

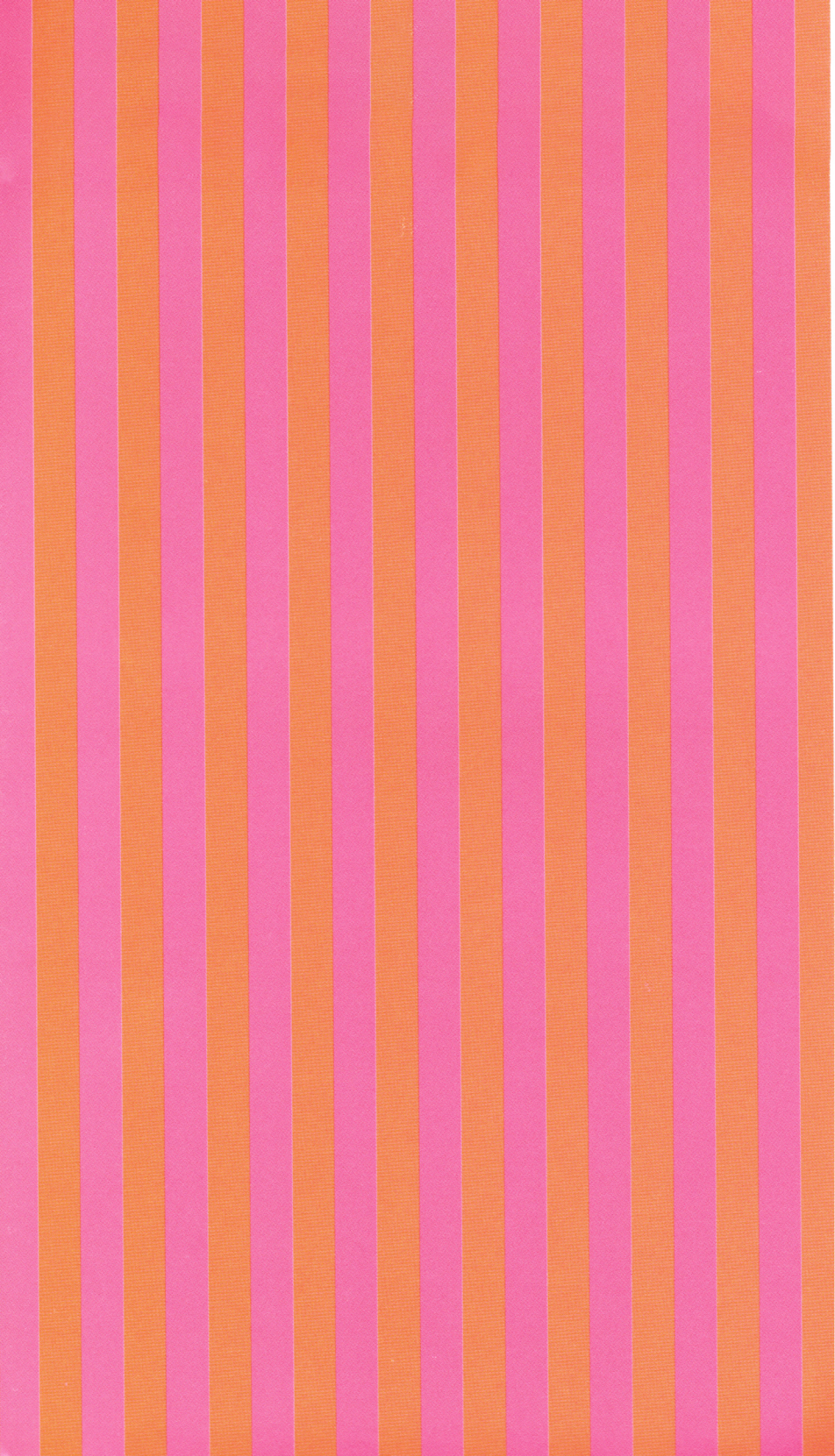
PLEASE BE SEATED

CONTEMPORARY
STUDIO
SEATING
FURNITURE

By

KARI M. MAIN





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SEATING FURNITURE

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Kari M. Main

Yale University Art Gallery

New Haven Connecticut

1999

This catalogue accompanies an exhibition held at the Yale University Art Gallery May 1-August 8, 1999.

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Objects 1-11 and 15 bear the credit line:

Please Be Seated Collection, Funded by Julian H. Fisher; B.A. 1969, in memory of Wilbur J. Fisher, B.A. 1926, and Janet Fisher.

Objects 12-14 and 16-19 bear the credit line:

Please Be Seated Collection, Funded by Julian H. Fisher; B.A. 1969, and Barbara Wallraff, in memory of Wilbur J. Fisher, B.A. 1926, and Janet Fisher.



Sideboard Table designed by Albert Paley (b. 1944).
Rochester, New York, 1990. Forged steel, steel plate, glass.
H: 75.7 cm W: 91.5 cm D: 61.2 cm
1990.3.1

PREFACE

The works in this exhibition were acquired over the last twelve years for the Yale University Art Gallery's collection for use as public seating in the galleries. Visitors have the opportunity not only to contemplate these objects, as they would any work of art, but also to sit on them and consider them from the point of view of function. The *Please Be Seated* collection therefore offers a double experience for the viewer, and we are very grateful to Julian H. Fisher, B.A. 1969, for initiating it and to him and his wife, Barbara Vallraff, for continuing to fund it. Inspired by a comparable collection at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, they have enabled the Art Gallery to acquire nineteen examples of furniture. Not only does the collection delight visitors but it has also allowed the Art Gallery to build a representative body of work by studio furnituremakers of the 1980s and 1990s, thereby strengthening our commitment to supporting living artists.

This furniture has played a role in teaching at the University. Edward S. Cooke, Jr., the Charles F. Montgomery Professor of Decorative Arts, has used the collection for his undergraduate and graduate courses. Indeed, the current exhibition and its publication are products of graduate education at Yale. The exhibition was organized by Kari M. Main, a second-year graduate student in American Studies. She began this project in the summer of 1998, when she was a Marcia Brady Tucker Fellow in the American Arts Office at the Art Gallery. In the fall semester of 1998 she continued work on it as an independent study directed by Professor Cooke. We are grateful to Kari for her efforts in seeing this project through from start to finish.

To come to fruition, exhibitions always draw upon the expertise and skills of many individuals. Patricia E. Kane,

Curator of American Decorative Arts, provided guidance for this one with the able assistance of Marcia Brady Tucker intern Meredith Cohen and administrative assistant Nancy Yates. Steven S. Waterman created the inventive installation that encourages visitors to interact with the objects. The execution of this design was expertly carried out by Burrus Harlow and his installation staff. Carl Kaufman photographed the illustrations for the catalogue. The catalogue itself benefited from the editorial skills of Barbara Folsom and the design skills of Greer Allen. The institutional administration of the exhibition and development of public programs were overseen by Kathleen Derringer, Louisa Cunningham, and Richard Field, as well as Ellen Alvord, Daphne Deeds, Linda Jerolmon, and Mary Kordak of the Department of Exhibitions and Public Programs. Marie Weltzien handled the publicity. I extend deepest thanks to all of them for their commitment to this project.

We celebrate this gathering together of the *Please Be Seated* collection objects from their usual Art Gallery locations. It is both splendid and a record of achievement to have these objects assembled within one exhibition space. Funding for the publication was made possible by the Center for the Study of American Art and Material Culture. In addition to placing the objects in a new and different context, the purpose of this show is to acknowledge the generosity of Julian H. Fisher and his foresight in understanding how such a collection could play a dynamic role in the teaching and exhibition programs of this university.

Jock Reynolds

The Henry J. Heinz II Director

INTRODUCTION

Seating is a fundamental need that many of us take for granted, except perhaps when it is unavailable. How often do we think about the chairs upon which we sit? Usually any such thoughts are provoked by discomfort, or perhaps extreme comfort. How can we contemplate these objects that elevate us and allow us to sit above the floor?¹ The examples in the Art Gallery's *Please Be Seated* collection encourage us to ask a wide range of questions, not just about the multiple functions of the objects (practical, aesthetic, symbolic) but about the makers and the traditions in which they were working. The strength of such a collection is that the pieces encourage a variety of interactions and can appeal to visitors on many different levels. The following essay probes what *Please Be Seated* reveals about attitudes toward modern studio furniture and about intentions of these contemporary craftsmen.

In 1987, Dr. Julian Fisher (Yale B.A., 1969) proposed to Patricia E. Kane, Curator of American Decorative Arts at Yale University Art Gallery, the idea of donating funds for a collection of contemporary furniture to be used for public seating. In a letter dated October 16, 1987, Fisher wrote: "drawing from my own background in the arts and my exposure to Jonathan Fairbanks' outstanding *Please Be Seated* collection at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston . . . I would like to explore the opportunity of giving a piece or two . . . to the Yale Art Gallery, for on-going public display and use." The response to his idea was positive. Kane replied by letter: "Since there is such a resurgence of interest in contemporary crafts, I look forward to having seating furniture by contemporary woodworkers that the public can use in the galleries."² The collection would be named *Please Be Seated* and would be dedicated to the memory of his parents, Wilbur J. (Yale B.A., 1926) and Janet M. Fisher. A dedicated collector of contemporary craft furniture, Fisher suggested

the names of David Ebner and Robert Erickson as artists with whom to begin. The idea that the pieces were to be acquired for practical reasons was integral to the formation of the collection. In October 1988, Fisher wrote again that he wanted "to focus more on chairs and benches that can be used, that are a living and useful testimony to wood/furniture/sculpture, in place around the galleries."³ Since 1987, the Art Gallery has acquired nineteen examples of seating furniture from various artists as well as a table by Albert Paley for the lobby, which is illustrated on the copy-right page.

The inspiration for Fisher's idea, the *Please Be Seated* collection at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, was established by curator Jonathan Fairbanks in the 1970s. As a need for additional gallery seating arose, Fairbanks had decided that handmade contemporary furniture was more in harmony with the early American furniture on view in the galleries than mass-produced examples. He applied to the National Endowment for the Arts for funds, matched by corporate donations, to purchase gallery seating from contemporary artists. In 1976, Fairbanks commissioned fourteen pieces from Sam Maloof, an acclaimed California furnituremaker, for the galleries. Fairbank's innovative idea met with some resistance, including a concern of curators that the furniture would distract visitors from the museum displays and a fear on the part of security that vandals might damage the expensive seating. On the positive side, Fairbanks believes that the *Please Be Seated* pieces have functioned to dissipate visitors' impulse to touch the works of art on view and to encourage feelings of greater connection with the collection. Since 1976, the collection at the Museum of Fine Arts has grown to represent approximately fifty artists, whose work serves both to provide gallery seating and to comprise a substantial accumulation of contemporary furniture.

At both the Museum of Fine Arts and the Yale University Art Gallery, curators had to break patterns of collecting that had been established early in the twentieth century. For the first years of the century until about 1970, art museum collecting of American decorative arts was confined by a pre-1840 date. Particularly for traditional collections of American arts, acquiring contemporary objects without the advantage of a fifty-year perspective was considered risky and speculative.⁴ After all, how could one be certain these new objects were “museum quality”? Yet studio furniture began to find a place in decorative art museums during the 1970s and 1980s as Fairbanks and Kane adopted the public-seating program to build significant collections of contemporary furniture. By stressing function in the acquisition of these pieces, these curators have helped to change established collecting patterns and to preserve the furniture being made today alongside the treasures of the past.

Does this necessity of use reveal an underlying assumption about craft furniture? Many people have a romantic perception of the making of furniture by hand, the fruits of which they assume should be a part of everyday life rather than destined to exist in a sterile gallery. The ongoing debate regarding distinctions between craft and fine art (or whether there should be distinctions at all) often revolves around the question of use. Historical handmade furniture in decorative arts collections, after all, has been through the cycle of use that separates the functional chair of the past from the art object meant only for contemplation. The daily wear and tear these objects receive, some argue, make them look better by endowing them with character, as they are being used in the way furniture should be. Thus, expecting contemporary furniture pieces to serve their time as functional objects indicates that some degree of usage underlies perceptions of these works as separate from art. Some of the pieces at the

Art Gallery, such as Judy Kensley McKie’s *Alligator Bench* (Cat. 13) and Henry Royer’s *Bench* (Cat. 14), are particularly durable for public seating. Others, such as Joanne Schima’s *Child’s Chair* (Cat. 9) and Kristina Madsen’s *Bench* (Cat. 10), were never intended as practical solutions to gallery seating but, rather, as significant acquisitions drawn in under the umbrella of utility. Factoring in use—practical or not—as part of the acquisition decision is another interesting indication that established assumptions about decorative arts collecting die hard.

The pieces in the *Please Be Seated* collection span a broad range of functionality and illustrate a decreasing importance on a narrow definition of use and an increased interest in the varieties of interaction. Many of the works, such as Robert Soule’s *Ownbey Chair No. 4* (Cat. 7) and Erickson’s *Van Muyden Chair* (Cat. 2), were designed specifically as practical furnishings for customers’ domestic use. Function, in these cases, was of primary consideration or the ultimate in real use. For Gregg Fleishman, in his conception of the *Surround Armchair* (Cat. 3), utility was equal only to efficient and innovative production. Fleishman was interested in creating a comfortable chair that could be easily produced and mass-marketed. At the nonfunctional end of the spectrum, John Cederquist made his *Revenge of the Deconstructionist Saw Chair* (Cat. 19) primarily as an artistic statement rather than a useable furnishing. In his *Folding Chair* (Cat. 5), Thomas Loeser intentionally played with these tensions between art and function in contemporary studio furniture by making a piece that could comfortably satisfy both categories.

In addition to the collection as a whole revealing interesting insights into attitudes toward contemporary craft, the biographies of the artists reflect the common training paths of furnituremakers in the 1980s and 1990s. Building on what

Edward S. Cooke, Jr., has called "the second generation of studio furnituremakers" in his 1989 book *New American Furniture*, the individuals represented in the Art Gallery's collection have received academic training in degree-granting programs such as those at the Rhode Island School of Design and Boston University.⁵ Craftsmen of previous decades, defined as the "first generation," which includes important figures such as Maloof, Tage Frid, and George Nakashima, had a limited range of training opportunities and perpetuated a reverence for wood and the supremacy of functionality. Nevertheless, this first generation of woodworkers expanded the range of formal training possibilities by spearheading programs across the country. The artists in the Art Gallery's *Please Be Seated* collection represent the next wave of formally trained art students, who have developed their skills and ideas in a cooperative learning environment. Some individuals in the collection do not identify themselves as artists, holding degrees in such varied fields as economics, philosophy, and anthropology. Yet in all cases we see very aware academic makers whose formal schooling gave them a broader outlook and range of sources upon which to draw.

Technical proficiency continues to be important to the new wave of furnituremakers, yet their work also embodies a refreshing new comfort with innovation and irreverence. The second generation, as Cooke argues, was able to break through previous constraints of woodworking, and the artists of *Please Be Seated* are reaping the benefits of their predecessors' work. The furnituremakers of the late 1980s now feel equally at ease with accepting wood as the primary designing material (Cats. 1 and 6) or covering the surface using a variety of innovative techniques (Cats. 5, 16, and 17). Nontraditional materials for seating, such as the aluminum used for Charles Crowley's chairs (Cat. 8), and techniques such as the multi-axis turning in Mark Sfirri's bench (Cat. 18),

are innovative but no longer radical and can be appreciated for their departure from convention.

Each artist in this exhibition has also deliberated upon the implications of creating a unique object or the limited production of multiples. Again, the underlying debate about the status of craft in relation to fine art clouds the issue. By making an object in large quantities, some would argue, its artistic value is compromised. As Bruce Metcalf discusses in his 1997 article "When Production Had a Good Name," the stigma of multiples still breeds prejudice against the general acceptance of craft on the same level as fine art.⁶ The furnituremakers in *Please Be Seated* are keenly aware of the dilemma of reproducibility versus unique art. Soule, for example, preferred not to make the same design twice, allowing for natural growth in his work. Fleishman, on the other hand, set out to design an easily reproducible chair: Economically, multiples can be faster and easier to produce for profit, which may have partially influenced artists like Schima. Others, such as McKie, see the decision as an exploration into diverse techniques (such as bronze casting) for artistic expression, which results in limited copies of one original design. Some furnituremakers simply work on commission or in small batches with minor variations. In all cases, the decision about how to proceed is mediated by both artistic philosophies and economic factors.

Even though purchases of studio furniture have increased steadily in the 1980s and 1990s, it is a rare furnituremaker who can depend solely for support on the work he or she produces. For the majority of consumers in our postindustrial age, mass-produced furniture satisfies their functional needs. The price of studio furniture is high, and the artists represented in this exhibition have no illusions about competing with manufactured goods. Handmade furniture,

therefore, fulfills a different need than the functional for society in the 1990s.

The diverse artistic impulses in each of the Art Gallery's pieces renders them accessible to viewers on a variety of levels. At a time when the majority of our possessions are fabricated in situations we can not comprehend, the idea that an object has been conceived and executed by one individual engages museum visitors. Perhaps it is difficult to understand the details of the process by which McKie's *Alligator Bench* (Cat. 13) was fabricated, or how the fluid lines of Richard Tannen's bench (Cat. 17) were created from wood. Some visitors may feel drawn to pieces that exhibit proficient workmanship (such as Silas Kopf's marquetry bench; Cat. 12), while others may stop to ponder the humor of pieces such as Alphonse Mattia's *Golden Banana Valet Chair* (Cat. 4). Artists like Cederquist take a postmodernist position in which the form is less important than the experience and ideas the viewer brings to the object (Cat. 19). Cederquist, and others such as Dean (Cat. 16), draw the viewer in by utilizing a collage of references to the built environment.

So what exactly is the appeal of these objects for purchasers and museum goers? The romantic conception of the craftsman who works without compromise holds powerful symbolic capital within the American tradition of individualism and the search for authenticity.⁷ The uninterrupted progression from concept, through design, to execution yields, through the integrity of the artistic process, a highly valued final product for consumers. In the modern industrial age, such pieces also actualize ideas of unalienated labor and the tangible fruits of one worker's hands. What greater exercising of individuality than to own an object that embodies distinctive accomplishment? The union of modern artistic

vision with the values of traditional handicraft makes these objects doubly charged.

The opportunity to experience such a collection of contemporary furniture tactilely provides yet another level of accessibility for visitors. Regardless of the degree of importance of function in the design of each piece, every artist has made his or her object useable. Visitors can experience the spring of Fleishman's chair; the comfort of Erickson's seat, and the smooth elegance of Giachetti's bench. Whether these works appeal to aspiring woodworkers, potential consumers, intellectual ponderers, or simply the visitor seeking a good place to rest, the *Please Be Seated* collection provides a range of services. Thanks to the generosity of Julian Fisher, the Art Gallery has been able to gather a valuable body of work from contemporary artists. As the years progress, works such as these will be moved to pedestals or perhaps even have galleries of their own. Meanwhile, *Please Be Seated* continues to stimulate the visitor, proving that the spirit of craftsmanship is still alive. By bringing otherwise uncommon objects into a museum, the collection preserves these treasures for today and for future generations.

1 For a fascinating discussion of the evolution of the chair, see Galen Cranz, *The Chair: Rethinking Culture, Body and Design* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Co., 1998).

2 Letter from Patricia E. Kane to Dr. Julian H. Fisher, dated December 15, 1987.

3 Letter from Dr. Julian H. Fisher to Mary Gardner Neill, dated October 27, 1988.

4 Museums such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art sponsored industrial art shows throughout the 1920s, supporting contemporary modern design in an industrial setting. By 1930, the Museum of Modern Art emerged to take over collecting "modern art." William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), pp. 313-319.

5 Edward S. Cooke, Jr., *New American Furniture: The Second Generation of Studio Furnituremakers* (Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, 1989).

6 Bruce Metcalf, "When Production Had a Good Name," *Metalsmith* 17, no. 3 (1997 Exhibition in Print): 2-8.

7 Cranz, p. 77.



I

Stool

David N. Ebner (b. 1945)

Bellport, New York, 1987

Purpleheart

H: 41.7 cm W: 40.3 cm D: 36.2 cm

1987.79.1

David Ebner relies on the beauty of wood grain for the artistic impact of this tranquil piece, while using exposed joinery as decoration. Developing an impulse common in furniture-makers from the 1970s, he also uses the intrinsic color of wood and straightforward construction as subtle elements of ornament. This stool is one of many similar pieces, the first of which was designed in 1975 for the exhibition "Craft Multiples" at the Renwick Gallery. Ebner explains that the stool "was hand-crafted with the intent of being a piece of functional sculpture, matching the attention usually given to the artist-craftsman who makes unique objects." Drawing inspiration from many sources, including architecture and plant life (see his bulbous scallion coatrack, for example), Ebner's approach to furniture design, he says, is both intellectual and intuitive. His works demonstrate a quietude that communicates his interest in meditative Eastern philosophy. In the case of the Art Gallery's piece, the concave seat of the stool mirrors Asian pagoda profiles and austere padouk seats while comfortably cradling the sitter. The result is a successful blending of art with function, beauty with comfort.

The stool rightfully begins the *Please Be Seated* collection, as it was the first piece purchased by the donor for the Art Gallery. The practical need for movable seating in the Art Gallery's silver-study room and the donor's interest in Ebner as a contemporary craftsman led to the acquisition of the piece. The simple yet elegant stool allows visitors to examine silver more closely while actually sitting on a work of art.

EDUCATION

1968 B.F.A., School for American Craftsman,
Rochester Institute of Technology, Rochester,
New York

1969 London School of Furniture Design and Production,
London

REFERENCES

David N. Ebner; response to author's questionnaire, August 1998;
Ebner resumé; Patricia Conway, *Art for Everyday: The New Craft
Movement* (New York: Clarkson Potter Publishers, 1990),
p. 104

2

Van Muyden Chair

Robert Erickson (b. 1947)

Nevada City, California, 1988

Walnut

H: 88.9 cm W: 56.8 cm D: 53.3 cm

1988.9.1

This chair was inspired by a trip to Norway that Robert Erickson took with his wife in 1977, during which he studied the locally built chairs of Scandinavia. Erickson was fascinated by the farm-made chairs he saw in people's front yards wherever they went and documented them in photographs. Noting a plentitude of three-legged chairs among those he recorded, Erickson returned to create the *Van Muyden Chair* as his variation on that form. The prototype for the Art Gallery's walnut chair was originally designed as a dining-room chair for customers William and Pauly Van Muyden of Woodland, California. Erickson has reproduced the *Van Muyden Chair* in numerous multiples since its original conception in the late 1970s.

For Erickson, achievement is reached through the total craftsman experience—designing and making furniture while working closely with customers. In the design process he prioritizes function, frequently asking his client for body measurements so he may customize the chair. A comfortable chair, according to Erickson, must also be aesthetically satisfying in order to merit distinction, as proficiency in craftsmanship should find expression through innovative design creativity.



For Erickson, artistic success consists in directness in construction. The three-legged form recalls Scandinavian folk furniture, while the modeling of the surfaces evokes modern Scandinavian work. The central solid splat is derived from Chinese Ming chairs, which were straight-sided and plain with a slight curve to the profile. By drawing on these two traditions, the *Van Muyden Chair* demonstrates a self-conscious attention to craftsmanship and a reliance on raw materials to speak for themselves. The result is robust yet refined.

EDUCATION

1969 B.A., University of Nebraska, Lincoln

1969-70 Studied with Ed Stiles and Roger Somers, Mill Valley,
California

REFERENCES

Robert Erickson, response to author's questionnaire, July 1998;
Erickson resumé; Don Cunningham, "From Prairie Roots,"
Nebraskaland (November 1984): 38-41

3

Surround Armchair

Gregg Fleishman (b. 1947)

Los Angeles, California, 1988

Birch plywood with red resin finish

H: 79.3 cm W: 57.4 cm D: 56.5 cm

1989.5.1

The *Surround Armchair* by Gregg Fleishman is an example of the designer's persistence and irreverence toward the idea of craft. Fleishman is, first and foremost, an inventor; having applied for and received fourteen patents since 1980. This chair, both visually and conceptually, is a production puzzle made of a less-than-lofty material (plywood) and designed to be re-created on a relatively large scale. Fleishman started designing chairs in 1976 and chose to work with plywood because of his experience with the material in inventive modular play structure designs. He was aiming for "a light comfortable chair with few parts and no fasteners . . . that could easily be built in multiples with a minimum of machinery and operations." Through experiments with plywood, Fleishman discovered that, when cut in slotlike patterns, the wood developed a relatively strong, flexible, springlike quality. Perfecting the correct patterns, however, was a four-and-a-half-year endeavor that saw the evolution of thirty-four prototypes before he was happy with the results of his experiments. Fleishman's methodology was "trial and error" and relied on his knowledge of the material. He would sketch the chair design on paper; transfer the basic outline to the plywood, cut out the shape with a router, and then "assemble the chair and sit on it—hoping it wouldn't break."

Fleishman's ultimate goal was a chair (or series of chairs) fit for relatively large-scale production. The chairs could be produced from templates on a router, ensuring quick and consistently made parts. As his brochure claims, "the total elapsed shop time for [the *Surround Armchair*] has been about one hour and fifteen minutes." The *Surround Armchair* is one of many designs featured in Fleishman's 1984 marketing brochure, *Forever Furniture*. Accompanied by the similarly designed *Lumbarest*, *Rock 'n' Roll*, *Little One Piece*, the *Bear* chairs, and a dining table, the illustration of the *Surround Armchair* is accompanied by directions for assembly and assurances of comfort and strength.

EDUCATION

1970 Bachelor of Architecture, University of Southern California, Los Angeles

REFERENCES

Gregg Fleishman, "Plywood Chairs," *Fine Woodworking* (March/April 1986): 41-43; www.greggfleishman.com; Fleishman resumé; Gregg Fleishman, *Forever Furniture*, privately printed brochure, 1984



4

Golden Banana Valet Chair

Alphonse Mattia (b. 1947)

Westport, Massachusetts, 1988

Walnut, birch, soft maple, plywood

H: 191.5 cm W: 46.3 cm D: 44.8 cm

1988.64.1

Alphonse Mattia's experience with wood started when he was a child making wooden objects in a basement shop with his father. His subsequent career, which began in the 1970s, followed two distinct paths: serious design and humorous creations. The *Golden Banana Valet Chair* clearly falls into the latter of these two categories. The chair is part of a group of similar forms inspired by valets designed by Hans Wegner in the 1950s. Mattia developed this series so that he could explore a variety of permutations of one form within specific parameters and create sculpture "related to function, but not ruled by it." In each valet, Mattia preserved the basic form, including hanging supports for clothes and low seats for tying shoes, yet he used paint and carving to give each piece a distinct and comical identity.

Using vibrant colors and interesting visual references, the artist makes a humorous statement about exoticism in the *Golden Banana Valet Chair* by placing a tropical fruit above a tiger-skin seat. He uses a combination of decorative elements for their evocative qualities rather than for their logical connections to each other. As in many other valets by Mattia,

the *Golden Banana Valet Chair*, with its knowing eyes and well-placed leaves, has an anthropomorphic animation that encourages the viewer to imagine the banana creature expanding as a personality when a jacket is hung on the hanger. The chair was an early creation in Mattia's valet series and demonstrates that he—along with other second-generation studio furnituremakers—believes that color can carry as much weight in a work as can form or grain. Other examples in the valet series were topped with a brain, a knothed, or the forms of a nun, Saint Sebastian, and the Devil.

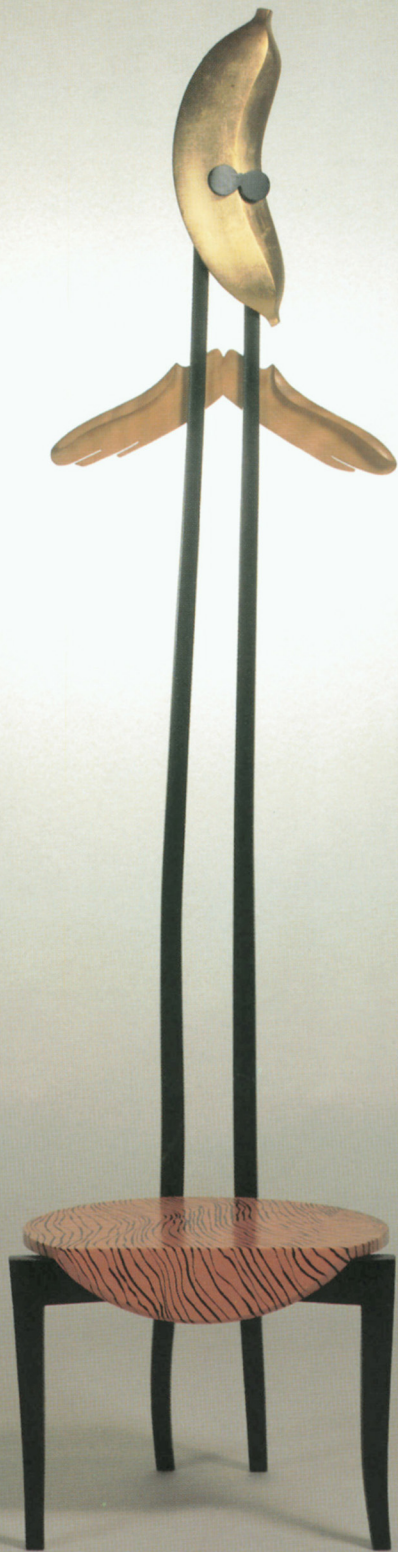
EDUCATION

1969 Philadelphia College of Art, Philadelphia

1973 M.F.A., Rhode Island School of Design, Providence

REFERENCES

Edward S. Cooke, Jr., *New American Furniture: The Second Generation of Studio Furnituremakers* (Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, 1989), pp. 76-79; Alphonse Mattia: *Bookshelves Any Size* (New York: Peter Joseph Gallery, 1993); Roger Holmes, "Color and Wood: Dyeing for a Change," *Fine Woodworking* 4 (January/February 1983): 70-73



5

Folding Chair and Bracket

Thomas Loeser (b. 1956)

Westport Point, Massachusetts, 1989

Baltic birch plywood, maple, stainless steel, enamel paint

Chair: H: 86.7 cm W: 70.2 cm D: 31.8 cm

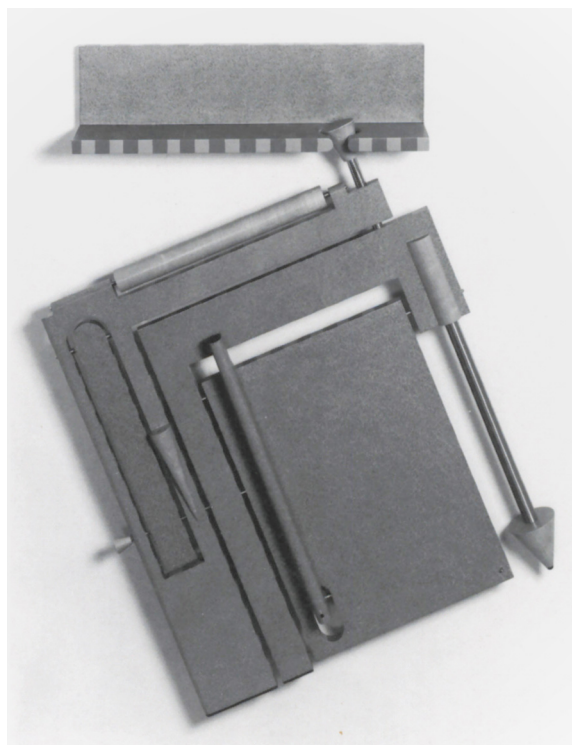
Bracket: H: 16.5 cm W: 61 cm D: 14 cm

1989.28.1 a,b

Illustrated in color on front wrapper

In this open statement on furniture as art, Thomas Loeser pokes fun at function and at craft history. By creating a chair that collapses into a two-dimensional art object in order to hang on the wall, Loeser literally blends the opposing ideas of function and art. The design for the folding chair began to develop in 1981, just as Loeser was completing school. He says, "my thinking was to design a chair that is all cut from one piece of plywood with all the parts nested together for efficiency," which could also be a semiproduction piece made in large numbers. He began by sketching a precarious three-legged version, but realized that creating "a sculpture about chairs" would be more effective if it were actually functional. Loeser was inspired by the Shaker practice of hanging chairs on the wall when they were not in use: "combining [the] chair on wall idea with [the] two-dimensionality of my design seemed obvious, so I added in the idea of a wall bracket." Blurring the lines between art and function, Loeser treats the chair's surface as a canvas, sponging on different enamel colors to "accentuate the planes and edges" and to reinforce his puzzling combination of geometric shapes.

Loeser made a total of thirty-seven similar chairs that were produced in small production runs over seven years. His design was widely acclaimed, earning him international recognition and establishing him as a respected furniture-maker. He has continued to explore the transformation between two and three dimensions, using tabbed paper cutouts that can be turned into ephemerally functional drawer chests. The lighthearted work of Loeser continues to remind the viewer that furniture does not have to be serious.



EDUCATION

- | | |
|------|--|
| 1979 | B.A. in sociology and anthropology, Haverford College, Haverford, Pennsylvania |
| 1982 | B.F.A. in furniture design and construction, Boston University |

REFERENCES

Thomas Loeser, response to author's questionnaire, December 1998; Loeser resumé; Edward S. Cooke, Jr., *New American Furniture: The Second Generation of Studio Furnituremakers* (Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, 1989), pp. 64-67; *Tom Loeser: Sixty-Five Drawers, Eleven Doors, and Four Lids* (New York: Peter Joseph Gallery, 1992)



6

Bench

Anthony Giachetti (b. 1944)

East Boothbay, Maine, 1989
Maple with ebony inlay
H: 51.8 cm W: 166.1 cm D: 51.3 cm
1989.34.1

Anthony Giachetti began making furniture in 1972 through a local cooperative that facilitated access to tools and wood. By 1974, he was making and selling his furniture in a gallery he established with his wife. Originally inspired by the restraint of Shaker furniture, Giachetti made uncomplicated forms out of solid wood, which were “finely but simply done.” Soon he went on to draw inspiration from the Arts and Crafts movement, in particular the woodworking from the Cotswold area of England. The region’s woodwork of this time, he explains, had an overall visual simplicity yet was extremely complex and demanding to make. Giachetti improved his technical skills to create forms with curved lines that combined complexity of construction with straightforward design. He began to experiment with lamination, creating desks and other forms with concave and convex sides.

The Art Gallery’s bench is an example of Giachetti’s exploration into nontraditional joinery. As he says, he “did not

simply want two pieces of wood coming together at ninety degree angles.” The arched supports of the bench create symmetrical and tangential joints while providing a central bridgelike effect. The bench’s concave sides and central arch testify to Giachetti’s mastery of lamination. With meticulous craftsmanship, he matched the grain of each laminated layer so that the viewer would not notice the composition technique. Although he had previously made four similar benches in oak and cherry, Giachetti chose tiger maple for this one because of the dramatic grain of the wood. The artistic use of wood, Giachetti explains, is important to all the woodworkers he respects: “How you use grain in a piece separates the craftsman from the manufacturer.” While respecting the inherent qualities of his material, Giachetti here uses the technique of lamination to create a bench that marries simplicity of design to complexity of process.

EDUCATION

- 1966 B.S. in economics, Villanova University, Villanova, Pennsylvania
1969 A.M. in economics, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts

REFERENCES

- Anthony Giachetti, conversation with author; December 1998



7

Ownbey Chair No. 4

Robert C. Soule (b. 1949)

Branford, Connecticut, 1989

American black walnut

H: 123.1 cm W: 58.3 cm D: 55 cm

1989.44.1

Robert Soule enjoys the challenge of making furniture for clients and the satisfaction of solving their particular needs by creating a unique, artistic piece of furniture. His career has included work in custom furniture, cabinetry, prototypes, and architectural models. Soule notes that “there’s a growing appreciation for things that are made by one person. . . . People react against mass production.” Accordingly, he makes copies of his furniture only with reluctance, preferring to allow a design to evolve in future embodiments rather than stagnate.

The Art Gallery’s high-backed walnut chair evolved from a commission by Richard Ownbey, a local psychologist, for his wife. After satisfying the needs of the customer, Soule experimented with various versions of the same design, including a low-backed chair. Making a similar chair for the Art Gallery, he says, “offered an opportunity to further explore and refine the design themes of this series.”

The Ownbey chair embodies the elements that distinguish Soule’s work. His designs are driven by a respect for the wood in which he works that results in refinement and

power in the finished object. Soule is also driven by a fascination with Asian woodwork. For example, he utilizes complex miter joinery (where the wood pieces join at forty-five-degree angles) for the seat rails. Many elements of the Ownbey chair, such as the shape of the legs, the modeling of the crest rail, and the solid splat, derive directly from Chinese furniture. The graceful curves of the Ownbey chair complement its sleek and modern appearance. Soule remarks: “I like the whole Oriental design philosophy. I’ve stylized and adapted them somewhat. I’m sort of partial to curves.” The firm and simple vertical lines announce the influence of modernity in the piece and reveal Soule’s inspiration by artists such as Frank Lloyd Wright. Thus, the chair simultaneously embodies traditional Asian design philosophies and a futuristic profile.

EDUCATION

1967-71 Courses in industrial design, University of Bridgeport, Bridgeport, Connecticut

REFERENCES

Robert C. Soule, response to author’s questionnaire, October 1998; Soule resumé

8

Pair of Aluminum Chairs

Charles Crowley (b. 1958)

Waltham, Massachusetts, 1989

Aluminum

H: 123.8 cm W: 56.2 cm D: 57.1 cm

1989.63.1.1..2

Charles Crowley thinks like a cabinetmaker but works in metal rather than wood. Trained in metalsmithing, he is widely acknowledged as a leader in the enthusiastic utilization of industrial machinery in craft fabrication. A tinkerer by nature and trade, his personal artistic style developed from his interest in milling machines and lathes. His designs are conceived with particular machines in mind and continue to evolve with the challenge and inspiration of new technology. Crowley says: the "forms I begin with are often machine generated and therefore simple and uniform. My 'art' is to arrange these in such a way as to create objects with emotional content." After making the basic form with machinery, Crowley is known for his intricate detailing and finishing, which results in a modern, sleek, and precise sculptural object.

Although his early career focused almost exclusively on hollowware, Crowley went on to develop an interest in re-creating traditional wooden joinery in metal. Experiments with milling machines led him to expand into the fabrication of tables and chairs. Combining his fascination with machinery and artistic finishing, this pair of chairs is made of aluminum bar stock, which was shaped with a slip roller (a machine usually used for making oil drums) and finished

with intricate punchwork. The clean lines of the chairs are typical of Crowley's hollowware, incorporating springy curves to "bring the object to life." The shorter back legs behind the broad front legs give the impression of an animal ready to pounce. Inspired by eclecticism, Crowley envisioned the chairs as part of a set, each piece being slightly different. By using varied punchwork patterns and only minimal modifications in the general elongated shape of the back, Crowley draws upon his metalsmithing expertise to create a harmonious effect.

EDUCATION

- 1982-83 Studied metal-spinning techniques: P.J. Gill Co., Woburn, Massachusetts; Halibut Point Pewter, Gloucester, Massachusetts; New England Metal Spinning, Medford, Massachusetts
- 1983 Welding techniques, Massachusetts College of Art, Boston, Massachusetts
- 1984 B.F.A., Program in Artisanry, Metalsmithing, Boston University

REFERENCES

Jonathan L. Fairbanks, Edward S. Cooke, Jr., Jeannine J. Falino, Linda L. Foss, Rachel J. Monfredo, and Maria Pulsone, *Collecting American Decorative Arts and Sculpture, 1971-1991* (Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, 1992), p. 80; Crowley resumé





*Child's Chair***Joanne Schima** (b. 1960)

Langhorne, Pennsylvania, 1988
 Maple, birch, fiberboard
 H: 57.1 cm W: 35.5 cm D: 30.5 cm
 1989.13.1

Before taking classes in woodworking and contemporary design with Mark Sfirri (see Cat. 18) at Bucks County Community College in Pennsylvania, Joanne Schima had no idea of the role that the craft would play in her life. For one of her first courses, the assignment was to create some object for a child. Her idea for a chair similar to the one now owned by the Art Gallery was inspired by children's playthings, in particular Tinkertoys. To create the *Child's Chair*, Schima readapted woodworking machinery to fabricate the intricate elements of her piece. She devised a special jig system for the lathe and drill press to shape and fit the Tinkertoy elements. The "cookie" pieces found at the top of each leg and the feet of the chair were also turned on a lathe. Schima finished her piece with bright primary colors in a whimsical manner delightful to the eyes of both children and adults.

Schima's chair design was immediately well received beyond the classroom, beginning with Sfirri, who showed it to other prominent studio furnituremakers. Soon Schima was selling copies of the chair to many other customers. She estimates that a total of twenty-five were created. She considered hav-

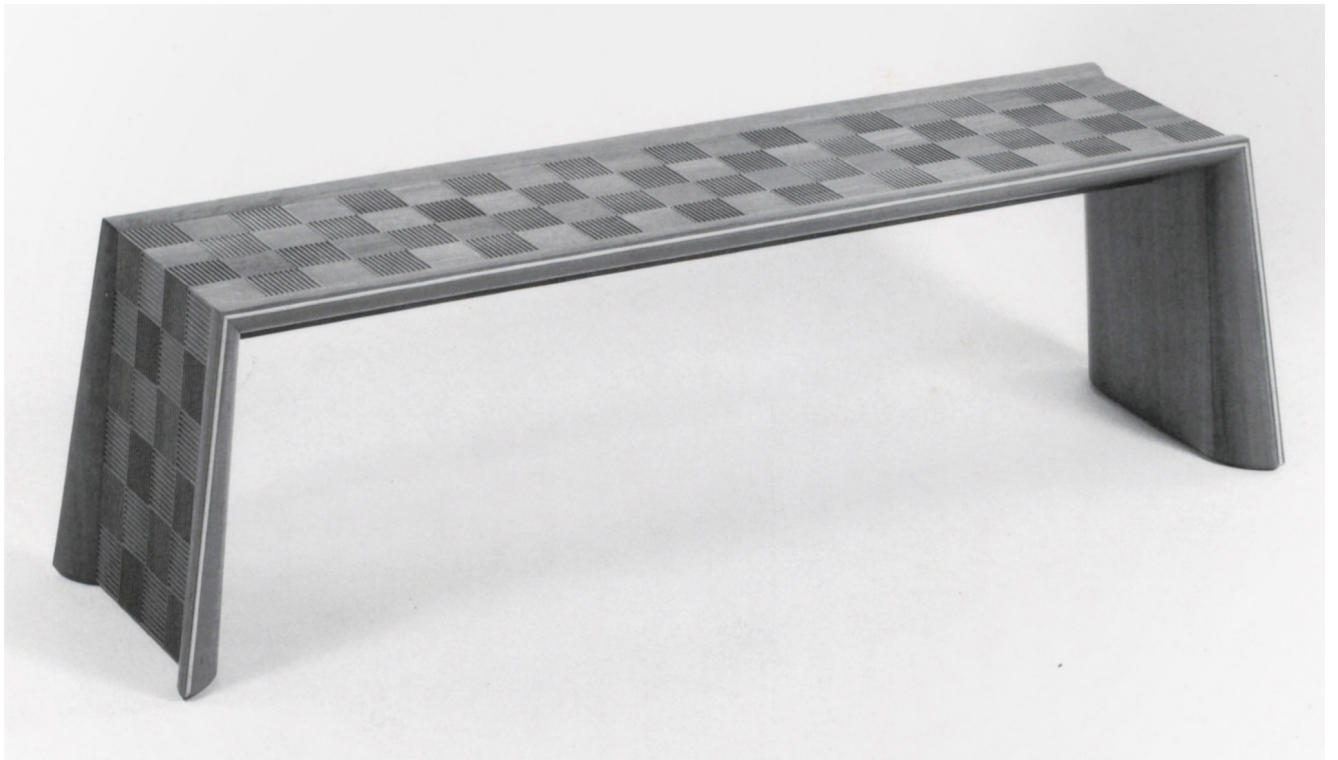
ing her successful design produced on a large scale and marketed through catalogs, but decided that increased availability would cheapen the value of the handmade versions. Achieving such overwhelming success at the beginning of her career, Schima notes, was both advantageous and difficult. Her name and her chair became widely recognized, allowing her to break into the world of studio furniture; yet such a resounding early success can give rise to enormous expectations. After a brief respite from woodworking, Schima has recently begun to work with Doug Finkel, another Bucks County Community College graduate, in Richmond, Virginia. Her current objective is to move beyond the doweled construction of her chair to the mastery of more complex joinery and traditional techniques.

EDUCATION

- 1985 B.S. in physical education, University of Delaware,
 Newark
 1985-87 Fine Woodworking, Bucks County Community
 College, Newtown, Pennsylvania

REFERENCES

- Joanne Schima, conversation with author; December 1998; Schima
 resumé



10

Bench

Kristina Madsen (b. 1955)

Easthampton, Massachusetts, 1990

Pearwood and holly

H: 32 cm W: 111.5 cm D: 26.5 cm

1990.13.1

Kristina Madsen began her journey into the craft world through an interest in textile techniques, such as quilting and lacemaking, inspired by her grandmother. The small, delicate geometric carving on this bench that echoes the subtle pattern of woven fabric shows how textiles influenced Madsen's design. The concept of the bench was developed in 1988 at the University of Tasmania, where she was an artist in residence and created the first of three similar benches. Deeply intrigued by South Pacific carving since 1982, when she discovered Roland and Maryanne Force's *The Fuller Collection of Pacific Artifacts*, Madsen began to experiment with surface texture and patterning in her work to achieve visual richness. Four months spent in Tasmania included a trip to New Zealand to look at Maori carvings. There she "was inspired by several of these which were laid out in patterns of squares. This was one of a series of fluted patterns that I developed for use on the surfaces of my furniture," which were originally achieved with the use of a router.

The Art Gallery's bench represents a key moment in Madsen's career when she began exploring the effects of reflected light on shallow carving to achieve "the illusion of depth and dimension." Since the creation of the Art Gallery's

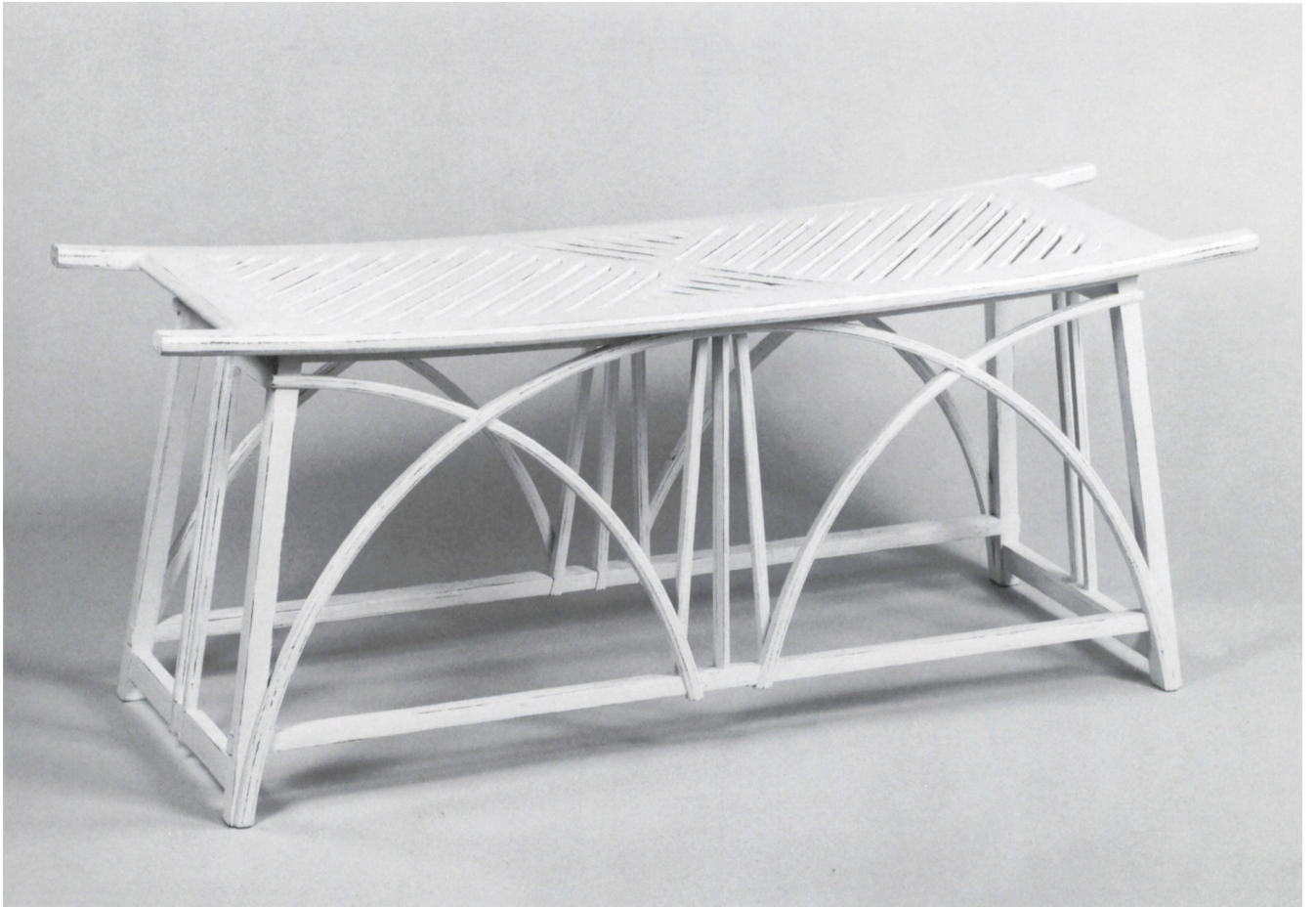
piece, Madsen has returned to the South Pacific and has studied extensively with master carver Makiti Koto in Fiji. She has expanded her surface texture into more physically demanding freehand carving and has developed her own combination of geometric systems with Fijian-inspired patterns. For Madsen, simple furniture forms provide a canvas for her carving. In her present work, which is primarily inspired by her experiences in Tasmania and Fiji, one can still see the influence of intricate lace and textile patterns.

EDUCATION

- | | |
|---------|---|
| 1976-79 | Furniture design and making, Leeds Design Workshops, Easthampton, Massachusetts |
| 1988 | School of Art, University of Tasmania, Hobart, Tasmania |

REFERENCES

- Edward S. Cooke, Jr., *New American Furniture: The Second Generation of Studio Furnituremakers* (Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, 1989), pp. 68-71; Kristina Madsen, response to author's questionnaire, November 1998; Madsen resumé; Terrie Noll, "Return of the Native: Kristina Madsen Revisited," *Woodwork* 51 (June 1998): 20-27; Laura J. MacKay, "Fiji Reconfigured: Furniture Maker Kristina Madsen," *Design Times* 8 (February/March 1996): 52-53; Roland W. Force and Maryanne Force, *The Fuller Collection of Pacific Artifacts* (New York: Praeger, 1971)



II

Bench

Michael Hurwitz (b. 1955)

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1990

Bubinga with milk paint

H: 55.6 cm W: 142.2 cm D: 42.2 cm

1990.39.1

Prior to 1982, Michael Hurwitz was primarily interested in creating simple forms out of solid wood with exposed joinery. After 1983, however, he became fascinated by the effects of paint and texture as a way to invest his pieces with another layer of meaning. Specifically, Hurwitz began experimenting with a variety of patinated finishes to provide a look of age and the sense of a richer history. Coated with a milk paint that has been slightly sanded and rubbed, the Art Gallery's bench exemplifies this technique. The peeling paint and purposely scuffed corners evoke a quality of aging and encourage the viewer to search for layers of historical meaning. By concentrating on surface finish rather than the wood underneath, Hurwitz has abandoned the widely accepted assumption that precious objects should be built out of exotic woods.

In 1985 Hurwitz traveled to the Dominican Republic on a fellowship, where he continued to explore his fascination with surface embellishment and developed an interest in local vernacular traditions as well as traditional joinery. Hurwitz's work in his later career demonstrates that he has overcome a yearning to achieve only technical proficiency with each piece. Instead, he has adopted an Eastern philo-

sophical approach and now finds the work process as fulfilling as the final product: as he says, "I work because it allows me to suspend reality. I am interested as much in the activity of making as I am in the notion of producing an object." The Art Gallery's bench and his recent furniture successfully merge this philosophy with Hurwitz's accomplished technical proficiency. His interest in intangibility finds three-dimensional expression in this bench, in which "the top is made of individual slats which should cast an interesting shadow and provide a pleasant sense of air flow." The negative space between the wood, and the meaning "between the lines," both give shape to Hurwitz's transcendental philosophy.

EDUCATION

1974-75 Massachusetts College of Art, Boston

1975-79 B.F.A., Program in Artisanry, Boston University

1990-91 Studied with Mr. Kenkichi Kuroda, Master Lacquer Craftsman, Kyoto, Japan

REFERENCES

Michael Hurwitz, correspondence in object folder, June 1988 and 1989; Hurwitz resumé; Edward S. Cooke, Jr., *New American Furniture: The Second Generation of Studio Furnituremakers* (Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, 1989), pp. 60-63; "Michael Hurwitz," *American Craft* 46, no. 1 (February/March 1986): 41

12

Marquetry Bench

Silas Kopf (b. 1949)

Northampton, Massachusetts, 1993

Mahogany with mahogany, ebony, holly, maple, and cherry veneers

H: 43.2 cm W: 134.6 cm D: 50.8 cm

1993.119.1

Viewers of this bench by Silas Kopf are first unsettled by the possibility of sitting on the trompe l'oeil magazines and then astounded by the realistic illusion created upon the bench's surface. Always concerned about achieving a meticulous level of craftsmanship, Kopf has made a career goal of mastering the technique of marquetry, the method of utilizing numerous flat pieces of wood veneer in a variety of hues to create a picturesque design. He aims to amaze the viewer with his precise workmanship since, as he says, "the key to success is to leave fans wondering how it's done." Like other furnituremakers who came of age in the 1970s, Kopf explores a change in surface treatment as opposed to using the qualities of the wood itself to dictate the design, as Ebner did in his stool (Cat. 1). Yet Kopf does not entirely reject the notion that wood grain can be a key component of decoration. While other furnituremakers were experimenting with painted finishes, Kopf chose to ornament the surface of his pieces with "paintings" in wood.

In the design of the Art Gallery's bench, Kopf engages the viewer through the use of three "magazines" on the left side of the top surface. The trompe l'oeil incorporation of a foreign object into the piece recalls the work of Wendell

Castle, with whom Kopf apprenticed for two years in the mid-1970s. At first glance, the viewer might assume that someone who was sitting here reading has left his materials behind. Upon closer observation, the viewer might perceive how the marquetry of the *Yale Alumni Magazine* cover makes reference to the "Treasures at the Art Gallery," of which the bench is now one. Upon final consideration, the viewer might also recognize the image of the man on the bottom newspaper as Julian Fisher, donor of the funds for the *Please Be Seated* collection, and notice the visual reference to the *Atlantic Monthly*, a tribute to Fisher's wife, Barbara Wallraff, an editor for the magazine. This witty layering of possible viewer perception reveals the sophistication of Kopf's design and technique.

EDUCATION

1972 A.B. in architecture, Princeton University
1974-76 Apprentice to Wendell Castle
1988 Program in marquetry, Ecole Boulle, Paris

REFERENCES

Silas Kopf, "Marquetry on Furniture," *Fine Woodworking* 38 (1983): 61-65; Silas Kopf, response to author's questionnaire, September 1998; Kopf resumé



13

Alligator Bench

Judy Kensley McKie (b. 1944)

Berkeley, California, 1993

Bronze

H: 55 cm W: 170.5 cm D: 37 cm

1993.90.1

Illustrated in color on back wrapper

The playfulness of Judy Kensley McKie's work bespeaks a sophisticated humor and personal vitality that has taken many forms throughout her career. Originally trained as a painter, McKie grew disillusioned with making nonfunctional art and began to explore furnituremaking as an artistic expression. After working for five years in a cooperative that produced simple modern furniture, she began in the late 1970s to investigate ways of reaching beyond what she saw as impersonal contemporary design. "Then, as I experienced an impulse to make the work (and the working process) more personal, my influences shifted. I sought objects made in a more caring and personal way." Her desires led her to examine and draw inspiration from Pre-Columbian, African, and Native American art. Utilizing her broad range of skills, in 1977 McKie began incorporating abstract animal imagery into her work to develop a personalized sense of vitality that can be seen in the *Alligator Bench*.

Although her first furniture pieces were made of wood using machinery, McKie began to expand her range of decorative techniques, first with freehand carving, then with painting, texturing, and gilding. She says, "I love to experiment with new techniques, materials and mediums as a mean of keeping myself engaged." This willingness to experiment, along with the encouragement of Oakland, California, furniture-maker Gary Knox Bennet, led McKie to consider producing multiples of her work. Bronze casting was a logical technique through which to achieve these goals. The *Alligator Bench* is an example of this phase in McKie's career. In designing the bench, she "wanted it to be 'alligator-like' without being too familiar or identifiable in terms of culture, politics, trends, etc."



The straightforward simplicity of the bench, combined with the beguiling smile of the alligator, achieves the successful integration of function and aesthetic intrigue that McKie is so interested in creating.

EDUCATION

1966 B.F.A., Rhode Island School of Design, Providence

REFERENCES

Patricia Conway, *Judy Kensley McKie* (East Hampton, N.Y.: Pritam & Eames, 1997); Carl Belz, *McKie: Todd McKie and Judy Kensley McKie* (Waltham, Mass.: Rose Art Museum of Brandeis University, 1990); Judy Kensley McKie, response to author's questionnaire, August 1998; McKie resumé; Edward S. Cooke, Jr., *New American Furniture: The Second Generation of Studio Furnituremakers* (Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, 1989), pp. 80-83

14

Bench

Henry Royer (b. 1952)

Evansville, Wisconsin, 1994
Soft maple, mild steel
H: 50.3 cm W: 148 cm
D: 35.8 cm
1994.42.1



By mixing steel industrial components, stone, and wood in geometric combinations, Henry Royer steps outside the traditional furniture vocabulary of form and material. The pieces he creates are explicitly solid and substantial. The reassuring sense of a sturdy bench under the sitter is important to Royer, as he imagines himself designing sculpture that is primarily utilitarian. For all the heaviness of material, Royer's benches project a sense of balance and movement. He explains, "I try to defy their heaviness with a sense of motion," which is illustrated in the Art Gallery's bench. The soft maple seat is balanced on bulky steel supports that emerge at angles and intersect with a circular tube.

Royer also is known for unusual combinations and surface treatment of his materials. He explains, "I want to create a tension between the materials that I use." He created this tension in the Art Gallery's bench by combining a wooden seat with a metallic base. Although other furniture makers may delight in the autonomous beauty of wood, Royer treated the maple seat with ferrous sulfate and an analyne black

dye. The result is a wooden seat polished and squared to deny its organic origins. In contrast to the smooth touch of the warm maple, the cold steel base has surface imperfections and a patina created with the blueing used for gunstocks. Yet Royer has made the two seemingly opposite materials work in harmony to form a coherent design.

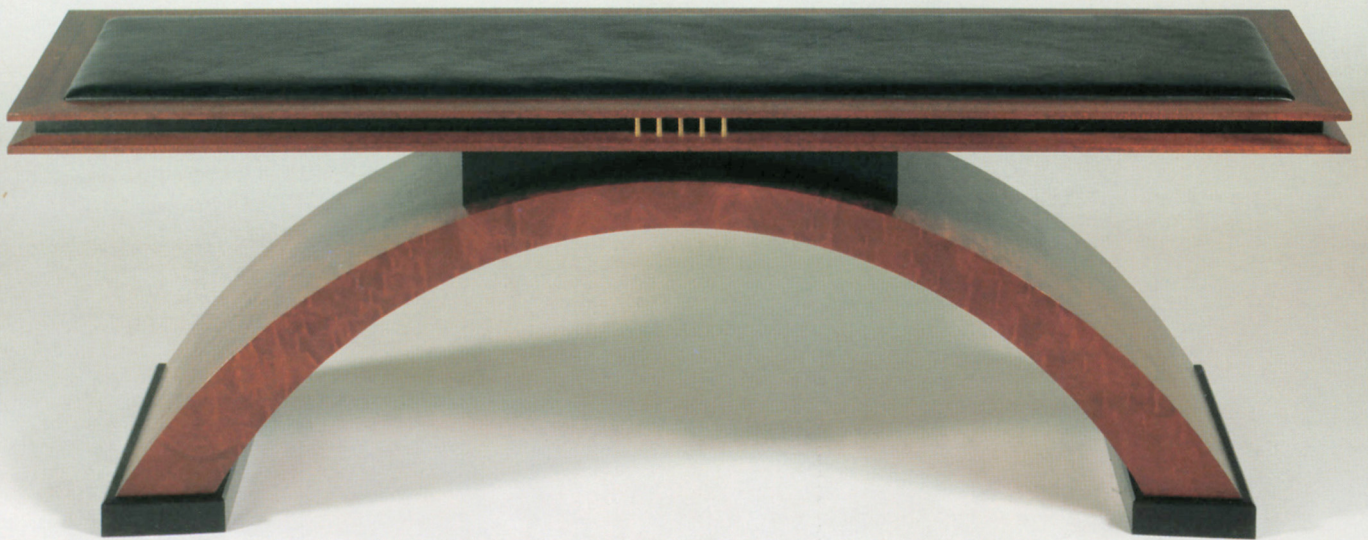
Since the creation of the Art Gallery's bench, Royer has attempted to explore more fluidity in his work. He asserts, "I am losing the rigidity of the geometric forms I started out using." He has also become less interested in the "polished look." Although using the same materials, Royer continues to experiment with a variety of surface treatments created by the combination of wood and steel.

EDUCATION

1975 B.A. in philosophy, City College, New York City,
New York

REFERENCES

Henry Royer, response to author's questionnaire, July 1998; Royer resumé



15

Rising Benchmark

Mark Del Guidice (b. 1954)

Norwood, Massachusetts, 1991

Mahogany, mobai veneer; black cowhide leather; brass inlay

H: 45.7 cm W: 137.2 cm D: 45.7 cm

1991.97.1

Having attended Boston University at a time when “post modernism was at its height,” Mark Del Guidice “caught hold of an eclectic wave.” Influenced by working in group shops in Cambridge and Norwood, Massachusetts, he also found inspiration in fellow woodworkers such as Wendell Castle (a prominent and innovative figure in furnituremaking since the 1960s) and Judy Kensley McKie (see Cat. 13). Initially, Del Guidice specialized in technically challenging furniture, and throughout his career he has explored the interesting juxtaposition of materials, as can be seen in the Art Gallery’s *Rising Benchmark*. The combination of brass inlay, mobai (a richly grained tropical wood) veneer, and leather seat provides an effect of playfulness in unexpected combinations. The piece was inspired by seeing a shop jig (machine) used for laminations in combination with a large sanding block. Intrigued by the transition of arch to plane, Del Guidice fabricated a foundational arch using bent laminations and added a horizontal cantilever to create a persuasive sense of visual tension. He explains, “I see the bench as a successful transference of physical properties,” such as weight, and “a continued challenge [to] physical perception”: Can one safely sit on the end?

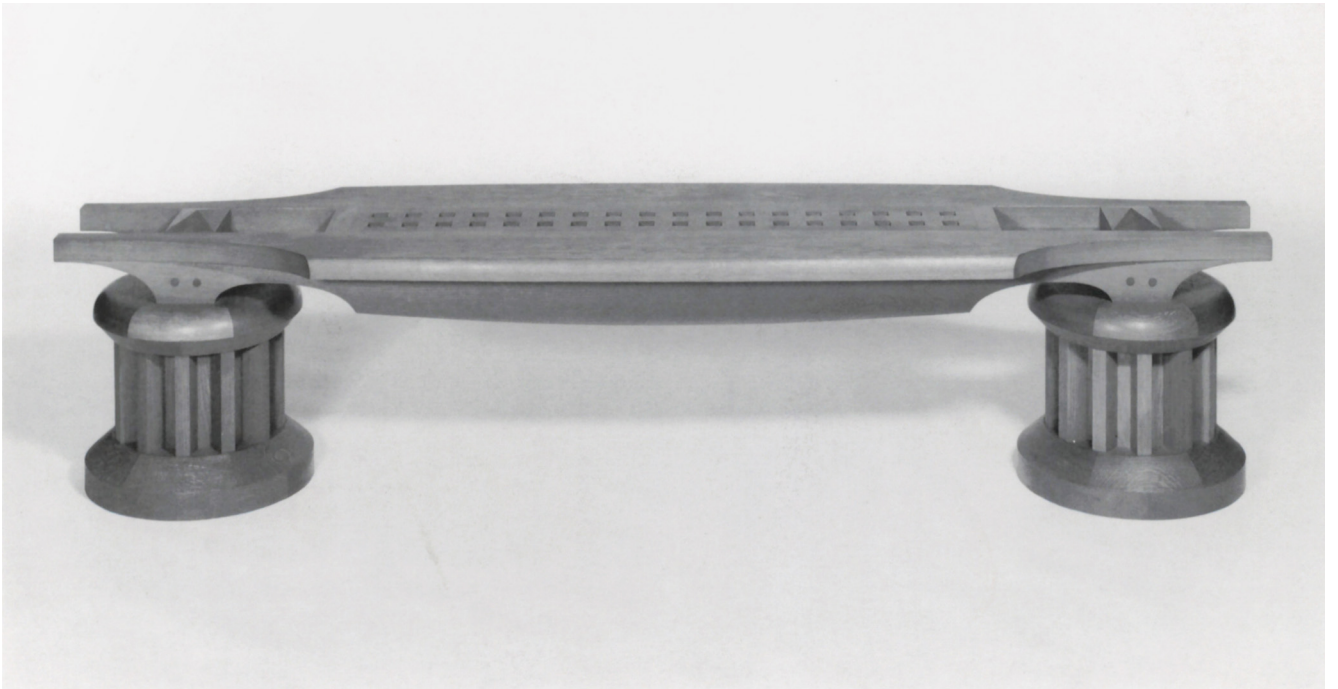
Del Guidice has since moved toward “simpler yet highly crafted pieces.” His latest work incorporates hieroglyphic carving and continues to synthesize outstanding workmanship with elegant design. Process, he notes, is integral to “transporting ideas from inception to a completed piece.” Working out structural concerns and proportions using a small-scale model, Del Guidice revels in the artistic freedom of the “series of decisions that lead to each other naturally” in his furnituremaking.

EDUCATION

- | | |
|------|---|
| 1978 | B.A. in psychology, Boston State College, Boston, Massachusetts |
| 1987 | A.F.A., Program in Artisanry, Boston University |

REFERENCES

- Mark Del Guidice, response to author’s questionnaire, December 1998; Del Guidice resumé: conversation with author, December 1998



16

Bench

Peter Dean (b. 1951)

Marion, Massachusetts, 1995

Oak

H: 45.7 cm W: 213.4 cm D: 49 cm

1995.37.1

With a background in architecture, Peter Dean brings to furnituremaking a keen sense of architectural history. He combines eloquent design with a mixture of eclectic elements to create work that has been influential in the field of studio furniture. Dean's work demonstrates refined, self-conscious workmanship enriched by a diverse design vocabulary. His training, which also included graduate work in theology and psychology, emphasized both technical proficiency and sculptural harmony. Dean's body of work reflects his superb technical training and demonstrates that he has drawn upon his intellectual endeavors to maintain "high levels of compositional structure and spiritual content."

The Art Gallery's bench hints at the broad background of its maker. The massive size of the imposing seat demands that the piece be encountered on an architectural level. Dean's training in architecture is also revealed in the incorporation of multifarious elements into the work. The bench demonstrates his ability to create densely loaded objects with a variety of structural components that may strike profoundly dissonant notes in the viewer. For example, the bench contains

a seemingly illogical combination of visual references to classical columns on either end, a trellis-type bench element, and a boatlike shape. This postmodern combination of elements results in a structurally solid foundation of columns transversed by an airy crossbeam. The artist has brightly and uniformly stained his bench a jarring bright-red color, further underscoring the illusion of unnatural, calculated construction. Typical of Dean's work, this bench embodies a bold yet subtle composition and a high degree of workmanship.

EDUCATION

- 1977 B.F.A. in architecture, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence
- 1979 Graduate work in theology and psychology, University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, Indiana
- 1980 Sculpture Workshop, Indiana University, South Bend
- 1984 M.F.A., Program in Artisanry, Boston University

REFERENCES

Edward S. Cooke, Jr., *New American Furniture: The Second Generation of Studio Furnituremakers* (Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, 1989), pp. 44-47; Dean resumé

17

Bench

Richard Tannen (b. 1948)

Honeoye Falls, New York, 1996

Ash

H: 42 cm W: 186.7 cm D: 48.1 cm

1997.11.1

Trained in structural engineering and technical woodworking, Richard Tannen demonstrated a desire to incorporate skilled craftsmanship with visual impact in his early furniture. In his later work, of which the Art Gallery's bench is an example, Tannen has reached a level of confidence in his career where he has transcended the desire to demonstrate technical proficiency and can concentrate more on utilizing the expressive qualities of wood. He says, "I still believe craftsmanship to be essential to the successful expression of any ideas I might have, but it can and most often should be invisible." Thus, in pieces such as this, Tannen achieves a fluidity of surface and materials that no longer foregrounds construction but rather highlights the piece as a sculptural, organic whole.

In this ash bench, Tannen explores gesture through swelling and gentle curves while simultaneously treating his wood in an ambiguous manner. The elegant sleekness of the surface reinforces the graceful curves of the bench, and the faded grain of the ash creates a slight suppression of the organic material. By bleaching the wood grain into faintness rather than staining it to create stark contrast, Tannen has utilized the characteristics of the ash in an innovative reversal.

Tannen's bench was commissioned specifically for the *Please Be Seated* collection. The design project forced him to face the challenges posed by public seating. Although his previous work had a "lightness of character" and "sense of fragility," he decided that his bench should "inspire confidence and invite its use." Expecting his piece to occupy the center of a room filled with art, Tannen has created a three-dimensional piece that one can sit on from any side. His sculptural bench "changes and evolves as the viewer moves around it. . . [and] cannot be completely understood from just a single view."

EDUCATION

- 1970 B.S. in civil engineering, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York
- 1978 Certificate of Mastery in Woodworking and Furniture Design, Program in Artisanry, Boston University

REFERENCES

- Richard Tannen, response to author's questionnaire, August 1998; Tannen resumé





18

Walking Bench

Mark Sfirri (b. 1952)

New Hope, Pennsylvania, 1998

Purpleheart and ash

H: 68.5 cm W: 171.5 cm D: 52 cm

1998.47.1

This bench by Mark Sfirri incorporates his innovative use of multi-axis turning. Using a technique on the lathe that involves turning a piece of wood on more than one axis, Sfirri makes what he calls "walking tables" whose bent legs suggest the illusion of animation and instability. He utilizes this technique to create objects that embody balance and energy in movement. Over the past five years, he has used multi-axis turning to produce both pieces of furniture and sculpture.

The Art Gallery's bench is Sfirri's first attempt to use the turning technique for seating furniture. Although designing this bench posed several structural challenges, Sfirri was pleased to expand his range of walking furniture. He says that "with six legs [on the bench], there is more opportunity to explore the effect of a swirling motion, like a rubbery structure caught up in a tornado." This theme is expanded through vague allusions to clouds in the shapes of the arms, seat, and rounded forms in the legs. The piece also demon-

strates Sfirri's fascination with his material. Turners have an added relation to the wood they are using, as all woods express different characteristics while under the lathe. Sfirri used ash for the turnings of the arms and legs, and so oriented the wood that the annual growth rings make interesting patterns on the prominent elements. He combined the light ash with dramatic purpleheart used to underline the seat, contrasting vivid colors while accentuating the lightness of the airy legs. The result, seen here, is a successful marriage of energetic balance with sturdy functionality.

EDUCATION

1974 B.F.A., Rhode Island School of Design, Providence

1978 M.F.A., Rhode Island School of Design, Providence

REFERENCES

Mark Sfirri, response to author's questionnaire, August 1998; Tony Boase, "Off Beat Artistry," *Woodturning* 52 (May 1997); Sfirri resumé

Revenge of the Deconstructionist Saw Chair

John Cederquist (b. 1946)

Capistrano Beach, California, 1995
 Baltic birch plywood, sitka spruce, maple
 H: 151 cm W: 47 cm D: 61 cm
 1995.7.1

Inspired by cartoons and two-dimensional Japanese wood-block art, John Cederquist intentionally subordinates function and form to image and perception. Working, as he has said, in two-and-a-half dimensions, he transforms flat surfaces into trompe l'oeil illusions using a variety of techniques including marquetry, burnt inlay, and lamination. Cederquist simultaneously is true to his material and unconcerned with maintaining the integrity of the wood surface, utilizing the inherent characteristics of the wood to suggest other materials. He combines this natural approach with surface manipulation such as paint or inlay to heighten the visual complexity of a piece. In *Revenge of the Deconstructionist Saw Chair*, the reflective sheen of oiled Pacific Northwest maple suggests the metallic surface of saw blades. Cederquist intentionally plays with his viewer, disturbing the potential sitter's comfort by introducing the prospect of resting against sharp saw blades and broken wood as a backrest.

Cederquist's career was greatly influenced by his training in California. Unlike more formal programs in the East, the Western craft environment encouraged experimentation

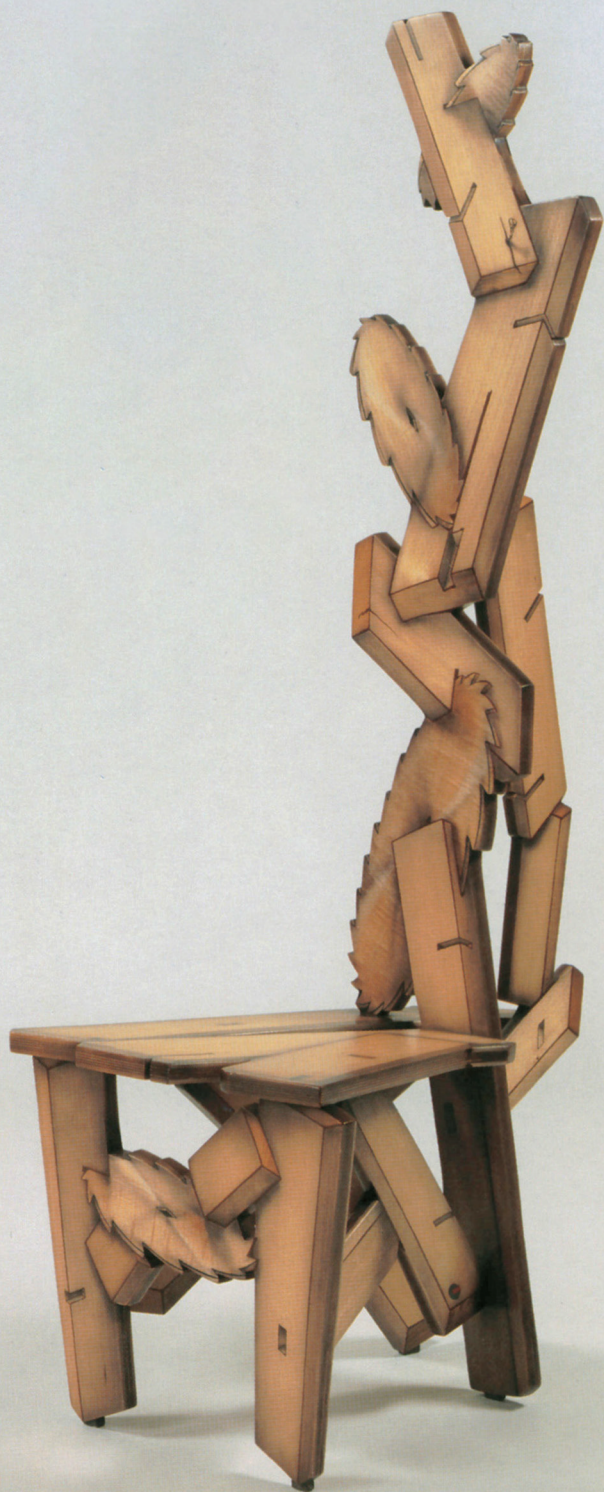
with spontaneity as well as a variety of visual imagery. While teaching a course on two-dimensional design in the late 1970s, Cederquist pondered whether the perspective could be manipulated into three dimensions. Through the years he has explored a wide range of themes within the framework of his innovative technique of sketching a flat image on plywood and expanding the facade into a third dimension. *Revenge of the Deconstructionist Saw Chair* is one of the latest in a series of other similarly themed chairs. The title of the piece, recalling that of a movie sequel, allays any doubt that Cederquist's inspiration comes from popular culture.

EDUCATION

1969	B.A. in art, Long Beach State (now California State University)
1971	M.A., Long Beach State, Long Beach, California

REFERENCES

Arthur C. Danto and Nancy Princenthal, *The Art of John Cederquist: Reality of Illusion* (Oakland: Oakland Museum of California, 1997); Edward S. Cooke, Jr., *New American Furniture: The Second Generation of Studio Furnituremakers* (Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, 1989), pp. 40-43



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