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Icon



HALL HAUS



Slovenian

ABOVE Lara Bohinc's
Compulsion Chair entwines
wood and metal chairs

BELOW London-based Soft Baroque's Soft Metal series allows metal to 'misbehave'

Design

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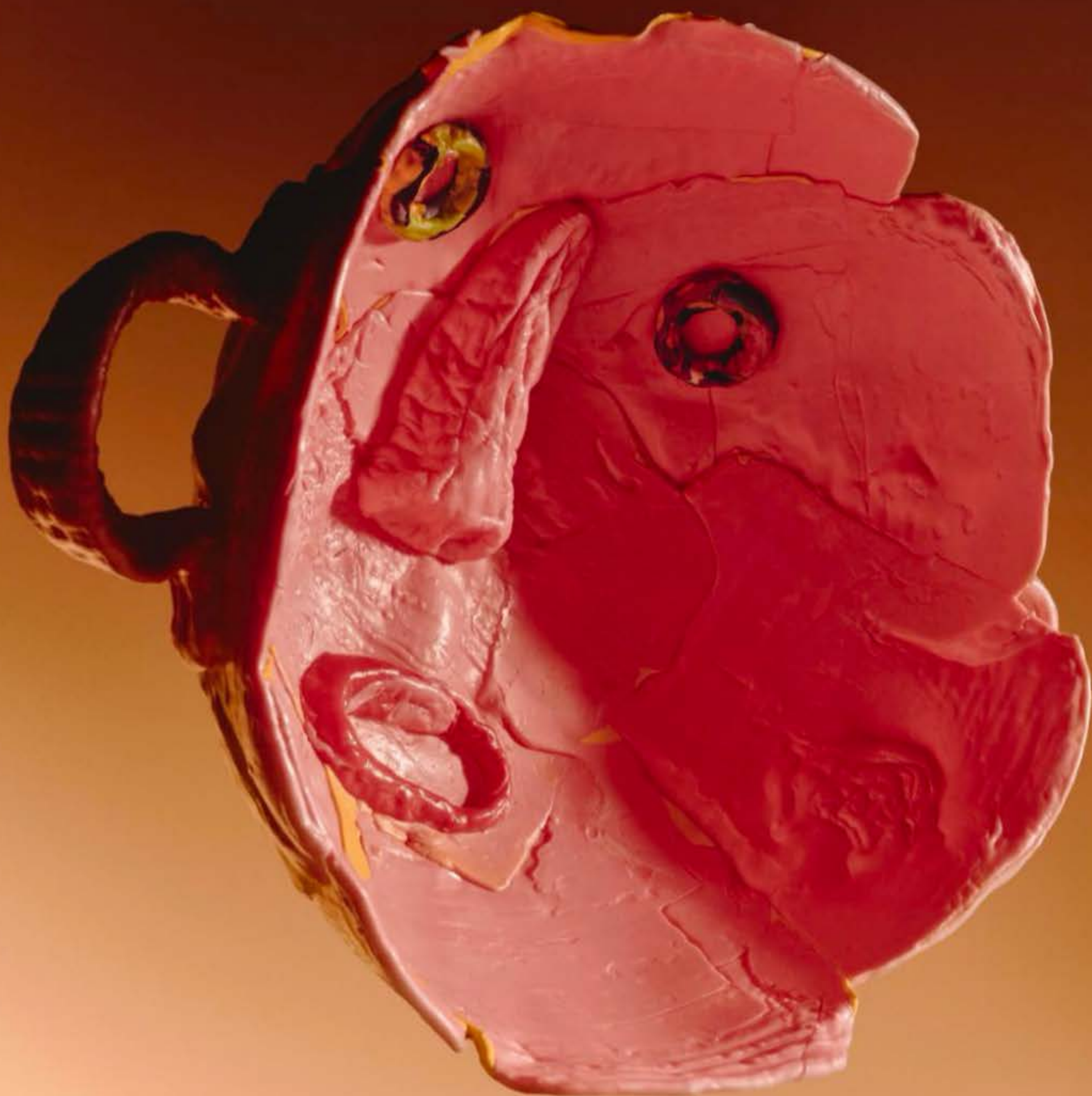
Once characterised by restraint and structure, Slovenian design is entering a new chapter. Through hybrid practices and an avant-garde sensibility, a rising generation of designers is reshaping the region's cultural narrative, where experimentation has become the catalyst for reinvention

OPPOSITE The inflatable garments in Sari Valenci's Meringue collection celebrate theatricality

What if the future of design isn't being created in the world's largest creative capitals, but in a country of just two million people? In Slovenia, a new generation of designers is challenging the conventional notions of what design can be and its role within a social and economic context. Working at the intersection of craft, industry, architecture and material research, they are developing practices that are as concerned with ecological responsibility and social impact as they are with aesthetics. And, in drawing from the country's rich cultural heritage and abundant natural resources, the result is a design culture that feels deeply rooted in locality while boasting an experimental flair and growing confidence resonating far beyond its borders.

At Milan Design Week earlier this year, a collective showcase of Slovenian design paid homage to this shift. Set within the growing design platform that is Alcova, the House of Creatures displayed the work of 10 contemporary Slovenian design practices, covering a wide array





LEFT Toasted Furniture's heat-softened plastic objects shift expectations of use

RIGHT Sera Eravci was one of the curators of the House of Creatures exhibition at Milan

of applications from food to fashion and furniture. Building on the legacy of visionaries such as architect Jože Plečnik and designer Niko Kralj, this new wave of talent is proposing a move away from fixed typologies and disciplines. 'Instead of asking what Slovenian design looks like, we became interested in what it does,' explains Sera Eravci, one of the curatorial team behind the exhibition. 'We thought about how objects can challenge expectations, disrupt familiar ways of seeing and invite us to recognise them as active participants in our relationship with the world, rather than merely beautiful or functional products.'

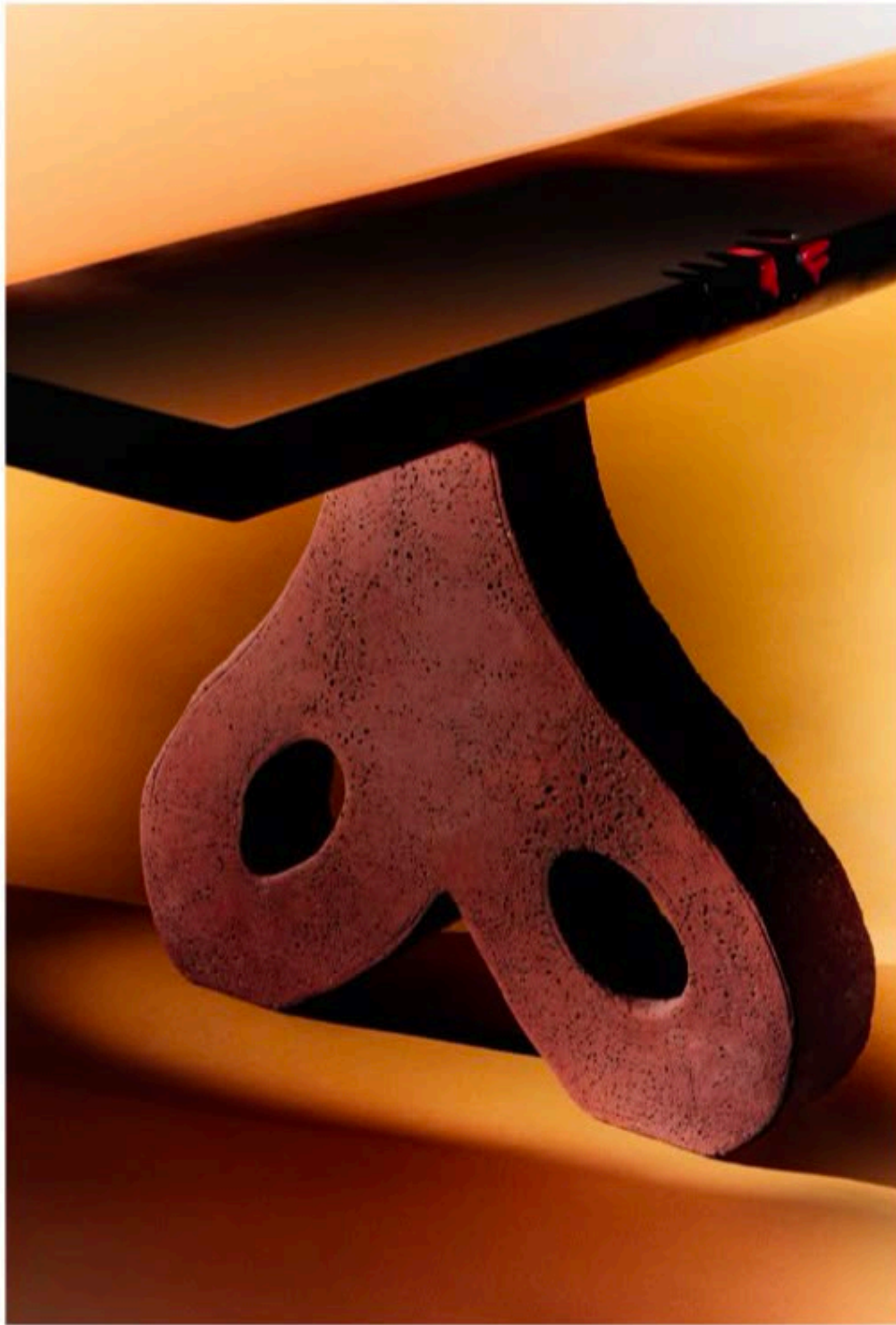
The selection of works on display was intentionally curated to demonstrate a cross-section of practices that transcended national borders. It featured designers living abroad but originating from the country, international creatives now working directly in Slovenia, as well as a mix of local established and rising practitioners. 'What emerged was not a singular national identity but a vibrant, diverse and evolving design culture,' says Eravci.

Included in the selection was Toasted Furniture, a Ljubljana-based design practice founded by Nina Mršnik and Nuša Jelenec, transforming discarded plastic into playful, new domestic objects.

Other featured designs included the Compulsion Chair by Slovenian-born, London-based artist Lara Bohinc. Marking 10 years since the launch of her eponymous studio, Bohinc sought to express emotion through familiar furniture forms. The piece features a metal chair held in the 'embrace' of a wooden counterpart, subverting conventional notions of function. Instead, the sculptural arrangement draws attention to the relationship between the two forms, inviting reflection on human behaviour and emotional connection, with a touch of playfulness.



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LEFT The exaggerated form of Maruša Sagadin's bench invites the user to engage

RIGHT Noma 1 (10:1) is a 10-times scaled version of artist Lucija Rosc's childhood ruler

Inflatable garments constructed from latex also caught the eyes of visitors. Conceived by Ljubljana-based fashion designer Sari Valenci, the Meringue collection is inspired by the exuberant aesthetics of children's parties, combining exaggerated silhouettes, ornate detailing and intricate material manipulation to create a surreal interpretation of fashion. Blending camp humour with decorative excess, the designs celebrate theatricality while challenging conventional ideas of dress.

Maruša Sagadin's sculptural bench drew on architectural history, while visual artist Lucija Rosc presented Noma 1 (10:1), a 10-times enlarged version of the artist's childhood ruler. Also featured was the London-based studio Soft Baroque founded by Nicholas Gardner and Saša Štucin, which continues to attract growing international recognition. The duo presented two works from their Soft Metal series, transforming rigid metal into fluid, sculptural forms that showcased their experimental approach and ability to seamlessly merge functional design with artistic expression. 'Each contribution shared a distinct presence: an ability to provoke curiosity and open up new perspectives,' says fellow curator Vid Žnidaršič. 'Together, they formed an ecology of creatures representing individual entities with their own identities, relationships and complexities.'

The momentum behind this exciting new shift is set to continue as Ljubljana prepares to host its 29th Biennial of Design from this November. Helping to shape the project and expand the outreach of Slovenian design on the global stage is the head of Slovenia's Centre for Creativity, Anja Zorko. 'Emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, extended reality and biotechnology are transforming both the ways design is created and experienced while making it increasingly hybrid,

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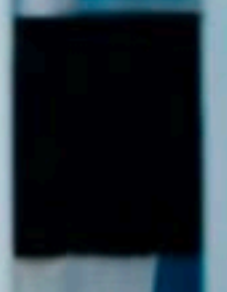
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LEFT Dan Adlešič's LED designs are part lamp and part sculptural object

RIGHT Janez Suhadolc's Lajt Chair can be lifted by one finger but can seat an adult

collaborative and systems-oriented,' she explains. While this reflects similar global shifts, Slovenia's creative industry – among them Dan Adlešič, Janez Suhadolc and others – is interpreting them through its own cultural, social and material contexts.

Developed under the curatorial vision of Martina Muzi, this year's Biennial takes the title of Soft Fields, exploring how knowledge embedded in research, industrial and infrastructural environments can be opened, redirected and redistributed through design practice. 'Rather than opposing technological innovation to local knowledge, contemporary Slovenian design increasingly understands them as complementary forces,' Zorko continues. 'Designers are integrating advanced technologies with cultural heritage, craft traditions and environmental responsibility.'

For London-based Slovenian artist and sculptor Ana Kerin, her culture is embedded deep within her work. 'Being born in Yugoslavia and then raised in post-war Slovenia, it has had a huge impact on how I see the world and how I experience design,' she says. 'There is a strong local knowledge of hand skills and crafts as well as a rich history of manufacturing high-quality furniture, lighting and ceramics. I grew up with utilitarian design objects made by Niko Kralj and Oskar Kogoj alongside design houses such as Iskra, Mura and Meblo.'

This appreciation of form and function feeds into her work today, as the foundation which inspired the opening of her own studio Kana London. 'There have been some very interesting people raised from this fertile space,' she adds. 'It's incredible to see the vast extent of how some cover the realms of technological innovation while others are raising the bar of what good design and art can be and become.'



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