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The Making of Design

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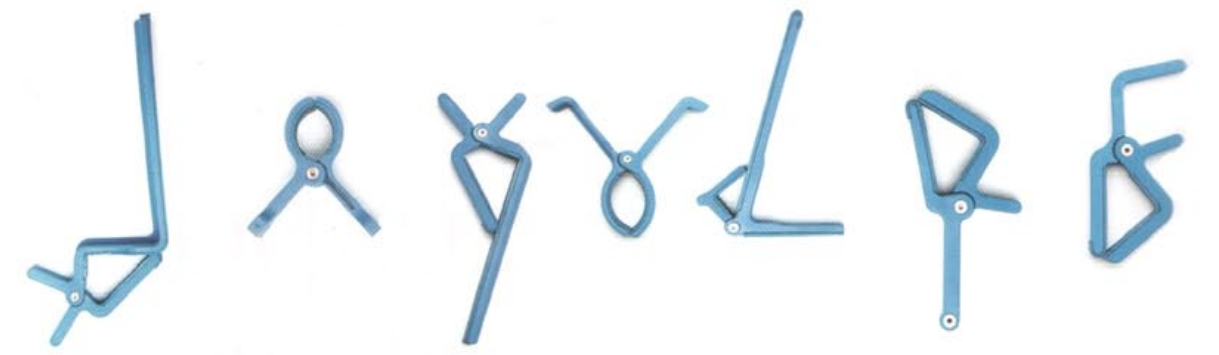


Stoffe, die anziehen

Fabrics That Will Move You

Kein Manifest, kein Credo, keine Ideologie: Funktionieren so Designkollektive im postutopischen Zeitalter? Das Okay Studio jedenfalls ist erfolgreich mit seinem Ansatz. Rechts: Multifunktionales Klammersystem Clampology von Jorre van Ast.

No manifesto, no credo, no ideological superstructure. Is that how design collectives function in the post-Utopian age? Okay Studio is successful with this approach. Right: multi-purpose clamping system Clampology by Jorre van Ast.





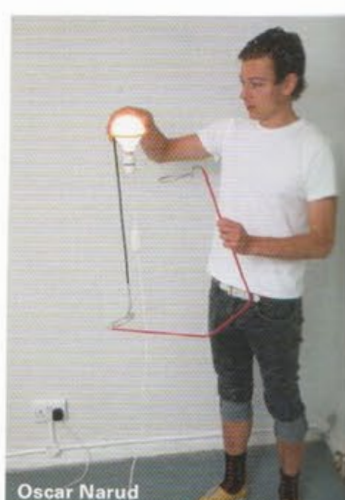
Mathias Hahn



Jordi Canudas



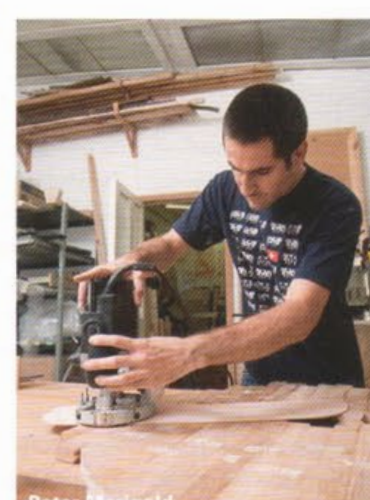
Tomás Alonso



Oscar Narud



Jorre Van Ast



Peter Marigold



Yael Mer & Shay Alkalay / Raw-Edges

Prinzipien und Naturgesetze an, die er in Modelle umsetzt, bis Regale aus geometrischen Rastern entstehen oder eine ganze Möbelkollektion, bei der er sich mit dem Prinzip der Spiegelung auseinandersetzt. Auch Jorre van Ast löst bekannte Prinzipien und Funktionen aus ihrem Kontext, und hat er sich einmal für eine Idee begeistert, schafft der Holländer unzählige Varianten: Seine Serie Clampology etwa handelt das Klemmprinzip an Kerzenhalter, Kleiderhaken, Bücherstütze und so weiter ab. Fast exotisch wirken die Arbeiten der Japanerin Hiroko Shiratori. Sie ist inzwischen zwar in ihre Heimat zurückgekehrt, gehört aber nach wie vor zu Okay Studio. Ihre Produkte setzen sich mit den unterschiedlichen Kulturen auseinander – Ergebnis ist etwa ein an die Form von Stäbchen angelehntes Holzbesteck, das den ungewohnten Umgang mit Messer und Gabel einfacher machen soll.

Große Pläne für die Zukunft hat die Gruppe nicht, meint Tomás Alonso: „Alles ist sehr ungeplant, unkoordiniert und fließt einfach“ – wenn auch ganz offensichtlich in die richtige Richtung. Ohne Überheblichkeit und Selbstgefälligkeit tun die neun einfach, was ihnen wichtig ist. Das macht dieses Studio so sympathisch – und es schlägt sich auch in den Resultaten nieder: Keine lauten, nach Aufmerksamkeit schreienden Objekte, sondern kluge, innovative Produkte, die oft erst auf den zweiten Blick ihre Raffinesse preisgeben. Natürlich möchten alle besser verdienen, mehr Hersteller für ihre Produkte finden, doch die Möglichkeit, „zu experimentieren und gleichzeitig für die reale Welt zu arbeiten“, wie Alonso zusammenfasst, ist für alle zentral. Und auch Oscar Narud spricht wohl für die ganze Gruppe, wenn er sagt: „Ich denke, wir haben ein Riesenglück, dass wir das tun können, was wir gerade machen. Und wenn ich in zehn Jahren noch genauso wie jetzt arbeiten könnte, wäre ich froh darüber.“

Strength in numbers: From its London base the young, international design collective Okay Studio has set out to conquer the design world. We met the unusual group in Milan.

“We are almost like a hippie community of designers,” says Oscar Narud, referring to himself and his eight colleagues – Jorre van Ast, Peter Marigold, Shay Alkalay, Yael Mer, Mathias Hahn, Tomás Alonso, Jordi Canudas and Hiroko Shiratori. Together they go to make up the Okay Studio design collective. There is no common creed, no theoretical superstructure of design dogmas, nor design policy manifestos such as were once propagated by the likes of Alchimia, Memphis and the various representatives of New German Design. “We are primarily concerned with the joint work process. We have a similar concept of good design,” suggests Mathias Hahn, to which Oscar Narud adds: “We are really fair, honest and ready to discuss our ideas openly.”

While they were still studying at the Royal College of Art in London, the group of originally six young designers planned to join forces once they had graduated. Then, two years ago, when Jorre van Ast was asked to participate in an exhibition in Cologne, the whole group presented itself and hastily sought a name which could be understood in all languages. After considering “The Okay One” they eventually agreed on Okay Studio. Their unexpected success on the Rhine spurred them on to greater things. With their combined financial resources they created sort of a design lab in which to produce design – and not only using paper or a computer as there just about anything is possible, from prototyping all the way to the production of small series. London proved to be the ideal location, because the almost complete lack of a local furniture industry allows for a less production-oriented way of working. The designers only look for a manufacturer once they have designed something; projects are not just showcased at fairs but also in galleries. Yet Okay Studio designs are definitely suitable for production as is attested to by their collaboration with Arco, Established and Sons and Royal VKB. An array of design prizes, a number of group and solo exhibitions, and several products in the MoMA collection in New York also show that in the past two and a half years the London-based design collective has made a strong name for itself.

Although all the members work individually on their own projects and emphasize that Okay Studio is not a joint label, with every individual success the name of the group

automatically pops up, too. As diverse as the designs of each individual are, there is one thing they all have in common, namely a very fresh, playful and experimental approach to design.

Oscar Narud from Norway is not just a product designer but a talented illustrator who attempts to combine both in his designs – for example when he sketches an office setting on cardboard boxes which serve as exhibition stands for table luminaires. By contrast, works by Spaniard Tomás Alonso often catch the eye with surprising material combinations. Jordi Canudas, another Spaniard, works on the cutting edge between art and design. Be it installations or furniture, his projects always reach fruition only in the course of the process – such as his Dripping Light spheres which he covers in paint or chocolate in his installations.

Okay Studio is almost like a hippie community of designers. There is neither a common creed, nor a theoretical superstructure of design dogmas, nor a manifesto. But a very fresh, playful and experimental approach to design – and a lot of fun at work.

Mathias Hahn, the German in the group, can be recognized by his attention to detail: He completely reinvents everyday objects with mechanical tricks and innovative solutions for connections and functions – for example, in his Lantern pendulum luminaires, which can simply be clamped at the right height on the cable.

Raw-Edges, namely Shay Alkalay and Yael Mer, are the Israeli duo in the group and take a more dynamic approach: They seek unusual ways to bring movement into their objects, as with Stack, a seemingly wildly-stacked chest of drawers for Established and Sons. Alkalay is the specialist for the “unusual course of events,” while Mer visually develops the patterns and colors for their joint designs. The sole Brit in the group is Peter Marigold, who is more of a natural scientist. His design draws on mathematical principles and natural laws which he translates into models until he has

come up with shelves from geometrical grids or entire furniture collections which grapple with the principle of reflection. Dutchman Jorre van Ast liberates known principles and functions from their contexts and once he is motivated by an idea can come up with any number of variations. His Clampology series, for example, deals with the clamping principle on candleholders, clothes-hangers, bookends and so forth. The works by Japanese Hiroko Shiratori, look almost exotic. Although she has now returned to her homeland she still continues to be a member of Okay Studio. Her products grapple with different cultures – one outcome is a wooden eating utensil which derives from the shape of a chopstick and is supposed to make it easier to eat with a knife and fork if you are not used to them.

The group doesn't have major plans for the future, as Tomás Alonso reports: “It is all much unplanned, uncoordinated, it simply flows,” – and seemingly in the right direction. The nine simply do what is important to them, but without the slightest arrogance or smugness. This is what is so appealing about the studio, and it is certainly reflected in the results: no brash, attention-grabbing objects, but clever, innovative products which often only reveal their refinement on second glance. Of course they would all like to make a better living and find more manufacturers for their products, but the chance to “experiment while also working for the real world,” as Alonso puts it, is a central concern for them all. Oscar Narud no doubt speaks for the whole group when he says, “I think that we are incredibly lucky that we are able to do what we are doing. And I would be happy if in ten years time I can still work just like I am working now.”

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