

MATERIAL MAN

MEET AUSTRALIAN designer Brodie Neill, whose work is “the perfect combination of technology and craftsmanship; the handmade and the digital”.

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Late last year, a rising star of the design world, much of whose work is dedicated to raising awareness of the scourge of ocean plastics, travelled to Germany to immerse himself in the philosophy of Mercedes-Benz.

In Stuttgart, Australian furniture designer Brodie Neill, whose work is showcased at the NGV Triennial exhibition, explored the Mercedes-Benz Museum, toured a factory and discussed the future of mobility with directors from Mercedes-Benz. It's an experience that Neill, who is known for his innovative approach to reconstituting materials, found invaluable.

“There is a great synergy between my work and the technology of Mercedes-Benz,” he says. “It's a very different scale [to my work] but it was amazing to see how developed and advanced the manufacturing is.”

The combination of manufacturing, materials and mobility proved fascinating for Neill.

“One of the most beneficial and exciting aspects

was an extensive conversation with the brand directors of Mercedes-Benz, where we really discussed the future of travel and mobility, which is very much at the fore of their thinking. It's all about ease of mobility, connectivity, experience, human-centred innovation and how the brand has evolved over a hundred years, and where it is going in the future,” he says.

Materiality at work

The nature of materials is at the very heart of London-based Neill's work, which he credits largely to his early design training in Australia.

“I've always been a designer that has focused on form and material and giving materials – predominantly natural materials – form, function and context and working with them in a very respectful manner; listening to the materials as to what they would like to be,” he says.

“That is the way I was taught in Tasmania when I learnt furniture design – we were taught to design and create things that will outlive you, plus 25 years. Longevity was very important.



That's always been with me. As a designer, when you're putting pen to paper or clicking the mouse, you're always thinking about what material to use ... on a larger scheme, as mankind, unfortunately we are using the world's resources at an alarming rate.”

This awareness led to Neill's fascination with the modern environmental scourge: plastics.

Gyro, table, originally created for the Australian Pavilion at the London Design Biennial in 2016 and subsequently acquired by the NGV for its permanent collection and a centrepiece of the NGV Triennial exhibition, highlights the issue.

“I was asked to represent Australia [at the Biennale] and in doing so, highlighted the issue of ocean plastics,” says Neill. “I thought it very fitting for the world's largest island and custodian of the oceans to take a leading role on the topic of ocean plastic. I wanted to utilise design to tackle this global issue and bring it to an international forum in the form of a round table, based on the idea of a round table discussion.”

The starkly beautiful piece tells a dark story of globalisation, industrialisation and consumption.

“*Gyro, table* is a contemporary rendition of a 19th century specimen table, which, traditionally, were tables made in the workshops and ateliers of Europe from precious stone, woods, ivories – precious materials gathered from far-away places,” explains Neill. “*Gyro, table* was a contemporary rendition that also has a sinister underbelly in that the material it is made from did come from all over the world but, unfortunately, it is plastics that are moved all around the world by the gyroscopic motion of the oceans.”

The Remix chaise

The piece is not Neill's first foray into reconstituting material that is typically considered waste.

In 2008 he created the *Remix* chaise, which is made of 44 layers of sheet material sourced from workshops and building sites around the UK. Neill reconstituted the material and sliced through it with a state-of-the-art process of computer numerical control (CNC) carving. “I applied, like a lot of my work, the perfect combination of technology and craftsmanship; handmade and the digital,” he says. “The *Remix* was then finished with super smooth French polish, so if you ran your hand over it, it is one sinuous surface.”

In doing so, Neill demonstrated that a material that is typically viewed as rubbish, could be reimagined into both an aesthetically beautiful and functional piece. “Rather than seeing it as waste, it's something that we wanted to see as a potential building block of something new,” he says.

SPARKLING SPECIMEN

Gyro, table tells the story of the world's oceans – marine life typically eat and ingest the more brightly coloured plastics, leaving the blue and black flecks behind.



WASTE REIMAGINED

The *Remix* chaise was Neill's first major foray into creating art from the world of waste.



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Flotsam bench seat

Supporting Neill's work with the NGV is a partnership with Mercedes-Benz. His *Flotsam* bench seat is a permanent piece at Mercedes me Melbourne store in the Rialto Towers, accompanied by interactive videos that tell the story of the design.

As well as *Gyro, table* at the NGV and *Flotsam* bench seat at Mercedes me Melbourne, Neill's commercial furniture line, Made In Ratio, is available in Australia from the retailer Living Edge.

View Brodie Neill's *Flotsam* bench seat at Mercedes me Melbourne, which is open from 7am Monday-Friday. NGV Triennial runs until April 15, 2018.