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The Icon Awards trophy

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The trophy that the Icon Awards winners will receive this week were designed and made by Anton Alvarez on his thread-wrapping machine. Watch him at work in his studio and read our interview with the designer

Words

Christopher Turner

Images: Gustav Almqvist; Märta Thisner

The Swedish-Chilean designer Anton Alvarez has created the third Icon award using his Thread Wrapping Machine. Each of the 11 trophies is bespoke, made using Alvarez's self-invented mechanical loom.

Working with an assistant, he shuttles the frame of each piece through the eye of his whirring device until it is cocooned in brightly coloured, glue-soaked thread. "It's accidental," Alvarez says of the process. "I like to keep my method unstable and unpredictable, because that makes the results more interesting."

Alvarez, who is based in Stockholm and featured as one of our graduates to watch in 2012, has had a great year. This spring saw his solo show at the Libby Sellers Gallery in London; his work also featured in a Kvadrat exhibition at the Salone in Milan; and, this summer, Libby Sellers commissioned him to create an impressive, large-scale installation, Thread Wrapped Architecture 290414, for Design Miami/Basel. "Everything's come very quickly," he says.



The finished award resembles a multi-coloured shepherd's crook

His work has grown in scale. In Basel, visitors were encouraged to walk through the arches of his obsessively bandaged sculpture (which used up to 24,000m of polyester thread). On spindly legs, it looked like a collection of Louise Bourgeois' oversized spiders under wraps. Of course, spiders mummify their prey in balls of silk thread in this way. Despite their tropical exuberance, Alvarez's works exude a similar sense of looming threat.

The creation of large pieces, such as the ones shown in Basel, required the invention of a new loom that is no longer static, but has a long arm that enables it to be moved around the object to be wrapped. Between May and September, Alvarez has been filling the 120sq m Gustavsbergs Konsthall in Stockholm with his multi-coloured creations – the stripy arches and pillars seem to hold up the 6m high ceilings of the gallery.

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The award is bandaged in polyester and wrapped in glue-soaked thread

“There is an interesting transition from design to architecture,” Alvarez says. “Architecture is something that you can enter – you become part of the piece.” Creating the Icon award presented a different challenge.

“When the scale goes down, the detail comes into focus much more,” the designer explains. He wanted to create something that winners would feel comfortable holding in their hands. The polychromatic result resembles the top of a shepherd’s crook. The base is made of wood, while the inside of the arch is fashioned from more flexible plastic, all bandaged in polyester fibre, textiles and pigment-infused glue.

A laser-engraved brass ring features the Icon awards logo. Alvarez thinks that he has much more to mine using his method. "I'm still in the middle of this adventure," he tells me. "I want to explore it as far as I possibly can". One imagines him, like the artist Christo, wrapping increasingly bigger things: the Pont Neuf, the Reichstag, a cliff, an island.

The 2014 Icon Awards take place on 4 December

