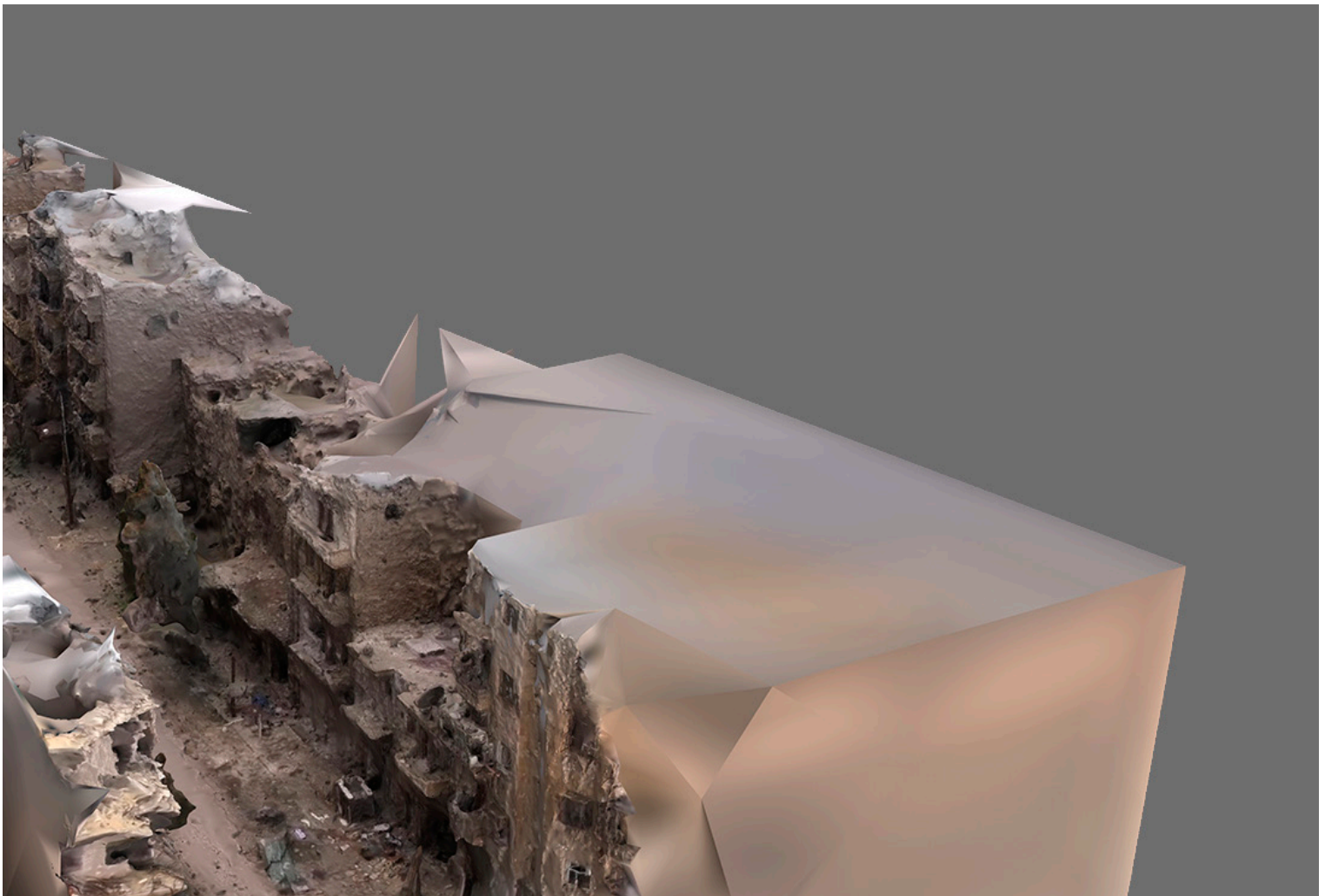Untitled 2 | 2019

Boite Noire

Thibault Brunet continues his research on the imagination of the great American spaces: virgin territories to conquer for a new start. From site to site, his investigation leads him to videos of deserts on YouTube. The prediction algorithm offers him cartographic views, drones flying over large areas, 3D simulations mixed with the fantasies of distant expeditions and evangelistic missions of yesteryear. It is May 2018, and Trump has just transferred the United States Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Suddenly his Twitter and Facebook news feeds are spreading new imaginings of emptiness. From the American deserts to the ruins of the Middle East, there was only one step.

Since the Arab Spring of 2011, Syria has become a theatre of bloody war and information. Never has a conflict been so photographed, filmed, or mapped, thus doubling it with a war of images and represen-tations. Every day, news agencies relay the ruins of Damascus, Aleppo, or Homs to mobilise international opinion, while the agreed carnage continues, with total impunity, in full view of everyone. The cities have become deadly skeletons of concrete and rubble. Comfortably ins-talled behind his desk, as if he were visiting a city, thanks to Google Street View or to the controls of a drone, like a soldier or a gamer, Thibaud Brunet penetrates a world where the trick of the real, the false, and the plausible seems porous. The slow and sometimes jerky flight of the drone gives the eye the impression of an on-board camera which heightens the feeling of an FPS (first-person shooter) game. The world is reduced to a model, a kind of «killbox» transla-ting space into 3 dimensions to better coordinate the action. From click to click, serendipity leads him to amateur videos of sometimes dubious provenance. Soon information is mixed with propaganda, the truth of the facts with alternative facts. The confusion becomes all the greater as the interpretation of these images separates formal
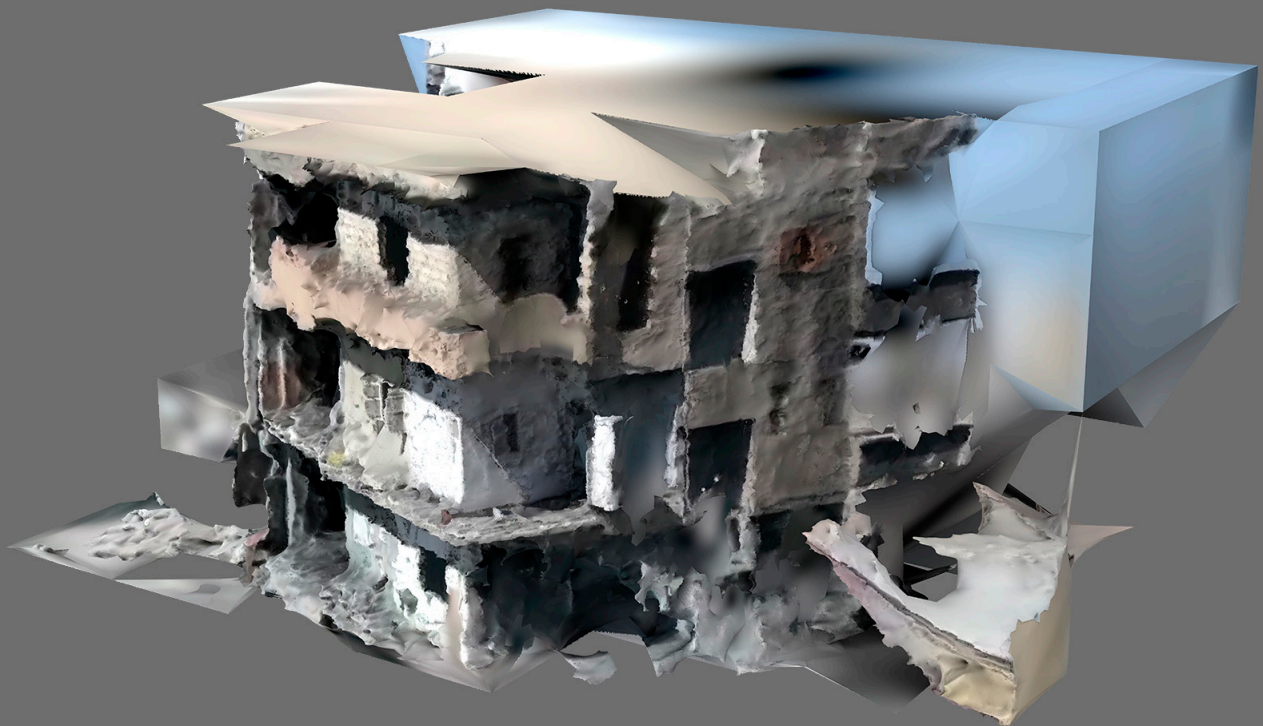
and aesthetic questions from ethical, moral and political issues. From Lebanon to Iraq, from yesterday to today, the fields of ruin remain the same: gutted, hole-studded, opensided buildings, cables littering the ground, piles of bricks covered with dust that erode and crumble the landscape like lace. Hard becomes soft. Derealisation and fiction invite themselves into the document. The ruins are timeless and in every way dehumanised; they challenge us to distinguish what is real and what is fabricated. This is undoubtedly the reason why they fascinate, hypnotise, and why our scopic impulses rub shoulders with the ambivalence of the sublime. RuinsPorn has become a juicy business, where the cynicism of black tourism, which packs Westerners into jeeps as if they were on a safari, alternates with the aesthetic experience of the event.

The Black Boxes series was born out of a strange feeling, that of being a voyeur and contemplator of an excitement led away from ethical considerations in favour of an algorithmic aesthetic. The views of the series were created from the videos proposed by the YouTube browser. Thibault Brunet sorted them in order to retain only those coming from press organisations, translated into JPEG, then modelled in 3D. The «black box» of the software encodes the real in encrypted data and organises the ruins of Aleppo or Damascus in the form of a model world, halfway between a video game and museographic restitution. These miniatures seem both de-realised and, paradoxically, re-embodied by the simulation. The object seems circumscribed by a fleshly envelope, whose sandy-coloured bricks and grey-blue cinder blocks of the buildings are reminiscent of bruised skin. These quasi-organic membranes, closed in on themselves, therefore conceal their function as black boxes, preservi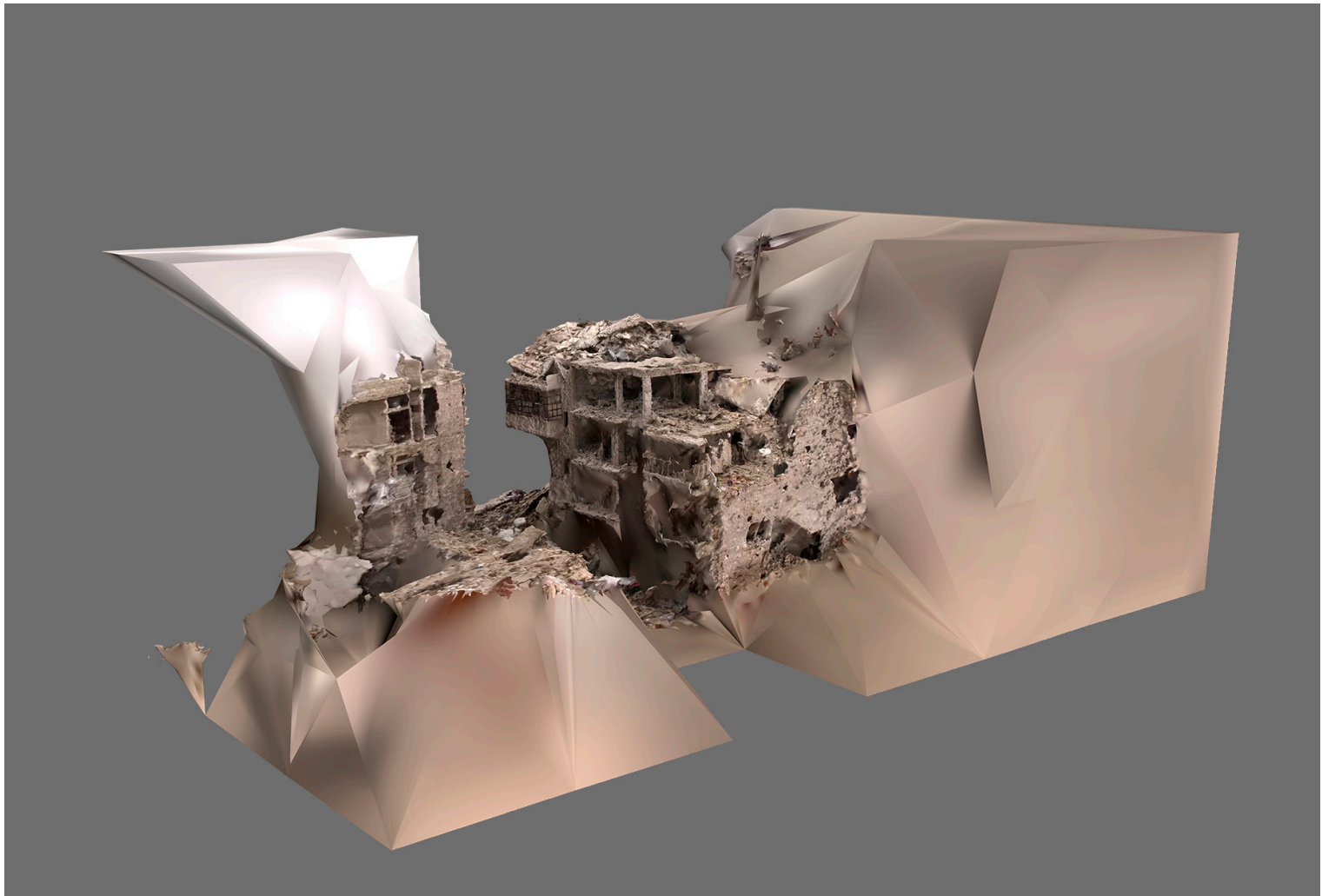ng the memory of the disasters of the war.