

25 April - 26 July 2025

Hella Jongerius has an earnest and poetic way of talking about her work, which one might describe as practice-led design research, rather than simply industrial design, the label usually assigned to it. For on many levels Jongerius' practice is at odds with the design industry, usually characterised by speed and short-term relationships. What is striking about her approach are the intensely close connections she has built with specific clients such as Maharam, Vitra and Nymphenburg, and, similarly, the deep and long-standing collaboration she has enjoyed with Galerie kreO for over 25 years. What unites the designer to each of them is the sharing of common values. Her studio Jongeriuslab, created in 1993, has likewise remained human in scale and cultivates long-standing collaborations with designers. Time thus holds a certain centrality not only to Jongerius' ethos, but also, and critically, to her material, colour and texture research.

Continuous experimentation is a related trait of the designer's approach. Jongerius keeps on learning new skills and training; she is currently studying glazes for ceramics, a recurrent medium in her work, but one that she has recently started to work with more directly. She also regularly self-initiates projects that test new processes, combinations of materials and gestures, some of which lead to industrial spin-offs and others to remarkable, reflective presentations. Such projects have notably engaged with colour behaviour (culminating in the exhibition *Breathing Colour*, 2017 Design Museum, London) and analogue 3-D weaving (*Interlace, textile research*, 2019, Lafayette Anticipations, Paris).

With experimentation comes fruition, non-fruition, contingency, accidents, imperfections: a whole work of unlearning what constitutes markers of success and failure, and of re-learning how to engage with and tune into materials, their aliveness and what they are telling us. For attention, but also self-education and communication, are required when one's plea is planetary health or, as Jongerius puts it, to be a 'designer on a mission'. She wants to alter the restless habits of producers and consumers, and reform design altogether, one of the most environmentally damaging industry, as she likes to remind us. In her view, design has a major responsibility in ensuring sound relationships between people and the objects they surround themselves with daily. Design mediates between humans and the world; that mediation ought to be virtuous rather than merely based on market demands and the illusion of novelty.

During our conversation, Jongerius is mostly interested in discussing two new bodies of work, *Bead Tables* and *Angry Animals*, which she describes as the main characters of the exhibition. As she talks softly and passionately, metaphors around language and communication abound. The *Bead Tables*, which emanate from her previous *Frog Table* for Galerie kreO in 2009, are functional objects in principle,

conversation pieces to be more specific. Just as with the unexpected frog at the table, the artificial ecosystem of beads takes over half of the table surface, demanding to be part of the conversation.

I am reminded of a recurrent offer made by the protagonists of Starkawks' 1993 ecotopian novel, *The Fifth Sacred Thing*, to the enemy. 'There is a place set for you at our table, if you will choose to join us'. In the case of the *Bead Tables*, the amorphous entities made of interwoven and tangled ropes adorned with beads are already firmly set at the table, which they traverse, sending some of their most defiant beads to the front line. Perhaps they are already part of the conversation and are inviting us, humans, to confer with them and come back to our senses. It is now a matter of listening to them and reading their posture as signals, just as the gardener knows what it means when a certain plant invades a certain area, or a responsible human knows what to do when they see a turtle trapped in a discarded net.

The designer insists on the ability for objects to express the unspeakable. Her first hand-made *Angry Animals* ceramic jugs go back to the pandemic, when the forms mutated from friendly to angry looking figures without much transition. Jongerius explains that the animal heads emerge from her hands despite her: a pig, a shark, a penguin, a hen, a walrus... Vociferous yet silent, they too demand to be part of the conversation about where the planet is heading. Clay, soil, oxides, silica, flux, and all other components of glazes are unwilling actors of extraction, waste production and water and soil contamination. Their fierce bubbling in the kiln, their breakage and the colour and texture accidents that arise from their experimental layering: all are a form of expression, a muffled cry, a silent language.

Jongerius concludes our conversation by sharing that she is grateful for the wisdom of her hands. Not only are these hands wise and intuitive, but they are also making waves. Without presumption, they put themselves forward as conduits to tune into the more-than-human world. In this quietly political exhibition further composed by a bead curtain, chairs and vessels, each auratic object becomes an actor in this interspecies council of sorts.

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Hella Jongerius' archives have been added to the collections of the following museums: the Vitra Design Museum, the Textile Museum in Tilburg, the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, Die Neue Sammlung in Munich, and the Centre Pompidou in Paris.