

# SPECTACLE

Jimmy Cauty   Laura Hird   Gordon Legge   Neil Cooper   Alex Allan

## Welcome to ESTATE Edinburgh.

## Welcome to the SPECTACLE.

Jimmy Cauty's dystopian model village housed in the back of a shipping container provoked several things.

One of them was the desire to bring it to Edinburgh as part of the UK-wide MdZ ESTATE tour led by L-13 Light Industrial Workshop, producers of all of Cauty's work.

Another is this publication, which is the first missive from Society of Spectacles, a new collective who became ESTATE's Edinburgh hosts in association with community-owned venue, North Edinburgh Arts.

This is the foundation of much more to come, including books, exhibitions, artworks, records, concerts and other happenings.

The works contained in SPECTACLE #1 were written and created in direct response to ESTATE, which at time of writing, is about to tour to Edinburgh for a month.

In keeping with ESTATE's themes of urban landscapes in flux, it was important to take it beyond the city centre.

The partnership with North Edinburgh Arts, situated in Edinburgh's Muirhouse and Pennywell neighbourhood, was a chance to collaborate with a community in the throes of its own transformation.

For Society of Spectacles too, it is something to build on.

**Can you tell us a bit of background about the thinking behind ESTATE? It obviously follows on from ADP, but this seems much more intense.**

I wanted it to be like zooming in on a detail of the ADP. ESTATE has the same default setting of total social and economic devastation but takes it to the next level in terms of detail. Mid 20th Century tower blocks can be seen as beautiful but there's something horrific about what they represent in terms of how humans might be regulated and controlled through town planning. Utopian ideas in the planning and dystopian for the residents. I also wanted to make something that could only be lifted with forklift trucks, something literally and conceptually heavy, so they had to be made of concrete, not model making foam like the ADP. And I thought it was important to be able to walk through the ESTATE and touch and smell the buildings, each tower weights half a ton, you can feel that presence. Ultimately the towers will be left outside to rot away, entropy is all part of the master plan but that could take 100 years.

**In the two years you've been making ESTATE the world has completely changed since the Covid-19 pandemic, with people unable to leave their homes. How do you think that might change perceptions of it?**

The first lockdown happened while I was preparing to assemble Tower Block 4, 18 months into the build. At that point I figured the project would be redundant, I thought who would want to experience a dystopian model village in a world that is actually more dystopian. But now we are used to the idea of COVID I'm not so sure that is the case. Things either work or they don't work, the timing may be in sync with the culture or out of sync, if it's in then that's kind of down to luck more than any clever strategizing...but I do feel lucky.

**Any thoughts on how this year's Turner Prize shortlist celebrates socially engaged groups rather than individual artists. It does feel, more than 25 years on since the K Foundation award, that they've got the memo...**

It sounds like they're out of step as usual whilst desperately trying to keep in step. Wouldn't it be better if the prize was awarded to model village builders and not for trying to make art seem relevant and worthy?

**Is there an odd affinity with your MdZ Estate and Rachel Whiteread's House? For which she won that prize and the K Foundation's Worst Art of the Year award?**

Only in the colour of the concrete. I would be happy to receive a prize for the worst model village...It would be a small triumph!

**Do the White and Black Rooms exist somewhere deep within Estate?**

If you mean The KLF and JAMs LPs then no, they are just musical compositions from the last century. Darker things could exist deeper within ESTATE, that's for the audience to discover.

**Do you feel that each Tower Block within Estate has its own personality, and do you think that was dictated by intent or as a result of the activities within each Tower Block?**

All the towers were going to be residential but somewhere down the line I ran out of ideas about residential and branched out into other areas. I didn't appreciate the amount of time and effort it would take to make these towers: each tower has 17 floors and each floor has 18 rooms, each room needed to be built, decorated, wired up for lighting and then partially destroyed. That's a lot of work, probably about 4 months' work for each tower. When I got to the end of Tower Block 1 I realised I couldn't just repeat the same thing on the next three towers, so came up with the idea of each tower having a different function as a way of staying engaged with the project over the prolonged build cycle.

If the intent is to make a high-rise residential care home, then in the world of ESTATE the activities that take place inside the care home must be hyper versions of reality. When you down-scale a tower block from 1:1 to 1:25 scale not only is the sound pitched up but the intensity of dereliction is also compressed and increased. It's worth spending the time to investigate the different aspects of each tower, that's if you survive the Full English Mode.

**ESTATE is the last of a trilogy of works. Now you've made all three, how do you think they sit as a body of work?**

As a model village concept part 2 (The ADP) and part 3 (ESTATE) fit well together, part 1 (A Riot in a Jam Jar) is somewhat low key in scale but is still part of the development of the idea of small worlds.

In fact, we plan to tour the trilogy in 2023 and beyond. The tour will be called 'The 2023 World Famous Wall of Death Tour'.



Screenshot

GORDON LEGGE |

**The Five Blind Scots Of Aruba**

“Contact Police. Body Inside.”

Locksmiths having failed, joiners were then summoned to prise said door from its hinges; only to reveal a wall of cemented brick.

“What the... ”

A bold neighbour appeared.

“What’s with the racket!”

A policeman retorted:

“Don’t happen to know who stays here, do you?”

“Some old dude, skinny. Not seen him in yonks. Tenement stair. Every man for himself. You know the score.”

The joiner said, “Well, that’s me. Heavy artillery job.”

It turned out heavy artillery, jackhammer etc, wasn’t without complications.

The noise.

The mess.

Consider: a flat-sized onion of solid brick to contend with.

A self-crafted mausoleum.

Neighbours decanted, half the street to hotels, courtesy the public purse.

Downstairs became media darlings.

“But what... ”

It was as if the very heavens themselves were set to rain down on them!

They successfully sued for millions.

It seemed highly unlikely the building would ever recover.

(Cue developers delight!)

Investigations continued:

The owner, a respected cartoonist (as opposed to the other kind), was thought to have been enjoying semi-retirement. He had property in Malta, so they said.

"Did he carry a bag?"

"Think so."

"Did he ever appear suspicious?"

"Tell you what, was never entirely happy re. the back door being left open; nor, come to that, with litter on the stair."

"And?"

"Well, he would shut the back door and take rubbish to the bin. One of them. That sort."

Nary fixtures nor fittings, but brick after brick upon brick.

"He's made some job," said workman 51.

"What gets me," wondered fat 42, "how did he put up the note?"

"It's maybe not him!" suggested stricken 46.

The police were thinking likewise.

Eventually, remains were discovered, alongside meagre supplies of canned food, untouched save for the pears.

Dental records confirmed the cartoonist.

Erstwhile contemporaries got cracking on tributes.

Meanwhile, somewhere off the coast of Aruba, bathed the culpable family downstairs.

Litter no longer a concern, closing doors effectively behind them, they could afford to have their slovenliness handsomely attended to.

Initially, the plan had been "collapsing ceiling", its only known risk being potential demise, to which they took turns.

Think Shawshank in reverse.

That said, it wasn't exactly happily ever after.

Almost daily, sometimes hourly, a recall, panic - trauma! - would prompt a frantic gaze upward, into the harshest sun imaginable.

Fittingly, the youngest was first to succumb.



LAURA HIRD |

**Untitled**

he

he

he

he

he

hell

hello

hello

hello

hello

hello

hello

hello

can anyone

TELL ME!

where

we are

do you come

from here

are you in the place you're from

are you a  
survivor??

or 1 of the  
giants?

Who knew giants could be  
so boring?

They are more scared of me than I am of them

Which is  
not at all

they  
don't

I KNOW

he

he

he

they

couldn't even imagine

I think they're  
a bit late

you'll see what  
I mean – ha ha  
ha

Nobody wanted to

to make them see??

is that why we  
keep moving??

Nobody cared then

What are you looking for?

Do you expect me to  
tell you where to  
look?

I can show you where it all went on

You'd like that, wouldn't  
you?

SICKO!!!!!!

do you dream of doing dirty things

in dirty places?

in which case she's in flat 42

which block?



you better start looking

she's in them all

don't forget to check the cupboards

nearly

It might still be there

she's in them all

I'll not forget her sweet face in the  
bath

before you go though

can anyone

**TELL ME!**

where

we are

I think it's best you leave and take me  
with you

They're all  
rotten now

and I'm very hungry



NEIL COOPER |

**High Rise, Low Life – Mary, Mungo and Midge in Paradise**

## Going Up

Sheil Road flats were considered to be the best high rises in Liverpool when me and my mum moved into the 16th floor of Kenley Close. Kenley Close and the other two blocks beside it that made up Sheil Park – Kenley Parade and Linosa Close - went up in the mid 1960s, around the time I was born. We were allocated the flat at the start of 1982, which meant we could move out of the temporary hostel we'd been put in a few weeks before Christmas.

That was after the house I'd grown up in had been sold. The house was next to Anfield Cemetery, with my back bedroom overlooking the gravestones that loomed in the moonlight as I read in the dark by the window. The sale was part of the deal after my mum and dad's divorce came through, which stipulated the house couldn't be sold until I left school. Unfortunately for us, it all went through when the council was on strike, and we couldn't be rehoused till they went back to work.

If I'd had any balls I would've moved out and found a flat, but I was on the dole by then and didn't have a clue. And anyway, I quite liked the idea of living in a high rise. I thought it might give me street cred, like the tearaways on telly in the teatime kids TV equivalent of Play for Today that produced shows like Four Idle Hands and A Bunch of Fives. In other programmes, a muckabout in an adventure playground would be played out to a reggae soundtrack, while the tower block lifts always seemed to break down for dramatic reasons that helped the story along.

There had been Mary, Mungo and Midge a few years before as well. This featured the everyday adventures of Mary, her talking pet dog Mungo, and Midge, a mouse that played a flute that went higher or lower pitched depending on whether they went up or down the lift of the block where they lived. Artist Martin Creed did something similar a few decades later.

Flute soundtracked lifts notwithstanding, Mary, Mungo and Midge was the BBC's diversity and social inclusion quota taking kids TV out of middle class suburbia into a cartoon fantasia of inner city living. I wasn't the only one craving street cred.

Yet, despite the move into neighbourhood full of animated concrete towers, the grass was green, the skies were blue and the lifts never broke down. In Mary, Mungo and Midge's world, high-rise living looked really rather lovely.

## On Top of the World, Ma'

I never got the street cred, but I really liked living in Kenley Close in the two years I was there. I'd stayed in a high rise before, for a few weeks in Middlesbrough with a couple who were friends of my dad's who looked after me while he went off to find work. Later, back in Liverpool, my dad's wife had lived in a tower block in Everton before they got married and bought an old council house as part of Thatcher's Right to Buy sell-off programme. But Sheil Road was different. It felt like home.

My mum was away a lot, seeing the world with her lorry driver boyfriend she'd met in Blackpool, so I was on my own loads, and the flat was high up enough to be able to see the city in a way I'd never known before.

In the daytime, from the living room window, you could see beyond the big houses opposite and right across Newsham Park. That first winter there, I became transfixed by the dancing lights of the teatime rush hour traffic in motion. I even wrote a poem about it, which ended up being published in a little magazine produced by the people who ran a writers workshop I went to a couple of times in Lark Lane at the bohemian side of town.

In the summer, I'd waste days basking in a deck chair on the balcony, eating cheese and tomato sandwiches and sipping chocolate milkshake while listening to NME cassettes and looking out on the centre of town beyond. It all looked a bit like the aerial views of Liverpool that made up the montage for the opening credits of Brookside, the Scouse soap that became one of Channel Four's flagship shows after the UK's fleetingly controversial new TV station launched later that year.

If you didn't blink, you even caught a glimpse in the credits of what I thought looked like the three blocks that made up Sheil Road flats. I was never totally sure I was right, but told people they were, anyway. All high rises looked the same, so it was hard to tell which was which unless you were up close. The lifts in Kenley Close did break occasionally, though rarely both at the same time. Using the stairs up sixteen floors was only scary if it was dark.

## Journey to the Lower World

I don't know what happened after I left, but I presume Sheil Road flats eventually went down hill. Something to do with the hangover of managed decline, probably. Having rehoused me and my mum in Kenley Close all those years before, the council seemed to realise that high rises probably weren't such a good idea after all, and decided to demolish all three blocks. The last one came down on March 13th 2005. There's a video of it on YouTube that looks like it was filmed from Newsham Park. Take away the chat of those filming it, and if you saw the footage of Linosa Close crashing to the ground in broad daylight without knowing what was going on, it would be easy to mistake it for some kind of disaster. Maybe it was, anyway.

When Kenley Close and the other two blocks were marked for demolition, they brought artists in to each flat as they emptied. This was part of a residency programme called Further Up in the Air. I only know this from a book I was given years ago, which is a glossy art book by Marcus Coates called Journey to the Lower World.

Journey to the Lower World was published in 2005 as part of the bookscapes series put out by Alec Finlay's morning star imprint. The book charts Coates' time as a resident in Sheil Park throughout 2002 and 2003 in words, pictures and a film contained on an accompanying DVD. It focuses on a shamanic performance by Coates based on a traditional Siberian Yakut ritual, which he presented to a group of residents in one of the flats.

The cover of the book shows a picture of Coates wearing a stag's head and standing in front of Linosa Close. Inside, among the poems and photographs of Coates' performance in the living room of the flat with the curtains drawn, there is a full transcript of the event, complete with various interjections from those watching. Watching the DVD, these comments are as entertaining as anything Coates was doing, standing there with his stag's head and his braces, being all shamanic. The expressions on the audience's faces in the photographs are the best thing of all.

It takes me back to Sheil Road, seeing the book. Even though it's not the block I lived in, I can see the layout of the flat is just the same. There's a picture at the back of the book as well, of Coates standing with one of the residents at the window. The curtains are open now, and you can see the big houses over the road, and Newsham Park beyond. Funny to think no-one will ever have that same view again.

## Writer in Residence

It must have been around the same time that Marcus Coates was in residency in Linosa Close preparing Journey to the Lower World that I got a phone call from my mum. I think it was a Monday night, which was unusual, because, as with many other awkward parental relationships, we only ever called each other for cursory chats on Sunday. It had been Mother's Day, and at the last minute I'd remembered to send flowers, hoping she'd get them in time. I called to make sure, but she never picked up. I was in the doghouse for sure. As it turned out, I couldn't have been more wrong.

My mum thanked me for the flowers, and explained she'd been out when they arrived, but how "that nice Will Self from downstairs" had taken delivery of them and brought them round later.

?!?

Will Self? The writer, Will Self? What's Will Self doing living in Sheil Road flats?

My mum explained how, with the flats being knocked down, as they emptied, artists were moving in and doing all sorts of things she couldn't quite describe. Will Self, it seems, was in a flat on the 15th floor, below her.

After Will Self had delivered my flowers, it seems he invited my mum round to his place for a cup of tea. The walls had pages and pages of paper pinned on, she said, each one filled with writing. Will Self asked my mum about the flats, and the history of them. He wanted to know all that stuff, it seemed, before they were knocked down.

I presume the clearly charming Mr Self was taking part in the same Further Up in the Air residency programme as Marcus Coates, though I was more than a little taken aback by what my mum had just told me about hanging out with Self. It felt bizarre that this sort of thing could be going on in the same block of flats where I used to live with my mum when I was a teenager. It also made me feel weirdly jealous that my mum was there and I wasn't.

Who were the other artists? What were they doing? And where could I find out what they were up to? Given Will Self's history with illegal substances at the time, I was also slightly concerned about what he might have put in my mum's tea. Then again, I figured it might do her good.

## Read it in Books

As far as I know, Will Self never wrote anything about having a cup of tea with my mum in Sheil Road flats that time. Not anything that was published, anyroad. I looked in one of his books once, which had a couple of pages about the project, but he never mentioned my mum. There were probably loads of things he thought of that he never mentioned, and I doubt my mum even remembers it now, but even so. It's like it never happened.

And now, Sheil Road flats have been demolished, and the view of Newsham Park from the 16th floor living room window has gone with it. It's almost like my mum never even lived there all those years. Everything's gone now, and no-one walking past even knows it was there.

## Coming Down

They eventually replaced the high rises with bungalows in a not quite gated community with a fancy new street name and back gardens for everyone. In the little closes that are there now, it all looks a bit Brooksidey if I'm honest. If Mary, Mungo and Midge had been there, they will have moved out to the suburbs where they belong, but my mum's still there. She's on her own now. Her lorry driver boyfriend disappeared years ago, so she doesn't get to see the world much anymore.

From the wall of the close beyond the garden, the big houses beside Newsham Park are just about visible, as are what's left of the shops and pubs on West Derby Road beyond. My mum moans endlessly about her bungalow in a way she never did about the flat on the 16th floor of Kenley Close. She says she wants a transfer, but can't get the points she needs so she can, and probably never will now.

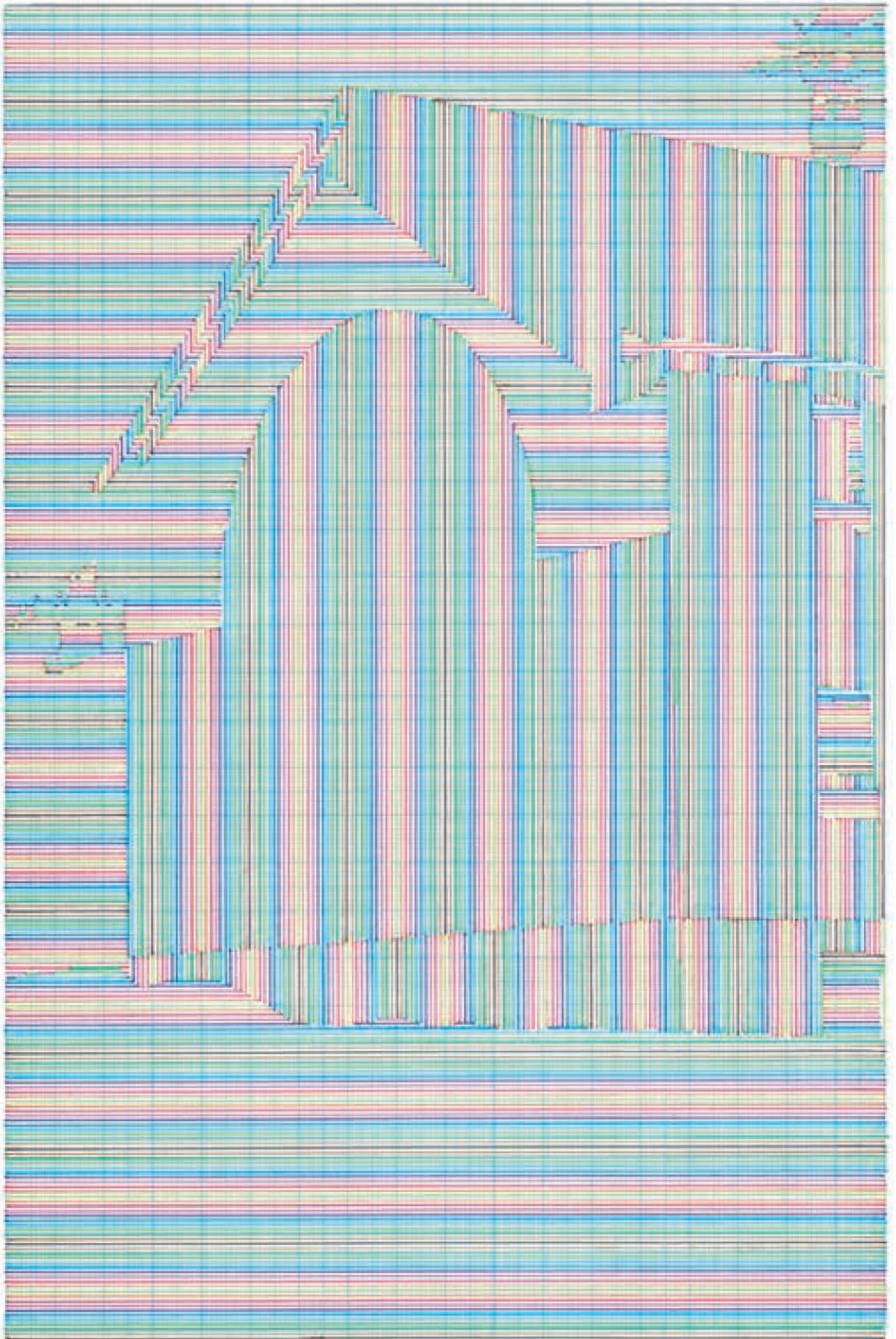
And in her world, my mum remains blissfully unaware of how Sheil Road sometimes pops up on telly these days. Not in the opening credits of Brookside before Channel Four pulled the plug because it too had gone downhill, but in gritty fly on the wall TV documentaries about desperate young women forced to sell themselves on the street for a few quid so they can score a bag of skag while predatory men exploit them.

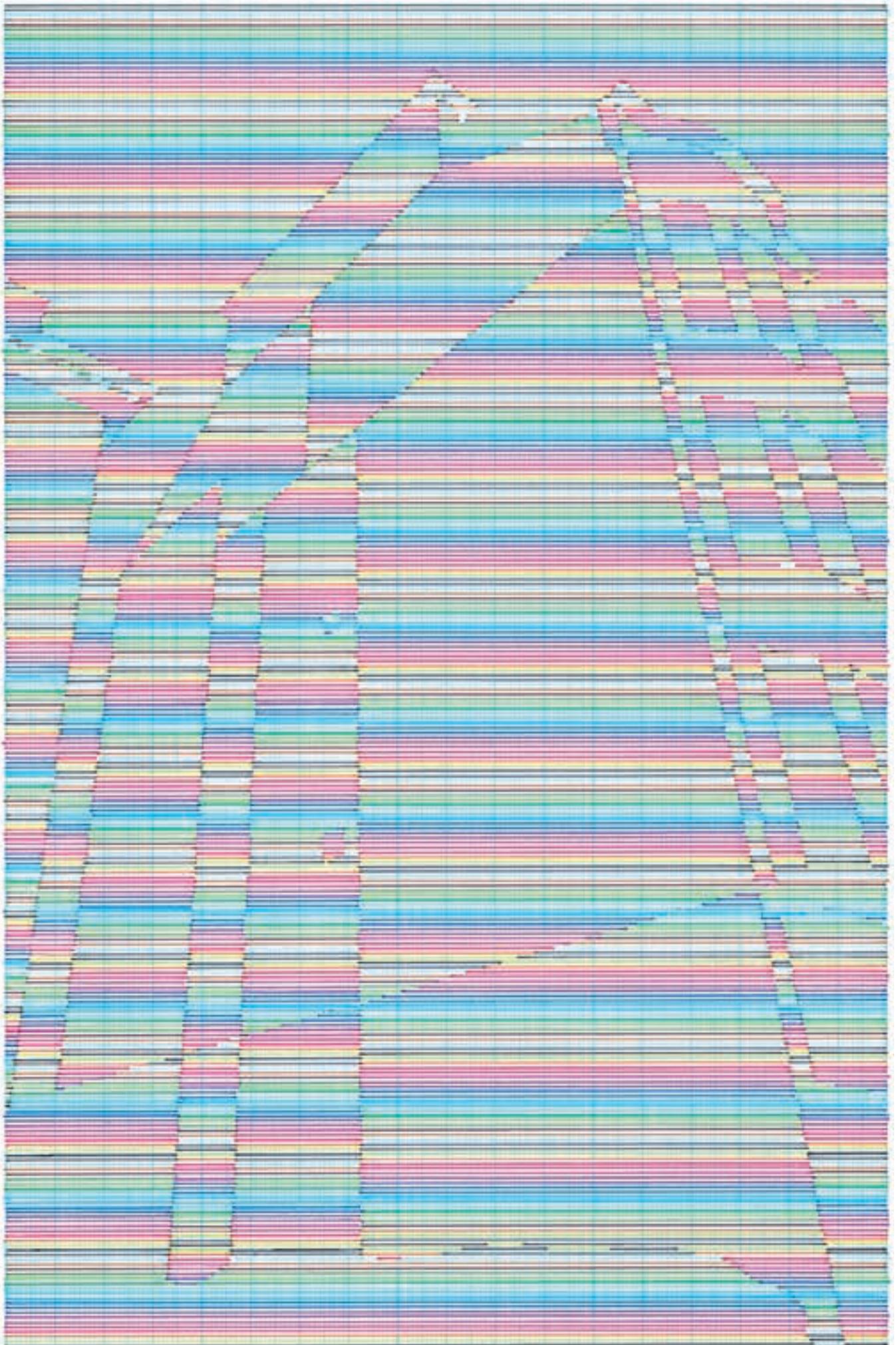
I've no idea if it was like that when what was reckoned to be the best high rises in Liverpool were still standing, or even when I was still living in Kenley Close and too wet behind the ears to notice. Either way, things seem to have got worse, and look like they'll keep on getting worse until something breaks. No wonder Mary, Mungo and Midge moved out.

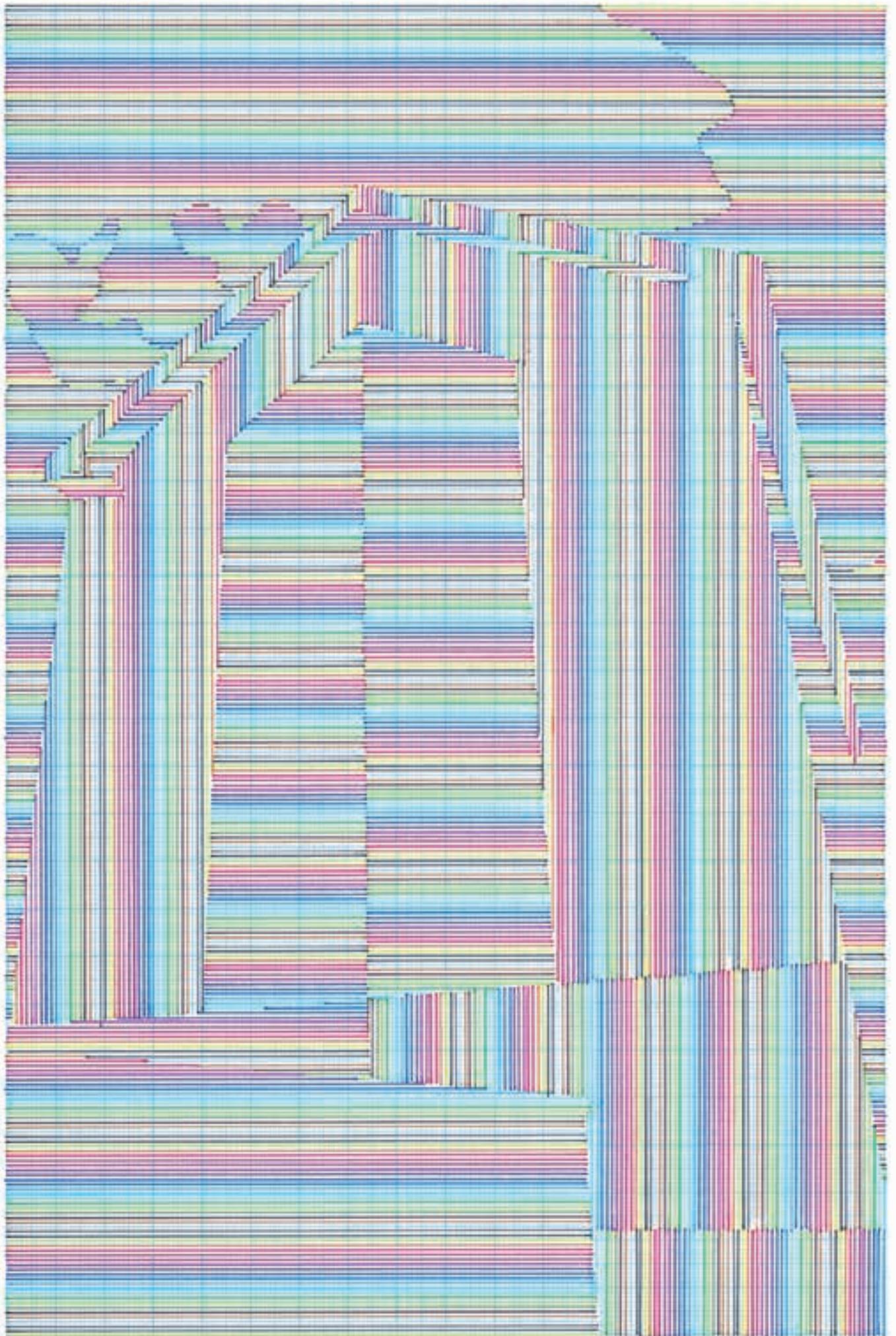


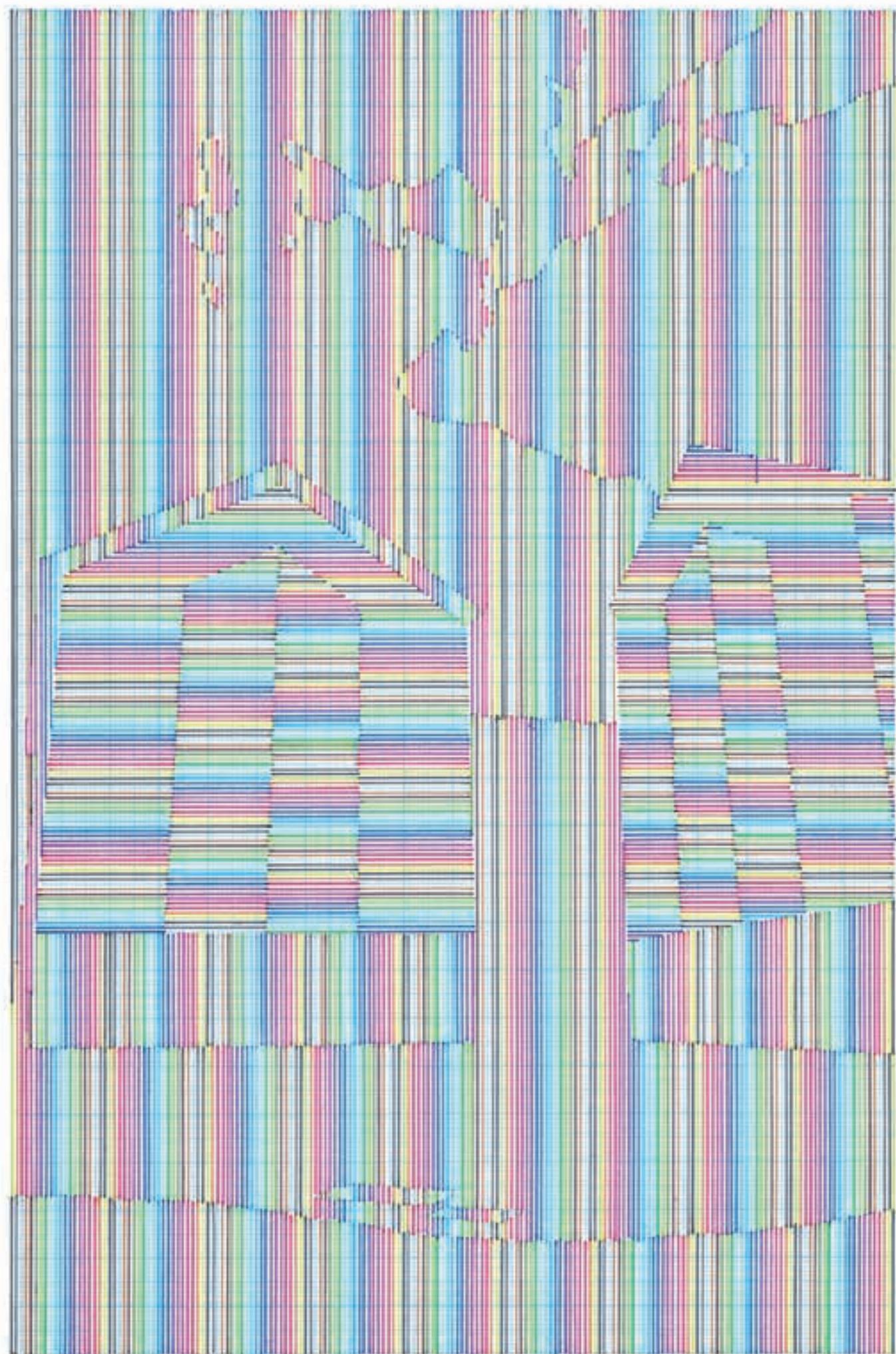
ALEX ALLAN |

Thresholds









# SPECTACLE

**SPECTACLE is a Society of Spectacles production, published in association with Show and Tell Editions.**

**ESTATE Edinburgh** ran at North Edinburgh Arts from 28.5.21 to 26.6.21. It was produced by L-13 Light Industrial Workshop as part of the MdZ ESTATE tour, and hosted by the Society of Spectacles in association with North Edinburgh Arts.

**Alex Allan** is a Glasgow based artist who has recently been engaged in a number of public art projects and is co-founder and operator of Govan Project Space in Glasgow. The works reproduced herein are Greenview Street, Riverford Road, Woodford Street, Tantallon Road - all 2020 and are pen on graph paper.

## **North Edinburgh Arts**

North Edinburgh Arts operates a purpose built, and community owned, creative venue, serving the whole of North Edinburgh from the Muirhouse base since 2002. The multi-award winning venue houses art studios, a 96-seat theatre, recording studio, gallery, offices, and café with children's play area leading onto a large community run garden, with a craft/making space beyond. NEA hosts 40,000 we visits per year, primarily from local residents, and we make sure all work is of the highest quality, because of where we are not despite it.

In April 2021 North Edinburgh completed a Community Asset Transfer with the City of Edinburgh Council. Secured by support from the local community and the Scottish Land Fund, the transfer includes an additional plot of land to allow for expansion to the north of our venue, as part of the planned MacMillan Hub. The enthusiasm of community has kept us going through these really difficult times and in return we want to build on this support to develop an inspirational place at the heart of Muirhouse.

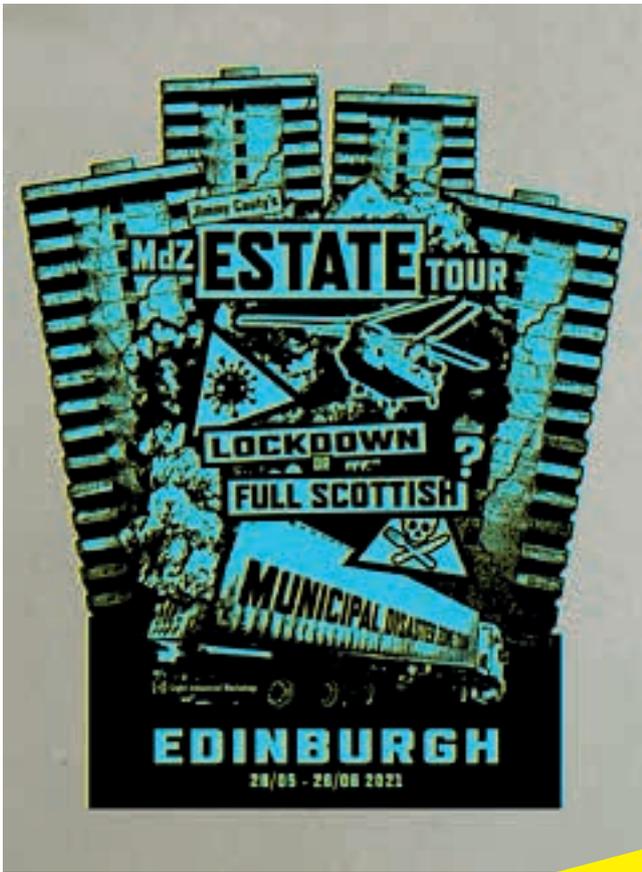
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Show and Tell Editions are at Lust & The Apple, 19 Temple, Gorebridge EH23 4SQ.  
**[www.unoriginalsins.com](http://www.unoriginalsins.com)**

The Society of Spectacles on this occasion was Neil Cooper, Graham Domke, Mark Reed and Paul Robertson.

CHILDREN OF THE AFTERMATH





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