

**JULIE
MEHRETU
ENSEMBLE**

**ACTIVITY
BOOK**

**with Nairy Baghramian / Huma Bhabha / Robin Coste Lewis /
Tacita Dean / David Hammons / Paul Pfeiffer / Jessica Rankin**

WHAT IS AN ABSTRACT WORK OF ART?

It is a work that does not represent anything recognizable, at least at first glance.

For centuries, artists painted as realistically as possible and then, little by little, they started exploring other ways.

They lost the need and desire to show the world as we see it, to go further: using signs, objects, gestures, and colors, artists began to propose a new perspective on reality.

With this activity book, we want to take you into the secret language of Julie Mehretu, to discover her codes and observe her works together: you will understand how they are created and what they refer to.

* These asterisks indicate the directions to follow for each activity

Graphic design and illustrations
Camilla Pintonato

For more information contact
education@palazzograssi.it

2 3 WHO IS JULIE MEHRETU?

Julie Mehretu is an American artist, born in 1970 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. She moved with her family to Michigan when Ethiopia became a dictatorship. This move from Africa to America marked a very important transition in her life and her career as an artist.

After spending time in Michigan and Zimbabwe, it was in Senegal while at university that she finally realised that she wanted to be an artist. Today, Julie Mehretu lives and works in New York. She also worked in Berlin: moving is part of her journey.

Julie Mehretu works from images of real places or events on which she superimposes signs, colored shapes, and traces with rigorous discipline. Her works therefore tell facts, landscapes, movements, and people.

“Being an artist means inventing a language and finding inspiration from many different sources,” says Julie Mehretu.

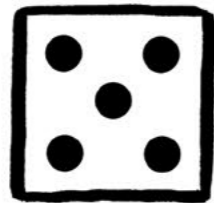
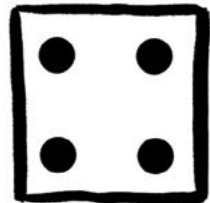
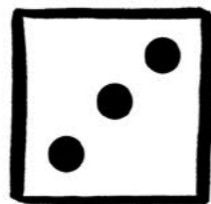
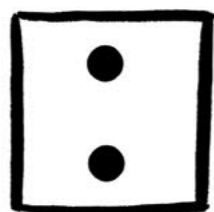
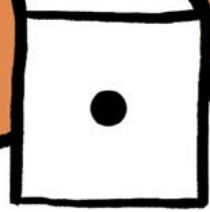
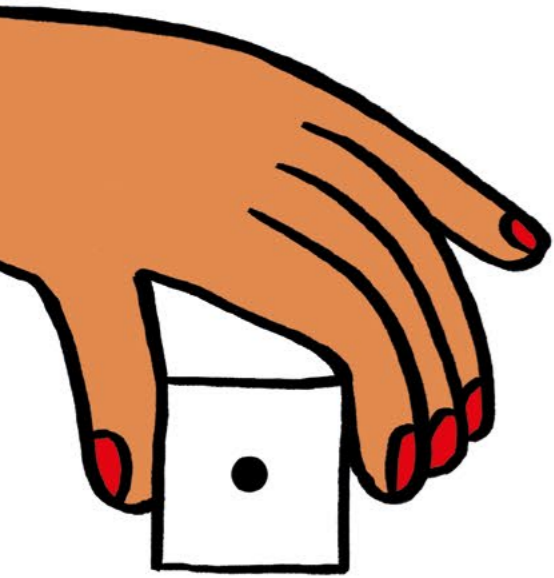


IDEAS AND RULES

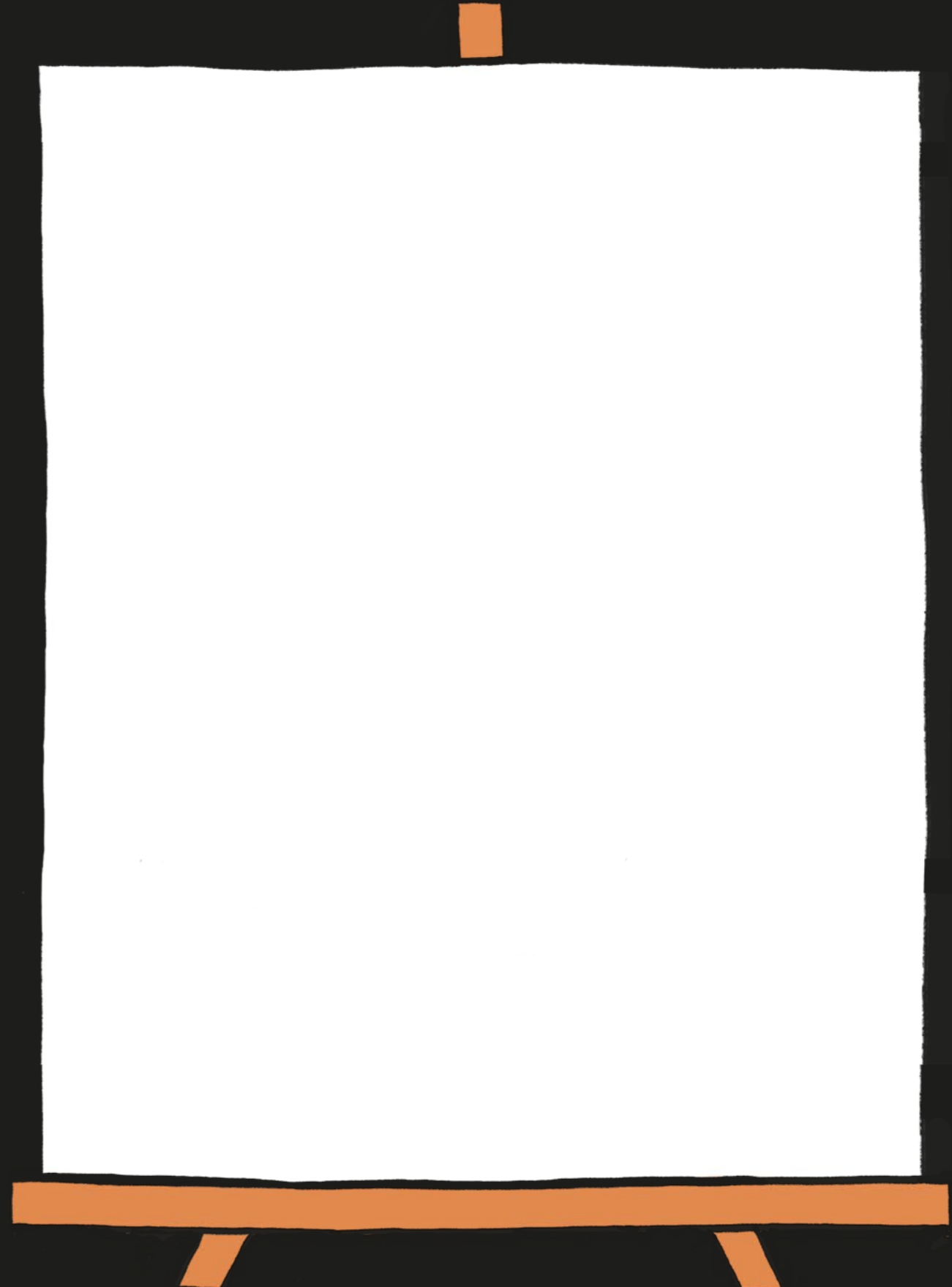
4

What does it mean to give yourself rules? Each sign represents a different "choice". It can be dictated by chance, by an emotion, by a number. It is up to the artist to decide why one sign is made in a certain way and to follow that rule in tracing all the others as well, to achieve a consistent result.

- * Roll the dice and read the number that comes out
- * Trace the sign that corresponds to the number
- * Continue rolling the dice and drawing until the composition seems complete



5



DRAWINGS WITH FEET

6

Warning! This page is very important! You will need to return here to record your steps and mark your movements within the space of Palazzo Grassi. You will wander and observe the works of art, walk around, and stand still: pay attention to what you do and follow the instructions.

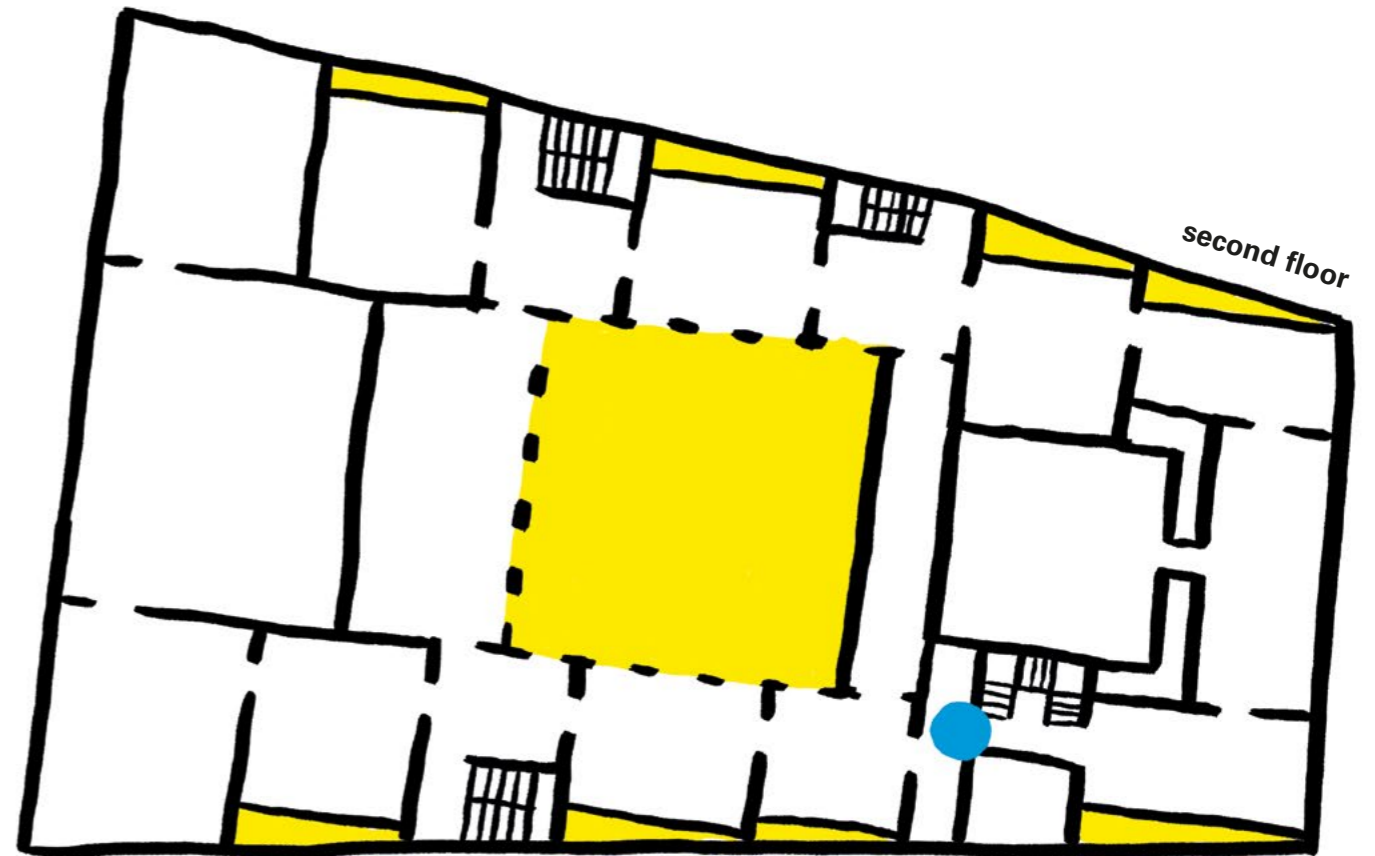
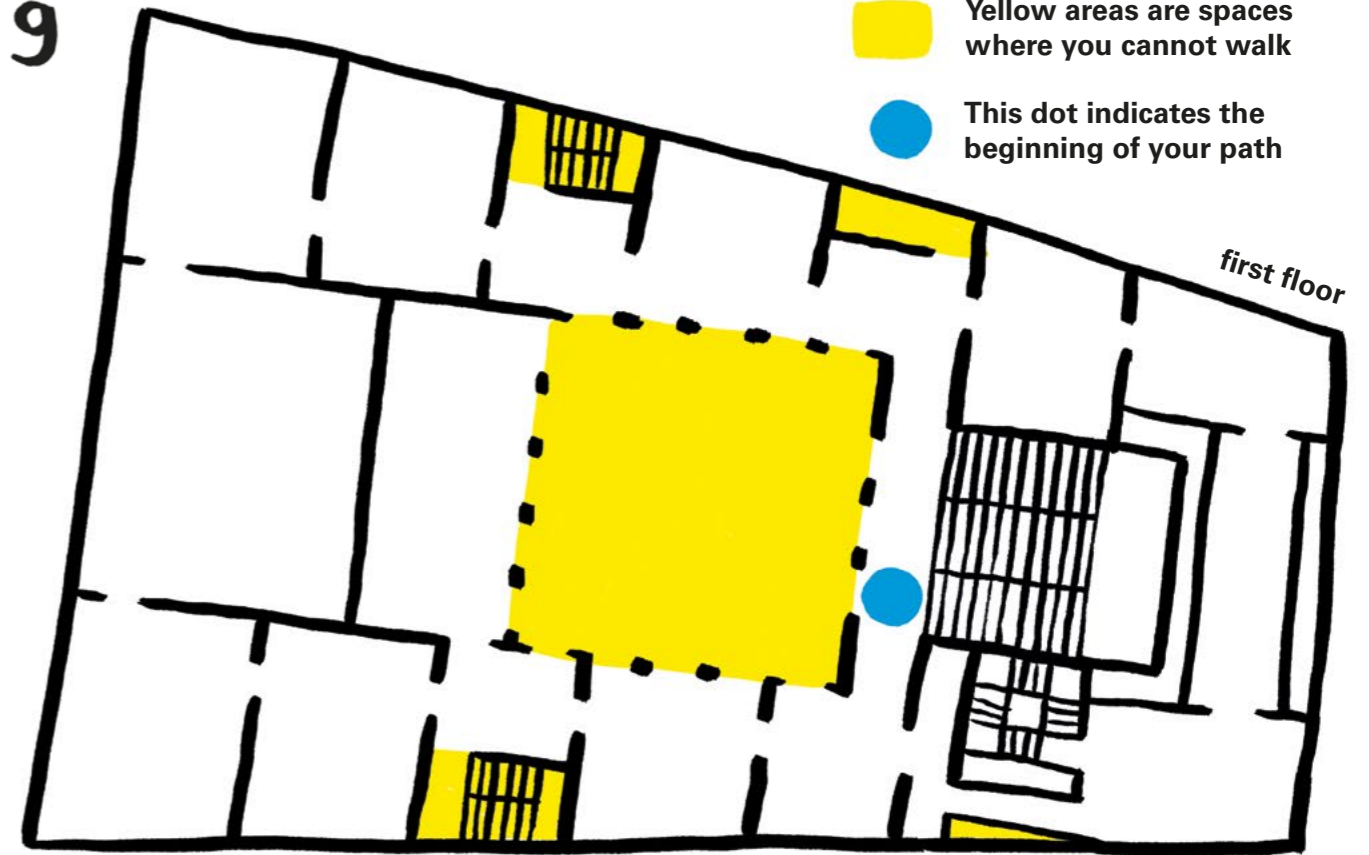


- * Use the red marker to draw your movements from one room to another
- * Use the blue marker to draw the places where you stood still
- * You can use the transparent page for drawing

Many of Julie Mehretu's works arise from diagrams, shining light on human migration and movements around the world or trade routes over the centuries. These invisible traces, once drawn, allow us to understand many things about history and life: the artist uses them as a basic structure, on which she adds other layers and elements.

9

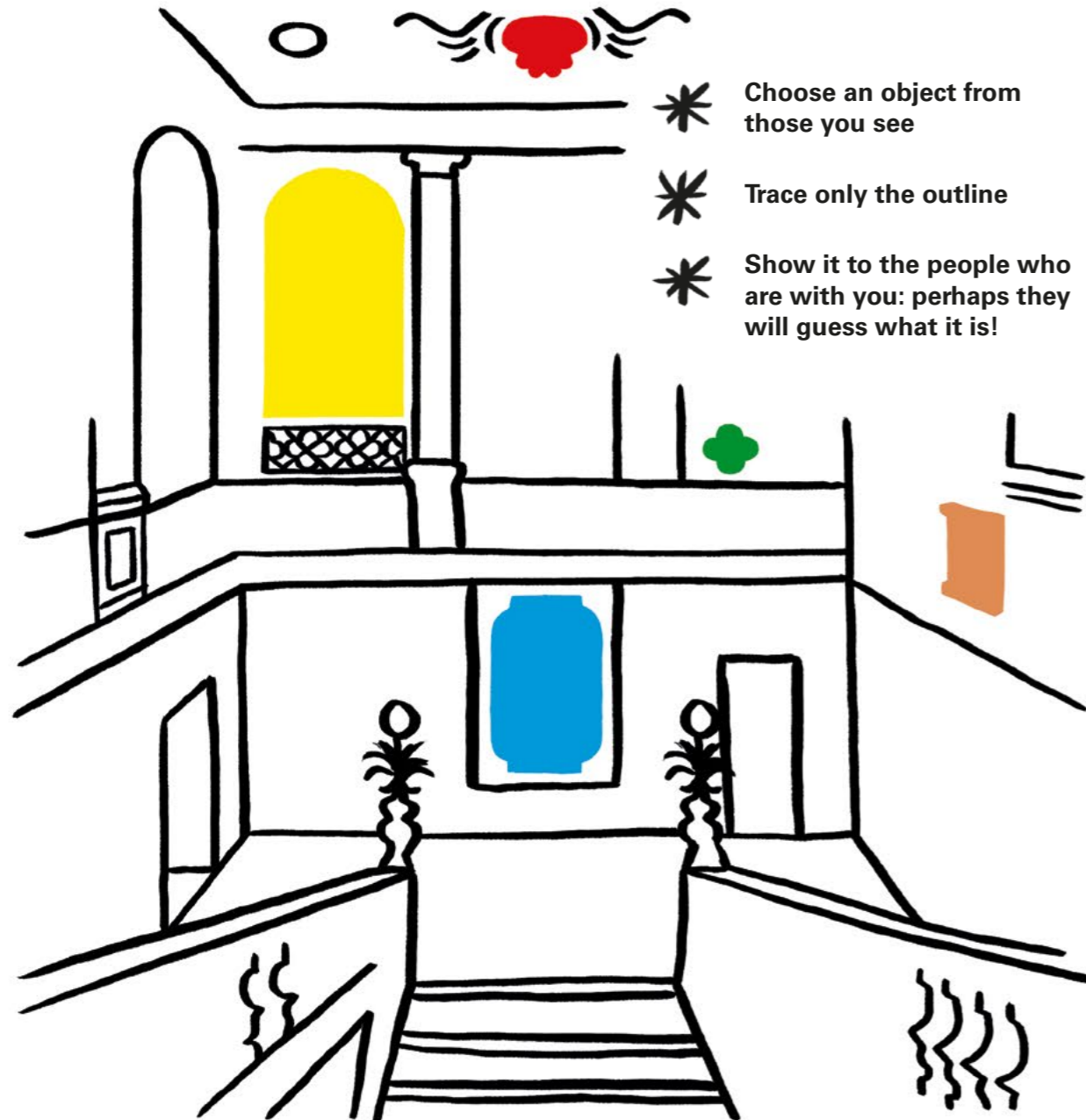
- Yellow areas are spaces where you cannot walk
- This dot indicates the beginning of your path



GUESS GUESS

10

You could probably recognize the shape of your favorite object from miles away. But could you do the same with an architectural detail in Palazzo Grassi? If you look around, there are columns, windows, artworks, and very uniquely shaped decorations: you don't see those every day!



11

Mural in the lobby of Goldman Sachs, NYC, 2009
Ink and Acrylic on Canvas 6,7 x 24,4 m Collection
Goldman Sachs, Inc. ©Julie Mehretu

In *Mural* (2010), a painted mural made in a building in New York City, Julie Mehretu reproduces the shape of turnstiles in the large atrium: seen from above, they resemble butterflies. The artist makes a synthesis of the objects around her, transforming them into abstract shapes. Find out more in the film *Julie Mehretu: Palimpsest*, (2021-2023) in the cinema located in the mezzanine.

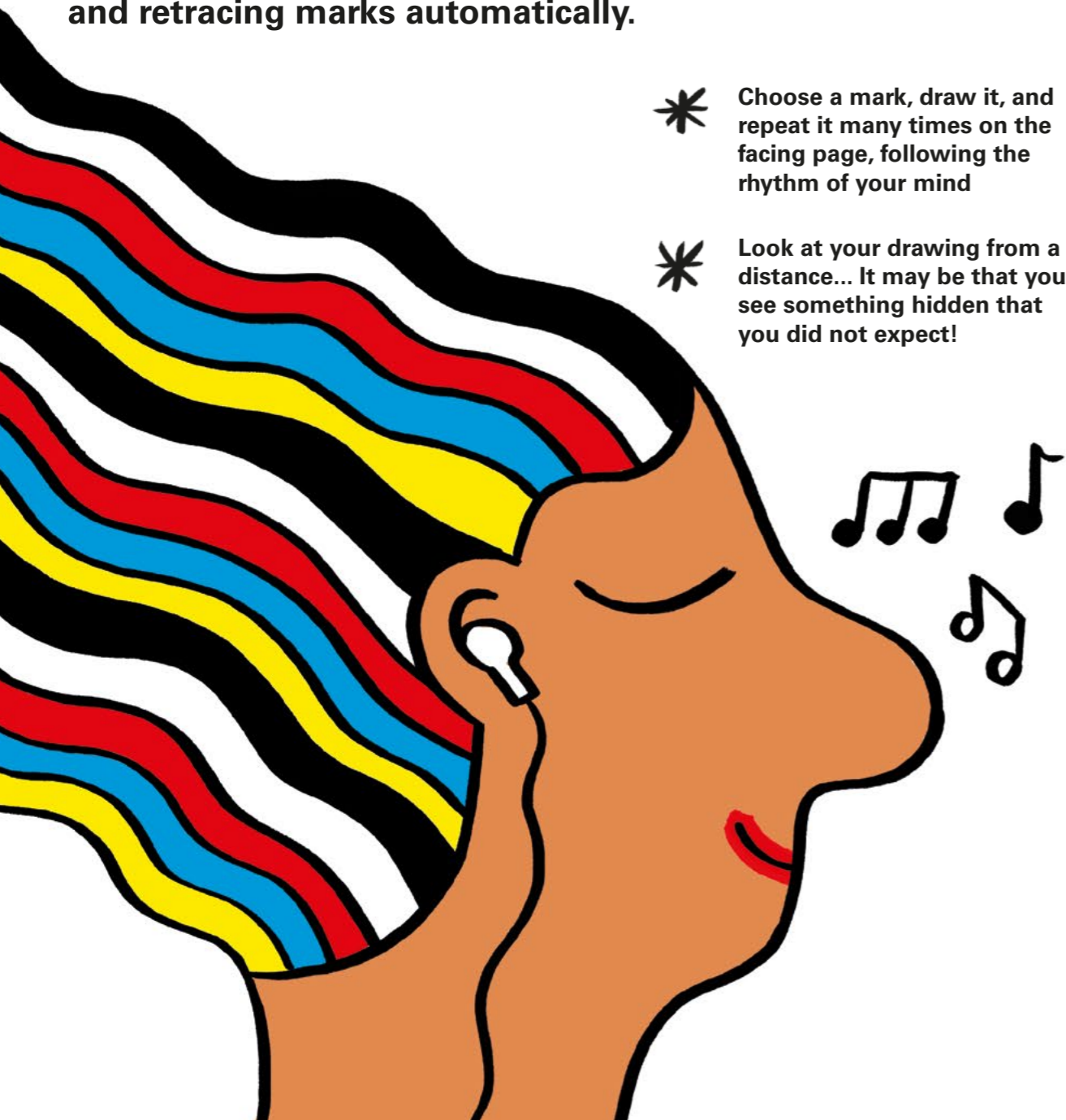


REPETITION WILL SURPRISE YOU

12

Drawing can also express thoughts and emotions and not just represent what one sees. Through lines, colors, and different-sized strokes, states of mind take shape: artists often train their hands by tracing and retracing marks automatically.

- * Choose a mark, draw it, and repeat it many times on the facing page, following the rhythm of your mind
- * Look at your drawing from a distance... It may be that you see something hidden that you did not expect!



13



Inkcity (circle), 1996
Ink on paper 35,5 x 26 cm
©Julie Mehretu

Julie Mehretu came to drawing while studying art. She learned abstract drawing by repeating the same single movement many, many times on the paper. The result is an abstract composition of graphic signs that, if observed all together, resemble constellations. Julie Mehretu tells us about it again in the video *Julie Mehretu. Palimpsest 2020*.



OUT OF FOCUS

14

As we zoom in more and more on a digital image, it becomes grainy and it is no longer possible to see it clearly. Instead, the tiny squares composing a digital image, the pixels, become visible.



15



Hineni (E. 3:4), Ink and acrylic on canvas 243,8 x 304,8 cm Don de la George Economou Collection, 2019. Centre Pompidou, Paris, Musée national d'art moderne - Centre de création industrielle © Julie Mehretu. Courtesy the artist, White Cube, London and Marian Goodman Gallery, New York. Photo: Tom Powel Imaging

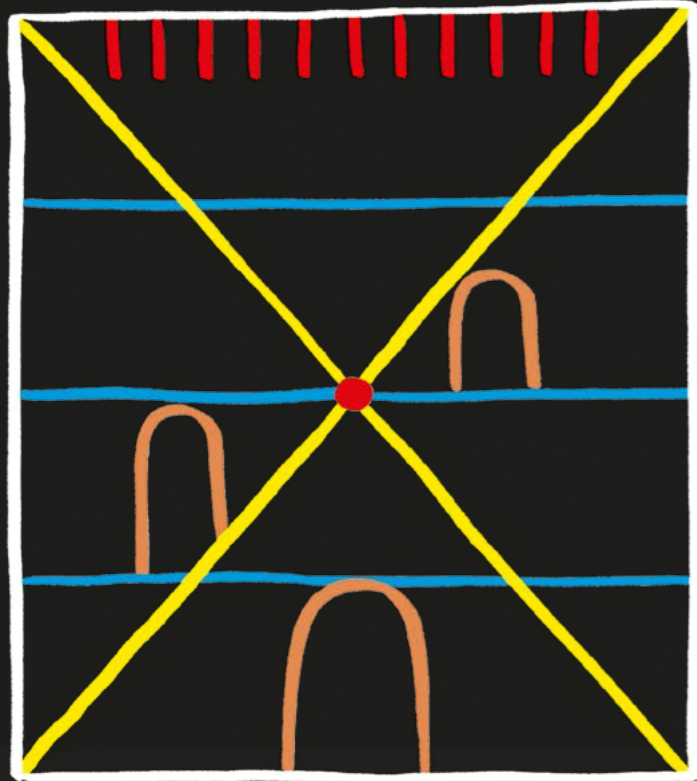
Sometimes Julie Mehretu's works start from photographs she finds in magazines or sees on the news: she chooses images that reference events in history and completely blurs them digitally. At this point, she superimposes other marks and layers. We cannot recognize which image forms the background of the work; we only see blobs of color. However, the artist assures us that the image is there, and that is what matters.



WHAT'S BELOW?

16

This photo reproduces the facade of Palazzo Grassi: it is the historic Venetian palace where you find yourself now. It overlooks the Grand Canal; you can observe it in its entirety only by standing on the other bank.



- * Sit down and take your time: choose a small piece of the photograph, even a very small one
- * Trace all the elements of your detail on the transparent sheet: leave nothing out!

As you saw with the maps and diagrams, Julie Mehretu works in overlapping layers. Architecture is often the starting point of her works. The artist projects buildings facades and meaningful places, onto large canvases, and then she traces all the architectural elements. This first layer is the basis for the subsequent ones: you can see this if you look at the paintings very carefully.



Fragment, 2009 Ink and acrylic on canvas 303,5 x 415,8 cm Collection particulière © Julie Mehretu. Courtesy the artist and Maïan Goodman Gallery. Photo : Matthias Schormann

© Palazzo Grassi Spa. Photo Matteo De Fina

19



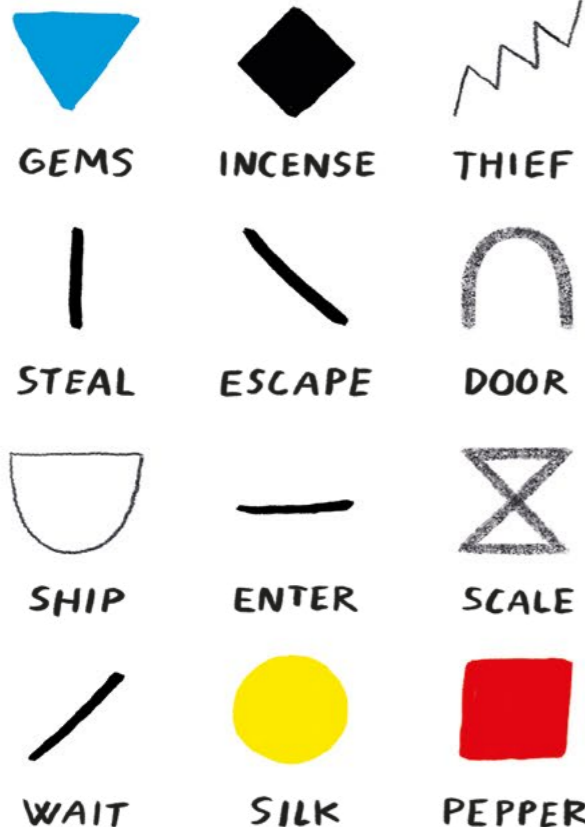
DRAW ME A STORY

20

21

The most difficult images to decipher are often those that stimulate imagination more than others. They prompt us to figure the stories behind their mysterious signs and invent new ones.

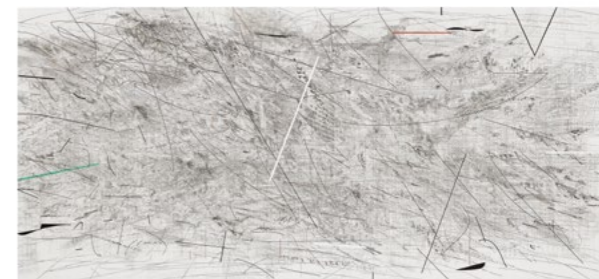
20 CARGO SHIPS ENTER ST.MARK BASIN IN VENICE.
EACH HAS A PRECIOUS CARGO ARRIVING FROM THE EAST:
SPICES, FABRICS, AND STONES. AT PUNTA DELLA DOGANA,
A LARGE SCALE WAITS FOR THE CARGOES TO BE WEIGHED:
THERE ARE 10 CHESTS OF SILK, 2 CHESTS OF PEPPER,
1 OF INCENSE, AND 20 CHESTS OF GEMS.
4 THIEVES STEAL 7 CHESTS AND ESCAPE THROUGH
A SIDE DOOR OF PUNTA DELLA DOGANA.



- * Use the signs and shapes featured here to draw the story
- * Repeat the shapes as many times as they are mentioned in the text
- * Choose the most suitable position and size to draw the various elements

Invisible Line (collective), 2010-2011 Ink and acrylic on canvas 347,3 x 758,8 cm Pinault Collection © Julie Mehretu. Courtesy the artist, Marian Goodman Gallery, New York and White Cube, London. Photo: White Cube, Ben Westoby

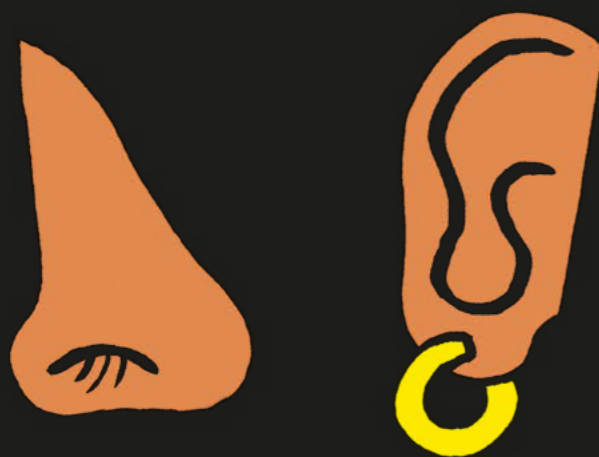
Mehretu's canvases are maps to decipher: each layer recalls an event, an action, or a gesture. Sometimes it is the shapes and colors that tell something. The story you represented here through marks is an example of how you can go about creating an image.



ENSEMBLE

22 23

Ensemble means together: it is the term used for a group of musicians playing together. Julie Mehretu chose it as the title for this exhibition. It brings together works by several artists, including people she selected for affinity and friendship.



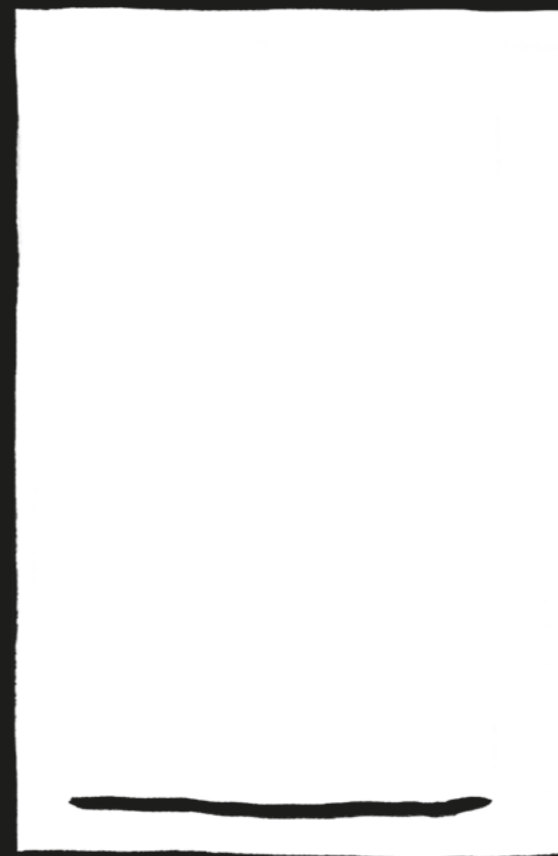
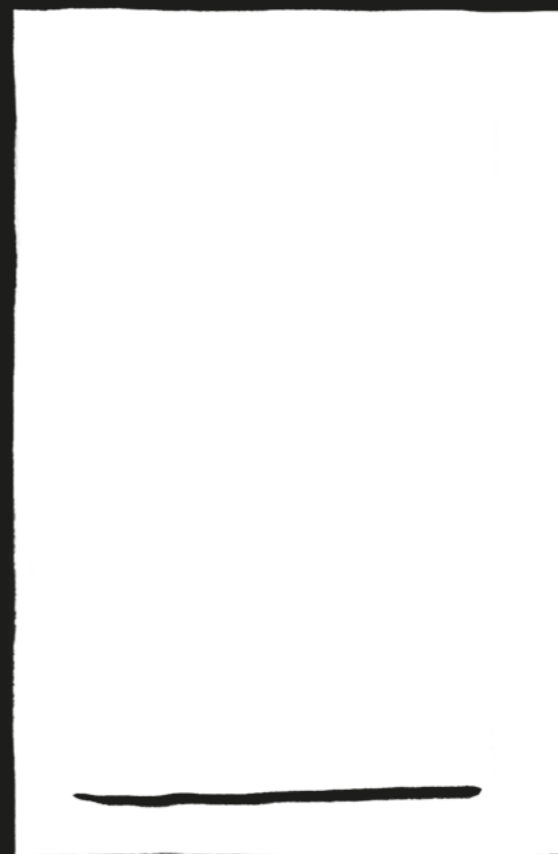
* Try to think of 4 people with whom you have affinities in taste, in what you like to watch and listen to, or in how happy you are together

* For each individual you want to include in your *ensemble*, draw their physical characteristics

* Write the name of each individual under their designated drawing



Julie Mehretu is not a solitary artist; on the contrary, she maintains a vast network of relationships with other artist friends. Together they inspire each other. The exhibition brings out precisely the ties that unite Julie Mehretu with Nairy Baghramian, Huma Bhabha, Robin Coste Lewis, Tacita Dean, David Hammons, Paul Pfeiffer, and Jessica Rankin.



THE TOOLS

The case you received was made in collaboration with Le Malefatte Venezia and is the result of the work of the Recycled PVC Workshop of the Rio Terà dei Pensieri social cooperative, which employs inmates of the men's prison in Venice.

Use it as you please, then – when you are done – put everything back in the case and remember to return it to the bookshop: somebody else will need it.

