MANIERA 03 & 04
Limited edition furniture by
RICHARD VENLET
6A ARCHITECTS
presented in Henry Van de Velde’s
HÔTEL WOLFERS

24, 25 & 26 April 2015

Press preview
Thursday, 23 April
11 am

Hôtel Wolfers
60, rue Alphonse Renard
1050 Brussels

When a building is being built, there is an impatience to bring it into being. Not a blade of grass can grow near this activity. Look at the building after it is built. Each part that was built with so much anxiety and joy and willingness to proceed tried to say when you’re using the building: “let me tell you about how it was made”. Nobody is listening because the building is now satisfying need. The desire in its making is not evident. As time passes, when it is a ruin, the spirit of its making comes back. It welcomes the foliage that entwines and conceals. Everyone who passes can hear the story it wants to tell about its making. It is no longer in servitude; the spirit is back.

LOUIS KAHN, conversations with architects.

Louis Kahn quote on the wall in Hôtel Wolfers © Richard Venlet
Henry Van de Velde
HÔTEL WOLFERS

The second MANIERA exhibition takes place in Hôtel Wolfers, a modernist, semi-detached town house in Brussels built by Henry Van de Velde in 1929. As well as being a beautiful example of this renowned architect’s late work, the building provides an appropriate setting to reflect MANIERA’s interest in architects who operate on a wide range of scales, ranging from objects to urban planning. Famous for the rounded edges of its façade as well as in its interior, Hôtel Wolfers takes the boundaries of the corner plot and recedes elegantly in terraces over three storeys.

The building has been kept in the state it was found in in the seventies by its current owner, an art collector who prefers to treat the spaces like art works, not intervening with face-lifts, transformations or renovations. As a result of this attitude the house has been allowed to age in its full grace and originality. As such, an undisturbed emptiness is provided for the interior objects that MANIERA exhibits in its 3rd and 4th series of limited edition furniture, designed by the Brussels-based artist Richard Venlet and the London-based architectural practice 6a architects respectively.

Richard Venlet
MANIERA 03
Hôtel Wolfers

Since the mid-nineties, Richard Venlet’s oeuvre has been built upon his profound interest in objects, sculpture, spatial interventions and exhibition spaces, as well as reflections on other artist’s works, historical research and references. As an artist who deliberately intervenes in the architecture of an exhibition space, Venlet moves further into architectural production through regular collaboration with architectural firms.

A recurring element in his installations is the notion of the ‘platform’, to which he gives different roles. To name just a few, in the woods at Monnkenheide in 2001 it defined an open room without walls, for the ‘Image Bank’ exhibition at Jan Mot Gallery in 2005 it provided a large background for a small room of photo-booth proportions containing a TV monitor, which thus becomes a one-man cinema, for the ‘Museum for a Small City’ exhibition in 2013 a tiled platform became the flexible stage for several artworks from the archives of the SMAK in Ghent, filling almost the whole exhibition space.

For his designs in MANIERA 03, Venlet has worked on the theme of Hôtel Wolfers. He proposes a daybed, a rest zone on a human scale that echoes the shape of the building plot on which the house stands. The furniture can be read as a platform raised slightly above the floor. Upholstered with sheepskin, it creates an immediate intimacy; a comfort zone to rest and to reflect upon its surroundings.

The piece is reminiscent of Venlet’s installation ‘Sertificate’ in the Galleria Estrany de la Mota (Barcelona, 2014). As a tribute to the historic Joan Prats Gallery in Barcelona, remodelled by the iconic Spanish architect Lluís Sert in 1976, Richard Venlet reconstructed Sert’s original floorplan on a scale of 1:1 in the gallery. A wooden platform in the shape of the plan was laid on the gallery floor. The sculptural, architectural volume was a fictional space within a real space.

In addition to the duplication of the site for the daybed, Venlet also makes use of a lost decorative feature of Hôtel Wolfers. During his research he detected in old photographs that the doors of the dining room, main hall and music room were originally plated in silver. Richard Venlet reconstructs one of these doors and leaves it as a permanent intervention in the space. The addition of this light-reflecting architectural element to the silently ageing interior gives it a certain autonomy and hence makes it to a self-aware object.

6a architects
MANIERA 04
Dust Free Friends

To MANIERA’s understanding, 6a architects’ design approach shares common interests with Henry Van de Velde, who often designed objects as part of his architecture. In his architecture, furniture and fittings are not additions, but are inseparable from his spatial designs. 6a architects operate with a similar attitude. Examples of this are the door knobs and the balustrades in their project for Raven Row Gallery in London, which are self-evident yet essential items of their architecture.

The firm is deeply rooted in ‘making’, their office being partly a workshop where they craft objects, mock-ups and furniture with collaborators who share a similar passion. This attitude, being rather unusual in the computer-dominated world of contemporary architecture, puts them in a position that allows aesthetic decisions to extend further than decorative additions to their architecture. In this regard the cast iron panels of the façade of the Paul Smith shop, also in London, refers to a familiar material tradition in the city and the serious craftsmanship involved.
Here the architect’s interest is focused on developing the ornament through the process of making rather than initiating pure decoration.

In MANIERA’s 4th series, entitled Dust Free Friends, 6a architects re-examines the long tradition of self-build that has shared the journey through modernism with industry and craft. A lot has happened since Enzo Mari opened the field of designer furniture to the user with his ‘autoprogettazione’. Affordable lifestyle consumerism has more or less ousted messy and old-fashioned DIY from our homes. Apple and Ikea have replaced amateurish tinkering with pleasure and promise sealed inside immaculate capsules. However, today’s portable power tools, such as the cordless drill, the self-tapping screw and the dust-free Festool have also revolutionised our vernacular. The world of self-made furniture has reopened with unprecedented speed and ease.

The architects take a raw plywood panel as the basis for a catalogue of domestic furniture, ranging from tables (in three dimensions) and stools to folding privacy screens, all derived from their needs and their experiences of objects which adapt themselves to different uses in the domestic environment. The plywood, always a good servant to new tools, is decorated with wallpaper, that other dinosaur of Sunday afternoon domestication. Hand-painted papers applied to plywood are then cut and reassembled, creating new arrangements of colour and pattern with wood surfaces and neat fibrous edges. Craft and colour, paper and wood, maker and user come together in a new series, which it is hoped can and will be infinitely extended with the help of our dust-free friends.
The work of Brussels-based artist Richard Venlet combines sculpture, art history research, exhibition design and architecture. Venlet creates 'environments' out of spaces. His refined abstract aesthetics and the pragmatism of his oeuvre reach far beyond a simple formal reference to Modernism and Minimalism. Working in context-specific situations, he has produced numerous installations that incorporate the work of other artists and collaborators, forming composite and circuitous environments that are often whimsical reconfigurations of architectural space. By intervening in a space, the artist gives the viewer an experience of alienation; making him see his surroundings anew and occupy a vital part in it.

As an artist who deliberately intervenes with the architecture of an exhibition space, Venlet reaches further into architectural production through regular collaborations with architectural offices, such as OFFICE Kersten Geers David Van Severen and Philippe Vander Maren.

Richard Venlet was born in Australia in 1964 but now lives and works in Brussels. His work has been shown in numerous national and international galleries and museums, including: S.M.A.K. in Ghent, BOZAR in Brussels, Macba in Barcelona and FRAC in Paris among others.
Whether they are fitting out a Savile Row shop or adapting a grade I-listed house, London duo 6a architects take a radical approach to history and conservation, cherry-picking elements of the past to weave into new narratives. Tom Emerson and Stephanie Macdonald are specialists in anthropological storytelling, the result of scholarly curiosity and sensitive attention to detail.

6a architects was founded in 2001 and has become one of the leading architectural practices in the UK. The practice is perhaps best known for its exhibition spaces in delicate historical settings, such as the South London Gallery (2010) which was expanded to include a Victorian terraced house, and Raven Row (2009), two Huguenot merchant’s buildings that they adapted and extended into a gallery.

Other recent projects include a façade for Paul Smith in Mayfair, the restoration of the Fashion Galleries at the V&A Museum and Tree House in east London. A new residential building for Churchill College, University of Cambridge, a photography studio for Juergen Teller and an apartment building in north London are under construction. 6a is currently designing the new MK Gallery in Milton Keynes, Modern Art Oxford and a new Arts Club in east London as well as several artists studios and residential projects.

6a has won several riba awards, has been nominated five times for the Mies Van der Rohe Award and won the Erich Schelling Medal for Architecture in 2012.
INFO

24, 25 & 26 April 2015
Group visits at 10 am, 12 am, 2 pm & 4 pm

Out of respect for the Hôtel Wolfers and its owner, the number of visitors is limited. Visitors need to subscribe to one of the group visits.

Bookings
info@maniera.be
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Hôtel Wolfers
60, rue Alphonse Renard
1050 Brussels

The MANIERA 03 & 04 series will also be shown in:

Milan
Avant-première
14 – 19 April 2015
ATELIER CLERICI
5, Via Clerici
20121 Milan

Brussels
Showroom presentation
16 May – 10 June 2015
Opening on 16 May – 5 to 9 pm
MANIERA
74, Rue de la Caserne
1000 Brussels

Basel
Fair
15 – 21 June 2015
DESIGN MIAMI
Messe Basel
Hall 1