

**Westfälischer
Kunstverein**

Maria D. Ropicavoli

**“The Other:
A Familiar Story”**

08.05.–

08.08.2021

/English

IMPRINT

PUBLICATION

Westfälischer Kunstverein,
2021

Text: Kristina Scepanski

Design: Dan Solbach

Editing: Jenni Henke, Jana
Peplau

Translation: Tim Connell

Installation views: Thorsten
Arendt

EXHIBITION

Maria D. Rapicavoli
“The Other: A Familiar
Story”

8 May-8 August 2021

Westfälischer Kunstverein

Curator: Kristina Scepanski

Production: Jenni Henke

Administration: Tono Dreßen

Project Assistant: Jana Peplau

Gallery assistant: Bernhard
Sicking

Installation: Anne Krönker,
Robin Völkert

The artist and the team at
Westfälischer Kunstverein
would like to thank our
colleagues at LWL-Museum für
Kunst und Kultur for their
support: Johann Crne, Thomas
Erdmann, Frank Naber, Hanna
Neander, Thomas Püth, Stephan
Schlüter, Beate Sikora.

The exhibition featuring Maria
D. Rapicavoli is funded by the
Kunststiftung NRW.

Kunststiftung
NRW

The production of her video
“The Other: A Familiar Story”,
2020, was supported by Italian
Council,
Direzione Generale Creatività
Contemporanea as well Shelley
& Donald Rubin Foundation,
New York.

italianCouncil
Bringing our Contemporary Art to the World

 Direzione Generale
Creatività Contemporanea

 RF
SHELLEY & DONALD RUBIN
FOUNDATION

The Westfälische Kunstverein
is supported by the Land-
schaftsverband Westfalen-Lippe
and the City of Münster.

 STADT MÜNSTER
Kulturamt

 LWL
Museum für Kunst und Kultur

© 2021, Westfälischer
Kunstverein,
Maria D. Rapicavoli

Rothenburg 30,
48143 Münster
T: +49 251 46157
info@westfaelischer-
kunstverein.de
www.westfaelischer-
kunstverein.de



Installation view
“main room: long term thoughts”
Westfälischer Kunstverein, 2021

The Sicilian artist Maria Domenica Rapicavoli (b. 1976 in Catania), who lives in New York, presents her new extensive video "The Other: A Familiar Story" together with an accompanying sculptural installation at the Westfälischer Kunstverein.

Based on a true story, the narrative revolves around a woman from Sicily who was forced to follow her husband to Lawrence, Massachusetts, USA and abandon her erstwhile life in her homeland. Rapicavoli links these personal memories with the supra-individual history of migration in a patriarchal society and the construction of women as "The Other" in reference to Simone de Beauvoir's opus "The Second Sex" (*Le Deuxième Sexe*, 1949).

For many years now, Maria Rapicavoli has been engaging with issues of migration, territoriality, and the claims to power and space by nation states and the military. While Rapicavoli's earlier works revolved primarily around the military presence of the USA in Sicily and migration from Africa across the Mediterranean to Sicily and southern Italy, her current work focuses on migration in the opposite direction, namely from Sicily to the USA. In both cases, the sea is seen as a powerful intermediary and locus of transit.

Almost twenty-minutes in length, the two-channel video "The Other: A Familiar Story" (2020) follows the protagonist Mena (whose name we do not learn in the video) from her home near Mount Etna in Sicily to America, where she arrives via Ellis Island off the coast of Manhattan - a two-week transfer by boat typical of the time and a familiar experience for all immigrants. In addition to the topos of migration, the artist engages here with domestic violence against women and the socially-accepted facets of paternalism and oppression. Mena was forced to marry her rapist and follow him a few years later, in 1907, when he wanted to emigrate to the USA. Their children were abandoned in Sicily and Mena would never see them again. Once in the USA, the couple settled near Boston, where Mena worked in a textile factory and had more children. The factory building still exists and served as a location for the filming of various scenes.

The focus on a female migration story allows Rapicavoli to depict a double degradation and humiliation: on Ellis Island, where all immigrants were initially registered, they had to pass numerous tests to certify their physical and mental fitness. Probably also due to the language barrier, wooden puzzles were used for this purpose, which had to be assembled within a certain time frame. In addition to the degrading treatment and the subsequent precarious living and working conditions that awaited most immigrants, women were faced with insecurity, danger and violence in their own homes. To use the title and reference to Simone de Beauvoir: the immigrant woman was secondary, "The Other", both in relation to the nationality of

the majority of US society and in relation to the man as the absolute, perfect gender from which one's identity as inferior, secondary and flawed is seminally defined.

When we hear the spoken text in Maria Rapicavoli's video, "I was never allowed to speak. The voice you hear is not mine. The story I am telling is not either. But it could just as well be mine. It is made up of the memories of those who knew me and those who have heard of me.",

her intention here is to tell an individual story, but at the same time to reveal a general grievance, a social problem of universal import. The artist herself is distantly related to Mena, and her story has been passed down through her family. Rapicavoli has compiled the narrative from the memories of various (exclusively female) family members. She herself, also a migrant who has been domiciled in Anglo-America for almost twenty years, represents the link between the family branches in Sicily and North America. Mena's story is told in many voices, after many years in which individual memories have taken on a life of their own and have perhaps become independent. Nevertheless, they form a powerful counterpoint to the main male narrative; factually, but also structurally, because the idea of the one valid truth is called into question here, as is the supposedly fixed dominance of the "one" over the "other", the primary over the secondary.

Rapicavoli's intention in her sequence of images is to render palpable the fact that the degradation in the case of domestic violence is perpetuated in one's own home. She succeeds in this by using the quotidian furnishings from the kitchen, living room and bedroom, but making them appear like artificial props. The familiar becomes "uncanny", haunting, weird and eerie, and has thus a disturbing effect. This is a key to the complexity of the visual language in the video: we see real spaces, geographies that actually exist, ones we may even recognise and be able to situate. But we also see scenes that may be a visualisation of the protagonist's mental state. The bedstead jammed into in the winding hallway viscerally evokes tangible hopelessness and a sense of claustrophobia. Rapicavoli's achievement lies in the fact that, in addition to impressive images of barren volcanic landscapes and actual architecture in the USA, she also thinks about their suggestive power and uses it to develop images in which Mena's despair, fear and anxiety become palpable emotions for us as exhibition-goers.

For the installation in the space, Rapicavoli has continued this principle and shows the two-channel video on two projection surfaces that hang at an obtuse angle to one another in the middle of the space, allowing us to walk around and view it from different angles. Objects that can also be seen in the video - partly as props, partly as found objects - are scattered around

the room. Via large mirrors, the exhibition space and cinematic space become blurred.

In the small exhibition space, the artist continues this approach, but concentrates here on the representation of a mental arena. As if speculating on Mena's interior state: defamiliarised residues of memories of her Sicilian homeland are juxtaposed with familiar domestic furniture which is, however, wonky, precarious and unsafe.

In the adjacent black cabinet, Rapicavoli shows a series of eighteen smallformat photographs that she managed to take in the textile factory during the video shoot in Lawrence. Hidden on the roof of the abandoned factory building where Mena worked were a number of drawings and carvings in the wooden beams, some dating from the 1920s through to the 1940s, depicting mainly naked women. Here, too, we witness the predominant image of women through the male gaze. Men and women worked in the factory - but there was no sign of equality between colleagues in terms of either mutual respect or pay. A carefully crafted depiction of a woman seems to have been drawn by a female hand and was rounded off with the caption "What am I?" And meanwhile, the video in the main room ends with the sentence: "This story keeps on getting written."

This "story" of migration, oppression, misogyny and economic inequality still feels far too familiar to us today, a century later. The video's reference to the catastrophic Spanish flu outbreak after the First World War even allows us to draw parallels to our current pandemic, in the wake of which we all too clearly see history repeating itself. The artist's approach of generalising an individual fate and rendering it palpable (instead of merely intellectually comprehensible), and thus recognising its cause as something eminently structural, can be a beginning for a further sensitisation and call to arms for us now to tell those stories that can ultimately challenge the dominant narrative, the absolute.



Installation view
"main room: long term thoughts"
Westfälischer Kunstverein, 2021

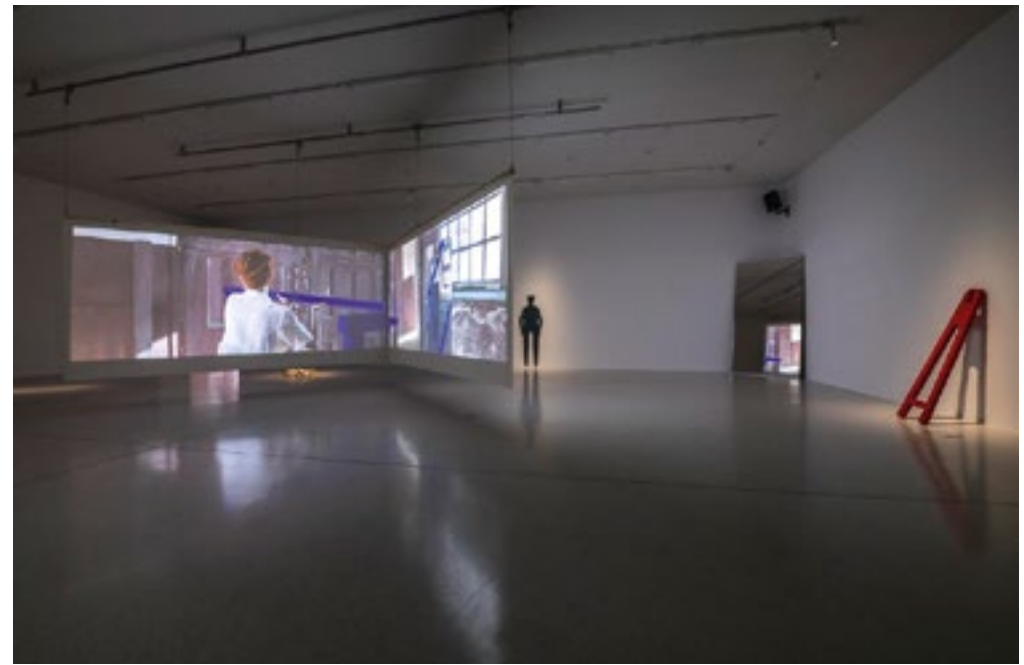


Installation view
"main room: long term thoughts"
Westfälischer Kunstverein, 2021



Installation view
"main room: long term thoughts"
Westfälischer Kunstverein, 2021

Installation view
"main room: long term thoughts"
Westfälischer Kunstverein, 2021



Installation view
“main room: long term thoughts”
Westfälischer Kunstverein, 2021

Installation view
“main room: long term thoughts”
Westfälischer Kunstverein, 2021



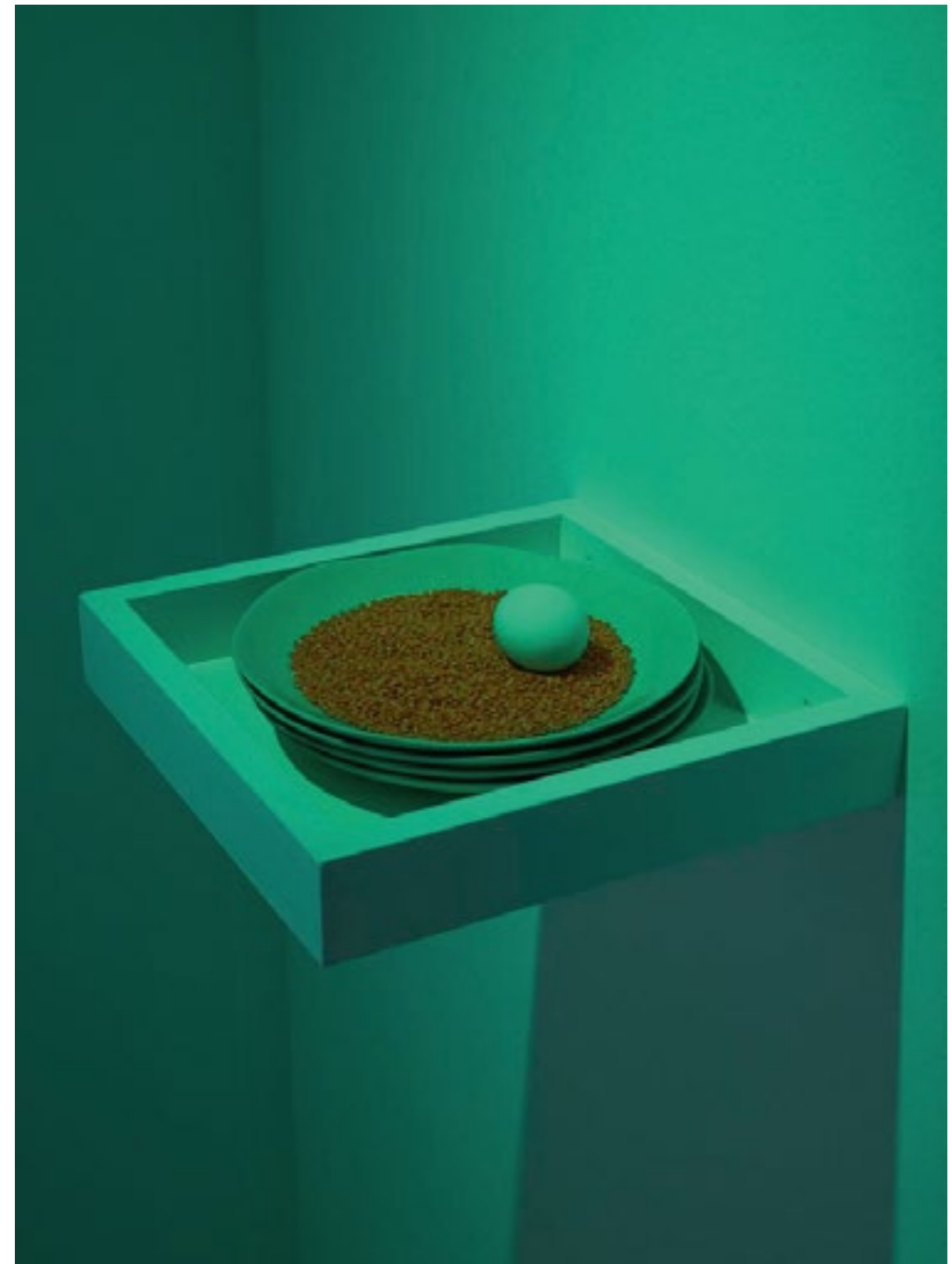
Installation view
"main room: long term thoughts"
Westfälischer Kunstverein, 2021



Installation view
"storage room"
Westfälischer Kunstverein, 2021



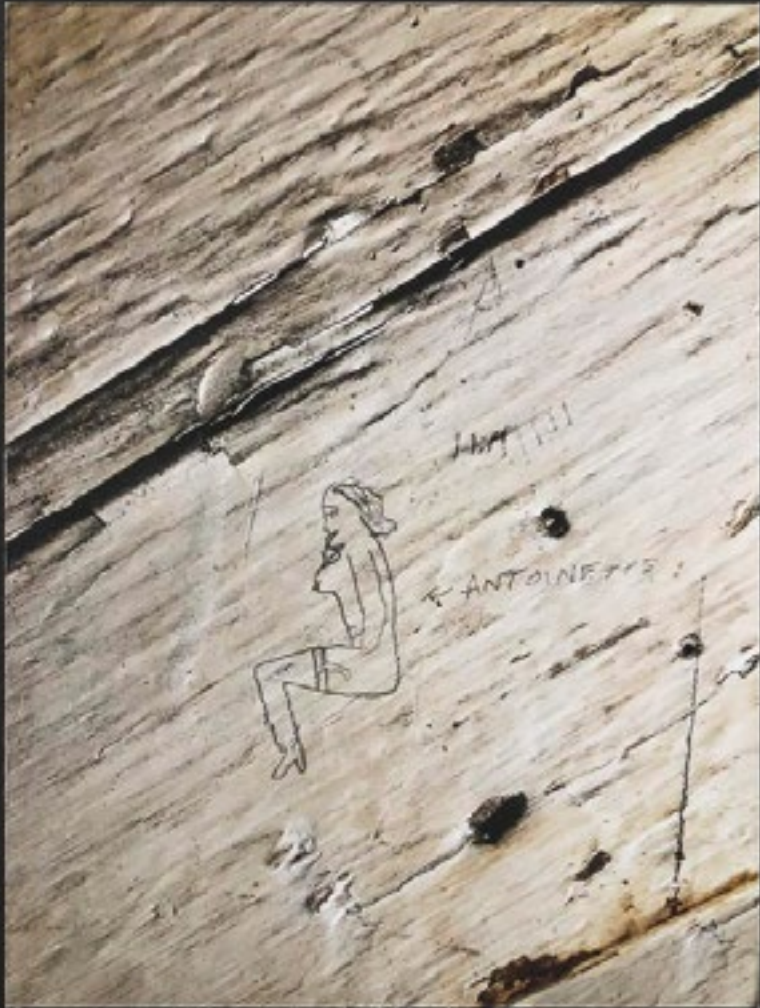
Installation view
"storage room"
Westfälischer Kunstverein, 2021



Installation view
"storage room"
Westfälischer Kunstverein, 2021



Installation view
"back room"
Westfälischer Kunstverein, 2021



Installation view
"back room"
Westfälischer Kunstverein, 2021



Installation view
"back room"
Westfälischer Kunstverein, 2021

PUBLIC PROGRAMME

OPENING DAY/ SOFT OPENING

- Saturday, 8 May 2021 from 11 am till 7 pm

GUIDED TOURS WITH DIRECTOR

KRISTINA SCEPANSKI:

- Tuesday, 1 June 2021 at 6 pm
- Friday, 2 July 2021 at 5 pm

ONLINE ARTIST TALK

- Tuesday, 4 May 2021 at 6 pm
- Maria D. Rapicavoli speaks about her artistic practice as part of the lecture series *Münster Lectures* of the University of Fine Arts, Münster

PUBLICATION

At the end of the year, a comprehensive monograph will be published by Mousse in conjunction with *UB Art Galleries*, Buffalo, New York and the Shelley & Donald Rubin Foundation for *The 8th Floor*, New York, New York.

LIST OF WORKS

MAIN ROOM: LONG TERM THOUGHTS

- 01: The Other: A Familiar Story, 2020
2-channel-video installation (colour, sound)
20:30 min.
- 02: mirror 1, 2021
mirror glass on wooden plate,
200×100 cm
- 03: wooden door, 281×72 cm
- 04: mirror 2, 2021
mirror glass on wooden plate,
320×200 cm
- 05: long term thoughts, 2021
wood, screws,
20×70×100 cm
- 06: man, 2021
manikin, silhouette,
196×65 cm
- 07: mirror 3, 2021
mirror glass on wooden plate,
275×150 cm
- 08: compass, 2021
wood, paint,
178×6×45 cm

STORAGE ROOM

- 09: hideout, 2021
projected photography
- 10: meal, 2021
plate, various lentils,
egg,
Ø 23 cm

- 11: stool, 2021
wooden stool, white ball,
75×34 cm

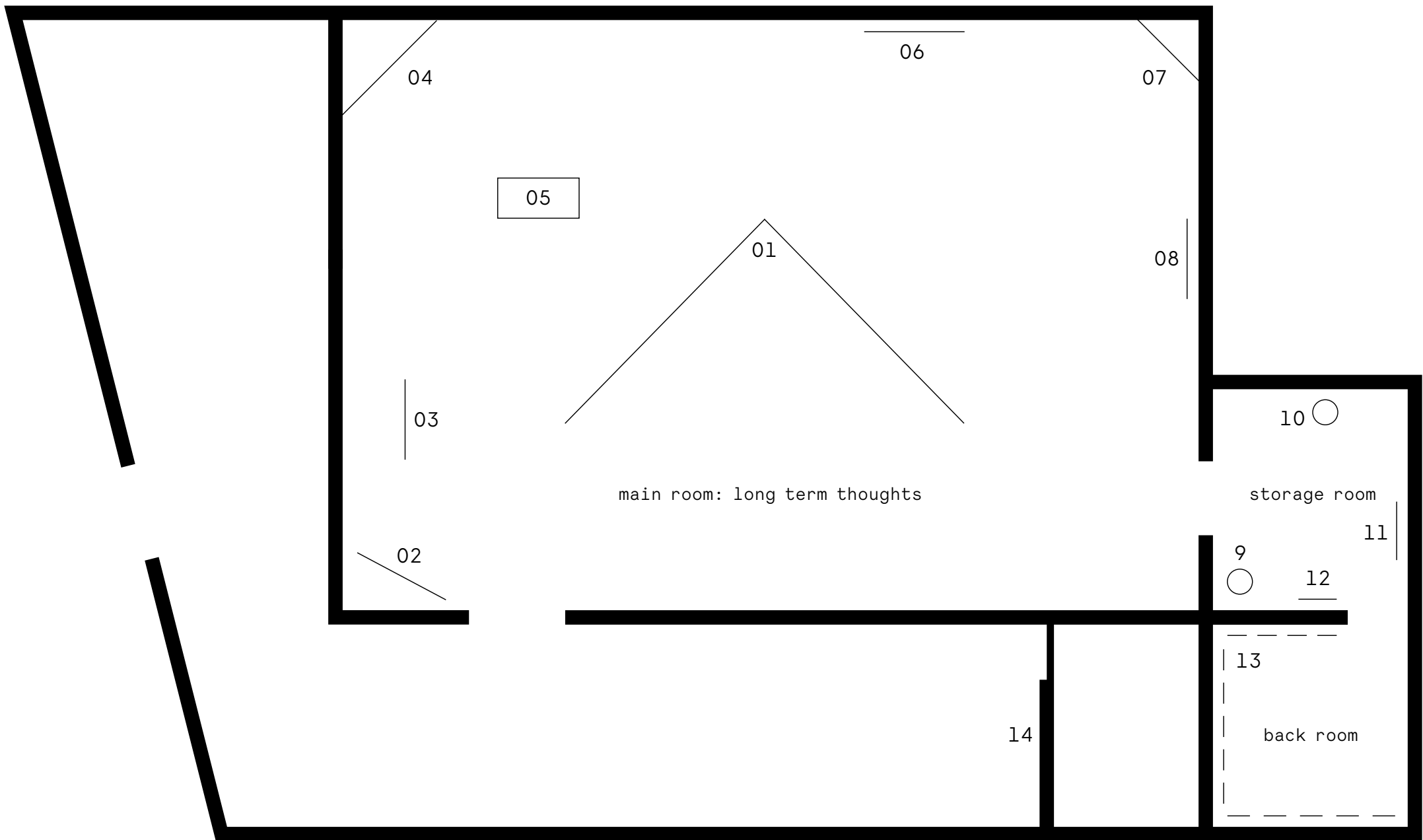
- 12: forgotten thought, 2021
photography printed on foil,
198×150 cm

BACK ROOM

- 13: what am I, 2021
series of 18 photographs
mounted on wooden panels,
20,3×15,2×0,5 cm

FOYER

- 14: Interview film with Maria D. Rapicavoli
9:57 min.
Videography: Philipp Wachowitz



04

06

07

05

01

08

03

10

main room: long term thoughts

storage room

02

11

9

12



13

14

back room