



# Konstantin Grcic 'Transformers'

25 May - 26 August 2023

We rarely confront the unknown head-on. Before setting out on a journey of possibilities, we often need a mediator — a conceptual character, as philosophy would call it, that helps us understand a complex idea. At Galerie kreO, this role is played by *Transformers*: an exhibition of which the playful title echoes the eponymous film franchise, filled with intergalactic robots turning into creatures and functional objects. It seems today that successful products in the cultural industries offer a glimpse into our dormant collective sensibility. Our era, it appears, fancies itself as a super-Proteus, imagining a future that is desirable because it is infinitely adaptable, transmutable, and transformable.

*Transformers*, the title of Konstantin Grcic's fifth exhibition at the gallery, evokes first and foremost this concept of modularity. Over the past four years, the designer has been working on a project inspired by his fascination for a 'prefabricated'\* material: that of a square sectioned aluminum extrusion, perforated with a double row of holes on each of its four sides. This profile, intended for use in the automotive industry as a measuring jig, ensures extreme precision throughout the production process of cars. A device, obtained by assembling multiple profiles into a complex geometry, accommodates the pressed steel body panels in such a way as to continually verify their exact adequacy to the plan.

'The system enables me to build different types of furniture in an extremely simple, precise, and powerful way,' Grcic explains. With the *Transformers* series, the designer repurposes the extrusions and reveals its latent potential for form. The result is a collection of nine pieces belonging to three typologies: black aluminum lights (four suspended, three standing), and two silver aluminum tables. Each perforation becomes a motif that represents the possibility for transformation.

In the 1990s, the countercultural figure of the hacker was a strong influence for emerging modes of thought regarding adaptability; namely, it inspired the development of user politics within the anthropology of the everyday. Thus, this philosophy of open access increasingly infiltrates offline spaces, giving rise to the prospect of a new era of 'distributed capitalism' according to economist Jeremy Rifkin and his theory of a 'third industrial revolution'\*\* operating inside a global networked sharing economy. Modularity, as outlined by Grcic, has a specific history within design, starting with the widespread adoption of standardized elements in the 1960s. Grcic's own take on modularity updates this tradition for contemporary thinking, and incorporates the inherent values of precision and preciousness of the material used.

The suspended lights in the collection possess a distinct status. Their monumental scale allows them to transcend the rational unit of measurement proposed by the human body. 'I always embrace the future, but science fiction has a tendency to freeze the possible by nostalgically representing it or relying on simplistic clichés. Instead, I am interested in a future that, although it remains almost

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invisible, is already influencing the behaviors of the present,' Grcic says on the subject.

The structures, adorned with chains and hooks, capture a range of connotations: they are simultaneously reminiscent of medieval candlesticks and cybernetic spaceships.

'I think that a paradoxical and even polarizing energy emanates from the pieces,' Grcic reflects. 'Personally, the works that have held a lasting fascination for me have always been those that I didn't immediately understand.' *Transformers* invites multiple interpretations whilst simultaneously allowing for temporal ellipsis. Walking through the exhibition space, one is transported five or ten years into the future – the potential time it will take for the collection to be received by the industrial world. We find ourselves in a state of weightlessness, floating in the celestial realm. Here, everything is waiting to be claimed, and a thousand potential narratives remain to be told.

*Ingrid Luquet-Gad*

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\* Konstantin Grcic's quotes are excerpts from a phone interview conducted by the author on December 16th, 2022.

\*\* Jeremy Rifkin, *The Third Industrial Revolution. How Lateral Power is Transforming Energy, the Economy and the World*, Palgrave MacMillan, 2011.