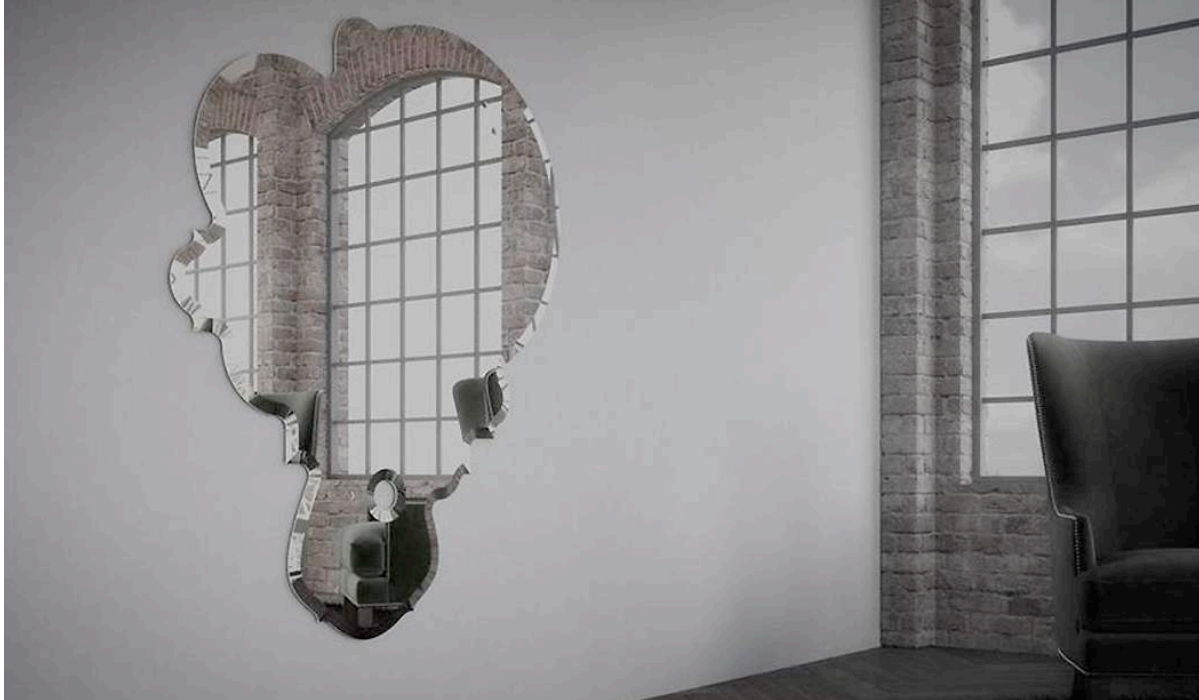


# BLOUINARTINFO

## 5 Questions For Designer Marcel Wanders at His New York Debut

BY JENNIFER PARKER | FEBRUARY 26, 2016



Marcel Wanders "Dysmorphophobia 1," 2015, currently on view at Friedman Benda gallery in New York. (Courtesy Friedman Benda)

On Thursday night, Dutch designer Marcel Wanders opened the doors to his first solo gallery exhibition in New York at Friedman Benda in Chelsea. Titled “Portraits,” the show is comprised of more than 30 new works, including monumental ceramic vases, streaming video installations, live models, and a massive bronze rocking horse.

Showcased on a black and red flowering carpet produced by Wanders’s own Amsterdam-based brand Moooi, each object is more daring than the next. Upon entering the one-room exhibition, viewers are flanked by “Phoebe 4,” a digital video installation depicting a nude woman adorned only with a bulbous light fixture for a necklace, which seems to be constricting her flow of oxygen. Directly ahead, an imposing bronze horse called “Tempter” appears ready for war. Typically, optimism and an uplifting spirit characterize Wanders’s work. But in this exhibition, he expresses his darker side by depicting “characters” in a

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distorted, nightmarish fairytale — rocking horse and lamp models included. It's here that the designer truly earns his "Lady Gaga of Design" title, as given by the New York Times.

"For a long time, I showed only the most beautiful side, the most beautiful ideas. I wanted to share and grow only the positives. It's not really love if you share only half of yourself," reads Wanders's quote on the black gallery wall, which serves as a simple introduction. "This work is more intimate, it is what I want to whisper to people — the hidden me that is disruptive and heavy."

For all its bold imagery, the exhibition is in many ways obscure — leaving us to guess its true meaning. ARTINFO spoke with the designer to gain insight into his process.

### **What does it mean to you, at this point in your career, to have a solo exhibition in New York?**

For my first exhibition, New York is really the best place. It is a truly contemporary city, full of people with a deep interest in art and a willingness to understand things. I feel New Yorkers are willing to look at others from a different position, without pre-conceived bias.

### **You've called this exhibition a "layered narrative." What story are you trying to tell?**

It's not linear, as in, a knight embarked on a journey and his princess died. The story is not so clear. But the exhibition is called "Portraits" for a reason. These are characters in a world, yes, but they are the distorted reflections of ourselves. I let them tell their own story.

### **What are the main themes you're exploring here?**

I've always felt being a designer is a positive and happy activity that supports beauty and trust in the world. But having worked for 20 years, you start to see it is a caricature of who you are. And I thought, maybe that work is not complete. I feel a need to find opportunities to create a different universe — exploring doubt, pain, and anger. The best way for me to share these feelings is in a gallery setting. This exhibition makes me feel like a more complete and honest creator.

### **What do you want to communicate with your nude "Phoebe" models?**

Beauty needs power and power needs beauty. We're all on that sliding track between one or the other, whether we like it or not. I want, with "Phoebe," to ask: What are we willing to sacrifice for beauty? In this case, we sacrifice a girl to stand there nude. When we look at her, it reflects the brutal way we use people for our own benefit.

### **What's with the adult rocking horse? What inspired this idea?**

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It's an ultimate icon for kids. Boys want to go out, pull their sword, have an adventure and save the princess. In our own way, as men, we still dream to do that — but we want the cooler, super version of it. But, you'll notice, the bronze horse is heavy. We can't lift it; we can't move it. We inevitably become too old for these fantasies.



*Wanders's previous work is on view in the design collections of Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum in New York, MoMA, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, among others. This new exhibition unveils the Dutch designer's most polarizing, potentially controversial work to date.*

*"Portraits" will run from February 25 through April 9 at Friedman Benda in New York.*

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