

london design festival

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As every year, this September, the London Design Week invaded the city. One could breathe design in its various forms and shapes. London has been the place for designers and makers from all over the world to show their work and raise their voice to open new discussions about what is happening around us. Year by year the Design Week gets bigger but it never loses the aim of showing the matters and challenges that design is facing in different corners of the world and globally. This year, the core themes of the event were sustainability, storytelling, women empowerment and the importance of preserving traditional craft techniques that are in risk of being lost. In terms of sustainability it was possible to see corn tiles, recycled materials, zero waste talks, and hundreds of other events running every day about how to build a sustainable future through design. The conversation between design and crafts has been notorious and easy to find across all the exhibitors. There is an unavoidable necessity of storytelling, a desire of using design to make meaningful things that no longer approves design as something only beautiful or useful. For many designers nowadays the challenge is to show what is happening in their cultures, how they interact and deal with tough political and social environments but also how to use design as a tool to preserve societies, identities, crafts techniques and improve realities. Summarizing, the London Design Week pointed out that design is an essential key for society, not just to help raise voices across the world talking about different life realities and cultures, but also as the opener of the climate change discussion, our responsibility towards the environment, and also its role as unifier of different beliefs, identities, languages, techniques and materials through objects. Objects that bring to the maker and to the user a sense of global belonging in a world plenty of boundaries.

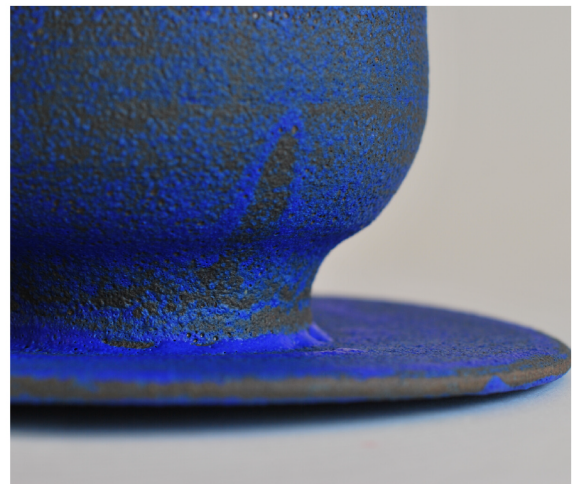
THE NEW CRAFTSMEN

The New Craftsmen curates, commissions and sells unique contemporary objects that are rooted in craftsmanship and narrative. Spanning furniture, lighting, textiles, gifts, ceramics and artworks made by a growing network of makers from across the British Isles. This project begun from a four month travel across British Isles trying to rescue those craft techniques scattered around the country. Currently they not only show British crafts but also grow a community of makers with a rich variety of expertise in different crafts.

Taking the traditional techniques, The New craftsmen teams works along with the makers to imprint their spirit in every piece and in doing so promote the importance of reinventing the traditional into a contemporary work to keep the crafts voices alive. In their own words: “We make visible the life of things: useful, beautiful objects to enjoy every day”

POTTERY FROM PALESTINE

Moïo Studio is the Berlin-based ceramic art studio of French-Palestinian artist Maia Beyrouti. The collection on show was called “Modern Ancestors”, a collection of monochrome sculptural ceramic vessels and accessories. The pieces attract immediately the visitor attention because of their characteristic blue marine colour and their architectural modern shapes. Faithful reminders of the Brutalism movement showing the basic identity of materials, but also reminders of those typical Middle East pottery shapes that Maia has re-signified and re-built to adapt to a much more contemporary global scene. The symbolism behind these pieces evokes “the desire to remember something that might return – a compulsion to not forget to keep looking for that which is lost”



AFRICAN CRAFTS KILUBUKILA

With the meaning of Kilubukila being “be wise” this project in its first approach to visitors invites to pay attention to what is the meaning behind their patterns. Their textiles are message holders with a mix of African and contemporary aesthetics. Based in DR Congo, this project opens questions about our behaviour in society and how it is possible for a cultural network model to bring value to crafts and traditions. With the Mandombe Script project, sponsored by the Craft Council Kilubukila set up a collaborative atelier between female artisan weavers and linguists to apply Mandombe, a pan-African language as a pattern to modernise the Kuba textile. The outcomes of this project are lovely interior pieces that hold not just the meaning of Mandombe language but also the identity of the makers, that is why they say that their furniture questions the concept of identity: “How does it relate to who you are?”

MATERIALS AND INNOVATION FROM UAE

United Arab Emirates was the special guest this year and so was its exhibition. Curated by the Irthi Contemporary Arts Council and the NAMA women Advancement Establishment 12 works made by women were featured; safeefah (a type of basket weaving), talli (bobbin lwe weaving) , traditional sand casting, accessories and tapestries. The room emulated a UAE landscape made of wood and camel leather. The designs were a perfect balance of nature and craft converted into luxury and contemporary meaningful items. It is hard to put into words the emotions that these pieces bring, every single detail has been thought in the deepest way to generate emotion and to show the importance of maintaining alive certain craft that are at the edge of disappearance. This room was not just about a country and its design, it was about empowering women through crafts and in doing so preserve dying artisanal and traditional techniques.



ACE HOTEL COLLABORATION WITH GAN

Storytelling and identity development have been in the front line of the festival. London design studio Raw Edges partnered up with GAN to produce room dividers for the rooftop at ACE HOTEL. The outcome was a perfect match between the aim of the two brands. Raw Edges rescued its past “reverse side embroidery” design. A rug made of stitches simulating the back part of a hand embroidery piece. Also these big and geometrical stitches are distinctive on Gan designs, all their rugs are made by their women association of weavers and embroiderers in rural India. These two studios put their identities and background together in a very joyful place at the ACE HOTEL where many events were running on the side where people were able to have an input in the developing designs.

TABELA

The aim of this London- and India-based studio is to empower women, making them believe that what they are making is beautiful, that they are preserving a dying ancient technique and that their reality can change with their work. Tabela is a collective women rug weavers based in rural and vulnerable areas. They employ over hundreds of women starting all the weaving process in a village. Their rugs are made from natural cotton and Himalayan wool in vibrant colours, and the abstract designs show the courage and power of the hands that made them and their desire to expand beyond boundaries.

