



FRONT

Teleri Lloyd-Jones reviews the highlights of this year's London Design Festival, 19-27 September

A focus on craft's future at the Festival

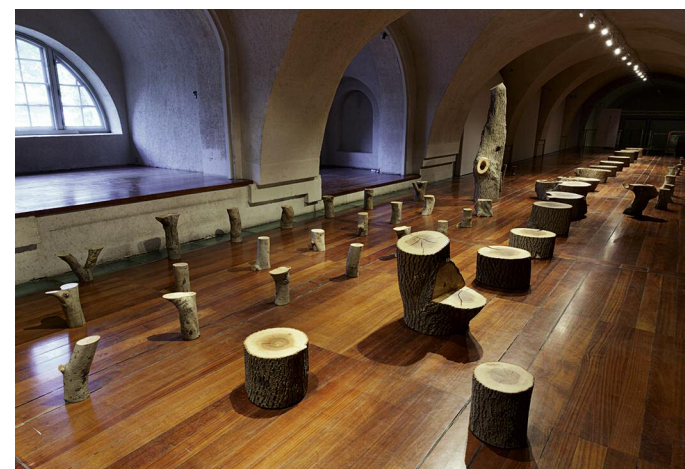
In a corner of the London Design Festival was a small, but significant, moment in which the status of craft in contemporary culture was brought into question. Many may have missed it, settled as it was among the demonstrations and celebrations of making that made up *Factory*, the collaboration between Benchmark, 1882 Ltd and The Future Laboratory. Visitors were treated to displays of wood-turning, transfer printing and slip-casting but at the back of the display talking heads on a film by The Future Laboratory questioned the value of the current taste for craft in design.

Authenticity, the film argued, had grown from our sincere interest in heritage, story and making, into an aesthetic. It has become a veneer appropriated and applied to objects by individuals and companies chasing such a sense of value and veracity. At the film's close, Sean Sutcliffe, co-founder of Benchmark, wondered what words he will be using in the future as though the current ones of 'craftsmanship' and 'making' had emptied in some way.

Looking beyond the *Factory*, one of the most crowd-pleasing LDF projects was a very hand-made affair. Barnaby Barford's *Tower of Babel* – a two-year journey for the ceramist – saw 2,000 miniature bone china shops (each one a transfer printed portrait of a real shop in the capital) piled high. At its base sat fried chicken shops and pound stores while the heights were reserved for auction houses and galleries.

1. We spotted this delightful vessel by Katriina Nuutinen on the Finnish Form stand at TENT London. The series is made using a combination of mouth-blown glass, birch and maple.

2. Native & Co mounted a small but perfectly formed display in Kanna: An Exploration of Traditional Japanese Carpentry, with tools the main focus. We particularly enjoyed the fact that planes ('kanna') and saws ('nokogiri') are used to cut on the pull-stroke rather than the European tradition of the push-stroke.



Above: *My Grandfather's Tree*, Max Lamb, installed at Somerset House
Opposite: *The Tower of Babel*, Barnaby Barford, installed in the V&A's Medieval and Renaissance Galleries

Each time I saw it, members of the public were busy photographing or sketching it. Undoubtedly they were in awe of Barford's obvious passion and the scale of the piece but one wondered how many engaged with the potent symbol of man's real estate folly, the installation as a testament to London's gaping chasm between the poor and the rich.

Elsewhere at the V&A, a hub for the festival, Assemble designed a Robin Day exhibition exploring his love of wood. Some of the display plinths stretched so tall above one's head it felt like a forest had grown up in this small staircase of the museum. From childhood reminiscences to his plywood chairs and the *One Tree Project*, Day's affinity with wood was laid bare: 'As a designer, I greatly enjoy working in timber. Unlike synthetic

materials, it has unpredictability, an infinite variety of texture and pattern, smells good when working and is sympathetic to the touch – it has soul.'

If wood's sense of soul was experienced anywhere throughout London Design Festival it was in Max Lamb's extraordinary installation *My Grandfather's Tree* at Somerset House. The story begins in 2009 with Lamb helping to fell a 179-year old ash tree at his grandfather's farm. He decides to cut the tree at regular intervals into 131 logs creating stools, tables or maybe just a series of logs. The pieces are then arranged across the expanse of a gallery mapping out the shape of the tree the way an archaeologist might re-order a skeleton. The installation was beautifully quiet – a demonstration of an intelligence courageous enough to make the simplest of interventions – and yet somehow hit upon the essences of material and design. Lamb talks of the tree's new history, and indeed there are new trees growing in its place at the farm, as if to drive home the cyclical rhythms of nature and family.

Among the product launches and branding exercises that make up the bulk of the London Design Festival it was satisfying to find these moments of sincerity and heartfelt making. The commercial hunger for craft and its values may well be parasitic and words may lose their meaning, but the meaning of such precious things stays the same.

On these pages you'll find a selection of our favourites from this year's festival.

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3. We've long been fans of Liam Reeves's blown glass vessels with mesh patterns undulating over their surfaces, so we were pleased by his new (but still amorphous) *Glass vs Metal* pieces shown by Vessel Gallery at *Decorex*.



4. Anyone familiar with Myung Nam An's work will be greatly surprised by her new oeuvre. The ceramist, known for her small anemone-like wall-hung piece has spent the last year working on a series of huge and intricately imagined insects. She launched her new collection at *TENT London*.

5. At *designjunction*, the University of Arts London showcased work by recent alumni. From Central St Martins, Evangeline Pesigan presented her exuberant *ANINAG* chair, exploring contemporary ways of working with basketry techniques in furniture design.

6. Also on the University of Arts London stand at *designjunction* was Camberwell graduate Yuta Segawa's rainbow installation of more than 100 miniature pots.



7. Another highlight of the V&A, *Curiosity Cloud* by Austrian design duo *mischer'traxler* included 250 glass globes made by Viennese company *Lobmeyr*, with each containing a hand-made insect. When visitors approached, the globes lit up and the insects buzzed around their cage. It was ever-so-slightly magical.

8. At *Decorex*, Nic Webb could be found, within a temporary workshop he'd installed, talking visitors through his sensitive yet compelling practice that combines woodworking, metalwork and clay.

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