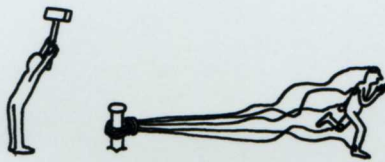


# Disegno

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This issue includes:  
*Gareth Pugh's* costumes for *Emperor Eliogabalo*; *Christien Meindertsma's* investigative profile of flax; a reworking of *Lufthansa's* design code by *PearsonLloyd*; the abandoned mansions of Točka; *Hella Jongerius* and *Louise Schouwenberg's* rebellion against the new; the forgotten waterways serving 21st-century Paris; global soft power at the Louvre Abu Dhabi; and 12 new emojis for 2018 from *Pentagram*, *Committee*, *Maiko Takeda*, and others.



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# Jamming the Stupid Machine

Introduction Matthew Ward Photographs Fabian Frinzel



Conversation





The photographer Fabian Frinzel was invited by *Disegno* to document the installation of *Beyond the New* at Die Neue Sammlung. His images of the space can be found throughout this article. The previous page shows a portrait of Hella Jongerius (left) and Louise Schouwenberg.



As you descend the staircase of the Paternoster Hall in Pinakothek der Moderne in Munich, you're confronted with a mortuary of design classics: Ettore Sottsass's Superbox cupboard, Jacques-Émile Ruhlmann's Tibattant desk, Gillis Lundgren's Billy bookcase. The canon has been laid to rest, lying prostrate, waiting to be buried forever.

*Beyond the New* by the designer Hella Jongerius and theorist Louise Schouwenberg at Pinakothek der Moderne's Die Neue Sammlung design museum presents a series of objects, automaton and textiles that asks us to question the future of design. Looking past the myopic, short-term cycles of contemporary capitalism, the exhibition invites visitors to see the complex social and cultural meanings of the discipline. It aims to open up a space for reflection on design beyond its function. By contextualising the histories and meanings of past creations, it questions the Proustian condition whereby our lives are constituted through the accumulation of memories, and where objects oscillate between a childlike demand for attention and a quiet retreat into the background.

Born out of frustration and anger at the continual, and often false, production of novelty within the product and furniture industries, Jongerius and Schouwenberg are trying to find life for design after Milan. First presented in the form of a manifesto at the Salone del Mobile in 2015, and elaborated upon the following year in a Serpentine Galleries show at La Rinascente, *Beyond the New*'s reappearance as an exhibition translates a textual project into the material realm. Executed in the language that Jongerius is most comfortable with – that of materials, colours and form – the Munich objects are playful, beautifully detailed and carefully crafted. But do they move beyond the new, or are they material witnesses to what the theorist Bifo Berardi has termed the “slow cancellation of the future”?

Contemporary furniture and product design is in a state of gradual decline. In an industry that survives on the production of the new, there is a crisis of confidence: novelty doesn't seem so novel anymore, the “shock of the new” hasn't happened for decades, and the fanfare given to product launches falls on deaf ears as an over-saturated, over-stimulated generation turns the other way. So where is the new site for cultural invention? How can a discipline with the skills to both visualise and materialise alternatives

make the time and space required to imagine a world beyond the frenzied overproduction of the current market-driven reality? Has the world of things lost out to the digital realm as the tool of choice for those interested in social transformation? Have our ideological expectations been eroded in the face of overwhelming complexity and global collapse?

During my conversation with Schouwenberg, Jongerius and Angelika Nollert, the director of Die

## The opportunity to expand design culture sits with institutions at the forefront of knowledge production and preservation.

Neue Sammlung, a surprising idea emerged: true disciplinary innovation can't happen through industry anymore. The opportunity to expand design culture sits with institutions at the forefront of knowledge production and preservation: universities and museums. As an educator, I find this an attractive opinion. All too often universities are lambasted for being slow-moving, outdated, pretentious and irrelevant. Museums, too, are criticised for their lack of representation and their limited modes of participation.

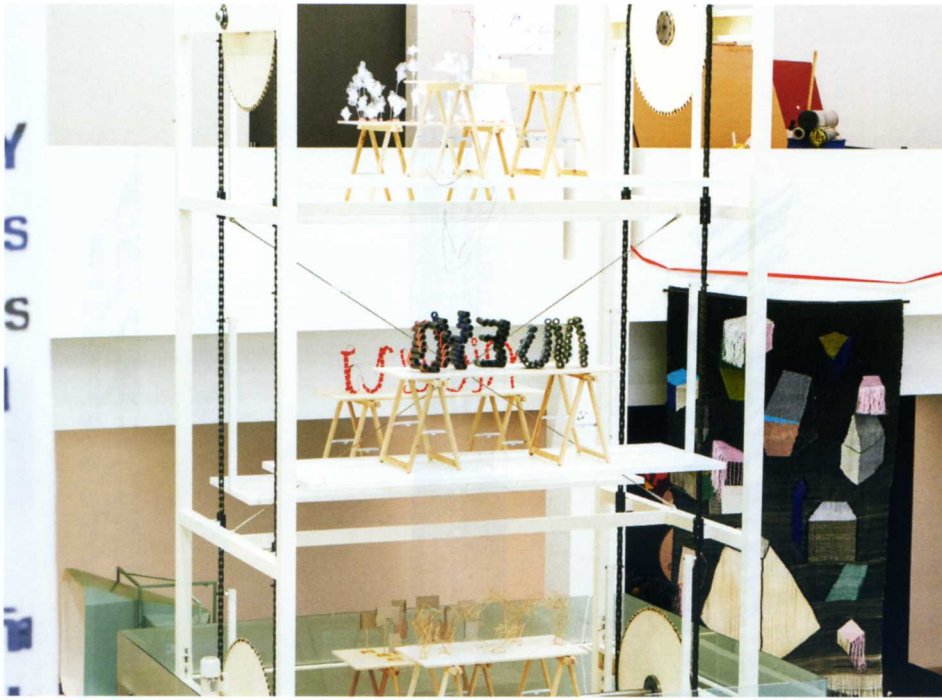
It's no longer possible to gain “academic consensus” on the direction, focus and meaning of design in today's diverse and fast-moving technological culture. Asking for trust and faith in institutions that have historically failed to speak for the marginalised and the dispossessed is a difficult proposition. However, at a time of great financial precariousness, universities and museums offer a different set of critical, cultural and temporal values. *Beyond the New* highlights some of the deep questions found within the material domain. If time and care are not given to thinking beyond our current paradigm, it's not just design that will pay the price; it may very well accelerate the slow cancellation of all of our futures.











Conversation



**Matthew Ward** I want to start with the concept of the new, which you've been exploring, reacting against, or moving beyond for a number of years. It feels like the manifesto that you published in 2015 started from a place of frustration with the industry.

**Louise Schouwenberg** *Anger.*

**Matthew** Could you elaborate? And have your ideas changed since you wrote it?

**Hella Jongerius** They've shifted a lot. When we did the manifesto in 2015, it was a critique, but we also wrote it all down in quite a compressed way: it was a very quick action. So when we were asked to do something for La Rinascente department store in Milan the following year, we felt that we had to build on that topic and come up with a design language that operated within the profession. We were interested in providing answers and going more in-depth with *A Search Behind Appearances* [the Serpentine Galleries show at La Rinascente for Milan 2016], but it still didn't go deep enough or point to the larger context.

**Louise** We felt the need to go beyond that initial critique. It can be cowardly to just stay on the sidelines, so with this exhibition we really want to show the potential of design: the pleasure; the research; the playfulness. It was a question of how to mix critique and playfulness. With one of the machines in the exhibition, we had a nice idea, but technically it didn't work out. We wanted to make a big balloon that would inflate and deflate continuously. When blown up, the word "new" would appear on its side. That was about the inflation and pomposity – the obesity if you will – in the design industry. When you make something like that, it works as a critique of the design world, but turning it into a balloon also makes it a joy to look at.

**Matthew** Has the shift from discourse to a design language – a material language – changed your perspective on the topic, and what angered you to begin with?

**Hella** Now, we're trying to communicate with the design profession in its own grammar. I'm not a word person, so it was really scary when we first published the manifesto. To give it hands and feet almost paralysed me. My god, the questions we asked were too big to answer!

**Louise** Many ideas preceded that research. Our relationship goes back a long time and we always joke

that Hella does the objects and I do the words, but in reality that's not true. She's a clever designer and good with words and ideas too, and we have an influence on one another. What we are doing now, and have done in Milan since 2015, is really just showing that mixture for the first time. I would like to say, however, that I struggled with the phrase "Beyond the New". It sounds nice, but it's also contradictory. Whatever you do, even if you go back to the past, is new. You can't go beyond the new; that would in itself be new.

**Matthew** Quite a few people have been writing about the pursuit of the new as something deeply alien to us as a material culture and the demise of that notion of newness; Bifo Berardi calls it "the slow cancellation of the future". Because we have access to so many different visual and cultural forms, we don't experience the shock of the new anymore. Certainly, the younger generation – the digital natives – won't experience that moment of listening to David Bowie for the first time, or the first moment of rock n' roll – these iconic moments in visual and audio culture. How did that fit into your thinking in relationship to the design industry and that search for novelty and newness?

**Louise** Newness for the sake of newness is manifested within the market economy and consumerism as mere stylistic variation. If you look at all the trade fairs, most designs are small variations on something else. It's not shocking anymore and what we're opposed to is that endless chain of stylistic variation which is presented in marketing verbiage as the newest of the new. Our interest is very much in how you can distinguish real innovation in a cultural sense from newness for the sake of newness. With that line, "Beyond the New", we want to question what is new, and whether newness is really important? Is it innovative? Does it actually open up new possibilities?

**Matthew** What do you mean by cultural innovation? How do you start to define that beyond those cycles of manufacturing?

**Hella** Cultural innovation is perhaps something that shifts users' or consumers' attitudes, although this form of innovation doesn't come from the industry itself: it comes from people's awareness. Industry looks at what sells; it's just a stupid machine that follows the money. So if people wanted different kinds of products, the companies would immediately follow. If you concentrated on users, then you could liberate



industry and it's important to recognise that that change will not come from industry. That's why the role of the museum is a very important one. The market is not leading us anywhere and it's actually the public you have to inform. Then industry will follow.

**Angelika Nollert** Design museums or museums of applied art can only be about the idea of offering contemporary narrations. Those are constantly changing, but you have a responsibility towards society to ask what the subjects of our time are:

**“As a museum, you’re constantly speculating about which objects and movements are the most influential.”** — Louise Schouwenberg

migration, sustainability, power, gender and so forth. Then you can look at the pool of 100,000 things in the museum's collection and find that even someone like Michael Thonet was working within a market and a power structure.

**Louise** As a museum, you're constantly speculating about which objects and movements are the most influential. So the Billy bookshelf from Ikea is an iconic piece in a sense. Even if it's not very valuable, it represents something.

**Hella** But companies aren't busy with that topic. Or if they are, it's only from a marketing perspective: they just project empty things and all those nice words. As a designer, however, I feel a responsibility to address that topic, ask questions and try to add more meaning to a design than what the client has necessarily asked for.

**Louise** Over time, people have become much more aware of how many meanings are included within “design”. Every design tells a story, and for us it's important to make the public aware of how you can read a design. What story does an object tell? What kind of worldview does it imply? If it has a perfect surface, what does that mean? If it has an imperfect surface, what are the implications for how you think about it? With this exhibition, we want to give clues

about how to read a design, because I think that if my mum went to see some exhibition of old designs, she would merely look at them as curious objects. At most you might compare them to your stuff at home, but that's it.

**Matthew** There's the economic reality of museums to consider as well. In the UK you need big names to bring people through the door, and that shifts and skews what goes on display.

**Louise** Is our show going to be a blockbuster, Angelika?

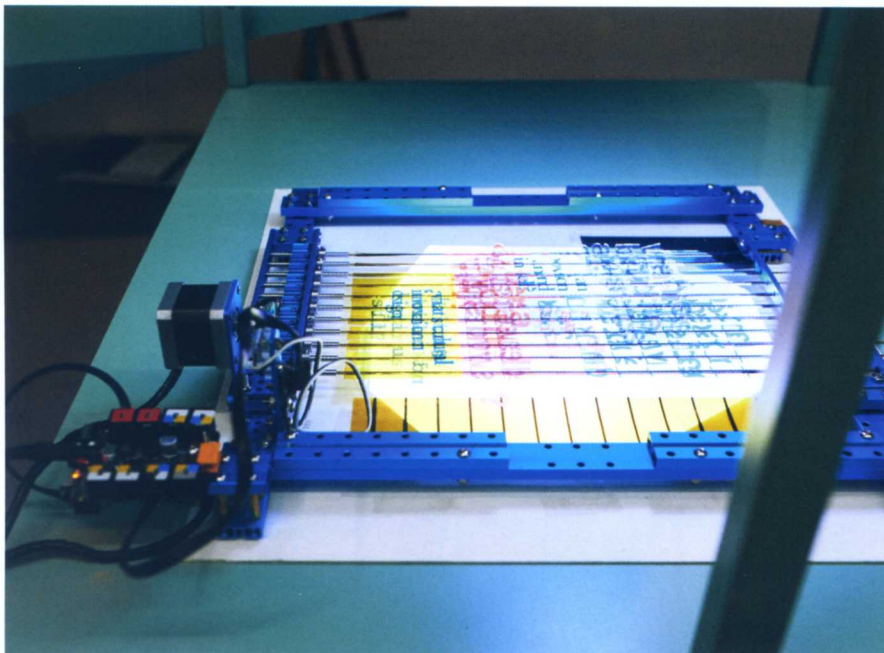
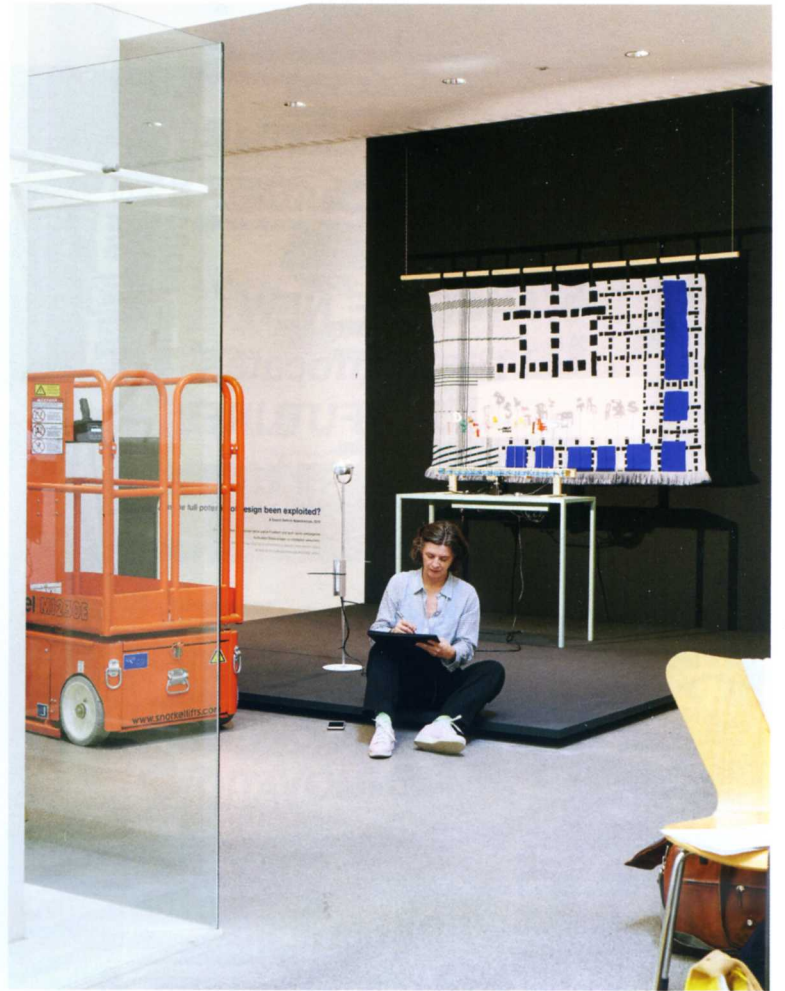
**Angelika** I don't know and don't mind. I never thought of it in terms of a blockbuster. State museums here in Germany are interested in visitor numbers, but they're never published. They don't want to have those in the discussion about what makes a good museum. Here in Munich, for example, we have a state museum for numismatics and you can imagine how many visitors they get; I think they have more people working there than they have visitors. In terms of economics, we're living and working in a really strange time. In no age were museums so under-financed as they are today.

**Louise** For a long time in the Netherlands we've had a very large subsidy system, so designers and artists can get quite a lot of money to build up their careers. Hella's generation has profited from that and the Dutch design world has profited from that. The system still works, but the overall money involved has decreased since the economic crisis. The same is true for Dutch museums, which face decreased funding and have to produce blockbusters to survive.

**Angelika** I think everyone who works in a museum has the mission of bringing people in, and then letting them out having prompted some new thoughts. But it's not necessarily about bringing tons of people in.

**Matthew** I had an interesting experience on a project we did a few years ago at the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich when our students suggested that a museum should be a site of fiction. Museums should be a resource for creating fictional narratives about the world and operate as a way of inspiring new forms of storytelling, which don't actually need to be about the truth. The museum really struggled with that idea that it should become a site of fiction and not a site of fact.

**Louise** We talk about a museum as an institution representing universal truth or objectivity, so it's interesting to compare it to the Wunderkammer, which was very personal form of categorisation. I have a feeling that we're now slightly turning back



Conversation



design is the eternal  
past, present, future.

IS THERE A  
BEYOND THE NEW?

the past suffocates  
the FUTURE

innovation in design  
equals technological  
INNOVATION

who's right, the  
technology skeptics  
or the skeptic  
of technology?

are we living in a perpetual state of impermanence?  
perfection equals death is IMPERFECTION life

can design CONFRONT us with ideas other than the ones we already had  
UNFOLDING the REACHERY of the images  
are we living in excess?

DESIGN IS CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE

away  
INK AND  
design  
the world?  
SIGN  
our  
can  
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DESIGN'S LEGACY of functionality and simplicity has defined its moral STANDARD  
implicitly the answer or a stylistic choice has design's relentless quest for  
IMPRISONED THE DISCIPLINE of innovation behind its

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MUSEUM,  
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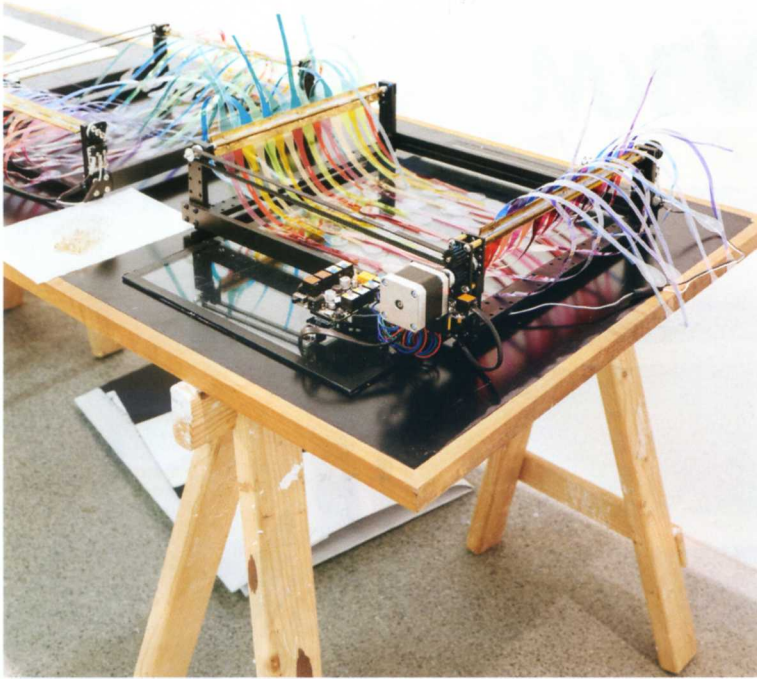
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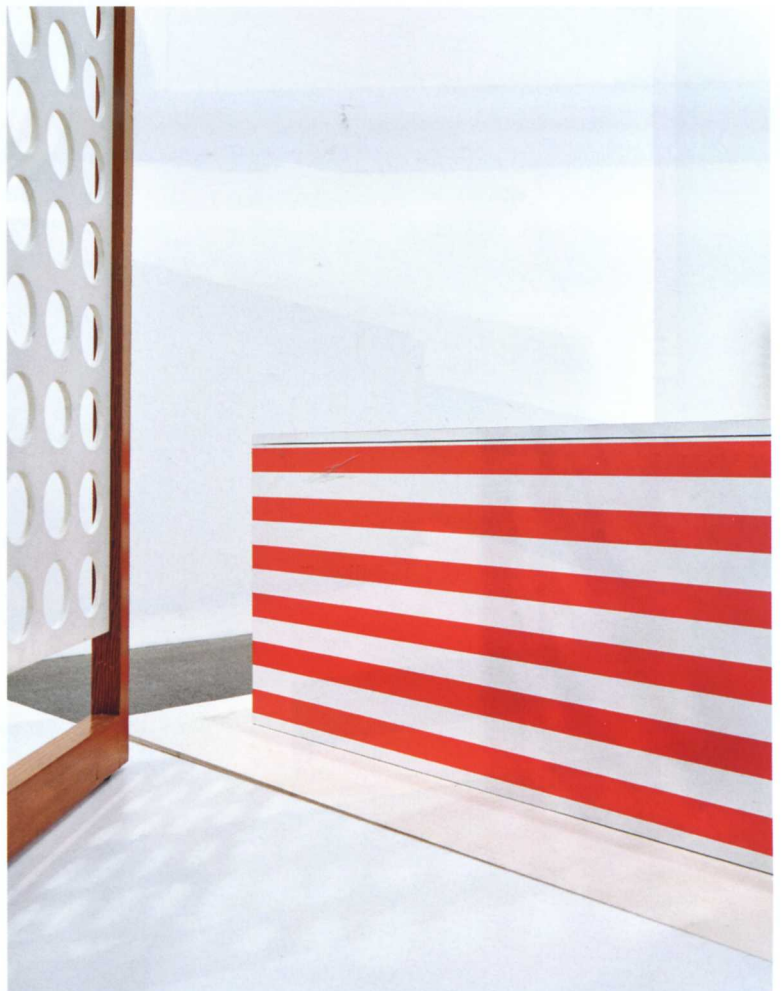
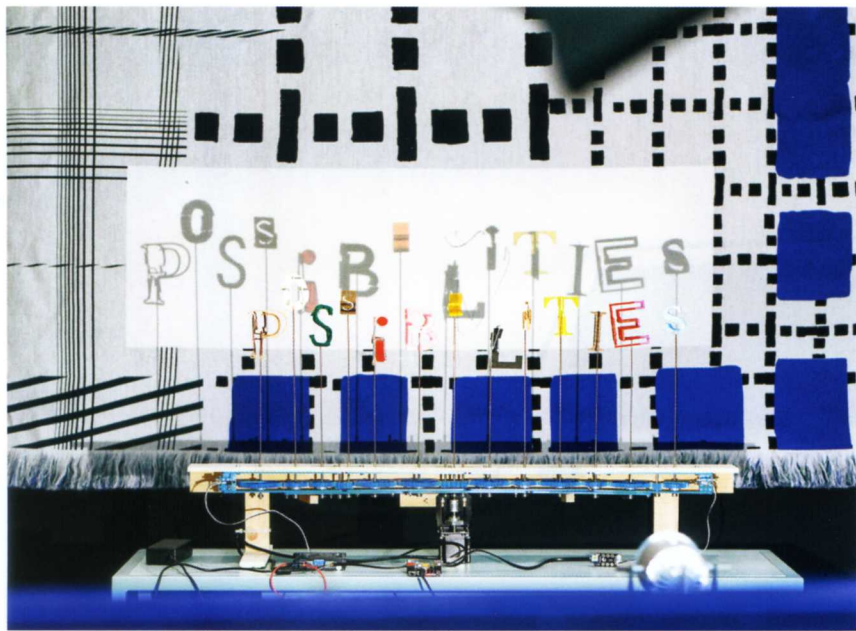
can daily artefacts reveal who we are  
MUSEUM COLLECTION SUGGESTS A











Conversation







towards the idea of the Wunderkammer in our sense of narrative. But not a single Wunderkammer: we're looking at a whole range of Wunderkammern that are evolving and changing.

**Hella** If you only come to look at "the real" or "the facts" in a museum, then you miss the opportunity to imagine some of the ideas engendered by certain projects, objects or installations. So for this exhibition, I wove some of our texts into a cloth, whereas we could have just printed those texts directly onto the wall and presented them as facts.

**Louise** We thought about whether we should just have plain text or add this element of craftsmanship through the weaving. We liked the time factor involved in the craftsmanship, because we develop all of our ideas over time. If we'd just put the texts on the wall, it would almost have been as if they weren't there – only present as ideas – whereas now you can see the effort behind them. I truly believe that in a woven work, the viewer's eyes go through the weaving and follow a route. It pulls you into the narrative.

**Angelika** The slowness of production goes into the slowness of reception.

**Hella** You can see imaginary voices in the weave, because they're all woven using the same technique and the same font, but we cut them differently so they look like different techniques. The cutting reveals different voices.

**Louise** Which somewhat takes away the notion of having a definite statement. The text becomes softer and more tentative; we're searching for meaning instead of claiming to know the meaning. The constant development of culture and constantly revaluing what you're actually looking for is important. You have to rethink everything all the time.

**Matthew** Walking in and seeing the cabinets lying on the floor, for instance, suggested the death of these objects, lying limp in the morgue of design.

**Louise** A cupboard in a museum is never functional and it's never about functionality: it's all about its objectness. So if you want to see it as an object without function, then you better lie it down, because then people start to look at it in a different way. It provokes a search and this exhibition is all about what is the essence or the experience of objects in real life, in contrast to the experience of them within a white cube space. What is behind the scenes?

**Angelika** People love to ask about the difference

between design and art. I always reply that without visual arts life is maybe a little bit sadder, but without design it's not possible. So I think design museums have a really challenging task for the future. Design can really change things and I always think that when there is societal crisis the visual arts tend to be very conservative, whereas design is often radical.

**Louise** Which is why it's so important not to leave it up to the market to decide what is important. We're surrounded by design – it's everywhere – but the market is just concerned with novelty.

**Matthew** Do you think those cycles of consumption in terms of novelty in the design industry have shifted throughout your career?

**Hella** They've accelerated. Companies want quick results, so they want to work with big names in order to add that layer of "signature". What has changed a lot is that marketing departments have become so big that the message is now larger than the thing itself.

**Louise** Industry has been carved up into marketing departments and development departments, and it's the marketeers who are defining what's being produced.

**Hella** There are companies where marketing has done the design, which is an easy way to do design if you don't want to have a designer. What has also changed is that the younger generation is not so materialistic. They don't need to own nice, new stuff, so the market has adapted to that. The younger generation is satisfied with having something second-hand or super cheap. Who wants a car if you live in a city, for instance? Who wants to spend so much money on a sofa if you can buy a cheap one from Ikea?

**Louise** That's weird, eh? I wrote about a cabinet in the publication that accompanies this exhibition, which my parents saved for years to buy. Now you can just go to Ikea and get a cabinet. Everything is so cheap for us that the whole notion of owning has changed.

**Hella** Which industry is aware of.

**Matthew** One of the things that chimes for me is that this idea of a pure form of industrialised capitalism, which was present at the beginning of mass industrialisation, has slowly had complexity added to it through layers of bureaucracy, laws, constraints and testing. It's now at the point where that idea of modernist purity is unattainable. We need a different type of language. I read the situation as almost being a split between a commitment to industrial process, but not to industrial consumption or industrial marketing. It feels that within your



work there is a deep commitment to those industrial processes of engagement, but when you try to reconcile contemporary cycles of marketing and the way things are distributed and consumed, there is a tension.

**Hella** That's where I try to push the boundaries, which is really a question of quality. What is quality? For a long time, we thought quality was safety: safety in terms of a chair not cracking or falling over when you sit on it. But that idea has gone too far.

**Matthew** At Goldsmiths, where I teach, we talk about the dark matter of design. We can design the best

with an idea like that, I'd be told there's no market for it or only a niche market, whereas in the context of museums we all treasure it and love it. They're different worlds.

**Louise** There's a big gap between objects in a museum and how you experience objects in real life. That was the main idea when we were asked here to Die Neue Sammlung. We thought that the first thing we had to do was define what design is. Design is not an object, for instance. Design is about relationships and how things mediate between us and the world – how we see the world and ourselves via the things.

**Matthew** There's again a kind of tension in that idea of newness and what a museum seeks to collect. There's currently a knowledge crisis around what happens in museums in terms of knowing what to collect, which is fantastic and exciting.

**Louise** It's so important that they open up their criteria.

**Matthew** We're running a project with our master's students at Goldsmiths at the moment, the Musée de Refusés. The idea is to look at all that's rejected from a museum in order to understand its collecting practices. One of the things I think is interesting is that crisis of collection. The academic consensus about what's important is fragmented or culturally questioned in terms of who you're representing. Those values shift and change and we're now at a point where ignoring those issues of gender, race and power are creating really big headaches.

**Angelika** We know how important design can be to shaping the world, but we don't have the platforms for bringing that out yet. What we should do as a museum – and maybe in cooperation with design academies – is really bring out the governmental side of design. We need more voices in government.

**Louise** I see a very big role for design in society, because it's about consciousness, narratives and the awareness that design is never really about the object, but much more about how it makes people relate to the world. Only institutions such as a school or a museum can actually do that, because the market puts more importance on the object itself for the sake of finance. **END**

**“The challenge is to keep the energy in an object. It's easy to make a design efficient, but it's difficult to keep the blood in it.”** —Hella Jongerius

table or the best chair, but if we don't engage with that invisible infrastructure of rules, systems and processes that will allow it to go into the world, then we have nothing.

**Hella** You just have an idea. It's not a product.

**Matthew** That layer of bureaucracy or the invisible legal systems that sit around our material environment have almost become materials in and of themselves. They're things that designers can either redesign, push back against or find ways through.

**Hella** With those kinds of background restrictions, the challenge is always to keep the energy in an object. It's easy to make a design efficient for everybody, but it's difficult to keep the blood in it. So what I do at the last moment of the design process is to kick something off or cut something off. Whatever it takes to keep some blood in it.

**Matthew** There's a lovely book by Finn Williams called *Sub-Plan*, in which he takes Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye and applies contemporary building regulations to it, and shows its slow mutilation into this utterly ugly form.

**Hella** Yesterday we were actually looking at a cupboard by Sottsass that has red and white stripes, and everyone was saying how lovely it was. If I came to industry