
FRIEDMAN BENDA  515 W 26TH STREET NEW YORK NY 10001
FRIEDMANBENDA.COM  TELEPHONE 212 239 8700  FAX 212 239 8760
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 fibres 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 his defiant flamboyance, breezy wit, and unremitting output. In 2016, 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 H&M 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 shows 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 Dysnomia. Their abstract outlines recall the classic Victorian cameo silhouette gone awry, Mondrake, which Wanders first unveiled during Design Miami in December, takes both name and form from 19th-century legend Edward Monk Dragon, a heir of English porcupine 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-portrait where we look in the mirror and see what's 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 no idea 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.