

THE DESIGN EDIT

FOR COLLECTORS AND DREAMERS

EXHIBITIONS

Galerie Philia at Walker Tower

A tightly curated scenography of collectible design, shown in one of New York's iconic art deco apartments.

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By Charlotte Abrahams / 15th February 2021



Installation view with Cédric Breisacher, 'Butterfly' stools, 2018; Frederik Bogaerts and Jochen Sablon, 'Gestalt' bench, 2019
COURTESY: Galerie Philia

“THE WHOLE IDEA of this show is to create a tension between a gallery and a real apartment,” says architect and designer Pietro Franceschini. He is talking about Galerie Philia at Walker Tower, the exhibition of international contemporary design he has curated, in collaboration with Galerie Philia, inside Ralph Walker’s Manhattan masterpiece.



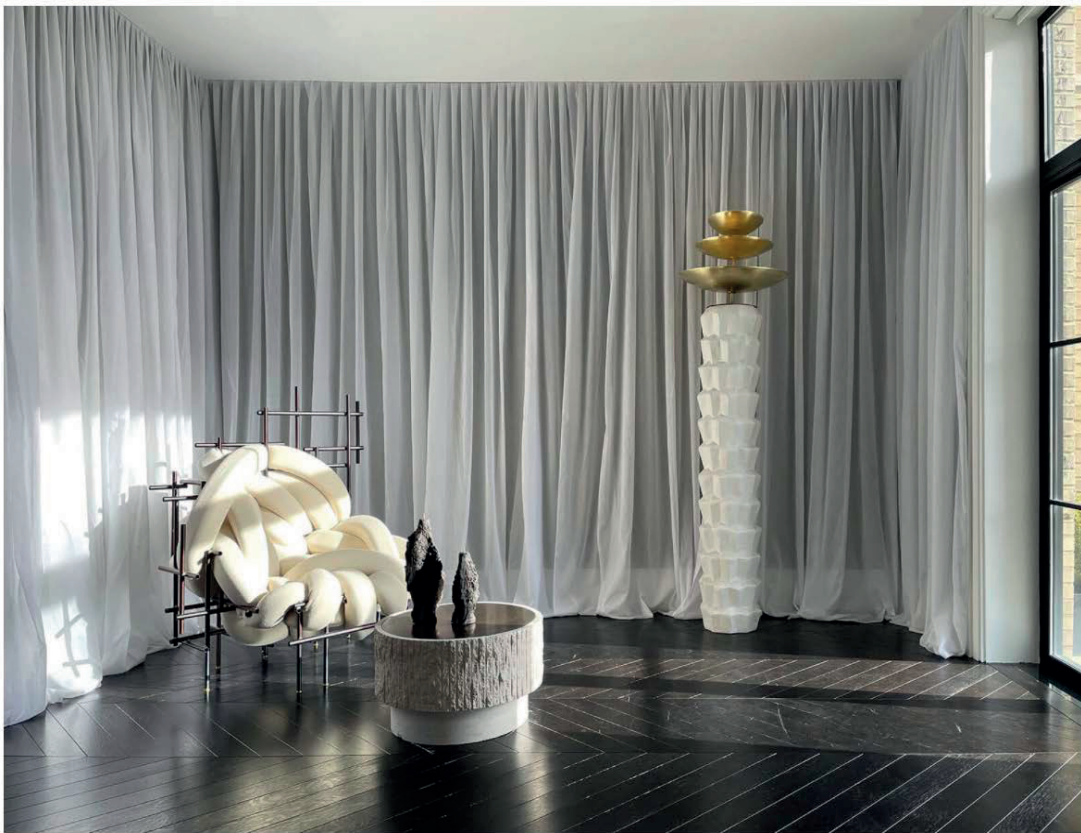
Élisa Uberti, 'Édifice' table lamp, 2020
COURTESY: Galerie Philia

Galerie Philia is known for staging exhibitions outside the conventional gallery space as a way of provoking a dialogue between the contemporary art and design scene and different architectural styles. Its founders, two brothers who prefer to remain anonymous, have used French castles, contemporary lofts and theatres dating back to the middle ages. New York's art deco icon fits the model perfectly – and coming at a time when the home has taken such a central role in our lives, this more domestic setting feels especially appropriate.



Installation view with 'Bling Bling' chair by Pietro Franceschini, 2020
COURTESY: Galerie Philia

“The gallery already represented all of the 40 designers in the show,” says Franceschini, “but the scenography was tightly curated and the 70 individual pieces were all carefully chosen to fit. Colour-wise, the keywords are neutral tones – black, white, cream and some brass, while primitive shapes and hand-crafted materials bring out an ethereal character that is consistent throughout the apartment. The goal was to show that minimal doesn’t necessarily mean reductive.”



Installation view with 'Lawless' armchair by Evan Fay, 2020
COURTESY: Galerie Philia

Taking centre stage in the main living space is a hand-sculpted oak dining table by French designer Cédric Breisacher. With its dark tones and organic simplicity, disrupted only by a cut across the centre, it is a perfect evocation of the exhibition’s aesthetic. Even that sole decorative intervention was born out of necessity. “The apartment is on the 18th floor,” Franceschini explains, “so the table wouldn’t fit in the elevator as one piece. Cédric’s solution was to cut it in two. That functional cut has become the table’s chief characteristic.”



Cédric Breisacher, 'Divided Scale' dining table, 2021
COURTESY: Galerie Philia

The brass note in this room comes courtesy of Franceschini's own 'Gold Arch Console', which, along with his 'Bling Bling Ottoman', was made especially for the show. Both works are part of his inaugural furniture collection, which was inspired by an exhibition of neotenic design he saw in New York a couple of years ago. "Neotenic design expresses the condition of preserving juvenile characteristics when you become an adult," he explains. "I wanted to bring that sense of playfulness to my work."



Dino Franceschini, 'Bling Bling Ottoman', 2020

Franceschini has also brought that spirit to his curation. The entire show is infused with a spirit of playfulness, especially upstairs where the monochrome colour palette is punctuated by occasional points of colour and the pieces take on even chunkier forms. Studio Noon's vast, pink, cast concrete 'Cherub' chair, for instance, makes you smile, confusing the senses with its soft form and colour, combined with hard materiality. The soft pink stoneware lamp by ceramicist Elisa Uberti appears dreamily to gaze out over Manhattan's skyline. The five hand-built ceramic vessels by young Dutch designer Willem van Hooff – deliberately misproportioned – bring yet more humour and colour to the scene.



Willem Van Hoof, 'Gamia', 2019
COURTESY: Galerie Philia / PHOTOGRAPH: Pierre Castignola

These flashes of colour come together in the final room of the show, the 'Pastel Bedroom'. "We wanted to create this single, very conceptualised coloured room at the end," says Franceschini, "so everything in here is tinted pink, yellow and green."



Installation view with 'Sculptural Floor Lamp', by Léa Mestres, 2020
COURTESY: Galerie Philia

The room also features two stand-out pieces, Léa Mestres's outsize plaster floor lamp and a resin console by Austrian-born, Rotterdam-based designer Laurids Gallée. "I'm really excited by this young designer's work," Franceschini explains. "His pieces are very pure in terms of geometry, but he creates this very ethereal effect because of the type of resin he uses. It's translucent and, as the light filters through, you get all these beautiful shades of green."



Installation view with Sandra Bottinga, 'Charme Table Lamp', 2019 and Laurids Gallée, 'Green Console', 2020
COURTESY: Galerie Philia

"Every piece here is an outstanding example of contemporary collectible design"

"... Each piece has been placed for its aesthetic impact, rather than any functional purpose"



Installation view with Elisa Uberti, 'Opéra' table lamp, 2020
COURTESY: Galerie Philia

Of course, the idea that we have been wandering the rooms of a real home is a conceit. Each one of these contemporary collectible pieces has been carefully placed to maximise its aesthetic impact, rather than its functional purpose. The 'library' for example, has no books, just a new iteration of Evan Fay's Lawless chair – one of Galerie Philia's signature pieces – as well as Frédéric Saulou's 'Ambiguë' coffee table with its patinated bronze top, and a sculptural floor lamp by Nata Janberidze and Ketí Toloraia of Rooms. But it is a very beguiling conceit. "What we wanted," says Franceschini, "is for the dilemma of whether the work is functional or aesthetic, which has been a huge one in our field for so long, to be forgotten as soon as you step through the door because beauty and function blend together."



Evan Fay, 'Lawless Fauteuil', 2020
COURTESY: Galerie Philia

Prices range from €900 to €48,000.

Galerie Philia – an international contemporary design and modern art gallery representing emerging and established designers and artists.

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