

GAGOSIAN GALLERY



Arts preview: Frank Gehry's Fish Lamps at Gagosian Gallery

Edmund Lee



Gehry's lamps are on display at Gagosian Gallery

The story of Frank Gehry's iconic Fish Lamps is now design history. In 1983 he was commissioned to create objects from the Formica Corporation's new product, the plastic laminate ColorCore. The Pritzker Prize-winning architect was inspired to turn the accidentally shattered pieces - which reminded him of fish scales - into gently glowing sculptures shaped like fish in motion.

"I noticed that the [Formica] product was translucent and glowed when lit from behind," says Gehry, who also detours into sculpture and furniture design. "It was beautiful and I decided to explore it. I continued to do so for many years."

Gehry's Fish Lamps have remained popular since they were first shown at a solo exhibition at Gagosian Los Angeles in 1984. But when Larry Gagosian and Deborah McLeod, the director of Gagosian Gallery Beverly Hills, came up with the idea to make a retrospective of them in 2012, it was not meant to lead to a new series. However, that is exactly what happened and several pieces of it are on display at Gagosian's Hong Kong space.

"We talked and thought it would be fun to do a show of the old lamps and make one new one," says the Los Angeles-based Gehry.

"But the more I got into it, the more ideas I had and before long, we had a whole show full of new lamps. The original lamps, by comparison, were rather refined and had less movement to them. These new explorations are more dynamic and a bit shaggier - [of] bigger scales [and] rougher texture."

The fish form would eventually become a recurrent motif in both his sculptures and architectural projects. In 1986, he made Standing Glass Fish for the Minneapolis Sculpture Garden and in 1992 he produced a monumental, gold-coloured stainless steel fish sculpture to sit on Barcelona's waterfront for the Olympics.

"I wanted to find a way to express movement in my architecture akin to the movement that I saw in ancient Greek and Indian sculpture," Gehry says. "When I built the first model of the fish, I saw [in it] the movement that I was looking for. It was startling that a static object could express motion in such a dynamic way."