

Of form and fantasy

Review: Design show at Rockland Center for the Arts in West Nyack highlights the sculptural dimensions of commercial design work

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Artists who've gone to art school understand that the dividing line between fine art and commercial art can be quite wide. And what a shame that is. The study of fine art is a precursor to a major in commercial art, and as any starving artist can tell you, it pays to know the marketplace.

A new exhibit at the Rockland Center for the Arts, "Function & Fantasy: The Design Show" examines the relationship between the two, focusing on design that is particularly sculptural in its style or inspiration. Fourteen designers are represented through a variety of mediums ranging from esoteric light forms to mass-produced plastic furniture.

The show originated at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, where it was curated by David and Joanne Weitzel. The show was called "Decorative at Work" and featured mostly photos of designers. Ned Harris of New City, a Pratt alumna, added the sculptural aspect to the show and included four



Eric Laxman is a Valley Cottage artisan who explores the interconnection between sculptural metal forms and raw, natural ones. His work is featured in a show on view at the Rockland Center for the Arts in West Nyack.

artists from the region.

Harris' tweaking of the exhibit has clearly improved it. One can't imagine learning about these designers

without experiencing their work in person. Except for the few sculptures by sculptor/artists, all of the work in the show has a practical

application.

The show is dedicated to Eva Zeisel, the grand dame of the ceramics world who, at 95, is still generating new

work and recognition. This year she won the Russel Wright Award for design excellence and the Pratt Institute's Legend Award. Zeisel,

who has a weekend home in New City, has taught at Pratt since emigrating to the United States in 1939.

Choosing Zeisel as the

drifting artist for the show makes sense. She is one of the few who has successfully bridged the gap between fine and commercial art. Even her most proletarian, mass-produced glassware and ceramic dinnerware bear her distinctive, organic style. Her fluid teapots, creamers and sugar bowls often end with downturned tips, a slight exaggeration of form that seems to stretch the lines of the object before gracefully ending it.

The show includes Zeisel's iconic salt and pepper set, inspired by the relationship between mother and child, but it is her relatively unknown pieces that were never commercially produced that display her sense of humor and problem-solving abilities. Take her collection of ceramic planters. This series of interlocking pots can stand alone, or be stacked, pyramid style, into a tiered ceramic sculpture. Zeisel also uses the interlocking concept in the wooden base of a glass table.

Another prolific artist who walks the fine-and-commer-



From left, pitchers by the master ceramicist Eva Zeisel, lighting by Ayala S. Serfaty and the Smiling Bandit chair by Alan Siegel illustrate the influence of sculpture on work intended for the commercial marketplace.



Please see DESIGN, 2E

Of form and fantasy

DESIGN, from 1E

cial lighttrope is Karim Rashid, who has a house in Scarborough. Although some would argue his attention is focused entirely on the marketplace, his sculptural forms are akin to fine art — often with a sense of humor.

Sofa from Karim Rashid

His beanbag sofa, for example, is filled with the tiny Styrofoam balls that stuff most so-called beanbag furniture. Rashid has shaped the sofa into two distinct seats, each of which is outlined in clear plastic so you can see the filling. His color choice of neon yellow raises the kitch level a few notches, along with the fun. The result is a Jetsons-meets-Star Wars piece of furniture.

Also on display are Rashid's imaginative plastic umbrella stands — simple pods with teardrop-shaped orifices; glass and metal collection for Nambé; and his well-known "Oh" chair, which has earned him a comparison to Charles and Ray Eames.

Others in the show are more artists than designer and their work is clearly more sculptural. Forrest Myers falls in this category, as does Valley Cottage's own Eric Laxman. Both use metals with other mediums to create furniture, though their styles are distinct.

After the Rashid sofa, Myers' Wing Back Armchair is one of the most engaging pieces in the show. The chair looks as if someone has taken a series of flowing doodles, gathered them in appropriate places, and — presto! — made a chair. That combination of using unusual materials in such a familiar shape gives the chair a



Story Point costume designer Kathy Ford's Jester Hat bridges the gap between sculpture and fashion.

If you go...

"Function & Fantasy: The Design Show" is at the Rockland Center for the Arts at 27 S. Greenbush Road in West Nyack through Dec. 15. Hours are 20 a.m. to 4 p.m., Mondays to Fridays; 1 to 4 p.m. on weekends. The suggested donation is \$2. For more information, call 845-358-0877.

pop-art sensibility.

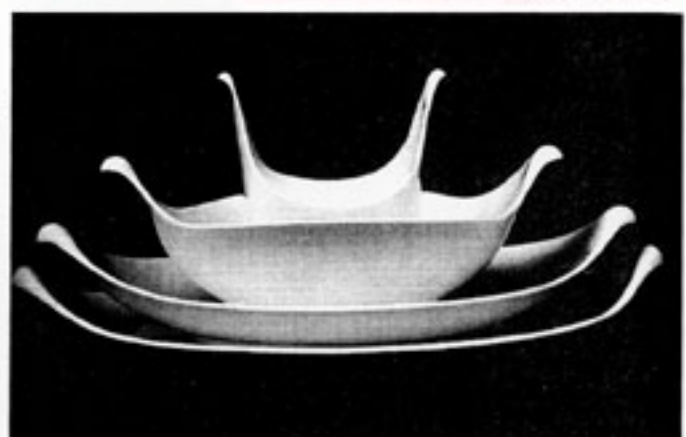
Laxman sculptures

In his sculpture, Laxman explores the contrast between natural materials and those that are finely wrought, such as a sculpture made from a slab of granite

with angular metal legs. In his furniture, however, the coarser side of that equation is often not represented. A glass-topped table, for example, has a metal base made into sinuous arcs, a clear example of precision craftsmanship. His three-legged chair is a study in balance and beauty.

Some of the artists fall into their own categories. Translucent lamp sculptures by Ayala S. Serfaty, inspired by sea forms, are clearly sculptural, but because many of them are covered in fabric, they almost seem like fashion.

Kathy Ford's costumes clearly cross that line into fashion. The Story Point artist, who is a Yale drama school graduate, counts among her clients the American Ballet Theater. Though the show



Above, nesting dishes by Eva Zeisel and, left, a spider coffee table by Eric Laxman.



includes her feathered, winged and unisex creations, it is her headpieces and masks that are the most sculptural, if only because they are more three-dimensional. Ford is a champion of col-

or — her costumes and headpieces display daring combinations.

Design is a subject that — unlike fine art — often doesn't travel to the suburbs. This show is

well displayed and will easily engage even the novice enthusiast. Reach Joanne Furio at furio@thejournalnews.com or 954-894-6079.