

**CORE SKULLS**

Left, James Hopkins in his studio, with collected objects

Opposite, one of his commissions for Wallpaper\*, arranged on 'Zumm' shelving unit, €1,964, by Lievore Altherr Molina, for Sellex. On top shelf, 'Silverstone Globe', £55, by George F Cram Company, from Harvey Nichols. 'Aalto Bowl', £89, by Alvar Aalto, for Iittala, from Skandium. 'Olivia' champagne flutes, £8 each, by LSA International. 'Squeeze' vase, £105, by Orrefors, from Skandium. Fake hydrangea stems, £19 each, from Fake Landscapes. 'Fontana 1853' lamp, €490, by Max Ingrand, for Fontana Arte. 'Imbroglia' calendar, £20, by Jean-Pierre Vitrac, from Thorsten van Elten. On second shelf, mirror, £55; clock, £39; tray, £12, all from John Lewis. On third shelf, 'Solido' storage drawers, £5; 'Solido' files, £3 for three, both from Habitat. Trivet for platter, £22, by Kaj Franck, for Iittala, from Skandium. Bread board with ruler, £47, by Telma Verissimo and Claudio Cardoso, from Thorsten van Elten. Chopping board, £17, by T&G, from House of Fraser. Hand mirror on stand, £37, by Kit Grover, from Thorsten van Elten. 'Savoy' champagne bucket, £42, from LSA International. On fourth shelf, universal media holder, £33, by Eva Solo, from ICTC. Guitar, £70, from Spitalfields Market. 'Spain' lamp (cut away), £49, from Habitat. Magazine rack, £32, from John Lewis. On fifth shelf, 'Ghost' candelabra, £30, from John Lewis. Books, from a selection, by Steidl. 'Max 365' calendar, £35, by Massimo Vignelli, from the Design Museum Shop. 'Iona' bowl, £22, by LSA International. Fake fruit, £6 each, from Fake Landscapes. On bottom shelf, 'Infinity' wine rack, £33, from Kartell. 'Barrell' storage box, £14, from Habitat. 'PP Portrait' drawers, £30, from Muji. Bin, £39, from John Lewis.

# Off the wall

Nothing is quite what it seems in the twisted world of British artist James Hopkins. But we think his creations, like the pair of installations he designed especially for us, are set for a long shelf life



**A**pproaching a work by James Hopkins could induce the kind of contemporary art-related panic we all fear - that moment when an art object seems so alien or impenetrable that we are left dumbfounded and defeated by some hidden meaning we can't quite perceive.

Yet, all is revealed if you look closely enough at the series of shelving pieces that Hopkins has been making for about a year, including two works commissioned by Wallpaper\* (opposite and previous page). 'Nothing is what it seems in my work because I often use perspective and illusions so, depending on which viewpoint you adopt, you see different things,' he says. For example, amid the mirrors, chopping boards and wastepaper baskets, a ghostly skull slowly appears across the shelves. Hopkins realises that design, like everything else, soon meets its maker. 'I see these shelves as tombstones to the current, ephemeral era in design because, while they look quite luxurious and modern now, next year they will already begin to look dated.'

In addition to the back issues of Wallpaper\*, furniture catalogues and design brochures that he scoured to source the items for his shelves, Hopkins has mined a rich vein of historical art for this series. Dutch painters of the 17th century began sneaking symbolically loaded objects into their still-life paintings, which became known as *vanitas* or *memento mori* (literally, reminders of death's inevitable approach). 'I think of vanity when I see my image in the mirror, of knowledge when I read a book, and of indulgence when I drink wine or play music; but all of these things are lost in acknowledgment of seeing the skull reveal itself.' Another recent set of skull shelves, *Wasted Youth* (2006), is less regimented and consists of beer bottles, disco lights, smashed speakers and the detritus of a 'party gone wrong or of time killed by an adolescent'. However, says Hopkins, 'I don't want people to think of these works as being negative or morbid - in fact, they should be read as a celebration of life.'

All the objects in these arrangements - the fruit, the globe, the white flowers, the wine, the books, even the guitars with one broken string - derive from *vanitas* paintings, especially from Hans Holbein the Younger's *The Ambassadors* (1533), with its smudged skull that's visible only when viewed at an oblique angle. Hopkins has also borrowed this age-old trick of rotating perspective, known as *anamorphosis*, for his sculptures of abstract, colourful plastic forms that, only when seen from the front, suddenly reveal cartoon characters such as Kenny and Cartman from *South Park*, Marge and Homer from *The Simpsons*, or Mickey Mouse himself.

As well as hide-and-seek, it seems Hopkins is partial to drinking games, as seen in his 2002 work, *Balancing The Beer Table*, a precipitous pub bench with pint glasses teetering on the edge, and in *Spirit Level* (2005), the slightly cocked cocktail shelves where there is just enough liquid in each of eight vodka bottles to create a perfectly horizontal line. Remember that disorientation can be enlightening, \*  
Max Wigram Gallery, [www.maxwigram.com](http://www.maxwigram.com)



#### TAKING THE MICKEY

Above, Hopkins has a partiality for rotating and distorting perspective, taking inspiration from things such as cartoon characters and drinking games, as seen in these two pieces, *Hey Mickey* and, top, *Drinking Game (A to z)*

Opposite, a second commission for Wallpaper\*, on 'Graduate' shelving unit, €2,695, by Jean Nouvel, for Molten! & C

Top shelf on left, 'Momento' clock, £120, by Aldo Rossi, from Alessi. 'White Ribbed' pot, £15, from Habitat. 'Bay Ball' fake bush, £99, by Fake Landscapes  
Top shelf on right, 'Basis' jug, £17, by LSA International. '5052' wine cooler, £100, by Ettore Sottsass, for Alessi  
Second shelf on left, '5001' tray (cut away), £110, by Ettore Sottsass, for Alessi. 'L442' Lorenzo guitar, £65, from London Resonator Centre  
Second shelf on right, cargo box, £7, from Habitat. 'Orbital Venus' mirror, €700, by Guglielmo Berchicci, for Glas Italia

Third shelf, records, from a selection at Music & Video Exchange. Chopping board, £15, from Heal's. Cargo box, £7, from Habitat. 'PP Land' two-drawer storage box, £18, from Muji. 'Otto' ashtray, £30, from LSA International  
Fourth shelf, tray, £35, from John Lewis. 'Solido' storage drawers, £5; cargo box, £7, both from Habitat  
Bottom shelf, 'Solido' storage unit, £3 for three, from Habitat. Wine rack, £37, by Eva Solo, from ICTC. 'Sara' lamp, €188, by Pierluigi Cerri, from Fontana Arte. Chessboard, £60, from Chessmaze International  
For stockists, see Resources, page 216

