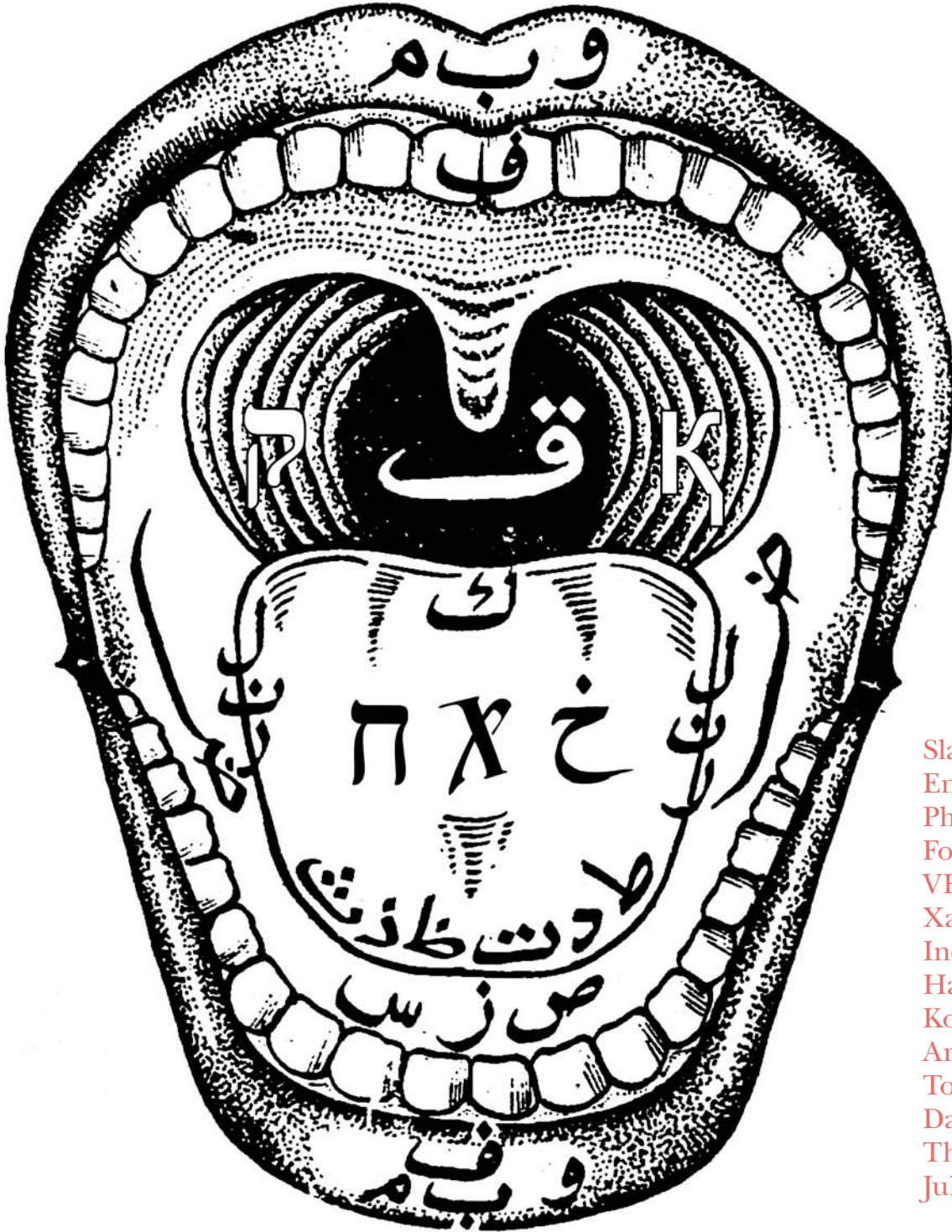


# DAMN<sup>o</sup> 41

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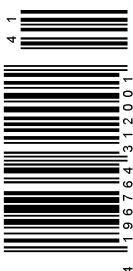
A MAGAZINE ON CONTEMPORARY CULTURE



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MOTHER & FATHER  
TONGUES THROATS

# Irresistible, Respectable

*Formafantasma, from Biedermeier Bourgeois to Future Present*

Studio Formafantasma had their work cut out. Accepting an invitation to appropriate the interior of the impressive Geymüllerschloß in Vienna, thereby taking into account the plethora of riches on hand and proffering a presentation in response to all that they viewed and otherwise sensed in such a setting, was no mean feat. All that now remains is for the attentive visitor to enter the scene and glean for her or himself how elements can combine to create new and unexpected sensations. The idea is to gaze inward and to heed the past in order to find inspiration for the future.



THOMAS GEISLER

The recently established MAK DESIGN SALON challenged Studio Formafantasma to adorn the Geymüllerschloß, a hidden jewel from the Viennese Biedermeier period, with an interpretive presentation. Entitled *The Stranger Within*, it constitutes their first solo show in a museum. Visitors are encouraged to search for the foreign within themselves in this festive summer residence.

If you take tramline 41 from the city centre to its final stop in Pötzleinsdorf, the 18th district — a noble neighbourhood on the outskirts of Vienna — and then walk a short distance, you will arrive at the Geymüllerschloß. This early 19th century edifice was put up after 1808, as a summer residence for the Viennese merchant and banker Johann Jakob Geymüller. Today, the building (whose architect remains unknown) is one of the few places in Austria offering an authentically original look at the diversity of the bourgeois Biedermeier lifestyle and decorative art. The venue became a branch of the MAK — Austrian Museum of

Applied Arts / Contemporary Art — in the mid-1960s, and after extensive renovation served as a study in interiors and a setting for small scale exhibitions dedicated to the century of its origin. Like an alien presence, one of James Turrell's Skyspace boxes sits in the surrounding English garden, disturbing the sleeping beauty — a remaining provocation installed by former director Peter Noever, who fought the dusty past with fresh, contemporary art installations.

What works in art is worth a try in design. The annual MAK DESIGN SALON invites designers to deal with this one-of-a-kind cultural legacy in order to set up aesthetic and thematic links to the present and open up new perspectives on the applied arts. While Michael Anastassiades' first intervention, *Time and Again*, was inspired by the villa's rich collection of old Viennese clocks, the current show by Studio Formafantasma, *The Stranger Within*, deals with the fascination evoked by the 'exotic', as expressed in the eclectic Arabic, Indian, and Gothic

STUDIO FORMAFANTASMA  
Simone Farresin and Andrea Trimarchi

Facing page:  
**THE STRANGER WITHIN**, 2013  
This central work is a rug designed specifically for the Geymüllerschloß's Blue Salon in collaboration with the Italian producer Nodus.

Photos © MAK / Katrin Wißkirchen





**CRAFTICA, 2012**  
A blown-glass bone jar from the series of objects.  
Courtesy of Libby Sellers Gallery

**MOULDING TRADITION, 2009**  
The 'Mosque' with vessels as critical reminders of the traditional Sicilian ceramics, *Teste di Moro*.  
Courtesy of Libby Sellers Gallery

Photos © MAK / Katrin Wißkirchen



elements found in the architecture and interior spaces. Located in the Blue Salon is a panoramic, hand printed wallpaper named Hindustan that shows Oriental-looking temples; this provided a starting point from which the design-duo Simone Farresin and Andrea Trimarchi set out to analyse the paradoxical phenomenon whereby the yearning of the occupants for distant places and cultures coexisted with Biedermeier 'homeliness'.

#### ATMOSPHERIC INFLUENCES

The central, eponymous work of the exhibition is a rug designed specifically for the Geymüllerschloßel, in collaboration with Italian producer Nodus. This piece, inspired by the texture and colouration of the surrounding interior, is reminiscent of an oversized mask and functions as a mystical metaphor of the 'foreign'. In its upright position in the middle of the Blue Salon, the rug acts as a totem around which the other exhibits — new work created in collaboration with Vienna-based glass manufacturer J. & L. Lobmeyr and well-known objects from the Formafantasma series, such as *Botanica* and *Craftica* — are arranged in the adjoining rooms. The textile work is intended as a reference to the Jewish family of a textile manufacturer, who owned the villa from the late 19th century up to the moment they were forced to flee the country after the National Socialists took power in 1938. "Despite looking exotic and almost

tribal, the rug, displayed alongside containers made of animal bladders, refers to local folk traditions", says Simone Farresin while pointing to a giant chandelier made of cow bladders, which was designed for the dining room at the opposite end of the villa.

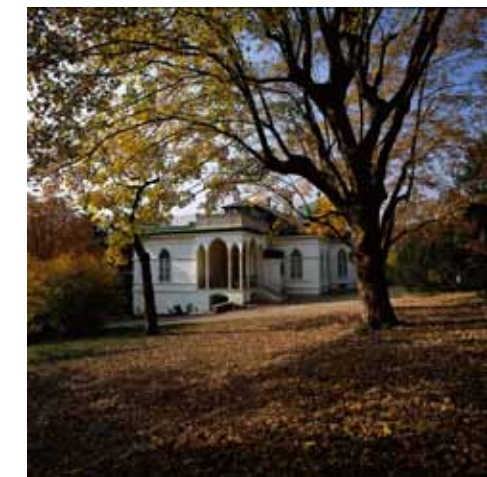
During the 19th century, the social sciences of ethnology and anthropology, as well as natural sciences such as botany, experienced an enormous upswing that occasionally expressed itself bizarrely when applied in the popular manner. Some of these intellectual fashions became 'crafted' into the original inventory, providing anchor points. Those anchor points served as elements that Formafantasma could reference with their own work. "The newly developed *Botanica* vessels mirror an extraordinary still-life that hangs on the wall. It is composed of hundreds of butterfly wings arranged like a bouquet of flowers", describes Andrea Trimarchi about the setting in the drawing room, which also includes *Alphabet*, a drinking service for wine and water, manufactured by J. & L. Lobmeyr. Presented upside-down and stacked atop one another, these pure, delicate glasses with their various engravings derived from the ornamental archive of the interior, are reminiscent of the artificial still-lives and flower arrangements protected in glass domes that one finds everywhere. "The highlight of *Alphabet* is the pleasure of diversity found within a set of objects, while also changing the rules of the table setting", declare the designers.



Another room, referred to as the Mosque because of its Oriental trompe l'oeil painting, contains the villa's indigenous counterpart to the already existing *Moulding Tradition* series. Vessels shaped like buoys display portraits of refugees — an allusion to the genre of Sicilian ceramics known as *Teste di moro*, which are decorated with grotesque Moor faces in a tradition that dates back to the 17th century. Starting from the Arabic and African influences on European ceramics production, these critical objects make reference to the present-day migratory flows from Africa to Europe, for which the island of Lampedusa has become a synonym, and reflects upon themes encompassing national identity and racism. "In a globalised world where the concept of the 'exotic' is losing its meaning, we invite the audience to take a closer look and, in a quest for inspiration for the design of the present and the future, to turn their gazes both inward and back towards the past", say the designers about their experience in such an environment, and about their first solo show in a museum that is far more challenging than a mere white cube. <

*The Stranger Within*, Studio Formafantasma, MAK DESIGN SALON, Vienna, until 01 December 2013; [www.MAK.at](http://www.MAK.at)

Thomas Geisler is the curator of design at the MAK.



Clockwise:  
**BOTANICA, 2011/2013**  
Vessel from the series of objects, inspired by the colour sets of the Geymüllerschloßel

**BLADDER CHANDELIER, 2013**  
Inflated cow bladders containing LED-lights, to brighten-up the dining room

**ALPHABET, 2013**  
Wine and water drinking service with delicate engravings manufactured by J. & L. Lobmeyr, Vienna  
Photos © MAK / Katrin Wißkirchen

**GEYMÜLLERSCHLÖSSEL, 1808**  
View from the garden  
Photo © Gerald Zugmann / MAK