

modern

MAGAZINE



WINTER 2018
modernmag.com

\$12 00US \$12 00CAN



design
decorative arts
architecture

FORM & FUNCTION

Elegant experiments at Joris Laarman Lab

"EXPERIMENTS" ARE WHAT JORIS LAARMAN calls the designs of his eponymous "lab," and a compendium of those experiments—from his graduate project at Design Academy Eindhoven in 2003 to his 2017 work—is on view at the Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum. On until January 14, *Joris Laarman Lab: Design in the Digital Age* is the first major solo survey and the first US museum exhibition for the Dutch designer/artist/inventor: it's an expansion of the 2015–2016 iteration at the Groninger Museum in the Netherlands.

The star of the show is high tech. Wall texts and videos throughout the third-floor gallery explain the science behind what's on view, such as the biomorphic Bone furniture—seating optimized by software that was originally developed to apply the way bones and tree limbs respond to stress (by adding/subtracting material) to the design of car parts. Also on display are a curtain of bubbly steel—Gradient Screen—extruded by a 3-D-printing robotic arm like one currently employed in building a footbridge across the Oudezijds Achterburgwal canal in Amsterdam; and a trio of Digital

Matter tables made from magnetized nickel and neodymium voxels (3-D pixels), each less pixelated than the one before as smaller and smaller voxels are used (along the wall, vinyl posters chart the analogous evolution of video-game plumber Mario from low-to high-res between 1985 and 2015).

But Laarman isn't interested only in cutting-edge fabrication methods, something the grace of the lab's creations testify to. "The appreciation for exuberant curved lines is in my genes," he writes in the monograph that accompanies the show. That appreciation is paired with an attention to historical design. His Makerchairs—a series of puzzle-like chairs pieced from digitally-fabricated wood, resin, plastic, or magnesium parts—riff on the furniture of Gerrit Rietveld; the Digital Matter tables evoke rococo; the Bone chairs, art nouveau. "If you make the perfect chair, it's boring, you're not going to look at it again. It's about the layers," he says. cooperhewitt.org

—Sammy Dalati

Friedman Benda . "Gigi tepv'Gzr gtko gpw'cv'Iqtktu'Ncto cp'Ncd," *Modern*, Winter 2018.

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