

Press Release

FORMAFANTASMA: CAMBIO

Serpentine Galleries

Reopens 29 September – 15 November 2020

MAJOR DESIGN EXHIBITION EXPLORES WOOD AND THE GLOBAL DYNAMICS OF TIMBER INDUSTRY

PIONEERING SHOW CONNECTS SCIENCE, CONSERVATION, ENGINEERING AND POLICYMAKING, INVESTIGATES HOW DESIGN CAN SHAPE A BETTER FUTURE



Image credit: Formafantasma: *Cambio* (Installation view, March 2020) Photo credit: George Darrell

The Serpentine is delighted to present *Cambio* by **Formafantasma**, a radical design exhibition about wood and the timber industry.



The exhibition brings together films, objects, artefacts and samples, including specially designed furniture made from a single tree felled during storms in Val de Fiemme in Italy; wood samples loaned by institutions around the world, from the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew to the Royal Museum of Central Africa; smells specially developed to evoke the wet earth and flora of a forest, and maps of the rainforest made by indigenous communities in the Amazon. *Cambio* offers a re-evaluation of our relationship with trees and poses a series of essential questions about design and sustainability, most pertinently: What can we do to better understand the connection between the objects we use and the conditions that produced them? Italian design duo Formafantasma are based in Amsterdam, The Netherlands. Their work looks at design's ecological and political responsibilities, while probing the global industries that consume natural resources.

This project opens a new chapter in the Serpentine's programme, embracing radical approaches to design and offering space to practitioners who operate between the traditional disciplines of design, contemporary art, and research.

Formafantasma return to the Serpentine following their participation in Serpentine's *Radical Kitchen* Live Programme and the *Work Marathon* in 2018. *Cambio* is the third exhibition of design in the Serpentine's history, following German product designer Konstantin Grcic's curated show on ground breaking contemporary design, *Design Real*, in 2009/10 and influential London-based Italian designer Martino Gamper's guest-curated exhibition *design is a state of mind* in 2014. It heralds the Serpentine's commitment to embedding design practice, research and thinking into its programming from 2020 onwards.

Cambio (from the medieval Latin *cambium*, 'change, exchange') is an ongoing investigation conducted by Formafantasma into the extraction, production and distribution of wood products. The industry's tentacular supply chain has grown out of the bioprospecting that took place throughout colonial territories during the nineteenth century, and has affected the entire biosphere. This exhibition aims to put into question the role that design can play in translating emerging environmental awareness into informed, collaborative responses.

Cambio also references the membrane that runs around the trunk of trees, the function of which is to produce wood (*xylem*) on the inside and bark (*phloem*) on the outside. The organisation of the exhibition follows the concentric structure of the cambium layer: at the centre of the gallery, two rooms will present interviews with specialists, and films made by Formafantasma in response, which scrutinise wood as a biological archive that stores data and narratives within its tissues. The outer spaces of the gallery will present a selection of objects from historical collections of wood samples and contemporary products that exemplify the structure of the current timber industry and which look beyond it, into the inner life of trees. These case studies explore instead the ways in which trees have been conceptualised by different disciplines, from an extraction-driven understanding of forest ecosystems to a renewed understanding of the philosophy and politics of plants.

The timber industry is one of the largest in the world, both in terms of the corporate revenues involved, and in terms of the scale of its impact on everyday life. Clothing, furniture, paper, fuels, fertilisers, are just a few of the thousands of uses that trees are put to, many of which have been felled in some of the most biodiverse and fragile ecosystems in the world.



Situated between the sourcing of raw materials and processes of production, the discipline of design occupies a vantage point from which to observe and critique timber's global infrastructure and its multiple scales.

Formafantasma said: “*Cambio* is an attempt to expand our understanding of what design can be, going beyond the finished object in order to include its disciplinary boundaries: forestry techniques and timber legislations then become tools for designing a better future for our forests; scientific knowledge goes hand-in-hand with environmental activism in fighting illegal logging, and the equilibrium of trans-national geopolitics is redefined in the struggle between conservation and consumption.”

The catalogue will be co-published by the Serpentine Galleries and Koenig Books, London and designed by Joost Grootens.

Project collaborators:

Emanuele Coccia (École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris)

Environmental Investigation Agency (London)

Gaia Amazonas (*Bogotá*)

Het Nieuwe Instituut (Rotterdam)

Magnifica Comunità della Val Di Fiemme (Italy)

Marco Carrer (University of Padua, Padua)

Naturalis Biodiversity centre, (Leiden)

Philipp H. Pattberg (Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam)

Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew (London)

Royal Museum (Tervuren)

Sissel Tolaas, Smell Researcher and Artist (Berlin)

Thünen Institute (Hamburg)

Victoria And Albert Museum (London)

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Notes to Editors

Andrea Trimarchi (1983) and **Simone Farresin** (1980) are Formafantasma, an Italian design duo based in Amsterdam, The Netherlands. Their interest in product design developed on the IM master course at Design Academy Eindhoven, where they graduated in July 2009.

Since then, Formafantasma's practice has been characterised by experimental material investigations and detailed explorations of the history, context and implications of the transformation of natural resources into commodities. In perceiving their role as a bridge between craft, industry, object and user, they are interested in forging links between their research-based practice and a wider design industry. As a result, works by Formafantasma have been commissioned by a variety of partners including Fendi, Max Mara - Sportmax, Hermès, Droog, Nodus rug, J&L Lobmeyr, Gallery Giustini / Stagetti Roma, Gallery Libby Sellers, Established and Sons, Lexus, Krizia International and Flos.

Whether designing for a client or investigating alternative applications of materials, Formafantasma apply the same rigorous attention to context, process and detail to every project they undertake. The added nuance for the duo is that they do so with an eye to the historical, political and social forces that have shaped their environments.

Their work has been presented and published internationally and museums such as New York's MoMA, London's Victoria and Albert, New York's Metropolitan Museum, the Chicago Art Institute, Paris's Centre Georges Pompidou, the TextielMuseum in Tilburg, the Stedelijk's-Hertogenbosch, the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, MUDAC Lausanne, the Mint Museum of Craft and Design in North Carolina and the MAK Museum in Vienna have all acquired Formafantasma's designs for their permanent collections.

In March 2011 Paola Antonelli of the Museum of Modern Art in New York and esteemed design critic Alice Rawsthorn listed their studio amongst a handful of practices that would shape the future of design. Andrea and Simone are lecturing and heading workshops in various Universities and Institutions. Currently they are teaching at the 'Well Being' and 'Contextual Design' Departments of the Design Academy Eindhoven. This exhibition will become the foundation of the new Masters programme that Formafantasma are leading from autumn 2020 at the Design Academy Eindhoven, titled 'GEODESIGN'. Since October 2016, they have been at the head of the Design bachelor at MADE Program in Siracusa, Italy.

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