



centre d'innovation
et de design
au Grand-Hornu



Oskar Zieta, Zieta BazAir, installation view © Simona Cupoli

Press release

Design on Air

Curator: Chris Meplon
Scenography: Benjamin Stoz

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Invisible, intangible, immaterial. Yet omnipresent and vital. No life on earth is possible without air. Scientists and philosophers share their fascination for air with contemporary designers.

The *Design on Air* exhibition at CID in Grand-Hornu explores the relationships between design and air, the most ethereal, and at the same time the most essential of the four traditional elements.

Air – at least for now – is free, belonging to everyone. But in our Anthropocene age, it is also becoming an increasingly threatened resource, in need of protection. How are designers reacting to this? How do they deal with air? What does air mean to them? And can design justifiably be compared to air?

In *Design on Air*, the theme of air is approached from diverse angles, from air as an inflatable material to blowing air as a formative and technical procedure. From the movement of air to the quality of air. Sometimes, the priority is a search for material expertise or innovation in technical production, or such functional issues as safety and comfort, or it might be about the magic of the rarefied, the fleeting, the ethereal. The one need not cancel out the other.

'Air not only forms the object of study in chemistry, physics and biology; it has always been an important inspiration in art, literature and philosophy. We wanted to know what this means in design,' explains curator Chris Meplon. 'At the moment, some important thinkers regard air as a powerful metaphor for our times. The lightness, the fleeting, floating, multiple character of air [always a composite: a mixture of gases] all express how we experience the world in the 21st century. The invisible, the intangible, the unfathomable are things we find equally decisive, or sometimes as threatening, for mankind and our living environment as what we are able to determine with our senses.'

'Air is always more or less than air,' writes the British literary theorist Steven Connor in *The Matter of Air*. 'Air is almost nothing, and yet not nothing,' claims the German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk in his monumental trilogy, *Spheres*. Sloterdijk uses such spatial metaphors as 'bubbles', 'globes' and 'foam' to describe the history of humanity. He believes that the 21st century is the century of 'foam', an extremely fragile, unstable and transitory collection of tiny bubbles. In this exhibition, we see that bubbles and clouds also speak strongly to designers, and that these shapes appear everywhere, thanks to their poetic power of expression. In short, air is a powerful metaphor in the design world as well. Design has become 'a ghost in the cloud', to cite the Limburg design expert, Jan Boelen. Design can no longer be defined unambiguously. The discipline is multifaceted, mixed, and relatively intangible... But it is certainly 'not nothing'!

Design on Air is built around six spontaneous associations with air in design. This presentation is not intended as a complete, objective or systematic overview. The 'airy' scenography of Brussels-based interior designer Benjamin Stoz is comprised of modules that you can look through, and that allow air to circulate freely. Nothing is strictly demarcated. The selected objects and projects – say free-floating bubbles of foam – allow lots of other associations and constellations. In all, a total of 80 projects have been selected, from established international names to young talents from Belgium and abroad, from one offs to mass-produced designs.

Here follows a brief overview of the six approaches followed in the exhibition, each with a few examples. A provisional list of all participating designers is included below.

1. FILLED WITH AIR

Air As Filling.

From freedom and happiness to ecology and comfort.

The arrival of affordable, inflatable PVC furniture designs in the 1960s came hand in hand with a spirit of freedom and happiness, a joyful lust for experimentation and rebellion against bourgeois conventions. Among others, the transparent inflatable furniture pieces from the iconic *Aérospace* series by the French-Vietnamese engineer **Quasar Khanh** represent the nonconformity and the uninhibited, carefree pop culture of the years around 1968.

In the meantime, the unique characteristics of air as a material for filling have also been applied out of environmental concern. The most sustainable use of materials is to use as little materials as possible. Air makes the use of other material resources unnecessary for fillings. It weighs nothing and takes up no space in transport. It can be locally resourced, anywhere. In this sense, air is incredibly ecological. The Polish design brand, **Malafor**, fills recycled 'dunnage bags' (paper sacks as padding to prevent cargos from shifting) for their seating furniture. The fact that you can sit just as comfortably on air as on a soft foam filling is also a point of departure for **Dirk Wynants'** playful *Do-Nuts*.

2. FORMED BY AIR

Air as a production technique. From traditional craft to high-tech and 3-D.

Air forms and deforms, bends and stretches. Here, we see air as an agent, it is used in the forming process to ensure that materials take on the shapes they are intended to. This is mostly about objects that retain their shape. It is not possible to empty them and blow them up again, as it is with typical inflatable objects.

Glass-blowing is a good example of this. Air is blown into a glass bubble, which expands, with or without a mould to shape it. For **nendo's** *Innerblow* table, several glass blowers work together. Animal skins, leather and both natural and synthetic fabrics can also be inflated. Even metals can be inflated. **Ben Storms** places a monumental marble block on an inflated metal cushion to create a coffee table. **Oskar Zieta** launched the FIDU procedure: two extremely thin metal sheets welded at the edges and then blown out under high pressure, into a 3-D object. And there is the famous *Air Chair* by **Jasper Morrison** for **Magis**. The technique of injecting gas not only involves injecting fluid plastic into a mould, but also gas, which forces the plastic against the walls of the mould. The hollow internal spaces make the final product lighter and save significantly on materials.

3. CLEAN AIR

The need for healthy air. From photosynthesis to fashionable dust masks.

Nine out of ten people breathe in polluted air every day, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). Air pollution damages lungs, hearts and brains. In Flanders, last year, 20,000 citizens took part in an investigation into the quality of air as a result of traffic. Pollution-repellent masks, already commonplace in Asia, are also showing up here in our streets as fashionable accessories (cf. **Airinum**). Designers are looking for ways of measuring and improving air quality, both indoors and outdoors. **Julian Melchiorri** investigates how he can make use of artificial photosynthesis. Some projects have a primarily signalling function, such as the Venetian masks with antipollution filter, by **Philippe Tabet**.

4. MOVING AIR

Cooling, energy and sound. From fresh breezes to a cheerful whistle.

Air movement has a cooling effect. Designers are engaging in diverse interpretations of the traditional fan. The portable *Ariante* model by industrial designer **Marco Zanusso**, the synthetic Clay Fan by **Maarten Baas**, and the 'naked' fan blades tied in a cage, designed by **Julien Carretero**, all illustrate very different visions of design.

Air movement and changing air pressure also play a role in the production of sound. For wind instruments, air is caused to vibrate by blowing into the instrument. This brought the young German designer **Philipp Weber** to the brilliant idea of adding valves to a traditional glassblowing pipe, enabling the glassblower to open and close different air streams, like with a trumpet. With **Michael Graves** and **Richard Sapper's** famous Alessi water kettles, rising steam generates a cheerful whistle.

5. AIR FOR SAFETY

Air as a protective cocoon. From shock absorber to insulation

Inflatable swimming rings, safety vests and airbags are just a few of the familiar objects for which air is used for safety. Objects that contain air will float on water, or absorb powerful shocks. Bubbles or cushions of air are excellent for packing material for both fragile living bodies or heavy freight. **Andreas Finke** integrates pockets of air into ultra-light, high-tech protective equipment for sports. Sometimes, existing protective air products are appropriated by designers for different purposes. **Katrin Sonnleitner** has designed a carpet out of bubble wrap, and **Jeff Rutten** uses fenders for protecting the sides of ships in designing multifunctional outdoor furnishings.

As it is a poor conductor of heat, air is also an ideal insulation. Like double glazing in buildings, the layer of air in between the walls of double-walled glasses has an insulating effect. **Nedda El-Asmar** and **Sebastian Bergne** make use of these properties in double-walled coffee classes and bowls.

6. IN THE AIR

Air to float in. Balloons, bubbles and clouds.

In his book *L'air et les songes*, (*Air and Dreams*), the French philosopher and writer Gaston Bachelard describes an aesthetic of the air by trying to release what he refers to as the “dynamic imagination” that will sublimate this experience of the air. He analyzes different literary texts in order to indicate a series of sensations that evoke the air element: e.g. floating, lightness, wind, steam, ascent, clouds. Part of this exhibition space is being reserved for poetic projects that either literally or figuratively float. Balloons, clouds and soap bubbles are part of this. They float all around and escape our grasp. If we try to catch them, they burst. Or maybe they don't. With his *Carbon Balloon Chair*, **Marcel Wanders** seems to perform a magic balloon juggling trick. Nonetheless, this feather-light chair is strong enough to bear the weight of a person. **Charles Kaisin** has come up with handblown text balloons made of coloured crystal. Their messages are projected onto the wall with a lamp. **Hideki Yoshimoto** toys with the image of rising air bubbles in water. He transposes this natural phenomenon in handblown glass bubbles, enveloped in epoxy. The Verhoeven twins defy the transience of soap bubbles by translating them into borosilicate glass, and in doing so freezing them in time.

So, we really do try to capture bubbles of air after all.

LIST OF DESIGNERS

- AKOUN Steven – France
- ALGE Victor – Suède
- BAAS Maarten – Pays-Bas
- BARROS Tiago – Portugal
- BERGNE Sebastian –
Royaume-Uni
- CARBONELL Nacho – Espagne
- CARRETERO Julien – France
- CHARLES Marc – France
- CHARRIÉ Pierre – France
- CLAESSION Mårten – Suède /
KOIVISTO Eero – Suède /
RUNE Ola – Suède
- CROSBIE Nick – Royaume-Uni /
SODEAU Marc et Mike –
Royaume-Uni
- DAHER Sarah – Liban
- DE BACKER Pascale – Belgique
- DE CEULAER Maarten –
Belgique
- DE PAS Jonathan – Italie /
D'URBINO Donato – Italie /
LOMAZZI Paolo – Italie
- EL-ASMAR Nedda – Belgique /
INDEKEU Erik – Belgique
- FABRICA - Italie
- FINKE Andreas – Allemagne
- FRONT
- FUKASAWA Naoto – Japon
- GIOVANNONI Stefano – Italie
- GRAVES Michael –
Royaume-Uni
- GRAVIKY Labs – Inde
- HÖVDING – Suède
- GÖHLING K. – Allemagne
- HJERTSTRÖM Alexander –
Suède
- KAISIN Charles – Belgique
- KAMEI Jun – Japon
- KLARENBECK Eric – Pays-Bas
- KOCH Wilhelm – Allemagne
- LOVEGROVE Ross –
Royaume-Uni
- MALAFOR – Pologne
- MAURER Ingo – Allemagne /
MÖLLER Theo – Allemagne
- MEERMAN Roos – Pays-Bas
- MELCHIORRI Julian – Italie
- MORRISON Jasper –
Royaume-Uni
- NENDO – Japon
- OGSB Studio – Belgique
- PESCE Gaetano – Italie
- QUASAR Khahn – Vietnam
- REINOSO Pablo - Argentine
- RUTTEN Jeff – Belgique
- SAPPER Richard – Allemagne
- SEMPÉ Inga – France
- SNOWCRASH – Suède
- SONNLEITNER Katrin –
Allemagne
- STARCK Philippe – France
- STORMS Ben – Belgique
- SUPPANEN Ilka – Finlande
- TABET Philippe – France
- VERHOEVEN Twins – Pays-Bas
- WANDERS Marcel – Pays-Bas
- WEBER Philipp – Allemagne
- WILLEMARCK Eline - Belgique
- WYNANTS Dirk – Belgique
- YOSHIMOTO Hideki – Japon
- YOUNG Michael – Royaume-Uni
- ZANUSSO Marco - Italie
- ZIETA Oskar – Pologne
- ZHONG Song Wen – Chine

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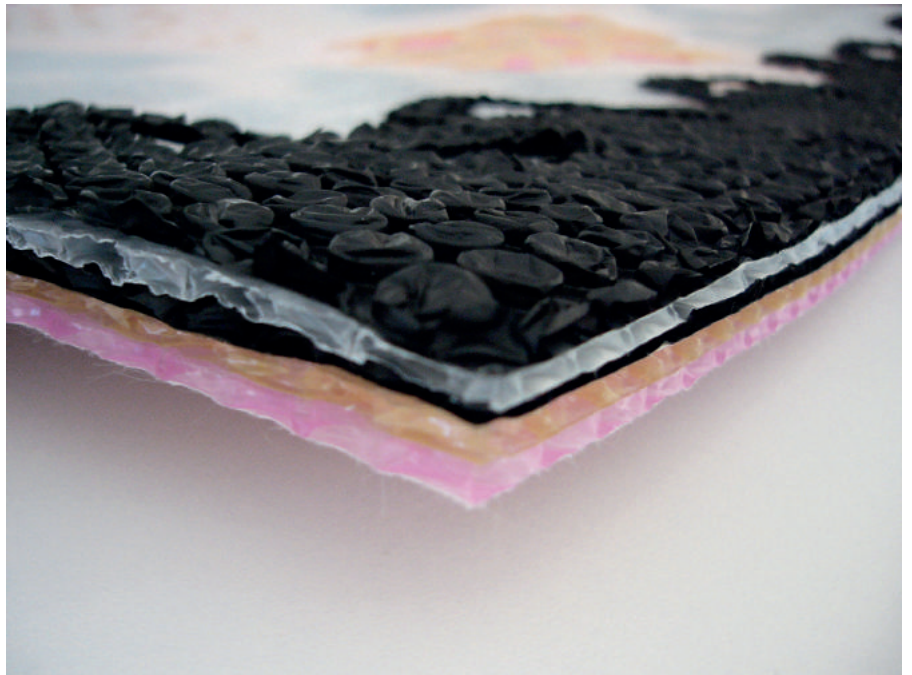
Roos Meerman
Aera Fabrica, 2014

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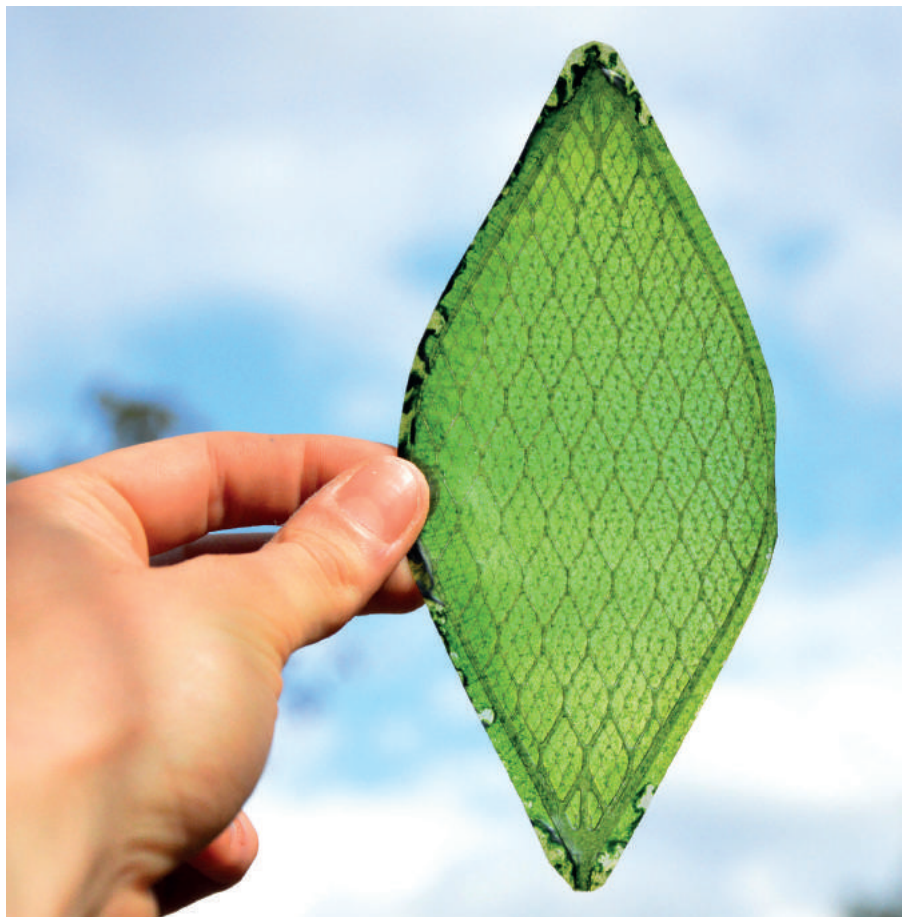


Bubblewraprug

© Gen Higashikawa



Julian Melchiorri
Silk Leaf



Maarten De Ceulaer
Mutation Series, 2012



MALAFOR
PAPER+ ARMCHAIR, 2015

© Pawel Pomorski



Nedda El-Asmar
Coffee glasses for Jacqmotte



Verhoven Twins
You & I, 2018



Hideki Yoshimoto
Rise

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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: €10
- Discount: €2 or €6
- Group rates (minimum 15 ppl.): €6
- 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
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SP)

BOOKING NUMBER

Advance reservation required for guided
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and/or historic site (FR / DUTCH /
GERMAN / ENGL).

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CATERING

Rizom is the sixth project of Chef
Sang Hoon Degeimbre.

This restaurant, located in the heart of
the Grand-Hornu, offers a cuisine that
melts different cultures together. In
addition, Rizom also provides a new fast
food service in the cafeteria that was
recently transformed by designer Benoît
Deneufbourg.

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