

ART IN CONTEXT

Rooted in the emotional underpinnings of art, Galerie Philia mounts immersive exhibitions meant to stimulate a deeper connection with design.

By Michael Wilson

"PHILIA IS A WORD THAT MEANS 'LOVE OF THINGS'—AS IN PHILOSOPHY, A LOVE OF WISDOM," Ygaël Attali explains when talking about Galerie Philia, the international contemporary art and design gallery he cofounded with his brother in 2015. "I like this idea because when you love art, [that love] has a certain kind of depth." Attali's lifelong passion for language and literature is evident as he discusses his practice, often in the language of classical Greek thought. And while other gallerists tend to focus on objects and artworks, Attali is unique in his insistence about the significance of emotion in the context of new art and design; he stresses the centrality of relationships among people, as well as among ideas, materials, and forms.

"My background is in philosophy, political sciences, literature, and the arts," Attali says. "I did a master's in comparative literature at the Sorbonne and [a master's] in political science at the Paris Institute of Political Studies. Finally, I did a [doctorate] in philosophy, [with a focus on] the concept of multiculturalism."

After receiving his doctorate, Attali spent a few years working at several art galleries in Paris before deciding to open his own. "I was a big fan of the new collectible design scene, but didn't see it widely represented," he says. "I knew some designers who were part of the trend toward organic design, so I decided to work with them."

Galerie Philia now has spaces in Geneva, New York, and Singapore, but it also pursues a traveling exhibition model, mounting displays in diverse locations around the world, from hidden gardens to historic churches, for which artists and designers make site-specific works. (For *Transhumances II*, a recent exhibition in Florence, a group of artists experimented with creative techniques used during the Renaissance, including organic dyeing.)

Ygaël Attali, cofounder of Galerie Philia, an international contemporary art and design gallery with locations in Geneva, New York, and Singapore.



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Φ PHILIA



Held in a penthouse in New York's Tribeca neighborhood, Galerie Philia's *First Times* exhibition featured 30 emerging and established designers. Seen here are the Bling Bling chair, Medusa stool (both by Pietro Franceschini), and Native Object 01 floor lamp from Hot Wire Extensions.

Φ PHILIA



During Milan Design Week in September 2021, Galerie Philia mounted a show (shown above) titled *Rick Owens—Dialog with Emerging Italian Designers*, which featured brutalist furniture from the Paris-based fashion designer alongside pieces by contemporary Italian artists. The Archivio CV01 console (a collaboration between CARA\DAVIDE and Mille997) is constructed from a single slab of Calacatta Viola marble.

Φ PHILIA



Architect Lorenzo Bini's marble table, shown with bronze pieces by Rick Owens, was part of the *Rick Owens—Dialog with Emerging Italian Designers* exhibition. »

Φ PHILIA



A custom piece by lighting design studio Morghen hangs above the Y dining table (by Dam Atelier) at Rick Owens—*Dialog with Emerging Italian Designers*. The sculptural objects on the table were designed by Owens.



methods, knife painting, and various plaster techniques.)

"The most important thing to me," Attali says, "is not [that the gallery is] nomadic, but that we constantly change the structure of the exhibitions. Every time we use a new setting, it gives new soul to the works. If we do an exhibition in a castle in France, as we did at [Château de Barjac] in 2020, it's very different than what we might do in a palazzo in Florence. The architecture leads us to different vibrations."

The approach comes with challenges, especially when the setting is consciously restrained. "We did an exhibition in a loft in Brussels that was very minimalist," Attali says. "At first, [such a blank canvas] felt like a gift, but ultimately, we couldn't work with the style—it just wasn't evocative. I'm interested in minimalism, but it doesn't touch me [emotionally]—because it's not supposed to, right?"

Attali works with emerging and established creatives, not all of whom fit neatly into a singular category. Galerie Philia's roster includes young

Dutch designer and ceramist Willem van Hooff, architect and furniture designer Pietro Franceschini, and fashion icon Rick Owens. On February 8, the gallery mounted *Transatlántico* in the Polanco neighborhood in Mexico City; the five-day exhibition, a satellite event during the Zonamaco art fair, showcased the rising stars of Latin American and European design.

Pressed on the conceptual underpinnings of his work, Attali returns to ancient Greece, and specifically to Aristotle, who wrote about *philia* in his treatise *Nicomachean Ethics*. "The word has different meanings," Attali explains, "but one of them is a friendship in which the two parts are equal; something that you work on with someone for your whole life. Galerie Philia came from this—I had friends who were starting out in the design scene, I took them with me, and they took me with them." ✦

Galerie Philia's *Walker Tower* exhibition, curated in collaboration with Italian architect Pietro Franceschini, was held at Walker Tower, an iconic 1929 art deco building in the heart of Manhattan. It included more than 70 works by 40 international designers.