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The Dallas Art Museum Invests in Contemporary Design by Women

In “Women + Design: New Works,” the museum brings attention to emerging and mid-career designers – and acquires their work

By Brook Mason
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Faye Toogood's Tools for Life Mobile 2, 2017, one of the works on display in the Dallas Museum of Art's new show, "Women + Design: New Works." Photo: Angus Mill Photography

Though the works of such renowned figures as Charlotte Perriand, Eileen Gray, and Ray Eames can finally be found in many museums (though notably not nearly as much as that of their male counterparts), contemporary female designers—especially those who are mid-career or emerging—too often get short shrift when it comes to museums showcasing their oeuvres. At Texas's Dallas Museum of Art, however, decorative arts and design curator Sarah Schleuning (who joined the museum staff in March) is taking a bold step to remedying such omissions. “Women + Design: New Works,” which opens October 28, spotlights seven designers, all under the age of 45, and ups the museum's holdings by acquiring all of the work on view.

“Far too often, the work of the younger breed of women designers is sequestered despite the fact that their talents are truly on a par with those in the hallowed pantheon of design,” says Schleuning, who came to the Dallas Museum of Art from Atlanta’s High Museum of Art, where she oversaw the acclaimed “Iris van Herpen: Transforming Fashion” exhibition.



Comfort Me, a 2015 work by Carrie Dickens. Photo: Courtesy of the Dallas Museum of Art

For her Dallas museum show, Schleuning zeroed in on van Herpen’s recent work as well as that of Faye Toogood, Najla El Zein, Katie Collins, Carrie Dickens, Genevieve Howard, and Katie Stout. “Each of them has been creating dynamic work and I wanted to amplify their presence in the museum world,” the curator explains.

The women hail from a wide range of locales, with Toogood based in London, El Zein in Beirut, and Katie Stout in Brooklyn. [Ed. note: Though it must be noted, in a show that promises representation, there are no black designers included here]. What they have in common is their openness to experimenting in various media. “What binds these seven designers is that they all take a multifaceted approach to tackling a variety of disciplines, materials, and processes while blurring the very boundaries of design with some edging in to sculpture and conceptual art,” Schleuning says.



An enamel and steel necklace by Katie Collins, 2014. Photo: Courtesy of the Dallas Museum of Art

Take the multitalented Faye Toogood, who has long delved into design as well as fashion, turning her talented hands to the interiors of residences in London and Ibiza, retail spaces (like her recent London headquarters for the British brand Mulberry), and even furniture. In the Dallas exhibition, Toogood, a former World of Interiors editor, has four items, among them a stool and side table from her totemlike Cup series.



Katie Stout's Selfish Shelf, 2017. Photo: Joe Kramm

Katie Stout, the 29-year-old wunderkind who has shown at New York's R & Company, has an idiosyncratic bookshelf in the show. On the so-called Shelfish Shelf, Stout encased a quirky convoluted metal frame with papier-mâché in a riotous palette veering from a punchy pink to pumpkin orange. "Katie is invoking the Dutch designer Maarten Baas's clay series in which he made each example by hand," Schleuning notes. So Stout, too, injects a sense of spontaneity by leaving her own fingerprints all over that work.



Najla El Zein, *Seduction*, 2018. Photo: Courtesy of the Dallas Museum of Art

Schleuning is further making her mark in the museum world by commissioning work. Upon seeing a maquette by El Zein, who boasts a masters degree from the prestigious École Camondo in Paris and graduated from the Atelier de Sèvres, Schleuning had her produce it in sandstone for the museum. “As an incubator of contemporary talent, our role as a museum is to act as a patron and support the designer,” she says. “Women + Design: New Works” is on view at the Dallas Museum of Art through February 17.