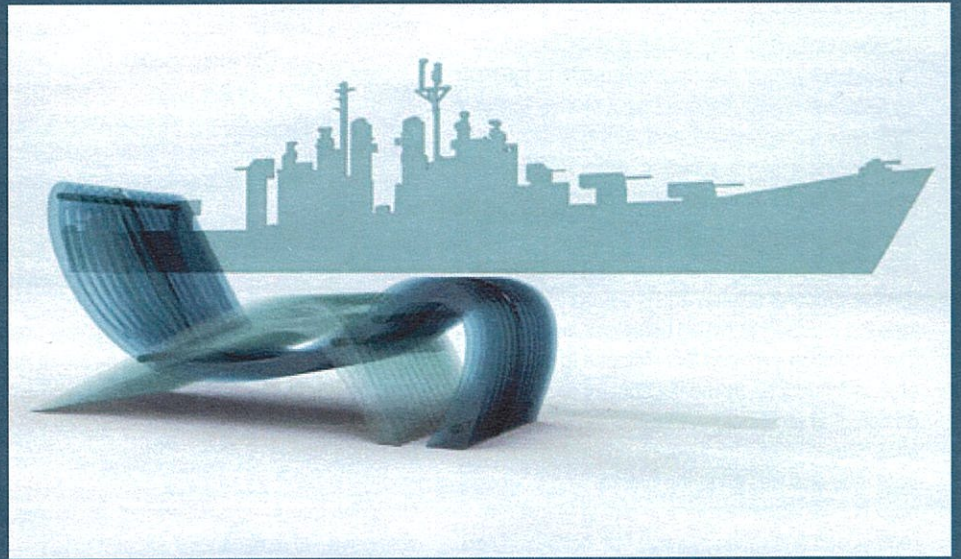
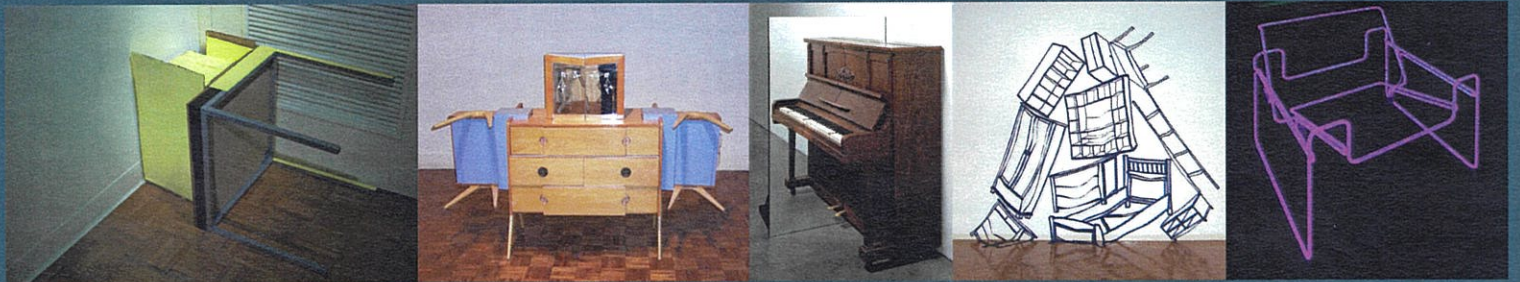


LEHMAN COLLEGE ART GALLERY



INFORMED BY FUNCTION



ALEXANDRE
DAVID
JEAN
CARLOS
FRANCIS
PEDRO
MARCIA
HISAE
MICHELLE
FRIEDRICH
FORREST
IVÁN
MARC ANDRÉ
COURTNEY
WILLIAM
MADELINE

ARRECHEA
BAUMFLECK
BLACKBURN
BUNGA
CAPE
CRUZ-CASTRO
GROSTEIN
IKENAGA
JAFFÉ
KUNATH
MYERS
NAVARRO
ROBINSON
SMITH
STONE
WEINRIB

FEBRUARY 6 – MAY 15, 2008

Co-curated by Claudia Calirman and Susan Hoeltzel

BEDFORD PARK BOULEVARD WEST . BRONX, NY 10468 . 718.960.8731
www.lehman.edu/gallery

Informed by Function

Introduction

by Claudia Calirman and Susan Hoeltzel

Throughout the early 20th century from Bauhaus design to Duchamp's ready-mades, there has been a dialogue between art and the domestic object. **Informed by Function** brings together a diverse group of sixteen artists whose work examines the interplay between utility and aesthetics. The exhibition explores this dialogue in sculptural objects influenced by the vocabulary of furniture, design, and architecture. Familiar yet displaced or transformed, these forms draw on sources ranging from industrial design to the natural world. "Found objects," with their history and patina of use are repurposed and reconfigured. The hand-built and mass-produced are incorporated in work throughout the exhibition. Subversion of intent, political allusion, and narrative content are among the issues raised by these hybrid works—along with wit, whimsy, and humor.

Recent contemporary artists such as Andrea Zittel, Jorge Pardo, Rachel Whiteread, Doris Salcedo, Cornelia Parker, Richard Artschwager, Mona Hatoum, Louise Bourgeois, among others continue to investigate the social as well as aesthetic relationships implied in the many possible uses of furniture. Precursors range from Vito Acconci's body conscious furniture/sculpture to Gordon Matta Clark's transformation and reconfiguring of the urban landscape with its cultural narratives. Doris Salcedo uses chairs and tables as a metaphor for trauma and mourning of the civil war victims in Colombia. Rachel Whiteread explores the negative spaces of domestic objects to evoke absence and memory implied in the void. Louise Bourgeois' use of domestic objects in her sculptural installations reflects painful memories from her childhood. Andrea Zittel's domestic and social environments blur the lines between art and life and the distinctions between art, architecture, and furniture design.

Pieces of furniture are meant to be movable as their names in Spanish "muebles" and in French "meubles" attest. Anatomically-based or sometimes anthropomorphically-oriented, they are designed to accommodate the human body. **Informed by Function** shows artists mostly dealing with the non-functional aspect of these objects. They make pieces that are sometimes abstract, flat, or even attached to the wall transforming them into unexpected forms with a myriad of new meanings and associations. The mediums are diverse as

Formica, stainless steel, fiber epoxy, carpet, wood, glass, mirror, cardboard and bronze.

The exhibition includes **Alexandre Arrechea's** *Secret Meeting* (2006), a lounge chair made of green, transparent Plexiglas from which a battleship emerges. The wavy shapes of the Plexiglas give the feeling of a boat at sea. Private space as opposed to public arena, secrecy versus transparency, revelation and concealment, conspiracy and openness, are key elements involved in Arrechea's work. War and politics cross the space of domestic privacy violating its safety. The intrusion of public matters and surveillance into our personal lives are constantly under scrutiny in his work. Arrechea was part of the Havana-based collective Los Carpinteros—known for working between the lines of the familiar and the uncanny, and creating humorous, dysfunctional, hybrid objects out of utilitarian pieces of finely crafted carpentry.

Utilitarian forms—chairs, ladders, doorways, and chimneys—give minimalist shape to **Iván Navarro's** luminous neon sculptures. Concealed behind a curtain in a room that has been painted black, Navarro's *Black Electric Chair* (2006) obliquely references intimidation, torture, and capital punishment with metaphor and double entendre. Navarro grew up in Chile during the military dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet. The work presents an intricate blend of meanings through language, visual elements, historical reference, and sound. The chair, based on Marcel Breuer's 1925 Wassily chair, appears to hover in midair in the darkened room. There is the buzz of the electrical transformer. "Black light" bathes the viewer including them in the installation. On one level the work is a formal object—non-threatening and familiar through a surfeit of modernist furniture knockoffs—yet there is the darkened, isolated room and that persistent electrical buzz suggesting both torture and the electric chair.

Francis Cape's work mixes an understated minimalism with the quiet intimacy of domestic architecture. *Ama* (2003) presents two walls at right angles and reveals the skills of an experienced cabinetmaker—Cape was apprenticed to a woodworker for five years. One side of the structure, wainscoted and painted a vivid colonial blue, has a paneled surface of varying proportions. On the other side, the exposed studs are a reminder of the construction process and what lays hidden behind walls. A pew-like bench nested inside, comes as a surprise as one rounds the corner of the work. The bench and its placement suggest seclusion, solitude, possibly a confessional. Cape's proportions are systematically derived. Using Fibonacci's sequence and, in this instance, Corbusier's Modulor (also based on Fibonacci) the proportions represent a mathematical relationship between the structure and the space for which it was originally

designed. The title *Ama* is a pun, a contraction of "I am a....."

William Stone's *Corrected Chairs* (2008) are funny and witty. His triple wooden chairs are mounted one on top of the other. The bottom chair is the oldest and shabbiest one and its back legs are cut short. The three chairs seem to be falling down in sequence, in a reference to Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase* (1912). The implied movement also makes them look like they are moving forward in space in an uncomfortable and unstable manner. The notion of rest and security that one might associate with chairs is shattered and challenged by a conceptual twist in which the imminent collapse of these objects is always present. In *Mixed Metaphors* (2000), Stone metamorphoses a ladder into a stair, creating a visual conflict out of the fusion of these two elements. Finally, the stair once more gives way to the ladder making fun of "social climbers" in society.

Jean Blackburn reinvents familiar domestic objects – chairs, sofas, beds, dinnerware, rugs—by taking apart and reconfiguring them as well as subverting their function. *Serviette* (2002) humorously named for the napkin folded over an exposed plywood armature, is a deconstructed wing chair that has been reassembled with its insides out and vice versa. Her technique draws on the strategies of furniture-making and upholstery. A lacy doily becomes part of the exterior covering, webbing is added to a side panel and the inner springs are visible. Holes penetrate the structure. The rough wooden supports are exposed and contrast with the polished finish of the chair's legs. *Serviette* offers a quirky take on an American classic.

Known for work that hovers between sculpture and furniture, **Forrest Myers's** *Parker* (2006) is a tangle of wire that inhabits the form of chair. The work looks like an armchair with asymmetrical arms that appears to be rendered in the animated line of a "gesture drawing." It is at once comic while, at the same time presents an object with compelling formal elements. While one could argue that the work could actually be used for sitting, comfort would not be among the qualities attributed to this seat.

Natural forms have long been a part of the furniture and design tradition with lion claws, eagle talons, and acanthus leaves. **Pedro Cruz-Castro's** work mixes natural/zoomorphic forms with the man-made. He carries this idiom to its literal conclusion in *Hybrid III* (2006) in which a small cabinet is supported by the legs and feet of an actual deer. The legs do not stand in a symmetrically repeated position on each side of the cabinet but instead, appear to dance, giving the impression that the cabinet is scampering away.

Constructed from discarded wooden chairs, **Marc Andre Robinson's** large-scale work *Throne for the Songs That Will Come by Themselves and of Themselves* (2008) was developed with the architectural space of the gallery in mind. Fifteen feet in diameter, this colossal circle reminiscent of a Ferris wheel, is a fanciful configuration created from twenty-three "found objects." With cushions removed from the back and seat, the structural forms of the chairs appear to arch backwards to create the circle. Each comes with a past and the wear and tear of use. The chairs have been joined together using traditional cabinetry techniques—glue and pegs—and spiky dowels punctuate the new incarnation.

Colorful abstract forms created from cardboard appear to evolve from small tables in **Carlos Bunga's** constructions. They transform the familiar and give a suggestion of the large-scale, architecturally-based interventions for which he is known. Bunga's constructions are in many ways akin to Kurt Schwitters' Merz projects. Part of the Dada movement in Germany, Schwitters is known for his collages made out of scraps of refuse combining pure geometric forms with natural shapes. Bunga, however, focuses more on the transformation that takes place after the work is constructed. *Model 36* (2008) is free standing while *Model 34* (2008) and *Model 35* (2008) are installed in the corners of the gallery next to electrical outlets and overlapping a louvered closet door. The placement of the latter works emphasizes their relationship to the architecture of the room. The fragility of the cardboard underscores the simplicity of means in their construction and emphasizes the transience of the work.

Courtney Smith's sculptures are like puzzles based on games of building blocks with no pre-fixed configuration. She creates structures that vary from recognizable pieces of furniture to totally conceptual abstract forms. *Polly Blue Pell Mell* (2005) is made out of a mid-century Brazilian chest of drawers with etched mirror and two side tables. In this piece, Smith combines organic and industrial materials. She cuts-up into pieces the original wooden furniture and incorporates them into geometrically-arranged shapes of Formica and plywood. *Polly Blue Pell Mell* is fully mounted as a dresser for this exhibition, but it can also be entirely deconstructed and spread out as one of the multiple possible configurations for the piece. In *Sim ou Não* (2004) Smith dissects a rosewood armchair into 16 random pieces. Each segment is incorporated into a plywood block. An abstract, two-dimensional configuration is laid out on the floor and, here, it becomes no longer possible to rebuild the original piece of furniture. *Island* (2007/2008) is an installation made of a series of isosceles triangles that can be grouped together in any given manner. They may be perceived as minimalist sculptures or geometric abstract blocks with no designated function,

but they are, however, all ergonomically-informed and can be used as real pieces of furniture.

David Baumflek's *Still Life* (2007) is made out of white tables piled up on top of each other forming a long-vertical pyramid that rises to a height just short of the ceiling. At the top of the assembled tables there is a bowl filled with plastic fruits. Hanging from the ceiling, there is a mirror reflecting the unattainable fruits. The work plays with ideas of display and consumption and with the longing for unfulfilled desire. Baumflek appropriates the classical genre of still-life to make a social comment on contemporary issues related to commodification, spectacle, luxury and excess in society.

Marcia Grostein's chairs are like anthropomorphic beings moving in space. The presence of an androgynous body is implied in the contour of *She* (1993) made out of fiber epoxy. Her anatomically-oriented sculptures are elegant and poised, and when juxtaposed with each other, in pieces such as *You and Me* (1993)—which are made out of fiber epoxy and painted bronze—they seem like organic shapes engaged in a modern choreography. A push and pull dance involving attraction and repulsion, sexuality, violence, and reconciliation emanates from her pieces, which seem to be in a permanent state of change and mutability as they interact with the space surrounding them.

The body and its relationship to clothing are also implied in **Michelle Jaffe's** *Maillot Maillot* (2004). Her sculpture is playful and whimsical, collapsing the shape of a chaise lounge with the one of a female bathing suit. Uncannily, body and suit are in unison. The stainless steel chair looks like an armor that shelters an implied reclining figure. The title *Maillot Maillot* refers to the recumbent female figures created by Aristide Maillol (1861-1944), and his emphasis on the heavy, robust, elegant, and stable forms.

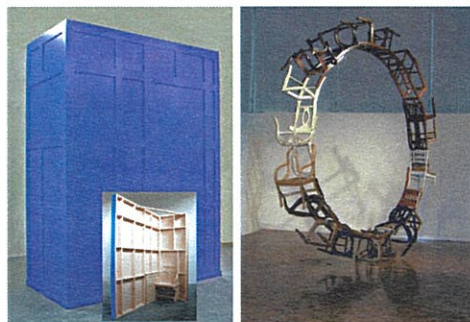
Madeline Weinrib's *Persian Illusion* (2008) is a carpet made out of mirror and gouache. It is inspired by the style of traditional Persian carpet combining classical motifs rooted in nature and organic shapes with modern patterns of abstraction. Weinrib fuses past and present, revamping an antique tradition with a fresh look. The tree of life, center medallion and borders are re-contextualized, creating a fragile object that, unlike a carpet, cannot be stepped on. Its life comes from its reflection on the wall. In *Persian Illusion*, Weinrib combines her practice as a carpet and textile designer with her training in painting and drawing, breaking the boundaries between art and design.

Hisae Ikenaga's *Untitled* (2007) is a 12' bas-relief made out of synthetic carpet cut-outs in the shape of recognizable pieces of furniture such as chairs, tables, and armoires. They are two-dimensional,

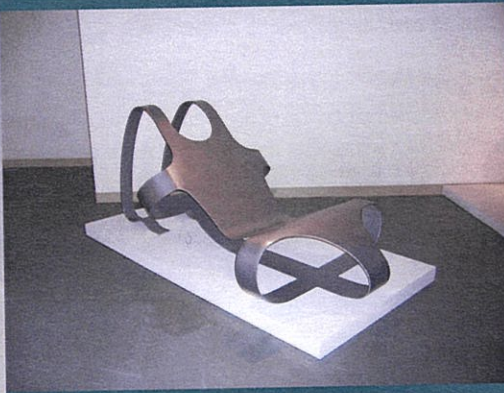
malleable forms attached to the wall with pins. The linear, unstructured, and flat aspects of her piece contradict the very notion of furniture as a three-dimensional, volumetric and sculptural object. Its soft forms hover 2" from the wall, creating shadows as they spill onto the floor. Her work plays with the concept of affordable furniture, the "assemble-it-yourself" pieces found in chain stores like IKEA as they come with their own instructions on how to mount them. Here, however, the instructions sent by Ikenaga in how to install her work lead to drawings in space, undermining volume and function. The illusion of three-dimensional objects attached to the wall reminds the flat surfaces inspired by furniture created by Richard Artschwager.

Where in the world are you now (2007) is by **Friedrich Kunath** is shown as both a discrete object and as a part of the larger installation *Twilight*. The latter is marked by the coupling of improbable objects and quirky juxtapositions—like the convergence of images when one is on the edge of sleep. They are playful and sometimes surreal with humor and absurdity just on the periphery. *Where in the world are you now* presents half an upright piano that is made whole by an image reflected in a mirror. It reflects the surrounding space incorporating the viewer. As one moves around the work, the illusion vanishes as easily as it was formed. The piano keys strike notes of Glenn Gould's performance of Bach's "Goldberg Variations."

Function, whether sublimated to form or wedded to intent, shapes each work in this exhibition. Some works may actually accomplish a utilitarian goal, however it is the aesthetic intention that resonates here. While bits and pieces of the real world make their appearance in stairs, tables, a chest of drawers, carpets, dressers, or chairs, it is their unusual and sometime incongruous configurations and juxtapositions that make us look again, understanding the familiar in new ways.



Francis Cape (left), *Ama*, 2003 and Marc Andre Robinson (right), *Throne for the Songs That Will Come by Themselves and of Themselves*, 2008



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