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at Grand-Hornu



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press
release

DAMIEN GERNAY. MIMESIS

Carte blanche: Damien Gernay

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INTRODUCTION

CID Grand-Hornu is pleased to present *Mimesis*, a solo exhibition by designer Damien Gernay, offering an overview of two decades of work that explores nature, materiality, and craftsmanship. Through his hyperreal representations and enigmatic surfaces, Gernay draws viewers into a space where perception oscillates between the familiar and the uncanny.

Staring into the sea — the deep blue water shining and reflecting across a wavy surface. Walking through a forest where darkness and light collide, revealing fleeting contours and indistinguishable sounds of the wilderness. Touching a surface whose origin, substance, or authenticity resists definition. Such sensory moments resonate throughout Damien Gernay's practice, where encountering his work can be puzzling and surprising, intriguing and spectacular. No words are needed to appreciate the intuitive and mystifying impressions his pieces evoke.

Aristotle once argued that *mimesis* — imitation — is a natural human activity and a way of understanding the world. Gernay observes, re-enacts, and recreates reality in similarly curious and intelligent ways. With a heightened perception of nature's wonders and a keen sensitivity to the possibilities of contemporary technology, he produces works that are at once relatable and unsettling. They instinctively give rise to questions: What is this? Is it real? How was it made?

Although the final outcome of Damien Gernay's work is highly aesthetic — often even mesmerizing — it is the stages of conceptualization and making that truly define his design practice. Trained in industrial design at the École Supérieure des Arts (ESA) in Saint-Luc Tournai, known for its workshop-based curriculum, he developed there both a conceptual approach and a pragmatic methodology focused on materials, at the crossroads between art and design.

Gernay grew up in France before rooting his life and practice in Brussels. In his atelier, certain works — such as the stoneware vases — take shape directly under his hands, while others are produced in external workshops in collaboration with skilled specialist artisans. A craftsman himself, Gernay remains closely involved in the entire production process.

Instinct and sensation drive his creative approach. Guided by a vivid imagination, strong curiosity, and a desire to test and direct the potential of materials, Gernay pushes his work to its limits — in construction, scale, and refinement. His process unfolds as a continuous conversation between control and chance, always aiming toward the precise aesthetic he envisions.

Mimesis offers an immersion into the elemental: fire, water, air, rock, and forest. Damien Gernay's poetic sensibility is evident in the way he captures traces of time, movement, and making across each piece. The exhibition encourages viewers to look more closely, question what they perceive, and experience the space where reality meets its re-imagining.

EXHIBITION WORKS

The exhibition brings together a group of works by Damien Gernay that translate natural phenomena into material processes, combining digital tools, industrial fabrication, and specialized craft techniques. Across sculpture and functional objects, the works explore how light, water, air, and surface texture can be transformed through different materials and methods.

Several works originate from digital modelling and scanning technologies. *Bois Mort* is a poetic transposition of a walk through a forest. The installation translates this experience into a sculptural arrangement of neon tubes in space, where variations in light intensity generate both illumination and sound. The work forms an evolving environment in which the structure appears to flicker and shift, echoing the fragmented perception of light filtering through trees rather than a direct technological capture.

Other pieces focus on surface treatment and material manipulation. In the *Blanc Cassé* table and mirror, stainless steel structures are finished with multiple layers of automotive paint that are subsequently altered by hand. Through sanding or controlled burning, the surface reveals subtle contrasts between white paint and dark traces, allowing the object's function to emerge directly from the treatment of its surface.

The *Amalgame* furniture series is produced in enameled sheet metal fired at very high temperatures. During firing, the glass-based enamel melts and spreads across the metal surface, creating fluid patterns that resemble mineral formations, flowing water, or marble-like textures.

Works such as *Ocean Sunset* and *Glaz* translate wave dynamics into sculptural surfaces through a combination of digital simulation and traditional glass techniques. Using fluid mechanics software originally developed for visual effects, ocean surfaces are digitally generated and then machined into molds using CNC milling. Glass is subsequently melted over these molds in a kiln, taking on the simulated wave forms. The surfaces are finished with hand-applied gold leaf on the reverse side, producing highly reflective objects whose appearance shifts with surrounding light and color.

In *Mer Noire*, the ocean surface is reinterpreted through leather. A digitally generated mold is used to emboss leather by means of expanding epoxy foam, which presses the material into the relief with extreme precision. The resulting surface captures intricate details that resemble fluid movement or reflected light, while the leather is mounted on a sculptural steel base treated with acid patination.

A series of leather-covered pieces, *Gypsum Disorder*, developed in collaboration with the Belgian house Delvaux explores the traditional technique of leather covering, in which leather is stretched and glued over a solid form. Here, the process is applied to shapes derived from plaster-pulling techniques normally used for architectural moldings. Entirely covered in leather, the objects create a subtle trompe-l'œil effect in which surfaces that appear to be plaster or stone are in fact soft material stretched over rigid structures. In one work, ink is absorbed into the leather through capillarity, creating a natural gradient that forms directly within the material.

Another group of works, *Froissé*, investigates the transformation of sheet metal through air pressure. Using a process related to aeroforming, thin metal plates are inflated by compressed air inside a sealed mold. The pressure causes the metal to bulge into smooth, organic shapes that appear soft or fluid despite their rigid materiality. The surfaces are subsequently treated with chemical patinas, producing deep oxidized tones.

The *Extraction* series brings together a group of works—including vases, mirrors, tables, and a cabinet—developed from high-resolution 3D scans of rocks. These scans form a “virtual quarry” from which forms are digitally extracted and translated into physical objects through casting, machining, or molding techniques, depending on the material. The resulting pieces retain the visual language of mineral fragments while remaining entirely generated from digital data. By substituting physical extraction with a process of simulation and transformation, the series proposes an alternative approach to material production—one that avoids direct intervention in natural landscapes. Through this shift, the works place the real and the virtual in dialogue, suggesting a form of material practice where resources are not depleted but reinterpreted and reproduced.

The final room presents a light-based installation derived from a point-cloud scan of a forest. Using highly reflective pigments similar to those used in road markings, the image remains invisible under normal lighting conditions and only appears when illuminated directly. As visitors move through the space and activate the surface with their own light, fragments of the scanned forest gradually emerge, revealing a ghost-like landscape that exists only momentarily in the act of viewing.

INTERVIEW

**Designer Damien Gernay and journalist Sisse Bro
November 2025**

Sisse: When looking across your work, what strikes me is that the pieces vary highly in material and appearance—glass, leather, steel, ceramics—yet they feel connected. What would you say holds the practice together?

Damien: The connection is less about the materials themselves than about a way of thinking. Usually a project begins with a very specific intuition or image in my mind. It might be something quite abstract: the idea of freezing a landscape inside an object, or translating a natural phenomenon into another material. So there is often a conceptual direction from the start. But I rarely design the final form directly. Instead, once I have that intuition, I try to find a process—technical, physical, or digital—that can produce the form indirectly.

What interests me is precisely that moment where the idea meets a system. The system might be a simulation, a material behavior, or a manufacturing technique. I set the conditions, but then the process generates the form in ways that I couldn't fully anticipate. That tension between intention and emergence is really central to how I work.

Sisse: So the form appears somewhere between the idea and the process.

Damien: Exactly. I know roughly what kind of phenomenon I want to evoke, but I don't want to sculpt every detail myself. If I want to evoke the surface of the sea, for instance, I'm not interested in drawing every wave. I prefer to use a system—digital simulation, gravity, pressure, fluid behavior—that produces those waves naturally.

In a way, I try to construct situations where the object can almost generate itself. That doesn't mean the designer disappears. It means the designer becomes more like a choreographer, setting up the conditions for something to happen.

Sisse: That seems to introduce a certain unpredictability.

Damien: Yes, and I think that unpredictability is extremely important. But it's not pure randomness. Everything remains parameter-based. You define the conditions very precisely: the material, the pressure, the algorithm, the physical constraint. If you change one parameter, the result changes slightly. It's a controlled environment that still allows variation.

I've always liked leaving that margin open. It creates forms that feel more alive, because they are not entirely predetermined. There is a small part of the process that escapes you, and that's where interesting things begin to appear.

Sisse: It sounds almost like the way natural forms develop.

Damien: Yes, nature is a very important reference point. Not because I want to imitate it directly, but because natural forms emerge from systems rather than from design. A tree grows according to forces, light, gravity, climate. A coastline is shaped by erosion, tides, and wind. These are dynamic processes, not drawings.

When I work, I'm often trying to translate that kind of logic into another context—into an object, a surface, or an installation. The goal is not to reproduce nature but to evoke the way it operates.

Sisse: Nature appears frequently in your work, sometimes quite literally. Why do you think that is?

Damien: It's probably partly biographical. I grew up in a fairly natural environment, and that shaped my sensibility. But the reason it continues to appear in the work is more conceptual. Natural phenomena contain an incredible complexity that comes from very simple rules.

What interests me is the interpretation of those phenomena. There is always a slight displacement. A piece may look like a fragment of landscape or a geological form, but it has been produced through a completely different process. That shift creates a small moment of doubt in the viewer's perception.

Sisse: A kind of trompe-l'œil?

Damien: Yes, but not in the classical sense of illusion. I'm not trying to trick people. It's more about creating a gap between what you think you're seeing and what the object actually is.

Sometimes the object looks natural but is the result of digital simulation. Sometimes it appears technological but was produced through a very simple physical gesture. I like that ambiguity. It destabilizes perception slightly and encourages people to look more carefully.

Sisse: In that sense the title of the exhibition, *Mimesis*, feels very fitting.

Damien: Exactly. Mimesis refers to imitation, but also to interpretation. The work often mimics certain aspects of nature—light, texture, growth, movement—without literally reproducing them. It's more like translating one language into another.

There's always a transformation involved. The reference may be natural, but the result is something hybrid, something slightly unfamiliar.

Sisse: Your pieces also often sit somewhere between sculpture and design.

Damien: That boundary is very important to me. I deliberately impose functional constraints on many projects. If an object is a table, it has to behave like a table. It must be stable, resistant, washable. These practical requirements create a discipline.

At the same time, function can also become a kind of pretext. The object may fulfill a basic function, but its real interest lies elsewhere—in the process that produced it, or in the perception it generates.

Sisse: So the function anchors the object in reality.

Damien: Yes, exactly. Function connects the piece to everyday life. It prevents the work from becoming purely abstract. But it also creates tension. The object may look sculptural or even surreal, yet it still has to operate in the world as an object.

That tension between the sculptural and the functional is something I enjoy exploring.

Sisse: Many of your projects evolve over long periods of time. Some techniques seem to reappear years later.

Damien: That's true. I rarely think of a project as completely finished. Often one piece leads directly to another. A technique developed for one context might later be used in a different material or at a different scale.

Over time, these experiments form a kind of chain. Each project opens new possibilities for the next one. The work develops almost like a landscape itself—gradually, through layers and connections.

Sisse: Collaboration also seems to play a significant role in your practice.

Damien: Yes. I've been collaborating with Félix Luque for almost twenty years. Our work together started very early in my career. He originally came from music and programming, and together we began experimenting with interactive installations and digital systems.

That collaboration opened many doors. It allowed us to combine digital technologies with material experimentation. Often the dialogue itself becomes a creative engine. When you bring together different disciplines—programming, fabrication, design—you start discovering possibilities that wouldn't appear within a single field.

Collaboration is also an important part of my practice through the work I develop with my partner, the ceramist Julie Gernay. Together we run the project *Terrain Vague*, where we explore the boundaries between art, craft and design. Our pieces combine traditional ceramic knowledge with experimentation, balancing control and spontaneity while allowing the material and process to leave visible traces. The stoneware *Extraction Vase*, developed within this collaboration, is presented in the exhibition, while our porcelain tableware pieces are used in the restaurant Rizom at Grand Hornu in collaboration with chef Olivier de Vriendt throughout the exhibition.

Sisse: Your approach also seems very intuitive.

Damien: Yes, intuition plays a large role. Often I have a strong feeling about the direction a project should take, even before I fully understand it intellectually. The reasoning usually comes later.

Working this way requires a certain trust in instinct. You follow an intuition, explore a technique, and gradually the project reveals its structure.

Sisse: Would you describe that approach as romantic?

Damien: Maybe not romantic in the dramatic sense. Perhaps more bucolic. It's about attentiveness—to materials, to processes, to small transformations. The work grows out of observing how things behave.

In that sense, the designer's role becomes less about imposing form and more about discovering it.

Sisse: When visitors encounter the works in *Mimesis*, what do you hope they experience?

Damien: Ideally a moment of hesitation. I like when someone first recognizes something familiar—a landscape, a natural phenomenon, a common object—and then suddenly realizes that something is slightly different.

That moment of uncertainty is important. It encourages a second look. And in that second look, the object begins to reveal the process behind it, the transformation that has taken place.

For me, that small shift in perception is where the work truly exists.

BIOGRAPHY

Damien Gernay was born in 1975 in the suburbs of Paris. Between 1994 and 1998, he studied design at the École Supérieure des Arts (ESA) Saint-Luc in Tournai, Belgium. After graduating, he worked on scenography projects for contemporary dance and theatre productions in Belgium. From 2003 to 2005, Gernay was an artist-in-residence at Le Fresnoy – National Studio for Contemporary Arts in Tourcoing, France, a centre dedicated to interdisciplinary artistic practices. In 2007, he established his own design studio in Brussels.

Gernay exhibits regularly at international fairs including PAD London and PAD Paris, ICFF in New York, and Milan Design Week. His work has also been presented in institutions such as the Triennale di Milano, the Design Museum Gent, and Bozar in Brussels, among others.

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS AND FAIRS

2026

“L’OSOSPHERE” – La Laiterie, Strasbourg, France
“La Société Automatique” – LABoral, Gijón, Spain

2025

*Révélation*s – Grand Palais, Paris, France
“La Société Automatique” – iMAL, Brussels, Belgium

2023

“Máquina Orgánica” – Teatros del Canal, Madrid, Spain
“Unique(s)” – Woluwe Museum, Brussels, Belgium

2022

“Chroniques” – Friche Belle de Mai, Marseille, France
PAD Art + Design London – Galerie Gosserez, London, UK
“L’Or Vert” – Galerie Gosserez, Paris, France

2021

“Verisimilitude” – MIMA Museum, Brussels, Belgium
“Memory Lane” – Centre des Arts, Enghien-les-Bains, France

2020

“Bois Mort” [part of Memory Lane] – KIKK Festival, Namur, Belgium
“Galerie Gosserez – 10th Anniversary” – Galerie Gosserez, Paris, France
“Conversations” – Galerie Du Côté, Biarritz, France

2019

“Les Garages Numériques” – Bourse, Brussels, Belgium
“Noir Brussels” – curated by Atelier Jaspers, Art Brussels, Belgium
PAD Paris – Galerie Gosserez, Paris, France
“La Promenade du Collectionneur” – Le Meurice, Paris, France

2018

PAD London – Galerie Gosserez, London, UK
“Between Art and Design: The Belgian Scene” – KANAL – Centre Pompidou, Brussels, Belgium
“Design Generations: Intersections 5” – ADAM – Brussels Design Museum, Brussels, Belgium
“Memory Lane” – Espacio Fundación Telefónica, Lima, Peru
PAD Paris – Galerie Gosserez, Paris, France
Collectible – Galerie Gosserez, Brussels, Belgium
PAD Genève – Galerie Gosserez, Geneva, Switzerland
“Saison VII: Die Werkstatt” – Spazio Nobile Gallery, Brussels, Belgium

2017

“From Belgium with Light” – Grand-Hornu, Hornu, Belgium
Art Élysées – Atelier Jaspers, Paris, France
PAD London – Galerie Gosserez, London, UK
PAD Paris – Galerie Gosserez, Paris, France
Festival Interstice – Le Pavillon, Caen, France
“Submersion” – Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, France
*Révélation*s – Grand Palais, Paris, France

2016

“Tendencias: Belgian Art in the Digital Age” – Bozar, Brussels, Belgium
“Belgian Matters” – Palazzo Litta, Milan, Italy
PAD Paris – Galerie Gosserez, Paris, France
“Créations Belges” – Mazel Galerie, Brussels, Belgium

2015

“Design Derby NL-BE” – Design Museum Gent, Ghent, Belgium
Manifesto – Brussels, Belgium
“Blanc Cassé” – Mazel Galerie, Brussels, Belgium

2014

"Elements of Craft" — Mint Gallery, London, UK
"Light Reflections" — Mint Gallery, London, UK
"La Matière des Nuages" — CWB, Paris, France
"Reflections" — Triennale di Milano, Milan, Italy
"Hout: Het Nieuwe Goud" — Design Vlaanderen Gallery, Brussels, Belgium
"No Lights On" — CC 't Vondel, Halle, Belgium
"The Toolbox" — Design Vlaanderen Gallery, Brussels, Belgium

2013

"Tales of Heroes" — Hong Kong, China
"Cabinets of Curiosity" — Mint Gallery, London, UK
"MAD(E) in Brussels" — MAD Brussels, Brussels, Belgium
"A Matéria das Nuvens" — MuBE Museum, São Paulo, Brazil
"Skin Touch" — Cornette de Saint Cyr, Brussels, Belgium
"The Toolbox" — Triennale di Milano, Milan, Italy
"L'Objet d'un Dialogue" — Saint-Étienne, France
"Das Wilde Denken" — Berlin, Germany

2012

Design Miami/Basel — Basel, Switzerland
Maison & Objet — Paris, France
D'leteren Gallery — Brussels, Belgium
Belgian Design on Tour — Liège, Belgium

2011

"Prelude 01: A Dialogue" — Basel, Switzerland
Milan Design Week — Milan, Italy
"5 Years of 101% Designed in Brussels" — Milan, Italy
"Dialogues" — Bangkok Art and Culture Centre, Bangkok, Thailand
"Kick Ceramic" — Cultuurcentrum 't Vondel, Halle, Belgium

2010

"Borders" — Brussels, Belgium
Dessers Beeck Gallery — Keerbergen, Belgium
Maison & Objet — Paris, France
"Le Génie de la Matière" — CWB Gallery, Paris, France
22-Birds Gallery — Cologne, Germany

2009

YDMI — Verona, Italy
Diito Gallery — Brussels, Belgium
Maison & Objet — Paris, France
"De Nieuwe Oogst" — Brussels, Belgium
DMY — Berlin, Germany
"Pastforward" (installation) — Brussels, Belgium
Milan Design Week — Milan, Italy

2008

Brussels Day — Berlin, Germany
Design September — Diito Gallery, Brussels, Belgium
100% Design — London, UK
ICFF — New York, USA
101% Designed in Brussels — Milan, Italy
Salone Satellite — Milan, Italy
IMM Design Talents — Cologne, Germany

PUBLIC COMMISSIONS

"Paysage Corrompu" — City of Brussels, Brussels, Belgium

PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

Design Museum Gent, Ghent, Belgium
ADAM — Brussels Design Museum, Brussels, Belgium

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Once Upon a Chair: Design Beyond the Icon — Gestalten
Desire: The Shape of Things to Come — Gestalten
Book on Bookshelf — Thames & Hudson

EXTRACTION, vase

© Photo Eline Willaert



FROISSÉ, wall-mounted cabinet

© Photo Bruno Timmermans



TEXTURED, sideboard

© Photo Nico Neef



BLANC CASSÉ, table

© Photo Bruno Timmermans



GYP SUM DISORDER

© Photo Julien Renault



BLANC CASSÉ, mirror

© Photo Bruno Timmermans



AMALGAME, sideboard

© Photo Alexander Popelier



OCEAN SUNSET

© Photo Bruno Timmermans





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OPENING TIMES

Every day from 10 AM until 6 PM, except Mondays.
The Grand-Hornu is closed on 24, 25, 31st December and 1st January.

The office can be reached during weekdays from 8 AM to 4.30 PM.

ADMISSION FEE

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- Discount: €2 or €6
- Group rates (minimum 15 ppl.): €6
- School groups: €2
- Free for children under 6
- Free entry on the first Sunday of the month
- Free guided tour from Tuesday to Friday at 3.30 PM, Saturday at 11 AM and 3.30 PM, Sunday at 3 PM and 4.30 PM
- Audio-guides for the historic site: €3
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Free guided tours for individuals

- From Tuesday to Saturday at 11 AM for the historic site, at 3:30 PM for the design exhibition
- Sunday at 3 PM for the historic site, at 4.30 PM for the design exhibition.

BOOKING NUMBER

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