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# DARK VISION

Marcel Wanders' debut gallery exhibition creates a space of moody self-reflection.

BY JANELLE ZARA

Since the 1996 launch of his groundbreaking *Knotted* chair, a crocheted matrix of fibers sculpted to stand upright as an autonomous piece of furniture, the prolific Dutch designer Marcel Wanders has grown into his own personal brand, one characterized by its defiant flamboyance, fairy-tale whimsy and relentless output. In 2014, Amsterdam's Stedelijk Museum gathered a cross-section of Wanders' extensive portfolio for "Pinned Up," a sprawling retrospective that showcased 25 years of projects—from products for Flos, Droog and his own design label, Moooi, to interiors, like that of his Mondrian South Beach—all of which feature a layering of ornate patterns that approaches a modern-day baroque.

"You could look at the work and see that design for me is very positive," says Wanders, dressed characteristically in an expertly tailored suit and strategically unbuttoned collar. "It adds value. It shares love. But it's kind of a caricature of a person instead of a person. There's a lot of other stuff which is in me—fear and pain—that I don't share, because design is not the place to do it."

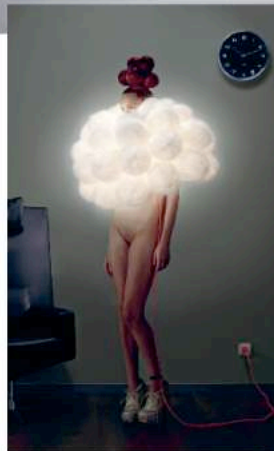
Seeking a platform outside of design to express these inner sentiments, he found the New York gallery Friedman Benda, where, as the antithesis of these aforementioned caricatures, he'll show "Portraits," his very first solo gallery presentation.

"The overall feel of the show is about entering Marcel's slightly darker side," says Marc Benda, who's collaborated with Wanders on and off for more than a decade. "He's doing a total environment: floor, ceiling, walls." Through new bodies of work, Wanders creates a space for self-reflection, quite literally with a new series of mirrors called *Dysmorphia*. Their abstract outlines recall the classic Victorian cameo silhouette gone awry. *Mordrake*, which Wanders first unveiled during Design Miami in December, takes both name and form from 19th-century legend Edward Mordrake, an heir of English peerage born with a demonic face attached to the back of his head that would sneer as he wept.

"It's a distorted portrait," Wanders explains. "We all have this wicked self-image where we look in the mirror and see what is not really there."

Elsewhere, Wanders animates photographs of dead flowers, bringing them to life with moving faces with the help of CGI, what he refers to as a "Hollywood technology." Despite his explorations into new genre and media, Wanders retains his identity purely as a designer.

"I'm happy not to call it art because I get so many questions from people who have their own ideas about what is and isn't art," Wanders says. "I don't know, and I don't care. I just make my own things"—an approach that has, for the past three decades, served him very well.



Wanders' first gallery exhibition will feature the *Mordrake* mirror and a new series of lamps, including *Phoebe 4*, seen above.



PHOTOS COURTESY MARCEL WANDERS