

# RON ARAD

10 - 31 MARCH 2023



OPERA GALLERY

# FOREWORD

Opera Gallery Geneva presents from 10-31 March an exhibition of recent works by one of the most coveted artists and designers of our times, Ron Arad. This exhibition features over 15 works, some of his iconic pieces such as the *Big Easy* or the *Little Albert* as well as brand new works, rethought or conceived especially for Opera Gallery.

Right from the start of his career in the early 1980s', Ron Arad forged a singular profile and a unique style for himself, blurring the boundaries between design, sculpture and architecture. He allows himself to constantly experiment without restraints of any kind. For him, "design consists in imposing one's will on materials, either to achieve a function, or for an artistic result". A vision that leads him to create true furniture-sculptures and that has put him at the forefront of contemporary design and architecture.

"Designers will tell you that I am an artist and not a designer. Artists will tell you that I am a designer and not an artist. I personally subscribe to what Oscar Wilde said. 'There are two kinds of people, charming and tedious.' And I think there are two kinds of things, things that are exciting and interesting and things that are not. Is it art? Is it design? I don't care. »

For Opera Gallery, Arad has created a whole collection made out of colored crystalline resin, in several vibrant hues. This material allows the eye to experience a whole range of optical plays deriving from the semi-transparencies, modulations in colors and variable thicknesses inherent to it. The light either passes right through the works, either caresses their surface to reveal their reliefs, expressive curves and contours.

Gilles Dyan  
Founder and Chairman  
Opera Gallery Group

Jordan Lahmi  
Director  
Opera Gallery Geneva

# BEAUTY AND UTILITY

Curatorial essay by Francesca Peacock

Back in 1988, a design classic was born: Ron Arad's "The Big Easy". With its curved form, domed arms, and plinth-like base, it was designed to resemble "an overstuffed club chair". But its final appearance — initially made as a single volume in sheet metal — is far more elegant and striking, and jaunty and fun, than any traditional piece of upholstery. After its initial incarnation in sheet metal (for which Arad had to teach himself how to weld) it has had a whole host of different lives. In the 1990s, it was initially made in patinated steel — more perfect, jewel-like than the original sheet metal — before moving into stainless steel.

In 1991, the Italian design company Moroso took the chair back to its roots: they created a "soft" version as part of the chair's "Spring Collection". Upholstered with foam and a cover, the chair's link to its original inspiration was ever-clearer, but the same principles of a clean-line and form were not diluted.

By the late 1990s, the chair had changed again: Arad designed a "New Orleans" collection, which he made by pouring paint inside a polyester mould. After a difficult, complex process — he had to climb inside, and was unable to see each layer after the next one had been painted; words had to be written backwards to render them visible on the outside — each finished project was original; an object that straddles the line between design, sculpture, and art.

In collaboration with Opera Gallery, Ron Arad presents nine new colorful crystalline resin versions of his iconic form. Each in a different, gem-like colour — and with folds and beams of light where the resin has been shaped — these chairs seem to glow, as if they are lit from the inside. The ergonomic, natural shape of the back and arms gives them an organic look: is this something that has come out of the earth? A fossil, or a rare stone? In Arad's words, there is a "dialogue" here: a symbiotic relationship between the "material and the process", and the "will" of the artist. When the resin comes out of the mould — the final part of this collaboration between artist and material — there is a moment when the unknown becomes visible; when the control of the artist over his creation, his object, is unsure.

In Arad's other resin-based works, there is absolutely no question of tedium. The "Little Albert" is a smaller, denser form than the "Big Easy". Initially made in 2000 for the "Victoria and Albert" collection, the chair has a small footprint, but still manages to pack a considerable punch. The collection was named for the retrospective held at the iconic London-based Victorian museum in 2000.

With its solid base, and curving back that rises almost seamlessly from the bottom, resin version of the “Little Albert” is a masterful play with light, refraction, and colour. In the lower part of the chair the colours are intense, dark, and overlapping, whilst, at the top, they become translucently clear and pure. As a chair that is both industrial design and a work of art (Moroso sells a very popular outdoor version), this new form revels in how beautiful an everyday object can be. Unlike the other objects in the collection, the “Little Albert” chair had an unlikely genesis: it was first made as a mass-produced version, before then being made as a handmade metal version and now, finally, these one-of-a-kind resin iterations. Arad’s creations normally come about in the opposite way — handmade version before the mass-produced — but the “Little Albert”’s differing path proves both its beauty, and its utility.

Cast in the same colourful resins as the two chairs is Arad’s “Two legs and a coffee-table”. With its mesmerising refractions and endless variations in colour, it is wonderful to trace the table’s heritage back to Arad’s earliest days of furniture-making. Just a year after the first metal version of the “Big Easy”, Arad made “Two legs and a table” in the same, highly-polished stainless steel. A flat surface — in an undulating, curved shape — sits on two cylindrical legs. The original version is a masterpiece of space and form: the whole is hollow, and there isn’t a part of the table that doesn’t have space inside it. For all its thinness and delicacy — Arad likens working with this metal to working with “skin” — there’s a distinct solidity to the table, as it sits on its wide-based legs.

With the coffee table, this solidity is increased: the whole form is squatter, but no less wide across the top. But, now cast in resin, the hollowness has been changed: in the place of empty space between the metal is the dancing light and changing colours. As with the “Big Easy” and “Little Albert”, an invisible space inside the form has been replaced by a material which invites you in; it does not hide what’s inside it, and the changing, unique colours it offers.

Arad’s creativity with form — hollowness; invisibility; works made from the inside out or cast in unlikely materials — is felt throughout this exhibition. Unlike many of Arad’s works which are made from one singular form, curved and shaped into the ideal structure, the *Tuba Sofa* is made from nine discrete cylindrical tubes, each of which has been cut in different ways at the centre to make a seat. When approached from one end, the resin tubes look like logs of wood, artfully arranged and stacked on top of each other; each one is not hollow, but contains a kaleidoscopic world of colour and shining patterns. But, from front on, the seat looks more like a wave, as its space has been carved out; a hollow made where there was previously none.

Amidst these re-interpretations of Arad's classic designs and iconic pieces of furniture is something different: the large, colourful form of a bookcase. Cast in gold, pink, red, green, yellow, blue and black resin is Arad's version of Henri Matisse's famous 1953 collage work, "The Snail". In Arad's version, the blank space of Matisse's work — the white paper, where no coloured paper was glued down — is made into empty space: this is a work that can be peered through; that can be viewed from all directions. But he has also altered Matisse's composition. In the place of the block, one-dimensional forms of the collage, Arad has hollowed out spaces in each colour. Ever one to prize both beauty and utility, Arad has made this piece fully functional.

This resin bookcase is not a new version of one of Arad's own "iconic" pieces, but it is a new, fresh look at a different icon. When Matisse made this gouaches découpées, the master of French post-Impressionism could no longer paint due to his ill-health. In the absence of paint and paintbrushes, he turned to a new form — and made it entirely his own. His cut-outs were radical, and transcended the boundary between sculpture and painting. From small-sized works, he even managed to develop the medium enough to cover entire walls and rooms.

In Arad's version of this icon, the paper has become resin, and the collage has become a functional, beautiful piece of furniture; the medium has changed, once again. But it's tempting to think what Matisse would have made of this: a form of art that once again is straining at boundaries and definitions.

From William Morris to Matisse's delight in new materials, Arad's resin pieces are saturated in the work of artists from previous years — including the iconic shapes and forms of his own famous pieces of furniture. But here, in a jewel-like, uncontrollable resin that is unique to each piece is a sense of true novelty: an exploration of form, space, and colour that, in bold technicolour modernity, makes the useful, beautiful, and the beautiful, useful.







*Big Easy (crystalline) Aquamarine*  
2023

Crystalline resin  
92 x 132 x 80 cm | 36.2 x 52 x 31.5 in  
Ed: 3/5

[Enquire](#)







*Big Easy (crystalline) Mixed Red and Transparent*  
2023

Crystalline resin  
92 x 132 x 80 cm | 36.2 x 52 x 31.5 in  
Ed: 2/5

[Enquire](#)



***Big Easy (crystalline) Mixing Blue***  
2023

Crystalline resin  
92 x 132 x 80 cm | 36.2 x 52 x 31.5 in  
Ed: 1/5

[Enquire](#)





*Little Albert (crystalline) Aquamarine*  
2023

Crystalline resin  
70 x 74 x 62 cm | 27.6 x 29.1 x 24.4 in  
Ed: 3/5

[Enquire](#)





*Little Albert (crystalline) Orange*  
2023

Crystalline resin  
70 x 74 x 62 cm | 27.6 x 29.1 x 24.2 in  
Ed: 1/5

[Enquire](#)



*Little Albert (crystalline) Mixing Blue*  
2023

Crystalline resin  
70 x 74 x 62 cm | 27.6 x 29.1 x 24.4 in  
Ed: 1/5

[Enquire](#)





*Little Albert (crystalline) Yellow*  
2023

Crystalline resin  
70 x 74 x 62 cm | 27.6 x 29.1 x 24.2 in  
Ed: 1/5

[Enquire](#)







*Little Albert (crystalline) Black*  
2023

Crystalline resin  
70 x 74 x 62 cm | 27.6 x 29.1 x 24.4 in  
Ed: 1/5

[Enquire](#)



*Little Albert (crystalline) White*  
2023

Crystalline resin  
70 x 74 x 62 cm | 27.6 x 29.1 x 24.4 in  
Ed: 1/5

[Enquire](#)



*Little Albert (crystalline) Purple*  
2023

Crystalline resin  
70 x 74 x 62 cm | 27.6 x 29.1 x 24.4 in  
Ed: 1/5

[Enquire](#)







*Don't Ya Tell Henri (crystalline)*  
2023

Crystalline resin  
200 x 200 x 35 cm | 78.7 x 78.7 x 13.8 in  
Ed: 2/5

[Enquire](#)











*Two Legs and a Table (crystalline) Aquamarine*  
2023

Crystalline resin  
40 x 230 x 87 cm | 15.7 x 90.6 x 34.3 in  
Ed: 1/5

[Enquire](#)









*Two Legs and a Table (crystalline) Yellow*  
2023

Crystalline resin  
40 x 230 x 87 cm | 15.7 x 90.6 x 34.3 in  
Ed: 1/5

[Enquire](#)



*Two Legs and a Table (crystalline) Transparent*  
2023

Crystalline resin  
40 x 230 x 87 cm | 15.7 x 90.6 x 34.3 in  
Ed: 1/5

[Enquire](#)







*Tuba (crystalline) Aquamarine*  
2023

Crystalline resin  
40 x 230 x 87 cm | 35.4 x 90.6 x 34.3 in  
Ed: 1/5

[Enquire](#)





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Ron Arad was born in 1951 in Tel-Aviv. He studied at the Jerusalem Academy of Art and later at the Architectural Association in London. In 1981, he co-founded with Caroline Thorman the design and production studio One Off Ltd, which notable early successes were the Rover Chair and the Big Easy. In 1989, he established Ron Arad Associates, an architecture and design practice, and soon after, Ron Arad Architects. Between 1994 and 2009, he was a professor at the Royal College of Art in London.

Ron Arad is an innovative and daring visual artist: manipulation, transformation and experimentation are the key words of the spirit in his creations. He never ceases to test the potential of materials, using them in unconventional ways to obtain unprecedented aesthetic effects.

Ron Arad designs furniture and objects for many leading international companies including Vitra, Moroso, Driade, Alessi, Kartell or Magis. As an architect, he has conceived the new opera house in Tel Aviv and a show room for Maserati in Modena among others. He has designed a number of public art pieces, including the Vortext in Seoul or the Keshet sculpture at the Tel Aviv university. He is the recipient of numerous awards and his work has been exhibited in prestigious museums worldwide such as the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris or the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.



# OPERA GALLERY

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## **Opening hours**

Mon - Sat: 10 am - 7 pm