

A wide-angle photograph of a resort pool area at sunset. The sky is a mix of blue and orange. Numerous palm trees are scattered throughout the scene, some in the foreground and others in the background. In the middle ground, there is a large pool with several lounge chairs arranged around it. A building with a stone facade and large windows is visible in the background, partially obscured by the trees. The overall atmosphere is serene and luxurious.

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JONATHAN TRAYTE'S CAST OF WEIRDOS AND MISFITS

By Katy Donoghue

Friedman Benda will present new work from Jonathan Trayte this week at Design Miami/. The artist is known for creating functional furniture with an element of the absurd. Pairing natural forms with not-found-in-nature finishes, Trayte takes inspiration from food (a nod to his previous life as a chef), packaging, travel, and our global language of consumption. Whitewaller caught up with the London-based artist to learn more about his process, and the fruit of a recent road trip from L.A. to Omaha.

WHITEWALLER: Can you tell us about what you'll be presenting at Design Miami/ with Friedman Benda?

JONATHAN TRAYTE: We'll be showing a pair of hot-pink cactus lamps, a radical-looking bird box, and a chaise lounge upholstered with various animal hides and woven polycord. It's an odd mix of colors and textures that I hope will come together nicely.

WW: You've said that your work comes together like a cast of characters. Who are the characters you've envisioned?

JT: [Laughs] Yes! A bunch of weirdos and misfits! Last autumn we did a road trip from L.A. to Omaha, Nebraska, and I saw some of the landscapes that I have been dreaming of for so many years. The vegetation changed dramatically through the 2000-mile trip, from arid mountain desert to rolling prairie. It was hugely inspirational. The Joshua trees, silver cholla, lichens, cottontops, and prickly pears of Arizona and Southern California were highlights, and these pieces reflect on what I saw. I'm only just beginning to digest all of the incredible places we hiked past and camped in, but these pieces feel like companions from that trip.

WW: Where do you typically begin with a new piece?

JT: Always with a drawing. I draw a lot to work out how something might take shape and come together. This then leads to ideas on color, texture, and rendering, et cetera.

Often, I already have something in mind, maybe inspired by a strange plant, tree, or succulent that I've seen whilst on a cycle trip through the mountains, or washed up on the beach.

I have a vast collection of wrappers from my travels that are regionally specific and differ ever so slightly from place to place. I find these discrepancies really exciting. Color is so important as a means of persuasion, persuading people to consume in particular kinds of ways, or in appealing to specific social groups.

WW: What do you enjoy about the juxtaposition of natural forms with not-so-natural finishes and colors?

JT: I like making work that has an appeal, an attraction, but it's also important for there to be a bit of a conflict, as nothing's ever perfect. There is always a bit of grit somewhere, a fly or a hair or speck of dust. My aim is to have something unsettling in the work set against a delicious texture or material—whether it's a hairy background, some weird ugly bronze cast, or a sexually suggestive neon shape.

WW: Can you tell us about your approach to lighting?

JT: I'm drawn to the light of a bulb like an insect; its luminance and warmth is enticing, and I like to include one where I can. Maybe it has something to do with the temporary nature of the element within—an incandescent bulb will only last so long. Or maybe it's the universal appeal of the fairground or seaside arcades; bright lights enticing punters out from the night? I also like my work to have multiple functions and for some of them to be absurd, too.



Photo by Daniel Kukla, courtesy of Friedman Benda and Jonathan Trayte.



Jonathan Trayte, *Pink Hot Solar Buzzer (1)*, 2019, courtesy of Friedman Benda and Jonathan Trayte.