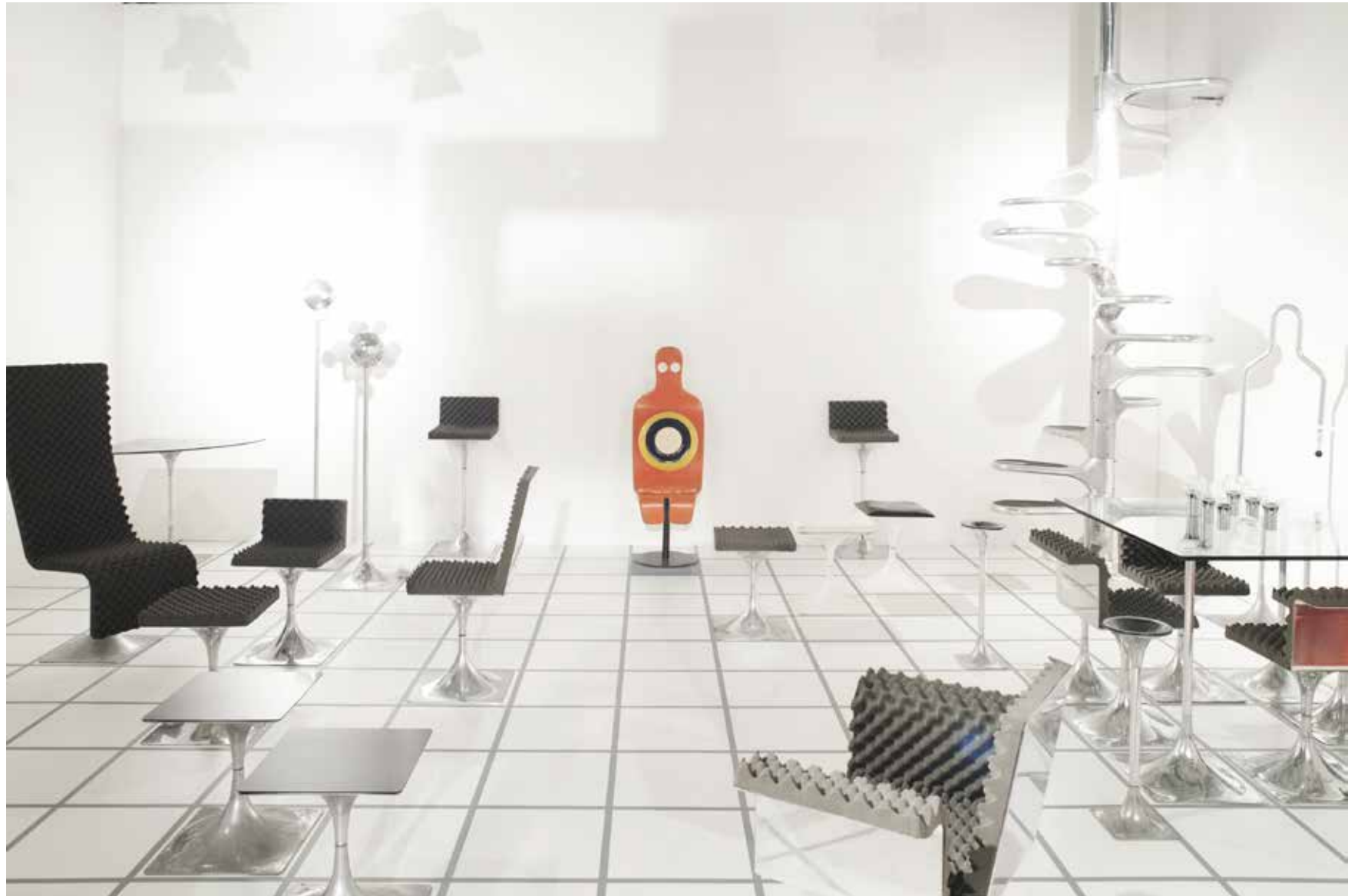


ROGER TALLON - MODULE 400

Opening on Saturday 10 september 2016

Exhibition from Saturday 10 september to Saturday 8 october 2016



Designer, planner, researcher, designer of objects... these were some of the words Roger Tallon used to introduce himself. We should not read any kind of hesitation or presumption into them, rather the movement of a mind totally oriented towards the discovery of the right forms deduced from an analysis of the functions peculiar to the projects which Tallon was prompted to work on. Let us mention just a handful of the best known: the Corail train, the TGV high-speed train, the Météor train and the Montmartre funicular. In all these works, he managed to develop his "total design" concept, in an ongoing struggle against the "design-shortcomings" (designo-déficience) of contemporary industry and society.

In the 1950s, Roger Tallon rubbed shoulders with the artistic avant-garde. He worked, for example, with Yves Klein, in particular for his air architecture projects. Friendships and joint projects of this kind gave Tallon a taste for utopia, challenges, and that determined desire to conceive an environment in its entirety. Taking the TGV was not just travelling from Paris to Lyon. It involved, above all, a two-hour experiment to do with dynamics, ranging from the train's design to its form, by appropriating an open structure enabling everyone to become a designer themselves.

Dynamism was thus the predominant feature of design as imagined by Roger Tallon. Involved, first and foremost, was giving a meaning to journeys (his major projects were vehicles, with design as the vector), but, more than this, shifting boundaries, not imposing any limits on things, and seeing them in all their aspects so as to get beyond apparent contradictions. In this quest for something diffuse, Tallon succeeded in dissolving the object and its functions by creating, for example, the "module" concept. This was a revolution which replaced the brutal, male idea of the finite with the values of femininity, the puzzle, and the collective. Parts were combined in sets which were capable of being transformed, to produce a design for living.

The pieces on view in our exhibition bear the threefold mark of the "Tallon system": spirit of invention and freedom; definitive unfinishedness; and the logic of flows. The spiral staircase (1964), with its petal-shaped steps, reinstated, like no other, the breakdown of the revolving motion of the helix. Its aeronautical qualities thus referred to Marrey and Muybridge, with an elliptical visual economy that did not rule out variety. Its elegant void/solid dialectic was close to some of Buren's installations, for example.

The "400 Module" (1965) was devised for the design of a night club. Occupying an old garage, the place was intended to conjure up a stretch of motorway. Tallon covered the floor with a grid of 400 x 400 mm metal slabs. The idea and the form call to mind Carl Andre's sculptures produced at the same time. Depending on the number of revellers, some of the slabs could be replaced by tables and chairs with legs made of the same metal, and of the same size. Jacques Lacloche became interested in the project and produced 400 Modules for collective furnishing. The reception areas in the Publicis head office were also furnished in this way for years. 400 Modules also featured in several films of the day, including Jacques Deray's *The Swimming Pool*. In the early 1970s, the collection was enriched by tall tables, "Soleil/Sun" lights, and coat-stands.

This kind of naming occurred in the "Zombie" seat (1967) in a more visual and figurative form. What was essentially involved was seating the body on a form which was itself body-like.

These strange yellow plastic ghosts are like an extreme state of furniture, reduced to its purely spiritual "protoform" state, another keyword in the Tallon system.

The exhibition illustrates the coherence of Roger Tallon's work, but also what we might call its duplication. The works themselves cannot be separated from a profound and critical line of thinking about the conditions and very nature of design, which is the prerogative of just the great masters.

Still espousing this idea of duplication ad infinitum that we find again in the 3T service and the "Cryptograms".

The gallery's last room will be showing some emblematic Jean Prouvé pieces. On the face of it, the link between these two great artists is not easy to establish, over and above the admiration which Tallon felt for his elder. Prouvé, as we know, marked the first half of the 20th century by his almost craftsmanlike industrial activities.

He was an engineer, for whom the logic of his work led to the "constructive idea". As for Roger Tallon, he incarnated a new age better than anyone else: he was the designer par excellence, a trade he invented almost singlehandedly in France in the 1950s, and one which he endowed with characteristics which are still topical to this day, somewhere between taking the dictates of industry into account and asserting an individuality which likened him more to artists than to artisans. Between the two, however, there are fertile connections. The first is their shared concern to do with an economy of means. With Prouvé this came to the fore through the use of "poor" or "humble" materials, easily adapted to all possible uses : sheet metal, to mention the most widespread. But also by way of the central idea that it is function which goes to make form. Working for industry, Roger Tallon focused his efforts on the compactness and slenderness of forms. He rounded off Prouvé's words, in his answer to a questionnaire in 1969: "Form does not result from the analysis of a function, but from the analysis of all functions", among which communication played a crucial part. He earmarked the same importance as did his elder to industrial materials (polystyrene, cast aluminium, Spazmolla...).

The other connection has to do with a set of ideas all aimed at not only simple production, but also at storage and transport: chairs that could be dismantled, stackable items, development of modules, flexible scale of forms. The "Tallon system" was invariably aimed at solving problems that were both practical and economic and, in the end, aesthetic, problems close to those which Prouvé had to tackle in the more dramatic context of postwar Reconstruction. This comparison between the two artists was dazzlingly illustrated in Roger Tallon's "Maison Dôme" project, initiated by Jousse Entreprise in 2005. This inhabitable and extraordinarily flexible module can be industrially produced in the spirit of Jean Prouvé, and claimed as such.