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Emmanuel Babled

The French designer's latest collection combines hand-blown glass and marble, with the fluidity of one dictating the precision-cut form of the other

NEW

Somewhere between mass production and sculpture lies the work of Emmanuel Babled. During the 55th Venice Art Biennale, the French designer launched his latest collection, Osmosi, in the grand setting of the Palazzo Franchetti.

Osmosi is a combination of hand-blown glass and CNC-milled marble. Working with the fluidity of glass and the static mass of marble is something that intrigues Babled, who describes the collection as a way to "find a new kind of link between two materials". Rather than dictating the design, Babled tries to capture the fluidity of the glass: "I have the concept of the form and the composition, but I leave the material to express itself." He likens the process to a birth: "Each time it's nice or ugly, but it's yours."

Each piece in the Osmosi collection is unique. Three-dimensional scans of the glass forms are used to create corresponding shapes in Carrara marble, which is precision-cut so that the glass elements are held using only gravity. The materials have a strange relationship, Babled says: "The glass seems to have blown the marble." Comparisons can

be drawn with Piete Bergmans' Vitra Virus project (2007), in which glass was blown directly onto pieces of furniture, infecting and scarring the designs.

The limited-edition Osmosi collection includes vases, table lamps and furniture. When I ask whether the vase would be able to hold flowers, Babled says: "You can if you want ... but it is more of a sculptural object."

Babled studied industrial design in Milan before setting up his own studio in 1992. The studio divides its time between creating limited-edition collections for manufacturers such as Venini and Baccarat, and mass-produced designs for Oluce, Macef and Waterford Crystal. Babled believes that working across these two dimensions helps his work to develop, as "one [approach] can complete the other".

Babled's work aims to bring modern industrial design and manufacturing solutions to the artisan process. "It's a form of continuous creativity between these two sectors," he says. "It's a contamination between industrial design and human capacity, human skills."

