Province de Hainaut

centre d'innovation et de design au Grand-Hornu



Image by Virginie Stoquart, inspired by Dune Lunel's original project for the Jad.

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ALEA, DESIGN AS ADAPATION

Curator: Baptiste Meyniel & Nicolas Verschaeve

15.11.2026 → 18.04.2027

INTRODUCTION

Initially put on by the JAD – the Jardin des métiers d'art et du design in Sèvres – the exhibition *Alea, Design as Adaptation* (Unforeseen Events, Practices of Adaptation) highlights creative and production processes that engage with the unexpected. Curators Baptiste Meyniel and Nicolas Verschaeve invite visitors to explore a multitude of proactive ways to see the world and reveal the ability of designers to keep adapting to the environments in which they find themselves. Generally, the concept of unforeseen events implies the idea of uncertainty arising from chance, but here it is more to do with a set of forces over which we do not always have the power to act. It is nevertheless possible to read, capture or skilfully handle these forces, making use of them and connecting ourselves to the world we inhabit. These phenomena take many forms, encompassing both the laws of the cosmos such as gravity, magnetism and the movement of the sun, and the intrinsic properties of materials or the pre-existing elements found within the designers' environment, requiring them, in a world of finite resources, to work with what is already there.

The works brought together in the exhibition thus reflect an approach based less on the project than on the journey: while a project assumes a defined destination towards which a range of parameters are directed, the journey is constructed more empirically, accepting whatever may alter its course along the way. It is therefore about the ability of the designers gathered together here to step away from preconceived methods, to incorporate into their work a range of active forces, to "work with" them rather than impose rigid doctrines. Beyond the objects themselves, we find attitudes, evolving strategies of adaptation, and forms of observation and listening that encourage a dialogue with a world that is constantly changing.

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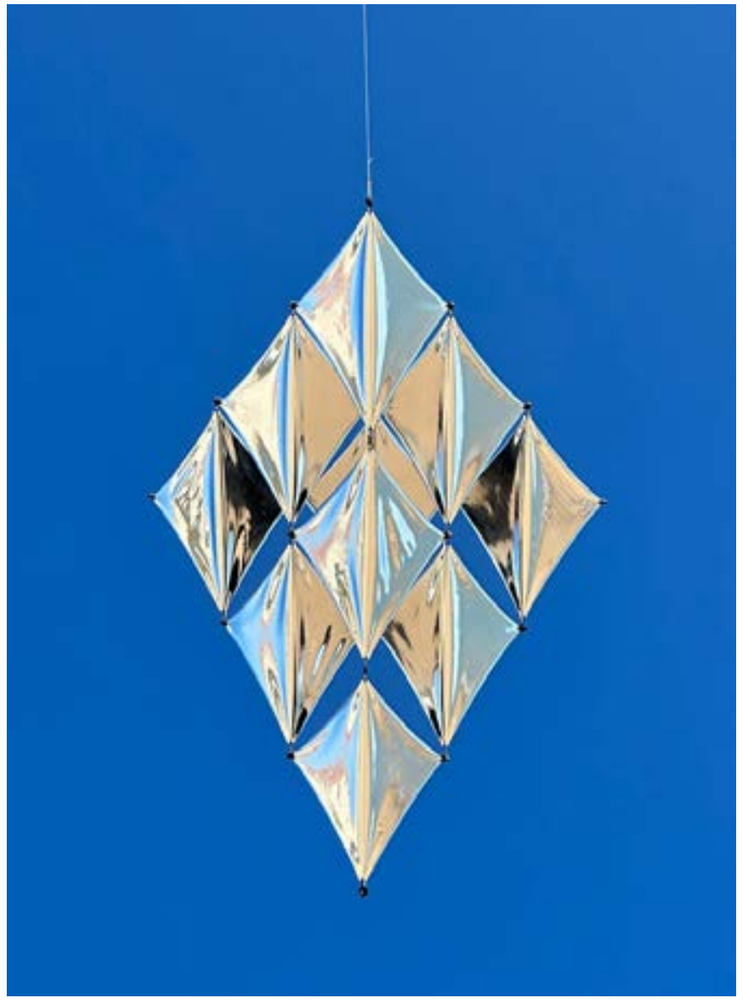
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EXHIBITION CHAPTERS:

I - Engaging with the forces of the cosmos
II - A dialogue between living beings
III - Responding to the flows around us
IV - Making use of what is already there
V - Repurposing the tools of production
VI - Letting materials lead the way
VII - Opening up processes, thinking in systems, enabling new uses

Victor Guéritault
Cerf-volant, 2020
© Victor Guéritault



I - ENGAGING WITH THE FORCES OF THE COSMOS

We might argue that our existence on Earth is shaped as much by our power to act upon our environments as by the power that certain external forces exert over our lives. Our relationship with the world around us plays a huge role in shaping who we are and who we become: beings shaped by our circumstances, open to and connected with our surroundings and influenced by forces that existed before us and to which we inevitably have to adapt. Indeed, our existence is governed by a range of laws, from the gravity that keeps us on the ground to the circadian rhythms shaped by the movement of the sun and the Earth's magnetic field. Together, they create the right balance of temperature, water and light to sustain a habitable world within our protective atmosphere for countless plant and animal species, including ourselves. While some of these dynamics are constant and predictable, others fluctuate, either naturally or as a result of human activity, making it increasingly difficult to predict the climate and define what constitutes a stable balance. Nevertheless, some designers seek to observe these phenomena as they unfold and develop ways of adapting to them,

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using a range of devices to understand them, make them visible or find ways of working with them. The exhibition thus reveals an attentiveness to a world and its realities in constant flux, through a series of attempts to learn how to "live with the trouble". (Donna Haraway)

At the entrance to the exhibition space, a Foucault pendulum hangs, echoing Sophie Krier's video work, ***Le pendule de Foucault*** en signes, reminding us that everything around us is in motion; that we, as inhabitants of Earth, are caught up in a perpetual odyssey around the solar system. A leaf mobile by François Azambourg is caught up in the currents, suspending the leaves mid-fall and inviting us to contemplate them. The same is true of circadian rhythms and sunlight, which Nathanaël Abeille's reflectors, when facing south, redirect into north-facing domestic spaces that receive no direct sunlight.

Making resources available where and when they are needed by collecting them when they are plentiful is also the principle behind Clémence Althabegoïty's ***Récolter la pluie***. A range of elements and energies affect us every day, whether or not we are consciously aware of their presence. It can sometimes be useful to bring these elements to light through devices that reveal what might otherwise escape our attention.

The energy of the wind, for example, only becomes perceptible when it encounters surfaces and forms that are sufficiently flexible and free to move. This is how certain objects are set in motion by the force of the air acting upon them, such as Victor Gueritault's kites, which come to life in response to these forces, and inspire such a sense of wonder in us;

Julie Brugier & Aléa Work,
Champignonnière, 2024 - in progress
© Aléa Work / Stella Lee Prowse & Miriam Josi



II - A DIALOGUE BETWEEN LIVING BEINGS

Living matter, whether plant or animal, is in some sense shaped by the conditions in which it grows. The rings of a tree can thus tell experts about the climatic conditions it experienced during its lifetime, the type of soil in which it grew, or the orientation of the slope on which it stood. Matter can therefore be read and interpreted through the processes and forces that have shaped its development and given it its distinctive, individual character. Following this reasoning, designers and manufacturers do not simply have *wood* at their disposal, but rather different *woods*, whose species and growing conditions need to be taken into account according to how the material will ultimately be used. In his work with split wood, François Azambourg strikes a subtle balance between his intentions for the material and the way it responds as he works with it with his tools. Here, the design, shapes and surface qualities of the furniture are moulded by a combination of factors, suggesting that the design of material objects is not solely in the hands of the designer: some laws have to be followed. Rather than imposing a smooth surface on the material, splitting the wood exposes and reveals its internal

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structure, its properties and the grain formed as it grows, its strengths and its weaknesses. Drawing on the idea of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, anthropologist Tim Ingold talks about the need for craftspeople to “follow the materials”, shaping matter by working with it rather than seeking to control it. Taking a different approach, *Nid d’abeille* sees the designer become part of the transformation process carried out by bees - producing wax from nectar - to create the matrix in which the object will subsequently be cast. Here the designer draws on the bees’ natural ingenuity and creative powers.

Similarly attuned to the plant world, Thomas Guillard takes a related approach, intervening at an earlier stage in the growth process. In his garden-workshop, he shapes the very conditions in which the marrows develop, using moulds to constrain their growth. After a lengthy process of cultivation and drying, objects emerge and potential uses begin to reveal themselves. Here, the designer rethinks the conventional point at which he intervenes: rather than simply giving a raw material its final form, he also helps shape the very nature of the living material itself.

The furniture developed by Samy Rio, in collaboration with the Chatersen workshop, uses chestnut shoots harvested from the Cévennes National Park to create a range of bentwood furniture. This craft contributes to the restoration of the park’s chestnut forest, while revealing a method of green-wood assembly and a technique for standardising the branches to a uniform diameter.

The kitchen containers designed and produced by Julie Brugier are more than simple utensils: they become partners in living processes. Whether used for lacto-fermentation, smoking or growing mushrooms (as with the mushroom cultivator created in collaboration with Aléa Work), her pieces draw on the natural properties of the materials. The porous clay encourages the growth of mycelium, while smoke from hay or wood transforms the flavour of fatty foods. These pieces create connections between humans and other forms of life, with clay, smoke and micro-organisms all playing an active role in the process of transformation. The kitchen becomes a space for co-creation with constantly changing organic processes.

Anna Saint Pierre and FABER
Gaïette, 2023
© photo Giaime Meloni



III - RESPONDING TO THE FLOWS AROUND US

Through their work, a new generation of recently established designers presents an eclectic overview of the issues facing society today. Together, they remind us of the importance of connecting with narratives, creating mythologies, cultivating hybrid forms of culture and becoming part of local networks. They do so through an essential process of bringing cultural, material, technical and logistical legacies into the present. Each of the projects brought together thus reveals, in its own way, the underlying forces that led to their emergence, and reflects practices shaped by many different kinds of flows.

In his film *Borgthor Sveinsson*, Brynjar Sigurðarson explores the powerful influence that superstitions exert on our individual cosmologies, sometimes to the point of becoming indistinguishable from tangible reality or what is generally accepted as true. In doing so, he reveals the subtle ways in which our material and immaterial realities are shaped, questions the boundaries between them, and invites us to consider the spheres of influence that give each living being its own distinct reality.

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These boundaries are blurred in a different way in the work of Dimitri Zephir and Florian Dach, centred on what they call “creolisation” - an exploration of the historical legacies and multiple influences that have shaped forms of culture in the Antilles. Their work on the *CHIEN knife* reveals the influence that flows of manufactured goods have had on island practices, and vice versa. Or how an object can break free from the forms and uses prescribed by industry and, beyond its original purpose, be appropriated and adapted in a variety of ways to meet the everyday needs of the island’s inhabitants - “ways of thinking sustainably about the design of objects that resist planned obsolescence” (Studio Dach&Zephir).

Approaching the question of flows from the perspective of energy, Pablo Bras works with existing networks and questions how they are used. With his infrared heater, which switches on as people move through the space, he questions the need for infrastructure to produce and deliver a constant flow of energy when our needs are intermittent.

Other practitioners work with whatever materials are available, creating forms from remnants and discarded material. Here, what is a finished material for some becomes a new raw material for others. Rikkert Paauw thus identifies a new source of material in the urban environment, collecting and storing old furniture and fragments of materials from which he creates new types of furniture, with a finely judged sense of proportion and use. For the *Aleas* exhibition, his pieces took shape from materials collected around the Grand-Hornu site. Also invited to create a piece for the exhibition, Lucie Ponard uses three types of earth selected by geologist Nicolas Dupont from the Héribus slag heap, south of Mons, as raw materials for formulating glazes. She has teamed up with Belgian brick manufacturer Nelissen to create a table made from discarded bricks that are glazed and assembled. Nearby, Anna Saint-Pierre and Atelier Faber reuse residues from former coal mining activities found at the Raismes slag heaps, turning them into pigments for the cladding of small-scale architectural structures.

Using a similar approach in textiles, Adrien Vescovi works with ochres from deposits that are still being exploited, using them to dye household textiles that he collects through reuse schemes.

Sybille Berger, whose work sits at the boundary between textiles and furniture, intercepts material samples from a fabric manufacturer before they are discarded. For the *Big Cushion* pouffe and *Veste N°24*, the geometry of the raw material determines the patterns and the construction of the pieces, minimising both intervention and additional waste. Here, as anthropologist Tim Ingold reminds us in his book *Making*, “materials are always and already on their ways to becoming something else”. Practitioners such as Lucile Viaud, Clément Rosenberg and Emylou Doutres, as well as Damian Jodorowsky and Timotée Rouffignac, work to forge new alliances between materials and local networks, revealing the distinctive qualities of supply chains rooted in or initiated at regional level. Here, creating or rebuilding a supply chain is not just about producing goods, but reflects a shared desire for the conditions under which production takes place to support the sustainable management of material flows, economic exchanges, and the transmission of knowledge and skills, while fostering networks of interdependence between human and non-human agents. .

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Jasper Morrison
Handlebar Table, 1981
© photo Jasper Morrison Studio



IV - MAKING USE OF WHAT IS ALREADY THERE

Some objects, originally produced to fulfil a specific function, seem, in the eyes of the designers presented here, equally suited to other purposes. When forms move away from their original function, they take on greater symbolic significance, carrying references that are often rooted in a shared popular imagination.

For Anni Albers, the perforated disc of a kitchen slotted spoon thus becomes an ornamental element, a piece of jewellery whose main motif derives from what was originally a purely technical function. Claire Lavabre’s *Stanley* lamp, made from industrial components at various stages of completion, playfully references the way garden hoses can be wound around a car wheel rim, used here both as a reel and as a ballast. Thelonious Goupil repurposes a non-woven paper covering to diffuse the light emitted by his lamp. Here, the designer focuses on the material’s translucent quality rather than on its usual use for sending mail. The same dynamic of repurposing objects or parts of objects, transferring them from one sphere of reality to another, can be seen in the work of

Guillaume Jandin, Jasper Morrison, Achille and Pier Giacomo Castiglioni, Jerszy Seymour and Andréa Branzi.

These shifts recall the iconic approach that Marcel Duchamp introduced into the art world from 1916 onwards, which he called the *readymades*. In other words, sculptures created through the carefully controlled composition of disparate, industrially produced objects, combined with one another through various forms of assembly; objects which, when placed in a different context, come to be seen in a new light and regarded as works of art.

Beyond the formal and symbolic power of these successful combinations of objects, the contemporary use of the *readymade* also speaks to the abundance of artefacts that populate the market and our societies. The process of designing and making through the use of the *readymade* is more a matter of reconfiguring available materials than of setting a whole new production cycle in motion. Here it is worth taking note of the designer Pablo Bras, who suggests that we "make connections before producing", explaining that "there is too much diversity in the real world for us to claim that we have exhausted all its possible configurations" (*Nous n'habitons plus seulement les endroits où nous nous trouvons*, article for AOC media, 2023). In other words, this is a form of economy of means that does not, however, diminish the importance the designer places on function in the design process, and therefore on use. In this respect, the observations made by designer Ernesto Oroza in his book Rikimbili (PU Saint-Etienne, 2009), on approaches to design within the closed Cuban context created by the embargo, are also illuminating: "Because need and use have become central to a new approach based on the responsible use of resources and the reduction of consumption on a global scale, the Cuban experience of household production can show the design and industrial sectors how individuals, when their options are limited, have dared to embrace this alternative."

Drawing on the material and symbolic ecosystem around them, designers demonstrate a capacity for observation and attentiveness, and an ingenuity in shifting things from one context to another and revealing affinities between forms, properties, functions and symbols. The objects brought together in this chapter thus reveal a reduced emphasis on the designer's role as author, in the sense that their forms do not result from the designer's own drawing, but rather celebrate forms that already exist, often anonymously in objects with no identified author. This amounts to a celebration of everyday objects, of their formal and symbolic qualities, and of uses that already exist in the world.

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Réjean Peytavin
Vases Karyotype Freaks, 2019
© photo CIAV Meisenthal

V - REPURPOSING THE TOOLS OF PRODUCTION

By adopting an approach similar to that described above in relation to the *readymade,* some designers seek to repurpose tools and processes used in craft or industry. They draw on the production resources that are already available, integrating their designs into existing manufacturing lines to do more with less, minimising both effort and resources.

Lila Guedin's *Échelle 1* chair, for example, grew out of a close examination of the assembly details of industrial aluminium steps and ladders. Observing the technical and aesthetic qualities of the crimping process, she works with Fortal, adapting the factory's expertise to develop new types of object and redirect its production towards domestic furniture. This approach allows new objects to be designed in close alignment with existing production capabilities, ensuring that the project is feasible while minimising investments in materials, research and development.

Likewise, when an object's form reflects the way it was made and the particular techniques used by a company, it can reveal something of the

material's journey through the production process. This is the approach taken by Réjean Peytavin in the workshops of the Centre International Verrier de Meisenthal or in a porcelain factory in Jingdezhen. By combining existing moulds found at the production sites and putting them to new uses, he explores error as a productive form of failure, opening up new formal possibilities and historical connections. In a similar way, Diane Steverlynck, together with Anne Masson and Eric Chevalier, works not through drawing but through code, directly modifying the programmes of weaving machines to generate new patterns, revealed in the resonance - flow - echo rugs. Floris Wubben repurposes clay extrusion processes normally used to make bricks, employing them instead to produce a range of domestic objects, such as the *Endos* table presented in the exhibition.

The approaches brought together here thus point towards ways of developing contemporary production that works with existing infrastructure. It remains possible to produce furniture or other artefacts locally with companies that do not normally make them, and potentially to develop inventive solutions capable of competing technically and economically with outsourced production.

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Sacha Parent & Valentine Tiraboschi
Vase Ballotini, 2025
© photo Sacha Parent & Valentine Tiraboschi



VI - LETTING MATERIALS LEAD THE WAY

Each material needs to be shaped with its physical and formal properties in mind. In *La matière de l'invention*, Ezio Manzini presents design as a process of dialogue between the designer, the material and its use. He emphasises that material is not simply a passive medium, but plays an active part in the creative process, bringing with it constraints, possibilities and meanings. Thus the grain of the wood influences how it can be cut or machined, while clay, being malleable, lends itself to a more organic and empirical approach to shaping. Each material therefore has its own language of forms, colours and sensations. The designer or manufacturer is therefore not the sole author: the material and the processes it undergoes also play an active part in shaping the object. The resulting forms emerge from the interaction between the actions applied to the material and its inherent limitations.

The objects presented in this chapter explore different ways of shaping a single material: glass. Its very nature requires the designer to develop

the project around the ways in which the material can be shaped, turning technical constraints into formal opportunities. Each project involves numerous iterations, as the designer explores how to work within the physical processes by which the glass is formed or deformed. This is how the working process for achieving the desired result can be defined, while the experiments themselves can also give rise to welcome surprises and unexpected outcomes. It is worth remembering here that the designer is, for the most part, a generalist, whose knowledge differs from that of a materials engineer, who can understand how the material will deform and predict that behaviour through calculation. What emerges then is less a high degree of skill in taming the unpredictable than a form of empirical mastery developed through unforeseen events.

In Nendo's *Melt* series, Fulvio Bianconi's *Fazzoletto* vases and Marco Campardo's *Unroll butter dish,* we see the combined effects of different physical parameters such as temperature, gravity, material thickness and malleability, as well as the movement of the material itself, whether it is held in place by a template in a thermoforming mould or at the end of a glassblower's pipe. The same is true of Valentine Tiraboschi and Sacha Parent, who use glass in granular form, allowing it to flow through a calibrated mesh and accumulate into small mounds that form according to the natural behaviour of granular materials.

At CIRVA, Brynjar Sigurdarson (38) works with *pâte de verre* using an unusual process for his *Spectrum vase*, developed through a long series of iterations to produce a result that mimics certain mineral formations created by sedimentation and also recalls materials formed from magma.

Many of these objects therefore appear as frozen moments in a process, "snapshots" taken from a movement that could have continued had it not been deliberately interrupted. The forms are only minimally designed and are mostly produced by subjecting the material to particular conditions. The material itself also determines what it can and cannot do within a set of constraints, a shaping protocol devised by the designer and the craftsperson.

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Marijn Van Der Poll
Do Hit Chair
© Collection Province de Hainaut - dépôt CID au Grand-Hornu

VII - OPENING UP PROCESSES, THINKING IN SYSTEMS, ENABLING NEW USES

The objects in this chapter do not prescribe exactly how they should be configured or used. The designers instead put forward proposals, protocols or systems, leaving each person free to engage with them in their own way.

Bruno Munari's humorous poster from his photographic series *À la recherche du confort dans un fauteuil inconfortable* invites us to reconsider the way we relate to objects. By exerting less control over our bodies and being less prescriptive about how they should be used, these objects open up a wider range of possible ways of interacting with them. Whether modular elements made up of several parts, such as Ronan and Erwan Bouroullec's *Vases combinatoires*, Martin Szekely's *Construction* shelving unit and Olivier Vadrot's *Goban* platform, or objects whose outlines can change, such as the *Sacco* pouffe by Piero Gatti, Cesare

Paolini and Franco Teodoro, Julie Richoz's *Thalie* baskets and Erwan Bouroullec's *Maap* lamp, these designs expand the possibilities for use through forms that are impermanent and can be continually renewed. They allow the domestic environment to be adapted, making it less rigid and fixed. As the organisation of space becomes open to change, it becomes more flexible and temporary, better able to adapt to different ways of living and greater freedom of movement.

By involving the user, these objects also give them control over the form, whether by following a prescribed protocol or by working within a system, as with the design software developed for Sander Wassink's *Chaise V8.0*. Everyone is therefore invited to play a part in adapting the objects to their own constraints or wishes, and in some cases their contribution is even necessary for the design to be used, as with Marijn van der Poll's Do hit chair. From the smallest unit to the deployment of an entire system, the ability to add or remove individual parts, or to take part in the process itself, gives users a great deal of freedom in how they use them.

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ABOUT THE COMMISSIONS FOR THE EXHIBITION:

The exhibition presents new works by five designers, invited by the curators and the CID at the Grand-Hornu, who draw on the history and resources of the site or the surrounding area, or make use of the winter period during which the exhibition takes place.

- Lucie Ponard has teamed up with Belgian brick manufacturer Nelissen to create a table made from discarded bricks, which she glazes and assembles. In keeping with her practice of developing glaze recipes from earth excavated on construction sites, she uses three types of earth from the Héribus slag heap, south of Mons, selected by geologist Nicolas Dupont, as raw materials.

- Rikkert Paauw has been given carte blanche to create a new piece on site using discarded materials sourced from the area around the museum. The elements gathered by chance during his wanderings provide the starting point for the work and take on a different use.

- Julie Brugier has created a smoker especially for the exhibition, using hay for the smoking process in a reference to the material once stored in the former Magasin aux foins, where the exhibition is being held at the Grand-Hornu. It will be put into use at the exhibition opening by chef Olivier De Vriendt, from Rizom, which has been based in the heart of the former colliery since 2021.

- Pablo Bras continues his exploration of energy and invisible flows with a heater that responds to visitors moving through the space and takes the configuration of the space itself into account. Activated by a person's presence, it becomes a hearth: a temporary, localised source of heat at the very heart of the exhibition. Here, he questions the need for continuous energy flows when use is intermittent.

- Nathanaël Abeille, meanwhile, uses a heliostat positioned outside to capture the sun's rays and redirect them onto one of his reflectors displayed inside the Magasin aux foins. Depending on the weather, sunlight will pass through the exhibition space, which is kept in relative darkness, despite the sun normally being very low in the sky and less present during the season in which the exhibition takes place.

ABOUT BAPTISTE MEYNIEL

Baptiste Meyniel, a French designer and graduate of ENSCI, has developed a practice with a particular focus on materials and the processes used to shape them. A recipient of the CIRVA award in 2019 and later selected by the Fondation d'entreprise Hermès for its 2021 Académie des savoir-faire devoted to glass, he subsequently joined the JAD, where he began working with other craft disciplines, including textile printing, photogravure and dyeing. His work has been exhibited at Fotokino, Frac Champagne-Ardenne, Frac Picardie, the Espace de l'Art Concret, the MAMC in Saint-Étienne, the Fondazione Rodolfo Ferrari and the Milan Triennale.

ABOUT NICOLAS VERSCHAEVE

Nicolas Verschaeve (BE-LUX) lives and works between Brussels and the Northern Vosges. His practice is guided by a particular attentiveness to the forms taken by our relationships with the world, whether social or formed with the places and environments around us. For several years, his practice has been grounded in fieldwork, engaging with what lies beyond objects and what precedes them: a range of geographical, historical, social, economic and political factors. His reflections in turn inform his work across research, design commissions, curating and teaching. He works with cultural institutions including the Centre International d'Art Verrier de Meisenthal, Wallonie Design, the Centre national des arts plastiques, Ateliers Médicis and the Fondation d'entreprise Hermès, as well as with regional organisations such as the Parc national de forêts in Burgundy. His work is represented by Galerie A1043, held in the Cnap collections, and has been shown at the Vitra Design Museum, BOZAR Brussels, Ateliers des Arques, the Saint-Étienne Biennale and the Salone del Mobile in Milan. Alongside his independent practice, since 2023 he has coordinated the educational programme Design des Mondes Forestiers, run by EnsAD Paris and based in the Pays de Bitche in Moselle.

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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
— Combined ticket for the Grand-Hornu site / CID / MACS: €10
— 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, Saterday 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
Advance reservation required for guided tours (by appointment) of exhibitions and/or historic site (FR / DUTCH / GERMAN / ENGL).
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