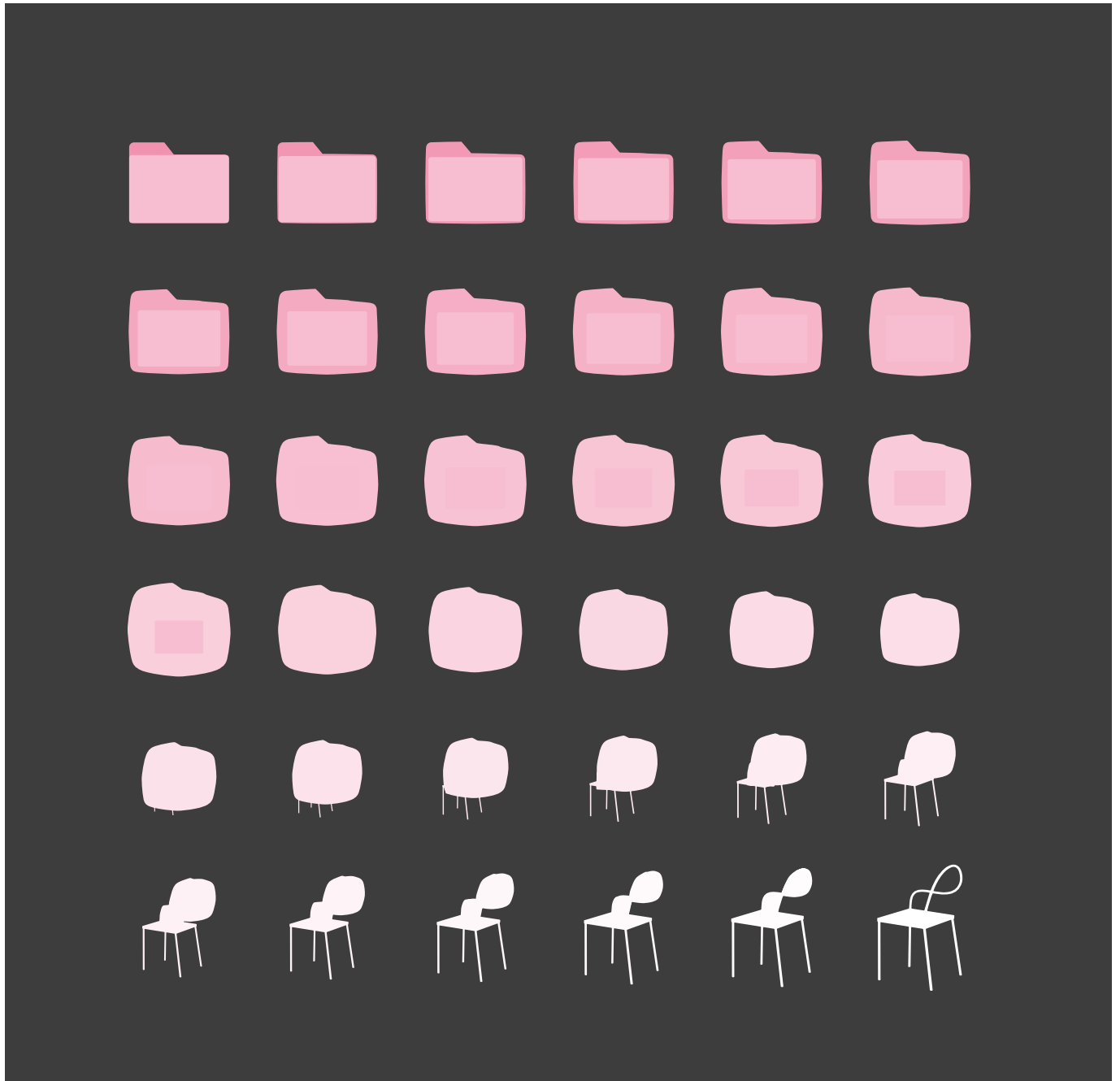




centre for innovation  
and design  
at Grand-Hornu



press  
release

## FROM ARCHIVES TO DESIGN

Audacity and innovation

Curators: Céline Ganty and Zoé Luc

Scenography: Benjamin Stoz

02.07.23 → 01.10.2023

**“The [CID’s] key value, innovation, is understood as a way of breaking away from the way we see, think about and do things. Innovation means accepting change [...] it’s about moving away from our convictions, getting out of our comfort zone, to incorporate innovation in our day-to-day lives.”**

**Marie Pok, 2014**

## INTRODUCTION

The concept of innovation has evolved a lot throughout history.

There is plenty of literature, particularly since the post-war period, that attempts to understand and define this notion.

At the dawn of the 4<sup>th</sup> Industrial Revolution, in a world that is experiencing endless technological, environmental and social changes, the word “innovation” is used a lot, because it refers to the values of progress and novelty. So much so that it has become cliched, inserted into a whole range of expressions: open innovation, participatory innovation, social innovation, frugal innovation, inclusive innovation, radical innovation, disruptive innovation...

Focusing on different perceptions of the concept of innovation, this exhibition creates a dialogue between two “repositories” of technical, industrial, human and social progress that are unique to the Grand-Hornu: on the one hand, its design collection [20<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> centuries] and on the other, its Léon Plaetens archives [18<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries].

Since it was founded in 2014, the CID has set itself the task, among others, of promoting responsible, non-standard - even militant - and open examples of innovation in the fields of design and architecture to the general public. This forward-thinking, discursive vision is translated into both the programme of exhibitions put on at the CID and in the resulting acquisitions. Indeed, the CID’s design collection follows the general progress of the phenomena that mark the creative world, focusing on objects that showcase the creative process itself and the new tools invented against this shifting backdrop.

The historic Léon Plaetens archives, which contain over a thousand previous iconographic and textual documents, reflect the many technical and social innovations introduced at the Grand-Hornu during its time as a working mine.

## INNOVATION, THE PAST AND THE PRESENT

In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, innovation was essentially the domain of scientists. Along with entrepreneurs, they were the ones who promoted industrialisation. They responded to the needs to industrialists by putting forward the necessary knowledge and solutions, guided by technology and its ongoing improvements. The first industrial revolution was characterised by a series of innovations like the first use of coal in metallurgy (1709), the first steam engine [T. Newcomen, 1710-1712] and its developments [James Watt, 1769] and the first mechanical loom (1764).

These innovations gradually started to spread throughout Western Europe during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, resulting in significant advances in productivity and launching an era of faster, but also more unstable growth, in these countries, using up more natural resources. The working conditions of manual workers declined, and proletarianisation resulted in new forms of social deprivation. However, this was the era of the saying: "You can't stop progress!". At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it is clear that the invention of the automobile and electricity triggered plenty of critical debate, pitting the workers, who feared for their jobs, social control and the ecological damage caused by these innovations against the emerging world of political economics and its first big treatises.

Innovation was seen as a positive thing in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, because it was a prerequisite for progress and economic growth. Unlike the 1970s, which were marked by considerable criticism of capitalism and the consumer society, the 1980s created technophiles, promoting intangible, clean IT which was favourably compared – perhaps blindly? – to the polluting innovations of the 19<sup>th</sup> century like the steam engine.

Now, at the dawn of the 4<sup>th</sup> industrial revolution, we have moved into the era of experiential innovation, steered by the expectations of users and uses. However, the technological and societal changes our world is experiencing are too complex for a single type of skill within a company to hold the solution. So it has become vital that we develop new ways of approaching innovation, relying on multi-disciplinary teams that encourage creativity thanks to collective intelligence.

Designers certainly have a part to play in this kind of multi-disciplinary team, because they give innovation its tangible form for the end user, and strategically steer it towards reality. However, we should not fall into the trap of expecting a technological fix to everything, whereby humans find a miraculous technical solution to every single ecological, social, cultural or political problem, sometimes triggering a damaging "rebound effect"<sup>1</sup>.

1 - (Economics) The paradox of a successful technology or practice being designed to reduce consumption, pollution etc., but the development of which cancels out the benefits..

## THE EXHIBITION

The exhibition is organised into four chapters or attitudes towards innovation, comparing and contrasting experiences of the industrial innovations specific to coal-mining at the Grand-Hornu in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and the innovative pieces in the CID's design collection.

These chapters are permeable, in that one piece in the design collection or one document in the archives can sometimes – and ultimately usually does – refer to more than one position on innovation. These four chapters are therefore not a narrow framework, but rather mere suggestions for how to approach the subject.

### Chapter 1: From growth to degrowth

Harnessing electricity was the trigger for the second industrial revolution, and its use marked the transition from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The day-to-day life of its users changed dramatically, as did the way that work was understood. Its use in industry led to mass production, which boosted efficiency, growth and productivity.

Today we can look back with some bitterness and see how this obsession with doing everything bigger and faster cannot be controlled, and causes international health, energy, economic and social crises. This volatile environment pushes society to consider scenarios that allow us to manage our future in a more humane, more ethical and more responsible way, by encouraging degrowth.

Design plays an active role in this quest for frugality by reclaiming less energy-intensive, low-tech solutions [*Biceps cultivatus* by Audrey Bigot and Antoine Pateau], embracing recycling [the *Navy chair*], encouraging short supply chains [*Douglas vase* by François Azambourg] and experimenting with new operating models based on an economy dedicated to sharing [*Autoprogettazione* by Enzo Mari].

### Chapter 2: New materials and manufacturing processes

The development and discovery of new materials and new technological manufacturing processes (3D printing, recycling industrial and production waste, reprogramming decommissioned robots etc.) open up all sorts of possibilities for design professionals and facilitate innovation when it comes to designing furniture and products.

Let's take 3D printing as an example, as it has turned the work of designers totally upside down. The first patent connected to this technology was applied for in 1984. Just like industry [car manufacturing, aeronautics, medicine and architecture], the design sector embraced 3D printing to develop new products,

many of which are quite spectacular. The *Miss Shellby* light, designed by Pauline Coudert and Laurent Chabrier in 2012, was one of the first pieces that used this technology.

When the Grand-Hornu Usines et Mines de Houille were founded, Henri De Gorge was keen to make sure the site was self-sufficient in terms of machinery, and decided to build his own workshop. He called upon the services of industrial pioneer, Englishman John Cockerill. Thanks to their expertise, the Grand-Hornu's workshops became a hub of innovation. In 1846, they were the 4<sup>th</sup> Belgian manufacturer chronologically to produce a locomotive, thus becoming pioneers of this new method of transport, constantly incorporating new production methods.

### Chapter 3: Craftsmanship and cutting-edge technology

This chapter identifies how innovators immerse themselves and take inspiration from the craftsmanship honed in historic and hybrid objects, reinterpreting them to create an audacious vision and often surprising results, whether they are adding their twist to the material, the shape or the technique used.

Since the 12<sup>th</sup> century in Belgium, coal was mined using "fourfeyeux" or coal tips, making the most of coal seams on the surface of the land. The invention of the Newcomen water pumping machine in the 18<sup>th</sup> century redefined the practice, which until now had been a rudimentary craft, although the management of underground water continued to pose problems. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the operators of the Grand-Hornu started using a process involving freezing for shaft no. 9. As the coolant (brine) made its way through the pipes around the shaft, it extracted the heat from the surrounding soil, reducing the temperature and freezing the ground.

This method is still common today, such a breach of the boundaries between cutting-edge technology and craftsmanship, modernity and tradition, is a necessity that designers understood and embraced very early on. So the group Unfold Design Studio based its research on bringing together the craftsmanship of the potter or ceramicist, with the unflinching precision of 3D printing techniques. The result is composite objects that subtly combine tradition with modernity. In addition, their work - accessible and documented in Open Source - is based on sharing and developing ideas as a community: a kind of "compagnonnage" 3.0 (compagnonnage refers to the system of craft guilds, where skills are passed on and shared).

Also drawing on the wealth of multi-disciplinary interaction, designer Amandine David blends traditional savoir-faire with digital technology in her creations, like weaving and coding in *Weaving Code*.

### Chapter 4: Reimagining and repurposing

Taking an object, a method or a place and reinventing it, seeing beyond their original function and finding a new purpose, is a creative exercise that is both inspiring and full of challenges, and one that has been adopted by designers in the past and the present.

Whether we're talking about Jinhyun Jeon's sensory dessert spoons, Sylvain Busine and Patrick Everaert's *Neolithic* nutcracker, or Aldo Bakker's containers, the designer's goal is to change the way we use things, to experience new sensations that are more diverse and more subtle than those traditionally associated with these everyday objects.

With *Turborama*, Emma Cogné has chosen to reimagine the protective sheath made of ICTA (a cheap, recyclable plastic material), which is usually hidden away inside our walls, turning it into a modular, colourful interior design object in its own right.

For its part, in its *Softer than Steel* collection, Japanese design company Nendo plays with typical furniture and the traditional features of metal to give its pieces an original new purpose, and an impression of impossible lightness.

Last but by no means least, the redeployment of the Grand-Hornu since the 1970s is the ultimate example of reimagining. This site, once dedicated to coal, was saved and transformed into a venue that's all about contemporary creativity. While some may frown on its new vocation, the essence of the Grand-Hornu endures. This desire of its founding father and the workers at the Grand-Hornu to experiment and innovate continues in the way the CID comes up with its exhibitions and enriches its collection of design pieces.

## SCENOGRAPHY

The task of creating the exhibition's scenography was entrusted to Belgian interior designer and scenographer, Benjamin Stoz. He had already worked with the CID on a number of previous exhibitions, including *Design on Air*, *Serial Eater – food design stories* and *From Belgium with light*.

Benjamin Stoz conjures up coherent, creative, personal environments for museums, trade fairs and retail outlets. He focuses on every aspect of the exhibition space to make sure it works for the audience, the budget, the content and the environment.

Within the context of this exhibition, Benjamin Stoz had to deal with a number of restrictions, all of which he has overcome to create an innovative, modular scenography. Indeed, the CID was keen to make sure the exhibition could be put up and taken down in a short space of time, by a small team, and that it was economical in terms of the materials it required, in other words, that it repurposed as many materials as possible that were already available at the Grand-Hornu.

## LIST OF DESIGNERS

.rad product / François Azambourg / Aldo Bakker / Audrey Bigot et Antoine Plateau / Emma Cogné / Sylvain Busine et Patrick Everaert / Quentin de Coster / Amandine David, Esmé Hofman et Joris van Tubergen / Jinhyun Jeon / Enzo Mari / Nendo / PaulinePlusLuis (Pauline Capdo et Luis Bellenger) / Ben Storms / Unfold Design Studio / Dirk Van der Kooij / Jólán van der Wiel / Olivier van Herpt.

Jólán van der Wiel,  
*Gravity Stool L*, 2013.

© Photo JVDW



Quentin de Coster,  
*Argand*, 2014.

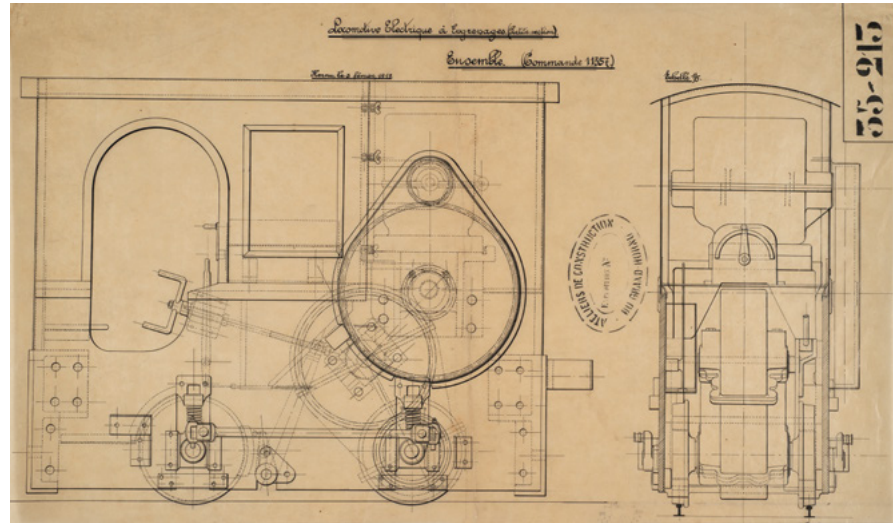
© Photo Quentin de Coster





Geared electric locomotive (Small section) made by the machine building workshops at Grand-Hornu, 1919

© Léon Plaetens  
Archives Grand-Hornu



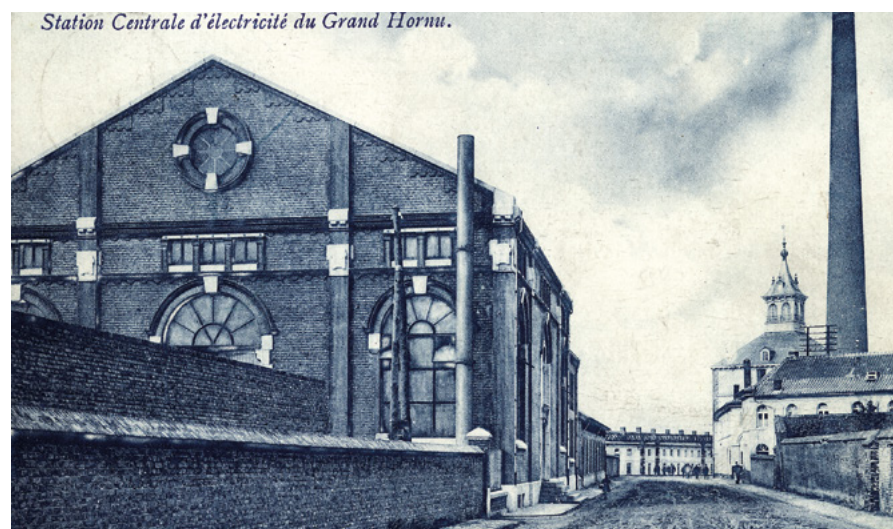
.rad product, Miss Shellby, 2012

© Photo Cid



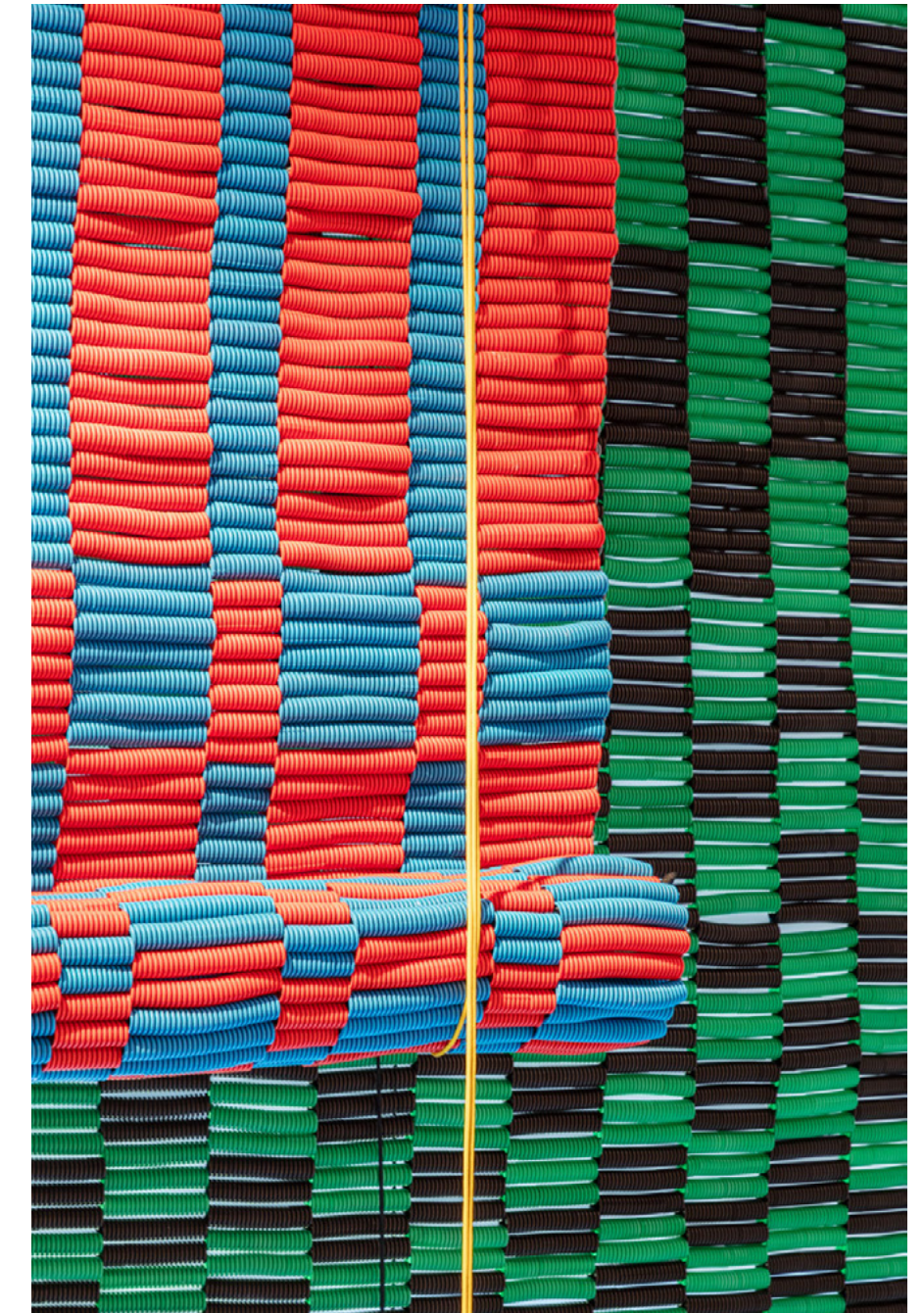
Grand-Hornu Central Electricity Station, n.d.

© Marcel Capouillez



Emma Cogné, *Turborama* (Small awning), 2018.

© Photo Emma Cogné





## ACTIVITIES CONNECTED TO THE EXHIBITION

### **Workshop in the company of the designer Amandine David: *Have a go, experiment, learn to weave...***

As part of the exhibition *From archives to Design. Audacity and innovation*, designer Amandine David will introduce you to her approach to weaving, by immersing you in the world of design.

"We work using our hands (except when we use the loom), with strips of fabric to create "large" scale woven pieces, appreciating both the simplicity of this technique and the endless possibilities that it offers. By using, repurposing or combining basic patterns (canvas, satin, serge etc.), each participant will be able to explore the technique to weave something." Amandine David

The programme includes:

- 10.15am: welcome coffee
- 11am: experience the exhibition
- 12pm-1pm: lunch
- 1pm-4.30pm: workshop

Date: Saturday 15 July 2023.

Price: €20 / €15 students.

Aimed at: teenagers aged 14 and over and adults. Please bring a picnic.

Equipment provided.

To book, call +32 (0)65 61 39 02 or  
email [reservations@grand-hornu.be](mailto:reservations@grand-hornu.be) before 7 July 2023.

### **Family Thursday: *Be a designer for the day!***

Be inspired by one or more pieces in the CID's collection and create your own by following your imagination and desires.

Dates: Thursday 13, 27 July and 10, 24 August

Time: 2pm

Duration: 2hrs (exhibition + workshop)

Price: included in your entry ticket for the site.

For information and to book: +32 (0)65 61 39 02 or [reservations@grand-hornu.be](mailto:reservations@grand-hornu.be).

### **Shuttle to the Design Museum Brussels: Tour of the *Zéphir Busine*. *Designer* exhibition, by Sylvain Busine**

As part of our exhibition, *From archives to Design. Audacity and innovation*, we would love you to come and see the exhibition at the Design Museum Brussels, *Zéphir Busine. Designer*. During this guided tour of the exhibition, led by the artist's grandson, we will find out all about the work of the designer and decorative artist, Zéphir Busine, and in particular his close relationship with glassmaker Boussu.

The programme includes:

- 10.15am: welcome coffee
- 11am: experience the exhibition *From archives to Design. Audacity and innovation*
- 12pm: lunch
- 1.30pm: set off to go to Brussels
- 2.30pm: guided tour of the exhibition *Zéphir Busine. Designer* at the Design Museum Brussels
- 4.30pm: leave Brussels
- 5.30pm: arrive back at Grand-Hornu

Date: Saturday 19 August 2023.

Price: €30 for the day.

To book, call +32 (0)65 61 39 02 or  
email [reservations@grand-hornu.be](mailto:reservations@grand-hornu.be) before 5 August 2023.

### ***What is Design?***

#### **Talk by Marie Pok.**

We think we know everything there is to know about it, or, on the contrary, we think we know nothing, and yet it's right there in front of us all the time. Director of the CID Grand-Hornu Marie Pok will share some stories from its long history, and give you her own take on the CID.

The evening programme includes:

- 6.30pm: guided tour of the exhibition *From archives to Design. Audacity and innovation*
- 7.30pm: talk
- 9pm: drinks

Date: Saturday 2 September 2023.

Price: €10 / €5 students.

To book, call +32 (0)65 61 39 02 or email [reservations@grand-hornu.be](mailto:reservations@grand-hornu.be) before 25 August 2023.

## PARTNERS



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### OPENING TIMES

Every day from 10 AM until 6 PM, except Mondays.  
The Grand-Hornu is closed on 24, 25, 31st December and 1st January.

The office can be reached during weekdays from 8 AM to 4.30 PM.

### ADMISSION FEE

- Combined ticket for the Grand-Hornu site / CID / MACS: €10
- Discount: €2 or €6
- Group rates (minimum 15 ppl.): €6
- School groups: €2
- Free for children under 6
- Free entry on the first Sunday of the month
- Free guided tour from Tuesday to Friday at 3.30 PM, Saturday at 11 AM and 3.30 PM, Sunday at 3 PM and 4.30 PM
- Audio-guides for the historic site: €3  
(FR / DUTCH / GERMAN / ENGL / IT / SP)

Free guided tours for individuals

- From Tuesday to Saturday at 11 AM for the historic site, at 3:30 PM for the design exhibition
- Sunday at 3 PM for the historic site, at 4.30 PM for the design exhibition.

### BOOKING NUMBER

Advance reservation required for guided tours (by appointment) of exhibitions and/or historic site (FR / DUTCH / GERMAN / ENGL).

+32 (0)65 61 39 02  
[reservations@grand-hornu.be](mailto:reservations@grand-hornu.be)

### CATERING

Run by Olivier Devriendt, former second-in-command to Sang Hoon Degeimbre at L'Air du Temps, **Rizom** offers a cuisine that is a cross between cultures. In addition, **Rizom** also offers a new fast food service in the cafeteria, which was recently transformed by designer Benoît Deneufbourg.

[info@rizom-restaurant.be](mailto:info@rizom-restaurant.be)  
[www.rizom-restaurant.be](http://www.rizom-restaurant.be)  
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