ARTIST BIOS FOR GREAT BRITS: THE NEW ALCHEMISTS
AT RMIT GALLERY, 31ST AUGUST TO 30 SEPTEMBER, 2006

PASCAL ANSON

Each object in Pascal Anson’s *Reunification Project* not only has a story to tell from its old life, but is starting to tell a new one. By unearthing objects orphaned from their original sets - cutlery, tea cups and saucers, tables, chairs, parts of tailored suits – and by changing their appearance, Anson unifies these objects into new sets and imbues them with new purpose and meaning.

Born in London in 1973, Pascal Anson studied three dimensional design at Kingston University and design products at the Royal College of Art. He has since designed and developed his own products, as well as concepts commissioned by manufacturers such as Rosenthal and Memphis, and has taught at Middlesex University and Central Saint Martins in London.

Both in the development of newly designed pieces, such as his vacuum-formed cloud lights and the mirrored *Flowermiser* vase, and in the reinvention of found objects for an exercise like the *Reunification Project*, Pascal Anson draws inspiration from unconscious design - doodles on paper, graffiti on walls and the whitewashing of shop windows while the interiors are refitted - to create design objects that are “different, challenging and beautiful.”

www.iampascal.com

MICHAEL CROSS + JULIE MATHIAS

When Michael Cross and Julie Mathias approach a new design project they do so by “taking an object we know and beginning again”. Their objective is: “the radical re-evaluation of objects, rather than a refinement of what they already are. The question is not how to make them slightly better, but how they might be entirely something else.” They also ensure that their finished work elicits an equally provocative response from the user.

For the *Flood* lighting installation, Cross and Mathias plunged dozens of electric light bulbs and coils of brightly coloured wire under water. The result is an eerily exquisite piece that, by defying the taboos about mixing electricity and water, encourages us to question our notions of safety by flirting with danger. They then created a shelving system in the sinister form of the coils of twigs they spotted in a Sri Lankan backwater and devised an electrical fan that only starts up after you have blown at it yourself.

Cross and Mathias met as students at the Royal College of Art in London. Born in the Hebrides, the Scottish islands, in 1979, Michael Cross studied industrial design at Sheffield Hallam University before enrolling at the RCA with Julie Mathias, who was born in Lyon in 1978 and had previously studied at Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Saint-Etienne. Since graduating from the RCA in summer 2004, they have worked together as Wokmedia.

www.wokmedia.com
JULIA LOHMANN

Transformation is the recurrent theme in the work of all the designers in Great Brits – The New Alchemists, yet one designer, Julia Lohmann, takes it to extremes. Intent on exploring the contradictions in our relationship to animals as sources of food and materials, she works with some of the basest and most banal materials – offal, off-cuts of leather and other waste products of the meat industry – with the aim of “giving value to leftovers”.

From a distance, her Ruminant Bloom lights look exquisite, if surreal - each a subtly different shape, colour and degree of translucence. As soon as you realise that each “bloom” is made from tripe – a preserved sheep’s stomach – the piece takes on a different meaning and “triggers feelings oscillating between attraction and disgust”. Like Lohmann’s cow benches, made in the shape of a cow’s torso and upholstered in a cow’s hide, her Ruminant Blooms also prompt us “to relive the childhood realisation that the piece of meat on one’s plate and the animal in the field are connected”. Born in Hildsheim, Germany in 1977, Julia Lohmann became interested in design on childhood walks with her father when they collected abandoned objects and transformed them into strange creatures. After studying graphic design at the Surrey Institute, she enrolled on the design products course at the Royal College of Art, London. Polemical as her work is, everything she designs is intended to be useful – “I would hate to design something useless”.

www.julialohmann.co.uk

MATTHIAS MEGYERI

Of all the contradictions in the British character, but the one that struck Matthias Megyeri the most when he arrived in London from his native Germany was the ambiguity of the national attitude to security. Look at a London tower block and, amid the ostentatious fortifications of alarms, surveillance cameras and security railings, you will soon spot the kitsch of garden gnomes, plastic flowers, pottery poodles and lacy net curtains.

Megyeri decided to embody this contradiction within a collection of security products, which would function as efficiently as a conventional alarm or camera while embracing their owners’ taste for the cute. Born in Stuttgart in 1973, Megyeri studied visual communication in Karlsruhe before enrolling on the design products course at the Royal College of Art in London, where he applied his graphic sensibility to the customisation of security products.

Since graduating from the RCA in 2003, Matthias Megyeri has continued those experiments by developing new products under the Sweet Dreams Security marque. Look around this building and you will see burglar alarms framed by daisy petals, surveillance cameras topped with cartoon character hoods and coils of barbed wire tipped with razor-sharp butterfly wings. The cuddly features of a teddy bear smile from Megyeri’s padlocks, iron railings are topped by the beaming cartoon faces of characters like Didoo and Peter Pin, while a snarling Alsatian and AK-47 assault rifle lurk in his lace curtains.

www.sweetdreamssecurity.com
The defining element of Peter Traag’s work as a designer is the production process, which he sees as a means not simply of realising his ideas, but of dictating the form of the finished object. His objective is to bend the rules of the production process to ensure that the end-result is as intriguing and unexpected to him as its designer as it will be to the user.

In the Sponge chair, reinforced fluorocarbon polyester thread fabric is filled with polyurethane foam that expands inside a mould during production. Each piece emerges creased and compressed into a distinctive shape determined by how the fabric responded during its production in the factory of Edra, its Italian manufacturer. The process of producing the Laminated Chair is equally unpredictable. Each piece acquires character from the after-effects of the accidents that occur during its lamination and afterwards by the wear-and-tear of daily use.

Born in Tegelen in the Netherlands in 1979, Peter Traag studied 3D Design in Arnhem and design products at the Royal College of Art in London, where he now lives and works. Since graduating from the RCA in 2003, he has worked for the Mike Smith Studio, which makes artists’ installations, as well as on his own design projects, the latest of which is the Folded Table made from a flat sheet of steel perforated by laser to fold into shape like a cardboard box.

www.petertraag.com