

DESIGN OF THE DAY

A Bench With a Very Surprising Bulge

Najla El Zein's "Distortion" furniture series is marked by smooth, hollow humps.

BY TIFFANY JOW

August 06, 2018

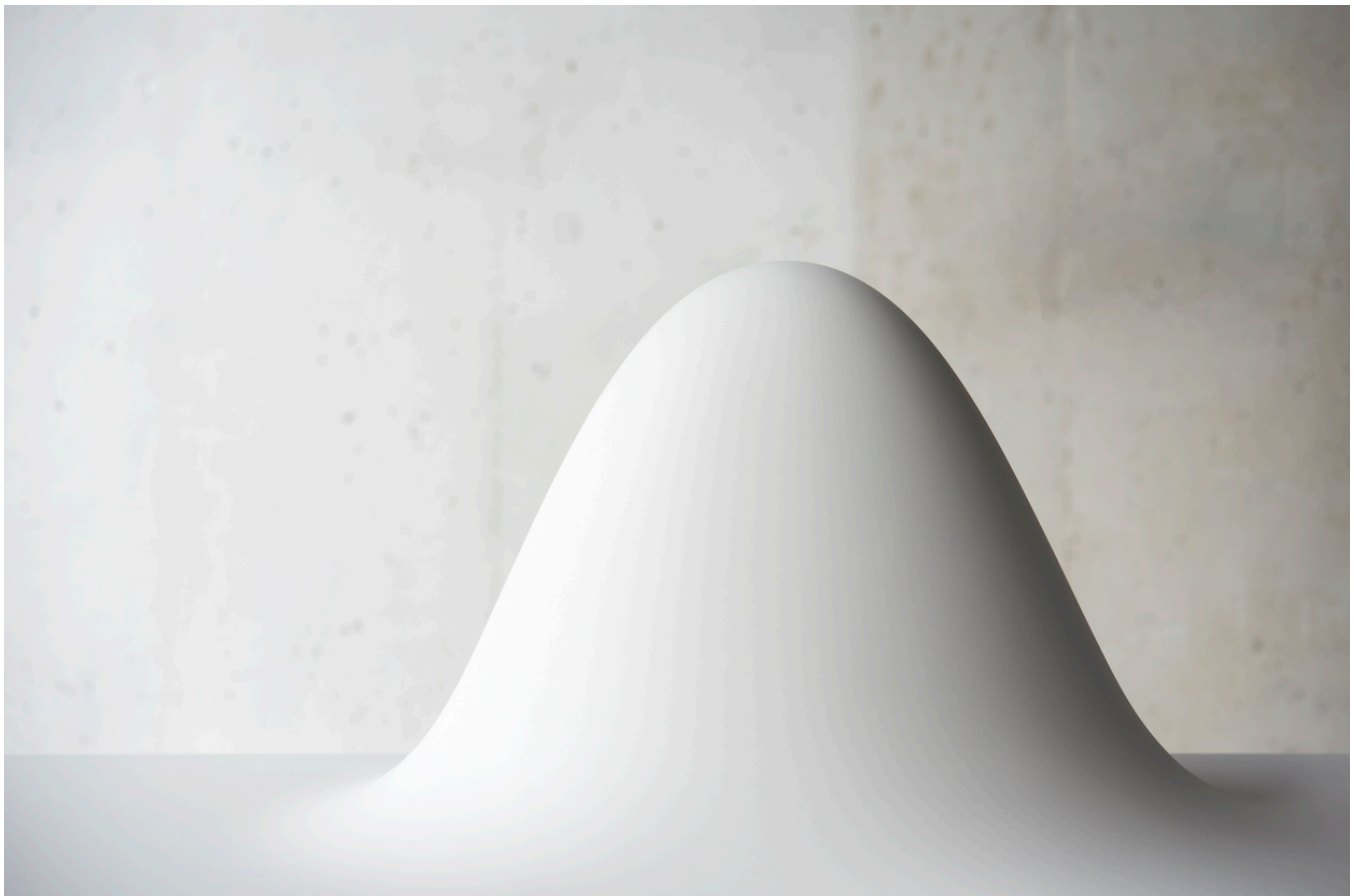


Jow, Tiffany. "Design of the Day: A Bench With a Very Surprising Bulge," *Surface*, August 6, 2018.

FRIEDMAN BENDA 515 W 26TH STREET NEW YORK NY 10001
FRIEDMANBENDA.COM TELEPHONE 212 239 8700 FAX 212 239 8760

Lebanese artist Najla El Zein wants you to feel something—sometimes, literally—while looking at her work. Creating an interactive experience is key to her practice, so she selects materials accordingly: A stole made of toothpicks could easily be mistaken for actual fur; running your hand across it creates a sensual, if perplexing, prickly feeling. A wall lamp made of 6,302 welded-together spoons looks like gold-flecked snakeskin from afar, but upon closer inspection, reflects the person looking at it in a distorted, disorienting pattern. Perhaps most recognizable are her Sensorial Brushes, a collection of handheld devices that inflict various sensations onto the skin via curious appendages—gold faux fingernails for scratching, an oversize feather for tickling, straws of hay for brushing—attached to a marble base. The fact that they can't be used as advertised is beside the point. Each piece has its own character, and implication, that prompt you to think twice about the relationship between a given physical sensation and how it's achieved.

Last November, during New York's Salon Art + Design fair, El Zein presented "Distortion," a series of milky-white reinforced concrete benches (including Bench 12, shown as a prototype above) at Friedman Benda's booth—a prelude to the solo exhibition the 35-year-old will launch at the Manhattan gallery next spring. Viewers are invited to touch and sit on the furniture, and observe it from there: Eyeballs will surely be drawn to gentle, knoll-like mound sprouting from the seat—an incongruous feature of an otherwise conventional form. Peer underneath and you'll discover that the hump is hollow, as if the bench had been poked. Such contradictory features—stark yet soft, conventional yet bizarre—showcase El Zein's knack for humor, mystery, and surprise.



Jow, Tiffany. "Design of the Day: A Bench With a Very Surprising Bulge," *Surface*, August 6, 2018.

FRIEDMAN BENDA 515 W 26TH STREET NEW YORK NY 10001
FRIEDMANBENDA.COM TELEPHONE 212 239 8700 FAX 212 239 8760



Jow, Tiffany. "Design of the Day: A Bench With a Very Surprising Bulge," *Surface*, August 6, 2018.

FRIEDMAN BENDA 515 W 26TH STREET NEW YORK NY 10001
FRIEDMANBENDA.COM TELEPHONE 212 239 8700 FAX 212 239 8760