

GAGOSIAN



Marc Newson's Latest Masterworks Blend Ancient Crafts with Modern Forms

The latest pieces, on view at Gagosian, are six years in the making

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Marc Newson. Photo: Courtesy of Gagosian

After six years of meticulous planning, renowned Australian designer Marc Newson's latest works have finally been unveiled at the Gagosian gallery's outpost on 21st Street in Manhattan. It's been more than a decade since Newson's last exhibition in this space, but when one learns of his methods, the long wait becomes understandable. The designer specializes in a form of alchemy, blending his favorite ingredients—raw materials, highly specialized crafts and immense patience—to create limited-edition furniture pieces of immense beauty. The resulting works hover somewhere between functional objects and sculptural artworks—and Newson's latest creations are some of his most artful to date.

"There is only one place in the world you can cast pieces of glass this big," explains Newson, referring to one of his Cast Glass Chairs. Carefully formed by huge glass molds in the Czech

Republic, these two-tone, hourglass-shaped seats appear as if carved from immense blocks of ice and translucent gemstone. “You could speak to 99.9 percent of glass manufacturers, and they wouldn’t have a clue how to make this. It’s almost a technical impossibility, and to get to this point, there is a huge failure rate.”



Chair, 2017, cast glass. Photo: Jaroslav Kvíz, courtesy Gagosian

This kind of artistic courage is characteristic of Newson. The Australian revels in challenging manufacturing techniques, celebrating the making process as an art form on par with the end product. “The simplicity of a piece like this belies its incredible technical complexity,” continues Newson. “It takes close to six months to create the form in an oven — three months to heat the oven to the correct temperature, and then another three months to cool down. It has to cool down incredibly slowly. Even then, you could then open up the mold to find it has a big crack down the middle of it. It’s all quite nerve-racking.”

A similarly elaborate process was required for Newson’s Murrina works, a series of desks, tables, and consoles crafted using a classical glassmaking technique first practiced in the Middle East and revived by Venetian glassmakers in the 16th century. For Newson’s contemporary pieces, glass rods were fused together and then sliced to reveal “cell-like” patterns. Each table sports a bold, almost luminescent color and a subtle translucence. With perfectly smooth edges and gently tapered silhouettes, the finished products possess a streamlined quality that contrasts with the intricacy of their fabrication. Just as with the Cast Glass Chairs, the art of creation is what lends each piece in the Murrina collection its unique value.



Cloisonné Black Blossom Lounge, 2017, one of the furniture pieces on display at Gagosian's Marc Newson show. Photo: Xiangzhe Kong, courtesy Gagosian

Perhaps the most audacious process of all, though, was employed for Newson's range of Cloisonné furniture. Cloisonné is an ancient Chinese technique for inlaying metalwork with decorative enamel, and is usually reserved for small items due to its technical complexity. "I've been aware of this process since I studied jewelry," reflects the designer. "Most people working with Cloisonné are making desktop-sized objects, something like a Fabergé Egg, for example." True to form, Newson has upended this convention, producing large-scale Cloisonné chairs, chaise longues, and a desk, each covered with sprawling flowers or circular patterns. A huge oven had to be purpose-built within a Chinese cloisonné factory in order to fire these pieces, taking the total fabrication time to several years.



Cloisonné White Magnolia Chair, 2017. Photo: Xiangzhe Kong, courtesy Gagosian

Furnished with backstories like this, even the most minimal objects take on a new artistic significance. Each piece of furniture on display represents high-stakes manufacturing at its breathtaking best. They are the result of a craftsman stretching himself to the limit, taking risks, and ultimately coming out victorious. The excitement this provokes is a hallmark of Newson's work, and why his designs command unparalleled levels of attention. Those on show at Gagosian certainly live up to the hype.