



STRIKING A BALANCE

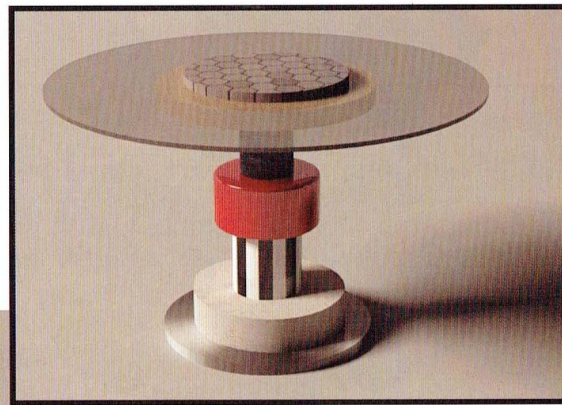
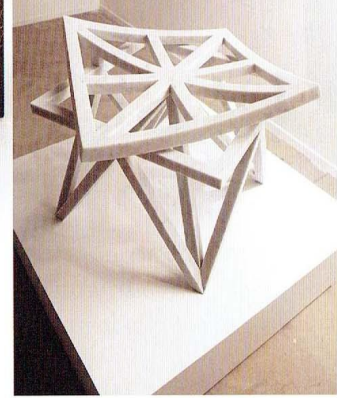
The first edition of Amman Design Week reflects upon the need for a greater synthesis between modern design and traditional craftsmanship

Words by REBECCA ANNE PROCTOR

Located on the Jabbok River on the eastern border of the Ajlun Mountains and approximately 40 kilometers northeast of the Dead Sea, Amman is a sprawling city of residential clusters coupled with magnificent ancient ruins. Occupying several locations in the so-called "cultural-corridor" in the heart of historic Amman, from the Hanger and the Jordan Museum, through Ras Al Ain, Downtown and all the way to the Raghadan Bus Terminal, the first edition of Amman Design Week sought to incorporate the urban character of the city as much as it did the spirit of regional artisans and designers. The vision for creating a platform in which to showcase local talent in Jordan was inspired by Her Majesty Queen Rania Al Abdullah. Led by co-directors, architect and cultural designer, Abeer Seikaly, and Rana Beirut, an architect and a curator, the inaugural design week, which was free and open to the public, transformed the Jordanian capital into an arena for educational and creative discourse.

Situated at the Hanger, the more formal design exhibition featured the work of established and emerging designers from across the Middle East region. Curated by celebrated architect Sahel Al Hiyari, themes that ran throughout the show revolved around ideas of locality, craftsmanship and notions that challenged principal understandings of design. "The layout and organisation of the hanger developed around the idea of

Facing page: Anne Holtrop's Barbar Model for a house
Right and below: Muka3Sab by Suliman Innab of Morph-X Design Studio
Far right: Jabal Amman Table by Jafar Dajani
Below: Unfolding Unity Stool Marble Edition by Aljoud Lootah Design Studio



establishing visual anchors that mediated the visitor's experience," explained Sahel. Upon entry visitors were greeted by an impressive installation by fashion designer Raya Kassiseh and architect Nader Tehrani (NADAA) entitled 'Entrelac' revealing a multitude of long, thick woolen strands that hung from the ceiling and gathered on the floor to create a cocoon-like structure. The piece was made from 350 kg of undyed wool yarn and hand knitted by 19 local communities of Jordanian women. "All the wool was regionally and locally sourced, the farthest we went was Egypt, and as an end result we will be attaching our strains and creating blankets for refugees," said Kassiseh. "Knitting is very low waste and the only waste we had was transporting our wool from Egypt to Jordan." Each strain is not identical to the next – showcasing the particular way in which each woman knitted each strain. "Everyone has their own stitch, no one can knit in the same way," she added.

Nearby was Jabal Amman table by Dubai-based Jordanian designer Jafar Dejani. Made from eight cylinders in different material that are stacked on top of each other to create a backbone-like structure, the table becomes a functional piece of furniture reflecting memories of the city of Amman. An added touch is the way the circles create shadows on the floor. Also exhibited was Nada Debs' 'Concrete Khatt Low Table' creating an altar-like object merging Zen minimalism with Islamic intricacy and adorned with mother-of-pearl; a table by the Naqsh Collective entitled 'Umm Assarab' which made use of delicate patterns found in Palestinian embroidery; lounge chairs by Local Industries, a company founded by Palestinian architects Elias and Yousef Anastas with the mission to create functional furniture crafted by local artisans; Morph X Design Studio's 'Sophisticated Simplicity – 40s Collection' revealing a stunning furniture collection in pure geometric forms; Emirati Aljoud Lootah's 'Unfolding Unity Stool Marble Edition' which

reflected a recurring arabesque 8-pointed star motif; and 'Pygmalion' by Mais al Azab, featuring two delicate two-custom designed wooden casels that forms one sculptural entity and pays homage to the formal aesthetics of the classical artist's casel. Creating design for the disadvantaged and those with health conditions, Sahar Madanat Design Studio created a contraption that would assist those suffering from a heart attack as well as specially designed table wear for those without an arm.

"Design is not only about visuals; it's about taste, it's about smell, it's about all of your surroundings," said Salwa Qattan, Amman Design Week's Communication Manager. At the Crafts District located at the Raghadan 'Tourist

Terminal a range of Jordanian-based arts and crafts shops revealed the country's culture and heritage through a series of pop-up stores. From Kama's local gourmet delicacies to Zawayed's minimalistic ceramics made by women and youth at the Ruwad Al Tanmeyah, creations by the women of Iraq Al-Amir Women Cooperative Society, Inamullumani's striking jewellery creations as well as a host of objects made from recycled materials, the district served as the link between traditional Jordanian craft makers and a modern design ethos. "It's not about the object itself; craft has become a means for self-expression and storytelling, and is therefore a tool of empowerment," says Beirut.

No design or art fair is complete without an emphasis on new technology. And at the Amman Design Week this could be seen at the MarkerSpace, an arena held at the Jordan Museum showcasing cutting-edge digital fabrication technologies from Amman's tech start-ups. Seen here was Hanna Salameh's revolving anamorphous white sculpture that shifted in shape as one moved it around, and Hashem Jouka's intriguing structural constructions offering glimpses into the future.

"It's really about this notion of bringing craft back into design and design back into craft," says Omar Zou'bi and Yousef Abdrabbo, responsible for the Amman Design Week's branding. That said, this new platform in Amman offered much to think about in terms of how to retain tradition within a modern structure – something, which achieved, would offer a way to maintain the past while forging a contemporary identity. ammandesignweek.com ■