

ONLY
HUMAN

Dutch designer Aldo Bakker creates sensory experiences via objects that flow with a sense of human form.

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ALDO BAKKER, SON OF GIJS BAKKER, THE FOUNDER OF DROOG DESIGN, CONTINUES THE FAMILY TRADITION.



DESIGNER ALDO BAKKER gives meaning to form. Design returns to the roots of its existence. He connects culture and nature, man and object. Says Bakker, “The motive should always come from the belly instead of from the mind. You have to feel the need.” Sitting, licking, drinking, pouring, touching, holding – Bakker ventures beyond the evident function, appealing to a range of fundamental sensory experiences. At first glance, these seem secondary, but in his and our hands, they assume priority. Function, for Bakker, entails making the user aware of this beauty and surprise. “The biggest mistake made is that people speak of either ‘this’ or ‘that’, when function, behaviour, sustainability, durability, sensibility, independence and aesthetic beauty all need each other to become an interesting whole,” he explains.

Isamu Noguchi, Giò Ponti and Piero Fornasetti, Henning Koppel, Pierre Paulin – their creations, like Bakker’s, are autonomously strange creatures that seem to be shaped smoothly out of the material. Nonetheless, everything in and on the object has a purpose. The product narrates what on first sight is a narrow and finite modernist story in a more interpretable, human and sensorial way. What you see is inevitably not what you get.

Last summer, Bakker was invited to stage a solo exhibition at Villa Noailles, Hyères, in the Var, southeastern France, something he calls “a fantastic experience”. The villa, an early modernist house built by architect Robert Mallet-Stevens, was originally the home of art patron Arthur Anne Marie Charles Vicomte de Noailles, a keen supporter of surrealist artists throughout the 1920s and 1930s, including Salvador Dalí, Man Ray and Luis Buñuel.

Brecht Duijf, Bakker’s wife and a designer cum laude from Design Academy Eindhoven, came up with the idea to animate Bakker’s designs, and present them as creatures, with pedestals placed so the products could interact. “This is essential in my work,” says Bakker. “You can’t escape from a human or animal-like posture or behaviour in an object. I try to make it self-aware.” The exhibition’s design was done by Brecht, with the help of Bakker’s assistant, Emilie Pallard. “It was the first time we’d shown more of the feeling and thinking behind the designs,” explains Bakker. “Only Brecht knows me well enough to make that translate.” It is clear that Bakker values Brecht’s opinion, particularly when it comes to the visual. “Colour becomes a tool in her hands. There is a very human and emotional approach to her work, which fits the products perfectly. She introduces twists, like balancing a candleholder on a thin line.” Surrealism returned in the villa. JAN BOELEN



ABOVE LEFT: VINEGAR FLASK, 2008.

ABOVE: WATERING CAN, 2009/10.

THIS PICTURE: OIL PLATTER, 2007.

BELOW LEFT: SIDE TABLE FROM THE URUSHI SERIES, 2008, WITH WATERING CAN FROM THE COPPER COLLECTION, BOTH PIECES ARE FROM BAKKER’S SOLO EXHIBITION AT VILLA NOAILLES IN FRANCE.



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