Circuits
A site-specific installation
by Experimental Jetset

Stedelijk Museum
June / July 2023
November 2025

circuits

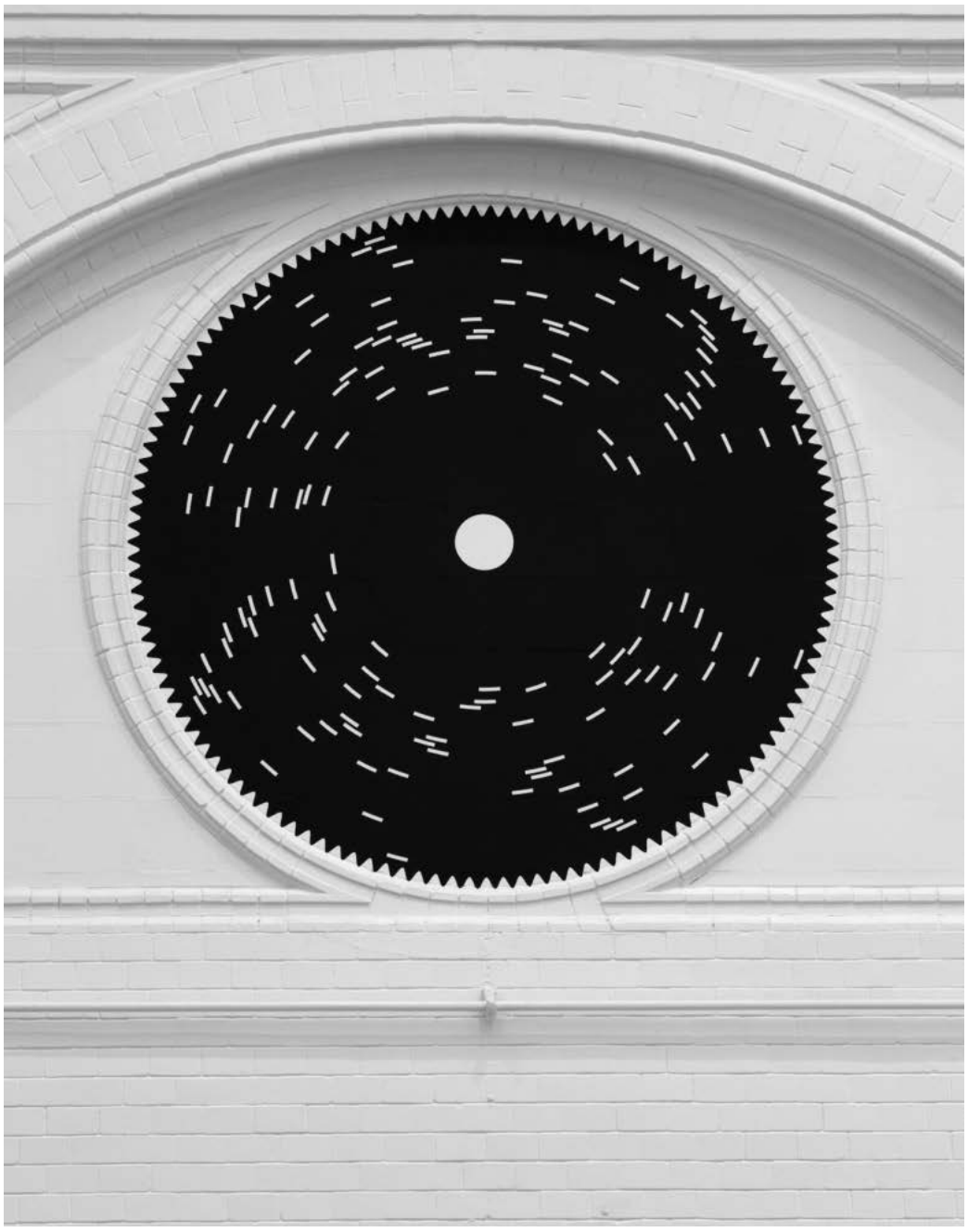


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0. Introduction

Before we start explaining the latest additions to our proposal, we thought it would be a good idea to repeat some of the texts that we wrote in the previous presentations (the PDF-files we submitted in June and July, 2023) – just for the sake of completeness, and to refresh our memories.

So, on this page you will find (first of all) a selection of what we wrote in these previous documents, followed by more recent additions (on the next page).

1. Circuits

Overload, generator, oscillator
Make a circuit with me

You can read my circuit diagram
I feed on electric jolts
I need fifty-thousand volts

– The Polecats, 'Make a Circuit' (1982)

The invitation we received from the Stedelijk Museum was two-fold: we were invited to develop a site-specific installation for the space above the staircase (referred to as 'the circuit'). This installation should then also refer to our past work (and more specifically, it should refer to past work as currently present in the permanent collection of SM).

Going through our own archive of past work, we tried to find themes and motifs that could somehow be transformed into an entirely new installation – an installation that could function as a piece in its own right, while also referring to the given context, the given location. At the same time, we tried to come up with an installation that would still be recognisable (at least, by people familiar with our practice) as having a clear link with our past work.

What we were especially looking for was a sense of *site-specificity*. An installation that specifically points to the context of the Stedelijk – its architecture, its legacy, and its spirit. We certainly hope that this intention shines through.

Experimental Jetset
Amsterdam
June 23, 2023

2. Formats

Walking through the Stedelijk a while ago, we noticed that one of our pieces was in fact included in the exhibition 'Tomorrow is a Different Day'. The piece in question was a framed spread from issue 57 of the US typographic magazine Emigre – an issue that was guest-designed and guest-edited by us, back in December 2000.

In this issue (titled 'Lost Formats Preservation Society'), we discussed the notion of 'obsolete formats'. As we wrote, 23 years ago:

There was once a time when every format contained its own specific data, while nowadays the CD-rom format is capable of containing all data – and even the CD-rom is slowly disappearing, to make way for the mythical 'non-format'.

What fascinates us about formats is the whole 'dialectical materialistic' dimension of the subject: the way content is shaped by formats, and formats are shaped by content.

We're really interested in this continuous interaction between form and content: Form determining content determining form determining content etc. It's a continues flow, and in the ideal situation, you can't really distinguish between form and content; they constantly change place.

A good example is the LP, the 12-inch vinyl gramophone record. The standard LP can only contain 45 minutes of music, so most albums by rock bands are approximately 45 minutes long. This is a very good illustration of the way in which a given format (in this case, the LP) can determine the length of an artwork (in this case, the rock album) in a very direct, physical way. Very similar to the way in which the format of the column determines the style of writing. In fact, many artists have played deliberately with this format. (For example, a lot of Brian Eno's ambient compositions have exactly the length of one side of an LP, the maximum amount of music).

But at the other hand, the length of the standard CD is 75 minutes, because those who developed the CD wanted to make sure that Beethoven's Nine could fit on it. So here you see the reverse process: the capacity of a format being determined by the length of an artwork. And that's exactly what we find fascinating: this constant interaction between form and content, between humans and their physical environment, between the material base and the superstructure.

We revisited this theme a couple of times after that – for example in October 2015, when we turned the 'Lost Formats Preservation Society' in a spatial installation, at Museum Winterthur.

Somehow, this theme (lost, obsolete formats) seems very suitable to be revisited yet again. At a time when information appears to be more immaterial than ever, we believe it would be a meaningful gesture to come with a monument for lost and fallen formats. A timely reminder of the fact that data was once physical.

This rings especially true now that it becomes more and more apparent that the 'non-physicality' of information (the 'cloudiness', so to speak) means that information has become less reliable, less transparent, and more prone to reactionary forces ("fake news", etc.).

But how to incorporate this theme (lost formats) into the circuit? Well – looking again at the Daniel Buren piece in the circuit ('Kaléidoscope – Un Travail in Situ', 1976 – 1983), we do believe that one of the reasons why Buren's intervention is so beautiful is the fact that he used a very specific architectural detail – the spandrels of the arches.

So our line of reasoning is this:
We would like to use the round frames (the 'rosettes'), above the arches, as an infrastructure for 16 lost formats. Somehow, these round frames seem tailor-made to display these formats.

We envision the lost formats to be rendered as black, monochrome (almost monolithic) wall paintings – not unlike Suprematist icons.

We like the tension between the lost formats and the round frames. The round frames are quite monumental, and solemn, and stable – it seems interesting to contrast these frames with these lost formats, and all these formats represent (forgotten data, unstable media, obsolete technology, etc.). We think this will result in a very valuable intervention.

Experimental Jetset
Amsterdam
July 6, 2023



Spreads from issue 57 of Emigre, December 2000

3. Additions

What follows now is a list with recent updates – some changes and improvements we made to our original proposal.

I.
First of all – we finalised the list of lost formats. The series we proposed in our original proposal contained some inconsistenties – so we came up with an updated and corrected sequence of formats. (This new list can be seen elsewhere in this presentation).

II.
We decided that the formats should really be *painted* into the round frames. Initially, we were also looking into the possibility to execute the lost formats as large perspex discs – but this material proved too costly, and too difficult to handle. So we now settled on the idea of painting the formats directly on the wall (using a specific stencilling technique) – which we think is better anyway: by having the formats painted, the work suddenly refers to the tradition of muralism, 'al fresco' painting, Suprematist iconography, etc. etc.



III.
Added to the sequence of lost formats in the rosettes, we propose a second layer, consisting of title/name plates (i.e., museum labels, or caption cards).
We envision these A4-sized plates (white print on black perspex) to be installed at eye level, on the pillars next to each rosette (see the drawing elsewhere in this presentation).

Originally, we wanted to use these title plates to give short descriptions of the lost formats shown in the rosettes. However, after considering the effect, we thought such an approach might be too didactic.
The installation suddenly became an educational device, like a display in an archeological museum. It simply became too explanatory. And we didn't like that.

Having said that – we did like the idea of having something at eye level, connecting the rosettes with the ground, while punctuating the lost formats. Moreover, we think the sequence of plates will function as a loop, activating the circulation of the visitors within the circuit.

Our proposal is now as follows – we would like to use the infrastructure of title plates to introduce, to the space as a whole, a second series of lost formats. So, underneath the layer of round lost formats (as framed in the rosettes), there is now a sequence of rectangular plates displaying (at eye level) a second series of formats: diagrammatic representations of the amount (and dimensions) of tracks contained within several devices.



For all clarity – there is no connection between the lost formats contained in each rosette, and the title plates underneath them. The series of title plates works as a second layer (a second circuit, or indeed a second *track*), below the main layer of lost formats.

We like the idea that we 'hijacked' a certain infrastructure (the apparatus of title plates), while at the same time slightly confusing the usual bonds between the title plate and the work. In our installation (at least, as we propose it here), there will be no direct link – and the title plates function as a work in itself.

Of course, the 'official' Stedelijk Museum title plate can contain all the necessary information (our name, the title of the work, etc.). And we can also imagine an additional publication (a poster, a pamphlet, or newspaper, to be obtained in the museum store), containing explanations of all the displayed formats.

IV.
Some final thoughts and loose remarks:

a.
While making these sketches, it suddenly occurred to us that it's not only the sequence of lost formats that make up the circuit together – each individual format can be seen as a circuit as well. The circular shape of the round formats (think of the looped grooves of a gramophone record) turn each of these formats into a circuit in its own right. In that sense, our installation refers to the notion of the *circuit* in several ways. (Just a quick observation how fitting the work-title 'Circuits' is…)

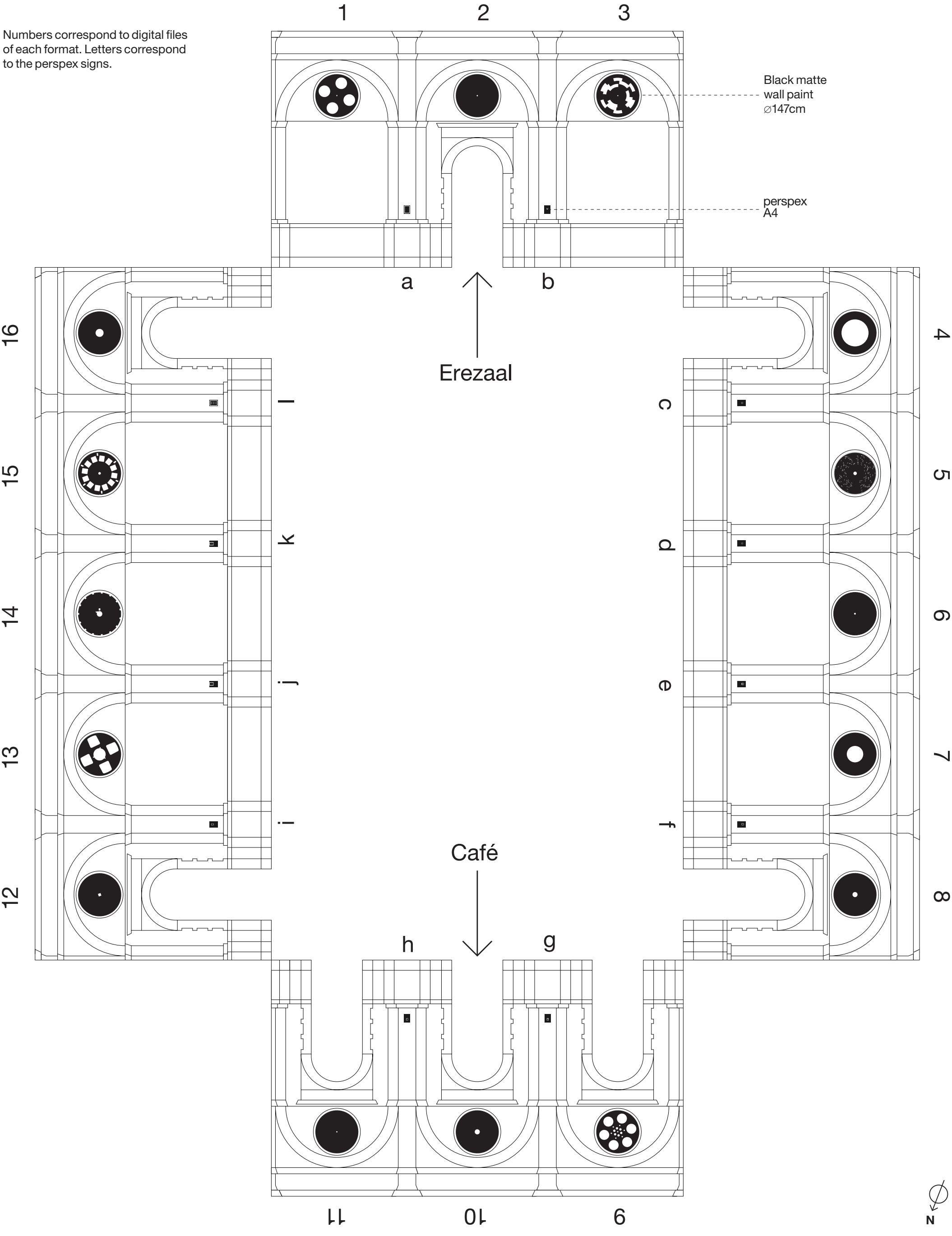
b.
Originally, we thought that the work of Daniel Buren would remain in the space alongside our installation. We have always considered this work ('Kaléidoscope – Un Travail in Situ') a permanent fixture of the museum. While working on sketches for the second layer (the rectangular plates, carrying the diagrams of tracks), we realised that the striped motifs on these plates actually seem to echo the piece of Daniel Buren ('Kaléidoscope – Un Travail in Situ', 1976–1983) in the circuit. More specifically – when seen in relation (or better said, in dialogue) with the tracks and lost formats, the panels of Buren suddenly reveal themselves to be multi-track devices. An interesting and unexpected rhyming of forms.

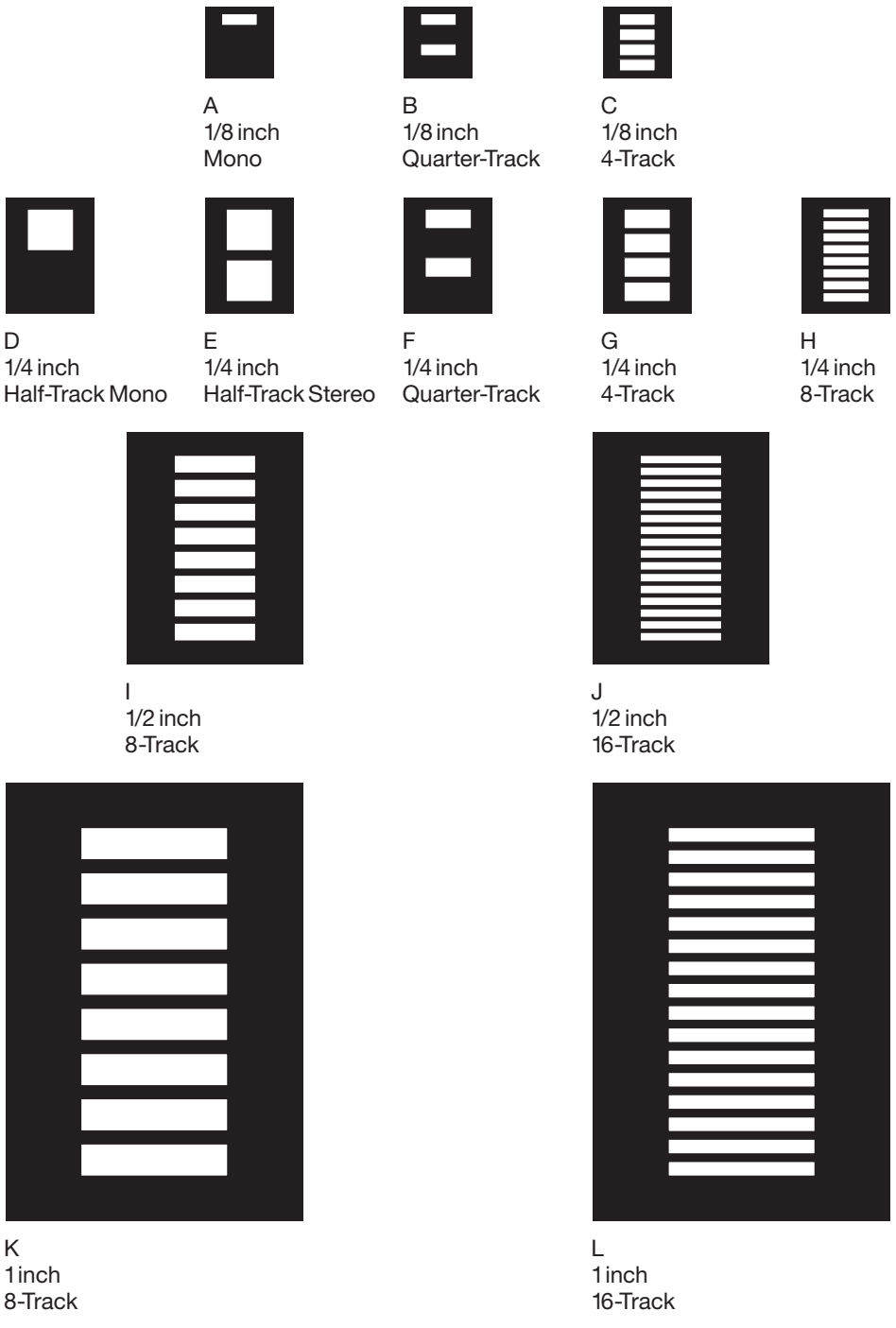
c.
As it turned out, Buren's work was de-installed in the period leading up to our installation. As we don't see the dialogue with the piece of Daniel Buren as an integral part of 'Circuits', his work does not necessarlily have to be installed simultaneously. But in an ideal case, both works will be shown next to each other.

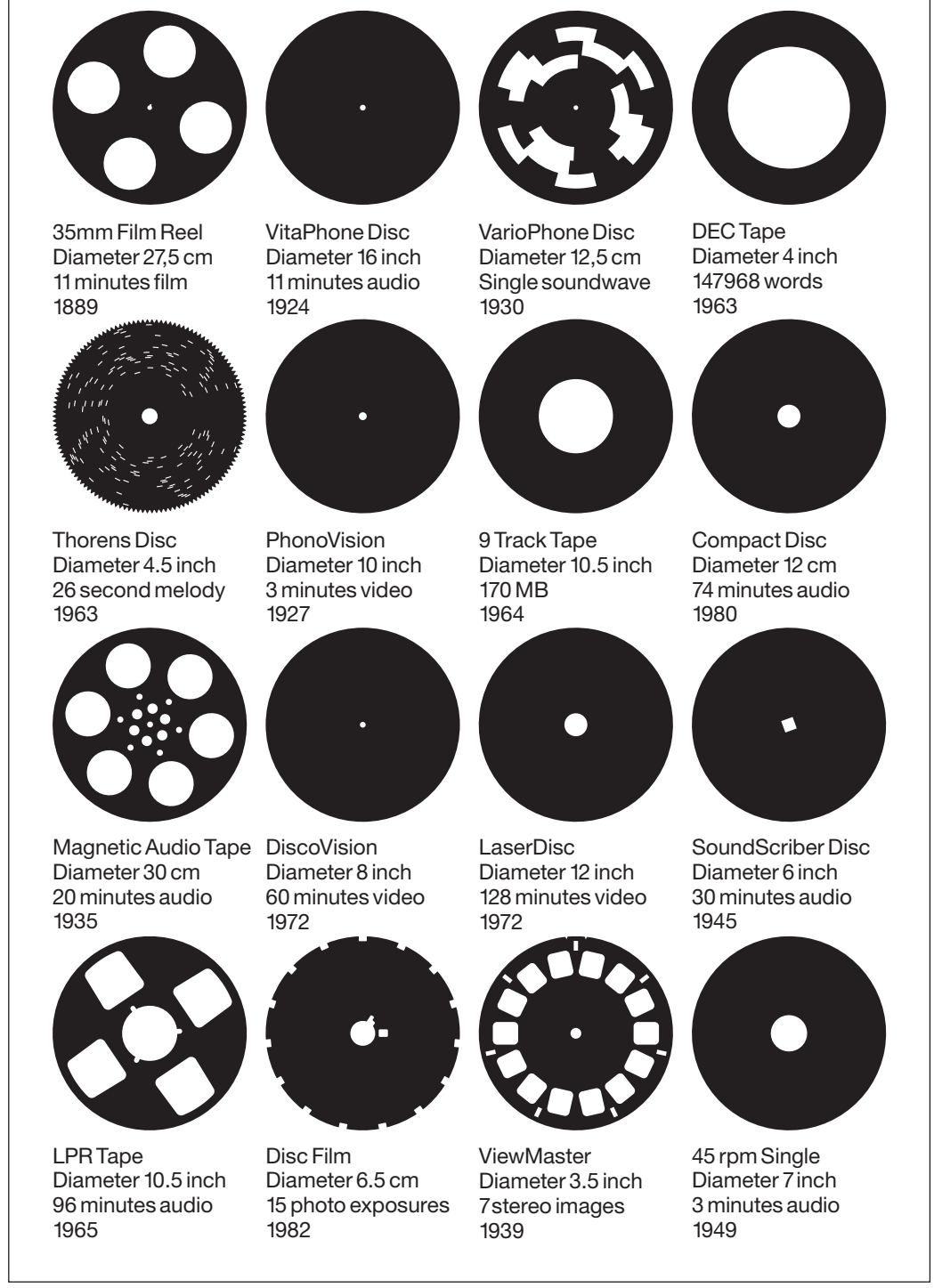
d.
In general, we prefer the surrounding walls (the walls underneath the rosettes) to be kept as empty as possible. If signage will be placed on the walls (for example, to point the visitor to an ongoing exhibition), this signage should be kept as minimal and standard as possible. It should be clear that the signage is the voice of the institute, as separate as possible from our installation. But in the ideal case, the walls underneath the rosettes will be kept empty.

Experimental Jetset
Amsterdam
November 12, 2024
Updated November 5, 2025

Numbers correspond to digital files of each format. Letters correspond to the perspex signs.







Two post cards,
offset printed, 10x15cm