

Collecting

# Strictly fantastic

**Furniture** | Emma Crichton-Miller explores the range of design on display, from sculptural to geometric, formalist to free-flowing

**T**homas Lemut is a sculptor and film-maker, who also makes furniture. His furniture is very pure, pared-down and linear, constructed usually from wood, stone, metal and leather, and is overtly engineered. The joints are exquisite. As Lemut puts it, "When there is a joining, you need to be saying something." He is a stickler for detail: "My coffee table has to have titanium screws, for both the function and the aesthetic. Each screw costs €10."

The furniture of Mathias Bengtsson, by contrast, squirms organically. His Growth Table offers islands of smooth walnut supported by a wriggly, beautiful, but apparently random tangle of curving limbs. Starting with pencil and clay, the shape of this table was ultimately developed by computer, through a unique system of rapid prototyping. "The analogy," Bengtsson explains, "is with a plant seed. It is a seed that is instructed in its DNA to grow a table. I coach it along."

Both these furniture makers will be showing at the Pavilion of Art and Design in London this year. They represent the twin poles of contemporary furniture design — on one hand classical, restrained and rational; on the other, exuberant, expressive, breaking out of the confines of sober geometries such as the square or the cube. And so London's Fumi Gallery, which represents Lemut, will also be showing the Boullée Table, made from mirrored glass and etched steel, designed by architect Brooksbank and fine artist Collins, where a series of interlocking circles and spheres is stretched out of true to become a planet with elliptical rings.

French gallerist Jean-Jacques Dutko, meanwhile, known for his love of Art Deco design with its symmetrical lines and geometrical patterns, will show a console by sculptor Benoît Le Mercier. Le Mercier is fascinated by the quantum and cosmic realms where order breaks down, and his Console in Patinated Steel, a rigidly minimal structure, bursts out at one end into wide ribbons of steel, curling sinuously like seaweed in water, which, he tells me, allude to superstrings.

The glittering, jaggedly cubist Mineral Commode and Gold Quartz Table of silversmiths Juan and Paloma Garrido, presented by Garrido Gallery from Madrid, also share a bold disregard for conventional furniture formalities with Hervé van der Straeten's silver Console Cristalloïde and beautiful, tumbling blue light, Lustre Origami.

These emphatically avant-garde pieces contrast with the elegant simplicity of Carol Egan's sculptural stools and consoles, with their single twists, for Paris-based Galerie BSL.

For London gallerist David Gill, who will show Fredrikson Stallard's surreal soft Pyrenees sofa from 2007, alongside Mattia Bonetti's fantastical Fakir Cabinet, these oppositions within design are perennial. "You have Quakerism and you have fantasy. You have a geometric tendency in design and you have a sculptural. You have cubism and you



Clockwise from main image: Mathias Bengtsson's 'Growth Table' (2014); Mattia Bonetti's 'Fakir' cabinet (2004); Hervé Van Der Straeten's 'Console Cristalloïde' (2015) — Martin Scott Jupp/Galerie Hervé Henningsen (Singapore); BSL (David Gill Galleries, Carol Mathieu/Galerie van Der Straeten)

have architecture. And then there are a handful of pure geniuses who invent a new language."

At PAD, you encounter the 20th-century game-changers. Scandinavian modernism is out in force, with its own linearity, distinctive sense of balance, and sympathy for natural materials. True to its name, Modernity gallery will show classic pieces by Danes Finn Juhl and Peder Møller, a pioneer of ergonomics, while Rose Uniacke will present a range of wooden furniture by their compatriot Poul Henningsen and the Swedish "primitive modernist", Axel Einar Hjorth.

French modernists are also well served. Gallerist Pascal Cuisinier is devoted to the generation of designers, born between 1925 and 1929, who introduced a radical, utopian minimalism into French design in the 1950s, which is still influential today. Cuisinier says of designers such as Pierre Guariche, Joseph-André Motte and Pierre Paulin, "Proportion was the primary value. But these pieces are not just about aesthetics and comfort. They have an historical and philosophical value."

**'You have cubism and you have architecture. And then there are geniuses who invent a new language'**

There are also iconic pieces on view from the innovative mid-century Lyonais designer André Sornay (at Galerie Alain Marcelpoll) and his better known, more colourful contemporary Jean Royère (Galerie Chastel-Maréchal).

Lemut's gallerist, Valerio Capo, sees a nostalgia for these and other great pioneers in "the purity of the concept, the austerity of what he does. You might call Lemut a modernist. Form absolutely follows function. But these are old terms derived from faded battles."

Today, Lemut describes his work, with its fastidious attention to structure and materials, as "super-modern". Bengtsson, who is Danish and was trained in the rigidities of Scandinavian design, and is now represented by Galerie Maria Wettergren, Paris, has made a different accommodation with design history. As he puts it, "I needed to settle my account with Scandinavian modernism and move on. At the Royal College of Art in London, under the influence of Ron Arad, systems and barriers were demolished."

For him, as for so many, "The digital opens doors to new forms and new possibilities."

PAD London, October 14-18  
All gallery details at [pad-fairs.com](http://pad-fairs.com)

