

## Farrell Hundley's Furnishings for a Dark New Golden Age

By Shana Nys Drambrot  
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Farrell Hundley: Polydorus Bench (Courtesy of Friedman Benda)

William Farrell and Elliott Hundley have been thinking about the past — specifically the myths and tastes of historical civilizations. From Ancient Greece to the Renaissance, and the halls of [Versailles](#), periods of advanced philosophy have coincided with explosions of aesthetic opulence that contained within them the seeds of the chasmic social and economic inequality and decadence that would be their undoing. In 2019 they founded design studio [Farrell Hundley](#), and since then on the theory that we are currently living in another such time, they've been making shiny, mutated, dangerous objects for the palaces of today's dark new golden age.

Through their unique collaboration and interpretive relationship to functional design, the pair — each of whom maintains a separate fine art practice — explores resonant passages of myth and poetry from the West's oldest societies. Their first Los Angeles exhibition of this project, *Chorus*, opening this week at elevated art and design gallery [Friedman Benda](#) leans into the cyclical paradoxes in the rise and fall of empires, culling imagery, characters, and symbolism from literatures past, as inspiration for a suite of irresistibly tactile cast-bronze, hand-embellished tables, benches, mirrors,

vessels, lights, and textiles enlivened by precious metals, organic patination, kaleidoscopic palettes, and knife-sharp nettles.

A masterpiece of a desk is named Lydian, in a reference to “Lydian gold,” which in turn is an obscure image the poet Sappho once conjured. Lydian coins are thought to be the first official “state” coins ever circulated, speaking to a reputation for wealth among its community of nations that prompted the poet to write, in part, “...she’s not here, and I’d rather see her lovely step, her sparkling glance and her face than gaze on all the troops in Lydia in their chariots and glittering armor.” The desk itself is supported by legs and sides that bear a king’s ransom in gold and platinum-hued baubles and spikes, creating a geological texture that seduces the eye and lures the hand, evoking treasure troves and royal adornments, and requiring an intense focus and a patient eye for detail that would be impossible to conceive of, if we were not used to this kind of thing from the millions-of-tiny-pieces collages by [Hundley the artist](#).

Other tables, lamps, mirrors, and benches are named for figures not only from Sappho but from Homer and other classical authors — tragic, regal, powerful figures like Iris (goddess of the rainbow and a fleet-footed messenger), Polydorus (a prince of Troy, murdered by his protector), Polyxena (a princess of Troy claimed by the ghost of war-vanquished Greek warrior Achilles as his share of the spoils and who therefore put to death at his tomb), Cyclops (somehow perfect for a mirror), Set and Osiris (the Egyptian god of war and the brother he murdered), Lukka (another kingdom whose wealth was comparable to Lydia’s), and Minoa (a thread of Bronze Age port cities and home of the Minotaur). Such pieces were made using the ancient but still perfect and evocative lost wax casting method — a process in which hand-sculpted wax forms are destroyed when molten metal is poured into the molds — and as befits the tales that inspired the pieces, the viscerally elemental alchemy of fire and metal is preserved in the mottled, scarred, thorny, topographical skin and hefty bodies of the results.

The mirrors fairly radiate magic powers, ringed in leaves and branches, beckoning with dark stories to be told; folded and footed vessels that could be vases (life) or funeral urns (death); a human heart-shaped box; and lighting fixtures deconstructing the wholesome sophistication of stained glass. A collection of textiles for wall and pillow has been created in a hand-felting technique involving upcycled cashmere, recycled clothing (find the Bulls T-shirt and Versace tie), and all manner of mediums one might find in an art studio — again creating a sort of post-punk melange of luxury, reclamation, comfort, and corruption.

Hundley’s aesthetic of assembling millions of tiny shards of things in embellished mixed-media collages as packed with minute detail as the most obsessive brocade, and Farrell’s muscular paintings merging poetry, strength, and literary meaning, combine to great effect. Both agree we’re living through a troubled and luxurious time — an age whose essence of fetid fancies and material contortions fail to be captured by the idealized paradigms of the past. The siren song of *Chorus* is sung by furniture with the same power to narrate its life and times as art possesses — in this case lavish, thorny times.

*Friedman Benda, 8260 Marmont Lane, West Hollywood; Opening reception: Friday, July 14, 6 p.m. to 9 p.m.; On view through Aug. 12; free; [friedmanbenda.com](http://friedmanbenda.com).*