

Exhibition

# Mauro Mori Celebrates the Beauty and Emotion of the Artist's Hand at Les Ateliers Courbet

New art furniture editions by the Italian designer in wood, metal, and marble debut at the Manhattan gallery

By Heather Corcoran

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Mauro Mori's limited-edition Mama table for Les Editions Courbet. Photo: Gian Paolo Barbieri

"We are obsessed with perfection," artist and designer Mauro Mori says, citing a distinctly modern problem. "But perfection doesn't exist, especially with natural things."

That ethos is at the heart of Mori's eponymous new exhibition of limited-edition art furniture, which runs from May 22 through July 22 at Les Ateliers Courbet in Manhattan's Chelsea gallery district. There, in a collection of seductively organic tables and consoles, Mori coaxes the natural, imperfect beauty out of wood, metal, and marble, drawing attention to the preciousness of natural resources and, as he puts it, "a respect for something bigger than us."

Each of his designs is imbued with evidence of the artist's hand and, even more ephemerally, his emotions. It's all there to see, touch—and perhaps even hear and smell. That's because the Italian creative, whose work bridges the art of sculpture and the design of furniture, thinks of every detail—carefully choosing scented wax or essence (never varnish!) to finish wood, and using specialized materials on the interior of his metal furniture to ensure it doesn't sound "like an empty Coca-Cola [can]," Mori says. "Some clients don't care, or they don't even know—but for me it's important. The sum of the details makes the difference, not for the market, but for yourself."



loegio bench in black leather by Mori. Photo: Gian Paolo Barbieri

That focus on handcraft and workmanship is a value Mori shares with [Melanie Courbet](#), who founded her gallery in 2013 to celebrate master craftspeople. “There’s another energy, another vibration in pieces that comes from the hand,” Mori explains of craft’s enduring appeal.

For his latest exhibition, Mori created a number of limited-edition pieces through the gallery’s Les Editions Courbet initiative, including the Mama table, a lyrical wood form that recalls a mother cradling her child. That design got its start in the Seychelles, where Mori maintains a small workshop for creating pieces in local albizia wood, an invasive species the artist obtains as felled trees from government lumberjacks. (“For me, the material is the tree, not the wood,” Mori explains.) There, on the Indian Ocean archipelago, he gives the material its first rough cuts with a chainsaw before shipping the piece to his Italian atelier for finishing. This rooted sense of place is a hallmark of his process that extends to the marble he hand-selects and works locally in Carrara, Italy.

While Mori's work offers the functionality of design—think: tables and consoles in *battuto*-style hammered brass, hand-carved wood, and copper—his process is more in line with ancient traditions of sculpture than with industrial design. He often works in a subtractive method, starting with a raw block of material and carving away until the desired form is revealed. “You change the tools [to suit the material], but the technique is the same: You take away until you find the shape you want,” says Mori. Through this process, the artist finds inspiration in the forms and proportions of the materials he uses—a method that puts him in a direct artistic continuum with Michelangelo and other masters. It's a method that allows him to celebrate the natural variations in materials that make each piece, even in an edition, a unique work of art.

“For me, using hand is very important; it's a very magical moment, the moment I completely focus on where I am,” he says. And while the process infuses the resulting work with emotion and personal history, Mori is hesitant to ascribe meaning to each individual piece. After all, he says, “when I'm finished [with] a piece, everything is inside.”

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