

## Arts & Crafts - A Declaration for Design

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"What's the difference between art and design?" is a popular question — "What's the difference between design and craft?" less so. But this all might change as William Morris' declaration, 'Turn our artists into craftsmen and our craftsmen into artists!' is fast becoming a popular movement in the design world today.

A shift away from a reliance on industrial production into a system emphasising the value of artisan labour and craft techniques was a key theme in both this year's Milan Design Week and New York Design Week respectively.



In the many fringe exhibitions scattered across the two cities, evidence of a critical mass of design returning to an ancient system of craftsmanship was widely apparent. And while the permeability between art and design remained significant, with a wave of limited editions being launched at both events, designs fusion with flawless craftsmanship was the prominent trend.

In his solo exhibition 'Extranormal', Milan-based French designer Emmanuel Babled exhibited a series of new works emphasising the nature of handcrafted work while focusing on the flawless execution of the design processes involved. These processes, looking to traditional craftsmanship instead of the typical planning approach associated with design, demonstrated the possibility of obtaining uniqueness and perfection through traditional handcrafted work.

The launch of Meta, a new company that is the creation of Mallett, one of the world's pre-eminent antique houses, was a direct response to the great interest in uniqueness, exquisite quality, and collectibility of furniture pieces. Mallett, who are specialists in 18th century furniture and works of art, wanted to contribute to the contemporary design market by drawing upon their knowledge of materials and production techniques from the 18th century.

For its inaugural collection Meta commissioned five internationally renowned designers, including Matali Crasset and Tord Boontje, to develop new contemporary works in collaboration with traditional mastercraftsmen. The result of the project is an emphasis on renovating tradition through the capabilities in handcraft and uniting them with the designers' vanguard visions. Every detail is handmade to perfection, transforming each design into a narrative object that reveals a story of its making.

## Arts & Crafts - A Declaration for Design continued

Not alone in its endeavours, Royal Tichelaar Makkum, concentrated on centuries-old craftsmanship - rather than technology - and produced five extraordinary artefacts.

While restoring the 17th century flower pyramids for Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum, the Dutch company developed the exact colours, gloss and brush technique employed throughout the period. With their newfound knowledge and acquired expertise Royal Tichelaar commissioned four cutting edge Dutch designers, among them Jurgen Bey and Studio Job, to use the restored flower towers and historic production processes as a starting point for modern interpretations of the traditional flower pyramids. Each new design is made in the original Faience technique and painstakingly hand painted by the Royal Tichelaar team of master artisans.

This recent fascination with combining 21st century designers with traditional master artisans is also playing a big role in the sustainability initiative. Collaborative exchanges between internationally renowned designers and skilled artisans from underdeveloped countries is increasingly becoming a sought after and desirable design approach.

Artecnic's 'Witches' Kitchen', the newest addition to its award winning 'Design with Cons sustainable product line, combines old world craftsmanship with sophisticated design.

For their initial foray into kitchenware production the Los Angeles based company produced extensive collection of intricately handcrafted products designed by Tord Boontje and hand by three artisan groups from South America.

The Italian furniture manufacturer Cappellini, together with New York designer Stephen B known for his eco-conscious design approach - developed a new eco-friendly collection, 'Love'.

The collection, featuring handmade furnishings and accessories made from shredded recycled magazines, and mosaic tiles was produced in Africa by local artisans.

Such examples show that renovating tradition through design while integrating local elements into global systems is a timely option for the furniture industry. In our world of material overload it is becoming imperative that design carries with it strong cultural and creative significance to be valued in the saturated consumer culture of today.

