

Seven Questions for the Campana Brothers



"I think our work is always based on materials," said Humberto Campana, glancing around the first U.S. solo gallery show for him and his brother, Fernando. "And we're more and more interested in natural materials." And so the new works on view through July 3 at Friedman Benda in New York swap plush and plastic for cowhide, fish scales, and gemstones, upping the luxe quotient while maintaining the brothers' signature straight-outta-Sao-Paulo brand of whimsy. While putting the finishing touches on the show last week, they made time to plop down on their leather Alligator Couch—a handcrafted update to the 2005 plush version—to share some stories behind the new pieces, their working process, and how they might spend their summer vacation.

What was the starting point for this show?

Humberto Campana: This [points to "Racket Chair (Circles)," pictured at right] was the seed for the exhibition. This chair was born from a mistake. We didn't want to do weaving...it was projected to be made with leather cushions. But that didn't work out and it stayed for two years in our studio, unfinished. And then one day we asked a guy to weave it. I think these



look like tennis racquets [laughs].

Fernando Campana: Here we are showing many different concepts. The thing with this exhibition is that one piece generated another one.

You've covered the walls of the gallery in coconut fiber. Did you expect it to have such a dramatic effect?

FC: It's to bring some part of Brazil—the nature of the place—and also to combine with the pieces that we put in this exhibition.

HC: Also, it was a way to come back to our roots, with using simple materials to construct the look of luxury. And the idea that this is luxury today. We wanted to make those statements—or pose those questions.

How did you decide to use amethysts?

HC: It's the best! My father was an agronomic engineer. He used to work on farms in Brazil and in some areas you can find crystals. And whenever he would find a crystal he would bring it back home to our house. And I would always hold up the crystals to the sun to see the details. It kind of gives...a shamanic quality.



Your famous Alligator chair has transformed, from plush to this extraordinary leather.

HC: With the plush, that was Chinese, and it's important in Brazil to work with NGOs, so this was a project that we'd like to do more of. We asked an NGO to make these alligators.

FC: It's a group of ladies that made them for us.

HC: We gave them a plush alligator and said "Please interpret this."

FC: Each one is handmade and different.

You've been working together thirty years now. What is your working process like?

HC: I'm much more...I like to stay alone with the artisans, to have a dialogue, make him or her understand the process. I love this, because it's at this moment that I learn that there is a very good connection—or disconnection! [laughs] But this interests me, the process.

FC: I'm more conceptual.

Do you foresee the prototypes in this exhibition going on to be manufactured on a large scale?

FC: Time will tell. For instance, the Rope chair, we never thought that could be a mass production. Then Edra came and took it for mass production. Or even the bowl for Alessi [based on a screen made out of TV antennas]. They took it, but we had never thought it could be for mass production. Sometimes we make a piece intending it to be a limited edition and then someone comes and says we want to produce it in industrial production. It doesn't depend on us.

After this exhibition, what are you looking forward to doing or where will you be going this summer?

HC: I'd like to go to the Esalen Institute in California. I always used to go in the '80s.

FC: To the Amazon!