



Chair as Meditative Space
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Chair as Meditative Space is a thesis project completed by University of Michigan School of Art and Design, 2008 graduate Andrew Sell. Andy has sought to explore the idea of chair through the practice of autopsy and reincarnation to create post-optimal objects.

While working with salvaged chairs, Andy preformed autopsies to deconstruct materials and methods of construction in the search of what each chair “was.” Working from what Sell learned about each chair, he reincarnated them to perform functions, which go beyond their original intentions. With inspiration from literature, art and the natural world, each chair exists as a meditative space for users, becoming objects of contemplation and discussion.



Why Chair?

Chairs are iconic for their ability to change through time, materials, form and function. As George Nelson once noted, “the chair represents a form in which most of the world’s innovative materials, processes and designs flows.” Bent plywood, injection molded plastic and carbon fiber are just a few examples of major technologic advancements that have shown up in chair form.

In Western society, people are raised with gradual observation and experience to learn to identify chairs and non-chairs. Chairs are objects with at least one horizontal and vertical plane suspended above the ground on a system of supports. They are created to assist in performing tasks and in relaxing the body. From the high seat toddlers struggle in to the office chair clerical workers use in their every day grind, chairs surround the human environment.

Chairs are objects to be used, related to, comforting, ages, and takes upon character as it evolves. They can be armature, art, functional as a means to express individualistic visions, expressions, materials and techniques. They are a design problem, which encompasses all manners of engineering, sculpture, kinesiology and psychology.

Recognized to sometimes have arms, legs and a seat, chairs are vaguely human scale. They are made to fit the human form, to hold, support, elevate the body. Chairs could be one of society’s most



Chairs and Those Who Choose to Sit

In a given day, people interact with seats more than they socialize with friends, peers and loved ones. For that amount of time, chairs become extensions of the people who use them. It is through these continual interactions that each scrape and body ache are bits of transferred personality the chair and user exchange.

As people age and grow with chairs, they discreetly record the user's interactions, routines, and habits until they become bespoke adornments. There are millions of designs, and an uncountable amount of chairs in the world, but although they might have been mass-manufactured, they become personalized. Chairs, like objects that evolve slowly over time, build up layers of narrative by reflecting traces of the user's invested care and attention.

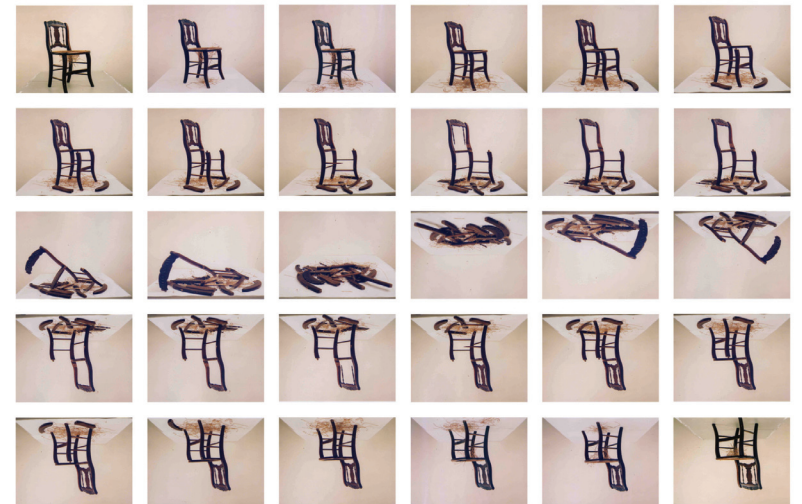


The Autopsy and Reincarnation of a Found Chair

“Found chairs” are objects that have a fertile history of cracks and blemishes relating to countless uses and witnessed individuals. They carry a secretive story. Through the process of autopsy, a better understanding of each chair’s personality and history allows for inspiration for reincarnation.

Through autopsy, one can be intimately involved and connected with the subject and its parts. Individual pieces begin to recount stories of the chair’s creation and use. It is where the chair as object is observed for what it is and not used for what it can do. One can discover the manufacturing process, the concealed maker’s insignia, the scratches and dents of time and perhaps the repairs along the way. Removing a skin or coating has both positives and negatives in the process of investigation. With experiments, coatings of paint and varnish can conceal the beautiful and undesirable. In the process of removing to give new life, minute and detailed events are erased, while the prominent and defining marks of time are left altered like that of a tale which has lost detail but gains historical richness in time.

In reincarnation, chairs are brought to another level of existence. Whether they act as a character in a fantastic tale or realized for their history or potential, they become more than a tool for sitting, they become a hybrid of design, sculpture and story.



Chairs as Post-Optimal Objects

The chairs, which now incorporate fine art, design and thought have become post-optimal objects. Inspired by Royal College of Art professor Anthony Dunne, post-optimal objects can be those that go beyond their original intention to satisfy another component of a user's needs. Whether this is in aesthetics, ability to tell a story, or create new fantasy- post-optimal objects bring a new dimension into the world of design.

The objects presented in Chair as Meditative Space utilize the idea of post-optimal through their ability to enliven our senses to natural materials in an unnatural form. A branch protruding, a plant growing or shadow forming out of a chair are amenities not normally seen to be essential in a chair design. These extremities are unnecessary, yet needed for thought. A chair can go beyond its intention to seat. Chairs can be living armatures, secluded habitats, and mark-making objects.



Inspirations for Reincarnation

Literature, poetry, art and the natural world became heavy influences in transforming used chairs into spaces that inspired a story and a place to meditate. From Eastern philosophy, to the writings of Thoreau, Andrew Wyeth paintings and the poetry, each had a role in shaping the transformed chairs.

The works of Andrew Wyeth, Robert Frost and Henry David Thoreau have had the largest impact upon the visual appearance of Chair as Meditative Space. As part of a declining agrarian family, Sell's views of the natural world align with the paintings, poetry and writings of these creative minds. To express these ideas, chairs were recreated to reference a human's place in a natural world.

The Japanese words and theology of *wabi* and *sabi* became further influences in seeing the chair as an emotional object, which referenced time, space and history. In a poetic sense *wabi* is said to mean simple, un-materialistic, humble by choice and in tune with nature. This, tied with *sabi*, or appreciation of time and age, becomes an Eastern view on what Thoreau had written beside Walden Pond over 150 years ago.



Chair as Meditative Space are post-optimal objects, which inspire contemplation in seats, which no longer perform the functions of regular chairs. While being reincarnated with adornments, modified surfaces and structurally changed, the chairs imply a space found within a Wyeth painting or Frost poem. They are chairs, which embody an appreciation of time and nature.



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