Artist in Residency: Sebastian Fröhlich, hallo@sebastianfroehlich.at
Medium: Photography (Black & White) & Augmented Reality
Location: Fonderie Darling, 745 Place Sable-Gris, Montréal, Québec, Canada
Duration: October 1 - November 28, 2025
Grant: dieKUNSTsammlung Oberösterreich, Austria & CALQ Québec, Canada
Credits: All pictures by © Sebastian Fröhlich 2025

Project Report

1. Background and Motivation

During a two-month residency in **Montreal**, I developed a photographic project focused on the city's architectural landscape, with a particular emphasis on **brutalist structures**. Montreal presents a unique architectural condition: monumental concrete buildings shaped by **utopian ambition** coexist with contemporary glass and steel constructions, historical layers, and visible traces of **political and economic compromise**. When I arrived in Montreal, I was truly amazed by how different the architectural landscape felt - the architecture in Austria is strongly shaped by historic buildings and richly detailed facades. It stood in striking contrast to what I was used to and left a strong impression on me.

The residency offered the opportunity to step away from fast-paced production and engage in a slow, observant practice. Architecture was approached not as documentation, but as a **carrier of memory, emotion, and future projection**. The project builds directly on this immersive engagement with place, time, and material.

2. Conceptual Framework

The project is conceptually grounded in the tension ***between concrete and promise***. Brutalist architecture in Montreal emerged from moments of optimism: Expo 67, large-scale public infrastructure, universities, and housing projects. Yet many of these visions remain incomplete, compromised, or weathered by time.

My work explores brutalism as a dual condition:

- as ***utopia***, driven by belief in progress and collective futures
- as ***dystopia***, marked by decay, neglect, and unfulfilled ambition

Rather than judging these buildings, the **photographs aim to listen to them**, treating architecture as a **silent witness to political, social, and emotional histories**.

Human presence is largely absent. This intentional reduction allows the buildings to appear as abstract bodies, monolithic, yet vulnerable, emphasizing form, surface, and spatial rhythm.

3. Artistic Approach and Methodology

The project combines **black-and-white photography with augmented reality (AR)** to expand the visual work into a narrative and historical dimension. While the photographs function as autonomous images, AR adds a second, **invisible layer that can be activated by the viewer**.

Through augmented reality, the **photographed buildings are given a first-person voice**. Each structure **speaks about its own creation**: the historical moment in which it was conceived, the societal ambitions attached to it, and the ideological framework that led to the choice of brutalism as an architectural language.

The voices reflect on what followed: **erosion, neglect, failed promises, and the emergence of dystopian realities** that contrast sharply with the original utopian intentions.

Text within the augmented reality layer is color-coded:

- **yellow text** represents *utopian visions:* optimism, progress, and belief in the future
- **black text** represents *dystopian outcomes:* decay, disappointment, and unresolved tension

This dual system allows both narratives to coexist simultaneously, without privileging one over the other. The photographic process itself remained slow and site-specific:

- repeated visits to the same buildings: **different sun angles, different shadows, different imagery**
- focus on **fragments**, **edges**, and **transitions**
- **abstraction** through framing and perspective

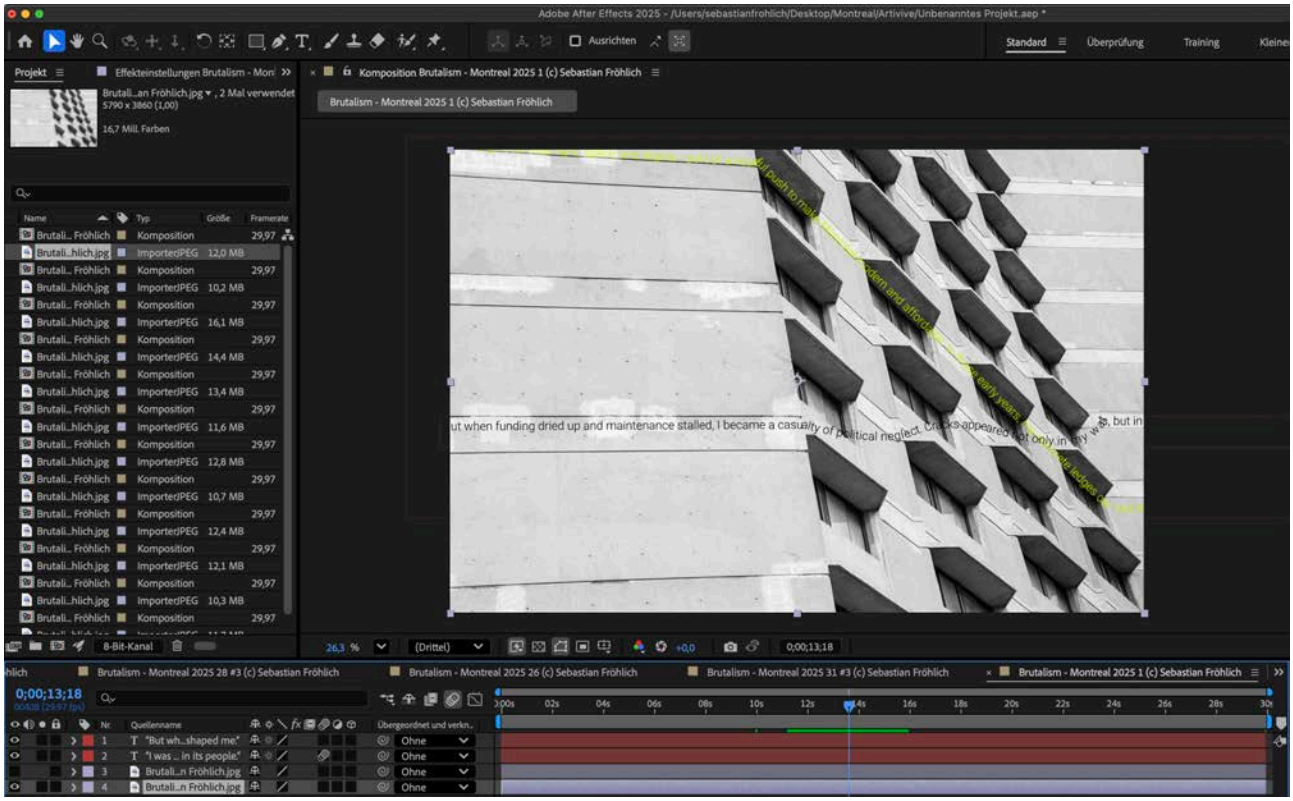
Over time, the images evolved from recognizable architectural documentation toward compositions that resemble architectural drawings or plans, blurring the line between built reality and conceptual design.

How does AR work on the presented photographs?

1. Scan the QR code (iOS or Android)
2. Download the Artivive app
3. Open the Artivive app
4. Scan the exhibited images
5. Experience the perspective of the brutalist buildings and dive into a 3D world

iOS

Android



4. Research and Historical Context

An essential component of the project was **extensive historical and theoretical research**. This research informed both the photographic work and the AR narratives.

Significant time was spent at:

- the *Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA)*
- *McGill University*, including its architectural archives and libraries (big thanks to Tellina Liu)

The research focused on:

- the emergence of brutalism in Montreal
- key architects, institutions, and political frameworks
- the societal ideals embedded in post-war modernism

This material formed the basis for the **buildings scripted voices**, ensuring that **each narrative is grounded in documented history** rather than fiction.

5. Results

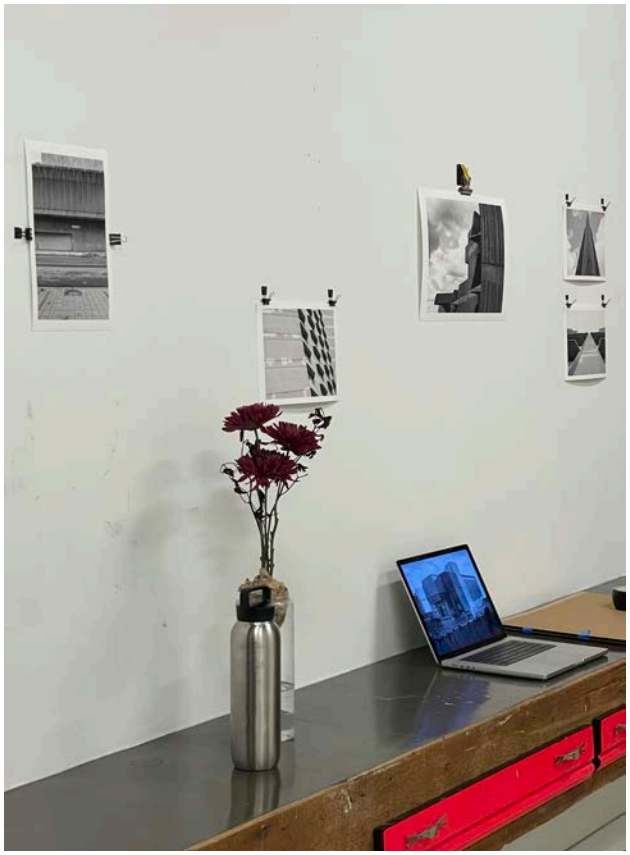
The outcome is a cohesive body of work that portrays Montreal **not as a traditional cityscape**, but as an architectural condition shaped by aspiration, failure, and endurance.

The series operates between:

- documentary photography
- abstract composition
- architectural drawing

The project forms the basis for an exhibition concept titled ***Between Concrete and Promises*** - ***Brutalism in Montreal***, potentially expanded through augmented reality, limited fine-art editions, and publication formats.

Open Studio: Thursday November 20, 2025



6. Building Voices: Augmented Reality Narratives

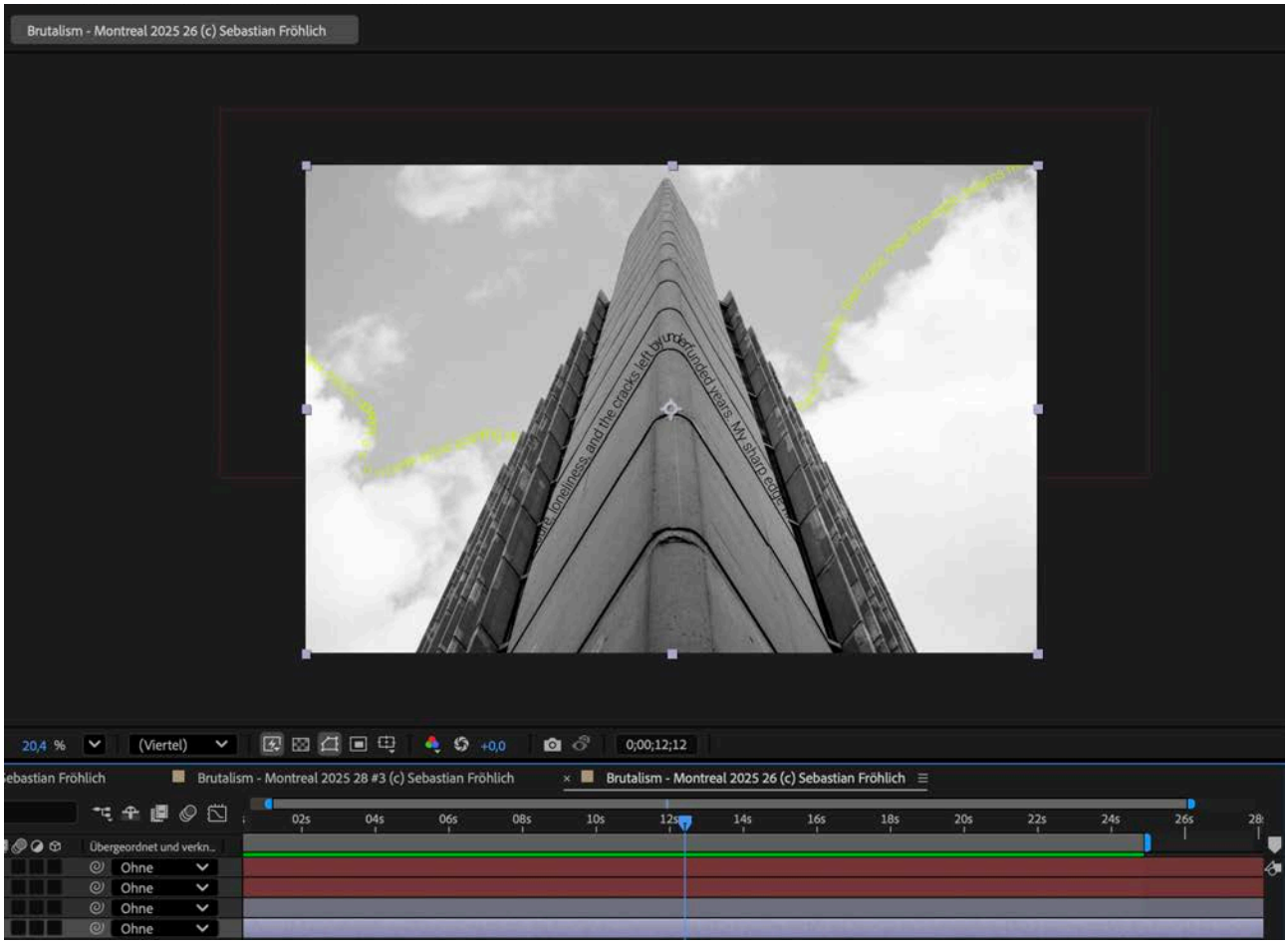
A core element of the project is the development of ***building voices***, accessed through **Augmented Reality**. These voices are **written in the *first person***, allowing each structure to speak as a witness to its own history. The tone is calm, reflective, and restrained: Never illustrative, but quietly emotional.

The texts are not fictional monologues; they are grounded in architectural research, historical documents, and social context gathered during research.

Example Voice — Student Housing

Utopia "*I was built to lift new minds upward, a concrete spine pointing students toward their futures. Each semester, I held their hopes, their noise, their late-night dreams rising through my walls.*"

Dystopia "*But I also absorbed their fears: The weight of pressure, loneliness, and the cracks left by underfunded years. My sharp edge hides how often I've stood as both shelter and burden.*"



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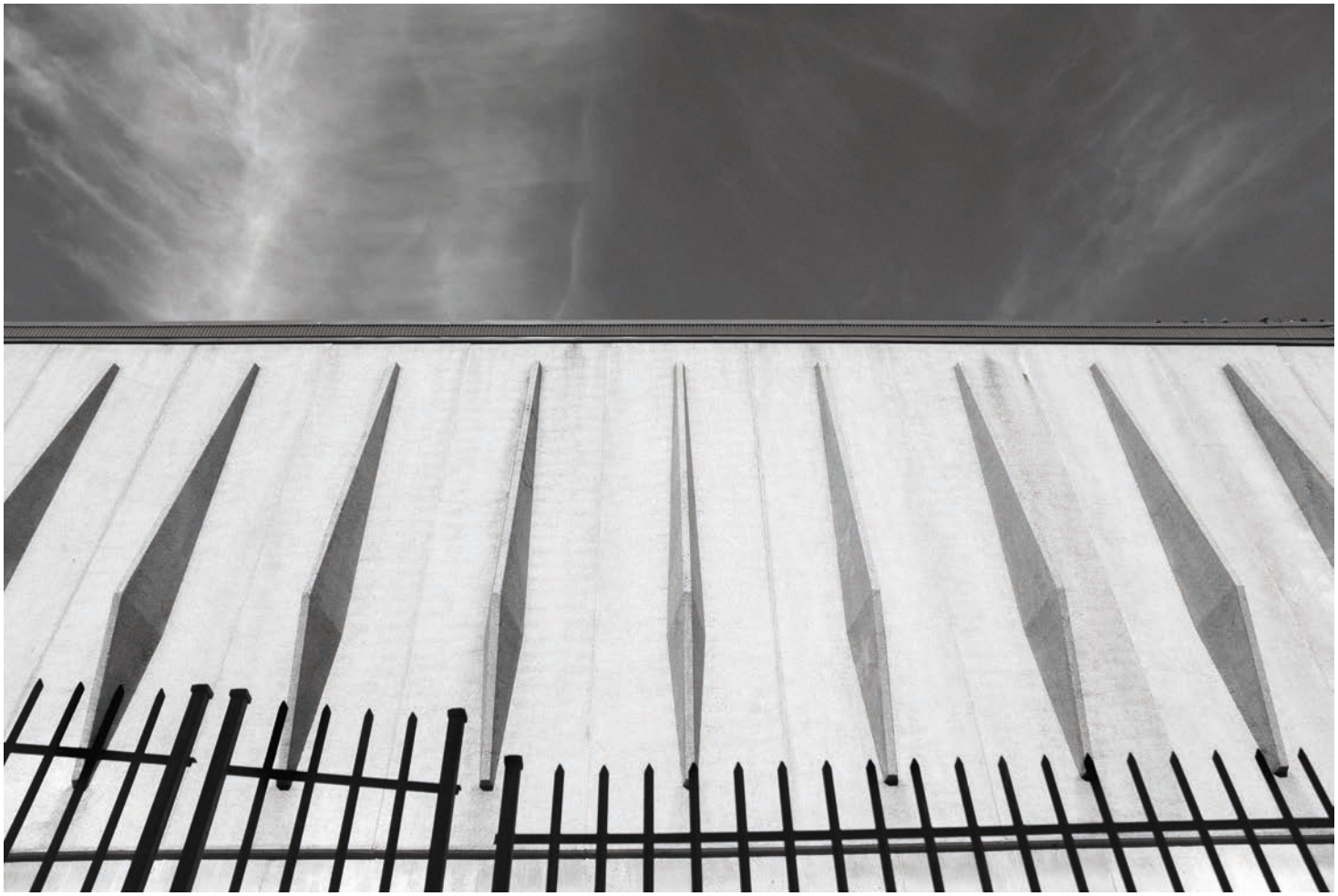

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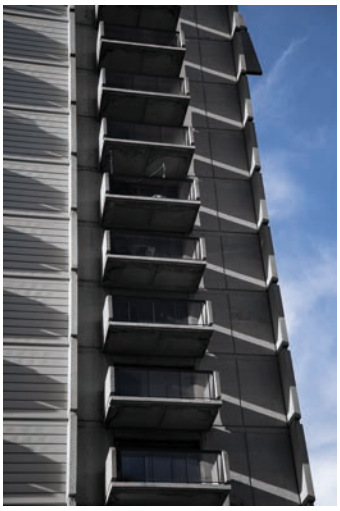

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