

A photograph of artist Hélène de Saint Lager sitting in her studio. She is wearing a white long-sleeved blouse and black trousers, sitting on a silver, textured stool. Behind her is a large, abstract sculpture made of layered, metallic-looking material. To her right, a shelf holds various colorful, abstract objects, including a blue and yellow bowl and a gold-colored vase. The studio has a minimalist, white background.

Hélène de Saint Lager's
Designs Suspend Time & Space

ELECTRIC DREAMS

by Benjamin Genocchio

All photos courtesy the artist
and Twenty First Gallery



Clockwise from top right: Black Candies Mirror, inclusions in resin, wood. Unique piece, 2019. Petit Vert Table, inclusions in green resin. Unique piece, 2017. Diabolo Table, stratified silvered steel base with surface of red resin with inclusions, 2020. Alualéatoire Chairs, random cast aluminum, unique pieces.



Jewelry designers have long made their mark in the furniture world — think of Hervé Van der Straeten, or, before him, Harry Bertoia and Louis Comfort Tiffany, all of whom translated the fine craftsmanship needed for working with precious metals and gems into the creation of their sculptural furniture.

Hélène de Saint Lager is a French designer known for intuitive, free-form furniture made from poured aluminum and polyester resin or epoxy. But she started in fashion and jewelry design; French decorator Jacques Garcia, on a visit to her studio in 2009, noticed her jewelry and asked her to make some resin tables for him in the same material. Her furniture line was born.

"I had not made such enormous pieces of resin before, and so experimented extensively with the materials and technique. It took me a while to master," the artist explains, speaking from her art-filled Paris home. Prints and



Déchiqueté Gold Mirror, poured aluminum, gold leaf finish. Unique piece, 2021.

paintings adorn her walls, while behind her stands a totemic sculpture from a recent sculptural installation at Charles de Gaulle Airport.

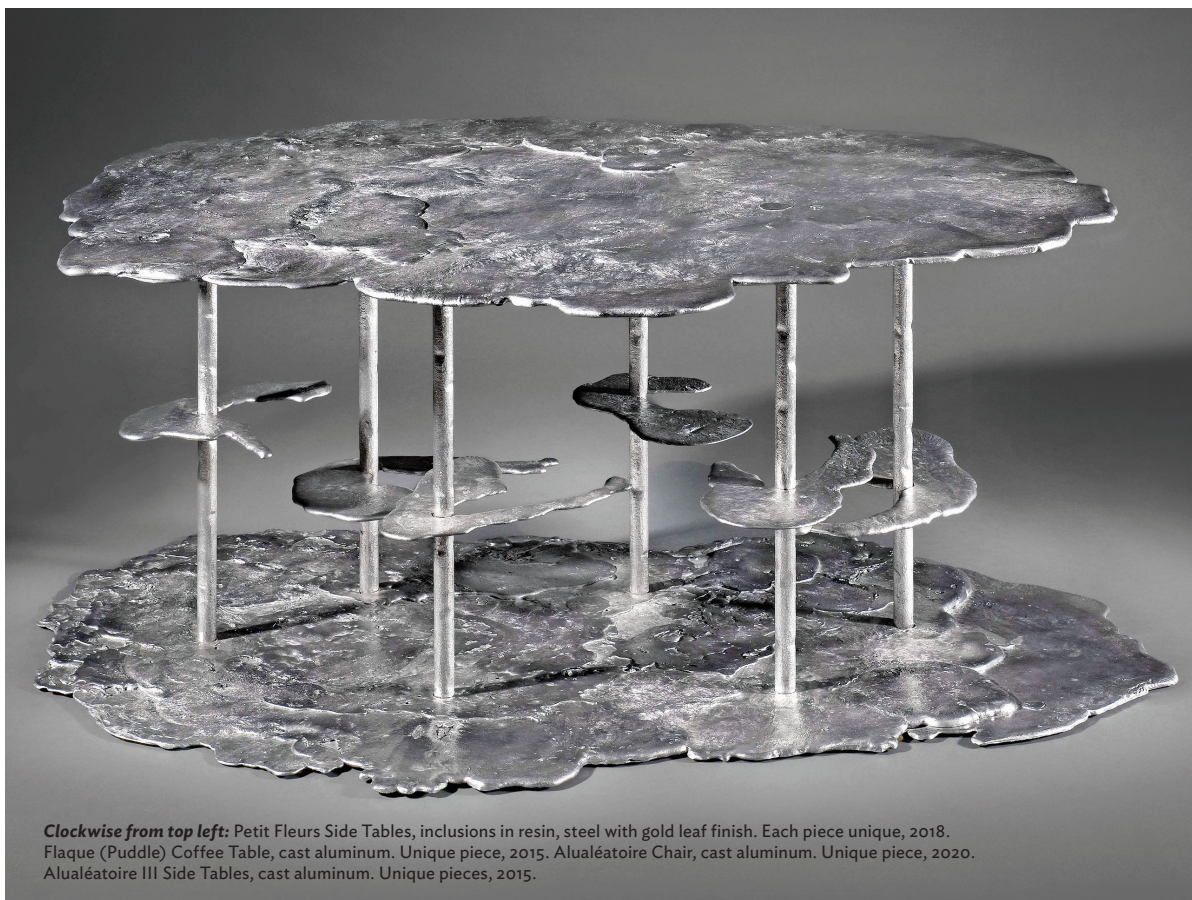
Having originally studied art history at the Louvre School, she honed her skills with hands-on training in restoration, casting, and metalwork. She's a painter, too, and it shows in the way she creates. She works from quickly rendered sketches, or, on occasion, maquettes, that guide her intuitive explorations in color and form. She prizes spontaneity. Renaud Vuailat, from Twenty First Gallery, where Saint Lager had her first solo exhibition in the United States in 2022, observes, "Her pieces carry a vibrant, chaotic energy softened by an intimate undertone, and the resin's depth, fluidity, and transparency yield breathtaking effects."

Her home workshop, where she makes her resin pieces, is located in Ivry-sur-Seine, outside Paris. Sometimes she utilizes molds, but more typically, a hollowed-out bed of sand lined with a canvas sheet defines the shape of the object. "It is done in layers," she explains. "Each poured resin layer is a couple of inches thick and has to be left 24 hours to cure before I can begin another layer, so it is a slow process." The tables take 5–6 layers to complete, sometimes more, depending on size. No two resin furniture designs are ever completely alike, as Saint Lager's works are colored with bubbles and dollops of industrial dyes, which create depth, opacity, and iridescence. They are also brimming with suspended inclusions, ranging from metal shavings, bits of holographic film, glitter, and

Moon Gold Nuages
Ceiling Light, poured
aluminum, Moon
Gold leaf finish.
Unique piece, 2023.



Detail, Moon
Gold Nuages
Ceiling Light,
with layered
nuage (cloud)
forms.



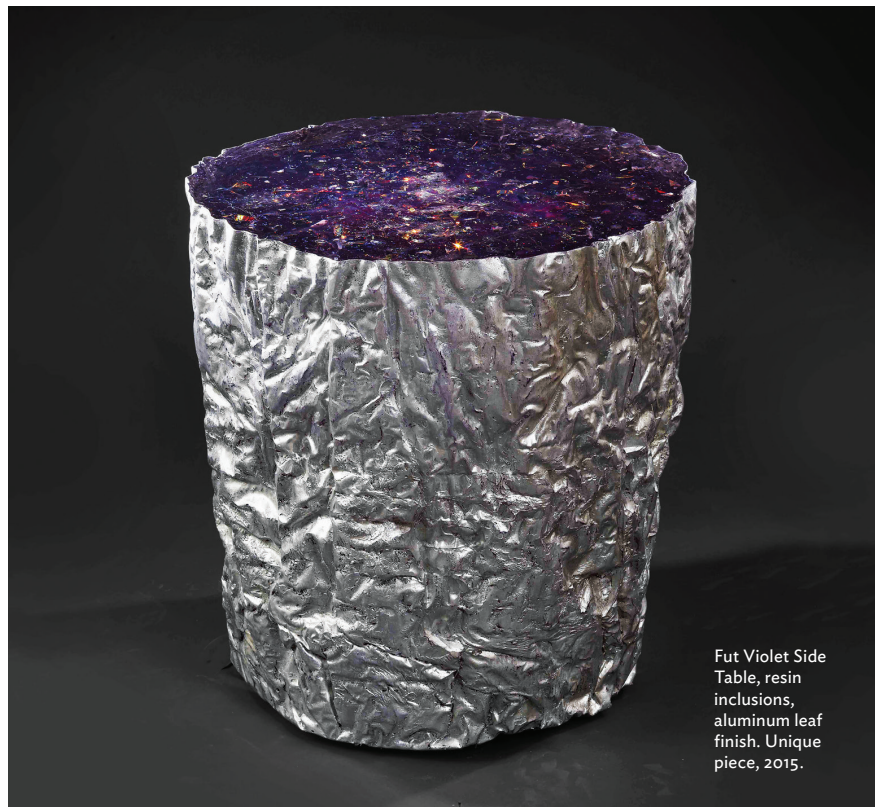
paper cuttings, to rock crystals, flowers, and even kitschy tourist replicas of the Eiffel Tower. “Working with resin is so creative,” she says, “things can move around inside the liquid once I’ve placed them. They can sink or float, pool or layer.”

Interior designers love her resin pieces. Garcia has included Saint Lager’s resin furniture in numerous projects, among them his makeover of the Elsa Schiaparelli boutique in Paris, where he commissioned an enormous table shaped like a flower and mirrors adorned with real butterflies suspended in resin. More recently, the architect Peter Marino placed Saint Lager’s resin tables in Louis Vuitton and Christian Dior boutiques located in London, New York, Hong Kong, Tokyo, and Seoul.

Saint Lager makes light fixtures, tables, chairs, mirrors, and various sculpture works, like the one installed at Charles de Gaulle airport. Design critics call her a Surrealist, but she prefers to see herself as more of a realist guided by the chance-like, alchemical nature of the art-making process. “Things happen during the creation of these pieces that are unexpected,” she says, “I don’t see that as right or wrong, it just is, so I stop and think about it and if I like what’s happening, continue.”

While she makes the resin pieces herself, with the aid of one assistant, bronze and aluminum furniture is produced in conjunction with a Paris-based foundry, owned by expert Italian metal caster Umberto Figini. “This kind of creation is dangerous to do on my own,” Saint Lager explains. “I don’t have the equipment that is needed either; the bronze and the aluminum are heated into a liquid, and then it is poured molten hot into sand.”

Much like her resin sculpture, her metallic pieces are inspired by her



Fut Violet Side Table, resin inclusions, aluminum leaf finish. Unique piece, 2015.



Petit Fleurs Side Tables, inclusions in resin, steel with gold leaf finish. Each piece unique, 2018.

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– Renaud Vuailat, owner Twenty First Gallery, New York



Clockwise from top left: Hélène de Saint Leger’s studio. Detail, Tokyo Fleurs Table. Tokyo Fleurs Table, multicolored resin inclusions, steel with gold leaf finish. Signed and dated, 2023.

jewelry. "One day, while casting jewelry, I noticed accidental runs on the sand and saw I could make bigger metal pieces with the same technique, pouring the liquid metal onto sand and allowing unexpected forms to emerge. So I asked Umberto to pour the liquid metal into the sand, under my direction, and then we waited for the shapes and forms to come out."

Spontaneity and chance continue to guide her furniture designs. Saint Lager might begin with an idea of what form she is looking for, but the metal, once poured into the sand, takes on a life of its own. Every piece is spontaneous and unique because she does not change the final forms; she might smooth out the edges or polish in places, but allows the objects to retain their solidified original shape. "I find the naturalness inspiring," she says.

Top designers agree. "There is a celestial quality to H  l  ne's work that feels to me so inspired," AD100 designer Kelly Behun remarks. Recently, Behun commissioned one of Saint Lager's Moon Gold Nuages chandeliers, made out of poured aluminum with a gold leaf finish that, Behun says, "does the most magical things in the room, especially as the changing light plays upon it. It feels like the ceiling has cracked open to the sky above and the loveliest cumulus clouds are floating by." Nature is her biggest inspiration, Saint Lager says, the place from which she draws ideas. But she doesn't replicate what she sees: "Everything is done with intuition. What emerges is unconscious," she explains, though what results often seems to reflect the random, fluid forms or processes of natural phenomena: fossilization of rocks, atmospherics, or the labyrinthine intricacy of the cosmos and its otherworldly beauty.



Nenuphar (Water Lily) Side Table, patinated bronze and resin. Limited edition of eight, signed and numbered, 2020.

