

TRACE

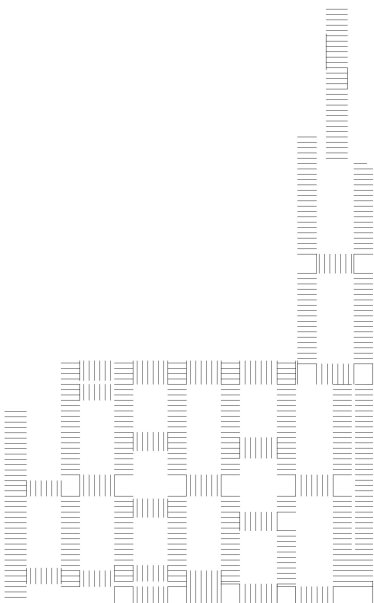
Design Project & Critical Reflection

Corinna Dean, Duarte Santo and Victoria Watson



This research explores questions of architectural scholarship through the medium of the architectural design project. The theme of the project is the Bankside air raid shelter that has become somewhat lost in the recent history of the area. We began by structuring the field of inquiry as a dialogue between three parties: 'design,' 'project' and 'critical reflection.' We did this as a message, a reminder and a positive encouragement to ourselves to constantly adjust and alter our processes of production and thinking as the inquiry proceeded.

The inquiry has already been formatted as an installation and shown in a gallery context as part of the London Festival of Architecture 2017 (<https://www.margarethowell.co.uk/news/arca/>). On that occasion we elected to separate out design and critical reflection as stand alone components within the project presentation. For Spaces of Tolerance we have taken the opportunity to reformat the work differently. Set out below is a visual essay that weaves together design, project and critical reflection into a single text.



Trace

a project by ARCA / Corinna Dean & Duarte Santo

ARCA has created two cast models of the World War II Air Raid Shelter situated below the Hopton Street Almshouses, Bankside, London. The Shelter is a little known piece of subterranean architecture and the models create a reminder of

Architecture, 'memory', bring
residential blocks.

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Scale 1:20

This model is a cast of a section of the actual retaining structure.

Critical Reflections

When ARCA told me about their plans to make a cast of the Bankside air raid shelter, because they wanted to draw attention to the lost history of the area, I immediately thought of Rachel Whitehead's piece *Untitled (Room 101)*. The piece was cast in 2003 and displayed for almost a year in the Italian Cast Court at the Victoria and Albert Museum. Just like the Bankside air raid shelter, *Untitled (Room 101)* has wartime connotations, one literary the other real. On the one hand referring to the torture chamber in George Orwell's novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, on the other to the actual room from which the piece was cast: Room 101 at Broadcasting House, supposedly the location of George Orwell's office when he worked for the Eastern Service during the Second World War.

ARCA's proposed title for their project, they called it *TRACE*, only reinforced the connection to Whitehead.

But as the project progressed the Whiteread reading became less convincing. Whiteread's work is often thought of as capturing a specific state of matter that would otherwise dissolve into the flux of time. The architects' 'hands-off' mode of working does not deal in specific states of matter, thus the open question of what it is 'Trace' traces seemed to me to be a truly beguiling feature of the work.

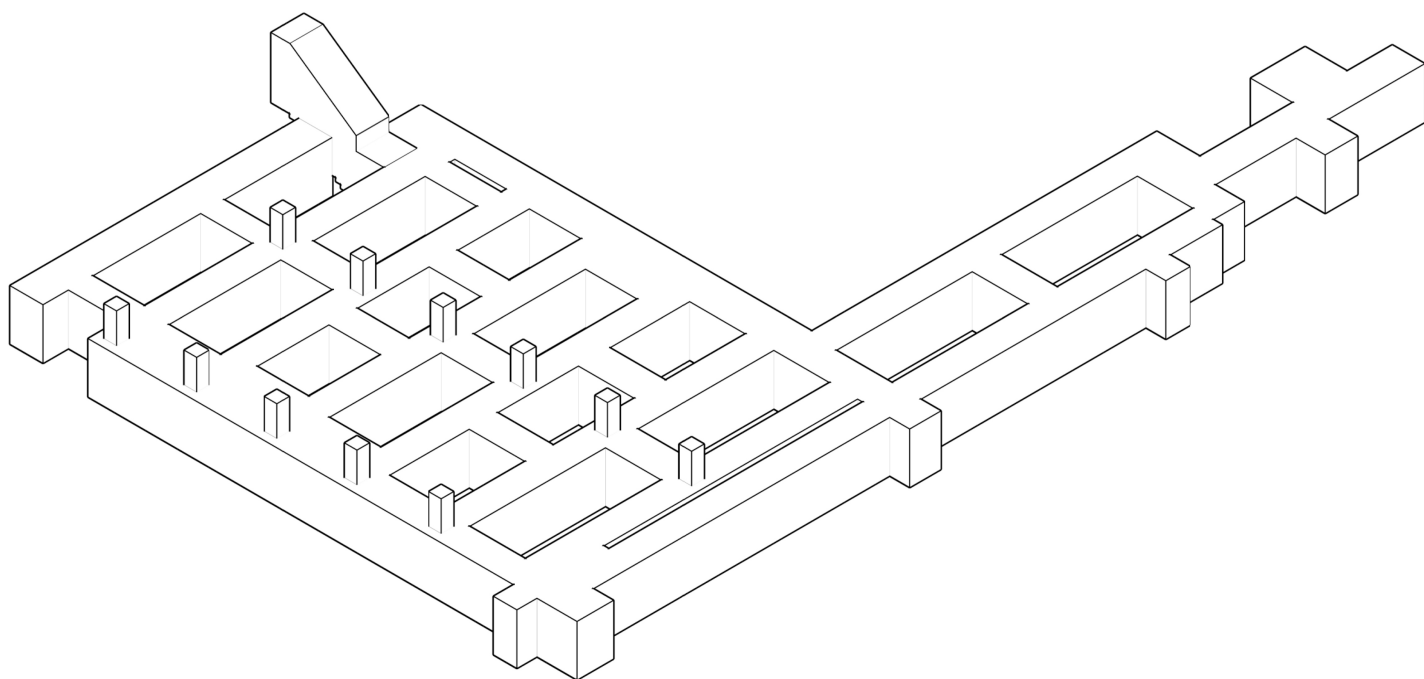


Anthony Vidler, in *Architecture and Anxiety*, first made the link between Whiteread's sculpture and architecture, where he associated Whitehead's casting with the plaster models of the Italian Modernist architect Luigi Moretti. In the early 1950s Moretti had wanted 'to illustrate what he saw as the history of different spatial types in architecture.' As Vidler explains, in order to do so Moretti made architectural models through a process of casting as solids what were in reality 'spatial voids.' The effect of the models was to make the spaces they revealed seem 'dense and impenetrable.' It seemed to me Moretti's manner of working, as described by Vidler, was much closer to what ARCA were planning for their Bankside project. Notice how Moretti's process works at an entirely different level of abstraction to that of Whiteread. Moretti worked in the architectural tradition of the formal model, by first reducing the subject space to a set of formal parameters. Whiteread's process has no intervening level of formal abstraction, she makes a direct imprint of the subject space. Whiteread's working process registers the subject space in a manner that is not unlike the way a foot-print or tyre-track is recorded in the damp earth, in mud or in sand.

And yet ARCA's project is not like Moretti's because they are not interested in revealing the spatial figure of the underground shelter per se. ARCA want to reveal a lost history, let's call it a memory, of Bankside as it used to be, before the developments that turned it from a locality into a venue and hub for the circulation of contemporary culture and art. In this respect it is interesting that Whitehead's work features as a star attraction amongst those circuits and that Herzog and de Meuron's winning image in their competition entry showed the Turbine Hall with curated art pieces situated in the space, one of which was by Whiteread.

Moretti's casts were of works of architecture with a long-standing reputation as works of historical importance, such as Hadrian's Villa, the Baroque churches of Borromini and Guarini, sequences of rooms in the Ducal Palace at Urbino. These days such places have been absorbed into the same kind of cultural circuitry that is facilitated and promoted by institutions like Tate Modern. ARCA on the other hand were proposing to cast a simple utilitarian structure of no architectural value, one whose primary interest for them lay in the fact it was below ground, thus invisible and had somehow managed to survive the accelerated development that had precipitated the rest of Bankside into the circuits of contemporary cultural production and consumption.

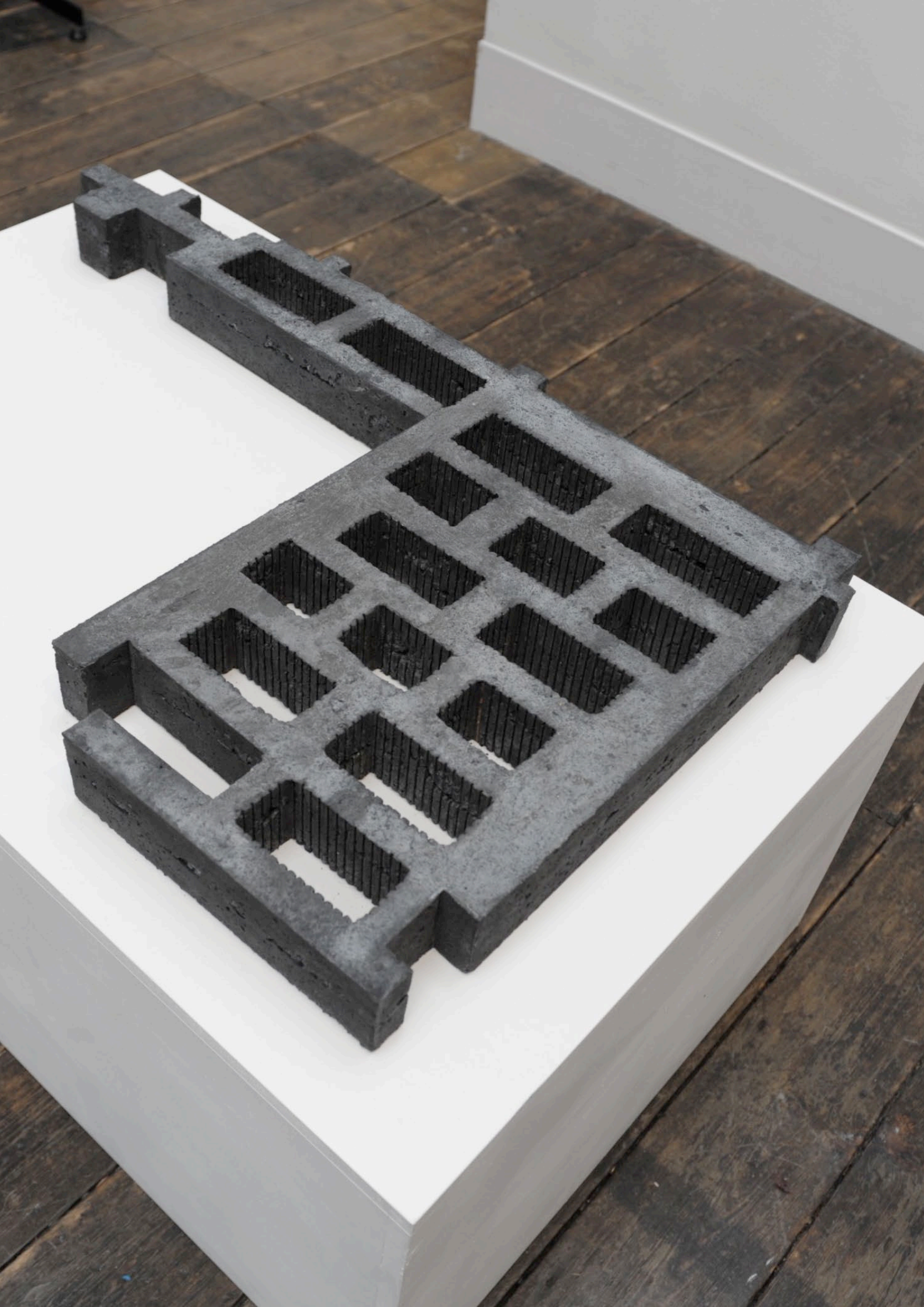




ARCA's work process involves at least three levels of abstraction: first they survey the subject space, second they build an electronic model based on the survey and, finally, they reproduce the electronic model in concrete, where it appears as an object both haptic and optic, awaiting installation in some appropriate venue, to be viewed by human subjects. As it turns out ARCA have so far made two models, not just one. The first is as they originally intended, it is cast in black concrete, in some sense the black responding to the darkness of the underground spaces and the materiality of the excavated soil. It is cast at a scale of 1:50 and it represents the full extent of the labyrinth of underground chambers. The second model, at the larger scale of 1:20, reproduces the texture of the walls and ceilings of the chambers. These had been formed out of a uniform concrete plank, replicated and laid vertically in the case of the walls, horizontally in the case of the ceiling and floors, an adaptation of dry dock construction. The system is simple and ingenious, the planks are evenly ribbed to form a 'U' shaped profile, thus they can be off-set and interlocked, rather like a zip and this is how the walls, ceilings and floors were set out and made to fit together on site.



Through their Bankside project ARCA have deployed architectural means to trace out a kind of architectural form-finding process in reverse, which is no doubt why they call the project TRACE. The architects have begun with a finished construction, a readymade, and worked backwards, unravelling the parameters of the built form and it is these symmetries, correspondences and materialities that are offered to the visitor in real space, having been cast as concrete forms.





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ARCA has created two cast models of the World War II Air Raid Shelter situated below the Hopton Street Almshouses, Bankside, London. The Shelter is a little known piece of subterranean architecture and the models create a reminder of London's recent industrial past, fast becoming forgotten in Bankside which was known for its concentration of small manufacturers.

The models show castings of the negative and volumetric space of the Shelter, which was built to protect the employees of the paper manufacturer, Amalgamated Press, which lay adjacent to the Power Stations's west façade, now the ramp leading into Tate Modern's Turbine Hall.

Trace is a poignant response to the theme of this year's London Festival of Architecture, 'memory', bringing attention to what lies beneath the modern residential blocks.

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ARCA say there is a third model in anticipation, I wonder if it will ever be realised and if so what aspect of the underground construction will it choose to model, what scale will it be and out of what materials will it be made, will it be a cast model or will it be formed in some other way?

Corina Dean is slkhsdj k as d a lsd a s d k as l d k a a s l k d a s l k d a s l f d k a s d a s d a s d k a l d k a d a s l d k a l d k l a s d k a l s d k l a s d k a l a s d k d d a l s a s l d k s a l d k a s d k a s a s d l k a s l d s a s a d l a s d k a s a s s a s s a s a s a s d l a s l d k l s d k a s l s a d a s d l k d a s d k a l s d k l a s d k l a s d a s k d a d k a s l k d a l s d k a s l d k a s k d a s d k l a s d s d k a a d k d.

Duarte Santo is slkhsdj k as d a lsd a s d k as l d k a a s l k d a s l k d a s l f d k a s d a s d a s d k a l d k a d a s l d k a l d k l a s d k a l s d k l a s d k a l a s d k d d a l s a s l d k s a l d k a s d k a s a s d l k a s l d s a s a d l a s d k a s a s s a s s a s a s a s d l a s l d k l s d k a s l s a d a s d l k d a s d k a l s d k l a s d k l a s d a s k d a d k a s l k d a l s d k a s l d k a s k d a s d k l a s d s d k a a d k d.

Victoria Watson is slkhsdj k as d a lsd a s d k as l d k a a s l k d a s l k d a s l f d k a s d a s d a s d k a l d k a d a s l d k a l d k l a s d k a l s d k l a s d k a l a s d k d d a l s a s l d k s a l d k a s d k a s a s d l k a s l d s a s a d l a s d k a s a s s a s s a s a s a s d l a s l d k l s d k a s l s a d a s d l k d a s d k a l s d k l a s d k l a s d a s k d a d k a s l k d a l s d k a s l d k a s k d a s d k l a s d s d k a a d k d.