

DESIGN EXHIBITION

Future fusion

Asked to speculate on the world 10 years from now, nine design studios and creative partners came up with extraordinary answers, writes **Stephen Todd**.

A mirror that reflects the viewer as a bird. Pleated lanterns that purify air. Seats melding Indigenous knowledge with 3D software. These are just some of the things that will greet visitors to the *Hybrid: Objects for Future Homes* show, opening on Saturday at the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney.

It has been almost a century since arch-modernist architect Le Corbusier ordained that a home be “a machine for living in”, a chair “a machine for sitting in”. *Hybrid* articulates a more nuanced approach. A home, according to the contemporary designers assembled for the exhibition, must be a space of respite, a refuge from the clamour of life outside.

Nine design studios were commissioned by the Powerhouse to speculate on a future in which climate change, rogue viruses and swiftly shifting demographics will alter the urban landscape irrevocably.

It's not science fiction: the future in question was set at 2030, a date aligned with United Nations and Australian Bureau of Statistics data indicating a significant watershed. By 2030, the Australian population is predicted to reach 29.8 million, up 21.5 per cent from 2017. Greater Sydney will number almost 6 million people, with 500,000 new dwellings needed to accommodate them. Immigration will account for much of that growth, particularly around Parramatta, where South Asian, Arabic-speaking and Pacific Island populations will create a new cultural mix.

The UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) estimates the planet will reach the crucial threshold of 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels as early as 2030, precipitating extreme drought, wildfires, floods and food shortages.

As creative director of this year's Sydney Design Week – held under the aegis of the Powerhouse for two decades and formerly known as the Sydney Design Festival – I chose “Hybrid” as a theme supple enough to respond to a culture in flux.

The idea was to invite a line-up of designers to collaborate with creatives from beyond the design sector – and perhaps outside their comfort zones – to create new work in response to a precise brief.

Working closely with Keinton Butler, the museum's senior curator of design and architecture, I felt that by creating a frisson across sectors the Powerhouse would become the grit that might produce a few pearls. In fact, we got a whole string of them.

Alice Springs-based conceptual designer Elliot Rich collaborated with neuroscientist Professor Joel Pearson to create an illusory mirror that questions the supposed dominion of humans over all species. Titled “Otherescope”, the hand-carved mirror sits at the base of a 60-centimetre-deep well made of slubbed glass pebbles (a technique developed by Canberra Glassworks). When users peer in, an abstracted owl figure distorts their features and a gentle hooting transports them elsewhere – or “others” them as a means to create empathy.

Amsterdam-based Golnar Roshan (a graduate of the University of Technology, Sydney) and her partner Ruben de la Rive Box also worked on transposing nature into the home.

Locked down with an infant daughter in their canal-side apartment, they spent the European spring watching light bounce off the water and slowly ripple its way throughout the day across the walls and ceiling of their home.

Rive Roshan, as their studio is known, worked with the Sydney company Axolotl to develop a mica-based powder to refract and reflect light off a series of parabolic glass bowls a metre in diameter.



Above: Stephen Todd and Keinton Butler in front of the *Hybrid* poster artwork, by m/m (paris). Below: household objects in quartz glass by Tom Fereday and Thea Brejzek. PHOTO: JAMES BRICKWOOD

A pendulum – based on that designed by French physicist Léon Foucault in 1851 to prove the earth's rotation – is suspended over each bowl, its oscillations mimicking the sun's movement through the day.

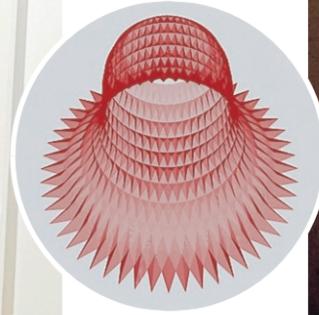
Installed with the rest of the *Hybrid* commission pieces in the heritage Turbine Hall of the Powerhouse building, it's a dialogue across space as well as time, expressing a commonality of human experience at a time of global crisis.

Writing the *Hybrid* commission brief over the Christmas break, bushfires and air pollution were high on my mind. (Where I live, in the Blue Mountains, six weeks of fires were followed by two weeks of flooding and months of concomitant landslides.) By the time the designers had been commissioned, a novel virus had been detected in China; before they'd had time to submit their concept, a global pandemic had been declared.

With swaths of the planet in lockdown, everyone's attention was on home base and how to ameliorate personal space.



Above: A chaise longue from Trent Jansen and Johnny Nargoodah. Right: An air-filtering light by Charles Wilson. Below: A table in recycled plastic from designer Adam Goodrum, and Ella Williams and Tran Dang at UTS's Advanced Fabrication Lab.



Above: A sandstone fountain by Henry Wilson and Stanislava Pinchuk doubles as a bee haven. Left: When users peer into the glass mirror created by Elliot Rich and Joel Pearson, they see an abstracted owl figure. PHOTOS: ZAN WIMBERLEY; COURTESY UTS ADVANCED FABRICATION LAB

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Designer Charles Wilson worked with engineers at the University of Virginia to incorporate metal-organic framework (MOF) fabric into a sculptural pendant light that filters purified air into a room.

Tom Fereday collaborated with spatial theorist Professor Thea Brejzek of the IKEA x UTS Future Living Lab to create small household objects in quartz glass, based on rigorous calculations of personal space.

Henry Wilson and artist Stanislava Pinchuk devised a monumental sandstone fountain that does double time as a bee haven. (Pinchuk, whose artwork focuses on data-mapping conflict zones, is also an avid apiarist and advocate for the vital role bees play in the increasingly fragile ecosystem.)

Designer Trent Jansen collaborated with outback saddler Johnny Nargoodah, a Nykina man who was born, raised and lives at Fitzroy Crossing in the Kimberley. Nargoodah had noticed a degradation in the Fitzroy River as a result of shifting monsoon patterns caused by climate change. Now running dry, its sand bed is dappled with rivulets and salt crystals form on its banks.

The pair's *Martuwarra Jiliny Walyarra (Like River Sand)* chaise longue, based on 3D modelling of the riverbed, is a 2.4 metre-long, undulating leather dune studded with semi-precious gems to evoke salination patterns. About as far from a “machine for sitting in” as one could get, it demonstrates the way design today is about much more than function.

The mission of Sydney Design Week is to bring the design industry – designers, craftspeople, manufacturers and thought leaders – together in one place at one moment in the year. While the complete Sydney Design Week 2020 program was scuppered because of COVID-19, the *Hybrid* commission marks a very particular moment in time.

The nine design studios, including that of Adam Goodrum, GibsonKarlo and Vert (Andrew Simpson), run the gamut from the poetically conceptual to the rigorously industrial. Taken together they represent the complexity and nuance of possible responses to a world that feels increasingly hostile. **L&L**



Need to know

Hybrid: Objects for Future Homes will be at the Powerhouse, Sydney, until February 28. Entry free; bookings essential maas.museum/hybrid