

FRIEDMAN BENDA  
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# designboom

## Samuel Ross on Society, Socialist Value Systems, and Self for Friedman Benda's 'Design in Dialogue'

By Nina Azzarello  
October 13, 2020



on april 1, 2020, new york gallery [friedman benda](#) initiated a series of online interviews aimed at connecting individuals across the world with leading voices in the creative field. [design in dialogue](#) is a conversational program hosted alternately by curator and historian **glenn adamson** and designer **stephen burks** that engages with designers, makers, critics, and curators as they reflect on their careers and creative processes. against the backdrop of [COVID-19](#) and global lockdowns, the conversations are held virtually on zoom for 1 hour for anyone in the world to tune in to, and include a participatory Q&A with the audience in attendance. friedman benda has since presented more than 40 episodes, and will continue with a lineup of future guests, each offering unparalleled insight into the sensibilities, musings, and memories of today's creative protagonists. [see our recent feature of pedro reyes and carla fernández on practice and personal life](#), and [april greiman on pre-computer technology and communicating with space](#).

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on september 30, *design in dialogue* welcomed multifaceted british creative samuel ross, who has risen to fame over the past few years for his material-intensive streetwear line A-COLD-WALL\*, his collaborations with brands such as **NIKE** and **oakley**, and his design firm SR A. ross joined glenn adamson to discuss his previous projects, as well as his latest creative venture — a body of work including furniture and other objects, which connects past archetypes with contemporary cultural concerns.

watch the full video interview at the top of the page and stay tuned as designboom continues to share *design in dialogue* features. see all past episodes — and RSVP for upcoming ones — [here](#).



looks from an A-COLD-WALL\* collection demonstrate ross' unique take on avant-garde utility

**ross began by considering how the current state of the world has affected his creative approach.** a polymath that engages in a gamut of creative fields — including fashion, installation, and furniture — ross has found that today's societal condition has pushed him towards experimentation, freedom, and thinking about projects from a more political and self-referential perspective. *'whereas before I was slightly more precious about what fields I would say I operated in simultaneously, at this time — when we're at such a pivotal point within the 21st century and the future of mankind — it's really about having a velocity and agility to works coming forward,'* he describes. *'my mantra and*

*philosophy as of now feels a little more open, and a little bit more experimental. there's definitely a spirit that pulls me to talk about things from a more political standpoint actually, which maybe wasn't the case before. there was always a social and socialist layer of messaging that was encrypted in my works, but now it feels like there's really this crystalized point where we need to be a lot more vocal about the works. there's a lot more of a focus on identifying with the diaspora and self, which really needs to be on the forefront all of works that come forth.'*



samuel ross x NIKE concept, 2018

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in discussing some of the commercial collaborations he has engaged in over recent years, ross commented on his interest in drawing on the experience to study human relationships with objects and materials. *'personally, the attraction goes beyond just making an interesting looking product. it's really about pushing forth the notion of how commercial opportunities can actually be used as a litmus test to re-engage how we operate with material, and really start to underpin the relationship and psyche we often hold regarding product and inanimate objects.'*

ross went on to reference a prototype sneaker he created in collaboration with NIKE (pictured above), citing his exploration of footwear as a representation of creative energy. *'how do we produce a shoe that is living and that can almost shed itself, and operate outside of the function of movement to a certain degree, whilst representing the character and energy of brutalism and raw material?'*

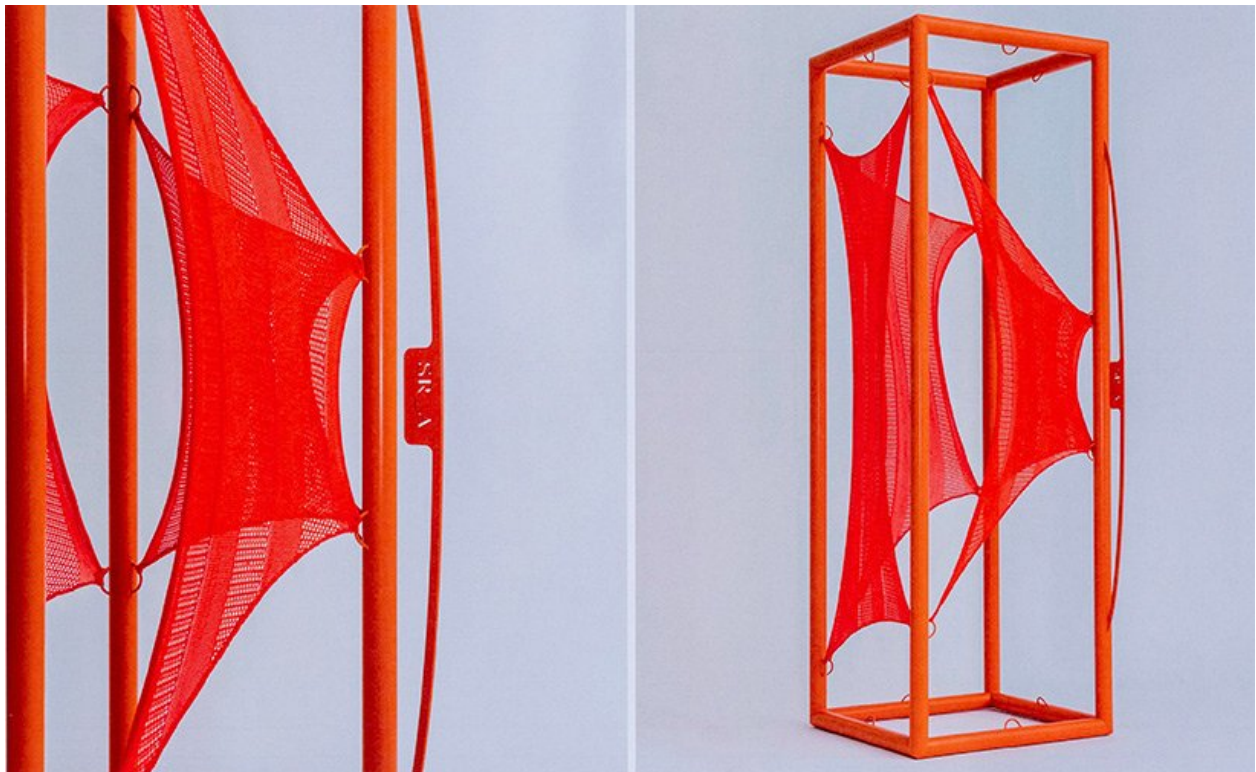


concave 1, 2019

ross also explored the thinking into his more recent foray into furniture and chair design, and shared his thoughts on how objects can convey a greater sense of urgency and emotion than was previously allotted to them. in speaking about pieces like 'trauma chair' (pictured below) and specifically 'recovery chair', ross has described how form can be drawn from experience. *'the idea of an article that reflects a transient phase within recovery of the diaspora fueled the ergonomic, soft forms — wounds are still present, though less in number. a problem still arises, with such*

*recovery, scar tissue masks a sensitivity that cannot be regained; loose the human touch and assimilate into a form that is impartial to the rights of the full human experience, or retain the open wounds to live, though impaired by the cavities that may in turn devour the identity we wish to rebuild.'*

ross told adamson that what appealed to him about chair design and furniture was a re-examination of what he had engaged with at the start of his career, *'the notion of product design, visual communication, and servitude coming back again...I don't think you can get any more functional and have such a level of critique applied to an article than a chair. I found it really interesting how an object can convey and signal so much from a cultural perspective, but also how this object needs to fundamentally function perfectly. there's a level of engineering excellence which is expected here. the chair seems to be the perfect mediation of the two.'*



Terminal 1, 2019



A volume of gratitude, 2019



Compression, 2019

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Untitled, 2020



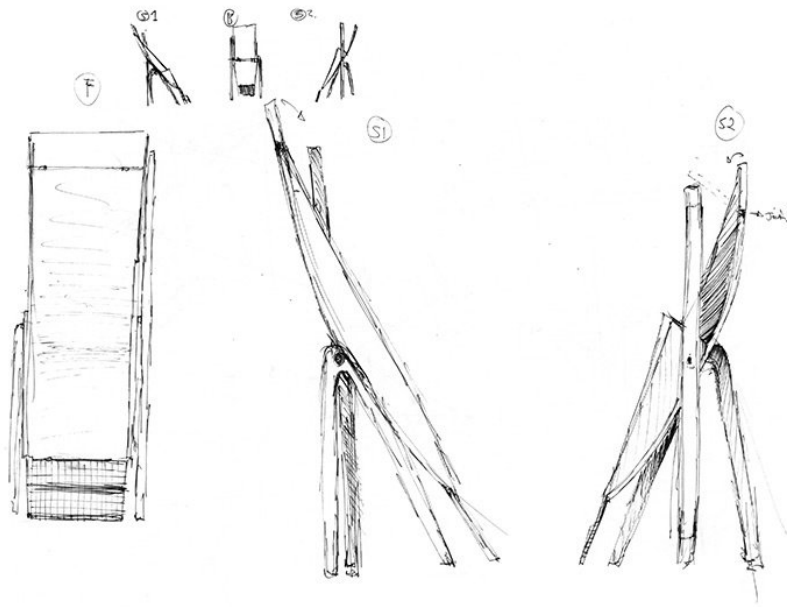
Concrete objects, Second collection, 2018

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TRAUMA chair, 2020

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Sketches of chair designs by Ross



Portrait of Samuel Ross  
Image courtesy of Friedman Benda

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**design in dialogue is a series of online interviews presented by new york-based gallery friedman benda that highlights leading voices from the field — designers, makers, critics, and curators — as they discuss their work and ideas.** hosted alternately by curator and historian glenn adamson and designer stephen burks, the conversations are held on zoom for 1 hour and include a participatory Q&A.

**watch the full video interview with samuel ross at the top of the page and stay tuned as designboom continues to share *design in dialogue* features. see all past episodes — and RSVP for upcoming ones — [here](#).**