

CYNTHIA HOOPER

Christopher Alexander taught at Berkeley in the eighties when I was an undergraduate there. When I visited his Mexicali Experimental Project on assignment in 2024, my recollections of that distinctive time and place vividly resurfaced when presented with those improbably voluptuous architectural forms. The bespoke construction techniques, improvisational orderliness, and devotion to classical form of this complex seemed operationally aligned with traditional art media. As I worked on this project, my pencils and paint haptically morphed into the sunbaked pigments, corpulent cement, and senescent lumber of the structures I described. The “builder’s yard” appears to me delightfully and exuberantly indulgent. The five homes across the street—updated in response to Mexicali’s economic contingencies and harsh climate—stand as stoic counterparts, as the families who continue to live there have admirably wedded the utopian to the practical. In interpreting this place, I selectively omitted some more recent additions—air conditioning units, water tanks, and transmission lines—to foreground the site’s overall design logic, as well as the picture logic inherent to each painting and drawing. The interpretations here are thus neither fully historical nor entirely contemporaneous, but rather inhabit a subtly surreal, temporally liminal terrain.