

Sight Unseen

UP AND COMING

MISHA KAHN, FURNITURE DESIGNER

10.24.13 – BY JILL SINGER

The first time we met Misha Kahn, he was slapping gold metallic wallpaper with long-lashed googly eyes onto the walls of a tiny room we'd afforded four RISD students at our 2011 Noho Design District showcase. We were never sure quite what to make of the wallpaper – was it technically even “furniture design,” or was it more a piece of Surrealist art? – but we knew from first sight that we loved it. Which is pretty much how we've felt about all of the work that's followed from the Brooklyn-based, Duluth, Minnesota-born designer's studio, whether it's a pink bench made from layers of resin and trash, a series of tables that resemble Froebel blocks on acid, or sewn cement pieces that look like the work of a woozy Jeff Koons.

“My process usually starts with a pretty rigid vision, but because I'm manufacturing my own things, something always happens that throws everything off,” Kahn explains. “I actually imagine my designs being these insanely crisp Pop-Art objects. I know they'll never end up that way but that's the fun in making them.

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Favorite material to work with: "Right now, I'm doing more stuff with urethane resin. I can't get enough. It's so versatile and feels like it wants to do what you want it to do. But at the end of the day I think you have to just keep mixing. I can't say everything with one material." (Above: Kahn's Pig Bench, which was made with resin and trash. "I was trying to simulate wood with garbage," Kahn says. "In my head, I dreamed of making a whole log cabin with this, a Unabomber-esque place with all of this vernacular furniture but it all has to be built out of layers of trash.")



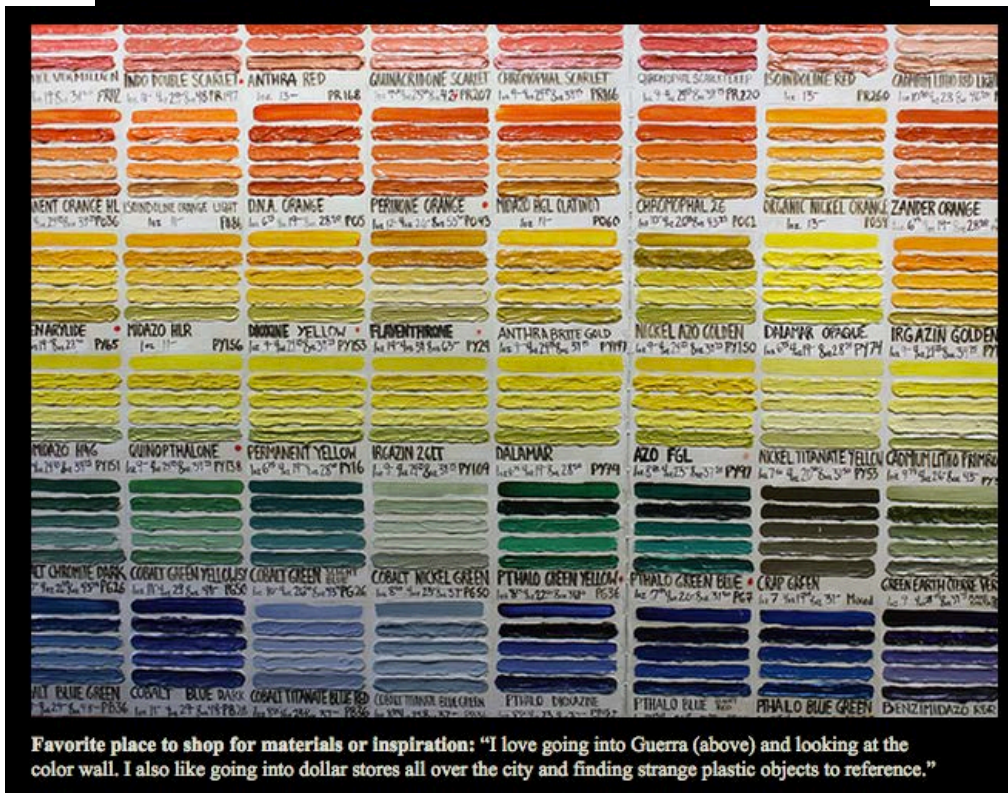
Favorite everyday object: "Potato peeling gloves! I don't actually own them since I would be too afraid a burglar would put them on and use them on my face but I think they are the most genius invention of our time."

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Favorite design object: "David Zelman's Pheln table."



Favorite place to shop for materials or inspiration: "I love going into Guerra (above) and looking at the color wall. I also like going into dollar stores all over the city and finding strange plastic objects to reference."

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Piece I wish I'd made: "Flintstones phone / cookie jar."



Place you go to be inspired: "I'm most inspired by developing countries where people get really into decorating. In the slums of Vietnam where I worked there would be old sewer tubes turned into houses with tin foil ornaments. In Israel, Palestine, and Jordan it would be these dusty cement boxes with glittery drapes, plastic chandeliers, and printed animal rugs. And best of all these arches in Morocco! I'm very inspired by resourcefulness when it comes to décor. I think being ingenuitive in terms of more functional goals is great, but when people turn this into a purely decorative end it can be so amazing. In the States it happens to some degree with our love of flea markets, but we don't usually take it far enough."

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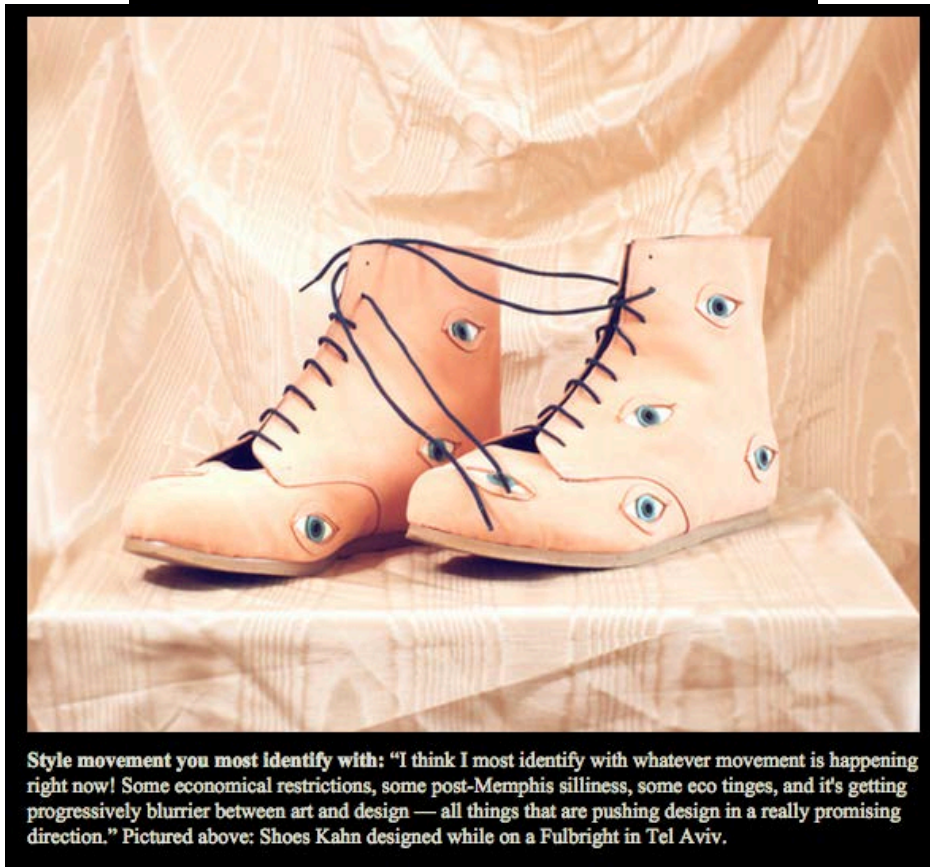
Favorite collection: "I'm sort of a hoarder, but I've moved a lot so I don't put too much importance on keeping track of things. I collect mutant candies. In Israel, I collected trash. I think I shipped two boxes of trash home, so that's sort of insane. My studiomate Chris Wolston is an obsessive collector, and we have a lot of shared likes. We both are obsessed with Alaska Clay objects right now." (above)



Last thing you bought at a flea market: "I buy so many strange things for work that I'm not doing it recreationally lately. I bought these fish plates, though — they have scales on them, are green, and marbled. It was at my favorite vintage store, B Squad in Minneapolis."

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Right now, Misha Kahn is: "Preparing for my opening tonight at Johnson Trading Gallery, from 7-10PM! For the show, I created these mirrors using a process of slip-casting resin inside of inflatable forms, and then ladling hot glass over tinfoil. The mirrors offer an obscured view of yourself, framed in bright, bloated plastic, and they're about our relationship with the American strip mall. It's simultaneously this very homogenous big-box experience with pockets of cheap real estate for authentic immigrant influences. This is the setting where most Americans go to try and satiate their material fantasies. The way a New Yorker would view this place is as a savage wasteland for tasteless bottom-feeders — perhaps an ironic view since this is in most of our roots."

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