

Not Vital
snow & water & ice

28 August- 6 November 2021
ALMA ZEVI Venice
Salizzada Malipiero

Kips Bay Decorator Show House Shares Renderings, IKEA Debuts a New Collaboration, and More News

Here's what you need to know

By Sophia Herring and Allie Weiss



A look inside one of the rooms at the upcoming Kips Bay Decorator Show House in Dallas. It was designed by Creative Tonic Design. Photo: Courtney Tarrt Elias

Product Launches

Jean Nouvel Delves Into Kitchen Design

AD100 Hall of Fame architect [Jean Nouvel](#) has put his stamp on a stylish new kitchen line for Danish brand [Reform](#). Featuring black and untreated metal structures with reflective cabinet fronts, the collection is now available in international Reform showrooms. Past Reform collaborators include Muller Van Severen, Norm Architects, and Cecilie Manz, among others.

IKEA Celebrates a Fashion Legend

IKEA's new collection with Dame [Zandra Rhodes](#) is all about prints, patterns, and fun. From her fashion and textile designs to her own signature pink-haired look, the British designer has long been known for her boldly colorful creations. The [Karismatik](#) collection, which includes lampshades, cushion covers, and other accessories, celebrates this legacy with eye-catching products that are a maximalist expression of individuality—just like the Dame herself.

Good Works

Herman Miller Makes Green Strides

[Herman Miller's](#) Aeron Chair, a longtime office staple, will now be made in part from ocean-bound plastics. The move is part of Herman Miller's larger initiative to use at least 50% recycled content across the company by 2030. The chair joins a range of other Herman Miller products—including the [Revenio](#) textile collection—as the latest piece to be re-engineered from recyclables.

Show Houses

Kips Bay Decorator Show House Gives a Sneak Peek of Their Dallas Plans

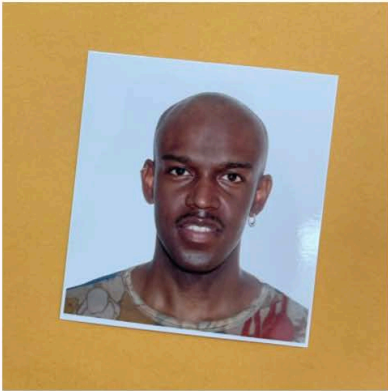
This year's [Kips Bay Decorator Show House Dallas](#) is set in a striking Georgian estate in the northern area of the Texan city. Per usual, each room in the home will be designed by a different designer, with an impressive participating roster including AD100 superstars Ken Fulk and Alexa Hampton. An exclusive first look at the renderings for two forthcoming rooms, crafted by [Yates Desygn](#) and [Creative Tonic Design](#), can be seen below and at the top of this page.



A concept by Dallas-based firm [Yates Desygn](#). Photo: Courtesy of [Yates Desygn](#)

Hires

A Design Talent Joins the *Pin-Up* Masthead



Emmanuel Olunkwa is the new editor of *Pin-Up* as of September 1. Photo: Courtesy of PIN-UP

The designer, artist, and editor Emmanuel Olunkwa, known for his [birch plywood flower tables](#), has joined design publication *Pin-Up* as editor. He will be responsible for overseeing the magazine's content both in print and online.

“I’m really excited to be working closely with Felix [Burrichter, *Pin-Up*'s founder] to build out the existing channels and expand the digital campus to feature more content regularly on our platform,” Olunkwa tells AD PRO. “We want to provide people with resources and experiences within the realm of art and design and to create new channels and platforms that support critical thinking.”

In Memoriam

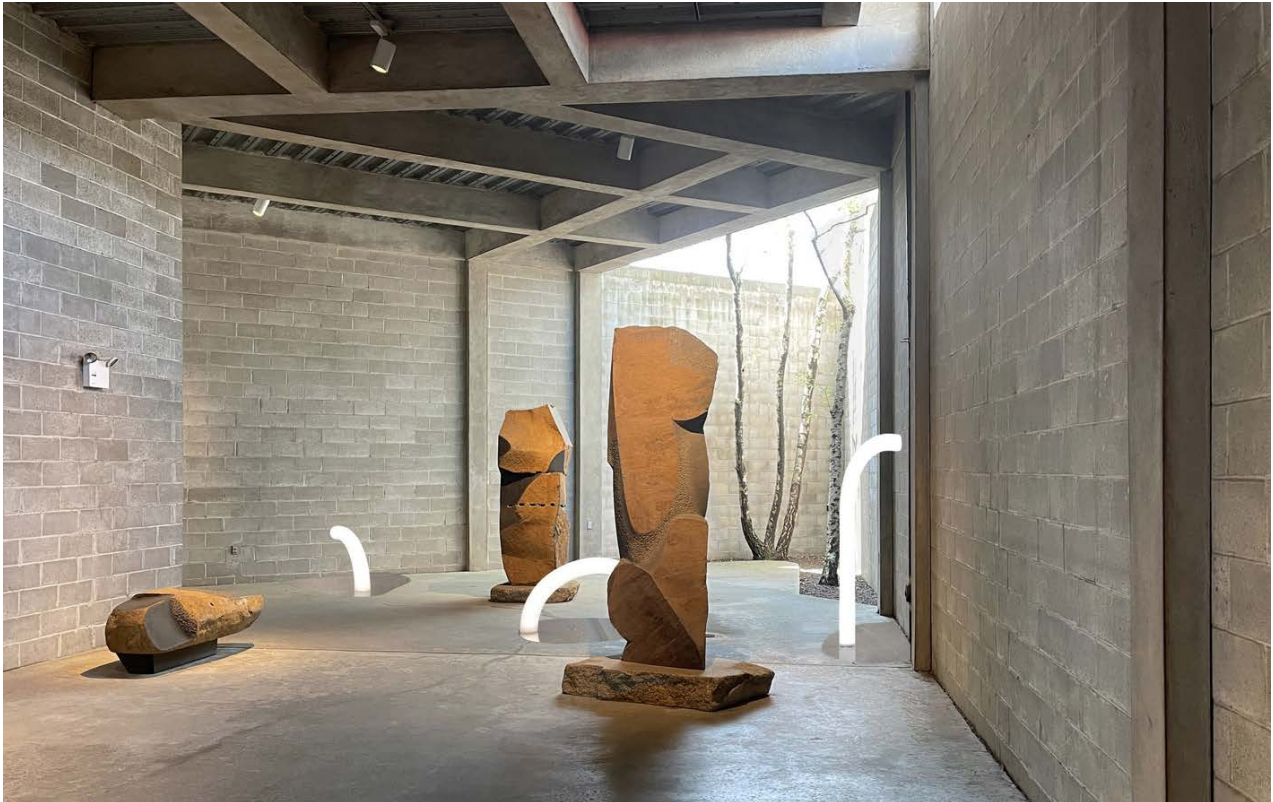
Plastic Pioneer Alan Heller Dies

Design-world pioneer Alan Heller has died at 81, as reported by the [New York Times](#). During the 1970s, Heller remanufactured a set of Vignelli dinnerware to make it suitable for the American market. Soon, the plastic products became a household staple across the country. Heller went on to produce plastic designs for a host of other industry mavens, including Philippe Starck, Frank Gehry, and Mario Bellini, whose Bellini chair was featured in the very first [Design Within Reach](#) catalog and remains a hit at the furniture store today.

Openings

The Noguchi Museum Prepares for a New Exhibition

The Athens- and New York-based design studio [Objects of Common Interest](#) is set to debut a new exhibition at [the Noguchi Museum](#) come September 15. Curated by the museum's senior curator Dakin Hart, pieces from the studio will interplay with Isamu Noguchi's works around the building. “Noguchi was known for his impeccable command on form,” Hart notes to AD PRO. “Objects of Common Interest design objects in the neighborhood of function, but their actual work is on those things' abstract correlatives. This was Noguchi's definition of design for living: the making of things whose notional and non-programmatic qualities help us to understand where we are and where we're going.”



"Hard, Soft, and All Lit Up with Nowhere to Go" is a new exhibition featuring works by Objects of Common Interest at the Noguchi Museum. Photo: Brian W. Ferry

A Venetian Show Engages with The Natural World

In other exhibition-related news, Not Vital has opened a new exhibition at [the Alma Zevi Gallery](#) in Venice. Titled "Snow & Ice & Water," the nature-focused show presents a selection of glass, ceramics, and paintings by the leading contemporary sculptor. "Not Vital and I have been collaborating on exhibitions and publications for the past ten years, and this show comes at a particularly exciting time as we move to publish the most up-to-date monograph on his practice." Zevi tells AD PRO. "That the pieces on display have a connection to Venice and the water of the lagoon makes it an incredibly special event for me as a gallerist."

Snow, water, ice. Not Vital: first solo show in Venice of one of the most important international sculptors



Not Vital in his studio in Sent. 1994. Courtesy the artist

Alma Zevi is pleased to announce *snow & water & ice*, Not Vital's first solo exhibition at the Venice gallery. Vital (1948, Sent, Switzerland) is one of the leading contemporary sculptors who has received international recognition since his career in New York in the 1980s. This exhibition includes a series of recent works and coincides with the artist's solo exhibition in Andrea Palladio's iconic Abbey of San Giorgio Maggiore (Venice), organized by Benedicti Claustra Onlus. Until November 6, 2021.

The elements of nature are a recurring theme in Not Vital's work: snow, in particular, is intimately linked to the artist's childhood in the Engadine mountains in Switzerland. In *snow & water & ice*, the snow falls into Vital's typically minimal and poetic oil painting. This work in white and gray can be interpreted as a semi-abstract, highly suggestive landscape, which instantly evokes the **ability of snow to muffle sound and repetitive gestures**. flakes falling from heaven to earth. Ice is naturally combined with snow: this ephemeral element finds its permanence in Vital's subtle works on paper, also on display. Although known primarily as a sculptor, Vital's practice as a draftsman has been pivotal in his oeuvre since the 1970s.



Kunstraum Dornbirn, Not Vital – Kunstraum Dornbirn

Water is another element with which the artist has experimented throughout his career, and in this new exhibition in Venice it is of fundamental importance, becoming a key element of the work *Val Sinestra* (2019), a sculptural installation exhibited in town for the first time. **The water of the Venice lagoon is enclosed in 42 unique and transparent glass bottles** . Each of these curved, sometimes twisted bottles has a slightly different organic shape. The artist had already worked with glass on several occasions in Murano in the 2000s. This important installation was made in Finland in 2018. Previously exhibited in Vital's home-studio in Sent (Switzerland), the bottles of *Val Sinestra* they contained water from mineral-rich springs in the canton of Grisons, Switzerland. **These springs are famous for their healing properties** and the title of the work, *Val Sinestra* , refers to the locality of the same name in the Graubünden Valley. On that occasion, the mineral-laden sediment separated from the water and sank to the bottom of each vessel. With the recreation of this work, Vital tries to find out if the water of the Venice lagoon will change during the exhibition. This experiment **adds a site-specific performative value extended over time to the sculpture** , where *Val Sinestra* changes appearance and evolves as a result of its material composition.

The link between water and glass is also central to the snowballs that Vital made in the early 2000s. In these sculptures, a glass snowball appears to be encased in ice. These works formed the core of his iconic installation *700 Snowballs* (2006), exhibited in 2014 in the exhibition on the island of San Giorgio Maggiore curated by Alma Zevi. In this fresh and sensual exhibition, *snow & water & ice* , Vital challenges us to explore the beauty that can be found both in the purest elements and in the liminal space between nature and artifice.

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AO INTERVIEW – NOT VITAL SPEAKS WITH QUINCY CHILDS ON HIS CURRENT SHOW AT ALMA ZEVI, ON VIEW THROUGH NOVEMBER 6TH, 2021



Not Vital at Alma Zevi (Installation View)

On view at [ALMA ZEVI](#) through November 6 is [SNOW & WATER & ICE](#) by Swiss artist [Not Vital](#). As Vital's first solo exhibition at the Venice gallery, it coincides with the artist's solo show in Andrea Palladio's Abbazia di San Giorgio Maggiore, organized by the Benedicti Claustra Onlus, on the occasion of this year's Architecture Biennale.



Not Vital at Alma Zevi (Installation View)

For the works on display, Vital employed ceramic, insulating tape, silicone, and even foam to create lifelike tableaux that cross the threshold of representation into immanence. Droplets of snow seem to emerge from the canvas as if the darting from the sky in a blizzard of grey, invoking the Grisons mountain range where Vital grew up, aptly named for its vernacular monochrome that alternates in shades of grey and white throughout the year. *Mountain* (2017), for instance returns to the realm of rendering, but only just: the silicone, snowcapped outline it emanates is nearly imperceptible against the aluminum foil tape. Walking around the work one must focus to keep the dimensions in view, insofar as the silicone's encrustations depict a mountain, rather than veering towards the abstract or *informe*.



Not Vital at Alma Zevi (Installation View)

The process through which Vital creates his works evokes, in unexpected ways, the morphology of glaciers. Icecaps, for instance, form over extended timeframes in which lightweight snow gradually compresses and re-crystallizes into minute granules under accumulated weight. This is, by definition, a slow process that inheres the duration of geologic timescales. Vital discovered a similar process with *White Line* (1970), where his daily walk to school during the thawing spring revealed a line of ice that had packed beneath his repeated treks in the snow.

Other processes of morphology can also be found in this show, such as the blown-glass bottles of *Val Sinestra* (2019). For this exhibition, the bottles are brimming with Venetian lagoon water. This work reconciles, in alchemistic ways, the representation of ice with its other form. As the winter solstice nears, the dichotomy of water within glass is altogether timely. The staging of a transformation that is to come when the show closes and the water is, presumably, re-poured into the canals. Should this year bring the incredibly rare phenomenon of the canals freezing (recorded only twice in the auspicious years of 1929 and 2012), Vital's prophesy in glass, as I see it, may be realized yet.



Not Vital at Alma Zevi (Installation View)

To commemorate the simultaneity of these exhibitions, Art Observed had the pleasure of interviewing Vital to learn more about his history creating works in Venice, his architectural approach to sculpture, and how his longstanding interest in ice stems from his alpine childhood skipping school to make “habitats” like treehouses and snow forts.

AO: Tell me about the inspiration behind your exhibition at [ALMA ZEVI](#) Venice.

VITAL: When I first went in to Venice in the late 1990s I wanted to make sculptures out of glass, and that wasn't an easy thing to do. I was lucky to work with Pino Signoretto who is the big master on Murano. The first thing I asked him was: “Can you make ice?” And he said: “Well, let me think about it, I'll tell you tomorrow.” In the end, it turned out he was indeed able to make glass that looked like ice. I made a few sculptures with Signoretto – one of them, entitled *700 Snowballs* (2001), is an installation of 700 snowballs enclosed in transparent ice, both the snowball and the ice being made out of glass. *700 Snowballs* was exhibited in several venues and museums, including when Alma showed it in Venice in 2013 in collaboration with [Stanze del Vetro](#) and [Fondazione Giorgio Cini](#) on the Island of San Giorgio Maggiore. The installation is beautiful and light; it's the closest I could come to transforming a snowball into something else. With Signoretto I also built a small house (*Glass House*, 2002), which is now installed in my [Sculpture Park](#) in Sent.

My current exhibition with Alma was a great chance to work with glass again and to spend time in Venice.



Not Vital at Alma Zevi (Installation View)

ZEVI: I think there's an interesting connection between the mountain lakes of the Engadin, the canals of Venice, and the changes between ice and snow. Obviously, in Venice you always feel the presence of water. And so, with this indoor piece of sculpture – *Val Sinestra* – you offer the idea of water in its different states, existing inside and outside, being mobile and immobile. The other works we are showing in the gallery are also connected to snow and ice, and consist of works on paper and painting. I think bringing that experience of nature into the gallery is interesting and connects to many important aspects of your practice.

AO: Can you talk about your childhood spent in the mountains of the Engadin in Switzerland? Did it have a deep impact on your work?

VITAL: When I was three years old and my brother was in his first year of school, we dug a tunnel in the snow which led from our house down to the street. I simply stayed in this tunnel. Somehow, this was the first habitat I built. And I thought, "This is great. It's better than going home!"

The feeling I experienced in this decisive moment stayed with me. I never forgot that feeling, and that's why I went on and built all these habitats all around the world. Just recently, I was in Indonesia to visit the house I am building there and to spend time in it. It doesn't have a toilet, and it doesn't have electricity. I love that.

ZEVI: It seems to me that the feeling you describe around those first habitats is really connected to a feeling of freedom and of autonomy. It's like you've continued that from your childhood into adulthood and your 50-year career working as an artist. It's like a red line: the idea of freedom and using materials to create different universes that don't 'abide by rules'.

AO: Speaking of lines, let's talk about some of the first works that you made. I am particularly interested in the piece called *White Line* (1970). What strikes me about this work is its process of discovery. In hindsight, now that it has been neatly catalogued within your oeuvre, the work appears performative and durational. But of course, in 1971, the work was somewhat of a revelation unto you. How did this come about?

VITAL: I made *White Line* in 1970 and it was one of my very first works. That winter, I was up near the village of Susch, which is a village not far from Sent. I was walking up and down the same path for so long until the snow underneath my feet was hard and compressed. And when the rest of the snow eventually melted away, this path I had created stayed as it was almost as compact and resistant as ice. So you could see this white line after the rest of the snow had melted.



Not Vital at Alma Zevi (Installation View)

ZEVI: And by walking, you play with the idea of a fixed materiality in *White Line*. Your action of walking transformed the snow into ice, and in doing so you intervened with a natural timeline.

VITAL: When I started making my first sculptures I used plaster. I didn't realize it at the time, but I later understood that I might have chosen plaster because it was somewhat similar to the snow I was so familiar with. Not only because of the color, but also because of its malleability. I explored this similarity when I did my *Snowball Walls* (2005, 2006, 2015, 2016). For these installations I formed snowballs out of plaster and threw them onto a wall. I did it for different museums, such as the [Victoria & Albert Museum](#) and [Yorkshire Sculpture Park](#).

AO: A work that seems connected to your *Snowball Walls* is the series of plaster mountains. Can you speak to the connection?

VITAL: I was preparing an exhibition in Milan in 2000, sitting in my natal house in Sent. I opened the window and just looked at the five magnificent mountains that are visible from the house. And then I said to myself, "I just have to make these five mountains in plaster."

ZEVI: The plaster seems like the perfect material for this as it has an immediacy that you might lose in another process.

VITAL: Yes, I like to work fast. And you are forced to be fast when you work with plaster as you only have five minutes before it hardens and becomes difficult to model.

ZEVI: I feel that you can see the speed at which you worked here; there is an urgency and you've left them quite rough at the base. There's the chicken wire that you can see poking out of the bottom. I love that.

AO: What instigated this formal interest in making sculptural works around snowballs, ice, and snow sculptures in 2000–2001, such as *Mias Muntognas* and *Piz Lischana*?

VITAL: I was living in New York, but when I returned to Switzerland I realized that what I actually had been wanting to portray all along was right in front of my eyes.

The area I live in is called the Grisons, which means 'the grey place'. The stones here are grey and so are the mountain peaks in summertime. In winter, on the other hand, they are white. And so one becomes not only accustomed to these colors, but develops a sensitivity for grey and white.

AO: I'm wondering if this resurgence of interest in ice plays into the theme of widespread glacial melting and climate change?

VITAL: I remember when I was little, a part of the mountain here fell down. It went on for days and nights. I remember the sound very well as it was a deep and distinct sound. The other day I heard it again. It's Permafrost. Inside the mountains, the ice melts and then the rock doesn't hold together anymore. Living here, I am aware of how nature changes.

AO: Not, you have come up with the word *SCARCH* to categorize your work where sculpture and architecture meet. Many of these works are on view at Hauser and Wirth Somerset. Conceptually speaking, is *SCARCH* more of the feeling you get in a space, rather than the direct parameters of the space?

VITAL: I would like to live in a large sculpture. I recently made a steel sculpture head of a camel head (*Camel*, 2018) and placed it in the grounds of my [castle in Tarasp](#). You can actually enter the *Camel* head through a little door, and it's like a different world in there, in the head of a camel. And this is precisely how my sculptures turn into architecture.

ZEVI: The Camel is a great example of your *SCARCH* practice, as it is so clearly interactive. I was also thinking a meeting between your work in glass and your *SCARCH* is the Glass House in your [sculpture park](#), which is made of glass bricks (made in Murano). It's fascinating because there are brick walls creating a threshold between inside and outside, yet the diffused light travels through the glass, almost dissolving that very threshold. So, I think bringing the element of glass into the discussion of *SCARCH* is complex, but also conceptually very interesting.

AO: We spoke about your *Snowball Wall* earlier – where you threw plaster against the wall. There's again a sense of performative energy, could you dwell on this?

VITAL: We would always throw snowballs at school. We measured how far we could throw snowballs. When I think about it now, it seems like it was actually a performance. Later on, in the 1970s I went to Rome after going to Art School in Paris. I wanted to become a painter. In Rome, people would spend a lot of time on Piazza Navona, hoping that Fellini would pass by looking for some actors. There I made a circus and learned how to blow fire; a lot of performance ideas grew out of my time with the circus.

AO: I love the theme of throwing different elements over your career, first snow, then fire, and finally plaster as if performing snow. As much of your work is site-specific, involves performance or repetition, and is designed for remote, outdoor spaces, it recalls the seminal earthworks of the 1960s and 70s. However, whereas these earthen ciphers were deliberate markings in the ground, works like *White Line* stands apart as a marking that gradually formed over time, as I understand without your intention. If this is the case, then *White Line* is unique in the history of earthworks. I would like to hear your thoughts about your proximity to the Land Art movement

VITAL: I was aware of Land Art; but they don't have so much in common with my work. What interests me is to create *habitats*.

I travelled to Niger in the late 1990s and created several buildings there in the subsequent ten years. This, together with the sculpture park in Sent, was the beginning of *SCARCH*. After I realized one of my first houses in Niger, in 2005, *House to Watch the Sunset* (a version of which was also on display at [Hauser and Wirth Somerset](#)), I decided to build one of these structures on every continent.

I did consider the Southwest (Utah is the most beautiful state I have ever been to in the U.S.), but there are already great works there – [Nancy Holt's *Sun Tunnels* \(1976\)](#) and [Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* \(1970\)](#). Richard Armstrong [Director of the [Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation](#)] said to me, "Why don't you do this in my home state – I live in Kansas, there is nothing there, and it's exactly in the center of America?" But I went to other places because I wanted to go far away. If you do a project in Patagonia, where I have an island in the middle of a lake, or in Tonga, where I was recently to realize another project, then it becomes like a myth. I've always liked this saying by Nietzsche, which can be paraphrased as, "if you really like something, even a person, if someone is your star, it's not in front of you, it's far away, otherwise it cannot be your star."

SNOW & WATER & ICE is open through November 6th.

– Q. Childs