

# What's in the air this month

by David Lipton



## Middle Fingers

The golden mean, Aristotle maintained, was always the path of virtue between two extremes. Yet amid the artistic poles of Scotland and the South of England, the Midlands – a lustrous core of creativity, as we shall see – often lies forgotten. Not for nothing was it once the beating heart of industrial Britain. Now Craftspace is throwing the focus back to the middle of the map: gathering together 37 artisans, it is staging a touring exhibition of stuff from north of the Watford Gap, aptly titled ‘Made in the Middle’. Included among the assembly of makers is the work of Michaela McMillan. Not exactly a *juste milieu*, her sculptures are in fact the opposite of run-of-the-mill,

being full-throttle kitsch constructions. But crafted as they are from recycled materials, they give a flavour of the flourishing skilfulness in the heart of Britain. Not so much the golden as the glittering, sparkling and sequined mean. Shown left: ‘Golden Ram with Little Ram’, £85, by Michaela McMillan. ‘Made in the Middle’ launches at Leicester Gallery on 25 January. Visit [craftspace.co.uk](http://craftspace.co.uk)

## Shammy Leather

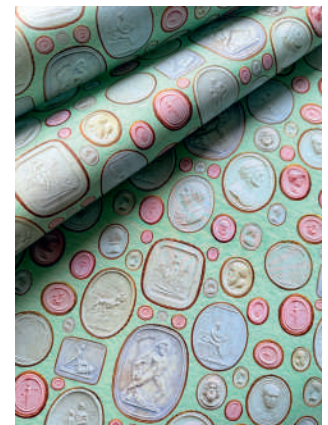
Of all fruitful unions, art and illusion are the most intimately intertwined. Literally so: from Zeuxis, who painted a bunch of grapes so realistic that birds were said to peck at them, to Grinling Gibbons’s overflowing garlands in limewood. Valentine H. Despointes, joined later by ceramicist Mélanie Durand, is taking up this bountiful baton. While previous practitioners preferred stone, wood and paint, their material is leather. ‘It allows you to create without limits,’ Valentine explains.

While the hide crafter may have picked up a knack for the medium in her father’s car-upholstery workshop, from that point she has travelled far. She has collaborated with major fashion houses from Loewe to Hermès, and presented a sculptural installation at Homo Faber last year. Recycling the offcuts of fashion houses – a wide range of differently coloured and textured hides in small quantities – has allowed her to perfect the imitation of diverse produce: a colourful cornucopia of enticing, if inedible, arrangements. Shown top: ‘Handle the Garden’, £2,070 approx. Visit Instagram [@valentinehdespointes](https://www.instagram.com/valentinehdespointes)

## Cameo Performance

Present-giving today rather jumps the gun: in the royal courts of early modern Europe, they were exchanged solely on New Year’s Day. Traditionally, *étrennes*, as they were called, included necklaces, rings, diamonds and jewels swapped as signs of favour – even, sometimes, intaglio and cameo gems. Certainly, their designs embodied the close connection between two people, an aspect that has long fascinated designer Erika Stefanutti of Parvum Opus, purveyor of papers and accessories. Thus, it is no wonder that her collection of intaglios – inspired by her many hours spent in front of the display of cameos at the British

Museum – has made its way on to a new paper design. With their gorgeous complementary colourways and heavyweight stock, they are perfect for everything from arts and crafts to bookbinding – or even for wrapping up those eleventh-hour presents. Shown below: ‘Carta’ papers, \$25 for a set of five sheets. Visit [parvumopus.com](http://parvumopus.com)



## Three-card Wicks

In a fiery frenzy, the French incinerated all social practices, from Catholicism to kingship, but not even a revolution could singe their games. Regardless of all that *égalité* and *fraternité*, playing to win, aka gambling, remained the national pastime. It even dictated the shape of tables and lamps. With its branch of candles and adjustable reflective shade, the *bouillotte* lamp – popular from the late 18th century onwards – was the





perfect device for playing this proto-poker game by night. In a collaboration with Delisle, French designer Edgar Jayet has returned to the formal principles underlying the card sharp's lamp but reinterpreted it in the sleek metal evocative of his Classical/Modernist sensibility: more a *rappel à l'ordre* than an uprising. Shown, above: 'La Bouillotte' lamp, £7,750 approx. Visit [edgarjayet.com](http://edgarjayet.com)

## The Dogs of Lore

As ancient authorities on inspiration, poets were once crowned with wreaths of laurel. Equally inspired, Rowan



MacGregor began her artistic relationship with copper by crafting such a crown. That was seven years ago. Since then, her inventiveness has led her through the garden to the forest and, specifically, folk stories: from the tallest fairy-tale castle to the smallest scuttling mouse – even, as shown here, the hounds hot on their tails – all find form in her work. Submerged in non-toxic solution, her cut-out copper creations take on the patina of 'pressed flowers or bits of buried treasure', as she explains. Inspired by Medieval metalwork and antique weathervanes, they evoke the flora and fauna that have enlivened stories for centuries. Shown below: 'Lurchers', from £25 for small pieces to £225 for larger items. Visit [rowanmacgregor.co.uk](http://rowanmacgregor.co.uk)

## Catty Dread

Rare hides are traditional trophies. Furs, including Jason's golden fleece and big-cat pelts in ancient Egypt, have long



been symbols of sovereignty. Dyed psychedelic orange and purple, this leopard skin is a groovy variant. The stretched-out specimen, designed in 1972 by Gabetti & Isola for Italian-based carpet-makers Amini, was once at the very vanguard of interior decoration: taking the forms of the past and recasting them in the fluorescence of the future. As a recognition of which, this rug is being inducted into the permanent collection of Triennale di Milano's Museo

del Design. While 'the rugs are fake [...] ferocious animals, lions, leopards, bears, dragons, nobody is afraid of them,' as Roberto Gabetti and Aimaro Isola put it when they launched their collection with Amini. That said, their design impact is real enough – and they make for witty analogues of the stately trophies they imitate. Shown above: 'Tapipardo' rug, by Gabetti & Isola for Amini, £2,230 approx. Visit [amini.it](http://amini.it)