

Wallpaper*

Fernando Laposse brings pink furry furniture and heroic farmers to Friedman Benda

Fernando Laposse sheds new light on the decline of biodiversity and the disruption of rural life in his native Mexico through furniture and tapestry on show at New York gallery Friedman Benda until 14 October 2023

By Adrian Madlener
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Fernando Laposse and work from his show, 'Ghosts of our Towns', at Friedman Benda. (Image credit: Courtesy of Friedman Benda and Fernando Laposse)

'Ghosts of our Towns' is Mexican designer Fernando Laposse's first solo show with New York's Friedman Benda gallery, on view until 14 October 2023. The exhibition is an overview of Laposse's research, an ongoing body of work shedding new light on the decline of biodiversity and the disruption of rural life in his native Mexico through new furniture and tapestry.

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Fernando Laposse: from humble materials to refined objects



'Totomoxtle Snake Coffee Table'. (Image credit: Courtesy of Friedman Benda and Fernando Laposse)

Fernando Laposse first grabbed headlines with his Totomoxtle project, his first foray into transforming humble natural materials into refined objects. Corn husk – a food by-product that is normally thrown away – was harnessed as a puzzle-like veneer inlaid into various limited-edition furnishings and accessories.

The project revealed how the staple vegetable corn comes in a vast array of heirloom varieties based on different geographic conditions. This variety is at risk of disappearing due to the proliferation of a standard genetically modified all-yellow variant preferred by the mass farming industry. For many, this is the only type of corn they know.

Collaborating with local farmers in Tonahuixtla, a small village in the Mexican state of Puebla, Laposse sought to reveal the potential application of these rare strains of corn and in doing so, re-employed and re-emboldened people who were otherwise out of work owing to the recent infiltration of mass production in the region.

Initiating a form of regenerative agriculture in the town to cultivate these near-extinct crops and find new applications for the use of their husks, he helped preserve a cultural tradition and spawn a new type of design.



A pair of 'Corn Kumiko' sideboards in front of Laposse's 'Resting Place' tapestries, depicting the heroic farmers of Cherán. (Image credit: Photography by Timothy Doyon. Courtesy of Friedman Benda and Fernando Laposse)

For Laposse, the effects of biodiversity loss are closely linked with social inequality. It's a preoccupation that has led him to develop numerous material research projects; exhibit at major international exhibitions; participate in top-billed conferences; and impart his expertise at design schools around the world.

Furniture and now textile design – as revealed in this latest exhibition – serve as the perfect mediums for him to document this correlation; the unavoidable links between environmental degradation and the negative social impacts of global trade on local agriculture and food culture. Through this practice, the designer had aimed to inspire fresh awareness but also celebrate the diversity of rural life and perhaps even revive the distinct farming and craft traditions that so rarely receive the attention they deserve.

Fernando Laposse's 'Ghosts of our Towns' at Friedman Benda, New York

'Ghosts of our Towns' builds on this trajectory and highlights Laposse's mastery of fibre; age-old natural materials like sisal, and the continued refinement of the corn husk by-product he's spearheaded.

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'Pink Furry Armchair'. (Image credit: Courtesy of Friedman Benda and Fernando Laposse)

'For him, "to get to the root, one must go to the soil", and to work with fibres is to engage with all the complexities around them: environmental crisis, loss of biodiversity, community disintegration, and forced migration,' curator Glenn Adamson writes in an accompanying exhibition catalogue.

The show includes the 'Totomoxtle Snake Coffee Table' and 'Corn Kumiko' credenza, both deftly implementing Laposse's signature corn husk material. The 'Hair of the Dog' cabinet, 'Furry Mirror', and 'Pink Furry Armchair' reveal his exploration of hand-knotted raw sisal and agave plant leaves.

A series of wall-hung tapestries entitled 'Resting Place' depict the heroic farmers of Cherán, a self-governed town in another rural region that has fought hard to protect its land and community from crime and deforestation. In keeping with his unique approach, Laposse opted to dye the various pieces with the pits of avocado endemic to the area.

'The avocado skins and pits we have been using were collected from a guacamole vendor in the local street market next to my studio in Mexico City,' he explains. 'This is the waste material from his small stand, from which we organised daily collections over the past year or so. The avocado pits give us all the pinks, peaches, and browns, while the yellows are made from Day of the Dead marigolds collected near my other studio in

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Tonahuixtla, the town where we've been growing corn since 2011. I see these portrait tapestries as a bridge between the Totomoxtle project, the start of my career, and the avocado exploration, the next chapter in my practice.'



'Resting Place' daybed, 'Don Emiliano' tapestry. (Image credit: Photography by Timothy Doyon. Courtesy of Friedman Benda and Fernando Laposse)



'Hair of the Dog' bar cabinet, made of agave fibres and brass. (Image credit: Courtesy of Friedman Benda and Fernando Laposse)

By remaining involved in every step of material development – from planting to extraction and application – Laposse gives new meaning to the idea of craft fabrication, a more considered and controlled alternative to mass production. His limited-edition designs serve as provocations, conceptual demonstrations of material generation and making processes that could be more widely adopted. For him, it's a means of uncovering new, innovative possibilities but also of giving back to the land and to the communities that have managed it so carefully for so long.