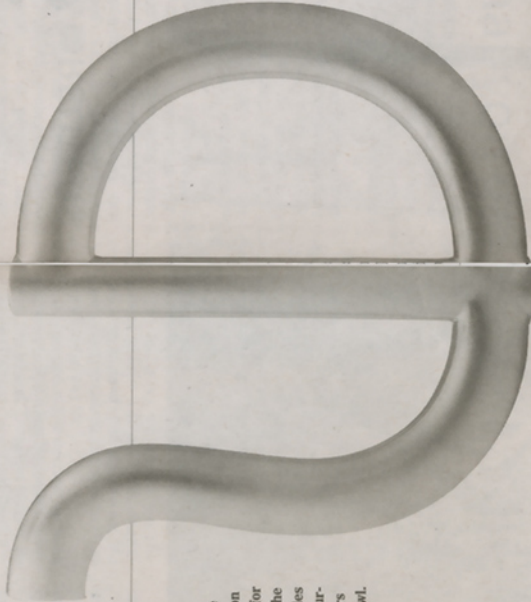


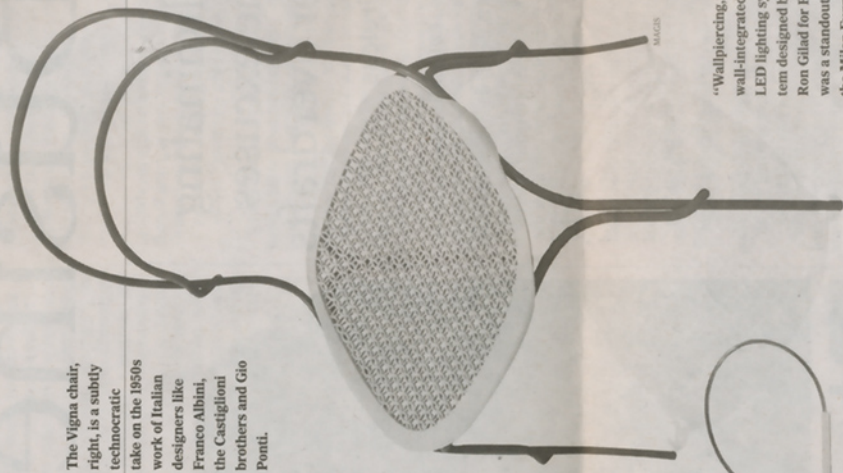
Culture

DESIGN BOOKS

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.

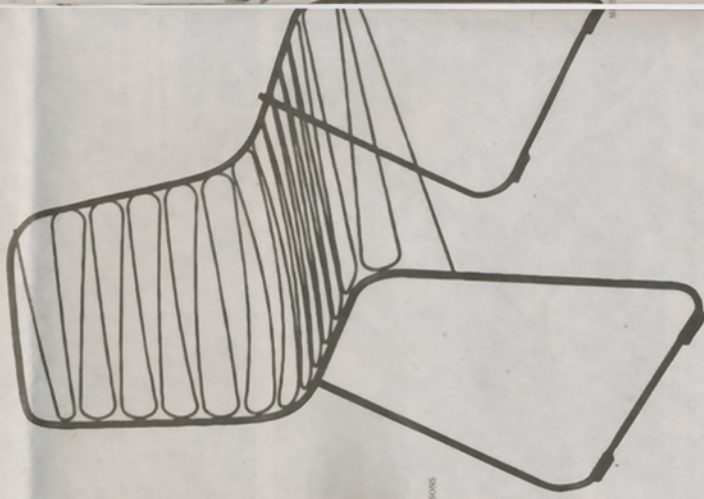


THOMAS EYCK



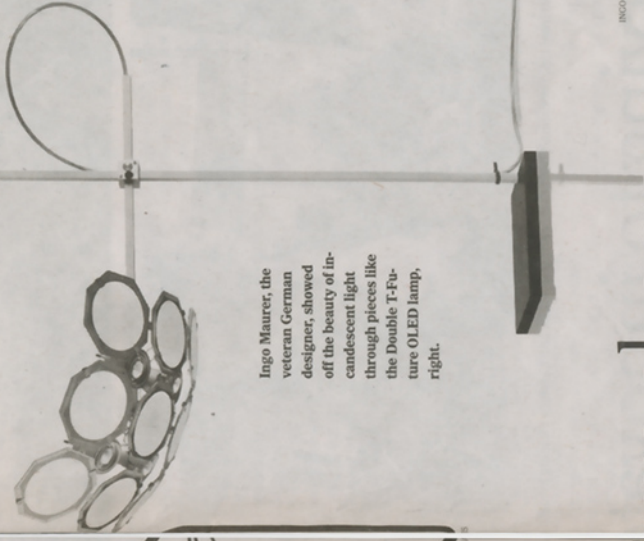
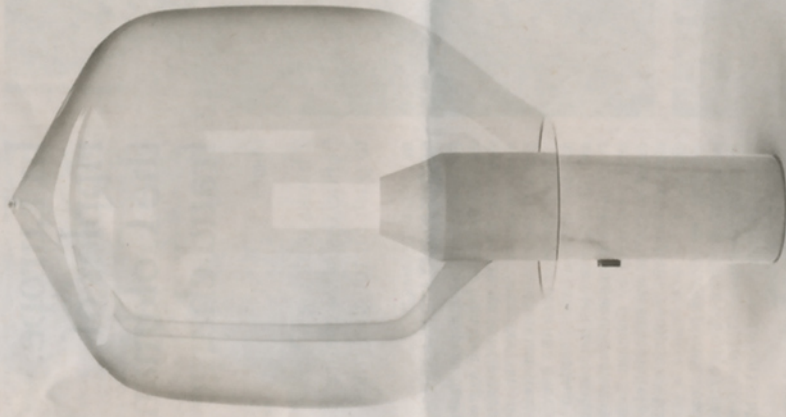
MALCO

The Vigna chair, right, is a subtly technocratic take on the 1950s work of Italian designers like Franco Albini, the Castiglioni brothers and Gio Ponti.



ESTABLISHED & SONS

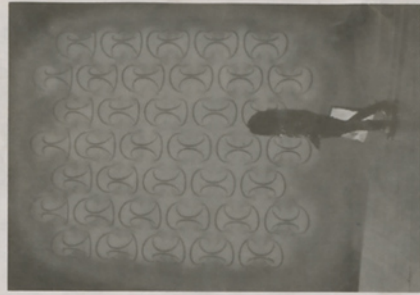
The Lighthouse, above, a lamp designed by Ronan and Erwan Bouroullec, and the Flux chair, at right, by Jerzy Seymour, reflected the emergence of the "superleggera" style of light pieces.



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

INGO MAURER

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



MICHAEL LOUIS VITA FLOS

Ermiting beauty at furniture show

Volcanic ash dampened enthusiasm in Milan, but the show still sparkled

BY ALICE RAWSTHORN

Little did I know when I began this column a week ago by suggesting that the most sensible question for anyone to ask at the Milan Furniture Fair — “Does the world need another chair?” — was that it would soon be ousted by something more urgent: “How can we get out of here?”

Those dystopian clouds of volcanic dust stopped thousands of people from flying in or out of Milan at the worst possible time — the busiest week of the city’s year. No sooner had the first flights been grounded than the talk at the fair turned from furniture to who was or wasn’t stranded; whether so-and-so had managed to nab the last seat on that flight from Rome; and the going rate to be driven to Paris.

What a party pooper that volcano turned out to be, because until it erup-

ted, things were going rather well (give or take the lingering effects of recession). The Milanese weather gods often greet the 300,000-plus people who flock to the fair with relentless rain, but this time they were kinder and the weather was glorious. The city was at its loveliest in the spring sunshine, with budding leaves and blossoms softening the gnarled stonework.

There were some great things to see. One Italian design grandee, Alessandro Mendini, co-curated a magical exhibition of his personal take on Italian design at La Triennale Design Museum. Some 700 objects ranging from a replica of Michelangelo’s “David” to cork screws, espresso machines, pieces of pasta, original models of E.T. and a giant bottle of Campari were jumbled on plinths as if at a flea market. Shamelessly kitschy and often puzzling, the results were also thoughtful, witty and poetic.

Another maestro, Enzo Mari, achieved a similar effect on a smaller scale with a wonderful show of 60 paperweights he has collected over the years at Kaleidoscope, an indie publishing house. Chunks of concrete, wood and marble, bits of machinery, old ink bottles

and crystal shards perched on musical scores, notes scrawled in Mr. Mari’s spidery handwriting and his drawings.

The young Dutch designer Maarten Baas scored the public relations coup of the week by introducing an iPhone app based on his Real Time project, an alternative clock for which actors “tell the time” by physically indicating the number of hours and minutes.

By the end of the opening day, the Milan streets were papered with fly posters advertising “The newest Maarten Baas for only 99 cents.”

There was even a successful geographic addition to the fair in the industrial suburb of Lambrate, where lots of young designers showed. Some were a tad pretentious. (One urged us to rediscover the “sensual pleasure” of washing up. Excuse me?) But Design Academy Eindhoven, the hot Dutch design school, staged a compelling exhibition of its graduates’ conceptual projects — titled “?” (An apt title at a time when design is in flux.) Z33, the Belgian contemporary design gallery, put on a “pop-up” version of its current show, “Design by Performance.” And the IN Residence project in Turin presented the fruits of its workshops with in-

triguing pieces by Pieke Bergmans, Formalantasma, Julia Lohmann and other rising stars.

Back to business, which is, of course, what the Milan Furniture Fair is all about. The global recession has softened since last year’s fair, and the industry was, if not more confident, at least less nervous about the outcome this year. Thankfully they were right. The market is still considerably weaker than in its glory days before the credit crunch, but as Rolf Fehlbaum, chairman of Vitra, the

“We felt it was time for something gentler and quieter.”

Swiss furniture group, confirmed, there has been an improvement.

When the recession struck, there were fears that manufacturers would do what they had done in past downturns, and play it safe by commissioning conservative pieces from established designers, rather than experiment with new names. Happily this hasn’t happened, although the new names masked the fact that many companies introduced fewer new products than usual and made them less technically

and Gio Ponti, one of whose chairs was named the Superleggera.

This was evident in the new chairs developed by Martino Gamper, Konstantin Grcic and Jersey Seymour for Magis, as well as the elegant copper objects made by Aldo Bakker for Thomas Eyck. Among the most accomplished examples were the slender aluminum Central tables designed by Ronan and Erwan Bouroullec for Magis and their Lighthouse light for Established & Sons. “We felt it was time for something gentler and quieter,” Ronan Bouroullec explained. “I heard a French perfumer talking about how 30 years ago, women wanted powerful scents to announce their entrance to a room, but now they prefer that to be subtler. I feel the same way about furniture. I’m so bored with the showoff stuff.”

But enticing though those superleggera pieces shows are, the 2010 Milan Furniture Fair will be remembered for one thing — the after-effects of that volcano, and how everyone finally managed to get away.

ONLINE: ON DESIGN

See previous articles by Alice Rawsthorn online. global.nytimes.com/articles

A poignant writer whose characters find unease at every turn

The Collected Stories of Deborah Eisenberg. Picador, 980 pages, \$22.

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

BOOK REVIEW

for both celebration and appraisal.

This collection contains the four books of stories Ms. Eisenberg has written over a 20-year span: “Transactions in a Foreign Currency,” 1986; “Under the 82nd Airborne,” 1992; “All Around Atlantis,” 1997; and “Twilight 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.

No one would presume to tell any of Ms. Eisenberg’s people to have a nice day. They seldom achieve as much as a good mood. They are as acutely self-conscious as they are outwardly inarticulate. Other more assertive and outlandish personalities overwhelm them; the world’s appalling circumstances appall them.

Ms. Eisenberg conveys their interiority in such a fine grain that one thinks of

Virginia Woolf, if only Woolf’s work were leavened with startling humor: “Shapiro felt as though he’d awakened to find himself squatting naked in a

glade, blinking up at a chortling TV crew that had just filmed him gnawing a huge bone.” This is from “Someone to Talk To,” and the wonderful incongruity is that Shapiro, a pianist, has just concluded a dubious performance of a piece of contemporary music.

Elsewhere we read of a character’s “cash register face” or of a woman using “a loud and artificially genial tone as if she were speaking to an armed high school student.” Such sharp and jittery observations — Ms. Eisenberg’s eye for the droll, the startling, the defamiliarized — are everywhere.

Conversations among Ms. Eisenberg’s characters are often cast as babble, with words a kind of evil charm to ward off meaning. People talk at cross purposes or, as in “The Robbery,” engage in marathon drunken quarrels. In “A Cautionary Tale,” Stuart attempts to “whine and orate” his way into his roommate’s bed: “Don’t you see the beauty of it, Patty? It’s sound in every way — politically, economically, aesthetically. You and I would be an entire ecology, generating and utilizing our own energies.” Clearly, seduction isn’t what it used to be.

Ms. Eisenberg writes with poignancy about young girls who lack any sort of compass in navigating the world. They witness adult misbehavior, like Kyla in “Mermaids,” who is palmed off on a weatherier and more troubled family

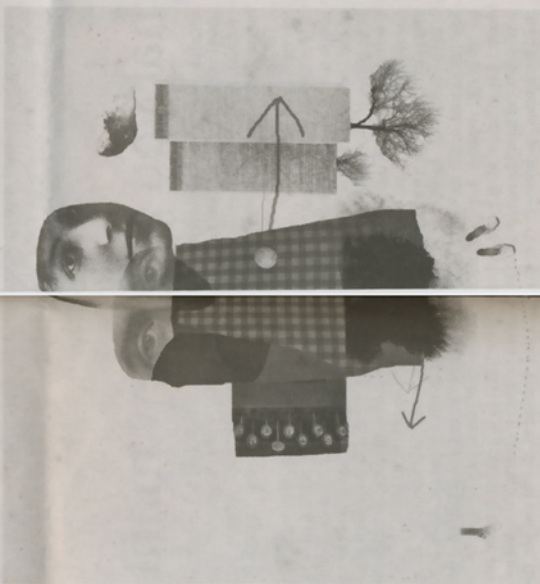


ILLUSTRATION BY MATTHEW RICHARDSON

“And now we’ll have a word with Aunt ‘orime.’”

Sometimes children function as the symptom of the family disease, like the little girl in “Some Other, Better Otto,” who conducts all discourse with her relatives as if it were a radio interview.

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 spools backward to tell us how the young woman sitting in another woman’s kitchen (who proves to be her half-sister) with a child (who is not her own child) has escaped (for the time being at least) abuse and real danger.

Some of the stories lack the coup de grace that gives an ending a sense of finality and the story preceding it momentum. A number of long stories accumulate rather than build.

“Rosie Gets a Soul” has a title that promises action, even transformation, but Rosie, recovering from drug addiction, is mired in rediscovering basic thought processes and assumptions, and her small self-assertion at the end hardly seems like an adequate payoff.

Readers disdain pat or manipulated endings, and warm-hearted females would be particularly out of place in the fraught, ironic and uncertain climate of modern life portrayed here. Epiphanies of any emphatic sort would overwhelm. It may be that Ms. Eisenberg’s characters, often paralyzed by their own sensibilities, are incapable of more than elegiac sadness or oblique increases in self-knowledge. Yet if our lives, real or fictional, now resist the easy imposition of meaning, it’s not too much to insist that the events of these lives still have consequences, and that we want our lit-

erature to say so.

But some stories can be told only by reinventing the form. “Twilight of the Superheroes,” the title story from Ms. Eisenberg’s most recent book, tells of a group of young people subletting 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 their different histories are invoked, but the heart of the story is the passionate voice, belonging to all of them and none of them, mourning that which was lost, decrying all that resulted: “Provocation and retribution, arms manufacture and starched, oil and spinning planet seemed to be boiling them all together at the center of the earth into a poison syrup.”

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 wounds and heals, 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 HER OWN WORDS

Ms. Eisenberg reads a story from “Superheroes.” global.nytimes.com/books