

FRIEDMAN BENDA  
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# designboom

## NGV Curators Simone LeAmon + Ewan McEoin on Commissioning Creativity for Friedman Benda's "Design in Dialogue"

By Nina Azzarello  
September 1, 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 \[bijoy jain\]\(#\), speaking about scale, skill, time, and craft, and \[ekene ijeoma\]\(#\) on his practice of drawing and sculpting with data.](#)

Nina Azzarello, "NGV Curators Simone LeAmon + Ewan McEoin on Commissioning Creativity for Friedman Benda's 'Design in Dialogue'," *Designboom*, September 1, 2020.

on august 26, *design in dialogue* welcomed simone leamon and ewan mceoin, curators at the national gallery of victoria in melbourne. together, the team has built australia's most ambitious museum program for contemporary design. in a conversation with glenn adamson, leamon and mceoin describe how design and fine art co-exist the NGV, their past commissions and exhibitions, and offer a sneak preview of the NGV triennial 2020 upcoming this december.

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](#).



formafantasma presented an investigation into the recycling of precious electronic waste, photo by IKON. read more on designboom [here](#)

mceoin and leamon preside over the NGV's department of contemporary design and architecture, which explores the manifold ways in which design creates positive economic, social and cultural opportunity. with a focus on practice from around 1980 to present day, the newly-formed department has been coherently unified within an institution whose collection spans 70,000 works of art and an historic treasury of ideas, disciplines and styles. leamon describes how the NGV uniquely presents design and fine art as a single continuum of creativity.

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nendo reimagined MC escher's work in immersive exhibition at the NGV, image by sean fennessy.  
read more on designboom [here](#)

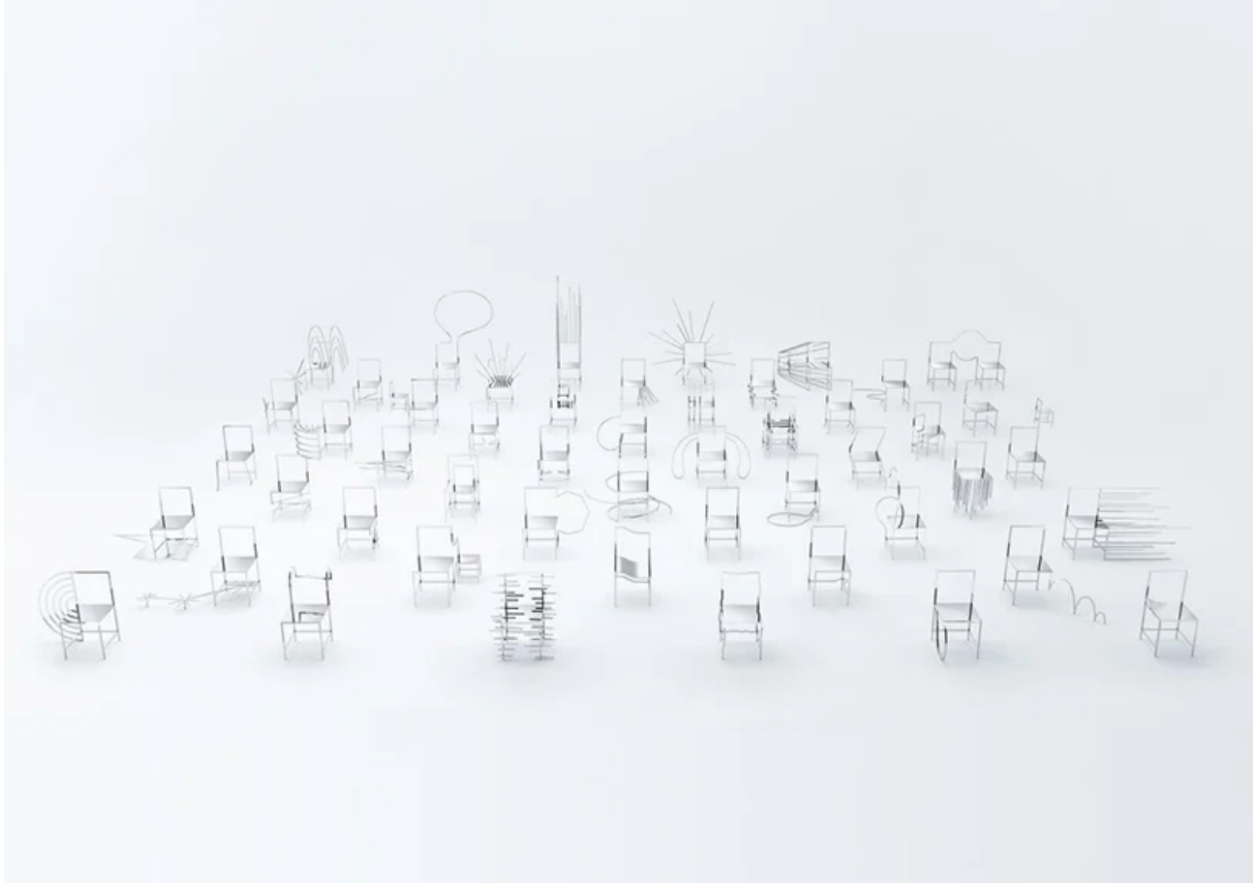
***'it's important to note that our department is only five years old,' leamon shares. 'previous to that, the youngest department was photography, and that was formed in 1969. under the leadership of tony ellwood, the director of the NGV, there's been an incredible resurgence of acknowledging contemporary practice over the last six years. when our department was formed, we moved in right beside contemporary art, and the other nine curatorial departments. there's no hierarchy — we collaborate and work with all of our peers, and I think design and architecture is being embraced as 'the new kids on the block', but something that's also really exciting for the organization. we've been able to deliver an exciting program without dedicated galleries, and managed to find a way to program, present and deliver a heap of auxiliary programs, including melbourne design week.'***



xu zhen's buddha figure buzzing with greek and roman figures at the NGV triennial, image by john gollings. read more on designboom [here](#)

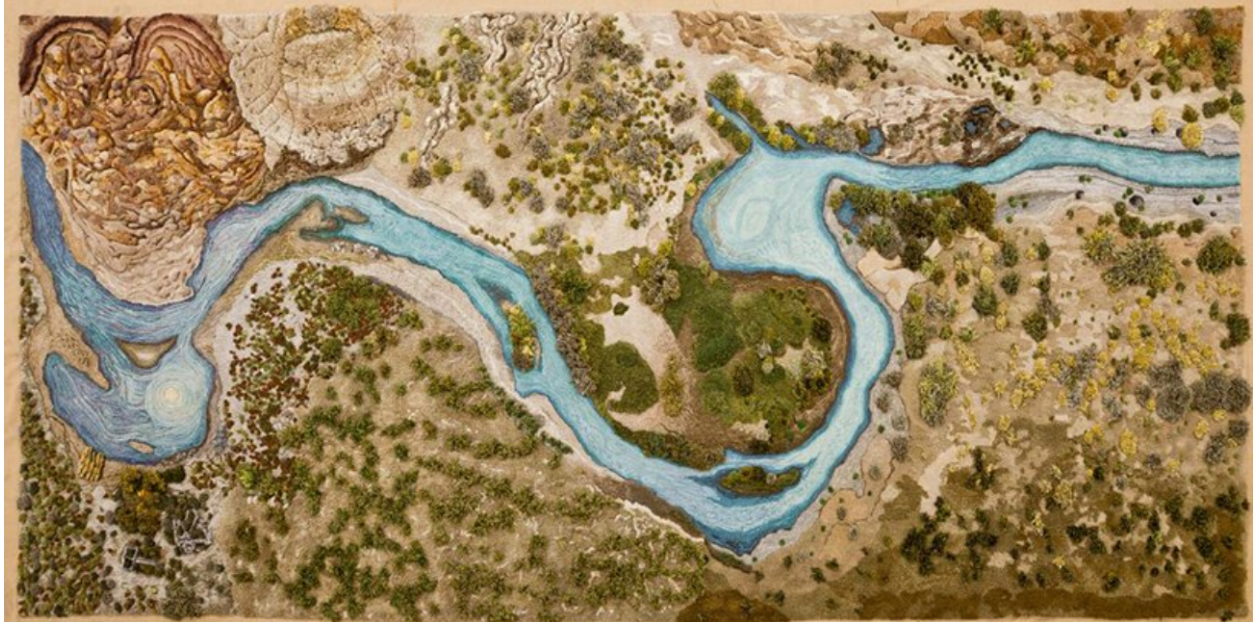
McEoin went on to discuss the importance of not only collecting, but also commissioning work for the NGV, in engaging closely with creative protagonists to present ambitious, monumental and distinctive new works. Significant commissions include 'ore streams', formafantasma's investigation into the recycling of precious electronic waste, and 'santa cruz river' by alexandra kehayoglou, a hand-tufted wool rug that documents the proposed site of two major hydroelectricity dams in argentina. Both projects were presented at the inaugural **NGV triennial** in 2017, a survey of culture, geography, technology, architecture, animation and many more creative disciplines, which featured the work of over 100 artists and designers from 32 countries.





manga chairs #1– #50 by nendo form part of the NGV collection. read more on designboom [here](#)

***‘our vision as an institution is to represent the most interesting work that is going on today from the contemporary period,’ mceoin says. ‘we’re very much engaged in exhibitions, and making, and collecting but also very engaged in commissioning work. from the top of the institution right through the departments, there’s an attitude of being engaged with artists and designers to help them realize new significant, ambitions work. perhaps there’s an understanding that there’s a certain limitation we see that if you’re only collecting what comes from industry, or what is produced within industry, it’s a retrospective act — perhaps bound within a commercial, financial or logistical paradigm, which is maybe limiting to designers. we sort of questioned that early on and thought — how can we create a space where we work with designers and be more generative and forward looking.’***



alexandra kehayoglou's 'santa cruz river', a hand-tufted wool rug that documents the proposed site of two major hydroelectricity dams in argentina

**while as of august, the NGV is temporarily closed due to COVID-19 and public health directions from the victorian government, the highly-anticipated NGV triennial 2020 is set to open in december.** free and open to the public, the upcoming exhibition will offer extraordinary contemporary art and design from around the world in person, as well as online. learn more about some of the monumental works presented at the NGV's inaugural triennial in 2017, [here](#).





yayoi kusama obliterated a room with the interactive 'flower obsession', image by eugene hyland  
read more on designboom [here](#)



a responsive digital installation by teamlab stirred up something otherworldly  
image © teamlab, courtesy ikkan art gallery, martin browne contemporary and pace gallery.  
read more on designboom [here](#)





ron mueck piled 100 individual human skull forms on the gallery floor, image by sean fennessey.  
read more on designboom [here](#)



a preview of upcoming work by talin hazbar for the NGV on the importance of working within  
natural systems. image included in the NGV's presentation with friedman benda,  
courtesy of NGV and friedman benda

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erez nevi pana is investigating salt as an architectural material in an upcoming project for the NGV. image included in the NGV's presentation with friedman benda, courtesy of NGV and friedman benda



portrait of simone leamon, image courtesy of friedman benda

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portrait of ewan mceoin, 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.

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