

Telling Tales: Fantasy and Fear in Contemporary Design

14 July – 18 October 2009



Fig leaf wardrobe by Tord Boontje, 2008 © MET A

This summer the V&A will explore the recent trend among European designers for limited edition pieces that push the boundaries between art and design. *Telling Tales: Fantasy and Fear in Contemporary Design* will bring together around 50 objects that share common themes such as fantasy, parody and a concern with mortality. The exhibition will feature furniture, ceramics, lighting and large scale installations by designers including Tord Boontje, Maarten Baas, Jurgen Bey and Studio Job.

Gareth Williams, the curator, has arranged the exhibition in three sections. The first, 'The Forest Glade', will display objects inspired by fantasy and nature that evoke the spirit of fairytales such as Tord Boontje's *Fig Leaf* wardrobe, constructed from 616 individual, hand-painted copper leaves. His *Petit Jardin* armchair, cut from sheet steel and assembled by hand, is designed to create the sensation of sitting in an overgrown garden.

Work by designers Fredrikson Stallard, Julia Lohman, Maarten Baas and Tomáš Gabzdil Liberty will be in this section. Liberty produces his intricate *Made by Bees* vase by placing a wire frame in a beehive and allowing bees to create its honeycomb walls.

The second section, 'The Enchanted Castle', will look at work that exaggerates and parodies historical design styles often associated with displays of status. Studio Job's *Robber Baron* series of gilded and cast bronze furniture subverts the extravagance of late-Victorian design, and the perceived taste of today's super-rich. A large cabinet, based on an original from the workshop of André-Charles Boulle of about 1700, has a huge hole blasted through its centre. Other works in the group include a clock, table, lamp and jewel safe covered in motifs of weapons, polluted clouds and factories representing war, power and industry.

On show will be two recent V&A acquisitions. Maarten Baas's *Smoke Mirror* is part of his *Smoke Furniture* series created by burning reproductions of antique furniture with a blowtorch to produce a charred effect. *Lathe Chair VIII* by Sebastian Brajkovic is an exaggerated love seat seemingly made from a single 19th-century chair stretched into two.

Alongside will be Jeroen Verhoeven's *Cinderella* table, Julian Mayors's *Clone* chair, ceramics by Hella Jongerius and Joris Laarman's *Heatwave* radiator based on rococo scrollwork.

The final section, 'Heaven and Hell' will display work by designers concerned with themes of mortality and the afterlife. *The Lovers* rug by Fredrikson Stallard comprises a pair of conjoined pools of poured red urethane representing the average quantity of blood in two people.

Some of the designers in this section reference historical depictions of 'The Last Judgement' or Dante's 'Inferno'. An example is Luc Merx's *The Fall of the Damned* chandelier made up of a cloud of around 170 weightless and tumbling human figures suspended in mid air. Others reflect an interest in psychoanalysis, such as Joep van Lieshout's *Sensory Deprivation Skull*, a large skull-shaped, fur-lined chamber to accommodate two people. These objects will appear together with work by Dunne & Raby, Niels van Eijk and Miriam van der Lubbe and Boym Partners.

Gareth Williams said: "*This exhibition aims to capture a way of designing that has been emerging in recent years. These objects have stories to tell and we wanted to present some of the most creative and innovative examples and explore common themes.*"

The exhibition designers are Nissen Adams who, together with lighting designer Zerlina Hughes, will create a dramatic setting for each section. In 'The Forest Glade' a background of printed gauze screens and dappled lighting will evoke the forests of myths and fairytales. A distorted palatial atmosphere will be the setting for 'The Enchanted Castle'. Spot lit objects and diagonal walls will create a disconcerting 'Heaven and Hell'.

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Notes to Editors

- *Telling Tales: Fantasy and Fear in Contemporary Design* is at the V&A from 14 July to 18 October 2009.
- ADMISSION: FREE
- Open daily 10.00 – 17.45 and until 22.00 every Friday.
- For public enquiries call 0207 942 2000 or visit www.vam.ac.uk
- The exhibition curator is Gareth Williams, previously V&A Curator of 20th century and Contemporary Furniture and now Senior Tutor of Design Products at the RCA. Gareth recently curated the V&A's new display of 20th and 21st-century design in the West Room on the first floor of the Museum.
- The exhibition is in the Porter Gallery, the V&A's gallery for contemporary exhibitions and installations.
- There will be an accompanying symposium at the museum on Friday 16 October.
- To coincide with the opening of the exhibition, V&A Publishing has produced a book of the same title (£19.99). For further press information about the book contact Julie Chan on 0207 942 2701 or 07747 607 822 or email j.chan@vam.ac.uk (not for publication).

About Nissen Adams:

Established in 2002, Nissen Adams works at a range of scales; from product design, to theatrical stage settings and exhibition design, to larger one-off buildings and refurbishments. Recent projects include a houseboat; the new auction house for Phillips de Pury in Victoria; and the set design for a new opera based on the Elephant and Castle shopping centre for Aldeburgh Festival.

For more information visit: www.nissenadams.com

About Zerlina Hughes:

Zerlina Hughes is a freelance lighting designer who has worked in theatre, opera, architecture and film. She designed the lighting for *Twilight: Light in the Magic Hour* at the V&A (2006). Her theatre work includes lighting for the National Theatre, London, a number of Broadway productions, New York and the Sydney Opera House. She was recently lighting design consultant for the film *Batman Begins*.

For more information visit: www.znaconsultancy.com

For further PRESS information about the exhibition please contact Alex Bratt or Dorothee Dines in the V&A press office on 0207 942 2503 / 2500 or email a.bratt@vam.ac.uk / d.dines@vam.ac.uk (not for publication).

A selection of high resolution images is available to download from www.image.net