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TOM DIXON
MAS YENDO
ANGELO SEMINARA

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2009, its 100th birthday, it ramped up the synergy, and chose to launch its new A8 in Miami – a supremely separatist act, bearing in mind that the major league Los Angeles Auto Show opened its doors 4,000km away just one day later. The reveal of the car, in a custom-built pavilion on North Beach (not far from the once-fabulous Morris Lapidus-conceived Fontainebleau Hotel), adhered to the tried and tested formula expected by auto journalists and enthusiasts of mean machines: screens slid portentously apart; the never-before-seen vehicle slithered across the stage; dry ice billowed to something swelling and Wagnerian with bone-vibrating bass. Yet in his introductory speech, Audi chairman Rupert Stadler referred to the craft, complexity and contemporary relevance of the work of Rauschenberg, outside in the foyer was an art exhibition showing impressive contemporary work from around the world; and prior to take-off Tom Dixon had been involved in a Q&A session with actress Lucy Liu (herself an artist with work on show at one of the city's off-piste fairs).

Dixon had been commissioned by Audi to create an installation, while the art, taken

from the 1500-strong collection of the Rubell Foundation, was just part of a larger show called Beg, Borrow and Steal showing across town at the Rubell family's Wynwood warehouse space. 'When Audi first approached Don, he said No,' stated Don Rubell's wife Mera. 'We just thought, oh this is Audi wanting to make an association with the cutting edge. Then I thought, this is a global company inviting art into their conversation. The biggest problem with art is that so few people see it, and this brings it to another audience.'

The 700 or so motoring journalists certainly rubbed against it. Whether they saw any beauty there – doubtless still swooning from their first sight of the ultimate luxury saloon that now goes to 62mph in 5.5 seconds, has handwriting recognition built into its MMI (multi-media interface) and a fabulously light aluminium space frame concealed beneath flawless iridescent oyster-coloured paint – was hard to tell.

Across the room, Dixon's silvery installation hugged the ceiling. Inflatables attached to polyhedral aluminium spheres glittering with LEDs huddled together like a

Above left: In 2008 Tom Dixon threw his unsold, limited-edition metal chair into Biscayne Bay. A year later he fished it out, covered with salt crust

Above right: Pae White's installation at South Beach covered 1,100 sq m and was like a collapsible city

Below left: Within Design Miami, one highlight was Max Lamb's oversized bench carved from Styrofoam

Below right: Julia Lohmann's disturbing vases were made from bones found in the River Thames

great big Christmas decoration. This was Dixon's narrative on the real delights of the car's design. 'Audi is all about showing performance, but I wanted to tell stories about the hidden qualities,' said Dixon. 'Theirs is the first application of LED-only headlights, for example, hence the aluminium globes with LED points. The silver inflatables suggest the lightness that informs the whole of the A8's interior design. They find that hard to convey – it doesn't look slimmer, it just weighs less.'

Of course, like any boy designer, Dixon had been most taken by his visit to the Audi HQ at Ingelstadt, a place where staff eat non-disclosure agreements for breakfast, lunch and tea. Such is the investment in its innovation, Audi is more than happy to help make a greener planet ('we simply see sustainability as an opportunity,' said Herr Stadler), but not to tell anyone else how it's actually spent its two billion R and D euros. While Dixon was impressed by the proximity of the designers to the engineers at the HQ, and the ladies who sniff out the right leather (literally, they really do hold it up to their noses), he also sensed that 'they need to get a life outside the car world. I >>

