

ART

# A Design Show Fit for Beetlejuice

By Su Wu

Nov. 3, 2015

Art et Industrie, founded in 1977, was an influential avant-garde design movement beloved by the likes of Jean-Michel Basquiat, who frequented the group's openings in SoHo. Years later, the gallerist Hugues Magen, newly arrived from Paris, was similarly struck: "I was educated in Europe, with all of the standards that this implies, and was confronted in New York with Art et Industrie," recalls Magen, a former principal dancer with the Dance Theatre of Harlem. "I was mesmerized and challenged, in front of something for which I had very little reference, and I was inspired by seeing liberty in such a way that I was not accustomed to in terms of design."

Thursday night, Magen opens a retrospective of the influential group at his Manhattan gallery, Magen H, accompanied by the release of a monograph examining the legacy of these artists and their willingness to push the limits of comfort. The show consists of more than 50 rare pieces, including early works from the artists Ron Arad and Michele Oka Doner, and James Hong's fully functional electric chair with green-and-red-striped Gucci belts and solar panels. Viewed together, the works exemplify the movement's acerbic social commentary and, as Magen puts it, "extreme thinking" about function.

"There is a playfulness in a lot of this work — and not on purpose, but just by its very daring, to take a table or chair out of itself," says the sculptor Forrest Myers, whose own otherworldly work is included in the show. When Myers and his wife needed a couch for their SoHo loft, for which he initially paid \$38.50 a month in rent in the '60s, he made one out of the rusted coils of a bedspring. He later put it in a solo show, at the Art et Industrie gallery then on Spring Street, but with an "exorbitant" price tag — so that it wouldn't sell (and he could return it to his apartment). "Of course the first guy that came in bought it," Myers recalls of the piece, which will be in the exhibition at Magen H. "We weren't making furniture, we were making art objects that became figurative when you sat in them."

"Art et Industrie" is on view from Nov. 5 at Magen H Gallery, 54 East 11th Street, Manhattan, [magenxxcentury.com](http://magenxxcentury.com).