

DESIGN MUSEUM



Gijs Bakker
Co-founder of Droog Design



Renny Ramakers
Co-founder of Droog Design



Chest of Drawers, 1991
Design: Tejo Remy



Chandelier '85 Bulbs, 1993
Design: Rody Graumans

Droog

Design Collective

Since 1993, when it was co-founded in Amsterdam by the product designer Gijs Bakker and design historian Renny Ramakers, DROOG has championed the careers of such designers as Hella Jongerius and Marcel Wanders, while defining a new approach to design by mixing materials and interacting with the user.

Discover more about Droog and its work at droogdesign.nl

When Renny Ramakers showed a few pieces of furniture assembled by young Dutch designers from cheap industrial materials or found objects, like old dresser drawers and driftwood, at exhibitions in the Netherlands and Belgium in early 1992, she sold so little that she barely covered her costs.

Even so, the pieces - a bookcase made from strips of paper and triplex by the Jan Konings and Jurgen Bey; a driftwood cupboard designed by Piet Hein Eek and a chest of drawers constructed by Tejo Remy by tying half-a-dozen wooden drawers into a bundle with thick cord - attracted so much attention that Ramakers, then editor-in-chief of the design magazine *Industrieel Ontwerpen* was convinced that she had discovered “a clear break from the past”, in other words, a genuinely new approach to design.

Hearing that Gijs Bakker, the product designer and professor at the Design Academy in Eindhoven, was planning to exhibit the work of his present and past students at the 1993 Milan Furniture Fair, she suggested that they collaborate on a joint show. “Before we started out Gijs and I agreed,” recalled Ramakers. “If we’ve made a mistake and they think it’s worth nothing we’ll shut up shop. If it catches on, we’ll keep going.”

The fourteen objects they showed in Milan ranged from Konings and Bey’s paper bookcase and Remy’s bundle of found wooden drawers, to Marcel Wanders’ Set Up Shades stack of ready-made lamps, Hella Jongerius’ bubbly polyurethane bath mat and a chandelier of lightbulbs devised by Rody Graumans. They called the collection Droog Design after the Dutch word ‘droog’, which translates into English as ‘dry’ as in the dry wit, or wry, subtle sense of humour that characterised all the pieces they exhibited.

Droog Design did catch on. It was the hit of the 1993 Milan Furniture Fair. The French newspaper *Libération* suggested that the “unknowns” responsible for Droog should be given a medal for *spiritual savoir vivre*. Many of the pieces unveiled in that first Droog exhibition - like Graumans’ 85 Bulbs Chandelier - are now regarded as iconic objects of the early 1990s. And many of the young designers featured in that show, such as Hella Jongerius and Marcel Wanders, have since emerged as pivotal figures in contemporary design.

Looking back it is easy to see why Droog made such a splash. By the early 1990s contemporary design had rebelled against the self-parodic cacophony of candy coloured plastics and kitsch motifs of the mid-1980s Memphis movement by adopting a restrained, sometimes overly retentive minimalist aesthetic. As Renny Ramakers put it: “Design became much more sober.”

Droog was different. It shared the simplicity of minimalism and its careful choice of materials, but deployed humour – albeit a dry or ‘droog’ humour - to strike an emotional bond with the user. Rody Graumans’ 85 bulb chandelier is an inspired example of lateral thinking in design, but it is impossible not to smile at the verve with which the designer transformed an everyday object like a standard light bulb into a spectacular chandelier. The stack of standard lampshades that Marcel Wanders turned into his Set Up Shades lamp and



B-Set tableware, 1998
 Design: Hella Jongerius
 Distribution: DMD/The Product Matters

Tejo Remy's bundle of battered old dresser drawers elicited the same response. "It is a comment on many things: on plenitude, over-consumption, the pretensions that beset the profession," said Ramakers of Remy's piece.

Cheered by the response to their Milan exhibition, Bakker and Ramakers established the Droog Design Foundation in the following January and struck an agreement with the Voorburg-based company DMD (alias Development Manufacturing and Distribution) to make and market its products, mostly as limited editions. Those products, according to Droog's statutes, would be those which "in terms of quality and content fit with the image and way of thinking communicated by Droog Design: original ideas (and) clear concepts which have been shaped in a wry, no-nonsense manner".

Droog staged a second show at the 1994 Milan Furniture Fair and began discussions with the Centraal Museum in Utrecht which would eventually acquire and exhibit the entire collection until 1999. Bakker and Ramakers realised that the designers championed by Droog would have more impact if their work was shown collectively, than they would by exhibiting individually. "All those designs would never have become as well known if we had not shown them together," observed Gijs Bakker.



Chest Box, 2001
 Design: Jan Konings
 Production: Picus

Rather than simply select a collection of designs for the 1995 Milan Furniture Fair, the Droog duo decided to initiate new work by liaising with the Delft University to experiment with new materials on the Dry Tech I and II projects and later the Dry Bathing collection of bathroom products in collaboration with DMD. Droog then began work on its first collaborative project with a private sector partner in 1997 by developing a collection of ceramics with Rosenthal, the German porcelain manufacturer. One of these pieces was the white porcelain Sponge Vase modelled by Marcel Wanders on a natural sponge.



Chest Box, 2001
 Design: Jan Konings
 Production: Picus

Bakker and Ramakers have since developed the Droog concept not by repeating and refining the original formula but by experimenting with new products, new designers and new industrial partners while adhering to the same principles. From creating visionary concepts for a New York Times millennium competition and designing a flagship store on rue Saint-Honoré in Paris for Mandarin Duck, the Italian luggage company, to devising the Dry Kitchen made from different variations on the same modular white ceramic tile, Droog has continued to reinvent its core principles on different scales and in different disciplines in industrial projects, books and exhibitions.

For the 2001 Milan Furniture Fair, it commissioned a group of young designers to dream up visionary ways of reconceiving the wooden cigar boxes made by Picus, a traditional Dutch box maker. The following year Droog commandeered a flophouse hotel in central Milan where another group of designers was each allocated a room and invited to create an intervention.



Tree Trunk Bench, 2002
 Design: Jurgen Bey

The core of Droog's work is its collection of more than 120 products, which were either created by one of its group projects or commissioned from their designers by Bakker and Ramakers. "The criteria are flexible and shaped by developments in product culture and the designers' own initiatives," states Droog. "The only constant is that the concept has validity today; that it is worked out along clear-cut, compelling lines; and that product usability is a must. Within this framework literally anything goes."

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