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The design maverick

*From tiny chairs and trouser-leg tables to sleek glass shelving for an Italian superbrand, the work of **Ron Gilad** defies categorisation. Here, he discusses Surrealism, Socialism and changing disciplines*

Words **DOMINIC LUTYENS**



One of Gilad's latest projects is Glass Cube, a super-slick showroom in Milan that he has curated for Italian superbrand Molteni & C ▶

In 2002, Ron Gilad created a vase called 'Ran Over By Car' – a brass tube with a horizontal slit that, on being run over by a car wheel, pops open to form a mouth. This project set the tone for many other idiosyncratic products by this clever, witty creative, who was born in Tel Aviv in 1972. While studying industrial design at the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design in Jerusalem, Gilad developed concepts that caught the attention of art gallerists. In 1999, he held a solo exhibition entitled 'Neopost' at Tel Aviv's Periscope gallery. Two years later, he moved to New York and set

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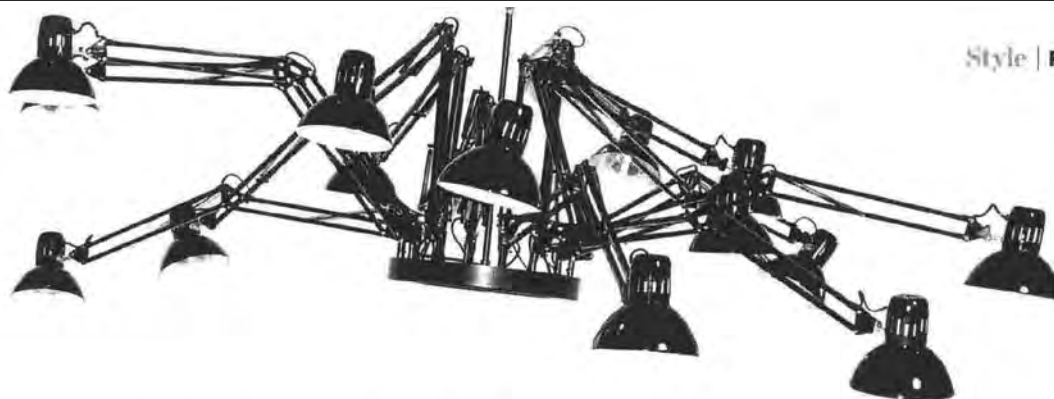
up his own studio, Designfenzider. Recently, he has gained international renown for his ethereally minimalist glass-and-metal tables for Molteni & C and a daybed supported by four Lilliputian Thonet chairs that he produced for Adele-C. His latest project is the curation of Molteni & C's glamorous Glass Cube space at its headquarters near Milan, where archive pieces by the likes of Foster + Partners, Giò Ponti and Gilad himself are on display.

Gilad's influences span Surrealism, kitsch, architecture and the work of minimalist artist Donald Judd; his approach is mercurial and unpredictable. His work seesaws between the pared-down, geometric and super-functional, and the playful and theatrical. Examples of the former style include his

minimalist 'Spaces' tables, which resemble 3D line drawings, and 'Void', a side table constructed in the shape of a stool's wooden shipping container with a cavity in the centre (both pictured opposite). Conversely, his 'Butler' table – which comprises a piece of wood resting on legs clad in suit trousers – is delightfully odd.

Overall, Gilad is more interested in the creative process than in finished products. 'I'm not satisfied with just creating another 3D object,' he has said. 'For me, a piece's beauty and functionality are the result of a process, not a premeditated goal.' We met up with the designer in Milan to discover more about his ideas and inspirations.

Gilad's Tel Aviv apartment is filled with his prototypes, including a blue daybed for Adele-C (above), the 'Void' tables that he made for his own studio and his collection for Molteni & C (all pictured opposite). Miniature figures recur in many of his products. **Opposite, top** The designer's 'Dear Ingo' light for Moooi, which is made from Ikea task lamps



Style | PROFILE

I wasn't interested in design as a child. I was just obsessed with drawing, though I wasn't confident about my abilities. Discovering that lines could be made sharper if I used a ruler led me to study architecture at high school. After that, I decided to stay in the realm of functionality and train in industrial design.

I never wanted a nine-to-five job with a boss telling me what to do. Luckily, after college, I had my Periscope gallery show and one thing led to another. I did, however, lecture in the jewellery department at the Shenkar College of Engineering, Design & Art in Ramat Gan, Israel, from 1999 to 2001.

I love modern and contemporary sculpture. In the Glass Cube space, I have arranged my Molteni & C shelving units as if they are Donald Judd sculptures. And, inspired by the American sculptor Claes Oldenburg, I've played with scale, displaying my 'Grado 60°' consoles so that they look as if they're marching into a pool of water. I love Surrealism and the way that it allows for things to defy logic. I also appreciate kitsch and the baroque. My childhood was spent in a Bauhaus-inspired apartment that was rectilinear, which forced us to put the sofa against the wall, so it's always exciting for me to do the opposite and put it in the middle of the room.

I would describe what I do as fooling around with ideas. I start by making abstract structures that usually end up being useless, but sometimes have the potential to function as objects. I don't like being pigeonholed as an artist or a designer. I know that makes me part of the 'design art' world, but I'm not interested in the consumerist side of the discipline. I believe that if you create something that's complicated or expensive – even if you end up producing just one piece – you should do it. It's not about making money. I try to offer questions rather than solutions. My work is about personal interpretations of elements of life that I see as ironic and absurd. **There's a design language that defines me** – mainly a minimalist one. I think this is because I grew up as a Socialist and didn't have many things. I learnt to make the most of the little that I had. I think that's why I often design furniture whose focus is the framework that contains the void, rather than the void itself. ▶



PICTURES: GIORGIO FOSSENTI (ALL EXCEPT LIGHT)



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Style | PROFILE



My biggest challenge has been my first architecture project. It's a villa on Lake Garda in Italy – construction began last October. Every designer produces at a scale that he or she feels comfortable with. I call mine 'table scale'. As I'm working with much bigger proportions on this project, I'm out of my comfort zone. But I love crossing over into other disciplines.

I've failed at almost everything! I'm very self-critical. One piece I look back on with ambivalence is my 'Dear Ingo' lamp for Moooi, which started out as a joke. My first studio in New York was above Ingo Maurer's shop in SoHo, and the piece – a chandelier made of a cluster of Ikea task lights – refers to the way that he takes an individual element and multiplies it to create larger objects. I've received nice royalties and lots of press for the piece, but it doesn't represent what I do. **The thing that I most enjoy about my work is the first glimpse of an idea being born.** But that rarely happens. I don't wake up every day with 100 brilliant ideas. When it comes to realising them, I aim as far as

'I'm too selfish to collaborate with other designers. I'm an individualist. However, working with companies is different. Technicians help me realise my ideas, and I welcome their input'



possible not to compromise. Of course, when working with big companies, your ideas get diluted. I've been lucky that I was approached early on, when my ideas were still pure. All the brands asked was to ensure that my designs accorded with their DNA.

I commute between two houses: my studio-meets-home in Tel Aviv and an apartment in Milan. The latter is warm and atmospheric, with old furniture provided by my landlord. My Tel Aviv place is a cross between a student's digs and a mad scientist's home. It feels improvised. I sleep on a mattress on the floor. I have some of my work there – prototypes, not finished pieces, but I do use them. I never buy furniture, as I'm never quite sure what I like. **The crucial thing for young designers** is to learn about design history in order to shape the future. As Isaac Newton said: 'If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.' That's how I see myself. I need to learn from history, too. **ED**

Above and left Gilad's 'Grado 60°' consoles appear to sink into the water at furniture brand Molteni & C's headquarters in Milan, Italy
Far left The 'Ran Over by Car' vases that Gilad designed in 2002

PICTURE: BEPPE BIANCA TO MAIN IMAGE AND GLASS CUBE