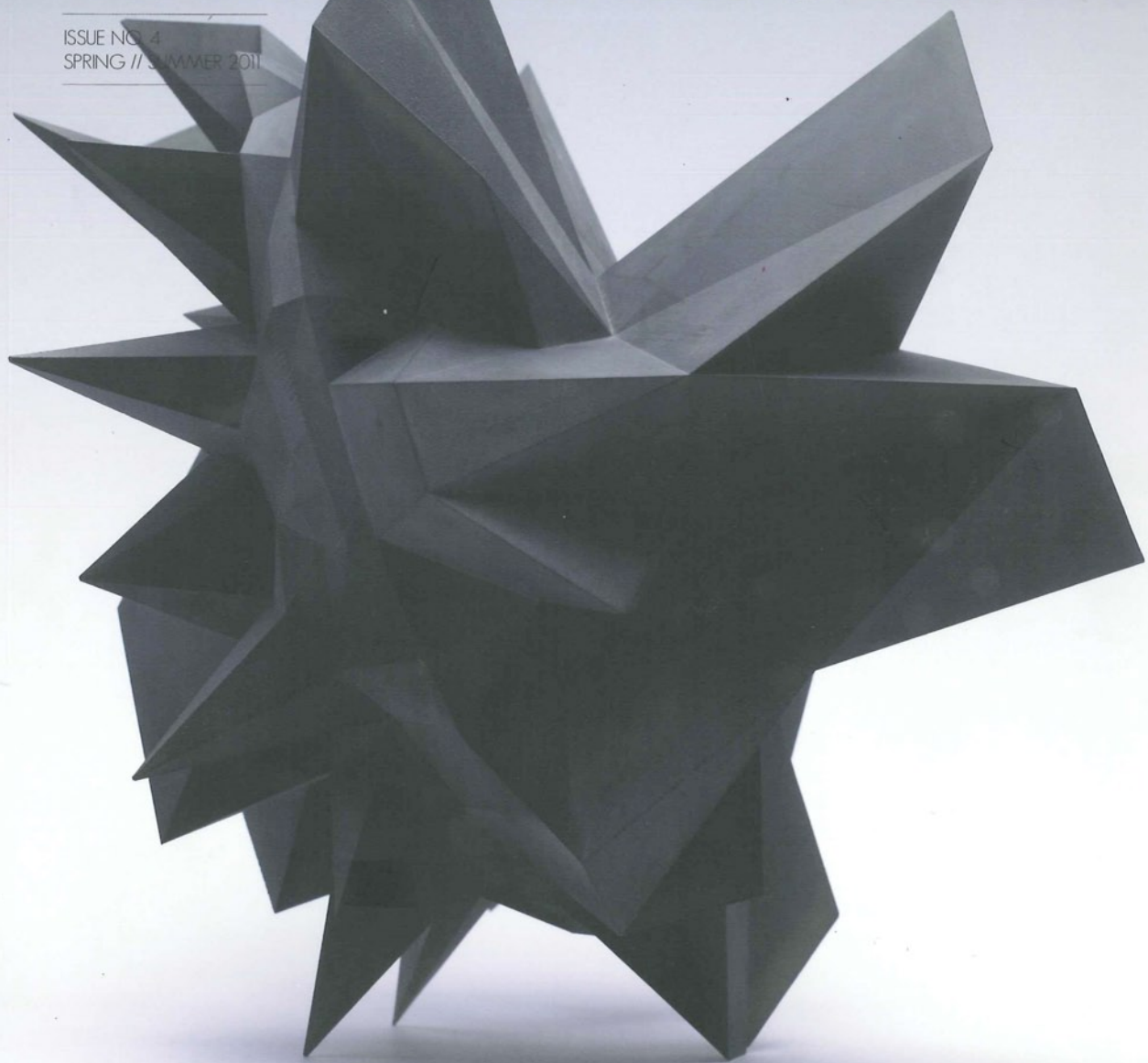
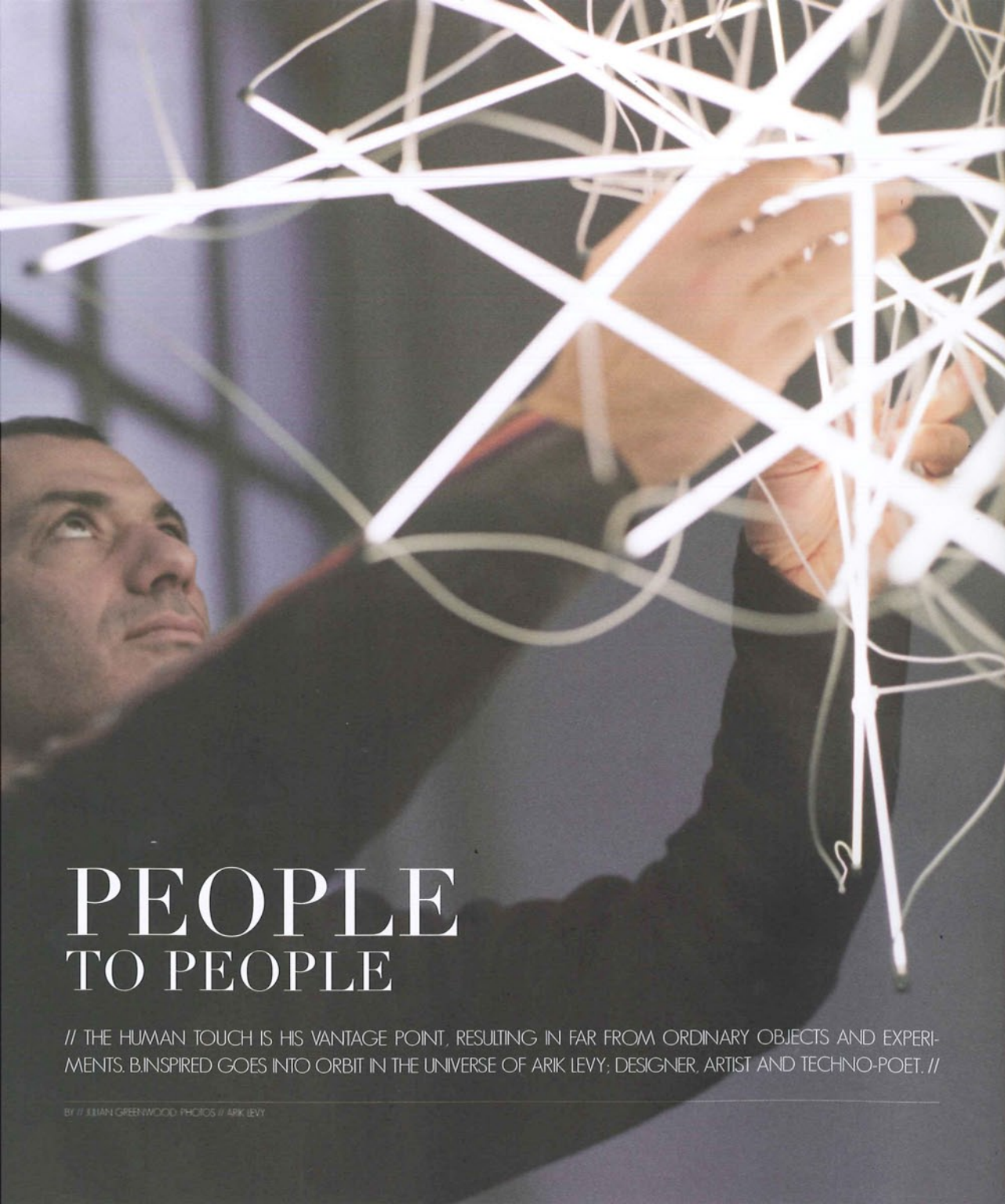


# B·INSPIRED

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# PEOPLE TO PEOPLE

// THE HUMAN TOUCH IS HIS VANTAGE POINT, RESULTING IN FAR FROM ORDINARY OBJECTS AND EXPERIMENTS. B.INSPIRED GOES INTO ORBIT IN THE UNIVERSE OF ARIK LEVY; DESIGNER, ARTIST AND TECHNO-POET. //

BY // ELIAN GREENWOOD PHOTOS // ARIK LEVY

**I**t was a dismal Wednesday. Escaping the morning drizzle under a curved canopy of a downtown façade, I waited for his car to pull up. Shortly arriving would be the man of the day – Arik Levy – Guest of Honor at the Stockholm Furniture Fair.

Very few designers explore the unfiltered truths of the human condition as this Israeli-born virtuoso. But then again, Levy is not your average designer. He's a freewheeling 'techno-poet' who orchestrates philosophical experiments, traversing such fields as product design, interiors, art, scenography and film.

There, lingering on the corner, I thought about a question that he seems to pursue in all his projects; 'if things are not always what they seem in life, why should design be any different?'

He shows up: "Hi, I'm Arik," brisk and seemingly unaffected by a busy schedule at the fair. Apart from this interview, he's due to appear on stage at a Stockholm department store in twenty minutes to talk about 'In Power of 10', an exhibition together with the Italian design brand Molteni & Co.

On our way there, we get hopelessly lost through a labyrinth of staff only-corridors and elevators, trying to find our way to the interior design floor. Until, finally; a sofa, coffee and conversation, beginning with that often repeated statement of his; "Design is an uncontrollable muscle."

"Breathing is an uncontrollable muscle, so is the brain. We only think we control the brain," says Levy. "I don't remember a point in my life when I said 'I want to be a designer' because it wasn't a decision for me. I came from fine art and did my first exhibition in 1986, way before I created design in any conscious way, like a chair or a sofa," he says and asks for another coffee, with warm milk this time.

"Of course, a sofa needs to be comfortable, but I want to log in and create gateways in people's minds, beyond the function of the

object. For me objects are like flavours or music, like a song that reminds you of your first slow dance when you were thirteen."

At Ldesign, the Paris-studio he co-founded with his colleague Pippo Lionni, some 20 designers and graphic artists work on the elaborate production of scientific-like concepts, ranging from mass-market products for companies like Baccarat and Swarovski to high-art installations and Levy's personal projects.

Levy is a storyteller not only through the objects, furniture, lighting, installations and all that is part of his intricate, often witty universe, but also in person.

"I started doing juxtaposition between objects and sculptures in the 80s. In those days, when I presented my pieces, people would say 'what are you doing, we only show paintings here. That's a chair.' So I just said, 'it's my way of painting'. It was a different discussion back then."

Among his signature experiments is the Rock Series, the monolithic blocks in polished steel or wood evocative of meteorites that seem to have landed on Earth. Made as a series of sculptures, table sets and bookshelves, I keep thinking they could serve as props if there ever was, God forbid, a remake of Kubrick's '2001'.

"It's all about recomposing an image", he says, and shows me photos of the latest addition to the evolving series. "I'm making the sections of what I call absent nature that create a new, man-made nature. My narrative with genetic intimacy says that if you put them on the floor, the rocks will germinate. This is why I need to go to psychotherapy..."

Levy is called to the stage. 'OK, five minutes', he replies in no apparent rush. We talk about what he refers to as "the life experience of the object", a concept based on the Wabi-sabi philosophy and aesthetic values that he came to appreciate while living in Japan in the early 90s, after winning a competition with Seiko Epson.

The audience is waiting and Levy takes a break to address the microphone. He looks down on the Persian rug and quips "What am I standing on, a flying carpet?"

It is not very often that a designer is referred to as a scientist and a poet. But that's exactly how the world has come to know Arik Levy. Drawing upon his work as a scenographer, he brings art into technology and theatre into design.

His multi-disciplinary encounters were evident at the Furniture Fair. Levy had created a relax lounge with monochrome, yellow seating, reflective panels and suspended sculptures from the "Identity Disorder" series.

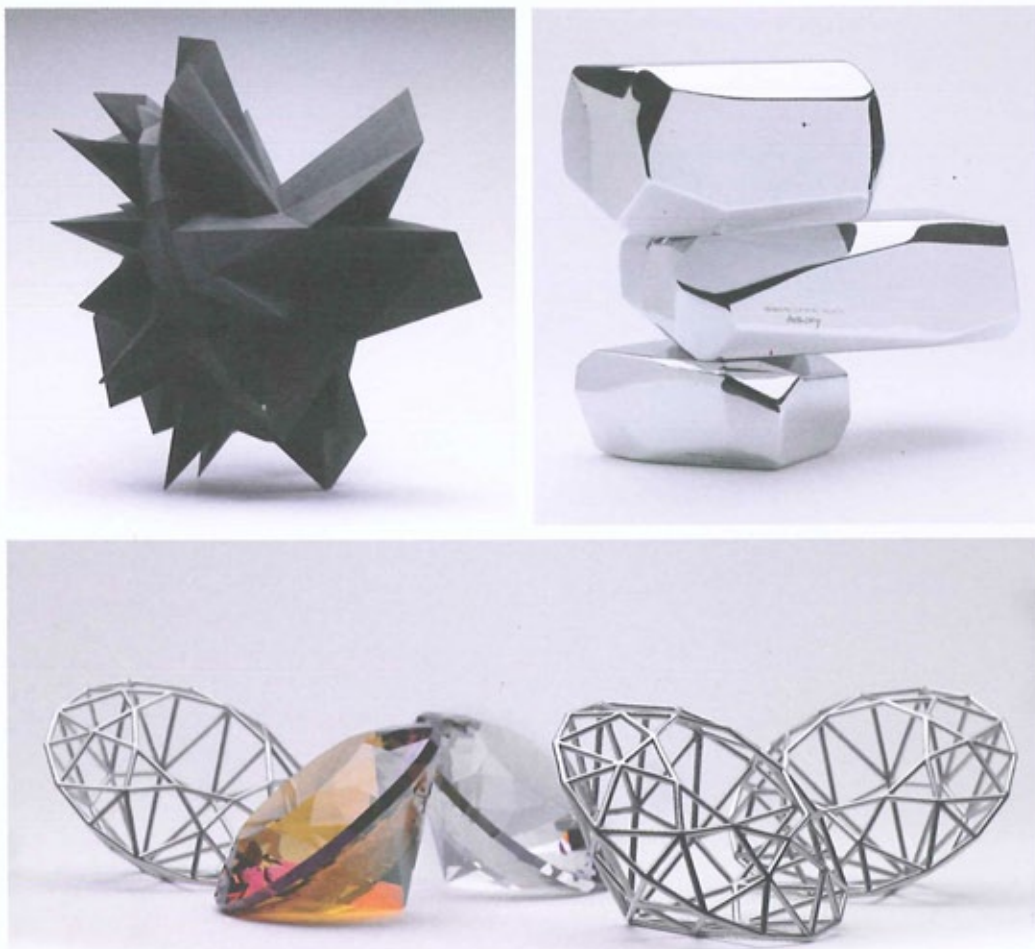
While in Stockholm, he was also part of a panel discussion with Tom Dixon and two scientists, focused on the environment and "closing the material gap".

The star has left the stage and we're back in the sofa for anecdotes. He shares them with an energy that can only be a main component for his creative output.

"Where were we? Oh yeah, Japan. I remember coming into the design studio and it was deadly quiet, like walking into a vacuum. All I could see was a cubicle landscape. So I took the Prince-cassette from my Walkman, put it in the sound system and cranked up the volume. Suddenly, heads started popping up all around this cubicle landscape, zooming in. 'Good morning, I'm here' I said. They all burst out laughing, and that's when everything changed. In Japan you can forever be a Gaijin, an alien, or you can try to penetrate the culture and when you do it is so rich", he says.

There's another favourite line Levy keeps up his sleeve for public speaking and interviews, that "design is about people, not tables and chairs". Admittedly, his work often resonates light-years beyond the functional with a spin, delving into subjects like absence, intimacy, identity and social codes.





One of his biggest blockbuster products is a simple doorstop, made identical to a gold bar. Instead of random serial numbers, he put 260373. It was the day in history when the first woman was allowed on the floor of London's Stock Exchange.

"The only problem was that people kept the gold bar on their tables, not on the floor as I intended. So I made a silver paperweight, to give them no excuse," he says.

Our conversation flashes between scenes from Levy's life, relinquished from any desire for secrecy. Among them is the time he was asked by Issey Miyake to design a sculptured perfume bottle.

"It took three years before I actually got to meet him. Even for the launch event he said 'I will not come to draw away the attention'. Only a Samurai like Issey Miyake would do that."

The assistant calls. "Mr Levy you really need to leave now." He is now very late for his next appointment, an indication perhaps that the artist in him will always have the upper hand over the scientist. 