



Najla El Zein's "sensual" furniture goes on show in New York

Dan Howarth | March 4, 2019

New York gallery Friedman Benda is hosting the first solo exhibition of work by Lebanese designer Najla El Zein, which includes sculptural furniture influenced by pregnancy and seduction.

Three sets of work based on the Beirut-based designer's personal experiences make up the Transition exhibition, which recently opened at the gallery in Chelsea.

Howarth, Dan. "Najla El Zein's "Sensual" Furniture Goes on Show in New York," *dezeen*, March 4, 2019.

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"All my work has been related to my own personal observations, but I was always distant with my works, where they were in a sense always inspired by material, or sight, or context," El Zein told Dezeen.

"These objects were my way to understand these feelings and these emotions. In a way it was quite therapeutic as well."

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The first series she created is the Distortion benches, which Friedman Benda presented at The Salon Art + Design 2017 fair in New York.

Each of the four minimal furniture pieces has a mound protruding from its flat surface, supported by thick cylindrical legs. The smooth rounded forms are various sizes, and reference how the body changes during pregnancy.

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On each bench, the bump is located in a different position – sometimes creating an obstacle between sitters, and in one instance shifting the visual weight to one side.

"Benches are usually objects that are made for more than one person, so I also played with the idea of separation between different people," El Zein said. "The distortion creates that separation."

The designer chose to make the benches from fine white concrete, to create a cold yet smooth finish. The absence of colour is intended to draw focus to the shapes, "so they act more like silhouettes".

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El Zein's second series, titled *Fragmented Pillar*, includes three vertical stacks of rounded white blocks. These blocks vary in shape and size, resulting in precarious-looking towers that appear as if they might topple over at any moment.

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