

# DAMN



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# N°18

A MAGAZINE ON CONTEMPORARY CULTURE

EUROPE €12, UK £8.5 AUGUST / SEPTEMBER 2008



BIMONTHLY - AUGUST / SEPTEMBER 2008 - OFFICE OF DEPOSIT, 9000 GHEENT - PH00314



# In God's Hands

## MARCO DELLA TORRE: BIG BRAIN, SMALL EGO?

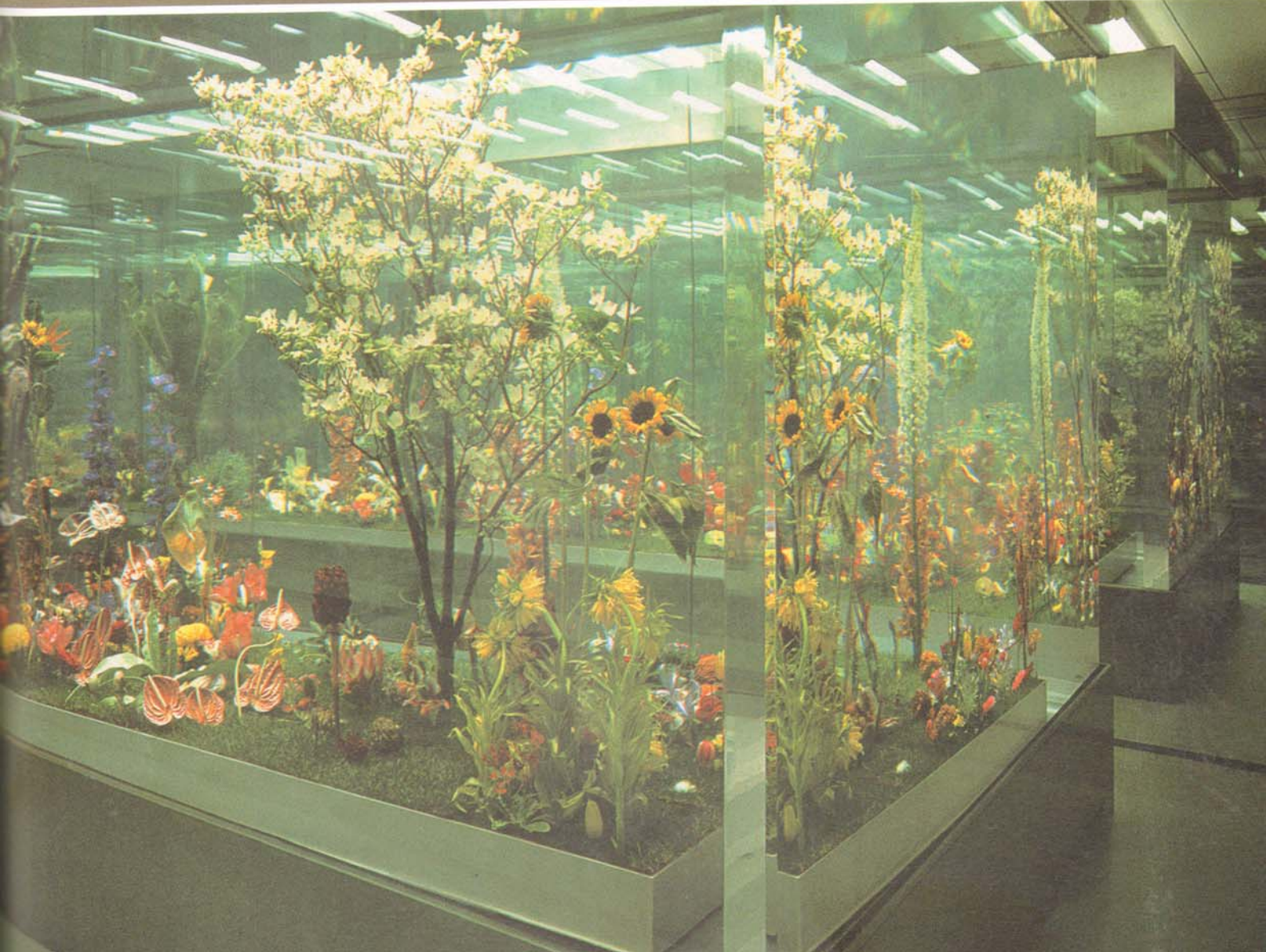
**When artists and architects meet it can often be not so much a case of 'I am Spartacus', more a clash of egos and temperaments that leaves generosity of spirit at the door in a fight for ownership of the big idea. It's not a question of dismissing credit where credit's due, but when it comes to projects that merge the sensibilities of architecture and art, a rotting rope bridge can provide more comfort than the pathway between the two. For architect Marco Della Torre the interpretation and understanding of art is key to his work, and the idea of going solo an antithesis to realising shared dreams.**

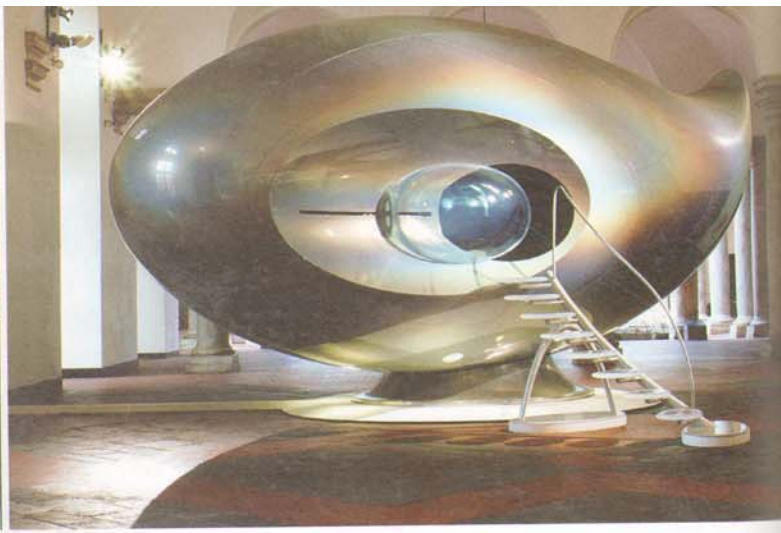
Text by Virginio Briatore

Top:  
Exhibit design VR retrospective  
VB52, Castello di Rivoli; perfor-  
mance glass table and seats.  
Courtesy Vanessa Beecroft

Facing page:  
Garden by Marc Quinn at  
Fondazione Prada, mirror effect of  
the Garden immersed in silicon oil  
Courtesy Fondazione Prada,  
photo by Attilio Maranzano

You gaze at the temple of Madurai, with its four gopurams 50 metres high, sculpted with thousands of deities with myriad faces and an infinity of eyes, arms, hands and fingers and you ask yourself: who conceived it, who designed it? In Ravenna, the mausoleum of Galla Placidia was built around 430 A.D. The cruciform plan measures 12.75 x 10.25m. The extreme simplicity of the outer structure gives no indication of the decorative and symbolic richness of the interior. We know that the Byzantine empress turned to the theologian Peter Chrysologus for advice in making her choice of the symbols of her universe, but no one knows who the master builders were who drafted the design of the stars and who tilted the gold mosaic tiles so they would catch the light filtering through the alabaster windows and reflect it for centuries in the small cosmos of the dim interior. Who was the artist? Who the architect? Who was the hand of god, the 'Mano de Dios'?



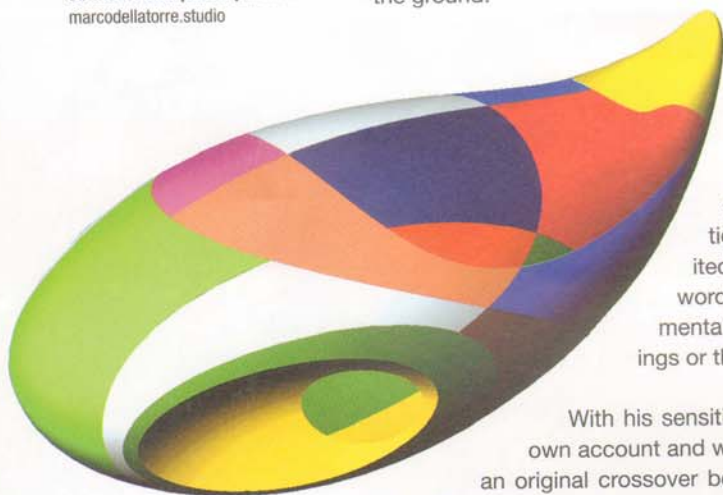


Top, from left to right:  
**Mariko Mori at the Marco Della Torre. studio working on the preliminary model, Milan, Italy.**  
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**Wave UFO installed at the Palazzo Ducale in Genova, Italy.**  
 Courtesy Mariko Mori Studio, photo by Luca Tamburini / Polifemo Fotografia

Below:  
**3D model with panels partition**  
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The same question arises today when we look at contemporary artworks in which the technological, architectural or manufacturing dimension is overwhelming, conspicuous, complex. We know the artist but we also know that this was not a solo effort. The work of art, multimediac, performative and at times monumental, is the product of numerous different interpreters. Who are these interpreters? In general they're only known to insiders or they're the trusted followers of an artist, just as a great classical stage or movie director has their own trusted carpenters and costume designers. Being the interpreters of artist-protagonists is difficult. The interpreter, the executor, needs a big brain, a small ego and above all great sensitivity. This is why architects capable of controlling their egos and lending their services to art are rare - gifted ones even rarer - and great artists who are also capable of being fine architects thin on the ground.



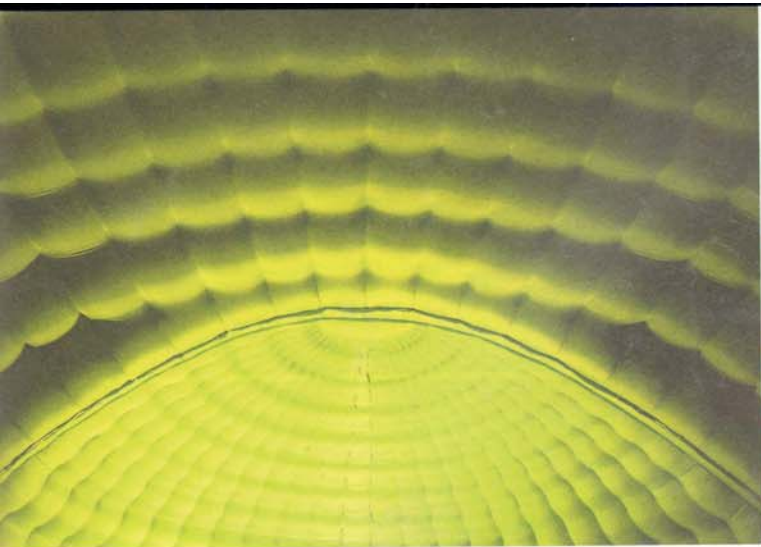
#### READ AND SEE ART

Marco Della Torre, an architect (with an Italian father and a German mother) is unique in this respect. He is a young architect who loves art and understands it. A flute player, the son of a well-known painter and graphic artist, he has developed the ability 'to read and see art' and engage in a dialogue with the artist's ideas. In the introduction to a recent book about him (Marco Della Torre - Design for Art, edited by Logos, [www.books.it](http://www.books.it)) his work is titled 'The sensitive project.' The word 'sensitive' gets it just right, as the dictionary shows: 'having acute mental or emotional sensibility; aware of and responsive to one's own feelings or those of others, the manifestations of nature, artworks, etc.'

With his sensitive mind, over the last ten years MDT has been working both on his own account and with international artists, creating large-scale installations and achieving an original crossover between architecture, installation, product design, communication and artistic activity 'tout court'. His art projects include the production of astonishing constructions like Mariko Mori's Wave UFO or Marc Quinn's Garden as well as installations in important settings like the Castello di Rivoli and the Prada Foundation. What's more MDT, an architect-artist in the Renaissance and humanist sense of the term, also produces his own works, which range from the scale of jewellery or saucepans to interior design, such as the colourful, rhythmical interiors he created for the Nuova Accademia di Belle Arti (today the most vogueish of the 12 Milanese institutions where design is taught), all the way up to inflatable structures such as the big Bruco ('grub') or the Blow Up characters placed on the rooftops of Zona Tortona in Milan.

#### SENSORY EXPERIENCE

In his way, MDT is the 'Mano de Dios.' He takes the bright ideas and visions of artists and then goes off and talks to legendary craftsmen and major corporations to ensure that these dreams will then be embodied in material forms. The sensory experience of Mariko Mori's Wave UFO called for three years of experiments in collaboration with three different businesses: Modelleria Angelino (a Turin-based automotive firm) for the PVC and fibreglass body and the frame in cast aluminium with magnesium; Technogel® by Vicenza for the backlit chaises longues; and the Lechler Colour Centre in Como for the iridescent paints. To create Marc Quinn's garden for the Prada Foundation, suspended in time by immersion in 30 tons of silicon oil at -25°C, MDT involved eight highly specialised companies based in Japan, Finland, Germany and Italy.



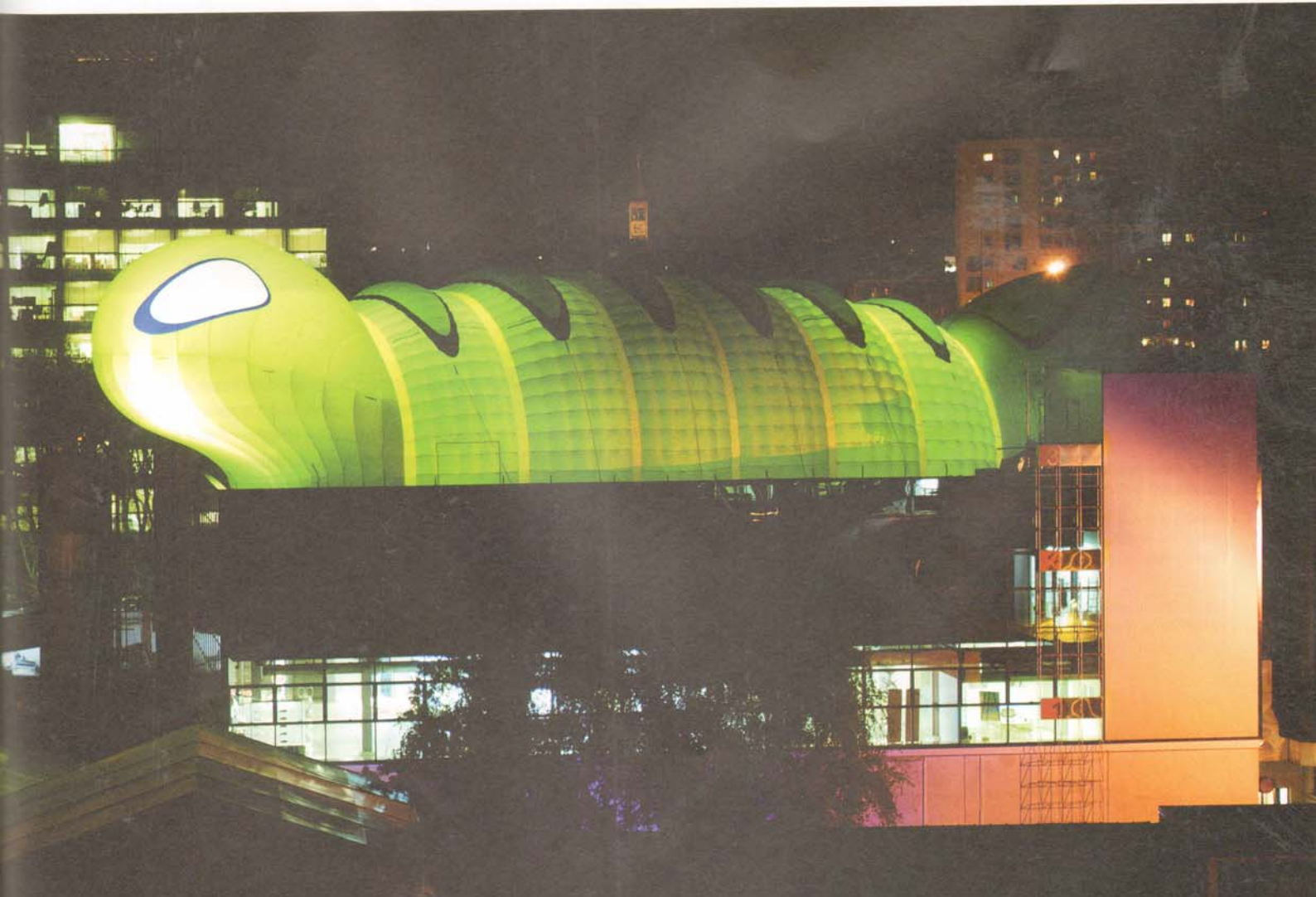
For Vanessa Beecroft's performance at the Castello di Rivoli, 32 models were photographed and filmed for 48 consecutive hours as they sat around a table nibbling at foods chosen on the basis of colour combinations. Since the focus was on the women, MDT thought up a table that could 'disappear': a floating, impalpable and yet majestic object. The table was made by Fiam in Pesaro: twelve metres long, in extra clear Float crystal; it was tapered and sloped to enhance the frontal perspective effect during shooting. In appearance all of a piece, the table is in fact made up of four separate parts weighing 400 kilos each. A mould was selected from Fiam's archive and was used, with certain modifications, to produce 32 chairs in curved glass, at graduated heights to follow the slope of the table. The Bruco, 46m long x 10m high and 16m wide, is the largest inflatable air-chamber structure in the world. Peraria, a firm of Piedmontese 'Argonauts' who love flying in dirigibles and hot-air balloons, built it. In the spirit of a new Icarus, they are now busy building the first individual hot-air balloon for low-altitude flights.

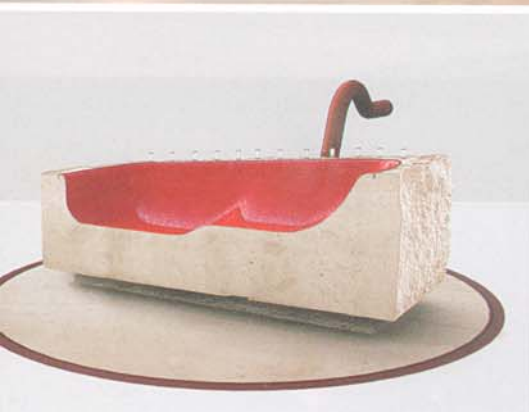
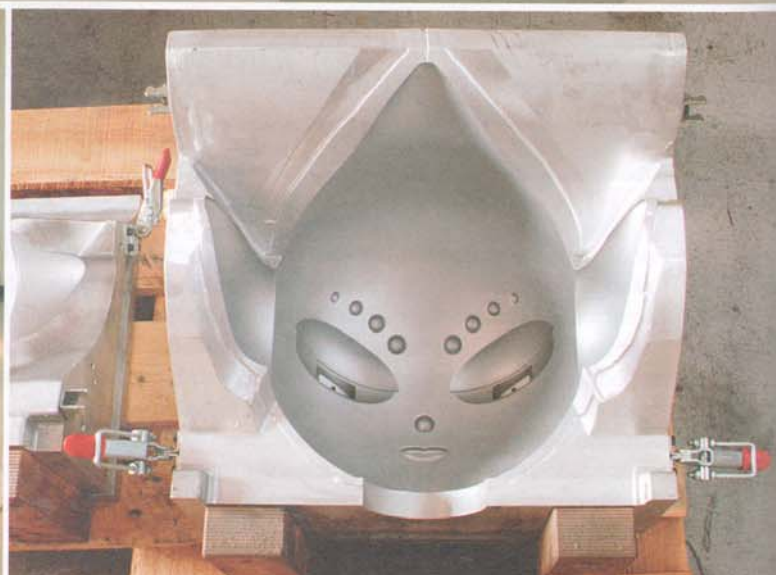
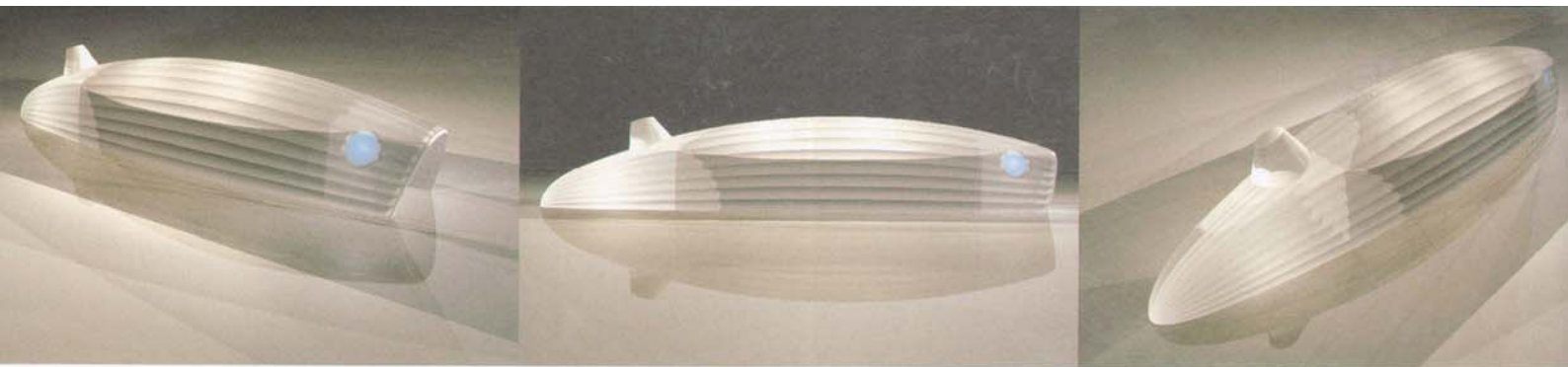
Top, from left to right:  
Bruco's inflatable skin

View on Bruco from via Tortona,  
Milano

Below:  
Night view from via Tortona

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Photos by Luca Tamburini / Polifemo  
Fotografia





## FLYING WHALE

Top, from left to right:  
**Moby inflatable structure**  
 by MDTstudio  
 3D model, external views

**Set of Aliens installed at the**  
 Technogel © factory, Vicenza, Italy

**Aluminium mould for the Alien**  
 head at the Modelleria Angelino,  
 Pinerolo, Italy

Below:  
**Verona turning public seat**  
 by MDTstudio, Modellazione  
 3d model of the turnable seat

From all his experiments with stunning artists and craftsmen suppliers of wonder, MDT has devised an original way of tackling projects rooted in everyday experiences, like those he is now telling us about: a ring, a whale, a travelling museum and an eco-friendly shopping centre. 'The design of the ring is the first in a series of jewels we are developing with the Modelleria Angelino, which make use of advanced technologies, including sinterising metal dust. This makes it possible to turn out limited editions of metal objects that have the same mechanical properties as a cast. It would have been inconceivable to create microcasts using traditional technologies. Moby, on the other hand, is a flying whale! A travelling pavilion commissioned from Peraria, which usually produces hot-air balloons and inflatables for advertising. The inflatable has a built-in container that can be installed as required. The tail of the inflatable houses accessories for the functioning of the pavilion, such as a generator that uses the whale's 'fin' as a flue for exhaust. This space also can be soundproofed.

'The Mobile Design travelling museum is a commission I received from the Cultural Office of the Province of Milan in 2007. Its aim was to make known the museum heritage of enterprises and institutions in the Province of Milan that have contributed to the dissemination of Italian products. Examples are the Kartell Museum, Alfa Romeo Museum, Zucchi Museum, Lambretta Museum, Iso Rivolta Museum, the ADI collection, the Compasso d'Oro award, etc. The idea is to send this virtual multimedia museum to China, where it can travel from city to



city and then return by land along the traditional Silk Road followed by Marco Polo. 'Finally, there is a major project for a shopping mall [in the Milan banlieu] which is still under discussion. To date the proposal has been accepted insofar as the colour scheme and a whole series of measures for renewable energies - collecting water and thermal exchange - which have today become decisive factors in the choice and communication of public architecture.'

### IRREDUCIBLE DREAMERS

But to really understand the huge outfit that our hero patiently and wisely manages, particularly when he materialises the thought of an artist, we would need to see the building sites and installation points where the works take shape. What won't humans do to be like gods! How many years, months and days do artists and their interpreters labour to give us 60 seconds of wonder? Do UFOs exist? Have you seen the work of the Japanese billionaire artist commissioned by the New York dealer Deitch? They say it was purchased by a nouveau riche from Ukraine and it now dispenses its sensory experiences in the Sancta Sanctorum of a big shopping mall in Kiev! A lot of people are claiming it was the great god money, which took it there, but we're irreducible dreamers and we continue to think that stars, UFOs, deities, saucers, lids and humans are all moved haphazardly by the unseeing Mano de Dios. #

[www.marcodellatorre-studio.com](http://www.marcodellatorre-studio.com)

Top and middle, from left to right:  
**Concept Design Shopping Centre,  
South view**

**Main entrance view**

**Internal piazza**

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Marco Della Torre with Roberto Boni

Above:

**Mobile Design**

External and internal views  
of the container  
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