

# Collecting

## Design Miami / Basel

It calls itself a forum rather than a fair, Design Miami/ began life as a satellite of Art Basel in Miami, and now also takes place alongside Art Basel's summer edition – this year, from June 12-17.

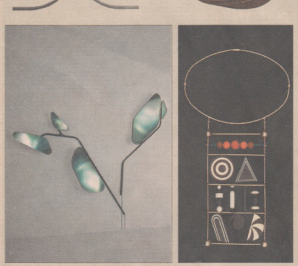
Collectible design – still a confusing concept for many – is highly elastic, embracing a wide range. Several of this year's exhibitors have curated stands of 20th-century classics, such as Anne-Sophie Dowal from Paris; others feature jewellery, or

lighting. New York-based Demisch Danant brings mid-century works by Maria Pergay, while Cristina Grajales focuses on emerging names whose work might seem closer to sculpture.

The Design Talks series looks at legacies, and the family dynasties of the design world, while the Performances section allows a view into the true creative process as designers open their workshops to public view.



**Playful** From top, Log Chess Set (2011) by Peter Margold; 'Wajima Light Screen' (2011) by Ronen and Erwin Bouroullec; 'Slow Relief' (2003) by Louise Campbell; Ring Chair (1968) by Maria Pergay; 'Untitled' (2012) by Takayuki Sakayama; Naturescope II, Lighting (2012) by Noël Duchaufour-Laurance; Abscon Necktie (1969) by Lucio Del Pezzo



# Why lovers of design go Dutch

Edwin Heathcote explains how The Netherlands has become the most distinctive and coherent nation in design today

Crowds were lining up around the block to visit this year's graduation show at the Design Academy Eindhoven. In this pleasant but dull Dutch city, the design school has been responsible for the education of many of the world's best-known, quirkier and most interesting designers and has made The Netherlands the most distinctive and coherent nation in design today. Tord Bontje, Marcel Wanders, Piet Hein Eek, Martin Baas, Hella Jongerius, Job Smets and Jurgen Bey, as well as the design collective Droog, are all Eindhoven alumni. Where once it was German functionalists or Italian exhibitionists who were making the running, there is no doubt that it is now Dutch designers from Eindhoven.

So just what is it that makes Eindhoven's designers so different, so appealing? The Academy was founded in the wake of the second world war in 1947 and, like another important European institution, the Ulm School of Design (which opened in 1953), it was a school of industrial design with a determinedly modernist philosophy.

This was an era when design was seen as a tool for social progress, an activity that could transform the everyday lives of the masses. It set out a serious, functional attitude to making simple things better and to creating new, modest and appropriate forms for the labour-saving devices sprouting from Europe's burgeoning post-Marshall-Plan consumer economy. Like Ulm, Eindhoven illustrated a particular northern European attitude to design as expressed function. Ulm, with its star teachers (Max Bill, Otl Aicher, Johannes Itten and Josef Albers) and its ambition to be a new Bauhaus, collapsed in an acrimonious clash of egos and ideas, and closed in 1968. But Eindhoven's Design Academy has emerged as a powerhouse of ideas and innovation, although very far removed from its functionalist roots. In fact its famous alumni now represent the apotheosis of a kind of narrative or conceptual design which is as playful as its modernist predecessors were severe, as humane as they were mechanistic.

## The Academy is a powerhouse of ideas and innovation – although far from its functionalist roots

So humane, in fact, that each of the school's units is presented in relation to humanity. There's Man and Identity, Man and Communication, Man and Leisure, Man and Public Space and Man and Well Being. This last one was established and is headed by Ilse Crawford, designer, writer, brand consultant and founder of the British Elle Decoration magazine.

I asked Crawford what it is that makes the school different from the rapidly growing number of design schools around the world.

"It's all about the individual," she replies "about creating authentic, independent voices. It's about coaching

rather than trying to turn the student into someone else. What's important is that the students are treated as designers from day one, by teachers who all practice. And a good school attracts good teachers."

As a highlight of this year's show, Crawford picks out Rianne Koon's "designer for a series of vegetables" to process fruit peel, a beautifully designed kitchen utensil which uses the usually wasted – but actually tastiest – part of the fruit.

Designer Dirk Vander Kooij, who graduated from the DAE last year, is already becoming a name. Last month he won the high-profile Dutch Design Award at Dutch Design Week for a machine which makes chairs using material recycled from the plastic insides of discarded fridges through an inventive adaptation of the rapid prototyping process used to create models in industry.

The point is not just the finished product – although some of his shapes are genuinely beautiful – but the theatrical, quasi-miraculous nature of the process itself, of seeing the chair appear before your eyes as it is literally fabricated by the complex, balletic movements of a robot arm. That this hugely sophisticated technical and conceptual piece was part of the designer's graduation show illustrates how advanced and ambitious some of the students are.

"The best thing about the DAE," he tells me, "is that there isn't too books. Since that sounds like a bad thing to me, I ask him to explain. "What I mean," he continues, "is that they really teach people to be independent learners, to find out for themselves."

"The teachers themselves are really good designers – they're only allowed to teach for two days a week at the Academy so they all work outside. A lot of young designers are really stubborn so if the teachers are real designers you're much more likely to listen."

One of last year's graduates, Massoud Hassani, concurs. "The teachers are not really like teachers," he tells me. "It's not about education but about how you relate to the individual. You can talk to the teachers about anything, any idea, they are open to everything."

Of course, none of this means it's easy. Hassani, who was born in Afghanistan, tells me, "In the beginning it was difficult for me to understand the design world and I had to experiment a lot. Each time my work wasn't quite there and it was only when I graduated that it all came together."

Hassani's graduation project was one of the most striking and original to come out of the school in recent years. "It was based on a toy we used to play with in Kabul," he says, "a ball that was moved about by the wind."

Hassani's design is a beautiful thing which belies an unsettling purpose. A ball of bamboo rods ending in a sphere of pads, this is actually a de-mining device. Rolled around by the wind, its path tracked by an embedded GPS system and available to view online, it clears paths through the minefields which haunted Hassani's childhood. It was shortlisted for the Design Museum's Design of the Year and is currently being developed by the Dutch army.

Hassani's is not the most typical path to success, many of the DAE's most celebrated designers found their way to recognition and fame through galleries and exhibitions. London gallerist Libby Sellers has a number of DAE alumni on her books and the



**Creations** From top, chair (2011) by Dirk Vander Kooij made of recycled plastic; recent graduate Massoud Hassani; designer Ilse Crawford; 'Moulding Tradition' (2009) by Italian duo Formafantasma; Hassani's wind-borne and mine detector



show with which she opened her new London gallery in 2007 featured a pair of DAE graduates from Italy collectively calling themselves Formafantasma. She puts the DAE's success down to "the liberal-minded attitude of the tutors and their interpretation of design. It's not just about design," she tells me, "but about developing broader political and social issues. They come at design from a very critical perspective."

Ilse Crawford also says that "It's about things that make us connect: there is a belief here that it is the conscious individual that drives society forward and holds it together." It is, she says, a place for "practical intellectuals".

And Eindhoven itself helps. An increasingly intense culture of design in the town has meant that people stay there. The huge complexes of industrial space left behind by the migration of Philips' manufacturing, which used to dominate the town, has left enormous volumes just waiting to be inhabited by studios. One recent graduate, Nacho Carbonell, Libby Sellers tells me, had a huge empty church as a studio for a while. Piet Hein Eek meanwhile has made a mini-city in the old Philips ceramic works, a place rapidly becoming one of Europe's gravitational centres for design.

The Design Academy might seem a one-off, a uniquely Dutch, deeply liberal, protestant/practical and sharply intellectual experiment, but it could also provide a template. Now that design is slowly being recognised not as a discreet field but as a broader way of innovative thinking, perhaps other post-industrial cities might want to take a look at exactly what the school has achieved.

[www.designacademy.nl](http://www.designacademy.nl)



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