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Guggenheim debut



Treffinger, Stephen. "Design Incubator," *CULTURED*, April/May 2017.

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# DESIGN INCUBATOR

Need a snapshot of the most significant creators in contemporary design? Friedman Benda's new show is a love letter to those who have shaped the canon—and the gallery—over the last decade.

BY STEPHEN TREFFINGER



Marc Benda has propelled the careers of numerous designers, including Front design collective, pictured at left, as well as Wendell Castle, whose *Walnut Sculpture*, 1958-59, above, is included in the show.

**A**niversary shows are typically something of a “greatest hits” collection, but Marc Benda, co-founder of Friedman Benda in Chelsea, New York, wanted something more to celebrate his gallery’s 10-year mark. “The first impulse was very straightforward, to show the best work that we have exhibited or produced over the years,” explains Benda. “We discarded that in favor of a show that looks at each designer discretely—rather than in context with each other—and gives visitors a brief about what makes each studio unique.”

This means that each will be presented in a different style: some will focus on inspirations, others on their process. In all, between 15 and 20 studios will be included in the retrospective.

When Benda first joined forces with Barry Friedman in 2002, the latter had never before shown contemporary work. In the years that followed, Benda organized exhibitions by designers Ettore Sottsass and

architect Ron Arad—both to great acclaim—and the gallery went on to underwrite pieces by Dutch designer Marcel Wanders, among others. In 2007, Friedman Benda was formed, and remained a partnership until 2014 when Friedman retired. The following year, Benda joined forces with Thorsten Albertz on an exclusively art program, while Friedman Benda remains focused on design.

Among those whose work will be part of the anniversary exhibition, aptly named “DNA10,” will be the Dutch designer Joris Laarman who, at 37, is still considered a “young” designer. He creates complex forms with 3D imaging that land, depending on your perspective, somewhere between furniture and sculpture.

“We’ll dissect a single piece, and show all the different input that went in making it,” Benda says about Laarman’s work. “So it will show the scientific, the algorithmic underpinning. How it’s more than just going to a company and printing a chair.” In contrast

to Laarman, the 84-year-old designer Wendell Castle, whose work will also be featured, has had a long career. In testament of this, his work is in the permanent collections of over 40 museums and cultural institutions worldwide. For the show, Castle says the gallery will display “the oldest piece they could get their hands on” of his and juxtapose it with a newer chair—as well as drawings and models.

“The old piece is not a sit-able chair but is my earliest investigation when I was actually a sculptor at that point and never made furniture but I had some interest in it,” Castle says. “I made this abstract form that has characteristics of a chair.” He will have an exhibition of new works at Friedman Benda right after the anniversary show.

“It seemed a very interesting moment to give a little bit of behind the scenes of what happens in a collaboration with a designer—and what brings this huge collection under one roof,” says Benda.

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