

17.01.14

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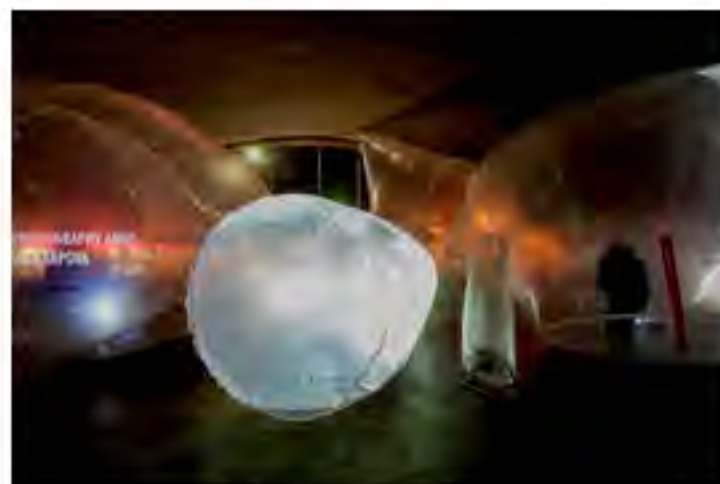
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Jörg Schellmann's work for e15, launching this week at imm Cologne. Pictured are the Sitz bench and Profil shelving

REPORT

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## Jörg Schellmann for e15

Cologne

13 January 2014

One of the launches of this week's imm Cologne trade fair is a furniture collection for the German brand e15. Developed by Jörg Schellmann, the pieces are interesting not only for their formal properties, but also because of Schellmann's background as an art dealer and limited experience within design. The e15 range, Schellmann's first for a major manufacturer, therefore provides an intriguing case study for understanding the realities of the furniture industry.

Since 1969 Schellmann has worked within the art world, publishing editioned work from artists such as Jeff Koons, Dan Flavin and Roy Lichtenstein. Born in 1944, Schellmann is late coming to design – in 2006 he launched a furniture company, the result, he says, of a longterm fascination with architecture and design.

Since its foundation, Schellmann Furniture has published not only works by established figures such as Joseph Beuys and Stefan Diez, but has also provided a vehicle for Schellmann's own designs. "One of the challenges has been coming to understand that designing a piece I like and designing a piece that can be sold to the public are not necessarily the same thing," he says.

Cologne is therefore a significant step for Schellmann. Whereas previously he has had a high level of control over his studio's hitherto modest output, his partnership with e15 represents a move into industrial design and wide-scale manufacture. With further work from Schellmann's studio expected to be launched by the leading Italian brand Moroso in April, it is a collection that sets the template for how his practice is likely to develop in the years ahead.

The designs themselves are simple and well-defined. A traditional wooden table and bench set – Platz and Spitz – are enlivened with a diagonal crossbeam that provides support, while these wooden pieces are joined by Profil, an industrial L-shaped aluminium shelving system that is produced through extrusion. All three pieces embody the kind of straightforwardness of construction and concept that one might expect from a figure who moved into design after experiencing disillusionment with the art world. "That industry seemed to have become more and more artificial," says Schellmann. "More about money, social impact and pretension."

Furniture initially promised an opportunity to work in a more individualistic manner. "When I started in furniture I intended to do the distribution myself, but it turned out to be too complicated," says Schellmann. "So we became convinced we should use a professional company. To control production, inclusive of quality control and so forth, is too much for our very small business, so we had to use existing companies. Of course, when you're considering German manufacturers e15 is one of the first ideas you have."

The collaboration has proved a smooth one, with e15's creative director Philipp Mainzer taking on three products that Schellmann had already developed and allowing him to maintain a strong artistic control over the pieces. "Philipp only made tiny changes," says Schellmann. "On the original table I had screws, real fat screws in black, and he wanted to get rid of those, but that is practically the only thing changed for e15."

The e15 pieces, and in particular the Profil shelving, were designed to be suited to industry. The decision to work with extrusion was motivated by a desire for simple manufacture. The aluminium form is extruded in one-piece from the machine, with its brackets already incorporated into the design's profile. The metal then simply needs to be cut for size before the finished product is powder-coated.<sup>1</sup>

This simplicity of manufacture was central to the design's conception. "When you make a chair or shelving for instance, it's almost impossible to invent something really new," says Schellmann. "So in this case I wasn't really trying to make a highly original shelf. My approach was to try and do something very simple, but in a way that is still aesthetically interesting."

While the e15 pieces are intended to be simple, serially produced pieces, they represent an increasingly savvy approach from Schellmann. An early furniture collection from the studio, the Frame series, failed to attract interest from manufacturers because of its austere, industrial aesthetic. These works, steel frame units that incorporate plastic boxes for storage, will now be distributed and manufactured in-house.

"Companies were concerned that the industrial look of the pieces wouldn't please the public, whereas pieces that were a little more elegant and a little less industrial were accepted," says Schellmann. "Of course, there is a market for pieces like Frame, but it is a smaller and younger demographic than for other pieces. Intellectually I have had to distinguish between a piece that I want to make and wanting to design a piece that has qualities that companies can work with."

The e15 range is a positive step in this direction. The works are industrial and straightforward, yet avoid the austerity of Schellmann's earlier works. It is a design approach that chimes with that of one of Schellmann's role models, the American artist Donald Judd (1928-1994), whose minimalist 20th-century furniture designs were widely lauded for their simplicity and elegance.

"When I'm now making pieces that are acceptable for trade, I don't feel it's a bad compromise," reasons Schellmann. "I think Judd's influence is obvious on me as he was always working with the idea of making a piece simple and sculptural. The question is how can I do something very simple, but which still looks, almost, like a piece of art or a sculpture?"

WORDS Oli Stratford, *editor of Disegno Daily*

imm Cologne opens today at the Koelnmesse and runs until 19 January

<sup>1</sup> Side panels may also be added.

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