

“Being curious and open to everything is necessary to always move forward”

An interview with Fien Muller and Hannes Van Severen



Photo by Nacho Alegre

Words: Éva Molnár

“As visual artists, we are engaged in questioning and reinterpreting the familiar world around us”

– say Fien Muller and Hannes Van Severen, whose shared practice blends art, design, and architecture into a singular language. Where does this distinctive approach come from? What comes first: form or colour? And what is it like to work together as two genuine visionaries?

WHAT’S BEEN INSPIRING YOU LATELY?

It’s never entirely clear where inspiration comes from. Certain things strike us more than others, and over time, all those impressions accumulate into an idea. Being curious and open to everything is essential—it’s the only way to keep moving forward. We’re motivated by looking at things in a new way, questioning the familiar, and finding beauty in the small details.

COMING FROM DIFFERENT BACKGROUNDS—ART AND DESIGN—HOW DO YOUR PERSPECTIVES INFLUENCE THE WORK YOU CREATE? HOW DID YOUR COLLABORATION BEGIN?

It started by chance. A freshly opened gallery invited us to create work in the space between functional object, art object, and architecture. We were both visual artists, each questioning and reinterpreting the world around us. That shared curiosity became the foundation of our collaboration. In many ways, we’re still doing what we did before—exploring form, context, and meaning—but now through the lens of functionality. The shift to functional objects didn’t change our approach; it simply expanded the possibilities.

DO YOU REMEMBER THE FIRST OBJECT THAT MADE YOU FALL IN LOVE WITH DESIGN?

Very early on. My great-grandparents had pieces by Bertolia and Mario Bellini. Fien grew up in a family of antique dealers and collectors. We've been surrounded by remarkable objects since childhood.



Photo by Nacho Alegre

“Trends are already outdated when they appear. Instead, you must work against trends to be relevant.”

HOW HAS THE IDENTITY OF BELGIAN DESIGN EVOLVED OVER THE YEARS?

I'm not sure Belgium has ever had a clear design identity—which might be its most Belgian quality.

WHAT NEW PERSPECTIVES ARE SHAPING THE DESIGN WORLD TODAY?

Design is more present and accessible than ever before. But trends? We don't follow them. By the time they appear, they're already outdated. To be relevant, you have to work against them.



“3D printing and computer simulations can help make a decision. Although it is sometimes unfortunate that then a process is skipped where only the best things are made and nothing ever fails in”

Photo by Courtesy Tim Van Laere Gallery, Antwerp – Rome

IN YOUR VIEW, WHAT DEFINES GOOD DESIGN TODAY?

It's impossible to pinpoint exactly—but it's a perfect balance of proportions, materials, colours, finishes, and more.

HOW IS DIGITAL INNOVATION INFLUENCING YOUR WORK?

We mostly focus on what we want to make, often with simple techniques and solid materials used in surprising ways. A table doesn't have to be complicated. But digital tools like 3D printing and computer simulations can help us visualize a design before it exists. The downside is that sometimes the natural trial-and-error process is skipped, and with it, the unexpected beauty of failure.

HAS YOUR DESIGN PHILOSOPHY EVOLVED OVER TIME?

Everything can be an inspiration. We work from instinct, but we always know where we're going with a piece. Our aim is to create objects that function as sculpture or small architectural forms—visually engaging even when not in use. Function is as important as appearance. Every piece we make informs the next, our design language keeps evolving, one object at a time.

HOW DO YOU NAVIGATE CREATIVE DISAGREEMENTS?

Because we're a couple, we can be very honest—there's no hesitation in saying if something works or not. We trust each other's opinion more than anyone's. We share an unspoken language. Often one of us will start an idea, and the other will develop it further. By the end, we have a “family” of designs, and we select the most relevant ones.

HOW DO YOU CHOOSE MATERIALS?

It's instinctive. We know what a piece needs to achieve the right presence. Materials, colours, finishes, proportions—together, they give an object a soul.

AND COLOUR?

Colour is like a material for us—it's a form, it gives life. Usually, it appears alongside the design from the very start.

HOW DOES INTUITION PLAY INTO YOUR PROCESS?

It's one of our biggest guiding principles. We can't work without it.

HOW DO YOU BEGIN A NEW PROJECT?

It starts with an idea for a material and the type of object we want to make with it. For our Alltubes series, it began with aluminium tubes laid side by side. They could form a surface or a leg. We created many variations until the idea felt complete, then chose the most relevant designs. The result is a series with the same genetic code.



“You may have an idea of what will be timeless, but you can never know in the end. What you should definitely not do is follow a trend or a particular style”

Photo by Courtesy Tim Van Laere Gallery, Antwerp – Rome

WHAT'S NEXT FOR MULLER VAN SEVEREN?

We're launching a new series for BD Barcelona with Office Kersten Geers and David Van Severen. We're presenting cabinets for Hay, outdoor versions of our seating for Valerie Objects, and a bar stool for Valerie Objects in collaboration with Bjarke Ingels. For Bleo, we'll present tiles in our signature colours.

DO YOU BELIEVE TIMELESSNESS IS POSSIBLE IN DESIGN?

You may think something will be timeless, but you never truly know. What you mustn't do is follow a trend or a specific style. Timelessness, for us, means an object that exists outside of trends—something that fits in any space, from any era, without losing its power, yet without imposing itself.



Photo by Courtesy Tim Van Laere Gallery, Antwerp - Rome