

DAMN^o 49

MARCH/APRIL 2015

A MAGAZINE ON CONTEMPORARY CULTURE

10 yrs
DAMN^o



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MARCH / APRIL 2015 - OFFICE OF DISPOSAL 9000 GENT X - P509314



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On Aalto's Shoulders

The Bouroullec's step up

Two heads are better than one: This year, Ronan & Erwan Bouroullec have not just started a collaboration with the long-standing furniture house Artek, the brothers have conquered a second Finnish sanctuary: the Iittala glassworks.

NORMAN KIETZMANN



Even if the North beckons like a siren, Scandinavian design is not only created by Scandinavian designers. More and more, it is becoming an international product. On the heels of Artek's first collaboration with Munich designer Konstantin Grcic in 2014, the company has gone into the next round this spring with French brothers Ronan & Erwan Bouroullec. Kaari – the Finnish word for arch – is not a single product. Rather, it is a systematically structured family of tables and shelves. The common feature of the series is materiality: wooden legs and surfaces supported by slender metal structures.

Already in the first sketches, one detail attracted attention: an unusual leg combined with a wavy metal support. This was the starting point for a whole system, which needed to match the existing collection but without being nostalgic. "It is simple, almost primitive furniture, which nevertheless has elegance", says Ronan Bouroullec, the spokesman in this conversation. That the screws remain visible not only makes the structure readable, it also refers to the Steelwood Family (2008) for Magis, wherein the Bouroullec's combined wood and metal in a similar manner. For both designs, a similar principle applies: the material mix is more than a constructive strategy – it determines the aesthetics and character of the furniture in an elementary way.



“For me, design is like language. We use the same words and sentence structures, and yet something new can emerge each time”, Bouroullec professes. The challenge was to mix the ingredients in the proper ratio. Of course, the devil is in the details. The balance between tradition and modernity is achieved by shrinking the thickness of the wooden surfaces and leg diameters – whilst the metal frames are characterised by a playful ease. As archaic ingredients obtain a fresh twist – it is impossible to assign this collection to a specific time period – the pieces appear new and familiar at once. They are beyond time.

The same strategy was also used for Ruutu, a series of glass vases the Bouroullec brothers designed for Iittala. Thanks to their rhomboid footprint, the glass objects can nestle up to one another in the way of modules – creating a sensual superimposition of seven transparent colours. “Our idea was to mix colours together atop a table or sideboard, like watercolours on paper”, explains Bouroullec. In his eyes, the challenge was to favour the material. Even a bad shape will have its charm, due to the atmospheric impact of

glass. Ruutu aims less at a singular object and more at a spatial scenario. During the making process, the material cast a spell on the brothers. Currently they are preparing a glass exhibition in Tel Aviv, scheduled to open in late October. “We want to create something very pictorial, with many colours that correspond to the lights of the city”, Bouroullec informs.

In his opinion, Artek and Iittala share a similar social dimension. The two companies are among the few whose products have reached a whole society – at least in Finland. “The products are not associated with social class. A taxi driver in Helsinki, as well as a fashionable architect, can own a stool by Aalto. This product is like a good song: whether sung in a concert hall or at home, its charm unfolds”, enthuses Bouroullec. It seems that the brothers are feeling quiet comfortable in the far north. <

bouroullec.com
artek.fi
iittala.com

The Bouroullec Brothers' glass exhibition at Tel Aviv Museum of Art will open at the end of October 2015. tamuseum.org.il

Kaari Collection for Artek

Facing page:
 Ruutu glass vases for Iittala
 nestling up to one another