

Aldo Bakker for Georg Jensen – by Hans den Hartog Jager

When Aldo Bakker was invited to design a series of new products for Georg Jensen Henning Koppel (1918-1981) immediately sprung to his mind. “To be honest, the company Georg Jensen has always been Henning Koppel to me in particular. Especially his pourers are gorgeous. They are so elegant, you might even say sensual. Or take for example his famous Eel dish, which is undoubtedly an abstraction of a fish, but it also has a very clear mouth-like shape with pursed lips that function as handles to lift the dish with. The tension between abstraction, sensuality and the point where the object almost becomes a being is very attractive to me. For me Henning Koppel is as much an image maker as a designer.”

Although Bakker does not want to call Koppel an example, a lot of elements dear to him in Koppels work are also present in Bakker’s own work. Bakker’s objects almost always originate in a fascination for an abstract form derived from daily life – being either a safety rail alongside the highway or the lines on the facades of a 17th-century Amsterdam canal house. The fascination results in lengthy periods of observing and drawing in order to explore the possibilities of transferring the form into an object. Initially logic and beauty are more important to Bakker than function. Bakker has always been fascinated by an exploration into ‘archetypical shapes’ similar to the ones present on the paintings and sculptures of Cézanne and Brancusi. Meanwhile he also likes to look in a different direction: during his research Bakker investigates the possibilities of creating new combinations of forms leading towards new objects and new methods of use.

It is precisely because of this reason that Bakker is really happy with the four new objects he designed for Georg Jensen: the large can ‘Pitcher’, the saltcellar ‘i’, the small oil pourer ‘Oil Pourer’ and sugar caster ‘Sugar’. Their style barely matches, but because of the innovative combinations of form principles that make the designs surprising, often unexpected apparitions, they are typically Bakker. He was partly inspired by Georg Jensen’s long tradition of using stainless steel: “I had never worked with stainless steel before”, Bakker says, “and I realized that its metal-like structure – hard, shiny and attractive at the same time – is beautifully appropriate for the containers and pourers that I love to work on. Meanwhile I hope that my way of working with shapes adds something to the DNA of Georg Jensen. A new consciousness of forms, a renewed awareness that good designs do not automatically conform to the expectations of the user, but also show people new possibilities that hopefully enrich their lives.”

i – saltcellar

Whoever discovers *i* on a table feels the irresistible need to take it up and enclose it by hand, like a chick you wish to protect from the outer world. Next you don’t release it anymore. *i* feels pleasant and so familiar that it looks like it had been waiting for you, and only you, to cherish it. The irony of Bakker’s design however is that he makes you cherish a saltcellar – even though *i* is small, smart and functional, it doesn’t resemble a traditional saltcellar enough to be recognized as such immediately. *i* originates in a combination of three elements: a large, round, slightly inclined form, a short line and a dot. “To me, the seduction existed in the idea of a large round shape that leans on something” Bakker tells. “This causes the shape to sag a bit, but because it is opposed with a line the object maintains a stately expression, it is in balance’.

Iron Pourer – oilcan

Contrary to i or Pitcher, Bakker's Iron Pourer keeps its user on a distance. The can looks unapproachable because of its bare lines, dark cast steel and closed top. Bakker designed several pourers, but this one distinguishes itself mainly because of the lid on the top, to Bakker the essence of the design. That lid comprehends everything: it refrains the topside form getting dusty, but also causes the can to become an abstract triangular sculpture. "When you place it on a table you have no idea what it is", Bakker says. "The can obtains its unapproachable character precisely because of its triangular form, which is even more intensified by the cast steel". But when you take up the can and remove the lid, the can immediately 'gives' itself. Bakker: "It is pleasant to hold in your hands and pours lovely. The parts are so well tuned that the oil flows perfectly. And when you move it backwards it immediately draws the fluid in. I like this: as if the user conquers the can every time again."

Pitcher – pourer

Aldo Bakker loves pourers. "A pourers is a grateful subject. I love to design shapes that contain something and I love the feeling of objects in which a lot of sensations meet. A good pourer is both about receiving, about containing and about pouring. It is also an object that emphatically seeks contact with the outer world: it gives direction, it sets things in motion" Bakker explains. Undoubtedly this is the reason for his satisfaction about his Pitcher for Georg Jensen, in which both the sense of space and the sensation of flowing are already visible on the outside. That sense is expanded on the inside: the proud spout on the top finds its counterpart in a similar spout in the container, because of which the can fills itself with a beautiful whirl. For Bakker there was no doubt that the Pitcher had to be made from stainless steel, precisely because he wanted to emphasize this sense of fluidity. "This can is completely about flowing, sliding, pouring. Such a combination of form and content is ideal to me."

Sugar – sugar caster

Sugar unmistakably contains the most important element of a successful new object. It looks like it has been here forever, yet it is also evidently new. The sugar caster might be a little modest compared to other designs of Aldo Bakker, but experts immediately recognize Bakker's typical way of playing with forms. The subtly inclining shape of the container is beautifully in balance and nearly connects with the spherical lid – a small contrast that is emphasized by the thin, slightly visible edge. Despite its modest character, Bakker fascination for content is also present in Sugar: the inside is smooth and rolling, due to which the sugar crystals automatically slide downwards. This again stresses the fact that Bakker's design are all about the suggestion of movement – even when they stand unused on the table, they bear the suggestion that a lot could be happening deep inside.