



PRACTICALLY SPEAKING

WITH A MONUMENTAL INSTALLATION IN MILAN, AN UNASSUMING COLLECTIVE IS CATAPULTED TO CENTER STAGE. BECKY SUNSHINE DISCOVERS HOW THE UPSTARTS OF ROTOR TRANSFORM MUNDANE ELEMENTS INTO MOVING WORKS OF DESIGN. PORTRAITS BY JAVIER BERNAL REVERT.



“We have a problem with the word design,” says Tristan Boniver, a co-founder of Rotor. “It’s just too strongly attached to furniture and product, and that’s not us.” Conception, he insists, is much more descriptive of the Brussels-based creative collective.

Imagine years and years of Prada fashion show detritus once used to decorate runways and their venues: piles of wood, pink and green polyethylene foam seats, mirrors, steel tubing, a dismantled white vinyl catwalk, and a plywood photographers platform. From just about every fashion show Prada has ever done, the remains have been stored in warehouses around Italy. Now picture the clever reinterpretation of this all in a single space. That was “Ex Limbo,” Rotor’s project with the Italian fashion house, shown during April’s Furniture Fair—a winning example of the type of work they produce. They didn’t build anything, didn’t reinvent, recycle, or rearrange. They simply chose the pieces they were drawn to and curated them within the vast Fondazione Prada space in Milan. The message was one both of scale and renewal.

PHOTO: “EX LIMBO,” AGOSTINO OSIO.

Rotor began in 2005 with Boniver and Maarten Gielen. Realizing they needed more help, the pair gradually selected like-minded people with backgrounds in architecture, design, engineering, graphics, filmmaking, and social science to get involved. Six years and four new members (Lionel Devlieger, Michael Ghyoot, Benjamin Lasserre, and Melanie Tamm) later, both creative and urban research projects are flooding in.

So just what brings these people together? A similar pre-occupation, says Boniver. All prefer to deal with aesthetic subjects in a non-academic, practical way. “I’d say it’s the dynamic of brute force—quite a militant approach that unites us,” he says. “We communicate to move people. Say something boldly and make it in a way that’s then easy to understand—that’s really what we do.” That is to say, Rotor works with household and industrial leftover materials to create temporary architectural structures. Take something discarded, they say, something that someone assumed was no longer wanted, and allow it to tell a new story in a new context by studying why it had been thrown out.