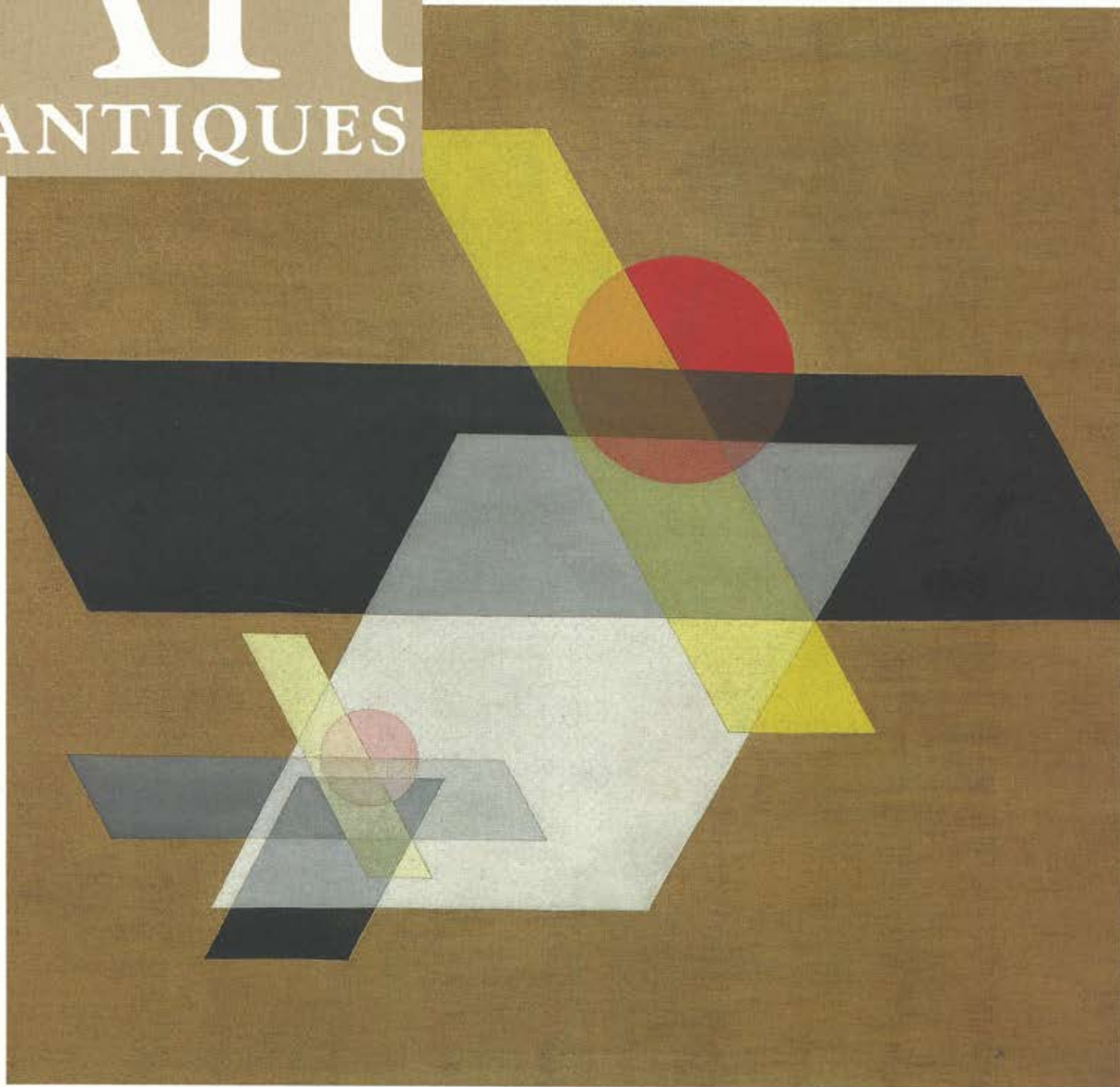


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# Art & ANTIQUES

FOR COLLECTORS OF THE FINE AND DECORATIVE ARTS



CONTEMPORARY DESIGN | CLAUDIO BRAVO | THE BROTHERS LE NAIN | ART IN CHICAGO

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LÁSZLÓ MOHOLY-NAGY



# DESIGNS OF THE TIMES





As the barrier between design and fine art crumbles, today's artist-designers are giving their imaginations free rein.

By John Dorfman

**A delicate skein of openwork bronze leaves and branches** coalesces to form a bench or a chair. A sinuously curved steel construction coated with auto-body paint is a chaise longue. What looks like an asteroid fragment glowing with cosmic rays is actually a floor lamp. With creations like these, today's emerging designers are playing havoc with the modernist mantra "form follows function"—unless the function is to provide delight as well as utility, to stimulate the imagination as well to support the body. The design scene

is being pervaded by a spirit of exuberance and playfulness, and something more—a sense that the traditional separation between design object and work of fine art is arbitrary and obsolete.

Some pieces seem at first glance to be sculptures but then turn out to have a functional aspect. Others may be non-functional (at least by the traditional definition) but are made by people who come out of the design world and show at galleries primarily dedicated to design. "It's been my experience over the last 20 years that the lines drawn





Previous spread, clockwise from top left: Vivian Beer, *Anchored Candy No. 6*, 2014, steel and automotive paint, 60 x 21 x 42 inches; Alex Rasmussen, *Blue Lunar Console*, 2016, anodized aluminum, 24 x 80 x 16 inches; Vivian Beer, *Ruffle Chaise*, 2013, steel, black and red automotive finish, 77 x 27 x 24 inches; gt2P (Great Things to People), *Marble vs. Bronze Coffee Table*, 2015, Italian marble and bronze, 14.5 x 39.25 x 39.25 inches, edition of 12; Ball Nogues, *Music Leg Glob Lamp*, 2012, sprayed paper pulp and lightbulb, 17 x 17 x 10 inches. This page, clockwise from top left: Gregory Nangle, *Forrest Bowl*, 2015, cast silicon bronze leaves, cast bronze, 15 x 7 inches; Gregory Nangle, *Forrest Bench*, 2015, cast silicon bronze leaves, cast bronze, 49 x 19 x 13 inches; Philipp Aduatz, *Melting Chair*, Black Chrome Edition, GFRP, special black chrome, 37 x 37 x 31 inches.



between artist, sculptor, designer have become increasingly porous and that the individuals in those categories are open to exploring other territories,” says Edward Cella of Edward Cella Art & Architecture in Los Angeles. “As a dealer, it’s been fascinating.” Lewis Wexler of Wexler Gallery in Philadelphia, which specializes in design, glass art, and ceramics, concurs: “The lines are blurred between fine art, design, and craft. The field has really changed. Fifteen years ago there weren’t design fairs at all; now at those fairs they would like you to show art as well as design. It’s a very exciting time to be in.”

To some extent, both the market and the museum world are simply ratifying what collectors are already feeling and doing. “Clients and collectors don’t tend to see the difference,” says Cella. “Go to Design Miami, and you see works by artists who are showing in museums next to design objects that are also in museums. Many museums are doing installations that combine art with design. At the Art Institute of Chicago or MoMA, you may see a Frank Lloyd Wright chair next to a contemporary piece, next to a painting, next to sculpture, with a rug underneath—an assemblage of objects with varying degrees of functionality and decorativeness.”

Thinking of fine art and design objects as being arranged along a spectrum of “functionality and decorativeness” is a good way to make sense of the diversity of today’s design. Toward the far end on the “fine art” side are works such as the ceramics of South African designer Andile Dyalvane, which will be on view in a solo show at the New York design gallery Friedman Benda from June 23–August 19. Some of the pieces have an opening at the top, giving at least a nod to the traditional concept of a vessel, but others are closed, which essentially makes them sculptures. The artist–designer incises the surfaces with patterns that allude to Xhosa ritual scarification, and to express the mixing of cultures in South Africa, some of those marks are made with fragments of 20th-century technological detritus found in street markets. The Friedman Benda show will also include a monumental ceramic-and-wood screen that recalls the forms of sky-

PREVIOUS SPREAD: WEXLER GALLERY; EDWARD CELLA ART & ARCHITECTURE; WEXLER GALLERY; IMAGE COURTESY OF FRIEDMAN BENDA AND GT2P; PHOTOGRAPHY: JONATHAN ALLEN STUDIO; EDWARD CELLA ART & ARCHITECTURE; THIS PAGE: WEXLER GALLERY

scrapers going up in Cape Town.

Another artist represented by Friedman Benda, Adam Silverman, also creates ceramic vessels, egg-shaped or asymmetrical, with differing degrees of functionality. A former architect, Silverman is having his first show at the gallery this month (May 5–June 11). Director Carole Hochman says, “To the question ‘are they functional,’ I would say they fall on either side of that line. He’s now starting to do groupings of open and closed vessels, so there’s a narrative between those elements. What I think is so incredible is his experimentation with surfaces—altering the thrown surface by pummeling, slashing, repeated firings and scraping away. It’s hard to classify him, but I don’t think that’s really important.”

Some of the non-functional pieces that are shown in a design context are made by people who come out of the design and architecture worlds and now are being given the chance to create works free from the constraints of function. Cella represents an L.A.-based collaborative team called Ball Nogues, led by architects Ben-



Laura Kishimoto,  
*Yumi Chair II*, 2014,  
ash veneer, steel,  
48 x 41 x 47 inches.



jamin Ball and Gaston Nogues, who formerly worked for Frank Gehry. Known for producing large-scale outdoor installations, they now “take architectural methodologies and design skills and apply them to fine-art work,” says Cella. Some of the pieces have domestic functionality, like the glowing, rock-like floor lamps mentioned above, but others are pure aesthetic expression, like their wall-mounted rectangular pieces made of folded and crumpled strips of steel. These present themselves to the eye as framed abstract pictures, but the materials speak of the construction and thought processes of architecture and heavy industry.

The support of dealers who give designers the opportunity to make fine-art pieces has been instrumental in forming and sustaining this trend. Hochman says that at Friedman Benda, “the goal is to work with the designers so they have the freedom to develop new bodies of work. What you’re seeing with



Clockwise from top left: Andile Dyalvane, *Sound Mellon*, 2015, red clay, 21 x 10 x 10 inches; Ball Nogues, *03:00.0*, 2015, steel, 26 x 38 x 3 inches; Adam Silverman, *Untitled*, 2016, stoneware and burnt wood, 17 x 13.25 x 14 inches.

has been making for six decades. Rasmussen, the third-generation owner of the company—which started out making dental instruments and stereos—has fabricated pieces for designers including Marc Newson and Peter Marino and is now designing his own pieces. “He does hand-drawn design and digital design,” says Cella, “milling the aluminum himself. He knows that material like nobody else. There’s a kind of hand to it, a kind of intimacy; that is what connects it to art making process. The Jeff Koons model is a whole other thing.”

Vivian Beer, who is represented by Wexler, also uses industrial materials and processes. She works with welded steel and automotive paint in what Wexler calls “hot-rod colors” to make innova-

all these people is exuberance and energy; that’s what’s driving them. Our collaboration helps them get the freedom and time to experiment and push the limits, to come up with something new and fresh.” Wexler comments that this kind of freedom has been a longstanding need on the part of designers. “A lot of craftspeople always wanted to be in the fine-art world,” he says. “Talk to Wendell Castle—he wanted to be a sculptor. We’re about freeing up artists to create a body of work that doesn’t necessarily have to meet the confines of functionality, giving them the freedom to experiment with many different things.” Occasionally the process goes in the other direction—one of Wexler’s designers, Gregory Nangle, who makes the bronze-leaf furniture, was originally a glass artist and then wanted to do something functional.

One of the things that a lot of younger designers are experimenting with is materials—in particular materials typically used for mass production or industrial fabrication but now worked on by hand for unique or limited-edition pieces. An example is Alex Rasmussen, who makes tables, chairs, benches, trays, and more out of a patented colored anodized aluminum product that his family’s business, the Neal Feay Company of Santa Barbara, Calif.,



tive pieces of furniture such as her “Anchored Candy” series of chaises longues. She has also made some chairs and benches out of steel tubing and a kind of artificial concrete composite called ferrocement. “She is one of those who bring a certain excitement to the design community,” says Wexler. “She’s incorporating car culture and also fashion.” Beer, who recently won “Ellen’s Design Challenge” hosted by Ellen De Generes on HGTV, spent a good part of 2014 researching the history of American industry, architecture, and transportation with a fellowship at the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum.

A different kind of materials experiment is being made by Great Things to People (gt2P), a design, architecture, and art studio in Santiago, Chile. In partnership with Friedman Benda, they recently made a table that merges marble with bronze in one smooth finish. The marble is given a cutout treatment, and the resulting gaps are then filled in with bronze, which seems to spread like liquid across the table’s surface and then down into the legs. While these two time-honored materials have often been used together in pieces of furniture, this almost biomorphic interpenetration of the two is something new. Hochman says that Gt2P, which the gallery introduced at Design Miami, “are very energetic, using 3-D imaging techniques and pairing



From top: Misha Kahn, grouping of black concrete stools and table; nendo, 50 Manga Chairs, Designed by nendo, brochure.

them with traditional techniques and local sourcing from Chile.”

One aspect of the exuberance of today’s design is a strong dose of fantasy, playfulness, or humor. Misha Kahn, a 27-year-old American who just had a show at Friedman Benda, makes wildly colored pieces of furniture and mirrors that look like they should be squeezably soft but are actually made of hard resin or concrete—sort of a tactile version of *trompe l’oeil*. He also works with bronze, plywood, epoxy, and even sawdust. Philipp Aduatz, an Austrian designer who shows at Wexler, made a black-chrome chair that is perfectly solid but looks like it’s melting. And nendo inc., a design firm founded in Tokyo in 2002, has created a series of 50 polished aluminum “Manga Chairs” that play with the visual language of comics. The series debuted last month in Milan at the Basilica Minore di San Simpliciano, in conjunction with the Salone del Mobile, Milano. Some of the chairs look like they have speech bubbles emanating from them; others have straight or curved lines of metal sticking out to one side indicating movements like spinning or zooming. Each can stand on its own, but together they form what Friedman Benda calls “a collective narrative.” In fact, says Hochman, all the pieces the gallery is showing “are more than just design. They all have some sort of narrative to them.”

But those narratives are inherent to the pieces; they’re not narratives about design becoming art, or art becoming design. “It’s not necessary to label,” says Hochman, “it’s how the pieces are realized. You have collectors who want to furnish and collectors who want more sculptural pieces to be juxtaposed with their art collections. Some are more concerned with function, some less. We don’t define it; we present it.”



50 MANGA CHAIRS. DESIGNED BY nendo.