

How Design Wunderkind Samuel Ross Reimagined the Humble Park Bench

The designer, artist, and fashion-forward creative discusses his new public works for the Miami Design District.

By Lee Carter



Samuel Ross on one of his new benches at Design Miami Paris in October.

The humble public bench has undergone a radical revamp at Design Miami this year, thanks to artist and designer Samuel Ross. The British wunderkind has crafted a series of 12 innovative benches—in three styles—for use by the Miami Design District, currently and permanently installed along its posh promenades.

Carter, Lee, "How Design Wunderkind Samuel Ross Reimagined the Humble Park Bench," *Artnet*, December 5, 2023.

The site-specific installation—previewed at [Design Miami Paris](#) in October—comes just in time for Miami Art Week, with its throngs of well-heeled visitors parading about the slick galleries, luxury boutiques, and tony restaurants of the 16-acre district. Ultramodern and utilitarian, the sculptures will no doubt offer welcome respite for the crush.



A Samuel Ross bench located in the Miami Design District.

Yet despite their futuristic appearance, the benches sit in the canon of British sculpture, according to Ross. “When you view the work,” he explained via video from his London studio, “you can see the relationship to [Anthony] Caro, [Barbara] Hepworth, and [Henry] Moore, which is purposeful. I’m extending the lineage of British sculpture and abstraction.”

In particular, he said, the benches are a nod to Moore’s *The Arch* (1979–1980), a travertine marble monolith in Kensington Gardens that deftly combines architectural and anatomical forms. As a child, his father would often take him to see the sculpture. “Being raised by two artists, one who went to Central Saint Martins and the other who paints religiously, will have that effect.”



A Samuel Ross bench located in the Miami Design District.

Ross started the bench designs as charcoal sketches before translating them into 3D format and shaping the CNC steel in his workshop. In all, the process took 12 weeks to cycle through numerous iterations and prototypes. In addition to form, Ross also gave a lot of thought to human haptics, allowing for a smooth interaction between the benches and their use by people.

“Housing the body is so interesting,” he said, “and the way temperature, elevation, texture, and materials come into play.” He considered “local variations that I don’t have to think about in England.” In other words, color absorption and heat on a steel sheet surface. He ultimately went with a chalk-white surface and a gloss veneer to reflect the sun’s rays.



Sketches of benches by Samuel Ross.

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“The tension between the sculptural and the functional is an obsession of mine. The line between the two is very exciting to push and pull.” Ross, however, is no stranger to pushing boundaries. It’s at the core of his product and industrial design company, SR_A, which is taking on increasingly complex commissions, most recently a tourbillon wristwatch for Hublot and headphones for Beats, leading Apple to offer him a newly created plum position, that of Principal Design Consultant for Beats.

SR_A is only part of his design ambitions. During Paris Fashion Week, his fashion line A Cold Wall has become a must-see runway event, particularly for its collaborations with brands including Nike, Dr. Martens, and Timberland. In fact, launched in 2015, the label was first on his to-do list of career objectives—at the urging of his mentor and friend, the late Virgil Abloh.



Samuel Ross with his new faucet for Kohler.

Fortuitously, one of the first actions Ross took upon finishing graduate school was contacting the celebrated architect-turned-artistic director of Louis Vuitton men’s. What began as an internship at Abloh’s own label, Off-White, led to the creation of A Cold Wall—which, in 2022, was the subject of a fashion exhibition at London’s V&A museum.

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Ross's forays into abstract painting are finding success, too. His exhibition at London's [White Cube](#) in April was well-received. So, too, was a show of granite sculptures at Friedman Benda in May in New York, his second solo show with the gallery.



Bench by Samuel Ross at 'Mirror Mirror: Reflections on Design' at Chatsworth House, U.K.

There is another reason Ross has come to Miami, and that's to present his inaugural collaboration with Kohler, the American bathroom company. Debuting at Design Miami, Ross has designed a distinctively angular double faucet, the Formation 01, that dispenses a smooth sheet of water. It's cast entirely in a recycled epoxy, a new material developed by SR_A that "enables better angulation." Created in solid orange, Ross's signature hue, the striking tap will be sold in a limited edition of 299. In April 2024, Kohler will also host an installation by Ross at Salone del Mobile in Milan, taking over the Kohler palazzo.

This isn't the first time Ross has participated in Miami Art Week. He started visiting Art Basel and Design Miami in 2020, he said, when "there was this shift happening, a convergence of commerce and artistry that was coming to a head, the coalition of all of these corporate entities and creative communities coming together that really defines Art Basel for me. It seems to have quite a serrated edge to it."