

Together

THE POWER OF COLLABORATION

16 September – 12 November 2021

Presenting new work from:

Emma Witter + Shinta Nakajima
Rowan Mersh + Sam Orlando Miller
Casey McCafferty + Saelia Aparicio
Kustaa Saksi + Nikari
Tina Roeder + Francesco Perini
Lukas Wegwerth + Voukenas Petrides
Glithero + JAMESPLUMB
Jie Wu + Tuomas Markunpoika
Max Lamb + Study O Portable
Johannes Nagel + atelier lachaert dhanis

From 16th September, visitors to Gallery FUMI's newly extended Mayfair space will find an array of exceptional works such as: a 6 foot high carved wooden sculpture, painted with abstractions of the human body and functioning as a lamp; a wunderkammer in woven Japanese paper and Finnish wood; a silver table centre coated in a biomimetic version of bone; a console covered in 70-year-old roof shingles. This is what happens when creatives collide, even if the collision occurs across thousands of miles and by digital means.

Earlier this year, Sam Pratt and Valerio Capo, FUMI's co-founders, invited the gallery's designers and artists to form collaborative pairs. Over WhatsApp and Zoom, these freshly formed units started to meld their ideas. "The need for exchange and being in touch with people in other places, via a shared project, is such a wonderful prospect," says Tina Roeder, who creates her explorations into archetypes and façades in her Berlin studio, and has teamed up with Francesco Perini, in Tuscany. Indeed, never has the idea of collaboration and communication seemed more essential or valuable.

When questioned about their immediate response, some designers admitted to a concern that their unique imprimatur would be eroded by the process, others were simply anxious about the potential loss of autonomy. But more frequently, words like "exciting", "stimulating" and "energising" tumbled out. "It is clever and timely, and it shows how the gallery functions like a family," says Emma Witter, who is working with Shinta Nakajima on the silver and bone tablecentre.

Out of these unique fusions of talent, incredible ideas have emerged, in total defiance of the physical separation of the makers. It is proof, if any were needed, of the power of the design mind to turn any obstacle into an opportunity.

For more information:
press@galleryfumi.com
+44 (0) 20 7490 2366

Gallery FUMI
2 Hay Hill, Mayfair, London W1J 6AS
galleryfumi.com

FUMI

Emma Witter + Shinta Nakajima: Table Centrepiece Vessel

Emma Witter fashions bones into incredible floral sculptures, while Shinta Nakajima hammers and chases silver into exquisite vessels and bowls. They met at the Sarabande foundation in East London, where both had the gift of a year's studio residency in 2018. Now 5500 miles apart (Nakajima has returned to Tokyo), they have used CT scanning and 3D printing to evolve a functional table centre. "It was key to fuse our materials and practice in the most fluid way," says Witter. They have brought in a third continent, in the form of Dr Michelle Oyen from the University of North Carolina, a bioengineer who is providing a biomimetic material that simulates bone. Some individual elements will be coated in her lab. Nakajima will be responsible for the final assembly of all parts. "Considerate human contact is what artists and makers need right now, and is what art and design is all about," says Witter.

Rowan Mersh + Sam Orlando Miller: Wall Piece

Both Rowan Mersh and Sam Orlando Miller are deeply invested in materials and construction, though the outcomes couldn't be more different. While Mersh focusses on intense accretions of small parts, including shells, to make astonishing 3D wall works, Orlando Miller works often with reflective materials including mirror and glass to create wall sculptures and furniture that are visually and experientially complex. The pair, working remotely between London and Spain, decided almost immediately to make a single wall piece in two parts, allowing the distinct differences in their work to prevail. "The finished piece will have a conversational quality," says Orlando Miller. "As we sent sketches and samples back and forth, it became very natural and free flowing," adds Mersh. "We both feel able to celebrate the inherent beauty of the materials we choose. That is the language that connects us."

Casey McCafferty + Saelia Aparicio: Multi-functional Sculptural Work

Communicating for the first time and across 1000s of miles, McCafferty in California and the Spanish Aparicio in London had to learn about each other's work long distance. "I love Casey's work," says Aparicio of McCafferty who carves directly into wood. "The materials are heavy, but the spirit of the pieces is light and playful." Exploring Aparicio's website, McCafferty decided he was particularly taken by the abstract anatomical nature of her painting on objects. Over Facetime they agreed that he would send a huge multifunctional sculpture incorporating a side-table and a light, McCafferty's abstract body parts, and three hands ("We both like hands.") Aparicio is going to add a hat ("to turn it into a lamp"), surface painting and possibly additional ceramic parts. "And I will only send him a picture when I'm finished," she declares, turning this into a short game of Exquisite Corpse.

Kustaa Saksi + Nikari: Cabinet of Curiosities

The Amsterdam-based Saksi has shown his unique woven artworks with FUMI since 2016. Now he is working with creative director Jenni Roininen and the master cabinet makers at Nikari to create something quite different. Combining a woven fabric made of Japanese paper and skilful carpentry, the result is intended as "a sort of Wunderkammer", says Saksi. "It is intriguing to find new ways to create a modern design piece with traditional Nordic methods says Joanna Vuorio of Nikari, a company who in the past made work with designers including Alvar Aalto since it began in 1967. "All collaborations test and expand our knowledge." "We're both entering unknown waters," adds Saksi. "But I've worked with lots of people, including Nike and Marimekko in the past, and it's something surprising always comes up. This time I'm finding it exciting to work with many locally sourced materials. We can show our Finnish roots in a completely new way in this piece."

Tina Roeder + Francesco Perini: Cabinet

The work of the Berlin designer Tina Roeder and Tuscan craftsman Francesco Perini is equally precise, and very different. Roeder works with archetypal forms in intricate ways – a classic day bed, for example; or the Slow Light credenza, made of 5068 strips of glass. Perini focusses on the beauty of marquetry, often inlaying metals or stones into beautifully grained wood. “We are making a cabinet, designed by Tina and made in my studio, where I will also add my marquetry skills,” says Perini. Roeder’s optimism around the project began with the fact that Perini has already created a series for FUMI called “Incontro”, the Italian word for “meeting”. “The beauty of this exchange is that it allows you to look at your own work differently,” says Roeder, “so every collaboration is a vivid learning experience.”

Lukas Wegwerth + Voukenas Petrides: Console

Lukas Wegwerth is interested in natural occurrences – the twisting branches of trees, or the way crystals will grow in the cracks of a ceramic vessel placed in a chemical bath – as well as the rigours of construction in metal. Steven Petrides and Andreas Voukenas create furniture in organic forms in bronze, plaster, and wood in their Athenian workshops. Combining forces, and communicating by WhatsApp and phone, they have created a console, with Voukenas and Petrides designing and making the architectural wooden armature, and Wegwerth applying an exterior layer of shingles once it arrived at his space outside of Berlin. “We are making the bones and Lukas will add the muscle and skin,” says Steven Petrides. “Collaboration has caused us to consider his needs.” “The shingles are existing ones, which come from my barn,” says Wegwerth. “They have been exposed to the weather for almost 70 years, and have turned a silver-grey colour.”

Glithero + JAMESPLUMB: Console + Vessels

“We all met at one of FUMI’s infamous Christmas parties,” says Sarah Van Gameren of Glithero, who with partner Tim Simpson, creates work firmly driven by process and materials. “We feel like we know James and Hannah through their work, which is intellectual, evocative and theatrical.” Indeed, James Russell and Hannah Plumb have used rebar and rubble to make lights and worked on interiors which privilege warmth, creativity and the reinventing (upcycling) of existing objects. The couples are aiming to combine their individual practices with JAMESPLUMB developing a display cabinet and sideboard for a new series of Glithero’s Hold Me vases. For these, a photographic process captures images of the hands holding the vessels. “Both of us are evoking some of the same ideas of absence and ephemerality,” says Van Gameren. “James and Hannah have taken an old steel cabinet as a framing device for our work, and added something new to it.” “Having fresh eyes on our work brought out themes that we’d only been intuitively aware of,” say JAMESPLUMB, “like our tendency to make containers, and that resonated with the idea of “holding” that pervades their vases.”

Jie Wu + Tuomas Markunpoika: Chair

“I like her playful style and refined sensibility towards colour,” says Markunpoika of Jie Wu’s work which brings together the natural and manmade worlds in its unique combination of vintage rosewood embedded in lusciously coloured resin. “But I’ve worked alone through my whole career, so while I was excited to broaden my horizons, I was concerned about my control over the outcome.” The pair have decided to combine two existing projects: Silence by Wu, in which objects informed by the Warring States period from Chinese history were made in wood and resin; and Engineering Temporality by Markunpoika, in which a fragmented layer made of steel rings is laid over an existing furniture piece which is then burnt away. With Markunpoika a Finn based in Berlin, and the Chinese Wu working from London, this is a project imbued with multiple levels of cross-pollination.

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Max Lamb + Study O Portable: Brick Works

Study O Portable is the London-based partnership of Dutch designer Bernadette Deddens and the Japanese Tetsuo Mukai founded in 2009, in which they explore and deliver delightful conceptual projects. These include a silk scarf printed with the image of nubbly grey art-packing blanket and a chess set made in glass, painted to look like rosewood. They happily teamed up with Max Lamb, whom Deddens has known since their time together at the Royal College of Art. "We've always admired how Max's work is so determined and principled," says Mukai. "The thinking behind his work is complex, though the objects appear simple." A co-product has not yet been decided upon, but Mukai says they are all influenced by groups like Memphis and Fluxus, where individual members retain their own voices in spite of intense collaboration.

Johannes Nagel + Atelier Lachaert Dhanis: Pedestal + Vase

Johannes Nagel is a master of innovation and improvisation, sometimes creating his vases by slip-casting clay in sand, while Sophie Lachaert and Luc d'Hanis are masters of trickery, patinating cast bronze to create pieces that seem to be made from wooden planks. "We've always loved Johannes work," says d'Hanis. "He allows himself incredible freedom, and uses a fantastic colour palette." They are making a pedestal in their Belgian studio, which will be sent to Nagel in Halle, Germany, who will then make a vase. "We both make objects which reflect upon their own existence, chairs about chairs, vases about vases," says Nagel, although in both cases boundaries are transgressed. "We hope that, when complete, the viewer will see this combination as a singular work," says d'Hanis.

Text by Caroline Roux