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Under the Influence | Where Fernando and Humberto Campana Get Their Ideas



The "Detonado" chair, with an iron frame and a seat and back made of a patchwork of caning, is part of the exhibition "Campana Brothers: Concepts" at Friedman Benda. *Fernando Laszlo*

For the Brazilian designers Fernando and Humberto Campana, inspiration has always lurked in unlikely places: scraps of wood, plush stuffed animals, plastic tubing, even bundles of castoff cardboard. And, as "Campana Brothers: Concepts," which opens on Wednesday at Friedman Benda, demonstrates, the brothers have no shortage of new ideas.

Some of the Campanas' inspirations for the objects in the show, their first solo gallery exhibition in the United States, come from their well-known affinity for

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the discarded. For instance, the iron-framed “Detonado” chair is made of a nylon-reinforced patchwork of the scraps of caning that are left over after a chair is repaired. “Lots of artisans do re-caning in São Paulo,” Fernando said. “We’ve always loved the beauty of the leftovers of the weaving.” The patchwork, he said, “connects to our philosophy of recovering things.”

Other pieces speak to their social awareness: the Campanas’ stuffed-toy furniture of 2002 has evolved into a sofa and chair made of stuffed leather alligators, constructed by underprivileged women who work for the Brazilian NGO Orientavida.

Still others were born purely out of the pleasure taken in beautiful things, like the “Ametista” (“amethyst”) pieces, which were inspired by frequent trips to a wholesaler of crystals and minerals near the brothers’ studio. “I don’t collect anything but rocks — my house is full of rocks,” Humberto said. “They rest my eyes.” Looking for something to do with the amethysts they found there, the Campanas decided to make something “immaterial” by combining them with glass, as hanging panels and a cabinet.

Both brothers make a point of spending time away from the studio to recharge their creative batteries. For Humberto, long walks with his dog provide visual inspiration as well as a little peace and quiet. “I think those silences open new spaces in our minds about design,” he said. Fernando, on the other hand, makes collages from magazines, newspapers and old books. “It’s therapeutic, like a puzzle,” he said. “Some of them are very complicated.”

“Campana Brothers: Concepts” is at Friedman Benda, 515 West 26th Street, June 5 to July 3.

This post has been revised to reflect the following correction:

Correction: June 4, 2013

An earlier version of the post misstated the name of a Brazilian NGO that constructs pieces for the Campanas. It is Orientavida, not OrientVida.