One and More Chairs   ENGLISH

Saâdane Afif, John M Armleder, Claude Closky,
Hans-Peter Feldmann, Isabell Heimerdinger,
Mathieu Mercier, Jonathan Monk, Gerwald
Rockenschaub, Gitte Schäfer, Fredrik Værslev
Curated by Hendrike Nagel

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The chair has been a continuous theme and motif in art history. The object has been widely explored using various means and is, until today, a popular subject of artistic exploration. Not only does the study of the chair blur the medium of painting and sculpture, it also illuminates the boundaries between design object and art object, craftwork and fine art.

Alongside, for example, Velásquez's *Portrait of Prince Phillip Prospero* (1659), Vincent van Gogh's *Chair* (1888), Henri Matisse's *Lorrain Chair* (1919), Pablo Picasso's *Chair* (1961), and Joseph Beuys' *Fat Chair* (1964), Joseph Kosuth's *One and Three Chairs* (1965) is one of the most canonical explorations of the chair. This conceptual work, which marked the beginning of conceptual art and inspired the title of this exhibition, juxtaposes a chair, the photograph of the chair, and the dictionary definition of the word "chair", thereby mediating the different forms of our (art) perception.

The art I call conceptual is such because it is based on an inquiry into the nature of art,. (…) Thus, it is . . .
a working out, a thinking out, of all the implications of all aspects of the concept 'art,' (…) Fundamental to
this idea of art is the understanding of the linguistic nature of all art propositions, be they past or present,
and regardless of the elements used in their construction. – Joseph Kosuth

Following this work, which correlates different forms of representation and interpretation, the group exhibition *One and More Chairs* brings together a wide variety of chair-based works by artists in the gallery's program and reflects on their individual practices. The works by Saâdane Afif, John M. Armleder, Claude Closky, Hans-Peter Feldmann, Isabell Heimerdinger, Mathieu Mercier, Jonathan Monk, Gerwald Rockenschaub, Gitte Schäfer, and Fredrik Værslev take up, rethink, and break with this tradition.

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Saâdane Afif

The ***Black Chair (The Coalman)*** (2023) represents the Coalman Edition of the seven-piece chair series Interface: The Heptahedron Seats (2020). The latter was Saâdane Afif's first attempt to give form to the seven characters of the theatre script *The Heptahedron* (2017), which he commissioned in 2014. As such, it adopts the coal motif and colour scheme that characterises the figure of the Coalman. The Chair (The Coalman) is a limited edition that could only be ordered during the exhibition. The amount of the edition is based on demand.

The drum stool presented as part of the work ***Interface (2023)*** previously belonged to a music studio set-up that Afif created for his solo exhibition *Paroles* at WIELS, Brussels, in 2018. On the stool is a bound compilation of *Lyrics*, which he commissions from artist friends in response to his work. Visitors in Brussels were invited to sit on the stools and browse the catalogue. It also served as lyrical inspiration for the improvised jam sessions that a studio technician led in the exhibition rooms. The sound shower installed next to the chair conveys an impression of the music pieces created there. As for each of Afif's performances, a poster announced the happening.

The concept of translation is crucial in the work of Saâdane Afif. Traveling to Sharjah, he ordered furniture made of arish, the local palm leaves. Upon Afif's instructions, the carpenter followed the concepts Enzo Mari sketched in his "Proposal for Self-Design" booklet. The resulting works, ***Heritages (Sedia, 1123xR) (2018)***, merge 1970s Italian design with Saudi artisanal heritage, forming a hybrid of tradition and modernity. The English transcript of a French and Arabic conversation between Afif, the carpenter, and a translator emphasises the many layers of the project.

John Armleder

Started in the 1970s, the ***Furniture Sculpture*** series by John Armleder may be considered his most important group of works. Inspired by the Fluxus movement, these works comment on the conventional practice of dealing with paintings when hung on walls, often serving as a backdrop for furniture, and they also bring to mind the aesthetic heritage of European avant-garde art.

In ***JC (Furniture Sculpture), 2006***, this methodology is further enhanced by Armleder, who reduced the painting to a white canvas that foregrounds the filigree aesthetics and technical materiality of Joe Colombo's bar stool. The black leatherette backrest forms the centre of the work. Its circular shape is reminiscent of Armleder's dot paintings and the geometric paintings of his Swiss colleague Olivier Mosset.

For ***CRE (Furniture Sculpture), 1986/2006***, Armleder combines four chairs from the "Plywood Group" by the American designer couple Charles and Ray Eames with a painting he produced in 1986. The painting depicts several strokes repeated in the same rhythm. The Eames couple developed a technique for moulding plywood for their post-war industrial design to produce furniture quickly and cheaply. The meticulously placed brown stripes on the painting echo this concept of uniformity, as do the chairs lined up next to each other.

Claude Closky

Claude Closky's artistic language is based on materials, such as pictures, texts, numbers, and sounds he finds in his immediate surroundings, collects, and appropriates. Instead of spectacular effects, he creates works that use few but familiar means to deal with questions of depiction, representation, visibility, and corresponding notions of value. The work ***Seen on the Ground, 1995***, for example, utilises perhaps the "simplest"

artistic strategy—the chair is a kind of readymade, encountered as an object trouvé on the ground in its natural setting and declared an art object. Through photographic reproduction, maintaining distance, and the handwritten inscription, however, Closky takes things a step further. Not (only) is the everyday chair structure declared "art" through artistic assertion, but above all, the readymade strategy itself is considered an equally accepted (value creation) practice.

Hans Peter Feldmann

In his installation, **Meine Zeit als Kellner (My time as a waiter)**, Hans-Peter Feldmann shows a standard pub chair placed upside down on a pedestal. The scene is reminiscent of a restaurant after closing time and, at the same time, refers autobiographically to Feldmann's youth. A sign on the pedestal bears the inscription "Memories of my time as a waiter"—an intentional placement of this work as the artist's personal experience. Once again, an everyday scene is isolated, enabling a multitude of associations because everyone experiences such situations.

The sculpture **Kleiner Kinderstuhl mit Häuschen (Small children's chair with toy houses)** shows a standard white-painted wooden chair on which several different toy houses are placed. The work is a good example of Feldmann's sense of creating absurd constellations that could just as easily occur in everyday life. The little houses, for instance, seem to have been borrowed from a model railroad landscape and placed on the chair's seat by chance. Feldmann shows the "ideal world" of the miniature village on a used chair and once again proves his unique sense of humour.

Isabell Heimerdinger

For her photography work, **Interior (2000)**, Isabell Heimerdinger used digital manipulation to remove the actors from the film sequences. Despite the scenes' separation from their original narrative function, the interiors remain recognisable film sets. They act as a classification, showing the viewer the logic and aesthetics of the film's spatial language. Because Heimerdinger used video stills from well-known films for *Interiors*, the images also display the digital language of their time; they are pixelated and blurred.

The work **Director Chair (2023)** operates in a similarly analytical way. For this sculpture, Isabell Heimerdinger uses standard folding chairs, found on film sets, as seats for the crew. Instead of personalising them the usual way, the works labelled "Director" only refer to the crew member's function—and hierarchical position.

Mathieu Mercier

The examination of modern design is a central theme in Mercier's work. In this piece, **Werk Zwei Stühle (Dritte Version einer Arbeit von 1998) (1998)**, two different chairs materialise the gap between the ideal of modernism and what actually became of it. The first chair was designed by Gerrit Thomas Rietveld in 1934. The original piece of furniture was made of reused crate wood and sold as a kit, available in several colours. Aiming for simplicity in construction, Rietveld was a member of the De Stijl movement and close to the Bauhaus; he hoped his designs would eventually be manufactured rather than hand-crafted. The second chair is a typical 1960s injection moulded plastic garden chair. Resistant, comfortable, and inexpensive, this kind of chair became so popular that it can be labelled a garden chair stereotype.

Mathieu Mercier's bench **Ohne Titel (Untitled), 2011-2012**, which can be used as one, is formed by a metal structure that allows you to place a material of your choice as a seat and backrest. The material could be

rolls of carpet, tree trunks, plastic, or ceramic tubes, etc. The piece can be placed indoors or outdoors. Most of his works imply that function is part of an aesthetic proposition and suggest a new reflection on the object—central to the modernist avant-garde movement. By creating a bench out of industrial materials with modular sitting surfaces, Mercier allows the sitter or viewer to consider how an object functions aesthetically and practically.

Jonathan Monks

The strategic use of quotations is central to Jonathan Monk's work. For this series, he prints photographs of landscape paintings by the Italian artist Salvo and paints over their backgrounds. The only parts he leaves untouched are the trees from the original composition. Monk introduces his own value system—the number of trees determines the monetary value of the work. Collaged onto individual pages of various fashion, art, and design magazines, the artist further contextualises his artistic appropriation strategy with serially produced fashion pieces from different sections, reflecting on trend and value creation mechanisms.

Gerwald Rockenschaub

Gerwald Rockenschaub's works made of lacquered MDF range from architecture to readymade or autonomous sculpture. The paintings and objects appear like abstract constructions. Still, they are reminiscent of familiar graphic motifs or actual objects, as Rockenschaub incorporates fragments from visual culture and translates them into a personal pictorial language. The three differently lacquered MDF panels in **MDF, lackiert (MDF, lacquered), 2014** immediately bring to mind a chair structure due to their simple construction.

Gitte Schäfer

In her collage works, Gitte Schäfer examines how time and experiences appear in images and objects once produced, disseminated, forgotten, or when they reappear in other contexts. By accumulating a wide variety of everyday objects—object trouvés—her collages involve a wide range of associations; she creates paintings and sculptures that appear timeless and astonishingly immediate. For **Nika, 2009**, she combines porcupine quills with stones and a stool. Her practice incorporates the (un)usual and the strange, thus creating a space within the exhibition venue that oscillates between a cabinet of curiosities and a landscape of marvellous fantasy.

Fredrik Værslev

In his artistic work, Fredrik Værslev deals with the re-actualisation of neo-modernist abstract painting. The use of everyday objects in combination with a pictorial language that refers to modernism is thereby stylistically decisive for Værslev's painting series. The works are often between genre boundaries—between architecture and painting, between craft and art. The triptych *Untitled* (2021-2022), for example, is reminiscent of Jackson Pollock's Action Paintings from the 1950s. While Pollock threw paint across a canvas rolled out on the floor with expressive gestures, the splotches of colour in Værslev's "terrazzo paintings" are due to the creative process and random effects that underlie the artistic creation process. Created in the garden of his family home in Drøbak, the untreated canvases have been painted with spray paint, house paint, and white spirit before being exposed to the elements for several months. Like Edward Munch, who also placed his paintings outdoors, Værslev aestheticises the random effects and disintegration arising from nature's treatment. The result is paintings reminiscent of terrazzo surfaces: an affordable imitation of marble made from a mixture of quartz, granite, glass, marble pieces, and cement, mainly used as flooring in official buildings.