

## **a fatal cycle**

Laurie Steer 2007

This exegesis is submitted to Auckland University of Technology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Art and Design.

## **Contents**

<b>Attestation of Authorship</b>	3
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	4
<b>Abstract</b>	5
<b>Declaration:</b> an introduction.	5
<b>Digging In:</b> the foundations.	6
<b>The Art of War:</b> historical contexts.	7
<b>Bad News:</b> observing the daily paper.	10
<b>Making War (Art):</b> methodologies, documentation and commentary.	12
• <b>Tactics:</b> methodological strategies.	12
• <b>The Battlefield:</b> issues of studio, site and installation space.	16
• <b>Operations:</b> what I did, how and why.	17
• <b>End Game:</b> after word.	44
<b>Table of Images</b>	47
<b>References</b>	51
<b>Appendices</b>	51



I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

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## Abstract

This art project focuses in a voyeuristic way on the fatality and futility of war. With its accompanying emotional responses; the aim is to reflect on these issues through a cyclical process of construction and destruction. The motivation for this research is to generate a personal and intimate understanding of the experience of war by exploring notions of helplessness and loss through art making processes. The research presumes war exists as a continuous fatal and futile cycle. Within this investigation fatality is defined as accepting the conditions of death, dying and disaster while also alluding to the philosophical concept of fate: futility is defined as pointless, hopeless or useless. Through methods of construction and destruction this project seeks to initiate alternate ways of emotionally processing, responding to, and understanding the experiences of war from a distance. This thesis is constituted as practice based artwork 80% accompanied by an exegesis 20%.

## Declaration: an introduction.

*"War inspires people to create in order to understand."*

Laura Brandon (2007, p.2).

This exegesis represents 20% of the research project and seeks to provide a record of the aims, focus, contexts, and methodologies directing and supporting this investigation. Through critical engagement, analysis and a chronology of related art making this document compliments the final practical work and assists the understanding of what the project is about, how I am responding to the issues and why.

Film documentation and commentary referred to in the text is available on DVD at the rear of this document. The DVD is standard format and sections can be watched by selecting the relevant chapter from the opening menu.

### **Digging In: the foundations.**

This research project defines war as described in the *Heinemann New Zealand Dictionary*: 'the use of armed forces in a conflict, especially between countries' (Orsman, 1989, p.1301). The specific focus is on people repetitively harming each other through warring actions and the presumed fatal futility of such endeavours. In his recent documentary *I Know I'm Not Alone*, American musician Michael Franti (2005) introduced the film by stating "after years of watching and reading about war in the Middle East I began to grow really frustrated with the news, hearing generals and politicians explaining the economic cost and the political cost of war without ever talking about the human cost of war..." The notion of a 'human cost of war', with its moral, ethical, spiritual, and economic implications is of particular interest to me. At the inception of this project I was unable to imagine or comprehend the horrific information I was receiving from newspapers about current war related events happening overseas. As a New Zealand war voyeur in a white middleclass urban position I felt ignorant of the issues being presented and powerless to intervene.

Within this research all notions of war are understood as having negative implications. This project assumes that war exists as a cyclical process of devastation and suffering and that this cycle of destruction is self-perpetuating and masochistic in nature. I have been exploring the possibility of emulating the futile and fatal cycle of war through art making because I do not want to experience these processes first hand. My final installation seeks to create a personal response to my frustrations while also offering an opportunity for others to reflect on my opinion of the cycle of war through an onsite experience.

## The Art of War

In her recent book *Art and War*, historian Laura Brandon (2007) suggests, “Any understanding or recognition of war-art presumes a prior knowledge of war culture that has underwritten its creation. War-art does not exist without war” (p.13). Brandon defines war-art as, “art shaped by war” or more specifically “permanent and impermanent art that may be propaganda, memorial, protest, and/or record” (p.3). The genre of war-art has developed over ten thousand years from the oldest known image, painted on rocks in Spain (c.8000-3000BC) to modern day representations of the conflict in Afghanistan. I have drawn reference from several artists whose specific work has similarities to my own project. The artists include: Francisco Goya, Pablo Picasso, and Lida Abdul. Their mediums (print making, painting, and film) are less important than the aims and focus of their work, which responds to, and attempts to understand, the experience of war from a safe distance (i.e. not being personally involved or in danger) while also discussing notions of perspective, bias and turbulence.

Francisco Goya’s (1863) collection of etchings *The Disasters of War* have become a seminal document within the genre of war-art and sets the philosophical tone for this exploration. Goya’s grim, grainy images depict the atrocities suffered by the Spanish nationalist insurrection and supporting populace as they fought to break from French rule during the Spanish Peninsula War of 1808. The actions and events portrayed by Goya in the nineteenth century have continued in current wars. One need only modernise the uniforms and weaponry of the characters portrayed to see the continuing relevance of his imagery. In the preface to the second edition of *The Disasters of War* (1967) American art critic Bernard Berenson reflected upon experiencing the works first hand at the Prado museum in 1932: “Here in Goya is the beginning of our modern anarchy” (p.1). A Spaniard himself, Goya only witnessed small parts of the conflict and relied on information from friends and contemporaries to inform his dramatic compositions. Goya’s inevitable patriotism and perspective created a bias in his narration of the war. Brandon describes Goya as an “onlooker and observer of war” (p.32), a position which is also shared by this researcher. Unlike many painters of war before him, Goya did not exalt a victor but chronicled a continuing cycle of horror, violence and suffering from the view of the loser and/or

helpless witness. Goya created an opinionated visual record of the miseries suffered by the Spanish (refer Fig. 1). His initial objective may have been to create a sense of despondent protest but it is difficult to really know. After the war he rose to significant prominence and wealth as a court painter yet never exhibited his collection of eighty-one prints. Perhaps he considered the work private or was constrained by political elements. The fact that Goya's extensive version of events was not published until after his death only intensifies the mystery.



Fig. 1. Francisco Goya, *Great Deeds - Against the Dead!*, c.1810-1813, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

Pablo Picasso's painting *Guernica* (1937) explores notions of protest, security and position by publicly commenting on a perceived experience of war from a safe distance. *Guernica* (refer Fig 2), was created in protest against the bombing of a small town in northern Spain by the German air force during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). The large, monotone painting specifically attempted to elucidate Germany's armed support of the Nationalist insurrection and coral international sympathy for the defending Republican government. Picasso was a Spanish Republican and experienced the war through accounts from his friends and the media. He commented on his perception of events from self-imposed exile in the security of his Paris studio. Picasso was initially invited to contribute an artwork for exhibition during the war to the (Spanish Pavilion) *Paris International Exposition* in 1937. Thus before any painting began he was already aware of the potential to influence a large public audience. At the time of exhibition Picasso enjoyed considerable fame and this, combined with the prestigious public institution where the work was exhibited, allowed him to project his opinion and perspective to a broad international audience.



Fig. 2. Pablo Picasso, *Guernica*, 1937, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid, Spain, Bridgeman Art Library © Picasso Estate/SODRAC (2006).

Afghani artist Lida Abdul's digital video projection *War Games (What I Saw)* (2006) explores ideas of destruction and memory. The dramatic video exhibited in *Turbulence*, the Third Auckland Triennial 2007 is set in Afghanistan and portrays several men on horse back trying unsuccessfully to tear down a ruined brick structure (refer Fig. 3). *Turbulence* curator Victoria Lynn (2007) describes the imagery as "transfixing, and strange [suggesting] that one is not sure if it is truth, fiction,

intervention or imagination at work" (p.22). Intrinsic to any possible reading is the work's inclusion in an exhibition titled *Turbulence*. Lynn describes this notion of turbulence as a state of "unsettledness [or] a condition that is always changing" (p.19). She suggests that artists responding to these notions "do not have one answer. When they resist, they explore moments of survival and resilience" (p.20). Australian academic Nikos Papastergiadis (2007) suggests a possible narrative for Abdul's work as "facing the consequences of actions taken by combatants as they seek to obliterate the enemy" (p.46). Continuing this theme, Papastergiadis concludes "Abdul resists the monumentalising of the trauma of war [imagining] that she wants to reclaim the normality of everyday life, rather than conjure some version of the epic resistance or resign herself to the cruel fate of nature's cycle" (p.46). Perhaps this is the case. What is clear is that Abdul is trying to communicate a sense of unsettledness within a specific event over time.



Fig. 3. Lida Abdul, *War Games (What I Saw)*, 2006, (Still) 16mm film transferred to DVD, Giorgio Persano Gallery, Turin.

### **Bad News: observing the daily paper.**

As a habitual war voyeur my preferred source of information is daily newspapers, the reading of which has become a ritual. I am attracted to the format of short stories inter-spliced with engaging imagery because it allows me to consume or disregard articles at leisure. In recent years I have been following stories of war (declared or otherwise) in the Middle East, Africa, Eastern Europe, South America and Asia and this has acted as a catalyst to this research art project. My daily

paper of choice is *The New Zealand Herald (national edition)* because it is the largest publication of its kind in New Zealand and offers (in my experience) the broadest opinion of international affairs. This possibility of consuming the obscene from a secure domestic position is not a new idea. In the early 1860's the French poet Charles Baudelaire commented in his journal,

It is impossible to glance through any newspaper, no matter what the day, the month or the year, without finding on every line the most frightful traces of human perversity... Every newspaper, from the first line to the last, is nothing but a tissue of horrors. Wars, crimes, thefts, lecheries, tortures, and the evil deeds of princes, of nations, of private individuals: an orgy of universal atrocity. And it is with this loathsome appetizer that civilized man daily washes down his morn repast (Baudelaire, 1990, p.91).

In *Manufacturing Consent: the Political Economy of Mass Media*, (1998) American economist Edward S. Herman and linguist Noam Chomsky advance a theory entitled "The Propaganda Model" (p.11). When interviewed by reporter Emma Brockes for *The Guardian* newspaper, Chomsky stated that mainstream media is undermined by a "systematic bias in terms of structural economic causes rather than a conspiracy of people" (*The greatest intellectual?*, 2005). This suggests



that news material is significantly constrained by issues of media ownership, media funding, news sources and advertising. As such, ownership implies the possibility of a personal or political stance, which enforces a particular ideological position. Advertising funds the majority of large newspapers (including *The New Zealand Herald*) making it economically undesirable to present an image of a product or service within the publication that conflicts with its position, stated or otherwise. Newspapers are seldom required to provide an accurate source for articles presented. This lack of regulation and reliance upon the honesty or opinion of the reporter/interviewee can result in the dubious portrayal of information. These issues fundamentally shape the war related information I receive through daily readings.

While this project acknowledges these underlying biases, the focus of the research reflects more on notions of voyeurism afforded to readers of newspapers than arguments surrounding authenticity. In *Regarding the Pain of Others* American essayist and critic Susan Sontag (2003) considers the relationship of voyeurism and imagery and challenges its subsequent affect on viewers by suggesting that:

There is shame as well as shock in looking at the close-up of a real horror. Perhaps the only people with the right to look at images of suffering are those who could do something to alleviate it – say, the surgeons at the military hospital where the photograph was taken – or those who could learn from it. The rest of us are voyeurs, whether or not we mean to be. In each instance, the gruesome invites us to be either spectators or cowards, unable to look. Those with the stomach to look are playing a role authorized by many glorious depictions of suffering. Torment, a canonical subject in art, is often represented in painting as a spectacle, something being watched (or ignored) by other people. The implication is: no, it cannot be stopped – and the mingling of inattentive with attentive onlookers underscores this (Sontag, 2003, p.42).

I am one of the powerless voyeurs Sontag describes. Reading war related articles in *The New Zealand Herald* initiated this research project. The newspaper allowed me to dubiously witness the cycle of war in a dated, daily format and it was this reoccurring chronology of events that first captured my interest and inspired the need for a response.

## **Making War (Art)**

### **Tactics: methodological strategies.**

This research is supported by reflective, constructive, and heuristic methodologies. These methodological strategies direct the inquiry and inform the practical process of making artefacts. These processes seek to provide an improved understanding of my experience of war by considering and responding to the aims, focus and issues previously discussed, using contemplative, experimental art making.

All areas of this research project are supported by a sustained reflective practice, which I define as the focused deliberate consideration of existing and emerging information, actions and events. This filtering system assists decision-making by refining my myriad of thoughts into usable and relevant categories that in turn direct the physical act of art making. Through sustained observation and contemplation the practice constantly questions the validity of reactions and responses by relating them back to the initial aims and focus of this investigation.

My constructive methods are a series of processes that allow me to explore representations of key ideas through art making. These processes activate my reflective methodology by creating tangible structures, objects and installations. This tangibility allows me to experience a close physical relationship with the developing project through deliberate actions such as collecting, building and destroying materials and/or artifacts. This in turn provides a sense of ownership by physically entangling me with the wider theoretical concepts of fatality, futility, tragedy and loss.

Experimenting with emerging ideas through processes of trial and error heuristically, assists investigations within this research. The constant testing and trialing allows me to make discoveries and formulate responses that encourage continual momentum. This methodological process can be seen effectively in the making of early experimental artifacts which explored the potential of drawing, object making and installation. The following selection of images briefly discusses earlier works that significantly impacted upon this project (refer Figs 4-9.).



Fig. 4. Laurie Steer, Detail, *I'm on Fire*, Porcelain and glaze, 20 x 10cm variable, March 2006.

Aims: To figuratively portray a cycle of human suffering.

Reflective comment: I made thirty-three small human figures depicting various states of burning and positioned them in a circle. [Connotations of the human form and fire excessively narrowed possible readings.] While they clearly portrayed human suffering, there was no context to link them to war.

Developments: It got me started and was the first artwork I made that related to the emerging project.



Fig. 5. Laurie Steer, *Untitled*, A3 Photocopies on clothing bins, Dimensions variable, July 2006.

Aims: To explore the possibilities of temporary public installation and the repetition of imagery and text.

Reflective comment: The work exuded a sense of protest that I did not want. The photocopies were statement orientated and their public presentation and content was reminiscent of propaganda i.e. posters and pamphlets.

Developments: It made me consider the future possibilities of temporal installation.

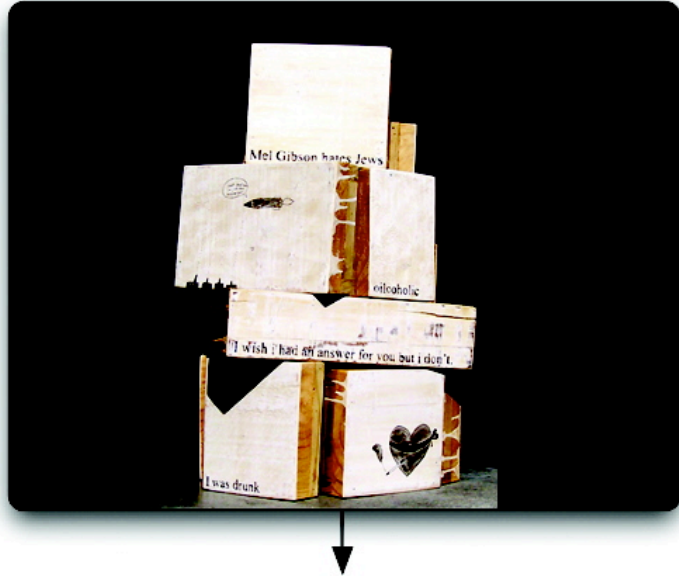


Fig. 6. Laurie Steer, *Untitled*, Ink and acrylic on fire wood, 1.4 x 0.5m variable, October 2006.

Aims: To explore applying imagery and text to material that was destined for destruction.

Reflective comment: I found the tension caused by the fragile construction of the blocks was more engaging and had huge potential for expansion to explore more experimental issues within a work.

Developments: This work initiated notions of construction.

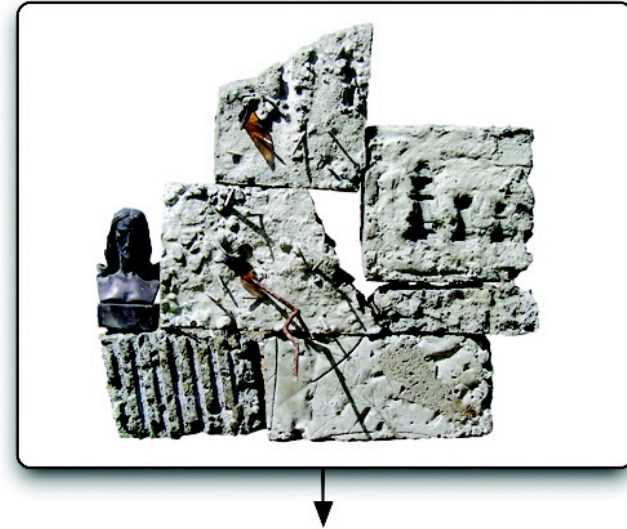


Fig. 7. Laurie Steer, *Untitled*, Embossed concrete, nails and glass, 60 x 50cm variable, December 2006.

Aims: To explore crafting objects that visually reference urban war zones, which could also be used for building structures.

Reflective comment: The work had very negative connotations which only partially referenced my opinion of war. I found the reading too cluttered but this reinforced the idea of building with broken concrete pieces.

Developments: This work initiated the use of concrete rubble as a sculptural medium. However I was concerned that the human cost of war was not evident.



Fig. 8. Laurie Steer, *Untitled*, Costumed concrete rubble, 50 x 40cm variable, January 2007.

Aims: To explore humanising concrete objects through the addition of textures and colour.

Reflective comment: The work was very kitsch and devalued the serious issues I was engaged with. While they humanised the object they did not exude a sense of fatality.

Developments: This work pushed me away from making object art and back towards installation in an attempt to engage in an experience...



Fig. 9. Laurie Steer, *Untitled*, Packaged selected objects on pallet, 1.2 x 0.9m variable, February 2007.

Aims: To explore notions of manufacture and packaging.

Reflective comment: The work was quite successful in terms of exploring the remnant evidence of destruction but it talked of little else and had lost much of its relationship with war experiences.

Developments: This finally split the project away from attempts at black humour, which seemed gimmicky and sent me in search of more physical engagement.



**The Battlefield: issues of studio, site and installation space.**

Throughout this project the physical act of art making and presentation has taken place in two key locations. These include a domestic studio space and a privately owned rural outdoor site that has also acted as workshop/studio. The domestic space has been used for researching, developmental drawings, the fabrication of small preliminary artefacts and the compilation of the exegesis. The rural site allowed for the extension of the project through experimental construction/destruction on a larger scale e.g. the building and destruction of substantial sculptural installations. The private rural site (refer fig. 10) was primarily selected for its functionality as it allowed me to work in a potentially unstable and dangerous way without restrictions or the need for permits. This site alternates between a studio/workshop and an installation space that allows an audience to intersect the cyclical exploration at a specific point rather than examine an inert final product.

The rural site is a shared space and is also used for forestry and farming. Over the period of investigation the site has been

progressively altered by the landowner through the planting of pine tree seedlings and the erection of an electric fence (along the edge of the site), which protects the plants from the resident cattle.



Fig. 10. Laurie Steer, Digital photomontage of the private rural site, January 2007,

## Operations: what I did, how and why.

By contemplating cyclical notions of fatality and futility I made a series of sculptural works that responded to ideas of helplessness and loss through processes of construction and destruction. The following investigations sought to further my understanding of the issues by playing a role of creator/destroyer. Initial investigations were undertaken in workbooks. These journals recorded quotes and images of interest from *The New Zealand Herald* and reflected upon literature that discussed issues of art and war. The workbooks were also used for exploratory drawing, preparatory list making and as a personal diary of related events. Speculative drawings led to early investigations into possible sculptural forms using refuse materials (refer Figs. 13,14).

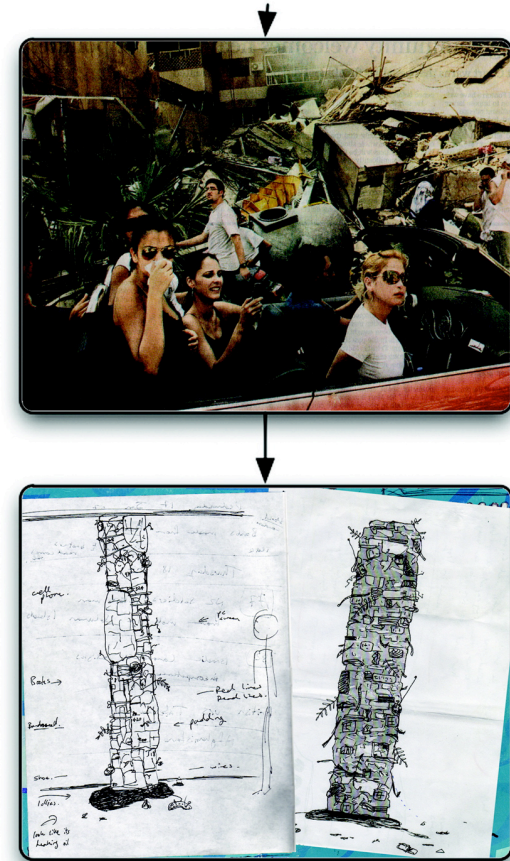
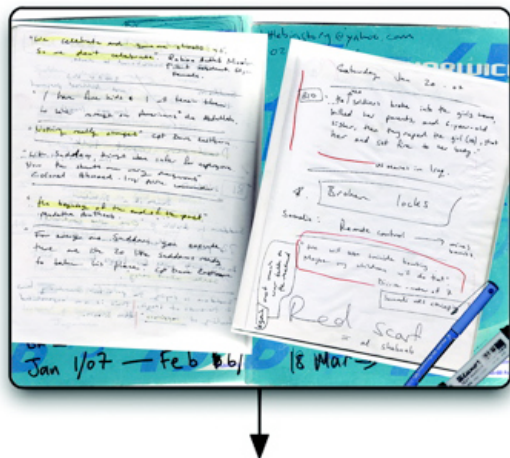


Fig. 11. Laurie Steer, Workbook quotes and diary entries, January 2007.

Fig. 12. Spencer Platt, *Untitled*, 2007, Scanned photograph from *The New Zealand Herald*, p. A7, (13.02.07). Getty Images.

Fig. 13. Laurie Steer, Workbook drawings, January 2007.

On an unrelated visit to the local transfer station (dump) I had noticed large piles of refuse building materials (refer Fig. 16, p.19). The colours and textures of the piles shared visual similarities to war related images presented in *The New Zealand Herald* (refer Figs.12,15). I used a variety of these materials to physically explore the possibility of making art works that implied a sense of futility through their construction (refer Fig.14).



Fig. 14. Laurie Steer, Photograph of an early test structure at the dump, February 2007.

The evolving form of these sculptural investigations was influenced by an image and caption published in *The New Zealand Herald* that showed a large building being demolished. The attached text read “ BOMB SITE: It’s Auckland, but it could be Hamburg after an air raid” (07/03/07. p. A9). I was drawn to the parody between the image and caption (refer Fig.15), and the insinuation that without specific context the damage to the building could have been the result of war. In areas it was unclear whether the structure was being torn down or renovated. This lead me to investigate the possibility of building a structure while simultaneously undermining the security of its construction by using unstable practices e.g. failing to provide any sort of foundation and/or not reinforcing the structure with concrete mortar, iron or similar fixatives.



Fig. 15. Paul Estcourt, *Untitled*, 2007, Scanned photograph from *The New Zealand Herald*, p. A9, (02.03.07).



This decision to use specific pieces of refuse was planned. Materials such as concrete, timber and iron were selected for their visual ambiguity and their ability to be manipulated and managed onsite. The predominant use of grey, brown and black materials referenced the sombre tones seen in images of war zones in *The New Zealand Herald*. The practical component of this investigation was influenced by the access and supply of these potential building materials. The following visuals (refer Figs. 16-27) illustrate these processes of sorting, collecting, transporting, delivering and application and also demonstrate their relationship to the final work.



Figs. 16-20. Laurie Steer, photographs showing the collection of refuse materials 1, 2007.



Figs. 21-24. Laurie Steer, photographs showing the collection and delivery of refuse materials 2, 2007.



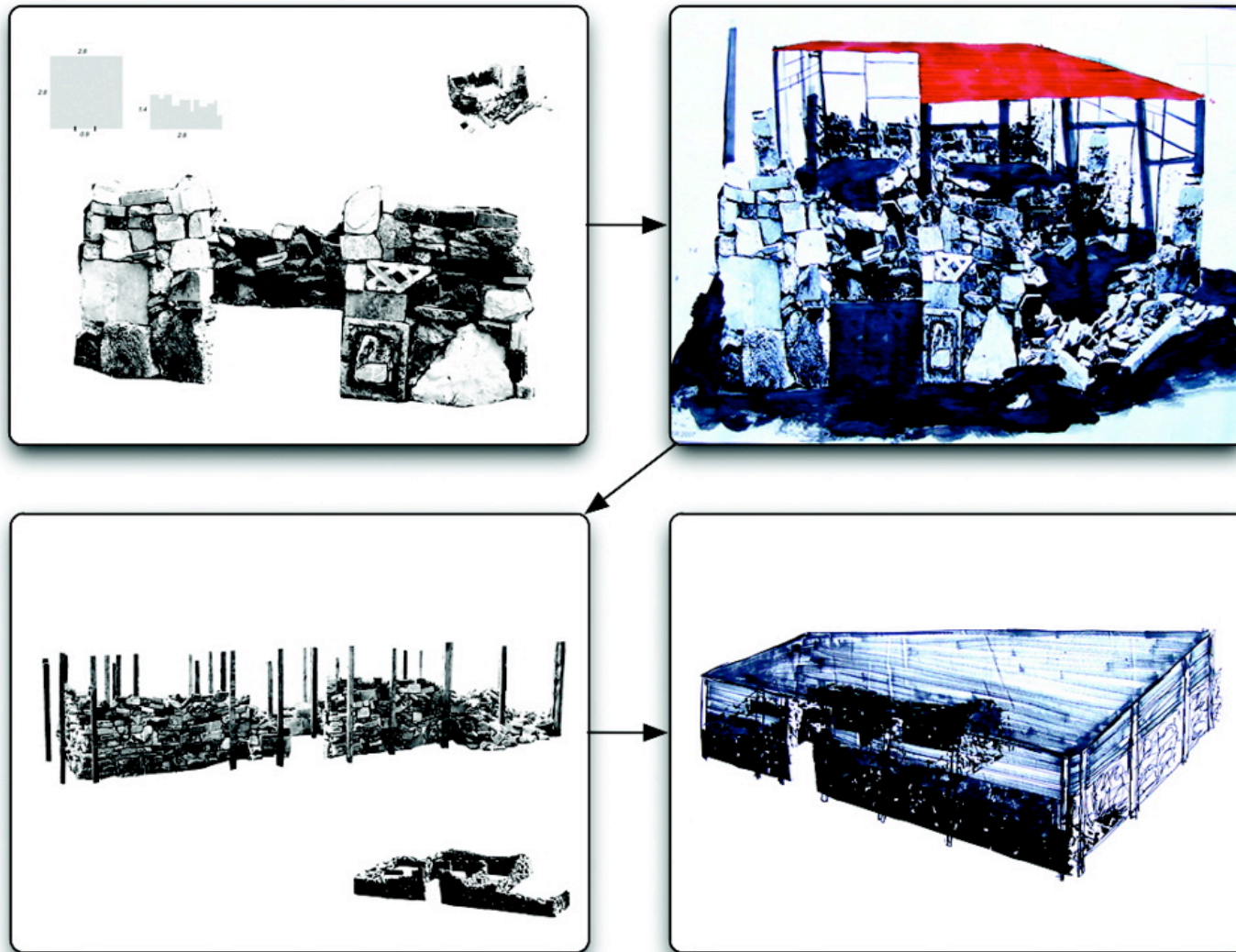
Figs. 25-27. Laurie Steer, photographs showing the application of refuse materials 2, 2007.



I wanted to make an installation that responded to the aims and focus of this research project. I had been observing war related issues and images through *The New Zealand Herald* and had formed a mental picture of a desolate, hopeless and tragic scene. My opinion of war was one of fatal futility and was understood as an endless cycle of manufactured suffering. Within this cycle I recognised reoccurring patterns i.e. liberation and subjugation, demolition and reconstruction. The processes directing the form and scale of the installation reflect my desire to have a more tangible sensory experience than that offered by the newspaper. The majority of the wars portrayed in *The New Zealand Herald* throughout 2007 were set in urban environments in Baghdad, Iraq and Kabul, Afghanistan. By using refuse materials I was able to construct abstract effigies of these environments that allowed me to reflect on my own position and experience of war. I attempted to build structures that suggested notions of shelter and security through positioning and form, i.e. doors, walls, rooms, and roofs. I tried to do most of the work alone. It was important that this was 'my' experience and I felt that I would have more ownership of any possible experience by being directly and laboriously involved in the processes of construction and destruction.

Continued planning through exploratory drawing, list making and reflective practice assisted the art making process and directed the design, construction and destruction of the artefacts. Drawing in workbooks (refer Figs. 28-31, p.23) allowed me to experiment with the form and scale of the emerging structures and enabled me to visualise what these developments may look like on site and how they might operate in relation to each other and to the surrounding areas. Creating lists helped me to accumulate the necessary equipment and materials that supported the project and maintained its momentum.

The positioning of the structures is related to the specifics of the site. It also responds to the practical sensibilities of the aims, in particular the construction/destruction process. A gravel road and logging debris frame the boundaries of the site. Structures were positioned to allow room to expand without getting too close to either the road or logging debris, which would have been a fire hazard. Paradoxically, this rural site allowed me to safely explore and personally experience dangerous destruction methods that referenced notions of fatality and futility.



Figs. 28-31. Laurie Steer. Exploratory workbook drawings using digitally manipulated images. March 2007.

The collected materials were buried, stacked, cut and nailed into place. I promoted the idea of futility by purposely trying to make the artefacts structurally unsound. This was achieved by failing to bind the concrete rubble and by using insufficient fixatives to secure the walls and roofs. These practices lead to the building's instability and continual (partial) collapse, which reinforced notions of a cycle of hopelessness.

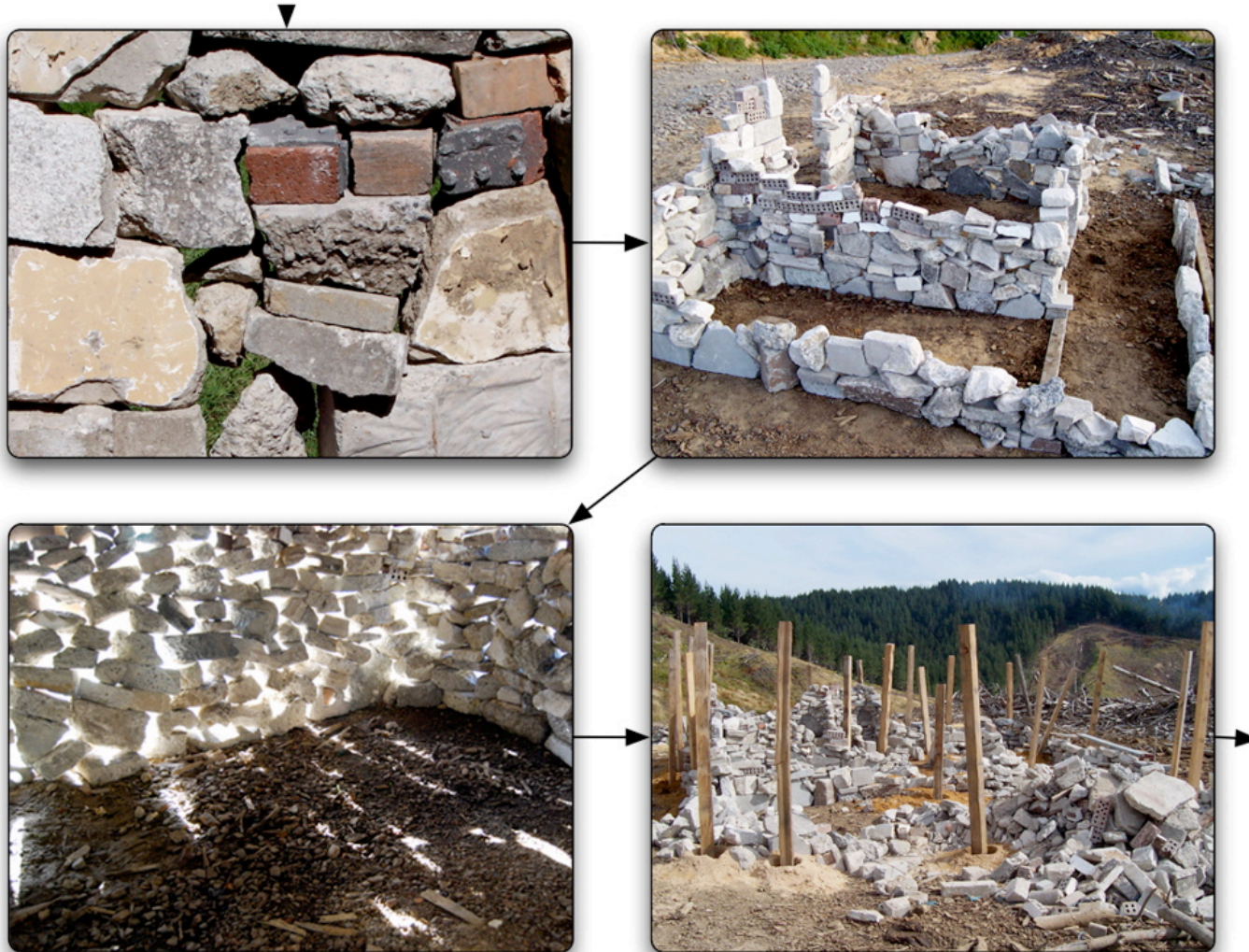
I built the larger of the two structures first (refer Figs. 32-48). As this building neared completion I became aware that it was failing to operate in the manner in which I had hoped. I initially wanted to create an environment and/or sense of location and this was not happening because the artefact looked more like an inert sculpture than an installation.



Fig. 32. Laurie Steer. Photograph of materials on site. March 2007.

Fig. 33. Laurie Steer. Photograph of early building on site. March 2007.





Figs. 34,35. Laurie Steer. Photographs of emerging concrete walls. April 2007.

Fig. 36. Grant Thompson. Photograph of emerging concrete walls. April 2007.

Fig. 37. Laurie Steer. Photograph of damage to the structure caused by resident cows. April 2007.

The construction of the following structures took place at the private rural studio/site and was completed over a period of four months.



Fig. 38. Laurie Steer. Photograph of the emerging structure, surrounding rural site and marauding cows. **April 2007.**





Figs. 39,40. Laurie Steer. Photographs of emerging timber framing. May 2007.

Figs. 41,42. Jason Mathieson. Photographs of emerging timber and rubble walls. May 2007.



Fig. 43. Jason Mathieson. Photograph of emerging structure. May 2007.





Figs. 44,45. Laurie Steer. Photographs of emerging roof. June 2007.

Figs. 46,47. Jason Mathieson. Photographs of finished structure: front door and interior. June 2007.



Fig. 48. Jason Mathieson. Photograph of first finished structure [actual dimensions 8.0 x 5.4 x 2.2m]. June 2007.



I activated the surrounding space by building a second structure out of the remaining materials available on site. The roof of the second structure was made out of my grandmother's deathbed. The structural inclusion of the bed served the dual role of roof and emotional experiment. I used this loaded personal item in the construction of the artefacts to increase the potential to experience loss at the point of destruction.



Figs. 49-52. Laurie Steer. Photographs of emerging second structure. June 2007.



Fig. 53. Jason Mathieson. Photograph of second finished structure [actual dimensions 1.2 x 2.2 x 3.8m]. June 2007.



Fig. 54. Jason Mathieson. Photograph of relational space between structures. June 2007.



Like the construction, the destruction also involved considerable planning. I destroyed the structures with petrol and diesel assisted fires to emulate and reinforce notions of helplessness and loss. I purposely used more accelerant than was necessary so that I would be helpless to intervene once the process of destruction had begun. I wanted the fire to be fatal, unstoppable, aggressive and destructive and intended to destroy as much of the installation as possible.

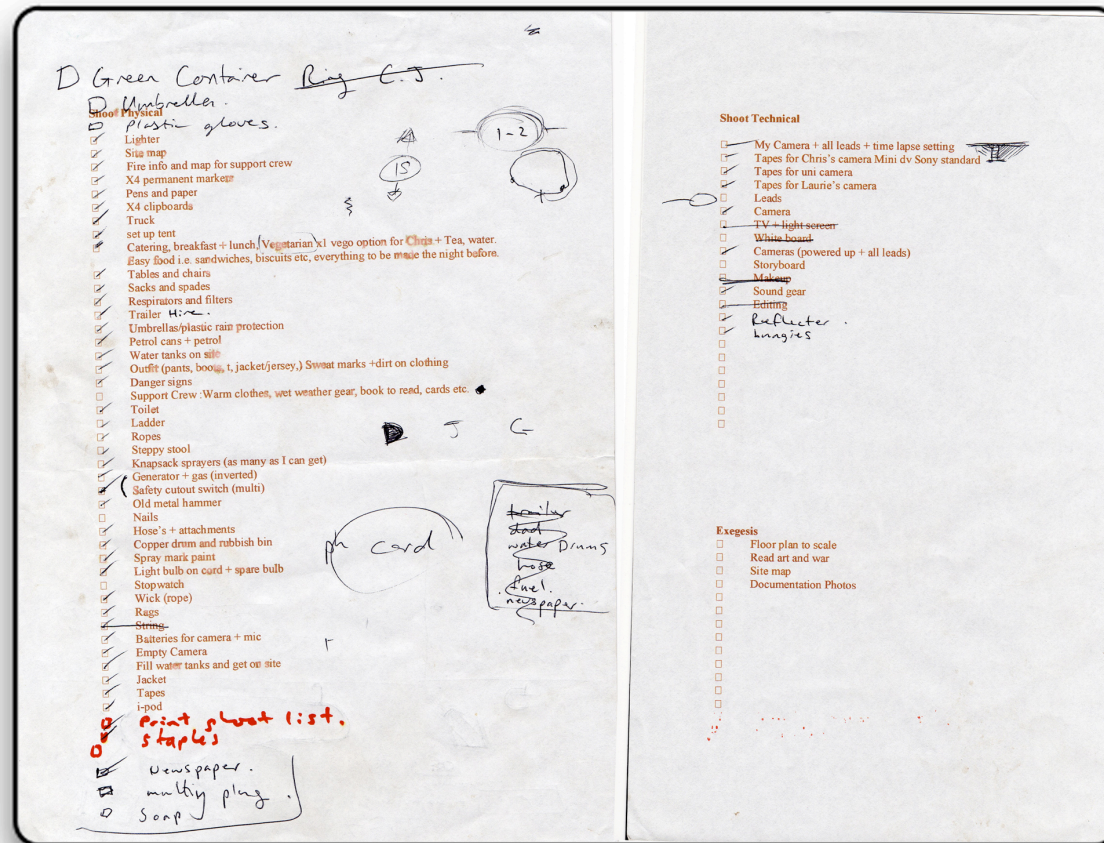


Fig. 55. Laurie Steer. Scan of destruction panning lists. June 2007.



I burnt down the structures to imitate my perception of an experience of war from a distance. I wanted to express a sense of hopelessness and fatality through a choreographed and premeditated negative action. Until this point I had been consciously building structures that (although unstable) held some positive implications of shelter and security. The burning process sought to totally destroy these notions. Additional video documentation and commentary of these processes is included on the DVD at the rear of this exegesis (refer p.52).

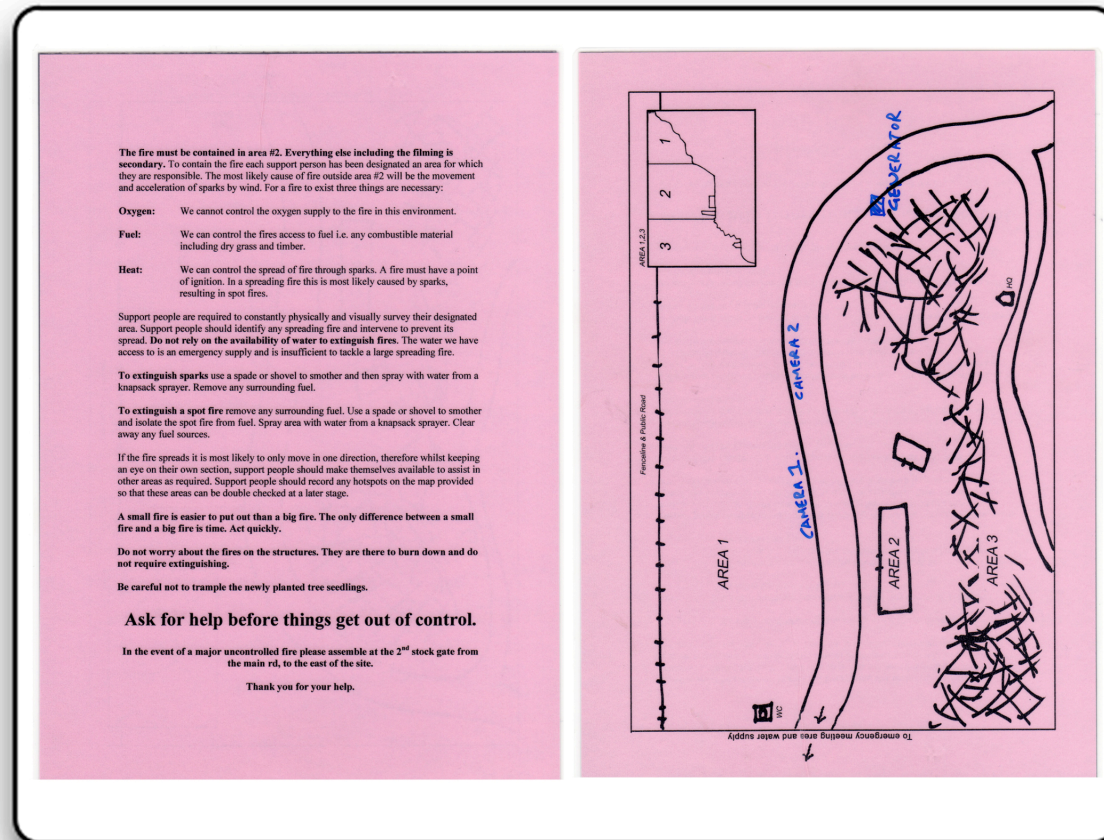


Fig. 56. Laurie Steer. Scans of destruction safety brief. June 2007.



Figs. 57,58. Jason Mathieson. Photographs of the team safety briefing and camera set-up. July 2007.

Fig. 59. Roland Ebbing. Photograph of safety equipment. July 2007.



Figs. 60,62,63. Jason Mathieson. Photographs of the destruction processes. July 2007.

Fig. 61. Roland Ebbing. Photograph of the destruction processes. July 2007.





Fig. 64. Jason Mathieson. Photograph of the destruction of the second structure. July 2007.



Figs. 65,66. Jason Mathieson. Photographs of the destruction processes and the documenting of these processes. July 2007.  
Figs. 67,68. Roland Ebbing. Photographs of the destruction processes. July 2007.





Fig. 69. Anne Shirley. Photograph of the destruction of the first structure. July 2007.



Figs. 70-73. Jason Mathieson. Photographs of the destruction processes. July 2007.





Fig. 74. Jason Mathieson. Photograph of the destroyed first structure. July 2007.



Once the structures had cooled the process of destruction continued. Anything deemed useful for rebuilding i.e. remaining timber and iron, was removed. As Nikos Papastergiadis (2007) suggested in his review of Lida Abdul's *War Games (What I Saw)* 2007 (refer p. 9) "the intention was not only to destroy the signs of life, but also the capacity of the survivor to return, reclaim and rebuild the place in which they feel at home" (p.46). My conscious and continually destructive actions sought to remove the structure's ability to provide any shelter and security and left the remaining burnt and semi-collapsed concrete walls exposed and desolate.



Figs. 75,76. Laurie Steer. Photographs of the continuing destruction.  
August 2007.

**End Game: afterword.**

The installation presented for the examiner's consideration represents a choreographed pause in the investigation. This pause allows the examiners to intersect the project at a specific point in its continuous cycle, offering a physical and sensual onsite experience. The site itself has pertinent traces of the actions and events explored during the enquiry. Many of these traces are subtle and partially concealed while others are dramatic and unavoidable. Through processes of construction and destruction this research has attempted to explore the possibilities of experiencing war from a safe distance. Associated notions of fatality and futility have been investigated and activated through the laborious creation and focused destruction of artefacts and has also insinuated a process of deliberate self-harm. By knowingly perpetrating these destructive actions I am acknowledging the human involvement that underscores the existence of war.

This investigation has reinforced my initial position, which suggested that war existed as a hopeless and endless cycle of deliberately manufactured and carefully orchestrated misery. During the destruction of the structures I did not feel any sense of loss, if anything I felt contrite. It was impossible to imagine a

human being who had witnessed war first hand not finding my work wasteful and naïve. Watching war from a distance leaves the spectator feeling useless and powerless to intervene. The artefacts that I have made from the safety of my studio/site are solipsistic representations of my hopelessly privileged position and voyeuristic gaze. Investigating the fatal futility of war in a focused and sustained manner has had a negative effect on me. My understanding of the experience of war from a distance is simply that it is much more complicated and worse than I had originally thought. Subsequently the examiners are encouraged to explore the tactile and sensual reverberations of the installation and recall the deliberate and continuous processes of war's fatal cycle.



Figs. 77-85. Jason Mathieson. Photographs of the artist experiencing the destroyed structures. September 2007.





Figs. 86-90. Jason Mathieson. Photographs of the artist experiencing the destroyed structures cont... September 2007.

## Table of Images

- Fig. 1. Francisco Goya, *Great Deeds - Against the Dead!*, c.1810-1813, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.
- Fig. 2. Pablo Picasso, *Guernica*, 1937, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid, Spain, Bridgeman Art Library © Picasso Estate/SODRAC (2006).
- Fig. 3. Lida Abdul, *War Games (What I Saw)*, 2006, (Still) 16mm film transferred to DVD, Giorgio Persano Gallery, Turin.
- Fig. 4. Laurie Steer, Detail, *I'm on Fire*, Porcelain and glaze, 20 x 10cm variable, March 2006.
- Fig. 5. Laurie Steer, *Untitled*, A3 Photocopies on clothing bins, Dimensions variable, July 2006.
- Fig. 6. Laurie Steer, *Untitled*, Ink and acrylic on fire wood, 1.4 x 0.5m variable, October 2007.
- Fig. 7. Laurie Steer, *Untitled*, Embossed concrete, steel and glass, 60 x 50cm variable, December 2006.
- Fig. 8. Laurie Steer, *Untitled*, Costumed concrete rubble, 50 x 40cm variable, January 2007.
- Fig. 9. Laurie Steer, *Untitled*, Packaged selected objects, 1.2 x 0.9m variable, February 2007.
- Fig. 10. Laurie Steer, Digital photomontage of the largest rural site, January 2007,
- Fig. 11. Laurie Steer, Workbook quotes and diary entries, 2007.
- Fig. 12. Spencer Platt, *Untitled*, 2007, Scanned photograph from *The New Zealand Herald*, p. A7, (13.02.07). Getty Images.
- Fig. 13. Laurie Steer, Workbook drawings, 2007.
- Fig. 14. Laurie Steer, Photograph of an early test structure at the dump, 2007.
- Fig. 15. Paul Estcourt, *Untitled*, 2007, Scanned photograph from *The New Zealand Herald*, p. A9, (02.03.07).
- Fig. 16. Laurie Steer, photographs showing the collection of refuse materials, 2007.
- Fig. 17. Laurie Steer, photograph showing the collection of refuse materials , 2007.
- Fig. 18. Laurie Steer, photograph showing the collection of refuse materials, 2007.
- Fig. 19. Laurie Steer, photograph showing the collection of refuse materials, 2007.
- Fig. 20. Laurie Steer, photograph showing the collection of refuse materials, 2007.
- Fig. 21. Laurie Steer, photograph showing the collection of refuse materials, 2007.
- Fig. 22. Laurie Steer, photograph showing the collection of refuse materials, 2007.

- Fig. 23. Laurie Steer, photograph showing the collection of refuse materials, 2007.
- Fig. 24. Laurie Steer, photograph showing the collection of refuse materials, 2007.
- Fig. 25. Laurie Steer, photograph showing the application of refuse materials, 2007.
- Fig. 26. Laurie Steer, photograph showing the application of refuse materials, 2007.
- Fig. 27. Laurie Steer, photograph showing the application of refuse materials, 2007.
- Fig. 28. Laurie Steer. Exploratory workbook drawing. 2007.
- Fig. 29. Laurie Steer. Exploratory workbook drawing. 2007.
- Fig. 30. Laurie Steer. Exploratory workbook drawing. 2007.
- Fig. 31. Laurie Steer. Exploratory workbook drawing. 2007.
- Fig. 32. Laurie Steer. Photograph of materials on site. March 2007.
- Fig. 33. Laurie Steer. Photograph of early building on site. March 2007.
- Fig. 34. Laurie Steer. Photograph of emerging concrete walls. April 2007.
- Fig. 35. Laurie Steer. Photograph of emerging concrete walls. April 2007.
- Fig. 36. Grant Thompson. Photograph of emerging concrete walls. April 2007.
- Fig. 37. Laurie Steer. Photograph of emerging concrete walls. April 2007.
- Fig. 38. Laurie Steer. Photograph of the emerging structure and surrounding area. April 2007.
- Fig. 39. Laurie Steer. Photograph of emerging timber framing. May 2007.
- Fig. 40. Laurie Steer. Photograph of emerging timber framing. May 2007.
- Fig. 41. Jason Mathieson. Photograph of emerging walls. May 2007.
- Fig. 42. Jason Mathieson. Photograph of emerging walls. May 2007.
- Fig. 43. Jason Mathieson. Photograph of emerging structure. May 2007.
- Fig. 44. Laurie Steer. Photograph of emerging roof. June 2007.
- Fig. 45. Laurie Steer. Photograph of emerging roof. June 2007.
- Fig. 46. Jason Mathieson. Photograph of finished structure: front door and interior movement. June 2007.
- Fig. 47. Jason Mathieson. Photograph of finished structure: front door and interior movement. June 2007.

Fig. 48. Jason Mathieson. Photograph of first finished structure. June 2007.

Fig. 49. Laurie Steer. Photograph of emerging second structure. June 2007.

Fig. 50. Laurie Steer. Photograph of emerging second structure. June 2007.

Fig. 51. Laurie Steer. Photograph of emerging second structure. June 2007.

Fig. 52. Laurie Steer. Photograph of emerging second structure. June 2007.

Fig. 53. Jason Mathieson. Photograph of second finished structure. June 2007.

Fig. 54. Jason Mathieson. Photograph of activated space between structures. June 2007.

Fig. 55. Laurie Steer. Scan of destruction planning lists. June 2007.

Fig. 56. Laurie Steer. Scan of the safety brief for the destruction. June 2007.

Fig. 57. Jason Mathieson. Photograph of the team safety brief. July 2007.

Fig. 58. Jason Mathieson. Photograph of the camera set-up. July 2007.

Fig. 59. Roland Ebbing. Photograph of safety equipment. July 2007.

Fig. 60. Jason Mathieson. Photograph of the destruction processes. July 2007.

Fig. 61. Roland Ebbing. Photograph of the destruction processes. July 2007.

Fig. 62. Jason Mathieson. Photograph of the destruction processes. July 2007.

Fig. 63. Jason Mathieson. Photograph of the destruction processes. July 2007.

Fig. 64. Jason Mathieson. Photograph of the destruction of the second structure. July 2007.

Fig. 65. Jason Mathieson. Photograph of the destruction processes and documentation. July 2007.

Fig. 66. Jason Mathieson. Photograph of the destruction processes and documentation. July 2007.

Fig. 67. Roland Ebbing. Photograph of the destruction processes. July 2007.

Fig. 68. Roland Ebbing. Photograph of the destruction processes. July 2007.

Fig. 69. Anne Shirley. Photograph of the destruction of the first structure. July 2007.

Fig. 70. Jason Mathieson. Photograph of the destruction processes. July 2007.

Fig. 71. Jason Mathieson. Photograph of the destruction processes. July 2007.

Fig. 72. Jason Mathieson. Photograph of the destruction processes. July 2007.



- Fig. 73. Jason Mathieson. Photograph of the destruction processes. July 2007.
- Fig. 74. Jason Mathieson. Photograph of the destroyed first structure. July 2007.
- Fig. 75. Laurie Steer. Photograph of the continuing destruction. August 2007.
- Fig. 76. Laurie Steer. Photograph of the continuing destruction. August 2007.
- Fig. 77. Jason Mathieson. Photograph of the artist experiencing the destroyed structures. September 2007.
- Fig. 78. Jason Mathieson. Photograph of the artist experiencing the destroyed structures. September 2007.
- Fig. 79. Jason Mathieson. Photograph of the artist experiencing the destroyed structures. September 2007.
- Fig. 80. Jason Mathieson. Photograph of the artist experiencing the destroyed structures. September 2007.
- Fig. 81. Jason Mathieson. Photograph of the artist experiencing the destroyed structures. September 2007.
- Fig. 82. Jason Mathieson. Photograph of the artist experiencing the destroyed structures. September 2007.
- Fig. 83. Jason Mathieson. Photograph of the artist experiencing the destroyed structures. September 2007.
- Fig. 84. Jason Mathieson. Photograph of the artist experiencing the destroyed structures. September 2007.
- Fig. 85. Jason Mathieson. Photograph of the artist experiencing the destroyed structures. September 2007.
- Fig. 86. Jason Mathieson. Photograph of the artist experiencing the destroyed structures cont... September 2007.
- Fig. 87. Jason Mathieson. Photograph of the artist experiencing the destroyed structures cont... September 2007.
- Fig. 88. Jason Mathieson. Photograph of the artist experiencing the destroyed structures cont... September 2007.
- Fig. 89. Jason Mathieson. Photograph of the artist experiencing the destroyed structures cont... September 2007.
- Fig. 90. Jason Mathieson. Photograph of the artist experiencing the destroyed structures cont... September 2007.

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## Appendix

### DVD Contents:

1. Roaming film documentation of the destruction processes (raw cut), July 2007. 00:6:29
2. Real time film documentation of part of the destruction from a set camera, July 2007. 01:02:55
3. Time Lapse footage of the destruction processes, July 2007. 00:03:30
4. Anecdotal video discussion on issues of fatality and futility regarding *a fatal cycle*. Presented to the Auckland University of Technology, Art and design Postgraduate Conference, August 2007. 00:19:55

