Culture

A watering can, right, part of the Copper Collection by Aldo Bakker for Thomas Eyck. The collection includes a stool, a soy pourer, candle holders and a mixing bowl.

The Lighthouse, above, a lamp designed by Ross and Erwan Bouroullec, and the Flux chair, at right, by Hervé Seymour, reflected the convergence of the “supergraphic” style of the pieces.

Ingo Maurer, the veteran German designer, showed off the beauty of incandescent light through pieces like the Double T-Future OLED lamp, right.

“Wallscrubbing,” a wall-integrated LED lighting system designed by Ron Gilad for Flos, was a standout at the Milan Furniture Fair.

Erupting beauty at furniture show
A poignant writer whose characters find unease at every turn


BY JEAN THOMPSON

Anyone who loves the short story, that perennially disrespected form, should rejoice in the appearance of a writer's collected stories. When the short-story writer in question is as innovative as Deborah Eisenberg, it's an opportunity for both celebration and appraisal. This is a large and grand project, one of books of stories. Ms. Eisenberg has written over a 28-year span: "Transgressions," "Under the Ednabor House," "All Around Adam," "The Sisters of the Superheroes," "2006." Those who admire some portion of Ms. Eisenberg's writing will find the same pleasures in the whole: remarkable language, unconventional storytelling and her characters' well-rendered and profound unease at inhabiting an uneasy world.

Not every story takes such liberties, but those that do sometimes deliver the goods and sometimes fail to do so. "Window" withholds a great deal of information at its beginning and only gradually divulges its secrets to us. Ms. Eisenberg's novels are often about how the woman sitting in another woman's kitchen who proves to be her daughter's (who is not her own child) escaped for the time being if not less) abuse and real danger.

Some of the stories lack the coup de grâce that leaves an enduring sense of finality and the story preceding it; many of Ms. Eisenberg's number of long stories accumulate rather than build. "Rosie Gets a Suit" has a title that promises action, but Rosin, recovering from drug addiction, is mired in rediscovering basic thought processes and assumptions, and her small self-assessment at the end hardly seems like an adequate payoff. Readers disdain pat or manipulated endings, and warm-hearted finales would be particularly out of place in the fraught, ironic and uncertain climate of life. Epiphanies of any emphatic sort would overwhelm. It may be that Ms. Eisenberg's characters, often analyzed by their own sensibilities, are incapable of more than elegiac sadness or oblique self-knowledge. Yet if our lives, real or fictional, nor exist, the easiest imposition of meaning, it's not too much to insist that the events of these stories still have consequences, and that we want our literature to say so. But some stories can be told only by reinventing the form: "Twilight of the Superheroes," the book I read most recently. What Ms. Eisenberg's most recent book, tells of a group of young people who move into a splendid New York apartment with a view of the World Trade Center. They enjoy their fortunate lives until that morning when something flashed and something tore, and the cloudless sky ignited.

Different characters enter and exit, and the plot thickens and thins as people are killed, but the heart of the story is the past and the characters' struggle to allude to and some of them, robbing, murdering what was lost, doing all that result in the present. The story follows the lives of four young people, one of whom makes and manufacture, oil and war, commerce and dogma, and the spinning plane看书 all together at the center of the earth into a poisonous blast.

The actual ground of the attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, has yet to be reworked into its final form, but Ms. Eisenberg has already told us what that day meant, in language that is wondrous and brutal, like a tuning fork set to a pitch of exquisite pain. Jean Thompson's novel "Everybody's Here, Everybody's Gone" will be published next year.

ONLINE IN OTHER WORDS

Ms. Eisenberg reads a story from "Superheroes". global.typenews.com/arts