

MISHA KAHN: Postmodern Delight

words by Luis Ortega Goveia



The first time I saw a Misha Kahn work was on an Instagram story. A huge crate had arrived at the side parking lot of M+B in Los Angeles. As shiny bronze surfaces next to spiky stainless steel were being slowly brought out of plywood boxes, my eye was pulled in by the objects reflecting the sun and glimmering on my screen. The videos were posted by Jay Ezra, who runs the Annex of M+B as a *Wunderkammer* of decorative arts. Their first show took place in 2018 and featured 120 artists, the work ranging from customized Bic lighters by Veronica Gelbaum to a ceramic slipper by Olivia Erlanger. Finding its crux between mass production, customization and art as pure interior decoration, the show was a proposition of sorts, confirming what's at stake in this space. It seems like a good and natural progression, then, to invite Misha Khan as a cleansing following act.

With "Just Around the Bend," his first solo show in Los Angeles, Khan dances between design and art as freely as his shapes avoid the straight lines. The selection and placement of works is the opposite of ostentatious, the show's display strategy as amorphous as the objects themselves. Bracketed shelves at different heights hold a series of bronze lamps; a long cashmere sofa in a Rugrats palette is displayed showroom-style; a totemic wicker standing sculpture reminds of the suburban obsession with the "tribal"; a thick stainless steel chain hangs a wicker chandelier with clear glass inserts. Along the wall, a series of mirrors reflects colorful polyurethane blobs; in the corner, a bronze table polished to various degrees looks like an overblown sand castle. This display of Khan's work is an aggressive and unashamed revelation that the intelligentsia's taste and value is moving back towards postmodernism—its colored palette, its refusal of modernist edges, its protest of purity in form in tandem with its expensive materiality. It's extremely sensical that a city like L.A., which has been so defined by its obsessions with mid-century ideals, is now finally learning to look at its postmodern legacy. The pretense of mid-century-as-good-taste

and patronage of California modernism has become more disastrous than helpful, inflating the market and twisting the principles of cheap materials and accessibility that are emblematic of post-war design into a gentrified style.

Naturally, postmodernism is a tough sell, as it's hard to shake off the stoical sacrifice of comfort for appearance. But what makes Kahn's pieces so delightfully postmodern is that they are as fun as they are invested in ergonomics. He is an inventor of blobby, comfortable and carefully designed furniture; whether these objects will be installed as sculptures or deployed as functional chairs is up to the consumer. (Though just imagine the cleaner who has to vacuum through the infinite spikes that hold up Kahn's tables, or the exhausting practice of reminding everyone not to drink red wine on the lavender cashmere.) Regardless of practicalities, these pieces are fun to look at. But just as Kahn makes visual ideas work in ways that deflate their fine art origins, his furniture pieces parody their own function. Khan fetishizes the fuzziness of organic shapes and the spikiness of structural points, but I can't tell if he does so out of adoration or repulsion.

There was something about the first image I saw of these objects, placed onto the concrete tarmac of a parking lot, that contextualized them visually as a series of public furniture pieces. It was in that short moment that the true exciting notion of these pieces was gestated: the possibility of Khan's work being able to exist in the commonality of the public rather than in the privacy of the domestic is where the true power of his anti-modern forms can begin to generate a change in the status quo, rather than existing as a timely tasteful product. **K**

MISHA KAHN (AMERICAN, B. 1989) IS A BROOKLYN-BASED DESIGNER WHO CREATES OBJECTS OF PLAYFUL ABSURDITY. HE RECENTLY HAD A SOLO SHOW AT ANNEX AT M+B, LOS ANGELES

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