

Shhh the hope keeper, wall sculpture in anodized aluminium by architecture and design studio gt2P (great things to People)/ Galerie Gosserez.

Talent spotter

With Design Days opening in Dubai this month, fair director Cyril Zammit extols the virtues of international and local influences, the value of the one-of-a-kind and explains why he feels a bit like a football manager.

TEXT: LAURA VOLPI



Design Days, the first fair in the Middle East dedicated to collectible furniture and objects, looks set to raise the bar even higher in its third year.

"People here are attracted by contemporary design, much more than in other markets," says curator Cyril Zammit. "In Miami or Basel, for example, you will see many more historical pieces, whereas the majority of our exhibitors are doing contemporary design, because people here look for new, fresh, different pieces."

Paris-born Zammit worked at the Institut Français in Prague and London, at the Montreux Jazz Festival, contributed to create the UBS Verbier Festival Youth Orchestra, and worked with Art Basel, Art Basel Miami Beach, Design Miami/ and Abu Dhabi Art. He evidently has vast experience in the field and yet he is very humble when it comes to take credit for his work.

"I am a bit like a football manager," he smiles. "I collect the talent and the expertise, and put them together during five days in Dubai. I am learning every day."

Ben Floyd, the co-founder and chief executive of Art Dubai, reached out to Zammit with the idea that, as the art market was maturing, it was the right time for collectible design.

"Everywhere in the world," Zammit says, "when someone starts to pay attention to the quality of the artworks that they put on their walls, they will also pay attention to the objects that they put in their houses."

In 2013, Design Days featured 29 galleries presenting more than 600 pieces and attracted over 10,800 visitors.

This year, things will be even bigger, with the new *Discover* section, which focuses on a specific country, starting with France.

"Supported by the Institut Français, we have four emerging galleries displaying their amazing creations," Zammit says. "All are unique pieces, and so pure. I like pure lines, because complexity often hides behind simplicity."

Eight new countries have also joined the line-up, including 10 designers from Algeria. "They have never been seen around. It is a great opportunity for us to open the door to other Arabic countries."

The fair will occupy 3,600 square metres, and will include a daily program of talks and workshops.

"You can't see 34 exhibitors in one go," Zammit says. "People have to take time, engage, ask and discover the stories behind every item. Some pieces might look obvious, but you have no idea how complex it was to create them."

The lines between art and design are often blurred, but the fair director thinks the substantial difference is functionality.

"The line goes one side or another: if you decide to seat on a chair or if you just leave it on a pedestal. It is a personal interpretation, but I believe that design is made to be used," Zammit says.

"It is a new market, we create trends here. There is not a typical buyer, due to how international Dubai can be."

At Design Days the range of items is diverse, so it is hard to forecast what will



Les Bulles, in Carrare marble and blown glass, by Piergil Fourquié/Galerie Gosserez.



Design Days fair director Cyril Zammit.

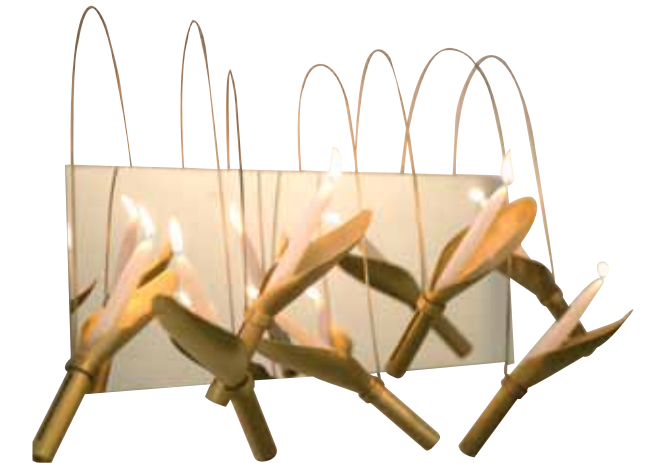
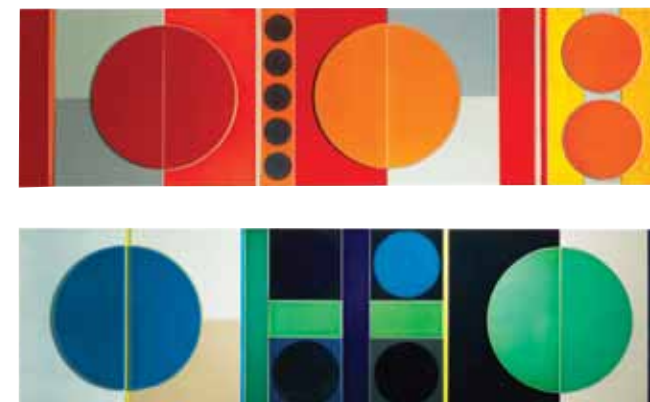
be successful. For example, last year, the Southern Guild Gallery, from South Africa, was extremely popular because of its blend of ethnic and urban pieces.

"I think going forward we will see more of the stability of metal, and a research on versatility, on pieces that follow our own changes," he says. "The world is so different these days, it is not settled forever, and it is great to have the chance to move around with it."

The Emirati design scene is also constantly growing. "There is huge talent here, and great schools, producing the voices of tomorrow. We are also lucky to have all the heavy industries on our own ground, so potentially we can produce everything, from steel to ceramic."

Design Days is encouraging the made-in-the-UAE motif. Tashkeel, supported by HH Sheikha Latifa Bint Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, has commissioned three Emirati designers to produce pieces for the fair, and HH Sheikha Wafa Hasher Al Maktoum, founder and director of FN Design, is asking 10 UAE-based artists to produce 10 pieces each, after taking inspiration from Mexican project *TenHundredThousand*, by design group La Metropolitana and designer Francisco Torres.

Chromatic Landscape, wall piece in glazed ceramic panels by Lubna Chowdhary/Crafts Council UK.



Un Grand Rectangle, in polished stainless steel, brass, candle, by Karim Chaya/Art Factum Gallery.



Console by Khaled Elmays/Iwan Maktabi Gallery.

Backgammon table in polyméthacrylate, by Jean-Claude Farhi/Galerie Yves Gastou.

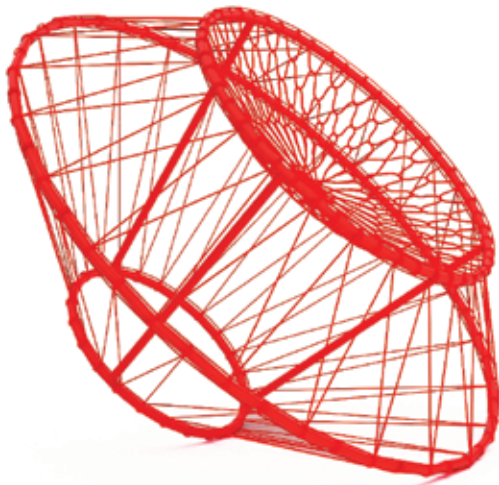




Cabinet in thermoformed polymer, by SOMOP/La Galerie Nationale.



Heritage sideboard in tiles, by Marco Costa/Nakkash Gallery.



Torus 3rd Generation in metallic tubular, parachute cord and macramé, by Hamza Drioueche/The Algerian Cultural Agency.



Graft II seat in sheet metal, spring and foam, by Adam Selmati/The Algerian Cultural Agency.

Magic Mushrooms, table centre piece by Wolfgang Joop/Wiener Silber Manufactur.



The value of new designs is likely to increase as the years go by.

"Galleries choose their designers wisely, as they invest in producing one piece, sometimes going through many prototypes before the final version," Zammit explains. "They choose only designers that they know will grow in value. Those who bought a Ron Arad or a Mark Newson 10 years ago now have pieces worth thousands of dollars."

Of course, owning a collectible has great cultural and practical value. At Design Days, historical pieces, such as those by Warren Platner or Jean Royère, are referenced and indexed into a national grid, and upon purchase the buyer receives a certificate of authenticity.

"Jean Royère did a lot of private interiors for celebrities in Egypt and Lebanon in the 1960s, but he also did the private apartments of the shah in Iran, so there are huge stories behind these pieces," Zammit says.

Design Days will open its doors from March 17-21 at The Venue, on Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Boulevard, with **identity** as one of the official media partners. **ID**

OTTO+ in polypropylene, by Marco Bruno and Simone Carena/VCU Qatar.

