



# The multifaceted, metallic design legacies of 'Prouvé / Arad - Masters of Metal'

Laffanour | Galerie Downtown's show dialogues between Jean Prouvé's pragmatic vision and Ron Arad's artistic approach, highlighting metal's versatility as a material and concept.

by Ron Arad

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For its ongoing show, *Prouvé / Arad - Masters of Metal*, Paris-based Laffanour | Galerie Downtown sets a dialogue between the pragmatic vision of [French designer](#), metal worker and self-taught architect Jean Prouvé and the inventive artistic approach of British-Israeli [industrial designer](#), artist and architectural designer, [Ron Arad](#). Running from November 14 - December 14, 2024, the [design exhibition](#) explores the multifaceted nature of metal, showcasing its potential as both a functional material and a medium for artistic expression.

[Jean Prouvé](#) (1901-1984) developed a fascination with metal early on while working as an ironworker with Émile Robert. This period was pivotal in shaping his aesthetic, "as he saw metal as a living material", capable of engaging with its surroundings, as the gallery notes. Throughout his career, Prouvé redefined metal's possibilities, particularly sheet [steel](#), blending creative and functional innovation.

Prouvé's iconic works, such as the 1950s *Cité* bed—made from enamelled folded sheet steel and solid oak shelves—and the *Dollander* desk shelf from 1951, designed for the Villa Dollander with its green-lacquered steel uprights and solid cherry wood, "illustrate his ability to combine materials to sublimate the harmony between function and aesthetics," the show's press release mentions. Another standout in the exhibition is the 1951 *Potence lamp design* conceived for the Vantoux school, which exemplifies his innovative use of white-lacquered tubular metal and folded steel.

Each of Prouvé's creations is designed as an overall solution, where every element contributes to a global experience. He placed particular emphasis on articulation and assembly systems, using them to showcase the beauty of his product designs, down to their very structure. A prime example is the base of his *Standard* chair, which was crafted to be not only elegant and ergonomic but, above all, durable.

In contrast, Arad is a prominent figure in contemporary design, known for his bold, organic creations that defy traditional notions of furniture. Trained at the Architectural Association in London, he quickly began experimenting with metal, pushing it beyond its utilitarian roots to create sculptural design pieces. In his *One Off* series from the 1980s, the acclaimed product designer showcased metal's flexibility and strength, challenging conventional design standards and demonstrating its capacity to be both solid and sophisticated.

In the show's selection, Laffanour | Galerie Downtown also presents *BLO-VOID III* (2004), a lacquered and anodised aluminium chair design that embodies Arad's 'experimental audacity', alongside *Two Legs and a Table* (1991), a unique piece crafted from mirror-polished and patinated steel. Also featured are the *Papardelle* chair (around 1994) and the *This Mortal Coil* spiral bookcase (1993), made from patinated and tempered steel, both of which illustrate Arad's ability to "transcend the function of the object to turn it into a genuine work of art", the France-based gallery shares.

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Laffanour | Galerie Downtown also presents the *Twenty-Four* chair, designed by Arad as a tribute to Prouvé. Toward the end of his university studies, Arad nearly failed his degree for failing to return a book by Prouvé to the library. Years later, upon rediscovering the book, he was struck by how deeply Prouvé's ideas resonated with his own.

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To emphasise the furniture designer's influence on the aesthetic approach, Arad draws inspiration from a mysterious chair known only through a sketch and a photograph. This enigmatic piece, never seen by even Prouvé's close associates and family—such as Rolf Fehlbaum, Deyan Sudjic and Prouvé's daughter and granddaughter, Catherine and Delphine Drouin Prouvé—remains a mystery in the designer's legacy.

Using a single low-resolution image, Arad embarked on a 'forensic reconstitution' of the chair, meticulously analysing the visible details and re-evaluating its dimensions, materials and technical mechanisms to revive this lost masterpiece. As the gallery relays, "To complete this tribute, Ron Arad has humorously written a sentence on the back of this iconic creation, laser-cut from an aluminium plate on a red leather background: 'No one, except maybe Prouvé, has ever seen the back of this 1924 chair. Ron Arad, 2023'. A bold nod to a century of visionary design."

"[The] *Twenty-Four* chair, produced in partnership with More-So in Udine, goes beyond a simple reconstruction; it embodies the essence of this exhibition, illustrating the harmonious dialogue between two great masters of design and pushing back the boundaries between homage and innovation," they add.

Since its founding in the early 1980s by François Laffanour, Laffanour | Galerie Downtown has been committed to showcasing the furniture designs of 20th-century architects, with a particular focus on the key figures of post-war architecture.

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