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TwentyFirstTwentyFirst Gallery



(D) (M) ART OUTDOORS





Rirkrit Tiravanija's mirror-polished stainless-steel and glass ping-pong table, unveiled 2009 (the future will be chrome) (ping-pong table), illustrates a fanciful and quirky sense of garden humor.

Furniture That Makes an Art of Being Outside

●● An outdoor ping-pong table with a glass "net" and a view of the sky, a barbecue shaped like a locomotive and a brooding, cross-legged girl-next-door are among a new collection of fanciful, functional objects for the garden. Not any garden, of course, but one to be imbued with plenty of nods, winks and nudge-nudges for the art-savvy cognoscenti.

Last year Nathalie Karg, a Paris-born New York landscape architect and art historian, set out to curate her own range of ornaments and furnishings suitable for the gardens she designs.

Karg says her wish list included "tables, chairs, games, things for children, water, everything that could have a function outdoors," and she signed up 15 contemporary artists for the task. Their mission was not to create precious art pieces, but "things to be touched, used, lived with."

The stunning results, a first batch of 17 prototypes, were on display at Twenty First/Twenty First Gallery in New York. Rirkrit Tiravanija's polished stainless-steel and glass ping-pong table, \$40,000, was manufactured in Berlin. The table was previewed in Miami last fall at the NADA art fair where it looked like a serene reflecting pool on legs, and in February it debuted at New York's Nyehaus Gallery at the National Arts Club at Gramercy Park. At Nyehaus, ping-pong pros offered pick-up games. The ball skittered across the glass with a toney tick-tack, and Susan Sarandon leaked news of her

investment in a ping-pong saloon, coming soon.

On the Friday night before her show opened, Karg made some final touches to the gallery installation. She rolled up her sleeves and painted a wall to make an "impeccable" surface to mount Rob Wynne's cast-and-polished-aluminum housefly. The 19-by-11-inch ornamental insect also makes a nice footstool or child's chair, Karg says. Wynne also made the bronze mushrooms and a 15-inch-high "log" stool of sparkling blown glass.

Jim Drain reinterpreted and contemporized the classic garden gnome as a bored-looking neighborhood teen in cutoffs, slouching in a bikini top, rather than the sleepy, and creepy, ubiquitous little guy with a beard and hat. No less weird, she's just shorter than she'd be in real life, like, 16 inches or so, and in painted ceramic. Stick that under your rhododendron.

And the blingiest tire swing ever, with a 24-karat gold chain, is by the macho-glam painter Aeron Young. This is the artist who once hired a dozen motorbike stunt riders to "bum rubber" in circles and swoops, Jackson Pollock-like, into a painted plywood floor at the Seventh Regiment Armory.

There's a limit to how functional this functional art can be. You'll not be doing cannonballs into the swimmin' hole from Young's swing. But it sure would look chic, suspended artfully, just so. —Timothy Jack Ward
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