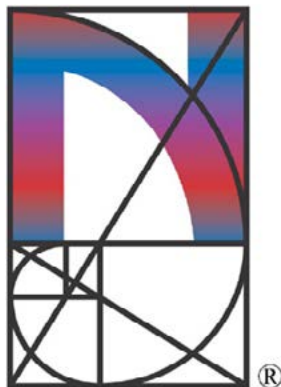


Catalogue 73:
Érik Desmazières,
“La Bibliothèque de Babel”:
The Complete First & Second Suites
of Prints (1997 & 1998)



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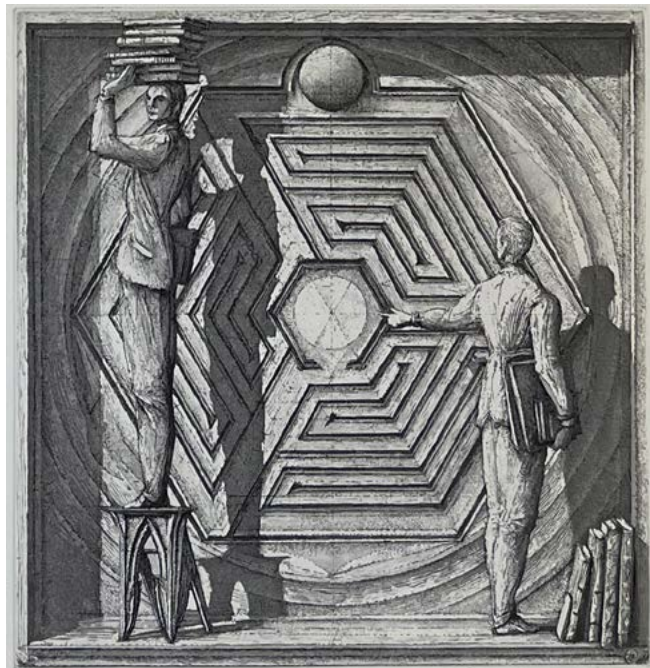
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In 1941 Argentine author and librarian Jorge Luis Borges published a novella titled *La Biblioteca de Babel*, in which he conceived a universe in the form of a universal imaginary library written in an imaginary language. This artistic vision has been viewed as a precursor of the way that the Internet may be conceived or imagined as a virtual universal library.

The most famous graphic representations of Borges's imaginary library are found in the two suites of prints titled *La Bibliothèque de Babel*, created and published by master printmaker Érik Desmazières in 1997 and 1998.



“La labyrinthe,” from the title-leaf of the Second suite (Fitch, no. 156)

The two suites were issued in very limited editions; most of these are now in institutions, while a number of other sets have been broken up and the plates sold individually. For these reasons, complete sets of each suite rarely appear on the market. Having both complete suites together for comparison is truly an exceptional opportunity.

Érik Desmazières has been described as a “contemporary printmaker of breathtaking virtuosity” (*The Independent*, London, Dec. 1993), and “arguably the finest French printmaker of his generation” (Robert Flynn Johnson, Curator, Achenbach Foundation for the Graphic Arts), rendering with masterly draftsmanship subjects ranging from workshop interiors to fantasies in the tradition of Bosch and Goya. Born in 1948, Desmazières graduated from the Institut d’Études Politiques de Paris in 1971 and spent the next two years studying printmaking under Jean Delpech at the Cours du Soir de la Ville de Paris. In 1978 he was awarded the prestigious Grand Prix des Arts de la Ville de Paris, and in 2008 he was elected

a member of l’Académie des Beaux-Arts. Desmazières’s prints have been collected by a number of major institutions—including the Bibliothèque Nationale (Paris), the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York), the British Museum (London) and the Library of Congress (Washington, DC)—and have been exhibited at over 100 galleries and museums in Europe, the United States and Japan.

Among Desmazières’s greatest and most iconic works is the suite of nine etched and aquatint plates he prepared to illustrate Les Amis du Livre Contemporain’s limited fine-press edition of Jorge Luis Borge’s *La biblioteca de Babel* (The Library of Babel), published in 1997. These nine plates, plus one new plate, were also printed separately on 520 x 330 mm. paper and issued in a portfolio comprising a “First suite”; 46 copies of this suite, printed on various papers, were offered for sale. The following year Desmazières issued a substantially reworked “Second suite” of the “Babel” plates, expanding the images to the edges of the printing plates and adding a title-leaf with a new engraved vignette (illustrated above); this “Second suite,” printed on 570 x 333 mm. Lana Royal paper, was offered in an edition of 60 copies. All the plates in both suites were individually signed, dated and numbered by the artist.

A 1998 review describes Desmazières’s “Babel” plates as follows:

Rendered in black and white, with cues from Piranesi and M.C. Escher, the prints are wonderful to behold. The multilevel library exterior, a profusion of portals and buttresses, is an improbable meld of medieval cathedral and the Tower of Babel. Views of its tiered and arched interiors, swarming with seekers, include the noble “Room of the Planets”, a grandiose chamber dominated by a surreal sphere; the “Hexagonal Room”, whose intricately constructed sides culminate in a hexagonal oculus, and a “Plunging View” that takes the eye a dizzying way down an infinitely tiered hexagonal shaft.

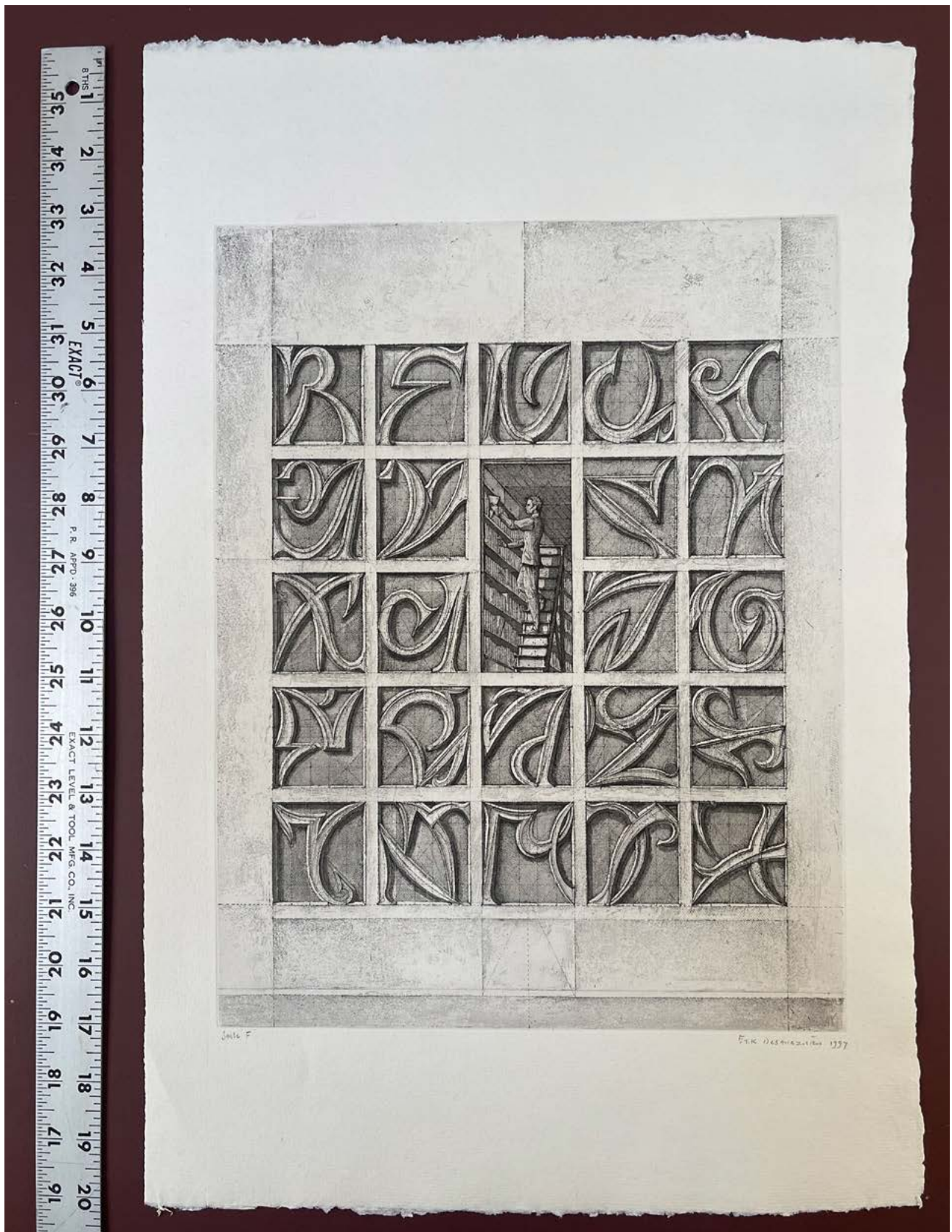
The entire project is a tour de force (or tower de force?) of drawing that sensitively captures the mystical spirit of Borges’s text (Grace Glueck, “Érik Desmazières: ‘Borges’s ‘Biblioteca de Babel’ and other recent work,” *The New York Times*, December 18, 1998).

We are offering one complete set each of the “First suite” and the “Second suite,” both in “mint” condition. On the following pages we illustrate each plate in both its first and second versions to enable a comparison of the two. The reference numbers identifying the plates are from the third volume of Andrew Fitch’s *catalogue raisonné* of Desmazières’s work, *Erik Desmazières: Etchings 1991-2001*. Fitch’s reference numbers apply to both versions of the Babel plates.

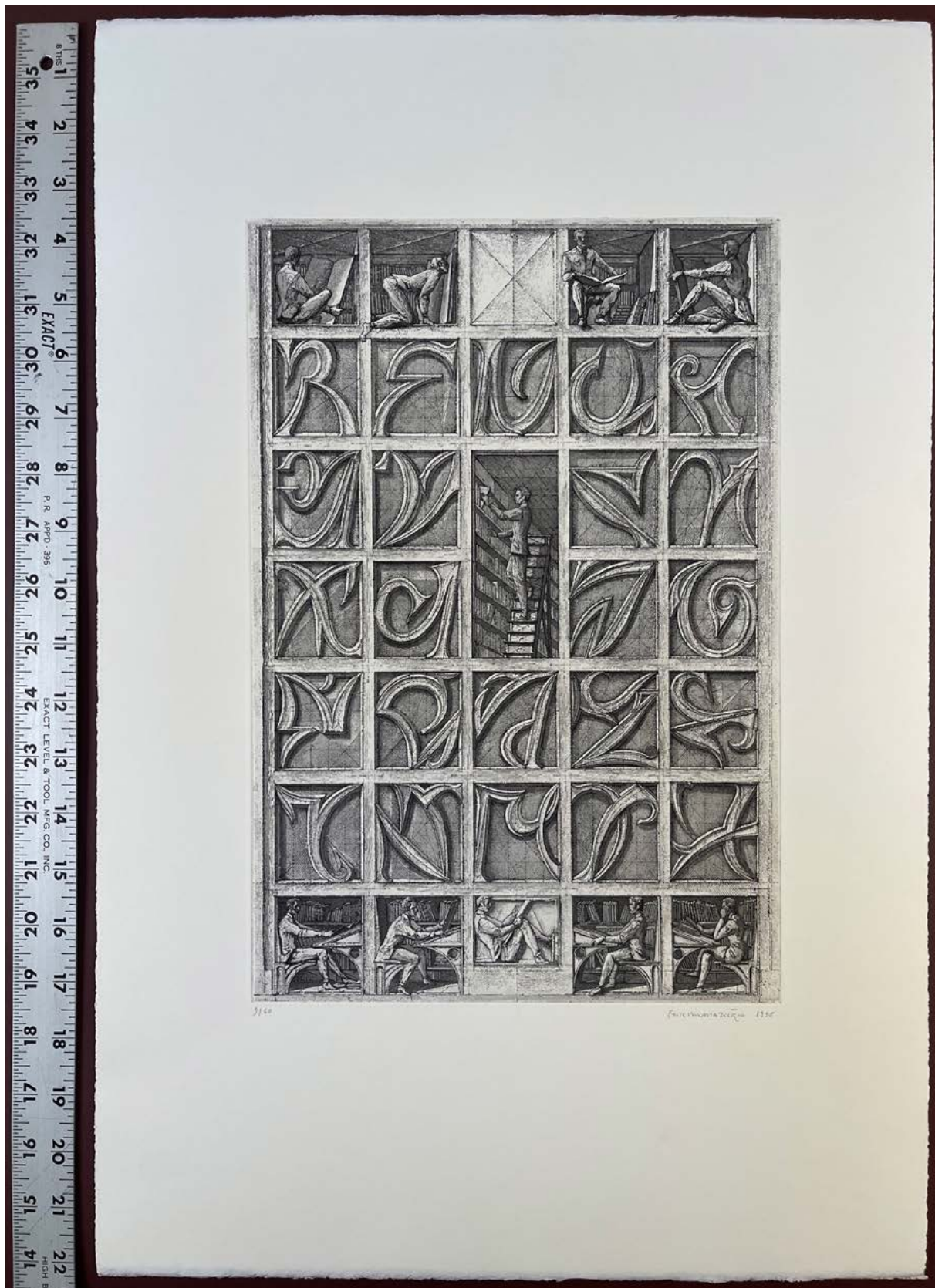
Our “First suite” contains an additional variant printing of the second print in the series, “La tour de Babel,” bringing the total number of plates in our set to 11. Our “Second suite” includes the portfolio’s original paper wrapping with printed label identifying it as no. 9 of 60, with the original owner’s name (“Remo Vescia”) added in ink. Laid into this set is an example of Desmazières’s “Menu” (Fitch, no. 167), one of circa 75 printed, inscribed by Desmazières to Vescia.

First suite: Letter “F” of 15 examples printed on Moulin de Fleurac paper (of a total of 46 suites issued), containing 11 prints (including one extra) individually numbered and signed by the artist. In the original printed cloth portfolio. \$15,000

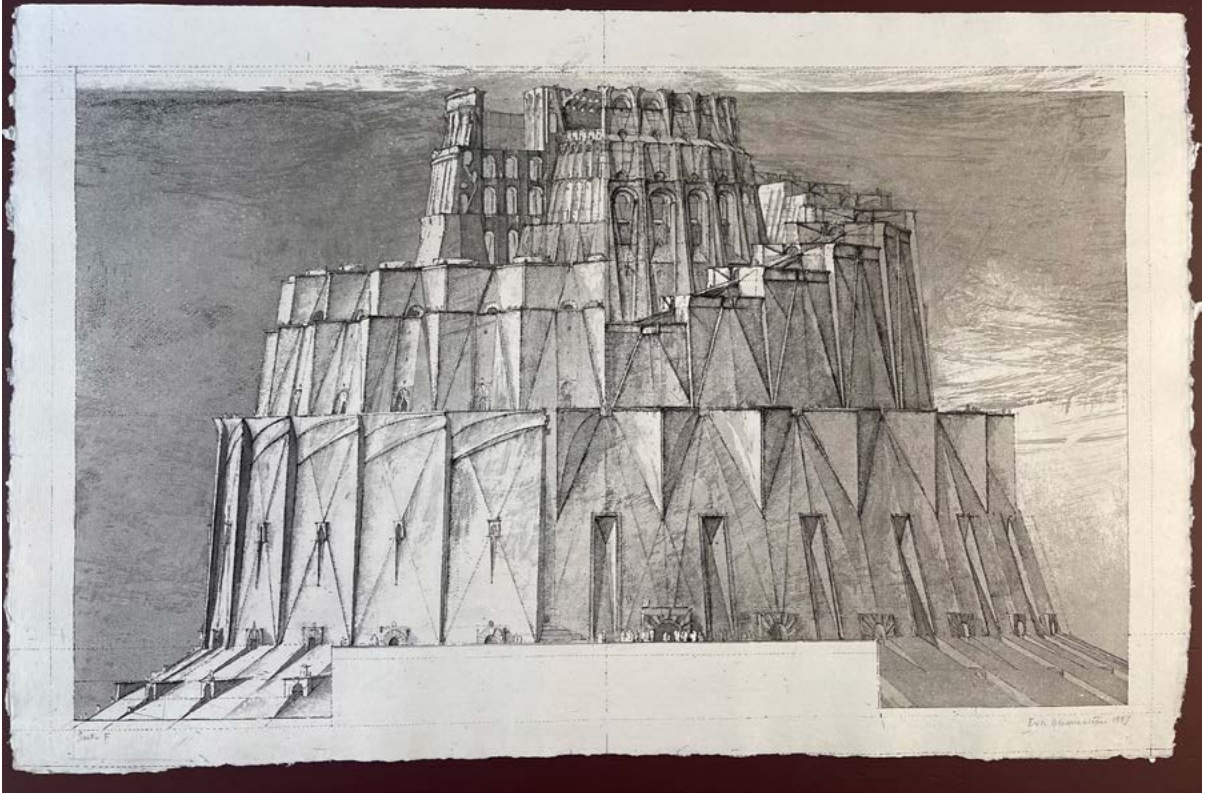
Second suite: No. 9 of 60 examples printed on Lana Royal paper, containing 11 plates (including the title), of which 10 are individually numbered and signed by the artist, plus the laid-in “Menu” inscribed and signed by the artist. In the original printed cloth portfolio. With the original brown paper wrapping (worn) with its original printed paper label. \$25,000

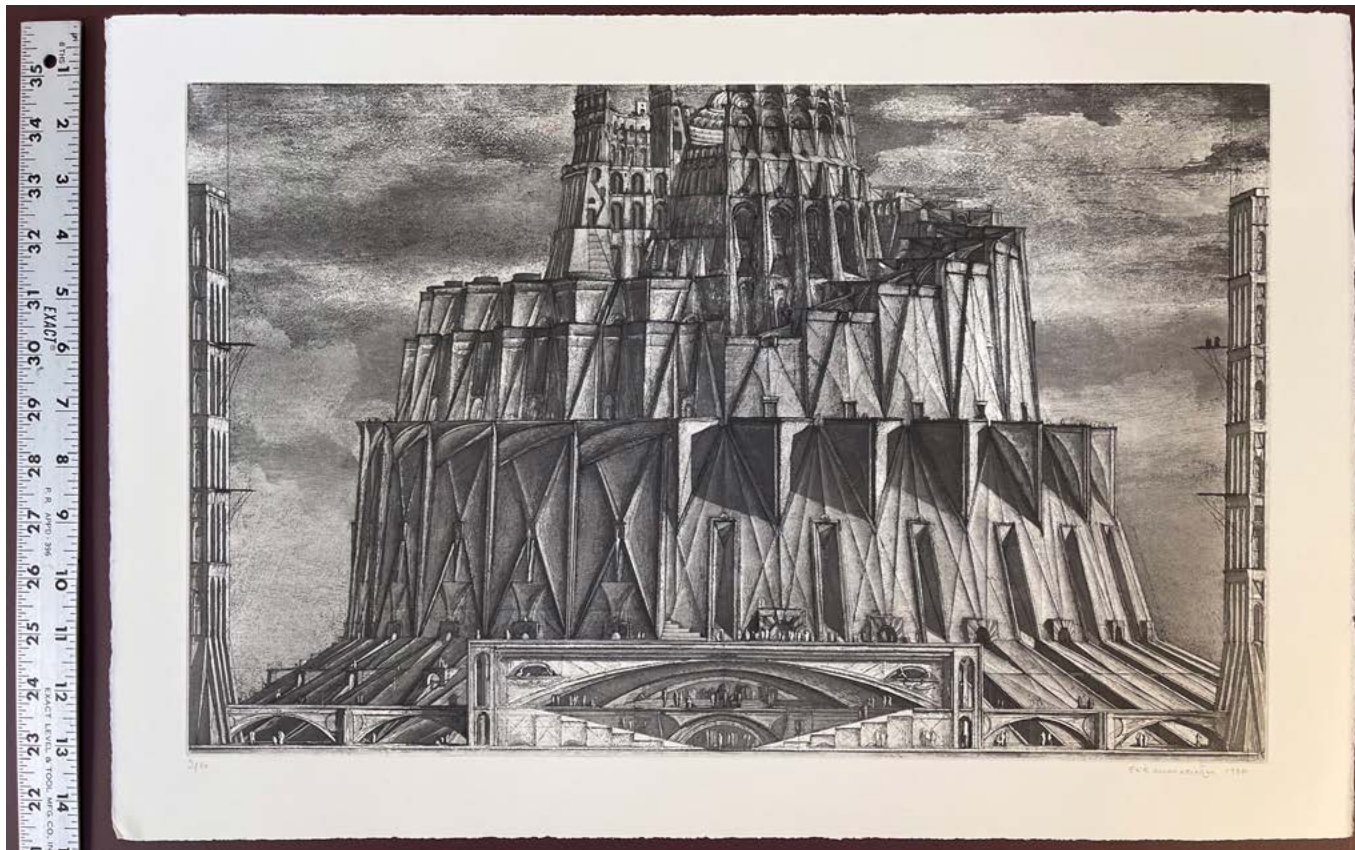


"Alphabet imaginaire I" (First suite). Fitch, no. 157 (both suites).



“Alphabet imaginaire I” (Second suite).





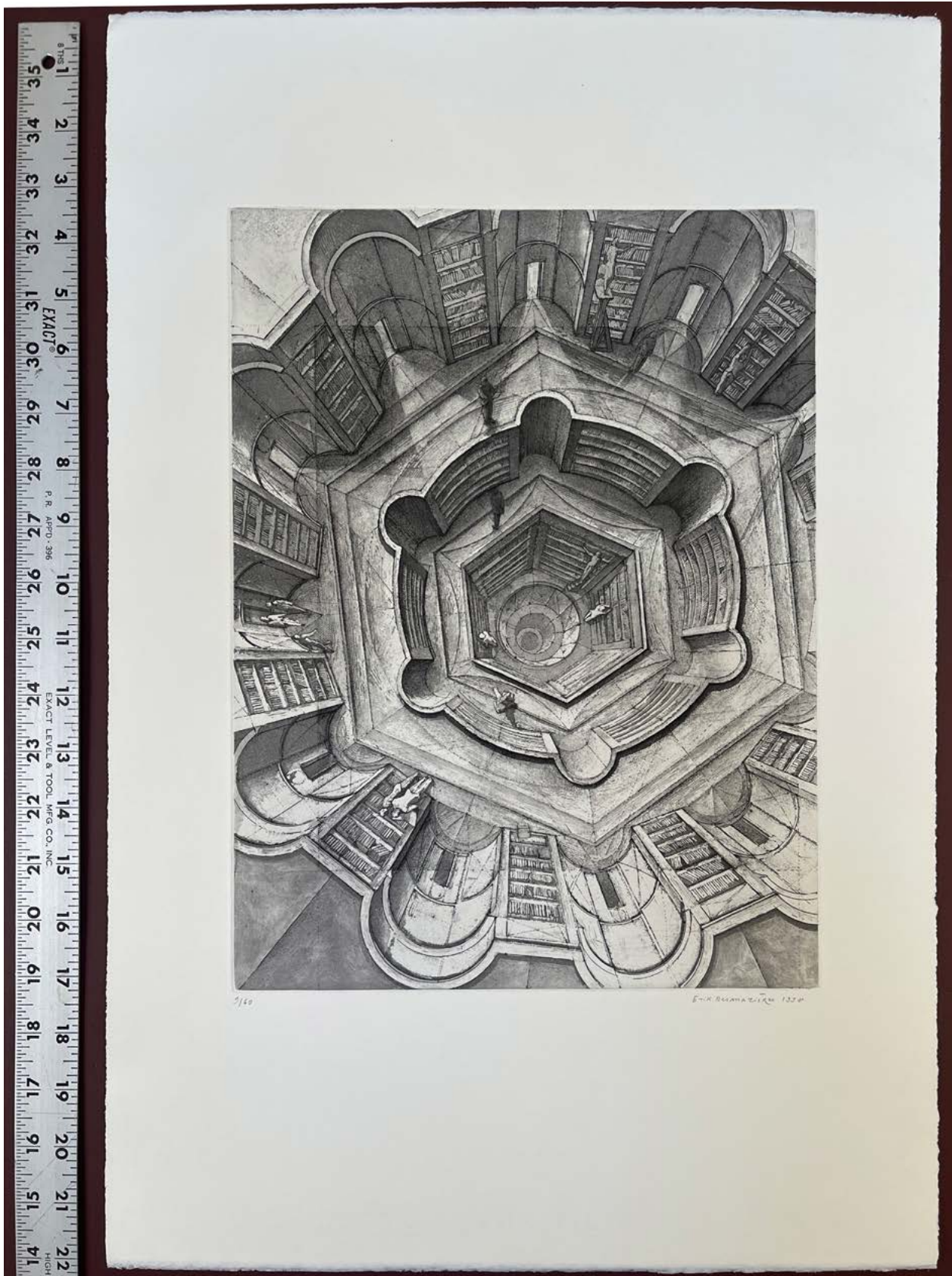
Page 6, top: *“La tour de Babel ou l'entrée de la bibliothèque”* (First suite). First state, before the addition of the title in the bottom rectangle. Fitch, no. 158 (both suites).

Page 6, bottom: *“La tour de Babel ou l'entrée de la bibliothèque”* (First suite). Variant printing of the first state.

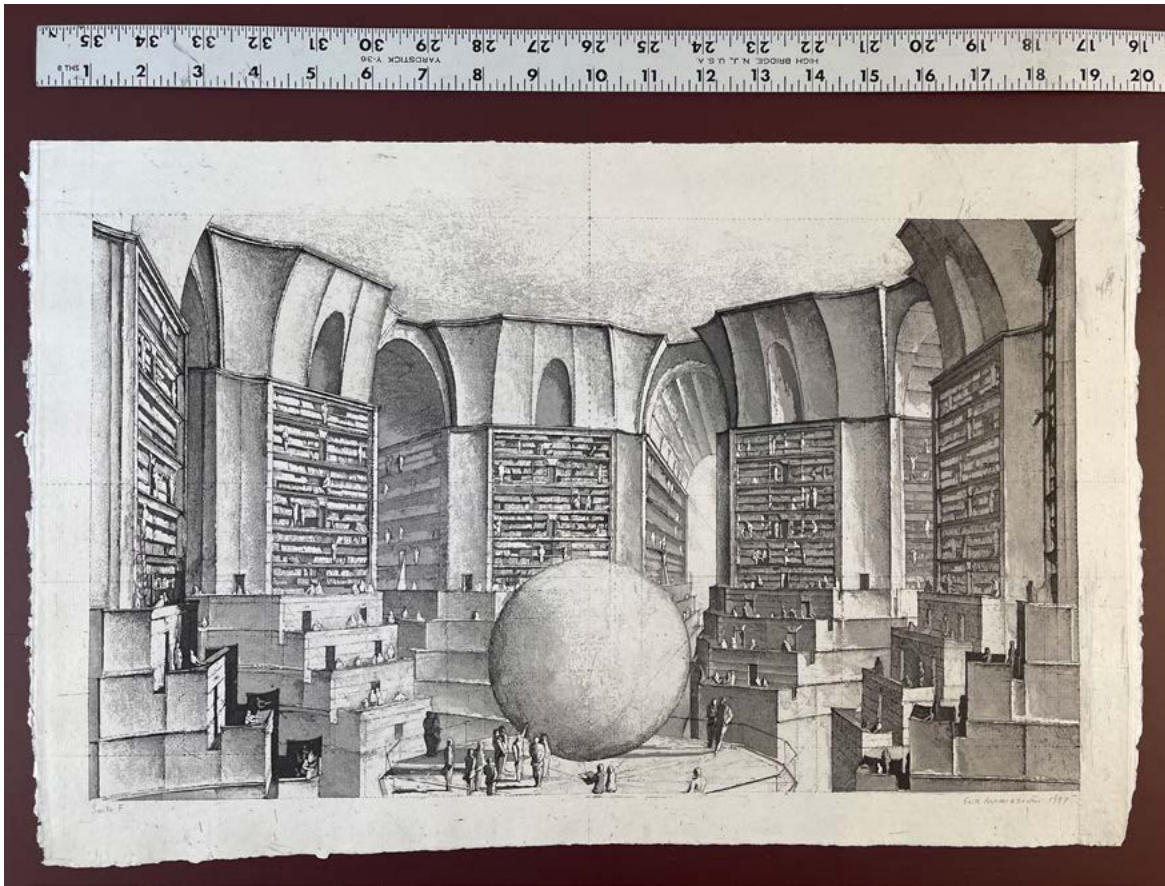
This page: *“La tour de Babel ou l'entrée de la bibliothèque”* (Second suite).



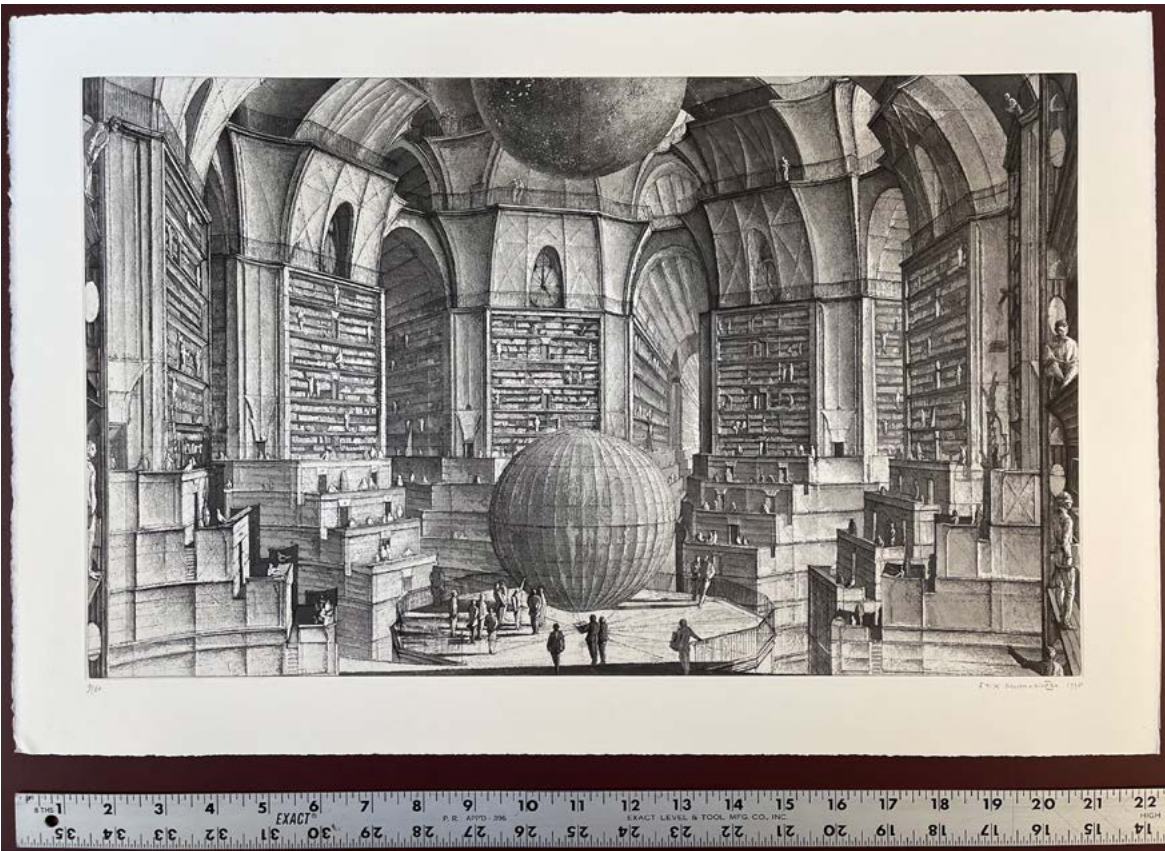
"La Bibliothèque: Vue plongeante" (First suite). Fitch, no. 159 (both suites).



“La Bibliothèque: Vue plongeante” (Second suite).



Above: "La salle des planètes" (First suite). Below: "La salle des planètes" (Second suite). Fitch, no. 160 (both suites).



ONZE ESTAMPES

inspirées de la nouvelle de

JORGE LUIS BORGES

“La Biblioteca de Babel”

inventées et gravées

par

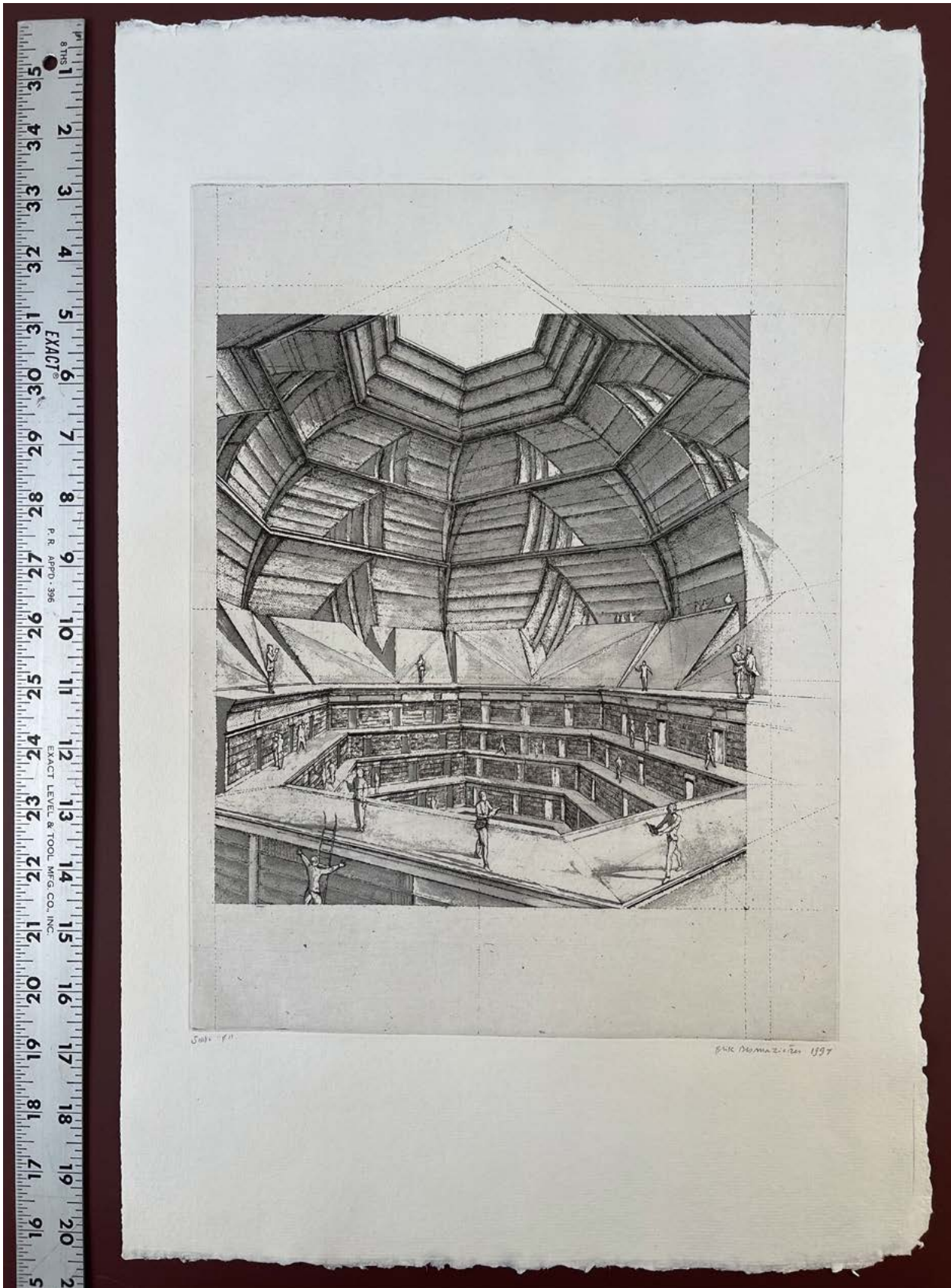
ÉRIK DESMAZIÈRES



A PARIS, MCMXCVIII

AUX DÉPENS DE L'ARTISTE ET DES AMIS DU LIVRE CONTEMPORAIN

Title-leaf to the Second suite, with “La labyrinth” vignette (Fitch, no. 156).



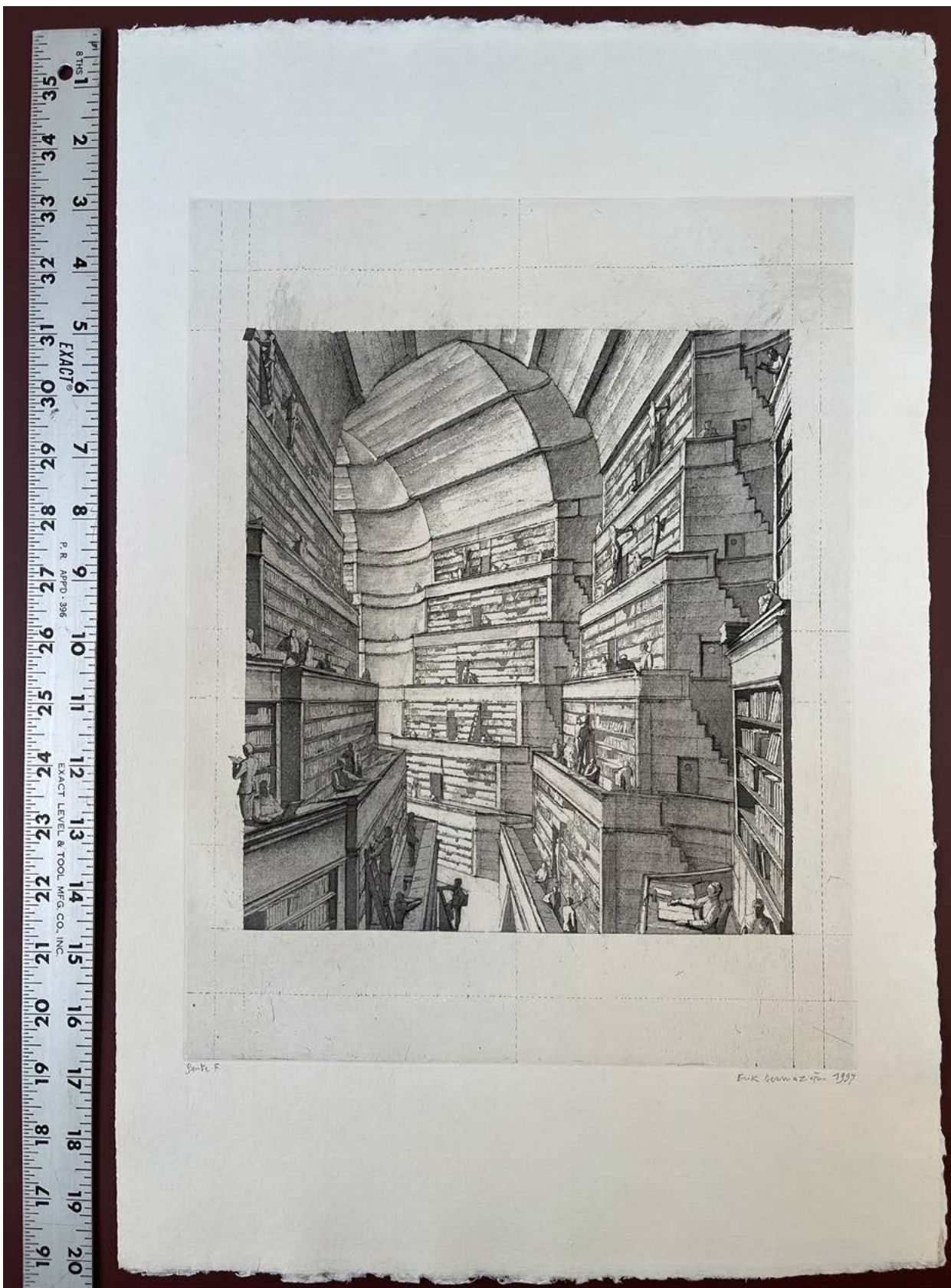
"Salle hexagonale" (First suite). Fitch, no. 161 (both suites).



9/60

E. H. GARDNER, ARCHT. 1937

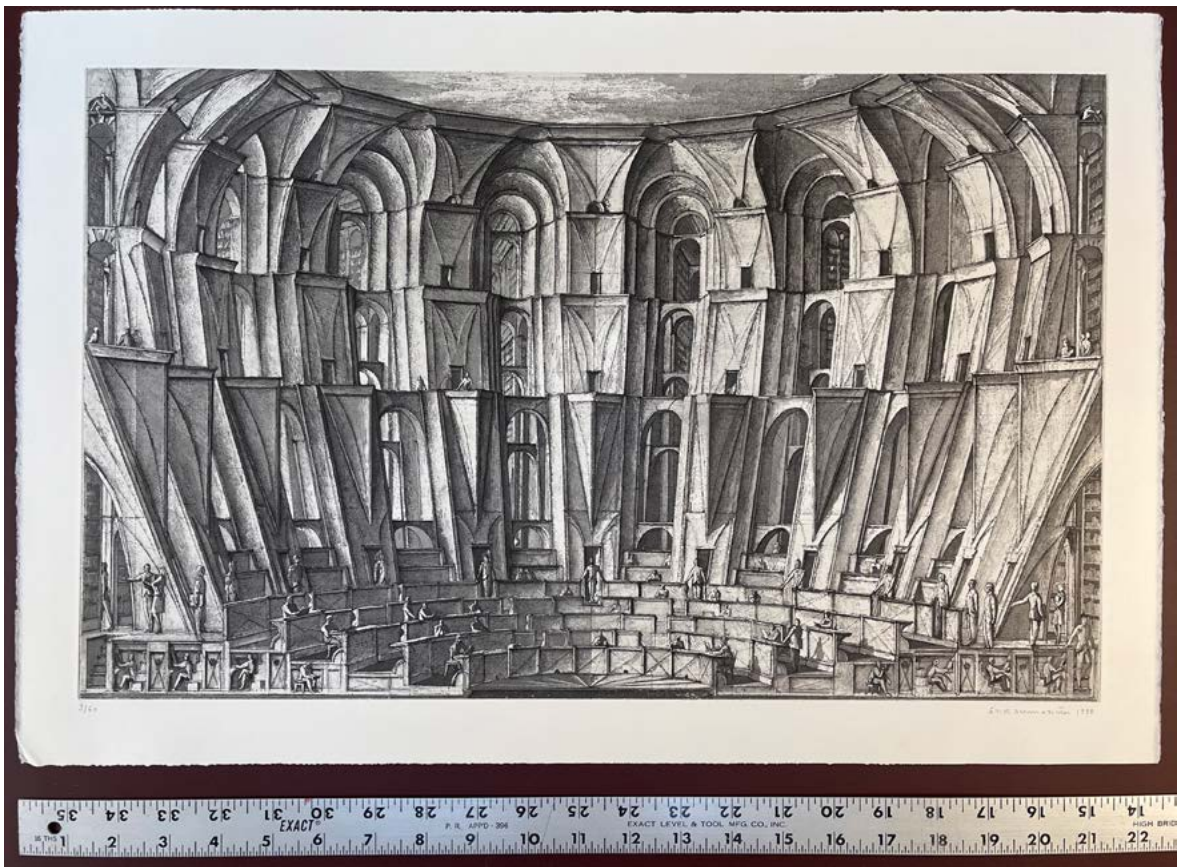
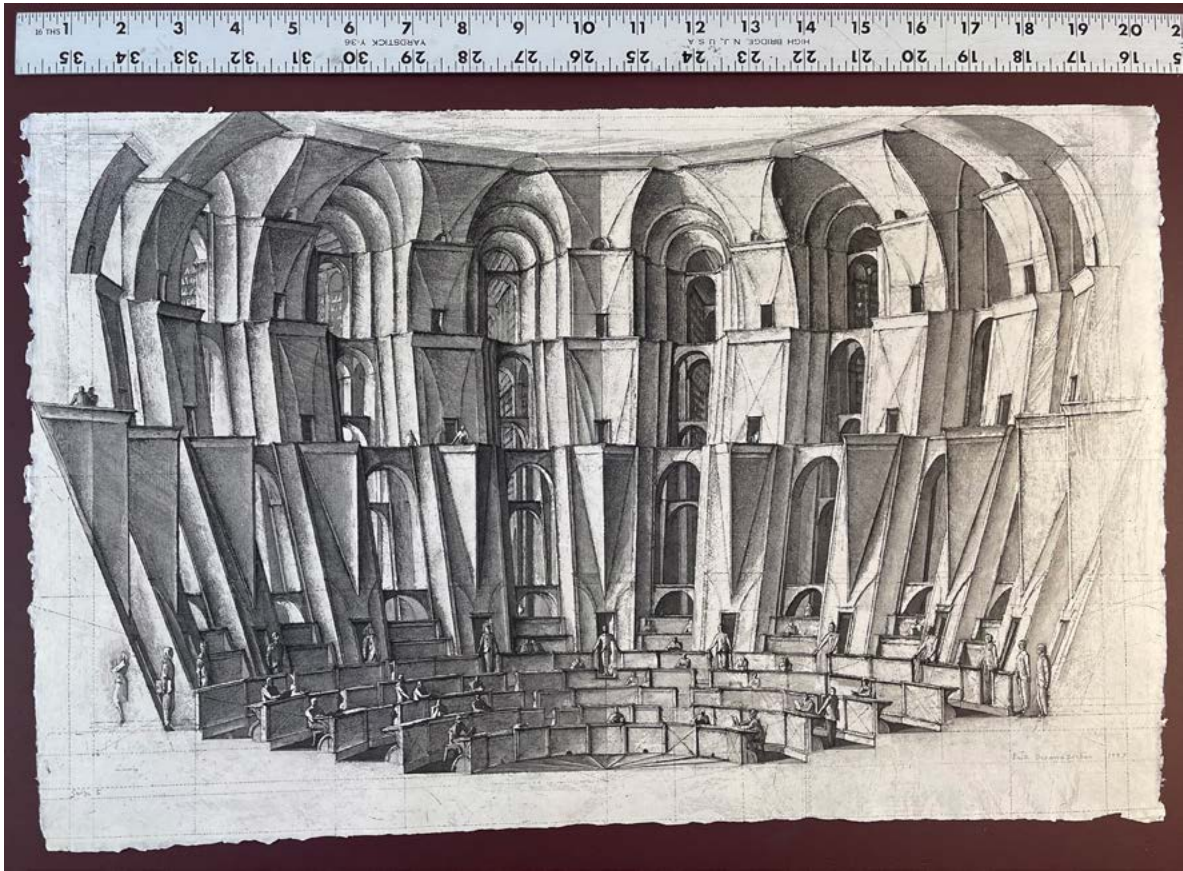
“Salle hexagonale” (Second suite).



"Haute galerie circulaire" (First suite). Fitch, no. 162 (both suites).



“Haute galerie circulaire” (Second suite).



Top: "Grande hémicycle" (First suite). Bottom: "Grande hémicycle" (Second suite). Fitch, no. 163 (both suites).

TITRES DES GRAVURES

LABYRINTHE (planche de titre)

ALPHABET IMAGINAIRE 1

LA TOUR DE BABEL OU L'ENTRÉE DE LA BIBLIOTHÈQUE

LA BIBLIOTHÈQUE : vue plongeante

LA SALLE DES PLANÈTES

SALLE HEXAGONALE

HAUTE GALERIE CIRCULAIRE

GRAND HÉMICYCLE

LA BIBLIOTHÈQUE : contre-plongée

ALPHABET IMAGINAIRE 2

BIBLIOTHÈQUE CONCENTRIQUE



Ainsi que précisé au colophon de *La Biblioteca de Babel - La Bibliothèque de Babel*, édité par les Amis du Livre Contemporain, cette suite de 11 gravures originales à grandes marges est tirée sur les cuivres ayant servi à illustrer l'ouvrage.

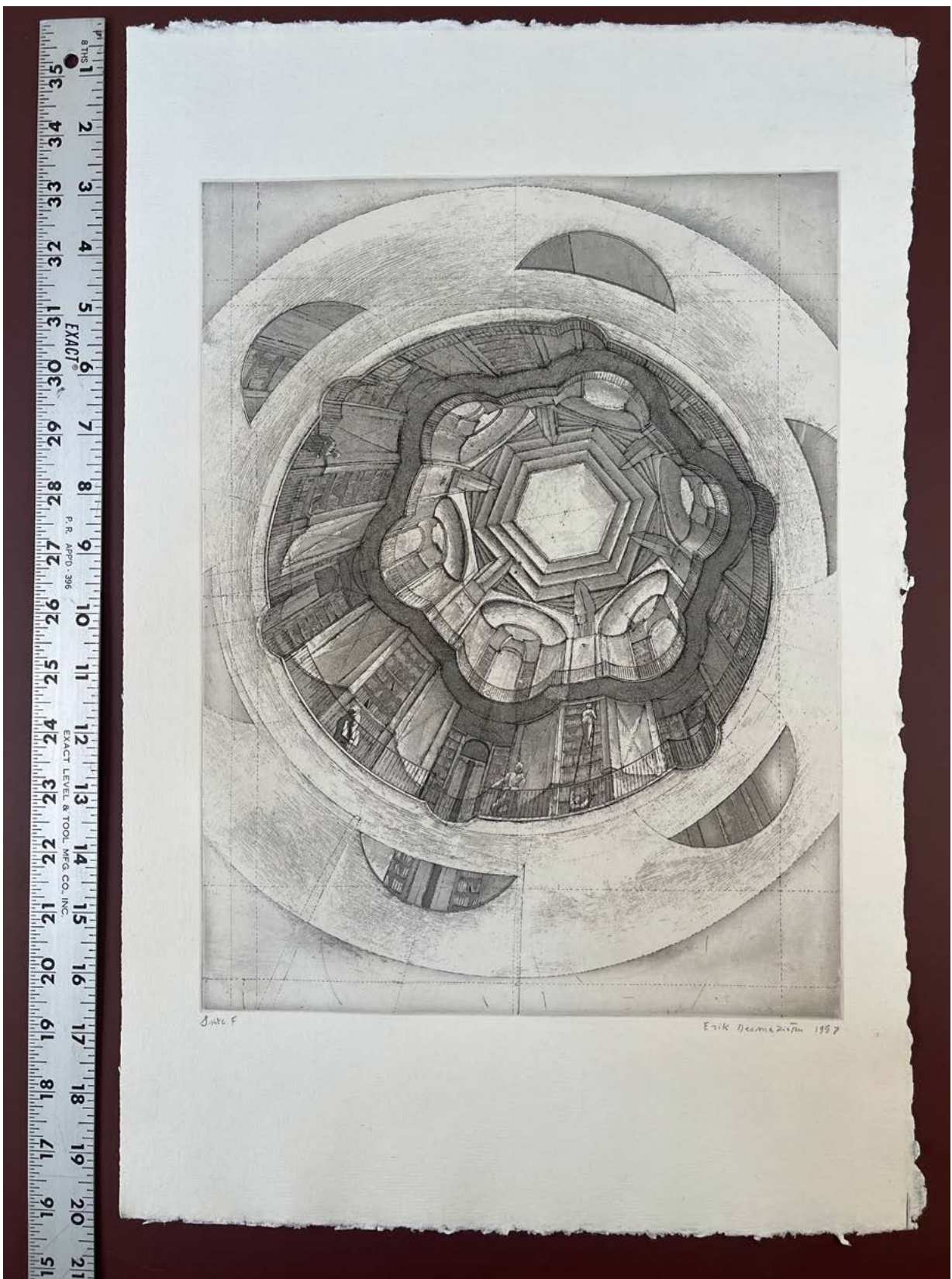
Les planches largement retravaillées ont été tirées à 60 exemplaires sur Lana Royal et numérotées de 1 à 60 dont 40 réservées à l'artiste. Le Labyrinthe et la Bibliothèque Concentrique sont ajoutées aux illustrations du livre.

En outre, il a été tiré deux suites nominatives réservées aux imprimeurs : François Da Ros pour la typographie et René Tazé pour la taille-douce, ainsi qu'une troisième suite destinée au dépôt légal.

Suite n. 3/60

Eme Desmazières

Verso of the title-leaf to the Second suite, signed and numbered by Desmazières.



“La bibliothèque: Contre-plongée” (First suite). Fitch, no. 164 (both suites).



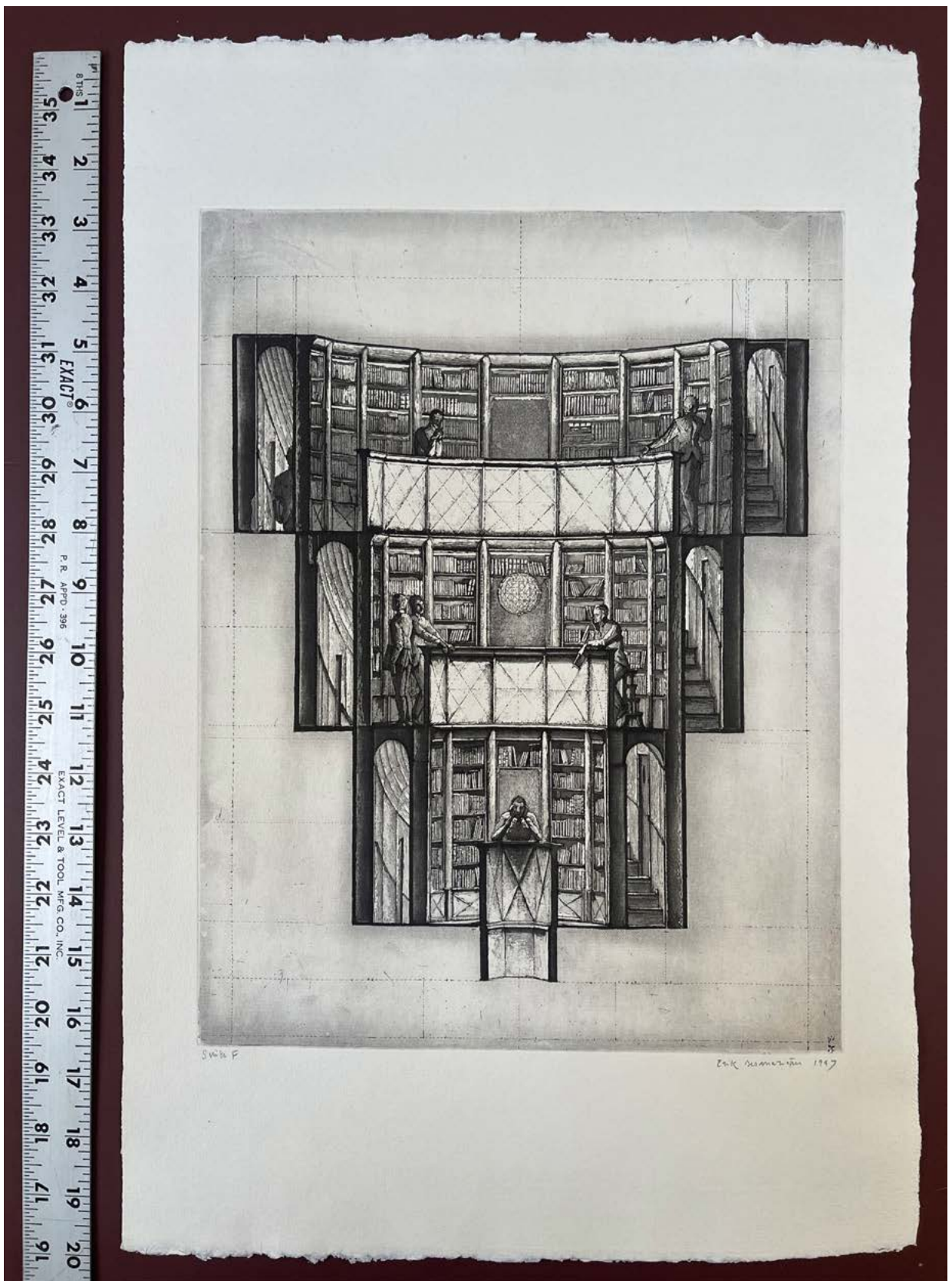
“La bibliothèque: Contre-plongée” (Second suite).



"Alphabet imaginaire II" (First suite). Fitch, no. 165 (both suites).



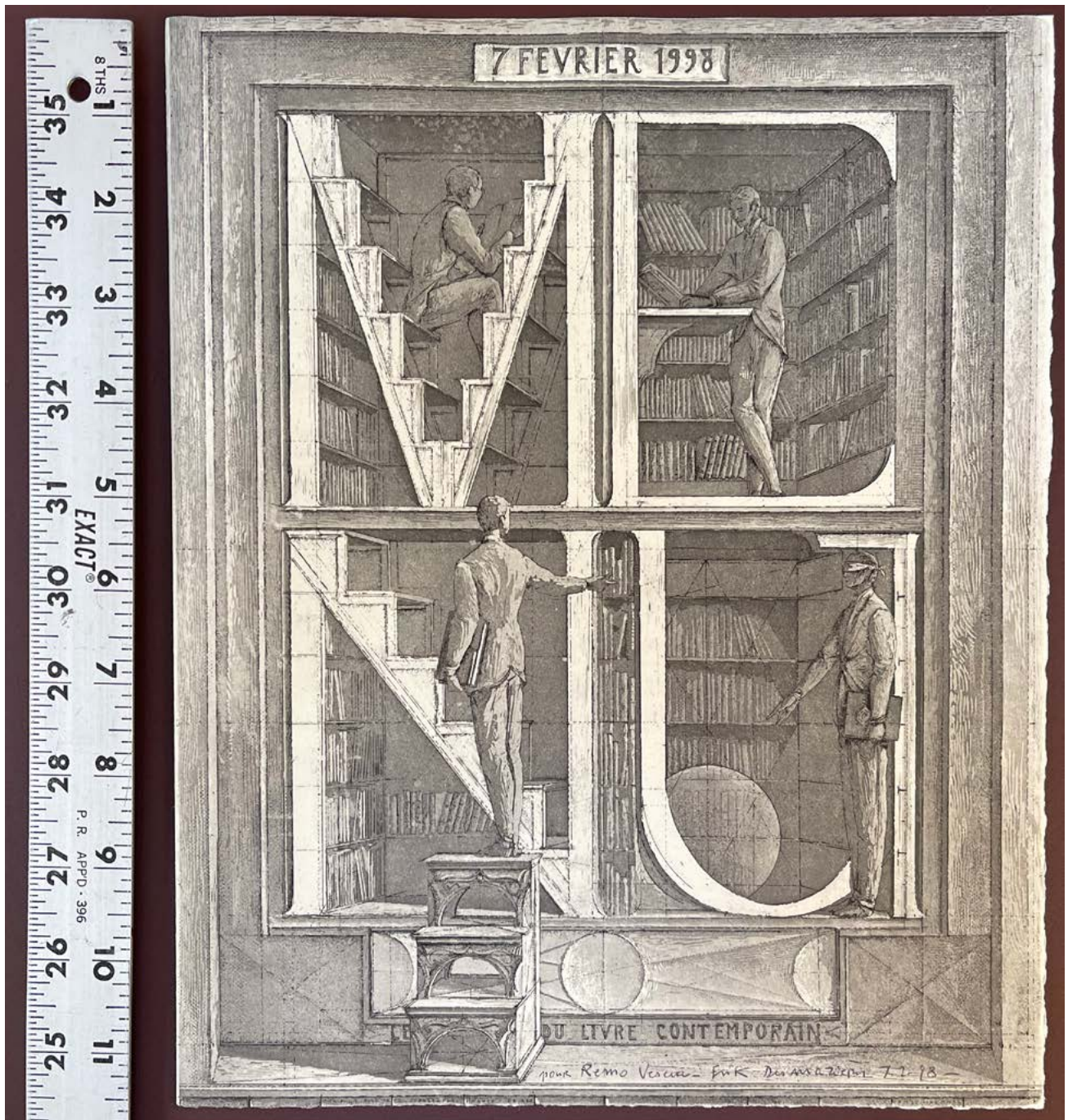
"Alphabet imaginaire II" (Second suite).



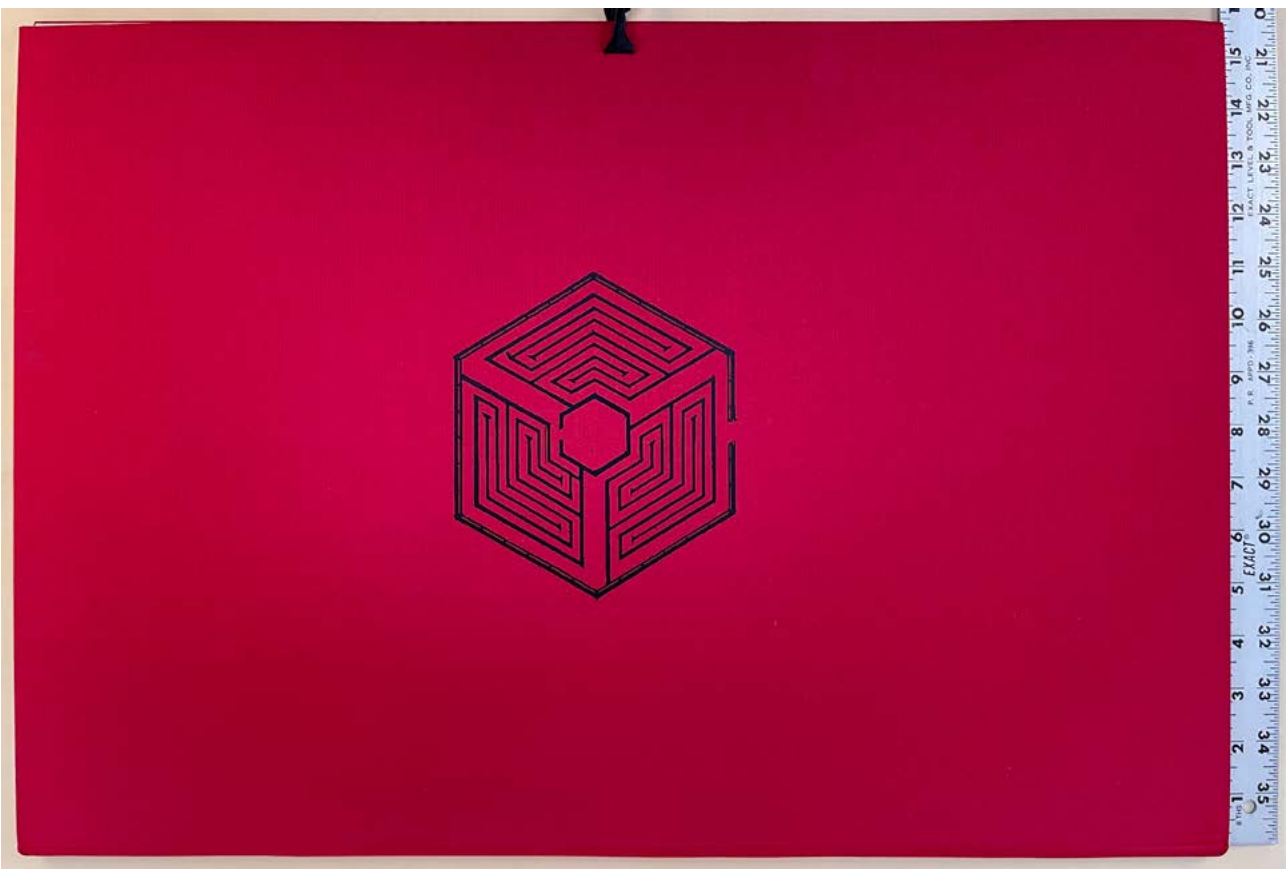
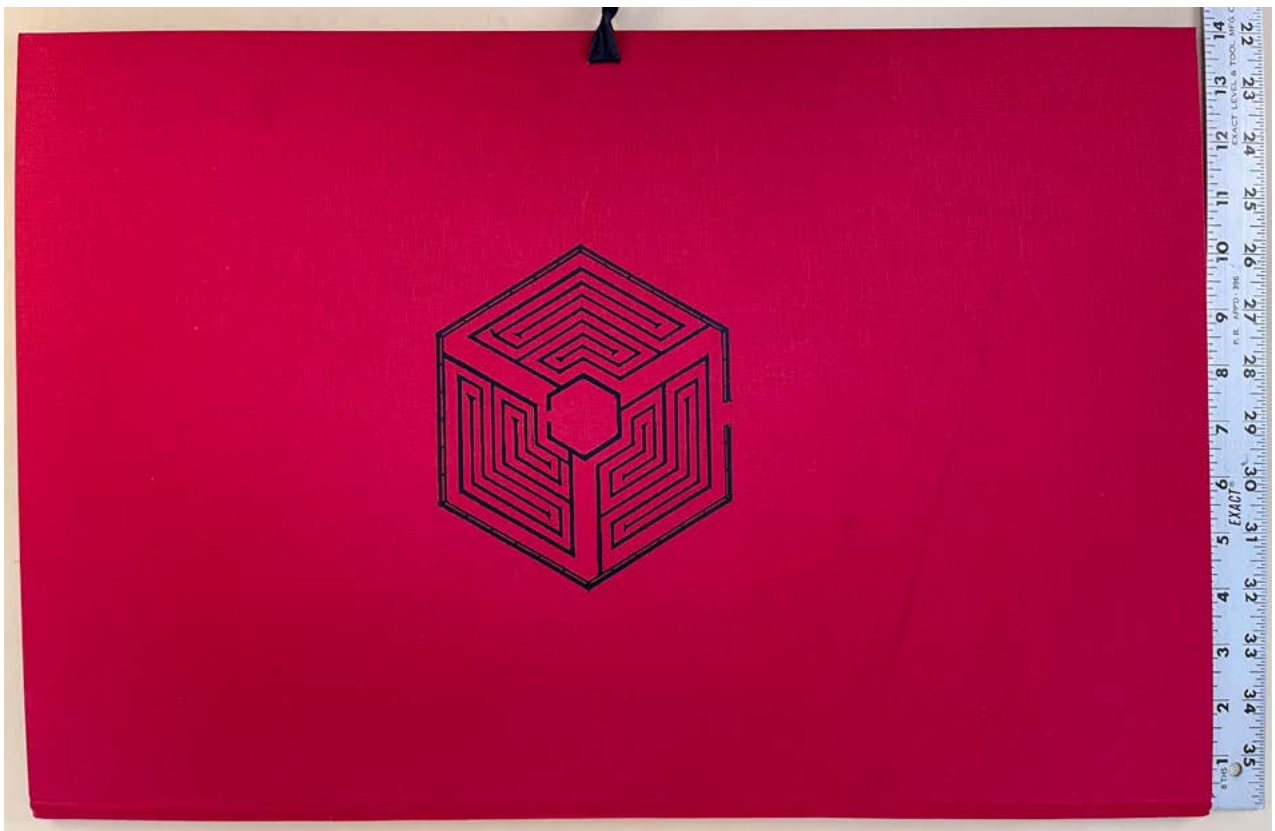
"Bibliothèque concentrique" (First suite). Fitch, no. 166 (both suites).



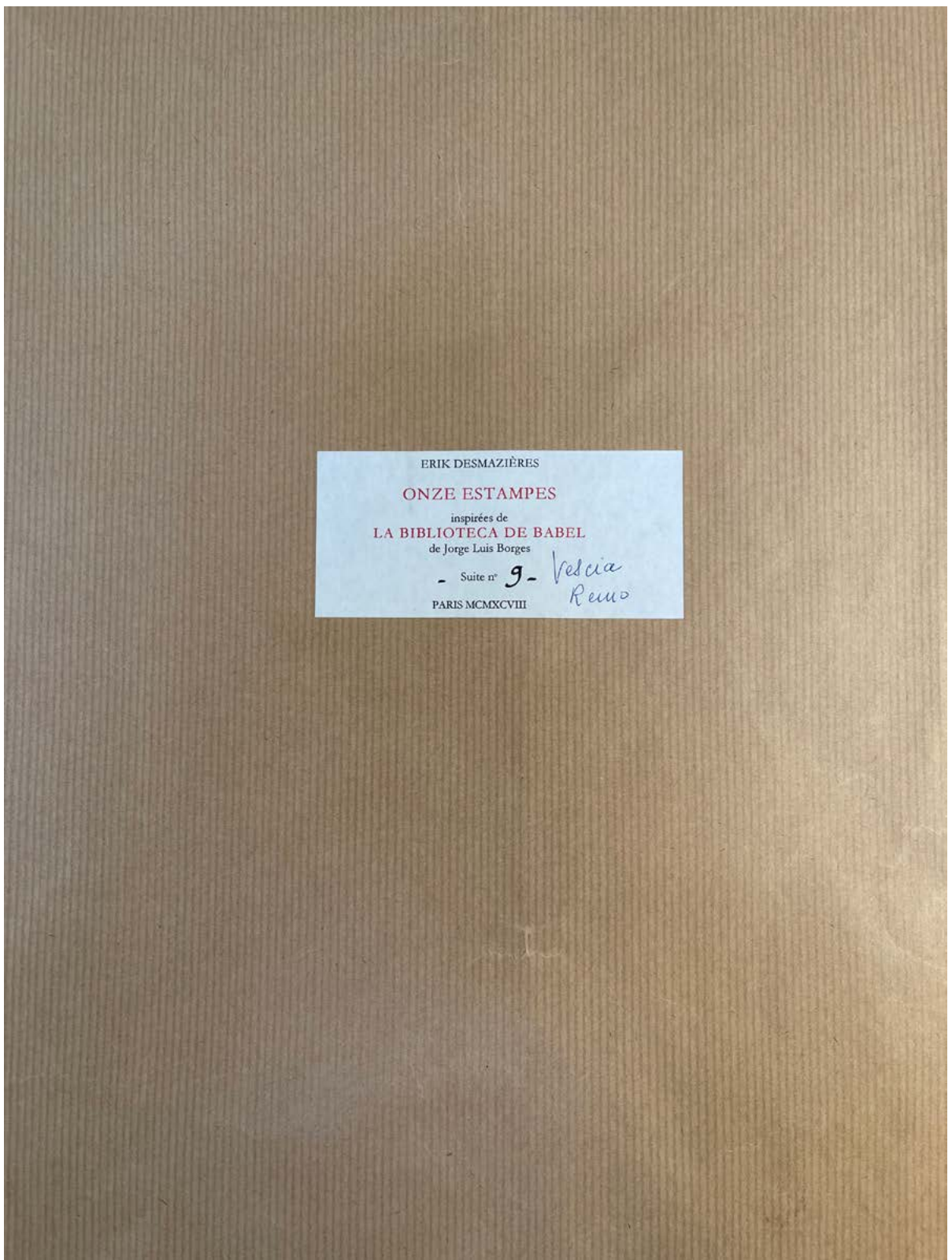
"Bibliothèque concentrique" (Second suite).



"Menu," inscribed by Desmazières to Remo Vesica. Fitch, no. 167. Laid into our copy of the Second suite.



Top: Portfolio for the First suite. Bottom: Portfolio for the Second suite.



Original paper wrapping, with numbered label, for our example of the Second suite, with original owner's name.