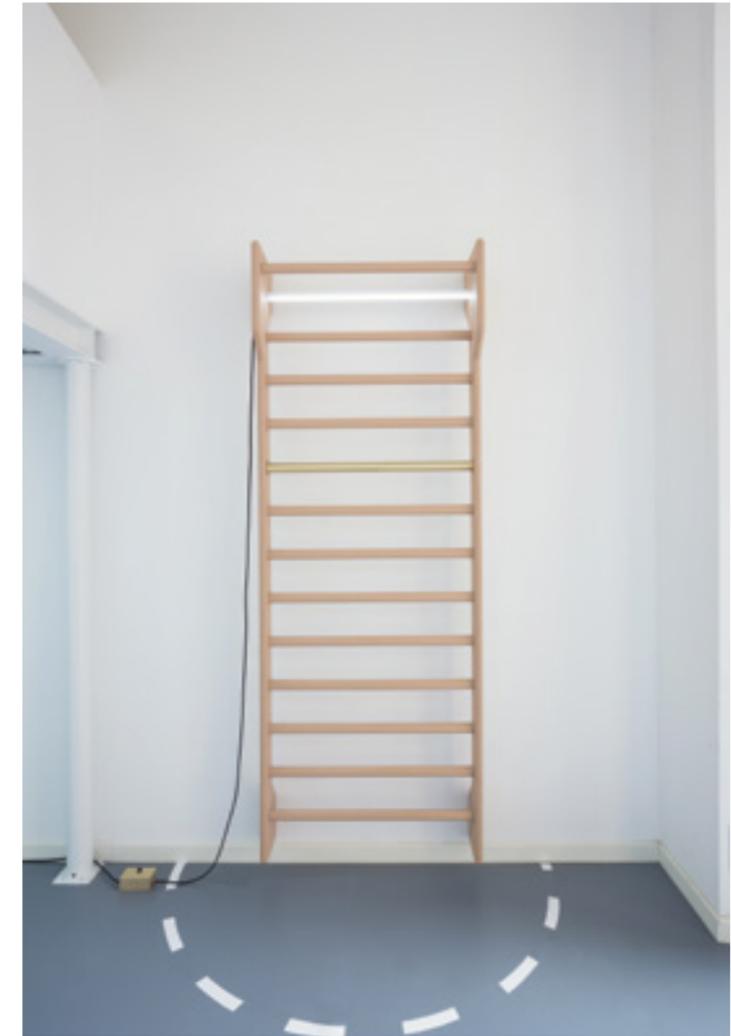
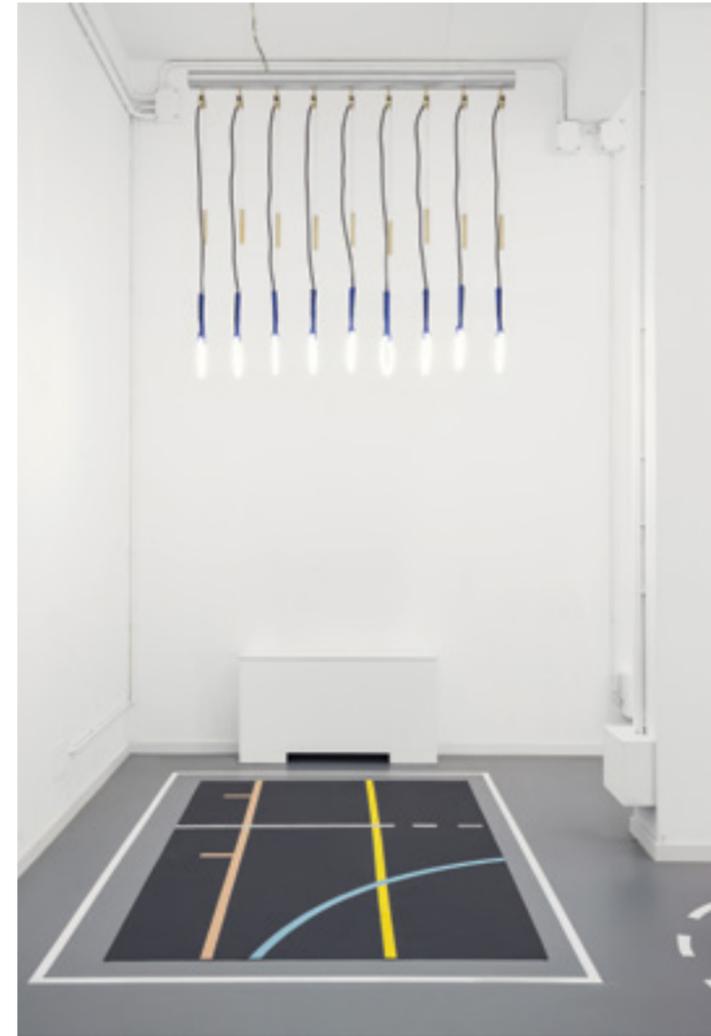


LET'S GET PHYSICAL

— *Atelier Biagetti's Body Building Collection*
In-Forms and Entertains —

When designer Alberto Biagetti and artist Laura Baldassari join creative energies, they produce objects and installations that strike a balance between aesthetic experience and a "functionality" that is packed with surprises. This is beautifully manifested in their latest labor of love, the "Body Building" collection, which fuses the rough crudeness of the gym world with the refinement of design in the most interesting ways. From their Milan based Atelier Biagetti, the design duo have rolled out a polished yet provocative commentary on the current global obsession with fitness and hence our unyielding quest for beauty and perfection. *Curve* hits Biagetti and Baldassari with some pressing questions.



What was the first idea that generated the "Body Building" collection? The idea was actually sparked by a real piece of home gym equipment that Laura bought with the good intention of "getting fit". This machine ended up (inevitably) being abandoned in a corner of one of the least used rooms of the house, and became an object that we threw clothes on – from a fitness machine to a clotheshorse. The fact that this object, designed with one use in mind, should become another when taken out of context (out of the gym and into the home) was interesting, and we wanted to explore it further. So we developed this concept of luxury, hand-made furniture that in many ways resembles traditional gym equipment, but is designed with another function in mind, not to stress the body but to accommodate and embrace it.

Did it occur during one of your workouts? No, more like in an "anti-workout"! When we design we try to maintain a kind of detached point of view, so that we can look on the world around us objectively.

Why did you choose to call it as such? We are fascinated by the idea that if you want you really can "construct" your own body as if it were architecture. It is not just what you are born with, of course you do get what you are given, but then you have a series of choices to make – how to use it, what to put into it, what you apply to it, where you put it. The name conjures up an idea of strength and dynamism, of the discipline necessary to pursue the quest for perfection – it is a very evocative name.

Which piece was the very first born in the collection? The "Anelli" chandelier. We loved the idea of the Olympic gymnasts' rings, where the body is pushed to its very limits to achieve aesthetic and disciplinary perfection through equilibrium, strength and willpower. Conceptually, it was the perfect centerpiece of the collection.

While no two pieces in the collection are the same there is a common thread between all. Please point out the points of



distinction and the commonalities between the unique pieces. The collection was developed as a whole, with one idea in mind. We developed a moodboard for the entire collection with different color, material and texture combinations and all the pieces are embodiments of that mood. We believe that people want to own personal objects, pieces that nobody else has that, and which reflect them as individuals. This is why we create unique pieces, even if they are part of a collection with a strong theme.

Were you thinking of any specific athletes while creating this collection? We were inspired by athletes who are so dedicated and disciplined as to be really at the top of their game – like the Italian gymnast Yuri Chechi (known as the “Lord of the Rings” over here) or Mr. Universe-type bodybuilders – Arnold Schwarzenegger was literally our studio pin-up while brainstorming the collection. To reach their level, they really do have to live and breathe their chosen sports. They have to look to every detail in order to achieve the perfection and performance that they desire. So they have to watch what they eat, drink, how much they sleep, they have to train in and out

of the gym... We tried to include an idea of this almost obsessive attention to detail in the collection – although in our case it is the attention to the detail of the design object, not the human body.

How did you pick the names for each piece? They’re quite simple really, they are the actual Italian names or derivatives of the original gym equipment that the pieces are related to – so the chandelier is called “Anelli” which means “rings”, the low table is called “Manubri” which means “dumbbells”, the “Cavallina” bench means “horse”, as in the pommel horse. The piece that is slightly different is the “Yoga” carpet, which is called as such because a friend of ours said, “Wow, this would be perfect for yoga!” – and the name just stuck.

This is your most elaborate collection to date, with the most number of items. How come? And over how long did you work on developing the collection? We first had the initial idea for this collection a couple of years ago, but we really put pen to paper immediately after Milan Design Week 2014... This collection has a “completeness” about it, which we have



been developing over the years. The role that Maria Cristina Didero played as curator has a lot to do with it. She has this fantastic intuition that really did help mold the collection and define the pieces.

A sense of irony is evoked through these pieces particularly in the contrast between rich materials used and the unrefined elements found in a gym. As the world is seeing more and more body obsessed gym rats and gym bunnies, do you think some fitness freaks would take offence by the strong message you are trying to send? I hope not, it is not meant to offend, just to get people thinking. You can interpret this collection any way you like, for example some people who are “anti-gym” might see it as ironic or a joke, or somebody who is passionate about their body or working out might take it seriously, think of it as homage to their way of life... When we launched the collection, we had a group of bodybuilders there to greet the guests and help show the pieces – they loved the collection.

In true Italian spirit, there is a sense of pride in your Milanese heritage and we sense that in the Bonjour Milan series. The name of the collection is intriguing. How does this collection convey the spirit of Milan? Milan is a complex city. It is beautiful and historic, but you either love it or hate it. Lots of people consider it to be a big industrial city, which is ugly, chaotic and hostile, but it isn't. It has so many hidden beauties, courtyards and gardens of ancient palaces hidden behind closed doors, frescos and paintings by great masters in private homes and unheard of galleries, thousands of years of history which are constantly being revealed by archaeological digs... and yet it is a city that looks to the future and to the world outside. Bonjour Milan paid homage to all of this – the collection visually explored the idea of a deep past to be discovered but also of a future to be explored.

When Alberto Biagetti and Laura Baldassari work together, what are the boundaries that they make sure to respect and

what are the lines that they willingly cross? We like all our pieces to be handmade in Milan, not just so that we can have a hands-on input into the manufacturing process but also because it is a matter of principle and pride for us... Within these boundaries we let ourselves experiment as much as possible and by working with the artisans and listening to what they have to say, by introducing them to new materials and shapes we try to achieve a new and ever changing aesthetic impact. There are two main boundaries in our work that we try to find a balance between: the first is that the technical experimentation we commit to is not just for the sake of it – there is always an aim, a concept we want to express, a scenario we want to evoke. The other main boundary is that all the items that we design are actually functional, not just purely decorative.

How would you describe the magic that you do together? It is a perfect alloy. We find an idea that is the catalyst for the reaction, and then we come perfectly balanced, we complement and counteract each other. Sometimes we both let our imaginations run wild and go off on tangents – the thing is that the directions are different, so in the end we always find a compromise and equilibrium between the two.

Your repertoire is very varied and you have not pigeonholed yourself in a single direction. What are you excited to work on next? We're already in the throws of developing our new collection. It is still difficult to describe it in detail at this stage but what we can say is that the project is very ambitious and we're trying to get NASA involved!

What's keeping the studio busy at the moment? As an atelier we do not just work on individual objects but also on creating whole scenarios and this year, thanks to the “Body Building” collection we are actually working on some luxury gyms designed ad hoc for the homes of some of our clients and collectors who want their gym space to be super special – just the way we like to design.