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MAGAZINE



SPRING 2017  
modernmag.com

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# Ayala Serfaty

**S**ince 2004, Israeli designer Ayala Serfaty has been building her Soma collection of light works, which can attach to a ceiling, fasten into the corner of a room, or rest on a floor. Her new pieces are inspired by natural forms like crystal cave formations or fog clouds but resist precise representation, tending more toward abstraction and organic minimalism than her earlier bright orange or grass-colored lamps shaped like morning glories or violas, which are still available through Aqua Creations Lighting & Furniture Atelier (and at Aqua Gallery in New York), the company she founded with her former husband Albi 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



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 radiant starburst cluster Taraxacum. 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 uncooked 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, veins, or the offshoots 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 lamps), which create a translucent wrapping similar to layers of silk produced by tent caterpillars. 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 shows through like the sunlit outlines inside a cloud.

Serfaty has also created a line of organically shaped and sometimes fanciful furni-

ture pieces (these belong in her Rapa and Paludes collections)—sofas, chairs, cocoon- or womblike hammocks, and even a fantastical canoe, more than thirty feet long, made for an exhibition at the Herzliya 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.

—Frances Brent



acquiring greater artistic authority. For the most part, her work is privately commissioned. In New York, she's represented by Maison Gerard 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; 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.



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