



FOLK TALE

DECO turns the spotlight on young Netherlands-based design practice, Studio Formafantasma

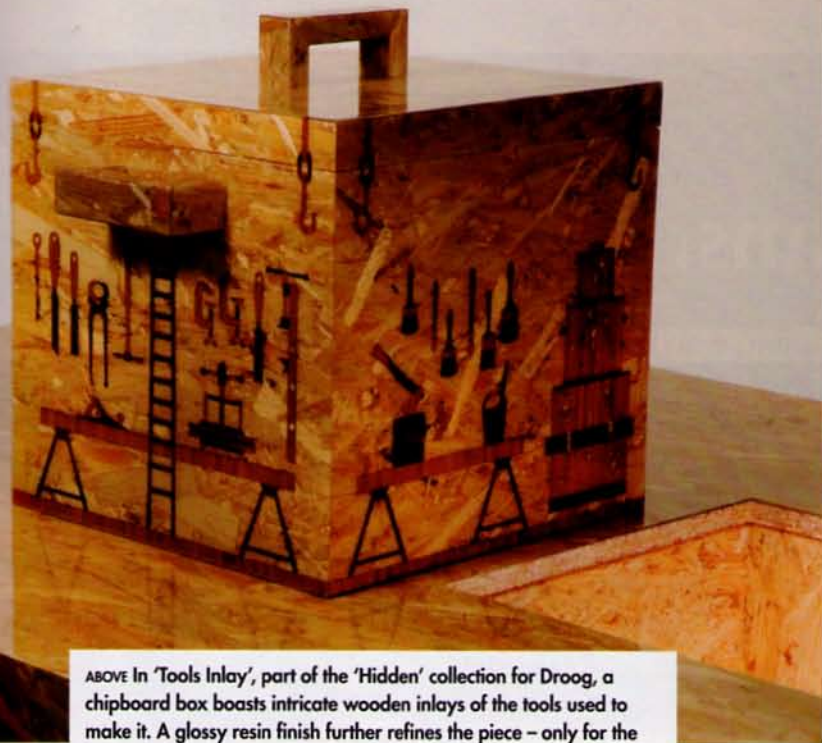
ABOVE The 'Moulding Tradition' collection is based on 17th-century 'teste di moro', Sicilian vessels traditionally decorated with a portrait of a Moorish conqueror. Studio Formafantasma replaced these generic portraits with photos of actual North African immigrants, whose presence in Italy has given rise to xenophobia. The project reveals and explores cultural contradictions: 'If, as Italians (and Europeans), we are able to represent our culture with a "Moorish vase", we must go beyond prejudice and fear, and allow our culture to change over time.'



WHO Andrea Trimarchi (left) and Simone Farresin (right)

WHAT Andrea and Simone, both Italian, met while studying communication design in Florence, Italy. They collaborated on book and magazine illustration, but it was during their masters at visionary Dutch design school, Design Academy Eindhoven, that their interest in product design blossomed and they formed Studio Formafantasma. Last year they graduated with a thesis based on traditional Sicilian folk craft.

WHY YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THEM Studio Formafantasma's installation 'Autarchy' – functional vessels made from an organic mix of flour, agricultural waste and limestone – is wowing design pundits with its fresh take on the link between traditional craft and design. Their homage to 'the simple, the uncomplicated and everyday life' reflects a young design movement that increasingly draws inspiration from rural craft and folk traditions.



ABOVE In 'Tools Inlay', part of the 'Hidden' collection for Droog, a chipboard box boasts intricate wooden inlays of the tools used to make it. A glossy resin finish further refines the piece – only for the box to be filled with sawdust, revealing 'its true nature'

RIGHT Inspired by a Sicilian folk festival where villagers make altars of bread to honour a patron saint, the 'Autarchy' installation features beautiful bowls, vessels and a lamp made from a mix of flour, agricultural waste and natural limestone. "Autarchy" suggests an alternative way of producing goods where inherited knowledge is used to find sustainable and uncomplicated solutions,' Andrea and Simone explain

10 MINUTES WITH STUDIO FORMAFANTASMA...

Why has traditional Sicilian folk craft become the departure point for your work? We're interested in traditional production methods – they connect with the user and evoke memories and thoughts. We're also attracted to ambiguity, and tradition is full of uncomfortable clichés to be disassembled. With our 'Moulding Tradition' collection of ceramics, for instance, we sought to highlight that tradition is malleable, which in turn, shapes our perception of history.

Why do you think designers are increasingly drawing inspiration from rural life? The renewed interest in rural culture and traditional production methods and craft is testament – in our opinion – to changing needs in society. We've lost faith in industrialisation: it's rendered objects as functional tools that can be produced everywhere, independent of the context. By contrast, handmade objects have in their imperfection the ability to evoke the human touch. The current urgency to find sustainable solutions has also brought back into fashion the more rural attitude of following natural cycles, and production that's driven by nature.

Where do you find inspiration? Everywhere! Day-to-day living influences us a lot – observing human behaviour and being open to external signals is a good way to get inspired. Most of all, we trust our feelings and intuition.

What is the most important aspect of being a designer? Every time you design an object, or an installation, you know that you're adding an element to the world that defines how you want this world to be. Being a designer is about visually defining the present or, in a best-case scenario, the future.



What do you aim to achieve with Studio Formafantasma? We believe in the role of the designer as a bridge between craft work, industry, user and object. From this position, we want to create a design practice that merges craft and industry – balancing local needs in a global context – and to stimulate a more critical and conscious relationship between users and objects.

What are you working on next? At the moment we're working on several commissions and exhibitions. Our 'Autarchy' installation is travelling – it was on show at Moss Gallery in New York in September, and is currently at the tódz Design Festival in Poland until the end of October, in a dual exhibition with Fabrica [Benetton's design research centre]. In November we'll be presenting a new chapter of 'Autarchy' at Abu Dhabi's new international art fair, Abu Dhabi Art, which will include a physical demonstration of our research on the use of pine resin and beeswax as a waterproof coating for the vessels. 'Autarchy' and 'Moulding Tradition' will also be on an exhibition in Istanbul organised by The Triennale Design Museum.

On the commission side, we're working with Droog [innovative conceptual design company, based in Amsterdam] on a project exploring the potential of digital fabrication and downloadable design. Other assignments include a carpet design for a really interesting company that works with developing countries globally, furniture design for an amazing Italian company and a commission for a foundation dedicated to research about and restoration of plastic materials. ■

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