



LE CERCLE FÈRME

MARTINE FEIPEL & JEAN BECHAMEIL

PRESS KIT

PAVILION OF LUXEMBOURG
54TH INTERNATIONAL ART EXHIBITION - LA BIENNALE DI VENEZIA

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BY PAUL VIRILIO
OPEN LETTER

BY RENÉ KOCKELKORN
- LE CERCLE FERMÉ
LEGGENDA NERA

IMAGES
PRESS

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la Biennale di Venezia

54. Esposizione
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PRESS RELEASE

Pavilion of Luxembourg at the 54th International Art Exhibition – la Biennale di Venezia
Martine Feipel & Jean Bechameil: Le Cercle fermé

René Kockelkorn, commissioner

Martine Feipel & Jean Bechameil have been selected to represent Luxembourg at the 54th International Art Exhibition – la Biennale di Venezia which will run from 4 June – 27 November 2011.

Born in 1975 in Luxembourg (L), **Martine Feipel** studied visual art at Marc Bloch University in Strasbourg (F), the University of Arts in Berlin (D), under the direction of professor Christiane Möbus, and at Central St. Martins College of Art & Design in London (GB), where she obtained a Master's degree in Fine Arts in 2002. Since 2000, she has regularly participated in exhibitions, particularly in Europe. She has been awarded several artists' residence grants in Europe. She is a founding member of the Pandora company. In 2007, she initiated the heteroclite project *The Game of Life* presented in Belgium, Germany and Luxembourg. The same year, she was selected for the *Prix d'Art Robert Schuman*.

Born in 1964 in Paris (F), **Jean Bechameil** has worked since 1990 as an independent sculptor. He lived in Copenhagen for about twelve years where he regularly participated in exhibitions. At the same time, he worked on numerous sets for plays and films. He first began working in Paris where he helped produce the decor for *Madame Bovary* by Claude Chabrol (1991). He then participated in set design all over Europe. Among other things, he designed the decor for *Antichrist* (2009), *Manderlay* (2002), *Dogville* (2000) and *Dancer in the Dark* (1998) by Lars van Trier.

Since 2008, Jean Bechameil has been based in Luxembourg where he works in collaboration with Martine Feipel. In 2009 they participated in the Kunst & Zwalm Biennale (B) with a collaborative artwork, and in 2010 they presented an exhibition of their work at the Centre d'Art Nei Liicht in Dudelange (L).

Martine Feipel & Jean Bechameil mainly produce installations that react to the context in which they are presented. From drawings and sculptures that serve as models, the couple tries to create spaces; by crossing and fragmenting volumes, they recreate a dislocated, rickety universe that is, a priori, completely illogical.

LE CERCLE FERMÉ

by René Kockelkorn, commissioner

Anybody interested in the work of Martine Feipel & Jean Bechameil soon realises that the notion of space is central to it. This is also the case in the artwork presented for the 2011 Venice Biennale. The observer is presented with a single idea: the obvious necessity of finding a new type of space.

At the root of their work is an awareness that sensorial perception has physiological limits – and that our conception of space is historically dated. Henceforth, in the wake of the philosophy of Jacques Derrida, it is a case of trying to go beyond the limit of a place to find a new one. This comes down to thinking about the meaning of the limit and the meaning of space which is mainly the result of tradition. The important thing is not to overstep or transgress the law by crossing the limit but to “open” a space at the very heart of the former space. This opening does not create new space to occupy, but rather a sort of pocket hidden inside the old meaning of the limit. It is about an opening in space according to the principle of slippage. This internal slippage and the recreation of space always implies the destruction of an institution. The meaning of the word “space” is profoundly destabilised. In this, our two artists are very topical because the management of space is in crisis. This space we think of as living space is simultaneously a space of action, orientation and communication. The development of science and technology, the erosion of particular visions of the world and traditional value systems, the structural crisis of the economy and the exacerbation of the issue of logic question a traditional conception of space and management that only thinks in terms of fields of competence and is obsessed with the constraints of growth and valorisation. We live in a period of mutation in which past models of orientation and action no longer work.

Certainly, the situation still seems open, but we lack concepts of action capable of responding to the ecological crisis and the crisis of civilisation we are currently experiencing without endangering democracy, human rights and the physical necessities of life. Today, there is no doubt that it is more urgent than ever to consider any reflection on the question of space as a work of civilisation, as a remodelling of civilisation. Modifying the everyday completely remodels our world, and that is what this is all about.

The artwork can be understood on various different levels that touch as much on philosophy as on art history or society.

54th International Art Exhibition – la Biennale di Venezia

Preview: 1 – 3 June 2011. Official opening: 3 June 2011.

Open to the public: 4 June – 27 November 2011

Opening of the Luxembourg Pavilion with the exhibition *Le Cercle Fermé*: 2 June 2011 from 6 p.m. – 8 p.m. at Ca' del Duca, 3052 Corte Del Duca Sforza

Press contact for the Luxembourg Pavilion:

Nadine Clemens

nadine.clemens@casino-luxembourg.lu

T. +352 621 21 36 56

The official representation of Luxembourg at the 54th International Art Exhibition – la Biennale di Venezia is financed by the Ministry of Culture, Luxembourg. The coordination of the project is under the auspices of the Casino Luxembourg – Forum d'art contemporain.



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OPEN LETTER

Paul Virilio

The Luxembourg pavilion is an architectural manifesto for the millennium that has just begun. Indeed, whereas the 20th century was marked by two concepts – destruction and deconstruction – that influenced architecture and urban planning, the 21st century is shaping up as the century of disorientation on the ecological, economic, and, of course, geopolitical and cultural levels.

The Luxembourg pavilion in Venice exhibits itself in all three volumetric dimensions, in a disarray triggered by the sudden “globalisation” of the environment. Somewhat like an engraving by Escher, here the architectonic structure disorients our relationship to floor and walls.

This suddenly multifarious space, transcending any truly orthogonal state, generates uncertain relationships. As Walter Benjamin aptly put it, architecture “present[s] an object for simultaneous collective experience”.

In Venice this year, the Luxembourg pavilion wonderfully illustrates not only our loss of aesthetic bearings, but also and especially the crisis affecting a formerly constructive geometry now confronted with the instantaneous and simultaneous nature of a *real time* that henceforth governs the *real space* of everyday life.

4 March 2011, La Rochelle

LEGGENDA NERA – LE CERCLE FERMÉ BY RENÉ KOCKELKORN

LEGGENDA NERA – LE CERCLE FERMÉ

René Kockelkorn

It is no secret that images have the power to steer reality. They make us succumb to a “physiognomic deception”, as Ernst Gombrich put it. They enchant and seduce. Image may become reality, but it is always only a surface that can be changed or deleted at any time.

An example is our perception of Venice. In reality a languishing city, the image we have of it is a lively image of promise; a projection that is anchored in art and architecture. But artworks and buildings are not just the material aspects of a place or a city; they are the visible objects of an abstract logic by which a society has historically grown.

In their installation *Le Cercle fermé*, Martine Feipel and Jean Bechameil take up this abstract logic and visualize the flip side of the coin. It is like a counter-image to veduta painting, which perpetuates and glorifies the historical image. They show us the *Leggenda nera*¹, the dark side.

The installation originated *in situ* and represents a specific confrontation with the city's architecture, history and social fabric. But the installation is not so much concerned with historicity or a linear historical narrative. Rather, it represents a construction, describing the conquest of space in the course of globalisation and the identity-creating effects globalisation has, while at the same time deconstructing this very space. In other words: a construction in which spatial finitude and loss of identity (in postmodern globalisation) visually take shape. The visitor is drawn into a dialectical process of appearance and perception.

As always in their works, Feipel and Bechameil proceed from the “physiological limitation” of our spatial perception. Here lies the centre of their oeuvre. Abstract cognition is countered by sensual experience. It is a matter of “felt knowledge” as Walter Benjamin understood it².

Like a hamster in a running wheel from which there is no escape, the visitor feels his/her way forward, confused and hard-pressed by drawers falling out, by sagging stairs and staggering columns, by a constantly swinging candelabra and doors opened as if by magic. The innermost seems to be turned to the exterior. What is perceived as a threat – which the space of rationality, materialised in architecture and its order, was constructed to keep under control – breaks free. Views open to a hidden, hitherto invisible space. It seems madness, yet there is method in it. Instability is created to reveal a deeper threat to space as a cosmos of its own. *Le Cercle fermé* is a “negation of expectation”, to use Karl Popper's term. Deregulation confronts us with the unexpected, and that is exactly what our consciousness registers.

In their artistic method, Feipel and Bechameil are guided by so called deconstruction, especially its most prominent representative, Jacques Derrida, a philosopher who extensively dealt with architecture and reflections on space. Derrida tackles the meaning of boundaries, the meaning of space, which itself is part of a long tradition. It is not about crossing the line, not about the

violation of law by transgression, but rather the “opening up” of a space within traditional space; an opening which does not lead to a new space that can be occupied, but rather to a kind of soul in the body. According to Derrida, every traditional concept of architecture has a hidden space, with tradition, construction and architecture blocking the path to it. Thus, this triad represents boundaries – boundaries that always include what they are supposed to exclude.

In this space, this nowhere land, a “ghost” dwells; a ghost that does not leave architecture, tradition, in peace. Its appearance is like a parasite; though not visible, it is always present. It is a secret roommate, hidden behind the old meaning of boundary. For Derrida, architecture and space are something mad, a place, where something happens – essentially an unreal place³.

Derrida’s concept of space is based on Plato’s understanding of space. Plato uses the term *Chora* (land providing a place) to designate his concept of space. According to Plato, space is a kind of hybrid, limited as well as unlimited, something that allows for a where-in and a there-in. Thus, the meaning of space gets fundamentally shifted⁴.

“Une architecture de l’événement, est-ce possible ? Si ce qui nous arrive ainsi ne vient pas du dehors, ou plutôt si ce dehors nous engage dans cela même que nous sommes, y a-t-il un maintenant de l’architecture et en quel sens ? Tout revient justement à la question du sens. On n’y répondra pas en indiquant un accès, par exemple sous une forme donnée de l’architecture : préambule, pronaos, seuil, chemin méthodique, cercle ou circulation, labyrinthe, marches d’escalier, ascension, régression archéologique vers un fondement, etc. Encore moins sous la forme de système, à savoir de l’architectonique : l’art des systèmes, nous dit Kant. On ne répond pas en livrant accès à quelque sens final dont l’assomption nous serait enfin promise. Non, il s’agit justement de ce qui arrive au sens : non pas au sens de ce qui nous permettrait d’arriver enfin au sens, mais de ce qui lui arrive, au sens, au sens du sens. Et voilà, l’événement, ce qui arrive par un événement qui, ne relevant plus tout à fait ni simplement du sens, aurait partie liée avec quelque chose comme la folie”⁵.

But what kind of appearance is *Le Cercle fermé*? The city’s historical architecture – especially the Doge’s Palace, the Biblioteca Marciana, the Arsenale, the Dogana and other sacred and secular buildings of distinction – originates from a time “in which objects are still part of a life process” (Hans Belting). They represent the front side of a state brimming with political, military and economic power, a “miracle of urbanity, wealth and scholarship”⁶ whose territory and sphere of influence are constantly increasing; a front side which, in the course of time, increasingly loses its glamour. By the time of the Napoleonic invasion of 1797 at the latest, Venice had fallen into insignificance in every respect. Already in the 18th century, the city was notorious for being “Europe’s fairground”. In the age of modernisation (19th century) Venice practically became a projection screen for an archetypical ideal: John Ruskin’s scary and beautiful “Paradise of Cities”; a city that only exists in the imagination, in a free construction; a city that removes boundaries, but does not adhere to anything, in order to finally (in the postmodern era) mutate into a space of the “spectacle” Debord-style where the city loses its secrets, only displaying itself as pure surface. Thus, the city has turned into a structural object in Roland Barthes’s sense; an object only existing by its name and its form.

Paradoxically, it was the very attempt at the end of the 19th century to turn Venice into a vibrant and modern city again and to free it from its *rigor mortis* that led to this total loss of identity. The idea of breathing new life into the city by staging an international exhibition of modern art, a *Biennale dell’ arte* – thereby taking up the past greatness of the Venice of Titian, Tintoretto and Veronese, when the city was setting standards for cultural development reaching far beyond the city’s territorial bounds – turned the city into a postmodern showcase for event culture and mass consumption, while at the same time providing a platform for the public display of an international jet set. Culture in Venice today also means capital turned into image. Unlike in the glorious past, Venice no longer creates an identity for a community, but destroys it. It seems like a late revenge of history; globalisation, which made the city great and created its identity, is now leading to its terminal decline. The circle is complete.

This circle is also reflected by the history of the Ca' del Duca, which houses the pavilion of Luxembourg. Its history summarises *in nuce* the process already described. It was originally constructed in 1461 for Francesco Sforza, Duke of Milan, as part of an ambitious city palace at the Canale Grande never to be completed, and with an (by Venetian standards) unusually fortified exterior. Thus, it represents that particular part of Venice's history when the city expanded and became one of the most powerful centres of Italy. However, at the same time, the Ca' del Duca highlights the loss of power and aura. Only the column of Filarete, the Sforzas's architect, reminds one of the magnitude of the planned residence⁷. The rest has deteriorated into an inconspicuous block of flats. During the Biennale, however, and made possible by the Luxembourg presence, for a short time the apartment block seems to regain its former glamour and awakens from its years of slumber. The presence of visitors is not, however, a sign of regained vitality, but a kind of visitation, a flash in the pan triggered by social interactivity.

Le Cercle fermé is a confrontation with space as a shaper of civilisation, but also with its crisis. The installation shows us Venice as a cautionary example of a development where – with our eyes open – we lose our identity, our worldviews and moral concepts, determined by the globalisation of a narrow way of thinking only concerned with efficiency and growth – and with devastating effects on society and individuals alike.

1. Robert Hewison, *Ruskin on Venice* (Yale University Press, New Haven/London, 2000), p. 2.

2. Walter Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk*, vol. 1, (Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt/Main, 1983). Introduction by the editor, p. 19.

3. Mark Wigley, *Architektur und Dekonstruktion: Derridas Phantom* (Birkhäuser Verlag, Basel 1994), pp. 147–157.

4. Stephan Günzel, "Philosophie und Räumlichkeit", p. 4, in: (ed.) Fabian Kessel, Christian Reuling, Suzanne Maurer and Oliver Frey, *Handbuch Sozialraum* (VS-Verlag, Wiesbaden, 2005).

5. Jacques Derrida, "Point de folie – Maintenant de l'architecture", no. 4, 1986, in: Bernard Tschumi, *La Case vide : La Vilette 1985*, (London, 1986).

6. Martin Schwader, "Venedigbilder. Geschichte und Mythos einer Stadt", p. 11, in: exhibition catalogue: *Venedig. Von Canaletto und Turner bis Monet* (Riechen/Basel, 2008).

7. Aldo Rossi, *A Scientific Autobiography* (Cambridge/Mass. and London, 1981, 19842), p. 6:

"I always observe this column and its base, this column that is both a beginning and an end. This document or relic of time, in its formal purity, has always seemed to me a symbol of architecture consumed by the life which surrounds it".

Kindly cited by the Luxembourg artist Bert Theis.

EXHIBITION

Martine Feipel & Jean Bechameil, *Le Cercle fermé*, exhibition view, 2011
© photo: Joseph Tomassini



























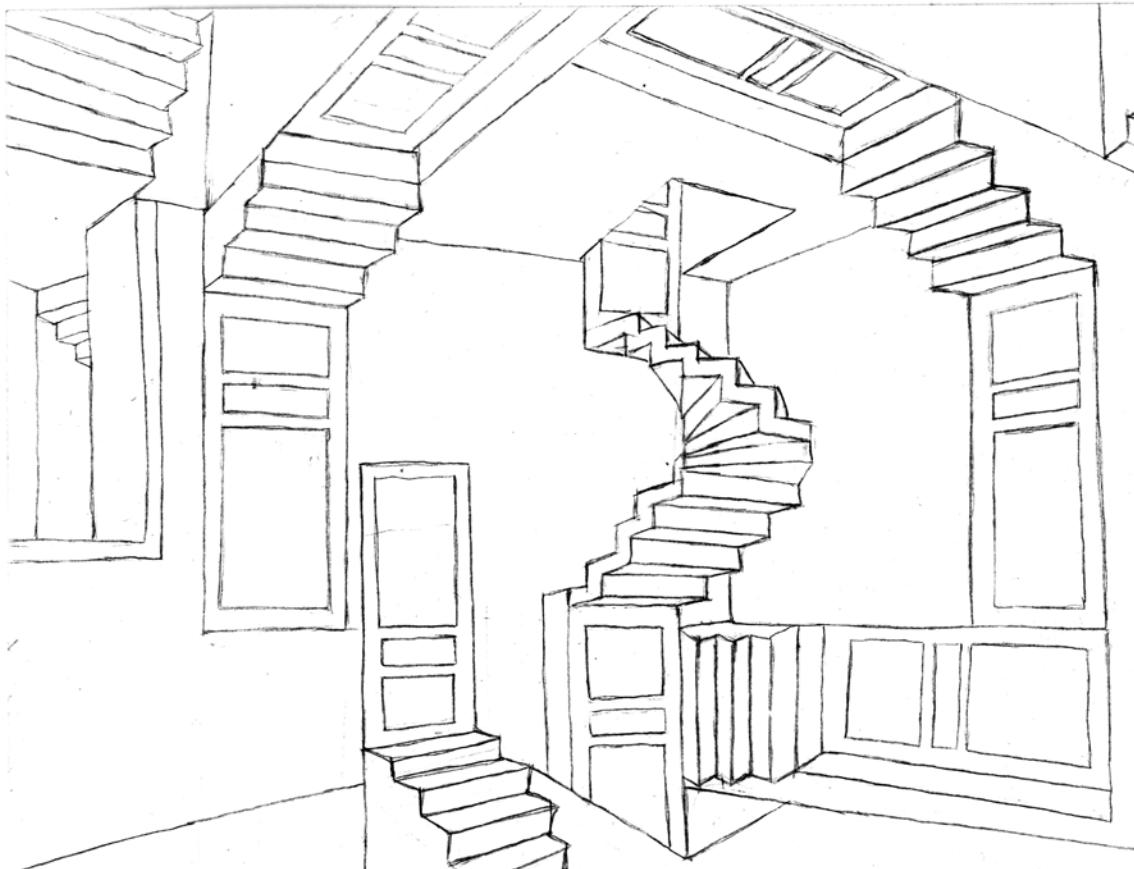


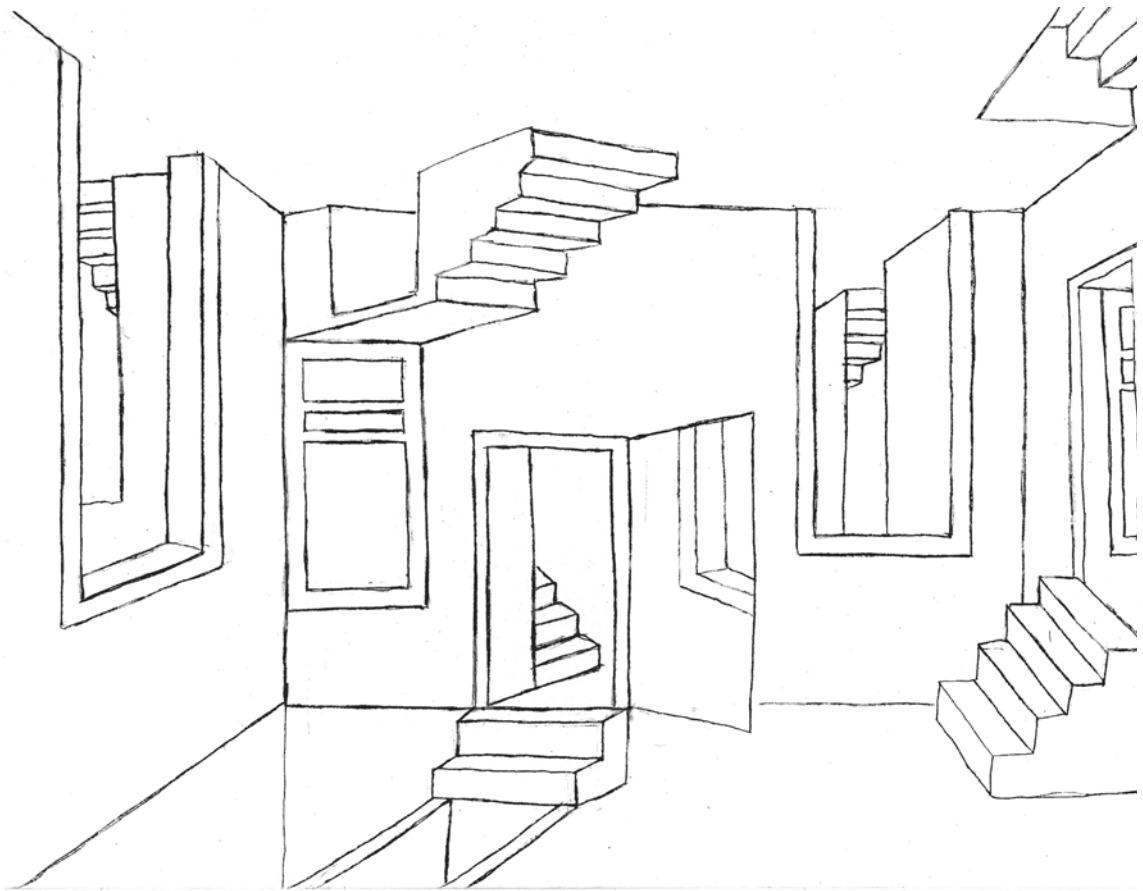


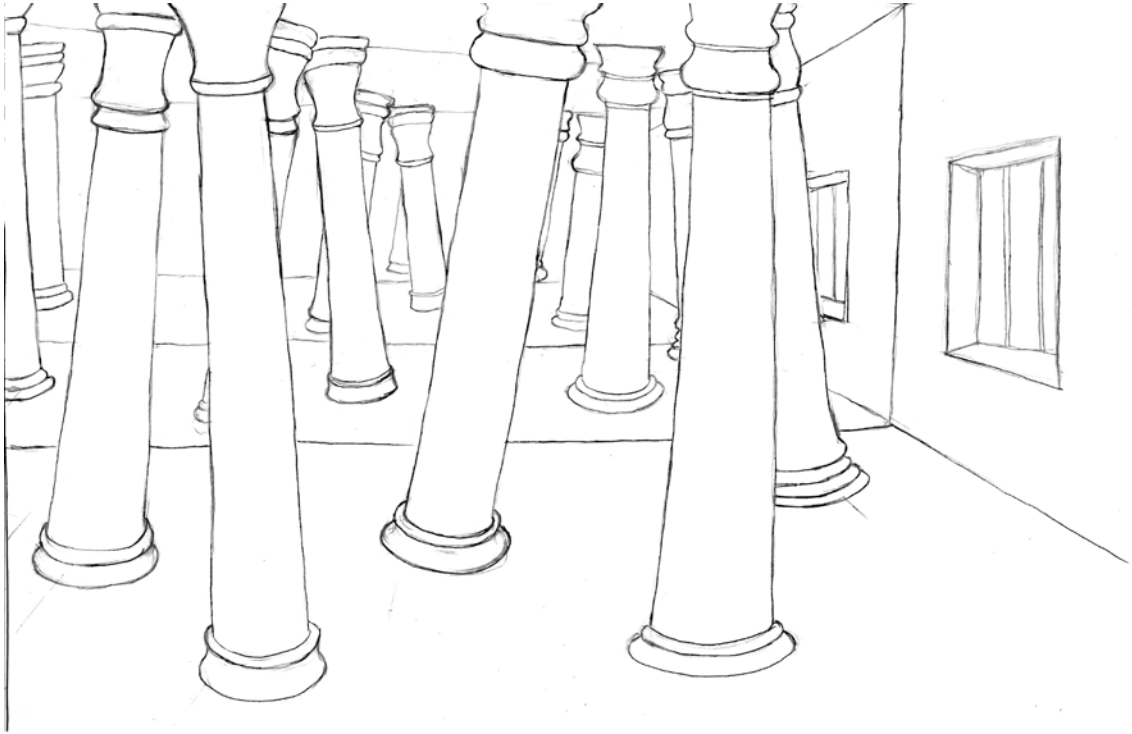


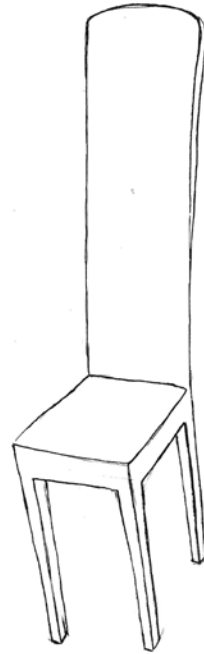
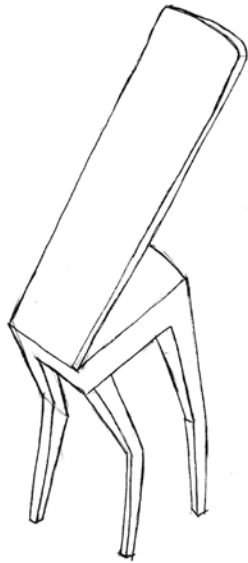
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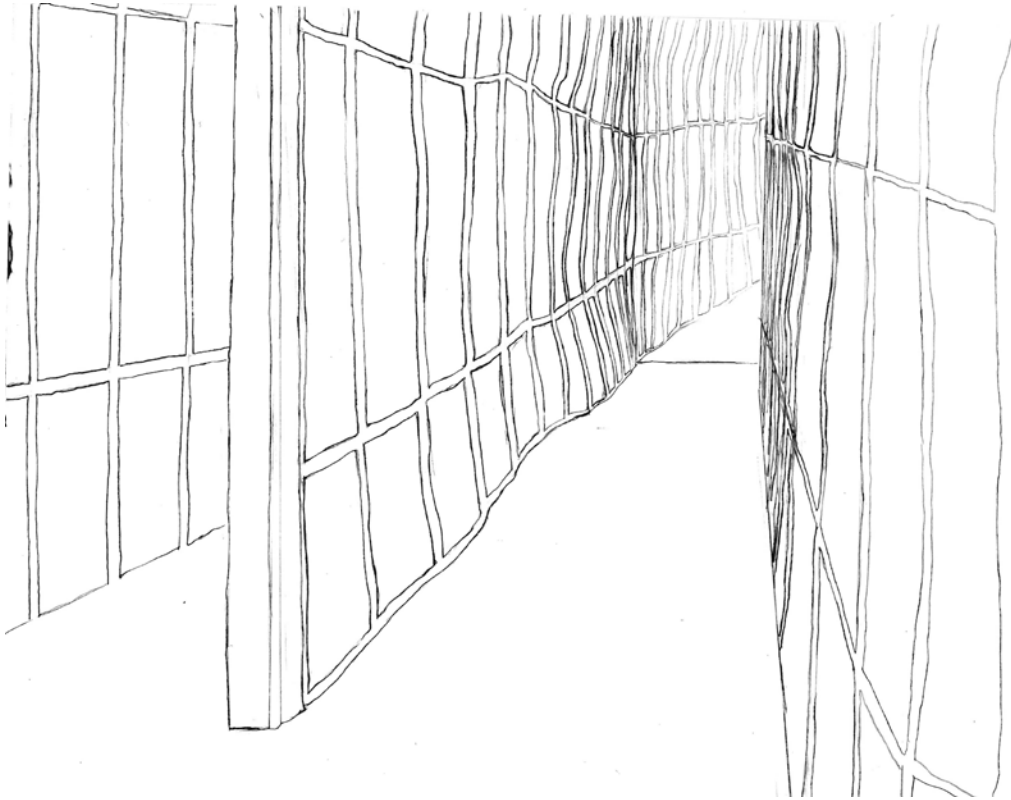
Martine Feipel & Jean Bechameil, *Le Cercle fermé*, drawing of a detail of the installation.
Pencil on paper. 26 x 18 cm, 2010
© Martine Feipel & Jean Bechameil

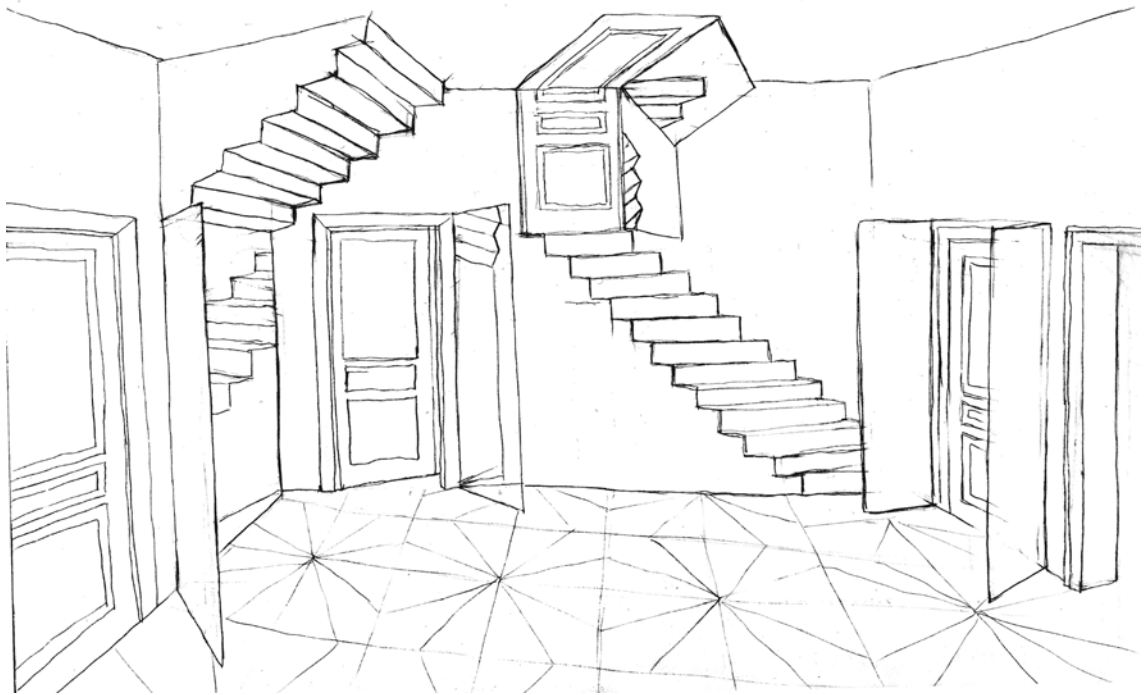


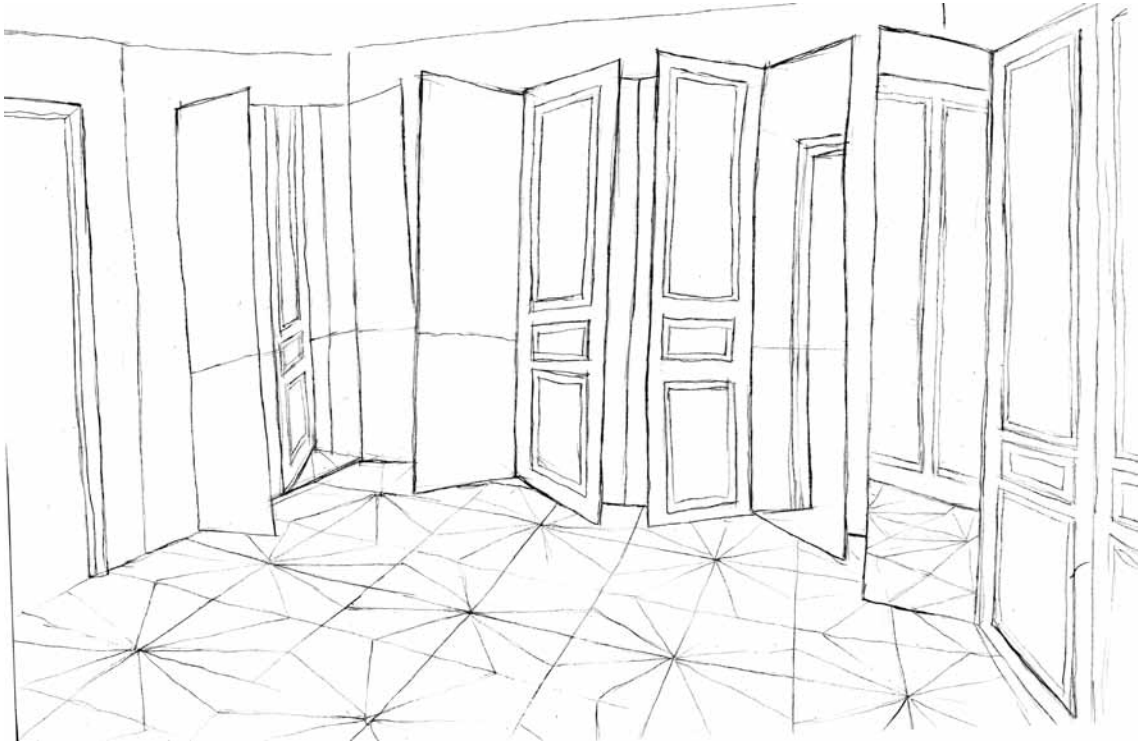


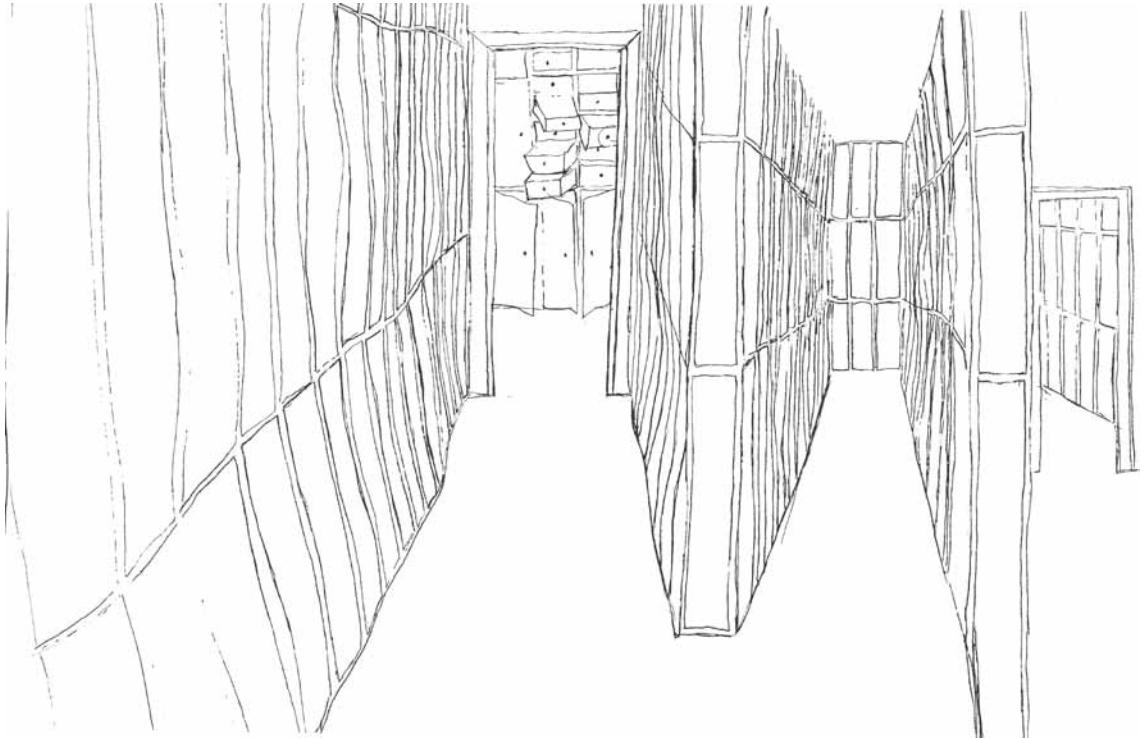


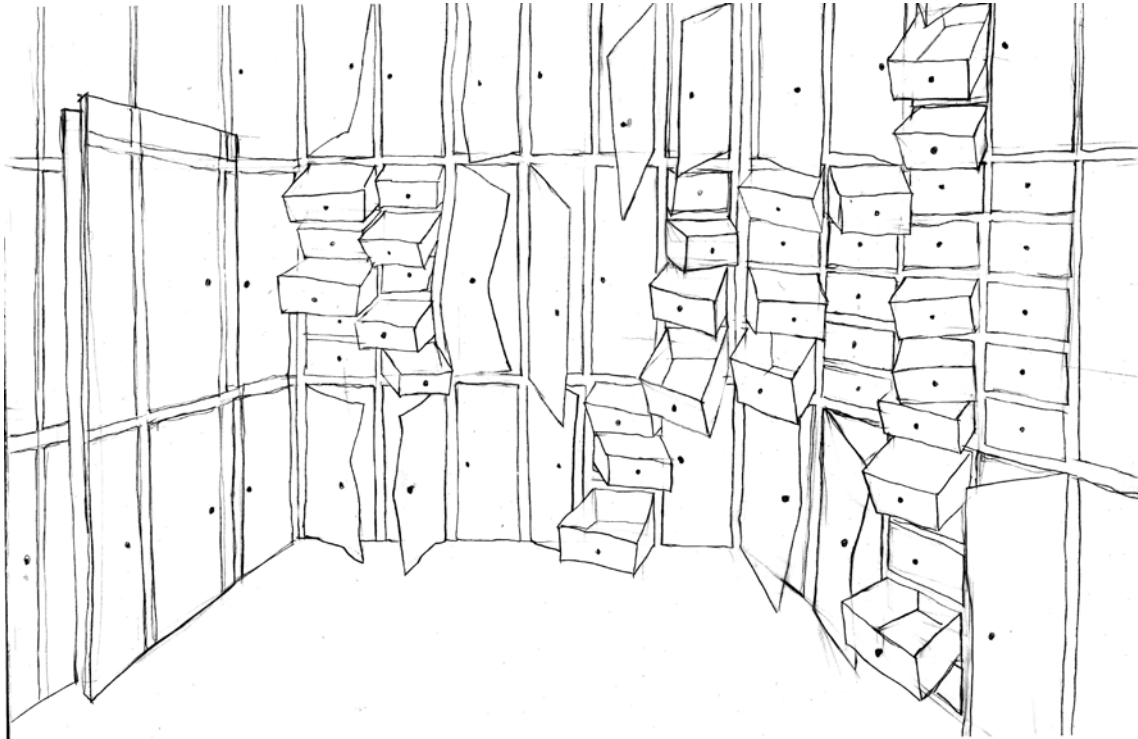


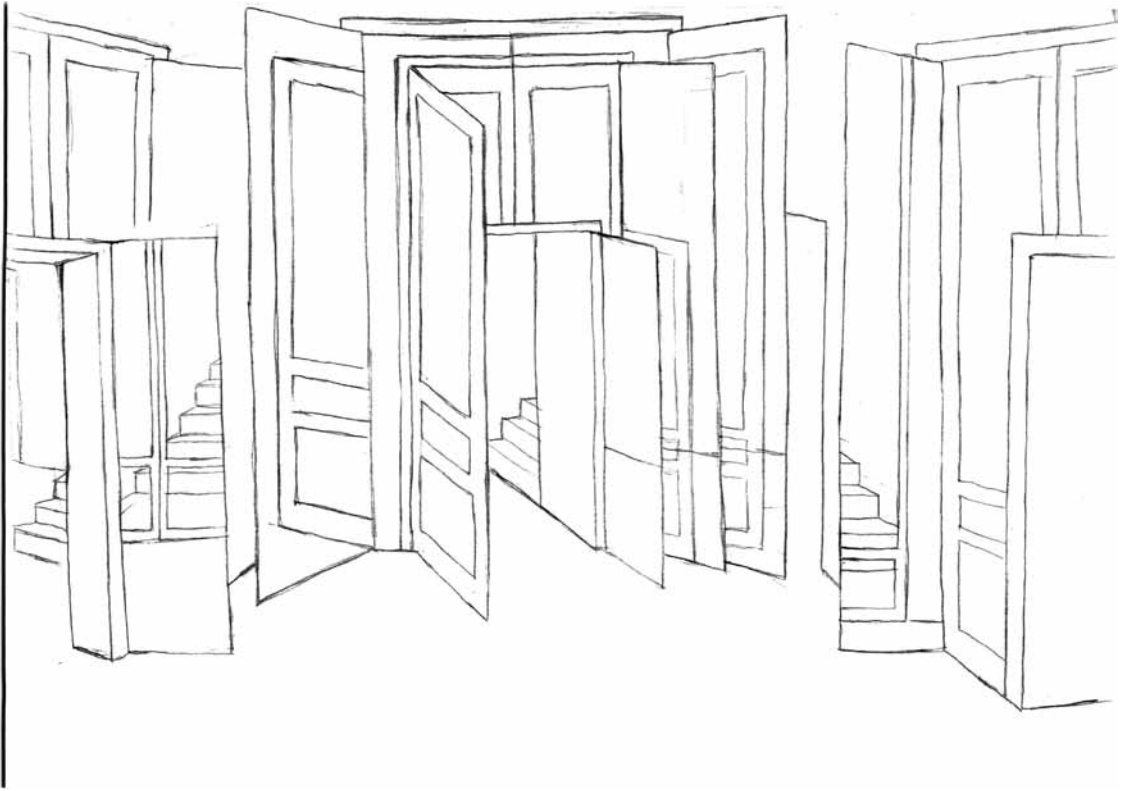


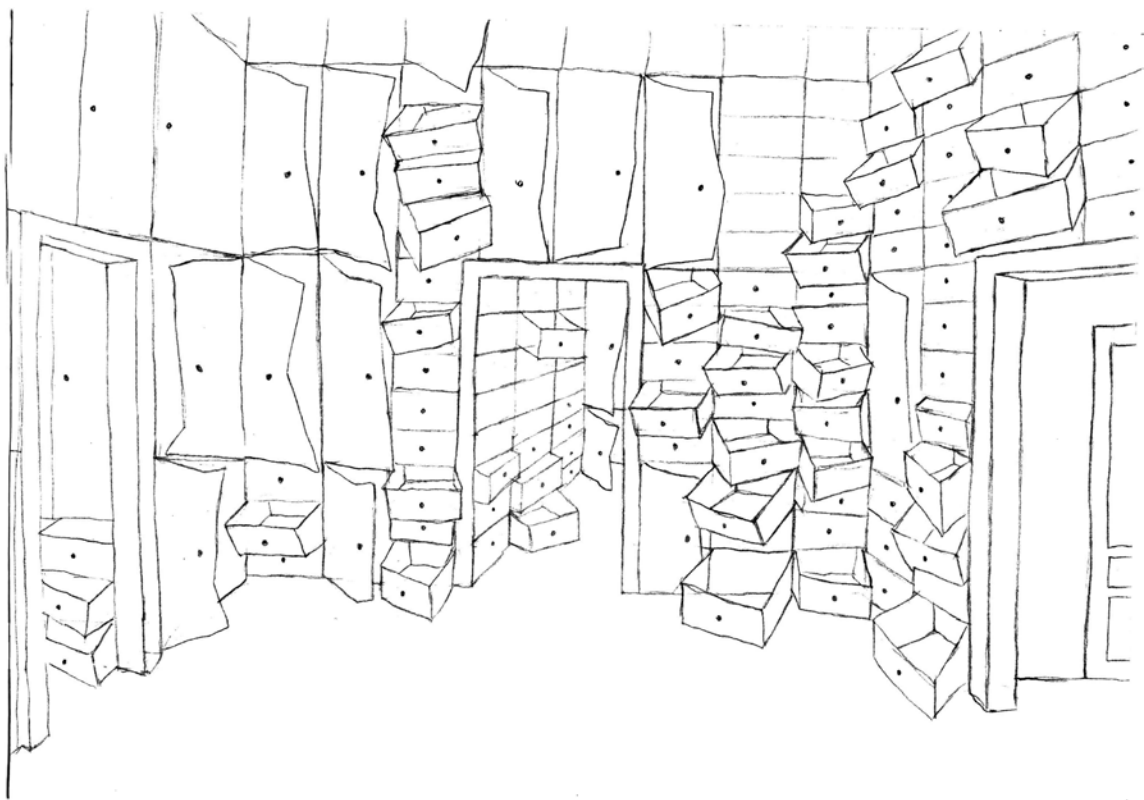












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