

CONVERSATION PIECE

Kelly Behun and Alex P. White bring two unique visions to their inspired co-creations. Here, Zesty Meyers, co-founder of R Gallery, speaks to the designers about their first collaboration.

PORTRAIT BY DANIEL KUKLA

Zesty Meyers: What led to this exhibition?

Kelly Behun: I would say equal parts enthusiasm and chutzpah. When we approached you with this idea of curating an exhibition, mixing original Kelly Behun Studio pieces with some from your collection, I didn't actually think you might say yes. That took a lot of courage.

Why did you choose R Gallery as the place to have your first exhibit?

Alex P. White: Both Kelly and I had a mutual acquaintance, the stylist Michael Reynolds, who curated an amazing show a few years ago at R. It inspired us both so much and was one of those moments where a whole spectrum of possibilities opened up; designer as curator, artist as designer, collector as patron and a return to the idea of gallery as salon. I couldn't believe there was a gallery and a group of people putting on shows like this at the time. It was fresh, categorically confusing and ahead of the curve in my opinion—it was the seed.

How did you feel about seeing your designs in the gallery setting for the first time?

KB: It was exhilarating to see everything realized more or less exactly as we'd imagined it and without compromise, which, let's face it, isn't a feeling you get to experience that often in life. It felt immersive, transporting, like a total environment. And that was the goal.

APW: I've always thought of Kelly as an artist. As long as I've worked with her she's collaborated with artists in really interesting ways that go beyond the purely decorative. This is the first time I've had the opportunity to see all the different types of work I do, and the collaborations I'm a part of, live together in one space, from the design projects I do with Kelly to painting and sculpture to performance, video and installation.

What inspired you to create your own line?

KB: I have been making custom pieces for my clients for years, but to create my own line was something I've wanted to do for a long time. The hardest part was editing down the myriad ideas to a manageable debut collection. This collection is small but features a rather



An installation view of "After" at R Gallery curated by Behun and White.

wide range of materials: from macramé, mosaic ceramic tile and digitally printed mirror and glass to Makassar ebony and hand-poured resin.

How do you incorporate contemporary and historic works into your design projects?

KB: I would like to say that there is some carefully crafted 'master plan,' but I tend to work in a more visual/emotional way, and it is generally not until after a project is nearly complete that I am able to discern its deeper meaning or the thread that runs through it. It is always there, though.

Do you have another collection planned?

KB: We are in the early design phase of the next collection, the honeymoon phase for sure, where practical considerations like cost and engineering have not yet reared their heads and ruined the party.

How does walking through Design Miami/ fuel your creativity? Or how do you adapt what you take in?

KB: I am moved by the extraordinary level of creativity in the design world right now, and to see some of the very best of that community come together in one place at one time is inspiring.

APW: Places like Design Miami/ and Art Basel are awesome to witness because you really get to see the complex network that makes what we all do possible. With such a large community of makers, thinkers and fans gathering together to view and sell art and design is in and of itself a creative inspiration because it makes making art seem possible again and again.

Which contemporary designers have caught your eye lately?

KB: The Haas Brothers strike me as the right mix of smart and irreverent. I am interested to see what path they take, and I respect what Kyle DeWoody is doing with Grey Area.

APW: Rafael de Cárdenas is someone who we think is producing timely work. His combination of Memphis-meets-first-generation-music-video aesthetics is

really smart. There is a whole new generation of makers rediscovering and reinterpreting the ideas and remix aesthetic of the late '80s and early '90s in surprisingly fresh and good-looking ways.

Who is your favorite architect and why?

KB: It would be impossible to pick a favorite. I've always liked Niemeyer, Lina Bo Bardi, Paul Rudolph's Sarasota houses and his design for the unbuilt Callahan residence. I love everything from the exuberance of Gaudí to the restraint of John Pawson. Right now, I am loving the Mexican architect Javier Senosiain. His houses are outrageously creative and life-affirming. I was looking through a book of his work and found it so unrelentingly beautiful I started to get upset—it was that good.

Tell us about your affinity for the all-white room.

KB: I did our apartment in all white a few years ago and am still a believer in its ability to exert a calming and restorative influence. I did it because we live in a high-rise, and it felt like we were in the clouds already. So white seemed like the obvious way to continue that theme, and I didn't want to distract in any way from the views of my beloved New York City. People get very nervous about incorporating too much white in their homes, but I have found if done correctly it can be quite easy to maintain, and it does have a way of clearing a mind that is on overload, which is most of us these days.

What was the most important thing you learned from working for Ian Schrager and Philippe Starck?

KB: To not be afraid to take risks. Ian was and continues to be a ground-breaker in the hotel industry, and Philippe was similarly unconstrained by any status-quo notions of how things should or shouldn't be done. Philippe would say the most provocative and outrageous things; he was always entertaining to be around. It was my training ground in many ways, and I cannot imagine a better one.