

University for the Creative Arts
Research Project Portfolios

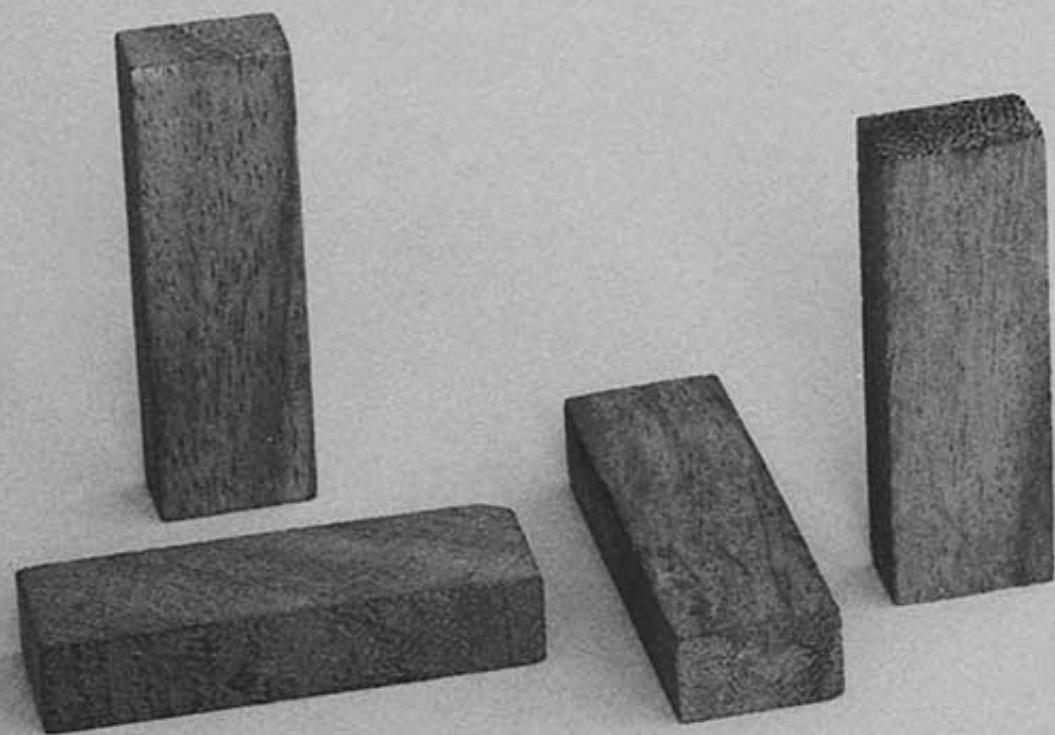
Jenga Arrangements

By Mike Marshall

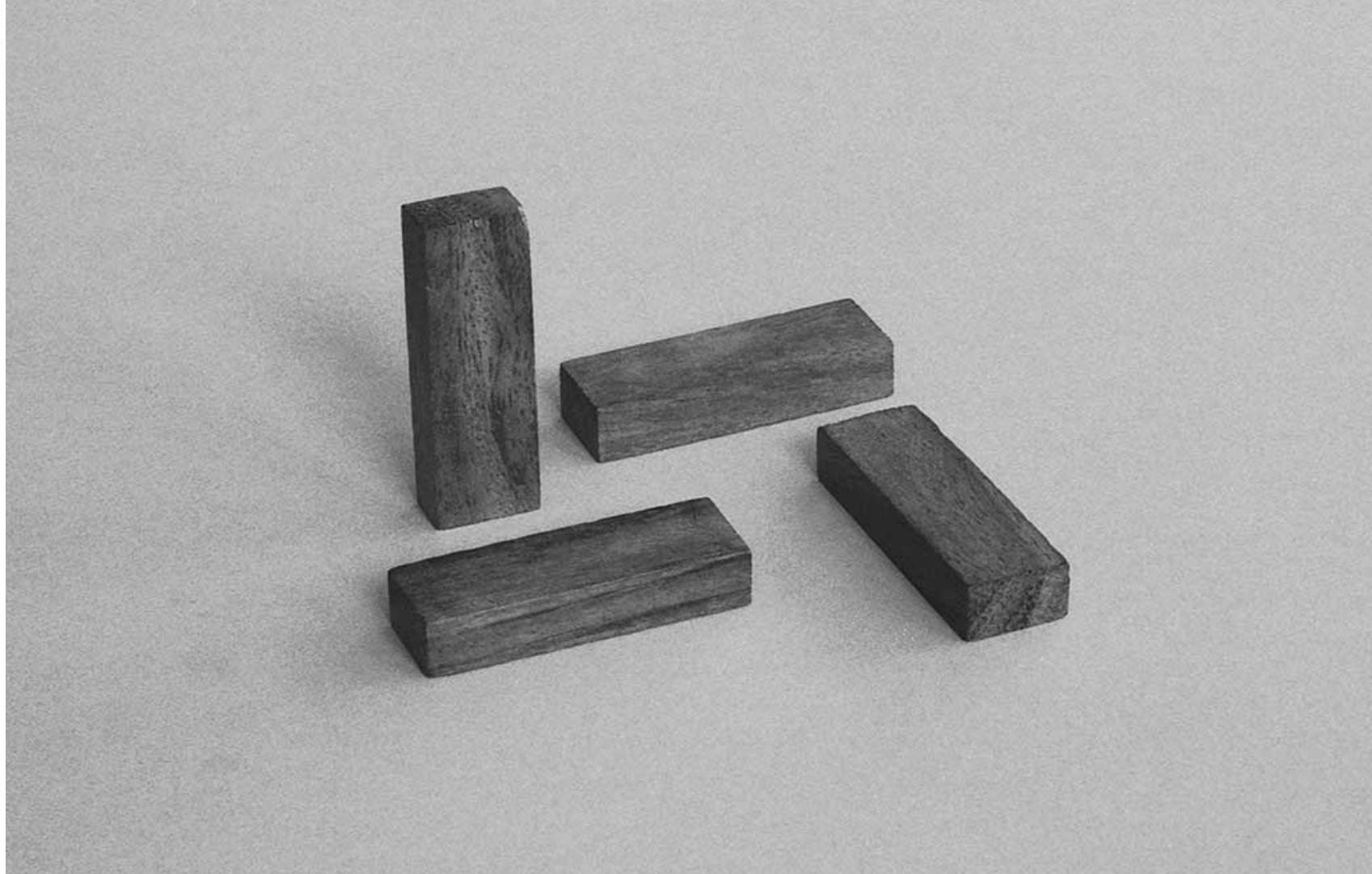


Project Details

Name of Researcher:	Dr Mike Marshall
Name of Output:	Jenga Arrangements
UCARO link/s:	https://research.uca.ac.uk/3499/
Output Type:	M – Exhibition; group exhibition of photographic works
Year and mode of dissemination:	2017 - 'Horizon: Against Nature' group exhibition, Instituto Cervantes, New Delhi, India
Key Words:	Photography, analogue, composition, labour, resource use
Funding:	Exhibition Funding Sources: Instituto Cervantes New Delhi (India) OED Gallery (Kochi India) Basque Institute Etxepare (Spain)



Arrangement One



Arrangement Two

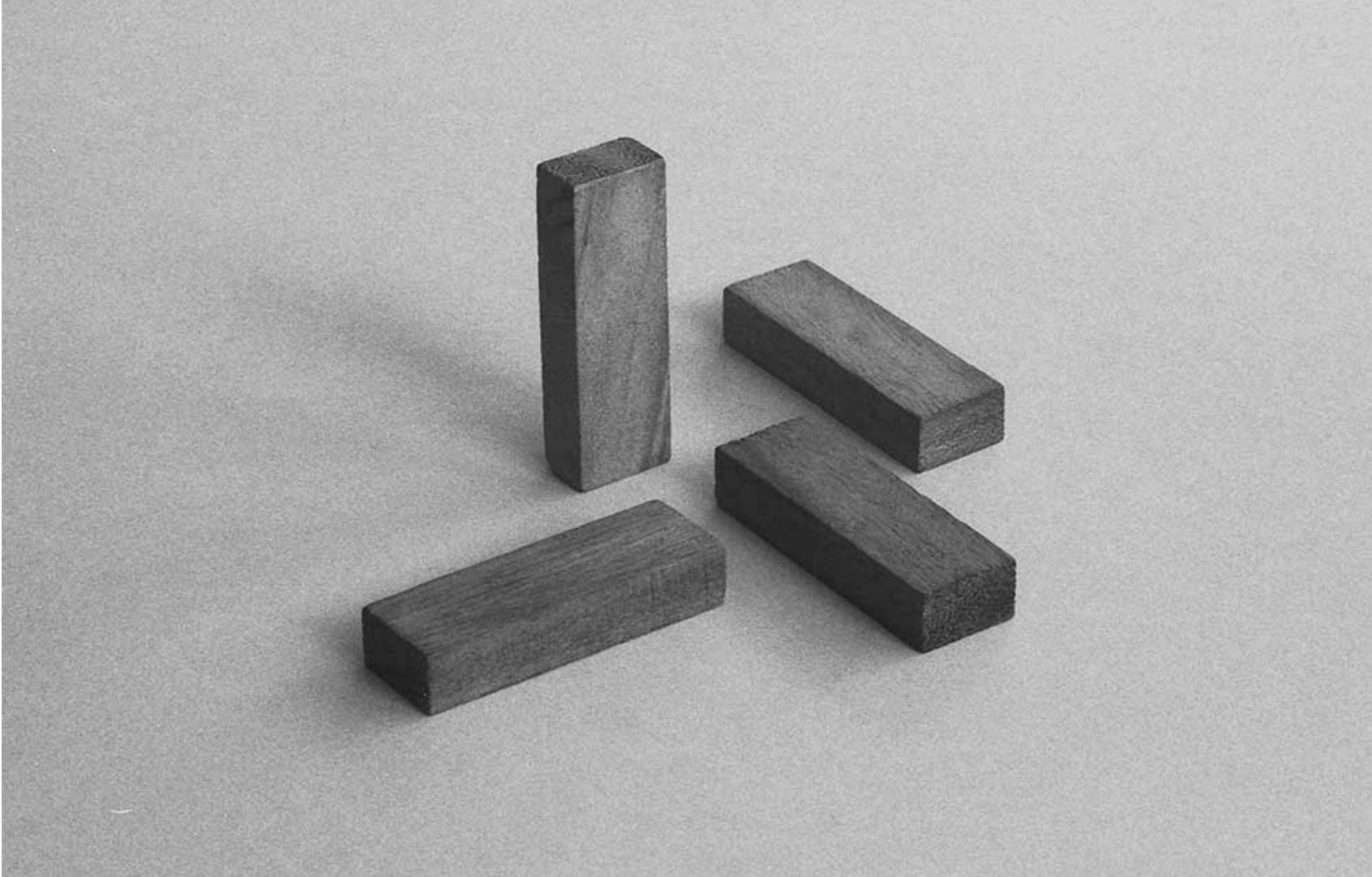
Synopsis

‘Jenga Arrangements’ is a research output by Dr Mike Marshall which consists of a series of 10 photographic prints on A3 recycled paper, laid on a desk. Each image shows a different arrangement of four wooden blocks from a game of Jenga. This game usually involves balancing a precarious structure but here the blocks are arranged into compositions that resemble models for larger scale minimalist sculpture.

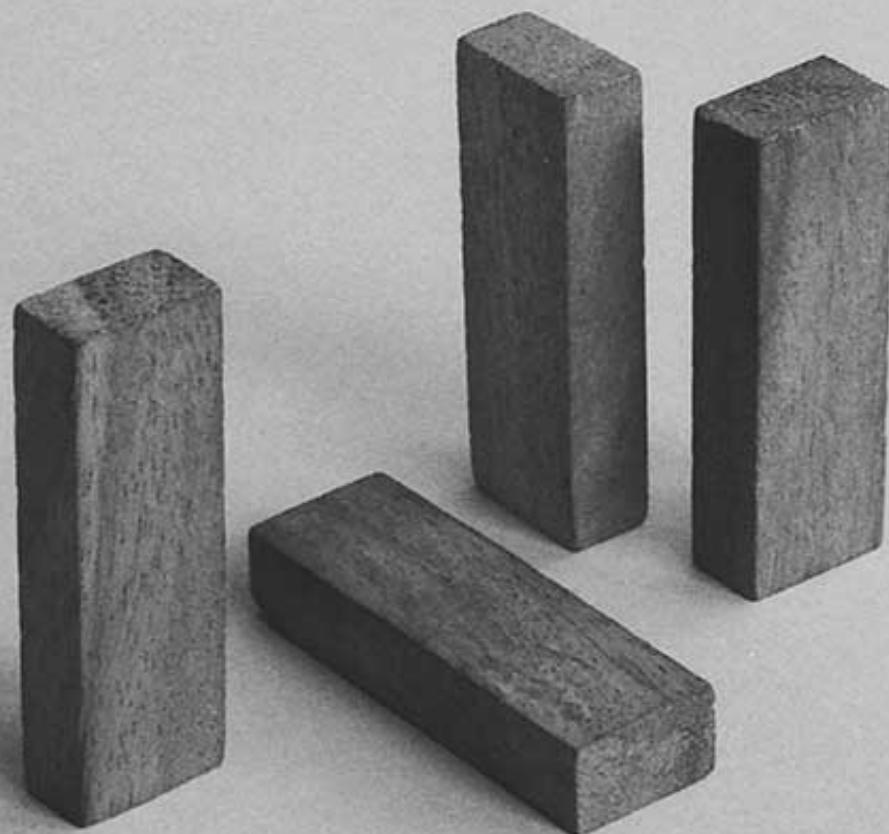
The research explores relationships between contemplation and action. In the movement from one to the other we have an opportunity to change something, begin again, notice an automatic response or habit. ‘Jenga Arrangements’ furthers this research through a simple activity of composition. It asks what can be done within a limited framework and examines an economics of activity in relation to production.

Mike Marshall’s ‘Jenga Arrangements’ photographs were laid on a desk as part of the group exhibition ‘Horizon: Against Nature’ at the gallery of the Instituto Cervantes in New Delhi, India, in 2017. This exhibition was one of three shows in the UK and India curated by Jasone Miranda-Bilbao, Finlay Taylor and Vaibhav Raj Shah exploring the relationship and opposition between nature and industry. Previous work by Marshall had been selected for two of the exhibitions, and the new work ‘Jenga Arrangements’ was selected and disseminated for the first time in ‘Against Nature’ in Delhi.

This portfolio of supporting contextual information includes evidence of the research aims, context and processes which led to new insights. It also includes all of the ‘Jenga Arrangements’ photographs in addition to installation images of the exhibition.



Arrangement Three



Arrangement Four

Context

‘Jenga Arrangements’ was displayed in one iteration of ‘Against Nature’, a series of three exhibitions. The first took place in London at Camberwell School of Art (22 April - 30 May 2014), the second at OED gallery in Kochi (10 - 31 December 2016) consisted of a program of artist videos which was a parallel event to the Kochi-Muzuris Biennale 2016. The third, exhibition, where ‘Jenga Arrangements’ was displayed, took place in Delhi at the Instituto Cervantes (30 January - 20 February 2017) and involved a larger group of artists working in varied media; it was a collateral event of the India Art Fair 2017. Curation of the three exhibitions was shared between Jasone Miranda-Bilbao, Finlay Taylor and Vaibhav Raj Shah. Other artists in the Delhi exhibition included Elizabeth Chadwick, Jeremy Deller, Uriel Orlow, Anri Sala, Surabhi Saraf, Shimabuku, Superflex and Asim Waqif.

The ‘Against Nature’ exhibitions took inspiration from the French novel by Joris-Karl Huysmans, *À rebours* (1884). The curators state: ‘The main protagonist, Des Esseintes, ... abandons himself to a life of decadence, fine art and literature in order to criticize the vulgarity of society. . . . Society and the prevalent ideology were seen in terms of nature and the beauty of its forms, structures and geometry.’ The exhibitions were thus an artistic exploration of nature in its relationship to industry.

Marshall was invited to participate in all three shows. Older work was selected for the first and second, but the more recent ‘Jenga Arrangements’ was selected for the third.

‘Jenga Arrangements’ explores an economy of material labour in relation to aesthetic production. The simple activity of composing small wooden blocks can link to implications that spill out of that visual frame: a history of minimalist sculpture, attitudes towards work and labour, the rationalisations of modernity, resource usage and deforestation. The wooden blocks are made from a species of hardwood now threatened and protected in India. India is in the midst of industrialisation while the West is largely post-industrial. Attitudes to art, work and resource usage differ across cultures as well as between individuals. This work attempts to tap into these differences.

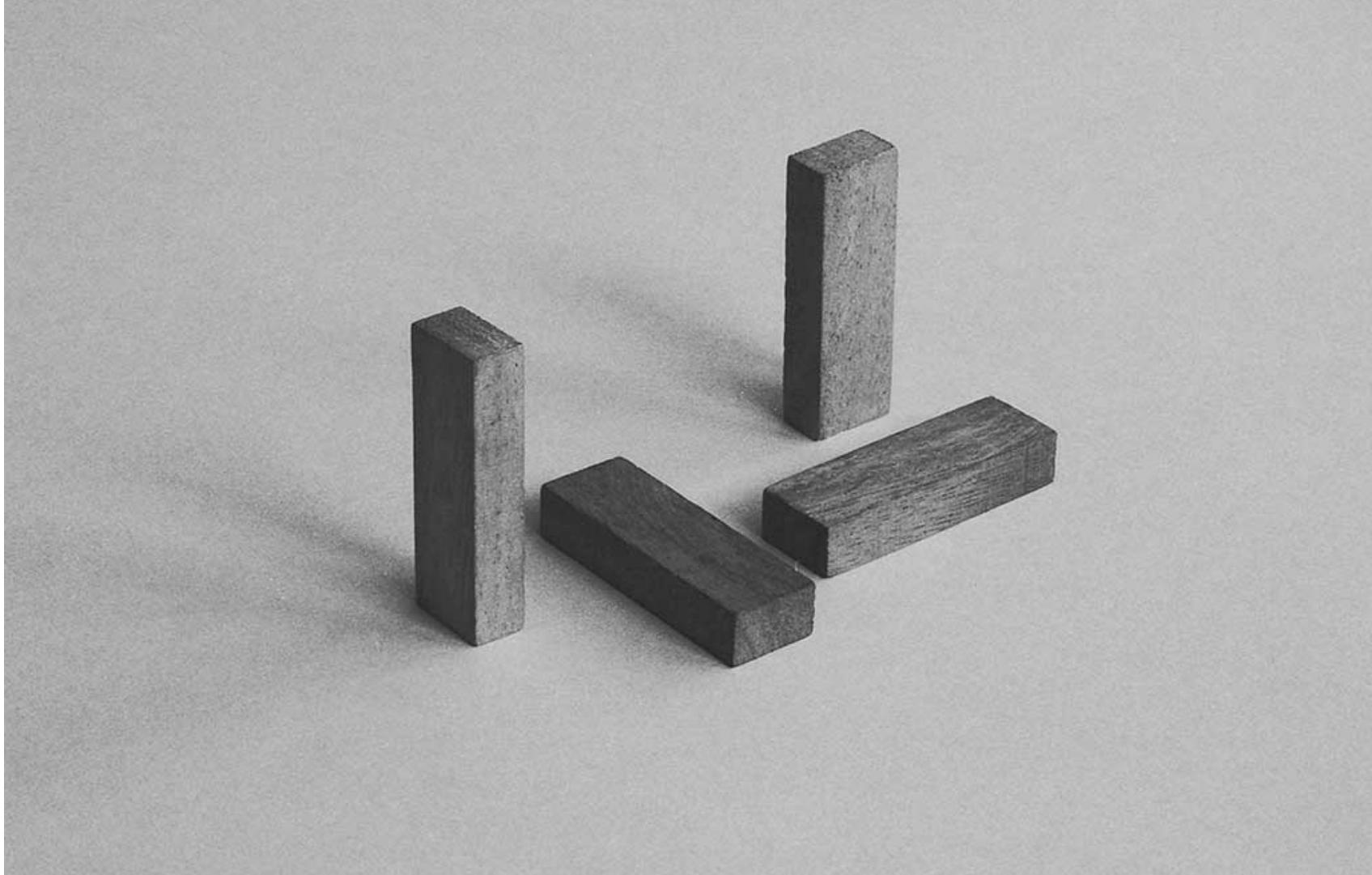
By positioning labour against aesthetics, ‘Jenga Arrangements’ builds upon Marshall’s video of migrant workers shown previously in the Kochi exhibition, and can be juxtaposed with the relatively labour-intensive large photo etching of an empty stretch of sea - amounting to almost nothingness - exhibited in the first ‘Against Nature’ show in London.

Key Texts:

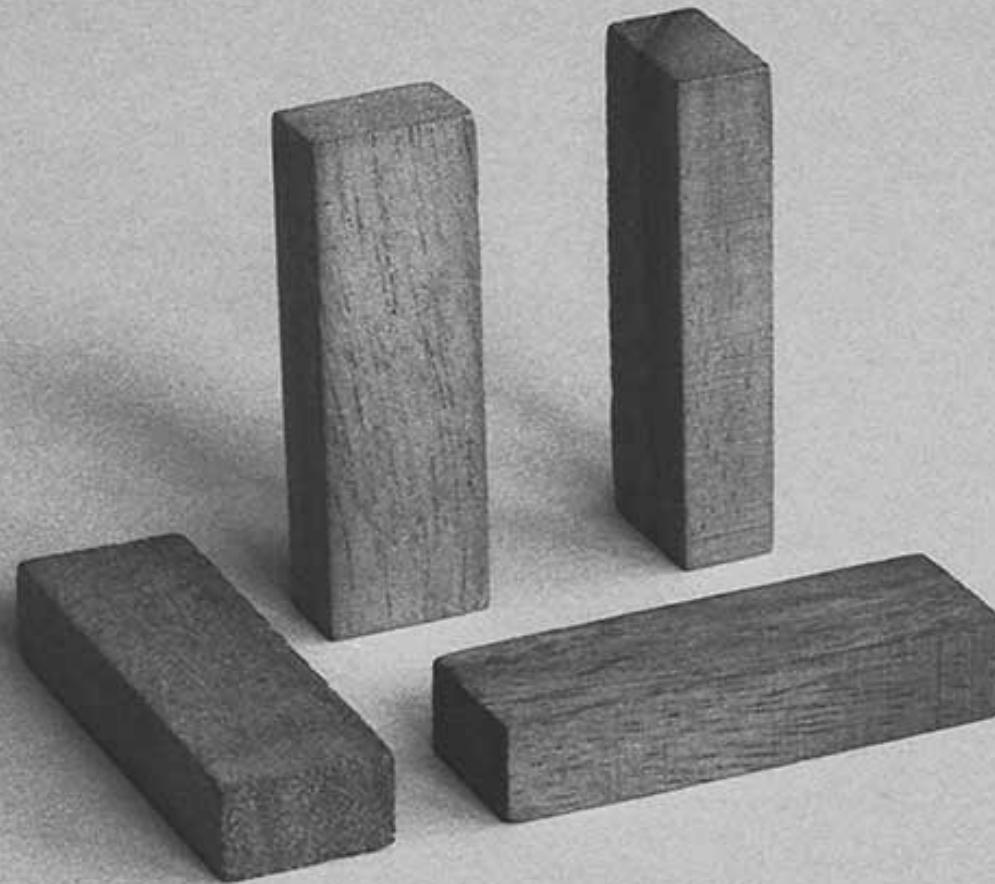
Huberman, A. ‘Naïve Set Theory’. *Afterall*, Issue 15, Spring/Summer 2007.

Huysmans, J.K. (2003 [1884]) *Against Nature (A Rebours)* (London: Penguin)

Verwoert, J. ‘Exhaustion and Exuberance, Ways to Defy the Pressure to Perform’. *Dot Dot Dot Magazine*, April 2008.



Arrangement Five



Research Questions and Aims

Research questions:

What can be done by simply arranging four wooden blocks?

How do the tonalities of the wood photographed in a flat light meet with the off-white of the recycled paper?

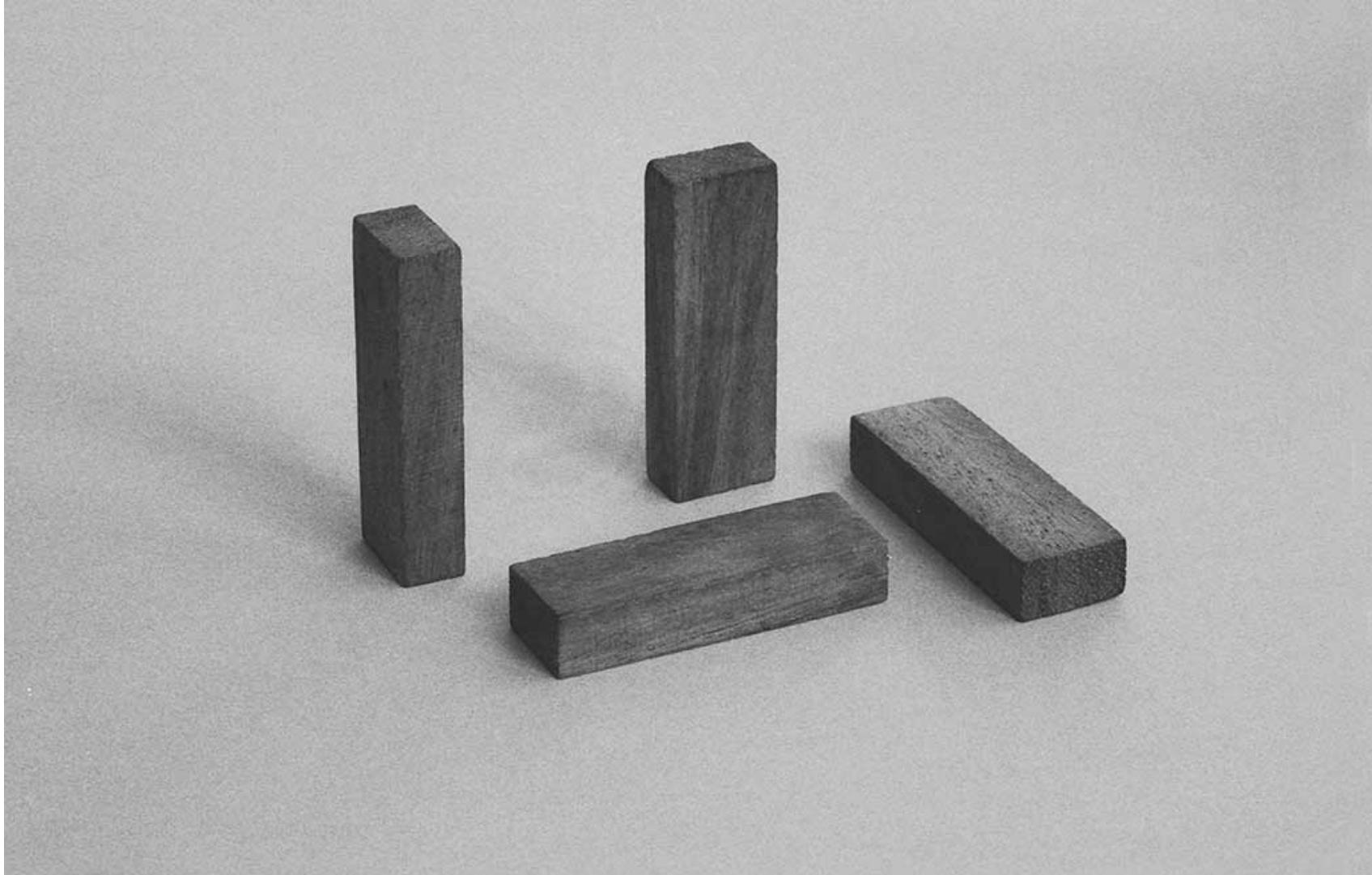
How might this be evocative of minimalist sculpture and its documentation?

What happens in terms of understanding when this is placed in a cultural context outside of the one in which it was made?

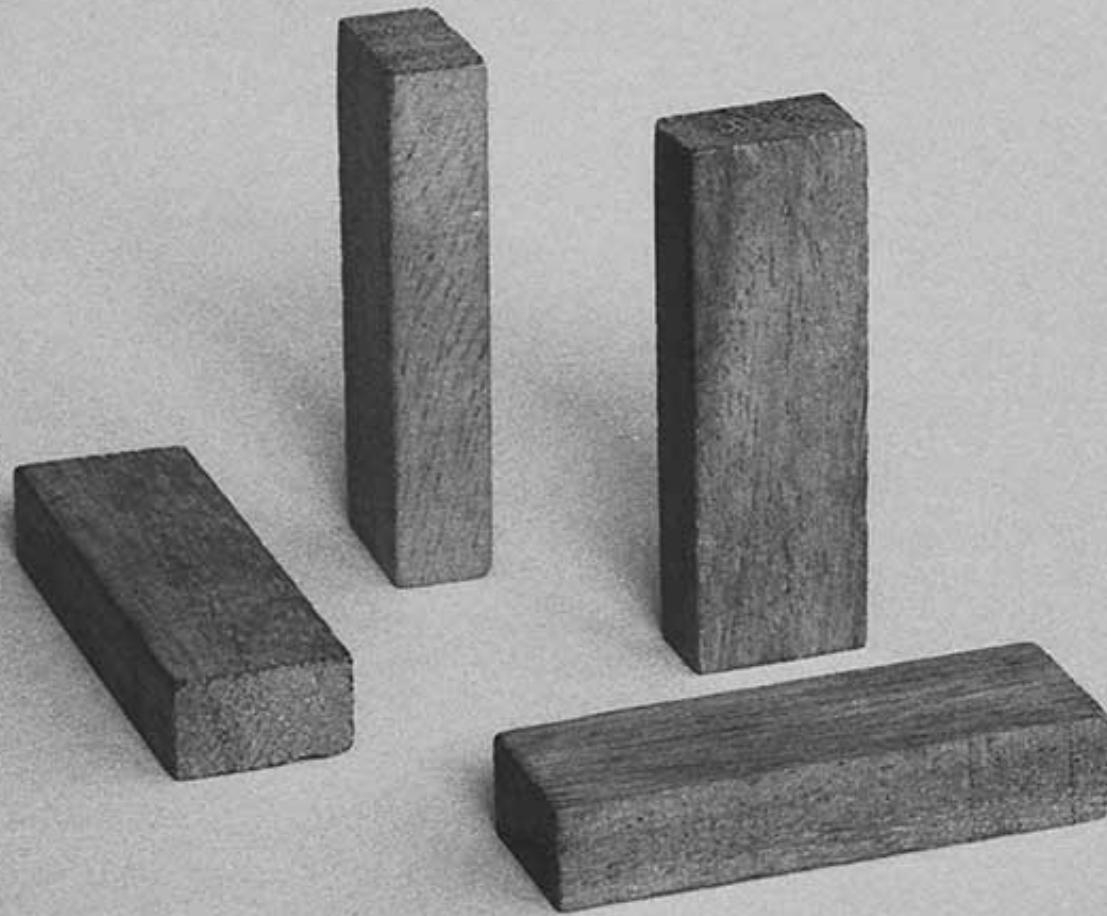
Research aims:

To explore the relationships between an economics of material labour and aesthetic production.

To then re-understand that relationship in a different cultural context.



Arrangement Seven



Arrangement Eight

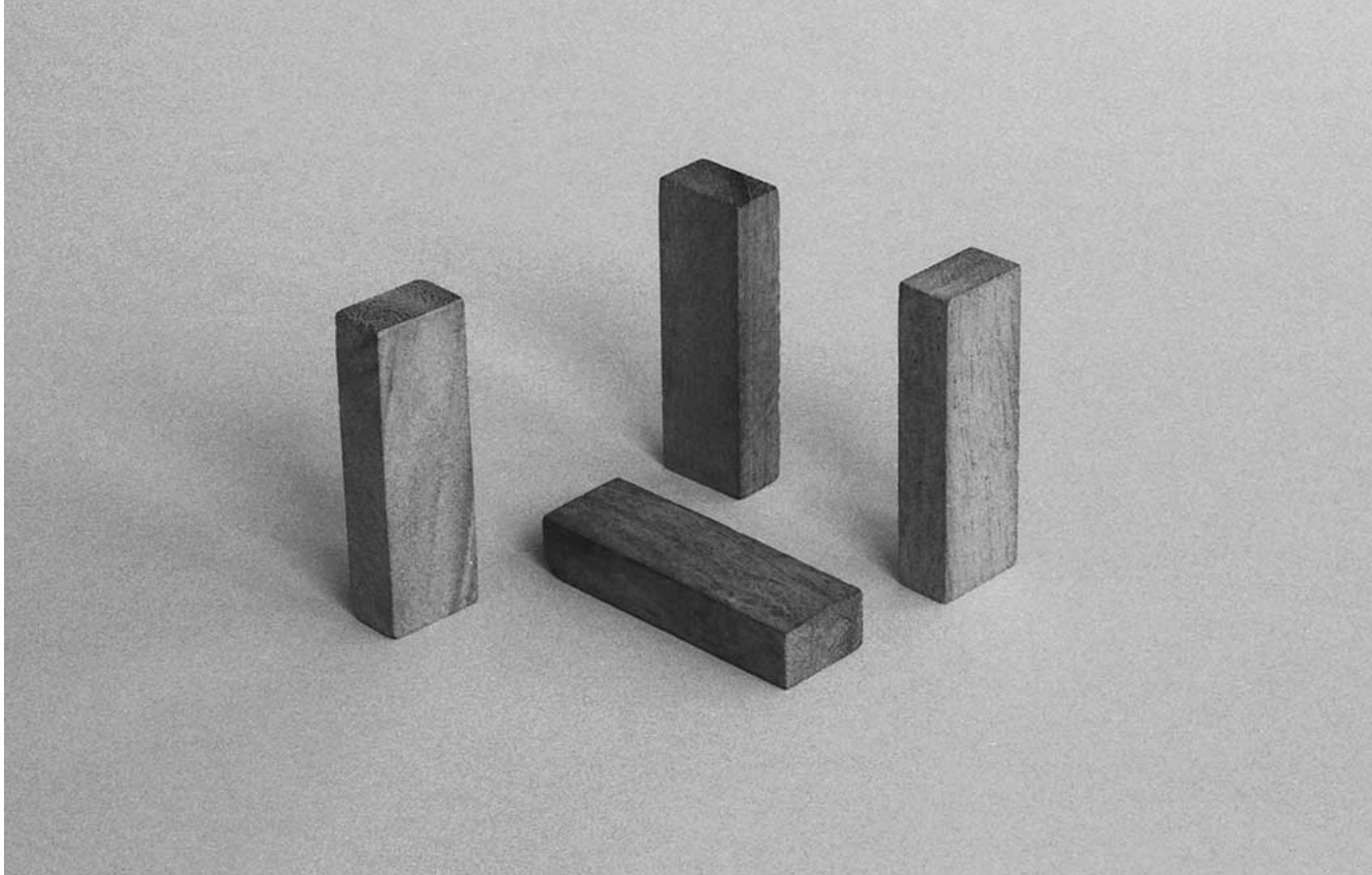
Research Methods and Process

The practical research methods were initially the testing of photographic processes in relation to camera type, film, light and printing materials. Testing was done through printing and adjusting, exploring differences between digital and analogue techniques; photographs were taken on both digital and film cameras, prints were made digitally and in the dark room on various types of paper. Reference points included black and white lithographic print publications of minimalist sculpture. Some understanding of the cultural context for the work came from Marshall having visited and undertaken research in India and Delhi numerous times in the past.

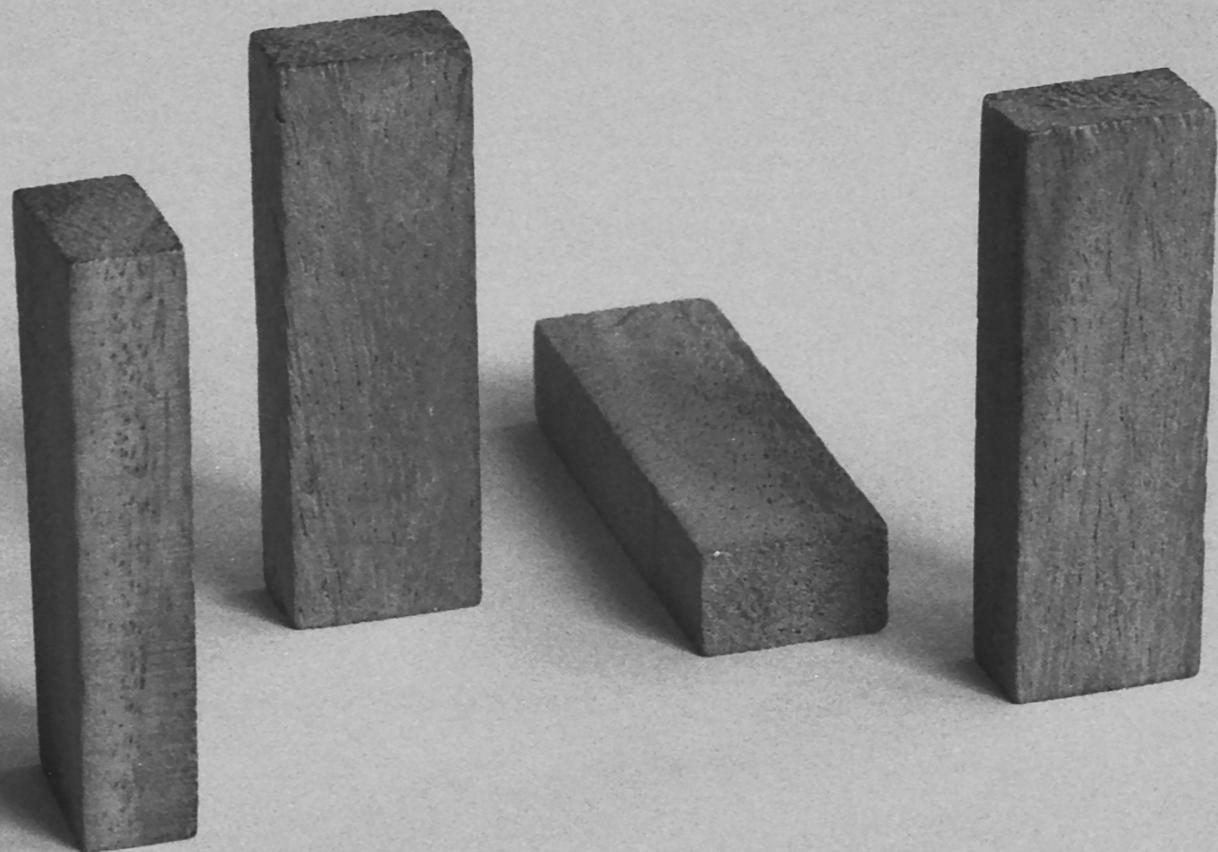
Drawn from a series of still lifes, this research experiments with what can be done with a limited range of close-at-hand materials. In a material sense, this research begins with photography. Jenga blocks are arranged and scaled to the viewpoint of a 35mm film camera. One intention is to test and find a meeting point between tonality of lighting, texture of the wood, grain and resolution of the 35mm film, and the grain and resolution of the printing paper - quite standard in photographic practice but taken to a relatively refined level.

Tests were made across a range of film, digital, darkroom and digital print materials. This, along with an eventual combining of analogue and digital process results in images that have no pure white or black, providing an exceptionally flat tonality. This produces the 'feel' of the images. In addition, material and conceptual meeting points were explored through a relation between the composition of tropical hardwood blocks and recycled paper from a temperate pine wood paper source, the image printed predominantly in carbon with a laser printer. This multiplying of meeting points continues into the cross-cultural context and themes of the exhibition.

The selection of work and display format were arrived at with the curators. Different works were discussed with agreement that the lightness of touch of the 'Jenga Arrangements' was the most suitable for the show's conceptual premise. The possibility of displaying framed prints was rejected and eventually the curators and artist settled on having a desk of the right size made for the prints. This gave the suggestion that the prints were open to being re-ordered, re-arranged.



Arrangement Nine



Arrangement Ten

Research Contribution and Dissemination

Research contribution:	Showing this work in India forced Marshall to reinterpret it. The wooden blocks were purchased in India on a previous trip fifteen years ago. Returning them as images produced a re-examination in terms of resource usage and deforestation. It also exposed the work to the possibility of differing cultural attitudes towards material labour and production.
Dissemination:	This show was widely publicised in online and print media over the duration of the exhibition and India Art Fair.
Follow-on-activities:	The exhibition has led to an ongoing research project exploring moving and still image documentation of a crystal and gem shop in Delhi that sources materials directly from mining sites across India.



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FRONT AND BACK COVER
Installation of Jenga Arrangements
at 'Horizon: Against Nature' group
exhibition, Instituto Cervantes, New
Delhi, India

