

# Ron Arad: Restless

18 February – 16 May 2010

**Media View, Wednesday 17 February, 10am – 1pm**

**Barbican Art Gallery, London**

Sponsored by Absolut Vodka

Media partner: Wallpaper\*

Online media partner: Dezeen

Bold, experimental and inventive, Ron Arad defies categorisation. This internationally acclaimed London-based maverick is variously described as a designer, architect and artist. **Ron Arad: Restless** is the first major exhibition of Arad's work in the UK. It opens at Barbican Art Gallery on 18 February 2010.

Spanning three decades, the show traces the development of Arad's designs from his early post-punk approach, assembling works from readymade parts to his technologically-advanced sculptural objects made of highly polished metals. Featuring a dramatic installation design by Ron Arad Associates using the latest LED display technology, the exhibition also includes architectural designs and instantly recognisable mass-produced objects.

**Kate Bush**, Head of Art Galleries, Barbican Centre, said:

"Ron Arad first hit the headlines in 1981 with the opening of his now legendary studio and workshop *One Off* in Covent Garden and he has been an unstoppable and uncategorisable force in world design ever since. I am delighted that Barbican Art Gallery is to present Ron Arad's first major British exhibition, and to share with our audiences the many different facets of this extraordinarily creative artist."

Bringing together over 120 works, **Ron Arad: Restless** features some of Arad's most celebrated pieces. *Rover Chair*, 1981, a car seat salvaged from a scrapyards mounted on a steel frame, that famously caught the eye of Jean Paul Gaultier, and catapulted Arad firmly into the design world's Hall of Fame; *Well-Tempered Chair*, 1986, a reinterpretation of the overstuffed club chair using four thin sheets of tempered steel bent and held together by wing nuts; and animated in the gallery space *Reinventing the Wheel*, 1996. Inspired by a children's toy featuring a globe floating inside a sphere, this bookcase has a wheel-within-a-wheel construction and can easily be rolled around while the shelves remain level.

Movement, play and an element of risk or surprise are key characteristics of Arad's work: chairs rock or roll; shelves flex and sway, spiral-shaped vases bounce and lights coil in a snake-like motion. For this exhibition, Arad's team have devised special mechanisms for some of the works to demonstrate their range of motion but also to bring them to life. The exhibition culminates in a large area featuring Arad's own ping pong table, made from stainless steel, surrounded by a wide selection of manufactured chairs ranging from modular sofas and screw stools to sprung chaises and upholstered armchairs of exaggerated forms. Visitors are encouraged to experience the works, sit or recline or play a game of table tennis.

Arad continues to expand the boundaries of design by constantly experimenting with new technologies. For *Swarovski*, Arad designed *Lolita*, 2004, a chandelier made up of 1050 LED lights embedded within 2,100 crystals and the first to have its own mobile phone number. Text messages appear at the top of the chandelier and wind down the ribbon curves, creating the impression that it is slightly spinning. *Lo-Rez-Dolores-Tabula-Rasa*, 2007 is a table made of a thin sheet of Corian illuminated with images using 22,000 fibre-optic pixels. It is displayed in a dark room for full effect. The exhibition also features a specially designed set of eight floor-to-ceiling LED screens. Dramatically placed near the entrance of all the upper galleries, each screen transmits a changing display of words and images relating to the surrounding works, including digital renderings of chairs or quirky facts about the design process and materials used.

Architectural projects featured include the rotating mountain-top restaurant and gallery Les Diablalets, Gstaad, Switzerland; the recently opened Mediacite shopping complex, Liege, Belgium; and the Design Museum in Holon, Israel. Due to open February 2010, this dramatic new building, Arad's most ambitious yet, is characterised by five bands of Corten Steel which undulate dynamically around the museum's internal spaces.

Highlighting the significance of process and the innovative use of materials in Arad's work, the exhibition also offers an insight into the development of objects from initial idea to end product. Rarely seen prototypes, from different stages of the design process, are displayed together with finished works. Short films including early footage of Arad at work in the studio or pieces being manufactured are shown. The exhibition also includes two workshop settings which feature pieces part-way through the production process, offering visitors a real sense of how the works are crafted and made.

Over the past two decades, Arad has collaborated with leading manufacturers, including *Alessi*, *Capellini*, *Moroso*, *Notify* and *Vitra*, successfully adapting his designs to affordable materials and industrial techniques. Initially a one-off piece made of sprung steel, *Bookworm* (1993), a flexible yet sturdy curving shelf with built-in bookends, was later produced in plastics by *Kartell* in three different lengths that could be endlessly combined and arranged. Whilst *Vitra* produces the now classic, moulded plastic stacking chair, *Tom Vac* (1999), the chair was originally conceived for a sculpture entitled *Domus Totem* consisting of a stack of 100 chairs made for the 1997 Milan Furniture fair.

Born in Tel Aviv, Israel in 1951, Arad attended the Jerusalem Academy of Art. He moved to London in 1973 and studied with Peter Cook and Bernard Tschumi at the Architecture Association. He launched his career in the early 1980s with the opening of *One Off*, the Covent Garden studio he created with his business partner Caroline Thorman. In 1989 they established, Ron Arad Associates, an architecture and design practice, with *One Off* merging as part of the company by 1993.

In 1994 Arad first taught a class in furniture design at the Royal College of Art, London. Three years later he was appointed Professor of Furniture and Industrial Design. He merged the two departments to create the Department of Design Products, a more open, interdisciplinary and experimental programme, which has had an enormous influence on a new generation of designers, including Paul Cocksedge, Peter Marigold and members of Troika and rAndom International.

In 1987 Arad participated in two important exhibitions and attracted the attention of the art world: *Nouvelles Tendances: Les avant-gardes de la fin du XXème siècle* at the Centre Pompidou in Paris and *Documenta VIII* in Kassel. Recent solo exhibitions include Timothy Taylor Gallery, London, 2008; Centre Pompidou, Paris, 2008; Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2009 and Ben Brown Fine Arts, Hong Kong, 2009.

## NOTES TO EDITORS

### EXHIBITION & EVENTS

*Ron Arad: Restless, 18 February – 16 May 2010*, is curated by Lydia Yee, Curator, Barbican Art Gallery. The exhibition is sponsored by Absolut Vodka. Media Partner and Online Media Partner are Wallpaper\* and Dezeen respectively. A vibrant programme of talks, workshops and lively late-night events examines the rising profile of London's contemporary design community and Arad's role in it during the past four decades.

### ART GALLERY SHOP

A carefully chosen range of Arad's designs as well as a selection of inspirational objects, books and curiosities handpicked by Arad himself will be on sale in the shop.

### BARBICAN ART GALLERY

One of the leading art spaces in the UK, Barbican Art Gallery presents the best of international visual art with a dynamic mix of art, architecture, design, fashion and photography. The Curve is dedicated to a vibrant programme of new commissions, created by leading international artists in direct response to this distinctive gallery space.

### PUBLIC INFORMATION

Open daily 11am–8pm, Tues & Wed 11am–6pm; Every Thurs LATE until 10pm.

Tickets online from £8, on the door £10. [www.barbican.org.uk/ronarad](http://www.barbican.org.uk/ronarad) Tel: 0845 120 7550

### PRESS INFORMATION

For further information, images or to arrange interviews contact Barbican Art Gallery Press Office:

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