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Assab One's latest show is equal to the sum of all its parts

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The Heart of The Matter by George Sowden. Photographs: Giuseppe Fenucci

Assab One, a former printing press owned by publishing heiress Elena Quarestani is a vast industrial space which twice a year opens exhibitions. Currently on show is '1+1+1', which sees an architect (Bijoy Jain, founder of Indian practice Studio Mumbai) meet a designer (Memphis founding father George Sowden) meet an artist (Korean-born, Italy-based Chung Eun-Mo).

Each participant has created new works for the show and had free reign to approach the 2500 sq m space as they wanted. For two weeks before the opening, Jain and his craftsmen transformed his section of the gallery into an in situ studio, lime washing panels made of cow dung and bamboo, and coating sculptures made of tar with coconut oil and indigo. Sowden however, with no fixed idea in mind, arrived with cups, saucers, beer mats and silicon tea pot lids – a selection of objects that he manufactures in China at his company Sowden. He installed them as *objets trouvés* within colourful decorative panels and new black-and-white wallpaper and paintings.

Sowden also bought two textile hangings from the 1970s, to emphasise his mantra that design has always been about decoration. 'I was working in Ettore Sottsass' office at that time; it was pre-Memphis and the idea that decoration could be design was unheard of,' he explains. 'Design was wedded to rules and dogmas and you were supposed to do things a certain way. We, as Memphis came along and said, "You can do what you want".'

Mo too, created new canvases for the exhibition, each one a series of colourful shapes with no meaning and no title. They are similar to her highly abstract works from the 1990s, which are also on show and were made after she relocated from New York to Italy.

Curator Marco Sammiceli muses, 'Chung Eun-Mo is always an artist, but in this show, George and Bijoy are neither designer nor architect. They too have become more like artists.'