



PRESS RELEASE

At Triennale Milano, East Meets West with Duson Gallery Seoul

The exhibition *Mother-of-Pearl Tables* organized by the South Korean art gallery presents works by six international designers, interpreting the traditional *Jagae* (mother-of-pearl) in coffee tables of great charm produced in collaboration with local artisans in Tongyeong, masters in the crafting of this precious material.

On view, works by Alessandro Mendini, Elena Salmistraro, Marcel Wanders, Marco Zanuso Jr, Stefano Giovannoni and Younghee Cha.

Title: Mother-of-Pearl Tables

Location: Triennale Milano

Dates: 18-23 April 2023 (press preview: 17 April 2023)

Organizer: Duson Gallery Seoul

Curators: Yangsoo Kim, Younghee Cha

Exhibition design: Alex Mocika

Duson Gallery Seoul, an art and design gallery founded in 1977 in Seoul (South Korea) with the mission of promoting Korean crafts in the world, takes part for the first time in Milan Design Week with an intercultural project that combines the age-old South Korean tradition of mother-of-pearl with contemporary design.

The exhibition **Mother-of-Pearl Tables**, presented at **Triennale Milano**, reflects the encounter between East and West through the gallery's collaboration with six internationally acclaimed designers, **Alessandro Mendini, Elena Salmistraro, Marcel Wanders, Marco Zanuso Jr, Stefano Giovannoni and Younghee Cha**, who were asked to create coffee tables of forceful artistic impact interpreting *Jagae* (mother-of-pearl), a material that embodies the essence of oriental crafts and culture. The objects were realized by Deokgun Jang and Gyesoon Kang, master artisans working in the region of Tongyeong in Korea, renowned for the production and crafting of mother-of-pearl.

FOGLIA, Alessandro Mendini

Foglia (*Leaf*) is a coffee table based on an original drawing from 2016 by Alessandro Mendini from the designer's archives. The development of the project was carried out by Studio Alessandro Mendini with the collaboration of Younghee Cha, and bears the signature "Alessandro Mendini. Cose" of the collection created by the famous designer with Elisa and Fulvia Mendini in 2018, reflecting the desire to make a series of editions based on the remarkable heritage of objects, projects and drawings contained in the archive. The top in glossy black lacquered wood features decoration in the form of a leaf made with the mother-of-pearl inlay technique by highly specialized artisans in keeping with the age-old Korean tradition. The central leg in two-tone pink and yellow lacquered wood has the form of a star.

MOLAN, Elena Salmistraro

The Molan coffee table reinterprets the shape of the typical Korean hat, the *Gat*, in a profile of circular rotation that vaguely reflects the form of cyclones, giving rise to a unique, highly characteristic object. The slim, enveloping silhouette catches the eye while the smooth, polished surface glows thanks to the use of fine decorations in mother-of-pearl. Molan reworks the age-old Korean tradition in a current way, bringing together Korean heritage and culture with elements and codes typical of contemporary design through a sophisticated, elegant language. Mother-of-pearl is utilized to create intricate motifs, also closely linked to



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tradition, making the table a one-of-a-kind inimitable work of art. The enveloping form generated by the rotation represented another challenge for the Korean master artisans as it requires precise, refined workmanship; it is intentionally juxtaposed with pure, solid, simple elements, giving the work a compact quality and a sort of formal contrast, for a forceful, theatrical presence. The surface is smooth and uniform thanks to the use of a pane of glass that does not obscure the sinuous form, underscoring the elegance and lightness of the object while making it innovative, precious and rare.

FIORE FOSSILE, Marcel Wanders

The Fiore Fossile (*Fossile Flower*) coffee table takes its cue from one of the most primordial and perfect forms of nature: a black bowl wedged between rocks. A simple and pure shape that reveals its deeper beauty through the ornaments of mother-of-pearl petals made with age-old Korean know-how. An entire world unfolds inside each flower, a perfect beauty honed by expert hands, a symbol of love created with the heart, an artistic treasure that transcends time. The surface of the bowl, rugged and smooth at the same time, harbours a promise of hope in every flash of iridescence, a memory of love, a vow of faith, a message of beauty that takes flight.

SOBAN, Marco Zanuso Jr.

Intimate and comfortable, Soban is a contemporary reinterpretation of the traditional Korean table-tray in lacquered wood utilized since ancient times for multiple functions from an individual dining table to a tea tray, a desk or even as an altar for rituals of commemoration of ancestors. A symbol of Korean craftsmanship, the *soban* was an object that combined elegance, refinement and functional quality, the same characteristics that inspired Marco Zanuso Jr. in his modern version for Duson Gallery. The oval top in dark red lacquered walnut is inlaid with small pointed mother-of-pearl inserts, which in their essential design act as precious points of light based on the purest elements of the natural world, like drops of water or stars in a clear winter sky. By contrast, the base is composed of slats of canaletto walnut and zebrawood, which grant verticality to the object while emphasizing its lightness through the clean lines.

CHERRY TREE, Stefano Giovannoni

The cherry tree, a traditional symbol of the East, inspired the form and decoration of the coffee table that bears its name, a unique creation with extremely sinuous forms in ash wood. The base, like the trunk of a slender plant, tapers towards the top and then opens at its highest point, seamlessly shifting into the table's surface. The latter resembles the foliage of a cherry tree with a sectional view that reveals the flowering branches made with precious inlay work in mother-of-pearl, skilfully decorated by Korean artisans. Two variations are available: a pale version that plays in a tonal way with the warm colour of mother-of-pearl and a darker alternative that accentuates the contrast of light and shadow.

OCEAN, Younghee Cha

Ocean, with a structure in natural black lacquered wood, is a coffee table with a dual function: thanks to the two heights, it can be utilized individually or in tandem, offering variable geometric perspectives. The ocean facing the coast of Tongyeong, a main location for gathering abalone shells to harvest mother-of-pearl, inspired the Korean designer to create two motifs for the tabletop: one suggests waves breaking on the shore while the other is based on the allure of gleaming shells at the bottom of the sea. The decorations made with inlays of white mother-of-pearl with slight natural shadings are crafted by Korean master artisans in keeping with age-old traditions. The forms and colours of the Ocean table embody and narrate stories of small creatures from underwater worlds. The mother-of-pearl represents symbols of the universe, expressing the shape of time and creating reflections that glimmer like starlight.



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Najeon: the craftsmanship of Jagae, the Korean mother-of-pearl

In Korea, Jagae (mother-of-pearl) is traditionally taken from abalone shells which are appreciated for their particularly bright and smooth quality. They are crafted with the ancient Najeon technique which calls for inlays on the surfaces of lacquered objects. This procedure is extremely complex, and requires over 30 steps: a base is prepared in materials like wood, metal, polyurethane and heavy paper (obtained by gluing many layers) or porcelain; the base is then polished and the empty spaces are filled with a special lacquer tincture from tree resin and clay; then the pieces of mother-of-pearl are glued onto the surface, after which comes another round of polishing and lacquering. Finally, the surface is buffed to make it smooth and shiny.

The Najeon technique has a history of over 1000 years. It is said that it was introduced in Korea during the period of the Three Kingdoms (57 BC - 668 AD) and also practiced in Japan and other countries in Southeast Asia. During the Goryeo Dynasty (918-1392) it reached the apex of its splendour: the lacquers produced in that period were of extremely high quality, and were considered luxury items only for royalty and nobles. The creations featured symmetrical chrysanthemum or arabesque motifs with slender strips of abalone shells in splendid iridescent colours. During the Joseon Dynasty (1392-1910) the symmetrical design was replaced by simpler, more natural motifs including plums, bamboo, the ten symbols of longevity, landscapes and geometric forms. With the Japanese invasion of Korea (1910-1945), this technique almost vanished. It was revived with the Korean independence, especially during the years of economic growth (1960-1970) when it became a status symbol. Today the Najeon technique is used for all types of everyday products, from toothbrush holders to dressing tables, chest drawers, cases, small dining tables, plates, trays and wardrobes.

DUSON GALLERY

Duson Gallery, founded in 1977 in Seoul, South Korea, focuses on antique and contemporary art, design and spatial composition, collaborating with modern and contemporary Korean artists and outstanding designers on the international scene. The gallery organized a solo show of the Korean artist Byeong-Hoon Choi in New York and at Design Miami/Art Basel in 2015, and presented the artist Chun Kwang Young in a collateral event of the Venice Biennale in 2022. Duson Gallery has actively promoted design culture in South Korea, showcasing outstanding movements like the Memphis Group and exceptional designers like Alessandro Mendini. During Milan Design Week 2023, the gallery will illustrate the Korean tradition of mother-of-pearl in collaboration with six international designers in the aim of creating a cultural bridge between East and West and emphasizing the bond between past and present.

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