

Introduction

Becky Beasley's photographs, sculptures and installations, while deeply personal, often develop through a deep engagement with the works and ideas of other artists and writers. This commitment to think with and through their work brought her to Eric Ravilious and in particular his watercolour *The Bedstead* (1939). This painting provided Beasley with a place to start from and journey into. Along the way she encountered Paul Nash and Enid Marx.

Paintings of interiors, such as *The Bedstead*, have much to tell us. These depictions of rooms convey what the Italian art critic Mario Praz called 'an archive of their experiences'. They are the unlikely witness and containers of histories, hinting at why the lives of their inhabitants took on their own particular form. In the surface of *The Bedstead* Beasley recognises an unstable boundary. A threshold, or burrow, open for her to transform the shapes, structures, colours, motifs and surfaces of the painting into distinct elements. In doing so she creates new arrangements of meaning, melding the domestic with the pastoral across six room installations.

The exhibition opens as one steps into *Double Bed (Ous version)*, a dappled green linoleum floor with two black rectangular shapes that correspond in scale to the size of a single and double bed. Around these 'beds' are yellow lozenges containing variations on the title of the exhibition. *Ous*: a nonsensical doubling word of no fixed pronunciation derived from the last three letters of Ravilious. Its indefinability sets up an oblique and playful set of ideas related to place (Où); to community (Us); to wonder (Où); to something slowly seeping to the surface (Ooze); and to the Ouse, the Sussex river haunted by the shade of Virginia Woolf. The large hand-printed photograph, *Sedum Joy (Double Grave)*, taken by the artist outside her former family home also reminds us that the cognates of 'bed' include 'garden plot', 'grave' and a 'dwelling dug in the ground'. A burrow.

As an interior, *The Bedstead* appears quite straightforward. Yet the play of shapes and angles give the painting a peculiar atmosphere as if something has happened or is just about to. We now know that the room would soon be bombed.

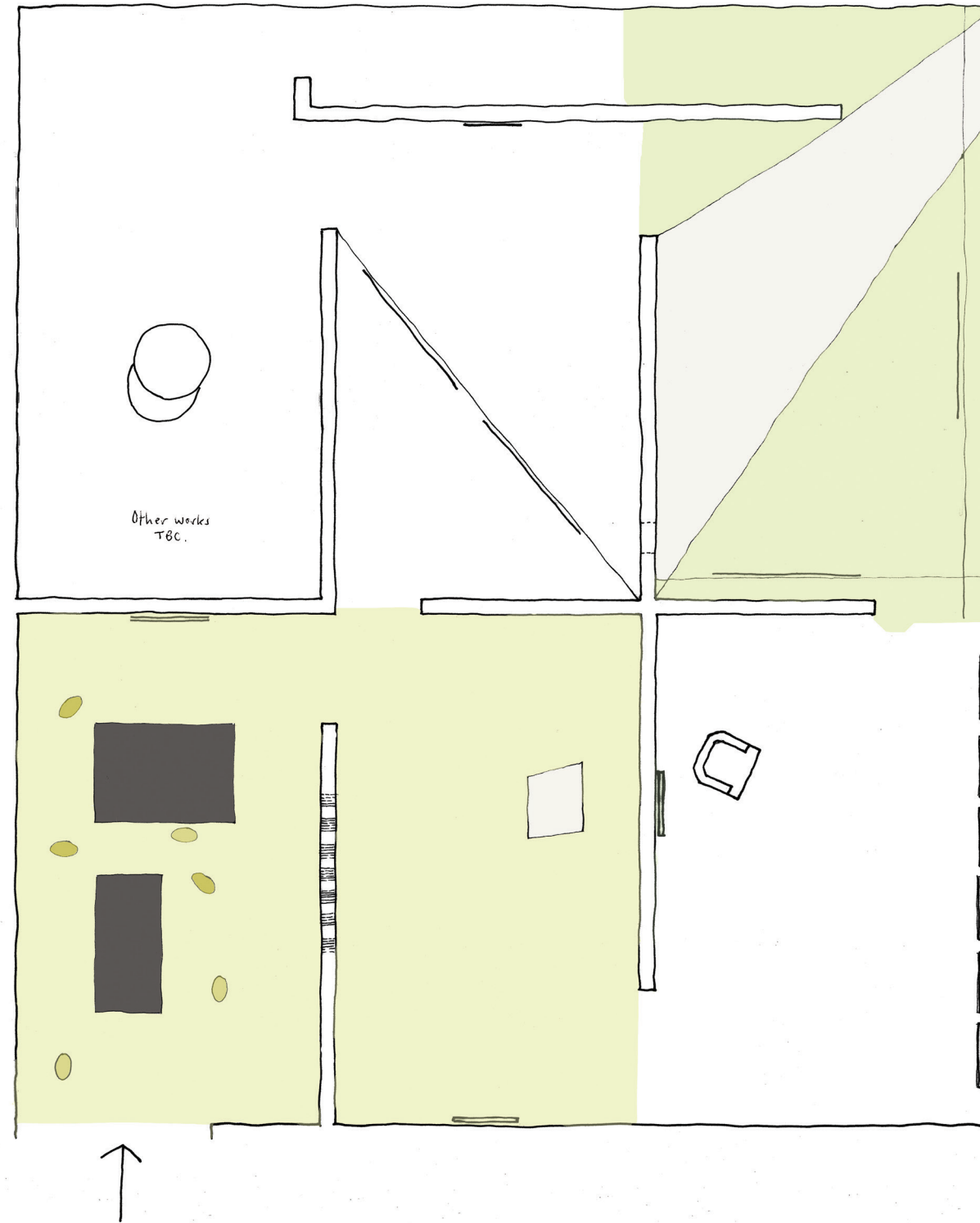
Most rooms do disappear and are forgotten. Consequently any history of interiors encounters this problem of evidence. The history of these spaces is a history of images of rooms rather than the rooms themselves. In *Interior (Day)* and *Interior (Tone)* we encounter both *The Bedstead* and the gallery's archival photograph of the painting. Both painting and its documentation are presented as representational images and objects in their own right. In these room installations we also find that the decorative motif on the wallpaper becomes a 'shrapnel' pattern in the gallery walls; the mysterious square above the bed inverted to appear as a projection of light on the linoleum floor, and an opening in the gallery wall for children to climb through.

Watercolours were the preferred medium for documenting interiors, a practice that proliferated in Europe from the 18th until the mid-19th Century. The demise of these 'room portraits' coincided with the first photographic experiments in which processes and materials were tested in order to see what would happen. Some of these first photographs, called cyanotypes, were blue.

Attendant to cyanotypes' capacity for abstraction and its embedded trace of absent things, Beasley uses them to reinstate photography as a material object and a process that can be used to explore light, space, and abstraction. These cyanotype photographs on vintage monogrammed French linen relate to found objects and spatial frameworks. It was dark and raining in Le Havre when Ravilious stayed there and in *Interior (Tone)* they are toned to resemble overcast weather and the striated blue panel walls dividing the interior of *The Bedstead*. In *Sunlight* they refer to, and materialize, Beasley's gesture of opening a blind to let the light in. The resultant images take on the functional minimalism of a colour calibration chart, and reflect a concern with the structures of standardisation involved in photographic reproduction.

Ravilious' interest in both artisanal and textile processes and his collaborations with other artists such as Enid Marx are echoed in a series of works developed in dialogue with Caroline Le Breton and David Rhodes. These are mourning works, alluding to the loss of friends and lovers, their collaborative creation suggesting a way of addressing loss with hope, rejuvenation and generosity. The first of these mourning works, *Untitled* (2017) in the installation *Clearing* is an ottoman. Its form is inspired by Paul Nash's painting, *The Eclipse of the Sunflower* (1945), in which the sun, though in eclipse, takes on the dual character of both sun and flower, while the flower itself dies back into the sea. The pairing, merging and separation of objects and images in this room installation invites us to consider the connection between the original and the reproduction, between the past and the present, between loss and what remains.

In the final installation, *Our (for D.)*, there is another chair. Like many pieces of furniture it appears to have been moulded by a human body. But is an imaginary chair, its dimensions reconstructed from a photograph, a sweatshirt, and the memory of the absent person. The toning and colouring of the cyanotype print seat cushions is intended as a kind of muted rainbow consisting of the palette of colours from Ravilious' *The Bedstead* and more generally from nature. Echoing the elements from the first installation, the seat cushion designs, as well as the photograph, 365 days, trace the significance the garden in the exhibition. *Our (for D.)* reminds us that the places we inhabit and share with our loved ones become part of who we are. We live and dream in them. They are the settings for experiences and absences.



<p>Drawing 1</p> <p>Scale 1:50 @ A3</p> <p>Date 14 Mar 2017</p>	<p>Ous Exhibition</p> <p>Floor Plan</p>	<p>Caroline Le Breton</p> <p>Claremont Studios</p> <p>48 Kings Rd,</p> <p>St Leonards on Sea, TN37 6DY.</p>
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Notes on Sunlight

Learning in this way from the dead is nothing new, but somehow forgotten and, as much as time meanders, preparations for the future can also be daily made.

Be kind. Attend to each accordingly. Tread gently.

Writers and artists I can never meet have been my closest allies, and guides. I simply went to their work and asked my own questions of it. The questions varied wildly. How to live? How to die?

Inhabiting works in this way allowed me to find a path I would not have taken alone.

I did not intend to get inside Eric Ravilious' watercolour, *The Bedstead*, but that's how it went. It was the flatness which drew me in. A burrow.

In there, I met Enid Marx.

And yes, I learnt half of it by turning it upside down.

I have always loved this quote from Edward Hopper, and generally felt foolish for thinking of it so frequently. I no longer care:

What I wanted to do was to paint sunlight on the side of a house... There is a sort of elation about sunlight on the upper part of a house.

Eric Ravilious was killed at the age of 39 while accompanying a Royal Air Force rescue mission off Iceland that failed to return to its base.

Living with depression when young is a death. Living with it after 30 is a chance to live close to oneself, attentive, fearless. It is in the littlest things that a breakthrough occurs one day and you survive. Paradoxically, it is one's closest allies who do the most harm, refuse to be kinder, gentler, thinking they know better. They do not know anything. And so the unkindness breaks you. And so too, it is the kindness which saves you.

'Sorrow comes in great waves...but rolls over us, and though it may almost smother us, it leaves us. And we know that if it is strong, we are stronger, inasmuch as it passes and we remain.' *Henry James*

Coda

Eric William Ravilious (1903–1942) was an English painter, designer, book illustrator and wood engraver. He was an official war artist in World War II. He was killed in 1942 at the age of 39 while accompanying a Royal Air Force air sea rescue mission off Iceland that failed to return to its base. He was friends with Enid Marx.

The Bedstead, 1939, Watercolour, 55.4 x 45.5cm. Eric Ravilious made this painting in a hotel in Le Havre, France in March 1939. He had travelled there to paint the port, but cold weather and heavy rain drew him indoors. Five years later, the town was destroyed during Operation Astonia, an Allied bombing raid so intense that it became known as *'the storm of iron and fire'*.

Operation Astonia (aka *'the storm of iron and fire'*) Le Havre, 1944. For some months after D-Day, Le Havre was still occupied by the German army. The town was also strategically vital so the Allies bombed Le Havre during the night of 5 & 6 September. The bombardment was so intense that it became known as *'the storm of iron and fire'*.

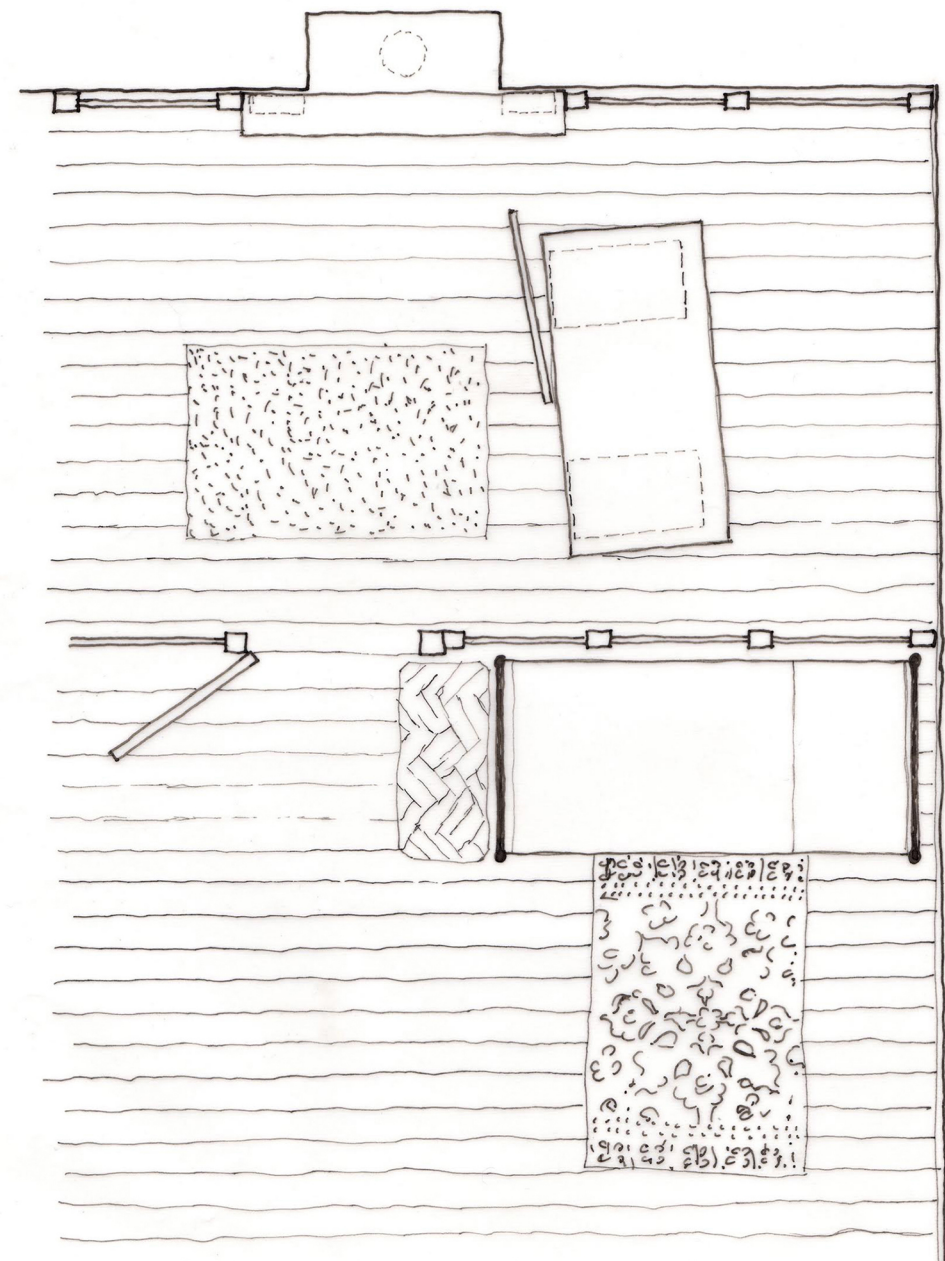
Enid Marx (1902-1998) was an English designer and artist. During her long career - spanning over 70 years - she produced a kaleidoscope of work including stamps, seating fabric and posters for London Transport, books and book-jackets, wrapping paper, logos, laminates for the wartime Utility Furniture Panel (she was awarded the coveted title Royal Designer for Industry in 1944), packaging labels, rugs and menu cards.

Eric & Enid's chair (1936) Eric Ravilious designed a set of chairs for Dunbar Hay, one of which was bought by Cecelia Dunbar Kilburn. She requested a seat cushion for it and so Eric designed a cushion using fabric by Enid Marx. (*Eric Ravilious: Landscape, Letters & Design* by Anne Ullmann, Christopher Whittick and Simon Lawrence; Vol 2 p.288-290, 2007)

Cyanotype (aka *Sunprint* or *Blueprint*) is a photographic printing process that produces a cyan-blue print. Engineers used the process well into the 20th century as a simple and low-cost process to produce copies of drawings, referred to as blueprints. Unlike silverprints, which are exposed under a red light, cyanotypes are exposed to UV light (sunlight) and washed in water. One unusual characteristic of the cyanotype is its regenerative behaviour: prints that have faded due to prolonged exposure to light can often be significantly restored to their original tone by simply temporarily storing them in a dark environment.

Linoleum was invented in 1855 by Englishman Frederick Walton, in Staines. Walton coined the name linoleum from the Latin name, *linum*, which means flax, and *oleum*, which means oil. Walton lost a law suit in defence of the use of the name Linoleum- which he had not trademarked- the court opining that even if the name *had* been registered as a trademark, it was by now so widely used that it had become generic, only 14 years after its invention. It is considered to be the first product name to become a generic term.

Linoleum, also called **Lino**, is made by oxidizing linseed oil to form a thick mixture called linoleum cement. The cement is cooled and mixed with pine resin, and wood flour to form sheets on a jute backing. **Forbo's** linoleum, Marmoleum, is made from 97% natural raw materials, 72% of which are renewable and will grow back within 10 years. Marmoleum is made with 43% recycled content to reduce the need for virgin raw material. Marmoleum is 100% biodegradable.



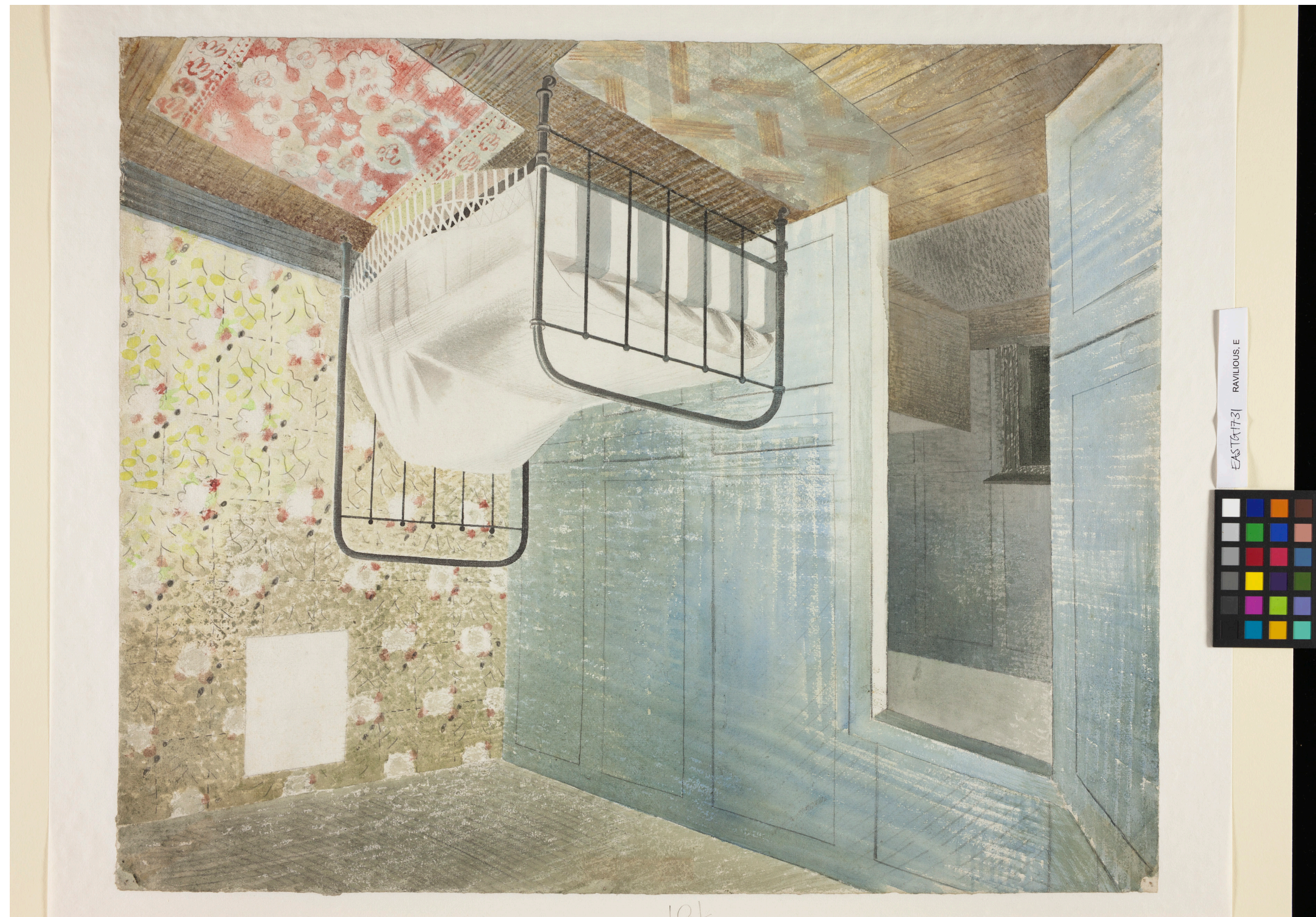
<p>Drawing 4 Scale 1:25 @ A4 Date 14 Mar 2017</p>	<p>Ous Exhibition The Bedstead Floor Plan</p>	<p>Caroline Le Breton Claremont Studios 48 Kings Rd, St Leonards on Sea, TN37 6DY.</p>
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Towner Art Gallery Presents

OUS

By Becky Beasley

In dialogue with Caroline Le Breton (b. 1966), Jonathan Cole (1961–2007), Enid Marx (1902–1998), Eric Ravilious (1903–1942), David Rhodes (b.1968) and Duncan Lewis (1951–2016)

Towner Art Gallery is delighted to announce *Ous*, a major new commission by international contemporary artist Becky Beasley. *Ous* is a response to the gallery's major collection of works by Eric Ravilious and is also framed by the spirit of the forthcoming exhibition, *Ravilious & Co: The Pattern of Friendship, English Artist Designers: 1922 to 1942*.

Ravilious' watercolour, *The Bedstead* (1939) became a burrow. Beasley has created a digressive, spatial deconstruction of the painting that melds the domestic with the pastoral across the six rooms of Towner's first floor gallery. *The Bedstead* depicts a room in a guesthouse in Le Havre in which Ravilious was confined

during inclement weather just prior to the outbreak of World War II, and which was later destroyed in a bombing raid. In her first installation of this scale, Beasley transforms the structures, colours, motifs and surfaces of the interior in the painting into distinctive elements that reflect her interest in flatness, light, abstraction, the everyday and nature.

Opaquely, and yet with great clarity and restraint, *Ous* explores human relations to interiors, gardens, weather and mourning across a series of installations that present cyanotype prints on vintage French bed linens, patterns in walls that appear to be damaged by 'shrapnel', linoleum floor designs, furniture, printed textiles and photographs.

29th April – 9th July 2017

Towner Art Gallery, Devonshire Park, College Rd, Eastbourne BN21 4JJ
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