



**CHERYL GOLDSLEGER**



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**PAINTINGS and DRAWINGS**

January 10 - February 4, 1988

**Bertha Urdang Gallery**

23 East 74th Street

New York, NY 10021

212-288-7004

“A cage went out to look for a bird.” (Franz Kafka) 1)

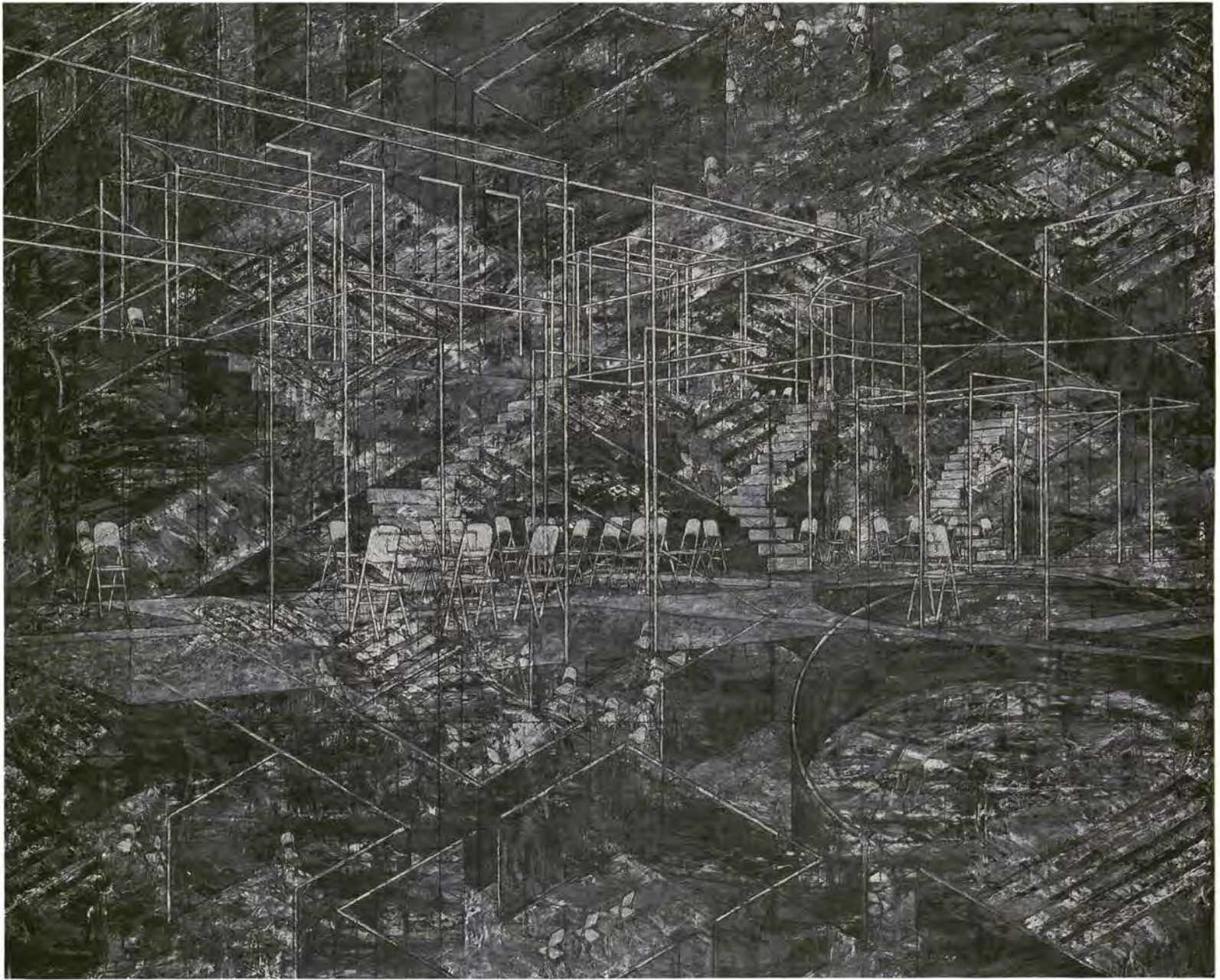
Spaces devoid of people, filled with shadows.  
-Comments on the works of Cheryl Goldsleger

Almost monochrome painting, graduated on a colorless scale from white to grey, to ochre, to black, that is how the labyrinth-like mysterious art concepts of Cheryl Goldsleger are represented. Rooms devoid of people, undefined by their expansion and purpose, only inhabited by chairs represent themselves at first sight as logical, perfectly constructed. Calculation and estimation express the strong world of mathematics, of which understanding and correlation remain a mystery. One looks as often from above into rooms as one becomes lost in them, hopelessly ensnared. Clarity and precision are suggested, where the impenetrable reigns, where invisible shackles, holes in the floor and abysses lie in ambush, and where every way out vanishes in the impenetrable walls, into one-way, dead end streets.

These are pictures, deeply afflicted, lucid and absurd at the same time and therein visibly establish an attitude as Eugene Ionesco had formulated it for the autonomous theatre. “Sometimes the world appears to me devoid of concepts and of a reality that is unreal. This feeling of unreality, the search for a fundamental, anonymous reality from which I believe I am not to be excluded, that’s what I want to express - by means of figures which go astray in senselessness and which don’t call anything their own except for their fears, their repentance, their failures, the emptiness of their lives. Beings who have been pushed into something, that fails to leave any meaning, can only appear grotesque and think suffering is nothing but a tragic joke. How could I, since the world remains incomprehensible to me, understand my own work? I wait until it will be explained to me.” 2)

Just as the grotesque presents the only possibility for Ionesco, namely to express in theatre a world that is neither rationally nor morally comprehensible and hence removes itself from any outside reality just as the traditional theatre does, so it seems that for the much younger Cheryl Goldsleger the ambivalence between superficially recognizable structures and inner absurdity is the only way out. She also develops a process comparable to Ionesco: she eliminates as much of the factual reality as - and this is crucial - she does away with the traditional characteristics of representational and abstract painting.





Scale: Substructure, 1988, oil, wax, pigment on linen, 48"x58"



Goldsleger's pictures are first of all not painted, but rather they produce the effect of construction drawings which have been executed in a very peculiar encaustic wax painting method. So they do not fit into any traditional categories such as drawing, collage or painting. Moreover, they are neither abstract nor figurative, but both together, without ever bringing one of these to its logical conclusion. So there are no rooms created which significantly reappear in our imagination, let alone which could be reconstructed. However, we are not dealing with informative, or even constructivistic, experiments. With respect to their rational as well as their sensual potential they remain open and inexplicable.

They are perfectly staged concealments of their own perplexity, of their own insecurity. And this necessarily leads us to another interpretation which is as subjective/biographical as it is generally historic: Goldsleger can no more be understood without including her Jewish environment as at the same time my own historical restrictions decisively determine my discussions of her work.

Places without history, nevertheless full of shadows, are created in Goldsleger's pictures. And they are and they challenge at the same time the posthumously born, certainly of her who created these works as well as those who look at them. And without a doubt I can and I am forced to look at these pictures as a German, who was, mercifully, born after the horrors of National Socialism and the Holocaust, and who looks at these differently from any non-German and may, therefore, also interpret them incorrectly. Maybe it is true when Cheryl Goldsleger states that her work, her rooms really are not threatening: "Well, no, not totally trapped. Because you're always looking down, there's no exit - a sense of closure, possibly. You can't get out of the spaces. But I don't see them as uncomfortable spaces or a place you really wouldn't want to be. If you were in this particular space you could go from place to place in that space. You wouldn't have to stay in just one room." 3) To me this sounds like a protective statement, which tries to hide her own vulnerability.

I cannot conceive of these works other than with consternation, as the attempt of a human being to banish the horrors of the past into form and hence to be free of them. I can hear in these rooms the voices of people who stand in front of us as a remembrance, without being given the chance to take on form, without attaining names and faces. These voices which again and again disappear in the alleys of the labyrinth, talking to us without our being able to understand them. "The speaker (who remained motionless during the scene of the double murders) decides after a few moments to speak. Facing the empty rows of chairs, he lets it be known to the insecure crowd

that he is deaf and dumb. He makes the gestures of the deaf and mute person: desperate efforts to make himself understood. Then he lets out all the croaks, moans and throat sounds of a deaf and mute person.” 4)

If one attempts, apart from the specific historic place and time in which these works have been created, to see them independently from their painful connection with Jewish history, and only see them in their general, iconographic context, then one is reminded of numerous parallels. The Palace at Knossos is an example and, in general, the always popular, consummate illustrations of the most complicated and potentially exitless, maze-like structures, gardens and horrifying “scream machines” since the Renaissance. And also, of course, one is reminded of the “Carceri” of Piranesi. Today, as a result of the development of psychoanalysis, there are the implied experiments searching for clues of the inner labyrinths as they have been so intimately depicted by Max Ernst in art. But there are also monomaniac and obsessive stories by Kafka and Kierkegaard, which portray a comparable view of life. One can find extraordinarily close parallels to Giacometti: the elongated figures there become spiritual substructure here, an attempt of an imagined, and here realized, network in the linear system of the passages.

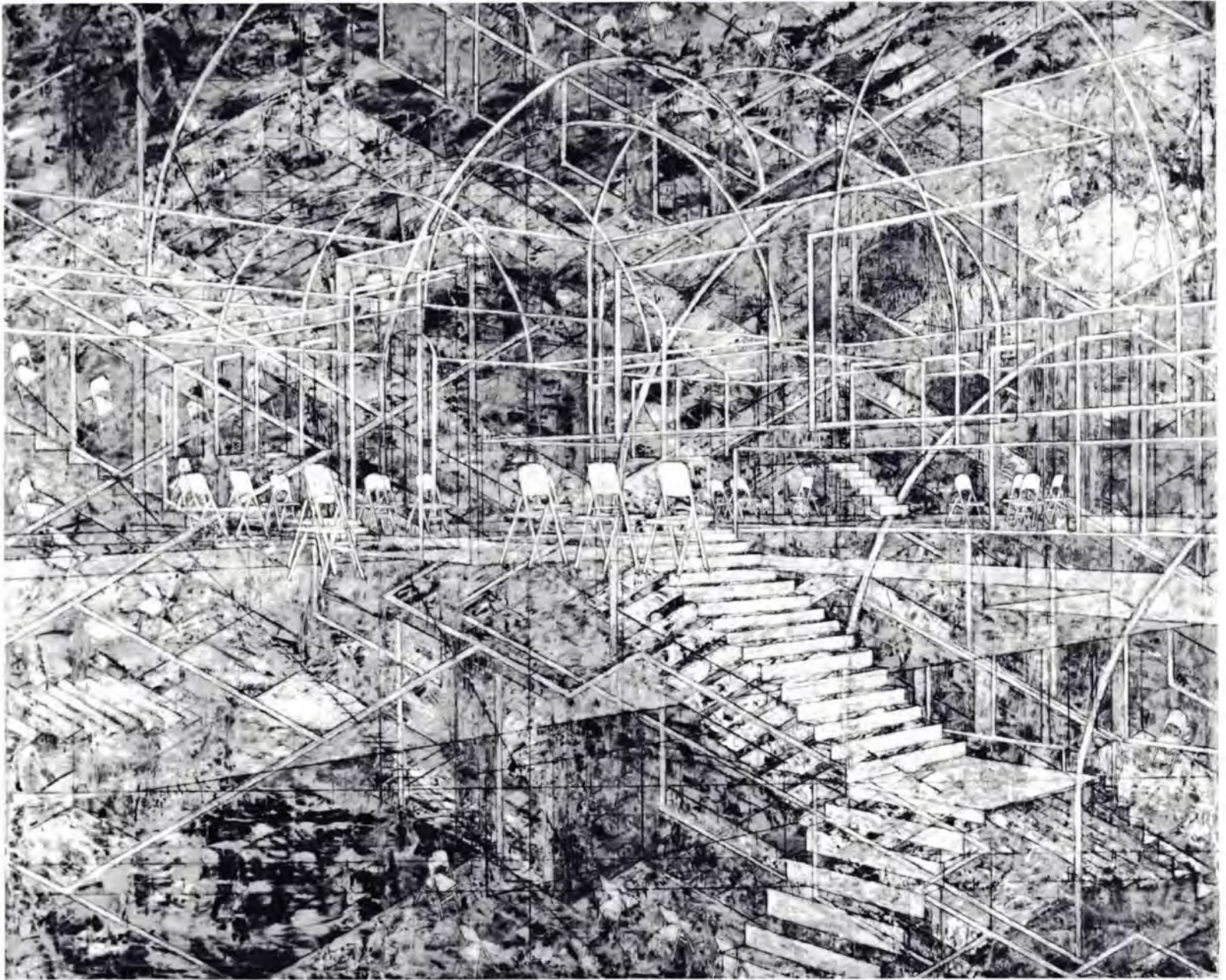
The quotation by Kafka at the beginning of the text of the cage looking for a bird 5), sounds like an interpretation of Cheryl Goldsleger’s structures: they are the sheathings and prisons for shadows, which were once figures and will be again, and they are at the same time metaphors of an apparent freedom that at closer view is full of barricades and blind alleys.

Dr. Carla Schulz-Hoffmann, Oberkonservatorin  
Staatsgalerie Moderner Kunst  
Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen  
Muenchen

Anmerkungen (Footnotes)

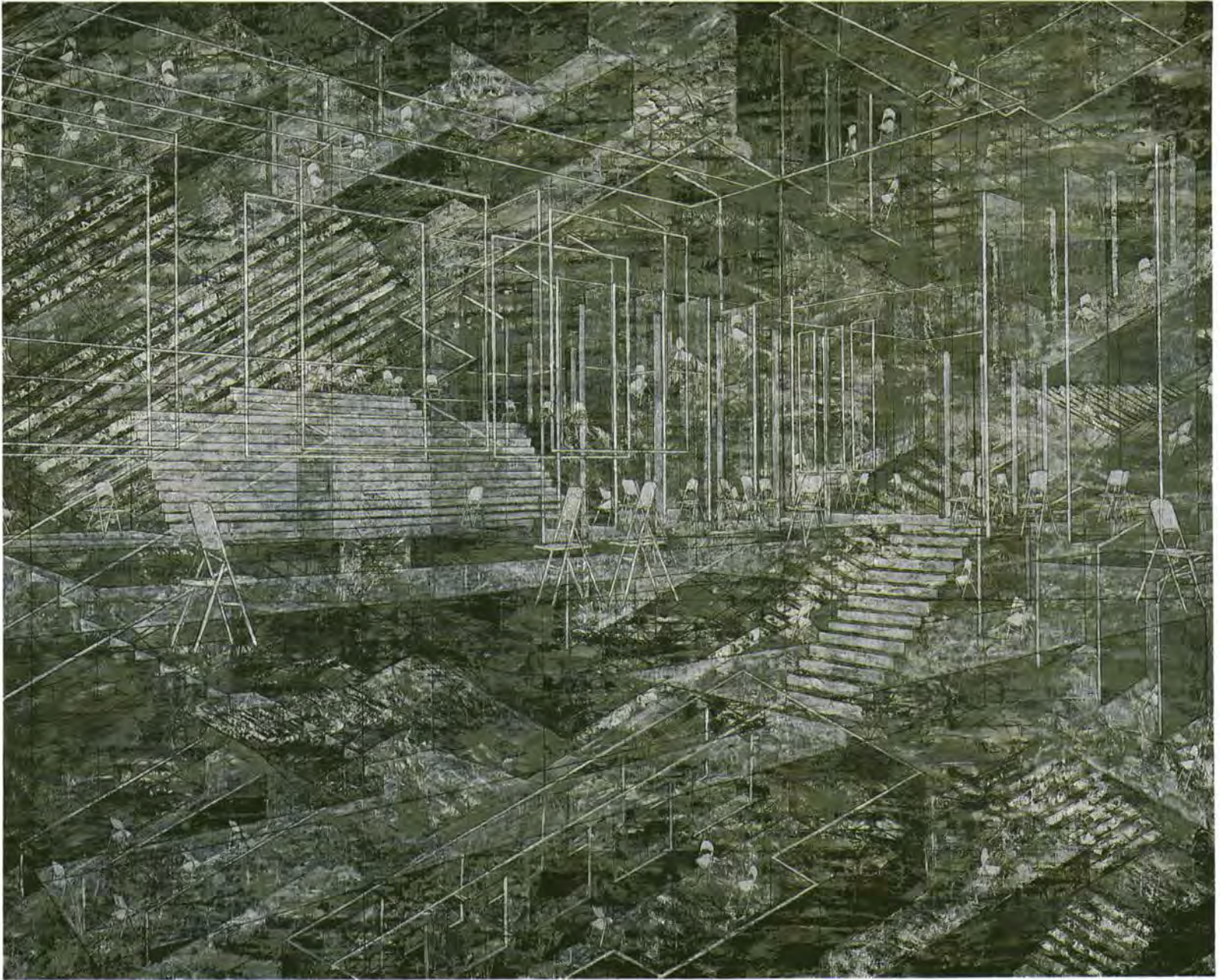
- 1) Franz Kafka, Betrachtungen ueber Suende, Leid, Hoffnung und den wahren Weg, in: ders., Er, Prosa von Franz Kafka, Auswahl von Martin Walser, Frankfurt 1963, S. 197.
- 2) Eugene Ionesco, “Die Stuehle, Der neue Mieter,” Stuttgart 1962, o.S. (Vorbemerkung des Autors).
- 3) Cheryl Goldsleger in einem interview mit Peter Morrin, abgedruckt in: Southern Expressions, the Kidder Peabody Series, High Museum of Art, Atlanta, Georgia, Dec. 10, 1985 - February 9, 1986 (publiziert anlässlich einer Ausstellung der Kuenstlerin in diesem Zeitraum).
- 4) Eugene Ionesco, vgl. Anm. 2, S. 71 (“Die Stuehle”).
- 5) s. Anm. 1.





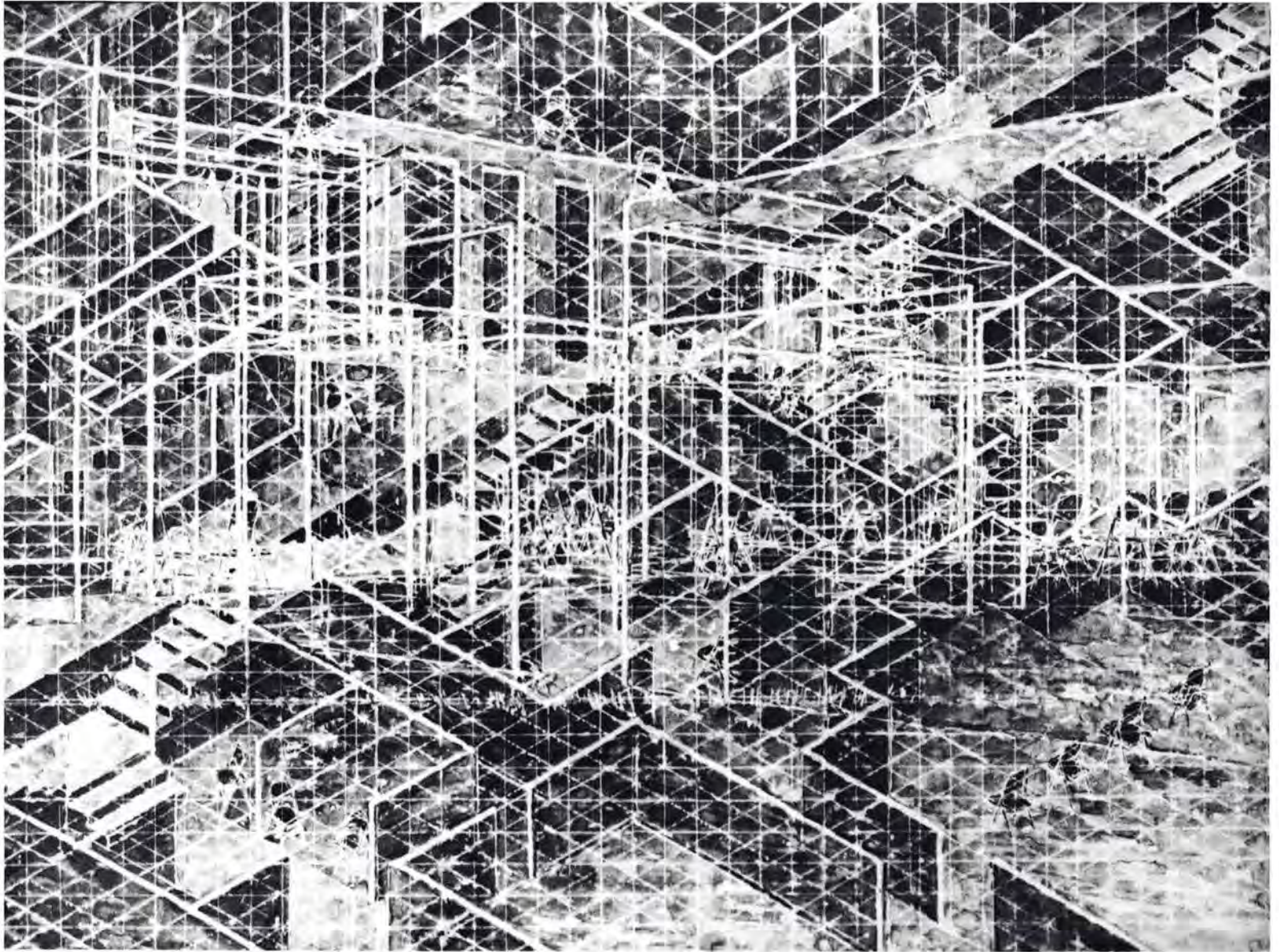
Scale: Arcade, 1988, oil, wax, pigment on linen, 34"x42"





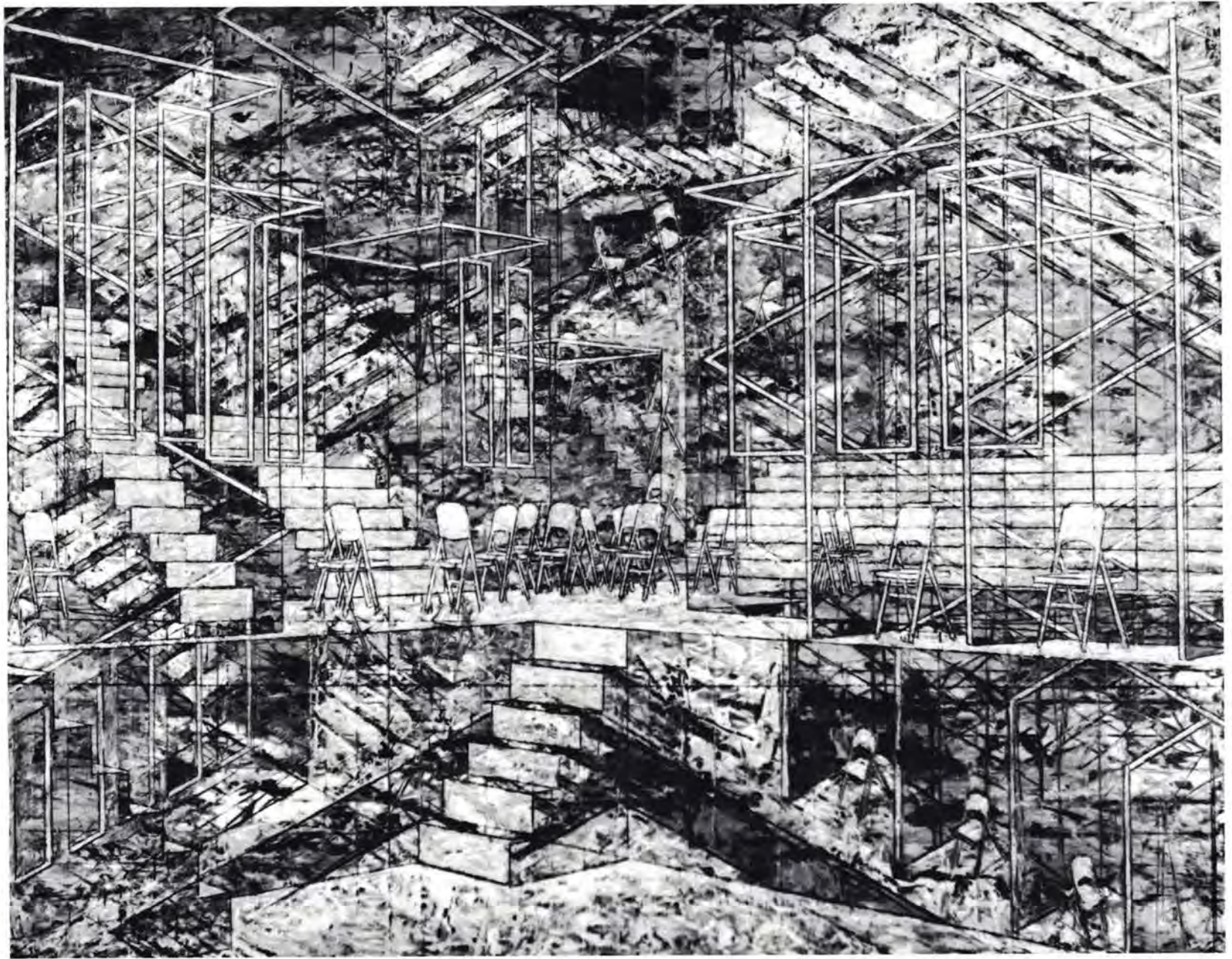
Scale: Interior Central Section, 1988, oil, wax, pigment on linen, 58"x72"





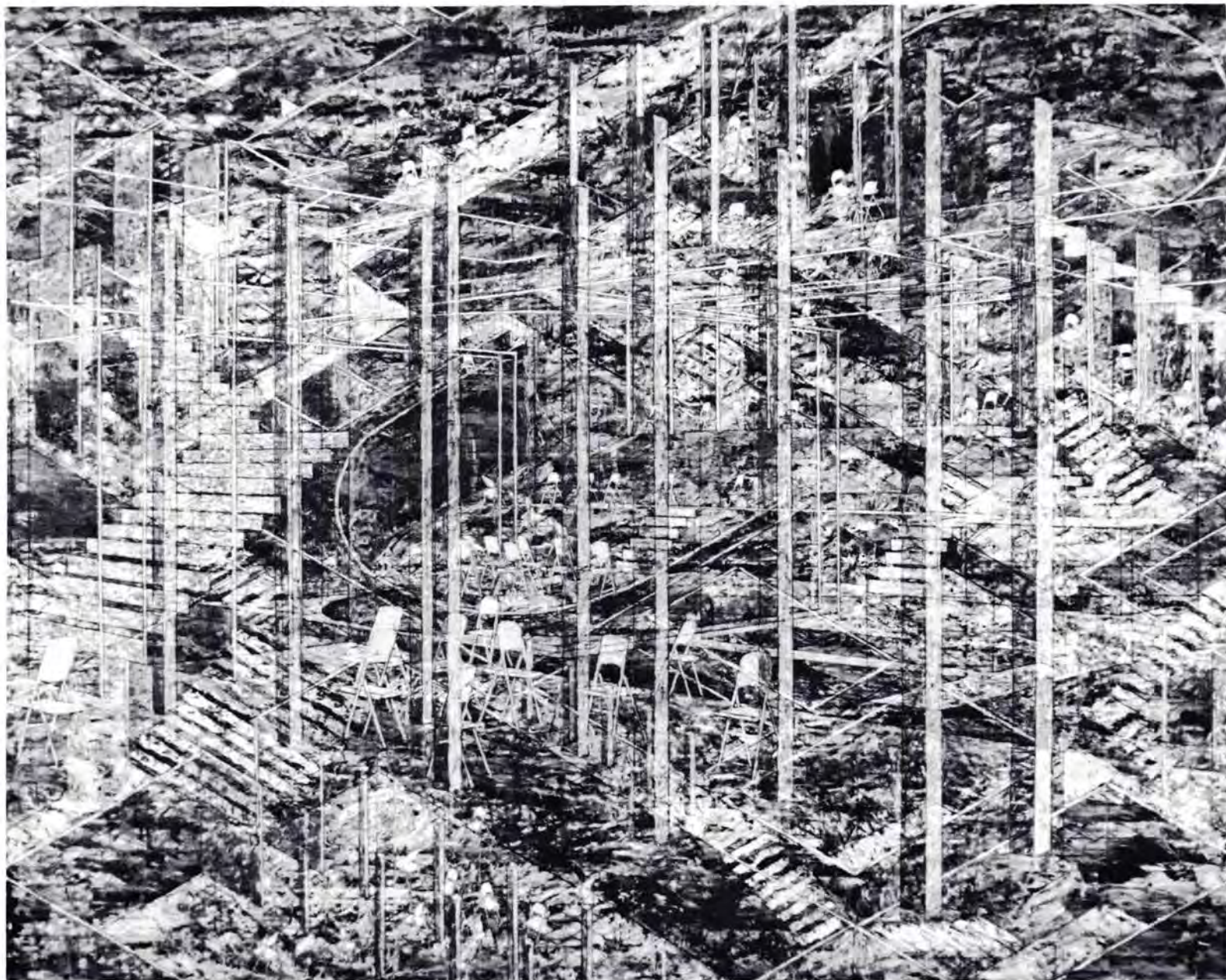
Scale: Substructure, 1988, gum arabic and graphite, 30"x40"





Scale: Site, 1988, oil, wax, pigment on linen, 30"x38"





Scale: Interior Boundaries, 1988, oil, wax, pigment on linen, 58"x72"



## CHERYL GOLDSLEGER

### SELECTED AWARDS

American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, New York, NY, Purchase Award, Childe Hassam Purchase Fund 1988  
RJR/SECCA Fellowship, Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art 1986  
National Endowment for the Arts, Artist's Fellowship 1982  
Ohio Arts Council, Artist's Fellowship 1982  
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, Artist's Fellowship 1981

### SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

Bertha Urdang Gallery, New York, NY 1989, 1987, 1984, 1982  
Heath Gallery, Atlanta, GA 1989, 1983, 1980  
Arden Gallery, Boston, MA 1988  
High Museum, Atlanta, GA 1985  
Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art, Winston-Salem, NC 1985

### SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, DC "41st Biennial Exhibition of Contemporary American Painting" 1989  
Contemporary Arts Center, New Orleans, LA 1988  
Lannan Museum, Lake Worth, FL 1987  
American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, New York, NY 1987  
Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY "Recent Acquisitions" 1986  
Ivan Dougherty Gallery, City Art Institute, Sydney, Australia "New Work, New York" 1986  
New Orleans Museum of Art, New Orleans, LA "1986 New Orleans Triennial" 1986  
Alternative Museum, New York, NY "Artists of the Southeast" 1985  
Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, VA "Drawing" (touring exhibition) 1985  
Islip Art Museum, East Islip, NY "Hard Line" 1984  
The Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia, PA "Connections" 1983

### SELECTED REVIEWS

Times Picayune, New Orleans, LA, "A Trio of Imaginative Views of Life", by Roger Green. April 20, 1988  
The Miami Herald, Miami, FL, "The Lannan Museum", by Mike Wilson. November 29, 1987  
New Art Examiner, Chicago, IL, "Southern Comfort/Discomfort", by Patrick E. White. Volume 13, Number 9, May 1986  
The Atlanta Journal and Constitution, Atlanta, GA, "Goldsleger Exhibit A Study of Cultural Fragments", by Catherine Fox. December 22, 1985  
Art in America, New York, NY, "Cheryl Goldsleger at Bertha Urdang", by Donald Kuspit. Volume 73, Number 3, March 1985  
Artforum, New York, NY, "Cheryl Goldsleger at Bertha Urdang Gallery" by Patricia C. Phillips. Volume XXIII, Number 5, January 1985  
Arts, New York, NY, "Cheryl Goldsleger", by Evan Firestone. Volume 59, Number 3, November 1984  
Art News, New York, NY, "Cheryl Goldsleger/Donald Shambroom: Bertha Urdang Gallery", by Gerrit Henry. Volume 81, Number 2, February 1982

### SELECTED COLLECTIONS

Brooklyn Museum, New York, NY  
Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Israel  
Herbert F. Johnson Museum, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY  
Albright Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY  
Lannan Foundation, Los Angeles, CA  
Tel Aviv Museum, Tel Aviv, Israel  
New Orleans Museum of Art, New Orleans, LA  
Chase Manhattan Bank, New York, NY  
John Wieland Homes, Atlanta, GA  
The Progressive Corporation, Cleveland, OH

## CATALOGUE OF EXHIBITION

### PAINTINGS

Scale: Central Passage, 1988, oil, wax, pigment on linen, 58"x72"

Scale: Interior Boundaries, 1988, oil, wax, pigment on linen, 58"x72"

Scale: Arcade, 1988, oil, wax, pigment on linen, 34"x42"

Scale: Substructure, 1988, oil, wax, pigment on linen, 48"x58"

Scale: Site, 1988, oil, wax, pigment on linen, 30"x38"

Scale: Interior Central Section, 1988, oil, wax, pigment on linen, 58"x72"

Scale: Enclave, 1988, oil, wax, pigment on linen, 38"x48"

### DRAWINGS

Sectioning, 1988, graphite, 18"x24"

Scale: Arcade, 1988, gum arabic and graphite, 30"x40"

Scale: Substructure, 1988, gum arabic and graphite, 30"x40"

Enclosure/Repitition, 1988, graphite, 48"x65"

Stations: Interior Central Passage, 1988, graphite, 26"x42"

Scale: Central Passage, 1988, gum arabic and graphite, 38"x50"





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