

Wallpaper*

French designer Marlène Huissoud creates silkworm cocoon set with London Bronze Casting

By Rosa Bertoli



Left, Marlène Huissoud at the London Bronze Casting workshop in Farnham.
Right, a wax mould before being coated in a ceramic shell, and the bronze copy of the mould.
(Image credit: Conor O'Leary)

French-born designer Marlène Huissoud has always experimented with the natural world. Her early projects, developed as part of her Material Futures Master's at London's Central Saint Martins, grew into a series called From Insects, which used various bugs and larvae as 'collaborators' in the creation of new materials.

Since graduating in 2014, she has been looking at the contribution bees and silkworms can offer the design world. 'It all started with my family's background,' she says. 'I grew up in the French Alps around my father's beehives, and I have always been fascinated by the creativity of insects.'

Huissoud is on the roster of London design gallerist Sarah Myerscough, a champion of highly-skilled artisans who celebrate the organic. Huissoud is used to experimenting with artisanal techniques, and her natural starting point has been expanded to incorporate and combine materials such as discarded [glass](#), honeybee bio resin and metal, always mixing the natural with the artificial.



Coating the wax model in a ceramic shell (Image credit: Conor O'Leary)

'Marlène really identified with the theme of the [Wallpaper* Handmade](#) exhibition as it is the core of her practice to look at organic and sustainable materials,' says Myerscough. Huissoud had been attracted to the [wellness](#) properties of the insect-made materials she was experimenting with, so she offered to take her research into silkworm cocoons to the next level and to present it in a context that speaks of the raw material's traditional use. 'I have had the idea to work with the therapeutic properties of insect bio materials for a long time,' she says. 'So when I saw the brief for the project, everything made sense and ideas came to me very quickly.'

Silkworm cocoons have been used for centuries in Asia for moisturising and cleaning purposes; sericin, a natural glue produced by the silkworm, can promote collagen production, heal scars, and increase skin elasticity and pigmentation. With this in mind, Huissoud combined the cocoons into modular compositions, creating two bowls and a stool to enhance an everyday beauty routine. Huissoud had previously created some pieces with the cocoons cast in pewter, but this time she opted to use bronze.

Huissoud worked in collaboration with London Bronze Casting, a foundry she had known for a few months and was keen to work with. Founded in 2014, the company specialises in bespoke bronze and aluminium casting, working with artists such as [Ryan Gander](#) and Tom Dale. The three founders each brought specific expertise to the table: Vincent Jack trained as a blacksmith and is a specialist in hot metal working, Derek Bayley focuses on patination techniques and other finishes, and Thomas Winstanley is an expert in the lost-wax bronze casting process.



Various stages of finish.
(Image credit: Conor O'Leary)

Each prototype was initially arranged by hand by the designer using the raw cocoons, which were used as the base to create a rubber mould. A wax model was made from the mould, then coated in a ceramic shell, into which melted bronze was poured. Finishing touches, such as jetwashing, sandblasting and waxing, completed the process, which took between eight to 12 weeks for each piece.

‘Ambitious projects can be hard work and worrying,’ says Winstanley. ‘Marlène’s work is ambitious in its complexity, but her approach to these projects and knowing exactly what she wants to achieve made the process really enjoyable. We have learned that we want to work with more people like Marlène.’

An important element of Huissoud’s work is to respect the life of the insects whose materials she incorporates in her work. While most worms are killed in the process of silk production, it was important for her to allow the worm to morph into a butterfly. ‘I wanted to show we can use the cocoons differently than in the silk industry and demonstrate that nature is precious.’

Sarah Myerscough Gallery will presenting a new piece by Huissoud, created with London Bronze Casting, at this year's PAD fair, which takes place in Berkeley Square from 1-7 October.

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