



MONASH University

Murmur: the house as vehicle for artistic and curatorial intervention

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Murmur unfolded

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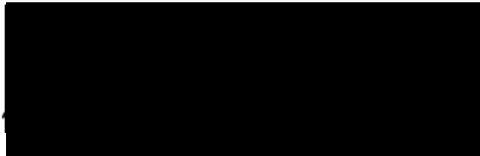
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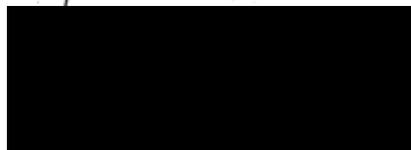
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Main Supervisor signature:



Date: December 5 2016

Research exhibitions during period of candidature

Solo exhibitions

- 2016 *Garden fracture/ Mirror in Vapour*. VeniceArtFactory, Castello, Venice, Italy
- 2015 *Last light* Gallery 360 Degrees, Tokyo, Japan
Hello Blossom – Inaugural Spring installation, Grub Food Van, Melbourne
Last light/ in vapour. Sutton Gallery, Melbourne
- 2014 *Evaporated Garden, Powdered Sky* Milani Gallery, Brisbane
- 2013 *Scent notations + ether and collapse:part 2* Sutton Gallery, Melbourne
Murmur - House of Ideas series, the Johnston Collection, Melbourne

Group exhibitions

- 2015 *Lurid Beauty, Australian Surrealism and its Echoes* National Gallery of Victoria
21st Century Heide: the collection since 2000 Heide Art Museum, Melbourne
- 2014 *Animal arch – depiction of the animal in art* . Art Gallery of Western Australia
- 2013 *Atlas for the Devil* Greenwood Street Project Space. Melbourne
Mix Tape 1980's: Appropriation, Subculture, Critical Style National Gallery of Victoria
Vibrant Matter Tarrawarra Museum of Art
10 Years 30 Artists Art Angels Turner Galleries , Perth
Home: Reframing Craft and Domesticity Hatch Contemporary Art Space, City of Banyule
The Art of Sound Holmes a Court Gallery, Perth
Reading the Space: Contemporary Australian Drawing 4 New York Studio School
Reinventing the Wheel: The Readymade Century MUMA, Monash University
Melbourne Now The National Gallery of Victoria

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Abstract:

Murmur: the house as vehicle for artistic and curatorial intervention.

This exegetical and studio research presents the house and the house museum as a rich and fertile site for artistic and curatorial intervention. Houses contain complex layers of trace, memory and aura. Domestic interiors and objects present rich possibilities for artists and curators to introduce further narratives that build upon and respond to an existing site, creating spaces of an uncommon intimacy not readily available in a museum or gallery space.

The research is based around my installation *Murmur* (2013) at the Johnston Collection, East Melbourne, Australia. As part of *The House of Ideas* exhibition series, I was invited to work within the entire Victorian house and its collection. I chose to represent the narratives of the lives of the late antique dealer W. R Johnston, Ahmed Moussa Aboelmaaty and Angus Winneke, all of whom had lived in the house and whose stories had been misrepresented or suppressed since the house was established as a museum.

A selection of works by other artists and curators dealing with the house and house museum are examined in the first chapter. This chapter demonstrates the various and rich diversity of interventions by artists and curators within the house. Further examples of artistic and curatorial intervention in the house and house museum are explored in subsequent chapters devoted to Dennis Severs' House, Spitalfields, London and the exhibition *Artempo: Where Time Becomes Art* held at the Palazzo Fortuny, Venice in 2007. Both works are considered as immersive spatial experiences that foreground uniquely intimate encounters with art works and objects within the context of the house.

Cumulus (mirrored) is the exhibition component of this research, which is to be presented at my studio and apartment in Fitzroy, Victoria, Australia in 2017. The exhibition is an invitation to attend my studio and apartment, where the spaces will operate as a mesh of connections between my own works and living spaces and those of W. R Johnston, Dennis Severs, and the City of Venice.

Introduction

Murmur: the house as vehicle for artistic and curatorial intervention

“For the house is our corner of the world... it is our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word.”¹

The house functions as a container or vessel of memory, trace, aura, emotion and archaeology. Objects within the house are suggestive of these complex layers and varying modalities. The house or house museum, presents a myriad of possibilities to an artist or curator (whose roles are often blurred), to create new narratives, to add further layers and to build both loaded, intimate and highly immersive spaces.

The research is largely based around and extends upon my installation *Murmur* held in 2013 at the Johnston Collection, a house museum situated in Fairhall, a Victorian house in East Melbourne, Australia. The museum showcases a collection of decorative art, furniture and paintings belonging to the late collector and antiques dealer William Robert Johnston, which was gifted to the people of Victoria in 1986. The collection is primarily housed in Fairhall and is displayed according to Johnston’s wishes, as if it constituted the furnishings of an occupied house. The objects and furniture are not behind ropes and there are no barriers or alarms, allowing the viewer, as Johnston wished, a close and intimate experience of the collection. Johnston also specified that the collection be constantly shifted and changed within the house. As part of their annual exhibition program, the museum initiated the *House of Ideas* series, inviting creative practitioners working outside the field of antiques and the decorative arts to engage with

¹ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 4.

and reinterpret the collection.² In 2011, the Johnston Collection invited me to participate in this program, the resulting installation, *Murmur*, was staged at Fairhall from 2 July to 23 October 2013. I was the first visual artist to be invited to reinstall the Johnston Collection. Amidst the complex and still uncertain histories of W. R Johnston and his collection, I chose to privilege the lives of the men, Ahmed Moussa Aboelmaaty and Angus Winneke, who had been close to Johnston and who had lived at Fairhall. The stories of their long and important connections and intimate lives had thus far been largely unspoken in the context of the museum. These stories interwoven with a very specific selection of objects from the collection and their placement in the rooms of the house, as well as newly created works, formed an installation that occupied the entire house of Fairhall.

The house and house museum as a site for artistic and curatorial intervention is a vast and currently vibrant field of research.³ As such, the full breadth of the field is too expansive to cover in this written exegesis. Chapter One covers a selected field of works executed in houses and house museums, as well as the image of the house within museums, providing further examples of spaces and interventions that have been influential on this aspect of my practice.

As a broader framework, in relation to *Murmur*, I specifically discuss two further examples, a house and a house museum and intervention. The first in Chapter Three is Dennis Severs' House in Spitalfields, London. This multi-sensorial immersive interior was created by an eccentric anglophile and occupant of the house, Dennis Severs, to give the impression that the fictive Jervis family of eighteenth-century Huguenot silk-weavers were still in residence. The second example in Chapter Four is The Palazzo Fortuny, Venice and the exhibition *Artempo: Where*

² The first exhibition in the *House of Ideas* series was staged in 2010, Akira Isogawa's *Akira Isogawa Meets Mr. Johnston*.

³ Recent examples include Elmgreen & Dragset's *Tomorrow* staged at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (2013- 2014) and Saskia Olde Wolders *Yes, These Eyes Are the Windows*, an Artangel project (2014), Yuri Ancarani's *Séance* (2014) at Casa Mollino, Turin.

Time becomes Art staged in 2007 by Jean-Hubert Martin and Mattijs Visser with Axel Vervoordt. These specific houses and interventions have sustained profoundly immersive experiences of detailed and intimate materialities, whilst also crossing histories and cultures, collapsing historical time and blurring fact and fiction. Both houses are richly layered, kaleidoscopic, dense, wondrous spaces that simultaneously affect the senses and the mind. I have had the privilege of multiple visits to both sites over the duration of this candidature, gathering information, conducting conversations, immersing myself in their atmospheres, and slowly walking through and recording the spaces. As such, both spaces have profoundly contributed to an ongoing experience of installation as immersive space, particularly within the life of a house.

The exhibition aspect of this research is to be presented at my studio and apartment on the second floor of a Victorian building in Fitzroy. *Cumulus (mirrored)* will present aspects of *Murmur* (2013), relocated from Mr Johnston's Fairhall to my home and working spaces. The studio and home is revealed as a space where much of the thinking occurred for *Murmur*; a site of conception. As such, there occurs a complex entangling of histories taken from the narratives around Mr Johnston, traces of other significant houses I have researched during this candidature, Dennis Severs' House in London, Palazzo Fortuny in the City of Venice and traces of my own ongoing working and domestic life. The proposed work, inevitably embedded with nuanced slippage, uncertainty and blending of separate stories relevant to different sites, functions as a mesh or web of connections constantly changing and in flux; speaking of trace, memory, the held, our attachment to objects and investment in them, followed by inevitable collapse, an unfolding, the ephemeral, human fragility.

Chapter One: A Field of Houses

The practice of making exhibitions outside of known conventional gallery or museum spaces, for both artists and curators, is certainly not new. This chapter offers a selective survey of a field of contemporary artistic and curatorial practice, outside of museum boundaries, though sometimes within them and specifically within the house and house museum. The field is vast and extends far beyond what it is possible to cover in this exegesis. I am not attempting a history or an encyclopaedic coverage of projects, which by their very nature resist categorisation, many being very subtle, deeply personal and ephemeral. In this chapter, I make meandering and select observations of some of the key activists who have worked from both within institutions and outside them to break down known modes of display. The selections are inevitably those that I have encountered or those that I find most engaging in the context of my own practice.⁴

Beyond its value in monetary terms, a house is quite simply shelter, from a cave, a box, a caravan to a vast palace and all of the numerously built variations in-between. Each of these spaces contains traces of their inhabitants and the layered lives of generations, known and unknown. The house, as shelter, as a lived-in space and domestic interior, either humble or grand, offers potential to both artists and curators as a site for the reclamation of human intimacy; where trace, resonance and silence can project a deep and affecting atmosphere.

Furthermore, it is possible to think about working within the spaces of a house, as representing

⁴ As an artist, I observe that an interest in seeking ways of working and presenting work outside of the institution likely corresponds to times of unrest, shift and indeed crisis, the myriad that face us today in the world. As known structures and systems, financial or environmental, government or social frameworks threaten to collapse, a reflexive response predicated on survival is to seek other ways, inventing and re-imagining other possibilities for our place in the world. Whether that be finding different ways to grow food, sharing resources and shelter, or if after essential needs are fulfilled, to express an inner life that reaches and enriches community and individuals. I like to think that artists are good at inventing and re-imagining and that we may be purposefully useful in times when there is some urgency for a new picture.

in itself a type of shelter for art and objects, a way of cocooning delicacy, of preserving a very central seed of its origin, a silent heart, capable of carrying us to the furthest reaches of our dreaming. Indeed, this is possibly the most beautiful and even transcendent aspect of making art, the possibility to fly high and very far in the space around making. Objects and art perform differently within the space of a house and indeed the studio, which in my case, is currently adjoined to my apartment. I have often noted that objects and paintings made in the studio, where I have intimate contact with them as they evolve and change, upon completion seem to change once they are placed within a gallery space or a museum. Of course, this has to do with changed light and other physical conditions, but the affecting shift from a private to public realm is profound. Almost like taking an innocent child to their first day of school, a private unworldly body made only of delicate dreams is subjected to the world beyond the door to become public. Sometimes this truly hurts and this is what an artist must bear. For an artist or curator, the house can be a sanctuary, where a deeper and more intimate contact with objects is possible. This is not to debase or debunk exhibitions within gallery or museum spaces, as many continue to achieve moments of special intimacy.⁵ Rather, this exegetical research highlights the special opportunity that the house presents for artistic and curatorial projects.

Harald Szeemann (b.1933–d.2005), one of the most influential curators of the late twentieth century, spent fifty years making exhibitions both within museums and outside of them, distinctly and powerfully breaking boundaries. His work has left behind formidable and unforgettable traces, a benchmark legacy for both curators and artists. Szeemann's achievements have been the subject of recent revision. In 2013 at the Prada Foundation, curator Germano Celant in dialogue

⁵ Visits to various museums or sections of museums do offer such profound sanctuary, though in my experience they are more likely to be unrenovated, even forgotten relegated cultural institutions. Remembering the Uffizi before online booking and mass "cultural tourism" is a case in point, where a visitor could wander in isolation along the galleria as if in another time.

with Thomas Demand and Rem Koolhaas, remounted his exhibition *Live in Your Head. When Attitudes Become Form*, originally staged at the Bern Kunsthalle in 1969. The original exhibition has become legendary for its anti-establishment actions and gestures. Sixty-nine artists from the United States, Italy, Germany, France, England, Belgium and Switzerland turned the Kunsthalle into a workshop. Michael Heizer used a demolition ball to smash up the sidewalk pavement, Richard Serra splattered hot lead against the wall, Daniel Buren was arrested for installing striped posters without permission; all this to considerable reaction from the local public.⁶ Entries in Szeemann's diaries reveal his struggle to find words or a terminology to embrace the gathered actions. "All of the suggested terms 'Anti-Form', 'Micro-Emotive', 'Possible Art', 'Impossible Art', 'Concept Art', 'Arte Povera', 'Earth Art', only cover a single aspect: the apparent opposition against form."⁷ Szeemann wrote in the foreword of the catalogue, "Surely, for most artists exhibited here, the work demonstrated by Duchamp, the intensity in Pollock's gesture, the unity of material, physical strain, and time in the happenings of the early sixties can be cited as elements of an artistic family tree. But, in some cases, it is not purely visual experience that has triggered the desire to create works. Sooner or later the hippy movement, the existence of 'rockers', and the use of drugs were bound to affect the behaviour of a younger generation of artists."⁸ Looking back, later in his career, Szeemann wrote: "The aim was to bring the intensity of the experience with the artists into the framework of the museum without a loss of energy."⁹ In his revisionary 2006 book devoted to Szeemann's contribution, Hans-Joachim Muller describes

⁶ A president of the Reinach Association for Cultural Event in the Aargau region writes: "Dear Dr. Szeemann: An anonymous benefactor has promised us an endowment of several hundred weights of dynamite. As soon as we can pick up the gift, we shall drive it to your place in Bern, and we sincerely hope you will be home (in the Kunsthalle) when we shall try out the artistic qualities of the powder." K Hegewisch and B Kluser, eds., *Die Kunst der Ausstellung. Eine Dokumentation dreißig exemplarischer Kunstausstellungen dieses Jahrhunderts* (Frankfurt and Leipzig: Insel Verlag, 1991): 216, quoted in Hans-Joachim Muller, *Harald Szeemann-Exhibition Maker* (Germany: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2006), 14.

⁷ Harald Szeemann, *Live in Your Head. When Attitudes Become Form. Works-Concepts-Processes-Situations-Information*, exhibition catalogue (Kunsthalle: Bern, Switzerland, 1969), quoted in Muller, 17.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

⁹ Szeemann quoted in Muller, 18.

Szeemann as “the inventor of a profession... Only with him, this one-man art entrepreneur, did the independent ‘exhibition maker’ appear on the scene; the traveling art director who knew how to set up exhibitions with sovereign sensitivity for place, space and local circumstance. He always carried the viewer away to realms of fantasy, where things were colourful and disorderly, sublime and weird, strange and meaningful... What counted was only the marvel factor, the added bewilderment value, the intensive structure of the work.”¹⁰ Szeemann coined this field of energy and realm of intensity “obsessions” progressively making his exhibitions around the idea of a seductive, embodied and affecting environment.¹¹

Szeemann was thereafter on a trajectory of the creation of path-breaking exhibitions. *Documenta 5*, staged in 1974, propelled him to a high level of visibility and acclaim. Returning from Kassel to his hometown in Bern presented an opportunity for reflection, a period of retreat, like going underground. Szeemann’s notebooks acknowledge greater possibilities and “self-fulfilment through the exhibition medium” but also record frustrating limitations, energies wasted through multiple bureaucratic trivialities.¹² Szeemann’s fascinating oppositional response to the spectacle of the large public art event such as *documenta 5* was to move towards an entirely intimate subject and space. In 1974, Szeemann staged in his own apartment in Bern an exhibition, *Grandfather, A Pioneer Like Us*, which consisted of artefacts from the estate of his late grandfather, Etienne Szeemann, who had been a hairdresser; indeed a “hair artist”.¹³ The exhibition presented an array of strange crimping tools, combs, mannequin heads and images of desirable hairstyles and fanciful attitudes from the early twentieth century. (fig. 1 and 2) By inviting an audience into his own apartment to view his grandfather’s tools, Szeemann created

¹⁰ Ibid., 6.

¹¹ Ibid., 53.

¹² Szeemann, *Museum der Obsessionen* (Berlin 1981): 64, quoted in Muller, 52.

¹³ Ibid., 54.

an intimate and private space for reflection upon a past time and his own lineage. The point of interest is that this gesture of intimacy within a private space came after a period of loud declarations of freedom, gestures of personal liberation and breaking boundaries within the museum. Szeemann steps quietly sideways from an overtly political platform to perform an intimate radicalism that has less to do with loud and overt declarations and more with obsession, as he notes “joyfully grasped, albeit pre–Freudian energy unit that doesn’t give a damn whether it is expressed or can be applied in a socially negative or positive, harmful or useful way.”¹⁴

A further lifelong project was Szeemann’s historical research into a utopian retreat, *Monte Verità*, (*Mountain of Truth*) Ascona, Northern Italy, frequented since the late nineteenth century by bohemian and artistic circles as well as those seeking an alternative lifestyle.¹⁵ Therapies included open-air bathing, a vegetarian diet, nudism, gardening, sleeping in simple huts, dancing, sports and a generic version of nature worship. (fig. 3) Social organisation was co-operative and sought to achieve the emancipation of women and new ways of cultivating body, mind and soul. *Monte Verità* gained a European reputation attracting a vast array of visitors from theosophists, reformers, anarchists, communists, social democrats and psychoanalysts followed by artists, writers and performers including Isadora Duncan, D. H. Lawrence, Paul Klee, Hugo Ball, Hermann Hesse, Hans Arp and Sophie Tauber-Arp.¹⁶ Szeemann was fixated by the utopian ideals of the community, noting the project was no longer the “sum of individual obsessions” but the “delusion of an ideal society.”¹⁷ His exhibition *Le mamelle della verità* (*The breasts of truth*) staged in 1978 at *Casa Anatta* (*House of the Souls*), Ascona, an early Modernist flat topped house built in 1910, with curved wooden interiors, (fig.4) was based around an archive of

¹⁴ Szeemann quoted in Muller, 55.

¹⁵ Szeemann is credited with rediscovering and re-launching the rich cultural life of idealised sanctuary of *Monte Verità*. “Monte Verità,” accessed November 27 2016, www.monteverita.org/en/43/monte-verita.aspx.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Szeemann quoted in Muller, 64.

documents, objects, publications, photographs, articles and other material related to the history of *Monte Verità*.¹⁸ He presented the histories of this utopian community non-chronologically in the spirit of freedom treasured by those who sought out the mountain refuge. (fig.5) *Monte Verità*, Szeemann's lifelong and unfinished project was perhaps also a personal refuge and sanctuary, a likeminded marginal community seeking alternative ways to live, think, reinvent beyond the constraints of institutional structure on this mountain top, as Szeemann declares, "The place where our minds can reach up to the heavens."¹⁹ It is important to note that Szeemann chose to present this archival material in his exhibition *Le mamelle della verità* at the site of *Monte Verità*, more specifically within the house of *Casa Anatta* thus maintaining an atmosphere and sanctuary for these utopian ideals and energies in the place where they had been enacted and lived.

Another leading curator—of the next generation—also began his career with an exhibition staged in a house. In his recent publication, *Ways of Curating*, Hans Ulrich Obrist, currently Artistic Director of the Serpentine Gallery, London, recalls his thinking and impulse for the creation of his first exhibition in 1991 at the age of twenty-three, *World Soup: The Kitchen Show* staged in the kitchen of his apartment in St Gallen, Switzerland.²⁰

I began to think about all the innovative, large-scale museum shows I had seen and whether it was possible to do something new, combining all the networks I had been enmeshed in, the entire European Thinkbelt. One conviction I had was that it could be interesting to do something smaller, after the gigantism of some of the 1980's art scene which seemed unsustainable after the crash of 1987.²¹

¹⁸ The building today is the *Museo Casa Anatta*.

¹⁹ Szeemann (April 1985), quoted in *Monte Verità*.

²⁰ Hans Ulrich Obrist, *Ways of Curating* (Great Britain: Penguin, Random House, 2014).

²¹ Obrist, 81.

In this, Obrist was influenced by H.C Binswanger, a Professor of Political Economy at the University of St Gallen's Institute for Economics and Ecology. In his later published book *Money and Magic*, Binswanger traces a historical relationship between alchemy and economics based on the fantastical search to turn lead into gold.²² Binswanger looked at the connection between art and economy from an original point of view. He proposed that art—which belongs to the realm of the imagination—might have a connection to the phenomenon of paper currency being printed for something that does not yet exist or that we might yet conjure into existence. As a product is sold, “imaginary” money becomes real value and according to classical economic theory this transaction can be infinitely repeated. Binswanger recognised a “quasi-magical fascination” in the idea of endless growth.²³ However, Obrist observes that the wisdom of his Professor's writings was contained in his proposition that endless growth was unsustainable in both human and planetary terms and his suggestion of ways to moderate the demands of the market. These ideas clearly made a strong impression on the early formative thinking of Obrist, influencing and shaping his later work with artists outside of power structures. Obrist was also aware of Szeemann's 1974 exhibition in his Bern apartment, *Grandfather, A Pioneer Like Us* and an exhibition curated by Jan Hoet in 1986 in Belgium, *Chambres D'Amis (Rooms of Friends)* in which fifty artists were commissioned to work in fifty apartments and homes around Ghent. The exhibition took the visitor on a sprawling journey around the city, through both public and private spaces. These varied influences cohered in *World Soup: The Kitchen Show* (1991). The kitchen in Obrist's apartment was an almost entirely unused room, as he explains he mostly ate outside his house.²⁴ The participating artists transformed the kitchen into a functioning room through subtle interventions. Christian Boltanski installed a projection of a candle in a cupboard under the sink, only visible through a small crack, an image of wonder and magic in a space

²² H. C. Binswanger (1994) quoted in Obrist, 81-83.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 24.

normally used for cleaning fluids. Fischli and Weiss installed giant-sized commercial packets of food, a five-kilogram packet of noodles, huge bottles of sauce and condiments inducing an *Alice in Wonderland* swelling of scale and a sense of play. Hans-Peter Feldmann installed six dark marble eggs in Obrist's nearly empty refrigerator and in dialogue with a small board arranged with feathers on the top shelf. Frédéric Bruly Bouabré constructed a kitchen drawing from the components of a rose, a cup of coffee and a sliced fish. Richard Wentworth placed a square mirrored plate on the tops of some cans of food, whilst also providing the title for the exhibition: *World Soup*. Fischli and Weiss also took the exhibition photographs. From this playful beginning, outside of an institution, Obrist has continued to curate exhibitions within domestic spaces of varying types, which he observes "brings a different focus and a special intimacy" to the exhibition of art.²⁵

In 1999, Obrist staged *Retrace Your Steps: Remember Tomorrow* at the famed house museum of neo-classical architect Sir John Soane (1753–1837) in Lincoln's Inn Fields, London. Soane was one of the greatest English architects of his era, holding a forty-five-year appointment as architect to the Bank of England and later also being appointed Professor of Architecture at the Royal Academy of Arts. He travelled extensively in Italy early in his career, researching, drawing, measuring and making models of antique and Renaissance buildings. Collecting was likely an early and then lifelong impulse assisted by an inheritance from his wealthy builder uncle George Wyatt, who died in 1790.²⁶ After his appointment as Professor of Architecture at the Royal Academy, Soane's personal collection became a teaching collection. His students were able to come to the house the day before and the day after each lecture to examine

²⁵ Ibid., 85.

²⁶ Peter Thornton and Helen Dorey, *A Miscellany of Objects from Sir John Soane's Museum* (Great Britain: Laurence King Publishing, 1992), 7.

illustrations and models and casts.²⁷ The interiors of the houses, 12, 13 and 14 Lincoln's Inn Fields, were constructed over a period of twenty-six years (1808–1834) as a mirror of his thinking, positioning “Architecture (as) Queen of the Fine Arts...” and with the aim of giving “some idea of the manner in which the Works of Art are arranged and the different effects produced...(so as to leave) as little as possible to the chance of their being removed from the positions relatively assigned to them; having being arranged as studies of my own mind, and being intended similarly to benefit the Artists of future generations.”²⁸ As opposed to numerous posthumous memorial house museums devoted to the life and achievements of the dweller, remarkably Soane initiated an Act of Parliament that was passed in 1833 stipulating that his houses in Lincoln's Inn Fields and his vast collection in their built arrangements remain the same as they did during his lifetime.²⁹ Soane's collection is broadly composed of classical antiquities, fragments and entire forms, both authentic and copied, paintings from Canaletto to Hogarth and Turner, architectural drawings such as Piranesi and his own work represented by an archive of architectural models and drawings.³⁰ A more eclectic array of over three thousand further items includes gems, jewellery, medals, silver, furniture, clocks, barometers, natural objects, Peruvian pottery, Chinese ceramics, medieval pottery and tiles, a mummy's head, mummified cats and a rat.³¹ It is impossible not to be completely beguiled by the constructed interior spaces of the house, which remain more or less intact, as scholastic architectural tools and as a wandering journey through his thinking and imaginative life. The spatial journey of the house takes us from a drawing room to tiny corridors barely wide enough to pass through without brushing against densely hung classical fragments, further mesmerised by mirrors, both flat and convex, light wells, angled corners. The Picture Room is a small chamber of salon-hung paintings on panels

²⁷ Ibid., 8.

²⁸ Ibid., 9.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Obrist, 86.

³¹ Thornton and Dorey, 9.

that hinge outwards from Piranesi to Hogarth and then outwards again and again in a series of actions opening to a window where one can look downwards into a crypt housing an empty alabaster sarcophagus of the Pharaoh Seti I. Another passage leads to an interior balconied colonnade laden with classical figures, busts, and fragments in a crowded gathering up to ceiling height bathed in a low cool English light and downwards to a basement steeped in gradually deepening shadow, orchestrated by the effects of Soane's designs. (fig.6)

I have regularly visited Sir John Soane's Museum on trips to London since my student days in the late 1970s. At this time, the museum was not widely publicised, if at all. Its renown spread via word-of-mouth, by a circle of artists, architects and art historians with insider knowledge of London's less conventional museums. An immediate association with installation practice, as a complete and immersive constructed space is clear, though—obviously—Soane had no knowledge of the art of our period.³² Though from our present time, the allure of Soane's house seems magnified, rarefied and jewel-like, much like a house-sized "found object". We feel dipped into another collected time and the recesses of one man's obsessive imaginative life.³³ The museum is now much better known—there is a shop and merchandise, as well as frequent queues. The arrangement and atmosphere of the interior spaces are still thoroughly authentic and transporting, perhaps more so through the restorations of original rooms. However, having walked through a merchandised entrance on arrival, the appearance is more about ticketing and

³² I attended an evening tour that was part of an olfactory event staged by artist, Paul Schutze, in the winter of 2015. The spaces were lit only with candles; the guide told the small audience in detail about the very controlling personal nature of Soane and various tragic events that ensued in his family life as a result of his rule. I was left with the impression that he clearly loved objects more than people, especially those in his family.

³³ Ibid.

less about the wondrous experience of a flâneur encountering a rare moment.³⁴ In 1999, when Obrist staged *Retrace Your Steps: Remember Tomorrow*, at the Sir John Soane's Museum, it is likely that the museum was still in the half shadows of rediscovery. Artist Cerith Wyn Evans, who has known the museum for many years, speaks of his fascination to Obrist,

I was always very stimulated and inspired by the relationships, the interstices in Sir John Soane's Museum, the conversations that are happening between various narratives, various objects and those extraordinary vistas that you come across by accident and then you catch a reflection of yourself. It is an incredibly complex, stimulating place, and no one visit is ever the same as the next.³⁵

The paradox of a well-guarded and yet public secret, and the tension in the house between visible and invisible, were the considerations for Cerith Wyn Evans's *Modified Threshold* (1999), an almost invisible intervention in *Retrace Your Steps: Remember Tomorrow*.³⁶ (fig.7) He installed tiny bells, altered to ring at a slightly higher pitch, on a rope around a staircase that softly rang if brushed by the visitor, also conceiving a fold out leaflet with plans by the then-director Christopher H. Woodward. Steve McQueen installed a subtle almost sonically hidden montage in his *Soane, echo, system* (1999). (fig.8) Richard Hamilton designed the poster and each artist a postcard. Gilbert and George were photographed by Nigel Shafran (1999) having tea in the museum. (fig.9) Cedric Price designed symbols for the show and gave a lecture in the kitchen

³⁴ I have been very fortunate to visit so many important museums and sites before the era of grand merchandising, headsets and computer booking, mostly catering for so-called "cultural" tourism. The Medieval rooms of the Denon wing of the Musée du Louvre now smell of fried chips from the nearby café. Last time I visited the Uffizi to revisit a favourite Piero della Francesca painting I was jostled out of the way by a large tour group and their leader, as I was taking notes and so on all over the world. Of course, with a little foresight, it is still possible to cut a path through the masses to find some precious privacy. Marketing may bring in huge incomes for museums, but it has endangered museums as places of silent repose, moments of what might be described as a kind of spiritual encounter with objects and paintings. This is something to be really considered as a very serious loss, prompting questions about the very value of art, the purpose of art, even its origins and our encounter with art at the deepest level and yet this is also another subject for a further exegesis.

³⁵ Obrist, 86.

³⁶ www.neromagazine.it/magazine/inde.php?c=articolo&idart=1093&idnum=43&num=334pics=0

titled *Time and Food* and Douglas Gordon created the title of the exhibition.³⁷ The interventions as with Obrist's *World Soup: The Kitchen Show* were very discreet, though in the case of Soane's Museum, I suspect this had more to do with very rigid conditions of Soane's will, that disallows any change to the interior spaces.³⁸ These are very constraining conditions for even subtle interventions by artists or curators. Under these constrained conditions, Obrist and his gathered artists essentially worked within Sir John Soane's Museum as a house-sized "found object", allowing the prismatic, kaleidoscopic interiors to resonate and as in the case of Cerith Wyn Evans, inserting the faintest sonic or visual sign, prompting an even closer sensorial engagement with these complex interiors.

The London based organisation Artangel founded in 1985 by Rodney Took, a former Director of the Barbican Art Centre, has significantly contributed to initiating and producing projects in unexpected sites outside of museums in London, across Great Britain and parts of the rest of the world.³⁹ A summary from the Artangel website states, "We produce art that challenges perceptions, surprises, inspires and wouldn't be possible within the confines of a gallery."⁴⁰ The current organisation has been co-directed since 1991 by Michael Morris and James Lingwood, both previously curators at the Institute of Contemporary Art, London.⁴¹ Morris speaks of his time working at ICA, "We used that space in every which way and after a while all I could think about were its limitations. I was very encouraged by the Director, then Bill McAllister, that if

³⁷ Obrist, 86-87.

³⁸ The Soane Museum Act of Parliament passed in 1833 stating that arrangements should be kept in the state they were left at his death, quoted in Thornton and Dorey, 9.

³⁹ Artangel is a charitable organisation that is funded by foundations, trusts, Arts Council England and individual patrons known as "Angels". https://www.artangel.org.uk/about_us/; Ben Luke, "The pioneers who took art out of the white cube," *The Art Newspaper*, 277, March, 2016.

⁴⁰ Artangel, "About Us," Artangel, accessed November 27 2016, https://www.artangel.org.uk/about_us/.

⁴¹ Lingwood has curated major survey exhibitions for Bernd and Hilla Becher, Vija Celmins, Juan Munoz, Juliao Sarmiento, Thomas Struth and Thomas Schutte. Morris after working at the ICA as Director of Performing Arts, established his own production company, Cultural Industry, in 1987, working with Pina Bausch, Robert Wilson, Laurie Anderson and Robert Lepage.

there was a project that somehow didn't fit into the building, then to go and find another space, and that got me thinking about London as a series of spaces. The city has no limits."⁴² The work of Artangel has often been described as provocative, which Lingwood responded to in an interview with Nancy Durrant, "I think artists are (provocative), it's something they want to do, disrupt the consensus or the status quo and make us look at and see things in a different way." Morris continues, "A word I would prefer to use is 'challenge' not least the expectations of artists and audiences... I think we want to show there are parallel possibilities (to showing work in museums) without trying to denigrate or to down the museums."⁴³

One of the earliest and most controversial Artangel projects was Rachel Whiteread's *House* (1993). (fig.10) Starting from a simple conversation between Whiteread and Lingwood in Whiteread's studio about the idea of casting a house, a search began for an available detached nineteenth-century house with access around its circumference, according to Whiteread's wishes. Eventually a single freestanding Victorian house, once part of a terrace, was located in Grove Road, East London.⁴⁴

Work began on making an inside-out cast of the entire house. "The house was carefully coated in a de-bonding membrane and then splatter-gunned room by room with two layers of concrete—fine white Locrete (used on the white cliffs of Dover restoration) and then 10cm of mesh reinforced concrete, with special reinforcing bolts at the corners. The external interior was

⁴² Nancy Durrant, "The guardian angels of modern art," *The Times*, 2011. <https://doc.google.com/file/d/0B4QLXfJyUL6KNktPMIRkZ1ZqNzQ/edit>.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ The house in Grove Road had been part of a nineteenth-century terrace. Some of the road had been destroyed in the Second World War, by the 1950s the area was covered in temporary housing and then new tower blocks. At the beginning of the 1990s the terrace no longer existed, except for this single remaining house. Artangel, "House", accessed November 27 2016, <https://www.artangel.org.uk/project/house>.

gradually sealed up and the last person leaving through the roof.”⁴⁵ A video documentary on the Artangel website containing much of Whiteread’s own video, photographic notebook and commentary during the construction of *House* provides an important insider view (literally) into the scenes and atmosphere of the work from the inside out. The making of *House* from the inside to the outside could in itself be another work such is the potency of the video and photographic records of eliminating and removing all traces of life within the lived spaces of the house. The rooms were wallpapered in various clashing patterns, dust filled curtains waver in abandoned open windows. There was even some concern over abandoned washing found hanging on a makeshift clothesline outside. Furnishings, cupboards and fixtures were removed, a staircase cut loose so it no longer travelled up or down. Windows were sealed, exterior walls reinforced and deeper foundations dug before teams of builders sprayed a slightly tinted mix of concrete over the interior spaces until they were ankle deep in it themselves. Whiteread describes the making of *House* at this stage as “...making a building within a building...you live and breathe within the skin of the house and we are like these little animals that have been in there gnawing away at the surface and getting into the woodwork and chewing it up and spitting it out. It seems to me that this was a very important part of the piece.”⁴⁶ The final stages required the meticulous removal of the outer shell of the house to reveal the internal concrete cast that is now the exposed exterior revealing skeletal traces of structure. The profile of the staircase, incisions of walls, floors and stepped Victorian windows appeared like an external lacework, “...fragile, yet strong...” as Whiteread observed.⁴⁷ The remaining image is as if all the contained resonance of the life of a house and its occupants over generations had been set in form and stilled in time

⁴⁵ Kester Rattenbury, “Building Design” (October 29 1993), Artangel, accessed November 27 2016, <https://artangel.org.uk/house/construction>.

⁴⁶ Rachel Whiteread. “Documentary: Rachel Whiteread, House” 1993 (online video), published Nov 25 2015, accessed November 28, 2016. www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZVueGIKQTE8

⁴⁷ Rachel Whiteread, “theEYE - Rachel Whiteread - House” (online video), published Dec 21, 2007, accessed November 27, 2016, www.youtube.com/watch?v=MEtsYIIIflkw.

in an eerie moment of concrete silence. The ensuing public controversy around *House* that played out over months after it was revealed on 25 October 1993, within local communities, as well as national and international press, specifically around issues of value, homelessness and complaints about cultural relevance, is testimony to the power of the image of the house and the deep resonance it holds in our psyche. Whiteread and Artangel perhaps underestimated the local reaction in the underprivileged area of Bow, where housing and poverty still remain a crucial issue in a landscape of complex shifting social and economic demographics. Various factions fixed their attention and complaints on *House*.⁴⁸ After less than three months standing, with public outcry and raging debates even reaching the House of Commons over cultural value, social significance, enduring episodes of graffiti and paint bombing, *House* was eventually demolished on 11 January 1994.

The appearance of *House* and its untimely disappearance is perfectly echoed in Gaston Bachelard's poetic assertion, as quoted below that dwellings are our primary universes. Beyond social issues, Whiteread's ghostly shell clearly struck a deeper chord in her varied audiences:

For our house is our corner of the world. As has often been said, it is our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word.... the house is one of the greatest powers in integration for the thoughts, memories and dreams of mankind. The binding principle in this integration is the daydream. Past,

⁴⁸ A local anarchist group KLF voted it the "Worst Artwork of the Year" and a monument to the progressively raised neighbourhoods in the area. As an act of protest they attempted to squat in *House*. Rachel Whiteread. "Squatting the Turner Prize-The Concrete House" 1993 (online video), published February 29 2016, accessed November 28 2016, www.youtube.com/watch?v=gYMBVWA9b5Y. "It was prescient of Whiteread, after months of careful searches through housing department lists, trawls with James Lingwood of Artangel, inwards through Islington, Hackney and Bow, to arrive at the one site where her project would fuse all the loose wires of potential catastrophe. *House*, seen from across the field, was a giant plug, feeding current into the madness of the city. Grove Road had the lot: a terrace house with three exploitable sides (and a sitting tenant), a hyperactive local politico, anarchist squatters, post-Situationist rock stars looking for the grand gesture, and wild-eyed psychogeographers prophesying war. This terrace was in the wrong documentary." Iain Sinclair, "The house in the park: a psychogeographical response." (1995). Artangel, <https://www.artangel.org.uk/house/iain-sinclair/>.

present and future give the house different dynamisms, which often interfere, at times opposing, at others, stimulating one another. In the life of a man, the house thrusts aside contingencies, its councils of continuity are unceasing. Without it, man would be a dispersed being. It maintains him through the storms of the heavens and through those of life. It is body and soul. It is the human being's first world. Before he is cast into the world, as claimed by certain hasty metaphysics, man is laid in the cradle of the house. And always, in our daydreams, the house is a large cradle.⁴⁹

The house as an immersive vessel and image has been repeatedly used in Artangel projects to varied effect. Gregor Schneider's *Die Familie Schneider*, staged in two neighbouring houses of mirrored plans, 14 and 16 Walden Street, East London from 1 October to 23 December 2004, worked with the existential and uncanny, remnant traces, presences and absences within the spaces of two houses. (fig.11) Visitors, only two at a time were issued keys to the houses from a nearby office. While one visitor entered 14 Walden Street, the other one entered 16 Walden Street. Then after ten minutes or so, the visitors left each house, exchanged keys and entered the other house. There was never more than one visitor in each house at any one time. The houses were mirror images and everything from shabby furnishings, room arrangements and marks on the wall were exactly the same. Each house was occupied by an identical woman washing the dishes, (fig.12) a child covered in plastic in the bedroom and a naked middle-aged man apparently masturbating in the shower, all as if there was no-one else observing or present in the house. The claustrophobic tension in the house was mirrored and amplified by the repeat experience of the second house. "One doesn't feel with the family Schneider that one is seeing ghosts—no, one feels that one is a ghost oneself, haunting these people in the middle of their heartbreaking routines. When I finally came to a mirror in the Schneider house I half expected not to see myself reflected; I felt I floated from room to room, seeing but not being seen.

⁴⁹ Bachelard, 4-7.

Someone once described ‘Waiting for Godot’ as a play in which nothing happens twice. The Schneider project is like that, a nothingness that one inhabits twice over, and on each occasion you discover a core strangeness about yourself that must be the signature feeling for ghosts.”⁵⁰

Roger Hiorns’s *Seizure*, staged from 2 September 2008 to 3 January 2010, used the interior of a small ground floor bedsit apartment within a condemned late Modernist council estate block, Symington House in Elephant and Castle, South London as an emptied vessel for transformation, growing rooms of otherworldly crystallised caverns.⁵¹ (fig. 13, 14, 15) This area of South London, like so many others was rebuilt to replace post-World War II slums. Contrary to the optimistic ideals of Modernist architecture, many of the developments built here, though basic and utilitarian, remained mean spirited and ungenerous, leaving us to wonder what sort of lives may have been lived in these diminished spaces.⁵² The stark contrast between the grim architectural surroundings and the startling transformation of the interior of this small apartment was an important aspect of the confronting tension of *Seizure*. From the moment of crossing the entry threshold, the viewer was completely immersed in another realm, alien to the surrounding life of council flats, their entrances often cluttered with an outpouring of unwanted purged possessions and detritus. The interior of *Seizure* poured inwards, the visitor captive in toxic mesmerism. Hiorns estimates that about 90 tons of copper sulphate powder was mixed with boiling water to make approximately 87,000 litres of a highly saturated solution which was then pumped into the sealed off dwelling and filled to the ceiling.⁵³ The liquid was left for one month to cool down and then siphoned off to reveal an extraordinary transformation, a growth

⁵⁰ Andrew O’Hagan, “The Living Rooms,” Artangel, accessed November 27 2016, <https://www.artangel.org.uk/die-familie-schneider/the-living-rooms/>.

⁵¹ On the completion of the project, 2011, Hiorns and Artangel dismantled the interiors. Since 2013 they have been installed in a purpose built structure at Yorkshire Sculpture Park; 151- 189 Harper Road, South London.

⁵² J. J. Charlesworth, “Signs of Life,” Artangel, accessed November 27 2016, <https://www.artangel.org.uk/seizure/signs-of-life/>.

⁵³ Ibid.

of deep blue luminous crystals covering every surface with their threatening sharp fracture. Footage showing the moment of cutting open a small doorway for Hiorns to enter the interior is reminiscent of finding and entering a secret cave, previously unseen by humans, or the moment of entering an Egyptian tomb sealed for thousands of years with both anticipated dread and wonder: it is the moment of crossing a threshold.⁵⁴ The interior scene revealed must have been a similar experience of alien wonder, in particular for the residents of Symington, leaving their neighbouring council flat homes to experience these total and unexpected spaces.⁵⁵ Except for a crystallised bath, no sign of human habitation remained. The interior had transformed and auto-generated into a pre-human or post-human world, beyond primordial, toxic protruding surfaces not even offering the warm comfort of a cave, taking the viewer into an alienating spectacle realm of the purely molecular. Unlike Whiteread and Schneider's houses, *Seizure* does not present us with trace realignments of a human world, but a non-human realm in which the viewer becomes a trespassing presence, as if momentarily and dazzlingly transported to another planet or a mythic subterranean cavern belonging to no time, past, present or future.

Saskia Olde Wolbers's *Yes, These Eyes Are the Windows* was staged from 3 May to 22 June 2014 at 87 Hackney Road, Brixton, South London, a house where Vincent Van Gogh had lived as a nineteen-year-old boarder from 1873–1874 with Ursula Loyer and her daughter, Eugenie.⁵⁶ (fig. 16) The house had been empty since 2012 until it was opened again for Olde Wolbers's primarily audio installation in the empty and almost derelict interiors. (fig. 17, 18) Olde Wolbers tells us,

⁵⁴ Ibid

⁵⁵ Hiorns tells us that there was a lot of interest in viewing the space from the neighbouring council flat residents. Charlesworth, Artangel, <https://www.artangel.org.uk/project/seizure>.

⁵⁶ "Yes, these eyes are windows, and this body of mine is the house." Melville. H. Moby Dick. Saskia Olde Wolbers, "Project", Artangel, accessed November 27 2016, <https://www.artangel.org.uk/project/yes-these-eyes-are-the-windows/>; Due to the research of a post delivery man during a postal strike in 1971, this historical information confirmed in 1971 and a blue plaque added to the outside of 87 Hackford Road.

the piece is not so much about Vincent Van Gogh, it is more about the anthropomorphology of the bricks as it were...the historical occupant is gone and in this case, he was a young boy, a 19 year old, he lived here for one year, so it's a very flimsy presence. The Loyers who lived here, they lived with a 19 year old boy. But the Smiths lived with his legacy, which was much more present.... The idea of the invisible is very important. There is a real technological hub here, but you can't see it. The technology also acts as a metaphor for memory. Some people might be disappointed that this is not a reconstruction of his time here, but I am not sure if this brings anyone closer to what they want. What is true to the past? Do we want to see decay or do we want to see a very preserved environment? ...That ambiguity I like, the unverifiable, I suppose it interests me.⁵⁷

Olde Wolbers worked with oral histories, press archives and literary works weaving a fictional narrative presented to visitors as audio spaces throughout the house allowing an interpretive access to the past. The physical interiors were presented as found upon the re-opening of the house with layers of flooring and other structural materials being peeled back to reveal a further archaeology. The presence of damp and decay formed olfactory images adding a further sensory layer to a sonic passage and delicately shifted objects within the house. Documentation shows in some rooms structural building supports were added, probably to prevent possible collapse or further damage from increased visitor traffic, adding to the impression of fragility and ephemerality. Olde Wolbers says that she is "... interested in the (psychological) pull of the blue plaque..." on visitors, perhaps raising expectations of a personage of mythic status commemorated and what we may hope to find remaining as trace presence.⁵⁸ Do the blue plaques, applied to buildings throughout London and Paris, stating the historical significance

⁵⁷ Anthony and Majorie Smith lived at 87 Hackford Road at the time the blue plaque was added to the outside of the house; Matan Rochlitz, "Interview with Saskia Olde Wolbers at 87 Hackford Road" (online video), accessed November 27, 2016, <https://www.artangel.org.uk/project/yes-these-eyes-are-the-windows/>.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

of the site and dweller, in this sense become portals of time travel, like dialling a teleportation device whilst standing on a particular point, allowing us to travel in our imagination directly to the time when the nineteen-year-old Van Gogh was living in that house? Sometimes, a casual encounter with a blue plaque can be mildly shocking, as we go about life in the present and look up to see that “Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948) lived here as a student” at 20 Baron’s Court Road, W14, London in a street that has no visible signs of the revolution he led.⁵⁹ The moment can be jolting, like time instantaneously collapsing, giving rise to pause, in which decades or maybe centuries flick past, recalibrating a state more awake to the myriad of previous footsteps, both imagined and real. By contrast, I have often deliberately sought out blue plaques in order to stand in a location directly associated with a history and a particular person.⁶⁰ In *Yes, These Eyes Are the Windows* Olde Wolbers has opened a cell of time, made more monumental by the application of a blue plaque and subtly manipulated sedimental layers to present a narrative that conjures a passage through the real and the imagined. The house becomes an amplified vessel for initiating memory and traces of living, both fictive and factual.

Further projects that work with collections, re-examining histories and further in the context of a house museum are seen in the long-term commitment of independent British curator, James Putnam. Putnam studied Art History at London University and then worked at the British Museum in the departments of Egyptian Antiques and Education, having curated contemporary projects both independently and for the museum. In 1994, he curated the highly acclaimed exhibition *Time Machine* at the British Museum, which juxtaposed contemporary art with historical artefacts. In 1999, he founded the British Museum’s Contemporary Arts and

⁵⁹ Wikipedia, “List of English Heritage blue plaques in London,” Wikipedia, accessed November 27 2016, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_English_Heritage_blue_plaques_in_London#City_of_London

⁶⁰ For example, pilgrimages to Gertrude Stein’s house, 27, rue de Fleurus, 6th arrondissement and Camille Claudel’s apartment and studio, 17-19, Quai de Bourbon, Ille Saint Louis, 4th arrondissement, Paris.

Cultures Program, set up to examine and re-examine history, art and artefacts in the context of contemporary cultural issues.⁶¹ *Time Machine* was intended to challenge the idea that the British Museum and in particular its Egyptian artefacts were stagnant remnants of the past with no validity or relevance for the present. Twelve artists made works in relation to selected Egyptian artefacts. It was a bold exhibition on an ambitious scale, installed in the vast Egyptian Sculpture Gallery, allowing the huge numbers of visitors to the British Museum to encounter artefacts from Ancient Egypt in an entirely different light, with many experiencing contemporary art for the first time. Andy Goldsworthy made a huge sand sculpture *Sandwork* (1994) using 30 tons of sand that curved between monumental pharaoh heads and urns through the long distance of the gallery. Presenting the mass of sand as an elemental and geological connection between Egyptian dynasties and the present. Marc Quinn's *Rubber Soul* (1994) consisted of a hollow perspex cast of his own head into which he placed a North American Wood Frog in the position of the dormant primitive part of the brain. The inside of the head was refrigerated to minus three, the temperature of winter months in its natural North American habitat and thus simulating in the frog a state of hibernation, paralleling the ancient Egyptian belief in an afterlife beyond death.⁶²

Interviewed by Sacha Craddock, Putnam reveals,

I'm actually an art historian by training, and when I was studying the subject I was disillusioned by its limited and rigid parameters focussed essentially on the history of Western art. At the time, it was not easy in this country to study ancient Egyptian or Greek art unless you became an archaeologist or a classicist, or to study African art without reading anthropology. I was lucky enough to get a job in

⁶¹ James Putnam, "Biography," James Putnam, accessed online, November 27 2016, www.jamesputnam.org.uk/biography.html.

⁶² James Putnam, "Exhibitions," James Putnam, accessed online, November 27 2016, www.jamesputnam.org.uk/inv_exhibition_01.html.

the Egyptian Department here at the Museum, which gave me the opportunity to learn a lot about the subject through years of working with the collection. Yet my interest in ancient Egypt was paralleled and eventually superseded by a passion for contemporary art. But how do you study contemporary art? You can't study it at university, because if it is truly 'contemporary' it is of the present, so you have to get out and see as many exhibitions and shows as possible to have any idea of what's going on, right here, right now. That's exactly what I've been doing for the last ten years and I've found it fascinating to contrast this activity with that of my previous discipline, in which I was immersed in the investigation of the past. I've become increasingly interested in the way the past and the present can trade off each other and this has led me to investigate the exciting area of juxtaposing the culture of the past with that of the present.⁶³

This interest led Putnam not only to working outside the parameters of his historical training, but also to working outside the museum and within unconventional spaces.

Putnam has continued to curate a series of exhibitions since 1999 in the Freud Museum, Maresfield Gardens in North London, a house where Sigmund Freud lived for only one year after he fled Europe in 1938 and until his death in 1939. His youngest daughter, Anna lived here for 44 more years continuing her psychoanalytical work especially with children until her death in 1982. In this significant house, loaded with memories and traces of pioneering work, Putnam has worked with artists as various as Sophie Calle, Sarah Lucas, Ellen Gallagher, Tim Noble and Sue Webster, Oliver Clegg, Matt Collishaw, Andreas Hofer and recently in 2015–16, Gavin Turk. Such artists have, on the basis of differing narrative interpretations of the history, significance and atmospheres of the site, situated their responsive interventions within the rooms of Freud's

⁶³ Sacha Cradock, "Art as Museum...Museum as Art," *British Museum Magazine*. No.41 (Autumn/Winter, 2001). www.jamesputnam.org.uk/press.html

house, his consulting rooms and his arranged collections of archaeological fragments. Sophie Calle's *Appointment*, staged in 1999 in the Freud Museum, consisted of placements of notes and also her own objects juxtaposed with Freud's collection and rooms. Although some of the texts and objects had been used in previous projects, in the context of Freud's house they acquired a new significance. Calle's objects and narratives echoed Freud's collection of antiquities and his consideration of archaeology as a metaphor for psychoanalysis. Calle placed on Freud's dining table a white plate with a wax banana and an ice cream dessert along with a note, "When I was fifteen I was afraid of men. One day in a restaurant, I chose a dessert because of its name: *Young Girl's Dream*. I asked the waiter what it was, and he answered: "It's a surprise." A few minutes later he returned with a dish featuring two scoops of vanilla ice cream and a peeled banana. He said one word: "Enjoy." Then he laughed. I closed my eyes the same way I closed them years later when I saw my first naked man."⁶⁴ With this succinct object and narrative gesture, just as Freud would ask his patients to speak openly and about anything at all, placed within the lived traces of the house and consulting room, Calle became Freud's new patient.

Some notable projects that imitate aspects of domesticity and interiors of a house within a museum have been the Scandinavian duo Elmgreen & Dragset's *Tomorrow* held at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 2013, Barbara Bloom's *Reign of Narcissism* (1989) held at Jay Gorney Modern Art, New York, at Württembergischer Kunstverein, Stuttgart (1990), the Kunsthalle, Zurich (1990) and the Serpentine Gallery, London (1990) and her *As it were...So to speak* held in 2013 at the Jewish Museum, New York. These projects in varying ways have used structural aspects of domesticity to subvert the public nature of the museum, bringing to institutional space an intimacy that we are more likely to associate with home. In some cases, the slippage between

⁶⁴ James Putnam, "Exhibitions," accessed online, November 27 2016, www.jamesputnam.org.uk/inv_exhibition_01.html.

public and feigned private spaces created confusion, as if for a moment the visitor was caught between them.

Elmgreen & Dragset's *Tomorrow* was staged in the large rooms of the Victoria and Albert Museum previously used as the Textile Galleries. A grand apartment was constructed to represent the fictive Norman Swann, who was born into money, inherited family artefacts, and attempted to live the life of a socially minded architect, but failed. The apartment is in its final days and being auctioned. Outside the museum a huge auction hoarding was erected, so convincing as a prop that I really thought that part of the building was being sold. (fig.19)

The entrance to Swann's apartment was not clearly delineated from the museum rooms. Entering it felt a little like mistakenly entering a theatrical stage, which was a portrayal of a private space, without knocking on the front door, a confusion initiated and explored by both Elmgreen & Dragset and the museum. Collection objects were mingled with art works, invigilator guards were dressed in maid and butler uniforms and asked to act in character, silently, a grand architectural office appears abandoned. (fig.20) As a further element, details of the narrative were written as a script for an unrealised film, also fictive. Visitors could choose to read the script or devise their own reading of the spaces.⁶⁵ *Tomorrow* speculated about ideas of cultural inheritance, shifts and failings in class structure, notions of private and public collecting and the cult of celebrity within Britain today.⁶⁶ This took place in an atmosphere of slippage between what seemed to be the museum galleries and a fictive domestic interior, which portrayed a past grandeur that had become a portrait of failure. (fig.21 and 22) For a moment the viewer is Alice in a place encountered around the wrong corner, intriguing and unfamiliar.

⁶⁵ Michael Elmgreen and Ingar Dragset, *Tomorrow: Scenes from an unrealized film* (London: V&A Museum, 2013).

⁶⁶ Martin Herbert, "Tomorrow is here," *V&A Magazine* 32, (Autumn/Winter 2013): 49.

Barbara Bloom has long employed tropes of the domestic as part of museum based installations, subverting conventional methods of display and approach to objects, often working with meticulous attention to detail on a small scale initiating a response of heightened intimacy and a shifted sense of space between the body and object. *Reign of Narcissism* (1990) presented a museum of images of self-portrayal across a range of materials and objects that recalled the Victorian era. (fig.23) Across the three separate museum venues, from Stuttgart, Zurich and London—a hexagonal room is the consistent format, reminiscent of a moderately sized parlour—houses in formal arrangement were placed around the walls; furnishings and objects within vitrines dedicated to the image of the artist. The central image was of a vase containing Narcissus flowers, a set of parlour chairs upholstered in fabric printed with Bloom’s profile, her horoscope chart, a tooth x-ray, her signature, four classicising plaster busts of the artist on either side of the two doorways into the room, plaster reliefs, silhouettes, more signatures, sets of vanity mirrors, a set of bound books in a vitrine (being the apparent complete set of works by Barbara Bloom), cameos made in Bloom’s image, porcelain teacups with a portrait seen through a fine transparent base and a signature in gold on the saucer, chocolates pressed in the artist’s image and, finally, her own tombstone as yet unmarked with the date of her death. Every object is realised with minute attention to crafted detail. Further researched, histories and literature are included in a publication *The Reign of Narcissism: Guide Book: Fuhrer*, that accompanied the exhibition.⁶⁷ The book is a work in itself, inserted with crafted details such as a page of postage stamps of the artist’s birthplace, a watermarked signature on an envelope and writing page, a transparent page printed with a pressed Narcissus flower. (fig.24) Bloom brings an intense and domestic-scaled scrutiny of narcissism to the museum. On one hand, it amounted to a fiercely intelligent, witty,

⁶⁷ Barbara Bloom, *The Reign of Narcissism: Guidebook: Fuhrer* (Wurttembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart, Kunsthalle Zurich: Serpentine Gallery, London, 1990).

feminist critique of the dominance of prominent male egos in the late 1980s art world. On the other, it drew the viewer into the intimate world of objects and materiality, self, memory and the ephemeral.

Betsy Sussler, who facilitated a conversation between Barbara Bloom and Kiki Smith, recalled:

When I first saw Barbara Bloom's art-stage sets for life—I had to stop myself from moving in and making myself at home. Inviting in their clarity, hauntingly pristine, elegant in wit, tableaux from rooms and the adornments of life wait for their namesakes, wait for us. Her work collects remnants of lives lost or left behind ready to be taken up by an invisible presence. A presence activated by our gaze. The longing her work generates is profound: we are the vicarious vessels of our own desire, and the space she leaves for us in her art reflects this.⁶⁸

In their exchange, Kiki Smith visiting Barbara Bloom in her New York home said,

In your living space and your work, there's a precision, an attention to surroundings that has an abundance to it." Bloom replies, "My ex-boyfriend used to tease me, he'd come in when I was working and say, 'Working on your dowry?' At certain times I'll put myself on an art diet, I'll say: no more dishes, no more 19th century, no more household objects. The use of them becomes a habit and then a style, which is not ever what I intended, it's embarrassing. But then I think, why am I so drawn to these things? It's not that they're from the feminine domain, although I'm certainly aware of it, but it has more to do with scale. I'm attracted to the enormous, important matters of life that take place on a small, everyday scale. Nabokov, a favorite writer of mine, pays incredible attention to details, like a glass breaking. In our culture everything which is large and grandiose is assumed important, and

⁶⁸ B Sussler, "Artists in conversation: Barbara Bloom by Kiki Smith," *Bomb magazine*, no.54, Winter 1996.

everything which is small is considered of less importance. I don't think that way. I'm interested in a gesture or an expression on someone's face. And that gets paralleled in the object-making world as well."⁶⁹

Bloom's *As it were...So to speak* (2013) a vast installation in the Jewish Museum, New York, continued her deep involvement with the intersections between the language and resonance of objects, histories, a blur between fact and fiction and renegotiating museum spaces, in this case as if it were a type of home. The exhibition was installed on the second floor of historic rooms that had previously been the residence of the Warburg family. (fig.25) The spatial structure of the exhibition space was used as chapter titles in Bloom's book *As it were...So to speak* published two years later in 2015, and refer to domestic spaces, such as *Doorways, Hidden Cupboards, Drawers, Sitting Room, Window, Library, Bedroom, Vanity Table, Mantel (reflected), Dining table*.

Wary of stepping over that precarious threshold into the world of interior decoration, I moved cautiously. In order to achieve an atmosphere of timelessness and ephemerality, everything in the museum's Neo-Gothic rooms was painted in a shifting shade of grey-blue-green. The emptied rooms were filled with 'ghosts' of furnishings—abstracted furniture—like structures with traces of specific detailing, designed somewhere between Donald Judd and Biedermeier. These furnishings doubled as display cases. Each 'furniture-case' housed a grouping of objects that were selected for their historical resonance, their implicit narratives, or marked with traces of past lives.⁷⁰

In her research for the exhibition, Bloom had come across the *Talmud*—a sacred text of

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Barbara Bloom, *As it were...So to speak*, (New York: Yale University Press, 2015), 7-8.

Judaism—which is structurally framed by other texts, centuries of debates and commentaries, as if the scholars who lived hundreds of years apart were conversing in the same room.

Accompanying each display, Bloom situated what appeared to be open books floating off the walls. On the wing-like pages were illustrated texts bringing together multiple voices over disparate times and places—Jesus, Nefertiti, Emile Zola and Amy Winehouse play in parallel.

Bloom says,

I found myself playing host, but oddly to two sets of guests: One group was the envisioned historical guests, personages from diverse times grouped around a piano, a bed, a table, engaged in imagined dialogues, toasts, songs, arguments... The other group of guests was the museum visitors who could think of the exhibition as a visit to a party, where they might wander about and figuratively eavesdrop on dialogues between improbable combinations of figures who never actually met in real life.⁷¹

In this museum exhibition, Bloom used ghostly structures of the domestic to stage conversations across time, between unlikely people, situating objects performing a highly complex, yet lightly articulated weaving of voice, presence and trace seemingly floating throughout the former residential rooms. (fig. 26)

I was fortunate to recently visit a further house museum, Museo Casa Mollino in Turin, Italy.⁷² The house, like the Soane's Museum and Dennis Severs' House, which I will discuss in Chapter Three, is composed of highly immersive interiors reminiscent of an installation work, wherein a further work is enacted, Yuri Ancarani's *Séance* (2014). Museo Casa Mollino is a reconstructed apartment interior within an eighteenth-century building facing the River Po in

⁷¹ Ibid., p.8.

⁷² I visited Museo Casa Mollino in Turin on 12 September 2016.

Turin, Northern Italy, designed in intricate detail by Carlo Mollino (b.1905–d.1973) from 1960 to 1968 in the later part of his life. Mollino was an eclectic designer whose prodigious talents and interests ranged from pilot, ski athlete and instructor, car designer, architect, interior and furniture designer as well as photographer. As a result, his ideas were synthesised and informed by his broad interests.⁷³ Many of Mollino's designs, especially his designs for furniture, could be described as organic, deriving from his interests in nature, the alps, skiing in motion; even observations of marks left in snow and his adoration of the female form. (fig.27) Mollino was fortunate to work with exceptional carpenters, such as Apelli and Varesi, resolving the finest twists and turns, technical details of weight and balance, as one would a delicate sculpture, arriving at forms that imply a deep knowledge of history and tradition, but which were also radically inventive, simultaneously reductive and richly layered.⁷⁴ Due to the complexity and subtlety of his forms, few ever went into mass production and they remain rare and valuable items today. Only a few of his buildings and interiors have survived over time, notably Teatro Regio in Turin. From the 1930s until the 1970s, Mollino devoted his efforts to photographing the female body, dressing his models and meticulously touching up the photographs with the same attitude of obsessive approach that he applied to his skiing manual. The erotic photographs were made in both Casa Miller, in the hills of Turin and Casa Mollino, where a vast archive kept completely private during his lifetime was discovered after his death. The photographs, in particular shed a further light on the extent of Mollino's deeply private and sensualised vision, a confessed bachelor, immersed in a realm of transdisciplinary, highly personal and obsessive research. (fig.28)

⁷³ In 1950, Mollino published his treatise on skiing techniques *Introduzione al discesismo* (Introduction to downhill skiing), illustrated with 212 of his drawings and 200 photographs; Fulvio Ferrari and Napoleone Ferrari, *The Furniture of Carlo Mollino* (London and New York: Phaidon Press Inc, 2006), 48.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 39.

Mollino designed the intricate interiors of Casa Mollino from c.1960–1968. Although many of the photographs of women are taken here against his backdrops, he never actually lived here. The apartment was conceived as a sanctuary space for his afterlife.⁷⁵ After Mollino’s sudden death in 1973, the property was sold and used as a studio for twenty-eight years by an engineer, until it was taken over and reconstructed by father and son, Fulvio and Napoleone Ferrari, who act as guardians and guides to this private museum. An inventory made of the apartment’s contents, interviews conducted with Mollino’s clients, students, University colleagues, craftsmen, girlfriends, and models, along with his private letters, all contributed to a detailed basis on which to accurately reconstruct the interior.⁷⁶ My visit to Casa Mollino on 16 September 2016 was a memorable experience. Entering the symbolic interiors was like entering a pictorial dream world, removed from the everyday. The entrance is a cool, blue and white majolica tiled garden subtly detailed with niches and foggy reflections. (fig.29) A movable Japanese-like partition and layers of curtaining lead to a deeper interior, like a dream unfolding. An illusionistic salon wall opens to a printed monochrome forest reminiscent of a rococo landscape complete with roaming deer. (fig.30) A photographic panel of one of Michelangelo’s Slaves is laid horizontally so that it becomes a dreamer. (fig.31) A fireplace too tiny to be functional floats in a now milky nineteenth-century mirrored wall panel; more of a portal than a hearth. A clock on a narrow ledge appears like a guardian figure. (fig.32) Two deeply buttoned crimson chairs either side, sit as empty seated companions in a conversation we will never hear. (fig.33.) There are references to the Orient in screen like proportions, a moving segmented door and huge battered early Isamu Noguchi paper lights. Modernist 1960s formed plastic chairs line a dining table, dominated

⁷⁵ Fulvio Ferrari makes this claim in conversation and although Mollino’s interests in Ancient Egypt are known, I have been unable to find a direct reference by Mollino to the claim of Casa Mollino as a space for his afterlife. However, the symbols within the interior are evident. Furthermore, Mollino was well known for his lack of explanation about his work. M Elali, “A visit to Casa Mollino.” All Items Loaded, accessed November 27 2016, www.allitemsloaded.com/item/2014-07/94/a-visit-to-casa-mollino#.WBLzC9yMc7C.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

by another suspended fragile paper Noguchi light. (fig.34) Materialities and history mingle: modernist plastic, battered Japanese papers, a turtle shell, a sea shell, a zebra skin splayed on the floor, two huge clam shells, which serve as guardians to a door leading to the balcony with a vista over the fast running River Po and towards the hills behind are juxtaposed. (fig.35 and 36) Heavy layers of curtains provide screens throughout the apartment, like eyelids closing off one episode before we enter another. In the small sleeping chamber, a nineteenth-century wooden boat-shaped bed sits upon a blue watery carpet, as if anticipating its voyage. (fig.37) The room is decorated with leopard skin wallpaper and a wall of framed butterflies—ephemeral aerial bodies. Gathered images of sleeping personage, a drawing of naked woman in repose and a plaster relief of a woman, her head turned and her eyes closed, cast a somnambulist fog pertaining to another realm, the other side of waking. (fig.38) A densely patterned tiled bathroom is like a ship's cabin hung with remnant silk garments worn by Mollino's models. A lozenge-shaped mirror is also a hinged door. (fig.39 and 40) Stepping through the door and over a raised aperture of the doorway, we enter a bedroom, a feminised space complete with a dressing table ingeniously designed to hold cosmetics and accommodate the shape of a female body leaning towards a mirror during the act of 'makeup'. A trick of space, both practical and disorienting, we move through chambers that are in themselves shifting, a movement that is echoed by the fast moving River Po directly below. On the opposite bank, the sounds of the Turin Zoo, which was situated there in Mollino's time, must have provided the effect of an entire ark waiting to voyage to the next world.⁷⁷

Yuri Ancarani's *Séance* (2014),⁷⁸ a film shot in the interiors of Casa Mollino, sets up a dinner between two guests for the purpose of making contact with the spirit of Carlo Mollino, the invisible third guest. In the film, Fulvio Ferrari, the guardian of the Casa Mollino, dressed

⁷⁷ In conversation with Napoleone Ferrari at Museo Casa Mollino, September 13, 2016.

⁷⁸ I first saw *Séance* at MUMA, Monash University Gallery, Melbourne, Australia, as part of the exhibition "Believe not any Spirit, but try the Spirits" 21 April – 27 June, 2005. Curated by Lars Bang Larsen and Marco Pasi.

entirely in white, ceremoniously serves dinner to two guests, one visible and the other invisible. The latter's plate remains empty of food; we must assume that spirits do not require food. The meal is a meeting between psychologist, Albania Tomassini, and her invisible companion, Carlo Mollino. Ancarani's camera slows time, flowing through the interior spaces, as if entering the substance and substrate of the surfaces and materials, amplified by a mesmerising sonic landscape of blurred voices and groans. The crimson salon chairs appear to be fluid, as do the forest walls, tipping and swelling as if in a dream—our vision rotates around Michelangelo's sleeping slave as if being careful not to wake him. Mollino speaks through Tomassini, her voice altering to a distinct masculine tone, of his past life and his aspiration to a state of perfection, which he now realises is only possible in the other realm. *Séance* amplifies, bends and opens up the densely layered atmospheric life of the apartment and the enigmatic inner-world of Mollino in a way that may only be possible through a warping of objects, space, sound, time and movement via filmic techniques.

This chapter has demonstrated that the house, in all of its variety and specificity, offers a rich opportunity for artists working outside of conventional gallery and museum spaces. The house is a richly embedded structure and image, resonantly layered with traces of generations past and present, being a uniquely rich vessel for artistic and curatorial intervention. Each of the houses mentioned in this chapter has provided an environment for artistic intervention that is rarely possible within galleries and museums. The purpose of this exegetical research has been to observe and record the effect of artists and curators working with or within houses or the idea of a house, through case studies and primary research, invoking interior spaces of heightened intimacy uniquely possible through contact with the inherent trace substance of the house, its archaeologies, essential meaning and purpose to us as humans.

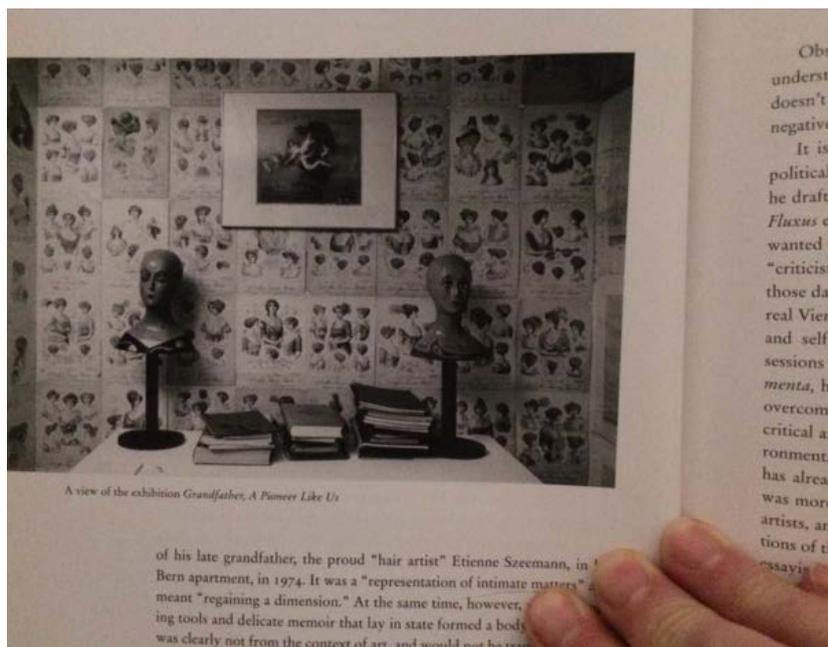
Figures:

**Chapter One:
A Field of Houses.**

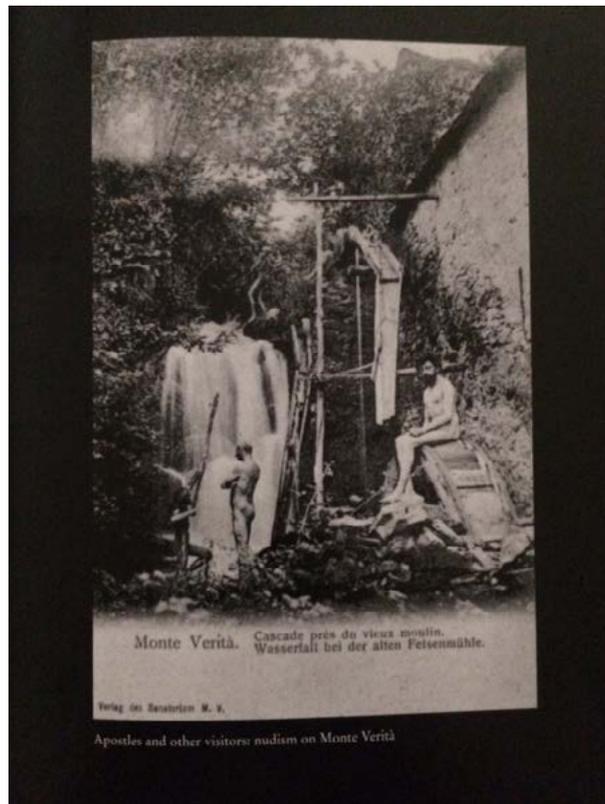


1. Harald Szeemann. *Grandfather, A Pioneer Like Us*. 1974. Installation detail. Szeemann's apartment, Bern, Switzerland.

Figures 1–5 source: Muller, Hans-Joachim. *Harald Szeemann-Exhibition Maker*. Germany: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2006.



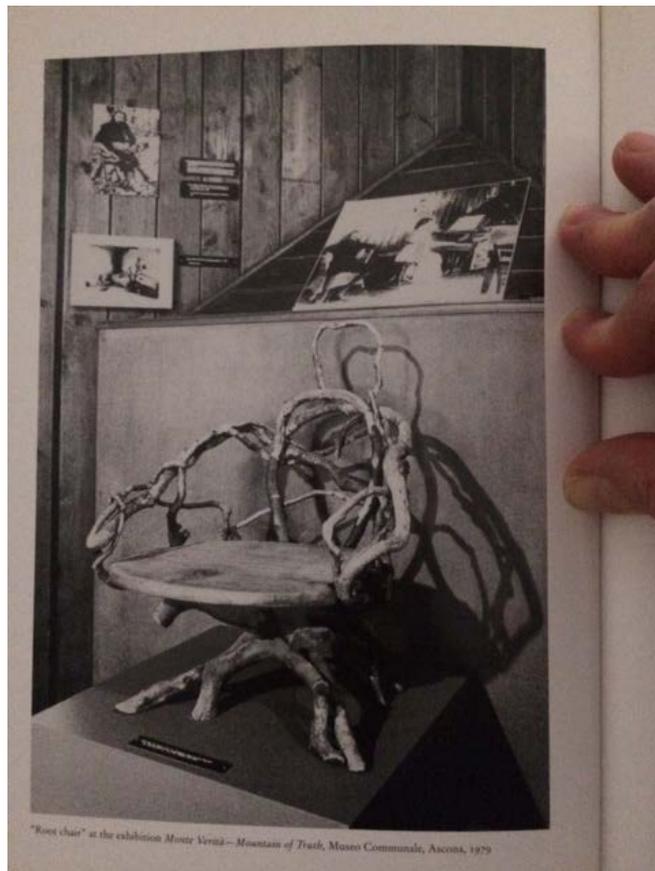
2. Harald Szeemann. *Grandfather, A Pioneer Like Us*. 1974. Installation detail. Szeemann's apartment, Bern, Switzerland.



3. Photographer unknown. *Cascade près du vieux Moulin (Waterfall near the old mill)*. Circa late nineteenth century. Postcard.



4. Interior rooms of *Casa Anatta (House of Souls)* as a museum. Circa early 1980s.



5. Harald Szeemann. *Le mamelle della verità (The breasts of truth)*. 1978. Detail of installation. *Casa Anatta (House of Souls)*, Ascona, Italy.



6. Sir John Soane's Museum. Detail of the colonnade. Photographer unknown.



7. Cerith Wyn Evans. *Modified Threshold*. 1999. Bells, rope. Pictured with the artist in situ on a staircase at the Sir John Soane's Museum.



8. Steve McQueen. *Soane, echo, system*. 1999. Antique table, mirror, sound, various materials.



9. Gilbert and George photographed by Nigel Shafran, 1999, having tea at the Sir John Soane's Museum, the photograph on an easel situated in the Library of the Sir John Soane's Museum.



10. Rachel Whiteread. *House*. 1993. Concrete, various materials. Grove Road, East London.



11. Gregor Schnieder. *Die Familie Schneider*. 2004. View of the exterior of 14 and 16 Walden Street, London.



12. Gregor Schneider. *Die Familie Schneider*. 2004. Interior rooms, various materials, actors.



13. Roger Hiorns. *Seizure*. 2008- 2010. View of the exterior of Symington House, Elephant and Castle, London. Interior rooms, crystals formed by deposits of copper sulphate, various materials.



14. Roger Hiorns. *Seizure*. 2008- 2010. Detail- interior rooms, crystals formed by deposits of copper sulphate, various materials.



15. Roger Hiorns. *Seizure*. 2008- 2010. Detail- interior rooms, crystals formed by deposits of copper sulphate, various materials.



16. Saskia Olde Wolbers. *Yes, These Eyes Are the Windows*. 2014. View of the exterior of 87 Hackney Road, Brixton, South London.



17. Saskia Olde Wolbers. *Yes, These Eyes Are the Windows*. 2014. Interior rooms, sound, various elements.



18. Saskia Olde Wolbers. *Yes, These Eyes Are the Windows*. 2014. Interior rooms, sound, various elements.



19. Elmgreen & Dragset. *Tomorrow*. 2013. View of exterior of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London with fictive auction notice.



20. Elmgreen & Dragset. *Tomorrow*. 2013. Interior rooms of former Textile Galleries, the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, decorative arts collection, various materials, actors.



21. Elmgreen & Dragset. *Tomorrow*. 2013. Interior rooms of former Textile Galleries, the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, decorative arts collection, various materials, actors.



22. Elmgreen & Dragset. *Tomorrow*. 2013. Interior rooms of former Textile Galleries, the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, decorative arts collection, various materials, actors.



23. Barbara Bloom. *Reign of Narcissism*. 1990. Various materials.



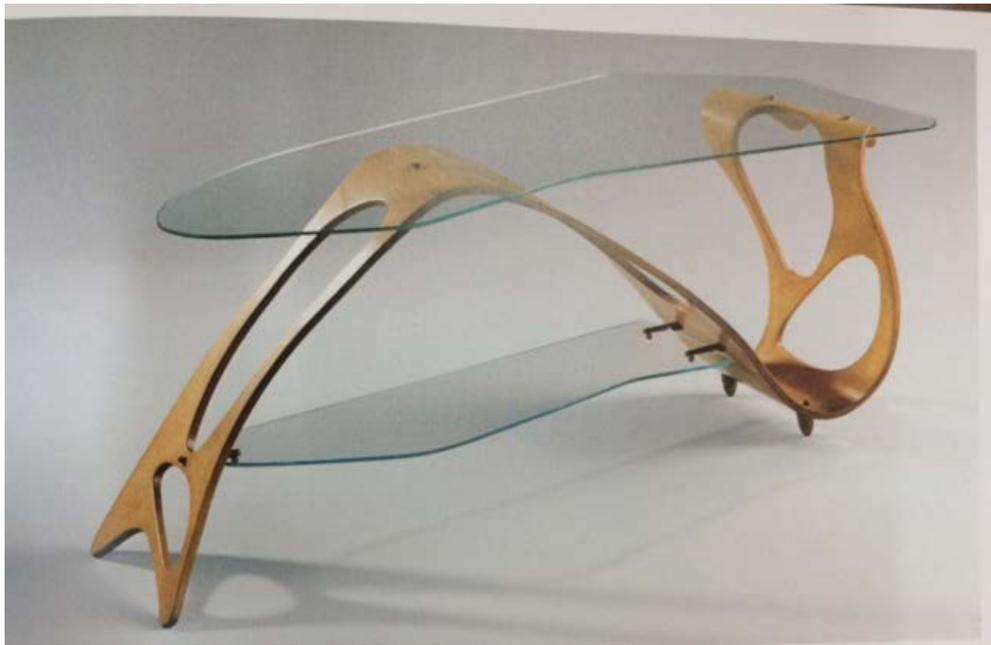
24. Barbara Bloom. *Reign of Narcissism*, 1990, publication with page of printed stamps picturing Temple Hospital, Los Angeles, California, birthplace of the artist, 1951.



25. Barbara Bloom. *As it were...So to speak*. 2013. The Jewish Museum, New York. Collections, constructed furniture, texts, various materials.



26. Barbara Bloom. *As it were...So to speak*. 2013. The Jewish Museum, New York. Collections, constructed furniture, texts, various material.



27. Carlo Mollino. *Low table*. 1950. Unique piece. Maple wood, tempered glass, brass. Originally for the G&A Ponti House, later given to the L&L Licitra Ponti House.



28. Carlo Mollino. *Untitled*. Circa 1960s. photograph.



29. Carlo Mollino. Casa Mollino. 1960- 1968.
Museo Casa Mollino. Reconstructed by Fulvio
and Napoleone Ferarri. Circa, 2001- 2016,
onwards. Interior rooms, various materials.
Photograph, Rosslynd Piggott, 2016.



30. Carlo Mollino. Casa Mollino. 1960- 1968.
Museo Casa Mollino. Reconstructed by Fulvio
and Napoleone Ferarri. Circa, 2001- 2016,
onwards. Interior rooms, various materials.
Photograph, Rosslynd Piggott, 2016.



31. Carlo Mollino. Casa Mollino. 1960- 1968.
Museo Casa Mollino. Reconstructed by Fulvio and Napoleone Ferarri. Circa, 2001- 2016, onwards. Interior rooms, various materials.
Photograph, Rosslynd Piggott, 2016.



32. Carlo Mollino. Casa Mollino. 1960- 1968.
Museo Casa Mollino. Reconstructed by Fulvio and Napoleone Ferarri. Circa, 2001- 2016, onwards.
Interior rooms, various materials.
Photograph, Rosslynd Piggott, September 2016.



33. Carlo Mollino. Casa Mollino. 1960- 1968.
Museo Casa Mollino. Reconstructed by Fulvio
and Napoleone Ferarri. Circa, 2001- 2016,
onwards. Interior rooms, various materials.
Photograph, Rosslynd Piggott, 2016.



34. Carlo Mollino. Casa Mollino. 1960- 1968.
Museo Casa Mollino. Reconstructed by Fulvio
and Napoleone Ferarri. Circa, 2001- 2016,
onwards. Interior rooms, various materials.
Photograph, Rosslynd Piggott, 2016.



35. Carlo Mollino. Casa Mollino. 1960- 1968.
Museo Casa Mollino. Reconstructed by Fulvio and
Napoleone Ferarri. Circa, 2001- 2016, onwards.
Interior rooms, various materials.
Photograph, Rosslynd Piggott, 2016.



36. Carlo Mollino. Casa Mollino. 1960- 1968. Museo Casa Mollino.
Reconstructed by Fulvio and Napoleone Ferarri. Circa, 2001- 2016, onwards.
View from balcony of the River Po, Turin.
Photograph, Rosslynd Piggott, 2016.



37. Carlo Mollino. Casa Mollino. 1960- 1968.
Museo Casa Mollino. Reconstructed by Fulvio
and Napoleone Ferarri. Circa, 2001- 2016,
onwards. Interior rooms, various materials.
Photograph, Rosslynd Piggott, 2016.



38. Carlo Mollino. Casa Mollino. 1960- 1968.
Museo Casa Mollino. Reconstructed by Fulvio
and Napoleone Ferarri. Circa, 2001- 2016,
onwards. Interior rooms, various materials.
Photograph, Rosslynd Piggott, 2016.



39. Carlo Mollino. Casa Mollino. 1960- 1968.
Museo Casa Mollino. Reconstructed by Fulvio
and Napoleone Ferarri. Circa, 2001- 2016,
onwards. Interior rooms, various materials.
Photograph, Rosslynd Piggott, 2016.



40. Carlo Mollino. Casa Mollino. 1960- 1968.
Museo Casa Mollino. Reconstructed by Fulvio
and Napoleone Ferarri. Circa, 2001- 2016,
onwards. Interior rooms, various materials.
Photograph, Rosslynd Piggott, 2016.

In the next chapter, I will focus on my own installation *Murmur* (2013) which was presented in a Victorian house in East Melbourne, Australia.

Chapter Two: Murmured

Murmur: Murmur (mûr 'mer) noun.

1. *A low, indistinct, continuous sound: spoke in a murmur; the murmur of waves.*
2. *An indistinct, whispered, or confidential complaint; a mutter.*

*Medicine—An abnormal, sound, usually emanating from the heart, that sometimes indicates a diseased condition.*⁷⁹

The full title of my installation at the Johnston Collection in 2013 is elaborated by an internet dictionary definition. A murmur is a low, indistinct and continuous sound, spoken and of breath. The word can, as the definition suggests, also describe the sound of distant waves in endless motion. A murmur can be a confidential complaint, something spoken sotto voce, almost inaudibly. It is, in addition, a medical term that describes an inconsistent heartbeat, a physical condition. These meanings all imply something underlying, the subliminal, the barely heard, and the nearly inaudible. In general, I find that titles rarely suggest themselves at the beginning of a work. Rather, they usually emerge during the process of making a work and can act as a form of illumination or a useful guide through labyrinthine and unclear processes. As I was working through the many stories of William Johnston, as well as conducting extensive visits to Fairhall, looking through archives, photograph albums, pacing the rooms, opening cupboards and drawers, visiting storage spaces, closing and opening curtains to observe the effects of light, observing the garden over the seasons, looking at objects—it became a natural impulse to look for what I could not see, beyond the formal interiors; to uncover something of the inner life of this house and collection, the stories that had not yet been told. The Johnston Collection

⁷⁹ “Murmur,” the Free Dictionary, accessed November 27 2016, <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/murmur>. As I scoured dictionary definitions of the word, ‘murmur’, this internet definition, rather than more formally accepted versions, such as Oxford, stood out as being the most poetic and resonant for the purposes of this work.

is usually presented as a house showcasing Johnston's extensive collection of the decorative arts and as such appeals primarily to an audience interested in the field of antiques. Perhaps I unwittingly felt a kinship with Johnston's collecting instinct, as I too make collections and understand the lure of the search, the possibility of discovery, reclaiming, and finding the lost. In being given the opportunity to relook at and redirect these polite and well behaved interiors and in effect using Johnston's own hunting techniques, inaudible sounds, mutterings, complaints and whispers, it became more present and the central axis for the direction of this work. The notion of the murmur, the barely audible, became a portal through which I could enter and reconstruct a new set of possibilities for the telling of this history within the entire Victorian house of Fairhall: eight rooms, five further in-between spaces, corridors, a staircase, a cupboard, vestibule and two half landings.

As a starting point, in addition to many repeated visits to Fairhall to pace the rooms, staircases, corridors, in effect gauging or collecting an embodied sense of the spaces, it was important to understand the trajectory of William Johnston's life. "Murmur" is in effect a type of portrait, a re-telling of a life through the objects and environments of the house in which it was led. In an unpublished history, Sylvia Black draws on public records and accounts from still-living friends and contacts, to chart the complex path of Johnston, collector and dealer of antiques, from his beginnings in Melbourne to London and his return to Australia, as well as his journeys throughout the world that importantly included Egypt and India.⁸⁰ This history functioned as a map for "Murmur".

Johnston's life as a map for *Murmur*:

⁸⁰ Sylvia Black, *William Johnston: A Decorative Life* (Melbourne: unpublished draft cited with permission of the Johnston Collection, 2012), 8.

William Johnston was born in 1911 in Lilydale, to Robert Alexander Johnston and Louise Friedrichs.

His father was a bootmaker, as were his grandfather and great grandfather. Although, it is unclear in

Black's history, it seems that Johnston's mother, Louise, may have been related to Thomas Welton

Stanford, the brother of Leland, founder of Stanford University, California. What is important is that

(sic) the belief that the two Stanfords were related. On her marriage certificate to Johnston her rank was

given as "Lady".⁸¹

William Johnston seems to have lead a relatively solitary life as his parents' only child, often staying close to his mother, helping her with chores. Louise's fondness for gardening was one that also stayed with Johnston throughout his life. Johnston was five when he started school at St. Patrick's Parish School in Lilydale. The surroundings were austere, the school had no heating and no carpets; teaching by the Irish nuns was very disciplined and thorough. Johnston excelled at Bible studies and had an excellent memory. He was remembered as a quiet child and even at this young age did not enjoy sport or rough games. His lack of interest in sport was a great disappointment to his father. Eventually, Robert taught him to swim and this was a bridge between their worlds. Johnston's love of swimming stayed with him throughout his lifetime. Louise was tolerant of Johnston's lack of boyish interests and to a degree encouraged it. She arranged for William to play at the tailor's next door, where the grown up daughters taught a young William how to sew clothes for dolls. He was apparently fastidious about the detail and precision of his workmanship. If his stitching was not good enough, he would pull it out and start again.⁸² The play with dolls also seems to have nurtured a strong sense of storytelling and love of make-believe in young William that continued in his adult imaginative life and possibly

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid., 11.

influenced his impulses as a collector.

A key event in his childhood was a gift from his maternal grandmother, Mary Therese Friedrichs, of a Minton teacup (1812–15) without the saucer. It was an unusual gift for an eight-year-old child, the teacup predating him by precisely 100 years. Johnston later claimed that this cup inspired his passion for collecting and kept it all his life. It is still in the collection where it is regarded as one of the most prized items.⁸³

For a child who enjoyed gentle pursuits, it was at the same time noted that Johnston had a quick temper. He could flare up and just as quickly calm down. He was known as a troublemaker at school and after an episode in which he snatched the cane from the hand of a nun trying to beat him and broke it, he was asked to leave.⁸⁴ In 1925, when Johnston was thirteen, he was sent to boarding school at Assumption College in Kilmore. The school valued academic achievement, but was better known for producing footballers. The school was an unlikely choice for Johnston, who was neither a scholar nor a sportsman, but perhaps his parents hoped to instil discipline and to turn their boy into a man. Inevitably, he hated the new school and did not fit in well. He did excel at History and topped his class in his first year. After one of his aunts congratulated him by gifting him £5, he promptly went to Kozminsky's and bought a pair of lustre candlesticks.⁸⁵ At this young age, it is curious to note that Johnston knew of the most prestigious place in Melbourne to buy antiques.

Johnston began his working life at the age of sixteen, in 1927, as a window dresser at fashionable drapery store Buckley and Nunn's in Bourke Street, Melbourne. The job did not last long,

⁸³ Ibid., 12.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 13.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

as one day after the head window dresser had rearranged the windows, Johnston thought he could do better and went ahead with his improvements. He was immediately sacked.⁸⁶ He then commenced a job at Ackman's Monster Furnishing Arcade in Smith Street, Fitzroy, working in the furniture department. At this time, he met fellow worker Keith Lawson, who was a similar age, and shared Johnston's passion for furniture. Together, they would visit auction rooms during their lunch hour. The Depression of the 1920s had led to many families downsizing their houses, so large numbers of household items and furniture had become available in the second-hand market. At this stage, it seems, these purchases were not intended for resale, rather for the joy of collecting.⁸⁷ Johnston, even at this young age, was developing his eye: he remained a life-long autodidact. During these early days, Johnston's mother was very supportive of his interests in collecting. After years of frugality and saving, a quality Johnston also learnt from his mother, Louise purchased a home in Brighton. The house, Ainstall, was an important stage in the growth of Johnston as a decorator, collector and dealer of antiques.⁸⁸ Johnston commenced the refurbishments of the single storey Victorian home in this grander suburb of Melbourne, which demanded a finer and more selective attitude towards his collecting. At this time, he worked at Brook Tozer in Elsternwick, who dealt in soft furnishings, furniture and floor coverings. Here Johnston created "brilliant, eye stopper windows" which were much admired.⁸⁹ He was often invited to homes to give advice and in this way his circle and connections grew. At the same time, he continued hunting and collecting in auction rooms. Johnston was beginning to realise that he could make collecting his business.

In 1942, after a brief time in armed service, his working life hardly interrupted, Johnston started

⁸⁶ Ibid., 15.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 16.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

trading from the Brighton home.⁹⁰ The first sales were held in the year of 1945 and were very successful. Johnston quickly realised that post-war England could offer him access to unlimited supplies of antique furniture, which he began to ship to Melbourne to sell at auction. In 1947, with money raised from these first sales, at the age of thirty-six, Johnston moved to London, where he set up residence, firstly in Creek Road, Greenwich and then in 1951 in a badly war damaged house in King William Walk, Greenwich.⁹¹ In this environment, Johnston flourished as a collector and dealer, shipping large amounts of Victorian furniture back to Melbourne.⁹² Initially, Johnston accompanied the shipments. Later Louise and then a team of people received the shipping and sold through auction. After only five years of commencing business in England, Johnston was able to begin to acquire investment properties in his hometown. The first house he bought in 1952 was 154 Hotham Street, East Melbourne was originally called Cadzow, a Victorian building, which he re-modelled to appear Georgian and then renamed Fairhall.⁹³ Over the course of his life he continued to acquire property. At the time of his death, Johnston owned a considerable number of houses which had been divided into a total of thirty-six rental properties in East Melbourne.

During his time in London, Johnston notably gained entry to several grand English country

⁹⁰ Ibid., 19. The reason given was that he was “medically unfit for service”, the disability being cited as “anxiety neurosis-homosexuality.”

⁹¹ Ibid., 28.

⁹² Victorian furniture was not popular in Britain, at this time, being seen as a product of the Industrial Revolution, mass produced and showing little of the skill and craftsmanship of earlier periods. However, Melbourne was built at the height of the Victorian era. During the 1960s, when Victorian buildings were being demolished by developers seeking land close to the city, many people realised the value of Victorian homes, sparking a reactionary fervour of renovation. In seeking an aura of old money or family heritage, they then needed appropriate furniture and fittings, a timely opportunity for Johnston.

⁹³ Black, 37.

house sales, securing significant paintings that are still in the collection.⁹⁴

Johnston travelled extensively during this period throughout Europe and then also to Northern Africa, Tunisia and Egypt. In 1963, during a trip to Egypt he met the young Ahmed Moussa Aboelmaaty, who would become his close companion until the end of his life. (fig.41) Ahmed was only thirteen when Johnston met him at the swimming pool of the Gezira Club in Cairo. Ahmed was at one stage Egypt's national champion swimmer. Johnston challenged him to a race, they had lunch and a friendship was forged.⁹⁵ On future visits to Cairo, Ahmed would assist with hotel bookings. Ahmed's brother-in-law, who worked in the antiques trade, also helped Johnston secure a significant rococo bureau plat, that is still a central object in the collection.⁹⁶ Ahmed was fifteen when Johnston invited him to Greenwich during the school holidays. He helped with packing of containers of objects bound for Australia, he cooked, did the housework and maintained a part-time job at Harrods. This became a regular routine throughout his school years and during his University course in Cairo, where he graduated with a BA in Physical Education and even in his early working years as a teacher and part-time swimming instructor.⁹⁷ Ahmed visited Melbourne with Johnston for three months in 1968. In 1976, three years after Johnston had returned to live in Melbourne, Ahmed joined him there permanently, taking up residence in an upstairs apartment at Fairhall. Sylvia Black refers to Ahmed's role as "houseboy".⁹⁸ In Ahmed's own words, "I was his personal assistant, worked in Kent Antiques,

⁹⁴ One of the house sales was Kimbolton Castle in Cambridgeshire, the seat of the Earls and Dukes of Manchester for 350 years. The house was sold in 1947 by Alexander Montagu, the 10th Duke of Manchester. During the four-day sale of the contents, Johnston bought two family portraits, paintings by Robert Peake (1601) of Edward Lord Montagu, 1st Earl of Manchester and Mary Beale (1683) of Lady Elizabeth Pelham, who married Edward Montagu still housed at Fairhall. They are both remarkably haunting portraits, strangely situated in a private collection in East Melbourne. *Ibid.*, 52.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ Ahmed's brother-in-law was able to lead Johnston to Pontremoli, Cairo's smartest department store, where Johnston found a Rococo bureau plat, at which King Farouk was said to have signed his abdication papers in 1952. *Ibid.*, 53.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 45.

his driver, cook, nurse and housekeeper. I was responsible for cleaning and maintaining a house in East Melbourne, the farmhouse and business as well as looking after his diet and medication.” Johnston paid him \$60 a week, which never changed.⁹⁹ Ahmed also always accompanied Johnston on buying trips, often carrying bags of cash in local currency up to \$20,000–\$30,000, as Johnston always dealt in cash where possible.¹⁰⁰ Reading these stories and supposing an intimacy, certainly a close companionship, between Johnston and Ahmed, such terms as “houseboy” to describe Ahmed’s care and devotion to Johnston seem very derogatory. Though these were perhaps used as a guise, in the context of a previous, but relatively recent era, when homosexuality was still illegal.¹⁰¹ Ahmed’s devoted role in Johnston’s life and achievements has certainly been neglected in the telling of this story. This may have been due to the conservative values of those involved in the establishment of Fairhall as a house museum in the late 1980s and also to the unhappy circumstances regarding Ahmed’s position in Johnston’s bequest.¹⁰² In 2013 when I proposed my concept for *Murmur* to Louis le Vaillant, the director of the Johnston Collection, he was required to seek approval from the Board. I was surprised to learn that half the Board voted for the proposed work and half against it. The narratives of *Murmur*—focussing on the intimate lives of the men who had lived at Fairhall—were still clearly considered controversial in their content. Le Vaillant made a directorial decision to allow *Murmur* to proceed.

Another of Johnston’s closest friends, Angus Winneke (1911–1982) had been one of the

⁹⁹ Ibid. Aboelmaaty, Ahmed Moussa in conversation with Nina Stanton, October 5, 2000.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 58.

¹⁰¹ The law in Victoria against homosexuality was repealed as recently as 1981.

Wikipedia, “Sodomy law,” Wikipedia, accessed November 27 2016, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sodomy_law#Australia.

¹⁰² During phone conversations between myself and Ahmed in 2012, I sought and gained his verbal permission to create his portrait within *Murmur*. Ahmed spoke with me at length about his grievances, unhappiness and great financial difficulties he has suffered in his life since Johnston’s death and the establishment of the Johnston Collection. Ahmed did inherit \$50,000, though no property, he commenced his own business in antiques, which has not flourished and now lives on a very low income.

first tenants at Fairhall, residing there soon after Johnston acquired the house in 1952 until 1966, when he moved to another of Johnston's properties at 90 Gipps Street, East Melbourne until his death. (fig.42) Winneke has been described as "the acknowledged black sheep of an establishment family".¹⁰³ His brother, Sir Henry Winneke was Chief Justice of Victoria from 1964–74 and Victoria's first Australian-born Governor from 1974–82. Angus, on the other hand, was a professional costume and set designer working full-time for over twenty-five years at the Tivoli Theatre. He was one of the very few people in his field working full hours in Australia at this time. The shows were in the style of glamorous and spectacular cabaret. For the time, much of the content was considered to be risqué and definitely adult entertainment. It is estimated that Angus created around 1,800 sets and 20,000 costumes for some 180 Tivoli shows. The Arts Centre, Melbourne, houses his archive of drawings and photographs, which were donated by the Winneke family. After the Tivoli closed in 1965, Angus worked for the luxurious Lido nightclub. When Johnston established Kent Antiques, Angus worked there as the manager, using his decorative skills to great effect, often aided by Laurie Carew, another friend and Visual Merchandising Manager at Georges department store for some thirty years. Although, Angus and Johnston were very contrasting personalities—Angus, elegant, quiet, and happy, while Johnston was unpredictable, moody, and irascible—they maintained a lifelong friendship.¹⁰⁴

In 1972, Johnston suffered a heart attack that caused him to consider the future of his extensive collection. He consulted his friend, John Rogan, who had trained as a lawyer and was also the senior salesman at Kozminsky's about bequeathing the collection to the State of Victoria.¹⁰⁵ Johnston decided to gradually transfer his Greenwich collection to Fairhall, the first house he had acquired in East Melbourne, which was to become his home. Since the time Johnston had

¹⁰³ Black, 39.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 44.

purchased the building in 1952, the large house had been divided into apartments and occupied by various tenants, including Angus Winneke. Johnston started renovations and in 1973 moved back to Melbourne, living downstairs at Fairhall.

Before his decision to return to Australia, Johnston established Kent Antiques, Armadale in 1971, initially as a joint venture. On his return, the business became his main place of dealing, as well as, on occasion, Fairhall. Business at this time, was buoyant as people were starting to realise the value of antiques. Johnston continued his travelling and buying between England, Europe and Australia, extending his trips to include India, where he increasingly bought a number of significant objects still in the collection. It was in 1986, during one of these trips to India, after complaints of ill health, that he collapsed and died of a heart attack.¹⁰⁶ Johnston bequeathed his collection to the people of Victoria as a collection of fine antiques, but also as a demonstration of how they should be displayed and used in a private domestic setting.¹⁰⁷ The museum took four years to set up and the house underwent numerous changes, considered to be more aesthetically fitting for an audience interested in antiques.

The Blue Room of Fairhall was the first room of the “tour”, as the guided journey around the house is known at the Johnston Collection, of *Murmur*.¹⁰⁸ This room, in the context of the house museum, is usually experienced as a small darkened sitting room, heavily draped, with deep

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 67.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 68.

¹⁰⁸ Tours are conducted throughout all the different arrangements of Fairhall by trained voluntary guides, who speak about the concept of each arrangement and present details and histories about the objects. In the case of *Murmur*, the idea of an entire house installation as understood in a contemporary art context was a completely new framework for the Johnston Collection and the voluntary guides.

blue brocade wallpaper, and often furnished with a sideboard or two as well as a small dining table set either for a small private dinner or perhaps afternoon tea. As specified by Johnston, the collection throughout the entire house changes three times each year. During my research visits before the installation, I constantly witnessed these changes and never saw the rooms as empty spaces. I became vividly aware and fascinated by the fictive nature of Fairhall, the telling of William Johnston's story, and the broader fiction of house museums pitched to suit the presumed taste of a target audience, in this case an audience interested in antiques. The early realisation of these layers of fiction were a key to beginning to look beyond the teacups, porcelain, bureau plats and the polite language of categorisation, initiating a desire to look behind and underneath these constructed veneers. I had already become aware of many uncertainties through my reading of Black's history and in particular the understated telling of Johnston's personal life and those of his closest companions. In *Murmur*, these were the stories that I became most interested in privileging and paying homage to, in a gentle unpeeling of the intimate lives of Fairhall.

During Johnston's life at Fairhall, the Blue Room had been his bedroom. I returned the room to an approximation of his small and humble sleeping room. (fig. 43) It was never my intention to illustrate the original functionality of each room.¹⁰⁹ Rather, I wanted to invoke an atmosphere or felt trace through specifically chosen objects, their relationships and further delicate interventions. The central object of the Blue Room placed on a single bed made with roughly hewn blankets strewn aside was the Minton cup (1812–15) without the saucer, the first object in Johnston's collection. Johnston, himself acknowledged that this single cup was the first object to stir his collecting impulses.¹¹⁰ The Minton cup placed here in the region of his heart, had he been lying in the bed, performed as a seed image. (fig.44) Emphasis is given to this seed, by its

¹⁰⁹ This would have been impossible within the constraints of the commission. I could not revert the rooms to exact physical replicas of their original state, nor did I wish to.

¹¹⁰ Black, 12.

uncanny and isolated positioning on the imagined figure of Johnston. The cup may have implied for Johnston visions of Europe and England, an escape from the harshness of early childhood in Lilydale, an imagined daintier, splendid life. Maybe his grandmother sensed in Johnston, the child, his delicate sensibility. It is easy to imagine how such a simple object can carry talismanic weight and meaning persisting through to adulthood. I picture a young Johnston dreaming into this small Minton cup and conjuring the land where it came from and a world beyond it. Gaston Bachelard in his *The Poetics of Space*, speaks of the enlarging eye of the child:

The botanist's magnifying glass is youth recaptured. It gives him back the enlarging eye of the child.

With this glass in his hand, he returns to the garden... Thus the miniscule, a narrow gate, opens up an entire world. The details of a thing can be the sign of a new world which, like all worlds, contains the attributes of greatness. Miniature is one of the refuges of greatness.¹¹¹

The single bed in the Blue Room is solitary and humble and faces a small portrait of an unknown lady, presumed to be Johnston's mother, who we know to be exceptionally supportive of Johnston's collecting impulses from an early age.¹¹² Both mothers, grand and birth mother, act here as guardians of Johnston in his beginnings, his dreaming and desiring. Also facing the absent sleeper, a painting that for Johnston presented a scene of desired family lineage, again elaborating an imaginary world grander than his own. Inscribed "The seat of JR Johnstone Esq Alexander Nasmyth (1758–1840)", the painting depicts a distant Alva House nestled in the idyllic Scottish highlands of Shropshire.¹¹³ Johnston allowed guests to Fairhall to presume that

¹¹¹ Bachelard, 154.

¹¹² Whilst Johnston cared greatly about the quality and provenance of objects in his collection, many of his friends note that he lived a frugal, even penny pinching day to day life. Vivid images of him using only rope to hold up his trousers and drinking from Georgian glasses, whilst only buying the cheapest bruised food from the markets. Black, 18-19; England circa nineteenth century, miniature circa 1840, anonymous photograph, leather case with silk lining, Johnston Collection.

¹¹³ After Patrick Nasymth, Scotland, 1787-1831. *Alva House, Shropshire, The Seat of J.R Johnstone Esq.*, circa 1800, oil on canvas. 865 x 1200 mm, Johnston Collection.

this scene presented his own family origins, continuing entangled fictions between Johnston's desires, imaginings and his life of hunting and collecting.¹¹⁴

I intervene with the sleeper's pillowcase, in *From B to A, in Colonial Knot*, the initial 'A' hand embroidered in a fluctuating pink thread, is not clipped at the end of the letter, continuing to trace a line through the chandelier above, seemingly through the ceiling and into the upstairs room.¹¹⁵ (refer fig. 44) Through this wavering line, a heart connection is made faintly and palpably visible, from 'B' to 'A'—'B' being the absent sleeping Bill and 'A' being Ahmed embroidered on Bill's pillow as a gesture of affection.¹¹⁶ The fathers in the room, some are turned, watch and attend this scene. A silent grandfather clock is positioned permanently in the corner behind the bed, a collection of male portraits, gentlemen, a Lord and a scholar are stacked face to the wall behind the sleeper's head, whilst the elegant, imposing and omnipresent portrait of Edward Lord Montague keeps prominent watch over all—he, himself, being oddly and rarely on this far side of the world, estranged from his home in Cambridgeshire.¹¹⁷ Beside the bed, the *Johnston* I picture in *Murmur*, has kept beloved images of the garden close in a delicate upholstered chair, abundant with split pomegranate, whilst early images of family life are scattered, perhaps

¹¹⁴ Black, 3.

¹¹⁵ Rosslynd Piggott (2013) Two hand embroidered linen pillowcases and silk thread (embroidery by Dorothy Morgan). Dorothy Morgan is one of the voluntary guides at the Johnston Collection and the former President of the Embroiderers Guild Victoria.

¹¹⁶ Bill to Ahmed.

¹¹⁷ Henry Hindley (clockmaker) York, England, circa 1731-1770; Clock, longcase, circa 1750; Walnut, brass, glass, iron. 2313 x 255 x 527mm, Johnston Collection; Joseph Highmore (1692–1780) *Untitled (Portrait of a Gentleman)* circa 1740. oil on canvas. 1240 x 1000 mm, Johnston Collection; Jonathon Richardson. *Lord Chancellor William Cowper*. 1706. Oil on canvas. 763 x 635 mm, Johnston Collection; Robert Peake (attributed) England, circa 1551-1626. Edward Lord Montague, 1st Lord Montagu of Boughton. 1601. oil on board. 1140 x 820 mm, Johnston Collection; Johnston notably gained entry to several grand English country house sales, one was Kimbolton Castle in Cambridgeshire, the seat of the Earls and Dukes of Manchester for 350 years. The house was sold in 1947 by Alexander Montagu, the 10th Duke of Manchester. During the four-day sale of the contents, Johnston bought two family portraits, paintings by Robert Peake (1601) of Edward Lord Montagu, 1st Earl of Manchester and Mary Beale (1683) of Lady Elizabeth Pelham, who married Edward Montagu. They are both remarkably haunting portraits, strangely situated in a private collection in East Melbourne. During *Murmur*, I was told by a voluntary guide who had recently visited Kimbolton Castle, that the family wishes for the return of these portraits.

dropped on the floor.¹¹⁸

Each room became the site of an rearrangement of carefully selected objects from the collection to form a new narrative based on factual history, but one comfortable with uncertainty, the unknown and intimacy. I wished to invoke spaces in which to wander with Johnston and without him, to pause with uncertainty as if to gauge it with our own, to reconcile and to find a quiet depth in these interiors that presented the interiorised Johnston.

The clearing of space in each room and around objects was an important aspect of the installation, allowing for a potency and a metaphysical understanding of the objects to clearly project without distraction and with intended suggestive and emotional weight. I cleared the rooms to such an extent that I caused a storage problem for the Johnston Collection. The instinct to remove in order to create clarity is fundamental to ikebana, which I informally practice on a regular basis.¹¹⁹ The initial act of selecting seasonal and available material looking carefully at its character and natural composition sets a motion of action and decision making for the arrangement that is highly focussed and sensitised to the finest details and qualities of the substance. The earliest forms of ikebana were temple offerings and acts of meditation steeped in a fusion of Shinto and Buddhist philosophy. Later forms became more domestic and even sculptural.¹²⁰ As I have learnt, through practice and observation of others, the angle of a blade of grass can matter greatly for the character of a composition.¹²¹ Even such a small detail can carry suggestion and indeed energy. Therefore, every detail is to be observed and respected. In the selection of the objects for *Murmur* and then in their later placement and refinement, I worked

¹¹⁸ England, chair, mid nineteenth-century, timber (ebonized), upholstered (Berlin wool work). 890 x 434 x 385 mm, Johnston Collection.

¹¹⁹ Various Schools of Japanese flower arranging, the earliest being Buddhist temple offerings.

¹²⁰ The Sogestsu School of Ikebana is the contemporary form of arranging, forms can be sculptural and on a massive scale, for example Kawana Tetsunori's *Five Elements-Water* staged at the National Gallery of Victoria in 2009.

¹²¹ I have made numerous visits to Japan since 1997, where I have observed Ikebana arrangements from hotel lobbies, ryokan tokonoma entrances, temple arrangements and visits to the Sogestsu School in Tokyo.

with the particular character of the material, both historical and physical, aligning it to a new narrative and observing what could be described as the pulse or resonance of the object.

Furthermore, I have previously worked with a felt resonance of objects in many installation works that begin with a found object. Notably, *Double Breath (contained) of the Sitter* (1993–94), staged at the National Gallery of Victoria and then reconfigured in 1998, where I selected: shoes, gloves and stockings from the Fashion and Textiles archives, a Victorian papier-mâché chair, a 1920s mirror and paper light Venetian drinking vessels that were housed in two Featherston cabinets—metaphorical bodies—further housing a looped video image of a naked rotating Venus figure and a house made of sugar cubes, with an icing sugar garden sprinkled through a cut out stencil.¹²² (fig. 45, 46, 47) The miniaturised Venus was projected into a glass Victorian bell jar and then refracted in a pattern of infinity as she passed through surfaces of glass and mirror. The conversations swayed across centuries and countries between antique and embroidered silks, butterfly weight nineteenth-century Venetian glass, sugar, mirror, various lost technologies and unknown wearers, I called by fictive and imagined names. I remember I selected the collection objects, not so much for their historical significance or their perfection, but for the felt resonance as they emerged from the archive boxes. In particular, the historical children’s shoes carried a distinct and often melancholy tone.¹²³ One pair conjured the image of a little English boy having just climbed an apple tree. I gave fictive names of owners, displayed on casually placed strips of paper, instead of didactic labels indicating dates and material details

¹²² This work was commissioned by curator (the late) Jennifer Phipps for an exhibition *Creators and Inventors: Australian Women’s Art*. National Gallery of Victoria (1993-94); As part of my solo exhibition, *Suspended Breath*, National Gallery of Victoria (1998), curated by Jason Smith.

¹²³ The NGV allowed me to work in close association with curators, at that time (c.1997) Robyn Healy, Head of Fashion and Textiles and Terry Lane, Senior Curator, Decorative Arts to enter into archived collections to research and make selections. Many of the objects had never been previously displayed, some due to imperfection; in itself an interesting aspect. Through these selections, these fictive objects within the NGV collection could be seen and viewed less as removed historical objects and more as objects aligned with an emotive human trace some bearing physical witness to the body and movements of the wearer.

to the selected gloves, shoes and stockings; thus conjuring a trace bodily presence, the memory of an event. A little boy stepping in a puddle wearing scuffed leather buckled shoes, a young lady attending a ball, perhaps a courtly encounter. An imagined association was set in motion. I was able to employ a similar methodology when I was selecting objects to use for *Murmur*. The objects, paintings and furniture that remained in Fairhall for the purpose of the narrative of *Murmur* were the ones I felt carried a symbolic or resonant weight for the emphasis of the room. In order for the volume of the narrative to be heard or the atmosphere to be felt, other objects were removed, like a clearing of a resonant sounding field. This might be understood as a selective curatorial action, but it is more so a careful aligning of objects through an intuited registrar, recalling Johnston's narratives and in particular, the untold ones, and seeking a voice for them through the material presence of his collected possessions. The required volume, a murmur, a sound that requires the listeners' heightened attention could only be expressed through specific selected objects possessing a more delicate tone and further their alignment in physical conversation with others.

Gaston Bachelard writes at length of sensitised and vibrational encounters with objects and spaces, in this case the space of the wardrobe that conjures further associative and imagined imagery. Each interior space of Fairhall presented a particular tenor during my preliminary research visits for *Murmur*, initiating choices of objects, related arrangements and the resulting atmosphere. Some objects, such as the huge wardrobe in Ahmed's bedroom remained in place without intervention. I simply closed the door, the wardrobe, in itself being a forceful and weighty presence. A closed room within the bedroom.

Does there exist a single dreamer of words who does not respond to the word wardrobe?... Every poet of furniture... knows that the inner space of an old wardrobe is deep. A wardrobe's inner space is also

intimate space, space that is not open to just anybody... If we give objects the friendship they should have, we do not open a wardrobe without a slight start. Beneath its russet wood, a wardrobe is a very white almond. To open it, is to experience an event of whiteness.¹²⁴

Architect, Juhani Pallasmaa, further writes of the essential importance of touch and its relationship to the entire sensory realm when encountering and entering a building. In *Murmur*, we pass from a huge variety of surfaces and materials varying also in scale from eighteenth-century mirror, finely painted and gilt bone porcelain, polar bear rugs, twenty-first-century furniture—our senses register every varied encounter.

The skin reads the texture, weight, density and temperature of matter. The surface of an old object, polished to perfection by the tool of a craftsman and the assiduous hands of its users, seduces the stroking of the hand. It is a pleasure to press a door handle shining from thousands of hands that have entered the door before us... The door handle is the handshake of the building. The tactile sense connects us with time and tradition... it is time turned into shape... There is a subtle transference between tactile and taste experiences. Vision becomes transferred to taste as well; certain colours and delicate details evoke oral sensations... Our sensory experience of the world originates in the interior sensation of the mouth, and the world tends to return its oral origins. The most archaic origin of architectural space is in the cavity of the mouth.¹²⁵

The selection of objects and their inter-relationships within the rooms of Fairhall work within this realm of poetic possibilities and synthesised senses forming a metalanguage to build the

¹²⁴ Bachelard, 78-81.

¹²⁵ Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin. Architecture and the Senses* (Chichester United Kingdom: John Wiley and Sons Ltd, 2012), 62-63.

narratives of *Murmur*.¹²⁶

The Blue Room was a space of low light—an effect of the intense ultramarine embossed wallpaper. Light, or the lack of it, and the various tones of nuanced shadow were a vitally important and carefully controlled element of *Murmur*. Light functioned as another character guiding and setting the tone and weight of each room. I carefully measured the small degree to which daylight, the outside world, spilled into the rooms; electric light was tuned by a dimmer. Heavy drapes were closed, shutters opening onto a small garden were closed, and gauze was used in two rooms to create a half light. The aim was to emphasise and enhance the interiority of the rooms, suggesting a zone of shadow, partially illuminated with nuanced greys of the liminal and the uncertain.

Pallasmaa notes the importance of the lack of light, a dulling of vision to connect to peripheral vision and to tactile senses.

The eye is the organ of distance and separation, whereas touch is the sense of nearness, intimacy and affection. The eye surveys, controls and investigates, whereas touch approaches and caresses. During overpowering emotional experiences, we tend to close off the distancing sense of vision; we close the eyes when dreaming, listening to music, or caressing our beloved ones. Deep shadows and darkness are essential, because they dim the sharpness of vision, make depth and distance ambiguous, and invite unconscious peripheral vision and tactile fantasy.¹²⁷

¹²⁶ I believe I experience a degree of synesthesia at times. I have been working with an ongoing series of paintings that attempt to depict scents of flowers in measurements and fusions of colour. An example is *Pink space: hovering scent of Jasmine Officinale* (2011) oil on linen, 75 cm x 150 cm.

¹²⁷ Pallasmaa, 50.

Japanese architect and writer, Jun'ichiro Tanizaki speaks of the great richness of darkness as part the fabric of traditional Japanese houses and the inner life of the inhabitants becoming lost to the blaring lights of Western influence in post-war Japan. Shadow is a further character in the narratives of *Murmur*, guiding the viewer from room to room through nuanced shade. "In the making for ourselves a place to live, we first spread a parasol to throw a shadow on the earth, and in the pale light of the shadow we put together a house."¹²⁸ In describing the interior of an old teahouse in Kyoto, Tanizaki gives darkness a physical and emotive viscosity that initiates further visions as if related to a spectral realm,

the darkness seemed to fall from the ceiling, lofty, intense, monolithic, the fragile light of the candle unable to pierce its thickness...It was a repletion, a pregnancy of tiny particles like fine ashes, each particle as luminous as a rainbow. I blinked in spite of myself, as though to keep it out of my eyes.¹²⁹

The shadow space of the Blue Room opened to the powdery softened half-light of the White Room, effectively leaving one mood for another. The White Room of Fairhall was used as Johnston's sitting room, a place of retreat, quiet afternoon tea and it remained so in *Murmur*. Emphasising silence and rest, I aimed to keep the room and its fittings as white and delicate as possible, a floating space. The room appeared coated in a hazy soft powder, as the eye flickered from surface to surface and era to era. (fig.48) I emptied the fireplace of harsh brass fittings so that it became a simple concrete cavity, a readymade diorama for three Parian-ware mythological figurines.¹³⁰ (fig.49) The meeting of modern concrete and the luminous soft white glow of Parian,

¹²⁸ Junichiro Tanizaki, *In Praise of Shadows* (Stony Creek, USA: Leete's Island Books Inc, 1977), 17.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹³⁰ A model of *Ariadne Reclining on a Panther*, after the original by Johann Heinrich von Dannecker, German (1758-1841), Minton, nineteenth century, England; *Una and the Lion*, John Bell designed figure for Summerley's Art Manufacturers, Stoke-on-Trent, England, (1859); *Mercury preparing to slay Argus*, after Bertel Thorvaldsen, Minton and Co, Stoke-on-Trent, (circa 1852).

a combination of porcelain and glass, edged by an expanse of polar bear rug slipped into a zone of chance encounter, where the familiar becomes unlikely—the gently bizarre. I allow myself for a moment to recall Oppenheim’s *Déjeuner en Fourrere*, but Méret had different uses for the teacup to Mr Johnston. (fig.50) André Breton’s world of poetic object association and its legacy is explored more fully further into this exegesis. Johnston, himself would have enjoyed playing with his collection and regularly forming new meetings, between era and materiality. These opportunities were too enticing and enthralling not to enjoy and to enter tangled possibilities of the sensual and material with purposeful play. Teacups picturing full blown English roses tipped over onto the polar fur, recalling a bout of Johnston’s temper, their golden rims leading our eye up the giltwood leg of a champagne coloured damask covered Louis XVI sofa.¹³¹ (fig.51) We are rapidly shifted into the twenty-first century by the inclusion of three pieces of contemporary furniture of notable innovation that use materials from moulded plastic, to lamb’s wool to polyester fibre.¹³² The scene is reflected, as is the viewer, by three mirrors, wavering in time and qualities of reflectivity, from the clear gaze of English eighteenth century to the mercurial liquidity of *Mirror, mirror no.1*, where the scene is molten distortion and constantly shifting.¹³³ (fig.52) This mirror does not clearly reflect, remaining clouded and only ever offering a partial view. *Murmur–Vapour* hung in a far corner faintly emanated through palimpsest veils, showing layers of mise en scène constructed in the earliest elegant interiors of Fairhall as a house museum.¹³⁴ (fig.53) The solid becomes transparent, the ghost of a Regency dining setting floats over a vaporised view of a formal sitting room, now made possibly liquid by the Photoshop tool.

The scene is like a whisper, a faint breathing, emphasising the powdery half-light of the White

¹³¹ Suite, one sofa and three armchairs, late eighteenth century, England, Louis XVI, giltwood, pale cream-pink damask, Johnston Collection.

¹³² B&B Italia by Antonio Citterio. J.J Armchair (2008), sheep skin and metal. Edra, bookcase, polyfibre and metal. B&B Italia by Patricia Urquiola, Armchair- Husk Outdoor (2011), poly fibre and metal.

¹³³ Rosslynd Piggott, *Mirror, mirror no.1*. (2009) Oil and palladium leaf on linen, slumped and mirrored glass, wood. Two panels, each 100 x 75 x 2cm, overall 100 x 150 x 2cm.

¹³⁴ Rosslynd Piggott, *Murmur-Vapour* (2013) digital print on Hahnemule paper, edition of 5, within a set of nine prints. Print size, 100 x 78.5 cm.

Room.

The viewer is led to the space of the corridor, simultaneously an entrance, an exit and a passage to a staircase leading to the second level, winding behind the staircase to a vestibule and a small kitchen. The corridor, a passage and an in-between space, here seven more of a series of nine prints are gathered in jostling layers.¹³⁵ There is too much to look at, the viewer laden with excess. Johnston's world of interiors meets Alice, the complexity and density of molten, layered images is dizzying, akin to the blurred moment just after we wake from dreaming. The dream is held, we occupy it for a frozen moment before we realise we are in the waking world. These prints or surfaces offer a window into Johnston's collected world and slippage in-between time and space, a constructed interior and memory. In *Murmur–Vacance en Paris* we glimpse Johnston as a tourist in the Tuileries standing in front of Etienne-Jules Ramey's *Theseus and the Minotaur*, veiled by an interior of his study, including the painting of his fictive Alva House, a pair of Staffordshire soldiers guard the desk, the distant Louvre and tempest trees dissect a grandfather clock keeping silent time. Bill is the same size as the Chesterfield chair, which is melting into a Persian rug that morphs into a miniaturised garden. (fig.54) In *Murmur–Magnolia Soulangiana*, Bill's beloved magnolias photographed in the rear garden at Fairhall in Spring 2012, swell to giant size and overlay a four-posted bed used at *Chandpara* situated in Ahmed's room in *Murmur*. (fig.55) The photographed garden blends with the fabric garden of the damask bedding and a Persian rug in digital melange, a weaving of nature and interior. The sway of the heavy bloom is held within the canopy of the bed. The opulent magnolia holds at its centre two polarised Wedgewood urns, the Greco-Roman youths mirroring and facing each other,

¹³⁵ Rosslynd Piggott, *Murmur* (2013) series of nine digital prints on Hahnemule paper. Edition of 5. Print size, 100 x 78.5 cm. *Murmur- Magnolia Soulangiana*, *Murmur- Canopy no.1*, *Murmur- Canopy no. 2*, *Murmur- Ink* (Absence of Venice, watched by Mary), *Murmur- Pond*, *Murmur- Vapour*, *Murmur- Tilt*, *Murmur- Vacance en Paris*, *Murmur- Ice- Camellia Japonica*.

yet separated. The surfaces of these prints reveal, slip away, disguise and dissolve in constant motion, like a mirage glimpsed and then vanished. *Murmur–Pond* pictures a ghostly construct of a European afternoon tea room, Louis XIV chairs sit politely at a hinged table replete with Chinese inspired porcelain, overlaid with a sunburnt scene of high Australian summer and a clipped view of skinny dipping Mr Johnston and Ahmed with an unknown friend at the dam at *Chandpara*. A nineteenth-century English chandelier is suspended over a distant canopy of gum trees, a vision of European ritual and manners looks ready to sink into the muddy dam, though it floats and is suspended as in a kind of melancholic longing. (fig.56)

The Green Room is the largest room of Fairhall, part dining room and part sitting room. In *Murmur*, in the first half of the room, a tumbling pile of furniture and objects, effectively a sculpture using the collection as medium, referred to the storage space at Kent Antiques. The prized rococo bureau plat bought in Cairo, supporting an upside down English sofa table its legs curving towards the ceiling, as if waiting inspection, miniature Georgian drawers and a tiny tilt table used to demonstrate a makers skill, disorientate a sense of scale and place.¹³⁶ The marble surface of a French eighteenth-century Louis XV commode is dislodged and slightly shifted to reveal its wooden structure, an action of inspection, valuation or authentication.¹³⁷ An English statue of Mercury is poised on top calling in good fortune for business.¹³⁸ Victorian papier-mâché tables tilt vertically to show their mother of pearl inlaid faces to full effect, these opalescent gardens glowing in their night surface, whilst an Indian ebony and ivory table lies in abandon sideways on the floor. Furniture and objects take on an anthropomorphic presence, as if bodies

¹³⁶ Jean- David Fortanier, *Bureau plat* (1745-1749), France, satinee veneer and partridge wood, oak, pine, gilded bronze, leather, kingwood, Johnston Collection; *Sofa table*, (circa 1810), England, rosewood, brass; *Chest of drawers, miniature*. Maker unknown, Georgian mahogany, England, date unknown, Johnston Collection; *Table, miniature tripod*. Georgian mahogany, England, maker unknown, date unknown, Johnston Collection.

¹³⁷ *Commode*, Louis XV-Louis XVI, transitional, (circa 1770), France, maker unknown, kingswood (breche violette) marble, Johnston Collection.

¹³⁸ *Mercury*, nineteenth century, England. Marble, Johnston Collection.

and beings.¹³⁹ (fig. 57 and 58)

Writer, Nuala Hancock in her in situ researching of Charleston and Monk's House, the literary, artistic house museums of Virginia Woolf and her sister, Vanessa Bell, writes of her encounter with Virginia Woolf's reading glasses, a bodily apparatus taking her even closer to the fibre and physicality of their tremulously brilliant wearer, herself perhaps overly sensitive to vibrational life:

As they emerge, they bring with them a rush of time—a repressed accumulation of memory—the space around them suddenly unbounded—blowing out emanations of the past—interspersing with the present—flowing into now. The more vividly they present themselves, the more far-reaching their source appears to be... They invite us to consider her materiality: the physicality of her head; the surface of her skin; the bony integuments of her skull—that protective shell around her prodigious intellect... Through this tangible relic, Woolf's habitual body ballets become haptically felt; more vividly knowable.¹⁴⁰

Though less intimately conjoined, the objects chosen to tell the narratives of *Murmur* also release and relinquish their own physical strata of memory.

The second half of the room was devoted to dining and Johnston's love of flowers and the garden. The huge dining table was concertinaed open to form a split table, as if a stretched and split body or two bodies, set for only three men, Bill, Ahmed and Angus with floral plates from

¹³⁹ *Table*, mid-late nineteenth century, papier-mâché, mother of pearl, Johnston Collection. *Table*, circa 1860-mid to late nineteenth century, papier-mâché, mother of pearl, lacquer, Johnston Collection; *Table, occasional*, mid-late nineteenth century, India, ebony, ivory, Johnston Collection.

¹⁴⁰ Nuala Hancock, "Virginia Woolf's Glasses. Material encounters in the literary/artistic house museum" in *Museum Materialities: Objects, Engagements, Interpretations* ed. S H Dudley (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 114.

a Sir James Duke and Nephews service.¹⁴¹ (fig.59) Dessert plates depicting a pansy, a violet and a passionflower play with a Victorian code language of flowers suitable for each diner.¹⁴²

In *Splinter-Garden* I projected a DVD loop of Johnson's magnolia and ice white camellia grown in the garden at Fairhall, filmed from Winter to Spring 2012, through the central English nineteenth-century cut crystal chandelier shattering the garden and forming a shifting mutable particle canopy across the ceiling above the absent diners—a dissolving of ego and body, a reminder of our origins as star dust.¹⁴³ (refer fig.59, fig.60)

Throughout all of the movement in the rooms, corridors, stairs and in-between spaces I observed that peripheral vision, the glimpsed, became unintentionally, an actively vivid aspect of *Murmur*. As I had worked on the main arrangements and the interventions, other presences formed, becoming a part of the embodied and felt experience of the spaces, more haunting and compelling as an indirectness; functioning like an echo of the initial sound, less locatable, coming from another space and time. In the Green Room, the eighteenth-century glass of the English bookcase presented its warped and muted reflection of *Splinter Garden*, through which the viewer could see the collected Sir James Duke and Nephew floral plates and further layers of floating images reflected from the other side of the room and corridor.¹⁴⁴ Unintended images unravelled and “found” in the substance of glass and mechanism colliding. The floral chandelier was reflected less brilliantly than in direct gaze, beguiling for its blurred distance in time and space, unattainable and unreachable. The image melts, flickers, rotates, appears and disappears, unknowable and fleeting. (fig.61)

¹⁴¹ *From a twenty-one piece dessert service*, Sir James Duke and Nephews, Hill Top Pottery, Burslem, Staffordshire, England, circa 1860-64, porcelain, polychrome enamel decoration, gilt, Johnston Collection.

¹⁴² “Pansy-think of me,” “Violet-modest worth,” “Passionflower-faith.” Mandy Kirby, *The Language of Flowers: A Miscellany* (London: Macmillian, 2011), 117, 173, 167.

¹⁴³ Rosslynd Piggott, *Splinter-Garden* (2012- 2013), DVD loop projected through nineteenth century cut crystal chandelier, English. Chandelier, Johnston Collection.

¹⁴⁴ *Bookcase*, England (1765), Cuban mahogany veneer, pine carcass, oak lining, glass, Johnston Collection.

A box frame containing a collection of Johnston's miniature watercolours on ivory (I selected women only) reflects the red wallpapered corridor and the *Murmur* prints further re-forming transparent multiplicity.¹⁴⁵ Fragile pale visage of English ladies in miniature, painted tenderly for in memoriam, to be worn close to the skin or kept in a private drawer, float on the brittle and watery surface of glass, as if suspended in a dream state even more remote. (fig.62)

A narrow Victorian staircase leads to the second level past a tiny half landing bathroom, which became an aviary of Staffordshire birds and living orchids in *Murmur*; to a landing devoted to images of travel: the voyage, the souvenir, instruments of time and weather prediction. Half landings and landings, like corridors, are places of passage sometimes waiting poised in-between time and space. Here, as reflected in *Murmur*, Johnston may have prepared for travel or remembered past journeys, taking into account weather patterns of his life and the time they occurred or will re-occur. Some of the instruments here still functioned, but they all told different times.

The immediate doorway from this landing leads to the bedroom used by Ahmed Abolmaaty Moussa, Johnston's friend and close companion for twenty-three years. In *Murmur* I retained this space as a sleeping room and sanctuary for Ahmed. The dominant object in the room, acting as another room space, is an Indian teak four-posted bed replete with heavy saffron coloured

¹⁴⁵ Richard Cosway, England (1742-1821), *Portrait miniature, Lady Margaret Cameron* (1790), watercolour on ivory, Johnston Collection; Andrew Plimer, England, (1763- 1837), *Portrait miniature, Lady Caroline Price* (1755-1826), circa 1790, watercolour on ivory, Johnston Collection; In the style of Mary Beale, England (1677), *Portrait miniature Lady Dorchester* (1677), watercolour on vellum, glass, silk, ink, silver, Johnston Collection; England, late seventeenth century, *Portrait miniature, unknown lady*, watercolour on vellum, Johnston Collection; England, (circa 1805), *Portrait miniature, unknown lady*, (circa 1805), watercolour on ivory, Johnston Collection; Edward Dayes, London, England, (1763-1804), *Portrait miniature, Hon. Mrs. Charles James Fox*, (circa 1785), watercolour on ivory, Johnston Collection.

drapes—the opulent fabric being a fictive theatrical device of Fairhall, the house museum.¹⁴⁶

An imagined Ahmed has left the bedclothes thrown aside, two mirror tables sit on top of his chest, facing each other, as absent bodies in perpetual gaze upon the other.¹⁴⁷ (fig.63) The continuing pink thread, *From B to A in Colonial Knot*, winds its way seemingly through the ceiling from Johnston’s sleeping room below, coiling around both mirror tables and embroiders *B* on Ahmed’s pillow. The gesture completes a silent love letter between ‘B’ and ‘A’ rarely spoken of in Fairhall.¹⁴⁸ (fig. 64) An olfactory image of Indian Sandalwood meets the saffron yellow drapes and layered Persian rugs, imaging gardens offering solace and comfort.¹⁴⁹ The room appeared to be the most silent, as if a heart space, the embodied multi-sensorial centre of *Murmur*. In peripheral vision, a painting of a sleeping Venus figure, her arms curved behind her head, innocently exposing her vulnerable breasts to a lurking shadowy Cupid poised to pierce her heart.¹⁵⁰ Layers of softness and sandalwood offered to Ahmed in this room attempts to bring balm and respite.

The Yellow Room was retained as Angus Winneke’s apartment and displayed copies of a selection of his vast archive of drawings for costumes and sets for productions performed at the Tivoli Theatre. It is estimated he designed 1800 sets and 20,000 costumes for 180 shows at the Tivoli from the late 1930s to mid 1960s, when he then worked at the Lido.¹⁵¹ I was able to visit the extensive archive of drawings and photographs now held at the Performing Arts

¹⁴⁶ *Four posted bed*, India, circa 1800, Indian cedar or teak, Johnston Collection.

¹⁴⁷ *Mirror table*, nineteenth century, mahogany, Johnston Collection; *Mirror table*, date unknown, mahogany, satinwood, Johnston Collection.

¹⁴⁸ Bill and Ahmed.

¹⁴⁹ Indian Sandalwood, its botanical name, *Santalum Album*, is the finest of available sandalwoods. Among its many therapeutic qualities are an antispasmodic, hypertensive and sedative all helping to calm the nervous system inducing relaxation and more positive thoughts. “Sandalwood,” Organic facts, accessed November 27 2016, <https://www.organicfacts.net/health-benefits/essential-oils/sandalwood-essential-oil.html>.

¹⁵⁰ *Untitled, Reclining nude with Cupid*, Artist unknown, French School, early nineteenth century, oil on canvas, Johnston Collection.

¹⁵¹ The Arts Centre Melbourne made available for viewing an extensive archive of original drawings and designs for sets and costumes and photographs. <https://www.artcentremelbourne.com.au>

Museum at the Victorian Arts Centre donated by the Winneke family. (fig. 65) Those displayed in the Yellow Room were a small selection and copies of the original drawings not permitted to leave the archive. (fig. 66, 67, 68) This aspect of the research for *Murmur*, like so many others presented another possibility for expanded research for another researcher, hopefully an exhibition on the work of Angus Winneke and his major contribution to theatrical design and night life in Melbourne. Perky designs for costumes—of girls wearing only balloons and swathes of feathers—line the sleeping alcove. Towering headdresses, scarlet red capes swoosh back to reveal sparkling mesh just enough for slight modesty and to avoid the closing of the venue. The drawings conjure fun and decidedly naughty times and a suggestion of the extent of Winneke’s fluid imaginative powers and great technical abilities. Many who visited this room, remembered their evenings at the “Tiv” with great fondness and a wicked smile, recalling times when naughtiness was truly opulent. A B&B Italia rocker vies with two Regency rosewood sofas, all of them dressed in yellow.¹⁵² Sunlit and chic, elegantly confident, the room portrays the busy, productive and bright personality of Angus. This room is without shadow, projecting optimism and production. (fig.69, 70)

A journey of perpetual mood swing, the final room of *Murmur* is loaded with shadow. I called it the Melancholy Room, not as a title, but to name this place. Posing as the study of Bill Johnston in Fairhall, the house museum, as I encountered this room during preliminary research for *Murmur*, it had always felt dark and nervous, full of regret. (fig.71) I had observed that the electric light in this room faintly hummed, a malfunction or a danger that I chose to amplify, as the central image in the room with a constantly flickering light globe. (fig.72) The tragic verges on comedic in this room, as a bust of Seneca looks upon Giovanni Battista Piranesi’s depiction of

¹⁵² B&B Italia, Jeffrey Bernett, *Landscape* (2011), wool, magnets and metal; *Sofa*, England, Regency early nineteenth century, rosewood, brass, silk, Johnston Collection.

Roman ruin, *The Baths of Caracalla – The Interior of the Central Hall*, a Faience cup and saucer depicting Don Quixote, his tale of illusion and failure, sit poised on Johnston’s desk, whilst a pair of Georgian mirrors, the silver blackened, record only a fog.¹⁵³ (fig.73, 74, 75) The metalanguage of objects in this room is a darkened melancholy laden with the loose ends of the lives of this narrative.

The series of rooms making up the Victorian house of Fairhall, effectively became mood chambers in *Murmur*, some approaching a portrait, others affecting a shadow, a half light, sunlight, silence, an ache, a sickness, all interconnected with trace and echoic memory, affecting emotive passage from one room to another. In *Murmur* I was dealing with entirety, an enclosed and constructed universe. I have not spoken about all the rooms, as this was a very complex installation, with too many elements to fully speak of in this context. Every visit to *Murmur*, I saw more and more detailed association, it was as if the house had kept doing its own work. The task of documenting the work was similarly very complex, neither the photographer nor I knew where to stop, as the more we looked the more we saw.¹⁵⁴ Every element, the present structure of the house, the selected contents, every corner, the light or lack of it, musty smell, every position and angle of every object was considered in its relations, both grand and intimate. All were important for their interdependent contribution to the whole. Elements were tuned, re-tuned, gathered, aligned and introduced—forming the realigned organism of *Murmur*.

I have since thought of Hayao Miyazaki’s film *Howl’s Moving Castle*, as an amusingly analogous, if more exaggerated work in an entirely different genre, as a moving organism, part

¹⁵³ *Seneca*, bust, Italy, eighteenth century, bronze, Johnston Collection; *The Baths of Caracalla- The Interior of the Central Hall*, circa 1765, paper, ink, Johnston Collection; *Cup and saucer; depicting Don Quixote*, France, nineteenth century, Faience, porcelain, Johnston Collection; *Mirror; two*, England, circa 1740, mahogany, one with a gilt scroll and gilt frame, original glass, Johnston Collection.

¹⁵⁴ Photographer John Brash.

Figures:

**Chapter Two:
Murmured.**



41. Rosslynd Piggott. *Murmur*. 2013. Detail, installation at The Johnston Collection. Ahmed's sitting room. Interior room, Collection art works and objects, various materials, archive photographs, photographer unknown, Ahmed Moussa Aboelmaaty and William R Johnston in various locations. Photograph: Rosslynd Piggott.



42. Rosslynd Piggott. *Murmur*. 2013. Detail, installation at The Johnston Collection. The Yellow Room- Angus's apartment. Interior room, Collection art works and objects, various materials, archive photographs, photographer unknown, Angus Winneke. Circa 1960s. Photograph: Rosslynd Piggott.



43. Rosslynd Piggott. *Murmur*. 2013. Detail, installation at The Johnston Collection. The Blue Room. Interior room, Collection art works and objects, various materials. Photograph: John Brash.



44. Rosslynd Piggott. *Murmur*. 2013. Detail, installation at The Johnston Collection. The Blue Room. Interior room, Minton cup (1812-15), Collection art works and objects, various materials. *From B to A, Colonial Knot*. 2013. Two hand embroidered linen pillowcases and silk thread (embroidery by Dorothy Morgan). Photograph: John Brash.



45. Rossllynd Piggott. *Double Breath (contained) of the Sitter*. 1993-94. Detail, installation at the National Gallery of Victoria. Collection objects, paper, sugar, silk, video loop.



46. Rossllynd Piggott. *Double Breath (contained) of the Sitter*. 1993-94. Detail, installation at the National Gallery of Victoria. Collection objects, paper, sugar, silk, video loop.



47. Rossllynd Piggott. *Double Breath (contained) of the Sitter*. 1993-94. Detail, installation at the National Gallery of Victoria. Collection objects, paper, sugar, silk, video loop.



48. Rosslynd Piggott. *Murmur*. 2013. Detail, installation at The Johnston Collection. The White Room. Interior room, Collection art works and objects, various materials. Photograph: John Brash.



49. Rosslynd Piggott. *Murmur*. 2013. Detail, installation at The Johnston Collection. The White Room. Interior room, Nineteenth century Parian ware, England, Polar bear rug, Collection art works and objects, various materials. Photograph: Rosslynd Piggott.



50. Rosslynd Piggott. *Murmur*: 2013. Detail, installation at The Johnston Collection. The White Room. Interior room, Porcelain teacup, Polar bear rug, Collection art works and objects, various materials.
Photograph: Rosslynd Piggott.



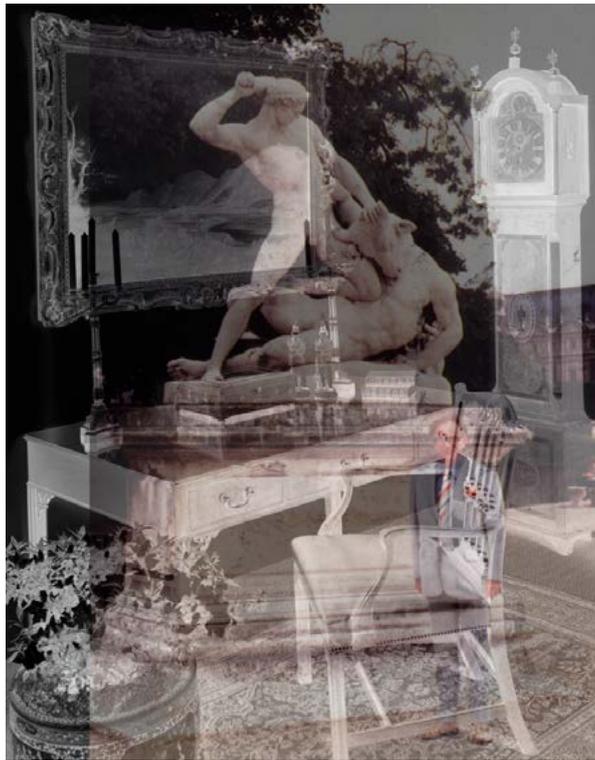
51. Rosslynd Piggott. *Murmur*: 2013. Detail, installation at The Johnston Collection. The White Room. Interior room, Collection art works and objects, various materials.
Photograph: Rosslynd Piggott.



52. Rosslynd Piggott. *Mirror, mirror, no.1*. 2009. Oil and palladium leaf on linen and slumped and mirrored glass, wood. Two panels, each 100 x 75 x 2cm, overall 100 x 150 x 2cm.
Photograph: Carl Warner.



53. Rosslynd Piggott, *Murmur-Vapour*. 2013, digital print on Hahnemule paper, edition of 5. Print size, 100 x 78.5 cm.



54. Rosslynd Piggott, *Murmur-Vacance en Paris*. 2013. digital print on Hahnemule paper, edition of 5. Print size, 100 x 78.5 cm.



55. Rosslynd Piggott, *Murmur - Magnolia Soulangiana*. 2013. digital print on Hahnemule paper, edition of 5. Print size, 100 x 78.5 cm.



56. Roslynd Piggott, *Pond*. 2013. digital print on Hahnemule paper, edition of 5.
Print size, 100 x 78.5 cm.



57. Rosslynd Piggott. *Murmur*. 2013. Detail, installation at The Johnston Collection. The Green Room. Interior room, Collection art works and objects, various materials. Photograph: John Brash.



58. Rosslynd Piggott. *Murmur*. 2013. Detail, installation at The Johnston Collection. The Green Room. Interior room, Collection art works and objects, various materials. Photograph: John Brash.



59. Rosslynd Piggott. *Murmur*. 2013. Detail, installation at The Johnston Collection. The Green Room. Interior room, Collection art works and objects, various materials. Photograph: John Brash.



60. Rosslynd Piggott. *Murmur*. 2013. Detail, installation at The Johnston Collection. The Green Room. *Splinter-Garden*. 2012- 2013, DVD loop projected through nineteenth century cut crystal chandelier, English Chandelier, Interior room, Collection art works and objects, various materials. Photograph: John Brash.



61. Rossllynd Piggott. *Murmur*. 2013. Detail, installation at The Johnston Collection. The Green Room. Interior room, Collection art works and objects, various materials. Photograph: Rossllynd Piggott.



62. Rossllynd Piggott. *Murmur*. 2013. Detail, installation at The Johnston Collection. The Green Room. Interior room, Collection art works and objects, various materials. Photograph: Rossllynd Piggott.



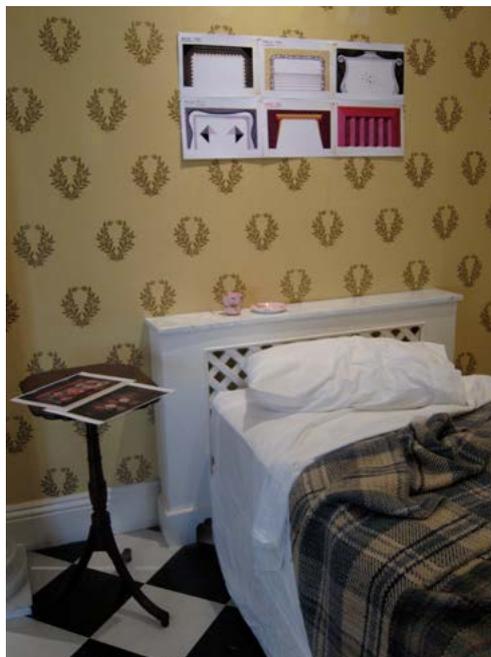
63. Rosslynd Piggott. *Murmur*. 2013. Detail, installation at The Johnston Collection. Ahmed's bedroom. *From B to A, Colonial Knot*. 2013. Two hand embroidered linen pillowcases and silk thread (embroidery by Dorothy Morgan), interior room, Collection art works and objects, various materials. Photograph: John Brash.



64. Rosslynd Piggott. *Murmur*. 2013. Detail, installation at The Johnston Collection. Ahmed's bedroom. *From B to A, Colonial Knot*. 2013. Two hand embroidered linen pillowcases and silk thread (embroidery by Dorothy Morgan), interior room, Collection art works and objects, various materials. Photograph: John Brash.



65. Rosslynd Piggott. *Murmur*. 2013. Detail, installation at The Johnston Collection. The Yellow Room- Angus's apartment. Copies of photographs of shows at The Tivoli, Melbourne, circa 1960s. Archive of The Performing Arts Museum at the Victorian Arts Centre, interior room, Collection art works and objects, various materials. Photograph: Rosslynd Piggott.



66. Rosslynd Piggott. *Murmur*. 2013. Detail, installation at The Johnston Collection. The Yellow Room- Angus's apartment. Copies of Angus Winneke's drawings for costumes and set designs, circa 1950-1960. Archive of The Performing Arts Museum at the Victorian Arts Centre, interior room, Collection art works and objects, various materials. Photograph: Rosslynd Piggott.



67. Rosslynd Piggott. *Murmur*. 2013. Detail, installation at The Johnston Collection.

The Yellow Room- Angus's apartment. Copies of Angus Winneke's drawings for costumes and set designs, circa 1950-1960. Archive of The Performing Arts Museum at the Victorian Arts Centre, interior room, Collection art works and objects, various materials.

Photograph: Rosslynd Piggott.



68. Rosslynd Piggott. *Murmur*. 2013. Detail, installation at The Johnston Collection.

The Yellow Room- Angus's apartment. Copies of Angus Winneke's drawings for costumes and set designs, circa 1950-1960. Archive of The Performing Arts Museum at the Victorian Arts Centre, interior room, Collection art works and objects, various materials.

Photograph: Rosslynd Piggott.



69. Rosslynd Piggott. *Murmur*. 2013. Detail, installation at The Johnston Collection. The Yellow Room- Angus's apartment, interior room, Collection art works and objects, various materials. Photograph: John Brash.



70. Rosslynd Piggott. *Murmur*. 2013. Detail, installation at The Johnston Collection. The Yellow Room- Angus's apartment, interior room, Collection art works and objects, various materials. Photograph: John Brash.



71. Rosslynd Piggott. *Murmur*: 2013. Detail, installation at The Johnston Collection. The Melancholy Room, interior room, Collection art works and objects, various materials. Photograph: John Brash.



72. Rosslynd Piggott. *Murmur*: 2013. Detail, installation at The Johnston Collection. The Melancholy Room, interior room, Collection art works and objects, various materials. Photograph: Rosslynd Piggott.



73. Rosslynd Piggott. *Murmur*. 2013. Detail, installation at The Johnston Collection.
The Melancholy Room, Giovanni Battista Piranesi. *The Baths of Caracalla- The Interior of the Central Hall*, circa 1765, paper, ink, interior room, Collection art works and objects, various materials.
Photograph: Rosslynd Piggott.



74. Rosslynd Piggott. *Murmur*. 2013. Detail, installation at The Johnston Collection. The Melancholy Room, *Cup and saucer, depicting Don Quixote*, France, nineteenth century, Faience, interior room, Collection art works and objects, various materials.
Photograph: Rosslynd Piggott.



75. Rosslynd Piggott. *Murmur*. 2013. Detail, installation at The Johnston Collection. The Melancholy Room, *Mirror, two*, England, circa 1740, mahogany, one with a gilt scroll and gilt frame, interior room, Collection art works and objects, various materials.
Photograph: Rosslynd Piggott.

architecture, part composite animal in constant transformation, groaning, tumbling, hissing and gurgling its way through the landscape.¹⁵⁵ Master Howl, a rather dark Prince, adjusts a dial near the front door to set time and space to his requirements, as he himself morphs from a melancholy adolescent to a liquid black substance to a winged flying super monster. The houses discussed in this exegesis also function as real, yet fictive spaces, made from layers of memory, collected and aligned trace materials capable of profound transportation akin to something like a spell.

¹⁵⁵ *Howl's Moving Castle*, directed by Hayao Miyazaki (Studio Ghibli, Japan, 2004).

Chapter Three: Meeting Mr. Severs- His Constructed World

Dennis Severs' House, Spitalfields, East London

From late November 2013 to late February 2014, I was temporarily located in the East End of London.¹⁵⁶ For the purposes of this research and after the absorbing experience of *Murmur* I was keen to visit house museums and historic homes in London where artist intervention may have occurred or may likely occur, especially in a city where the opportunities may seem endless and histories run deep with layered complexity. The Johnston Collection actively communicates with other house museums around the world and had advised me to visit Dennis Severs' House noting its exceptional and unconventional approach to a house and history.

I first visited Dennis Severs' House at 18 Folgate Street, Spitalfields, London in December 2013 and was completely unprepared for the extraordinary constructed world that lay beyond the threshold of the front door and for the depth of its physical and emotional effect, that was as wondrous and moving, as it was perplexing and resistant to categorisation.¹⁵⁷ The house is neither a house museum nor a conventional display of history, it is an entire creation based on history, though fictitious. As a construct I propose that the house is more aligned to what we understand today as installation art, three-dimensional works that are often site-specific and concerned with a transformation of space. Both physically and conceptually, this precisely describes Dennis Severs' House. It is uncertain whether Severs knew the early installation practices of his time,

¹⁵⁶ During the time I was artist in residence at the Australia Council for the Arts studio run by Acme studios at The Bow Quarter, East London.

¹⁵⁷ December 9, 2013.

but the question may be moot anyway.¹⁵⁸ Can we posthumously claim this for him? In glimpses, Severs does appear to understand the context of his work. For example, he writes, “As an artist my canvas is your imagination.”¹⁵⁹ When I asked the curator of the Severs’ House, David Milne, if Severs thought of himself as an artist, his direct answer was “I don’t know.”¹⁶⁰ Severs possibly had little to pitch himself against given his apparent isolation from an artistic community, or little reason given the voracity and persistence of his drive and vision. What is certain is the enduring power of Severs’ work and its extraordinary ability to affect, (which is why I discuss it at length in this exegesis). David Hockney famously described his visit to the house as being the greatest operatic experience of his life.¹⁶¹ In the vessel of this house, Severs constructed a world that was both his home and a fictive time capsule. Severs’ work, in contrast to that of an artist working in an established house, is an interior world constructed in its entirety, starting with the shell of a house in ruins. Although he did not make major structural changes to the house, every other aspect and detail is formed from his own extensive collecting, assembling and construction.

Dennis Severs was born in 1948 to Earl and Helen Severs, then of Escondido, a small farming town in the mountains of southern California.¹⁶² The family ran a petrol station and his father

¹⁵⁸ I remember encountering Ed Kienholz’s *The Beanery* (1969), as a young teenager in the Stedijlk Museum, Amsterdam, circa 1976. A small room to be entered, which was a hauntingly real and rather spooky impression of a grimy down and out bar. The space was an atmosphere and entirely immersive. I was deeply impressed, even shocked by what was to me, a new form of sculpture in space. Though entirely different, the immersive atmospheric realism of the Severs house reminds me of this early installation work. The ability of the work to act like a vessel and a time machine to completely surround and hold you in its world. In 2011, I encountered an earlier work of Kienholz, *Roxy’s* (1960), installed at the Punta della Dogana in Venice, as part of the exhibition *In praise of Doubt* curated by Caroline Bourgeois. Though strange and displaced during its time, indeed Kienholz is still rather under regarded, this work is now acknowledged as among the first installation works in art history.

¹⁵⁹ Peter Ackroyd. Introduction in Dennis Severs. *18 Folgate Street: The Tale of a House in Spitalfields*. (London: Vintage and Chatto and Windus, 2001 and 2002) ix.

¹⁶⁰ David Milne in conversation with Rosslynd Piggott at Dennis Severs’ House, basement kitchen, February 11 2014.

¹⁶¹ David Milne in conversation with Rosslynd Piggott at Dennis Severs’ House, basement kitchen, February 11 2014. “... they (his circle) all came to the house while Dennis was alive...”

¹⁶² Gavin Stamp, “Dennis Severs” *The Guardian*, accessed November 27 2016, www.theguardian.com/news/2000/jan/10/guardianobituaries.

wanted Dennis to join the family business.¹⁶³ (fig.76) Dennis clearly inhabited an entirely different realm. As a child he remembered hearing his teachers observe that he “lay somewhere between exceptional and mentally retarded...” and that he was constantly being shifted between teachers and year levels.¹⁶⁴ He was often called upon to tell stories to other school children on rainy days in an attempt to occupy them, and never had any problems with inventing. Every day after school Dennis watched British costume dramas on television. In a BBC documentary (2003) about Severs and his house, the historian Dan Cruickshank tells us,

He imagined a world of beautiful ancient houses governed by people of impeccable politeness, when people clothed in elegant gowns and breeches were constantly making declarations of love to one another. And once he had created this image, Dennis fell in love with it.¹⁶⁵

In Severs’ own recollections, he writes,

I always believed that a day would come when I would travel past picture frames and into the marinated glow of a warmer, mellower and more romantic light. There was one such light, in particular, that I saw in combination of old varnish and paint, that appealed to me as my ideal. By the age of eleven it was identified as *English*.¹⁶⁶

From the age of fifteen, the quest began to locate that light. Dennis earned money from different jobs, delivering papers after school, dishwashing jobs, even not eating lunches in order to save

¹⁶³ Dan Cruickshank, “The house that wouldn’t die” BBC 2003 (online video), accessed November 27, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eAjZWZwxg_g.

¹⁶⁴ Dennis Severs, *18 Folgate Street: The Tale of a House in Spitalfields* (London: Vintage and Chatto and Windus, 2002) 2.

¹⁶⁵ Cruickshank, BBC, 2003.

¹⁶⁶ Severs, 4.

funds for his travel. He was first able to visit England in 1965 and again in 1966. In 1967, travelling by sea, just five days after graduating from high school, he permanently emigrated to London at the age of eighteen.¹⁶⁷

The reality of late 1960s London was far from his romantic dreams. At this time, Britain was in the throes of trying to modernise and sweep away memories of the past, particularly graven memories of two world wars. Entire quarters of historic towns were being demolished and replaced by often very ill advised and ugly high-rise housing blocks and office towers.¹⁶⁸ Severs must have felt both confronted and disappointed by this strident atmosphere of gentrification. In response, it appears that Severs made the extraordinary, yet clear and conscious decision to abandon the twentieth century.¹⁶⁹ Indeed on the inside of the front door of 18 Folgate Street his own note (still there today), clearly positioned next to a spy hole as the last thing one might see before opening the door, reads, “The Late 20th Century may be a fascinating place to visit; but surely nobody would ever want to live in it?” (fig.77)

In 1969, Severs acquired a Victorian horse drawn carriage and started conducting tours in the backstreets of West End London. It was the only privately owned carriage in London, a 1840s Landau with an early 1800s harness. Severs and his horseman, Haydn wore original uniforms.¹⁷⁰ (fig.78) Severs recalls, “The atmosphere of these backwaters, with the clip-clop of the horse and carriage, worked as a time machine, and I was beginning to speak in the ‘dramatic present’, as if things in the past were happening right now. The combination worked astonishingly well, with people returning years later to say that they felt they had been on another planet while in

¹⁶⁷ Severs, 5.

¹⁶⁸ Cruickshank, BBC, 2003.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid. In conversation, the opinion of Dennis Severs’ editor, Jenny Uglow.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., Nationwide, BBC TV (1978).

the centre of their own city.”¹⁷¹ His friend, Douglas Blain describes the content of the tours: “... recited in rich, breathy, mid-Atlantic tones from his perch on the back axle was inclined to be on the light side (he was dyslexic and no great reader), but the emotional content, themed on the decline and fall of the British Empire, was such that, after an hour and a half, there was seldom a dry eye in the house.”¹⁷²

During his first decade in London, Severs lived in several rental properties, one being a small apartment in Canning Place Mews, off Palace Gate, where he was able to keep his horse and carriage.¹⁷³ His tours became very well known and most likely profitable. Severs was also working as a day porter at Christie’s, South Kensington, “...by night, when he was supposed to be studying law, he was leading a social life to die for, having already befriended everyone worth knowing in that celebrity-rich quarter...”¹⁷⁴ Later when he had to move from Canning Mews, through certain elevated and mysterious social connections, he was given permission to temporarily use the Royal Mews.¹⁷⁵ During these times, Severs had already started collecting, beginning as a sport and soon developing into a daily obsession in the early morning London street markets and later salerooms. When asked by certain dealers what he was looking for or had found with so little money, Severs replied he was “collecting auras: signposts to the thinking of other times.”¹⁷⁶ He believed that his collecting activities would enable him to, “eventually work out what the *mood* was that once related them all: the spell that had constituted an age. From there I would assimilate what I heard about real history... and what little I do know about

¹⁷¹ Severs, 6-7.

¹⁷² Douglas Blain, “Dennis Severs as I knew him.” *The Spitalfields Trust*, Newsletter 1999, 3.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid. David Milne, a close friend of Dennis’s and current curator at Dennis Severs’ House told me in conversation, (January 2015 at DSH), that after Dennis died, representatives from the Royal household came to the house to remove papers and most likely photos that were in Dennis’s possession. This is an aspect of his private life that is certainly mysterious and most likely unknowable.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Severs, 6.

English history, I know this way. I can only dig into the air for the core of a subject and then work outwards from there. Human nature first, history later, as proof. I call it working *inside out*.”¹⁷⁷

Severs was certainly familiar with the region of Spitalfields, famous still today (albeit rather more gentrified, even sanitised) for its longstanding markets in an area that was then run down and somewhat forgotten.¹⁷⁸ The area has long been populated by various immigrants being home to the newest influx of Bangladeshi immigrants in the 1960s, many of whom still run food businesses along Brick Lane and work in fabric industries. Large parts of the area were blighted with poverty and rampant crime during the Victorian era including the notorious killings of Jack the Ripper. Nearby Dean Street was claimed in 1881 to be “perhaps the foulest and most dangerous street in the metropolis”;¹⁷⁹ Horace Warner’s recently published photographs of children in the area reveal young faces that feel hauntingly present, their small bodies clothed in muddy rags.¹⁸⁰ They are often depicted working, tending to younger siblings and engaged in activities beyond their age. Besides being images of dire poverty, these tender portraits of alarming uneasy clarity and emotive presence offer a compassionate and humane vision of lives at this time.¹⁸¹ It is still somehow surprising that the area had stood for so long in neglect, perhaps bound by collective memory or even fearful stigma. Such stereotypical views, however, create opportunity for those who could see beyond them. The artists, Gilbert and George and Tracey Emin, the writer Jeanette Winterson, and the historian Dan Cruickshank, all saw early

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ In 1638 Charles I issued a license for selling flesh, fowl and roots in the area known as Spittle Fields. *Old Spitalfields Market* (2008).

¹⁷⁹ Wikipedia, “Spitalfields,” Wikipedia, accessed November 27 2016, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spitalfields; Jerry White, *London in the Nineteenth Century: A Human Awful Wonder of God* (London: Jonathon Cape Publishers, 2007), 323.

¹⁸⁰ Horace Warner. *Spitalfields Nippers*. (London: Spitalfields Life Books Ltd. 2014)

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

opportunities, purchasing Huguenot buildings here in need of restoration for homes and studios and in doing so became part of an active preservation movement in the area. The Spitalfields Historic Building Trust was formed in the late 1960s in order to preserve entire streets of Huguenot houses from the rapid and still to this day aggressive growth of the nearby City, London's financial district.

Severs certainly craved a home of his own and, in 1979, through income earned from his tours and in the same spirit of his collection of objects and his ability to spot an opportunity he was able to purchase a rundown seventeenth-century Huguenot silk-weaver's house—18 Folgate Street in Spitalfields. (fig. 79) However, Severs did not intend to restore the building in a conventional or historically correct way, but to bring the spaces to life as his home. “With a candle, a chamber pot and a bedroll, I began sleeping in each of the house's ten rooms so that I could arouse my intuition in the quest for each room's soul. Then, having neared it, I worked *inside out* to create what turned out to be a collection of atmospheres: moods that harbour the light and the spirit of various ages. As things came even closer together I began to realise that the material things I had been collecting all my life were really a cast of characters; and that 18 Folgate Street was destined to be their stage.”¹⁸²

The approach to 18 Folgate Street from the Liverpool Street Underground station is a journey of passing from one time to another in a very dramatic way. Tall towers of steel and glass on the boundaries of the city, are literally pressed up against dilapidated red brick Georgian houses. (fig. 80) The visual juxtaposition presents a shocking yet fascinating collision of time. The streetscapes here continue to morph and change, as developers persist in their grab for land and

¹⁸² Severs, 7.

property with proposals for vast constructions with little or no regard for histories.¹⁸³ (fig. 81)

Having left the glass and steel structures behind, standing at the entrance of 18 Folgate Street is like standing on a threshold of another time. Severs himself was explicit about this:

From where you stand in Folgate Street you hear a door being unlocked from inside. As it opens you should remind yourself of the FOUR DIMENSIONS. The FIRST dimension is back and forth—the SECOND is up and down; both-like the door itself—are *flat*. The THIRD dimension is not flat, but comes forward and goes back to constitute a *space between*. Within it life happens. The door is opened, but now you hesitate. The *third* dimension before you contains something more than space: as thick as treacle—it hosts a foreign fourth. And the FOURTH dimension, dear Reader, is *Time*. So into Another Time ...you go.¹⁸⁴

Once inside the house, the visitor encounters a series of atmospheres, each loosely based on history. Historical accuracy was not, however, Severs' aim. Many visitors arrive expecting to see a historical house, but leave feeling annoyed as they point out all the various inaccuracies. Severs, in turn, on various occasions marched visitors of this type to the front door and unceremoniously back onto the street. This is a site that is difficult to place or define. It is easy to misidentify Severs' work as a history house or even as a house museum, since he lived there, but the house does not function as his own memorial. Experiencing the house as a contemporary artist with understandings of installation practice, I see the house as an entire work closer to the idea of an immersive installation space recalling mesmeric detail of a Gesamtkunstwerk with

¹⁸³ Such proposals by powerful organisations continue to be a challenge for the Spitalfields Historic Trust. See recent campaign to Save Norton Folgate from British Land, March 2015. www.dennissevershouse.co.uk/news/

¹⁸⁴ Severs, 11.

Severs as the live-in performer and articulator of the myriad material surfaces of the ten rooms over the five levels from basement to attic of a kind of time machine for which the viewer is subjected. For the purposes of this research, while Severs is not working within an existing house museum context, rather he created an entire work within the shell of a historic building, his intervention is a series of deeply affecting, mesmeric and saturated fictive interior spaces, which is my reason for discussing it in detail and placing his house in a position of relevance in the context of artist intervention in house museums and the house. Questions surround his status as an artist or whether he considered himself as an artist.¹⁸⁵ A loosening of definition is useful and instructive; many highly creative individuals work across boundaries or rather do not perceive or regard them. In fact, this may be a definition of contemporary art practice. Severs was a creator of considerable originality and understood the effect of his work upon the viewer. It is the affecting experience of this house and the idea of house as a work, that makes it relevant to discuss in the context of this exegesis.

After Severs' death in 1999, the house was purchased by Spitalfields Historic Buildings Trust and has been maintained by a group of Severs' close associates and friends, among them, Mick Pedroli, the House Manager (until 2014) and David Milne, the curator. Milne had spent considerable time at the house during Severs' life and closely understood his vision.¹⁸⁶ (fig. 82) He continues Severs' work as a highly talented, experienced and committed creator of mise

¹⁸⁵ Peter Ackroyd. Introduction. in Dennis Severs. 18 Folgate Street: The Tale of a House in Spitalfields. (London: Vintage and Chatto and Windus, 2001 and 2002) ix.

¹⁸⁶ David Milne in conversation with Rosslynd Piggott at Dennis Severs' House, basement kitchen, February 11 2014. David Milne had been employed by Paul Dyson, as creator of installations, including work for the Royal Opera House, Versace's retrospective at the Royal College of Art, his clients included Giorgio Armani. Milne also dressed windows for London's largest department stores, Harvery Nichols, Selfridges and Harrod's, at a time when the budget for window display was vast and the installations considered art. Other work included sets for television, film and later again with Paul Dyson creating mise en scène for historical stands at Fine Art and Antique fairs at Olympia, Kensington. For example, Milne created the mise en scène in a seventeenth-century paneled room, in which every object was for sale.

en scène with an extraordinary eye for detail and understanding of the role of multi-sensorial imagery. If it were not for Milne's absolute dedication and understanding of Severs' work, the house would not continue to be the experience it still is today.

During Dennis's lifetime and to this day, visitors are instructed to enter and occupy the house in silence, an experience rare in present times. Silence operates as a key to the experience, in some causing irritation or anger and for others, as was Severs' wish, allowing deeper mental and emotional entry to the created atmospheres of these spaces. Visitors are told that the house is occupied by a fictive family, the Gervais, Huguenot silk-weavers who had anglicised their name to Jervis. The material narratives are based around their lives in the house as if members of the fictive family may have just left the room or are in the next room.

We enter the hallway, an interstitial space between interior and exterior, containing objects needed for that transition. Severs reminds us that it was common in the eighteenth century for houses to be purchased as brick shells, then a joiner was later commissioned to build walls to assemble rooms.

You stand, therefore, inside a piece of furniture with each a room like a drawer within a chest of drawers, and each with its own quirky characteristics and features. Like the interior of an old ship, there is a wooden tightness, and its creakiness reminds us that it is its business to protect and embrace.¹⁸⁷

The journey begins in the basement. Moving away from the closed front door, there is less and less available sunlight. The only illumination is provided by candlelight. Creaking downward,

¹⁸⁷ Severs, 21.

stairs lead to what appears to be an abandoned excavation. There is broken ceramic and glass, as well as bones, all covered in thick layers of cobweb. Severs used to begin his tours here with low wooden seats deliberately drawing the visitor's attention to the mostly earth floor. "Within, the color *black* is the only place to begin...a memory of the discomforts of being so low to the ground is essential to man's first step towards sophistication."¹⁸⁸ The excavation alludes to the early origins of Spitalfields: exhibited here are the fictive remains of the twelfth-century leper hospice, St. Mary's Spital.¹⁸⁹ The Jervis children developed a curiosity for the past and on rainy days started their own excavation, imagining also the Romans, Normans, Elizabethans, Stuarts and Georgians whilst digging the soil. Almost a cave, though not sheltering, the space is palpably cold, rotten and full of baleful shadows. The next room is much less unnerving—a basement kitchen.

The basement kitchen is steeped in the glow and warmth of comfort with a drooped ceiling so low your head is nearly touching it. According to Severs, "Here black is warmed from the inside out to blossom into honey...if this picture has a label, then it must be "Home"... Here in a basement in the centre of Europe's largest city, we seem to have come across a little paradise: a domestic Garden of Eden."¹⁹⁰ Severs tells us that on moving into 18 Folgate Street, this was the first room in which he settled. Though much of the ceiling was lying on the floor along with the carcass of a dead dog, the original dresser, wooden interior, sash windows, fireplace, lead plumbing and linseed white paint were all still in place.¹⁹¹ Severs found a place for all the objects he had collected over the years, lit the fire and began his occupation of the house and his work of

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, 25-26.

¹⁸⁹ In 1197 the site of the cemetery became a priory called "The New Hospital of St Mary without Bishopsgate" later known as St Mary Spital. Wikipedia, "Spitalfields," accessed November 27 2016, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spitalfields; Thomas Sloane and Phillipotts. *Excavations at the Priory and Hospital of St Mary Spital, London* (London: Museum of London, 1997), 19-20.

¹⁹⁰ Severs, 29-30.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 36.

building atmospheres. The dresser heaves with the weight of Severs' collected English ceramics. (fig.83) Here there are no orderly museum arrangements of perfect specimens, rather tumbling groups of obviously used, cracked and repaired, blue and white, rose coloured and sienna pastoral scenes. The picture is of tender domesticity, refuge and the slight disarray of home. The complexity of the scene, as throughout the house, is dazzlingly obsessive and spectacular in its cumulative detail. One glance cannot take in the whole. For myself, this had the effect of then being drawn further into details and the material intimacies of the *mise en scène*, which seemed endless. Yellowed children's paper cut-out dollies are suspended in mid play near the copper pots. (fig.84) Sugar mice appear between a stacked teapot, with a slumped lid and gorgeous arched plaited handle, and a blue and white English garden serving plate edged in Spring blooms and dancing butterflies. Nearly hidden on the shadowed mantelpiece almost scraping the ceiling, there is another ceramic scene depicting a country boy wooing a shepherdess. (fig. 85) Each tiny detail conjures an historical world of the imagination. Conversation does not flatten or interrupt sensed responses and as Severs wished, in silence we become held in an emotional involvement with the scenario that had been collected and placed, very carefully and precisely, as part of the narrative fiction of the Jervis family.

Severs was interested in the effect of his arrangements on the entire sensorium. In the kitchen, for example, on various visits I encountered generous still lifes of seasonal vegetables, enough to feed the fictive Jervis family and to generate an olfactory response in the visitor. Cut onions, fresh leek, glowing pumpkin, a compressed sugar loaf, tea, crushed spices and old flour split whilst reading an open recipe book have also been carefully placed.¹⁹² Log fires burn in this

¹⁹² The French call these large sugar loaves, *pain du sucre*. Whilst on a residency at the Cite Internationale des Arts, Paris in 1994, I was surprised to see this food item essentially from a previous era still in production in the window of a pharmacy on the Ile Sainte Louis. Its marvellous shape looking like a large sugar bullet. I purchased one and bought it back to Australia and eventually used in a work called *Love letter* a collaboration with Gregory Pryor. Exhibited in *Lovers* curated by Juliana Engberg at Heide Museum of Modern Art, 1995.

room and in the drawing room above. A strung rabbit and two pheasants are thankfully stuffed, remaining as visual images. Our sense of smell being regarded as the most immediate and vibrant connection to memory. Conjured and placed scents throughout the house provide a vivid and deeply resonant dimension to Severs' installations, and change depending on the season. At Christmas, for instance, the table in the Drawing Room is abundant with pungent festivity, a plated swan at its centre, surrounded by towering displays of candied fruits, pudding, spiced wines and a log fire burning sage leaves. During Severs' life, several accounts of the tours recall Severs actually pissing in the chamber pots in the bedrooms, the contents often being left for extended periods (and offending some visitors).¹⁹³

Though this particular effect is not re-enacted today, the curator David Milne is keeper of these atmospheres and performs what could be described as daily ritual, a detailed and very delicate process of some precision. On my various visits to the house from 2013 to 2016, when I have had the great privilege of being welcomed behind the scenes of this drama, I witnessed elaborate and vigorous preparations for a tour. In a strange and humorous moment, David dusted logs in the fireplace in the ground floor Drawing Room (fig. 86) and arranged grapes at the perfect angle to catch dim Winter light refracted through golden sherry in a Georgian glass. He ran up and down the five levels of the house, continuously throughout the day, adjusting the elaborate drapes of Huguenot silk, (fig.87) leaving a note at a believable abandoned angle, along with some unfinished sewing next to jewellery and rouge which the fictive Madame Jervis applied from a found mussel shell and placing fresh mint to enliven the kitchen. Wood fires are lit, beeswax candles arrive from a local chandler, the scent imbued with honey and pollen. Instructions are called out and echo throughout the house, up and down the levels, to helpers responsible for small details. Maintaining the atmospheres of the house is a complex task requiring constant

¹⁹³ Cruickshank, BBC, 2003.

daily attention, such is the fragility and tentative nature of Severs' interiors. I understand and perceive this attentive work as no different to working in a studio or installation space, adjusting details, weight, angle, gravity or the levitation of materials. The process is one of decision-making within the parameter of a concept, always with the desire to extend, invent, perhaps reimagine and subtly renew the spaces. Milne is Dennis Severs' angel in his daily devotion to keeping these atmospheres charged and alive. As Severs worked with the house as a vessel, this is also the continuum of Milne, who has worked for seventeen years since the death of Severs in 1999 maintaining these delicate atmospheres. His work is quite simply an act of love, preserving the vision of his strange and extraordinary friend. Seventeen years is a long time to work within the confines of one house, that was initially the vision of a dear friend, remembering that Severs lived in and created the house over a period of twenty years.¹⁹⁴ As Severs worked with the shifting spaces, changing over seasons and often in intricate detail from day to day, Milne's work mirrors and elaborates upon this action. I observe over my various visits, that Milne has innately accumulated over these seventeen years, a hyper-detailed, multi-sensorial, and trans-seasonal recall of all the myriad of spaces, nooks, and surfaces of the house. (fig.88) He understands, for instance, how the light in the corner of a room transforms from morning to afternoon and from Winter to Summer and how those differences in degree would influence the scent of herbs, seasonal flowers or stale bread. From day to day, Milne attends to micro details, a cluster of threaded crystallised sugar is poised over silver and cut glass, each material refracting and glowing in candlelight according to and in relation to their various properties. (fig.89) Candles are alight behind scallop shells sconces projecting dull upward light onto portrait paintings of the fictive Monsieur and Madame Jervis. Icing sugar falls in random sprinkling across a section of the dining table to evidence casual enjoyment. Wilted cool pale-blue hyacinth lean pungently against a papered wall, itself emitting the odour of English damp. In a profusion of multi-tasking,

¹⁹⁴ From 1979–1999.

further details are constantly adjusted across the five levels of the house, often simultaneously, so that a sensorial pitch is raised and built within the interiors. The cumulative sensorium leads us by vision, scent and sound through the spaces of the house and our own neural pathways. Severs, and now Milne, perform the roles of conductor, painter, composer and parfumeur working across disciplines to conjure a Gesamtkunstwerk that seduces and transports the visitor to a parallel world.

Such are the intertwined labours of Severs and Milne, that they became the subject of a recent book of fiction, *The Marvels*, by Brian Selznick.¹⁹⁵ The book, half of which consists of drawings and half of narrative prose, begins in 1766 with the pictorial story of a boy called Billy Marvel, who surviving a shipwreck, finds work in a London theatre. The second part of the story is loosely based on and dedicated to the lives of Dennis Severs and David Milne, who are fictively named Albert Nightingale and his nephew, Joseph Jervis. Fiction is doubled and tangles further with real life to become a thoroughly endearing homage to Severs and Milne. During my visit early 2016, Milne proudly presented me with a copy of this publication, produced in appearance like an old fashioned boys' own adventure book. In the afterword, Selznick describes Milne's great devotional care to the objects of the house as an act of love. As he writes:

On a cold winter's night a few years back, David Milne invited me to Dennis Severs' House when it was closed to the public. He made a fire in the dining room, and for an hour or two we talked. That entire time, David polished the black dining table, balancing on his knees, checking every inch of the surface of the table to make sure it was smooth and perfect. I'm sure David didn't give this a second thought. To him, he was just polishing a table. But I remember thinking it was one of the most beautiful things I've ever witnessed. That's what love and devotion look like, as I watched him so

¹⁹⁵ Brian Selznick, *The Marvels* (New York: Scholastic Press, 2015).

lovingly caress that tabletop. I've never forgotten that moment, and I gave it to Joseph at the end of this book to show how much he loved his uncle and his house.¹⁹⁶

Sounds add another sensorial layer to the fabrication of the fictive life of the Jervis family within the house. During his early occupation of the kitchen, Severs realised that the house needed a family to become a home and thus the beginning of a fiction.¹⁹⁷ In addition to his collecting of objects from markets, Severs started collecting sounds. He writes,

I found a family abandoned in the streets and alleys of the East End—loudspeakers, which I looted from the backs of discarded television sets. I then recorded domestic sounds: crying babies, bottles being uncorked with glasses being filled, collected and washed; fires poked and clocks wound—all recorded here within the house's own wooden acoustics. Then I placed the speakers under the floorboards and inside cupboards, for the family was destined—like the real source of sound anywhere—to remain out of sight.¹⁹⁸

During my various visits to the house, the first floor, in particular reverberated with sounds of clocks tick-tocking, horse drawn carriages on a cobbled street and undecipherable bumps, scraping chairs, creaking floorboards and doors. The aural effect provided a background texture, the production technically somewhat unsophisticated, as described by Severs above.

Brian Selznick gives a beautiful and very touching account of the importance of sound in the

¹⁹⁶ Ibid, 654-655; "The dining table, where the buffet had lain all morning, was scratched and scuffed. Joseph loosened his cravat, took out a cloth and polish from the pantry, and got on his knees. He leaned over the table at eye level, just like his uncle used to do, and he slowly, carefully polished the table until it shone like new. Looking out across the glistening black expanse was like looking across the black ocean, and he could see his own reflection in it." Ibid, 601.

¹⁹⁷ Severs, 38-39.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

house through his fictive tale of Albert Nightingale (Severs) and Joseph Jervis (Milne) in a scene at the end of Albert's life:

Joseph listened to Albert's laboured breathing and the occasional car that passed outside, and realized the noises were all wrong. He got up and went to the back office, where he opened the hidden panel and flicked the switch to ON. The sounds of the Marvels, their voices and footsteps, their silverware and bells and carriages, came to life all around him. Billy was alive again, whispering in the next room, and the ghostly bird sang once more.¹⁹⁹

Throughout Severs' own account, *18 Folgate Street*, he intersperses writing with (words for) sounds, often quite oddly, at random, as if instead of words he would prefer to use a sound. For example: "You must close your eyes to help you see. Outside—and coming nearer—is the clippity-clop, clippity-clop, louder and louder of horses' hooves. A horseman rides up and passes the door and then softer and softer—and softer and softer—he rides on by. I whisper: Where?when... are we?"²⁰⁰ And, "Listen to the old brass clock...Clink...clank. Clank...clank...I gesture to the still life before us...."²⁰¹ It is as if these thoughts are literally exploding or popping in his mind as he is on his own journey through time. Severs (and his editor) chose not to remove these idiosyncrasies.²⁰² The text and the house convey a picture of Severs as a fluidly ambidextrous maker, readily shifting between thought (part fact and fiction), sound, scent, sight and touch in a way that perhaps recalls the cruel comments of his school teachers—that he was part genius, part lunatic.

¹⁹⁹ Selznick, 580.

²⁰⁰ Severs, 54.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 62.

²⁰² Editor Jenny Uglow.

Milne shares Severs' love of collecting and also possess a skilful eye for overlooked treasures, often bringing his finds into the house to use as part of the *mise en scène*. In the Jervis bedroom, I was shown drawers of recently found Spitalfields silks bought very inexpensively either because they were damaged fragments or simply overlooked in local markets. During my residency at Bow Quarter, upon hearing that I was gathering a small collection of nineteenth-century lace from the Portobello Road markets, to which I was making responses in cut and fringed silk, (fig. 90, 91) Milne, on our next meeting bought from home his gorgeous collection of Elizabethan laces. He proceeded to lay them all out on the coffee table, surrounded by local hipsters at Shoreditch House—a sumptuous and extravagant 'show and tell' treat.²⁰³ Collectors relish and appreciate collections other than their own. Perhaps they recognise a similar affliction, a tendency to obsess, and an underlying melancholy. A need to gather a world (or family) of objects, found and selected, to be held and admired in a more controlled and detailed manner than is possible in the random nature of the everyday. Collections of objects may represent aspects of the world in micro and multiple form and may be fascinatingly diverse, in some cases reaching pathological depths of obsession.²⁰⁴

One of the materials that is most strongly present throughout the Severs' House is fabric. From the extravagant floor-length drapes of Spitalfields silks in the ground floor drawing room, eroding lace on the remnants of a Jacobean gentleman's cuff, (fig. 92) spider-web-fine lace on a fireplace guard to countless other examples. Continuing through the house, after leaving the polite civilisation of the piano nobile, one encounters its opposite—an adjacent disordered men's

²⁰³ Australia Council for the Arts, artist in residency, Acme studio at Bow Quarter, 2013- 2014; I have since held two exhibitions of this body of works, *Last light* held at Gallery 360 Degrees, Tokyo, Japan and *Last light/in vapour* held at Sutton Gallery, Melbourne, Australia both in 2015.

²⁰⁴ The nineteenth-century writer, Joris-Karl Huysmans gives full reign to the extreme collecting obsessions of his fictive Count des Esseintes in *A Rebours (Against Nature)*, that goes from one obsession to the next throughout the novel ending with his pitiful character as a complete nervous wreck; Joris-Karl Huysmans, *A Rebours (Against Nature)* (London and New York: Penguin Classics, 1979).

drinking room—before proceeding upwards to the next floor, passing on the landing a towering array of translucent sugary preserved fruits. (fig. 93) On this level are the sleeping quarters and the bedroom of Madame and Monsieur Jervis. In this space of privacy and intimacy, the display and the materiality of fabric is opulent, functioning almost like a cloud and an internal garden. During my visits since 2013, among the ten spaces of the house and their narratives, I have kept returning to this room, as this is where I found the most affinity and relationship to my own interests and past works, especially those related to fabric, the act of dressing, the space of the bedroom, the image of the bed and further still allusions to Eastern influences.²⁰⁵

A huge canopied bed is the dominant structure and image in this room. The bed is a virtual room within a room, heavily draped in billowing cloud formations on all four corners. (fig.94) Despite being the private marital space of the couple, Mr. Jervis is a background and barely visible presence here, his boots thrown aside in the far corner of the room. The atmosphere is of the feminine. As the eye travels across the surfaces of Madame Jervis's dressing table, we comprehend, both intellectually and emotionally, the preparatory space of a lady, as if we are witness to her private space. The intricacy of this object universe is such that the eye is drawn into each detail and the emotive register is one of intense intimacy. The eye encounters a lacquered dressing mirror of Chinese influence upon a drape of Spitalfields silk and a tumbling array of objects related to make-up and dressing. Strings of pearls twist across lacquer, curl into glass bowls, across paste buckles. There is a flourish of ostrich feathers, a discarded lace handkerchief, rouge in an empty mussel shell, hairs caught in a lice comb, a reminder note to attend Christ Church, and a clustered pin cushion. The effect is of a still life, as if the moment after Elizabeth Jervis has left the room has been frozen in perpetuity. (fig.95)

²⁰⁵ In particular, works such as *High Bed* (1998), *La Somnambule* (1996), *Conversation* (1995-96), *Constructing Paris* (1996), various works made in response to the Sai-no Kuni Saitama artist in residency in 1997 (and many trips to Japan since), such as the bedrooms of *Murmur* at the Johnston Collection in 2013.

Over the various visits to Dennis Severs' House, I have come to understand the house as being a vast collection of overlapping object universes, or islands, each telling its own story. Though such is the density of this universe, the whole house is somewhat impossible to see or sense in one visit. Each further visit, I absorbed a little more, further unseen details, as well as observing shifts and seasonal changes. The space in-between, as Dennis tells us, is the atmosphere that is conjured, the sense impressions, thoughts and emotions that carry the viewer through the house.²⁰⁶

A small table for breakfast and tea is again a scene in motion as objects are left in mid-action, unfinished tea, notes being scribed and freshly opened letters. Towering over the breakfast table, a mantelpiece arrangement of blue and white ceramics appears like a shrine to the East, 'the Other', that place unknown. (fig.96) Severs intended it as a place for the Jervis imagination to drift, "whether by sea or by sky—to Somewhere Else."²⁰⁷

China Blue is an imaginary oriental city that sits high upon rocks, crags and cliffs overlooking the China Sea. 'Listen,' I begin. 'I hear the gulls, the lapping water and the popping creaks of our wooden junk? Feel the balmy breeze scooping at our sails as we are blown so gently in. Alas the Orient! Look! Just as the Jervises always imagined it—too. An entire city built of the finest porcelain: with turrets and towers, gates and walls: its citizens have come out to stand, watch and wave us in. Everyone is porcelain. Tiered right up—stacked from the harbour on the rocks, right up into the mountains—to

²⁰⁶ "You see," I say to your imagination, while knowing too well that while some part of your mind is still concerned with identifying 'things', another part is busy creating Edward Jervis, "the Space Between is more important to him than anyone or anything on the other side." Severs, 112.

²⁰⁷ "Whether in blue jeans or porcelain, the reason that blue and white are so universally popular as a pair of colors is that the combination transports the imagination 'over'—whether by sea or by sky—to Somewhere Else." Severs, 211.

disappear into clouds, to somewhere near the seat of Gods.²⁰⁸

I too am taken to the East, reminded of well-worn trade pathways across oceans and land to arrive at 18 Folgate Street.

Madame Jervis's dress on a standing mannequin waits in poise in itself a further loaded fabric universe in this room of sleep, drift and personal preparation. Her dress is constructed in an exquisitely opulent Spitalfields silk depicting English flowers, with a further trace echo to the Orient, as tendrils and mannered scrolls twirl around flowers that may be identifiable as carnations and delicate snowdrops. The dress stands as an absent body, softly glowing; the light refracted from the silk and metal threads might be shining through a Winter English garden, with its pale mud earth. Our gaze enters this ideal silk and woven garden and then strolling, we encounter Madame, almost unintended—we are in a space of intense intimacy. Folding undulations of heavy silk lead us through landscapes of shadow and light, the hidden and revealed, like a form of breathing; inhale and exhale. The gown dresses, embellishes and gently intimates Madame's femininity in her undress. (fig.97)

None of the fabrics in the house are stored or displayed in archival museum conditions, nor to my knowledge have they been restored, they are not behind glass and certainly not labelled. We encounter the fabrics at very close proximity as they have been found and arrived to us through time. Though this dress fabric is not dated, it could be up to 300 years old, as Huguenot and Irish weavers were mostly active in Spitalfields from late 1600s to the mid 1800s.²⁰⁹ We encounter time through our close engagement with this material surface. I have always found fabric as a

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Clare Browne, "*The Silk Industry in Spitalfields*," Ravenrow, accessed November 27 2016, www.ravenrow.org/pdf/38/the_silk_industry_in_spitalfields.pdf.

material to be a particularly potent carrier of time and human presence. Perhaps this is due to the fact, when used to construct garments, we wear them against our bodies and skin, we live, breathe and even die in them. We seem to automatically connect with this human information when we see a garment, whether it be from an opportunity shop, an Egyptian binding, one of Marie Antoinette's gowns or a Spitalfields silk dress. A sense reaction to fabric in a garment is highly essential, intimate, even primitive as we round up a whole range of emotive responses from compassion, wonder, curiosity, desire, disgust as that relates to our own body. In unrestored garment fabrics, there are bound to be nano traces of skin and hair that would allow a scientist to locate DNA information. Our primitive selves locate and make this connection outside of a laboratory. As another direct example of felt connection, the experience of trying on second hand shoes, gives us a vivid impression of the past owner, as our own foot makes contact with the impression made by a former wearer's weight and step. A further layer of human connection with the dress of Madame Jervis is through the evident arduous and meticulous labour of the fabric creation in a pre-industrial era. For the more elaborate designs, draw boys were employed to lift the warp threads on a drawloom. This process required the boys to lift the warp thread allowing a master weaver to create the design. Less than one yard of fabric could be made each day, though this time consuming technique was superseded by the Jacquard loom in the nineteenth century. Luxury affordable by few and grinding labour are still inexplicably woven. The conditions of entering this silken garden are due to skills of a master and the concentrated efforts of a boy lifting each warp thread around a design.²¹⁰ The presence of touch and the hands of the master and the boy are literally embedded in each warp and weft thread as we encounter the garden today, invoking further layers of emotive response to this rarefied surface and a technique lost to time.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

The Spitalfields silk of Madame Jervis's dress is the one image I have returned to film in the house. In this image there is recognition of a connection to previous works I have made in fabric.²¹¹ (fig.98) Here I find a point of conversation with Severs. Perhaps, the feminine realm was not something Severs felt confident in elaborating, he did not do so in his writing, though this image and room are so richly infused in mood. I have collected the image as a souvenir of an atmosphere and hope to insert it in my studio/ apartment on the other side of the world—the New World.²¹² Through a focussed gaze upon this fabric garden, I hope to extract even further atmospheres from the substance. A little like looking at the same substance with a more powerful microscope or being able to travel into deeper space, or from another angle, not knowing what one will find in newly found micro, macro or tilted spaces.

From the sleeping level, the journey and narrative through the house continues further upwards to the top of the house. Here is a small room for a family of boarders living in an atmosphere of ruin. Severs' narrative relates to a time when the silk industry was in decline and many were living in dire poverty. The image is further fancifully elaborated in the adjoining room that is steeped in dramatic gloom, turning to the stories of Charles Dickens, this is the downright scary bedroom of Ebenezer Scrooge. Here Severs takes us to a place where all civilisation is stripped and daily human life is threadbare returning to a primitive place. From the top of the house Severs directs us once more to the ground floor in a cyclic movement, now into the early age of Victoria, an age of Reason and Romance, a place of stability and of home, although not without the shadow of what can be lost and inevitable cycles of time and human life. We, the viewer are an integral part of Severs' observations, for while we have been witness, each atmosphere has entered our sensorium and now it is time to return to the world outside, which Severs has named the eleventh room of his

²¹¹ *La Somnambule* (1996), *Conversation* (1995-96) and a recent body of works *Last light* (2013- 2015), nineteenth-century lace collected at Portobello Road and cut and fringed silk.

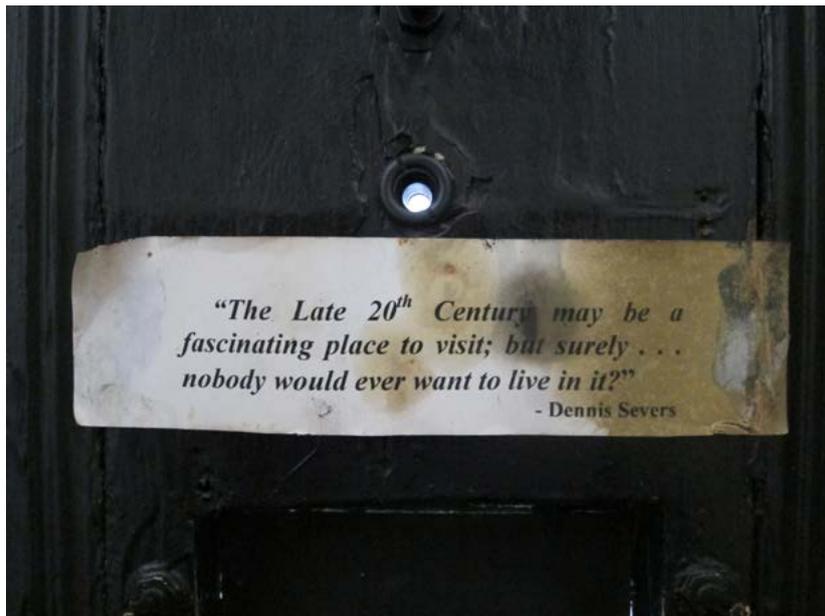
²¹² In much the same spirit as I collected air samples in *Collection of Air* (1993-94).

Figures:

**Chapter Three:
Meeting Mr. Severs, His Constructed World:
Dennis Severs' House, Spitalfields, East London.**



76. Photographer unknown. Circa 1950s. Photographs of the Severs family in California. Archive, Dennis Severs' House, Spitalfields, London.



77. Dennis Severs' House, Spitalfields, London. Interior rooms, various materials.
Photograph by Rosslynd Piggott 2014.



78. Photographer unknown, circa late 1960s- 1970s. Dennis Severs' House, Spitalfields, London. Interior rooms, various materials. Photograph by Rosslynd Piggott 2014.



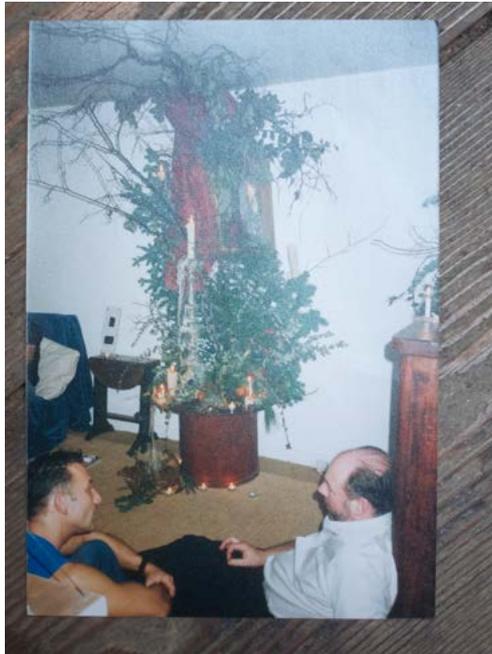
79. Photographer unknown. Circa 1979. Archive, Dennis Severs' House, Spitalfields, London.



80. View of Folgate Street from the front of Dennis Severs' House towards the City. Photograph by Rossllynd Piggott. 2015.



81. David Milne in the surrounding area of Norton Folgate during proposals by British Land for vast areas of this historic area to be demolished for the construction of high-rise towers. Photograph by Rossllynd Piggott. 2015.



82. Photographer unknown. Circa 1980s. David Milne (left) and Dennis Severs (right). Archive, Dennis Severs' House, Spitalfields, London



83. Dennis Severs' House, Spitalfields, London. Interior rooms, various materials.
Photograph by Rossllynd Piggott 2014.



84. Dennis Severs' House, Spitalfields, London. Interior rooms, various materials.
Photograph by Rossllynd Piggott 2014.



85. Dennis Severs' House, Spitalfields, London. Interior rooms, various materials.
Photograph by Rossllynd Piggott 2014.



86. Dennis Severs' House, Spitalfields, London.
Curator, David Milne at work. Interior rooms, various materials.
Photograph by Roslynd Piggott 2014.



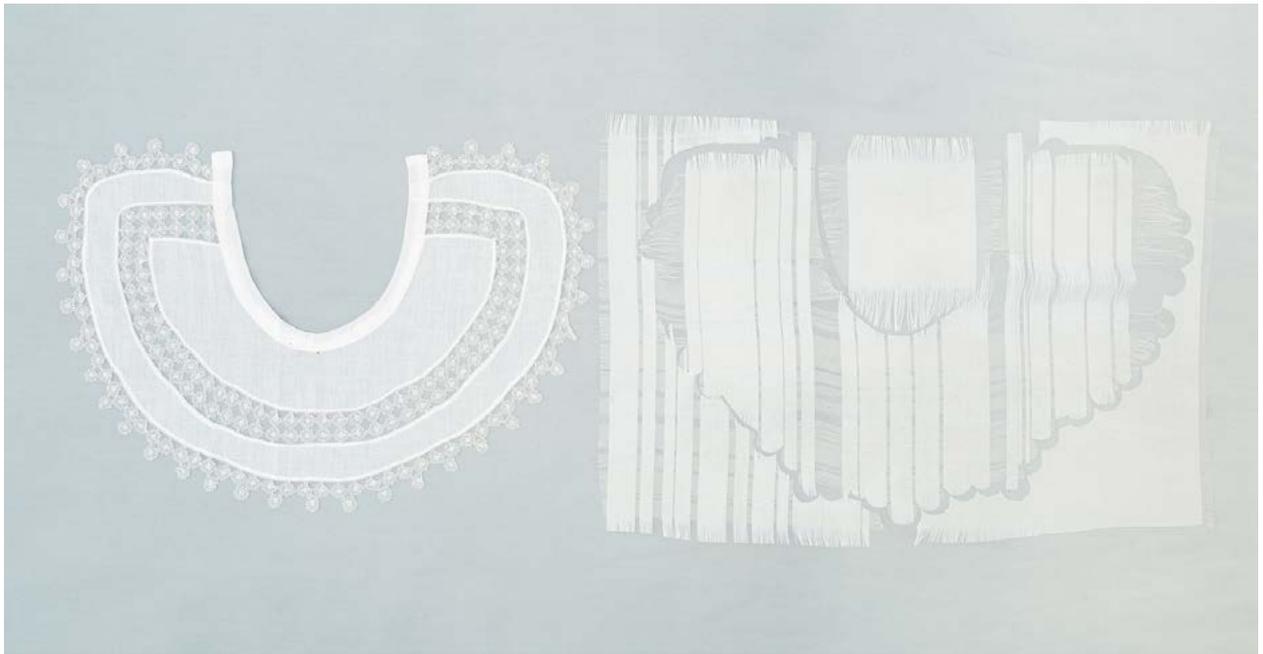
87. Dennis Severs' House, Spitalfields, London.
Interior rooms, various materials.
Photograph by Roslynd Piggott 2014.



88. Dennis Severs' House, Spitalfields, London. Interior rooms, various materials.
Photograph by Rosslynd Piggott 2014.



89. Dennis Severs' House, Spitalfields, London. Interior rooms, various materials.
Photograph by Rosslynd Piggott 2014.



90. Rosslynd Piggott. *Flower cloud collar and unfinished edge*. 2014. Nineteenth century English cotton collar and cut and fringed silk. 30 x 78 cm. Solo exhibition, *Last light*, Gallery 360 Degrees, Tokyo. *Last light/ in vapour*, Sutton Gallery, Melbourne. 2015.
Photograph: Christian Cappurro.



91. Rosslynd Piggott. *Last light/ in vapour*. 2015. Detail of exhibition installation at Sutton Gallery, Melbourne.
Photograph: Christian Cappurro.



92. Dennis Severs' House, Spitalfields, London.
Interior rooms, various materials.
Photograph by Rosslynd Piggott 2014.



93. Dennis Severs' House, Spitalfields, London.
Interior rooms, various materials.
Photograph by Rosslynd Piggott 2014.



94. Dennis Severs' House, Spitalfields, London. Interior rooms, various materials. Photograph by Rosslynd Piggott 2014.



95. Dennis Severs' House, Spitalfields, London. Interior rooms, various materials. Photograph by Rosslynd Piggott 2014.



96. Dennis Severs' House, Spitalfields, London. Interior rooms, various materials. Photograph by Rosslynd Piggott 2014.



97. Dennis Severs' House, Spitalfields, London. Interior rooms, various materials.
Photograph by Rosslynd Piggott 2014.



98. Rosslynd Piggott. *La Somnambule*. 1996-97. Detail. Silk, hooks, coathangers, Perspex.

house.²¹³

The wayward and cyclic movement through the house, up and down, its narratives become more and more complex, so that even after many visits and with its seasonal changes, I feel I could never grasp or know it entirely. Severs' overarching motto for his work is "Aut Visum Aut Non—Either you see it or you don't."²¹⁴ Upon leaving the house overfilled with these unique atmospheres, a feeling of instant maladjustment to the world immediately outside the door overcomes me, to the point of physical and emotional exhaustion. A melancholic longing for another place and time lingers whilst eating lunch at Itsu at the present day Spitalfields Market, surrounded by City of London workers—this might be the effect of having seen what Severs wanted me to see.²¹⁵

²¹³ Dennis Severs. "The Plot," Dennis Severs' House, accessed November 27 2016, <http://www.dennissevershouse.co.uk/the-plot/>.

²¹⁴ Severs, 276.

²¹⁵ Itsu is a ubiquitous and very popular chain of low cost Asian-style café based in London.

Chapter Four: Aerial Dreaming

Time and Space Collapse in Venice

From there, after six days and seven nights, you arrive at Zobeide, the white city, well exposed to the moon, with streets wound about themselves as in a skein. They tell this tale of its foundation: men of various nations had an identical dream. They saw a woman running at night through an unknown city; she was seen from behind, with long hair and she was naked. They dreamed of pursuing her. As they twisted and turned, each of them lost her. After the dream they set out in search of that city; they never found it, but they found one another; they decided to build a city like the one in the dream. In laying out the streets, each followed the course of his pursuit; at the spot where they lost the fugitive's trail, they arranged spaces and walls differently from the dream, so she would be unable to escape again.²¹⁶

Italo Calvino evokes the City of Venice in his *Invisible Cities* through prose that shifts fluidly from passages of desire, memory, eyes, signs, trade, the dead, sky, continuity and the hidden. The city of islands presents a constant shifting between openness, drifting, the monumental and the closed. A sense of imminent collapse is mirrored in our own bodily response as we walk from solid rock fondamenta to swaying vaporetto stops. As we are mostly fluid, so too is this city. Our own breathing and step finds a rhythm with the tidal flow of the city. Venice is a city reimaged, an impossible reality, supremely audacious in its dreaming, exquisite in her ageing vulnerability; threatened, yet still standing.

Within this extreme construction—a dreamlike reality—we are removed, destabilised, charmed, twirled. The city invokes and even demands a mirrored response, as if there is no other way that one could respond, other than deeply, repetitively, obsessively; as if in love. Joseph Brodsky, the

²¹⁶ Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities* (London: Vintage Books, 1997), 39.

Russian writer who regularly visited Venice only during winter over seventeen years, compares immersion in the city to an ocular and bodily eroticism.²¹⁷

If there is anything erotic to those blueprints' marble consequences, it is the sensation caused by the eye trained on any of them—the sensation similar to that of the fingertips touching for the first time your beloved's breast or, better yet, shoulder. It is the telescopic sensation of coming into contact with the cellular infinity of another body's existence—a sensation known as tenderness and proportionate perhaps only to the number of cells that body contains.²¹⁸

This is a romance that is located, yet as elusive as the city's shifting waters and all consuming. The need to return is compulsive. Through its wavering sway and glimmering decay, Venice itself like a shifting body invokes our heart and through its stupendous impossibility opens us to poetic possibility, suspending our sense of time, place and body. Its built labyrinth holds us, caught and then releases us. The spaces are both internally multiplied and then opening to sky and water. Even water here functions like an internal space, becoming more ink-like, darkened stilled mirrors gliding further into the liquid maze. It is the perfect city to initiate further collision, a collapse of time and space through a sited dislocation of objects. This is how we encounter the exhibition *Artempo: Where Art Becomes Time* staged at the Palazzo Fortuny in 2007.

Firstly, it is necessary to locate the enchanted vessel, Palazzo Fortuny. Originally known as Palazzo Pesaro degli Orfei, the Palazzo Fortuny was built for a noble Pesaro family.²¹⁹ The

²¹⁷ Born 1940-Died 1996. Brodsky is buried in the Protestant section on the cemetery island of San Michele, Venice; P.D Smith. www.theguardian.com/books/2013/mar/22/watermark-essay-venice-review 1

²¹⁸ Joseph Brodsky, *Watermark: An essay on Venice* (London: Penguin,1992), 32-33.

²¹⁹ www.fortuny.visitmuve.it/en/home/

building most likely dates from the thirteenth century.²²⁰ The external features are distinctly Gothic in character, the front facade facing Campo San Beneto, now not seen to its full effect due to the surrounding more recently built houses, comprises of an imposing series of pointed arched windows diminishing in size to the top floor. (fig.99, 100)

Mariano Fortuny y Madrazo (b.1871–d.1949) was born in Rome to a painter father, Mariano Fortuny y Marsal (originating from Granada), and Cecilia de Madrazo (who belonged to an aristocratic family).²²¹ Both parents had a love of collecting. In 1860 his father was commissioned to record scenes of war between Morocco and Spain (in Morocco), which gave him the opportunity to explore the many back alleys and markets of Morocco– he collected furniture, Syrian muskets, damascened scimitars, spiked Saracen helmets, prayer mats, and copper trays.²²² Cecilia’s collecting focussed on fabrics, in particular those of the fifteenth and sixteenth century, a period in which opulence reached a level of magnificence before it was constrained by the Reformation.²²³ French poet and novelist, Henri de Régnier describes a scene of a showing of a vast treasure-hold of fabrics within Palazzo Martinengo, the first building occupied in Venice by the widowed Cecilia and her two children:

Slowly, slowly the magic is wrought: one by one, the fabrics are brought forth, unfolded, viewed, and cast over the back of an armchair or a sofa, later to be replaced in the great cassone where they reside. There are heavy fabrics from Venice, Genoa, and the East, sumptuous and delicate, brightly colored or muted, with rich designs of leaves and figures: velvets once worn by doges and

²²⁰ Anne-Marie Deschodt and Doretta Davanzo Poli, *Fortuny*. (New York: Abrams, 2001), 29.

²²¹ Mariano Fortuny’s full Spanish name combining his father’s name and his mother’s aristocratic name, Madrazo. ed. Axel Vervoodt and Mattijs Visser, *Artempo: Where Time Becomes Art* (Ghent, Belgium: Mer. Paper Kunsthalle, 2007), 9.

²²² Deschodt and Davanzo Poli, 11.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 13.

caliphs. There are rich brocades, subtle silks, church vestments, court finery, charming taffetas and glimmering satins sprinkled with tiny florets and bouquets...It all happens in a rustle of invisible wings, as the piles of cloth accumulate around the great room, as evening draws in and Madame Fortuny bends over her inexhaustible trove. In the hush of her palace, she is like the stately conductor of an orchestra directing a mysterious concerto of precious fabrics in the Venetian twilight.²²⁴

Sadly, Cecilia was widowed early in her marriage. She initially travelled to Paris before settling in Venice with her two young children, Mariano and Maria Luisa. Palazzo Martinengo on the Grand Canal became their first Venetian home. Mariano was raised in the almost cultish memory of his father, his mother more of a companion and creative guide, as was the role of his future wife, Henriette Nigrin. Close family friends included artists of many disciplines from Spain, forming a growing and international artistic circle who gathered at Palazzo Martinengo.²²⁵ Mariano grew up in this atmosphere between Venice and Paris, moving in a circle of Belle Epoque Parisian artists and also studying technological subjects, such as photography, printing methods, electrical engineering and machinery design. After his schooling, Fortuny settled in Venice, living for ten years at Palazzo Martinengo, where his father's memory continued to exert a strong guiding influence on his life. Despite living at a time of great artistic experiment, Fortuny had no faith in contemporary art, convinced it would not survive, and was even less concerned with the political issues of the day.²²⁶ Anne-Marie Deschodt in her *The Magician of Venice* writes, "Fortuny has chosen Venice as his place of refuge and Venice was the loveliest, most moving and moribund city in the world."²²⁷ In spite of this place of ancient refuge and a general disenchantment with the modern world, perhaps even due to it, Fortuny worked to

²²⁴ Henri Régner, *The Balcony or Venetian Life*, quoted in Deschodt and Davanzo Poli, 15-16.

²²⁵ The composer Isaac Albeniz, poet Jose-Maria de Heredia, photographer, Jose-Maria Sert, in Deschodt and Davanzo Poli, 17.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 23.

²²⁷ Deschodt, *The Magician of Venice* in *Ibid.*

create another world, an ode to the revival of antiquity, freely encompassing many art forms and technical knowledge resulting in radical innovation during his lifetime.

At the age of thirty, in 1900, as if he had been waiting for the new century, Fortuny declared his independence from his family, crossed the Grand Canal and set up a studio initially in one room of the then dilapidated Palazzo degli Orfei. The palace was away from the bustle and glamour of the Grand Canal—set in a quiet corner of Campo San Beneto more suited to an atmosphere of privacy, even isolation. The Orfei Musical Society had occupied the building between 1786 and 1826 and had done considerable damage. Later, bands of local craftsmen had taken over the building. When Fortuny first moved in there were over 350 people working there.²²⁸ Gradually, he acquired additional rooms, restoring and removing partitions and additions until the interior and exterior resembled the original form and he finally became the sole occupant. He not only restored the structure to its medieval appearance, but also decided to fill the rooms and spaces with objects and images that would recall a distant past. Together with Henriette Nigrin, whom he met in Paris some years earlier and who came to Venice in 1902 as his companion and later his wife, Fortuny transformed Palazzo Pesaro degli Orfei into his home, library and studio for his polymathic practice encompassing painting, printmaking, drawing, photography, set design, lighting design, interior design, writing, textile design and fashion and costume design.²²⁹

(fig.101)

Nigrin was omnipresent in all of Fortuny's projects and was especially involved in fabric and garment production, which over a lifetime became the most enduring signature achievement

²²⁸ Ibid., 30.

²²⁹ Museo Fortuny recently held an exhibition, *Henriette Fortuny: portrait of a muse*, (December 2015-March 2016), in homage to Henriette Nigrin, acknowledging her substantial contribution to Mariano's achievements and legacy.

of Fortuny's oeuvre. Fortuny gowns and fabrics were luxurious items prized by glamorous bohemia, an artistic milieu and aristocracy across Europe and eventually America. The pleated Delphos gown based on the robe worn by the bronze Hellenic statue, the *Charioteer of Delphi*, is perhaps the most iconic of Fortuny's gowns.²³⁰ (fig. 102) In a pre-World War I climate, where women were freeing themselves from the corset, the gown was a wild success. Worn by Isadora Duncan and referred to by Proust, amongst others, the gown captured a calling of the time, a yearning for fluidity, a greater freedom and an allure of a distant past perhaps perceived to be idyllic.²³¹ The loose elegance of this luxurious gown still looks radical today, surprisingly, when looking at the date early in the twentieth century.²³²

Although, undergoing phases of success and difficulty, the Fortuny factory is still operational today on the island of Giudecca, and products from fabrics, furnishings and lighting are sold around the world. After Fortuny's death in 1949 and towards the end of her life, Henriette Nigrin donated the building and its collections to the City of Venice (in 1956). The building named Palazzo Fortuny now functions as a view into the polymath world of Mariano Fortuny and as an exhibition venue as part of the program of Musei Civici Venezia.

²³⁰ Deschodt and Devanzo Poli, 104.

²³¹ "The Fortuny gown which Albertine was wearing that evening seemed to me the tempting phantom of that invisible Venice. It was covered with Arab ornamentation, like the Venetian palaces hidden behind sultan's wives behind a screen of pierced stone, like the bindings in the Ambrosian Library, like columns from which the oriental birds that symbolised alternatively life and death were repeated in the shimmering fabric, of an intense blue which, as my eyes drew nearer, turned into a malleable gold, by those same transmutations which, before an advancing gondola, change into gleaming metal the azure of the Grand Canal. And the sleeves were lined with a cherry pink which is peculiarly Venetian that is called Tiepolo pink." Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time* (1923), quoted in Descholt and Devanzo Poli, 99.

²³² I am reminded of living Japanese fashion designer, Issey Miyake's Pleats Please.; One of my favourite fashion photographs is of Selma Schubert wearing an orange Delphos in 1907, taken by her brother, Alfred Steglitz. Selma is relaxed and almost draped in a mirroring gesture of the pleated gown on a garden bench, a huge silk flower perched just under her breast on her upper waist, a central button indicating a tilted spine. Both Nature and depicted Nature are at play here. The flow of silk conjuring a vision of a nearby stream, a breeze felt drifting through the garden. Autumn leaves fallen at her feet, a pillared tangerine cardigan provides practical warmth. Selma appears comfortable and at ease, both physically and in soul, staring outwards towards the world, yet also inwards glazed and captured by her own interiority.

To enter the Palazzo Fortuny today is still to enter a hushed and softened sanctuary within the winding labyrinth of Venice. It is a Venice that is drawn to a pitch of hyper sensitivity and solemn privacy. Entering from the tiny street of Calle Orfei opening out to Campo San Beneto we are confronted by this towering aged ship. Passing through thick wooden doors and walls of substantial depth, the ground level has a chilled tenor, a darkened damp sound, the inky canal lapping the rear wall. (fig.103) Movement is upwards like scaling a Gothic mountain. Entering the vast salon level is a point of arrival. (fig. 104) I feel I am home. Mariano and Henriette have gathered their world and culminated the space as a living organ. It is a heart space. All that matters is here. In delicate alignment and softened hush, we enter with wonder, opening and further opening in a ripple effect, absorbing us into an alchemic trance. Walls breathe and shimmer, hung and overlapped with Fortuny drifting fabrics their liquid weight both physical and historical. (fig. 105, 106) Here is the collected weight of Cecilia's trove of historical fabrics, replicated in her son's vision, calling upon a lost past and yet propelling forward. Opulent damask in the style of those magnificently painted by Bronzino have been reimagined and repurposed to become quivering walls further hung with paintings, the arrangements changing according to each staged exhibition. Burst open pomegranates overlap with velveteen pineapples, intertwined laurels surround a garden opening where a bird holds a single branch. Oak and acorn repetitions, mathematical floral designs, and Moorish dials are among the many motifs laid onto fabric. Fortuny's silken printed lights suspended throughout, replicate a softened glow originating somewhere in the East. (fig. 107, 108) Cabinets hold objects, from stencilling tools to framed smudged glass used to imitate passing clouds as part of theatrical designs. A small side room is revealed as Fortuny's painting studio, the walls completely covered in only recently revealed trompe l'oeil depictions of a constructed garden.²³³ (fig. 109, 110, 111) Arched openings

²³³ In conversation with Curator, Claudio Franzini on a private visit to Palazzo Fortuny on January 13, 2014. I made multiple visits to Palazzo Fortuny during research trips from 2011–2016.

and columns heavily laden with floral and fruit garlands, nymphs, Pan, a little monkey, and pheasants perch among the foliage. Semi-draped figures act as columns, maidens opulently nestle and undulate along the floral garlands beckoning towards each other. The painted view opening out to a vista of hills, valleys and distant sea, painted in rapid movements conjuring wind and the necessity of this vision. In a corner there is a simple basin, and above it on the wall, a thick layering of clean-up daubing from Fortuny's brushes reminds us plainly that the scene we have just turned from is one man's painted wanderings. (fig. 112) The passage upwards leads to a more open space. The opulent fabrics disappear. Here the vast space speaks of ochre earth and excavation. The structure of stone, mortar and massive wooden beams are evident. A full wall of window illuminates the space. (fig. 113) Here we feel the influence of air and sky, weather too, appearing as if it has battered through layers of historical sediment. (fig. 114) Still further upwards, the top floor is not always accessible. It is an unornamented space, ceilings are lower and elemental structures are likewise revealed. Wooden beams expose their origins as tree trunks, sienna imbued, the space invokes cerebral privacy, an attic for retreat and thought. Ordinary little windows peer out over a vista of Venetian rooftops and the distant sound of its passing daily life. In one corner, a wooden spiral staircase leads enticingly to a closed upper hatch. The steps appear as if they could barely hold a human figure. During my visits this space has always been closed. I was not able to find out what lay beyond. Does it lead to the sky? (fig.115)

In 2007, the Palazzo Fortuny hosted the exhibition *Artempo: Where Art Becomes Time*. Under the governance of Musei Civici Venezia and the City of Venice, the curatorial team included Jean-Hubert Martin, Mattijs Visser and Axel Vervoordt, a Belgian collector and successful property entrepreneur, who also helped to finance the exhibition.²³⁴ For the purposes of this exegetical inquiry, I focus my attention on the curatorial methods of Jean-Hubert Martin, as

²³⁴ Jean-Hubert Martin in conversation with Rosslynd Piggott, Paris, January 5, 2014.

aligning closely to the investigations, processes, ocular and sensorial interests of an artist. His persistent output, highlighting the non-chronological, ethnographically inclusive positioning of objects, results in an encounter of the unexpected and emotive wonder, in this instance within the spaces of Palazzo Fortuny. The inaugural Director of the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, Martin was notably curator of a landmark exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre* held between Centre Georges Pompidou and Parc de la Villette in 1989. Initiated as a replacement for the traditions of the Biennale de Paris and seeking to address a problem of “100 percent of exhibitions ignoring 80 percent of the world”, Martin positioned fifty Western artists, from the perceived centres of the world alongside fifty non-Western artists from the perceived margins of the world, in an exhibition that could claim to be truly contemporary and global.²³⁵ At the time, this was an uncommon strategy, a sweepingly ambitious gesture and one destined for debate. Martin sought to redress a Eurocentric vision of the world inherited from a colonial age. Amid criticisms of what some regard as a simplified and overly aesthetic approach to geopolitics, Martin has persisted with his vision of a binding and delicate humanism.²³⁶ By radically doing away with inherited museological categories, themselves a Colonial construct, Martin seeks out deep connections between objects and cultures.²³⁷ Through his audacious, fluid yet highly articulated placement of objects, Martin transports the viewer to a place of overriding and deep human connection.

I was fortunate to visit and conduct a conversation with Jean-Hubert Martin at his apartment in Paris on 5 January 2014. The day before, I had visited his curated exhibition *Theatre of the World*

²³⁵ “The Biennale de Paris was launched in 1959 by André Malraux with the purpose of creating a meeting place for those who would define the art of the future. After a hiatus of several years, the Biennale was relaunched in 2000.” “Biennale de Paris,” Biennial Foundation accessed November 27 2016, www.biennialfoundation.org/biennale-de-paris/; “Magiciens,” Wikipedia, accessed November 27 2016, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magiciens_de_la_terre.

²³⁶ *Third Text* ran an entire issue devoted to the problematics of *Magiciens de la Terre*: “Magiciens de la Terre: Les Cahiers,” *Third Text*. No. 6. Spring, 1989.

²³⁷ See in particular, Benjamin D Buchloh’s interview with Jean-Hubert Martin in *Ibid.*, 19-29.

staged in Paris at Maison Rouge, a larger version of the exhibition having been previously held in 2012 at the Museum of Old and New Art in Tasmania. During our conversation, Martin openly and generously speaks about learning from his association with artists and the act of looking:

I love to say I learnt a lot more from artists than art historians...I don't read so many art historical texts, I look at images. I look at thousands of images of works and I'm always very excited when I find something I didn't know and that leads to a new idea and idea associations. What artists say in interviews in art magazines is very much more enlightened (pause) enlightening opening new ways of thinking much more than art historians.²³⁸

I find this conversation thrilling, as it completely validates what I have found to be exciting about Martin's exhibitions. Inherent in Martin's simple statement is a deep engagement in the act of looking and an acknowledgement of a felt sensorial intelligence gleaned from the directed ocular act. This is certainly the realm of artists, art making, research and thinking about art. In my own practice, the act of intensive looking, being in the world, physical and sensorial encounter and experience is of primary importance. I seek experience to initiate felt and visual responses.²³⁹ I look at objects and art in the museum before reading didactic labels, actively disliking the phenomena of audio guides. Firstly, I seek to locate a response to the objects through vision, which may then transfer as a felt response, whilst never being disconnected from a thinking

²³⁸ Jean-Hubert Martin in conversation with Rosslynd Piggott, Paris, January 5, 2014.

²³⁹ I have long taken regular field trips to Magnolia fields in the Dandenong hills, Cherry Blossom viewings in Japan, trips to North Stradbroke Island, Queensland and so on.

response.²⁴⁰ This is often not about seeking historical information, but could be about the observation of the finest material detail that may trigger a response that can be profoundly, even shatteringly altering, both physically and emotionally.²⁴¹ Artists practise the act of seeing, this is hopefully still one of our skills. Like most skills that are practised, it is possible to become a little more exceptional in this area. Focussed looking delivers us vibrant information about the world and materialities that are essential for our making processes.²⁴² Martin understands and has observed this very well, through his engagement and conversation with artists. There is a freedom in his roaming that is adopted from artists, further based on precision and a deep engagement with histories. By shirking familiar methodologies, Martin makes his profound collisions. In effect, this is similar to an act of making a collage using objects, initiating a kind of rupture or explosion where unlikely parts are brought together, yielding an emergent poetry. Although Martin certainly does not call himself an artist, I propose Martin's curatorial methods to be very similar to a form of artist thinking and acting, thus my reason for including his pairing of objects in the exhibition *Artempo: Where Art Becomes Time* at the Palazzo Fortuny as part of this exegetical writing.

In writing for the *Theatre of the World* he says:

²⁴⁰ My encounter with a particularly fine eleventh-twelfth century Chinese scholar's tea bowl at the National Gallery of Victoria, begins with observing its exquisitely fine gold covered rim, tapering shape and an improbably delicate foot. The interior bowl has thirty-five delicately inscribed elongated petal shapes fanning out from the centre. Its refinement resembles a floral specimen. Then, looking to the didactic label, I see it is eleventh-twelfth century Chinese scholar tea bowl, made in Dingzhou, Hebei province, North China (accession number 3700-D3). Another set of responses pertaining to time, place and culture will overlay the initial encounter to form a more complex view and grasp of the object. How did it come to us through hundreds of years and across seas in its still perfect condition? In 2005 I made an appointment with the Asian Department of the NGV to view the object outside of the vitrine. I made a painting in direct response to this object *Double-love flower eyes, incomplete (eleventh century China)* (2005), oil on linen, 100 x 160cm.

²⁴¹ I have often had responses to work in Italy that have been emotional and visceral. In 1988, in Florence, for instance, although it seems clichéd I experienced a near fainting experience after seeing the golden cupola of the Baptistery dome and stepping out into passeggiata hour.

²⁴² Though the very act of looking is changing in a digital age. Our retinal and sense experience being vastly different from screen to the real world, a subject for an entirely different area of research. The act of focused looking is still a crucial part of an art making process.

For museums of enchantments, the failings of art history are opportunities; it can mount quite unprecedented exhibitions.... The museum of enchantments is above all visual, it appeals to the visitor's sensibility and emotions. Scholarship and pedagogic language take second place here. They are replaced by visual poetry and a cultivation of the senses. The direction or tone of a theme is summarized by a phrase or word inscribed on a wall. The essential thing is to shape and express the kind of visual thinking that underpins artistic creation; the objective is not nostalgic immersion in history but an insight into the desires, fears, and hopes of humanity as these are transcribed in our material culture.²⁴³

A historical format for the display of heterogeneous works is the "cabinet of curiosities". The *Wunderkammer* is a form of categorisation, and, as Martin writes, some still exhibit the Renaissance categories of *naturalia* and *artificialia* (natural history and art). Martin's spaces unpeel and re-form even the constraints of these cabinets. About his debt to artists, Martin writes, "Artists, like collectors, admit no constraints in the connections that they make with the past."²⁴⁴ He recalls the collection of Antoni Tàpies, as "One of the most beautiful collections ever made.... arranged over several stories of his house and quickly works its magic on the visitor as the very diverse works converse among themselves in a register of eloquence and discreet concision of form."²⁴⁵ Martin notes that when artists cannot collect there are often studio displays of reproductions in unexpected combinations that can offer reminders and solutions to various questions around making. As he states:

²⁴³ Jean-Hubert Martin, *Theatre of the World* (Hobart, Tasmania: MONA, 2012), 18-19.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

Bertrand Lavier calls them “short circuits” on account of their paradoxical semantic concentration and synthetic value. The short cut produces the spark. This is specific to the eye: a single glance can be enough to store up a multiplicity of complex and sometimes contradictory data. In many artists’ collections, the notion of authenticity is notable by its absence; what counts is the formal solution contributed by an idea or the powerful symbolism revealed by the work in relation to the issues of the moment.

...Not enough has been made of this kind of visual thinking, which has been the preserve of artists and a few curators by whom it has been transmitted.²⁴⁶

Further into our conversation, Martin reveals that a visit to André Breton’s apartment after the writer’s death was an important influence on his exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre*:

I often said that I was extremely impressed when I first saw the studio of André Breton with all the works in it. When I saw it he had already died, but everything was there, you know on the wall, when I visited. This gave me really a sort of support to the idea of making *Magiciens de la Terre* at the time, in the 80’s, because everybody told me it was wrong. It’s wrong because you are not allowed to put things coming from different cultures together. It’s forbidden. Well, I said, when you look at, you know the famous wall at the Centre Pompidou, which comes from the flat of André Breton, it’s just a fantastic combination, completely heterogeneous works or new objects.²⁴⁷

I can only imagine what an extraordinary experience and privilege it must have been to enter Breton’s apartment, resonant with decades of living, working and collecting.²⁴⁸ The revelation

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ JHM in conversation with RP, Paris, January 5, 2014.

²⁴⁸ 42, rue Fontaine, Paris, 9th arrondissement in the Pigalle area. The famed Moulin Rouge cabaret visible at the end of the street. André Breton lived here for 44 years from 1922 until his death in 1966.

of Martin's early formative experience was a surprise in the moment yet completely logical, as I imagined him encountering small rooms amassed with Primitive collections jammed next to flea market oddities, and works by his luminary friends of the time. The visit must have functioned like a magic switch, turning a world of categorisation into another realm of possible associations. For me, also, Martin's revelation of entering Breton's apartment has acted as a spark igniting and connecting many of my own personal trajectories, including the early influence of Surrealism, the idea of wandering, visits to flea markets, my interest in poetically loaded encounters between objects, and the space of romance through Breton's elusive character Nadja, which opens with the primary question, "Who am I?"²⁴⁹

The single wall retained from Breton's apartment is today housed in the collection of Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.²⁵⁰ (fig.116) I had the opportunity to visit it in February 2016. Through the thick glass wall that divides the viewer and the amassed objects and furniture, the effect is somewhat dulled and institutionalised, as if the collected objects are somehow distantly asleep. I receive a cerebral impression of Breton's writing room, but I do not feel an aura, spark or the "enchantment"—a term Martin uses—of the space.²⁵¹ Isolated and turned into a museum exhibit, this energy is implied and imagined, rather than directly felt. The objects have been anaesthetised by the museum. This is exactly the point made by the example of an intimate and close encounter

²⁴⁹ My teenage paintings were heavily influenced by perhaps the more obvious tones of Surrealist painting. Later as a student (1977-1980) at University of Melbourne, Melbourne State College, our third year Fine Art History course in 1979 was devoted entirely to the study of Surrealist writing and the manifestos. The course was devised and led by Associate Professor Kenneth Wach, this was the first year he delivered the course. He is now an internationally recognised expert on Salvador Dali and Surrealist studies. Wach was decidedly ahead of the zeitgeist in his timely revision of Surrealism and its importance to our time. The close contact with these ideas, so radical at the time and still, persist as a profound early influence for my work; I have always loved visiting flea markets or second hand dealers in Australia, London, Paris, Rome and Japan. Quite a number of works have been initiated by a single found object, including for example *Conversation* (1995), *La Somnambule* (1995), *Pink room-tracing* (1995-96), a recent series of works *Last light* (2013– 2016) responding to nineteenth-century laces sourced at Portobello Road markets, London. Many found and collected objects remain in my studio and house for their instructive and talismanic qualities. I do not wish to subsume them, preferring with respect to leave them undisturbed in their own aura and space, observing their silent power and grace; A. Breton. *Nadja*. (New York: Grove Press, 1960), 11.

²⁵⁰ Niveau 5, Exposition-dossier 21.

²⁵¹ Martin, 18-19.

of objects and spaces in all three of the houses written about in this exegesis. The encounter with objects and space unimpeded by ropes, barriers, sealed vitrines and didactic labels allows the viewer to connect directly and intimately with the aural space and matter of the object, giving rise to a response beyond the merely cerebral. An embodied sensorial response invoking memory and a myriad of emotive trace connections.

The encounter with Breton's glassed-in atelier is fascinating and thrilling, but also sad for the graveness of this lost opportunity—the preservation in its entirety of an important moment in French cultural and intellectual history. After thirty-seven years of maintaining the collection since Breton's death in 1966 (initially by his widow, Elise), it became clear to the family that the weight of keeping the amassed collection together was too difficult, the responsibility too heavy, especially given the reluctance of French authorities to set up a Surrealist Foundation in Paris. Breton's surviving daughter, Aube Breton-Elléouët (herself nearly seventy) and her daughter, Oona, as sole heirs of the Breton estate reluctantly organised a public sale.²⁵² Apart from the wall of Breton's writing room, earlier removed and preserved at Centre Georges Pompidou, every other object and artefact in this extraordinary archive was publicly auctioned. Protests were organised by groups of French intelligentsia and Surrealist sympathisers allegedly led by Jacques Derrida and continued vehemently up until and throughout the days of the auction.²⁵³ This uncharacteristic loss for the French and for us all is profoundly tragic and I suspect will be regarded as more so in the future, as the significance of the Surrealist movement becomes increasingly appreciated. The eight-volume catalogue produced by auction house Calmels Cohen, testifies to the vast and exhaustive archive of documents, books (most marked with

²⁵² The auction was held by Calmels Cohen at Hotel Drouot-Richelieu between 7–17 April, 2003.

²⁵³ Fiachra Gibbons, "Art Features," *The Guardian*, April 14, 2003, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2003/apr/14/art.artfeatures>; A jaunty description by the journalist attending one of the days of the auction at Calmels Cohen and being confronted by organised protests.

letters), notes or drawings, scribbles on envelopes, exquisite corpses, manuscripts, poems, works on paper, paintings, photographs, found objects from the frequently visited flea markets, a mineral collection, insects, stuffed exotic birds, a vast collection of non-Western art and artefacts (notably from Oceania and the Americas)—all housed in a small apartment.²⁵⁴ One can imagine possibly further layered by decades of dust and microbial shedding. As Julien Gracq writes of his visit to the apartment:

The profusion of objects of art crowded against the walls everywhere has little by little reduced the space available; one circulates only along precise itineraries created by use, avoiding as one progresses the branches, vines and thorns of a forest trail. Only certain Museum rooms, or the ageless premises which formerly housed the Geography department at the University of Caen, have ever given me the same impression of unvarying, rainy light, as if the contact with the dateless ancientness of all the objects from the wilds crammed into the space had caused the light itself to grow old.²⁵⁵

Breton was an avid collector across the spectrum of both rare and common objects, from his adolescence until his death. Further to the instinctive act of hunting and gathering poetically loaded symbols and signs, throughout his life Breton acted as an agent and advisor for wealthy patrons as a means of supporting himself and his family as a poet. The first object in his collection was a statuette from Easter Island bought at the age of seventeen in 1913 with money given as a reward for good grades. Later he trained his eye in the studio of Derain, known for his exotic and odd collections, but more so in the atelier of the poet Guillaume Apollinaire, who had accumulated an impressive number of masks, statuettes and curiosities. Another poet, Paul Eluard, would become a close and constant companion in his search for in particular, non-

²⁵⁴ André Breton, *42, rue Fontaine* (Paris: Calmels Cohen, 2003).

²⁵⁵ Julien Gracq, *En lisant en écrivant* (Librarie Jose Corti, 1980), 249-251, quoted in *André Breton, 42 rue*, 340.

Western objects.²⁵⁶ By the end of his lifetime, his apartment must have indeed appeared as a rare and magical forest from another time.

A short film *L'oeil à l'état sauvage* (1994) by Fabrice Maze, produced by the Centre Georges Pompidou with permission from Aube Breton-Elléouët, is the only filmed document of the apartment in its original state made since Breton's death in 1966. The camera acts as an eye roaming over the two rooms separated by a short staircase. A large vitrine of exotic birds overlooks a humble daybed surrounded by naïve portrait paintings. A portrait of Baudelaire looks over a collection of Indian Hopi dolls hovering over the wall, along with paintings by Victor Brauner, Tanguy, Miró, and an eroded Magritte nude. A photograph of young Breton sits next to a line-up of multiple armed Indian warrior Gods, jumbles of shells, minerals, coral, glass and a bronze Leda entangled with her swan. Oceanic objects surround a melancholy Edvard Munch painting of a couple. There is a board of mother of pearl fishing hooks. The writing atelier is the most densely populated by a veritable landscape of objects including domed covered butterflies, African and Oceanic masks, a multiple lens mirror, shells, rocks, turquoise fragments, a Man Ray sculpture, a wooden sphere suspended over a crescent moon, alongside a photo of a dreamy Elise, Breton's wife. An indigenous Australian bark painting aligns with Duchamp. The bookshelf is the entire wall itself interspersed with micro collections, stones, cast glass bottles, and a wooden arm. There is a clairvoyant crystal sphere distorting a cluster of pipes, a group of letters held together by a tiny brass clasp in the shape of a hand, and a watch. Apollinaire's pens rest on his glass pen holder; a bronze glove lies across the table in a gesture of abandon. These varied objects are overlooked by a massive Oceanic ancestor statue, known as "Uli", which

²⁵⁶ Pierre Amrouche and André Breton, *42, rue Fontaine. Arts Primitifs* (Paris: Calmels Cohen, 2003), 274.

Breton finally acquired after several attempts—his last significant purchase.²⁵⁷ The interior, although only available now via the film and the sealed glass barrier of the museum, must have been powerfully transporting, as it was for Jean-Hubert Martin and so many before him.

During my visit to Paris in February 2016, I take the metro to Pigalle and locate 42, rue Fontaine. The exterior is unexceptional—a shabby street. In 1930 a theatre had been built in front of the apartment block, now operating as Comédie de Paris advertising a decidedly unappealing line-up of Cabaret shows.²⁵⁸ (fig. 117) I peer through the gridded security gate leading to the rear apartments and see only the dimmest sign of a possible entrance through to a world that can only now be imagined. I am in disbelief that the monumental achievements of one man could be so reduced and yet the irony of being confronted with a closed Cabaret show is not lost on me, as if Breton himself had posthumously staged it. Breton's long occupancy is recorded by a simple sign, "André Breton (1896–1966) 'Je cherche l'or du temps' a fait du 42, rue Fontaine le centre du mouvement Surréaliste de 1922 à 1966."²⁵⁹ (fig. 118) I rush to the other side of town to see an exhibition of Belle Epoque couture once belonging to Countess Greffulhe at the Musée de la Mode.²⁶⁰ It is staggeringly beautiful. Close by, the Yves Saint Laurent and Pierre Bergé Foundation was exhibiting comparative interiors of fashion designer Jacques Doucet, Saint Laurent and Berge at the famed 55, rue Babylone on the Left Bank.²⁶¹ Doucet's collection of Eileen Gray furniture and the opulently minimal interiors of his Hôtel Particulier at 33 rue

²⁵⁷ Amrouche, 276. There is no doubt that since Breton's time and today we consider such fetishistic collection of sacred and important indigenous artefacts to be deeply problematic, held out of context for private admiration being close to a form of personal colonialism. However, simplistic or naïve his actions may seem today, Breton and his colleagues acted out of a desire to locate another, a place or spirit of magic that was so foreign to post-war Europe.

²⁵⁸ Architect G.H.Pingusson.

²⁵⁹ A. Breton, translated as "I search for the gold of time."

²⁶⁰ Countess Greffulhe, renowned beauty, socialite and patron to artists including Whistler, Rodin, Gustav Moreau and a muse to Marcel Proust.

²⁶¹ Jacques Doucet (1853-1929) was known for his supremely elegant dresses of layers of transparent fabrics.

Saint-James at Neuilly-sur-Seine is another breathtaking immersion.²⁶² Rounding the corner into the more eclectic world of YSL and Pierre Berge, I am astounded to see, sitting alone in a small vitrine the actual hand written manuscript of *Nadja*.²⁶³ I did not seek it, if I had it would have been impossible to find or see. Like some electric lightening shock, Nadja appeared. Photography was not permitted, so I remember it in my mind's eye.²⁶⁴ The opening line, quivering in cursive ink "Qui suis je?" burning into my retina.²⁶⁵ That weekend I was in the city of the Surrealists bathed in a light of astonishing synchronicity. Paris can be like that—"Merci beaucoup et aussi à André."

And so to Venice: Jean-Hubert Martin finds himself in Mariano and Henriette's Gothic palazzo still cloaked in the vestigial traces of Breton's accumulated world. It is as if, holding this early experience close, Martin has been able to amplify Breton's practice of bringing disparate objects together in unlikely union. Breton, as a writer guided by a poetic intuition and a spirit of the flâneur, combined with his milieu and contacts with access to non-Western artefacts and the peoples themselves, had the cumulative effect of bringing together his "marvellous" world.²⁶⁶ Martin has been able to further amplify and emphasise such poignant connections in a more theatrical, deliberately articulated space, literally spotlighting and turning up the volume on the marvellous. The Palazzo Fortuny is the perfect venue for this objective.

²⁶² Eileen Grey (1878- 1976) was an Irish furniture designer and architect, a pioneer in the Modernist movement. Doucet owned some particularly exquisite pieces of her lacquer furniture, working with a Japanese lacquer artisan, Seizo Sugawara in Paris.

²⁶³ The manuscript had belonged to the collection of Pierre Bergé. It has since been purchased by the Bibliothèque Nationale.

²⁶⁴ I sometimes take the liberty of taking a harmless unpermitted photo for the sake of research. In the months after the terrible multiple shootings of November 2015 at the Bataclan club and elsewhere, the City of Paris remained heavily guarded, including museum venues. In respectful propriety, I did not wish to disobey instructions not to take photographs.

²⁶⁵ "Who am I?"

²⁶⁶ "Let us not mince words: the marvelous is always beautiful, anything marvelous is beautiful, in fact only the marvelous is beautiful." André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*. (The University of Michigan: Ann Arbor paperback, 1977), 14.

In *Artempo: Where Art Becomes Time*, elements as various as mercury mirrors, the skeleton of a monkey's hand, an Inuit anorak made from intestines, a burnt Tintoretto painting, Man Ray's photograph of dust on Duchamp's *The Large Glass*, Lucio Fontana and a James Turrell light room, mingle and meet within the rarefied sanctuary of Palazzo Fortuny. Within the palace— itself an enormous “objet trouvé” to be occupied—the curators, Martin and Visser fully inhabit the spaces. Jan Van Eyck's *Santa Barbara* (1437), a meticulous unfinished drawing even more exquisite for its areas of space and silence, meets Fujiko Shiraga's *White paper* (1960).²⁶⁷ (fig.119) A member of the Gutai group, Shiraga believed it important to work in a state of induced inner emptiness. Working on the floor, she used layers of traditional papers soaked with glue. Before they had completely dried, she would crawl over the surface striking the papers using her body as a tool to make compressions and creases.²⁶⁸ An unlikely meeting separated by over 500 years, the European continent and the Japanese islands—a silence sensed in the unfinished delicacies of Van Eyck's drawing never intended to be seen beyond his desk— meets perfectly with the emptiness of Shiraga's crinkled paper ocean. The two silences ring in a heightened pitch that is further amplified as our minds make a leap in time, through space, from country to country, languages and purposes. The conversation is one of a felt and binding humanity. We all understand and need silence, a place of personal or spiritual poise, whether that be pictured or un-pictured, through Christian saints or an activated gesture aligned to Shinto belief.²⁶⁹ These meetings picture a place of deep and essential commonality.

²⁶⁷ Jan Van Eyck *Santa Barbara* (1437), panel, 31 x 18cm. Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Antwerp; Fujiko Shiraga *White paper* (1960), traditional Japanese paper relined on canvas, 220 x 132cm. Collection of Axel Vervoordt, Antwerp.

²⁶⁸ Ed. Axel Vervoordt, Mattijs Visser, *Artempo: Where Art Becomes Time* (Ghent: Mer. Paper Kunsthalle, 2007), 88.

²⁶⁹ Shinto is a system of Nature worship followed in Japan. The majority of Japanese still practise part Shinto and part Buddhism.

An anonymous Dream stone, circa 1800, a round section of found and cut marble imitates a distant mountain in fog, mounted in a freestanding bronze frame ornately styled with a swirling cloud pattern, the object venerates the found image in stone.²⁷⁰ The object honours and privileges a space into which we can gaze and dream. The viewer finds the atmospheric mountain and its association with solitary refuge, a place of retreat for Chinese monks and poets, in stone. The Dream stone could be thought of as a pre-Surrealist artefact, where embellished meaning and association are attached to found objects. Similarity to a mirror, in particular a foggy Shinto mirror is apparent. Looking to nature looking back to us. Distant mountains of poetry are reflected back as our own potential face. Peter Buggenhout's *Gorgo # 8*, (2006), an earthy bundle of coarse fabric embedded with dust, horse hair and blood appears as an image lifted from the earth, a probable site of death, burial and decay in isolated suspension.²⁷¹ Its tendrils and fragments quiver in response to the movement of the viewer's passing body, as if perceiving our own state, dust and skin. Like the Dream stone, *Gorgo #8* allows us to gaze inwards, though the earthen mass does not offer its flat stone surface for calm reverence, its hollow, bloody, cave calls in witch-like tones. The object is a Neanderthal vortex recalling pre-historic nightmares. (fig.120) Nearby, an anonymous mineral appears, its interior a glowing emerald globular network of strata formed over a long period of time.²⁷² Its sparkling surface resembles a bubbling flow, the result of chemical precipitation, minerals trapped and solidified in the cavity of the deep underground rock. This cave revealed presents wonder. Rocks have long been venerated in Asian cultures as living deities.²⁷³ In contrast, Shozo Shimamoto's *Cannon Picture* (1956), is an image of violent release.²⁷⁴ The painting was made with a homemade cannon loaded with paint, fired and hitting

²⁷⁰ Anonymous Dream stone, circa 1800, China, marble, bronze, 68.6 x 16cm. Collection Axel Vervoordt, Antwerp.

²⁷¹ Peter Buggenhout, *Gorgo #8* (2006), mixed media, horse hair, blood. 51 x 120 x 90 cm. Collection of the artist.

²⁷² Anonymous. Mineral, malachite chrysocolla stone. 20 x 30 x 16cm. Collection of Axel Vervoordt, Antwerp.

²⁷³ Rocks and plants are considered living deities in the Shinto belief system.

²⁷⁴ Shozo Shimamoto *Cannon Picture* (1956), paint on canvas, 94.5 x 72cm. Collection of Axel Vervoordt, Antwerp.

the canvas at high speed, exploding and leaving its trace within fractions of a second.²⁷⁵ (fig.121) Enacted through these disparate meetings and paced through our own physical, felt and cerebral encounters are a reverential dreamy meditation, primitive earthly horror, ancient underground wonder and violent expulsion, presented as a theatrical progression. As I meet these collaged objects, it is clear to see that the curatorial placements are precise and knowing, there is a close observation of the material character of the object or art and there is an understanding of the historical context of the object. Further, in the context of these understandings of the material of the exhibition, the placements seem to be enacted as an artist may act in a studio in the spirit of intuitive play, testing, calculated risk. An absolutely necessary action, if not sometimes reckless, in order to seek and find new possibilities, to break open boundaries.

Man Ray's *Elevage de Poussière (Dust Breeding)* (1920–1975), a photograph that pictures close up accumulated dust on the surface of Marcel Duchamp's *The Large Glass (Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even)* (1915–1923) presents a completely different possible landscape of the iconic work, as if through some alchemical process the glass is transformed into a vision of an eroded desert or a lunar surface.²⁷⁶ This simple observation is a beguiling transformation of the opus work in progress of his friend, Duchamp, operating like “anti-work” in the production of another vision.²⁷⁷ In Richard Serra's *Hands scraping* (1968), a fixed video camera shows us two male hands, Serra and composer, Phillip Glass, sweeping metal filings from a studio floor.²⁷⁸ The men are dealing with the remnants of studio production. Process becomes the material of this

²⁷⁵ Vervoordt and Visser, 89.

²⁷⁶ Man Ray *Elevage de Poussiere (Dust breeding)* (1920- 1975). Silver reprint, 20.8 x 48.8cm with frame. Collection David Fleiss, Paris.

²⁷⁷ Duchamp had been in Paris for some months and left the sheet of glass on a bench gathering dust. The photograph took over an hour to expose, allowing renderings of high detail. After the photograph was made Duchamp cleaned the glass, but left a section that he permanently adhered to the glass. “Elevage de Poussiere, New York,” Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, accessed November 27 2016, <https://www.mfah.org/art/detail/70759?returnUrl=%2Fart%2Fsearch%3Fnationality%3DFrench%257CAmerican%26show%3D50>.

²⁷⁸ Richard Serra *Hands scraping* video still (1968), video. Collection Stedelijk Museum.

time-based work, an ephemeral antithesis of the large-scale, heavy metal sculptures that define Serra's oeuvre. In proximity to Man Ray's stilled accumulated dust portrayal of Duchamp's work in progress, these studio remnants are activated and removed. The action of the two works, separated by 48 years, is opposed in the moment of their now residing next to one another in the exhibition. Each work retains its necessary space, yet activates a further possible narrative of movement, accumulation, stillness and clearing. Mariano Fortuny's *The hand of the artist* (1890), depicts a hand stilled in the studio, settled on a mass of heavily painted drapery, as if the artist is both moulding the substance and claiming it as a territory.²⁷⁹ The juxtaposition of the three works take us back and forth between an anti-portrait made out of dust, one of the major works of early conceptual art, a work composed of the remnants of giant metal sculptures, and a painter's hand melding an earth-like substance of paint and a history of painting. The three images situated in proximity allow the viewer new and rich associations that would not have been possible in a chronological arrangement. (fig. 122, 123, 124) Stillness and dust, remnant material, the action of clearing, hands that clear, mould and build, are in communication as if through a newly invented sign language functioning through a passage of time; aligned and further amplified by the layered interior of the Palazzo Fortuny.

Cai Guo-Qiang uses gunpowder as a medium. His work *Coming!* (2006) produces an abstracted field by igniting black powder on paper.²⁸⁰ In China, black powder has been used for centuries for military purposes and also for ceremonial and socially significant occasions such as births, weddings, and funerals. Cai Guo-Qiang refers directly to Chinese traditions, whilst also undoing them through the unpredictable and uncontrollable action of the black powder upon the paper which produces an image within fractions of a second. *Coming!* manifests both destructive

²⁷⁹ Mariano Fortuny *The hand of the artist* (1890), tempera on cardboard 33.5 x 30.5cm. Museo Fortuny, Venice.

²⁸⁰ Cai Guo-Qiang *Coming!* (2006), gunpowder on paper, 200 x 300cm. Collection Axel Vervoordt.

and constructive action. The remaining trace is reminiscent of a Chinese scholar ink painting depicting a distant landscape, in which we may expect to see a humble poet's hut in contrast to a towering mountain range. This picture of eternity has been made in a flash ignition. Breaking apart tradition by its own methods, Guo-Qiang reminds us that we can arrive at a place of awe and beginnings through violently different means. Nearby is hung a School of Tintoretto *Portrait of a Procuratore*—a late sixteenth-century painting that has sustained severe damage from fire.²⁸¹ The important man, an attorney, is depicted in a formal sitting position, hand upon chest, his view deflected from the painter and the viewer, but now burnt and charred and seared into the wooden panel. We see only his outline as a kind of buried oblivion in ash. A presumed accident offers a view of removal, an aura of the unknown, sinking into the ashen surface we can only wonder who was previously pictured. Both the ashen Procuratore and Cai Guo-Qiang's gunpowder drawing are the result of fire, both accidental and deliberate acts offer their shadowy unknowns, allowing the viewer a space of non-specificity, an emptied space to enter, wander and dream. Nearby, an anonymous eighteenth-century metal dragon is positioned, a flying talismanic marker of visible magic, itself a bearer of fire.²⁸² An anonymous Italian mercury mirror, its blurred and oily surface, presents a further void space of darkened emptiness, even alluring toxic vapour.²⁸³ From the result of searing fire, both destructive and constructive, to possible flying magical beasts with fire breath, to the allure of a darkened toxic mirror, offering only a silvered shadow. These alignments speak of appearance and disappearance and a probable space in-between.

²⁸¹ School of Tintoretto *Portrait of a Procuratore* late sixteenth century, burnt painting, 120 x 98cm. Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice.

²⁸² Anonymous. *Dragon*, eighteenth century, metal, 18 x 95 cm. Correr Museum, Venice.

²⁸³ Anonymous. *Mercury amalgam mirror* (C.1820), 157 x 146 x 12 cm. Italy. Collection of Axel Vervoordt, Antwerp; "Improper handling of historic mercury amalgam mirrors presents a potential risk for elemental mercury exposure. The tin-mercury amalgam from which these mirrors were fabricated is inherently unstable and releases mercury liquid and vapour as it deteriorates." "Conservation," Wikipedia, accessed November 27 2016, www.conservation-wiki.com/wiki/Tin-Mercury_Amalgam_Mirrors.

Figures:

**Chapter Four:
Aerial Dreaming: Time and Space Collapse in Venice**



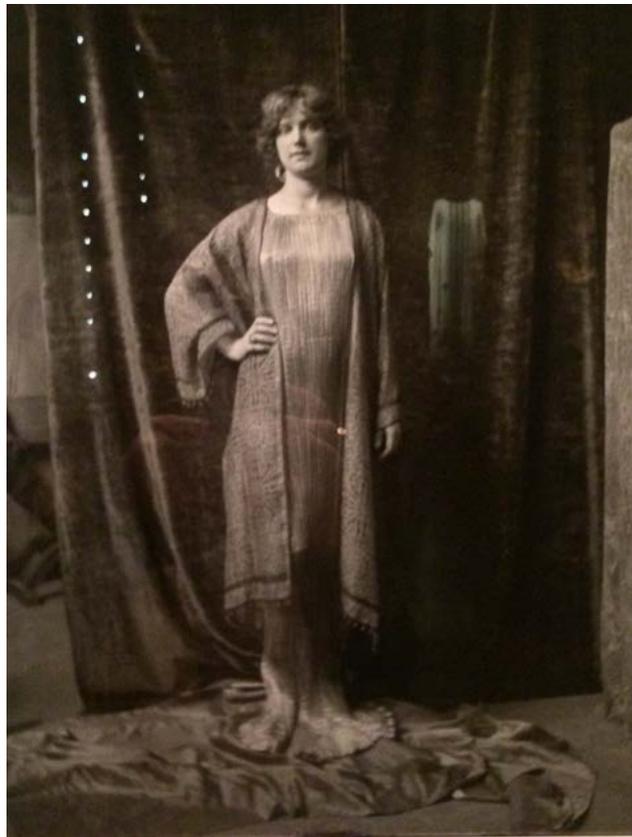
99. The front fascade of Palazzo Fortuny, Venice. Photograph. Rossllynd Piggott. 2015.



100. The interior courtyard, Palazzo Fortuny. Photograph. Rossllynd Piggott. 2015.



101. Photographer unknown. Henriette Nigrin and Mariano Fortuny in studio overalls at Palazzo Fortuny. Circa 1920s.



102. Photographer unknown. Studio model wearing the Delphos gown and light over jacket. Circa 1912.



103. The rear wall of the Palazzo Fortuny. Photograph. Rossllynd Piggott. 2015.



104. The salon level of the Palazzo Fortuny. Photograph. Rosslynd Piggott. 2015.



105. Mariano Fortuny. Printed fabric hung over interior wall, salon, Palazzo Fortuny. Photograph. Rosslynd Piggott. 2015.



106. Mariano Fortuny. Printed fabric hung over interior wall, salon, Palazzo Fortuny. Photograph. Rosslynd Piggott. 2015.



107. Mariano Fortuny. Printed silk light, glass beads, various materials. Circa 1915. Salon, Palazzo Fortuny. Photograph. Rosslynd Piggott. 2015.



108. Mariano Fortuny. Printed polyhedron silk light, Murano glass beads, various materials. Circa 1915. Salon, Palazzo Fortuny. Photograph. Rosslynd Piggott. 2015.



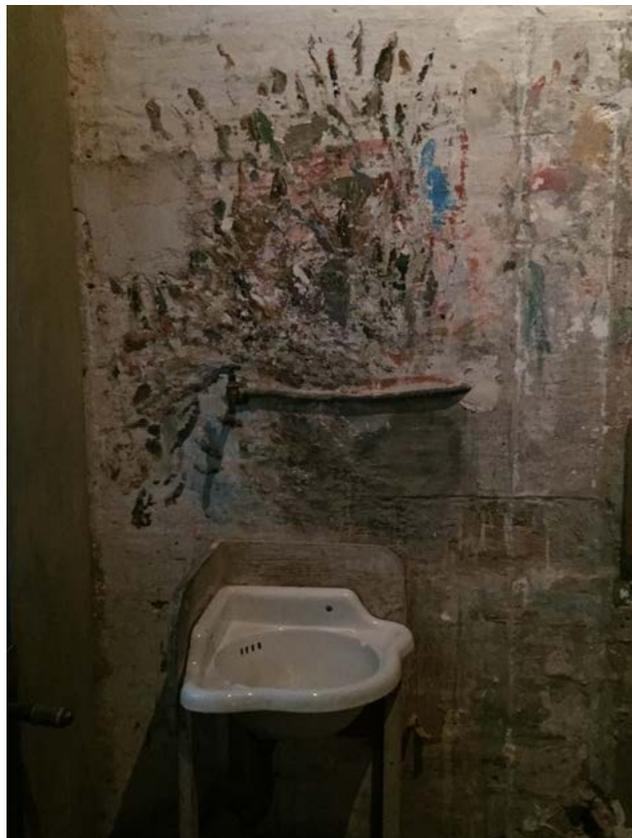
109. View of Mariano Fortuny's studio. Palazzo Fortuny. Photograph. Rosslynd Piggott. 2015.



110. View of Mariano Fortuny's studio. Palazzo Fortuny. Photograph. Rosslynd Piggott. 2015.



111. View of Mariano Fortuny's studio. Palazzo Fortuny. Photograph. Rosslynd Piggott. 2015.



112. View of Mariano Fortuny's studio. Palazzo Fortuny. Photograph. Rosslynd Piggott. 2015.



113. Upper level. Palazzo Fortuny. Photograph. Rosslynd Piggott. 2015.



114. Upper level. Palazzo Fortuny. Photograph. Rosslynd Piggott. 2015.



115. Top level, wooden spiral staircase. Palazzo Fortuny. Photograph. Rosslynd Piggott. 2015.



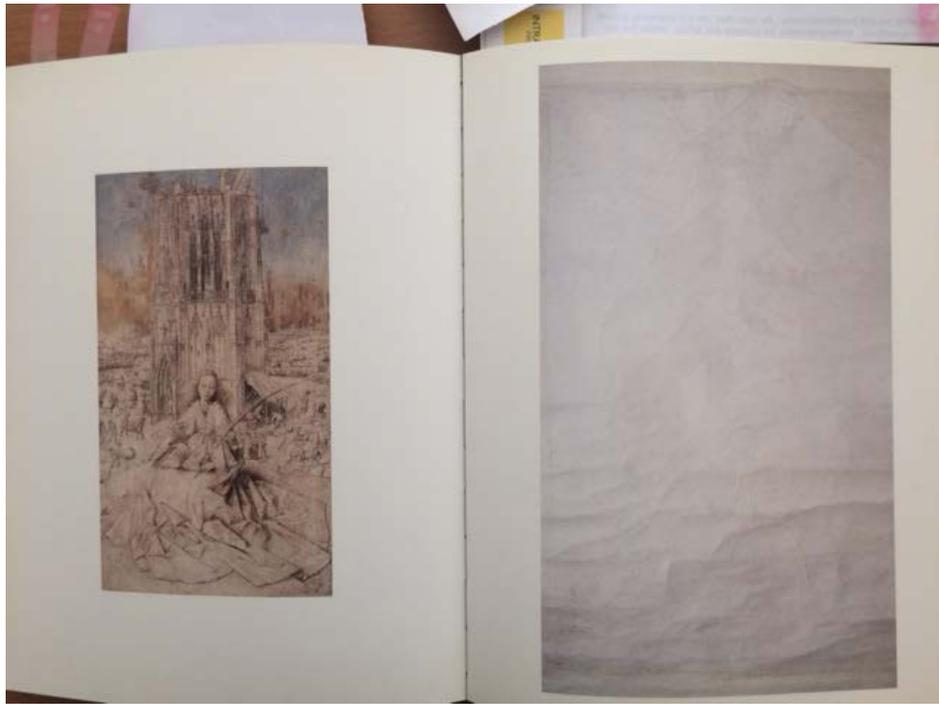
116. View of André Breton's writing room and contents (reconstructed). Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris. Niveau 5, Exposition-dossier 21. Photograph. Rosslynd Piggott. 2015.



117. View of the exterior of 42, rue Fontaine, Comédie de Paris, Pigalle, Paris. Photograph. Rosslynd Piggott. 2015.



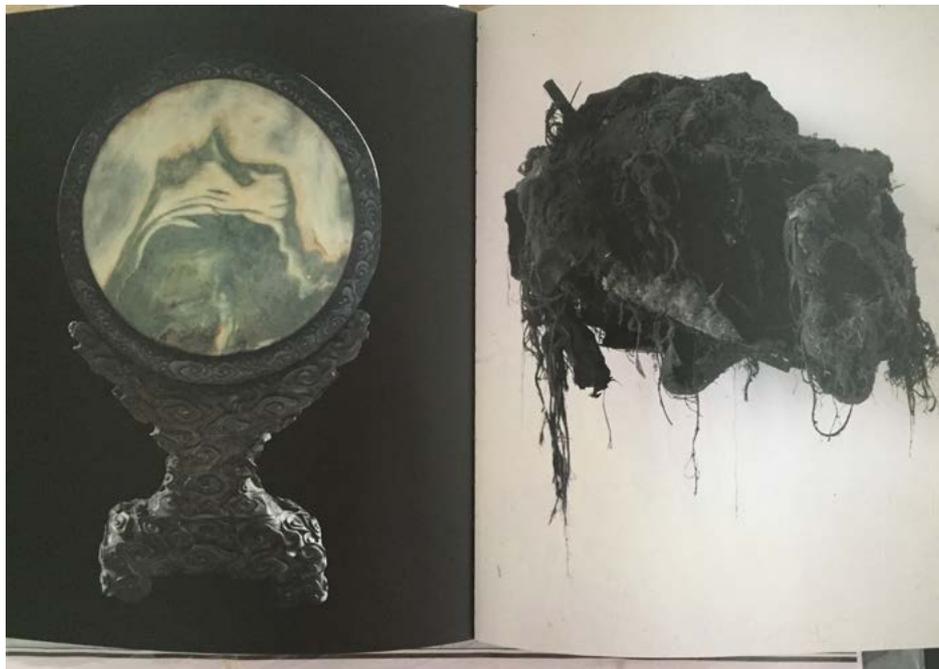
118. View of commemorative plaque indicating the dwelling of André Breton between 1922 to 1966, 42, rue Fontaine, Pigalle, Paris. Photograph. Rosslynd Piggott. 2015.



119. Jan Van Eyck. *Santa Barbara*. 1437. Panel, drawing, 31 x 18 cm. Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Antwerp.

Fujiko Shiraga. *White paper*. 1960. Traditional Japanese paper relined on canvas. 200 x 132 cm. Collection of Axel Vervoordt, Antwerp.

Figures 119–124 source: Vervoordt, Axel and Mattijs Visser, eds. *Artempo: Where Time Becomes Art*. Ghent, Belgium: Mer.Paper Kunsthalle, 2007.

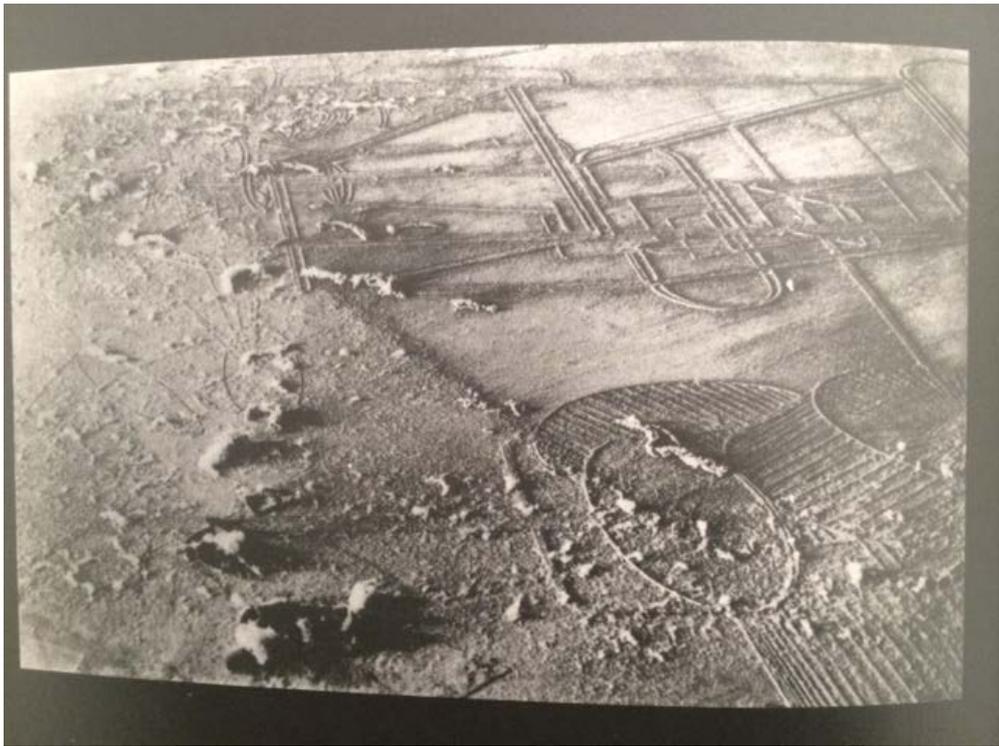


120. Anonymous. *Dream stone*. Circa 1800. China. Marble, bronze. 68.6 x 16 cm. Collection of Axel Vervoordt, Antwerp.

Peter Buggenhout. *Gorgo #8*. 2006. Mixed media, horse hair, blood. 51 x 120 x 90 cm. Collection of the artist.



121. Anonymous. Mineral, malachite chrysocolla stone. 20 x 30 x 16 cm. Collection of Axel Vervoordt, Antwerp. Shozo Shimamoto. *Cannon Picture*. 1956. Paint on canvas. 94.5 x 72 cm. Collection of Axel Vervoordt, Antwerp.



122. Man Ray. *Elevage de Poussière (Dust Breeding)*. 1920- 1975. Silver reprint. 20.8 x 48.8 cm with frame. Collection David Fleiss. Paris.



123. Richard Serra. *Hands scraping*. 1968. Video still. Collection Stedelijk Museum.



124. Mariano Fortuny. *The hand of the artist*. 1890. Tempera on cardboard. 33.5 x 30.5 cm. Museo Fortuny. Venice.

The nearly 200 objects of *Artempo: Where Art Becomes Time*, engage in a rich dialogue, that initiates and offers further possible readings of the works. Jean-Hubert Martin's continuing legacy is his loosening of objects and art from the constraints of art history and museum chronologies, enabling a view of objects and cultures as profoundly related rather than separated across time and space.²⁸⁴ The multiplied enchantment of *Artempo: Where Art Becomes Time* derived from this union of objects, art works, and artefacts from various cultural contexts, within the densely laden interiors of the Palazzo Fortuny and preserved traces of the life and work of polymath, Mariano Fortuny. The experience of the exhibition resembled that of a chamber within a chamber. Like a continuing echo or ripple, one was first drawn into a city that appeared impossible, then invited into the world of a dazzling polymath who had transformed the interiors of a Gothic palace in his own reinvention of space and time, and then flung further back and forth through time by an encounter with a series of contrasting objects. In this way, the exhibition hinted at a possible new alignment of the world and of oneself.

²⁸⁴ Jean-Hubert Martin has recently staged *Carambolages* at the Grand Palais, Paris, March–July 2016.

Chapter Five: Murmur Unfolded

Cumulus (mirrored)—an invitation

Cumulus (mirrored) is an invitation to attend my studio and apartment located on the second floor of a Victorian building in Fitzroy (Melbourne, Australia). The installation will function as the physical presentation of this research and will inevitably deal with the territory of self, though this is not the overt aim. While I invite the viewer, privately, into my studio and apartment, the invitation is to attend an accumulated psychic interior space rather than an overt revelation of daily details. Works and objects will be carefully chosen and associated to represent the sites and people I have come to know over the duration of this research. As such there occurs a complex entangling of histories taken from the narratives around Mr Johnston, collected traces from Dennis Severs' House, engraved glass works made in Venice within the space of my own working and domestic life. *Cumulus (mirrored)* will consist of intentional islands of self-curated works made during the period of this candidacy inserted into an existing environment. At the moment of writing, I expect to include the following works: a group of small scale slowed video loops, an image of a floral Spitalfields silk fabric "collected" via my iPhone from Dennis Severs' House, (refer fig. 97) Tasmanian peonies in full bloom on a mirrored surface filmed in my studio quivering with blown breath, (fig. 125) a filmed nineteenth-century "entremblant" bodice ornament made from diamonds and silver (recognisable as a plant specimen), (fig. 126) borrowed objects from the Johnston Collection, my own paintings, complete and in progress, (fig.127) and an easel once belonging to Sir John Longstaff (fig.128) and recently bequeathed to me from my father's estate, many lengths of graduated dyed silk, a layered Venetian glass engraving, (refer figs 138, 139, 140) an interior garden, (fig. 129) blocked areas through which aspects of my own collections may be glimpsed, illuminated areas and possibly a barely

detectable olfactory work.²⁸⁵ As the installation unfolds in its making, there may inevitably be other included works, which at this time of writing are impossible to predict. The viewer will be guided through a *mise en scène* of the living and working areas, amidst some of my own collections and areas of intervention by a map, that may or may not be referred to, as the viewer wishes. The interior becomes uncertain, embedded with nuanced and intentional slippage, a blending of separate stories transferred to this site. As the site is my home and working space, it inevitably functions as a mirror of self and also pictures my connection with found friends in the homes I have visited—William Johnston, Dennis Severs, Mariano Fortuny, Henriette Nigrin and others. When we make new friends it is likely we find in them traits that resemble our own. I have always needed to construct an interior world. As a first generation British Australian, born to artist parents, having had the privilege of traveling since I was a young child, I have often felt adrift in mainstream Australian culture (probably since the late 1950s). Experiences of “other places”, a “far-away” phenomena, further parts of the world, generally Europe though also Japan, have been vivid and sustained by regular travel. Memories of “here” and “there” still enact a great personal tension and likely a residue of persistent melancholy. I recognise that for many years my home and studio (now they are one) have acted as a sanctuary, a place that is entirely personalised, via accumulated microcosms of objects and works.²⁸⁶ My daily involvement with the interiors, objects and even scents facilitates a virtual travel that serves as a type of balm in the

²⁸⁵ I gained permission to film in the jewellery gallery of the V&A Museum, London, a bodice ornament circa 1850, diamonds and silver, maker unknown, once owned by Lady Corey; An Australian painter, who spent time living and working between Paris and Australia. (b.1861–d.1941); Owen Piggott, an Australian painter, (b.1931–d. 2015). My father was gifted the easel from the estate of his painter friend, John Thomas Nightingale Rowell, (b.1894 –d.1973). I remember visiting his studio in Mornington, Victoria, Australia as a child with our family; I hand dyed over 100 metres of Chinese silk in a graduated method to use as draped walls for my exhibition *Last light / in vapour* at Sutton Gallery, Melbourne, 2015.

²⁸⁶ I lived at 82 Alfred Street, Prahran, Melbourne for 25 years, from 1998–2013. The house belonged to artist Pam Hallandal, who wished for it to be occupied by artists or writers paying a peppercorn rent. The weatherboard workers’ cottage (circa late nineteenth century–early twentieth century) was in almost original state. Hallandal allowed me to decorate in whatever way I wished, so that over my twenty-five-year tenancy, the interiors became deeply personalised, somewhere between a gathering of densely collected personal narratives, bohemian exotica and dereliction. Australian Belle and then Italian Elle magazines both ran feature articles on the interiors, circa 1999.

regular face of unease.²⁸⁷ Strangely, boundaries of an interior invoke boundlessness, a freedom to roam and dream, to connect with something lost or left behind. I allow myself to imagine for a moment how it must have been for early immigrants arriving to a much harsher colony. One treasured object may have held their entire previous lifetime in its substance. I do not wish to tell my own histories in detail, but to infer possible connections with new friends, as I invite them and the viewer into my house. The spaces will function as a mesh or web of connections constantly changing and in flux, speaking of trace, memory, the held, our attachment to objects and investment in them, then followed by inevitable collapse—an unfolding, the ephemeral, human fragility—and yet also our power.

The metaphorical innermost room is important to mention. Painting too is a contained boundary, an interiorised space, a location that can be entered holding the viewer. I maintain that painting is the centre of my practice as an artist. Over the years, the space of painting has opened out onto the space of objects and a broader sensorium to become the related space of my practice. The innermost room remains painting. I enter and occupy this room alone and in silence. Here I am solitary. The room has four walls, it is both intimate and vast. I can travel here. The space of the innermost room induces a kind of focussed reverie, allowing recall of a specific detail, place, scent or fused atmosphere, then becoming held again within the boundaries of painting. This room will speak only in whispers in the context of this exegesis, but has a role in informing an understanding of space, surface, materiality, encounter, poise, historical context and furthermore, is ever present. This room seems to be a place in contemporary time that is close to oblivion;

²⁸⁷ I have always loved to work with interiors in the spaces I have occupied as homes, partly out of aesthetic necessity, as I occupied mostly run down spaces, rents being cheaper. From a huge warehouse space as a student in 1978 in the city of inner of Melbourne partitioned by floating curtains, to the dumpiest tiny apartment in South Yarra in 1980, to a 1950s apartment in St Kilda from 1982–1987 where I displayed a collection of broken glass and cicada wings on the deep window sills to Alfred Street where I lived for twenty-five years from 1988–2013 in a series of painted rooms, dim with light and resonant with personal collections and mise en scène surrounded by a tangled garden, itself like a series of rooms.

beyond and deeply misunderstood or unregarded. Even feared, which is always interesting to me, in itself a place of the radical outsider, a place of potential undermining power. This is a subject for another exegesis. Painting is for me, the interior of interiors. For some time, the painted spaces have relinquished objects completely, referring to mostly natural spaces and sensation via fused vapours. (fig. 130, 131, 132) In this silent room, substance evaporates, illusion unpeels and is superseded by allusions to our particle self and the world as particle. *Cumulus (mirrored)* presents an accumulation and resonance through the space of the interior and the relational trace of objects. Cumulus is the highest towering cloud, tumultuous, active and filled with condensation. Cumulus clouds also sometimes gloriously refract light as in a roccoco representation of Heaven. The innermost room of this interior declared as painting atomises 'object-ness'. *Cumulus (mirrored)* suggests an alternation between appearance and disappearance, between the thing and the non-thing, between absence and presence.

I have found that throughout the duration of this research, I have been able to examine more acutely these complex relationships, between evaporated paintings and their likely opposite in situ and to find points of precise relational poise, both poetically contextual and in material and historical tension. I wish to continue to invoke a practice that is both research led and highly intuited, experiential, open ended, both wandering and focussed. One that continues to work, though with exception, on projects within unconventional spaces—those as richly layered and highly intimate as the house—drawing upon histories and trace resonance bringing further elements of intervention that open out association and unforeseen possibilities.

Further images will be inserted into a small bedroom space. Previously a storeroom for artworks, this space and two other small rooms were hurriedly converted from a studio to become a small apartment for my partner, Miles Du Heaume and myself after having to leave 82 Alfred

Street, Prahran in 2013. The departure from the long tenanted house was a traumatic time, a bodily wrench away from a long term (though in ruin of beautiful patina) nourishing home. The house was literally the vessel of my world for twenty-five years, loaded with memories, objects, collections, love and the pain of loss. As it was an old house, it had been full of previous lives and fragile for its wear. I had to live in this house delicately respecting its uneven floors, eccentric plumbing and paper-like surfaces constructed with old building techniques. The house called for a quieter and more considered way of living and in return it gave a deep peace commented upon by visitors and guests. Like a mothership, the house was always there when I returned from many travels and then it was not. Not that I intend this work to be overtly autobiographical, there is a sense in this current home of a refuge place and in a tenuous reality it is what two artists can manage in the current marketplace. Then in the sleeping chamber of this refuge, I intend to insert W. R Johnston and his companion Ahmed Moussa, their embroidered monogrammed pillows in Fairhall situated on different levels but connected with a single thread from *B* to *A*. Here they might have eloped to a time and place that readily accepts their union, the pillows now side by side, enmeshed in a room that is further a space for my dreaming and collected objects. A time and place, redialled and resituated, of reunion for Bill and Ahmed. This room is a place of softened shadow where love whispers can hover and dreams in half-waking can fully bloom. Through the corner of half sleeping eyes, objects glimpsed add further layers of memory and surface, collected histories and a place for a roaming subconscious. Again, I refer to Jun'ichiro Tanizaki's *In Praise of Shadows*:

we find beauty not in the thing itself but in the patterns of shadows, the light and the darkness, that one thing against the other creates. A phosphorescent jewel gives off its glow and colour in the dark and loses its beauty in the light of day. Were it not for shadows, there would be no beauty. Our ancestors made of woman an object inseparable from darkness, like lacquerware decorated in gold or

mother-of-pearl. They hid much of her as they could in shadows, concealing her arms and legs in the folds of long sleeves and skirts, so that one part and one part only stood out—her face. The curveless body may, by comparison with Western women, be ugly. But our thoughts do not travel to what we cannot see. The unseen for us does not exist. The person who insists upon seeing her ugliness, like a person who would shine a hundred-candlepower light upon the picture alcove, drives away whatever beauty may reside there.²⁸⁸

Full direct sunlight, so highly favoured in Australian homes is like shining a blazing torch on reverie and repose. Half shadow and deep shadow is a zone more conducive to daydream and reverie. Not everything needs a description, shadow provides a space in which to imagine, to hover, to be silent and for silence to gain its own volume.

In the sleeping room, an olfactory work of West Indian Sandalwood, as in Ahmed's bedroom at Fairhall, is opulent, warm and soothing, therapeutically as a sedative for the nervous system, to calm and to promote positive thought.²⁸⁹ A faint presence of scent from the oil of the Sandalwood tree adds a layer of balm for the two reunited men, enabling deeper travel into a state of reverie.

Various personal collections will be partly revealed and others will remain enclosed and hidden. The collections are concentrated ranging across varied obsessions from glass to Japanese lacquer, perfume to garments, gloves, ikebana baskets, and Japanese suiseki stones. (fig. 133, 134) Vintage glass collections obtained from Ebay and during trips to Venice are both exquisitely fine drinking vessels and informative research material for my works in glass. (fig. 135) I have always conducted research in the physical world, seeking, finding, and handling objects of daily

²⁸⁸ Tanizaki, 30.

²⁸⁹ "Sandalwood," Organic facts, 2016.

life. The objects perform a kind of note-taking, yet also a desire to learn something about the life of the object, to guard and protect it from its disappearance, to give it a renewed privileged place in the present and possibly the future. Here there is an acknowledgement of demise laden with an emotion approaching melancholy, perhaps a tendency to see in the past what is now redundant. Not only is there a curiosity and attraction to a lost technique, further to the memory of that object. I wonder how it was made, who made it, who owned it, where did it live, what did it witness and what were its onwards movements? In each movement the object gathers further layers of patina of memory. Repositioned in my spaces, the objects have unexpected meetings: an oversized nineteenth-century cameo from Naples, meets an envelope containing fragments of ambergris found on a New Zealand coastline and a piece of coral oddly mounted on top of a shell. A Victorian parian ware half-naked lady sits attentively mending fishing net under a large bough of *Phalaenopsis* orchids forming an internal garden. There are diverse materials, including the bamboo of an Ikebana basket, a porcelain and glass mixture that comprises parian ware, porcelain and a living plant, the binding image being the state of cloudlike whiteness. Islands of gathered images have been made throughout the house and studio, engaged in a silent conversation.

A further unexpected meeting is represented by two objects, that literally “appeared” during this research. In my archive, I found a handwritten essay that I had written about André Breton’s *Nadja* in 1979 for Associate Professor Ken Wach, when he was conducting his subject of Surrealism at Melbourne State College, University of Melbourne. The essay appears more like an object comprised of my micro, rather obsessive handwriting. I kept it, as to my eyes, it resembled a drawing. (fig.136) The other object is a pair of vintage black leather gloves with cut-out details, which I bought on Ebay in 2016. When they arrived from the seller in California, I was amazed to see that they had been posted from the small town of Escondido – the birthplace of Dennis Severs. (fig. 137) These two objects embody in *Cumulus(mirrored)* the degree to

which unexpected synchronistic events can occur during periods of creative gestation.²⁹⁰

I have long worked with glass and mirror. An early fascination for an ancient mirror that has darkened through oxidation persists. This mirror does not clearly reflect, the viewer struggles to find his or her reflection, a doubled-self registers a flesh coloured temperature through a contorted fog. The self evaporates and is lost to a realm of ether, though the mirror remains as an instrument for narcissism that has taken a detour into the particle world. This mirror reflects not the self but an upper atmosphere, a cloud world. (refer fig.52) Glass is the transparent conduit for vision to pass through layers, from one side to another in a shift of space and time.

I have made a number of engraved and layered glass works depicting fractured gardens over three winters with a master engraver in Venice.²⁹¹ The series titled *Garden fracture: Mirror in Vapour* multiplies visions of a gathered flora, cherry blossom, Yamazakura mountain cherry blossoms pictured in Japan, magnolia, climbing rose, wisteria and peony, shattering them in a collapsed chaos leading the viewer through the known into unknown realms. Beauty is mirrored by fear and unknowing. In the context of this interior, the viewer encounters further interiors, each its own dwelling within the apartment and studio. (fig. 138, 139, 140)

In this dwelling, a living garden is tended inside. Again, a response to loss, as I had left behind the overgrown tangled garden of Alfred Street that I had determinedly kept at bay from growing into the old house. As much as this was a battle, the old garden had been a place of sanctuary, oxygen, like a plot of countryside in the middle of an inner city suburb. Here my contact with

²⁹⁰ Such events have repeatedly occurred during periods of my research and intense preparations in the studio. I see them as powerfully affirmative events.

²⁹¹ I have worked with Maurizio Vidal, master engraver with a mirror making workshop, Ongaro e Fuga, Murano over three Winters from 2013–2016, assisted by Francesca Giubilei and Luca Berta of Venice Art Factory.

living plants has miniaturised to articulated arrangements of Phalaenopsis orchids poised in ikebana vessels. The garden here is reductive, though for its apparent lack I find it surprisingly rewarding and enriching in another way entirely. As if removing the rambling wild labour of the old garden, spiders, rocks, weeds, overgrown branches, possums, I am able to focus only on the beauty of these waxen blooms and ever more closely as if through a lens on their tremulous mouths bordered by scrolling whiskers, exquisite markings and their bowing faces. Like the objects gathered here, they too are a life form removed from their habitat to embellish a domestic interior. Further images of nature—pictured and artificial—play in contrast to these living forms. A contained Chinese cork garden dials miniature down a few notches, as the space of the garden continues to shrink, topped by a found palm frond with reference to natural decay and wind. Looped footage of filmed fully blown peony blooms, their petals quivering in response to my directed breathing, is projected. (refer fig. 129, 125) It is an intimate interaction of adoration. I await the arrival of peonies every year, attending their opulent theatre as they change from a luminous coral, opening from day to day and eventually fading to the palest lemon yellow before thudding to the floor like a real diva. Looped footage of a floral Spitalfields silk dress filmed in Madame Gervais's bedroom at Dennis Severs' House wanders through this silken thread garden now situated on the other side of the world and in play with a glimpsed view of my garment collection. (refer fig. 97) A looped projection of Lady Cory's naturalistic "entremblant" bodice ornament, a quivering identifiable plant species constructed in silver and diamonds, is situated in the sleeping chamber; a sparkling artifice of nature, like an image dreamt.²⁹² (refer fig. 126)

The interior in which *Cumulus (mirrored)* is staged transverses upwards and downwards, staircases being liminal passage. I had never lived in a house with so many staircases involving

²⁹² *Entremblant* bodice ornament, silver and diamonds, circa 1830, originally belonging to Lady Cory. Filmed with permission at the Victoria and Albert Museum, Jewellery Gallery, 2014.

persistent movement up and down, providing elevated views, descending views. A half landing in a Victorian building is an opportunity for a library, a garden and a sitting place. On the top half landing the sky can be seen and birdsong heard. Staircases change perspective on the mundane through movement, a twisting action and a requirement to be more attentive to the placement of feet and body weight.²⁹³ Writer Georges Perec muses,

We don't think enough about staircases. Nothing was more beautiful in old houses than the staircases.

Nothing is uglier, colder, more hostile, meaner, in today's apartment buildings. We should learn to

live more on staircases. But how?²⁹⁴

We descend into a tiny basement kitchen and here domesticity is glimpsed only, along with a gathering of Mr. Johnston's blue and white porcelain in conversation with my humble collection. Both in situ between east and west, a muddled melange, dreaming of elsewhere, whilst staying at home to make tea, which is not what either of us did or do.

Repose is glimpsed through a transparent barrier screen. A further interior garden, revealed collections of glass, a cabinet holding a group of Japanese suiseki rocks and a nineteenth-century Kannon surrounded by gilt wooden temple flowers. A sitting room for repose seeks no conversation drawing further away from the business and social clatter of the front street. Here a further space for drifting via a gathering, a cumulus of objects, histories and places. A cumulus that further mirrors its occupants and its invited guests in an interiorised interior.

Cumulus (mirrored) is an invitation to enter my studio and apartment. The installation reveals,

²⁹³ At this point, I remember the shifting staircases at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry in the Harry Potter series.

²⁹⁴ Georges Perec, *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces* (London and New York: Penguin Classics, 2008), 38.

Figures:

Chapter Five:

Murmur Unfolded: Cumulus (mirrored) – an invitation.



125. Rosslynd Piggott. Untitled. Still from iPhone footage of peonies quivering from breath 2014. Proposed component of *Cumulus (mirrored)* 2017.
Photograph: Rosslynd Piggott.



126. Rosslynd Piggott. Untitled. 2014. Still from iPhone footage of Lady Cory's entremblant bodice ornament, circa 1850, diamonds and silver, the Victoria and Albert Museum. Proposed component of *Cumulus (mirrored)* 2017.
Photograph: Rosslynd Piggott.



127. Rosslynd Piggott. *Passing peony and petal space*. in progress.
2015. Rosslynd Piggott studio, Fitzroy, Australia, 2015.
Photograph: Rosslynd Piggott.



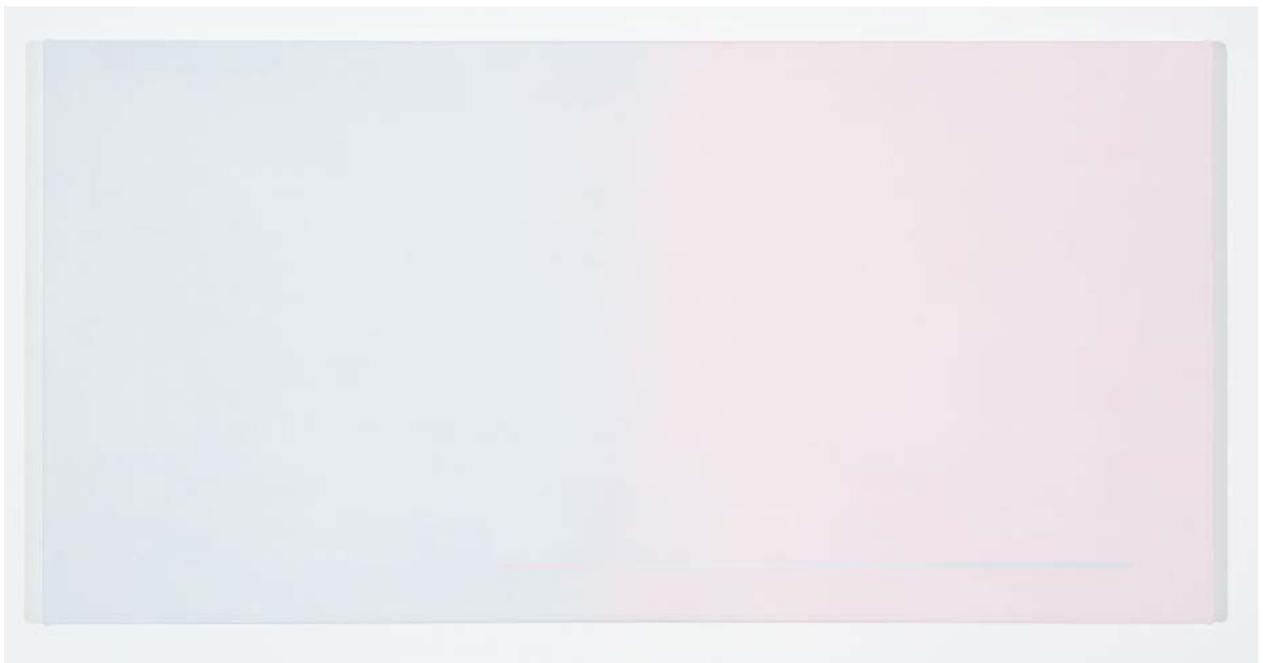
128. Sir John Longstaff's portrait easel,
bequeathed by John Thomas Nightingale
Rowell to Owen Piggott to Rosslynd Piggott
in 2015. Proposed component of *Cumulus*
(*mirrored*) 2017.
Photograph: Rosslynd Piggott.



129. View of an interior garden, Rosslynd Piggott studio. 2015. Chinese cork garden, wood, glass, Phalaenopsis orchids. Proposed component of *Cumulus (mirrored)* 2017. Photograph: Rosslynd Piggott.



130. Roslynd Piggott. *Pink space and blurred prism*. 2015. Oil on linen. 75 x 150 cm.
Photograph: Christian Cappurro.



131. Roslynd Piggott. *Cherry blossom edge and 5am*. 2015. Oil on linen. 75 x 150 cm.
Photograph: Christian Cappurro.



132. Rosslynd Piggott. *Passing peony and petal space*. 2015. Oil on linen. 20 x 200 cm.
Photograph: Christian Cappurro.



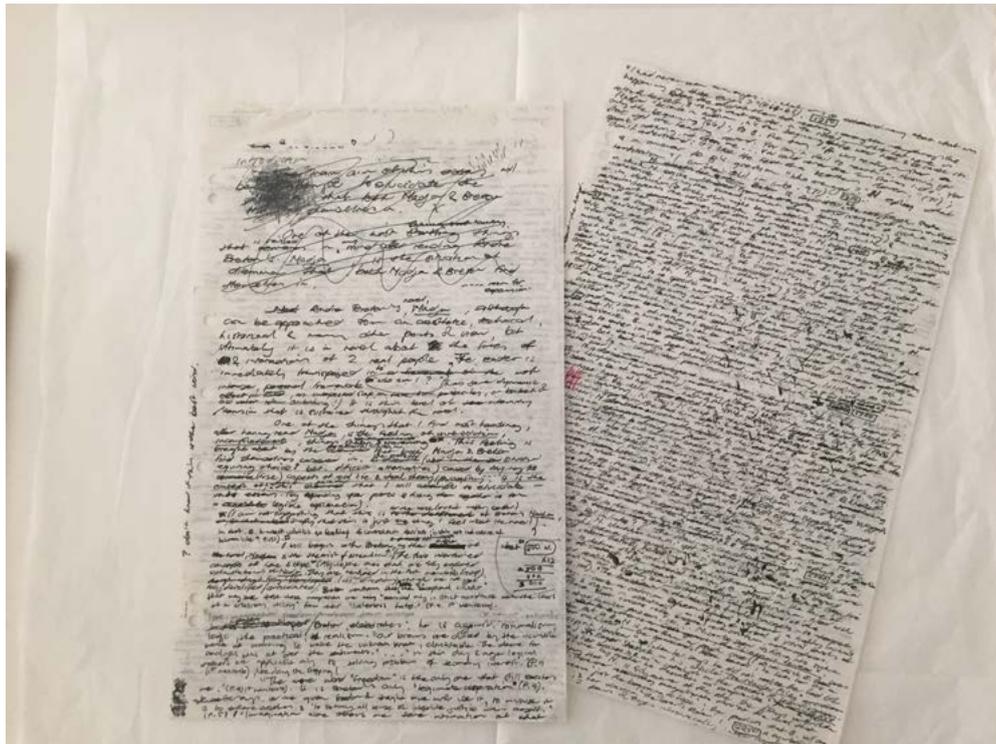
133. Rosslynd Piggott. Detail, collection of gloves. Twentieth and twenty-first century, leather and fabric. Proposed component of *Cumulus (mirrored)* 2017. Photograph: Rosslynd Piggott.



134. Rosslynd Piggott. Detail, collection of Japanese suiseki stones, early twentieth century. Stone and carved wooden stands. Proposed component of *Cumulus (mirrored)* 2017. Photograph: Rosslynd Piggott.



135. Rosslynd Piggott. Detail, collection of Venetian glass, circa 1910- 1960. Salviati, Cenedese, Pauli and unknown. Proposed component of *Cumulus (mirrored)* 2017.
Photograph: Rosslynd Piggott.



136. Rosslynd Piggott. Handwritten draft of essay about André Breton's novel, *Nadja*, 1979. Proposed component of *Cumulus (mirrored)* 2017. Photograph: Rosslynd Piggott.



137. Rosslynd Piggott. Leather gloves with cut-out detail, circa late 1950s and envelope delivered from Escondido, California to Fitzroy, Australia, February 2016. Proposed component of *Cumulus (mirrored)* 2017. Photograph: Rosslynd Piggott.



138. Roslynd Piggott. *Garden fracture/ Mirror in Vapour*. 2012- 2016. Murano glass, slumped mirror, engraved clear glass. 55 x 55 x 20 cm. Photograph: Commissioned by VeniceArtFactory.



139. Rosslynd Piggott. *Garden fracture/ Mirror in Vapour*. 2015. Murano glass, slumped mirror, engraved clear glass. 55 x 55 x 20 cm.
Photograph: Rosslynd Piggott.



140. Rosslynd Piggott. *Garden fracture/ Mirror in Vapour*. 2016. Murano glass, slumped mirror, engraved clear glass. 55 x 55 x 20 cm.
Photograph: Rosslynd Piggott.

though only partially, my working and living spaces, attempting to perform as a holding vessel and mesh of accumulated associations between the narratives of lives and spaces I have researched during this candidature. The fabric of the mesh comprises memory, trace, varied materialities—the visible and the invisible—bound by a sensorial and emotive affect.

Conclusion: Opening a Door to Open Another

This exegesis, interwoven with studio and site-based research, positions the house and the house museum as a rich and fertile site for artistic and curatorial intervention. In the context of the house, interior space and objects act as a vehicle and vessel for intervention. The role and action of the artist blurs with that of the curator, the archivist and vice versa, enabling the creation of spaces of a highly sensitised intimacy such that are rarely achieved within an institutional or commercial gallery space. The spaces of the house and the objects contained therein are the essential material for the resulting work. Form and site offer expanded potential for the creation of, and access to, spaces of emotional intimacy, resonating in the profoundly delicate and powerfully elemental realms of memory, body and sense.

The research has used as its starting point my installation *Murmur* held at the Johnston Collection as part of the *House of Ideas* series in 2013. The Victorian building, the objects of the house museum, and the historical narrative of the life of W. R. Johnston became the site and the material for the resulting installation.

Through my reading of Sylvia Black's unpublished history of W. R. Johnston, I became aware of the various fictions of the house museum within Fairhall that had been devised to suit the tastes of an audience interested in antiques and the decorative arts.²⁹⁵ Amid the complex and uncertain histories of W. R. Johnston, I became increasingly interested in the human stories of two of his closest and longest friendships, those with Ahmed Moussa Aboelmaaty and Angus Winneke, both of whom had lived in Fairhall. My curiosity increased as it became evident that their stories of long and important connection and presence in the current house museum were virtually

²⁹⁵ Black, 2012; *Fairhall* has been a house museum since 1990.

unspoken and invisible. This problem, as I saw it—a privileging of teacups and bureau plats over human stories—was the consequence of delicacies surrounding homosexuality in an earlier period.²⁹⁶ After Johnston's death, in 1986, these sensitivities persisted, influencing to some extent the setting up of Fairhall as a house museum focussing, as were Johnston's specific wishes, on changing displays of antiques and decorative art objects to the exclusion of other details. *Murmur* in effect, disobeyed Johnston's wishes and sought to reinstate and acknowledge these human stories in the hope of giving them a dignified and rightful presence in Fairhall today.²⁹⁷ *Murmur* was a major installation project, an uncommon opportunity to work with a large interior and its collection, inserting new works to create a previously unheard narrative. From polite rooms for afternoon tea, I reinstated the bedrooms and personal living spaces of each friend, Bill, Ahmed and Angus, tracing connections between them, through both newly created works and a careful selection of objects, art and furniture from the collection to develop a sequence of mood chambers across eight rooms, five in-between spaces, a staircase, corridors, a cupboard vestibule and two half landings. *Murmur* presented a series of atmospheres that invoked the spirit of the lives of the men, rather than merely presenting an illustration of their stories. Chosen objects and their careful alignments within the spaces formed a metalanguage invoking the bodily presences of the absent men and the events of their lives. The lack of didactic labels and barrier ropes enabled close proximity to every object in order to stimulate further flights of memory and imagination. Although the viewer could not handle the objects, close uninterrupted proximity allowed an almost ocular touch, unlike the more cerebral experience of looking at an object labelled and captured in a museum vitrine.

²⁹⁶ The law in Victoria against homosexuality was repealed as recently as 1981. See note 100.

²⁹⁷ The current Board of the Johnston Collection were somewhat surprisingly evenly divided over agreeing to allow my concept for *Murmur*. The Director, Louis Le Vaillant gave me final permission to develop the work.

A notable aspect of the methodology of working with Fairhall and its collection was a deep physical and psychic immersion in the house. This was absolutely necessary to my understanding the intricacy of the spaces and the mind of Mr. Johnston, as it were. Constant visits to the house, wandering through rooms, observing light and even the scent of damp, handling objects were the processes of absorbing an emotive and sensorial understanding for histories. The substance of the house became the material of the work—*Murmur* was, in other words, uniquely possible within Fairhall. Yet much of the thinking and planning for *Murmur* occurred within the space of my apartment and studio. *Cumulus (mirrored)* 2017 thus becomes a continuation of the project begun at Fairhall and taking in the other houses, their occupants and their stories, from London to Venice, encountered in the course of this research.

The first chapter explored the vast and growing interest in the house and house museum as a site for artistic and curatorial intervention. The limited scope of this exegesis cannot adequately cover the breadth and expanding nature of this area of practice. As I suggested, in many of the cases discussed in this exegesis, the roles of artist and curator become blurred. Throughout, however, in both the written, site and studio-based research, I have been fully conscious of my own position as—in the first instance—an artist.

For artists and curators, the lure of working outside of a sanctioned white commercial cube or museum space is especially enticing. In current times of global financial crisis, questioning institutional powers, a reclaiming and re-visioning of spaces that we might recognise to be deeply human seems especially relevant and enticing. I have traced a path from maverick curator Harald Szeemann and his projects in domestic spaces, to Hans Ulrich Obrist's first curated exhibition in his kitchen and further projects staged outside of conventional spaces. I have cited various Artangel projects from Rachel Whiteread's *House* (1994) to Roger Hiorns's *Seizure*

(2008–2010) and Saskia Olde Wolbers's *Yes, These Eyes Are the Windows* (2014) among others, all of which make use of the house and the image of the house, albeit in vastly different ways, provoking a range of responses from shock, loss, alienation, wonder, dislocation, and suspension, to the unhomely. Artangel remains a particularly active commissioning body bringing together artists and unconventional spaces, initiating spatial interventions and responses rarely possible in the zone of the museum or gallery. Other relevant projects include Elmgreen & Dragset's *Tomorrow* (2013), staged in the former Textile Galleries at the Victoria and Albert Museum. Barbara Bloom was discussed for her long and ongoing use of domestic tropes and materials, effectively bringing an intimate language of the house into the institution. Historian and curator, James Putnam, has curated several exhibitions on the theme of the house, notably within the Freud Museum in London, the house where Freud lived and worked in the final years of his life and his daughter, Anna continued to live for a further forty years. My most recent research—in September 2016—was to Turin to visit Casa Mollino, an apartment within an eighteenth-century building facing the River Po, designed in delicate detail by Carlo Mollino as a sanctuary for his afterlife. The apartment is revealed as a hyper-sensitised interior and a work in itself. Yuri Ancarani's film *Séance* (2014), shot within the apartment, further amplifies the spirit of the interior.

These diverse projects are linked by their use of the materiality of the house itself as medium. The projects cited mimicking domesticity within the museum, then bring a language of the domestic in an action of subversion into an institution. Both approaches acknowledge a primary power in the image, trace resonance and vessel of the place we call home that is within the structure of a building we call a house.

I chose to focus on two particular works for their extraordinary affect: Dennis Severs' House, East London and the 2007 exhibition *Artempo: Where Time Becomes Art* shown within the Palazzo Fortuny, Venice. Both houses presented profoundly moving encounters that continued over multiple visits. As such, both sites have been important as primary research data and further prompting the creation of specific imagery, such as a Spitalfields woven silk garden in the form of a slow motion video loop and ongoing collaborative work with a Venetian glass engraver. When questioned throughout this candidature, why I chose these particular houses to engage with, my response has been, "they chose me or, in a sense, we chose each other". In my practice as an artist, I have always strongly trusted intuition, wandering and a heightened sense of being in the moment. I have found that some of the most productive and enduring beginnings for work can occur in a space of focussed daydream and encounter that is both random and directed. Certain encounters are powerful and persistent in their resonance; a magnolia in late bloom, clouds of cherry blossom in Japanese Springtime, particular light in a room, heavily eroded dust-filled fabric curtains at Fontainebleau.²⁹⁸ These meetings can carry a spark or electric charge, a shock akin to the beginning of a romance, the beginning of a fall. There occurs a primal recognition that something important, yet elusive, needs to be followed and pursued. Over the years of my practice there have been countless such encounters, some more lasting than others. Many I have managed to capture and hold in a notebook as a scribbled note or more recently with the ubiquitously available iPhone camera. These moments have become my own archive allowing me to dig into past encounters and collected imagery, in a kind of archaeology. In the case of this research, a three-month residency in London and an introduction from the Johnston Collection took me to Dennis Severs' House.²⁹⁹ A residency at the British School at Rome

²⁹⁸ I visited Palais du Fontainebleau during 1994–95, when I had the University of Sydney Power studio at the Cite Internationale des Arts, Paris. The fabrics in some of the rooms were still original and unrestored, almost in shreds and heavy with hundreds of years of dust. I still recall a kind of shock encounter, like being transported to that exact moment in time. Fabric has this ability to touch and transport.

²⁹⁹ The Australia Council residency with Acme studio at Bow Quarter, East London, November 2013–February 2014.

allowed me to seek contact with glass artisans on the island of Murano and thus the city of Venice, the realm of the polymath artist and artisan, Mariano Fortuny.³⁰⁰ As with the labyrinthine paths of Venice, one place or event leads to another. I have come to trust in this kind of serendipity; paying attention and furthermore to finely tune it. There are countless other houses to research and I hope that the future will present more opportunities to do so.

It is important to further emphasise that in the case of Dennis Severs' House and Palazzo Fortuny, I was fortunate that I could conduct multiple visits to each site from 2013–2016. The research is based on actual physical encounters allowing a very detailed view and visceral response to the interiors, both complex and layered. I was able to conduct conversations with David Milne, curator at Dennis Severs' House and close friend of Severs himself, thereby eliciting a much more detailed view of Severs' life and work and importantly, the ongoing work of Milne in keeping these delicate atmospheres alive. In Paris, 2013, I was able to conduct a conversation with Jean-Hubert Martin, co-curator of *Artempo: Where Time Becomes Art*, who revealed the early influence on his non-chronological approach to objects within museum collections and within Palazzo Fortuny specifically—as a visit to the apartment of André Breton after his death. This then, uncannily, provided a link to early Surrealist influences on my own work. The idea of wandering, random encounters with objects, places and a space of wonder have all remained essential and important experiences for my work and methodologies.

In conclusion, I have not set out to displace the role or function of galleries or museums, but rather to present the case of the house and house museum as sites for works of an uncommon intimacy and emotionality due to our prime and universal relationship to the house as shelter, home and heart. The house is a space both bounded by walls and boundless. I picture the house

³⁰⁰ The Australia Council residency at the British School at Rome, April–June 2011.

as a vessel that is more aerial than earth bound, a space for filtering dreams, both waking and sleeping. Time dials backwards and forward. The substance of the world flows through this house leaving traces. *Cumulus (mirrored)* attempts to realise this vision.

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