TO BUILD A HOUSE

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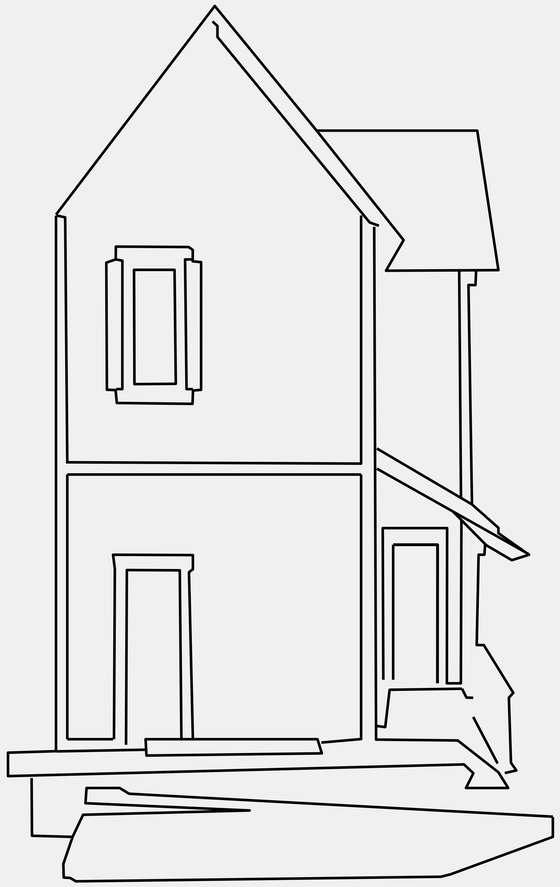
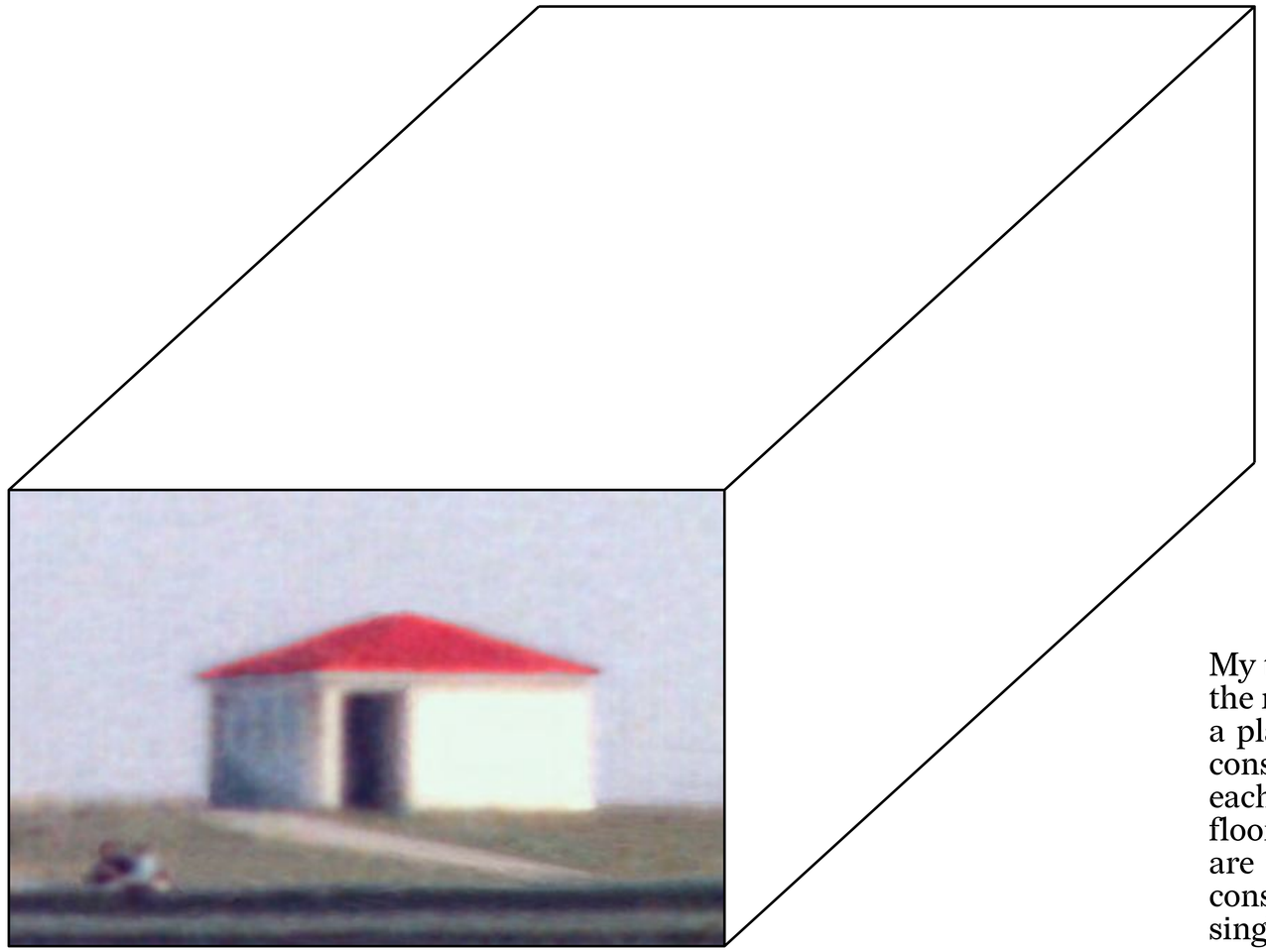


Introduction:



Jorge Sasse, *3502*, 36 x 54cm print, 1995

A couple of years ago, I was asked to write an artist's statement. Faced with this difficult task, I decided to cheat. I started to make it up. Thus, the *Installation Project* was born: a project in which I claimed that all of the artworks that I have ever created were meant to be part of a greater work. An installation soberly called Installation Project, that would follow me throughout my whole life, and would grow with time and the accumulation of projects it would constitute. Thereby, each of my artworks would exist by themselves but also as part of a whole, a kind of world. Like a self-fulfilling prophecy, this supposedly fictional statement became true. Almost in spite of myself, my artworks would match with each other. A group of sculptures and drawings started forming an installation. The Installation Project came to life.

My thesis reopens the theme of "life-long artwork" by the means of the metaphor of building a house. What if the house was more than a place to live, but a metaphor for creation, a creation that grows constantly until the end of our life? To strengthen this metaphor, each part of my thesis is represented by a floor: ground floor, first floor, second floor, and the attic. Furthermore, each of these parts are introduced by a fictional text, in which I narrate the construction of the house two anonymous characters decide to single handedly undertake.

In “Ground Floor: Laying the first bricks”, I give a definition of the House and look into the urge human beings have to build. In “First Floor: An Ideal Palace, or When Outsider Artists Become Architects,” I introduce Ferdinand Cheval, who will become a recurring character of my thesis. I will assert that his construction built in the middle of France can be the link between a palace, a sandcastle, and a mausoleum. I then analyse the different implications of “building a house” and “building a tomb” before comparing Cheval’s labor with Sisyphus’s punishment. In this section I affirm that Sisyphus, instead of repetitively pushing his boulder up a hill for eternity, (and as suggested by Camus, was happy doing so) could have been sentenced to build his own house. To close this part, I draw a comparison between “mainstream architecture” and the architectural realisations made by outsider artists, that I qualify as Total Artwork. In “Second Floor: A Space to Claim and a Way to Claim a Space”, I tackle the political connotations of houses, huts, and shelters: their feministic meanings and abilities to conquer and claim spaces. I point out next the aesthetic similarities provisional dwellings share with contemporary art sculptures and installations. Finally, in “The Attic: The House as Universe”, I explain my vision of the House as a tool to connect thoughts, and how despite its verticality, it grows like a rhizome. By its way of knitting ideas together, the house can even be used as a method for storytelling. Viewed and organised collectively, the concepts put together through the construction of a house give a faithful representation of our mind. Houses are universal, houses are our universes.

Part One:

Before the Construction.

Lars von Trier, *The House that Jack built*, Zentropa Production, 2018

Gazing at an Empty Piece of Land.

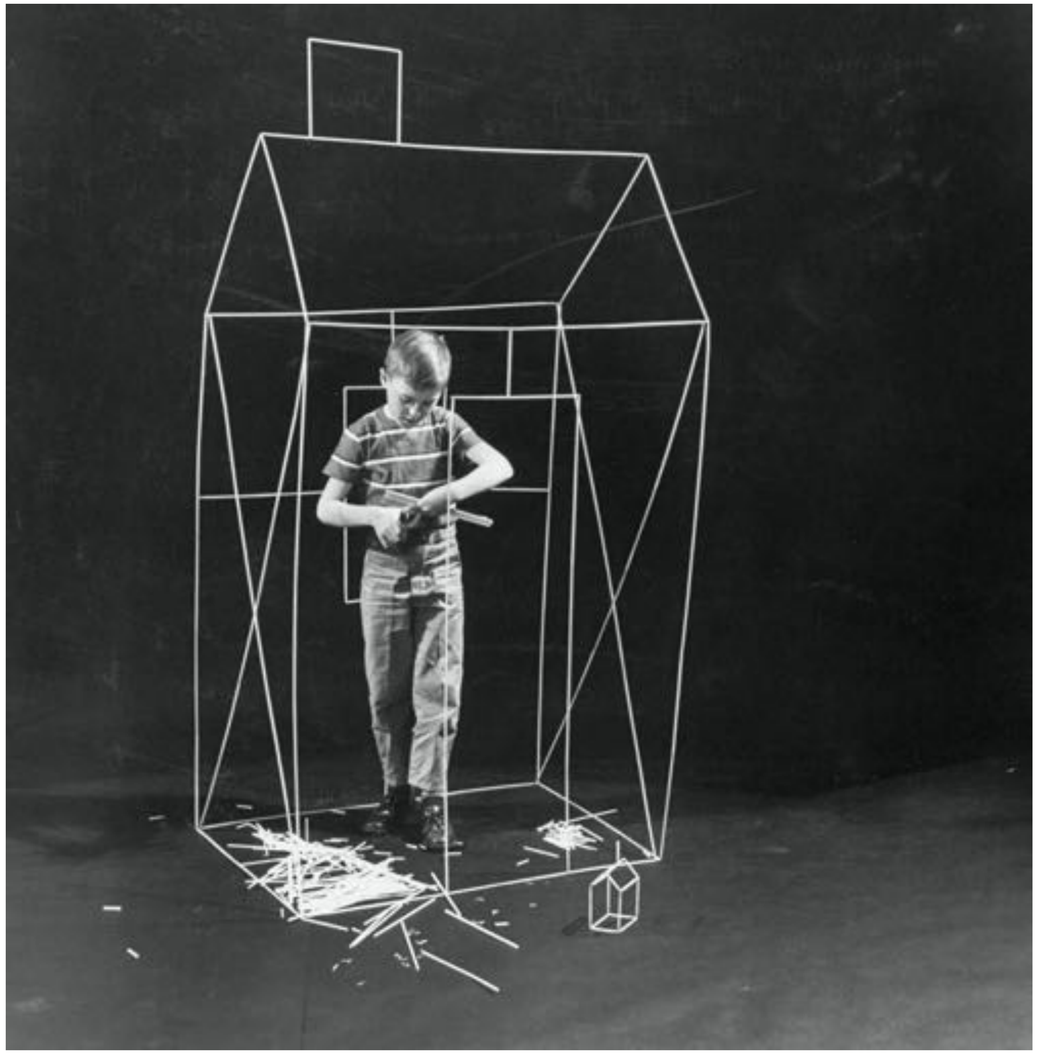
Finally. They have at last acquired an empty piece of land. Their dream is about to come true: building their very own house from scratch. While they are gazing at their terrain, a thought emerges almost simultaneously in their minds. They are not an exception, everyone wants to create. Whether it is writing a book about palm trees, making a shelf to store an impressive collection of wooden shoes, recording a song about a lost teenage love, planting vegetables in a garden or even building a dwelling, people are eager to create something new. They could have built anything. However the house is universal, built by any sort of people since the beginning of humanity. A metaphor for creation, creation that grows with time, that grows with them, that they will build constantly until the end of their life. A creation that represents them, that can be their self-portrait. A creation in itself but also a creation that encompasses other works, as well as themselves. Now, as they stand still in the middle of this field, our two characters share the same purpose. They want to build it: their house, their universe.

*"Our house is our corner of the world. It is our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word."**

* Gaston Bachelard, The Poetic of Space
(Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1957), p24

*"(...) Let's go back to the terrain. I was speaking about despair. No, a terrain, on the contrary, allows every hope. On the terrain, we can build, and I will build. Now I'm sure. I'm saved. I have a foundation. Beforehand, everything was in space, without ceiling, nor floor, obviously, if I was placing a subject there, I never saw it ever again. It had disappeared. It was disappearing by falling, that's what I didn't understand, and I've always thought I didn't build it right ! I would come back a couple hours after placing it there, and would always be surprised by its disappearance. From now on, it won't happen again. My land, it is true, is still boggy. But I'll dry it little by little and when it will be hard enough, I will establish a working family."**

* Henri Michaux, *My properties*, (Paris: O. Fourcade, 1929) (translation mine)



Peter Stackpole, *New Toy, Fiddle Straws,* 1956

Taiyo Onorato & Nico Krebs, from *The Great Unreal* series, USA, 2005-2009

Part Two:

Ground Floor:

Laying the First Bricks.

A Definition of a House and the Begining of its Construction.

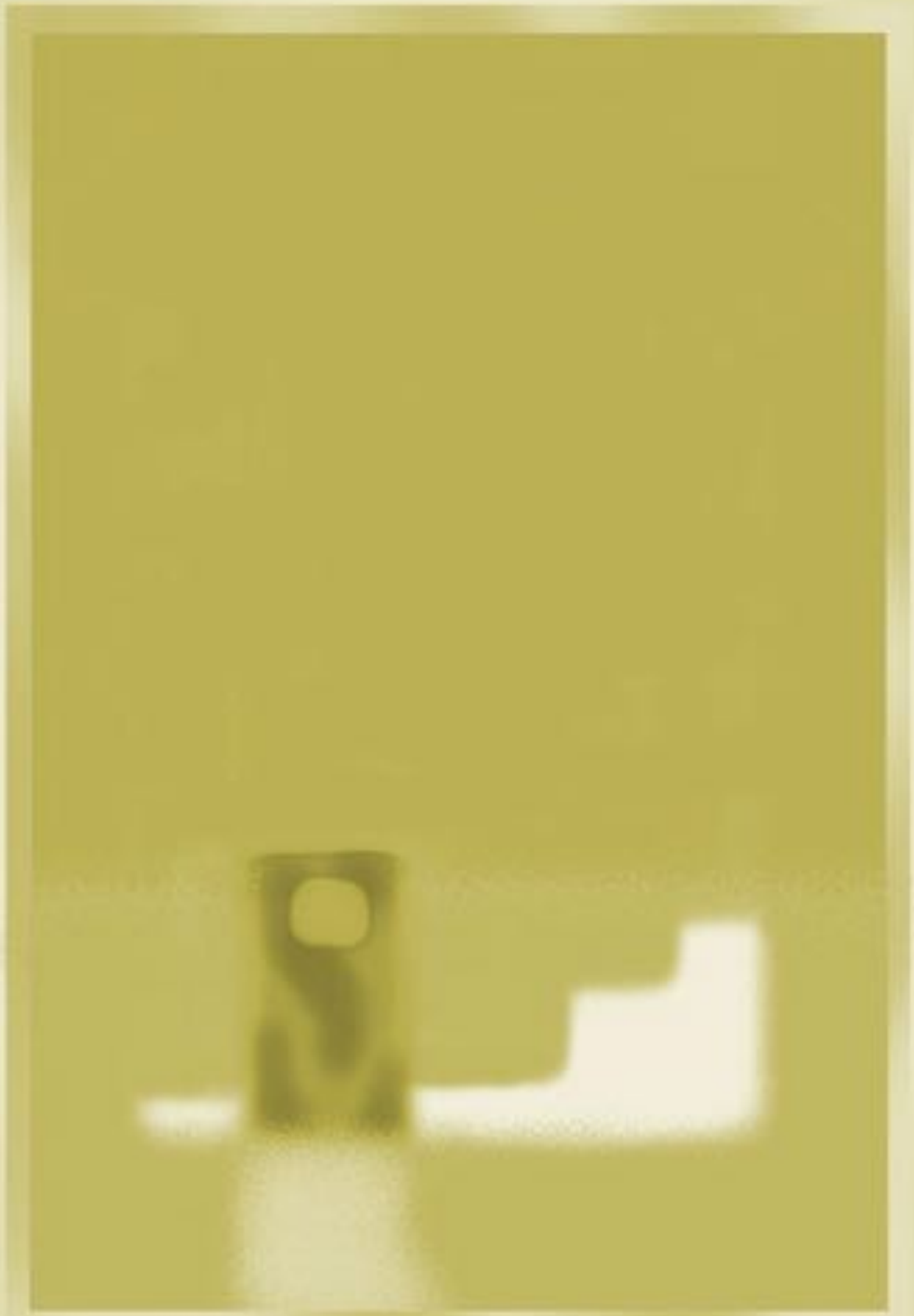
“It is body and soul. It is the human being's first world. Before he is "cast into the world," as claimed by certain hasty metaphysics , man is laid in the cradle of the house. And always, in our daydreams, the house is a large cradle.”

Gaston Bachelard*

* Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetic of Space*, 1957, p26

A house is a receptacle, a receptacle that shelters life. The life it shelters builds the house, making it an exchange. Inside a house, there is a universe, but the house itself is also part of this universe. In a nutshell, a house is both a universe and the universe it contains. Houses can travel in time. They help us store our memories and our past. They shelter us and provide us with immediate safety. Houses, and buildings in general, are also a way for human beings to reach eternity, a way not to be forgotten. They outlive us.

No one starts a house with its roof. Usually, we first delimit a space, like a map, that will be our foundation. However, there are no rules. There are as many ways of building a house than buildings in the world. Then, we build. We start from the bottom, to the top, add a floor or two, maybe a balcony, and an attic. It keeps growing with time. It keeps growing as our universe expands. We can even dig a basement if we want. Some people have a garden. However, a house is not just a container. It is alive, growing like a rhizome, always connected with the life that inhabits it. Our house resembles us, and we build our houses the same way we ourselves are growing.



Now that they are done staring at their land, they decide to start building. Weirdly enough, even before starting the construction of their home, they have already created their universe. A long time ago, probably right after they were born. It just didn't have a physical form yet. "In fact, they know the universe before they know the house, the far horizon before the resting-place"*

* Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetic of Space*, 1957, p25

The Irrepressible Appetite of Human Beings for Building Things.

"We do not dwell because we have built, but we build and have built because we dwell, that is, because we are dwellers"

Martin Heidegger*

* Martin Heidegger, Building Dwelling Thinking (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1971)

Mezhyrich Huts, Ukraine, mammoth bones, picture Ria Novosti

Humans have always built their houses. The idea that early humans mostly lived in caves is actually a misconception: humans build shelters. Archeologists mostly found traces of inhabited caves because they were much better preserved. However, as nomadic, early humans were actually most of the time living in huts, tents, and other shelters built with the material they could find. They even shared at times a certain aesthetic.

Again, many people dream about building their own house, including several artists and architects. However, it is much more than a drive only emerging among people working in the creative field. As children, we have an urge to draw houses, to build blanket forts in our living room, sandcastles on the beach, small huts in the woods, or a treehouse in our garden for the luckiest of us. Maybe building houses is not even about creativity. Most children's drawings of their house look pretty much the same - for instance, they draw a simple pentagon with two windows and a door - even though the child may live in an apartment.

Perhaps it is more about safety. They are not drawing their own home, but the archetypal representation of a safe space. Moreover, the house is rarely represented by itself. The family is drawn next to it, and the composition of this family is what makes their home unique, rather than the house itself. You have a house, that is, your personal space in which you can hide, and you're not alone.

First of May, Anonymous Child Drawing, 2010

Our relationship towards these different sorts of houses seems to change according to the material they are built of. Blanket forts are made with rather soft and comforting material. It is a place to feel safe and to tell stories. It is a place, on the scale of a child, to hide within an adult-sized world. A house within a house. Wooden huts and tree-houses are a way to claim our own space. We are finally the master of our own habitation since these constructions stand outside of the family house. It is almost a sort of land conquest. Sandcastles, due to their ephemerality, are principally there for the archetypal representation of a building's aesthetic. You decorate them with seashells, algae, and whatever sea debris you can find, knowing that they are too fragile and small to be a shelter and that they will most likely be gone tomorrow.

We love to be in control, safe, and original. That is exactly what building our own house offers us. We want to build a house that resembles us, welcomes us, and hosts us in the exact way we want. We have decided everything, and our house is as unique as we can be. It seems today that we are witnessing a gradual return of what people call "slow life", coming from our new ecological values, but also from our desperate need of control, independence and original creation. We have decided that from now on, we will grind our coffee ourselves, make our own soap and toothpaste, and why not, build our own home. We want to take part in the process.

It is exactly Edward Bernays's idea. Bernays was a famous Austrian-American psychoanalyst of the mid 20th Century and incidentally Sigmund Freud's nephew. He's considered the first person to work on "public relations" and best-known for being a pioneer in the use of psychology and psychoanalysis on branding and advertising strategies. Among many other projects, Bernays helped in the making of the "Betty Crocker Cake Mix" marketing, a ready to bake preparation for cake. Housewives, at the time in charge of most culinary tasks, didn't respond to the concept of "cake from a box". Finally it became clear that they felt guilty about baking a cake to which they had contributed so little, so the recipe was changed to require the addition of an egg.*

This is also probably one of the reasons Ikea is a big success. It has given us the opportunity to build our pieces of furniture, to be in control. Yes, we are buying extremely widely produced objects owned by millions of other people, but we built them ourselves. We feel that we are remaining the master of our home, our universe.

*Adam Curtis, *The Century of the Self*, episode 2 (London: BBC documentary, 2002)

This cognitive bias has a name, the Ikea effect. Theorised in 2011, this effect makes consumers disproportionately value products they created, or helped create, even if it only was partially the case. A study found indeed that people would agree to pay 63% more for furniture they assembled themselves than for the same pre-assembled ones*. That year, researchers Michael Norton, Daniel Mochon and Dan Ariely published three studies in which they described the effect. According to them: "Labor alone can be sufficient to induce greater liking for the fruits of one's labor: even constructing a standardised bureau, an arduous, solitary task, can lead people to overvalue their (often poorly constructed) creations"**. However, before this specific bias had been coined, this tendency had been recognised by psychologists and marketers for a long time. For instance, the Canadian psychologist Albert Bandura stated in a 1977 study that "successful completion of tasks was a crucial means by which people can meet their goal to feel competent and in control."***

*Jillian Berman, *The IKEA Effect: Study Finds Consumers Over-Value Products They Build Themselves* (New York: Huffington Post, 26th September 2011

**Michael Norton, Daniel Mochon, Dan Ariely, *The IKEA Effect: When Labor Leads to Love,* (Massachusetts: Journal of Consumer Psychology 22, no. 3, July 2012.) p. 453–460

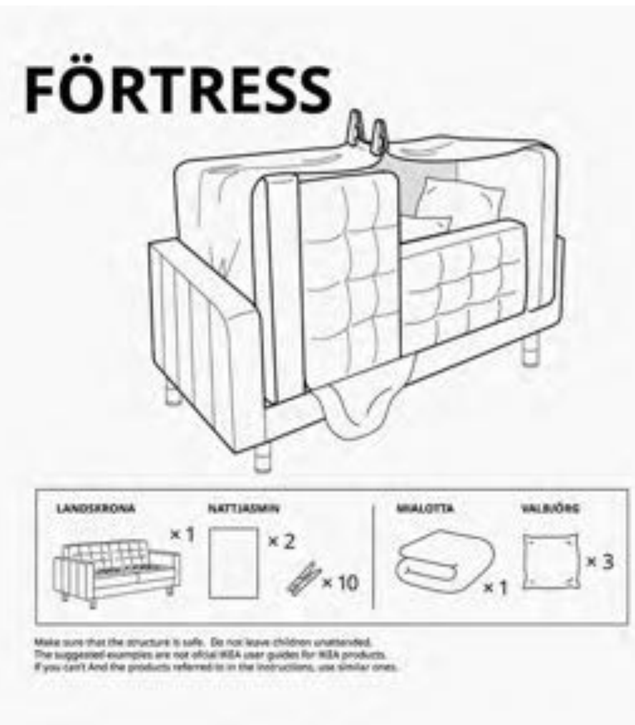
***Albert Bandura, *Self-Efficacy: Toward a Unifying Theory of Behavioural Change* (Amsterdam: Elsevier Inc. 1977)

Ikea is aware of it, and plays with its image of a multinational DIY company. In May 2020, during the lockdown due to the Covid crisis, Ikea launched a new advertising campaign in which they imitated their iconic manual to invite us to build blanket forts and other castles with their furniture. The genius of this marketing campaign does not only reside in its DIY aspect and the psychological effects it induces in the customers, it also brings the target audience back to the safety of their childhood. Ikea helps us furnish the only place we feel safe in these very uncertain pandemic times, our very own home. Moreover, the campaign gives us the tools, by the bias of the manuals, to build our own little shelter inside our grownup house. What is safer than a home within a home ? It is even more crucial knowing that, in this period, our house is not only our universe, but it is our only remaining universe.

Humans' irrepressible appetite for construction is now obvious. Dwellings appear to be as old as humanity, and even today, human beings from all backgrounds start building different sorts of houses and shelters since childhood, or dream of building their very own home. Besides, the "self-made" part of the construction seems to be primordial. They stay in control, their home becomes personal by essence, and their own labor brings, in their eyes, more value to their work. Their home, like a form of self-portrait, is as unique as they are. Their universe, as Bachelard would say. However, if building is so primordial for human beings, it is most likely because "building is not only the means of dwelling, a path that leads to it, building is already in itself dwelling"*

*Martin Heidegger, *Building Dwelling Thinking* (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1971)

Ikea Advertising Campaign, May 2020



Ikea Advertising Campaign, May 2020

Part Three:

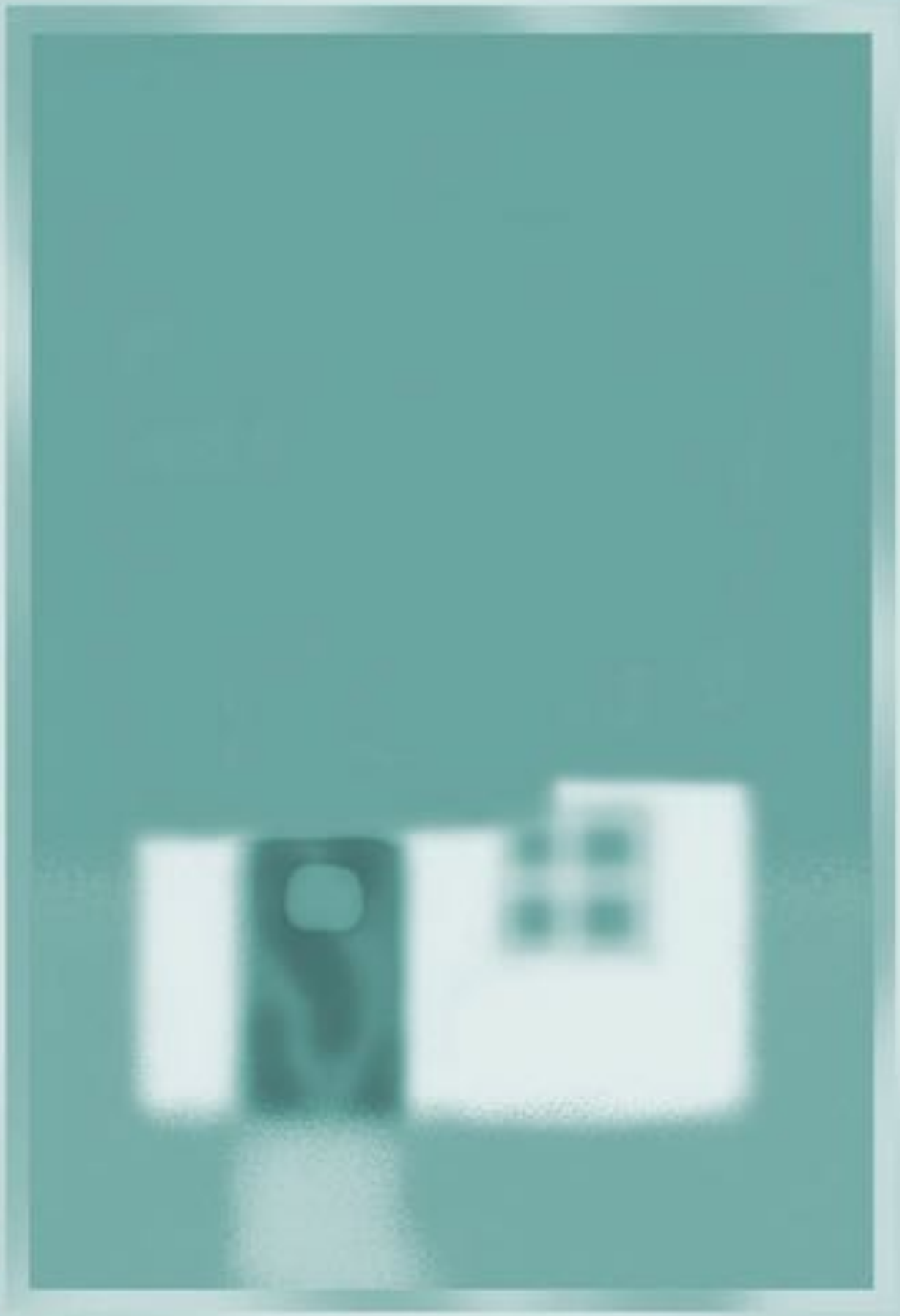
First Floor:

An Ideal Palace

Leonard Knight, Salvation Mountain, California, 1984-2011

or

When Outsider Artists Become Architects.



Reflection on the Reassuring Banality of their House.

Their house looks quite funny with its unique level. It almost reminds them of a Bauhaus building, with less style. At least, if they try hard enough, they can now picture a somewhat final version of their habitation. It won't be a crazy building, just a humble house for some humble people. They agreed on it from the start. Nothing like a palace, nothing like a castle, a simple house to host them, their potential family and the tasteful decorative objects they acquired with time.

One thing is certain, their house won't have anything in common with Facteur Cheval's Ideal Palace, this strange and impressive building lost in the middle of France. A chaotic architectural structure, which according to them, looks more like a giant sandcastle than an actual habitation.

In spite of themselves, they are thinking about the titanic work of this man while embarking in the construction of the first floor of what was meant to be their home.

The Postman, the Stone, and the Wheelbarrow.

Born in Charmes, France, in 1836, Ferdinand Cheval was a rural postman. Every day he would travel nearly 30km to deliver mail around his village. “What can you do but dream when you walk perpetually in the same decor ?” he wrote in his auto-biography. One day in the spring of 1879, the 43-year-old man stumbled on a weird stone that awakened a dream. From then on, he would always make his rounds across the countryside accompanied by his wheelbarrow to pick up stones on his way. Ferdinand devoted 33 years of his life to single-handedly build a palace in his garden. Finally achieved in 1912, we can read “The Work of One Man” engraved as an epitaph on the construction he called “The Ideal Palace.”

Because he was a simple postman, Ferdinand Cheval’s work was quickly categorised as “Outsider Art” or even “Naive Art” by the French elite. His inspirations, however, didn’t come out of nowhere. Indeed, the exotic postcards and the very first illustrated magazines he delivered were for him a true source of fascination. By his way of assembling stones together with concrete, he is also considered the precursor of “reinforced concrete,” a construction technique in which concrete’s fragility is compensated by the inclusion of more solid or flexible materials. This building method is still used nowadays for imposing structures like tall buildings and bridges.

Palais Ideal (detail), Ferdinand Cheval, picture Regisa, 2020

Palais Ideal (detail), Ferdinand Cheval, picture Jean Damiens, 2020

Palais Ideal, East Facade, Ferdinand Cheval, picture Al Capitol, 2019

Cheval began his work with a fountain, ”The Spring of Life.” It was built with seashells, snails, oysters, and various stones assembled with lime mortar, as a hymn to the majesty and wonder of nature. His second piece of work was a cave he named "St. Amadeus' Cave" , in honour of the patron saint of his village. At its entrance, he recorded the date he started working, 1879. After building his second fountain "The Source of Wisdom”, he continued with an Egyptian-inspired tomb, as the Postman wanted to be buried in the heart of the Palace, “like the Pharaohs.”

On each wing of the East Facade, Cheval built a monument. The Egyptian Temple, with four columns decorated with sandstone balls, is standing on one extremity. On the opposite end, the Three Giants, considered as one of the finest features of the Palace, seem to watch the surroundings. Their headgears are reminiscent of the Easter Island statues, as the giants are supposed to figure the three keepers of the monument. Behind them, in a small niche, rests the postman's wheelbarrow, called his faithful companion in times of trouble. The whole is dominated by the “Tower of Barbarism” surrounded by a variety of vegetation: palm trees, olive trees, aloes, and prickly pears. This tower serves as a reservoir for water and once fed the “Spring of Life” through a network of pipelines. The date 1899 is engraved between the Three Giants, and marks the completion of the eastern facade.

Above the staircase leading to the terrace of the North facade, he challengingly wrote: “Let any man more obstinate than me get to work.” On the West facade, he built not less than a Hindu Temple, a Swiss Chalet, the Square House of Algiers, a Medieval Castle, and a Mosque. Finally, the South facade contains what he called an "antediluvian museum”, where Cheval stored the stones that he collected or intended to use.

Palais Ideal, South Facade, Ferdinand Cheval, picture by Patrick, 2016

Ferdinand Cheval never built his palace as a place to live. His plan was to be buried in it. Unfortunately, the legislation was against him. There was, and still is, a French law that bans everyone from being buried outside of a regulatory cemetery. Two years after the achievement of his palace, he decided to spend 8 extra years bringing and assembling stones to Hauterives's cemetery, to create the “Tomb of Silence and Never Ending Rest”. It was completed in 1922, only two years before his death.

Cheval was among those who work their whole life to prepare for their death. One could even say that this work fundamentally made his death the ultimate accomplishment of his life. Indeed, his monument would only be achieved after his body lied in its vault, finally turning it into a tomb, which was its original purpose. A corpse put in the ground, like a cherry put on a cake.

In a way, the postman had always been fascinated by the notion of eternity. He had built his palace during 33 years, then built his actual grave for another 8 years. It is an eternity compared to the lifetime of a single man. It makes sense that the even greater eternity of death was appealing to him, that he wanted to dedicate his monument both to his life and death. After all, why not try to make death beautiful ? Even more important, the postman wanted to build a work that would live on after him. The only certain eternity resides in other people's memories of us. Building your very own palace, which also happens to be your future grave, can be a good way to achieve that.

Ferdinand Cheval alone is the perfect example of what I am trying to state. This uneducated rural postman had built a unique palace, the architectural summary of his personality and interests, his ultimate self-portrait, free from all trends and artistic currents. Moreover, he devoted his whole life to this construction. Perpetual labor, tribute to his life but also his death, that led him to eternal recognition. He achieved what many people aspire for, leaving on earth a work that will live on after him. Perpetually building a perpetual building.

Tomb of Silence and Never Ending Rest, Ferdinand Cheval, 1922
Picture Chantal Edus, 2019

The Intrinsic Differences Between a House and a Mausoleum.

A tomb is a repository for the remains of the dead. It is generally any structurally enclosed interment space or burial chamber, of varying sizes. What Ferdinand Cheval built is in fact a "mausoleum," which is a sort of tomb similar to the ancient pyramids. It consists of an external free-standing structure erected above the ground, which acts as both a monument and a place of internment. To keep it simple, a house is a home for the living, while a mausoleum is a home for the dead. Technically they are both a sort of dwelling, however they are housing individuals at different times of their life (or death). Then what makes "building a house" and "building a mausoleum" two very distinct actions with differing purposes?

The purpose of one's "construction of their life" is to a certain extent the reflection of the builder's priority. If they are going for a house, they choose to spend a part of their lifetime to prepare their future life. If, on the contrary, they pick the tomb, they spend their lifetime preparing their future death. From this perspective, if a tomb commemorates death, the house is a monument that commemorates life. We could say that people build mausolea in order to erect a construction that will remain standing after their death, but weirdly enough, a house also outlasts the person who built it. Houses and mausolea are both subject to eternity, or at least longevity.

As I said before, the postman wanted to build a work that would live on after him. He could have built a house. It would have probably stood long after his death too, especially if it was a similar sort of palace, with a creative and original aesthetic. No, instead he wanted to build a mausoleum, so he could be buried in the heart of his construction. The fact that the palace was supposed to be his place of internment completely changes the essence of Cheval's initial aim. A building that houses a corpse is entirely dedicated to it. A house is rarely dedicated to the person who built it (or lives in it) even if they are the same person. If a house outlives the person who built it, it will then be used by someone else.

A mausoleum dedicated to someone will always be dedicated to this person. It cannot be used for anyone else, unless maybe they are part of the same family. A house can be the reflection of a person or even a self-portrait, but I wouldn't say it is a building that involves some kind of worship, unlike the tomb. In a way, tombs, graves, mausolea, sarcophagi, coffins, and other mortuary receptacles are the most personal constructions you can build for someone. It is surprising that in Western Societies, they are the banalest, most insipid, unoriginal and impersonal vessel a human being could ever occupy. They are one of the most glaring consequences of Christian modesty. Everyone's last home looks the same, as if it was to remind people that when facing death everyone is equal.

House-Shaped Grave, Czech Republic, picture by Off the Beaten Track, 2020

However, certain communities see the issue differently. The “Ga”, ethnic group of southern Ghana, bury their dead in colourful coffins shaped like chickens, fishes, or even sneakers, as a last reminder of the deceased’s life and personality. The art historian and ethnologist Regula Tschumi gave a lecture in 2018 about this old figurative art that became a tradition even among Christians and makes death look like a celebration*. Originally, the burial rite was reserved to kings and priests. They were the only ones who were granted as their last home a colourful coffin in tribute to their aspirations (shaped like a lion, chief sandals, or an eagle). It is only since the sixties that this practice became common among both Protestants and traditional Ga. Unfortunately, rare are the churches that accept such coffins, leaving only two choices for Christian families: to bring the pastor home or to make the coffin bible-shaped. That said, people are mostly free to be as creative as they want. Drivers are buried in cars or buses, musicians in guitars or pianos, and some rest for eternity in the animal that represents their personality**. The Ga’s believe in reincarnation. Death is for them only a transition. Thus, funerals are a celebration. Except when it comes to people who died in an accident, of an illness, or when a child passed away. Some coffin makers have achieved great recognition within their country as true artists, and some names like Paa Joe, Ataa Oko, or Kane Kwei even became labels.

*Marie Destraz, *Construit moi un cercueil*, (Geneva: Protestinfo, réformés.ch. 2018) (translation mine)

** Ibid

1) Paa Joe, Selection of Coffins, Ghana, 2019

2) Kane Kwei, Coffin for a Landlord, picture Fellipe Abreu, Ghana, 2018

1) Eklutna Cemetery, Alaska, picture Diana Derby, 2012

2) Marie Rosenberg's Spirit House, Alaska, picture Diana Derby, 2012

There is, very far away from Ghana, another beautiful example of a mortuary rite in which tombs are as unique as their residents. In Alaskan cemeteries, native and orthodox rites mix, as well as graves and houses. In the 18th century, imperial Russia claimed Alaska, leading to the encounter of Russian fur traders and native Dena'ina people. Even today, churches with copper-coloured onion domes and topped by the Russian Orthodox cross are still part of the local landscape. Before the Russian invasion, Dena'ina people cremated their dead. The ashes were then usually put into a birch-bark basket and placed in a tree or by a riverbank. Admittedly, it was the most logical thing to do, considering the very frozen and rocky Alaskan soil. After being converted to Orthodoxy, Dena'ina's were forbidden to cremate human remains by the church. To avoid a back-breaking process, people constructed some sort of spirit houses, like long, low boxes built over the graves. They usually have peaked roofs, their boards are cut into fancy patterns, and colourfully painted which make them look like big outdoor dollhouses. Some even have windows and porches and are inspired by the house the deceased lived in. These houses are the perfect middle ground between the two cultures. Keeping with Dena'ina beliefs, the houses provide shelter for the spirit. And following the Orthodox tradition, the bodies are buried in the ground*.

* Corey Flintoff, *In Alaskan Cemetery, Native And Orthodox Rites Mix, Series "Dead Stop* (New York: NPR News, 25th June 2012)

Going back to France where we left Ferdinand Cheval, it is undeniable that, in Western Societies, there is something very megalomaniacal about deciding to build your own tomb. It implies a certain greatness, virtue, or high status*. That is exactly what makes the work of Cheval and other "Outsider Architects" so noteworthy. A postman, from the countryside, allowed himself to build a monument dedicated to his own life and work. There is a certain paradox about working your whole life to build a palace dedicated to your labor. But by doing so, and especially by making it his tomb, Cheval got to elevate his status at the same time he reached posterity. Unfortunately for him, the man was only granted his ultimate consecration after his death, which makes the goal even more paradoxical. Indeed, in 1969, André Malraux, French Minister of Culture at the time, regarded the construction as the only example of "Naive Art" architecture.

* I must add, however, that Cheval actually built two vaults in his palace. Although, it is unsure who the second one was dedicated to initially. It was most likely put up for his daughter Alice who died prematurely. No epitaphs written on the edifice seems to explicitly mention her. However, he named his house, also built with his own hands, "Villa Alicius" in her honour. She lies with him alongside the whole family in the tomb Cheval built in Hauterives Cemetery.

There is a correlation between the price of an artwork and whether or not the artist is still alive. When they pass away, their *oeuvre* becomes complete and can be seen as a whole. The amount of their artworks can be quantified and is therefore limited. The financial value of their work increases. Death, in a way, becomes a sort of apotheosis of the artist's life, the highlight of the show. Many writers have reported people who used their own death to promote their notoriety. The Syrian satirist Lucian of Samosata (c. 125 – 180 A.D.) recounted the story of Peregrinus Proteus, a Greek Cynic philosopher remembered for committing suicide after giving his own funeral oration by cremating himself on a pyre at the Olympic Games in 165 A.D.. In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Albert Camus mentions a young author, without giving his name, who decided to kill himself to draw attention to his book. The writer successfully died but the novel was unfortunately considered poor*. To quote Camus, "What we call a reason to live is at the same time a very good reason to die**."

* Albert Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus
(Paris: Folio Essais, 1942)
footnote p22

** Ibid, p18

To a certain extent, Cheval, by building a mausoleum, also could have had the desire to benefit from his death in order to assert his notoriety. This would be an easy answer to our former question, “What can you get from building a mausoleum opposed to building a house?” Yet, instead of focusing on their differences like I initially planned to do, I find their similarities much more worthy of interest. Houses and mausolea, as any architectural structures, have a different relation to temporality as human beings. By that, I mean that the “lifetime” of a building is much more important than the one of a human. Put more precisely, houses and mausolea are both subject to eternity or at least longevity from a mortal perspective. *Here*, a graphic novel made by the American comic book artist Richard McGuire and published in 2014, reports the same idea. It depicts the story of a corner of space throughout time, and on which for a long period is built a house. We witness its construction in 1902, see it shelters several generations of occupants, before finally burning in 2029 and being demolished in 2030, highlighting the dizzying difference of temporality between the livings and architectural structures.

By the means of their future dwelling, people whose goal is to build a house aspire to a better life. Tombs, on the contrary, are the aim of people who have little interest in the limited moments that represent their lifetime. They are looking for eternity, even if, paradoxically, it means that they won’t have a taste of their notoriety before they die. Why do they spend energy on something they won’t be able to enjoy? They want notoriety beyond the here and now, beyond mortality. When it comes to the intrinsic differences between the mausoleum and the house, I can outline them like this: The mausoleum “is” when the tenant “is not.” When the tenant “is”, the mausoleum "is not.” The mausoleum’s existence depends entirely on its initial and only tenant. The house “is” after its initial tenant “is not,” as long as the house finds a new tenant. The house in comparison seems now weirdly impersonal. Its condition of existence only resides in the fact of not staying empty, and will be satisfied with any occupant. However, let’s keep in mind their similarities. Whether someone decides to build a house or a mausoleum, the construction will always outlast its maker. As long as building will be a way for human beings to grasp a semblance of eternity, houses and mausolea will remain a fundamental part of our landscape and history.

Richard McGuire, *Here,* Pantheon, 2014

Benjamin Reed, *Untitled*, 2020

Ferdinand Cheval and the Myth of Sisyphus, Two Stories about Stones.

A notion that seems deeply linked to the Palace of Facteur by Cheval is perpetuity. I'm using "perpetuity" because, like the word "eternity", it states that the object has a continued occurrence. However, unlike "eternity", it also states that the object has a recurrence. As I said earlier, he had built his palace and his grave for 42 years all together, an eternity for a lifetime. Every single day, he would pick up stones on his mail route and assemble them in his garden. More than 10 000 days or 93 000 hours, only to build his palace. On a human time-scale, the recurrence of his repetitive work makes it basically perpetual. Moreover, Cheval never built his monument as a place to live, but as a mausoleum (as a place to rest). He wanted to be buried in it, so his memory, through his palace, could live forever. He wanted his building to outlast him, to reach posterity, so he could reach it too.

A famous myth uses the notion of perpetuity: the story of Sisyphus. Sisyphus, king of Corinth, was punished for challenging the gods by being forced to roll an immense boulder up a hill. Unfortunately, the rock would roll down every time it neared the top, forcing him to repeat this action for eternity. The myth was so well assimilated by modern culture that, nowadays, tasks that are both laborious and futile are described as Sisyphean. Therefore, Cheval and Sisyphus share more than a story about stones. They both spent their life repeating the same task over and over again, a task that many considered futile. Some people might say that, unlike Sisyphus, Cheval had achieved his goal at the end of his labour. His palace is indeed still standing in his little town in the middle of France. Although it is true that we can actually visit the Ideal Palace, I'm not sure, as I stated before, that working your whole life to build a palace dedicated to your own labor makes more sense than pushing a boulder up a hill. Even though these tasks were paradoxical, I don't believe they were futile. The same way I don't consider Cheval's effort vain, I don't believe Sisyphus's efforts were pointless. As asserted by Camus at the end of his essay on the myth: "One must imagine Sisyphus happy"*, which in my opinion seems one of the most honourable achievements one can ever imagine.

Using Camus's statement, I'm asking this question: What if Ferdinand Cheval, just as Sisyphus, was a happy man? Still according to the French philosopher, creation is a revolt, a revolt against the absurdity of life. "Revolt is what makes life worth living", he affirms in the second part of his book. In his chapter called "Ephemeral Creation"(which is an unfortunate translation of the original title "Creation Without Tomorrow"), he goes so far as to say that "[...] a conclusion can be reached as to the creative attitude, one of those which can complete absurd existence."** Recurring creation might be a remedy for the absurdity of life:

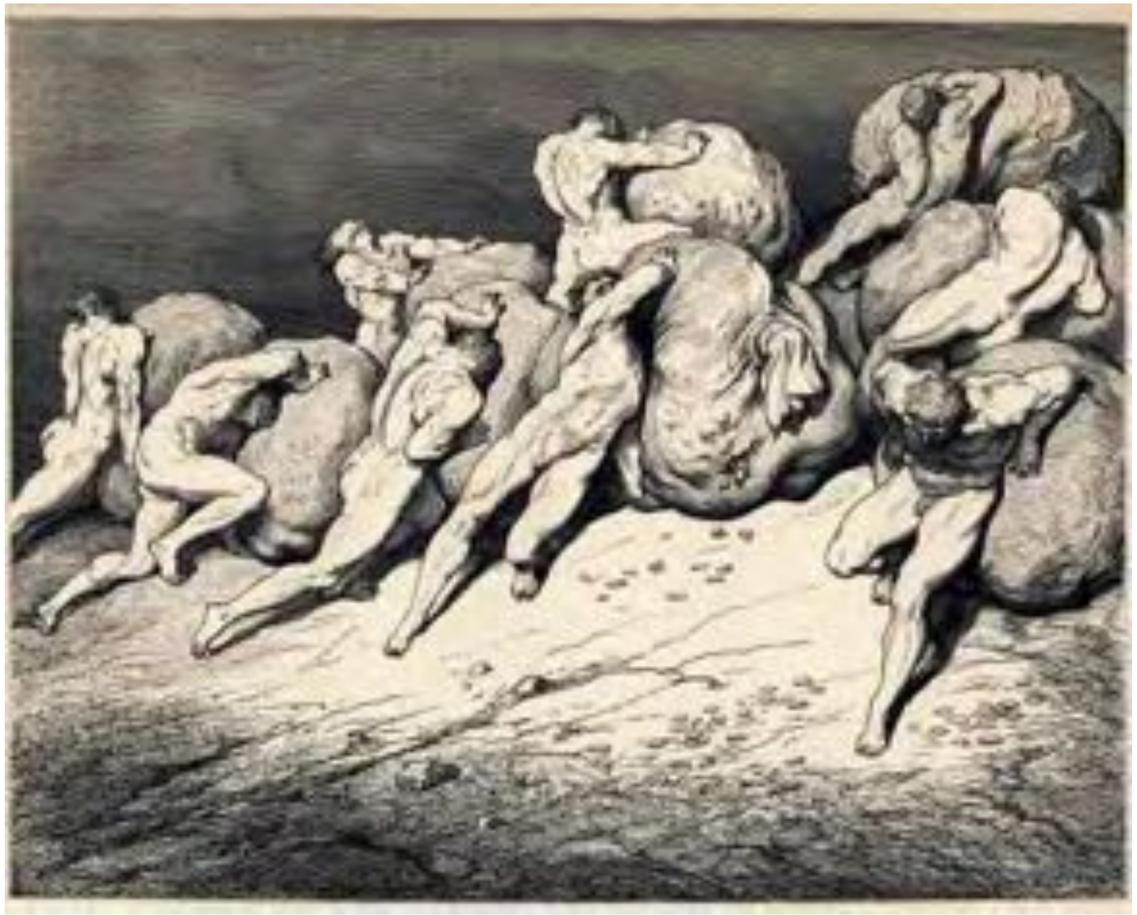
* Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus,* p168

** Ibid, p154

*"To work and create 'for nothing', to sculpture in clay, to know that one's creation has no future, to see one's work destroyed in a day while being aware that fundamentally this has no more importance than building for centuries- this is the difficult wisdom that absurd thought sanctions. Performing these two tasks simultaneously, negating on one hand and magnifying on the other, is the way open to the absurd creator. He must give the void its colours."**

* Ibid, p154

Gustave Doré, *Avares et Prodiges*, 1861



To me, Cheval and Sisyphus suffer the same punishment. To go even further, I believe that instead of repetitively pushing a boulder up a hill, Sisyphus could have been sentenced to build his house. All without altering any of his doubts, questions, nor general feelings. No one alive is ever done with building their house. To quote Camus one more time: "If something brings creation to an end, it is not the victorious and illusory cry of the blinded artist: "I have said everything," but the death of the creator which closes his experience and the book of his genius."* This sentence brings us back to how, once more, death is the apotheosis of the artist's creation. Now, let's push the metaphor of the house and the creation to its extreme and treat the house as a retrospective. The house will then only find its final form when its creator dies. As a retrospective, the house is only achieved when its maker and inhabitant passes away, because at last, it is empty of life and movements. It is fixed.

However, I explained in the last chapter that, opposed to the tomb, the house's essence is to shelter life. When it is empty, the building then ceases to be a house. To this extent, a house is therefore achieved when it stops being a house. The house turns out to be unable to ever be finished. Its condition of existence resides in life and movement while its condition of completion resides in stillness. The construction of a house is a just as infinite task as pushing a rock up and down a hill for eternity.

* Ibid, pl54

* Ibid, pl54

Cheval and Sisyphus both suffer perpetuity. If the postman's construction were to be a house instead of a mausoleum, they would have experienced it the exact same way. Sisyphus could even have been sentenced to building his house, as the completion of this goal is as unreachable as the one of his original punishment. Nevertheless, by repeating their actions in spite of their infinite and paradoxical nature, they finally achieved something. "They give the void its colours."* One must imagine Sisyphus and Cheval happy.

When Outsider Artists experience Architectural Freedom, the Birth of Visionary Environments.

Ferdinand Cheval wasn't the only genius who decided to build something really big in his garden. A great number of outsider artists were busy building crazy houses, towers and other monuments. Let's be clear, what we commonly call Outsider Art isn't a movement. Outsider artists aren't following or standing against any art trend*. This term only exists since it was conceptualised by Jean Dubuffet in 1945, after the artist decided to document the work of uneducated makers. "We call Outsider Art (or "Art Brut", which means "raw art" in French) works made by people untouched by any artistic culture, for which mimicry doesn't take much or any part, unlike what is happening with intellectuals. The authors of such art take their inspirations from nowhere but themselves, and aren't following any trendy movements".**

* Mathieu Morin, *Des Pépites dans le Goudron* (Brussels: FRMK, 2019) p14, (translation mine)

** Jean Dubuffet, *Asphyxiante Culture* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1968) (translation mine)

Poetically, or for fear of offending "real architects", these structures aren't called "buildings" but "Visionary Environments". The term refers to any large artistic installation, on the scale of a building or sculpture park, intended to express a vision of its creator. In general, these environments shine by what non-profane architects could qualify as "excess" or even megalomania. It is true that, in our Western Societies and from a biblical point of view, "delusion of grandeur" in architecture wasn't seen so favourably. Indeed, as stated for instance by the story of the Tower of Babel, the construction of a tower big enough to reach God would only earn its builders a heavy punishment. Humility is considered a virtue, and many would fear that these "Outsider Architects" are overpassing the limits of what is acceptable to build within the boundaries of "good taste" or those of their social status.

Robert Tatin, *Musée Robert Tatin*, France, 1962-1983, picture Emmanuelle Pierrat, 2020

The other very big contrast between “mainstream” Architecture and Outsider Architecture is that the former is among the only artistic fields still working with a system of commissions. Architect’s works are never completely theirs. They start by being someone else’s idea, have to follow numerous norms, rules and laws, and are realised by a professional team of experimental builders. By contrast, Outsider architects have an easy answer to the authorship question. Free as the wind, they create buildings using beer cans or old car bodies without being accountable to anyone. In a 2003 essay, the French sociologist Christophe Camus also pointed out the variations of lexical terms used by architects and “profanes”, as he calls people foreign to the very private world of architecture. When an architect would say “projects”, “constructions” or “realisations”, a profane would rather use the words “objects”, “buildings” or “houses”.*

Robert Tatin, *Musée Robert Tatin*, France, 1962-1983, picture Radio France, 2021

* Christophe Camus, *L’architecte : entre le service et l’œuvre, Cahiers Ramau 2*, (Paris: Editions de la Villette, 2001)

(translation mine)

In today’s capitalist society, an architect has a highly symbolic and economical function. Still according to Christophe Camus, it is a “person who gives an architectural label to a building, in order to give it a surplus of economical value”*. Christophe Camus states as well that this function can only occur in a society that values this operation by the bias of two conditions: the professional recognition of the architect (whose name is recognised by an international community of experts), and the certain trust in their value or specific skills by the people in charge of the construction**. In 1996, the just as French sociologist Veronique Biau stated that “architecture nowadays is dominated by a sort of “Star System” of around 50 names.”*** She provides a list of modalities for the consecration of an architect, such as appearing in a publication, winning a prize, being the object of an exhibition, or evaluating and promoting other architects. This media system is self-justified by a convergence of interests in which notoriety is built and maintained around a few figures who attract an audience.

* Christophe Camus, *Pour une sociologie « constructiviste » de l'architecture*, *Espaces et sociétés*, 2010/2, n° 142 (Paris: Erès, 2010) p. 63-78. (translation mine)

** Ibid

*** Véronique Biau, *Stratégies de distinction. Les architectes français et la tentation du “star-system”*, Socio-logos. (Paris: Association Française de Sociologie, 1996) (translation mine)

Visionary Environments, besides their hypothetical artistic superiority over mainstream architecture, can also be qualified as Gesamtkunstwerk. By definition, a “Gesamtkunstwerk” - literally translated as “total artwork”, but also as “ideal work of art”, “universal artwork”, “synthesis of the arts”, “comprehensive artwork”, or even “all-embracing art form” - is a work of art that uses, or intends to use, as many art forms it is possible to combine together. The term first appears in 1827 in an essay written by the German philosopher Karl Friedrich Trahndorff, but is better known to have been used 20 years later by the German opera composer Richard Wagner. Thus, the word became deeply linked with Wagner’s aesthetic ideals and, by extent, with opera and theatre in general. Even if it takes its roots from the stage, the term is nowadays applied to various media such as film, installation, as well as architecture. Even a simple house can gather all the characteristics to be qualified as Gesamtkunstwerk, as total artwork.

In the 20th Century, the first architectural writers used the term Gesamtkunstwerk on architecture to qualify the work of architect who were also responsible for the interior design or overseeing of the building's totality: shell, accessories, furnishings, and landscape. This term can naturally be applied on a single handedly-built house but is particularly suitable for “Visionary Environments.” Furthermore, in order to close the Gesamtkunstwerk loop and make a link between theatricality and architecture, let me mention the work of Betty Woodman, an American Artist for which the domestic space should be treated as a theatrical one. Her installations bring together her ceramic sculptures and colourful paintings, and often represent archetypal domestic space. However, the same way her paintings give her ceramic an additional environment, they also induce something theatrical, a decor. It is undeniable that Visionary Environments, like immersive installations, show a theatrical aspect. The audience enter the new world like they would enter a stage. If they aren’t especially its actors, they are at least it's lucky guests.

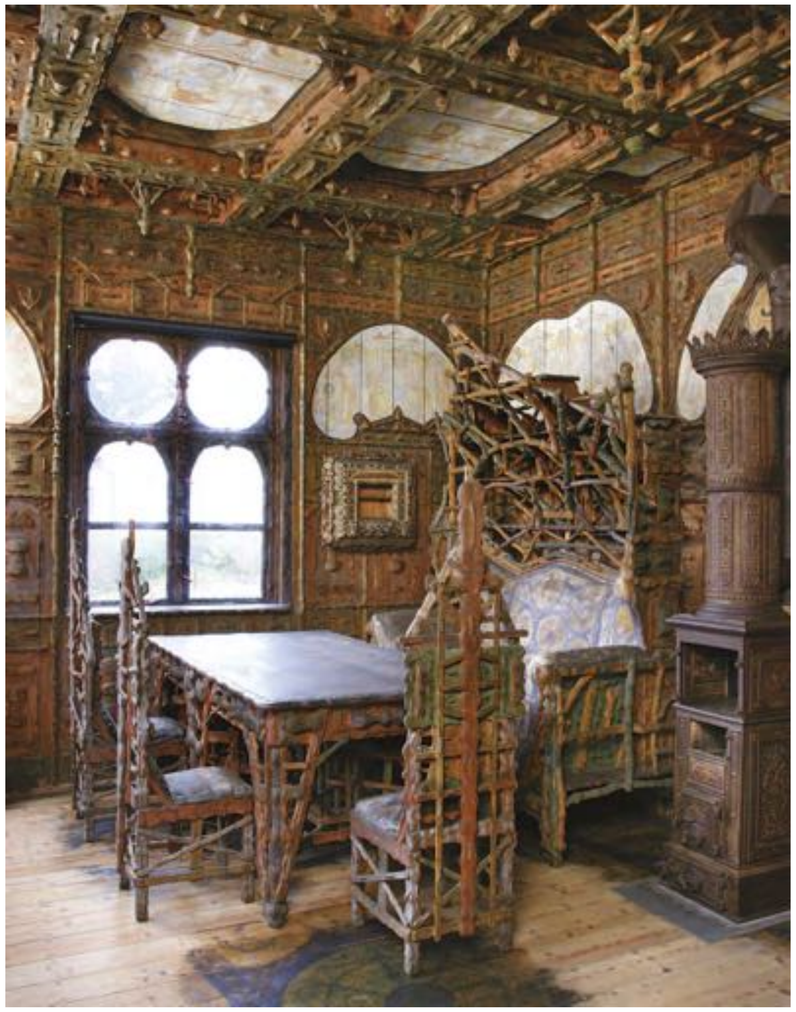
“Mainstream Architecture”, because it is constrained by so many rules and an uncompromising hierarchy, slowly loses its Art status at the same time architects lose their authorship only to become economical labels. Architectural creations made by Outsider Artists however, aren’t the result of any request or commission but only the fruits of their own labor and minds. These “Visionary Environments” are the creation of total authors, responsible for both their designs and their means of production. These “total authors” can therefore, without big surprises, produce art pieces that qualify as Gesamtkunstwerk, sometimes not so far from theatre. Outsider Artists, despite their unfortunate lack of recognition, unfold to be total authors unafraid to make total artworks.

Bruno Weber, *Bruno Weber Park,* Switzerland, 1962–2011

1) General View, picture Zürich Tourismus

2) Blue Monsters detail, picture Yuriy Buriak, 2017

3) Deer-Shaped Lamp detail, picture Arthur



Karl Junker, *Junkerhaus,* Germany, 1889–1893

1) General View of *Junkerhaus*, picture Wikimedia Foundation

2) Karl Junker's Livingroom, picture Lemgo Tourismus

Chalermchai Kositpipat, *Wat Rong Khun,* Thailand, 1997-Unfinished

1) General View, picture JJ Harrison, 2013

2) Zodiac Animals detail, picture Ray Cannon, 2014

3) Outstretched Hands detail, picture Jan Albrecht, 2014

4) Indoor Painting detail, picture Onarto, 2015

Raymond Isidore, *Maison Picassiette*, France, 1928-1964

1) General View, picture Véronique Domagalski, 2020

2) Courtyard, picture Cécile Corne, 2020

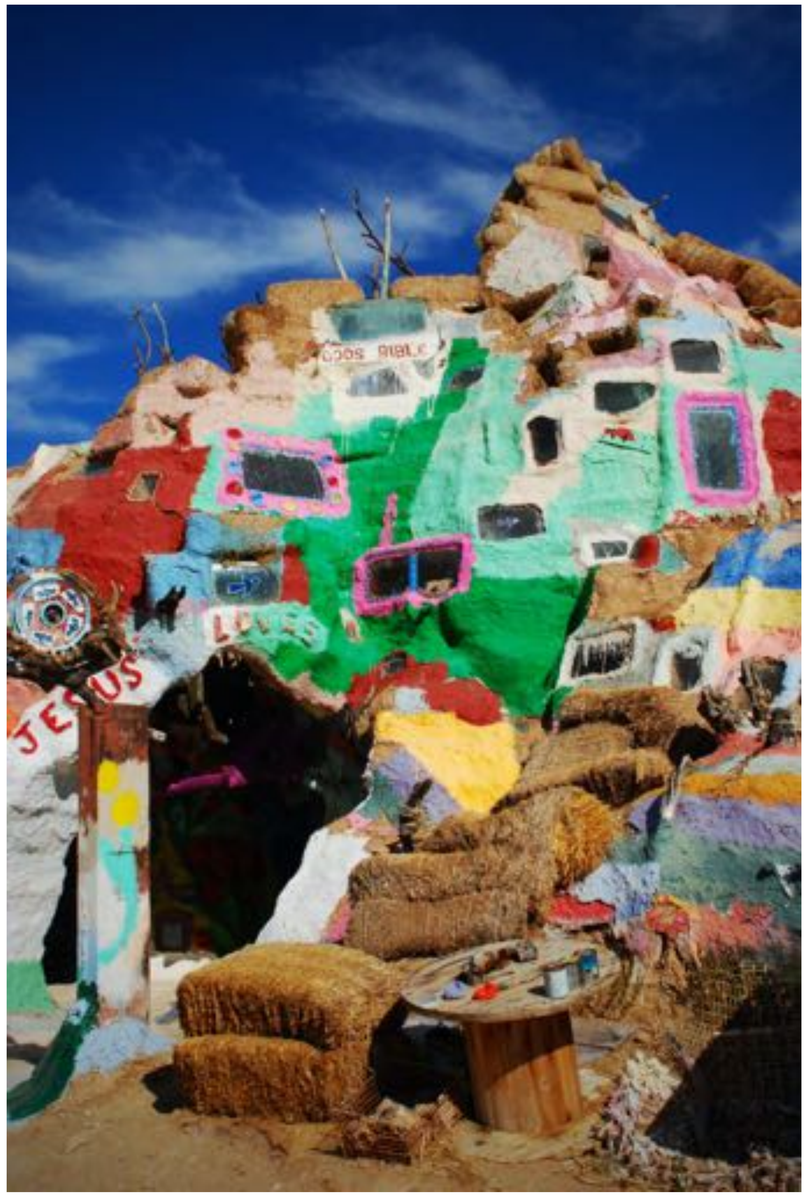
3) Bedroom, picture Lahcène Abib, 2016

Leonard Wright, *Salvation Mountain*, California, 1984–2011

1) picture Handluggageonly, 2021

2) *Love is Universal* detail, picture Isaiah Everett, 2019

3) *God is love* detail, picture Carol Highsmith, 2012



Sergey Kirillov, *Kirillov's House,*
Russia, 1954-1967

1) Front Facade in the Snow,
picture Filip Fisher

2) Front Facade in Spring,
picture Deborah Mcree

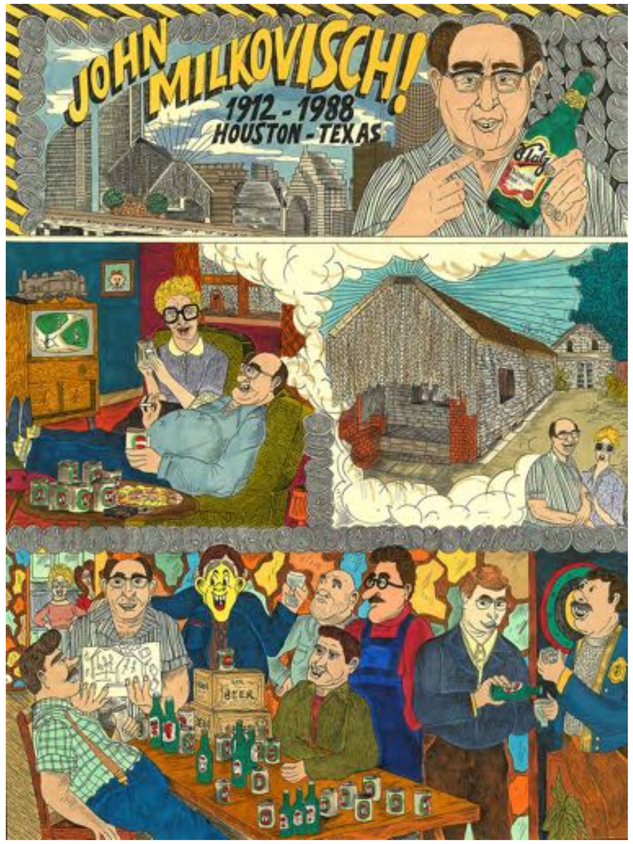
3) Detail, picture Uralo Ved

Nikki de Saint-Phalle, *Le Jardin des Tarots*, Italy, 1979-1993

1) General View, picture Laurent Condominas, 2003

2) *Le Pendu,* photo Itstuscany

3) *La Grande Papesse* detail, photo Itstuscany



John Milkovisch, *Beer Can House,* Texas, 1954-1967

1) General View, picture French District, 2015

2) Camille Lavaud, Illustration for the book *Des Pépites dans le Goudron*, FRMK, 2019

Part Four:

Second Floor:

Tom Jamieson, *Maidan,* Kiev, 2014

A Space to Claim and a Way to Claim a Space.

A Precarious Castle.

Before building the first floor, there was nowhere to hide in the house. Neither roof nor ceiling, so no shelter. They were sleeping in a tent. Last night was the first time they had slept inside their soon to be home. It was still very precarious. The wind, by rushing inside the house through the non existent windows, made terrifying noises. Weirdly enough, they felt safe. Safer than in the tent.

This morning, they were both sitting on what was supposed to be the floor of their second level, eating a sandwich. Although, it currently looked more like a sort of fancy wooden roof. A piece of transparent plastic, which was probably previously wrapping the isolation wool, was attached to one on the wooden pillars. It was peacefully floating in the air, like a very improvised flag on top of their temporary fortress.

Women and Domestic Space.

*"Women have sat indoors all these millions of years, so that by this time the very walls are permeated by their creative force, which has, indeed, so overcharged the capacity of bricks and mortar that it must needs harness itself to pens and brushes and business and politics."**

Virginia Woolf

Houses are our shelters, the place where we seek comfort. They give us protection from bad weather, and any dangers, such as wild animals and other people.

In the patriarchal society, houses have especially become women's domain. If they can be their shelters, they can also turn into cages. From a binary and patriarchal point of view that I obviously denounce, men are the masters of the outside world, women the masters of the domestic space. Architecture and public space have long been masculine, while domestic space remained that of women. In other words, building a house is a masculine task, building a home is a woman's issue. However, despite the women's responsibilities towards the private space of a house, this space remains a "man's property." Even today, a house is called "patrimony", and therefore lingers to signify something else that "a female kingdom inherited from father to son". Women's prison remains men's property.

** Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own, (London: Penguin Books, 1929)*

Womanhouse, Los Angeles, 1972

If the domestic space can be a woman's cage, many female artists tried, through art, to make this place a "room of their own." A shelter conducive to creation, and freed from the domination of men.

"Womanhouse" was a feminist art installation and performance space that took place in 1972 in an old mansion in Los Angeles. It was organised by Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro, co-founders of the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts) Feminist Art Program and was the first public exhibition of Feminist Art. Many local women artists, as well as Chicago's and Schapiro's students participated. In total, 35 women were involved in the project and worked together to build an environment where women's conventional social roles could be shown, exaggerated, and subverted. While doing so, the artists claimed to reconquer the house space, ironically called "feminine" by patriarchal society.

Womanhouse, "Bathroom" Los Angeles, 1972

Womanhouse, "Kitchen" Los Angeles, 1972

Women House, Exhibition, La Monnaie de Paris, Paris, 2017

1) Shen Yuan, *Hair Saloon,* 2000-2017

2) Carla Accardi, *Triplice Tenda (Triple Tente),* 1969-1971

3) Nil Yalter, *Topak Ev,* 1973, picture Isabelle Arthuis

Decades later, the 2017 exhibition *Women House* (taking place in both Paris and Washington D.C.) explored the different significations of the notion of “domestic.” Indeed, the word refers to “anything related to the running of a home or to family relations” (having for synonyms “family”, “home”, “private”, or even “intimate”), as well as “a person who is paid (or not) to help with cleaning and other menial tasks in a person's home” (having for synonyms “servant”, “domestic help”, “domestic worker”, or sometimes even “slave”). According to the curators Camille Morineau and Lucia Pesapane, the sum of these two definitions makes a good summary of the woman condition.*

* Camille Morineau, Lucia Pesapane. *Woman House, exhibition at La Monnaie de Paris,* Catalogue d’Exposition, (Paris: Manuella Edition, 2017)

The exhibition had the goal to explore various paradoxes. For instance, it explored the relationship between women and houses, from domestic slavery or “perfect housewife” to the power offered by owning your own space, as claimed for instance by Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One's Own*. The female artists involved in the exhibition either represent their desire to **escape from** the house, perceived as a prison, or to **escape to** the house, perceived as a refuge. Simply put, the artists of the *Women House* exhibition had two claims: first, denouncing the confinement of women in private spaces; and second, reappropriating the domestic space as their own and from their own initiative.*

Louise Bourgeois, *“Femme Maison ?”*, 19**

* Ibid

Several women artists highlighted throughout the exhibition decided to redesign spaces, especially portable architectures, halfway between the private and the public sphere, or constrained space and chosen space. Nil Yalter, for instance, presents a felt yurt, *Topak Ev.* (1973), nomadic shelter and ambivalent feminine space which simultaneously represents "the dowry, the prison and the sanctuary for women". Lucy Orta, in the Mobile-homes section, explores another form of mobile housing, more contemporary: a tent made from clothing that belongs to her series of “Refuge Wear” (shelter clothing). Both offer a reflection on what a house can be, and on the place that women may or may not have in it, particularly in a context of crisis and great global mobility.**

** Ibid

Even today, the house is a space of capital importance that is urgent for women to reclaim. The artists from these two exhibitions both denounce women’s imprisonment in domestic space, as well as reaffirm their property rights on the domestic territory. They aim to make the house a space that finally belongs to them, and that they can use as both shelter and place of empowerment.

Alvaro Sanchez-Montanes, *Leikur,* from *Landnemar* series, 2011

What to Expect from a Hut, or the Contributions of Provisional Architecture.

A shelter is a place giving temporary protection from bad weather or danger, a basic architectural structure or building that provides protection from the local environment. To shelter means to protect or shield from something harmful, especially bad weather. A hut is a type of shelter. A small, single-storey house that usually consists of one room. It is a primitive dwelling, which may be constructed of various materials. They can be considered a type of vernacular architecture because they are built of readily available materials such as wood, snow, ice, stone, grass, palm, leaves, branches, hides, fabric, or mud, sometimes using techniques passed down through generations. Despite its rustic appearance, one can find more than rudimentary safety in a hut. "All really inhabited space bears the essence of the notion of home."*

* Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space,* p57

People expect a hut to hide them, to offer them a place to stay safe. They expect to hear birds chirping, squirrels squeaking, and the wind blowing through their thin, non-isolated walls. They expect to hear the sound of the rain falling on their roof, made waterproof by the addition of a plastic tarpaulin, while inside, safe and dry. They expect to be awakened by sunshine, the smell of wet grass, or what, in the middle of the night, sounded like a human scream but was probably only the sound of foxes mating. In a nutshell, people expect the hut to be an in-between space. A private space, but with a strong connection to its surrounding. An indoor space that is part of the environment it is built in. A hut in a way is almost transparent.

"These virtues of shelter are so simple, so deeply rooted in our unconscious that they may be recaptured through mere mention, rather than through minute description. Here the nuance bespeaks the colour. A poet's word, because it strikes true, moves the very depths of our being."

Gaston Bachelard*

Building houses can be a way to protest. They provide us shelter, but they also can be a way to claim, or conquer, a piece of land. We can observe this occupation process in different areas all around the world, such as in France, Germany, Belgium, or Seattle. These places can be called autonomous zones, or Z.A.D. (from French "zone à défendre" which means "zone to defend"), or more generally "political occupations". These occupations attempt to use space, and in these particular cases "dwellings", as an instrument to achieve political, economic, sociological, or ecological changes. Of course, they are a good way to draw attention to protesters's claims, but they can be even more. They can lead to the experimentation of new ways of living, more democratic, more inclusive. Our common ideas of public and private spaces are challenged with the appearance of political spaces that could be understood as a 21st Century Roman forum, where everyone is free to share their political requests or beliefs, as well as "safe spaces" where individuals who feel oppressed or marginalised can come together to communicate regarding their experiences or only take a break from the outside world. Building becomes a political act.

I've seen a lot of self-made dwellings within the past ten years. Through the media, on the outskirts of big cities, or in what we call refugees camps. Even if they may look similar from the ones built in "autonomous zones", I don't want to pretend that they are the product of any other political act than just the survival of their makers and inhabitants. Moreover, I don't intend to romanticise the terrible living conditions refugees have to face. The construction of their shelters is very unlikely the result of their own choice, but a matter of survival. Having a shelter is one of the most important human necessities, just as well as eating and drinking. However, it is undeniable that these two categories of shelters share a lot of aesthetic aspects, as well as a possible beauty. Therefore, it is on their visual features rather than on their origins that I will focus upon.

* Ibid, p66

The most surprising part isn't that these dwellings look like each other, but that they seem to share similar aesthetics with contemporary art sculptures from the last decade. Some of these sculptures or installations can even host the audience within themselves. Even if to me they evoke shelters, these artworks might not immediately claim to belong to an hypothetical house-shaped art category. Nevertheless, it is important to remember, as stated by Bachelard, that whenever a person finds the slightest shelter, their imagination is capable of building walls out of simple shadows*. These works of art are jumping across the boundaries of sculpture and installation. As far as I know, they aren't part of any common theorised movement. Thereby, I will chose to call this non-existent movement "wonky aesthetic", because of the odd combination of materials that they are built of, their precarious, fragile, spontaneous, and wobbly characteristics, as well as the sometimes very ethereal - yet clumsy - way of being hanged and arranged in the air.

* Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, p57

1) Berverly Buchanan, *Cedar House With Poplar Base*, New York, 2009

2) Berverly Buchanan, *SO. FLA. Hurricane Survey Home, November, 2008*, New York, 2008

3) Berverly Buchanan, *House from Scraps,* New York, 2011

" ..And I choose to declare war on gravity and proclaim it an enemy who, though possessed of a certain nobility, arrogantly claims control over my existence. I reject gravity's arrogance and claims, and assert a counterclaim – I am a free spirit, autonomous and self-determining, a being and an architect of antigravity."

– Lebbeus Woods, *Anarchitecture,* Academy Editions, 1995

In the section that follows, I will target the visual elements that make huts and provisional shelters – besides creating a dialogue between public and private space – share a great deal of aesthetic characteristics with contemporary art sculptures and installations, as well as incidentally lay the foundations of a made-up and unlikely artistic movement.

Lebbeus Woods, *Aerial Paris* from his book *Anarchitecture*

1) Filippo Menichetti, from *What Remains* photography series, Denmark, 2012

2) Anonymous, *Shelter in Notre-Dame-des-Landes Z.A.D.*, France, 2017

3) Julien Creuzet, *Red Tongue Eats Me,* Kiosk, Ghent, 2019

1) Peter Bialobrzeski, Shelter in Manila from the *Case Study Homes* book, Published by Hatje Cantz, 2009

2) Daiga Grantina, *What Eats Around Itself,* New Museum, New York, 2020

3) Daiga Grantina, *What Eats Around Itself,* New Museum, New York, 2020

1) Peter Buggenhout, *Detitled*, from *Large Scale* exhibition, Ghent, Belgium, 2012

2) Pakui Hardware, *Creatures of Habit,* Helsinski, 2017

3) Henk Wildschut, from *Shelters* photography series, Calais, France, 2009

1) Tristan Bründler, *Phantom,* France, 2019

2) Tristan Bründler, *Phantom,* France, 2019

3) Treehouse in Hambach Forrest Z.A.D.,
picture by Hambacher Forst, Germany, 2016

1) Kevin Faingnaert, Ecological Village in North of Spain, from the *Matavenero* series, 2015

2) Dimitris Baboulis, *The Trap,* Athens, 2013.

3) Frank Bayh & Steff Rosenberger-Ochs, shelter made by a protester in Stuttgart from the series *The Development of New Urban Quarters in the Heart of the City,* 2012

1) Julien Creuzet, *Les lumières affaiblies des étoiles lointaines (...),* Palais de Tokyo, Paris, 2019

2) Anonymous, Treehouse in Arlon Z.A.D., Belgium, 2019

3) Kevin Faingnaert, Ecological Village in North of Spain, from the *Matavenero* series, 2015

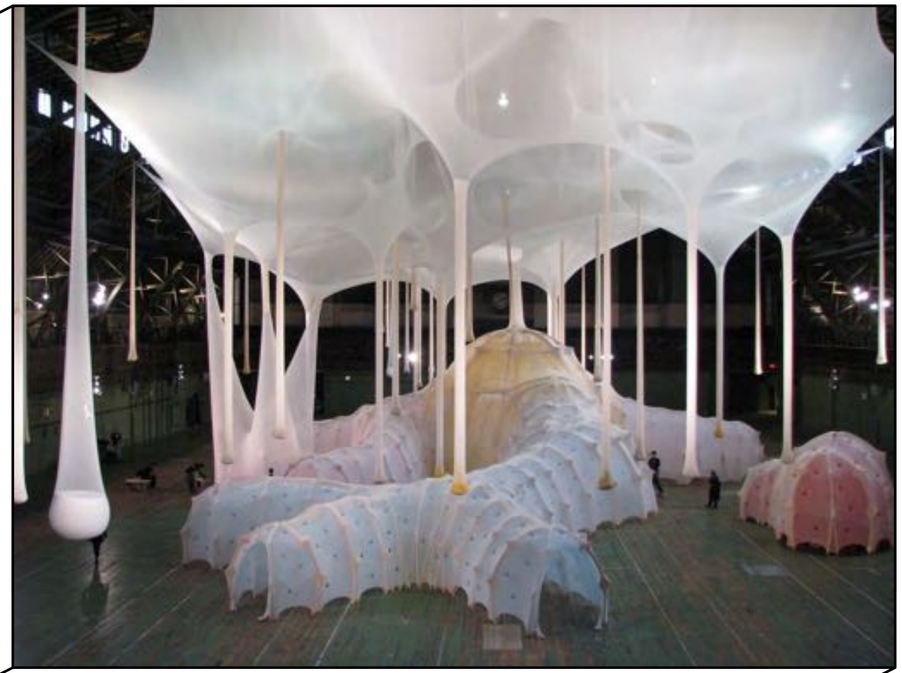
1) Patrick Ostrowsky, *New Monuments for Munich (Grün Waschen),* 2021

2) Virginia Overton, *Untitled*, New York, 2011

3) Eugenia Arbugaeva, from *Tiksi* photography series, Siberia, 2015

Part Five:

The Attic:



Ernesto Neto, *Anthropodino,* New York, 2009

The House as Tool to connect Thoughts.

Skeleton of a Space.

The roof frame was almost over, but very see-through. At this stage of the construction, it was only made up of wooden beams, underlining the edges of a half-invisible house. The beams were pretending to crown the house, while in reality they formed something more like a giant cage that wouldn't even imprison the stupidest bird. The promised residents were looking around, trying to picture the future room as it will be in ten years. It was weirdly upsetting to imagine this now skeleton of a space packed with such life, filled with a motley of objects overflowing with memories and old boxes of passed daily treasures. And yet somehow, the place would make a perfectly unified whole of this mess. They would call it the attic.

Building, Knitting, Narrating.

"*Now my aim is clear: I must show that the house is one of the greatest powers of integration for the thoughts, memories and dreams of mankind.*"

Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space**

I called the house a self-portrait, a metaphor for creation, a universe, and even a retrospective. Now I'm going to call it a tool, a tool that connects thoughts. As said by Camus: "Too often the work of a creator is looked upon as a series of isolated testimonies"**. I believe that, by the means of building a life-long work like a house, one can make unexpected connections between the sum of ideas they themselves are constituted of.

"A profound thought is in a constant state of becoming; it adopts the experience of a life and assumes its shape. Likewise, a man's sole creation is strengthened in its successive and multiple aspects: his works. One after another, they complement one another, correct or overtake one another, contradict one another too. If something brings creation to an end, it is not the victorious and illusory cry of the blinded artist: "I have said everything," but the death of the creator which closes his experience and the book of his genius [...] Their works may seem to be devoid of interrelations. To a certain degree, they are contradictory. But viewed all together, they resume their natural grouping. From death, for instance, they derive their definitive significance".***

* *Gaston Bachelard, The Poetic of Space,* p59

** Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, p154

*** *Ibid,* p155

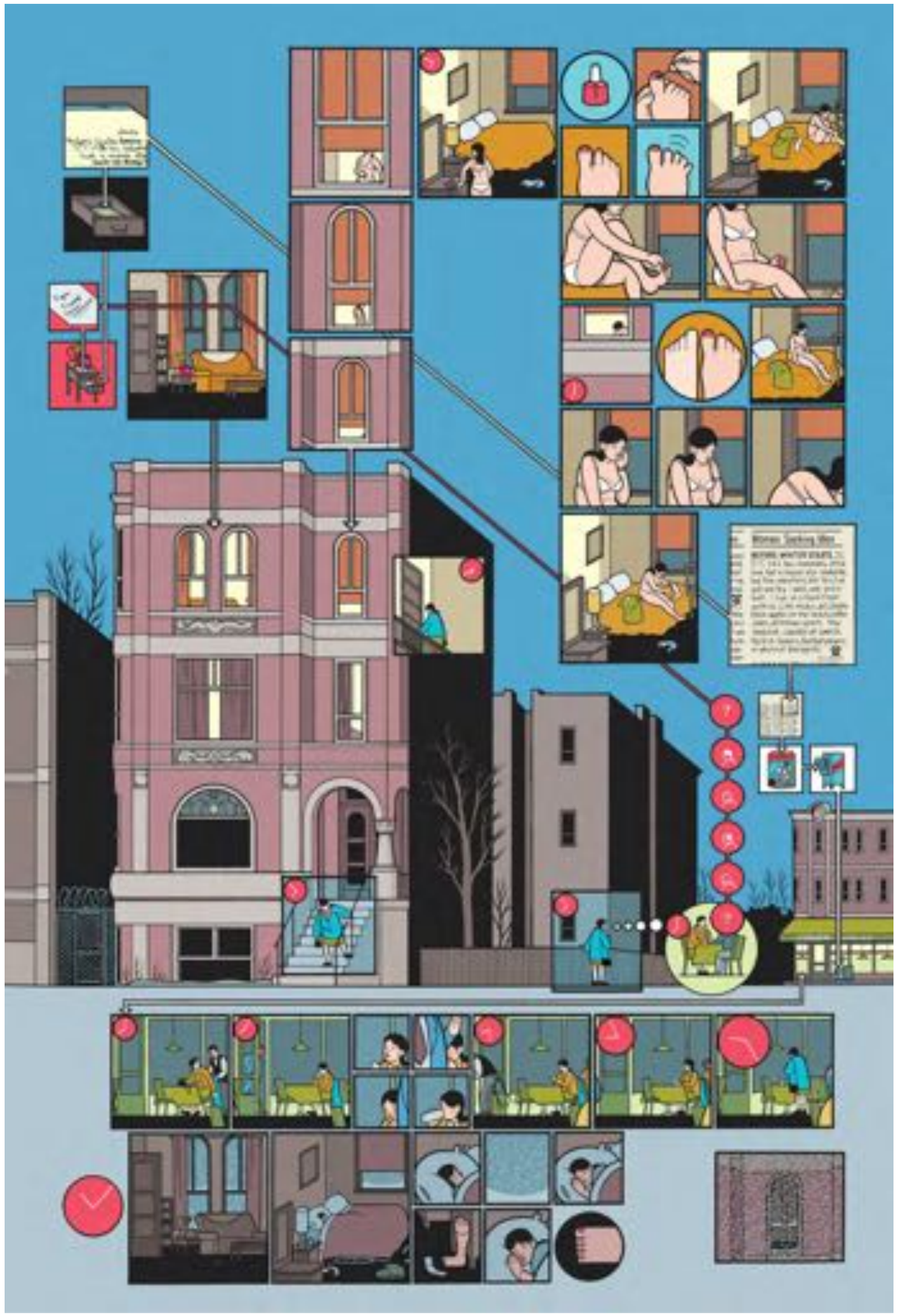
The way thoughts and ideas communicates when a house is being build is similar to Deleuze and Guattari's "rhizome" theory, first conceptualised in their 1980's work *A Thousand Plateaus*. Concepts and researches are characterised as "rhizomatic" when they allow multiple, non-hierarchical connections between all the points, data, or ideas this concept encompasses. Initially, a rhizome is the main stem of a plant that grows roots underground horizontally, instead of vertically like in a regular tree structure. It could be paradoxical to call the house "rhizomatic" given its vertical formation. However, it is primordial not to forget that even if the construction of a house seems "achieved" from the outside, it is part of the house's essence to remain unfinished, in perpetual mutation. The planar movement of the rhizome resists chronology and organisation, instead favouring a constantly moving system of growth and propagation similar to the perpetual transformation experienced by the house.

David Altmejd, *The Flux and the Puddle,* Montreal, 2014

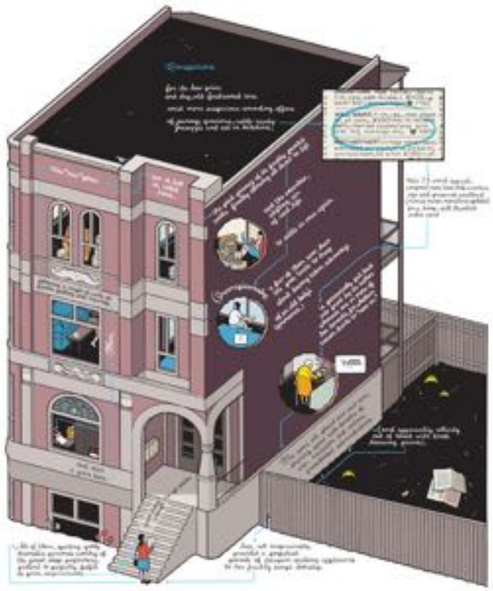
A perfect example of an artwork which making is in accordance with the concept of rhizome is the 2014 sculpture *The Flux and the Puddle* by the Canadian David Altmejd. The artist's sculpture, built like an ecosystem, seems to sprawl and multiply like a growing organism, and contains all sorts of disparate elements from body parts to fruits. They appear like knitted together, each being connected to another. Like most of Altmejd's work, this piece is impressive in its details. In an Interview, he would even defend himself from thinking big. "I think microscopically, I think details. When details are added up, at one point you end up with something large. Then if you keep going, you end up with something gigantic." The same way a rhizome would develop, Altmejd began his work with a starting point and let it grow organically, but without making it of greater importance. From an external point of view, it is difficult to know where to start, and that is exactly his point. Unlike the tree structure, the rhizome doesn't allow hierarchy. In the case of this particular work, the starting point was a werewolf. A werewolf eating grapes. Other elements lost in the plexiglass cubes seem to evoke a sort of narration, like this wolf's paw that sequentially turns into a human's hand. Every of these details co-exist and even reference one another in subtle ways. They become a perfectly organised whole.

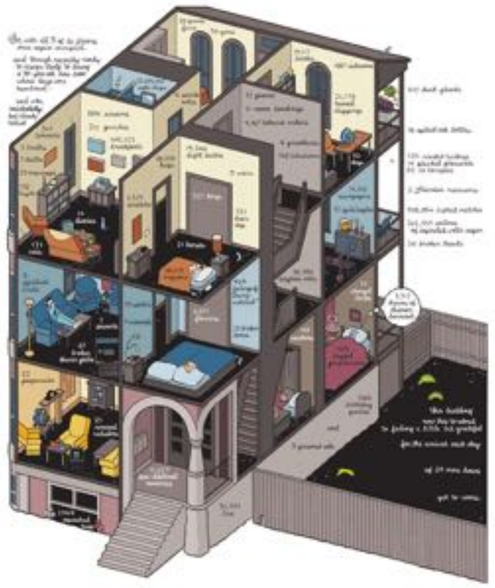
David Altmejd, *The Flux and the Puddle,* Montreal, 2014

As mentioned with David Altmejd, construction can be a tool for storytelling. *Building Stories,* the 2012 graphic novel by the American comic book artist Chris Ware is another proof of it. The book doesn't look like any conventional one since it is made up of fourteen printed works packaged in a boxed set, and that the reader is free to read in any order. It took its author a decade to complete. A story unfolds gradually throughout the multiple books, as well a metaphor. Indeed, besides asking the readers to lay the bricks of the story themselves by being in charge of its order, Ware develops his narrative around a Chicago building. Devoid of beginning and end, Ware's work offers a rhizomatic way of telling a story. The intricate, multilayered stories are weaved to each other and break the novel's chronology at the same time they build something greater, a story-to-build about the human condition seen through the eyes of a building.



Chris Ware, *Building Stories,* Pantheon Graphic Library, 2012





The house is a means to connect all the thoughts, concepts, and ideas – even the most contradictory – we are constituted of. However, despite its vertical structure, a house doesn't grow like a tree, but like a rhizome. The ideas are knitted together, without beginning nor end, nor hierarchy. The house never stops evolving and so our thoughts. Moreover, a house can even be a method for storytelling. Viewed and organised collectively, the concepts put together give a faithful representation of our mind. Plural, contradictory, and unique.

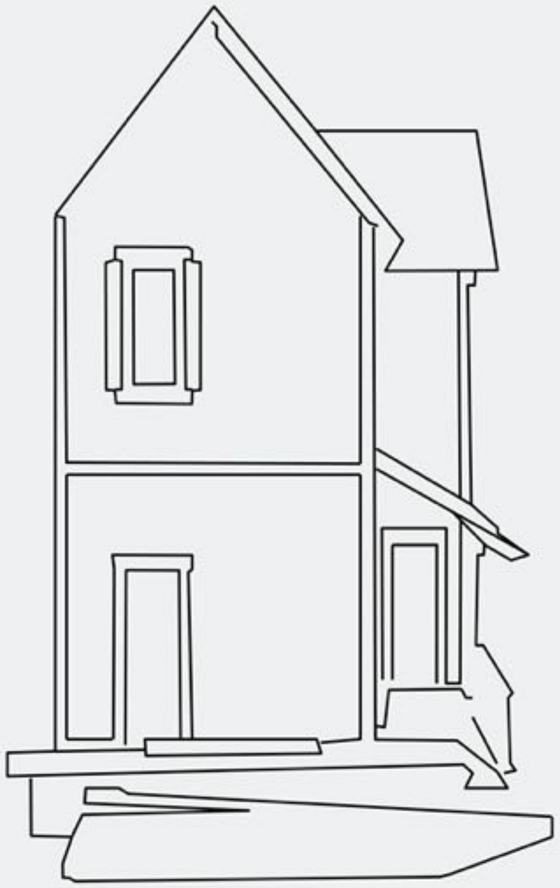
They Thought their House Was Over, Although It Was only the Beginning.

They hugged each other. After a couple of months and several mental breakdowns, the construction was over. Well, only the hard work. There were still a couple of walls to paint, light-switches to install, and pieces of furniture to assemble, but it could wait. They didn't have the slightest idea that they were about to live five years with the bedroom's switch disconnected from the ceiling lamp, or that in ten years they would think of building a veranda. While gazing at the bathroom tiles they had just finished laying, they felt purposeless for a brief instant. Then they remembered it was time for dinner and that the cutlery was still in a box somewhere.

Conclusion:

Thomas Prior, *Untitled,* 2018

Building a house bears a lot of implications. It is a way of life, even a purpose, that follows its makers until their death. It is a universal drive that is impossible to restrain. After starting their house, one might also feel the urge to build their tomb. Building a home is a task that is impossible to finish. It is Sisyphean, similar to pushing a boulder up and down a hill for eternity. Additionally, it is also a way for its maker to reach posterity, because its creation will outlive them. It is a manner to explore authorship issues, as well as an opportunity for its maker to free themself from the traditional architectural conventions and embrace total creation. Building can also be a political act, an excuse to reset the established norms and recreate others. Building has to do with life as much as it has to do with Art. It is a way of organising your mind and a non-hierarchical approach to link ideas together that can even be used to tell stories. Houses are our universe. They are perpetual buildings that we perpetually build.



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