

VIENNA DESIGN WEEK
2023

Curation and
Texts by
Laura Houseley

Alexandra Gerber
Alexandre Delasalle
Anna Nordström
Erika Emerén
Fabio Spink
Heiko Bauer
Jakob Niemann
Jesper Oléhn
Johanna Seelemann
Kuo Duo
Lab La Blah
Leo Koda
Liam McClure

Moon Seop Seo
Office For Ordinary Objects
Roxanne Kury
Sarah Yao-Rishea
Studio Joachim-Morineau
Studio Nicolas Erauw
Thomas Waidhofer
Victor Montour
Ward Wijnant

The Series



Make, sell, and repeat. Such is the existence of the independent designer using studio-based production techniques and producing limited series of works. In the growing arena of collectible design, this type of small-scale making has come to define a generation of emerging designers. Yet rarely is it recognised as the consequential system it is. Within this intention; to make in multiples and to make creatively, attitudes to making, invented processes and aesthetics are developed that influence much more than this relatively niche corner of the design world.

A small edition of objects that repeat in form and material but each one is made subtly individual by some distinctive feature. This is not mass production, nor art, but the middleground: The Series.

Making in small series is about overcoming constraints; of money, time, labour, space, material and machine availability, to make repetitively and therefore efficiently and therefore economically. But unlike in industrial design, perfection is not sought and unlike in art, commerciality and usability remain important. The series is made up of unique objects where creative expression is paramount; hard-wired into the system rather than left outside of it. This means that processes, machines and materials that amplify differences, imperfections and variety are highly prized. As we explore in this exhibition, creating a truly original series often requires unconventional thinking.

This year's successful FOKUS-Open Call applicants were a cohort of emerging international designers selected for their ingenuity, originality, and invention in creating a series of objects. Each of the series displayed illustrated a different approach to making in multiple. Exploring FOKUS:

The Series meant taking time to reflect on how specific materials and processes have been carefully sought out or chosen with the specific desire to make many objects. How processes create variation, or at least allow it in and the importance of creating systems, even seemingly uncontrollable ones. How each designer or design studio finds their own way to be creative and express themselves with the end result influencing other trends, attitudes, aesthetics, outside of the context we present here.

Nature

Series-orientated designers aim to make multiple objects that retain individualism. Perfect duplication is not desired. Instead value is found in objects that are each different and therefore unique to their owners. It should be no surprise that nature offers both inspiration and resources for the series designer.

The inherent variations found in natural materials can simply be moved to a new context, be reframed, in order to give a series the variation it needs. The undulating forms of Lab La Bla’s Tree Trunk vases are formed from the voids inside dead tree trunks. In this instance nature has given two helping hands; first to create the tree, and then the decay which creates the unique form. Lab La Bla’s work is opportunist and therefore efficient, cleverly acknowledging the assistance nature is able to provide.

Sometimes nature’s influence is less direct. For example; designers actively embracing materials natural qualities in unconventional ways. This might include materials that fail during making; ceramics that slump, glass that moves, wood that breaks, wax that melts. By inventing systems of making that exist in the space between control and freedom, designers can redefine the notion of what beauty is in the object world. The works in Nicolas Erauw’s Nothing Lost series are exactly such items - their organic shapes are created using wax, which has been allowed to move naturally before being fixed into shape by a structural resin skin. In these ways the concept of natural qualities, along with nature itself, can become a decorative asset and a way of making unique objects.



Waste

Independent designers face strict limitations when it comes to making. Unrestricted material choices are a luxury few can afford. Instead, system-building and opportunity take precedence. It is the designers’ purpose to create a method of making that optimises everything at hand. Material opportunity, availability, and affordability are more valued by the series-maker than material preciousness, scarcity, or performance. Within this environment, unconventional materials are revaluated, and locality and abundance become incredibly significant.

For many designers, using waste as a raw material has profound moral significance. Keeping materials in use for as long as possible is a key principle of responsible manufacturing at every level. However, considering waste as a primary source of raw material has clear benefits beyond the environmental. Often, waste streams are unharvested and plentiful in local areas. Making them, strangely, one of the most reliable sources of material. Using ‘low’ materials and creating value where once there was no perceivable value has become something of a modern mission for designers. It is especially significant that materials once considered ‘waste’ are now found at the heart of collectible design.

Anna Nordström’s quilting technique is a fresh take on a familiar process that uses exactly these principles. But her minute pixelated textiles banish any suggestion of traditional craft and remind us what waste material, in this case synthetic textiles, can become in the right hands. Alternatively, Heiko Bauer uses an unlikely material for his Discount designs; old abandoned shopping carts. Whilst Office For Ordinary Objects elevate a palette of found materials such as sheet polyester, in their designs. Using waste, or low value materials, is about demonstrating an ability or a way of seeing that exceeds the material value. Putting an emphasis on the quality of a concept, the skill of a practice, and the originality of a form before more traditional quantifiers of value, has helped establish the reputation of many series-making independent designers.



VIENNA DESIGN WEEK
FOKUS, 2023, Sept 22 – Oct. 1

This publication is supported by
the British Council.

System

Many designers who create small series consider themselves to exist between the worlds of industry and art. Taking inspiration from both worlds, they value the quality of handcrafted objects and the expression of the individual, while simultaneously seeking efficiency and repetitive production. Consequently, this group of designers is prone to inventing their own systems of making and, even, their own machines.

Typically, these systems or machines create a production line for unique objects. Studio-based designers often ‘pimp’ mass-production industrial techniques, subverting processes so they no longer result in flawless objects. Sometimes, this means transplanting reliable materials for appealingly unreliable ones that slump or fault, or removing finishing processes to reveal the true variation in a material or process. Others simply use familiar industrial or craft machines or processes in an unexpectedly creative way.

To make his CHUNK series of objects, Ward Wijnant uses a common workshop machine; the metal press. But he replaces sheet metal with aluminium kitchen foil to create entirely unexpected objects and an original design. Studio Joachim-Morineau has discovered the latent creative potential of a digital program that is by its nature predictable, using it to create unpredictable ceramic decoration. Leo Koda makes 3D printing far more interesting by adding an extra step that sees objects inflated and made three-dimensional. With each of these examples we are reminded of the designer’s impulse to create their own ecosystem within which to operate both efficiently and creatively.

FOKUS: The Series Exhibits

Untitled by Alexandra Gerber ^{UK}	Vitrum by Johanna Seeleman ^{DE}
CHUNK by Ward Wijnant ^{NL}	TLO4 by Liam McClure ^{CA}
BITSCAPE by Moon Seop Seo ^{NL}	Plush Garden by Alexandre DelaSalle ^{FR}
Shiny Little Treat by Erika Emeren ^{SE}	Ten Thousand Drops by Studio Joachim-Morineau ^{NL}
Copy Paste by Anna Nordström ^{SE}	Discount by Heiko Bauer ^{DE}
Scaling Volumes by Roxanne Kury ^{AT}	Branchwood by Jakob Niemann ^{AT}
Tree.Trunk (M05.2023) by Lab La Bla ^{SE}	Nothing Lost by Studio Nicolas Erauw ^{BE}
S,M,L by Office For Ordinary Objects ^{CH}	Quetschi by Thomas Waidhofer ^{AT}
Fractures by Fabio Spink ^{AT}	Brik by Victor Montour ^{CH}
Contra Mirrors by Sarah Yao-Rishea ^{AT}	Refined Primitivism by Jesper Ohlén ^{DK}
MIX WOOD Vessels by Kuo Duo ^{KR}	In Fill Out by Leo Koda ^{NL}

Curation and Texts: Laura Houseley
Organisation: Laura Winkler
Scenography: Dóra Medveczky
Graphic Design: Bueronardin
Production Team: Florian Kläger
Photography: Ines Bacher, Carolina Frank,
Michael Mayr, Christof Nardin

A format of VIENNA DESIGN WEEK