

FRIEDMAN BENDA
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NEW YORK NY 10001

CULTURED

MAGAZINE

The Creative Brit Designer Who is so Too Good

By Brook S. Mason
February 2017



Faye Toogood. Photography by Rory Van Millingen.

A London fashion designer who also turns her talented hands to creating tables of luminous cast glass – not to mention 18th century Georgian mansion interiors – along with installations Hermès boutique? That would be the extraordinary Faye Toogood. Right now, her latest endeavors are showcased at the Friedman Benda exhibition “Assemblage 5” which runs until April 15, 2017.

In setting the stage for her first solo show Stateside, Toogood eschewed the traditional white box Chelsea gallery quarters but rather created an entire mesmerizing environment. The walls are cloaked in painted canvas with a rippled texture and drenched in a subtle taupe palette and then her design efforts are laid out on white painted English sea grass panels.

And the inspiration for her new exhibition? “When I first visited Matisse’s in Venice, I realized that I too could create a spiritual sanctuary filled with my own design examples,” says Toogood whose East London studio boasts a staff of ten, including architects and interior designers as well as pattern cutters.



The 23 objects, sculptures and tapestries on display represent a radical departure in that this multi faceted designer developed new materials such as coating sand cast bronze consoles in silver nitrate. Yet once again Toogood highlights contrast and unexpected juxtapositions all grounded in clean lines and stark simplicity. And the shapes blur the boundaries between design and sculpture.

This time around, Toogood visually evokes the moon, water and earth. In portraying water, she called on a Czech glassmaker to fabricate chairs and low tables and the very process was distinctively different in that the cast glass required a staggering five months to cool down in the massive kilns.



Faye Toogood's Spoon Chair/ Earth, 2016

There's a primitive nature to some of this work. Take Toogood's Spoon chair composed of concrete, resin and well, dirt appearing as ancient terra cotta pottery but poised on squat legs.

Her painted tapestries take their cue from priests' cloaks are Toogood's first efforts in textiles beyond her fashion designs, which are sold at Dover Street Market.

"Her multidisciplinary approach is very much of our times," notes Marc Benda. "The intuitive forms, visceral approach to formal language are hers but bring to mind archaic forms," explains Benda, who has spent more than a decade collaborating with such groundbreaking designers as Wendell Castle.



While this multi faceted designer has long garnered critical acclaim, surprisingly Americans have acquired some 80 percent of her design oeuvre. Recently, the Denver Art Museum acquired Toogood's Roly-Poly Chair. Plus, Toogood's work is featured in the Philadelphia Museum of Art's exhibition "Design Currents" which was curated by Colin Fanning.

"Interestingly, Faye's in sync with art and design as part of a larger scene and follows in the footsteps of William Morris and Ettore Sottsass," says Fanning.

Oddly enough, Toogood began as a stylist at the highly influential World of Interiors where she developed stories from Mayfair and the south of France to Mali in West Africa.

Just as she proved her prowess in styling photo shoots, later Toogood went even further and completed a raft of idiosyncratic installations for Alexander McQueen, Comme des Garçons and Kenzo.

"My overwhelming aim here was to create an ethereal environment for reflection," says Toogood. For those seeking a refuge for contemplation from the hectic Armory scene this week, this virtuoso designer's gallery show is a must see.

Images Courtesy of Friedman Benda and Faye Toogood