

FRIEDMAN BENDA
515 W 26TH STREET
NEW YORK NY 10001

designboom

Thaddeus Mosley on sculpting with the spontaneity of jazz for Friedman Benda's 'Design in Dialogue'

By Nina Azzarello
October 27, 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 april greiman on pre-computer technology, and samuel ross on society, socialist value systems, and self.

Nina Azzarello, "Thaddeus Mosley on sculpting with the spontaneity of jazz for Friedman Benda's 'Design in Dialogue'," *DesignBoom*, October 27, 2020

on october 16, 2020, *design in dialogue* welcomed celebrated american artist thaddeus mosley, who crafts monumental sculptures from the felled trees of pittsburgh's urban canopy, wood from local sawmills, and reclaimed building materials. using only a mallet and chisel, and with influences ranging from african tribal art, to isamu noguchi and constantin brâncuși, he reworks salvaged timber into biomorphic forms. in a conversation with stephen burks, mosley discussed his self-described 'sculptural improvisations' that draw from the spontaneity of jazz, and which mark an inflection point in the history of american abstraction.

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](#).



all images from thaddeus mosley's presentation with friedman benda
courtesy of thaddeus mosley and friedman benda

the 94-year-old artist, who still works to this day, opened the discussion by introducing his background and upbringing, and the origins of his interest in sculpture. growing up in new castle, pennsylvania, mosley's mother was a talented seamstress, and his father a coal miner who enjoyed crafting spoons and knives from disused metal in his spare time. his family was a musical one — his father played the trumpet, while his mother, who played piano, and three sisters had a gospel group

called 'the mosley sisters'. mosley studied english and journalism at the university of pittsburgh and recalls visiting the carnegie museum to see the international shows, arising from an innate love for art. his interest in sculpture specifically developed in the 1950s, when mosley saw a display of scandavian design in a department store. *'in the very early 50s, scandavian design came to pittsburgh,' mosley recalls. 'a department store did a big display of danish and swedish furniture and they had small sculptures in all the displays. in all of the furniture displays, they had art, which is something you don't see in america even now, but they would show sculptures, like little fish and birds out of teak wood and brass rods. I looked at those, and desired that furniture tremendously, so I got some! but I decided I could make those fish and birds myself. so that's what started it. I didn't have teak wood, I just used 2x4s. and another thing — instead of the very thin birds and fish, I made fat ones! (laughs).'*



mosley went on to discuss his greatest artistic inspirations, and why — with a huge interest in design — he chose not to become a designer. *'I have some things in the background, stools and things that I've made, but they're sculptural'* he says. *'I think every artist is a designer in some sense of the word, whether a painter, or sculptor or furniture maker — and a lot of people combine them both.'* one such creative that mosley cites as one of his most important inspirations is isamu noguchi. through a lifetime of artistic experimentation, the japanese-american created sculptures, gardens, furniture and lighting designs, ceramics, architecture, and set designs. *'noguchi has been one of my strongest inspirations and influences,'* mosley says, *'especially what he*

was able to do with planes and volumes and some of his interested sculpture. I met noguchi twice and talked to him, and I always admired him, and felt he never got his dues, and still hasn't. he's one of the greatest artists of his time.'



mosley's own work is based on the weight and space concept, and draws from motifs found in african tribal art, to the sculptural work of isamu noguchi and constantin brâncuși. his monumental freestanding sculptures are crafted from the felled trees of pittsburgh's urban canopy from the city's forestry division. he uses traditional joinery techniques to manipulate form, weight, and space to create gravity-defying sculptures, with bold, sinuous curvatures that derive from existing recesses and protrusions in their raw material. *'people always ask me — what would you call your sculptures?,' mosley explains, 'and I say, 'animated abstractions'. people are always trying to come up with a concrete or succinct idea of what a piece of art is about, but it's mainly about a mystery — something you can think about, something you can solve. the key to my thing is animated abstraction . it's not a dog, it's not a horse, it's not a house. if you can get a feeling for the movement, if you can get a feel for the shape, then you've got it.'*



Nina Azzarello, "Thaddeus Mosley on sculpting with the spontaneity of jazz for Friedman Benda's 'Design in Dialogue'," *DesignBoom*, October 27, 2020



Nina Azzarello, "Thaddeus Mosley on sculpting with the spontaneity of jazz for Friedman Benda's 'Design in Dialogue'," *DesignBoom*, October 27, 2020



Nina Azzarello, "Thaddeus Mosley on sculpting with the spontaneity of jazz for Friedman Benda's 'Design in Dialogue'," *DesignBoom*, October 27, 2020



Nina Azzarello, "Thaddeus Mosley on sculpting with the spontaneity of jazz for Friedman Benda's 'Design in Dialogue'," *DesignBoom*, October 27, 2020



Nina Azzarello, "Thaddeus Mosley on sculpting with the spontaneity of jazz for Friedman Benda's 'Design in Dialogue'," *DesignBoom*, October 27, 2020



Nina Azzarello, "Thaddeus Mosley on sculpting with the spontaneity of jazz for Friedman Benda's 'Design in Dialogue'," *DesignBoom*, October 27, 2020



Nina Azzarello, "Thaddeus Mosley on sculpting with the spontaneity of jazz for Friedman Benda's 'Design in Dialogue'," *DesignBoom*, October 27, 2020



portrait of thaddeus mosley | photo by nate guidry

—

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 thaddeus mosley 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](#).