

SCALIA REGIA





THE INTERIORS OF PIERRE BERGIAN

TRANSLATING IMPRESSIONS
AND FRAGMENTS INTO
ART AND ARCHITECTURE

Pierre Bergian

WORDS PIERRE BERGIAN



Grand Salon au Première Étage,
Chez Hubert de Givenchy
2021

opening spread
Les Mirroirs Chez Hubert de Givenchy,
Hôtel d'Orrouer à Paris
Detail, 2021

As if transfigured through the fine mirror that is the sensibility of the artist and fixed forever in vigorous lines and jewel-like hues, the artwork of Pierre Bergian is both oneiric fantasy and loyal reflection of reality past and present. Nonchalant and erudite, convolute but orderly, it is a pleasure to the eye that we now invite you to discover.

When, at the age of eleven, I picked up my first potsherds, hidden in the ground for centuries in the street, I was unaware that these relics would not only guide my life through history but also eventually lead me to the path of painting. My imagination was actually already stimulated by the old streets, squares and buildings of the inner city of Bruges, where, especially in the winter when entire neighbourhoods are somewhat deserted, there is a medieval atmosphere. You found those archaeological traces in construction pits dug for parking lots or building foundations just like that. You kicked a hunk of earth and a colourful shard appeared. You can hardly imagine the wealth of finds, from medieval leather shoes to pieces of majolica and painted floor tiles from the Spanish city of Manises. I converted my room into my own little museum, an exciting experience. I also enjoyed every museum visit from a young age. I loved the fifteenth-century Gruuthuse Museum, once a Bruges city palace, with kitchens, reception rooms, bedrooms and countless secret passages. In the adjacent Groeninge Museum, my attention was drawn to the Flemish Primitives, especially those in which you catch a glimpse of an interior, since that is where all those vases, dishes and tiles, of which I found fragments, appear. Then, of course, there are those countless interior scenes from the seventeenth century that you see just about in all of the museums and collections of the Low Countries. Teniers, van Ostade, Seghers and Vermeer — their names alone still sound wonderful to me. They often painted in small format, which I also prefer because it intensifies intimacy, as if you were peering through a keyhole. Such format offers you an extra intimate experience when working because everything can be seen at a glance, and as a result

you concentrate more deeply on what you are painting. It always gives me the feeling of actually being in the interior, standing for a moment in the middle of the room and being able to look at the ceiling, light, floors and doors. Such a meditative trip all those painters probably also experienced at the time. Just as you converse with the character in a portrait as a painter, I guess, you do with the interior. What fascinates me in their paintings is not so much the scenes between the characters in the foreground, but the interior in the background, often a half-dark room with wallpaper, tapestries, a fireplace, doors and a bedstead, often featuring dark and obscure passages leading to rooms behind. Portraits of seventeenth-century *cabinets de curiosités* also captured my imagination. Consider the works of Frans Francken or Gonzales Coques. I found their art cabinets so interesting once I started drawing them... They soon became capriccios with walls full of paintings, for which I impulsively reverted to my imagination and memories. Next to antique ruins sometimes appear prints by Piranesi, or Moorish tile patterns, but also *tableaux* inspired by Rothko or Twombly. By the way, I grew up in a house full of design and abstract art. Too bad neither art collectors nor museums now venture into such a baroque arrangement. My first art rooms were more abstract; nowadays they are quite wild and flamboyant. I paint them very spontaneously and hardly think when drawing. They also reflect our home, a labyrinth full of doors, and certainly my studio, full of eclectic *trouvailles* with which the walls are papered. For a long time, I wondered why I didn't study architecture but chose art history and archaeology. My fascination with the way everything evolves over time has always been strong. I love erosion and patina, observing how



Bergman
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“ I love erosion and patina, observing how everything undergoes the passage of time

everything undergoes the passage of time. This element also lurks in my work, as many interiors resemble abandoned houses in which by the way I loved to wander back in my youth in Bruges. Back then, so many buildings stood empty, awaiting demolition or restoration. You could just walk in and discover *salons* with high doors and sparse light, sometimes with an abandoned chair or table. Had I studied architecture, I might never have painted. As a painter you have more freedom than as an architect. Moreover, the path of art history leads me through architecture. I see a close connection between the buildings and the interior with its objects, furniture and art. My palette and formal language are certainly indebted to what was painted in the Late Middle Ages and Renaissance. My series of exteriors, the *Citta Ideale*, take me to a metaphysical world without people, with empty rooms, streets and squares. This is only a step away from della Francesca and Vredeman de Vries, who showed us the way earlier. Quite a few of these architectural sketches I think of as theatrical scenery. It would be fascinating to see them enlarged one day for an opera.

Natural light is also important. It may overwhelm during the day and be soft and sensitive in the evening or morning. It sometimes falls in from high and reflects on the floor and walls, or on mouldings and furniture. That is why I love nineteenth-century painting. In the Biedermeier era, the light in paintings is usually particularly fresh, and in the Romantic era, it became warm, dark and mysterious. Today, with an excess of artificial light, natural light seems to have less chance. Light, even from a candle or fireplace, is vital. This is where the archaeologist in me comes out for a moment: *Homo sapiens* has lived around a fireplace for millions of years. That is why I take light into ac-

count in such an intense way when painting it, letting it shine through everywhere, between every crevice and crack.

I draw inspiration not only from photographs or prints but also from reality. Buildings shouldn't just be visited: they should be experienced, walked through and drawn. I always have pencils and sketchbooks with me. This is how I have approached the Parisian interior of the French couturier Hubert de Givenchy. In his *Hôtel d'Orrouer*, I spent a week sketching. This is how you see the light evolve and understand how shadows are created, bringing space and objects to life. I don't really paint portraits of interiors; I make impressions. By leaving out furniture and objects, emptiness emerges, providing the architecture.

I am not an interior portraitist like Alexandre Serebriakoff was, and rather feel akin to the still painting of Wilhelm Hammershoi and Félix Vallotton. Starting from an existing interior is sometimes a special challenge. This is certainly true of Givenchy's interiors, which instilled in me a sense of detail. This also prompted me to paint the interiors of Pierre Le-Tan and Robert Kime. Coincidentally or not, they too were avid collectors and fond of tiles and ceramics. After visiting the Palazzo Altemps in Rome, I rediscovered Cy Twombly's half-empty interiors. His antique sculptures turn the rooms into metaphysically charged spaces. In this way, I absorb all these impressions and a painting laden with architecture emerges. Wouldn't producing art also be a way of collecting it, I often ask myself. A way of collecting memories and emotions? I must also think of the architect John Soane and his house and work. He even succeeded in blurring the border between the past and present. I suppose I work and think in a similar way and never see myself as a part of an artistic movement or period, but more as a very eclectic collector of art and memories. ■

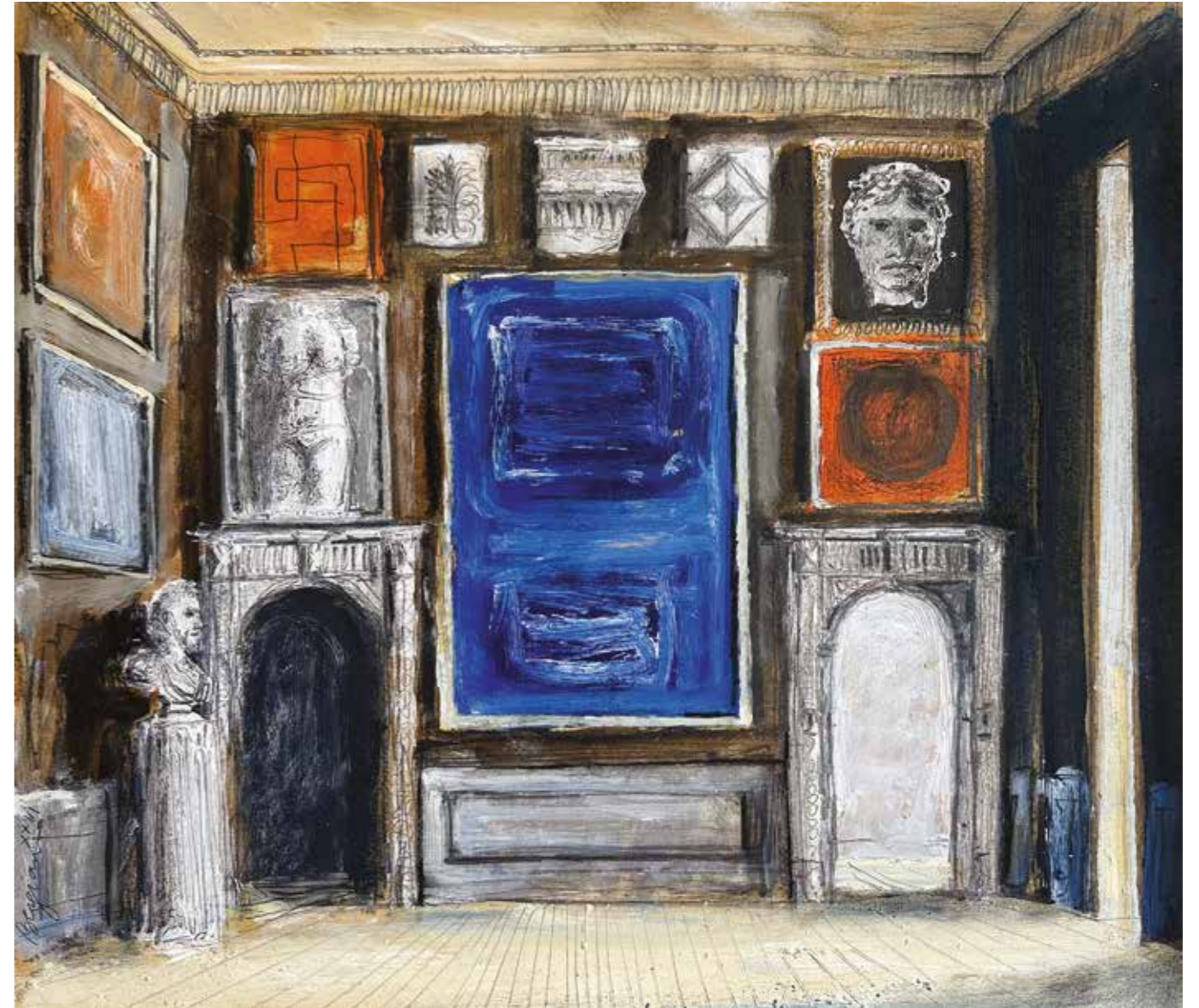




Palazzo Doria Pamphilj
2023

facing page
Almost Empty
Detail with stone fragment, 2023





Blue From the Sky
2023

facing page
Le Paravent d'Angèle Boddaert-Devletian
Detail with ceramic fragment, 2022



The Blue Folding Screen
2023

facing page
Tiles and Fragments
Detail with ceramic fragment, 2023

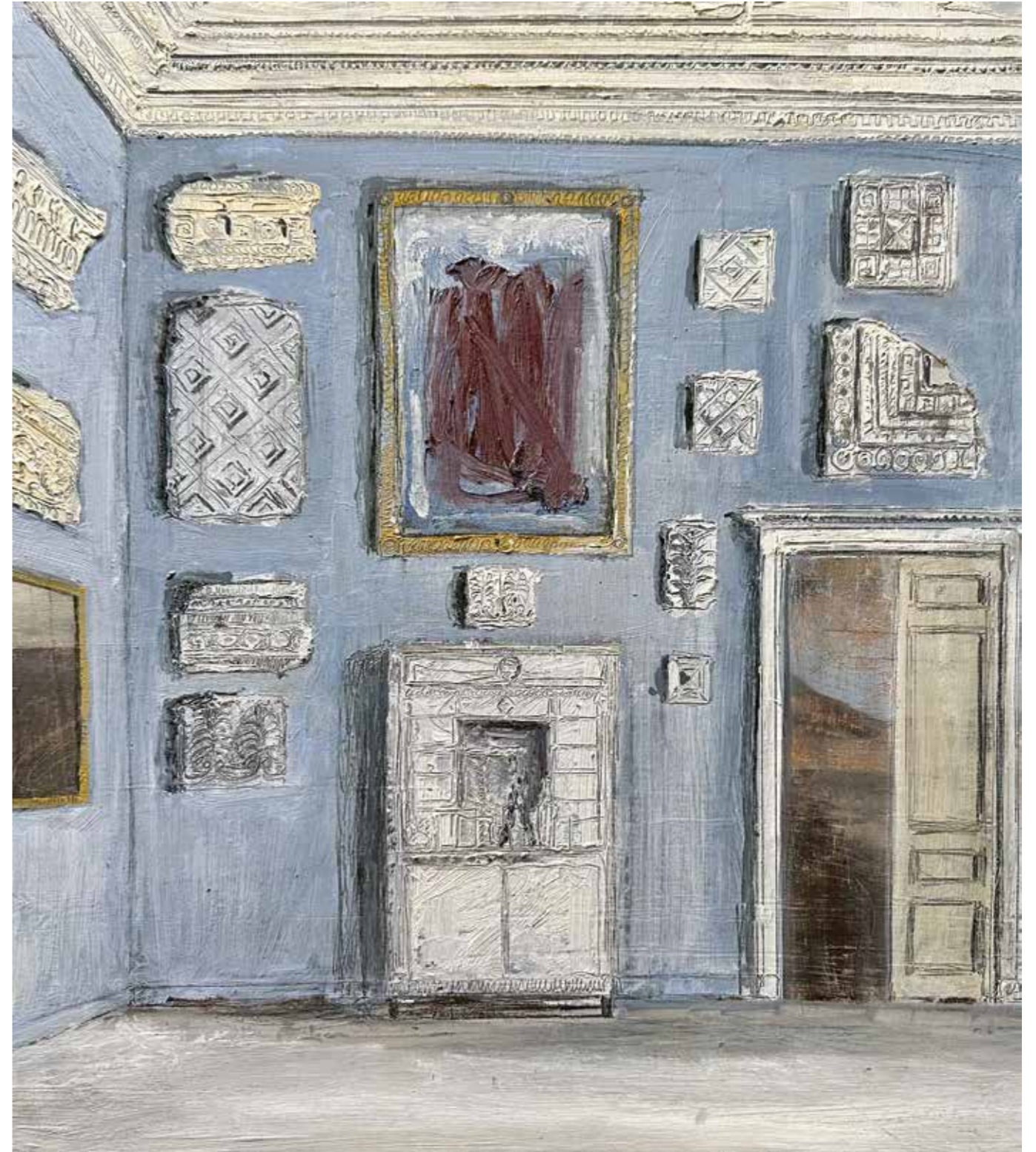


The Golden Bench,
Chez Cy Twombly
2023



chez Cy Twombly

2023



White Sectaire
2023

facing page
Twombly Capriccio
Detail, 2023



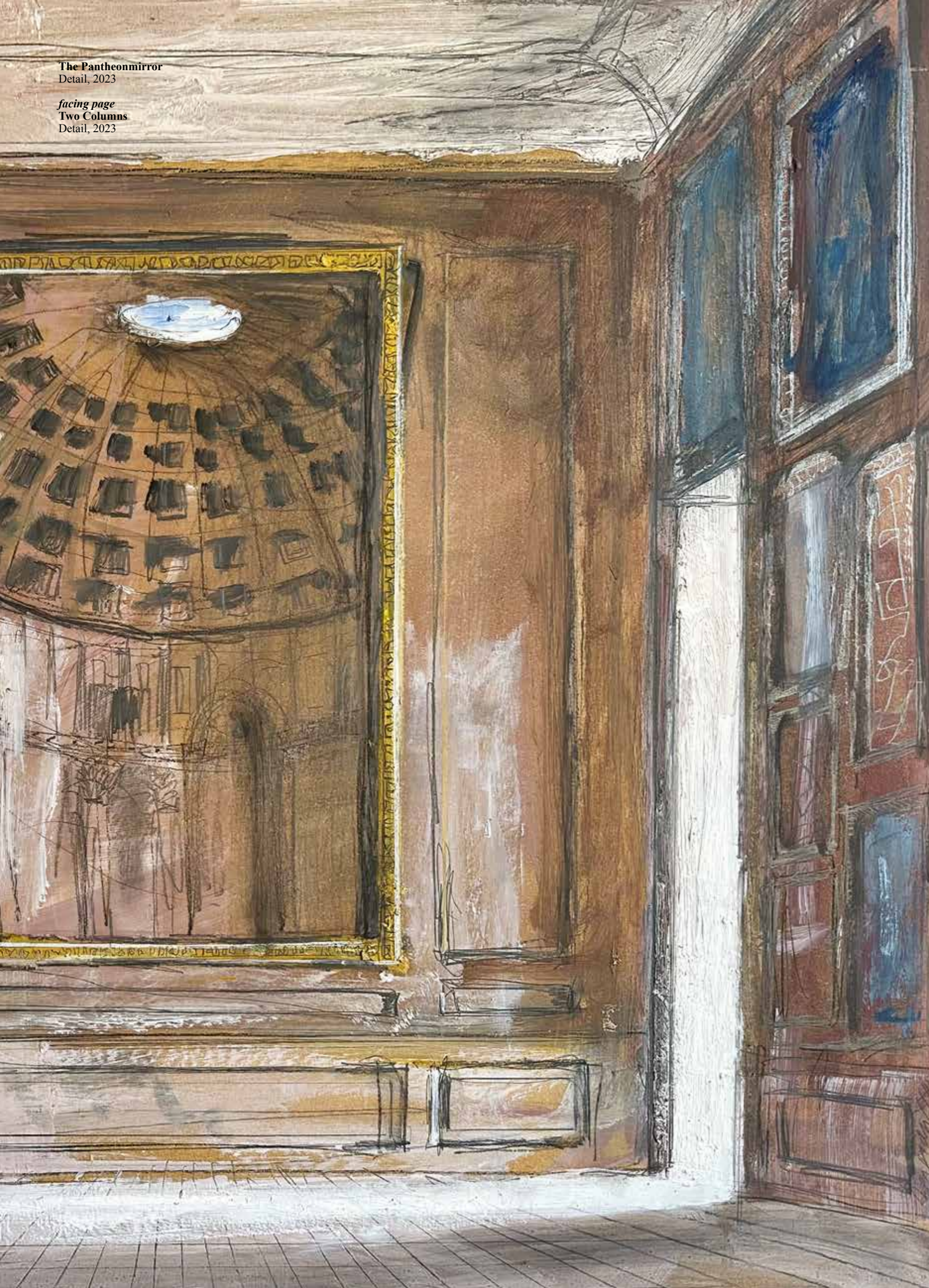
Chez Pierre Le-Tan à Paris
2021

facing page
La Commode de Pierre Le-Tan
Detail, 2022



The Pantheonmirror
Detail, 2023

facing page
Two Columns
Detail, 2023



The Pyramid of Robert Kime
2023

