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designboom

Paul Cocksedge talks transformation, and object-making at all scales for Friedman Benda's 'Design in Dialogue'

By Nina Azzarello
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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 40 episodes, and will continue with a lineup of future guests, each offering unparalleled insight into the sensibilities, musings, and memories of today's creative protagonists. see our recent feature of [samuel ross on society, socialist value systems, and self](#), and [thaddeus mosley on sculpting with the spontaneity of jazz](#).

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on october 28, 2020, [design in dialogue](#) welcomed prolific and innovative british designer [paul cocksedge](#). in a conversation with glenn adamson, cocksedge discussed his process-driven approach to object-making at all scales, which generates dramatic and unprecedented forms through acts of transformation. the designer shared insights about his experimental methodology, and also reflected on the different scales and contexts of his work, from gallery display to public space.

watch the full video interview 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](#).



sidewalk life is enhanced with 'please be seated' at london design festival 2019
image by mark cocksedge, courtesy of paul cocksedge. read more on designboom [here](#)

[cocksedge](#) began by describing the broad scope of his practice, and the variety of mediums and methodologies it spans. 'it's a collage of different ideas, scales, materials,' he says. 'what's quite interesting is hearing people describe the work that we do — some people will say product design, public art, small-scale architecture, or interactive public projects. I think for me, I see them all very much connected, because I see there's a thread. my drive is to have an idea and then follow it without restriction. it's always quite fascinating to see where an idea can take you.'



the large-scale installation responds to the rhythmic heartbeat of the surrounding community. image by mark cocksedge, courtesy of paul cocksedge. read more on designboom [here](#)

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cocksedge went on to describe one of his earliest works, 'styrene' — a student project under the guidance of ron arad at the royal college of art. arad tasked the young designers to 'grow a product', and in deciphering and following the brief, cocksedge began his first experimentations with material transformation. after placing a polystyrene cup in an oven, he watched it drastically change in property and 'grow' into a new form, and eventually he turned the resulting objects into a hanging light (see 'styrene' at the bottom of the page). 'a lot of the things that inspire me is when a reaction happens, like heat,' cocksedge continues. 'you take something, heat it up, and something inevitably happens. there always needs to be a catalyst to make something.'



'excavation: evicted', in collaboration with friedman benda and beatrice trussardi, during milan design week 2017. image by mark cocksedge, courtesy of friedman benda and paul cocksedge. read more on designboom [here](#)

this sense of stimulus is ever-evident in the 'excavation: evicted' series commissioned by friedman benda, which was born from his unexpected eviction from his studio in london. cocksedge started drilling into the floor of the hackney building after finding out from his landlord that the site would be transformed into luxury apartments, and extracted hundreds of cylinders of concrete — even discovering victorian bricks from the building's former life as a stable. after sanding, polishing and cutting the cores, cocksedge incorporated their forms into a series of six pieces that contrasted the coarseness of the concrete with the lightness of glass. 'I have designer friends that get a design brief, but this was a reaction — a reaction to a knock on the door, to the

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situation we were put in', he says. 'it makes me feel that I'm being true to my creativity. there's was no brief. we did this because I felt this was necessary to release an idea.'



the objects are the physical and visual reaction of cocksedge's eviction from his london studio. image by mark cocksedge, courtesy of friedman benda and paul cocksedge. read more on designboom [here](#)

from the context of a gallery setting to the openness of the public sphere, cocksedge's work has spanned indoor and outdoor settings, and both private and communal conditions. 'it goes back to my upbringing I think,' he says on his enjoyment of creating work for the public space. 'I'm from quite a down-to-earth, working class background, and the world of an art gallery was only something I discovered probably in my 20s. it's hard to believe — I'm in london, but my parents were taking me to the natural history museum, or the science museum, but they weren't in that sphere. I become addicted to the thrill of the art scene, and creating objects that people buy, and that was so exciting — working in these territories where there are no limits. however, I make my pieces and they wind up in peoples homes that I never see, and I miss that connection. so if I just stayed in that territory, I would feel slightly unfulfilled. the public projects bring me back to the street, back to the community, back to where I'm from. the public projects are part of my personality, and I need that balance otherwise things wouldn't make sense.'

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'exploded view' bridge in cape town to use invasive eucalyptus tree wood. read more on designboom [here](#)



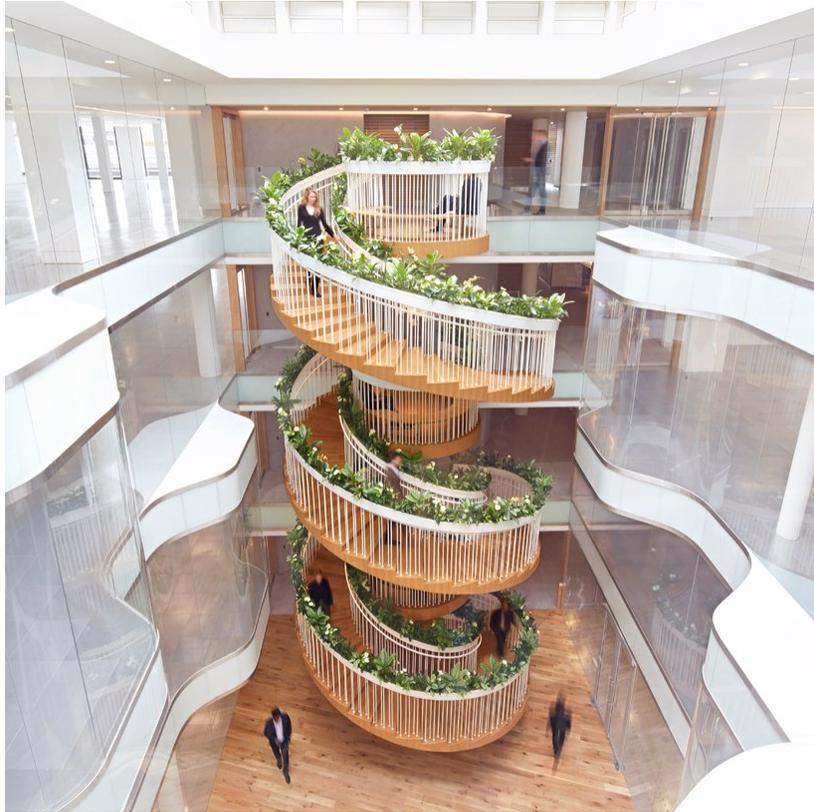
the 'push' series brings giant blocks of concrete together with sheets of metal. image by mark cocksedge, courtesy of friedman benda and paul cocksedge

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'capture' is a 1.6 meter hand-spun aluminum domed lamp, whose concave construction holds a diffused glow. read more on designboom [here](#)

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cocksedge designed 'living' staircase through ampersand's new london office. read more on designboom [here](#)



'styrene' — a student project by cocksedge and one of his earliest works — was inspired by the concept of growth. by applying heat to polystyrene, the form changed, and with it, the properties of the material

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portrait of paul cocksedge

image by mark cocksedge, courtesy of friedman benda and paul cocksedge

***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 paul cocksedge 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](#).

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