

Ready-Made Dream

Sue Johnson



This catalogue is printed on the occasion of the *Ready-Made Dream: Sue Johnson* exhibition at the University of Mary Washington Galleries, on view from October 25, 2018 to December 2, 2018.

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Cover artwork: Sue Johnson, *Room with a View of Infinity, Extended*, from “Ready-Made Dream” series, 2018. Print on vinyl, 115” x 240”.

Mission Statement

The University of Mary Washington Galleries, comprised of the Ridderhof Martin Gallery and the duPont Gallery, are dedicated to advancing the educational goals of the University through the collection, preservation, exhibition, and interpretation of works of art. The Galleries promote arts education on campus and in the local community.

Hours:

Monday through Friday, 10am to 4pm

Saturday and Sunday, 1pm to 4pm

Closed university holidays and break periods

Information:

540.654.1013

www.umwgalleries.org

Location:

Ridderhof Martin Gallery, College Avenue at Seacobeck Street

duPont Gallery, College Avenue at Thornton Street

1301 College Avenue, Fredericksburg, VA 22401



It is with great pleasure that we welcome *Ready-Made Dream* by Sue Johnson to the University of Mary Washington Galleries. This immersive exhibition explores the post WWII American dream through the lens of the ideal(ized) single-family suburban home and its miniature companion, the dollhouse.

Entering the exhibition, we find ourselves surrounded by slightly larger-than-life depictions of an idealized postwar home; we have been transported into a dollhouse and we are the dolls. Vinyl coverings transform the gallery into a beautifully designed home, depicting wallpaper, furniture, and appliances, while referencing dollhouses of the era. Colorful lithographic prints covered the walls of these smaller versions of our homes, featuring detailed renderings of the ideal accessories, from artwork on the walls to roasts in the two dimensional ovens.

Johnson’s childhood of the 1960s and 70s provided initial perspective, but it was her later research into material culture and the American dream that led to this work. No doubt her background in painting, with an MFA from Columbia University, and her studies in England and Italy have also informed this work. Each component of the installation begins as a small gouache painting, with collaged elements from magazines and out-of-date encyclopedias. These collaged elements reference the painting tradition of *vanitas*, where objects hold symbolism meant to remind us of our own mortality and the meaninglessness of pursuing worldly possessions.

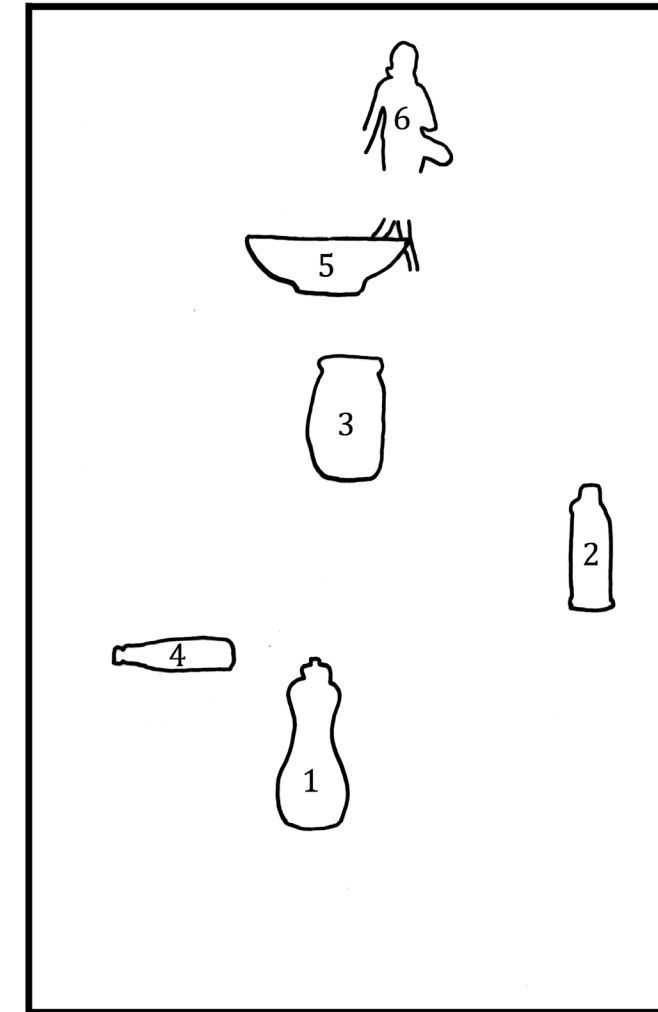
These objects and their symbolism come together to create a landscape of things, presenting the American dream as object. As such, the dream becomes something to be consumed, again referencing the material and consumer American culture of the mid 20th century. Sprinkled throughout the exhibition, between the vinyl wall coverings, we find actual objects, telephones, which not only emphasize the oversized scale of the two dimensional objects, but also remind us of how the American dream has evolved. At one time, a phone in every room was a goal of luxury; today we carry our phones with us, attached at the hip, always available, always on.

Ready-Made Dream transports us to a familiar space, whether it is because we grew up in similar spaces, or because we experienced these spaces through reruns and movies. However familiar, the space is also unsettling in its larger-than-life scale and its perfectly curated objects. Surreal and yet oddly comfortable, this installation offers an environment for contemplation of our contemporary relationship to objects, consumerism, and way of life through a mid century lens.

Rosemary Jesionowski
Associate Professor of Studio Art
Gallery Specialist, UMW Galleries



Iconography: a Prose Poem by Sue Johnson



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

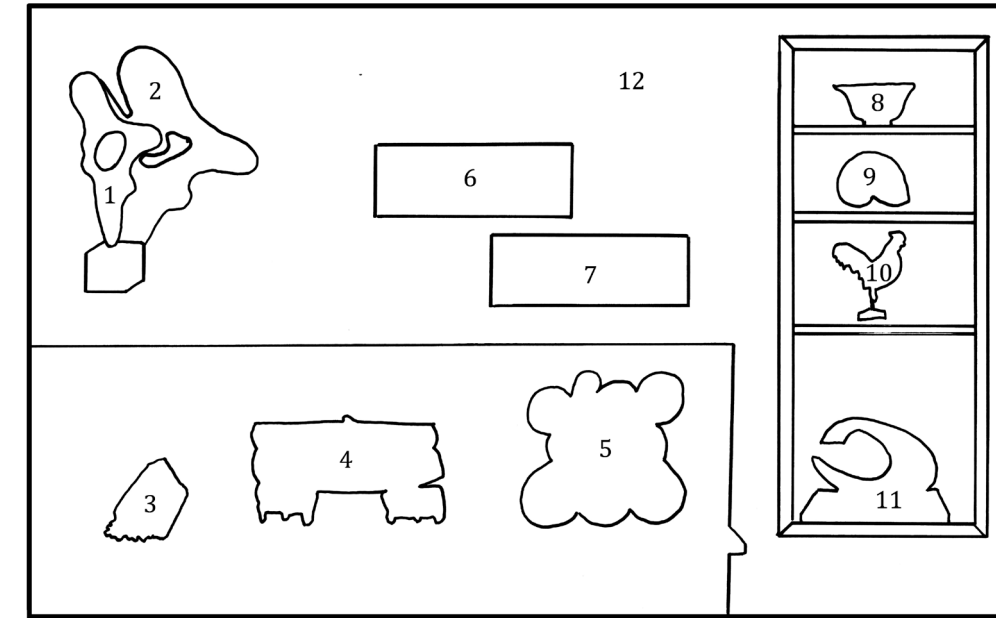
1. The new shape of a lemon
2. The shape of processed cheese food
3. The shape of mayonnaise
4. The shape of ketchup
5. The shape of something valuable
6. The shape of something ideal

1. *The Here and There Room Divider* 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

2. Title is an allusion to the now iconic 1956 collage by British pop artist, Richard Hamilton (1922-2011), "Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?"



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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

1. For information on this subject, see *Forest and lumber* by Neil Jenney (1945 -), painted in 1969.
 2. See footnote above.

7. Mid Century Modern gravel art, marketed as the "Colonial" still life
8. Blue and White Chinese bowl
9. Nautilus shell
10. Rooster³
11. Watercolor reproduction by Sue Johnson of *Wave* (1943-44), which is a work by British sculptor, Barbara Hepworth (1903-1975).
12. Overall room "look" based on historical sources⁴

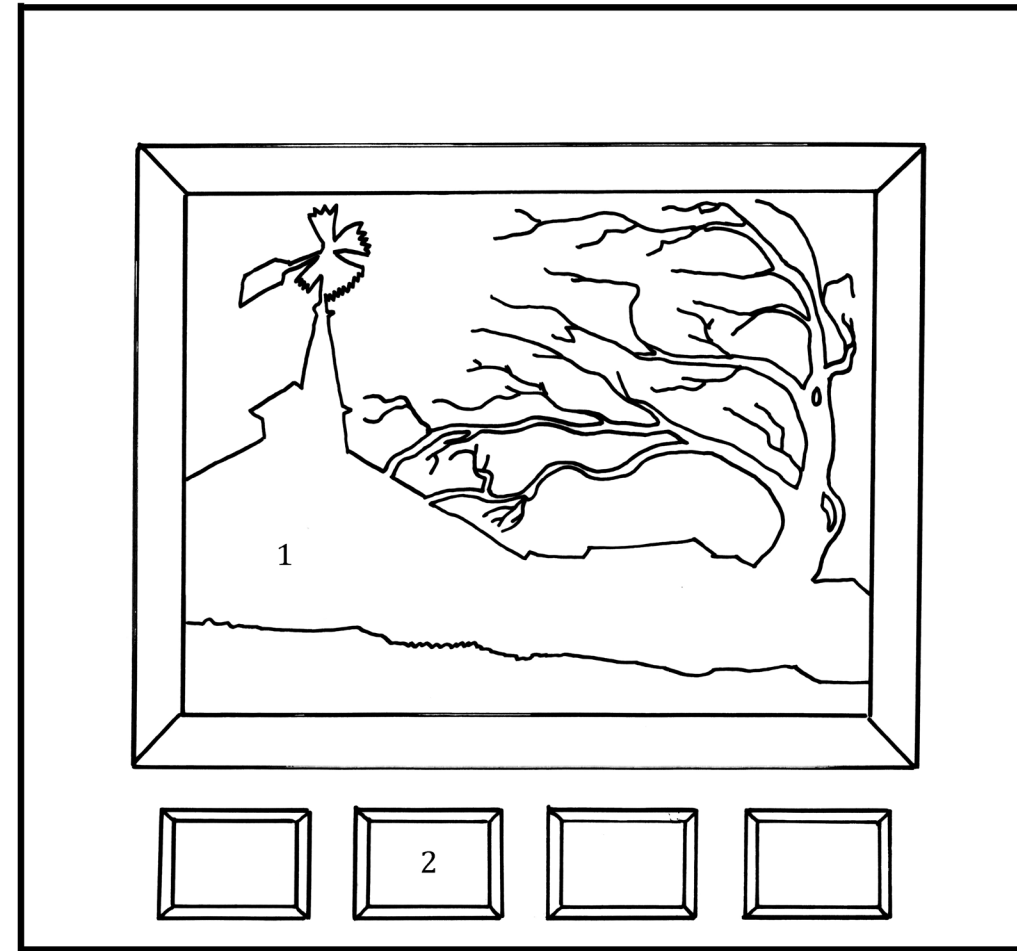
3. Marx produced what is called the "Rooster Ranch House" with lift-off roof that featured a rooster silhouette on the outside chimney.

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.

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Picture Window Looking West

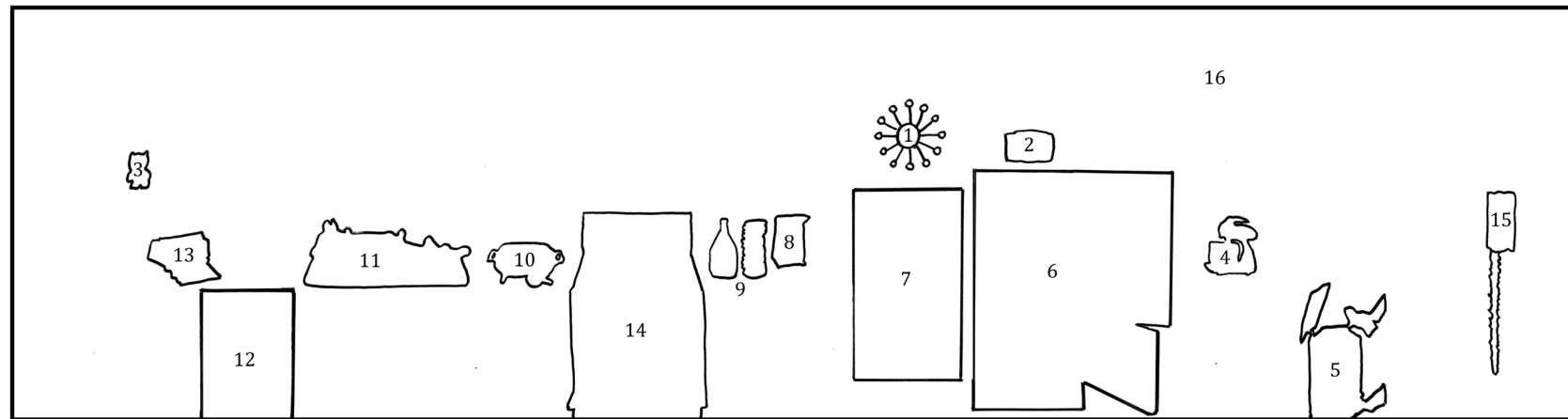
1. Substantially enlarged reproduction of *Broken Windmill* (Anonymous. Paint by-Number painting, 18 colors, Craftint, 1956). PROVENANCE: eBay
2. Wood paneling as subject

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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

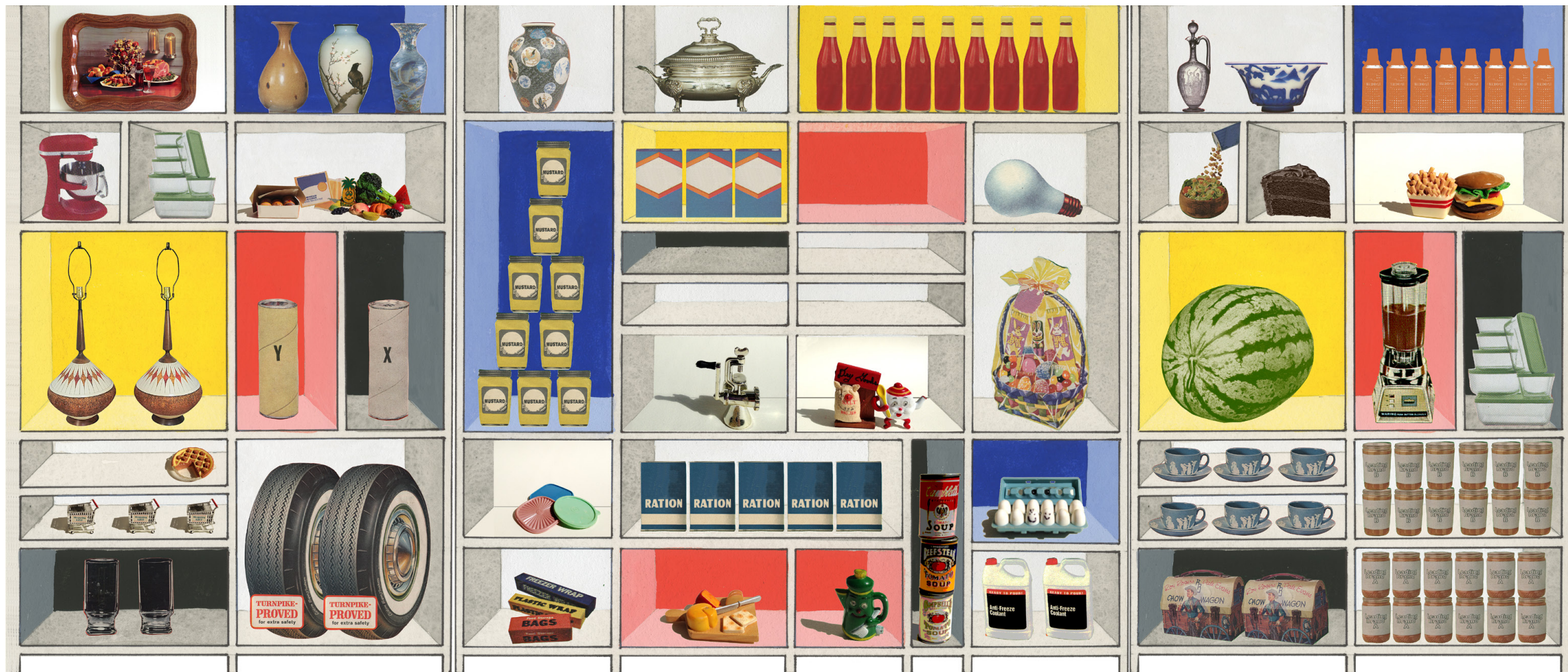
1. Title intended as a reference to the painting, *Early Sunday Morning* by Edward Hopper (1882-1967) from 1930.

2. An oblique reference to the 1942 essay by Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986), "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.

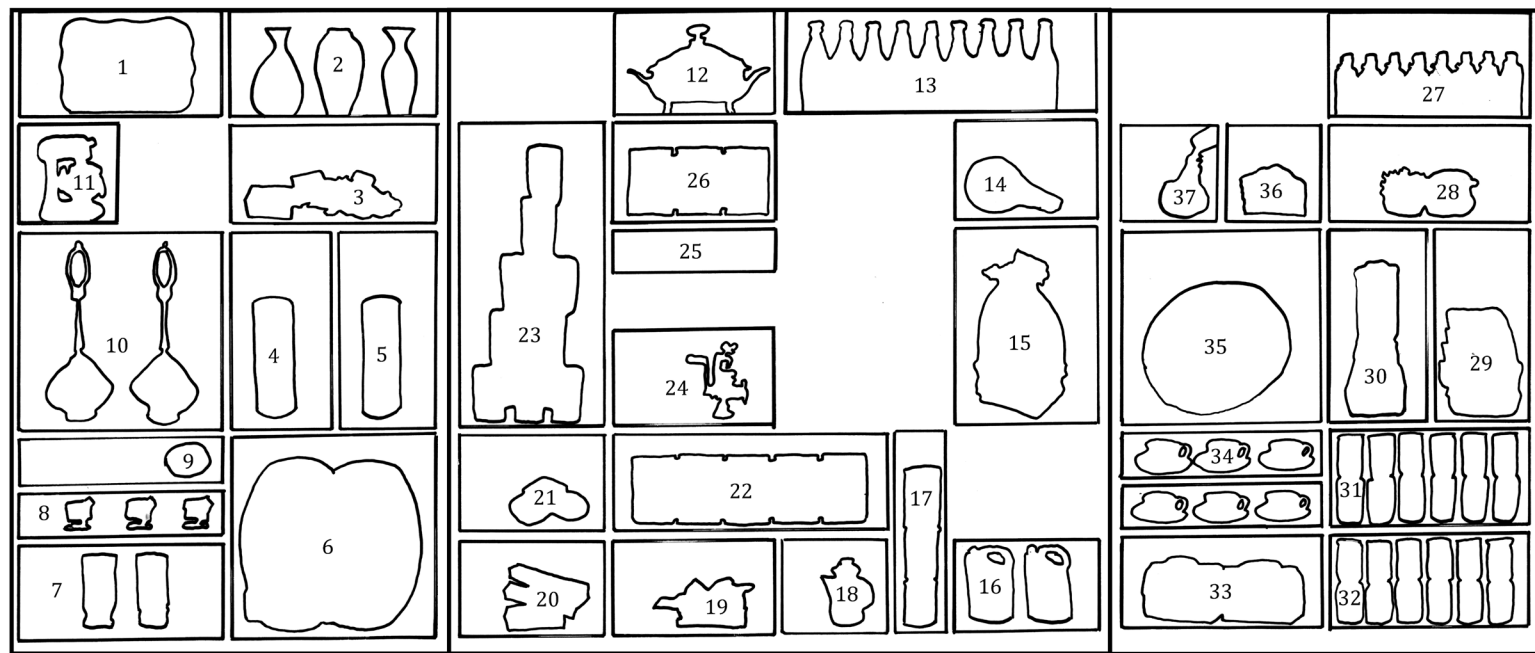
4. Photographic evidence exists that the artist's family kitchen sported matching avocado appliances in the 1970's

5. Also available as wrapping paper.



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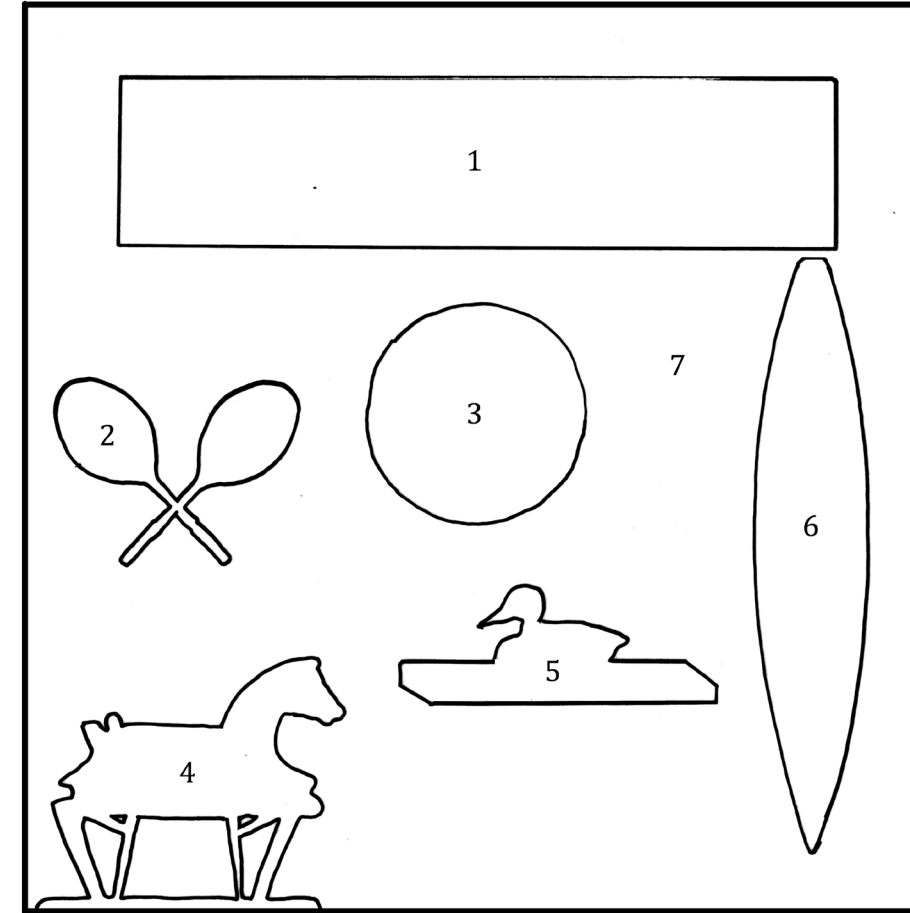
Dutch-inspired Home Warehouse¹

1. Metal TV tray showcasing Coca-Cola products, circa 1962
2. 3 vessels
3. Facsimiles of food
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
9. 1 leftover
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
18. Smiling Coffee Pot. Close relative of Smiling Teapot and Smiling Carton of Eggs
19. Cheese and crackers on wood panel
20. Assortment of generic wrapping products
21. Lids
22. 5 cans
23. Mustard Jars Mistaken for Acrobats
24. Wee meat grinder
25. Home of Future Things
26. Like a Minimalist painting
27. Canned cheese
28. Plastic food
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 (Wedgwood Blue cups and saucers)
35. Jumbo watermelon
36. Slice of cake
37. Crouton waterfall

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



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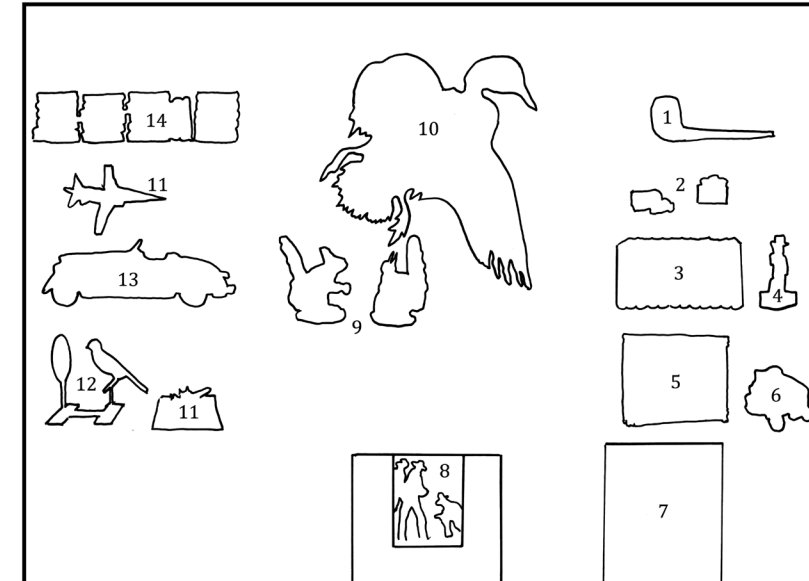
The Forest Room (left wall)

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.



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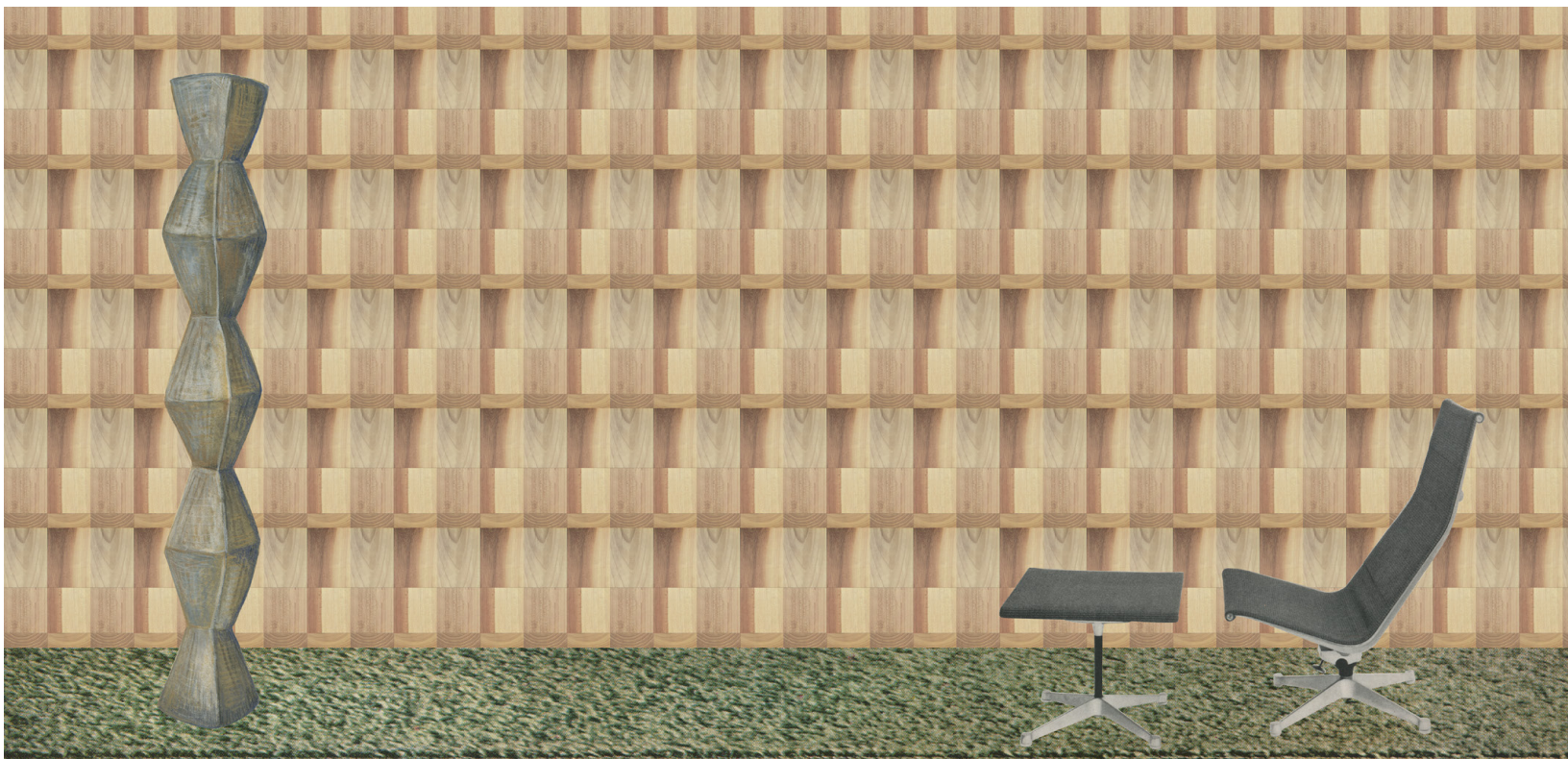
The Forest Room (right wall)

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.
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)

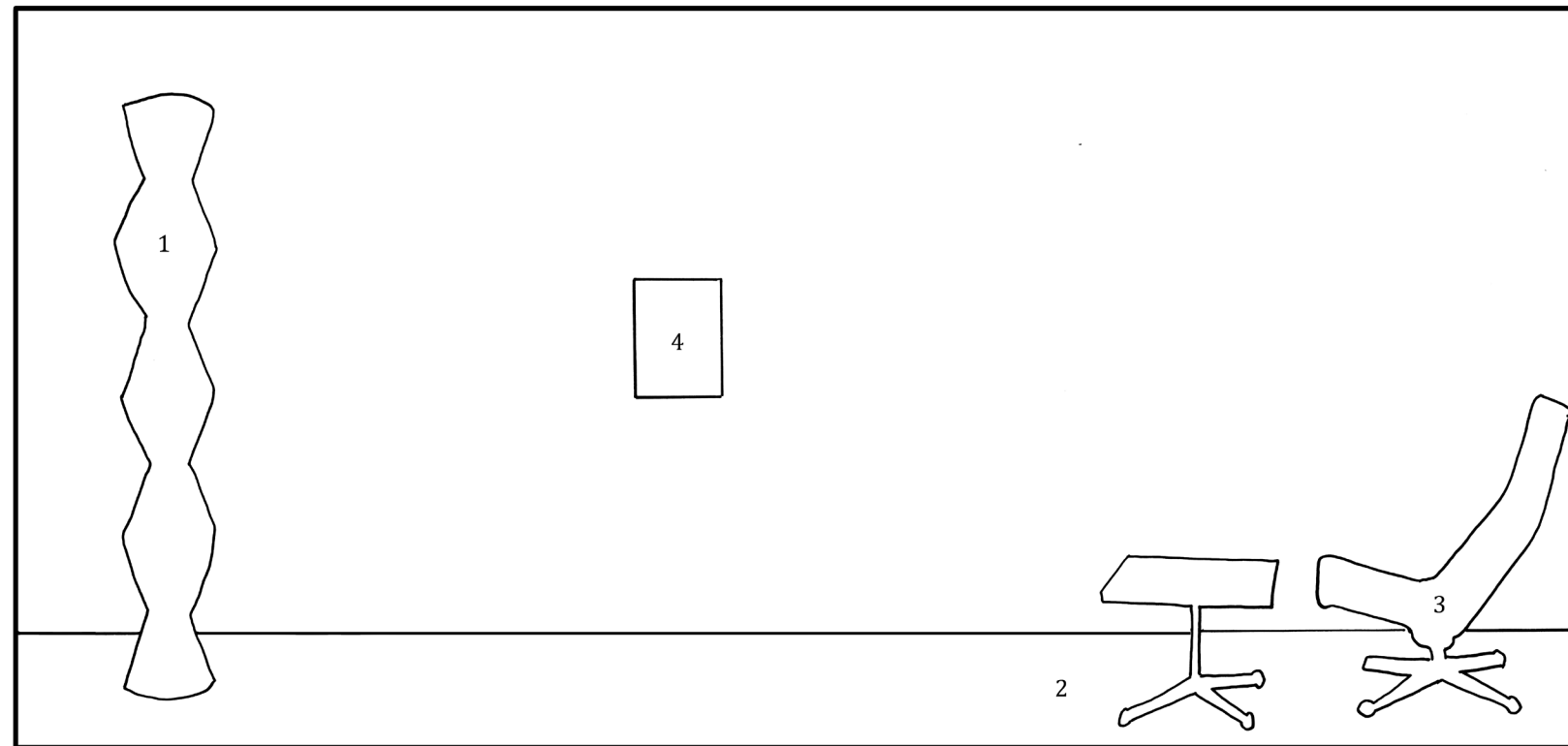
1. An acknowledgment of the importance of Belgian artist, Rene Magritte (1898-1967) and his 1928-29 oil on canvas painting, *La trahison des images* (English: *Treachery of Images*) that consists of a painted pipe under which the artist wrote "Ceci n'est pas une pipe" (English: *This is not a pipe*).

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 Monterrey, California, which was a favorite family painting since they had just recently relocated from Southern California to New Jersey.

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Room with a View of Infinity, Extended

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."

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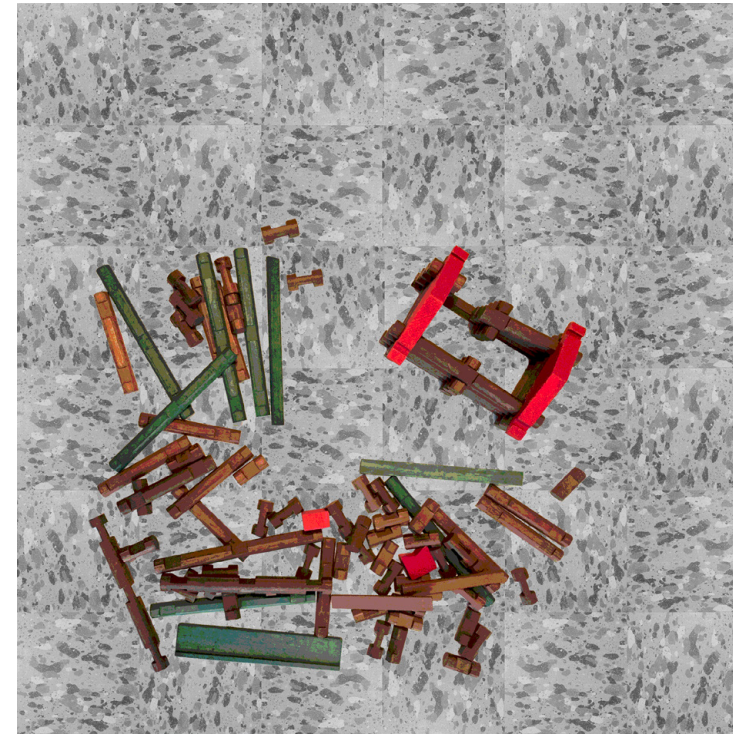
Additional Pieces in Exhibition
all images courtesy of the artist



Unswep Floor I
36" x 36"
vinyl floor decal
2018



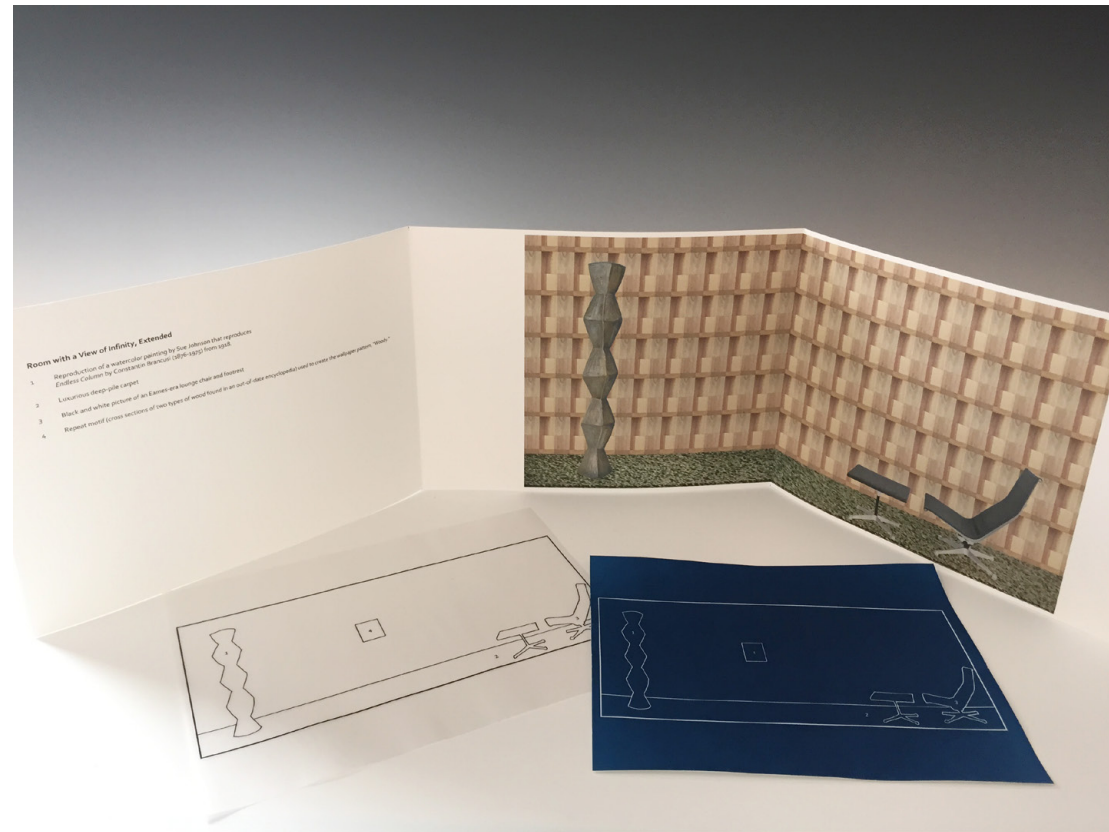
Unswep Floor II
36" x 36"
vinyl floor decal
2018



Construction Zone
50" x 50"
vinyl floor decal
2016-18



Shag Lawn
50" x 50"
vinyl floor decal
2016-18



Ready-Made Dream: The Iconographia
 9" x 37.5" with vellum and cyanotype diagrams
 Artist book in a box
 2018



Ready-Made Dream: The Iconographia
 9" x 12" x 2" (closed)
 Artist book in a box
 2018
 Edition of 10
 12 folded sheets in folio
 With 1 collectable piece of Louis Marx and
 Co. plastic dollhouse furniture



Louis Marx and Co. “T” Ranch “tin-litho” doll house

circa 1950’s

Photo Credit: Greg Staley

Work List:

1. *Here and There Room Divider*, from “Ready-Made Dream” series, 2013. Print on vinyl , 115” x 75”.
2. *Mod-style Hearth*, from “Ready-Made Dream” series, 2013. Print on vinyl, 115” x 184”.
3. *Picture Window Looking West*, from “Ready-Made Dream” series, 2013. Print on vinyl, 115” x 115”.
4. *Early Sunday Morning in the Kitchen*, from “Ready-Made Dream” series, 2013. Print on vinyl, 115” x 376”.
5. *Dutch-inspired Home Warehouse*, from “Ready-Made Dream” series, 2013-18. Print on vinyl, 115” x 271”.
6. *The Forest Room*, from “Ready-Made Dream” series, 2013. Print on vinyl, 105” x 275”.
7. *Room with a View of Infinity, Extended*, from “Ready-Made Dream” series, 2013. Print on vinyl, 115” x 240”.
8. *Unswept Floor I*, 2018. Vinyl floor decal, 36” x 36”.
9. *Unswept Floor II*, 2018. Vinyl floor decal, 36” x 36”.
10. *Shag Lawn*, 2016-18. Vinyl floor decal, 50” x 50”.
11. *Construction Zone*, 2016-18. Vinyl floor decal, 50” x 50”.
12. *Ready-Made Dream: The Iconographia*, 2018. Artist book in box, 9” x 12” x 2” (closed)
13. *Wall mounted avocado telephone with extra long cord*, Found object.
14. *Yellow Slimline Telephone*, Found object.
15. *Orange Slimline Telephone*, Found object.
16. *Chocolate Brown Sculptura Donut phone*, Found object.
17. *Turquoise rotary dial telephone*, Found object.
18. *Red “Genie” phone*, Found object.
19. *Louis Marx and Co. “T” Ranch “tin-litho” doll house*, circa 1950’s
20. *Louis Marx and Co. Split Level “tin-litho” doll house*, circa 1950’s
21. Twenty-four (24) Vintage advertisements mounted on foam core. Each approx. 8.5” X 11”