



Craftica by Formafantasma—

Originally developed for Fendi's Design Performances series, Simone Farresin and Andrea Trimarchi's research project on the cultural history of leather debuts at Gallery Libby Sellers, anticipating a new commission that will be presented at the end of the year. A [design report from London](#) by [Catharine Rossi](#)

You don't expect to come across salmon skin stools, scallop shell spoons and wolffish skin water bottles everyday, and especially not in such serene surroundings as London's [Gallery Libby Sellers](#). You might be less surprised though when you realise that behind such exotic confections are Simone Farresin and Andrea Trimarchi of [Studio Formafantasma](#). Since graduating from Design Academy Eindhoven in 2009, the Italian duo have gained a reputation for an approach that combines conceptual thinking with material experimentation, the latest expressions of which are *Craftica*, a series of stools, vessels, lights and tools currently on display at the gallery.

Craftica is the most recent chapter in Fendi's annual Design Performances programme, in which the luxury fashion house invites emerging practitioners to create work using offcuts from its production process. First presented at [Design Miami/Basel](#) in June 2012, this installation is the project's London debut. It is not a complete representation of the original show — several pieces are absent as they have already entered Fendi's archive. To make up for this absence Sellers has completed the display of *Craftica* objects with a selection of the studio's previous collections. While these are useful for contextualising the designers' work, it could have also been interesting to fill this gap with insights into the research process involved in *Craftica*, an aspect clearly vital to both the designers' approach and to our appreciation of this.

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Author
[Catharine Rossi](#)

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↑ Top and above: *Craftica* by Formafantasma, installation view at Gallery Libby Sellers, London

As with their earlier projects, for *Craftica* the designers conducted research into the cultural history of their chosen material; leather. As they see it, this is "a material that, more than any other, represents the complex relationship between humans and nature." Leather could seem a conservative choice for a duo whose previous material experiments have included natural rubber and bois durci (a material composed of blood albumen and sawdust). In fact, they have kept their use of cow leather to a minimum, seeing it, according to Sellers, as too obvious a choice given their Italian heritage. Instead, they turned to the skins of "common, 'unsophisticated' animals" such as pig as well as trout, salmon and wolffish, the latter sourced in collaboration with an Icelandic company that specialises in working with fish skins discarded from the food industry.

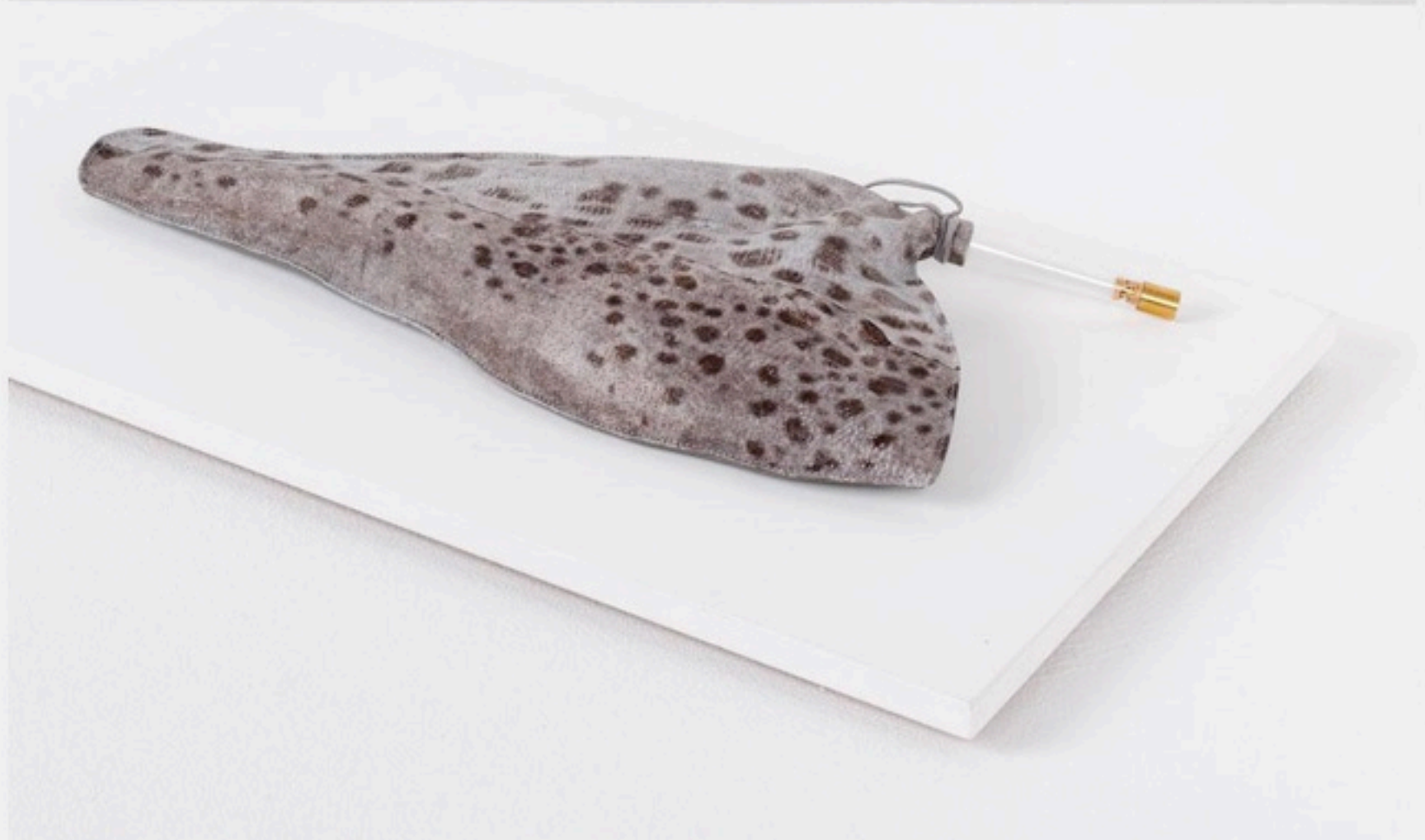


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Craftica by Formafantasma, installation view at Gallery Libby Sellers, London

Such materials are not as unusual as they first seem. As Sellers notes, perch and wolfish skin are widely used in the luxury leather goods industry as an alternative to crocodile and snakeskin. While this usage is largely a question of imitating more expensive materials, in *Craftica* these materials' qualities have been exulted in their own right. Most exhibits have tags listing the materials involved and several are named after them, such as the *Perch Fish-Pig Stool*, one of four stools displayed on individual plinths around the space. Each have thick, flat legs whose profile recalls that of fish fins. This was intentional: "we wanted to somehow recall in the shapes the origins of the materials. Even the dimensions of the stools are bigger or smaller depending on the average dimension of the fish used."

Against one wall is a table displaying smaller objects, including the scallop shells spoons, some cow bladder water vessels, and a knife made of cow bone, leather and metal. As with the *Craftica* series as a whole, there is a Robinson Crusoe quality to these primitivist assemblages — alongside echoes of the German designer [Julia Lohmann's](#) work. This is most notable in the vessels displayed at the front of the gallery. They have been made of glass blown through the empty middles of assorted marrowbones, whose individual shapes have informed the vessels' formal variations. Like every object displayed, all are for sale, available in a limited edition through the gallery.

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Craftica isn't the only work on show. Above the table of objects are 28 drawings on goatskin parchment by studio member Francesco Zorzi, humorous depictions of the use of leather through the ages. At the rear of the premises a smaller gallery houses examples of four of Formafantasma's previous projects — *Botanica*, *Colony* and *Moulding Tradition*. While *Craftica* is less political than some of these earlier works, it still contains a critical element in its challenge of how we value certain materials while rejecting others — a worthy consideration amidst growing scarcity of, and increasing scrutiny over, our use of more conventional materials.



↑ *Craftica* by Formafantasma, installation view at Gallery Libby Sellers, London

The presence of these earlier works in *Craftica* speak of the close relationship that the gallery and studio have forged, and this looks set to continue, they are currently collaborating on a new commission that Sellers hopes to present at the end of 2013. All she will reveal is that it will be "a study of lava." If *Craftica* is anything to go by, it promises to be a worthwhile undertaking, one with both carefully considered and surprising results. Catharine Rossi (@cat_rossi)

Through 28 February
Craftica by Formafantasma
Gallery Libby Sellers
41-42 Berners Street, London