



# KEEPING IT UN/REAL

The textiles of Elisa Strozyk

text Dana Hughes  
photography Sebastian Neeb



Elisa Strozyk has been slowly developing her particular style as a designer, but in recent years has solidified her approach. She is based in Berlin.

It's not very often that I see such innovative and engaging work in the vein of Elisa Strozyk's intent, work that challenges the conventional and radically reinvents the familiar. Her most recent designs do just that. In some respect Strozyk's work and her approach display a depth and maturity beyond her years – considering she is only 28 years old – and her work is already capturing hearts and minds the world over.

Born in Berlin, Strozyk studied at prominent arts colleges at a young age, ENSAD (L'Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs) in Paris and KHB (Kunsthochschule Berlin-Weissensee) in Berlin, before she received her masters in Future Textile Design from London's Central Saint Martins in 2009. There is no doubt the young woman is particularly well-qualified when it comes to design pedigree, but it is the artistry, originality and use of symbolism, in which her work is well rooted, that is most impressive about this young designer.

Strozyk's work is an antidote to the increasingly virtual, immaterial and non-tangible world we live in. Her designs are a contrast to our daily online, SMSing, downloading, computer screen-based, on-demand lives. Her alluring wooden textiles provide a much-needed emotional refuge and engage the viewer by connecting them with a traditional surface in a new form. Developed as her final masters project, Wooden Textiles is a mind-bending cross between parquet and carpet. "It looks and smells familiar, but feels strange, as it is able to move and form in unexpected ways," says Strozyk of her wooden surfaces, which can be manipulated by touch. She has effectively created a whole new tactile experience by playing tricks with our preconceived ideas of what timber can do, or what it should feel like.

Her vision is to give "importance to surfaces that are desirable to touch" and those that may reconnect us with the material and natural world – possibly to enhance the emotional value of an object. She manages to do this by allowing us to be still in admiring the time, effort and skill needed to produce such exquisite pieces. Strozyk says, "One of the processes to design a flexible wooden surface is its deconstruction into pieces, which are then attached to a textile base. Wooden Textiles is an approach toward responsible design thinking and concerned

A young German designer is reshaping the world of textile design and redefining how we relate to commonplace materials.

mainly with the life-cycles of products. The outcome is a material that is half wood and half textile."

She is conscious of the dark truth that, in the future, we will all have to deal with more waste and fewer resources. Funda-

mental to her practice are responsible thinking and awareness of life-cycles of objects. For this reason, she is drawn to timber as a material that can age beautifully. Further enforcing her commitment towards sustainability, Strozyk uses off-cuts of veneers and wood left over from timber workshops.

She carefully studies the notions of modularity and geometry by manipulating the flexibility of her wooden textiles dependent on the shape of the tiles, their size and the gaps between them. She studied timber parquet floor and its traditional herringbone pattern, and she tested the possibilities of different geometric shapes. She ultimately concluded that rectangular shapes created a textile that is able to roll and fold up across their length. Hexagons and other polygon shapes block each other and cause inflexibility. It became clear that the triangle shape allowed the best manoeuvrability, while the isosceles triangle (at least two equal sides) was the most versatile.

By pushing the boundaries between the possibilities of two- and three-dimensional forms, Strozyk's Wooden Carpet embodies the idea of interactive flexibility. The carpet can be rolled up and transported, laid flat on the ground or shaped in dramatic ways, even up the wall. The possibilities to interact and customise are infinite.

After developing her original idea for the Wooden Carpet, Strozyk needed nearly two weeks to create geometric timber pieces, before bonding them to a textile backing. The wood is both cut by hand and laser cut, and all tiles are bonded by hand to compose a textile-like surface. With further refinements, this process now requires just four days.

Further examples of Strozyk's work are the Miss Maple pendant lamp, a highly sculptural object that has the ability to visually transform from day to night depending on whether or not it is lit from within. Her limited edition textile furniture collection includes a cabinet, telephone bench and two coffee tables, all of which combine wooden textile concepts with reused furniture pieces.

[01]



[01] Wooden Carpet (2009)  
Textile, material: mixed wood,  
silk / cotton mix  
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[02] Phone Bench (2009)  
Bench & Textile, materials:  
found furniture + mahogany wood

[03] Wooden Textiles (2010)  
Textile, material: maple wood,  
elastan/cotton mix  
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[04] Accordion Cabinet (2011)  
A collaboration with artist Sebastian Neeb  
Material: mixed wood, wooden textile

[03]



Continuing her exploration of wooden textiles, Strozyk's most recent collaboration with artist Sebastian Neeb resulted in the Accordion Cabinet, which was shown at imm Cologne in January of this year.

Branching out beyond the world of product design, in 2010 Strozyk collaborated with a Brazilian fashion designer, Maria Bonita, on her spring/summer ready-to-wear collection of women's clothing and accessories.

Continuing her exploration of wooden textiles, Strozyk's most recent collaboration with artist Sebastian Neeb resulted in the Accordion Cabinet, which was shown at imm Cologne in January of this year. As the name suggests, timber doors on the cabinet can be folded and stretched in a manner similar to an accordion. Each of the laser-cut pieces of wood is hand-fixed to a flexible textile base (similar to Lycra). Flexible accordion doors wrap around a rectangular base and hide the shelves within when they are pulled closed.

Having such a strong collection of highly imaginative products, it is not surprising that Strozyk is no stranger to exhibitions and awards. In 2010, she received the Marc Charras Award and a prestigious German design award for newcomers. As well as exhibiting Accordion Cabinet at the 'D3 Talents' at imm Cologne and a string of other exhibitions in France, Netherlands, Italy, the UK, Poland, Korea and Japan. And her Wooden Carpet was included in 'Future Map 2009', an exhibition celebrating 25 of London's most talented emerging designers at Hoxton Square Projects.

This year, Strozyk is participating in the Internationale Handwerksmesse in Munich and the prestigious Salone Satellite at the Milan Furniture Fair (her second consecutive year of exhibiting in Milan). This will, no doubt, firmly place her on the world design map as an exciting young designer on the rise. Embraced by design blogs and mainstream media alike, Strozyk has a justifiably strong following. If the quality of her work to date is anything to go by, her developing skills, experience and wider exposure in the design industry all point toward a single outcome – Strozyk as a bright design star in the making. *(inside)*

[02]



[04]

