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# Kris Van Assche Is Trying His Hand at Bronzes

The menswear maven seems to be in a "vase phase," though his vessels created for the Laffanour Galerie Downtown in Paris don't require any flowers to dazzle.

By **MILES SOCHA**

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Kris Van Assche with his bronze vessels at the Fodor foundry. **JÉRÉMY**

BARNIAUD/COURTESY OF KRIS VAN ASSCHE

Bronze artworks usually come in brown, green or sometimes near-black patinas.

Leave it to menswear maven **Kris Van Assche** to arrive at the Fodor foundry in eastern France with a color card of searing shades.

“I wanted something more radical,” he said. “I liked the fact that I would pull the material in a new direction.”

Given carte blanche by Paris art dealer François Laffanour to create sculptural objects in bronze, Van Assche made it his mission to cast an old-fashioned material in a contemporary – and otherworldly – light.

The lifelong lover of flowers, who recently designed **a collection of vases for Belgian homewares firm Serax**, also decided to make vases that don't need any roses, peonies or irises to dazzle.



Bronze vessels by **Kris Van Assche**. JÉRÉMY BARNIAUD/COURTESY OF KRIS VAN ASSCHE

His hulking, microwave-sized vessels, which go on display Thursday during men's fashion week in Paris at Laffanour's Galerie Downtown, beckon with intense, matte colors on the outside, and gleaming metal and lacquer on the inside visible through portholes, which beckon viewers in the way nectaries sheltered inside flowers attract bees.

Van Assche said he approached the project with gusto, relishing the opportunity to work closely with artisans — and to apply his fashion toolbox of shape, color and texture to a new field.

“I just took it as a challenge. I knew nothing about bronze, aside from the sculptures you come across in these beautiful parks in Paris or on the fireplace of my grandmother,” he said in an interview.

The designer's North Star was to create decorative objects that could live with the iconic furniture for which Laffanour is known by such greats as Charlotte Perriand, Jean Prouvé, Pierre Jeanneret and Le Corbusier.

At the gallery show, the vessels were propped on hulking logs instead of the usual square plinths in a forest-like setting that goes on for infinity, thanks to strategically placed mirrors.



The installation at Laffanour Galerie Downtown. IVAN EROFEEV/COURTESY OF KRIS VAN ASSCHE

As with his project for Serax, Van Assche riffed on classic vase shapes on square bases, through distending gourd, botanical and rotund shapes, and creating openings in unusual placements.

The designer was fascinated to witness how Fodor's artisans first pour molten bronze into twin molds, like an Easter egg, and then solder them together to create the vessel. Workers in protective gear employ a variety of tools to create the final surface texture, here dimpled on the outside and cratered on the inside, parts of the brass polished to exalt its natural pinkish gold color.

“I immediately came up with this idea of the vases having one story on the outside, but then another story on the inside, because there were two surfaces to work,” Van Assche explained. “There’s a lot of color combinations that I did in the past in fashion that now you can find here in these vases.”

The shapes were realized employing fashion techniques.

“I just played with proportion, like I would do with a shoulder or with a coat. It’s just like blowing things up, exaggerating, enlarging,” he explained.

The main difference with fashion, however, was the production cycle.

“I was used to making four, six or eight collections a year, but here, things take time,” said Van Assche, best known for past roles as creative director of Berluti and Dior Homme, in addition to his namesake brand.

The designer has been shuttling to and from Port-sur-Saône for the past two years, learning a great deal at the Fodor foundry.

“I’m always happy to see how people make beauty with their hands,” he said.



The vessels have contrasting outer and inner textures. JÉRÉMY BARNIAUD/COURTESY OF KRIS VAN ASSCHE

This marks the third time Van Assche has collaborated with Laffanour. In 2017, he displayed Isamu Noguchi's Akari lamps at Art Basel Miami for the launch of Dior Homme's Black Carpet collection.

And in 2019, when he was leading Berluti, he applied that house's leather patina to 17 pieces of furniture by Jeanneret, which sold swiftly.

The exhibition at Galerie Downtown runs until July 19. Van Assche created seven forms, each available in two color combinations, and produced in editions of eight. Prices are available upon request.