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**BEING AT  
THE STUDIO**

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or on the future as something to reach.

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**Wera Selenowa**

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Behind every daily action, behind what we do and how we do it, lies not only what we *are* in that specific moment, but also what we will *become*. Nothing is ever static, but in flux; and everyday actions lead to the making of the future. The idea of creating the future is incorporated in the actions of the present. Being is a state of unceasingly becoming. Paraphrasing John Dewey, experience is cumulative and it acquires expression thanks to this cumulative continuity. It is about living in the present with awareness as a process of being and becoming, with no reason to glorify the past or chase the future.

Experiencing daily life at Pakhalé's studio, it is clear that the focus is never on the past as something to long for, or the future as something to reach. In fact, there is no need to talk about past, present or future, since we can never really separate them. What matters is the process, the action in the specific moment, or better yet the journey of those actions inside which the notion of being and becoming refines itself.

### A Way of Living

If you ask Pakhalé what design is, he will simply say it is 'a way of living' or 'just like breathing'. In his everyday design practice, Pakhalé looks at the world with curiosity and humility, thinking critically, and trusting only in direct knowledge grounded in experiential reality. He is informed by the Kālāma Sutta, which recommends avoiding 'blind faith and belief spawned from specious reasoning and its encouragement of free inquiry; the spirit of the sutta signifies a teaching that is exempt from fanaticism, bigotry, dogmatism, and intolerance'<sup>1</sup>.

*Do not believe in anything (simply) because you have heard it.  
Do not believe in traditions blindly because they have been  
handed down for many generations.*

*Do not believe in anything because it is spoken and ru-  
moured by many.*

*Do not believe in anything (simply) because it is found writ-  
ten in your religious books.*

*Do not believe in anything merely on the authority of your  
teachers and elders.*

<sup>1</sup> Tathāgata, *Kālāma Sutta, Anguttara Nikaya, Vol 1,188-193 PTS Ed.* The Buddha's Charter of Free Inquiry, translated from the Pali by Soma Thera, 1994.

*But after observation and analysis, when you find anything that agrees with reason and is conducive to the good and benefit of one and all then accept it and live up to it.*

*Tathāgata (Anguttara Nikaya, Vol 1)*

*These five annotations are a summary of the ten expositions of the Kessaputtiya Sutta, popularly known as Kālāma Sutta.*

*– Kālāma Sutta*

With this in mind, Pakhalé approaches the age-old field of creation and the story of human making in a fresh way. He looks at object creation in depth and with a non-conformist mindset. These are his only maxims when bringing his design projects into being.

### Culture of Creation

One cannot fail to notice that Pakhalé seems to be intuitively aware of how design influences the human condition. His studio's everyday activities, gestures, critical thinking and cultivation of curiosity are all important components that nurture each other and animate life there. They are the constituents of a highly sensorial process, the foundation of a 'studio culture' or, as Pakhalé calls it, a 'culture of creation'. His approach to creation is deliberately artisan-like, even though he has mastered technology and is adept at using everything from state-of-the-art 3D CAD, to CNC, to 3D printing. In each project, he thinks deeply about every aspect of learning, researching and observing and then starts sketching, making 3D CAD drawings, sketch modelling along the way and then model-making and prototyping to reality before going back to thinking, drawing and sketching again, until he arrives at a satisfactory result. The process of experimentation, design, testing and execution is a sort of circular, cyclical process of thinking, sketching, making and back again.

This 'choreography of creating' is supported by meetings, presentations, documentation and sharing ideas over a meal with the team and collaborators. Experiencing materials is one of the active driving forces in the process of building the studio's culture of creation. Since the foundation of his studio in 1998, Pakhalé has cultivated this culture, refined it and made it part of each day's studio practice.

## Why Design?

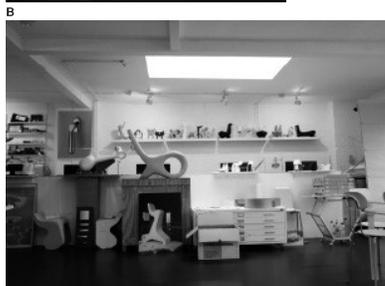
The synthesis between being and becoming is embodied in objects that belong not to this or that time, but to general human existence, while celebrating every day the dignity that design is meant to give human life. The culture of creation is the place of making, thinking, discussing, acting, contemplating, pondering, questioning and more. These are nurtured by continuous, tireless research at the roots of the meaning of creation. Why design? Why create? Pakhalé would say. That cumulative continuity, which brings expressiveness, manifests itself in the culture of creation: in the scheme of topics and subjects of investigation brought into the discussion as the direct consequence of everyday actions and gestures. Concepts involving atmosphere, poetic analogy, sensoriality, social modernity, technology and the culture of making are at the core of this thinking. All these themes are closely connected and are vital for the continuous development of the studio's culture of creation. Woven together through thinking and making, these topics are part of being, while becoming is still patiently shaping itself from within.

Observing and acquiring more knowledge and experience is one of the ongoing actions at the studio, leading to many discussions and an overarching, deeper insight into the human condition through all the topics brought into the conversation. Apparently contradictory ideas and paradoxes are nourished in the studio - discussed, thought through and cultivated further.

## Something Magical

This cultivation of mind and critical thinking is supported by Pakhalé's drawings and watercolour sketches – which make room for something magical to happen – as well as models which go from physical modelling to three-dimensional digital drawings and vice versa. Indeed, being aware of the possibilities and limitations of 3D CAD modelling software, Pakhalé has cultivated a studio culture with constant attention to perception as the source of an experiential reality, alternating continuously between visual thinking, physical modelling and experience.

He accompanies every phase of a project, never forgetting that the goal is a final product that is able to speak to all the senses of the end-user. He himself therefore experiences the new reality created through his design and the sensorial effect of his output



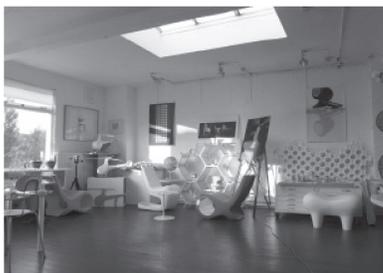
A First-floor open studio space with shoji-inspired sliding doors at Pakhalé's studio, Amsterdam, NL. Courtesy: Satyendra Pakhalé Archives, Amsterdam, NL.

B Pakhalé's personal space filled with objects and curiosities collected from around the world. Courtesy: Satyendra Pakhalé Archives, Amsterdam, NL.

C First floor studio space. A long shelving system filled with numerous study models at Pakhalé's studio, Amsterdam, NL. Courtesy: Satyendra Pakhalé Archives, Amsterdam, NL.

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in the studio. With the support of his team, collaborators and industries, he constantly questions the possibilities of improvement. In doing so, he does not merely look at the object, but he also seeks to generate atmospheres through objects. In this way, every single aspect of a given project is precisely controlled, ensuring an appropriately proportioned and meaningful result. The object becomes a presence that fills the space with both physical and immaterial boundaries. In addition, even if technology in a broad sense plays a leading role in Pakhalé's design projects, it is never dominant in the perception of the final result. Rather, technology is an essential assistant, which cannot be shown merely for its own sake.

The core of every project for Pakhalé is how to arrive at a deep insight into the project requirements and the inter-being of projects within the studio context as well as via the external collaborative partner – whether an industrial manufacturer, artisan, or cultural or educational institution. The intent is to create a refreshing approach to innovation, diligence, and aesthetic consistency with contemporary expression. Every project carried out in the studio is endowed with the commitment and determination to innovate and push boundaries.

### Inside the Space

Pakhalé's studio is organized and designed as a creative environment reflecting all these positive energies. The industrial space that used to be a fur-making factory, and later a woodworking shop and office, is an unassuming place. Passing by on the Zeeburgerpad, you would not notice it. The front door opens onto the staircase that takes you to the first floor. On entering the upstairs, the gloominess of the staircase is left behind with the welcoming feeling of an open space that is well lit with daylight from the ceiling and a glass frontage overlooking an Amsterdam canal, filling the interior with bright northern light. A long shelving system is filled with numerous study models of various scales and materials. The single open space allows the team and collaborators to enjoy and experience the creative activities happening there. The daily studio work becomes the dynamic scenography of every event and meeting. On one side of the space a set of computer desks runs perpendicular to the windows, with a short partition system designed and made at the studio making them visually disappear.

D The open space at Pakhalé's studio first floor is filled with ever changing study models. Courtesy: Satyendra Pakhalé Archives, Amsterdam, NL.

E Ground floor studio work space filled with hand tools and study models. Courtesy: Satyendra Pakhalé Archives, Amsterdam, NL.

F Satyendra Pakhalé Archives, Amsterdam, NL on the ground floor of the studio space. Courtesy: Satyendra Pakhalé Archives, Amsterdam, NL.

Shelves filled with everchanging study models of current as well as older projects create the backdrop to the daily studio activities.

The elegant *shoji*-inspired sliding doors, designed by Pakhalé, conceal his personal space and lend a touch of mystery. With their wooden frames, translucent off-white textile and articulate handle details in saddle leather, the doors are typical of Pakhalé's way of making bespoke objects for his personal use. Situated behind the large oval table of the studio director, they gently introduce visitors and collaborators to a wonderland – a space within a space – filled with objects and curiosities collected from Pakhalé's travels around the world. An entire wall from floor to ceiling gives space to the extended library with rare books acquired over the years. A bespoke desk, equipped with a water-colour kit and handmade paper, neatly occupies a corner space for the daily morning practice of watercolour sketching, providing the silence needed to focus on the thinking and contemplation.

### The Journey as Reward

The studio is a serene space, a silent space filled with fresh light, enthusiasm and lots of energy. As you walk down the stairs to the ground floor, there is another kind of atmosphere. Here, it is possible to breathe the studio's projects in their process of evolution and continuous refinement. The entire space is full of prototypes, archives and models, some packed in wooden crates ready to be shipped to industrial partners or exhibitions. No machines populate the space; most of the tools are hand tools. As Pakhalé says, 'We do not want to limit our thinking with any one type of technology or given machines facilities. We want to be free and allow the hand to connect to the mind and senses and be immersed in the process of creation'. No limitation should be given to the birth of an idea.

The studio's culture of creation is animated by enthusiasm and idealism that creates the conditions for closely working together and cultivating the mind in order to further collective development. Every activity is carried out with passion and an awareness of the impact of our actions and the responsibilities they bring. There is a subtle seriousness here, yet also the joy of creation and of sharing the challenges and results with collaborators and the rest of the world. After two decades, the studio practice is still evolving. The journey is the reward.