

RO/LU

*Interview with the three founders of
RO/LU design group*

I came across design studio RO/LU at a panel discussion during my last trip to New York, where Matt Olson, one of it's founders (along with Mike Brady), was giving a talk regarding the relationship between art, design and architecture. It's actually hard to place the practice of these guys in a category; design comes up first but then once you are introduced to their world, all lines are blurred. Inspired by art and it's history, with different creative backgrounds, RO/LU does not copy, but celebrates all forms of art.

DANIELE BALICE: *I understand that you all came from different backgrounds before ending up in design. And I am not sure if design is even the right word to define your practice. How did you start RO/LU? And why in Minneapolis?*

MATT OLSON: RO/LU started as a landscape design studio in 2003. From the start we looked at the Eames Office as our model - not so much the work they did but the breadth of it. Mike Brady and I founded the company and we both have art and music backgrounds. I'm from an architecture/furniture family so I suppose what we are doing is in my blood. We are in Minneapolis mainly because we are close to family, but we increasingly subscribe to the idea that "attention is place" and therefore it often doesn't really feel like we are here. We don't spend much time thinking about whether we are designers or not, we just do what comes our way and what seems interesting. We hoped things would turn out exactly as they have.

DB: *The way you share information about your practice and inspirations with your audience is incredibly generous. When you refer to another artist's work it's a celebration: you share knowledge without being academic: even the simplicity of the materials you work with supports this attitude. Is this something that we can also consider as a political position? Is generosity the right word?*

MO: This is a flattering question! It makes me happy to hear in relation to our work, but it is not intentional. What is important is the experience of making the unique experience people have when encountering our work. Since we use photographs and art history as a material, an explanation seems relevant. Some people understand the conceptual premise and others don't. Knowledge is not necessary. As far as a political position...maybe. There are many layers at play and the audience should discuss our work however it makes sense to them. We love the work of the late 60s Radicals, whose work was often very political. We are excited by the idea that things are constantly evolving as context changes. We like to say "making as thinking" and "certainty" is the enemy!

DB: *In my opinion, your fervent activity online is probably part of your success. Does blogging affect your practice?*

MO: We love the Internet! Five or six times a week for the last five years or so, I've put together a blog post that interests me. There's definitely a community of blogs that are similarly minded that the RO/LU blog participates with. Increasingly, it has led to projects with people we meet through the blog. The research that goes into it is really useful and it starts to feel like we are following the things that inspire us as much as we are asserting a direction. We've come to trust this "unfolding" in a deep way.

DB: *Among your furniture projects which one do you think best represents your creative process?*

MO: ROLU4OMMU! We redesigned the interior of OMMU, an art book store in Athens. We hoped to connect our work to text and thus language and typeface. We discussed Ettore Sottsass and his views on set design. Claude Pascal and his "line poetry", Guy De Cointet's games with language and meaning...eventually landing on an essay by Seth Price called Decor Holes that explored the way a sample is used in modern music. We connected deeply with the concept of taking a fragment of something and turning it into something else. We extracted forms and made our own versions on a large field in order to explore the shapes in a different way before finally building furniture. Daniele Balice is an art dealer who lives in Paris and New York.

From top, clockwise: RO/LU, Box chair square (after Scott Burton).
Photo: Cameron Wittig; RO/LU, After ur (a magnetic superbox) for wright 21.
Photo: Thea Dickman; RO/LU, Shapes after guy (Yves and Enzo), upcoming
RO/LU jewelry performance. Photo: RO/LU.

