

A Design Lab Is Proposing a New Kind of Object – *and asking the public to decide what it means*

ESTRA debuts at the London Design Festival with The Vertebra: the first in a category it calls the Tectonic Object, a proposal that a thing's value might live in its structure, not its surface, and a question it hands to the public to answer

London, 7 August — ESTRA is opening its first exhibition with an unusual proposition: that the meaning of an object might be settled not by its makers, nor by the narratives surrounding it, but by its structural truth, openly laid for everyone who comes to look.

At the heart of the London design lab's debut is a single object, **The Vertebra**, and a single question it deliberately leaves unanswered: **is the leather caged, or carried?**

The object wears its structure on the outside. A metal frame, in full view rather than concealed, holds a piece of soft leather. There is no caption, and no answer supplied. The frame is left visible so that whatever you conclude, you conclude by reading the object itself.

It is a small question, and it does not stay small. Ask it once, and it is hard to keep to leather and metal: it settles on anything living that is held by something firmer than itself: a body in a role, a life in a structure.

ESTRA calls the object its first **Tectonic Object** (a term rooted in architecture), a category the lab is proposing, in which structure comes first, is made visible, and is asked to hold not only the weight of the object but also its meaning. It reflects an idea the lab is setting out to explore: that an object's value might come from the thing itself and its passage through the world – from structure that leaves visible evidence, and from the distinctiveness it grows to possess as time marks it – value a person can read directly, rather than being told it is there.

"We're curious whether value can also come from the object itself: from structure that leaves evidence, and time that leaves marks. Something anyone can read without needing to be told," said **Philip Chung**, founder of ESTRA.

The two materials make the idea physical. Where the metal holds its form unchanged, the leather will age, soften and darken with handling, until no two examples remain alike. One is permanent; the other, living. And the tension between them is the whole question. Does the exposed frame protect the leather, or confine it? Shelter it, or hold it captive? **Caged, or Carried?**

ESTRA offers no answer of its own. Rather than present a finished statement, the lab shows The Vertebra as a *development object*, a first experiment, honestly early, and asks the public to supply the reading it withholds. Across three parts – Encounter, Proof, and Archive – visitors record their own judgement in a vote that stays open throughout the Festival and beyond, so the object's meaning accumulates from everyone who comes to look.

Caged or Carried – ESTRA at LDF 2026

“We’re at the very beginning: one object, and a question we found compelling enough to build an exhibition around. Rather than working from an answer, we wanted to exhibit something honest enough to pose a real question, then step back and see what people bring to it that we never could,” said ESTRA.

The Vertebra is intended as the first of a longer enquiry, into structure, material, and the relationships we live among but rarely examine. *Caged or Carried* runs in Knightsbridge, minutes from the V&A and a short walk from Hyde Park, where the Great Exhibition of 1851 first staged the belief that industry and design belong together.

Caged or Carried

20 Beauchamp Place, Knightsbridge, London SW3 1NQ
12–20 September 2026 · 10am–8pm daily · Free entry

About ESTRA

ESTRA is a London design lab working through enquiry: research, experiment, and open discussion, into the relationships between people, objects, and the materials they are made of. It proposes the Tectonic Object as a category of made object in which structure is made visible and made to carry meaning. *Caged or Carried* is its first exhibition.

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High-resolution images available on request.