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Selling a different kind of ‘organic’

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The Garden in the Machine: Organic Design 1930 to the Present at Friedman Benda Gallery in New York

Stapley-Brown, Victoria. “Selling a different kind of ‘organic’,” *The Art Newspaper*, January 29, 2016.

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What makes design “organic”? In 1941, at the competition and exhibition Organic Design in Home Furnishings at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the curator Eliot Noyes referred to it as the “harmonious organisation of the parts within the whole, according to structure, material, and purpose”. Today, however, it is mostly thought of as “something that evokes the natural world”, says James Zemaitis, the former director of 20th-century design at Sotheby’s and Phillips. To explore this shift, Zemaitis has co-curated the show *The Garden in the Machine: Organic Design 1930 to the Present* at Friedman Benda Gallery in New York, with Jennifer Olshin, a partner at the gallery (through 13 February). The exhibition presents around 40 objects, many of them made from natural materials like wood, by designers like Marcel Breuer, George Nakashima and Wendell Castle, dating from the 1930s to 2014. Around three-quarters of the pieces are for sale, with the remainder on loan from private collections. Zemaitis aims to make up for what he perceives as a “lack of the historic design gallery show in New York”, also pointing to the works hidden away in the reserves of the city’s museums, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which “has a far deeper Modern design collection that you would imagine”, he says.

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