

Wallpaper*

Friedman Benda presents A New Realism

By Pei-Ru Keh
June 8, 2021

With a mix of furniture, ceramics and textiles, Friedman Benda's new exhibition 'A New Realism' (on show until 2 July 2021) curated by Glenn Adamson presents works by leading designers and artists that confront the present through their work



A piece by Thaddeus Wolfe on display at Friedman Benda as part of 'A New Realism', an exhibition of furniture, ceramics and textiles curated by Glenn Adamson. Photography: Joe Kramm. All images courtesy of Friedman Benda

The term 'realism' may at first evoke ideas of naturalism in the creative fields, but a new proposition for the term, put forward by the curator Glenn Adamson, emphasises the immediacy and need to quite literally, keep it real. In an exhibition entitled 'A New Realism' (on show until 2 July 2021) curated by Adamson and staged at the New York

design gallery Friedman Benda, Adamson pulls together sculptural works from eight practitioners that confront the present in a direct and head-on way. The exhibition includes furniture, textiles and ceramics by artists and designers including Fernando Laposse, Ferreol Babin, Tanya Aguiñiga and Paul S. Briggs.



'Within Without' by Tanya Aguiñiga. Photography by Gina Clyne, courtesy of Friedman Benda and Tanya Aguiñiga

'We are interested in the range of historic resonances that the concept of 'realism' has for contemporary practice,' the curator says. 'In some cases, it is a form of social engagement—a position that can be traced all the way back to the 'realism' of mid-19th century French painting (artists like Courbet), but has important connections to the polyphonic voices of contemporary activism. Realism can also be expressed in a less politicized way, through material indexicality that recalls the work of Rauschenberg; or by exploring the overlaps and divergences between representation and abstraction as means of responding to the real, with a sophistication that recalls historic African sculpture, or constructed textile.'

It is this individualised approach to materiality that serves as a connecting thread between the eight artists on show. Each of them are makers armed with highly specialised skills - whether its Thaddeus Wolfe's unique process of casting glass using styrofoam pieces, sculptor Paul S. Briggs' use of slab-building and pinch-forming to create his philosophical works or Tanya Aguiniga's mixed media weavings that

simultaneously confronts ideas of gender, identity and culture, especially of marginalised communities. The ceramicist Ebitenyefa Baralaye blends several different methods - hand-building, pottery, and using rubber and plastic molds - to create intricate pieces that powerfully meditate on ideas of displacement, cultural and personal authorship, representation on all scales as well as symbols interpreted through the diaspora lens.



'Portrait III' by Ebitenyefa Baralaye. Photo courtesy of Friedman Benda and Ebitenyefa Baralaye

'In some ways, the case for a new realism almost makes itself,' Adamson emphasises. 'We've heard so much about fake news, and the distortions of the digital and political realm, over the past few years. A response is badly needed. And you can see this abundantly in the work we've included: it's all so intensely made, and draws deeply on its creator's own personal, physical, and psychological resources. That directness and honesty doesn't come from nowhere though. I was also thinking about deeper histories of realism, in art history and even in philosophy, as a way to frame the creative act as a confrontation with its own time.' §



A close up of Thaddaeus Wolfe's sculptural glass piece. Photography: Joe Kramm



Wall-hanging textile by Terri Friedman

Pei-Ru Keh, "Friedman Benda presents A New Realism," *Wallpaper**, June 8, 2021.



'Telemachos' by Mattias Selden

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A detail of 'Slugger' by Mattias Sellden



A detail of the 'A La Derive' bench by Ferreol Babin



'Noise n. 1 and 2' lamps by Ferreol Babin



The 'Agave Cabinet' by Fernando Laposse



'Battered but Beautiful' by Paul S. Briggs



'Dark Red Powder Variation #2' by Carl Emil Jacobsen. Photography by Jeppe Gudmundsen Holmgreen

INFORMATION

'A New Realism' is on show until 2 July 2021

friedmanbenda.com

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