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THE DESIGN ISSUE

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"LIVING MYTHS IN BLACK RUBBER SUITS AND GLASS MASKS HAUNT THE SHORES, SINGING BLUES FROM THE DEEP." PAGE 82

THE NEW YORK EYE

Wherever the great design pieces come from, they tend to end up in New York. But the curators of this movement don't work for museums—they're out there in the marketplace.

BY JOE DOLCE • PHOTOGRAPHS BY MARK HEITHOFF

You shall go to the ball....
The birch plywood Cinderella Table from the Dutch team Demaker van's Eindhoven collection.

New York these days is less about a bubbly homegrown design movement—that's happening more in Holland, with Britain and Belgium

bringing up the rear. Instead, New York is where you go to discover what's happening around the world, and the best place for that is—still—at Moss.

In fact, the history of Moss telescopes the story of contemporary design in this city—with the current chapter represented by a second wave of increasingly influential design arbiters across the river in Brooklyn. Fourteen years ago, Moss was a sliver of a shop in SoHo, surrounded by a vibrant gallery scene,

It sold practical, beautiful, mostly Italian industrial design that complemented the midcentury modern stuff that was about to hit. "I was more interested in method, not the final result," says Murray Moss, a former set designer who today runs his enterprise with his life partner, Franklin Gretchel. The galleries left SoHo years ago, but Moss remained and today it's a multiheaded design destination showcasing furniture and decorative objects, along with a new exhibition

space. Its popularity appears to be rivaled only by the Apple Store around the corner.

"In the past few years the conversation, the subject, and the audience have changed," says Moss. "The people who went to school to become industrial designers are exploring things on their own. And what they've found is that there's a market for that one-off piece that's been sitting in their studio." What he means is that the boundaries between categories like industrial, lighting, or furniture design have broken down and a new, very lucrative market for limited edition, more personal pieces has opened up. While the prices for these objects are often stratospheric, it is good news for those who make the objects. "It's not so wacky for a person

to become a designer anymore," points out Moss. "In the past it was very questionable, sort of like becoming a ballet dancer. It's now considered a possibly viable career."

What it also means is that this new design market is sold less like fashion and more like art. At the highest end, the beautiful functional object has given way to the rarified, collectible *objet*. This has left design editors and bloggers twisting their knickers trying to answer the question that Duchamp raised 90 years ago: Is it design, or is it art—and what the hell's the difference anyway?

These days it isn't just the well-heeled who are driven to design; everyone thinks that wallpaper or an iPhone reveals something about their character, and you never know

Born to be wild: Amanda Levete's polyurethane Drift bench references nature, while Stephen Burke's Missoni vase is entirely urban.



A gold clock and a place to retire: Kiki van Eijk's Soft Clock nestles beside the Double Poltrona, from Jamie Hayon's Showtime collection.

who you'll find in a design shop. "Figurines are having a complete resurgence and a lot of skater boys are coming in to buy Lladró," says Dave Alhadeff, owner of the design store The Future Perfect in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. "OK, they're now in their late 20s and semi-famous graffiti artists, but I couldn't have predicted these guys' love of the decorative object." The same holds true with wallpaper. "I'm often surprised that so many men, dudes with chain wallets from

the neighborhood, are drawn to wallpaper," he says. "It's black on black damask and a little punk, but I'd have thought women would control that purchase decision."

To see where design in New York—and the rest of the Western world—is heading, I asked Moss, Alhadeff, and Jamie Gray, owner of Matter in Brooklyn and Manhattan, to choose a few talents that continually delight their eyes and their minds. Here's what they said. >

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Murray Moss

MOSS, MANHATTAN

Job Smeets, Maarten Baas, Hella Jongerius, Marcel Wanders, Tord Boontje: These are the big Dutch (and Belgian) names with whom Moss is in close association. He works with them personally, both in their industrially manufactured pieces as well as their limited edition studio pieces. "I'm not interested in who's hot or not," he says. "I'm interested in what goes on in a designer's mind."

His relationship with Maarten Baas exemplifies this point. Several years ago he debuted Baas's "When There's Smoke" collection in New York and brought the Dutch designer to U.S. renown. The series, in which Baas literally sets fire to a classic piece of furniture—a chair, piano, or credenza—produces a haunting transformation of the surface that leaves the form intact but exposes its fragility.

Their next collaboration ups the ante to a fantastic level that signals either the end of Western civilization or the broken relationship between design and function. They plan to burn a 1940s sailing vessel, currently docked in Eindhoven in the Netherlands, because "we thought the biggest fear of fire was at sea." First they have

to figure out how to burn it, and then how to transport and show it. "We don't even know," says Moss, "if it will fit in any venue." Here are Moss's current favorites.



Joost van Bleiswijk

The elaborate, often iconic, objects of Dutchman Joost van Bleiswijk are assembled without glue or screws: urns, bookcases, hourglasses, grandfather clocks, among them. "They're often big, very beautiful, and functional," says Moss of the pieces. And they often hark back to another era. "I'd rather design wine decanters or chess boards than mobile phones," van Bleiswijk says.



Julien Carretero

Young French designer Julien Carretero has worked with Maarten Baas since 2006. His work sheds new light on ancient production methods, in particular the craft of casting metal. "When you cast an object, you have to

make a new mold after each edition because the mold distorts quickly," explains Moss. In Carretero's piece "Chapter One," he takes a small two-inch-wide profile of the cabinet, casts it in resin, and then reuses the same mold to cast another sliver in a different color. The mold distorts over time, and the result is a wavy exploration of an object that appears to be shifting in time.



Tomáš Libertiny

This Slovakian-born engineer is presently living in Rotterdam and is making his name with limited edition vases made by bees. To coerce his bees to create the shapes that interest him, Libertiny created a scaffolding of a Ming vase, and then placed it in a box and put the bees in with it. They produced a wax vessel in 7-12 days—but once they do it, they resist doing it again. They know something is odd. Says Moss, "Libertiny reminds me of a 16th-century person who'd make objects for the cabinets of curiosity, the Wunderkammer. There's a synthesis between nature and

an intervention by man that results in a piece of art."



Miriam van der Lubbe

Miriam van der Lubbe brings a fine art sensibility to plastic by laser cutting enormous blocks of material as if she were carving marble. The Dutch designer is currently carving scenes from *The Divine Comedy* into giant blocks of polypropylene that will eventually find their final form as chairs.



Job Smeets

Moss says the Dutch designer Job Smeets is "really exploring something current by taking industrially produced iconic objects—milk stools, kitchen pots, lanterns—and re-rendering them through the artistic process. He'll do a life study of one of these quotidian objects," explains Moss, "model it in wax, do another life study on a larger, more heroic scale, cast it

in wax, then in bronze, polish it, and put it on an elaborate wood pedestal—as if to say, 'Now that we went through an art process, can you see sculptural qualities inherent in everyday objects?' He magnifies what it took to make these pieces and in doing so shows you exactly what is going on."

Dave Alhadeff

THE FUTURE PERFECT, BROOKLYN

When Dave Alhadeff launched The Future Perfect five years ago, he harnessed the energy of a dozen or so Brooklyn-based designers, some of whom (Sarah Cihat, Jason Miller) went on to bigger and better things, and others who just went on. His selection leaned toward the kitsch, and he was occasionally criticized for his shop of one-liners. Personally, I always preferred to think he was stepping out on the edge of "good" taste.

Today, there's still plenty of humor, but Alhadeff has expanded his offerings to include international names, plus a smattering of American designers whose work is still rooted in the craft tradition. "A lot of great American design is hidden within this community," he says, pointing to a hand-carved vase by Jennifer McCurdy,

a potter from Martha's Vineyard. "These ceramics are fantastic and I think she could design for Rosenthal. The beauty of that is when I mentioned it to her she didn't know what Rosenthal was."

Alhadeff's shop today is more cluttered than when he launched (designers call this "layered"). His eye has grown more sophisticated, he says, and so too have those of his customers. If there's one object that exemplifies his aesthetic, it's the four-inch-tall hand-carved Crayola crayon sculpture by Seattle-based artist Diem Chau. "It has sat alone on a shelf in my house for years now and I'm not sick of it," says Alhadeff. "It's playful, ironic, obsessive. It's art yet crafty. I love it." Here are Alhadeff's picks for designers to seek out.



Sarah Cihat

"What impresses me about Sarah," says Alhadeff of the Tennessee-born, Brooklyn-based designer, "is that she's so young but has had such success already with her rehabilitated dishware," made from dishes bought in secondhand shops, redesigned with new motifs, and re-glazed. "Her new porcelain

figurines include wolf heads with open jaws featuring gold teeth or dogwood flowers in their mouths, as well as vases and bowls with brass and copper chains.



Kiki van Eijk

"Kiki continues to impress year after year in Milan," says Alhadeff of Dutch designer Kiki van Eijk. "She was one of the only designers who I felt had great new work on display this year." Her furniture is packed with details and decorative elements, and she strives to invoke a strong sense of personal memory in her works.



Jamie Hayon

"Jamie's on a clear path to stardom," declares Alhadeff of the Spanish designer. "He has a refreshingly original and utterly unique style. With work for some of the best manufacturers slated for release in the next few years, he'll soon be everywhere. His range is

vast, from furniture—like the bright blue Multileg Cabinet—to toys. He's also the design director for Lladró and his figurines, to which he hand-affixes 1,000 tiny flowers, are obsessive and amazing."



Jason Miller

A former assistant to Jeff Koons, Jason Miller works in Brooklyn. His "I Was Here" table is a series of contradictions. "It's a picnic table made of plastic wood that mimics real lumber," says Alhadeff. "All the graffiti is found on actual park benches, then routed onto the table so nothing is done by hand. It's also graffiti-proof. Everyone who comes in makes a comment. When that happens, pocketbooks open."



David Wiseman

Based in Los Angeles, David Wiseman makes sculptural lighting and ornaments inspired by nature: Tree bark, branches,

or cherry blossoms are among his favorite motifs. "I love the branch chandelier and the 'Wall Forest,' which are castings of fallen trees available in different species," says Alhadeff.

Jamie Gray

MATTER, MANHATTAN AND BROOKLYN

Less ironic than The Future Perfect, more user-friendly than Moss, Matter is owner Jamie's Gray's personal mix of objects for the body, wall, table, and shelf. While he seeks out American designers, he also says he's "still waiting for the design capital of this country to emerge." His main focus is on functional objects, but he's also playful. He's got quirky one-offs like Rob Teeters's Book Table, an 18-inch-thick bound book that doubles as a bedside table, or an oversized charm bracelet cast in porcelain by hot young Dutch team Demakersvan.

According to Gray the next frontier in design is the environment, though his perspective is more informed by preservation than pollution. "I feel like I curate a collection of functional objects that are so well made they'll never see a landfill," he says. "Even when people are done with them,

they'll eventually find their way to some auction house."

Gray believes the most exciting design right now is coming out of the UK. At Matter he carries the entire line of Established & Sons, known for innovative works from designers both up-and-coming and known. "Amanda Levete of Future Systems creates these sinuous forms that reference nature, but are truly otherworldly," says Gray. "Her 'Drift' bench, though inspired by driftwood, is nothing short of remarkable in a gloss black finish." The Cinderella table (by Demakersvan) "shows a beautiful use of technology," says Gray. "It evokes a bit of classical form while its hi-tech design turns it inside out." Herewith more designers Gray likes to keep watching.



Lindsey Adelman

"When Lindsey Adelman turned a series of her drawings into a lighting collection she came up with something remarkable," says Gray. He particularly likes her "Bubble" series, which he says is "a perfect example of what has always

been so right about truly good American design—think George Nakashima or Wendell Castle back then, or Tyler Hays now. Parts are made locally, there's attention paid to tiny details, and a touch of craft in the hand-blown glass elements." Grays says that "like many of the great American designers, Adelman has broad appeal, because her work can live as easily in either a classic or a contemporary setting."



Shay Alkalay

"When I first saw Shay's 'Stack,' I had to find someone to tell me what I was looking at," recalls Gray of a work by Israeli designer Shay Alkalay. "What I saw was a massive geometric totem in pantone colors that was actually a towering chest of different size drawers, albeit not very functional at nearly 20 feet high. But the impact was great, and the actual production versions are fantastic—the drawers can be pushed or pulled open on both sides—and the result is completely unexpected." ■



Stephen Burks

"I remember seeing what was probably the first piece of press he ever received, maybe seven or eight years ago," says Gray. "I didn't know Stephen Burks at the time, but saved the article because I thought, 'This guy is going to do something really cool and I should work with him.'" Today, Chicago-born Burks designs for some great manufacturers, including Missoni (patchwork vases made from fabric scraps) and Cappellini (a table hand-made from shredded design magazines by artisans in South Africa). "He pairs eco-consciousness with high design and should set the bar for how the design community naturally approaches manufacturing," says Gray. "Leaving a smaller footprint should no longer be an afterthought." ■

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The Future Perfect: 115 N. 6th St., Brooklyn; 718/599-6278; thefutureperfect.com.

Matter: 405 Broome St., New York; 212/343-2600; mattermatters.com.