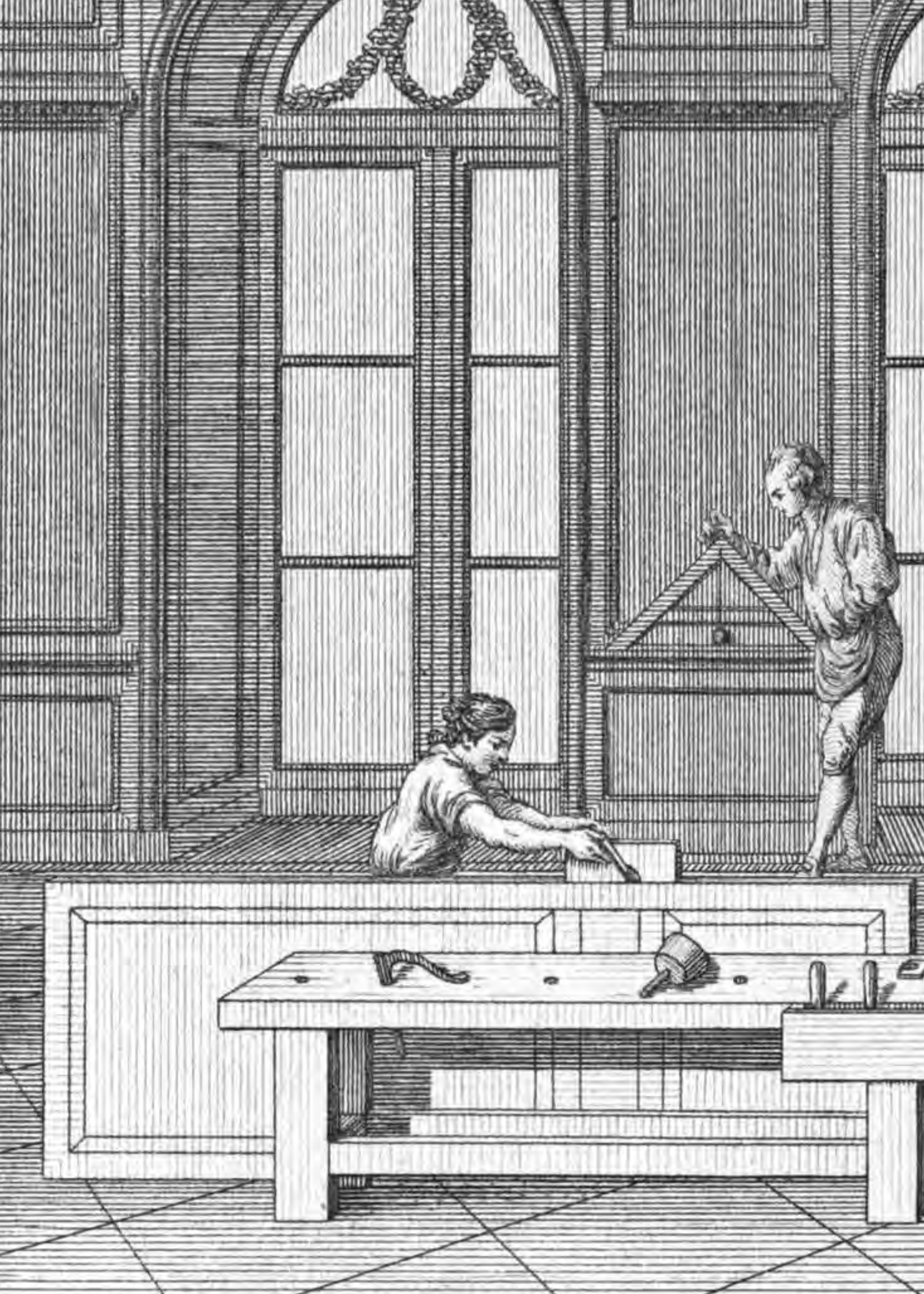
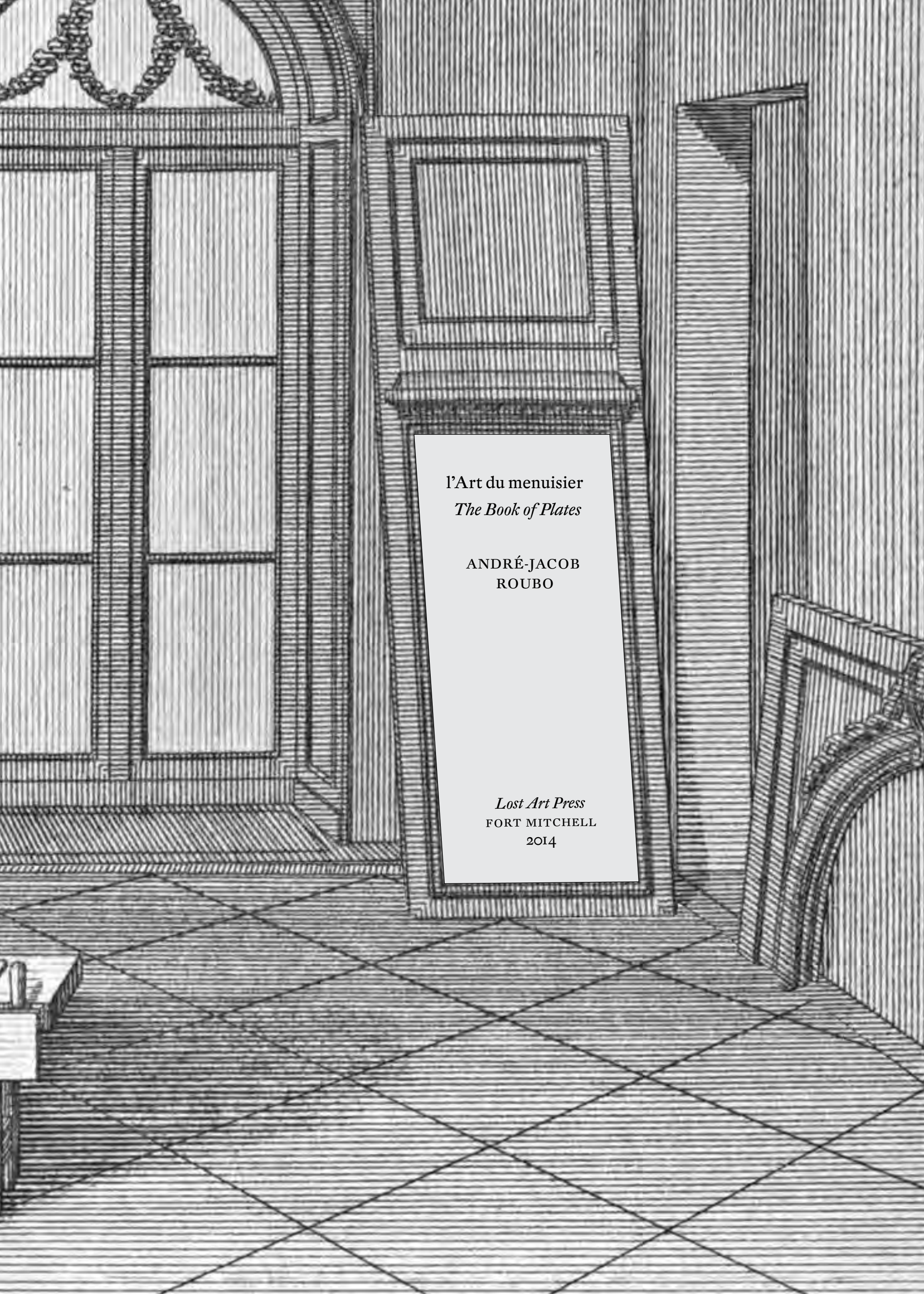


l'Art du menuisier: *Plates*





l'Art du menuisier
The Book of Plates

ANDRÉ-JACOB
ROUBO

Lost Art Press
FORT MITCHELL
2014

André-Jacob Roubo

L'Art du menuisier: The Book of Plates

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The Power of the Real

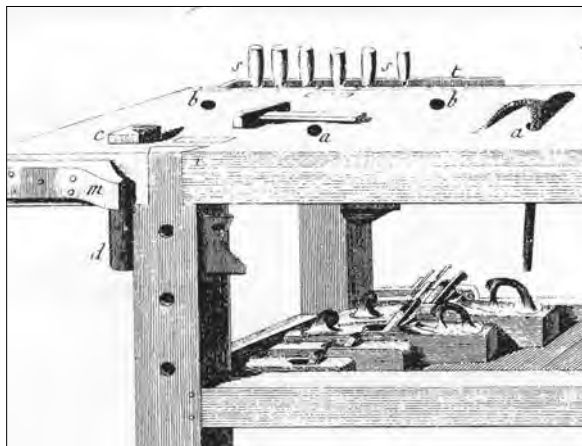
M*Y initial “in the flesh” introduction to l’Art du menuisier was in 1985 when I arranged for the branch of the Smithsonian Libraries in the facility where I worked to have it sent from the library branch at the Cooper-Hewitt Museum, the Smithsonian’s National Museum of Design. I kept that set “checked out” from that day until Dec. 27, 2012, the day before I walked out the door as an employee for the last time, when I almost sorrowfully returned it to the library with the other scores of books residing on my office shelves.*

Until that point in 1985 I had been exposed only to snippets and passages from l’Art du menuisier, and the occasional image in magazines or books, so the quality and physical scale had not been infused into my brain. So, I wasn’t exactly sure what would arrive, but when the librarian called and told me to bring a cart, I was intrigued. A cart for three books?

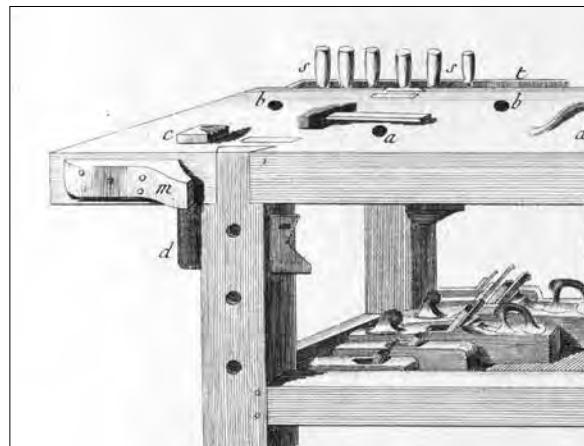
Her recommendation was well-justified as the three elephant folio-sized volumes were simply un-carry-able otherwise. En toto the set is about 12” by 18” and the full stack is just under 1’ thick. I have never weighed them, but I would estimate their combined weight at near 30 or 40 pounds. In short, these are not a trifle.

These volumes were the 1976 replicas from Léonce Laget, a set of which I now own myself. I say that as a reference point and to indicate the quality of the images in these 1976 books is the result of an undetermined number of generations of replication from the process of creating this landmark set using available technology. Because each subsequent

generation of imaging loses some portion of the image quality, and this was long before ultra-high-quality digital scanning or anything similar, the final result is necessarily a



A detail from Plate II as published in the 1970s edition



The same detail from a digitized version of the 18th-century edition

diminished copy of the original. It is not my intention to denigrate this replica set – it was a remarkable accomplishment and offering, after all – but rather to point out that it was limited by the technologies of the times, and perhaps by the condition of the originals being copied.

Being belligerently 100-percent illiterate in the French language, once the books were in my hands (well, truthfully filling up my lap and then some), I was restricted to ogling the oversized engraved images. For hours. At the time Philippe Lafargue was a postgraduate fellow in the Furniture Conservation Laboratory, and periodically we would browse the images together, and on occasion, under great duress, he would explain some of the text to me. At one point, and it may have involved coercion of some sort, he translated the volumes' table of contents for me, a handwritten document that remained a guiding beacon for a project that did not even begin until decades later.

Only when I was able to fondle and scour a genuine first edition of l'Art du menuisier was the full impact of the 1976 edition's shortcomings glaringly apparent. These reinforced what my dear friend and colleague Dianne van der Reyden called "The Power of the Real." As a renowned paper conservator, and eventually the chief of the Preservation Directorate for the Library of Congress, Dianne often extolled the information embod-

*ied and transmitted in “real things.” I’d had inklings of this personally with Roubo, most notably as Michele Pietryka-Pagán and I would encounter some passage of the text referring to specific details in the engraving that we could not discern. The reason we could not discern them was because they were not observable. In *The Real Thing*, that pristine set Christopher Schwarz sold his prized Karmann Ghia in order to obtain (and have digitized), the information we gleaned was immeasurably increased as those details, previously obscured by multiple generations of replication, were now crisp and brilliant.*

For starters, all those references to tiny little details became clear, rather than sources of confusion to us as translator and wordsmith. Second, the literal, physical texture of the pages provides a tactile connection to the hands that created and prepared the volumes almost 25 decades ago. Finally, that level of detail provided not only the a priori information that Roubo was trying to convey, but because he drew some of the plates himself, we could see the facility of his own hands and eyes in creating the original engraving plates from which the first editions were pulled.

*l’Art du menuisier’s *Power of the Real* became even more virulent when Lost Art Press arranged for a premier archival scanning company to digitize the books’ plates to the highest level that current technology could provide. (It did not diminish our enthusiasm one bit when they declared that this was the fifth first edition of l’Art du menuisier they had scanned, and ours was by far the best quality of those five.) The “deliverable” was a huge portable hard disk, packed to the gills with data files. When Chris sent the thumbnails of the plates for me to use on our side of the project, I was astounded at even their quality. The “thumbnails” were several megabytes themselves!*

From the moment Chris took possession of his nearly perfect first edition, I believe that all the project’s principals harbored a secret (or not-so-secret) desire to distribute the images far and wide. The result of those yearnings is this compilation containing an exquisite full-scale representation of every engraved image plate in the originals. While this volume cannot possibly recreate the tactile glory of the first edition and its typeset and intaglio pages, it can replicate the visual imagery of the plates themselves down to a level

of detail that surpasses the capacity of the naked eye. The sumptuousness of the oversized original plates is immediately apparent on first glance, but their ultimate opulence will require you to pick up a magnifying glass.

So welcome to the almost-decadent pleasure of encountering the plates from l'Art du menuisier the way they were intended to be enjoyed.

Donald C. Williams

AUGUST 2014

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

FOR YEARS, I resisted publishing the book you now hold in your hands.

That's because the true genius of *l'Art du menuisier* is how André Roubo's plates and text work together to illuminate the craft of woodworking. Reading the text without the plates – or just looking at the plates – is likely to confuse you or lead you to erroneous conclusions.

For example, if you look at plate Nos. 314, 315 and 316, it's easy to conclude that 18th-century woodworkers were using the “waving engine” that Roubo has illustrated there in beautiful detail. Yet in the text Roubo explains that he was unable to find a waving engine to study because they are not in use, so his drawings are based on a 17th-century source and educated guesses.

You'll find situations like this throughout *l'Art du menuisier*; you must have both the plates and text to make sense of Roubo's intent.

So what changed our minds about publishing *The Book of Plates*? The short answer is that the best way to experience *l'Art du menuisier* is to have the plates printed in full size as you read the text.

No matter how you read Roubo's text – in a book, on a computer screen, in French, German or English – having the full-size plates before you is helpful to grasp Roubo's intent. So we have endeavored to make this book useful for the woodworkers and scholars of today and tomorrow.

The plates were digitized at the highest resolution available then printed on 100# Mohawk Superfine paper at a level of detail that requires great skill on a top-line printing press. The pages have been sewn and bound so the book will lie flat on your bench and last for generations of use.

All of the plates are printed at the same size as the 18th-century originals. The only difference in their presentation is with the 45 fold-out plates. We could not find a printer that could produce fold-outs affordably. So we have instead printed the fold-outs over a spread of two pages with a small and intentional gap between the two halves.

We hope you and your heirs enjoy *The Book of Plates* and that Roubo's words and drawings inspire you – as they has us – to become better woodworkers and perhaps earn the title *menuisier*.

Christopher Schwarz

AUGUST 20 14

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An essay on appreciating and measuring the value of hand work

Conclusion to the Art of Woodworking

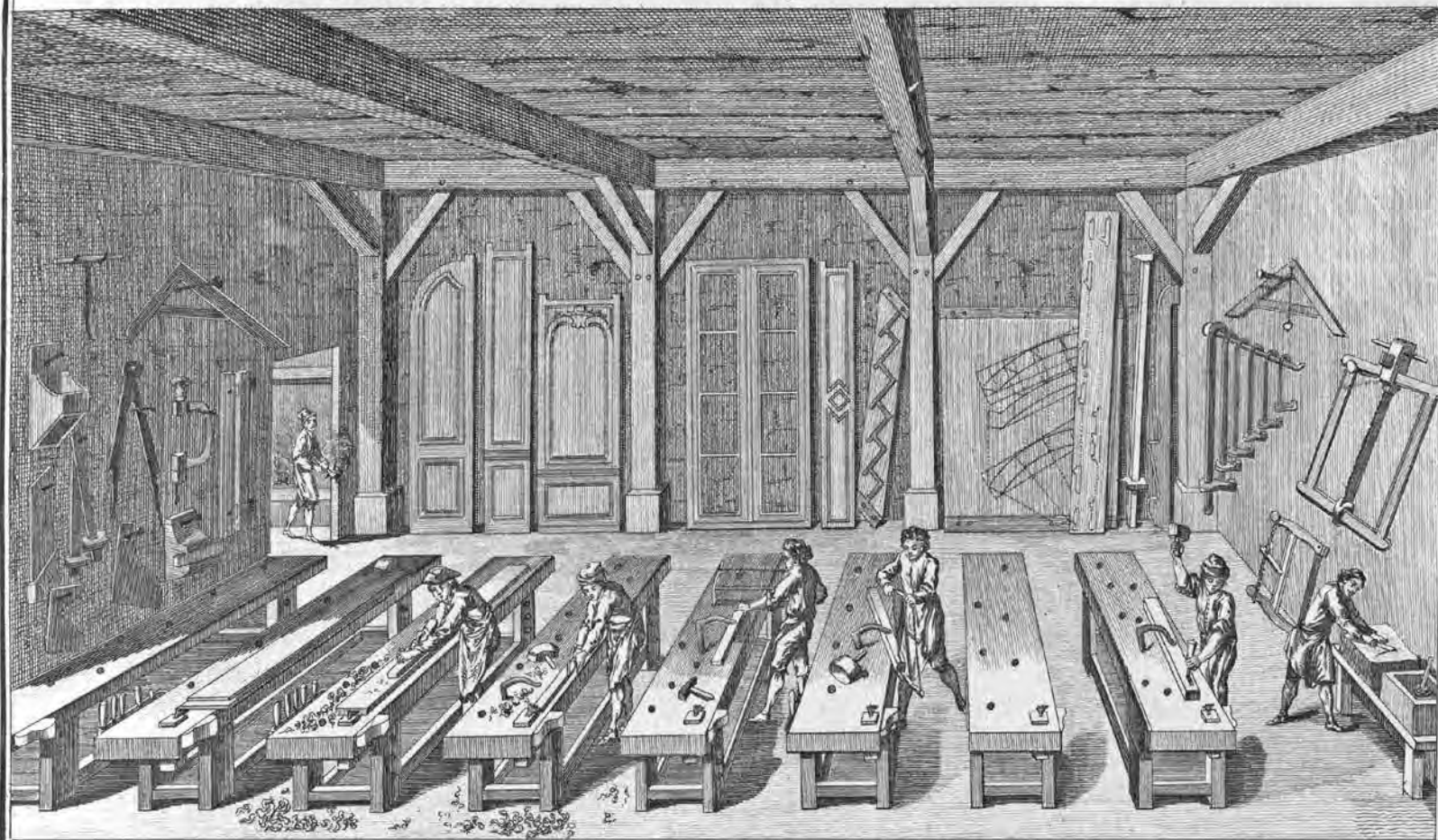


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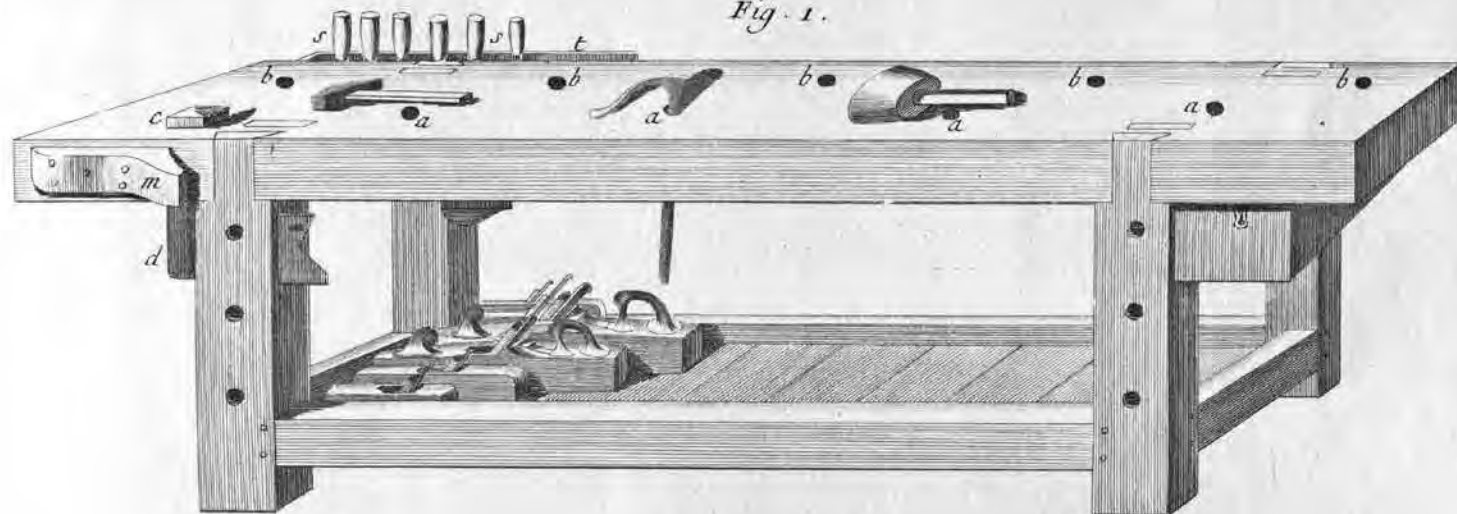


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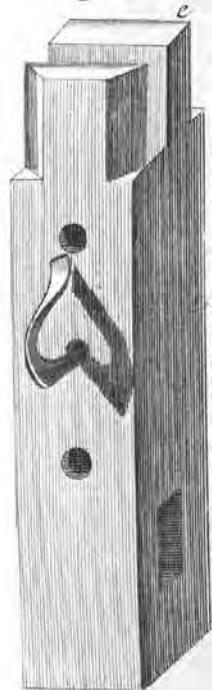


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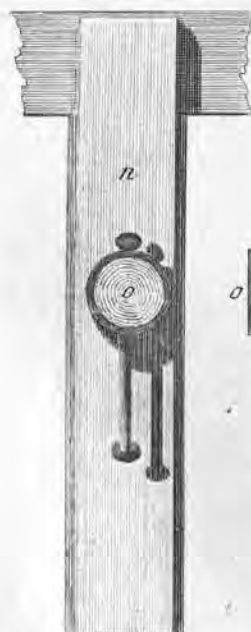


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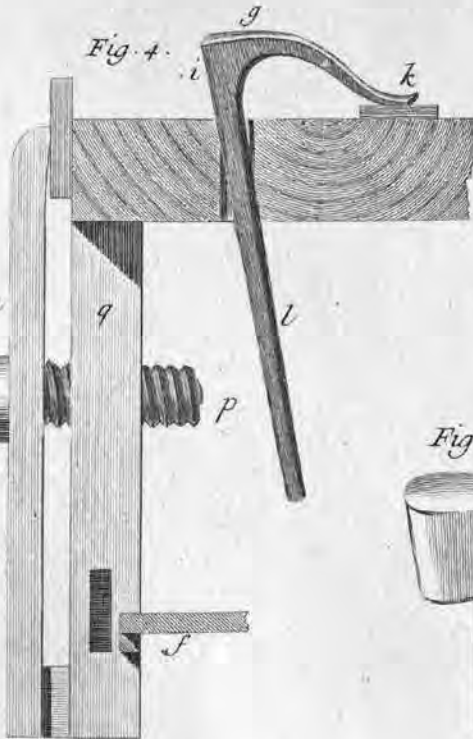


Fig. 6.



Fig. 5.

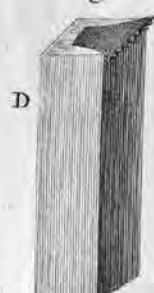


Fig. 7.



Fig. 8.

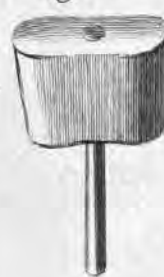
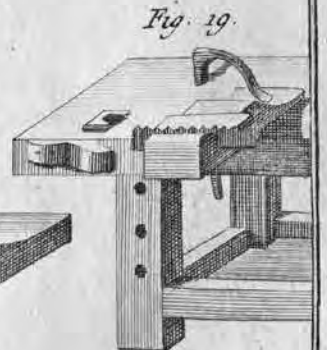
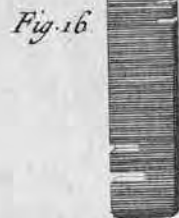
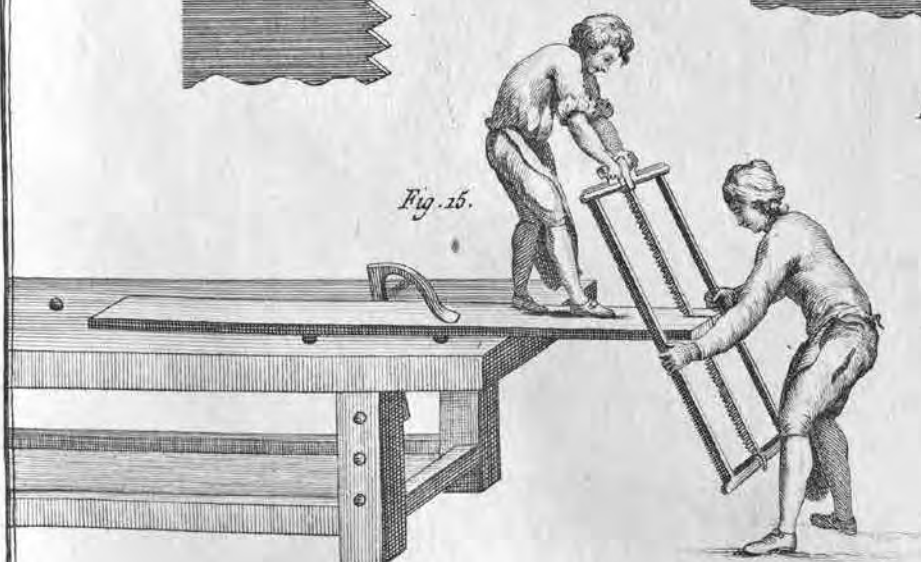
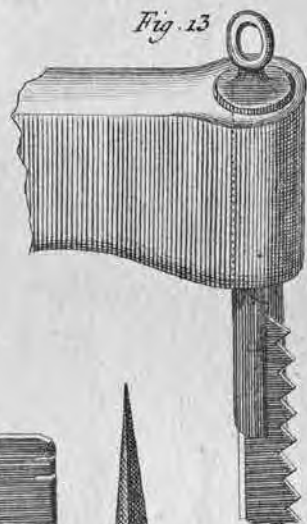
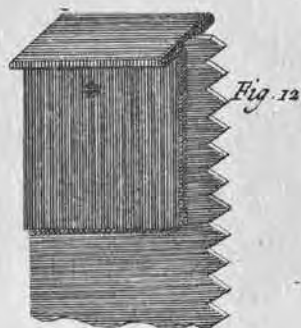
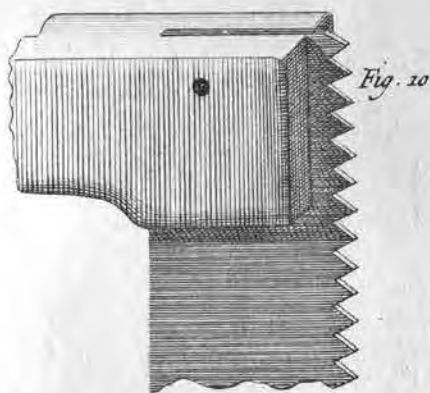
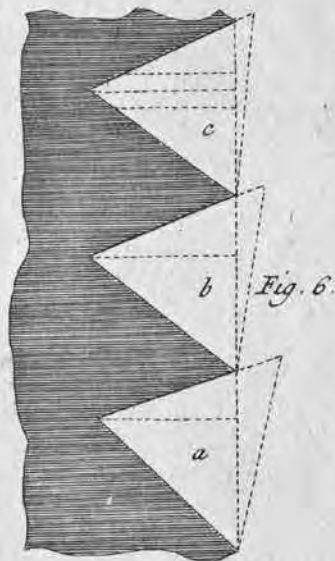
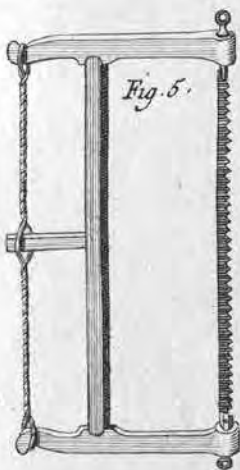
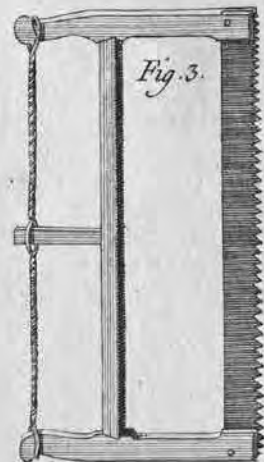
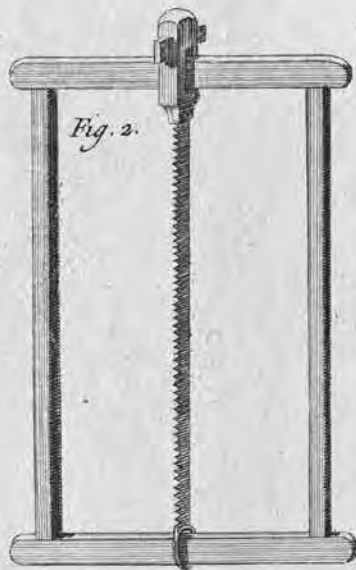
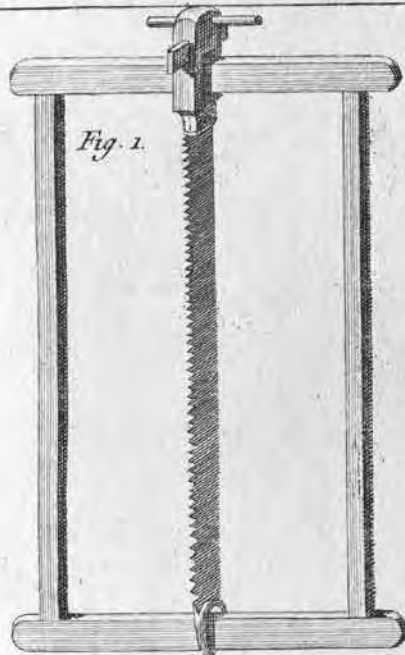
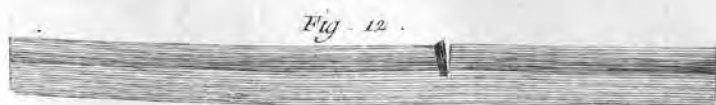
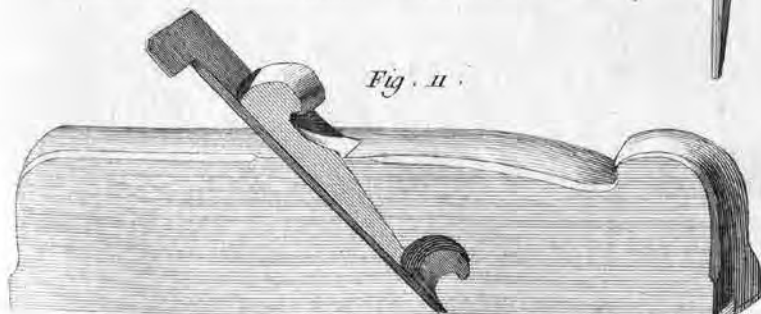
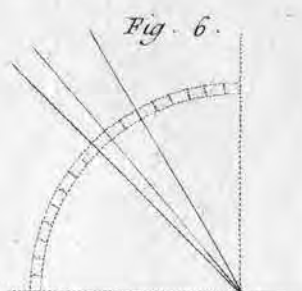
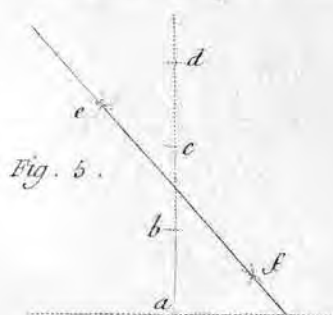
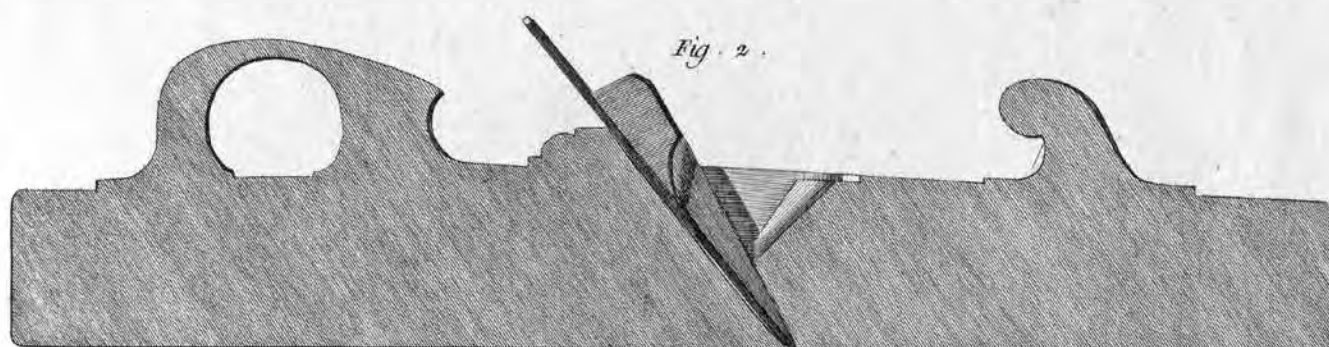
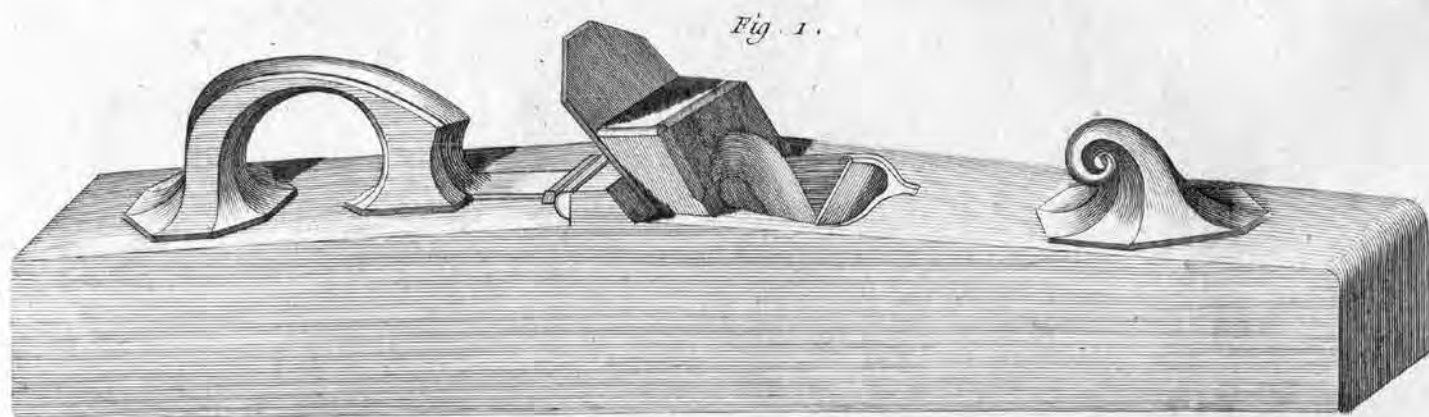


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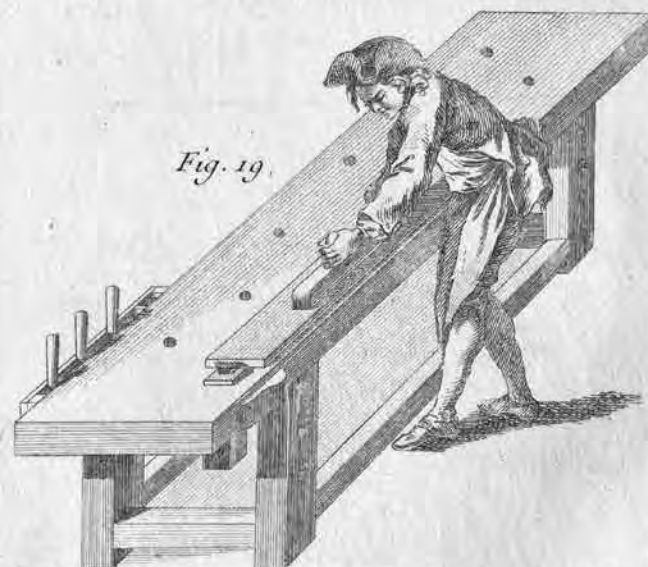
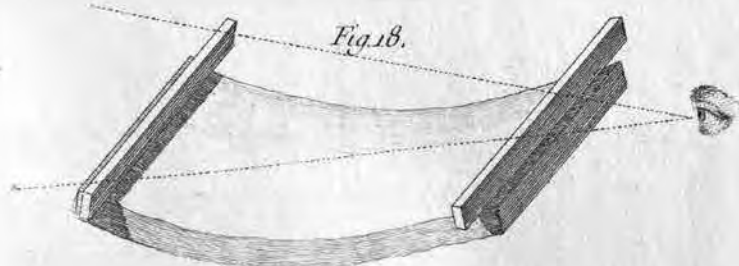
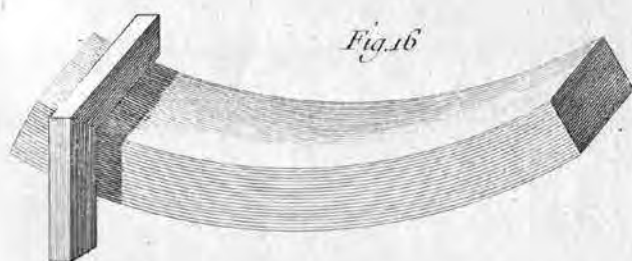
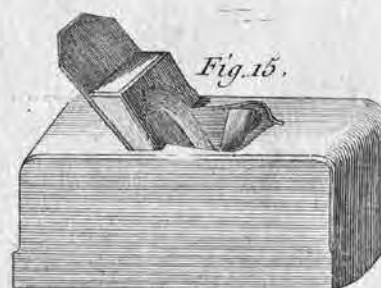
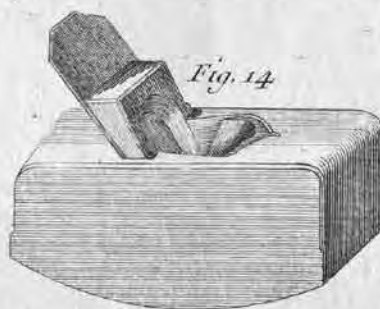
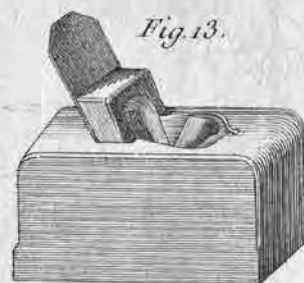
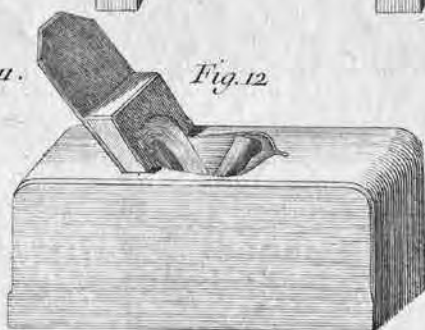
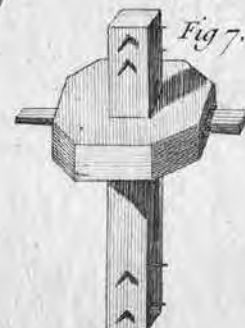
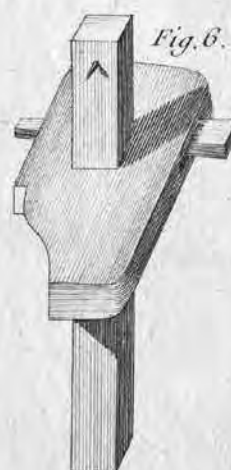
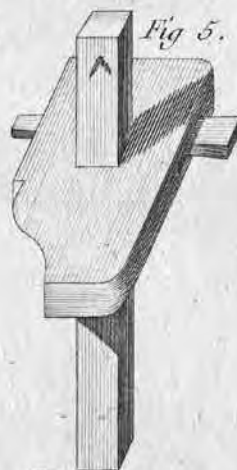
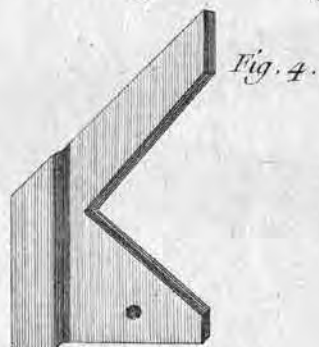
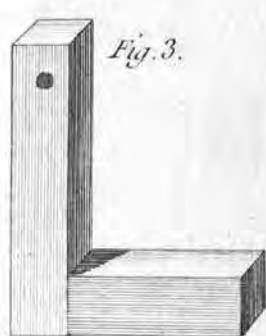


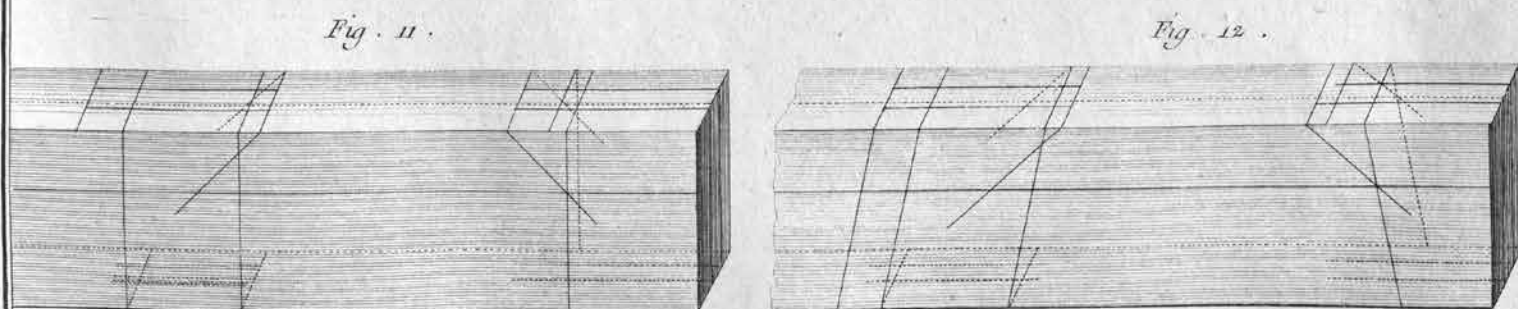
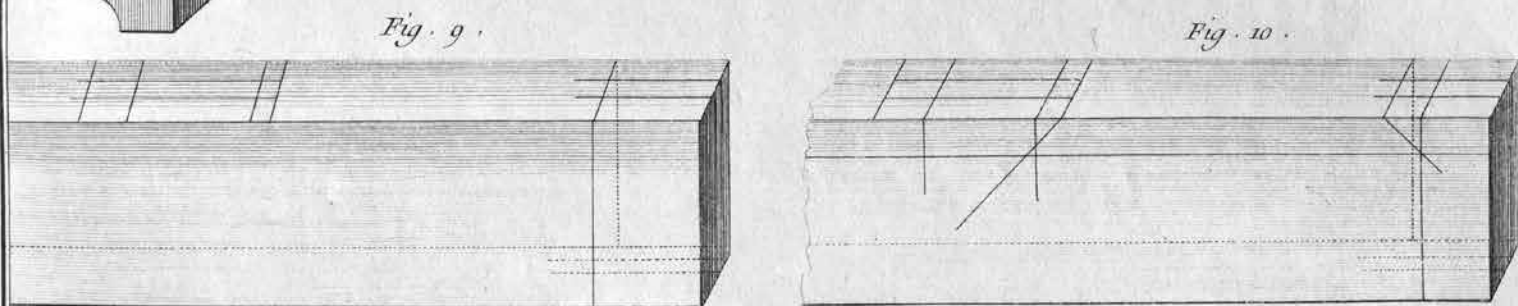
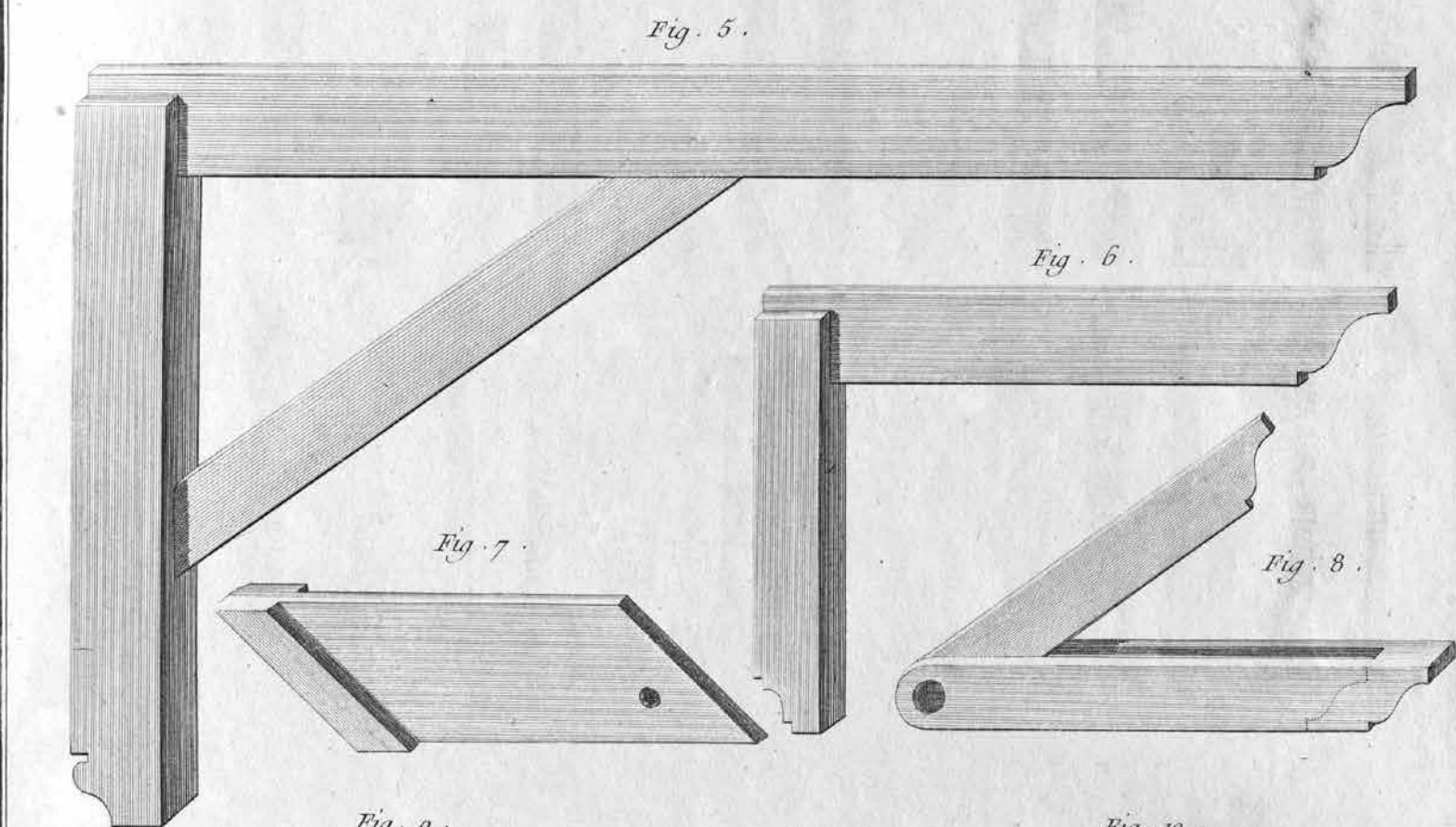
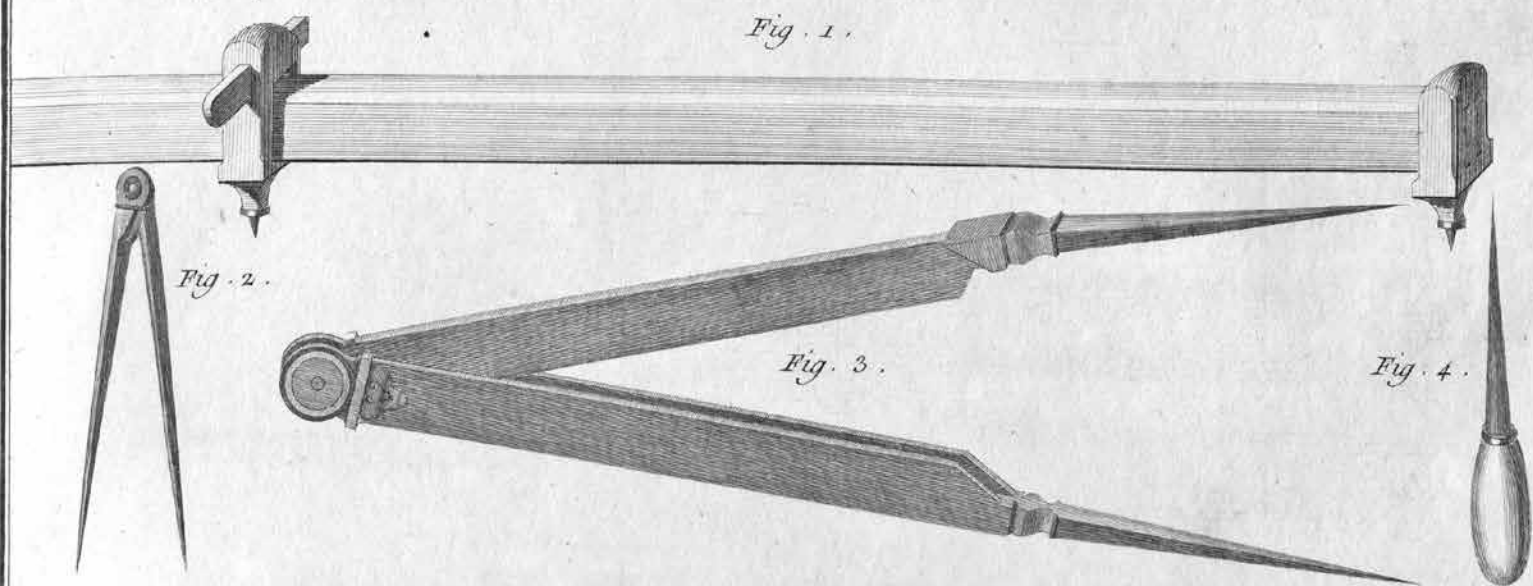




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