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# OXYGEN

THE INTERNATIONAL DESIGN ART ARCHITECTURE QUARTERLY



## JORIS LAARMAN

DIVINELY DECORATIVE DUTCH DESIGN



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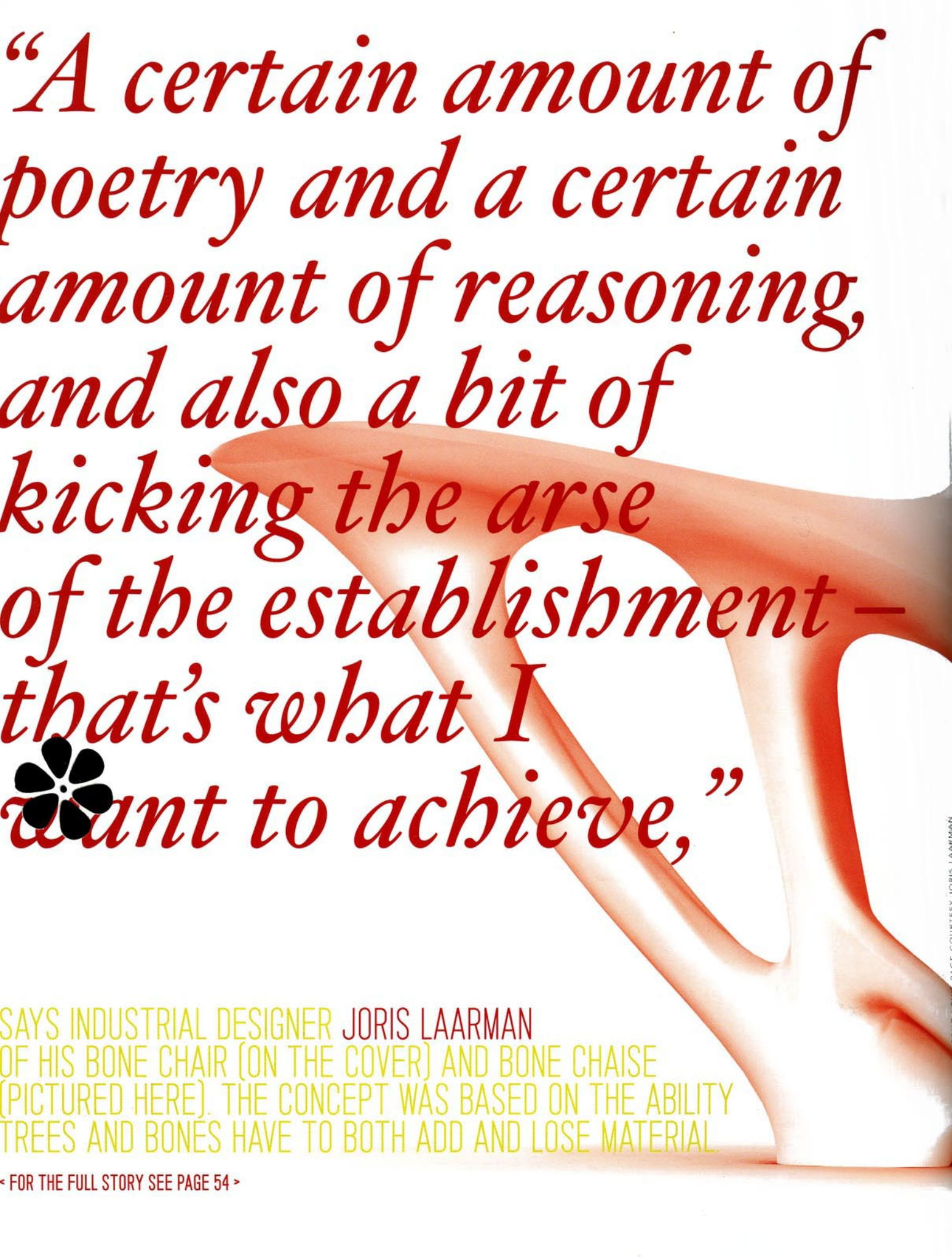
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*“A certain amount of poetry and a certain amount of reasoning, and also a bit of kicking the arse of the establishment – that’s what I want to achieve,”*

SAYS INDUSTRIAL DESIGNER JORIS LAARMAN OF HIS BONE CHAIR (ON THE COVER) AND BONE CHAISE (PICTURED HERE). THE CONCEPT WAS BASED ON THE ABILITY TREES AND BONES HAVE TO BOTH ADD AND LOSE MATERIAL.

< FOR THE FULL STORY SEE PAGE 54 >



**LEFT** Credit Brooch, 2006, gold, copper, nickel, epoxy. A piece of jewellery and credit card in one, the Credit Brooch further explores Laarman's idea of bringing together function and beauty. It also aims to challenge our perceptions of value and money. "In our time of virtual value, a thin piece of plastic can be worth much more than a diamante ring," says the designer. "You can put as much money on it as you wish, so you will be able to literally wear the virtual value of your jewellery."

dreamily. Any material will do, as long as it can be poured as a liquid into the intricate ceramic mould that has to be made for each piece. "I'd call this chair high-tech minimal. But I'm interested in history too, and wouldn't you say it owed something to Art Nouveau?" The Bone chairs proved a huge drawcard when they were launched by Barry Friedman's gallery at Miami's Design 06 in December. And even at \$32,000 for a chair and \$39,000 for a sofa, they sold at quite a pace. "We've stopped sales of the rubber ones; it was going too fast. They need time to grow and people need to have a sense of that."

#### BONES AND ALL

Laarman didn't come from an arty family. His father works for the government and his mother is a nurse, though according to her son: "She's a really good stylist, she just doesn't know she is." The two of them, though, are the scourge of the local flea markets and antiques auctions. That the house "looks like a museum of kitsch, it's full of old furniture and paintings" explains a lot

about Laarman's delightfully eclectic design eye. The rest of the stimulation perhaps comes from the very non-urban nature of the Netherlands. Though the country is almost entirely man-made – and every last part of it is designed – it doesn't possess a city on the humanity-denying scale of London or Los Angeles. Life in Rotterdam, especially, is cheap and fosters its own creative community – designer Jurgen Bey, for example, works out of a warehouse, across town from Laarman, where some of his employees sleep in little caravans inside the space. "We have freedom here," says Laarman. "In Amsterdam we'd only afford a small space to work and you have to go to hip trendy clubs to socialise. Here we have a beer outside at the end of the day and watch the ships. In the summer we have fantastic barbecues."

Anita, meanwhile, is working on a film about her name, which is the Dutch equivalent of Sharon in Britain, or Kylie in Australia. "She's finding out why it's become a symbol of white trash," says Laarman. Something that these exceptional people are unlikely ever to be considered.





THE DUTCH COURAGE  
JAN VAN DER BEEK  
JAN VAN DER BEEK

WITH HIS DELICATE  
DECORATIVE TOUCHES TO  
PRACTICAL FURNITURE,  
JORIS LAARMAN  
REPRESENTS AN  
EXCITING NEW WAVE  
OF DUTCH DESIGN.

# THE FLYING DUTCH MAN

# YOU COULD BE FORGIVEN FOR THINKING THAT SOMEONE HAD INTRODUCED A BEAUTY BAR AT NUMBER 52 MARCONISTRAAT IN ROTTERDAM'S PORT AREA, AND THAT THEY'D SET IT VERY HIGH INDEED.

Everyone working in this huge studio, which looks out to a wide ship canal where enormous tankers slide heavily by, looks like a model. It could be a fictitious design studio in a film.

This, however, is real life for Dutch designer Joris Laarman who shares the space with Jeroen Verhoeven, Joep Verhoeven and Judith de Graauw of design partnership Demakersvan (their sinuous birch plywood Cinderella table has already been collected by the Victoria and Albert Museum in London) and his girlfriend Anita Star, a filmmaker. And he doesn't have much time for playing. At just 27, Laarman is already establishing himself as one to watch in the highly competitive world of European design.

At Milan this year, he showed a new glass pendant light for Flos (Nebula, 2006), as well as a walk-through version of his Heatwave radiator that first brought him attention in 2004 and the Bone furniture (2006) he has designed for Droog Design's Smart Deco project. By the end of the year, there will be new products created for Schepping, a company he runs with Demakersvan,

which a private investor has underwritten to ensure the designer's unbridled creativity and growth; kitchen appliances for Dutch company Princess; and a bespoke piece for a project that Austrian crystal company Swarovski has established on the theme of weddings. With Demakersvan, he is also working on a US-funded resort in China where those anxious about the future can go for DNA checking, to alert them to what diseases they might expect to suffer. Not your most relaxing spa, but doubtless Laarman will soften the experience with his trademark decorative touches. "We're having to hire new people for the studio, including someone who can do business management," says Laarman, who, though not quite overwhelmed, still seems slightly in awe of his own success.

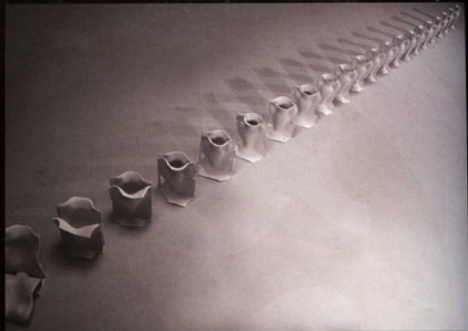
Those familiar with Dutch design won't be at all surprised to hear that Laarman is a graduate of the Eindhoven Design Academy. This is the school that gave us Droog back in the 1990s, and a whole new wave of industrial design that refused to turn its back on emotion and humanity. Where Italian

PREVIOUS PAGE Joris Laarman sits on his Bone chair, 2006, made from high polished aluminium and silk polished aluminium. OPPOSITE Painfully Beautiful, 2004, porcelain, silver and cotton. Inspired by the upper-class ancient Roman tradition of mealtime bingeing and purging, this vomit bowl with silver evoker and napkin aims to formalise modern-day obsessive eating habits related to vanity and health. Says Laarman: "All those excesses we have banned to the back doors of our sense of shame. Yet they belong more to our normal way of life than we probably would expect."



*Only the ugly say  
beauty  
comes from within.*





*"Modernism was all square and efficient, but now we have other machines and materials and there is an explosion of possibilities."*

«JORIS LAARMAN»







CLOCKWISE FROM OPPOSITE PAGE, FAR LEFT Stakhanov tableware, 2005, ceramic. Named after a Soviet miner who became a celebrity in 1965, this series of stackable white tableware is based on the hard-wearing kind traditionally used in hotels. "Because of this industrial repetition, a slight difference in every cup quickly has a big impact on the appearance of the total stack," says Laarman; Limited, 2003, ceramic. Laarman's method for creating "limited edition" objects involved establishing a mass-production line with a mould of a short life span. The quick erosion of the mould during a production run ensures that each reproduction is different, and only a few are functional. Pictured is a series of vases "that will bloom, wither and die as the flowers it will bear"; Beech, 2004, beech. For a commission for Arco, Laarman chose beech timber for its responsive qualities to its environment, like temperature and moisture, to create chairs that "transform with age and live like their owners"; Ivy, 2005. Ivy is made up of seven different pieces of polycarbonate – a material used for sports climbing grips – that can be mixed and matched and attached to the wall with Allen screws. It may be used as an alternative staircase; Stakhanov tableware, 2005; Nebula, 2007, aluminium and blown glass. For a commission for Flos, Laarman bunched together lampshades of different sizes and shapes to create a lively suspension lamp reminiscent of "an explosion of light, like a star in the sky".







**OPPOSITE** Heatwave, designed in 2004, reinforced concrete, manufactured by Jaga. The Heatwave radiator represents Laarman's design rationale that the decorative and the functional can coexist. Indeed, due to the radiator's large surface area, it emits heat more efficiently than traditional radiators. **ABOVE** Laarman at work on the Heatwave radiator.

design of the 1960s to the 1980s could be typified by a brittle, factory-manufactured brightness, the Dutch movement looked like its products had been made by hand by people with little concern for symmetry.

#### NEW DIRECTIONS

Laarman, though, represents the next wave. He took Droog Design's ideas of the great concept, but not their sobriety. "That's very Calvinistic, very Dutch maybe. But I like decoration – as long as that decoration is also functional." The first result of this way of thinking was the Heatwave radiator, a swirling ornamentation of reinforced concrete that also happens to work very well indeed. Now in production with Jaga, the Belgian radiator company, Heatwave has proved that function can be combined with the truly, elaborately, divinely rococo.

The Bone furniture takes things one step further, engaging with high technology at an extreme level, in order to produce pieces of

bizarre, bewildering beauty. "I'm most interested in science. You go onto a website like [www.noorderlicht.nl](http://www.noorderlicht.nl) and you can be amazed for a week." It was precisely here that Laarman discovered a 'mad' professor, Claus Mattheck, in Karlsruhe, Germany who was studying the growth of bones and trees. "He looks like Ozzie Osbourne in the 70s, but with sunglasses and lederhosen," says Laarman. "But he's researching into how trees have the ability both to add and lose material."

Laarman wasn't the only one to be lured by this discovery. A student working at German car manufacturer Opel refined the software that copied how nature could grow while reducing its material content, and it's this that the designer applied to the creation of furniture that has a dazzling lightness and complexity of form. "Modernism was all square and efficient, but now we have other machines and materials and there is an explosion of possibilities," he says. He has made chairs in aluminium and a type of rubber that is, weirdly, neither hard nor soft but somewhere between. "Titanium would be super thin!" he says