

The radical art of repair

Curated by Phineas Harper, 'Beyond Repair' celebrates the beauty of visible mending at Rotterdam Architecture Biennale

29 June to 13 October 2024

With International Architecture Biennale Rotterdam (IABR) selecting 'the Nature of Hope' as the theme for this year's event, critic and curator Phineas Harper leads a collective of designers, builders and makers shining the spotlight on repair – the ultimate act of hopefulness.

'Beyond Repair' presents a collection of broken found objects – some pulled from skips or plucked from the street – that have been brought back from the brink of disintegration through playful, characterful repairs which add new layers to each product's story.



Before and after: a paper lamp, savaged by a pet cat, repaired with mulberry paper. Image courtesy of Phineas Harper.

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Showing at Nieuwe Instituut until 13 October, the exhibition makes a case for an 'architecture of repair' through a host of visibly mended objects, including: a broken chair with new hand-whittled legs; cracked glass pots fixed using wood and plaster; and a cat-shredded IKEA floor lamp that has been turned 90 degrees, tensioned with new modular components and reinvented as a hanging lamp. Holes in the shade have been patched with layers of colourful mulberry paper, highlighting where repairs have been made.

Taken together, the objects underscore the excessive levels of waste in the architecture and design industries, and present visible repair as a radical – and desirable – alternative to disposal.

"I see our tableau of patched up and reborn objects as a physical manifesto for more and more exuberant repairs in architecture and beyond. It is meant to inspire people to think more ambitiously and creatively about how repair could form a richer part of cultural life."

– Phineas Harper



Mended Foreshore Pots by Martha Summers. Image courtesy of Martha Summers.

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Ranging widely in scale and function, the objects in the Beyond Repair collection are not vintage heirlooms, iconic designs or craft pieces; they are mass-produced products made artificially cheap by international wage differences. By fixing and foregrounding these items, Harper and the Beyond Repair team hope to expose the flaws of global supply chains, which often make repair a more costly option than replacement, consigning viable items to landfill.

Other mended objects in the collection include:

- A heavily rusted hammer head and chisel blade cleaned up by the Yorkshire-based ecological builder Kit Jones and given new handles made from found holly and hazel.
- An old Afghan rug that belonged to the grandparents of designer Thomas Randall-Page has been cleaned and patched up using tufts of colourful fabric.
- A set of fragments of broken glass bottles and other vessels found on the foreshore of the Thames, repaired with a variety of materials and techniques by architect and artist Martha Summers.
- A folding paper and timber screen, found discarded in Sheffield, riven with rot and covered with slugs. The salvageable components, mottled by colourful mould stains, have been sanded and oiled, expressing a new patina. Found wood, brass and fresh paper have replaced materials that were too far gone to save.

The Beyond Repair collective features Phineas Harper, Thomas Randall-Page, Kate Bowman, Lucas Facer, Kit Jones, Felix Kary, Smith Mordak, Allegra FitzHerbert, Sanjukta Jitendhar and Martha Summers. Each has documenting their research process, finding examples of expressive repair in architecture and design on Instagram: [@architectureofrepair](https://www.instagram.com/architectureofrepair).

"High-carbon economies are addicted to demolition and waste. We throw away tens of thousands of decent buildings every year rather than refurbishing or upgrading them. Of the 222 million tonnes of waste the UK produces annually, about 62% is from construction and architecture. The UN estimates that the volume of electronic waste alone is rising five times faster than recycling rates. Transitioning to a just and ecological economy must centre on revivifying a culture of repair, care, maintenance and restoration."
– Phineas Harper

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Fixed hammer by Kit Jones. Image courtesy of Kit Jones.

Beyond Repair is at Nieuwe Instituut, Museumpark 25, 3015 CB Rotterdam, Netherlands, throughout the Rotterdam Biennale, from 29 June to 13 October 2024.

For more information about Beyond Repair and Phineas Harper, please contact sabine@zetteler.co.uk.

Notes for editors

Architecture of Repair

Founded by Phineas Harper, Architecture of Repair is a collective research project exploring the creative, expressive and ecological potential of repair in architecture and beyond.

[@architectureofrepair](https://twitter.com/architectureofrepair)

Phineas Harper

Chief Executive of Open City until 2024, Phineas Harper is an innovative leader in developing sustainable cultural programmes that engage broad audiences with architecture and design. [A regular contributor to *The Guardian*](#), their career spans criticism, curation, education, youth engagement, journalism and sculpture.

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