

Character Studies: Nendo's '50 Manga Chairs' on Show at Friedman Benda in New York

BY LISA CONTAG | SEPTEMBER 12, 2016



(Courtesy of Kenichi Sonehara)

Japanese design firm Nendo's "50 Manga Chairs" had their grand premiere at the Basilica Minore di San Simpliciano alongside Salone del Mobile in Milan earlier this year. Now the installation has moved on to the US, where it is currently debuting at Friedman Benda gallery in New York.

The ensemble, which is shown in New York in a slightly different configuration to Milan, is an original study both of one of design's most universal subjects, the chair, and archetypical modes of expression in Japanese Manga art. Though it sounds rather abstract when described, the installation makes for an interesting visual experience courtesy of its witty exploration of dynamics in inanimate objects and its transfer of illustrative styles to the third dimension.

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“The chairs are happy, distressed, embarrassed, surprised; they leap and bound, zoom past, or slowly slink away,” a text issued for the show explains, pointing out that “each chair has its own personality, allowing it to stand on its own or, when placed next to the others, to become part of a collective narrative.”

“50 Manga Chairs” is Nendo’s third and most ambitious solo exhibition at Friedman Benda’s to date. The Japanese design firm under the creative leadership of Oki Sato rose to international fame soon after its foundation in 2002 with its distinctly playful but thought-through creations. The “cabbage chair” is perhaps the brand’s most widely known design today. The delicate, blossom-like seat, constructed from peels of pleated paper sheets, was created for the Issey Miyake curated “XXIst Century Man” exhibition in 2007 and soon made it into the collections of the New York Museum of Modern Art, the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum, the Centre Pompidou, Paris, or the Design Museum Holon (which is currently also presenting Nendo’s first-ever large-scale retrospective), among many others.

According to the brand philosophy, Nendo designs are all about “giving people a small ‘?’ moment” every day—or, as with the Manga Chairs, 50.

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