

PIN-UP

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Moments

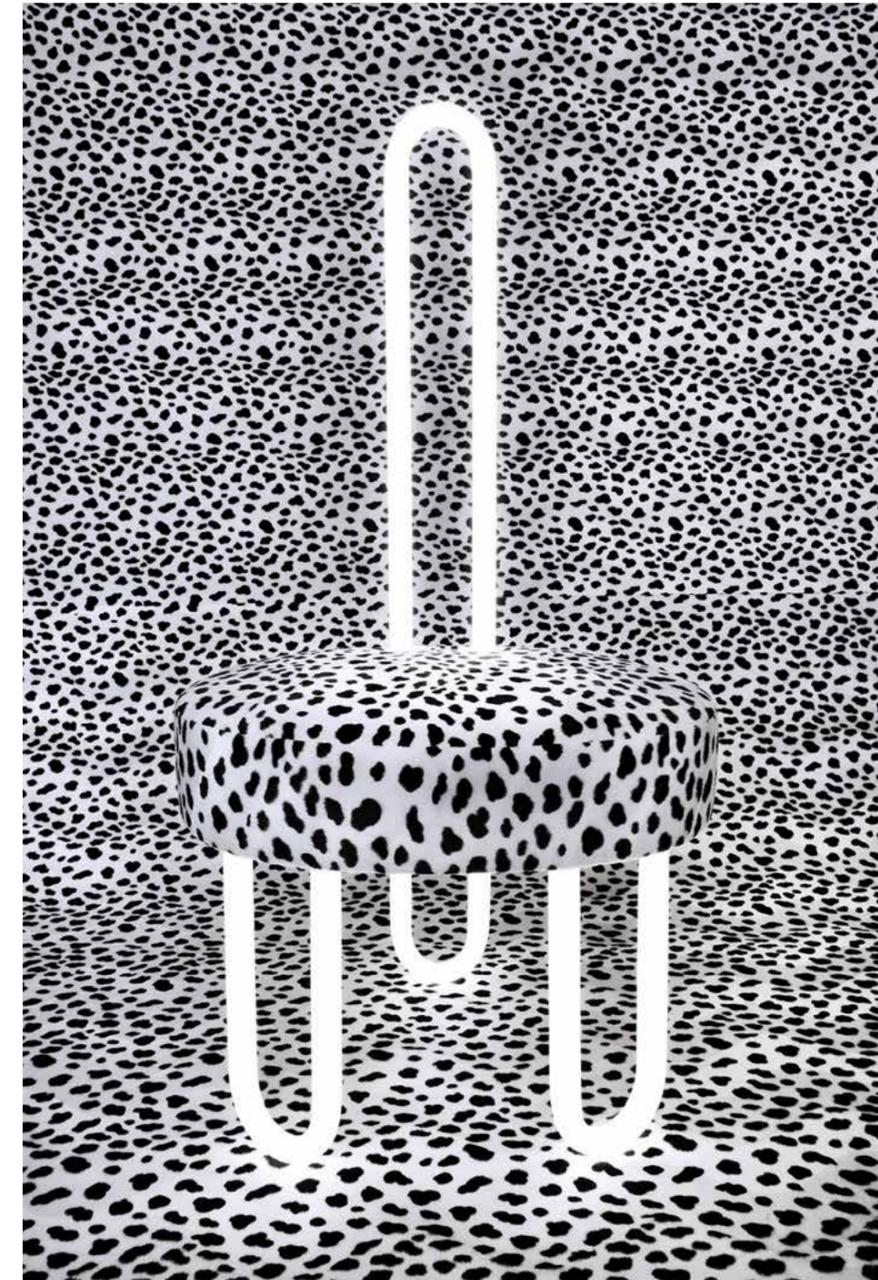
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Since founding their Zürich-based office *Allgemeine Entwurfsanstalt* (which translates rather prosaically as “general design institute”), in 1967, Trix Haussmann-Högel and Robert Haussmann have worked on hundreds of projects, from urban planning, buildings, residential interiors, and boutiques to furniture, graphics, exhibitions, and textiles. And yet the husband-and-wife team’s sophisticated oeuvre remains a well-kept secret. One of their trademarks is the unique way they use the mechanisms of illusion, anamorphosis, reflection, and distortion to parlay historic aesthetics into the present day. “There is little new to invent, but much to be reinterpreted,” they explain. But throwing the Haussmanns’ work into the diffuse Postmodern pot would undermine the *raison d’être* of their extensive portfolio. Always playful and imaginative — not unlike work by their Memphis contemporaries of the 1980s — the couple’s oeuvre maintains an intellectual rigor in the way objects are perceived as manifestos rather than commodities, frequently pitting form against function. They outlined these subversive undertones in their *Manierismo Critico* (1980), a malleable blueprint of sorts that propagated an alternative approach away from Modernist dogmas, whose “increasing commercialization and internationalization was partly to blame for the rampant poverty of expression,” as Robert Haussmann wrote in 1981. “If a design just happens by using forms without thinking, it is mostly ridiculous and therefore uncritical,” Trix Haussmann recently wrote. There is certainly no poverty of expression in the Haussmanns’ work, especially in the way they confront language both literally and conceptually in their objects. An example is the *Log-O-Rithmic Slide Rule* (1980), in which two sheets of paper printed with 100 adjectives and 100 adverbs are juxtaposed to produce fantastic, absurd matings. And then there is the *Lehrstück* (literally “teaching piece”) series, first developed in the late 1970s, whose nine objects, based on reflections about furniture as architectural quotes, range from a classical column with drawers (*Lehrstück II*, 1978) to a chair that doubles as a playable guitar (*Lehrstück VII*, 1981).

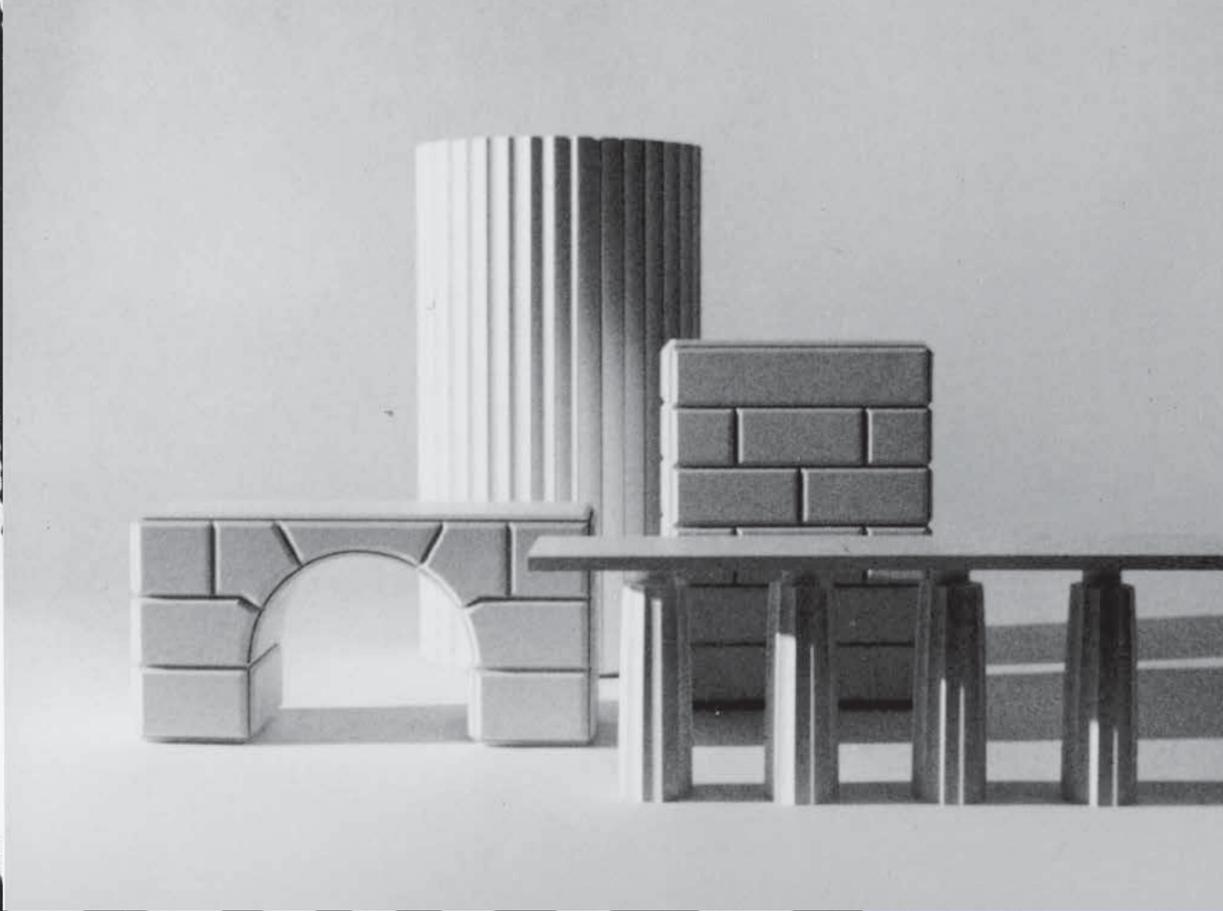


Trix and Robert Haussmann, *Chair Fun: Neon Chair* (1967); neon tubes, upholstery.
Image courtesy of STUDIOLLO and Edition Patrick Frey, Zürich.

Couple Alert

Revisiting the work of Trix and Robert Haussmann

Text by Tiffany Lambert



They circumvent, question, or deal with function through irony. *Neon Chair* (1967/2012) bade function adieu entirely with its fragile construction of fluorescent tubes, one in a series of four developed for the 1967 event “Chair Fun,” organized by the Schweizerischer Werkbund. Here, paradoxical functions obliterate frozen norms.

For all their intellectual musings, time and again the Haussmanns have applied their principles to the commercial world of hospitality, residential interiors, and retail. The Lanvin boutique in Zürich (1977) and the lobby and bar of Basel’s Hotel Plaza (1984), for example, transpose architectural elements such as bricks or marble onto fabric, toying with a sense of illusion. Tucked away on a mezzanine in Zürich’s central train station is the Da Capo Bar (1981), which mimes and undermines the station’s historic façade. Most assertive is the Galleria shopping arcade in Hamburg (1978–83), with its graphic façade, glass entrance etched into a grand striped trompe l’oeil curtain, and intricately detailed passageways. Materials and optical theatricality reign supreme.

If today the still-dynamic, octogenarian duo is finally coming out to a wider audience, it’s partly thanks to a small but seminal 2012 exhibition organized by Fredi Fischli and Niels Olsen from the Zürich-based exhibition space Studiolo. The recent craze for all things 1980s certainly hasn’t hurt either. But too often trends are mere shallow appreciation, oblivious to history, whereas the Haussmanns confront history with a precisely playful rigor. It’s a balancing act they themselves are all too aware of: “Walking on a tightrope may run the risk of ending in a fall,” Trix Haussmann notes, “but it does provide a better view.”

- 1 Trix and Robert Haussmann, *Lehrstücke I: Möbel als Architekturzeit* (1977); model of desk, cabinet, chest, table; 20 x 21 x 33 inches. Courtesy of Studiolo and Edition Patrick Frey, Zürich.
- 2 Trix and Robert Haussmann, *MAnHATTAn* (1987); furniture collection produced by Röthlisberger. Courtesy of Studiolo and Edition Patrick Frey, Zürich.
- 3 Trix and Robert Haussmann, Interior of the bank vaults at Kantonalbank Aarau (1994). Courtesy of Studiolo and Edition Patrick Frey, Zürich.
- 4 Trix and Robert Haussmann, Poster design for the exhibition *Manierismo Critico* at Studio Marconi, Milan (1981). Courtesy of Studiolo and Edition Patrick Frey, Zürich.
- 5 Trix and Robert Haussmann, Lobby interior of Hotel Plaza, Basel (1984). Courtesy of Studiolo and Edition Patrick Frey, Zürich.
- 6 Trix and Robert Haussmann, interior stairway at Da Capo Bar, Zürich (1981). Courtesy of Studiolo and Edition Patrick Frey, Zürich.
- 7 Trix and Robert Haussmann, RTH 7 sideboard, *Intarsia Collection* (1992); produced by Laurameroni. Courtesy of Studiolo and Edition Patrick Frey, Zürich.