

DESIGN ART ARCHITECTURE INTERIORS DECORATING ENTERTAINING TRAVEL

VOGUE

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WAYS OF SEEING

Australian Libby Sellers celebrates new talent and outside-the-box design at her London gallery.

FOR LONDON GALLERIST Libby Sellers, dealing in design reaches far beyond presenting pretty or seamlessly functional objects. "I know galleries can be intimidating; even stepping over the threshold is hard. I welcome anyone who wants to enter the dialogue I'm trying to have about design," she says. In essence, for Sellers its concept is "about questioning ourselves and the world we want to live in."

A senior curator at London's Design Museum for seven years, Adelaide-born Sellers set up her own gallery in 2007, first with a series of pop-ups in disused buildings across London, then last year with her own space in the West End. She is a champion of emerging talent such as Max Lamb, Peter Marigold and Stuart Haygarth, and graduate talent from London's Royal College of Art and the Netherlands' Design Academy Eindhoven. "I'm taking a large responsibility in nurturing the designers' careers," she says.

Recently exhibited pieces include Formafantasma's Moulding Tradition ceramic vessels and Colony mohair blankets that reference the flow of cultures migrating between Italy and Africa; Julia Lohmann's vases fashioned from animal bones (some carbon dated back 250 years); and contemporary versions of 17th-century ceramic flower pyramids by leading Dutch designers such as Hella Jongerius and Jurgen Bey. "I'm drawn to an absolute curiosity and rigour in the people I represent; those with a passion not to accept the norm but to explore the alternatives," she says. "This is a generation of designers who feel they need a really good reason for doing something, rather than designing a chair simply for a chair's sake." >

Adelaide-born Libby Sellers in her gallery in the heart of London's West End.



From top left: Sellers's gallery; Rolf Sachs's *Weighing up the Competition* (2012), for the *Games* exhibition; *Mould in Motion* by Philipp Grundhöfer, for September's *Hot Tools* exhibition, designed in collaboration with students at ECAL; modern interpretations of 17th-century ceramic flower pyramids by Jurgen Bey and Hella Jongerius (background); a Colony mohair blanket and Moulding Tradition ceramic vessels, both by Formafantasma.



< This creates a charming artisanal and highly personal narrative to the work she has on show. Over the past summer, to time with the London Olympics, Sellers curated *Games*, an exhibition of chess boards she commissioned in all manner of materials, from refashioned found tree branches to bone, brass, leather and Japanese lacquer *urushi* (and to include a new musical score by upcoming composer Hannah Kendall). In October, to time with the Frieze Art Fair, she hopes to show a 'Carpetalogue' of silk rugs by graphic designers MM (Paris).

Sellers discovered her passion for design, having previously wanted to write about art, during a history of design masters degree at the Royal College of Art, run in conjunction with the Victoria and Albert Museum. After graduation, she worked for the Glasgow 1999 UK City of Architecture and Design programme, "an amazing event during which I met all the people I then went on to work for."

Sellers's break came when she met Alice Rawsthorn, then director at the Design Museum. "I'd resisted working for museums because I didn't want to do cookie-cutter exhibitions. Alice said it wasn't how she saw it, either." Once at the helm herself, Sellers's seven-year stint included exhibitions on fellow Australian Marc Newson, graphic designer Peter Saville and – controversially – the life and work of 20th-century florist Constance Spry. Many of the Design Museum's board members were aghast – "how could flower arranging possibly constitute iconic design?" For Sellers, "I was simply exploring the breadth and diversity of what design is. I loved Spry's motto that everyone could be a millionaire for a few pence. By simply walking out to the hedgerow and picking a few wild stems to put into a soup tureen, she argued that you've made your environment better, and I think that's what design is about. It is about not seeing the obvious. As the designer Paul Smith says: 'you can find inspiration in everything – and if you can't, look again.'" **FIONA MCCARTHY**
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