

# Ado Chale

## **Ado Chale retrospective exhibition**

**From 18 October to 16 November 24**

**Stables of the Hôtel Solvay**

**Brussels**

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Sublimating nature seems to have always been the creative leitmotif of famous Belgian designer Ado Chale. Now supported by his children, Ilona and Pierre, he is celebrating 65 years in the furniture business this year. It's the perfect opportunity for a retrospective, featuring both historic creations and never-before-seen pieces, testifying to both the wealth of his talent and the passing of the torch to the younger generation, who are faithfully and respectfully carrying on the work of this visionary designer, who has become a great classic of furniture design.

From his travels in France, Germany, Arizona, India, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Persia and Madagascar, Ado Chale (1928), this 'lover of geology', as the critic Hugues Vehenne described him, brought back mineral treasures that were the driving force behind his creative genius. Quartz, chalcedony, lapis lazuli, jade, turquoise, rhodochrosite, amethyst and all the other natural beauties worthy of illuminating his artist's furniture are still at the heart of his tireless quest for these noble materials, which sublimate his famous tables and turn them into mineral gardens. In addition to these geological marvels, the artist's raw riches that glorify semi-precious stones and which, without him, would have remained mere stones. He has also added cast bronze and cast aluminium, always polished and smoothed in the studio until they reveal the scars and imperfections that make them unique. The materials he uses are so fragile and so rare that they make each of his creations unique.

As his daughter Ilona, who is now in charge of continuing her father's work and running the Atelier Ado Chale, rightly explains: 'Preferring solitude to schools, he created his follies and marvels by exploring his own land, by "scavenging nature" (...) His joyful discoveries gushed forth like a spring, from cliffs or beaches. (...) This pure intuitive gave shape to his projects in symbiosis with the material. It was in this raw, pure state that he conveyed his emotions. For example, he has given a banal object like a table an original treatment, transforming its top into a surface for composition. From the 1970s onwards, his quest for novelty and original materials naturally found an

international following among collectors, and his work is still very much in vogue today, at a time when quality craftsmanship is extremely highly valued.

André Jacqmain (1921-2014), a leading figure in functionalist and Brutalist architecture in Belgium, with whom Ado Chale collaborated intensively from the 1960s onwards, aptly remarked: 'His successes are the fruit of inventive passion and rigorous craftsmanship. A Chale table is an irrational universe whose forces have been created by sensitivity. (...) Through the sensual organisation of the material we look at and touch, Chale distracts us from conversation". In 2007, the designer associated himself with the architecture of another Belgian master, Victor Horta (1861-1947), when he took over the stables of the Hôtel Solvay, opposite his studio on rue Lens in Ixelles. A lover of stone and surrounded by many of Horta's creations, he rediscovered the spirit dear to the architect, produced by the juxtaposition of 'poor' and 'rich' materials, in different textures and shapes.

This autumn, his children Ilona Chale and Pierre Barbion-Chale will be taking over this astonishing space with a retrospective tribute to their father's talent. Showcasing old and historic tables, some rarely seen, with their famous cast-iron legs that are instantly recognisable, this exhibition celebrating 65 years of Ado Chale design will be enriched by never-before-seen pieces, created especially for the occasion by Pierre Chale, scrupulously respecting his father's original drawings. Many of these drawings, dating from the 1960s, will be on show for the first time in the Hôtel Solvay stables, as will rarely-seen wall paintings and bas-reliefs in semi-precious stones.

Pierre Chale is now in charge of the design itself, as well as the artistic direction of the Atelier Ado Chale, working closely with his sister Ilona. He drew his inspiration from the impressive stock of materials assembled by his father. He has also been responsible for developing the production methods in line with the latest technical developments, while remaining scrupulously faithful to Ado Chale's artistic approach. The exhibition will also be an opportunity to show the public what the Maison Ado Chale looks like today, thanks to the joint work of Ilona and Pierre, and their invaluable collaborators. The author of the mosaics that adorn the Chale tables, Pierre insists on the meditative dimension involved in creating them, and on the long process that goes into the final result, in a scheme of precision and rigour that is faithful to his father's artistic ideals: 'It's a bit like working on a written score, which remains original but can be interpreted in many different ways. While the iconic and historic pieces on display in the 'museum' section will not, of course, be for sale, the exhibition will also offer other pieces for purchase.

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## **Bios**

### **ILONA CHALE**

Born in 1954 in Brussels, Ilona is the second child of Adolphe Pelsener (known as Ado Chale) and his wife Huguette Schaal. During the 1970s, Ilona grew up in the midst of her parents' artistic world, in the "gallery house" they had opened, rich in discovery and freedom, captivated by encounters between artists, art experts, architects, decorators, the curious and lovers... At the age of 14, thanks to her older brother Eric, who played the guitar, she discovered her voice, becoming an author, composer and performer. She spent 25 years in the world of show business, lending her talent to numerous musical projects and accompanying a number of artists on stage, in the

studio and for the cinema. Changing artistic direction in the mid-2000s, she launched into jewellery design and opened her own boutique, which also served as her workshop, where she developed her style and a loyal clientele. Since 2010, Ilona has been overseeing the smooth running of Atelier Ado Chale and working to establish recognition for her father's work. In 2012, a new boutique in Ixelles also became a showcase for his work. At the same time, determined to produce a book on her father's work, she undertook a lengthy archival project that culminated in the publication of an imposing monograph in September 2017, at the same time as the first major retrospective of Ado Chale's work opened at the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels (BOZAR), under her curatorship.

## **PIERRE BARBION-CHALE**

Born in Brussels in 1985, Pierre Barbion is the youngest child of Ado Chale, son of his partner Catherine Caba. Both his parents work together in the artist's studio, producing his works. So Pierre grew up in a world without borders, where the plurality of cultures is omnipresent, and the slightest object arouses wonder. He was soon fascinated by the multitude of stones and tubs full of material, treasures to be found in every nook and cranny. In this unique environment, perfect for developing the soul of a charismatic artist, he observed and drew on the techniques used by his father, as well as his own spirit of freedom, fantasy and imagination. In the process, he developed a philosophy of life, combining curiosity and altruism, which he quickly put to good use when, at the age of 19, he set off to discover the world, from India to South America, via Europe and Morocco. Following in the footsteps of his forebears, he let himself be surprised by unusual objects and materials. That's how he came to collect so many bones that had been bleached, washed and dried out by the sea. In 2012, on his return from a trip to Morocco, Pierre began to imagine and make objects using materials he had also found in his father's workshop. At first, he was naturally inspired by his father's work, composing wall panels, before gradually breaking away and creating more personal sculptures that are both instinctive and sophisticated. In recent years, Pierre Barbion-Chale has taken over the mosaic work and artistic direction of the Atelier Ado Chale.

## **ADO CHALE**

Born in Brussels in 1928, Adolphe Pelsener was a self-taught blacksmith who first worked in an advertising sheet metal workshop. At the end of the 1950s, during a trip to Germany, he discovered mineralogy. In 1962, with his wife Huguette Schaal, he opened his first gallery on rue de Livourne in Brussels. It was the time of his first table tops, in cement inlaid with small marcasites, which he signed Ado Chale. At the end of the 1960s, he travelled to the four corners of the world in search of other precious materials, including fossilised redwood, chalcedony agate, carnelian, rhodochrosite, jade, haematite, tiger's eye, jasper, turquoise and amethyst, to illuminate his furniture. He cast them in epoxy resin, a new material at the time, which broadened the aesthetic possibilities: the tops became larger and were entirely covered in stones. In 1967, at the Universal Exhibition in Montreal, Ado Chale exhibited a map of the European Union in the European Pavilion, entirely covered in marcasite. This marked the beginning of his international career, which began in 1968 when he was commissioned to create 25 marcasite mosaic tables for the brand new Hilton Hotel in Brussels. At the same time, the artist produced his first pieces of furniture in cast bronze and cast aluminium,

including the famous Goutte d'eau table, inspired by pre-Columbian art. Between 1966 and 1986, the gallery moved to a private mansion on Avenue Louise, completely redesigned by architect André Jacqmain (1921-2014), with a façade designed by Belgian ceramist Pierre Culot (1938-2011). Ado Chale creates its own scenographic elements and welcomes emblematic figures from the world of art and decoration to this exceptional setting. Attracting a clientele as discerning as it was varied, production increased and diversified from 1978 onwards, while the artist acquired a studio close to his new gallery on rue Lens. From the 1980s to the early 2000s, his international reputation continued to grow, even though the Gulf crisis in 1990 prompted him to turn to less precious natural materials, such as bone and mother-of-pearl buttons, shale and peppercorns. At the end of the 1990s, marked by a new infatuation with the aesthetics of the 1970s, his first creations were rediscovered, and their prices soared in auction houses, while his reputation continued to grow. This boosted the return of an international clientele and paved the way for numerous collaborations with interior designers such as Alberto Pinto, Peter Marino and Jacques Grange. From 2005 onwards, the artist concentrated on bronze and aluminium creations, developing new shapes and surfaces, as well as new models, available for the first time in limited editions (La Joséphine, 2014) and appealing to contemporary art lovers.

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