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## 5 Young Designers to Watch Out For at PAD London

BY JANA PERKOVIC | OCTOBER 12, 2015



Barnaby Barford: Tower of Babel  
(Sylvain Deleu, courtesy of David Gill Galleries)

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The contemporary design market has been steadily growing, with works made in this century increasingly taking pride of place next to art and antiques at major fairs, such as the upcoming PAD London.

Now in its 9th year, PAD (Pavilion of Art and Design) brings together galleries of tribal and modern art, jewelry, photography, and design. Of the 62 exhibitors, 15 are galleries presenting high-end collectible design.



Often controversially labelled Design Art, these are design objects produced in very limited editions, and exhibited and sold in the manner of contemporary art.

The five young designers we have selected work with galleries and high-end workshops to produce objects with fine materials and extraordinary craftsmanship, with the design process and outcome often underpinned by a rigorous conceptual inquiry. Here are the five young designers and design collectives presenting at PAD London 2015, whose work you should pay attention to (click on the slideshow to see their creations):

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**1. Nucleo-1221865** create 'fossils' of carefully selected antique objects, preserved in a shell of epoxy resin. A contemporary, synthetic material, resin responds to the object it contains. The reaction between the materials surrounding timber pieces in their Stone Fossil series (presented at PAD London in October) creates cracks, bubbles, and ruptures, resulting in jewel-like appearance.

"I really think there is no other group like them at the moment," says Gabrielle Ammann, who has worked with **Nucleo-1221865** for five years. "They create usable objects, but each of their pieces tells you a story. It's very intellectual, and completely different from industrial design, where functionality is in the foreground." Ammann describes **Nucleo-1221865** as keeping one foot in the art scene, and the other in design. Their fossils of stools, trestle tables and antique ladders point to the beauty of these everyday objects, while modifying them with a designer's approach.

## 2. Tuomas Markunpoika

Memory also features, in a surprising way, in the work of Tuomas Markunpoika. This young Finn garnered significant attention with his graduating pieces at Design Academy Eindhoven. Engineering Temporality. To produce them, Markunpoika covered furniture pieces with thousands of fine steel rings, and then burnt the object until only its three-dimensional imprint remained. The result are ghostly silhouettes in recognizable roccoco shapes, resembling faint memories of furniture.

"It's a beautiful project about a difficult subject: absence and temporality, the loss of memory," says Valerio Capo, co-director of Gallery FUMI, who will be presenting Markunpoika at PAD London. "The audience approaches them as pretty objects, until the back story emerges."

Markunpoika's ghostly furniture was created as a reflection on his grandmother's battle with Alzheimer. "Markunpoika said it's a tribute to human fragility," says Capo, noting that the works have a huge emotional effect on the audience. "We have seen people cry in front of the pieces."

## 3. Mathias Bengtsson

Where Markunpoika's deconstructed furniture embodies loss, **Mathias Bengtsson's** Growth series exudes optimism, marrying technological advancements with a celebration of organic form. Bengtsson's designs grow from a digital 'seed', programmed with DNA that mimics organic growth, meteorological conditions, and sets instructions – for example, on the height of the flat surface for the Growth Table.

"His work expresses a rare combination of high technology and excellent craftsmanship, art and design," says Paris-based gallerist Maria Wettergren. "I wouldn't be afraid of calling him a genius."

Despite his youth (Bengtsson graduated in 1999), his pieces are already in major design collections, while Growth Table, with its wiry knots of high-quality timber, is fast becoming one of the most reproduced images in contemporary furniture design. "I'm convinced that we will be looking back at his works as milestone pieces of our time," says Wettergren.

## 4. Charles Kalpakian

**Charles Kalpakian's** work harks back to Ettore Sottsass' boldly visual experimentations with Memphis in the 1980s.

French, but Beirut-born, and with Armenian and Syrian roots, Kalpakian eschews nationality, describing himself as "the designer of the new world". Gallerist Béatrice Saint-Laurent, who started working with **Charles Kalpakian** in 2012, agrees. For her, the most interesting cultural reference in Kalpakian's work is his grounding in street culture: "His work exhibits a strong verticality and flatness – as if he is drawing on an imaginary wall. His stroke is always clean and defined, and simultaneously looks like calligraphy – such as in his brass chandelier Clé de Sol."

The Cinétisme wall cabinets create an optical illusion with bold combinations of colors. The cabinet, which is entirely flat, appears to jut out of the wall in sharp angles. "Most designers don't know how to use or associate colors. Kalpakian has a real understanding of color," says Saint-Laurent. "The effect is hypnotic."

## 5. Barnaby Barford

Just as hard to categorize is the work of British designer Barnaby Barford, whose narrative works in ceramics have attracted a wide following. Rising to prominence with humorous pieces, assembling both antique and mass-produced figurines into witty tableaux, this Londoner has just completed a monumental installation for V&A Museum – a Tower of Babel comprising 3,000 individual porcelain shops, each representing an existing London location, and rising from the low to the high end of the market. At PAD London, he will be showing a mirror, new work anticipating his upcoming show in November 2016.

"For an artist to flourish in ceramics is a very tough call. The ones that succeed are the very avantgarde," says Francis Sultana, Artistic Director of David Gill Galleries, who has worked with Barford for over a decade. "Barnaby is a creator with a unique language, and yet his style is very British. He is something that the British household – any household, from the great collector to a normal person – can understand."

Sultana compares Barford to Grayson Perry, 2003 Turner Prize winner, acclaimed both for his ceramic vases, and cross-dressing. Both, Sultana notes, have a unique artistic language, but one based on the ordinary world around them. "Barnaby is working in public spaces now, entering a cultural dialog. For someone so young, he is moving up very rapidly. He is going to be very significant."

*PAD London will run October 14 – 18 at Berkeley Square, W1.*