

FRIEDMAN BENDA
515 W 26TH STREET
NEW YORK NY 10001

NAJLA EL ZEIN
OPACITY, TRANSPARENCY, AND EVERYTHING IN BETWEEN
JUN 27 – AUG 10 2024



Najla El Zein, *Ensemble n° 6*, 2023

Opening Reception: Thursday June 27th 6 – 8 pm

New York – Friedman Benda is pleased to announce *Opacity, transparency, and everything in between*, Lebanese designer Najla El Zein’s second solo exhibition with the gallery, opening on June 27, 2024.

Artist Statement:

Opacity, transparency, and everything in between reflects on one’s initial perceptions, misunderstandings, and the necessity to decipher the layers beneath, as truth often lies between the lines. The title of the exhibition came to me long before its form or direction materialized, representing my persistent quest for a deeper understanding of life’s intricacies. This exploration naturally extends into my artistic expression, where I seek to methodically break down and interpret these observations.

Opacity, transparency, and everything in between gained particular significance during my initial foray into working with glass, a material that always fascinated me for its ability to encapsulate life from within. Unlike stone, which reveals the historical and slow geological passage of time, glass captures and preserves the magic of a fleeting moment. Delving into the crafting process of stone, glass, and ceramic – all equally requiring a team of skilled craftsmen – emphasizes that the works do not spontaneously come to life. Rather, they require a collaborative effort where individuals engage in dialogue and establish deep connections. Manual work demands dedication, passion, and reflection, with each piece telling its own narrative within the multiple layers of creation.

The complexity of “everything in between” would not be translated into words. Hence, my objective with this series of works is to convey such understanding and nuances through the dimensions of time, space, materiality, light, reflection, use, touch, and emotions, hoping to discover answers and provoke new questions.

My profound interest in human relationships is rooted in a situated context. I draw inspiration from my surroundings – those I live and work with, my roots, and my current environment. Everyday experiences contribute to an ongoing learning process. *Opacity, transparency, and everything in between* serves as a testament to that journey, weaving together personal reflections with material explorations. The diverse mediums of stone, glass, and ceramic enrich this artistic venture, allowing the authenticity of each material, through a particular subject, to express its true essence.

About Najla El Zein

Born in Beirut in 1983, Najla El Zein is a Lebanese-French designer and artist based in Amsterdam. She completed her education at the Ecole Camondo in Paris, earning a BA in product design and an MA in interior architecture and spatial design. Her first solo exhibition, "Transition" (2019), marked the debut of three bodies of work: *Distortion*, *Fragmented Pillar*, and *Seduction*. These pieces delve into themes such as the unconscious, sensuality, femininity, and desire, capturing the complexities of her identity as a woman, a mother, and an artist.

In 2022, El Zein was commissioned by Qatar Museums to create large scale public permanent installations. *Us, Her, Him* at the Flag Plaza, the entrance gate of the Cultural Museum District, comprises hand-carved sculptural limestone benches spanning over 1000 feet, reflecting on the abstract notion of human connections. *Her, Him* is installed at the National Museum of Qatar roundabout.

El Zein's pieces have been acquired for the permanent collections of museums such as the Dallas Museum of Art, TX; Qatar Museums, Doha; St. Louis Art Museum, MO; and the Victoria & Albert Museum, London.



Group of five, 2024



Lovers bench, 2023



Us, Her, Him (detail), Flag Plaza, Doha, 2022

About Friedman Benda

Friedman Benda identifies and advances key narratives that intersect contemporary design, craft, architecture, fine art, and cutting-edge technological research. The gallery promotes synthesis between leading creative thinkers and makers by creating opportunities to advance new connections within the global design community. Friedman Benda is committed to a critical view of design history. We aim to expand the design dialogue from its established sources, exploring perspectives that have previously been marginalized. Spanning five continents and five generations, Friedman Benda represents a roster of seminal established and emerging designers, as well as historically significant estates. With locations in New York and Los Angeles, the gallery's exhibitions, publications and collaborations with institutions have played a vital role in the development of the contemporary design market and scholarship since 2007. For further information please visit www.friedmanbenda.com and the gallery's Instagram @friedman_benda and YouTube channel @FriedmanBenda.

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