

Chris Schanck's new sculptures at Friedman Benda merge fantasy and science-fiction

DESIGN / 1 MAR 2018 / BY BENOIT LOISEAU



'Cu' bench by Chris Schanck. *Courtesy Friedman Benda, 2018*

For 'Unhomely', his first major solo exhibition at Friedman Benda in New York, American designer Chris Schanck has produced a series of 15 pieces where furniture enters in an otherworldly dialogue with art, punctuated by references to fantasy and science-fiction.

Initially trained in sculpture at the School of Visual Arts in New York, Schanck practiced as an artist before continuing his education in the early twenty-tens at the Cranbrook Academy of Art in Michigan, where he transitioned to design. 'In short, I wanted to make sculptures you could touch,' recounts the 42-year old designer, who is known for his furniture of biomorphic lyricism and his unorthodox approach to materials.

It is probably his idiosyncratic, low-tech Alufoil technique — first developed while studying at Cranbrook — that propelled him to international attention. The now-

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signature method consists of sculpting pieces out of wood and industrial foam, sealed in a resin-based coating and covered with layers of confectioners foil, applied in small pieces.

‘Each piece is first conceived as a sculpture, then I work out how it can be engaged as a design object,’ explains the Detroit-based furniture maker of his meticulous process, which bears similarities to a medieval craft guild practice.



‘Fleshbot’, by Chris Schanck at Friedman Benda, 2018. Courtesy Friedman Benda, 2018

Upon graduation, it didn’t take long for industry veterans like William Sofield and Peter Marino to note Schanck’s talent, and commission Alufoil pieces for ambitious retail projects: respectively, the Tom Ford Madison Avenue flagship, and the Dior boutique in

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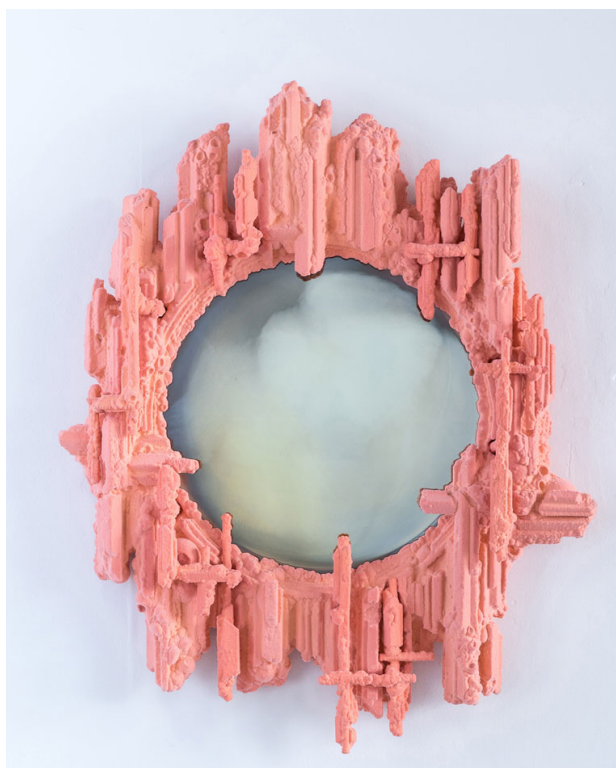
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Manhasset, New York (which later expanded to 12 more stores, from Paris to Mexico City).

But for his new exhibition at Friedman Benda, Schanck indulged in a creative process at once introspective and mythical, drawing from a wide range of inspirations from brutalist and art deco architecture to ancient Egyptian, Anatolian and Aztec iconography.

Reviving a sense of figuration remindful of his formative years, the series includes a silver, head-shaped cabinet; a gold coffee table resting on a kneeling, contracted human figure, reminiscent of a Pompeii plaster cast; and a highly-sculptural, copper-coloured shelving structure evoking a dystopian, overgrown biotope — which, Schanck explains, was inspired by his neighbourhood of North East Detroit.

‘My neighbours have built gardens on their roofs, they’ve taken abandoned lots and made lot-sized gardens. Things are unregulated, I don’t know that you can get away with this anywhere,’ says Schanck, whose 3,200 sq ft studio is home to 25 employees, ranging from art students to members of the local Bangladeshi community. ‘To me, my neighbourhood very much feels like a living organism, the squash vines integrate and it’s cultural and it creates some kind of network or system of living.’



'Blush' mirror, 2018 and 'Crustacea' closet, 2017, both by Chris Schanck

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'Gold 900' by Chris Schanck



'Spore' by Chris Schanck

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