

WIRED

3 Ingenious Designs That Will Fool Your Eyes

BY LIZ STINSON 09.20.13



Paul Cockedge's new show, *Capture*, is full of perception-tweaking pieces that are made possible because of the fusion between science and design. *Image: Paul Cockedge Studio*

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Even in a white-walled gallery in New York City's gallery district, Paul Cockledge's work is unapologetically nerdy. It doesn't first appear that way. In fact, his work looks very designer-y, in the sense that it's meticulously crafted into aesthetic perfection. But the London-based designer, who recently opened his first solo exhibition at the Friedman Benda gallery, has always been attracted to the principles of science and the natural world. "There's so much beauty in nature and physics and the world around us," he says. "It's just about packaging them and moving them into different contexts that makes people see them in different ways."

Cockledge's new show *Capture*, is full of perception-tweaking pieces that are made possible because of the fusion between science and beauty. Perhaps the most perplexing is *Poised*, a steel table that appears to be teetering delicately on its edge, moments from toppling over. Made from 1000 lbs of steel, the piece was actually inspired by the way a piece of paper can often be found poised on its tips, just before blowing over by a light gust of wind. "The initial model was just me rolling a piece of paper," he explains.

"It was a simple gesture of folding it over, and I thought, 'I'd love to be able to create that.'" Cockledge began designing the piece on a computer, searching out the center of gravity and refining the weight distribution so that the piece wouldn't fall over once weight was placed on it. "I started to collaborate with gravity, mass physics and balance," he says. "And what started to happen was the piece became all about weight and heaviness." The fact that Cockledge is able to stand on the edge of the table without face planting into the ground is a testament to the table's perfectly-designed dimensions. "It completely surprised us," he says. "If I made this piece one millimeter thinner, it wouldn't work."



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In *White Light*, the ceiling panels transition from brightly colored LEDs to warm white, but the lighting in the room remains the same. Image: Paul Cocksedge Studio

It's a clever optical trick that echoes the same lighting a rainbow emits.

Cocksedge's other pieces are similarly dependent on the rules of science. *White Light*, for example, exposes the phenomenon of colored light appearing as white light. On the ceiling of the gallery, Cocksedge created an array of precisely-calibrated rainbow-hued LEDs. "You look down to the very end of the gallery, and it looks like an empty room being lit by sunlight," he explains. "Then you go in and look up you actually realize that these thousands and thousands of very vibrant colors on the ceiling glowing."

Each LED was painstakingly placed in order to blend their colors into the white light you actually see. As the panels crossfade from colored to warm white light, the lighting in the room remains totally the same. It's a clever optical trick that echoes the same lighting a rainbow emits. "This very decorative ceiling is in fact not decorative at all; it's completely functional," he says. "You get the feeling of decoration in a way but the twist really is that if you move any of those colors into different combinations it wouldn't work."

The show's namesake piece, *Capture*, is a hand-spun aluminum dome that holds a glowing white light. The hollow 5 ¼ foot piece is more or less a lighting fixture, but all of the infrastructure that you normally associate with lights are invisible. The wiring, bulb and electrical cables are hidden away, and instead viewers simply see a flat, white light that appears captured by a film across the base of the dome. The opening of the dome is actually empty and the light source is totally invisible, which creates a trippy effect that leaves you wondering where the light is coming from and where it's going.

"I didn't want to see the light source, what I'm interested in is light itself just light?" Cocksedge says. "I was trying to create an object when you look up into it, there's absolutely nothing there apart from light." The pieces in *Capture* are a departure from the industrial design work Cocksedge often does. It's less about staying within the set parameters of a client's need and more about exploring and pushing the boundaries of what we think is possible. "Within this gallery environment which I'm relatively new to, it gives me a chance to work in perhaps a slightly different way, than how I've worked before," he says. "But that sense of freedom is something I very much enjoy—it's about pure creativity."

Capture will be at the Friedman Benda gallery until October 12.

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