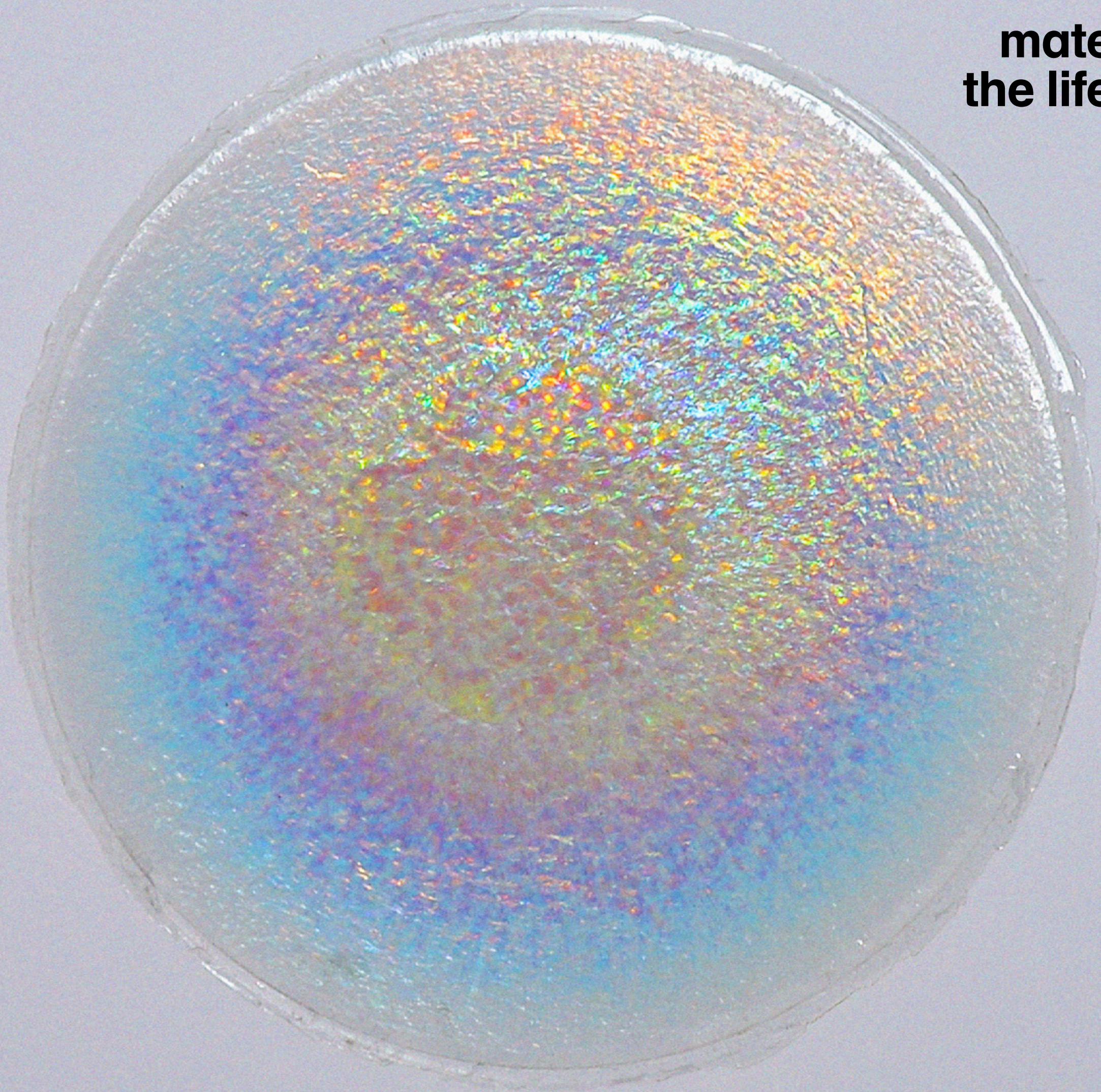


# material tales: the life of things

Tour Proposal





## The Design Museum Touring Programme

The programme was set up in 2002 with the aim of bringing design exhibitions to audiences around the UK and internationally. Since then, the museum has toured more than 180 exhibitions to 145 venues in 38 countries worldwide.

The Design Museum's touring exhibitions range in size from 150 to 1,000 square metres and cover all areas of design – architecture, fashion, furniture, graphics, product and more.

## About the Design Museum

The Design Museum is the world's leading museum devoted to architecture and design. Its work encompasses all elements of design, including fashion, product and graphic design. Since it opened its doors in 1989, the museum has displayed everything from an AK-47 to high heels designed by Christian Louboutin. It has staged over 100 exhibitions, welcomed over five million visitors and showcased the work of some of the world's most celebrated designers and architects including Paul Smith, Zaha Hadid, Jonathan Ive, Frank Gehry, Eileen Gray, Dieter Rams, Margaret Calvert and Yinka Ilori.

On 24 November 2016, the Design Museum relocated to Kensington, West London. John Pawson converted the interior of a 1960s modernist building to create a new home for the Design Museum, giving it three times more space in which to show a wider range of exhibitions and significantly extend its learning programme.

In May 2018, the Design Museum was awarded the title of European Museum of the Year.

In 2021, the Design Museum launched Future Observatory, a national programme for design research supporting the UK's response to the climate crisis. The three-year programme is coordinated by the Design Museum in partnership with the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), which is part of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI).

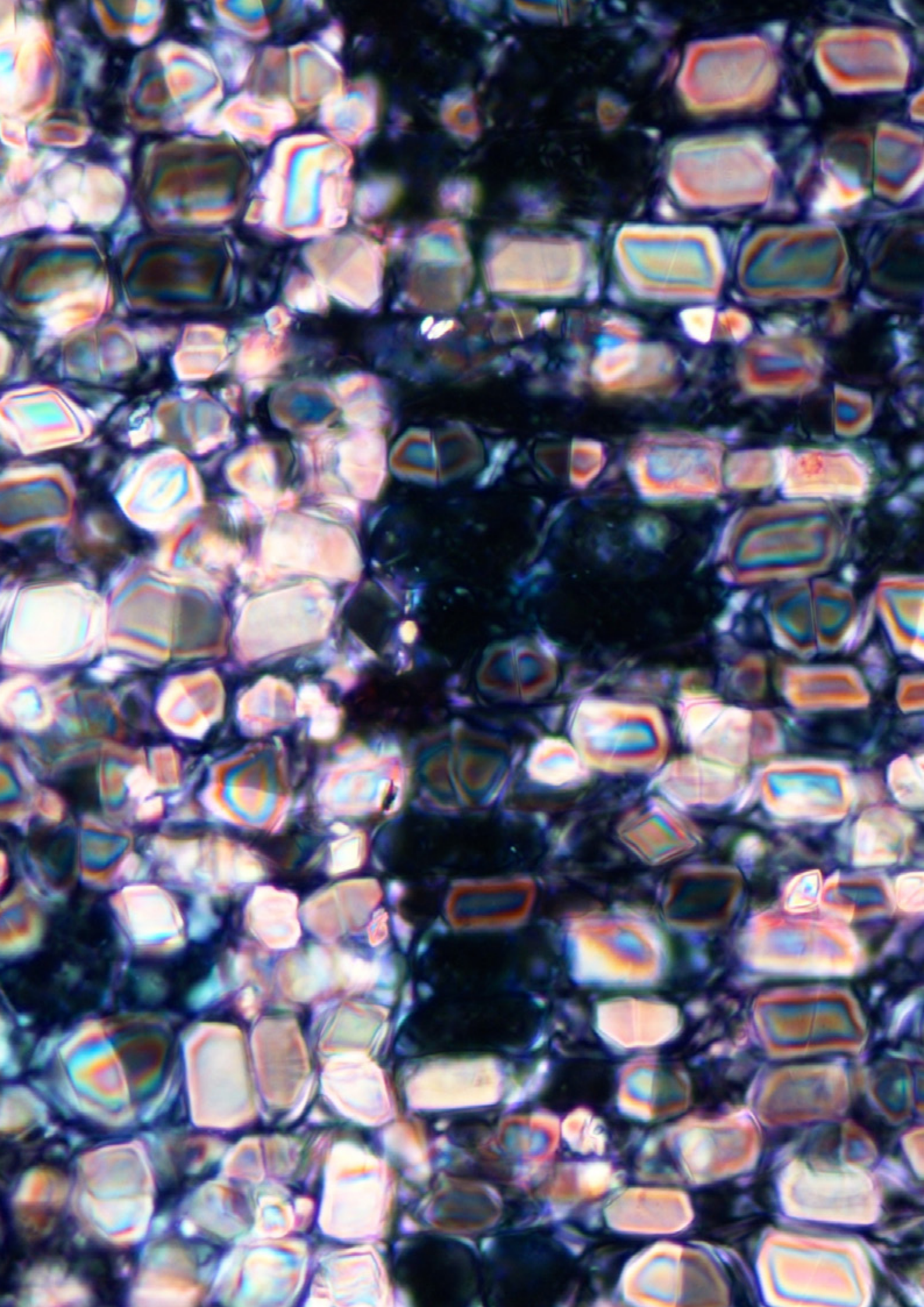
## Contents

3	Exhibition overview
9	Origins
11	Transformation
13	Consequences
15	Evolution
19	Research in action
22	Learning resources
25	Terms and conditions
26	Contact



The Design Museum, London





#### CURATOR

**Eleanor Watson** is a former Curator at the Design Museum

#### EXHIBITION DESIGN

**vPPR Architects**

#### GRAPHIC DESIGN

**Twelve Design Ltd**

#### VENUES

**CAFA Art Museum, Beijing**

17 September - 17 October 2021

**Art Museum of Nanjing University of the Arts, Nanjing**

8 - 24 December 2021

**Hong Kong Science Museum**

19 May - 18 October 2023

#### TOUR AVAILABILITY

Available from 2026

#### SPACE

approx. 500 square metres

## Exhibition overview

As we face the realities of the Earth's limited resources, designers and users alike are seeking greater clarity around how objects are made, and at what material cost. What materials go into the objects that define our day to day lives? And how might we learn to make better use of these materials in future?

Material Tales is a uniquely poetic exploration of the world of materials, taking visitors on a journey through the origins, uses, and evolution of matter. From their microscopic structure through to the global impact of their use and exploitation, materials are revealed in all of their complexities as they share the incredible stories of their emotional, technical and political lives.

Occupying approximately 500sqm and featuring iconic exhibits from the Design Museum Collection, as well as innovative materials in development today, the exhibition will inform and inspire visitors, allowing them to understand the complex processes that go into everyday objects.

The exhibition offers an informative and empowering experience, and aims to foster greater respect, and care, for our material world. From the first example of mass-produced furniture, to the latest experiments in bio-fabrication, the exhibition explores the materials that have defined modern life, and how we might learn to make better use of them in future.

Exhibits fall under three categories: objects from the Design Museum Collection, contextual material to explain the process behind the finished product, and recent work by contemporary designers to showcase the direction that material design is taking. The exhibition features approximately 80 objects, as well as a wealth of images, film and process material.

There is scope for host institutions to complement the exhibition with objects from their own collection, drawing out local stories and showcasing historical material through a contemporary lens. This applies to institutions with design and applied arts collections, but also to science, technology, anthropological and general encyclopaedic museums.





Sanne Visser, The New Age of Trichology, 2019, bag made from human hair

## What's in the exhibition

**A super-strength bag woven from human hair**

**A cutaway of the world's largest ship under construction**

**An insight into the fragile ecosystem held within a wine cork**

**A newly commissioned film showcasing the global impact of material extraction**

**A system for producing textile dyes with bacteria**

**A project that safeguards native corn species in Mexico**

**A sustainable fashion solution that helps protect marine life**

**A vegan leather grown from coconut waste**

**A self-healing concrete that prolongs the life of buildings**

**A yarn made from 100% recycled polyester**

**A car tyre made from dandelion rubber**

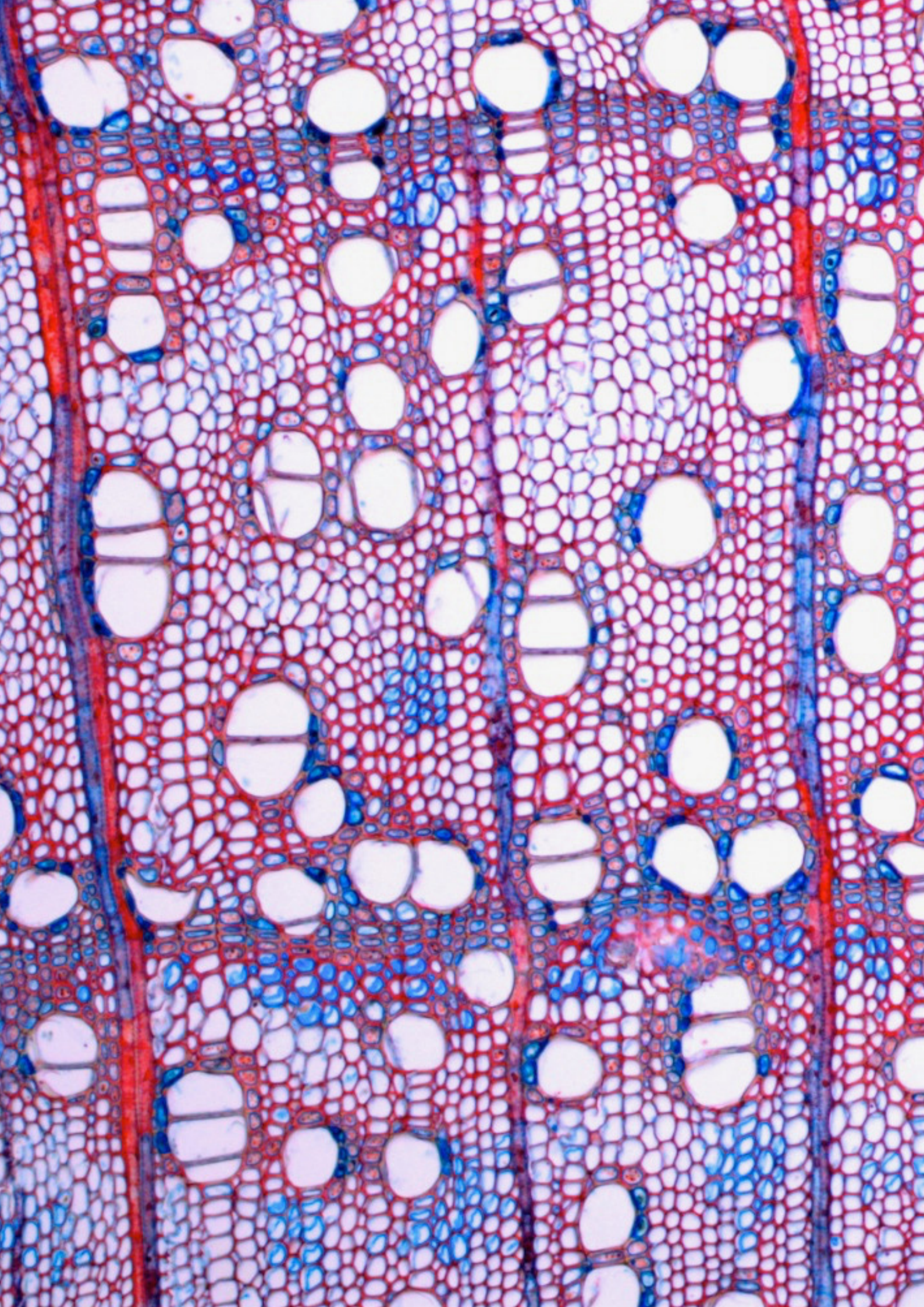
**An investigation into the unique properties of a matchstick**





BUILDING THE LARGEST SHIP IN THE WORLD, MAERSK TRIPLE E, SOUTH KOREA, 2019  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALASTAIR PHILIP WIPER





## Origins

### Where do materials come from? Why do we love them?

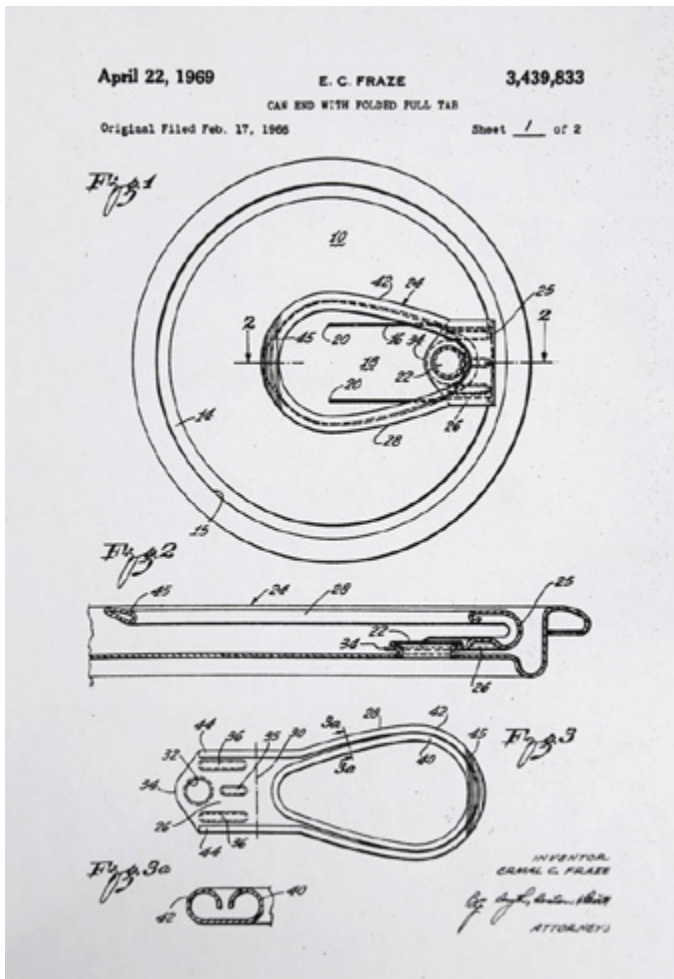
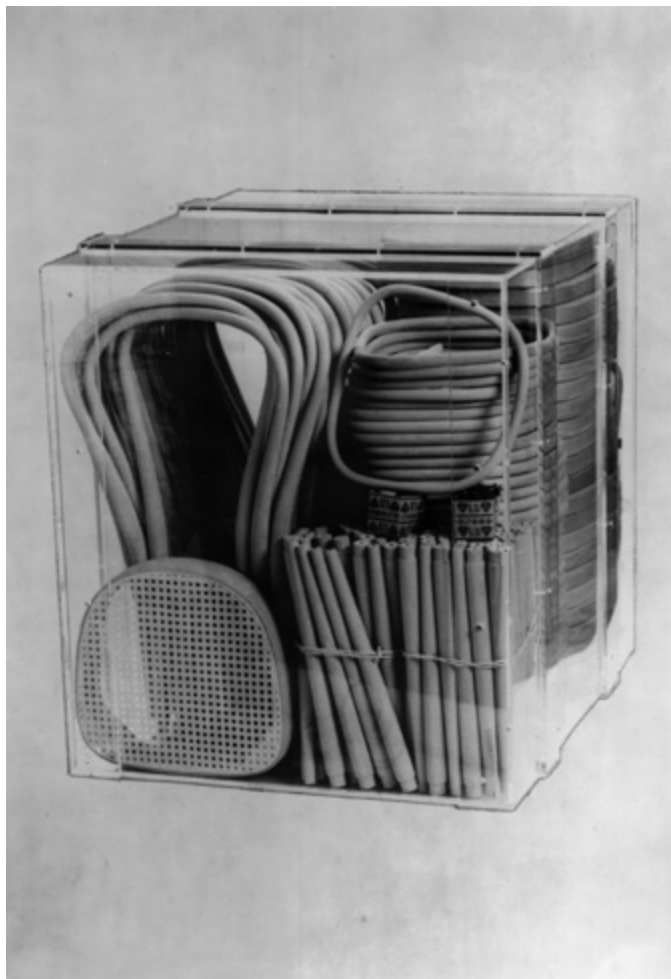
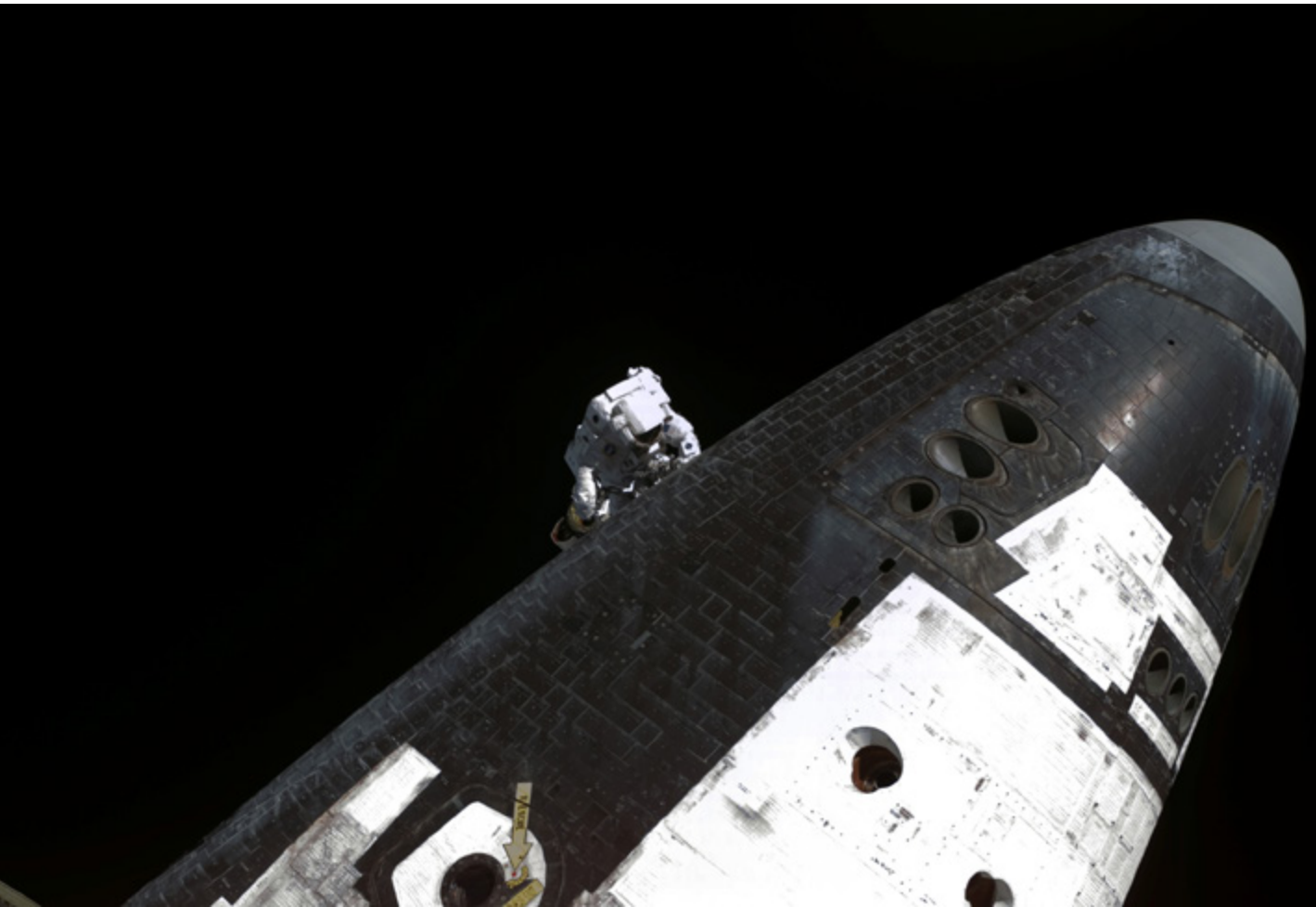
The first chapter of the exhibition provides an introduction to its main protagonists, examining materials such as wood, clay, glass, metal, plastic and fibre in their raw state. Large-scale microscopic images are paired with mounds of raw material to illustrate each of their unique properties, while also showing visitors how every material- no matter how complex or seemingly synthetic- finds its origins in the earth.

The opening chapter also includes a section exploring the emotional qualities of materials. Humans and materials have long-standing relationships, and all materials elicit particular emotional responses. Designers have often played with these emotional qualities to create objects that we instinctively want to live and work with, an idea which is explored through a series of intriguing and highly tactile objects.

Adaptation: Materials can be added to this section that have a specific relevance to the host venue's region or country (e.g. bamboo, coir, silk). The section on emotional qualities can also be supplemented with objects from the host museum's own collection and place greater emphasis on history, anthropology or science as required.

1. Alan Crivellaro, Microscopic image of a tree cross-section, 2007
2. Cotton boll





# Transformation

## How do we manipulate materials?

The second chapter of the exhibition explores the transformation of materials through mass manufacture. From the earliest examples of flat pack furniture through to the world's largest sheet glass factory, this chapter showcases the technical possibilities and overwhelming scale of the materials that are being processed and mass produced today. It is a high-density, dynamic, and inspiring overview of how we have pushed materials to their technical limits, with an emphasis on speed, variety and a high degree of specialization.

Featuring a wealth of original objects as well as large-scale photography and process films, the chapter provides a highly informative 'behind-the-scenes' of how our modern material world is formed, from space craft to drinks cans.

Adaptation: Objects can be added from the host venue's collection to place greater emphasis on local material innovations or everyday objects with a particular cultural resonance.

1. Exhibition view, CAFA Art Museum, Beijing.
2. Thonet No.14 packed in a 1m³ shipping crate
3. Erma Frazee, Pull-ring can patent, 1969
4. NASA, Astronaut Stephen K Robinson, a STS-114 mission specialist, removing gap fillers between the orbiter's heat-shielding tiles, 2005





## Consequences

### What have we done?

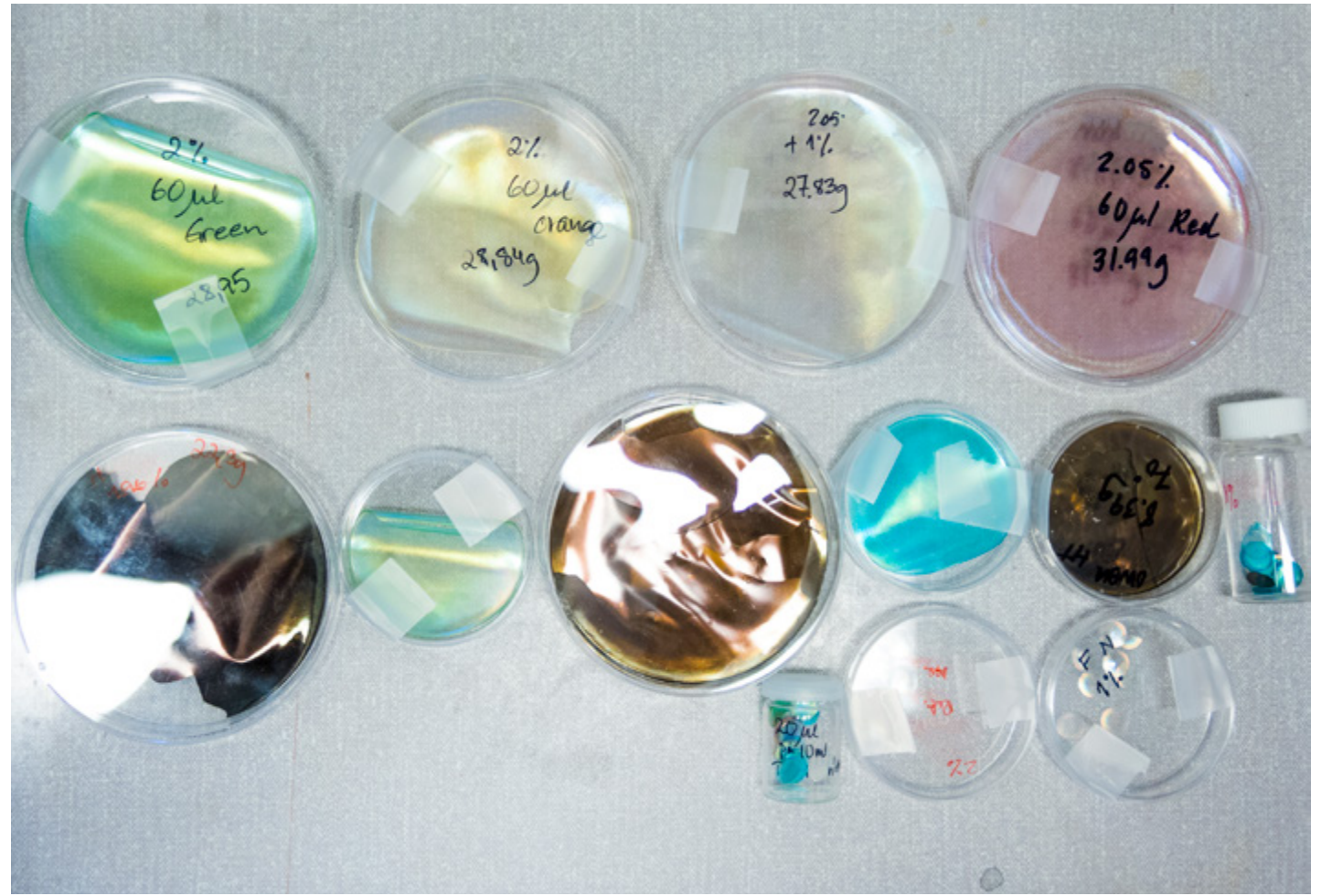
The third chapter of the exhibition examines the environmental and human impact of current global systems of material extraction and consumption. Environmental impact is explored through a newly commissioned film, drawing together a mosaic of photography and moving image to illustrate the disastrous consequences of material extraction, from mining through to intensive cotton farming.

Human impact is explored through a more focused case study, charting the violent history and legacy of the rubber industry. Through original objects, contextual film and photography, this section of the exhibition will bring to light the complex and often shocking stories linked to nature's wonder material.

Adaptation: Another material can be used to tell an alternative human impact story with greater local resonance (e.g. cotton, concrete, copper).

1. Exhibition view, CAFA Art Museum, Beijing
2. Clearing trees at Fordlandia Rubber Plantation
3. Deforestation in Great Otway National Park, Victoria, Australia





## Evolution

### What is the future of materials?

The final chapter of the exhibition looks to the future of materials, and how designers are working to find more intelligent and sustainable ways of working with finite resources. Featuring the work of a dozen contemporary designers, the chapter offers an inspiring and optimistic overview of material design today from large-scale industrial interventions through to hyperlocal projects with an emphasis on the individual and the handmade.

The chapter reminds visitors that materials design is a constantly evolving field, and one that plays an important role in tackling urgent environmental and societal issues.

Adaptation: Work by local contemporary designers, craftspeople, engineers or material scientists can be assimilated into this chapter.

1. Fernando Laposse, Totomoxtle, a new veneer material made with husks of heirloom Mexican corn, 2019
2. Tamara Orjola, Forest Wool, a stool made from pine needles, 2016
3. Faber Futures, Project Coelicolor, silk dyed with bacteria, 2019
4. Exhibition view, CAFA Art Museum, Beijing
5. Elissa Brunato, Bio Iridescent Sequin, exploring bio iridescence through material samples created from cellulose, 2019









## Research in action

The exhibition includes a 'Research in Action' element whereby new thinking around materials is generated, documented, and shared through the Design Museum website and the websites of host institutions. The museum has commissioned a unique toolkit to allow host venues to run a full-day materials workshop, allowing them to generate new thinking around materials and sustainability within a local context. Each iteration of the workshop will be documented and shared on the Design Museum website, creating a collaborative and ever-expanding depository of materials knowledge.

There is also the possibility for host venues to develop a residency programme around this strand.

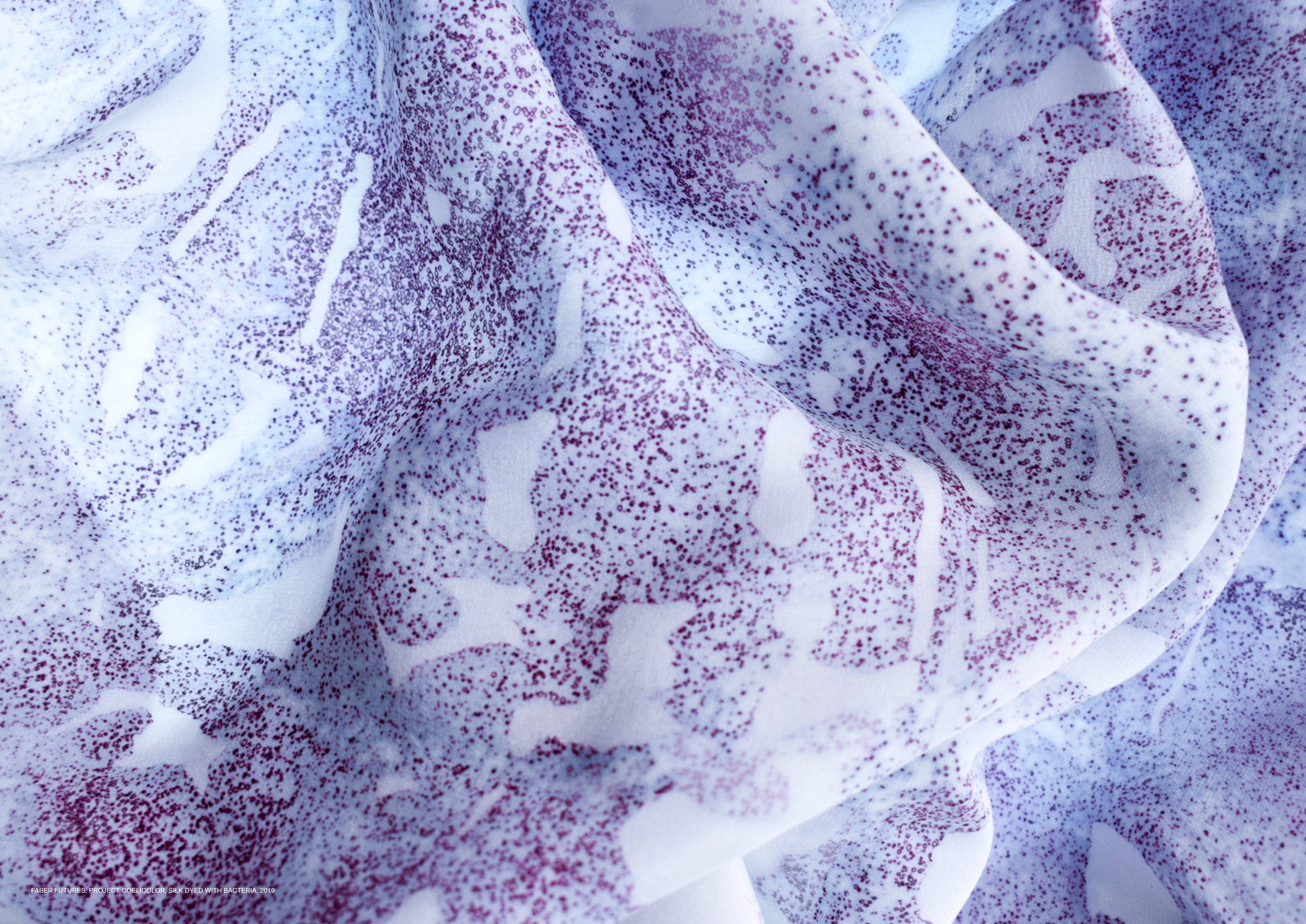




## Learning resources

As a topic with a strong educational element, Material Tales has been developed in close collaboration with the Design Museum Learning Department. An additional learning package has been developed to sit alongside the exhibition, including lesson plans for primary and secondary school students.







## Terms and conditions

### Hire fee, on request, includes:

- Curation and exhibition concept
- Tour management by Design Museum staff
- Exhibits
- Images and films
- Exhibition text in English
- 2D and 3D design concept
- Selected display kit

### Costs payable by the venue:

- Hire fee, in instalments
- Exhibition and graphic design adaptation
- Share of transport and crating costs
- Storage of empty crates
- Nail-to-nail insurance
- All costs relating to exhibition production
- Installation and de-installation costs
- Marketing



## Contact

To find out more about this exhibition and other tours available, please contact:

**Charlotte Bulté**  
**Head of International Engagement**  
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**Erika Batey**  
**Senior International Project Manager**  
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[designmuseum.org/exhibitions/touring-exhibitions](https://designmuseum.org/exhibitions/touring-exhibitions)

### PICTURE CREDITS

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Cover image: Elissa Brunato, Bio Iridescent Sequin, showcasing the sequin's natural structural colouration and shimmer under the microscope, 2019



