The British Empire, encompassing almost two-thirds of the Earth's surface, grew throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. Forming the imagery in this sculpture, Picton is also inspired by Charles Dickens and William Hogarth's vivid portrayals of the dark civilization along the Thames. Other sources include Jack London's 1903 book *The People of the Abyss*—an account of life in the East End of London in 1902—and Alvin Langdon Coburn's 1900s portraits of London, which Picton enlarges with street networks to cover the surface.



Matthew Picton

Rio de Janeiro, "The City of God," 2017

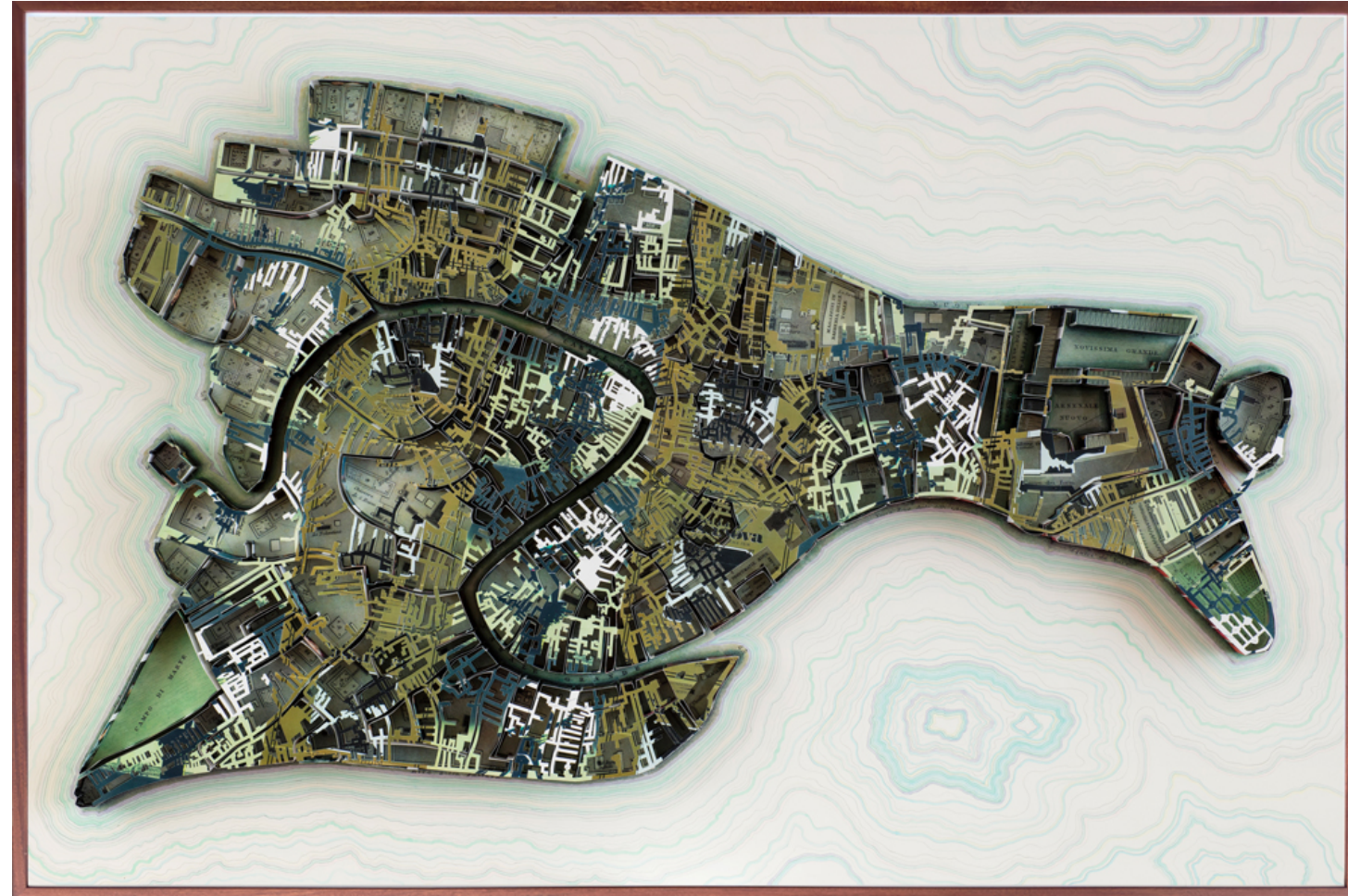
Archival prints and photographs, pencils, film posters, pins

53 x 53 x 4 inches (framed)



Famed for its stunning setting, exuberant carnival, and notorious crime, Rio De Janeiro serves as the inspiration for Mathew Picton's sculpture, in which he delves into its dark historical underpinnings and fantastical modern-day narratives. In 1808, amidst Napoleon's threat, the entire Portuguese royal court, led by Prince Regent Joao VI, sailed to Rio, ruling the Empire until 1821. Picton sources French artist Jean Baptiste Debret's hand-colored engravings from that period which vividly capture Rio's flamboyance and brutality, and earned the city the moniker "Tropical Versailles." Picton integrates into his sculpture images from Debret's depictions, including the departure of Queen Carlota and scenes from early 19th-century society. A layer of greenery symbolizes modern carnival parades, while the street network, cut from posters from the 2002 film *The City of God*, mirrors the gang dynamics of modern-day favelas. The artist also uses images of surrounding waters from Lopo Homem's 1519 map of the Portuguese fleet, and red Rhumb lines to denote compass directions, echoing the Portolan charts widely used in past centuries.





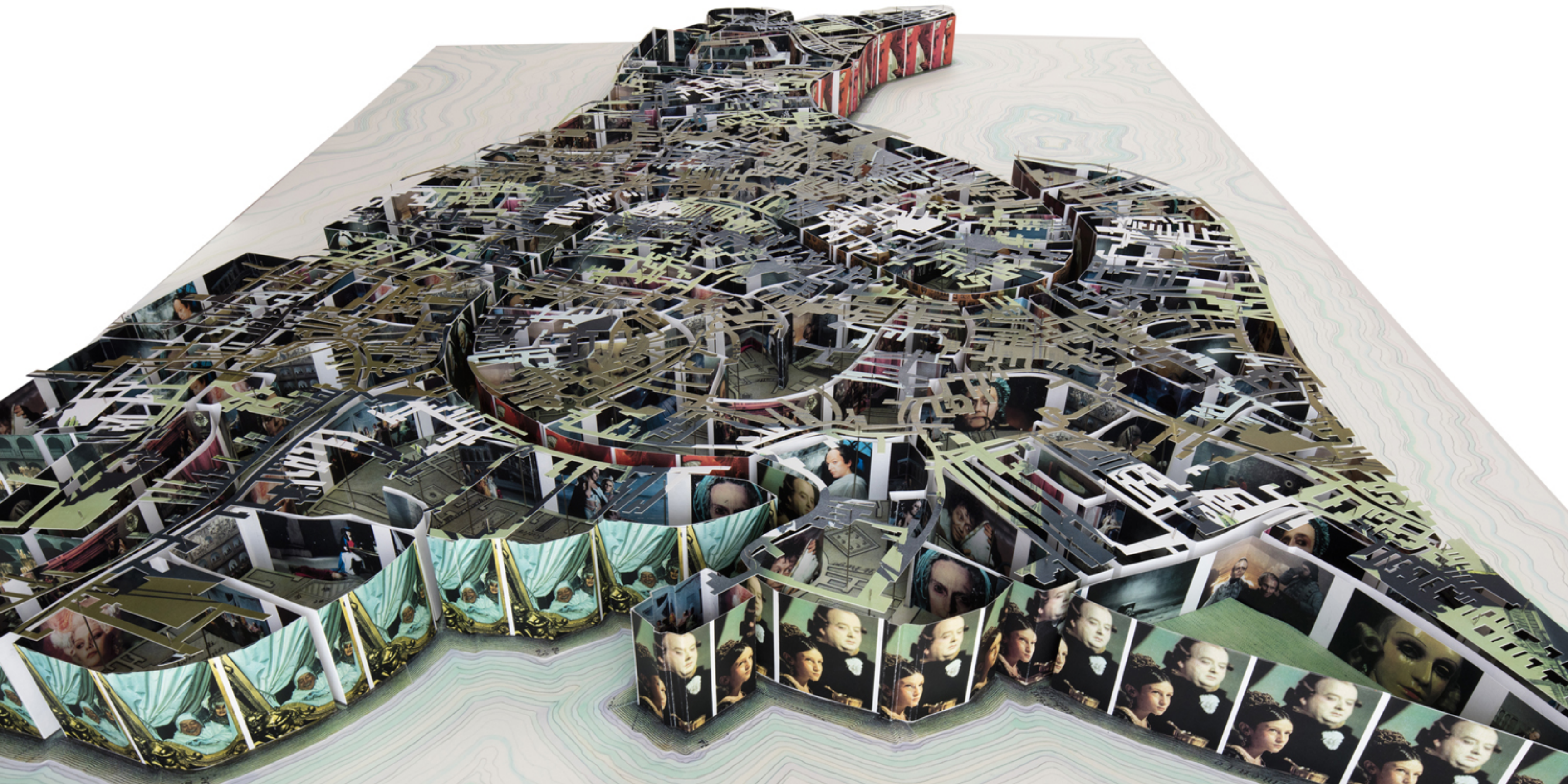
Matthew Picton

Venice, "Casanova," 2016

Archival boards, inks, photographs and film posters

54 x 81 x 5.5 inches (framed)

In his Venice sculpture, Matthew Picton incorporates imagery from Fellini's 1976 film *Casanova* with the street network derived from posters created for the movie, while an antique 19th-century map forms the base. Giacomo Casanova, born in 1725, known for his seductive prowess and complex affairs, was also a gifted writer, intellectual, gambler, dandy, preacher, spy, alchemist, and adventurer. His life mirrored the opulence and decline of Venice's golden age, transforming from the pleasure capital of Europe to Napoleon's conquest. Fellini's film, set in a surreal Venice, captures a phantasmagoric carnivalesque world, starting with the famed carnival and masked ball. Casanova, depicted as an intellectual figure of the Enlightenment, reflects the corrupted decadence of Venetian society facing Napoleon's sweep. Fellini's film portrays Casanova's downfall through the lenses of unrequited love, sex, and death, juxtaposing aristocratic opulence with Rabelaisian depictions of humanity.





Matthew Picton

Mecca, 2022

Archival photographs, Yupo paper, Copic inks

56 x 56 x 3 inches (framed)

In this piece Matthew Picton is inspired by the site of the world's largest annual pilgrimage and the revered birthplace of Muhammad and where the Quran was believed to have been revealed to Muhammad. Five times every day a quarter of the world faces Mecca to pray. Inside the great Mosque lies the Ka'bah, believed to have been built by Abraham and Ismael. The dense and detailed imagery upon the surface of Picton's work contains multiple views of Mecca during the Hajj, the surface pattern is that of the great ceiling in the Sunni Mosque, Sheik Lotfollah in Isfahan, Iran, widely considered one of the most beautiful works of Islamic art. The radiating pattern of the ceiling serves as a vehicle for transcendence and the contemplation of eternity that the interlocking patterns and forms of Islamic art create. Below the surface layer are the shadowy forms of those at prayer during the Hajj, centered in circular form around the Ka'bah.



Matthew Picton

Forum, 2023

Archival digital prints and photographs

48 x 82 x 3 inches (framed)



Matthew Picton created this diptych from a drawing, of unknown authorship, reconstructing the Ancient Roman Forum. The image depicted in the drawing is of the persecution of the Christians, events that transpired during the first three centuries after Christ in Rome. Mathew Picton cuts through the template of this drawing with combined imagery of the Coliseum and Brueghel's painting *The Tower of Babel* (c. 1563). Brueghel was inspired to create this work from a visit to the Coliseum. In some upper sections of the lower layer, one can see glimpses of the Raphael painting *The Vision of the Cross* (1520-1524) where Emperor Constantine is said to have had the vision of the cross prior to the Battle of the Milvian Bridge in 312 CE. This is considered a pivotal moment in history when the Roman Empire turned toward Christianity, which led to the establishment of Constantinople and the Eastern Orthodox Church.





Matthew Picton

Mobutu Sese Seko, Histories of the Congo River #1, 2018

Archival prints and photographs, pins, Yupo paper and inks

49 x 49 x 3 inches (framed)

In the 14th century, philosopher Ibn Khaldun observed, "Those who are conquered always want to imitate the conqueror in his main characteristics, in his clothing, his crafts, and in all his distinctive traits and customs." Drawing parallels between Mobutu Sese Seko and King Leopold II of Belgium, in this sculpture Matthew Picton depicts Mobutu's one-man rule, establishment of Congo as his personal fiefdom, and total appropriation of the nation's wealth, reminiscent of Leopold's legacy. Crafted from excerpts of a 1970s graphic novel by Serge Michel, which offered an idealistic portrayal of early Mobutu years akin to propaganda, Picton's sculpture captures the legendary excesses of Mobutu's reign, including his "African Versailles" palace in Gbadolite. The lower layer reveals imagery from paintings by Congolese artists at independence, referencing the nation's aspirations with Patrice Lumumba--the first prime minister of the Democratic Republic of the Congo--portrayed as a cultural hero. Yet, shadowy photographs of King Leopold II of Belgium and the conspicuous absence of Lumumba's imagery highlight Mobutu's selective glorification.





Matthew Picton

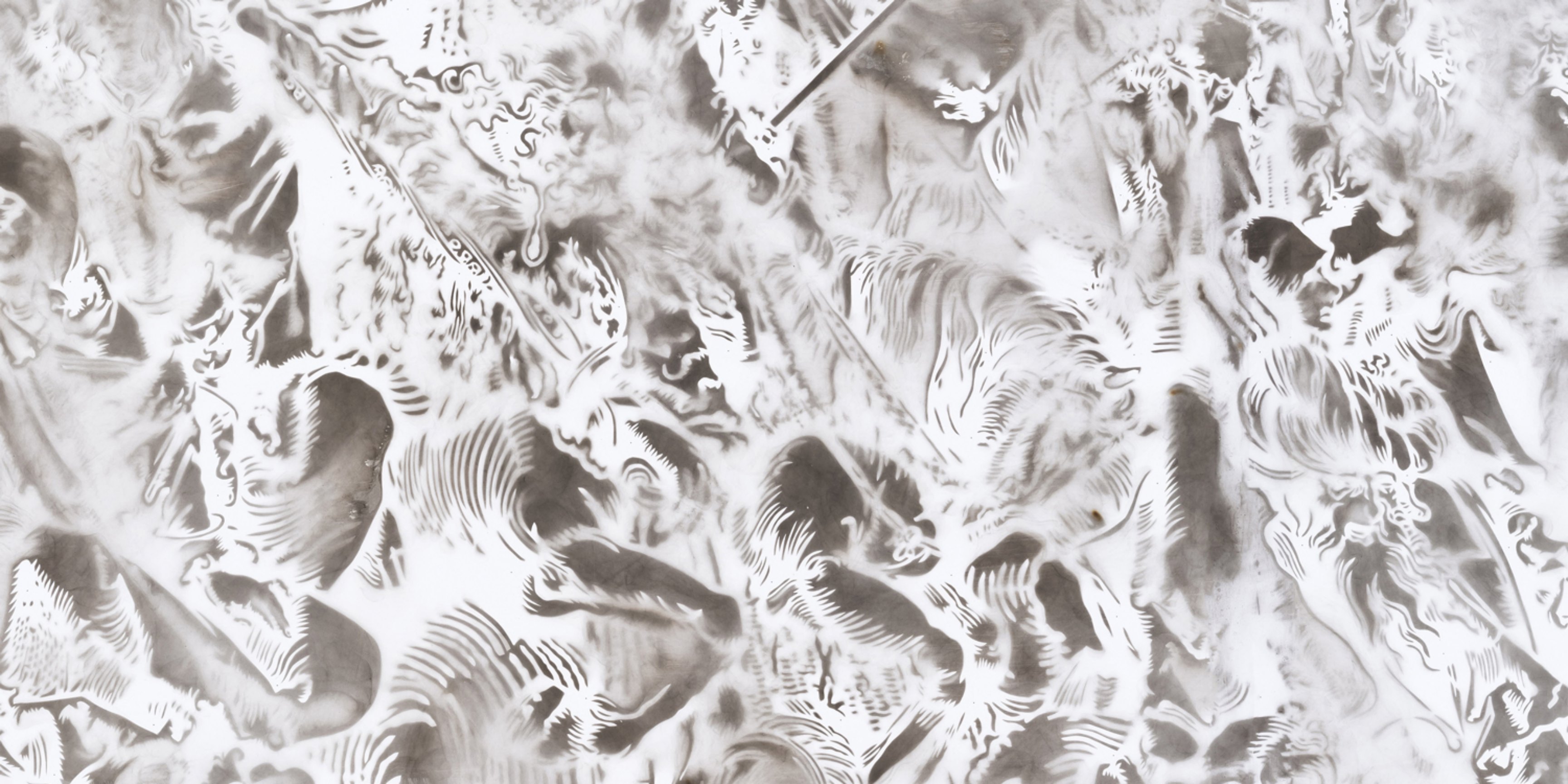
Tsunami, 2022

Archival digital print

42 x 42 x 2 inches (framed)

Edition of 5

In Matthew Picton's *Tsunami* the forms and figures of history are dissolved into a flood of phantoms, former kingdoms, empires, and religions washed away into insubstantial memories and ghosts. In the process of creating *The Well of Souls* an artwork about Jerusalem's Dome of The Rock and The Wailing Wall, a smoked imprint of the surface template was obtained. The resulting image was cleaned up in photoshop and an archival version was obtained.





Matthew Picton

Survivors Found, 2022

Archival prints

24 x 20 x 3 inches (framed)

Matthew Picton has cut through the front page of *The Wall Street Journal* with a tattoo from Siberian corrective camps in 1960. The middle layer is a *Financial Times* front page from February 26, 2022, cut through with a tattoo titled *A Warrior's Grin*, and the lower layer is a reverse copy of a front page from *The New York Times* combined with the tattoo of a criminal boss. Practically the whole of modern Russian history has been drawn on the bodies of Russian convicts. "As in a mirror, everything the country has gone through has been reflected in prison and camps life," said Russian artist Danzig Baldaev, who in 1948, after serving in the army in World War II, was ordered by the N.K.V.D. to work as a warden in the infamous Leningrad prison, Kresty, where he started drawing the tattoos of criminals. As filmmaker Andrei Tarkovsky prophetically wrote in 1986, "We have reached the point where.. the present has essentially merged with the future, in the sense that it contains all the preconditions for immanent disaster; we recognize this and yet can do nothing to stop it happening."

"All the News
That's Fit to Print"

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National Edition

Northern California: A mix of clouds
and sunshine. Highs in 50s in the
mountains to 70s in the Central Valley.
Rain and mountain snow tonight.
Weather map appears on Page B10.

Printed in the United States
\$3.00

Survivors Fought Winter Bitterness at Suffering Whens



Human Head Losses on Battlefield, Russian's Aim Missiles at Cities

The article is by Andrew F. Kra-
mer, Michael Schwartz and Eric
Nagourney.

KYIV, Ukraine — A day after a
Russian strike reduced to rubble a
theater in southern Ukraine
where hundreds of people had
been huddling for shelter, rescu-
ers wading through the debris —
even as Russian shells kept falling
— began pulling out survivors one
by one.

Adults and children are emerg-
ing "from there alive," Ukraine's
human rights ombudsman, Lyud-
mila Denisova, reported early
Thursday as the rescue effort con-
tinued at the Drama Theater

in an overnight address.
The rescue at the theater
came again fearsome back-
drop of thousands of civilian casu-
alties as Russia's war in Ukraine
taking heavy tolls on the battle-
field, Russian forces have increas-
ingly been dropping bombs and mis-
siles at cities and towns. Unable to
capture major cities, they are
looking to extend the toll
in a more vicious way.

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Matthew Picton

Suffering Widens, 2022

Archival prints

24 x 20 x 3 inches (framed)



PAVEL DOROSOV/ASSOCIATED PRESS

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