

A&A

Mother and Child exhibition

17 March – 9 April 2022

This exhibition is part of Melbourne Design Week 2022, an initiative of the Victorian Government in collaboration with the NGV

- 1 *Mother and Child* cabinet 2021-22
Custom dyed rye straw, birch ply
200h x 140w x 35d cm
Unique
\$240,000.00 incl GST



- 2 *Continuum* table 2021-22
Custom dyed rye straw, birch ply
40h x 160w x 92d cm
Unique
\$110,000.00 incl GST



Our exploration of curious sculptural forms and their intersection with straw marquetry, intentionally blurs the line of art, craftsmanship and design allowing the emergence of something unexpected.

In the *Mother and Child* cabinet, the dual definitions of emergence are explored as processes that make something visible after being concealed or bring something into existence.

The former finds expression in the opening of the cabinet, in the disruption of the undulating form to reveal the recognisable figures of a mother and child. The latter through the symbolism of the lines in the closed form representing a continuum of energy, which is transferred to the mother and child making their existence possible.

The space in between, the opening of the cabinet by the viewer, enacts the mystery of this process, evoking palpable surprise and wonder.

This piece is a departure from the riot of colour usually present in our work. This allows the concentric lines to be amplified, accentuating form while the properties of straw direction create a spectrum of tone and texture within the confines of black and white.

The use of graphic, vivid contrast and emergence processes echoes the sensibilities and metamorphosis theme in the work of M.C. Escher and a shared love of visual puzzles.

– Adam Goodrum and Arthur Seigneur, 2021

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Mother and Child / Continuum

There is no stronger bond than that between a mother and her child, a truth artists working in the Christian tradition sought, over many hundreds of years, to capture in paint, bronze, marble, terracotta and wood when portraying the original mum-and-bub duo, the Virgin and Child.

Invited to exhibit as part of Melbourne Design Week 2022, Perth-raised industrial designer Adam Goodrum and Paris-born straw marquetry artisan Arthur Seigneur, who collaborate as A&A, have given novel expression to this intimate connection in the form of an asymmetrical cabinet with two columns, four doors – and one delightful surprise when said doors are unlatched.

Approaching the unique work, the viewer could be forgiven for thinking they had stumbled upon a sleek, minimalist sculpture whose parallel lines and graphic contrasts riff on the aesthetic of op artists such as Bridget Riley and Victor Vasarely.

The geometric design is also redolent of Lance Wyman's multi-lined typeface for Mexico City's Summer Olympics in 1968 and Tony Wenman's Stripes typeface, which he created for Letraset in 1972.

Yet upon closer inspection, one becomes aware of the dynamic lustre and illusion of depth provided by its surface, every square centimetre of which has been meticulously hand-decorated with thousands of sections of rye straw imported from Burgundy, which Arthur dyes in an array of custom hues.

And when the cabinet is activated by the opening of its doors, what was merely graphic becomes anthropomorphic as the design is transformed into two figures, one tall, one short, united in an unbreakable bond.

Mother and Child's overall form is considerably more ambitious than that of any of their previous works.

The product of dozens of iterations, the shape-shifting cabinet contains diamond-shaped voids within each of its columns, both of which incline towards each other ever so slightly to underscore the closeness of the maternal bond.

Meanwhile, opting for a black-and-white palette and a design characterised by thick, even stripes serve to accentuate the cabinet's unusual shape.

To wit, there's a subtle tension between the hard-edged concentric lines and the peak-trough-peak undulation of the form, whose sphericons – a 'paradoxical solid' that is fast becoming an A&A signature – enable those smooth 180-degree turns.

Another innovative aspect of *Mother & Child* is its incorporation of white straw.

"Traditionally, straw marquetry doesn't utilise white straw because bleaching causes straw to dissolve," explains Adam.

"But Arthur has worked out a way to do it and the colour he's achieved is gorgeous – a rich, creamy, pearlescent tone that's warmer than pure white," he says.

Working with such a 'simple' colourway, however, has its challenges.

“This is actually more complex than doing straw marquetry in full colour because neither black nor white is at all forgiving,” explains Arthur.

“White straw is very transparent, so I need to ensure the substrate is completely clean. And black straw is highly reflective, so I need that to be consistent.

“Also, because it’s black, any gaps between the straw will really jump out, so precision is paramount.”

Complementing *Mother and Child* is the *Continuum* table, whose similarly ingenious form comprises an extruded equilateral triangle with slanted sphericons at either end. The unique work’s head-scratching shape means it can be positioned in two different ways, completely changing its appearance in the process.

“We always challenge ourselves to do something different each time, and with these pieces we wanted to celebrate the drama of their unorthodox form,” says Adam.

“It’s radical and even a little absurd, but why not? We want to achieve something that hasn’t been done before.”

As with their previous works, both *Mother and Child* and *Continuum* are made of sandwiched timber precision-carved by a CNC machine.

Straw marquetry is a painstaking technique similar to marquetry, which utilises wood veneer as well as materials such as shell and ivory to decorate furniture and other objects.

Emerging in 17th-century Europe, straw marquetry, or *marqueterie de paille*, was especially popular under the reign of Louis XV (r. 1715–74) and enjoyed a revival in the early 20th century thanks to Art Deco luminaries such as André Groult, Jean Royère and Jean Michel Frank.

Globally, there are around 25 artisans trained to practise this intricate and exacting craft, and, to his knowledge, Arthur is the only one working in Australia.

Arthur first trained as a cabinet maker and furniture restorer before studying straw marquetry under the guidance of esteemed practitioner Lison de Caunes, granddaughter of decorator and furniture designer André Groult.

The idea of a visual surprise activated by the viewer came to A&A after the pair had been invited to design a wooden trunk to commemorate the bicentenary of the birth of Monsieur Louis Vuitton.

Some 200 “global visionaries” – Frank Gehry, Lego, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Peter Marino, The Simpsons and Gloria Steinem among them – were selected to reinterpret the luxury label’s classic travel trunk.

Referencing the folding-paper fortune-teller game known as Chatterbox, A&A’s design, *Cocotte en Paille*, or *Chatterbox in Straw*, consists of four connected columns that can be turned inside out to reveal 16 secret drawers.

In so doing, the maple and brass trunk morphs from a black-and-white diamond pattern to a zig-zag containing pops of orange, pink, burgundy, green and blue.

“Designing a trunk that changes form or has two different states inspired us to push the envelope when conceiving what became *Mother and Child* and *Continuum*,” says Adam.

Currently on display in Louis Vuitton's birthplace of Asnières, west of Paris, as part of the travelling exhibition, *200 Trunks, 200 Visionaries, Cocotte en Paille* will be auctioned at Sotheby's in December 2022, with all proceeds going to an educational charity.

"Each time we work on something together there seems to be an evolution in that one project informs the next," says Adam.

"Arthur and I both have a fascination with op art, puzzles and geometry, especially the mathematical side of it."

Eschewing editions in favour of highly collectible unique works, A&A's practice is in a league of its own, a fact reflected by the awards they've snagged of late, including Best Collection at the 2020 Créateur Design Awards in New York.

Adam and Arthur were also shortlisted for the 2020 Dezeen Awards and took out the furniture category at the 2020 Design Files Awards.

So far, their designs have been acquired by the National Gallery of Australia, the National Gallery of Victoria and arts philanthropist Judith Neilson.

Adam puts their good fortune down to what he terms a serendipitous meeting of like minds.

"Arthur called me out of the blue in 2015 just after arriving in Australia to ask if we could work together, and I'm so glad he did," he says.

"This ongoing collaboration has been the most wonderful and unexpected thing."

When Arthur isn't labouring over his straw marquetry with a steel ruler, scalpel and wood glue, he can be found practising yoga meditation or riding his bike around Melbourne, where A&A's atelier is based, to keep him "sane and happy".

"I moved to Melbourne from Sydney in mid-2020, so I feel I have the right to call myself a Melbourne citizen because I went through all that lockdown pain with them," laughs Arthur.

"I love living here. The people are friendly, there's a creative spirit in the air and there's always something interesting to see or do, from music to art to surfing."

– Tony Magnusson, February 2022