

Tomás Saraceno

Cloud City at Houston University

Tomás Saraceno's proposition for a Houston University artwork on campus emerges from a consideration of its location as a site of investigation and learning and the networks of interdisciplinary knowledge required to shape future modes of living on the interconnected levels of the local and the global. Set at the front side of Cullen College's new Multidisciplinary Research and Engineering Building (MREB) and *vis-à-vis* Michael J. Cemo Hall, the work acquires the form of a light weight and seemingly floating, while highly visible and emblematic ensemble of modular habitats that itself allows for multiple connections to its pictorial, informational and physical dimensions. *Cloud City at Houston University* will be the whole campus' visual icon.

The Houston University proposition is part of Saraceno's longstanding engagement in artistic research on architecture and utopian living, which has lead him to the notion of 'cloud cities', – conceptual airborne habitats that, following the discourse of Buckminster Fuller and others, are meant to allow us to think the kinds of mobility, adaptability and political innovation that is required, on a global scale, for a sustainable urbanism of tomorrow. These investigations have crystallized in multiple works and exhibitions, among them the eponymous exhibit at Hamburger Bahnhof – Museum für Gegenwart, Berlin, Germany (2011-12), and in an installment at the Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Roof Garden of the Metropolitan Museum of Arts in New York (2012).

Rising up in front of MREB's façade and anchoring on Michael J. Cemo Hall, Saraceno's *Cloud City at Houston University* in turn formulates a series of cloud-like habitats consistent of polygons with highly reflective surfaces. The piece thereby invites its immediate surroundings to inhabit its fabric and become part of it, – which it does in a way sensitive to the viewer's position. Thus as students, staff and visitors move freely alongside and below it, different fractions of neighboring buildings with their respective designations will appear combined as new wholes in the airborne structure, literally making ever new constellations of interdisciplinarity emerge that catch the bypasser's eye and attract the viewer's active engagement. All disciplines converge in *Cloud City*. And while the multiple reflections enable the artwork's active communication with its site, they also contribute to the impression of its unreal aesthetic lightness.

On a second level, as the piece reflects not only ambient images but sends out reflective beams of sunlight, it performs an illuminated intervention into the campus' architectural and intellectual fabric. Allowing students to stroll through and around its strings and beams and inspiring participatory practices of DIY student astronomy of the solar system, *Cloud City at Houston University* projects recognizable and traceable marks of light onto the 'coordinate system' of the university according to time of day and time of year. It thereby turns into a veritable solar clock as well as a tool of practical forecast, drawing attention to the future paths of the Earth as the common habitat humanity has to start govern responsibly. The work indeed enters the Houston atmosphere in order to push the ecological question much further than is usually done: thinking habitats entirely fueled by nothing but sunlight that up in the clouds finally reduce their ecological footprint on the Earth to zero, and that start engineering the climate in a responsible manner, – a process the artist likes to sum up as 'becoming aerosolar'.

Constructed from so-called Waeire-Phelan structures – perfect packaging geometries found e.g. in the inside of foam –, Saraceno's proposition itself represents a most economic use of its main resource: the space it gives shape to. By so doing, it showcases the artist's frequent interest in latest scientific and technological findings. Saraceno's own interdisciplinary practice, which has resulted in cooperations with experts from numerous fields and has led to his invitation as first residing artist at the Center for Art, Science and Technology (CAST) at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in 2012, collaborating as well with the Fraunhofer Institute and many other institutions, is very much rooted in a spirit that makes research and engineering conjoin with artistic practices to stand up to the unprecedented ecological callings of the Earth in the Anthropocene.

Making these pressing issues and promising connections immediately tangible, and allowing observers to immerse in the work both aesthetically and intellectually, Tomás Saraceno's proposition for a Houston University artwork creates a sensually enthralling first-hand experience of the entanglement of contemporary art with terrestrial atmospheres and the progressing natural sciences today.

Proposal for University of Houston
Tomás Saraceno
2014

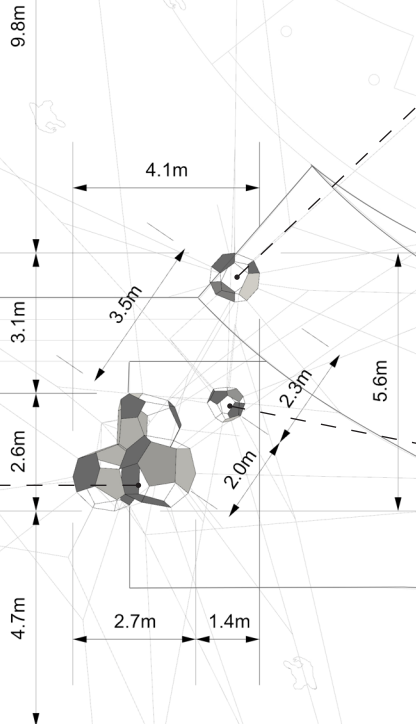


View from the ramp, entering the building

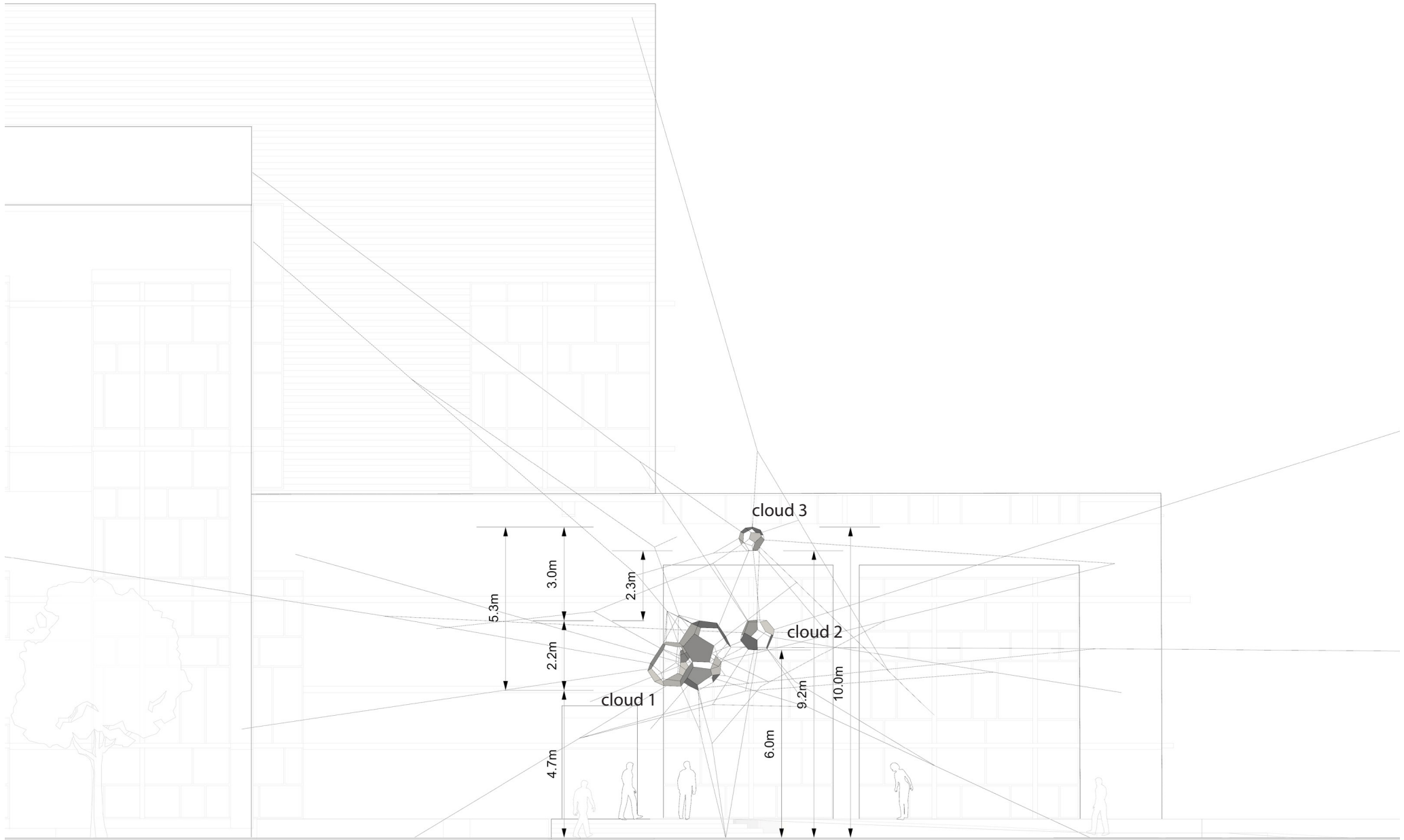
cloud 1 >
3 modules / 1.5m diameter

cloud 2 >
1 module / 1m diameter

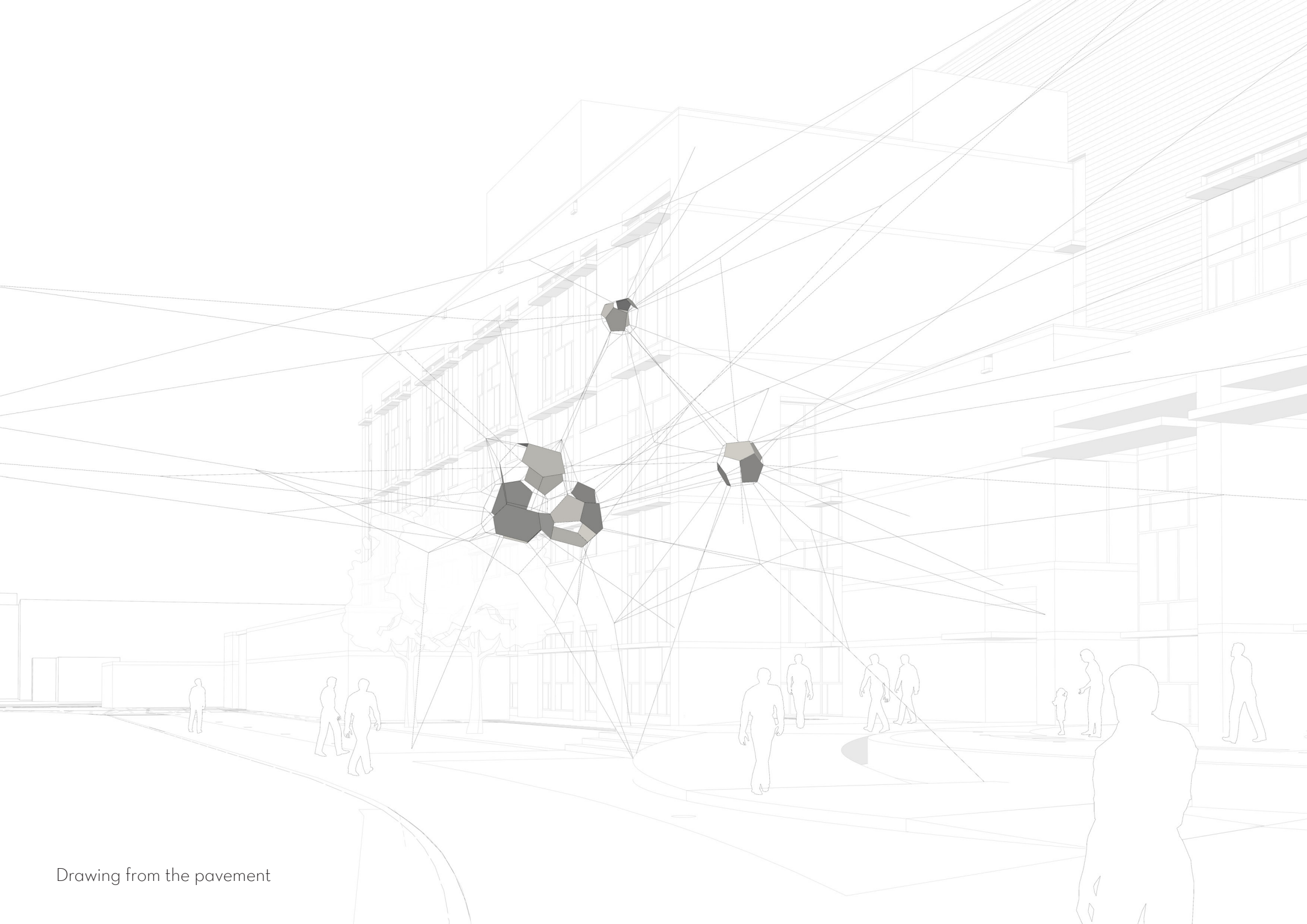
cloud 3 >
1 module / 0.9 m diameter



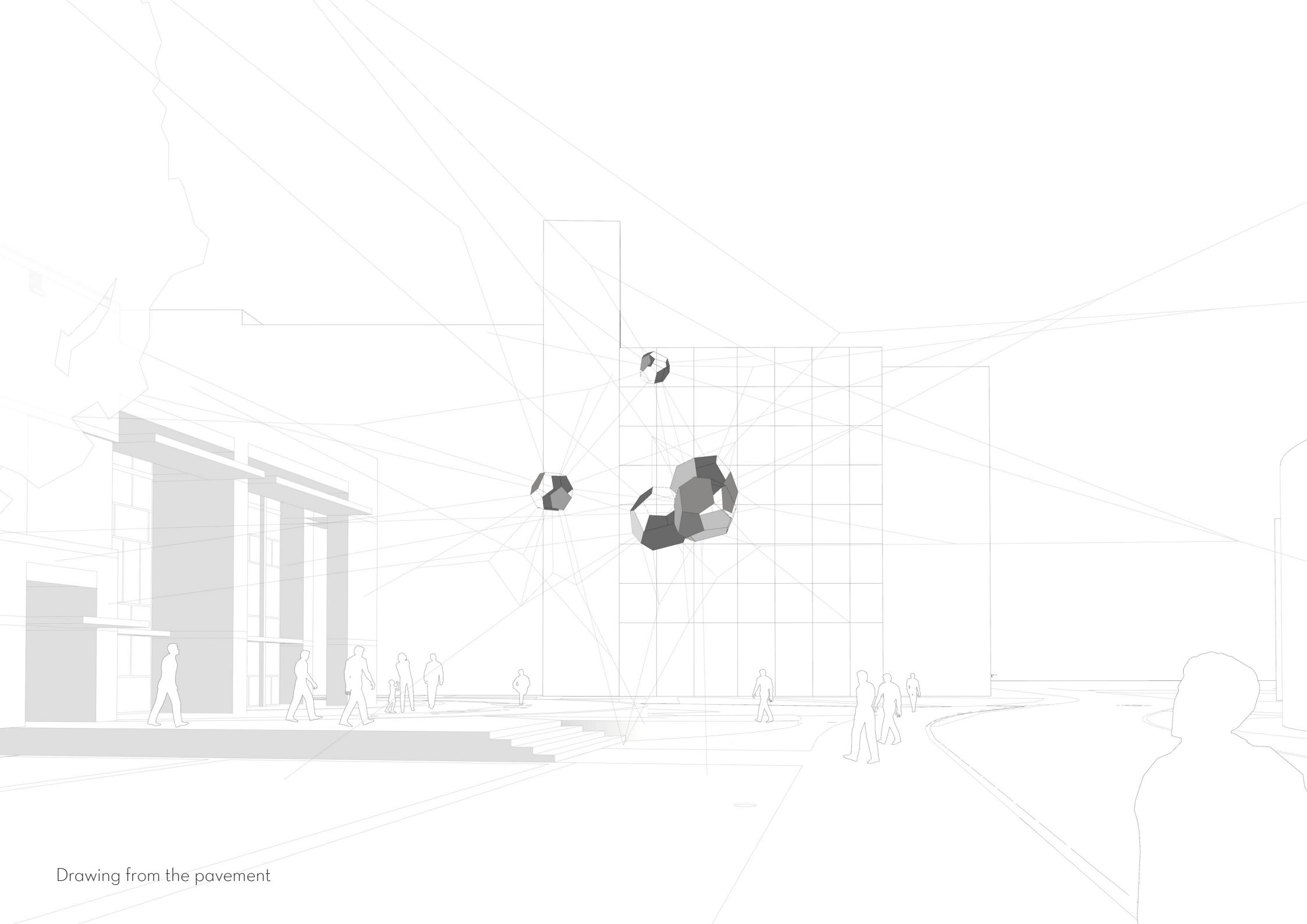
Top view
Location & General Dimensions



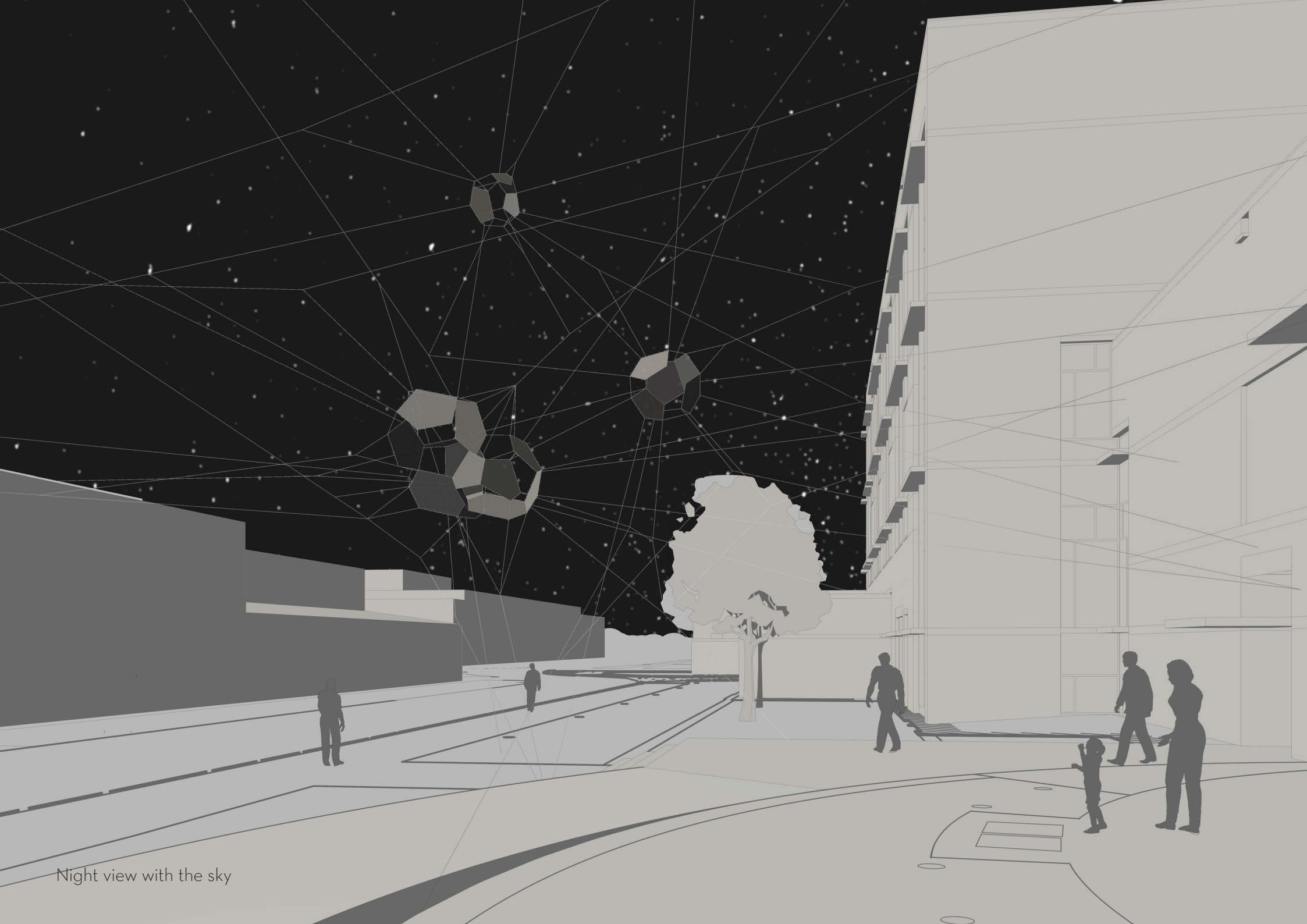
View from South
Location & General Dimensions



Drawing from the pavement



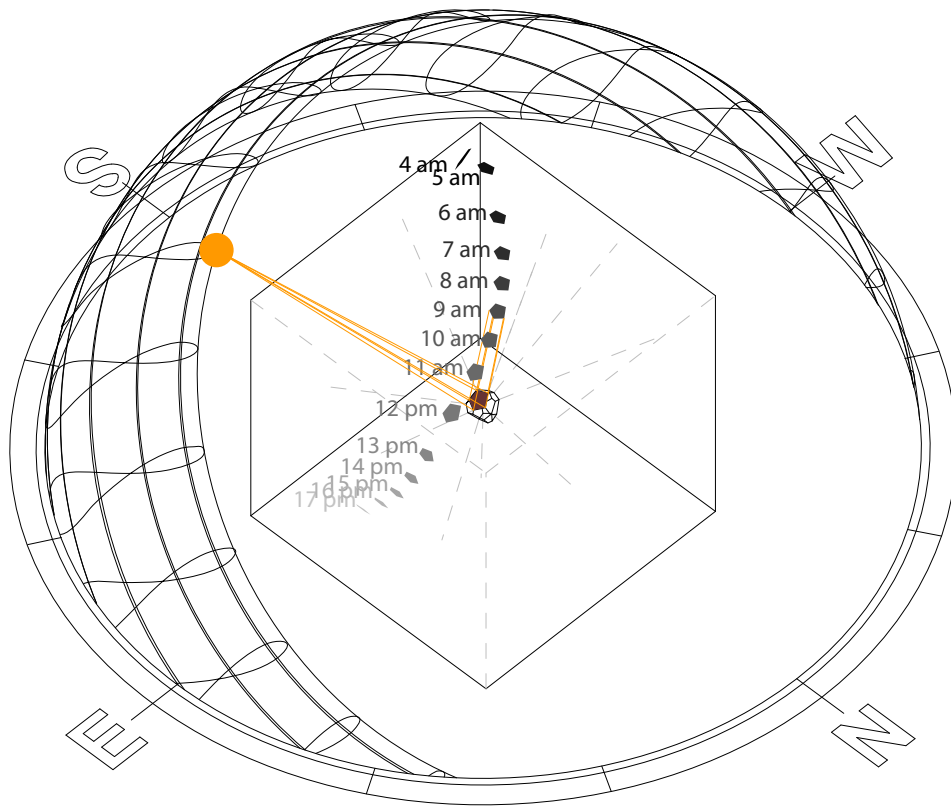
Drawing from the pavement



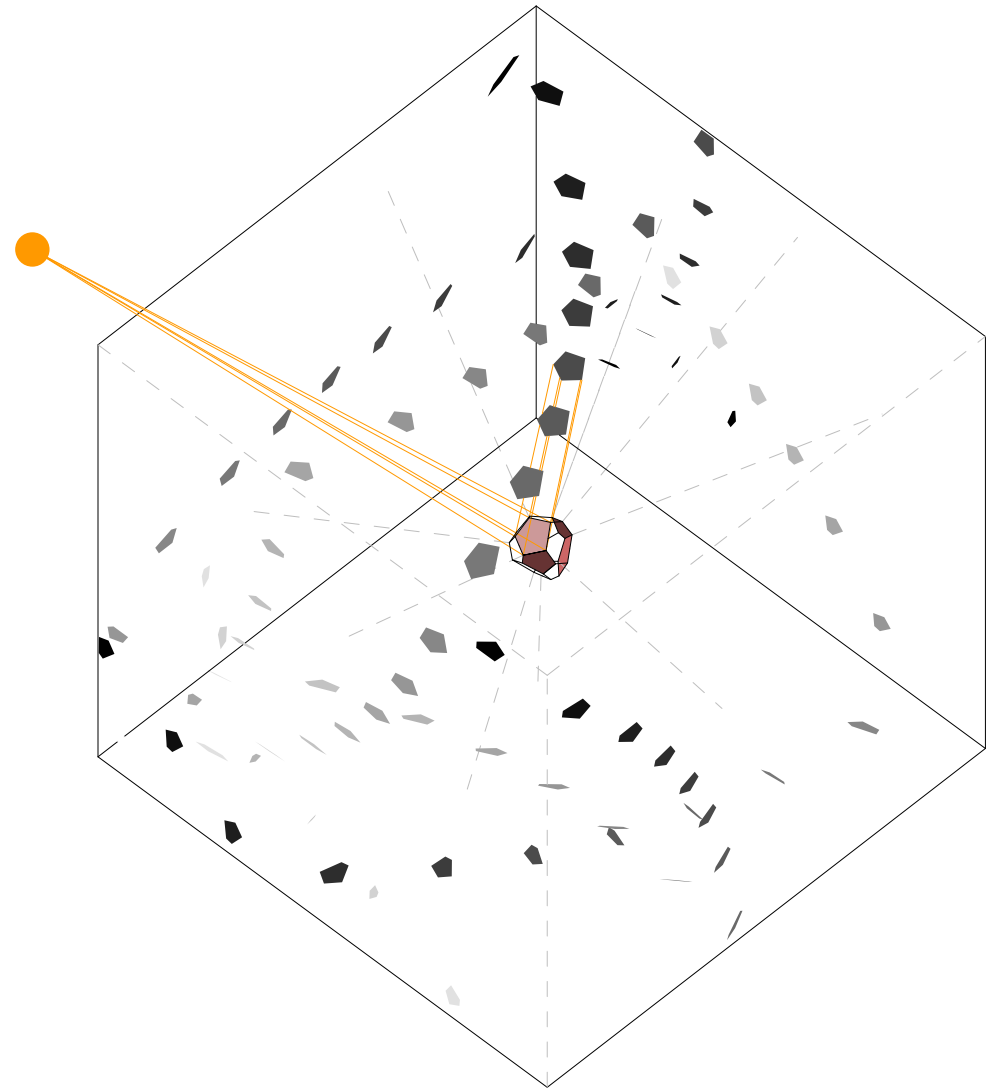
Night view with the sky



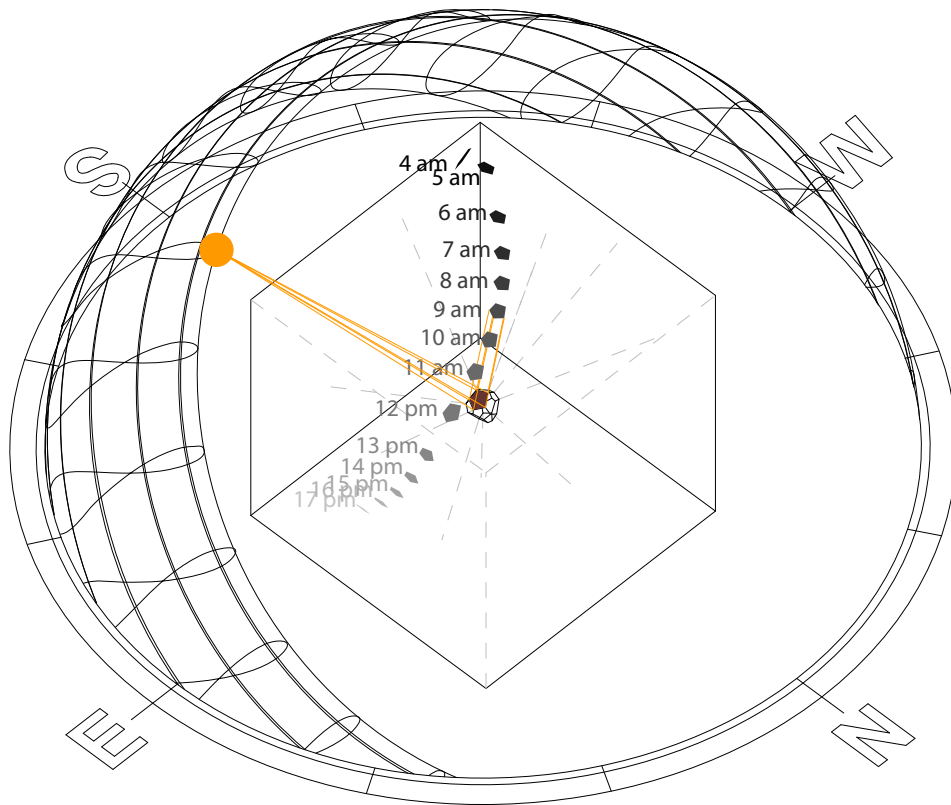
Daytime view with the sky



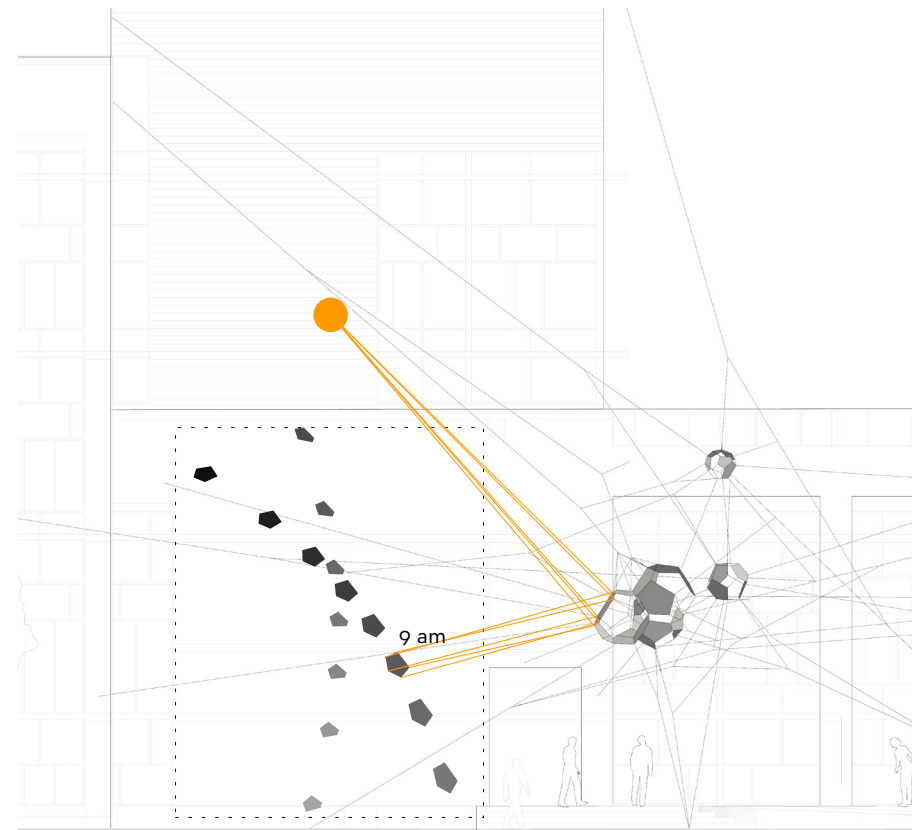
Each mirroring face reflects the sun throughout the day, the reflection moves around in space around the installation.



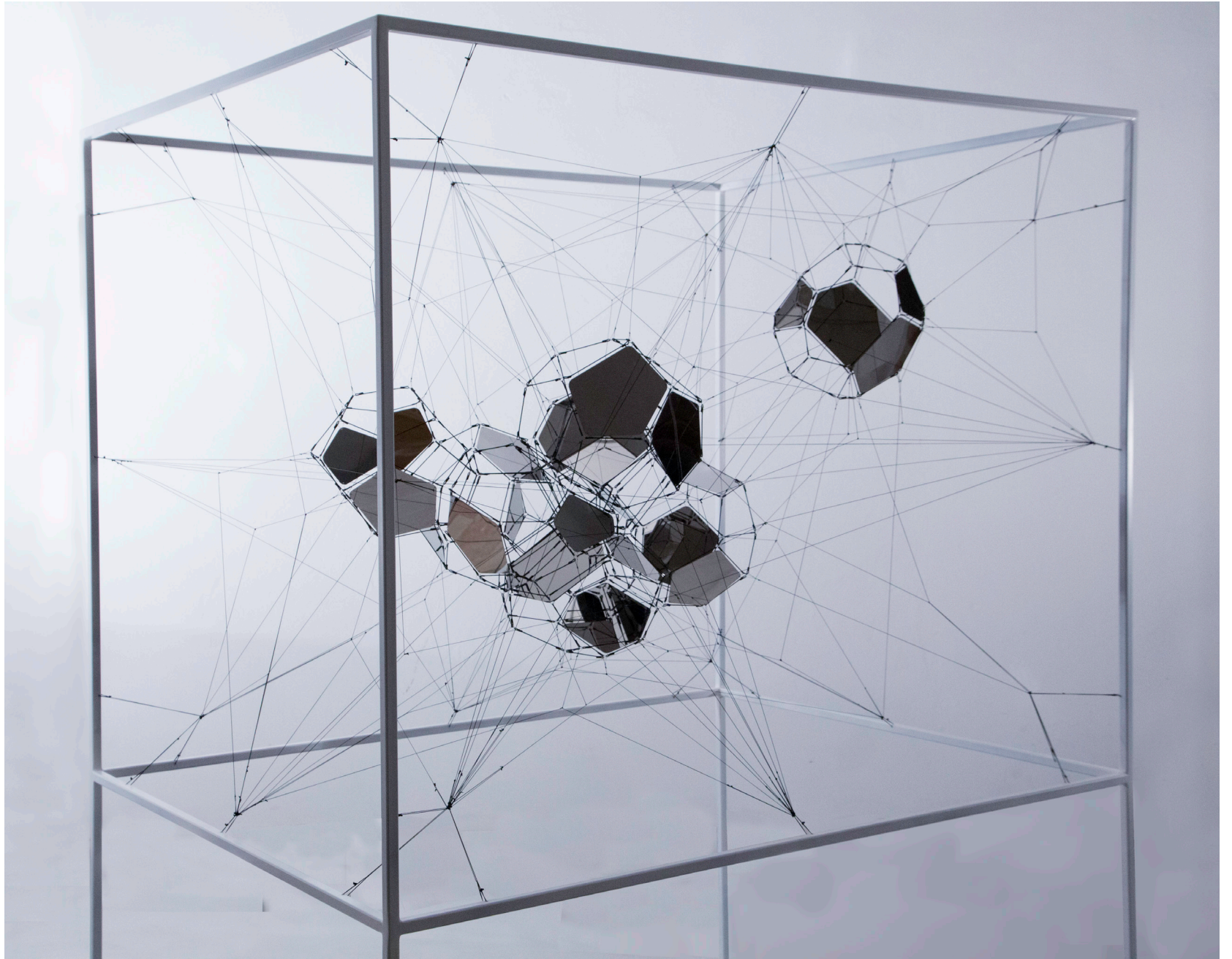
Multiple reflecting faces of the solar clock form a spatial evolving threedimensional pattern in the surrounding environment and make the relationship to the sun more readable.



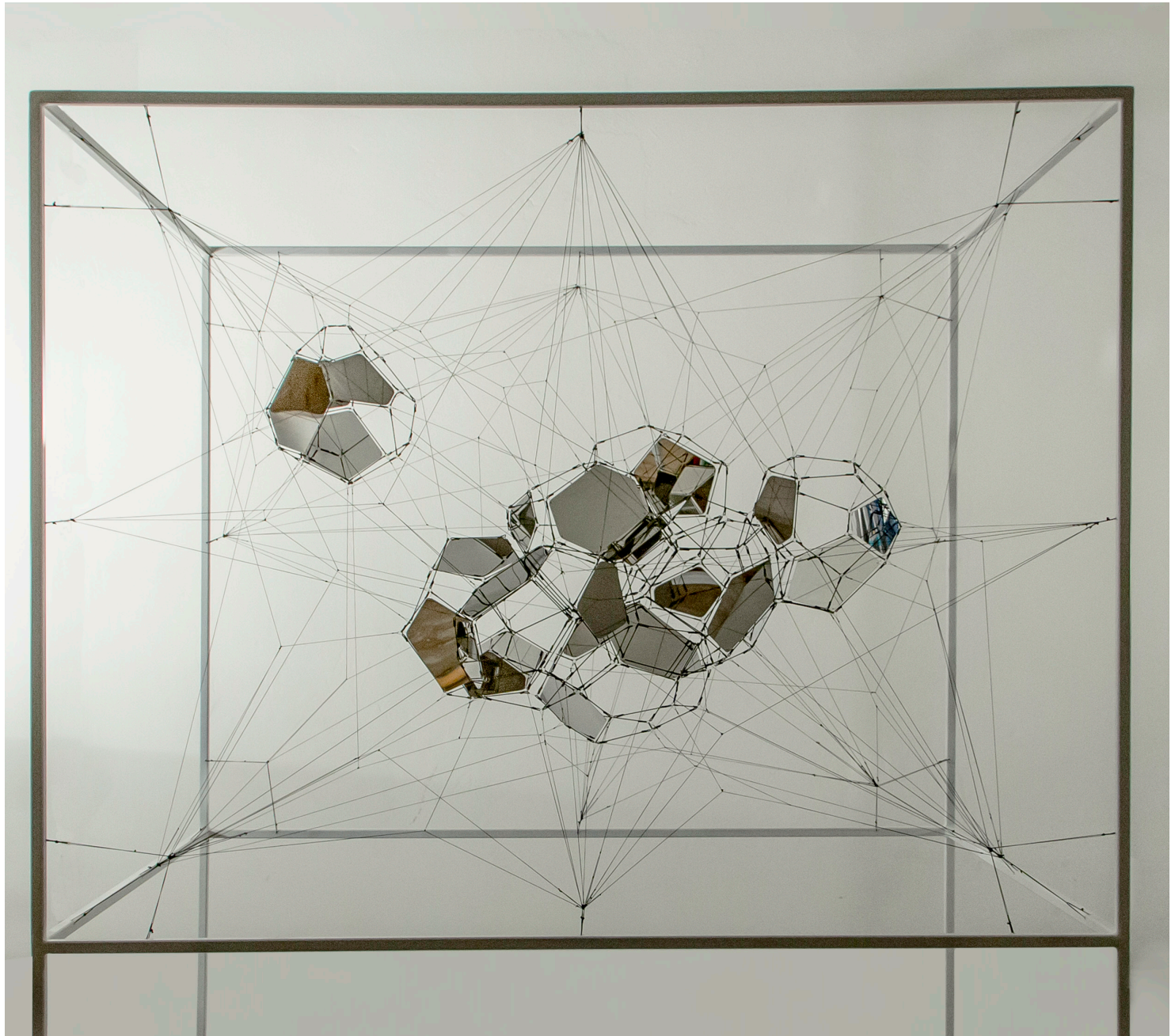
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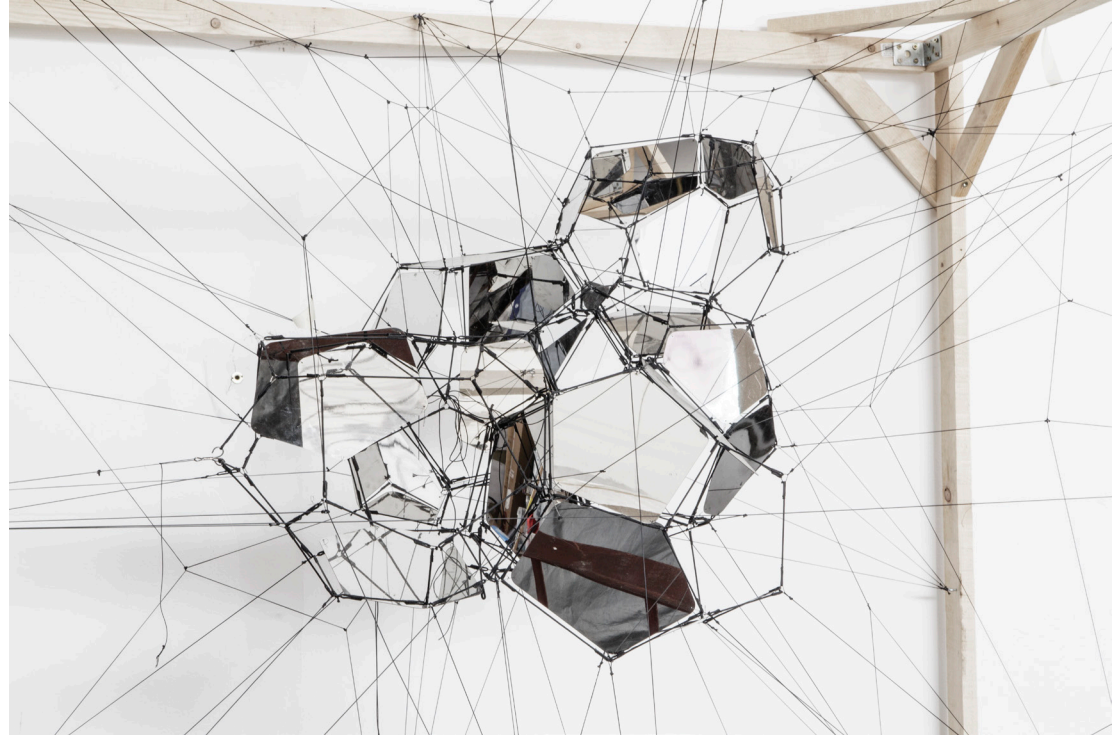
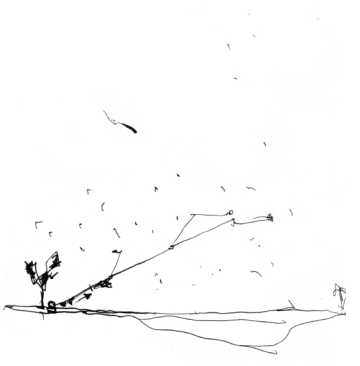
The reflections are projected onto the surrounding buildings, where the path can be observed and marked.



Connectome: 210(height) x 170(width) x 133(depth) cm steel frame, black cord, stainless steel faces. Tensile form based on foam soapbubble geometry composed of reflective surfaces. This installation is able to transport visitors in its reflective surface from the ground, elevating visitors to a new spatial dimension, blurring the boundaries of reality and defeating gravity.



Connectome: 210(height) x 170(width) x 133(depth)cm steel frame, black cord, stainless steel faces.





Outdoor reflection study of the mirroring surfaces.

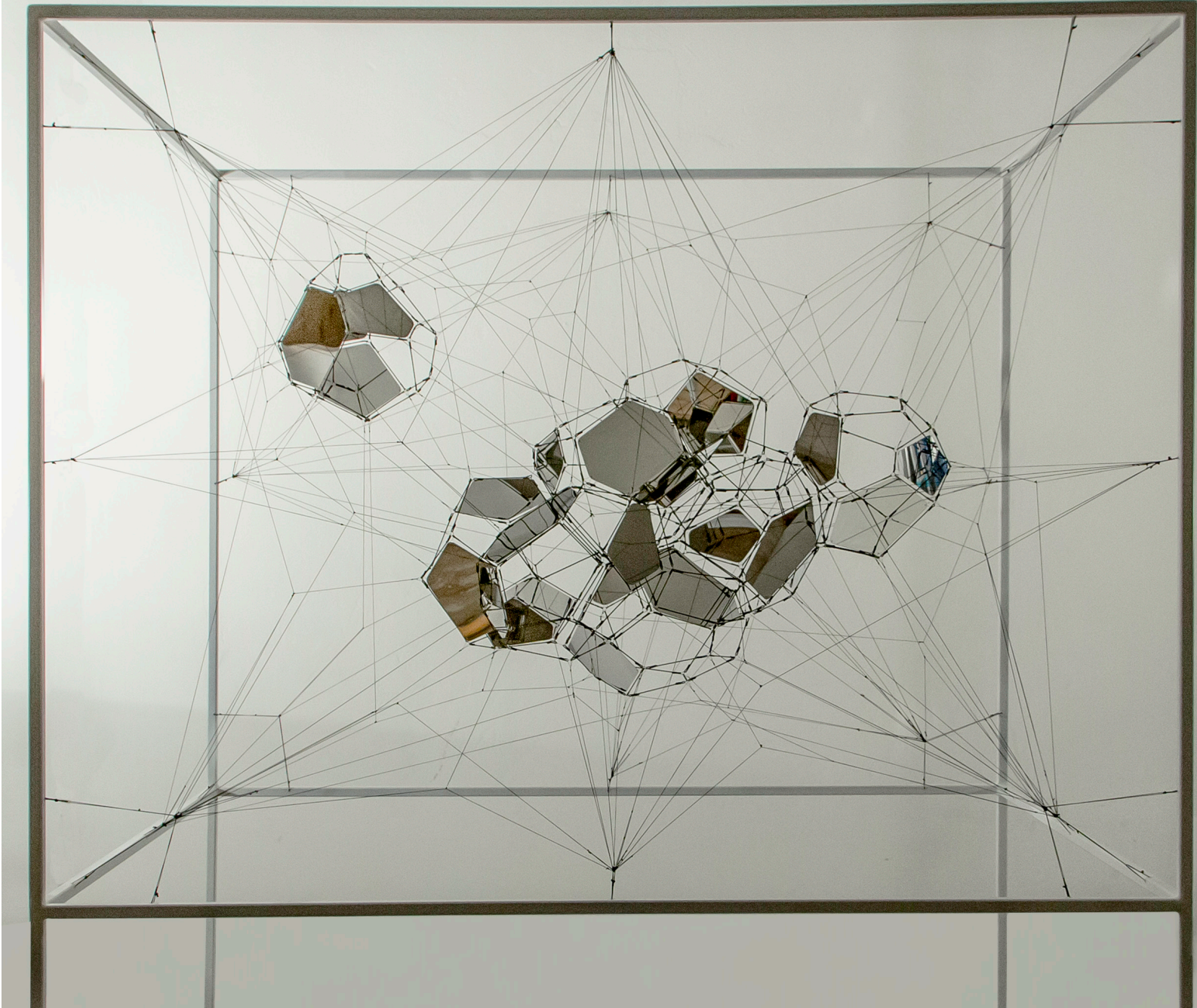


Outdoor reflection study of the mirroring surfaces.



Production of the artwork

We will be in charge to produce the artwork stretched to a specific boundary frame (not included frame) The Installation on site (planning, engineering and technical 3d and 2d drawings) will be carried out by the commissioner.



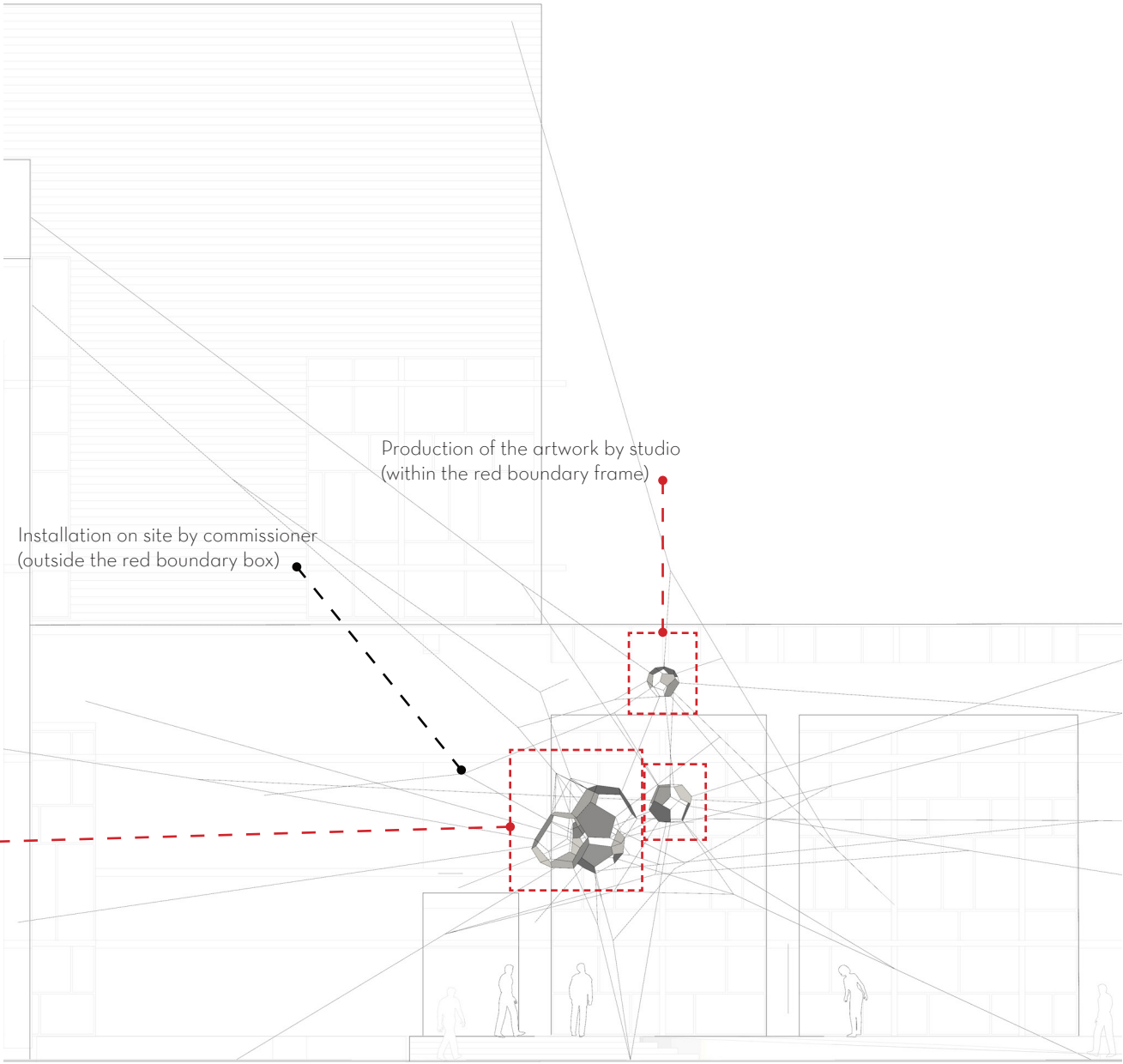
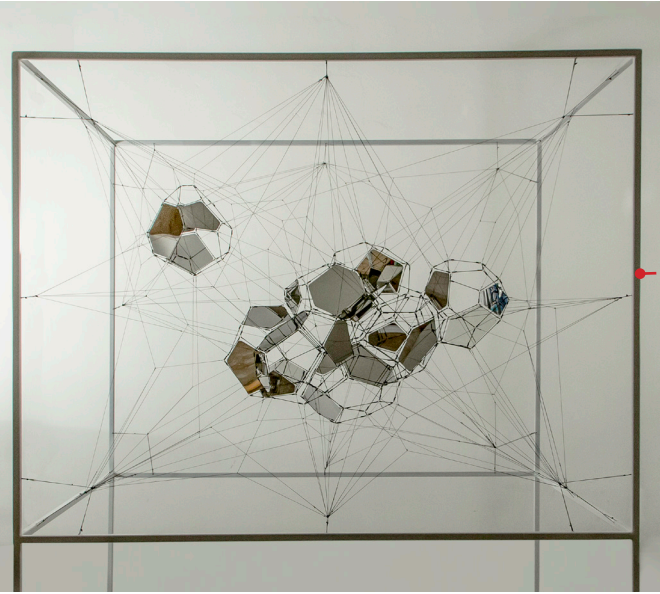
Reference: Connectome: 210(height) x 170(width) x 133(depth)cm steel frame, black cord, stainless steel faces.

Production of the artwork

The Studio will be in charge to produce the artwork stretched to a specific boundary (frame not included)

The Installation on site (planning, engineering and technical 3d and 2d drawings for anchoring the artwork to the venue) will be carried out by the commissioner.

Production of the artwork (frame not included)



Production of the artwork by studio
(within the red boundary frame)

Installation on site by commissioner
(outside the red boundary box)



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