

FRIEDMAN BENDA
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Marc Benda on Contemporary Collectible Design

Design doyenne Daniella Ohad shares insights
into collecting design drawn from her conversations
with the world's premiere design experts

By Daniella Ohad
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nendo: ghost stories exhibition at Friedman Benda (2009). Photo © Jimmy Cohrsen; Courtesy of Friedman Benda and nendo

Offered as an online course for the first time, Collecting Design: The Legends seeks to engage architects, interior designers, design lovers, and art collectors in an exploration of the fascinating world of collectible design, presented as one-on-one conversations between Daniella Ohad and leading experts. For Design Miami, Ohad recaps each

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weekly program (co-sponsored by AIA New York), sharing rare insights into how to enjoy and “read” objects while cultivating a critical eye and elevated discernment.



Jennifer Olshin, Partner & Founding Director, and Marc Benda, Co-Founder, Friedman Benda. Photo © Friedman Benda

"Marc Benda is a trailblazer in the design world," [Al Eiber](#), noted collector of avant-garde design, has remarked. "Beyond his discerning eye for raw talent, he supports [his

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designers] financially. Even more consequentially, Marc pushes the designers that he works with to go beyond their comfort zones."

Marc Benda is the legend behind Friedman Benda, the man who, driven by vision and intensity, enabled the rise of living design legends. As he is always behind the scenes and never in the spotlight—rarely commenting on the gallery's work—it was an extraordinary opportunity to host him this week in the second session of my Collecting Design: The Legends program and to hear his thoughts on what makes contemporary design great.



Faye Toogood | Assemblage 6: Unlearning exhibition at Friedman Benda (2020). Photo © Daniel Kukla; Courtesy of Friedman Benda and Faye Toogood

Born into a family of collectors, Benda has pursued a lifelong passion for art and design since early childhood. When other families went to the beach, he told us, his parents took him to flea markets, instilling him with an educated taste and love for sophisticated creative expressions. He began his career in the art world, apprenticing with venerable arts dealer Barry Friedman before opening Friedman Benda gallery in 2007. (Friedman retired in 2013.) The gallery has since become one of the world's powerhouses in design, yet Benda maintains a modest posture. "No single design dealer," one of his loyal clients told me, "has garnered as much respect or power in the world of design museums, and no one is as reserved when it comes to putting forward the faces of his stable over his own."

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The gallery is renowned for showcasing the most cutting-edge and revolutionary design of our time—always conceptual, daring, poetic, and surprising—propelled ever forward by Benda's penetrating eye for the best. Keen on flawless beauty and genuine fabrication, Benda seeks out phenomenal materiality, narrative, and innovation and understands each object offered by the gallery from the inside out. When I asked Benda about the impeccable finishes that are the gallery's signature, he explained, "While finishes are just the last 5% of the process, they are in fact 90% of the product."



Joris Laarman Lab: Bits and Crafts exhibition at Friedman Benda (2014); Photo © Friedman Benda and Joris Laarman

At the core of the gallery's fascinating program, though, are the relationships that Benda has forged with his roster of talents, extending professional dialogues into mutually stimulating creative partnerships. Benda and I discussed some of the gallery's most collectible designers and the bodies of work they developed over the years: Wendell Castle, also known as the Dean of American Design, who re-emerged in the 21st century with a new take on the iconic materiality and formal language that he originally formulated in the 1960s, embracing the possibilities of digital technology; Dutch designer Joris Laarman, who merges nature and machine through the application of algorithms, software, and digital fabrication methods informed by his deep love for history, which has resulted in some of the most magical objects in recent memory; British designer Paul

Cocksedge, whose design processes are so groundbreaking that merely understanding them results in a powerful design experience; and Lebanese designer Najla El Zein, who expresses distortions and sensuality in stone and concrete, sculpting white, feminine forms that evoke the peace and harmony of ancient Greek art while also feeling entirely new.



Najla El Zein: Transition exhibition at Friedman Benda (2019). Photo © Daniel Kukla; Courtesy of Friedman Benda and Najla El Zein

Zeitgeist is the word Benda uses when describing the direction of Friedman Benda. Capturing and advancing the spirit of the time is certainly a theme common to all designers represented by the gallery, because only those in tune with the zeitgeist can enter the pantheon of history. "Marc pushes and encourages his artists to move into new and uncharted territory," I was once told by Detroit-based designer Chris Schanck, who has been represented by the gallery since 2017. Whether they fabricate objects in house or not, whether they use digital technologies or hand craftsmanship (or both), they all have chosen the path of innovation. And the support of the gallery enables them to substantiate their dreams, as great design always begins with dreams.



Byung Hoon Choi: In One Storke exhibition at Friedman Benda (2014). Photo © Adam Reich; Courtesy of Friedman Benda and Byung Hoon Choi

The public is invited to enroll in Collecting Design: The Legends [here](#). Sponsored by AIA New York, these weekly virtual classes run through December 16, 2020.