

BRIDGING THE GAP

interview : anna carnick

Stilt House

A self-described nomad, Belgian artist Arne Quinze is known for an impressive, eclectic portfolio. It's one that includes everything from art to architecture, interiors and furniture to branding to massive public art installations—each piece more thought-provoking and innovative than the last.

He's also well-known for his colorful personality and creative approach. Pieterjan Mattan, Arne's 20-year-old assistant, designer and upcoming clear magazine contributor, met clear's creative director Emin Kadi in NY, and introduced us to Arne. Says Pieterjan, "I would describe our studio as a rock band. Arne is our front man and we take care of the music and rock'n roll."

Quinze's latest project, Big Four Bridge, scheduled for completion in 2011, complements plans to convert an abandoned railroad bridge running over the Ohio River from Kentucky to Indiana for pedestrian use; Quinze's vision envelops that bridge with a curving, wooden canopy, replete with solar-powered music and lights. His creation turns the pedestrian bridge into a functional piece of art, reinvigorating these cityscapes while stimulating and serving the citizens who inhabit them.

clear editor Anna Carnick sat down to interview the artist.

Let's start at the beginning. I understand your career has its roots in graffiti. Tell us a little bit about your background/history.

Graffiti, with its associated lifestyle and approach to life, had a huge impact on me. I started as a young lad in 1985 and was a pioneer in Brussels' graffiti scene at the time. I saw it as a challenge. I started out with graffiti to have a creative outlet. It kept me going and gave me the strength to fight. Now I translate that fighting spirit into getting things done. If I hear the words "it can't be done," a project really catches my interest. Nowadays I have a whole studio working for me. The team puts an amazing effort into every project. Titles or labels are not my thing, but rather something given. I just do my thing and see what happens.

You're well-respected for a variety of projects, across a plethora of mediums and industries. Let's talk about two in particular. What can you tell us about your Lamborghini concept car project and the Paris hotel installation?

Have you ever driven a Lamborghini? It's a monster! When you step on the gas, you feel this amazing explosion of energy. It's the same with my work. It's like dance to me, a very intense and sensual experience. I've always been very fascinated by transport and speed, how people travel, move and interact in and between cities.

In daily life, I'm still wondering why our vehicles still have wheels, why things are changing so slowly. Nothing's essentially really changed since World War II. The cars that I've got in mind for the future won't need wheels, are driven by magnetic and eco-friendly energy, will be logged in on an intuitive GPS-network, are less noisy and much lighter. The Magna (Magnetic Jet Engine) is one of my concept cars, my Lamborghini for 2030. It's a prototype of transporters for the distant future. It's a super car, a burst of energy cleaving skies in two as it navigates through space. Wasting energy and pollution are things of the past. All things in the future will bring an optimum efficiency. The world will not look so different in 2100, rather the way we interact with it. Fossil fuels will be extinct, roads will be blocked, over 10 billion on the planet—maybe 20 billion—it will take creativity and a lot of open minds to survive this all.

As for the Rebirth installation we did for Le Royal Monceau in Paris, I have to say I was impressed by the history of the building. The hotel was about to undergo a restyling by designer Philippe Starck. Back in its glory days, the hotel was a beacon in Paris high society life: Ernest Hemingway, Walt Disney and Madonna stayed in this Art Deco hotel. Rebirth underlines the seizure between the past and the future. The wooden sculpture—which lasted for only one night—embraced the entire hotel building as a conquering and bold alien stream, breaking through walls, corridors, stairways, lobbies and rooms.



2007 Cityscape Brussels

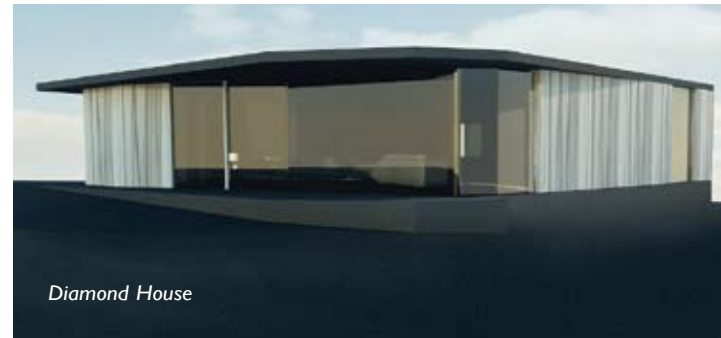
Images courtesy of Studio Arne Quinze



Rebirth
Le Royal Monceau



Stilt House



Diamond House

It was an expression of pure energy, a chaotic tornado removing the history of the hotel and blazing new, fresh energy inside.

Now your latest project...what drew you to the bridge initially? What about it inspired you?

I love great opportunities like the one we're having in Louisville at the moment. When I visited the Louisville Waterfront Park and got to see the bridge for the first time, I immediately understood the bridge had to generate social interaction. My installations are all about bringing people back together and connecting them. This public art installation for the bridge over the Ohio River has the same aim. The sculpture is designed to evoke emotion, to spark conversation, to make people stop in their tracks. It gives people a moment to reset their minds and reevaluate their perceptions of what's going on in society.

Tell us about the bridge's history and role in these cities.

The installation is going to be built on a 50m-high old railroad bridge called The Big Four Bridge, which connects downtown Louisville (Kentucky) with Jeffersonville (Indiana). It hasn't got any running lines on it any longer, so the bridge has no function at this moment.

How would you describe your installation?

My vision calls for turning what is to become a pedestrian bridge over the Ohio River into one that will be a timeline of local history, with markers along the way, transmogrifying its purpose and aesthetics. It will have music and lights powered by solar cells embedded in a mass of fluorescent red and unpainted wooden planks that will wind through the six arched steel spans atop the bridge. Sunrays will play with the wooden beams; a game of light and shade will create ever-changing patterns, and its immense size—800m long—will absorb you.

What role do you wish the bridge and your work to play in citizens' future?

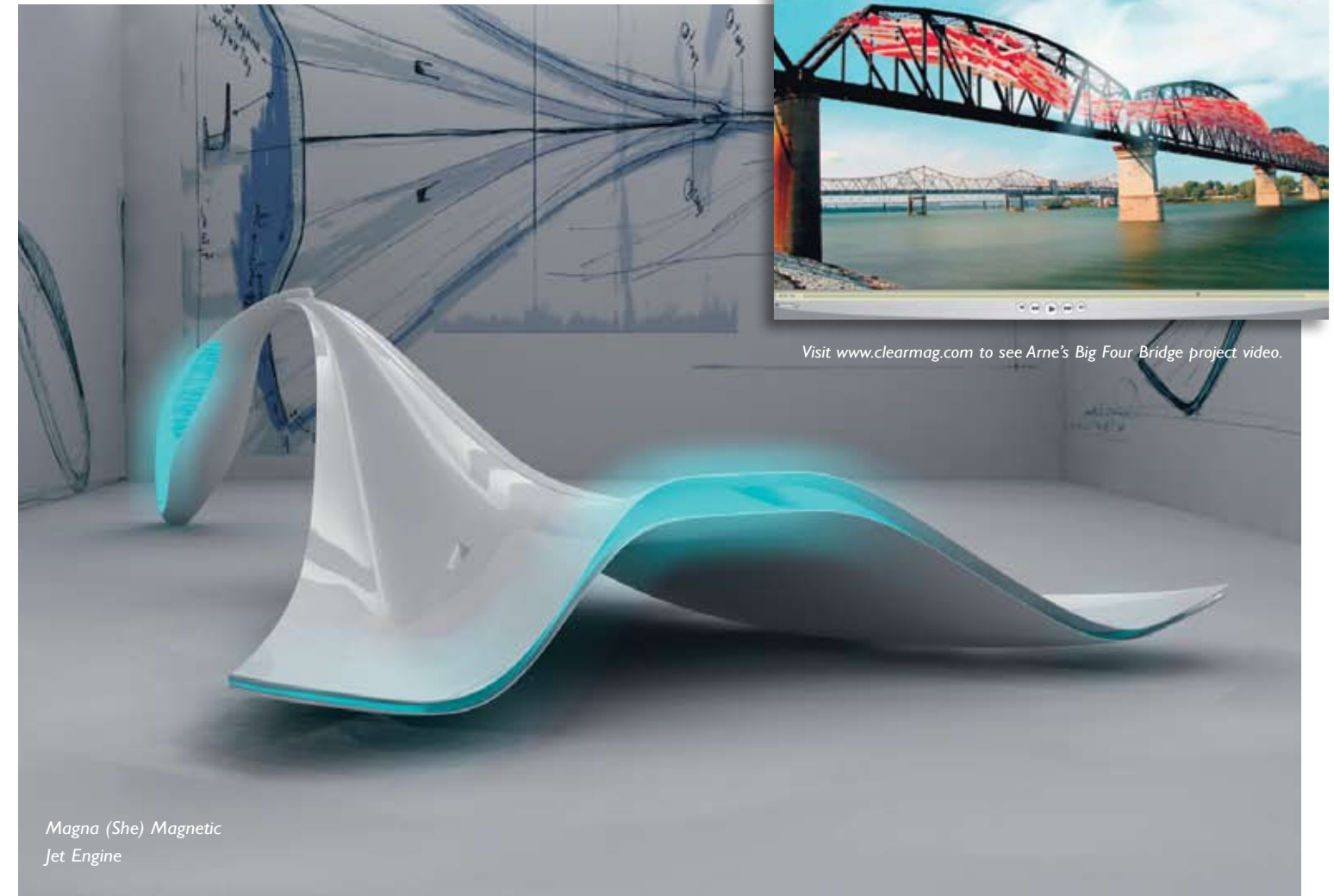
At the moment the location is a visual scourge within the city. Architecture, art and urban planning can make a social and structural impact on a once stagnant space. Once parted from each other, it brings people together again. I'd like to create a park-like destination to connect people and a community together, literally and figuratively. Floating in the air and winding through the steel spans of the bridge, the sculpture will provide a shelter to curious visitors, a place for contemplation and silence.

What impact do you wish to make on these cityscapes?

Regarding each city's urban-scape, it's neither a place of ever-changing modern architectural avant-garde, nor of exceptional art installations. Each installation brings a new spirit to their surrounding environment. People feel interconnected only by looking at the entangled wooden sticks. Amazed by the enormous scale of the installations, they come and have a look. In this way the cityscapes encourage us to interact and boost new energy into a somewhat discarded location.

How does the bridge project fit into your overall oeuvre?

We've built and are building similar installations all over the world. The only thing I'm interested in is touching people with my work. It's also my aim to give something valuable back to the people with the bridge project: reviving the setting with a new spirit, a new atmosphere so the inhabitants feel there's a changing, dynamic mood going on.



Magna (She) Magnetic
Jet Engine

Your portfolio is full of juxtapositions—often projects blending past and future together. Would you consider this another project along those lines?

I've always been passionate about traveling in time and space, speed, rhythm and movement...

My work reflects this passion and often has the ability to change things and places, giving a positive impulse to the people for the future. I see my wooden installations as expressions of speed caught in time, endless streams of energy.

Which aspects of the bridge project represent the past and which symbolize the future?

Regarding the vision behind it, the entire installation represents both the past and future.

It's a frozen movement, captured somewhere between past and future. My works are gates to places beyond what we get to notice; they're timeless and coming from another world than the one we know. They're transporting data, messages and information, concerning both past and future.

I understand the installation may involve a timeline of local history. Will this be literal or symbolic? How might it be presented?

We're still developing the ideas on this part, but I'd like to have something interactive that helps people to see things in a different way, from a different point of view. Sound, light and displays will take visitors on a journey through history.

What do you enjoy most about your own work?

We once received a letter from an old lady in Brussels, thanking us for the fact [that] she finally talked again with her neighbors, because of our public art installation (Cityscape). I love the reaction of the people, the smiles on their faces while walking under the sculpture and experiencing the installation. It has the ability to improve social life in areas where people didn't talk to each other anymore. I see it as a huge and energetic social magnet.

Tell us about your plans for Design Miami.

I'll have an art exhibition running December 2nd to January 17th at Wolfgang Roth & Partners Fine Art gallery—mainly showing my Bidonvilles and Stilt Houses, an abstract vision on how people will live in the future. My Stilt Houses, for example, are the houses of the future, layered and hierarchical. Everything will go faster there; people will build without thinking about it. We'll live above and around each other because ground space will be scarce. Communal activities will flourish and social cohesion will be the norm. The houses will extract all the energy they can—from wind, water, sun or frequencies—to satisfy their own requirements as well as the needs of their inhabitants. They're the nomads of the future. I'll share the gallery with photographer David LaChapelle, who will also be doing an exhibition on a selection of his work. And I'm also involved in Luminaire's Paperlove fundraising event.

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