



Michael Verheyden's segment in white marble

DESIGN

Minimalist design masters

Two new London exhibitions showcase the minimalist furniture and forms of Michaël Verheyden and Thomas Lemut



BY HENRIETTA THOMPSON
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Two gallery shows open this week in London which demonstrate the power and allure of minimalist design at its most luxurious. Firstly, there is the beautiful new collection of Belgian designer [Michaël Verheyden](#) which [Rebecca Willer](#) has brought to her boutique space off Kensington Church Street. Then, over in the eastern environs of Hoxton Square, [Gallery FUMI](#) opens *ÖST OUEST*, a collection of pieces by Parisian furniture maker [Thomas Lemut](#).

Both these selling shows are a dream of combination of rational aesthetics and perfect craftsmanship: which not only makes them an easy, highly sophisticated fit within almost any interior, but also a safe bet for anyone looking for an investment piece.



Lighthouse Candlesticks, Michael Verheyden

[Enlarge](#)

In his native Belgium, Verheyden is best known as a handbag designer. But it's really since expanding his collection in 2009 to include home accessories, which he creates together with his wife Saartje, that his reputation has taken off internationally. Their use of solid, noble materials such as marble, wood, leather, and linen gives the weight of tradition and great physical presence to candlesticks, bowls, table centrepieces and vases that are pared down to an extreme that makes them impossible to place within a particular era. A home collection, says the designer of his success, gives a greater freedom to experiment. "I can go much further than I can with producing fashion accessories. Also a bag is only a small part of the fashion world, you can't paint the whole picture with

accessories. With the home collection, we can create an entire atmosphere, which makes us strong as an international label."

Verheyden is now inundated with commissions for bespoke pieces as well as collaborations with architects, and "lots of boats". The couple has recently worked on the *L'Apogée hotel* in Courchevel with [India Mahdavi](#) and [Joseph Dirand](#), and they're also making table accessories for the new restaurant in Antwerp "The Jane" for three-star Michelin chef Sergio Herman, which will open on the 25th. Then there's the loungers for the Pearl Brewery hotel in San Antonio, Texas by [Roman and Williams](#), and many private projects besides. "We're feeling very lucky that so many architects whose work we admire are contacting us to work with them."



Side Lamp by Thomas Lemut, 2013

[Enlarge](#)

And it doesn't stop at architects either: handbags are still very much part of Michaël's oeuvre. "[Rick Owens](#) sent me an e-mail three years ago asking me about my work. During a brief meeting at his place in Paris it turned out he was looking for some help on his leather goods. So I'm helping out on the development of his bags. I really enjoy working for him and his team, they're very nice people, and it is a very inspirational environment. I'm very much into fashion, but there aren't many designers that are presenting good work every season. But Rick really surprises in a good way, with every collection."

The home collection is also growing by some 10 new products every season. "All collaborations with clients give us a lot of ideas and freedom, some stress as well on timing, but good things take time." Where exactly he finds that time it's not entirely clear, but I for one am just happy to see that he does.

Across town, Thomas Lemut's *OST OUEST* collection came about as a special commission by Gallery FUMI's directors Sam Pratt and Valerio Capo. Lemut – primarily a sculptor, film director/producer and artistic director – has worked in art from a very early age but is now creating furniture. The *OST OUEST* collection is a collaboration with Johannes Eckart, an Austrian cabinetmaker and interior architect, and sees six pieces exclusively locally produced in Austria. Like Verheyden's work, this is furniture with craftsmanship at its core. "This project is a rare and unique challenge in contemporary furniture creation and interior design," say the gallery. "It underlines the wish to propose something new to the public. This both in terms of art furniture, as well as to add another perspective to the economic structure of today's furniture design."

Verheyden once said that "If you work with a material long enough, it will tell you the form it should take." And in his work and that of Lemut it is the materials that bring their minimal forms alive, and will ensure they age beautifully into the future too.



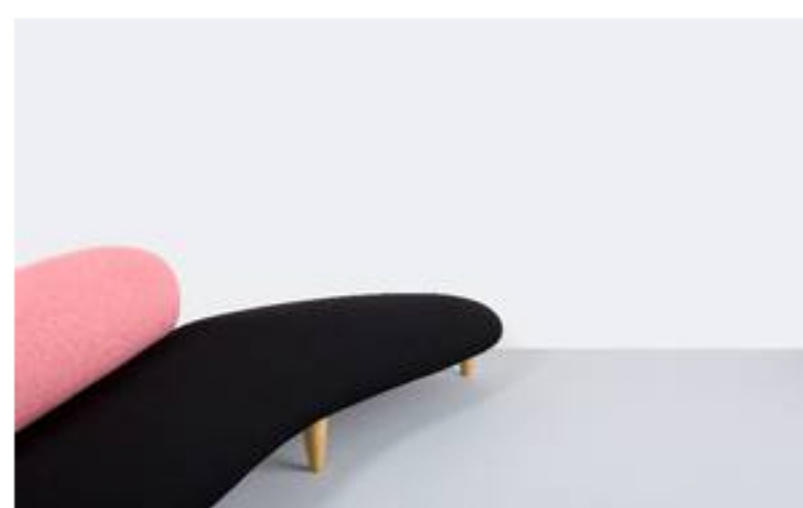
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