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High-contrast design — from  
New York to St. Moritz

**MIX**



The designer Kim Sang Hoon in his Gangnam, Seoul, studio, surrounded by colorful prototypes of his painted foam furniture and pieces from his "Meteorite" series.

# THE RENEGADES

Three firms in rising design communities — Seoul, Moscow, Athens — that are both refuting and refining the local aesthetic.

By Alice Newell-Hanson  
Photographs by Jana Romanova

KIM SANG HOON, 40, began developing monolithic sofas and knobby end tables in foam three years ago in secret. Though he is earning acclaim as a furniture maker — he showed his paint-splattered foam seats at Design Miami last December — he's still working his day job at the manufacturing company that his family has run in Seoul for three generations, making polyurethane foam used in mattresses and pillows. Working after hours in his Gangnam studio, Kim, who trained in fine art and design at Michigan's Cranbrook Academy of Art,



altered the chemical composition of the company's foam to adjust its firmness, then used the material to create building-block-like sectionals with varying levels of rigidity: the seats soft like a cushion, the backs hard and supportive. "They didn't know I was using it to make my own artwork," Kim says of his family. "My father wanted me to run the company."

Kim is breaking with tradition in broader ways, too. Before he began crafting foam furniture, he built biomorphic stools and screens from stacks of polished ash, birch and walnut wood that he

precisely contoured using a CNC machine to evoke rolling waves or gusts of wind. Such undulating shapes complied with the naturalistic aesthetic of classical South Korean design, which, he says, often echoes the organic curves of the country's mountains and streams. In contrast, his foam works — with their pockmarked surfaces and straight lines — seem unearthly, even extraterrestrial. "I don't think about Korean tradition at the moment," he says. "I want to create *new* Korean traditions."



# Objects of Common Interest

ATHENS, GREECE

DESIGN REPORT

PEOPLE



THE FIRST TIME Eleni Petaloti and Leonidas Trampoukis's son, Michalis, then a year old, encountered the designers' chubby foam Tube chair, shaped like an oversize doughnut peach upholstered in fuzzy white wool, he stuck his head straight through the hole at its center. They couldn't blame him: Petaloti and Trampoukis, who founded their interiors and industrial design firm Objects of Common Interest in 2015, create satisfyingly tactile furniture — a post-and-lintel stool made from glossy opalescent acrylic, a circular dining table of glass balanced on a neon pink steel frame — that invite unexpected interactions.

Based in Athens (with a second studio in Williamsburg, Brooklyn), the 37-year-old designers focus on manipulating materials such as marble, acrylic and glass to reveal surprising properties. Their first lighting collection, for example, which

they showed at this year's Collectible Design Fair in Brussels, consists of three glowing acrylic tubes, bent into a semicircle, a quarter circle and an elongated half-arch. Each can be used as either a wall, ceiling or floor lamp — and seem to shape-shift when viewed from different vantage points. "It's not just about the objects themselves," Trampoukis says. "It's about the feeling visitors have when they start moving around." For a solo exhibition at the ADAM — Brussels Design Museum that will open in February of next year, the couple plans to install a forest of transparent 10-foot-tall inflatable plastic shapes inspired by the anthropomorphic forms of Cycladic art, produced in the Aegean Islands from 3300 to 1100 B.C. Highlighting the handmade traditions of their country, especially as it recovers from economic crisis, is imperative to them: They fabricate most of their furniture in Greece,

often employing master craftspeople — a seventh-generation marble specialist, for instance — and are champions of Athens's vibrant creative scene. "After long years of darkness, it was tough," says Petaloti, "but the seeds have been planted and they're going to grow." ■

Above: Eleni Petaloti and Leonidas Trampoukis of Objects of Common Interest in their Athens studio, surrounded by their work. Below: the couple's Tube chair sits below their Tube Light III and beside a transparent prototype of their Standing Stone II.

