

Design Twists

BY NGIOM

DESIGN AS A TERMINOLOGY IS RELATED TO FUNCTION, AS WITHOUT IT, IT IS MERELY ART. ON THE OTHER HAND, IF A DESIGN PROVOKES THE SENSES AND PROMPT QUESTIONS OTHER THAN ITS FUNCTION IT ALSO BECOMES ART. PROVOCATIVE DESIGN IN ANY FORM CHALLENGES THE MENTAL PERCEPTION OF THINGS AND IN PARTICULAR, CHALLENGES OUR PRECONCEPTIONS OF DESIGN CORRECTNESS. 'SOMEWHAT DIFFERENT' WAS AN EXHIBITION HELD AT THE GALERI PETRONAS IN COLLABORATION WITH GOETHE-INSTITUT MALAYSIA, WITH THE EXHIBITION OF PERCEPTION-CHALLENGING EVERYDAY HOUSEHOLD PRODUCTS CURATED BY THE GERMAN DESIGNER DR. VOLKER ALBUS.

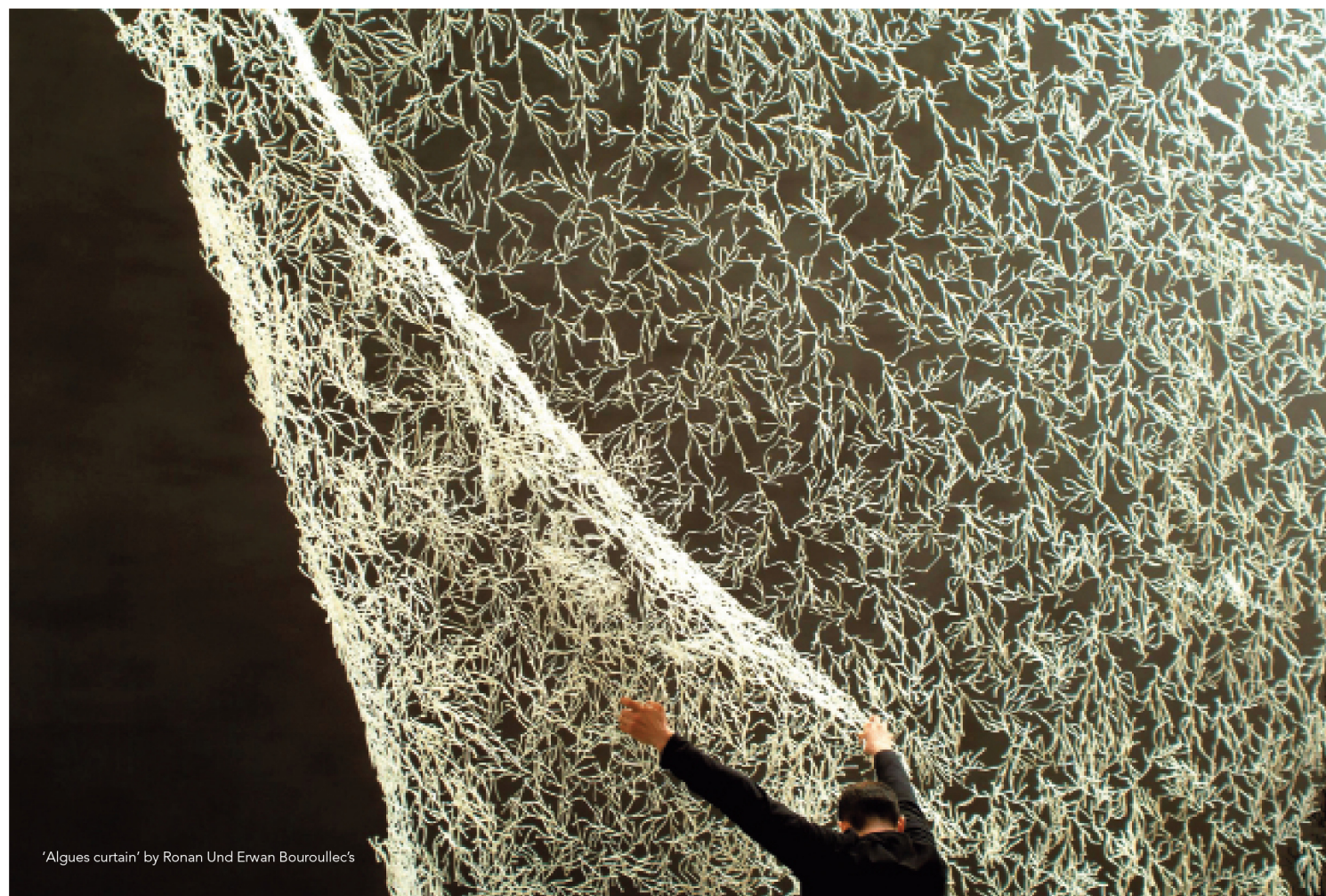


'The bookshelf' by Tom Pawlofsky

There is a European philosophical underpinning about the exhibition as it provokes the percipients on the way things of the world are read and also the way the brain gets conditioned over the course of temporal experiences. Our brain lulls us into shared acceptance of things – which often convert into local culture. Taking the step beyond mere appearances, the percipient is prompted to challenge all that appeared to be right. What we read then are normally culturally conditioned, which may not necessarily be right as rightness is externally imposed. Therefore, prompting beyond the exhibits themselves, the exhibition tells us that rightness is a circular argument – that, being the prompting of the exhibition beyond the exhibits themselves.

Everyone knows what a bookshelf looks like, and it fulfils the function of arranging and displaying books. What then if the bookshelf were to hold books as well as prompts other questions, as well as aesthetic ones? The bookshelf by Tom Pawlofsky looks like sagging plasticine, or twisted spaghetti but the purpose is still distinguishable; however, the composition could be either provocative or derided. To some, the form is meaningless indulgence; and to others it could be seen as a witty statement. Still, the shape carries a provocative narrative beyond its function.

There is then 'Cousin Hans easy chair' by Kombinat which is not a chair at all – not something that one can sit on, but it undoubtedly resemble a chair. It is a lamp that resembles a chair – what then is the point of that other than to provoke questions on design preconceptions. Volker Albus' own floor lamp design goes against the conventional grain where the lamp is expected to sit on an upright, whereas instead, the upright is over the lamp that rests on the floor. Matali Crasset's 'Easy Chair' by every functional definition – just that it also did not resemble the visual pre-conception of an easy chair, which are normally expected to be bulkier with visual trappings of comfort. Marti Guixe's chair is an abstract indulgence, which belong to the unreal world of cartoon animation, where function is supplanted by spectacle. 'Kant Desk' by P. Frey and M. Boge is seriously a desk, which resemble a chair. It is desk that is complete with its own bookshelf, a more complete feature than even a conventional desk. Again the visual preconception of a desk is challenged, as the piece of furniture clearly described itself as a desk.



'Algues curtain' by Ronan Und Erwan Bouroullec's



'Web Bench' by Andreas Bergman

'Somewhat Different' exhibition also offers designs that are more witty than provocative – twists in the way that designs are carried out. Andreas Bergman's 'Web Bench' is a clever manipulation of the normally malleable wire fence into a dual-function item that includes both a fence as well as a bench. Bless' 'Vacuum Cleaner' has again dual usage where the back of a chair becomes a vacuum cleaner with storage. Notice the power outlet at the back of the chair than makes the item more of a vacuum cleaner than a chair, although it has to be admitted that it is a rather cumbersome thing to drag around. How about a tubular air mattress by Daniel Wandres, where the mattress probably rolls with the occupant, providing a perpetual sense of enclosure? Gerhards and Glucker's 'Soft Wall' isn't just a wall but also storage and shelving for papers and magazines, where again a normal product item has another use. Ronan Und Erwan Bouroullec's Algues curtain is both a curtain and an art installation. The way the curtain holds itself together delicately is a thing of marvel.

In the end, the exhibition provokes and promotes design intellectuality, which sometimes emerges from settled, literary cultures, providing playful twists to the usual serious artistic aesthetics. The refinement is mental rather than physical. With intellectual appreciation, some of the exhibits may appear crude but taken in the universal mental context the exhibits are intriguing and satisfying. There is a sense that the exhibits are merely the tip of the iceberg, and there is a wealth of this sort of exhibits found in mature urbane cultures. The fact that this sort of exhibits could be appreciated universally shows that there is commonality in the way minds work despite culturally differences and it is only good that humour and aesthetic appreciation can be commonly shared. ●

'Kant Desk' by P. Frey and M. Boge



'Easy Chair' by Matali Crasset



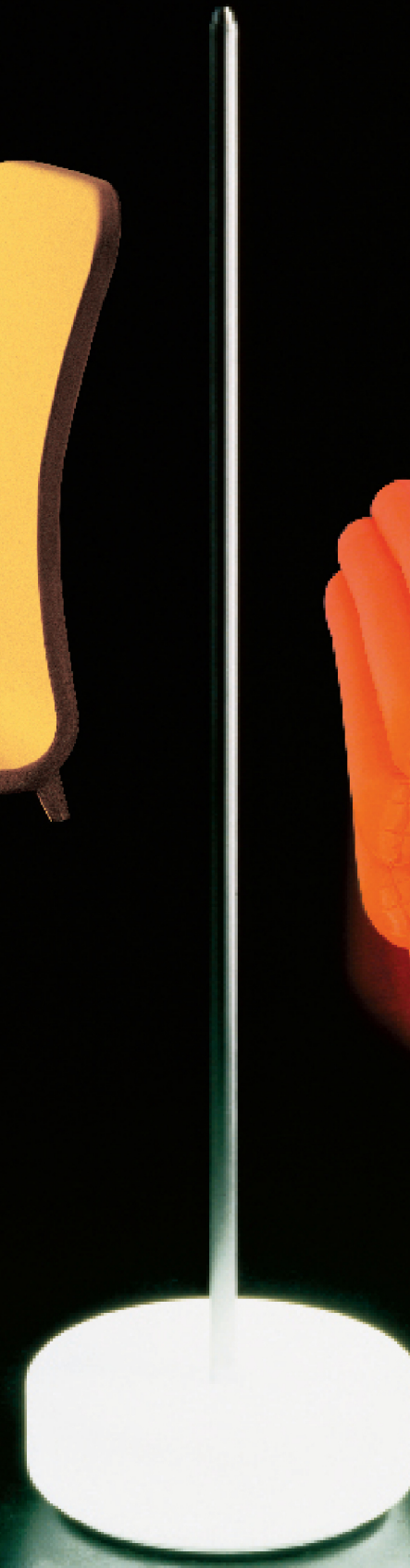
'Soft Wall' by Gerhards and Glucker



'Galeria H20 chair' by Marti Guixé



Air mattress by Daniel Wandres



Floor lamp by Volker Albu