

THE WORD

“Hinges, joints and knots are fundamental to my work.”

Bram Kerkhofs on modernising functional furniture

This September Brussels becomes the booming hub for all things Belgian design, and as part of this year’s framework, Design September is launching #ikkoopbelgisch/#jachetebelge for the very first time. Set to be a highlighting opportunity for the country’s blossoming stars of the country’s design scene to showcase their strongest work in various shop windows across downtown Brussels. To help you get to grips with the unlimited talent on show between 6th and 30th September, we’ve gathered together three of the brightest young things that would be foolish to miss.

Born and raised in Wezemaal, Bram Kerkhofs (1977) is passionate about his home region in Eastern Flanders, as he set up his present-day base only 20km away in Leuven. Since discovering from a fairly young age that being creative was what he does best, he decided to follow the path of design, completing a stone sculpting course in Anderlecht and a masters in jewellery design at Hasselt’s PXL-MAD. After winning Kortrijk’s Biennale Interieur’s Grand Award in the Objects category with his impressive elastic cabinet piece *Coil*, Kerkhofs has certainly become one to keep an eye on. All the better, as he’ll be teaming up with the furniture shop Diito.

Written by Fiona Holland, published on september 4, 2018 in Art / On-design

At its core, what is your work about? How would you describe it?

My work is about connecting – connecting individual objects in their constructions, modular concepts and combinations in order to create larger wholes with different forms.

What is its starting point and statement?

I intend to design objects that will last generations. I achieve this by using only the best materials, and giving them a timeless shape and look. Damage isn't an injury, it's a story connected to the piece.

What characterises your work?

The main focus of my work in general is my approach to object construction. Hinges, joints and knots – all the connecting parts – are fundamental to my work, and I try to find effective solutions to obtain the best results with it, both visually and construction-wise. My objects focus mainly on adjustability or modularity, creating bigger wholes out of combined objects or parts with endless formal possibilities. As a result, they often generate visual worlds translated into codes and formulas. That explains why my work often gets described as mathematical. Besides that, most of my objects can be transformed in their use or in giving them the right position depending on its specific personal situation.

Can you talk to us about your approach in general?

Most of my designs arise out of phases that emerge from the research I do. I like to challenge the characteristics of my materials and many common forces like gravity, friction and tension. My greatest challenge is in finding the right materials to make an object work.

For the first time, Design September will take place in Brussels' downtown public space too. How will you adapt the selection process of your work now that it will be showcased in a shop front?

To visualise my approach of constructing and connecting, my work will be presented as a small exhibition. The presentation will mainly focus on presenting my work *Coil*, but there will also be some other objects on show.

How has the atmosphere of the city you live in influenced your work or inspired you in a certain way?

I live and work in Leuven, but I know Brussels quite well. I think the things a designer creates are definitely based on what surrounds him or her – at least that's how it works for me. So, obviously

my work is influenced by the culture and the cities I live in or frequent.

Do you feel Brussels is an inspiring city to live and work in as a designer? If so, what inspires you the most?

I'm especially inspired by the people, their use of the city and how they question whether design, architecture and urbanism can improve life quality for all.

This year's edition will be marked by the latest trends in Belgian and international design. What do you think are the most significant trends in Belgian design, and how has the design scene changed?

I think Belgian design is known for its quality. I can only think of the more recent focus on handcrafted objects or objects that carry the designer's signature, but this is definitely not solely a Belgian trend.

How do you see yourself fit into the country's design scene? What makes your work stand out?

The fact that a lot of my work arises from research; its visual aspects, material characteristics and the formal and functional possibilities these generate all help me distinguish myself from the common Belgian design scene.

Do you feel that Belgium as a country does enough to support upcoming designers? How could it improve?

A designer needs many skills in order to create good objects. I think Belgium should have more guts in playing its cards better when it comes to promoting its qualities on an international scene.

Which Belgian (design) brand or artist do you follow or look to for inspiration?

I feel that my approach relates to [Thomas Lommée](#)'s work. My designs and material research has an affinity to that of [Maarten Van Severen](#) and [Xavier Lust](#).

How does your work relate to the ideas of the shop with which you have been paired for this project?

I think we match in our architectural approach and focus on quality.

On a more personal note, how does your everyday inform your work?

My studio is part of the Leuven-based collective BatimentA, a place where art and creation come together and there's a sort of sounding board for me as well as lot of likeminded colleagues. I garner inspiration out of the differing disciplines present.

What does success look like to you?

Success lies in taking the time needed to make every step the best possible without necessarily having a fixed endpoint. I wouldn't be as motivated if I was working with an endpoint that was already fixed. Besides that, I feel that I've gained success every time a project is properly finished and the client is satisfied.

Finally, what project(s) are you currently working on?

I'm working on innovational research like that which *Coil* was based on to find better ways to use the same system in other areas like architecture, lighting and exterior design. On the one hand, the research implements the curve as a connection system and its formal possibilities, while on the other it implements the used materials and related durability and material characteristics of the elastic rope.

→ Catch Bram Kerkhofs as part of [#ikkoopbelgisch/#jachetebelge](#) at [Diito](#).
Rue de Chartreux 19 Kartuizerstraat (1000).

→ bram-kerkhofs.be

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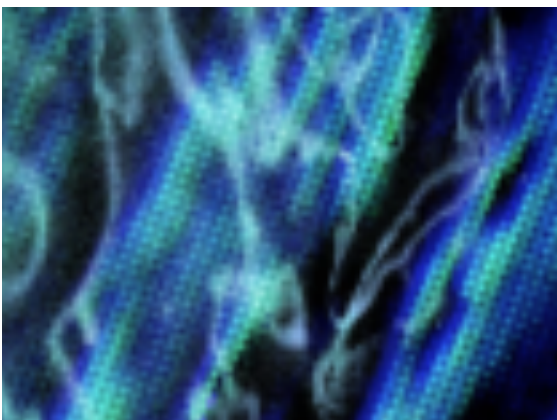
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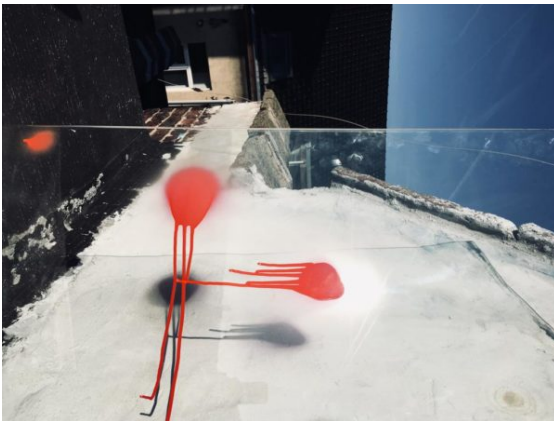
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