OLGA TREIVAS IN CONVERSATION WITH GIACOMO INFANTINO

STUDIO TREIVAS

To enter the work of Treivas Architecture Bureau is to accept a wager on perception. It means abandoning reassuring, resolved forms to immerse oneself in a dimension where space, furniture and architecture are not stable formulas, but presences in a constant state of adjustment. Led by architect Olga Treivas, the collective operates at a threshold, between the rigidity of structure and its gradual emotional dissolution. Whether working with blocks of Jatobá wood that are literally wounded and stitched back together by hand, or with glass and crystal sculpted to deconstruct light, their practice transforms matter into a resonant device.

To grasp the scope of this trajectory, two celebrated literary visions that explored the fractures of the human psyche offer a useful lens. The first comes from Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*, with its fierce attack on the "Crystal Palace", a hyper-rational, positivist symbol in which human beings ultimately suffocate, deprived of error, irrationality and the need for imperfection. The second is Hermann Hesse's "Magic Theatre" in *Steppenwolf*: a prism of mirrors and fragments in which bourgeois identity disintegrates in order to recover a more complex truth.

Treivas's design inhabits precisely this threshold. Far removed from serial geometry and the aseptic perfection of the rendering, the collective places its faith in roughness and the slow temporality of manual craftsmanship. It is here that its structures recover an archaic candour akin to that of Henri Rousseau: just as, in his jungles, a leaf or the disc of the sun could be distilled into solemn symbols, Treivas's materials are stripped of the superfluous to allow primordial archetypes to surface, restoring to architecture a suspended, visceral temporality.

In response to the dogma of pure function, the *Emma In Paraty* series and the *Antifurniture* research challenge industrial ergonomics. The solidity of Jatobá wood is not treated as an untouchable mass, but pierced and stitched with wool and cotton threads. The project reclaims the Brazilian saying "tapar o sol com a peneira" (to cover the sun with a sieve): an apparently illogical act that transforms the irregularity of the textile stitch into the strongest of ethical statements. The repetition of the gesture becomes an act of resistance to serial calculation.

The same occurs in the hand-engraved crystal of *Quatro Estações* and the *Cactos Aquáticos* totems, where manual carving transforms crystal into Hesse's Magic Theatre. The material sheds its decorative legacy to become a prism capable of breaking light, multiplying shadows and deconstructing inhabited space.

Through Olga Treivas's responses, we attempt to trace the contours of this methodology, in which the object ceases merely to serve and begins to resonate.



Centipede from the series Antifurniture, 2022, Fyodor Pavlov-Andreevich with Olga Treivas. Photos: Ruy Teixeira

GIACOMO INFANTINO: There is a key intuition within your approach: static form is not what matters; what matters is the vibration generated by irregularity. I wonder how this tension changes when moving from the macro scale of public or museum architecture to the intimacy of an embroidered chair or a crystal vase. Is collectible furniture architecture in miniature, or a realm of complete liberation from structural constraints?

OLGA TREIVAS: Of course, working with collectible design is a liberating experience: the process mostly depends on you, and there are no pressing deadlines. Although if we leave these strictly proceedural things aside, the developement demands more concentration on the specific material of choice and, as the result, its limitations and properties. Personally, I perceive any boundary as a blessing: this is a challenge that provokes creative freedom.

Totem 1, Cactos Aquáticos, 2026. Crystal glass. Photo: Ruy Teixeira.

GI: In Emma In Paraty, you bring the discipline of carpentry into collision with the naïve slowness of hand embroidery, invoking the saying "tapar o sol com a peneira". At a time when industry pursues aseptic perfection and artificial intelligence promises flawless symmetry, what ethical, political and poetic value does human error hold for you within the design object?

OT: Today when everything can be perfect only some irregularity can catch onlooker's attention: I notice it myself, and now I am more interested in analogue crafts than ever. Emma series was actually inspired by my childhood hobbies: I loved needlework and constructing things equally, and it deeply echoes in everything I do today. Nevertheless, I wouldn't call my method 'a human error', yet I agree that the line between defect and uniqueness of handicraft is rather blurred. Me and my team program irregularity on the starting stage of design process, making it the core concept of our pieces or architectural projects. Otherwise, the result may appear sloppy instead of sincere.

GI: In the hand-engraved crystal works, from Quatro Estações to the Cactos Aquáticos totems, glass is never an inert substance, but a living presence shaped by weight, mass and optical void. When conceiving these pieces, are you working on the object itself, or on the shadow and refraction it will project into space? What kind of archaeology of light does the studio seek to construct through crystal?

OT: We treat crystal glass pieces as an architecture with a different scale: we mostly think of them as of material volumes. Of course, we are trying to program the ethereal things such as light & shadow as well, but crystal glass can be very unpredictable. Some effects are becoming visible only on the final stage of polishing the item: that is when every stroke of a diamond cutter begins to shine. We love to experiment with different decorating techniques and colours, what stays the same is the use of crystal glass instead of regular glass: its shine and hardness is a game changer for us.

GI: Antifurniture deconstructs the dogmas of ergonomics, demanding a performative rather than passive interaction with furniture. Looking at the domestic interior, where does the boundary lie today between an object's pure function and its capacity to operate as a psychological device? Does contemporary living still genuinely require functional furniture, or are we instead seeking objects capable of resonating with our emotional states?

OT: We are very strict in case of norms and regulations: we believe that the greatest living spaces are the interiors where its user doesn't notice the work of an architect. It should be comfortable to be good, for us this is a non-negotiable rule which lie in any solution that we suggest our clients. Regarding Antifurniture, this is an art project done in collaboration with the performance artist Fyodor Pavlov-Andreevich: every piece of this collection comes with a certain number of rules, even rituals. The contemporary living by our team is, on the other hand, a place to rest, not to perform: we are very sure about that.

GI: Your work brings together a powerful layering of cultures: the memory of Eastern European crystal merges with the light, warm woods such as Jatobá, leather and the visual culture of Brazil. How do you metabolise this nomadic geography within the studio? How can such distant contexts and materials be brought into dialogue without falling into the trap of exoticism?

OT: Our position is rather unique: in Brazil our Eastern European legacy is considered exotic and vice versa. We learn to be open and in result we absorb the best of both worlds: that is what makes our practice genuinely diverse. The constant change of the distance, however, lets us be candid about what is truly great in terms of design and what is just appealing because of being exotic.

GI: Maria Montessori said that the hands are the instruments of human intelligence. I imagine that, for you, material prototyping and visceral dialogue with craftspeople, such as those at Oficina São João, are as important as drawing itself. What does everyday life within the studio look like during the genesis of a project? Which materials or intuitions are you currently focusing on for the next "excavations" in your research?

OT: Every project that we are working on starts with a thorough research: at the moment we are mostly interested in the comissions that we can direct on every stage, from first concept to decorating. In order to do that right we are constantly embracing diverse roles to think outside traditional frameworks of our profession. Right now we are digging into the 'excavations' which are already there, but who knows what comes next?

What emerges from the conversation with Olga is a practice that moves beyond pure aesthetics to investigate the vulnerability of matter and the tensions of everyday life. Crystal refracting light, carpentry wounded and stitched back together by hand, ergonomics called into question: everything converges towards the aim of restoring an emotional temperature to inhabited space, a visceral humanity capable of drawing us away from the coldness of the external world.

It is a gesture that takes on political significance. If there is one image that encapsulates the vertigo of modern living, it is the one carved into the collective imagination a century ago by Fritz Lang in *Metropolis*. There, the industrial, Expressionist city becomes a metaphor for the reduction of the human being to a cog trapped within a rigid, austere geometry. Today, that old alienation has silently entered the domestic sphere, taking the form of hyper-standardised environments modelled on digital renderings, sanitised to the point of suffocation and stripped of memory: an accessible seriality of the kind William Morris envisioned, yet emptied of the authenticity of the human gesture.

It is here that Treivas's work operates as a deliberate fissure. Faced with the risk of transforming our homes into anaesthetised machines for living, the studio reasserts the presence of imperfection and the value of extended time. Between the threads embroidered through Jatobá wood and the refractions of sculpted crystal, Treivas reminds us that an object should not impose conformity upon a space, but reactivate it, offering an antidote to metropolitan neurosis: the possibility of inhabiting a place willing to resonate with our own fragilities.



Totem 4, Cactos Aquáticos, 2026. Crystal glass. Photo: Ruy Teixeira



Cupboard Emma In Paraty, 2026. Jatobá wood with handmade yarn embroidery. Photo: Ruy Teixeira.



Side Table Emma In Paraty, 2026. Jatobá wood with handmade yarn embroidery. Photo: Ruy Teixeira



Emma In Paraty Collection, 2026. Jatobá wood with handmade yarn embroidery. Photo: Ruy Teixeira.

Totem 3, Cactos Aquáticos, 2026. Crystal glass. Photo: Ruy Teixeira.

Totens II Cactos Aquáticos, 2026. Crystal glass. Photo: Ruy Teixeira.