



LATENT SPACE: TRADITION REFRAMED

The Anton Gerner Exhibition III



Anton Gerner is an award-winning furniture designer and maker based in Hawthorn East. From an atelier and workshop that was once the local dairy, he conceives and creates one-off pieces of furniture for Australian and international clients.

Six years after his inaugural solo exhibition at Caulfield's Labassa Mansion, Anton held his first Melbourne Design Week showing in 2025 in the same heritage venue. The boundary-pushing undertaking celebrated furniture as both functional art and a vessel of memory, with two of the striking pieces joining Anton's earlier works in being acquired by the National Gallery of Victoria.

Returning for a second Melbourne Design Week exhibition, Anton has crafted a new, focussed collection of furniture. Presented alongside process documentation, drawings and research studies, the exhibition explores how time-honoured methods and designs can evolve, adapt and remain relevant in a contemporary world.

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Latent Space: Tradition Reframed is a capsule collection of five new works conceived by the enigmatic mind of furniture maker Anton Gerner. Intriguing and original in its own right, this body of work recalls the Vector Cabinets shown in Anton's 2025 *The Storm, The Craft & The Future* exhibition to further interrogate the surface of furniture as a decorative canvas.

Anton has carefully crafted each piece to interact with the viewer, revealing their entireties only after observation, movement and engagement. Meaning neither fixed nor declared is free to unfold as conditions shift between visible and hidden, exterior and interior, encoded and perceived.

Presented in Anton's Hawthorn East atelier, the exhibition forms part of the Melbourne Design Week 2026 program, which invites you to Design the World You Want. For Anton, that is a future in which craft knowledge and design heritage are not relics, but active and renewable cultural resources.

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

Over almost four decades as a furniture designer and maker, Anton Gerner has taken his fascination with latent space to develop a theory detailing how the knowledge held within the legacy of his craft can remain relevant to the aesthetic of contemporary design culture.

This theory takes shape in *Latent Space: Tradition Reframed*, a collection that investigates the persistence of design memory. In exploring how classical furniture motifs, proportions and construction methods continue to inform his design practice, Anton abstracts and reinterprets recognisable forms and further explores surface decoration as a statement.

Each of the five exhibited pieces tells a story, showcasing a dialogue between precision and restraint. The visual language remains minimal and architectural, yet Anton's deep connection to the tactile intelligence of making is always present beneath the surface.



THE LATENT SPACE THEORY by Anton Gerner

1. LATENT SPACE

A condition, not a place.

Latent space describes the territory in which inherited information, formal systems and material behaviours coexist without being fully resolved.

2. TRADITION AS AN ACTIVE ARCHIVE

Tradition is not static.

It operates as an active archive of encoded customs, carried forward through adaptation. What remains is not tradition itself, but its latent framework.

3. ENCODED SYSTEMS

The work does not provide a key.

Individual elements accumulate into larger fields; ordered but not fully legible. These systems suggest the presence of meaning yet resist complete decoding.

4. MATERIAL AS CARRIER

Timber holds information.

Grain, figure and variation form natural systems that exist prior to intervention, eschewing neutrality to become active participants in the work. At times, material is revealed. At others, it is suppressed.

5. SURFACE AND DEPTH

Minimal exteriors often conceal internal complexity.

Not always immediately visible, detail is discovered through proximity and interaction. This shift between surface and depth introduces a temporal dimension, allowing the work to unfold over time rather than presenting itself instantly.

6. GEOMETRY AND FORM

Familiar structures are destabilised.

Cabinet shape, symmetry and proportion are upturned until form becomes a site of negotiation between order and disruption.

7. PROCESS AS EVIDENCE

The work emerges through iteration.

Drawings, material tests and pattern studies form part of an ongoing investigation rather than a linear progression. These artefacts are not secondary to the finished object, they are evidence of thinking – traces of decisions, revisions, and possibilities.

8. THE ROLE OF THE VIEWER

The work does not resolve its internal tensions.

Instead, it suspends craft and design, utility and sculpture, reverence and disruption. Interpretation is left open, so meaning is constructed through the viewer's experiences of proximity, perception and time.





Dressing Table

Fiddleback Blackwood, Huon Pine, Birdseye Huon Pine, Gidgee, leather, aged brass hinges, mirror

In material, proportion and detail this Huon Pine and Fiddleback Blackwood dressing table is immediately familiar. It's the contemporary, almost postmodern form that compels a closer look and establishes a new reference point for future works. The beguiling piece carries its Art Deco and Art Nouveau influences lightly, allowing them to remain embedded rather than overtly stated.

“This dressing table epitomises the idea of inherited design knowledge carried forward. Subverting historical references allows tradition to be maintained while ensuring continuity within contemporary making.”





Above / Below

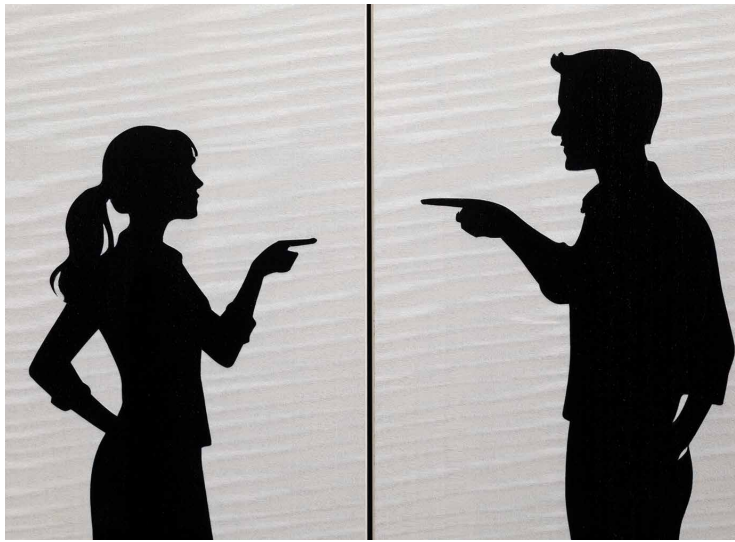
Black dyed Poplar, Vavona Burl, Brazilian Rosewood, Chestnut Burl, Huon Pine, aged brass hinges

Above / Below marks the next iteration in the embryonic Tree Series that began with the centrepiece Tree Cabinets in 2025's *The Storm, the Craft & the Future* exhibition. The cabinet depicts a tree through inlay, extending beyond the visible trunk and canopy to include its root system and collapse the separation between above and below. By presenting the tree as a continuous structure, the cabinet reveals both what is normally seen and what remains hidden beneath the surface. The tree is understood as a complete system rather than a singular image.

“What’s normally hidden is made present in this cabinet, which perfectly encapsulates my Latent Space Theory by contrasting latent versus manifest conditions. The veneer represents the tree using natural grain and colours, with the visible and hidden systems made simultaneous.”







Conflict, Roses, Calm

Bleached and white dyed figured Anegre, black dyed Poplar, Myrtle Burl, aged brass hinges

Conflict, a conciliatory gesture, calm. The cabinet's inlaid silhouettes traverse three states, suggesting a progression while remaining open and avoiding a fixed narrative. The stark white dyed Anegre contrasts with the black Poplar to reduce the figures and gestures to essential forms, allowing the viewer to recognise familiar conditions while bringing their own experiences to the relationships depicted.

"An example of meaning being shaped by the personal, this cabinet demonstrates human interaction as shifting states rather than set conditions. Tension is held and unresolved; symbolic gestures with endless narrative possibilities."

Facing Pair

*Bleached and white dyed figured Anigre,
black dyed Poplar, aged brass hinges*

A cabinet with giraffes inlaid on the exterior doors and elephants on the interior, each pair facing one another. The imagery shifts as the cabinet opens, revealing a second condition that is not immediately apparent. The relationship between the pairs is discovered rather than declared. By unfolding through contact, the work holds the exterior and interior equal – an enduring preoccupation in Anton's work.

“This cabinet invites the viewer to examine recognisable subjects as they appear in their own perceptions, memories and emotions. Interaction leads to revelation, ensuring the emphasis transcends the external to validate the interior. It also happens to be a strikingly stunning piece at face value.”







728/182 Encoded Field

*Fiddleback Blackwood, Huon Pine,
aged brass hinges*

By the numbers, this cabinet's doors are constructed from 728 individual pieces of Fiddleback Tasmanian Blackwood inlaid with 182 Huon Pine dots. On the surface this reads as a geometric pattern, yet its structure is governed by counting, placement and accumulation. The field presents as ordered and resolved, while quietly holding the logic of its making. The work does not reveal its system outright.

“This cabinet is an example of Encoded Systems – the idea that information can be held within a field and not immediately legible. The repetition and variation can be interpreted to suggest something more than what is seen at first glance.”





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ANTON GERNER FURNITURE

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Melbourne Design Week is an initiative of the Victorian Government through Creative Victoria.

