

A Corrugated Converter of an *Artful Kind*

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From the gilded frames that enclose her comical portraits of 18th- and 19th-century aristocrats to the candle sconces that flank the front desk at the advertising agency where she keeps her office, French artist Amélie Dillemann's work is the very embodiment of irony.

At first, it's the luminous glow from the gold filigree on her ornate frames that might catch the eye, especially when the sun streams through the

windows at Louis Quatorze, the advertising agency at 10 Avenue de Friedland in Paris. But as one draws closer, the eye begins to focus on the details—the small folds in the frame, the tiniest paper-like furls in the filigree and the wavy texture in the surface of the portrait. Wait, that's not just any wavy texture... Why, that's corrugated fluting! Mon Dieu! Dillemann has used the most humble of mediums to create a masterpiece of art—and an ingenious twist in *trompe l'oeil*, to boot. Oh, the irony!

And it doesn't stop there. In fact, the subject of the portrait is an 18th-century aristocrat in a powder-dusted wig and silk ascot, who smirks at his viewers from his "krafty" perch and playfully winks an eye. It's as if he, an image skillfully borne of pen and watercolor, is thoroughly amused by his little trick and is mocking his viewer.

"Had you going there for a moment, didn't we?" he seems to say, uttering his words from a small cutout that forms his mouth. "Ah, but you see? I am nothing but an image sketched upon your average corrugated board—that which could have been a shipping container, you might say. And yet, here I hang upon this

With containerboard as her medium of choice, Paris artist Amélie Dillemann rules the corrugated art world with an 'ironic' hand.



As a Parisian, Dillemann favors classical architecture and design, like this table. But she also crafts more contemporary pieces, depending on what sparks her creativity.

wall, appreciating in value with each passing day.

"Look there, upon the wall behind you and on each side of the receptionist's head," he continues. "Imagine—candle sconces made of corrugated. Aren't they clever? And that little marble-topped cabinet? Corrugated. And..."

"Ahem!" another aristocrat rudely interrupts, this one hanging on the wall along a marble staircase. He is wiggling his bejeweled fingers in the air (a real ring adorns his three-dimensional, corrugated hand) to catch the viewer's attention—not that his taxidermic eyeballs popping out from his corrugated face wouldn't have had the same effect.

"Dear, dear, girl, but you must get a closer look at the double-tassled tie-backs on those dreamy blue- and white-striped drapes," he commands. "Those are my favorite items in the room and those are made of corrugated, too."

The first aristocrat mutters something incomprehensible under his breath, then continues. "As I was saying, everywhere you turn, there is something made of corrugated—chandeliers, mirror frames, wall-hangings..."

"You're probably starting to feel a bit like Alice in Wonderland, n'est-ce pas?" He raises a thin eyebrow sketched in black ink. "Amélie is truly a genius. After all, she created *me*. She has a certain 'je ne sais quoi' with corrugated, wouldn't you agree?" Most certainly.

AN ARTIST IN KRAFT

Dillemann, who was born and raised in Paris 32 years ago, has always been somewhat eccentric—a trait that seems to come naturally to Parisians. However, Dillemann, who is petite in stature but has a strong and independent spirit, stands out even among her own.

According to an article that appeared in the British publication, *World of Interiors*, she was expelled as a girl from several schools, but "passed her baccalauréate by a whisker" then spent two years at the Ecole Supérieure des Arts Graphiques in Paris.

"But I was expelled" from the art school, Dillemann explained to BOXBOARD CONTAINERS INTERNATIONAL, "because I would question the



professors and (criticize) them for not teaching well." She said this with a nonchalant snicker, a flutter of her hand and a puff on her cigarette.

At the age of 20, Dillemann landed a job at an advertising agency, where she worked as an assistant art director for about three years, then as a copywriter for about six years. During

her tenure at the advertising agency, she explored her own art on the side, writing and illustrating poetic stories—which she bound in little books fashioned from paperboard—and creating miniature, three-dimensional theatres, equipped with curtains, footlights, props and figures, all constructed of corrugated.

About five years ago, a friend's mother commissioned Dillemann to design a set of shelves for storing shoes. A bit strapped for cash at the time, Dillemann set about finding materials and settled upon corrugated, which she found in large supply behind her local supermarket. The end result, which Dillemann created by folding several pieces of corrugated board and securing them with a few dabs of strategically placed glue, was a fanciful collection of compartments, stacked one upon the other, and decorated with her own version of corrugated brick-a-brack.

Dillemann's creation was practically an overnight success. Before long, the orders for more of her corrugated creations were pouring in, and Dillemann was designing residential and commercial interiors, convincing her clients to put away their Baroque or Louis XVI furniture and chandeliers in favor of her whimsical replicas.

"Not that they are the same," Dillemann was quick to point out. "I never copy things the same as the originals. But I look at how they're done, and I mix them up." She also noted that, although she is inspired by the classical art and design of the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, "I will try to do

This devilish, 18th-century aristocrat greets visitors in the lobby of the Paris advertising agency where Dillemann keeps her office.

Dillemann appreciates the strength, versatility and warmth that corrugated lends to her pieces, such as this mirror frame.



anything that pleases me. Everywhere and any time, anything can inspire me."

Dillemann now works full-time on her art. Over the years she has created décors for French television and window displays for Christian Lacroix and Yves Saint Laurent. She's even created a line of small corrugated handbags for Comme de Garçons, and she's had several shows in Europe. Dillemann now produces pieces on a regular basis for a Paris gallery.

The possibilities for the objects that Dillemann will create out of corrugated are endless. A casual stroll through the advertising agency where she keeps her office is like a stroll through an exclusive gallery. In an upstairs conference room, a large looking glass leans against the wall, framed in corrugated, and on the hall tables sit picture frames and candle holders, holding real candles.

Dillemann's portraits are often three-dimensional and contain—as extensions of her own personality—elements of humor and surprise. One portrait, for example, is of an older woman with a particularly long front tooth, which Dillemann cut with a blade then poked out, so the tooth protrudes slightly from the woman's corrugated mouth. Dillemann also loves to use taxidermic eyes in her portraits, such as those used for stuffed animals or Teddy bears. She buys them at one of her favorite places in Paris, a taxidermy shop called Deyrolle on Rue de Bac.

QUEEN OF CORRUGATED

Being a malleable medium that also holds form and color, corrugated is ideal for Dillemann's artistic technique and style. It is also well-suited to her vision—that of a young woman who has classical taste and panache yet loves to challenge convention, laughs at those who take themselves too seriously and delights in tricking the mind and eye.

Dubbed as the "Queen of Cardboard" in the British magazine (although we'll take the liberty to modify that slightly to the "Queen of Corrugated"), Dillemann once said she yearns to live in a corrugated castle, "a caramel-colored castle," with corrugated furniture and furnishings and covered by a glass dome to protect it from the elements.

"I appreciate the way (corrugated) feels," Dillemann told BCI. "It's very warm and soft, yet it's very strong. You

have everything in corrugated." It is also very easy to come by, she said, as everyone has corrugated boxes in their homes. Dillemann also buys sheets of new corrugated board—in all sizes and flutes—that lean in bundles against her office walls.

Dillemann's tools include only scissors, X-acto® knives or other, stronger cutting blades, glue, brass fasteners and her hands. She uses pen and watercolors for most of her pictures and portraits, or to create certain visual effects, such as the look of a marble surface. Although she sometimes paints her objects, she often opts to leave them in their natural kraft state, giving them a coat of varnish to protect their surface.

Dillemann's talent has enabled her to make a decent living. A set of her shelves might sell for as much as \$10,000, while a miniature theater might go for \$4,000 to \$5,000. Her portraits run from approximately \$800 to \$2,500 each.

Dillemann said she does not believe she will grow tired of corrugated any time soon.

"I keep finding more and more things to make," she said. At this writer's naïve suggestion that she could make such items as spice racks, jewelry boxes or book cases, Dillemann politely interjected, stating she considers her pieces more like sculptures for display, not as practical objects to be used on a daily basis.

"I do more sculptures than actual furniture, because they are quite fragile," she said. "You could use my pieces, but you would have to pay attention, because as you touch them they get worn down. They are like old furniture—you have to be careful with them."

Back in the lobby of the advertising agency, the first aristocrat winks again at the visitor and beckons her to come closer. "Well? I told you Amélie has a certain gift with corrugated. I trust you found an abundance of surprises in her castle, yes?" Yes, the visitor replies.

"Au revoir, mon amie," he said. "And don't forget to mention that Amélie's work can be found at the *Gladys Mougin Gallery at 30 Rue de Lille in Paris, zip code 75007*. Pass it on!"



Dillemann's portraits are often three-dimensional, featuring taxidermic eyes and real objects, such as the ring on this subject's finger.

