Luna Coesens

hybrids

The Wrong House: The Architecture of Alfred Hitchcock

Steven Jacobs

010

one minute site

week #1

The first week I watched the film Vertigo by the director Alfred Hitchcock. I was already briefly familiar with his best-known works like Psycho, North by Northwest, Rear Window, etc.

In each of his films, you notice the collaboration of the architecture of the set and the cadence of the picture.

For me, the film is a great example of how the set is its own character in the film.

Playing with colour, light and depth creates an architecture that captures and influences the story.

So in my first one-minute site, I experimented with how the personnages can detach themselves from these spaces and occupy them in a different way.

By placing the characters in different ways in the image and thus the space, I reinforced their role in the story. Deconstucting the image allowed me to sense, understand and occupy the space itself as a viewer.

I found the use of mirrors in these sets very interesting because they had a lot of meaning for the characters in the story.

week #2

I now tried to focus on the space in which the story took place by leaving out one of the personas. By leaving this person out and leaving the other person in context, a kind of tension was created in the space, though still narrative. It did create more of a feeling with the space.
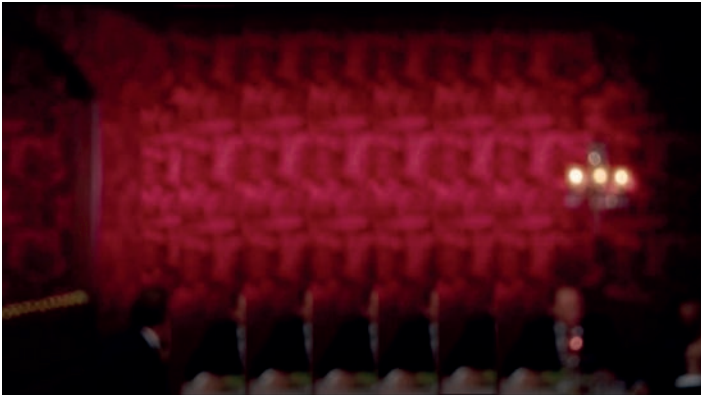
My eyes fell on the architectural elements that framed the image. I noticed how the spaces that support the person have a strength themselves. I understood the effect of Hitchcock's construction of an image, made up of foreground and background.

The partial removal of the actors in the images still made the story very palpable, though.
So how the camera enters this space is very intentionally worked out and proportioned.

one minute site

empty ambiance

ambiance
week #3

My research into Hitchcock's empty sets continued and so I removed the characters in each of these interior shots. I tried to do this as much as possible in moving images because I was interested in the movement of the camera through these spaces, how far into the set can be seen, the depth of the images. I took in the space and started imagining them myself. Because it is not a still image, in the images of the bedroom

I also saw the slight movements of the curtains moving across the walls and furniture as well as shadows across the relief of the room. What I found interesting was the green light flickering through the translucent curtains and drama-tised on the wall on the other side of the room being trans-ferred to certain elements of the room. In the red interior of the restaurant, the depth of the space was obscured by the busy pattern on the wallpaper.

By taking this space away from the personnages, this image became almost a collage of lines and planes. The depth of the space then did return when the shadow that remained did move across this wall.

one minute site

I composed the music fragment that plays by reducing the underlying orchestral instruments to the repetitive melody that keeps sounding under the dramatic strings that follow the tension of the story. In this way, I have also removed the character notes in the audio.

My one-minute site is therefore a spur for me to further explore what these spaces can mean on their own. How can they manifest and connect to each other in other ways? How can I play with depth, light and shadow?

the (matte) painting

So I wanted to use the matte painting concept in a way that matched my one-minute film by covering the foreground by painting with oil on a piece of canvas, and placing it over the frame of the film. By covering it, the background then reappeared. This then created a layering of a created shape set reduced to a flat surface by the camera, which I then tried to match with paint. What I am left with is a surface that has lost some of the dynamism it had in my one-minute site.

I read Steven Jacob's book 'The Wrong house', an architectural analysis of Hitchock's film sets. The director barely filmed outside the studio, to get a view through a window he always used matte paintings where perspective is an illusion.

This is a painted representation of a landscape, scenery or distant location that allows filmmakers to create the illusion of an environment that is not present at the filming location. Sometimes they painted on a sheet of glass placed in front of the camera with part of the glass left unpainted, this made us continue to see the live action through the glass. This is what Hitchcock used when recreating the bird scenes in "The Birds" (1963).
A matte painting can also create a scene with certain live action elements over it. In this case, the entire frame of the camera would be painted, with live elements (often 3 or 4 birds) placed over it to convince the viewer that it is a real location
Although modern film is now mostly working with green screen and digital worlds, for me the painted is always the most interesting. This therefore stems from my own interest in painting.
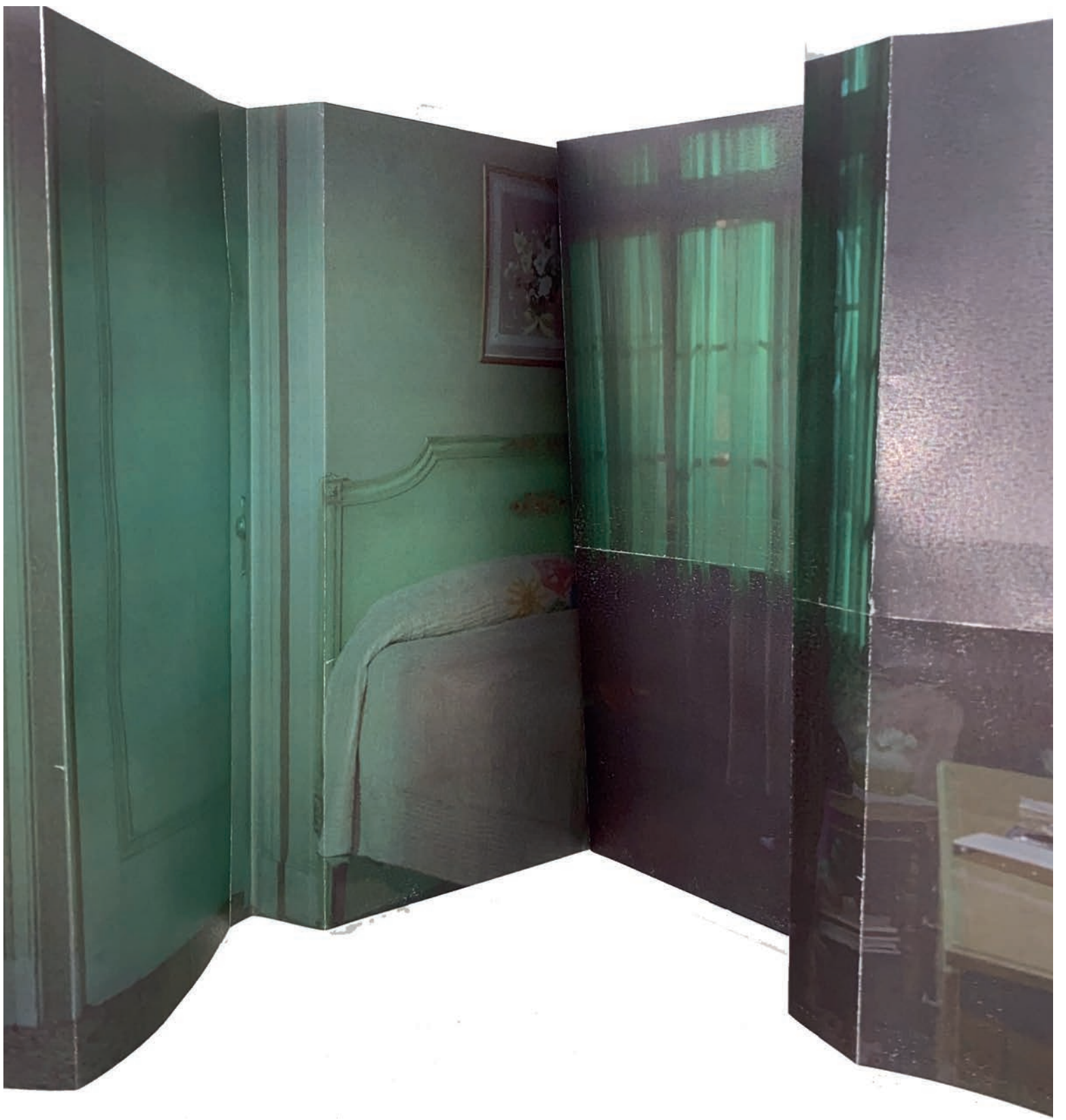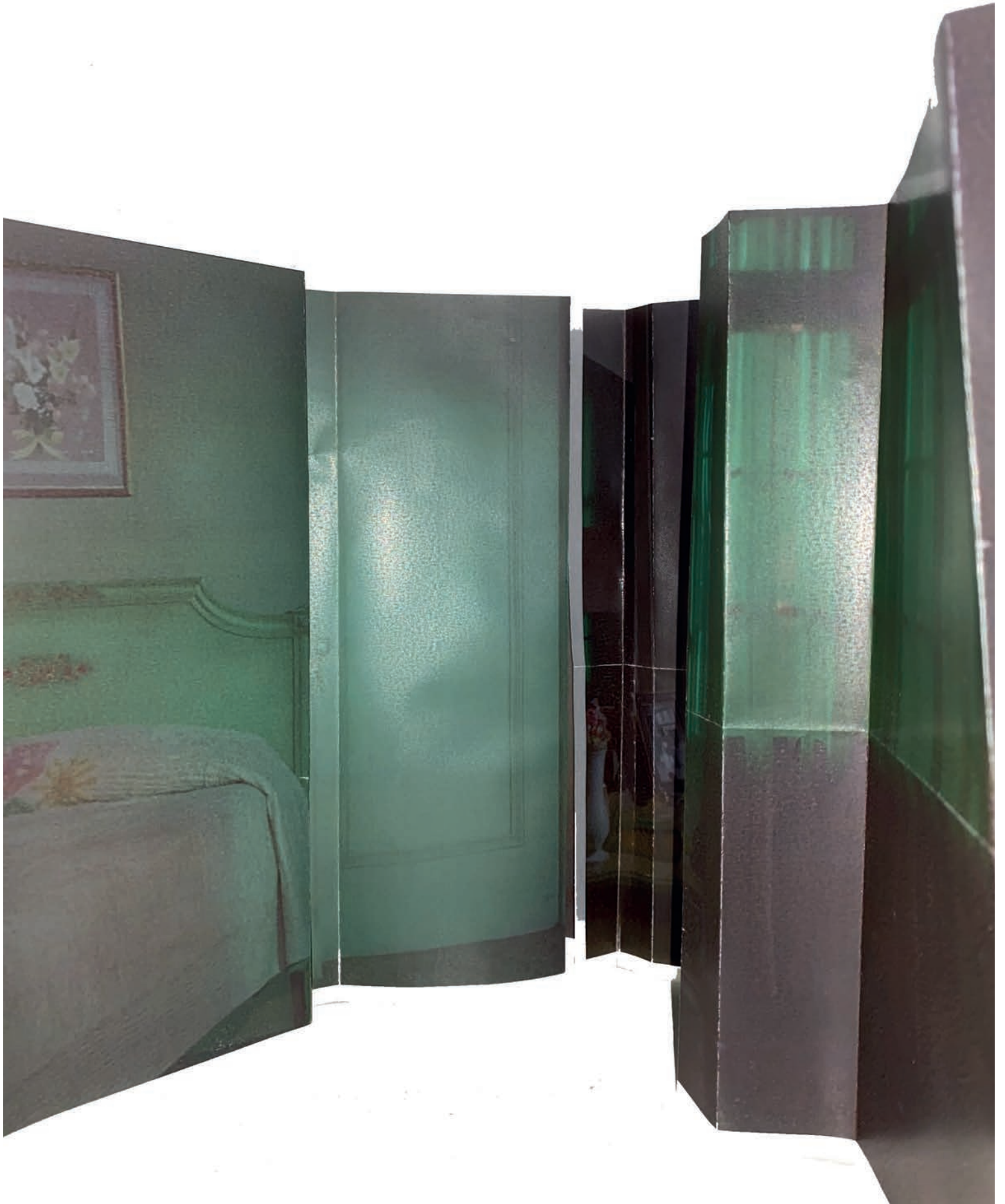
folding into space

folding into space

week #3

I then folded these scenes according to the vertical lines I found in each image. These folds created a new spatiality for these rooms. New perspectives, shadows and depths emerge, the perception of the space changes as I fold certain parts inwards or outwards on the lines. The spaces transform into something new by moving from flat to bulky.By connecting these folds, new rooms and atmospheres are then created.

The formality of a set arises back and invites exploration. Looking at these sets from other angles, I see planes more or less, as they were folded and how the light of the room touched it.

By printing the frames of my one-minute site on chalk paper, I tried to reflect the translucency of the spaces. When light entered the "space" from the back, it lit up and reacted with it as it did in the film.

I therefore find light, perspective and illusion very interesting and want to take it further in creating architectural images. When Hitchcock had a specific perspective in mind and staged the set exactly, I want to explore how a space can change through different perspectives by reshaping expectations of what a plane is trying to represent.
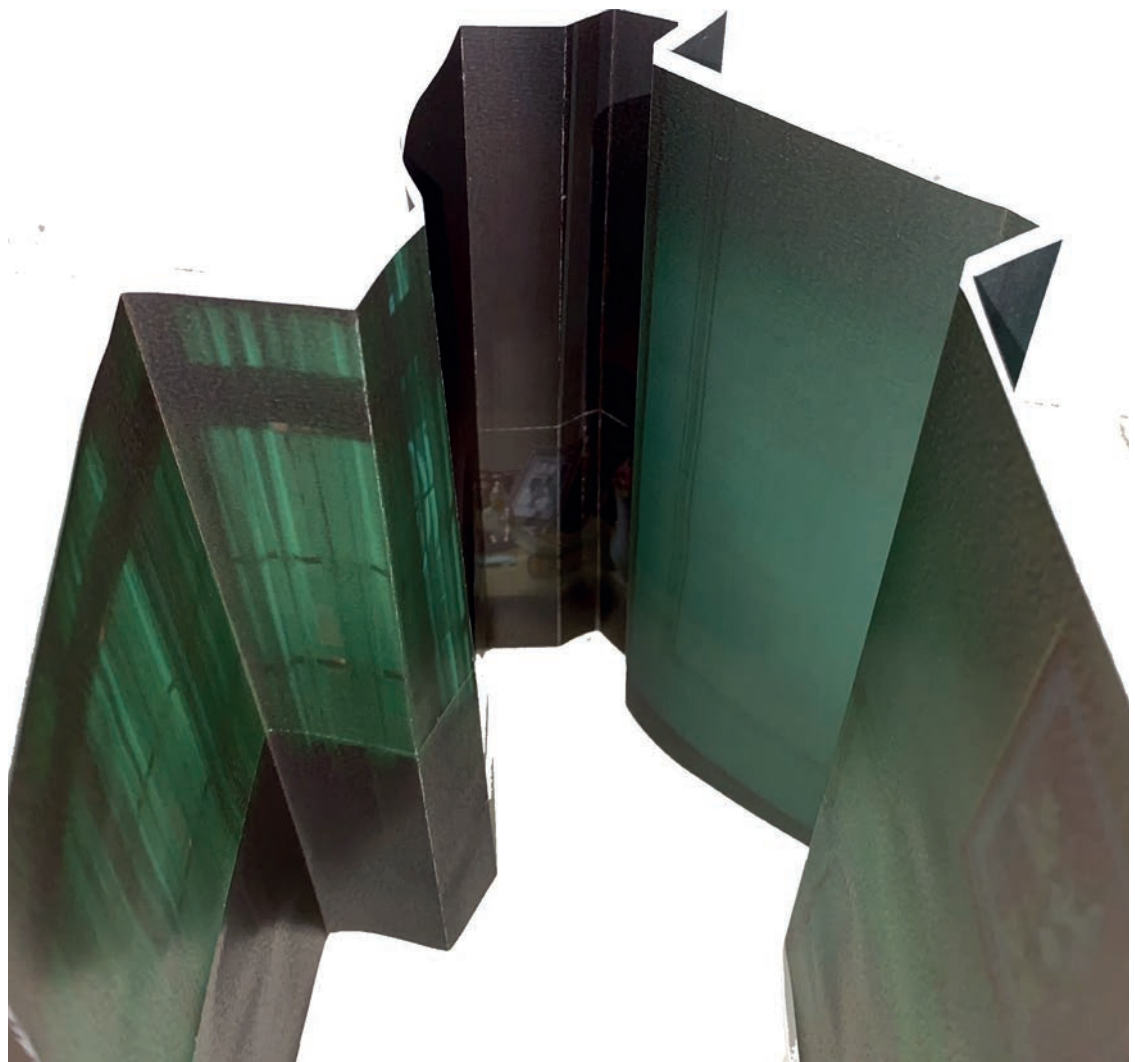
Edouard Despléchin, 1867
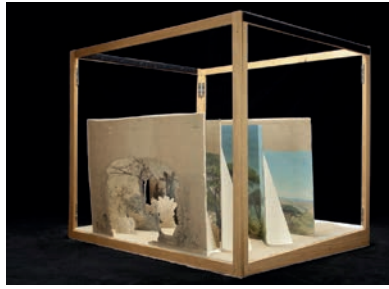
Philippe Chaperon, 1862

I took these 19th-century 'set and volume maquettes' as a reference to continue because they express the same ideas I found interesting when experimenting with folding film frames.

An illusion is created by folding and composing different images with cut-outs, this reminds me of the matte paintings I also found interesting earlier when reading 'The Wrong House'. These models take into account how the set will be seen from certain eye angles in a theatre hall.

I actually find it interesting how these scenes change as you go even further and view the illusion from other perspectives.

Layers come off, some elements emerge, others are hidden again, shadows emerge and enlarge when light hits the scene from different angles.
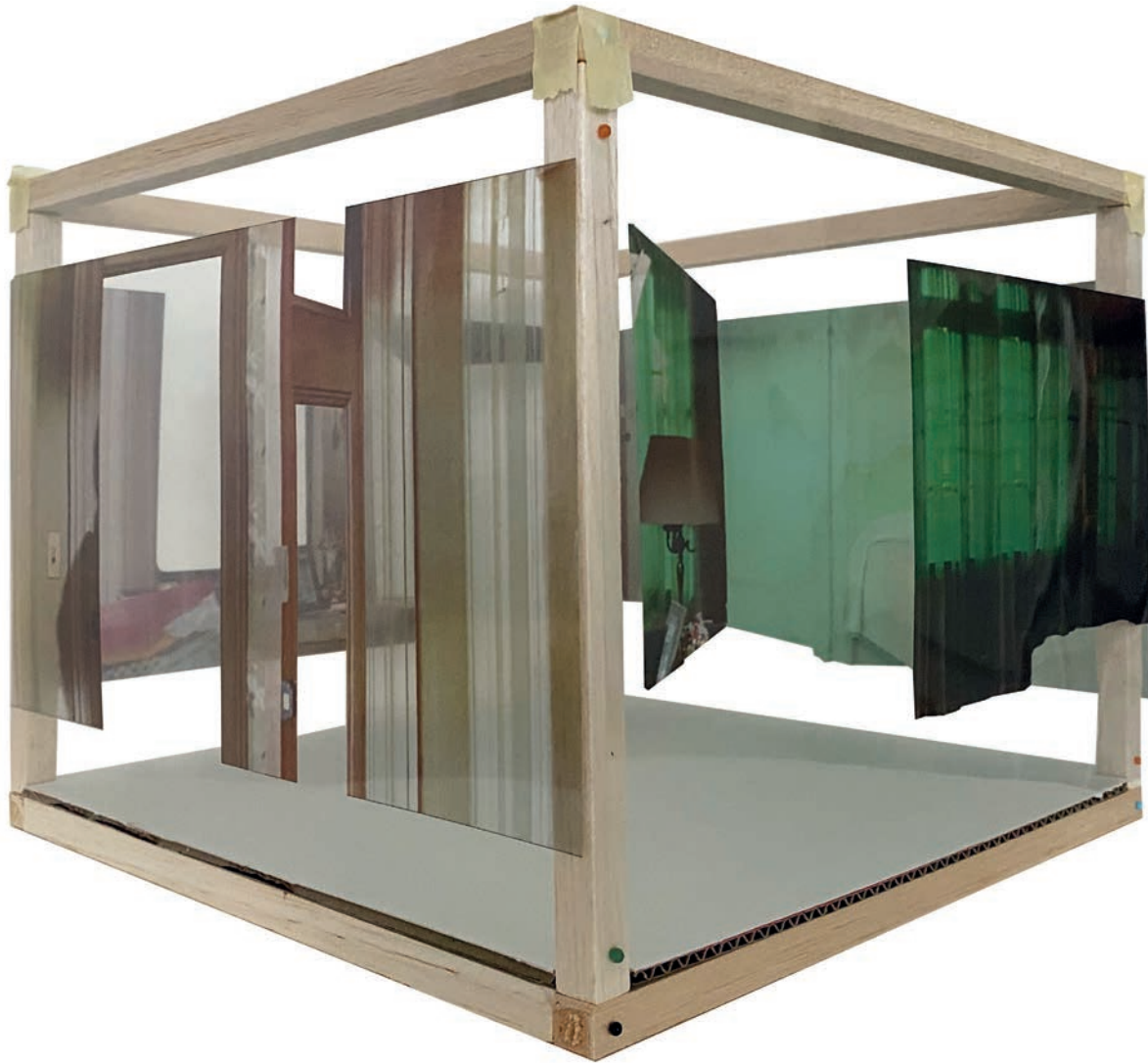

Edouard Despléchin, 1863

forming the scene

Philippe Chaperon et Auguste Rubé, 1876

Eugène Carpezat, 1888

#1 kader omhullen

folding into space

#2 kader invullen

folding into space
week #4

The element of transparency kept recurring in my interests with my one-minute site, how light entered through a window and then reflected to the other side of the bedroom. This element also recurs with the art of the matte paintings on glass used in the making of many Hitchcock films. I looked to decor and volume maquettes from the 19th century to create spatiality that is changeable.

A wooden frame envelops the space and suggests axes of vision to view it. Printing these film decors on transparencies made it possible to see through them, fully or only partially. Placing these images then over and through each other creates shadows on different elements and illuminated spots on others.

A faint green glow skips through the transparency to other parts of the space. These spaces open into each other, walls come apart and then fit back together differently when you change the perspective around the walls, this differs from my reference of the models where they only take into account how the set would be viewed by the audience in front. I want to discover how each eye angle can obtain a different interesting and imaginative view of the spaces from Vertigo.

1a, 2a, 3a, 4a, 5a, 6a, 7a, 8a.

5b, 5a, 2a, 7b, 3a, 6b, 7b, 4a.

8b, 7b, 6b, 5b, 4b, 3b, 2b, 1b.

3b, 5b, 1a, 3a, 4a, 7b, 7a, 4b.

2b, 8a, 6b, 3b, 4b, 3a, 7b, 1b.

7b, 1a, 5a, 6b, 2a, 6b, 7b, 4a.

1b, 2b, 3b, 4b, 5b, 6b, 7b, 8b.

8a, 7a, 6a, 5a, 4a, 3a, 2a, 1a.
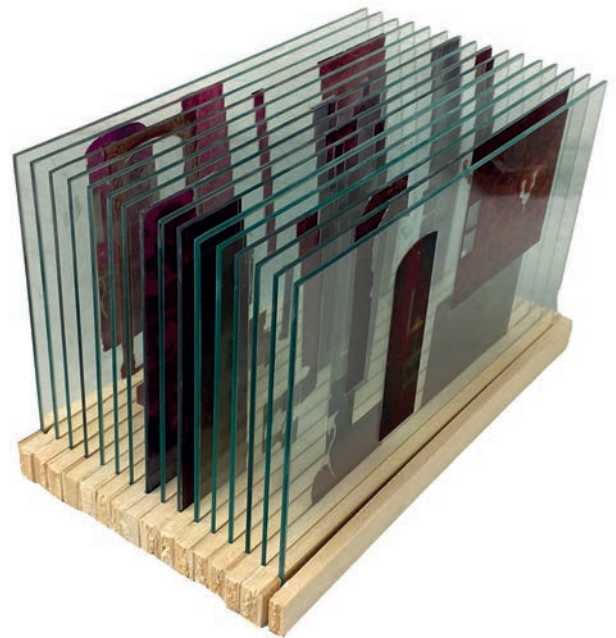
scattering space

week #6
I continued to experiment with the layering of the flat image. I divided the images up into layers from foreground to background and then placed them on top of each other with glass plates in between, creating real depth. When I turned this stack over, I then obtained a negative where the background became the foreground. I then played with this further by mixing up the layers and also layering different images on top of each other.
This created new depths and spaces with elements of Hitchcock's cinematography.

Placing the glass plates back to back with more space between them creates a new, formal object. The plates along the outside represent the furthest elements of Hitchcock's set, evolving into the foreground but then meeting the foreground of the other film still. Wooden elements keep these plates at distance, creating the depth of the stage. A space is created between these plates when the object is viewed from the sides or from above. Only from two perspectives can the object show its original space, without mixing with the others.

scattering space

scattering space

I want to bring together the different surfaces of Hitchcock's spaces into a new set that can be viewed from all sides, joining multiple rooms together so the eye can travel through them. This can be seen as a spacial collage of interiors, scattered across a surface. The glass plates are placed perpendicular to eachother to allow the eye to see only one of the spaces at a time. But when circling the installation, a new comprehensive space is formed, an amalgamation of Hitchcock's scenery of the film Vertigo.

I adapt the size of the glass plates to the fragment of the space. When viewed from the front, the image of the space remains the same. The cut-outs are sometimes filled, not filled or partially filled depending on the distance of the object. The transparancy of the model's base also allows the model to be viewed from below.

My work concludes my experimentation with "the matte painting" on glas and the depth and variety it brings to images that it creates. The slightest rotation of the camera in this set creates new perspectives and perceptions of the space. Closed walls open up, while others close of or become hidden. This way I create a set that, in contrary to Hitchcock's set, takes advantage of the changing and accidental, as opposed to the static and planned.