

## *Je suis la chaise*

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Allora & Calzadilla, Abraham Cruzvillegas, BLESS, David Douard, Francisco de Goya, Wade Guyton, Mona Hatoum, Thomas Hirschhorn, Klara Lidén, René Magritte, Jean-Luc Moulène, Ken Okiishi, Rick Owens & Michèle Lamy, Hamish Peach, Anri Sala, Wolfgang Tillmans, Rirkrit Tiravanija, Oscar Tuazon, Heimo Zobernig.



René Magritte, *La Vocation*, 1964. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris.  
Photo: Pauline Assathiany.

The exhibition *Je suis la chaise*—borrowing the title of Michael Krebber's eponymous exhibition at Galerie Chantal Crousel in 2007—explores the different symbols and interpretations given to this generic and daily used object. The chair is seen here by various artists as a shape to be deconstructed or reconstructed, as an extension of the human body or even as a social allegory.

The chair has since its origin in ancient Egypt for main function to symbolize the rank and power of its occupant and owner. This symbolic origin is contained in the very etymology of the French word dating from the 13<sup>th</sup> century—*chaiere*—which means chair, seat, throne. A chair is an incarnate object: empty it marks absence, but when used it becomes one with the body it supports. It is also an invitation to stillness, to individual or collective reflection, like a pause in time. This exhibition aims to question the form, the function, as well as the symbolism of the chair, inviting us to reconsider it thanks to the often irreverent or highly symbolic take on of the artists.

Allora & Calzadilla

*Body in Flight (American)*, 2011

*Body in Flight (American)*, appropriates the form of state-of-the art airline seat and reproduces it as full-scale wooden replicas stained like polychromatic religious icons. In *Body in Flight (American)* the wooden sculpture substitutes the pommel horse and is used by a male gymnast from USA Gymnastics—the national governing body for gymnastics in the U.S.—to perform a routine that emphasizes flexibility, fluidity, quick movements, and sheer gymnastic power. Working with the 2007 U.S. All-Around men's gymnastics champion, David Durante, and modern dance choreographer Rebecca Davis, the artists developed routines that created a new vocabulary of movement between gymnastics and modern dance, sculpture, and performance. *Body in Flight (American)* was realized in 2011 for the project Gloria, conceived by the artists for the US Pavilion at the Venice Biennale.

Abraham Cruzvillegas

*Untitled portable sculpture (La Señora de Las Nueces) 3*, 2020-2021

Attention to movement is central to Abraham Cruzvillegas' process of creating hanging sculptures made from urban objets trouvés and materials picked up around the city of Paris (odd bits of furniture, wooden boards and planks, metal strips, strings, stones, computer keyboard...). They are all put together to be carried and carry something else. Their architecture includes a platform or a basket, a back, and straps. Based on scientific proposals as to the transportation techniques the Olmecs used for the Señor de Las Limas and its symbolic function, Abraham Cruzvillegas completed his sculptures in 2021 by a hybrid activity: strapped to his body, he embarked each of these two works on a journey between the gallery and a place of personal importance in this day-to-day life (The École des Beaux-Arts where he taught and his home, amongst others). Brought back to the gallery right before the opening of his exhibition, they signify the end of a series of performances in which the artist attended to his serendipitous encounters with the fragments picked out of the urban fabric. Creating the sculptures in part expresses a quest to understand the body as a tool. Handling and moving them is akin to physically experiencing the reproduction of routine gestures. The question of the relation between the body and the work of art is fundamental to Abraham Cruzvillegas' thinking.

BLESS (

*N°56 Woodenpillowchair ; N°56 Neckrestdesk*, 2022

*N°56 Neckrestdesk* and *N°56 Woodenpillowchair* are both chairs that are part of the N°56 Workers' Delight collection of workout furniture pieces, dedicated to diversifying work at the office or at home.

The piece *N° 56 Neckrestdesk* was formerly a massage chair, its armrests were replaced with a tabletop that allows you to do desk work or read in a neck-and-back-friendly position.

The piece *N°56 Woodenpillowchair* is the opposite of an ergonomic office chair, its visually inviting pillow is by design quite uncomfortable to sit on. Instead of allowing for long hours in the same sedentary position, it's hard surface gently reminds you that the best working position is an alternating one.

David Douard

*The voltage murmur of calcium*, 2022

This sculpture is inspired by chairs often found in the South of France.

The artist appropriates the public space by moving the chair from the inside to the outside —the exhibition space— as the inhabitants of his hometown, Perpignan, would do. Verticality gives way to horizontality, depriving the chair of its function, making it unusable, defying normality, conformity and authority. As often in his work, the artist approaches the subject of immobility of bodies. Inaction, often associated with “refusal to do”, with “immovable laziness” gives way here to mental activity. Functioning as a plinth, it invites the viewer to inner mobility: “the movement of thought” making the visible form abstract and purely organic.

Wade Guyton

*Untitled (CMYch)* ; *Untitled (CMYKch)*, 2016

These editions of Wade Guyton were produced on the occasion of his exhibition at the MAMCO (2016–17) for the members of the Circle of Friends of the Museum Association. The artist presented about thirty previously unpublished works, the central image of which was chosen for this edition. This is one of Wade Guyton’s emblematic sculptures: the tubular frame of a Marcel Breuer chair modified and placed on the floor of the studio. Through this *mise en abyme* of his own work, the artist questions the entire chain of production and representation of art and some icons.

Wade Guyton

*Untitled Action Sculpture (White Thonet Chair)* ; *Untitled Action Sculpture (Black Thonet Chair)* ; *Untitled Action Sculpture (Red Thonet Chair)*, 2019

This edition by the artist Wade Guyton, was published by Schellmann Art on the occasion of the THONET 200 Project in the Haus der Kunst, Munich, in 2019, to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the Thonet furniture company.

“This edition is based on other sculptures I’ve made with old Breuer chairs. The first was a chair I found on the street in the East Village near my Second Street studio in 2001. For the Thonet project I used new Thonet chairs in red, white and black.” —Wade Guyton.

Mona Hatoum

*Remains (chair) VI*, 2020

This burnt and charred shell of a chair, with black charcoal fragments barely held together by a wire armature, appears like a ghostly shadow of the solid object it once was. The work is part of a series that evolved from an installation Hatoum created for the 10th Hiroshima Art Prize exhibition in 2017. This piece of furniture no longer suggests a refuge or a comforting interior, but points to a situation that is both alarming and disturbing.

Thomas Hirschhorn

*Capture, 2022*

*Capture* is an enlarged screen capture made with everyday materials: cardboard, wood, photocopies, paper, felt, 'crystal' wrapping paper. The book *Leçons de Philosophie* by Simone Weil is enlarged, opened to page 35: "Les Sens - Les Sensations". This is an extract of text intended to be 'translated' by a tool offered in the I-Phone applications, which allows users to choose and enlarge a precise place of a page. I decided to 'capture' an extract where Simone Weil - through the notion of 'the chair' - invites us to look for what the view tells us about an object and this is the origin of my work which bears the title *Capture*. The notion of 'the chair' and Simone Weil's demonstration of it in this book is striking. She uses the 'chair' as an example because the plasticity and form of the 'chair' lend themselves clearly to the visualization of her philosophical proposition. The 'chair', a common piece of furniture, concentrates the simplicity, but also the complexity of the questioning between 'Sense' and 'Sensation'. I decided to use the 'contemporary' aesthetic (the screen of an I-Phone) to assert the timelessness of Simone Weil's lesson. I insist on the importance of the text in the book (that's why it is enlarged) and in the same gesture I wanted to empty the meaning of its 'content' (that's why you can't read the whole page). With this work I want to determine the value of the notions of 'Sense' and 'Sensations' - through the example of 'the chair' - beyond its content. As an artist I know that by asserting a form - loudly and clearly - one can touch what goes beyond its content. With this paradoxical procedure, I want to accentuate the topicality of the demonstration and the philosophical significance of Simone Weil's lesson.

René Magritte

*La Vocation, 1964*

The surrealist painter René Magritte produced the drawing *La Vocation* in 1964. Known for his pictorial alphabet, such as the pipe, the apple, the bird, the man with a bowler hat, the artist surprises us this time with a new subject, a cat lying down, which carries on its back a small white chair.

For Magritte, the painting is not a representation of a real object but rather a representation of the thought of the artist towards the object: "The art of painting is really only limited by a depiction of an idea which shows a certain resemblance to the way it is seen by the world".

He is constantly looking for the right "dialectical partner" of different objects like, in this specific case, the chair that he associates with a cat. This "painting of thought" plunges us into an unreal, unconscious world, in which he questions the order of things. The chair loses its usefulness as an element of support and is transformed into a supported element. The cat, for its part, is alienated as a decorative object.

Jean-Luc Moulène

*Standard et Ornement, 2021*

Jean-Luc Moulène's sculpture, *Standard et Ornement*, displays a standard plastic armchair and is presented as the ideal place to sit. It is a tool, shaped for the weary body with a bronze sculpture in the imprint of a pressing hand.



The theme of the absent is in focus, with a rather clear question: how to identify the missing body? The ornament is the living part of the chair, reaching out to the viewer, stating its relationship with the chair itself. This ready-made, daily object evokes two forms of absences. There is the absence of the participant brought on by the empty seat, and the absence of the artist himself. The first absence seems timeless, with a constantly available seat. The other is a reminder of time, of the human body defying the passing of time.

“I tried at the same time to pull the piece of clay a little outwards, so as to make something that moves forward. If you will, there’s immediately manifested the idea of placing an ornament on a standard chair, I think that’s the most important thing. Now this idea is not mine, it comes from an Indian manufacturer of standard plastic chairs, who found an ingenious way of inserting lion heads into his chairs. But the object is essentially rooted in two types of absences, which are of a different nature”. —Jean-Luc Moulène.

**Jean-Luc Moulène**

*Standard*, 2013

Jean-Luc Moulène, “archaeologist of daily life”, use to illustrate, through the photographic medium, the type of ubiquitous, generic, stackable plastic chairs. The most general search word ‘plastic chair’ in a Google search generates images of this very model at the top of the list indicates that “this somewhat quotidian form of seating had permeated our life world”.

**Klara Lidén**

*Untitled*, 2021

Klara Lidén work often incorporates materials sourced from urban locations, which she makes new and ripe for re-encounter with an inventive, and at times playful verve—a process she has described as ‘unbuilding’. With interests in architecture and its environments, social constructs surrounding material function, her art is marked by an enduring exploration of the physical and psychological bounds of the spaces—both public and private—we inhabit.

**Ken Okiishi**

*The Kitchen Ghost Chair (produced in 2022)*, 2011

This chair was commissioned by The Kitchen, New York, in 2011, as part of a fundraiser that was intended to take place on a home make-over reality TV show during Art Basel Miami Beach: "10 artists reinterpreting 10 iconic chairs." The segment was produced and filmed but never aired. The tape used in this chair is the tape used in film production when working with a chroma key green backdrop—a method of production where the actor and props can be filmed in a small space that is overlaid into a *mise-en-scène* in editing. The actor in this method of filming is required to perform this awkward nonspace as a vast mental projection. In 2011, Okiishi had been working with this method in the way that the chroma key color can become any and multiple spaces at the same time, opening up "impossible" material relations and antagonisms between geographical and cognitive sites that correlated to how the screen was proliferating an accelerated velocity of interaction

and production of what would come to be known as "alternative facts." The base of the intervention is the *Louis Ghost chair* (2002), an iconic design by Philippe Starck from an era in which the concept of "transparency" became an ideological core.

**Rick Owens & Michèle Lamy**

*TRIDENT, 2012*

The dark, minimalist style of Rick Owens and Michelle Lamy's designs was created in the United States when they started making bespoke furniture for his bunker-style loft in Los Angeles. His furniture appears as a monumental totem, as if it was taken from a fantastic temple, as if it were the props for strange ceremonies. Through their choice of subtle and rare materials, Owens and Lamy suggest the beauty of nature and develop a contrasting palette of black and white that confirms their taste for the monochrome.

**Hamish Pearch**

*All the trees in the world will, 2022*

The artist reflects on the complex structures humanity occupies, exploring the materials, objects and spaces that make up our worlds. Pearch's sculptures mix, merge and remake forms to create objects of instability. His chair seems frozen on the brink of metamorphosis. This volatile object presents material and metaphorical meeting points, where an everyday object slips between states of reality and the unconscious.

**Anri Sala**

*Let's Entertain, 2000*

The cinema seats placed under a tree on the edge of a street in Tirana, come from a cinema being demolished on the opposite pavement. Deprived of their ransacked cinema, the spectators have no choice to watch cars and pedestrians go by: "Let's entertain". After the collapse of the dictatorship, which limited the population's cinematic leisure activities to a few carefully selected Albanian, Vietnamese, or Indian films, the armchairs found a new function in the city's public space.

**Wolfgang Tillmans**

*Max Pearmain, 2016 ; Micha, Arboretum, 2020*

The artist explores traditional genres such as portraiture with a constant interest in the limits of the visible. Through the use of diverse genres, subjects, techniques and exhibition concepts, Tillmans expands conventional ways of approaching photography and poses fundamental questions related to image-making in an increasingly saturated visual world.

Rirkrit Tiravanija,

*DO NOT EVER WORK*, 2016

Rirkrit Tiravanija is known to use provocative slogan in his oeuvre. “Do not ever work” is written on a Parisian wall, rue de Seine in 1953, by the theoretician of the situationist movement Guy Debord. This slogan is part of the revolutionary demands from Marxist and anarchist currents linked to the abolition of salaried labor and which was taken up during the events of May 68. Designed by Sébastien de Ganay for Onestar press edition, the goal was to produce a lounge chair that could be produced anywhere: cut four pieces out of simple plywood on a local CNC machine — in order to make its carbon trace as low as possible — and assemble it in a minute with no screws or glue.

Heimo Zobernig

*Untitled*, 2000

This model of chair is one of the late and commercial versions of plywood cast chairs, an industrial technique of production used since the beginning of the fifties, notably by the designer Arne Jacobsen. In the choice of colour which recalls value (gold), one can see an ironic critique of its multiple versions marketed on a large scale which overrun contemporary interiors from an original version produced in a more limited and more precious edition – a kind of a modernist fetish. These chairs are now part of a contemporary collective memory. The chairs’ arrangement, according to Juliane Rebentish, evokes a possible presence, neither a thing nor a sign but some “scenic presence” which refers to the domain of the theatre and scenography, as well as the contemporary arrangement of museums, a subtle form of institutional criticism.

Oscar Tuazon

*Scott Burton (Version 2)*, 2012

*Scott Burton (version 2)* by Oscar Tuazon is a rough concrete sculpture, following the design of Scott Burton’s 1984 polished granite *Pair of Two-Part Chairs, Obtuse Angle*. Tuazon translates this chair-form into the supposedly functionalist, yet architectural aesthetics of pure concrete. This work underlines Tuazon’s DIY use of construction materials and pursues issues addressed by his works such as how the functionality of an object and its aesthetic qualities can blend.

Oscar Tuazon,

*Reading bench 2 (liberty with love) ; Reading bench 8 (selecting a site for a Vonu home)*, 2016

The Reading benches are part of a series of 10 benches realized by Oscar Tuazon in 2016 “The 10 benches are the complete collection of Vonulife\*, a way to put these words where they can be read. Reading benches, a place to sit and read, alone or with others. It is a complex, passionate, weird text, full of contradictions, written in multiple pseudonymic voices, both quasi-fictional and ardently factual. Out on the radical fringe, the final frontier fantasy, somewhere between Walden Pond and the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge.” — Oscar Tuazon

\* *Vonulife* is a zine published between 1971 and 1972 in Grants Pass, a small Oregon town. *Vonulife* is a document of extreme experiments in liberty and invulnerability to coercion.

Francisco de Goya  
*Ya tienen asiento*, 1799

The etching *Ya tienen asiento* (in English "They are well seated") is an engraving from the suite *Caprichos* by the Spanish painter Francisco de Goya. Number 26 in the series of 80 engravings, the work was first published in 1799. The edition displayed here, dating from 1868, is the fourth printing. There are several interpretations of this engraving. We find in the manuscript of the Prado Museum the following interpretation: "For scatterbrained girls to have a seat, there's nothing better than putting it on your head." The Manuscript of the National Library of Spain reads in the engraving a more daring intention of Francisco de Goya. "Many women will only have judgment, or seat on their heads, when they put their chairs on them. Such is the furor of discovering her half-body, without noticing the rascals who mock them."