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# LOST CITY ARTS

Harry Bertoia  
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78”h



18 Cooper Square, NY, NY 10003  
T.212.375.0500  
www.lostcityarts.com  
lostcityarts@yahoo.com

## CONTRIBUTORS



**JOHANNA GRAWUNDER** (“Voices,” page 30) splits her time between San Francisco and Milan, creating projects ranging in scale from architectural to small product design. Her influences are as diverse as her output; she was raised amid the Danish modernist interiors of her parents’ Southern California home, but her first show, called TRUCK, was a sort of homage to the low-rider culture of San Diego.

Grawunder often frequents junkyards and hardware stores for new project ideas, exercising a freedom of materials and design adopted during her education in Florence and Milan, and later working for Ettore Sottsass. She has a deep respect for the power of light, “the muse of architecture,” as she calls it, and the guiding force behind much of her work today. Look for her lighting design inside and out of the new FreePort building (designed by Carmelo Stendardo), soon to open in Singapore.

**PHILIP MICHAEL WOLFSON** (“Voices,” page 30) is a London-based designer working with furniture and residential and gallery exhibition interiors. Aesthetically, his work is inspired by the motion and lines of Futurism and Constructivism, but also betrays the dualities of his education. He began at Cornell University, where he studied engineering, and then attended London’s Architectural Association School of Architecture, which focuses on design. Today Wolfson’s work plays with light and shadow and balance and scale, enhancing aspects of movement and motion in static spaces. He collects mid-century glass, silver, and ceramics, and recently contributed services to the Make It Right Foundation, an organization dedicated to rebuilding New Orleans.



**JOHN STUART GORDON** (“Dining with Architects,” page 92) is the Benjamin Attmore Hewitt Assistant Curator of American Decorative Arts at the Yale University Art Gallery. He was first exposed to design history at Vassar College and, after working at Christie’s auction house, returned to the field at the Bard Graduate Center in New York. Currently writing a dissertation on designer Lurrelle Guild at Boston University, Gordon notes that his academic and personal interests are very different. At home he prefers more conceptual and minimal art, particularly works on paper, including a Josef Albers *Homage to the Square*. But he declines to be called a collector. “Collecting is definitely a gene,” he observes, adding that in his home he is simply surrounded by objects that make him happy.

**EDWARD ADDEO** (“A Machine for Living,” page 98) is a New York-based photographer whose work has been featured in the *New York Times Magazine*, *House & Garden*, *Vogue*, and *House Beautiful*. Addeo studied at the School of Visual Arts in New York and developed a passion for color during an internship with a colorist at the city’s Decoration and Design Building. Today his fascination with the moody effects of light, texture, and color combines with his design savvy to capture the works of designers and architects with astute atmospheric veracity, an ability that has landed him photography credits in five major books. Addeo is currently traveling in Asia with *Hand/Eye*, shooting art and artisans along the “Golden Road” to Samarkand.



**JEFFREY HEAD** (“L A Threeway,” page 114) is a California-based art historian whose interest in art and design history began in Chicago where he became aware of the city’s historical influence on architecture. “It’s also where I initially saw a wide variety of modern design that was an everyday part of life,” he says. This extends to his personal collection of modern design, which tends toward the functional. Head notes that while his tastes are discriminating, they are broad, ranging from simple Bauer planters to a Craig Ellwood painting. As a design researcher he has studied film theory and criticism and recently received a grant from the Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA) to research architectural toys.





## Complimentary / Complementary



Top: Wolfson's "SoundForm2" steel communal table at ROBERT measures a monumental 15 feet long with a 6 foot high "sound wave" element in the center. He also designed the aluminum mirror-polished and powder-coated bar stools that surround the table.

Above: To provide ambient lighting, Grawunder drew on a system she devised in 2008: suspending Lucite panels, lit by pinkish LEDs, from the ceiling like mobiles.

TWO OF THE MOST ESTEEMED TALENTS IN THE WORLD OF CONTEMPORARY ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN—**JOHANNA GRAWUNDER** AND **PHILIP MICHAEL WOLFSON**—DISCUSS THEIR OFTEN SHARED, OFTEN OPPOSING VIEWS ON THE STATE OF THE CREATIVE SPIRIT TODAY

LET'S FACE IT: A significant cohort of contemporary architects and designers are obnoxious blowhards, as interested in cultivating an image of blasé and superior erudition as attending to the advancement of the building art. Brutal as that last comment sounds, the approach is understandable in the current context of name-brand design and "starchitecture." Two exceptions to the "behold my works" school of self-promotion are Johanna Grawunder and Philip Michael Wolfson—both are smart and hip, and never put on airs. We won't recount their bona fides in this space (see "Contributors," p. 18), but the two, reared in different schools of modernism, recently collaborated on the much admired interior of the restaurant ROBERT in New York's revamped Museum of Arts & Design. Grawunder lit the space with LED-illuminated Lucite panels hung like mobiles and installed glowing orange Lucite boxes around the room's perimeter. Wolfson supplied dramatic metal tables and barstools that play off typically sexy upholstered seating by Vladimir Kagen. At the request of MODERN, Grawunder and Wolfson engaged in a colloquy on their work philosophies.

**JG:** I think one reason our work complements each other is because we are both architects and so have a similar design process. **PMW:** An architectural background makes us think about the environment

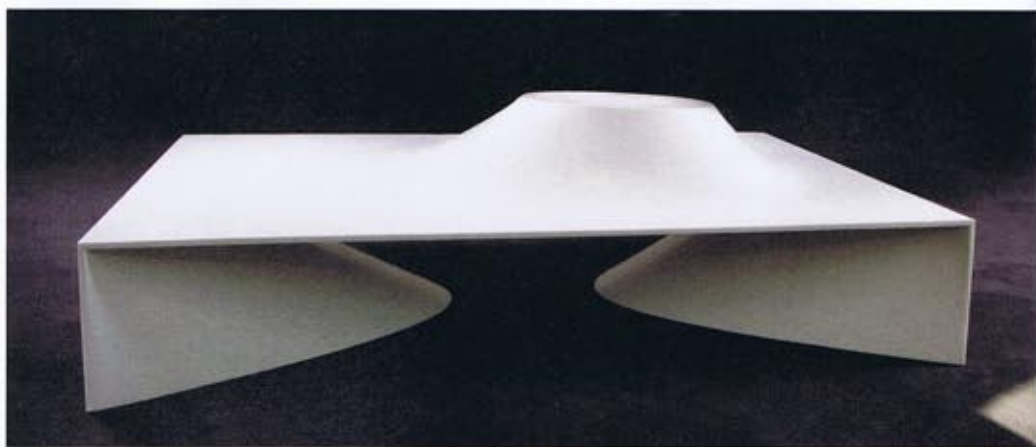




Above: "Half-Pipe" desk by Grawunder, 2008. Aluminum, wood, and light.

Center: "Eruption" coffee table (edition of 8) by Wolfson, 2009. HI-MAC acrylic stone.

Below: "Tempest" wall light installation by Grawunder, 2009. Painted aluminum and polished stainless steel.



around an object, rather than just focus on the object. With regard to ROBERT, I admire the way you designed your lighting to respond to the raw space.

**I notice we both avoided "blobs."** Blobs—like, biomorphic, organic forms? I like 'em. Don't you? **I am sorry to say I still haven't met one I like. It's not a style or personality thing. It is, I think, actually a very formal problem. Blobs in nature, like a poppy or a jellyfish are amazing—elegant and beautiful. So far, blobs in steel and glass or acrylic, not so much. Allianz Arena in Munich is the huge exception, but I'm not sure the architects, Herzog and de Meuron, would call that a blob.**

Certainly, blobs in architecture have yet to approach the grace of a natural blob. Don't think they should try, either. However, amorphic freeform architecture and design can work quite successfully. Just look at the Breda Pavilion [designed by Luciano Baldessari for the 1954 Milan Triennale]. The looping, Mobius strip-like walls and that rounded, angled roof are visually aggressive elements that convey a sense of dynamic motion. Yes to that sort of blob.

**Okay. Let's move on. What's the future? I've been reading a lot about all the copyright skirmishes over "sampling" in music and literature. This really intrigues me because in the design world, there is a lot of sampling going on. A well-known gallerist once told me, "It's not important who did it first, it's more important who did it last." For me, sampling is a totally valid and almost unavoidable technique these days. I feel no shame in openly saying I love many artists' works. I also mine other disciplines avidly—such as car design. Also art installations and music. A Leonard Cohen**

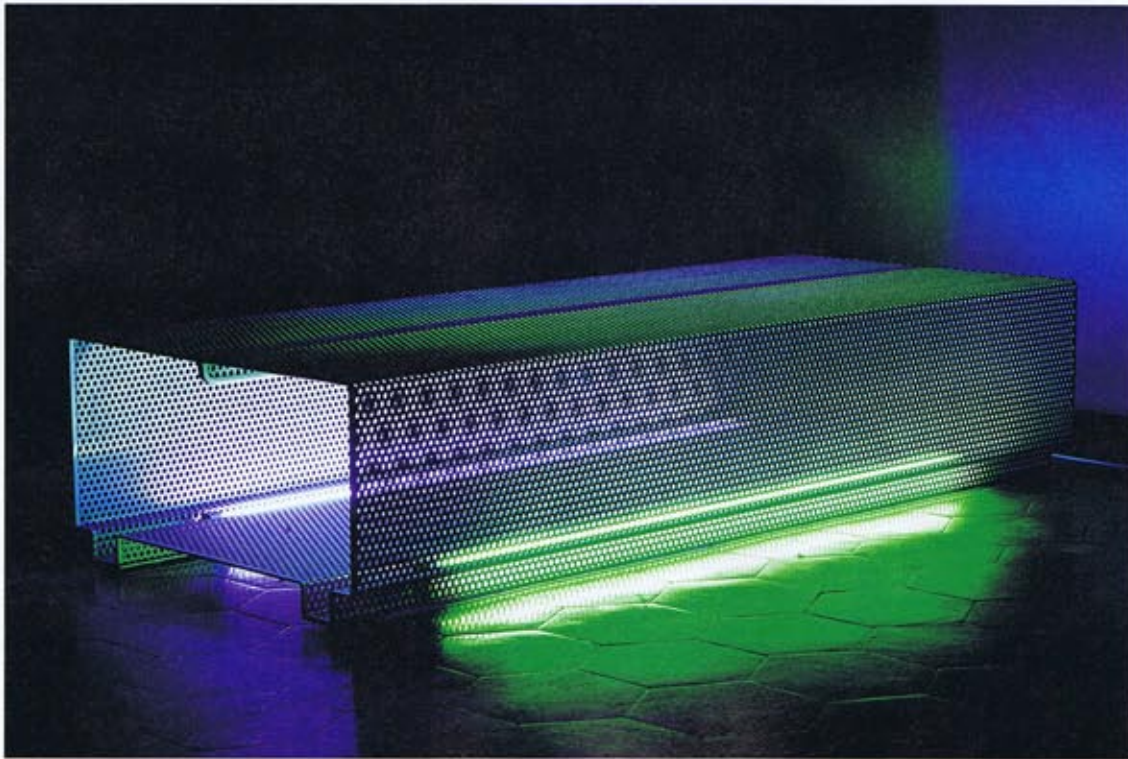
**lyric comes to mind—"Forget your perfect offering/there is a crack in everything/that's how the light gets in." I could make an entire collection from that one lyric.** Certainly, everyone is using references in their work in some way or another, but it's to what degree a reinterpretation is original that makes it more, or less, noteworthy. Take someone like Maarten Baas, who says that his work comes from references to his life. It may be some subliminal inspiration that prompted him to char a Frank Lloyd Wright floor lamp, or it might be intentional. In any case he sampled an object and morphed it into something original. Unfortunately, there are too many others who are way too "inspired" by his work. This is where neither sampling nor intent can be used as an excuse. It's just mediocre design. And, like mediocre art, it will always be around.



Right: "SideLine"  
table by Wolfson  
(edition of 4), 2009.  
Carbon fiber.



Left: "Perf" bench  
by Grawunder,  
2008. Perforated  
metal with colored  
fluorescent lights.



I was intrigued by the phrase "work comes from references to his life." That's a big "duh," obviously. But as an architect trained to be constrained by sites, rules, codes, budgets, materials, clients, even concepts, the freedom to just admit that you are a filter for your life's experiences must be really liberating. I don't know if you also have this insecurity, but I have always felt required to explain what I am doing and why it is like it is. It was the old conundrum in architecture school when the professor would ask why you made the door of your project red, and you would make up very complicated constructs to explain it. When in reality, you chose red because you liked it, and the professor probably

would have had more respect if you'd just said that! For me, it is interesting to compare the Western philosophy behind the analysis of "why" with the Eastern traditions where perhaps it's more "why not." Maybe that's what makes it difficult within the Western structure of art and design to allow for something that is not so easily definable or disciplined. Certainly, there needs to be some sort of structure, but the degree to which it becomes rigorous should not be so strict. Someone once said that an artist asks why and a designer asks how. Of course, that's the basis of the problem right there! Way too simple. And, just how do you officially become an artist, and who exactly grants that