



Contemporary  
Arts Center

DO HO SUH  
**PASSAGE**



Do Ho Suh, *Bridging Home*, 2010.

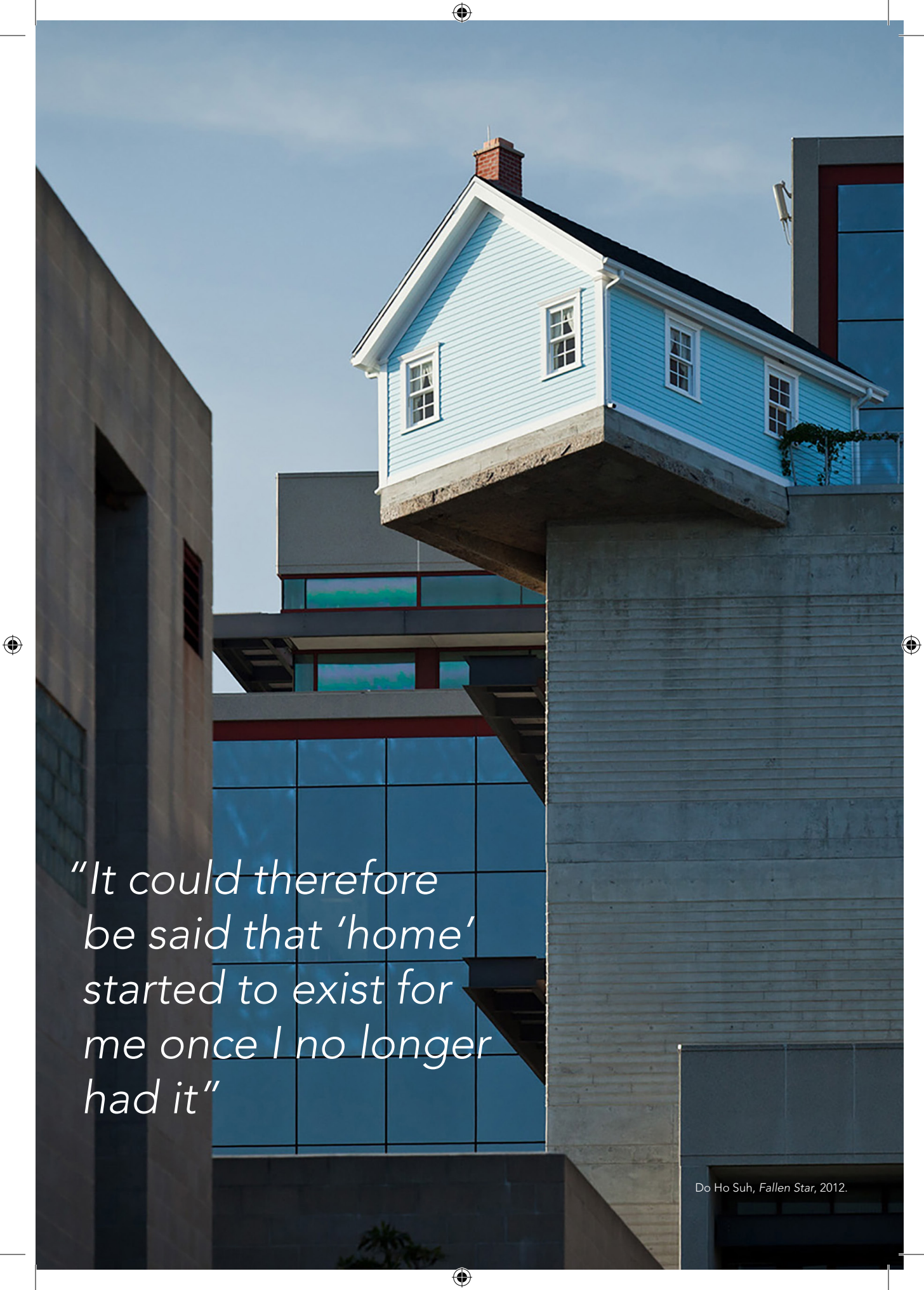
Passage is a landmark survey of celebrated Korean artist Do Ho Suh's work as it relates to building, being, and the ever-present, but evolving relationship between the two. Suh was born in Seoul, South Korea in 1962 and moved to the U.S. in 1991 to attend school. He later relocated to Berlin and London and continually travels the globe as life and art intertwine. Every structure he has inhabited throughout that time serves as inspiration for meditations on the meanings of home, place and migration. Each abode becomes manifest in an ongoing series of life-size fabric recreations that float gently, but vividly in space – hovering like architectures of the mind. Alongside life-size rubbings, works on paper, immaculate videos and multimedia models, Suh fashions a uniquely immersive exchange where our movement through his structures reflects a notion of home that is unfixed, in continual flux.

Much has been written about this pursuit of home in his work, which is clearly a fundamental, if now well-traveled course. Discussions about his memories of Korea have spanned as many pages as he has cities, leading to a state of what I would argue are diminishing discursive returns. For while Suh is an artist that is continually in motion – geographically and conceptually – the interpretation of his work grows increasingly static with now tired platitudes about nostalgia and lyrical longing. The consistency of his aesthetic language and presiding interests are all the more double-edged in this light, circumscribing the transgressive capacity of an artist celebrated around the world for colorful, airy delights that seduce the eye and seemingly invite our presence. For his part Suh assures us that he is not homesick


– eschewing sentiment and ostensible paradox to affirm that,

*Leaving Korea to go to the U.S. was the most difficult, and yet the most important experience in my life. The experience of leaving home is what made me think and become aware for the first time of the notion of home as such. It could therefore be said that 'home' started to exist for me once I no longer had it.*

For a large portion of its history Korea has faced decidedly inward, employing mono-cultural and isolationist policies that earned it the title of "Hermit Kingdom" at various times across the 19th and 20th centuries. Architecture professor Reinhold Martin confirms that "globalization is defined as much by exclusion as inclusion," with the added, and especially applicable insight that, "every act of withdrawal into the 'home' or the 'homeland' cannot help but connect back out into networks from which it seeks refuge." Suh's work and words attest to this perplexing, but no less pivotal exchange: actively subverting models of site specificity, essentialism, individuality and cultural authenticity to embrace "interdependency and the way things coexist." Public works such as *Bridging Home* (2010) and *Fallen Star* (2012) go to extraordinary lengths to replicate his past houses (inside and outside) before they crash land into a Liverpool alley and a university building in San Diego respectively. The ensuing symbiosis suggests new models of occupation, co-existence and interdependency.



*"It could therefore  
be said that 'home'  
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me once I no longer  
had it"*



*"I'm not in one place  
just in-between,  
definitely"*

– Do Ho Suh

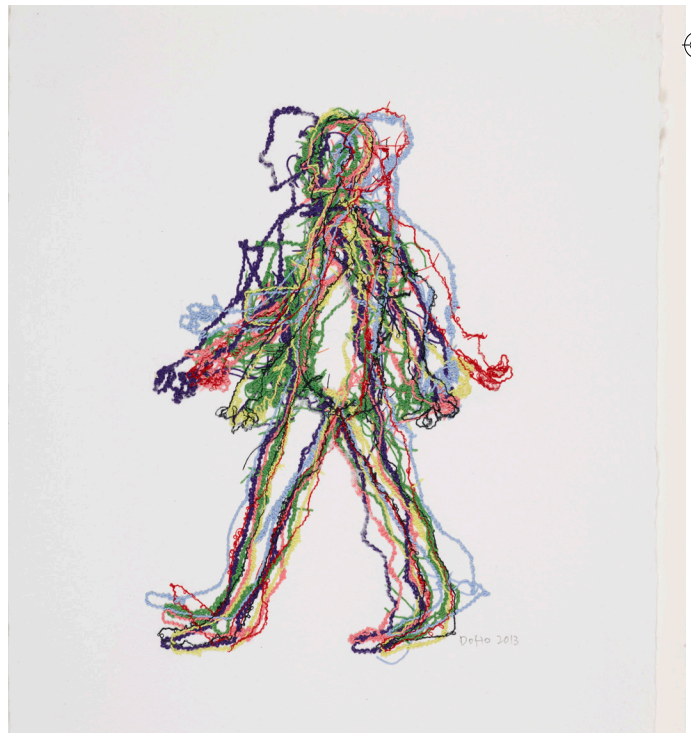
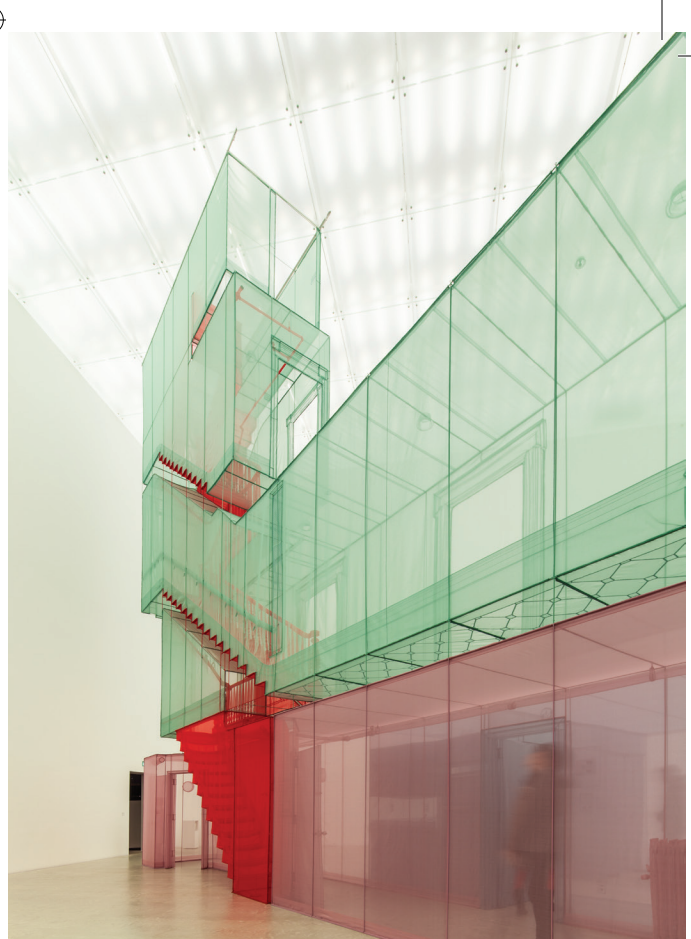
This oscillating, and ever more equivocal history of movement echoes through the work of Suh: speaking hauntingly in a lexicon of staircases, hallways, bridges, doors and gates. Assuming tentative form in translucent polyester, these non-sites are machines of/ for movement – *outside* places rather than *of* them – living as vehicles that are forever in-between. In this continuum the gate is especially compelling as both a divider and connector; “boundary and passage,” through which the outside is gently extended inside and inside outside. Such a gate is the archetype from which Suh’s 2005 work *Reflection* is borne, channeling his personal, political and cultural history into a reluctant monument that is both portrait and portal. The artist’s father, Suh Se-ok is a celebrated painter in Korea and his mother, Chung Min-za, is one of the founding members of an organization dedicated to preserving Korean heritage. Her vocation took new life in Se-ok’s auspicious decision to construct the family home based upon a house that has long straddled reality and fantasy. As Suh tells it:

*King Sunjo, the 23rd sovereign of the Yi Dynasty, wanted to experience the life of ordinary people. In 1828, he ordered a civilian-style house to be built in the secret garden of the palace complex. Only members of the royal family were allowed to see it. Ironically that building is considered one of the most beautiful examples of Korean traditional architecture. 150 years later, in the 1970s, my father modeled a building for our family after the royal home.*

Suh’s father built a reflection of this now celebrated reflection out of 200-year old timber salvaged during the demolition of a neighboring Yi Dynasty building. “In another twist of fate,” the artist illuminates, “the duplicate created by my father is now being used as a model for the redecoration of the original house.” In this dizzying hall of mirrors Suh’s *Reflection* floats as a memory multiple times removed – translating a structure he lived as a child into the conduit for collective imagination. Rendered in exquisite detail using diaphanous fabric, it is “ghostly and evanescent... surreal and disembodied” in the eyes of art historian Elizabeth Smith – lingering in a dream state that curator Clara Kim reiterates as “present but transparent, sculptural but formless, seemingly there but not there.” In this way *Reflection* arrests the eye while propelling the body in and through its lens, producing an incongruity where the desire to move inside pushes one to the outside.

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Once again blurring the lines between inside and outside, Suh made a rubbing from the same family home he gleaned the gate for *Reflection* by wrapping the façade in rice paper and exposing the material to the environment. For the 2012 Gwangju Biennale Suh was



Opposite Top: Do Ho Suh, *Reflection*, 2005-2011.

Top: Do Ho Suh, 348 West 22nd Street, New York, NY 10011, USA - Apartment A, *Corridors and Staircases*, 2011-2015.

Bottom: Do Ho Suh, *Myself*, 2013.



commissioned to rub three sites in a city that has “altered the center and periphery in repeated attempts to rectify a historical wound.” In so doing, in the government’s attempts to remedy the scars of the May 18th uprising via equally violent acts of erasure and redevelopment, Gwangju has been pushed through “the character of being wounded, victimized, traumatized, and marginalized.” It is here that Suh and his assistants rubbed the interior of an abandoned theatre space while blindfolded, silent and cloaked in white robes – adding a ritualistic dimension to a gesture that reflects both the media censorship of the time, as well as the return of that which lives in traces. Suh’s corresponding rubbing of a former college dormitory employed the four colors of the CMYK palette [cyan, magenta, yellow and key/black] to forge an equally poignant enigma – keeping each color from consolidating (as they typically do in the printing process) to render the replica forever incomplete. Taken as a whole, the *Rubbing/Loving Project* remains purposefully and willfully partial – obsessively mapping the scars of an absent body.

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The symbol for “human” in Korean (*hanja*) is a telling composite of the characters for “man” and “between” – anticipating Suh’s climactic declaration that “I felt like I had been granted a new body when I came to America.” The suggestion of this body moves through his works on paper as a mutable vessel with an enlarged cranium – always seen in profile – that Suh calls “a contemplation of myself.” These works slide between the empirical and the expressive, and range from simple ink sketches, watercolors and painterly studies to calligraphic musings and complex hybrids where thread is embedded into handmade paper pulp. With every added technique and iteration the parameters of portraiture are stretched to perforate the individual with a collectivism that spans the living, dead, and those not yet born. In Suh’s prescient words, “When you see a person, you don’t just see the person standing in front of you – you see their background, their family or ancestors, the invisible webs of relationships or information.”

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348 West 22nd Street, New York, NY 10011, USA – Apartment A, *Corridors and Staircases* (2011) is the centerpiece of *Passage* and one of his most towering and enigmatic works to date. It remembers in meticulous detail the passages Suh climbed to reach his Chelsea apartment, while simultaneously leaving the viewer in an Escher-like pursuit of orientation and equilibrium. The aura and emptiness of 348 West 22nd Street coaxes us to enter and fill the evanescent space but once “there,” we are immediately confronted with a haunting vacuity – an absence of both objects and inhabitants – that makes the exterior of the corridor (visible through the sheer fabric) all the more familiar. We arrive only to yearn for escape. Inside this ghost there





“I felt like I had been granted a new body when I came to America.”

is “ambivalence and longing” to return to a home that no longer can be lived, and the corresponding ecstasy of evaporating walls and porous place-making. The current *HUB project* (2015) comes closest to realizing this vision, butting together replicas of Suh’s former apartments in London and Berlin. As we walk in and through this compressed chronology we wear Suh’s former homes like a succession of garments, putting them on and taking them off in swift order, collapsing dimensions of time and space, distance and geography, through the act of passage. The experience is one of a transitional *spectrum* of being rather than a state, living as a moment in a sequence.

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The fruit of such flight is most vividly imagined in Suh’s video works, which vary in content from meditations on movement to more outlandish visions of post-national being. In *A Perfect Home: The Bridge Project* (2010-2012),” Suh accords plausibility to the fantastic feats of engineering that would be required to build a bridge capable of spanning the Pacific Ocean and whose midpoint provides grounding for a single home.” The artist’s employment of bridge engineers and extreme terrain gear designers to conceive this plan elevates such efforts beyond sheer whimsy, leading to a visionary constellation of tech-

nic drawings and a multi-channel animation. These videos are utopian in every sense of the word: not only for their idealism and ambition, but for their fidelity to the Greek origins of this word, which literally translates to “no place.” The sites and systems that Suh presents in video have no physical existence and we cannot enter their virtual suggestions (as we can his fabric pieces), allowing them to live vividly without place. They, “emphatically are not static things closed in upon themselves,” coming full circle to reinforce his physical works and undermine the singular definitions of home, site and self. Suh’s art begins in unmooring the fixity we attach to site, but his greater accomplishment comes in losing himself and opening our notions of individuality to the collective.

– SM 2016

excerpts from forthcoming catalog  
essay “Man Between”

Opposite Top: Do Ho Suh, *Rubbing/Loving Project: Company Housing of Gwangju Theatre*, 2012.

Opposite Bottom: Do Ho Suh, *Rubbing/Loving Project: Gwangju Catholic Lifelong Institute*, 2012.

Above: Do Ho Suh, *Blueprint*, 2013.

## CONTEMPORARY ARTS CENTER

**DO HO SUH**

**PASSAGE**

February 12 - September 11, 2016

Curated by Steven Matijcio

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**Do Ho Suh** (South Korean, born 1962 in Seoul) splits his time between New York City, London, and Seoul. He received a BFA in painting from the Rhode Island School of Design and an MFA in sculpture from Yale University. His recent solo exhibitions and projects include *Home within Home within Home within Home within Home*, the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul (2013–2014); *Do Ho Suh: Perfect Home*, 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa (2012–2013); *In Between*, Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art (2012); *Fallen Star*, the Stuart Collection, University of California, San Diego (2012); *Home within Home*, the Leeum, Samsung Museum of Art, Seoul (2012); and *Wielandstr. 18, 12159*, DAAD Galerie, Berlin (2011). In 2001, Suh represented Korea at the *Venice Biennale* and subsequently participated in the 2010 *Venice Architecture Biennale*, the 2010 *Liverpool Biennial*, and the 2012 *Gwangju Biennale*. Suh was named *WSJ. Magazine's* 2013 Art Innovator of the Year.

The artist's work is included in numerous museum collections worldwide, including the Museum of Modern Art, New York City; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York City; the Guggenheim Museum, New York City; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Tate Modern, London; the Leeum, Samsung Museum of Art, Seoul; the Artsonje Center, Seoul; the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo; the Mori Art Museum, Tokyo; and 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa, among many others.

Cover: Do Ho Suh, *Wielandstr. 18, 12159 Berlin, Germany - 3 Corridors* [detail], 2011.

All images courtesy of the Artist and Lehmann Maupin, New York & Hong Kong, unless otherwise noted.

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