

LA VIE MODE D'EMPLOI (LIFE A USER'S MANUAL)

Ignasi Aballí
A Kassen
Nina Beier
Alighiero Boetti
Sarah Bostwick
Mariana Castillo Deball
Susan Collis
Lieven De Boeck
Marjolijn Dijkman
Patrick Everaert
Hreinn Fridfinnsson
Dora Garcia
Sofia Hultén
Michael Johansson
Kris Martin
Jorge Méndez Blake
Jonathan Monk
Sarah Ortmeyer
Cornelia Parker
Claudio Parmiggiani
Sarah Pickering
Kirsten Pieroth
Wilfredo Prieto
Evariste Richer
Damien Roach
Sylvain Rousseau
Fabrice Samyn
Katrín Sigurdardóttir
Mungo Thomson
Rachel Whiteread

SEPTEMBER 10 – OCTOBER 15

"I am imagining a building in Paris whose façade has been removed (...) so that, from the ground floor to the attic rooms, all the rooms at the front of the building are instantly and simultaneously visible." G. Perec

La Vie Mode d'Emploi (Life A User's Manual) is an exhibition that can be considered as a double tribute. It clearly alludes to the eponymous book by Georges Perec published in 1978 as well as celebrating, in a roundabout way, the centenary of the construction of the house (1911) in which the gallery operates.

In his book, subtitled "novels", Perec traces the life of a building located at number 11 in the (imaginary) rue Simon-Crubbellier in Paris between 1875 and 1975. Each chapter describes methodically a specific room in the building. In the 600 pages of the book, Perec writes about the residents of the building, as well as the objects found there, and stories concerning them, either directly or indirectly. In parallel with the structure of the book, it was decided to open up literally all areas of the gallery to exhibit works (offices, storage rooms, kitchen, etc.).

The structure of the building described by Perec is schematised into a kind of chessboard with ten by ten squares, from the cellars to the attics. Emulating the movement of the knight in chess, Perec moves methodically through the hundred boxes in the course of a hundred chapters which, in an attempt to muddy the waters, only go up to ninety-nine.

The rooms on the ground floor contain various works describing the games, constraints and obsessions that drive many artists in their creative process. Perec wrote his book under self-imposed mathematical/lexical constraints, which show that the imagination can be activated by a system that the artist assigns himself.

It seemed logical to welcome visitors by highlighting the work of **Dora Garcia**, *I Read It With Golden Fingers* (1), which consists of an original edition of *La Vie Mode d'Emploi* read by the artist while her fingers were coated with gold paint. A fine metaphor for the richness concealed in a book as well as the "emanations of thought" that reading can generate once the book has been read.

Susan Collis (2), meanwhile, has produced a work that runs throughout the house in all its verticality. Assuming that the building described by Perec is, in the final analysis, the main character, the artist opted for a subtle work in situ, while feigning danger. She drew a crack in the wall in pencil, which seems all too real; if you look closer, it becomes difficult to distinguish the real cracks from the fake one ... To paraphrase Perec, she forced an "outburst of fiction into a world to which, due to our everyday blindness, we are no longer able to pay attention."

Ground floor. Left-hand room

The left-hand room focuses on the puzzle that features so prominently in *La Vie Mode d'Emploi*. Beyond the game itself, the puzzle is a reconstruction of a world, a way of making a fragmented space intelligible again. **Evariste Richer** (3) commissioned a wooden jigsaw puzzle from the last company able to make them in France. The reconstructed image is an array of fine black dots on a white background, which would normally be found on cinema screens. A space that can accommodate all kinds of possibilities, this fragmented and recomposed screen shows us whatever our imagination feels like projecting onto it. "Despite appearances, this is not a solitary game: every move that the person who assembles the puzzle makes has been made previously by the creator of the puzzle; each piece he takes and puts back, that he examines or caresses, every combination he tries and re-tries, every trial and error, every stroke of intuition, every hope, every discouragement, has been determined, calculated, studied by the puzzle creator"(p. 251).

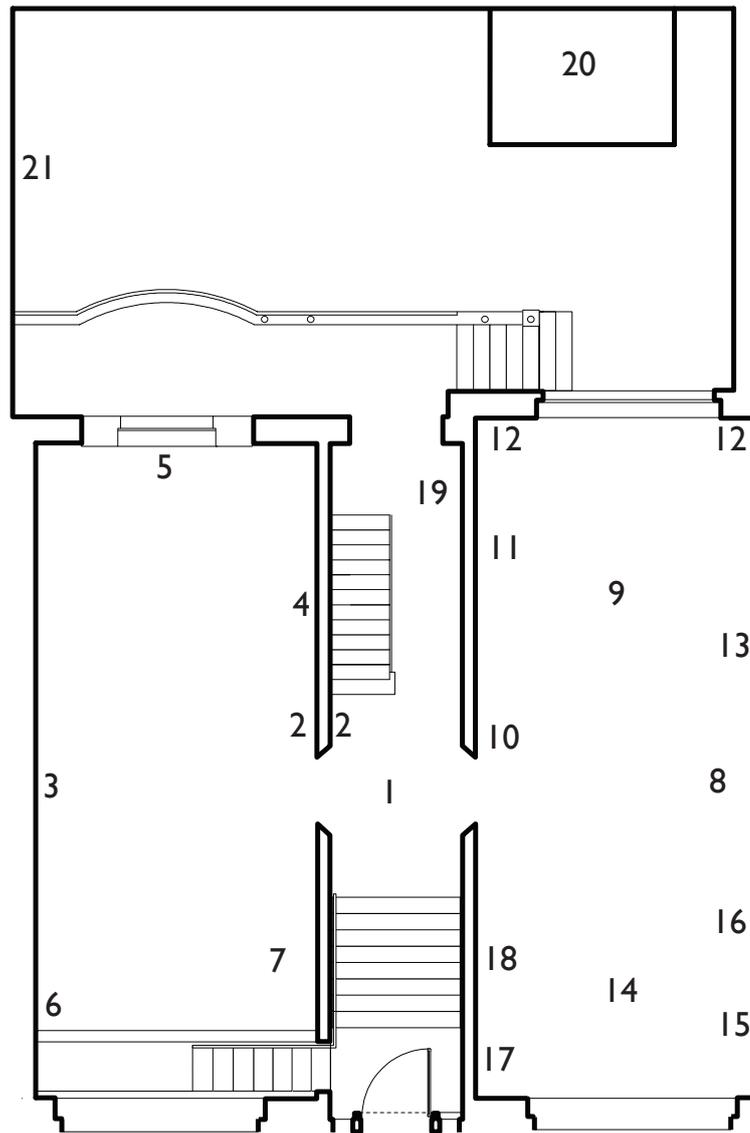
Hreinn Fridfinnsson (4) gives us his *Urban Impressions*, in which he recombines the scattered pieces of various puzzles. A reconstruction of the world in small flashes of colour, like the Impressionists in the nineteenth century.

Stressing that travel and space are paramount for Perec, **Katrin Sigurdardottir** (5) presents a series of postcards transposed onto plaster, broken up and then rearranged meticulously. This kaleidoscopic world view is not unrelated to that of one of the characters in the book, who collects postcards and sends them to another character in the 'novel'. We find this idea again in her piece shown on the ground (6).

The Danish collective **A Kassen** also uses this idea of breaking up a work and making it into a "postal work". A copy of an ancient art work in plaster, the *Postal Statue* (7) sculpture is found in carrots in cardboard tubes, ready for mailing.

Can we see not in the puzzle a series of fragments which, once rearranged in a certain order, recreate a world? One could say that these are discontinuities which, when assembled according precise sequencing principles, reveal a harmony.

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- 1 Dora Garcia, *Read It With Golden Fingers*, 2011
- 2 Susan Collis, *Something Between Us*, 2011
- 3 Evariste Richer, *Chaque seconde à partir de cet instant*, 2011
- 4 Hreinn Fridfinnsson, *Urban Impressions*, 2011
- 5 Katrin Sigurdardottir, *Small pieces*, 2011
- 6 Katrin Sigurdardottir, *58 pieces*, 2011
- 7 A Kassen, *Postal Statue*, 2010
- 8 Katrin Sigurdardottir, *Untitled*, 2009
- 9 Susan Collis, *Decent International*, 2010
- 10 Sarah Ortmeyer, *SCHACH SCHUH*, 2011
- 11 Michael Johansson, *Some Assembly Required - Bed Frame Included*, 2009
- 12 Sofia Hultén, *Fuck it up and start again*, 2001
- 13 Sarah Pickering, *Candles*, 2007
- 14 Jonathan Monk, *The Outside of Something*, 2009
- 15 Jonathan Monk, *Keep Still*, 2001
- 16 Alighiero Boetti, *Talvolta luna talvolta sole*, 1992
- 17 Wilfredo Prieto, *Hiroshima 1945*, 2011
- 18 Lieven De Boeck, *Le Corbeau*, 2010
- 19 Wilfredo Prieto, *Che Guevara 1960*, 2011
- 20 Marjolijn Dijkman, *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum*, 2005-ongoing
- 21 Mariana Castillo Deball, *Penser/Classer*, 2002-2011

Ground floor. Right-hand room

Katrin Sigurdardottir (8) present a work in progress, with drawers, in a way. Placed on the ground the landscape consists of plots that can be combined and separated leaving the possibility of making them larger if necessary.

Creating a work by imposing a constraint on himself is a recurring process in Perec's work. We find this liking for constraints in this work *Decent International* (9) by **Susan Collis**. This is a paper bag patiently drawn in lead pencil that is reminiscent of the Tati bag in France. Used, among others, by people in precarious situations or refugees, it symbolizes wandering or at least an itinerant lifestyle.

Sarah Ortmeyer (10) refers to the chequerboard, as well as to all the dualities that govern our relationship with reality (black squares, white squares, odd/even, left foot/right foot, etc.).

With *Some Assembly Required - Bed Frame Included* (11), **Michael Johansson** was inspired by scale model assembly kits. He is interested in the transformation of everyday objects, and reverses the production logic in a humorous way.

In her video *Fuck it up and Start again* (12), **Sofia Hultén** smashes a guitar and rebuilds it in seven sequences. She develops a typology in her work for the rehabilitation of an object and uses repeatable processes to make and dismantle, remake and re-dismantle. In other words, jigsaw puzzle logic.

Candles (13) from the series *Fire Scene* by **Sarah Pickering** is a reconstruction of an interior that was deliberately set on fire by firefighters as an exercise. The need to recreate this environment according to certain constraints (small size of the space, piles of objects, ...) and the density of information suggest the idea of the novel, which is a profound constituent of Perec's 'novels'.

The sculpture presented on the ground called *The Outside of Something* (14) by **Jonathan Monk** is a work that illustrates the idea of discontinuity. In addition to an oblique reference to Carl Andre, this work, which looks like an incomplete jigsaw puzzle, examines the idea of absence. The inner parts exist in the form of another sculpture, *The Inside of Something*, but the two sculptures must never be shown in the same space.

With two photographs from the series *Keep Still* (15), Monk obliges himself to form a word or a phrase, a kind of portrait of an artist from the past (Sol LeWitt and Marcel Broodthaers), based on the number of people photographed (each person corresponds to a letter). On the wall,

The small tapestry painting by **Alighiero Boetti**, stating vertically *Talvolta Luna Talvolta Sole* (sometimes the moon, sometimes the sun) (16), is a good example of the work by the Italian artist. Small reference to Perec (bearing in mind his book *La Disparition* in which the letter e is not used) is the decision of Boetti to add an 'e' between his first and last name (Alighiero e Boetti), doubling this way his personality.

Lieven De Boeck has chosen to show some of the 365 letters (18) sent to him anonymously by 'Le Corbeau' (The Raven). For each day of the exhibition, there is a letter that a staff member at the gallery is expected to delete with Tipp-ex, making it unreadable. This act is a daily constraint that frustrates the reader but releases the artist from the content of these letters.

In various parts of the gallery, **Wilfredo Prieto** (17-19) provides a perfect illustration of one of the many stylistic devices that Perec used. By revealing a mere detail of an iconic 20th-century image, it is a visual synecdoche (the part representing the whole). Each piece stands on its own merit and yet only takes on its full meaning in proximity to the other pieces. Here a detail of the explosion of Hiroshima is shown.

Videobox

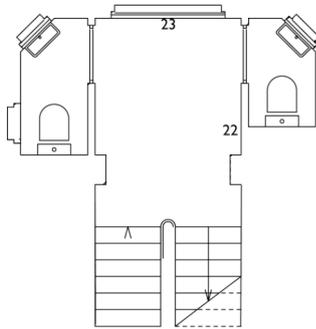
With *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* (20), **Marjolijn Dijkman** compiles dozens of human activities that she documents in the form of photographs she took on her many travels. For this release, she projects 8000 photos divided into specific categories, listed alphabetically in the Videobox. A kind of contemporary atlas, her work is a way of describing the world, shaping it by observing the infra-ordinary.

Mariana Castillo Deball published a photographic essay in 2002 inspired by Penser/Classer. With the work presented here, she extends the original idea by reproducing images of her work table taken over the course of a year. Seven examples are shown here (21).

First floor

As we go upstairs, we see on the landing window a work in situ by **Ignasi Aballí** (23). Like Perec, Aballí is fascinated by the list as a method of understanding the world. Observe, identify, classify. Who says list, says categories. The artist has identified a whole series of items of information about what is potentially visible through the window. Birds and physico-chemical phenomena are identified while remaining invisible.

The puzzle piece of **Wilfredo Prieto** hung near the toilets is a detail of the readymade *Fountain* by Marcel Duchamp.



22 Wilfredo Prieto, *Fountain* 1917, 2011
23 Ignasi Aballí, *Window*, 2011

In the alcove, *Stairway, hallway, bedroom, study* (24) by **Katrin Sigurdardottir** is a faithful rendition of part the apartment she lived in during her childhood in Reykjavik. A work suggesting the duality of "memory of place" and "place of memory ».

Office left

In *Penser/Classer*, Perec wrote "*Brief notes on art and how to file your books*". The new classification of library books was dictated by its proposal to file them by colour. To counterbalance this intoxication of colour, **Jorge Méndez Blake** shows four white watercolours (25), almost monochrome, which refer to the activity of one of the main characters in the book, Bartlebooth, while raising the question of the possibility of representation in art.

Continuing the task that was Bartlebooth set himself, Méndez Blake erases seascapes that he has seen and painted. By immersing them in a solvent solution, he clearly opts for a "zero state of colour". Monochrome becomes the emblem of the unrepresentable and loss of memory.

Kirsten Pieroth (26) worked from the preamble to *La Vie Mode d'Emploi* and established a new one, identifying all of the words used by Perec by classifying them according to categories ranging from "words that could be easily misspelled" to "palindromes" through "the only words beginning with V". The whole work is reminiscent of the archives that Perec could have handed to the English translator, who would have had little chance of reconstructing the original text.

Kitchen

Perec endeavoured throughout his writings to describe the real world and the complexity of modern society. In describing everyday life, he attempts to grasp "*not what the official (institutional) discourse calls the event, the important, but what is underneath, the infra-ordinary, the background noise which constitutes every moment of our everyday life.*" **Michael Johansson's** quest is no different. By rearranging the kitchen utensils under a stool, he creates a new layout and gives a new status to all these objects (27). One also finds back the sense of detail of **Susan Collis** in her work *Untitled (platinum staples)* (28). She fixed a white page to the wall with staples made out of platinum, one of the world's most precious metals.

Office right

It was just too tempting for Perec to deviate from his writing plan which was to describe 100 rooms. To thwart this logic, he decided to write only 99 chapters, leaving one room undescribed. In order to highlight this observation, it was decided not to open the apartment located on the top floor of the building. Nevertheless, **Ignasi Aballí** proposed to incorporate this space without actually opening it up, placing a surveillance camera which films it 24/7, but with new viewpoint every day (30). The live transmission is in real time on a monitor placed in an office. Challenging in this way the boundaries between public and private, between work and document, Aballí incorporates the private space into the public space.

Control mechanisms and fiction are also examined in *Mire* (31) by **Lieven De Boeck** in the form of a test-card pattern painted on a 'spyglass'. Originally created to calibrate a TV screen, the pattern has almost disappeared nowadays.

Patrick Everaert (33) describes the world of images in an allusive way, while making them impossible to read since they are crushed by a stone mortar. The frustration is due to the fact the mortar prevents any understanding of the images despite their profusion.

Wifredo Prieto makes us guess two important events from the sixties: the first steps of men on the moon and the murder of John F. Kennedy (34).

Right-hand room

Cornelia Parker has recovered silver commemorative items (dishes, cutlery, cups ...) before flattening them under a 250-tonne press. *Thirty Pieces of Silver* (35) evokes a bygone era and conveys a variety of reading opportunities. To whom did these objects belong? What was their previous life before being crushed? Parker tracking the minutiae of human life, and like Perce, looks for the infra-ordinary. "Turn out your pockets, your bag. Ask yourself where each of the objects you find comes from, what it's for and what it will become. Question your little spoons.

What is underneath your wallpaper ? (...)

I do not care that these questions are fragmentary, barely indicative of a method (...). It is very important to me that they seem trivial and futile: it is precisely what makes them equally if not more essential than many others things through which we have vainly tried to capture our truth. "

With his 'Time' (36) titled paintings **Mungo Thomson** archives the evolution of the logo of Time Magazine through time. Since 1922 Time regularly changes its font and Thomson methodically shows the variations here. We find this reference to time also in the other works in this room.

Driven by a poetic vision of tremendous clarity, **Claudio Parmiggiani** (37) has been working for forty years on the concepts of time and memory. Through his technique of "Delocazione" (smoke and soot on wood), Parmiggiani paradoxically represents the quintessence of the object itself by referring to its absence.

Deliberately placed on the wall, *Peinture de la Chambre* (38) by **Fabrice Samyn** is a work on an old painting. The artist gives form to a very original pictorial research, by partly removing the varnish in a very carefully-arranged way from portrait of a man dating from the 18th century. By removing the dirty varnish, it extricates this man, as it were, from the dirt accumulated over the years. An intrusion driven by spatiality while adopting a past.

This practice is not far removed from those that pushed Perce to follow in the footsteps of another writer, transcribing passages while contextualizing them differently.

This intervention also stresses that every work is the mirror of another and a new work often takes its meaning only in relation to earlier works.

Connecting passage in the back

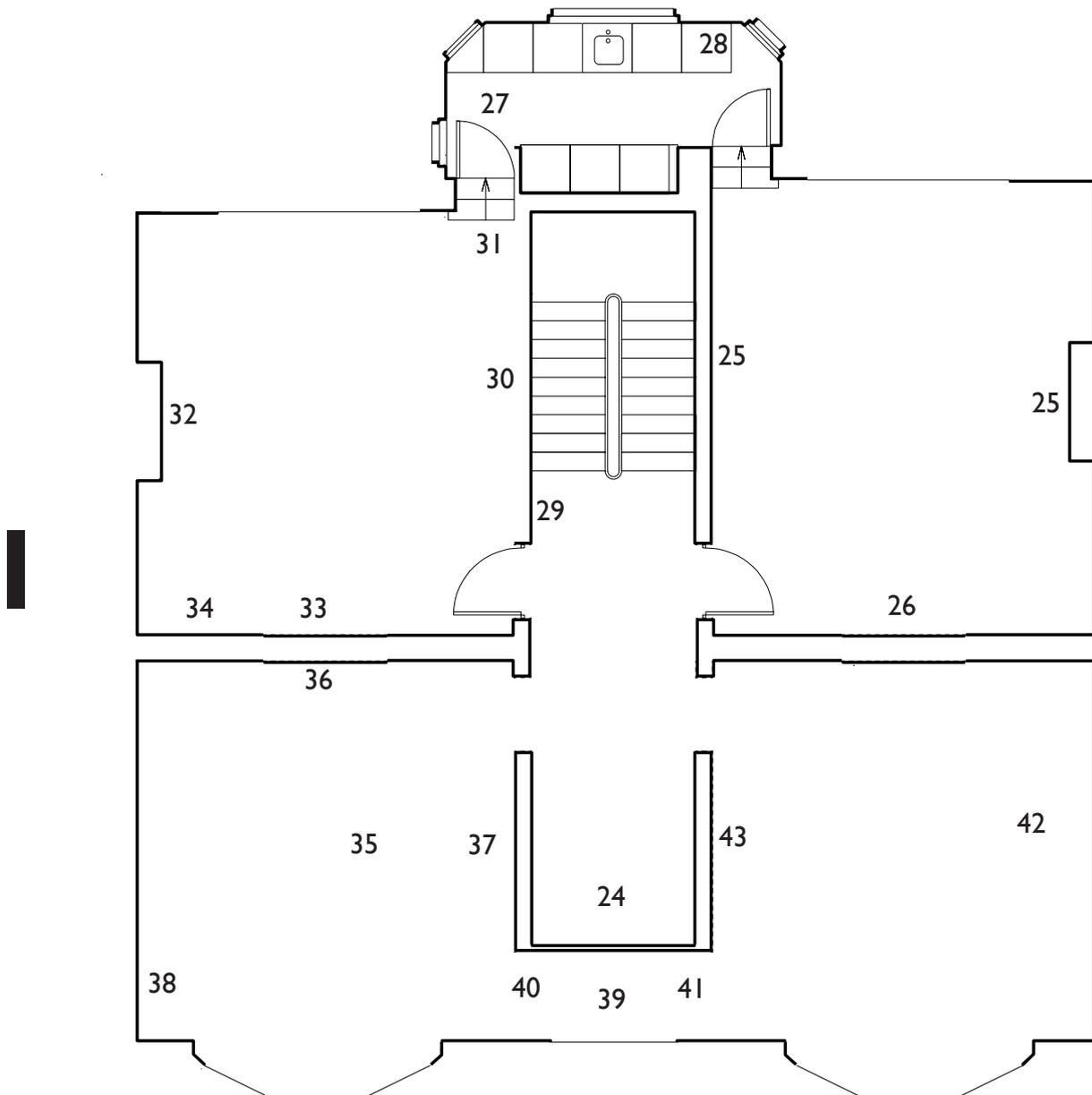
Placed in the middle of this passage is *Doorknob* (39) by **Rachel Whiteread**, the sculpted inside of a doorknob of a hollow door. Working the idea of the domestic Whiteread here delivers a work underlining the symmetry of the house and reminding us that the house Perce describes is a character in its own right.

Placed in height two jigsaw pieces by **Wilfredo Prieto** show political figures symbolising the two utopian totalitarian systems of the XXth century. Hitler's nazism with its dreadful consequences (41), and Gorbachev (40) who accelerated the decline of communism. These pieces remind us also that Perce's mother was deported and killed in Auschwitz, while his father got deadly wounded a war volunteer in 1940.

Left-hand room

With *Shelving for Unlocked Matter and Open Problems* (42), **Nina Beier** creates an installation of objects found at flea markets where she has systematically cut off the upper part, and which she has then assembled on shelves putting glass plates on them. A work about collection, networks, life and memory of objects, references to styles and cultures, the relevance of an undefined arrangement, *Shelving* is a fine example of interrelation between objects.

Opposite to this installation **Susan Collis** (43) placed a hardly noticeable work, a trompe l'oeil. On first sight it looks like two non filled holes in the wall refer to a spot where once a painting hung, but looking more closer one sees two black diamonds, subtly inserted in the wall.



- 24 Katrin Sigurdardottir, *Stairway, hallway, bedroom*, 2011
 25 Jorge Méndez Blake, *The Bartlebooth Monument*, 2011
 26 Kirsten Pieroth, *Complete list of words for the translation of the preamble of La Vie Mode d'Emploi*, 2011
 27 Michael Johansson, *Domestic Kitchen Planning*, 2010
 28 Susan Collis, *Untitled*, 2011
 29 Susan Collis, *Something Between Us*, 2011
 30 Ignasi Aballi, 2011
 31 Lieven De Boeck, *Mire*, 2011
 32 Sarah Pickering, *Insurance Job*, 2007
 33 Patrick Everaert, 2011
 34 Wilfredo Prieto, *JFK 1963 and Man on the moon*, 2011
 35 Cornelia Parker, *Thirty Pieces of Silver*, 2002
 36 Mungo Thomson, *TIME*, 2011
 37 Claudio Parmiggiani, *Senza titolo*, 2008
 38 Fabrice Samyn, *Peinture de chambre I*, ca 1750-2007
 39 Rachel Whiteread, *Doorknob*, 2001
 40 Wilfredo Prieto, *Mihail Gorbachov*, 2011
 41 Wilfredo Prieto, *Adolf Hitler 1889-1945*, 2011
 42 Nina Beier, *Shelving for Unlocked Matter and Open Problems*, 2010
 43 Susan Collis, *You won't be seeing me again*, 2011

Storage room

Mungo Thomson

Untitled (Margo Leavin Gallery, 1970 -) (44) is a 16mm film that takes as its subject the Rolodex of the Margo Leavin Gallery in Los Angeles. The addresses of thousands of contacts (artists, collectors, curators, suppliers, ...) are filmed and made visible and in five minutes. A fine, silent work on the determination to file all this information, classify it and make it intelligible and functional. We can consider a cardfile as part of the essential data of a gallery, like a storage room, the secret place par excellence.

Small Technical Room

With "Pot noir, Pot blanc, Pot rouge" (45) (Black pot, white pot, red pot), **Sylvain Rousseau** talks to us about painting.. These are discussed throughout the 'novels'. Here we find a tribute to Malevich (white on white background, black on white background, red on white background) which is similar to a exercise in style.

Workshop

With *John Silver* (46) placed against a wall in the workshop, **Susan Collis** reintroduces fiction in our daily lives and gives us behind what appears to be an ordinary piece of wood is a very fine work in exquisite wood, gold and diamonds. **Damien Roach** also takes an interest in the invisible and exhibits a blue table (49) and orange chair (48) on which he has subtly engraved picturesque scenes.

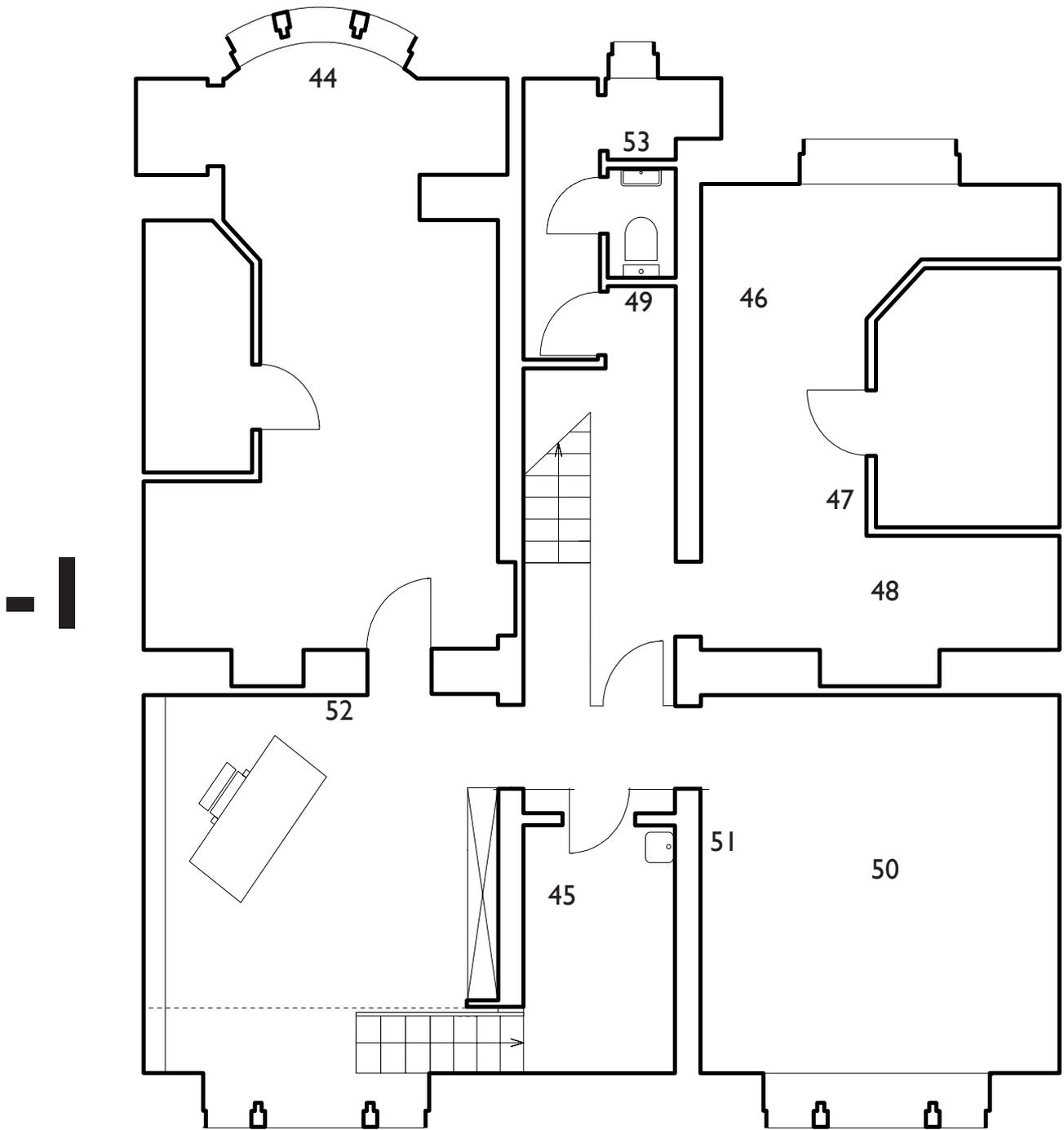
Sarah Bostwick with her relief, represents a point of view that existed before the renovations of the building (47). According to her reconnaissance in 2008, she has carved and moulded a perspective that shows the room where the work is exhibited.

Wunderkammer

With *DCD* (50), **Sylvain Rousseau** and **Benjamin Rondeau** make a reference to another legendary work by Perec *La Disparition (Disappearance)* in which the writer uses only words not containing the letter "e" throughout his story of more than 300 pages. A challenge in French where "e" is the most common letter! The name of Georges Perec becomes GORGS PRC transcribed on a tombstone.

With *End point of La Vie Mode d'Emploi* (51), **Kris Martin** gives the finishing touch by cutting the end point of the 'novel'.

It will be understood that Perec's fiction finds support in the games and constraints as well as for many contemporary artists. *La Vie Mode d'Emploi* is probably Perec's richest and most accomplished work. The vast network that he has developed, the original relationship between formal innovations and profound meaning, the profusion of detail and complexity of the structure of the book ensure that it is not only a jewel of world literature, but also an inexhaustible source of inspiration for many artists. Let us hope it is equally inspirational for you!



44 Mungo Thomson, *Untitled (Margo Leavin Gallery, 1970-)*, 2009

45 Sylvain Rousseau, *Pot noir, Pot blanc, Pot rouge*, 2008

46 Susan Collis, *John Silver*, 2010

47 Sarah Bostwick, *Cellar Floor Right*, 2011

48 Damien Roach, *Cro-Aloha*, 2005

49 Damien Roach, *Dawn Chorus*, 2004

50 Sylvain Rousseau et Benjamin Rondeau, *D C D*, 2009

51 Kris Martin, *Endpoint of "La Vie Mode d'Emploi (Georges Perec)*, 2011

52 Wilfredo Prieto, *Mona Lisa 1503-1506*, 2011

53 Wilfredo Prieto, *Easyjet*, 2011