

In the summer of 2017 my brother Todd took me to a small town north of Omaha that had been settled in the late 19th century. There was a building there for sale with 14-foot-high ceilings that sounded like it might be a possible studio for me to finish some large-scale paintings when my residency at the Bemis Center in Omaha ended.

The minute I crossed the threshold I could feel that the building was built using the same ratios that I work with to construct my grids. I carefully observed details and relationships within the structure and quickly knew I would buy it; the price was a steal, even if the edifice needed some work. I didn't allow myself to think about practicalities, I'd never considered owning property.

A year later when I'd finished the last four of the *Treaty* paintings, I wasn't sure what I wanted to do with the building, so I called Peter Ballman. We had been talking to each other for nearly 20 years about all manner of things circling around architecture and I knew he would be as entranced with the structure as I was, yet I hardly would have imagined what followed when I engaged with Ballman Khapalova.

Among the first drawings of the project I saw that Peter and Dasha made were the two *Light and Structure Grid* drawings (see [Gallery 3](#), images 9 – 10). I initially thought, "Oh, I don't remember giving them an image of the 12358 drawing" from 1993 (see [Gallery 4](#), image 1). Later, when I realized how they made their drawing and that they had never seen my large drawing, I understood that it was an architectural drawing that verified my feeling that the building was using the same ratios I work with in my paintings. As a painter I never could have made that drawing, yet it conveyed the information I had perceived through my body when I first entered the building.

A similar thing happened with their *Fields and Elements* drawings (see [Gallery 3](#), images 1 – 5). I first saw them as Peter was flipping through some images on his phone when we met for coffee. They were so remarkably similar to my [Torso/Roots](#) paintings (see also [Gallery 4](#), images 3 – 5), I thought he had downloaded some images from my website. But no, in fact, *they* were drawing through iterations of their architectural plan, articulating different layers of space within spatial configurations coexisting inside the building. Through our work together I discovered a very similar intention informs the *Torso/Roots* paintings, a series I began while teaching at The Irwin S. Chanin School of Architecture.

As the profound resonance between their project for the Hooper building and my work surfaced, it was impossible not to riff on the possibilities. The program had evolved into an archive and studio for my paintings, drawings and writings, and so it became an affirmation of our endeavor that the architecture and the works of art we planned to install in it had been talking to each other since before the beginning.

I had to reflect on my many seminars for the architectonics classes at Cooper that focused on the relationship between art and architecture with both the similarities and differences in their respective formal languages in view.

– Joan Waltemath