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Design

Michael Najjar's Space Suite at the Kameha Grand Zürich

Future*world*

Glass talks to visual artist Michael Najjar about looking out of this world to design the new Space Suite at the Kameha Grand Zürich

Space: the final frontier. For some, that 'belief holds infinite possibilities and for those few, there is no end to the many ways in which one can interpret 'space' whilst relegated to planet earth. The Kameha Grand Zürich is a hotel where transcending the traditional is of the utmost importance, so when they decided upon a new specialist suite, the task of transporting business and leisure travellers into another atmosphere was put to adventurous German visual artist Michael Najjar. The hotel is located in the hub of the city and situated less than ten minutes away from the airport whilst also

remaining nestled in the Opfikon municipality, surrounded by forests, meadows and the largest freshwater lake in Zürich, so it couldn't be any more earth-aware. It was natural then that Najjar decided to take the newly designed suite to infinity and beyond, and thus the Space Suite was born. Glass met with the starry-eyed artist himself to find out more about creating an inhabitable yet entirely out-of-this-world concept space for a commercial lifestyle hotel. This, earthlings, is deep space Najjar.

As one of Germany's most visionary visual artists, where does the concept of space come into the fold for you?

Space travel has been a lifelong fascination since I was a little boy. Science fiction literature and movies always have been an inspiration to my artistic work. The fascinating thing today is the fact that what always has been fiction has now become reality for me – flying into space.

Along with most of the human race, you have yet to actually journey into outer space, so why is it so important for you to keep exploring the infinite space beyond the earth's atmosphere in your art and design work?

As an artist I am interested in the development of new technologies and how they will affect our future way of life. In the field of space travel and exploration, we are facing huge technological leaps which will make space accessible for many people in the near future. In my work I try to show the cultural dimension and impact of these new developments towards our society.

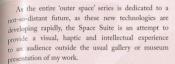**When do you think you may have found your signature aesthetic?**

I don't think that I have a signature aesthetic, as every work series I have ever done has a different visual expression. The link between all these works is the conceptual approach and the questioning of the relationship between man and machine, humans and technology.

How would you describe this aesthetic in your own words?

My work always walks on a thin line between reality and simulation; maybe this is a kind of signature aesthetic. But I am much more interested to find a new way of visual expression with every new body of work.

Your artistic view has always been one of faraway utopias and social structures of the perhaps not-so-distant future. How does this come into play when you lend your hand to creating physical, inhabitable spaces such as the Space Suite?

As the entire 'outer space' series is dedicated to a not-so-distant future, as these new technologies are developing rapidly, the Space Suite is an attempt to provide a visual, haptic and intellectual experience to an audience outside the usual gallery or museum presentation of my work.

How much active input did you have on how the Space Suite would really stand out from the rest?

This unique room is only possible because Carsten Rath, the CEO of Kameha, gave me carte blanche to create this. I have developed the entire concept, designed the furniture, the lights, the carpet and many other details.

You've taken care to ensure that the Space Suite is truly a testament to an impressive and awe-inducing sensory experience. How have you achieved this within four walls?

One important aspect to achieve this is the fact that we have blocked every view to the outside to concentrate the guest's experience on everything that's happening inside. We have banned TV Channels completely, but the guest will have a live stream from the International Space Station, a direct link to NASA TV, and a selected library of books, audiobooks and movies related to space travel. A very sexy board computer voice guides them through the Suite when they enter the door. There is a floating bed, which is a supported mattress fixed to the wall creating the illusion of suspended gravity, a universe carpet, rocket lights, and there are of course original large scale artworks from my 'outer space' series.

What, in your view, do you think guests will gain from such a fantasy-driven hotel experience?

As I have never created something similar before, it's hard to tell now what the guests will gain from their stay at the Space Suite. Let's wait for the feedback of the first 'crew members'.

As for the design elements themselves, what do you think makes this sparkling, dare I say 'futuristic', spaced-out motif so timelessly appealing and in many ways so immersive to inhabitants?

I think it's the relationship between all the different elements in the suite. The books you find in the library reappear in the movie database, the rocket engine lights you will recognise when you see a rocket launch on NASA TV, the universe carpet is a mirror image of the ceiling to play with your sense of orientation, and last but not least is the fact that you can't see outside.

Finally, the Space Suite has been described as an incredible design destination by Founder & CEO of Kameha Grand Zürich, Carsten K Rath. What makes any form of design destined for greatness?

I think it's not a question of design; there are many hotels which have a great design. What makes the Space Suite so unique and special is the fact that this a piece of art which you experience from the inside; you can actually live inside it.

– By Liam Feltham

Kameha Grand Zürich (www.kamehagrandzuerich.com) offers the galaxy getaway two-night package from 1845 CHF/£1282 per night. This includes B&B accommodation in the space suite, space amenities on arrival, 1.5 hours bodyflying in a wind tunnel to simulate anti-gravity or 1 hour flight simulation in an A320, personally signed 'outer space' book by Michael Najjar, an opportunity to visit Michael Najjar's Berlin studio to meet him personally and a designer art gift to take home.