Jacob Schlaepfer, a case study in laser innovation and the unexpected.

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Abstract:

This report aims to counter some assumptions about the nature of industrial technology by exploring the creative potential of the distance inherent in laser materials processing between designer and manufactured product.

A case study of an industrially based project involving the textile company Jakob Schlaepfer, St Gallen, Switzerland, will provide the research material and underpin the report. The case study presents the development and expansion, by Schlaepfer, of self-customised laser technologies and how different laser processes have come to form an integral part of the design and production process. We aim to offer through this historical picture of Schlaepfer’s commitment to new technologies and investments that encourage innovation, two propositions that are facilitated by the distance inherent in the creative use of lasers. Firstly, that it is possible to utilise technologies normally linked with impersonalised standardisation in production, to instead create experimental products; and secondly, that technologies normally used to repeat and replicate the unexpected unique capacities of traditional making, can-be in-themselves capable of un-programmed unpredictability.

6 key words: Lasers, Technology, Design, Creative, Innovation, Unexpected