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ARIK LEVY

BY ANNA SANSON



"I'M ONLY A JUMPING BOARD TO EVERYONE'S EMOTIONAL SOUVENIR. I THINK AND I BELIEVE THAT WE SHOULD FEEL FIRST AND THEN SEE AFTER"

To make an analogy between pop stars and artists, Arik Levy likes to rock and roll—literally. The Israeli designer and artist, who is based in Paris, makes artworks and furniture that are inspired by rock formations, nature, and mineralization. When they are placed outdoors, his aluminum sculptures respond to the time of day and reflect their surroundings, including the changing colors of the sky. As his work has become highly sought after, Levy, 50, is on a roll. Late last year, the Fondazione Bisazza, opened by the glass mosaics manufacturer in Vicenza in northern Italy, commissioned Levy to make *Rock Chamber* in a space that Levy designed. Meanwhile, the Passage de Retz in Paris traced Levy's trajectory through another exhibition, "Nothing is quite as it seems," featuring a range of works including sculptures, paintings, drawings, and film.

WhiteWall met Arik Levy at the opening of his exhibition in Paris.

WHITEWALL: You're better known as a designer than as an artist. How would you describe the background to your activities?

ARIK LEVY: I have a few hats: One of them is art; the other is design. When I did my first sculpture exhibition in Tel Aviv in 1986, I was facing the world of art, which is not how it is today, and I had to see, "How do I manage my life? How do I buy a chicken for my kids every day with the art?" Obviously, it's very difficult to manage your financial life through art, especially 30 years ago. So design has been the closest and most attractive field to deal with, and I preferred that to being a waiter. Design has always

been a financial source to support the art activities. Painting is one thing, but sculpture is a very expensive hobby.

WW: Some of your sculptures take inspiration from rock formations. What aspects of rock formations do you consider, and what kinds of transformations do you seek to make?

AL: I have in mind more the scientific part of nature, the inner genetic code or the molecules. And when I insert a genetic code, a gene of myself or of my idea, the genetic code is changing and I create a new interpretation that's a metal, not a mineral. So there's a cross between social codes and understanding, emotions and science. So I say "rock" and you see rocks in your head. When you put it indoors, it pulls in nature. When you put it outdoors, it has a dialogue [with the external elements], but you see that it's not a rock. It's meteoric or Kryptonite or comes from a different civilization. Each and every facet grows in its own direction and creates what I call "the raw growth." It has kinetic qualities without moving. And that's what I like about it, because it leaves a big space for the people that acquire them or have them in front of them to complete the piece in their own way.



Opposite page: Arik Levy's *Experimental Growth*, photo by Lorianzo Ceretta.

This page, top: The designer inside the *Experimental Growth* rock chamber, photo by Carlo Perazzolo - 28tranta.com.

Bottom: Arik Levy's *Experimental Growth*, permanent installation at Bisazza Foundation, 2012, 3D simulation.





WW: *How the surroundings are reflected on the surfaces of your aluminum sculptures is integral to their aesthetic. What do you aspire to achieve through this?*

AL: Most of the pieces are made for outdoors, and the reflections make them become part of nature and nature is part of them. The nature that we know is woven into my new interpretation of nature. What it shows is how quickly and beautifully the pieces integrate and nearly disappear and breathe the daylight. The pieces are living in the moment of the day and the location that they are in. It's my dream to make a really Zen garden in Japan or somewhere using my interpreted rock.

WW: *Other sculptures have explosive, multibranching forms. How do you develop them and contemplate them?*

AL: I make a lot of drawings and paintings of raw growth that help me to experiment with the transition from 2D to 3D. I see them unfolding all

the time because of the way I build them. Then the inner surfaces get into different colors and different cores that inspire other sculptures that will come in the future. If you take the *Rock Growth Hollow*, the branches or the logs are empty and you can see through them or into them in different ways.

WW: *So do you always draw with pen and paper?*

AL: I always draw myself — I love pen and paper. I'm a very bad computer operator. So these are some of the drawings I have in 16 notebooks full of texts and memos. You can see how the piece will grow and correspond to our internal environment.

WW: *Sometimes the drawings are an interpretation of a habitat or a cave.*

AL: We are the historic people of the future. In 3,000 years, they'll look at us and say, "What was that? How did those people live? What kind of form did they have?" Because we have iPhones and Blackberrys, we think we're the

Left: Arik Levy's *Experimental Growth*
photo by by Lorenzo Ceretta.

Portrait by by Carlo Peraculo,
28trenta.com.



Olympus of the world, but we're basically nowhere. We don't even realize how far we are from being able to control. And this no-control issue — the thinking that you have control when you don't have control — is a very dangerous and a fragile situation. The freedom of art for me is to create an interpretation of that, and it goes on from there.

WW: *From afar, your paintings on wood look pixelated. But they are actually composed of multifaceted shapes that you create yourself. It's also evident that you use photography as a pictorial starting point. How would you describe the creative process?*

AL: I work on a photo and transform it by creating the mineral facets, and then print it over wood. The wood takes over because it changes the colors and that's something I don't control. The wood veins create other facets, and part of it I paint over. So there are three or four different layers of depth. But at the same time it's done intuitively. There's a moment where the crystallization gets so abstract that you can construct different things [in how

you interpret the image]. It's unidentifiable. It ignites the notion of personal memory of an event that each one of us has. I'm only a jumping board to everyone's emotional souvenir. I think and I believe that we should feel first and then see after.

www.ariklevy.fr
www.passagoderetz.com
www.fondazionebisazza.it