

Murray Guy

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Francis Cape

Home Front

25 April – 6 June, 2009



Murray Guy is pleased to announce *Home Front*, our fifth solo exhibition with Francis Cape.

This exhibition will comprise new sculptures and photographs expanding on a project that Cape developed for *Prospect 1. New Orleans*, which related the destruction and rebuilding of New Orleans to the Utility Furniture Scheme. This project continues Cape's consideration of carpentry as a site for investigating functionality and the art object; here he invites an aesthetic reading of furniture that was designed to be almost purely utilitarian. Moreover, he uses this aesthetic space for considering a host of difficult issues relating not just to New Orleans but to a general cycle of American production and consumption, and to the legacy of modernist debates surrounding utility and ornamentation, social idealism and mass consumerism.

The Utility Furniture Committee was formed during World War II after the Blitz damaged millions of homes across Britain, and was charged with drafting and authorizing standard furniture designs to ensure a supply of quality furniture during a time of very scarce resources. On the one hand, the Utility Furniture Scheme was one of the last clear links between furniture design and social idealism, continuing a tradition that ran from William Morris to de Stijl to Bauhaus. And on the other, it was a chance for designers such as Gordon Russell to break the British public's taste for ornamental reproduction furniture by introducing a more modern, unadorned style, ultimately provoking a public backlash that led to the initiative's demise in 1952.

On view in one room will be a number of sculptures that pair framed photographs of wreckage – a mound of destroyed furniture, a dilapidated trailer under a tarp, a trash dump – with wood furniture constructed according to the original (1943) Utility Furniture designs, including a bed, wardrobe, table and chair. The photographs show not only New Orleans but also scenes from upstate New York and Maine. Each component of furniture has been left unfinished – for instance, the chair is missing its seat, the bed its frame, the table its top – stripping each of any potential function and instead emphasizing the structure of each form.

In the other room Cape will present *London Avenue*, a variation on a sculpture that he exhibited at *Prospect 1*, along with a number of framed photographs taken on walks through New Orleans. *London Avenue* joins the studs of an 8 x 13ft foot wall, a common size in many houses in this area, with components from a desk, chair, chest and wardrobe built according to Utility Furniture

designs. After the flooding from Hurricane Katrina the first thing many people did was to throw out their furniture, and the second was to tear off the wall board. This work and the show as a whole, far from being any sort of didactic prescription, is instead a proposition: how can we re-imagine forms and models of production in response both to historical precedent and current disaster?

Francis Cape was trained as woodcarver before receiving his MFA from Goldsmiths College. He has exhibited his work extensively in the U.S. including shows at the St. Louis Art Museum; P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, Queens, NY; The Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Ridgefield, CT; Eli Marsh Gallery, Amherst College, Amherst, MA; Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, OH; and in galleries in Germany and United Kingdom. His work is currently on view in *Trap Door*, an exhibition organized by the Public Art Fund at the Metrotech Center in Brooklyn, NY. Cape lives and works in Narrowsburg, NY.