New materialist encounters: an ethnography of Castrum Peregrini

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Abstract

This thesis is an alternative tour of Castrum Peregrini, an unusual arts organisation based in a historic Amsterdam canal house. With an interdisciplinary approach, this study is influenced by the recent scholarship following the post-human material turn. It draws from theory and research from a number of disciplines, including anthropology, archeology, art history and heritage studies. Ethnography and auto-ethnography allow for a thorough and reflexive exploration of Castrum Peregrini’s intriguing material heritage as a past WWII safe house and the home of a visual artist, Gisèle van Waterschoot van der Gracht (1912-2013). The significance of Castrum Peregrini’s collection of artworks, objects and furniture, has recently been justified as an ensemble. As such, the new materialist paradigm (or entanglement) of ‘people - place - things’ will situate an analysis of this museum-like collection, within its historic domestic setting, into a wider societal and cultural context. In line with a renewed interest in materiality in both arts and popular literature, and museum studies’ interest in biography, three contemporary novels concerned with heritage, archeology and contemporary art, are woven into the tour, as well as my own auto-ethnographic recollection of home. In addition, the House of Gisèle (as the building’s historic interiors has been recently named) will be discussed in the context of other house museums.
Table of Contents

**Introduction** .................................................................................................................. 4
Methodology
The material turn
New materialism, art & fiction
Local heritage & house museums
Walking as form
The route ahead
Brief biographies: Herengracht 401 and me

**Chapter 1: The Entrance Hall** ..................................................................................... 23
An antique ensemble
The family portrait

**Chapter 2: Gisèle's Salon** ............................................................................................. 31
Tangible & inherited objects
A pentaptych
Metamorphic tapestry
‘Digital before digital’

**Chapter 3: The Hiding Floor** ....................................................................................... 47
Crowns of leaves
Three beds

**Chapter 4: Gisèle's Atelier** .......................................................................................... 59
Flora
‘Death of a tree’

**Conclusion** ..................................................................................................................... 70

**Bibliography** ................................................................................................................. 76
INTRODUCTION

Facing the typical 17th century brick facade of Herengracht 401 (with your back to the canal), you will see ‘Castrum Peregrini’ hand-painted in italic script on the brass letter box, along with ‘Gisèle D'Ailly’ and ‘Goldschmidt.’ Glance down, and ‘CASTRVM PEREGRINI’ is spelt out on the low window (by your feet), in black lettering stuck to the glass (the type of glass with a wire grid sandwiched inside). ‘Entrance around the Corner,’ the lettering directs. Up above, screwed into the brickwork, is a plaque: a commemorative message in Dutch; the dates 2013 and 1912, with ‘Gisèle’ debossed (in a handwritten style) into the metal.

You walk, as instructed, around the corner of the triangular building and a small digital monitor catches your eye. Titles such as ‘Memory Machine,’ ‘The Female Perspective’ and ‘European Academy of Participation’ are accompanied by dates and logos. You arrive at the double doors, painted green, and meet a series of doorbells and an intercom system. A sticker on the glass again states ‘CASTRVM PEREGRINI,’ followed by a change of font and the suffix: intellectual playground. You are greeted, as if on the threshold of a home.
Homes, belonging to people, and museums, belonging to places, are rich vessels for learning about society, ourselves and others. This ethnographic study will consider the materiality of Castrum Peregrini, a contemporary art and heritage foundation situated in the centre of Amsterdam. A semi-domestic, semi-public building, Castrum Peregrini has a compelling and complex history, it is described by the organisation’s current director as “a microcosm…magical place…a magnet for artist and intellectuals.” Over the past decade, artists and curators have been invited to make work and exhibitions within and inspired by the building’s heritage, whilst researchers and academics have contributed to Castrum Peregrini’s programme of events, exhibitions and publications. Although the material historic interiors within the building, recently entitled the ‘House of Gisèle,’ are just one aspect of the organisation’s work today, they are central to this study. They are, I posit, the material from which the organisation has extrapolated interest, meaning and validity. This study aims to open up the historic building into a wider academic discussion, in order to explore its societal relevance and potential as a house museum. Each chapter will dwell in a particular room or apartment, with a description of the space serving as a point of departure, followed by a detailed and reflexive analysis of selected objects (or ‘things’). Following from the material turn, this study will serve as an alternative tour with an ethnographic approach, allowing for an interdisciplinary discussion. This thesis will explore biography in relation to museums and objects, art and literature’s renewed interest in materiality in art, and the increasing concern with both professionals’ and the public’s emotional and sensory experience of heritage.

The House of Gisèle is one of three pillars to the organisation along with a think tank programme (Intellectual Playground) and a programme of artistic research and events (Memory Machine). These three aspects sit under an umbrella of the guiding themes of freedom, friendship and culture, inspired by the legacy of visual artist Gisèle van Waterschoot van der Gracht (1912-2013), who allowed her small apartment at Herengracht 401, in the centre of Amsterdam’s 17th century canal ring, to be used as a hiding place for Jews in the Second World War. The apartment’s code name was ‘Castrum Peregrini’ which translates to ‘Pilgrim of the Castle.’ Gisèle later supported the artistic endeavours of the resulting community including her visual art and a German literary magazine called Castrum Peregrini, buying the entire canal house and neighbouring buildings and leaving her entire

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material legacy to a foundation of the same name. Today, Castrum Peregrini is run by a trio of directors who live and work in the building. As part of their programme developments, they began hosting pre-booked group tours around the House of Gisèle’s historic interiors in 2016. However, the tours are not widely advertised and both capacity and accessibility is very limited. Hence, this study will situate the House of Gisèle in the context of comparable buildings despite the fact that Castrum Peregrini does not position itself as a museum or house museum, but instead as a “unique cultural centre.”

Although reflections on the building have featured over past decades in mémoires, coffee table books, historical fiction, video documentaries, artworks, websites, publications, and even in a forthcoming biography of Gisèle, the House of Gisèle’s museum-like collection of objects, artworks and preserved historic interiors is yet to be included in an objective, scholarly discussion alongside other biographical museums or house museums. As such, Castrum Peregrini’s materiality remains ripe for an analytical and interdisciplinary written enquiry, particularly from the perspective of an outsider—and the next generation.

Throughout my research process, a number of key questions emerged; what is the experience of visiting the building and the different spaces within it? Why are these historic ensembles worth preserving? How does Castrum Peregrini sit amongst the heritage industry and the context of house museums? What can we learn from a closer look at the objects that occupy the space? And, finally, how does this collection, or ensemble, relate to the arts sector and wider society today?

Methodology

In order to contextualise Castrum Peregrini in this way, and to offer a personal, self-reflexive perspective, I have employed ethnographic research methods advocated by today’s new materialist thought: “current thinking about heritage and the archeology of the recent past challenges archeological paradigms, advocating a new, ethnographic approach.” The editors of a special edition of the Public History Review, Rethinking Materiality, Memory and Identity, published in 2016, argue that “merging heritage and ethnographic practices allows...”

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3 Due to be published in the September 2018.
4 In the documentary film Herengracht 401 (directed by Janina Pigah, 2017), Lars Ebert remarks that they are carefully archiving objects “for the next generation.”
the exploration of the meaning of the past in the present, the politics of practice and contemporary debates focused on the material traces of the past.” A ethnographic approach thus allows this study to traverse time periods and academic disciplines to explore this multiple experiences of, and opinions on, this one place in an analysis of the societal and personal relevance of this building’s material heritage.

As Research Intern, I spent three days per week inside the building over a period of four months, amassing written and audio-visual field notes. I held semi-structured interviews with a number of significant people involved in the organisation today, including the three directors, Michael Defuster, Frans Damman and Lars Ebert. In order to gain an understanding of the processes and intersection between the material heritage and contemporary art projects exhibited here, or made in response to the building’s heritage, I interviewed artists who have worked with Castrum Peregrini over the past decade including Amie Dicke, Renée Turner, Ronit Porat, Marijn Bax and Charlott Markus as well as a filmmaker, Janina Pigajt. In addition, I interviewed three independent curators, Ronit Eden, Radna Rumping and Nina Folkersma who curated exhibition programmes at Castrum Peregrini in 2014, 2016 and 2017/18 respectively. I also interviewed Eric Wie, the Head of Marketing and Communication at Cobra Museum who, along with Radna Rumping, was part of an early advisory board that helped Castrum Peregrini develop their artistic programme. Finally, I also interviewed Gisèle’s biographer, Annet Mooij, and Joke Haverkorn, a long term colleague and friend of Gisèle, who established the De Uil weaving studio and was involved in the past Castrum Peregrini community. These interviews provided essential context, as well as providing an array of experiences and opinions on the subject at hand. Further internet-based research allowed me to gain a wider understanding of the organisation in a more broad, public context. As well as joining a number of tours around the House of Gisèle, I developed a digital survey for visitors to collect data on outsiders’ responses to the materiality of the building.

Rather than rely solely on the experiences and views of others, I will place my own impressions, reflections and memories within this study, utilising auto-ethnography. Increasingly used in material culture studies, auto-ethnography is defined by archeologist Steve Brown as “a method that focuses on cultural analysis and interpretation. It uses the researcher’s autobiographical data to investigate the practice of others and employs

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6 Ibid., 5.
reflection to develop analytic insights.” Brown argues that “self-awareness and reflexivity are important tools for archeologists who seek to recognise and respect personal and communal place-attachments,” and states that his personal experience, personal heritage and place attachment provides data that informs his understanding of “other people’s experience of place; that is the social values of heritage places.” As such, Brown explores his own ‘home-place’ as a field site, as does fellow anthropologist Ralph Mills in their contributions to the aforementioned volume of the *Public History Review*. Meanwhile, social anthropologist, Daniel Miller, also reflects upon his own home in a chapter which includes sections on Housing and Power, Homes and Agency and Carribean Homes in the 2010 survey of his career, *Stuff*, which collates three decades of the scholar’s work. Therefore, I believe that my own autobiographical data and impressions from houses that I have lived in will enhance my analysis and interpretation of Castrum Peregrini as a historic home and place of interest for artists, researchers and audiences.

**The material turn**

The division between people and the material is entrenched in Western, Cartesian thought. However, this is disrupted by the post-human material turn, where objects, ‘stuff’ or ‘things’ are granted their own agency, and objects, people and places are ‘entangled’ in today’s capitalist, post-industrial and post-human society. Baudrillard declared in the 1980’s that “just as modernity was the historical scene of the subject’s emergence, so postmodernity is the scene of the object's preponderance.” However, in his introduction to *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* published in 1986, Arjun Appadurai argues that both *The Gift* (the well-known study by Marcel Mauss) and Marx’s commodity fetishism both provide Western examples of a mutually reliant relationship between people and things. In this volume, Igor Kopytoff goes on to advocate for biographies of things (following from anthropologist Margaret Mead’s assertion that “one way to understand a culture is to see

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8 Ibid., 10-11.
what sort of biography it regards as embodying a successful social career"). However, Appadurai’s approach is criticised by Bill Brown as “methodological fetishism;” “it disavows, no less the tropological work, the psychological work, and the phenomenological work in the human production of materiality.”

Anthropologist Daniel Miller, an eminent scholar in this field of study, advocates an interdisciplinary approach, and likewise, Bill Brown says “as they circulate through our lives, we look through objects (to see what the disclose about history, society, nature, or culture - above all what the disclose about us) but we only catch a glimpse of things.” Material culture studies is not a cohesive academic discipline, but instead straddles many areas of research and theory. As Miller suggests, that there is no single established academic discipline to study artefacts (“the object world created by humanity”), is down to “mere happenstance.” Routledge’s seminal Object Reader, published in 2009 draws upon sixteen disciplines with writings from the 20th and 21st centuries. Whilst this may present a lack of cohesion, in this instance, where we are considering a building that is both a home and an institution, a heritage site and a contemporary art organisation, it is useful to draw from a range of disciplines, including heritage studies, archeology, museums studies, anthropology, biography studies, classical studies and art history.

Furthermore, in seeking to intertwine people, places and things, new materialism is a useful theoretical paradigm with which to approach Castrum Peregrini, which in itself is a manifestation of these three actors. Following from Miller’s assertion of ‘stuff’s’ agency, the archeologist Brown refers to the way in which he conceptualises his relationships with ‘stuff’ in his home environment, as “a paradigm of co-production and co-enactment that focuses on entanglement: that is, entanglement across assemblages of people-places-things.” Miller, whose theories are often cited outside of anthropology, utilises Bourdieu’s theory of practice (with the built environment shaping behaviour), to argue his own theory of the “humility of things,” where “objects make people.” He elaborates, writing that “before we can make things, we are ourselves grown up and matured in the light of things that come down to us from the previous generations. We walk around the rice terraces or road systems, the

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15 (And, by looking at things we render them objects, he footnotes). Ibid., 6-7.
16 Miller, Stuff, 1-2.
housing and gardens that are effectively ancestral."¹⁹ This is especially pertinent to a contemporary study of an inherited 20th century material legacy situated within an urban setting of a 17th century UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The rise in the interdisciplinary material culture studies has encouraged an intersection between museums and biography; the volume *Museums and biographies: stories, objects, identities*, was published in 2012 (after a 2009 conference of the same name drew great interest and a breadth of complex approaches.)²⁰ The editor Kate Hill, writes:

“when museums and biographies come together or overlap, what we get is relationships: between people, between people and things, and between people and buildings...They prompt us to ask how far we can interact with the materiality of the museum to develop our relationships with others, alive or dead, and whether objects can be active agents in those relationships.”²¹

Like Brown, Hill identifies a dynamism between people, places (buildings) and things. Castrum Peregrini presents such a triptych in itself, and so biographies of people, a building and a things are equally relevant. In her ‘Introduction: Museums and Biographies - Telling Stories about People, Things and Relationships,’ Hill points out that a biographical approach to museums (established from the 19th century) “suffer from a ‘smoothing out’ effect.” She goes onto ask; "can lives, of people, things and institutions, be seen as messier, more entwined, less coherent, and yet still yield meaning?”²² Approaching the multifarious building and collection belonging to Castrum Peregrini, I believe Brown’s concept of ‘entanglement’ to be the most effective way to ‘yield meaning’.

Castrum Peregrini already highlights key objects in its collection and refers to the preserved interiors as Gisèle’s “visual diary.”²³ In this study, however, we will not be stopping at the hiding pianola, since its story and significance has been told to every visitor.²⁴ Following on

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¹⁹ Miller, *Stuff*, 53.
²¹ Ibid., 1.
²² Ibid., 2.
²³ Lars speaking in *Herengracht 401*.
²⁴ The musical instrument was adapted by a carpenter and neighbour to serve as a hiding place when raids took place to find Jewish people in Amsterdam. It was successfully used for this purpose and remains in its original place. As an object it connects culture with the narrative of the house and is therefore an important part of the historic house tours.
from the academic prevalence of new materialism and popular interest in object biographies (as Bill Brown writes, "these days you can read books on the pencil, the zipper, the toilet, the banana, the chair, the potato, the bowler hat"), this study aims to look at mere ‘things,’ as well as well as offering a more extended analysis of (or biographies on) objects that have been given some attention. Situated in various rooms in the building, the 'stuff' of interest includes photographs, artworks, dried flowers, beds and pieces of wood. Significantly, new materialism also allows the inclusion of nature, with the concept of ‘naturecultures' created by Donna Haraway in 2003 considered a conceptual innovation in contemporary cultural theory.

New materialism, art & fiction

In the introduction to the aforementioned journal volume, Rethinking Materiality, Memory and Identity, the editors Ireland and Lydon identify a "renewed concern with materiality" in art and literature from the 1990's. Interestingly, a number of my artist informants have made work in relation to objects and the materiality of the building, intertwining their own memories and interests into their resulting work. "How much does what is seen in the house today say about her, and how much does it say about the person doing the looking?" asks an art critic discussing the work of Amie Dicke, who found correlations between her own art practice and that of Gisèle in the materiality of short handwritten titles written in English. Meanwhile, Castrum Peregrini's current artist-in-residence, Renée Turner, who is working on a digital project researching Gisèle's wardrobe and photo archive, is honest about her notion of self-recognition as an artist: “Are you like me? Am I like you?” Artist Ronit Porat utilised collage as a medium for the first time, merging her own memory and biography (growing up in a Kibbutz community) with visual traces of Castrum Peregrini past community that she found in books. These are just a few examples of how artists have used Castrum Peregrini’s

29 Amie Dicke was the first artist to work with the collection over a period of 8 years, making around ten works.
material heritage to explore people as a subject, whilst also relating new work to their own biography, their heritage or art practice. As such, all of these projects are, to some extent, examples of experimental auto-ethnography.

Literature is mentioned alongside art in terms of being influenced by new materialism, and as such, this study will also consider three contemporary novels that have relevant parallels with Castrum Peregrini’s heritage, my own auto-ethnographic reflections and objects that will be discussed in my written tour around the House of Gisèle. Ireland and Lydon list examples of recent fiction that “freely delve into the affective economy of objects.”31 Interestingly, they name a book that sprang to my mind after first visiting Castrum Peregrini - the multi-award winning, international bestseller *The Hare with the Amber Eyes: A Hidden Inheritance* by ceramicist Edmund de Waal.32 Part ancestral biography, part object biography, de Waal unfurls the story of his inherited collection of ‘netsuke,’ 264 small carved Japanese objects collected in the 19th century by an enthusiastic art connoisseur, Charles Ephrussi, a member of de Waal’s European Jewish family’s banking dynasty. Situating himself in the narrative, the book is self-reflexive and philosophical, with many parallels to new materialism and the relationship between heritage and biography discussed:

“I am a maker: I make pots. How things are made, how they are handled and what happens to them has been central to my life for over thirty years. So too has Japan, a place I went to when I was 17 to study pottery. How objects embody memory - or more particularly, whether objects can hold memories - is a real question for me. This book is my journey to the places in which this collection lived. It is my secret history of touch.” 33

De Waal and Gisèle’s biographies have parallels in that they are both artists, descendants of wealthy families European and archivists of their own lives. That this book was so well received and has been widely translated helps us understand the potential appeal of the House of Gisèle.

32 Ireland, and Lydon, “Rethinking Materiality,” 3.
More recent, feminist examples of materiality in popular fiction include *The Power* by Naomi Alderman, published in 2015 in the US and 2016 in the UK.\(^{34}\) Alderman bookends the narrative with imagined letters between herself and the story’s fictional male author whilst also including illustrations of real and invented archaeological finds as evidence of a matriarchal world history. These archeological finds are illustrated and captioned; the history of Western archeology and object classification are essential to creating a convincing world in this radically feminist novel. Irish novelist Sara Baume’s *A Line Made by Walking*, published in 2017, follows the inner dialogue of a 25 year-old art graduate and gallery invigilator, Frankie, who moves to her recently deceased grandmother’s rural bungalow during a period of depression.\(^{35}\) The title refers to the 1967 artwork by Richard Long and explanations of contemporary artworks remembered by the protagonist punctuate the prose throughout.

Baume’s chapters are named after dead animals that Frankie finds and photographs throughout the narrative, and these images are included in the text. The novel could be seen an auto-ethnographic study by an Irish art graduate raised in a rural area, and has parallels to my own (English) biography. The way in which these novels give credence to objects, merging contemporary art with fiction and elevating (marginalised) female histories, is relevant both to new materialism and to this study of Castrum Peregrini. Gisèle, I have been told, was not a reader of fiction although “she loved the *Metamorphoses.*”\(^{36}\) Stories from classical antiquity remain alive because they speak to human nature, presenting how people, stories and the arts in Western culture have not changed much over two millennia. However, despite dealing with memory and heritage, the contemporary fictional literature laid out here locates us in the present (and, to some extent within my mind)\(^{37}\) as we walk around and reflect upon Castrum Peregrini.

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\(^{35}\) This is Baume’s second novel and has been shortlisted for the Goldsmiths Prize. Her debut novel, *Spill Simmer Falter Wither*, was shortlisted for a number of awards and won the Geoffrey Faber Memorial Prize. Sara Baume, *A Line Made by Walking* (London: Windmill Books, 2017).

\(^{36}\) Referring to Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, the short tales of transformation written in Latin. Interview with Joke Haverkorn.

\(^{37}\) At an Artist Weekend event at Castrum Peregrini, translator and lecturer, Kate Briggs, talked about the craft of weaving as a metaphor for translation. She recounted an anecdote of a translator who set out to read the entire library of the thinker they were planning to translate.
Local heritage & house museums

Widening the scope, this study will also contextualise the physical place amongst other preserved houses across the world which were once the home of artists or writers; Castrum Peregrini cannot be considered in a vacuum. Nearby in Amsterdam, the Museum Het Rembrandthuis presents the (re-staged and re-furnished) home of celebrated Dutch painter Rembrandt; “Come and meet him in his own home.” Meanwhile, you are invited to “see the place where Anne Frank went into hiding and wrote her diary.” Domesticity, I believe, is fundamental to the organisation’s uniqueness. This is evident in the personal approach taken by the current team and their role as hosts, however it is also omnipresent in the materiality of the building; a vessel of things or objects collected, received, made, used and displayed by past and present inhabitants. This ‘stuff’ occupies multiple rooms which remain largely unchanged from the 1940’s, 1950’s and 1980’s, offering an unusually rich and dynamic opportunity to explore Castrum Peregrini as a historic home, a house museum and contemporary art organisation.

Riemer Knoop, a museum consultant and professor in cultural heritage, wagers that the House of Gisèle “illustrates, I think, a special, ongoing involvement with critical thinking about the condition humaine, in art, science and social life. The uniqueness lies in being preserved down to the most bizarre detail, period by period.” Knoop uses the term “ensemble” to describe the significance of the site as a whole. Interestingly, UNESCO define Castrum Peregrini’s neighbourhood of historic canal streets as with the exact same terminology: a “unique and innovative, large-scale but homogeneous urban ensemble.” The significance of historic ensembles can be seen to appeal to both an expert and popular audience.

A trio of house museums in England provide interesting comparisons with their material completeness manifesting in their public and scholarly interest. Kettle’s Yard (Cambridge) was the home of an important mid-20th century curator, Jim Ede, showcasing his mid century art collection. Gisèle visited Kettle’s Yard herself, and the house museum (which was gifted to Cambridge University) has recently reopened after a multi-million capital project

41 ibid.
providing further gallery space and an education centre.\textsuperscript{43} In addition, Charleston House (Sussex) offers an interesting viewpoint into the artistic and literary output of the Bloomsbury Group, who were most active in the interwar period.\textsuperscript{44} I will also refer to Sir John Soane’s Museum (London), a 17th century home and architecture school that was left to the nation by the eminent architect. This too has recently undergone a major refurbishment, and despite being from a different century, is particularly relevant because of its autobiographical nature. Belinda Nemec calls this house museum Soane’s “Gesamtkunstwerk” in her essay that aims to redress the lack of scholarly attention given to autobiographical museums.\textsuperscript{45}

Biographical and autobiographical artist and writers’ house museums, preserved for posterity, form part of the heritage tourism industry, which has been identified as a growing sector.\textsuperscript{46} Charles Landry, a leading thinker and consultant on ‘creative cities’ concludes that “cultural heritage connects us to our histories, our collective memories, it anchors our sense of being and can provide a source of insight to help us to face the future.”\textsuperscript{47} Landry’s suggestion that heritage sites can be relevant to the future of society correlates with the trend in contemporary art programmes at heritage sites. It is also important to situate Castrum Peregrini in the context of Amsterdam as a city. Occupying a large building on Amsterdam’s 17th century canal ring World Heritage Site, Castrum Peregrini is based in the centre of a small but global city with a history of trading and slavery, art and wealth, resistance and persecution, politicised and creative occupation of buildings and, currently, mass tourism attracted by its architecture and cultural heritage. Castrum Peregrini sits not only within a World Heritage Site, but also amongst Amsterdam’s contemporary and historical artistic ecology, with both parallels and partnerships with better-known museum destinations (with larger visitor capacities) such as the Anne Frank House, the Stedelijk Museum, Museum van Loon and Oude Kerk.

That Castrum Peregrini was a WWII hiding place where the hiders actually survived, a 20th century female artist’s home, that the interiors survived, makes the organisation a unique and intriguing site. However, Castrum Peregrini’s capacity for visitors, audiences,

\textsuperscript{43} This is evident from an exhibition catalogue and has been confirmed by her biographer who has studied Gisèle’s correspondence.

\textsuperscript{44} As suggested by Frans Damman and Renée Turner in conversation.


researchers and artists is extremely limited by space, resources, infrastructure, funding, the vulnerability of the collection and the fact that it is also functions as a private home for the directors. However, the organisation aspires to be a safe and somewhat isolated place for artistic research and an educated, engaged audience, rather than increasing visitor footfall. This study, therefore, will also to serve as a means opening the intimate spaces and collections up to a wider discussion and different perspectives.

**Walking as form**

Described by the director Michael as “a maze of stairways, corridors and rooms,” Castrum Peregrini lends itself to exploration by foot. Whilst some floors are private living quarters, guesthouse apartments or rented offices, much of the building can be traversed during a tour of the House of Gisèle whilst events and exhibitions also allow for encounters with multiple rooms and stairways. Currently, the tours are almost always led by Frans (for groups of of thirteen people or fewer) and have been running since 2016. Tours are not advertised externally and audience development is not a current focus for the organisation, many people encounter the building via word of mouth or encounter it via the guesthouse apartments. As such, tour visitors usually have distinct cultural capital and even a prior interest in contemporary art, WWII resistance, Gisèle herself or canal houses. Developing the building to make it more accessible for more diverse and larger audiences are part of future plans for the sustainability of the organisation.

Indeed, canal houses are typically tall and narrow and thus the movement between rooms (or storeys) is inherently physical. The surrounding 17th century canal ring is similarly maze-like, with its preserved network of concentric canals and streets an early example of city planning; walking is the main form exploring the city for visitors. Walking as an form of encounter and research is also evident in contemporary projects made here; film director Janina Pigaht utilises tracking shots, evoking the feeling of walking as you watch her documentary *Herengracht 401*, whilst the artist Amie Dicke used walking as her research method: “I walk around this house and point. The more I visit the more I start to see it outside its walls.”Indeed, walking around a urban space is a popular contemporary artistic practice with an interdisciplinary and varied history that stretches from the wanderings of the

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19th century literary flaneur (including Walter Benjamin and Charles Dickens), the conceptual dérive practised by the Situationists in the mid-twentieth century and the revival of psychogeography in the 1990’s. Whilst all of these walking practices intertwine people with cities, in classical antiquity, walking and memory were related in that walking around imagined rooms allowed great orators to perform their lengthy speeches. In a publication for an exhibition that Dicke’s *Important Souvnirs* project was exhibited in, a professor writes a fictional tale about diaspora and memory; a character recites a poem by heart; “He’s using a trick, a memory palace, a place where he stows away consonants and vowels...The ancient art of memory now almost lost.”

To somewhat simulate the tours of Castrum Peregrini and Amsterdam, and evoke walking as culturally significant, creative and socially-orientated practice, this study will borrow from Walter Benjamin’s monumental *Arcades Project* and take the form of a walking tour. Each room will be introduced descriptively, coloured by a mixture of my own encounters with the space as recorded in fieldnotes, melded with impressions from my memory and that of my interviewed informants and the interests of surveyed visitors.

### The route ahead

After a short contextualising biography of Castrum Peregrini and myself, the ensuing tour will take us into Castrum Peregrini’s current front hall (often referred to as the bar), Gisèle’s Salon (her post-war apartment), then to the Hiding Floor apartment below, and finally, Gisèle’s Atelier (her studio constructed in the 1980’s). There are further rooms within the building that are encountered by visitors on their tour of the House of Gisèle, however, I believe that these four distinct spaces best represent the heritage of the building and offer an abundance of material ‘stuff’ to discuss. An encounter in each of these spaces will give us the opportunity to dwell with certain objects in relation to the given context, novels and house museums. In the Front Hall, I will dwell upon the recent redesign of the space and a photograph of the current directors. Then, in Gisèle’s Salon, I will focus upon two photographic portraits and three artworks by Gisèle herself. Once we find ourselves in the Hiding Floor apartment, a collection of crowns made from dried leaves will be discussed along with three small beds. Finally, in Gisèle’s Atelier, a number of dried floral

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arrangements will be explored along with a piece of a tree trunk. My analysis, utilising new materialism, heritage studies and (auto-)ethnography, will address the following questions: what is the experience of visiting the building and the different spaces within it? Why are these historic ensembles worth preserving? How does Castrum Peregrini fit amongst cultural heritage and the context of house museums? What can we learn from a closer look at the objects that occupy the space? And, finally, how does this collection, or ensemble, relate to the arts sector and wider society today?

As I have demonstrated, this written tour offers a contemporary, post-human perspective. And although I have spent a number of months inside the building, as a young woman, a newcomer to the building, and an outsider to Amsterdam and its contemporary art and heritage scenes, this study is also from different perspective to that of the directors and many of the artists and academics who have added to the narrative. My perspective is arguably that of the anticipated “next generation.”52 This is also a timely (re)evaluation. Having been operating in its current guise for about a decade, it is five years since Gisèle died at the age of 100 (along with her first hand stories attached to her house, collection and ‘stuff’) and 75 years since Castrum Peregrini was used as a hiding place during WWII. The team are in the early planning stages of widening access to the building. Also, the current heroic narrative they share, may evolve in light of the forthcoming publication of a biography of Gisèle, proposed by Castrum Peregrini and written by independent researcher Annet Mooij. The directors are also working on plans for a future project and life in Athens, Greece, (as the Director Michael is currently nearing retirement age) and they want to secure the organisation’s future. The present is a pivotal moment and 2018 is a pertinent time to reflect on the experience of visiting Castrum Peregrini, observing where it sits in a wider context of its city the heritage sector. And, through embracing the material turn, it is possible look ahead in terms of how this place relates to society today and that of the future. Since Castrum Peregrini’s current capacity for visitors, audiences, researchers and artists is extremely limited by space, resources, infrastructure, the vulnerability of the collection and the fact that it is also functions as a private home for the directors, this study also serves as a step towards opening the intimate spaces and collections up to a wider audience, different perspectives and academic discussion. Meanwhile, it may also be useful to Castrum Peregrini themselves, in thinking about how to secure the future of the fabric and essence of their place.

52 Lars speaking in Herengracht 401.
Brief biographies: Herengracht 401 & me

To contextualize and further present the appropriateness of an ethnographic approach, I will provide a short biography of Castrum Peregrini and my own ‘home-place.’ As a contemporary arts organisation, Castrum Peregrini has a growing reputation, a European network and a global outlook (in relation to their chosen theme of freedom). However, the organisation remains resolutely personal. Each of the three full time members of the organisation, Michael, Frans and Lars, have long-term and personal connections to the building and its community; the director Michael first encountered the building at a New Year’s Eve party in Gisèle’s Salon, meeting her for the first time whilst sitting on the window ledge that overlooks the canal, finally finding an accepting community in a city that sometimes felt hostile to a Belgian. Meanwhile, Lars and Frans joined the publishing company as interns, and Lars (from Germany) slept in the room beneath the hiding floor, where it was impossible not to hear conversations at the kitchen table in the next room. Michael, Lars and Frans cared for Gisèle in her final years and they have consciously chosen to dedicate their home and working lives to her legacy, living in the building as partners in life and work. Even Judith Couvee, who currently works at Castrum Peregrini three times a week, first got to know the organisation via her late grandmother, who was friends with Gisèle, and whose photograph sits in the upstairs kitchen. As such, Castrum Peregrini is an unusually intimate, intergenerational arts organisation.

The origins of Castrum Peregrini and its multiple phases provide essential context for this study. In 1942 a young woman called Gisèle, brought up between America, the Netherlands and Austria, was determined to find her first apartment on Amsterdam’s beautiful Herengracht canal, where some of the richest merchants of the Dutch Golden Age had built their homes, and more importantly, where her late Dutch grandparents had lived. Gisèle went to art school in Paris, but her time there was cut short by growing unrest in European and family finances. She became part of the Netherlands’ artistic community in rural areas and, significantly, soon after moving to Amsterdam Gisèle joined the Resistance movement. Gisèle risked her life by welcoming persecuted young Jews to hide in her small apartment during the Nazi occupation at the suggestion of her friend, a German poet, named Wolfgang.

53 The author’s interview with Michael Defuster.
54 As told in a lunch time conversation at Castrum Peregrini.
55 In a group interview with the directors, the following is stated: “Life decision: To intertwine our private and professional lives and dedicate them to Gisèle and her heritage.” Avner Avrahami, “Family affair: The Castrum Peregrini family,” in The House of Gisèle: Highlights of Memory Machine and Intellectual Playground 2014-2017, 84.
Frommel (1902-1986). Gisèle and Frommel lived in the apartment as normal, and chose ‘Castrum Peregrini’ as the codename for the secret safe house, where the hiders hid ‘in plain sight.’\footnote{In contrast to non-domestic hiding places, such as the Anne Frank house, where noise could not be made.} An intensive cultural education led by Gisèle and Frommel, namely in poetry and drawing, allowed for an intellectual freedom that helped two young Jewish men survive, and built an intriguing creative community visited by other persecuted people and artists, including the well-known artist Max Ernst. Gisèle’s illegal work as a portrait painter supported the community.\footnote{Gisèle did not register with the Kultuurkamer and therefore should not have been practicing as an artist according under the controlling Nazi occupation.} This is the heroic narrative told to visitors to the House of Gisèle today; with Gisèle celebrated as “the true unsung hero and her house of the Herengracht - the House of Gisèle - a monument to courage and humanity.”\footnote{“About,” in The House of Gisele: Highlights of Memory Machine and Intellectual Playground 2014-2017, 3.}

Gisèle went on to buy the rest of the building, and later even the further adjoining property, to house and enable the activities of the “family” established during the war.\footnote{Gisèle speaking in documentary Het Steentje van Gisèle, directed by Cees van Ede, (1997).} Frommel’s German poetry publishing house took precedent, using the Castrum Peregrini codename as their magazine’s title, whilst Gisèle painted, designed tapestries and took interior design and stained glass window commissions. Although Gisèle spent many summers on Paros, Greece, from the 1950’s (after marrying Arnold d’Ailly - the ex-mayor of Amsterdam with whom she had had an affair), this community in her enlarged Amsterdam home evolved over time, with many artists and young culturally-engaged people joining the circle. However, the current generation have chosen to distance themselves from the legacy of Wolfgang Frommel, the German poet who spent much of his life living in the building until his death in 1986.\footnote{The complexity of this community includes abuse of power and allegations of sexual abuse surrounding the circle of Wolfgang Frommel. The perspective of a survivor of this abuse has been published in a Netherlands magazine over the past year. A Board of Recommendations has been selected to research past historical abuse. Since this is a highly sensitive, ongoing issue it will not be discussed within this thesis.} The current guise of the organisation was developed in Gisèle’s last years, but after the deaths of the Jewish hiders Claus Bock and Manuel Goldschmidt, who like Frommel, had returned to live at Herengracht 401, Castrum Peregrini began to invite artists to work (and sometimes live) in these historic spaces and make work inspired by their surroundings. The organisation has developed somewhat organically, supported by the advice of consultants, advisors and their board. Recently, museum professionals advised Castrum Peregrini that there are few wartime hiding places and preserved mid-century interiors.\footnote{The author’s interview with Michael Defuster.}
and, the importance of the building’s accumulated material heritage has been described as an “ensemble.”\(^{62}\) Alongside successful bids for financial support from Netherlands and European cultural funds for project based work, Castrum Peregrini’s core running costs are enabled by income generated from three guesthouse apartments (advertised via Airbnb)\(^{63}\) whilst a number of floors are let to other organisations as offices. Until June 2018, a co-working space also contributed to this revenue. Gisèle’s prime real estate gift to the foundation has enabled her creative community to grow and have some sustainability where many artists studios and cultural spaces have been pushed out of Amsterdam’s centre.\(^{64}\)

How is my own biography relevant to this unique, complex place? Like most, I share the universal but personal experience of home. Moreover, that Castrum Peregrini is an alternative family business, part-private, part-institutionalised (where both people and place are active in developing a sustainable future for a heritage site) is comparable to my own ‘home-place’ in the the village of Westonbirt, in South West England. I grew up in a converted barn on a working dairy farm, which was part of a historic estate with Grade 1 listing from English Heritage (a national version of UNESCO), positioned in the Cotswolds which is an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (a UK governmental protection scheme to “conserve and enhance natural beauty.”)\(^{65}\) I am the fourth generation of my father’s family to grow up here, and so like Castrum Peregrini, generations of a community add to the a complex paradigm of people, places and things. The immediate landscape also represented social and cultural heritage, with an ostentatious mansion (now a school and wedding venue)\(^{66}\) and a world-famous tree collection with an annual footfall of 400,000 visitors.\(^{67}\) My own life, then, has been somewhat shaped by material heritage. Moreover, whilst writing this thesis, my maternal grandfather moved from his 400 year-old cottage, The Folly, where he had lived with my late grandmother for over fifty years. Again, people, places and things are at play. I had a close friendship with my grandmother, and like the current generation of Castrum Peregrini, I was tasked with sorting out her ‘stuff’ after she died. A number of


\(^{63}\) Airbnb is a popular digital app that allows anyone to rent their spare room or entire home to visitors. Whilst these Castrum Peregrini’s Guesthouse Apartments are let to tourists they are also are sometimes used by artists and intellectuals involved in the programme.

\(^{64}\) The author’s interview with artists Renée Turner.


visitors identified that things within Castrum Peregrini reminded them of their own
grandparents, and so my own connection or entanglement with this ensemble of material
heritage is far from unique.

68 The author’s online survey.
THE ENTRANCE HALL

The floor is tiled; old terracotta forms a grid laying out the formal rules of perspective ahead of you. Simple built-in couches skirt the edges of the narrow hall, and a long, polished but well-worn counter stretches along the low-ceilinged narrow space, with magazines, a coffee machine, kettle, tea bags, glasses, sugarcubes, card machine and a pot plant. There’s a painting to your left (a circle, in shades of sandstone), and a bit further, a display of books (related to Gisèle and Castrum Peregrini through the ages). At the vanishing point there is a square photograph (unframed and almost matte in finish) of three men and a elderly woman in a large white room. You lock eyes with the men (two perched on stools either side of the woman, another standing behind her). The elegant grey-haired woman looks across our gaze and down to her left; posing with confidence like a model or muse. Feet walk by in the hazy windows either side; you are below ground level.
Halls, as a threshold and semi-public space, are both an introduction to a house or a building as well as a functional space from which to enter or exit. Although this space is largely practical (rather than a destination on the tour of the House of Gisèle), I believe it is a significant space to discuss and the best place to begin this alternative tour. The cavernous space was in fact a bookshop when Gisèle first arrived in the 1940’s and later a private apartment of someone involved in the later Castrum Peregrini publishing house, during which time the windows were blacked-out: “I still remember removing the blinds from the windows on the ground floor where for decades the publishing house in exile was based. With that act we symbolically opened the place for the first time in its 70 years of existence.”

I have heard this story in person and it is reiterated in Frans’ website biography. For him, the materiality of these windows, and the act of reverting them to their original purpose (and literal transparence) neatly signifies his generation’s approach of widening access to the building whilst also being more outward looking. Interestingly, the physicality of buildings are often used as effective metaphors and idioms such as ‘beneath the facade’, ‘built on strong foundations’ or ‘when one door closes and another opens.’ Architectural vocabulary is material and yet aspects of buildings are intertwined human emotion and experience; in the post-human world, our built environment has agency.

An antique ensemble

The space is functional and the furniture is mismatched; some of it was found on the street (central Amsterdam has rich pickings on collection day). The bar counter top is elegant and old- it fits in in a way that institutional front desks in historic buildings often jar with their surroundings. Michael, being an architect, resident and Director, has adapted the entrance with taste and subtlety. It is difficult to know what is original or not: the wooden counter top is in fact from an old fabric cutting shop, a relic of a time when individuals made their own clothes and curtains, and its length allowing rolls of fabric to be easily unfurled and cut to order. The counter is ‘reclaimed’ just as in my family’s kitchen the work surface was a wooden butchers block and the oak kitchen table some kind of preparation table (bought for £7 in a sale as my mother always remembers) from the 19th century mansion that is now a school. Baudrillard critiques such restoration as a form of nostalgia or “neo-cultural syndrome”: “the quest for authenticity (being-founded-on-itself) is thus very precisely a quest

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for an *alibi* (being elsewhere).” Whilst Castrum Peregrini’s historic interiors are celebrated for their completeness and authenticity, this example suggests that the layers in the building, added by successive generations, are not always linear or even authentic. Whilst Frans sees the room’s windows as signifiers of his generation and their openness, this hall also distinguishes the hybridity of this private domestic home and public art and heritage building. “Ensemble” is the unifying term suggested by heritage professor and consultant, Riemer Knoop, to justify the importance of the collection here. The hall, I posit, is the room where today’s generation have most significantly added to the ensemble.

The tone and functionality of halls in public cultural buildings is especially interesting in Amsterdam, where contemporary art and heritage sites often intermingle. In her recent text *The White Cube as a Lieu de Memoire: The Future of History in the Contemporary Art Museum*, Margriet Schavemaker ruminates on the emotive significance of an entrance hall in Amsterdam’s main institution for contemporary art, the Stedelijk Museum. She describes the hall as “a non-space between the entrance area and the galleries with artworks, a transition zone between inside and outside that offers a place for experimentation and spectacle: festive openings, remarkable performances;” a functional and yet significant space. However, when the hall temporarily reopened during the museum’s extensive renovation and expansion, the historic stairs, restored and painted white, resulted in a highly emotional response with visitors even crying in response to the space. Growing up in a single storey house (a converted barn previously housing pigs and horses), I was drawn to the drama of sweeping staircases as pivotal locations in historic house settings of gothic novels such as *Rebecca* by Daphne Du Maurier and the Victorian feminist trope of the madwoman in the attic. Schavemaker argues that the material affordance of staircase itself transported visitors to the past, either with historian Pierre Nora’s notion of a *lieu de mémoire* (“a place that unlocks personal and collective experiences from the past”), or in the literary mode of the “frequently cited madeleine cake that carried Charles Swann back to his childhood” referring to a novel by Proust. Similarly, Job Cohen, the past mayor of

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73 Ibid., 9.
74 Ibid., 10.
Amsterdam, describes Castrum Peregrini as “this lieu de memoire.” The French phrase is clearly an accurate way to describe the layers of personal and societal memory within the building. Castrum Peregrini’s side-street ‘non space’ is comparably small and static (rather than a place of performance or spectacle), although the aesthetics of the space do introduce visitors to the organisation and the rest of the building. Whilst the hall does not elicit emotional responses as a place of memory, I believe that it serves as a reflection of the multiple uses of Castrum Peregrini’s building at present as well as being a material manifestation of Castrum Peregrini’s management today.

There are no stairs in Castrum Peregrini’s entrance hall. In the historic centre of Amsterdam, the canal houses are especially tall and slim; with narrow halls and steep stairs reflecting the cost of land in this area at the time. I have never become comfortably used to climbing and descending stairs (often falling down them at other people’s houses as a child), and the steepness domestic flights of stairs in the Netherlands are one of the most noticeable differences from my home-country, England. Thus, the original front hall on Herengracht, with a staircase immediately in front of you upon entering, is too restrictive for today’s coming and going, with rented office spaces, public events, meetings and deliveries creating a steady flow of bodies. Domestic halls create a logistical issue for other such house museums; at Kettle’s Yard, entry to the house (made up of small cottages knocked together) is managed in 10 minute pre-booked slots. However, pulling a string to ring the old bell still gives the impression of entering a home, just as if curator and collector Jim Ede still lived there, welcoming students on Sundays. At Sir John Soane’s Museum (three conjoined terrace houses), visitors queue on the street before being escorted into the narrow hall by a visitor assistant. However, Castrum Peregrini’s entrance hall is not the original hall of a house (there are no stairs nor even a coat rack). The space has been designed to accommodate multiple groups (from office workers in the let space to groups going on a tour), whilst being restricted by the fabric of the building and the area’s heritage status. The feeling of entering a home (emphasised by artist Marijn Bax), is thus not established.

78 The author’s interview with Marijn Bax.
because you enter a traditional domestic hall but, I posit, because of other ‘things’ including the intimacy and inheritance that objects exude.

The Family Portrait

The front door is usually locked and, sometimes, passers-by ring the bell out of curiosity. One morning I opened the door to a curious, forthright woman: she paced slowly around the hall (frustrated she could go no further), instead dwelling in front of the two artworks and the displayed books. First, she stopped at the portrait. “Look,” she remarked, “isn’t it interesting that she’s the only one not looking at the camera!” The photograph seems to give away the fact that Gisèle had been her own artistic muse. The full-body, group portrait is both large and prominently placed; somewhat comparable to status-signifying painted portraits of family dynasties that now have been relocated from their intended settings to art museums. However, the photograph has no (ornate) frame, and neither subjects’ nor the photographer’s name accompany the piece. Digitally printed on matte board in a style similar to museum and exhibition interpretation boards, it serves as both a pictorial introduction to the organisation and a contemporary family portrait.

With the accessibility of mass-produced cameras and digital printing, family photographs serve as material souvenirs in our own homes; portraits are no longer reserved for the elite in their distinguished houses and museums. In my parents’ kitchen, there are photographs of myself and my siblings; black and white because my aunt specialised in monochrome film photography, with simple black frames suiting my mother’s taste. The only other framed photographs are two large portraits of my paternal great-great grandparents, elegant in Edwardian dress and framed in traditional dark wood frames that are either original or bought at an auction house, I am not sure which. Hazy and static, they reflect the studio setting they were taken in rather than the farm that they lived on. Taking Baudrillard’s semiotic approach that the function of the antique in modernity is “merely to signify,” these photographs present my parents’ connection to their family farming heritage. In contrast, my partner’s parents’ hall is full of photos from the past decade, including official graduation photos with grey backdrops and mortarboards and studio family photos with white backdrops and a jeans and white shirt-dress code (a studio package deal fashionable in the early

noughties); their frames are wood painted a silver; the present and future are signified. These examples give an insight into the universality of family photos in a domestic setting whilst also signifying different tastes. In her essay ‘Photography and Objects of Memory’ Elizabeth Edwards opens with Barthes’ description of a photograph of his mother in Camera Lucida, significantly, rather than the image, “what he first describes is an object” including its physical traces of age and use (having been stuck into an album). Utilising anthropologist Daniel Miller’s promotion of the material and sensual aspects of objects in his important study, Material Cultures: Why Some Things Matter, Edwards argues that “the materiality of a photograph is integral to it affective tone as an image.” However, she also observes that this is underrepresented in writing on photography; whilst Bourdieu discussed social meaning, display, taste and cultural capital, he merely “hints at materiality” but fails to engage on an analytical level. New materialism’s active relationship between objects and people (or society) can thus be seen as a development of the 20th century’s interest object signification, evident in the landmark texts of Barthes Mythologies (1957) and Bourdieu’s Distinction (1979).

At Castrum Peregrini, in a building that has a collection of archival photographs and painted portraits, the prominence of this materially contemporary, sleek, unframed photographic portrait is emblematic of the culture and mentality of the organisation; the current team assert their own importance, their connection to each other and their personal relationship with Gisèle. The three men pictured (Michael, Lars and Frans), are not Gisèle’s family, but they have inherited Castrum Peregrini via the foundation that she left her property to. The late Gisèle remains at the centre of the image, reflecting the statement that they have dedicated themselves to her legacy. Meanwhile there are no images of the Jewish hiders or Wolfgang Frommel who spent decades living here. Historically, early (male) museum directors “did not separate their professional and personal identities” in pursuit of their own place in history. The materiality and curation of this photograph can be seen as an assertion of the subjects’ power but it also it is also somewhat self-reflexive and intergenerational. A second group portrait of the directors is printed on the penultimate, heavy matte page of a beautifully designed magazine publication that sits on the counter, the House of Gisèle, which is full of images and writing covering three years of Castrum Peregrini’s Memory machine programme. In an interview entitled ‘Family Affair,’ Michael,

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81 Ibid., 332.
82 Ibid., 33.
Lars and Frans present themselves as living together in a personal relationship as well as working together. Here, the three men are photographed in Gisèle’s Salon; the image is small in print but more colourful and intimate than its counterpart hung on the wall. The inclusion of themselves on a prominent page suggests that their professional work and personal relationship are intertwined with Castrum Peregrini, lacking the usual divisions of the post-industrial world. As Lars attests, Castrum Peregrini is, in part, the construction of their ideal, non-conformist way of life in which he is lead by “meaning-making.”

A number of painted and photographic portraits of de Waal’s ancestors and family are included in *The Hare with the Amber Eyes* to provide visual context. They become more informal over time and de Waal’s comments on a photo of his Jewish great-grandparents taken in August of 1938, after they managed to escape Nazi-occupied Vienna, their house and possessions seized by the Reich: “Emmy leans into Victor. It is the only picture I have where they are touching.” The *House of Gisèle* magazine is bound with red thread and printed on high quality paper, it might occupy a coffee table at home; it cleverly mirrors both the aesthetics, programme and aspirations of the organisation. The presentation of the photo is comparable to newspaper supplements and magazine features, where aesthetes and celebrities are pictured in their own homes. However, in this example those pictured are also the editors of the magazine, thus exerting full control over how they are presented. The two photographs act as visual bookends of the visitor experience. Positioned at the beginning and end of an encounter with this place, thus emphasizing the directors’ importance to the organisation. Many artists and curators cite their friendship with the trio, and their qualities and knowledge base both enhancing Castrum Peregrini and their projects. As one artist told me; they are the organisation.

Interestingly, having extensively described the palatial European homes of his Jewish ancestors (rich connoisseurs and collectors), and the Japanese home of his late great uncle, de Waal gives an extended description of his own home, but only as far as the hallway on the penultimate page of *The Hare with the Amber Eyes*. His hall “contained - this morning - a cello and a french horn, some wellington boots, a wooden fort that the boys had outgrown and that has been on its way to the charity shop for three months, a heap of coats and shoes, and Ella, our aged, loved gun-dog - beyond that it gets messy.” This lively description, with a new-materialist dynamic between people, place and things, utilises this

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84 The author’s interview with Lars.  
85 de Waal, *The Hare with the Amber Eyes*, 264.  
86 Ibid., 350.
hall as a microcosm to describe the author’s home, immediate family and position in society. Although he is self-reflexive, positioning his own research process in the narrative, the hall is all de Waal will concede of his private home. Likewise, Michael, Lars and Frans use this hall as they come and go from their private living quarters; areas of the building that I, and the majority of their colleagues and visitors have not encountered. The combining of art and life has its limits. By dwelling in this space, and engaging with the theory of new materialism, it is evident that the entrance hall serves as an abstract of today’s Castrum Peregrini.

The latch will not stay when you close the old wooden door behind you. What to lay your eyes on first? Where to begin? The green-grey ceiling is peeling and the paintwork is decorated by the remains of a climbing plant, scrawled across the ceiling like an ink drawing which you trace back to the far right corner: an indoor garden with succulents reaching for the light. Boats pass by on the canal down below and stairs lead up behind you, but a large vase is positioned to stop your ascent. The curtains are velvet mustard, and the walls papered with the yellowish grass. The furniture, however, is veneered and more plush. There is more light too, and there seem to be fewer books.

Above a couch is a large painting; what looks to be a triptych (with two panels), but it unfurls five panels wide, stretching across the width of the room depicting goddesses (or people swathed in cloaks). The leader holds a curled wand or staff. There is a desk to your right and an opening into a miniature library room to the left with another desk, hardback art books to the ceiling and a black and white photo of a man affixed to a soft rectangle of driftwood. Pinecones sit in a pair of ceramic camels next to a photograph of a young woman, a vase of dried flowers sits near the man.

In the main space, the furniture is honey-coloured, pairs of polished-wooden swan necks hold up the surface of a sideboard and the seat of a couch. In front, a square, slate-topped coffee table is laid out with an empty Isnic-style vase and two bronze pigs facing one another. Book shelves also serve as alcove displays: shells laid out and a dolls house-scale Last Supper, the miniature table laid ready to eat. Above the swan couch is a tapestry; a woven teal surface with two trees (or figures) intertwinied. ‘Gisèle’ is stitched into wool, as if handwritten. Amongst other objects, a small switchboard or remote control with five buttons sits on the sideboard: you press the buttons and an analogue slideshow commences, with five painted panels spinning within the wall, and the composition undulates between a landscape and stones depicting the female form.
Before we even sit down with our tea, Gisèle’s old friend and colleague, Joke Haeverkorn, tells me that “Gisèle was a storyteller” - and her life story becoming more interesting than life because her artwork (which “was not strong enough”). Similarly, Gisèle’s biographer Annet Mooij, has emphasised that Gisèle constructed a fairytale out of her life. Gisèle’s Salon (as it is currently called), which became her apartment after the war and later her marital home, gives the impression of a scholarly and bourgeois but alternative and creative lifestyle. The Director Michael says;

“The house at Herengracht 401 reveals every phase of her life; photos and objects from her childhood among American Indians in the Wild West, furniture and other items from the sturdy Austrian castle, belonging to her mother’s noble family in Styria, and from the Amsterdam Canal house of her father’s family.”

This mix of photographs, inherited objects and furniture is most evident in this particular space, which serves as an eclectic contrast to the more traditional interiors and gilded decor presented alongside it in a coffee table book on Canal Houses and their inhabitants. Michael goes onto say; “her own work hangs throughout the house, engaged in a symbiosis with the interiors that she skilfully arranged.” This work, predominantly paintings and some tapestries, received no critical acclaim in Gisèle’s lifetime (she had hoped to sell paintings to the major museums and was disappointed that this did not happen), and today, artists, curators and her biographer are disinterested in her paintings. My exploration of the Salon will give an impression of the environment that is part deeply personal, and in part museum-like. The chapter will largely focus upon Gisèle’s artwork, turning to two particular paintings and a tapestry: the five panelled Goddesses, (which has recently been acquired by the Stedelijk Museum but will remain in situ) and Cycladic Ritual (which can be enlivened by remote control) and finally the Metamorphoses-inspired hand-woven tapestry (designed by Gisèle and executed by De Uil’s female weavers). As such, her artwork will be (re)considered in the context of the 21st century and new materialism, leading to an analysis of the apartment in the context of artist’s house museums. Does Gisèle’s Salon make

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87 The author’s interview with Joke Haeverkorn.
88 The author’s interview with Annet Mooij.
90 Marc van den Eerenbeemt, Koos de Wilt, Arjan Bronkhorst et al., Grachtenhuizen, Amsterdam Canal Houses; four Centuries of Amsterdam Canal Houses and their Residents, (Amsterdam: Lectura Cultura, 2013.)
91 Defuster, “The House of Gisèle is a time machine,” 5.
Castrum Peregrini unique? Can the apartment seen as an material autobiography and, furthermore, how can the salon of a little-known 20th century artist be pertinent today?

Tangible & inherited objects

Firstly, it is important to state that, in the words of curator Radna Rumping, this apartment is “bourgeois.” Gisèle’s family heritage is presented in object form, with references to literary prowess, colonial anthropology, transnational dwelling and Catholicism. Within her built-in bookcases, Gisèle has shelves dedicated to an assemblage of objects; shells, primitive sculptures and a miniature Last Supper. Archaeologist Ralph Mills, argues that “a mantelpiece, a surface above a hearth or fireplace, where objects are positioned in a close, meaning-rich relationships with each other, can be regarded in an archeological context, and the objects displayed on it as an architectural assemblage.” Such displays are commonplace in western homes, making links between objects from different times and places, some inherited and some new; Gisèle however, required more space than a mantelpiece allows.

Aleida Assmann, a memory studies scholar, made the following comment at a 2014 lecture, ‘Forms of Forgetting,’ at Castrum Peregrini in 2014: “Generally speaking, it is only a minimal part of what has been experience, communicated and produced that actually outlasts a human life and is handed on to future generations. A photo, a necklace, a piece of furniture, a proverb, a recipe, an anecdote - that is, at most - what grandchildren retain from the lives of their grandparents.” However, Gisèle inherited much more and was unable to confine her extensive domestic assemblages to a single mantelpiece for a number of reasons, firstly her father and male ancestors’ social standing and careers left her with so much ‘stuff’. Secondly, as visually oriented artists, these objects often served more than memory, but gave Gisèle artistic inspiration. Also writing from the perspective of an archeologist, Steve Brown states that “in singling out and privileging rare and exotic objects, I am participating in a practice that harks back to seventeenth-century European antiquarian traditions of assembling curiosities.” Indeed, the collecting and display of objects is a historically

92 The author’s interview with Radna Rumping.
95 Brown, “Experiencing Place,” 16.
Western, masculine and colonial practice (in line with the Herengracht 401’s 17th century origins). As anthropologist Arjun Appadurai states; the formation of major art and archeology collections of the Western world “represents extremely complex blends of plunder, sale and inheritance, combined with the Western taste for things of the past and of the other.”\(^{96}\) Baudrillard is similarly critical of today’s “voracious appetite for nostalgia and primitivism of the Western world’s bourgeois interiors,” sated through flea markets, works stolen from churches and museums, and forgeries.\(^{97}\) In this sense, that Gisèle’s 20th century rearrangement of objects is largely inherited makes them ‘authentic’ and this space more museum-like than domestic.

Open at the front, the display shelves are somewhere between a shrinemake, mantelpiece and museum vitrine. However, upholstery fabric, pinned to form a backdrop, serves as a domestic, feminine addition. It feels likely that the objects were picked up, perhaps passed around. In essay *Happy Objects*, Sara Ahmed explains that "happiness functions as a promise that directs us toward certain objects which then circulate as social goods. Such objects accumulate positive affective values they are passed around."\(^{98}\) Objects worthy of our mantelpieces or Gisèle’s equivalent displays fit into Ahmed’s concept; they have been accumulated for various reasons, based on their aesthetic and cultural meaning but undoubtedly laden with emotive meaning by Gisèle. They were, I posit, Maussian gifts.\(^{99}\) However, now that their resting place is static and uninhabited, this emotive meaning is somewhat dissipated unless the objects are handled or used. These objects clearly held emotive value for Gisèle but, following from Appadurai’s theory, their social lives are now frozen. The objects will not be passed on, and as outsiders behaving like museum visitors as our tour guide expects, we cannot touch them. De Waal, as a ceramicist, emphasises how his family’s collection of netsuke are enlivened by being touched by handled and moved around each of their owners and their children; he strongly advocates interaction with objects, antique and contemporary and refers to the book as “my secret history of touch.”\(^{100}\) With no tangible meaning or affect; they are merely aesthetically pleasing and act as symbols of Gisèle’s elite European family: we are in a museum, not a living room.

\(^{96}\) Appadurai, “Introduction: Commodities and the politics of value,” 27.
\(^{97}\) Baudrillard, “Subjective Discourse,” 47.
\(^{100}\) de Waal, “Writing a very special book.”
In terms of tangible qualities, it is worth briefly looking at the presentation of photographs in this room in contrast to today’s entrance hall. There are a number of small framed photographs which provide an interesting counterpoint to the contemporary group portrait discussed earlier. Here, all of the photographs are single portraits, serving a more private, intimate function. As Elizabeth Edwards points out in ‘Photographs as Objects of Memory,’ photographs serve a tangible existence, in contrast to film and video: “one of the formal characteristics of photography, which distinguishes it from other mimetic inscriptional devices...is that photographs make the image visible through the nature of its materiality.” Edwards emphasis how people can physically interact photographs; they “can be handled, framed, cut, crumpled, caressed, pinned on a wall, put under a pillow, or wept over.”

One photo, capturing a beautiful young Gisèle, sits in an ornate oval frame, propped on a sideboard in the small study space. A photograph of her husband Arnold is stuck onto a piece of dry wood, in a rough oval shape - perhaps a piece of driftwood collected on Paros. Above the photograph of Gisèle is a patch of colour where the wall was once protected from the sun; the frame must have hung there. This assemblage appeared on the poster advertising Janina Pigah’s documentary, *Herengracht 401*, whilst also relating to the way in which artist Amie Dicke explored the physical remnants left by past residents: “I noticed for instance the fading of colours - that you see when you pick up a book, or remove a painting from the wall. That’s an area of encounter.” Dicke’s ‘encounter’ relates to Brown’s description of being brushed against by things. Meanwhile, the wooden plank serving as a frame for Arnold draws attention to the tactility of photographs; this would be light and comfortable to hold. Wood, according to Barthes, is an “ideal material” for making toys “because of its firmness and softness, and the natural warmth of its touch.” Gisèle, who was married to Arnold for less than a decade because of his premature death, perhaps picked this object up, held it and moved it around.

My late grandmother blu-tacked three unframed photographs above her bed in her late eighties, one of each granddaughter taken in our respective childhood; I am watering a flower bed and my sister is dressed as a Victorian (for a school trip). Housebound, perhaps my grandmother was improvising. Or perhaps without frames, she could take them off the wall for a closer look or to check the dates and names she had written on the reverse. De

101 Edwards, “Photographs as Objects of Memory,” 334.
104 Roland Barthes, “Toys,” in *The Object Reader*, 40
Waal goes as far to imagine the material and visual qualities of a photograph to describe his great uncle’s four-decade long relationship with his Japanese boyfriend, Jiro; “their life was Kodachrome, I can see that yellow-and-black car glistening like a hornet on a dusty road in the Japanese alps, the pinkness of the croquette framed on white.” Close relationships and physical interactions with objects no longer occur on a domestic level in Gisèle’s Salon. Since visitors should not touch anything, material agency or the liveliness of things, to use theorist Jane Bennet’s term, is somewhat diminished. However, touch and physical interaction is still integral to Gisèle’s own artworks. Two paintings, which require a person to eliven them, will be explored in further depth, alongside a handmade tapestry, where every stitch signifies the skilled manual labour involved in making the artwork.

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Iggy adopted his partner Jiro as his son to gain a legal family connection. De Waal, “The Hare with the Amber Eyes,” 326.

A pentaptych

Upon entering the apartment, the painting first encountered fills a whole wall, albeit one with gaps either side. It can be opened, like double doors, with five panels in total stretching out like wings. When open, it is almost impossible to pass by, thus cutting off a small section of the room. Like a devotional diptych or triptych of early religious paintings, today a movement more familiarly performed with books and laptops, the action of opening the hinges changes the physical form of the painting and activates it. Michael, who is a trained architect and landscape designer, is particularly interested in ‘encounter’ within spatial design; Gisèle evidently designed the way people move in this space. The curation of her own painting initiates a physical encounter with a large, mythical painting. After the war, Gisèle worked as an interior designer (Joke maintains that crafts earned a living whilst painting was her creative impulse), which positions Gisèle in a wider context of female design history. In Women, Museums and the Problem of Biography, the author provides a survey of revisionist feminist art history, particularly crediting Sachko Macleod's 2008 study Enchanted Lives, Enchanted Objects which "convincingly links women's interest in the decorative arts and their arrangement of their domestic space with the active role many of them played in promoting the fine arts (including the establishment of art galleries) in the United States." Whilst this is interesting in terms of reframing domesticity as a step towards professional roles in the arts for women, art and design were interlinked for Gisèle. There is a gulf between high art (or contemporary, conceptual art) and the decorative arts; this space offers an opportunity to reconsider this.

This painting and curation has parallels with Sir John Soane’s Museum's Picture Room, arguably the museum's highlight. The architect had his collection of 118 paintings hung in layers which have to be manually opened like doors because of the extent of his collection and limitations of wall space. Revealing the paintings is a theatrical act, relying on a visitor guide to physically move them whilst adding their verbal narrative; in this way they retain the object function Soane had constructed for his architectural students and guests in the 18th century. Archival photographs depict a round table set below the painting; the artwork creating a as a stage set for Gisèle’s dinner party. Today, the painting maintains agency and

107 The author’s interview with Michael Defuster.
108 The author’s interview with Joke Haverkorn.
control over the visitors' impression of her home and work; visitors are actors upon a stage surrounded by Gisèle’s set and props.

Additionally, there is an object depicted within the painting; an unusually shaped driftwood stick. Found natural objects were a great source of inspiration for Gisèle, especially from the island of Paros in Greece where she spent many summers. The unusually shaped, sensuous and organic object is a prop, a momento or even a toy. Interestingly, Joke, who ran the De Uil weaving studio, showed me a black and white photograph of herself swathed in fabric whilst modelling for this painting. In the summer holiday of my first year at university, I helped catalogue photographs from a Victorian house, belonging to a Punch cartoonist. Linley Stanbourne’s photographed his servants with props as a visual aid for his work, this practice soon turned into amateur pornography which the featured the drawing room’s best furniture. Unlike the patriarchal power dynamic of a male artists working with a female model, there is an element of innocent, childlike play in this work.

Moira, Gisele’s five-panelled painting hung in her Salon. Its panels are closed here.
In Barthes’ essay entitled ‘Toys’ (berating the simulation of adult life replicated in mass produced plastic and metal toys), the extent of his ode to the natural material of wood is highly relevant: “it is a familiar and poetic substance, which does not sever the child from contact with the tree, the table, the floor. Wood does not wound or break down; it does not shatter, it wears out, it can last a long time.”Whilst 20th century children played with miniaturised metal and plastic versions of cars and kitchen utensils, Gisèle the adult artist played with natural forms. Barthes’ sensorial description of wood as a material would not be lost on Gisèle; she recalls an uncle had taught her to walk through forests in Austria and she picked up fallen leaves into her old age. As a child, I collected and pressed leaves, picked off bits of bark, collected sticks, snapped twigs and jumped over logs. Despite Barthes despair, wood and trees were offered many games whilst growing up on a farm; and yet like many adults, I no longer play. The presence of this material object thus gives an insight into Gisèle’s artistic process which involved encounters with nature.

Metamorphic tapestry

Gisèle’s predilection for trees is again evident in the tapestry hanging above her couch. A pair of anthropomorphic trees are intertwined like dancers, one root (or foot) elegantly pointed. Its movement and lightness contrasts with the busy narratives or landscapes of historic tapestries of mansions and castles, like the one owned by Gisèle’s mother’s family. Gisèle apparently loved the Roman poet Ovid’s Metamorphoses, and the tapestry depicts the tale of Daphne and Apollo. Whilst ancient myths were among the wartime community’s interests, Gisèle’s rapture and study of nature itself is also evident. Painted depictions of this story tend to depict a female nude with a few leaves sprouting, whilst this composition is more rustic than human. That Gisèle decided to keep the sculptural twig-like remnants of a dead plant (that had grown up the walls and along the ceiling), is testament of her fascination with plant growth and unusual organic object. The growth and movement of the climber can be related to the laborious handwork of of this woven art work; the irregularity of the texture provides a narrative of the time-consuming skilled labour involved. Like organic growth, the handmade object is related to the passage of time. In Homer’s ancient Greek epic, Penelope famously sat at her loom in the years that Odysseus spent on the seas, but this link between materiality and time hast been erased in our

110 Barthes, “Toys,” 40.
111 Gisèle speaking in documentary Het Steentje van Gisèle.
112 An epic poem of mythical tales based around the theme of change. The Roman poet, Ovid wrote in Latin, 43 BC- 17 AD.
post-industrial, digital world. However, social anthropologist Tim Ingold (who is currently interested in the connection between anthropology, archaeology, art and architecture in order to explore humans and the environment they inhabit) made a relevant ethnographic study of basket weaving in the 1980's. Ingold argues that traditional basket making and other “skilled, form generating practices” links (human) making with (organic) growing, softening the distinction between artefacts and living things.\textsuperscript{113} And, interestingly, the last decade has seen a resurgence in handcraft in contemporary Western art and wider society.\textsuperscript{114} In a new materialist sense, this work can be seen to diminish the divide between humans and nature in both form and subject.

A detail of the handmade tapestry in the Salon, depicting Daphne and Apollo.

\textsuperscript{113} Tim Ingold, “On Weaving a Basket,” in \textit{The Object Reader}, 80-81.
\textsuperscript{114} De Waal has penetrated the contemporary art world as a potter, along with Turner Prize-winner Grayson Perry, who also popularised tapestries, although his textile works are digitally rendered.
Artist Amie Dicke has explored Gisèle’s obsession with trees in her project *Important Souvenirs*, a website, importantsouvenirs.com (an “an almost ‘endless scroll’”), and accompanying hardback art book. Photographed details of this woven artwork are juxtaposed with photographs of trees from Gisèle’s archive of images. This archive, held at Castrum Peregrini, show Gisèle’s trees of interest are irregular and unusual, often gnarled or misshapen; such trees offered their materiality to her artistic predilection for metamorphic possibilities, represented in the composition of this tapestry. Working in the 20th century, we can associate Gisèle’s interest in the relationship between humans and nature with today’s epoch of the anthropocene, rather than the mythical, polytheistic era of classical antiquity. As such, this work is an interesting, post-human and feminist counterpoint to male-artists’ rendering of the metamorphoses, particularly during the Renaissance and 19th century, which can be seen as a vehicle to depict an idealised female nude.

In presenting Gisèle’s artwork alongside her photographic research, (which Gisèle herself organised and archived with an assistant), Dicke’s work is somewhat ethnographic. Gisèle’s Salon is autobiographical (as Belinda Nemec terms the Sir John Soane Museum). Dicke’s project is partially auto-biographical, in that she identified shapes, rhythms and subjects in Gisèle’s ‘stuff’ and work that were already a focus of her own artistic practice. However, neither Dicke nor Gisèle’s names appear on the website; “the anonymity of a website offered space to give all these images their own life as well...this format made it possible to think about what these images are saying, dislocated from where they were made.” Thus, presented in this way, Dicke’s work offers an experimental visual ethnography of a maker inspired by natural forms in symbiosis with human beings; the visual rhythms, clean aesthetic and curated selection add a universality and the potential of a wider, more diverse audience. Returning to curator Radna Rumping’s point that this house is unrelatable for many in its bourgeois style, and my assertion that this is most evident in Gisèle’s Salon, this artwork offers a more universal material experience: we all have bodies, and we are all immanent with nature. As such, rather than being confined to the feminine art history of textiles, the work is somewhat genderless and remains relevant in our post-human times.

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116 Sold at around 500 euros.
118 The author’s interview with Amie Dicke.
120 The author’s interview with Radna Rumping.
121 Women’s place in art and design history is often associated with textiles. Key examples include May Morris managing the embroidery department of the Arts & Crafts movement Morris & Co. and the work of famous artists Judy Chicago and Tracy Emin.
‘Digital before digital’

Both the painting and the tapestry have been hung in prominent positions; Gisèle’s third work discussed here is actually built into the room. Cycladic Ritual is a painting made up of five panels, each painted on two sides, offering an array of compositions when operated with the wired-in control panel that electronically spins each panel around. Prehistoric (or futuristic) sculpted female forms appear and disappear, some limbless, whilst a sea or desert scape undulates in the distance. The moon (or sun) lowers. Seated comfortably on the swan-necked couch, you could watch it rotate, pause, rotate ad infinitum. If the Picture Room at the Sir John Soane Museum is a visitor highlight, Cycladic Ritual, I believe, is the pinnacle of Gisèle’s Salon. Fitted within a specially constructed wall cavity, the surface is flush with the wall, as if a projection or mirage. The experience is captivating: “one more turn!” was the plea of one student visitor, prompting artist and lecturer Renée Turner to state that Gisèle “was digital before digital.”

A digital artist who embraced the web in its early days, Turner has been developing a research project, *The Warp and Weft of Memory*, using Gisèle’s wardrobe which is still in situ in her bedroom (however, this space is used as a private apartment by one of the directors and not currently open to visitors). Gisèle’s multiple analogue systems, developed to categorise and file her stuff, relate to digital coding and tagging systems of today argues Turner; although sometimes Gisèle’s systems were defied by objects that did not fit her categories. This has inspired Turner’s contemporary work (in the form of digital wiki which allows for crowdsourced, organic development); such semantic systems present a mutually dynamic relationship between people and things.

In his study of the domestic mantlepiece, archeologist Ralph Mills suggests that the 19th century mirror has been replaced with the 21st century flat-screen television, retaining the past function of “mirroring the identity of both room and occupants.” Gisèle’s artwork is digitised, and she believed it to be the world’s first digital painting. The work can be seen as a reflection of both Gisèle and women in art history and society. The repetition of the turning movement mimics the way in which we repeat and hand down stories; the aural tradition has provided us with ancient narratives (including the *Metamorphoses*) and women are credited for sustaining oral and family histories across generations.

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122 Students of Critical Pedagogies at the Piet Zwart Institute were visiting for a day of seminars.
123 The author’s interview with Renee Turner.
discovered on the island of Keros by a University of Cambridge archeology graduate. The find was of cultural significance to archeology and art; the linear beauty of Cycladic sculptures had apparently inspired the work of Picasso and Henry Moore. In the 1980’s further archeological research found that these fragments had been broken up and deposited as part of a ritual from 2800 BC to 2300 BC.\textsuperscript{126} Gisèle surely kept abreast of these archeological developments, and in naming her work Cycladic Ritual she undoubtedly had an engaging tale to accompany the animated work. The work is a material, feminist retelling of this archeological discovery, which in itself tells a story of an epoch.

It is interesting here to draw a comparison with the newly published novel, The Power, in which drawings of archeological artifacts are interspersed throughout as material, scholarly evidence of a (re)invented female-dominated world history. We read a fictional male author’s ‘manuscript,’ followed by a letter exchange: "I know you’re going to tell me that ancient excavations have found male warrior figures. But really, I suppose this is the crux of the matter for me. Are we sure those weren’t just isolated civilizations. One or two amongst millions?\"\textsuperscript{127} Utilising archeology and the academic attribution given to such historic objects (via Western men), Alderman imaginatively and concretely subverts the dominant male narrative of world history. In Alderman’s Acknowledgements, she elaborates upon the importance of the archeological illustrations to her narrative:

\begin{quote}
“Two of them, the ‘Serving Boy’ and ‘Priestess Queen’ are based on actual archeological finds from the ancient city of Mohenjo-Daro in the Indus Valley...there are some findings to suggest that they may have been fairly egalitarian in some interesting ways. But despite the lack of context, the archeologists who unearthed them called the soapstone head illustrated on page 214 ‘Priest King’, while they named the bronze female figure on page 213 ‘Dancing girl’. They’re still called by those names. Sometimes I think the whole of this book could be communicated with just this set of facts and illustrations.”\textsuperscript{128}
\end{quote}

The aforementioned “renewed concern with materiality in both art and literature\"\textsuperscript{129} can therefore be seen not only as a means to negotiate heritage and memory, but as a useful tool in feminist art and literature which contributes to shaping our present and future society.

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{127} Naomi Alderman, The Power, 332-333.
\textsuperscript{128} My italics. Ibid., 340-341.
\textsuperscript{129} Ireland & Lydon, Rethinking Materiality, Memory and Identity. 3.
\end{flushleft}
The visual depiction of archaeological objects and their categorisation offer a concrete means of addressing our ontological history told by men. Gisèle’s groundbreakingly technological *Cycladic Ritual* painting (perhaps better described as a kinetic sculpture), is a female interpretation of archeology, religion and nature. In its ability to present a number of sculpture collections (like video), it intensifies the viewer’s relationship with the two-dimensional objects, cutting through the dominance of language in today’s Western society. Although a person must operate the remote, there are so many possible iterations that the work holds autonomy.

Interestingly, *The Power* ends with a metaphor of women’s power as a growing tree. The final illustration in the novel (“Discovered in a cave in Cappadocia, c. 1,500”) depicts an all seeing-eye with branches of lightning-like ‘power’. The metaphor is very similar to Ingold’s comparison between spirals in natural shells and man-made baskets. Alderman’s poetic

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130 Ingold, “On weaving a Basket,” 84-85
writing draws together the human experience and societal structure with the dynamic motifs of the natural, material world;

“The shape of the power is always the same: it is infinite, it is complex, it is forever branching...A human being is made not by our own will but by that same organic, inconceivable, unpredictable, uncontrollable process that drives the unfurling leaves in season and the tiny twigs to bud and the roots to spread in tangled complications.”  

Whilst *The Power* and *The Hare with the Amber Eyes* use words as a medium, they favour objects as a catalyst for their stories and exploration of society. As an artist working in the 20th century Gisèle somewhat preempted the material turn and Haraway's concept of naturecultures.  

To conclude our time dwelling in Gisèle's Salon, it is worth returning to Belinda Nemec's study on autobiographical house museums. Nemec identifies just one woman who created an autobiographical museum: sculptor Adele d’Affry (1836-1879). This museum was in Switzerland, complete with d’Affry’s own work, furniture, tapestries, other possessions and gifts from artist friends; it sounds similar to Gisèle’s Salon. However, it closed in 1936. Unlike house museums and collections opened up by artists and writers families and friends, Nemec asserts that creators of autobiographical museums ensure their own legacy; British architect Sir John Soane left his home to the state. Likewise, I would argue that Kettle’s Yard is an autobiographical museum in that Jim Ede, an important 20th century curator, gifted Kettle's Yard to Cambridge University. Although Gisèle did not formalise this as an educational museum space in her lifetime (as Soane and Ede did), it is clearly designed as a place designed to share with others; remember that Castrum Peregrini’s director Michael first encountered the building at a New Year's Eve party here as a young man. It is significant that Gisèle left her entire estate to the Castrum Peregrini Foundation, and that all of the large artworks hanging on the walls in her salon are by Gisèle herself. Whilst Sir John Soane’s Museum and Ede’s Kettle’s Yard both showcase the work of many painters and sculptors, these are predominantly male artists from Hogarth to Canaletto, Brancusi to Miró. Gisèle’s

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134 Ibid., 285-6.  
135 The author’s interview with Michael Defuster.  
136 Two small studies are by a well known artist, Max Ernst, however, these apparently did not originally hang in here, but next to the fridge in the kitchen.
bookshelves are filled with books on male artists, but this is reflective of male-dominated art history.\textsuperscript{137} In the opening of Lynn Hershman Leeson’s \textit{Women Art Revolution} documentary film of 2010,\textsuperscript{138} a roving microphone on the streets of America show the public’s shocking inability to name three female artists; Frida Kahlo (1907 - 1954) was the only female artist most could recall. Even in the 21st century, art history and the art world continue to be male-dominated.

However, the societal relevance and public appetite for a view into the life and work of historic female artists today can be seen in the popularity of the 2018 blockbuster exhibition, \textit{Frida Kahlo: Making Herself Up} at the V&A Museum in London. The exhibition focuses on painter’s careful presentation of herself, via fashion and makeup. Similarly, as Michael said of Gisèle one lunchtime; \textit{everything was form}. The Kahlo exhibition links artist figures to the cultural phenomenon of the image-orientated social media platform, Instagram, and to the culture of ‘selfies’ and fashion blogging, whilst also relating to a recent resurgence of feminism across the world. However, a comparison with Frida Kahlo is unbalanced in that Gisèle has had no critical acclaim for her work and is not a famous artist, let alone a cult figure. Interestingly, Kahlo’s personal legacy has been managed very differently; her personal belongings were locked away for half a century at the request of her husband Diego Rivera, and her house in now a museum dedicated to both of their legacies.\textsuperscript{139} The (re)emergence of Kahlo’s ‘stuff’ in Mexico lead to the V&A’s exhibition in London. Perhaps, therefore, Gisèle’s material legacy will gain further pertinence in forty-five years time. However, dying before she reached fifty, Kahlo’s image and biography is forever young, unlike the centenarian Gisèle. Popular interest in Kahlo’s image then, can be seen as a reflection with society’s obsession with youth and beauty as well as a celebration of a rare famous female artist. Despite Gisèle’s lack of critical acclaim, that she curated her own work and constructed her own legacy is highly unusual for a 20th century female artist. If we consider Gisèle’s Salon as the world’s only autobiographical museum created by a woman, then Castrum Peregrini’s House of Gisèle is of major cultural significance.

\textsuperscript{137} In 1971, Linda Nochlin wrote her provocative essay, \textit{Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists}?  
\textsuperscript{138} \textit{Women Art Revolution}, directed by Lynn Hershman Leeson, (2010) 1hr 23min.  
A narrow corridor, lined with framed drawings by different hands, leads to two doors; take the door to your right and you will enter a room filled to the ceiling with things. Bookshelves reach the ceiling all around you, one shelf even suspended above you. A passageway of books leads to a piano, painted white and nested behind a further fitted bookshelf, with a small jug of dry eucalyptus sprawling in the sun. The curtains are a mustard yellow velvet, the carpet an emerald-teal and the walls a woven, grass-like texture the colour of straw colour. A sideboard is covered with photos propped against the wall, wide-eyed boys, bare legs and a bust - a milk-white ceramic of a youthful head wearing a brittle halo of dried leaves. Faded olive green corduroy covers the hotchpotch of cane and wooden chairs, and a simple couch (or daybed), is topped with mustard velvet cushions matching the curtains. Above, hangs a large landscape photograph of what you too are looking at - you can try to spot the differences.

A bureau desk, beside the couch holds some papers, more eucalyptus, and a framed angel hangs on its side. More Bacchus-esque dried wreaths hang from the corners of a gilded mirror and shelves that carry uniform collections of Castrum Peregrini journals above an unused fireplace. There is another small desk and another daybed.

Returning to the doorway, you turn right into a small room; with a third desk and bed. The curtains are green and neon post-it notes catch your eye on the desk. Above the bed, covered with a brown throw, is a selection of framed works in black and white - an assemblage of drawings and collages.
The director, Michael, writes; “the original interior from the wartime years of hiding has remained intact to this day. It is a magical place that puts you in touch with your deepest feelings and drives: fear, mistrust, sacrifice, self-assertion, responsibility, trust, love, belief in truth and justice. It leaves nobody unmoved.” That Gisèle’s first apartment became a hiding place for young Jewish men during WWII is fundamental to the scope and integrity of the organisation, forming a basis for Castrum Peregrini’s contemporary programming guided by the themes of freedom, friendship and culture. The apartment is symbolic of a heroic tale of humanity (where Gisèle and her friend Frommel created an atmosphere of intellectual and creative freedom for the young hiders). It is a highly emotive space, with a complex history.

The organisation’s Strategic Focus 2016-2019, highlights their building as a site of commemoration for historical figures. As such, I would like to take the opportunity to focus closely on the materiality and aesthetics of this space, unusually preserved as they are. Riemer Knoop, heritage Professor at Reinwardt Academy, believes the apartment is actually more interesting than the world-famous Anne Frank House. He explains that “the House of Gisèle forms a contramal, an opposite, that complements the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam. The latter is a static and almost immaterial memorial.” Although the space is open to visitors by appointment, here I will shine a light on objects that are not mainstays of Castrum Peregrini’s current heroic tour narrative. As Lars tells me, the tours are currently Frans’ own perspective, and, with with such a densely woven fabric, the teller must choose their own threads. The following chapter will explore two collections of things; the multiple beds in the space and the dried foliage wreaths dotted around the space.

When giving public tours, Frans customarily dwells on five things that illustrate his story of the building’s heritage and the way in which the organisation works today. Firstly, the simple furniture that Gisèle was given by an artist friend. Secondly, photographic documentation of After Goldschmidt is handed around, a temporary site-specific artwork created by Amie Dicke in 2012, where slivers of metallic gold safety blanket were inserted into every gap and crevice in the space. The remarkable hiding place in the pianola (fashioned by a carpenter who lived above) is opened and shut by the tour guide. Then, a second conceptual art work

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141 Despite two raids by the Nazis, the young men survived the war and both Gisèle and Frommel were recognised at Righteous Among the Nations by Yad Vashem, The World Holocaust Remembrance Center in Israel.
143 Knoop, “Refuge for the Condition Humaine,” 88.
144 The author’s interview with Lars Ebert.
by Dicke is explained; a leather armchair that was driven to Germany and swapped with one at Haus der Kunst, designed by Hitler's favoured architect. Finally, as you exit the space back towards the stairs, framed sketches of the community made in the wartime years are pointed out. These chosen objects support a heroic narrative; of an artistic community supporting one another in the face of mortal danger. Dicke’s works are a poetic, engaging addition to the historical objects. However, when filmmaker Janina Pigaht first encountered the space she says "the house left a strong, physical impression. I could feel, hear, see, touch and smell it all at once. It had the sense of different stories to it and triggered me to investigate." In the resulting documentary, Herengracht 401, some past inhabitants talk about the closed community that continued after the wartime, including Frommel’s alleged abuse of power.

Interestingly, Sara Ahmed asks readers of Happy Objects to "consider the opening sentence of Teresa Brennan's book, The Transmission of Affect: "is there anyone who has not, at least once, walked into a room and 'felt the atmosphere?'(2014, 1)." Brennan goes on to say that anxiety is 'sticky'." Indeed, there is a heavy atmosphere in this space, one that could indeed be described as ‘sticky;’ the relationships between people who lived here during the wartime and in decades since were physically close, undoubtedly complex and based on circumstances that including attraction and affinity with the arts: Gisèle's biographer Annet Mooij writes that “this group of young men had been selected not only because of the way they looked, but also for their artistic talents and poetic sensibilities.” Expanding the narrative of the hiding floor, including non-war years, would allow for a more nuanced, human and engaging visitor experience as encouraged by contemporary approaches to museology.

145 Amie Dicke, A Biographical Road Trip of Two Chairs, 2012.
147 This situation has also been explored in a short book by Joke Haverkorn who ran the De Uil weaving workshop. The forthcoming biography of Gisèle by Annet Mooij will add further breadth to the narrative.
150 This is the main argument of both Nina Simon’s The Participatory Museum Simon, Nina. (Santa Cruz: Museum 2.0, 2010) and Franklin D. Vagnone and Deborah E. Ryan. Anarchist’s Guide to Historic House Museums. (New York: Routledge, 2016).
**Crows of leaves**

This space is dotted with crown shaped vines, hanging from almost every corner. The leaves are dry, curled and crisp, but their circular shape and abundance remains. In the smaller room, a single such crown has withered, translucent, tissue paper-like remnants of spring daffodils. In an archival photo reproduced in a Castrum Peregrini publication, daffodil crowns are shown resplendent in black and white, but fresh and full in form, and sitting atop the heads of a group of men. On the sideboard, the ceramic bust of a young androgynous head, in glazed pastels that evoke Renaissance ceramics by Luca Della Robbia, also wears a crown of dried leaves. Amongst photos of young men, a toy elephant and candles, this crown is also part of a Ralph Mills’ mantlepiece-like assemblage where “objects are positioned in a close, meaning-rich relationships with each other.”

The wreaths also hang above a blocked-in fireplace on the edges of white-painted shelves holding a collection of Castrum Peregrini German literary journals, on the corners of a gilded mirror above a tall bureau, and on the top of a cupboard alongside a book by Stefan George, a German poet revered by Frommel. These assemblages all somewhat resemble a mantel-piece collection, and as Mills tells us, “one of the most frequent features of the 19th century chimney breast is a large mirror. What this does is reflect the room and the occupants back at them.” The wreaths of leaves are symbolic and prominent remnants of the past community.

That the vine crowns repeatedly appear in such a display emphasises the literary, classically-enthralled, ritualistic circle of men around the poet Frommel. The number of wreaths suggests a large group. One of today’s team of directors, Lars, addresses the literal circle in which the (male) community took a position within, in order to stand and read poetry, according to the wartime memoirs of Claus Victor Bock (one of the young hiders). Lars writes that “the metaphor of a circle and the recitation may remind us of religious ceremonies” but goes on to argue that “the meaning-making mechanism was much more fundamental and much broader in a cultural sense.” However, these circular wreaths offer a pagan or classical aesthetic, signifying a structured, insular and arguably culturally elitist group. Indeed, Annet Mooij believes that the wartime community “can best be described as a religious brotherhood” and that Gisèle was “deeply crushed by this systematic exclusion” in

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151 Mills, ‘Everyday Magic,’ 75.
152 Ibid., 80
being excluded from literary meetings. As such, the seemingly beautiful wreaths can also be seen as controversial, patriarchal objects, adding to the 'sticky' atmosphere.

Spread across the hiding floor apartment with the circle of men long since dispersed, these organic objects are disintegrating. Lars tells me of their roles as ‘curating decay’ whilst Frans says they are ‘delaying decay:’ whichever, these objects are likely to be the first to become dust. A British installation artist, Rebecca Louise Law, works solely with dried (dead) flowers that reference relating themes; “the physicality and sensuality of her work plays with the relationship between humanity and nature.” With titles such as Life in Death, Community, Intertwine and Nature Morte, her large-scale installations made of dried flora serve as a metaphor for human life: "the process of decay is unpredictable, developing independently of human expectations." As such, the wreaths of leaves in this room have their own independent lives in a post-human, new materialist sense.

Crowns of leaves sitting on top of a cupboard in the Hiding Floor.

Across epochs, flowers have been associated with ceremony and ritual. Funeral floral wreaths were made over three millennia ago and excavated from the Egyptian tomb of Tutankhamun in the 20th century, they are now held in the world-renowned collections including the herbarium at The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew (London) and the collection at The Met (New York). Floral designs have great cultural significance, which are usually managed by scientific botanic organisations offer a diverse record of global heritage, mapping out Western geographical, historical, agricultural and religious explorations. Flowers remain prevalent in cultural rituals; I remember the browned remnants of my mother’s 1980’s bouquet sitting on the kitchen dresser and, sitting in bed at the age of 92, my grandmother confided in me that she was still angry at her elder sister for forgetting to bring the bridesmaids’ posies to her wedding. Now, a dried posy from a wreath I made for my grandmother’s coffin sits on the dresser; the emotional and symbolic nature of flowers is highly charged.

However, the Hiding Floor’s crowns of leaves are not recognisable as as societal rituals of the 20th century or today’s wedding bouquets and funeral decorations. Their presence represents a circle of people and their insular ritual (from which Gisèle was apparently excluded), whilst their decay symbolises that this epoch and aspect of the heritage here is of the past. As such, they are useful objects to address a the more complex, arguably darker aspects of the appartment’s history. The dried crowns, along with vases of dried eucalyptus and and other foliage, give the opposite impression of the popular museum presentation suggesting the inhabitants having ‘just left the room’ with the fresh flower arrangements displayed in other historic houses open to the public, including Kettle’s Yard. Indeed, that these wreaths are still in place, after Frommel (d.1986) and then Goldschmidt (d.2012), lived here after the war, points to the importance of the literary circle in this space. Although the apartment is presented as intact from the wartime, the addition or long-term preservation of these delicate objects draw attention to the interim decades, and widen the narrative or “broaden the period of interpretation” as advocated by the Anarchist’s Guide to Historic House Museums.157

Three beds

Entering a small domestic space with three single beds in its two rooms is an intimate act. Huge, ornate four poster beds are objects acquired by museums and are highlights of some house museums, however, the beds here are small and humble. When I volunteered at the ostentatious house museum Leighton House, built by painter Lord Frederic Leighton, his single brass bedstead led to hushed speculation of homosexuality or affairs with working-class models. As teenager, friends of mine were embarrassed of their parents’ separate beds and I bargained with my mother to get a double bed when I was 18; to me it symbolized adulthood. We are born, sleep, have sex, endure illness and die in our beds; they are messy (in both a physical and emotional sense) and private. However, in historic house museums, beds are often present. In the Anarchist's Guide to Historic House Museums, which promotes "poetic preservation," a section begins with the imperative; "Embrace the physical complexity of habitation." These three beds, I believe, should be presented as equally important to other objects.

One of three beds in the space. This one looks most couch-like.

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158 Ibid., 35.
159 Ibid., 134
Indeed, the messiness and harshness of life is powerfully portrayed in feminist artworks depicting beds over the past century, including Tracy Emin’s infamous unmade bed installation, *My Bed*, (1998) and some of Frida Kahlo’s well-known paintings such as *Henry Ford Hospital* (*The Flying Bed*), (1932). In 1969, John Lennon and Yoko Ono politicised the privacy of the bed, discussing world peace in their 1969 ‘Bed-ins’- one held in an Amsterdam hotel. As specialist consultants, the authors of the *Anarchist’s Guide* advised one house museum to reintroduce a dormitories, to present a phase of its heritage when the house was used as a school for disabled children in the early 1900’s. At Castrum Peregrini, the beds offer an opportunity to link heritage with the complexity of life, including relationships.

In Sara Baume’s novel, *A Line Made by Walking*, the young protagonist’s mental ill health is shown through her own restless relationship with beds and her recollection of related contemporary artworks. She calls her bed at parents her “child-bed,” whilst her rented room’s bed is described as “my colonised mattress with parasite dust-mites.” Moving into her late Grandmother’s bungalow, she sleeps in different beds each night, or on the sofa. Contemporary artworks recalled within the art graduate’s inner-dialogue are then shared with the reader:

> “Works about Bed, I test myself: Tracy Emin, 1998. *My Bed* she called it, but Emin’s work was not simply the disarranged item of furniture upon which she slept...It was about feeling shit first thing in the morning...It was about workaday despair. And yet people were so angry over that bed, they did not realise it was the easiest piece of art in the world with which to identify.”

This famous work is clearly relatable for the protagonist. And, a few pages later, the pertinence of this theme in both contemporary art and society is emphasised: “works about Bed, I thought of another one.” She describes a New York billboard campaign showing Felix Gonzalez-Torres, *Untitled* (1991), a response to the AIDS crisis. There are no heads on the pillows; and thus an image of a double bed alone has the agency to demonstrate people’s loss of loved ones (both the artist and his partner died of AIDS): “This is the best conceptual art; by means of nominal material, vast feeling is evoked.” Baume’s author’s note states “I

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160 Ibid., 141.
162 Ibid., 41.
163 Ibid., 40.
164 Ibid.
165 Ibid., 44.
want to make clear that these are described as the narrator remembers and perceives them...I urge readers to seek out, perceive and interpret these artworks for themselves.”

Whilst this is a discussion of fiction rather than art criticism, Baume’s recurring device of describing contemporary art is an innovative and effective way of linking people’s emotion with contemporary art. The universality and complexity of beds is a pertinent contribution to new materialism’s entanglement of people, places and things.

As demonstrated by multiple well-known artworks and their presence in this historic apartment, beds fit neatly into Nina Simon’s definition of ‘social objects’ in her book *The Participatory Museum*. Simon lists four attributes: personal, active, provocative and relational. Interestingly, whilst visitors are not allowed to touch objects or sit on chairs, they are welcomed to sit on the edge of one of the beds. By being used in this practical way, the object is physically hidden by people (especially as they have no headboards) and the potential discussion is diminished. Simon argues “to make objects social, you need to design platforms that promote them explicitly as the center of conversation.” Inviting visitors to lie down would create an entirely different experience, perhaps awkward and impractical, but small adjustments such as positioning a pillow at one end of each bed, or the tour guide sitting on the bed themselves, would present them as beds more clearly.

It is significant that past artist in residence, Ronit Porat, slept in the smaller room during her residency, and then made work collages merging her own memory with images of the classical depiction of male beauty that she noticed recurring in books within the apartment, as the curator Ronit Eden tells me. Arguably, sleeping in one of these three beds, made Porat aware of the people that inhabited this space as well as their bodies and desires, rather than the overarching wartime narrative. It is highly relevant that Franklin D. Vagnone, co-author of the aforementioned *Anarchist’s Guide to Historic House Museums*, has created an ongoing project named ‘One Night Stand,’ where he sleeps for a night in a historic house museum. His aim, he states, is “shifting our cultural perceptions of historic house museums away from viewing them solely as public venues and moving toward a more intimate and tactile appreciation of them as places of private, domestic life.” Interestingly, he believes that

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166 Ibid., 303.
168 Ibid., 5.
169 Ronit Porat slept in this space whilst working here during a five week residency (a situation no longer offered to resident artists at Castrum Peregrini), and the works were donated by the artist and hung in this room that she worked in. Porat had some affinity with the idea of a closed community having grown up in a kibbutz in Israel.
by sleeping in a historic, preserved space, he is able to “highlight more nuanced and latent understandings of these places as vessels for life, social issues, politics, and habitation – not merely as decorative arts objects and collections artifacts.” He argues that in using furniture and interacting with a home “as an inhabitant” leads to an alternative reading of such spaces. This is a new materialist methodology, allowing for his human experience to be actively involved with a building and the or collection stuff within it. Whilst ‘artist residencies’ imply a residential stay, this is often not the case. Castrum Peregrini no longer host artists in the historic rooms because of concerns over preservation. However, today’s programme at Castrum Peregrini, I believe is driven by the current directors’ position and ongoing experience as inhabitants. It is worth noting historic spaces, including the building’s kitchen constructed in the 1950’s, have been converted into Guesthouse Apartments to serve the needs of paying and invited guests, and are thus considered as separate to the House of Gisèle whilst giving a more engaging experience for those who have the privilege of staying there. Interestingly, the hugely successful app, Airbnb was founded by Silicon Valley designers in 2008 to offer travellers a unique ‘home’ instead of a hotel experience. Given this popular and critical interest in physically staying in homes and house museums, it would be interesting to reevaluate this divided between Castrum Peregrini’s Guesthouse Apartments and the House of Gisèle. Allowing artists and researchers to physically dwell in this space would undoubtedly adds to the social and political understanding of its heritage and relevance today.

Sleeping arrangements and intimate relationships go unmentioned in the tour; and whilst there is the danger of sensationalising people’s lives, as with all communities, love and sex are part of this apartment’s history. There are three beds, and during the wartime there were four long-term residents with people regularly coming to stay. That these beds remained whilst one person lived here in later decades is also intriguing; where they seen as symbolic of the community? Recently, the nearby Anne Frank House utilised technological advances to decipher a covered page in an original diary revealing writing about sex and prostitution. The organisation stated that “over the decades Anne has grown to become the worldwide symbol of the Holocaust …These - literally - uncovered texts bring the inquisitive and in many respects precocious teenager back into the foreground.” The organisation have used sexuality as a means to (re)humanise Anne Frank, making her story more relevant or

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accessible today. Meanwhile, many museums are presently working on queering their collections in order to better represent queer history and alternative ways of living. In 2017, the a network of archive and museum professionals named from the Netherlands, UK and US held their inaugural symposium, ‘The Art of Queering,’ in Amsterdam.\textsuperscript{172} Meanwhile, National Trust, which owns hundreds of historic houses in the United Kingdom, ran a LGBTQ programme called Prejudice and Pride. On Charleston House’s website, the rural house museum where many of The Bloomsbury Group lived and worked, biographies of each of the key characters note their intimate relationships, including many same-sex affairs.\textsuperscript{173} That young Jewish people were welcomed to hide here on account of their good looks and artistic disposition (as Annet Mooij suggests),\textsuperscript{174} is an interesting and controversial point to discuss, especially in the context of the Nazi’s promotion of eugenics. Considering, too that some see the organisation’s memorialising of Gisèle as ‘god-like,’ and whilst others say that the life story she propelled was a fairytale, drawing attention to these three beds as objects would allow a more complex and emotional telling of an otherwise a linear, heroic narrative. It is worth noting that this historically significant apartment is not the most popular space in the house with visitors;\textsuperscript{175} perhaps exploration of this space and its objects should be privileged over Gisèle’s biography and the heroic wartime narrative.

To conclude, although the wartime years are arguably the most compelling period in the history of this building, this chapter’s focus upon the leaf crowns and beds draws our attention to the community that preserved the apartment in later decades. Arguably, the multiple beds and collection of wreaths are the objects that show this to be an apartment with an unusual, complex history. Whilst materiality including chair, books, windows and cracks in the walls and furniture have inspired contemporary art projects, and the pianola and drawings illuminate the wartime narrative, the beds and crowns discussed are equally interesting and worthy of consideration. Indeed, they could also support a more contemporary, diverse approach to heritage by “exposing domestic complexities” and “expanding the guest list” as advocated by house museum critics.\textsuperscript{176} Meanwhile, that these objects exist as collections (as do books), suggests that they have an large impact on environment or a prominence in the “ensemble” identified by Riemer Knoop.\textsuperscript{177} This again

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{172} “The Art of Queering,” Symposium, University of Amsterdam, accessed June 20, 2018, http://aihr.uva.nl/content/events/symposia/201/06/art-of-queering.html.
\item \textsuperscript{174} Mooij, “Das passt zu Dir,” 10.
\item \textsuperscript{175} The author’s online visitor survey.
\item \textsuperscript{176} Vagnone and Ryan, \textit{Anarchist’s Guide to Historic House Museums}, 138.
\item \textsuperscript{177} Knoop, “Refuge for the Condition Humaine,” 88.
\end{enumerate}
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chimes with the *Anarchist’s Guide to Historic House Museums* which tells us to “embrace interaction from a collective environment”\(^{178}\) and, in line with the material turn, to “consider non-material relationships of material things.”\(^{179}\) The two collections described are materially worthless but rich in potential to learn more about human communities and relationships and today, museums are argued to be most relevant to contemporary life when audiences make an emotional connection.\(^{180}\) Whilst most people cannot personally relate to the experience of hiding themselves or others, the objects discussed are intertwined more widely with people, culture and society.

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\(^{179}\) Ibid., 133.

\(^{180}\) Simon, ‘Chapter 4: Social Objects,’ *The Participatory Museum*, 1-42.
Bathed in light from glass running along either side, the room is expansive; open to the sky, the spire of the next door church and the decorative summits of the surrounding canal houses. The floor is polished grey concrete, with reddish lines forming traces of furniture longer present. The walls are white, but the room’s neutrality is interrupted by a cacophony of things: paintings hang on the walls, a series of circles, and every surface is covered in natural curiosities, some are combined into sculptural forms.

You walk along the left, passing a shelving which seems to be designed to store canvases. The furniture is like that of a summerhouse, woven by a craftsperson, including a high-backed chair covered in a colourful handwoven throw and cushion. There is also a simple mattress-shaped couch. A large mirror with a decorative white frame is hung on hinges like a door, next to it, a portrait of a young blonde woman on an easel. Books are laid out in piles on surfaces and large art books are arranged in a low bookcase, in alphabetical order, you notice. Leaves, skeletons of leaves, driftwood, stones. A white horse, mid-canter, has been liberated from a carousel and, nostrils flaring, stands in front of you. Along the back wall, below the paintings, are some vases filled with dried flowers. The other side, a flat television screen is mounted on a huge easel, beside it a cabinet on wheels with pigeon holes for paint tubes. You come across smaller vases, vases made of onions and corks, feathers sitting with seed heads. Two mannequins are dressed smartly in a cape with a fur collar and a red skirt suit. The dark red of the heavy woven fabric interrupts the greys, blues, whites and shades of sand.
This space is influenced by Gisèle’s summer home, an abandoned monastery on the Greek island of Paros; “I turned it into a monastery, I wanted it to be all white.” Created in the 1980’s, this is the only original interior influenced by Modernism and the white cube. Designed as a studio, it was also used as a space to receive guests, store, share and organise her collection and work. In her last years, Gisèle lived in this space; it is her later salon. Today, much of the original assemblage, including Gisèle’s self-organised archive, has been removed to make way for meetings, exhibitions, events and tours. Archival photographs of the early minimal arrangement of the space gave the current management team the confidence to make this change, along with the encouragement of curator Radna Rumping and artist Amie Dick in preparation for the 2016 exhibition Things to Remember (Page Not Found). Meanwhile, artist Renée Turner is drawn to exhibiting in what she considers a “contaminated space” whilst curator Ronit Eden tells me that she thinks that it is impossible to curate a contemporary exhibition within it. Frans ends his House of Gisèle tours here, and considers it “the arrival” figuratively and metaphorically with light streaming in; indeed, visitors often find this space most interesting or memorable.

Whilst the architecture, artwork and other objects all contribute to creating this engaging space, it is the only space of the House of Gisèle tour of historic spaces that allows room to walk around and, therefore, allows for people to discover objects for themselves. The experience is something like visiting a sculpture park or walking around a city and artist Amie Dicke recalls walking around the space as art of her research. Gisèle’s Atelier, I posit, is a hybrid in the sense that it has been radically rearranged and repurposed, but also in that it is an indoor room with a significant connection to the outside, natural world. The director, Michael, writes that this new studio was a place “where she could show her predilection for remarkable objects shaped by nature. Amidst her own works of art, she collected shells, bones, minerals, feathers and leaves, which she arranged into compelling still lifes.” Michael goes on to note that the documentary, Het Steentje van Gisèle "illustrated the inspiration that the then 86-year-old Gisèle found in her nature discoveries." Twenty years after this documentary was made, time is ripe for a reassessment of this space, following the material turn and coining of natureculture. This final chapter will focus upon one collection and one object; Gisèle’s dried floral arrangements dotted across the space, and a slice of a tree trunk which sits against the back wall.

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182 The author’s online visitor survey.
Dried floral arrangements or still lifes made by Gisèle and left in her Atelier.
Flora

Whilst there thousands of natural objects here (the surfaces under the slanting glass windows acting as a continuous mantlepiece), I would like to draw attention to dried floral arrangements made in vases, and even natural receptacles (including an onion). On the floor and almost every surface is an example, including many clay pots full of stems with architectural seed heads at shoulder height. Smaller arrangements include feathers, a larger one includes paint brushes. Cork circles serve as a type of floristry foam for Gisèle's choice of assembled stems. Although there are larger more abstract still-lifes, including a driftwood and sand assemblage named The Argonauts, there is a regularity with these alternative flower arrangements that make them a collection worth considering, despite the fact that Frans is unsure that Gisèle would have considered them as objects herself.¹⁸⁴

Certainly, for Gisèle, these natural things supported her memory as an elderly person; a leaf and stone are elaborated upon with rapture in Cees Van Ede’s documentary. Each stem will have been gathered from a certain place or perhaps received as a gift. As such, we can consider them objects rather than mere decoration if we take Marius Kwint’s definition that in Western tradition "objects serve memory in three main ways...Firstly they furnish the recollection...Secondly objects stimulate remembering...Thirdly, objects form records."¹⁸⁵ My Grandmother and I regularly corresponded via post, and when I helped pack up her things after she died, I found just one postcard she had kept - I had sellotaped a small yellow flower to it from a mountain in Edinburgh; my writing had faded and yet the dried flowers made it somehow worth keeping; it reminded her that I had gone to the Edinburgh Fringe again, that my boyfriend was performing and that I had shown interest in her Alpine garden (her organic memory palace reminding her of years spent in Austria).

Although it is easy to argue that this collection is worthy of object status, how can we consider them as art? Curator Nina Folkersma and artist Amie Dicke both consider Gisèle’s still lifes as more interesting than her paintings, although her biographer, Annett Mooij dismisses Gisèle’s “thing with nature” as uninteresting.¹⁸⁶ In Western tradition, flower arranging is not considered high art, and whether it is considered as part of the design canon

¹⁸⁴ The author’s interview with Frans Damman.
¹⁸⁶ The author’s interview with Annet Mooij.
has been conflicted. As a female-dominated form, this is arguably a sexist view. In the past five years, female entrepreneurial floral designers have reinvigorated the industry, with large-scale installations utilised within fashion shows, design magazines, luxury branding. Many have published their own books, and have hundreds of thousands of followers on Instagram. Stylistically, there are similarities with this contemporary trend in the use of dried flowers and sculptural seed heads.

These Instagram screenshots present the popularity of contemporary floristry and landscaping in high fashion and the artworld, and the presentation of the natural objects at Kettle’s Yard.

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188 Notable contemporary florists who make artistic and conceptual installations in the UK include Worm London, Flora Starkey, Pyrus Botanicals, Grace and Thorn, Petalon and Electric Daisy Flower Farm.
However, in other cultures, flower arranging has a distinguished art history. The Japanese art form of Ikebana originates from a 1500 year old Buddhists ritual, which by the mid 15 century was a symbolic and philosophical art form; "it is in essence, a perfectly balanced hybrid of nature and culture." One famous ikebana artist, Sofu Teshigahara gained a reputation on the international contemporary art scene of the 20th century, visiting artists such as Andy Warhol and Salvador Dali and exhibited in sculpture galleries in Europe. Gisèle’s collection can thus be considered within an international contemporary art context. The iconic Dutch master still life paintings that celebrated life, death and beauty are admired for their painters’ skill but they are also objects that allow us to learn about the wealthy colonial epoch in which they were made. Similarly, Gisèle’s still life assemblages tell us of her love of different landscapes; Joke tells me she was amazed at seeing the arid natural shades of Greece and Turkey for the first time on holiday with their husbands, whilst also remembering the plains of America from her childhood and the verdant forests of her mother’s home in Austria. Gisèle social status gave her an unusually broad experience of different countries, however, it is worth remembering that even in the early 20th century female artists did not typically travel alone in contrast to the ‘grand tours’ undertaken by male artist for centuries. As well as a personal interest in diverse landscapes, the dried flora can therefore be seen as a representation of women’s liberation.

That this space is full of dried flora is also relatable to the contemporary art world. In the summer of 2018, major European art museums are highlight nature with their exhibition programmes; in London, the V&A has is hosting ‘Fashioned From Nature’ alongside their blockbuster Frida Kahlo show. In France, the Centre Pompidou-Metz presents ‘Infinite Garden. From Giverny to Amazonia’, (exploring gardens as artists’ up to the present day). The recently reopened Kettle’s Yard house museum in Cambridge is highly regarded for both its extensive collection of mid-20th century avant garde art, but because of the presentation of nature, with pebbles, plants and a single lemon arranged by its founder Jim Ede in the 1950's. Gisèle visited Kettle’s Yard in the early 1980’s, as we can tell from her bookshelf here which includes an exhibition catalogue and a copy of Ede’s book A Way of Life: Kettle’s Yard. She was undoubtedly inspired by the experience and Ede’s vision to

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190 Ibid.
191 The author’s interview with Joke Haverkorn.
merge art and life, and presenting his own taste and that of the period. Kettle's Yard remains popular with contemporary artists and Instagram influencers alike. In Amsterdam, the Stedelijk Museum's current exhibition is called Coded Nature. The retrospective by Studio Drift fuses the patterns and rhythms of nature with technological innovation. Installations include opening and closing flowers (on the Schavemaker's iconic stairs), dandelion seed heads reconstructed with an LED light in their centre and drones flying like a flock of birds; new materialism and nature's agency is the very subject of their work.

Interestingly, in both the Netherlands and England, the new private contemporary art galleries of Hauser and Wirth Somerset and Museum Voorlinden (The Hague) which opened in 2014 and 2017 respectively, commissioned Dutch landscape architect Piet Oudolf to design their surrounding landscape. Oudolf's work compares stylistically to Gisèle's in that his planting becomes a collection of sculptural dried organic shapes and seed heads throughout the winter; as such, Gisèle's dried arrangements fit the current aesthetic of floral and landscape design which are seen to enhance contemporary art collections.

Returning to the assertion that the art form ikebana is, at its very essence, a “perfectly balanced hybrid of nature and culture,” this collection is the embodiment of the natureculture theory and the post-human turn. Additionally, whilst curator Jim Ede’s curation of nature is perfectly preserved (down to the replacement of a single fresh lemon sitting on a plate), further flowers and plants are often added to this space. One spring evening Annet Mooij brought a cream white magnolia branch along with her to a meeting. In bud, it was positioned in a vase on the studio floor and the flowers opened over a week: you could hear the waxy petals drop one by one onto the concrete. Flora, alive of dead enlivens the space.Whilst the three directors have different approaches to using and protecting the historic spaces today, Frans, who is the most conservative in his approach, looks after and adds new flowers and plants. As such nature offers an approachable opportunity to keep the historic rooms alive and create a sensory and engaging experience for everyone inside the building, in line with house museum criticism and new materialism.

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193 After talking to Gisèle’s biographer Annet Mooij, Frans believes that whilst Gisèle had her own vision, the experience of visiting Kettle’s Yard ratified her own ideas.

194 Currently Turner Prize-winning sculptor is exhibiting at Kettle’s Yard.


196 According to the directors themselves and other informants.
‘Death of a tree’

The collection discussed begins to frame Gisèle’s Atelier as a landscaped garden or a sculpture park. One final object neatly links Gisèle’s relationship with nature, the city with her archive and, finally, with nature with contemporary art. In Gisèle’s archive of photographs, within the handwritten category HERENGRACHT 1, I came across a series of photographs of three stages of a canal-side tree being felled behind red and white tape. Gisèle had labelled three separate folders with the poetic titles; “Death of a Tree,” “goodbye to TREES in front of our house,” “THE TREES GO.” Some photos are colour, others black and white. These creative archival records are embodied in a slice of that tree’s trunk, which leans against the wall with each ring of age on display. In documenting the work of Amsterdam’s municipal tree surgeons in this artistic way, Gisèle ratifies her obsession with nature as well as making a comment on the urban control enforced upon nature. In her article, ‘Past Imperfect (l'imparfait) Mediating Meaning in Archives of Art,’ Nancy Ruth Bartlett asserts that “modern artist and other arbiters of new creative expression have been very clever at keeping at least one step ahead of the classifying cataloguers who, despite their best efforts, can be decades behind in their taxonomy.”

Gisèle indeed archived her own life and work in a ordered but creative manner. Charles Landry, an expert on the concept of creative (and therefore sensory) cities, writes: “the distinction between the natural and built environment has eroded...The nature we have is manicured, contained and tamed.” This piece of wood and accompanying archival documentation provides engaging proof of Landry’s assertion. Whilst archives are seen as a means of storing things that are irrelevant to society as Derrida argues in Archive Fever, (or offering an alternative to throwing them away as Lars tells me), Gisèle’s archive is interesting as an alternative 20th century urban herbarium.

Growing up in historic parkland, I was saddened every time lightning, disease or people in yellow brought one of my old trees crashing down. I have memories tied to particular trees, partially because the landscape I grew up in is a living museum in that it was designed and planted from specimens collected from all over the world. Societies across time and continents have emotional and symbolic relationships with ancient trees, such as the Cedars of God in Lebanon (a UNESCO World Heritage Site) and Robin Hood’s folkloric 1000

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year-old home, The Major Oak. And, throughout history, forests have been used as an atmospheric motif in literature and film. In *A Line Made by Walking*, Frankie, the protagonist, is fixated on the relationship between a fallen tree and her grandmother’s death; “On the day my grandmother died, the undertakers took her away almost immediately. As swiftly and efficiently as the County Council men cleared the fallen tree.” Published in 2017, the author describes exactly the same experience that Gisèle has carefully archived; perhaps Gisèle’s interest in the tree was linked to her own mortality. On her deathbed, my grandmother requested a small Christmas tree, with a red bow. My family misplaced the small potted tree, which somehow felt like a second loss.

Consider, for example the eerily moving Birnam Wood in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* and the forest as a key location in the 2016 Netflix television series *Stranger Things*.
Human relationships, literature, heritage and the symbolism of trees merge in Virginia Woolf’s famous modernist novel, Orlando; an oak tree features as a material motif whilst centuries pass and the protagonist changes gender. The oak tree remains steadfast. The short book was written Woolf’s lover, Vita Sackville West, who could not inherit her historic family estate due to primogenitor tradition; the eldest male relative inherits the family's house and land. Subsequently, the world renowned Sissinghurst Castle Garden was created by Sackville West and her husband in the 1930's; it is open to the public and looked after by the National Trust. Finally, like beds, trees are often utilised by contemporary artists, particularly in land art, a movement that emerged in the 1960's. A Line Made by Walking ends with: “Works about Trees, I test myself, the final test, I promise. Joseph Beuys, 7000 Oaks. The first planted in Kassel in 1982.” The author is recalling a famous work by Joseph Beuys, the Fluxus artist, art critic and teacher, whose art project continues to grow and change after he has died. Again; nature has agency.

In this chapter I have chosen to focus on natural objects, however, under Castrum Peregrini’s core values of Freedom, Friendship and Culture, human interrelations rather than human-to-nature relations have taken precedent. Whilst this is representative of the the rare and symbolic wartime narrative, I believe that the natural world, materially represented in Gisèle’s Atelier with her still lifes utilising flora and the tree trunk both displayed and creatively archived, is also a compelling area of study, especially after the material turn and our society’s growing concerns over our post-industrial effect on global ecology in today’s geological era of the anthropocene. Gisèle’s friend Joke told me that her grandchildren, having been scared of Gisèle and thinking of her as a witch, began to mimic Gisèle’s interest in nature and they started collecting natural objects themselves. Thus, it can be argued that Gisèle’s Atelier serves as a three-dimensional, personal and urban museum and herbarium. Whilst it is a record of a life, work and interest in the natural world, Gisele’s Atelier now provides creative and educational stimulus.

Andrew Moutu argues against the traditional concept that “collecting is classification lived” and instead offers the idea that “collection is not necessarily an enactment of a classificatory scheme of thinking but rather that the enactment of social relations necessarily summons differentiation.” Nature (or matter) becomes culture (as objects, art and literature) through the way in which it is (re)presented by people. Gisèle’s Atelier is a cultural cathedral for our

202 Ibid., 301-302.
shared natural world. In a 2016 exhibition, *Things to Remember: Page Not Found*, flowers have featured in a cultural literary sense in Mehraneh Atashi's video installation, *The Rose Garden*, and the symbolism of trees featured in short story about migration, *Twig*, which was included in the accompanying publication. However, there is further opportunity to allow artists for visitors, artist and curators to explore the the interwoven themes of nature and culture, indeed the objects discussed would be an interesting stimulus for artistic projects related to ecology and nature in an urban environment. Landry argues that our sensory landscape is “shrinking”, and is overtly manipulated by retailers, meanwhile critics argue that sensorially and environmentally attuned historic house museums will make heritage sites more emotionally engaging and relevant to contemporary society. In the age of the anthropocene, and in light of the demonstrable interest in nature in both historic literature and revived contemporary artistic, fiction, exhibition and floral design; Gisèle's collected flora must be considered as an asset of the organisation's collection rather than the preoccupation of an older woman.

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204 The 2011 video piece was inspired by the 13th century Persian poem, *Gulistan*, by Saadi.
205 A refugee carries a twig in a water bottle in his backpack, thought to be a cedar from the Cedars of God forest. He plants it in his new home and it grows “The sprig’s growing at a bewildering speed, so fearless that it scares me. I’m talking to trees now, I’m talking to this twig, hoping its not deaf, but that it’ll hear me speaking to it and to the life that’s to come.” Groes, *Twig*, 40-42.
CONCLUSION

This new-materialist ethnographic study charted my encounters with rooms full of ‘stuff’ within Castrum Peregrini. The proliferation of new materialist thought utilised across archeology, anthropology and heritage studies, and embraced by wider contemporary culture (particularly in art and literature), justifies my theoretical approach, paving the way for an self-reflexive tour of the organisation’s building and collection. My alternative tour methodology, drawing on walking as an ethnographic and artistic practice, allows me to dwell in and upon four distinct spaces; The Hall, Gisèle’s Salon, the Hiding Floor and Gisèle’s Atelier. In each space a number of objects are explored, including a number of collections of things. A discussion of both appearance and agency allowed these things to be useful to my key concerns of the experience of visiting the building, its societal relevance, and its relationship with other museums, arts and design, and Western culture past and present.

The Hall allows for an introduction to both Castrum Peregrini’s current management and the relevance of material theory in both institutional and domestic settings, with the inclusion of my own ethnographic reflections plus that of two archeologists and the potter and writer Edmund de Waal. Whilst The Hall is not one of the historic interiors highlighted on tours of the House of Gisele, it is materially reflective of the layers of heritage here. The current directors’ merging of work (or art) and life, discussed via a photographic portrait and the overall design of the space, is an interesting example of post-human entanglement; is it the place of the people who have most agency today? Furthermore, this discussion demonstrated parallels between Castrum Peregrini and halls in other homes, house museums and the Stedelijk Museum, as significant sites of new materialist encounter.

Gisèle’s Salon took us back in time, to the late matriarch’s carefully constructed world. Here, a close, post-human reading of her artworks and personal possessions allowed for a feminist reevaluation of Gisele’s legacy. Her interest in nature was explored, evidencing her own perception of new materialist relationships between people and nature, and indeed the agency and forms of nature in comparison to handcrafts. This chapter also demonstrated that Gisele’s material legacy is of interest to contemporary artists via a discussion of artists working with Castrum Peregrini in recent years. Again, my own memory of the landscape I grew up demonstrated parallels in human experience of the natural world. Literature from
Ancient Rome (Ovid) to 20th century Modernism (Woolf) to contemporary fourth-wave feminist literature (Alderman) presented Western culture’s ongoing, complex between people and the natural world, predating the post-humanism. Furthermore, as a woman’s autobiographical house museum, Gisèle’s Salon is justified as unique and of great societal and cultural importance.

The chapter spent in the Hiding Floor re-focussed on the interim, literary community that preserved this wartime safe house. Again, nature is explored in relation to culture and commonplace furniture in relation to visual art, via contemporary fiction (A Line Made by Walking). The two collections discussed suggest a ‘sticky’ atmosphere. The intersection between house museums and private domestic space was also explored, in relation to house museum criticism, the queering of museums and the current cultural phenomenon of Airbnb. Ultimately, this chapter suggested that visitors’ personal encounters with the identified ensemble would allow for a more complex reading of the heritage here, rather than relying on the heroic wartime narrative.

Finally, we found ourselves in Gisèle’s Atelier. My analysis returned to nature, which following the material turn, presents an opportunity reevaluate Gisèle’s floral arrangements or still lifes and her creative archiving of the removal of a tree on Herengracht. This vast collection of objects relate to the trope of flowers and trees in art and contemporary literature, and the rise of contemporary, conceptual floristry. Sara Baume’s novel, A Line Made by Walking, provided an example of the materiality of nature in intergenerational relationships and contemporary art, which I contributed to with my own recollections. Meanwhile, the popularity of the presentation of nature within the house museum Kettle’s Yard is discussed, and the opportunity of flora to enliven the historic interiors at Castrum Peregrini. This chapter argues that rather than mere decoration, the material affordance of Gisèle’s natural collections serves as an alternative urban herbarium.

Since new materialism is embraced across academic fields, across the arts and literature and is used to draw meaning from the very concept of homes, it is a highly useful, relevant angle to approach house museums from. Although Castrum Peregrini positions its programme as relevant to contemporary society and issues, with its broad umbrella of freedom friendship and culture, my new materialist encounters prove the physical collection and interiors here to be widely relevant to feminist art history, contemporary reanalysis of
heritage and everyday contemporary life. As both a home and house museum, this place is entanglement personified.

Whilst I have explored just four key spaces, many other rooms offer the potential for further ethnographic research and analysis, including the top-floor kitchen, the 1950’s kitchen now used as a Guesthouse Apartment, the ground floor gallery space (that has also functioned as a co-working space) and finally, the directors’ own private apartments. Furthermore, it combining field work across a number of historic house museums in different cities and culture would create an interesting discussion on the relevance of house museums and the possibilities of material collections. I believe that Castrum Peregrini’s House of Gisele has further potential if visitors, like artists and residents, are able to engage more intimately and actively with the space an the things in it. As such, continued research and experimentation with ethnographic projects could provide an interesting means of engaging people with their inherited, built environment and with contemporary approaches to museology and the presentation of house museums.


van den Eerenbeemt, Marc, Koos de Wilt, Arjan Bronkhorst et al., *Grachtenhuizen, Amsterdam Canal Houses; four Centuries of Amsterdam Canal Houses and their Residents*. Amsterdam: Lectura Cultura, 2013.


**Castrum Peregrini Publications**


**Films**


*Het Steentje van Gisèle*. Directed by Cees van Ede. NPS. 1997. 60min.

!Women Art Revolution. Directed by Lynn Hershman Leeson. 2010. 1hr 23min.

**Important websites**

Anne Frank House: http://www.annefrank.org/en/
Castrum Peregrini: http://castrumperegrini.org/

Charleston House: https://www.charleston.org.uk/

Important Souvnirs: http://important-souvnirs.com/

Kettle’s Yard: http://www.kettlesyard.co.uk/

National Trust: https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/

New Materialism working group: http://newmaterialism.eu/

**Figures**

All of the images here are my own, however, the archival photographs of the tree-felling depict Castrum Peregrini’s archival documents and they retain copyright.
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