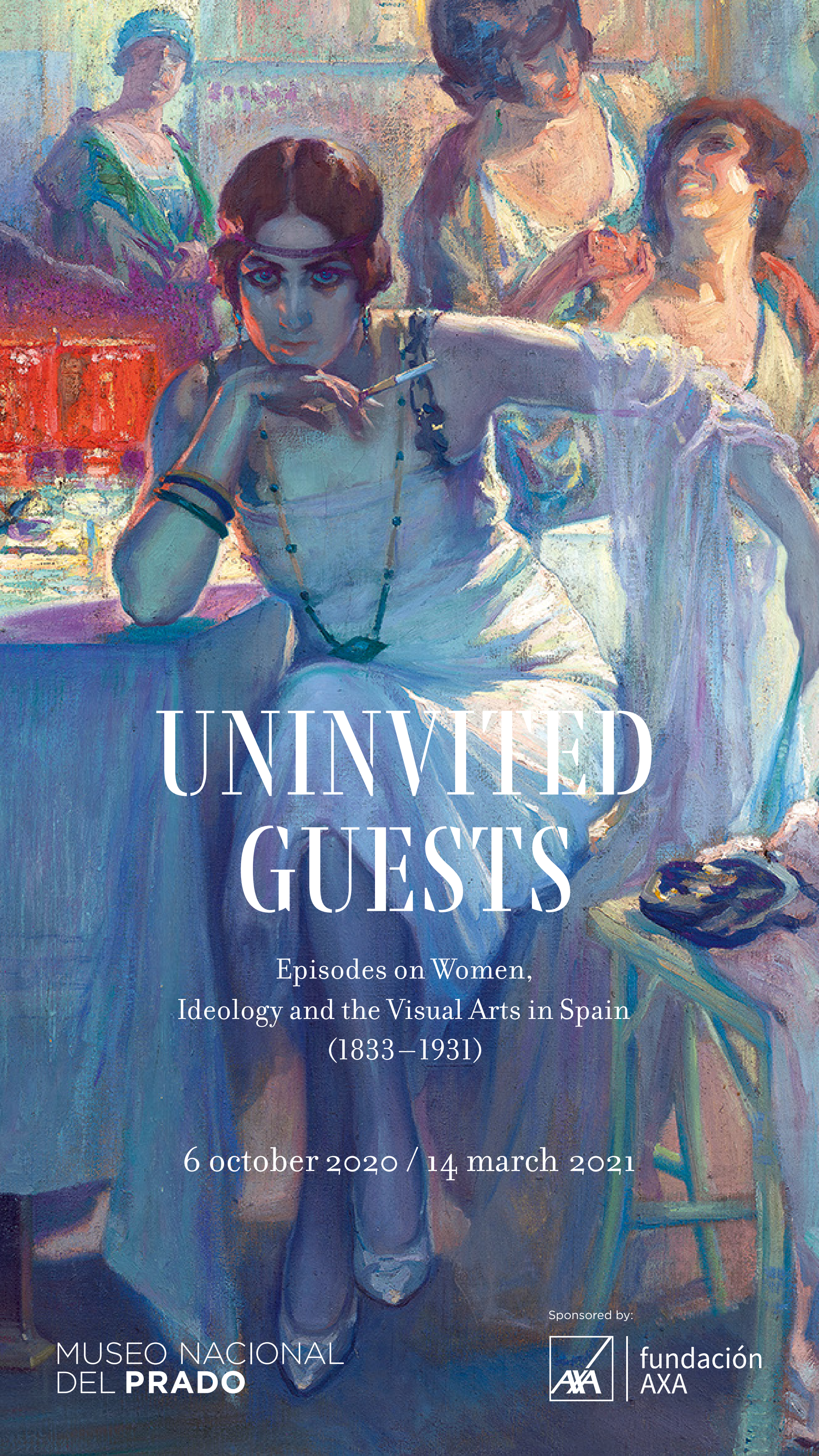


UNINVITED GUESTS

Episodes on Women,
Ideology and the Visual Arts in Spain
(1833–1931)

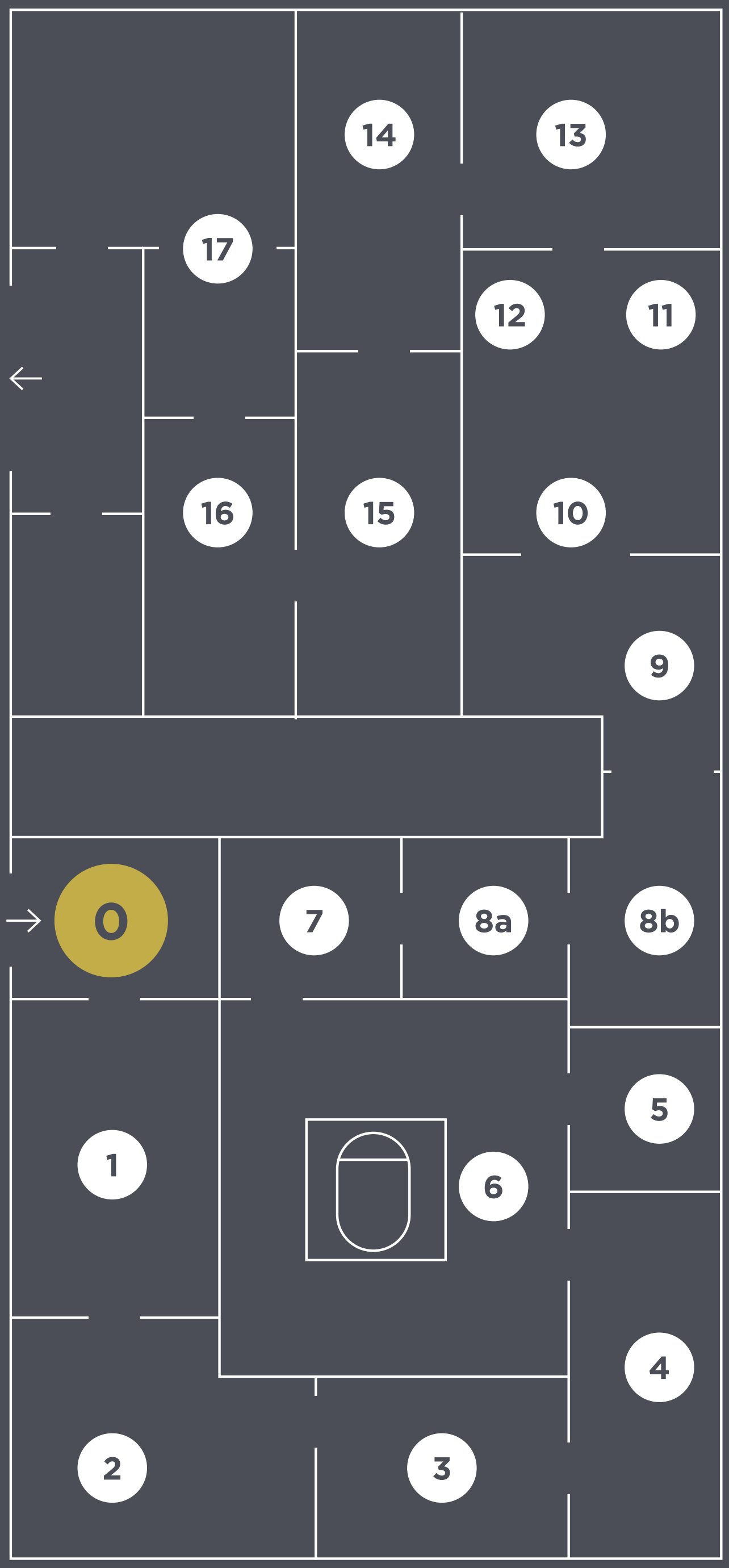
6 october 2020 / 14 march 2021

MUSEO NACIONAL DEL **PRADO**

Sponsored by:

AXA | fundación AXA

UNINVITED GUESTS



Section 0

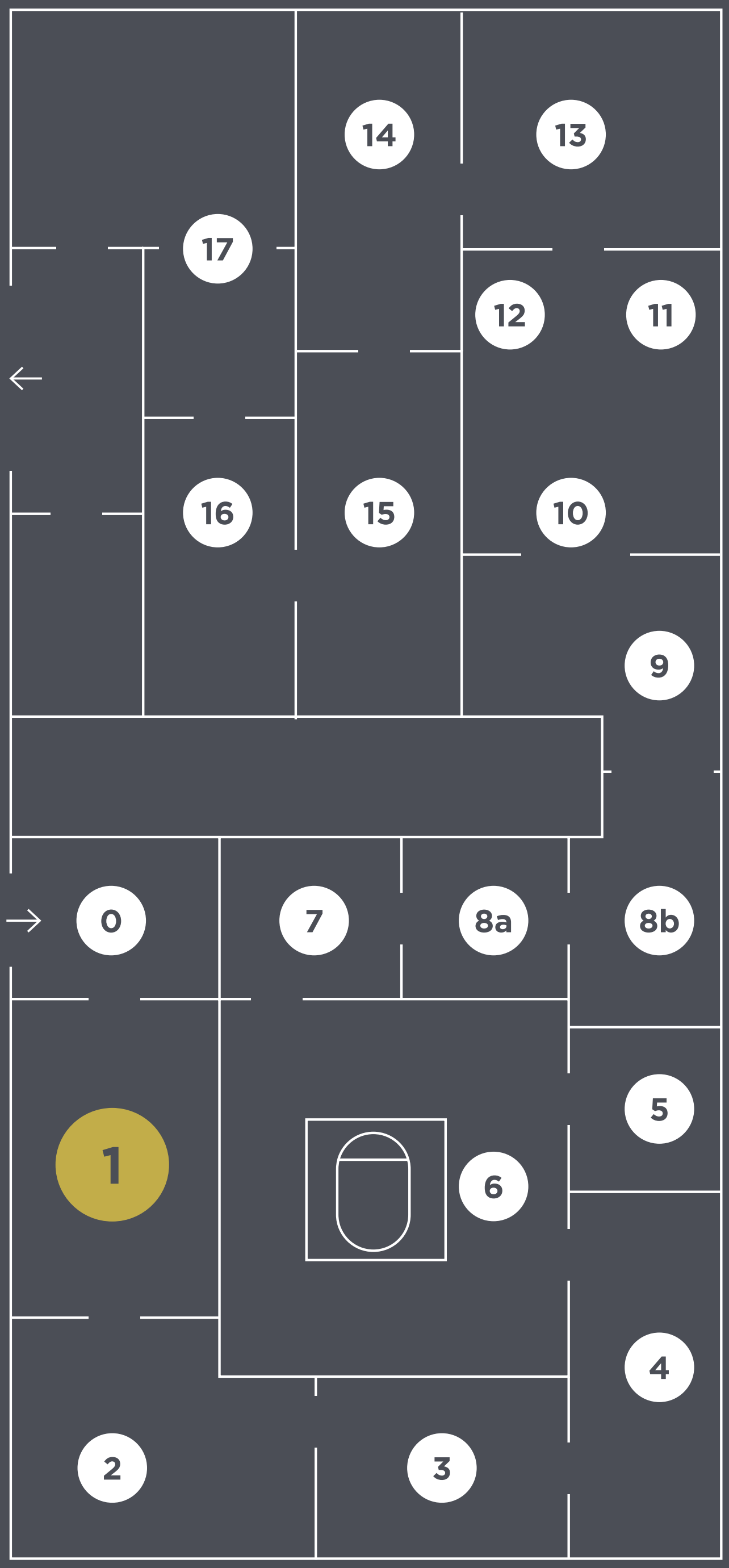
INTRODUCTION

In this exhibition, the Museo del Prado presents a survey of the situation of women in the Spanish art system through some of the least known works in its collection of art from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, together with a small but significant group of loans from other institutions.

Circumscribed within a chronological period going from the times of Rosario Weiss (1814–1843) up to those of Elena Brockmann (1867–1946), the exhibition is divided into two sections articulated in their turn in various thematic fragments. The first illustrates the official support given to those images of woman which conformed to the bourgeois ideal. The State legitimised these works through commissions, prizes or acquisitions, and they were taken as valuable demonstrations of an artist's maturity. At the same time, all those which failed to conform to this

imagery were rejected. The context in which these representations were validated serves as an antechamber to the second part of the exhibition. This looks at central aspects of the careers of women artists, whose development was determined by the predominant thought of the time. This laid down the rules for their training, their participation in the art scene, and their public recognition. To give visible shape to this second field of activity, the exhibition presents works by the key women artists from Romanticism to those working within the framework of the avant-garde movements.

UNINVITED GUESTS



Section 1

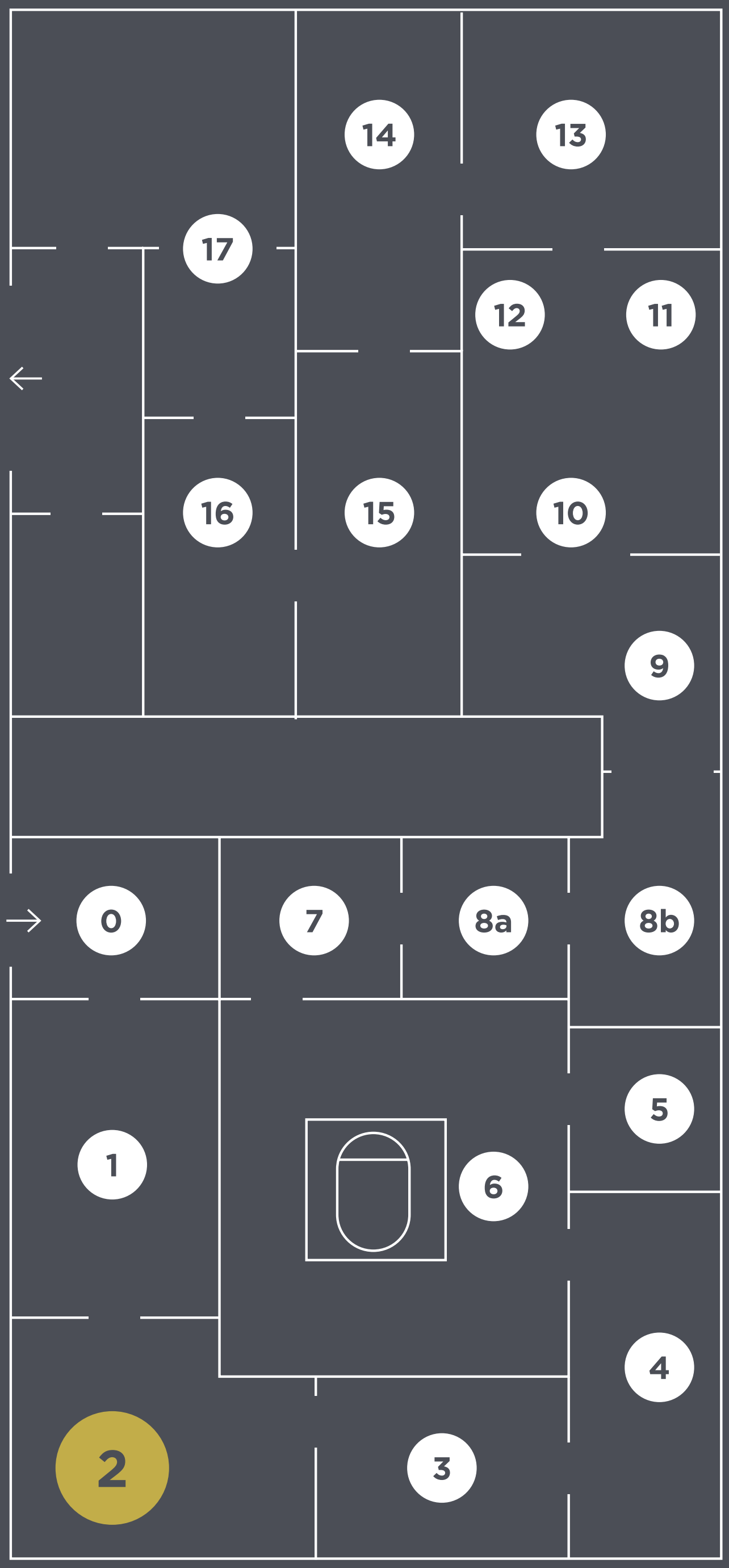
INTRUDER QUEENS

The *Chronological Series of the Kings of Spain* was a museum project planned in 1847 by José de Madrazo to adorn four of the new rooms at the Real Museo de Pinturas (Royal Museum of Paintings), then under his direction. At the height of the confrontation between the supporters of Isabella II and the Carlists, who denied the sovereign's right to occupy the throne because she was a woman, the queen assented to the creation and display of a portrait gallery that would represent all the preceding monarchs in chronological order. To fill the gaps of the medieval kings, of whom there were no images in the Royal Collections, portraits were commissioned from a number of young painters. At the same time, given that the clear political purpose of the series was to provide visual legitimisation for Isabella's right to the crown, a special effort was made to represent the queens of Spain's history.

Section 1

After the fall of Isabella II, Joanna I of Castile became the favourite figure among history painters, who would ignore historical exactitude to stoke the myth of her madness, a sign of the prejudices that had accumulated regarding women and their supposed inability to govern. These images make it evident that even after the end of the nineteenth century, recognition of the royal dignity and political power of women continued to raise representational problems.

UNINVITED GUESTS



Section 2

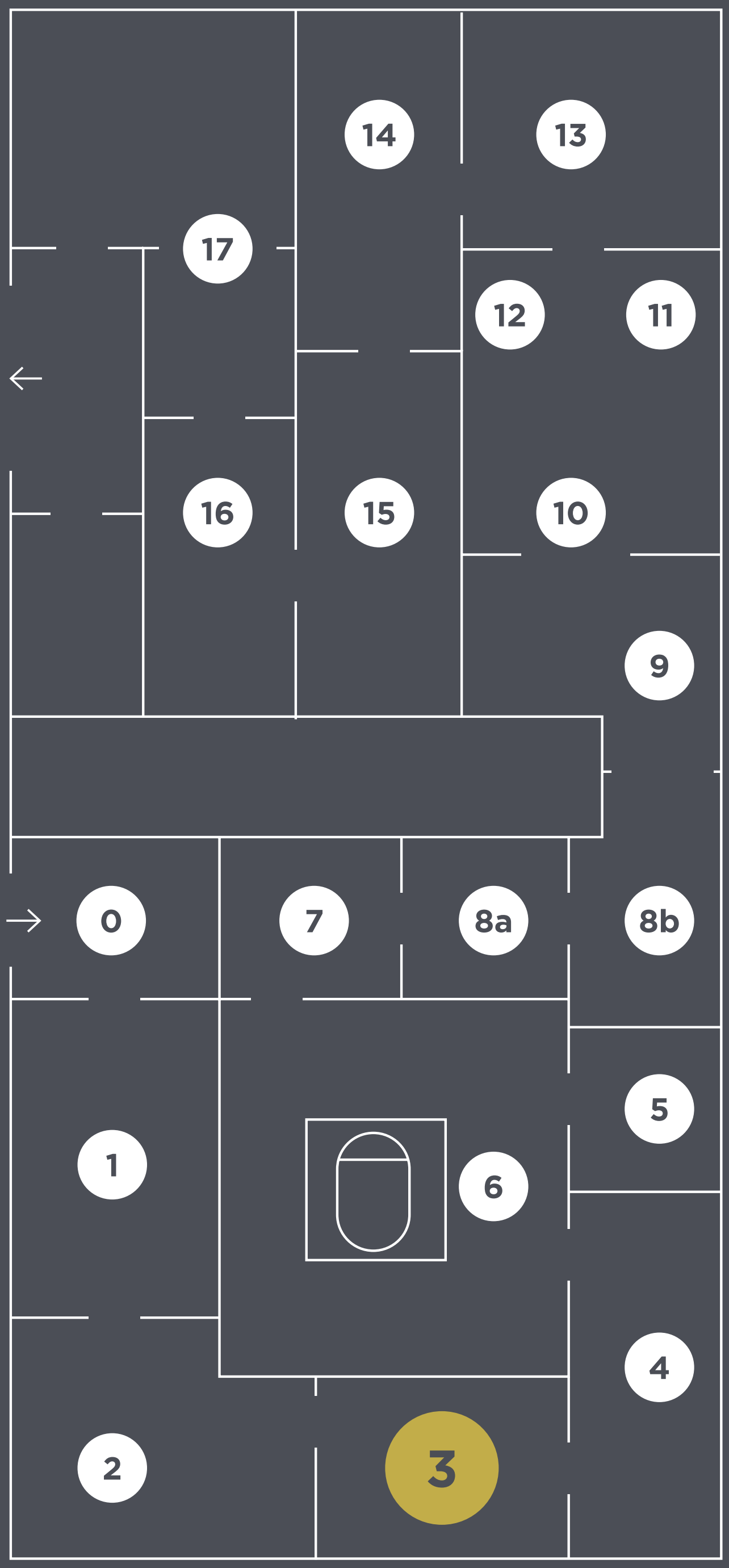
THE PATRIARCHAL MOULD

In the late nineteenth century, the State shifted its attention from history painting onto works of social denunciation, and to a lesser extent onto the so-called "subjects of the day", reflected in scenes that became vehicles for the validation of customs and the legitimisation of social practices. Within this second category, there was a particular interest in girls' schooling. Although the law recognised the right of women to a primary education, this remained differentiated by sexes, a question that drew a string of criticisms from writers like Emilia Pardo Bazán. Alongside scenes of girls' schools, where the pupils were shown being taught unimportant things with their teachers or classmates, it was also frequent to find pictures of parents and grandparents gravely lecturing their daughters or granddaughters on moral values, and

so producing a hierarchical discourse.

In the meantime, the patriarchal message of feminine virtue also found its way into artistic expression, and the "angel of the hearth" gave way to more realist images of wives subordinated to their husbands in the new context of social painting.

UNINVITED GUESTS



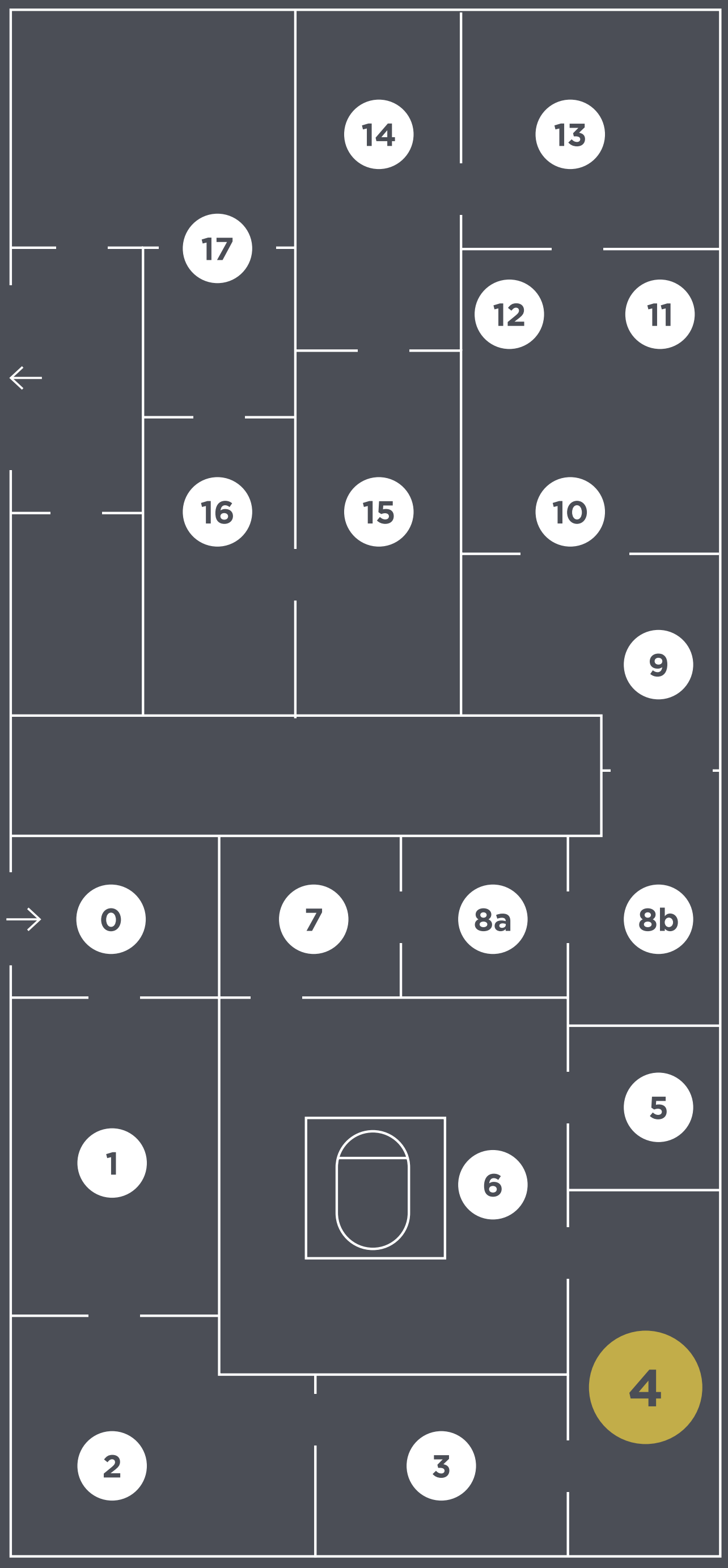
Section 3

THE ART OF INDOCTRINATION

Some of the works shown in the official exhibitions were centred on a paternalist notion of the day that women needed men's restraint to prevent them from being swept away by their uncontrollable emotions. Artists interpreted this supposed emotional nature as part of women's charm but also as a sign of their weak character, an idea they represented in light-hearted images with titles like *Pride*, *Laziness* or *Thirst for Vengeance*, all clearly critical beneath their inconsequential appearance. The representation of madness or witchcraft was used to explore the same concept, associating woman with states of mental imbalance or some inexplicable connection with the realm of the occult and the irrational. However, other artists preferred to show them enjoying themselves in recreational settings, without any moralising reflection attached to

the images, and a few, like Fillol, openly denounced the unfavourable position in which the patriarchal institutions had unjustly placed them.

UNINVITED GUESTS



Section 4

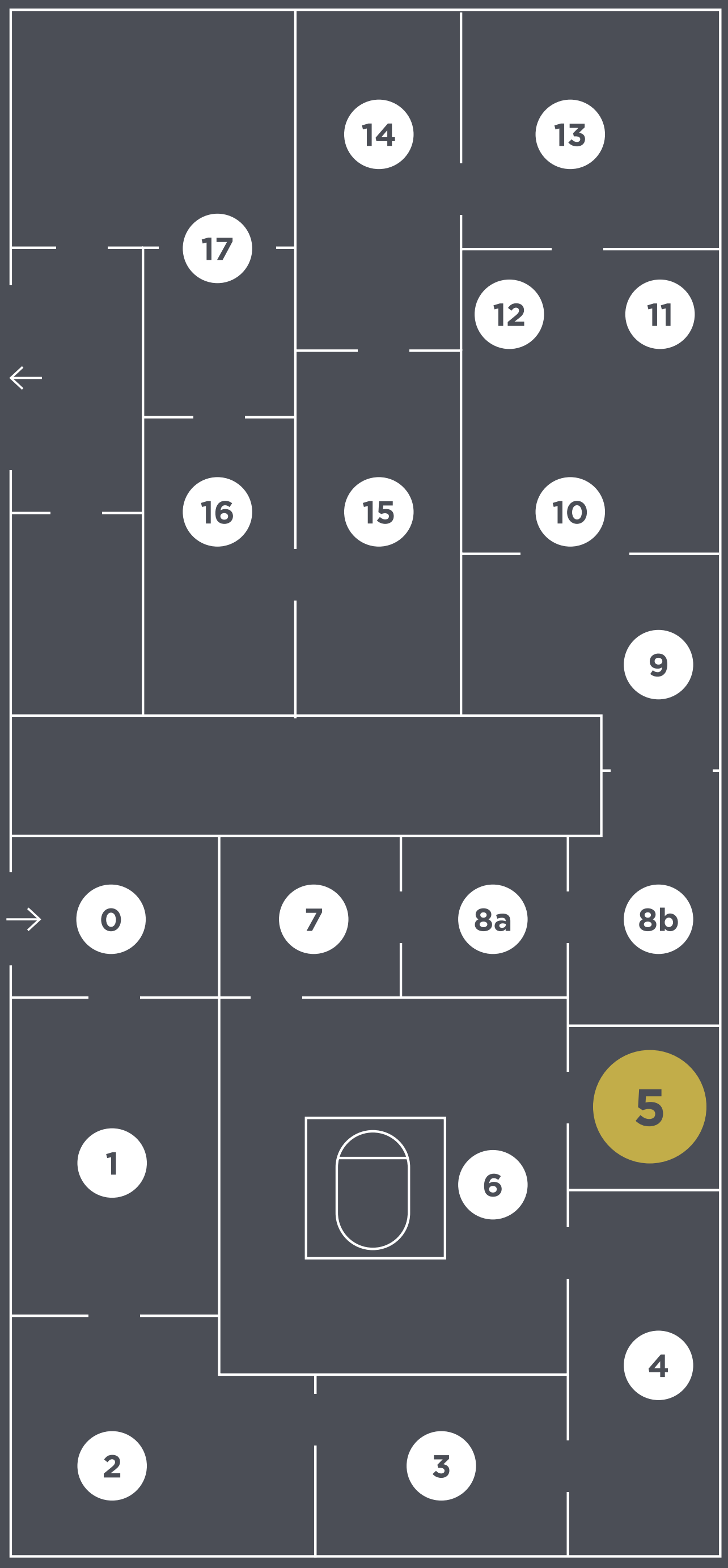
GUIDANCE FOR THE WAYWARD

The National Exhibition of 1895 saw the triumph of a new sentimentalist sub-genre inspired by serialised fiction, that of prodigal daughters returning home to implore their fathers' forgiveness after being seduced by a man. These fallen young women, usually from humble backgrounds, were redeemed through a theatrically tearful repentance. They were fleeing from a tragic destiny of abandonment or even death, the consequence of their rebelliousness in daring to question the role assigned to them by the patriarchal society. These images, like the texts which inspired them, were in fact educational warnings for the most wayward young women.

In the following years, some works shown at the official exhibitions started to make open denunciations of the prostitution networks and the process of degradation

to which their victims were subjected. An unflinching gaze at this problem of public order, which the authorities tried to hide but not eradicate, generally met with unanimous rejection from both the critics and the public. The only works that were tolerated were those which held a moralising message beneath their asperity, and these were the only ones acquired by the State, which thus legitimised their paternalist discourse.

UNINVITED GUESTS



Section 5

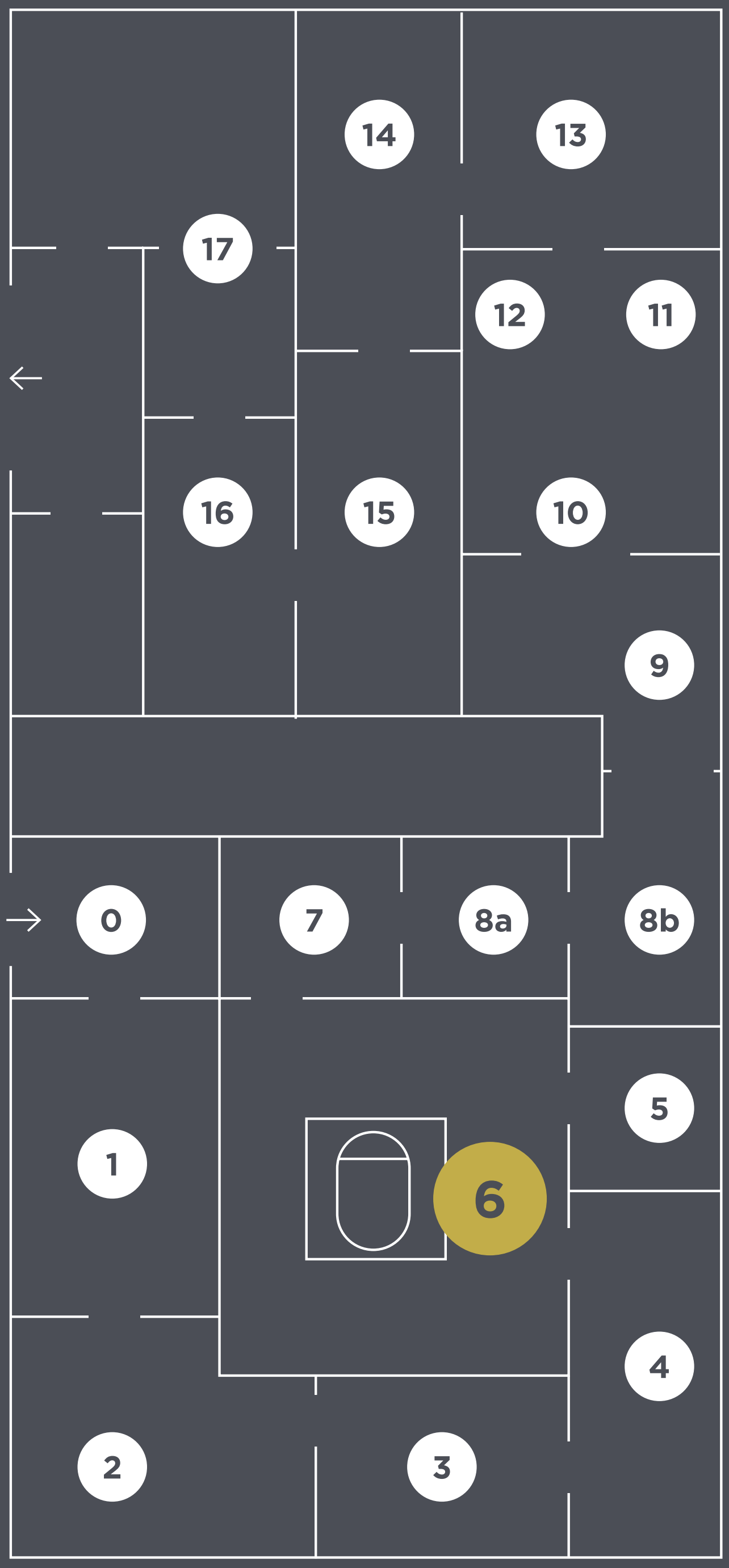
MOTHERS UNDER JUDGEMENT

From the end of the nineteenth century, images of various kinds reflected the normative and moral framework that women were expected to stick to. Among those concerned with maternity, then equated with women's personal fulfilment, there were two subjects, both controversial, that were addressed by painters with special frequency, and were also denunciations of irresponsible parenthood. The first was that of the consequences of parents' evil habits for their children's health and their subsequent neglect, in which the figure of the mother always came off worst. Supported by hygienist medical theories, various artists warned of the congenital after-effects left on children's bodies by practices like prostitution or infidelity, both related to the dreaded venereal diseases. Painters meanwhile also explored a second subject, that of the drama involved for many

Section 5

wet nurses in having to leave their rural homes and their own children to serve wealthy families in the city. The narrative of surrogate nursing, frequent in the official exhibitions, was thus mixed with the nascent notion of class struggle.

UNINVITED GUESTS



Section 6

NUDES

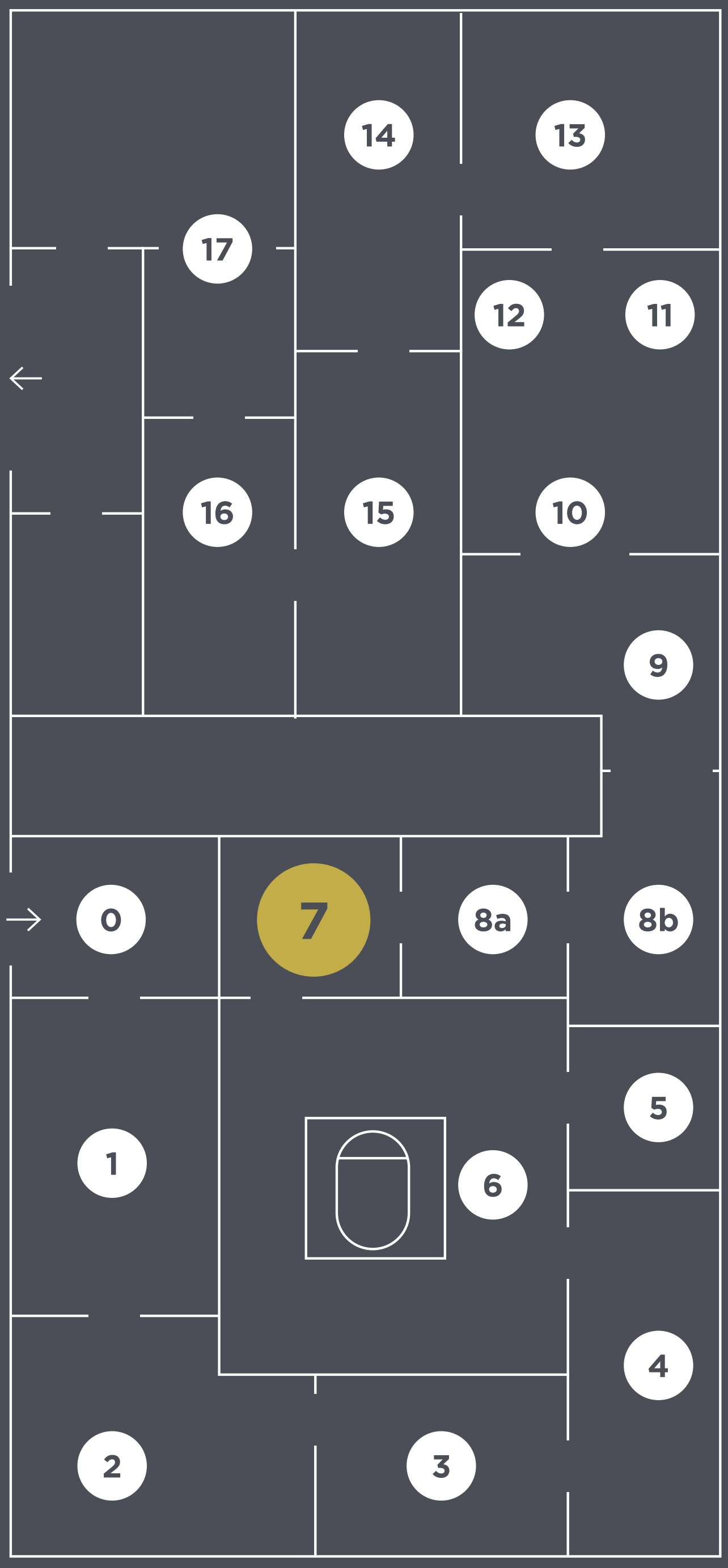
In the nineteenth century, the traditional concept of the female nude, historically associated with the exaltation of ideal beauty, started to be called into question, and new reflections arose on the codes and limits that should govern both representation and perception of a genre that had no male equivalent. Although the Academy continued to demand that artists insert nudes in canonical historical or literary narratives that would act as their justification, the subjects chosen mainly sublimated the fantasies and drives of men, masking them beneath moralising pretexts that counterposed chastity to lust or, as in the case of slave girls and odalisques, locating the scenes in remote and exotic oriental settings.

Various *fin de siècle* artists centred their gaze on the artistic pose, sometimes using girls in the transition to adulthood. A more abundant iconography, however, showed

Section 6

models obliged by financial difficulties to pose nude in the painters' ateliers. The modesty and demureness with which they are depicted contrasts with the overt display of other feminine bodies, whether lying in extreme foreshortening for the delight of the male gaze or fragmented and stripped of identity.

UNINVITED GUESTS



Section 7

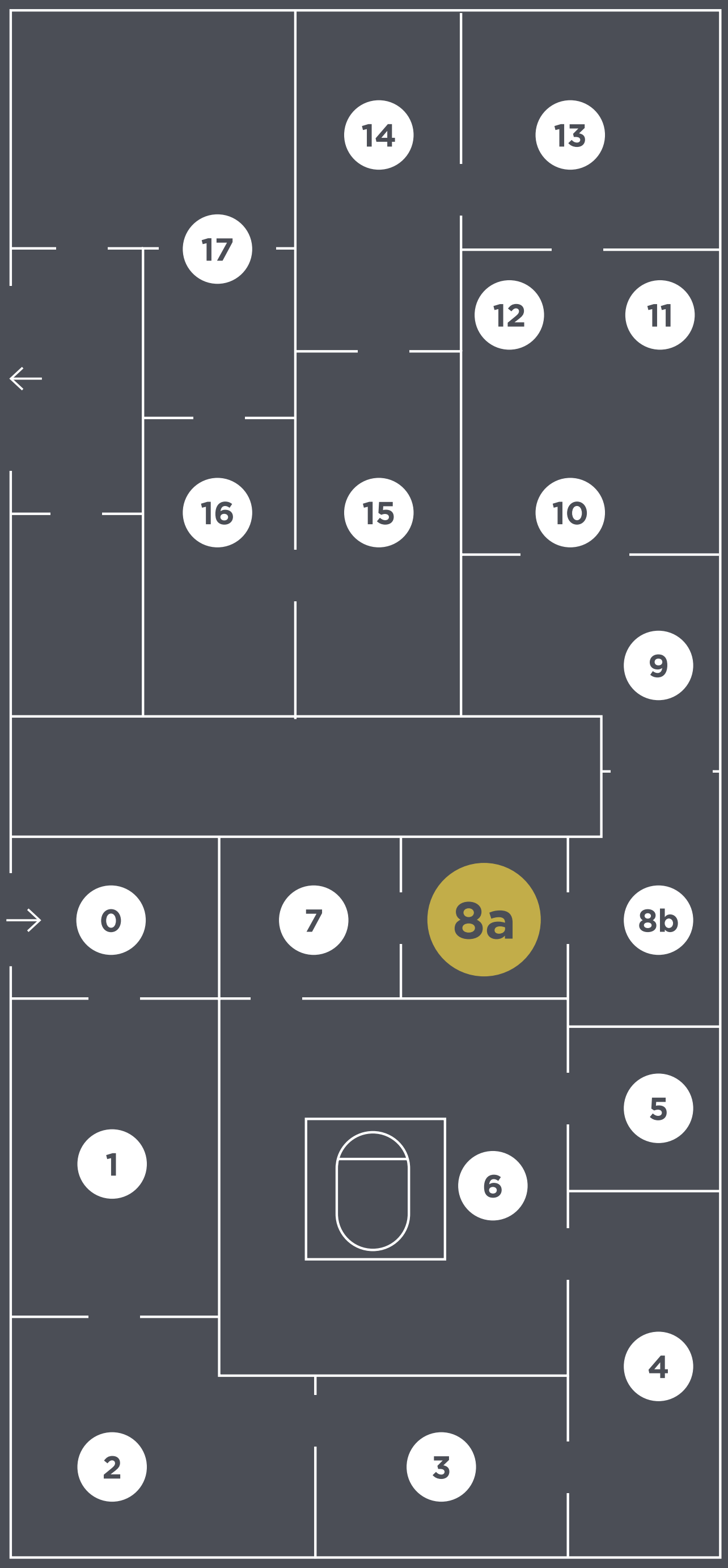
CENSORED

The juries of the National Exhibitions had the power to veto works whose subjects were deemed to contravene moral precept. In 1906, four pictures, in spite of their artistic merit, were considered unworthy to “appear in a public competition”. One of them was *The Satyr* by Antonio Fillol, a social painting whose subject matter, in the opinion of the jury, went beyond the bounds of the admissible.

In those same years, various sociological studies analysed aspects of delinquency and the underworld in cities. At the same time, representations of prostitutes had a heyday among modernist artists, and even a painter like López Mezquita, who had personally supported the academic rejection of indecorous subjects, depicted the interior of a Madrid brothel. As they proliferated in public exhibitions, these audacious and uncomfortable subjects started to make viewers aware of the contradictions

of a society based on hypocrisy and false appearances. Censorship, though not free of controversy, meanwhile pursued various subjects that dealt with the rights and freedoms of women, excluding them from the official circuits. These topics were seen as a threat to decency and decorum, and it was preferred to relegate such thorny issues to the private sphere.

UNINVITED GUESTS



Section 8a

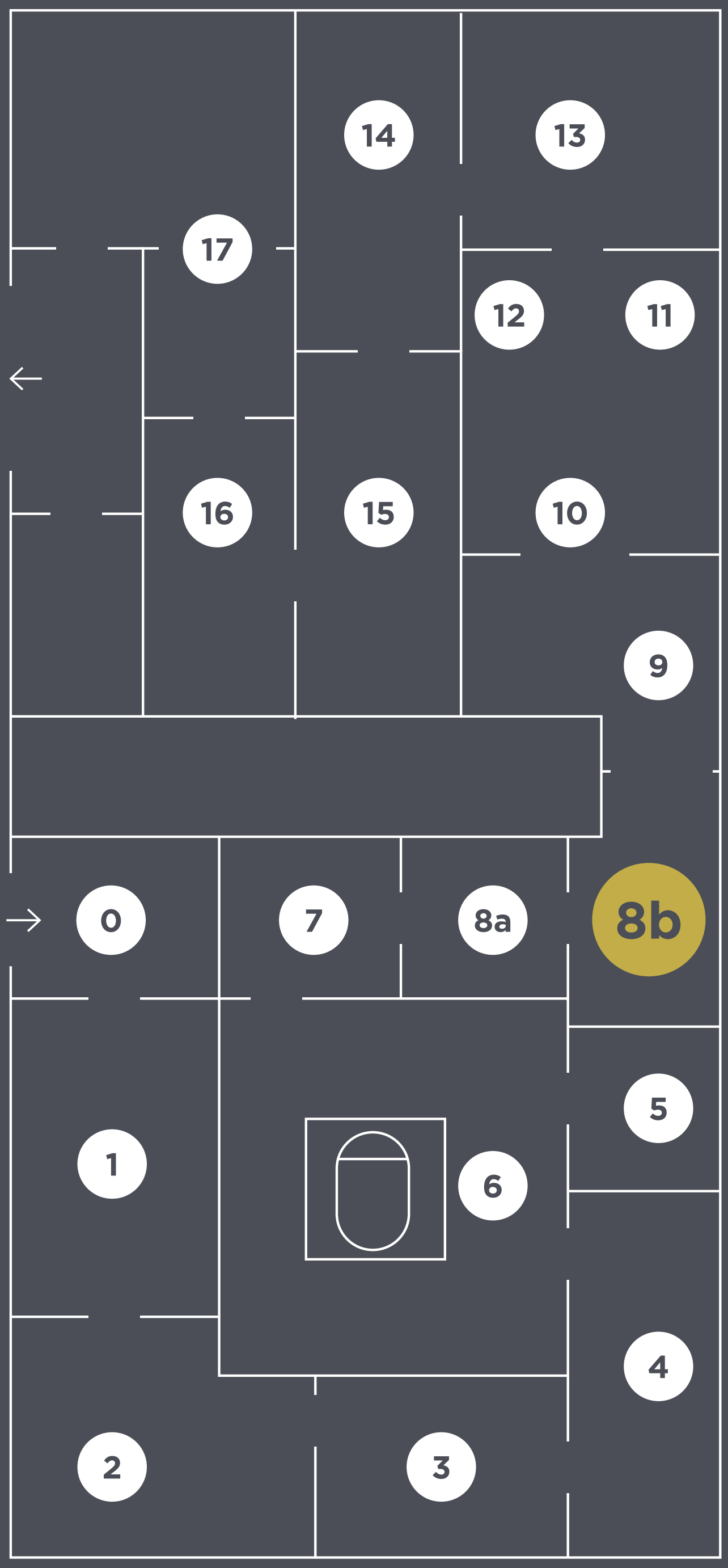
RECONSTRUCTING THE TRADITIONAL WOMAN

In contrast to the image of the liberated modern woman that started to move to the fore in the first decades of the twentieth century, some artistic circles came out in defence of tradition. In 1909, for instance, the Sociedad Española de Amigos del Arte (Spanish Society of Friends of Art) was founded by members of Madrid's high society to act as a channel for taste and foster the traditional arts and crafts. Besides education and protection, its goals also included the political vindication of the status and refinement of that social elite. The exhibitions it organised extolled the virtues of the domestic items and female adornments that had been preserved in aristocratic homes.

Another of the institution's favourite subjects was the image of the Spanish

woman since the eighteenth century. In the midst of the suffragette era, such an image provided visual support for a conservative ideological trend that looked back to its great-grandmothers as models of perfection. It became popular to paint portraits of women wearing items that had belonged to their forebears, and a modern language was used to construct a nonetheless anachronistic image of the traditional woman as an ensign of national identity.

UNINVITED GUESTS



Section 8b

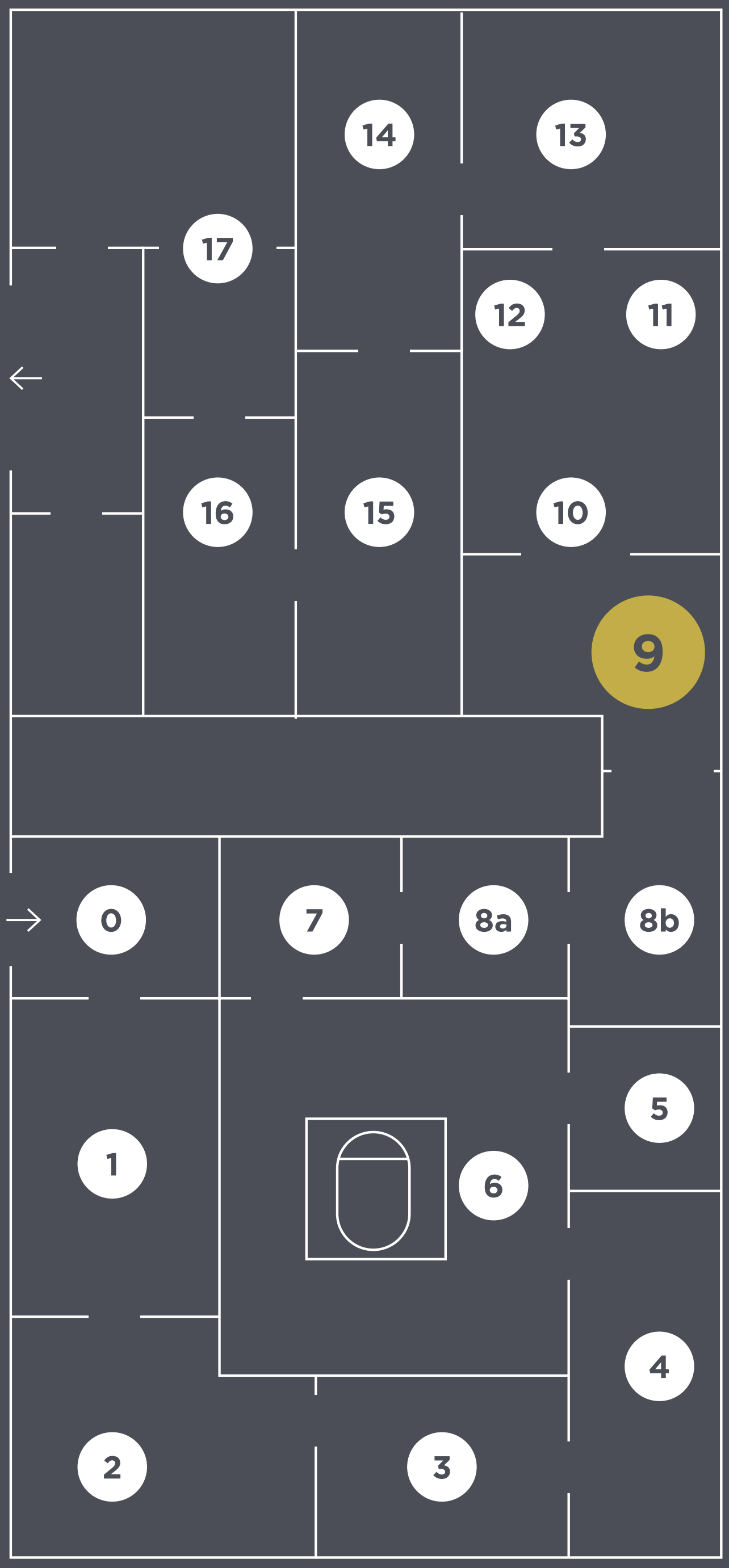
DELUXE MANNEQUINS

A member of a family that spawned generations of artists, Raimundo de Madrazo y Garreta pursued his career in Paris, where he became a highly reputed genre painter and portraitist. Raimundo was adept at meeting the demands for superfluous images of female beauties that came from an international art market as refined as it was conservative. In his atelier, Aline Masson, his favourite model, embodied various feminine prototypes ranging from the full-blooded Spaniard to the cosmopolitan Parisian dressed as a Pierrette or a *coquette*. Always passive and accessory, these figures also proliferated in the illustrated magazines and leapt over to the cinema. The same formula for success was transferred to the society portrait, contaminated in turn by a fashion that harked back to the lost elegance and decorum of the eighteenth century. In their efforts to gain social respectability,

Section 8b

the women of international high society thus posed for Madrazo in the guise of aristocrats at the court of Versailles. This elitist new feminine ideal turned them into vacuous and inexpressive mannequins, their identities swamped beneath sumptuous silk and satin dresses.

UNINVITED GUESTS



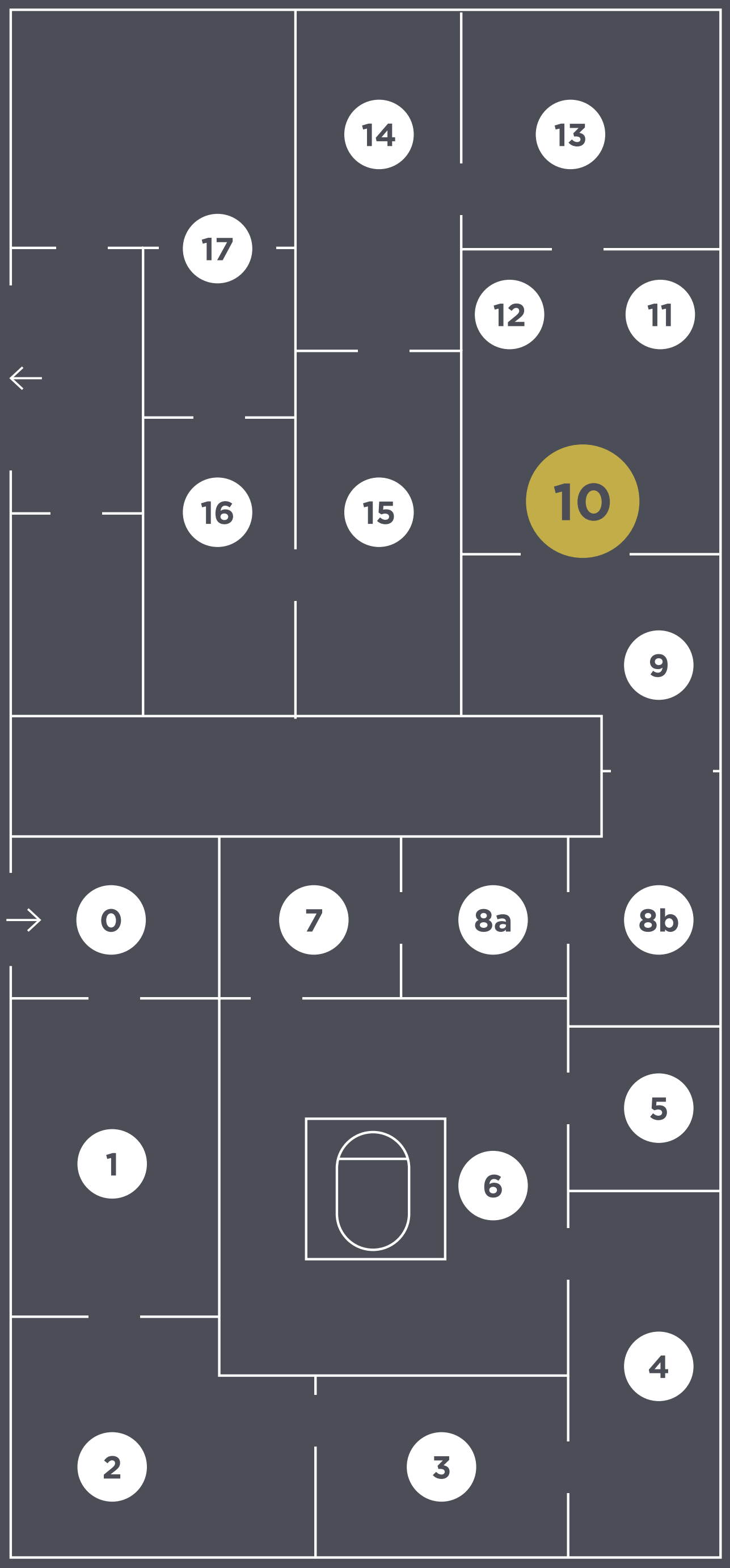
Section 9

SHIPWRECKED WOMEN

The term *náufragas* (shipwrecked women) appears in the titles of two literary texts published in 1831 and 1909 respectively. The first is *Las españolas náufragas* (The shipwrecked Spanish women) by Segunda Martínez de Robles, and the second is a short story by Emilia Pardo Bazán that appeared in the magazine *Blanco y Negro*. Both texts centre on the marginalisation suffered by many women in the patriarchal culture of the nineteenth century. A lack of specialised training often prevented them from entering a profession and earning a living for themselves, or forced them into modest if not demeaning jobs. Some rebelled against these imposed constraints. In the particular field of art, wives and daughters of painters were on occasions given specific training, but the duties they performed in the ateliers were generally the subordinate tasks of

an assistant, and their presence in spaces of male creativity was therefore habitual but invisible. Nor was there any public recognition of the silent work done by many other women in domestic surroundings, a production regarded by elitist art history as belonging to the minor field of handicrafts. The names of the women who made those pieces were thus lost as in a shipwreck.

UNINVITED GUESTS



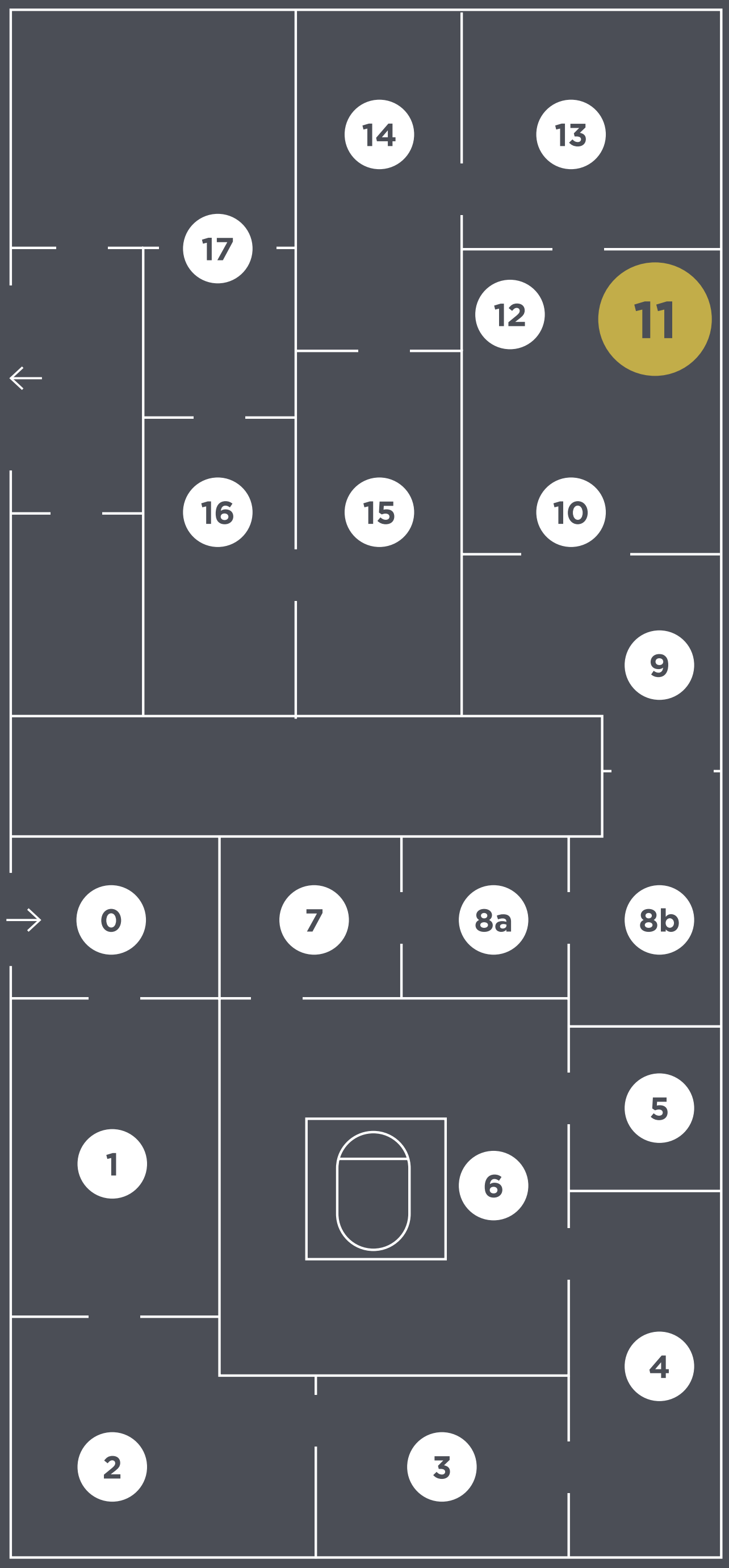
Section 10

MODELS IN THE ATELIER

The magnification of feminine beauty during the nineteenth century brought new roles for models, who theatricalised their poses to incarnate new characters in the artists' studios. Dressed in period costume or haute couture, and caged like beautiful birds deprived of an identity, the progressively high value placed on external appearance and composure turned them into exquisite consumer items destined to give pleasure to the public. In time, the representation of models in the atelier, their workplace, almost acquired the category of a sub-genre. Most painters depicted them as bibelots, little ornamental figures arranged alongside the other objects in the studio. Passive spectators of male artistic creation, they dared intervene in it only to emphasise their superficially childish image, turning their "impudence" into an object of mockery, and reaffirming

their lack of artistic genius. These images, all devised by men, plainly show how women in the art system were given the subordinate role of models and muses to be transformed, painted and gazed at.

UNINVITED GUESTS



Section 11

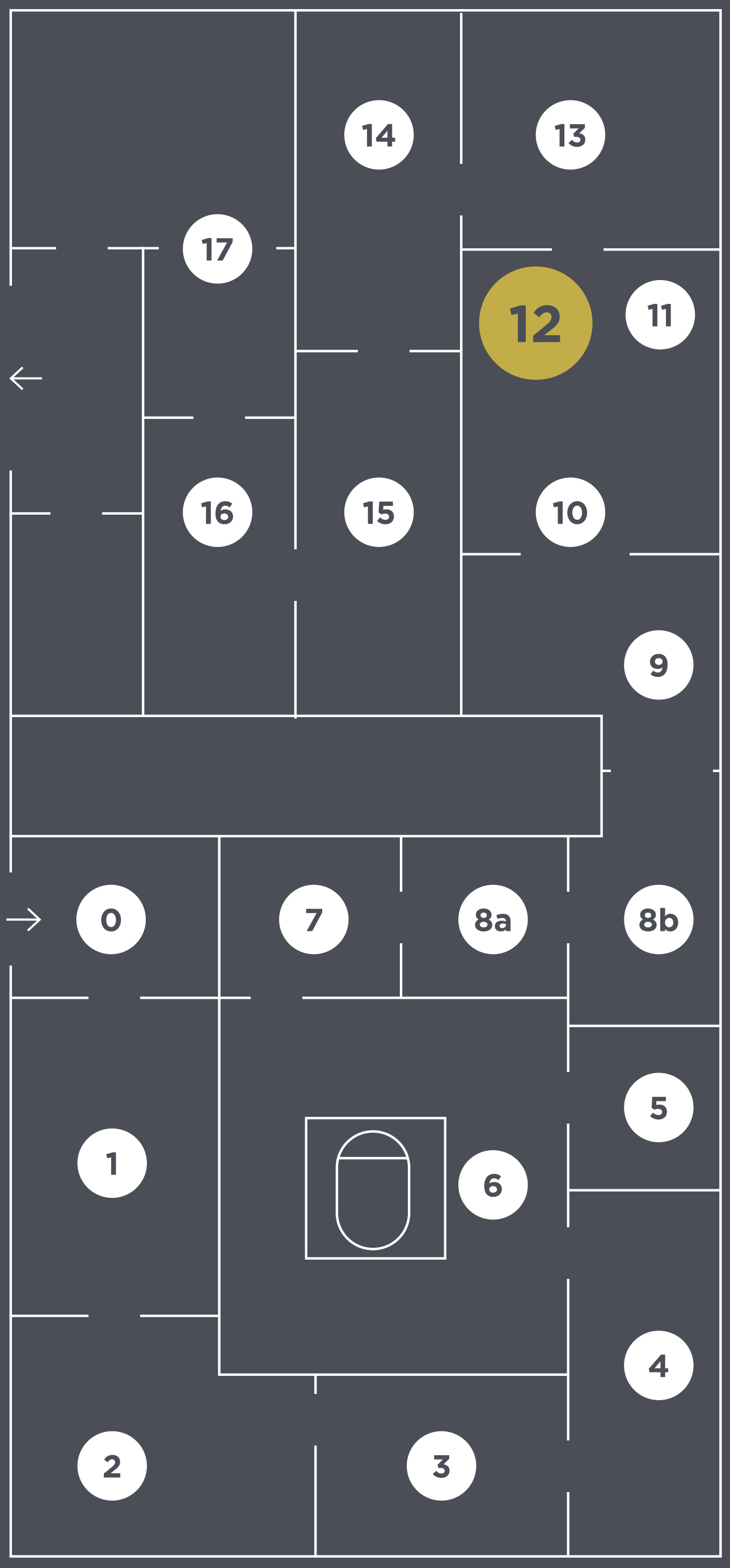
MINIATURE PAINTERS

In emulation of aristocratic custom, the cultivation of painting became another of the accomplishments, like piano playing and singing, that accompanied the upbringing of every young lady in respectable nineteenth-century society. However, since they had no access to the teaching at the Fine Arts Academies, the artistic education of women was limited to drawing schools or the studios of other painters. Even so, some managed to exhibit their skills as amateur painters at public exhibitions, where they were labelled as “amusing” or “charming” by the critics. The few who succeeded in pursuing a professional career, most of them from families of artists, devoted themselves mainly to miniature portraits or copies of works by old masters, generally religious. Their lack of training, together with the rules of decorum of the period, thus channelled them towards an almost

Section 11

ineluctable destiny as miniaturists, copyists or drawing teachers, activities which they largely performed in circles close to the nobility. Their careers were regarded as minor, and they have been treated with condescension to this day.

UNINVITED GUESTS



Section 12

THE FIRST WOMAN PHOTOGRAPHERS

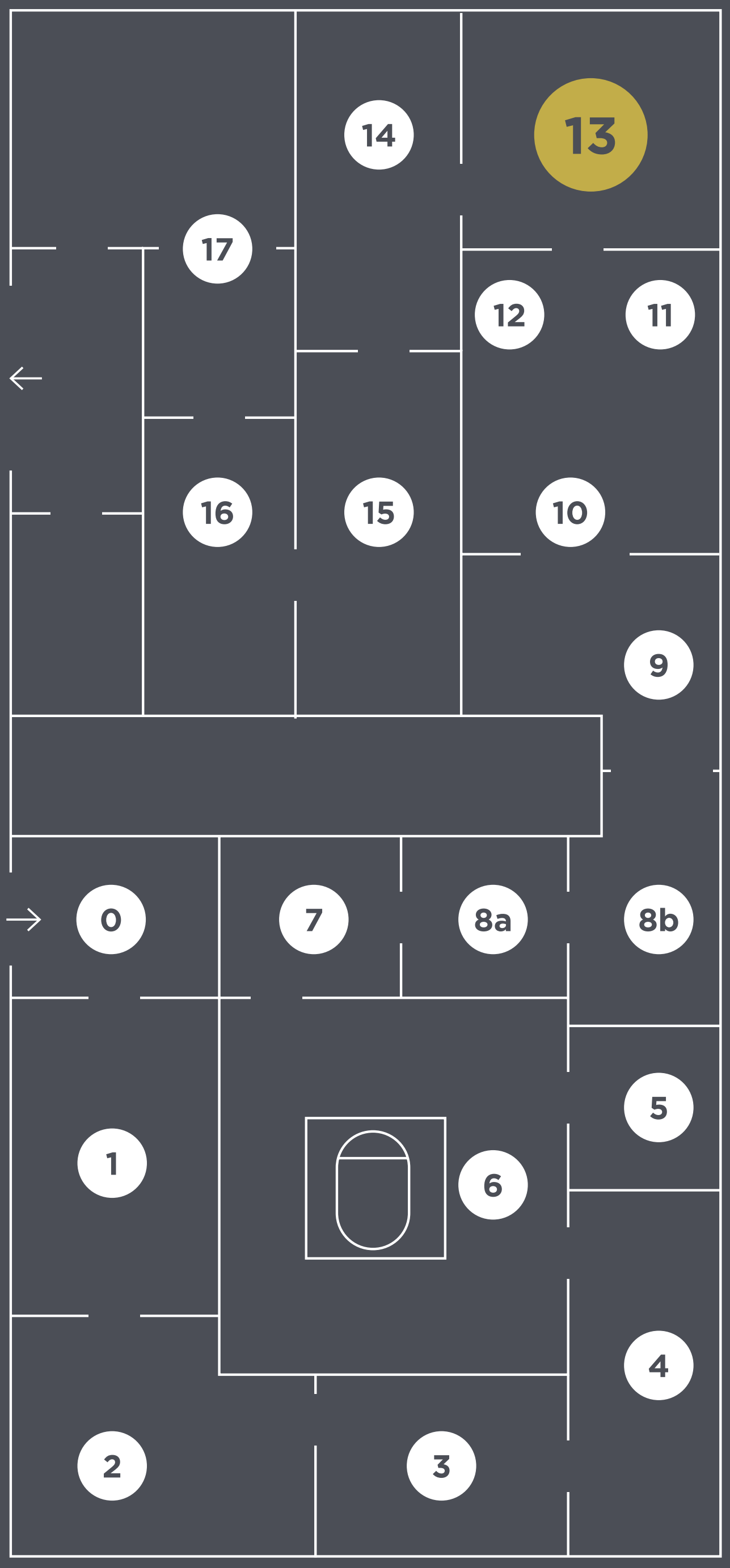
Since photography was regarded in its early years as a minor discipline, it allowed for the more active participation of women. From the 1840s onwards, a considerable number devoted themselves to the production of daguerrotype portraits. Some of the pioneers who came to Spain were temporary and itinerant visitors, such as Madama Fritz, who travelled around the Iberian Peninsula offering her services as a portraitist. Others had stable jobs in photography studios, family businesses run predominantly by men.

In the autumn of 1850, a British couple, Charles and Jane Clifford, took up residence in Madrid, where they organised aerostatic balloon displays and opened a photography studio specialising in views, monuments and public works. After Charles's death in 1863, his widow continued the business and received a commission from the South

Section 12

Kensington Museum in London (today's Victoria & Albert) to photograph the Dauphin's Treasure held by the Museo del Prado. Her work, performed outdoors owing to the low sensitivity to light of early photographic plates, was among the first examples of the systematic documentation of Spain's artistic heritage. It was attributed until recently to her husband Charles.

UNINVITED GUESTS



Section 13

LADY COPYISTS

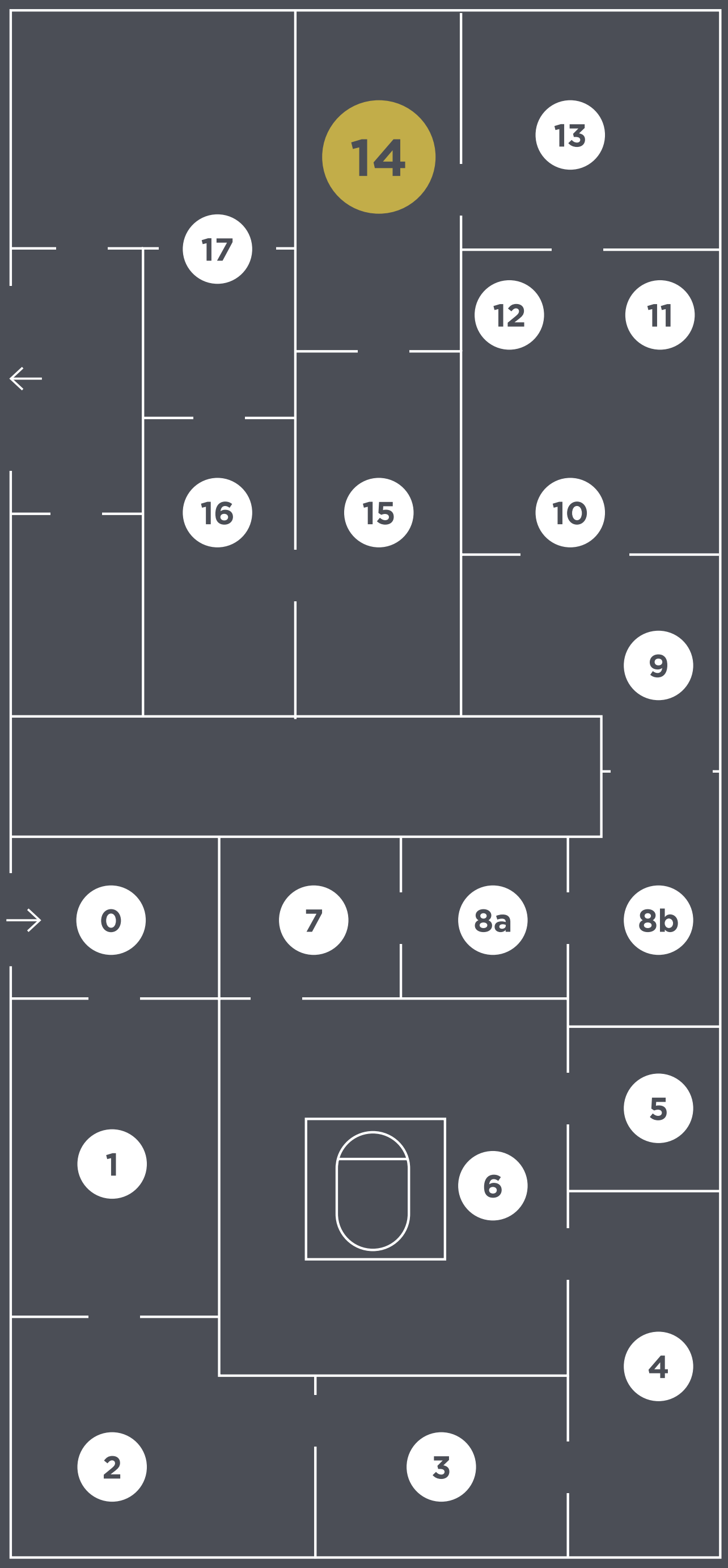
For much of the nineteenth century, women's artistic activity consisted essentially of copying the works of the old masters. Regarded at first as an appropriately decorous activity for a lady, it also helped to alleviate the restriction of being barred from an academic training, and it eventually became a pursuit with lucrative possibilities that led to calls for professional status. Women thus showed their replicas at the public exhibitions, and it became common to see them copying works in museums, although it was to be some time before they went unaccompanied. When they signed the register at the Museo del Prado, most of them added the word *copianta* after their names. This is a feminised version of *copiante*, or copyist, showing their desire for professional recognition. Only a few referred to themselves as painters or artists.

Among the women copyists who appear

Section 13

in the registers are some painters who achieved considerable public success, like Rosario Weiss and Emilia Carmena, who was appointed court painter to Isabella II. The queen herself submitted copies by her own hand to various fine arts exhibitions.

UNINVITED GUESTS



Section 14

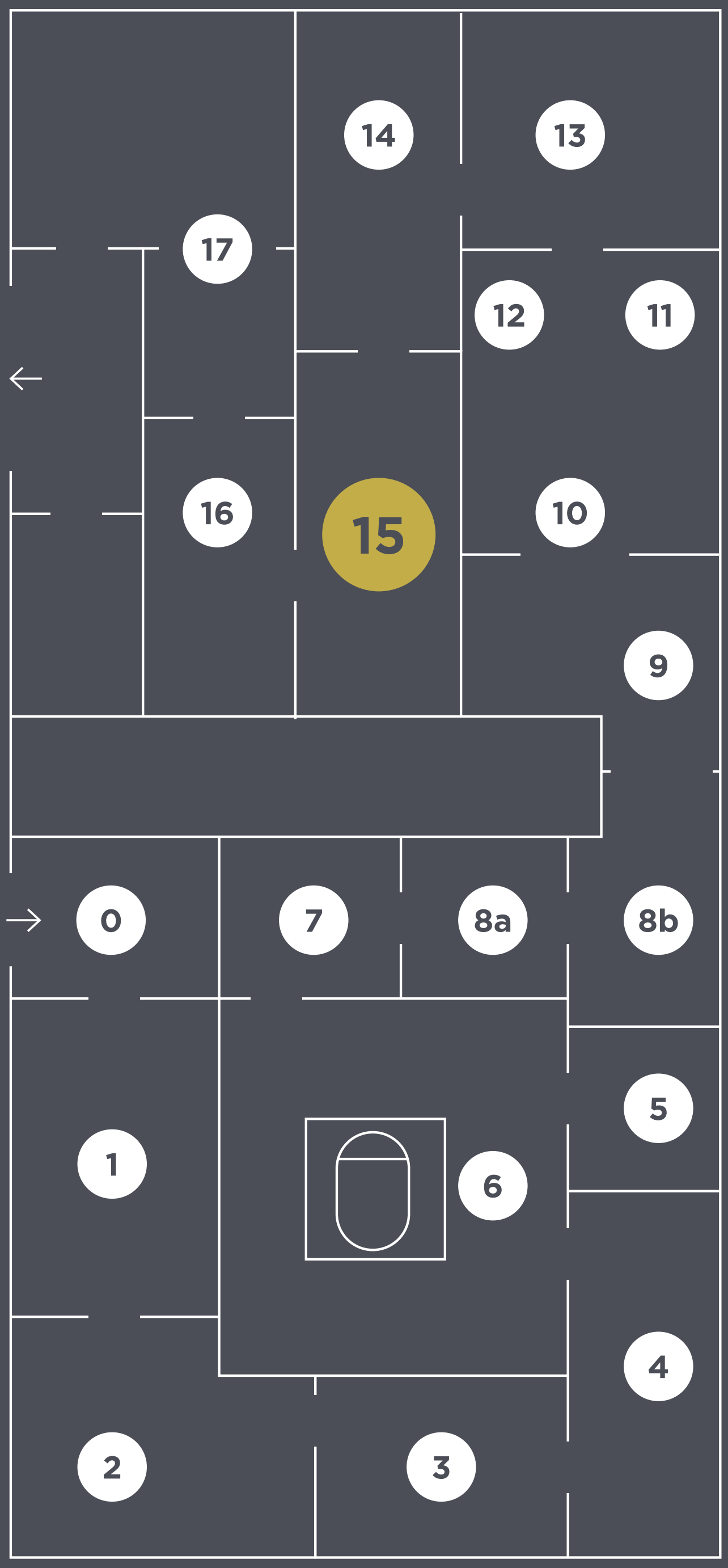
QUEENS AND PAINTERS

Both María Cristina de Borbón and her daughter Isabella II were especially enthusiastic followers of the queenly painting tradition, and they frequently exhibited works by their own hands, especially copies of the old masters, at the exhibitions held at the Academia de San Fernando and the Liceo Artístico y Literario de Madrid, as well as at receptions organised in their respective palaces. The press praised not only their outstanding qualities but also the example they set as patrons of the arts. During their successive reigns, a considerable number of women painters and miniaturists were appointed members of the Academy by merit, and many of these, like Teresa Nicolau, Asunción Crespo, Rosario Weiss and Emilia Carmena de Prota, were engaged to work at court.

Isabella II favoured women painters in

particular with her patronage, acquiring various works from them to adorn the rooms of the Royal Palace. She continued this practice in exile, entrusting the portrait of her legitimate heir, the future Alfonso XII, to the French artist Cécile Ferrère. This royal patronage continued during the following reigns and served as a paradigm or the houses of the Spanish nobility.

UNINVITED GUESTS



Section 15

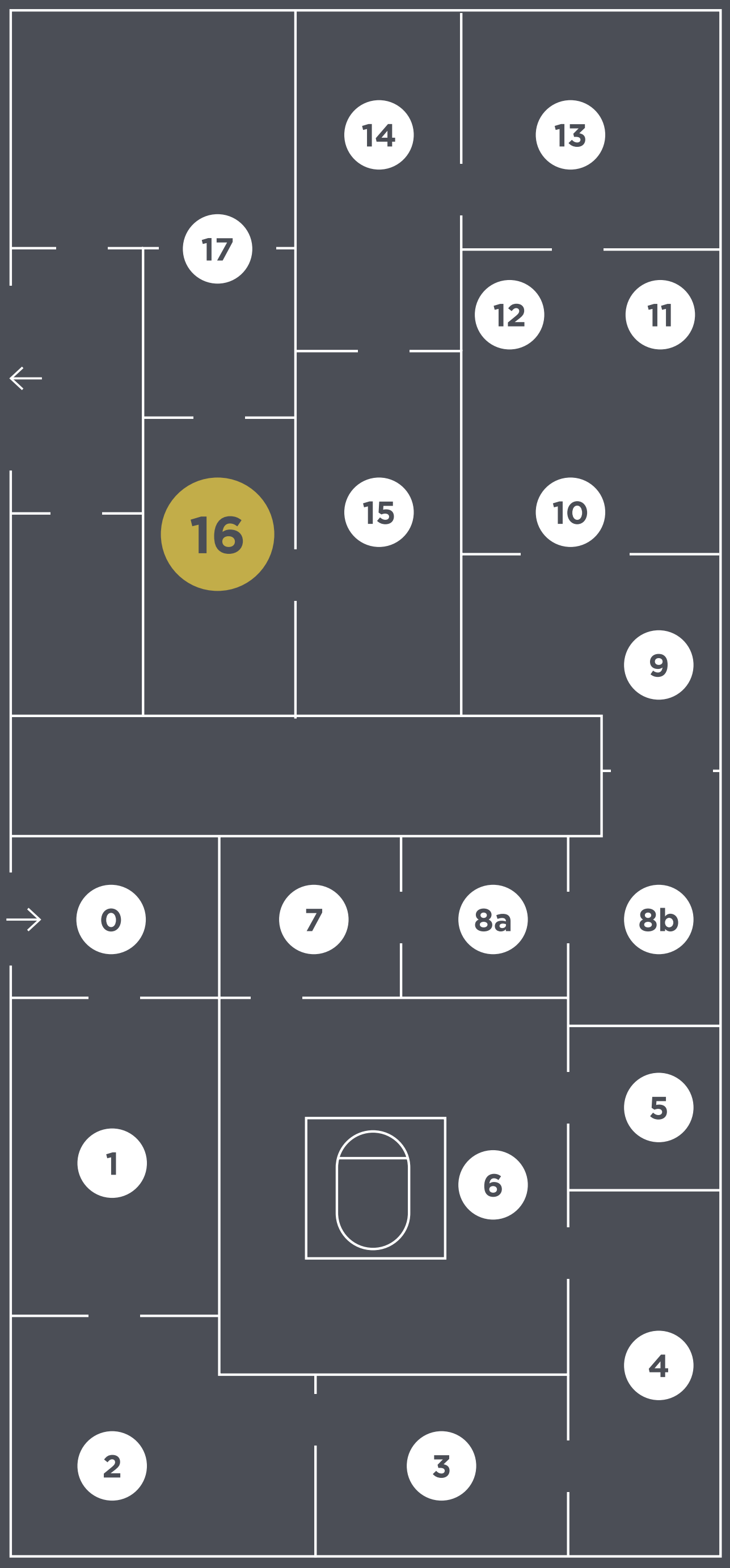
THE ‘OLD MISTRESSES’ AND THE ‘TRUE PAINTERS’

Women’s limited access to systematic artistic training meant that they tended from the Early Modern Age onwards to dedicate themselves to genres regarded by the academic hierarchy as minor, such as the still life, the miniature or, to a lesser extent, the portrait. The Museo del Prado itself exhibited works by ‘old mistresses’ such as Clara Peeters, Catharina Ykens and Margarita Caffi, so marking out a path to prestige for modern women painters. At the same time, the painting of flowers and fruits was associated with certain qualities and virtues regarded as feminine, like powers of observation, minuteness, delicacy, domesticity, and even chastity.

The presence of women in major

exhibitions increased as the century wore on, and reached considerable numbers in certain cases like the 1887 National Exhibition, where work by more than sixty women artists was displayed. The critics could no longer ignore them, and although their tone often remained condescending, they progressively replaced the term "amateurs" with that of "true painters" when referring to many of the women artists who painted canvases of fruits and flowers. Some, like María Luisa de la Riva, achieved considerable international renown, doubtless aided by their residing in Paris, whose art scene permitted more active participation by women.

UNINVITED GUESTS



Section 16

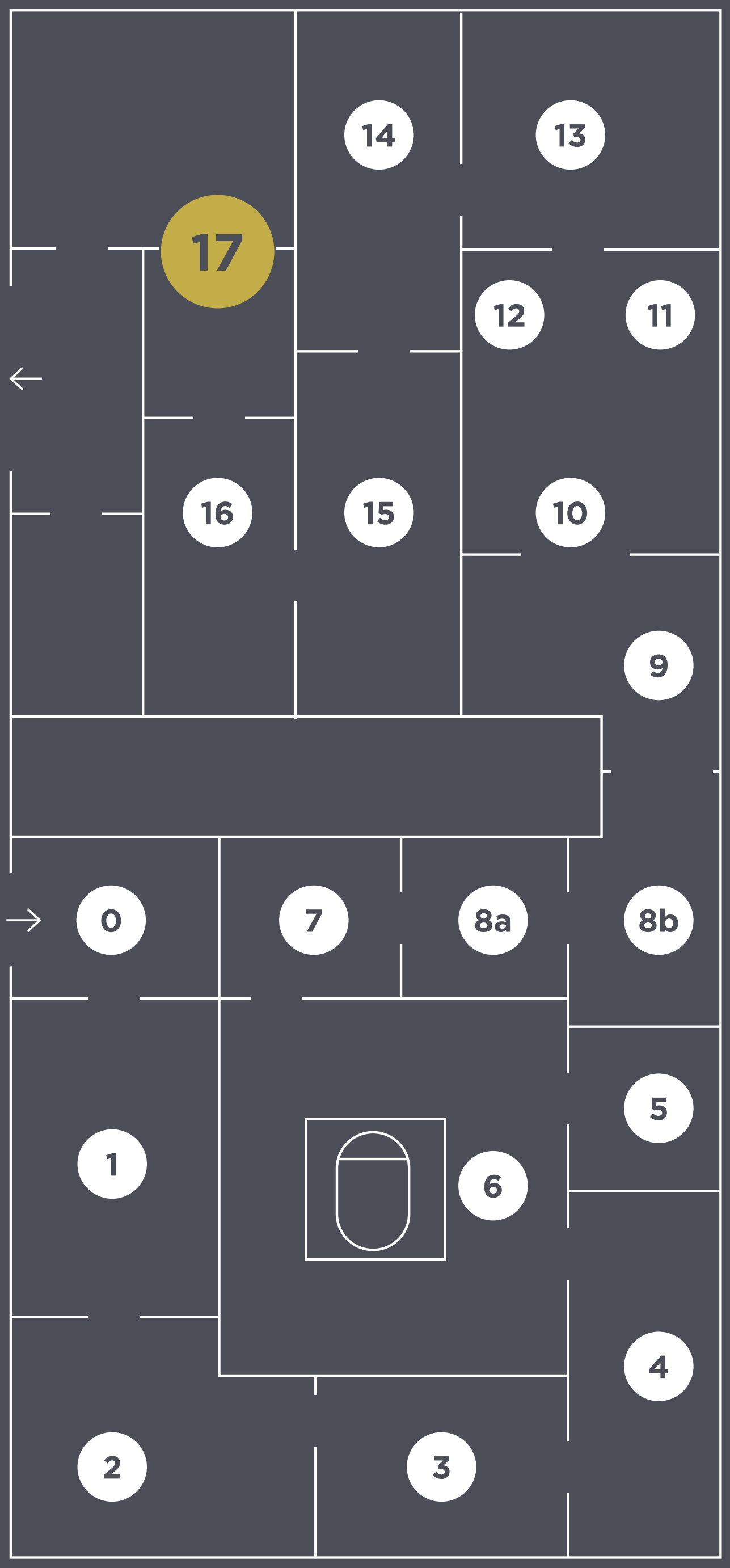
LADIES RATHER THAN PAINTERS

Throughout the nineteenth century, women artists projected a public image of themselves which largely contrasts with that of their predecessors. With only a few exceptions, they chose not to depict themselves in the act of painting or with the instruments of an activity, the professionalization of which might compromise their social status. This representational strategy moreover equated their images with those of established women writers with unquestioned reputations, such as Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda or Carolina Coronado, who were portrayed by Federico de Madrazo without any attributes to indicate their literary calling. Following the same type, the painters Madame Anselma and Julia Alcayde preferred to be immortalised as society ladies, while Lluïsa Vidal made it clear that she wished to be shown as an

artist, so breaking away from the archetype.

Exceptional too are the portraits left by male painters of their female pupils. The court painter Vicente López produced a canonical yet intimate image of the miniaturist Teresa Nicolau, and although Joaquín Espalter did show his niece Joaquina Serrano painting, she is seen indistinctly in the background of the interior of his studio.

UNINVITED GUESTS



Section 17

THEIR OWN HOSTESSES

In the last two decades of the nineteenth century, there was a significant increase in the number of women taking part in the public exhibitions. Some critics recognised the value of many of them, even going so far as to call them the “legitimate hope of Spanish art”, and modified their condescending tone to judge these women’s work regardless of their gender, at least in appearance. Behind most of the praise, however, there was still a clear bias evident in remarks like the assertions that Elena Brockmann painted “like a man” or that Antonia Bañuelos was “the best painter of her sex”.

Young women from a cosmopolitan family background that was receptive to creativity, like Bañuelos, Brockmann and Helena Sorolla, enjoyed greater freedom to pursue their careers, while others, like Aurelia Navarro, succumbed to social

pressure. The twentieth century brought a series of different initiatives aimed at remedying the low opinion held of women artists, such as the First Exhibition of Feminist Painting, held at the Salón Amaré in Madrid in 1903. However, none of these efforts was fully successful.

Hazte Amigo
www.amigosmuseoprado.org

GOBIERNO
DE ESPAÑA

MINISTERIO
DE CULTURA
Y DEPORTE

MUSEO NACIONAL
DEL **PRADO**