

BALNAKAILLY BUNKER MURAL PROPOSAL

PHANTOM ROOMS

The Phantom Rooms mural project responds directly to the bunker's original function as part of a wartime deception strategy, exploring illusion, fabrication of reality, and perceptual completion – how limited information is enough for the mind to project a coherent world. As pilots would have interpreted scattered lights, powered by the bunker's generator, as habitation, visitors are invited to interpret sketched interiors as lived-in rooms. The bunker projected a false exterior outward; the murals reverse this logic by projecting imagined domestic interiors inward.

The proposal envisions several mural paintings in each of the bunker rooms, covering only parts of the walls. The murals depict trompe l'oeil breaches in the brickwork to suggest spaces beyond the bunker walls. The illusionistic “holes” are rendered with high visual clarity (photo-realistically), while the rooms seen through them are depicted as loose architectural sketches. This contrast reinforces the idea of suggestion over realism and places emphasis on the viewer's role in completing the image. This way the suggested interiors are not presented as fully rendered scenes to be looked at passively, but as prompts for imaginative reconstruction.



Mockup of the Balnakailly bunker wall with a trompe l'oeil mural of a hole in the brick wall with a kitchen visible on the other side, rendered as a sketch.

SPATIAL ORGANISATION AND MURAL PLACEMENT

Middle Room – entrance, orientation, context, visual anchor

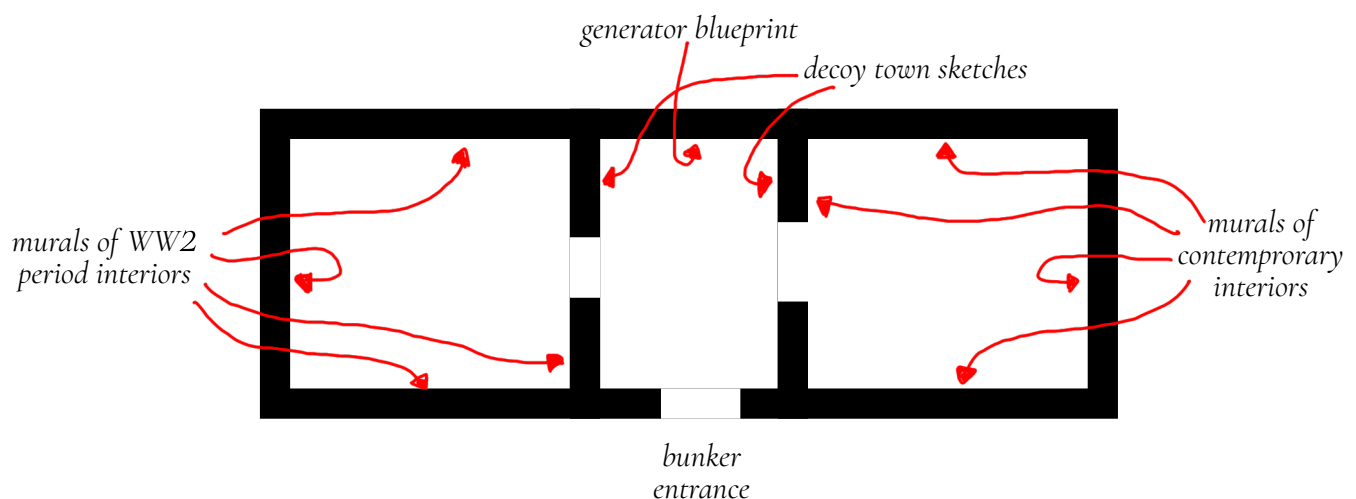
- A mural on the wall facing the entrance shows a technical blueprint of the generator once housed in the bunker, with annotations explaining its function.
- Painted electrical lines extend from the generator sketch across onto the walls on the left and right, connecting it to technical sketches of wooden frames with windows that were used to form the decoy town during the war.
- The walls immediately adjacent to the entrance are left clear for any interpretive text, perhaps explaining the historical context and/or the mural concept.

Left Room – imagined interiors of the wartime period

- Four trompe l'oeil wall openings reveal domestic interiors from the 1930s–1940s, rendered as loose architectural sketches. Suggested spaces include a kitchen, bedroom, parlour, and bathroom.
- On the wall with the existing ladder, the mural may be divided into two openings that both show parts of the same interior, leaving the ladder as is.
- The area of exposed brickwork by the door is left untouched, visually linking the painted “holes” to the bunker’s real structure.

Right Room – imagined contemporary interiors

- Four trompe l'oeil openings reveal contemporary domestic interiors, again rendered as loose architectural sketches.
- The spaces may match the types shown in the left room, allowing visitors to draw visual and time-based parallels.
- Again, parts of the real brick wall are left exposed as a visual anchor.



PROJECT WORKFLOW

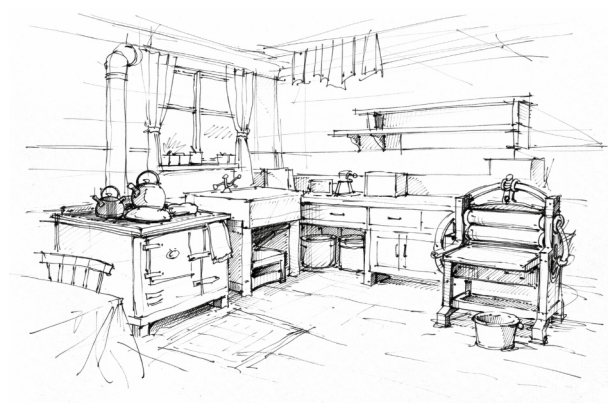
Design

- Select the interiors to be depicted across both side rooms.
- Sketch the interiors from imagination using period reference images or alternatively use AI to generate the interiors based on selected reference and turn those into sketches. This avoids using any one specific interior as reference.
- Design trompe l'oeil “holes” in different shapes. Only general outlines are needed at this stage; realistic brick rendering can be done during painting, using photo reference.
- Test hole shapes against the planned interiors and the specific bunker walls using digital mock-ups.
- Source a 1930s–1940s generator blueprint, or photo reference that can be converted into a technical drawing.
- Prepare technical sketches of the decoy town’s frame structures.

Example of the AI-assisted room reference generation workflow:



Real photo reference for 1930-40s kitchens found online.



AI-generated images: a photorealistic 1930-40s kitchen generated based on reference provided, and an AI-generated sketch from the previously generated photorealistic image

Execution

- Transfer the outlines of the trompe l'oeil holes onto the walls using a projector or grid.
- Paint the brick openings photo-realistically, using consistent depth cues and a clear, fixed direction for light and shadow.
- Transfer the interior sketches, keeping perspective accurate. The rendering can remain loose to maintain the “sketch” quality and allow for a degree of freedom in the execution.
- Transfer the generator blueprint and the frame sketches (projector or grid), then paint.



Mockup of the 1930-40s period kitchen mural in the left room. Bricks rendered photorealistically, the room beyond the wall as loose sketch.

Mockup of a contemporary kitchen mural in the right room.



Interpretation

Together, the two rooms form a temporal dialogue and work as a pair. The left room suggests homes from the 1930s–1940s – the kind of everyday life the decoy was designed to protect. The right room suggests present-day homes, shaped by what survived. Between them, the middle room shows how the deception worked: a generator powering a small set of signals that pilots would read as evidence of a town. The murals use the same principle. They provide just enough information for visitors to recognise a space and fill in what is missing. The goal is not to recreate specific historical rooms, but to see if believable places can be constructed from partial clues.

Practical considerations: strengths and potential challenges

- The murals occupy only selected areas of the walls, reducing the overall amount of painted surface and allowing the work to be completed more efficiently than a full-wall treatment.
- The concept calls for some photo-realistic rendering but it is limited to the trompe l'oeil brick openings. These consist of a single texture and repeating structure, making the task technically focused and, hopefully, manageable.
- The interiors are intentionally rendered as loose architectural sketches. This removes the need for high levels of finish and allows three artists to work together without stylistic uniformity becoming a problem. Minor differences in hand and approach are consistent with the visual language of the project. We can decide whether the sketches should be purely black and white or include some color too.
- Digital mock-ups and projection/grid transfers reduce uncertainty during execution and support accurate placement and perspective.
- Sourcing a suitable 1930s–1940s generator blueprint may be difficult. If an exact drawing cannot be found, photographic reference may need to be adapted into a technical-style drawing.



My attempt at painting a photorealistic hole in a brick wall to test the difficulty of achieving a trompe l'oeil effect. This has been done with acrylic paints on an MDF board, about 40 x 60 cm. I believe a better effect can be achieved on a larger scale, if attention is paid to the colors of the real bunker bricks.