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Talent spotting

This year's winners of the Designers of the Future awards **Page 6**



After disaster

Rebuilding of a hurricane flash flood

FT WEEKEND | Saturday May 30 / Sunday May 31, 2009



Mysterious green

Parakeets in her New York garden prompted Judith Matloff to in

It's been a strange year in Harlem. The robins didn't migrate. The hyacinths popped up in the snow. And then, tropical intruders took over

"Definitely feral," he concluded. The exotic visitors stuck around for weeks, creating wonder to no end. We were thrilled to see such colourful creatures this

winters were prompting some birds to venture further north, while others were holding off migrating or so on. That could be why our in

Multiple reflections

The winners of Design Miami/Basel's design competition each created a space from plaster and mirror. By Nicole Swengley

When Design Miami/Basel launched four years ago it created a Designers of the Future award, aimed at pinpointing young creative talent. The first two winners were companies: Established & Sons and Front Design. Last year it was five individuals (two of whom work in partnership): Martino Gamper, Max Lamb, Julia Lohmann and Clemens Weisshaar and Reed Kram, all known for their experimental work.

This year the awards went to people again – Nacho Carbonell, Peter Marigold, Tomás Gabzdil Libertiny, Shay Alkalay and Yael Mer – but event organisers made them work for it, asking each to take two materials – plaster and mirror – and create a 30 sq metre “environment” that would “stimulate discourse, reflection and community”.

“We stipulated an environment rather than an art or design installation so the designers would create a space that translates as a moment of reflection about themselves, their work and also makes a point – politically, economically, geographically – about this particular moment in time,” says Ambra Medda, director and co-founder of Design Miami/Basel.

Why those particular materials? “Plaster is cheap, malleable and beautiful but generally under-appreciated. Mirror can, as any reflective surface, be applied with the reflections having further associations,” she says. “Both are relatively flexible and basic.”

The resulting spaces, on display in Basel from June 9, are anything but.

Nacho Carbonell



Carbonell, a 28-year-old Spaniard now based in the Netherlands, enjoys creating a connection between objects and users. His best-known design, Pump It Up, made for his Design Academy Eindhoven graduation show in 2007, comprises an air-filled seat attached by thin tubing to playfully shaped, inflatable animals. As you sit and the seat moulds itself to the body, air is exhaled into the animals, which spring to life.

Committed to hands-on design, Carbonell was in his element at Design Miami's Craft Punk show, held during Milan's Salone Internazionale del Mobile in April. Using basic moulding skills, he created wire-framed animals, then stapled together leather scraps to give them suede coats.

At Design Miami/Basel, Carbonell has a solo show at Galleria Rossana Orlandi's stand in addition to his Designers of the Future space, an assignment he says was “intriguing”. “Plaster has great potential because it's rigid but free; you can play with it using your hands to make very expressive pieces,” he says. And “I've never used mirror before. It's always a surprise for me how a design will turn out.”

He came up with a womb-like environment inspired by the theme of fertility, echoing his Evolution series of papier maché “homes” seemingly hewn from rock. “My idea is to bring [plaster] close to a natural shape –



Timely From left, Tomás Gabzdil Libertiny's egg, the mural that inspired Raw-Edges and Nacho Carbonell at work on his 'environment'

stalactites and stalagmites – with a cave-like flow to the design,” he says. “The exterior surface looks rough but the mirror adds smooth, shiny detail. I like creating private spaces; it's the idea of escaping.”

Peter Marigold



As soon as London-based Marigold, 34, heard the Designers of the Future brief he “knew exactly how to handle the materials”. He took symmetry as his starting point: “I had in mind those Rorschach blot prints in which an ink blot turns into a butterfly print when a folded sheet is opened out,” he says. “So I created plaster shapes and mounted them on mirror. The symmetrical reflection of the mirrored image turns the plaster blobs into three-dimensional ‘heads’, which I've put into an interpretation of a hunting lodge environment, mounting them high on the walls like animal trophies.” The space is meanwhile furnished with five pieces of furniture; half of each is made from recycled wood while the other half is formed from its original plaster mould.

Marigold is no stranger to optical illusions and special effects. After studying sculpture at Central St Martins in London he worked in theatrical set design and prop-making before graduating from the Royal College of Art's Design Products course in 2006. His aesthetic direction was natural. “Geometry pro-



vides the rules that govern everything,” he explains. “It's also a visual stimulus that acts at a very basic level. Pure, perfect geometry stirs an emotional reaction in us that's primal. Mirrored reflections create a response in us that's completely instinctive.”

As for the materials in this project, “I've used plaster extensively, mainly for mould-making, while working in the scenographic industry,” he says. “My design process has always been a hybrid between design and accident, chaos and order, and I wanted to use plaster and mirror to continue this.”

Tomás Gabzdil Libertiny



Slovakian-born Libertiny, 29, who graduated from Design Academy Eindhoven in 2007 and is currently based in Rotterdam, enjoys exploring new ways of making objects. The resulting designs are, he admits, sometimes a by-product rather than the initial imperative. “Materials and processes fascinate me,” he says. “It is important to know how things work and how materials behave.”

Layering is a favourite technique so, for his graduation project, he constructed a vase-shaped hive, letting live bees build up its waxy, honeycombed form, while his Welded Stools are made by gradually adding drops of stainless steel solder from a welding gun, each building on the last one to create spindly furniture with unpredictable shapes.

His contribution to the Designers of the Future exhibition – a two-metre-tall egg surrounded by eight-metre-tall black walls – plays on the same themes. “I like the idea of the egg being visually impressive and built to human scale,” he says. “The idea was to rotate its profile, scraping off excess material during rotation so the end product looks very finished. I've also tried to show all the processes in one object. On one side it looks organic, cave-like and fluid. But on the front it's well-polished with a high-gloss finish. I was inspired by the unfinished marbles of 16th-century Italian artist Michelangelo Buonarroti, which are both rough and polished at the same time.”

The primary material is plaster, which “relates to the shell of an egg”, he says. “Plaster is often used as a modelling material and I've always felt that plaster models are themselves very beautiful but are never usually seen, so I wanted to create an experience



Studio Libertiny; Jos Kottmann

based around that idea. And because there's something beautiful about an object you can't touch, the egg is on a pedestal, proclaiming to be a sculpture.”

The black plaster walls are meanwhile cast in glass with the centre mirror-polished. “The egg and mirror relate to each other because they're both theatrical, yet gradually reveal the material's hidden quality. The plaster mirror is very dreamy. It almost feels as if it has a short focal point like an old Polaroid camera.”

Raw-Edges



Shay (pronounced “Shai”) Alkalay, 33, and Yael Mer, 32, whose design studio is called Raw-Edges, share a desire to create previously unseen objects. They met at Jerusalem's Bezalel Academy of Art & Design while studying industrial design and graduated from London's Royal College of Art's Design Products course in 2006. It's a partnership that, in a few short years, has produced sexy yet practical designs such as the Stack storage unit and Pivot bureau.

“I'm fascinated by how things move, function and react, while Yael has a folding fetish; she loves playing with two-dimensional materials and turning them into functional forms,” says Alkalay. Neither had previously worked with plaster, so “we decided to use plasterboard because it relates better to our design language and we felt more comfortable with it. It's used in so many buildings and renovations, yet you never see anything interesting done with it.”

“To make it look more domestic, we covered it with a simple, embossed wallpaper then scored the plaster and folded it into rough, random triangles, retaining the raw edges and using the backing board as a structural device,” says Mer. The result looks like an exploded plasterboard mountain erupting from the walls.

“We were inspired by a kitsch poster of a mountain and lake that covers our entire living room wall,” Alkalay says. “The mirror part of the brief is the ‘lake’ we've created using reflective domestic objects.” Mer adds: “It's an observation of nature tackled in an industrial way.”

Design Miami|Basel, June 9-13, Hall 5, Messe Basel, tel: +1 305 572 0866, www.designmiami.com

Switzerland

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