ANTI-MATERIALS

By Hannah Robinson and Aleksandra Szymanska

28 : 08 : 2014 Value Redefined : Luxury : Ephemeral Materials

Conventions are shifting. A group of designers is starting new conversations and questioning the value of materials, creating a new hierarchy.

Introduction

Material Illusions by Sophie Rowley

‘What do we appreciate more? A surprising process, the material, or the time that goes into making the material that makes the product valuable?’ Sophie Rowley asks LS:N Global.

Time and process are replacing precious materials as indictors of value and thereby challenging conventional ideas about luxury. Designers are re-appropriating previously disregarded materials – including cheap common substances such as salt and sugar, waste products and pollution particles – and treating them as untapped resources. ‘People appreciate the surprise in my material samples. It becomes a game, where people are guessing what the source material was – it’s a kind of illusion that fascinates them,’ says Rowley.

This new direction sees natural and artificial materials viewed on an equal footing. The visual language fuses earthy qualities and textures with highly synthetic treatments, emphasised through accents of highly saturated, chemical colours.

Ephemeral Spaces
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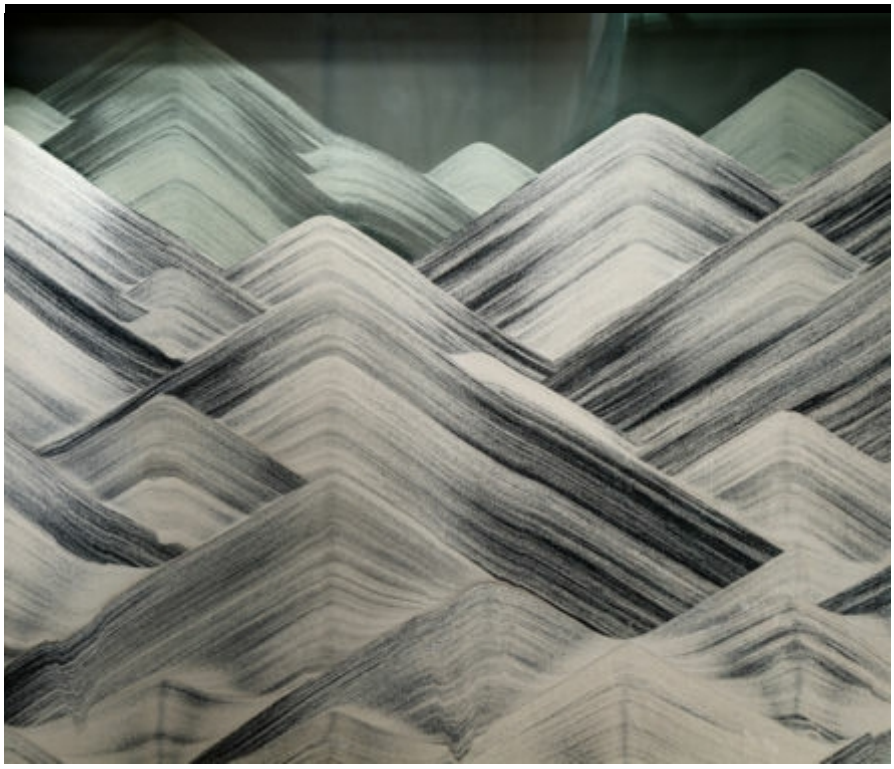

House of Dust by Antonino Cardillo, Frida Escobedo's installation for Aesop, New York, Floating Garden by Motoi Yamamoto, Riverbed by Olafur Eliasson, Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, House of Dust by Antonino Cardillo

The beauty of the ephemeral and transient is being explored through installations.

Architect **Frida Escobedo** designed an in-store installation for Aesop in Brooklyn that artfully portrayed the movement of time and reflected the ephemeral nature of the temporary retail space. ‘This installation for Aesop reflects the passing of time in the way of an inverse sedimentation,' explains Escobedo in a statement displayed alongside the work. Layers of black and beige grains of sand were poured into a large glass box set against mint green hues, reminiscent of an abstract mountain scene. The sand gradually moved downwards and out of the box through a hole, shifting the pattern over a five-month period and illustrating temporality.

Experimenting with a similar aesthetic and resource, **Motoi Yamamoto** creates large-scale installations composed entirely from salt particles. Inspired by the temporality of life and memory, Yamamoto hand draws intricate patterns that are reminiscent of storms, the movement of chemical spills and reeling tides. Each small cell pattern drawn with the salt is designed to represent a fragment of passing time. The delicate and temporal nature evokes a beautiful chaos. At the end of the exhibition at Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art, visitors broke down the salt structure by hand.

Olafur Eliasson installed a texturised riverbed at Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Denmark. The installation is also designed to be ever-changing, as visitors are prompted to engage with the space and move elements of the set around. White, clinical cubic walls contain the space and form a crude juxtaposition between the natural and the man-made.

In **Antonino Cardillo**'s architectural project House of Dust, the ceilings of a series of rooms are rough and raw, evoking the texture of piled particles of dust juxtaposed with vibrant acidic fuchsia lighting. 'In this house, classical orders and proportions celebrate dust,' says Cardillo.

Common Treasures
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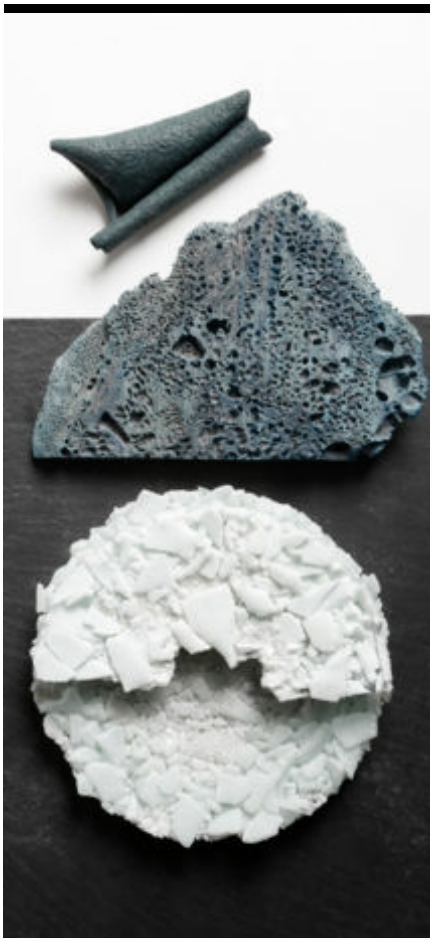
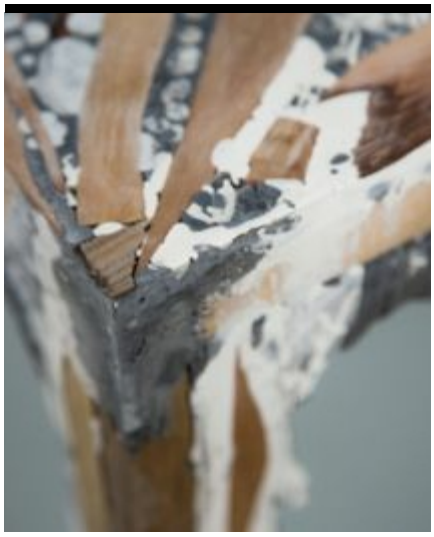




Material Illusions by Sophie Rowley, Salt Drum by AM/MA studio, De Natura Fossilium by Formafantasma, Quad Table by AM/MA studio, Project Saccharum by Ella Bulley, Sediment Objects by Ruben de la Rive Box, Material Illusions by Sophie Rowley

Challenging conventional luxury materials, a wave of designers is treating common ingredients and materials with new processes to create aesthetics which are halfway between natural and faux.

Material Illusions by **Sophie Rowley**, ‘derived from an attraction to the mundane, hyper-common and unspectacular’, is a sophisticated collection of interior objects in a cool mint and blue palette, composed from compressed layers of materials including denim, glass and styrofoam. ‘The exploration of alternative materials to replace the increasingly rare and precious natural materials could be seen as preparational for future times,’ reads Rowley’s accompanying text. Formed in clean simple shapes, some of the delicate surfaces appear marbleized, and others are reminiscent of vibrant spongy coral.

Also making use of commonplace materials, **AM/MA Studio** has created sculptural furniture composed from pink Himalayan salt, sand and coffee grains. Cast with peach and jade-toned smooth concrete, the abstract sculptural forms present a contrast of geodic textures and tones whilst challenging the perception of low-cost commodities. The pieces also investigate the 'shared language between art and furniture', according to designer Fernando Mastrangelo.

Saccharum by **Ella Bulley** looks at the devaluation of sugar cane and her work proposes elevating the crop through craft. White sugar is transformed into a precious artefact in Bulley’s hand-made sugar cane tableware. In line with this, during **Frieze New York**, **Galleria Fortes Vilaça** presented a collection of coins cast from solid salt. The pieces by Rivane Neuenschwander referenced the changing notions of value and looked back to a time when salt was used as currency.

Seeking alternatives to the natural and progressively precious materials used in design, sediment by **Ruben de la Rive Box** is a series of furniture composed from waste material that mimics the aesthetic of sedimentary layers. The layers appear to be created by minerals that have shifted and settled over time, but have actually been achieved through a less time-consuming man-made process.‘Like a scientist taking earth samples or an archaeologist searching for an insight into the past, I try to induce the surprise of revealing a hidden treasure and show the time that went into creating the volume of material,’ says the designer.

Fake Fossils
Fake Fossils

Morphologies material research by Sarah Linda Forrer, stone perfume bottle, Tumblr image, Primal Skin by Annemiek van der Beek, Primal Skin by Annemiek van der Beek, Traditional Futures by Shubhi Sachan, Morphologies material research by Sarah Linda Forrer

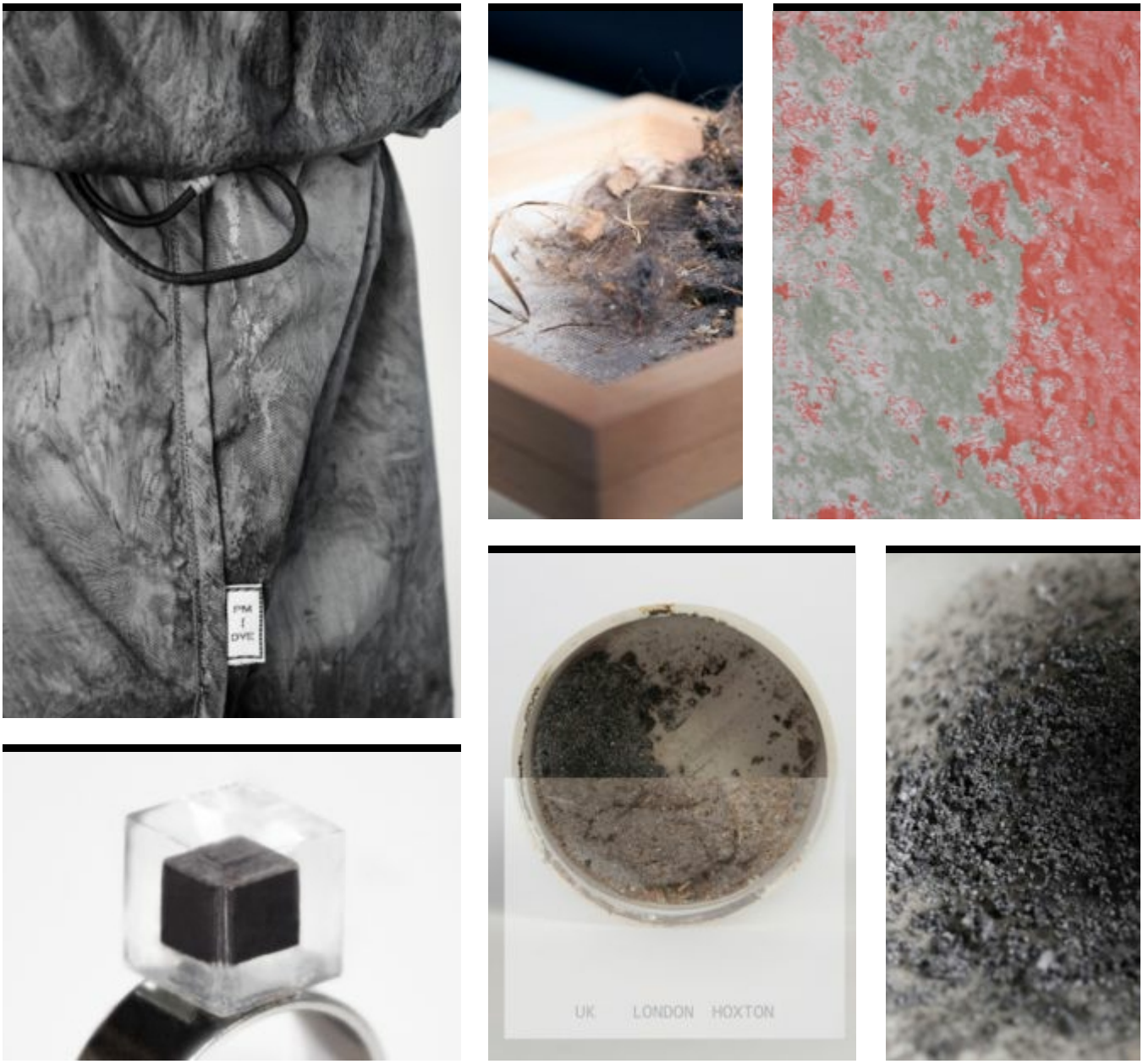
Designers are crafting beauty products and tools from raw materials, some regarded as waste.

Traditional Futures by CSM graduate **Shubhi Sachan** redefines the value of rice husk ash, by exploring its ancient use in cleansing. ‘The idea of the project is to revive the traditional uses of the material which has been lost in the modernisation of lifestyles,’ Sachan told LS:N Global. She mixed raw rice husk ash with oil to create an exfoliator, and created Zallaki, an incense burner and kohl applicator, using finely ground rice husk, with liquidised rice bran wax acting as the binding agent.

Cosmetic tools in **Sarah Linda Forrer**'s Morphologies are crafted from coarse, fossil-like materials and ephemeral sponge textures are created from lava stone. With her project, Forrer is blurring the boundaries between artificial and natural materials, giving equal value to both and highlighting the fake fossil structures with saturated, almost chemical colours. 'My aim was to create fossil artefacts, between man-made and natural, and to morph the crafted and the raw,' Forrer tells LS:N Global. For more examples of beauty products embracing an unkempt and raw aesthetic, read our **Feral Grace** micro-inspire.

Primal Skin by **Annemiek van der Beek** is a make-up set employing raw ingredients such as coal, clay and mineral stones. Designed to make the beauty experience more acceptable for men, the set includes sturdy applicators reminiscent of miners' tools. Another project seeking to give a more manly aesthetic to beauty products is Barb, a perfume concept created by students at the British Higher School of Arts and Design in Moscow, where the flask is embedded in a piece of rock.

Pollution Patterns
Pollution Patterns



The Colour of Air by Tino Seubert, San Polo, I Sestieri textile collection by Acqua Alta, Spiritualism, Craft and Waste by Ágústa Sveinsdóttir, Dust Matters by Lucie Libotte, Dust Matters by Lucie Libotte, Smog Ring by Studio Roosegaarde

Treating waste products and pollutants as untapped resources, designers are using unexpected materials to create elemental dyes and anarchic embellishments.

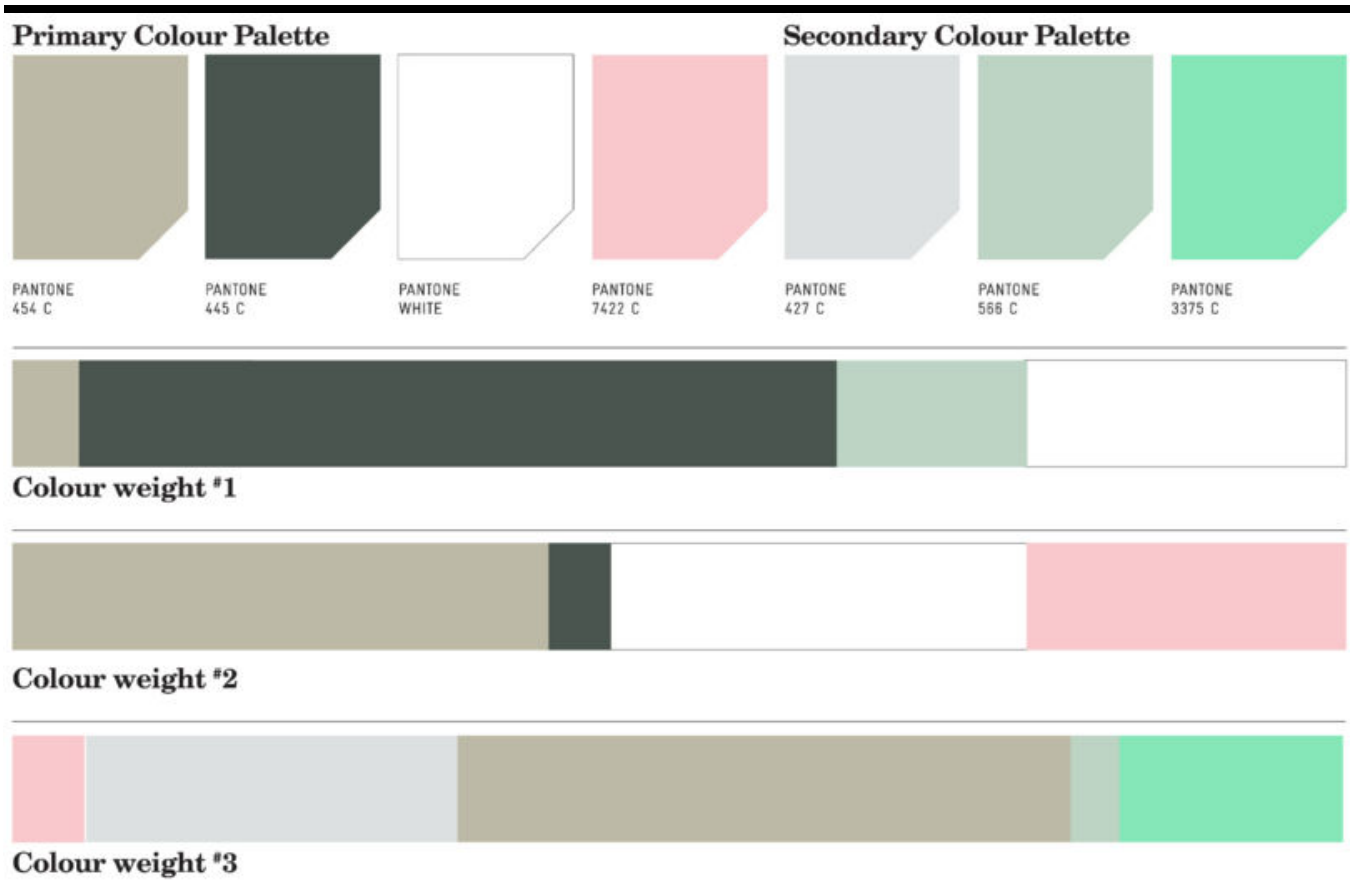
In **Tino Seubert**'s graduate project The Colour of Air, harmful exhausts produced in manufacturing processes and transportation are used to dye outdoor garments, creating intricate, graphite- coloured patterns. With his project, Seubert seeks to give new value to the particles that cause environmental pollution. 'The aim of my project is to show that particulate matter is a valuable resource and worth being collected – not only for its decorative applications, as it could also be used in nanotechnology to create super capacitors,' Seubert tells LS:N Global.

Another project celebrating the value of the immaterial is **Lucie Libotte**'s Dust Matter(s), where dirt collected from various locations is translated into ceramic glazes applied to minimal vessels. 'Each piece offers an element of surprise, driven from the transformation of unwanted grey particles into colours, textures and structures,' Libotte tells LS:N Global. The texture and hues of the glaze reflect the environment where the dirt was collected.

As part of its ambitious project to create smog-free areas in Beijing, **Studio Roosegaarde** is working on Smog Rings, produced by turning smog vacuumed from the skies over the city into soot cubes. Contained within a clear centre stone, the carbon soot is shaped into a millimetre cube containing smog collected from one cubic kilometre.

Ágústa Sveinsdóttir reinterprets dust as a precious material in a jewellery collection Spiritualism, Craft and Waste. 'It is a reflection on material worth. We always demand that everything should be flawless but in the end, everything is dust or in time becomes dust. Is it possible to make use of materials that have always been considered nothing more than useless dirt?' Sveinsdóttir asks.

Toolkit



A new hybridised aesthetic born from experimentation, and new and unexpected materials, typifies this direction.This toolkit reveals the key design cues and treatments to consider when incorporating this design direction into product, textile and interior design.

Toolkit

Create elements of surprise and curiosity for the viewer and look to unusual and overlooked resources for pigmentation and dyes. Re-appropriate the common and mundane into the fantastical.

Explore the potential of the aesthetics that emerge when the organic and the artificial are merged – both have equal value. Use environmental tones and references with off-beat faux colour pigments.

Collaborate with practitioners who play with the meanings behind given materials and resources to form new worth. ‘Sharing a new understanding of value making in the field of material innovation’ is the basis of Lucie Libotte’s project.

Experiment with creating temporal installations and environments that illustrate the transient and poetic nature of time.

For more about the changing state of value, look out for our Meta Value Matrix macrotrend as part of our **Me-Conomy trend briefing**.