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For Galerie Philia, the Pandemic Sparked a Multi-City Exhibition

After isolating for months in a remote village in the south of France, the gallery's director was inspired to bring together a group of artists in the spirit of collaboration.

By Rachel Gallaher



A room at the "Transhumances II" exhibition, mounted by Galerie Philia at the Palazzo Galli Tassi in Florence. Image by Maison Mouton Noir.

Like many people during the seemingly never-ending months of the pandemic, Ygaël Attali—director of [Galerie Philia](#), an international contemporary art and design gallery with locations in New York, Geneva, and Singapore—and his wife, who is an artist, retreated into isolation. For them, the location was Le Sauvan, a secluded village in the South of France. The experience proved to be transformative: the isolation coupled with close, everyday proximity to nature sparked in Attali the idea for a residency that would once again bring artists together in a world where they had been forced apart for so long. The result, *Transhumances I*, was a residency that took place in the summer of 2020 in Le Sauvan, followed by an exhibition at the neighboring Château de Barjac. There, a group of international artists collaborated to create a body of work that celebrated, and drew from, the resources available in the region: oak, boxwood, limestone, wheat, and cherry wood.

"In the early days of the pandemic, I was inspired to seek solutions to bring artists together in a distanced world, closer to nature and in a way that would be conducive to creation and ideas," Attali says. "During the pandemic, we could feel people's isolation and the environmental crises aggravated by Covid. The answer was *Transhumances*, a residency where invited designers would explore and experiment with natural, locally sourced materials, immediately followed by an exhibition in the same place, village, or city. The initiative aims to cut down on long-distance transportations and heavy logistics, thus reducing carbon footprint, and ultimately invite the local community to discover the work of emerging and established designers."



The artists participating in "Transhumances II" worked with local and regional materials found throughout Tuscany. Image by Maison Mouton Noir.

The inaugural residency was a success—artists and designers, all represented by Galerie Philia, included Roxane Lahidji, Jojo Corváiá, Pietro Franceschini, among others—and Attali decided to take the concept to different cities around the world, “each time with different local materials and incorporating the local history,” he says. The latest iteration of the show, *Transhumances II* opened on October 9 at the Palazzo Galli Tassi in Florence, where a mix of emerging and established artists and designers (Cédric Breisacher, Isac Elam Kaid, and Elisa Uberti among them) held a residency during the first half of July. Once again, Attali wanted the group to engage with local materials and history.

“Each artist has experimented with the creative techniques used during the Renaissance, for instance with natural dyes, when extracting color pigments from flowers and other organic materials sourced locally in Tuscany,” Attali explains. “Vibrant colors are a recurrent feature in their work, and the techniques of knife-painting and tempera (involving mixing egg yolk with ground color pigments to form an emulsion thinned with water), have also been explored. *Scagliola*, a plaster technique that flourished in the final century of the Renaissance, is another process residents have investigated; it was used as a substitute for marble, made from selenite, glue, and natural pigments, imitating the more expensive stone. Florence, with its rich history and endless natural resources, offered a wealth of creative possibilities and perspectives.”



The installation (which runs through December 2) is earthy and elemental—masculine-leaning materials shaped into feminine-edged forms and layered with industrial details (concrete, bricks, wood, piping) ground the exhibition in its space. Many of the pieces echo each other in shape, with a cantilevered element or one side that has more weight or material than the other. And yet, they do not feel unbalanced. The distance between each object, the pairing of materials, and the combination of recognizable design pieces (bench, table, furniture) with art objects create an elevated mix. Light coming in through large windows (or focuses from the ceiling) breaks through the dark palette and shrouds each room with a sense of mystery, a suffusion of emotion—something Attali sees as vital, yet lacking, in many modern exhibitions.

“Emotionality is often despised in the contemporary art scene,” he says. “We are against an easy form of lyricism, but we do try to convey emotions through the scenography of the exhibitions as well as the atmosphere that we try to create. The idea is to have a different atmosphere for each exhibition through the curation but also other sensations such as music, odors, etc.” As for what he hopes visitors take away from the exhibition? The answer is both simple and poetic, like many works in the show: “A deep breath.”



A room at the "Transhumances II" exhibition, which is the second in a series of nomadic art and design shows put on by Galerie Philia. Image by Maison Mouton Noir.