

GAGOSIAN

HONG KONG TATLER

Designer Marc Newson—who is joining Jony Ive’s new studio, LoveFrom—discusses his exhibition in Hong Kong
Industrial designer Marc Newson has revived an ancient art and translated it spectacularly to his minimalist furniture, which is now on show at Gagosian in Hong Kong

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Marc Newson at Gagosian Hong Kong. (Photography: Affa Chan/Hong Kong Tatler)

Marc Newson, often described as the most influential designer of his generation, says his work accounts for something like 28 per cent of the entire auction market for design items. The 55-year-old Australian tends to speak softly, matter-of-factly and without much inflection, so when he makes statements like this—or that he is the only designer to have been represented by the elite Gagosian gallery, or that he’s “done a hell of a lot of things, more than most designers”—it’s hard to tell whether he’s bragging or simply stating fact.

Facts they are—facts that illustrate just how prolific and influential Newson is in the world of design. He has worked with every brand, from Louis Vuitton to Nike, Apple to Dom Pérignon, in any capacity that he or they have ever wanted, to the point that he can barely list or remember everything he’s working on now, let alone everything he’s ever done.

On June 28, it was announced Newson is adding yet another starry collaboration to his long list of achievements, as he’s joining former Apple designer Jony Ive’s new studio, LoveFrom.

“Name a project and I’ll tell you if I’ve done it; that’s easier,” he says, not joking, at Gagosian in Hong Kong, where his current exhibition goes back to basics, if you can call an almost lost ancient artisanal craft “basic.”

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Marc Newson, Cloisonné Black Blossom Lounge (2017). (© Marc Newson. Photo: Xiangzhe Kong. Courtesy of Gagosian)

LOST ARTS

“I’m not interested in whether it’s a chair or a light; I’m interested in the material, the process and the kind of technique,” he says. In this case, the material is enamel, the technique is cloisonné and the process ... well, the process was long and arduous.

If there’s a string that ties Newson’s work together, he says, it’s that it’s always deceptively simple. The cloisonné desks and chairs on show may be structurally minimalist, but to execute them Newson had to resurrect a dying art, seeking out the last artisanal masters interested in and

able to handle such an archaic exercise, funding the creation of a new purpose-built factory, and learning how to apply the craft to objects so very imposing, when the technique has typically been applied to pieces delicate and diminutive.

It took the better part of a decade, while fulfilling the editions of this collection—30-odd pieces of furniture, give or take—should take another three or four years. And this, take note, is only one of a handful of lost arts championed in Newson's show.



Marc Newson at Gagosian Hong Kong. (Photography: Affa Chan/Hong Kong Tatler)

Part of the allure was no doubt that it's something that nobody—not even Newson—had done. But there certainly was an element of activism in it, of resuscitating a lost art. “I feel very frustrated that there are many things now that are extremely difficult, if not impossible, to do that 200 years ago you could've done. In many ways we've regressed. I find it bizarre. I find it stupid. We should be cleverer than we were but in many cases we're not, particularly when it comes to things like people doing things with their hands.”

NOT FOR THE MASSES

Despite his wish to revive lost arts within his personal work, his intentions are not to pervade society with it, so don't expect a cloisonné Apple watch (another of Newson's projects). “I don't know that I'd want to pollute these things. I kind of like having these different worlds in which to work; it stops me from getting bored and offers me a degree of respite. When I do stuff like [this], I do it for me. I'm not answerable to anybody.”



Marc Newson, Cloisonné Blue Desk (2017). (© Marc Newson. Photo: Xiangzhe Kong. Courtesy of Gagosian)

Not that he minds answering to a client. “The reality is it’s my job, it’s what I’m supposed to be doing. That’s my *métier*; it’s not a conquest. The point is that I don’t want to get stuck doing one thing. I don’t want to get stuck doing chairs day in and day out.” Is that ironic coming from someone who’s just commissioned a whole factory of people to work on his chairs and desks for the foreseeable future?

“I’m acutely aware of how much easier it’s become to do [my] job, and I don’t feel good about it. My daughter could spit out stuff on a 3D printer. Designing products is different from making stuff, and I do really believe that we’ve lost specialisation because everyone thinks they can do everything. It’s simply laziness. But once these skills start to disappear, people become less aware of them and they just fade away from human consciousness.”