



MARIAWETTERGREN  
GALERIE

# MODERNISM CRYSTALLIZED

F A M I L Y A F F A I R



*We find the idea of time running out in the Black Mirror glass table illuminated by the City Light pendant. The table is a carnival mirror that shows New York, the ideal modernist city, to be an illusion. Might it be Plato's Atlantis? That mythical civilization now sunk beneath the waves. We can see in the surrounding fabrics that modernism is entering its twilight.*

Christian Holmsted Olesen  
(Head of Exhibitions and Collections, Designmuseum Danmark)

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Cover: *City Light* (detail), 2020. Boris Berlin & Daniel Berlin

Left: *City Light*, 2020. Boris Berlin & Daniel Berlin; *Black Mirror*, 2021. Boris Berlin & Germans Ermičs

# A MODERN STRIPTEASE

## PREFACE

by Maria Wettergren

The stripping down to the essentials of the 20th-century modernist movement did not only remove the ornaments and superfluous details from architecture and design, it simultaneously made space for other elements to further interact with form – light, space, color, movement, materials, crafts and new technologies - paving the way for an interdisciplinary approach, of which the Bauhaus is an illustrious example.

In that respect, the artists of the exhibition *Modernism Crystallized (Family Affair)*, Boris Berlin, Daniel Berlin and Germans Ermičs, are children of modernism. Their empirical approach and material-oriented vocabulary seem to rise like a second wave from its main explorations: focus on materials paired with new technologies and craftsmanship; perception of form, light and space; urban esthetics with a tendency towards geometric abstraction. Even the concept behind the exhibition echoes the collective approach of the

modernist movement. When inviting Boris Berlin to exhibit in my gallery, the Russian-born designer responded by asking his son, Danish architect Daniel Berlin (of Snøhetta) and Latvian designer Germans Ermičs (whom he affectively considers his adopted son), to create the works with him, some collaboratively in pairs, others individually, in a twilight zone between art, design and architecture.

However, contrary to their 20th-century peers, this little family of designers seems to explore simultaneously the modernist vocabulary and its potential collapse with, as leitmotif, order and dissolution; geometric regularity and deformation; clarity and illusion; presence and disappearance. A certain sense of drama is palpable here, a theatrical dimension which is underlined by Boris Berlin's chiaroscuro scenography and textile curtain, softly graduating from white to black, from light into darkness. It's showtime, with the modernist bride





stripped bare by her bachelors. What is revealed through the seductive power of these optically strong objects and their *fetish finish* is the crucial part played by the spectator in their coming into being: light and color modulations, *trompe-l'œil* effects, form-altering reflections, optical grids. With their ever-changing surfaces, these works were made to be accomplished by the gaze of the spectator, who takes pleasure in perceiving the mechanisms of perception.

Made from materials cherished by the modernist architects – cool and irresistible – the works seem under tension: The illusionist table, *Black Mirror*, by Boris

Berlin and Germans Ermičs, hardly reaches the floor, as it fades into its own reflection. By a masterful gradation from 100% mirror to 100% black glass, the table constantly appears and disappears, according to the surrounding light, shapes and point of view. Over the table hangs an imposing light pendant, *City Light*, designed by Daniel and Boris Berlin. Cast on the city of Manhattan, the light in translucent resin reflects the ordered yet chaotic grid of the modernist city *par excellence*. Programmed to the shifting color/light cycle of the city, this light-clock travels an entire day in one hour, from the first rays of sunrise into a glowing midday sun, to the nocturnal fading of light.

At dusk, the reflection of the city slowly vanishes, like the ghost of a Promethean civilization, into the infinite blackness of the *Black Mirror* table. Another day in the city of glass...

Germans Ermičs' sculptural glass chair in flaming colors, *Sunburst Tall Glass Chair*, expresses a delicate balance between two clashing polarities: a perceived fragility and an imagined state of solidity. With its three vertical glass panes, caught in a sublime moment between stability and collapse, the high back and sides provide personal space and protection, although the sitting experience may be closer to that of a falling throne. In its masterful articulation of rectilinear volumes and the interaction of colored vertical and horizontal planes, the chair creates an interesting dialogue between color and form: the burst of orange and red colors evolves gradually from the ground and upwards, alluding to, rather than defining, the shape of the chair. The impact of color on the comfort of the spirit is both enhanced and challenged by the fragile aspect of the glass material. You cannot help but hold your breath while walking around this tall, ethereal piece, which constantly changes according to the surrounding light and perspective. In that respect, Ermičs seems close to the minimalists of California's Light and Space movement, such as James Turrell and Larry Bell, in his exploration of color and materials to catalyze a shift in how we perceive objects and space. On the



opposite wall, a slender, mirrored totem by the same artist, *Sunburst Mirror Beam*, echoes the sunny colors of the chair, in a movement from earth to sky.

The human body almost seems absent from these works, with their cool reflecting materials and abstract geometric forms: furniture pieces that are not about

physical comfort but instead are about our own perception. Yet, they were made to the scale of the body, to be optically accomplished by the spectator moving around them. These surface vibrations are equally present in Boris Berlin's handmade wooden chairs, *High Grid* and *Low Grid*, however in a much more organic form, reminding us that the body is always

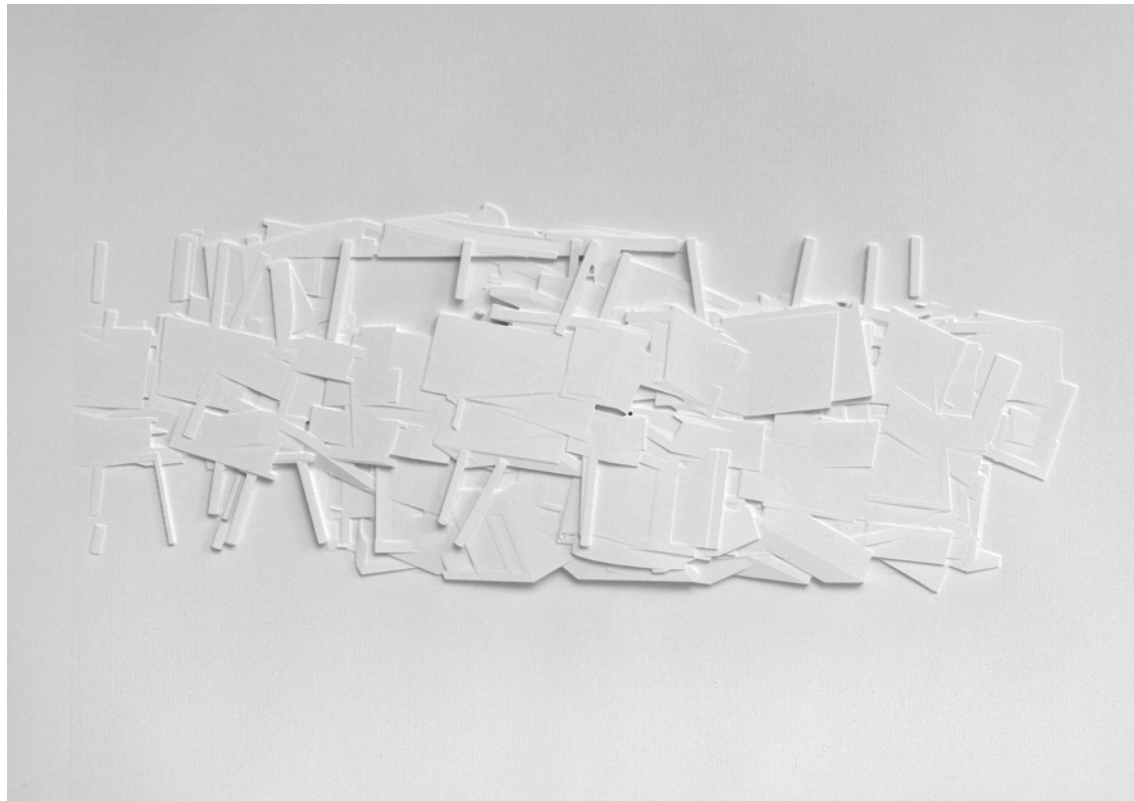
there. Undulating, their perfect geometric grid seems disturbed from within by an organic presence. *A geometrically precise wooden grid of the iconic chair silhouette, transformed by the memory of a human body...* to paraphrase the artist. The *Grid* chairs interpret the fusional interaction between the human body and the chair, breaking its shape down into a skeleton.

In Germans Ermičs' cylindrical object, *Pele de Tigre (Signature Object)*, three-dimensional marble veins burst through the surface. Inspired by the natural erosion of the material, Ermičs has been developing a new processing method to enhance the unique pattern of the stone. Instead of forcing a preconceived image onto the marble, Ermičs works with the stone's own texture, uncovering its wild, organic beauty and liberating it from centuries of domesticated polishing in the fields of art and architecture. The marble object is part of a small series of eight cylindrical pieces, *Signature Objects*, made individually by each designer. While obeying the same dimensions and cylindrical form, each object is defined by its specific materiality and construction. What is left is a sign of its author, his signature. Scattered throughout the exhibition, they look like... *fragments of columns brought from the ruins of seven temples from seven continents. Each of them telling its own story, each of them keeping traces of the craftsman, who once created them*, in the words of Boris Berlin.



The idea of trace and memory is particularly present in Daniel Berlin's poetic wall reliefs in composite aluminium, *Villa Savoye*. By multiplying thirty times Le Corbusier's famous villa, the Danish architect deconstructs the iconic masterpiece of his French predecessor. In its new compressed state, void of space, it seems crystallized in its essence, yet reoriented, in transition. Solid and void. Surface and depth. From the icons and vestiges of the past, something new is growing in the valley. Boris Berlin recalls contemplating the city of Seoul, from a hilltop from which the city can be seen,

lying in the valley like a giant plate with its urban grid and diverse buildings laid bare, surrounded by fields and hills. Day turns into evening; the city lights grow while the night slowly sinks down on the city, lights fading out, until the city almost disappears. Then, the thought that in spite of all human attempts to restrict the city, imposing on it the grid of mathematic regularity, an organic, unrestrained growth is protruding from the bottom of the valley, framed by nature, not quite infected by it yet.



Page 5:  
*Sunburst Tall Glass Chair*, 2021. Germans Ermičs

Page 6:  
*Black Mirror* (detail), 2020. Boris Berlin & Germans Ermičs

Page 7:  
*High Grid*, 2016. Boris Berlin

Page 8:  
*Pele de Tigre* (Signature Object), 2021. Germans Ermičs

Page 9:  
*Signature Object 1*, 2020. Kalmar Pine. Boris Berlin  
*Signature Object 2*, 2021. Ash. Boris Berlin  
*Signature Object 3*, 2021. Ash. Boris Berlin  
*Signature Object 7*, 2021. Basalt. Daniel Berlin

Page 10:  
*Villa Savoye I*, 2012. Daniel Berlin

# A CRYSTALLIZATION OF MODERNISM OR ITS TWILIGHT?

by Christian Holmsted Olesen  
Head of Exhibitions and Collections  
Designmuseum Danmark

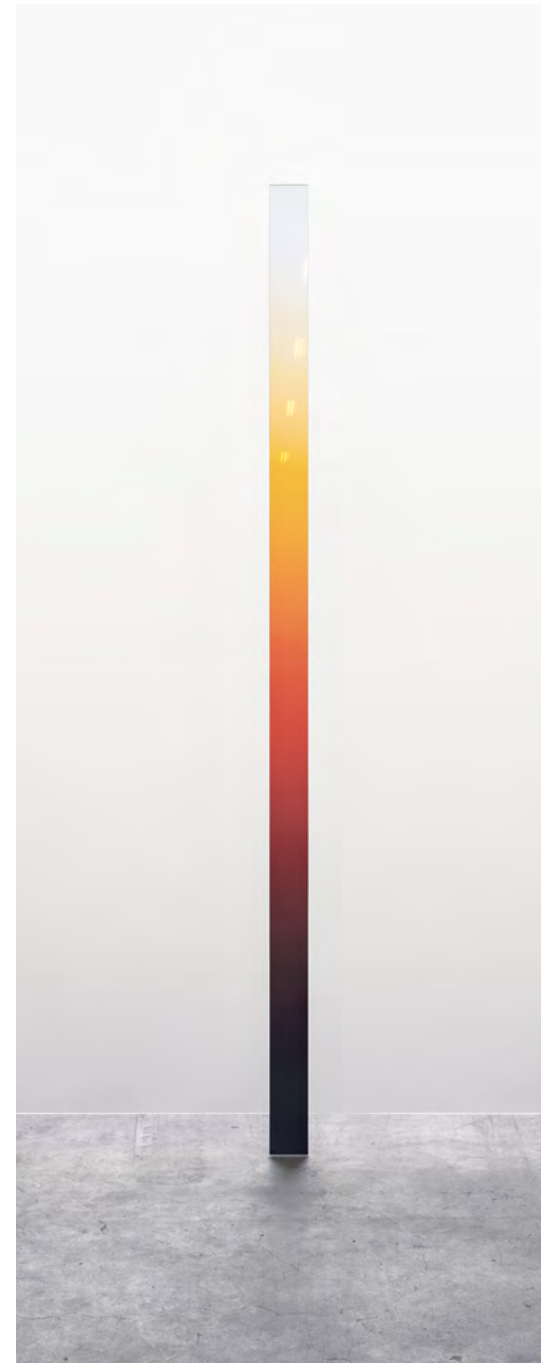
*I've got an exhibition coming up at Maria Wettergren's gallery in Paris and I almost always work with other people. So I do things with family, with Daniel and Germans. It's 'hyggelig' [cosy] to work with family.* Boris is busy showing me something that could scarcely be less *hyggelig*: grids, glass, cylinders; simple sharp and threatening; bold, magical and thought provoking. There is serious business afoot in Boris' family.

This is about modernism and the way we live in these rationalized times. A table, a chair and a city in translucent resin and glass, the modernists' favorite building material: ice-cold, dangerous, and compelling. An opalescent white Manhattan, *City Light*, is exhibited with a clockwork illumination, where you follow the day's passing – an ordering grid in the city-structure. But the order the grid gives us looks more like chaos, something shattered or crystalline. Something from the future; something

crystallized. Humans have imposed a rational order on something as organic as a city. Though cities designed around a grid-structure date back to antiquity, they are also an image of the rationality of modernism. Everything has been systematized.

Boris has a passion for chairs, and here he has designed two thrones, in a knowing wink to their long history as a symbol of power, where one can literally sit on the grid: Modern humans' mastery over the system, rationality, technology, the city, and even the world. At least we think we have...

Germans' glass throne looks like it might implode at any moment. And there is fire in it. Perhaps this divinely modern and enchanting material is not quite so rational, transparent and innocuous as we might like to believe. This classically honest and guileless material somehow gives body, in



the play of its light, to a reality that is both poetic and untrustworthy. It might shatter at any moment and become perilously sharp...

Daniel thinks that modernism has had its day. The temple of architectural modernism, Le Corbusier's *Villa Savoye*, has been deconstructed to little more than an overlaid relief. This architect thinks that architecture is simply about space. The *Villa Savoye* is an icon of modernism's conception of space. Daniel has transformed it into a sharp esthetic relief, all level planes and artistry. Perhaps Le Corbusier's masterpiece was not a space for people, but something closer to esthetics or art.

The three modernists have set themselves the challenge of working with cylinders – one of the simplest shapes that one can build with.

Daniel, the architect, has made basalt and travertine columns, each with a hole in it. Perhaps, so each column can be connected to something... perhaps, in search of transparency... perhaps, just to give more space.

Boris, the furniture designer, works with wood, its composites and joints; trying to enhance the columns, by giving them more of a human form. That's the designer's job.

Germans, the designer, gives the classic marble column a temporal aspect. The soft,

white stone has been weathered away. Time, form and thought have worn out and been transformed.

The family of works, and the works of the family, have an affair with modernism. It is both an esthetic homage and a weighty critique.

We also find the idea of time running out in the *Black Mirror* glass table illuminated by the *City Light* pendant. The table is a carnival mirror that shows New York, the ideal modernist city, to be an illusion. Might it be Plato's Atlantis? That mythical civilization now sunk beneath the waves. We can see in the surrounding fabrics that modernism is entering its twilight.



Page 13:  
*Sunburst Mirror Beam*, 2021. Germans Ermičs

Page 14:  
*City Light* (Pendant), 2020. Boris Berlin & Daniel Berlin



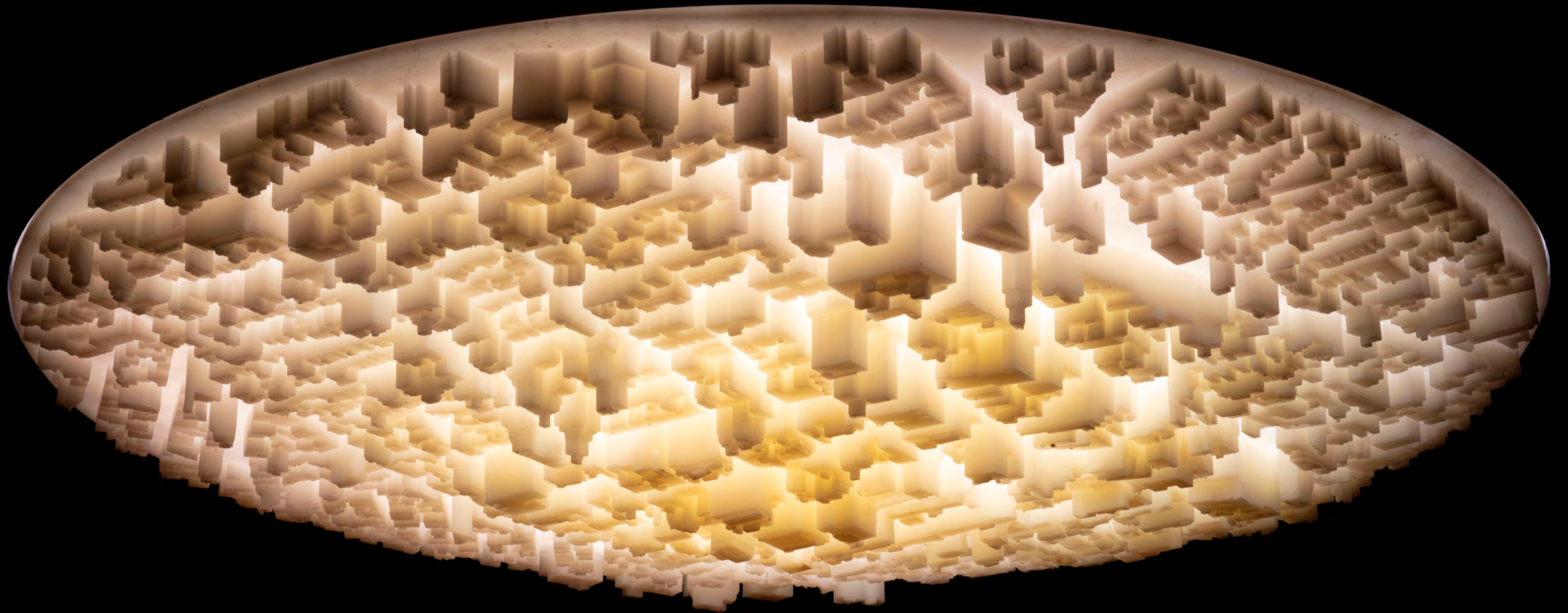




*This is about modernism and the way we live in these rationalized times.  
A table, a chair and a city in translucent resin and glass, the modernists'  
favorite building material: ice-cold, dangerous, and compelling.*

Christian Holmsted Olesen  
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Pages 16 - 18:  
Boris Berlin & Germans Ermičs  
*Black Mirror*, 2020  
Glass, mirror  
Ø150 x 75 cm

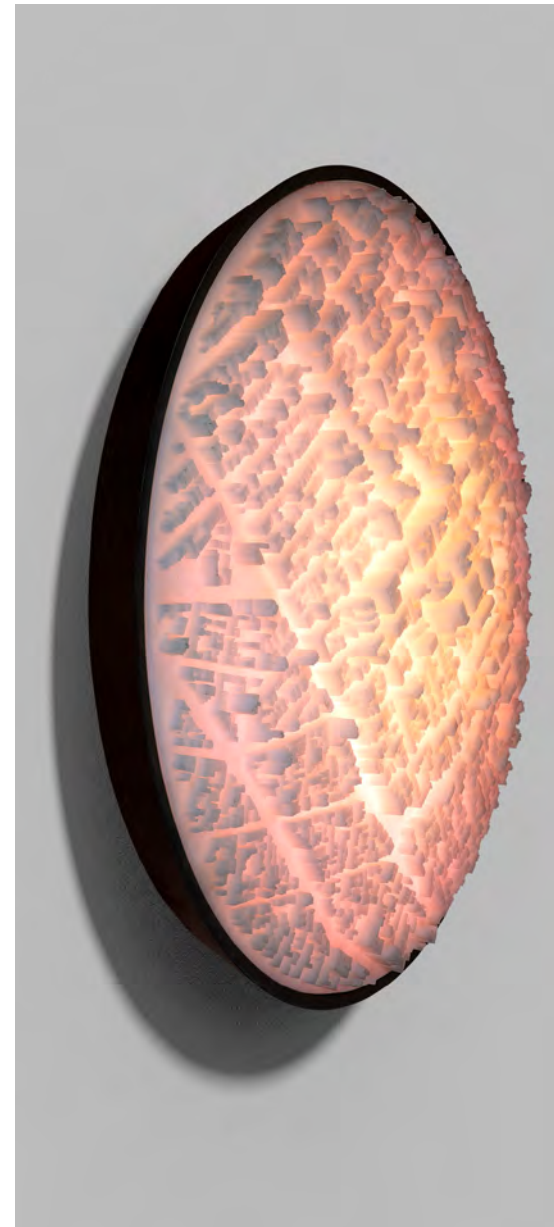
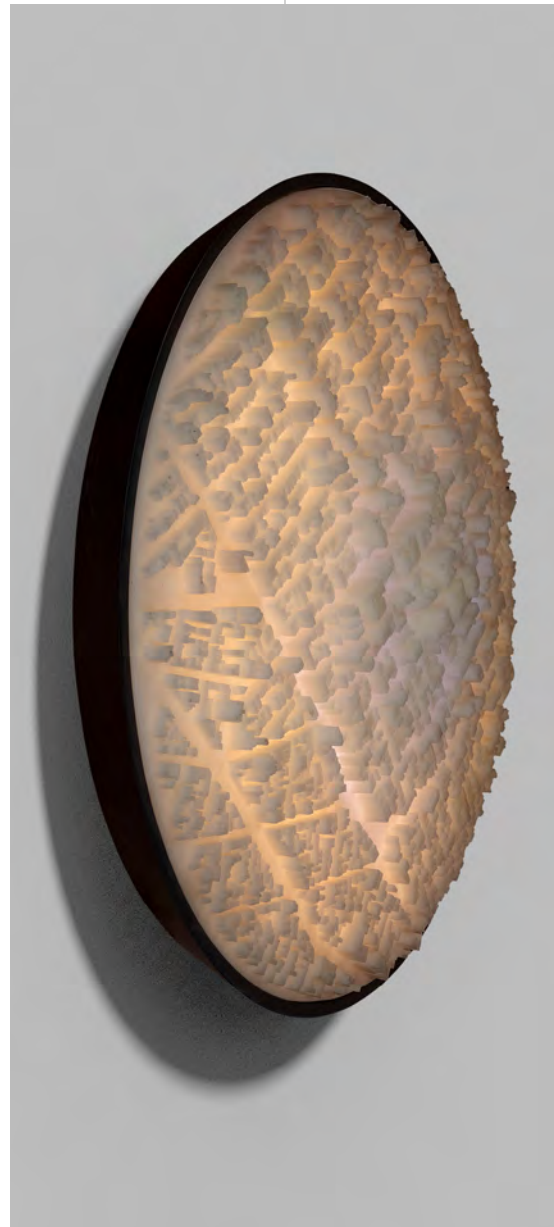


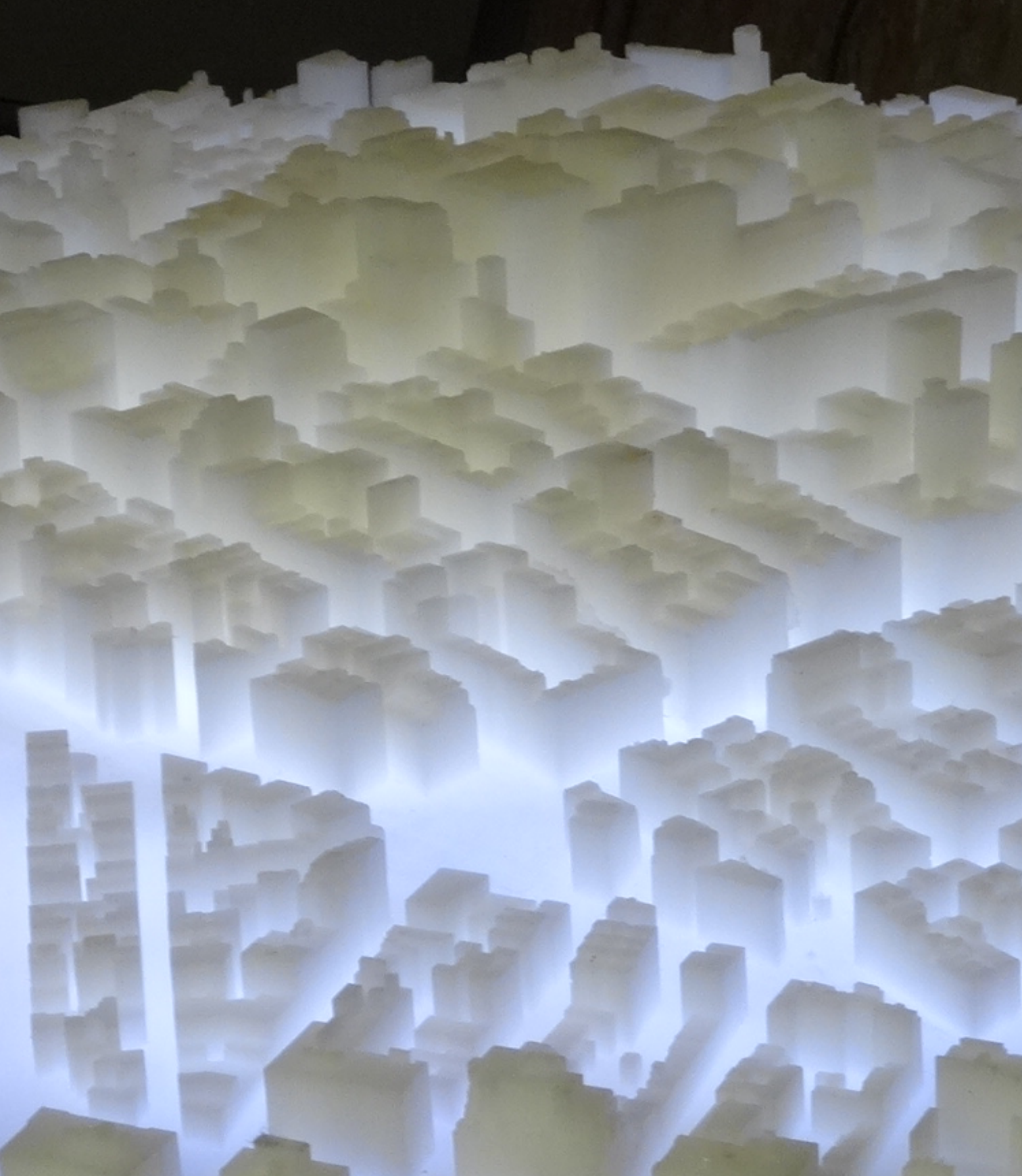




*I remember contemplating the city of Seoul, from a hilltop from which the city can be seen, lying in the valley like a giant plate with its urban grid and diverse buildings laid bare, surrounded by fields and hills. Day turns into evening; the city lights grow while the night slowly sinks down on the city, lights fading out, until the city almost disappears. Then, the thought that in spite of all human attempts to restrict the city, imposing on it the grid of mathematic regularity, an organic, unrestrained growth is protruding from the bottom of the valley, framed by nature, not quite infected by it yet.*

Boris Berlin





Pages 20 - 23:  
Boris Berlin & Daniel Berlin  
*City Light* (Pendant), 2020  
Resin, fiberglass, LED  
Ø110 x 32 cm

Page 22:  
*Modernism Crystallized (Family Affair)*  
exhibition view at Galerie Maria Wettergren, 2021

Pages 24 - 27:  
Boris Berlin & Daniel Berlin  
*City Light* (Wall lamp), 2020  
Resin, fiberglass, LED  
Ø104 x 24 cm

Page 28:  
Boris Berlin & Daniel Berlin  
*City Light* (detail), 2020, at the artists' studio



## **BORIS BERLIN**

Boris Berlin (b. 1953) is a Russian-born designer, who lives and works in Denmark. Berlin works and experiments with new technologies and materials, exploring their possibilities and impact on the design of everyday objects, as well as on sculptural design art pieces. Berlin graduated from the Higher School of Art and Industry in 1975 and began his career as an industrial and graphic designer at VNIITE in Leningrad (now St. Petersburg). In 1983, he moved to Denmark, founding Boris Berlin Design, and then in 1987, became a co-founder and partner of Komplot Design. Later, in 2010, Berlin co-founded and became a partner of Iskos-Berlin Design. The geography of his clients spreads from Denmark and Sweden to USA and Japan, including companies such as Gubi, Hay, Muuto, Normann, Fritz Hansen, R+R, Källemo, Tendo Mokko, Stylex Seating, and Jot.Jot. Boris Berlin's designs have received numerous distinctions and design awards, and his works are represented in museums around the world, among them: Designmuseum Danmark; Trapholt; Designmuseo Helsinki; Die Neue Sammlung Munich; Museum of Modern Art, New York; and the Vitra Design Museum.





*Grid is an archetype of the chair with its straight geometric side silhouettes, connected by an organically waving wooden grid, shaped by the imprint of the human body. Grid chair is an alliance of wood knowledge and the classic art of joinery with computer-controlled processing - where tradition embraces modernity.*

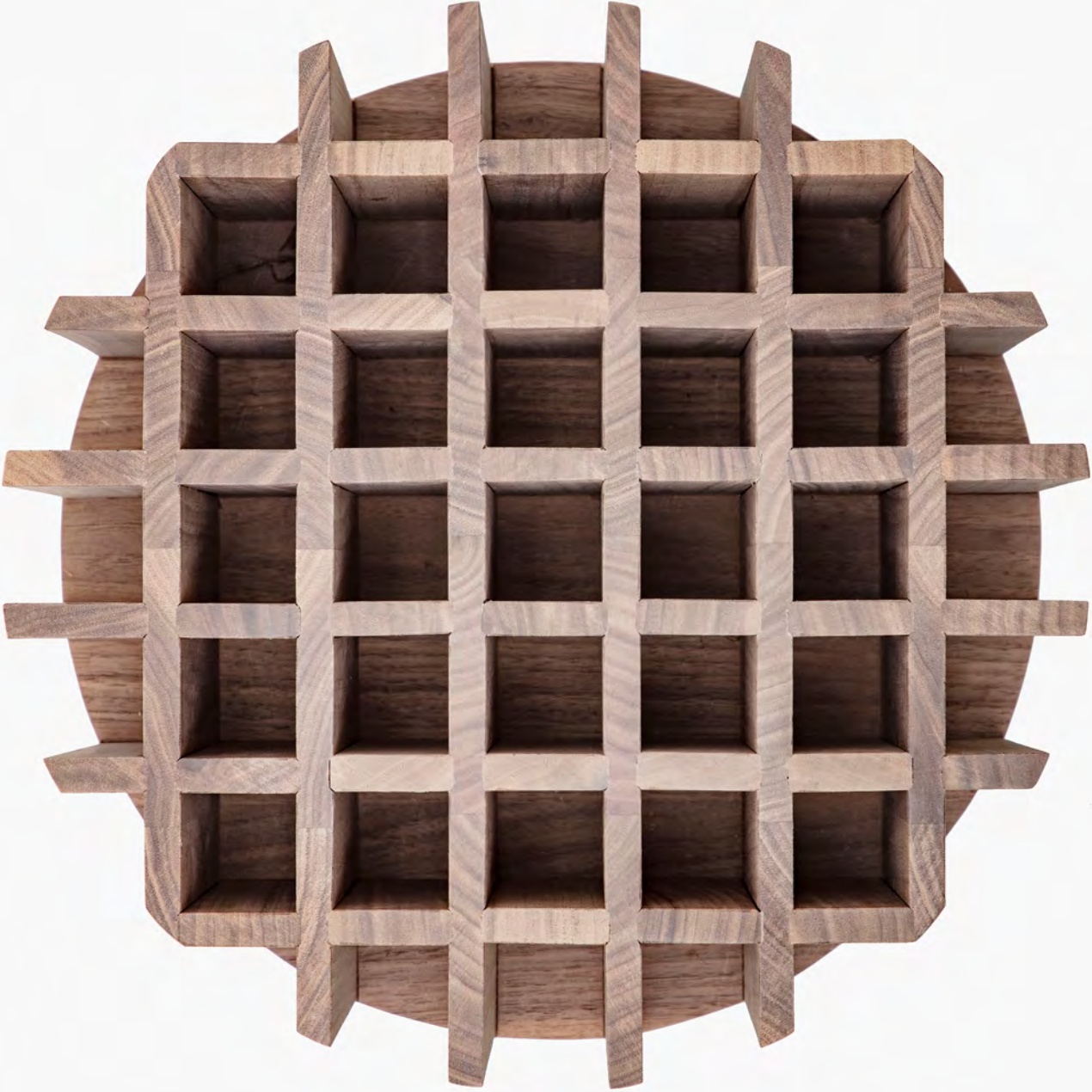
Boris Berlin



Page 32:  
Boris Berlin  
*Low Grid*, 1999  
Walnut  
65 x 49 x 78 cm

Page 34:  
Boris Berlin  
*High Grid*, 2016  
Oak and walnut  
39 x 50 x 140 cm











Pages 36 - 44:  
Boris Berlin  
*Signature Objects 1, 2, 3, 4, 5*  
Ø35 x 50 cm

Pages 36 - 37:  
*Signature Object 1, 2020*  
Kalmar Pine

Pages 38 - 39:  
*Signature Object 5, 2021*  
Walnut

Pages 40 - 41:  
*Signature Object 4, 2021*  
Oak

Page 42:  
*Signature Object 2, 2021*  
Ash

Page 43 - 44:  
*Signature Object 3, 2021*  
Ash



*I would like to make people look at the glass, not just through the glass.*

Germans Ermičs

## GERMANS ERMIČS

Germans Ermičs (b. 1985) is a Latvian designer, who lives and works in Amsterdam. For the past few years, Ermičs has crafted refined and ethereal pieces of glass furniture with exquisite chromatic expressions. Like the minimalists of California's Light and Space Movement, Ermičs explores the field of color and materials to catalyze a shift in how we perceive objects and space. After studying design in Denmark, he carried out an internship at the Rasmus Koch Studio (Copenhagen) where he developed his skills in graphic design. In 2007, he co-founded the Latvian culture magazine Veto, serving as art director, while studying at the Design Academy Eindhoven in the department Man & Living, where his primary focus was on furniture and interiors. In 2014, he founded his own studio in Amsterdam. Ermičs was awarded the Wallpaper\* Design Awards in 2017 and 2018, and has realized important site-specific installations and collaborations with Instagram and Bang & Olufsen, among others. Ermičs' works have been exhibited worldwide in museums such as Toyama Museum of Art & Design, Japan, and Designmuseum Danmark.



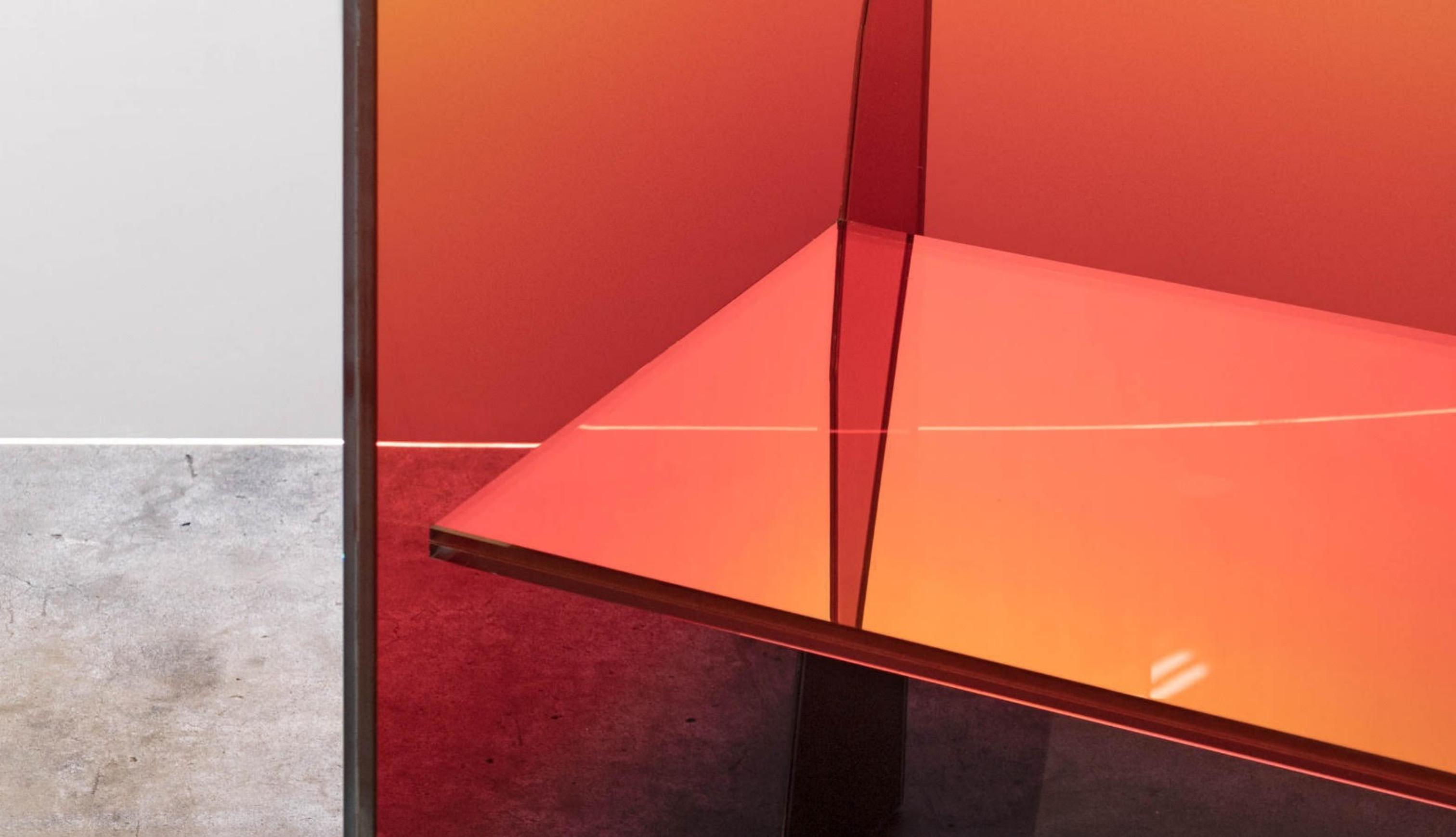


*I choose very simple geometric shapes and transform their cold, linear geometry into elements of unprecedented depth, opening the way for a world of new interpretations. The color becomes the element that generates the meaning of the form, transforming the pure geometry of material into an expressive object...*

Germans Ermičs

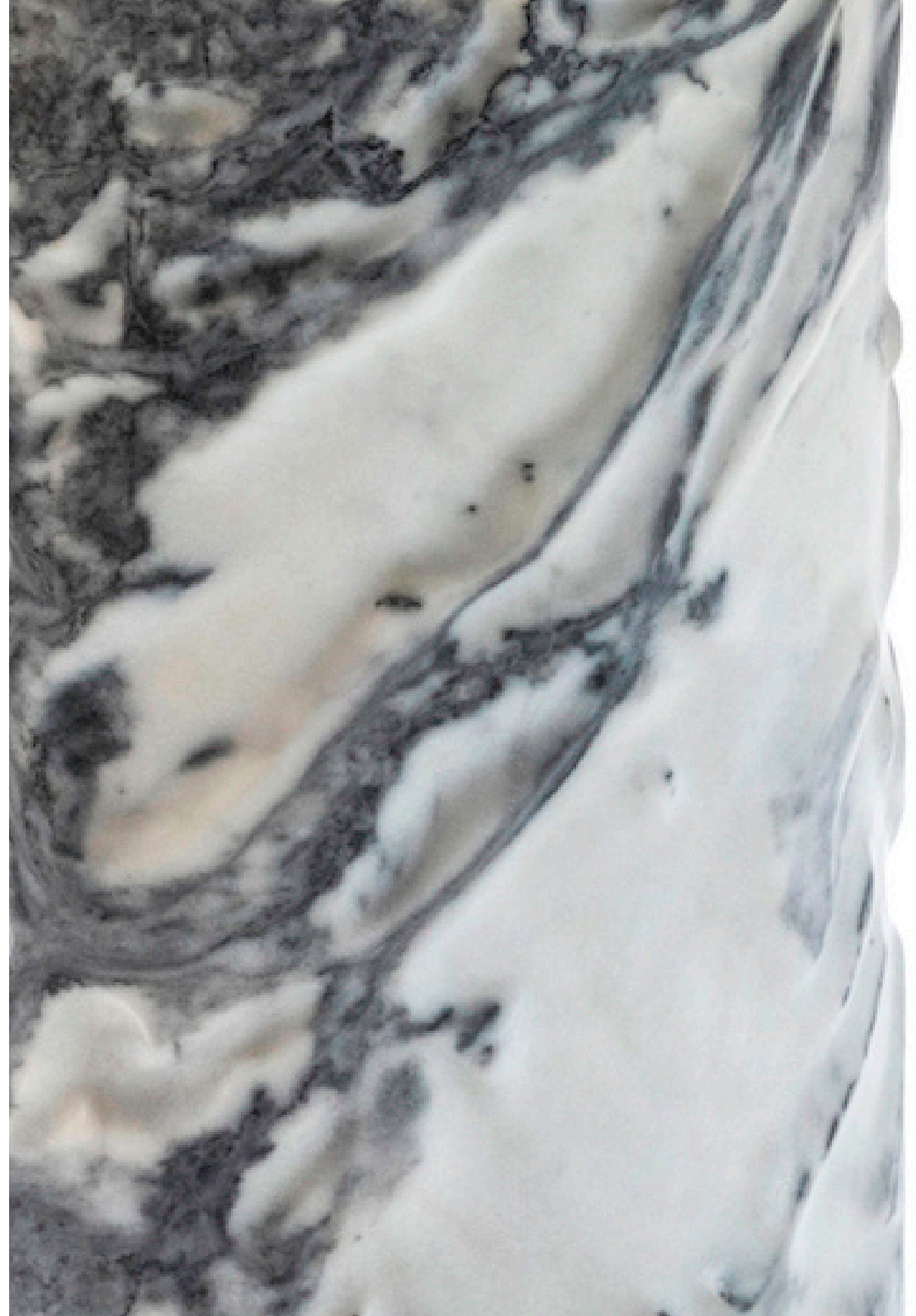
Pages 48 - 53:  
Germans Ermičs  
*Sunburst Tall Glass Chair*, 2021  
Glass  
74 x 67 x 150 cm







Germans Ermičs  
*Sunburst Mirror Beam*, 2021  
Glass, mirror  
10 x 250 cm





*Marble is a natural and beautiful material that has been widely used in architecture and design for centuries. Somehow, I felt that it doesn't do justice to this wonderful material, which has so much more depth and detail - most of the time it's just flat and polished. So I wanted to challenge this perception of marble and work with the texture... not in a graphic design way that would be forcing a preconceived image onto the stone, but working with the stone and uncovering its natural beauty.*

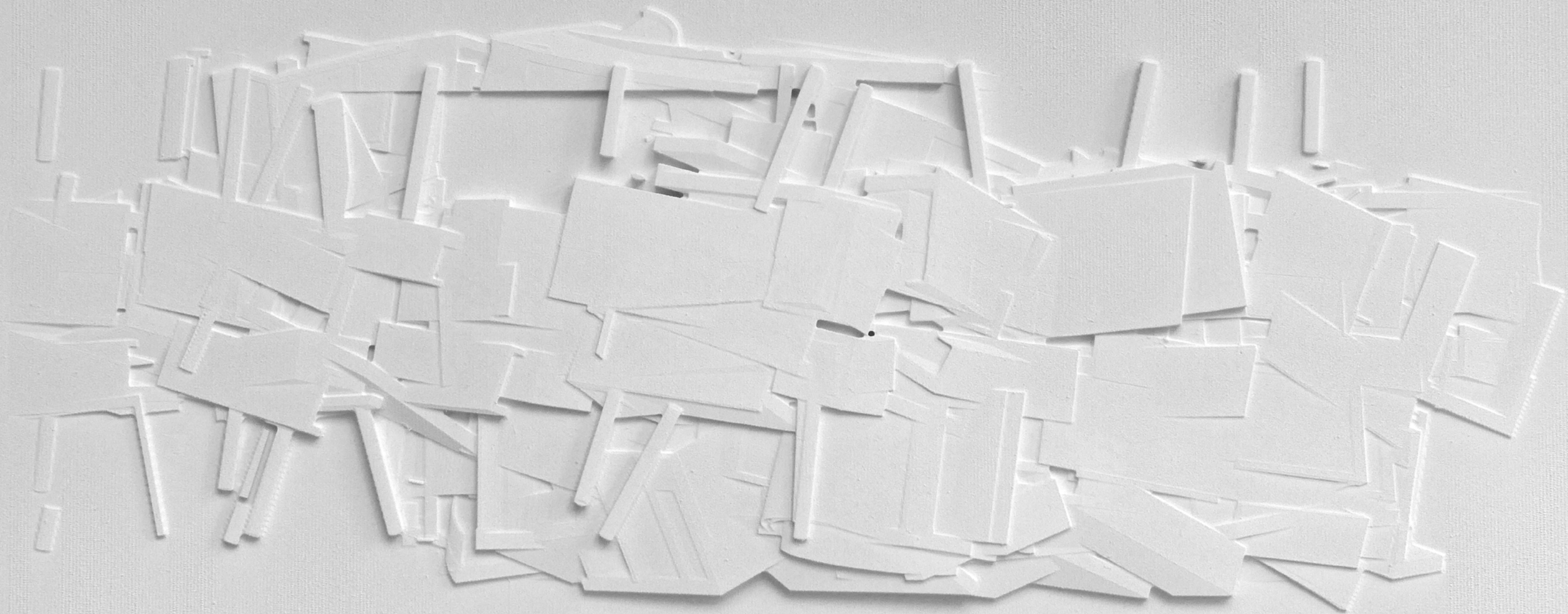
Germans Ermičs

Pages 56 - 58:  
Germans Ermičs  
*Pele de Tigre (Signature Object)*, 2021  
Pele de Tigre marble  
Ø35 x 50 cm



## DANIEL BERLIN

Daniel Berlin (b. 1984) grew up in Copenhagen, and graduated from The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, School of Architecture. In 2012, he continued his architectural education with a Master of Fine Arts in Architecture at the Southern California Institute of Architecture (SCI-Arc), where he was awarded the Merit Award for best thesis in Architecture. After practicing in Los Angeles with the renowned Ball-Nogues Studio, he moved to Oslo in 2013 to join the architecture, interior and landscape studio, Snøhetta. Berlin has been involved in several award-winning competitions with the company, developing a variety of large-scale cultural, infrastructural and commercial projects, including the Fukuoka Concert Hall in Japan, the American University in Beirut, and the Nan Fung Tower, Hong Kong. Berlin's independent work has been published widely and he frequently lectures around the world.





## *Rendezvous*

### *Subverting the latent relationship between a stack and a pile.*

You,  
your solid and your void.

Your resolution.

You, mirrored,  
you, upside down,  
you, inside out,

You Reoriented, reorienting you

Your solid and void,  
a lot,  
many times,  
solid and void, solid and void

And then the void,  
only the void of you  
is subtracted from all of you.

Leaving the void of you  
in you,

An imprint of you,  
in you.

A sense of you,  
in the chaos of you.

The transition from void to void,  
extended.

Door becomes corridor,  
Becomes a walk through poche  
consisting of the misplaced and  
reoriented self.

I have been studying you closely and have found out that you often snap the rules. The rules you set up for yourself.

In fact, I think that might be the most interesting thing about you.

The history of design is an articulation of our quest to conquer, adopt and control nature.

This urge leads to our most startling achievements and to utter catastrophe.

Industrialization has numbed us to extreme convenience, smoothness, the homogenous, the conventional, to rules, and premises, and points.

The literal translation of any rule set establishes a monoculture.

But architecture flourishes in your fecund perversion of the rule.

Blossoming in a process of capricious appropriation.

I exploit your particularity, unscrupulously redeploing your ephemera to create a new entity; reconfigured, intentionally corrupted, curated and reoriented. Your pre-existing tensions are invigorated.

You comprise dialectic opposites: meaning and its dissolution.

Challenging orthodox conceptions of “meaning”, I ask: Can architecture ever be appropriate?

The architecture suggested, deploys your myriad iterations via which cultural consumers interact with popular culture, and you, today.

Taking this subjective mindset literally with the intention of propelling an act of design, I engender a situation where your multiple ontologies productively collide - a location at the margins where your meanings fray - where you slip from a homogeneous totem toward a delicious heterogeneous confection.

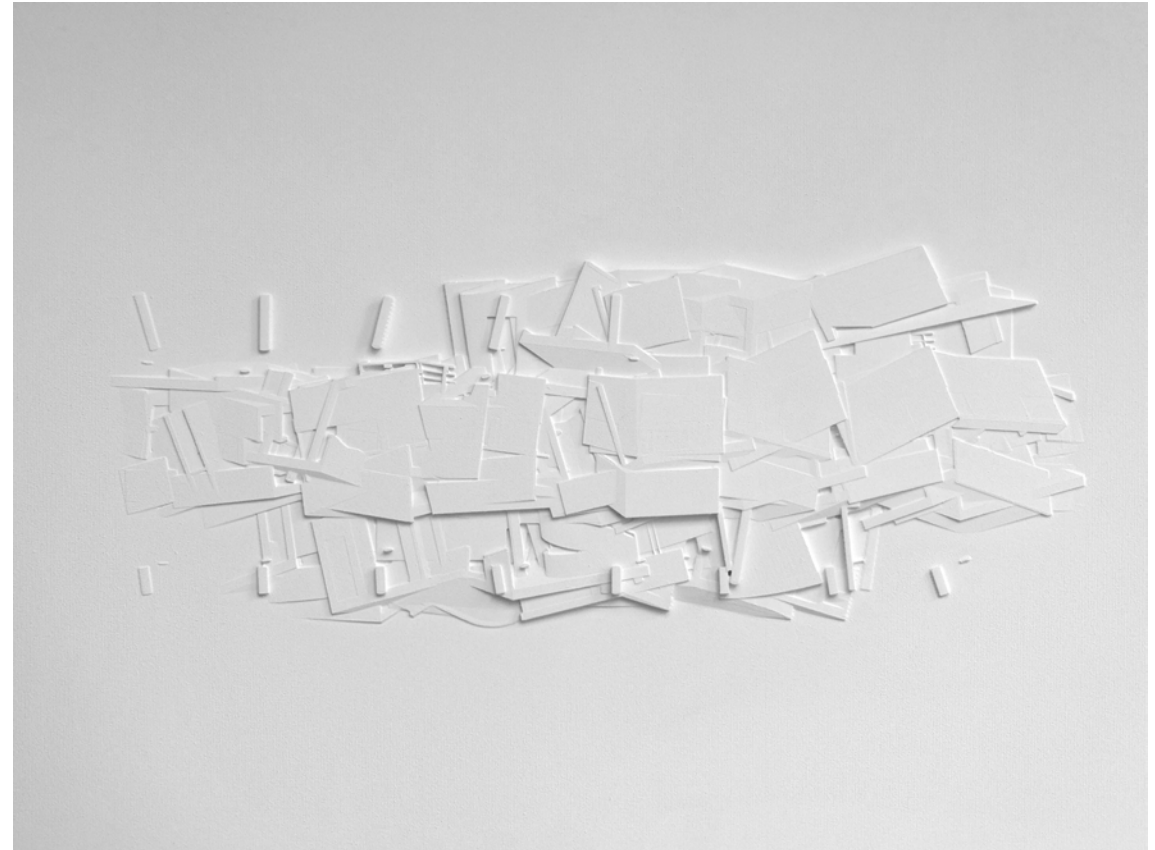
There is no new model for architecture; You are not a bad idea made good. Or a good idea turned bad. You are not a good idea made better.

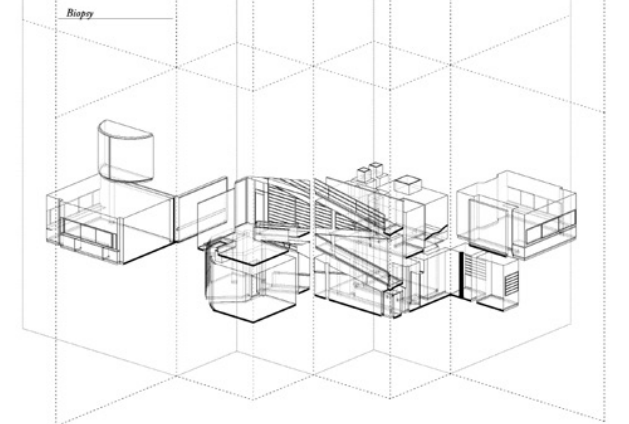
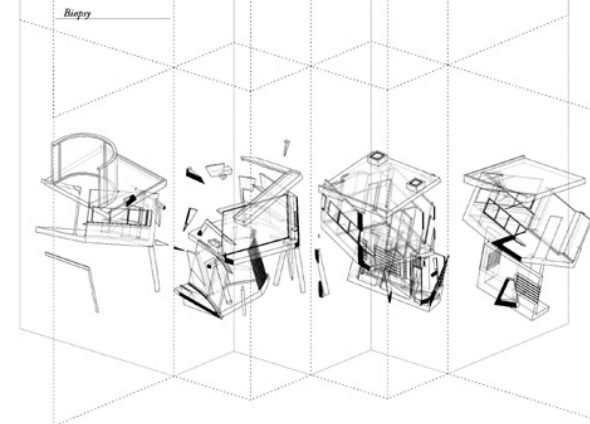
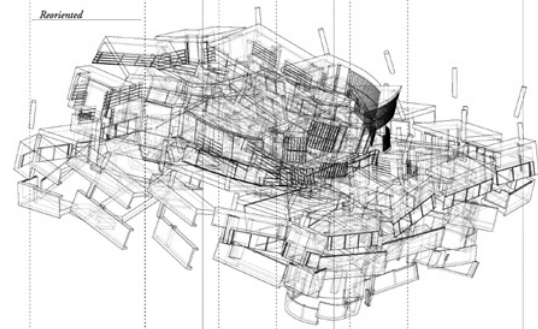
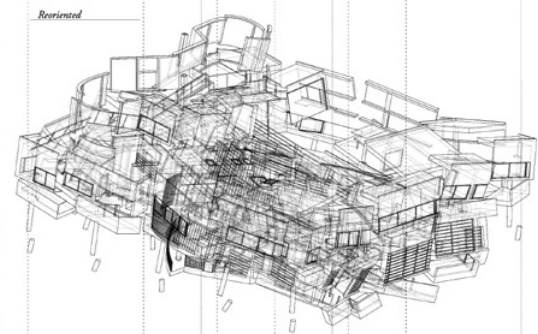
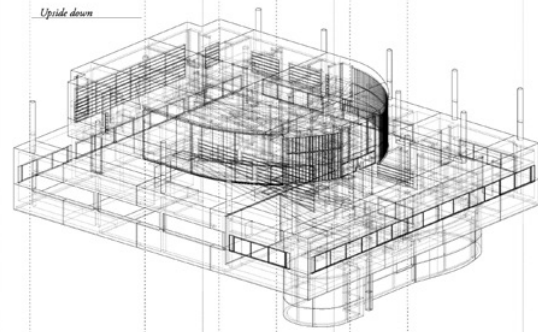
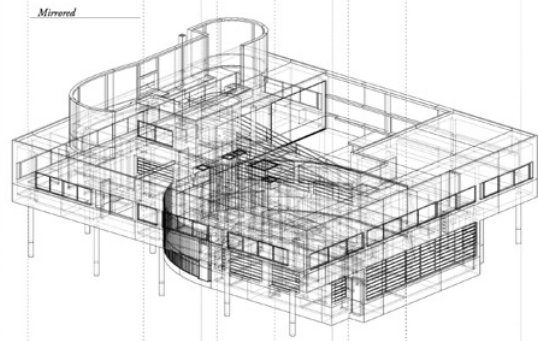
Rather, you are a commonplace but unrepeatable process with complex consequences. You are architecture gone gung-ho.

Let’s put ourselves in a position where we constantly have to forgive.

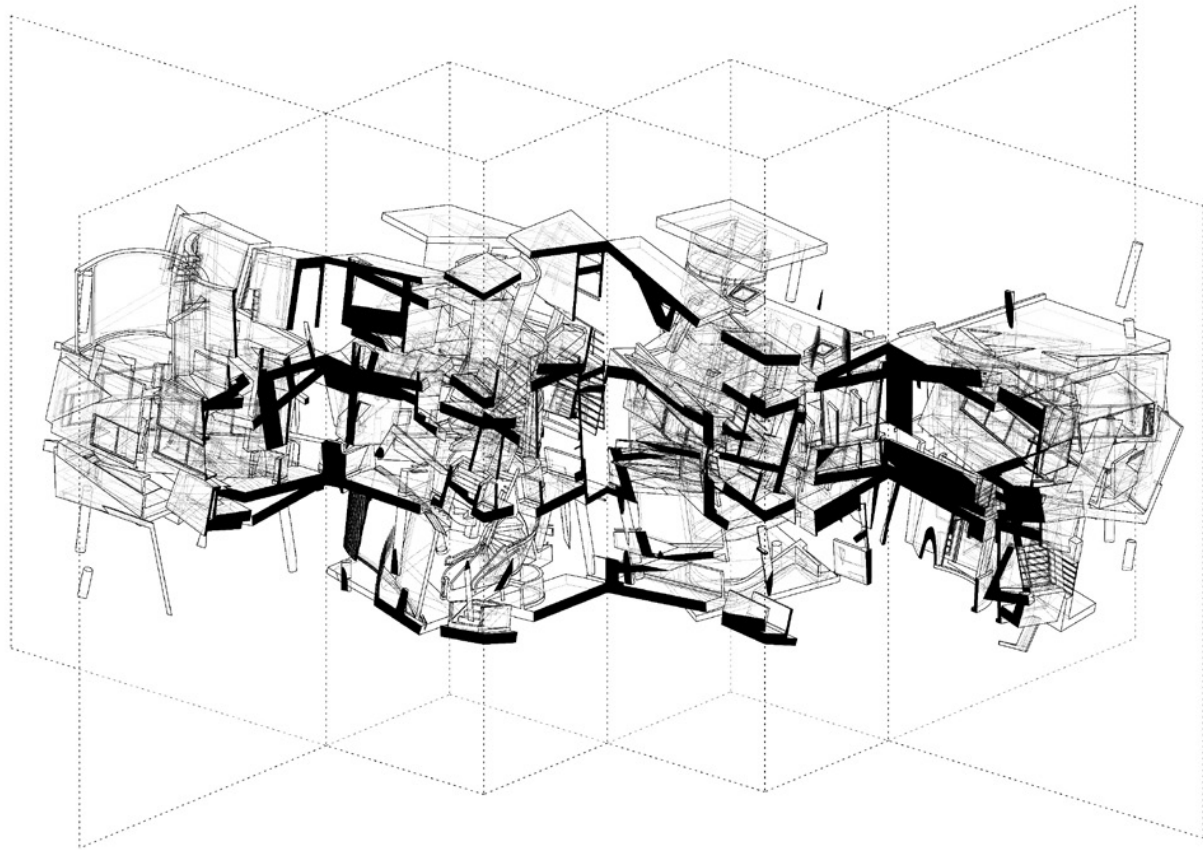
With no apologies,

*Daniel Berlin*





*Mirrored, upside down, inside out, overlaid*



Pages 62 - 63:  
Daniel Berlin  
*Villa Savoye I*, 2012  
Aluminium reinforced composite board  
122 x 86 cm

Page 65:  
Daniel Berlin  
*Villa Savoye II*, 2012  
Aluminium reinforced composite board  
122 x 86 cm

Pages 66 - 68:  
Daniel Berlin  
Drawings for *Villa Savoye I* & *Villa Savoye II*, 2012







Page 70:  
Daniel Berlin  
*Signature Object 7*, 2020  
Basalt  
Ø35 x 50 cm

Page 71:  
Daniel Berlin  
*Signature Object 6*, 2020  
Travertine  
Ø35 x 50 cm

Page 72:  
Daniel Berlin  
Making of *Signature Object 7*, 2020

Page 73:  
Daniel Berlin  
*Signature Object 6* (detail), 2020

Page 74:  
*Modernism Crystallized (Family Affair)*  
exhibition view at Galerie Maria Wettergren, 2021



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**Boris  
Berlin/  
Design**

**kvadrat**

Danmarks  
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moto muto



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