Tales from a design weekend in the Hamptons: Nomad lands at The Watermill Center

Itinerant design fair Nomad made its USA debut with an inaugural edition at Robert Wilson's Watermill Center. Here's what went down

By Stephanie Murg | Published June 30, 2026 In Features

When you purchase through links on our site, we may earn an affiliate commission. Here's how it works.

Fields of Vision, a site-specific commission by Rachel Hayes, presented by Giorgio Armani
(Image credit: Ivan Erofeev, courtesy of Nomad)

Share Newsletter

ROLEX Wallpaper*
DATEJUST
Rolex Oyster Perpetual Datejust – A Watch that Made History
BUY NOW

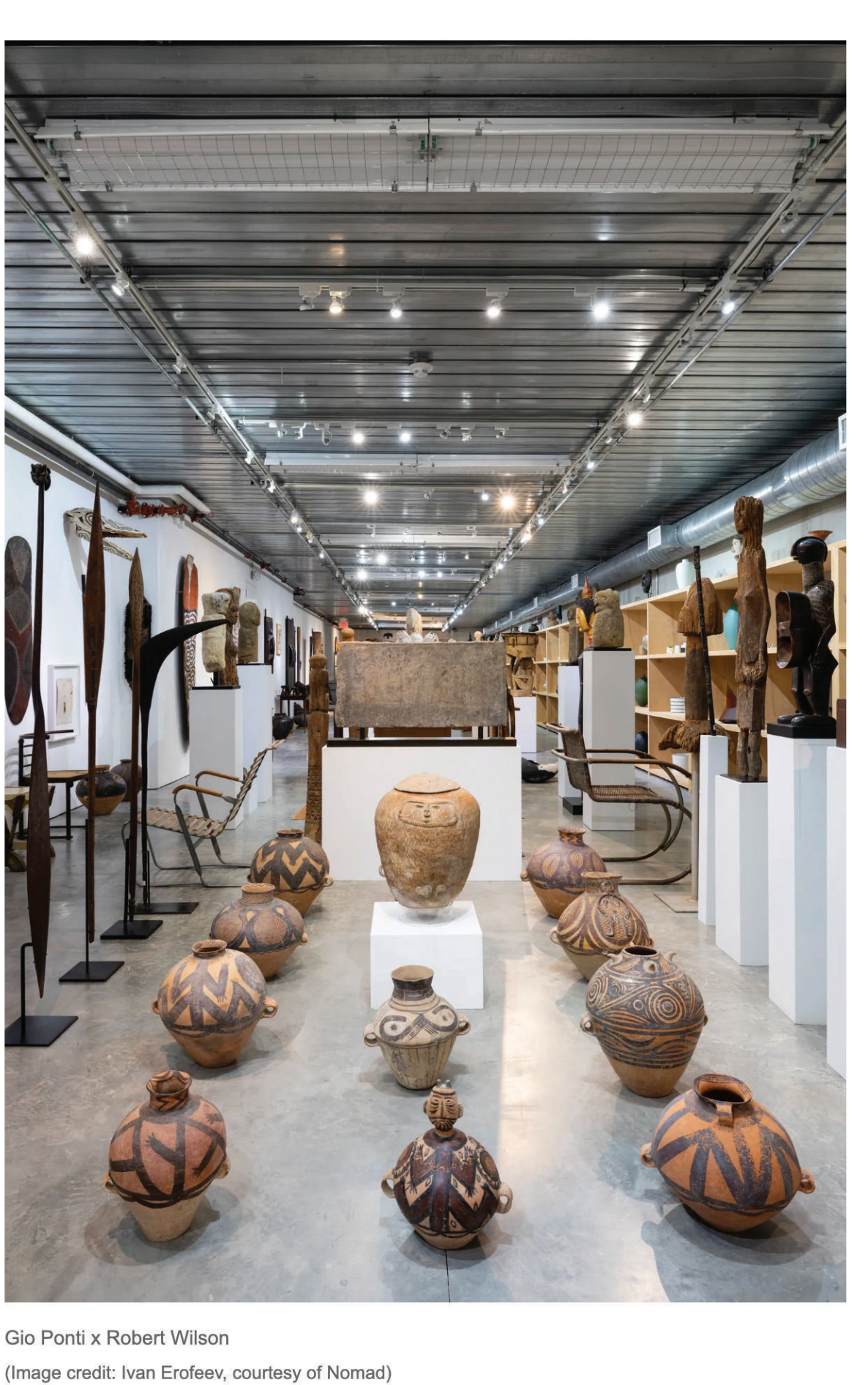
Robert Wilson was the ultimate nomad. The Texas-born, Pratt-educated artist and theatre-maker moved easily and always: between cities and continents, cultures and disciplines, the expressive and the elusive, defying boundaries through the force of his vision and a compelling charisma. And so it's fitting that The Watermill Center, the laboratory for creative thinking that Wilson founded in 1992 in an abandoned Western Union building on New York's Long Island and described as his 'greatest artistic achievement', was the setting for the first American edition of Nomad, the globe-trotting showcase for art and collectible design.

Nomad makes USA debut

(Image credit: Ivan Erofeev, courtesy of Nomad)

Powered by extraordinary destinations, ranging from the Monaco villa once occupied by Karl Lagerfeld (another nomad *par excellence*) to the decommissioned modernist terminal at Abu Dhabi International Airport, nine-year-old design fair Nomad has emerged as the anti-fair. It doesn't layer atop a site so much as nestle and immerse itself within it, soaking up the power of a place to illuminating effects.

The prospect of a stateside debut at Watermill, home to a year-round artist residency programme and funded in part by one of the most highly anticipated bacchanals of any summer in the Hamptons, was suggested to Nomad co-founder and director Nicolas Bellavance-Lecompte by a trustee of the centre some years ago and ultimately blessed by Wilson in spring last year, before his death on 31 July 2025 at the age of 83. (An age at which, he'd told Wallpaper* in an interview at Watermill earlier that year, he had 'more work than ever', including an installation destined for Salone del Mobile.)



Gio Ponti x Robert Wilson
(Image credit: Ivan Erofeev, courtesy of Nomad)

'I think Robert Wilson liked the concept of Nomad very much, because it aligns with his way of being interdisciplinary and combining different cultures. We have a lot of common ground,' said Bellavance-Lecompte, an architect and curator. 'It was a whole process to consider how we could come here without invading, to do it in a respectful way that could also support and promote his work, and now to expand his legacy.'

Art, design and architecture at The Watermill Center

(Image credit: Ivan Erofeev, courtesy of Nomad)

An architect of time and space across hundreds of performances around the world, Wilson viewed The Watermill Center as 'my most concrete and accessible legacy'. He boiled down the institution's mission to four foundational principles: honour the present, look to the past, support the local community, and support the global community.

Wilson first came upon the ten-acre property in the mid-1980s, drawn to Long Island's East End by the beautiful light and a desire to trade Manhattan loft living for natural surroundings. In the crumbling, U-shaped industrial building – once a research hub that from 1925 until its closure in 1965 developed innovations including the high-speed fax machine – he discerned an appealing architectural simplicity and a beguiling surplus of windows.

Retaining the original footprint, he embarked on a 15-year project to rebuild it, inspired in part by the work of Philip Johnson, in whose New York architecture office Wilson worked as an assistant in the early 1960s. A barn-like artists' residence, designed by Wilson in collaboration with the architect Roger Ferris, was completed in 2021.

Wallpaper* Newsletter

Receive our daily digest of inspiration, escapism and design stories from around the world direct to your inbox.

Your Email Address SIGN ME UP

☐ Contact me with news and offers from other Future brands
☐ Receive email from us on behalf of our trusted partners or sponsors

By submitting your information you agree to the Terms & Conditions and Privacy Policy and are aged 16 or over.

(Image credit: Ivan Erofeev, courtesy of Nomad)

ROLEX Wallpaper*
DATEJUST
Rolex Oyster Perpetual Datejust – A Watch that Made History
Published by Wallpaper*, editions in English and French are now available to buy online exclusively at WallpaperSTORE*.
BUY NOW

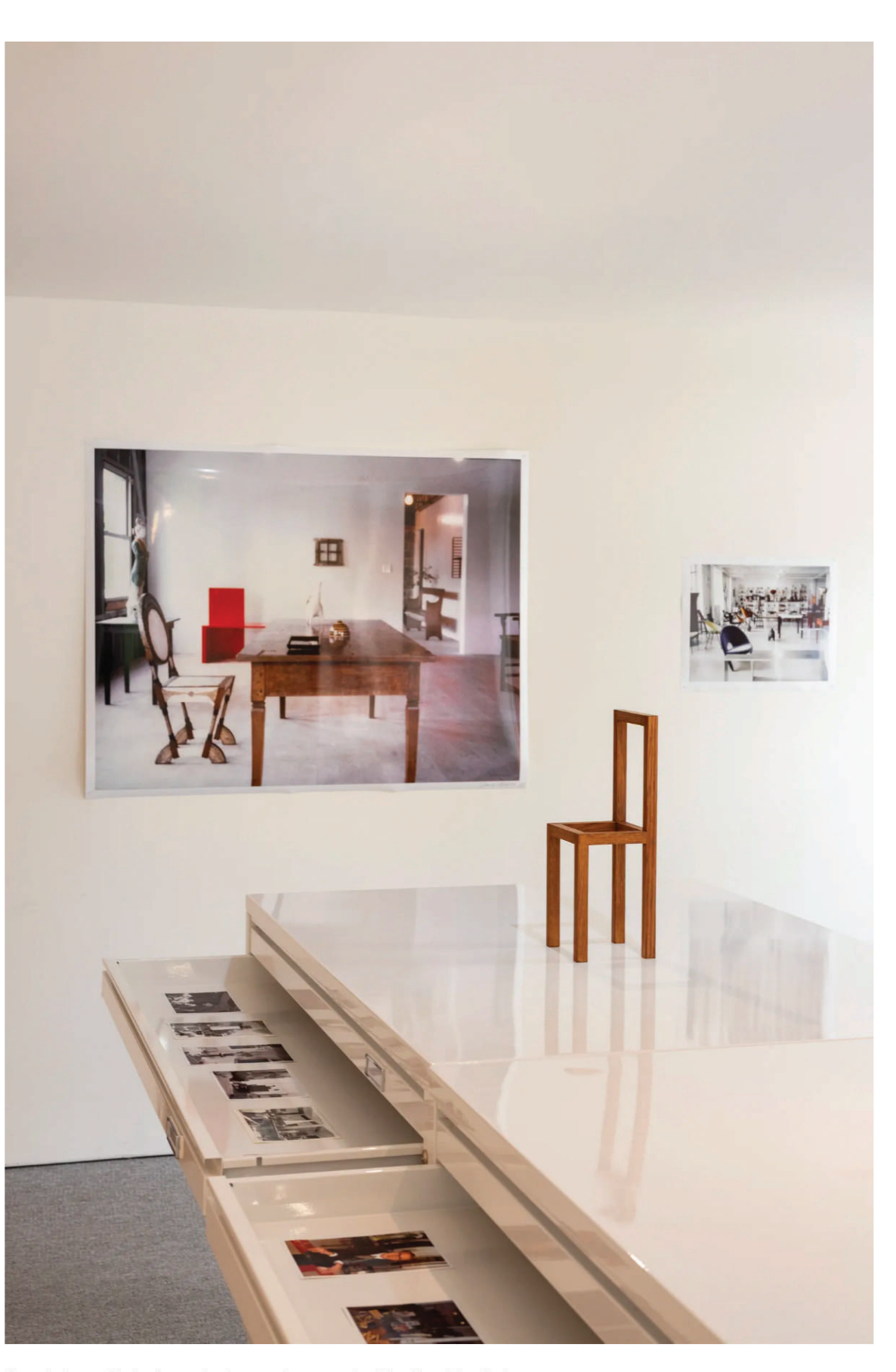
Visitors to the inaugural Nomad Hamptons arrived at the centre as Wilson intended: by walking along a lush woodland path studded with monumental sculptures from his collection of more than 6,000 art and design objects, before ascending the stairs to reach what he dubbed the 'Knee building', a zinc-sided structure that acts as a joint between the north and south wings.

With a floor lined in river stones, it is punctured by perpetually open doorways that afford a clear east-west view through the building. A veil of cherry red heralded Nomad's four-day residency (25-28 June 2026), and in the trees fluttered American artist Rachel Hayes' vibrant and dreamy textile collages, a special commission that also made for picnic blankets with a Rauschenbergian flair.

'The concept is always to dialogue with the architecture where we go to create an experience,' said Bellavance-Lecompte. In the Hamptons, that experience was shaped by a thoughtfully curated group of 32 exhibitions, each one unfolding in its own nook of the Watermill campus, including the third-floor eyrie that served as Wilson's summer home. Opened for private tours guided by Noah Khoshbin, the light-filled space is a mesmerising mélange in which a petite René Magritte cloudscape can join a Bruce Nauman screenprint to float above a Navajo blanket, smoke-fired ceramic vessels by Bonnie Lynch, and a stainless-steel mesh chaise longue designed by Wilson in 1987 for his production of *Parzival* in Hamburg. And that's just the first room. (Wilson furniture fans can find more in his self-explanatory 2025 book, *Chairs*.)

'Bob started collecting when he was 12 years old. The collection is a bit like Andy Warhol's or André Breton's in that all periods, mediums, and cultures are represented,' said Khoshbin, the centre's curator, who also organised a presentation of works from Wilson's vast archive in a lower-level space. 'His mission and his legacy for the artists who are in residence is that they have this collection as a resource – you can touch the works, move the works, have it in your studio or your bedroom.'

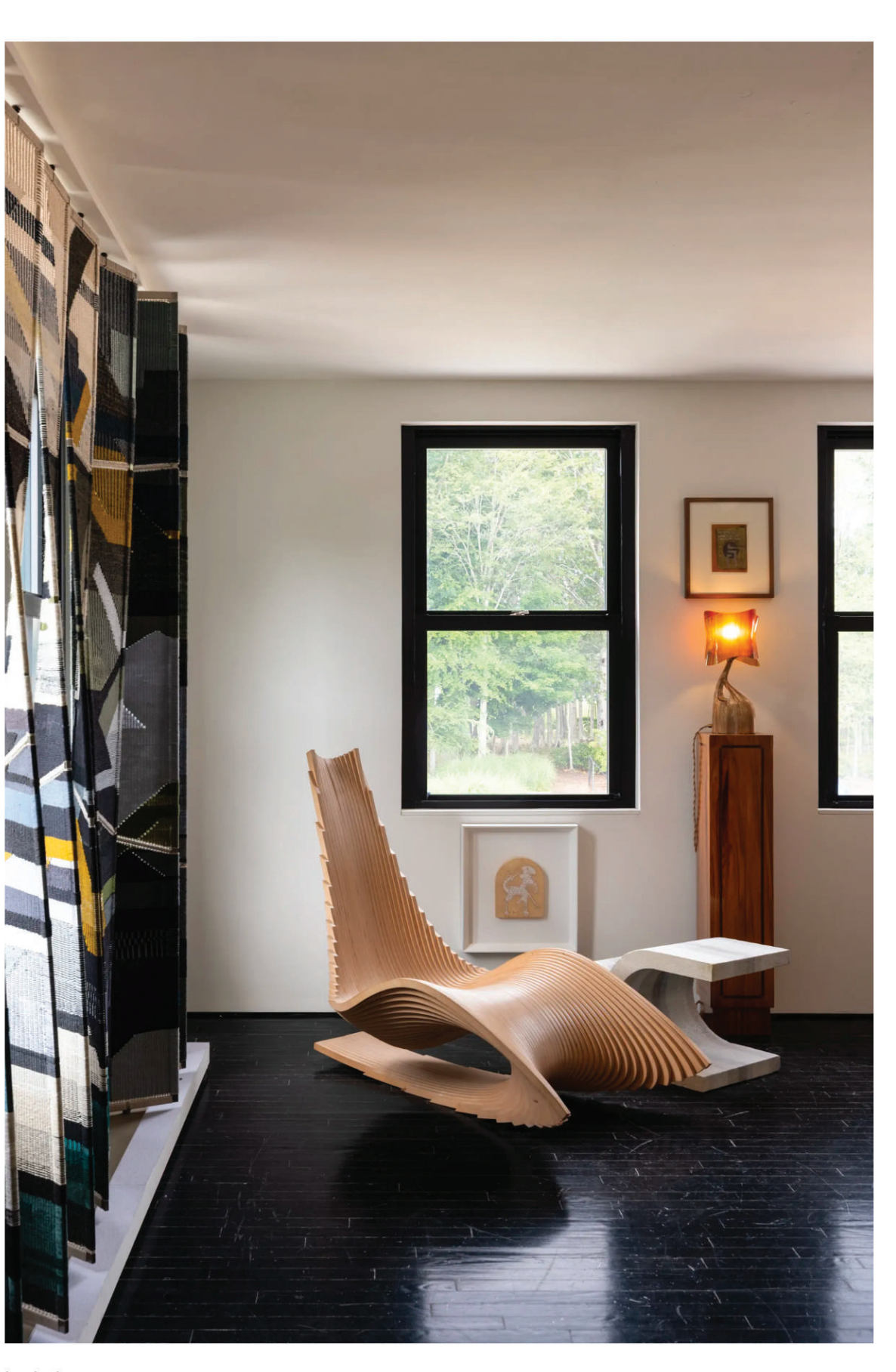
A visual tribute to Robert Wilson



Dominique Nabokov photography curated by Sophie Dries
(Image credit: Ivan Erofeev, courtesy of Nomad)

The photography of Dominique Nabokov offered additional vantage points on Wilson's singular approach to living and working (spoiler alert: the two were inextricable). Curated by Paris-based architect Sophie Dries, who instantly ingratiated herself to seasoned Wilson followers on the fair's VIP day by toting a fluorescent Louis Vuitton handbag from the edition he designed in 2002 at the invitation of Marc Jacobs, the images were accompanied by Wilson-designed objects ranging from iconic chairs ('as important as a character' in most of his productions, he bristled when they were referred to as 'props') to striking glass works made in Marseille during his artist residency at CIRVA (Centre International de Recherche sur le Verre et les Arts Plastiques) that spanned 1994 to 2005.

Nomad in the Hamptons

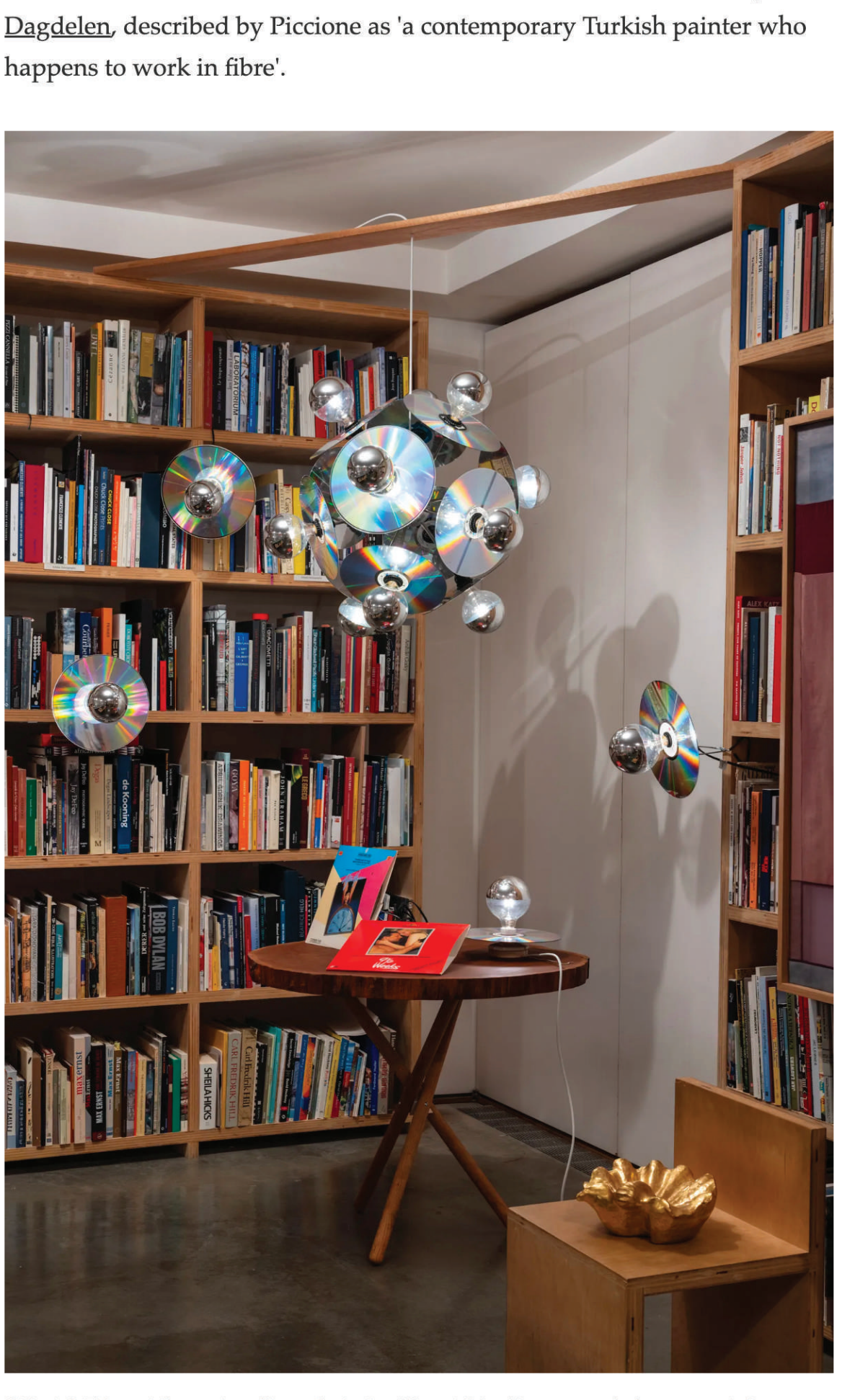


Le Lab
(Image credit: Ivan Erofeev, courtesy of Nomad)

ROLEX Wallpaper*
DATEJUST
Rolex Oyster Perpetual Datejust – A Watch that Made History
Published by Wallpaper*, editions in English and French are now available to buy online exclusively at WallpaperSTORE*.
BUY NOW

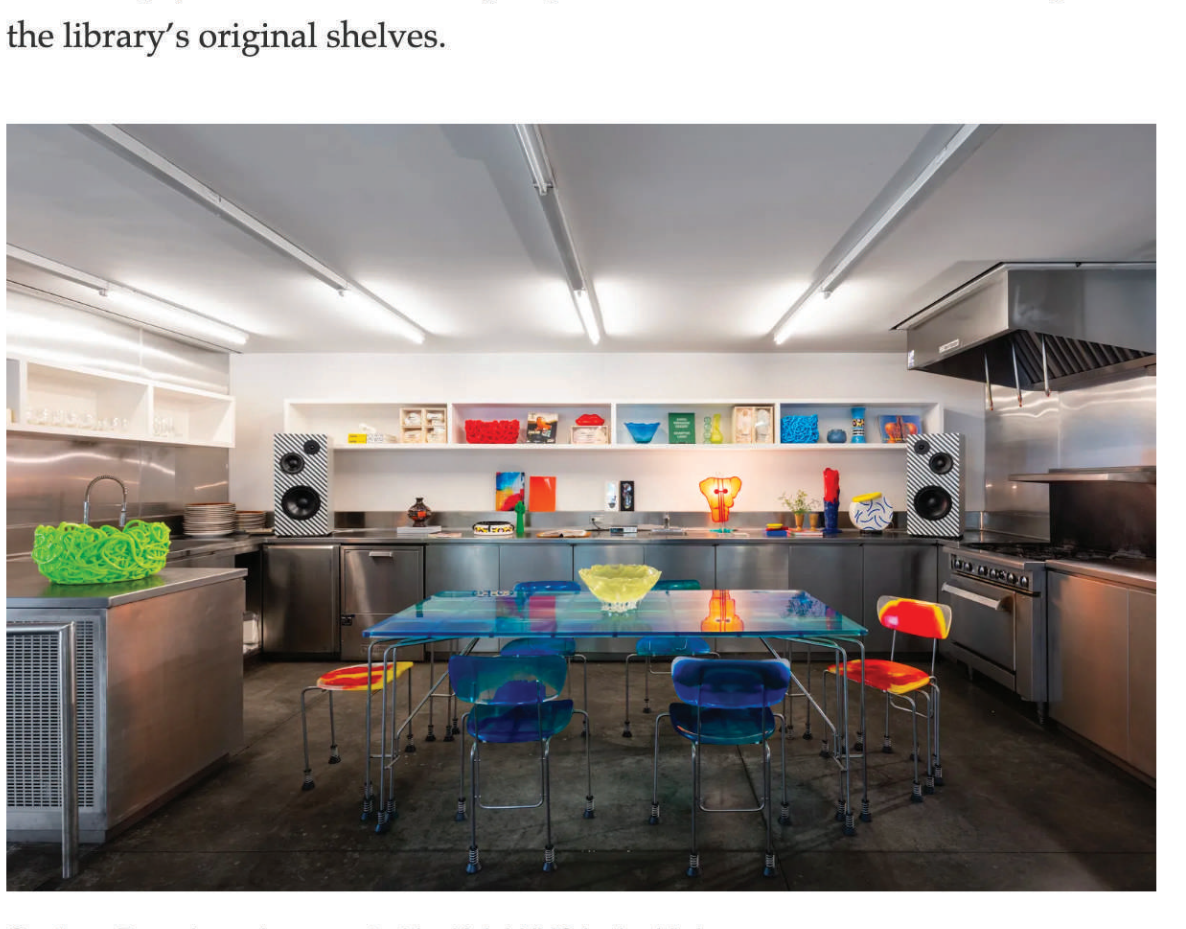
For most exhibiting galleries, 'site specific' was the prevailing ethos. Cairo's Le Lab was given a room anchored by a massive wooden table that Wilson designed for, and built within, the space. 'This table will never leave this room. It's here for good,' said Russell Piccione, who curated the presentation, titled 'Through a Collector's Eye', with gallery founder Rasheed Kamel. 'Knowing that it was going to be in our room influenced a lot of decisions: materiality, surface, and depth, a certain soulfulness.'

Among the works orbiting the table were Ibriham El-Salahi's *Pain Relief Drawings*, etched on scrap paper during the African artist's 2016-18 incarceration in Khartoum, and a steel-framed louvered wall work by Betil Dagdelen, described by Piccione as 'a contemporary Turkish painter who happens to work in fibre'.



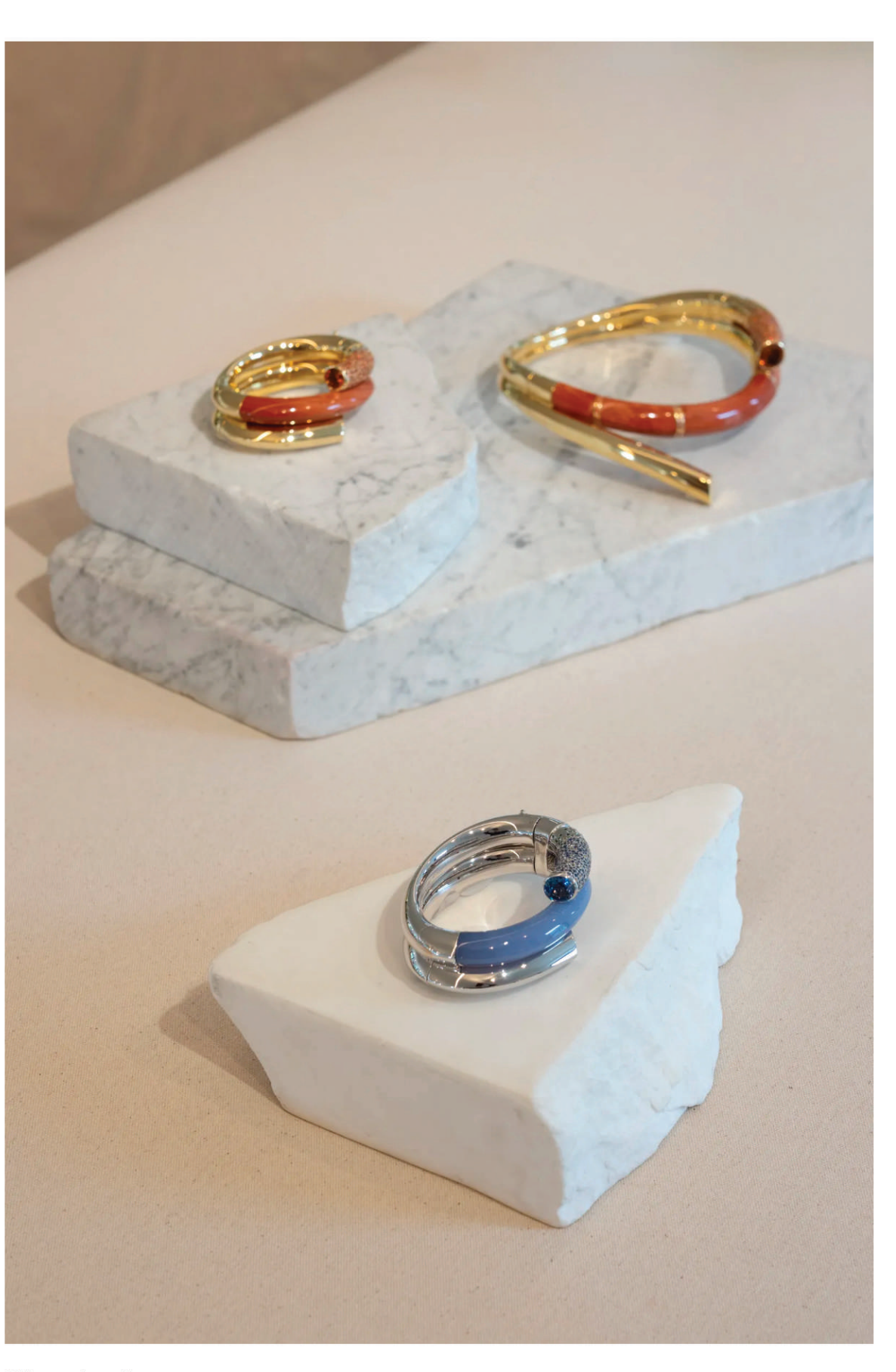
Object & Thing at the sunken library featuring 'Disco Vision' lamps, made from upcycled LaserDiscs, by Christian Wassmann
(Image credit: Ivan Erofeev, courtesy of Nomad)

The centre's serene sunken art library hosted Abby Bangser's Object & Thing, which celebrated material experimentation and the collecting impulse with works that included a special Watermill edition of 'Disco Vision' upcycled-LaserDisc lamps by Christian Wassmann, who designed the library's original shelves.



Gaetano Pesce's work, presented by Kalei NYC in the kitchen
(Image credit: Ivan Erofeev, courtesy of Nomad)

On the other side of the space, amid volumes dedicated to matters anthropological, theatrical, and sartorial, was the unmistakable work of Gaetano Pesce. Presented by Kalei NYC in collaboration with the designer's estate, the forms of the colourful resin chair and jumbo throne were inspired by the frankincense trees native to Oman. More Pesce was on view in the centre's kitchen, reimagined as a joyful haven for Italian Radical Design and spritzed regularly with a fragrance from Amouage – a precursor to the scent-embedded Pesce pieces slated to launch soon.



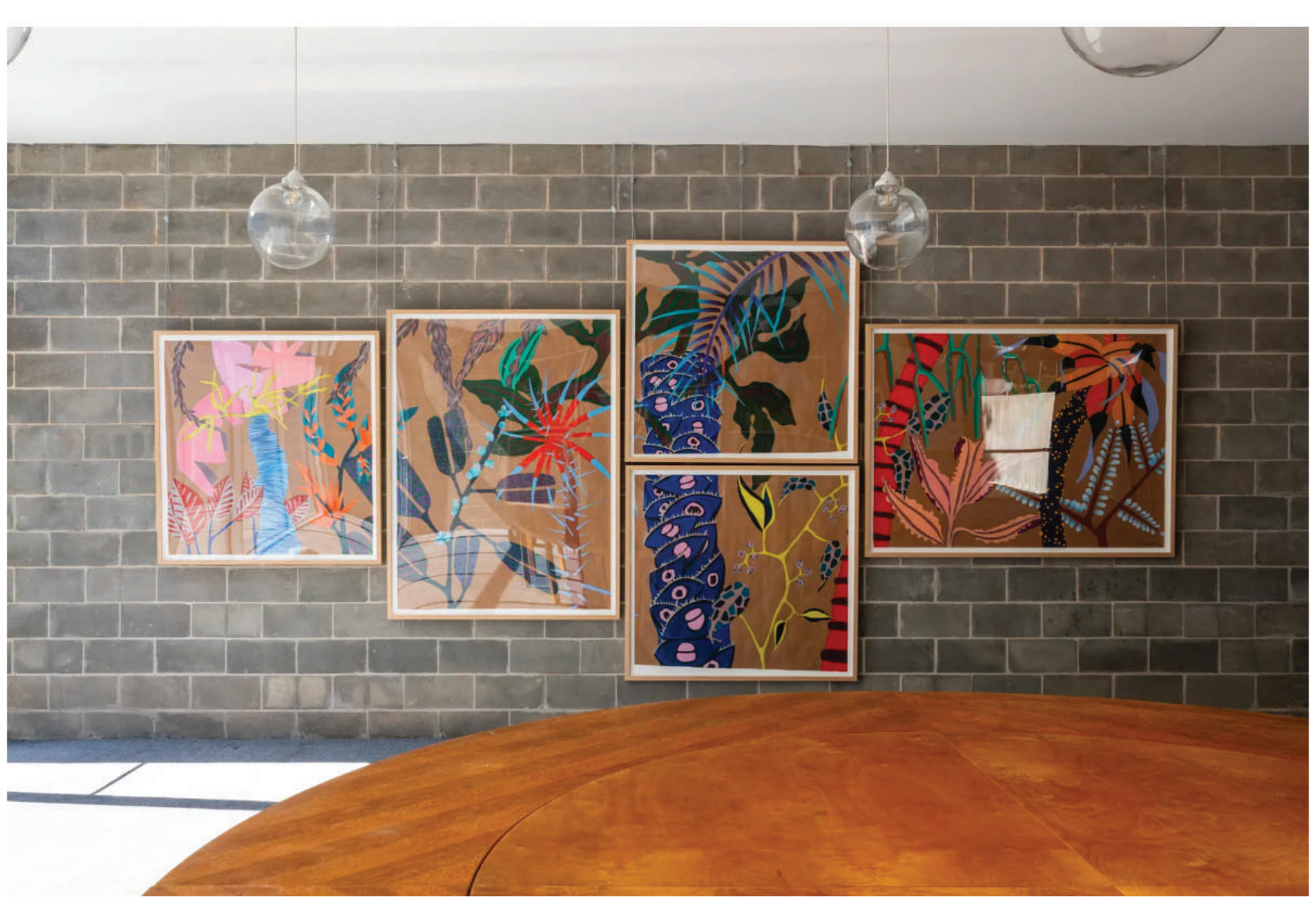
Tabayer jewellery
(Image credit: Ivan Erofeev, courtesy of Nomad)

Other highlights included Tabayer jewellery, with finessed gold forms inspired by modernist sculpture and inlaid with otherworldly morsels of chrysoprase, blue chalcedony, and red jasper. At the Maison Gerard nook, Ayala Serfaty's patinated bronze console, part of her new 'Janus' series, had the lightness of a lily pad and the organic intricacy of multiplying cells.

Auréce Vettier by Spaceless Gallery
(Image credit: Ivan Erofeev, courtesy of Nomad)

Ippolita Rostagno with Piotrek Panszczyk Burke
(Image credit: Ivan Erofeev, courtesy of Nomad)

Aurèce Vettier (an art project founded in 2019 by Paul Mouginot and presented at Nomad by the Spaceless Gallery of New York and Paris) deploys algorithms to inform the creation of forms ranging from an Aubusson tapestry to a tree-like outdoor sculpture that evoked a glitchy mash-up of Claude Lalanne and Ingo Maurer. New York-based jewellery designer Ippolita Rostagno joined forces with Piotrek Panszczyk Burke on an installation of wearable nuggets of eroded gold, harvested from the Yukon using placer mining. 'Please touch them!' they encouraged.

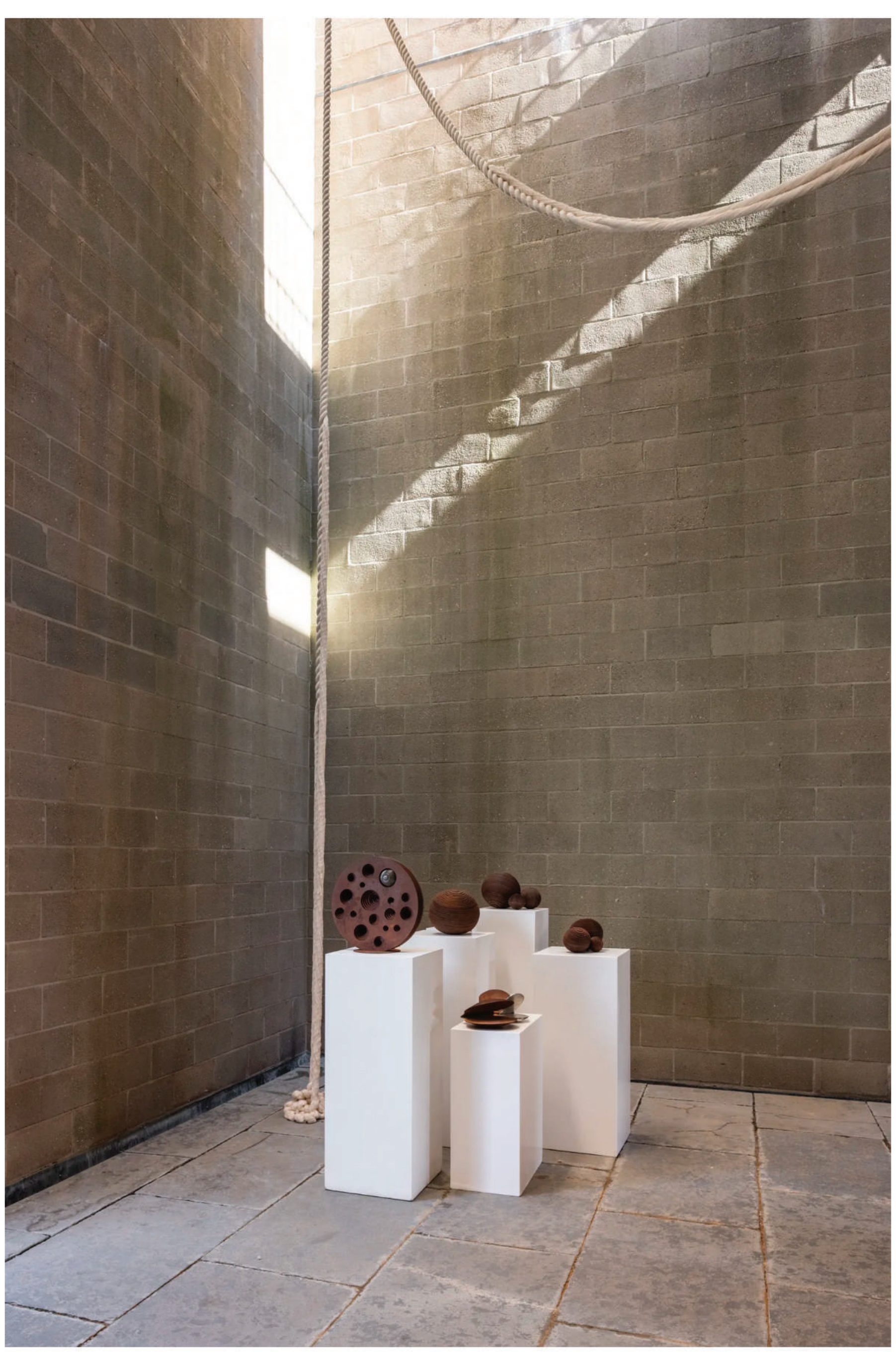


Botanical series by Sydney Albertini for Sisley Paris
(Image credit: Ivan Erofeev, courtesy of Nomad)

'Giorgio Armani/Unveiled' curated by Abby Bangser, featuring wall pieces by Jonathan Kline
(Image credit: Ivan Erofeev, courtesy of Nomad)

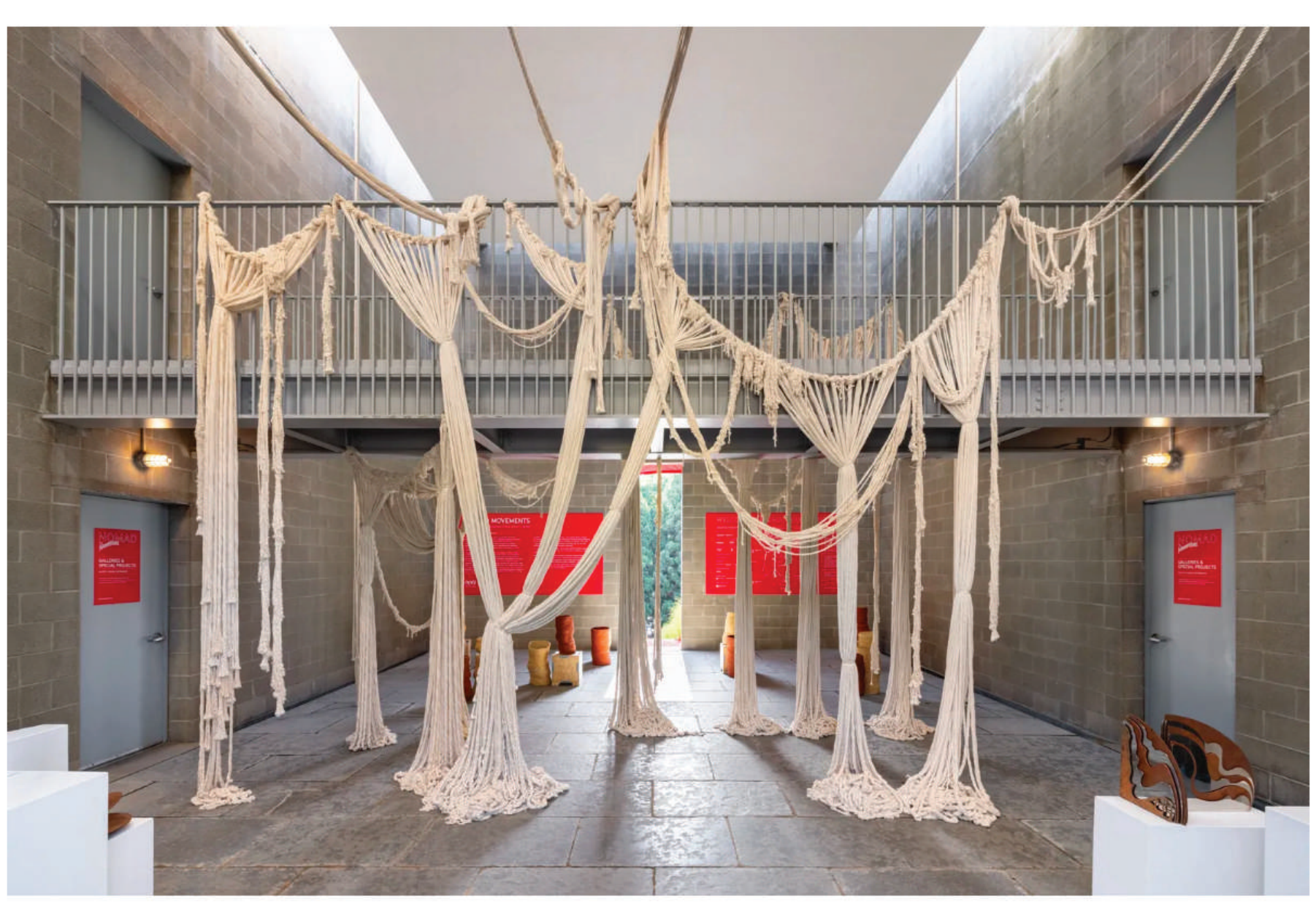
Corporate partners were intelligently integrated. Sisley Paris tapped French-born artist Sydney Albertini, based in nearby Amagansett, for an installation of lively and large-scale botanical compositions that lined the walls of the centre's dining room, while Giorgio Armani, a longtime Wilson collaborator, explored the connections between art, design, and craftsmanship with the help of commissioned works by New York-based artists Ariel Dearie and Jonathan Kline. Curated by Abby Bangser and inspired by the natural setting of The Watermill Center, the Armani presentation placed the new works in conversation with Armani/Casa pieces in Murano glass and Limoges porcelain.

Kline, a basket maker whose chosen medium is black ash, created a suite of wall-mounted open-weave grids using the inner layers of the tree, which are distinguished by their intriguing grain and irregular contour. His process shares elements prized by Wilson: slowness, contemplation, and the endless possibilities unlocked by the meeting of vertical and horizontal. 'With basket weaving, there's a lot of time between concept and realisation. You often don't really know where it's going,' said Kline. 'Baskets kind of grow more than you create them. They give you time to ponder.'



'Rooted Movements', developed with Abu Dhabi's Department of Culture and Tourism
(Image credit: Ivan Erofeev, courtesy of Nomad)

A place to ponder when entering, exiting, or traversing the Knee building was created by 'Rooted Movements'. Developed with Abu Dhabi's Department of Culture and Tourism, the presentation brought together the work of Emirati artists Afra Al Dhaheri, Zuhoor Al Sayegh, and Azza Al Qubaisi. 'Our objective is always to link the destinations where we go around the world, and it was important for us to bring a presence from the Middle East,' said Bellavance-Lecompte, who in 2011 founded Carwan in Beirut as the first contemporary design gallery in the Middle East.



Afra Al Dhaheri's cotton rope installations
(Image credit: Ivan Erofeev, courtesy of Nomad)

Al Dhaheri, a native of Abu Dhabi and a 2023 participant in The Watermill Center's flagship International Summer Program, created cotton rope installations that cascaded in banded, hair-like bundles from the industrial catwalk, their deliberately untwisted ends frizzled and pooled on the cool stone floor. The suspensions created arches to walk under, directing movement through a space infused with fragrant incense. Recalled Al Dhaheri, 'It's like Bob used to say, "Interesting things happen when people cross paths".' ✱

TOPICS

USA

Stephanie Murg

Stephanie Murg is a writer and editor based in New York who has contributed to Wallpaper* since 2011. She is the co-author of Pradasphere (Abrams Books), and her writing about art, architecture, and other forms of material culture has also appeared in publications such as Flash Art, ARTnews, Vogue Italia, Smithsonian, Metropolis, and The Architect's Newspaper. A graduate of Harvard, Stephanie has lectured on the history of art and design at institutions including New York's School of Visual Arts and the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston.