

# Wallpaper\*

THE STUFF THAT REFINES YOU

## Dubai's Downtown Design fair highlights the region's emerging role as a catalyst for the creative scene

DESIGN / 8 NOV 2014 / BY SUZANNE TROCME

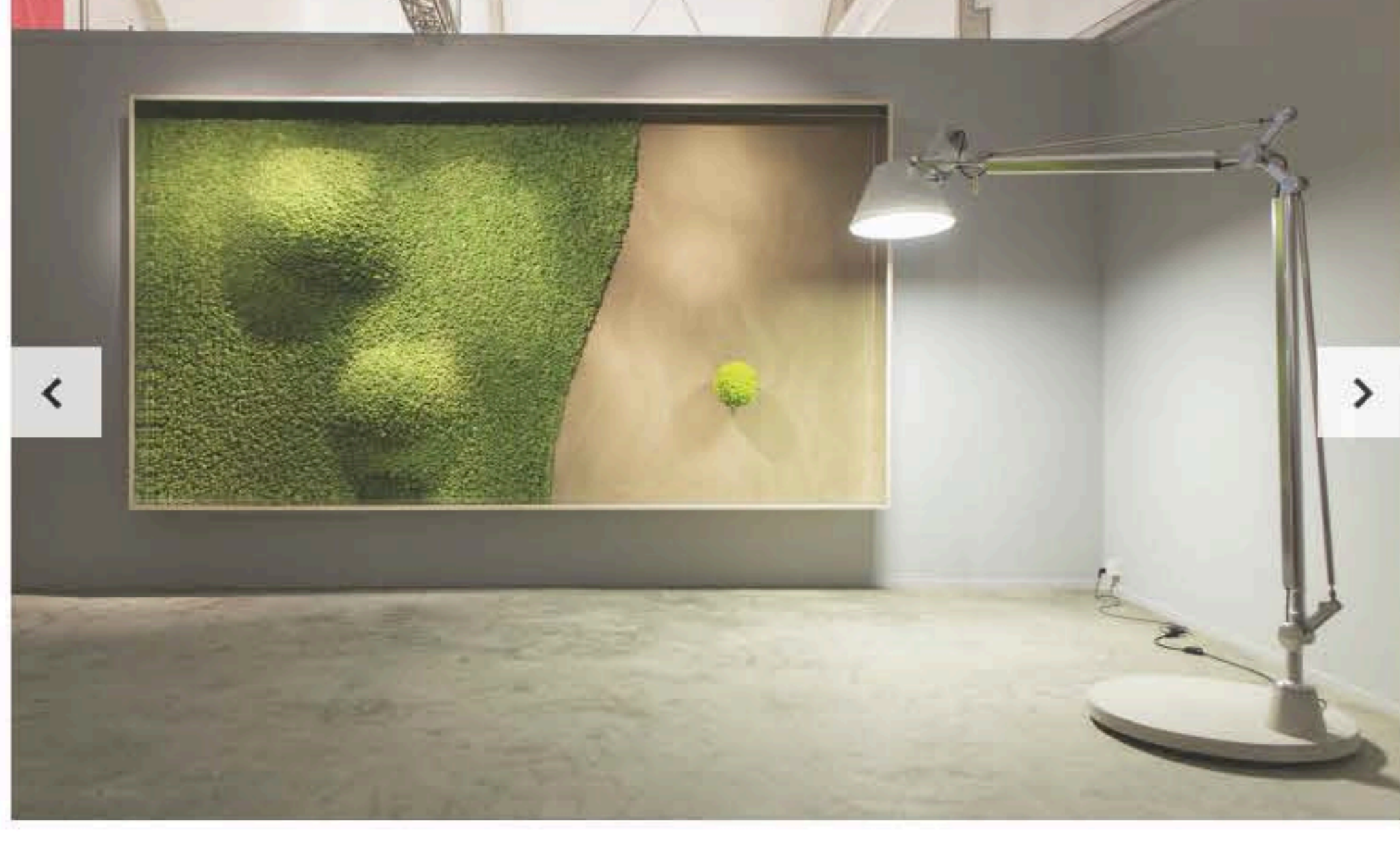
In its second year, **Downtown Design** takes place in a purpose-built smart white structure at the foot of Dubai's Burj Khalifa. Following the curation of **Wallpaper's Middle East Revealed** exhibition in September for the **London Design Festival**, it seemed appropriate to visit the show to see quite what the Middle East, or MENA region (Middle East North Africa) as I now understand, could further reveal.

Similar to the inaugural year of 100% Design, as it was first called here in London in the mid-nineties (later being part of the conglomerate of events taking place under the umbrella of the LDF), the small but effective Downtown Design is succinct and its curation clever. A mix of big names - Kohler, Herman Miller, Hästens, Axor, Bang & Olufsen - are all present as commercial enterprises bringing a sleek international body to the fair, it was up to the local talent to pepper the mix.

Under the patronage of her highness sheika Latifa Bint Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, vice chairman of the board of directors for Dubai Culture and Arts Authorities, Downtown Dubai is organised by the team behind the Art Dubai Group. It's headed up by British expat Ben Floyd, and testament to Dubai's emerging role as a catalyst for the design scene in the UAE and the region, supporting the transformation of Dubai as a design hub that will create opportunities and jobs and encourage new talent and entrepreneurs to explore the sector. A wise idea leading up to the 2020 expo for which Dubai is clearly in urgent preparation.

Supported by Emaar properties, who built the Burj Khalifa and are currently on site with an extraordinary Opera House by architecture firm Atkins (responsible for the earlier Dubai visual icon by the Burj Al Arab hotel with its sailboat shape) just close by, activities at the fair included 'must attend' talks by invited international speakers. Ab Rogers was amongst them, present to nurture his RCA innovations with his team of techies from the school - a smart move for an intentionally smart city - as well as Mario Bellini, Aric Chen, curator of architecture and design for **Hong Kong's new M+ museum**; Giovanna Castiglioni from the **Fondazione Achille Castiglioni**; and Kartell owner and president Claudio Luti. It was an international meet and a useful cross pollination of ideas.

Highlights included the magnificent curation of design from MENA regions by Lamia Bousnina Ben Ayed, owner of the Tunis gallery Musk and Amber where she usually mixes brands she represents in her home country: Knoll, Moooi, Gaia & Gino et al, with Middle Eastern finds. Here it was just the locals. It is clear the culture and arts authorities in Dubai are committed to encouraging a free creative flow into and out of Dubai. Downtown it may not have seemed. Design it certainly was.



Installation view of 'Green Dunes', by Aldo Cibic for Blumohito, which greeted guests at this year's Downtown Design fair. Cibic has joined Blumohito to produce a new smart acoustic green vegetal wall - smart technology being central to new buildings in Dubai. *Photography: Xavier Ansart*



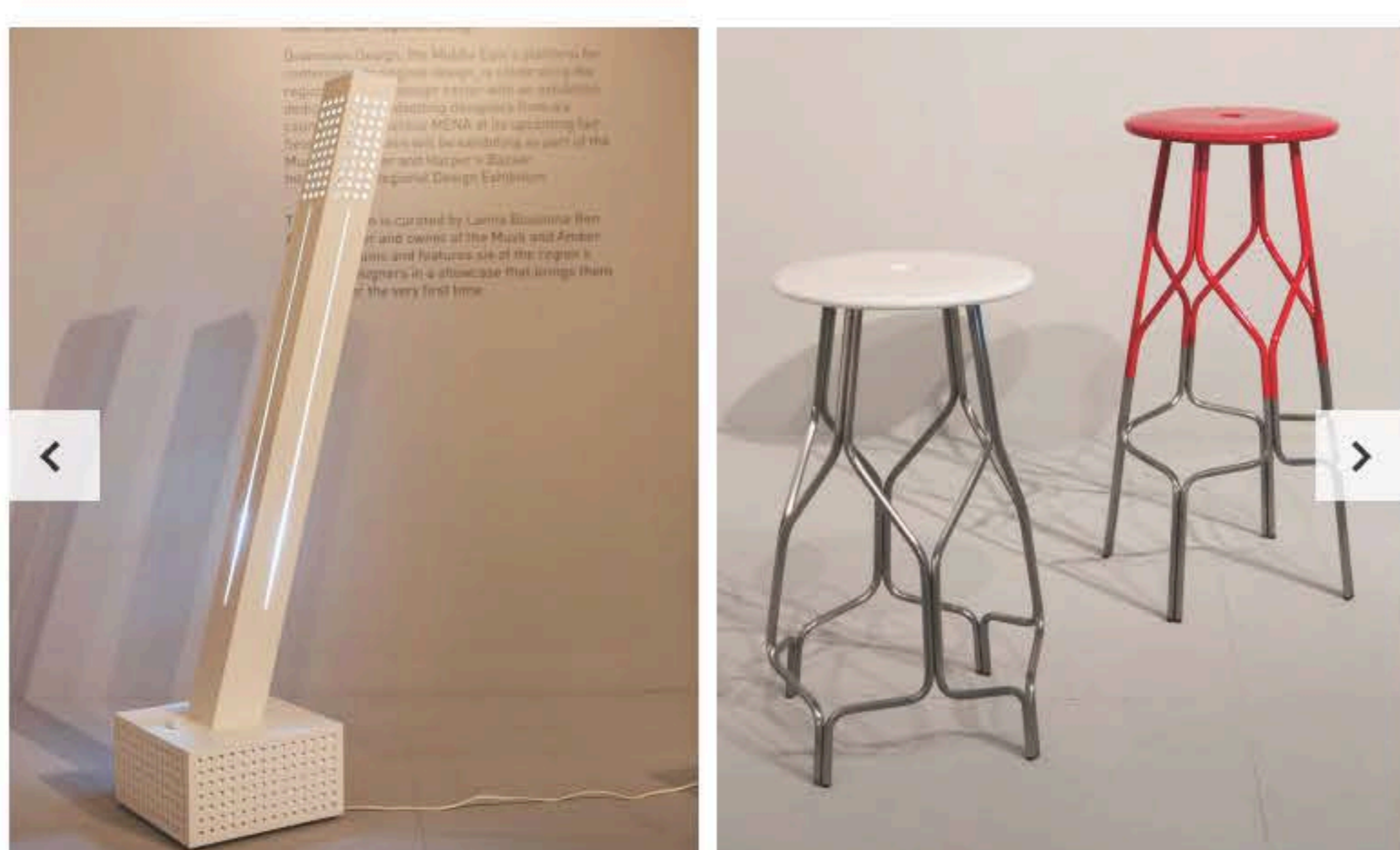
Swedish materials firm Bolon linked with local UAE architecture firm Loci to inspire a locally designed and made product, 'Khatt', a garment hanger with a difference. Subtly engineered the articulation of the movable parts is solid and seamless. Inspired by Dubai heritage, the making of Dhow boats and driven by its locus, 'Khatt' came into being to answer a regional need for local design, knowledge, and handcraft. Made from wood, leather, and brushed stainless steel, the hit of Downtown Design



'Parallel Angles' seating, by Kuwaiti Nana Al Hamad studio, whose design philosophy 'remember the future' creates pared down playful furniture. Nana Al Hamad has studios in Kuwait City and New York City. *Photography: Xavier Ansart*



Arwa Hafiz from Saudi Arabia is the woman behind the Odd Piece Gallery and travels far and wide sourcing vintage, reclaimed, and antique and contemporary pieces which she restores and updates using vibrant materials she has found en route. Using silks, satins, shag weaves and any colourful array, the finished products are sold in her Dubai gallery. *Photography: Xavier Ansart*



Right: Kuwaiti Al-Hamad Design Studio's 'Parallel' light forms part of the curated vision by Lamia Bousnina Ben Ayed, which reached out to a total of six countries from the MENA (Middle East North Africa) region. Right: Inspired by Islamic architecture in its astute way of distributing weight using minimal material and achieving great rigidity, 'Mook' is a cost-effective product repeating one element eight times to form the whole. The smart stool, by Cherif Morsi from Egypt, also has a stackable version. *Photography: Xavier Ansart*



The d3 master plan a future mini city for Dubai, already in construction, the Dubai Design District is a purpose built community dedicated to promoting and nurturing emerging local talent and providing a creative home to established international and established fashion and design brands. *Photography: Xavier Ansart*



The interactive map delineates the different quarters of the entrepreneurial d3 scheme, which will be a cornerstone of Dubai's design future, contributing to the GDP, generating jobs in design and developing designed tourism. *Photography: Xavier Ansart*



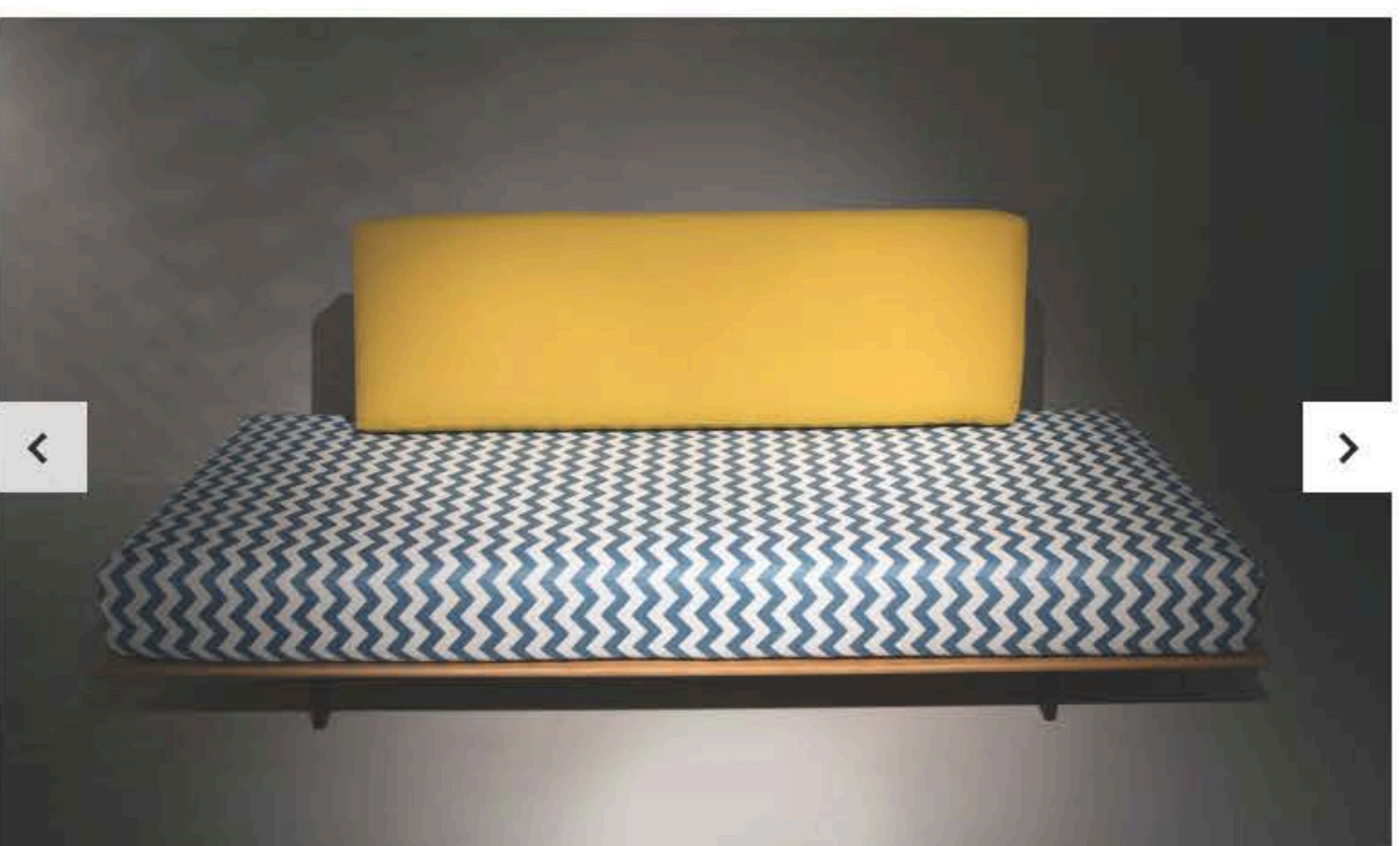
Downtown Design took place in a stunning white structure at the foot of the Burj Khalifa, the tallest man-made structure in the world constructed by Emaar, who also supported the fair



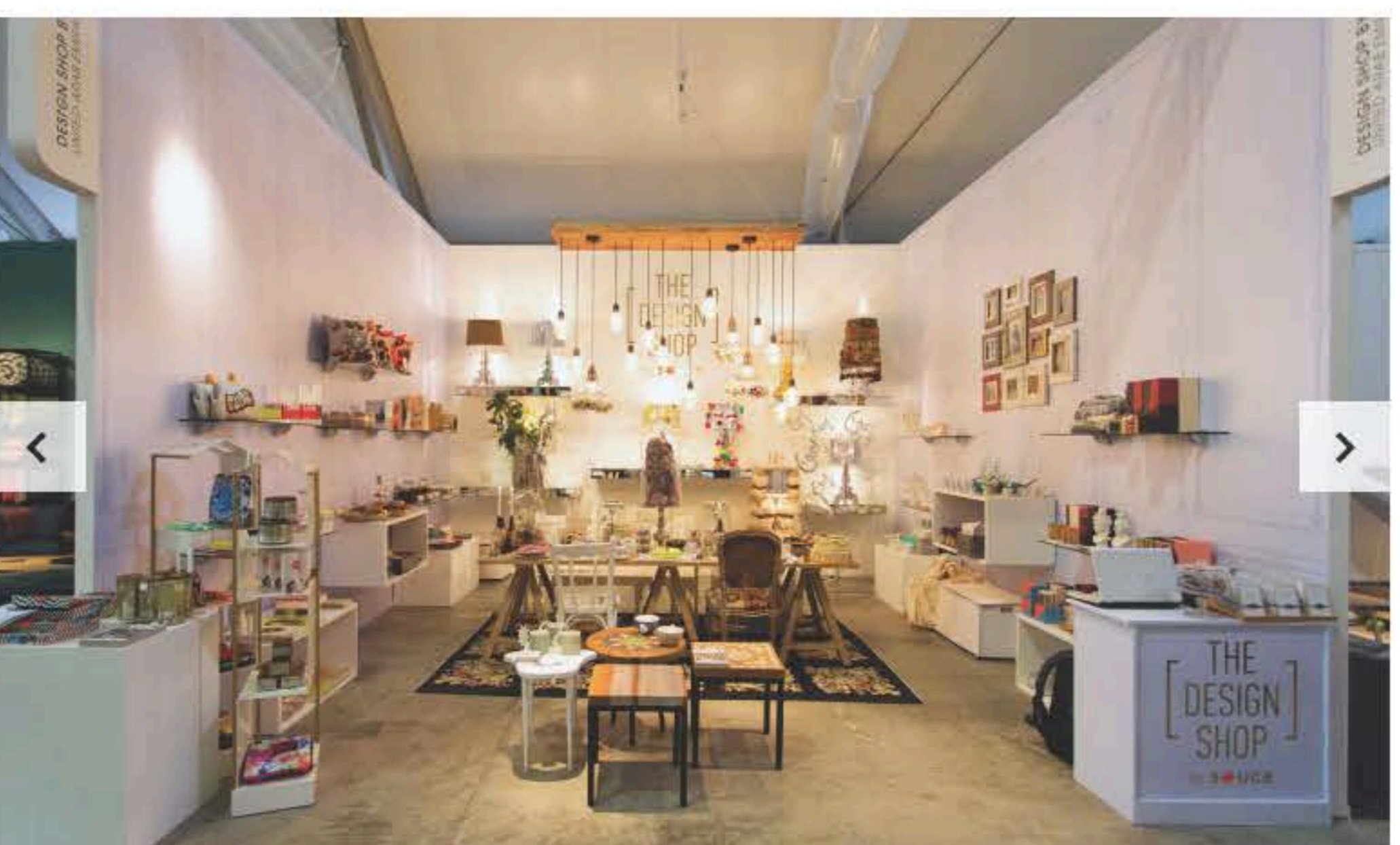
From left: Alserkal Foundation president Ahmad Bin Eisa Alserkal, LOCI partner and architect Hamad Najib Khoory, and Dubai Culture and Arts Authority manager of visual arts Khalil Abdulwahid



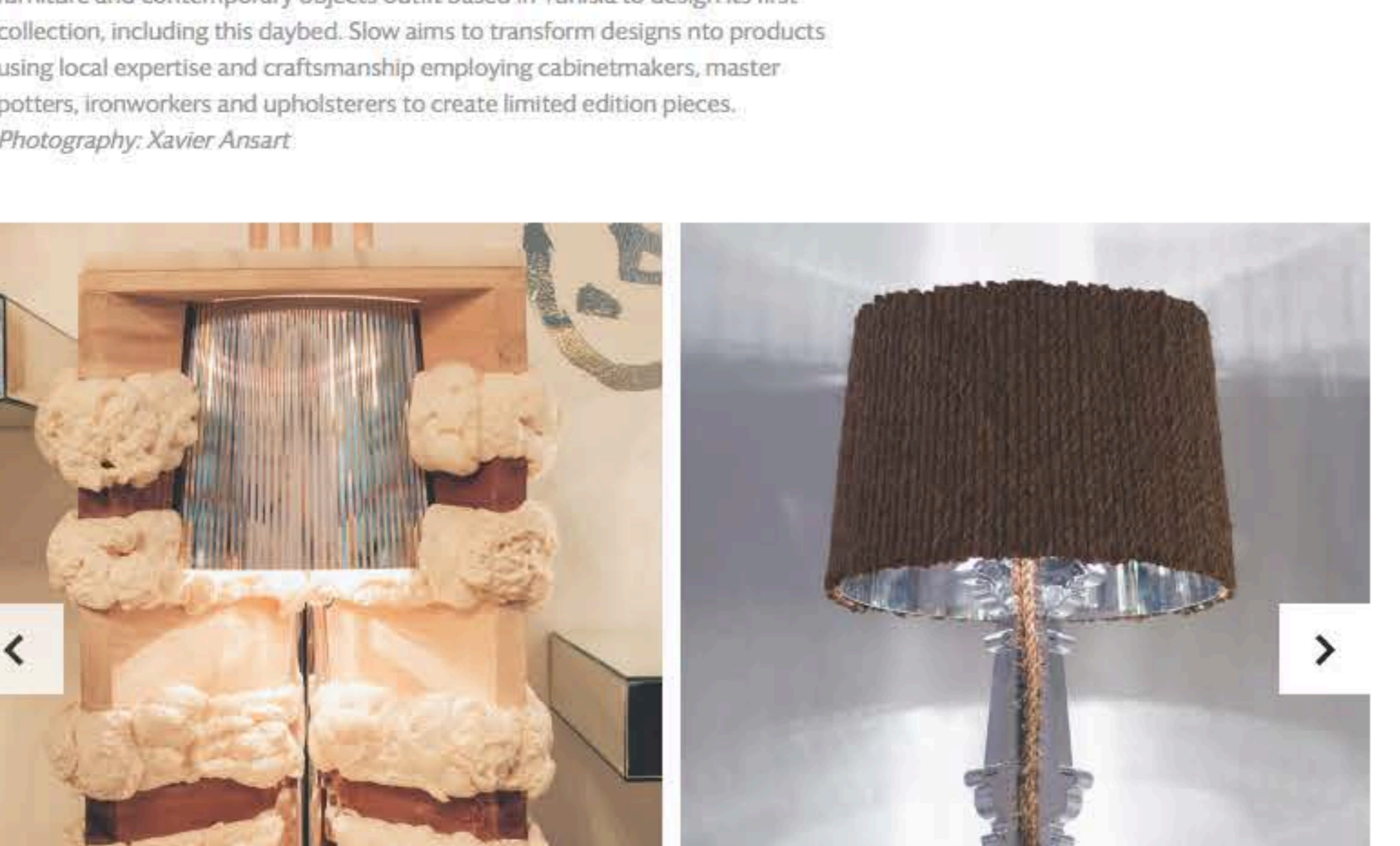
'Weaved Lamp' by Lebanese interior architect and boutique owner Nayef Francis, included in Downtown Design's Musk and Amber collection, a group show curated by Tunisian gallery owner Lamia Bousnina Ben Ayed



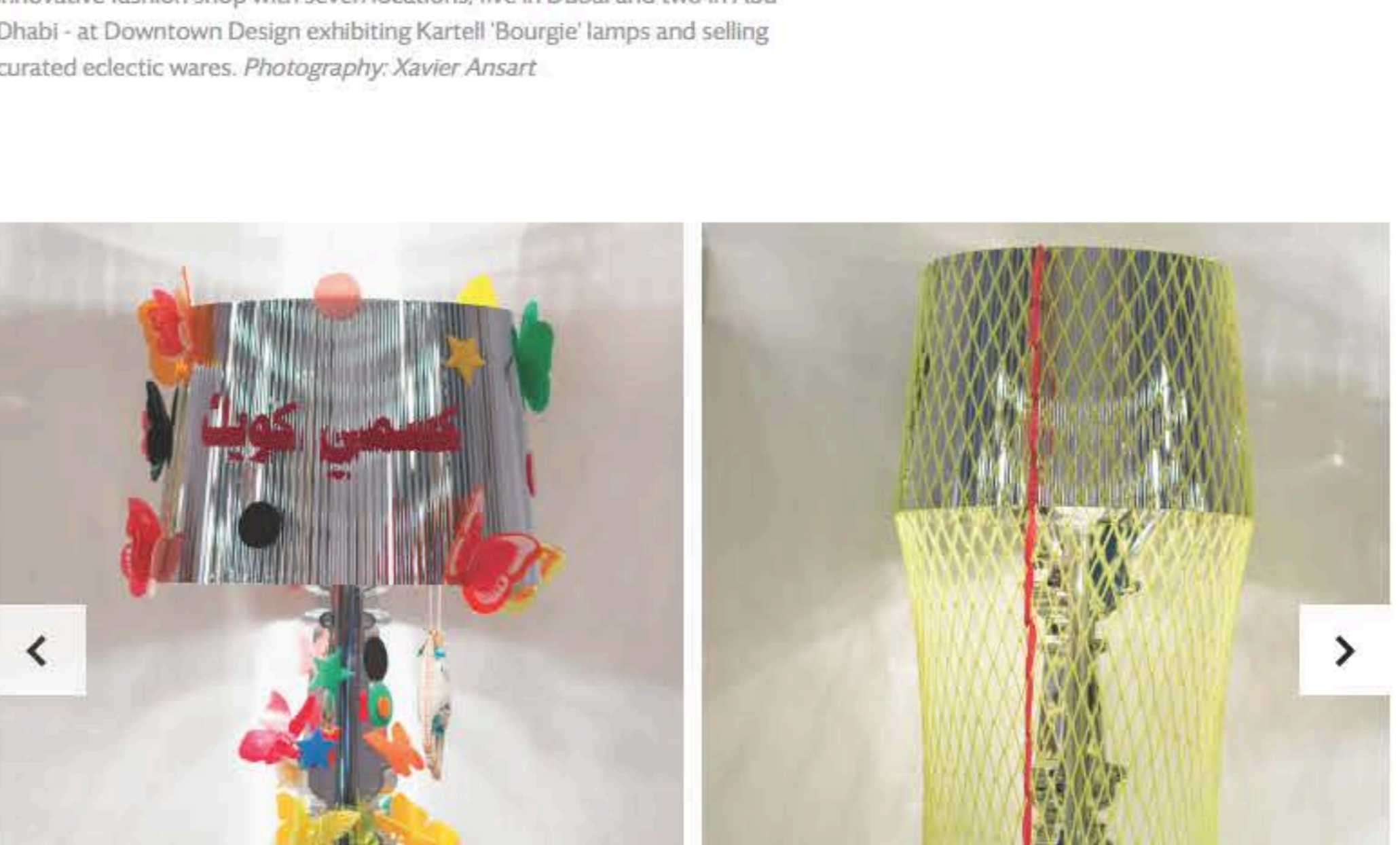
Tunisian designer Chacha Atallah was commissioned by Slow, a young furniture and contemporary objects outfit based in Tunisia to design its first collection, including this daybed. Slow aims to transform designs into products using local expertise and craftsmanship employing cabinetmakers, master patterners, ironworkers and upholsters to create limited edition pieces. *Photography: Xavier Ansart*



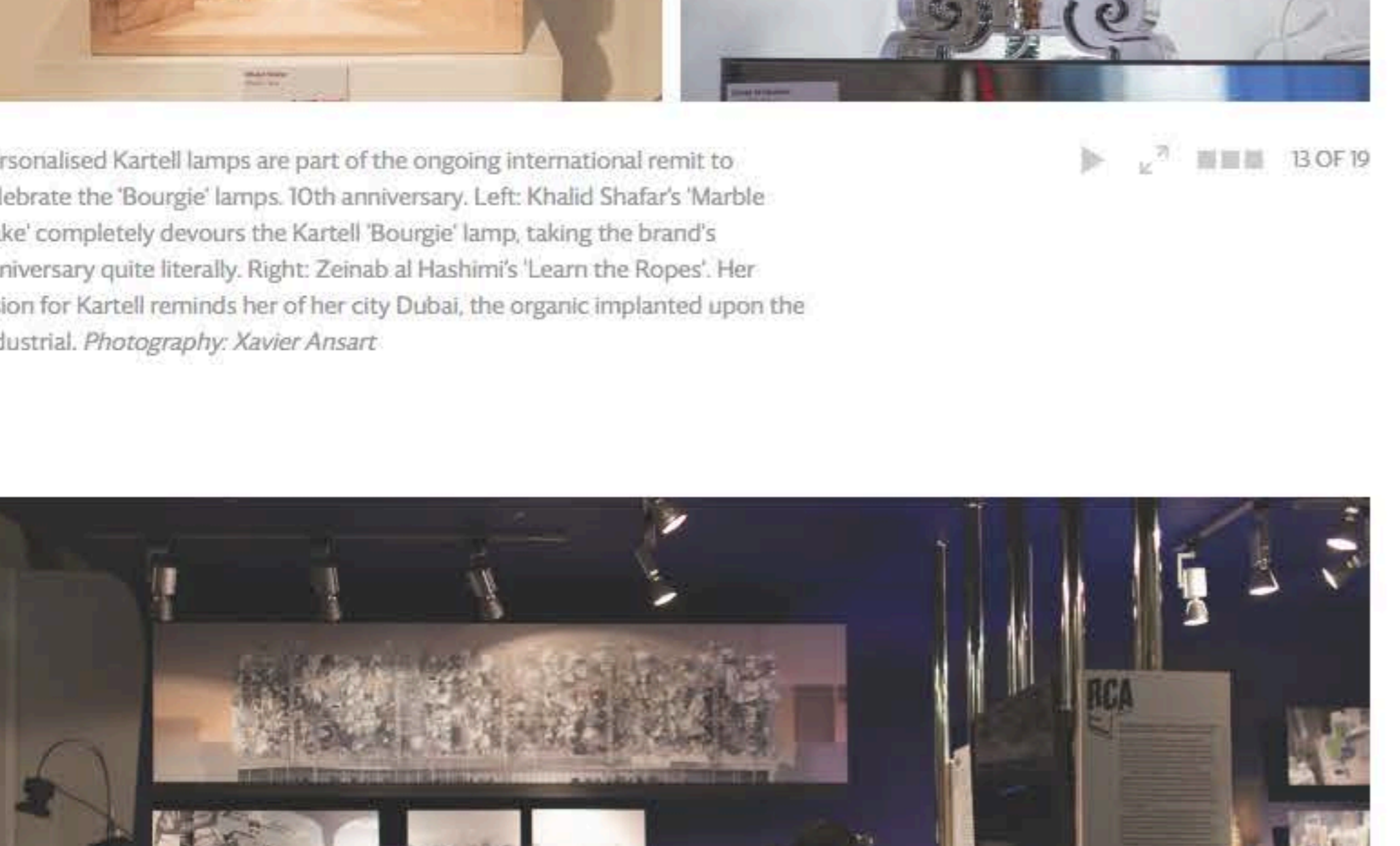
The Design Shop by S'uce (mouthed as Sauce) - an award-winning and innovative fashion shop with seven locations, five in Dubai and two in Abu Dhabi - at Downtown Design exhibiting Kartell 'Bourgie' lamps and selling curated eclectic wares. *Photography: Xavier Ansart*



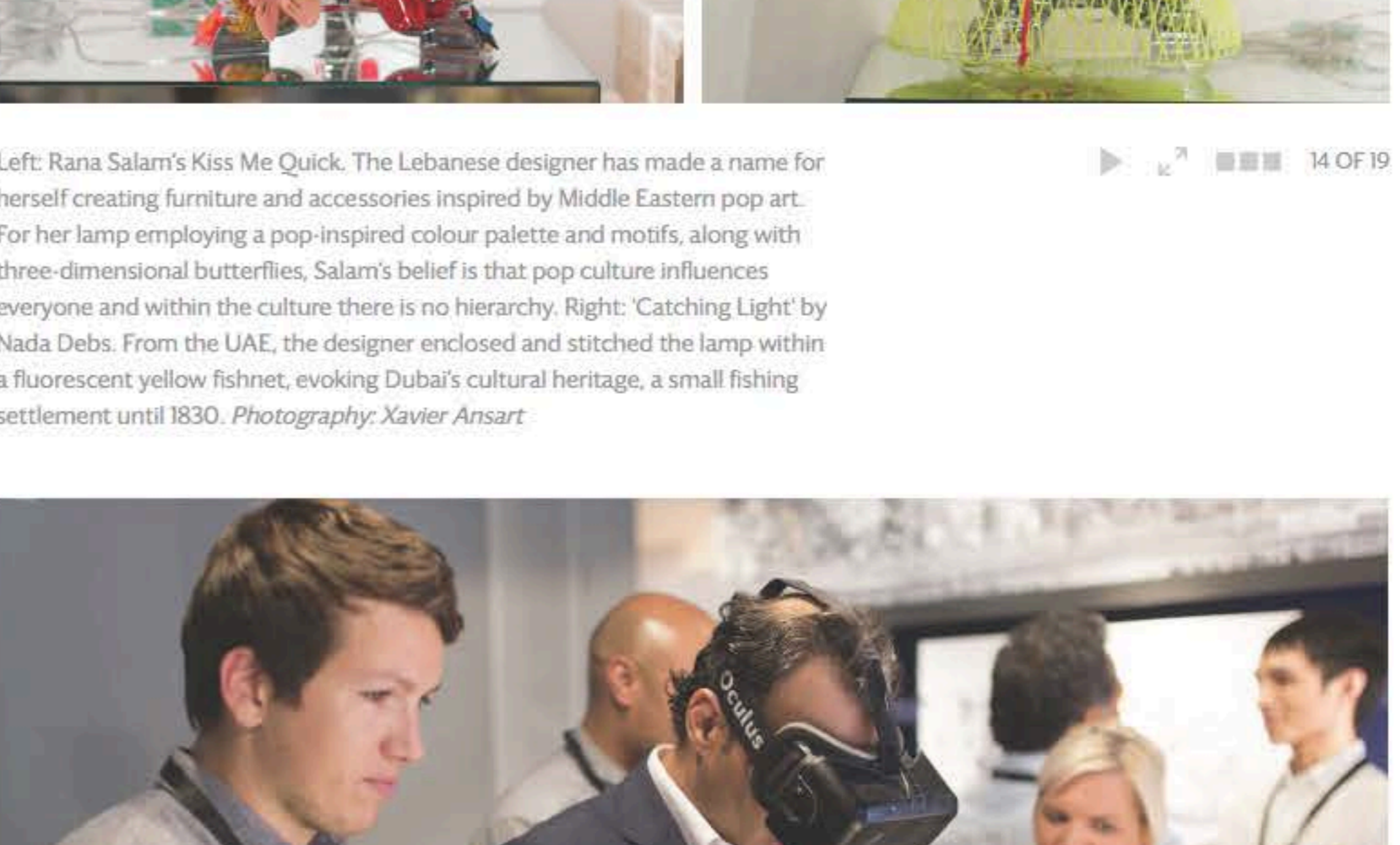
Personalised Kartell lamps are part of the ongoing international remit to celebrate the 'Bourgie' lamps. 10th anniversary. Left: Khalid Shafar's 'Marble Cake' completely deconstructs the Kartell 'Bourgie' lamp, taking the brand's anniversary quite literally. Right: Zehab al Hasham's 'Learn the Rope'. Her vision for Kartell reminds her of her city Dubai, the organic implanted upon the industrial. *Photography: Xavier Ansart*



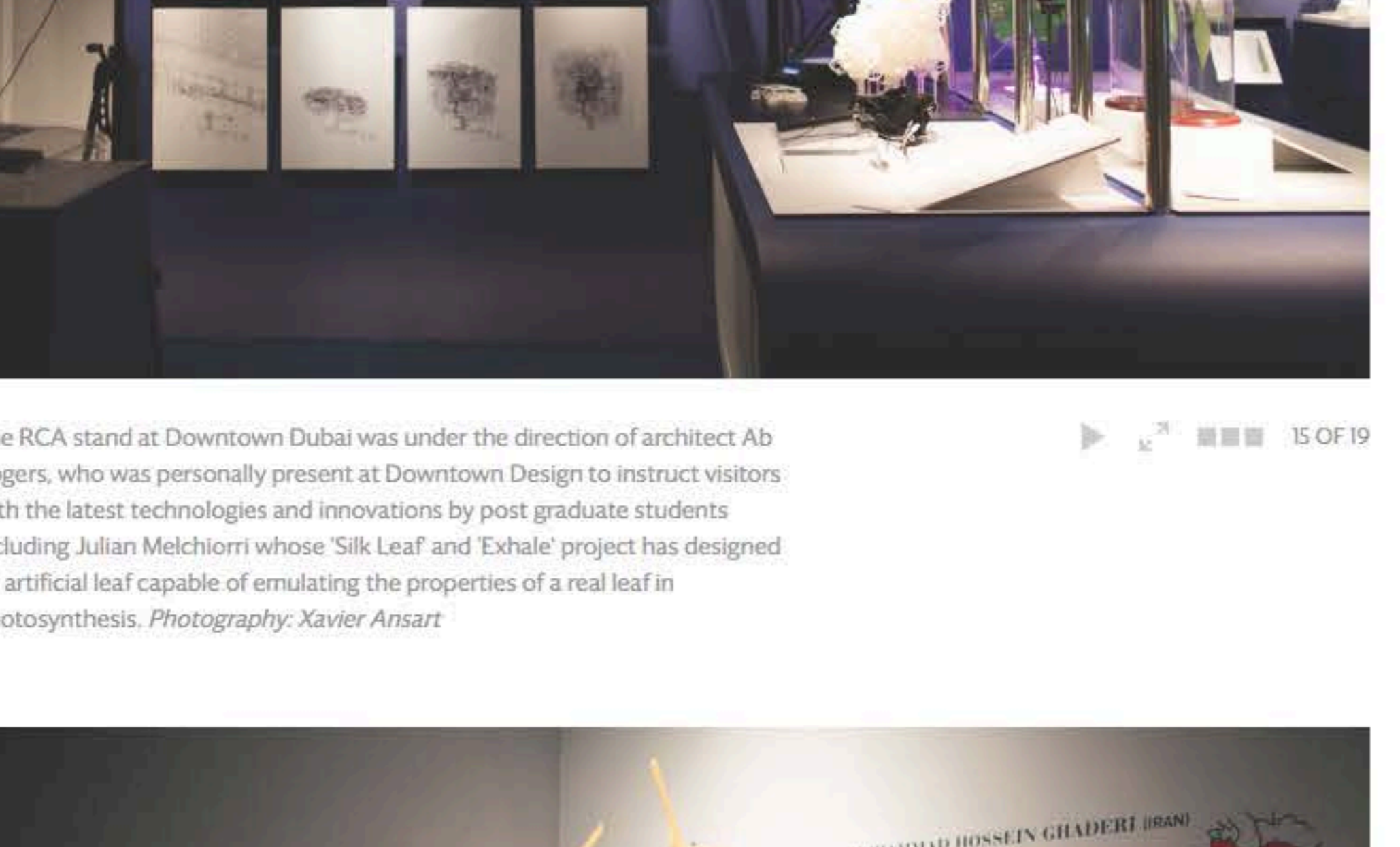
Left: Rana Salam's Kiss Me Quick. The Lebanese designer has made a name for herself creating furniture and accessories inspired by Middle Eastern pop art. For her lamp employing a pop-inspired colour palette and motifs, along with three-dimensional butterflies, Salam's belief is that pop culture influences everyone and within the culture there is no hierarchy. Right: 'Catching Light' by Nada Debs. From the UAE, the designer enclosed and stitched the lamp within a fluorescent yellow fishnet, evoking Dubai's cultural heritage, a small fishing settlement until 1830. *Photography: Xavier Ansart*



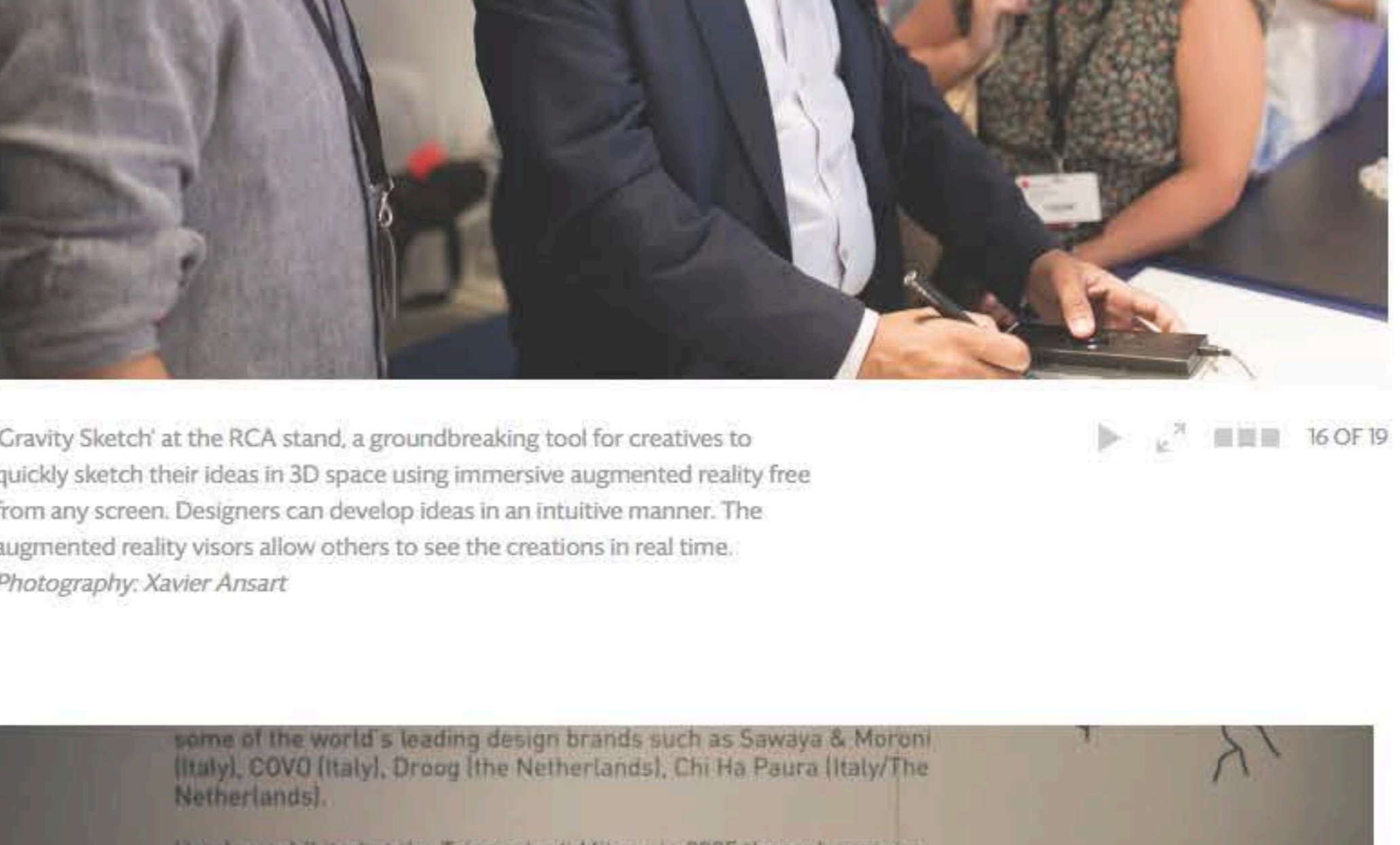
The RCA stand at Downtown Dubai was under the direction of architect Ab Rogers, who was personally present at Downtown Design to instruct visitors with the latest technologies and innovations by post graduate students including Julian Melchiorri whose 'Silk Leaf' and 'Exhale' projects has designed an artificial leaf capable of emulating the properties of a real leaf in photosynthesis. *Photography: Xavier Ansart*



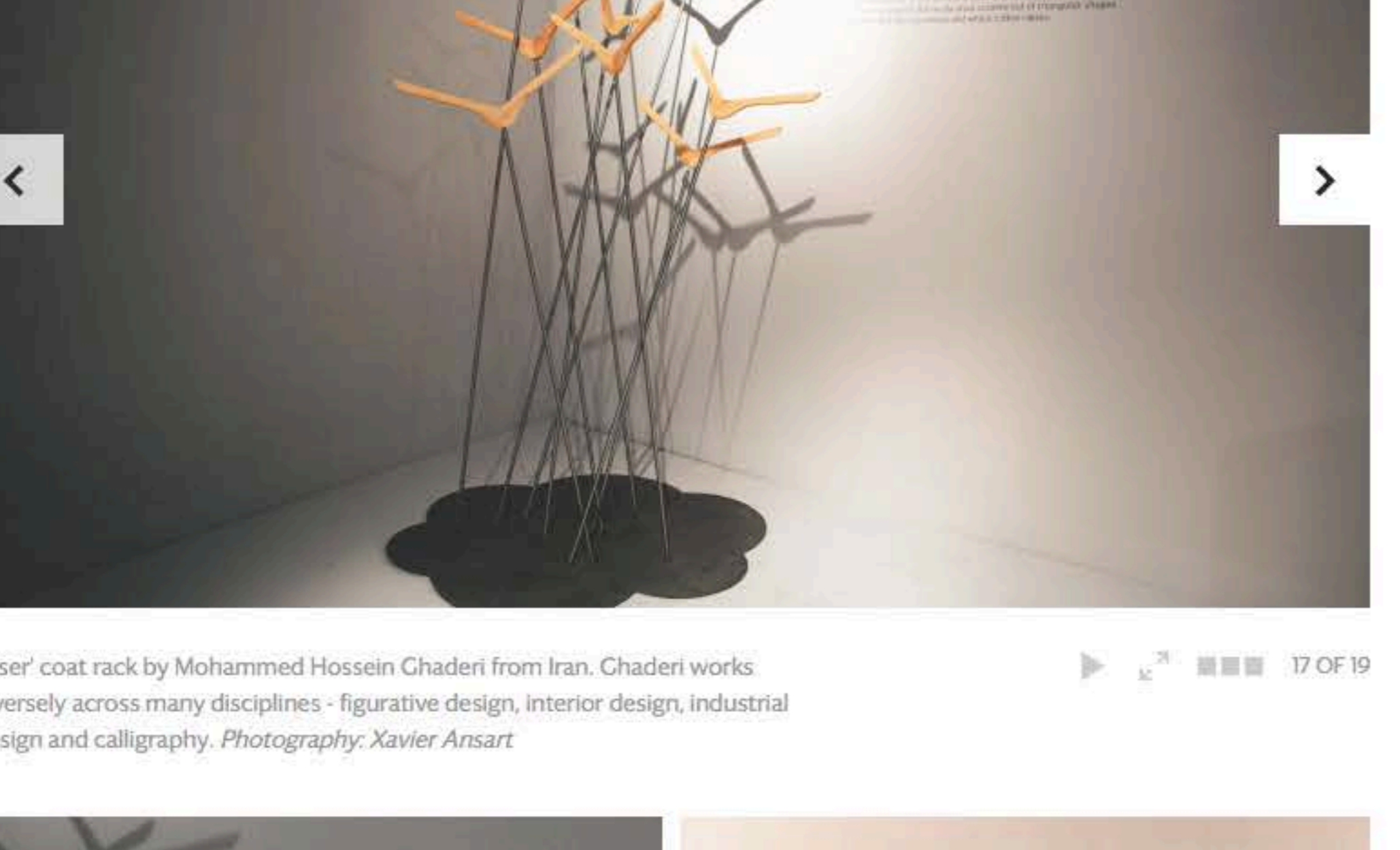
'Gravity Sketch' at the RCA stand, a groundbreaking tool for creatives to quickly sketch their ideas in 3D space using immersive augmented reality free from any screen. Designers can develop ideas in an intuitive manner. The augmented reality visors allow others to see the creations in real time. *Photography: Xavier Ansart*



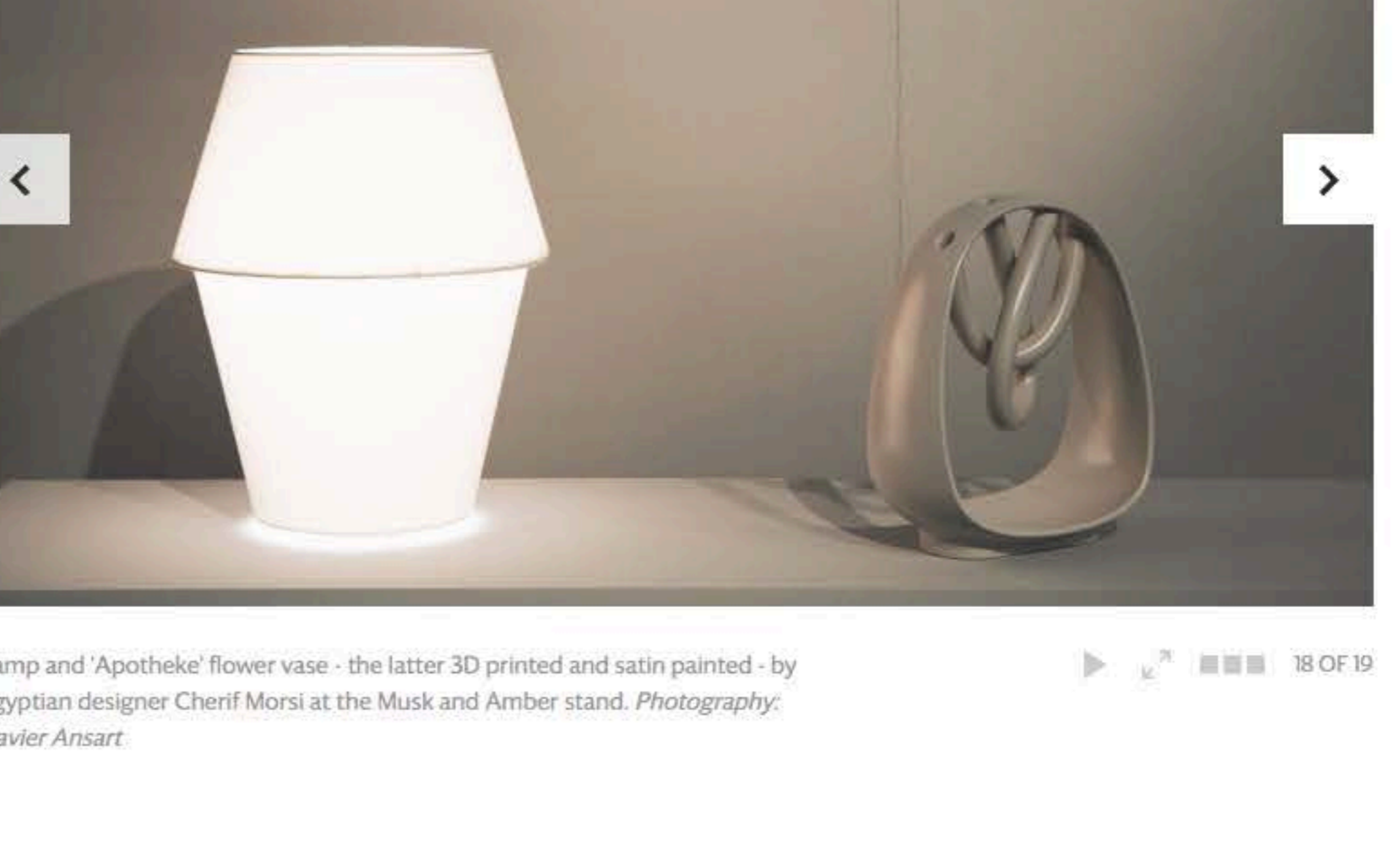
'Riser' coat rack by Mohammed Hossein Ghaderi from Iran. Ghaderi works diversely across many disciplines - figurative design, industrial design and calligraphy. *Photography: Xavier Ansart*



Lamp and 'Apotheke' flower vase - the latter 3D printed and satin painted - by Egyptian designer Cherif Morsi at the Musk and Amber stand. *Photography: Xavier Ansart*



Left: 'Bernuda' bar stool by Iranian designer Mohammed Hossein Ghaderi. Graphic elements are highlighted in much of the designer's work. Right: The 'Cul de Sac' chair by Lebanese interior architect Nayef Francis uses a single piece of black metal and the leather is craftily held in place under the arms with a metal rod system. Simple, effective and robust. The designer explains its flexibility - when the leather runs out of steam simply replace or change the leather colour at whim. A highly original design epitomising the practical creativity of many young designers from the entire MENA region seen at the fair. *Photography: Xavier Ansart*



Lamp and 'Apotheke' flower vase - the latter 3D printed and satin painted - by Egyptian designer Cherif Morsi at the Musk and Amber stand. *Photography: Xavier Ansart*