

Made

Directions and Intersections in Current Canadian Design

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Essay by
James Campbell
Director/Curator

at The Visual Arts Centre
of Clarington
July 8–August 5, 2012

Made

Introduction

In 2005/2006, Julie Nicholson and Shaun Moore, guest Curators for this exhibition, conceived of and brought to reality the design product company MADE. They were fulfilling a vital need. In their own words: “few Canadian designers had access to a formal outlet for their designs.”¹ Their Toronto showroom opened in 2006, and continues to gather and celebrate the unique creations of designers, artists, architects and craftspeople from across Canada. They take these works beyond their Toronto home, as well. In 2008, Julie and Shaun organized the exhibition *Radiant Dark*, which debuted in a 6,000 square foot building, in Toronto. A more compact version of that show traveled to Cambridge in the summer and autumn of that year. Their intent was “to show that the world of Canadian design is not static, but rather a living, evolving thing, to be continually explored.”²

Julie and Shaun culled the vision of forty-two designers from across Canada for the exhibition at The Visual Arts Centre of Clarington. The result was an intriguing and stimulating journey through our three gallery spaces. As revealed in Shaun and Julie’s essay, the works occupy three interconnected thematic areas: they acknowledge and animate *cultural* context, they reveal the considerable challenges inherent in methods of *fabrication*, and they exude an invigorating *modernism*. In some of the pieces, the Canadian landscape emerges through linen, steel and porcelain, referencing past explorations of our beloved land. In another piece,

2 a laser was required to cut steel that would become a coat rack; and a wooden cabinet, encased in concrete, triggered a succinctly contemporary re-reading of a functional object through a surprising fusion of materials.

Pillows, coat racks and cabinets, each indeed has a function, each responds to a human need. So do stools or end tables rolled into desired form with felt, discarded clothes line cord sculpted into a bowl, and hockey sticks become fluted architectural columns, encasing a light. These works embody a confident, enlightening, and sometimes humorous fusion of function, of a specific *use*, with an *idea*. The most monumental conception in the show hung in our third floor loft gallery. Delicate, multi-coloured one inch squares of fabric were sewn together with thread to form a stag standing in the woods, ten by fifteen feet in size. We are stopped in our tracks not only by the scale, but once again, by an immediate re-reading of the familiar. The rich historic tradition of decorative stitching is honoured, yet made new. The imagery of flora and fauna on fabric reaches far into the past, yet not on this scale, not with this delicacy, this fragility. The window beyond backlights the piece, stressing its translucence, a sun through the trees. Walking near it, the wake of air from our body causes the piece to undulate; the stag seems to move through the forest, wary of our presence. An *idea*, one that honours and embraces history and identity, one that celebrates the demands of its production, and one that causes us to stop, to re-think an object and how and why it was made. •

Endnotes

- 1 Julie Nicholson and Shaun Moore, Exhibition catalogue for *Radiant Dark* (Cambridge Galleries, 2008) 4.
- 2 Julie Nicholson and Shaun Moore, Introduction for the catalogue *Radiant Dark 09* (Elegant Corruptions, 2009) 5.



Grant Heaps, *Stag*, 2009; salvaged fabric scraps, cotton thread; 180×120 in



Elsworth Wang, *Knit Bowl*, 2010; reclaimed laundry line; 17×14×7 in

Essay by
Julie Nicholson
Shaun Moore
Guest Curators

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Made – Directions and Intersections in Current Canadian Design aims to introduce a cross section of work made by independent, contemporary practices (those who do not work for a large company or with large manufacturing resources behind their practice). We hope to reveal some of the many ways current Canadian designers consider, craft, and produce their work as part of a continuing conversation.

The designers' works are charted through three thematic areas intended to trigger the kind of curiosity, thoughts and feelings that develop into a dialogue between the makers, and the observers and users of their works. Combined, they offer many connections and overlaps in works that articulate craft and skills through a present day lens. Common cultural and aesthetic threads bind the whole and contribute to a larger picture.

History and Affection

An emphasis on the value and relevance of local culture, traditions and a sense of place are touchstones for many makers. In the development of new works, they are also seeking to connect in personal ways to reshape ideas of history and affection surrounding Canadian identity.

Referencing Lawren Harris's paintings of Disco Bay through her *Arctic Bookends*, Katherine Morley reflects on some contemporary concerns regarding the increased melting and disappearance of icebergs. At the

same time, the bookends reverently underscore a long continuum of Canadian writers, artists and makers who, in their work, have explored encounters between man and nature.

The natural Canadian world is a place that many of us visit or inhabit in some way but it is also a mythical place idealized by many. Kerry Croghan's *Great Outdoors* series of cushions and table linens portray iconic imagery inspired by Canadian landscapes. Their subtle vintage feel reminds one of the value of experiences and memories of the Canadian wilderness in a period where time is increasingly considered an intangible luxury. Her objects, used for relaxation or gathering for meals, also connect to ideas of a slower pace, peaceful reflection and appreciation.

We see designer/makers drawn to visual tropes, things that speak of Canada which are familiar, or beloved, such as a stag, logs, maple cookies or hockey sticks. These clichés are examined and revised in a sincere exploration of why things matter. The result is often the rebuilding of a genuine affection offered through objects, combining personal and cultural expression into a fresh perspective.

Materials and Process

These modern day designer/makers describe an ongoing involvement with the knowledge, exploration and development of their craft. Further, many have the confidence to introduce new methods of fabrication, such as digital processes and other technologies, to their already substantial skills and materials-based knowledge (their craft understanding). They have an astute awareness of how both medium and method may effect the outcome of their objects.

Artists and designers, Greg Ball and Shoko César, created their *Hoodoo* coatrack with laser cut steel. The simple cutting and bending process

Installation view (left to right): Wheeler Studio, *Meltdown Credenza*, 2011; oak, mdf, 48 x 18 x 25, 25 in; Propellor, *Calvino Pendant Lights*, 2006; bamboo, aluminium canopy, electrical components, each shade: 4 x 4 x 12 in; Kerry Croghan, *Great Outdoors Series*, 2010, silkscreen on linen, foam, down fill, floor cushion: 24 x 24 x 4, 25 in/throw cushion: 19 x 19 in/ placemats: 19.5 x 14 in



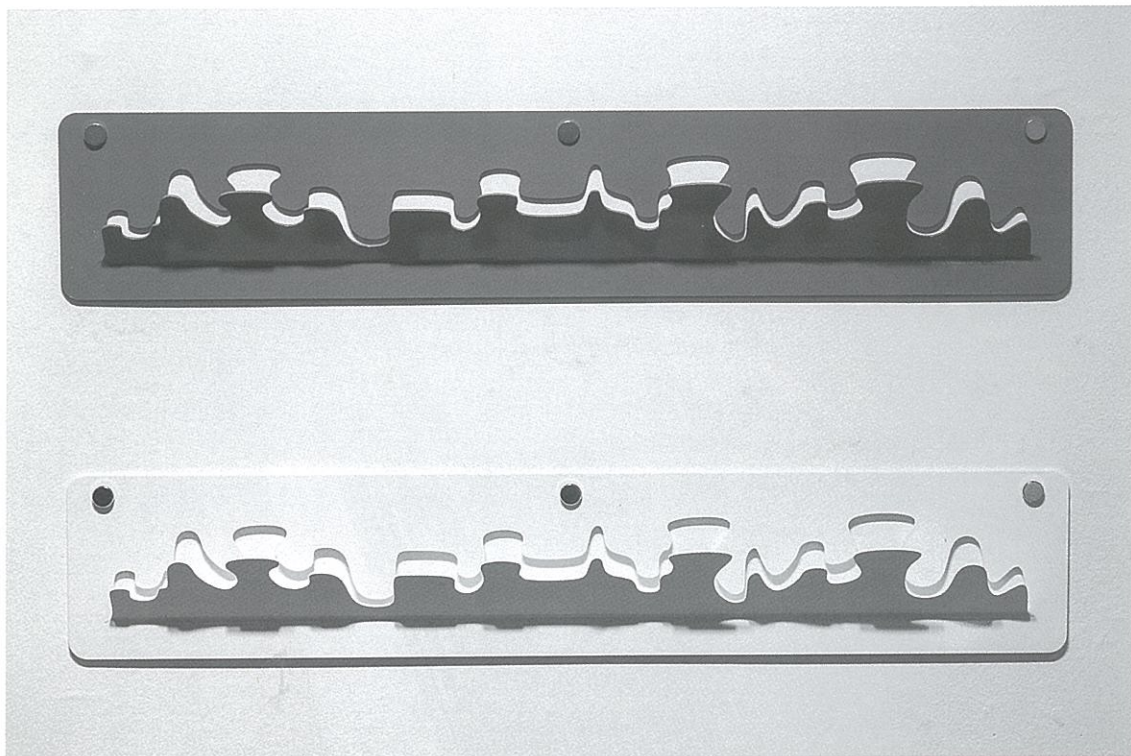
creates both the form and function of the rack. The outline and shadows of the piece also reference a distinct physical place, the Hoodoos formations in Alberta, which informs the design and spirit of the object.

The independent designers, represented here, show a consideration at each stage of their practice, from the source of their material to the final products and by-products. Their objects are made with care, and environmental awareness, often aiming for sustainability (Brothers Dressler), using materials that offer character, durability and longevity (AHDI, Jason Wheeler) or offer the potential of recyclability (Toma Objects). This often leads to the employment, in considered pieces, of humble or natural materials with a strong identity, such as the laundry line employed to create structure in Elsworth Wang's *Knit Bowl*.

Forms and Modernity

Jean Willoughby, with *Concrete Cabinet*, links craftsmanship and expressive use of materials to a modern form. The industrial character of concrete is softened in form and raised in perceived value as Willoughby cloaks her cabinet in the ubiquitous material. *Concrete Cabinet* and works such as *Jagged* chandelier and *Tamatik* chair express their makers' views on the effects of modernism, its aspirations and ideals, as they move forward onto fresh ground.

There is a consideration of use and the attendant aesthetics that apply to and enrich modern life, promoting a design relevance. Certain pieces really could not have occurred any earlier in time, and now come into being as technology contributes to their viability through factors such as price, efficiency and economy of process or material. This often leads to a fresh approach to tradition without being bound by it.



Greg Ball and Shoko Cesar, *Hoodoo Coatracks*, 2005; powdercoated steel, 27×5×1.5 in



foreground: AHD+Lift Coffee Table, 2010; cherry, 54 x 28 x 15 in; background: FELT Studio, Spool Stools, 2010; industrial felt, foam rubber, 14–18 x 15–20 in

Summary

As the old adage goes, it is useful to understand where you have been in order to know where you are going. The gathered works show a careful re-evaluation, re-tooling and re-defining in order to create objects that describe our current and past experience in distinct, fresh, engaged and engaging ways. Their designers well understand the responsibilities and consequences of their output. A conscious use of materials and resources allow provenance and authorship to shine, coupled to the recognition that a thorough knowledge of *making* leads to works that are not easily disposed of, but rather, resonate with their owners and users to remain valued. These works offer something back to the culture from which they came and contribute to a narrative on Canadian identity through the unique perspectives of their designers. •



left: Heidi Earnshaw, *Blanket Chair*, 2012; walnut, reclaimed wool blankets, 30 x 26 x 23; right: Annie Tung and Brad Turner, *Stack of Plates Light*, 2011; salvaged china plates and cups, electrical components, walnut, 22 x 12 in

Loyal Loot Collective, *Log Bowls*, 2004; reclaimed logs, various woods, acrylic paint, water-based finish, from 2-10x3-5 in



The Participants

AHDI (Matthew Agostinis
and Joel Harrison-Off)

Greg Ball and Shoko Cesar

Cali Balles and Don
Maclennan

Brothers Dressler (Jason
Dressler, Lars Dressler)

Joseph Bauman, Mark
Finnigan, Tomas Rojczik

Connie Chisholm

Kerry Croghan

Heidi Earnshaw

Elsworthy Wang (Deborah
Wang, William Elsworth)

Felt (Kathryn Walter)

Barr Gilmore

Jeremy Hatch

Grant Heaps

Angela Iarocci

Studio IIWII (Yvonne Ip)

Ryan Legassicke

Jessica Lertvilai

Loyal Loot Collective (Doha
Chehib Lindskoog, Carmen
Douville, Dara Humniski,
Anna Thomas)

Katherine Morley

Propellor (Toby Barratt,
Pamela Goddard, Nik Rust)

Tamara Rushlow

Orest Tataryn

Toma Objects (Anne
Thomas, Monique Gauthier)

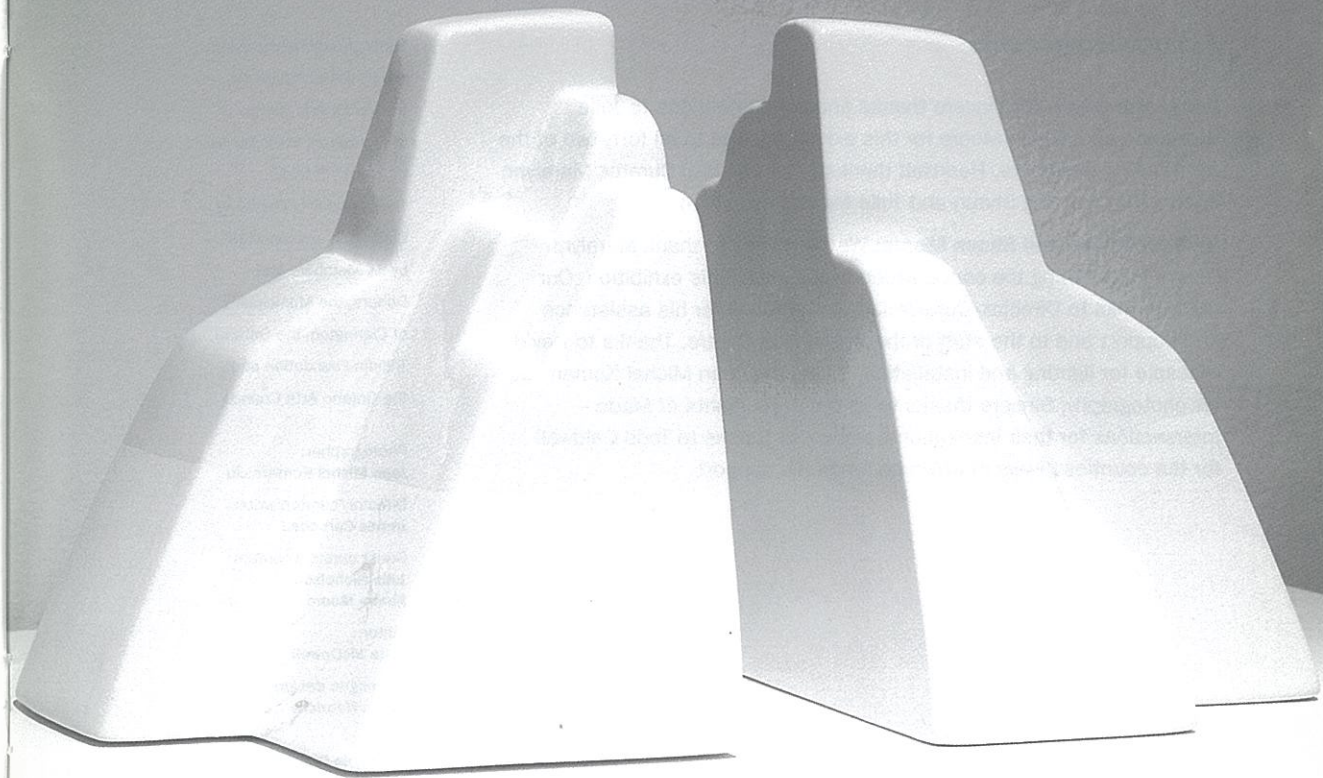
Tsunami Glassworks (Eva
Milinkovic, Kriston Gene)

Annie Tung and Brad Turner

Wheeler Studio (Jason
Wheeler)

Jean Willoughby

Anneke van Bommel



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