

Galerie

At Faye Toogood's North London Studio, Cross-Pollination Is the Rule

Leading up to a solo exhibition at Friedman Benda, the British multi-hyphenate relocated her studio to an idyllic building in Camden with ample open space to foster the cross-disciplinary exchanges that have become emblematic of her practice

By Ryan Waddoups
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Faye Toogood's North London studio. Photo: Genevieve Lufkin, courtesy of Friedman Benda and Faye Toogood

It's impossible to describe Faye Toogood's creative output succinctly. Since branching out on her own following a longtime position as an editor at *The World of Interiors*, the British superstar has emerged as one of contemporary design's most prominent women. That's partially thanks to her ultra-popular Roly Poly Chair, a dish-shaped seat

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perched on four chunky cylindrical legs that helped usher in an industry-wide appreciation of neotenic furniture.

Refusing to be boxed in, Toogood has since proven to be restlessly experimental and embrace new vocabularies for her diverse creations while still retaining her core ethos of purism and tactility. They can range from exuberant rugs based on her watercolor textile collages and plump lounge chairs with detachable upholstery to rough-hewn maquettes resembling crumpled paper or twisted wrought iron, the latter stemming from her goal to “unlearn” the process of designing. Then comes her fashion proclivities, in which she applies her exploratory creative process to craft unfussy and timeless wardrobe staples she has described as “living sculpture.”



Faye Toogood. Photo: Genevieve Lutkin

Lately, Toogood has been focused on two key materials emblematic of British craftsmanship: English oak and Purbeck marble. Her experiments within this vernacular compose “Assemblage 7: Lost and Found,” a body of multilayered sculptures and collectible design that originated as clay models. She likens creating the collection to an “archaeological dig—the block was a landscape, and I was finding my treasure within this block.” After debuting in Los Angeles and the palatial Chatsworth House in Bakewell, England, “Assemblage 7” will make its eagerly awaited New York City debut at Friedman Benda on Saturday, January 11.

At the same time, Toogood was busy relocating her longtime studio from a Victorian house on London’s Redchurch Street north to Camden—a move that afforded her tight-knit team much more open space for the type of cross-pollination that has come to define her practice. Ahead of the exhibition’s opening, Toogood shared her new studio with Galerie and spoke about how the

British countryside informs her interiors, her latest art history rabbit holes, and why she considers herself to be a “tinkerer” rather than a designer.

Many of the works in “Assemblage 7” employ oak, a material with powerful resonance through British history. As someone who was immersed in nature and landscapes during your upbringing in the East Midlands, do you recall your first experience with oak? How has the material resonated with you over time?

Oak feels omnipresent in the British countryside, in the woods, interiors, and architecture all around you. When I started, I deliberately turned away from oak—the tradition of oak furniture simply put me off. I turned to slender woods and heavy metals. More recently, I've embraced the chunky and sturdy attributes of oak again. I believe this comes with my desire to connect us closer to nature and landscape. There's something inherently honest about oak.



"Calm" by Faye Toogood.
PHOTO: ANGUS MELL, COURTESY OF FRIEDMAN BENDA AND FAYE TOOGOOD



"Plot II" by Faye Toogood.
PHOTO: ANGUS MELL, COURTESY OF FRIEDMAN BENDA AND FAYE TOOGOOD

Other pieces in the show employ Purbeck, a limestone often used as masonry in cathedrals. Like ecclesiastical buildings, do you feel this recent body of work contains unseen forces?

Purbeck has something serene, a limestone that is called a marble due to its luminous quality with layers of trapped fossils. You never know what you'll get. Each slab is a little discovery in itself. There's an inherent spirituality and otherworldly quality to the material—the sheer age of the fossils and stones feels like something we need to live with and have closer to us. There is rural quality to it but this rural is collided with the modern/human.



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What prompted relocating your studio from East London to Camden?

The beloved studio on Redchurch Street was a three-story Victorian House with lots of tiny little rooms, people separated, and not enough space to make. I was craving more light and open space. In our new Camden studio, we all come together on one floor over three extended rooms. We work on large tables that move on wheels to make, paint, draw, sew, cut, and so forth. This studio has enabled me to create a totally new way. We threw away so much—it was very freeing. The opportunity for change brings endless possibilities.



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Traces of the British countryside tend to weave their way into your work—a Paul Nash painting inspired a fashion collection, and your Calico Wallpaper prints evoke sylvan calm. How do these idylls inform the interiors you create?

The British landscape gives me a myriad of color palettes and material inspirations: not at all just drab greens and steely grays, even though those are important in the balance. I want to create landscapes now. I want to blend culture and nature. I used to be preoccupied with delivering something avant-garde, but now I feel the desire to connect us all to nature. Nature is what we need to face the future.

You've described yourself as more of a tinkerer than a designer. Is there a particular element of the studio that took some tinkering to get right?

I avoid labels where I can. I've always refused to be pigeonholed. I could be considered a dilettante—a dabbler, meddler... a tinkerer as I toy with things, but I'm serious about what I'm doing. I enjoy working on the fringes (of design, art, fashion) and the borders where others don't inhabit. I work in depth at the edges.

You've said that "in order to bring something into existence, I first need to establish if it works as a picture. It starts with an image, then I employ the materials and shapes and forms that allow me to build that story." What was your initial image of this new workspace?

This is the way I work with all spaces, objects, or clothing, not just the studio. I wish to make an imageless sculpture, to create a new landscape painting in your room. I do this three-dimensionally rather than paint on canvas.



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Since your practice spans so many categories, often sculptors, illustrators, weavers, and more will all work together under one roof. How does the new studio foster this cross-pollination and the creative tension it can fuel?

By all working in one room—hide away to concentrate if you need! Otherwise, I need the fashion designer to get inspired by oak carving as much as the furniture designer by sculptural pattern cutting. I'm looking to find a way of defying convention. I reject conventional ideas of beauty, design, and function. I'm interested in surprises and accidents, things that jar and irritate. I'm trying to give them a new sense of identity or beauty. To do this, I need to work in an interdisciplinary way.

As a student of art history, you don't shy away from implementing historical references and techniques. What's the most recent particularly memorable rabbit hole you've gone down?

Where to start? Seventeenth-century wrought iron candelabras yesterday and figurative engravings by Nicolas de Larmessin today. I have a note to look into Joan Mitchell tomorrow. This is all alongside my passion for music. I'm trying to get my head around classical music right now.



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A deep blue green seems to recur in the studio, from the thick wool bouclé on a Gummy Sofa to a meeting table's painterly surface. What qualities pull you in to certain colors and compel you to explore them?

The deep blue green meeting table started as reference to the Regent's Canal, which runs adjacent to our studio. I've always admired malachite as a color, a dreamy black green with a hint of blue. I find myself slipping into landscape and green is often the starting point for that. It's the color I feel the most comfortable with.

Can you tease what's in your next Assemblage?

Upside down, skinny, housework.



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