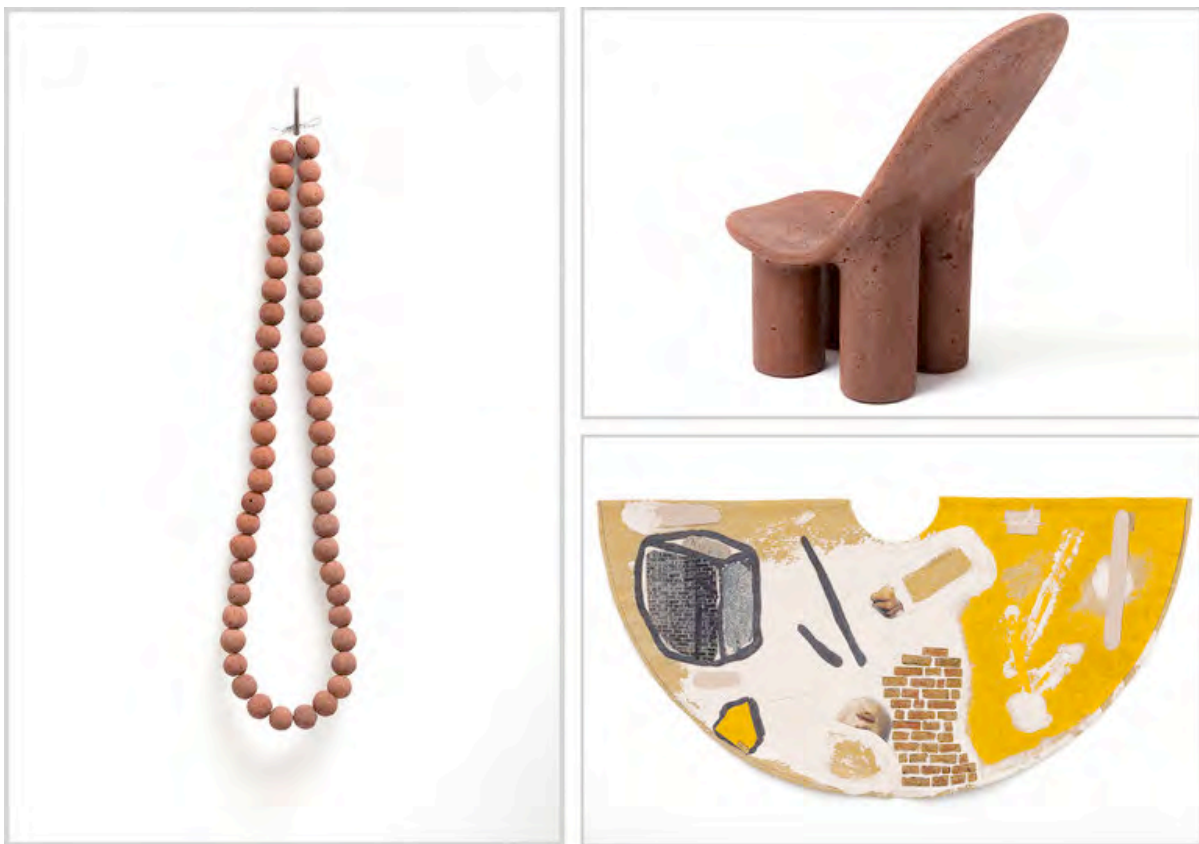


A New Show of Disparate Objects — Inspired by Matisse

By JILL KRASNY FEB. 21, 2017



Clockwise from left: "Bead/Earth (Prototype)," 2016; "Spoon Chair/Earth (Prototype)," 2016; "Earth Tapestry," 2016
Courtesy of Friedman Benda/Faye Toogood

When Marc Benda gave Faye Toogood free rein for her first solo exhibition in his gallery, she instinctively feared he'd regret it. "It was an incredibly bold move on his part," says the British designer, whose exceptional interiors, furniture and fashion reflect a singular English aesthetic and fascination with materiality. "He didn't know if I'd come back with a set of vases, a rail of

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coats or a chair.” After presenting 23 objects she wanted to show, “almost as a shopping list,” she jokes, Benda responded: “We’ve got to do everything.”

The resulting exhibition, her first in the U.S., titled “Assemblage 5,” opens in New York’s Friedman Benda Gallery this week. The rustic works were inspired by elements in Henri Matisse’s Chapelle du Rosaire de Vence, which he built in the town of Vence, on the French Riviera, between 1948 and 1951. The show picks up where “Assemblage 4,” which debuted at Milan’s Salone del Mobile in 2014, left off: pushing Toogood’s exploration of form and geometry in a bold new direction. “I’m not a religious person, but the spiritual experience of all these objects in one space was quite profound to me,” she says. “Pews, altar pieces, chalice relics and vestments — those were the starting points for the function, almost.”

With a trio of materials, Toogood aimed to communicate “the very essential, the very raw, the elemental and the primitive.” She chose lithium-barium crystal, cob composite and silver nitrate bronze to convey the essence of water, earth and the moon, the latter signifying a connection between the lunar cycle and femininity. Each came with its own set of challenges: The first cob pieces crumbled to the floor, and the bronze was almost too heavy to work with. The glass threatened to shatter during the months-long process of curing — an expensive gamble for an exhibition of such a large scale.

Still, no one can deny the thrill of seeing Toogood’s sculptural Roly-Poly chair rendered in “the purest glass you can get,” she says, or giant wall hangings of beads made of smooth, chalk-like cob. “The journey of perfecting the techniques and the scale of working has been pretty momentous,” says Toogood, who entrusted a Czechoslovakian manufacturer with bringing her creations to life. She also points to three oversized tapestries, based on cloaks worn by priests. “I’ve been able to work with materials that I never thought I could work with on such a scale,” she says. “It’s taken me out of my normal comfort zone.”

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