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Press Julia Lohmann
2009

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Confronting taboos with subtle humor
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Confronting taboos with subtle humor

By Alice Rawsthorn

LONDON

Fungi, viruses, bacteria and digestive organs don't sound like the most enticing things to see when you're hurtling along a busy London road or, more probably, sitting glumly in one of the city's endless traffic jams.

Gruesome though that combination sounds, it looks surprisingly fetching on the 9,000 petri dishes now displayed outside the Euston Road headquarters of the medical research charity, the Wellcome Trust, as an installation by the German product designer, Julia Lohmann. Each of the dishes contains a pixellated image of one of the most commonly found bacteria in the human body, and together they depict a pair of naked women — and their intestines.

Forcing us to confront things we usually prefer to forget is nothing new to Lohmann, one of the new breed of conceptual designers whose work challenges us to address contentious issues. Often she does this by using materials that are generally considered to be taboo or repulsive including sheep's and cow's stomachs, animal carcasses and, now, bacteria.

Conceptual design is currently very fashionable, especially among young designers, but much of it falls into the category of "great idea, shame about the object" because the execution doesn't live up to the concept. Lohmann's work stands out because it is so cleverly realized that she articulates complex ideas clearly through beauty or humor, sometimes both. "It is gentle, subliminal, yet very effective, a sort of propaganda that teaches by example and inspiration, not inculcation," said Paola Antonelli, senior design curator at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

Take the Cow Bench with which Lohmann, now 31, made her name at her Royal College of Art graduation show in 2004. It is literally a bench shaped like a cow's body and covered in cowhide. You may well have sat on a similar type of leather on numerous sofas without thinking of where it came from, but not while perching on Lohmann's. "It has a wonderful primal appeal," said Emily Campbell, director of design at the Royal Society of Arts in London. "Without being kitsch, it evokes feelings of warmth for the beast." That's the point. By thinking fondly of the cow, we are likely to wonder about how it was treated during its life, and about the contradiction between our sentimentality toward live animals and the commercialization of dead ones. "I am not pointing a finger and saying that it is wrong to use leather for furniture," explained Lohmann. "I just want people to think about it more."

Sitting in her studio in an industrial unit in north London, she seems improbably serene for an agitprop designer with a sunny demeanor and softly accented English. Her interest in animal issues dates back to her childhood in the countryside near the German town of Hildesheim, when Lohmann was torn between becoming an artist, designer or vet. After moving to Britain to study design, she has combined the first two roles with exploring the politics of the third.

After the Cow Bench, she revisited animal issues in a series of lights with shades made from dried sheep's and cow's stomachs, parts of the animals that are often thrown away, despite being edible. People are drawn to the strange, subtle beauty of the shades, until they discover what they are made of.

Lohmann then addressed the politics of fishing in a sculptural installation made during a residency in the Japanese city of Sapporo by constructing a giant wave from hundreds of discarded wooden tuna crates. She chose the wave as a symbol of destruction, and the crates to signify a sea, which was once full of fish, but is now empty after years of irresponsible overfishing.

During her time in Sapporo, Lohmann visited a seaweed farm, and started to explore its potential as a design material. She and her husband, the graphic designer Gero Grundmann, set up an impromptu seaweed workshop in the design gallery, Nilufar, during last year's Milan Furniture Fair. Having made seaweed lampshades there, she is now researching how different seaweeds from all over the world can be used to produce other objects. "We are using up so many natural resources," she said. "If there is one like seaweed that grows fast and isn't being used fully, we should find useful things to do with it."

Lohmann is lucky in having started out at a time when there is growing interest in the type of self-expressive, intellectually provocative objects she produces. The design auctions are still dominated by visual eye candy, mostly whimsical chairs, but as collectors become more knowledgeable and sophisticated, the market for more challenging work like her's will expand. Lohmann is already represented by Galerie Kreo in Paris and Gallery Libby Sellers in London, and her work has been bought by museums, notably the Museum of Modern Art in New York, whose collection includes a Cow Bench called Waltraud (she names them all) after her mother.

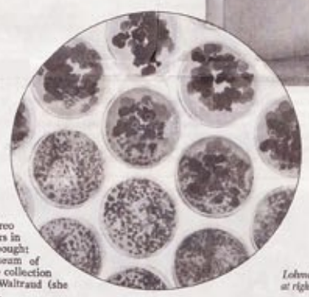
Not all of her ideas work. Lohmann is still struggling with the seaweed project, and last fall she abandoned a plan to make objects from natural crystals after months of research. Nor does everyone approve of her approach. The veteran Italian designer Alessandro Mendini wrote to Galerie Kreo criticizing The Lasting Void, a series of benches cast on the carcasses of dead calves, as "cynical and pointless ... turning the torture of a dead animal into entertainment."

Others believe that the impact of Lohmann's work is rooted in its realism. "The Lasting Void is a very powerful piece for me as a memento mori of the particular animal from which it is cast, but also as a symbol of life," said the curator Gareth Williams, who has included it in "Telling Tales," an exhibition opening this summer at London's Victoria & Albert Museum. "It is the cast of the internal body cavity of a calf and embodies something essential in all of us that we cannot see. Even though much of Julia's work involves animals, I think her principal subject is humanity."

Gero Grundmann

Wellcome Library, London (above and below left)

Clockwise from top, Belinda, a black cow bench; several of the benches in a field; a display at the Wellcome Trust Headquarters in London showing images of microbes on petri dishes placed where the microbes are commonly found in the body; a closeup of the petri dishes; and Julia Lohmann in her kelp workshop last year in Milan.



'It is gentle, subliminal, yet very effective, a sort of propaganda that teaches by example and inspiration, not inculcation.'

Lohmann's Ruminant Bloom light, at right, and her Flock ceiling light, below, made from sheep's stomachs.

Images by Julia Lohmann

iht.com/design
A slide show of Julia Lohmann's work and more columns by Alice Rawsthorn.

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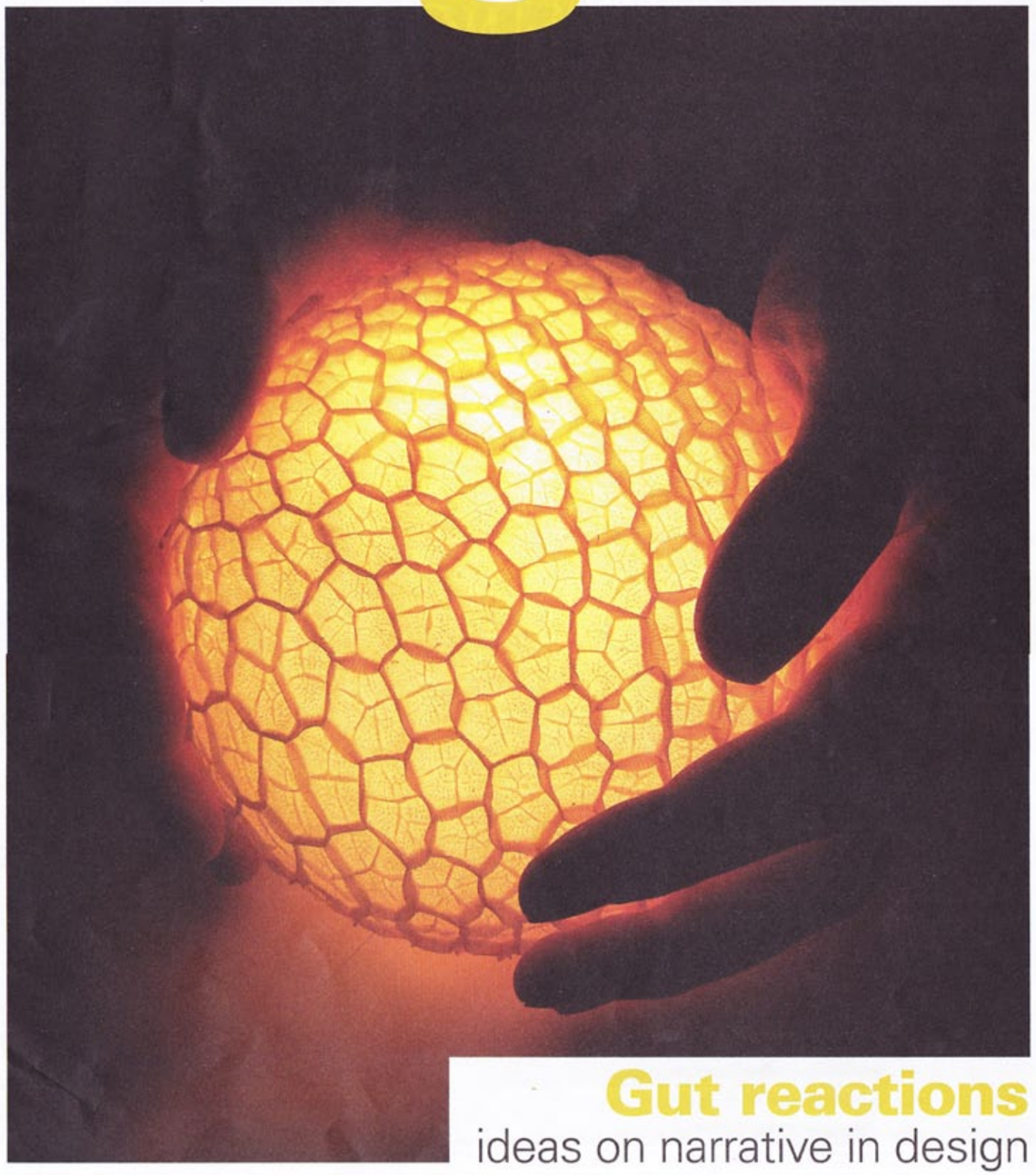

Gut reactions

ideas on narrative in design

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Tall tales

Why shouldn't design tell stories and encourage imaginative interaction, just like art? **Liz Farrelly** considers the narrative potential of some ambitious works of design art, ahead of an upcoming exhibition at the Victoria & Albert Museum

1

© JULIA LOHMANN

2

1 Cow bench, 2005 – 'a leather bench or bovine memento mori', which 'explores the threshold between animal and material', by Julia Lohmann

2 The making of Julia Lohmann's 2007 work Lasting Void, a cast of the internal cavity of a calf

3 and 4 Hideaway Furniture, part of Designs for Fragile Personalities in Anxious Times, 2004/05, by Dunne & Raby. Designed for people who are afraid of being abducted, these objects open in surprising ways, encouraging the occupant to feel in control

5 Co-Existence, 2009, a work for the Wellcome Trust featuring 9000 Petri-dishes with images of bacteria colonies, by Julia Lohmann

6 Pixelated Chair, 2007, by Studio Makkink & Bey

THE FINAL chapter of Gareth Williams' seminal book about the contemporary furniture industry, The Furniture Machine (2006), foretold the future. Pointing to the 'lifestyle' triumvirate – retail, fashion, media – Williams charted the appropriation of furniture as a carrier of meaning beyond mere function. That observation, in turn, kick-started his next project, which comes to fruition this month in Telling Tales. The exhibition at the Victoria & Albert Museum and its accompanying book investigate the recent phenomenon of design art, and the complex aims and motives of the designers producing these curious objects.

'Cutting-edge contemporary design has conquered the taste market. It is very high-end and very expensive,' says Williams. 'I wanted to curate an exhibition of these museum-quality objects, but not simply display the expense and gloss without offering a critique.'

If these objects are conceived in a system that is closer to the fine art world than to industrial mass-production, with a designer's personal project nurtured to fruition by an alliance of supportive gallerists and patient collectors, then it follows that the results will embody more complex concepts than 'is this chair comfortable?'. 'These designs allude to ideas beyond the object itself,' suggests Williams. 'I realised that story-telling and narrative connected these designers, because rather like art does, their objects evoke meaning, myths, fairy tales and history.'

Employing a methodology informed by literary criticism and material culture, Williams set out to 'read' the furniture displayed in Telling Tales, by charting the development of story and life in tandem, from the innocence and sanctuary of childhood and nature, to the worldliness of social display and its inevitable decadence, and the finality of anxiety and mortality. Williams' thesis posits these design art objects as material embodiments of universal concepts and narrative moments.

But how have the designers reacted to this process? 'I've given them hints of my thinking, and they've been open to the interpretation', says Williams. 'The designers are not consciously evoking these stories, but are providing us with glimpses into what we share. These designers feel confident enough to speak through their work and make statements.'

Williams' project layers meaning on top of already completed designs, but how and why do designers create meaning and narrative in their own work? 'We're interested in objects that spark different stories in people's imaginations, usually about what it would be used for, and we try to provide just enough clues to trigger a train of thought,' explains Fiona Raby of Dunne & Raby.

She goes on to explain one of the projects, a coffin-sized safe-room, constructed from parquet-patterned oak. 'The Hideaway objects deal with the emotional part of our lives, our irrational thoughts and anxieties, which are rarely acknowledged or materialised in any formal way. In many ways they are ridiculous – in their scale, their function and their attempts to become invisible through camouflage. They are themselves irrational, but they engage with idea of possibility.'

Isn't that leaving too much of the meaning up to the individual, precisely because imagination is culturally specific? 'That is the point. Ambiguity is very important, but it needs to be crafted; too much and people can't make any sense of the design at all, too little and there's no room for their imaginations to wander,', suggests Raby. 'We demand a lot from people who encounter our work – we think of narrative objects as generators of narrative rather than transmitters or representations. Imaginative interaction is essential.'

Fellow Royal College of Art tutor Julia Lohmann agrees with Raby's insistence on ambiguity, but foregrounds accessibility. 'Everything we communicate is understood subjectively. Consequently, it's important that objects are accessible,' she explains. 'The best objects can be understood on a variety of levels and allow their users to understand them better the more they interact with them. If access points are considered during the design process, from functional to emotional and aesthetic, the user can reflect further. The objects shouldn't shout their messages, but they work with what's between your ears.'

Lohmann's work explores the aesthetic potential of organic materials. 'Every material has a very long story to tell,' she says. 'Sheep stomachs speak of pastures, grassland and slaughterhouses and about the successful breeding of an animal species over thousands of years; plastic speaks of ancient forests, sunk in the mud, of oil pipes and tankers, easy money and landfills. There are a vast array of stories.'

Formerly of Droog Design, Jurgen Bey creates both high-value limited editions and designs that are more affordable thanks to batch production. For him, narrative and ideas lead directly to change. 'Design has its own language, and can guide people about how to use it. And when you can guide people, you can change society with design,' explains Bey. He suggests that design can communicate in a similar way to how a fairy tale might address a complex issue under the veil 'innocence'.

'Society needs people to think differently, to be open, to appreciate otherness, since that is what fuels progress,' says Bey. Once again, the slippery nature of language is something to be celebrated. 'Things have their own language, and can be read by the culture they are made for. But misunderstanding is part of culture. We have been given different languages – thanks to the Tower of Babel. Imagine if we only had one language – we would understand everything, no questions asked. What would science be like if we had no riddles?,' he says.

For designers and curators, objects that encourage contemplation and comment present endless narrative possibilities and ultimately create meaning. But, being open to reading that requires a little more effort than simply sitting comfortably. ●

Telling Tales: Fantasy and Fear in Contemporary Design is at the Victoria & Albert Museum, Cromwell Road, London SW7 from 14 July to 18 October

PHOTO: ALAIN SPELTDOORN, COURTESY STUDIO MAKKINK & BEY

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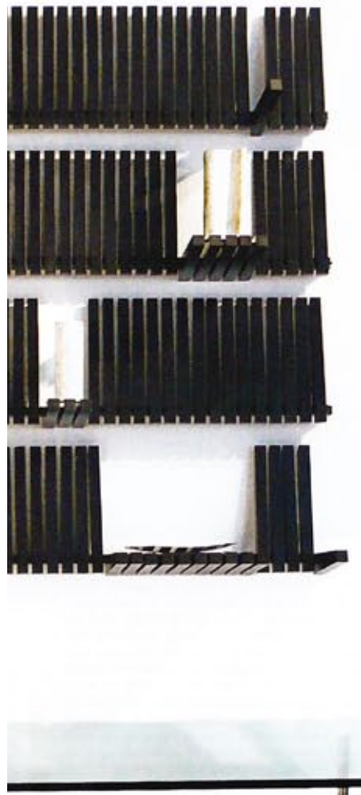
at home again, naturally

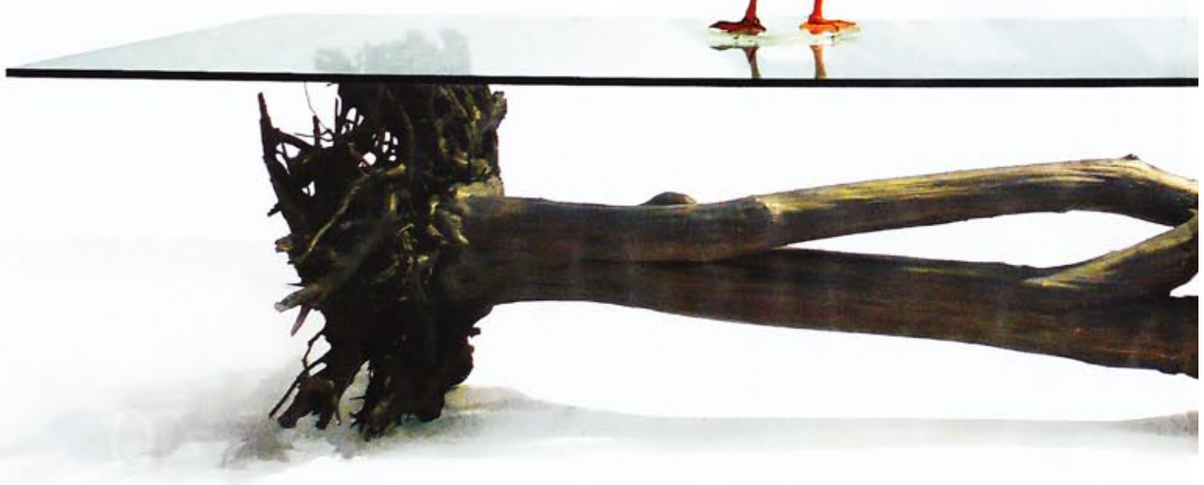
Designers are forging a new relationship with the natural world to weird and wonderful effect, says Helen Chislett.

Sheep stomachs, dandelion seeds, lumps of solid granite and seaweed are not the usual ingredients of a designer's palette, but there is something raw and elemental underfoot in the often rarefied worlds of furniture and lighting that heralds a new relationship with the natural and organic world. Just as the Slow Food movement was born out of a desire to reconnect with where food comes from and to kick back against homogenous ready-meals, so this trend towards "slow design" echoes a desire to ease the planet's problems by forging a new relationship with nature.

"Designers are embracing both nature and science, and in doing so are creating beauty that exceeds our imagination," says Kate Franklin, creative director of trend forecaster LSN Global. "In many ways they are finding a new aesthetic which pushes the boundaries of what we previously thought possible."

The natural world has been a source of artistic inspiration for millennia, but young, international designers are seeking a new kind of interaction. Take the work of Lonneke Gordijn and Ralph Nauta, graduates from Design Academy Eindhoven and founders of Dutch design atelier, Drift. At the 2007 Milan Furniture Fair they presented Fragile Future II, a wall installation comprised of circuit boards connected to LED lights, each one shrouded by dandelion seed heads. Pause to think about this. Each dandelion is tweezered apart, seed by seed, then reassembled by hand onto a LED bulb with glue – the process takes about half an hour. Fragile Future can involve up to 50 circuit boards – hundreds of dandelions – but you can also buy a single Dandelight for about €75. They have also launched a 3-D version of Fragile Future at Art Basel with Carpenters Workshop Gallery making it possible to create objects such as chandeliers (prices on request).





At this point you may be thinking, why? But Gordijn is clear about their reasons: "As a designer, it's rare to find a beautiful shape that is not related to nature, and you can never reproduce good natural forms by using industrial processes. I actually find that a very comforting thought. When we first had the idea for the Dandelight, I was trying to find something that had the same beauty, softness and poetry of a dandelion, but I could not find anything. The only thing like a dandelion is a dandelion."

Nauta says that they regard themselves as serious industrial designers, but they want their work to surprise: "People have lost their balance with nature. Romanticism was a reaction against industrialisation, and our work is a reaction against the communication age – everything digital, too fast, overloaded with images. We believe it is important to find a balance in this mass-consumption world. Fragile Future is about showing what else is possible."

The German designer Julia Lohmann, who has been based in London for several years, has a desire to remind people of our intimate connections with the plant and animal kingdoms. "There is a paradox at work. On the one hand we are distancing ourselves from nature as far as humanly possible, creating our own artificial world, but the more we do that, the more we long to be a part of nature and bring it back into our lives," she says. "It is ironic to me that when we speak of animals we talk so much of the importance of natural habitats and yet we have removed ourselves very much from our own ones – and over time that breeds unhappiness within us."

In her sketchbook, Lohmann makes two lists: one itemises the animals we kill and the materials commonly made from them, the other is of objects made from those materials. She then looks for ways to bridge the gap between the animal and the object, such as lights made from sheep stomachs (pictured overleaf, from £300) and benches made from entire cow hides that replicate the shape of a cow (price on request).

"My sheep stomach lights and cow benches have two functions. One is to use in the conventional manner, but the other is to make you think, to look at your own leather sofa or shoes with fresh eyes. You don't have to buy one for it to fulfil that function – if it is written about and thought about, it already works," says Lohmann.

Now she is turning her eye to the potential of seaweed, fascinated by its strength, beauty and translucency. "We're running out of so many resources but kelp is not fully used as a material – it could replace plastics or wood veneers." She has produced wonderful kelp lights (price on request), and is studying different samples of species to find new ways of adapting it. To this end, she has been awarded a research

This picture: **Chilean designer Sebastian Errazuriz's work includes this Tree Table with integral Crespon tree (price on request).**

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fellowship by the Stanley Picker Gallery at Kingston University. In collaboration with a marine biologist, Lohmann has also seeded a collection of objects with micro-organisms, creating a coral-like pattern on designed objects inspired by marine pollution.

The work of Chilean designer Sebastian Errazuriz also demands us to pause and reconsider familiar objects. His Tree Table (pictured on opening page, price on request), for example, uses a Crespon tree as the base. It makes a raw and powerful statement against the crisp stainless-steel legs and glass top. Cristina Grajales, the gallerist who represents him, says that for Errazuriz such materials offer a different blank canvas. "Sebastian is fascinated with the dichotomy of life and death. He urges people to be aware of every moment, and truly stop and contemplate the object," she says.

British designer Max Lamb, who along with Lohmann and two others was a Designer of the Future at last year's Design Miami, is also passionate about reconnecting with raw materials. In 2007, he took part in a show of former RCA graduates called Gradual, curated by Martino Gamper, for which he chiselled a boulder of granite from the clay mines of his native St Austell, Cornwall, into a chair of solid rock. "People are very familiar with stone floors, bathrooms and kitchen-worktop surfaces, but by then it is so processed, shiny and flat that you can't see much of its original form. My motivation was to use stone in as raw a state as possible and remind people about where it actually comes from, like the rocks you see on hillsides, in fields or on river beds."

Above: **Julia Lohmann's sheep-stomach Ruminant Bloom Lamps (from £300).** Below: **Max Lamb's granite chairs (from $10,000).**

Since then, he has produced about 15 such pieces (from $10,000, examples pictured below). They are time-consuming to make and Lamb works with selected quarries, from Ladycross in Northumberland and La Cerne in Switzerland to a Delaware County bluestone for a solo show at Johnson Trading Gallery in New York last autumn (at that show, work was priced at between $10,000 and $40,000). He is involved at every stage, from choosing the rock and directing how it should be cut to the grinding, polishing and finishing that he does by hand himself. "It is very labour intensive. This is a material that is very resistant to changing the shape it has had for millions of years." And yet like Lohmann, Gordijn and Nauta, he sees himself as an industrial designer first and foremost, with collaborations under way between the Austrian glass company J&L Lobmeyr and the Tokyo furniture company E&Y. "I know how to work with industrial processes and make things by hand. At the moment I'm interested in exploring both."

"My motivation was to use stone in as raw a state as possible and remind people about where it comes from."

Brothers Humberto and Fernando Campana, named Designers of the Year 2008 at Design Miami, have long used natural materials from their native Brazil, such as the apui plant and indigenous amethyst crystals, integrated into their thought-provoking but often playful furniture. At Milan this year, they launched the Cobogó Table, produced by Plusdesign (about €21,850) with a terracotta clay top. To them, nature is an essential building block of design, as Fernando explains: "It is about nature but, in fact, nature is also about the humanisation of a product – a way of expressing how people relate to one another. When we were designing 20 years ago we used such materials not to be 'eco correct', but simply out of economic necessity. Now we consciously choose materials such as the apui that can be reused." Much of their work echoes the Brazilian talent for improvisation and the need to capture people's imaginations if the environmental message is ever to hit home. As Humberto says: "Design is like a movie that searches for a happy ending."

Certainly, it seems that design's renewed passion for organic and natural materials is linked not just to aesthetics, but to the knowledge that preserving the planet should be top of everyone's agenda. Nadja Swarovski, vice-president of international communications at Swarovski, who has been pivotal in forging successful collaborations between the company and leading designers, recognises the design elite are not just concerned about highlighting problems, but about solving them too. "There is a definite shift in aesthetics right now, a down-to-earth mood, with designers excited by materials such as stone and wood again," she says. The planet is in danger and this translation of the natural world into design is very much part of that Zeitgeist. This new love affair with the organic is all part of a new appreciation of what we have and what we must do to save it." ✦

GROW WITH IT

Campana Brothers, campanas.com and see Moss Gallery. **Carpenters Workshop Gallery,** 3 Albemarle Street, London W1 (020-3051 5939; www.carpenterswork shopgallery.com). **Cristina Grajales,** 4th Floor, 10 Greene Street, New York (+1212-219 9941; www.cristinagrajalesinc.com). **Drift,** www.designdrift.nl and see Carpenters Workshop Gallery. **Johnson Trading Gallery,** 490 Greenwich Street, New York (+1212-925 1110; www.johnsontradinggallery.com). **Julia Lohmann,** julialohmann.co.uk. **Max Lamb,** www.maxlamb.org and see Johnson Trading Gallery. **Moss Gallery,** 150 Greene Street, New York (+1212-204 7100; www.mossonline.com). **Sebastian Errazuriz,** www.meetsebastian.com and see Cristina Grajales. **Swarovski,** 020-7255 8410; www.atelierswarovski.com.

To see more designs that incorporate the natural and organic, including Drift's Dandelights, go to **howtospendit.com**

CRISTINA GRAJALES, JULIA LOHMANN, MAX LAMB.

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Neues Deutschland

Ausgerechnet der belgische Kurator Max Borka zeigt uns, wie avantgardistisch junge deutsche Designer sind

—— *Herr Borka, woher rührt Ihre Begeisterung für deutsches Design?*
—— Ich war schon immer von deutschem Design umgeben. Ich bin gewissermaßen damit aufgewachsen. Mein Elternhaus war von oben bis unten mit Braun-Geräten von Dieter Rams bestückt.
—— *Das hat Sie offenbar nicht zu einem Fan von ihm gemacht. In Ihrer Herforder Ausstellung »Nullpunkt. Nieuwe German Gestaltung« fehlt er.*
—— Rams ist zweifellos einer der wichtigsten deutschen Designer. Aber mir geht es darum, etwas Neues zu zeigen. Deutsches Design wurde immer mit Purismus und Funktionalität verbunden. Diese Image wurde geradezu als Marke gepflegt. Unsere Ausstellung zeigt ein unbekanntes Gesicht des deutschen Designs – experimentell und verspielt.
—— *Sehen Sie neue Bewegung in der Designszene?*
—— Ich habe für meine Ausstellung eine Deutschlandreise unternommen und viele Designer besucht. Besonders in Berlin trifft man auf völlig neue Einflüsse. Man kann dort beobachten, dass die Gestalter wieder alles aus einer Hand machen. Sie haben die Idee, sie stellen das Produkt selbst her, sie verkaufen es sogar im eigenen Laden.
—— *Es gibt in Berlin wohl einfach zu wenige Aufträge aus der Industrie.*
—— Gerade darin liegt auch eine Chance. Die Markenindustrie hat in den vergangenen Jahren einen unglaublichen Einfluss auf das Design gewonnen. Design ist heute oft nur noch dazu da, Produkte zu verkaufen. Denken Sie doch mal an die Autoindustrie: An welches Auto, das in den vergangenen Jahren gebaut wurde, erinnert man sich noch?
—— *In der Ausstellung sind unter anderem Lampen zu sehen, die aus Kuhpansen gemacht wurden. Ist das noch Produktgestaltung oder Kunst?*
—— Immer wenn der Einfluss der Industrie zu groß wurde, haben Designer sich in die Kunst geflüchtet, um sich wieder neu zu entdecken. Ich glaube, in Deutschland gibt es da enormen Nachholbedarf.
—— *Sieht es denn im Ausland besser aus?*
—— In Italien hatten sich in den achtziger Jahren radikale Bewegungen gebildet wie die Gruppe Memphis. Dabei waren Ettore Sottsass und Andrea Branzi. Zwanzig Jahre später waren diese Rebellen führende Designer.
—— *Und Deutschland hat keine Rebellen hervorgebracht?*
—— Und ob! Es ist erstaunlich, wie viele Designer vom Neuen Deutschen Design der Achtziger beeinflusst waren. Auf meiner Deutschlandreise habe ich auch Andreas Brandolini besucht, in Saarbrücken. Einer der wichtigsten Vertreter dieser experimentellen Bewegung. Seine Arbeit ist völlig vergessen.
—— *Es scheint, dass die Deutschen Hilfe aus dem Ausland benötigen. In Ihrer Ausstellung spielen auch Spanier wie Martí Guixé eine große Rolle.*
—— Er wohnt seit Langem in Berlin, arbeitet dort und wird von Berlin inspiriert. Seltsam, dass noch niemand vor mir darauf gekommen ist, seine Arbeit als deutsches Design zu bezeichnen.
—— *Hat Ihre Reise Ihr Bild von Deutschland verändert?*
—— Ja, ich liebe es jetzt noch mehr.

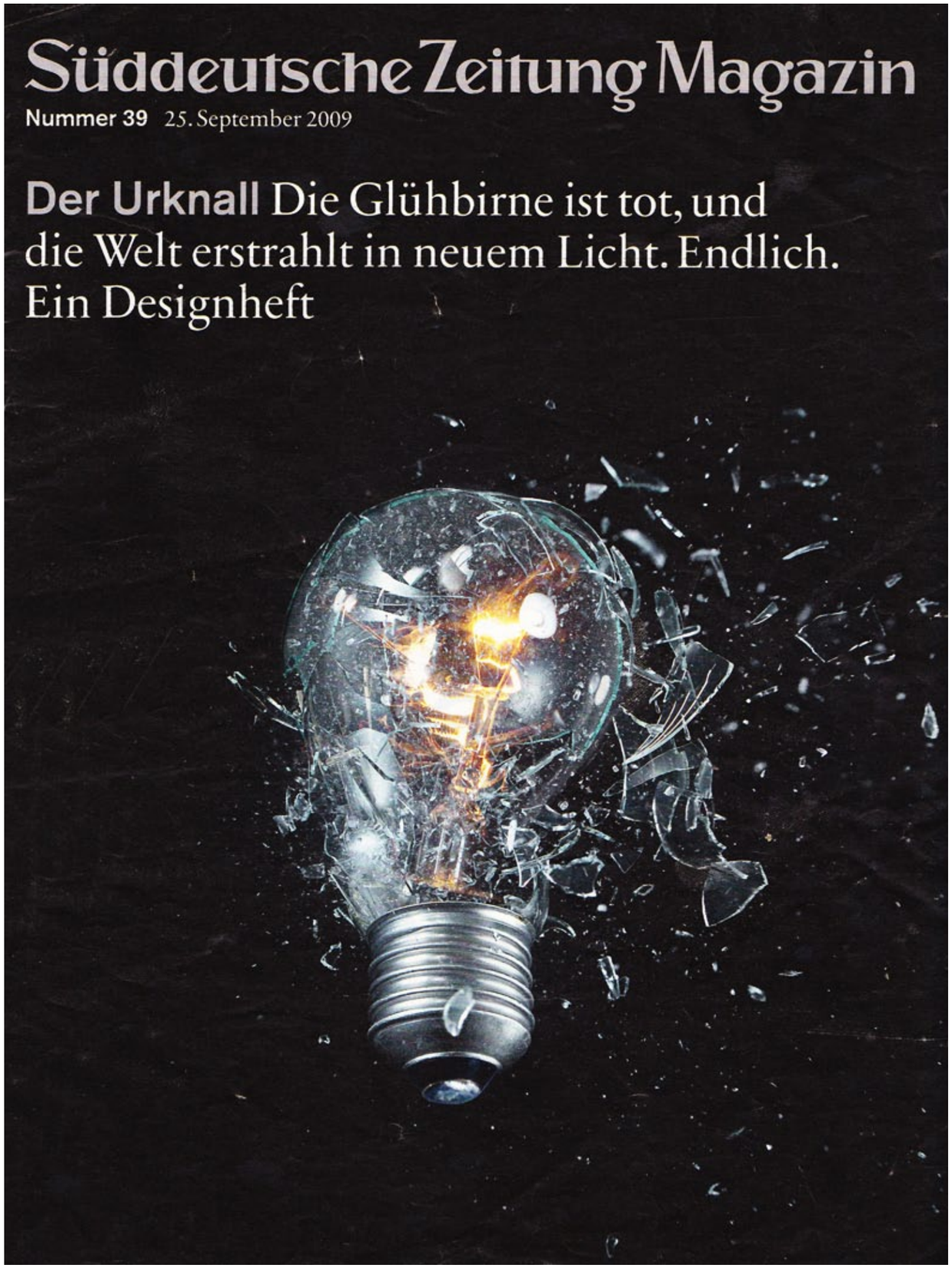
Das Gespräch führte Tillmann Prüfer

Julia Lohmann, Lasting Void, 2007. Die Fiberglas-Bank ist der Abguss eines ausgehöhlten Rinderkörpers

Jerszy Seymour, Bonnie and Clyde, 2001. Der in Berlin lebende Designer hat einen 1985er Ford Escort Coupé nachgebaut und den Innenraum als Sofa gestaltet

Linda Kostowski & Mashallah! Design, The T-Shirt-Issue, 2008. Kleidung, die sich zu Wolfsköpfen falten lässt

Max Borka, 54, ist Autor und Kurator. Der Belgier schreibt über Kunst, Architektur und Design und lehrt an der Universität in Gent. Seine Ausstellung »Nullpunkt. Nieuwe German Gestaltung« ist vom 14. Februar bis zum 19. April im Herforder Museum Marta zu sehen



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Entschuldigung, das klingt jetzt etwas unappetitlich: Die Designerin Julia Lohmann fertigt Lampen aus Schlachtabfällen, arbeitet mit Schafmägen und Kalbsgerippen – aber wenn es doch so wunderschön anzuschauen ist?

Von Raphael Honigstein / Foto: Heiko Prigge

Tief im Inneren dieser fremdartigen Zellstrukturen schimmert es zart, und dann staunt man: So schön kann Licht sein, in getrocknete Schafmägen gehüllt. »Flock«, Herde, heißt eine dieser aus Schlachtabfällen gefertigten Lampen, die ihre heikle Entstehungsgeschichte ganz bewusst im Namen tragen. »Ich arbeite gern mit Dingen, die andere übersehen oder wegwerfen«, sagt Julia Lohmann, 31, »ich will sichtbar machen, dass das Material seinen Ursprung im Tod eines Tieres hat.« Die gebürtige Hildesheimerin arbeitet seit zehn Jahren als Produktdesignerin. Ihr Studio befindet sich in Kentish Town, einem Stadtteil im Norden Londons, ihr Thema: die Würde und Ästhetik der Vergänglichkeit. Es ist also kein schwarzer Humor oder gar Zynismus, der ihren Objekten zugrunde liegt, eher Respekt vor dem Rohstoff Natur. Ihr »Lasting Void«-Hocker (bleibende Leere) aus Plastik zum Beispiel schuldet seine eigentümliche Form dem leeren, organlosen Brustkorb eines Kalbes. »Das Tier starb eines natürlichen Todes auf dem Feld und wurde deswegen nicht für den menschlichen Verzehr freigegeben«, erklärt Lohmann. »Indem ich sein Inneres ausgegossen habe, gebe ich ihm die Würde der Erinnerung zurück, die auch einem Wesen zusteht, das die Landwirtschaft als wertlos ansieht.«

Julia Lohmann will Dinge von Bestand machen. Die Flüchtigkeit unserer Verwertungsgesellschaft ist dabei ihr Ausgangspunkt. Bei den aus Tiermägen geformten Lampen oder Sitzbänken in

Julia Lohmann bringt Licht in die Verwertungskette: Lampe „Kelp" aus getrocknetem Seetang (oben). Lampe „Flock" aus konservierten Schafmägen.

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EIN BUCH NAMENS ZIMBO
DAS NEUE BUCH VON
MAX GOLDT
ROWOHLT BERLIN VERLAG
€ 17,90 (D) / € 18,40 (A) / sFr. 32,20 (UVP)

Design, das Fragen stellt: „Cow Bench" zeigt schon in der Form, woher das Leder kam für den Bezug. Die Installation „The Catch" aus Fischkisten spielt auf die Überfischung der Meere an.

Kuhform, die jeweils mit dem Leder eines einzigen Tieres bezogen sind, wird offensichtlich, dass sie den Tod immer mitdenkt. Schön muss es natürlich trotz allem sein, denn sonst ginge die Botschaft verloren. Lohmann begreift ihre Objekte als »ethisches Barometer«, das Hersteller wie Käufer vor die Frage stellt, welchen moralischen Preis sie bereit sind zu zahlen. Sich selber sieht sie dabei keineswegs auf der sauberen Seite. Sie isst schon ab und zu Fleisch. »Aber nur solches, das ein gutes Leben hatte.«

Als Kind wollte sie Tierärztin werden. Später arbeitete sie auf einer Farm mit Pferden und Schafen in Island. Wie unsentimental dort mit Tieren umgegangen wurde, aber auch wie respektvoll, ist ihr im Gedächtnis geblieben: »Vom Feld auf den Teller.« Sie lernte Bauern kennen, die jedes ihrer Schweine an seinem Gang erkennen konnten. 2001 ging sie nach England, studierte zuerst Grafik in Surrey und danach Produktdesign am Royal College of Art. In ihrer Abschlussarbeit untersuchte sie 2005 die Rolle von Tieren in der zeitgenössischen Kunst: »Warum stoßen sich Leute an Damien Hirsts Formaldehyd-Kadavern, aber nicht an dem Steak, das sie essen?«

Die oft willkürlichen Kategorisierungen von Tieren in »Freunde und Feinde« hatte sie drei Jahre zuvor schon mit ihrem Partner und Ehemann Gero Grundmann zum Thema gemacht. Ihre Grafikabschlussarbeit war eine Art Guerilla-Aktion: Die beiden schlichen sich in einen unbewachten Raum der Tate-Modern-Galerie in London und bauten eine Installation auf, bei der in Farbe getauchte Maden über Londoner Stadtpläne krochen und die britische Nationalflagge abbildeten. »Wir gaben den Maden Namen und sahen, wie die Leute sie plötzlich als Individuen wahrnahmen«, sagt Grundmann. Mehrere Stunden blieb die Aktion vom Museumspersonal unentdeckt. »Als wir gehen mussten, machten sich die Besucher ungekannte Sorgen: ›Sie werden die Maden doch nicht töten?‹«

Ihre ersten Lampen aus Tiermägen stellte Lohmann 2005 noch auf dem eigenen Balkon her. Zurzeit arbeitet sie im Auftrag der Kingston University in London mit appetitlicherem Material: Aus getrocknetem Seetang sollen Lampenschirme entstehen. »Ich habe Meeresbiologen in aller Welt angeschrieben und um Seetang gebeten«, sagt sie. »Neulich bin ich sogar mit einem Koffer voller nasser Meerespflanzen aus Irland zurückgekommen und habe sie zu Hause in den Trockner gesteckt.« Man sieht die ersten Prototypen und staunt: Als essbare Hülle für Reis und rohen Fisch wirkt das Zeug auf einmal tatsächlich verschenkt.

Raphael Honigstein **musste beim Anblick von Julia Lohmanns Seetanglampen sofort an die hervorragenden Sushi seines Londoner Lieblingsjapaners „Roka" in der Charlotte Street 37 denken. Das Licht dort ist übrigens eher schummrig.**

Fotos: **Yoshisato Komaki (1)**

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L'ÉCOLE DES FEMMES

Depuis une dizaine d'années, le design ne s'accorde plus seulement au masculin. Nombreuses sont les jeunes femmes à opter pour ce métier et à développer une approche singulière de l'objet qui se veut pourtant loin de tout cliché.

Par Olivier Reneau.

Même si le XXe siècle se souviendra des femmes qui ont contribué à l'essor de la modernité artistique, de Eileen Gray à Gae Aulenti, de Charlotte Perriand à Andrée Putman, la gent féminine est pourtant loin d'avoir eu le droit de cité à parts égales avec cet aréopage de messieurs devenus maîtres de l'architecture et du design. Mais cette suprématie du genre masculin tend aujourd'hui à s'estomper sérieusement. Certes, il n'est pas encore question de parité, mais force est de constater que quelques-unes des plus remarquables créations de la décennie sont bien issues des tablettes de créatrices. De Matali Crasset à Wieki Somers, il n'est pas une édition de salon du meuble sans que le nom d'une femme ne retienne l'attention du public, professionnel comme amateur. Mais que l'on ne parle pas de design féminin – comme si le design avait un sexe – mais plutôt d'un design au féminin. Une subtilité qui exprimerait au mieux la question des points de vue et des sensibilités en matière de création.

FRONT DESIGN est un collectif suédois basé à Stockholm, fondé par quatre femmes designers : Anna Lindgren, Sofia Lagerkvist, Charlotte von der Lancken et Katja Sävström.

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LIGHT BLUBS, 2008

PIEKE BERGMANS, Néerlandaise

Pieke Bergmans s'est fait remarquer au salon du meuble de Milan en 2006 en présentant des vases en verre soufflé dont la forme était en partie conditionnée par la "rencontre" avec un objet icône du design. Durant la partie finale du soufflage, le maître verrier applique la pâte de verre encore malléable sur un objet, altérant en partie celui-ci mais générant dans le même temps la forme de la pièce en verre. La designer y voit ainsi l'intégration du concept de virus dans le processus de création (ci-contre, *Light Blubs*, 2008).

www.piekebergmans.com.

BLESS N°22 PERPETUAL HOME MOTION MACHINES, mobile 4b

DÉFILÉ PRINTEMPS-ÉTÉ 2009, collection Bless n°36 Nothingneath

BLESS
(Desiree Heiss, Allemande, et Ines Kaag, Autrichienne)
Plus connues dans la sphère de la mode que dans celle du design, Desiree Heiss et Ines Kaag n'en sont pas moins intéressées par les rouages de l'espace domestique. Aussi, elles appliquent les processus d'élaboration du vêtement à la création d'objets qui viennent en quelque sorte habiller les intérieurs. www.bless.fr.

HOMESNACK, 2005, de Matali Crasset.

MATALI CRASSET, Française
Designer industriel de formation, Matali Crasset se frotte à la production de masse en travaillant un temps chez Thomson. A la tête de sa propre agence depuis 1998, elle s'efforce de questionner les codes de notre société par la mise en place de formes et de rituels qui intègrent souvent un caractère ludique. Ainsi, elle développe des typologies d'objets autour des questions de modularité, flexibilité et de mises en réseau.

www.matalicrasset.com.

PHOTOS COURTESY FRUITSOFLEEL.NL, WWW.BLESS.FR, WWW.MATALICRASSET.COM, WWW.PIEKEBERGMANS.COM

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TÉLÉLUMINE, 2002, de Florence Doléac.

FLORENCE DOLÉAC, Française

Cofondatrice du collectif Radi Designer, Florence Doléac poursuit, depuis 2003, ses projets en solo. A la frontière de l'art, du design et de la mode, elle s'empare de certains constats de la vie quotidienne, à la limite de la banalité, pour imaginer de nouvelles fonctionnalités, tels ce kit de sommeil pour ronfleur, ce manteau devenant housse de chaise, ces "saladiers" à visage humain...

www.fake.fr/florence.

INEKE HANS, Néerlandaise
Après une expérience chez Habitat UK, Ineke Hans regagne, en 1998, la Hollande et lance sa propre collection de meubles et objets. Consciente de la nécessaire dimension commerciale de ses productions, elle tient cependant à préserver ses pulsions créatrices, identiques à celles d'un sculpteur, afin d'imaginer des formes pertinentes répondant aux besoins de fonctionnalité et d'utilité.

www.inekehans.com

VASE *WILLIAM AND MARY*, conçu sur une base en porcelaine de Delft datant du XXVIIe siècle, de Ineke Hans.

FRONT DESIGN (Sofia Lagerkvist, Charlotte von der Lacken, Anna Lindgren et Katja Sävström, Suédoises)
Qui aurait penser que des animaux puissent produire des objets de design ? Avec Designed by Animals, les quatre instigatrices de Front Design appliquent le concept de ready-made (la réactivation d'une forme à de nouvelles fins) à des formes générées par la nature. Sur ce terrain de l'illusion, le quatuor invente désormais des meubles qui défient les lois de la gravité ou qui prennent forme par la magie d'un dessin dans l'espace.

www.frontdesign.se.

MEUBLE *VANISHING* (disparition), 2007, de Front Design.

KIKI VAN EIJK, Néerlandaise
Parfois associée à Joost Van Bleiswijk (Kiki & Joost), Kiki Van Eijk développe également ses propres projets dans lesquels elle s'efforce de reposer les repères des arts décoratifs. Particulièrement attentionnée à la question du détail, du motif et à ce qui caractérise le concept même de l'objet-bijou, elle puise dans ses voyages les sources d'inspiration pour ornementer son univers domestique.

www.kikiworld.nl

KNITWARE, 2009, de Kiki Van Eijk

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JULIA LOHMAN, Allemande
Diplômée en 2004 du Royal College of Art, Julia Lohman n'est pas restée longtemps dans l'anonymat dès qu'elle a exposé ses bancs réalisés à partir de peaux de vaches remis en forme à l'identique. Pour le moins figuratifs, même si démunis de leurs membres et leur tête, ces nouveaux animaux domestiques interrogent de manière frontale la production du matériau, le cuir, qui recouvre depuis toujours bon nombre d'assises.

www.julialohmann.co.uk.

TABOURET *LASTING VOID*, 2007, de Julia Lohman.

WIEKI SOMERS, Néerlandaise
Les objets de Wieki Somers, ou plutôt leur allure, ne sont pas banals. Ici, une théière en forme de crâne de sanglier recouvert d'une fourrure de ragondin, là une baignoire qui évoque clairement les barques des canaux de son pays natal. Ou bien encore cet étrange tabouret aux pieds en bambou et à l'assise en résine opaque évoquant la vague de froid qui s'abattit, en 1987, sur la Hollande. En somme, une collection d'objets qui parlent.

www.wiekisomers.com.

THÉIÈRE *HIGH TEA POT*, 2003, de Wieki Somers.

DANIEL SCHWEIZER/COURTESY TOOLSGALERIE (PARIS), INTER IKEA SYSTEMS B.V. 2009, DR

MARIA VINKA, Suédoise
Sans aucun doute la moins médiatisée de toutes, Maria Vinka est en charge du programme PS chez Ikea. C'est dire si ses créations bénéficient d'une importante diffusion et nécessitent au préalable de répondre aux contingences de la production de masse.

www.ikea-ps.fr/tag/maria-vinka.

CHOPE IKEA PS FJÄLLBJÖRK, 2009, de Maria Vinka (ci-dessus).

HELLA JONGERIUS, Néerlandaise

Figure féminine du design néerlandais, Hella Jongerius a largement participé à l'essor de cette scène du design, elle en a clairement posé les bases qui marient industrie et artisanat, haute technologie et bricolage, tradition et modernité. Aussi, elle rejoint, dès 1993, les rangs de Droog Design, avant de répondre aux appels d'éditeurs tels Vitra, Ikea, Kreo ou de s'auto-éditer avec sa structure Jongeriuslab.

www.jongeriuslab.com.

BACKPACK SOFA, 2007, de Hella Jongerius.

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profile

A matter of respect

Controversial desiger Julia Lohmann finds inspiration in anatomy, chemistry and forms from the natural world. ***Laura Traldi*** *caught up with her in London.*

Let's put things straight. Julia Lohmann loves animals. She loves them passionately, in fact. This is something that you understand clearly after talking to her for only five minutes. Because Lohmann uses animals' interiors as well as lots of other biological materials in her designs, I have to admit that before meeting her in her London studio I had a few preconceived notions about her.

The Lasting Void is a resin and fibreglass seat made by casting the internal cavity of a calf. "It died of natural causes," points out Lohmann. Okay, that's good enough. Yet the whole idea – despite undeniably beautiful results – leaves one somewhat puzzled and asking lots of questions. Why would a young woman deal want to deal with these things? Why explore death when you have your whole life in front of you? Is this some kind of fetish, or a media-attracting plot?

The open letters with Italian architect and designer Alessandro Mendini certainly played a big role in raising these questions. "I know design now is not an idyll and I also know that one is forced to take extreme action to find innovations and new languages," wrote Mendini in an open letter to Didier Krzentowski, the owner of the Parisian Galerie Kreo, who commissioned The Lasting Void. "However, Julia's creative energy, in the case of your stool, truly seems to be badly directed. I do not understand what so much unpleasantness is supposed to demonstrate. If the photograph of her stool enters into the history books of design, this will be one of the most bitter examples, an extremely sad moment in the history of objects. It brings to mind the items made out of human skin in the concentration camps, the horse skin chaise-longue by Le Corbusier, elephant foot stools or tribal leopard skin rugs. I can see no theoretical, aesthetic, methodological or anthropological reason which justifies the idea

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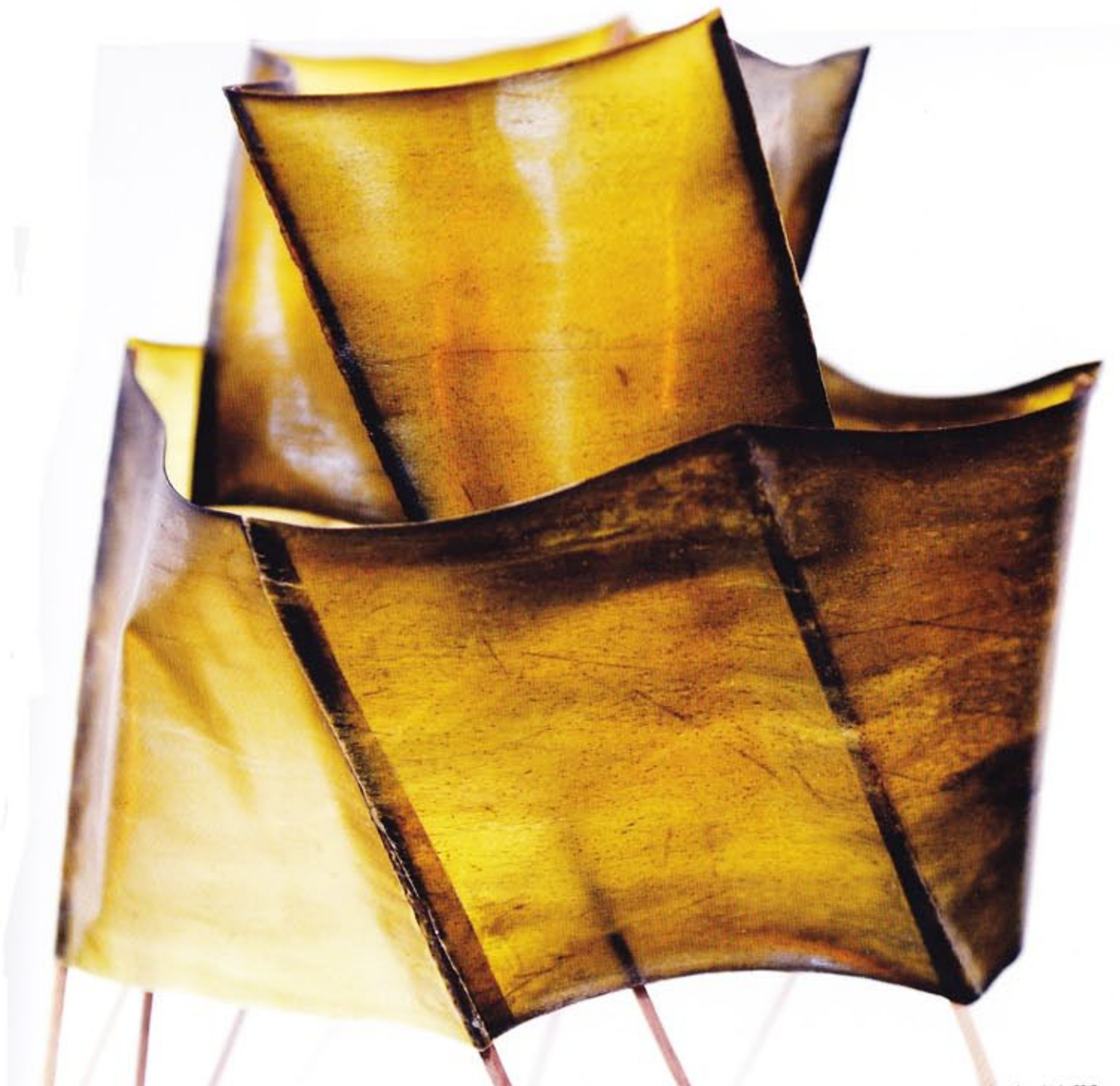
a skull in Lohmann's studio in London

below
a lamp made from algae

opposite page
Lasting Void stool, cast in resin and fibreglass



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above
Crystals grow on cardboard in a specific process engineered by Lohmann.

Lohmann shows the stomach of a sheep after it has been worked to become a lamp shade.

below
Julia Lohmann

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above
detail of a lamp made from a sheep's stomach

of immortalising a dead animal's last breath, in order sadistically to propose it as an item for everyday use, directly expressed in its suffering. The idea is cynical and pointless, it is simply turning the torture of a dead body into entertainment."

"I felt this was a real challenge," admits Lohmann. "Being openly criticised by one of the greatest maestros gave me an opportunity to explain the reasoning behind my choices." With her designs, Lohmann wishes to ask questions about the way in which people consume their resources. "People buy meat every day and it is nicely cut and packaged into attractive boxes or trays in the shop. None of the pain and suffering of the slaughtering process is actually passed down to us as consumers and as a consequence very few people think about it." This, according to Lohmann, shows a lack of respect towards animals, and constitutes a collective lie.

"Design should stop us from becoming numb to the world and instead prompt us to rethink how we lead our lives," she wrote to Mendini. "Thousands of cows are slaughtered every day in the EU alone, supplying us with 6.3 million tons of beef per year – in an accepted process of anonymous killing and docile consumption of nondescript products that often disguise their animal origin. The calf I used to make The Lasting Void was a waste product from this process. Deemed unfit for human consumption after it had died of natural causes in the field it was going to be incinerated. By casting the negative space inside it I preserved the memory of a single, discarded creature that was deemed of no value for conventional use."

The final missive in this epistolary exchange was a note from Mendini to Lohmann in which he simply wrote, "I now understand".

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above and opposite page
The Catch, a 90 m² installation of towering waves made of used empty fish boxes

right
Lohmann in her London studio

below
Lohmann holding one of her crystal-growing pieces

Photography by Paolo Woods

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In her studio, Lohmann collects algae, grows crystals, explores ways to preserve sheep's stomachs. She is simply fascinated by two great opposites: growth and decay. After finishing her Bachelor or Arts in graphic design, she started using maggots to create paintings. "I would put the maggots into paint and let them walk freely on a surface," she says. "The result was beautiful patterns." And a lot of food for thought, because, inherently, we all dislike maggots and find them repulsive creatures. "But why?" wonders Lohmann. "It's just because we instinctively connect them to the idea of death. I wanted to see if by putting these animals out of context, the horror that they raise would end." In 2001 Lohmann entered the Tate Modern with her husband, Gero Grundmann (also a designer), got to the top floor and went into the panoramic room armed with maggots, bottles of ink, paper and washing lines. Her unauthorised maggot-painting performance was very much liked by a lot of visitors.

"I have always been fascinated by nature and how things grow and develop," she says. During my visit to her studio, she was busy growing crystals on cardboard structures to make some lamps for Libby Sellers, the London gallery operator. "I put the structure in an oversaturated solution of magnesium ammonium sulfate then cool it down. The crystals grow in about twenty-four hours. My challenge is to manage their growth in an aesthetically pleasant way."

Seeing the care and attention that she puts into handling these materials, it is obvious that her relationship with nature is clean, spontaneous and sincere. She reminds me of an eco-warrior but without the anger. She talks enthusiastically of her months spent on a horse farm in Iceland, for instance – of the getting up at dawn, the hard physical work, the herding of sheep in the highlands. And about her installation entitled *The Catch* – 90m² of towering waves made of used empty fish boxes taken from Sapporo's fish market. "I got the idea while walking through Tokyo's Tsukiji fish market," she says. "Such an enormous amount of fish is taken away from the seas every day that it is hard to believe there will be any left soon. So the viewers of the installation are confronted with a vast empty ocean depleted by overfishing." It's a gentle yet powerful way to shake our faith in endless supplies of marine life.

I am not surprised to hear that Lohmann is not a vegetarian. Somehow I expected it. Lohmann touches carefully the algae that she collects, dries and varnishes in her studio. Much of it will be turned into limited-edition lamps. The way she strokes it – just like the way in which she handles her solidified sheep's stomach (also soon to be a shade) leaves no room for doubt. This woman is someone who cares deeply about nature, in a matter-of-fact way. She does not deny the life cycle and appreciates the large-eats-small situation. One word springs to mind when thinking about her work: respect. Lohmann respects life, she cherishes it. And this understanding is the key to accessing her world, and her work. "After all," she says, "my dream when I was a kid was to be a vet." ■

Laura Traldi