



GLORIA CORTINA



GLORIA CORTINA FROM WITHIN

CRISTINA GRAJALES GALLERY, NEW YORK



FORWARD: CRISTINA GRAJALES ANA ELENA MALLET: FROM WITHIN GOLDEN UNIVERSE 18 MATHIAS BLACK HAWK SYNERGY THE BULLET EYE OF GOD 50 SILENT A SERPENT QUIET HUMMINGBIRD WHITE NIGHT FEATHER WALL BIOGRAPHY ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



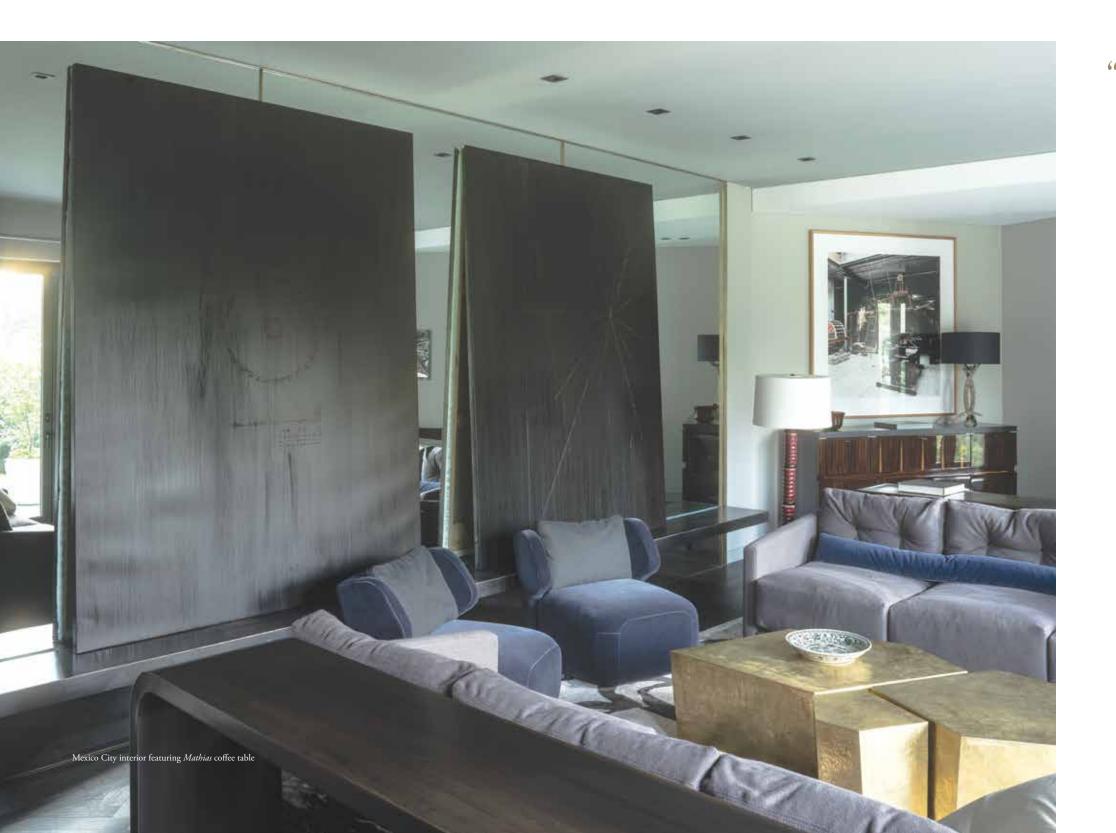
FORWARD

In December of 2013, under a beautiful tree at the Raleigh Hotel in Miami, I had the pleasure of meeting furniture and interior designer, Gloria Cortina. As we ate breakfast together, she began to talk about her unique design philosophy and research into her Mexican roots. I knew I had met a kindred spirit, and I was immediately hooked. As a Latin American woman working within the design world, I identified with many of Gloria's struggles and successes. The more I learned about Gloria and her regard for the materials and forms used in her country, the more enchanted I became. Her professionalism and passion for design were fascinating, and I knew in that moment that we had to work together.

We introduced Gloria's work for the first time at the Salon of Art and Design in November of 2014. Gloria's deep connection to Mexican culture was evident through her use of native materials in the *Mathias Table* and *Eye of God*, from the hand-hammered brass finish to the meticulously cut black obsidian tiles. Obsidian, a magical stone that shimmers like a starry night, is seen in gold and silver tones in the *Golden Universe* table and *White Night* cabinets. I was initially puzzled by the use of lacquer in her work, not knowing that since the 16th Century, lacquered designs were coming out of the far east, and entering the Americas through Mexico. Gloria's *Bullet Cabinet* and *Black Hawk* console are perfect examples of this emergence of cultures and traditions.

Inspired by the materials and myths of her ancestors, the Aztecs and the Mayans, Gloria has opened the door to a beautiful new world of history and fantasy that we are thrilled to experience and learn from. I am honored and excited to introduce Gloria's work and design in our gallery.

CRISTINA GRAJALES



"The spirit of the monumental in Mexican culture can be found in each of Cortina's works – they are silent yet majestic."

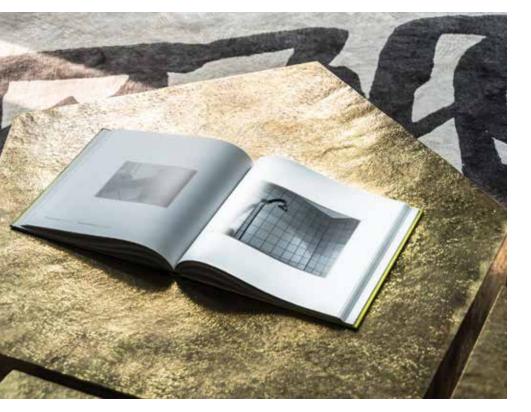
GLORIA CORTINA FROM WITHIN

EARLY INFLUENCES AS DESTINY

Arturo Pani, the pioneer of Mexican interior design and younger brother of renowned architect Mario Pani, spent his childhood in Europe and eventually studied at the École des Beaux Arts in Paris. These European experiences and influences were critical in the development of his own style, by helping him understand and appreciate upon his return to Mexico in 1936 his country's longstanding tradition of crafts, its vibrant colors, and multiple raw materials. He assimilated the best of both worlds and was able to deliver them to the emerging Mexican middle class during the middle of the twentieth century.

Pani's decors overflow with fine textiles and brocades, furniture that alludes to elaborate history, and exclusively selected pieces of Mexican popular art. His decor became reference points for Mexican society at that time. Gloria Cortina grew up in such a place – her maternal grandparents' home is completely designed by Arturo Pani. Cortina remembers spending long afternoons during her childhood in her grandfather's library, emblematic of Pani's style, where she would learn to read and help her grandfather plan family trips. Undoubtedly, the first imprints on Cortina's visual map come from the decorator's rich and eccentric language, as well as his handle on multiple esthetic traditions.

Along with Pani's influence, travels with her grandparents also marked Cortina's design imprint. One of her most vivid memories is of her first trip to the southeastern Mexican state of Chiapas and the Mayan archaeological site of Palenque. She recalls the thick forest as a backdrop for numerous trails that led to the observatory, the hues of the stones, their



above: *Mathias* in hammered brass right page: Gloria Cortina's sketchbook, 5 angles concept pattern

placement, and meaning. Palenque is a place imbued by the aroma of people, pilgrims and travelers, and by the colors of the landscape. It offers up the possibility of a moment of self-discovery as part of a larger and more transcendental whole. Cortina's first contact with the Mayan world is etched in her memory and has become a constant recollection, present in each of her designs.

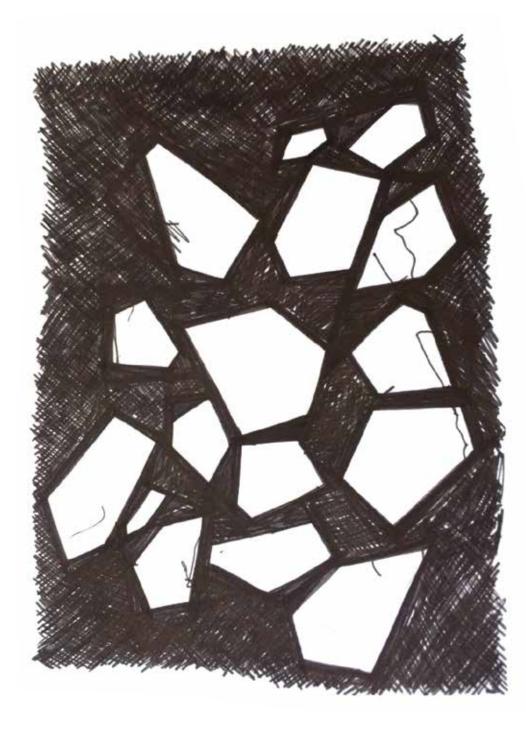
Another formative visit for Cortina, less far afield and again during her youth, was to Mexico City's Palacio de Bellas Artes, which remains a defining visual reference for Cortina. Inaugurated in 1934 after 30 years of construction, the building combines both Art Nouveau and Art Déco styles to represent one of Mexico City's most imposing architectural icons. It is a palace built entirely of marble in various colors and hues. The marble is combined with bronze metalwork that makes iconographic references to Pre-Columbian cultures. The whole construction is completed with a glorious collection of murals by the great national artists of the twentieth century – Diego Rivera, Clemente Orozco, David Alfaro Siqueiros, Jorge González Camarena, Rufino Tamayo, Roberto Montenegro, and Manuel Rodríguez Lozano. Cortina's great-grandfather, Manuel Sierra (son of the esteemed historian and politician, Justo Sierra) was in charge of all of the woodwork and finishes of this great building. Cortina has art and design in her blood. When combined with her visual education, her history creates an innovative and striking way of seeing the world. Her works recall Mexican culture by using different shapes, materials, and finishes. A Mexican viewer will detect local references. A foreigner sees Cortina's language as persuasive and elegant yet exotic all at the same time. The spirit of the monumental in Mexican culture can be found in each of Cortina's works - they are silent yet majestic.

A WOMAN IN A MAN'S WORLD

The profession of designer is a relatively new one in Mexico. It was not until 1950 that the first university degree was created in this field. However, Mexico is home to an important tradition of applied arts and craftsmanship, but only a few generations of professionally trained designers. The same can be said for the field of interior design. This area of study did not have a corresponding university major until a decade ago. Prior to these emerging trends, the only options for study were in the form of certificates or specialty studies at unofficial centers. The pioneers in this field began their careers as autodidacts and trained themselves by intuition. Design was traditionally linked to females – only women decorated interiors. For this reason, all courses were directed at this female audience. Nevertheless, in the world of architecture, architects (primarily men) defined the atmosphere in which all interiors were created. They had the last word and even went so far as to design their homes' furnishings. Interior design as a profession was plagued by contradictions and questions. Was it a profession or a pastime? If interior design was a profession, then should it be relegated to males or females? Was it really necessary to propose the interior design for a home if the client would most likely end up changing it once they inhabited the space? Gloria Cortina began her career in the midst of all of these ambivalences and disjunctions. During the period of Mexican modernism, architects were the principal players when defining the organization and style of their works' interiors. This was their method of satisfying their clients' needs.

During the period of Mexican modernism, architects were the principal players when defining the organization and style of their works' interiors. This was their method of satisfying their clients' needs. Luis Barragán had a reputation for being an autocrat in this mien. His proposal had to remain the final word. Many of his clients affirm that he continued a tradition of revisiting his buildings in order to assure that his recommendations were being followed and remained in place. Mario Pani, on the other hand, used his brother Arturo at first and later integrated the Cuban born designer, Clara Porset, into his project team. She learned to work and move in a man's world and managed the interiors with subtle grace. Porset proposed fabrics, furniture, and layouts for Pani. Her arrival in Mexico in 1936 propitiated an encounter with Mexican culture and popular art that forever defined her style. From that moment forward, her furnishings were defined by constant references to the Mexican vernacular. Porset achieved a style that unified cultural constants and free associations in varied types of furniture. Her work has the seal of approval of "Mexican Design".

Gloria Cortina descends from the genealogy described above. She trained and grew as a professional in this very milieu. She is a woman who, like Porset, developed her style in a man's world. She also went



abroad to pursue her education, find her vocation, and reunite with her culture in the end. Cortina's cultural background, her vast visual repertoire, and her multiple references to both national and international precedents give her a unique perspective. She knows how to use the past in order to work in the present and make a proposal for the future.

DESIGN AND CULTURE

Gloria Cortina understands interior design in the same way that Mathias Goeritz conceives of emotional architecture. "Emotional architecture is an experiment that seeks to find sensations through which one can move." For Cortina, the spaces she creates are ones made for movement, passage, living, and being. She understands space as a whole that needs a new stage – furnishings. But, the pieces are not conceived of individually. to be converted into a domestic and functional environment as well as an esthetic experience. Each piece that she chooses has a reason for its placement. It belongs. In each of her interiors, Cortina highlights all five of which we live. our senses. She challenges them and makes them stand out. Her spaces are conceived as three-dimensional entities composed in three stages. First, she creates an immediate impact, and second, the experience while in the space. The final and third stage consists of its legacy, its lasting impression. These three stages embody the sensations that arise out of being in contact with Cortina's spaces. Trilogies, uneven numbers, and symbols are all very important in Cortina's creative process. They emerge in her final products.

Cortina has not satisfied herself with choosing works of others in order to create her spatial experiments. Her never-ending search for perfection has led her to design her own furniture. These give her interiors a unique and inimitable quality. This exhibition showcases the first collection of her work as a whole. Cortina's collection highlights her many cultural perceptions. Her pieces seek to solidify many Mexican points of reference. To begin with, Cortina uses materials that are commonly associated with millennial traditional and local craftsmanship. These include obsidian, copper, wood, bronze, and enamelware. Cortina adeptly works with Mexican craftsmen and artisans who are masters at transforming their raw materials into beautiful but functional objects. This collection of objects

created by Cortina unites and adapts her creative passions. They are displayed, re-examined, and transformed. Gloria Cortina's designs are not only what meets the eye or what we come to see and imagine. They are also the unseen, the hidden element, what they symbolize and reflect on polished surfaces are charged with multiple meanings.

THE COLLECTION AND IT'S STORIES

If Cortina's work had, until now, alternated between rational and irrational, functional and esthetic, this collection exemplifies how her experience, tenacity, and impeccable taste have matured to perfection. The designer has stepped out of her comfort zone in order to position and reinvent herself on Instead, they are a collection of communicating vessels that each have their own history and references to the history of design and the world in

The Mathias table began this collection. It represents a reinterpretation of "Messages", a series of pieces created by the sculptor Mathias Goeritz beginning in 1957. The original pieces were made of perforated metals. Cortina recycles the gold but gives it a new, hammered finish, creating textures that have modified the nature of the metal sheets. She builds pentagonal modules and places them contiguously to create a flat surface that becomes the table. Goeritz associated his abstractions with religion and spirituality. Cortina revisits the artist's esthetic discourse by using his shapes, materials and volumes. But, she produces a utilitarian object that doubles as a sculpture anchored in space while reflecting light. This table is also a work of contrasts. Its finish is detailed and delicate. It creates reflections that change the surface of the piece continuously. At the same time, the reflections face off with the expansive volumes of the individual modules. Micro and macro facets of the work meet to create a sense of stability, beauty, but also ethereality.

References to Mathias Goeritz are also found in the piece titled Serpent with a Smoke Mirror. Exquisite and spectacular obsidian mirrors are mounted on a bronze base to set on a table or desk. This piece recalls Goeritz's zoomorphic sculptures, specifically "The Serpent of El ECO", a



left page: Mathias this page left to right: Feather Wall detail, bronze castings



piece designed in 1953 for the artist's Museo Experimental El ECO. For Gloria Cortina, this work highlights a duality present in all of her objects. The duality addresses Mexico's mountainous regions and its emblematic volcanoes – Popocatepetl and Izztaccihuatl. These are the sun and the moon, masculine and feminine.

The Golden Universe is a table that makes reference to Cortina's first contact with the magic and monumentality of the Mayan culture. The central piece is made of golden obsidian, a stone typically associated with Pre-Columbian cultures and one that is still worked today with great mastery in workshops around San Juan Teotihuacan. Cortina places the golden stone in concentric movements that serve to unravel the concept of the beginning and the end of the universe.

White Night are cabinets that belong to the same family as Golden Universe. However, here Cortina creates them in negative. She uses silver obsidian to create a white hue with delicate glimmers. The concentric movement is present once again, but in these pieces it is seen simply as a brilliant and successful play on esthetics as well as a reference to history and its continuous repetitions.

For each piece she creates, Cortina does intensive research. She looks not only at her raw materials and their possibilities but also delineates shapes and their symbolic content. Her fascination with Pre-

Hispanic culture has led her to seek meaning and affinity to give her objects multiple interpretations. Her pieces do not only have a utilitarian purpose. They also tell stories, express symbolisms, and transmit culture.

Birds and their feathers and movements are an integral part of Pre-Columbian mythology. Cortina is aware of their symbolic value. For this reason, she uses the contours of their plumage to create patterns out of which she has designed two very interesting pieces that recall traditional Art Deco style. The Black Hawk console and Feather Wall screen both have a common denominator - a latticework of bronze feathers with black obsidian centers. As in other pieces, general patterns recall graphic design from the Art Deco period, and, in particular, renowned design pioneer Charles Rennie Mackintosh.

For Gloria Cortina, feathers come from the legend of Huitzilopochtli, the great Mexican God of War. He was born out of a nest of feathers and turned into an invincible warrior. In Nahuatl, his name means "hummingbird of the south". He is portrayed wearing an enormous headdress made of hummingbird feathers. The legend states that this God became a hummingbird in order to guide the Aztecs as they emerged from their place of origin, Aztlán. He has dual qualities that Cortina replicates by juxtaposing the different materials - obsidian in several colors, rose quartz, bronze, and lacquered wood.

Text from Mathias Goeritz in the catalog to the exposition Mathias Goeritz. Arquitectura emocional. Museo de Arte Moderno, México, junio-septiembre de 1984. Reproduced in Cuahonte, Leonor (comp), (2007), El Eco de Mathias Goeritz. México: UNAM/IIE., p. 93. Cited by Garza Usabiaga, Daniel (2013), Mathias Goeritz y la Arquitectura emocional. Una revisión crítica (1952-1968). México: CONACULTA/CONARTE, p.15.



Quiet Hummingbird is a work comprised of two wall lamps made out of rose quartz with bronze bodies and a refined obsidian tail. A sitting hummingbird stands out in this work as a primary motif. For the Aztecs, the bird was immortal and, despite his size, displayed tremendous determination when fluttering its wings. His tenacity assured that he would achieve his goals. For the Mayans, the hummingbird was responsible for carrying out one's desires. Cortina's pieces provide a beautiful presence in the same way that a hummingbird brings its desires to fruition.

When one looks at the side table called *The Eye of God* made out of bronze and black obsidian, it is impossible to miss the reference to indigenous Mexican mythology. This piece is derived from the Huichol people's "Ojo de Dios" which is a good luck amulet that protects its owner. The eyes are traditionally made of yarn woven into a rhomboid form, the four corners of which symbolize the four cardinal points and their center, or the five directions of the universe. Cortina begins with a rhombus for her piece. She adds volume in order to create the final object. It has been produced in two different versions – water cut and chiseled. The end product is a striking sculpture of primarily masculine essence, with shine and reflections that produce a vibrant, symbolic effect. This is an eye that comes into being, persists and sees all, always.

In the recent past, Mexico's image on the international stage has been marred by violence. Any person sensitive to this environment, as is Gloria Cortina, could not let this reality go unnoticed. *The Bullet* is a chest of drawers or storage cabinet. But, it is also a reflection of Mexico's current situation. Cortina tells us that this piece was conceived as the result of a personal experience, after an accident. The truth is that the piece contains a direct reference to the current atmosphere that permeates the country. The designer's work cannot escape her reality. The piece is an enormous chest with a black lacquer exterior. Its massive doors are decorated with bronze details that resemble the explosion of a firearm. The hole that would have been created by a bullet is located at the center, also at the location where one must place one's finger in order to open the doors. The interior approximates the sublime. It is finished in a purple lacquer almost identical to that of the *cochineal grana*, the traditional color of Guerrero state or of the finest of plights and r to misery see The of two large silver plated geometry an spirit yet also This designer. Sh culture. She past, its indig these are tho Cortina's obj product that These pieces at the same daily lives. Th

of the finest Japanese dyes. This piece is brutal in its evocation of tragic plights and memories. But, its beauty is so overwhelming that the links to misery seem distant. They evaporate.

The last piece of the collection is titled *Synergy*. It is composed of two large golden cubes joined in the middle by a smaller, elongated, silver plated cube. These shapes combine to form a bench that celebrates geometry and the impeccable lines of design. This object has a playful spirit yet also inspires order and perfection.

This collection is a testament to Gloria Cortina's maturity as a designer. She has selected materials that are associated with her national culture. She uses shapes that recall the Mexican imaginary, its glorious past, its indigenous people, its art history, and its design. Nevertheless, these are thoroughly international pieces. They are exceptionally cosmopolitan. Cortina's objects combine design, solid matter, and culture to forge a final product that is profoundly emotional. They are forceful and astounding. These pieces tell us tales that allow us to anchor ourselves in space while at the same time becoming a part of the new narratives that construct our daily lives. They are a fundamental part of our existence.

ANA ELENA MALLET





The Bullet detail

Bronze casting



"The obsidian pieces in the table top start as a concentric layout. The pattern rolls into itself, and then rolls out again in the other direction, and this creates a shift of scales, and a shift in imagination."



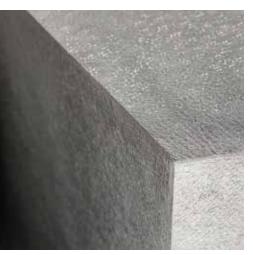


Golden Universe Bronze and golden obsidian, 2015 12 ½[°]h x 47 ¼[°]w x 29 ½[°]d 32cm x 120cm x 75cm



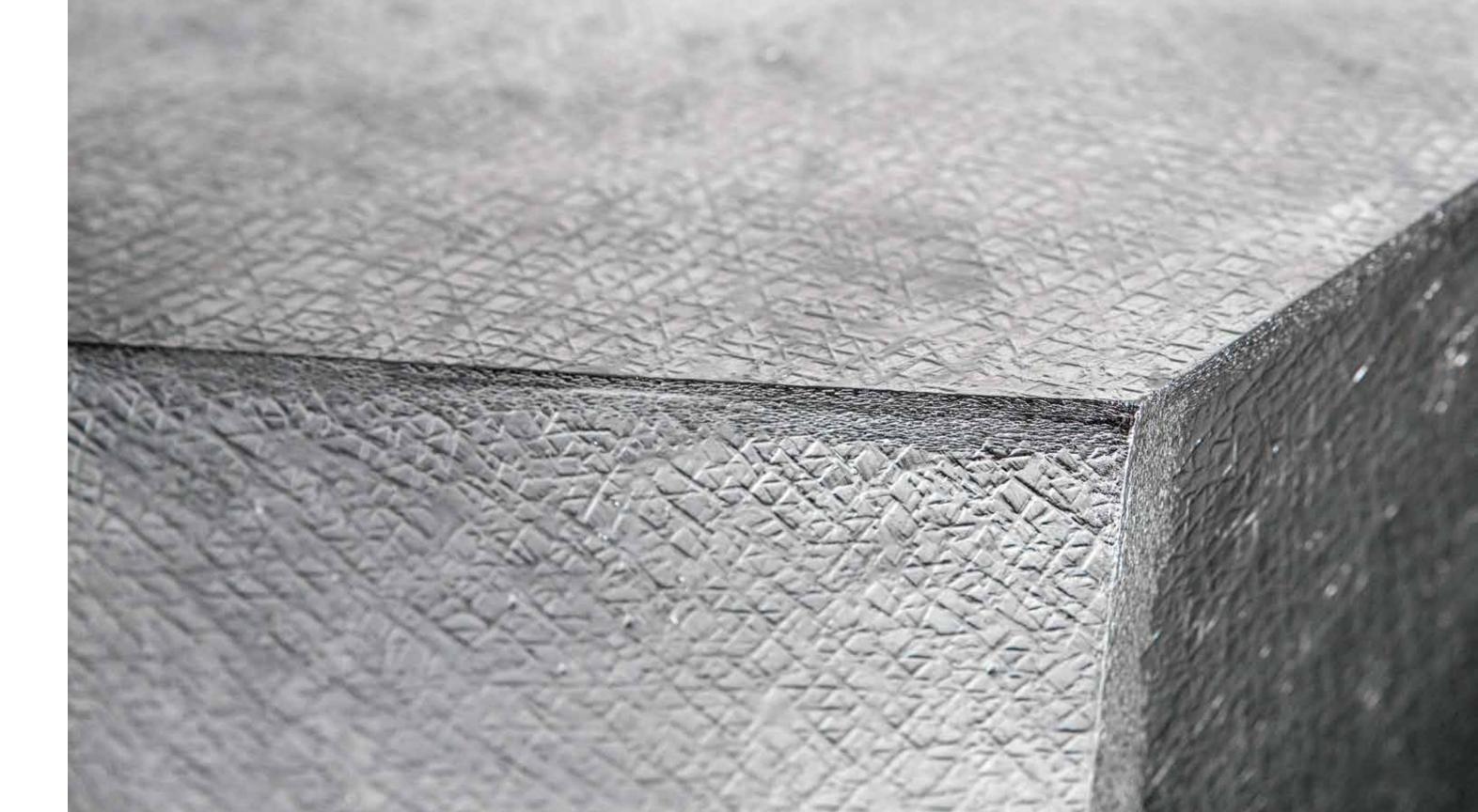


"As it happens, many of my designs start with a three way crack, like the letter Y — and this symbolizes my personal equilibrium."



Mathias Hand-hammered nickel, 2016 16 3/4"h x 73"w x 39 ½"d 43cm x 185cm x 100cm

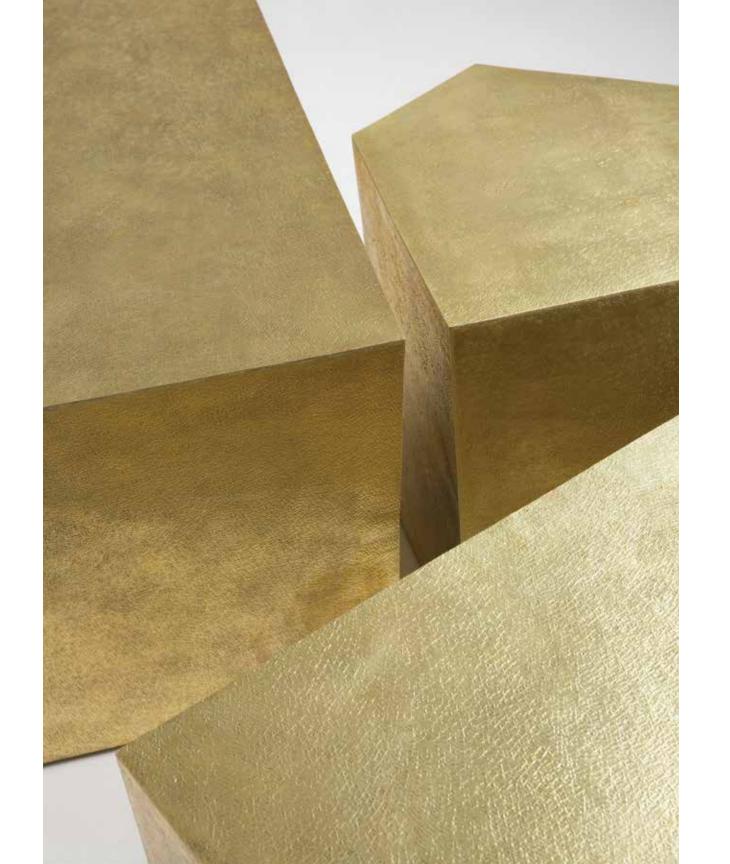












Mathias Hand-hammered polished brass, 2014 16 3/4"h x 73"w x 39 1/2"d 43cm x 185cm x 100cm

"So this design, like all of my work, is the product of questions. Who am I? What do I cherish?"



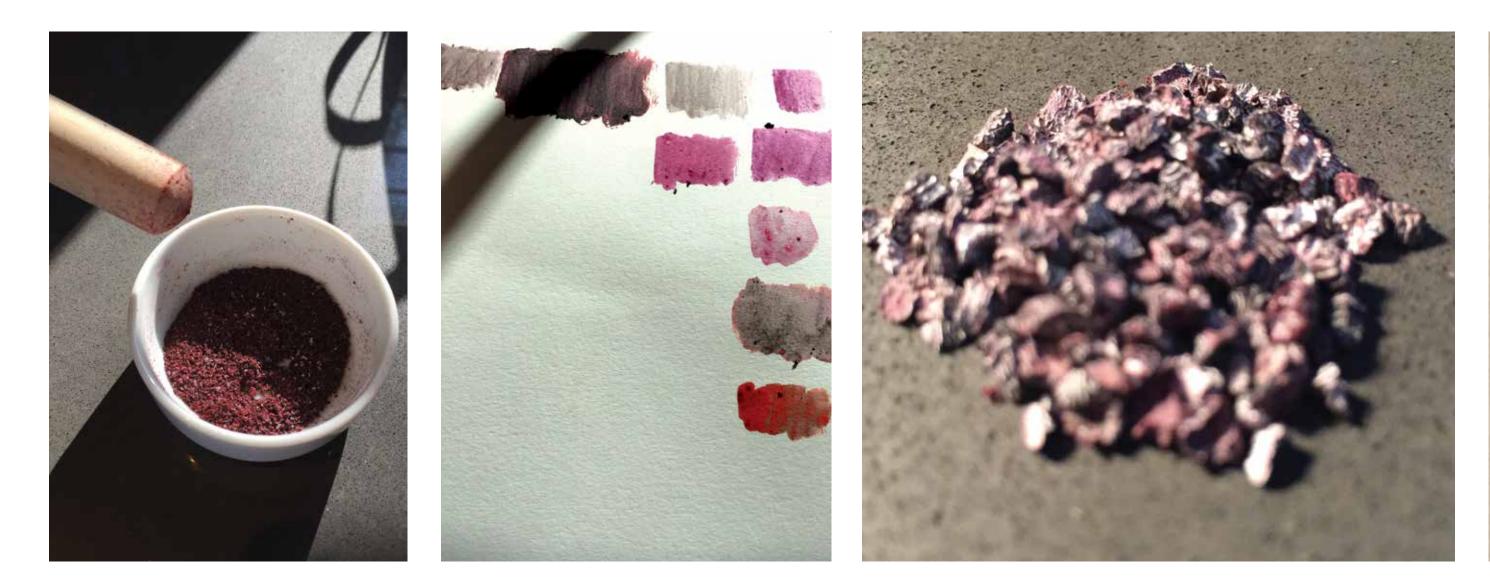


Black Hawk Purple cochinilla lacquer, bronze and black obsidian, 2016 36 1/2"h x 55 1/8"w x 13 3/4"d 93cm x 140cm x 35cm

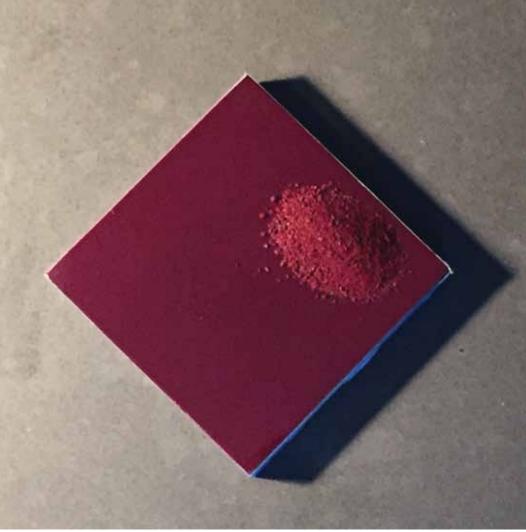


this page: Mexico City workshop, feather structure production for *Black Hawk* and *Feather Wall*. opposite: bronze casting "Birds and their feathers and movements are an integral part of Pre-Columbian mythology."



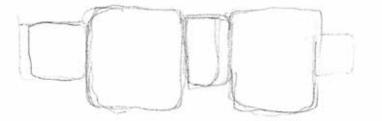


"It seems that anything of relevance in this world has a shade of red to share."

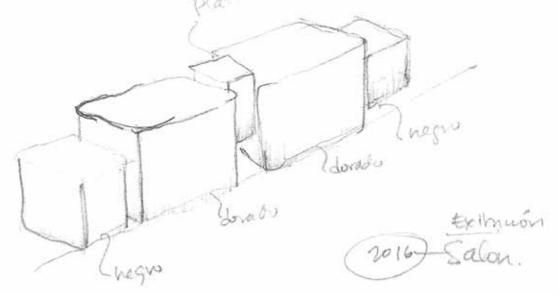


Cochinilla is an insect that grows in the prickly pear. It is used as a natural colorant and can be combined with other natural ingredients in order to obtain a variety of colors. Cortina uses a purple cochinilla lacquer in *Black Hawk* and inside *The Bullet*.







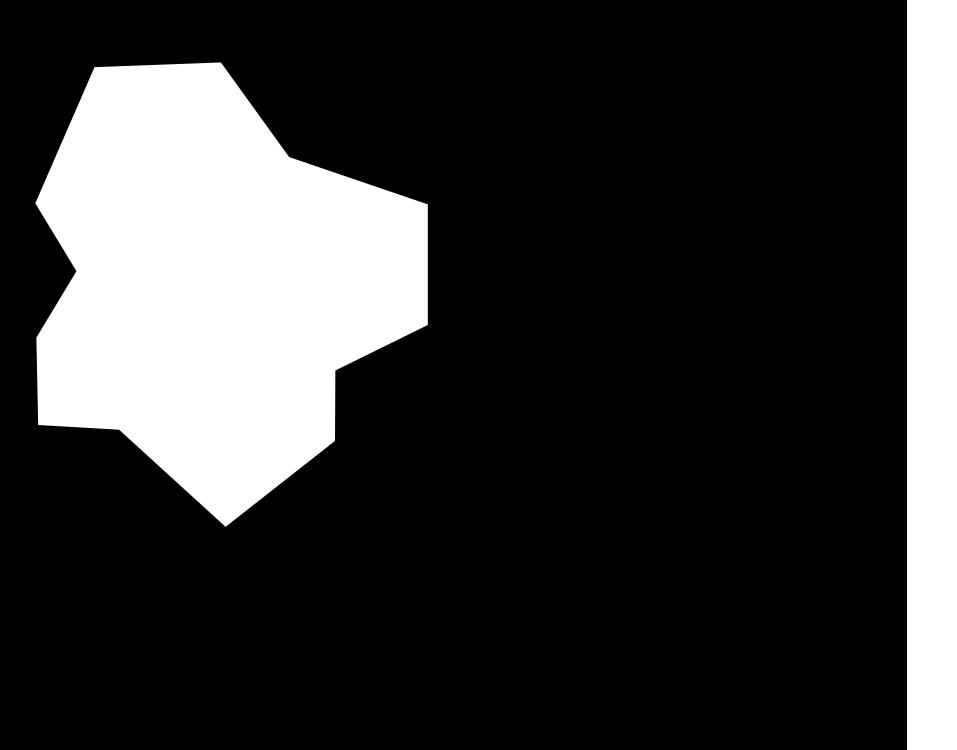




Synergy Hand-hammered polished brass, patinated brass and nickel, 2016 21 3/4"h x 65"w x 17 3/4"d 55cm x 165cm x 45cm

"Finding beauty in the most obscure of feelings, when you think you can't go lower, you really search and surely you can find -it within you- it's there ...The perfect balance of life."

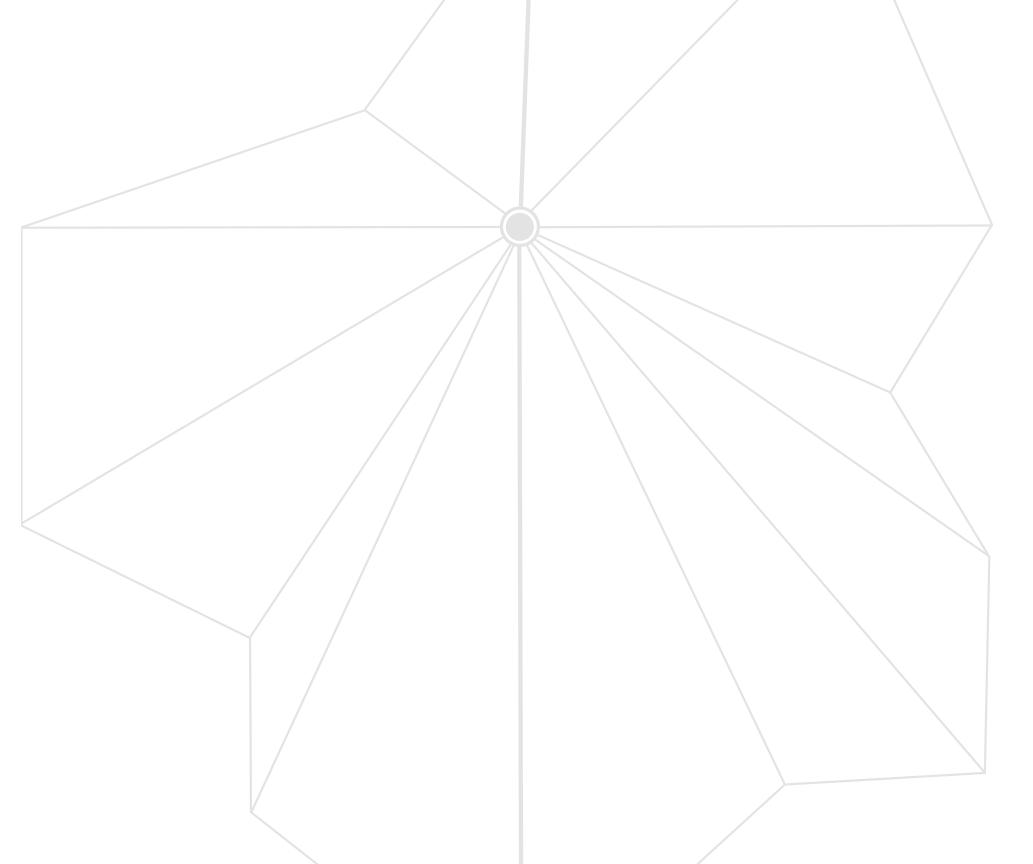




The Bullet Black lacquer, polished bronze, and cochinilla lacquer, 2016 55 1/8"h x 43 ½"w x 19 5/8"d 140cm x 110cm x 50cm



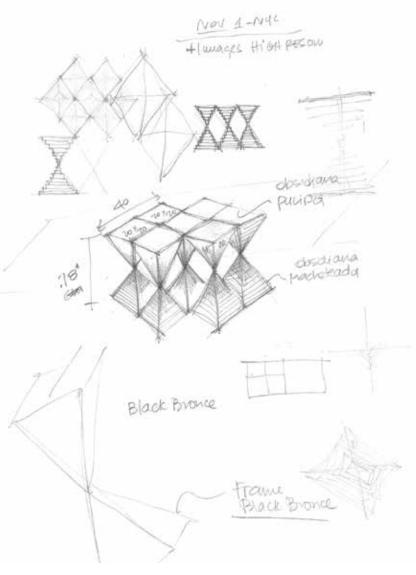




"When you see the *Eye of God*, you see yourself. And I think this is an exceptionally powerful idea in terms of both cultural history and pure design."







Eye of God Black bronze and hand-hammered black obsidian, 2016 17 3/4"h x 17 3/4"w x 17 3/4"d 45cm x 45cm x 45cm



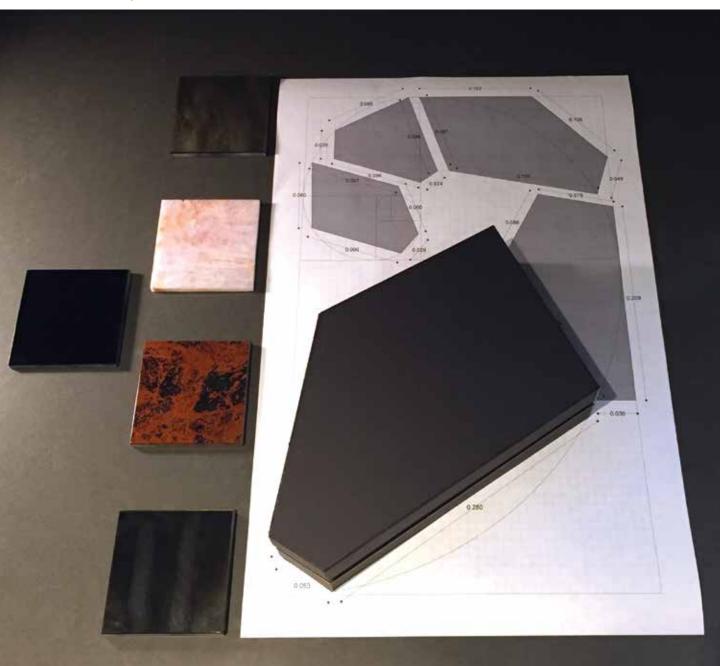


Silent A Polished bronze, black obsidian, golden obsidian, silver obsidian, red obsidian and pink quartz, 2016 2 3/4"h x 19 3/4"w x 12"d 7cm x 50cm x 30cm





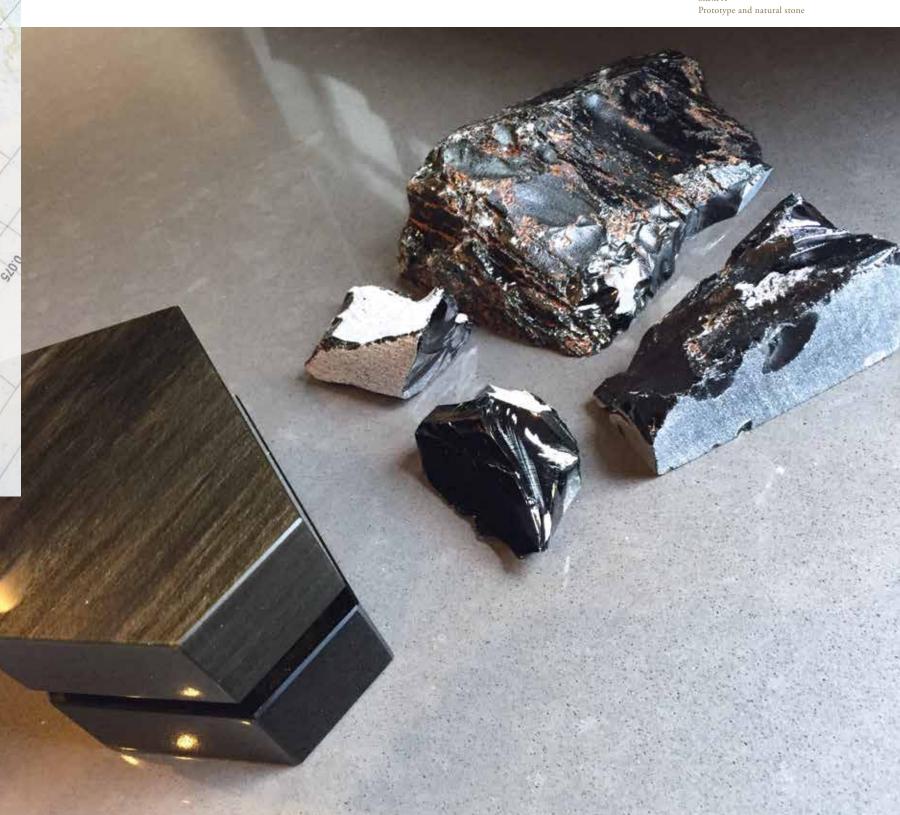
Silent A Development and material selection



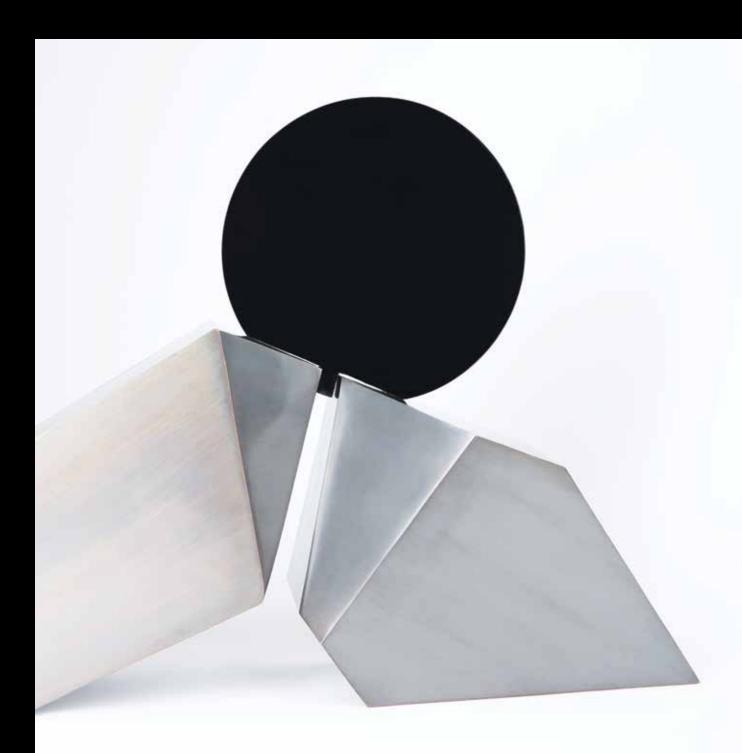


Silent A Production at obsidian workshop in Teotihuacan

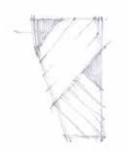








Serpent Bronze and black obsidian, 2016 12"h x 30 1/2"w x 3 1/2"d 30cm x 77cm x 9cm

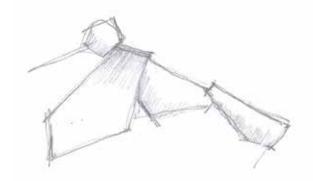








Quiet Hummingbird Polished bronze, black obsidian, and pink quartz, 2016 23 3/4"h x 8"w 60cm x 20cm









White Night Black steel, nickel and silver obsidian, 2016 35 3/4"h x 45 5/8"w x 17 3/4"d 91cm x 116cm x 45cm

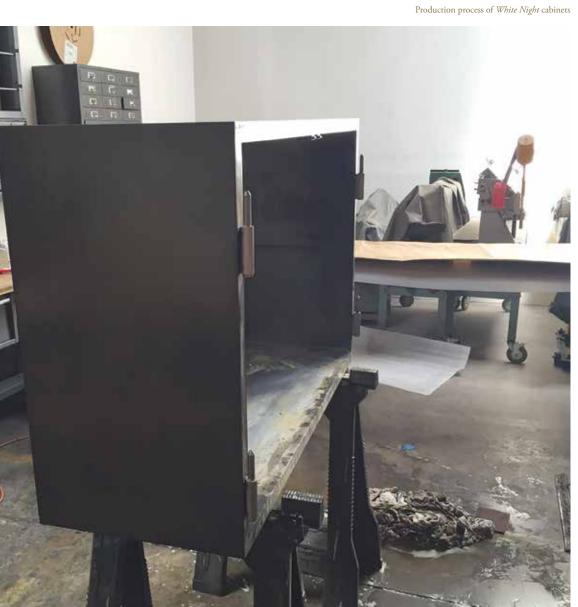


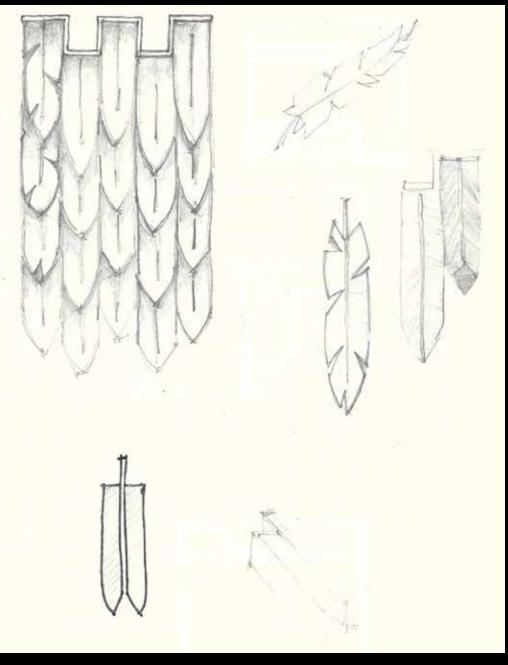
Bottom detail of White Night











Feather Wall (sketch drawing above) Bronze, black obsidian, golden obsidian, silver obsidian and pink quartz, 2015 82 3/4"h x 35 1/2"w x 2"d 210cm x 90cm x 5cm







BIOGRAPHY

GLORIA CORTINA

Gloria Cortina is a well-established and renowned interior designer based in Mexico City, where she is the principal of her eponymous design studio. Cortina holds a bachelor's degree in philosophy and aesthetics from the Universidad Iberoamericana (1997), Mexico City, which was followed by a degree in interior design (1999) from Parsons The New School for Design, New York City.

Following her education, Cortina gained experience working under the tutelage of acclaimed architects David Ling in New York City, and Ricardo Legorreta in Mexico City, before going on to form the multidisciplinary design firm A5 Arquitectura with a group of peers. Today, fully dedicated to her interior and furniture design practice through Gloria Cortina Estudio, she provides design services for luxury properties, anchored on her own bespoke furniture and lighting created in collaboration with local artisans and workshops to uphold the utmost standard of quality and design.

Favoring exquisite materials such as tropical woods, extraordinary stones, textured metals and rich textiles sourced both locally and worldwide, Cortina's blend of Old World sophistication and Mexican flare has affirmed her position as an arbiter of taste among the country's elite; her aesthetic reflects the cosmopolitan nature of contemporary life in Mexico. Following the philosophies of great Mexican masters such as Diego Rivera, Luis Barragán and Mathias Goeritz, Cortina similarly considers her work a consolidation of style in which she interprets motifs from a wide array of inspirations, from Cubism to Modernism to Mexico's own arts and crafts heritage. All of these influences combine to create a strikingly unique visual language.

Gloria Cortina's work evokes the harmony that exists in our own complexity and contrast. She manipulates volume and proportion, space, texture, color, and shadow or light, to motivate the senses and stimulate conversation in each piece. Her conviction in this regard speaks to the permanence of her design, both in the creation of a lasting product, and within the greater context of her milieu evolving a Mexican aesthetic movement.

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68

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> Designed by Robert Romit Printed in Canada

"Absolute contemplation, I really tried to see the connection between death and life/ugliness and beauty all carried by incredible emotions."

CRISTINA GRAJALES GALLERY