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Collecting

FTWeekend



Boxing clever Max Lamb turns cardboard into treasure — PAGE 2

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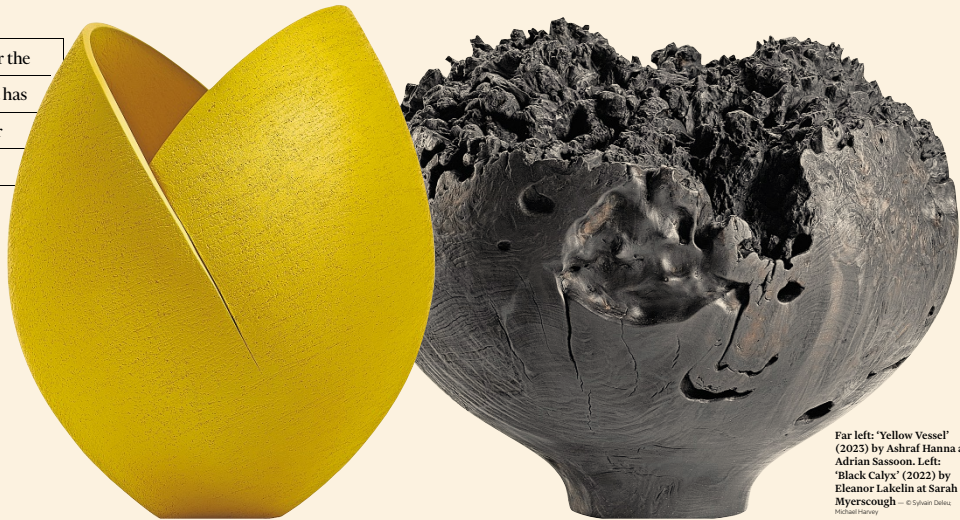
Design of the times

PAD London | The market for the meeting point of art and craft has boomed over the fair's 15-year history. By *Susan Moore*

The London edition of the PAD art and design fair, which celebrates its 15th anniversary this month, reflects the evolution of a growing global appetite for contemporary collectible design and functional art. It is a market that has risen in response to a proliferation of design museums — from Tokyo to Barcelona, Canberra to Dundee — as well as dedicated design publications, auctions and yet more fairs.

Driving this activity is a rich creativity which is blurring the boundaries between art, craft and design. So porous are these distinctions that contemporary art galleries increasingly present functional objects, while artists, architects and designers move blithely

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Far left: 'Yellow Vessel' (2023) by Ashraf Hanna at Adrian Sassoon. Left: 'Black Calyx' (2022) by Eleanor Lakelin at Sarah Myerscough. © Michael Harvey



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75 YEARS OF INFINITE TALES

Max Lamb | The British furniture-maker has always had an experimental bent, whether using steel or lacquer. Now he's turning to cardboard. By *Caroline Roux*

In the world of limited-edition design, Max Lamb is perhaps the best-known furniture-maker of his generation. Now 42, he has built an international reputation thanks to a continuous stream of poetic but process-driven work. From irregularly shaped chairs hewn from blocks of polystyrene via consoles, chairs and daybeds constructed entirely from dowel rods to split-wood furniture finished in luscious lacquer by Japanese craftsmen, his pieces exude an easy-to-read honesty.

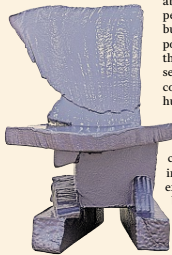
"I want my work to be legible and literal, and not superficial," says Lamb, "and if somebody wants to buy it, I'm honoured. If somebody likes it, I'm happy." A new furniture series of 34 unique pieces, launching on October 5 at London gallery Fumi, is made entirely of cardboard that has been pulped and layered and endlessly worked into a series of tables and chairs.

"I've used cardboard for years to make models and prototypes," he says, "but now it's become a primary material. We've been collecting it in the studio. It's come to us as packaging, at no cost." Using a wheat and water glue that he makes himself, the process of building up a form has been a quiet and safe one – just Lamb and three assistants in his studio. Unlike so much furniture-making, there is no waste, no toxic component, no noise.

"But it's been frustrating," he says. "I like speed, and this is the slowest process I've ever developed. There are things about paper that aren't conducive to permanent furniture. We've had to build it up and up to make it stable." He points to a two-metre-long dining table that is still waiting to be sealed with linseed oil. "That's taken 17 days so far, not counting any of my time. It's been a huge team effort. The expense here is all in human labour." Its top is a beautiful patchwork of varying shades of brown and gold – the colours of the cardboard itself, its legs seem dappled in a muddy camouflage. Nearby is an exuberant round seat, formed on a blown-up balloon, its curvy surface overlaid with paper ribbons the colour of dried leaves.

Unlike some of his peers in the shiny world of limited-edition design, Lamb's work is devoid of anxiety or tension or neediness; there are no running gags or steaming intellectualism, no tricks, no style. It is what it is: intuitive, material-led, at times primordial. Those polystyrene pieces could approximate to something carved by early man from a rock. "You become a designer by engaging with the physical world," he says. "By touching

Main: Max Lamb photographed in his studio for the FT by Tom Jamieson. From below, Lamb's Poly chair, two tables made from cardboard in his new Box series. Opposite: a cardboard Box vase – © Angus Hill. Photographs courtesy Gallery Fumi.



things. Touch, touch, touch." His degree show presentation at the Royal College of Art in 2006 included a stool made on the beach near where he grew up in Cornwall, creating a mould in the sand and filling it with liquid metal. By the time the show finished, he was a star.

His studio is one of a collection of buildings clustered around a courtyard in picturesque Harrow-on-the-Hill, where London begins to give way to the countryside. First we look around the red-brick Mission Hall, built in a Dutch style in 1884-85 by Edward Prior, that Lamb has converted (with help from restoration architect Michael Gollings) into a home for himself, his wife, the jeweller Gemma Holt, and their six-year-old son.

He did much of the work, making the deep-pink terrazzo flooring from crushed-up Drednought tiles reclaimed from the roof; creating his own flesh-coloured wall paint by adding brick dust to a standard base. Opposite is the studio, two primary volumes by the architects Matheson Whiteley clad in shimmering corrugated steel. Another building on the Lamb campus is a house dating from 1400. He has yet to embark on its complicated restoration.

Two of Lamb's three assistants, recent graduates, are busy at work – one fielding deliveries, another hand-knotting a multicoloured carpet for a huge cushion cover. A rack contains some remaining cardboard, though Lamb, a hoarder, says he has six or so garages dotted around London full of the stuff. What he has used already serves as a narrative of

'I've used cardboard for years to make models and prototypes but now it's become a primary material'

his life so far. The seat of one new cardboard chair is an old Fujitsu box, its logo still visible – "that's from when I was still living with my parents," he says. Another once contained fertiliser, according to its logo, and would have come from his grandfather's farm.

The ideas of sustainability and reuse are built into the Cardboard project, though it is a running concern in his work. In making the polystyrene pieces, he has managed a 2-3 per cent material waste rate; for a 2015 project, he used every possible part of a grand old ash tree that had grown on his grandfather's farm, milling the last thin branches into ever-smaller stools.

The result of his new work, in spite of the precaution of his endless papier-mâché layers, is perhaps less durable than the norm. "It is going to challenge people's perceptions of furniture and how it should be treated," says Lamb. "You're more likely to hurt the chair than yourself, if you run into it. But perhaps we should learn to look after things better. And also to learn that things don't have to be perfect forever."

October 5-November 18, galleryfumi.com



Design of the times

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between materials and disciplines. There is hardly a major international contemporary art fair in the world that has not expanded to embrace design.

For Patrick Perrin, PAD's co-founder, collectible design has come of age. "This is a market reaching maturity," he says from his office in Paris.

The idea of a London edition – the fair first launched in Paris in 1996 – emerged out of conversations with friends Lóic Le Gaillard and Julien Lombail, who had launched the Carpenters Workshop Gallery in Chelsea in 2006. "London was buzzing. It was the beginning of Prieze and the arrival of the power contemporary art galleries," says Le Gaillard. "We thought we could present a French way of looking at collectible design. There was David Gill in London but no one else. A fair was needed to put collectible design on the market." Such a fair had to be during Prieze Week.

The duo were more focused on sculptural form than function, as were collectors turned dealers Valerio Capo and Sam Pratt of Gallery Fumi. "For us," says Capo, "the gallery is all about the tactility of materials, the human element, unusual materials and old techniques bought back to life." The gallery

is showing work commissioned for its 15th anniversary show, the PAD. Most are unique pieces, from Lukas Wegwerth's Crystallization 185, confected from ceramic and salt crystals, to Rowan Mersh's hand-dipped paint on birch Marmaros Metamorphosis II and an organic bronze volumetric chair by Voukenas Petrides.

Another gallerist to enter the fray was Sarah Myerscough, known for concept-led but handcrafted sculptural pieces in wood and other natural materials. "Collectible contemporary design was such a new form of visual expression when I started," she says. "It was exciting to be at the inception of an emerging market."

For design historian Libby Sellers, it was a moment of the conflation of market interest, demand and supply. "I think the growing sophistication of the consumer played a large part. Suddenly everybody seemed interested in contemporary design." Driving the market was London's success as a financial capital, and the number of rich people taking properties here to capitalise on tax benefits.

"It was also a heady time in the city's art schools," says Sellers. "Ron Arad, head of product design at the Royal College of Art, was encouraging a curious, concept-led design strategy which played with the idea of one-off pieces,



From far left: 'Stack Vases 2' (2023) by Glithero at Gallery Fumi; PAD co-founder Patrick Perrin; 'Crystallization 185' (2023) by Lukas Wegwerth at Gallery Fumi. Courtesy: Gallery Fumi. © Angus Kamnitsos



The cyclical nature of art markets and museum shows continues to inform what the next generation produces. "Twenty years ago, you could not move for yet another installation of Prouvé or Perriand," says Sellers. "Then came a big focus on the Memphis Group – Ettore Sottsass, bright colours and Italian radical design. Now we are moving quickly – too quickly, I think – through a revisit of the post-punk era of welded, found, slightly aggressive furniture."

What comes next? "A return to minimalism but softened – clean, natural materials in a very reduced aesthetic." What has changed over the past 15 years is the scale, complexity and conceptual ambition of the work produced.

"Making processes have become so incredibly diverse and innovative," says Myerscough, "and the science of making with recycled materials is again extraordinary." An emphasis on sustainability in materials and techniques has evolved into design projects which extend far beyond the studio and involve and empower local communities. New exhibitors, such as the first gallery from India to show at PAD London, for instance, bring French women design-

What comes next? 'A return to minimalism but softened – clean materials in a very reduced aesthetic'

and the people he taught went on to be tutors or mentors to the next generation." London was leading as a creative centre, with Central St Martins, Kingston and the RCA art schools, she adds, although Eindhoven in the Netherlands was also making its name. The usual tra-

jectory for young designers is to start by making one-off pieces in their studios; some decided to stay with that, preferring the immediacy and satisfaction of working directly with galleries and clients to the long process of mass production.

ers Valérie Lazard, Florence Louisy and Wendy Andreu, who honour the country's ancient craft traditions through collaborations with local artisans.

The globalism of this community of designers and makers is striking. Those exhibited at PAD London's 62 galleries represent more than 30 countries. Despite that, Le Gaillard is surprised that there are still so few design galleries in London. Perrin puts the number worldwide at no more than 100-120, a fraction of those showing contemporary art. "Design does have one advantage," he smiles. "It is much less expensive."

October 10-15, padesignart.com