

FRIEDMAN BENDA  
8260 MARMONT LANE  
LOS ANGELES CA 90069

EBITENYEFA BARALAYE  
MAKING SPACE : TRACING TOMORROW  
FEB 15 – MAR 18 2023



*Akanza IX*

*Post I*

**Opening Reception: February 15<sup>th</sup>, 2023 12pm – 6pm**

**Los Angeles** – Friedman Benda is pleased to present *Making Space: Tracing Tomorrow*, ceramicist, sculptor, and educator Ebitenyefa Baralaye’s first solo exhibition with the gallery. Born in Nigeria, Baralaye spent his formative years in Antigua and is currently based in Detroit. Drawing from a broad range of cultural traditions, forms, and iconography, while recontextualizing them through contemporary reflection, Baralaye’s compositions are “markers of identity, place, state, and the fluid dynamics around them,” says the artist.

Presenting three distinct bodies of work, the exhibition reflects Baralaye’s personal negotiation of and concern with the fragmented and transitional presence of the Black diaspora. The first, is a culmination of his portrait series’, *Akanza* and *All My Relations*, begun several years ago. These commanding busts are animated by free-flowing, abstracted clay lines. Intrigued by the facial features of black men, particularly his father’s, Baralaye uses clay to form expressions of individuality. His creative processes are both calculated and intuitive, relying on various degrees of preliminary planning through sketches, blueprints, and digital models, while remaining open to the ongoing technical and conceptual discovery that he finds in the acts of throwing, coiling, modeling, and embellishing material. Inspired by the 19<sup>th</sup> century poetic jars by David Drake (the enslaved potter-poet known as Dave the Potter) these works find balance in the interplay between abstraction and figuration; pottery and narrative. As described by curator Glenn Adamson, Baralaye’s distinct portraits are “at least implicitly anthropomorphic... shaped into the guise of a face” as he “sees each object as an incarnation of bodily presence, expressed in its own lexicon.”

Departing from his portrait works, Baralaye’s second body of work revolves around what he calls “finial” forms. Delineating registers upon flattened and elongated closed vessels, these works act as tableaus which reference the self and its community at large. Inspired by Olowe of Ise (1873-1938), a wood sculptor and the most significant artist of the Yoruba people who depicted royalty and communal life in his wooden sculptures, Baralaye fills his objects with figuration and storytelling.

The third body of work presented in *Making Space: Tracing Tomorrow*, consists of “stakes,” monumental multi-fragmented posts of architectural scale marking home, place, and community. Consisting of integrated vertical elements, these totems come together to form literal and symbolic narratives. Baralaye notes his interest “in the psychological agency of objects that project manifestations of identity and desire: shrines, statues, monuments, urns, etc.”

**About Ebitenyefa Baralaye**

Ebitenyefa Baralaye (b. 1984) is a ceramicist, sculptor, and designer. 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. Baralaye received a BFA in Ceramics from the Rhode Island School of Design and an MFA in Ceramics from the Cranbrook Academy of Art. Baralaye was an Emerging Artists Program recipient at the Museum of the African Diaspora in 2017 and an AICAD Teaching Fellow at the San Francisco Art Institute from 2016 to 2018. He is currently an Assistant Professor and Section Head of Ceramics at the College for Creative Studies in Detroit.

**About Friedman Benda**

Friedman Benda identifies and advances key narratives that intersect contemporary design, craft, architecture, fine art, and cutting-edge technological research. The gallery promotes synthesis between leading creative thinkers and makers by creating opportunities to advance new connections within the global design community. Friedman Benda is committed to a critical view of design history. We aim to expand the design dialogue from its established sources, exploring perspectives that have previously been marginalized. Spanning five continents and four generations, Friedman Benda represents a roster of seminal established and emerging designers, as well as historically significant estates. With locations in New York and Los Angeles, the gallery's exhibitions, publications and collaborations with institutions have played a vital role in the development of the contemporary design market and scholarship since 2007. For further information please visit [www.friedmanbenda.com](http://www.friedmanbenda.com) and the gallery's Instagram [@friedman\\_benda](https://www.instagram.com/friedman_benda) and [YouTube channel](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC...).

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