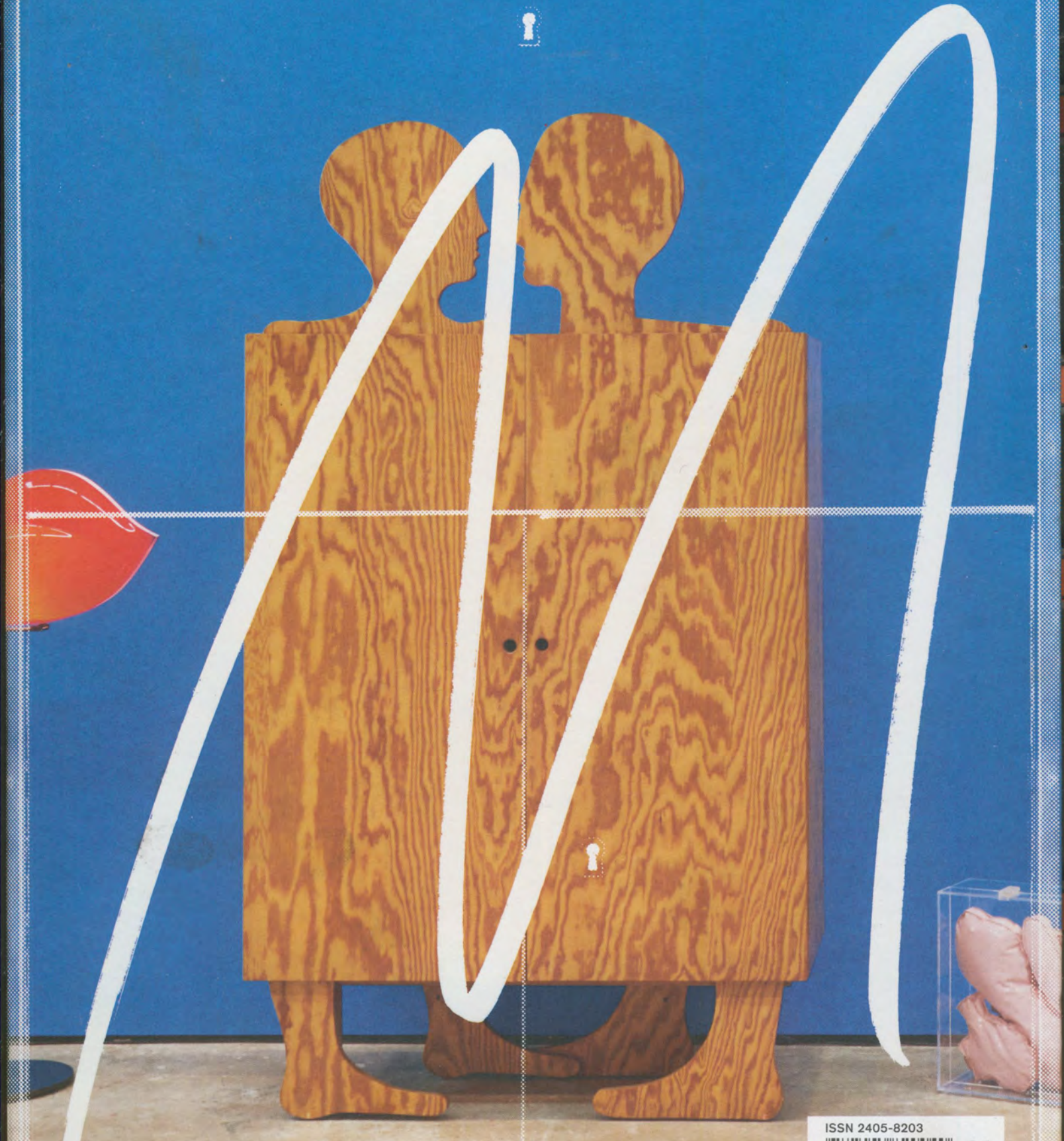


MacGuffin

The Life of Things

N° 5



The Cabinet

ISSN 2405-8203



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NL €16 UK £14

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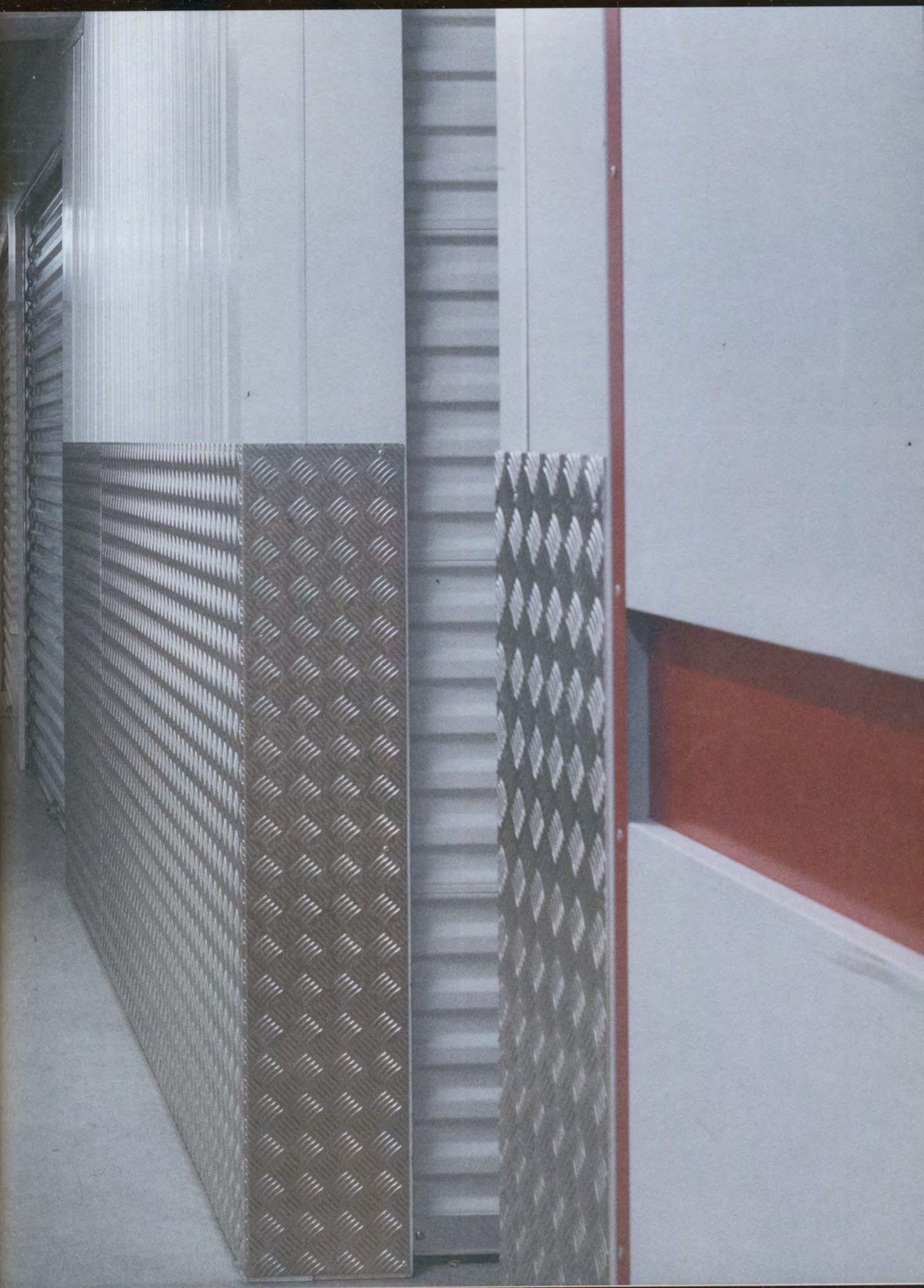
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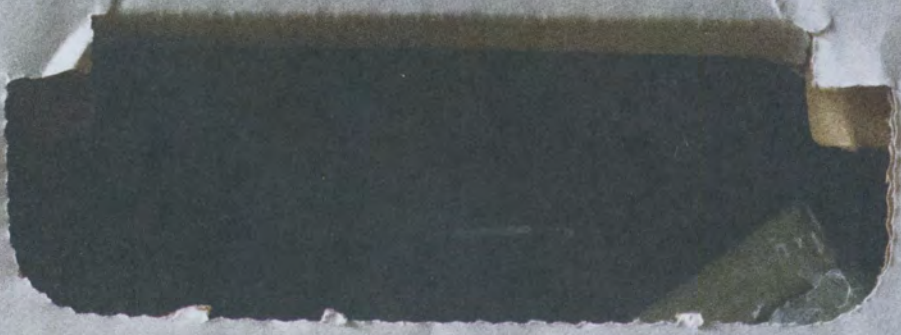
SPACE

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ALWAYS USE PKGS

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FAST











Giveaways





Self-storage facilities are a ubiquitous yet ignored component of the urban and suburban landscape. In the periphery, self-storage facilities are part of the light industrial landscape of warehouses and ex-urban alienation. Within the urban fabric, storage buildings represent both container and camouflage architecture, and are perfect examples of what Margaret Crawford calls 'background buildings'. They represent everyday urbanism: the extraordinary hidden within ordinariness. Crawford writes:

Everyday space is a diffused landscape, without coherent formal characteristics. It is banal, often repetitive, it's everywhere and nowhere, it's a place that has few characteristics that people pay attention to. [...] Everyday space is often described as generic and often generalizable. But, once you closely observe the people who inhabit it and the activities that take place there, it becomes highly specific.

Storage architecture is a by-product of the architecture of shopping and goods: if malls were the pleasure palaces that consumerism built, storage facilities are its landfills. The storage industry is involved in the production of space in its most naked form, a space to house the surplus commodity. In the cycle of consumption, we experience an interesting phenomenon: as malls become outdated models and turn into modern ruins — abandoned, shuttered and suburban pathologies —, storage facilities are flourishing and sometimes assume the gaudy aesthetics of shopping mall architecture.

Self-storage facilities are worthy of study and analysis as an architectural typology because their emergence and evolution encompasses social, economic, historical, architectural, urban and planning issues. Historically, they are a unique and hybrid typology with roots to other archetypes, or 'architectural sacred cows', such as dwellings, granaries, warehouses and tombs. Self-storage is synonymous with surplus — and preservation.

The cabinet has traditionally been, simultaneously, a medium of display and of storage. This intersection between showcase, storage, and clutter makes cabinets the most organized in a family dedicated to the storing of stuff. This family includes armoires, closets, garages and their often external cousin: the storage unit. Storage has become a 20th-century 'first world

problem': we are running out of space in our homes. A 2006 UCLA study drew on ethnography and urban economic history and found middle-class families in Los Angeles 'battling a nearly universal over-accumulation of goods'. The comedian George Carlin says 'That's what your house is, a place to keep your stuff while you go out and get...more stuff! Sometimes you gotta move, gotta get a bigger house. Why? No room for your stuff anymore.' After exhausting the built-in and added storage, we have turned to self-storage facilities as an external repository, or collective cabinets/closets, to store things. Self-storage has emerged as the solution for the 'housing of stuff' that we can't or won't fit in our home — and which we can't get rid of.

There are more than 60,000 self-storage facilities worldwide, and about 86 percent are found in the United States. According to industry factsheets, the area currently occupied by self-storage is equivalent to a surface three times the size of Manhattan, and in continuous growth. Self-storage is expanding worldwide, rapidly becoming a marker of having achieved affluence. The *Wall Street Journal* has called self-storage a 'recession-resistant' model, and the Self-Storage Association boasts it generated \$37.5 billion

If malls were the pleasure palaces that consumerism built, storage facilities are its landfills

in 2017, with higher returns than any other real estate investment.

Why pay rent for something we already own — and likely pay more than what our possessions are worth? The answer is a combination of guilt, procrastination and the endowment effect, the hypothesis that we ascribe more value to something simply because we own it. As Karl Marx said in 'The Fetishism of the Commodity and Its Secret', the mystical character of the commodity does not arise from its use-value.

Forbes calls storage facilities 'convenient repositories of clutter' and states that, in good times and bad, no one can bear to toss out objects that 'might be useful someday'. The self-storage model is one built on a kind of psycho-financial inertia that keeps so many tenants in place. The blog Storage Promoter boasts that in a culture of consumerism, self-storage units are a popular option for many people who need extra space for 'all those things they don't need right now but can't bring themselves to throw away'.

An article in the satirical publication *The Onion* calls self-storage units 'museums of personal failure'. In *Self-Storage Nation*, Tom Vanderbilt calls them 'catacombs of consumerism'. The most common items in household storage units are, in order, furniture, photographs, kitchenware, clothing, holiday decorations, household supplies, books and magazines, collectibles and hobby items, tools and sporting equipment. Of course there are garage sales, a tradition started in the 1950s *Suburbia Americana*, and Craigslist, started in the 1990s in the San Francisco Bay area — yet with move-in specials and easy contracts, the option of renting a storage unit emerges as the path of least resistance to solve the problem of getting rid of stuff (while still keeping it). A paradox? Sure, but a storage unit is the definition of the concept of 'out of sight, out of mind'. Finally, according to *Self Storage Self*, self-storage is aligned with the concept that it's the accumulation of things that defines you as an American, and that throwing anything away is wasteful. The self-storage industry reconciles these opposing values: paying for storage is, paradoxically, thrifty.

The modern self-storage facility is an American invention. The first commercially viable storage company in the United States is thought to have been founded in 1889, in Sioux City, Iowa, by the brothers Martin and John Bekins, the sons of Dutch immigrants. In 1928, Arthur Trachte, of Trachte Building Systems,

built interconnected metal garages for 'cars without homes' in Wisconsin. According to US Self Storage, the Collum family founded the very first self-storage facility for residential tenants in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, in 1958. The first facility which featured garage-style doors was built by Russ Williams in Odessa, Texas, in 1964. It was aptly named *A-1 U-Store-It U-Lock-It U-Carry-The-Key*.

The *Fedgazette* calls self-storage the 'second garage'. Garages are intimately tied to the history of self-storage, as form-generators and as part of the car culture, which did and does so much to fuel the self-storage industry. Ironically, residential garages are increasingly becoming storages for overflowing household clutter — and no longer cars. Things come full circle: when garages are no longer enough, storage facilities come to the rescue.

From an economic point of view, storage facilities are compelling: they are a product of unbridled consumption and planned obsolescence. They embody currently popular issues of clutter and hoarding. The issue of material excess becomes an (ex) urban pathology, endemic to a culture of instant gratification, 24-hour online shopping and warehouse buying experiences. The clutter culture can be mapped and becomes tangible in the form of the 'country of storage facilities'.

The need to self-store and the rise of self-storage is not a societal effect but a symptom: we're looking at either an architectural disease or the architectural manifestation of a disease I call 'stuff obesity'. This typology has an increasingly greater influence on the future of cities, is a direct result of social/consumer behaviour, and it behoves us to consider the impact of its proliferation within the urban space and the periphery.

ANA ÁBALOS

is an architect, researcher, university lecturer and co-founder of the studio AbalosIlopis Architects. She would love to find the witch's broom cabinet (Hexenbesenraum) among the tree-tops and stay there forever...

MITI AIELLO

is an Italian architect, academic, artist and poet living in California. Her favorite cabinet is her late father's vetrinetta, or small showcase, where mementos from his youth and travels (and cigarillos) were jealously kept under lock.

AMAL ALHAAG

is a curator and researcher based in Amsterdam. Once in a while, she dreams of building a mirrored medicine cabinet for all her homemade hair products and secrets, but her two left hands always refuse to do the work.

FRANCESCA BALENA ARISTA

is an architect and design historian. As a student she fell madly in love with Sottsass's work (especially his cabinets!) and decided to write her thesis on the Italian company Poltronova just so she could meet him.

LADO DARAKHVELIDZE

is a hybrid artist-journalist-broadcaster. In the mathematics classroom, on his first day in Soviet school, geometrical figures and installations were on display in wooden cabinets.

MAURITS DE BRUIJN

is currently working on his third novel: a queer love story that takes place in 1999. The cabinet that he wishes to own is, without a doubt, the glorious Carlton bookcase by Sottsass.

SARA SEJIN CHANG

(Sara van der Heide) is an artist. From 14 October 2010 until 23 April 2012 she made 558 drawings of Dutch cabinets, the same number of days the Dutch right-wing populist government was in charge.

SAM JACOB

is principal of Sam Jacob Studio for architecture and design. He does not really understand what role a cabinet has in the modern world.

JESSICA GYSEL

is an editor, content researcher and publisher living in Brussels. Her

favourite cabinet, which she'll probably never get her hands on, is the Carlton by Ettore Sottsass, in steep competition with Nicola L's La Femme Commode created in 1969, which happens to be Jessica's birth year.

ELIOT HAWORTH

is the Assistant Editor of *Fantastic Man* magazine. During a year spent studying in rural Finland he could neither afford nor find a suitable cabinet so he built a small hanging one from a Chiquita banana box and fishing wire. It is still his favourite.

EMILY KING

is a writer and curator. She wishes she had a well-stocked household cupboard, a beautifully organized repository of items such as lint rollers, needles and thread and Brasso.

VYTAUTAS KUMŽA

is a Lithuanian photographer based in Amsterdam. He's a big fan of closed cabinets, because he's not good at keeping his clothes or stuff very neat.

NAZIF LOPULISSA

is an illustrator, painter, sculptor, et cetera. As a seven year old he used to have a little cabinet next to his bed in which he kept his glow-in-the-dark stars. One morning he put his stars on top of the lamp so they could absorb all the light and shine all night. By evening, the stars had melted.

LINCOLN MICHEL

is a fiction writer and critic living in New York. When he was a small child, his father promised to build him a hidden cabinet in the wall to store all of his secrets. But he lied.

PETRA NOORDKAMP

is moving fluidly between photography and film. She explores the influence of experiences, memories and movies on the perception of architecture. She is very sad that her walk-in closet has shrunk in size just recently because of the instalment of a new central heating system.

SMÁRI RÓBERTSSON

is an Icelandic artist living in Amsterdam. In his childhood home in Reykjavík there is a teak sideboard with one permanently locked door. Before the key was lost it stored liquor and sweets that can still be smelled through the keyhole.

LOUISE SCHOUWENBERG

is an art and design theorist and head of the master department Contextual Design at Design Academy Eindhoven. She hated the monstrous cabinet in the family living room throughout her youth because it radiated the illusion of a family life in control.

JOHANNES SCHWARTZ

looks for images, if he can't find them. His favourite piece of furniture is Herman Verkerk's 'A-kast', whose shelves are covered with a sheet of wood containing thirteen doors of different sizes, all from the A series. You wouldn't believe how well things can be hidden behind such pages.

VEERLE SPRONCK

is an art historian and researcher, currently conducting PhD research on symphonic music practices. For weeks now she has been considering buying a sheet music cabinet, though she doesn't know how to play an instrument.

ADAM ŠTĚCH

is a design and architecture theoretician, writer and curator. He is fascinated by stories of cabinets he finds during his visits to 20th-century houses.

PRATYUSHA SURYAKANT

is an architect and voracious bookworm. She stashes her favourite biscuits in the drawer of her cabinet. She used to climb her grandmother's wooden almirah and hide on top reading her favourite book.

BATIA SUTER

is a Swiss artist based in Amsterdam with a weakness for old cabinets. The more complex, crooked and impractical the better. This may be because her great-grandfather was a carpenter.

MAJA VARDJAN

is an architect and curator. She is in possession of a glass cabinet full of unrelated stuff that she continuously keeps rearranging looking for the unobtainable balance.

MARIËTTE WIJNE

lives and writes in Amsterdam. She remembers her grandparents' bedstead as the most beautiful cabinet on earth. The pale green wooden doors were decorated with hand-painted images of Chinese vases and Dutch river landscapes.