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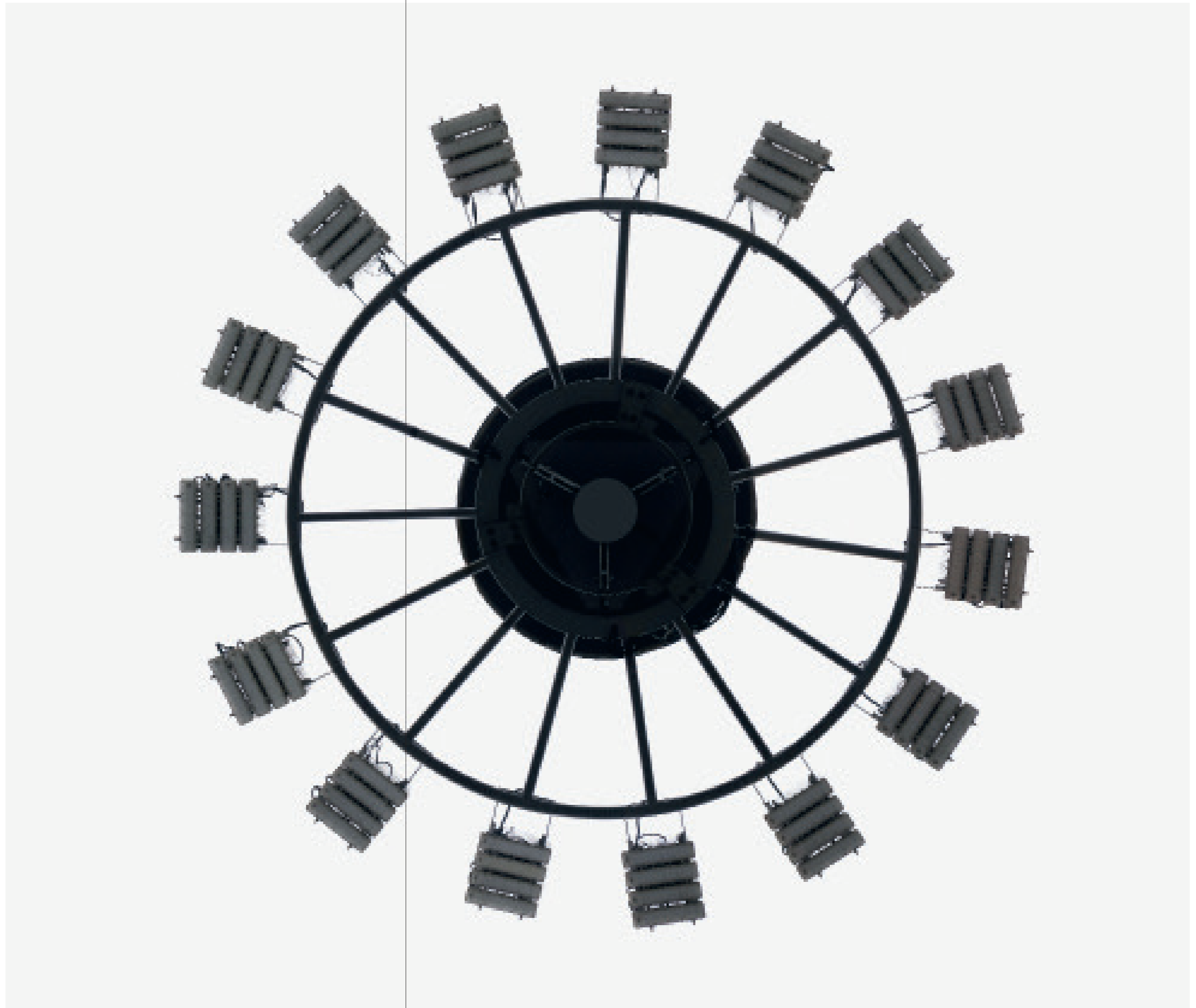
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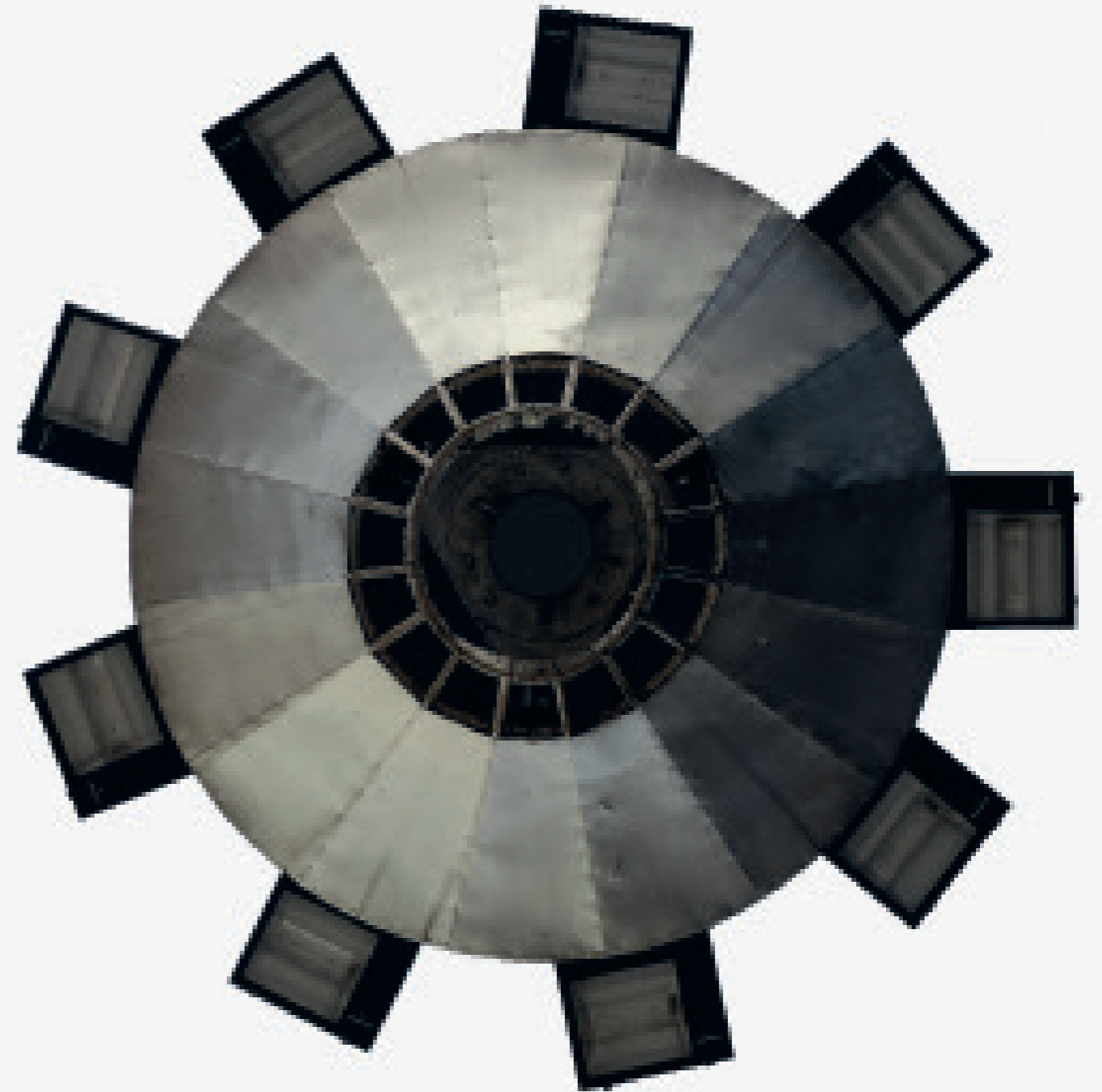
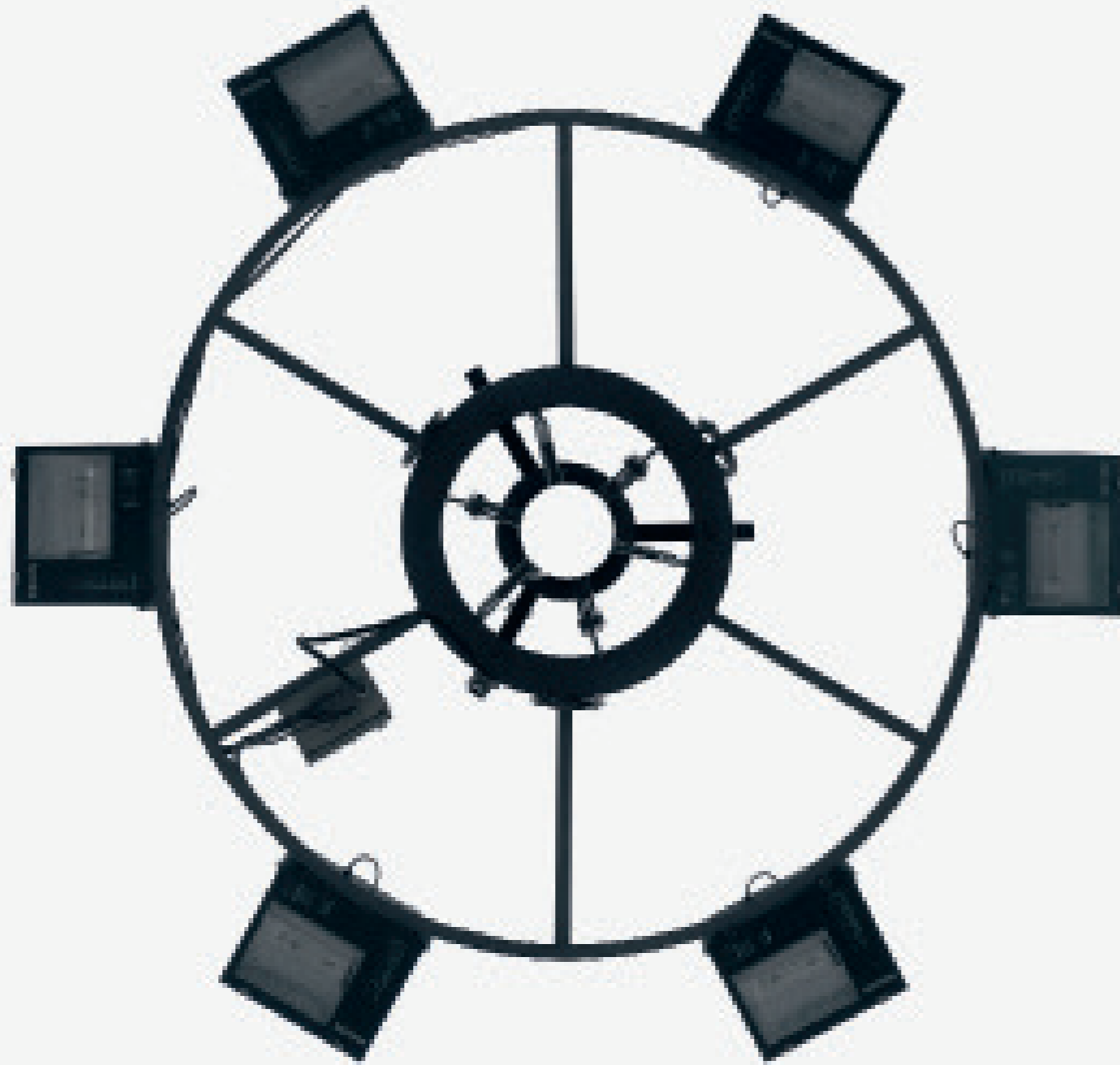
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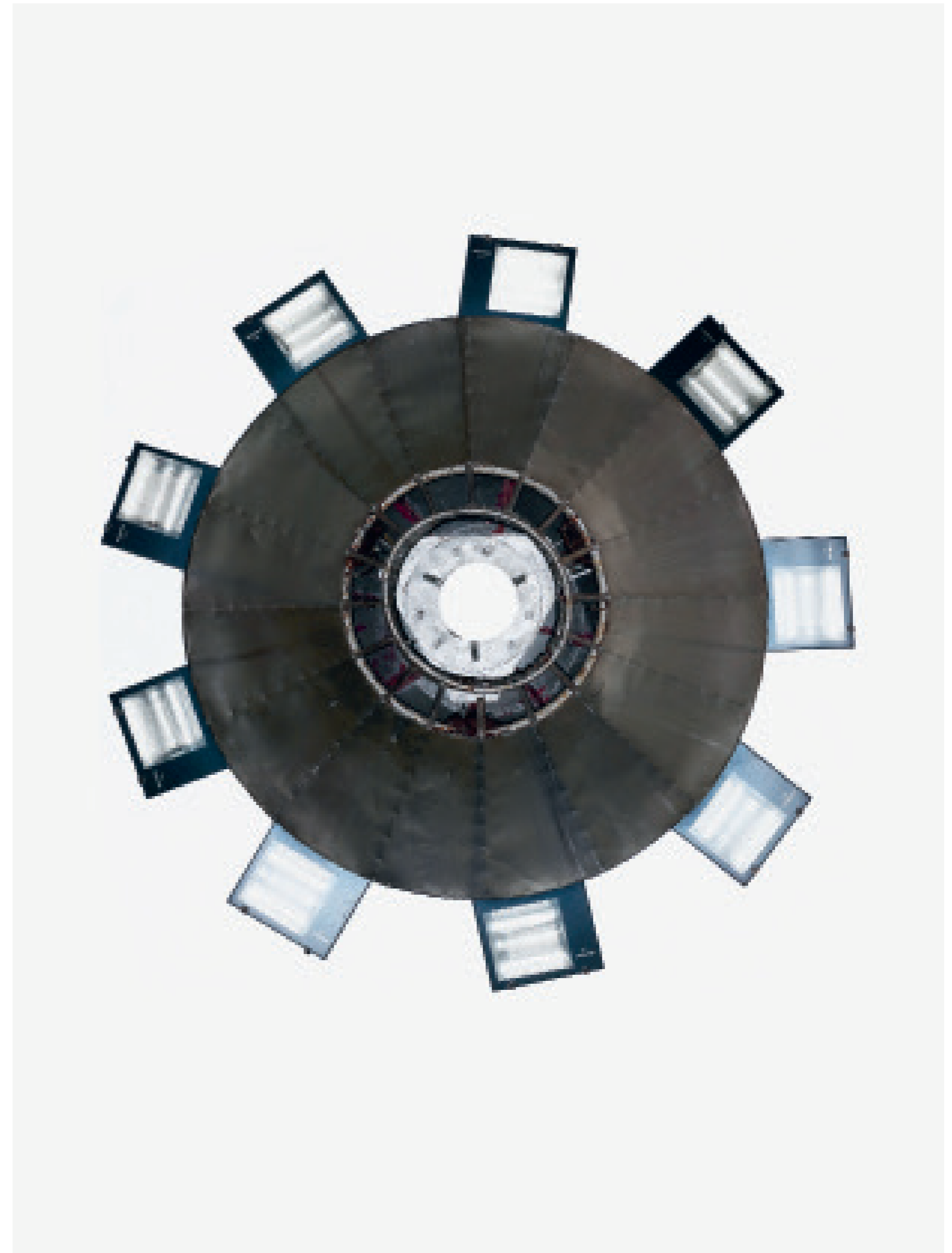
“The true mystery of the world
is the visible, not the invisible.”¹

— Oscar Wilde





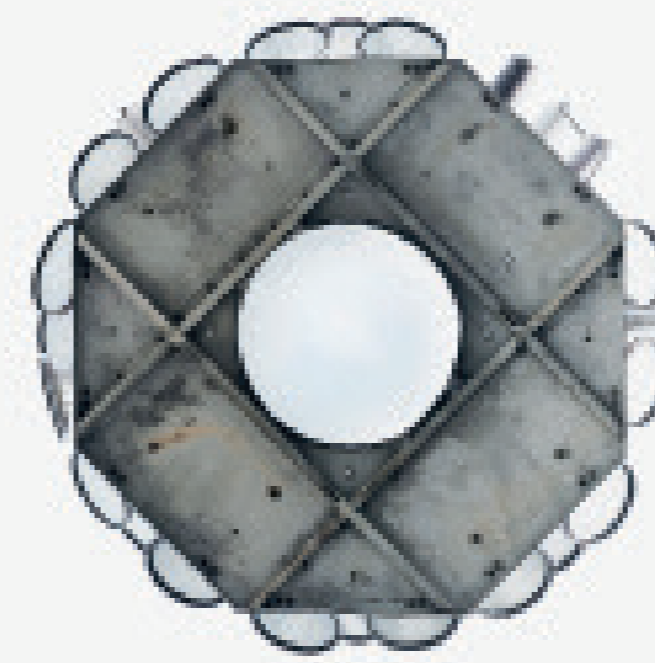
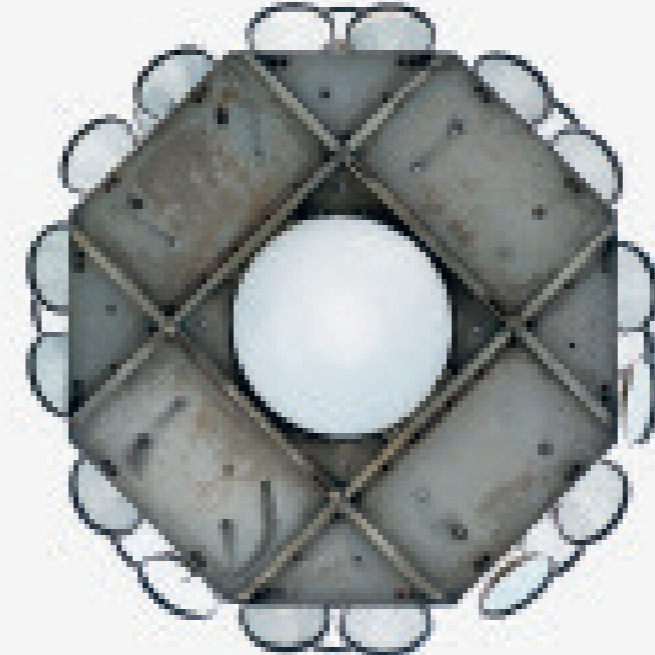


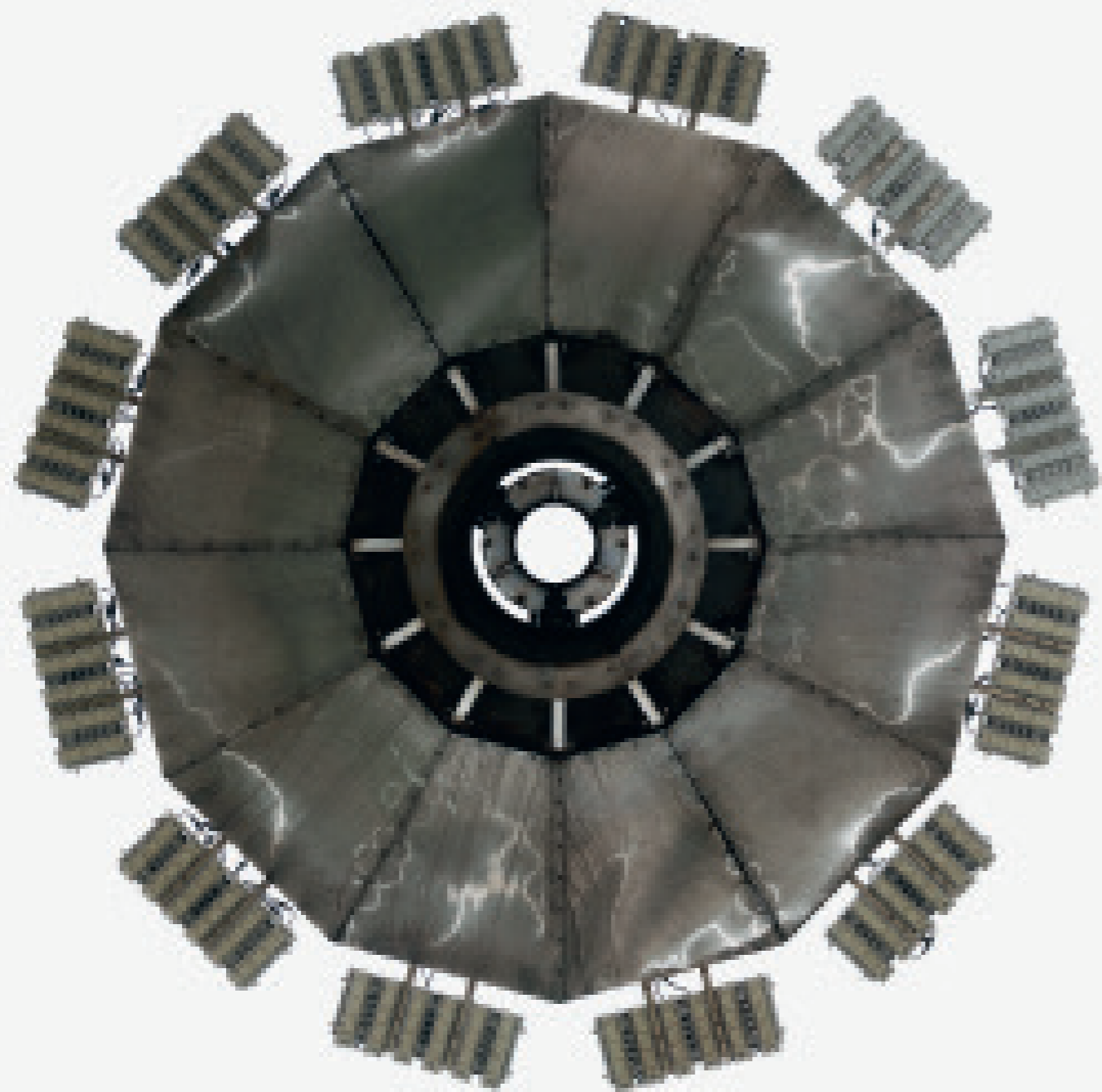


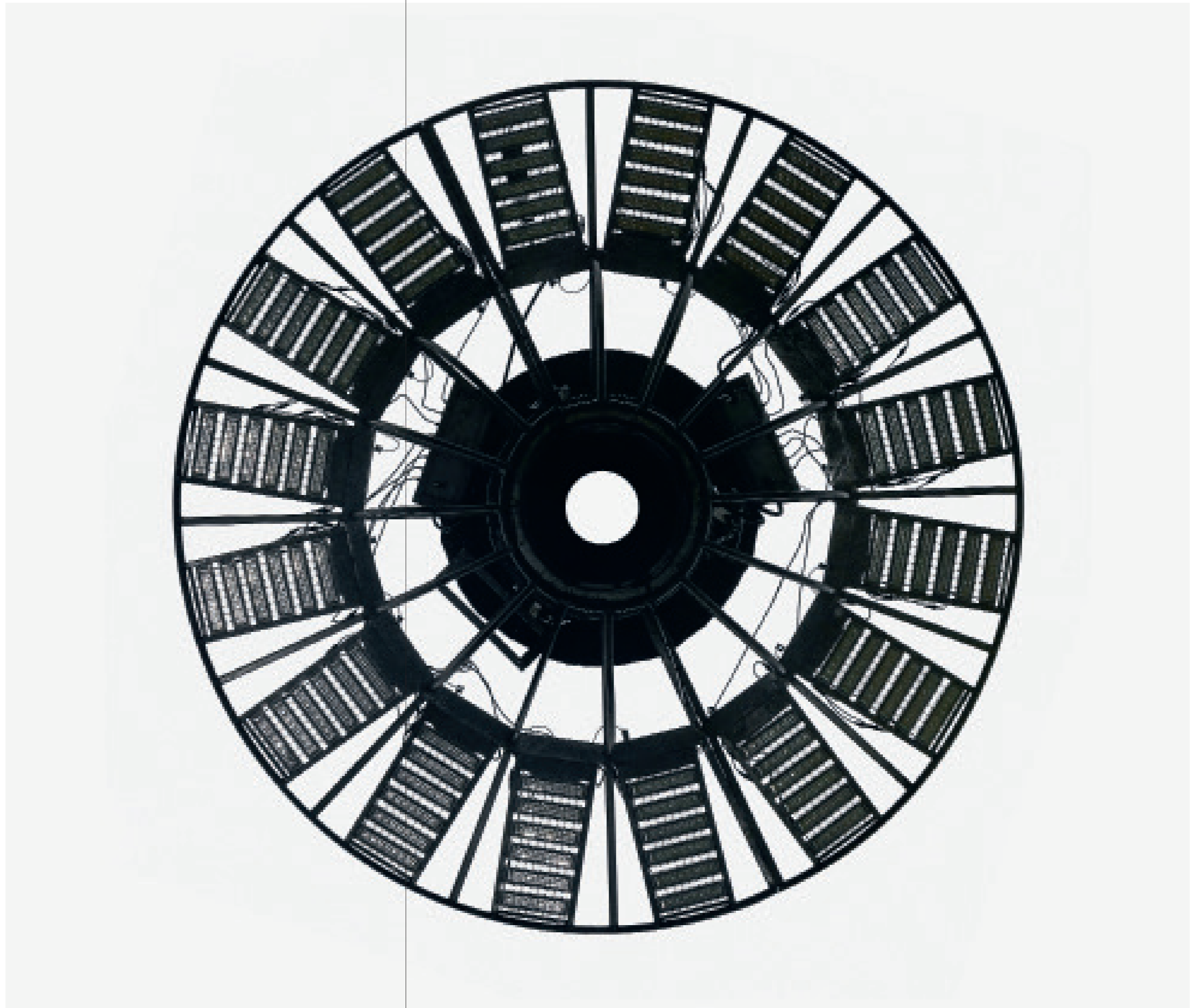












Gregor Jansen and Mischa Kuball in conversation with Robert Pufleb



“Isolation, magnification, order.”

3 July 2018, 05:03 p.m., start of transcript
(office of Gregor Jansen, Kunsthalle Düsseldorf)

GJ [Gregor Jansen]

The first time I saw a TRANSFORMER, I thought, what is it up to, what is that? I related it to space travel... As a child I was fascinated by a picture of the lunar orbit capsule, the Apollo mission command module. And this here looks quite similar. There is a famous photograph of planet earth quite small in the background, like a crescent, and then the moon, the whole surface covered with craters and the module circling around in space. I couldn't help but thinking this immediately. Because, strangely enough, it's like some zero gravity, I don't know why. Perhaps because you set them up all together kind of Becher-like against a light grey background... No sunlight, but a rather foggy basic grey tone. Is the background white in printing?

RP [Robert Pufleb]

No, the paper is white but the TRANSFORMER has a very light grey tone as background. Very light. Like a huge soft box. In 2015 the light in Chongqing used to be like this, mostly completely diffuse because of the dust.

GJ And even in fine weather you would have eliminated clouds or the blue sky, it had to be plain grey?

RP Yes.

GJ And that's what distracts you from function. Even though it is an object having a clear function, a light source, you don't really perceive it in urban space. It doesn't bother you. During the day it might stand in your way when you are parking your car, but visually it doesn't distract you. True? I've never been bothered by a light source in the city. Quite opposite. Actually it's kind of romantic for me thinking of Düsseldorf and its gas street lights. It's kind of idyllic. But you only notice these huge lamp-posts at truck stops and at night, these giant floodlights. Or in big stadiums, illuminating the arena. But otherwise, I think they are just out of sight, outside the field of vision. At night they are outshined by their own light and by day, yes, good question, why don't you see them by daylight? I think simply because of the bare height of the posts.

RP It's all well above normal focus.

GJ Out of sight. You do not notice, because you're focused on street level and don't look up to the sky. That's exactly what's so fascinating about it. You found them all in China?

RP No, not all of them. But they all have about the same dimensions.

GJ Which means?

RP Dimension means that an actual TRANSFORMER with a diameter between 3 to 5 meters is fixed on mighty cast metal piles at 15 and 20 meters above the ground, really high. It illuminates major traffic or highway intersections and large public places.

GJ And of course, one might ask, why do they often have that compact, concave shaped forms? Why is this such a compact module, right? Because constructively it doesn't make much sense, it doesn't protect from rain, it doesn't improve the light shielding, which is only a reflector's matter. How come?

RP I tried to get in touch with relevant people at the bureau of transportation and infrastructure. Because I also wanted to know who is in charge of this kind of urban illumination, who designed, set up and maintains those light objects? And, of course, why do they all have this UFO-like look? Some are equipped with a winding mechanism to bring them down to street level for maintenance work.

GJ Ah, for lifting.

RP ... And letting them down, yes. Light sources can be replaced and the whole thing can be pulled up again.

MK [Mischa Kuball]

But that probably explains this compact form. Because otherwise you might have a static problem. If you mount it out of the axis, freely floating you are no longer able to move it down or up again.

RP Sure, after all it's a design issue. In my photographs the viewer's visual axis is replacing the position of the posts. An optical shifting technique allows me to make the post disappear without altering the lighting module up there. It's the view from an impossible, a virtually impregnable perspective.

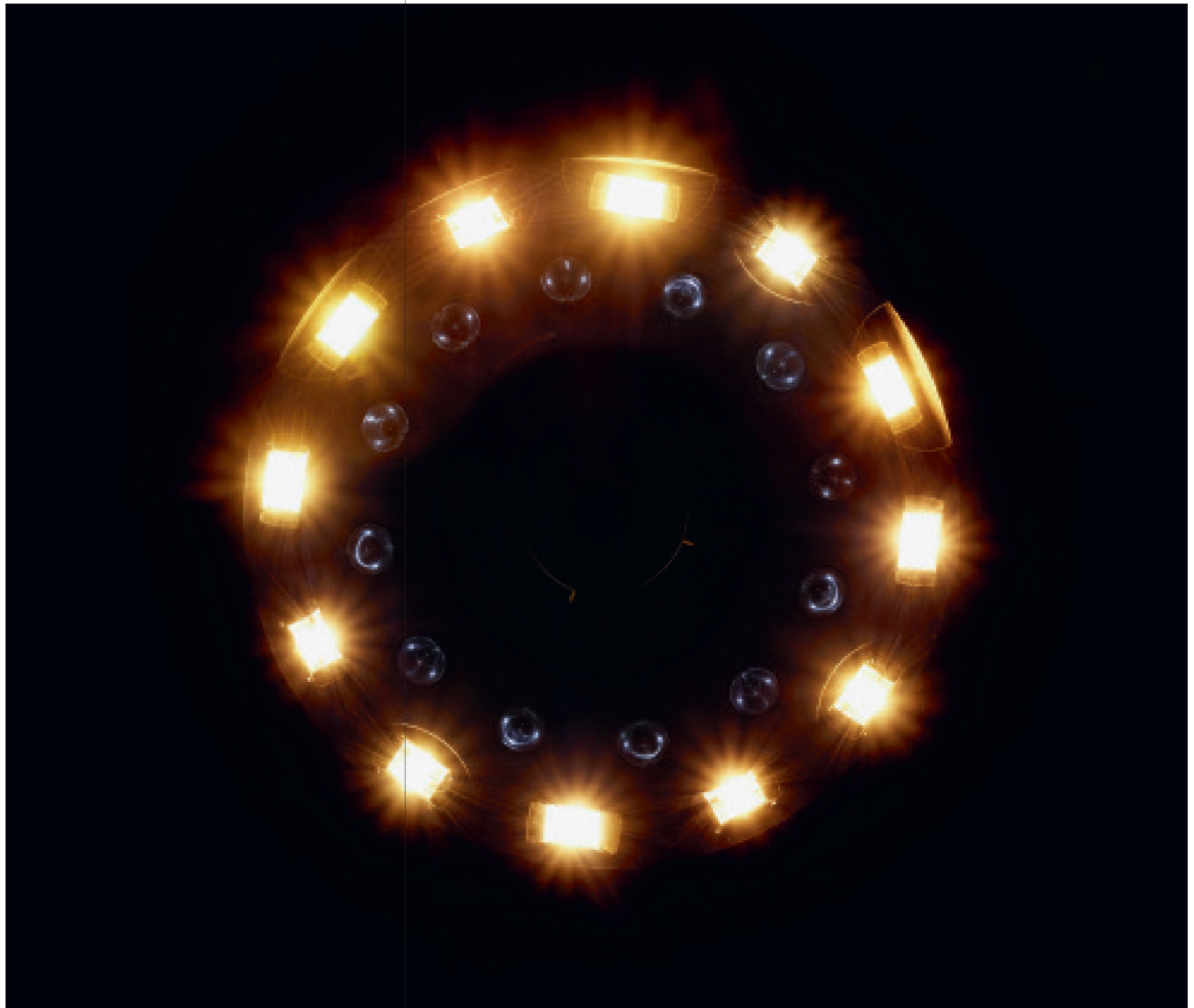
MK So that's what dissolves them from their functional context and makes them visible as ornament as well as pure form. But back again to your question, Gregor, you can actually see a relationship between the height of the light source, the size and the quality of a location. The higher the light source is located above ground, the more dystopic the site appears. You can see it at the airport. They are very high there for generating a maximum distance – that's why it's atmospheric. Basically the sodium vapor lamp is creating such an Edward-Hopper-like scenery, dissociating us from the human subject.

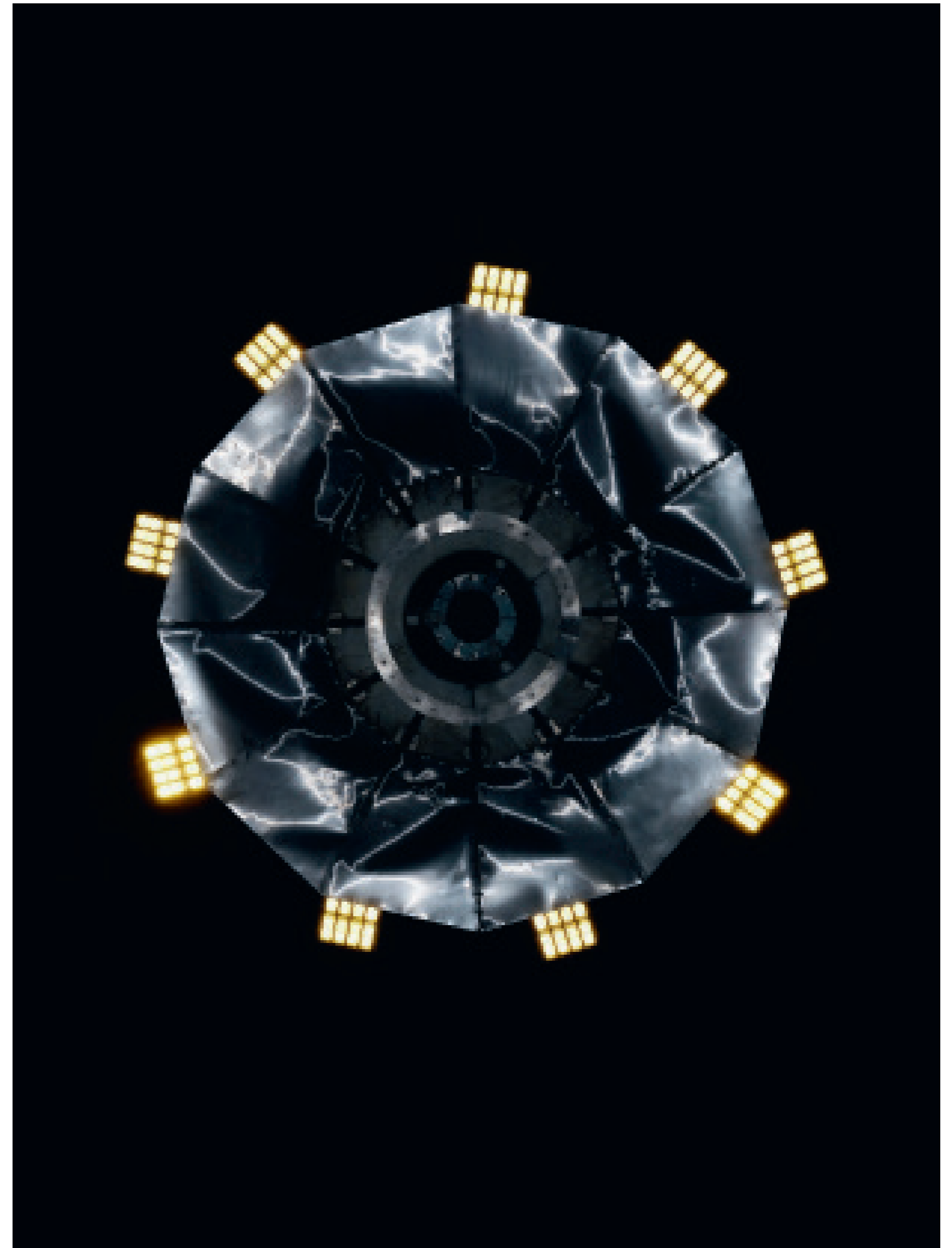
GJ How do they look like seen from the side? It also has that UFO look...

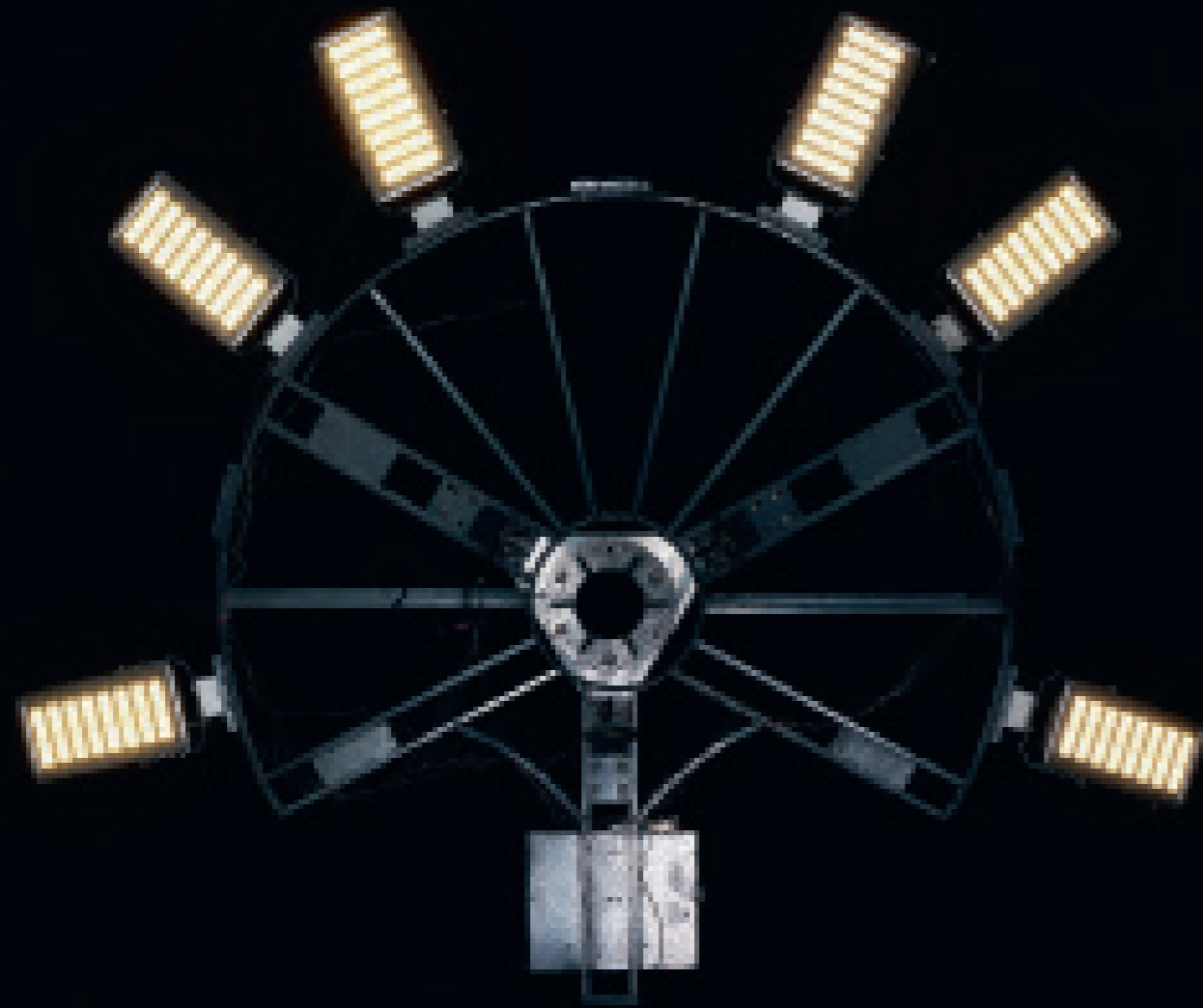
RP If you look at verbatim drawings of UFO sightings...

MK But that's not how we do it here. This is the artistic, photographic frame and Robert's intervention. Here metamorphosis starts. For example by showing no more urban space, I'm creating a context-free view. Whether you isolate such an object à la Rachel Whiteread or if you look at the *Leitplanken* (guardrails) of Rita McBride, a new visual quality of shape is established. And here you find of course typologies, I myself also show two lights like these in my other project *Solidarity Grid*, like you mentioned it earlier, in Düsseldorf, but also in Wuhan and Gansu, and of course you will also notice that there is a creative drive for urban development. Urban space, political space, designed space, so to speak. The big size is certainly no coincidence, it's supposed to be like that. It's a metaphor for the twelve-lane road, for giantsquares and, of course for the *magistrals*, the *prospekts* in international









The swarm

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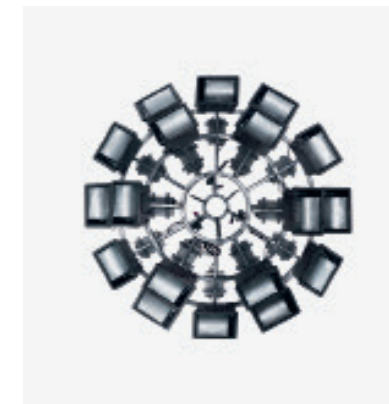
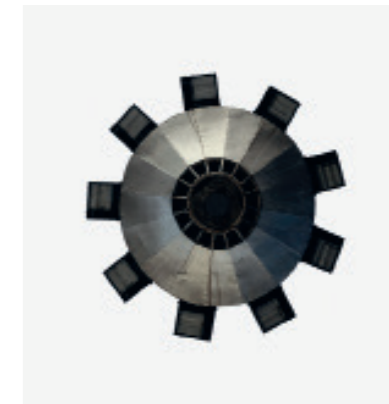
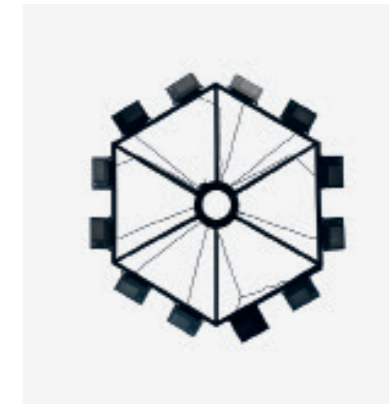
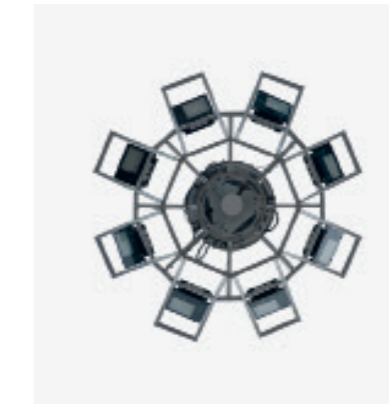
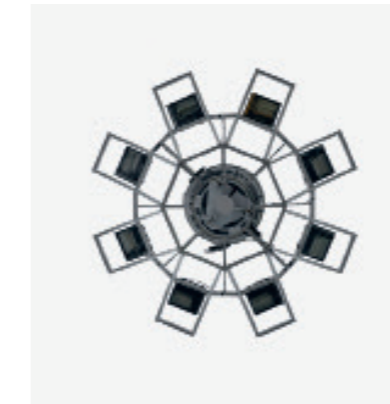
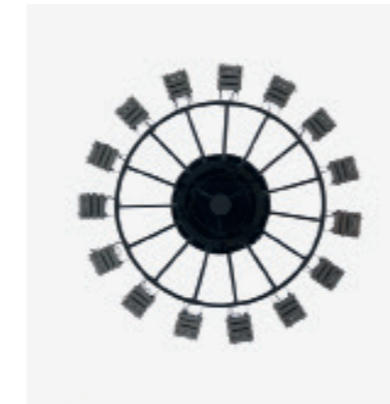
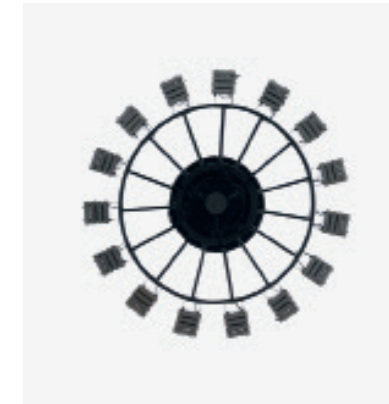
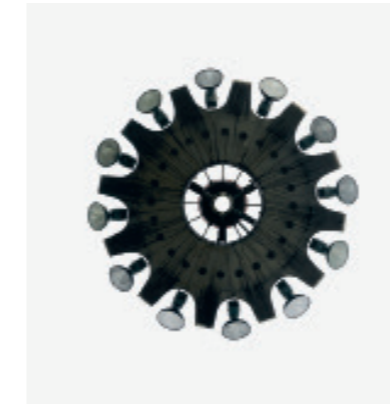
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The publication TRANSFORMER is the essence of a three-year project which assembles photographs of flood lights illuminating urban spaces and roadside areas in the cities of Chongqing, Paris, Riga, Marienborn, Leverkusen, Duisburg and Neuss.

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