

DESIGN MIAMI /



Daniel Arsham

T H E
P O L L Y

**Daniel Arsham's artistry
knows no bounds.**

By Ian Phillips



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Daniel Arsham,
photo by James Law.



From left: Arsham in his studio, Kith Paris designed by Snarkitecture; photos courtesy of Daniel Arsham Studio.





The New York-based artist Daniel Arsham never watches movies on planes. Instead, he packs old sketchbooks in his hand luggage. "I go through notes of things I made in the past and kind of rehash ideas," he says. It's easy to understand why Arsham has no time to lose. At any time, he is juggling some 100 different projects with a scope and diversity that is quite simply mind-boggling.

At 42 years old, Arsham is a product of the modern era's belief that creative talent is and should be transferable. While his principal medium of artistic expression is sculpture, his projects refuse to be narrowly categorized - a pair of monochrome sneakers for Adidas; a bracelet inspired by barbed wire for Tiffany & Co; a collaboration with Kim Jones for the Dior summer 2020 menswear show; a pebble-like sink for Kohler using a 3D-printed ceramic technique developed specially by the brand; set design for legendary choreographer Merce Cunningham. Then, there

is his ongoing collaboration with lifestyle brand Kith, which saw Arsham's multidisciplinary design firm Snarkitecture (cofounded with Alex Mustonen) design many of the store's global flagships, including the Paris location where Arsham debuted his unisex clothing line called Objects IV Life - made largely from a stock of Japanese denim he found sitting in a Los Angeles warehouse.

The idea of juggling so many creative balls would have others breaking into a sweat, but Arsham seems to take it all in stride. Marc Benda, owner and gallery director of Friedman Benda, describes Arsham as "calm, disciplined and organized." Arsham gets up each day at 6.30am, spends an hour at the gym before work and arrives at his Long Island studio at 9:00am. For him, the notion of working in disparate disciplines seems to present a welcome challenge. As the curator Glenn Adamson notes, "He's committed to an ideal of art that is pervasive and not set apart."

Objects IV Life, a clothing
line by Daniel Arsham.
Photos courtesy of
Daniel Arsham Studio.







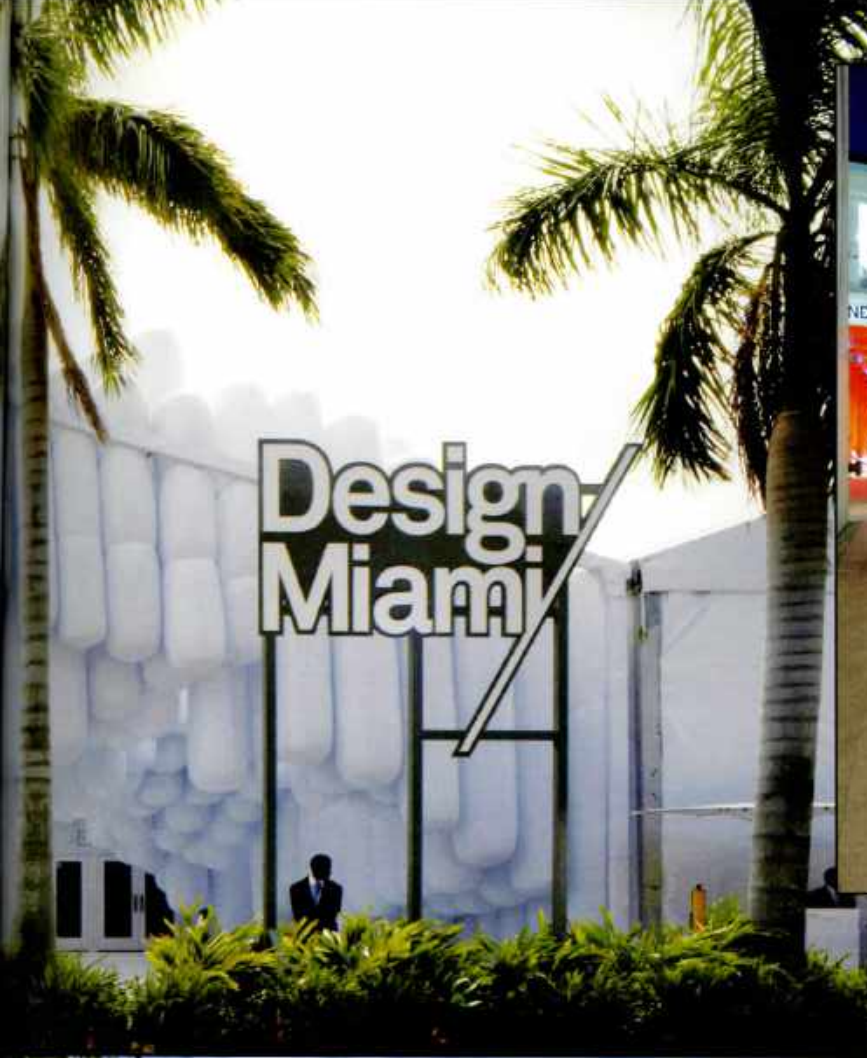
Arsham at a Cleveland Cavaliers game; photo courtesy of Daniel Arsham. Snarkitecture's *Drift* at the entrance of Design Miami/ 2012 and their 2015 *Holiday* installation in the Miami Design District.

But perhaps the role he currently seems most pleased to occupy is creative director of the NBA team the Cleveland Cavaliers (Arsham was born in Cleveland). A longtime fan, he travels to about five or six home games each season and counts current and former players like Darius Garland and Kevin Love as friends. He was introduced to the Cavs' owner, Dan Gilbert, through the dealers Anthony and JJ Curis of the Detroit-based gallery the Library Street Collective, and took up his current position in 2020. So far, Arsham has redesigned the logo, the kit, and the courts, and oversees the team's social media accounts. "It's pretty much my stamp on everything visual," he says.

Aside from Cleveland and New York, Arsham has maintained strong links to the city of Miami since his family moved there when he was five. "The area where we lived was right on the edge of the Everglades," he recounts. "It felt very wild. I remember there was a canal close to my house where there were alligators." He went on to attend the Design and Architecture Senior High School in the

Design District and later returned to Miami for a time after graduating from The Cooper Union in New York in 2003. He initially ran an exhibition space with friends called The House in Edgewater (a neighborhood in Miami), which was where he first met his Paris-based dealer of nearly 20 years, Emmanuel Perrotin. For a while, he also shared a free studio above a couch dealer opposite his high school in the Design District. "The neighborhood was very different from how it is now," he recalls. "Many of the buildings back then were vacant."

The Magic City has also been the site of some of Arsham's most notable projects. In 2012, Snarkitecture wrapped the Design Miami/ pavilion with an installation consisting of giant vinyl tubes of various heights that one observer described as "inflatable sausages." Three years later during art week, they came up with an installation entitled *Holiday* at Palm Court and Paseo Ponti in the Design District, which took the form of four giant fiberglass and foam candy canes each measuring roughly 30 feet tall.







Top: Renderings of The Ursa with exterior and interior art and furniture designed by Arsham. Bottom: Arsham's *Objects for Living* presentation at the Friedman Benda booth at Design Miami/ 2019; photo courtesy of Design Miami/.

Design Miami/ was also the site of Arsham's 2019 exhibit titled *Objects for Living* presented by Friedman Benda. The immersive space filled with furniture and objects was modeled on Arsham's living room from his Long Island home designed in 1971 by modernist architect Norman Jaffe. Benda praised Arsham's "constant material innovation" and his "focus on superb execution" when discussing the follow up exhibit at the New York gallery in 2021 titled *Objects for Living: Collection II*. That collection, conceived during the COVID-19 pandemic, was said to originate from freely sculpting with his children's Play-Doh.

More recently, Arsham was approached by the architectural firm Arquitectonica and real estate developer Dacra to design three bas-reliefs for the façade of The Ursa, a new 15-story office building due to open in the Miami Design District in the fall of 2024. He explains that they will be inspired by friezes from antiquity, but will incorporate objects from contemporary culture, such as cars. "It will look like these things were found somewhere, brought to the building and suspended on the exterior," he says.

An exploration of ancient remains is at the very heart of Arsham's practice as a multidisciplinary artist. His fascination grew after a trip to Easter Island in 2011, a visit that inspired his attempts to create "an archaeology of the present." His method is to recast everyday objects such as basketballs, game controllers and sneakers in other materials

like sand, selenite, and volcanic ash, and to erode the resulting sculptures to make them look as if they were in a state of decay. "It's almost like a fossil that has been reformed," he says. He refers to them as "future relics of the present" and deliberately adheres to a very reduced palette—a decision that has been linked to his own color-blindness. Arsham himself equates them to Greek and Roman sculptures, which were initially decorated with bright hues that have disappeared over the course of time.

A few days after our interview, Arsham was due to fly to Japan for the opening of a new show entitled *31st Century Still Lives* at Perrotin Tokyo, composed of five still life paintings, two new busts of the Greek god Hermes and the Italian nobleman Giuliano de' Medici, and three movie posters (*E.T.*, *Back to the Future*, and *2001: A Space Odyssey*) recast in geological crystals. He was also busy working on three books, transforming a former firehouse on Lafayette Street in SoHo into a new home for him and his family, and preparing for a major new museum show, which will debut at the Orange County Museum in mid-February before traveling to Cleveland and Miami. It will, he promises, offer a very comprehensive overview of his career to date. "So far, my exhibitions tend to have been very minimal, with very few works," he says. "But this one will be different. It will feel like walking into an art storage unit with shelving, with literally thousands of different objects on it."