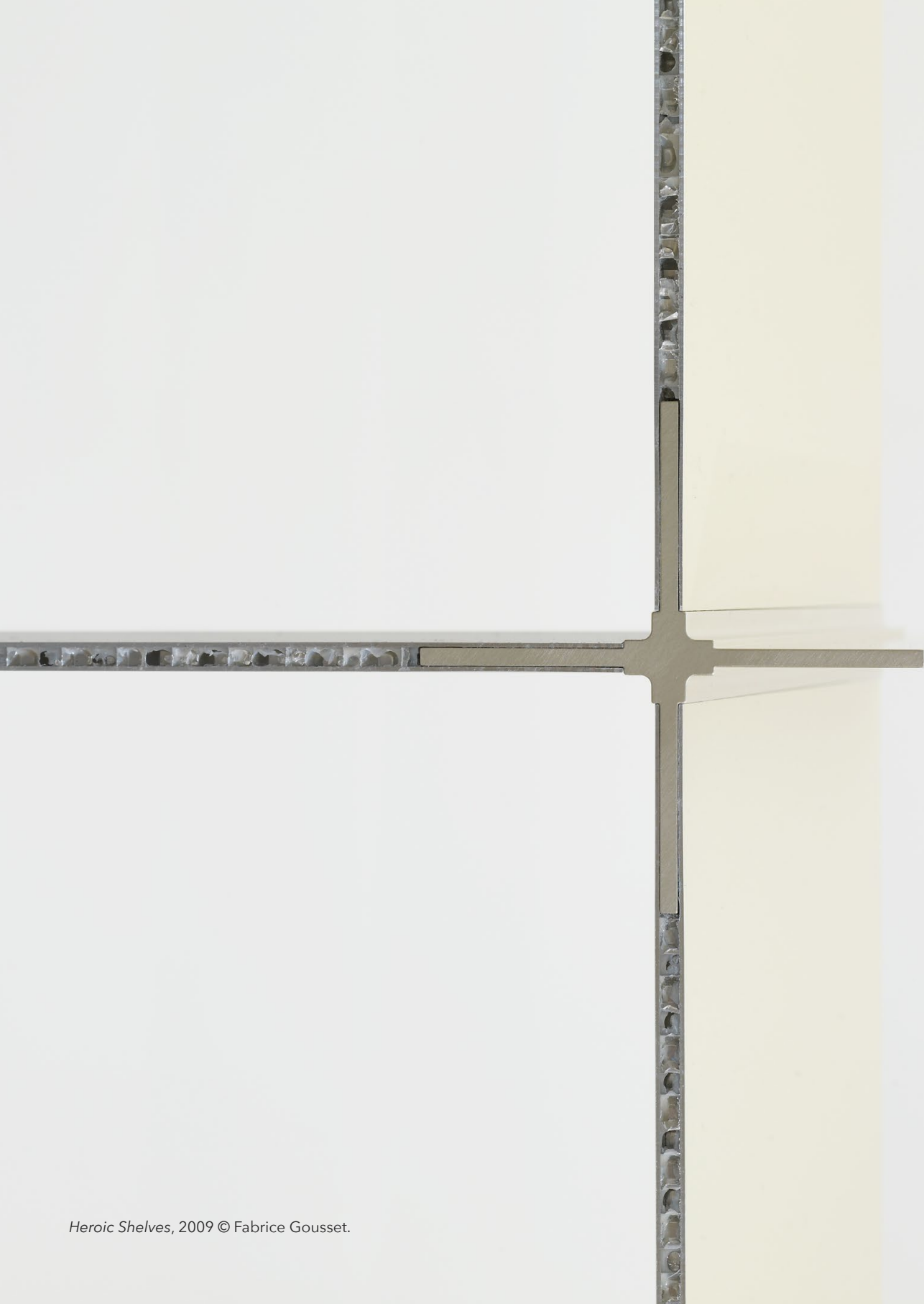


Written exchanges with
MARTIN SZEKELY



ENSA Limoges School of Art & Naima Editions



FOREWORD

"Written exchanges with..." puts asking questions at the heart of teaching practice in an art and design school. Indiana Collet-Barquero, lecturer in art and design history at ENSA Limoges, has been running the project since 2015 with successive groups of third-year students. Her aim has always been to foster a spirit of independent enquiry fuelled by contact with significant movers in the world of contemporary design.

Before conceiving their questions, the students must first acquire thorough knowledge of the designer's creative output, researching aspects such as their subject's education, apprenticeships, practical experiences, favoured techniques, aesthetic leanings or political stances. This leads to inevitable exchanges which are progressively refined by the students prior to finalising the publication in the school's print department.

The whole process provides an active way of teaching design history based on practical experience, ideally suited to art and design students. The present work is an augmented digital version of the original paper edition.



Chaise longue Pi, Pi collection, 1982 © Les Arts décoratifs/photo Jean Tholance.

INTRODUCTION

Martin Szekely (b. 1956) is renowned in the world of French design. Coming from a family of artists, he deliberately turned his back on art as a teenager, preferring instead to pursue creative practices “grounded within the bounds of utilitarianism, ergonomics, cost effectiveness, technique and aesthetics”. Between 1971 and 1976 he enrolled at two schools in Paris, spending his days at the Estienne School of Printing and Graphics learning engraving and typography, and his evenings at Boule School of Furniture and Applied Arts where he learnt cabinetmaking. This was followed by an apprenticeship in a carpentry workshop specialising in furniture restoration.

Martin Szekely’s first brush with design took place from 1978 to 1980 when he worked alongside Hong Kong architect and designer Kwok Hoï Chan (1939-1990), whose ideographic chairs inspired by Chinese calligraphy had left their mark on design styles of the 1960s and 1970s. Martin Szekely readily points out the importance of this encounter. A certain calligraphic approach underlies his pieces and one can also speculate on the relative influences of other factors, such as classes with the graphic designer and typographer Pierre Faucheux (1928-1999) at Estienne School. At the very least, one of his earliest designs, the *Chaise longue Pi* (1982), clearly displays a careful attention to line and purity of form redolent of Chinese calligraphy. Development of these sculptural forms is paralleled in his research, published texts which confirm the importance he gives to the circulation of air around an object, to notions of solidity and void. This type of formal minimalism stems from a conviction that an object should not have to advertise itself.

When he made the decision to stop drawing in 1998,¹ Martin Szekely moved on to the next stage in his minimalist progression – i.e., reducing personal subjectivity in aesthetic decisions to a minimum, in order to leave as much room as possible for the essential functions of the objects he was making. Restraint and erasure virtually constitute a trademark of his work, an aspect which, with similar logic, he rarely evokes. This is why the third-year art and design students at ENSA Limoges and Indiana Collet-Barquero are particularly grateful to him for agreeing to launch the written exchanges series, throughout 2015-2016, and provide a personal insight into his positioning at the crossroads of art and design, a stance of obvious interest in art schools like Limoges where design is taught as a specific part of the curriculum. Martin Szekely was subsequently invited to partner with the school’s experimental ceramics laboratory, *La Céramique Comme Expérience*, and local company Keraméo in a two-year ceramic research residency at ENSA Limoges, “Slow Matter”, between 2018 and 2020.

¹ *Ne plus dessiner* [Draw No More] was also the title of Martin Szekely’s solo exhibition organised at the Pompidou Centre from 12 October 2011 to 2 January 2012.



MAP CAN, 2013, exhibition at Blondeau & Cie, Geneva © Didier Jordan.



MAP TBL, 2013, exhibition at Blondeau & Cie, Geneva © Fabrice Gousset.



1. How did you become a designer?

MSz: My experience began while growing up in a family of artists, followed by learning the ropes in engraving and typography at the Estienne School (1971–1974), plunging into the world of work in a carpentry firm, evening classes at the Boulle School, opening my own carpentry company and antique furniture restoration workshop, designing and producing my own line of furniture and finally, in 1978, meeting and working with Kwok Hoï Chan, an eminent 1970s designer who has since passed away. From then on, I became aware of what design is and set out to learn as much as I could through travel and encounters all over the world. Being a designer probably boils down to analysing historical, technological and contextual aspects of a project. Furniture and objects are the focus of my study. I approach this work as an anthropologist, a sociologist, an engineer, even as an artist despite not being one. I am someone who is always candidly questioning the use of objects and their presence among us. And just as persistently, I spend my time weighing up the solutions proposed in the furniture and objects I design. This has been going on for more than forty years now, without any definitive answers. Furniture is an almost ideal bridge between intellectual thought, art and commercial crafts. It is also omnipresent in daily life: houses around the world are cluttered with furniture. Their owners are to blame. It's the same everywhere.



Tino, 2009, exhibition at the Pompidou Centre © Mauro Davoli.

2. Why did you take up design instead of art or architecture?

MSz: When I was a child, I wanted to be an architect or an artist. My parents often brought me to the offices of architects they were working with, and I soon sensed the difficulties of the profession. As for art, I was quick to move away from it: the result of pride and youth, of wanting to leave the family nest and go my own way. Art felt like a black hole of freedom, devoid of reference points. So, I took up design, still a creative practice yet grounded within the bounds of utilitarianism, ergonomics, cost effectiveness, technique and aesthetics... Also, particularly at the beginning, I derived great pleasure from a certain sense of unfettered independence designing and making the furniture myself. Apart from my adolescent years when I deliberately shunned art, the rest of my life has been constructed around contact with artists and artworks. Today, collectors add my furniture to their artworks, appropriating it for their daily use. On this subject, Pierre Staudenmeyer² declared that "Furniture occupies a humble position in the field of art because of its relentless attachment to functionality, yet it is for that very reason it has a force that works of art cannot possess."

3. What influence did Kwok Hoï Chan have on your thinking and your work as a designer?

MSz: Chan taught me the rudiments of design: the range of people who make it happen, but also the importance and interdependent play of voids and solids in objects.

² Director of the Néotù Gallery in Paris in the 1980s and 1990s.



Black Mirror One, 2007 © Fabrice Gousset.

4. On the occasion of your exhibition *Martin Szekely*. *Ne plus dessiner*³ you declared that "Making a clean sweep of the past is virtually impossible in any field of production." What elements from the past do you feel are part of your work?

MSz: Despite our volition, history is unavoidable. One way or another we are defined by the past. In fact, I make a point of studying the evolution (and therefore history) of construction materials and techniques. Material and technical possibilities shift with the emergence of each invention and amongst other things, my work, too, is subject to this constantly moving boundary. Historical knowledge helps situate what you are doing with respect to what has been done before. It makes you a little more modest and also gives you the clarity to aim beyond what has been achieved up till now. After all, isn't knowledge the fruit of doubt, nuance, moderation and discernment? Making a body of work is primarily about consulting the past to challenge the present – a strategy not entirely without its disadvantages.

³ *Martin Szekely. Ne plus dessiner*, exhibition at the Pompidou Centre, Paris, 12 October 2011–2 January 2012.



Artefact, tables, 2013 © Fabrice Gousset.

APPROACHES

5. "A work of art exists as itself; a chair exists as a chair itself", wrote Donald Judd in 1993.⁴ Can you give us your definition of design and explain its relationship to art?

MSz: The word "design" has many meanings: a sign, a drawing, a project or plan... However, the meaning most commonly used is restrictive and connoted – an upbeat attitude suggesting better living. In my work it essentially boils down to noting the current state of the world in a defined area of usages, materials and structures applied to furniture. You do what you can at any given time and place. The predefined generic name of a piece of furniture sets it apart from a work of art. A *table* for example, immediately conjures up a surface supported above the floor that obeys a basic, original model or archetype. The principal material of art is thought; that of design is the reality of matter. What could be more different than a chair and a painting, a text, a play or a film? Matter in artwork is an expressive exterior whose real content is within, a subject for contemplation and interpretation. A chair, on the other hand, is at most just a chair, and if we sit on it, we can no longer even see it. Its ultimate purpose is simply to support the weight of our bodies. And, for other typologies of furniture this might instead consist of providing a place to put objects on or contain them.

⁴ Donald Judd, "It's Hard to Find a Good Lamp", in *Donald Judd Furniture: Retrospective*, catalogue of eponymous exhibition, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, 25 April – 20 June 1993.

6. You do industrial work and also exhibit in galleries. Do you find the two activities divergent? What do you get out of them?

MSz: There is no contradiction in working for these two distinct worlds. On the industrial side, I respond to commissions and the results must be immediately acceptable to the public. Otherwise, they are deemed failures. The research I exhibit in galleries is more concerned with building up a corpus of pieces over time, one that opens new chapters with every exhibition. The question of trade in this case depends on a collector's hypothetical desires which either transpire today, in several years' time or never. Until now, industrial work has been a way to verify my ability to read the world, to understand commercial trends as well as detect commonly shared shifts in taste; industrial products must sell in quantity and thus attract as many people as possible when launched.

7. "Ne plus dessiner" [Draw no more] has been your personal motto and working method since 1996. The phrase was even used as the title of your solo exhibition at the Pompidou Centre in 2011-2012. On that occasion, you declared: "Nowadays I see my work as a disengagement from the expressionism of drawing". The implication is that foregoing drawing somehow enriches the

design process. Are you advocating exclusion of all forms of representation or just drawing? How do the disadvantages of drawing compare to its advantages? Without using drawings, how do you manage to communicate ideas (especially when collaborating with companies)? And what impact does this have on your own work process?

MSz: I am certainly not against putting pen to paper to sketch out ideas. "Draw no more" is neither an order nor a constraint I would ever impose on myself, nor is it an ideological stance. On the contrary, it is an invitation to open up to the outside world and avoid a sclerotic "self-centred" mindset. The idea of "abandoning drawing" gradually developed through contexts that were both personal and historical (the late 1990s), culminating in a text I wrote about designing a drinking glass for Perrier (1996).⁵ It arose from a recognition that well before ever being drawn, every object conforms to a definition, that every object has a function, that usage is the sole determining factor in the definition of what an object is and that usage is not something you can draw. Not drawing creates an objective distance between

⁵ Up until then, the brand's defining image had been the skittle-shaped Perrier bottle itself. Indeed, skittles were the owner and designer's original inspiration for the bottle in the nineteenth century. Given the task of designing the first-ever glass for Perrier, I felt it had to be halfway between the historical bottle and a glass. Any marriage could be defined as the union of two entities sharing the same spirit but not necessarily bearing any physical resemblance to one another. This seemed to apply to the present situation, so I began by researching the bottle's history and analysing its form. It had a small base but one wide enough to keep the bottle standing upright. A rounded body contained the sparkling water and terminated in a narrow neck. My glass therefore had to be designed along similar lines: a thick base to avoid breakage when hitting the surface of tables and bar counters, a hollow volume to hold the water and a shape to facilitate the user's grip on the glass.



you and your subject. Drawing is an aid to personal expression, and when suppressed, it removes the urge to develop a signature "style", something I was attempting to do in the 1980s and 1990s. The idea is to establish a working method purely based on data exterior to yourself and accessible to anyone. These "stepping-stones", as I call them, include the type of object (a table, a chair, etc.), its cultural context (history, function), production methods and therefore choice of material, its purpose or the intended location of the object and, above all, for whom the object is being made. Renouncing drawing is about relying on the facts, much like in the same way as a scientist or judge might do. At any point in time or specific spatial context, new facts arise and, consequently, the project must be modified. Utopian schemes are not expressed in my work because I exclude all optimism. What keeps me moving forward is the acquisition of facts or data which I reorganise until a sort of efficient and unified form emerges that momentarily satisfies me.

At every stage, the limits imposed by materials and techniques provide concrete and communicable reference points – common economical considerations. The designer's drawings and personal style are superfluous once you concentrate solely on the limits of materials, methods and final purpose in the production of an object that fulfils its functions – the very definition of its existence. In *Des étagères* [Shelves] (2005), for example, the shelves are built at the limit of their physical capacity. Any thinner and they would collapse under normal use. The extremely fine aluminium sheets are designed to bear heavy loads and are precisely assembled. The project was a structural challenge, as to how to create a standing structure using the least amount of material that could support its own weight plus that of books or objects placed on it. This economy of material also implied economy of visual



impact - there being so little to see. The materials imposed their own laws and I did nothing more than follow their lead. Any more from me would have been unnecessary, any less material and the structure would have been fatally compromised. All its component parts are interdependent. If a single element is removed, the whole structure would lose coherence and risk falling apart. Construction of *Des étagères* was dictated by the specific functional capacity of its mode of assembly and not by any subjective aesthetic decisions. The shelves designed themselves; they were not the result of any design I made. Each shelf is attached above or below to its neighbour and it is this sequence that contributes to the stability of the structure and the load it must bear. Height between shelves depends on whatever needs to go on them - in this case, books and objects. Distance between the uprights is also governed by functional considerations, such as ease of removing and replacing books or rearranging items on the shelves. In fact, the uprights act as bookends. As you can see, not drafting designs is far removed from renouncing the use of a pen to take notes or even make sketches. I regularly communicate this way when working with others.



Heroic Shelves, 2009, exhibition at Kreo Gallery © Fabrice Gousset.

8. In the late 1960s, Andrea Branzi's designs began to dissolve borders between public and domestic spaces, particularly visible in the furniture he produced. Your own projects have also spanned work for public spaces (JCDecaux Group, museums, etc.) and furniture for private interiors. How do you see this work and what is your approach to it?

MSz: My industrial work and personal research have never been inspired by political or social ideology. Motivation comes from within the work itself and I seek no ideological justification outside it. I freely leave planning and improving the future to others who are more competent. As for Andrea Branzi's views, I suspect they were in the name of abolishing all the walls that glorious mankind delights in erecting between individuals. On the other hand, it is also a relief occasionally to be home, in your own territory, protected from other people. You can always go out and meet others whenever you chose to do so. Over-simplified ideas and slogans evade complexities and sooner or later lead to violent outcomes. Only this morning I read an interview in the newspaper with the architect and urban designer Chantal Deckmyn: "Public space is owned by us all and plays the role of a buffer zone. A third of our space is needed to avoid close contact and coming to blows with others. Public spaces function as the third that enables people to come together." Hannah Arendt memorably stated, "Public space is what keeps us from being at one another's throats." Maybe



Manière Noire, 2013, exhibition at Blondeau & Cie, Geneva © Didier Jordan.

Andrea Branzi was right and ahead of his time. For instance, the way smartphones now connect us to others night and day around the globe. The walls have crumbled. Our only option is to press the "off" button... if you can find the willpower to do it!

9. "Metaphysics at its deepest level is based on an implicit geometry [...] in giving thoughts a spatial dimension; can a metaphysician even think without drawing?"⁶
Would you say that "draw no more" can be construed as a wish to find thoughts in objects? Does this also apply to your vision of domestic space and the role of objects within it? How do you envisage our overall relationship with objects?

MSz: It is only after I've made my objects that I start reflecting and commenting on them, but I never expect anyone else to consider the whys and wherefores of an object; that is my domain and private compass. If some people appreciate my work, they do it for personal reasons and I have no wish to impose my thoughts on them. Objects, pieces of furniture, are inanimate blocks which encumber our lives when unsuitable. If the opposite is true, they accompany us as naturally as our own shadows.

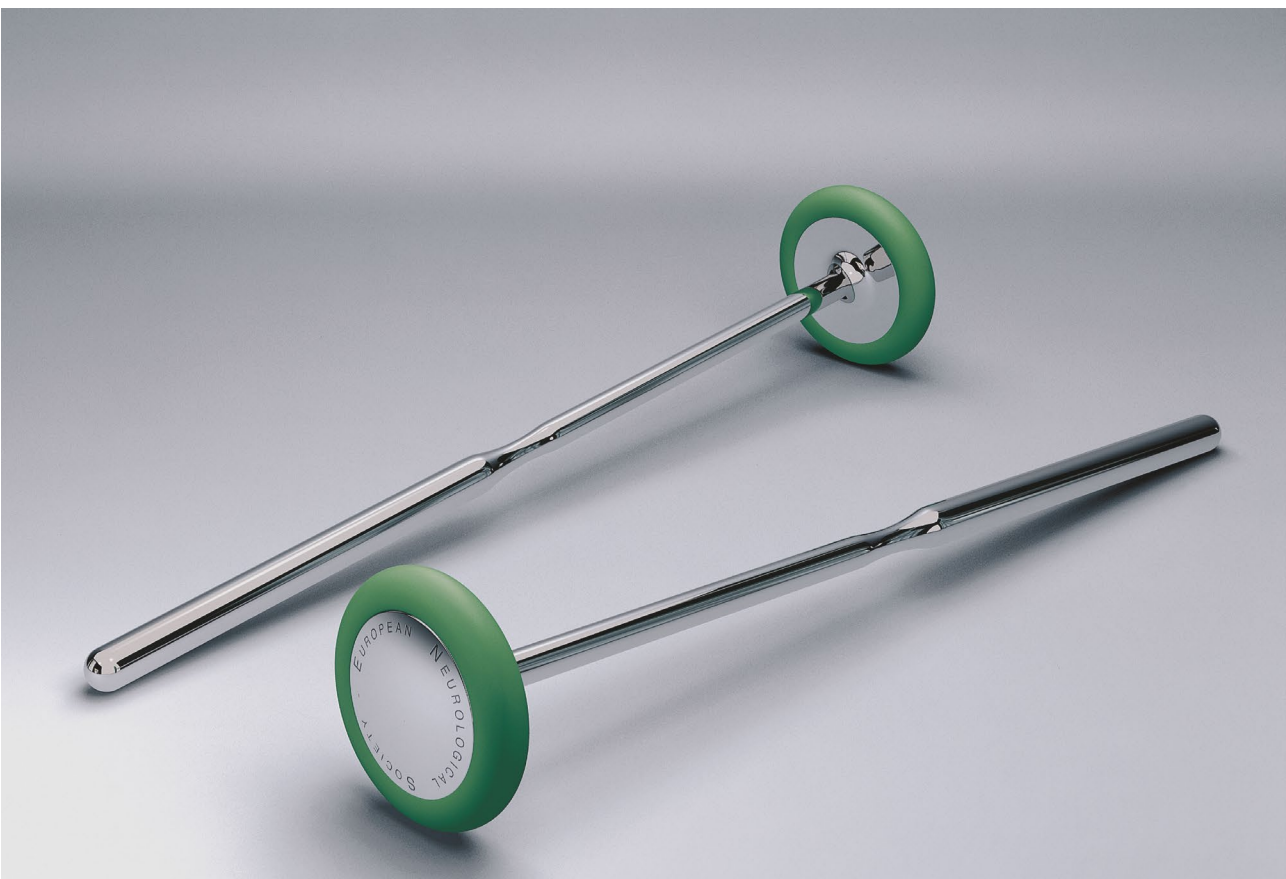
⁶ Gaston Bachelard, *La Poétique de l'espace* (Paris, PUF, 1957), 141.



Manière Noire Tower 1, 2013 © Fabrice Gousset.

10. "Not drawing creates an objective distance between you and your subject. [...] The idea is to establish a working method purely based on data exterior to yourself and accessible to anyone. These 'stepping-stones', as I call them, include type of object [...], its cultural context [...], production methods [...], the intended location of the object and above all, for whom the object is being made." Françoise Guichon once raised the question of your "mildly distant stance which some commentators interpret as coldness." Does this come from the modesty of approach or from perhaps a quest for an abstract quality in furniture?

MSz: Cool on the outside but warm within, this is exactly what I strive to do in my work. It's often an issue of ambiguity, one that in the end tends towards a state of balance. When Françoise Guichon asked me about the coldness of my works and the "mildly distant stance which some commentators interpret as coldness", I replied that when everything is overheated and designers feel they always have to elicit emotions, sensations and affect users, maybe a touch of cold might not be such a bad idea. Is it not possible to imagine a silent space to retreat into?



Marteau Réflexe, 1998 © DEIS.

11. How can one resolve the equation between freedom of use and prescribed use? What parameters might provide a basis for development?

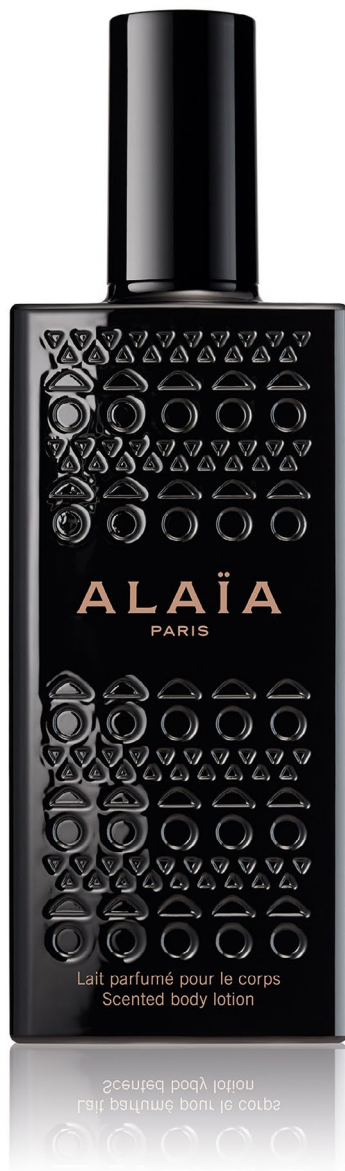
MSz: I'm afraid I don't see the equation you refer to. Ideally, objects and pieces of furniture should inspire uses, even if we feel encumbered to a certain extent by the object's physical presence. As a maker, my practice involves envisaging how the things I create will be used, which implies consideration of the user, his or her body, and the user's environment. Unlike an artist, for whom ideas are all it takes to make a work, a maker builds on knowledge of previous structures and their related technologies. Designers can no longer just play with forms and ideas to churn out yet another product. Experience has taught me that making a new table is fairly easy but that I will reject innumerable models until finally I find one that, for various reasons, I consider worth producing! After so many rejected designs, I know the one I choose, just by existing, will have an impact on the perception of everything that I have done up until then. This has been a constant quest of mine, a thought in progress.



Vase à boules, biscuit-fired porcelain, 1996 © Craft, Limoges.

12. Is ornament a crime?
What role does colour
play in your work?

MSz: At the beginning of the last century, Adolf Loos reacted strongly against ornament. He had his reasons. From early on, I have always been attracted to common tastes that run throughout culture, the need for factual and symbolic forms so wonderfully expressed in folk art, for example. In addition, whether or not ornament and pattern are appreciated for aesthetic reasons, they are primarily admired for the time spent in making them, the time an artisan requires to cover the work with decorations. It could almost be expressed in terms of good manners; ornament and complexity are understood as time spent to honour the onlooker. And I wonder if the modern equivalent of ornament might not be the degree of technological complexity that goes into each of my pieces? Ornament and smoothness are opposite sides of the same coin. One cannot exist without the other. Indeed, each exists because of the other. As for the question about colours, I see them in the same way I perceive coloured hues in a black-and-white film. Colour is a fugitive phenomenon, not just concerning the pleasure it procures but also in terms of its durability. We all seem to need colours. However, they tend to fade and require freshening up. Personally, I enjoy different shades of grey. I've seen some very beautiful varieties in China and in Paris too.



Alaïa, perfume bottle, 2015.

13. *Common/commonality* [*lieu commun*] are words you often employ. Do they signify anything other than archetypal?

MSz: Calling something a *table* immediately conjures up a basic, original model from our collective consciousness: a table archetype. My definition of an object as a *commonality* is suggested by the word itself, implying a convergence of opinion or accepted vision; for example, the same intuition and collective agreement that helps us recognise a landscape, an axe-head or a principle.

14. You were making drawings up until 1996. The catalogue for your 1995 exhibition, *Martin Szekely, Meublier-designer*⁷ contains a passage where you say that sketches "are always as moving as a Polaroid picture, a precise moment in a process". Looking back, what do you think of your work from the 1980s and 1990s?

MSz: From afar, with affection and a critical eye. It was a beginning, a period when I was trying to establish my individuality. I had to start somewhere. It's strange saying this to young people who are just starting out now!

⁷ *Martin Szekely, Meublier-designer*, exhibition catalogue, Santa Monica Art Centre, Barcelona, and The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, 1995.



Des plats, projected molten glass, 2000 © CIRVA Marseille.

MATERIALS AND TECHNIQUES

15. "Focussing just on the constraints of materials and how to assemble them removes the need for me to sketch out a design; the aesthetic style that results is out of my hands."⁸ You have underlined the importance of materials. Could you comment on how they fit into your work process?

MSz: Material is an important factor amongst several others. It dictates your approach, how you envisage working, taking account of past practices, connotations, its physical constitution and usages. Materials are like living organisms, each with their own intrinsic characteristics. They are like books that need to be opened and read. Objects used to be made mostly from single materials (clay, leather, wood, etc.) or else by assembling and juxtaposing different materials together. It is only relatively recently that a revolution has come about by using glue to produce mixed or "composite" materials. The overall strength is greater than the sum of individual components which, in their combined state, can be considered as a new material with novel properties. Each combination therefore promises an infinite range of possibilities. Consequently, in some cases we can even choose materials that match an object's requirements rather than having to adapt the object to existing materials – a profound shift in the way a project is handled.

⁸ Martin Szekely, "Martin Szekely Interview d'un créateur de l'essentiel" [Martin Szekely Interview with a Creator of the Essential], interview by Marion Vignal, Côté Maison, 26 October 2011.

16. Has your interest in composite materials led to collaborations with scientists and engineers in order to develop new materials or methods?

MSz: Yes, it does happen from time to time for me to get in touch with experts of all kinds. I explain my hunches and together we concoct solutions to projects that eventually are made. Time is of no concern. We can take as long as is needed and obtaining results is never an obligation. My attitude is very different from that of an artist who "creates". I feel much closer to the patient scientist who collects, classifies, compares and experiments ceaselessly until, on very rare occasions, the facts point to something significant. In the project *Concrete* (2008), we managed to go beyond what the inventors of Lafarge's Ductal had imagined for their material. It was a genuine technological step forward. On the other hand, things can develop in other directions entirely. For instance, I have recently registered a patent for an invention I made without anyone else's help as the solution for a project I was working on. In this case, the materials involved were nothing more than plain planks and screws. Generally, however, I frequently solicit the knowledge of specialists and engage in joint projects with them.

17. In his *Entretien sur la mécanologie* [Enquiry into Mechanology], published in 1969, Gilbert Simondon declared that "We lack poets in technique". What is your reaction to this statement? Is it reasonable to see your approach as a process of sublimating or transcending technique?

MSz: We could certainly come to an agreement over the meaning of "technique", but I am at a loss to pin down "poet". Nevertheless, Simondon seems to convey his desire to consider objects and especially machines as living things. Didn't he go as far as to claim that machines were beings that should have rights of their own? Stanley Kubrick, too, in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) allowed the machine to contradict the will of man. Long before that, objects were cherished as beings in animist religions. Instead of a one-way relationship between humans and objects or between objects and humans, it seems more pertinent to speak in terms of reciprocity and complementarity. Depending on type and presence, an object can be just as charged with energy as we are and can exert an influence on our behaviour, which will in turn influence our perception of the object. Through this dialogue, an object can keep you company or even take on a more important role. Over and above Simondon's machines, technological objects have become the depositaries of our intimate selves. They embody our lives (and it is worth noting that, like living beings, they are never cold to the touch). Technological objects have become prosthetic limbs that we imbue with life, or perhaps the other way round—they



Unit Shelf 3, 2011, exhibition at Kreo Gallery © Fabrice Gousset.

imbue us with life? "You can't touch without being touched. When you touch an object, you are simultaneously aware of it and of a part of yourself."⁹

18. Issues such as ecology and sustainability are very much part of design today. Are these aspects important to you as a designer?

MSz: The jeans we wear most days, organic fruit grown in distant countries that we sometimes buy, our smartphones that market forces pressure us to regularly replace, the next design project I hope to make... for each of these, can we really determine their impact on the environment and their effect on our health? It seems extremely difficult to make the right virtuous choices with certainty. If we consider ecology to be a type of hygiene, I would be concerned first about my own mental hygiene. That is where our relationship with the world begins.

⁹ Max-Henri de Larminat, *Objets en dérive* (Paris Centre Pompidou/Atelier des enfants/Dessain & Tolra, 1984).



Table Tore, 2007 © Fabrice Gousset.

DESIGN AND TEACHING

19. When design is taught in an art school (as it is here in Limoges) does this produce anything special, any added benefits or shortcomings that might influence the profession?

MSz: School is where different generations meet. The available time and space encourage you to forge your own opinions and move forward independently. But once you have found your place in school, it is then equally important to leave it.

20. What would you consider a good teaching programme in design?

MSz: I haven't set foot in a school for forty years or more so I must ask you the same question. Are you happy with the teaching here?
"See the present through the eyes of your future. You must seek what you want single-mindedly even though it might at first sight appear inaccessible and tell yourself that this rigorous pursuit is all important. Use it to envisage whatever can be achieved. Don't be satisfied cobbling together bits and pieces of the everyday squalid present."¹⁰

Translation: Jonathan Bass

¹⁰ From a dialogue in the film *Charles, mort ou vif* [Charles, Dead or Alive], directed by Alain Tanner (Bern: SRG SSR/Geneva: Groupe 5, 1969).

"I am not interested in making images but in creating objects that want to be used."

"I am only interested in an object's usage, the sole reason for its existence. No need to display a signature style, the craft of an artisan, the beauty of a material or of a motif. The object stands in its own purity. Drawings become irrelevant when you focus on testing the limits of materials and construction methods. The resulting aesthetic is no longer yours."

"Nowadays I see my work as a disengagement from the expressionism of drawing. My aim is to achieve an economy of means that cannot even be called minimalist - an accepted commonality."

"The function of written or oral commentary is to provide a modicum of information about a subject. It can never hope to include the entirety of latent layers involved and nothing can be done to alter this fact. Commentary is therefore only a partial form of interpretation, and language further reduces the subject's reality to an even smaller fraction of itself. However, what if the commentary should become an object in its own right, the original subject serving as a starting point? This is what we tried to do in company with the students from Limoges. I thank them and their teacher for having encouraged me to voice my thoughts."

Martin Szekely



Six constructions, box, ladder, stand, platform, 2002, exhibition at Kreo Gallery © Marc Domage.

FURNITURE/ OBJECTS/ INTERIORS/ SCENOGRAPHY

(selected list)

Limited and Unlimited Editions

The Drawers and I, 2017-2018 – storage compartments: multilayered oak and blackened brass

Moon Wood, 2016 – container: carbon fibre and resin

Opus, 2016 – shelving: aluminium, honeycomb aluminium

Construction, 2015 – shelving: bamboo and brass

FAR, 2014 – mirror: silicon carbide; exhibition at Blondeau & Cie Gallery, Geneva

MAP, 2013 – console tables: anodised aluminium; exhibition at Blondeau & Cie Gallery, Geneva

Artefact, 2013 – coffee table and pair of stools: stone and gold-plated stainless steel; exhibition at Blondeau & Cie Gallery, Geneva

Manière Noire, 2013 – shelving block/storage compartments: carbon fibre; exhibition at Blondeau & Cie Gallery, Geneva

Units, 2011 – shelving: plaster and glass; exhibition at Kreo Gallery, Paris

Heroic Carbon, 2010 – desk, day bed, stool, shelves: carbon fibre, honeycomb aluminium

Tino, 2009-2010 – shelving: aluminium panels, Nextel, stainless steel

GlassGlass, 2009 – table: glass, stainless steel

Heroic Shelves, 2009 – shelves: aluminium panels, honeycomb aluminium core; exhibition at Kreo Gallery, Paris

Simple Boxes, 2009 – desks, chests of drawers, coffee table, storage units: cork; exhibition at Kreo Gallery, Paris

StoneStone, 2009 – table: stone, honeycomb aluminium

Concrete, 2008 – desk, tables and coffee table: Lafarge Ductal concrete; exhibition at Kreo Gallery, Paris

Blanche, 2007 – table: Corian, honeycomb aluminium core

Black Mirror One, *Soleil Noir*, 2007 – mirrors: silicon carbide

CasaDoDo, 2007 – table and benches: solid wood, stainless steel

Fake, 2007 – round and square couch ends: aluminium, ebony

Tore, 2007 – bronze or stainless steel table

Console 103, 2006 – console table: stainless steel, leather or wood

BBD & Naxos, 2006 – tables: ebony, honeycomb aluminium, woven stainless steel mesh

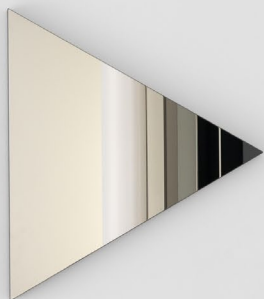
OD, 2006 – table: Corian or plywood, stainless steel

RNL, 2006 – table: stone, stainless steel

Bing One, 2005 – sofa end tables: glass; Kreo Gallery/Contrats Gallery, Paris

EPI, 2005 – desk: ebony, aluminium (one-off piece)

Des étagères, 2005 – shelving: aluminium, Nextel; exhibition at Kreo Gallery, Paris



AA, SAM, 2005 – sofa end tables: honeycomb aluminium, Corian, brass/stainless steel or cork, copper, resin bonded plywood

Solaris, 2005 – table: yellow galvanized steel

Stonewood One, Stonewood Two, Stonewood Three, 2005 – height-adjustable tables: stone, steel

Domo, 2004 – armchairs and pouf: leather, wooden frame, foam plastic; displayed at Domeau & Pérès, Paris

Fine Art, 2004 – desk: onyx, glass

CO, 2003 – bookcase: black MDF or birch plywood, lacquered steel

KL, 2003 – console table: stainless steel, aluminium

SL, 2003 – table: Corian, honeycomb aluminium, stainless steel

ML, 2002 – table: steel, aluminium, lacquer

Six constructions, 2002 – furniture elements: aluminum honeycomb, fiberglass, lacquered steel, exhibition at Kreo Gallery, Paris

Chaise Cork, 2000 – chair: cork, birch plywood

Des plats, 2000 – dishes: projected molten glass; research and prototypes made at CIRVA, Marseille; *Un banquet* exhibition at Kreo Gallery, Paris

Table 00, 2000 – table: birch plywood; *Un banquet* exhibition at Kreo Gallery, Paris

Slim, 1999 – table: honeycomb aluminium, glass fibre

L'Armoire, 1999 – wardrobe: aluminium, polypropylene; exhibition at Purple Gallery, Paris

Brique à fleurs, 1998 – flowerpot: clay; made by Lou Pignatier at Vallauris

Satragno, 1994 – table: MDF panels, wood; exhibition at Néotù Gallery, Paris

Initiales collection, 1991 – exhibition at Néotù Gallery, Paris

Pour faire salon collection, 1989 – exhibition at Néotù Gallery, Paris

Containers, 1987 – furniture collection: MDF; exhibition at Néotù Gallery, Paris

Stoléru, 1987 – couch: wooden framework, foam plastic, textile covers; *Containers* exhibition at Néotù Gallery, Paris

Carbone, 1985 – chair: carbon fibre, lacquered steel

Pi collection, 1985 – exhibition at Néotù Gallery, Paris

Pi, 1982–1983 – chaise longue: steel and lacquered aluminium, leather; exhibition at Néotù Gallery, Paris

Toluca éditions

Le Sacrifice des béliers, vol. 26, photos by Éric Poitevin, texts by Eugène Savitzkaya, case by Martin Szekely, graphic design by Olivier Andreotti, 2012

Les Grands Transparents, vol. 8, photos by Candida Höfer, texts by Antoine Volodine, case by Martin Szekely, graphic design by Olivier Andreotti, 2006

Public Works

Creation of furniture for galleries in the Louvre Museum, Paris, 2019

VLG display, Le Gramme, 2015

Palazzo Grassi, showcases made for *Martial Raysse*, François Pinault Foundation, Venice, 2015

Alaïa Parfums, perfume bottles, 2015

Roger & Gallet, *Fleur de figuier*, perfume bottle, 2014



FAR, 2014 © Fabrice Gousset.

Palais Galliera, Musée de la mode de la ville de Paris, scenography design for Azzedine Alaïa show, Paris, 2013

Alaïa, clothes racks and showcases for shop, 2013

S. T. Dupont, *Pompidou Pen* design, 2011

J. M. Weston, bench for trying on shoes and foot measurement device, walnut plywood, felt, metal, 2010

Christofle, *Radius*, set of tableware objects and serving platters, stainless steel, 2010

Parrot, *Specchio* and *Grande Specchio*, digital photo frames, 2008-2009

Les Églises, stained glass windows, public commission, Chelles Contemporary Art Centre, 2000-2008

Maison Hermès, Café Hermès (Tokyo, 2006; Osaka, 2007), tables, chairs, counter and stools, interior design by Rena Dumas

Roger & Gallet, eau de cologne bottle and soap bar travel case, 2006

Mudam, foyer and SoundLab, Museum of Modern Art Grand-Duc Jean, Luxembourg, 2006

Manade/Clen, *Perfo*, desktop accessories, lacquered steel, 2003

Groupe Canal+, Canal Satellite, *Pilotime*, multimedia terminal, plastic, metal, 2003

Christofle, *Ténéré*, cutlery, silver or stainless steel, 2003

MK2, *Love Seat*, two-person cinema seat, moulded foam plastic, upholstered, 2003

Heineken, glass, tempered glass, 2002

Christofle, *Reflet*, crafted platters, solid silver with or without vermeil gold gilt interior, limited edition, 2001

Legrand Sécurité, B. A. E. S., emergency exit sign, 2001

Dom Pérignon, champagne bucket and cooler, pewter, 2000

Hermès, *Symbole*, surgical stainless-steel pendant, 1999

Cristallerie Saint-Louis, *Eau de Saint-Louis* perfume bottles, fine glass, 1999

Terreal, *Tuile Z*, terracotta tiles, 1999

European Neurological Society, reflex hammer, stainless steel and plastic polymer, 1998

Hermès, *Reine de Saba*, solid silver or gold chain necklace and bracelet, 1996

Perrier, glass, tempered glass, 1996

Legrand, light switches, plastic, CMF design by Castelli Design Milano, 1995

Transel, *Corolle*, high-voltage electricity pylon, laminated pinewood, made by Transel for EdF, 1994

Perrier, *Tennis*, umpire chair and rest benches for players, Paris-Bercy, 1993

Winter Olympics official podium, larchwood, national wood development council, Albertville, 1992

JCDecaux, street furniture, cast steel, 1992

Delvaux, leather briefcases and baggage accessories, crafted leather, 1992

Sports clinic, room design, sponsored by Elis, Paris, 1992

La Courneuve police station, entrance hall design, public commission, 1992

Musée de Picardie, seating and visitor information desks, public commission, Amiens, 1991

Encyclopaedia Universalis, reading hall design, Paris, 1990

LaM, bookshop design, public commission, Lille musée d'art moderne, Villeneuve-d'Ascq, 1988



Stonewood Three, 2005 © Fabrice Gousset.

Works and designs in museum collections

Pompidou Centre, Paris

madd-bordeaux, Bordeaux

Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris

Fonds National d'Art Contemporain, Paris

Mudam, Luxembourg

Museu do Design e da Moda, Lisbon

MoMA, New York

Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum, New York

The Israel Museum, Jerusalem

Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal

Victoria and Albert Museum, London



Manière Noire Shelf 2, 2013 © Fabrice Gousset.

EXHIBITIONS

1985

Pi collection, Néotù Gallery, Paris

1987

Containers, Néotù Gallery, Paris

1988

MDF (Medium Density Fibreboard), des créateurs pour un matériau, Fondation Cartier, Jouy-en-Josas

Contemporary French Furniture, Victoria and Albert Museum, London

1989

Pour faire salon, Néotù Gallery, Paris

1990

Les Années VIA, Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris

French Furniture, Museum of Art, Tel-Aviv

1991

Capitales européennes du nouveau design, Pompidou Centre, Paris

Initiales collection, Néotù Gallery, Paris

Initiales et autres meubles, Néotù Gallery, New York

Horloge des Amis, Société des amis du MNAM, Pompidou Centre, Paris

1992

Manifeste: 30 ans de création en perspective, 1960-1990, Pompidou Centre, Paris

1993

Martin Szekely, Meublier-designer, 1983-1993, Arc en Rêve Architecture Centre, Bordeaux

1994

Satragno collection, Néotù Gallery, Paris

1995

Martin Szekely, Meublier-designer, 1983-1995, touring exhibition presented at the Santa Monica Art Centre in Barcelona as part of *Primavera del disseny* and at The Israel Museum, Jerusalem

1996

Martin Szekely, Meublier-designer, 1983-1995, touring exhibition presented at Iparművészeti Múzeum, Budapest, Hungary; Bratislava, Slovakia; National Library, Tallinn, Estonia; Contemporary Art Centre, Vilnius, Lithuania; Warsaw, Poland; Pompidou Centre, Paris (October 1996-January 1997)

1997

Design Français: l'art du mobilier, 1986-1996, Boulogne-Billancourt Cultural Centre



MAP, 2013, exhibition at Blondeau & Cie, Geneva © Didier Jordan.

1998

Premises: Invested Spaces in Visual Arts, Architecture and Design from France, 1958-1998, Guggenheim Museum, New York

Martin Szekely designer, Grand-Hornu, Belgium

Martin Szekely à Vallauris, Centre Européen d'Art Contemporain, Vallauris, France

1999

L'Armoire, Purple Gallery, Paris

Objets inanimés, avez-vous donc une âme...: Deux décennies de design domestique, 1980-1999, Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Bordeaux

2000

Un banquet, Kreo Gallery, Paris

2002

Six constructions, Kreo Gallery, Paris

2005

Des étagères, Kreo Gallery, Paris

2008

Concrete, Kreo Gallery, Paris

2009

Heroic Shelves and Simple Boxes, Kreo Gallery, Paris

2011

Martin Szekely. Ne plus dessiner, Pompidou Centre, Paris

Units, Kreo Gallery, Paris

2014

Artefact et MAP, Blondeau & Cie, Geneva

2015

Artefact, Salon 94 Gallery, New York

Martin Szekely: Les années 80/90, Cat-Berro Gallery, Paris

Manière Noire, Blondeau & Cie Gallery, Geneva

2016

Moon Wood, Pierre-Marie Giraud Gallery, Brussels, Belgium

2017

Recent Works, Clermont-Tonnerre hotel, Paris

2018

Construction, madd-bordeaux, Musée des Arts Décoratifs et du Design, Bordeaux

2019

The Drawers and I, Pierre-Marie Giraud Gallery, Brussels, Belgium



L'Armoire, 1999 © Camille Vivier.

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30 vases pour le CIRVA. Paris: Michel Aveline/Marseille: CIRVA, 1989.

Gaston Bachelard. *La Poétique de l'espace*. Paris: PUF, 1957.

Jean Baudrillard. *Le Système des objets*. Collection Tel. Paris: Gallimard, 1968.

Anne Bony. *Les Années 80*. Paris: Éditions du Regard, 1995.

Chloé Braunstein-Kriegel and Éric Germain, eds. *Les Années Staudenmeyer: 25 ans de design en France*. Paris: Norma, 2009.

François Cheng. *Vide et plein: Le langage pictural chinois*. Paris: Seuil, 1979.

Christine Colin. *Design aujourd'hui*. Paris: Flammarion, 1988.

Christine Colin. *Objets-types et archétypes: Les villages*. Paris: Industries françaises de l'ameublement, 1997.

Françoise Darmon. *9 entreprises, 9 créateurs*. Paris: Chêne, 1992.

Jean-Marc Ferrer, Jean-Marc Prévost and Jeanne Quéheillard. *Présence de l'objet: Créations céramiques au Craft (Limoges)*. Nice: Grégoire Gardette, 2000.

Françoise Guichon, Mona Thomas, Jean-Pierre Causse and Roland Pilloni. *CIRVA 1986-2006: L'artiste, l'atelier, le verre*. Paris: Xavier Barral, 2007.

Françoise Guichon, Philippe-Alain Michaud and Martin Szekely. *Martin Szekely. Ne plus dessiner*. Paris: B42, 2011.

Raymond Guidot, Nestor Perkal, Jeanne Quéheillard and Laurence Salmon. *L'Expérience de la céramique. Centre de recherche sur les arts du feu et de la terre - Craft - Limoges*. Paris: Bernard Chauveau, 2007.

Donald Judd. "It's Hard to Find a Good Lamp". In *Donald Judd Furniture: Retrospective, 7-21*. Rotterdam: Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, 1993. Exhibition catalogue.

Adolf Loos. *Ornament and Crime*. Translated by Shaun Whiteside. London: Penguin Classics, 2019.

Monographies

Claire Fayolle, Alison M. Gingeras and Christian Schlatter. *Martin Szekely*. Paris: Images modernes, 2003.

Nadine Coleno. *Découvre le design de Martin Szekely*. Paris: Éditions du Regard, 2004.

Élisabeth Lebovici and Martin Szekely. *Martin Szekely* (French/English). Zurich: JRP|Ringier, 2010.

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Martin Szekely: Groupe Totem; de création industrielle au Château de Vassivière en Limousin, 15 June – 15 September 1986. Limoges: Association Limousin art contemporain et sculptures, 1986.

M.D.F.: Des créateurs pour un matériau. Exhibition at Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain, Jouy-en-Josas, 24 April – 22 May 1988. Paris: Fondation Cartier, 1988.

Yvonne Brunhammer. *Les Années VIA: 1980-1990*. Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 24 April – 26 August 1990. Paris: Union Centrale des Arts Décoratifs, 1990.

Martin Szekely, Meublier-designer. Paris: Association Française d'Action Artistique/Hazan, 1995.

Martin Szekely designer. Brussels: Grand-Hornu, 1998.



Jacqueline du Pasquier. *Objets inanimés, avez-vous donc une âme...: Deux décennies de design domestique, 1980-1999*. Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Bordeaux, 27 May – 30 September 1999. Paris: RMN/Grand Palais, 1999.

Olivier Zahm and Bernard Joisten. *Opération rangement dans l'Armoire*. Paris: Purple Books/Kreo, 1999.

Martin Szekely. *Des Plats*. Collection CIRVA/Carnet de bord. Nice: Grégoire Gardette, 2000.

Pierre Leguillon. *Des objets stratifiés*. In *Un Banquet*, by Christian Schlatter and Pierre Leguillon. Paris: Kreo Gallery, 2000.

Christian Schlatter. Martin Szekely à l'atelier Lou Pignatier. In *Des designers à Vallauris 1998-2002*. Paris: CNAP/Michel Baverey; Nice: Grégoire Gardette, 2003.

Christian Schlatter. *Martin Szekely: Des étagères*. Paris: Bernard Chauveau, 2005.

Christian Simenc. *Martin Szekely: Concrete*. Paris: Bernard Chauveau, 2008.

Une commande publique réalisée par Martin Szekely & Marc Barani: Chronique d'une commande publique en Île-de-France. Paris: Drac Île-de-France/Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication/Chelles: Ville de Chelles, 2008.

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Alison M. Gingeras. *Martin Szekely: "six constructions"*. Paris: Kreo Gallery, 2002.

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Claire Fayolle. "Martin Szekely, design élémentaire". *Beaux Arts* magazine, no. 196 (2000).

Anne-Marie Fèvre. "Le moins est un plus". *Libération*, 18 October 2000.

Martin Szekely. "Créateur de l'invisible". Interview by Marion Vignal. *L'Express*, no. 27 (March 2007).

Anne-Marie Fèvre. "Martin Szekely, l'objet au plus juste". *Libération*, 28 October 2011.

Martin Szekely. "Pour vivre heureux, restons couchés". Interview by Jean Couvreur. *La Revue du Design*, 10 December 2011.

Yann Siliec. "Martin Szekely – Sine qua non". *Intramuros*, no. 157 (November/December 2011).

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<http://www.martinszekely.com>

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L'Armoire, unfolded, 1999 © Camille Vivier.

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Gilbert Simondon. "Entretien sur la mécanologie". Interview by Jean Le Moyne. Quebec: Ministère de l'Éducation, 1968. 74 min.

Françoise Darmon and Jean-Dominique Ferrucci. *Histoire d'objets: Rencontre avec dix designers français*. Documentary. Georges-Pompidou Centre, 2000. DVD-ROM edited by TF1 videos. DVD-ROM, 52 min.

François Cardon. *Martin Szekeley*. Documentary. Collection Design/Designers. Images de la culture, 2000. 12 min.

Martin Szekeley, Christian Schlatter, Elisabeth Lebovici, Odile Nouvel and Marc Barani (discussion). Service audiovisuel, Musée national d'art moderne/Centre de création industrielle, Georges-Pompidou Centre audiovisual department, 2011. 110 min. [Online](#).



Opus, shelving in aluminium and honeycomb aluminium, 2016, madd-bordeaux (Musée des Arts Décoratifs et du Design, Bordeaux) permanent collection © Fabrice Gousset.

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