

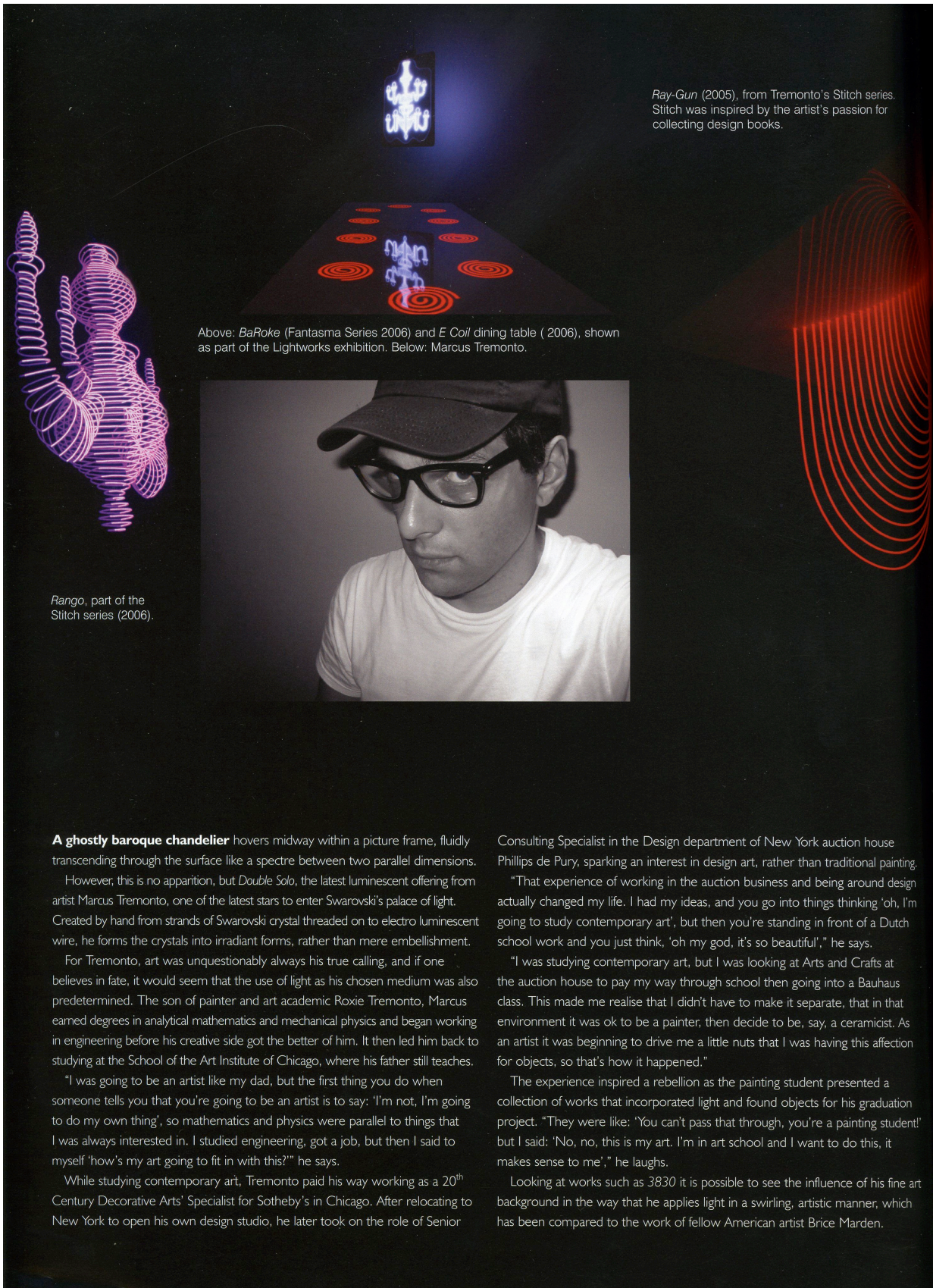
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Ray-Gun (2005), from Tremonto's *Stitch* series. *Stitch* was inspired by the artist's passion for collecting design books.

Above: *BaRoKe* (Fantasma Series 2006) and *E Coil* dining table (2006), shown as part of the *Lightworks* exhibition. Below: Marcus Tremonto.

Rango, part of the *Stitch* series (2006).

A ghostly baroque chandelier hovers midway within a picture frame, fluidly transcending through the surface like a spectre between two parallel dimensions. However, this is no apparition, but *Double Solo*, the latest luminescent offering from artist Marcus Tremonto, one of the latest stars to enter Swarovski's palace of light. Created by hand from strands of Swarovski crystal threaded on to electro luminescent wire, he forms the crystals into irradiant forms, rather than mere embellishment.

For Tremonto, art was unquestionably always his true calling, and if one believes in fate, it would seem that the use of light as his chosen medium was also predetermined. The son of painter and art academic Roxie Tremonto, Marcus earned degrees in analytical mathematics and mechanical physics and began working in engineering before his creative side got the better of him. It then led him back to studying at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where his father still teaches.

"I was going to be an artist like my dad, but the first thing you do when someone tells you that you're going to be an artist is to say: 'I'm not, I'm going to do my own thing', so mathematics and physics were parallel to things that I was always interested in. I studied engineering, got a job, but then I said to myself 'how's my art going to fit in with this?'" he says.

While studying contemporary art, Tremonto paid his way working as a 20th Century Decorative Arts' Specialist for Sotheby's in Chicago. After relocating to New York to open his own design studio, he later took on the role of Senior

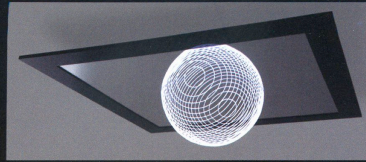
Consulting Specialist in the Design department of New York auction house Phillips de Pury, sparking an interest in design art, rather than traditional painting.

"That experience of working in the auction business and being around design actually changed my life. I had my ideas, and you go into things thinking 'oh, I'm going to study contemporary art', but then you're standing in front of a Dutch school work and you just think, 'oh my god, it's so beautiful,'" he says.

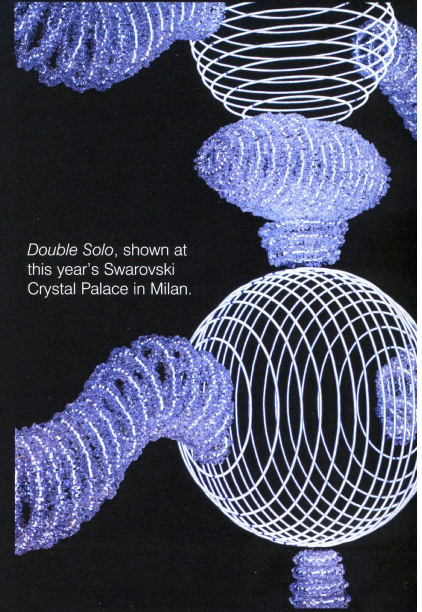
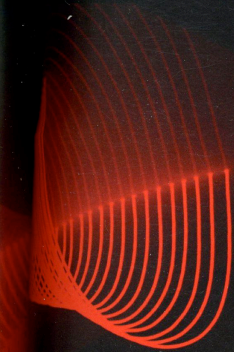
"I was studying contemporary art, but I was looking at Arts and Crafts at the auction house to pay my way through school then going into a Bauhaus class. This made me realise that I didn't have to make it separate, that in that environment it was ok to be a painter, then decide to be, say, a ceramicist. As an artist it was beginning to drive me a little nuts that I was having this affection for objects, so that's how it happened."

The experience inspired a rebellion as the painting student presented a collection of works that incorporated light and found objects for his graduation project. "They were like: 'You can't pass that through, you're a painting student!' but I said: 'No, no, this is my art. I'm in art school and I want to do this, it makes sense to me'," he laughs.

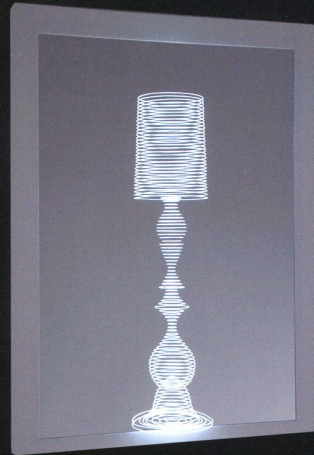
Looking at works such as *3830* it is possible to see the influence of his fine art background in the way that he applies light in a swirling, artistic manner, which has been compared to the work of fellow American artist Brice Marden.



Above: *Bauhaus* (2006), was shown as part of Tremonto's Light Works exhibition. Below: *S1 Standing Lamp* from the *Stitch* series (2007).



Double Solo, shown at this year's Swarovski Crystal Palace in Milan.



Hints of well-known works of art and design are evident in Tremonto's work, such as the *Fantasma* series, which features illuminated silhouettes of bowls of fruit and vases of flowers and brings to mind references of popular subjects among old masters. The influence of early 20th century brass chandeliers is also evident in *Ragno* and, more recently, *Double Solo*. However, his work is both unique and cutting-edge, baring no element of pastiche.

"I think that you instantaneously have to decide how to live your life. I am literally a sum of all my experiences, so as an artist you can say that you can remove it, but it's always there. So the real challenge for me was that I know what has been said and I think it's important to know what's been said, so that you can figure out what you want to say," he explains. "When I started out doing the series of works that I've been working on, it was really with that conscious element of 'how do I take those things that are important to me, things that I recognise?' As an artist and as a designer, I find something that I find incredible and then make it my own."

He relates this to *Fantasma*, a series that began in 2005, based on the subconscious images that both inspire and haunt him as an artist. "When those kind of things start edging you along, you start to think about how you're going to manipulate it," Tremonto says.

Just as he manipulates pre-existing forms and ideas, he reinterprets them by removing the functionality, focusing primarily on the visceral aspect, creating

not an object, but an experience. "When you go to a restaurant and people ask you about it, you'll always say that it was the cosiest place, or whatever. You'll remember things such as it being dimly lit, so when creating things like that, regardless of the image, something that emits light or has light on it, as a medium how do you respect that process?" he asks.

"With my work I'm not trying to create something that you can read a book by, what I'm doing is taking a material that illuminates via a different way so you instantaneously don't get what you want. Personally, that's how I think you have a human experience with something, when you have to decide what you want to do with it." Following the success of *Lightworks* – his first major solo gallery exhibition held by Phillips de Pury at the end of last year – and Swarovski's Milan exhibition Tremonto has joined the ranks of New York's flourishing creative scene. This despite after initially being contacted by the Austrian crystal manufacturer to show at the Crystal Palace thinking it was his mum playing a practical joke.

"I feel like I'm in a golden time, because I think that what's happening in design and contemporary art has been around for a while, but we're now two generations strong of people who know this is good. We no longer have to convince people that it's a valid profession – you can even get a doctorate in design," he smiles.

Designer, artist, choose if you must, but just don't call him 'the light guy'. ■