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Carmen D'Apollonio Makes Lamps That Feel Like Friends

The Swiss Born, Los Angeles-based designer is gearing up for her first solo show in the United States, “Don’t Wake the Snake,” at Friedman Benda, Opening July 15.

By Abigail Glasgow
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Carmen D'Apollonio, “I’ll wait a million years,” 2021. Courtesy of Friedman Benda and Carmen D'Apollonio. Photography by Schaub Stierli fotografie.

In 2014, Carmen D'Apollonio started posting her ceramic lamps on Instagram. She sold to friends, picked up a bit of traction and found herself exhibiting her pieces just two years later at [Linn Lühn](#) gallery in Germany. This isn't at all surprising when you see D'Apollonio's work.

Not exclusively sculpture nor functional living room décor, her lamps and planters feel like companions: some can physically sit next to you; some make you consider an attitude check. Even their titles have character—*All by myself*, *Dinner at my house*, *If I knew you were coming I would have baked a cake*—and are unparalleled in their playful nature. D’Apollonio’s personified pieces reflect her demeanor: nonchalant, a bit silly, unapologetic and experimental. I felt like I was speaking to my ideal art teacher who just so happens to sell unbelievable décor at upwards of \$7,000.



Carmen D’Apollonio, *Dinner at my house*. Courtesy of Friedman Benda and Carmen D’Apollonio. Photography by Daniel Kukla.

Growing up in Switzerland, D'Apollonio recounts that she was always building, drawing, knitting or crocheting. She started her career as a window dresser, and then worked across several artistic fields, from fashion (she cofounded the label Ikou Tschüss in 2006) to set design. She got into ceramics through local workshops and then, when she found herself needing lamps after a big move to Los Angeles, her new craft was born.

"I do just whatever I want to do," D'Apollonio says of her creative process. "I see something I like and I sit down and think about how I can make a lamp out of it." Some of her lamps evolved from a fascination with Roman statues, while her planters were a direct response to Sicily's Moorish head versions. She started out sculpting her work based on the faces of her friends. When that became too complicated, she moved on to a new approach—it's the essence of her curious practice.



Carmen D'Apollonio, *One of us no. 1*, 2021. Courtesy of Friedman Benda and Carmen D'Apollonio. Photography by Daniel Kukla.

When asked how she feels about permeating the decor-meets-art space, D'Apollonio laughs. "I don't really care what people think in the design world," and it's her accessible disposition that has bolstered her success; nothing bars her from experimenting—and certainly not the consumers' perspectives. Even the new color in her work isn't strategically planned to fit into some trendy palette. "I never do glaze testing," she explains. "I buy a bunch of different colors and do experiments on the pieces—whatever comes out comes out."

D'Apollonio's first solo exhibition in the United States, *Don't Wake the Snake*, debuts July 15 at New York's [Friedman Benda](#) gallery. She spent approximately eight months working on a series that has never been seen before, with new body shapes, paper shades that face the floor and lamps made entirely of ceramic. "I just made everything a little different than I made before," she says. "They're all my babies."



Carmen D'Apollonio, *Sorry I missed your call*, 2020. Courtesy of Friedman Benda and Carmen D'Apollonio. Photography by Daniel Kukla.

As her own work combines the warmth and inclusivity of a DIY craft with the elegance and grandeur of larger scale ceramic pieces, D'Apollonio encourages other creatives, too, to adventure in their respective fields. Design, she believes, should create what you want to own for yourself. "No risk, no fun," she adds. "And if people can't buy my work right now, make one of your own!"