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ADPRO

7 Design Exhibitions to Know About —Even If You Can't See Them

Regardless of location, timing, or format, these new shows are sure to inspire

By Alia Akkam
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After navigating a year of canceled fairs, furloughed staff, and online tours, the intertwined design and art worlds are slowly starting to bounce back. The seven new design exhibitions in the U.S., Ireland, and England—featured below—are all reasons to look forward to 2021.



Totomoxtle Camo Table, 2020. Photo: Courtesy of Friedman Benda and Fernando Laposse

“Split Personality” at Friedman Benda

Alice Stori Liechtenstein, independent curator and founder of the Austrian cultural institution Schloss Hollenegg for Design, assembles contemplative contemporary design exhibitions like “Split Personality,” a forthcoming exhibition at the New York gallery Friedman Benda that explores the subjective meaning of objects. By highlighting furniture from 17 different international artists, including Fernando Laposse, Jonathan Trayte, and Nobukho Nqaba, “Split Personality” examines this duality, as well as the process that transforms the practical into the symbolic. January 11–February 6

“Votre Maison” by Maison Gerard

Imprisoned together during World War II, Robert Guillerme and Jacques Chambon discovered a shared love of design, which led them to establish a furniture and interiors company in 1949. In the first-ever retrospective exhibition of the French duo’s work, “Votre Maison,” a mix of midcentury tables, chairs, lamps, sofas, and beds will be on display at 330 Sackett Street, a townhouse in the Brooklyn neighborhood of Carroll Gardens designed and developed by the Brooklyn Home Company. The vignettes, curated by New York gallery Maison Gerard and the design agency frenchCALIFORNIA, are interspersed with the likes of bronze sculptures and ceramics that infuse each installation with the feeling of a glamorous abode. Through February, by appointment only

“Objects: USA 2020” at R & Company

The monumental crafts exhibition “Objects: USA” opened at the Smithsonian Institution in 1969, later traveling to venues across the U.S. and Europe and spawning a sought-out catalogue a year later. For that 50th anniversary, New York’s R & Company gallery showcases “Objects: USA 2020,” a sequel that investigates the shifting role of multidisciplinary craftspeople and artisans in an era fueled by digital transactions. A meditation on American craft, it will feature 50 works that appeared in the original show, from such heavyweights as Wharton Esherick and Anni Albers, alongside 50 new artists, forging a dialogue between past and present. Bonus: an updated companion book published by the Monacelli Press. Mid-February through July

Inside~Out

In 2019, the Brooklyn design practice Kin & Company debuted Inside~Out, a celebration of innovative outdoor design. In light of the pandemic, the founders, Kira de Paola and Joseph Vidich, were forced to cancel the second iteration at the William Vale, but decided to self-produce a virtual show instead. Some 40 different outdoor furniture pieces from indie designers are now arranged in small groups against imaginary, otherworldly landscapes conjured by artist Duyi Han. The site will be up indefinitely, and de Paola and Vidich plan to roll out more content over time—hopefully culminating in live exhibitions as well. Ongoing

“Alternative Histories” at the Irish Architectural Archive

Following runs in London and Brussels, “Alternative Histories” now makes its way to Dublin, on view at the Irish Architectural Archive. Organized in collaboration with the Drawing Matter Trust and the Architecture Foundation in London, the exhibition examines the notion of alternative realities by envisioning exchanges between 80 European architectural firms. For the Irish finale, a few more practices, such as Grafton Architects and O’Donnell & Tuomey, were added to the mix.

An exercise in possibility, the team was given a different drawing culled from the Drawing Matter Trust's library, and then asked to make a model that imagined another outcome for the original plan. Through February 26

"Memphis: Plastic Field" at the MK Gallery

A vast collection of furniture by the Memphis Group, the radical Italian design collective founded by Ettore Sottsass, is the focus of "Memphis: Plastic Field" at the MK Gallery in Milton Keynes, England, outside of London. The pieces—look out for those from Shiro Kuramata and Michael Graves—were created between 1981 and 1988. Colorful, kitschy, and sensual, they incorporate bold graphics and unconventional materials like plastic laminate and terrazzo. Through April 25

"Tears That Taste of the Sea" at the October Gallery

Multifaceted Algerian artist Rachid Koraïchi, who is working on the Garden of Africa, a Tunisian cemetery that honors the lives of migrants who drowned while crossing the Mediterranean, is fascinated by the signs and symbols found in other languages and cultures. He likes integrating them into his creations, and in "Tears That Taste of the Sea," at the October Gallery in London, these hand-drawn characters are the identifying link between a wide body of work Koraïchi turned out over the course of the pandemic. These include a large etching, paintings, a series of imposing steel sculptures, and a collection of blue-and-white ceramic vases, all of which aptly speak of loss. January 22–March 27