



MAGRATHEA
vis à vis with Jan Huijben

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***With special thanks to:
Bloemenwinkel de Iris***



home gallery
Den Haag
1.2.2022 -1.5.2022

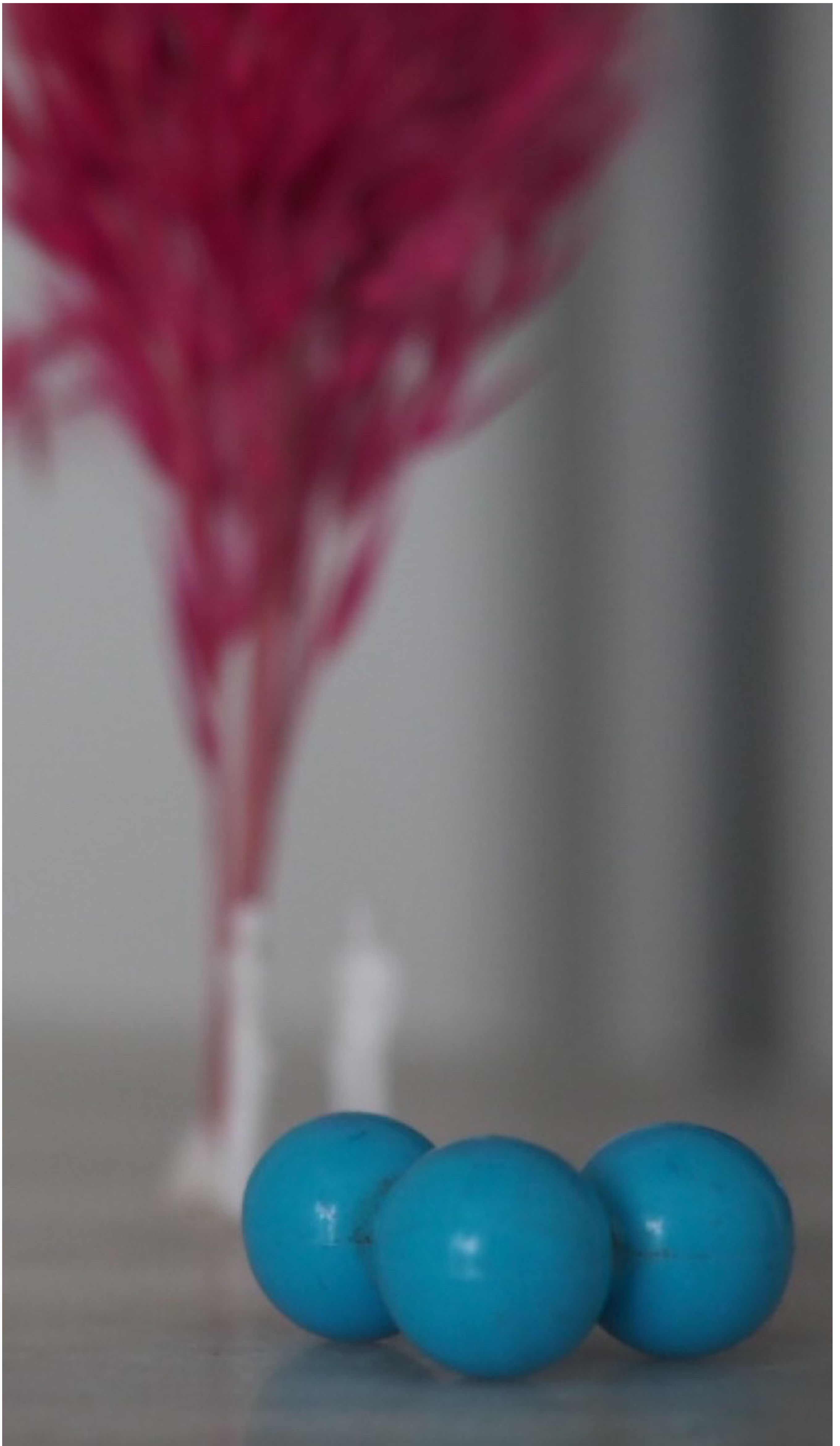
Text, photographs, curation:
Alexander Johannes Heil

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Far back in the mists of ancient time, in the great and glorious days of the former Galactic Empire, life was wild, rich and largely tax-free. Mighty starships plied their way between exotic suns, seeking adventure and reward amongst the furthest reaches of Galactic space. In those days spirits were brave, the stakes were high, men were real men, women were real women, and small furry creatures from Alpha Centauri were real small furry creatures from Alpha Centauri. And all dared to brave unknown terrors, to do mighty deeds, to boldly split infinitives that no man had split before - and thus was the Empire forged. Many men of course became extremely rich, but this was perfectly natural and nothing to be ashamed of because no one was really poor - at least no one worth speaking of. And for all the richest and most successful merchants life inevitably became rather dull and niggly, and they began to imagine that this was therefore the fault of the worlds they'd settled on - none of them was entirely satisfactory: either the climate wasn't quite right in the later afternoon, or the day was half an hour too long, or the sea was exactly the wrong shade of pink. And thus were created the conditions for a staggering new form of specialist industry: costume-made luxury planet building. The home of this industry was the planet Magrathea, where hyperspatial engineers sucked matter through white holes in space to form it into dream planets - gold planets, platinum planets, soft rubber planets with lots of earthquakes - all lovingly made to meet the exacting standards that the Galaxy's richest men naturally came to expect. But so successful was this venture that Magrathea itself soon became the richest planet of all time and the rest of the Galaxy was reduced to abject poverty. And so the system broke down, the Empire collapsed, and a long sullen silence settled over a billion hungry worlds, disturbed only by the pen scratchings of scholars as they laboured into the night over smug little treatises on the value of a planned political economy. Magrathea itself disappeared and its memory soon passed into the obscurity of legend. In these enlightened days, of course, no one believes a word of it.

(Excerpt from The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy, Page 634784, Section 5a. Entry: Magrathea)



Jan Huijben
'Object', plastic, 2,5 x 1 x 2,5 cm, year unknown.

DO NOT PANIC!

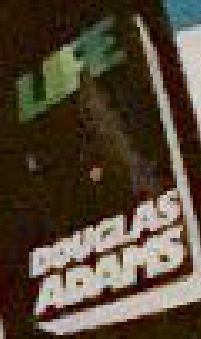
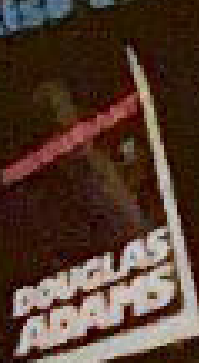
Too late 

Arthur Dent is already having a really bad day, even before the Earth gets demolished to make way for a new hyperspace bypass. After that things get much, much worse.

With just a towel, a small yellow fish and a book, Arthur has to navigate through a very hostile universe in the company of a very unreliable alien oddball. Luckily the fish is quite good at languages. And the book is *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*...

Douglas Adams's mega-selling cult classic sends facts into orbit, plays havoc with physics and twists time, but most importantly it's very, very funny.

Also available



Intergalactically
inspirational
foreword by

Eoin Colfer

THE HITCHHIKERS' GUIDE TO THE GALAXY

DOUGLAS ADAMS

The Magratheans were builders of worlds. So are we - builders of our world. Looking at Jan Huijben's work, one overarching logic seems to reside in every thing we produce. From the smallest scrap of trash to the layout of whole cities.

What logic that is, lies hidden behind a veil of unresolved meaning of function... a Mysterium in fact.



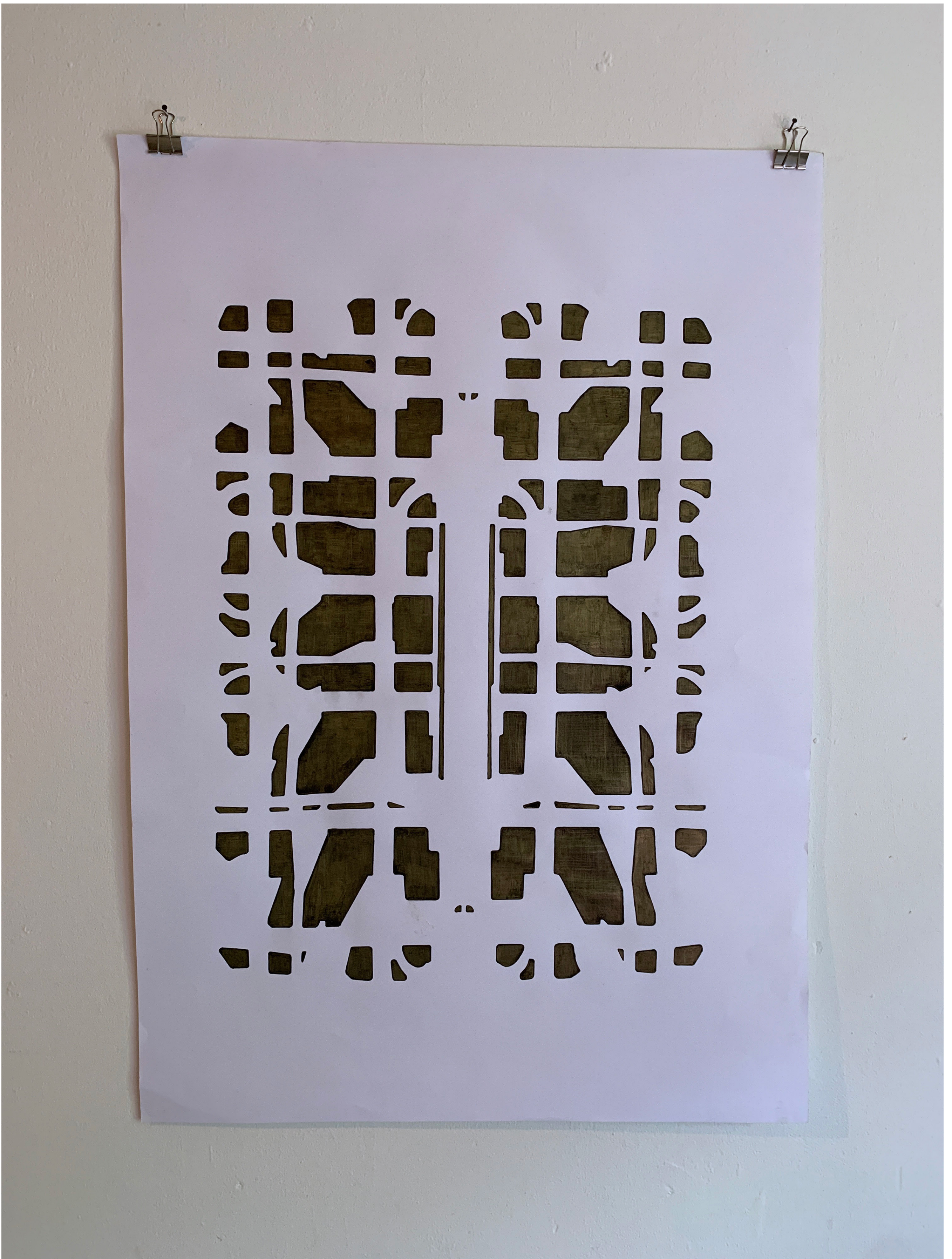
Alexander Johannes Heil

Collage made from Jan Huijben's 'Map', drawing traced from gaps of a beer crate (detail), 2022 (left) and a detail of the 'Plan for Chicago' (1909), in: Van Zanten, Robinson. Sullivan's city, The Meaning of Ornament for Louis Sullivan, Hong Kong, 2000. (right)

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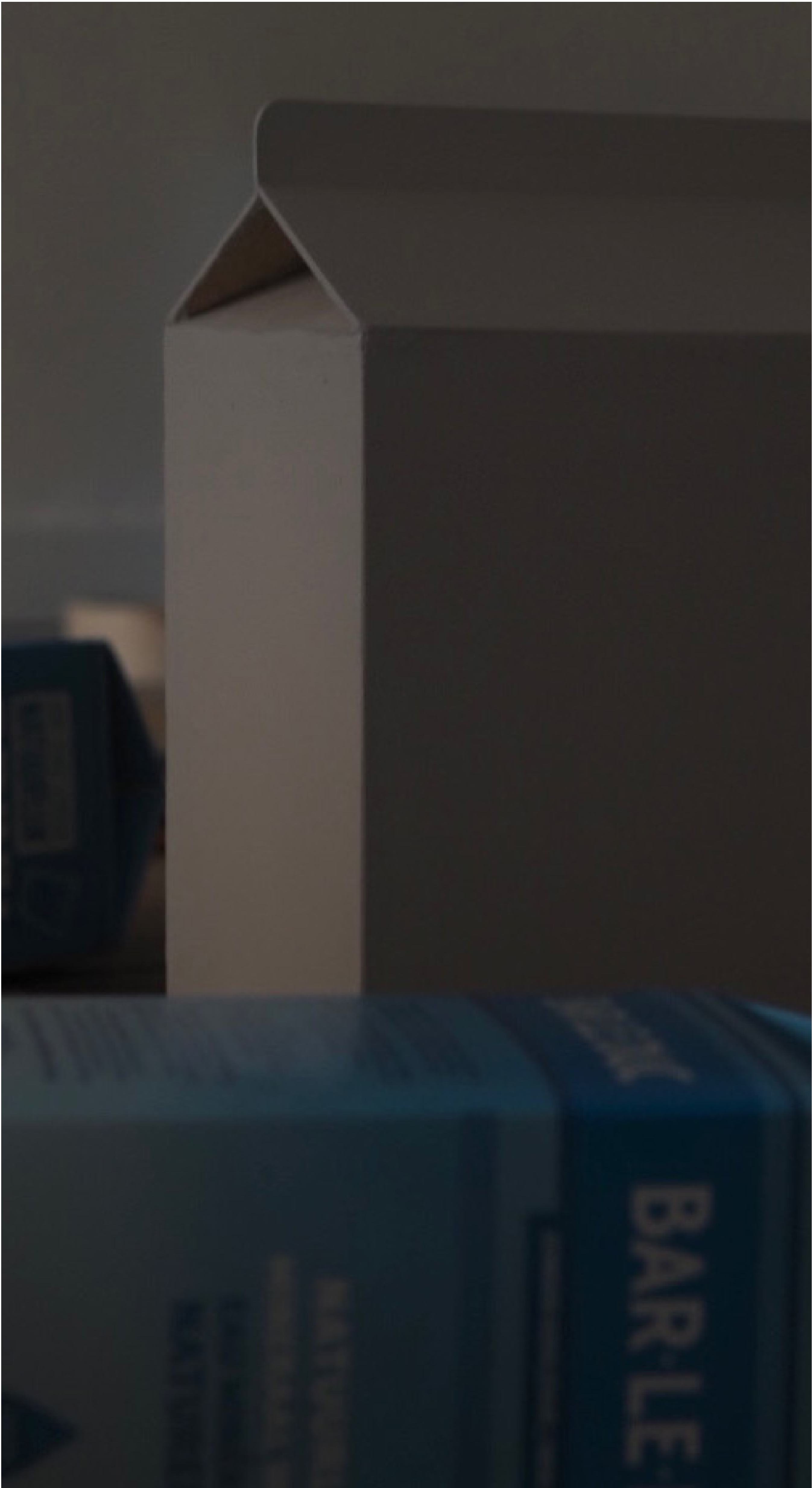
The Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy by Douglas Adams was available to read in the exhibition.





Jan Huijben
'Map'
drawing traced from gaps of a beer crate
graphite on paper
100 x 70 cm
2022

previous page:
The work 'Map' in context of the exhibition.



What we sometimes forget, is the fact that everything which is made is designed and therefore has inherent an expression of meaning.

Does that mean that these meanings - intentional and unintentional alike - transcend into the mind of the greater public, through the objects, envisioned in design studios around the globe?

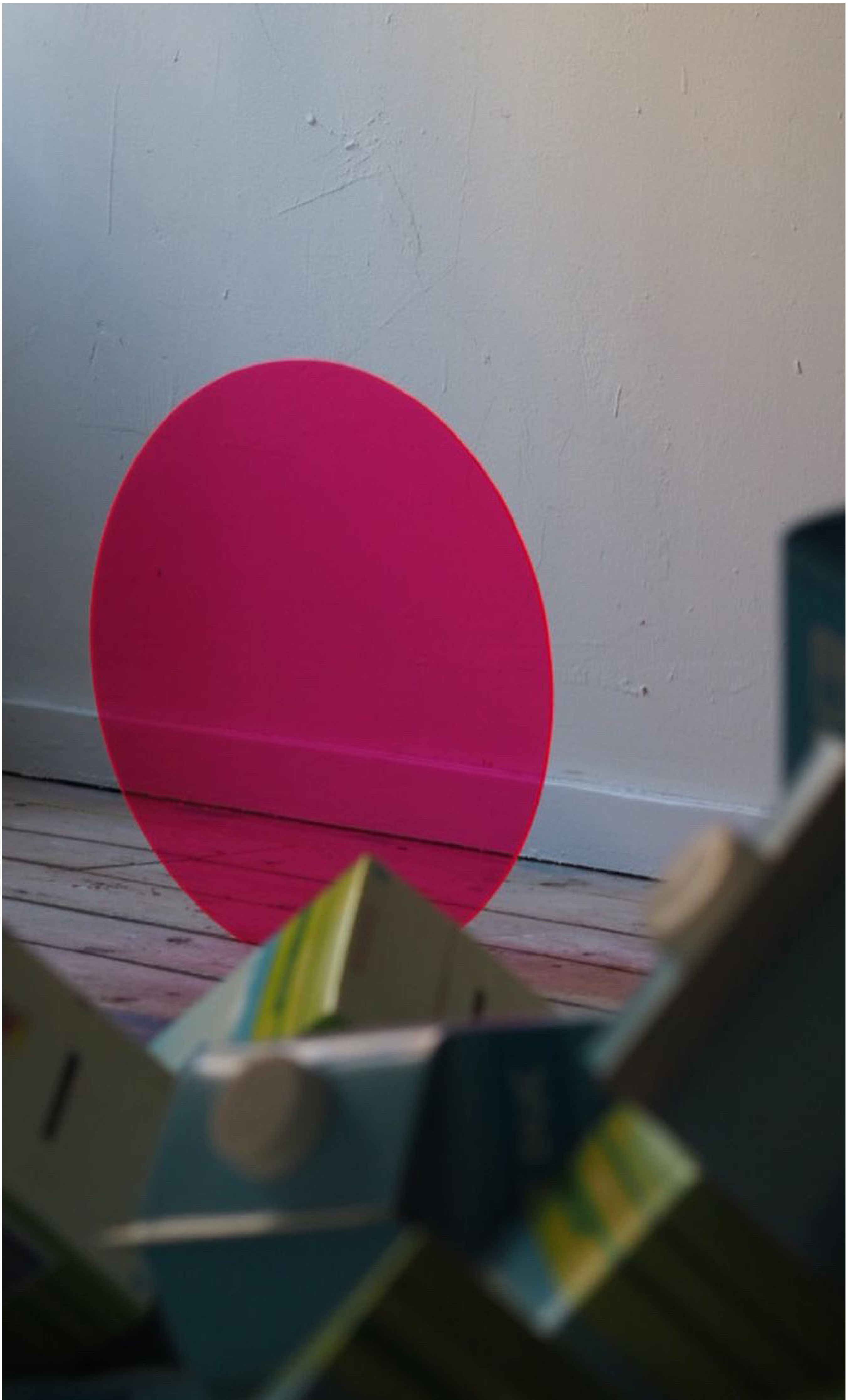
Jan Huijben's work 'Model' was presented as an architectural model in Alexander's installation. Thus he noticed that at a scale of 100:1, the 'Model' with the dimensions of three Bar Le Duc containers matches the regular building height of an apartment house in Berlin.

"Since Warburg always examined the social and political significance of the pictorial works, all visual forms - from paintings to advertisements - appear to him to be noteworthy." (translation: A. J. Heil)

Pablo Schneider in Aby Warburg, Nachhall der Antike. (Echo of the Antiquity).



**Jan Huijben
'Model' (installation view; previous page: detail)
painted wood
26 x 30 x 10 cm
2022**



Jan Huijben
'Disc'
acrylic glass
38,5 x 38,5 cm

“A red star the size of a small plate...”

Douglas Adams, The Hitchhikers Guide To The Galaxy

Is this an allusion to a sun disc, lost its wings, a plastic divider to prevent the spread of a disease used in a game show, or just an innocent refractive object?

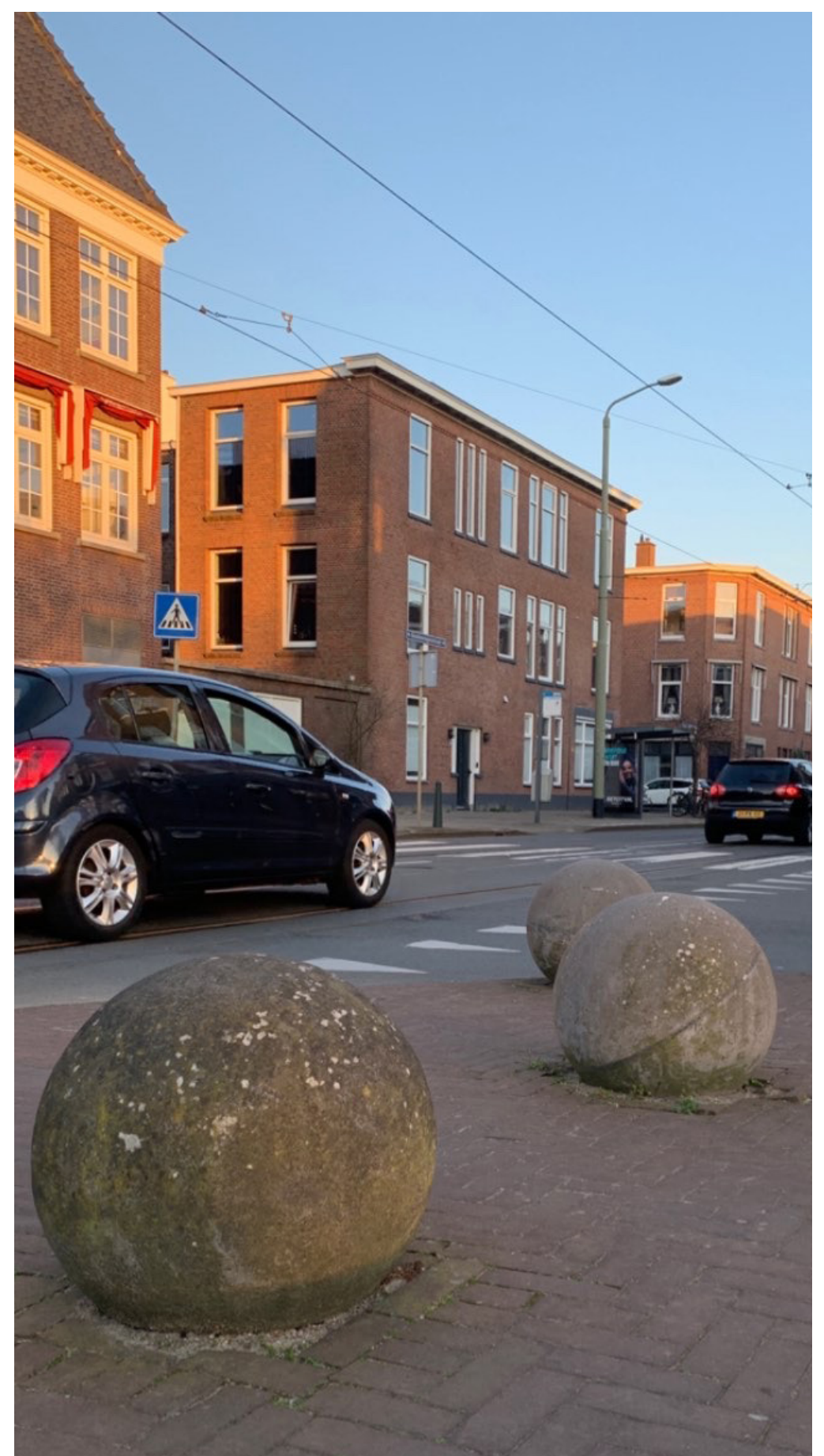
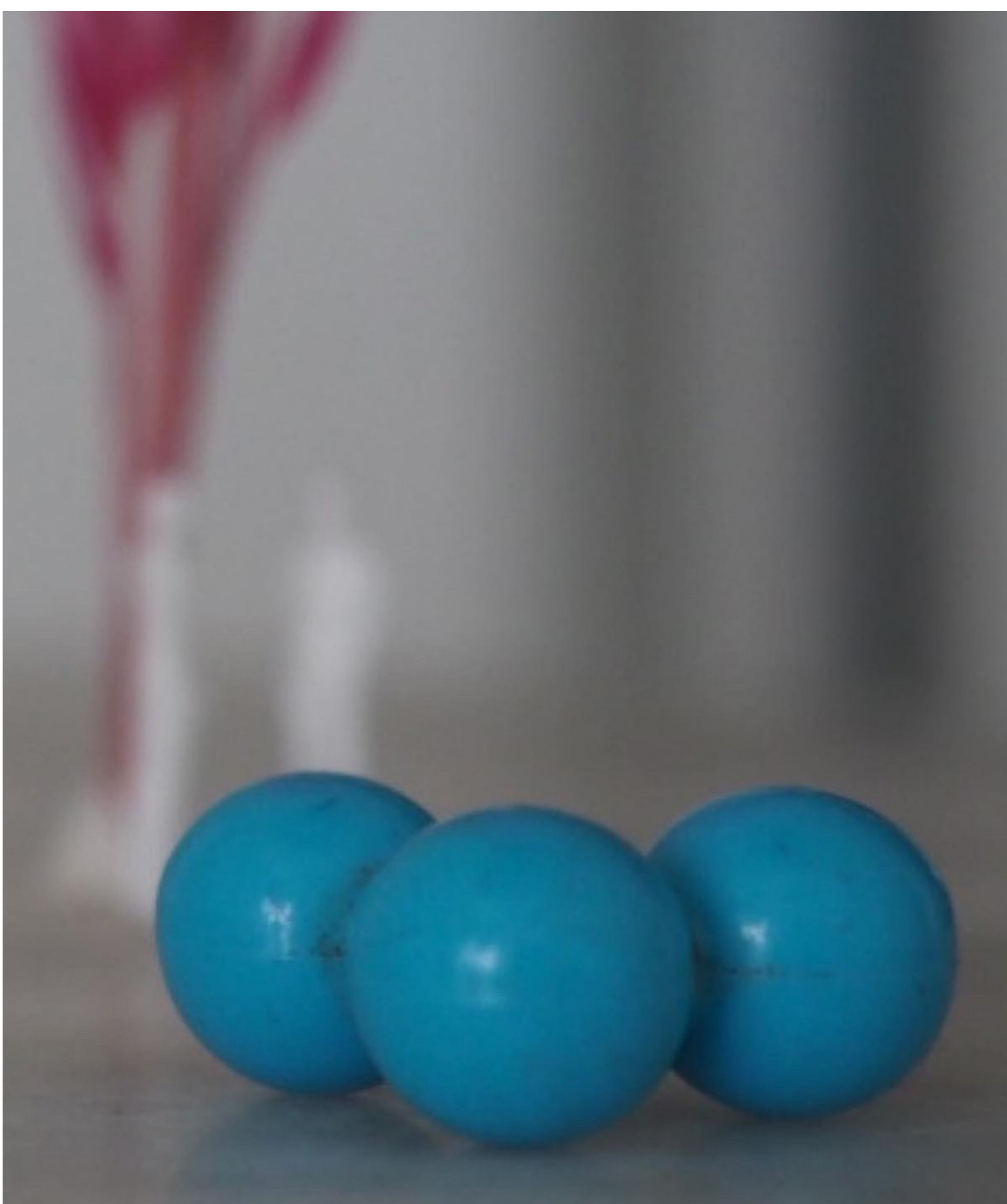
In general, I am sharing the opinion that ‘the thing itself’ can never be ‘the artwork’.

Jan Huijben has the talent and the necessary attitude to present to you a piece of trash and make you rethink your whole world view.

“Earthman [Slartibartfast said], the planet you lived on was commissioned, paid for, and run by mice. [...] The whole business with the cheese and the squeaking is just a front. [...] They’ve been experimenting on you, I’m afraid.”

Ah no, he [Arthur Dent] said, I see the source of the misunderstanding now. No, look you see, what happened was that we used to do experiments on ‘them’.

(Douglas Adams, ‘The Hitchhikers Guide To The Galaxy’)



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Jan Huijben

‘Object’ (in conversation with a photograph by Alexander Johannes Heil of concrete objects meant to prevent unallowed parking.)

plastic

2,5 x 1 x 2,5 cm

year unknown.

I was not surprised when he agreed to design the ashtray. “What do you think it should be like?” he asked. “You decide that, Mr. Sullivan. Anything you design will be what I want.”

John Lloyd Wright, My Father Who is on Earth, 1946; in David Van Zanten, Sullivans City, The Meaning of Ornament for Louis Sullivan, 2000. p.133

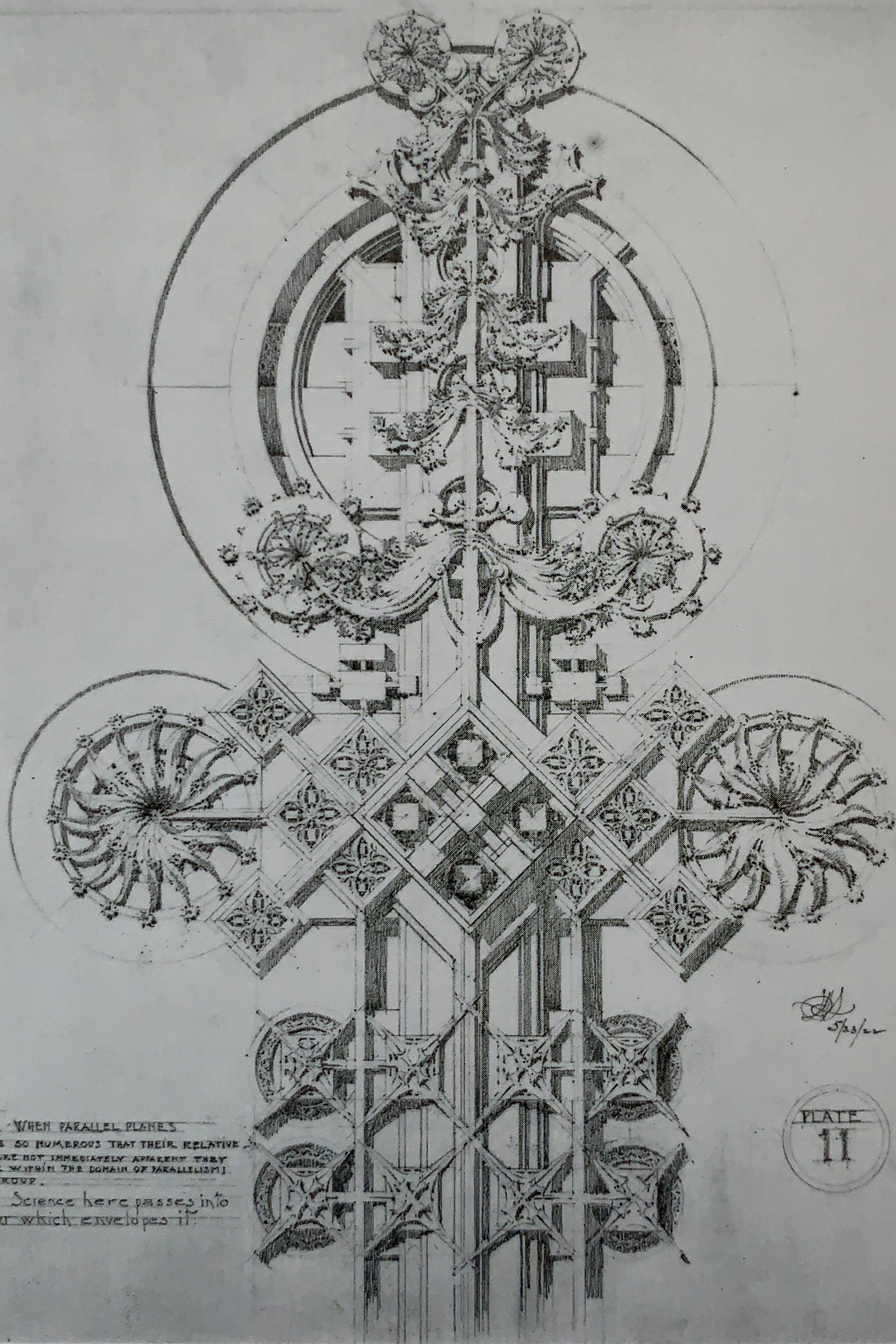
While strolling through the exhibition Magrathea, you will find a book here and there. They are suggestive exits to art historical references and narrative stories, expanding the installation towards a broader cultural context.

A visitor of the exhibition looks at a book that documents Louis Sullivans work. He was an icon of American architecture and a pioneer of early skyscraper design in Chicago at the end of the 19th century.

Reverently, she gazes at his ornaments, commenting: “Nobody today can even make things like that anymore - nobody has the craftsmanship!”

What people often do not think of is that not only that you have to have the craftsmanship to execute the design, but that first, you have to imagine it. Sullivan’s designs are not simply copies of flowers and plants. They are inspired by them. Yet, they are products of his creative mind!

The creative mind was already in Sullivan’s time, successively replaced by the logic of machine production and a progressing scarcity of resources.

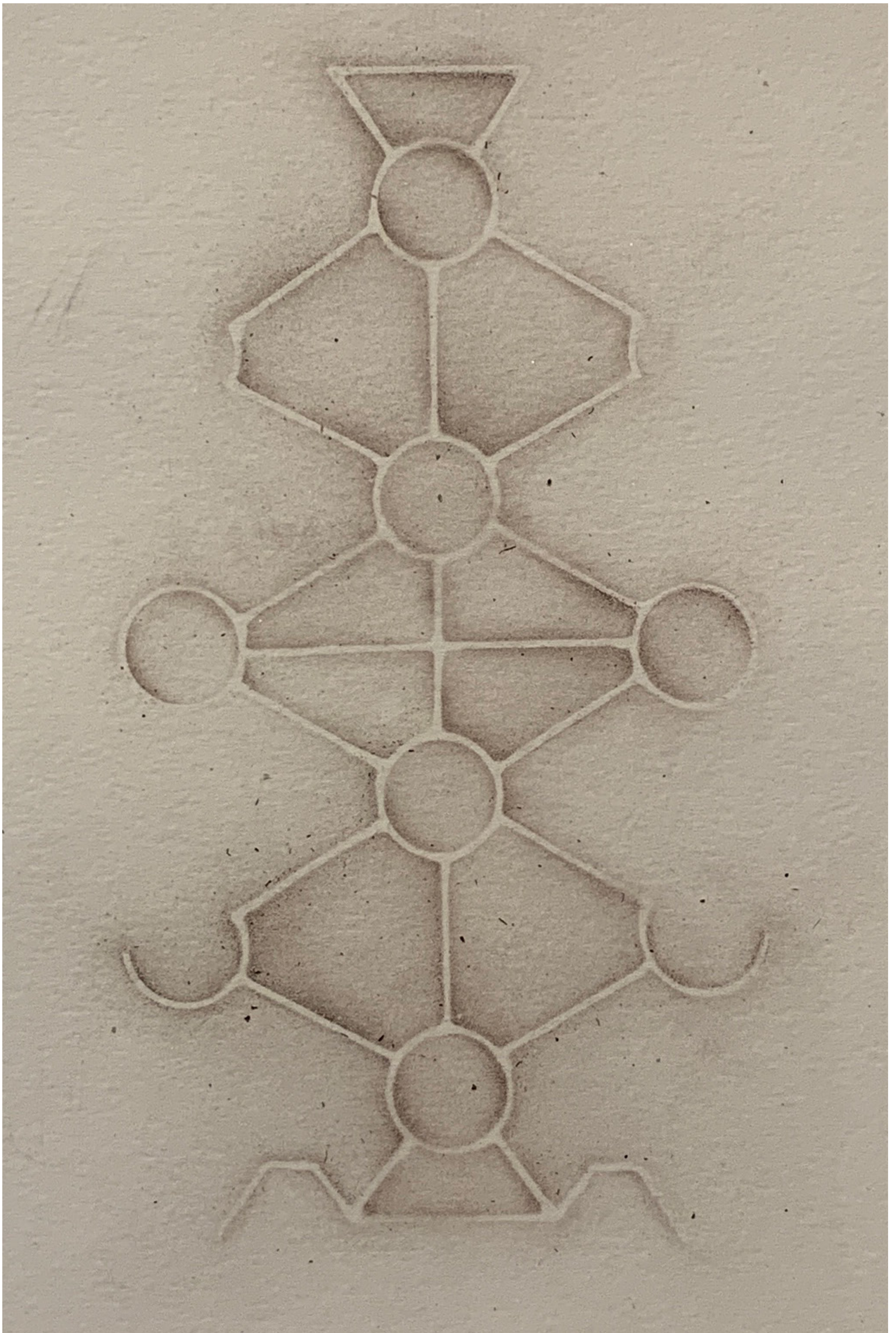


NOTE WHEN PARALLEL PLANES BECOME SO NUMEROUS THAT THEIR RELATIVE VALUES ARE NOT IMMEDIATELY APPARENT THEY THEN LIE WITHIN THE DOMAIN OF PARALLELISM AS A GROUP.
Note: Science here passes into an Art which envelopes it.

L.S. 5/23/22

PLATE 11

Louis Sullivan
A System of Architectural Ornament
drawing
1922



Jan Huijben
'Ornament'
print with sawdust
41 x 31,5 cm
2022

Economic optimization, sometimes disguised as ecological optimization is to ensure and sustain a wasteful and unreflective lifestyle. The scarcity of resources is a result of the design going to waste.

This is one of the messages I feel I discover in Jan Huijben's work. The 'Ornaments' he presents to us - unlike Sullivan's - are not made to touch our emotions but to ensure scarcity of resources by being optimized for a massive waste production, creating the need to replace products rapidly with new ones.

Nevertheless, meaning is everywhere to find in human production. The two old Volkswagen in the background of the image below, relate weirdly to Jan Huijben's 'Ornaments' on the windowsill. The works appear like orthodox icons, sacred blueprints indeed, of our industrial produced world, where the imagination is often dictated, and ever more often, being done by machines.



**Jan Huijben
'Ornaments' in conversation with two old volkswagen.**



Jan Huijben
'Ornaments'
polyetheen
red fragment: 20 x 24 x 2 cm
egg white: 39 x 29 x 2 cm
2022



Jan Huijben
'Ornament' (exhibition view with shadow from
ornament objects on the windowsill.)
print with sawdust
41 x 31,5 cm
2022



Jan Huijben
'Crate with table lamp'
polyethleen, wood, metal
141 x 120 x 90 cm
2022

In a conversation with Jan Huijben, he told me about his affection for gothic architecture. He says that he finds analogies in the structures of modern plastic beer and cola crates. Indeed, there seems to be an underlying formal language, both entities submit to. In his light-projections with crates, you can see many things. The verticality of gothic cathedrals, Mies van der Rohe's Wettbewerb Hochhaus Friedrichstraße, or the modern vision of the radiant city are certainly among the associations which can be made.



Wenzel Hablik
Freitragende Kuppel mit fünf Bergspitzen
Oil on canvas
1918/23/24



Jan Huijben
'Crate with table lamp'
polyetheen, wood, metal
141 x 120 x 90 cm
2022



**Mies van der Rohe
Wettbewerb Hochhaus Friedrichstraße, Berlin
1921**



Jan Huijben
'Model'
painted wood
26,5 x 10 x 10 cm
2022



Jan Huijben next to his work 'Model' and the Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy at the opening of Magrathea, vis à vis with Jan Huijben.

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