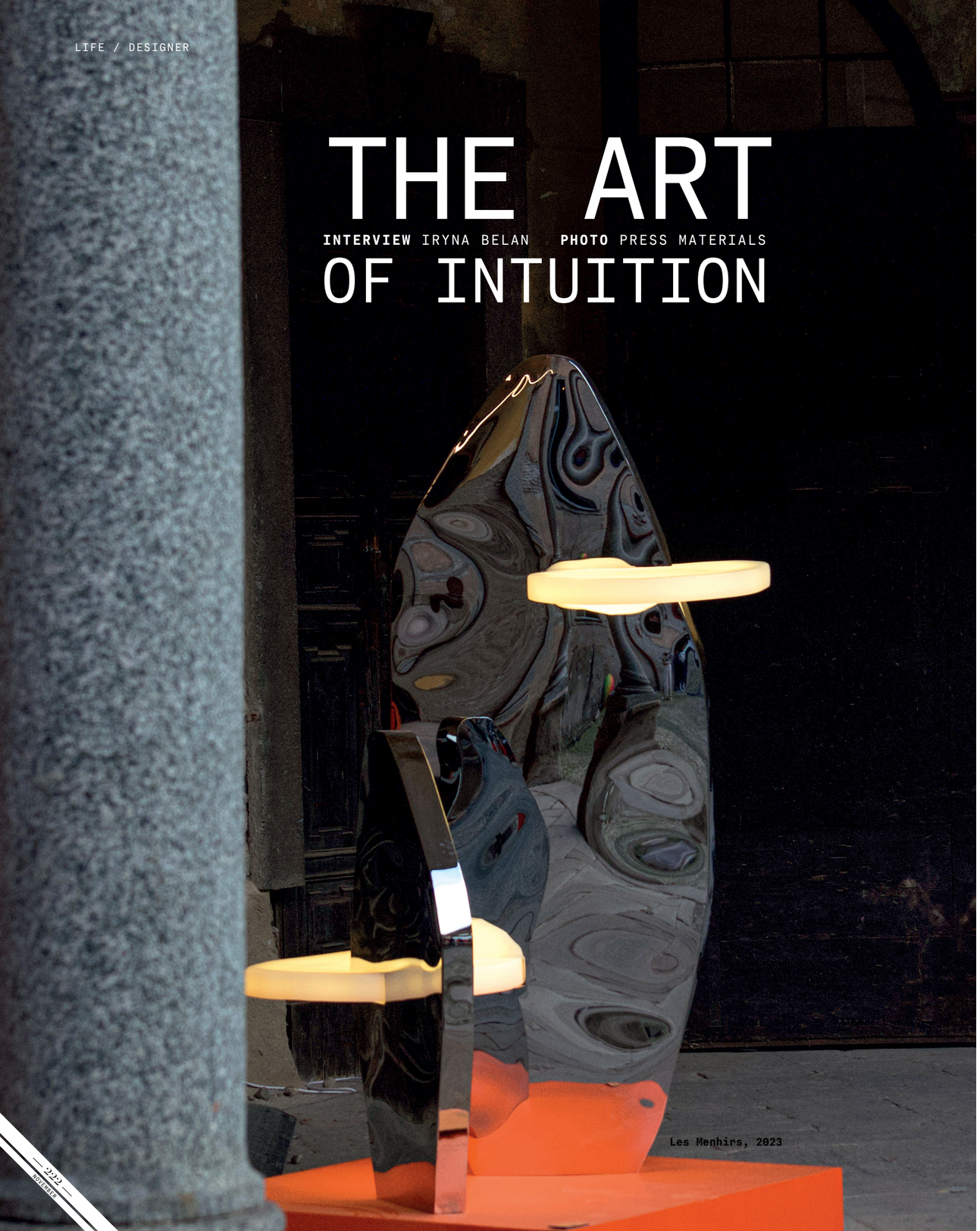
THE ART OF INTUITION

INTERVIEW IRYNA BELAN **PHOTO** PRESS MATERIALS



Les Menhirs, 2023



El Mar, 2022 / photo Ronald Smits

A graduate of the Design Academy Eindhoven, Pepe Valenti balances meticulous craftsmanship with an intuitive manipulation of natural materials, making him one of the most exciting young voices in the contemporary art and design world today. His creations have already earned significant international acclaim, having been presented at major global events like Art Miami, Milan Design Week, and Pan Amsterdam.
Most recently, his sculpture Beyond Being became a focal point at the launch of Mia Karlova Galerie's temporary outdoor sculpture garden in Amsterdam. We interviewed the Barcelona-born, Netherlands-based artist to learn more about his emotionally driven approach to collectable design, which centres on his sculptures.

Your work exists at the intersection of design, sculpture, and installation. Do you see these as distinct disciplines, or is the distinction between them irrelevant to your practice?
It depends on the approach. For me, they are different disciplines. The final form of a piece or project is never really decided in advance; it simply emerges through the process. So, it's not always clear what the final outcome will be. Sometimes it becomes art, sometimes design, and sometimes an installation.
I also love playing around with the ideas of sculpture, design, and spatial design. Why can't we simply create a space where everything coexists without so many labels?

Which term do you prefer when talking about your work – art or design?
I don't necessarily prefer one over the other. If I had to choose, it would perhaps be sculptural art. I feel that, as an artist, I can create a piece that is functional yet remains sculptural. I also want my pieces to convey emotion and evoke an emotional response in others. That's what art and sculpture do.
I can design things, too, but my work usually comes from a place of creation rather than design. For example, I don't sketch things out as a designer would. Instead, I need to be present in the process and see where my hands lead me.

You have described your creative process as highly intuitive. At what point do you know that a piece is finished and the process is complete?
I struggle with that a bit. I don't really know how to finish a piece. I keep reworking and perfecting things, and if I indulge that tendency too much, it can go on forever. Sometimes I reach a point where I almost go a bit mad from reworking a piece. But perhaps I am the only one who notices the difference.
Sometimes I spend five months on a piece; other times, just three days. But there is usually a certain feeling that comes over me – a sense of euphoria when I reach that point, followed by a feeling of peace when I look at the object.

Your work often brings together contrasting qualities: raw, industrial materials and refined surfaces, heaviness and lightness. What attracts you to these contrasts?
My mind finds peace where both extremes meet. That's how I understand the world: we can only be happy because we know what sadness is.
I think the industrial aspect, or the heaviness of the pieces, is necessary to stir people's emotions. The pieces can carry an energy and hold on to it. Using materials that are very loud yet sensitive is important for capturing the viewer's attention.
Sometimes I also try to recreate movement. There is something mesmerising about falling rain, flowing water, or the wind. But the pieces are always static, and the only way to convey movement is through the interplay of materials or through the shape itself.

How do you manage to translate stillness into movement?
For me, it begins with a deep appreciation for craftsmanship and an understanding of how the

The Portalito, 2024

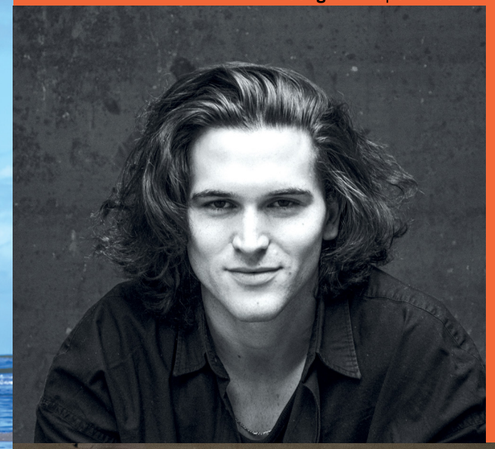




La Mer Chair, 2025

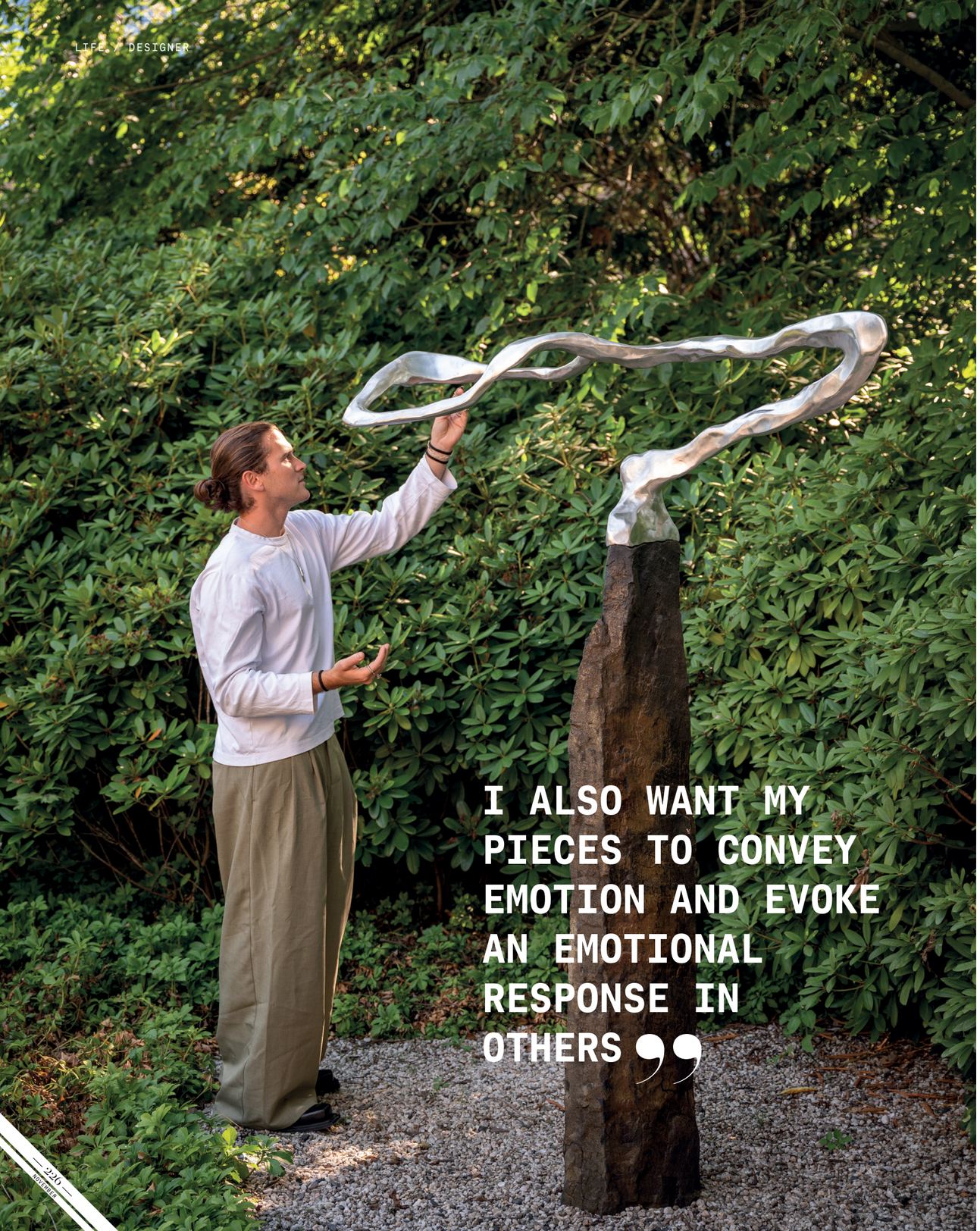
YOU HAVE TO ALLOW THE MISTAKES TO HAPPEN, BECAUSE THEY ARE PART OF WHAT MAKES THESE PIECES BEAUTIFUL”

Designer Pepe Valenti





Copper Wall Piece, 2024



material wants to be shaped. I use stainless steel as one of my main materials, and I have found that it moves as I work with it. When I weld it or apply heat, it distorts in organic ways I can't control. That's where accidental discoveries happen. In the end, a piece emerges that wasn't conceived in that form from the beginning. There is a certain beauty in this tension between movement and stillness.
I also rely on the viewer to bring movement to my pieces through their interaction with them. As you move through the room, the pieces seem to move with you, reflecting their surroundings. You begin to see yourself differently, which is part of this portal-like experience. It's all about changing perspectives.

How do you approach making your wall pieces, from shaping the metal to refining the final form?
All my pieces are hand-drawn and hand-sculpted. I start with large sheets of metal and draw directly onto them, which gives each piece its uniqueness. No two organic shapes can ever be exactly the same, even if I tried.
The heating process gives the metal volume. I can control the dimensions and the overall shape of each piece. We then cut the metal to shape, assemble the pieces, and make sure everything fits. Finally, we weld the edges and refine the work, ensuring that each element fits perfectly and has the right amount of space around it.
I have made many wall pieces, which have become a bit of the bread and butter of the studio. I love the repetition, because even when a piece resembles another, its shape is always different. For me, each new piece is a little better than the last as we continue refining the process.

Your chair La Mer, created in collaboration with Antoine Aimé, is inspired by the sea and motherhood. How did you bring these seemingly unrelated concepts together?
I think it was the energy I drew from both. They are actually quite similar.
The chair is very much like a throne – an incredibly powerful place to sit. It is also a way of capturing the power of the sea: something bigger than you, something you cannot control. I grew up by the sea and have a deep respect for it, knowing that it can sweep you away in seconds.
A mother can have that same kind of power. I found that energy in my own mother, whom I deeply admire, so the chair became an homage to her. To me, my mother has a superpower, and I believe all mothers have that for their children. It's unbelievable that you can bring a child into the world from your own body.

Tell us more about your Les Menhirs project. How did you decide to draw on prehistoric monuments and translate their forms into a contemporary object?
The project is named after the prehistoric monolithic stones erected by humans in northern France. It was another collaboration, this time with my friend Lucas Zito, a designer based in Paris.
For me, it was about creating a piece with a friend of mine who does a lot of lighting design. We wanted to combine two worlds in a very literal way. I made the vertical pieces, and he made the horizontal ones, and they came together.

How did The Portalito installation come about?
I first made a small wall piece and liked its form, but I wanted to create something bigger. That's how The Portal was created – a two-and-a-half-metre-tall piece with a water fountain that became a portal into my world.
Sometime later, I returned to the original, smaller form. That's how Portal Junior, or The Portalito, came about. It needed to stand on a podium, so I used locally sourced Belgian greystone. And that's how a small wall piece evolved into a large sculpture.

Have there been times when you have turned mistakes into something beautiful?
Yes. I recently created Beyond Being, a large outdoor sculpture made of cast aluminium and Turkish basalt. I did the drawing, but the form was too complicated to create in stainless steel, so I bought everything I needed to cast aluminium myself. I spent many nights alone in the studio, working until six in the morning, casting and reworking the piece. The mistakes became part of what gave the sculpture its organic, almost bony shape.
Mistakes always happen. There are always little things you can't control, things that emerge when you take the time to listen and look closely. But you have to allow the mistakes to happen, because they are part of what makes these pieces beautiful. —

a menhir is a large, upright stone erected by humans, most commonly dating from the Neolithic period. The word comes from the Breton words maen (stone) and hir (long)