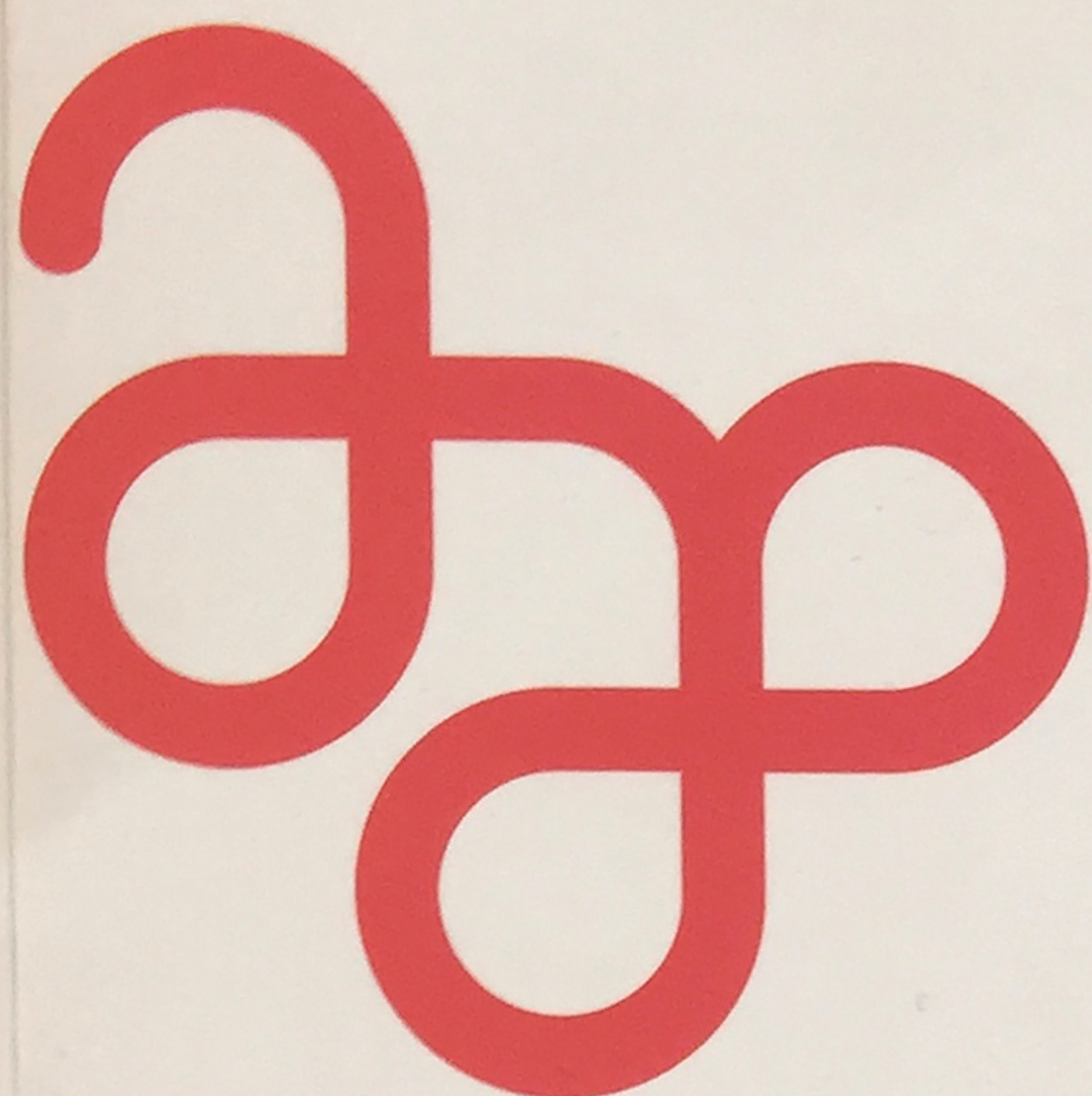
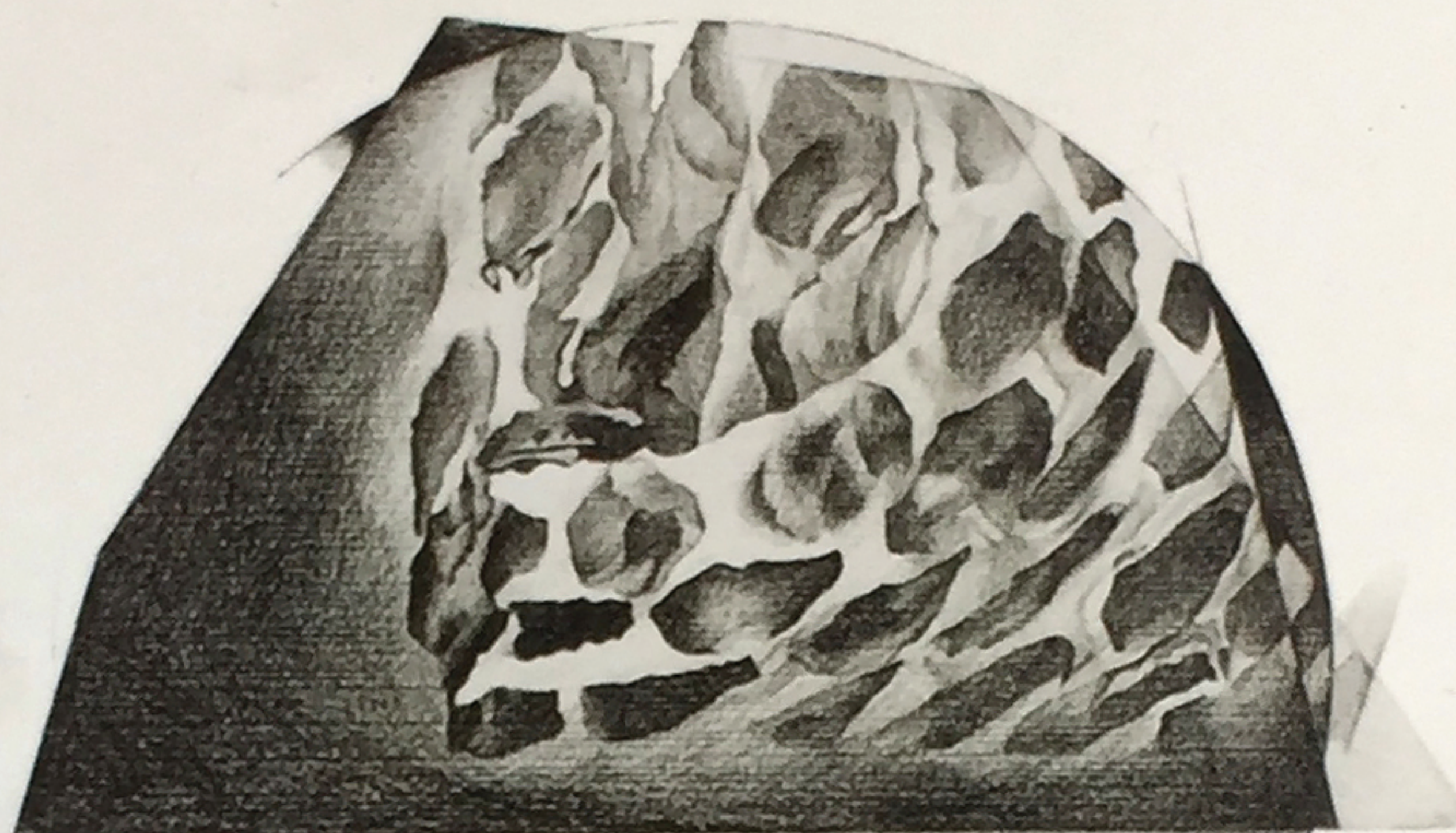




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# Emre Hüner

PHOTOGRAPHS AND TEXT BY HG MASTERS

Exploring the architectural, archaeological and science fictional



Emre Hüner behind the desk of his Istanbul studio, with a test screenprint from a 2017 residency behind him.

The area around Emre Hüner's Istanbul studio is a sea of electrical hardware and lighting stores, occupying dilapidated, exhaust-stained buildings that surround islands of the city's stalled gentrification, like the nearby mixed-used venue Suma Han. During the day, the streets on the hillside from Şişhane down toward Karaköy are flooded with merchants, jammed with cargo vans and littered with dollies, as stacks of industrial products are endlessly loaded and unloaded.

It was mid-afternoon in early May when I visited Hüner, who called out to me from the entrance of an incongruous blue-tiled building, and led me up a dusty staircase into a clean, freshly painted space, no more than 30 square meters. He had only occupied the studio for three or four months, he explained by way

of apology and introduction. To the right was a sawhorse table piled with foam core, spray cans, glazed ceramic forms and a pair of yellow-painted, abstract maquettes; several photographs were hanging on the fluorescent-lit walls. A metal bookcase facing the door held stacks of art and architectural publications, a black-and-white photo of a pod-shaped, 1960s-era NASA lunar vehicle, another abstract maquette in a deeper yellow and more amorphous ceramic objects with dark or earthen glazes. To the left was a larger open area with a desk covered in drawings, stacked with plastic palettes of dried watercolor paint, and print-outs of texts.

We sat down at his desk to look at his laptop and reviewed his projects of the last three or four years. I had not seen Hüner's work since the 14th Istanbul Biennial in

2015, when he showed a complex, 38-minute, three-channel film titled *Neochronophobia* (2015), with filmic depictions of his sculptural assemblages and a bald man exploring landscapes with striking geological features and scrutinizing strange-looking objects—a work that evoked ideas from the fields of object-oriented ontology and post-humanism. In the same venue, Hüner had also shown large, abstract, glazed-ceramic sculptures mounted on angular supports, from the series “Perpetual Island Infinite Vehicle” (2015), that themselves looked like geological samples or lava-covered landscapes.

He pointed to the sawhorse table and the wall behind it where he had put up photographs of near-identical maquettes, photographed against colorful red, blue or muted-gray backgrounds. He had produced these images—called “Floating Cabin Rider Capsule Reactor Cycle”—during a residency in Kitakyushu, Japan, at the Center for Contemporary Art Kitakyushu, in early 2015. He described the forms as “something between fictional architecture, a 3D print and an organic thing that becomes a dimensionless, monumental object in space-time.” He had wanted to produce a book of these images, but because of a budget cut, the publication never happened. Instead, he held the last exhibition in CCA's gallery space before it was demolished, painting three-and-a-half-meter-tall gray helmeted figures—resembling futuristic spacesuits and indoor-bicycling helmets—on the walls and showing the maquette-sculptures on low, connected white platforms. “I was imagining a different sort of society, a thousand years on,” he said. After the show, because the constructions were so delicate and there was no budget to ship or store them, they were destroyed.



Hüner doesn't know what to do with his photographs, which is part of the reason why he rented the studio. He said he is contemplating producing a book of them with some of the writings he did in Japan, which range from short science-fiction stories to poetry. He gave me one, a prose-poem titled 12:59:00, that begins, "Orange fields of fertile tech-soil, / Tons of plastic boxes containing other boxes in them." They are loosely based on an imagined place Hüner calls the Settlements. "There are always elements of landscape and there are no characters," he said of his writings. "They are more like descriptions of situations; yet there's always an element of travel."

Like the texts, the images and objects of "Floating Cabin Rider Capsule Reactor Cycle" are in transit between stable categories. Hüner explained he doesn't know what to call the maquette-like forms because "they are not sculptures per se—because I wouldn't just show one. But, it's not a prop either." He said it's the same for the ceramic objects he made for scenes in *Neochronophobia*, some of which resemble Neolithic tools or ritual objects. That took us back further in time to the film itself.

Hüner had originally planned to shoot the video for a 2013 solo exhibition at Arter, in Istanbul, but production was interrupted by the anti-government protests that swept the country in late May and June of that year. The script called for only a sole actor, Tomás Lemarquis, with whom Hüner had wanted to work, interacting with ceramic "thought forms" and other objects, which become equally central figures. The title itself is a neologism—which appears in a story Hüner wrote before shooting the film—of "neo," "chronophobia" ("fear of time") and "ubiquitous," and means, as Hüner explained it, "the desire to be everywhere at the same time." The human protagonist is a bald-headed character, known as the Maker, who inspects objects including stones, metal instruments and ceramic objects at visually stunning sites across eastern and southeastern Turkey—some geologically unique, others featuring massive infrastructure projects that look both, or either, prehistoric or intergalactic. (At one point he gets a lift in the back of a donkey cart from several village kids, so the scenario is not entirely postapocalyptic.) In the central channel, the camera circles around

Hüner's compositions made from amorphous, glazed ceramics resembling ancient artifacts from ancient civilizations, juxtaposed with rocks, salts, crystals, fabrics and metals against colorful backdrops. The third (right) channel features the Maker again, appearing in a window-less, studio-like capsule, examining and cataloging images (a postcard from Expo '70 Osaka, for example) and objects. The materiality of every element, including the actor's own skin, a watermelon rind, a toad, and the walls of a cave, comes into sharp focus, taking on a new and strange, science-fictional appearance. Collectively, the three channels collapse a sense of ancient, present or futuristic time.

The way that the past can look futuristic, and vice versa, at the same time, is echoed again in a series of prints that he produced in Belgium in the summer of 2017 at the Frans Masereel Centrum, with found images of Japanese modern architecture as well as minerals and stones. These works juxtapose photo etchings of modernist buildings and geometric forms with letter-press-printed corporate logos from a book about designing corporate identities.



Hüner's studio overlooks this brutalist concrete building full of electrical hardware and lighting companies. He pointed out the sign on one of them reading "Elektrik İzolasyon" ("Electrical Isolation").





(Top)  
The bookshelf is a microcosm of Hünér's interests and practice, with books on architecture and art. There was also a yellow-painted maquette, similar to the ones in the photographs he produced while in residence in Japan, at CCA Kitakyushu, and several ceramic pieces next to a set of carving tools.

(Bottom)  
Resting on piles of purple foam board on the tabletop were a pair of yellow-painted sculptural maquettes, made from wood and plastic pieces, as well as several glazed ceramic pieces by Hünér. Photos from the "Floating Cabin Rider Capsule Reactor Cycle" series are taped to the wall.





We then started talking about Hünér's current works-in-progress, which he's calling "Electricity and Isolation"—based on the name of the shop outside ("Elektrik İzolasyon")—and which involve a return to his intuitive drawing practice. The sketches and unfinished drawings on his desk take us further back in time, to 2007 and Hünér's artist-book *Bent 003*, a volume of 28 drawings published that year by BAS (artist Banu Cennotoğlu's platform and imprint) with artist Philippine Hoegen. Hünér turns to a page with a dystopian landscape featuring a giant gas mask and a military tank. He had only realized later, he told me, that it was like a three-channel video. On another page, he showed me a bald-headed

figure that resembles the actor Lemarquis, who he hadn't actually met yet at that point.

While he discussed how art ideally gives you this free space to, for example, make a dialogue-less, three-channel video, ceramic sculptures, and drawings, the material properties of objects—which receive incredible attention in his works—are also what propel him. "I have the necessity of doing things, because I don't work with a single idea. I'm not a conceptual artist, but I'm also not really a studio artist. Making ceramics lets me apply that idea. But maybe for the next idea, I will need epoxy," he remarked. "How I spend my time, that's the crucial thing." And with that, we were back to the present.



(Top)  
Pages from *Bent 003*, a book of 28 drawings published by BAS in Istanbul.

(Bottom)  
Hünér showing me prints that he made on a residency in 2017 at the Frans Masereel Centrum in Belgium. The top images in the prints are photo-etchings made from found images of modern architecture or minerals and stones, while the letterpress texts are corporate logos from a typography book.

