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ATELIER BIAGETTI'S ALBERTO BIAGETTI AND LAURA BALDASSARI WITH DESIGNS FROM THEIR BODY BUILDING COLLECTION, TO BE UNVEILED DURING SALONE DEL MOBILE

Milan Preview 2015

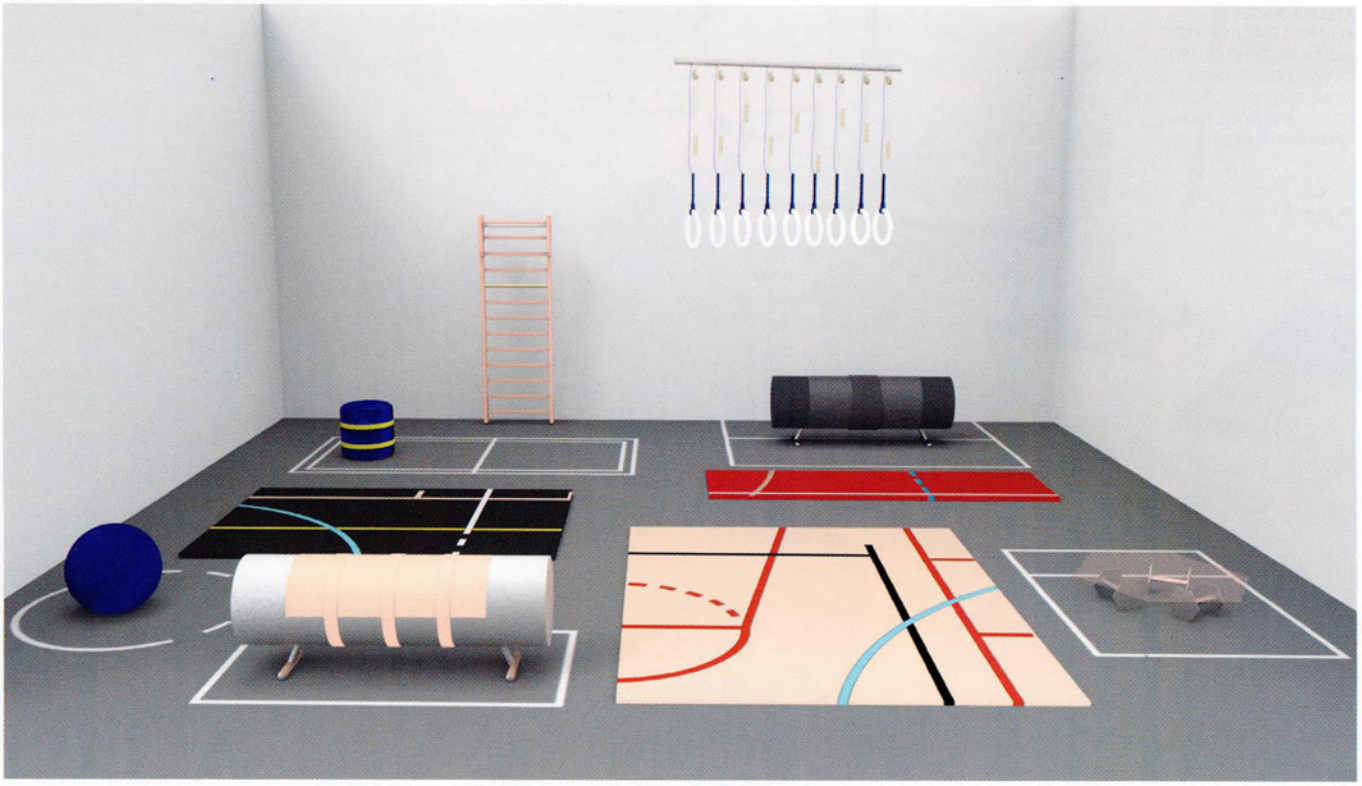
Fit parade

Milan's Atelier Biagetti shows its design muscle with a collection of gym-inspired furnishings

PHOTOGRAPHY: ALBERTO ZANETTI WRITER: ROSA BERTOLI

Hoping for a healthier lifestyle, artist Laura Baldassari brought home a step machine, which was immediately hidden in the laundry room and used as a clothes rack instead. Fast-forward a few months, and the (ugly and unloved) step machine has inspired a collection that cleverly elevates humble gym equipment to design star.

Designed by Atelier Biagetti – comprising Baldassari and her life/work partner, designer Alberto Biagetti – the Body Building collection is a playful take on familiar gym shapes; part aesthetic entertainment, part formal exercise. Biagetti and Baldassari's »



collaboration is an ongoing dialogue: the pair throw challenges at each other throughout the creative process, resulting in an eclectic mix of colours and materials.

The furniture collection is a typical Atelier Biagetti provocation: elevating the apparently mundane through the use of precious materials, exquisite craftsmanship and ironic execution. The studio's 2013 'Vincent' chairs, designed to mimic a traditional wicker chair partly destroyed by a cat's claws, are a perfect example of how the pair recast design's supporting players in a starring role. 'Our domestic objects are designed to become protagonists on a stage,' says Baldassari.

With the Body Building collection, the concept is taken to the next level, creating a humorous, luxurious interpretation of an archetypal gym. The inspiration is not today's hi-tech fitness equipment, but more traditional apparatus such as wall bars, vaulting horses, weights and hanging rings. Their vintage look is enriched with precious, unexpected materials – silver calfskin is mixed with bright blue horse hair, navy fur sits next to neoprene, pink crystal is set beside steel.

Although the pieces are all about visual impact, Biagetti is quick to point out their practical side. 'The ball chair is totally functional,' he says – he modelled it on a wellness ball he used himself. 'And you could do yoga on the leather rug.' The wall bars are also a reproduction of real gym equipment, albeit covered in the finest nude calf leather with brass details, and transformed into a lamp with a neon tube. Other objects have been given a new functionality: a row of gymnastic rings becomes a chandelier, while steel weights form the base for a coffee table.

There is a mix of practicality and imagination in equal parts, with each detail analysed to get the best of both worlds. Baldassari explains how the designs are modelled after items originally made to stress the body. 'Our pieces embrace the body, rather than stressing it,' she says.

TOP, THE GYM-INSPIRED FURNITURE COLLECTION, INCLUDING LEATHER RUGS, A CHANDELIER MADE OF GYMNASTIC RINGS AND A COFFEE TABLE SUPPORTED BY DUMBBELLS

ABOVE, SOME OF THE DESIGNS FEATURED ON THIS MONTH'S NEWSSTAND COVER, PHOTOGRAPHED BY PIERPAOLO FERRARI

Atelier Biagetti's work is partly defined by its collaborations with curators and local artisans. The artisans ensure the highest levels of craftsmanship, although they are mostly used to much more traditional Italian design, explains Biagetti. 'They first look at us like we are aliens when we ask them to produce our prototypes: they have always done the same thing, and we are asking them not to do the same thing. But then they follow our lead,' he concludes.

The curators Biagetti and Baldassari work with (usually borrowed from the art world), on the other hand, give them new stimuli and allow them to be innovative with each collection. For Body Building, design guru Maria Cristina Didero took the helm and worked with the couple to develop the initial concept. 'Biagetti and Baldassari managed to adapt [the fitness] universe to the domestic realm, developing an anti-gym idea with sophistication and elegance,' says Didero. She and the designers agree that this collaboration was fun for all involved, an experience and outcome that Didero defines as an 'ironic hymn to happiness'.

Set to be presented at the Atelier Biagetti's Milanese headquarters – transformed into a gym for the occasion – the Body Building collection is a witty nod to society's obsession with the body beautiful. Even the artwork used to promote the show features a vintage image of a body builder's pumped biceps. 'I think it's interesting to talk about sport right now, at a time when the body seems to be increasingly important,' says Biagetti. The idea of the mind being detached from the body is one of his ongoing existential concerns. 'There are people who live thinking they have no body,' he concludes, 'and there are people who think their body is all they have.' ✱

'Body Building', by Atelier Biagetti, 4 piazza Arcole, 14 – 19 April, atelierbiagetti.com