



If trees are symbols of strength, longevity, and productivity then Maria Pergay's latest masterpiece can be seen as the quintessential work of her long career. Over the course of more than fifty years of designing amid a field dominated by men, Pergay has never been afraid to take chances. She has consistently developed some of the most unique and eye-catching design forms using intricate artisanal techniques. *Bronze Tree*—on view at Demisch Danant gallery in New York for just a few days longer—is the *pièce de résistance* in Pergay's new collection *Secret Garden*, and a superlative example of her considerable capacities.

Measuring more than six feet tall, *Bronze Tree* constitutes an impressive feat of craftsmanship. To create it, Pergay collaborated with an expert metal smith, directing the fabrication process and dictating every bend and twist. The molds for the trunk and branches were cast from life, but Pergay manipulated each element to achieve the details she desired. Each leaf was treated individually: hand-cut from brass and copper sheets; hammered, sculpted, and filed to replicate Pergay's sketches; patinated using a secret formula to achieve the deep red tones; and finally positioned one by one on the branches to heighten light reflection. Pergay drew inspiration from a variety of botanical sources, and the final product is deceptively naturalistic. She has commingled parts of different plant species—exotic flowers, oak leaves, and fern-like fronds—to make a tree unlike anything found in nature.

Trees and other organic motifs have played a recurring role in Pergay's production since the 1960s, but like *Bronze Tree*, most of her designs walk the line between the real and the imagined, the natural and the artificial. Working primarily in metal—especially stainless steel—she possesses an uncanny talent for marrying innately cold and inert materials to the warm and complex forms of nature. Such consistent and unique stylization makes her work instantly recognizable, from *Boite a Cigarettes Mais* from 1960 and the 1970s-era *Oursin Sculpture*, to her iconic *Screen* from 2006.



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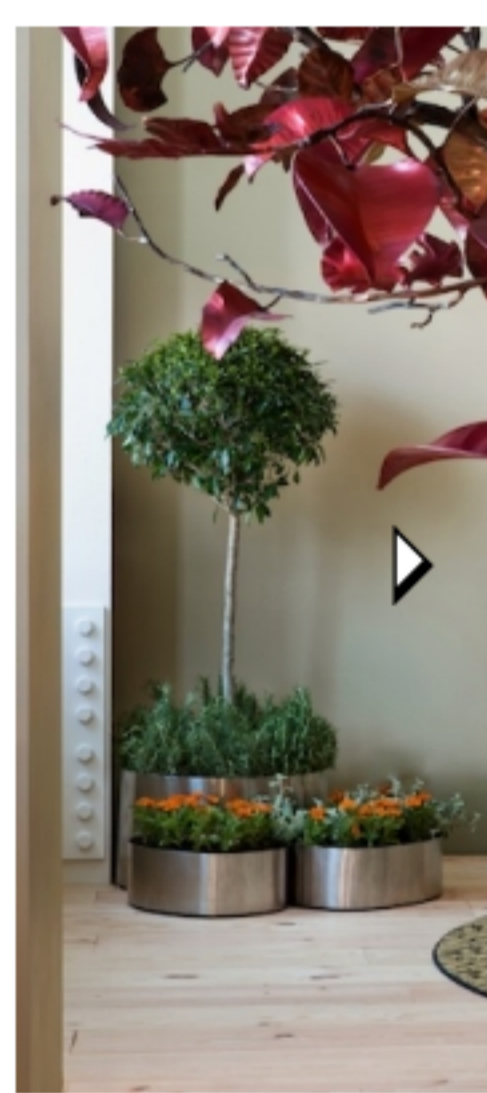
MARIA PERGAY - BRONZE TREE



Maria Pergay © Ed Alcock (Images 1,2 & 3)



Bronze Tree



Secret Garden exhibition NYC

Pergay's biography is as dramatic and unexpected as her work. Born in 1930 to Russian-Jewish parents in Moldavia, at the age of six she fled with her mother to Paris to escape impending Soviet invasion. After studying set design at the Institut des Hautes Etudes Cinématographiques and sculpture with Ossip Zadkine in Montmartre, she fell into window dressing with a friend. This unplanned path led to a series of commissions from luxury brands, including Dior and Hermès. By 1960, Pergay was able to open her own shop on the Place de Vosges, specializing in one-off, jewelry-like decorative objects, usually in silver.

Her career took another turn in 1967 when the largest steelworks in France, Uguine Gueugnon, approached her to use their product. She surprised everyone by proposing furniture rather than the small-scale works she had become known for. She found that stainless steel suited her, that she had a natural sensitivity to its material qualities. At times, she literally guided the hands of her fabricators to show them the shape she desired. The following year, Galerie Maison et Jardin in Paris exhibited the Uguine Gueugnon collaborative work, and Pierre Cardin bought every piece. And her fame grew . . . for a while.

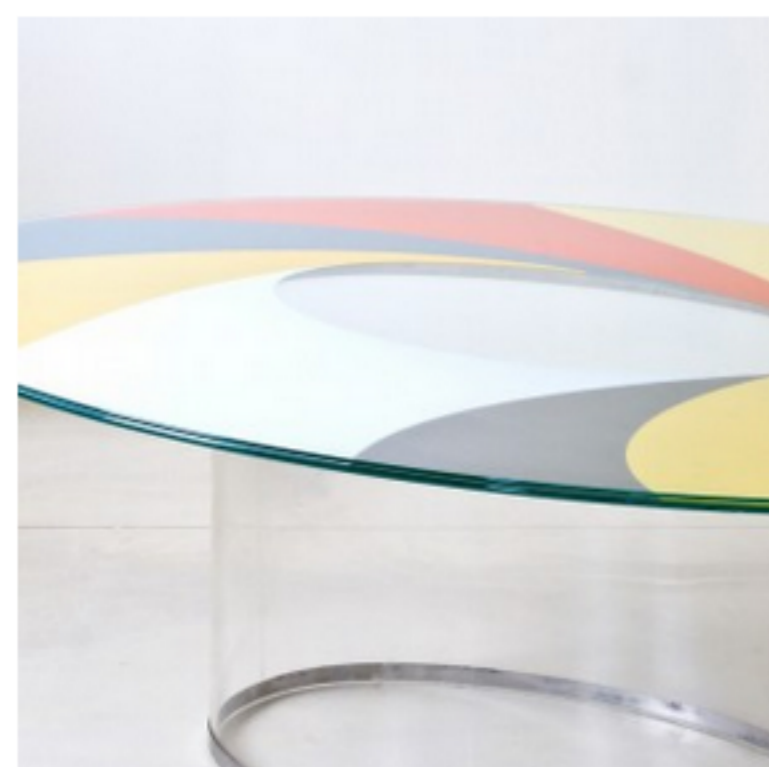
Pergay completed several notable commissions throughout the 1970s and 1980s for A-list figures such as Salvador Dalí and Saudi Prince Abdullah, but by the end of the 20th century—even though she was still working—she was all but forgotten by the mainstream design community. That is until gallerists Suzanne Demisch and Stephane Danant discovered her work in Parisian flea markets and recognized its significance. Demisch and Danant tracked Pergay down in Morocco and asked if she would be interested in producing for the gallery. By 2006, she was an auction house darling and a perennial contributor to the Demisch Danant program. In recognition for her lifetime achievements, Pergay was appointed a *Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres* in 2012.

One can't help but see a correlation between the exquisitely twisting form of *Bronze Tree* and Pergay's own dynamic, varied life. Just as this phenomenal piece seems to hover on the threshold between blooming life and stoic, knowing endurance, Pergay's monumental body of work is now firmly rooted in the annals of design history, while always retaining a freshness and vitality as though it had sprung from the fertile imagination of an adventurous design newcomer. At 82-years-old, the *grande dame* of sculptural French design is generating work as bold and original as ever.

Pergay's new collection, *Secret Garden*, is on view at Demisch Danant, New York, until July 13th.

Title image courtesy of Demisch Danant Gallery, NYC

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