

# The Design Museum opens first major museum exhibition on more-than-human design



More than Human at the Design Museum\_Courtesy of the Design Museum. Photo by Luke Hayes

## More than Human

11 July – 5 October 2025 | the Design Museum

PRESS IMAGES AVAILABLE [HERE](#)

- The Design Museum's landmark exhibition *More than Human*, the world's first major museum exhibition on more-than-human design, opens this week on 11 July 2025.
- The exhibition comprises of over 140 works by more than 50 participants, with several presenting new work, as well as four exciting new commissions.
- This is the first major exhibition that has been jointly curated by the Design Museum and its national design research programme Future Observatory.
- Highlights include artworks for octopuses, a pavilion for multispecies encounters, a large-scale seaweed installation, an enormous nature calendar and several new commissions.

*More than Human*, the first major museum exhibition on more-than-human design, opens at the Design Museum this week, showcasing works by renowned artists and leading design changemakers to set a new direction for design based on humanity's collaboration with the living world.

More than Human refers to a growing design movement that questions the human-centric lens that has defined Western design practice and embraces the idea that the flourishing of all species is interconnected. More-than-human design calls for focused attention on the needs of environments and the species they host. Designers, architects and artists are increasingly directing their work towards the needs of non-human species. Their approaches range from the sharing of ancient knowledge to the design of new habitats and, ultimately, the shifting of perspectives.

Highlights include major new commissions by four designers who were supported with research fellowships funded by Future Observatory. Alexandra Daisy Ginsberg's vast new tapestry explores the perspectives of pollinators, while an 8m-long mural by MOTH (More Than Human Life Project) depicts the growing movement to award legal rights to waterways around the world. Brazilian architect Paulo Tavares has worked with Indigenous communities in Sao Paulo, Brazil, on the development of mapping techniques used in the struggle for land recognition, and Chinese spatial and visual designer Feifei Zhou has observed the fishing practices of local communities in Timor, Indonesia, revealing the porosity of multispecies exchange along coastal zones. Meanwhile, the designer Julia Lohmann has created a large-scale seaweed installation specifically for the exhibition, a group of five organic seaweed forms that seem to have met to discuss the state of the seas and human impacts upon them, entitled 'Kelp Council'. The exhibition and new commissions are funded by the UKRI Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC).

There are more than 50 artists, architects and designers in the exhibition, including Ant Farm, Marcus Coates, Dunne & Raby, Forensic Architecture, Formafantasma, Andrés Jaque, Kate Orff/Scape, Solange Pessoa, Reef Design Lab, Diana Scherer and DnA\_Design and Architecture to name a few, several of whom are presenting new work.

By bringing together over 140 works spanning contemporary and traditional practices, fine art, product design, architecture and interactive installations, the exhibition explores how humans can relearn to design *with* and *for* the natural world in the face of climate emergency.

## **Being Landscape**

The exhibition is structured into three sections. Visitors first encounter 'Being Landscape', showcasing art and design that conveys the idea that humans are very much part of the natural world, not separate to it.

This section includes a major new commission, an 8m-long mural by MOTH (More Than Human Life Project), including lawyer César Rodríguez-Garavito and illustrator Elena Landinez. The expansive mural depicts a sprawling network of interconnected rivers decorated with a myriad of illustrations of animals, plant life and text, addressing the growing movement to award legal rights to waterways around the world.

Also featured here are three paintings by Brazilian artist Solange Pessoa, whose work dissolves the boundaries between human, animal and vegetal and evokes the animistic beliefs of Indigenous peoples. On loan from Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo is a painting by artist and former rubber tapper Hélio Melo, whose works record his personal relationship with the forest and the longstanding threat to the Brazilian Amazon from global agribusiness.

Our relationship with trees is also examined through a European lens with photographic works by Federico Borella and Michela Balboni, who document the ancestral ritual in Southern Italy of the 'Rumiti', tree-men covered in ivy who act as living symbols of a deep connection with nature and its preservation. Renowned British artist Johnathan Baldock presents a series of bronze-cast cornhusk masks inspired by pagan corn dollies. Baldock's interest in craft and working-class histories stems from his family's agricultural background in Kent, England.

This idea of weaving one's relationship with the land into crafted objects can also be observed with the Ye'kuana, an Indigenous community in the Venezuelan Amazon who are renowned for their basketry, several examples of which are on show in the exhibition.

Marcus Coates' *Nature Calendar* functions as a reminder of the parallel lives and activities of the species we live amongst. The days of Coates's

calendar each reference a natural event, recalling a time when humans would once recognise the passage of time through minute seasonal shifts. Visitors to the exhibition will be able to see what natural phenomenon is taking place on the exact day they visit the museum.

### **Making with the World**

The second section, 'Making with the World', provides both practical and speculative design solutions that are made for the benefit of plants, animals and environments.

On show are historical fishing traps from communities in the UK, Myanmar, Indonesia, Nicobar Islands and the Waswahili (Swahili) people, demonstrating how traditional, localised techniques are far less impactful on marine ecosystems compared to modern fishing.

This section also features contemporary design innovations that help restore damaged and dying marine ecosystems such as coral reefs. Reef Design Lab's *Living Seawalls*, a man-made habitat for marine life, is exhibited alongside the lab's *Modular Artificial Reef Structure II*, which is dropped to the ocean floor to help regenerate and repopulate natural reef structures.

Travelling from the ocean to land, the exhibition recreates a version of the award-winning Alusta Pavilion designed by architects Elina Koivisto and Maiju Suomi, first constructed in Helsinki in 2022. The pavilion's main structure has been reconstructed using unfired, mass-produced insulation bricks to create a form that provides shelter for humans and insects alike. Designed as a space for multispecies encounters, the pavilion demonstrates how architecture can encourage biodiversity in urban environments.

German designer Johanna Seelemann incorporates her research into historic irrigation practices into a contemporary design approach with her works entitled *Oase*. On show are several terracotta vessels that are designed improve the conditions of trees in urban spaces that were inspired by the forms of car fuel tanks.

## **Shifting Perspective**

The final section, 'Shifting Perspective', asks us to consider how plants and animals perceive the world and identify their place within it.

This section includes nests from various species including wasps, ants and birds, intricate structures that provide a glimpse into the needs and decision-making of these creatures. It also features a seminal early work of more-than-human design by the art collective Ant Farm. *Dolphin Embassy*, from 1974, was an extensive research project that sought to build a marine centre for communication between humans and dolphins.

Japanese artist Shimabuku's long-term fascination with the behaviour of octopuses is on display, conveyed through the small glass balls he created for *Sculpture for Octopuses: Exploring for Their Favorite Colors*, which is exhibited alongside a slideshow documenting the octopuses' reactions.

Future Observatory fellow Alexandra Daisy Ginsberg is presenting a new iteration of her artwork *Pollinator Pathmaker* entitled *Pollinator Pathmaker: Perceptual Field 7SzzLn6GnY97DS07hCSLMf*, a vibrant monumental tapestry depicting a potential living artwork. Reminding us of the need for empathy for other species, the tapestry shows the unrealised garden from the perspective of a pollinating insect. Ginsberg is one of four Fellows who received funding to conduct research and produce a new work for the exhibition. Her tapestry incorporates research from her work with the Eden Project to create an algorithm that could design planting schemes for gardens that specifically cater to the needs of pollinator species.

The exhibition concludes with an immersive seaweed installation by Julia Lohmann, a German-born designer and researcher who investigates and critiques the ethical and material value systems underpinning our relationship with flora and fauna. Lohmann has created a compelling new installation entitled 'Kelp Council', with five organic seaweed forms that seem to have met to discuss the state of the seas and human impacts upon them.

For the last three years Future Observatory, the Design Museum's national research programme for the green transition, in partnership with the AHRC, has funded more than 100 research projects pursuing more sustainable

design. Future Observatory has showcased this research through several free displays on the top floor of the museum, acting as an example for how museums and cultural institutions can integrate meaningful sustainable initiatives into a cultural programme. *More than Human* is a major milestone in Future Observatory's mission to harness the cultural power of the Design Museum to engage broad audiences in new thinking that can help drive the green transition.

*More than Human* is co-curated by Future Observatory Director Justin McGuirk and Future Observatory Head of Curatorial Programme Rebecca Lewin and will be accompanied by a lavishly illustrated catalogue.

**Tim Marlow, Director and CEO of the Design Museum** says, *"It's important for museums and cultural institutions to respond to the complex issues facing our planet and society at present. It's also important to shift perspectives from a human-centric view of the world to one closer to nature which will make this a landmark exhibition in every sense. More than Human will showcase some of the ground-breaking work that Future Observatory has done at the museum and beyond over the last three years, a blend of extensive sustainable research, critical thinking and advocacy which is central to our cultural programming."*

**Justin McGuirk, Director of Future Observatory** says, *"This is not just another exhibition about 'sustainable design', this is a radical rethink of design's role in the world. While much of the work in the exhibition is nascent or exploratory, it represents a fundamental shift in worldview toward humans using design not just for their own benefit but for the flourishing of the living systems we depend upon. More than Human is what design needs to become in the 21<sup>st</sup> century."*

**Rebecca Lewin, Future Observatory Head of Curatorial Programme** says, *"We want people to leave the exhibition feeling inspired and informed but also hopeful for the future. The huge network of issues raised by the climate crisis can feel overwhelming, but the fields of design, art and architecture are finding creative and often beautiful solutions for the needs of the planet. It has been heartening to collaborate with such an incredible group of talented creative minds from across the globe to bring this project together."*

To accompany the exhibition, the Design Museum will host a series of relevant workshops and events, including a More than Human symposium on the 13<sup>th</sup> September 2025, bringing together thought leaders and industry experts to discuss the ideas explored in the exhibition as well as consider new design initiatives in response to the ongoing climate crisis. To coincide with the exhibition, there is a *Pollinator Pathmaker* DIY Edition planted at St Mary Abbots Gardens in Kensington, created by children from a local school using the planting algorithmic garden generator tool developed by Alexandra Daisy Ginsberg. Planted in April, the garden is now in full bloom for the opening of the exhibition. Also in tandem with the exhibition is an outdoor installation in the Design Museum garden entitled *Dwellings, Rehomed*, a collection of 16 bird houses (and one bird bath) created by some of London's most exciting designers which will remain in the garden for the next two years.

**-Ends-**

#### **Notes to Editors**

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#### **About the Design Museum**

The Design Museum is a multifaceted museum, an ever-changing space for the public, industry and education to come together and explore new ideas. A registered charity, the museum's innovative exhibitions, partnerships, research and learning programmes evidence how design can enable this planet and its inhabitants to thrive. Our landmark building in Kensington is the centre of our national network and a global hub for the transformative potential of design.

[Home - Design Museum](#)

#### **About Future Observatory**

Launched in November 2021, Future Observatory is the Design Museum's

national research programme for the green transition. Based at the museum, it is coordinated in partnership with the UKRI Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). Acting as both a coordinating hub for a nationwide programme, as well as a research department within the museum, Future Observatory curates exhibitions, programmes events and funds and publishes new research, all with the aim of championing new design thinking on environmental issues. In July 2022, AHRC and the Design Museum launched Future Observatory: Design the Green Transition, a multi-million-pound fund bringing UK design researchers, universities and businesses together to catalyse the transition to net zero and a green economy, now benefitting over 100 higher education institutions and 75 industry and local authority partners across the nation. It is the largest publicly funded design research and innovation (R&I) programme in the UK.

[Future Observatory](#)

### **About Arts and Humanities Research Council**

The UKRI Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funds internationally outstanding independent researchers across the whole range of the arts and humanities: history, archaeology, digital content, philosophy, languages and literature, design, heritage, area studies, the creative and performing arts, and much more. The quality and range of research supported by AHRC works for the good of UK society and culture and contributes both to UK economic success and to the culture and welfare of societies across the globe.

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