

## A STOP IN WONDERLAND: MARCEL WANDERS AT FRIEDMAN BENDA, NEW YORK

BY *Hannah Ghorashi* POSTED 04/11/16 12:57 PM

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Installation view of "Marcel Wanders: Portraits," 2016, at Friedman Benda.

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In his solo show at Friedman Benda, design virtuoso Marcel Wanders offers a creative haven in the form of what appears to be a depressive, jewel-toned counterpart to the manic, fairy-tale world of *Alice in Wonderland*. (In fact, Wanders designed the interior of the Andaz Amsterdam Prinsengracht Hotel, a project that was nicknamed “Alice in Amsterdam.”)

The perimeters of the large gallery space are deep blue. The floor is covered with a primarily violet carpet featuring large flowers, which, when viewed indirectly, resembles a Hieronymous Bosch scene from outer space. The contents of the room are at once familiar in form and disconcertingly alien in detail. Mirrors, shaped like scrambled eggs, punctuate the walls, while oblong, egg-shaped chairs—with portions scooped out for sitters—are embroidered with such patterns as rainbow-hued interlocking hearts, stars, and bird’s-eye weaves.



Marcel Wanders, *Phoebe 4*, 2013, mohair weave, monofil, LED lights, and steel wire, 71 x 29½ x 29½ inches.  
COURTESY MARCEL WANDERS STUDIO AND FRIEDMAN BENDA, NEW YORK

The most arresting components of the show are the flora and fauna that populate this charming rabbit hole, including seven rabbit-like animals crudely molded in ceramic—except for one, which is coated in gold leaf. An oversize brass rocking horse guards the entrance, like a knight in a human-size game of chess. Humans, or creatures that look just like them, appear as well. In a life-size video work propped up on the floor, a naked woman wearing only a wreath made of

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fuzzy balls of light shifts imperceptibly, as though slightly bored. A photo blown up to the same proportions shows another nude woman, her back to the camera, wearing what appears to be an enormous neck ruff, an exact copy of a Seussian treelike lampshade elsewhere in the room.

Three other video works, which depict the faces of overtly grotesque mammal-esque creatures, fuel a sense of disquiet. One sprouts a pair of rabbit ears, while another, possessing a beakless face, has a decidedly aquiline quality. Composed of delicately dyed, computer-modeled flower petals, the animals appear to be either extremely wrinkled with age or devoid of their outer layer of skin. Their robotic eyes stare forth from hollowed eye sockets. Mouths agape, the three creatures reveal a mixture of wariness and naiveté, their heads moving slightly. The show is alternately symmetrical and asymmetrical in pairs or groups of magical numbers—1's, 3's, and 7's. Titled "Portraits," the name evokes both the image of a distorted funhouse mirror and the idea of multiple portraits acting as shields to guard the subject's true likeness.

Wanders addresses this idea in a wall text near the entrance, which reads, "It's not really love if you share only half of yourself....This work is more intimate, it is what I want to whisper to people—the hidden me that is disruptive and heavy." Any meaning to be found in these works darts behind the fantastic characters and is reflected off mirrors as the viewer, distracted, watches a video of a naked woman shift and preen. On the other hand, the show's peculiar style succeeds tremendously from a design standpoint as it seduces the viewer with creative potential as well as a sense of respite from the outside world. Copyright 2016, ARTnews Ltd, 40 W 25th Street, 6th Floor, New York, N.Y. 10010. All rights reserved.

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