



An

ICONOGRAPHY

a prose poem
written by the artist to accompany
Ready-Made Dream

from Sue Johnson's
American Dreamscape

Amy G. Moorefield, Exhibition Curator
and prior Director, Eleanor D. Wilson Museum

Eleanor D. Wilson Museum
Hollins University, Roanoke, VA



INTRODUCTION to *Ready-Made Dream* (2013)

Installation with prints on vinyl and found objects
From the exhibition, *American Dreamscape*

Ready-Made Dream is based on the continuing narrative of the American Dream as expressed in designs for the ideal home, and in particular, the post-WWII suburban, single-family home – and its miniature manifestation, the modern dollhouse. The artist's childhood growing up in the 1960's and 1970's provides the autobiographical spark to the project, however it is through her exploration of mid 20th century material culture that she re-discovers this era in which consumer culture and the American Dream seemed to become one and the same.

The overall exhibition entitled *American Dreamscape*, rather than presenting itself as an abstract ideal like the American Dream, can be contemplated as *an object* – like a landscape of things. At its core, *Ready-Made Dream* is a contemporary updating of the *vanitas* painting tradition in which symbolic objects remind the viewer of the transitory nature of human life and the meaninglessness of pursuing worldly goods and pleasures. The choice of the word *Dreamscape* is significant because, like our dreams, the American Dream can *feel* real but is illusory. Further, it is in the domestic sphere - the home - where an individual can literally see and palpably experience the Dream becoming a *tangible object* through the pursuit of possessions and consumer goods – through objects of desire.

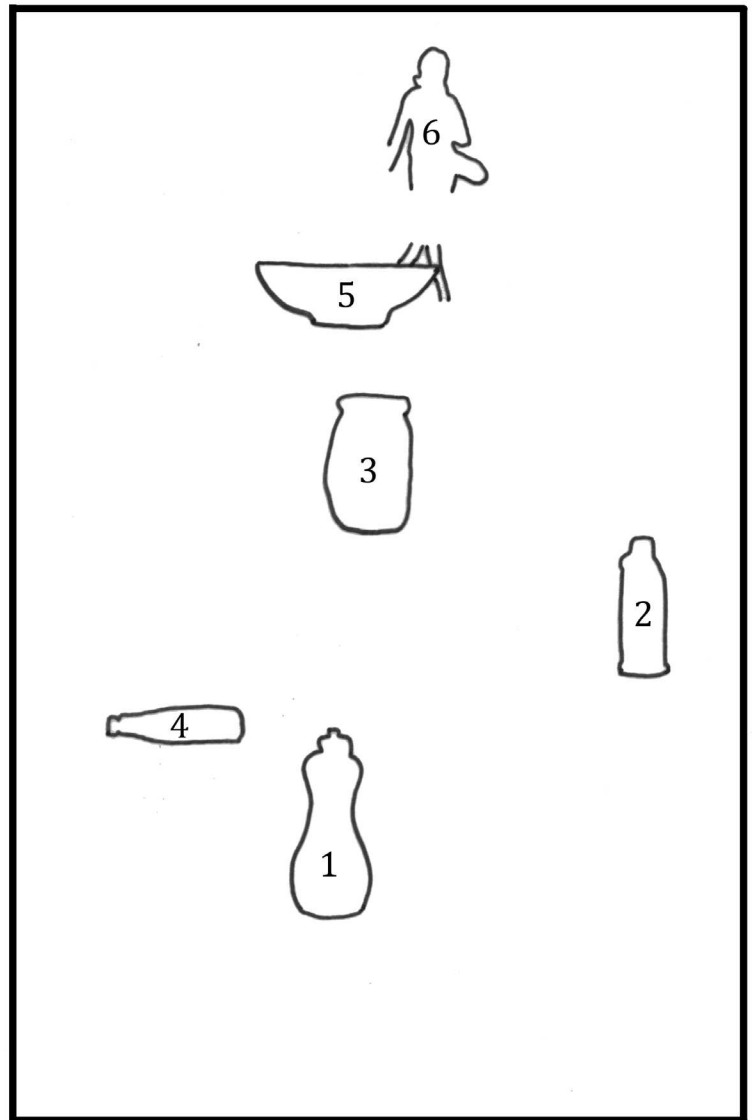
Based on mid-20th century home design, the main gallery installation of *Ready-Made Dream* is comprised of a series of room-sized, *trompe l'oeil* (literally “to fool the eye”) compositions that create a fictional-ideal and ultimately ephemeral house. With “walls” that rise 10 feet tall, “rooms” that stretch across expanses as long as 32 feet, and the depiction of a plethora of larger-than-life everyday objects, navigating the installation is something akin to shrinking oneself down (like Alice) in order to enter a make-believe world. The artist's process begins with detailed gouache paintings of the architectural settings to which are added collage elements from magazines, advertising and out-of-date encyclopedias. The final images are digitally scaled up to billboard size and printed on vinyl, and stretched across the gallery walls using a system of grommets. At discrete intervals, 3D objects of the period such as an avocado wall-mounted telephone with extra long cord, Lincoln Logs, and a paint-by-number painting are interjected into the otherwise flat *trompe l'oeil* installation, which serves to momentarily rupture the illusion and bring the viewer back to concrete reality. Focusing on the avalanche of new consumer goods and the related marketing that together helped define post-war aspirations, *Ready-Made Dream* is designed to create a hyper-real, larger-than-life contemplative environment that is as unsettling as it is familiar.

Children's toys often mirror the world of adults, and so it was that mid-century dollhouses were available in Colonial, Ranch House, and Split-Level styles complete with modernized kitchens, living rooms with picture windows, trend-conscious design elements, rec rooms, breezeways, pools and patios, garages and carports, and even bomb shelters. High-quality, colorful lithographic printing made it possible for playhouses to come to the young consumer *ready-made* with artwork on the walls, rugs on the floor, drapes and wallpaper installed, possessions on shelves, roasts in the oven, etc. These miniature pre-fab worlds, like their real-world suburban house counterparts, are artifacts of the American Dream – and as an object of child's play, they provide a model-sized version of the Dream itself.









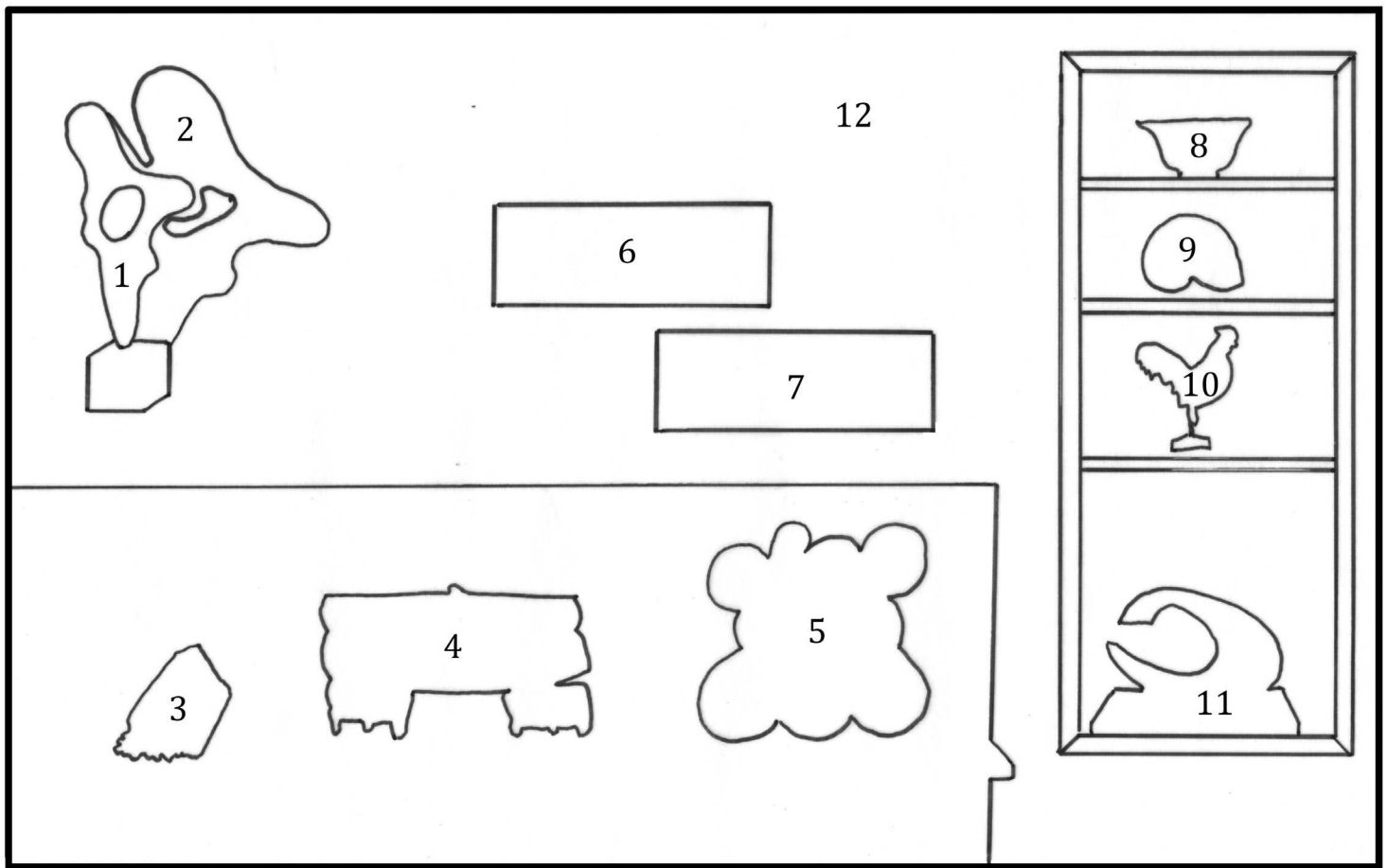
Here and There Room Divider¹: Just what is it that makes yesterday's homes so similar, so appealing?²

- 1 The new shape of a lemon
- 2 The shape of processed cheese food
- 3 The shape of mayonnaise
- 4 The shape of ketchup
- 5 The shape of something valuable
- 6 The shape of something ideal

1 The *Here and There Room Divider* openly recreates the look of mass-produced plastic dollhouse furniture manufactured by Louis Marx and Company. Marx furniture was cast in a single color, and featured details of everyday objects as if placed on surfaces in a real house. See authentic Marx room divider cast in gray plastic in this exhibition.

2 Title is an allusion to the now iconic 1956 collage by British pop artist, Richard Hamilton, "Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?"





Mod-style Hearth

- 1 Generic abstract sculpture
- 2 Shadow of generic abstract sculpture
- 3 Overturned striped bag of popcorn
- 4 Transformation of trees into logs, side view¹
- 5 Transformation of trees into logs, end view²
- 6 Mid Century Modern gravel art, marketed as the "Provincial" still life
- 7 Mid Century Modern gravel art, marketed as the "Colonial" still life
- 8 Blue and White Chinese bowl
- 9 Nautilus shell
- 10 Rooster³
- 11 Reproduction of a watercolor reproduction by Sue Johnson of "Wave" (1943-44) by British sculptor, Barbara Hepworth.
- 12 Overall room "look" based on historical sources⁴

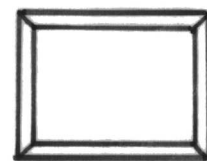
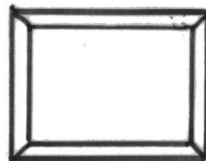
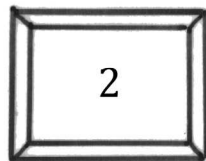
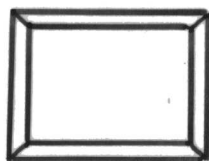
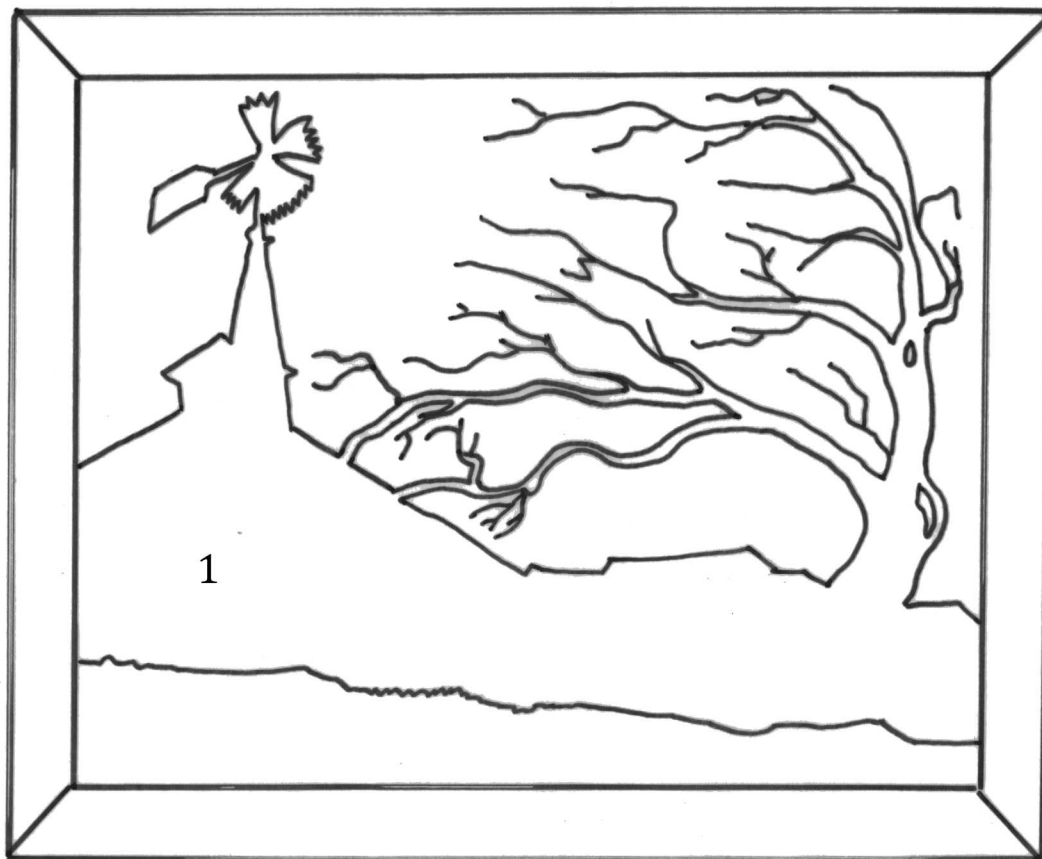
¹ For information on this subject, see *FOREST AND LUMBER* by Neil Jenney, painted in 1969.

² See footnote above.

³ Marx produced what is called the "Rooster Ranch House" with lift-off roof that featured a rooster silhouette on the outside chimney.

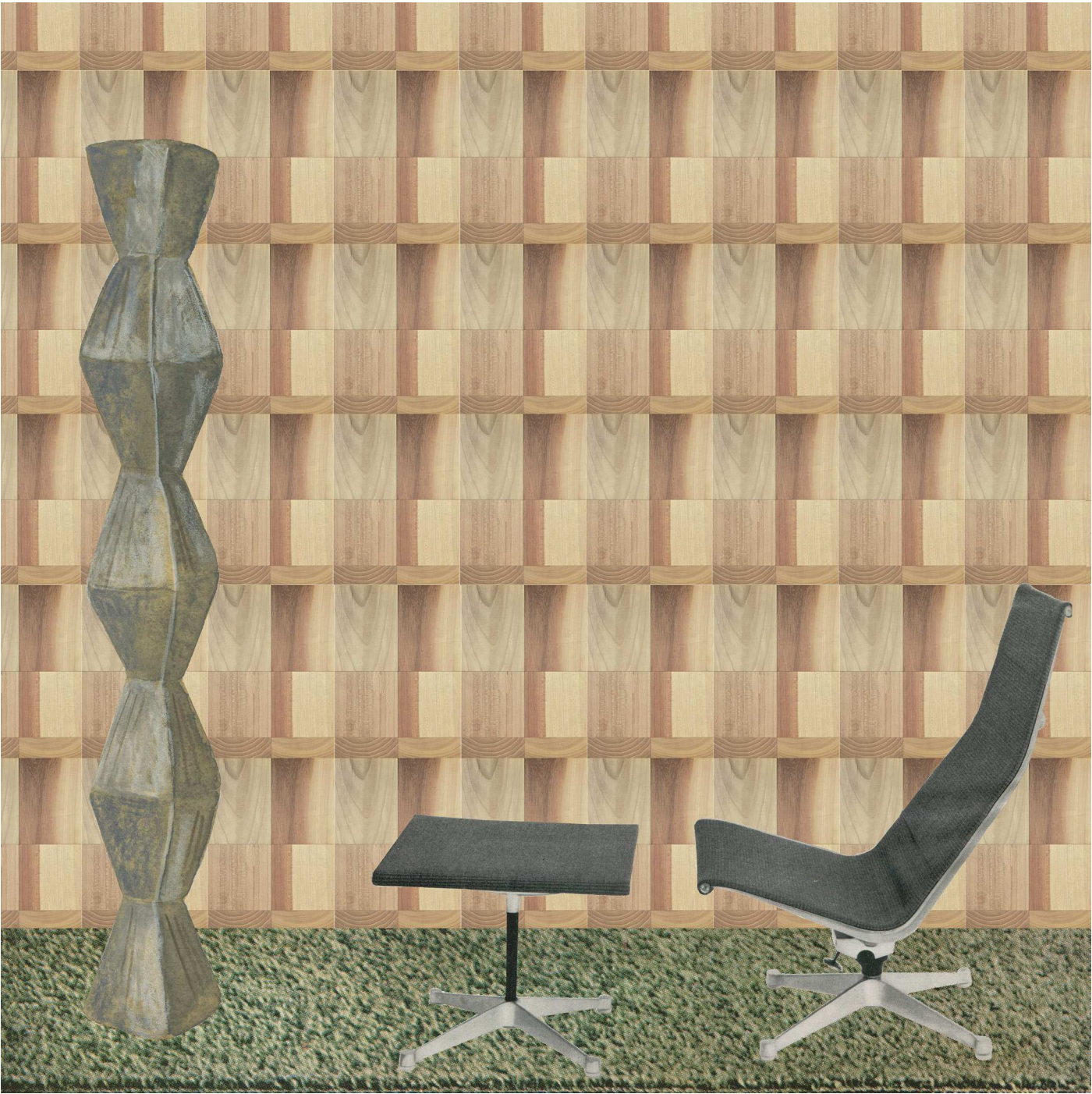
⁴ For more room design ideas like this one see the Marx New Split Level Dollhouse #4861, and *Better Homes & Gardens Decorating Book* (Des Moines: Meredith Publishing Company, 1956) pages 16 and 208.

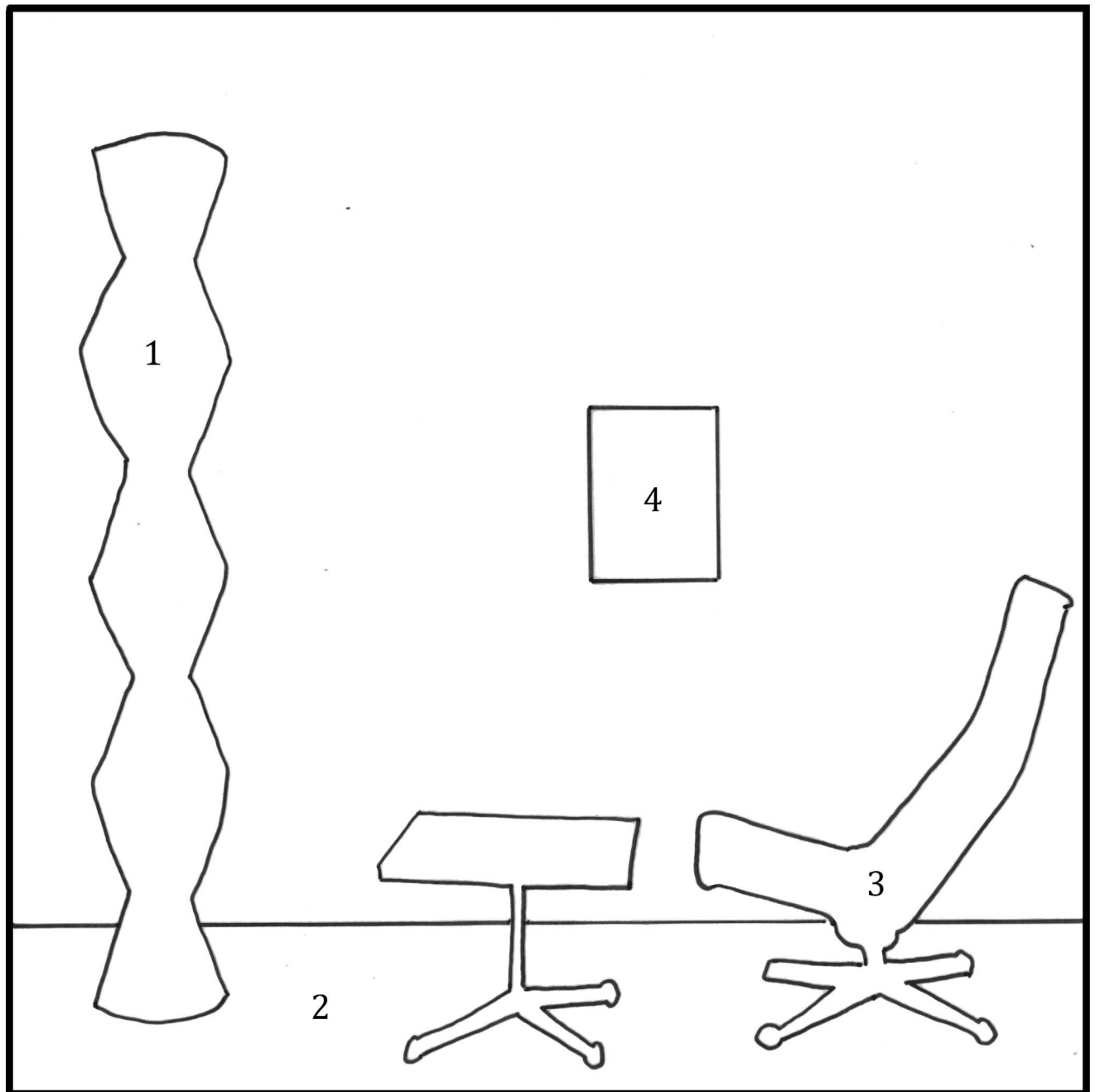




Picture Window Looking West

- 1 Substantially enlarged reproduction of *Broken Windmill* (Anonymous. Completed paint-by-number painting, 18 colors, Craftint, 1956). Provenance: eBay
- 2 Wood paneling as subject





Room with a View of Infinity

- 1 Reproduction of a watercolor painting by Sue Johnson that reproduces *Endless Column* by Constantin Brancusi (1876-1975) from 1918.
- 2 Luxurious deep-pile carpet
- 3 Black and white picture of an Eames-era lounge chair and footrest
- 4 Repeat motif (cross sections of two types of wood found in an out-of-date encyclopedia) used to create the wallpaper pattern, "Woody."

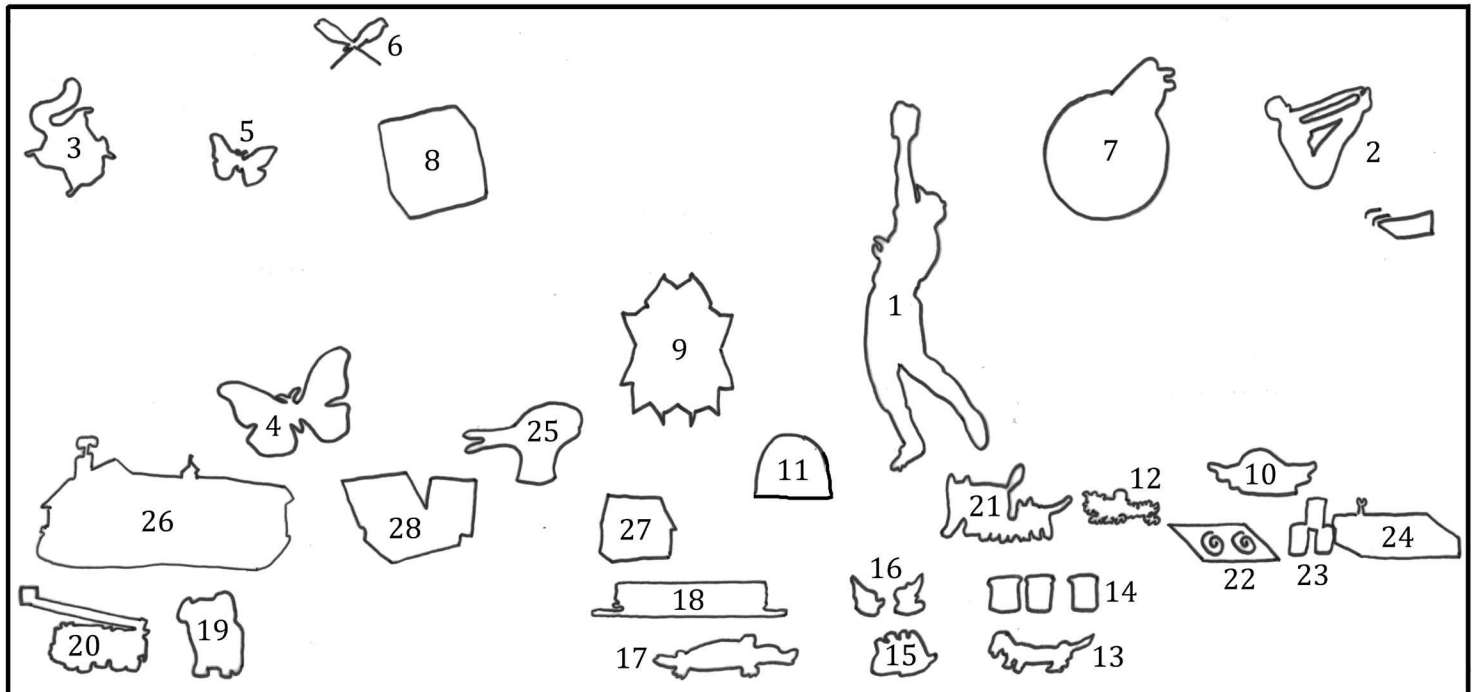
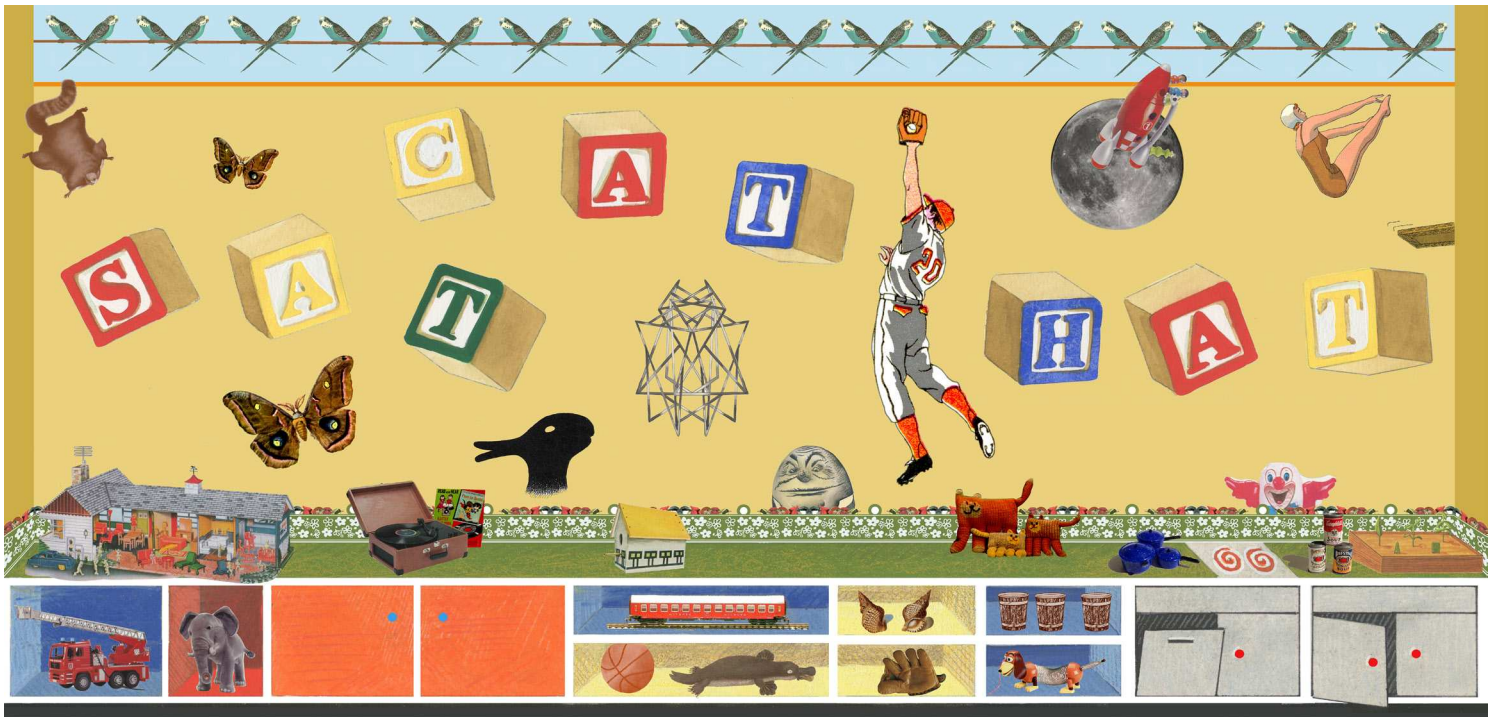
Room to Grow (multi-purpose bedroom-playroom)

- 1 Jumping Man
- 2 Diving Woman
- 3 Flying Squirrel
- 4 Big Moth
- 5 Little Moth
- 6 Birds on a Wire
- 7 Rocket on the Moon
- 8 Alphabet Block in the Sky
- 9 Floating Dynamic Form
- 10 Head of Bozo
- 11 Head of Humpty Dumpty
- 12 "Bird and Flower" border pattern inspired by ubiquitous 1960's dishware pattern
- 13 Slinky doggie
- 14 Wood-effect paper cups
- 15 Baseball mitt
- 16 Shell collection
- 17 Egg-laying, duck-billed, beaver-tailed, otter-footed mammal¹
- 18 Train Car and Track
- 19 Elephant in a cubbyhole
- 20 Fire engine
- 21 Yarn Cats
- 22 Playtime stove
- 23 Faux Campbell's soup cans (Johnson Magnet Collection)
- 24 Indoor garden
- 25 Zoological Ambiguity²
- 26 Marx Ranch House circa 1956³
- 27 House for Birds
- 28 Record and Player

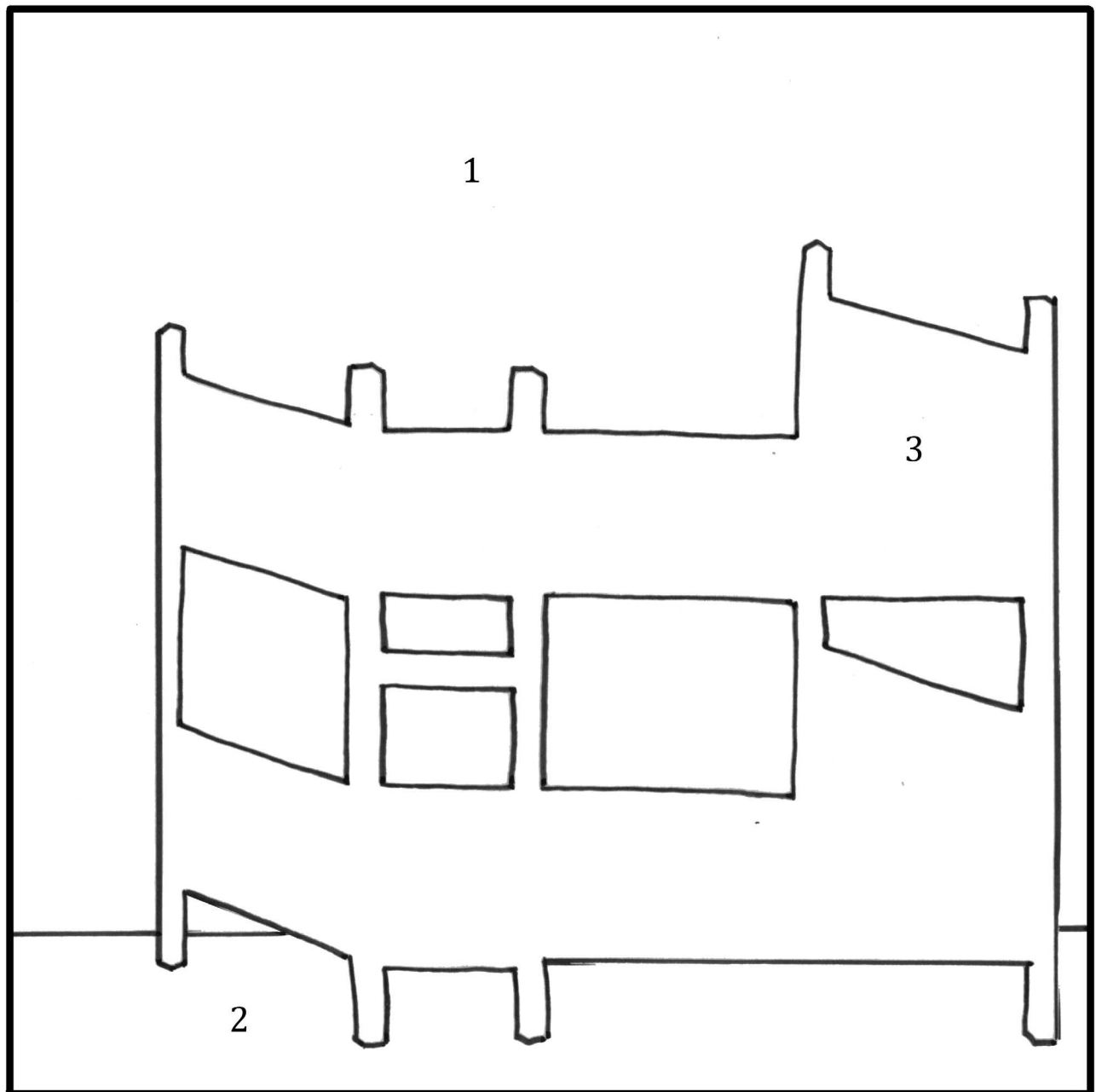
1 Platypus

2 Rabbit – Duck Illusion

3 See the real ranch house in this exhibition. In the 1962 *Sears Christmas Wish Book*, a 6-room Ranch House or a 2-story, 6-room Colonial metal dollhouse – with plastic furniture - sold for \$3.97.







Goodnight Basketball Moon

- 1 "Goodnight Basketball Moon" wallpaper pattern
- 2 Shag carpet
- 3 Bunk bed

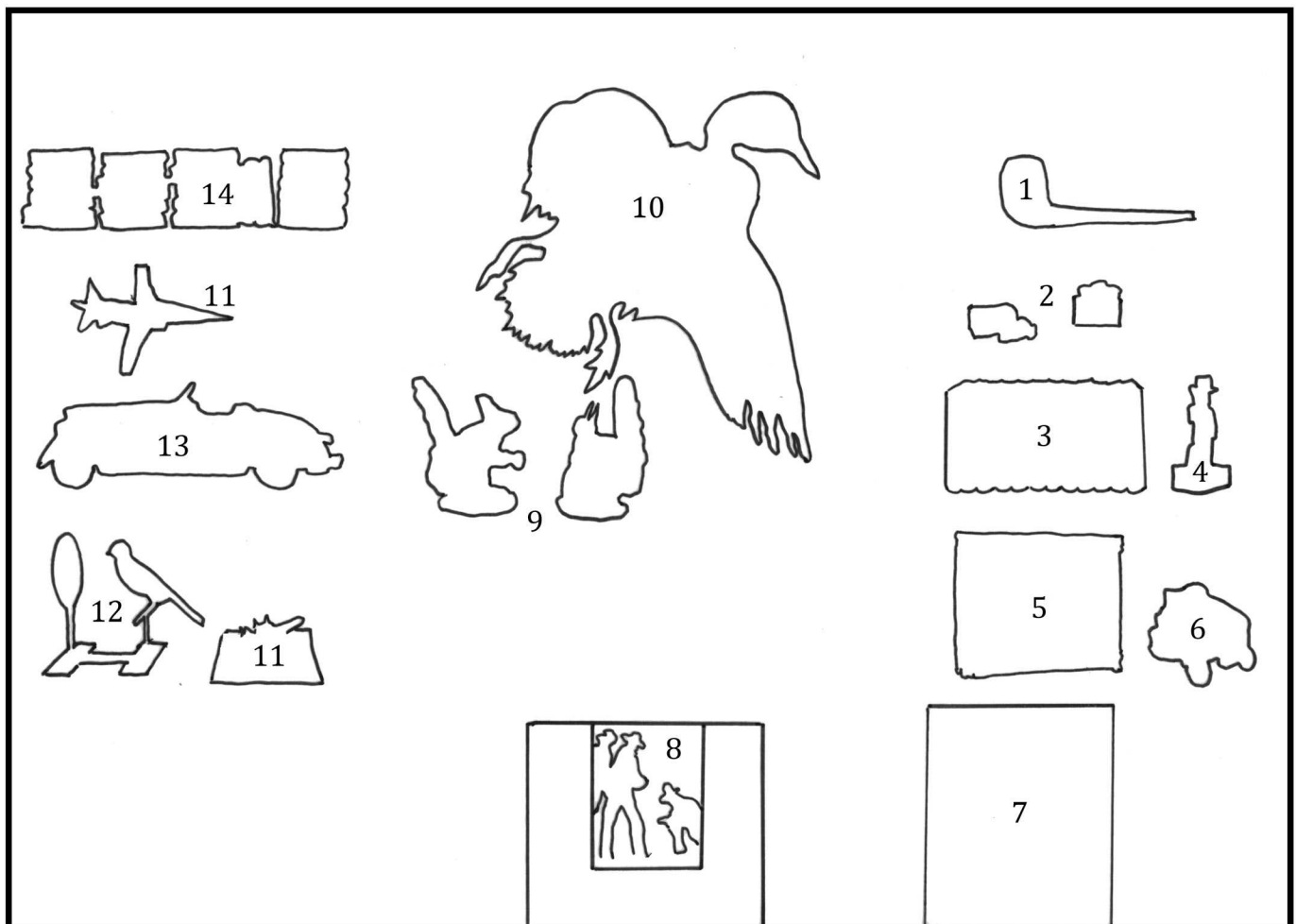
The Forest Room (right wall)

- 1 Not a pipe¹
- 2 Not a matchbox or a car
- 3 Paper knowledge
- 4 Uncle Sam look-alike
- 5 Portrait of the artist with family, circa mid-1960's²
- 6 Miniature tractor
- 7 Flat version of a tree
- 8 Portal for The Western Wonderland, the view of which looks remarkably similar to a Del Monte advertisement about so-called "Round-Up time" during which consumers send in product labels in exchange for valuable product coupons.³
- 9 Pair of ceramic squirrels
- 10 Flat version of a flying duck
- 11 Two grounded planes
- 12 Avian-type Narcissus
- 13 Over-sized dream car
- 14 Selection of 8-track tapes that offered convenience plus portability (popular for use in automobiles)

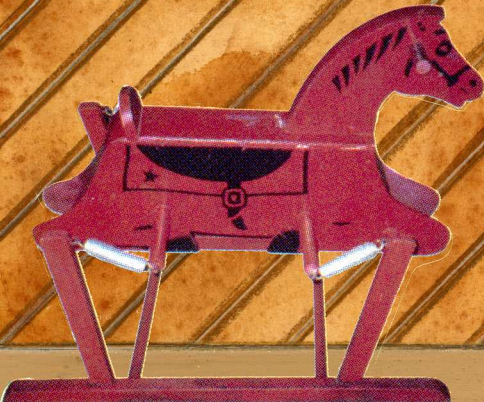
1 An acknowledgment of the importance of Belgian artist, Rene Magritte and his 1928-29 oil on canvas painting, *La trahison des images* (English: Treachery of Images) that consists of a painted pipe under which the artist wrote "Ceci n'est pas une pipe" (English: This is not a pipe).

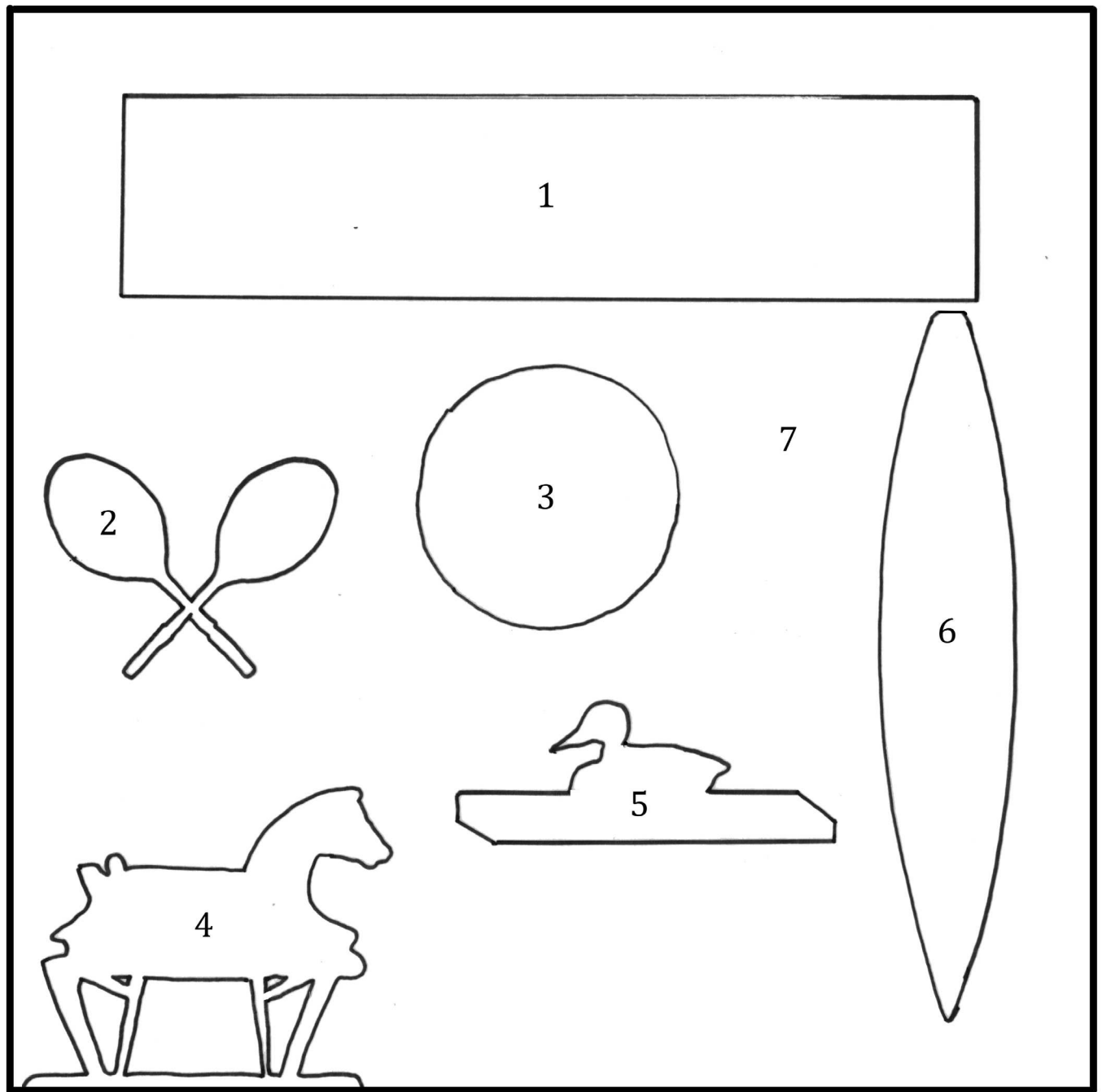
2 Self-explanatory. Though, we can add this picture was taken in Harding, New Jersey where the family lived in a split-level house. Over the mantle is a black and white painting of Monterey, California, which was a favorite family painting since they had just recently relocated from California to New Jersey.

3 See a reproduction of this advertisement in the Resource Room of this exhibition.



CAMP PLEASANT LAKE





The Forest Room (left wall)

- 1 Wooden sign of The American Dream
- 2 Decorative wooden tennis rackets
- 3 Modern dartboard¹
- 4 Wooden red spring horse
- 5 Wooden duck decoy
- 6 Non-wooden kayak, hanging
- 7 Wooden paneling, diagonally installed

¹ Early games of darts entailed throwing arrows at slices of trees which had concentric rings already built into their design, or at the bottoms of wooden barrels.

Early Sunday Morning in the Kitchen¹

- 1 Reproduction of a reproduction of a George Nelson-style ball clock
- 2 Reproduction of a reproduction of an Aunt Jemima clock
- 3 Those that, at a distance, resemble collectible cookie jars (from an old auction catalog)²
- 4 Streamlined (mixer, there's another in the warehouse for when this one doesn't work anymore)
- 5 Cleanliness (spray disinfectant and covered trash can)
- 6 Abundance (refrigerator, fully-stocked)
- 7 Space-Age (built-in see-thru double oven with control panel)
- 8 Convenience (electric can-opener)
- 9 More Abundance (stack of pancakes with syrup)
- 10 Appealing New Gadget (electric skillet)
- 11 Pre-Modern Way (washing dishes by hand)
- 12 Hygienic Modern Labor-Saver (dishwasher)
- 13 Economical Efficiency (meal-sealing-type device)³
- 14 Cheerful Color (turquoise stove and oven combo)
- 15 Coordinated Color Scheme (avocado green wall-mounted rotary telephone with extra long cord)⁴
- 16 "Souvenir" wallpaper pattern⁵

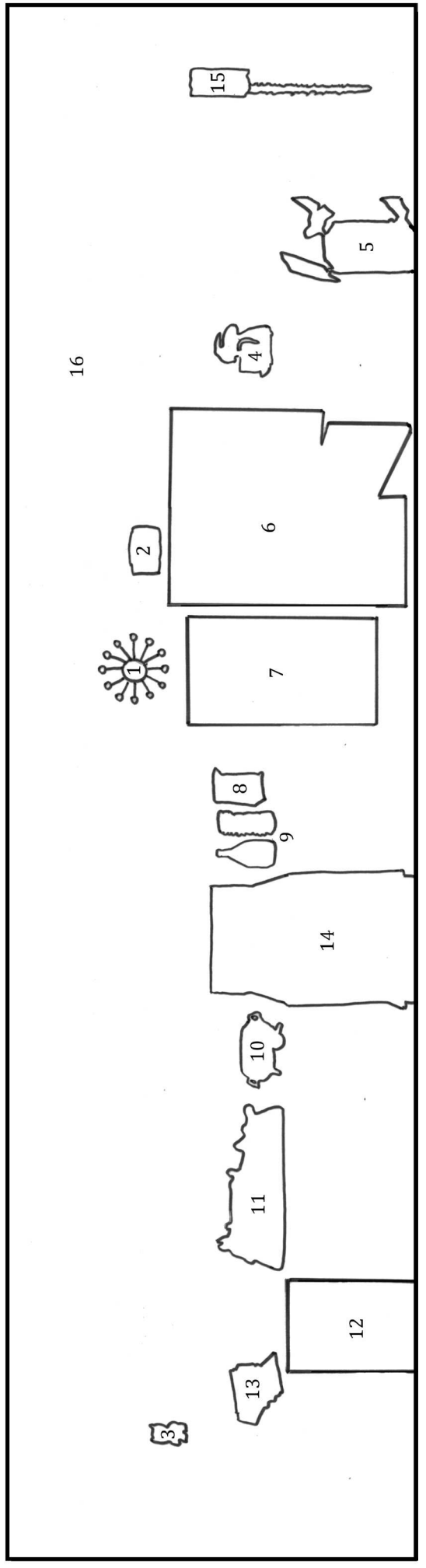
1 Title intended as a reference to Edward Hopper's painting from 1930, *Early Sunday Morning*.

2 An oblique reference to the 1942 essay by Jorge Luis Borges, "The Analytical Language of John Wilkins" in which is described a certain Chinese encyclopedia, The Celestial Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge.

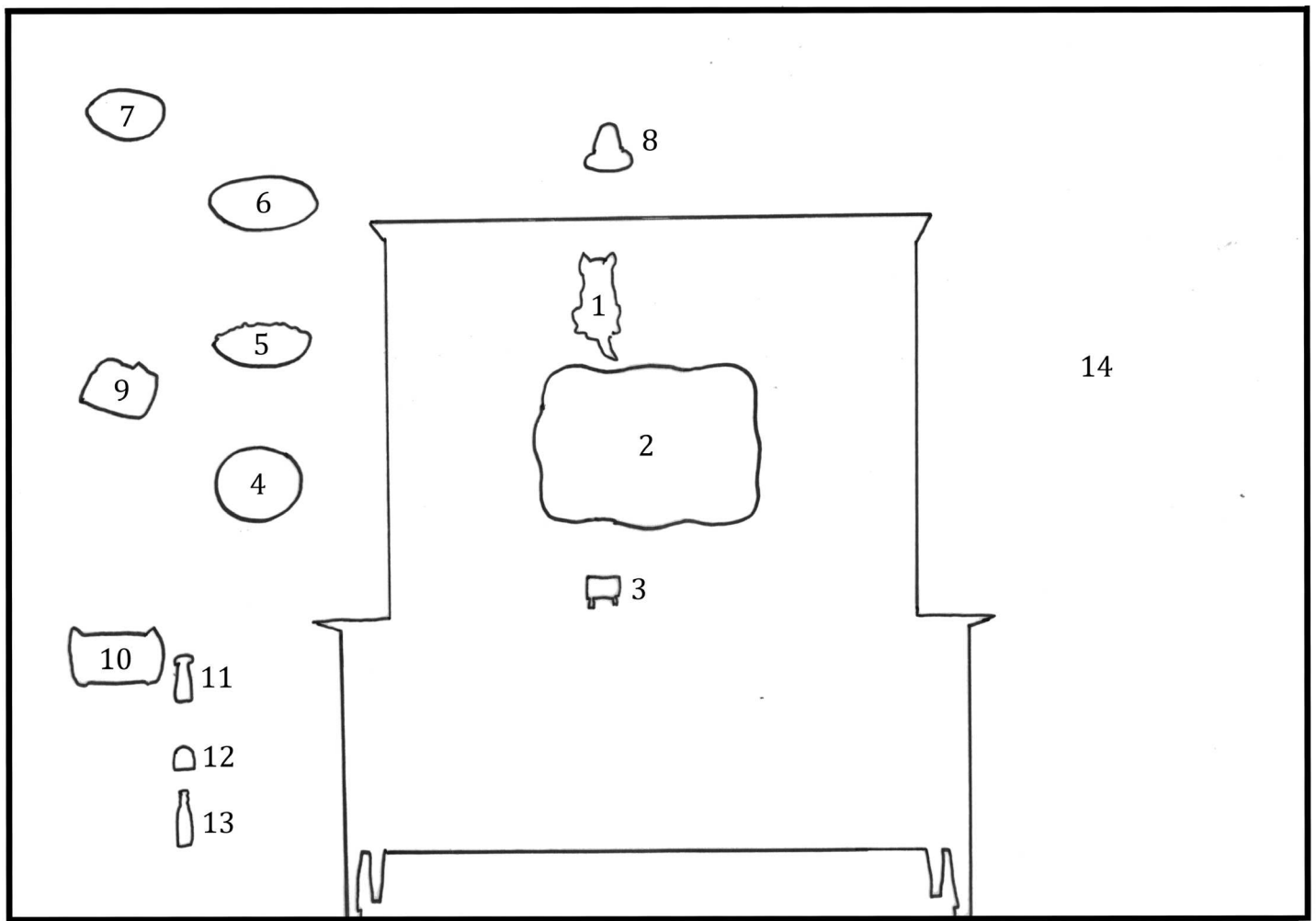
3 Reference to Sue Johnson's previous archival project, *The New Ark Preservation Project*, in which cultural objects are sealed in Food Saver Brand sealing bags. The project's collection categories include: 1) animals wearing clothes, 2) things that look like other things, and 3) fake food items.

4 Photographic evidence exists that the artist's family kitchen sported matching avocado appliances in the 1970's.

5 Also available as wrapping paper.







Land of Plenty

- 1 Time-keeping mutant cat
- 2 Metal TV tray showcasing Coca-Cola products, circa 1962¹
- 3 Salt & pepper shaker in the shape of a wood grain TV set²
- 4 Smiling Pancakes (friend of Smiling Coffee Pot)
- 5 Hamburger being helped by macaroni
- 6 Salisbury Steak dinner
- 7 Big steak
- 8 Fancy gelatin
- 9 Soup & sandwich combo
- 10 Meatloaf slathered in ketchup
- 11 Atomic-style vessel
- 12 Half-sandwich with bacon
- 13 No-brand ketchup
- 14 "Mod-Automat" wallpaper pattern

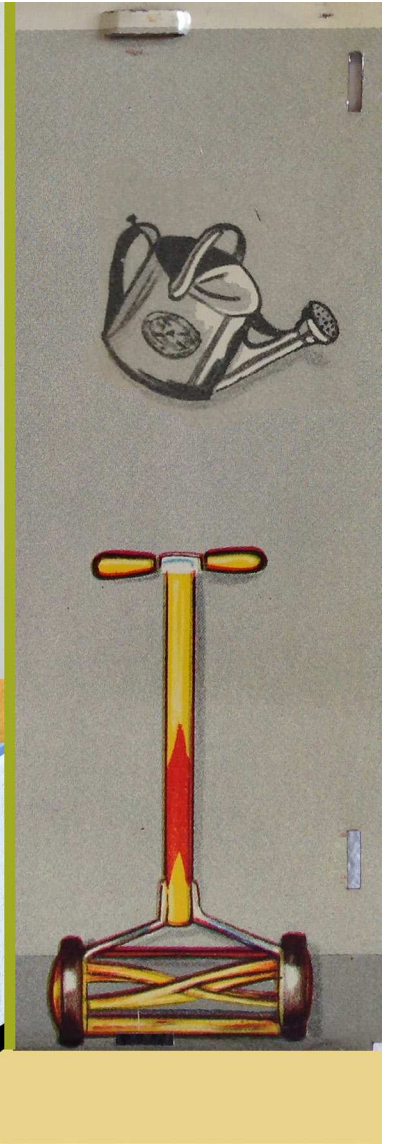
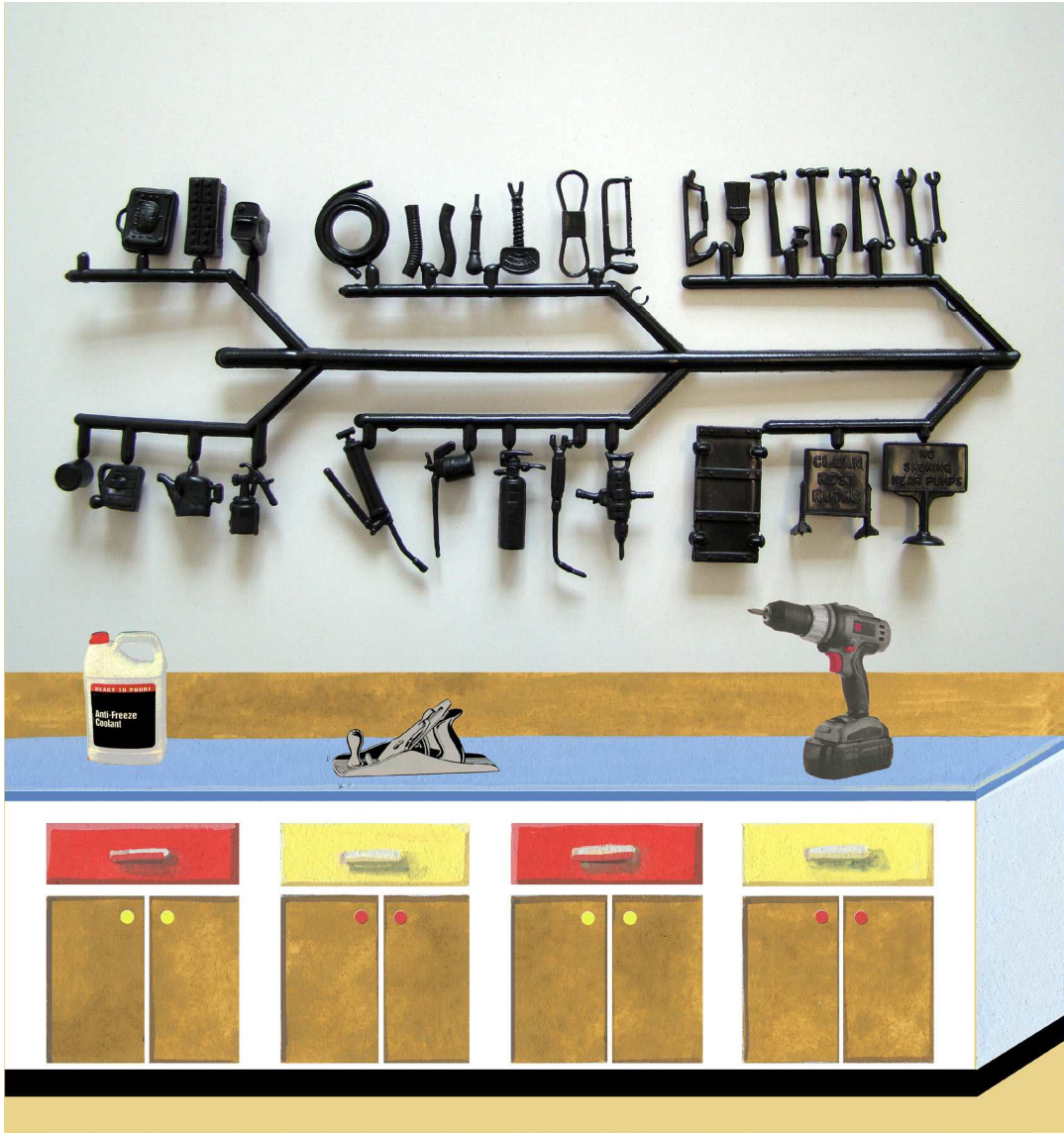
1 Back up extra TV tray in the Dutch-inspired Home Warehouse
 2 See the actual TV set salt & pepper shaker in this exhibition

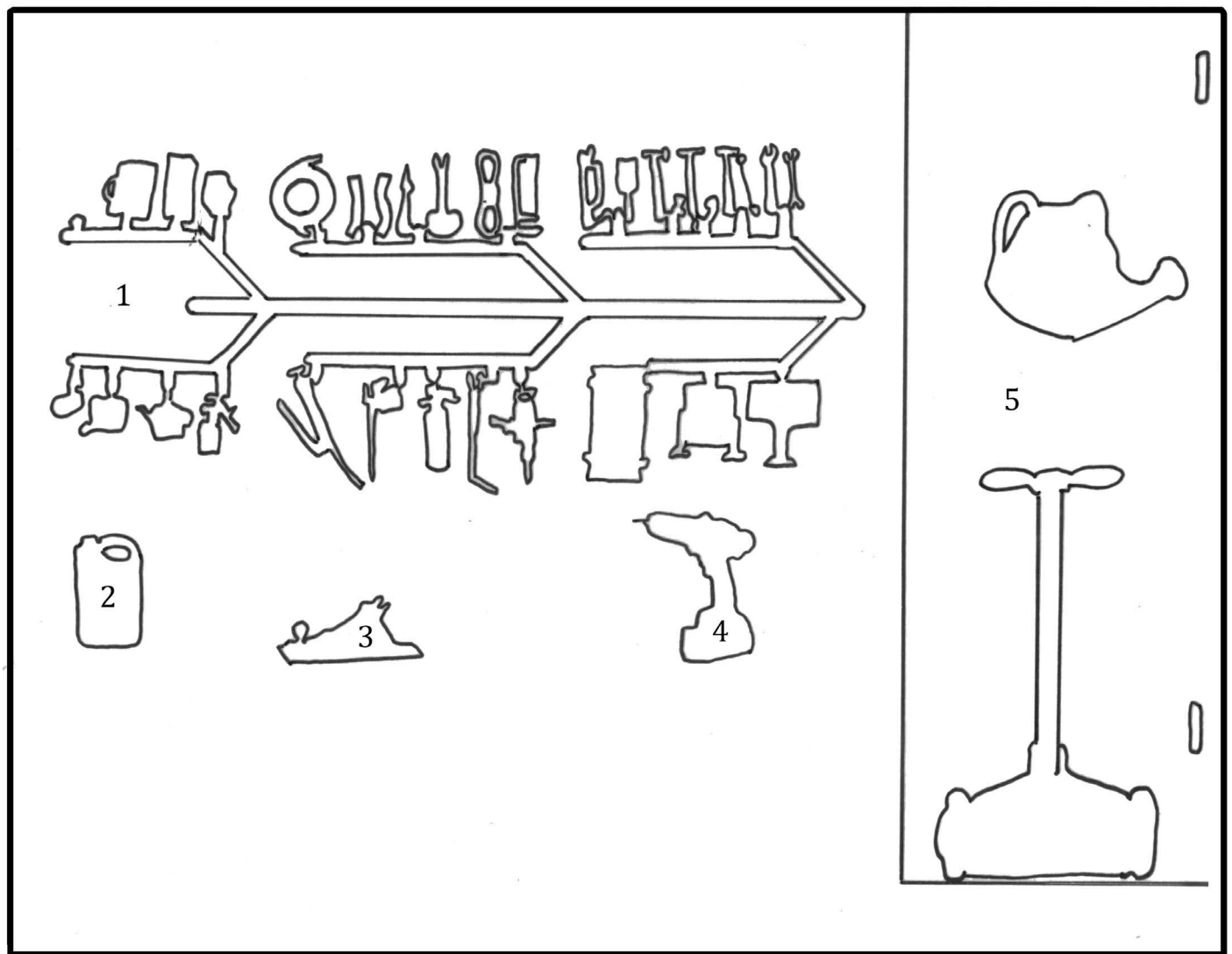
Dutch-inspired¹ Home Warehouse

- 1 Metal TV tray showcasing Coca-Cola products, circa 1962
- 2 3 vessels
- 3 Facsimiles of food (JMC)
- 4 Brand X. Provenance: advertisement for Comet Brand cleanser, circa 1963
- 5 Brand Y. Provenance: advertisement for Comet Brand cleanser, circa 1963
- 6 New World exploration equipment
- 7 Spotted and Spotless (derived from advertisement for dishwashing detergent)
- 8 3 impractical shopping carts (JMC)
- 9 1 leftover (JMC)
- 10 Pair of Danish modern lamp bases
- 11 Planned Obsolescence (back-up mixer)
- 12 Object from fine dining array
- 13 Lot of ketchup bottles
- 14 Spare light bulb for Jasper Johns
- 15 Easter basket, stocked. Provenance: Workshop of The Easter Bunny
- 16 Back stock (anti-freeze)
- 17 Faux Campbell's soup cans (JMC)
- 18 Smiling Coffee Pot. Close relative of Smiling Teapot and Smiling Carton of Eggs (JMC)
- 19 Cheese and crackers on wood panel (JMC)
- 20 Assortment of generic wrapping products
- 21 Lids (JMC)
- 22 5 cans
- 23 Mustard Jars Mistaken for Acrobats
- 24 Wee meat grinder (JMC)
- 25 Home of Future Things
- 26 Like a Minimalist painting
- 27 Canned cheese
- 28 Plastic food (JMC)
- 29 Auxiliary storage with green lids
- 30 Modern electric convenience (blender)
- 31 Leading Brand A (peanut butter taste test challenge, circa 1970's)
- 32 Leading Brand B (peanut butter taste test challenge, circa 1970's)
- 33 Food transportation devices (Roy Rogers & Dale Evans *trompe l'oeil* "Chow Wagon" lunch boxes, circa 1950's)
- 34 Imports (*Wedgewood Blue* cups and saucers)
- 35 Jumbo watermelon
- 36 Slice of cake
- 37 Crouton waterfall

JMC Johnson Magnet Collection

1 Piet Mondrian (1872 – 1944) was a Dutch painter. Further, cabinets of curiosities were very popular in Netherlands in the 17th and 18th centuries.





Garage-Hobby Center

- 1 Marx vehicle tools and accessories molded in black plastic
- 2 Anti-freeze coolant
- 3 Plane (not to be confused with an aero plane)
- 4 Drill as advertised in a junk mailing
- 5 Digitally rearranged section of a garage wall from a Marx "tin-litho" two-story Colonial dollhouse, circa 1950's¹

¹ See a photographic copy of this wall segment in the Resource Room of this exhibition. Note the slots on the top and right sides for the metal tabs used to put the dollhouse together.



Objects in *Ready-Made Dream*

Lincoln Logs

Canister with diagrams and Lincoln Log architectural model

Sizes variable

The canister announces that Lincoln Logs are America's National Toy. Lincoln Logs were invented in 1916 by John Lloyd Wright, son of Frank Lloyd Wright, the architect. The current distributor of the toy claims that it was originally named after the 16th President of the United States, Abraham Lincoln. According to the Lincoln Boyhood National Memorial in Indiana, which is two miles east of Gentryville, Indiana, Lincoln did indeed grow up in a log cabin built by his father. Collection of the artist.

Completed paint-by-number painting of a still life composed of artifacts associated with Native American life. Anonymous. Date unknown. Little is known about this particular painting pattern. The Paint By Number Museum, a virtual museum, reproduces the image however does not have information about the manufacturer, the kit series, or size of the work.

Provenance: eBay. Collection of the artist.

Assorted Louis Marx and Co. plastic dollhouse furniture

Circa 1950's – 60's

Provenance: eBay

Collection of the artist

Avocado green wall-mounted Bell telephone with extra long cord

Provenance: eBay

Collection of the artist

String art, hanging plant

Circa mid 20th century

9.5 x 12 x 1.25

Provenance: eBay

Collection of the artist

Resource Room

Sue Johnson

3 gouache paintings created for Ready-Made Dream installation (left to right)

The Forest Room (2013), 9.75" x 13.5"

Here and There Room Divider (2013). 16.5" x 11.25" Courtesy Heiner Contemporary

SAT, CAT, HAT (2013), 12.5" x 9.5"

Assorted reproductions of source materials from the artist's collection

Sources include shelter magazines dating from the 1940's – 1980's, Barbie's Doll House (Collection of the artist), and a wall segment from a Marx Colonial dollhouse.

1953 Louis Marx and Co. T-Shaped Ranch "tin-litho" dollhouse

Provenance: eBay

Collection of the artist

Aspen Magazine

Volume 1, Issue 3, 1966

Designed by Andy Warhol and David Dalton

On loan from the Wyndham Robertson Library, Hollins University

A short-lived "magazine-in-a-box" published from 1965 to 1971. This box for this issue was based on the graphics of the Fab laundry detergent box, and some of the contents include; a flexi-disc by Peter Walker and John Cale of the Velvet Underground, a flipbook based on the film *Kiss* by Andy Warhol and Jack Smith's film *Buzzards Over Bagdad*, an IBM advertising booklet designed especially for this issue, *The Plastic Exploding Inevitable* which was an underground newspaper from Warhol's Factory, and 12 Paintings from the Powers Collection which reproduced artworks from the collection of Thomas Powers including works by Willem de Kooning, James Rosenquist, Jasper Johns, Bridget Riley, Andy Warhol. For each issue of Aspen Magazine there was a guest editor, and some of these included Quentin Fiore and Fluxus artist George Macuinias.





Sue Johnson

***Quaking Aspen*, Vol. 1 (2010)**

***Quaking Aspen*, Vol. 2 (2010)**

Collection of the Eleanor D. Wilson Museum, Hollins University

The *Quaking Aspen* project (shown opposite page) creates a flattened contemporary *wunderkammer*, and takes on Fluxus-type programmes and cabinets of curiosities, scrap-booking, idiosyncratic practices and library archiving. This on-going project by Sue Johnson was originally inspired by *Aspen Magazine* and another archive in a box from the Wyndam Robertson Library at Hollins University.

Ethan Allen Room Planning Kit

9 1/8" x 11 5/8" x 2"

Inside this kit, several business cards were found belonging to Charles Carter, Design Sales Consultant for Ethan Allen, Warwick, Rhode Island. Along with the ready-made, magnetic shapes and sizes corresponding to tables, chairs, sofas, beds, carpets, etcetera, were also found hand-made paper rugs of various sizes. Provenance: eBay. Collection of the artist.

Miniature objects in a vitrine from the collection of the artist.

Objects include: miniature Lincoln Logs, miniature TinkerToys, wood grain salt & pepper shaker in the shape of a T. V. set, and gray plastic Marx and Co. dollhouse room divider.



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 Photographs by Christine Carr and Sue Johnson
Ready-Made Dream art works, text and drawings by Sue Johnson

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Hollins University and the Eleanor D. Wilson Museum, the Wyndham Robertson Library of Hollins University, exhibition curator and prior Director of the Eleanor D. Wilson Museum Amy G. Moorefield, and the museum staff Janet Carty, Laura Jane Ramsburg, Karyn McAden and the many student interns and workers. Funding for *Sue Johnson: American Dreamscape* has been generously provided in part by Roanoke County and the City of Roanoke through the Roanoke Arts Commission.

Wallpaper designs reproduced in this book were created by the artist especially for *Ready-Made Dream*

Back cover: "Woody"

Inside front cover: "Goodnight Basketball Moon"

Inside back cover: "Souvenir"

For more information about works by Sue Johnson, please visit <http://www.suejohnson1.com>



