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15 Amazing Designs That Were Impossible to Make 15 Years Ago

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Richard DuPont's untitled sculpture uses data from a self-scan he did back in 2001. *Image: Courtesy of the artist*

Post-digital is a confusing phrase. It's hard to know what people mean when they throw it around—are we done with digital? What does digital even *mean* anymore? The definition is blurry. But to Ron Labaco, post-digital is less about a definition than it is about a mindset. Labaco, a curator at the Museum of Arts and Design in New York City, has put together a massive exhibition of digitally fabricated works from 2005 to present day for the recently opened *Out of Hand: Materializing the Postdigital*.

The collection of more than 100 works is a comprehensive survey of design pieces and works of art that illustrate Labaco's point—which is that over the past decade, there's been a shift in the way that we talk and think about digital fabrication. Meaning, as technology becomes more ingrained in our daily lives, we're moving away from a preoccupation with the technology itself into discussions about how it can be used and applied. In other words, we've entered the post-digital era. "These technologies are now being utilized as tools," Labaco explains. "So it's part of the toolkit as much as a chisel or as much as a paintbrush."

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In the case of *Out of Hand*, digital fabrication means a lot of things. There are fully 3-D printed pieces like Naim Josefi's *Melonia Shoe*. Then there are CNC cut works like Maya Lin's stunning foam iceberg. Nike's Vapor Laser Talon running cleat, which features a 3-D printed plate are on show, as is a necklace by Marc Newson with 2000 diamonds and sapphires arranged in a fractal pattern. It's an odd mix of pieces, but Labaco has arranged all of them under cohesive conceptual umbrellas like "Remixing the Figure," which features a 3-D printed dress that Shapeways created for Dita Von Teese and "New Geometries," which explores how mathematics and science have impacted art and design.



Joris Laarman's *Bone Armchair* is created with marble resin and is meant to mimic bone structures. *Image: Courtesy of the artist*

You can appreciate many of the included pieces through pictures—Wim Delvoye's Twisted Dump Truck, an intricately laser cut steel piece that appears to be made from Victorian lace, is impressive two-dimensionally—but it's not until you see the pieces in person that you grasp how far digital fabrication has come. "I wanted for there to be an interesting dialogue between the virtual world and the real world because I think when we see things online we tend to believe we've experienced it," he says. "I wanted people to know it's a different experience to see something two dimensionally on a screen and to see the object in real life."

Labaco points to Richard Dupont's trippy life-size sculpture of himself that greets visitors upon entering the exhibition. Back in 2001, the artist scanned his entire body and has since been manipulating that digital data to create physical sculptures. The bizarro mannequin is an optical illusion; as you circle the sculpture the outline of it fades away and it's almost as though you're looking at something completely different. Dupont's piece is a perfect example of the melding of digital and craftsman methods of creation—using digital data, Dupont was able to mill the wavy form of his body, which he then created a mold of and cast in polyurethane. "It shows how practitioners are using these technologies in different ways but also as part of a larger process," Labaco explains.

On the second floor of the museum, Shapeways has set up a 3-D printing workshop, which allows visitors to get a feel for how additive fabrication really works. There's a Formlabs on hand, and people can get themselves 3-D scanned. "Everything in this show is amazing and looks expensive and out of this world,"

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explains Duann Scott, a design evangelist at Shapeways. “But you can’t touch it, so we want that to be the opposite. You can feel the materials, have a go at some 3-D modeling, and get the idea that they can access this now.”

The interactivity underscores the idea that in the art and design world, technologies like 3-D printing are becoming more an extension of the artist or designer and less a fancy new process that needs to be talked about. It’s becoming so common to use some form of digital fabrication in making and creating, that we’re going to have to begin dedicating entire exhibitions to totally analog works of art. As Labaco points out, even the technology used to create the works in *Out of Hand* is already outdated. “It’s actually the past in many ways,” Labaco says of the featured technology. “What is happening right now is building up on this, so if this seems like the future to you, you can only imagine what’s going on in the minds of people working in this field.”

Out of Hand: Materializing the Postdigital will be at MAD until July 6, 2014