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How Chelsea's Albertz Benda Gallery Was Called Into Being by an Art-World Taboo

By Alexandra Peers
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Thorsten Albertz at the Metropolitan Museum of Art

Chelsea gallery **Albertz Benda** was born, in the fall of 2015, out of something of an art world bias, explains co-founder **Thorsten Albertz**. His partner **Marc Benda**'s gallery, **Friedman Benda**, was long-established and respected, but it

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showed both artists and designers. And the art world was being “snobby” about it, notes director Albertz.

Some people would say “but you show *furniture*,” says Albertz. (The gallery’s exhibitions had included such undisputed geniuses as **Ettore Sottsass** and **Wendell Castle**.) It even proved difficult to get into some art fairs, adds Albertz. So, last September, the gallery bifurcated, with **Friedman Benda** on 26th Street to show designers, including the **Campana brothers** and **Marcel Wanders**, while Albertz Benda premiered with artists like [Agathe Snow](#), [Bill Beckley](#), and **Jen Ray**. The new venture was recently included in[NADA New York](#)’s project-space section.



Installation shot of *A Cosmic Traveler of Blindness* by Motohiko Odani

Up now, at 515 West 26th Street, is a just-opened installation by Japanese star **Motohiko Odani**, a choice that came out of Albertz's previous job running the **Goethe Institute** in Tokyo. (Odani, well-known in Asia, represented Japan

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at the 2003 **Venice Biennale** and received a retrospective at the **Mori Art Museum** in 2010.)

He loved the Goethe job, notes Albertz, but the language barrier and other realities of living in Japan proved challenging, and soon he was back in America. Based originally in Berlin, Albertz had already run galleries in Chelsea—among them Korean art gallery **Arario**—before and during the recession. It was a difficult time, but he credits it with reminding him how much he really wanted to do this for a living.

One lesson he learned from the recession? “Not just to show the younger kids, but who has been there in the past,” he says. “Not just to find artists with the hype, but those who didn’t have the right dealer or weren’t social enough.” Which brings us to the gallery’s big upcoming fall show, the work of **Ed Moses**.

The groundbreaking L.A. abstract painter and teacher turned 90 this year and celebrated with a show of new work at **Bergamot Station**. One of the original **Ferus Gallery** crew—he showed with [Ed Ruscha](#) in 1957—Moses is one of the many older artists who may have lost market heat but not art world respect. There are 19 of his works in the **National Gallery** collection, for example, more than two dozen in **MoMA**, but none are currently on view. Meanwhile, the Odani show, of sculpture and video work includes the premiere of *A Cosmic Traveler of Blindness*, which follows a blind man as he drifts underwater “tracing the contours of sculptures cast from his own face, hands and feet,” according to the gallery. It is up through June 18.

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