

Top 5 Innovative 3D-Printed Items

By Leyla Hussein • 14 February 2020



Someone once handed me a small plastic bracket at a trade stand and asked me to guess how it was made. Injection moulded, I said, obviously. It had been printed that morning from a spool of filament, layer by layer, while its designer drank a coffee. That is the moment [3D printing stops being](#) an abstraction and starts rearranging what you thought was possible.

It has [transformed manufacturing](#), and the appeal is simple: fast turnaround and cheap production. It is not just plastic either. Metals, glass, ceramics, carbon fibre and all manner of resins can be printed, which is exactly why the technology has reached into so many corners of life. To show you how far it stretches, here are five everyday things you would never guess were 3D printed.

5. A heart-shaped pizza

Could pizza become as effortless as those machines that pour you a coffee at the push of a button? A printer at your local garage or in the office kitchen? 3D printing could genuinely make it happen, even if Papa John might not send a thank-you card.

4. A rib-caged violin

A strange and lovely thing, its sound close to a traditional violin but its body like nothing in the orchestra. Designs like this hint at a whole new family of instruments, varying in tone and shape, and a fresh chapter for how music is made.

3. A fully working pistol

For all the good it does, 3D printing also carries an uncomfortable truth. A printed, functioning firearm is a remarkable feat of engineering and a genuinely unsettling one, because this technology does not only live in commercial workshops. It lives in spare rooms too.

2. The world's largest 3D-printed boat

Printing a boat takes a seriously large machine, but the speed of it, set against the traditional business of building moulds and skeleton structures by hand, is dramatic. What used to take weeks starts to look quaint.

1. Human organs

Once the problem of compatibility is solved, a printed organ for transplant moves from science fiction toward something viable. Think of the number of people on waiting lists who could be helped. It raises real questions too. Will a fabricated organ prove more reliable than the one we were born with, or fall to the same faults? Extraordinary either way.

3D printing is quietly taking over the manufacturing world, and here is where we can help.

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