

Abraham Adams

United States, 1985

Nothing in MoMA 2018

Paper, ink, glue

Courtesy of the artist



Nothing in MoMA

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Fig. 1. Hieronymus Bosch, *Ship of Fools* (1490–1500)

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The BABEL Working Group is a collective and desiring-assemblage of scholar-gypsies with no leaders or followers, no top and no bottom, and only a middle. babel roams and stalks the ruins of the post-historical university as a multiplicity, a pack, looking for other roaming packs with which to cohabit and build temporary shelters for intellectual vagabonds. We also take in strays.

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David Joselit

Museums are engines of attention. They solicit it and they monetize it. Museums are engines for accumulating, preserving, exhibiting, and producing images. Their galleries are picture-engines. Every work of art at MoMA furnishes the raw material for more and more pictures. Standing before pictures, museumgoers *take* their own pictures to populate social media everywhere. Figure, ground, figure, ground, figure, ground, figure...

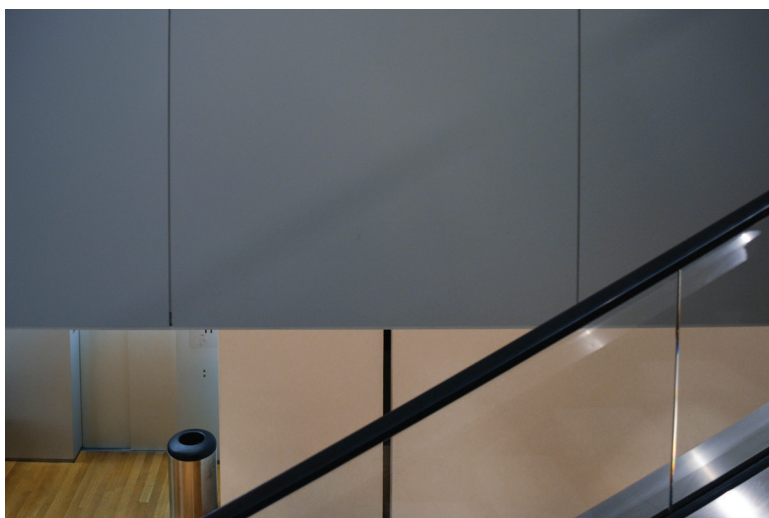
Museums are picture machines, fitted with their own repair shops, and storage depots, and marketing crews, and guards, and architects, and billionaires, and discourse-producers, to assist in producing more and more pictures. More is better. Museums are nuclear power plants of pictures; they are the Fort Knox of pictures, where the real gold is stored while its expropriated currency gushes into the world. Even in neoliberal Trumpamerica there is a gold standard. It's art. Nothing is obscene in museum galleries—nothing should be unseen. But here are scenes that are not seen—not even populated by artworks or persons. Vertiginous black holes of attention where there

is *no-thing* and *no-one* and, even though the museum's doors are open for business, even though the picture-engine is churning—*just a few feet away*—there is nothing. Nothing in MoMA. This is vertiginous and uncanny and wrong.

What we see in Abraham Adams' pictures of nothing is a semantics of stanchions and bleached wood floors, and flush doors and benches and stairways and windows. That this empty, bland nowhere is *always there*, a grammar that organizes and secures our scene of looking is in fact obscene, an embarrassment. What's funny is this: Adams takes these vanishing points, and makes them into pictures. Those empty walls look like paintings!

Grammar or picture; infrastructure or product? This is a question provoked by this work, but not, in the end, its point. What matters is the discovery of an elsewhere—an elsewhere of attention lying unnoticed in the heart of the museum's factory of attention. This elsewhere is hopeful and ecstatic and always already present. It's not a picture but a promise.

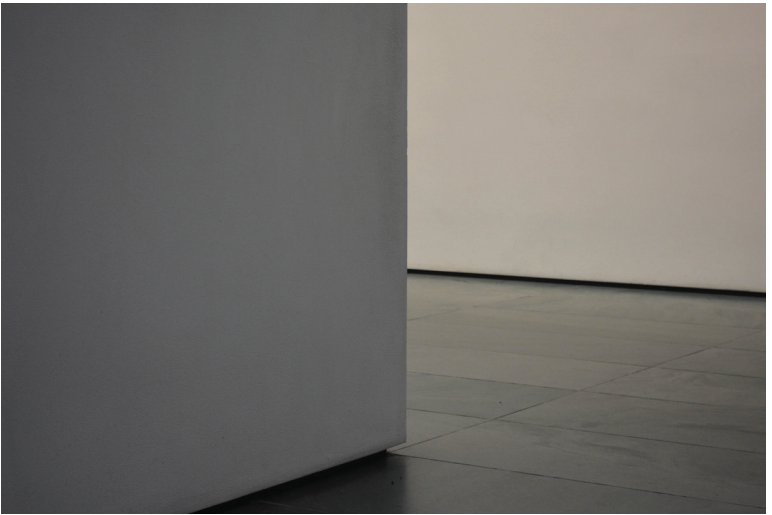










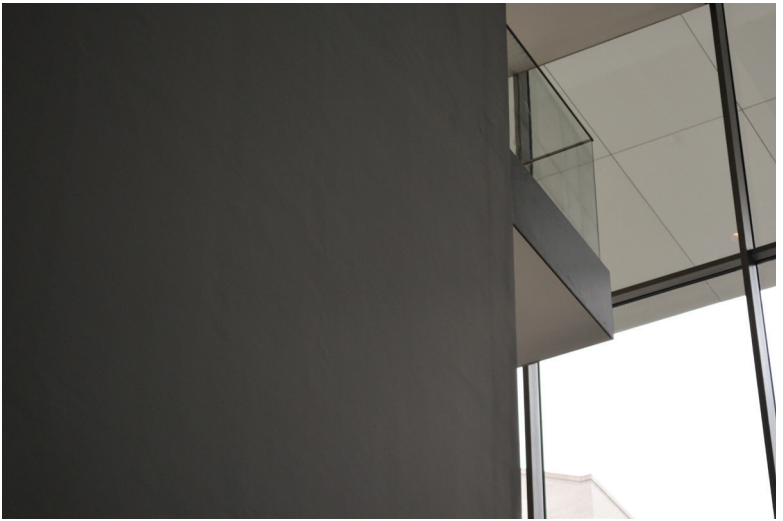


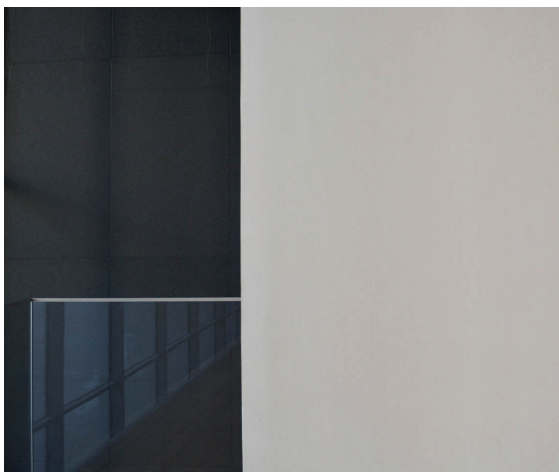






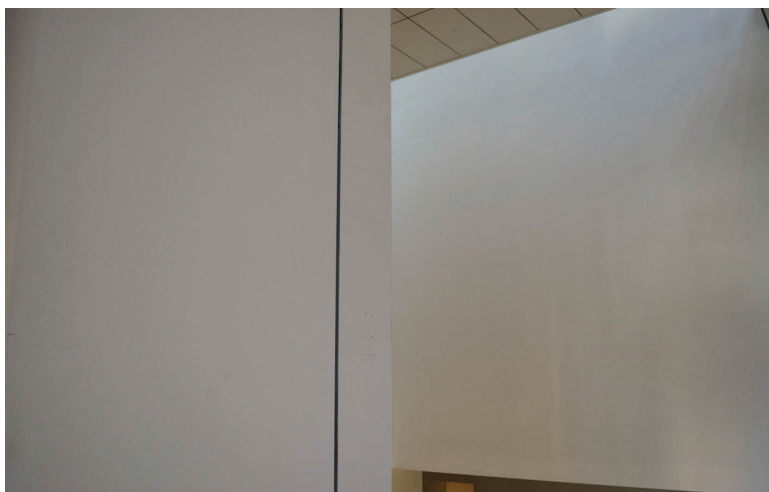






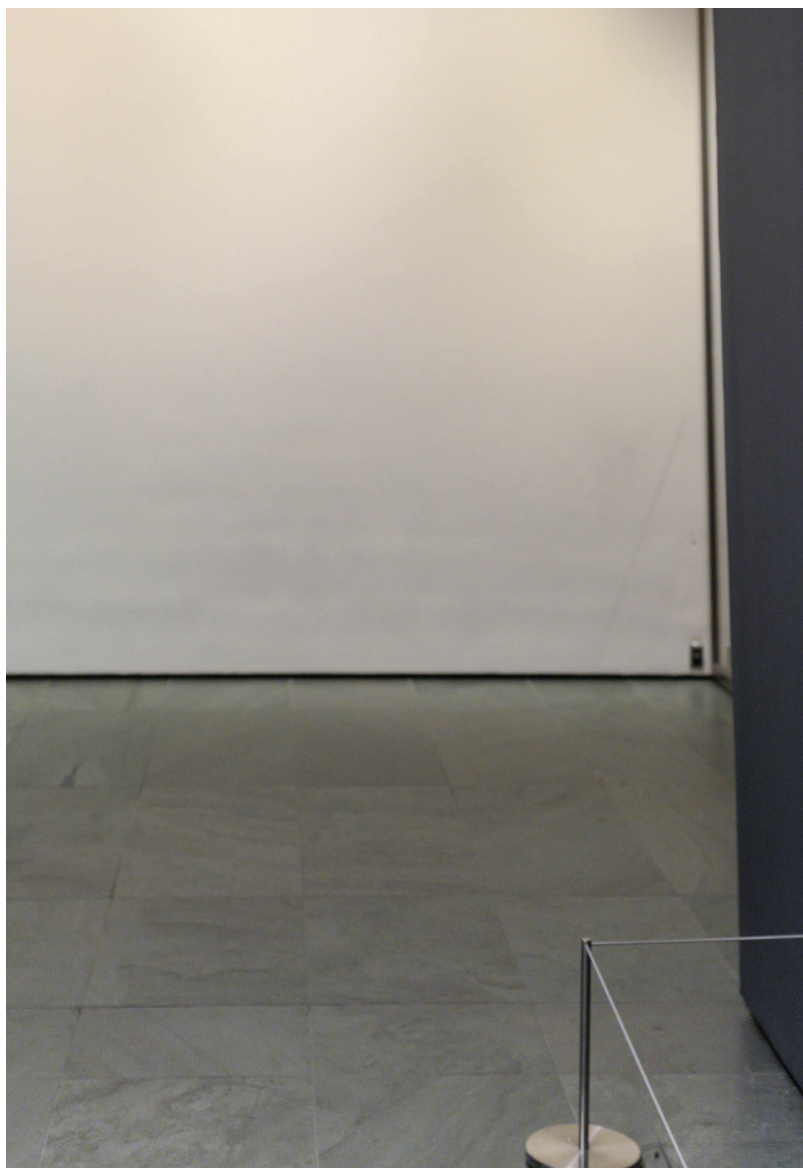






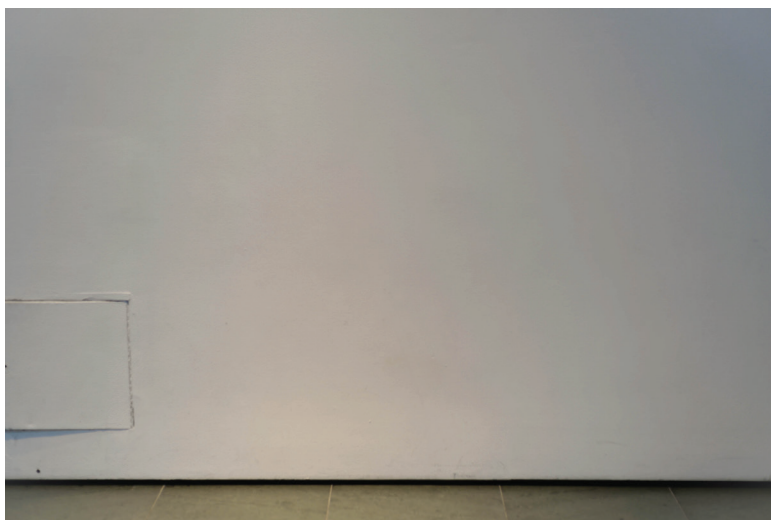








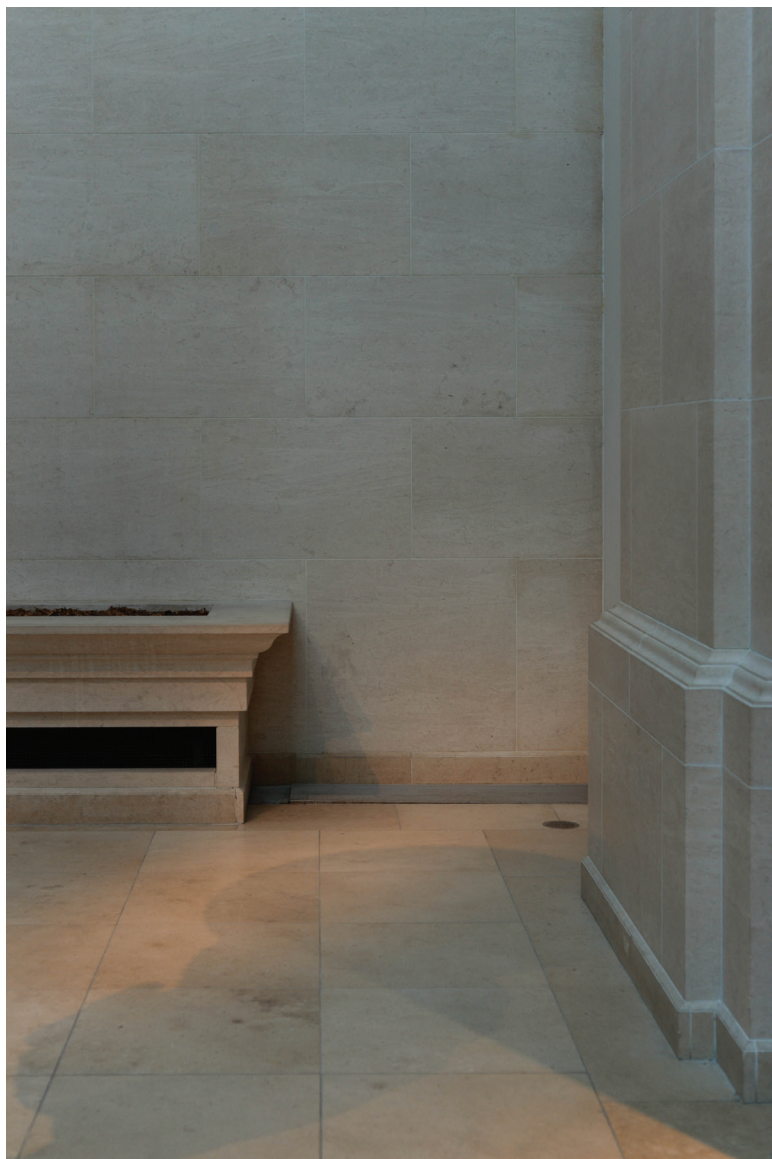






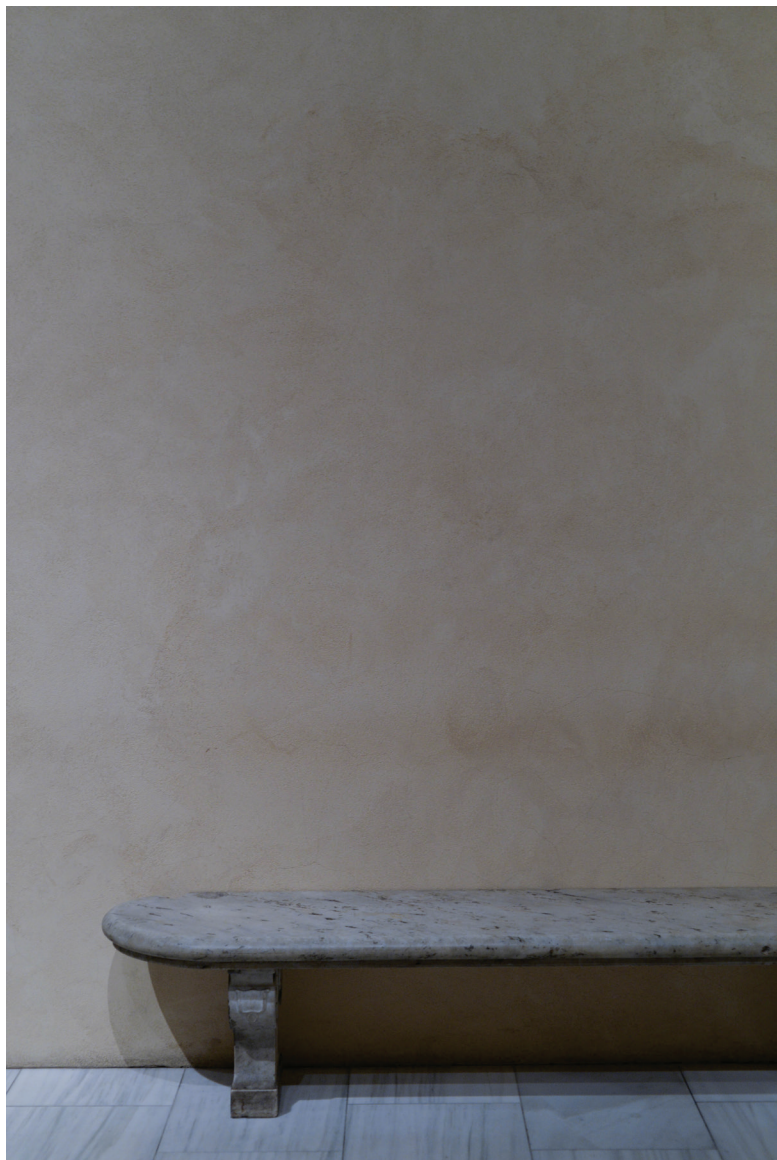






















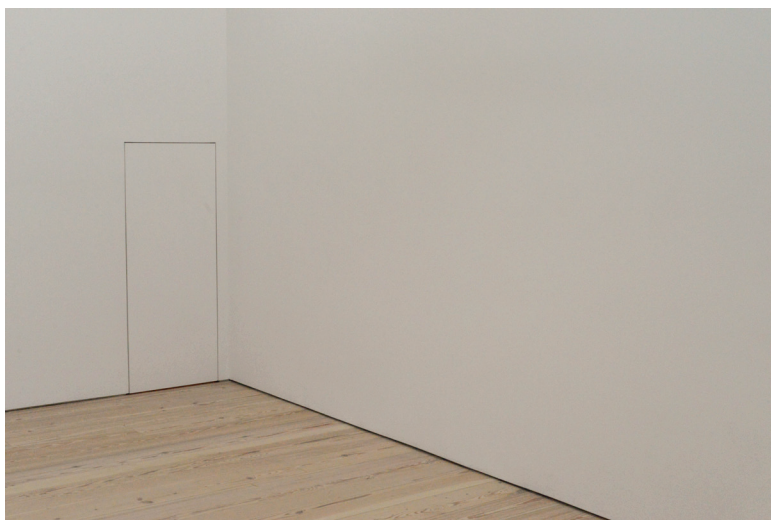


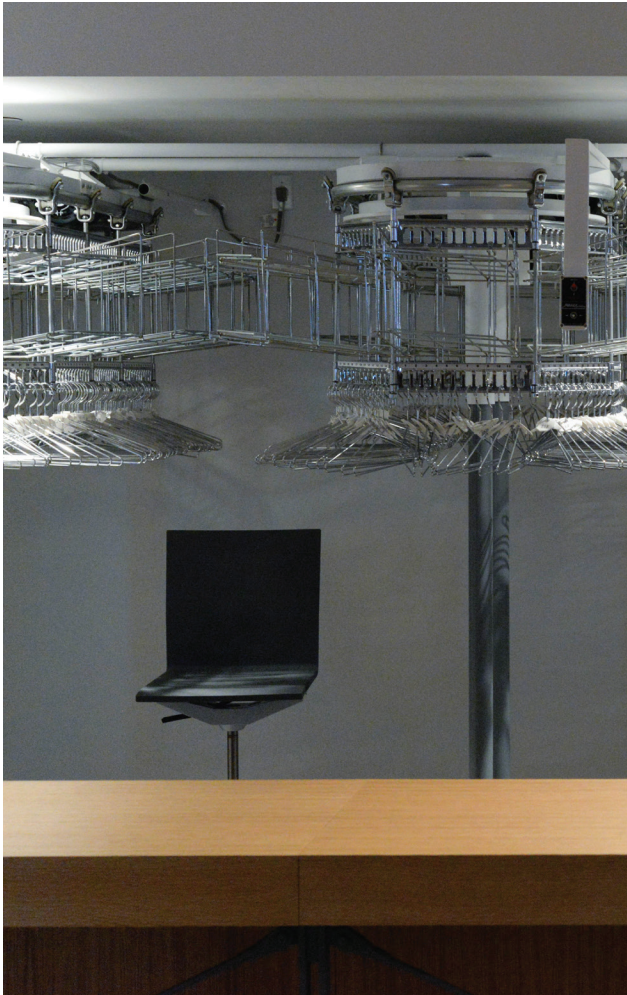




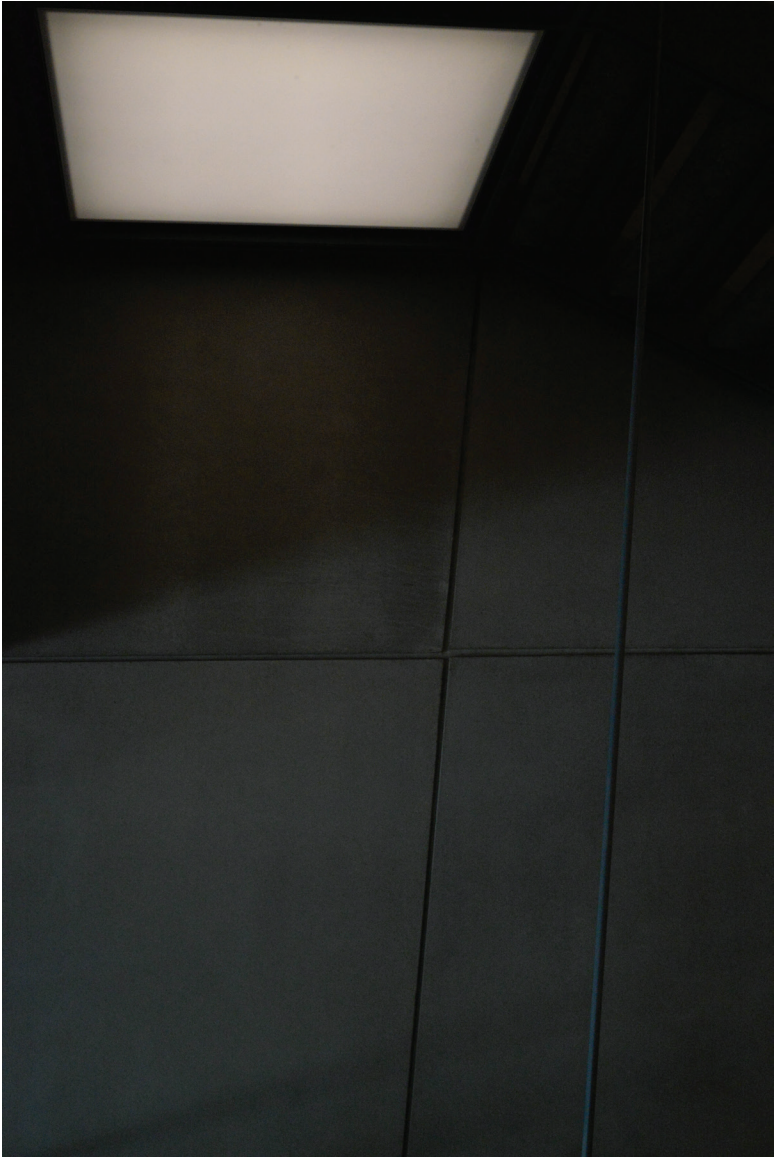


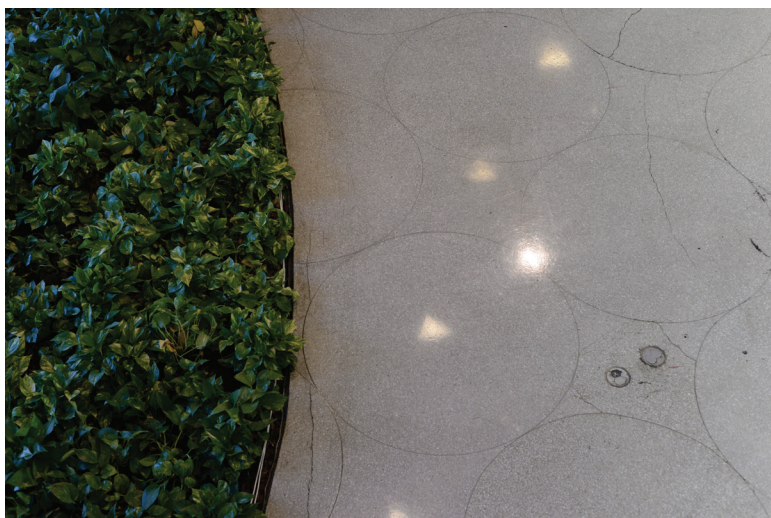




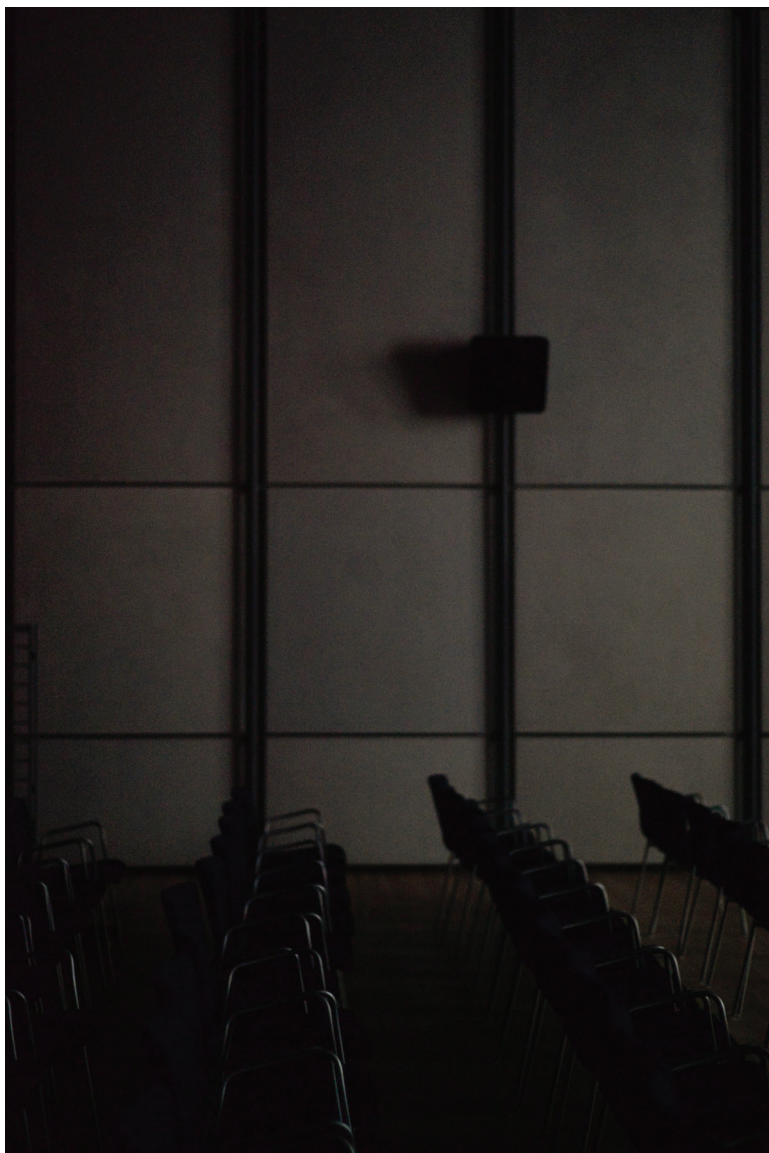
































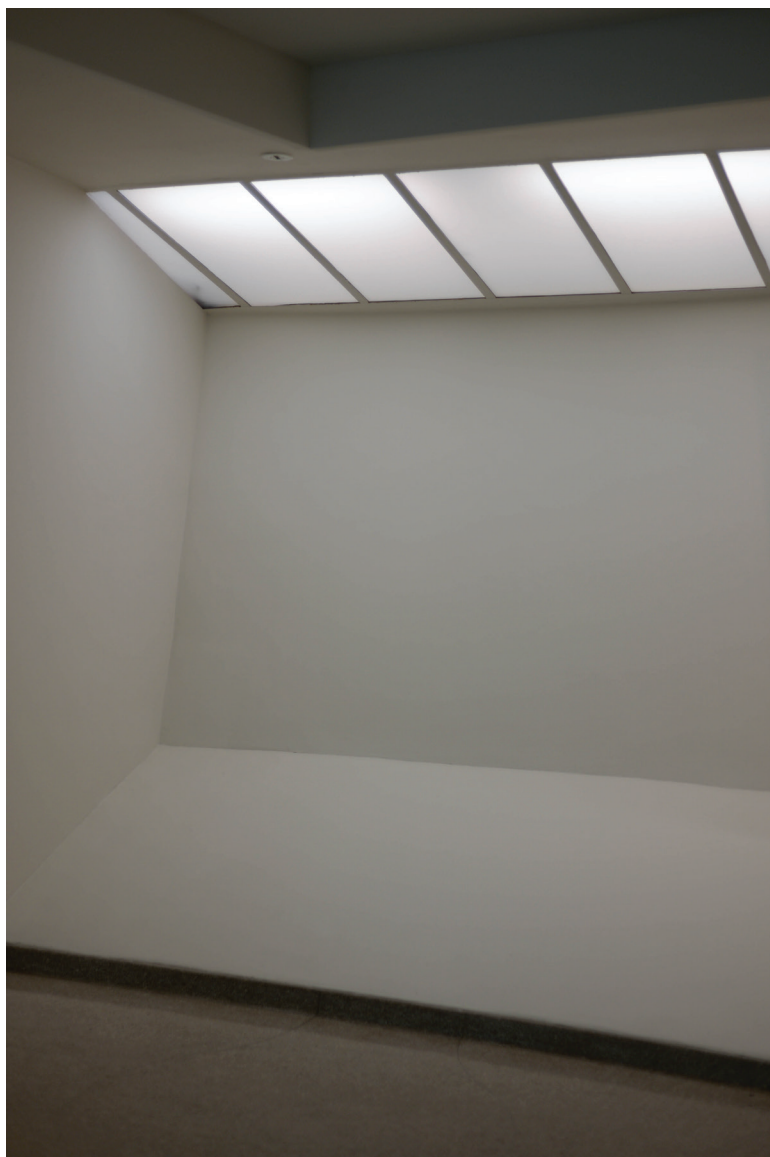




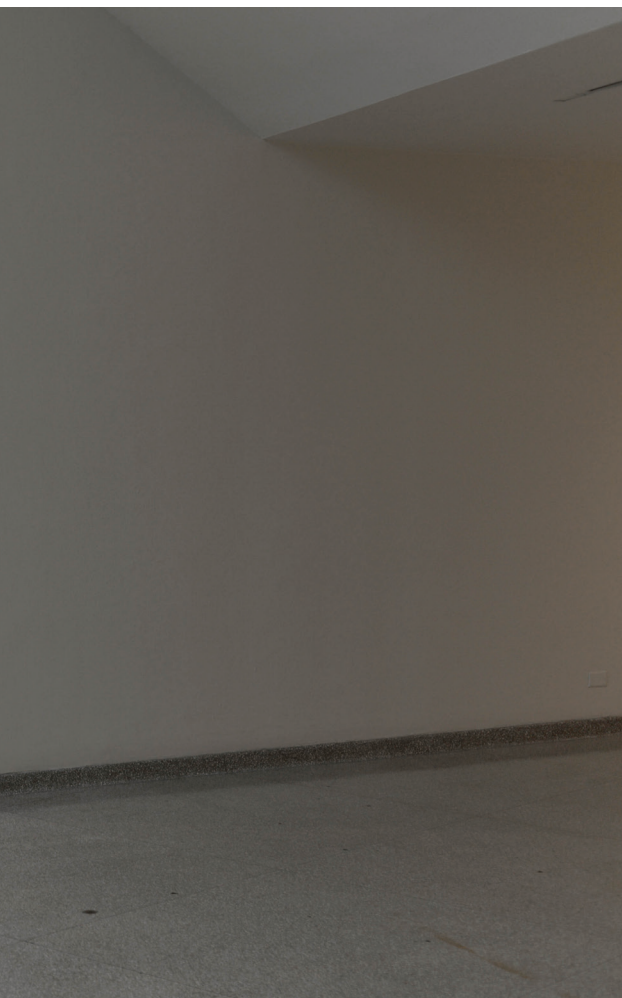










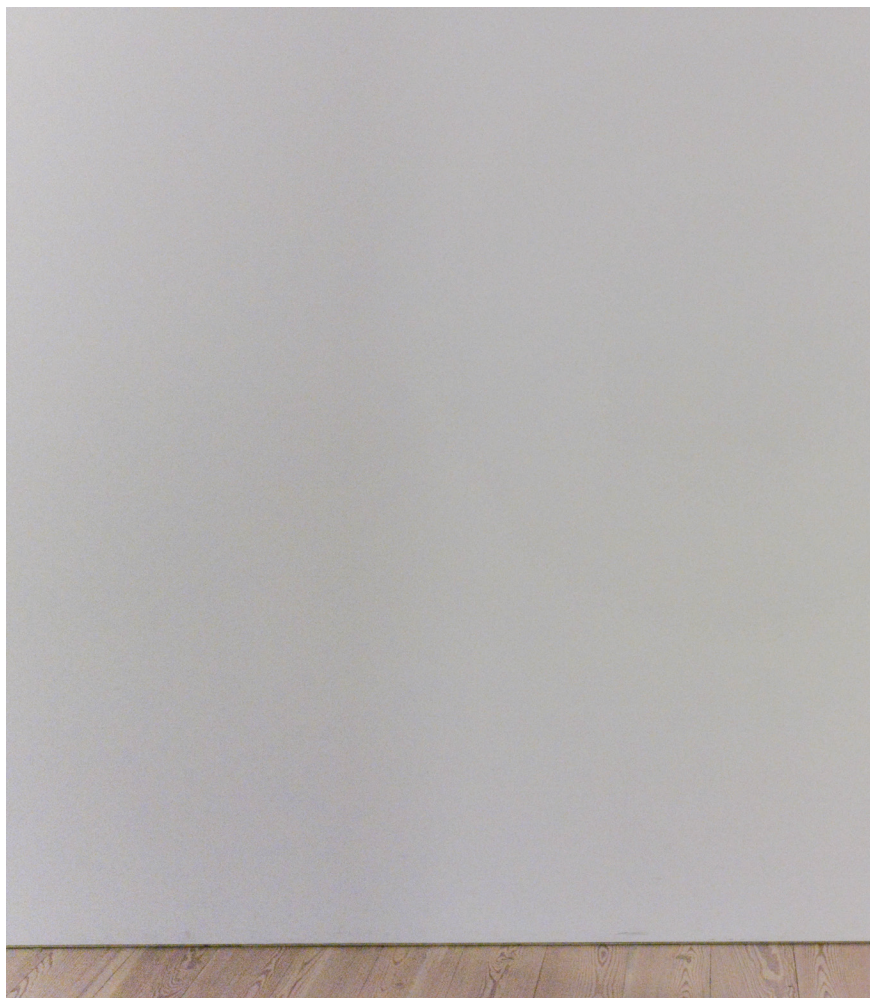






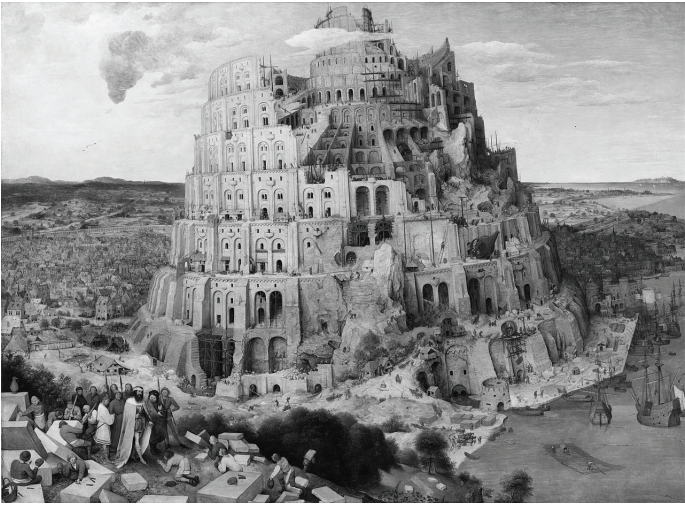








This is a Dead Letter Office publication



*W. dreams, like Phaedrus, of an army of thinker-
friends, thinker-lovers. He dreams of a thought-army,
a thought-pack, which would storm the philosophical
Houses of Parliament. He dreams of Tartars from the
philosophical steppes, of thought-barbarians, thought-
outsiders. What distance would shine in their eyes!*
—Lars Iyer





Adams, Abraham

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