

AUTHENTIQUES

Antique Furniture from Europe
18th & 19th Century



Ever Evolving

Text / Shonquis Moreno

Queues for Manhattan openings often spill down the block, but the line to get into the Offsite design exhibition this May smoked, texted and Tweeted impatiently down a second block too. A satellite to the International Contemporary Furniture Fair (ICFF), which has long felt like a trade show unable to escape its own convention centre, Offsite offered an intriguing snapshot of a fertile moment in American design.

Curated and produced by Jill Singer and Monica Khemsurov, Offsite was an offshoot of the web magazine the two edit. *Sight Unseen* delves into the heads and studios of makers of every stripe — Singer calls it ‘the Why as much as the How of design’ — and features a shop selling handmade objects from stone bangles to wind chimes. Even if their editorial focus is much broader, Offsite showcased a progressive side to US design that has been gaining momentum, developing its own signatures and finding independence from the big brands. With work by more than 30 independent studios, the show had a circumscribed sensibility, but it illustrated designers’ pragmatic responses to the exigencies of self-production.

An evolution of Singer and Khemsurov’s Noho Design District (2010-13), it featured Fredericks & Mae, Ladies & Gentlemen Studio and DAMM, barely-there textiles by Brook&Lyn, convertible slat furniture by Ian Stell and lighting by Rosie Li. Five pop-up shops resembled exhibits: there were expertly naïve ceramics curated by Su Wu of *I’m Revolting*; architectural planters by Plant-in City and papier mâché plants by Chiaozza; housewares for men from Field; authorless, everyday design objects from a kiosk vending machine; and

even a Future Food canteen serving up sautéed crickets and talking about the future of food design.

American design, from Altadena, California to Washington, DC, is entrepreneurial and dextrously DIY. Designers have opened their own showrooms (Lindsey Adelman, David Weeks), created their own labels (Field; Roll & Hill), founded limited-edition producers (Lindsey Adelman, The Future Perfect), launched exhibition platforms complete with retail (the American Design Club; Join: Design Seattle) and assembled cooperative design galleries (Colony Design Cooperative). Even seemingly romantic materials — brass, glass, wood, clay, sand, ground coffee and tinted salt (cast into stools by AMMA Studio) — make the most of what is easily workable and close at hand.

‘E-commerce and the Internet should not be underestimated; they’re more places where people can see what you’re making,’ Singer says. ‘Today if you create a well-trafficked Pinterest site, you can sell it yourself.’ They also prove that a variety of products are sellable beyond chairs and iPod cases, Khemsurov says. ‘Blogs open your mind and you dream a bit more. You become part of a global community.’

If much of the work at Offsite looked carpenterly, crafted and skilfully crude, heavily textured and richly hued; if there were a lot of ziggurats, polka dots and pyramids, slouchy pinch pots and weaving; if surfaces were important and minimalism less so; ideas thrummed through every object.

‘We gravitate towards things that have great backstories, that are beautiful, intriguing and well-resolved,’ says Khemsurov. ‘I like new ideas, but I like old ideas too.’



Ceiling lamp by Fredericks & Mae



Ascension chair by Whyte



Decorative box by RabLabs. Image by Mike Vorrasi



Lighting and sculptures by Ladies & Gentlemen Studio. Image by Mike Vorrasi



Rod+Weave chair by Eric Trine



A collection of pieces by AM MA Studio. Image by Mike Vorrasi



The Sight Unseen OFFSITE location. Image by Mike Vorrasi



Crates by Zoë Mowat



Theo lamp by DAMM



Ellsi table lamp by Rosie Li



Pagan chair and Alchemy table by Material Lust



Agate table by RabLabs



Ceramics by Ian McDonald. Image by Mike Vorrasi