

designboom

Ebitenyefa Baralaye on 'the encoded nature of faces' for Friedman Benda's 'Design in Dialogue'

December 1, 2021



Design in Dialogue Welcomes Ebitenyefa Baralaye

on april 1, 2020, new york gallery [friedman benda](#) initiated a series of online interviews aimed at connecting individuals across the world with leading voices in the creative field. [design in dialogue](#) is a conversational program hosted alternately by curator and historian glenn adamson and designer stephen burks that engages with designers, makers, critics, and curators as they reflect on their careers and creative processes. against the backdrop of [COVID-19](#) and global lockdowns, the conversations are held virtually on zoom for 1 hour for anyone in the world to tune in to, and include a participatory Q&A with the audience in attendance. friedman benda has since presented more than 90 episodes, each offering unparalleled insight into the sensibilities, musings, and memories of today's creative protagonists. see our recent feature of [dorte mandrup on designing 'irreplaceable places'](#) and [mabel o. wilson and mario gooden on 'reconstructions'](#).

on june 30, 2021, [design in dialogue](#) welcomed detroit-based ceramicist, sculptor and designer [ebitenyefa baralaye](#), whose glazed stoneware portraits are currently on view as part of [friedman benda's](#) annual participation at design miami/ 2021 (see more of

"Ebitenyefa Baralaye on 'the encoded nature of faces' for Friedman Benda's 'Design in Dialogue'," *designboom*, December 1, 2021.

designboom's coverage on this year's edition [here](#)). his work explores cultural, spiritual, and material translations of form/objects, text, and symbols, interpreted through a diaspora lens and abstracted around the aesthetics of craft and design. I have been thinking about the encoded nature of faces,' baralaye says, 'the way facial features represent not just one person, but a community, a society, and a culture.'

watch the full video interview at the top of the page, and learn more about ebitenyefa baralaye's works and first collaboration with the gallery below.



installation view of friedman benda's design miami/ 2021 booth. courtesy of friedman benda | photography by oriol tarridas

Friedman Benda at Design Miami/ 2021

friedman benda's annual participation at design miami/ features works from renowned field leaders, many of which operate within multidisciplinary creative universes. here, the dynamic and electrifyingly original vision of the multi-hyphenate is placed forefront, its power undeniable. a commanding presence among them is ebitenyefa baralaye, who is collaborating with [the gallery](#) for the first time to launch of a series of glazed stoneware portraits. on view until december 5, 2021, at booth G22, the colossal busts feature characteristics that have been rendered in a free-flowing, abstracted clay line. the body of work acts as a vehicle through which to offer reflections on [baralaye's](#) individual experience of being a black man in america, while also traversing universal realities of the collective diaspora, in particular struggles with mental health and well-being.

"Ebitenyefa Baralaye on 'the encoded nature of faces' for Friedman Benda's 'Design in Dialogue'," *designboom*, December 1, 2021.



installation view of friedman benda's design miami/ 2021 booth. courtesy of friedman benda | photography by oriol tarridas

born in nigeria in 1984, ebityefya baralaye spent his early childhood in antigua and is now based in detroit, where he is currently an assistant professor and section head of ceramics at the college for creative studies. his work was also included in the group exhibition 'a new realism' curated by glenn adamson at friedman benda, new york, in

"Ebityefya Baralaye on 'the encoded nature of faces' for Friedman Benda's 'Design in Dialogue'," *designboom*, December 1, 2021.

the summer of 2021. writing about baralaye's most recent body of work – the tall, anthropomorphic vessels – in the exhibition catalogue essay, adamson notes, 'there is a clear reference, in these works, to the typology of the african-american face jug, which dates back to the mid-19th century; it was likely derived originally from ritual figures and containers made among the kongo peoples of central africa, forcibly brought to america. with this allusion comes a huge weight: enslavement and its attendant tragedies of suffering and erasure. baralaye is facing up to this history. but he is also looking outward, and forward.'

'these objects, then, are portraits on multiple registers simultaneously—of the self, of family, of the black community at large. ultimately, they address the very notion of identity formation, which may be specific (he acknowledges a correlation between his use of dark, iron-rich terracotta and the black body) but is also transcendent, a shared human experience, beyond racial and cultural difference,' adamson adds. 'we have become more aware of collective consciousness than we were previously,' baralaye says, 'the choice of being with other people is being weighed in a context, the very possibility of exchange of ideas.'



akanza III, 2021, stoneware and slip, 33 x 18 x 18 inches. courtesy of friedman benda and ebitenyefa baralaye

"Ebitenyefa Baralaye on 'the encoded nature of faces' for Friedman Benda's 'Design in Dialogue'," *designboom*, December 1, 2021.



akanza IV, 2021, stoneware and slip, 33 x 18 x 18 inches. courtesy of friedman benda and ebitenyefa baralaye



akanza I, 2021, stoneware and slip, 33 x 18 x 18 inches lakanza II, 2021, stoneware and slip, 33 x 18 x 18 inches l akanza VII, 2021, stoneware and slip, 31 x 18 x 18 inches, all courtesy of friedman benda and ebitenyefa baralaye

“Ebitenyefa Baralaye on ‘the encoded nature of faces’ for Friedman Benda’s ‘Design in Dialogue’,” *designboom*, December 1, 2021.



akanza V, 2021, stoneware and slip, 33 x 18 x 18 inches. courtesy of friedman benda and ebitenyefa baralaye



akanza VI, 2021, stoneware and slip, 33 x 18 x 18 inches. courtesy of friedman benda and ebitenyefa baralaye

“Ebitenyefa Baralaye on ‘the encoded nature of faces’ for Friedman Benda’s ‘Design in Dialogue’,” *designboom*, December 1, 2021.



akanza VIII, 2021, stoneware and slip, 31 x 18 x 18 inches. courtesy of friedman benda and ebitenyefa baralaye



installation view of exhibition 'a new realism' curated by glenn adamson, 2021 at friedman benda, new york. courtesy of friedman benda | photography by daniel kukla

"Ebitenyefa Baralaye on 'the encoded nature of faces' for Friedman Benda's 'Design in Dialogue'," *designboom*, December 1, 2021.

project info:

name: akanza

designer: [ebitenyefa baralaye](#)

gallery: [friedman benda](#)

on view at: design miami / booth G22 / november 30 – december 5, 2021

[design in dialogue](#) is a series of online interviews presented by new york-based gallery [friedman benda](#) that highlights leading voices from the field — designers, makers, critics, and curators — as they discuss their work and ideas. hosted alternately by curator and historian glenn adamson and designer stephen burks, the conversations are held on zoom for 1 hour and include a participatory Q&A.

watch the full video interview with mabel o. wilson and mario gooden at the top of the page and stay tuned as designboom continues to share design in dialogue features. see all past episodes — and RSVP for upcoming ones — [here](#).

friedman benda X designboom