

Of Amethysts and Alligators: Campana Brothers Debut Exotic ‘Concepts’



An installation view of “Campana Brothers: Concepts,” on view through July 3 at Friedman Benda.

New York’s Friedman Benda has been temporarily transformed from a white cube into a moody, tobacco-hued chamber—a backdrop that evokes art deco treasures rather than the gallery’s typical twenty-first century prototypes. Visitors are greeted by a brass buffet comprised of square panels filled with vortices of bent metal, like the sprightly cousin of a **Paul Evans** console. But take a closer look: the walls aren’t paneled in silk or leather but nubby coconut fiber, and that buffet’s checkerboard of metallic explosions calls to mind a certain Alessi fruit bowl. This is the latest work of the **Campana Brothers**, who, after three



decades of working together, could coast for three more on their greatest hits and Brazilian charm. Instead, they've challenged themselves with a selection of exotic new materials—including constellations of Sao Paulo-sourced amethysts and the skin of an ancient fish unique to South American waters—and craft techniques.

"It's important for us to keep the traditions that are disappearing but at the same time give them more modernity," said **Humberto Campana** (the older of the two by eight years) last week, as he and **Fernando** led a group of journalists through the Friedman Benda exhibition, the brothers' first solo gallery show in the United States. He sidled up to their new "Racket" collection (*pictured*), which includes a chair with a hand-stitched motif made from leftover Thonet chair backings. "The guy we work with who weaves with straw, it was a matter of helping him understand what we're doing—this idea of weaving with leftovers. It's to reinvent the traditions that may otherwise die." Added Fernando, "And instead of making traditional weaving with straw, we decided to make it with nylon string."



The Campanas' "Boca Shelf" (2013)

Another inspiration? "Architectural deformation," said Fernando, pointing to the cowhide-covered, wall-mounted bookshelf from their new "Boca" (Portuguese for "mouth") series. "We wanted something that comes out from the wall, kind of like a tumor." The works in the exhibition range from tubular brass shaped into curvy puddle forms to a glass cabinet studded with fist-sized amethysts. They've updated the plush agglomeration of their 2005 "Alligator Chair" using leather reptiles handcrafted by [OrientaVida](#), an NGO that employs underprivileged women. Another cabinet is sheathed in the megascales of the *pirarucu*, a monster fish that is now being cultivated in Brazil. "This big fish is providing jobs for local people that now don't have to move to the city," said Humberto, who described the

brothers' work as having several readings. "We don't get stuck just in one element," he said. "Sometimes our work can get a little surrealist, another time organic. Whenever we find ourselves on a familiar path, we try to take a detour, even make mistakes. We think that's important."

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