

# DESIGN UNBOUND

Seven Australian designers  
took to Milan's global stage  
to unveil new products and  
design collaborations.

**Interviews**  
Sophie Lewis



Photography Pier Sorgetti

# Don Cameron

## Translations

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### **Congratulations on 'Translations', what was the genesis of this collection?**

'Translations' was a response to an earlier body of work, 'Communion' – a slow photographic project that came from a desire to lens concrete buildings as pure sculpture. This personal project occurred over the course of 20 years. Having presented 'Communion' at Gallery Sally Dan-Cuthbert in 2020 and being conscious of my design of unique furnishings for my interior projects, the gallery encouraged me to work on functional objects for my next solo showing. As a gallery that sits at the intersection of art and design, they enabled me to work in both modes. It felt natural to use the former body of work as a starting point for the collection.

### **'Translations' is described as a merging of design, architecture, and sculpture. How have you translated the forms and surface patina from your photographs into the objects?**

I liked the idea of the collection beginning as architecture, becoming an image, and then an object – moving through dimensions. All objects have shared origins in architecture. The aspect of the architecture I wanted to foreground informed a material search to best describe each outcome. In this way, I saw the potential of coarse clay to describe the surface patina and weathering of the structures I photographed, the architecture that was graphic or cuboid, I looked to an even sharper rendering using finished stainless steel. The poured form of the Atlantic wall structures I photographed – where concrete was used as form and structure – liquid stone, compelled me to make the desk and stools completely out of timber with all joints concealed to give a similar read of total sculpture.

### **'Translations' beautifully explores materiality, such as the Black Spanish clay and glazes in the Oblique coffee table. How did you work with makers such as Simon Reece to achieve your desired outcome?**

I was very lucky to work with small workshops and skilled ateliers I rely on for my interiors work, but in the free zone of the gallery space - without a particular space, client, budget or timeframe in mind. I felt lucky to find Simon, who lived only 30 minutes up the (Blue) Mountains from me.

Simon has his own artistic practice which has taken him and his family from Sydney to Japan, Spain, and back. I persuaded him to be the 'hands' that I could direct towards the desired outcome. We spent several months working on glaze tests and then the design of moulds that would enable the wire-cut face to the tiled elements that would catch the glaze. Similarly, working with Luke Tosic and his team at Élan Construct on the wooden objects was a process of drawing then prototyping in order to arrive at the blunt forms and silhouettes of the desk and stools. The metal objects started in Sydney ateliers, then finessed, and are now produced in the famous workshops of Italy's Cantu region.

### **Why did you decide to present 'Translations' in Milan as part of Alcovà?**

I owe that in large part to a chance meeting with David Caon one morning over coffee, who mentioned that Tom Fereday had presented previously at Alcovà and was presenting again this year. I was in Northern Italy last September with my partner and set up a meeting with Alcovà founder Valentina Ciuffi, which she forgot about. It ended in a wonderful evening around a dinner table with a small group of friends who have remained just that. The concept of Alcovà staging presentations of designers in semi-derelict or abandoned places spoke to the fundament of 'Translations', my photography of obsolete or forgotten buildings. Further, I wanted to present the objects in the open field of Milan Design Week alongside designers from other countries and cultures and have them exposed to and experienced by an international audience.

Previous page: Australian interiors and object designer Don Cameron presented 'Translations' at Alcova's Villa Bagatti Valsecchi during Milan Design Week.

This page: Translations comprises a series of eight furniture and lighting objects. Pictured: the 'Bloc' lamp, 'Bloc' sofa and 'Oblique' coffee table in ceramic.







**Why did you select the area you did at Alcovas Villa Bagatti Valsecchi, and how did you approach the space in terms of curation?**

Once accepted to present at Alcovas, your presentation requirements are assessed and spaces that work with the overall curatorial itinerary Valentina and co-founder Joseph Grima have in mind are offered for your consideration. I was lucky with my space as the architectural volumes and light worked so well with the objects. I plinthed the objects so they appeared separately within the space. It was actually relatively simple to conceive as you were not able to touch the walls or floors of the historic Villa Bagatti Valsecchi. The proportions, the light, the terrazzo Veneziano were perfect cadence to the objects.

**How was the furniture and lighting collection received?**

The objects were very well received by a cross-section of attendees from diverse cultures and backgrounds. Each day at Alcovas was equally enthralling and unpredictable. Half an hour in a day might look like talking to a design practice from Estonia, then a gallery from Iran, before explaining the collection to a Chinese interpreter who in turn translated to a Chinese tour group, then being interviewed by a radio station from Design School Eindhoven, a bus load of Australians, talking to furniture producers, collectors, students and galleries about the works and their backstory and material decisions and processes. It was wonderful to hear how people from different cultures described the collection of objects and the words they used. It gave me a very kaleidoscopic understanding of things that came intuitively and directly to me. The camaraderie, the shared language, the universality of ideas expressed as design is equally humbling, inspiring and empowering.



