

JOHN M ARMLEDER

Furniture Sculptures

February 15 – April 5, 2025

Opening: February 15, 2025, 4 – 7 pm

MEHDI CHOUAKRI WILHELM HALLEN

Kopenhagener Strasse 60-72

13407 Berlin–Reinickendorf

Saturday from 11 am to 6 pm and by appointment

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PRESS RELEASE

Berlin, March 4, 2025

John M. Armleder's *Furniture Sculptures*, an iconic series that has been central to the artist's practice since the 1970s, takes center stage in the exhibition of the same name at **Mehdi Chouakri Wilhelm Hallen**. With **works from 1984 to 2014**, the show highlights Armleder's ability to **blur the lines between fine art, functional objects and design**.

Inspired by the Fluxus movement, this series challenges the convention of treating paintings merely as decorative backdrops for furniture. Armleder incorporates found objects—often curious pieces of furniture from the 1950s and 1960s—which he either combines with paintings created specifically for them or modifies directly. His works reference the aesthetic legacy of avant-garde art and reveal a formal affinity with Constructivism. At the same time, they subtly and ironically question the concepts of art and design by playing with the perception and value of everyday objects. With ostensibly trivial items, Armleder succeeds in unsettling fundamental principles of art reception.

The exhibition opens with **AA (*Furniture Sculpture*)**, 2004–2008. Here, Armleder deconstructs a 20th-century design classic: a wall-mounted cabinet by Finnish architect and designer Alvar Aalto. The cabinet's bulbous gray door protrudes plastically from the wall. To its left, Armleder places a mirror and a white monochrome painting—both precisely matching the door's dimensions, creating a formal dialogue between the elements. The mirror not only reflects the surrounding space but also serves as a link to the cabinet's original function as part of a dressing room. The interplay of surface, depth, and three-dimensional form explores fundamental aspects of spatial perception. Mirrors frequently appear in Armleder's oeuvre, as in the next ***Furniture Sculpture*** from 2002, in which he combines two monochrome, perforated panels in muted green tones with a round, illuminated mirror. The perforation of the panels echoes the pattern of the mirror's metal backing—a found object from Berlin's Komische Oper from the 1950s. The subtle visual connections between the elements reinforce the composition's unity and create a play of light and texture.

The title of **UIUEUUE** is a compound of the vowels in the words *Furniture Sculpture*. With this work, Armleder highlights an object that appears to be an incidental find: the fragmented foot of a piece of furniture. Mounted on a cream-coloured MDF panel, the delicate black spiral appears to float in midair. Its eccentric placement creates a subtle sense of disorientation, while the overlapping rings, when viewed from the side, recall the linear constructions of Naum Gabo. In conjunction with the shifting play of shadows, the

sculpture unfolds a geometric-mystical presence that changes continuously depending on the light. The 1986 work **Untitled (Thunder and Lightning, Furniture Sculpture)** combines a tanning lamp with a painting. Armleder employs fluorescent paint that reacts to the lamp's light, establishing an optical dialogue between the elements. This interplay of light, color, and object introduces an additional layer of perception and underscores Armleder's playful engagement with material and context.

MY is a distinctive work within this series, as it does not incorporate a canvas but rather a pendant lamp from the Gaboseries by Japanese artist Mariyo Yagi. Its fine, white threads cascade like the fringes of an Art Deco dress, dividing the space with their delicate transparency. Armleder intervenes subtly in the light bulb's programming, causing the light to switch on and off at random intervals. This fluctuating rhythm creates a pulsating dynamic reminiscent of the Charleston dance of the 1920s. The lamp thus transforms into a light sculpture that actively interacts with its surroundings. The **Furniture Sculpture** from 1990 once again consists of found objects—in this case, two ceramic pedestal sinks. These ordinary readymades, usually hidden inconspicuously beneath a washbasin, are highlighted by Armleder as he presents them mounted on the wall. The artist plays with a shift in perspective, allowing viewers to see a familiar object from an unfamiliar vantage point, thereby placing it in a new, estranged context.

The earliest work in the exhibition, from 1984, brings together three chairs in the style of the 1950s, which may once have stood in a hotel lobby or tearoom. Armleder marks each with a small white dot in different locations and leans them at an angle against the wall. Through this simple yet precise intervention, he plays with balance and gravity, stripping the furniture of its functional purpose and granting it a new sculptural quality—a subtle reference to Constructivism. In **Let it ride**, Armleder combines two overturned playground slides with a dot painting. While slides are typically associated with childhood, joy, and carefree play, his altered perspective removes them from their original context. Instead, their metallic, reflective surfaces engage in a formal dialogue with the painting, evoking an industrial aesthetic. The title, borrowed from the world of gambling, reinforces the work's lucid, almost surreal character.

The exhibition concludes with **Life is a Bench**, a work that combines a museum bench with a painting precisely tailored to its dimensions. The bench, originally designed by Martin Visser for the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, traditionally serves as a place for contemplating artworks. Through Armleder's intervention, however it becomes an artwork itself, shifting from the realm of functionality to the domain of artistic expression. In doing so, he continues his exploration of the boundaries between art and design.

Armleder's work have been shown in solo exhibitions at the **Barbier-Mueller Museum**, Geneva (2024), **Kunsthalle Zürich**, Zurich (2023), **Rockbund Art Museum**, Shanghai (2021), **MAMCO - Museum für moderne Kunst**, Geneva (2020), **Schirn Kunsthalle**, Frankfurt (2019), **MUSEION – Museo d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea**, Bolzano (2018), **Musée national Fernand Léger**, Boit (2014), **Swiss Institute of Contemporary Art**, New York (2012), **Peggy Guggenheim Collection**, Venice (2011), **Palais de Tokyo**, Paris (2011), **Institute of Modern Art**, Brisbane (2008), **Tate Liverpool**, Liverpool (2006), **Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea**, Bergamo (2004), **MOMA Museum of Modern Art**, New York (2000), **Centraal Museum**, Utrecht (1992) and many others.