

09

**DESIGN BY
DREAMING**

The magical encounter between the world of dreams and the real world

has inspired the very origin of
human making, communication,
behaviour and thinking.

Tiziana Proietti

DESIGN BY DREAMING

Tiziana Proietti

‘It is important to keep in mind that the necessity for dream is stronger than any utilitarian need... Man’s first expression, like his first dream, was an aesthetic one,’ writes Barnett Newman in his essay, *The First Man Was an Artist* (1947).¹ Barnett describes the very origin of human action, thinking and behaviour as a genuine and instinctive act of dreaming: that is, the act of opening the doors for the aesthetic experience born in the creative mind. Dreaming comes before any necessity-driven action and is at the very root of all human expression. It is in itself an artistic act: that is to say, as Barnett states: ‘The artistic act is man’s personal birthright.’ However, when thinking about those people who give birth to the objects that become part of our life, it is customary to think of them as ‘form givers’ in a traditional sense. With the focus often on form and function, attention is rarely given to the powerful act of imagination, the immersive act of ‘dreaming’, that is vital for the full expression of human making.

Watching Satyendra Pakhalé approach a design project, you see a man dreaming like a child, searching and patiently waiting for that powerful moment when the aesthetic experience comes to answer the simplest question of addressing a human need. But that aesthetic experience, as Pakhalé knows very well, is completed only when the dream is brought back to reality and starts to take its shape, to patiently mould itself from the inside. That magical encounter between the world of dreams and the real world has inspired the very origin of human making, communication, behaviour and thinking. Design, meant as the action of shaping the human microcosm, was born of dreams that too often are left behind.

Continuation of Ideas

At the beginning and during the development of every project, whether a limited-edition piece or an industrial design product, Pakhalé keeps on dreaming. The challenge is equally valid, and industrial production should never be perceived as an obstacle to dreaming. Pakhalé is one of those few designers who has successfully created industrial design works for leading design companies like Cappellini ¹, Fiam ², Poltrona Frau ³, and Tubes ⁴ to name a few,

¹ Barnett Newman, *The First Man Was an Artist*, Tiger’s Eye Magazine, USA, October 1947.

as well as some germinal pieces – which he calls ‘studio pieces’ – resulting from several years of exploration and experimentation, such as the B.M. Horse, Black-White Swan and others. As Henri Focillon reminds us, the formation of forms ‘does not occur on the spur of the moment, but results from a long series of experiments. To speak of the life of forms is inevitably to invoke the idea of *succession*.² Succession comes in Pakhalé’s work from the daily back-and-forth between dreaming and reality, which in the end is an expression of the dreaming itself, and equally the reality.

Pakhalé’s dreams are nurtured by an instinctive curiosity that he feeds with constant research. Pakhalé is a designer driven by his research into the deep culture of making things. In each of his pieces, he is committed to exploring design typologies, examining rituals and cultural gestures, understanding the human sensorial response and pondering the way the object expands beyond its physical limits to create atmospheres. To make this happen, he looks at materials, technology, and design tools with a fresh mind, constantly imagining how to enhance and even challenge the possibilities that each tool offers, while collaborating with industries, artisans and craftsmen from various parts of the world.

Cultivation of Mind

At the core of his design thinking, or ‘cultivation of mind’ as he calls it, is a dynamic approach to history and to the notion of what is past and what is future. Pakhalé neither approaches tradition with nostalgia nor glorifies contemporary technologies. Neither a traditionalist nor a futurist, he gives no credit to dualities and seeming opposites. In his design, he seeks the ‘present’ by embodying a blended spirit of ‘past’ and ‘future’. He believes that any object is meant to express the encounter between the object and the subject, a timeless encounter beyond any style, mannerism or tradition. The materials and surface structures of Pakhalé’s design objects stand out because of their inherent sensuality and timelessness.

‘Every decision and action taken from the inception of an object to the final form is a result of the ‘cultivated mind’ of the person or team creating it,’ says Pakhalé. ‘Design that comes from a sensitive mind, through the personal experience of the creator as an author – that is what I am after.’ In Pakhalé’s view, the privilege of designing is twofold: it entails both shaping the built

² Henri Focillon, *The Life of forms in art* (1942), New York: George Wittenborne, Inc., USA, 1948, p. 53.



environment, which means shaping the way people live in it, as well as the society they will develop in, and revealing a personal way of looking at the world. This is something that must be handled carefully, in order to enable that magical encounter between human sensorial qualities and unlimited nature that transcends time and space and produces authentic totems that can live with us as companions.

As Pakhalé says, ‘Design is a process that transcends itself. In the end the object outlasts the creator. Designing means cultivating one’s own mind and expressiveness to create things that make life easier for people, while nurturing their senses. One has to create a point of view capable of shaping a specific design in that context – that is what I see as authorship. Design is really getting in touch with the broadest necessities and nurturing all of them.’

Futuristic yet Archaic

Pakhalé’s pieces have an energetic physical presence halfway between soft and hard, between flesh and object, between craft and industry. The B.M. Horse series⁵ is a perfect example of this blended character. It not only shows unique technicality or ingenuity in terms of the way the material is handled or pushed to its limit to achieve the desired results, but is also refreshing in its sensuality, re-eroticizing the world, as it were. After a long journey and numerous trials in India, the various pieces – B.M. Horse Chaise, B.M. Hi, B.M. Lo, B.M. Table and B.M. Stool⁶ – were ultimately brought to life in a foundry in Italy. It took a continuous exploration lasting more than seven years to translate the idea that Pakhalé had in mind to create a seamless, single-piece casting in bronze. Pakhalé immersed himself in the traditions of the Muria community and its bell metal craft technique, searching for the essence of those gestures and techniques that bring Muria objects into being and reinterpreting them as though exploring them for the first time. This is how Pakhalé was able to embody the B.M. Horse series with a sense of lasting presence.

The B.M. Horse family pieces are archaic and futuristic at the same time. They look at the past and the future in a single stroke. They do not simply occupy space, they complement it by creating powerful atmospheres or auras with their sensorial, analogical and totemic presence. This makes them very much ‘present’ in space

A B.M. Horse was first presented by ammann//gallery, Cologne, DE after the seven-year-long development period at Design Miami/Basel, CH, 2007. Courtesy: Satyendra Pakhalé Archives, Amsterdam, NL.

B B.M. Horse Chaise Longue at *Satyendra Pakhalé: OriginS*, solo exhibition, Curated by Gabrielle Ammann at ammann//gallery, Cologne, DE, 2008. Courtesy: Satyendra Pakhalé Archives, Amsterdam, NL.

C B.M. Horse Family at group show at ammann // gallery, Cologne, DE, 2008. Courtesy: Satyendra Pakhalé Archives, Amsterdam, NL.

Watching Pakhalé approach
a design project,

you see a man
dreaming like a child,

searching and patiently
waiting for that powerful
moment when the aesthetic
experience comes

to answer the simplest
question of addressing
a human need.

Tiziana Proietti

– almost like an object that has always been there, that has come from the distant future and the past at the same time.

Dreaming Hand

The same thing happens with industrial design pieces designed by Pakhalé. This is indeed the peculiar twofold character of his design. Pakhalé is acutely aware of the lack of sensorial quality in industrial design, which often risks being divorced from the senses by losing its cultural and symbolic meaning and responding instead to short-lived fashion trends. Over the years he has explored and investigated the meaning of the senses and how objects can nurture them, and he welcomes the challenge to instill industrial design with sensorial thinking, as in his Fish Chair (2005)⁷, made by rotational moulding with a special insert making it a bi-colour object, produced in seven different colours but always with the white inside.

As Focillon says, ‘The hand finds every instrument useful for writing down its signs [...] The hand means action: it grasps, it creates, at times it would seem even to think,⁷³ or to expand it further, even to dream. It is through the laborious work of the hand, with all the possible tools that human evolution has brought, that the artist acts, immersed in the process of creating. Pakhalé is constantly in search of those meaningful and thoughtful working hands in order to instill into his objects a joyful sense of being and of the fullness of life with a great economy of means – so that the object belongs not to any specific time, but to collective human culture in its broadest social and sensorial nature.



⁷ Fish Chairs at Satyendra Pakhalé: *Meeting of Minds*, solo show at Hästens flagship store, Stockholm, SE, 2010. Courtesy: Satyendra Pakhalé Archives, Amsterdam, NL.

⁷³ *Ivi*, p. 65 and 74.

He believes that any object
is meant to express the
encounter between the object
and the subject,

a timeless encounter
beyond style,
mannerism or tradition.

Tiziana Proietti