

Jeroen Verhoeven + [JOEP VERHOEVEN]
+ **12 aluminium blocks** +
[VIA FRANÇOIS LINKE] **24 sketches** + **66**
3D laser programs + **150**
panels + **700 CAD drawings**
+ **2,300 bolts** + [THE CURIOUS IMAGE] +
[BLAIN|SOUTHERN] = **Lectori Salutem**

'IMPOSSIBLE! IT CAN NEVER BE HOW YOU WANT IT TO BE'
— THE REPLY FROM MANY CRAFTSMEN AND MANUFACTURERS
TO ME. 'NOT WITH THE SMALL TOLERANCES (GAPS) BETWEEN
THE SECTIONS, NOT WITH THESE SHARP LINES' A PARTICULAR
MANUFACTURER SAID. 'DO YOU OWN AN OIL WELL? BECAUSE
WE WILL NEED ONE TO MAKE NEW MACHINES FOR THIS
CONCEPT'. THESE WERE SOME OF THE REPLIES I GOT AFTER
MANY MONTHS OF DRAWING, PLANNING AND REALISING
IDEAS IN 3D AND HAVING SENT THE INITIAL FILES TO
MANUFACTURERS.

THEN. THEN I KNEW FOR SURE — I AM ON THE RIGHT PATH.
THE PATH OF RESISTANCE, WHERE NEW THINGS ARE BORN.

— JEROEN VERHOEVEN

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Foreword by Harry Blain

It is always an honour to introduce the work of an artist you admire and I am thrilled to present this comprehensive catalogue on the creation of Jeroen Verhoeven's phenomenal work Lectori Salutem.

Lectori Salutem's elegant, fluid form, although inspired by a François Linke desk of the Belle Époque, has its genesis in the hundreds of individual drawings that Jeroen created which exist only in 3D format. Each drawing transcribes a component part that forms the DNA of this remarkable object. In the end over two thousand nuts and bolts hold these ideas together. Lectori Salutem brilliantly merges the realms of art and design, shifts ideals and has pushed present technologies in production to the limits of their capabilities thereby ensuring a new benchmark for the future of artistic production.

A non-conformist, with an insatiable appetite for the new, Jeroen Verhoeven almost deliberately avoids categorisation. He is designer/sculptor/creator/individual and studio. I believe he is one of the most forward thinking 'storytellers' of our age.

I hope that you enjoy going through the following pages which detail every aspect of the evolution of this work, from the early stages of conception to the final polish.

— Harry Blain

**Twisted Time Machine by
Robert Cook, Curator of
Modern and Contemporary
Photography and Design, Art
Gallery of Western Australia**

Photos arrive in my inbox and a film starts playing in my head.

A low shot sweeps across big chrome bumpers, on big American cars, gleaming in a big 1950's car yard. The camera rises, finds a chubby sales guy squished into a shiny grey suit. He's puffing on an almost-Cuban in-between exhortations to goggle-eyed buyers, old and young. The camera pans back to the chrome. It reflects the sales guy talking dreams to a cute couple who peer in, spying not only their distorted features but the utopian freedom of modern auto-consumer life about to unfold before them.

Once they've taken care of the paperwork.

Sure, it's a clichéd scene but the fact that it leapt straight to my mind in response to Jeroen Verhoeven's *Lectori Salutem* signals a tacit imaginative resonance between the 'scene of the table' and that 'scene of the car'. As our fictitious salesman channels his period's conviction about auto-modernism's transformative potential, *Lectori Salutem* deals with our own culture's belief in design's ability to deliver freedom from mundane functionalism and the constraints and limitations of life.

Some 60-odd imaginary years later, Verhoeven naturally complicates and redefines these dynamics. Of course, he doesn't give them the noirish twist that so often corrupted those car yard scenes, but he twists them just as tight. So, while its mobilisation of the promise of self-defining passage in a post-Ford world is evident in its hymn to technological progress, it is also an intricate re-thinking of what this might mean in human terms. As it lays out and deconstructs these tropes, it simultaneously foregrounds and disguises the fundamental role of design in the establishment of the parameters of our inter-locked physical, social and mental worlds. The exact ways it does so fashions the work's profoundly glamorous allure, its intellectual gleaming.



ABOVE : JEROEN VERHOEVEN
CINDERELLA TABLE, 2004-2007,
CNC-CUT BIRCH PLYWOOD,
57 LAYERS, 80 X 132.1 X 101.6 CM.
[31 1/2 X 52 X 40 IN.]

Before we consider this in a little more detail, it is worth noting that Verhoeven's construction of a richly styled product, harbouring an unforced question about what has made its creation possible, is the hallmark of his brief, though astonishing career. Indeed, as his work has rapidly matured it can be seen to occupy an ambiguously challenging zone where the usual conventions of form, function, style, need, desire, sculpture and furniture start to come undone and begin to be remade into seductive new propositions.

Given the ubiquity of implicitly and overtly interrogative works in the fields of modern and post-modern design and art, it is no mean feat that he has been able to make what amounts to classics of our time; the fact that Verhoeven has done so says much about his vital role in the cultural history of the contemporary object. He opens this position up for himself by offering works that elicit clusters of potential responses – a felt idea, a train of thought, a slew of thwarted functions, activations of pasts, alternative presents and possible futures – that can never be fully resolved.

The fluid 'betweenness' Verhoeven's work generates is perhaps the most obvious trait of *Lectori Saludem* and, as such, it pivots off the piece that made his name practically overnight: The Cinderella Table. As has now been amply documented, that marine ply work combined cutting-edge technology with an amalgam of historical forms drawn from the design library where Verhoeven was studying at the time. The character of Cinderella was alluded to in the references to the work's construction (the arms of the laser cutter dancing like our heroine at the ball). So too, though, was the idea of her being offered a shoe that finally fitted, signifying the (longed-for) perfect pairing of human and object. It was a synergy that cut through social convention and expectation to reveal beauty overlooked. Hence, the almost miraculous transformation of the humble ply into a stunningly singular artwork. And what was central to the work was the alignment of purpose, material, manufacture and end result to create

a complex open-ended set of readings. In the relationship of desire and function between Cinderella, her Prince and the slipper, there is a triangulation that realises a new thing, and with it a new set of possibilities, and the revelation of unknown desires for them.

Lectori Saludem similarly exists in the space between the material and immaterial. As it does, it builds on recent design traditions such as that of Sottsass and Memphis, for whom the proto post-modern was a high-key, mash-up of ideas and media. Operating in this zone, Verhoeven's work creates a space for the radically hybrid object to exist as a 'sculptural thought' beyond fantasies of strict modern functionality, and which thereby reclaims notions of the ornamental.

As implied above, he grasps this freedom in order to foreground an awareness of the historical evolution of style and technology that is less linear than we might imagine. In basic terms, this particular form looks back to 18th Century writing desks and yet comes together in the most contemporary of ways. Looking utterly of the moment, with no trace of the hand, it appears to be a spontaneous manifestation which hovers between the past and the future.

Importantly, its multiple references and its mutable, chronology-defying nature are grounded in the human body. Indeed, we might consider the work as equally informed by the organic modernism of artists such as Jean Arp, Barbara Hepworth and Henry Moore. As Australian artist Philip Brophy has posited, all modernism of this ilk is about the body [01]. And it is the body struggling with form – to be inside form and to escape form – that is so apparent. The works of the organic moderns internalize the human, trapping it; as one moves around a large Arp, Hepworth or Moore, one is hyper-aware of the form implied within, and importantly the very idea of "withinness" itself.

I think it is the same with *Lectori Salutem*; as Verhoeven offers a human profile, visible from certain angles (in such a way as to bring to mind the momentary appearance of Hitchcock in his own films). This body reads like a figure on the prow of a ship, ready to plow through the swells with an impassive face and strong torso, which might also reference (obliquely) the Daimler icon. Signifying ceaseless forward movement, the figure is both emblem (reflecting existing conditions of status and use) and progenitor (blazing new ground beyond existing beliefs and structures of being). As such, it arguably functions as a challenge to itself. Its potential pushes out of a work that barely contains it.

The viewer is caught in this dynamic too, as the polished surface embeds them within the work, in just the same way the bumper in my imaginary film 'captured' my fictional salesman and his customers. The viewer cannot help but be fundamentally aware of their own presence, their morphing shape, their scale, relative to the shape and size of the work itself. Like the implied bodies in the biomorphic abstract sculptures the work references, the viewer can be seen to be wrestling with themselves within the work.

However this set-up creates a gap in the approach to the object. It reminds us of Sartre's fable in 'Being and Nothingness'; when we look through a keyhole we might see something secret but in being so captivated we let our guards down, and thereby are caught within, what was later known as Lacan's 'Gaze of the Other'. In this, our awareness of ourselves is undermined by a blind spot which prevents us from seeing how or where we are truly located [02].

In relation to Verhoeven's work, caught by our reflections, we forget ourselves and become an object for another's scrutiny. Beyond this, we can also interpret the function of the reflection metaphorically, as activating a blind spot which relates to the technical evolution and culture that surrounds us. It's a leap, but the work seems to actively construct both amazement and bafflement as it refuses to reveal not only technique but the conditions of possibility that made

it come into being. As this is staged as a kind of (gallery-induced) self-forgetting, it's possible to say that as we are pulled in, we are also subtly alienated. The viewer is no longer an engaged evaluator and instead comes to question their very relevance and connectedness to the designed world [03]. Maybe design is advancing away from us. Maybe it is no longer 'at our service'. Therefore, the design spectacle that Verhoeven fashions is dangerous: it holds us hostage and it slaps us back. Are we inside it, or are we mere vacuous, narcissistic reflections?

With a further stretch of thought, we might also feel that we are creatures of paradox, hardwired to both seek stasis and comfort, and to challenge ourselves technologically. Verhoeven seems aware that we might just as equally retreat into the form and into the status quo as embrace the new, and that thereby, the drive forward is never simply or fully forward. The push towards the new is always burdened and enriched by pasts (and subjectivities) it can never let go of.

All of these complications and contradictions are presented to us as an address: *Lectori Salutem* – 'greetings reader'. It is familiar. It is welcoming. It makes of itself a benign platform for the consideration of another's remarks. It is about communication between two figures – two forms, therefore. Obviously, the tale it tells is not simple: it speaks about how all forms ask questions of us and the other forms around them, and never merely provide 'solutions'. Or rather, while 'design solutions' exist they are complexly embedded in the cultural, economic and biological histories we ourselves are bound by, resistive to and partially blinded by.

So, we address and let ourselves be addressed by this work. It speaks, we ask questions, we are questioned in return. The object holds us as we look at it, as does the past and the future it stretches between. It makes us elastic, as we consider how it is of us and not of us, making us wonder just exactly how our needs are turned into desires and our desires turned back into needs and ultimately, where the human ends and the machine begins....

NOTES

- [01] PHILIP BROPHY, COLOUR ME DEAD (PERFORMANCE LECTURE), ART GALLERY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA AS PART OF THE EXHIBITION PARALLEL COLLISIONS : THE ADELAIDE BIENNALE OF CONTEMPORARY AUSTRALIAN ART, MARCH, 2012.
- [02] I AM AWARE THIS IS A SOMEWHAT FACILE RENDERING OF THIS COMPLEX THEORETICAL TROPE.
I AM ALSO AWARE THAT A LESS FACILE RENDITION OF IT IS PROBABLY BEYOND ME.
- [03] A MORE COMPLETE READING WOULD CONSIDER WHAT THIS THREAD OF INQUIRY MIGHT MEAN IN RELATION TO BORIS GROYS' CRITIQUE OF THE WAY THE DOMINANCE OF DESIGN DISCOURSE TODAY FORCES US TO ENGAGE IN CONTINUAL SELF-DESIGN. SEE HIS BOOK : BORIS GROYS, GOING PUBLIC, STERNBERG PRESS, BERLIN, 2010.

Glenn Adamson, Head of Research at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, interviews Jeroen and Joep Verhoeven

[GLENN ADAMSON] : It's great to have you here at the V&A, proud home of your Cinderella Table, one of the avatars of our contemporary furniture collection. Could you begin by telling us a little bit about how that work came about?

[JEROEN VERHOEVEN] : When I graduated I wanted to study modern craftsmanship, where craft wasn't just a man with hammer and chisel. I researched the latest tools available and the most logical thing was to use robotics as tools. I approached car and boat production lines where robots were purely programmed to make 10,000 of the same car. They can do so much more, but they're programmed to do just that. Because these tools are so costly, craftsmen don't use them to the utmost of their ability for fear of breakage. There was a long period of struggle to find somebody prepared to give me a robot to work with. We took one robot out of a production line and tried to find the limit of its possibilities. I studied in the Rijksmuseum library for several months and with traditional furniture makers' drawings I created a drawing that could only be used in 3D, and be processed by a tool that needed a programme. You can't give a robot a sketch, you have to give it numbers. I had to process it into their language. This drawing that I made can't simply be drawn on paper. It actually needed a robot for the artwork to exist.

[JOEP VERHOEVEN] : Jeroen really had to sculpt through the computer. It took months to achieve the final drawing.

[GLENN] : This is comparable to how an 18th Century craftsman would use a drawing or a pattern book, because even though there was an elevation drawing the carver would still be required to do a lot of interpretation.

[JEROEN] : Exactly.

[GLENN] : This is interesting because often when people distinguish between craft production and machine production, they assume that the essential difference is the nature of the tool. If the tool can be held in your hands and controlled manually, then you're doing a craft, but if it's a large expensive tool that has to be programmed to act repetitively, then it's mass production – are you trying to break down that distinction?

[JEROEN] : Yes. I could have learned first how to shape furniture with a hammer and chisel, but I wanted to

show that these machines are far more interesting if you push them to extremes.

[JOEP] : People don't connect with how objects are made. Sometimes modern machines take away the soul of an object, but we wanted to keep that present.

[JEROEN] : In the fairytale, Cinderella was a hidden beauty and The Cinderella Table demonstrates the hidden talent of our modern day tools. The robots, though soulless, can create a thing of beauty. You walk past a street a million times and one day you see something and you think 'I walked right past this a million times before and I didn't see this, it's so beautiful.' And that moment is your Cinderella moment – the hidden moment.

[GLENN] : For me the title also speaks about the idea of magical transformation. Cinderella is in the ashes for her whole life and then suddenly her dream actually comes true.

[JEROEN] : I think that's good you have your own association with that word. It's almost the same in my opinion. Were you ever amazed about a robot being a tool? A lot of people don't seem to be because so much has been made by robots. It's hard to amaze people. To recreate the effect of when man landed on the moon, to stop the world for a second. As a contemporary artist I think this is the most difficult thing.

[GLENN] : And there's a sense that the more design pushes at its frontier, the more it acts like Hollywood or maybe like a drug we're all addicted to. It gets less effective every time we take it.

[JEROEN] : Yes. My teachers wanted to push me in another direction – the more formal Dutch way of designing. To show the 'honesty' of the whole process. I felt 'maybe you can make something with that story, but that's not my story.'

[GLENN] : This brings us very nicely on to this incredible desk – Lectori Salutem – which picks up where the Cinderella Table left off. Can you say a little bit about what brought you to that piece?

[JEROEN] : One of the drawings that came out of the Cinderella Table concept was already leading towards a desk and we also wanted to return to the automotive robots. Incidentally when the financial crisis began the automotive industry was suddenly more open to work with us.

[GLENN] : Because the economy was weak you mean?

[JEROEN] : Absolutely! That opened up a lot of doors to artists. Normally we had to wait in the cafeteria, and be thrown a folder and told to go away. And now they were seriously listening to us. Welding robots, stamping robots and laser cut robots all were used at different stages and then the human hand applied at the final stages. So actually you could see my craft and that of the machines working together. A process normally used to make ten thousand of the same thing now used to make only one. We wanted to compress all this attention and put it into one thing.

[GLENN] : Do you feel that gives the object a great deal of intensity?

[JEROEN] : Absolutely.

[JOEP] : Every desk is incredibly well made. The robot manufacturers from Japan came over to look at it, and they didn't even know their own machines were capable of it.

[GLENN] : In future projects, can you imagine making something that does not in some way involve the human hand?

[JEROEN & JOEP] : I think it's impossible.

[JEROEN] : Maybe in twenty or thirty years time. But for now, the capabilities of our tools do not fully allow it; we need a human soul to create art.

[GLENN] : I'll just ask one last question. When you finish with a project, what kind of relationship do you have with all the people that you have worked with?

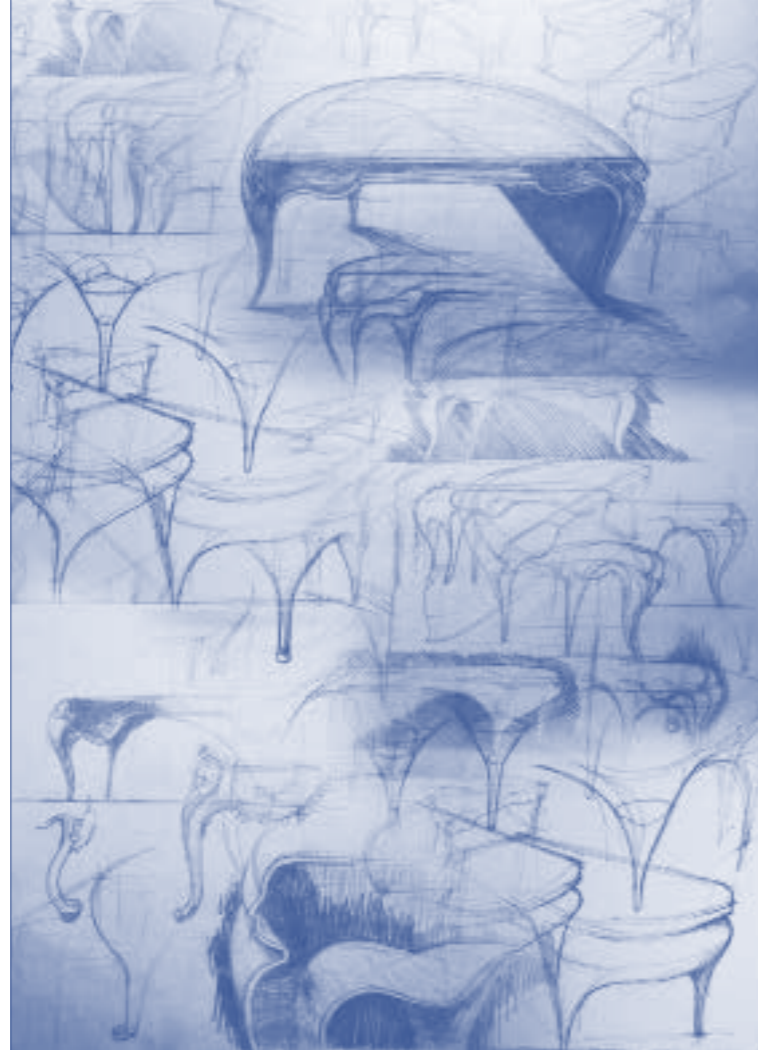
[JEROEN & JOEP] : Proud!

[JEROEN] : Super proud, yes. I think the most astonishing thing is that you fight with these people at the highest level and then in the end, everybody's like, 'okay we did it', and they want to put it on their business card.

[GLENN] : And presumably you learn a lot from them in the process as well?

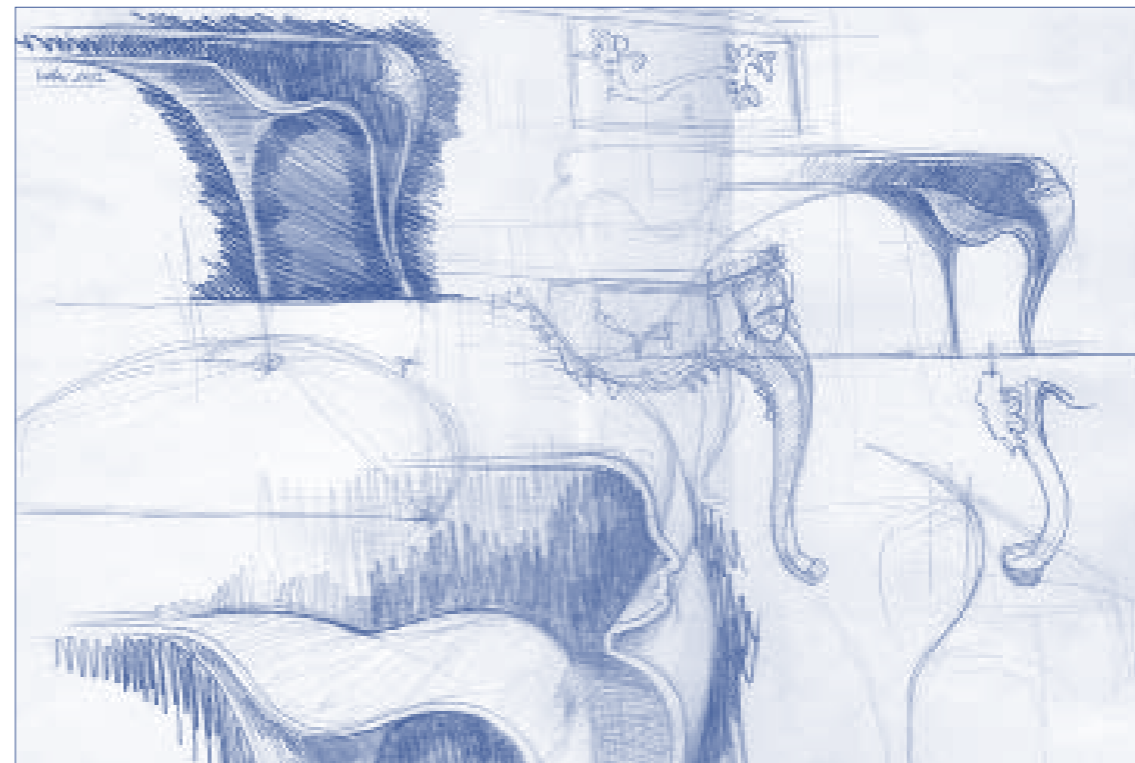
[JOEP] : Of course. We need each other.

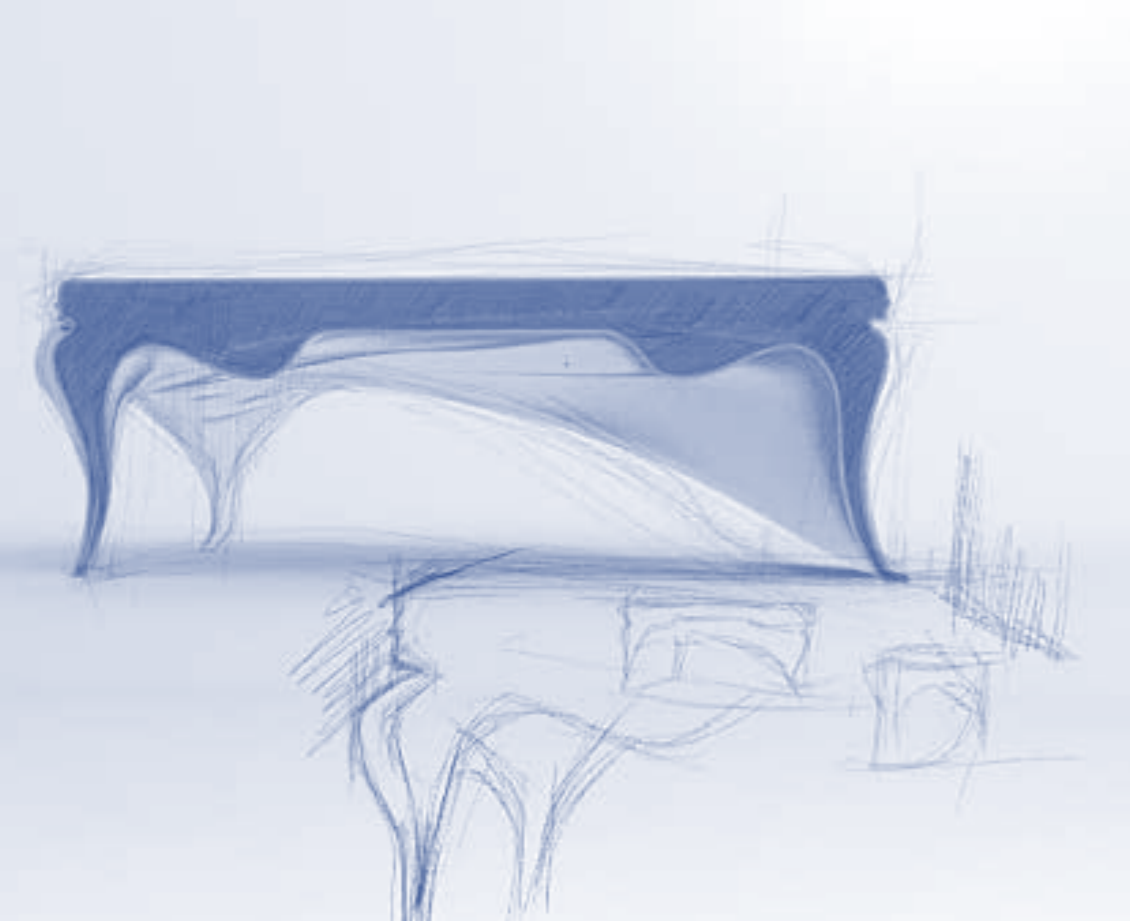
The Process: From first sketch to the exhibition



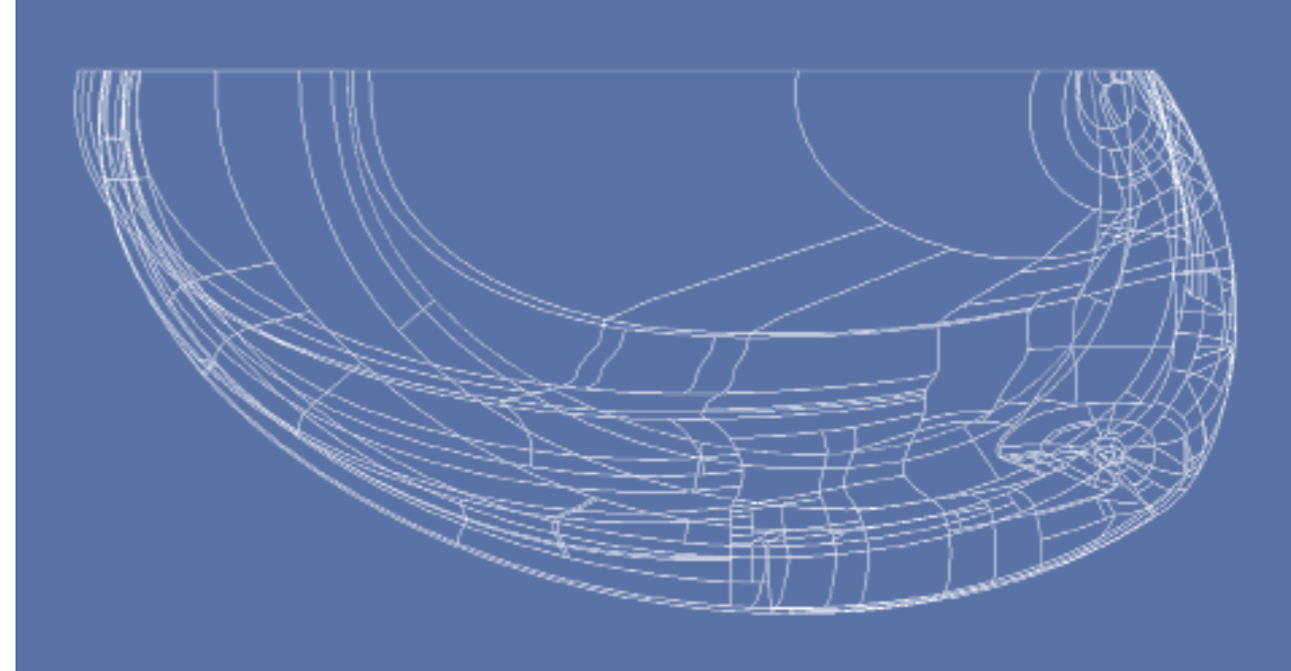
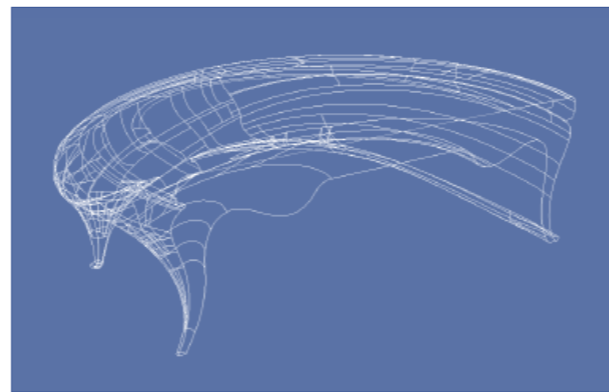
ABOVE : INITIAL STUDIO SKETCHES OF THE LEG SECTIONS

BELOW : PRELIMINARY SKETCHES OF THE PROFILE

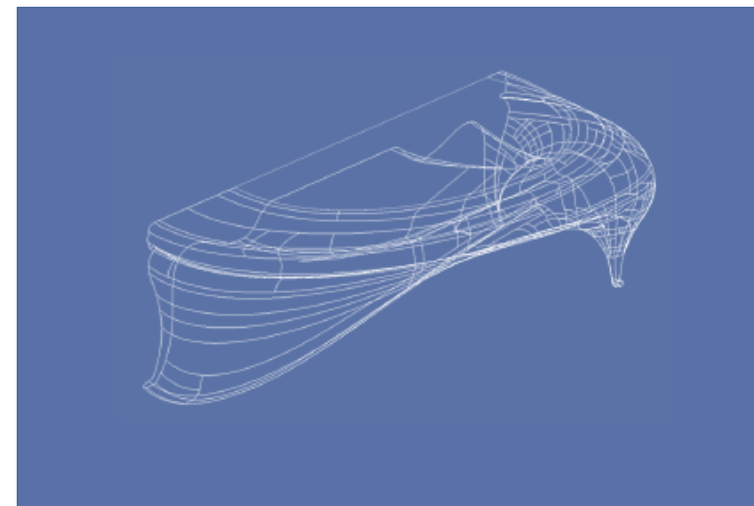




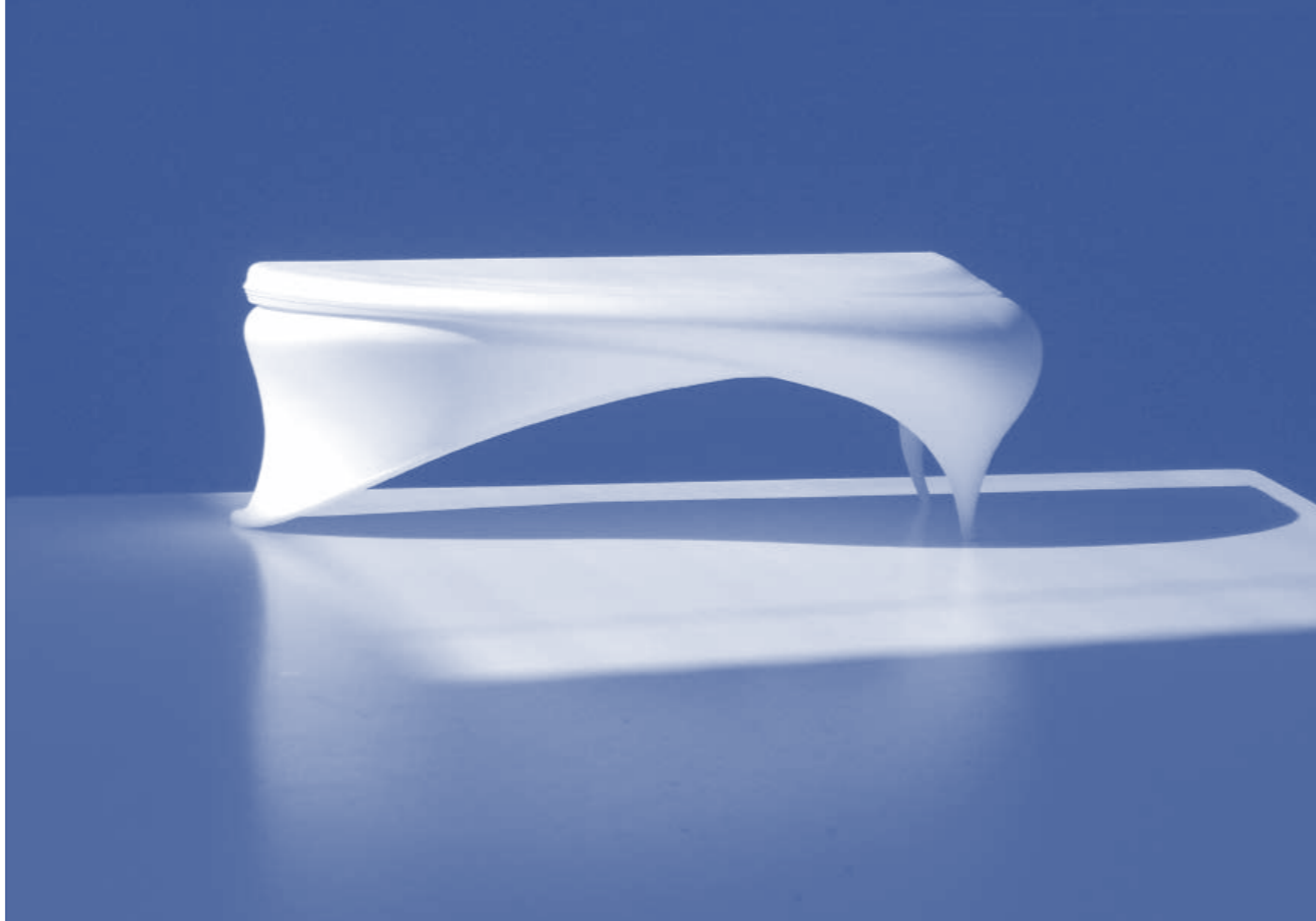
BELOW : 3D RENDERING AND CURVATURE DRAWING



ABOVE : AERIAL VIEW OF THE TOP SURFACE SECTIONS



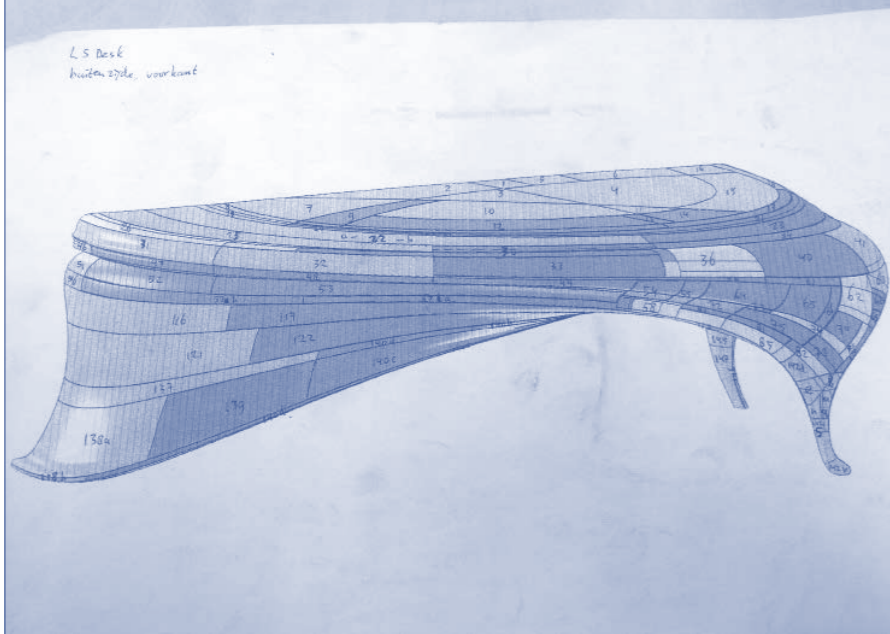
BELOW : FINAL RENDERING SKETCH



ABOVE : RAPID PROTOTYPE LASER MODEL, SCALE 1:20

BELOW : IN THIS MODEL WE UPDATED THE DESIGN OF THE OUTSIDE LEG

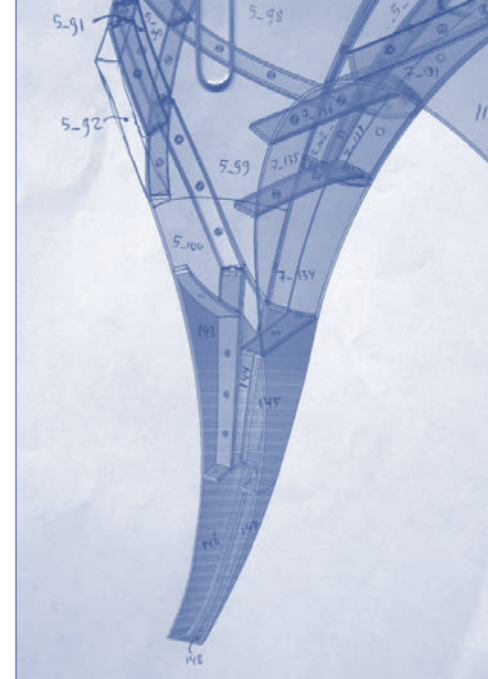
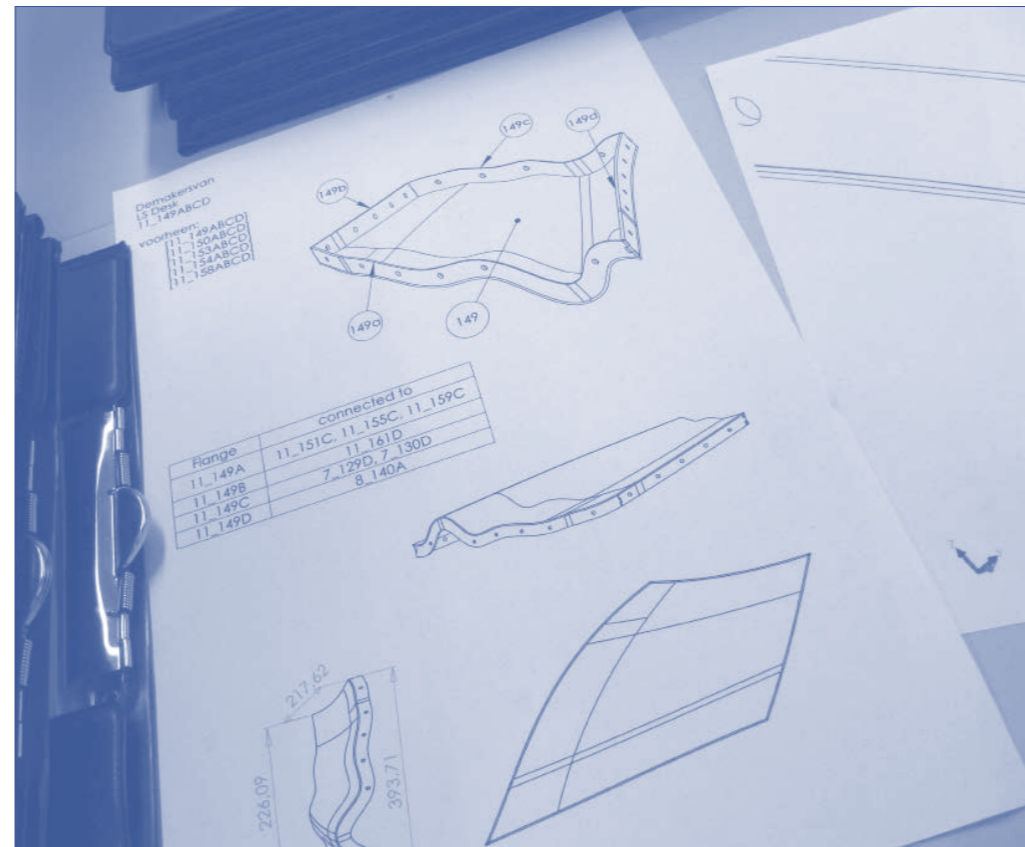




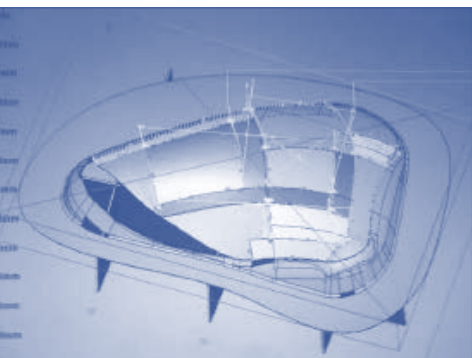
ABOVE : DRAWING SHOWING NUMBERING OF STEEL SECTIONS



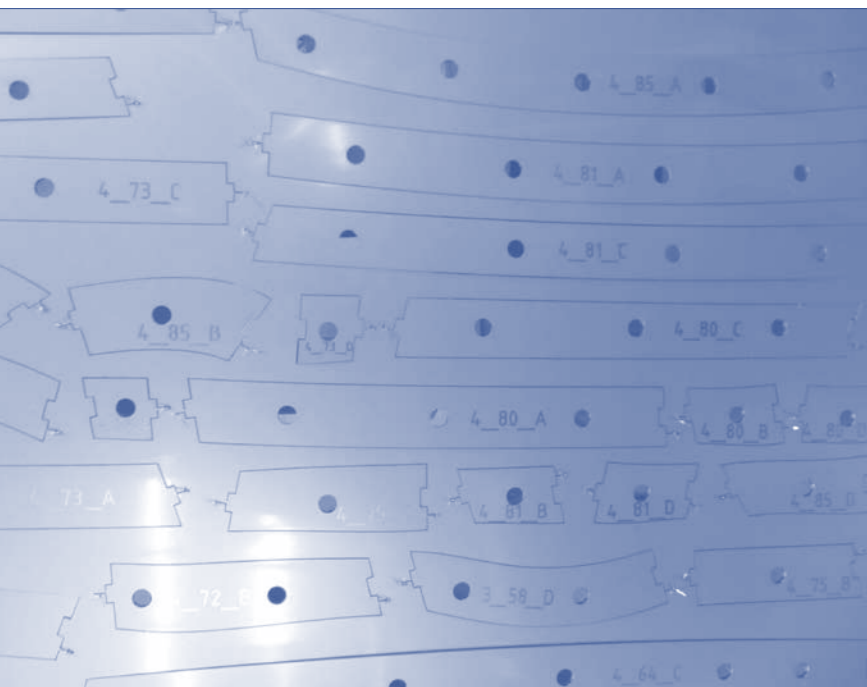
BELOW : TECHNICAL WORKING DRAWING FOR EACH SECTION OF THE DESK



ABOVE : WORKING DRAWING OF THE FRONT LEFT LEG



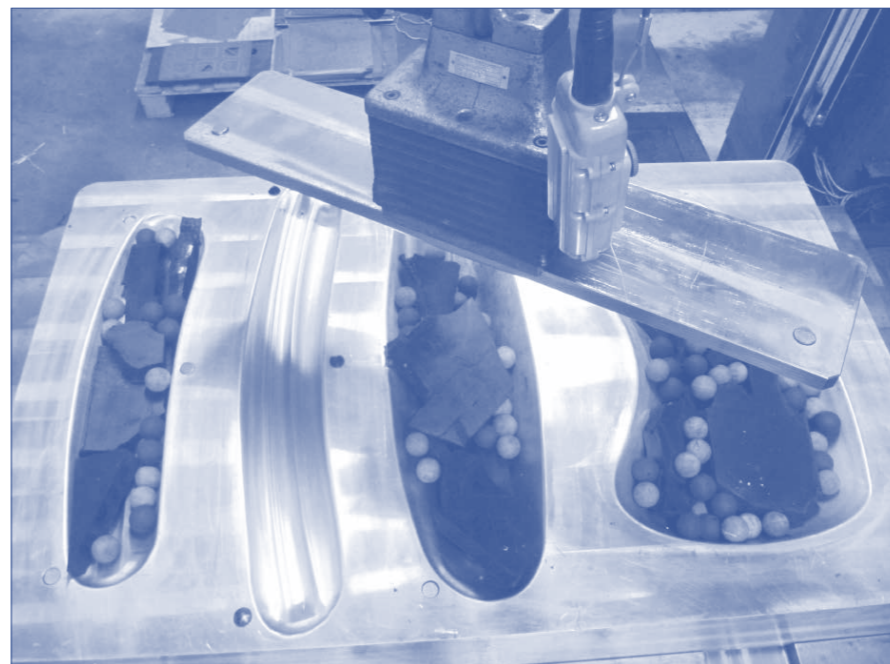
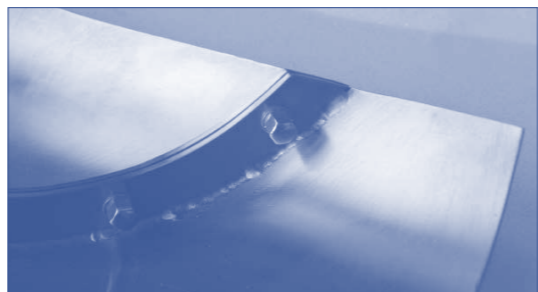
BELOW : LASER CUT INSIDE RIBS - EACH SECTION WITH ITS OWN SERIAL NUMBER



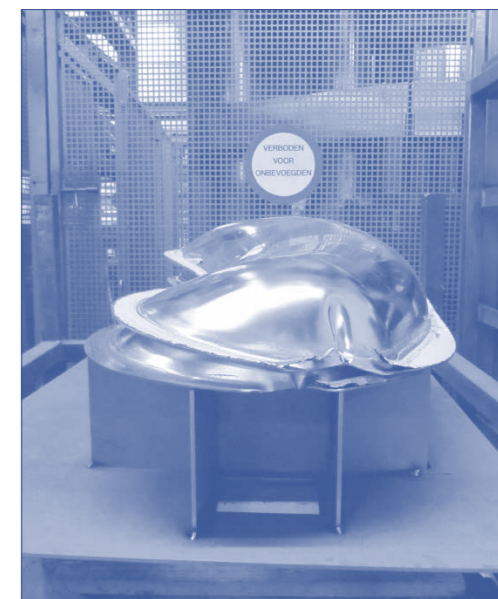
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ABOVE : WORKING DRAWING OF A RIB CONNECTION



ABOVE : CNC CUT ALUMINIUM SHEET PRESSING MOULD





ABOVE : 3D LASER CUT STAINLESS STEEL PANEL



BELOW : PART FITTING IN LASER CUTTING MOULD

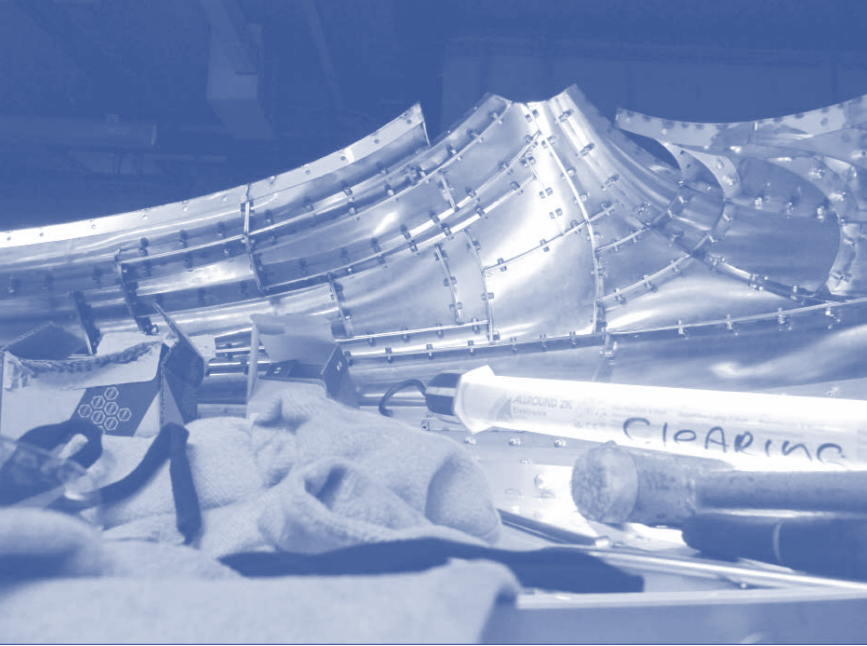


BELOW : EVERY SECTION HAS ITS OWN LASER CUTTING MOULD

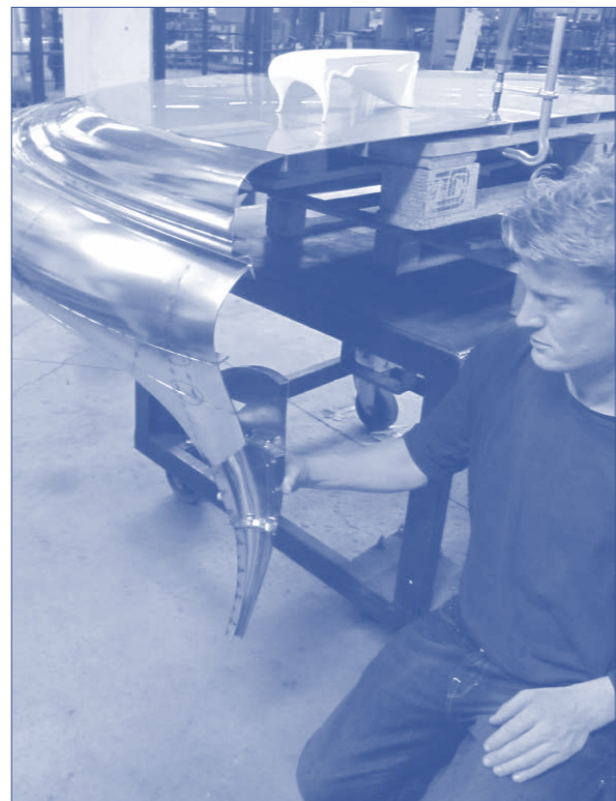


ABOVE : DISCUSSING HOW TO ASSEMBLE SECTIONS





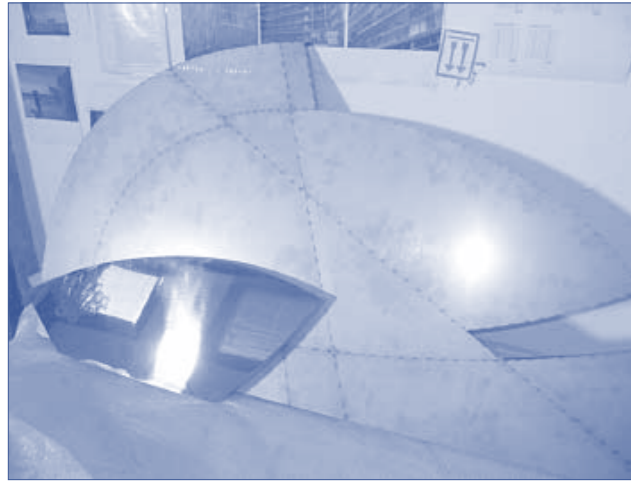
BELOW : ASSEMBLING THE PROTOTYPE



ABOVE : CRAFTSMAN IN THE FACTORY



ABOVE : FRONT VIEW DETAIL OF THE FIRST ASSEMBLY OF THE PROTOTYPE



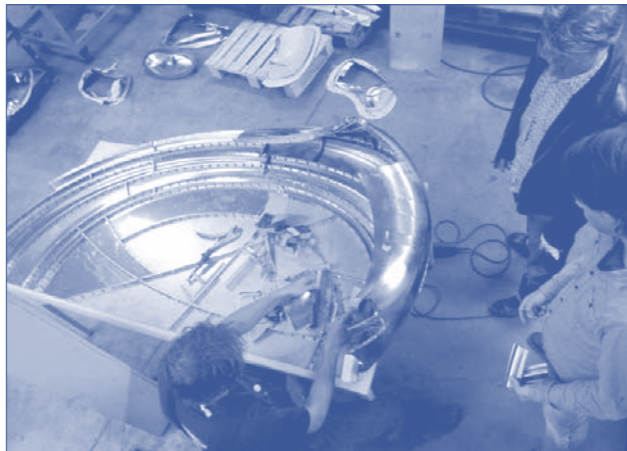
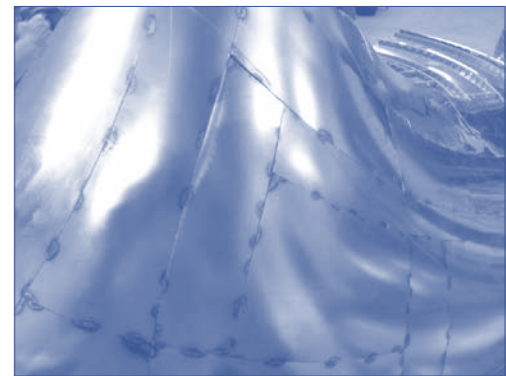
ABOVE : AERIAL VIEW OF THE FIRST POLISHED TOP SECTION

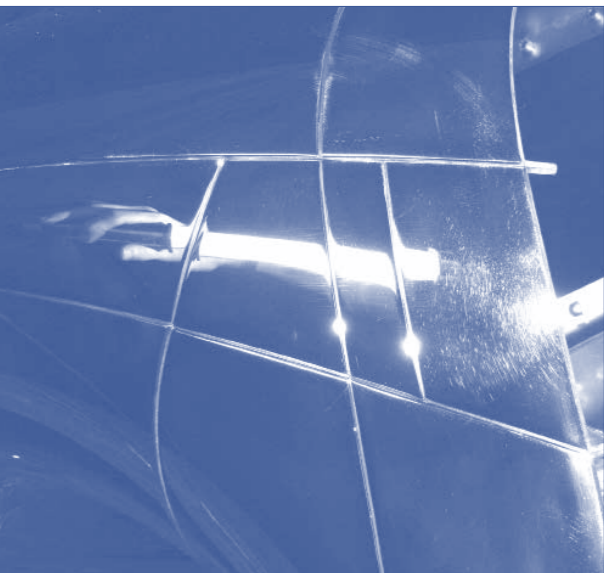


ABOVE : CHECKING THE PROTOTYPE'S CURVATURE AND LINE FEATURES



BELOW : EXTERNAL VIEW BEFORE POLISHING





ABOVE : PRE-POLISHED AND POLISHED SECTIONS ON THE PROTOTYPE

Lectori Salutem: installation views from The Curious Image, Blain|Southern, London

[P.41—P.56]
JEROEN VERHOEVEN
LECTORI SALUTEM, 2010,
POLISHED STAINLESS STEEL
77 X 242.4 X 110.7 CM
[30.31 X 95.43 X 43.58 IN.]

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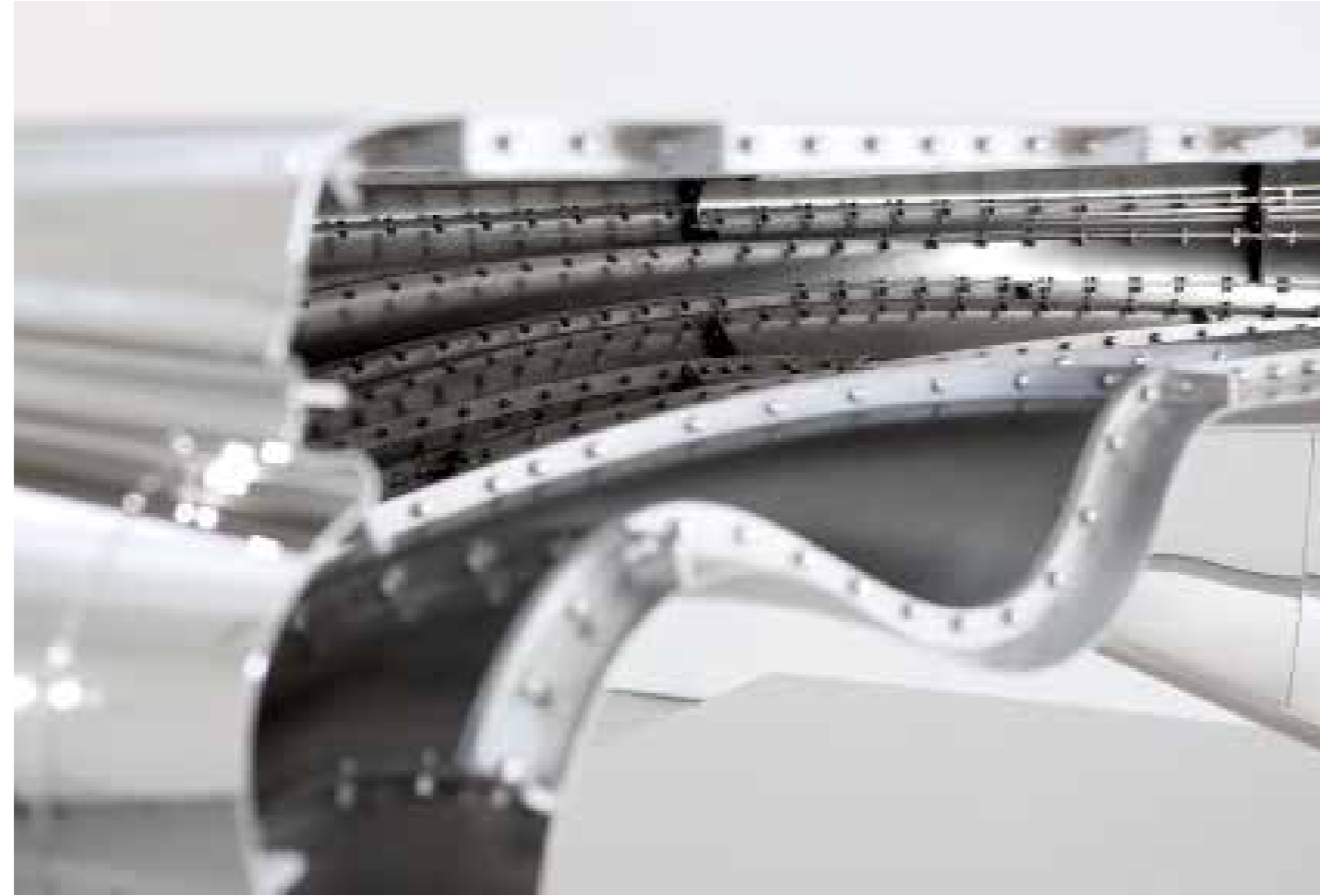
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Jeroen Verhoeven Biography:
Education, Awards and
Nominations, Solo and Group
Exhibitions, Selected Projects,
Publications, Selected Articles
and Public Collections

P.57

Jeroen Verhoeven

Awards/Nominations

Selected Exhibitions

1976 Jeroen and twin brother, Joep Verhoeven born in The Netherlands

2009 Toon van Tuilprijs, NL
2008 Design Museum Award, London, UK
2007 Nomination, Well Tech Design Award, UK
Nomination, Elle Decoration International Design Award, UK

2013 Against the Grain: Wood in Contemporary Art, Craft, and Design, Mint Museum of Craft and Design, Charlotte, US (September 2012 – January 2013); travelled to Museum of Arts and Design, New York, US (March – July 2013); Museum of Art, Fort Lauderdale, US (October 2013 – January 2014)

2008 Design and the Elastic Mind, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, US
Young Blood, Carpenters Workshop Gallery, London, UK
IFF Tokyo, Toyko, JP
SDM Milan, Milan, IT
IFF New York, New York, US

Education

2006 Nomination, Design Prijs Rotterdam, NL
Nomination, Woonbeurspin, NL

2011 New Energy in Design and Art, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, NL
The Curious Image, Blain|Southern, London, UK
Thinking Big, Brooklyn Museum, New York, US

2007 Digitally Mastered: Recent Acquisitions from the Museum's Collection, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, US
Space for your Future, Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo, JP
No Windmills, Cheese or Tulips, ESPACE 218, Minato-ku, Tokyo, JP

2005 Art Academy, Eindhoven, NL

2005 DSM Design Award, NL
Renee Smeetsprijs, NL

2010 Sotheby's at Sudeley Castle, Sudeley Castle, Winchcombe, UK

Teaching

2008 Art Academy, Maastricht, NL

2004 Items-Ahrend, NL

2009 Telling Tales: Fantasy and Fear in Contemporary Design, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, UK
Thing: Beware the Material World, Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth, AU

2006 Furniture Design, Montis, NL
IFF New York, New York, US
SDM Milan, Milan, IT

2004 Architectural Association School of Architecture, London, UK

2005 Droog Design interior, 21st century room, Friedman Gallery, New York, US
IMM Cologne, Cologne, DE
SDM Milan, Milan, IT
IFF New York, New York, US

Publications

- 2013** Reinders, A, Diehl, J. C, and Brezet, H, eds., The Power of Design: Product Innovation in Sustainable Energy Technologies, Chichester, Wiley, Chichester, UK, on cover, p.8 and 67
- 2012** Adamson, G. The Invention of Craft, Berger Publications, London, UK, p.12 and 168
Stokes Sims, L., Against The Grain, Wood in Contemporary Art, Craft and Design, The Monacelli Press, New York, US, p.84-85
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