

DUTCH DESIGNER HELLA JONGERIUS' WORK BLURS THE LINE BETWEEN INDUSTRIAL DESIGN AND CRAFT. ALTHOUGH MASS PRODUCED, EACH PIECE IS MADE WITH A RARE ATTENTION TO DETAIL.



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WHEN YOU MEET 42-YEAR-OLD DUTCH DESIGNER HELLA JONGERIUS, THERE IS NO EXCHANGE OF PLEASANTRIES OR UNNECESSARY CHITCHAT.

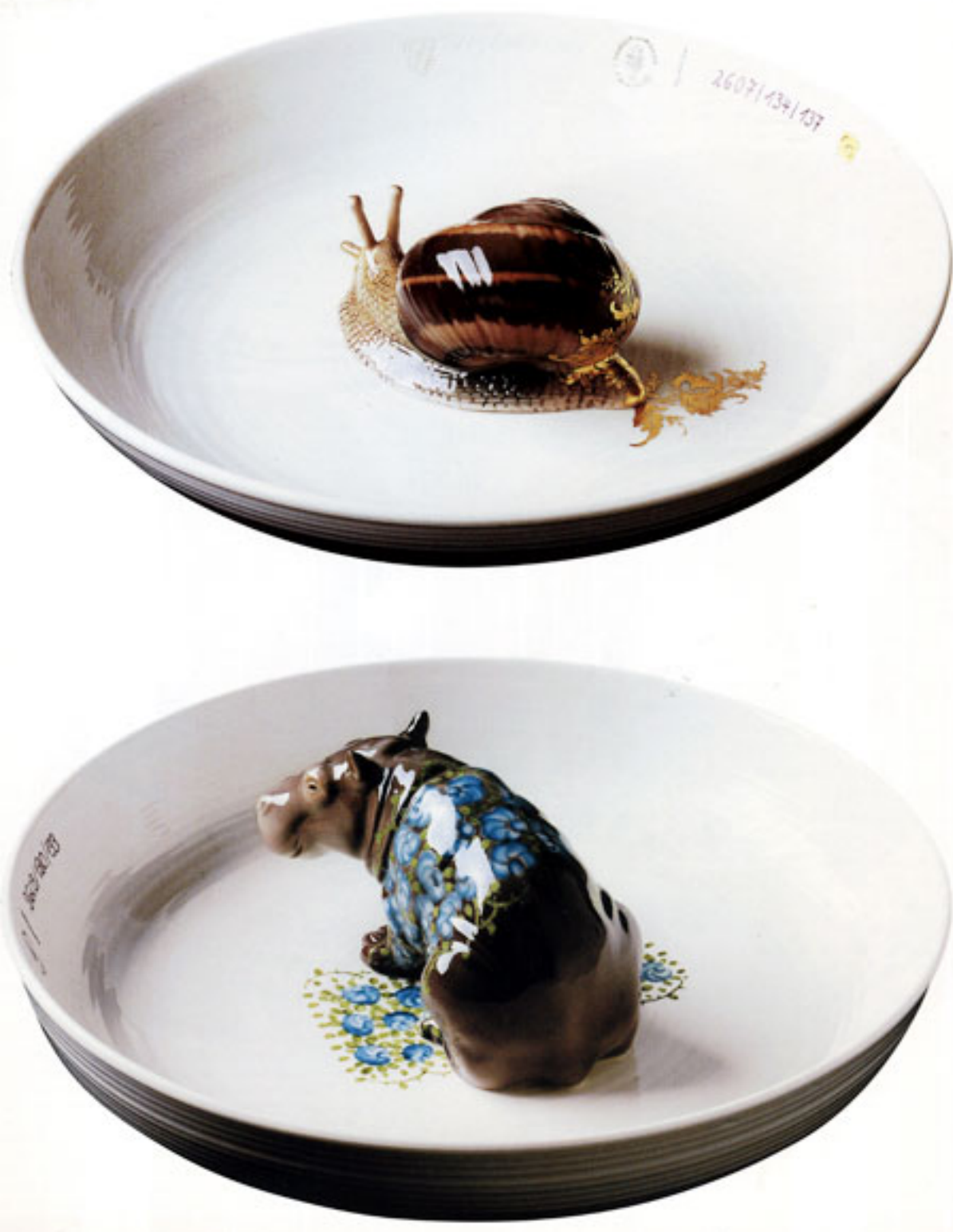
Tall, slender and elegant, with long hands and short, wavy hair, she looks you straight in the eye when she talks, smiles sparingly and is clear about the topics she finds interesting. These include her latest creation for Dutch ceramics manufacturer Royal Tichelaar Makkum; the sofa and poufs that Vitra asked her to make for this year's Milan Furniture Fair; and her unusual studio space in Rotterdam. One thing she does not find interesting is discussing her two children. When asked if having them has changed the way she works, she asks, "What do you want me to tell you? Cliches?"

I tell her that other designers have said that having children has spurred them to think more about 'bigger' issues, such as the future of the planet and sustainable design. "But I have always been more interested in the human being behind the things," says Jongerius. "Of course I want to save the world, but this is not my task here." What Jongerius wants to do is make objects that have "character", the "kind of thing that you find in a flea market, something that you pick out and really love and that you would like to give to your grandchildren when you die". And, she concedes, making things that "last longer than the trend of the moment" is also a way of saving energy and materials.

Jongerius is at the forefront of a general shift in the design world. As Alice Rawsthorn, director of London's Design Museum, says, "One of the most important themes in contemporary design is to instill industrially produced objects with the character and complexity that people have traditionally loved in antiques and craftsmanship. By creating unexpected contrasts of the old and new, unlikely materials and unexpected symbols, Jongerius plays on our preconceptions of different



FACING PAGE Jongerius' Non-Temporary series of earthenware crockery, produced by centuries-old Dutch ceramics manufacturer Royal Tichelaar Makkum earlier this year. The bowls, dishes and plates are made from the Fryslân marine clay found near Royal Tichelaar's factory and are decorated with glazing and painting techniques that the company has used since the 17th century. Jongerius based her design on authentic majolica, domestic ceramics from the 17th and 18th centuries. "Those old skills create something that people recognise and with which they feel comfortable," says Jongerius. "I can build on that by using them in an unconventional way to make the product contemporary." PREVIOUS PAGE Hella Jongerius stands next to her Giant Prince embroidered ceramic vase, produced in 2000 by her studio for the Museum Het Princeshof in Leeuwarden. BORDER Jongerius' Classic Repeat fabric, produced by Maharam in 2002. Each band stretches for two to three metres before repeating, an unheard-of length in traditional upholstery. This ensures that no two cut pieces will look the same.



typologies, production processes and materials to imbue her work with meaning.

But meaning in design does not necessarily come cheaply. Despite recently designing a vase for Swedish furniture giant Ikea that will be "something that anyone can buy", Jongerius' goal has never been to make cheap products. "If I could choose, I would like to make more affordable products, but if you really do something with attention, then it costs more." The design industry, she feels, is too focused on economics. "I think the industrial world is afraid of making something a little bit more expensive, but there is a market for it." Her new series of Non-Temporary crockery for 400-year-old ceramics manufacturer Royal Tichelaar, for instance, combines the best of the industrial and craft processes. The series is also selling well. "If it does not sell," she says with a very smile, "you did not do your job very well." Each plate and bowl is partially dipped in a tin glaze, with the rest left raw, but treated so that it can be washed. The

decorative pattern blends traditional motifs with Jongerius' own modern influences.

There is a high level of mutual regard between the family-run company and the Dutch designer. Working with Jongerius has forced Royal Tichelaar to innovate (the company had previously only produced earthenware, and was "a little afraid" of trying the porcelain manufacturing process), while the group has applied the sort of skill, craftsmanship and mastery of detail that is lacking in so much modern design, and which is a fundamental element of Jongerius' work. Before starting the new project, she says Royal Tichelaar told her: "Our painters don't have any work any more, can you do something about that?" So she came up with a "simple shape, a rough flower" which allowed the painters to "go a bit crazy". Each plate is different "because each painter is different," she explains. "They could have a hangover that day..."

It is this sort of gentle, unexpected irony that informs much of Jongerius' work. It may also be due to the fact that she entered the design world

FACING PAGE Jongerius' Nymphenburg Sketches, produced in 2004 by German porcelain manufacturer Nymphenburg. The company has 700 different animal figures in its collection, representing stylistic periods from Rococo to Art Nouveau. Jongerius placed these figures in a new context, covering them in colourful patterns and decorations from the Nymphenburg collection, which extend from the figures onto the surface of the bowls. ABOVE A Taste of Dutch Design (2004). Jongerius was commissioned to design the gift given to the delegation members during the Netherlands presidency of the EU by the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. Each chocolate features an object designed by a famous Dutch designer.



FACING PAGE One of the rooms in Jongerius' studio, with the four vases she designed for Swedish furniture giant Ikea, released in August this year. Jongerius told Icon magazine, "I'd like to see if it's possible to keep my handwriting, my style, my grammar, if [the vases] are mass-produced. It's a kind of craftsmanship in mass production. The challenge was to design a vase that could be made in huge quantities, but to make it in a very crazy way."

"I think the Dutchness in me is a soberness and the love of craft and the love of history."

HELLA JONGERIUS

almost by chance, in her late 20s. "I thought I wanted to be a carpenter, so first I went to carpentry school," she explains. "Then I thought I should work with people and so I worked with handicapped people." A year later she suddenly realised: "I want to be creative myself. But it took a little while before I found my path." She eventually enrolled in the Design Academy in Eindhoven. The academy is, according to Rawsthorn, "one of the world's most dynamic and influential design schools" and counts Marcel Wanders, Jurgen Bey and Tied Boonstra among its alumni. After graduation, students benefit from an enlightened support structure of government-funded grants and institutions which enable [them] to continue to develop their work and to exhibit it internationally," says Rawsthorn.

Jongerius was one of the first beneficiaries of this system. Shortly after graduation, she began exhibiting with Dutch design collective Droog. She did so until 2000, when she set up her own studio, JongeriusLab, in Rotterdam. Eighty per cent of her work is now commissioned and past projects include the Crystal Frook chandelier for Swarovski (2002), her Repeat collection of upholstery fabrics for New York company Maharam (2002), and the Big Porcelain Pot and Jar for Cappellini (2000). She has also designed the gifts given to delegation members during the Netherlands presidency of the EU in 2004 (chocolates featuring objects by famous Dutch designers) and is currently designing the textiles for the bedding and curtains in the Square hospital in Amsterdam.

FORMAL AND INFORMAL

One of Jongerius' other current projects is a sofa and series of embroidered poufs for German company Vitra. The group asked her to design a sofa about a year ago, but there was just one problem: Jongerius hates sofas. "They are always so boring and they all look the same. And then you have this big thing in your house forever," she says. "On the other hand, I too would like something to lay down on at the end of the day, so it's a necessary evil." Vitra's brief was simple: "Make something that you would like yourself." And what Jongerius wanted was a long sofa in



ABOVE Blankets from 'Hella Jongerius Selects', a site-specific commission produced as part of an exhibition at the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum in New York in March, 2005. The installation was the third in a series of exhibitions in which guest curators select from and respond to the museum's permanent collection of over 250,000 objects. Jongerius chose to exhibit a group of embroidered samplers and, alongside these, she exhibited her own needle-punch embroidered blankets. Each blanket is a one-off and the motifs were inspired by the designs on the historic samplers. "As a designer I am fascinated by process, both the learning process that occurs in the act of making something and the physical processes that leave their mark on a finished product," says Jongerius. "Samplers have their own vocabulary and began as embroidered notes made by needlewomen as a personal record to document and exchange design ideas."

five shades of green, with different-sized pillows made of different fabrics and adorned with large vintage buttons sewn on roughly with red wire. The sofa, Polder, was so much of a secret in the run-up to this year's Milan fair that it was wrapped in swathes of plastic in the catalogue picture. It will be produced next January in a variety of colours. "It's got this very modern feel, but it's also cosy," says Jongerius. The hard and "sturdy" exterior, offset by the soft pillows and coloured buttons, was an attempt by Jongerius to bring the "informal and formal" together and was also a way of saying: "Don't be too serious about this."

UPLIFTING DESIGN

"Lifting things up" is a recurring theme for Jongerius. She feeds off questions that might make her seem bookish or academic. When asked if she pores over archives in museums she says, "I look at the pictures, or 'I buy the book, it's quicker." She also says she likes to use the internet and to "shop with my eyes". Yet despite saying she is a "gift of 2005" and that she "knows what is

going on", Jongerius also has a self-professed "Calvinistic side". The past has a great resonance for her. "I think the Dutchness in me is soberness and the love of craft, and the love of history," she says. "If you can say [of my work], 'This is something I already saw; I have a memory of this', it gives you this comfort."

This atmosphere of comfort pervades both her home and studio. Her home is a three-storey, renovated 100-year-old townhouse and her studio is an old house filled with grand staircases, "marble bathrooms and paintings". Jongerius doesn't pay rent because it's a listed building that "collapses a little bit each year". "If you were to redo it, it would cost so much money," she explains, "so nobody wants it. Once the ceiling came down." But having developed a genuine bond with the space, Jongerius is not about to let details like crumbling ceilings deter her.

Durability for Jongerius is an emotion – you are attached to something and still like it after years and years." This sentence could be applied to all her work.