

SURROUNDED IN HER MILAN STUDIO BY THE ART OF FRIENDS AND SELF, NATHALIE DU PASQUIER, **OPPOSITE**, HAS RECENTLY BEEN CONSTRUCTING WOODEN EVOCATIONS OF HER STILL-LIFE PAINTINGS FOR A SHOW IN LUXEMBOURG. (SEE OUR STORY ON HER COLLABORATION WITH MELBOURNE ART STORE THIRD DRAWER DOWN ON PAGE 132.)



In Living Colour

THE ETHICS OF A POSTMODERNIST MOVEMENT SEEKING FUN AND FREEDOM IN DESIGN STILL UNDERPIN THE WORK OF ONE OF ITS FOUNDERS 25 YEARS ON

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THE BORDEAUX-BORN, Milan-based artist Nathalie du Pasquier is busy in her studio finishing a series of wooden constructs for her late-September show at Galerie Lucien Schweitzer in Luxembourg. The third-floor studio, in the heart of shades-of-grey Milan, is a 30-minute walk from du Pasquier's apartment and blessed with big windows, high ceilings and a southern orientation that affords all-day evenness of light. It connects to a kitchen and a corresponding space inhabited by her husband, George Sowden, the Leeds-born industrial designer who came to Milan in 1970 to work with Olivetti (then under the design stewardship of Ettore Sottsass) and stayed.

The pair are founding members of the Memphis Movement – a radical design collective recently described by the *New York Times* as “bad boys and two girls fooling around with Postmodernism in the 1980s”. Their “fooling around” spawned offspring so alien and era-affecting that London's Victoria & Albert Museum has seen fit to headline with these naughty boys and girls in its upcoming retrospective ‘Postmodernism: Style and Subversion 1970–1990’.

Whether you love or loathe ‘PoMo’ and its flamboyant departure from ‘objective truths’, Sowden and du Pasquier played purposefully with the signifiers of time and class and made it okay for all future form to have fun. “Memphis happened to me at the starting point of my adult life, so I can say, even though it lasted only six or seven years, it had a big impact on my transformation,” says du Pasquier, recalling her arrival in 1979 in Milan as a young au pair hoping to get a job in publishing. “I am French and in France people are full of respect for the ‘court’... the ministry of culture is the avant-garde. I was lucky to be able to develop outside France.



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ALTHOUGH DU PASQUIER'S NEW TIMBER CONSTRUCTS VERGE ON MINIMALISM, **THIS PAGE**, THE DYNAMISM OF HER COLOUR AND SHAPE HARK BACK TO HER BUSIER MEMPHIS DESIGNS.

WHEN THE MEMPHIS GROUP BEGAN TO WIND DOWN IN 1986, DU PASQUIER STARTED PAINTING, FOCUSING IN PARTICULAR ON STILL LIVES, **THIS PAGE**, AND HAS STAYED ON THAT COURSE EVER SINCE. PAINTING THE OBJECTS OF DOMESTIC FAMILIARITY, SHE INTERPLAYS SOLID AND VOID, EXTERIOR AND INTERIOR IN HER THIRD-FLOOR STUDIO FLOODED WITH SOUTHERN LIGHT, **OPPOSITE PAGE**.



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While du Pasquier questions her status as a designer – "I was not educated as a specialist and I tend to do what I want" – she comments that, even after directing all creativity to the canvas in 1986 (just before Memphis's founding father Sottsass dismantled the group), objects kept creeping back. "I was painting still lifes, arrangements of things, and now I build things that I represent in my paintings – more still lifes."

Her serene works tell of the legacy of Italian artist Giorgio Morandi – unremarkable objects in remarkable relationships – of the subliminal seep of De Stijl abstraction and a lingering Memphis protest against mass production and marketability. "I am interested in 'harmony,'" she says of the endless recycle, repaint and reconstitution of parts required to reach it. "I'm interested in things being well together in composition."

Harking back to her Memphis makings, du Pasquier believes her work has evolved but not really changed. "The sophistication came from the ideas underlying the project, not the means of fabrication. There was no computer to give a first glimpse... it was a surprise for the designer as much as the public. It was an experiment." And it still is. *VL*

