



KIRSTEN HASSENFELD

Dans la Lune

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Rice Gallery
HOUSTON, TEXAS

F O R E W O R D

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irsten Hassenfeld's translucent sculptures have been characterized as "extravaganzas of the handmade."

Since 1999, she has used paper, the

most ordinary of materials, to create ornate, obsessively detailed objects that reference luxury goods, classical architecture, and decorative arts. When Kirsten first saw Rice Gallery's large glass wall in January 2006, she immediately thought of it as a kind of curio cabinet for her fragile objects. However, she had never worked at this large of a scale before, so Kirsten spent the next two years (on and off) conceptualizing her installation and in turn, creating the thousands of components that would ultimately make up *Dans la Lune*. To invent the endlessly adorned, hybrid forms, Hassenfeld scoured her collection of auction catalogues and books on decoration, indulging in her attraction to the beauty of ornament. Simultaneously, she experimented tirelessly with new types of paper and methods, spending thousands of hours hand-cutting, folding, gluing, rolling, and coiling three types of archival papers: tissue, corrugated, and vellum. Knowing the massive amount of energy Kirsten had put into her installation, it was an incredible moment when her work arrived at Rice Gallery. We marveled at the care that Kirsten had lavished on the construction of even her shipping containers, exactly crafted cardboard boxes reinforced with plywood frames. Opening each box evoked a sense of wonder, as if peering into the miniature world of a diorama.





Once *Dans la Lune* was finished, structures four to eight feet in diameter, resembling gigantic droplets or the onion domes of Russian architecture, were embellished with a profusion of swags, chains, honeycomb "beads," gem-like crystals, and a myriad of surprises, including a branch holding a tiny swing, a woman demurely leading a lacey pony within a miniature gazebo, and a pendant featuring Bacchus raising his cup of wine. I would like to thank Kirsten for how *Dans la Lune* transformed the gallery. As one visitor remarked best in the gallery guestbook, "Magical . . . took me to the moon and back; thanks for the trip!"

Kimberly Davenport
Director

KIRSTEN HASSENFELD ON

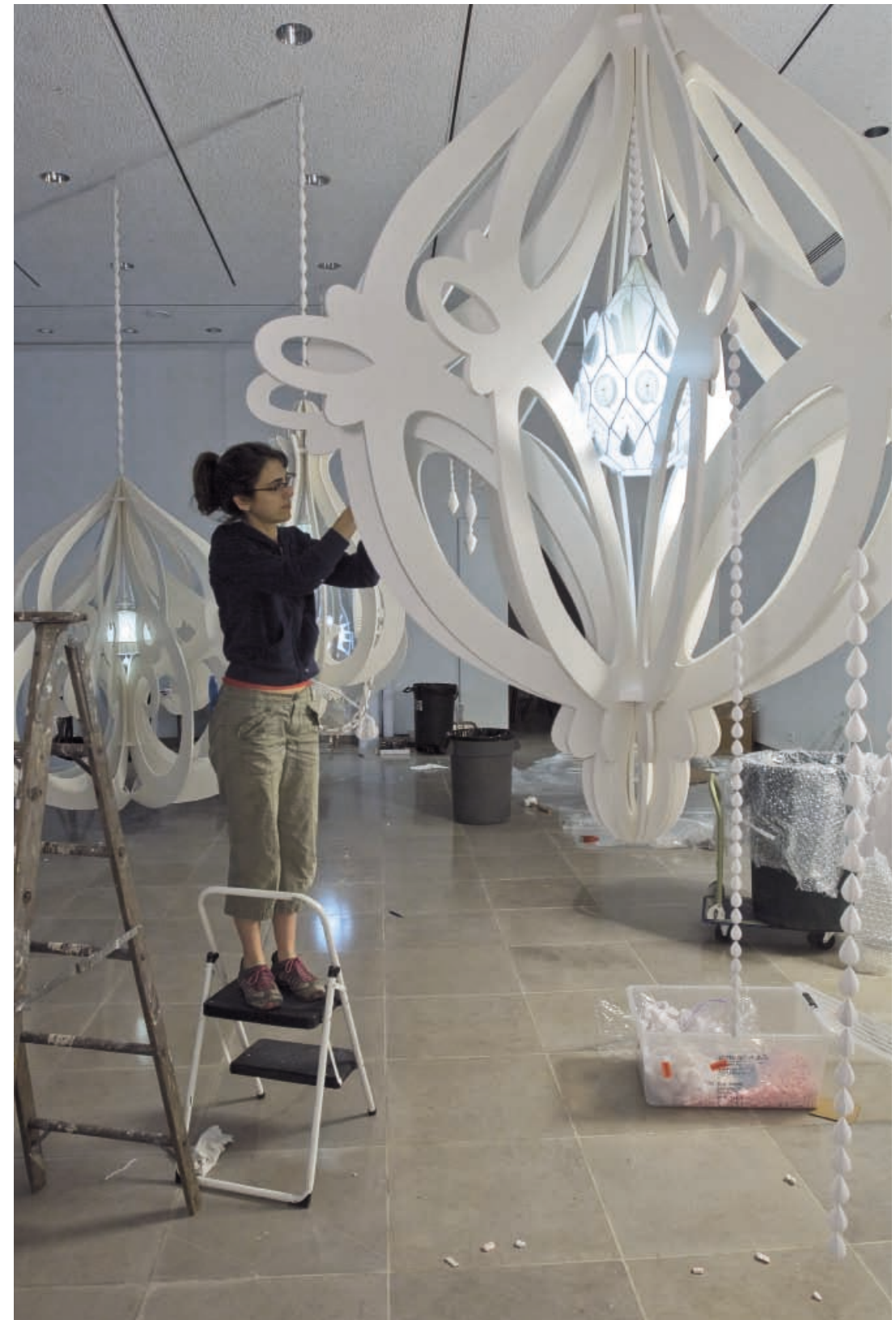
Dans la Lune

Gallery Talk at the Exhibition Opening, 27 September 2007

I will talk briefly about this installation, which is a continuation of a number of things I have been investigating in my work. I have done installation before, but on a much smaller scale. I've also made individual sculptures and for the past four years, I've done sculptures made predominantly from paper and lit from within.

This installation is a little bit of a departure for me because the ribs, which form the armature of these radiant structures, are not paper. Instead, they are a substrate that's made from foam and plastic and were actually cut out by computer. I don't have the skill or funding to do this kind of cutting, so support from Rice Gallery gave me the opportunity to make this leap forward in my work.

Everything else you see is made out of paper of different opacities and weights. The translucence and the opacity create many of the designs. Although it looks really complicated, the techniques are very basic. They include rolling paper, creating little skeletons with tubes, taking apart party decorations to figure out how they work and then recreating them in vellum. I start simple but it gets progressively more and more complicated and finally, the accretion of these little bits coalesces and forms the sculptures.



As far as the motivation behind the work, I want to create a place where people can take a little vacation from reality. That's what I think about when I am making the work. I'm interested in going to a place where there is no want, only endless plenty, and I use a lot of symbols that bring jewelry and riches to mind. To fill a void, I pile them on top of each other, and then I invite the viewers into my world and hope that everybody enjoys it in their own way.

I am also interested in fluctuations in scale, an "Alice in Wonderland effect," that takes you out of day-to-day life even more. For example, there's [points to element in sculpture] a little swing. If I am a regular-sized person, then who can sit on that swing? The person must be tiny, or I'm huge. On the other hand, what if this whole thing [gesturing toward the largest sculpture] is an earring or a Christmas ornament? Then I must be tiny. Are these normal crystals or could they be buildings? If they are regular crystals, then I am normal-sized, but if they are part of the Emerald City, then I am huge. I am really interested in that kind of constant shifting.

Another thing I would like to point out is the figure of Bacchus with attendants, which I painted on the window with a very, very delicate material. I included that because I want to welcome you into this place where hopefully, all your longings are fulfilled. To me, this Bacchus represents a complete sinking into pleasure or decadence. It is a new motif for me, and I like the dark and light sides of losing yourself in pleasure. I do think there is a dark side to the self dissolving into this world of pleasure and plenty.

Kimberly Davenport: Tell us about the title, *Dans la Lune*.

I was desperate for a title and I had a friend over who speaks French. She was talking about a medication she planned to take for pain, but she was worried that it might make her *dans la lune*. I asked, "What

is that?" and she said, "Oh, you know, drugged or groggy." When I looked it up, I learned it is more like, "He's in outer space," or "He's on another planet." That idea of a total departure or a daydream sounded blissful to me, and captured perfectly what I hoped to do in this installation.

QUESTIONS FROM AUDIENCE

Do you use different colors of paper?

I have eliminated most color when I work with paper because I have found that white paper in itself seems to have a lot of color. An example is that head [points to sculpture with silhouette inside armature], which is made out of very pale, off-white paper. When you set it [the paper] on edge and you put a light inside, it starts reading like this yellow-ish ecru, or a dark cream color. Restricting the color has actually opened up possibilities for me in terms of playing with subtleties. When you look at something that has less color in it, you are more sensitive to the small differences. But I have worked with color, and I'll come back to it.







Everything seems so fragile and precariously close together? Are you interested in that feeling of fragility?

I think I am. I am interested in representing things like diamonds that are valuable because they're the hardest things on the planet or precious metals that are valuable because they're durable. To represent those precious things in something as ephemeral and fragile as paper creates a friction that I like. At the same time, I'm so used to working with paper that I'm not as acutely aware of the fragility anymore because I know how to handle it.

How long did it take you to make the installation?

I don't know how long it took because I cannibalize my own work. If something isn't working, I set it aside and later I use it in another piece. As a result, parts of this installation have been sitting around for years. Five years ago, I spent two weeks making something that didn't go anywhere and then for this show I said, "Oh, this is the perfect thing;" and I used it. There is no way I can add up the time, but I can say that the lit elements — there are five of them in the show — took an entire summer. I worked on those exclusively. You also have to factor in how many hours I was working, and I had some help, so it's a lot of hours.

How did you decide on the lighting to use?

I experimented with different temperatures of light. They're all fluorescent, but fluorescents can range from extremely warm to extremely cold light. I feel as if I got the balance just right in the installation. There is a place where each of them [the five central, lit elements] opens up so you can access the bulb. Before the show opened, we made certain that if a bulb blows it could be changed. The installation is designed so that not only can it be dismantled and put back together, but also it can be maintained. ↩



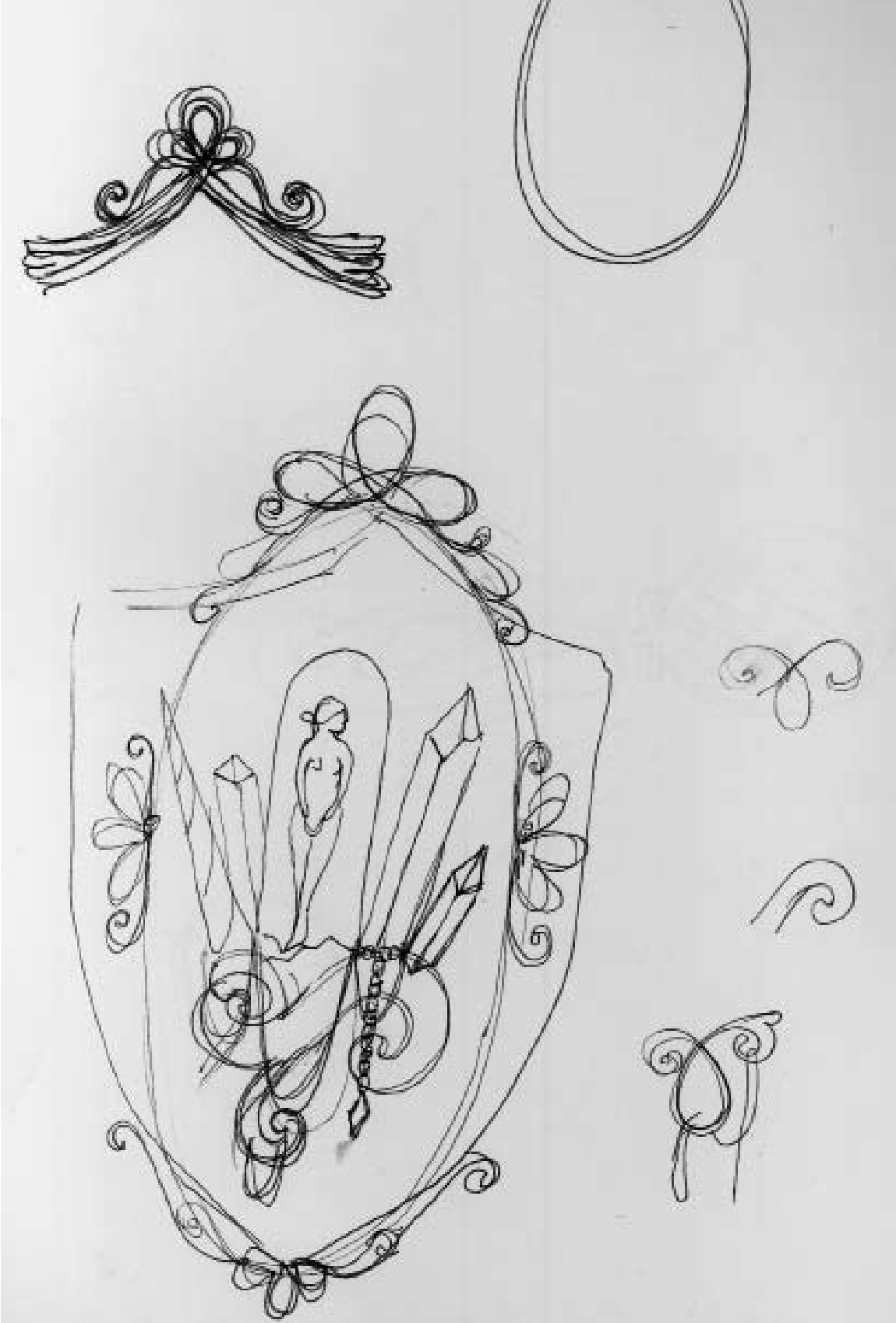


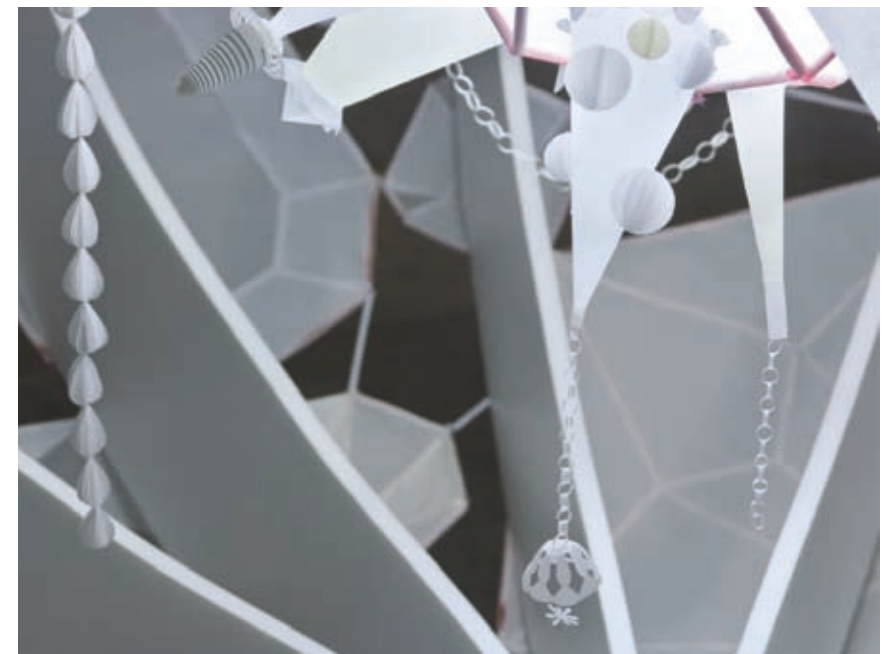
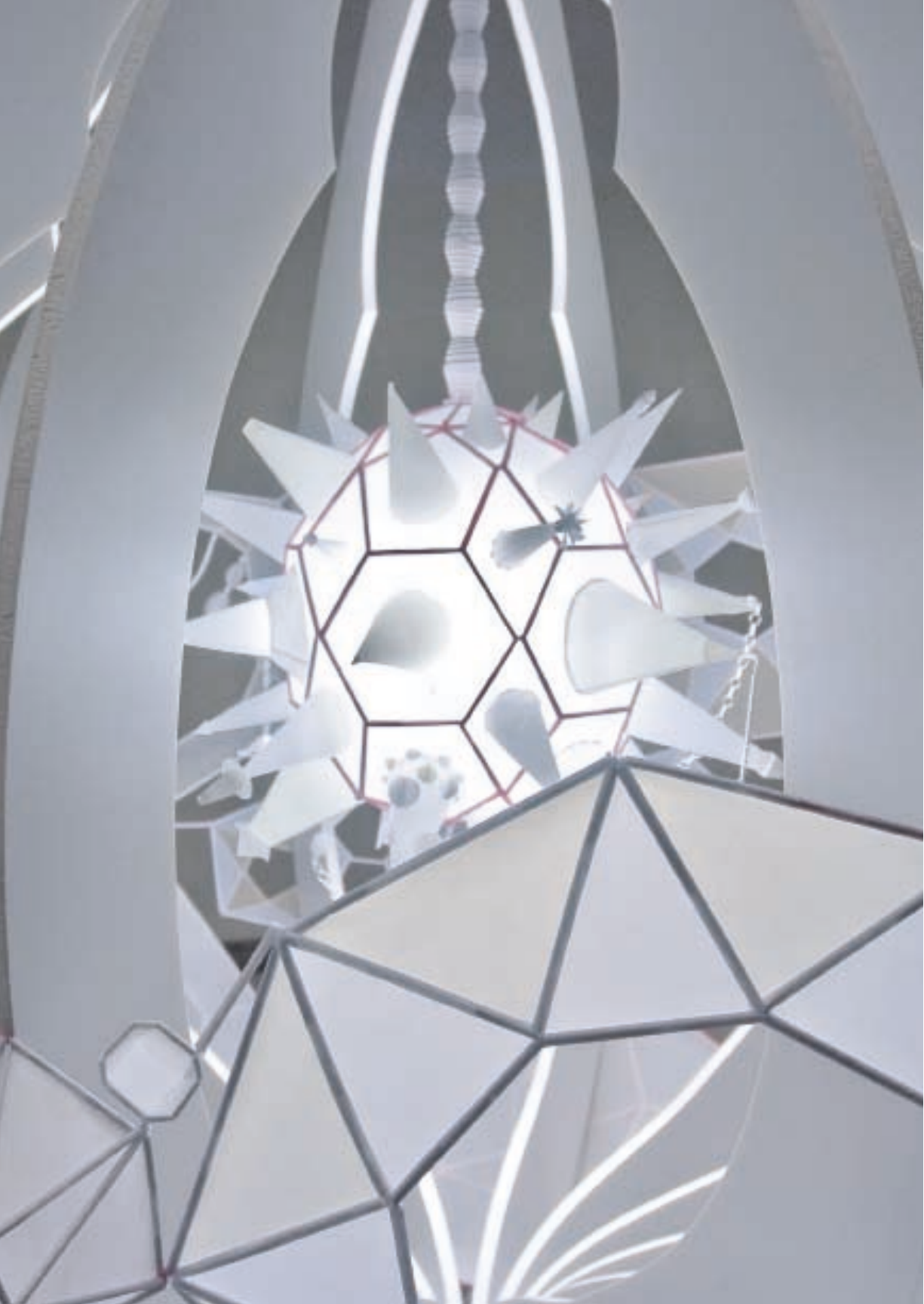










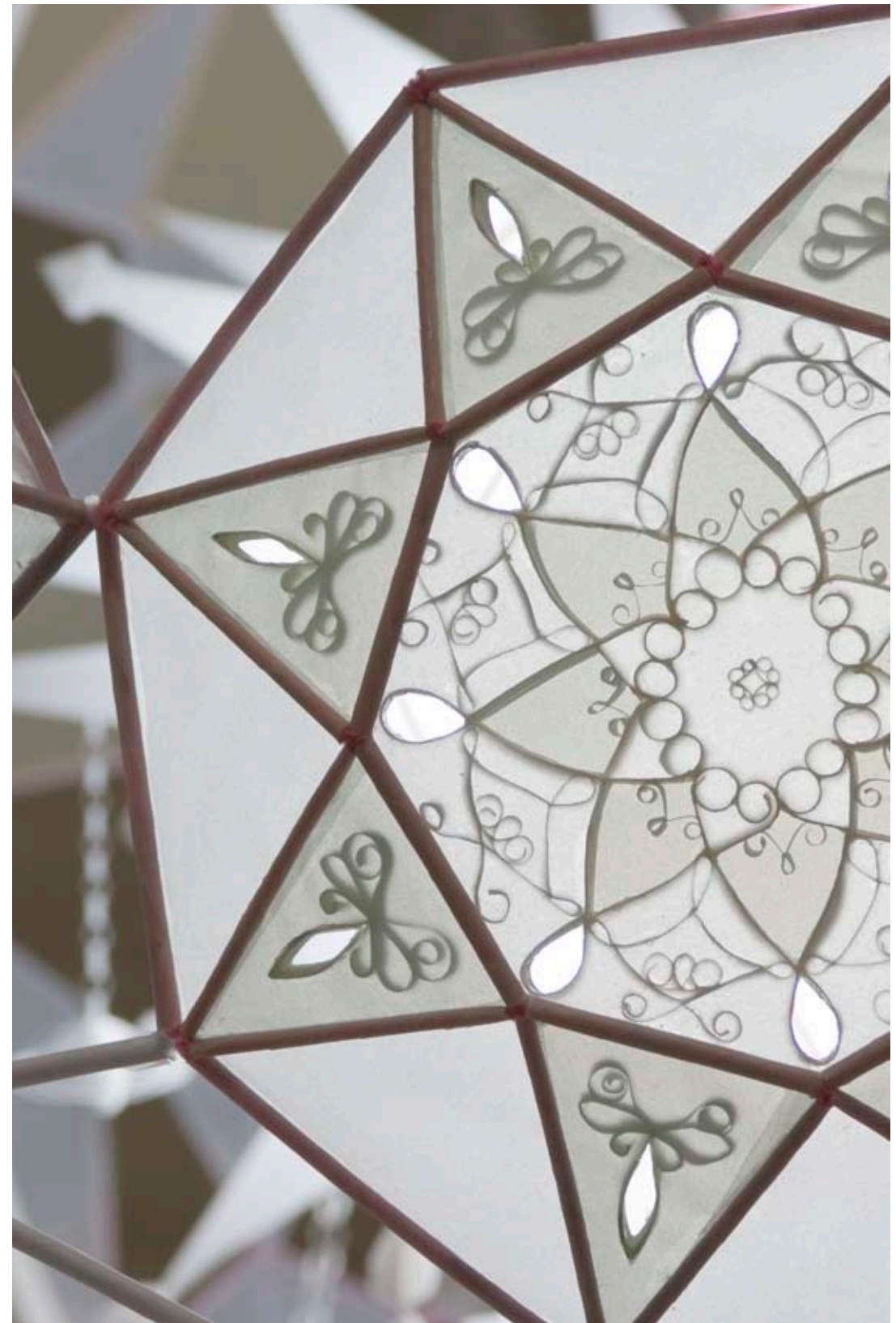












A B O U T T H E A R T I S T

Kirsten Hassenfeld was born in Albany, New York. She received a BFA from the Rhode Island School of Design in 1994 and in 1998, an MFA from The University of Arizona, Tucson. In 2004, *Objects of Virtue*, a solo exhibition of her work, was on view at Bellwether Gallery, New York. Her work has been in group exhibitions throughout New York, at the Hudson River Museum (2007); The Jewish Museum (2006); P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, a MoMA affiliate (2005); and the Brooklyn Museum (2004). Her artist residencies in New York include Dieu Donn  Papermill (2005), The Marie Walsh Sharpe Art Foundation (2004), and Smack Mellon Artist Studio Program (2003). In 2006, Hassenfeld was awarded a grant from The Pollock-Krasner Foundation. She lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.



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