

# Wyssem and Cécile Nochi

## at the 2008

## week of design

Wyssem and Cécile Nochi  
art and design at  
Superstudio Più – Showroom  
Via Tortona 27, Milan

Opening Hours:  
April 16 – 20, 2008  
H 10.00 am to 10.00 pm  
April 21, 2008  
H 10.00 am to 6.00 pm

How to arrive:  
Subway MM 2,  
Porta Genova station

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## 'Anticipation No Explosives:' caffeine in progress Design exhibition at On/Off gallery blends political comment and do-it-yourself ethos

Kaelen Wilson-Goldie

BEIRUT: Fancy a new set of soaps in a galvanized metal dish called "Tribal Politics Soap Opera"? How about a small folding side table topped with a road sign warning of possible bomb blasts called "Anticipation No Explosives"? Or a low-standing coffee table made from a tire and a car windshield called "Goodyear Riot Shopping"? The latest exhibition on view at the design showroom and gallery On/Off, located on the ground floor of the Arab Bank building in Downtown Beirut, takes many an irreverent swipe at local politics. The aforementioned items poke affectionate fun at the promises of the country's political class, the spate of political assassinations and the uproar over a television skit satirizing Hizbullah leader Hassan Nasrallah. To be able to laugh in the face of frustration, tragedy or destruction is a survival skill the Lebanese have fine-tuned particularly well. "Raw Design: No-Made Urban Prototypes" proves that design can offer comic relief even as it references serious political circumstances and financial hardships. Wyssem Nochi, who runs On/Off with his partner and wife Cécile, wanted to produce a collection of do-it-yourself designs - objects and products for the home that would be cheap, functional, disposable, portable and non-precious. "Everything here is priced 30 percent above the cost," he says of the nearly 50 items on view. "So if you subtract that 30 percent, you get

to the raw cost." Nochi hopes this equation will help to inspire the show's target audience - young people, university students, transient Beirutis decorating their apartments on the fly or even more affluent consumers kitting out their second homes. He hopes they will not only buy from the collection but consider making their own pieces as well. "A lot of this stuff is just fun. It's DIY. You could go out and do it yourself. You don't need to buy it here. Maybe you just get the idea. Most Lebanese designers are either producing abroad or they are producing for chic clients. That stuff is precious but it isn't affordable for most people. Young people can't afford it. This stuff is more actual to their lives." Nochi estimates that one could decorate an apartment, top to bottom, from the collection at a total cost of just \$3,000, significantly less than the price one might pay for a single designer table or chair. "There may be a piece missing here or there," Nochi says, frowning his brow. "For example, we didn't do floor mats," he admits, jotting down a note to himself in the small spiral notebook where most of his ideas tend to germinate. Many of Nochi's pieces were inspired by the political events set in motion by the assassination of Lebanon's former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in February 2005. The show's starting point, for example, is the "February 14 Golden Heart Cake." The "Anticipation No Explosives" table marks Nochi's response to the political assassinations that followed. "It's just the gener-



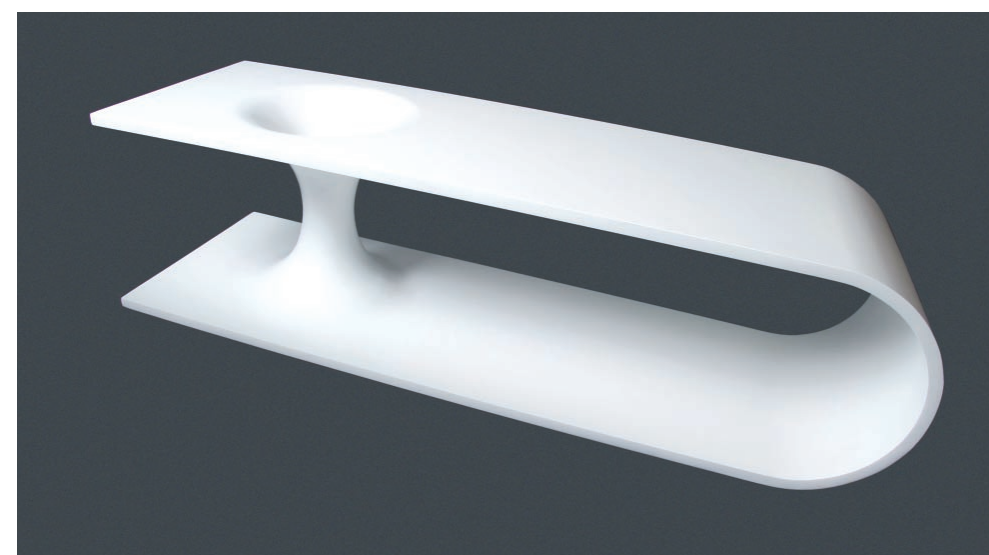
"Anticipation no explosives" (Wyssem Nochi): folding side table, topped with a road sign interdicting bomb blasts and suicide bomb attacks.

ic folding table you would find in Ouzai, with the wood top removed, and replaced with this sign." Nochi imagines it as the table where one sits to have a coffee in the morning. "I mean, you wake up, it's 9 or 10 a.m. and you learn that Gebran Tueni's been assassinated." The table, then, serves as both a reminder and a talisman. Rather significantly, Nochi is in the process of filling a large order for an Iraqi client. "He came in and said: 'These are perfect for us, for what we are living in Iraq.

I want to put one everywhere.'" Of course, therein lies the rub. At the beginning of the summer, Nochi's showroom was jammed with clients from Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the US. Students from the American University of Beirut, the Lebanese American University and the Académie des Beaux Arts were exercising the full force of their purchasing power. Lebanese visiting from abroad were buying keepsakes in bulk - particularly the pieces referencing

the million-strong demonstrations on Martyrs Square, along with those related to the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon a month later. (Particularly popular among this set were the bed sheets emblazoned with the logo of Lebanon's finest rolling paper - Papier de Damas, tweaked to Papier de Berouth.) "Business was really coming back," says Nochi with an exasperated sigh. "It really took a long time after Hariri's assassination and all the others. But now, with the war, we are straight back into the void." When the bombardments began, Nochi was in the midst of planning his next show - a collective exhibition of Lebanese designers from all over the world. With operations at the airport stifled and the port blockade continuing, that show has been postponed. Still, Nochi worked through the war. Though the gallery is now open on an appointment-only basis - by way of explanation, Nochi gestures to the empty street outside - he is busy sketching new work. As evidence that life does not stop, even under siege, Nochi's wife gave birth to their second son, and their first turned seven, all during the war. "He was having a great time with his friends, riding around on their bicycles, shooting off firecrackers." Nochi jots down another note and it's clear - more than just politics inspires his work.

RAW design (DIY): "No-Made" Urban Prototypes, c/w\_n\_product made in Lebanon at On/Off. For more information, call +961 1 966 179



wormhole II table, void serves as fruit bowl. in ply-wood, mdf and resin cast hole painted white, available in a transparent resin cast version, or DuPont™ Corian® 37 cm x 130 cm x 40 cm item # 02-05-002

space travel model: linear travel from point a (here-earth) to point b (there-galaxy) or short cut through the wormhole a-b. short listed in the designboom skin of corian competition. ... "A wormhole in our space-time universe might connect us to places that are many light-years away. It's a shortcut that allows you to beat a light ray taking the long route--a straight line. "Relativity says that nothing can pass you going faster than the speed of light," as Geoffrey A. Landis, a physicist at the Ohio Aerospace Institute of the NASA Lewis Research Center in Cleveland points out. "But it doesn't say you can't get from here to there faster than light could." Since you don't pass anything on your way through the wormhole, there is no violation of relativity. Wormholes are loopholes..."

## From Lebanon, affordable design inspired by science, nature and politics Wyssem and Cécile Nochi at the 2008 week of design

Sabine Schweigert

Affordable design inspired by science, nature and politics with strong social and environmental traits in its DNA: this is what Lebanese designers and artists Wyssem and Cécile Nochi will showcase at 2008 design week in Milan (April 16 – 21, Superstudio Più, via Tortona 27), displaying their new projects surfing between design and art and a selection of their collector pieces and best hits. The exhibition, held at "Showroom" of Superstudio Più, aims at providing an overall impression of the driving forces behind the design phi-

losophy of Wyssem and Cécile Nochi: scientific concepts, the preservation of nature, the desire to create affordable products, coming also from recycling, and the tough experience of daily life in Lebanon, their home-country. "Most of the pieces we produce are one-offs, some are weighted with reference, others are more ephemeral, like the times we live", says Wyssem Nochi when asked to summarize their work. The exhibition of Wyssem and Cécile Nochi expands on an indoor area, displaying luxury and lifestyle objects, and on a courtyard area featuring a politically provocative outdoor furnishing collection, looking with ironic and satiric spirit at the conflicts and the violence in

Lebanon. Scientific concepts are a further key inspiration for Wyssem and Cécile Nochi. The shapes and concepts of their creations and products may come from the structures of atoms and DNA or from astrophysics. Daily life experience and the concern for the environmental impact of products and objects are fundamental motivation behind a do-it-yourself attitude towards manufacturing, openly considering the opportunities offered by recycling. Making low-cost designs available to everybody and suggesting the possibility to imitate their design philosophy by recycling used objects in self-made furnishings - this delivers social and environmental traits to the design and the artwork of Wyssem and Cécile Nochi.



benz 'eversafe'® terrorist punch bag (ribbon detail)  
object - two compacted car doors 50 cm x 61 cm x 15 cm  
item # 06-02-001

on february 14, 2005 Lebanese prime minister Rafic Hariri was assassinated along with 22 others with 400 kg of explosives buried underground and detonated from a distance. his mercedes benz motorcade was shredded apart. the piece benz 'EverSafe'® terrorist punch bag, compacts two mercedes benz car doors in a pack, wrapped with the ironic EverSafe® ribbon of the crime scene...



(feb14) golden heart cake  
hanging clock in a plastic cake box  
25 cm x 23 cm x 12 cm item # 06-03001

...she had brought us back home a valentine cake in a heart shape plastic box for that evening...we could not swallow it: inserted a functioning quartz clock in the box center and removed the battery instead. time stop...



anticipation "no explosives"  
folding table with 3M reflective road sign  
60 cm x 60 cm x 42 cm  
item # 02-06-004

...Lebanon has not recovered from that attack. other assassinations followed. 12 prominent political figures and members of parliament have been killed to date, three other bombs missed their target only to injure or cripple their destiny...



cry martyrs soft box  
tissue container in felt  
23 cm x 12 cm x 10 cm  
item # 06-09-001

...carry on martyr mourning days...



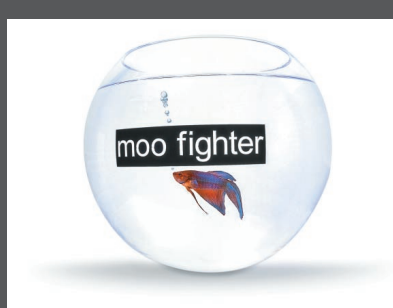
brake curve (single/stack)  
GI Joe (camouflage)/Barbie (pink) - camp out on 'martyr square.'  
seat in foam with fabric or synthetic leather with anti-slip adhesive  
43 cm x 112 cm x 7 cm  
item # 01-005-001

...light, easy to bend into a seat position - back against the wall - the seat grips the floor. set on a pile of 3 to raise it to become a chaise lounge, or chaise and side table to set something on. the glamour seat during Beirut demonstrations...



absolut freedom  
poster - photo collage on mdf laminate  
30 cm x 120 cm x 1 cm  
item # 06-12-002

...march 14, the 1,000,000 demonstration that liberated Lebanon of Syrian occupation. the picture is not a trick, it is the actual (bottle shape) foundation of a municipal building that used to occupy the space in 'martyr square', with only absolut freedom text added to it. the blue tents at the bottle's tip mark the long camp out of the protester's appeal for "the truth" in the assassination of the prime minister Hariri...



moo fighter  
glass fish bowl with fish name adhesive  
25 cm x 25 cm x 25 cm  
item # 06-04-001

...moo fighter title use the Syrian word moo=no? Lebanese demonstrators carried a famous banner with arabic text written on it saying: "fagaanakom moo"=we surprised you no? - fighter fish in water - pure Lebanese...



ON/OFF

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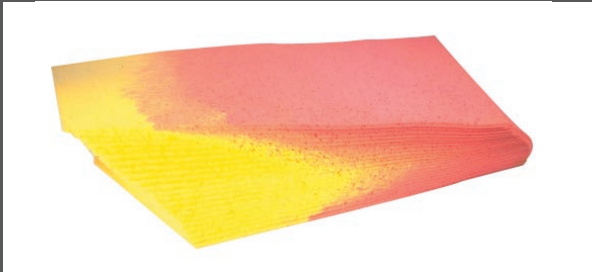
c/w n\_product

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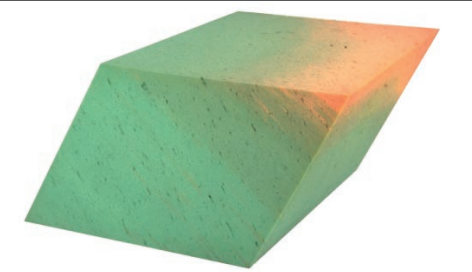
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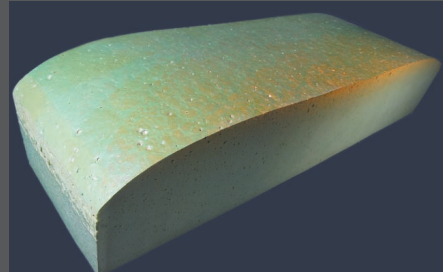


**catch-22**  
bed in twenty two layers of 2 cm  
red and yellow foam mats  
90 cm x 196 cm x 44 cm  
item # 03-02-002

shuffles like a deck of cards, gather  
and drop to change form. sleep over  
friends after a late party

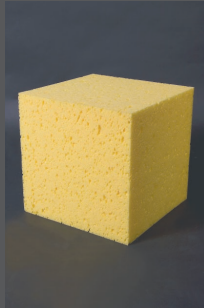
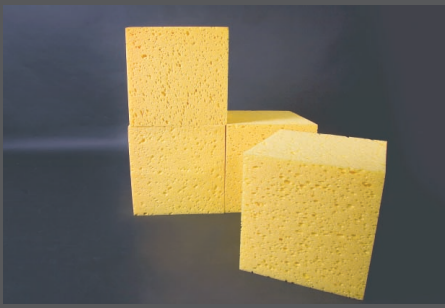


**rhomboid 1**  
seat in green and red foam  
66 cm x 100 cm x 36 cm  
item # 01-04-003



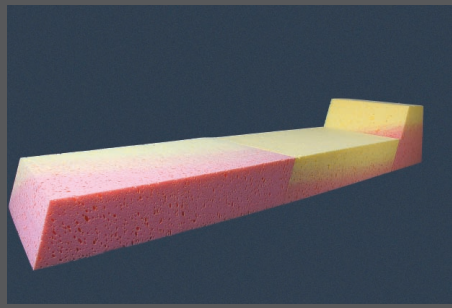
**crust**  
bed in red and green foam  
200 cm x 68 cm x 43 cm  
item # 01-04-009

sit on a lunar surface



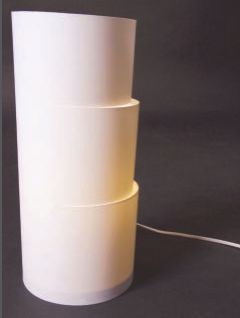
**sponge bob square pants**  
seat in yellow foam (kid)  
33 cm x 33 cm x 33 cm  
item # 01-04-002

**sponge bob realism**  
(famous cartoon character)



**unfold (3 forms)**  
seat / bed in red and  
yellow foam  
55 cm x 103 cm x 74 cm  
item # 01-04-005

two different seat-couch  
positions, and becomes  
a bed unfold



**one two cut**  
light shade in white or transparent  
acrylic sheet with wood base  
15 cm x 15 cm x 33 cm  
item # 05-03-001

two cuts fold around a wood base, wire,  
switch, socket, plug



**parsons reedited**  
folding table in galvanized steel  
37 cm x 37 cm x 37 cm  
item # 02-06-001

homage to frank alvah parsons



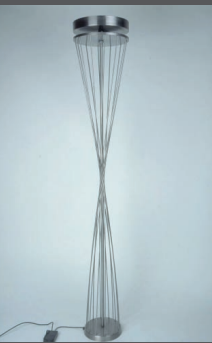
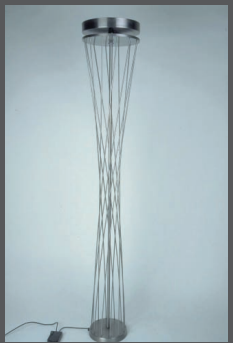
**chaise longue** (winter/summer ver-  
sion) chair in pine wood with felt or  
canvas cover  
64 cm x 104 cm x 98 cm  
item # 01-09-001

a re-edition of the traditional folding  
chaise longue with changeable cov-  
ers for winter or summer



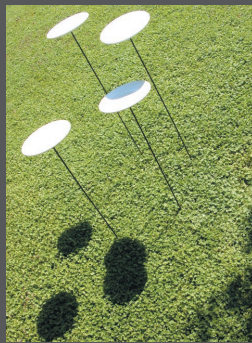
10 minutes of sun a day...fold time away (tan)  
poly-styrol mirror in silver/gold and quartz  
crystal clock  
50 cm x 34 cm x 2 cm  
item # 06-03-002

take 10 - minutes of sun a day - all it requires  
for an even tan all year round



**contort**  
light with halogen bulb, dimmer,  
wire, in steel  
33 cm x 33 cm x 190 cm  
item # 05-07-001

stress level indicator - spin to  
level of stress. this piece make  
homage to isamu noguchi's din-  
ing table in chromed steel and  
laminated of 1954.



**circus hors-d'oeuvres**  
plate set on a metal disk and stem  
22 cm x 80 cm  
item # 06-13-001

the plate magnetic base adhere to  
the steel disk welded  
to a stem. plate can easily be  
removed the 'stick' and refreshed  
with favorite 'hors-d'oeuvres'.



**wormhole II**  
table, void serves as fruit bowl. resin cast.  
37 cm x 130 cm x 40 cm item # 02-05-002



**liquid crystal hexagon**  
chair in steel, liquid crystal foam, and graphite powder coat paint.  
80 cm x 80 cm x 75 cm  
item # 01-12-001

the extension of the lines of hexagon form a pyramid. sitting in  
"liquid crystal hexagon" the head and breathing person's nosere  
within an invisible pyramid's energy field. the heat sensor liquid  
crystal foam pads leave a fading trace of the sitting body.



**transparent I II III**  
transparent tables in oak and glass in three  
different sizes.  
transparent I 40 cm x 40 cm x 50 cm  
item # 04-02-004  
transparent II 75 cm x 40 cm x 45 cm  
item # 04-02-005  
transparent III 80 cm x 80 cm x 36 cm  
item # 04-02-006

glass box tables to store pressed flowers from  
dust press or other surreal items.



**dust press "with hidden noise"**  
flower press table. two unpainted 1 cm steel plates joined by 4 screws  
and 16 control nuts with a stack of cardboard inserted in between the  
two 1 cm steel plates to press a flower pick from nature - (dust)  
40 cm x 40 cm x 45 cm item# 0205-001

make homage to a marcel duchamp work titled "with hidde noise" (1916)  
assisted ready-made ball of string between two unpolished brass plates joined  
by four bolts, the ball encloses a small unknown object (added by walter  
arensberg) which makes a noise when shaken, 12,9 cm x 13 cm x 11,4 cm  
philadelphia museum of arts. the louise and walter arensberg collection



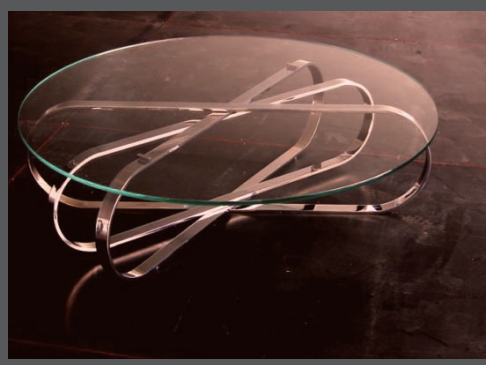
**DNA table / drawer stool stack and DNA bar**  
3 stools in plywood, mdf - bar in plywood, mdf  
40 cm x 40 cm x 148 cm  
dna 3 stool item # 04-02-003  
dna concealed bar item # 04-02-002

3 stools or low drawer tables stack; molded in plywood and mdf, lets light through from  
bottom to top through glass bottom drawers and table/seat tops. the concealed bar uses  
one of the molds from dna table drawer stool stack; an additional conical mold was built  
for its exterior, as well as specially machined hardware for pivot. two shelves extend out  
to mix drinks on, and a drawer can be pulled out to use as serving tray or to store bar  
accessories. the bar contains a large number of bottles and glasses.



**atom**  
table in brass chromium plate and glass top.  
120 cm x 120 cm x 34 cm  
item # 02-02-001

the atom structure model. three concentric rings;  
two pivot to support the glass, one spins within  
the other two rings. the table base make a fun  
spin game by foot conversation in the living room.



## Wyssem Nochi

Wyssem Nochi holds an MA from the Architectural Association in London and a BA from the New School of Social Research - Parsons School of Design in New York. He has taught architecture and design at the American University of Beirut and the Lebanese American University, where he introduced product design to its curriculum. He has produced works in architecture and urban design and has developed numerous products in limited batch editions and on-offs. He has earned a number of awards and has shown works in Lebanon and abroad. He recently founded ON/OFF a design stage in downtown Beirut.

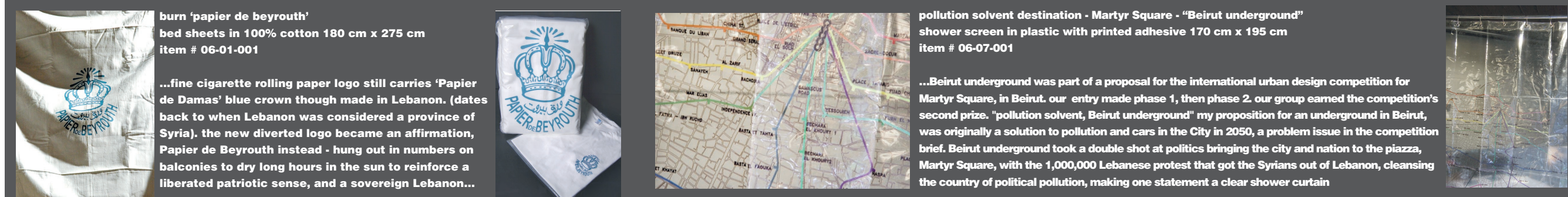


## Cécile Nochi

Cécile Nochi studied at l'École des Beaux-Arts and l'École Supérieure d'Art Moderne de Paris. She has developed products for MEKER industries, and earned the « Table Rase » Centre Culturel Français prize for her chairs « c/w » and the « Achkal Alwan » Ministère de la Culture prize for her « Hommage à Saint-Exupéry ».

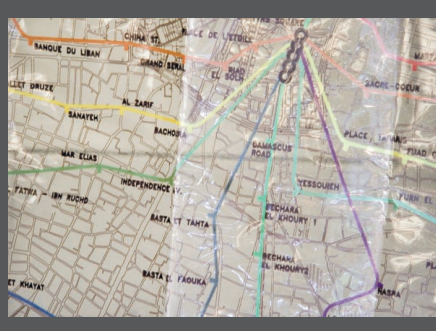






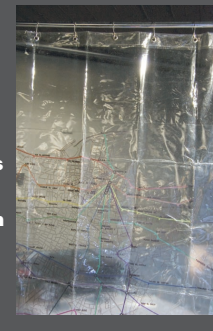
burn 'papier de beyrouth'  
bed sheets in 100% cotton 180 cm x 275 cm  
item # 06-01-001

...fine cigarette rolling paper logo still carries 'Papier de Damas' blue crown though made in Lebanon. (dates back to when Lebanon was considered a province of Syria). the new diverted logo became an affirmation, Papier de Beyrouth instead - hung out in numbers on balconies to dry long hours in the sun to reinforce a liberated patriotic sense, and a sovereign Lebanon...



pollution solvent destination - Martyr Square - "Beirut underground"  
shower screen in plastic with printed adhesive 170 cm x 195 cm  
item # 06-07-001

...Beirut underground was part of a proposal for the international urban design competition for Martyr Square, in Beirut. our entry made phase 1, then phase 2. our group earned the competition's second prize. "pollution solvent, Beirut underground" my proposition for an underground in Beirut, was originally a solution to pollution and cars in the City in 2050, a problem issue in the competition brief. Beirut underground took a double shot at politics bringing the city and nation to the piazza, Martyr Square, with the 1,000,000 Lebanese protest that got the Syrians out of Lebanon, cleansing the country of political pollution, making one statement a clear shower curtain



tribal politics "soap opera"  
box in galvanized steel with seven soaps  
8 cm x 44 cm x 4 cm  
item # 06-10-001

... on the evening news, watch political tribes debate - 'a soap opera' in technicolor...



safety net politics - 1200 hours sound relief 'out to lunch' hammock in plastic with braided rope  
100 cm x 300 cm  
item # 03-04-001

...at 1200 hours the city is silent when workmen use the safety net to nap after lunch on site. the title poke fun to Lebanon's Orange party 'out to lunch'... obviously not my color...



polycritical colors Smarties® 'manifique!'  
magnifier ball and smarties candy cap for base  
5 cm x 5 cm x 14 cm item # 06-05-001

...sugar overdose. a magnified situation. political groups have appropriated themselves different colors to represent them in flags other than the Lebanese flag, wearing a certain color symbolizes your belonging to some political party group. play some 'smarties' color cap game or eat up your adversary colors first...



'goodyear®' riot shopping (feb 5)(jun 1)(jan 23)(...)  
table, goodyear tire and car glass shield 80 cm x 135 cm x 27 cm item # 02-01-001

...the caricatures of the prophet Mohamed provoked a number of riots in the Muslim world. this piece title and component parts is inspired by the riot that took place in Beirut on feb 5, the following day the caricatures were published, the Danish Embassy building was burned down, cars parked around the area had their windshields broken, and tires were burned all over the streets. several more riots followed and continue to still whenever there is civil unease. 'goodyear®' riot shopping (feb 5)(jun 1)(jan 23)(...) - stopped counting - is a living room table in anticipation of the next riot...



'holcim®' ultra-light concrete ideas - Beirut under mushroom dust seat, laminated paper bags filled with styrofoam to stack single or triple seat, ten stack into a couch  
59 cm x 38 cm x 12 cm  
item # 01-02-001

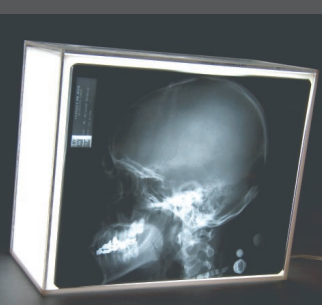
...any concrete ideas after the Israeli invasion and the bombings of Beirut of July 2006 that lasted 34 days? hard to even imagine possible...



naïve waterbed in 1/4 (bench)  
bed with bottles for base, plexiglass board, foam mattress and lights 120 cm x 43 cm x 42 cm  
item # 03-03-001

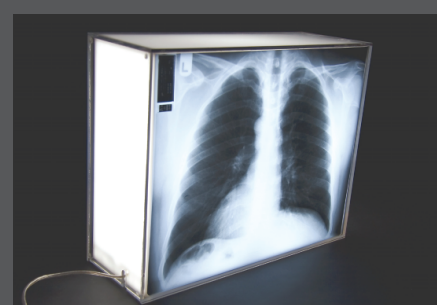
this is actually a chaise but is the \* of the size of the full size bed multiplied by 3 becomes a water bed, or a water table when cushion is removed.

...the bottles eventually become the water supply used when under siege...



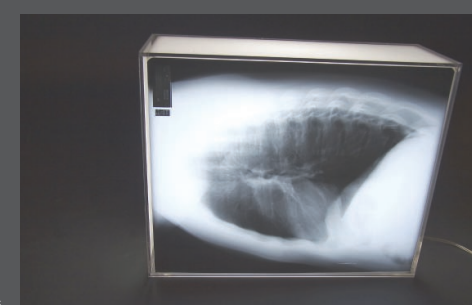
x-ray (head) mine  
light box in plexi-glass with x-ray film  
14 cm x 25 cm x 31 cm  
item # 05-04-002

...its important after concussion to have one's head examined...



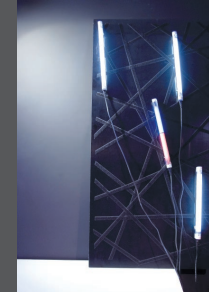
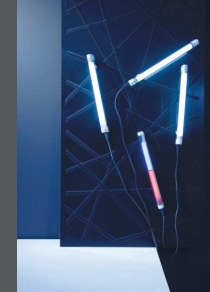
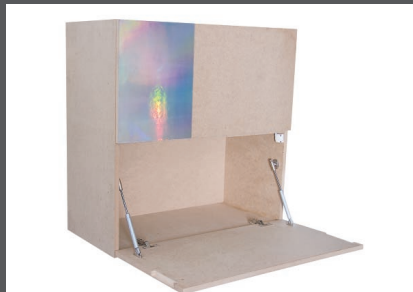
x-ray (lung) mine  
light box in acrylic with x-ray film  
15 cm x 36 cm x 43 cm  
item # 05-04-001

light with your body part x-ray images



wall pack  
desk - bar (shelf load 15kgs) in mdf or marine ply wood with laser etch laminate  
80 cm x 40 cm x 80 cm  
item # 04-04-002

office or bar store away



light FX  
4 fluorescent lights attach with velcro on marine-plywood in small and large size panels  
S 61 cm x 120 cm x 2 cm - L 120 cm x 120 cm x 2 cm  
item # 05-05-001

homage to dan flavin. add color gel filters for light effect.



foldaway (wall hung trestle table)  
table and trestle cut in one plank of marine ply-wood  
122 cm x 244 cm x 2 cm  
item # 02-03-001

hung on the wall foldaway is a conscious piece of functional art



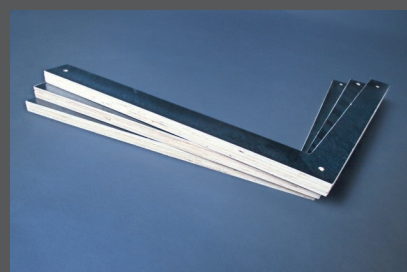
H-D® live to ride  
desktop mirror in chrome  
7 cm x 13 cm x 18 cm  
item # 06-06-002

original Harley Davidson motorcycle rear view mirror. are you riding your desk more than your bike? get out a here!



H-D® tail light  
desk paper block in black plex with Harley Davidson tail light bulb  
10 cm x 10 cm x 6 cm  
item # 06-06-001

writing ideas on 10 x 10 paper, tell tale of light flash



LX3  
chair in (20 - 2 cm) marine plywoo slices 40 cm x 62 cm x 76 cm  
item # 01-07-001  
LX3 is one same (boomerang) shape - spin into back, seat and legs; cut from one marine ply-wood sheet, and assembled with bolt and screw (no glue)



plank 20 (medics stretcher)  
table in 20 slices of marine plywood  
102 cm x 244 cm x 72 cm  
item # 02-03-002

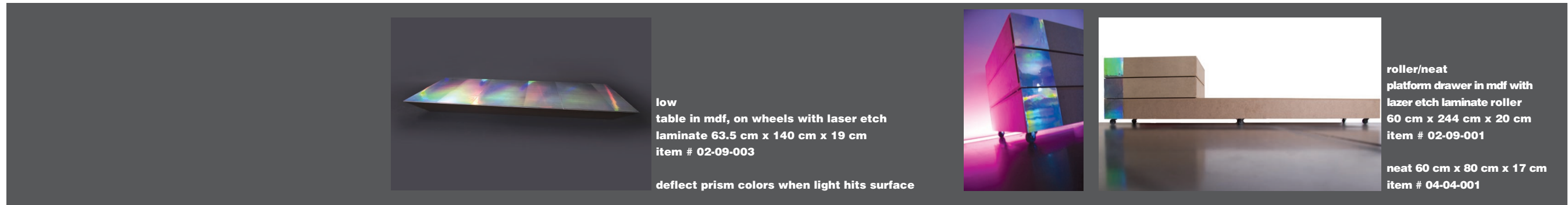


"bazooka joe®" comics  
shelving crate in mdf with bazooka joe comics laminate tablemat  
34 cm x 34 cm x 42 cm  
item # 04-04-003

low-high separator wall - bed side table - shelving system, for people that move often with a growing collection of comic books







# New gallery turns bath sponge into high art\_Two Beiruti designers reinvent luffas as lamp shades

By Kaelen Wilson-Goldie

BEIRUT: Nothing gives a bath that scrubbed-clean feeling like the luffa. A natural exfoliant of unrivalled strength and a staple of good Mediterranean grooming, the luffa is, like pomegranates and jasmine shrubs, at once sensuous in effect and ungainly in appearance. The fibrous, cylindrical off-white sponge is in fact the dried-out vein network of a notably phallic fruit, related to the cucumber, which grows in tropical climates as a climbing vine with deep green leaves and bright yellow flowers. The young fruit, also known as Chinese okra, can be cooked and eaten like squash. As it matures, its vascular structure stiffens and thickens, to the point where it can be plucked, dried, peeled, and pressed to become the common bath sponge. Though best known as a somewhat ragtag skin and

beauty product, the luffa - official name: the luffa aegyptica, or luffa cylindrica - has also been used as a dishrag, an air filter, packing material, insulation, and, according to writer Elizabeth Harwick (whose eccentric grandfather cultivated fields of luffa in the American South), the stuffing for shoulder pads and mattresses. By all reasonable estimates, it has not, until now, been used as a decorative lampshade or design-savvy lighting fixture. And that's where Cecile and Wyssem Nochi come in. the Nochis - a husband and wife team who work together as well as independently in the fields of architecture, urban design, product design, and fine art - are exhibiting 30 variations on the luffa lamp at their new design space, On/Off, at the corner of the Arab Bank building in Downtown Beirut. Sound strange? Well now, of course it

is. Wyssem Nochi - who studied environmental design at New York's Parsons School of Design in the mid-1980s, earned a master's degree in housing and urbanism from London's Architecture Association in 2002, and worked as a building restoration consultant for Solidere two years ago - has been angling to open a design space in Beirut for years. Along the way he has toyed with different models - an austere post-industrial showroom, a rootsier artists-run collective - and finally settled for a small gallery on a boutique scale with a flexible and open exhibition program. That his family held an old lease on the Downtown venue helped get things off the ground. But then he and Cecile - who attended the Ecole des Beaux Arts and Ecole Supérieure d'Art Moderne in Paris - They were messing around in their studio one day,

brainstorming ideas, when Cecile - in an act of non sequitur, delirium, or both - picked up a stray luffa lying on the floor, shoved a light bulb inside, and tossed it back onto the ground. He and Cecile looked at it and then at each other. They laughed, as if to say: "No way, really?" The Nochis produced a prototype of the luffa lamp last year for an exhibition in Saifi Village on lighting design curated by Foufie Zein (the show also included imaginative lamps by artist Ana Corbero and architect Pascale Tarabay, who is now producing a special edition of his neon light for the gallery Fadi Mogabgab Contemporary Art in Gemmayzeh). Because they both already produce work that forces together divergent elements into unlikely unions - Cecile's pieces combine clear and groovy lines with surrealist, otherworldly ideas;

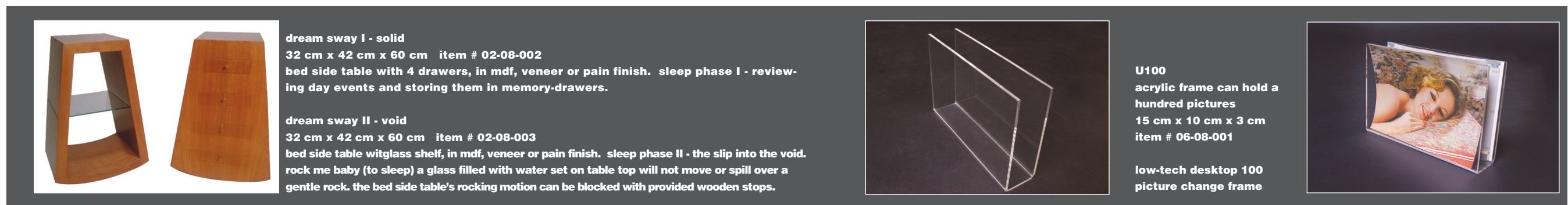
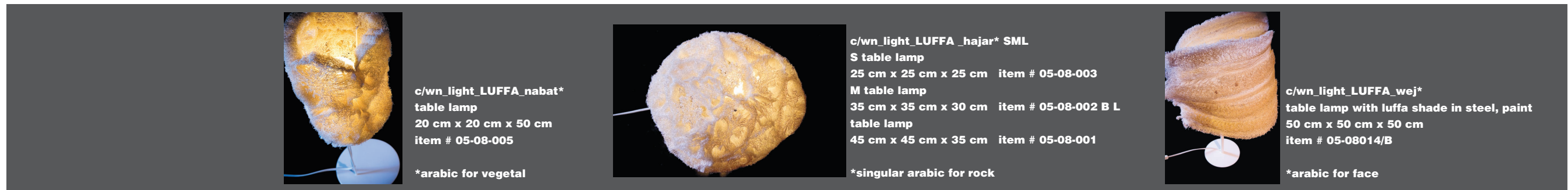
Wyssem's pieces attest to an interest in scientific principles, ecological materials, and heady art historical references to Francis Picabia and Marcel Duchamp - the Nochis used the luffa lamp to crack open a fertile field of experimentation, on many different conceptual, aesthetic, formal, and functional levels. Soon a few trial runs blossomed into multiple variations on themes like "Tashkeel (Formation)," "Hajar (Stone)," "Souk (Market)," and "Medina (City)." The collection now includes standing lights and table lamps along with pendants, sconces, and ceiling fixtures. The pieces range deftly in price from just \$45 (for a small table lamp with a single luffa and a light-weight circular steel base) to over \$3,000 (for an elaborate, sculptural hanging lamp made from scores of sponges). At the research and development stage, the Nochis quickly

stripped neighborhood shops of their entire luffa stock. Eventually, they found a supplier in Egypt who could provide them with mass-produced sponges by the box-load. They tested the fibers extensively for flammability, discoloration, and degradation (most of the luffa lamps use cold bulbs as opposed to hot, though those with hot bulbs are protected by steel casings - "They won't catch fire," Wyssem insists). They also experimented with different shapes, configurations, and stiffening agents, for the sake of finding interesting forms and also for the purpose of minimizing labor and material costs. Of the luffas themselves, Wyssem explains, "We treat them, bleach them, air dry them, cut them, and run them through a press. Some are sewn with a brown cotton thread - a beautiful stitch - but it takes a long time, so mostly we glue them." Novelty

aside, it remains to be seen whether the Nochis will truly succeed in making the world of object design embrace the luffa as legitimate source material (that world being rather strict in its paradoxical devotion to fashion and longevity a la chairs by Charles and Ray Eames). Arguably, the gesture - pulling material from one realm into another - is more valuable than the product. As such, the luffa exhibition is essentially a proving ground for the next show scheduled to open at Galerie On/Off in September, called "Raw Design." Like the lamps, "Raw Design" will highlight innovative, stripped down, and decidedly do-it-yourself approaches to home furnishing. Wyssem Nochi is still hoping that the gallery with manage to create a collective vibe. On/Off joins a handful of other boutiques - such as Maus Haus on Abdel Wahab al-Ingiliz Street, Nada

Debs in Saifi Village, and XXe Siecle in Hamra - that are earnestly advancing the design scene in Lebanon, gaining strength in numbers, challenging one another, and educating the public along the way. Perhaps most crucially for all involved, such venues are also helping to inspire students - the next generation of talented designers - to get into the game by proposing their own shows and installations. "If we can sustain our existence, then that would be the best," says Wyssem. "Were waiting to see who wants to occupy the gallery and in the meantime we hope to get people interested in the space."

c/wn\_light Luffa at On/Off in Downtown Beirut. For more information, call +961 1 966179.



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