

EMMANUEL BABLED: EXTRANORMAL

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For several years, there has been an increasing interest in uniqueness and aesthetic significance of the design object. In a world of materialistic overindulgence, much of this interest comes from a renewed demand for an excellence of quality and for objects produced in limited editions rather than in mass production. Often these projects emerge from an encounter with local cultures and processes that incorporate contemporary ideas and are able to create within this congregation a vanguard vision. Their processes are more comparable to those used in contemporary art than the planning approach of design. They put the emphasis on the designer's intangible intention and uniting the capacities in handcraft with innovative technological processes. If the realism of mass production is lost, it is replaced with a rich formal and conceptual content.

In his solo exhibition *Extranormal*, the French designer Emmanuel Babled (born in 1967) emphasizes the concurrence of the handcrafted work and concentrates on a process that has historically developed a technical culture much closer to the activity of the craft workshop than to heavy industry. The exhibited works advance by slight but specific adjustments – an evolution that proceeds from product to product through explicit improvements with the focus on a behaviour innovation.

*Extranormal* shows new design works in which Babled explores materials and forms that challenge and excite our expectations of design. He interprets "classical" materials in a new, transversal way and finds inspiration within the futuristic idea – extra normal – extra new. Although each material is different from another, all the objects, which Babled especially designed for the exhibition, have in common an exceptional design approach, taking their matters far beyond their ordinary utilization.

His playful examination of the capricious material glass can be seen through *Digit*, a glass lighting series which includes three floor and table lamps as well as a chandelier. Glass, which is an amorphous, infinitely malleable material, responds to the manipulation and blowing of the master who shapes it but still obtains space for its self-expression. With *Digit* Babled created an antithesis – unusual and far from the perception of glass as a fluid material – bringing the idea of being digitally designed to the fore and demonstrating the possibility of perfection in traditional handcrafted glassmaking. This project is the result of a digital vision, based on images of subatomic particles composed by precise glass spheres merged together.

With his new ceramic series *Naturellement*, produced in limited edition by Superego, Babled indicates his interest in the potential of materials other than glass, and suggests fluid and organic shapes using an imagery which is related to sinuous and soft bodies, sometimes complex and always indissociable as "Siamese" objects. In addition, the extraordinary whites and perfection of the formal continuity give the ceramic an unusual plasticity.

The music box *Spirit*, on the other hand, is a humorous interpretation of the ancestral archetype of silver. *Spirit* is a series of "ghostlike" masks, which expresses Babled's interest in emotive objects. These objects are directly born out of the deformation of silver laminates that seem – equivalent to glass – to be blown. This technique, a specific production of the Milanese silversmith De Vecchi, is perfectly illustrated in this series of blusts. In contrast of their awkward forms – their faces seem to be screaming – these objects hide music devices, playing different compositions, such as "Swanlake" or "La vie en rose".

Another example of the dialogue between the old and the new is *Talea*. It is an homage to the tradition of the Venetian island Murano, its legendary glassmaking and, in particular, to the company Venini and its historical colour "ciclamino". This new series of vases, produced by Venini, is an exploration of the sublime ruby red colour obtained with gold. Because of its complexity, it will not be produced any longer but Babled was given the possibility to use the last of it. For *Talea* he created a modern composition of eight pieces in which white predominates over the inserted "ciclamino" and additional vivid colours.

The exhibition *Extranormal* is a return to a point of origin with the emphasis on renovating tradition and Emmanuel Babled's conceptual intention to individualize objects and put cultural values into them. His projects start to frame a story and represent a tentative participation of the design culture through a new image that genuinely believes in the power of historical type to evoke memory and therefore meaning.