

Jean-François D'Or on Precarious Balance, and the power of the moment

An interview with Jean-François D'Or



Jean-François D'Or, Audace. Photo: E. Bellow

Words: Éva Molnár

On 2 October, Belgian designer Jean-François D'Or will present a unique performance featuring the musician Benjamin Glorieux at MAD Brussels as part of the exhibition Trans-formations. Known for his poetic yet functional objects, D'Or here steps beyond product design into an ephemeral, multidisciplinary space where music, writing, installation, and risk meet. We spoke with him about his upcoming performance, his design philosophy, and the thread that connects two decades of creative work.

Brussels designer Jean-François D'Or has a way of making objects speak softly. Since founding his studio Loudordesign in 2003, he has created lighting, furniture, and accessories that are modest in appearance but lasting in presence. His approach earned him the title of Belgian Designer of the Year in 2013, and his works are produced by brands across Europe. But D'Or is not content to stay within the boundaries of industrial design. Over the past decade he has experimented with installations and performances – live events where sound, space, and gesture are as important as form and function. On 2 October, he returns to performance with *Équilibre précaire* (Precarious Balance) featuring Benjamin Glorieux, a virtuoso musician. A one-night work presented at MAD Brussels during the exhibition Trans-formations.



“The performance started with the idea of fragility — the sensation of being in balance but never fully stable. We think of balance as something fixed, but in reality, it’s a constant negotiation”

THIS EVENT AT MAD IS DESCRIBED AS A PERFORMANCE RATHER THAN AN EXHIBITION. HOW WOULD YOU INTRODUCE IT TO SOMEONE WHO'S NEVER SEEN YOUR WORK IN THIS FORM ?

Jean-François D'Or: It's not a show of objects to be admired at a distance. It's closer to an experience you enter. My performances sit at the crossroads of design, music, and writing. The most important thing for me is sharing something live with people. When I design an object, the process is long: it can take years before someone uses it at home. Often, I never even meet those people. In a performance, everything happens in the moment. The scenario is carefully prepared, but there's always space for improvisation. Nobody, not even me (smiles), knows exactly what will unfold. That unpredictability is vital. The aim is to create an atmosphere that touches people – to see their reactions, to feel emotions together.

WHAT WAS THE SEED FOR ÉQUILIBRE PRÉCAIRE ?

JFD: I was invited to the performance by Marie Pok, who is the director of CID Grand-Hornu, the Centre for Innovation and Design and curator of that exhibition Trans-formations at MAD Brussels. It started with the idea of fragility – the sensation of being in balance but never fully stable. In connection with the scenario I proposed, I decided to invite Benjamin Glorieux, musician, and writing this performance together. We think of balance as something fixed, but in reality, it's a constant negotiation. We want to bring that feeling into space: to place ourself, or certain objects, in situations where something could shift, tip over, or collapse. That sense of risk changes how you pay attention. You listen differently, you look more closely. I want the audience to share that tension with us. This time the performance is part of a larger program and will be relatively short – one chapter of an evening that includes other pieces. I see it as one voice among many in the exhibition. I want the audience to discover the broader

universe, not only the performance. This time the mise en abyme (self-reflexive embedding) is accentuated. Everything starts with an object, which itself dictates an installation, which itself is disrupted by the performance, which itself is filmed and projected during the duration of the exhibition. We were lucky to have a super pro studio, Woogie, to follow us and make this video.

HOW DOES PERFORMANCE CONNECT TO YOUR DAILY WORK AS A DESIGNER OF OBJECTS ?

JFD: In the studio I deal with constraints: the typology of the object, the production process, the market. It's rewarding, but also slow and sometimes frustrating. You design something, it goes into production, and years later you might discover someone has been living with it every day. That's moving, but also distant. Performance is the opposite. It gives me immediacy. I can test ideas about design – about how objects behave, how people react to them, how sound and space interact – without waiting for factories and shops. It's still design, but through another medium.



“I don’t want spectacle or shock. I want intensity. Balance is fragile — you realize that when you place yourself or an object on the edge of falling. That moment of uncertainty forces you to be present”

Benjamin Glorieux. Portrait.

YOU'RE COLLABORATING WITH A MUSICIAN THIS TIME. WHY BRING MUSIC INTO THE PROCESS ?

JFD: Sound shapes space in a very physical way. In earlier performances I composed the soundtrack myself, with piano, guitar or digital tools. For this piece the scenario demanded something very specific that I couldn't play myself. So, I invited Benjamin Glorieux, a musician I admire not only for his talent but for his human qualities. In performance you need trust, as you are both exposed. Together we are building a dialogue between instrument, objects, and space. His presence adds a dimension I could never achieve alone.

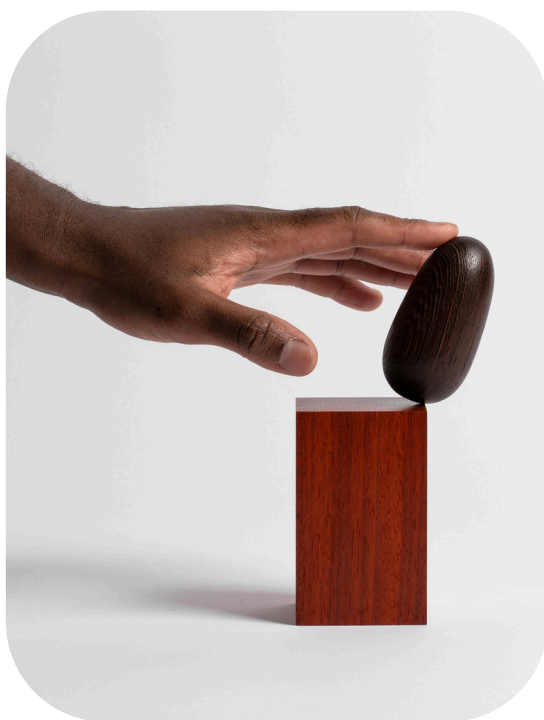
THE TITLE, ÉQUILIBRE PRÉCAIRE, SUGGESTS FRAGILITY AND RISK. WHAT DO YOU WANT PEOPLE TO FEEL ?

JFD: I don't want spectacle or shock. I want intensity. Balance is fragile – you realize that when you place yourself or an object on the edge of falling. That moment of uncertainty forces you to be present. Some people who follow my performances tell me: “for a few minutes I forgot everything else, I was completely absorbed.” That's what I aim for. A performance doesn't last long, but it can shift your perception, even briefly.

LOOKING BACK, YOU FOUNDED LOUDORDESIGN IN 2003 AND WERE NAMED DESIGNER OF THE YEAR IN 2013. HOW HAS YOUR APPROACH EVOLVED SINCE THEN ?

JFD: At the beginning the challenge was simply to make it possible – to survive as a designer, to prove it could be a profession. I set myself guidelines early on: to make calm, essential objects, not loud “wow-effect” pieces. I wanted to design things people could really live with. After about ten years, the rhythm became intense: new collections every year,

international fairs, endless deadlines. I began to wonder whether producing more and more was really meaningful. That was when I accepted other kinds of projects: exhibitions, performances, collaborations outside the usual field. So the core principles – usefulness, clarity, poetry – have remained. But the ways of expressing them have expanded.



Jean-François D'Or, Audace. Photo: E. Bellow

“I also enjoy challenges from outside. A manufacturer might ask me to work with a specific technique, and then I dive into learning how the machines work, what the material can and cannot do. That curiosity often leads to new ideas. And sometimes I simply want to try something unfamiliar, just to see where it takes me”

MATERIALS ARE AT THE HEART OF YOUR WORK. HOW DO YOU CHOOSE THEM ?

JFD: Sometimes the material is dictated by necessity: an object must last, it must function, so you choose the strongest or most practical option. Other times it's about emotion: wood can give warmth, glass can bring transparency,

metal precision. I also enjoy challenges from outside. A manufacturer might ask me to work with a specific technique, and then I dive into learning how the machines work, what the material can and cannot do. That curiosity often leads to new ideas. And sometimes I simply want to try something unfamiliar, just to see where it takes me.

WHAT DO YOU HOPE PEOPLE EXPERIENCE WHEN THEY ENCOUNTER YOUR WORK — WHETHER AS AN OBJECT IN THEIR HOME OR IN A PERFORMANCE ?

JFD: With objects, the highest compliment is when someone tells me they've used one of my pieces for years and it still gives them pleasure. That means the object has become part of their daily life, not just decoration. With performances the timeframe is shorter but the intensity greater. For a moment you can create a bubble where people forget their routine and sense the world differently. If I can bring that – through an object that endures, or a fleeting experience that resonates – then the work has value.

AND WHAT COMES AFTER MAD BRUSSELS ?

JFD: I don't like to look too far back, and I don't like to plan too far ahead. Balance is always moving; life is fragile too. What matters is to stay curious, to avoid repeating myself, to accept challenges. The next project will appear – it always does. Many projects ahead, both into the world of object typologies and hybrid expressions.

Jean-François D'Or's performance "Équilibre précaire" takes place on 2 October at 6:30 pm and 8:30 pm at MAD Brussels, as part of the exhibition Trans-formation and MAD opening night. Registration required: RPSV: info@loudordesign.be

More information about Jean-François D'Or :
www.loudordesign.be
@jeanfrancoisdor_loudordesign



Jean-François D'Or, Équilibre Précaire. Photo: Julien Renault