

Ron Arad Don't Ya Tell Henri

May 17 - June 14, 2023



OPERA GALLERY

FOREWORD

Opera Gallery New York is delighted to present Ron Arad's latest exhibition, "Don't Ya Tell Henri". This exhibition marks Arad's second solo show with Opera Gallery, and offers an exciting opportunity to explore the artist's latest body of work. Through the deconstruction and reimagining of motifs within his oeuvre, Arad challenges traditional narratives about form and function.

Arad is widely recognized as one of the most innovative and influential designers of our time, and his work transcends traditional boundaries between art, design, and architecture. In this exhibition, Arad presents a series of new works that explore the tension between structure and absence in the material world.

The exhibition's title, "Don't Ya Tell Henri", is a nod to both Bob Dylan's song and Henri Matisse's enduring influence on Arad's artistic vision. Like Matisse, Arad is known for his use of bold color and fluid forms, and for his ability to capture the essence of movement and energy in his work.

At the heart of this exhibition are Arad's new crystalline resin pieces, which are both sculptural and functional. These pieces explore the tension between the solid structure of the resin material and the empty spaces that surround and define it. Through his use of light, color, and form, Arad creates a dynamic interplay between the material and the void, challenging viewers to reconsider their perceptions of space and form.

We invite you to immerse yourself in the world of Ron Arad's "Don't Ya Tell Henri", and to experience the thrilling duality between structure and absence in the material world. This exhibition offers a unique opportunity to explore the latest chapter in Arad's creative journey, and to witness firsthand the power and beauty of his work.

Gilles Dyan
Founder and Chairman
Opera Gallery Group

Laura Adams Miller
Deputy Director
Opera Gallery New York

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 than any traditional piece of upholstery. After its initial incarnation in patinated steel (for which Arad had to teach himself how to weld) it has had a whole host of different lives. In the 1990s, it was made in stainless steel — more perfect, jewel-like than the original patinated metal.

In 1990, for the Italian design company Moroso, Ron Arad took the chair back to its roots: creating a "soft" version as part of the "Spring Collection". Upholstered, 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 the "New Orleans" collection, which he made by hand, one by one, painting layer after layer inside a mould to build up each painterly chair. 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 has made nine new

colourful, crystalline epoxy 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.

Back in 2010, Arad adeptly played with this division between the man-made and the natural. In the Sotheby's sculpture exhibition "Beyond Limits" in the gardens of the grand country house, Chatsworth, he showed two stainless steel versions of the chair. One was the original, recognisable form but constructed out of truncated spheres; the other was made of only the space those spheres. . Set in the garden at Chatsworth, the pair of chairs invites a comparison between solid and space; structure and absence; and a man-made object and the world around it. These questions only become more intriguing when Arad reveals that, in the photo, one of the chairs was a computer-made mock-up: it would take another year for the real-life version to be completed.

On another of Arad's works — his giant, three-and-a-half metre-long cedar bench that, by virtue of an interior mechanism, rocks back and forth when you sit on it — has a William Morris quotation carved on the seat. In elaborate, cursive handwriting, Arad writes: "Have nothing in your house that you do not know to be useful or believe to be beautiful". Just underneath, and in the same flourishing, curling script, Arad adds "or love". This link to the Arts and Crafts principle of beauty and use — and a division between "art" and industrial design or architecture — is present throughout Arad's works for this new collection. In his own words, this distinction between art forms is meaningless: the only division is whether something is "tedious or beautiful".

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.

Given the tube-structure of the sofa, and the way it changes when viewed from different directions, it is hard not to draw a link to Arad's recent work, LOVE SONG, in which a carved block of marble reads "LOVE" from one end, and "SONG" from the other. LOVE SONG is an exploration of form and material, and the possibilities contained within a narrow set of parameters — in this case, the shape of the words "love" and "song" —but there's something similar at work with the "Tube Sofa" too: a delight in creating something from unlikely shapes, and unlikely materials.

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 technical-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





Big Easy (crystalline) Yellow
2023

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



Big Easy (crystalline) Black
2023

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





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





Little Albert (crystalline) Aquamarine
2023

Crystalline resin
70 x 74 x 62 cm | 27.6 x 29.1 x 24.4 in
Ed: 2/5





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



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





Little Albert (crystalline) Olive
2023

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





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





Tuba (crystalline) Aquamarine

2023

Crystalline resin

90 x 230 x 87 cm | 35.4 x 90.6 x 34.3 in

Ed: 1/5





Two Legs and a Table (crystalline) Olive
2023

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



BIOGRAPHY



© Denis Rouvre

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 Vortex in Seoul or the Keshar 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

Opera Gallery New York

791 Madison Avenue New York, NY 10065

nyc@operagallery.com

T +1 646 707 3299

Opening hours

Mon - Sat: 10 am - 7 pm