

# CRAFTS



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## SIZE MATTERS

*Jacqueline Poncelet on  
making big art*

## FINE FEATHER

*The extraordinary sculptures  
of Kate MeeGwire*

## CRAFT CRUSADER

*Glenn Adamson reaches  
the end of the road*

# ORIGINAL SIN

*Barnaby Barford's  
deadly new mirrors*



Femke de Wild on Formafantasma's latest work

## Welcome to the wonderful world of skin and bone

A salmon-skin stool with a sea-sponge seat and a cow bladder that functions as a water carafe: Studio Formafantasma is well known for its unexpected use of materials, but even by its standards the pieces from the *Craftica* collection are distinctly unusual. The objects were originally designed for the annual *Design Performance* programme, organised by Italian fashion brand Fendi during Design Miami/Basel last June, but are coming to London for the first time, at Gallery Libby Sellers this February.

'When Fendi asked us to develop pieces using discarded leather from its workshops, we immediately said yes,' says Simone Farresin, who together with Andrea Trimarchi makes up Formafantasma. 'But we proposed to add different kinds of animal skin as well.' Although leather has seen a recent revival in design, its use can be a sensitive topic. 'But that sensitivity is exactly what's most interesting about it,' says Farresin. 'People once had to hunt for food, and animal skin was one of the first materials they could work with. Our relationship with leather is complex, and ancient. We wanted to reflect that relationship in the collection.'

*Craftica* shows thought-provoking applications for different animal skins, but is also based on historic uses of such materials. The show features bones that function as knives and drawings (by illustrator Francesco Zorzi) on parchment, a precursor of paper made from hide. Potentially controversial objects are juxtaposed with less surprising, but highly sophisticated works, such as glass pendant lights that hang from the ceiling on leather straps. The entire installation is more than just a presentation of independent objects. 'Installations offer us the possibility to get our ideas across, without having to scream with one outspoken piece,' says Farresin. And getting ideas across is what Formafantasma is all about.

The two Dutch-based Italian designers started their career in communication design, but discovered their shared passion for objects while doing a Masters at the Design Academy Eindhoven. 'We always try to reverse clichés,' says Farresin. 'Tradition versus innovation, crafts versus

industry – and in this case exotic versus daily and common. We wanted the collection to look like a cabinet of precious curiosities, but in reality these pieces are made from leftovers: leftovers from Fendi's production sites but also from the food industry. The salmon and wolf-fish skins come from an Icelandic fishery for example.'

To make the pieces for *Craftica*, the duo collaborated with craftsmen from Fendi and dozens of experienced workers from other industries. Craft is a recurring theme in Formafantasma's work, and often even interpreted as their main theme. But its projects are always imbued with another layer of meaning; craft seems to be a tool rather than a topic in itself. 'You're right,' says Farresin. 'We don't design objects. We do a lot of research and formulate ideas. Working directly with the material – or in this case with people who do so – makes it possible to translate these ideas into objects fluidly. There's no machine in between.'

According to Libby Sellers this way of working allows the duo to learn and grow. 'Andrea and Simone are not "designer-makers",' she says. 'Their approach is more traditional. They are the ones who perceive an idea, but they co-operate with other people to realise what they envisioned. It prevents them from being limited by their own capabilities.'

Sellers has been presenting the duo ever since they graduated from Eindhoven. As a result visitors to the *Craftica* exhibition at her gallery will also find a selection of objects from Formafantasma's previous collections: *Colony*, *Botanica* and *Moulding Tradition*. 'It's very interesting to see the development of the studio's work,' says Sellers. 'Until now, Andrea and Simone mainly made vessels, but working with highly experienced craftsmen from Fendi has made them more confident and brave. This co-operation was a lovely departure for them to start working with furniture.' '*Craftica*' by Formafantasma is at Gallery Libby Sellers, 41-42 Berners Street, London W1T 3NB, (020) 3384 8785, from 1-28 February. [www.libbysellers.com](http://www.libbysellers.com), [www.formafantasma.com](http://www.formafantasma.com)

Clockwise from right: Bells-lights, discarded Fendi leather, glass, leather-covered hooks, leather-covered electric wire; Bone Jar, mouth-blown glass on a cow bone, cow leather; Wolf-fish hot water bag, vegetal tanned wolf-fish skin, glass, brass; from left to right, Wolf-fish Pig stool, Studs stool and Salmon stool, vegetal tanned pig leather, vegetal tanned wolf-fish skin, Fendi discarded leather, vegetal tanned salmon skin, brass, wood and sea sponge. All works by Studio Formafantasma, 2012

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SIMONE FARRESIN







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