Ayala Serfaty has been building her Soma collection of light works, which can attach to a ceiling, flown into the corner of a room, or rest on a floor. Her new pieces are inspired by natural forms like crystal cave formations or fox clouds but resist precise representation, tending more toward abstraction and organic-minimalism than her earlier bright orange or grass-colored lamps shaped like marching, glistening or violins, which are still available through Aqua Centro’s Lighting & Furniture Atelier (and at Aqua Gallery in New York), the company she founded with her former husband Ari Serfaty in 1994.

Ayala Serfaty has been working the middle ground between design and visual arts since the 1990s, adapting over the decades as she has come across new and unconventional ways to use materials while acquiring greater artistic authority. For the most part, her work is privately commissioned. In New York, she’s represented by Metro Möblerte Gallery and in the last few years she’s been a visible presence at many of the design fairs. Several of her pieces have been acquired by major museums, including the Met and the Museum of Arts and Design in New York and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Her museum installations can be massive, as for an exhibition in Tel Aviv she assembled a structure out of twenty-four parts that appeared to blossom across twenty-six feet of the gallery floor.

Serfaty follows in the footsteps of several pioneers in modern lighting design, but especially George Nelson, who made the Bubble Lamp, and Achille Castiglioni, who created the Triennale bulbo cluster table lamp. In her studio she directs four professional artisans with whom she’s been working for many years. From her design ideas and drawings, they prepare three-dimensional models to exact specifications for new projects. The pieces are handmade, built with two-millimeter-thick glass filaments. Serfaty has compared these rods to smoked spaghetti and they come in 150 different translucent colors melted through the process of lampworking. Attached to a metal base that holds the light sockets, each new formation begins in the structural core and reaches out as the glass is bent and woven into patterns that can look like molecular structures, vines, or the arborvitae of forest branches. When the skeletal framework seems complete—and this can take months or even years—the studio begins the process of spraying it with several coats of polymer (the same material George Nelson used for the Bubble Lamp), which create a translucent wrapping similar to layers of silk produced by hawk catterpillars. Because the project is touched by the hands of everyone on the team, it’s built freely and the final structure always contains an element of surprise. When the light is turned on, the bent glass shines through like the sand outlines inside a cloud.

Serfaty has also created a line of organically shaped and sometimes fanciful furnishing pieces (these belong in her Rave and Palodos collections)—sofas, chairs, occasional- or womblike hammocks, and even a fantastical canoe. More than fifty feet long, made for an exhibition at the Haysley Museum in Israel. She covers the structural frames in handmade felt stretched over a mold so there are no seams, and the dyed, layered, and intricate textures bring to mind the complex and faceted configurations of the Soma works.

—Francois Bert