

For Immediate Release

Ron Arad: Fishes & Crows, 1985-1994

June 21 – July 27, 2018

Opening reception: Thursday, June 21: 6-8pm



Left: Ron Arad, *Tinker Chair* (1988)

Right: Ron Arad, *Italian Fish* (1989)

New York, NY – Friedman Benda is pleased to present a survey of the pioneering early work of Ron Arad. “Fishes & Crows” examines the critical period of his career between 1985 and 1994, and presents rarely seen works from this time, including early prototypes. This marks the gallery’s first solo exhibition of Arad’s work since “Guarded Thoughts” in 2008.

For Arad, this decade was marked by constant experimentation, motivated by a profound questioning of the status quo. This excavation of new possibilities culminated in some of the most iconic works of late twentieth-century design. In 1981, Arad founded his Covent Garden studio “One Off,” which quickly became legendary for its look and energy, equal parts construction and deconstruction. His first works there were Duchampian experiments, made with found industrial fittings like Kee Klamps and discarded Rover seats. These paved the way toward more freely sculpted explorations in welded sheet steel: collisions of raw materials, industrial methods, and complex abstraction that immediately suggested a connection to the British punk scene and cemented his underground status.

During his formative years, Arad shunned machine tooling, which was at the time associated with modernist mass production, and instead adopted lower-tech and immediate methods. He coaxed remarkably expressive volumes out of metal with tools like a hand welder, a metal compactor, or a simple rubber-headed hammer. His *Tinker Chairs* demonstrate the potency of these direct means: paradoxically smashed into existence, they extended the psychological affect of design into unprecedentedly confrontational territory.

Arad’s practice was a counterweight to the much more slick and populist Memphis movement, which was emanating from Milan at the same time. Both impulses can be seen as aspects of postmodernism. While direct process served as Arad’s primary inspiration, the playful allusion and subversive humor that one might associate with Memphis were also present in his practice. He sought a degree of accessibility with his witty forms and titles, such as *Looming Lloyd*, *Wild Crow*, or *Italian Fish*.

By the late 1980s and early 1990s, Arad was beginning to explore more polished and precise forms, anticipating later experiments. The *Cone series* marked a key initial step in this direction; though still somewhat rough and ready in their execution, the pieces have a geometrical clarity that was new to his practice. This impulse was brought to tremendously satisfying resolution in his *Big Easy* furniture, cleanly articulated compositions of shaped planes and hard seams.

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“Fishes and Crows” tracks this progression in Arad’s approach, from deliberate crudeness to increasing sophistication. The exhibition will bring scholarly attention and research to this body of work, one of the most generative of its era in any discipline. In many ways, the design field is just catching up to it now.

About Ron Arad

Ron Arad was born in Tel Aviv in 1951 and studied at the Jerusalem Academy of Art (1971-73) and at the Architectural Association in London (1974-79). In 1989, he and Caroline Thorman founded 'Ron Arad Associates'. Arad has exhibited at many major museums and galleries throughout the world, and his work is considered definitive within public collections of contemporary design, including those at the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Metropolitan Museum of Art, N.Y; Victoria & Albert Museum, London and the Vitra Design Museum, among many others. In 2017, Ron Arad along with British architect David Adjaye was named the winner of a competition to create the UK's National Holocaust Memorial in London along with British architect David Adjaye.

About Friedman Benda

Friedman Benda is dedicated to presenting established and emerging designers who create historically significant work and are at the forefront of their practice. Founded in 2007, the gallery’s exhibitions and publications have played a vital role in the development of the contemporary design market and education, and take a comprehensive approach to work that intersects the fields of design, craft and art. Friedman Benda represents an international roster of designers spanning six continents and multiple generations.

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