



centre d'innovation
et de design
au Grand-Hornu



paddle chair © Photo Crusio

Press release

Benoît Deneufbourg.

Process

21.10.18 → 03.02.19

The CID – centre d'innovation et de design at Grand-Hornu- provides an International platform, to showcase the work of Belgian designers. For many, it presented the first opportunity to organise an exhibition of their own: Big-Game, Nicolas Bovesse, Marina Bautier, Charles Kaisin, Sylvain Willenz, Jean-François D'Or, Chevalier-Masson. From 21th October to 3th February, the CID will host Benoît Deneufbourg's first solo exhibition. The Belgian designer, born in La Louvière in 1977, studied Interior Architecture at St Lucas (Brussels) in 2001. He works and lives in Brussels.

His interest in materials and their uses lead him to discover practical design applications, characterised by simplicity, for furniture, lighting, design objects, scenography and interior architecture. His discrete and restrained approach is expressed in unpretentious, agreeable coherent, practical, atmospheric design.

The first part of the exhibition displays the designer's experimental work and specially commissioned pieces. The chairs *Paddle* [Cruso], *Crossing* [Interni Edition] and *Donald*, the tables *Twist* [Interni Edition], the lamps *Pipeline* and *la Liseuse* [Macrolux] and the coat hanger *Sticks* [Normann Copenhagen], have all quietly entered the realm of post-2010 design classics. As the name of the exhibition indicates, Benoît Deneufbourg's aim is to explain the creative process behind the design object. Sketches, plans, samples and prototypes depict the various stages, experiments, tests, searches and choices made, from the initial concept to the finished article. He generously gives public insight into the whole manufacturing process.

For the occasion, the CID and the Centre Keramis [La Louvière] have joined forces to develop a collection of office accessories and ceramics, designed by Benoît Deneufbourg. The exhibition emphasises the talent of the designer as well as the knowhow of the local partner in collaboration.

The second part of the exhibition highlights Benoît Deneufbourg's work as an interior architect. Often overlooked by cultural institutions, this practice receives increasing interest when viewed as a separate discipline. Plans, drawings, samples, research and considerations provide insight into the projects he develops. For his exhibition, he supplied a hypothetical estimate for designing the house of an artist on the Grand-Hornu grounds. He also designed a full-scale model of the renovation of Grand-Hornu's canteen. The stage, he designed, restores the view of the forecourt and leaves the option to rearrange tables according to requirement (as a café, a workshop, for meetings, informal gatherings, picnics) as well as providing a space for the temporary design exhibition of small designer objects, in a large cabinet or behind guardrails. Chairs are chosen from the collection of the Belgian company Declercq, in Comines, that specializes in school furniture. The salvaged floorboards were supplied by *agence Rotor*. These choices reflect the values shared by Benoît Deneufbourg and the CID: the reduction of the carbon footprint and of associated costs, the fight against waste, the re-use of decommissioned materials and the encouragement of local trade. These values inspired them to find solutions throughout various scenographic collaborations, including *L'éloge de l'heure* and *Halte à la croissance!*

BIOGRAPHY

- 1977: born in La Louvière, Belgium
- 1995/1997: studied architecture at La Cambre Brussels - Belgium
- 1997/2001: studied interior design at ESA- Brussels – Belgium
- 2001/2003: assistant for designer Xavier Lust (Brussels, Belgium)
- 2004: Benoit Deneufbourg opens his design studio in Brussels (Belgium)
- 2010: Kelly Claessens opens the furniture shop La Fabrika. Together they collaborate on interior design projects
- 2012/2016: teaches at ESA Saint-Luc High School of Art and Design (Brussels, Belgium)
- Since 2014: teaches at ENSAV La Cambre (Brussels, Belgium)

AWARDS

- 2005: nominated for « Prix à l'INNOVATION Marc Charras-Ville de Saint-Étienne» for Pivo_table
- 2010: jury award for Twist at “Les découvertes”

EXHIBITIONS

2017

- Milan Furniture Fair - Belgitude (Italy)
- Milan Furniture Fair – SaloneSatellite. 20 Years of New Creativity (Italy)
- IMM - The Mad Office (Cologne, Germany)

2013

- Mube - A Matéria das Nuvens (Sao Paulo, Brazil)
- Milan Furniture Fair - The Toolbox (Italy)
- Stockholm Furniture Fair - Mad About Chairs (Sweden)

2012

- Biennale Interieur - MAD about Chair (Kortrijk, Belgium)
- Reciprocity Design Liège - Memorabilia (Belgium)

2011

- Milan Furniture Fair - Belgium is Design (Italy),
- Stockholm Furniture Fair (Sweden)

2010

- “Belgium is Design. Design for Mankind” (Grand-Hornu, Belgium)
- “Fighting the box” - La Centrale électrique (Brussels, Belgium)

2009

- Design Vlaanderen - De Nieuwe Oogst (Brussels, Belgium)
- DMY - Designmai (Berlin, Germany)
- Milan Furniture Fair - Exhibition in Atelier A1 (Italy)

2008

- DMY - Designmai (Berlin, Germany)
- Milan Furniture Fair - SaloneSatellite (Italy)

2007

- DMY - Designmai (Berlin, Germany)
- Milan Furniture Fair - SaloneSatellite (Italy)

2006

- Designed in Brussels - installation from atelier a1 (Belgium)
- Saint-Étienne design biennale (France)
- La Verrière Hermès (Brussels, Belgium)
- DMY - Designmai (Berlin, Germany)

2005

- Prix du Jeune design belge - Galerie Usage Externe (Brussels, Belgium)
- DMY-Designmai (Berlin, Germany)

TO THE HEART OF THINGS

Related to both the *Super Normal*, as Jasper Morrison and Naoto Fukasawa like to call their design and the genuine yet restrained innovation of the Bouroullec Brothers, Benoît Deneufbourg's design, he has been developing since 2005, is characterized by its quiet and balanced coherence. It belongs to the fields of product design, interior architecture and scenography.

Before Benoît Deneufbourg took to interior architecture, focussing specifically on product design, he studied architecture. This choice of study has proven of great significance to him: he considers the object, released from its environment and displayed on a pedestal, of no interest what so ever. For his design objects only exist in interaction with their environment and their purpose, as they emerge through a process which is simultaneously and intrinsically both technical and human. These objects, presented in all their evidentness, invite the users to *domesticate* them.

Benoît Deneufbourg's design restores the object's pure relationship with its users. Unpretentiously, his products are displayed in a way that reflects their primary function: to make things simple and rational, and above all to fulfil a need by adjusting a series of criteria, which tend to exceed their form and function. The harmonious objects, emerging from this process, convey a particular feeling of aesthetic joy, intrinsic to our rituals and ways of life.

Designed as tools for interaction, the objects engage in an ongoing dialogue with their users and with the surrounding space, inhabited by other objects. Hence the choice of the designer to optimise his design by connecting product design and interior architecture and, I might add, deeply felt sensibility and curiosity about human relations, a key element in a designer's work.

His *no-nonsense*, direct, practical and pertinent design, also has a certain lightness to it, that reminds us of a quality which we not often encounter nowadays: a silent force, drawing us nearer to the object while simultaneously moving us away from the ornaments of aesthetic judgment, thus enabling us to be fully receptive to the experience, without any kind of intellectual consideration. A relief indeed!

In these times of *cultural voyeurism* and *superlativeness* and the ubiquitous 'wow!', where everything must be gorgeous or sublime and where ostentatious display, or intrusive overload is needed for our feelings to arouse, Benoît Deneufbourg's designs, by contrast, reinstall *simplicity*.

His design generates design products, far away from craving artistic recognition and the claim for status upgrade. Quite the contrary, the designer modulates the meaning of the object and its basic and logical accessibility – this is what Bruno Munari defined as *technological aesthetics*. More importantly, he applies an ethic consistent with the

economy of means, which leads the project and its process towards sustainable and environmentally friendly solutions and products in the broader sense: covering aspects such as adaptability, efficiency, functionality, the number of bonded parts required, the assembly methods involved and the processing of materials. The focus remains on the user and the context of use, the production cost and retail price. Thus, a back and forth movement from the whole to the details and vice versa is generated: the basic rhythm of the designer's profession.

I met Benoît a couple of months before the opening of his solo exhibition at Grand-Hornu. It was kind of a perfect moment, as the designer was still going through a phase of reflection and observation regarding his work, which eased our way into a conversation on the *essence* of the object and not so much on its *appearance*.

Giovanna Massoni GM – Is an exhibition a tribute or a responsibility?

Benoît Deneufbourg – To me it marks a turning point in my professional life. I make it into an opportunity to gain insights and discover new possibilities.

GM – How do you use this tool?

BD – Not so much to showcase my work, but rather as an occasion to explain it. I will, of course, show my objects, but not on pedestals. I would like to elaborate on the process and how a project starts and evolves, using prototypes to illustrate the different steps that lead to the finished product. The exhibition is designed as a walk through the different processes and areas of work. It shows how these different environments interact and create complementarity between them, which is of vital importance in my overall vision of design.

GM – Does your design evolve along a clear line?

BD – To speak more generally, even if I 'd rather not, I'm not tied to a specific technique. I use the method that best suits the product, the nature of the order and the manufacturing capacity of the client. Depending on several technical requirements and on the producer's briefing, the work will be different for each product.

GM – How can we get an idea of the complexity of the work of a designer?

BD – An important section of the exhibition, set up as a work cell, displays my work as a product designer. The aim is to give insight

on the stages preceding the finished product and the process and the solutions I chose, based on my research. A very practical kind of research it is, that considers the object globally, the hidden details included. This process contains all my mistakes, the projects my clients refused, and the path followed by developing ideas, fuelled by compromises and professional and human interaction. A kind of return journey which follows a code of conduct.

GM – What is your code of conduct?

BD – I make simple objects: not in the sense of minimalist art, but accessible and logical, easy to understand in an intuitive, natural way, without superstructures. Each element of the object is chosen for a purpose and has a meaning. They are not merely pieces put together to form a decorative object.

GM – How do you relate to the current design scene?

BD – In my personal life, I chose quality over quantity. I prefer to work with a small group of brands and companies – their level of reputation is not my concern -, and develop together the lines of products, being involved in each step of the process. My goal is to ensure continuity. Having a good relationship with every person concerned is important.

GM – Is design a learning process?

BD – It is without a doubt, and very much so all the time. Belgium, the United Kingdom, the Scandinavian countries ... Manufacturers, producers, industries and craftsmen... This kind of diversity is the most interesting aspect of it. I'm not only referring to the cultural mix, but also to the opportunity to confront and to learn each time again about new production methods [from craftsmanship to serial production], new techniques, new markets.

GM – The work of a designer doesn't end with the finished product. How would you describe your profession?

BD – A designer is a kind of sponge, absorbing every information on the manufacturing process of an object and on its use. When working with companies, the more detailed the briefing, the more challenging the work will be and the better the result.

GM – The ability to observe, to listen and above all to connect all the elements in the right way, are these essential qualities in the designer business?

BD – They are, but technical mastery is too. Assembly techniques, knowledge of materials, the logic behind the way we assemble two pieces of wood, controlling expenses, this requires continuous attention to production methods, industrial processes which are

different for each firm ... All of this must be integrated in the process: the designed object must be adaptable to the right production method.

GM – The connexion, the junction, the bridge and the context placing of the object.

This consideration reveals a fundamental aspect of one's design: the necessity to passionately explore assembly solutions and the capacity to give attention to each part of the object, even if hidden.

BD – Details, the technical solution, the developed processes for each assembly session, in accordance with the shape and the used material... This is what captivates me about product design. It's a question of measure. My approach of interior architecture on one hand and design on the other is complementary, but it is in the field of design where I can concentrate most on details, technique and finish.

GM – I always thought that the key function of a designer was to find solutions in the manufacturing phase of the product. Is that true?

BD – To be directly involved with each production phase is essential. I prefer to stay close to the product and discuss and engage in dialogue with the manufacturers and learn from them. My job is not to draw sketches but to go to the heart of things.

Giovanna Massoni

THE INVENTION OF SPACES

Towards the end of the 19th century, numerous architects began to incorporate interiors, often down to the smallest detail, into the buildings they designed. Belgium produced a number of prominent interior designers, Victor Horta, Paul Hankar, Henry van de Velde, Huib Hoste, Herman De Koninck and others. They began to design all the furniture, lighting, accessories and fabrics, turning their architectural creations into Gesamtkunstwerke. The profession of interior designer in Belgium progressed along unconventional yet ultimately successful lines. Whilst its status was officially recognised, the profession, oddly enough, wasn't protected. It was an ambiguous, ill-defined occupation. During his architecture studies at La Cambre, Benoît Deneufbourg felt more drawn to the interior aspect of projects. He considered an object design course, but ultimately opted for interior design at ESA St-Lucas, in Brussels. His varied educational background enables him to combine two distinctive occupations: object design and interior design. From 2010, he concentrated especially on the latter, when his partner, Kelly Claessens, opened the furniture shop La Fabrika. The design and furnishing they develop together is appreciated primarily for its completeness. The outstanding projects for staging exhibition Benoît Deneufbourg undertook additionally, further refined his approach to the creation of spaces, with emphasis on the object and understanding of the cultural dialogue between different works and worlds. The different aspects of his profession interact and enrich. It mirrors honesty, usefulness and restraint, characteristic of his design.

How would you define the profession of an interior designer?

Creating both exterior and interior living spaces is a multidisciplinary task. The interior designer has to interact with other disciplines: exhibition staging, graphic design, exterior architecture. Interior design requires an overall view on various factors: cultural, historical, practical, technical and economical, as well as on aesthetic principles. It has to include a vision on contemporary and future lifestyle, with consideration given to the sensible use of materials, the economic aspect, the manner of construction and to every technical detail. Both spaces and object must service people's needs and contribute to their social and cultural lifestyle.

You frequently stress that whilst studying architecture, you were often more drawn towards details [door handles, furniture, objects, etcetera] Is interior design a question of scale?

I prefer the smaller object I can easily handle. I like to go into the details and study the ergonomic aspect of a space. It takes up a lot

of time to redesign with millimetre precision a light switch or socket, to choose materials, to combine several light sources or to find smart ways of improving its use, or simply to enhance the atmosphere in a given space. In architecture, we can't always afford to spend the time required for such things, which is the way I prefer. Interior designers distinguish themselves from decorators, who mainly give ambiance to a room. They don't define or alter a space, they dress it up. The interior designer has a more overall view, forming a link between all the different objects and their function.

The interior designer structures spaces. Has your background in architecture proven useful in that?

It has. It gave me the tools and the technical knowhow, knowledge I apply daily to all my interior projects, large and small. I've come to realise that I'm really very fond of architecture. The link between the interior and its outer shell is evident. However, one can't be an expert on everything. I believe that the architect and the interior designer can be a finely-tuned duo.

What do you consider the first priority in the concept of an interior?

The choice of raw material, finish and colours. I am reluctant to use standard materials. For each project I conduct extensive research. If I choose a type of stone, say marble, I visit the supplier, accompanied by my client, to personally choose the stone. It's important to me to be able to pick out a stone for its beauty, its marbling and texture. I usually draw clear lines to obtain a relatively pure shape. The right combination of material and colours brings out its character. I have a strong dislike of monotony. But first and foremost, a project is defined by the wishes of the client and the restrictions deriving from it. I find restrictions especially inspiring.

Between the wars, lighting became a fully-fledged decorative element. It's a structural element too and potentially an element of communication [illuminated advertisement...]. What is the importance of lighting in your work? What is your approach?

It is essential. Naturally, lighting above all is functional, but it also influences our perception of a space; it can optically modify its dimensions. Apart from the decorative aspect, lighting can also

affect our senses, mood and even our behaviour. In any given space, I combine several light sources making sure to avoid systemic applications and taking into account all parameters. Lighting technology has advanced tremendously in recent years. I call upon competent specialists and suppliers whenever necessary.

Industrialization [comprising mass production] has greatly influenced the development of interior design. Standardized furniture was introduced into the home. Today we notice a return towards bespoke, artisanal pieces. What is your take on this trend?

Serial design has become standard and people want stop buying it overnight. Perhaps in time they will purchase less, and invest in better, ageless pieces. Even in a time of crisis as we're experiencing today, people have a need for comfort. Surrounding yourself with personal, unique design meets this need. When possible, we sketch everything ourselves. Each kitchen, for example, is specifically designed with the client in mind, in accordance with their personality, their requirements and their perception of how comfortable the room should be where meals are made.

You teach interior design at La Cambre. What does your program consist of?

It is essential for the students to develop strong ideas and principles in a consistent, logical manner, that stimulates critical awareness. My aim is to encourage innovative concepts of form and its integration into a space, by introducing various parameters in social and economic relationships. The interior design studio is a place for experimenting, for practical learning and intellectual development. A place where risks can be taken but measure is required, where the student is trained, enabling him to engage in the profession of his choice.

What distinguishes your work as an exhibition stage designer?

It brings a different set of challenges. Possibilities and restrictions differ from those in interior design. We no longer represent a single individual, but we stage a number of works. We must understand the theme of the exhibition and the nature of the pieces on display and integrate the whole into a meaningful ensemble. It provides me

with the much appreciated opportunity to try out materials I wouldn't normally use. There is more experimentation than in a domestic interior. As durability is less of an issue with a scene that rarely exceeds a period of a couple of months, I commit to a sensible recycling policy.

Nathalie Delsipée, Marie Pok

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Press visuals can be downloaded without access
code on WWW.CARACASCOM.COM

paddle stool
© Photo Cruso



Stick Hook

© Photo Normann Copenhagen



Crossing chair

© Photo interni



Twist

© Photo interni



Pipeline

© Photo Stephen Papandropoulos



Candle-plate

© Photo Another Country



Donald chair

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PARTNERS



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OPENING TIMES

Every day from 10 AM until 6 PM, except
Mondays.

The Grand-Hornu is closed on 24, 25, 31st
December and 1st January.

The office can be reached during
weekdays from 8 AM to 4.30 PM.

ADMISSION FEE

- Combined ticket for the Grand-Hornu site / CID / MAC's: €8
- Discount: €2 or €5
- Group rates (minimum 15 ppl.): €5
- School groups: €2
- Free for children under 6
- Free entry on the first sunday of the month
- Free guided tour from Tuesday to Friday at 15.30, Saturday at 11.00 and 15.30, Sunday at 15.00 and 16.30
- Audio-guides for the historic site: €2 (FR / DUTCH / GERMAN / ENGL / IT / SP)

BOOKING NUMBER

Advance reservation required for guided tours (by appointment) of exhibitions and/or historic site (FR / DUTCH / GERMAN / ENGL).
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