



CATCH THE DRIFT

Studio Drift's *Flylight*
installed at the Arsenale
in Venice in 2014.

Studio Drift fuses nature and technology
to create otherworldly installations that illuminate and inspire.

BY SABRINA WIRTH

When a designer tells you that his inspirational role model is Elon Musk—the business magnate behind Tesla, SolarCity and SpaceX—you know the discussion will inevitably extend beyond aesthetics. It is quite fitting then that Ralph Nauta and Lonneke Gordijn's practice is one that blurs boundaries between technology and nature to create something of a science fiction fantasy. From *Flylight*, a lamp that emulates the flight of birds through the transfer of light, to *Fragile Future III*, a modular sculpture that incorporates real dandelions encaged within bronze electrical circuits, each creation is a perfect marriage of oppositions: fragile/strong, natural/industrial and science/fiction.

In deciding the name of their company, Nauta was drawn to the word "Drift" because, "In Dutch, 'drift' means 'aggressive passion,' whereas the English meaning of the word is about flow, finding your way naturally," says Nauta. "I'm more the Dutch translation and Lonneke is more the English translation." When both find that they are equally

intrigued by a concept, they know that they are on the right track.

This track has led to projects around the world, including at Design Miami, Salone del Mobile and a permanent installation at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. During Art Basel Miami Beach, an installation of five *Shylights* will be on view at the Faena Hotel Miami Beach.

Two recent works—a site-specific piece during this year's Venice Biennale, *In 20 Steps*, and the installation *Shylight*—are Drift's most dynamic sculptures yet. Through sophisticated and original technical programming, the elegant joints are engineered to maintain constant motion. They are also the sculptures that most resemble living and breathing life forms: *In 20 Steps* hovers inside the Berengo Foundation in Murano, Italy, with its slender, glass ribs moving with the graceful motion of a bird in flight, and *Shylight* floats toward viewers like flowers in bloom or jellyfish in motion. In fact, the starting point for *In 20 Steps* came from questions about how

the movement of wings makes it possible for a bird to stay in the air. As the creators of these unique works of art, Nauta says that their proudest moments are in seeing them come to life for the first time. "You can think about how it's going to work but you can only hope that it's actually going to work like you think, and if it turns out that it comes out better than you hoped or you thought of, then that's the ultimate happiness."

With enough ideas in their sketchbooks to last several life times, Studio Drift is trying to shorten their production time with each new design. The duration for *In 20 Steps* is the shortest one yet—at two months from idea to finish. "We learned a lot from *Shylight*, *Flylight* and *Fragile Future*, in what you need to do or develop in order to get from start to finish faster." In the process, the designers have developed their own electronic platforms and are working on new technology. And, just like their name suggests, their engineering and craftsmanship—a hybrid of nature and technology—is a mix of letting it flow and taking control.