



**Penelope  
Haralambidou**

**City of Ladies**



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**1 (previous)** Elevation.

**2** *City of Ladies* installation  
view at Domobaal, London.

## Project Details

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Author	Penelope Haralambidou
Title	City of Ladies
Output Type	Solo exhibition
Venue and Dates	Domobaal, London (30 January to 8 February 2020)
Curators	Penelope Haralambidou with John Cruwys and Domo Baal
Project Dates	2018 to 2020
Research Assistant	John Cruwys
Manufacture	The pieces were developed in collaboration with B-Made at The Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL
Glassblower	Graham Reed, Jaytec Glass
Digital Film	Penelope Haralambidou (concept, original design and direction); John Cruwys (digital animation and design); Kevin Pollard (sound design)
Funding	£8,915.64 The Bartlett Architecture Research Fund (ARF); £1,500 Domobaal



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**3** Detail from the gilding process.



## Statement about the Research Content and Process

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### Description

In *The Book of the City of Ladies* (1405), the medieval author Christine de Pizan describes the construction of an imaginary city, a utopia built and inhabited by women. Her work can be seen as a proto-feminist manifesto, conflating the act of building with stories of notable female figures from fiction and history, and erecting a thesis against misogyny. This cross-disciplinary project, taking the form of a solo exhibition and a refereed paper, aims to introduce Christine's work to an architectural audience for the first time. It builds upon existing scholarship on the relationship between image and text in her work and proposes an innovative, design-led remodelling of her architectural and urban allegory, which displays the city in three stages of completion.

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### Questions

1. What is the architectural significance of Christine's thinking and iconography?
2. How can a design-led methodology reveal the underlying architectural themes in Christine's text and analyse the architectural motifs in her illuminations?
3. Can a remodelling of Christine's book/city provide an impetus for a contemporary feminist re-evaluation of the future of the city?

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### Methodology

The primary methodology is cross- and trans-disciplinary and is design-led. It focuses on a close study of the original illuminated manuscript, Harley 4431, which was potentially written in Christine's hand. It brings together medieval drawing with cutting-edge digital manufacturing and imaging- and time-based techniques. The research is supported by an extensive review of existing literature in Christine de Pizan studies and discussions at the biannual international conference at Université Sorbonne Nouvelle in Paris.

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### Dissemination

One solo exhibition, *City of Ladies*, at Domobaal, London; one conference paper presented at AHRA Dundee 2019; one refereed paper in the journal *Architecture and Culture*; one invited seminar at the Architectural Association, London; one invited keynote lecture at the Postgraduate Symposium on Research By Design: Re-appropriation and Representation at Edinburgh School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture; and one invited lecture and exhibition at the experimental drawing festival Cartographies of the Imagination, London.

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## **Project Highlights**

The research is significant as it is the first study linking Christine de Pizan's work with architecture. Christine's proposal for the construction of an allegorical city to protect women from misogyny, and its iconographic representation in three stages of construction, suggests her to be an early female/feminist speculative architect; yet, her work remains almost entirely unknown in the field of architecture. Beyond architecture, the research is also significant in the field of French and medieval studies, as it provides a novel lens through which the iconographic programme of Christine's book can be evaluated. Finally, the design-led analytical and creative investigation, which marries medieval drawing techniques with digital modelling and film, constitutes a methodological innovation in both disciplines.

## Introduction

The female sex has been left for a long time now, like an orchard without a wall, and bereft of a champion to take up arms in order to protect it.

... For this reason, we three ladies whom you see before you have been moved by pity to tell you that you are to construct a building in the shape of a walled city, sturdy and impregnable. ... You alone of all women have been granted the honour of building the City of Ladies. In order to lay the foundations, you shall draw fresh water from us three as from a clear spring. We will bring you building materials which will be stronger and more durable, than solid, uncemented marble. Your city will be unparalleled in splendor and will last for all eternity. (Christine de Pizan 1404)

With these words, the Italian/French medieval author Christine de Pizan is commissioned to construct a walled city in order to protect the female sex from misogyny. The three 'ladies' who commission her are the allegorical female figures Reason, Rectitude and Justice. Christine describes their visitation, and fictional architectural commission, in her celebrated text *The Book of the City of Ladies* (1404). Each virtue takes a turn in one of three chapters to educate Christine about the achievements of great women throughout history – queens, artists, scholars, warriors, saints – while directing and assisting her in the gradual allegorical construction of a city.

*The Book of the City of Ladies* is seen as a proto-feminist manifesto, correlating the act of writing a book that defends women with the construction of an imaginary defensive city. Although widely studied in terms of its literary significance,

I am interested in the under-researched architectural and urban allegory depicted in the text and the accompanying illuminations (4-5) – a manuscript's miniature illustration made using silver, gold and bright mineral colours, the name of which derives from the Latin *illuminare* (to light up) – that imagine a utopia constructed and inhabited solely by women.





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4 Harley 4431, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, chapter two illumination.

5 Harley 4431, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, chapter three illumination.

Alongside historical research, this speculative project explores Christine's allegorical spatial scheme through a unique design-led methodology, an embodied act of drawing that combines medieval drawing techniques on vellum with digital craft and film. The research culminated in an exhibition featuring an installation and a digital film, which spatially and materially reconstructed Christine's book and reframed her message in an architectural context while also projecting her allegorical city of ladies into the future.

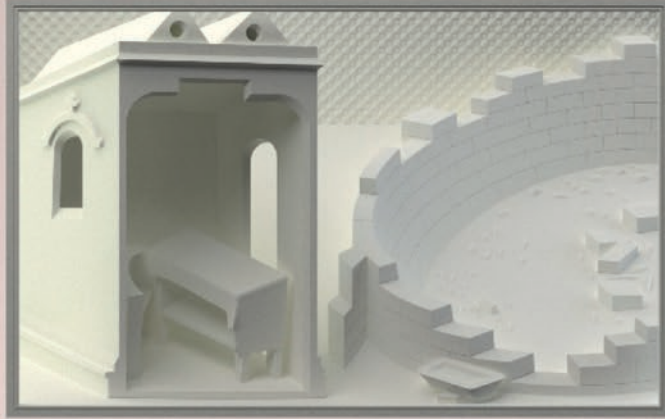
Born in Venice in 1364, Christine moved to Paris as a young child when her father joined the court of King Charles V as a royal consultant. She was married at 14 and had three children. Christine decided to take up writing professionally at the age of 25 in order to support her family after the sudden death of both her father and husband. Between 1401 and 1404 she instigated the Quarrel of the 'Romance of the Rose', where she protested against the misogyny of the popular French poem, insisting that it was slanderous to women. Her resulting notoriety led to commissioned work and was the trigger for her decision to embark on an authored text, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, with the main purpose to portray women more positively.

The specific version of the text that this project examines is part of Harley 4431, a compilation that Christine assembled for Queen Isabeau of Bavaria between 1410 and 1414 (7). It is one of the most important manuscripts held at the British Library since its foundation as part of the British Museum in 1753.

This research develops the theme of architectural representation in medieval manuscripts explored in two earlier projects by the author: *With-drawing Room on Vellum* (2016) and *Between the Retina and the Dome* (2018) (8-9). Both of these projects/drawings link history with design research to consider the impact of digital technology on architectural representation. They combine medieval drawing materials and illumination techniques with digital film and projection.

**6** Digital models of the illuminations at the beginning of the three chapters.

# INTRODUCTION







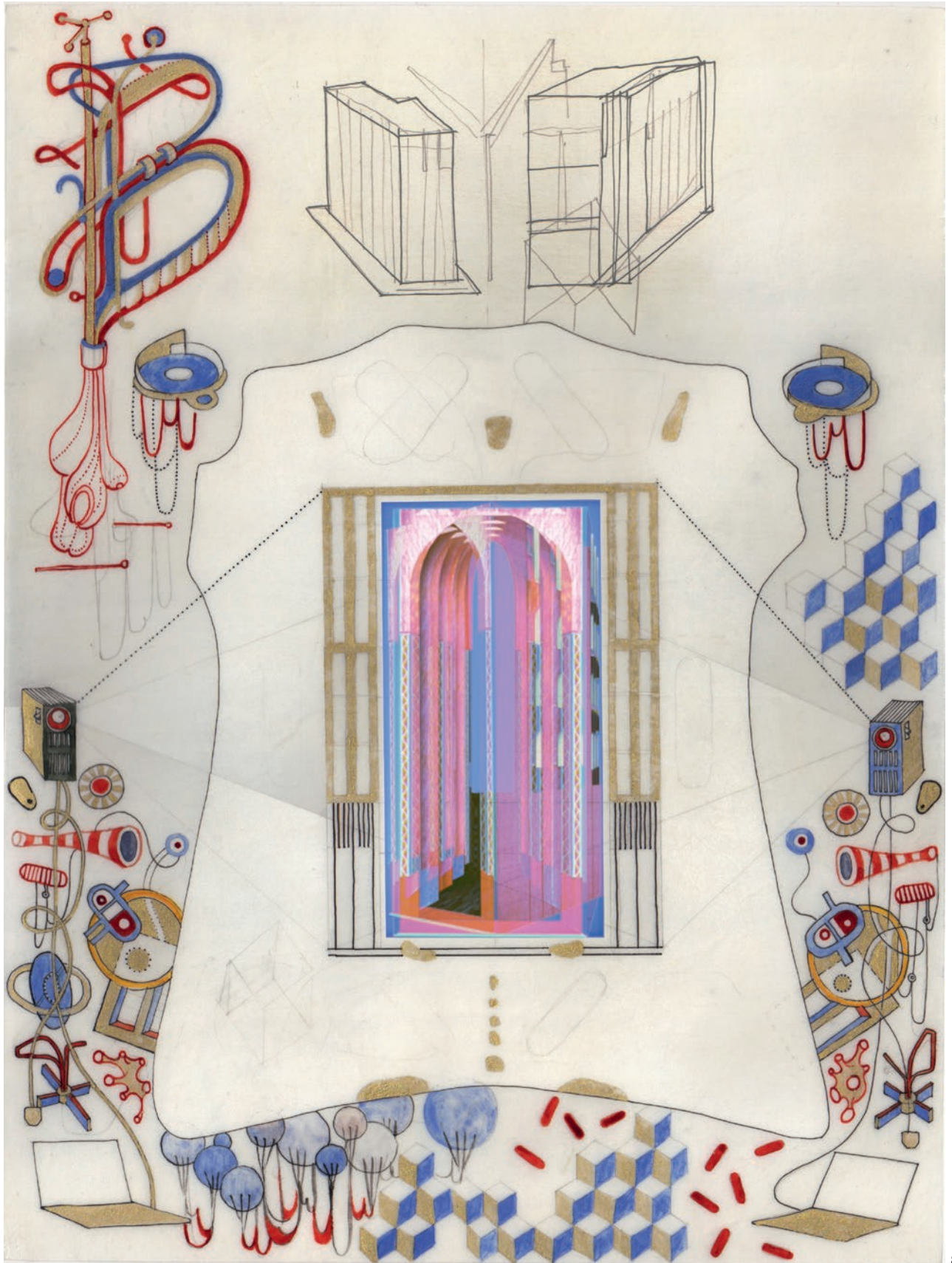




**7** Harley 4431, frontispiece showing Christine offering the book to Queen Isabeau of Bavaria.

**8 (overleaf)** With-drawing Room on Vellum, 2016.

**9 (overleaf)** Between the Retina and the Dome, 2018.





INTRODUCTION



## Aims and Objectives

The main objective of the research is to establish the literary and iconographic significance of Christine de Pizan's *The Book of the City of Ladies* for the history, practice and education of architecture. The research positions Christine's imaginative speculative design within architectural history for the first time, presenting her work as an early example of female spatial imagination and perhaps the earliest visual representation of a feminist utopia. Widely celebrated as the first French female professional author, this research also aims to establish Christine as an early female/feminist speculative architect, and one of the first proto-feminist thinkers, through a close study of the design of the architectural illustrations adorning her text.

The project aims to use Christine's work to underpin an appraisal of the importance of female authorship in shaping the image of the city. Although written and illustrated more than 600 years ago, Christine's message continues to be topical and prescient. Positioned in parallel to the real constructed city, her allegory can shine new light onto female values, measures, modes of design, structures of power and urban life, which can influence policy. Inspired by and in support of initiatives and events that attempt to remember and define the female contribution to the built environment, *The Book of the City of Ladies* can begin to inform architectural pedagogy and motivate urban futures from a female perspective by claiming Christine's work for architecture.

The project aims to establish a pioneering area of scholarship that brings together medieval studies with architecture and medieval architectural history with design.

It does so by employing an innovative methodology, which develops existing research on the relationship between text and image in Christine's work but from an architectural design perspective.





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10 Gallery installation, close view of Justice.





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**11** Domobaal  
installation view.

## Questions

### **1. What is the architectural significance of Christine's thinking and iconography?**

What is the historical significance of architectural motifs in medieval illumination? How do they operate as framing devices for narrative structures and for organising different parts of the text on the page? What is their historical value in depicting everyday scenes and construction techniques?

### **2. How can a design-led methodology reveal the underlying architectural themes in Christine's text and analyse the architectural motifs in her illuminations?**

Can a hybrid drawing technique discover underlying hidden meaning in her use of imagery by bringing together vellum – recalling the forgotten, visceral past – and digital projection – expressing the uncertain evanescent future of architectural representation? How can an embodied act of drawing perform as practice-led historical research? Can contemporary digital drawing and immersive environmental technologies empower a female vision of the city of the future?

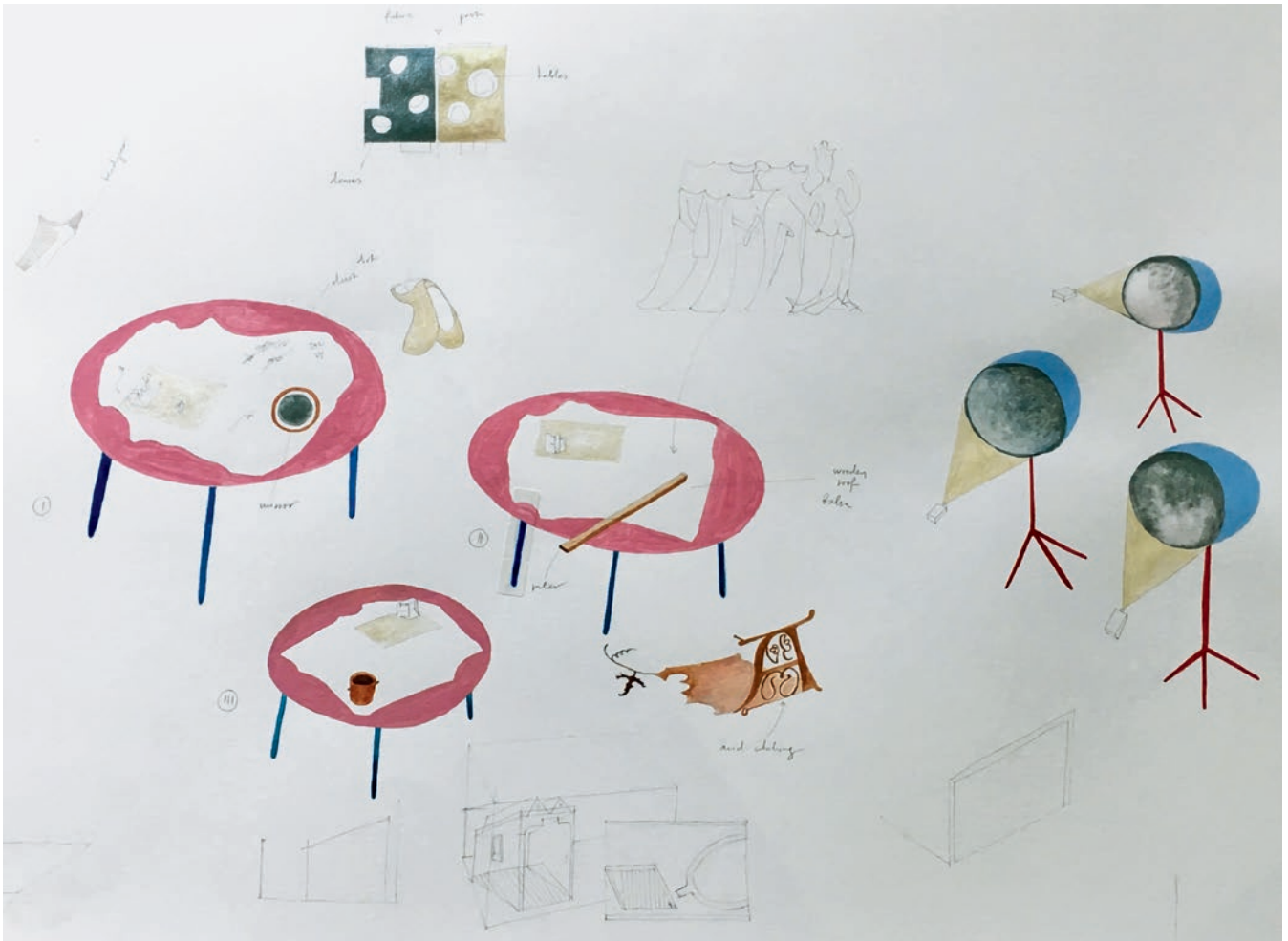
### **3. Can a remodelling of Christine's book/city provide an impetus for a contemporary feminist re-evaluation of the future of the city?**

What is the significance of the allegory of the city as a metaphor for writing and the construction of a thesis against misogyny? Can a revisiting of the visual metaphors in Christine's text help trigger women's desire to draw the city and propose more sustainable,

equitable, dignified and visionary urban futures that cater for the needs and desires of both genders? What is the role and value of the female spatial imagination and female architectural drawing practices in the production and perception of architectural and urban design? Christine's desire for women to shape the image of the allegorical city 600 years ago remains largely unfulfilled. What will our cities look like in the next 600 years and how much will women be involved in shaping them?



QUESTIONS



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12 Early sketch arrangement of exhibition.

## Context

### Design-led research in architecture

This research project fits within the context of my previous practice-led, cross- and trans-disciplinary work, which incorporates architectural design with history and theory. Directly employing the tools of the architect – drawing, model making and digital film – I have analysed ideas and work, not only in architecture but also in visual representation, the history of architectural drawing, the politics of vision, fine art and cinema. This methodology is exemplified in my monograph *Marcel Duchamp and the Architecture of Desire* (Haralambidou 2013), a design-led investigation of French artist Marcel Duchamp's work, which adds to but also challenges other art historical analyses. Two recent research drawings relating to this project, *Between the Retina and the Dome* (9) and *With-drawing Room on Vellum* (8), were presented at *Works + Words 2019*, 2nd Biennale for Artistic Research in Architecture, at the Royal Danish Academy (17). These were subsequently published in *The Artful Plan: Architectural Drawing Reconfigured* (2020).

Using creative design that employs drawing and model making to perform a feminist re-reading of architectural history resonates with the work of Slovenian artist Jasmina Cibic, who works in film, sculpture, performance and installation to explore 'soft power': how political rhetoric is deployed through art and architecture (13). It also resonates with Emma Cheatle, who in her book *Part-Architecture: The Maison de Verre, Duchamp, Domesticity and Desire in 1930s Paris* (2016) combines theory, creative writing and drawing to trace the history of the spaces and sexuality of Marcel Duchamp's *The Large Glass* (1923) and Pierre Chareau's *Maison de Verre* (1932) (14-5).



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**13** Jasmina Cibic, *Nada: Act I*, 2016.

**14-5** Emma Cheatle, *Part-Architecture*, 2016.



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**16** Penelope Haralambidou,  
*The Blossoming of  
Perspective*, Domobaal,  
2007.





17

**17** *Works + Words 2019*,  
2nd Biennale for Artistic  
Research in Architecture,  
Royal Danish Academy.

## Medieval studies

By focusing on the iconography of architectural representation of the city in the illuminations, the project builds upon existing research in medieval studies on the relationship between text and image in Christine's work. Among the most important: Charlotte Cooper, 'A re-assessment of text-image relationships in Christine de Pizan's didactic works' (unpublished PhD thesis); Sandra L. Hindman, *Christine de Pizan's 'Epistre Othea': Painting and Politics at the Court of Charles VI* (1986); Marilynn Desmond and Pamela Sheingorn, *Myth, Montage, and Visuality in Late Medieval Manuscript Culture* (2003); and Millard Meiss, *French Painting in the Time of Jean De Berry: The Limbourgs and Their Contemporaries* (1974).



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## Fine art

Although focusing on the architectural allegory, the work – an installation and a film presented in a gallery – can also be positioned in a fine art context, especially in relation to feminist artworks inspired by the work of Christine de Pizan. For instance, Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party* (1974–9) is an important icon of feminist art, comprised of a triangular table with 39 place settings, each commemorating an important woman from history (19). One of the place settings is for Christine and references her 'collecting' of renowned women's stories (18). Similar to Chicago's work, this research uses a table in a triadic formation, albeit much smaller in scale and analytical rather than representational.

18-9 Judy Chicago,  
*The Dinner Party*, 1974–9.

CONTEXT



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A more recent example of an artwork inspired by Christine is Tai Shani's *DC: Semiramis* (2019), which explores mythical and real women in an expanded performative adaptation of *The Book of the City of Ladies* (20). Shani uses 'the structure of an allegorical city of women to explore "feminine" subjectivity and experience, through a gothic/science-fiction lens' (Tate 2019). Shani's work involves the creation of sets and performances based on the narrated stories of women in Christine's text. Although this research project includes an element of playful performance, the focus is on the design of the architectural motifs and themes in Christine's text and not on the storytelling.

and Parlour, and through numerous publications, events and exhibitions. The study of Christine enriches these efforts to trace a distinct lineage for the female architectural imagination by providing an early example of a desire to construct the city.

### **History of female architectural design**

Although extensively examined in French and medieval studies, Christine's work remains overlooked, if not completely unknown, in architectural history and design. Her primary aim when writing *The Book of the City of Ladies* was to commemorate, celebrate and preserve details of exceptional women's lives, talents and endeavours, while also putting across a wish for the creation of a city that reflects female values. It is, therefore, astonishing that even today, more than 600 years later, her message is still topical. Her wish for an all-female city is still unfulfilled. The main objective of this research is to remember and establish Christine as an early female/feminist speculative architect. The project and its dissemination belong to a context of similar initiatives that work to bring hitherto forgotten female thinkers, designers and architects to the foreground. This work began in the 1970s and continues today, through collectives such as Women in Architecture, Part W, Voices of Experience





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20 Tai Shani,  
*DC: Semiramis*, 2018.

## Methodology

The primary methodology is design-led research that culminated in an exhibition, *City of Ladies* at Domobaal in London. The exhibition featured an installation and a digital film that spatially and materially reconstruct the three illuminations and imagine the pictorial city blossoming from two dimensions into three. The work claims Christine's message for architecture and is in search of a way to project it into the future. Although it culminates in a composition of finished pieces, the artefacts should not be seen as complete outputs but as design experiments that attempt to interpret Christine's ideas and iconographic arrangement.

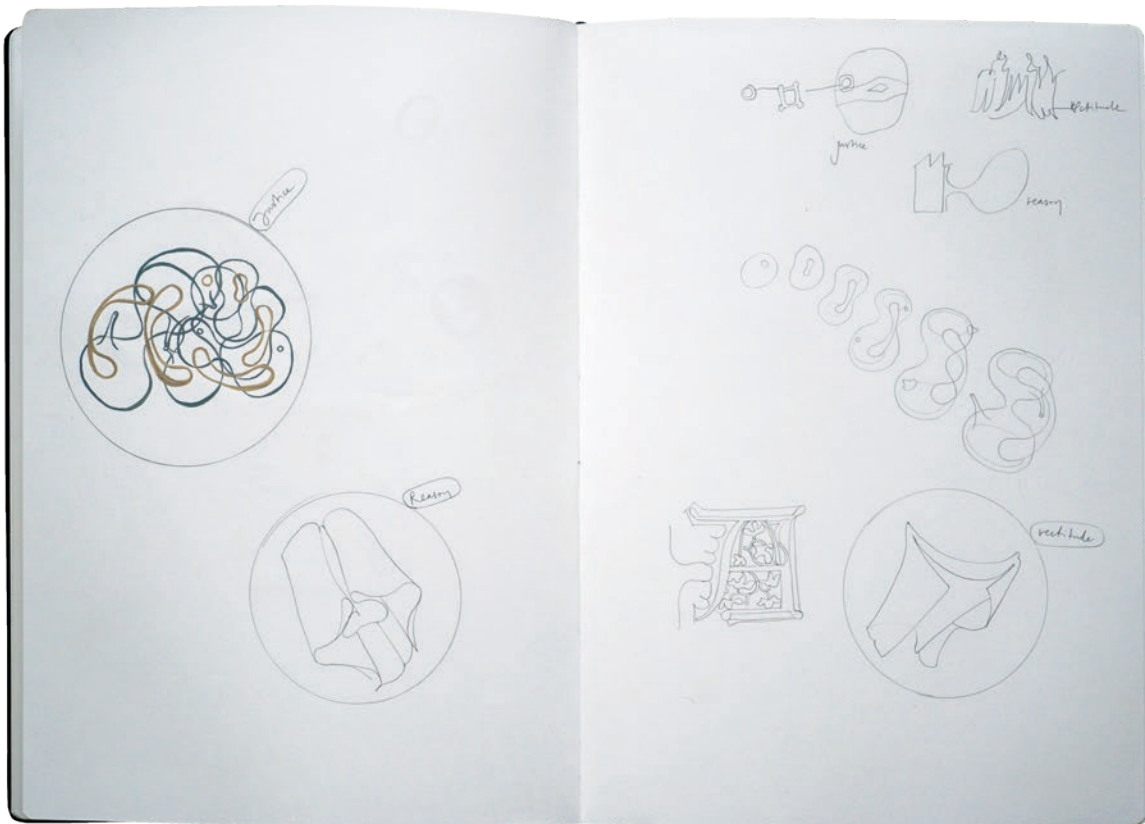
The analysis was based on a close study of the recently digitised manuscript at the British Library and two versions of the English translation of the text. The research builds upon *Album Christine de Pizan* (2012) by Gilbert Ouy, Christine McArdle Reno and Inès Villela-Petit, which studies the composition of the manuscripts and offers significant new information on the illuminators collaborating with Christine. My research has led to a more detailed analysis of the overall architectural composition and decorative motifs in the manuscript, specifically the city-building illuminations.

The research employs an embodied act of drawing and making of a series of artefacts, which combine medieval illumination drawing techniques with digital craft and film to directly respond to the iconographic content of Christine's work.

### 1. Gilding on vellum

Manuscripts were handwritten and illuminated on sheets of vellum, an extremely durable writing and drawing surface made out of animal skin, which was also used for architectural drawing at the time. Each chapter frontispiece is produced on a whole skin of vellum, obtained from the last remaining manufacturer in the UK, William Cowley Parchment Makers. The vellum skins become drawing surfaces that carry important diagrams relating to selected themes in the book and markings for the positioning of other elements. Their pure white surface is decorated in a painstaking process of gilding, following medieval techniques using silver, gold and white gold leaf (22).

21 Sketchbook 02, gilding pattern development.

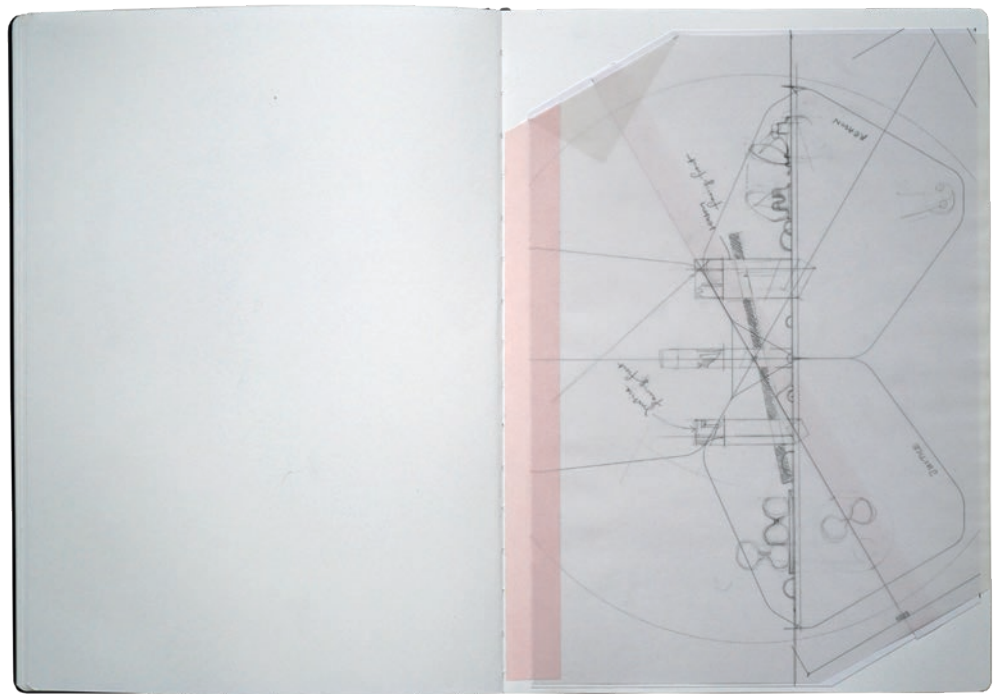






## 2. Design and construction of tables

Resembling tablecloths or place mats, the vellum skins lie on three specially designed tables supported by slender wooden legs. The table-top design was developed in direct reference to the shape of the three skins, so that they can be arranged radially forming a larger composite raised surface **(24-5)**. Each table is named after one of the three virtues, and their surface is covered in different colours of furniture linoleum: Reason (4185 powder), Rectitude (4183 pistachio) and Justice (4177 vapour).



23

**22** Gallery installation detail, gilding.

**23** Sketchbook 02, development of the table arrangement.



24

**24** Table design iterations.



25

**25** Testing the arrangement of the tables.

### 3. Crystal-glass half domes

A group of six crystal domes in three different diameters operate as paper weights to keep each vellum skin in place on the table (26-7). As a living material, vellum has a tendency to expand, contract and curl depending on environmental temperature and humidity levels. The positions of the crystal domes are decided after observing the natural movements of the material to form an overall composition, dictated by the gilding, but they can also be re-arranged at will. The domes work like magnifying lenses highlighting the drawings on the vellum.

**26** Gilding marks organising the positioning of the crystal domes on the vellum.

**27** Gallery installation view (detail).



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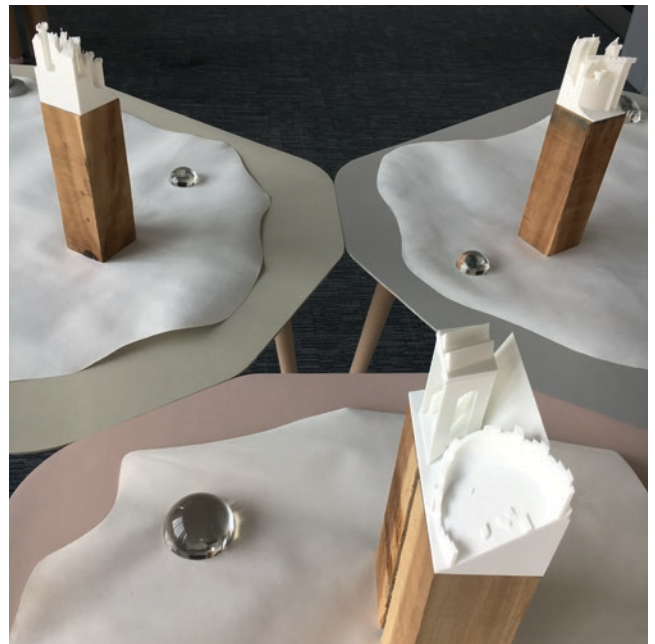


27



#### 4. Translation of the illuminations into three miniature 3D-printed models

The illuminations showing the city under construction use a distorted projection system that does not obey linear perspective – a technique that would later be invented in Renaissance Italy. To enter the figurative space of the city, the illusory depth depicted in the illuminations was decoded and fleshed out into three dimensions, following a design process in reverse. The pre-linear perspective was translated into digital models as accurately as possible. These were then 3D printed at the same scale. The miniature models, supported by rough blocks of wood representing the columns of text that the illuminations crown, become nuclei of a city not yet built (28).

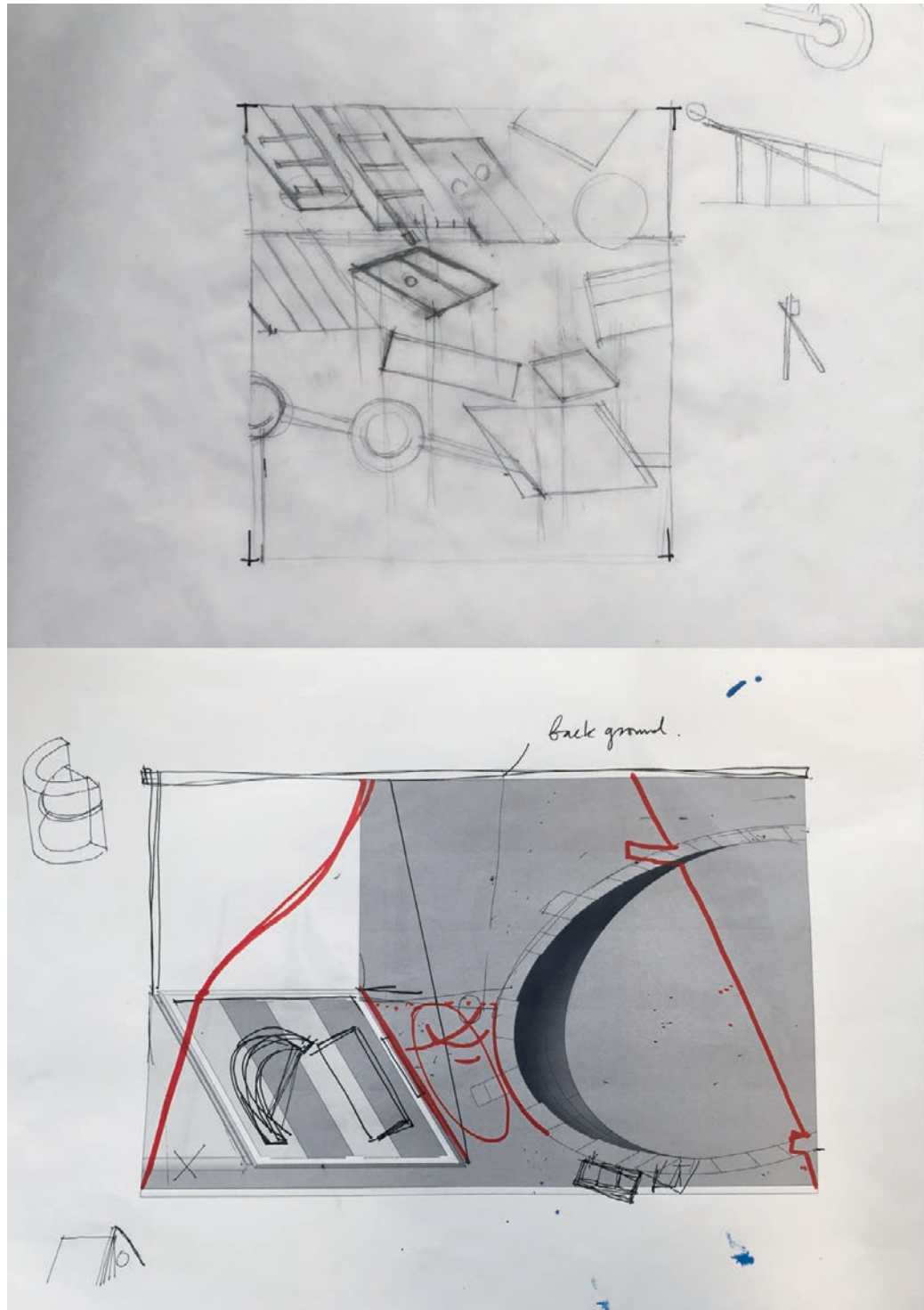


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**28** Models are supported by wooden towers/bases.

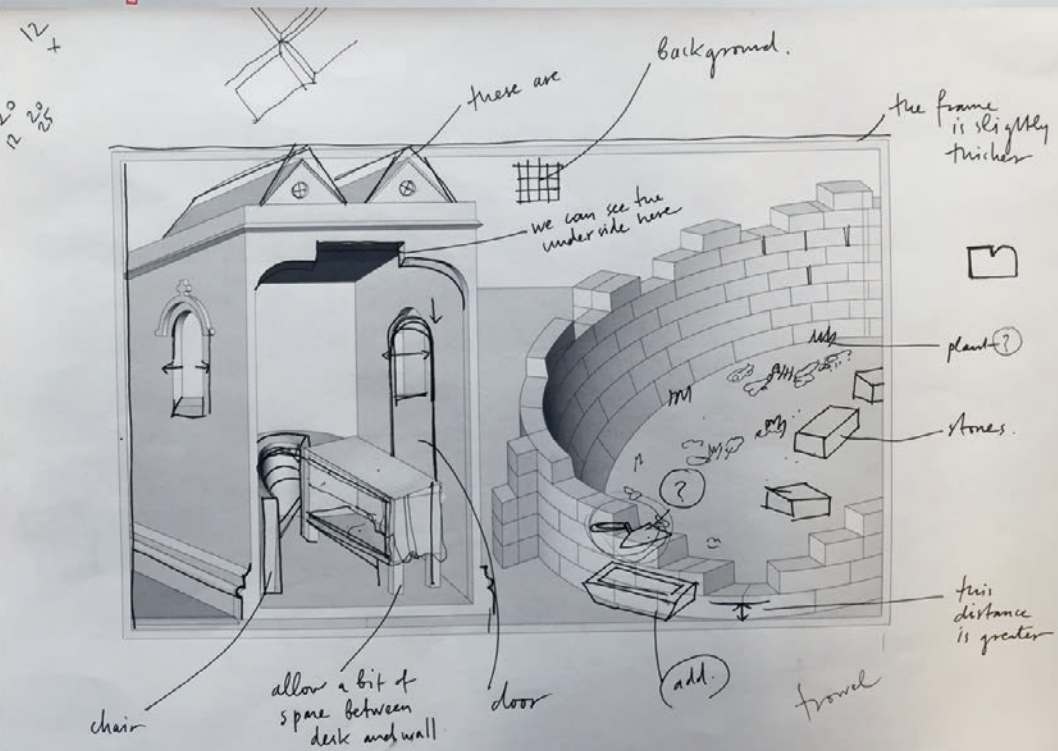
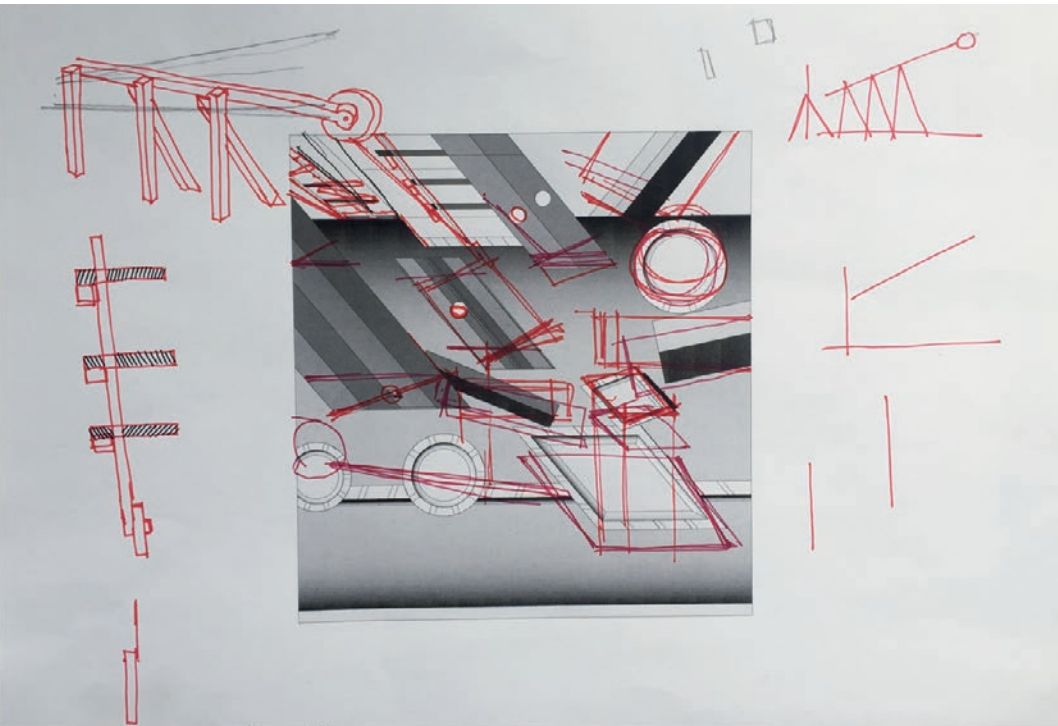
**29** Rearranging the crystal domes.





**30** Development of the digital models. Hand-drawn marks on printed digital drawings.

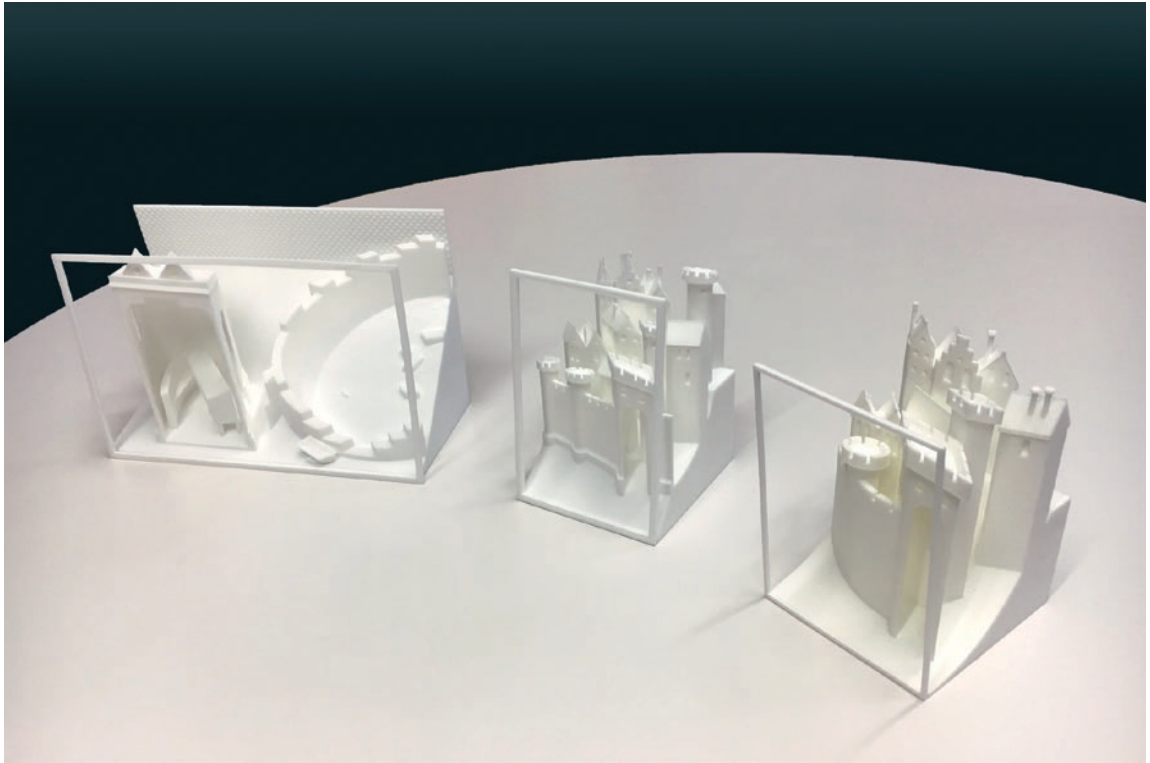
METHODOLOGY



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**31** The printed models are placed on 1:1-scale printouts of the manuscript pages.

**32** Different views of the three models.

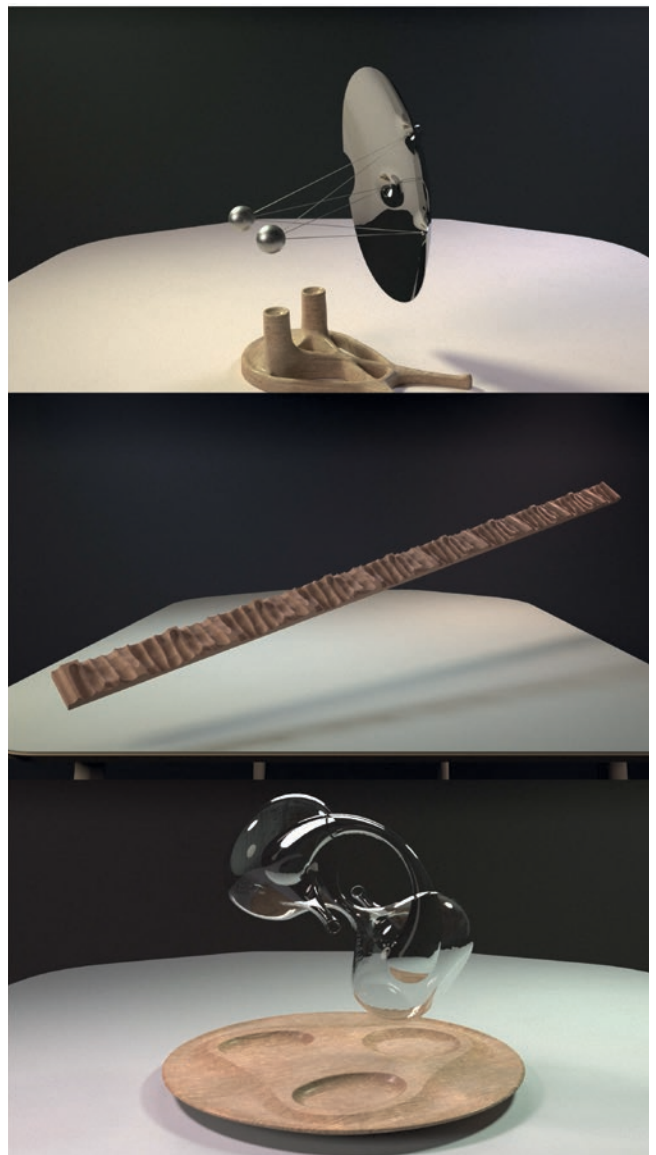
### 5. Significance and construction of the three artefacts

A key part of the research involved the interpretation of three symbolic objects, which the virtues offer to Christine as measuring and material standards guiding the metaphorical construction of the female city. This resulted in the design and construction of three artefacts: a mirror, ruler and a measuring vessel (33). The development of the design of these artefacts occurred in conjunction with the research for my AHRA 2019 conference paper 'The Female Body Politic: Re-modelling The Book of the City of Ladies', which explores the city as a body.

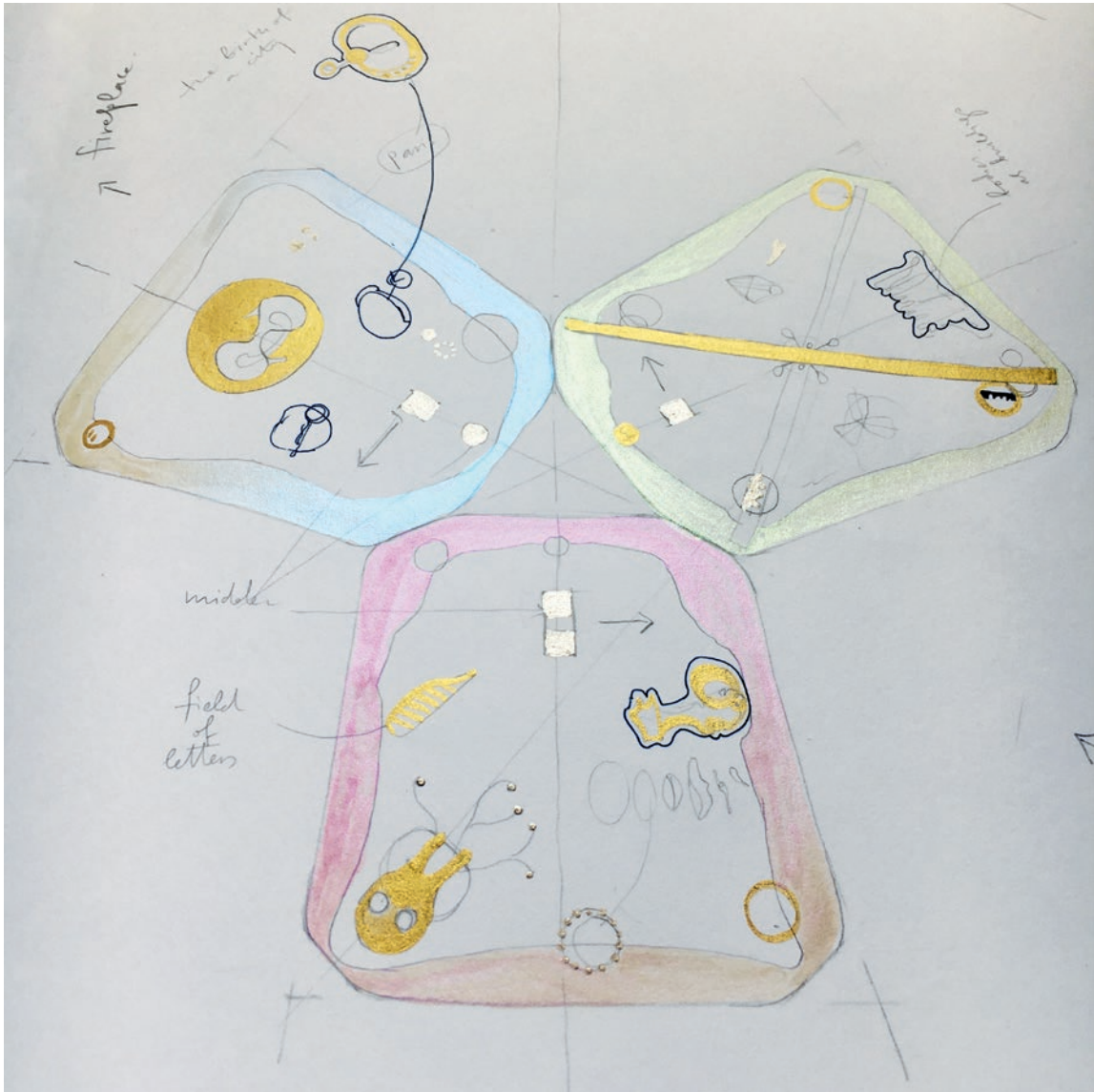
#### The Mirror of Reason

Reason brings a mirror as a device for measuring self-knowledge and -worth, which she suggests Christine will need to plan the city. The translation of this metaphorical artefact is a table-top mirror (38). It portrays binocular vision as an alternative visual matrix embedded in the body, a female vision against the male sharpness of linear perspective and an instrument to help plan the form of the city. The surface of the proposed mirror is made out of polished metal, as most were in medieval times. The geometry of the surface references the horopter – a geometrical surface describing the binocular picture plane – and is held in place by two large ball bearings referencing the eyeballs, which carry slender steel wires representing the visual rays. It is held by a wooden base made out of machined walnut that also references the visual perceptual system; more specifically, the optical chiasma (37).

Self-knowledge and recognition of the value of the female point of view literally and metaphorically become the basis of the conception of a new female city. Relating it to body parts, the mirror is equivalent to the face or the head. Reason's table thus becomes a 'dressing table'.





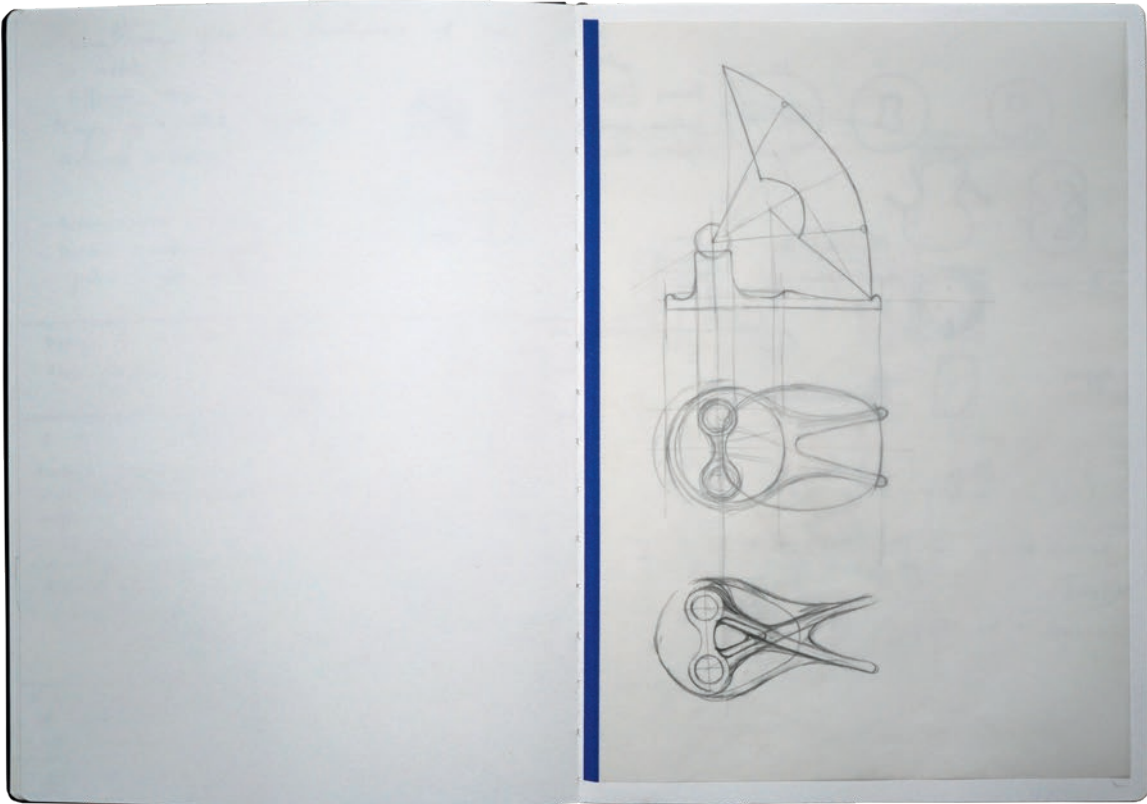


34

**33** Digital models of the Mirror of Reason, Ruler of Rectitude and Vessel of Justice.

**34** Sketchbook 02, development of the table arrangement.





35

**35** Sketchbook 02, development of the base of the mirror.



36



38



37

**36** Digital model of the base of the mirror.

**37** Machining the base of the mirror in walnut.

**38** Final mirror with polished metal surface.

### The Ruler of Rectitude

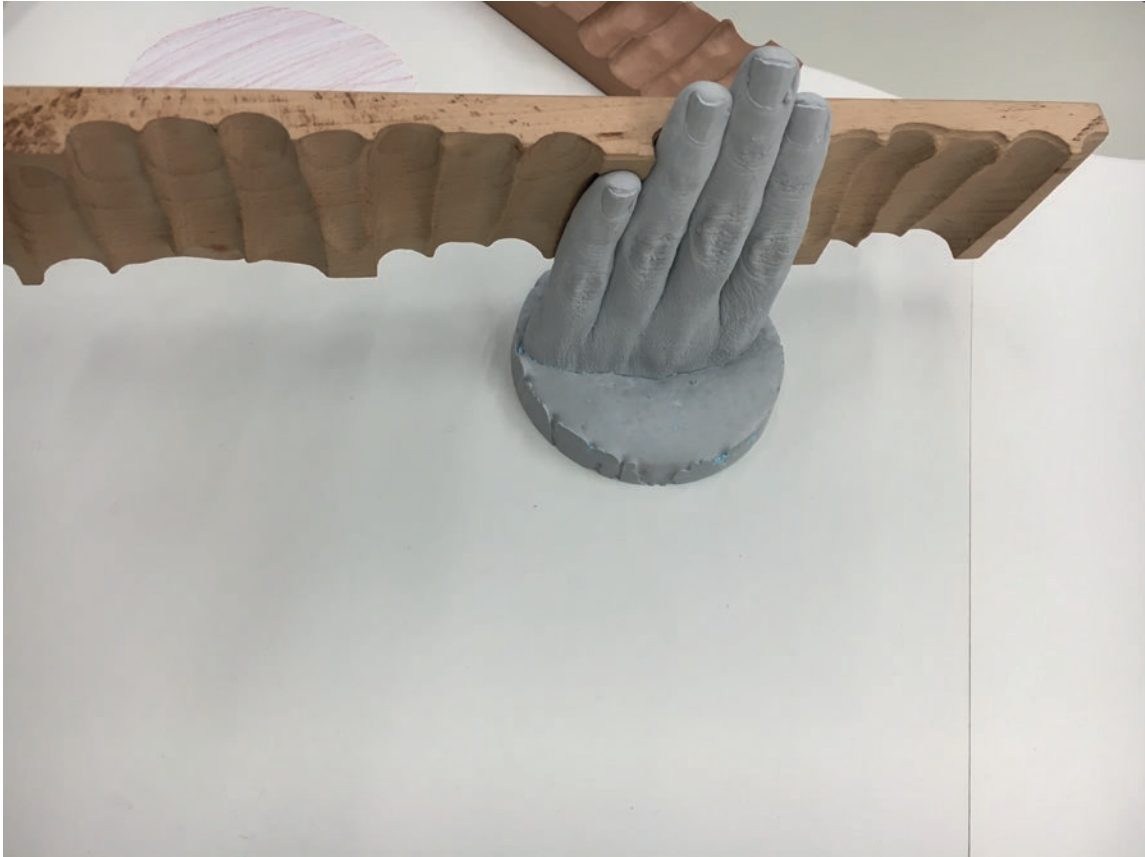
Rectitude holds a ruler, a yardstick of truth that separates right from wrong, which she insists Christine should use to design the interior of the city and its high temples, palaces, houses, roads, squares and marketplaces. In the history of measurement, many distance units are based on human body parts such as the cubit, the fathom and the foot, with variations in length by era and location. One aspect, however, has been constant: they always refer to the male body, as does the name of the measuring instrument, e.g. 'ruler' (king). The interpretation of the ruler here is a direct imprint of female hands, specifically the hands of the author. The ruler was derived from a complex process of physically casting hands in ink-tinted plaster (39-40). The casts were then used to create a digital model through photogrammetry, and alternating units of fingers were then arranged to the length of a French ell (*aune*) used to measure cloth. The resulting model of concave imprints was machined into a piece of pear wood (41). The ruler points to a city that is made for female bodies and their needs. Obviously relating to hands, Rectitude's table thus becomes a 'drawing table'.



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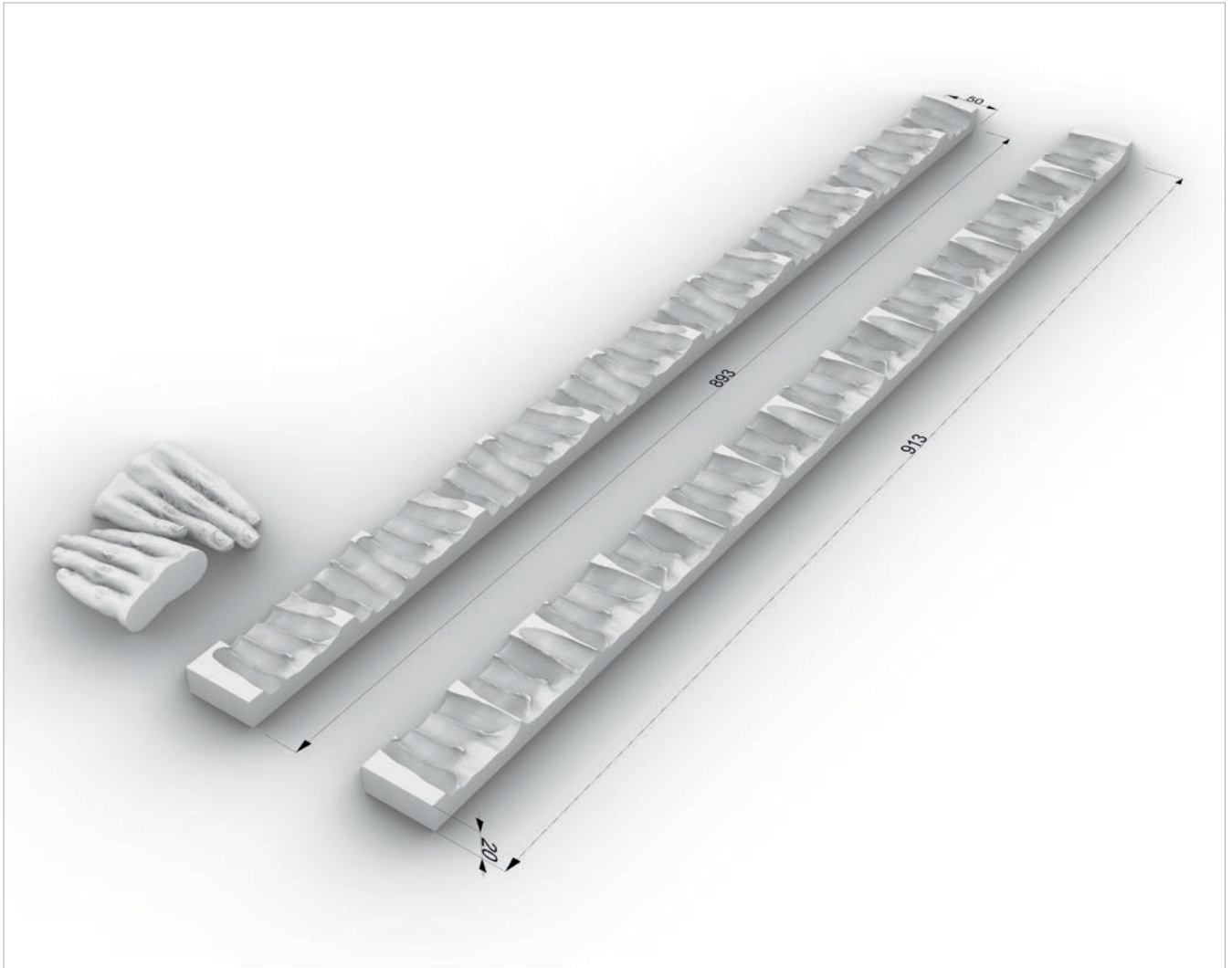
41

**39** Alginate mould.

**40** Tinted plaster casts  
of hands.

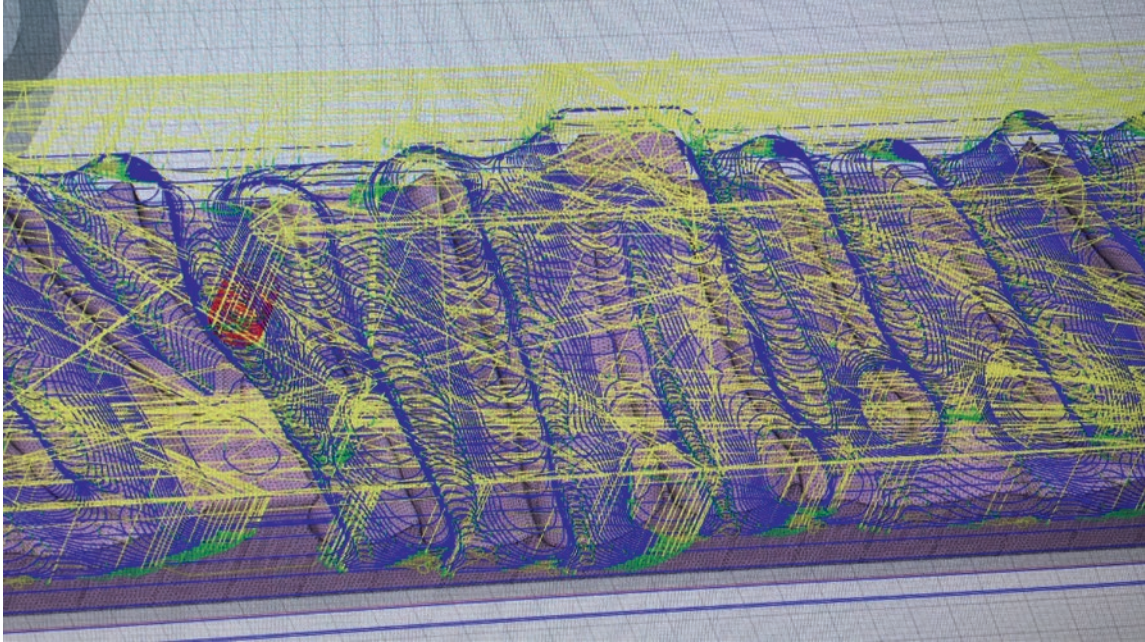
**41** 'The ruler fits like a glove'.





42

**42** Linear arrangement options.



43

43 Machining path.

### The Vessel of Justice

Justice offers Christine a vessel of gold, a container measuring weight or volume that is able to calculate and distribute fortune for each individual. She suggests that Christine will use it to embellish the high turrets and roofs of the completed buildings, and will adorn the city with gold. I see the vessel as a gauge of female values. My interpretation is a complex glass-blown form comprised of two interlocking chambers resembling splitting cells (44-6). A hybrid between an hourglass and a double pitcher, the vessel is able to measure time through mass, promoting long-term thinking that is often absent in design. Sitting on a base machined in lime wood, the vessel decants its time-keeping white-marble sand on designated areas of the vellum. It is an ingesting and gestating abdomen, and its presence on Justice's table makes this a 'dining table'.

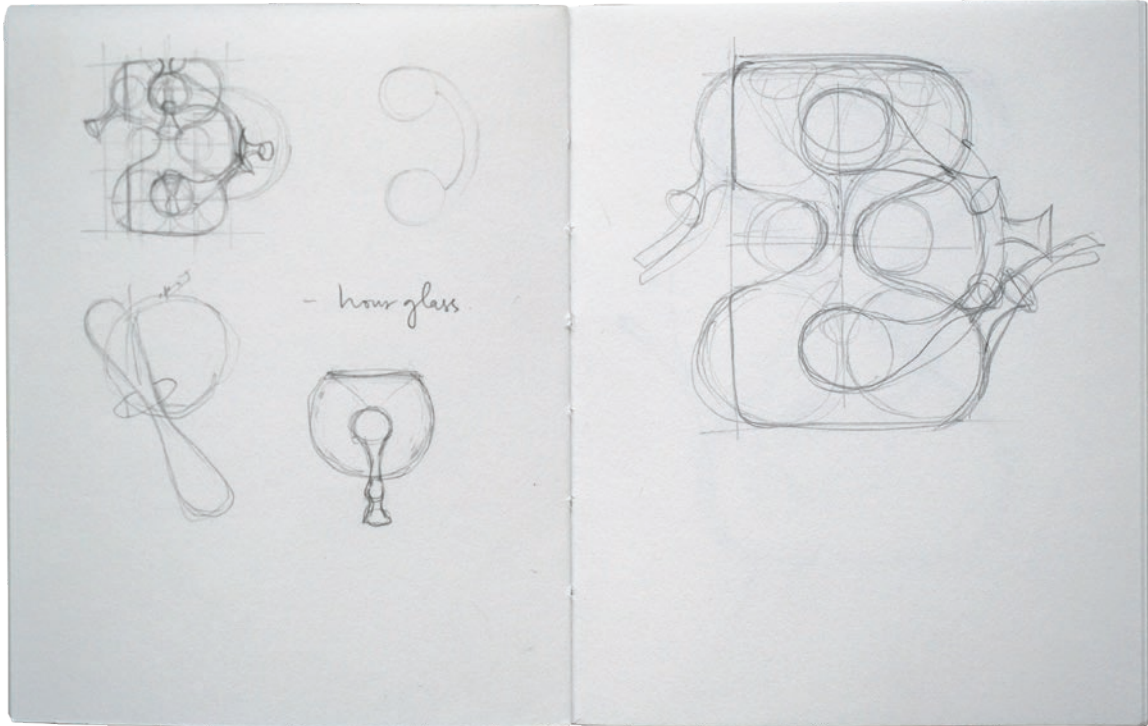


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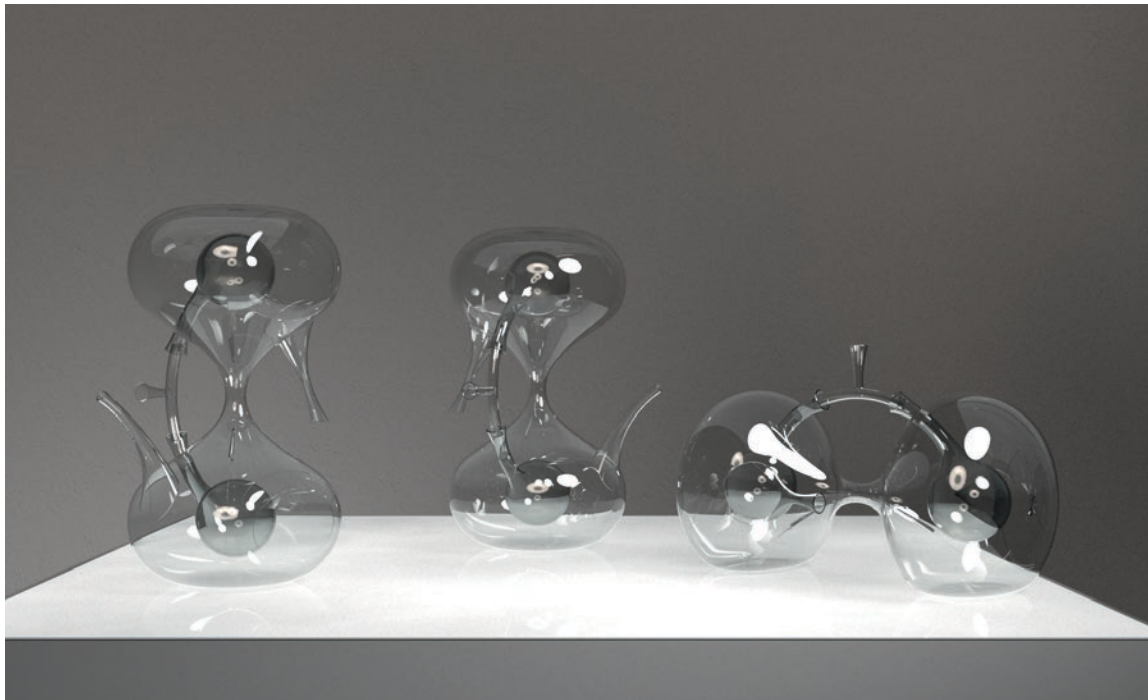
**44** Final glass-blown vessel.

**45** Sketchbook 01, design of vessel.

**46** Early 3D model of the vessel.



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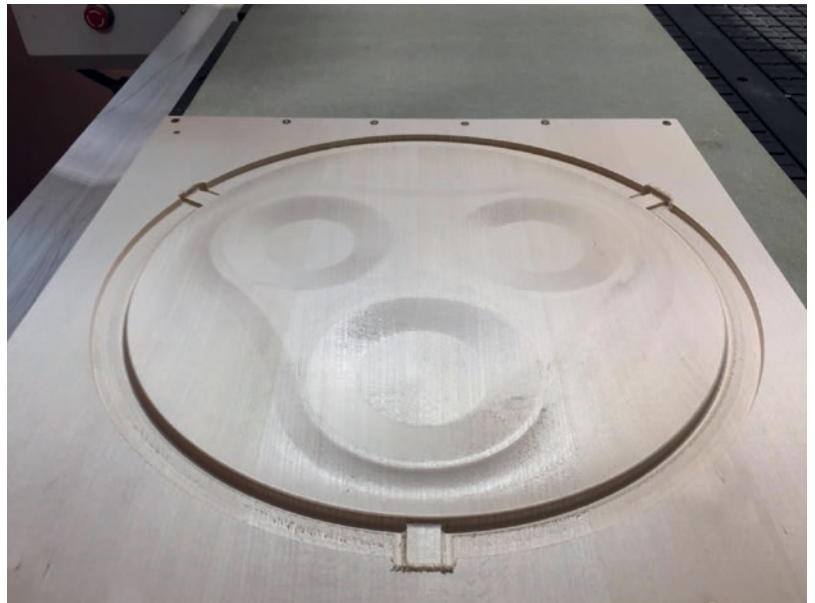






47

**47** Gallery installation view, the Vessel of Justice.



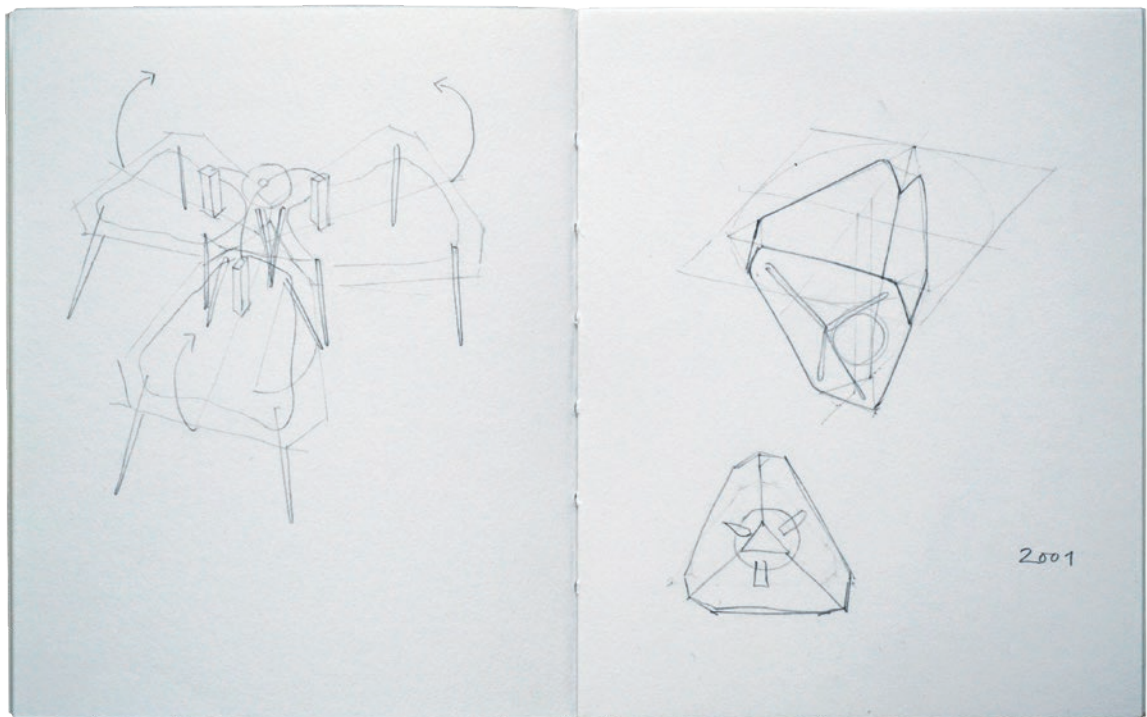
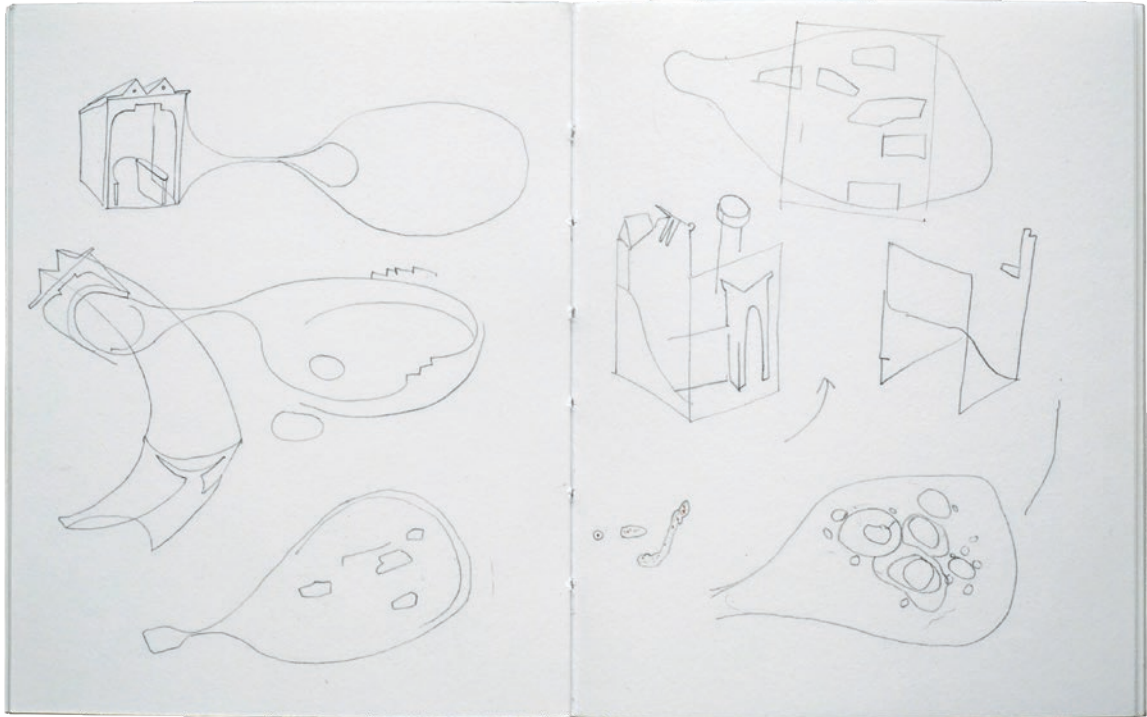
48

**48** Machining the lime-wood base for the vessel..

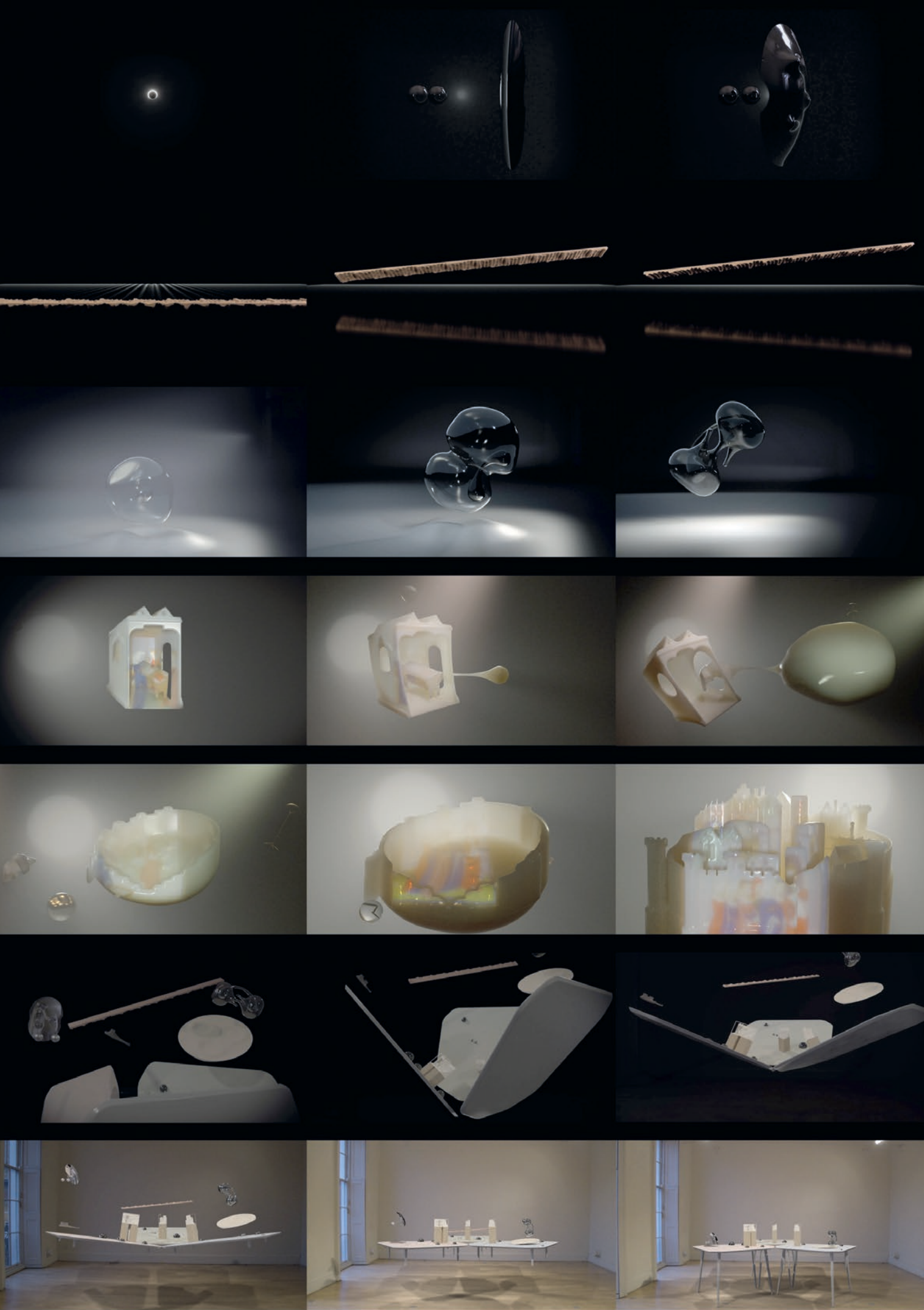
## 6. Digital film

In direct dialogue with the installation, which performs a historical reading of the medieval artefact of the book, the film attempts to project Christine's ideas into the far future (50). Developed in collaboration with John Cruwys and Kevin Pollard, the film catches a glimpse of the allegorical genesis of the three artefacts, the mirror, ruler and vessel, which leads to the conception and gestation of the City of Ladies. Using visual and sonic tropes from science fiction films, it creates an ambiguous spatial voyage moving from the interior of the body to outer space and back to the present moment in the gallery.

49 Sketchbook 01,  
planning the film scenes.







## 7. Performance

The artefacts and glass half domes, and their positions on the vellum, have been designed so that they can be moved into different locations and configurations like pawns on a game board. A performance around the installation involves the setting of the tables and the ceremonial repositioning of the artefacts **(52-3)**.



51

**50** Digital film stills.

**51** Gallery installation view with film.

**52-3 (overview)** Film stills from the performance, rearranging the artefacts.





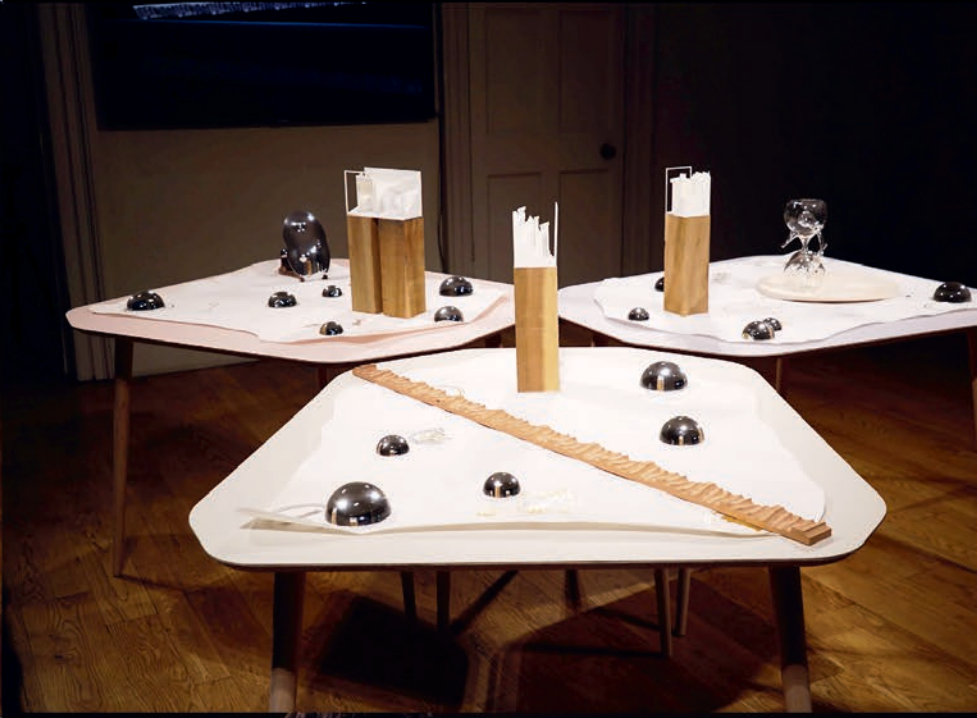












## 8. Literature review

An expansive literature review of historical and theoretical research relating to Christine, primarily *The Book of the City of Ladies* and the relationship between writing and image in her work (54).

This research also looked at a second book, Christine's *The Book of the Body Politic* (1407), where she attempts to describe the underlying structure of medieval collective life.

54 Harley 4431, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, chapter one illumination.





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## Dissemination

- One solo exhibition, *City of Ladies*, at Domobaal, London (2020);
- One group exhibition, *Works + Words 2019*, 2nd Biennale for Artistic Research in Architecture, Royal Danish Academy, which included an accompanying leaflet;
- One conference paper, 'The Female Body Politic: Re-modelling The Book of the City of Ladies', presented at AHRA Dundee 2019: Architecture & Collective Life;
- One refereed paper (approx. 6,000 words), 'The Female Body Politic: Enacting the Architecture of The Book of the City of Ladies', published in the journal *Architecture & Culture* (2020);
- One book chapter in *Drawing Futures: Speculations for Contemporary Art and Architecture*;
- Review of the exhibition published by *The Conversation*;
- A short paper for *Architectural Research Quarterly*;
- Invited seminar at the Architectural Association in London to present 'The Female Body Politic: Re-modelling The Book of the City of Ladies';
- Invited lecture and exhibition at the experimental drawing festival, Cartographies of the Imagination (postponed due to Covid-19);
- Keynote lecture at Postgraduate Symposium on Research by Design: Re-appropriation and Representation, Edinburgh School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture, University of Edinburgh (2020);
- Forthcoming review in *The Journal of Architecture* by Teresa Stoppani, Doreen Bernath and George Themistokleous (2021);
- Forthcoming interview with Nicholas James for *CV/Visual Arts Research*.

## Project Highlights

This research project is significant because it introduces for the very first time the literary and iconographic importance of Christine de Pizan's *The Book of the City of Ladies* to the history, practice and education of architecture. To date, it is the only study of the architectural implications of Christine's allegory and iconographic construction, presenting her work as one of the earliest examples of female spatial imagination and visual representation of a feminist utopia. Although recognised in Medieval and French studies as the first female professional author, and one of the earliest proto-feminist thinkers, this novel analysis of her oeuvre aims to also establish Christine as an early, if not the first, female/feminist speculative architect.

Although written and illustrated more than 600 years ago, *The Book of the City of Ladies* continues to be topical and prescient. By exposing Christine's work to an architectural audience, it underpins the importance of female authorship in shaping the image of the city and also the persistent lack of it throughout history. By claiming Christine's work for architecture, the project aims to inform architectural pedagogy, impact 'the desire for the city' and 'the formation of the urban imagination' of young female architects, and motivate urban futures from a female perspective.

Finally, the project is also significant for medieval and French studies. It contributes a pioneering design-led methodology that develops existing research on the relationship between text and image in Christine's work from an entirely new architectural design perspective.



55



56

55-7 (overleaf) Domobaal opening.



57

**58** Gallery installation view, close-up of model.







59


**59-60** Gallery installation view.




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