

## Jeroen Verhoeven

Jeroen Verhoeven (b.1976 Netherlands) makes work that combines the fantastic with the practical: it is function and form turned into mystical narrative, where the supple feather-light impressions of dreams become objects that we can see, touch and most importantly use in our every-day lives. 'We are storytellers, from fantasy to factory, from statement to product,' Verhoeven writes on the website of the Dutch design house Demakersvan, which he founded together with his twin brother and Judith de Graauw. This storytelling, which Verhoeven so passionately advocates, not only demonstrates that the improbable can become the extraordinary, but it puts a new perspective on design itself: what it once was, what it has become, and what it might be in the future.

Verhoeven's possibly most famous work, the Cinderella Table, demonstrates exactly this practice: using computer software, Verhoeven translates a sketch of an 18th century commode and an antique console into two digital drawings that he then morphs into a third representation forming a table. From this image, computer aided manufacturing hardware produce thin birch plywood sheets composing a three dimensional object of the digital image. The artist glues all individual birch slices together by hand, thereby forming a unique piece of furniture.

Contemporary software and computer-aided manufacturing create a fable-like object that ultimately narrates the story of a unique hand-manufactured and antique piece of design. It is the narrative of fairy tales: something old and something ordinary, something that we think we know, metamorphose into an entirely new thing that dazzles us in its juxtaposition - just like Cinderella.

Together with his brother, Verhoeven has achieved at the beginning of his career what many designers never manage in their lifetime: translating aesthetic fantasies into real objects without sacrificing function, and turning functional objects into key-pieces of beauty without becoming exclusively form. The names of Demakersvan's products - Demakersvan literally meaning 'the makers of' - speak for themselves: there are garlands woven out of fifteen thousand Swarovski crystals, turning the most fragile and disposable object - party paper-decorations - into an expensive and precious piece of interior design. Bathroom tiles transform into water lily scattered black pools in Bloomstone, and Lucky Charms - a charm bracelet of life-size ceramic tableware for which Verhoeven won the EDIDA: ELLE Decoration International Design Award - evokes society's inability to decide what should have function and what should decorate in a home.

It is this sophistication to make the banal precious and the unique and antique adapt to contemporary methods of industrial production that has earned Demakersvan a place in museums like Centre Pompidou, Die Neue Sammlung, the Victoria and Albert Museum in London and the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, and projects with market leading companies such as Nike and Swarovski. 'Functionality is only important if that is the subject,' Verhoeven says. 'Dream impossible things.'

The question whether he is an artist or a designer, Verhoeven rigorously refuses to answer: 'Why do I have to put myself into a certain box?' he asks. What is certain, however, is that he enables us to

experience a fairy tale world in an environment that we have learned to take unrightfully for granted. In the words of Sol LeWitt: 'Conceptual artists are mystics rather than rationalists. They leap into conclusions that logic cannot reach... illogical judgments lead to a new experience.' [1] It should come as no surprise then that one of Verhoeven's most recent projects Virtue of Blue, is a delicate construction featuring 500 solar panels cut into the shapes of four different breeds of butterfly. These cluster around a flame-like, hand-blown glass bulb and, though they are static, appear in flight. Another remarkable element of the chandelier is that it is self-sustaining; like living butterflies, which use the rays of the sun to raise their own body temperatures, the wings of the chandelier butterflies absorb energy during daylight hours to provide power for the light they surround.

Verhoeven graduated from Eindhoven Design Academy in 2004, together with his twin brother Joep Verhoeven. Since then, Verhoeven's work has been exhibited internationally, with recent group exhibitions including *Against the Grain: Wood in Contemporary Art, Craft and Design*, at the Mind Museum, North Carolina, which travelled to the Museum of Arts and Design, New York, US (2013), *New Energy in Design and Art*, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, NL (2011) a solo exhibition *The Curious Image*, Blain|Southern London, UK (2011), *Telling Tales* at London's Victoria and Albert Museum, UK (2009), *Thing: Beware the Material World* at Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth, AU (2009), *Digitally Mastered: Recent Acquisitions from the Museum's Collection*, Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, US (2007) and *Space for your Future*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo, JP (2007).

Verhoeven's practice is included in several publications including *History of Design: Decorative Arts and Material Culture, 1400-2000* (Yale University Press, New Haven 2013); *The Power of Design: Product Innovation in Sustainable Energy Technologies*, (Wiley, Chichester 2013); the publication by Glenn Adamson; *Invention of Craft*, (Berg Publishers, London 2012); *21st Century Design* by Marcel Wanders and Marcus Fairs (Carlton Books Ltd, London 2011); *Design Dictionary: Perspectives on Design Terminology* (Board of International Research in Design) by Michael Erloff, Timothy Marshall, Laura Bruce, and Steven Lindberg, Birkhäuser Architecture, (Basel 2008); *And Fork: 100 Designers, 10 Curators, 10 Good Designs*, by Tom Dixon (Phaidon Press, London 2007) and Gareth William's *The Furniture Machine*, (Victoria and Albert Museum London 2006).

Verhoeven's work is in several public and private collections, including Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth, AU; Brooklyn Museum, New York, US; Die Neue Sammlung in Munich, DE; The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, US; Victoria and Albert Museum, London, UK; Centre Pompidou, Paris, FR; and has most recently been acquired by The Corning Museum of Glass, New York, US.

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[1] LeWitt, Sol, "Sentences on Conceptual Art", 1969