

FRIEDMAN BENDA  
515 W 26TH STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10001

THE NEW TRANSCENDENCE  
CURATED BY GLENN ADAMSON  
JAN 11 – FEB 24 2024



Samuel Ross, *Optimistic uncertainties solicit integration (Material Articulation)*, 2021

**New York** – *The New Transcendence*, the last in a series of three pace-setting exhibitions curated by Glenn Adamson for Friedman Benda, will explore the place of the spiritual in contemporary design today. The works on view are infused with profound significance, whether as relics, ritual tools, or representations. The New Transcendence is not an exhibition about religion in the organized, traditional, or dogmatic sense. Rather, it aims to discover how design can serve as a vehicle for personal and societal transcendence.

The exhibition includes work by six designers: **Ini Archibong, Andrea Branzi, Stephen Burks, Najla El Zein, Courtney M. Leonard, and Samuel Ross**. Each of the participants has their own perspective, yet one thing unites them: the impetus to provide an objective, material anchor for the subjective and ultimately private nature of spiritual belief. The immaterial means something different, today, in our digital age – perhaps making physical artifacts more crucial as anchors for transcendent experience.

In tribute to Andrea Branzi's longstanding and deep thinking on this topic, three works from his Roots series are included, which he wrote "similar to thought or philosophy. They don't have a reason why they're there. They are brought there by streams, the wind." This same quality pervades the work selected for *The New Transcendence*, we acknowledge that they originate not only from the designer's process, but as a result of some larger force, perhaps ancestral, perhaps cosmic.

The project marks the culmination of a trilogy that began with *A New Realism* (2021), which looked at pragmatism and craft-based, materially-intensive process, and continued with *The New Figuration* (2022), an examination of the nearly unprecedented exploration of the human image in design today. As with the previous exhibitions in the series, the goal of *The New Transcendence* is not so much to champion individual designers as it is to establish a current archetype of practice. We are reflecting on tendencies even as we see them emerge, presenting a mosaic of possibilities which may someday (in hindsight) be more easily recognized as a distinct pattern. Having begun with raw matter, then continued with images of the body, the series now concludes with a glance towards something higher – perhaps even universal.

#### About Glenn Adamson

Glenn Adamson is a curator, writer and historian based in New York and London. He has previously been Director of the Museum of Arts and Design and Head of Research at the V&A. Dr. Adamson's publications include *Thinking Through Craft* (2007); *The Craft Reader* (2010); *Postmodernism: Style*

and *Subversion* (2011, with Jane Pavitt); *The Invention of Craft* (2013); *Art in the Making* (2016, with Julia Bryan-Wilson); *Fewer Better Things: The Hidden Wisdom of Objects* (2018); *Objects: USA 2020*, and *Craft: An American History* (2021). His next book, *A Century of Tomorrows*, will be published by Bloomsbury in 2024. Dr. Adamson is Artistic Director for Design Doha, a new biennial festival for Qatar (forthcoming in 2024), and editor of *Material Intelligence*, a quarterly online journal published by the Chipstone Foundation. His current curatorial projects include *Worlds Within: The Art of Toshiko Takaezu* at the Isamu Noguchi Museum (forthcoming in 2024, and touring thereafter).

## About Participating Artists



**Ini Archibong** imparts a deeply personal and spiritual approach to design. Archibong's practice is characterized by his dedication to craftsmanship and to the integrity of his chosen materials, as well as an unyielding passion for world cultures and his own Nigerian heritage. Archibong was born in 1983 in Pasadena, California. Originally trained in Industrial Design, Archibong graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Environmental Design from the Art Center College of Design. Upon graduation, he moved to Singapore to work alongside Tim Kobe, who developed the Apple store concept. He then relocated to Switzerland where he received a Master of Arts in Luxury Design and Craftsmanship from L'École cantonale d'art de Lausanne (ECAL). Since establishing his own studio in 2010, Archibong has gone on to collaborate on numerous high-profile projects including with Hermès and Knoll. His works have been exhibited at museums and public institutions worldwide and most recently in the exhibition *Speechless* (2019), co-organized by the Dallas Museum of Art, TX and the High Museum of Art, Atlanta, GA, and *Connected* (2020) at the Design Museum in London.



Seminal Italian architect, designer and educator **Andrea Branzi** (1938-2023) has held a lifelong fascination with how humans interact with objects, and has sought to reconcile design and architecture with the evolving challenges of contemporary society. Born in Florence in 1938, Branzi studied architecture at the Florence School of Architecture, receiving his degree in 1966. From 1964 to 1974, he was a founding member of the experimental group Archizoom, which envisioned the groundbreaking *No-Stop-City* among other projects. Branzi was a key member of Studio Alchimia, founded in 1976, and went on to associate with the Memphis Group in the early 1980s. He distinguished himself as a co-founder of Domus Academy, the first international post-graduate school for design, and was a professor and chairman of the School of Interior Design at the Politecnico di Milano until 2009. Branzi is a three-time recipient of the Compasso d'Oro, honored for individual or group effort in 1979, 1987, and 1995. In 2008, Branzi was named an Honorary Royal Designer in the United Kingdom and he received an honorary degree from La Sapienza in Rome. That same year, his work was featured in an installation at the Fondation Cartier, Paris. In 2018, Branzi was the recipient of the prestigious Rolf Schock Prize in Visual Arts by the Swedish Royal Academy of Fine Arts. Branzi's works are held in the permanent collections of the Centre Pompidou, Paris; Israel Museum, Jerusalem; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX; Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, and Victoria & Albert Museum, London among others.



Chicago native, **Stephen Burks** is an industrial designer whose innovative approach to design synthesizes craft, community, and industry. He has collaborated with artisans and craftspeople in over ten countries on six continents. His socially engaged practice seeks to broaden the limits of design consciousness by challenging who benefits from and participates in contemporary design. He has had solo exhibitions and led curatorial projects at the Studio Museum in Harlem (*Stephen Burks Man Made*, 2011), the Museum of Art & Design (*Stephen Burks, Are You a Hybrid*, 2011), and the High Museum of Art (*Stephen Burks: Shelter in Place*, 2022). Most recently, in the fall of 2023, *Stephen Burks: Spirit Houses* opened at Volume Gallery in Chicago and *Stephen Burks: Shelter in Place* (Nov 18 - April 14, 2024) traveled to the Philadelphia Museum of Art where Stephen, the only African-American to win the Cooper Hewitt National Design Award in product design, became the first African American to receive the Collab Design Excellence Award.



**Najla El Zein**'s artworks explore the relationship between form, use, and space. El Zein's approach is rooted in her personal observations and experiences as she stresses the importance of the expression through the creation of objects. Born in Beirut in 1983, El Zein moved to Paris at the age of two where she studied at the École Camondo, receiving a BA in Product Design and a MA in Interior Architecture and Spatial Design. Upon graduation, she worked in the Netherlands before relocating to Beirut in 2011. Her first solo exhibition, *Transition* (2019) marked the debut of three bodies of work that acted as varied embodiments of El Zein's personal journey: *Distortion*, *Fragmented Pillar*, and *Seduction*. To coincide with the World Cup 2022, El Zein was invited by Qatar Museum to intervene in two public spaces in Doha: "Us, Her, Him" at Flag Plaza

and "Her, Him" at the National Museum of Qatar Roundabout. El Zein's pieces have been acquired for the permanent collections of museums such as the Dallas Museum of Art, TX and the Victoria & Albert Museum, London.



Born in 1980, **Courtney M. Leonard** is a Shinnecock artist and filmmaker, whose work explores marine biology, Indigenous food sovereignty, migration, and human environmental impact. Leonard's current projects articulate the multiple definitions of the term breach and investigate and document Indigenous communities' historical ties to water, marine life, and native cultures of subsistence. Leonard's work is in the permanent collections of the United States Art in Embassies, the Crocker Art Museum, the Heard Museum, the ASU Art Museum and Ceramic Research Center, the Peabody Essex Museum, the Newark Museum, the Weisman Art Museum, the Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, the Museum of the North, the Mystic Seaport Museum, the Pomona Museum of Art, the Hood Museum of Art, the Denver Art Museum, the Autry Museum and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Leonard has been the recipient of numerous awards, fellowships, and residencies that include The Andy Warhol Foundation, The Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, The Rasmuson Foundation, The United States Art In Embassies Program, and The Native Arts and Culture Foundation.



A polymathic creative force, Hublot Award-winning British designer, creative director and artist, **Dr. Samuel Ross**, deftly mines the cross-sections of socio-geographic relationships, enlisting rhizomatic micro and macro references in the formulation of his works. Born in Brixton in 1991, Ross graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Graphic Design and Illustration at De Montfort University, Leicester. Upon graduation, Ross embarked on a career as a product designer, working for a number of high-profile brands, advertising agencies and industrial design practices, while concurrently focusing on his own creative endeavors spanning experimental film, street art and garment design. In 2015, Ross self-funded his label, A-COLD-WALL\*—renowned for its material investigation and innovation, married with incisive explorations of Brutalist and abstract forms and precise execution. During the Hublot Prize exhibition at London's Serpentine Gallery in 2019, Ross launched his latest venture – SR\_A (Samuel Ross & Associates), an industrial design studio operating within the fields of interior installation, architecture, furniture design, sound design and sculptural/visual communication. Ross' accolades include being named the British Fashion Awards' Emerging Menswear Designer (2018) and receiving the Hublot Design Prize (2019). In 2020, he was named as one of Forbes' 30 under 30 [Europe] and won both the GQ USA Fashion Award and People of the Year British Fashion Award, the latter specifically for his philanthropic endeavors. He has also been a finalist for both the LVMH Prize and ANDAM Award. He has collaborated with brands, including Converse, Dr Marten's, Mercedes-Benz, Nike, and Oakley, as well as noteworthy artists Virgil Abloh, Daniel Arsham, Futura and Takashi Murakami. Specific SR\_A partnerships include those with Apple, Beats, Nike, Medicom, Hublot LVMH, Kohler, and Acqua Di Parma.

### **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 five generations, Friedman Benda represents a roster of seminal established and emerging designers, as well as historically significant estates. With locations in New York, Los Angeles and Paris, 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 and YouTube channel @FriedmanBenda.

###

### **Media Contacts:**

Blue Medium, Inc.  
Michelle DiLello  
[michelle@bluemedium.com](mailto:michelle@bluemedium.com)  
T: +1 (212) 675-1800

Friedman Benda  
Lucy Gong  
[lucy@friedmanbenda.com](mailto:lucy@friedmanbenda.com)  
T: +1 (212) 239-8700