



Karim Rashid

Oct. 7-Nov. 21, 2001

Johnson County Community College • Gallery of Art



*Mutant Pixels, 2000, vacuum formed polystyrene, fluorescent paint, 14"x18"x18" (each unit), courtesy Sandra Gering Gallery, NY.*

## Pleasure

After 10 years of practicing, I hated industrial design. I wanted to leave the profession because I had a greater interest in art and fashion, which seemed more liberated. These professions were intellectual but fun, exciting, and full of energy and life. Experimentation was expected. Strong personality was obvious in the work. As with art, beneath the seeming fickleness of fashion, the underlying agendas of life, time and space were being defined, documented, and perpetually tried and tested. They optimized autonomy of expression, of contributing to the ever-changing, ever-vast cultural shaping of the world and popular culture. I knew industrial design could play the same, if not an even more profound, role. All culture is now popular, and I wanted to participate in it. I wanted to create beauty – objects relevant to our new global, nomadic lifestyles. I wanted to engage the new digital-global marketplace, I also realized a few years ago, after playing it safe for the longest time, working with many conservative, dull clients. Fifteen years ago, I proposed a new colored, clear-tint polypropylene to a kitchen appliance manufacturer. The reaction was, *Why would anyone want to have a translucent appliance?* I remember presenting a humidifier that was a simple, translucent, organic object with no visible interface. It was tall and vertical in orientation, with just a small orifice for the

steam to come out, like a smokestack. The clients just stared into space as I spoke about the poetics of the ultrasonic mechanism as a vibrating interior shadow. I knew I was in the wrong place at the wrong time, but I also knew that I was learning – learning that product development was not a creative field. Sure, you could do a little styling, but there was little room for real innovative design. What did they know about the rest of the world; what did they know about others' likes and dislikes? Contrary to their beliefs, I realized design is not calculative. It is not a service profession to simply answer clients' or consumers' needs. It is not a profession based on market studies, stratas, marketed groups and tribes, focus groups, predictability of sales, solving problems (we have solved all the problems), meeting certain "market" criteria or metonyms. Instead, it is a profession of shaping new cultures, shifting human paradigms, contradicting the familiar and proposing new object protocols – creating an exciting world, an experiential world, a poetic world. Design is music, writing a song that can affect millions, that can inspire millions, that can reach the deeper spiritual side of our souls. It is a profession that should bring new experiences, greater pleasures and higher values that will elevate and enrich our material world. Anything I design today will really have an effect three years from now. Therefore, I should project into the future;

I should not look at the marketplace but instead examine changing trends, changing attitudes and new paradigms.

I remember the school of social responsibility, of humanization, of creating things for people. The true radical work in the world, the projects, artifacts and concepts that really shaped our world, are mostly personal and somewhat stubborn visions of a few artists that saw the world unlike the average being. They saw a New World; they saw a new possibility, an alternative to the world we created.

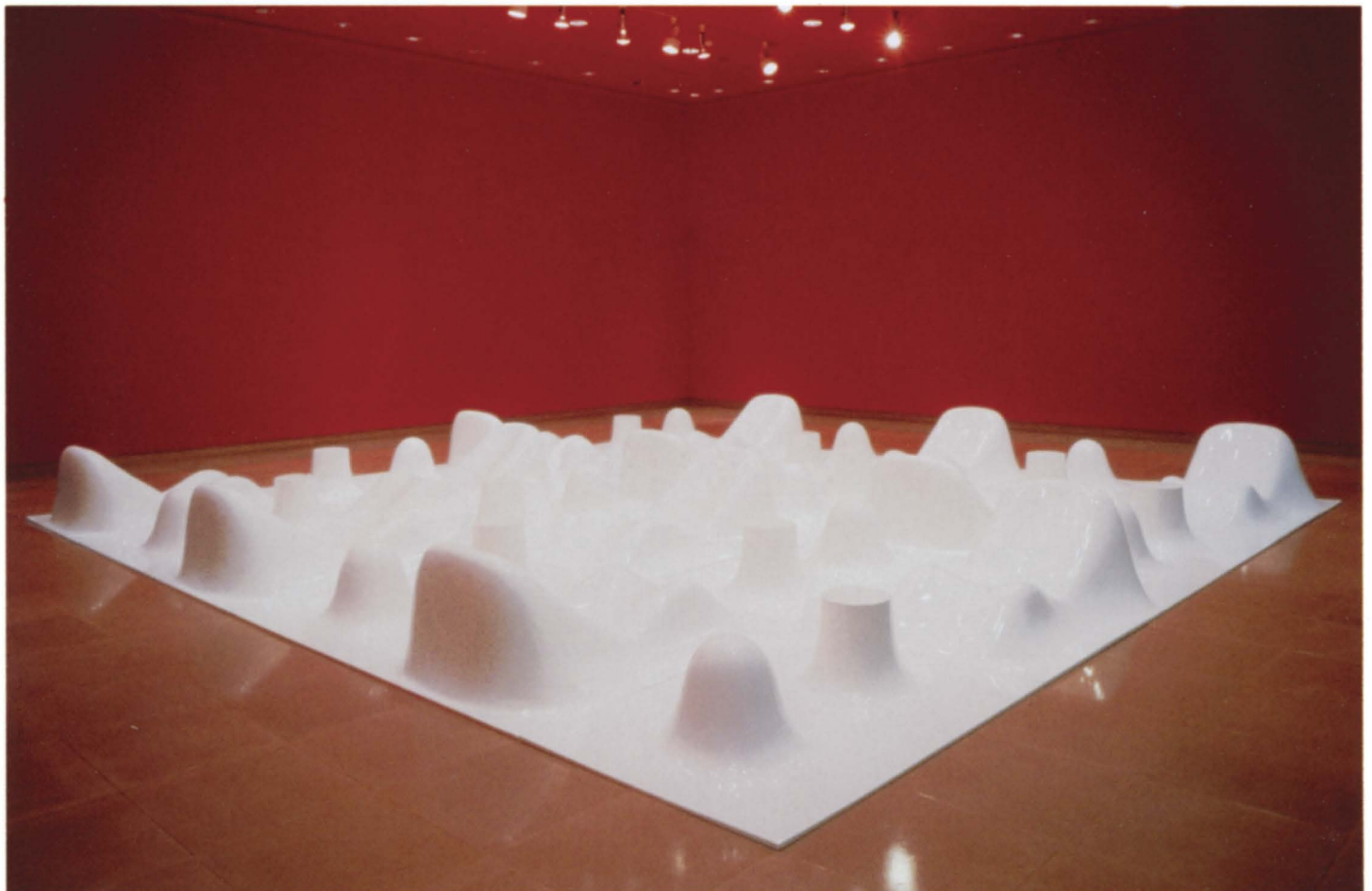
Artists are perceptive, inquisitive, hyper-aware of their surroundings, so they see messages, ideas, signs, issues, opportunities that many others don't see. They see details. They see visual nuances. Artists exist in every profession. They are the few who are perpetually in search of, and highly passionate about (if not completely obsessed, sometimes to the detriment of others, about) creating something original – a doctor finding a new form of medicine, a cure or an alternative to the applied and dogma. I always felt designers should learn everything about their profession, know it extremely well, dive into the deep end, so to speak, until their knowledge is saturated. Then they have to forget everything. This catharsis, this rubric, is the cleansing process, the road to complete autonomy of thought so one can create freely

and change behaviors, change our human conditioning, our evanescent public memory, and change the world.

Post-industrial design is a profession that will engage the immaterial, the dematerialization of the object. We will eventually reach a state where, as designers, we will have fewer physical objects to design. The argument of post-industrial design is that objects are becoming more technological and complex and, therefore, require other experts to be part of the materialization process. So, if I design a chip to be implanted in an arm or an eye or I develop e-money as a fingerprint, at some point there will be always the same issue, interface, interaction, navigation, and possibly some physical dock. If my fingerprint is my credit card, someone has to develop the interface. What do I put my finger on; what do I touch? Is it warm, cool, smooth, slippery; is it attached to something? Is there some feedback on whether my finger has that credit limit? Do I receive a receipt; is it visual or aural? Do I have to protect that print; is there a cool little sheath that becomes a fashion item, a sheath that can differentiate me from everyone else to support my need for individual expression?

Post-industrial design means bioengineers, scientists, behaviorists (although I consider that I am a behaviorist as a designer), doctors, geneticists, etc. But there is only

*Pleasurescape*, 2001, fiberglass and automotive lacquer, 24"x48"x72" (each unit), Rice Gallery installation, Houston, TX.



one person who keeps a pulse on the public, on human life – the designer. The designer is an editor of culture, a conductor of the production of goods, the mediator between the corporation, the company and the audience. The designer has a phenomenological role to understand how our object landscape is engaged or disengaged, how things change our lives, shape our lives and touch our lives. An average person touches 500 objects a day. These objects range from the hyper-banal, such as a toothbrush, to the less than 1 percent probability of touching something new. Post-industrial design will deal with all our senses, as Gianfranco Zaccai once said, “Design has primarily focused on the visual and the tactile, but we are now.” The kinesthetic, the sensorium, the omniexperiential: the future will be made up of an orgy of experiences. The digital age has created a new hypersensitivity, a more exotic connection with our senses, and a kaleidoscope of stimuli, of information, of living, loving and well-being.

Karim Rashid

(adapted from *I Want to Change the World*, published by Universe Publishing, 2001)

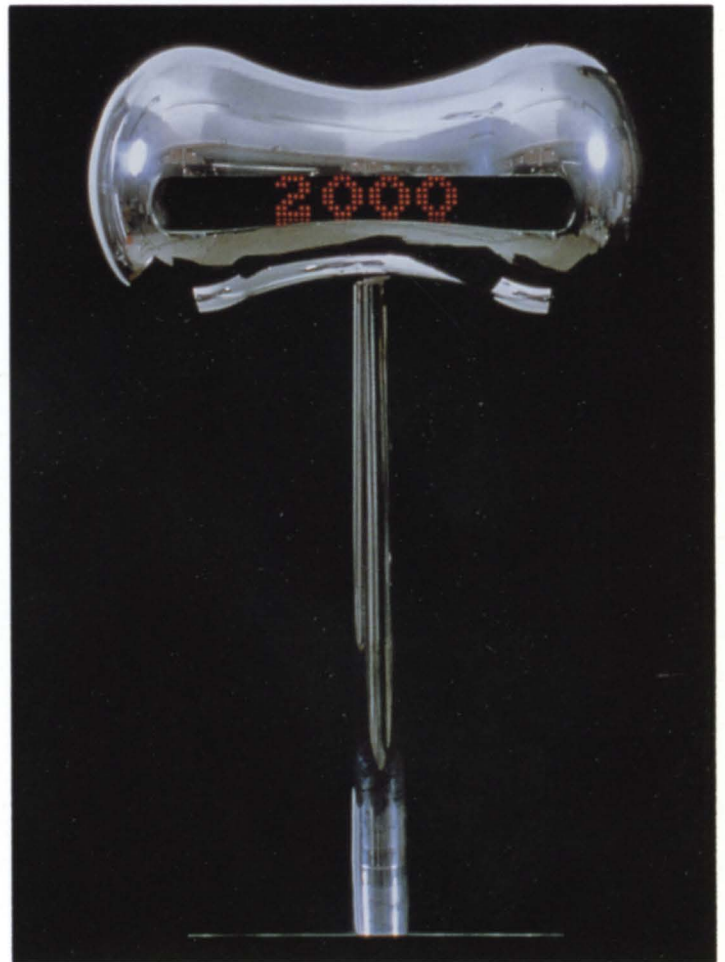
*Karim Rashid was born in Cairo, Egypt, in 1960. He is half English, half Egyptian and was raised mostly in Canada. In 1982, he received a bachelor of industrial design from Carleton University in Ottawa. He pursued graduate design studies in Naples, Italy, with Ettore Sottsass and others, then moved to Milan for one year at the Rodolfo Bonetto Studio. On his return to Canada, he worked for seven years with KAN Industrial Designers. While at KAN, he also cofounded and designed the Babel Fashion Collection and North from 1985-1991.*

*Rashid opened his own practice in New York City in 1993. He has worked for numerous clients globally, such as Nambé, Umbra, Idée, Issey Miyake, Totem, Pure Design, Zeritalia, Fasem, Guzzini, Estee Lauder, Tommy Hilfiger, Giorgio Armani, Sony, Magis, Edra, Leonardo, Zanotta, Prada, Maybelline, Yahoo, George Kovacs, Citibank, Nienkamper and YSL.*

*Rashid has more than 70 objects in museum collections, and his design work has been exhibited at the Philadelphia Museum of Art; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Wexner Center, Columbus, Ohio; Museum of Decorative Arts, Montreal; Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum, New York; The British Design Museum, London; the Miami Museum of Contemporary Art; and The Groningen Museum, Holland, among others.*



*Blob table and stool, 2000, chrome metal base and fiberglass, 42"x36"x56", courtesy Sandra Gering Gallery, NY.*



*Digitalia, 1999, aluminum alloy with LED display unit, courtesy Sandra Gering Gallery, NY.*

Cover: *Mutant Pixels* (detail), 2000, vacuum formed polystyrene, fluorescent paint, 14"x18"x18" (each unit), courtesy Sandra Gering Gallery, NY.

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