

Houstonia.

GOOD TO THE BONE

The Organic Beauty of Joris Laarman

The Dutch designer offers an elegant array of algorithmically-perfected objects at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

By Morgan Kinney



Bone Rocker, Joris Laarman. 2008, black marble and resin.

IMAGE: COURTESY OF ARTIST

THE WORLD SEEMS INFINITE once you realize a chair need not be a chair. It can be better, simpler, more elegant. It can even tell a story.

Dutch designer and artist Joris Laarman explores those possibilities among radiators, tables, bookcases, rock walls, and even bridges on display at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston in *Joris Laarman Lab: Design in the Digital Age*. Sixty-five of Laarman's objects are spread among the Beck Building's downstairs galleries, 3-D printed into curvaceous reality as the product of algorithmically-optimized designs.

Consider his ornate *Heatwave* radiator, which sprawls across a gallery wall as a web of grayish curlicues. Radiators, he explained at the recent press preview, require a large exposed surface to warm efficiently, so he adopted the elaborate 18th-century rococo style for the

Kinney, Morgan. "The Organic Beauty of Joris Laarman," *Houstonia*, July 9, 2018.

FRIEDMAN BENDA 515 W 26TH STREET NEW YORK NY 10001

FRIEDMANBENDA.COM TELEPHONE 212 239 8700 FAX 212 239 8760

vine-like tangle. He called it an “artistic looking object” that’s primarily concerned with functionality.

Another gallery isolates what Laarman calls his “Nintendo-rococo” tables, where 3-, 5-, and 10-millimeter 3-D pixels make up *Super Mario*-inspired furniture. You see, laid out beneath superimposed Nintendo characters, a two-pronged evolution of physical and digital creation.



Joris Laarman beside his “Nintendo-rococo” tables; an embellishment inspired by NES classic *Duck Hunt*.
IMAGE: MORGAN KINNEY

Laarman’s “Bone Furniture” showcase organic design principles in galleries ahead. The artist explained how industrial design—the stuff responsible for everything from the Ford Model T to your Ikea bed frame—roots itself in geometry and interchangeable parts that can be mass-produced and easily assembled. Instead, Laarman looked to the human body. Always iterating, always optimizing, the body literally eliminated the “lazy bones,” Laarman quipped, to hone the biomechanics that power our every movement. After his designs were fed into a finely tuned algorithm, the Bone Furniture represents a structurally optimal design, eschewing right angles for elegant curves. The patent black *Bone Rocker* serves as the standard bearer for the exhibition, it’s criss-crossed wishbone structure suggesting some alien architecture.

That’s not to call this a paint-by-numbers operation. The printed and polished objects reveal their creator; without the usual seams and natural matte finishes, one could literally see Laarman reflected in the work on display. His influence is also there in small decisions made with each object, such as the room-sized *Vortex* bookcase that occupies the final gallery as a sculptural wave. Although a computational model hones the swirling design, Laarman dialed back the chaos to preserve functionality (after all, a bookcase still needs to hold books).

By preview’s end, Laarman’s loving spiel on digital design recalled the computer whizzes and eggheads who gush about that “beauty” and “elegance” hidden amid mathematics and

Kinney, Morgan. “The Organic Beauty of Joris Laarman,” *Houstonia*, July 9, 2018.

FRIEDMAN BENDA 515 W 26TH STREET NEW YORK NY 10001

FRIEDMANBENDA.COM TELEPHONE 212 239 8700 FAX 212 239 8760

code. Which made it clear: Laarman's triumph here at the MFAH is helping us dummies see that mathematical beauty for ourselves.

Thru Sept. 16. GA tickets \$15. Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 5601 Main St. 713-639-7300. More info and tickets at mfah.org.

Kinney, Morgan. "The Organic Beauty of Joris Laarman," *Houstonia*, July 9, 2018.

FRIEDMAN BENDA 515 W 26TH STREET NEW YORK NY 10001

FRIEDMANBENDA.COM TELEPHONE 212 239 8700 FAX 212 239 8760