



I N T E R N A T I O N A L

Furniture DESIGN

For the '90s

By the editors of PBC International

I N T E R N A T I O N A L

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For the '90s



The Library of Applied Design

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The following quote was provided by Rick Kaufmann/ART et INDUSTRIE.

"...if our houses, furniture and utensils are not works of art, they are either wretched make-shifts, or, what is worse, degrading shams of better things. Furthermore, if any of these things make claim to be considered works of art, they must show obvious traces of the hand of man guided directly by his brain, without more inter-position of machines than is absolutely necessary to the nature of the work done. Again, whatsoever art there is in any of these articles of daily use must be evolved in a natural and unforced manner from the material that is dealt with, so that the result will be such as could not be got from any other material: if we break this law we make a triviality, a toy, not a work of art. Lastly, love of nature in all its forms must be the ruling spirit of such works of art as we are considering; the brain that guides the hand must be healthy and hopeful, must be keenly alive to the surroundings of our own days, and must be only so much affected by the art of past times as it is natural for one who practices an art which is alive, growing and looking towards the future."

"Hopes and Fears of Art"

William Morris
1882—London

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Introduction

The future of product design and the fate of the technology, art and craft that lend it coherent form, parallels the development and degeneration of culture. At the most essential level, at its intellectual core, the culture of this century that is about to end has been molded by the idea of modernism; the application of reason, law and science in the service of the progressive improvement of the conditions of human life. From the nineteenth century this notion of modernism has been under critical attack by both the right and the left.

With the end of the Cold War, however, and the collapse of the notion of historic and economic inevitability, the ideological orthodoxies of the right and left have been relocated to academia leaving us in the grip of a world market, an international mercantilist structure riddled by a lack of certainty or faith thanks to this century's legacy of war, genocide, barbarity, pollution and waste.

Is this the result of modernism? Are these brutal voices inherent in industrial mass production, in the idea of human 'progress' and in the means of its realization—the assembly line? Postmodernism says yes. It claims that modernism is ecologically unsound, authoritarian, a deluded fanaticism that strips down all forms, ideas and differences until they attain transparency, weightlessness, a repressive sameness, and then it pushes us into a nihilistic endgame, the choice of either/or: total meaning or no meaning at all.

The postmodernism of the 70's and 80's sought to replenish the meaning drained from cultural objects by modernism's reductive tendency by the appropriation of past styles. In the arena of forms and objects, buildings and products, postmodernism served as a creative tonic, allowing the emergence of a profusion of recombinant design strategies. None of them did anything to alter the hardware of our contemporary world, the manufacturing technique and social structure put in place by modernism.

It has been said that the essence of civilization, Oriental, Western, living and dead is restraint. In the last century we have learned the necessity of living within limits politically, economically and emotionally.

Postmodernism, the dominant intellectual trend of the past two decades, postulates constant critical opposition to all absolutes, in the hope of attaining a truly secular society, a culture of 'liberation' where authority is subverted, where no group or group of ideas can ever again attain mental dominance in the way rationalism and modernism became canonized.

Product design lies at the intersection of industrialism, art, craft and the science of ergonomics. This makes it an ideal testing ground for a synthesis of an environmentally alert modernism and a license giving postmodernism. The many genies modernism has unleashed upon our overcrowded world may be tamed by self-imposed restraint. This is not to say that our freedom to imagine and invent and our expectations from life need to be austere or constricted. On the contrary. We need to fully exercise our imagination and creativity, to construct challenging and fanciful prototypes and to fully think through the consequences of what we are doing, making, building, before we act in a world where each of us is nothing more than a temporary guest.



Lois Lambert
Director, The Gallery of Functional Art
Santa Monica, California

THE GALLERY of FUNCTIONAL ART

"The artist thinks by way of relations"
— Theo Van Doesburg, 1917

There is no where more appropriate to experience first hand the dialectical relationship between art and object than at the Gallery of Functional Art. Located at 2429 Main St., at Edgemar, designed by Frank Gehry, in the heart of Santa Monica, the Gallery has become the focal point for outstanding functional art in the United States.

Inaugurated in August 1988, the Gallery of Functional Art has consistently held outstanding exhibitions of art furniture and other functional objects. The Director, Lois Lambert, assembles excellent collections by fine artists and architects for each show, and the result has been exhibitions which are both unique and innovative.

The artists themselves come from around the world, each bringing his own sense of style and design. The artists work with a wide range of materials; from wood and glass to steel, stone, precious metals and found objects. They create new conceptions of chairs, tables, mirrors, screens, lights and other practical items. The art works are available as either one-of-a-kind or limited edition pieces. In addition, one may peruse through the Gallery's extensive slide catalogue which is available by appointment.

During a recent interview with a design journalist, I expressed the view that, in creating an object, one should not pay attention to the market. Trained, educated and experienced, you listen only to your voice and create the object for itself. With prescience, the market will come to it. The journalist responded that this was asking the mountain to come to Mohammed, a purely romantic view in a society where astute designers are informed by, and create for, the market. This illustrates the current upside-down thinking in which we fail to perceive that the idea or the object is the mountain to which the market must come.

Our preoccupation with the market had its beginning well over a century ago, in the then seemingly romantic philosophy of William Morris who mated artisan and machine so as to make rarified objects available to a greater number of people. From a single artisan creating for 100, to one market-conscious designer creating for 100,000, we have come full cycle from a narrowcast to a broadcast society. Now that cycle has started to reverse itself.

The need to re-focus on a narrowcast approach became apparent with Europe's emerging presence as design leader in the 1960's. By then, American design had become subservient to mass-marketing and manufacturing concerns. The resulting incapacity for prototype development and short-run production fostered a demise in creativity and craft skills. The overt attention paid to the market diluted the conceptual and physical quality of our objects which, though more available, became increasingly disposable and ultimately less desirable.

Europe, while mistakenly restructuring toward the U.S. model, had a residual, though rapidly diminishing, base of small ateliers capable of creating prototypes and putting them into limited production for its still de-centralized market. The risk-taking and turnaround benefits of these seemingly outmoded cottage industries were Europe's creative and qualitative advantage.

Meanwhile, back in the States, saturated with shoddy and uninspired product, the '70s began to react. Lacking a network of small ateliers and faced with industry's indifference, creativity required an alternate

approach. With the European prototype and its own vital arts scene as a model, creative American designers got back to their roots as artists, creating furniture as art. Concurrently the search for more honest forms of expression in the art world, prompted a number of American artists to return to their roots in the applied arts, creating art as furniture. Europeans followed suit and transformed their creative format from make-shift prototype to fully resolved art work.

For the first time since the Bauhaus, the right and left brain were re-connected, as artists and designers approached the same goal from opposite directions. The ends of design (specific and interactive) justified the means of the artist (intuitive and abstract). Together, the focus of design, energy of art and warmth of craft had combined to re-ignite and, in fact, re-invent the decorative arts. The past was perceived not as a grab bag of historical applique, but as the philosophical wellspring in the way of making things.

Historically, of necessity or desire, artists have always made furniture. By the 1980's artists' furniture had become a movement. The importance of individual vision was clearly expressed in the stylistic diversity of works connected, not by ideology or 'ism, but by simple originality and integrity. Minimalist or decorative, the unity of these objects is in their pluralism. Function is the framework, but the idea is varied beyond the formalist concerns of an avant-garde. It is art that is not in the image of art; it is an art that is something, not about something.

Hopefully in this last decade of the 20th century these unique art works and the deeper meaning they infer will balance the necessity of industry, while expanding the quality and diversity of its potential cornucopia. These objects honor the past in their relevant present and are windows to the future, stones whose waves will later reach the shore.

The decorative or applied arts are intrinsically real and potentially non-obsolescent things that, unlike fashion and technology, last. There is a definite need for permanence in an increasingly impermanent society, for works worthy of handing down through the generations. The idea is a new art, both of our times and timeless; meaningful objects of conceptual integrity that are meticulously crafted by one hand and passed to another. This care with which we create our objects for the 21st century can ensure that the future also has a future.



Rick Kaufmann
Director, Art et Industrie
New York, New York

ART et INDUSTRIE

Rick Kaufmann founded Art et Industrie in New York City's Soho district in 1977. The first gallery of furniture by artists, it helped define the new decorative art. It has consistently foreshadowed the future, as its exhibitions introduced the artists, materials and movements that influenced a generation. Emilio Ambasz has described the members of Art et Industrie as "exquisite birds in a zoo full of hippopotami."

From 1970-1977 Rick Kaufmann was co-director of Kaufmann/Rust Decorative Arts Int'l. From 1968-1970 he directed Mr. Spitz Antiques in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

The artists represented by Art et Industrie are:

Ron Arad, Norman Campbell, Jim Cole, Michele Oka Doner, James Evanson, Dan Friedman, James Hong, Laura Johnson, Gloria Kisch, Alex Locadia, Paul Ludick, Terence Main, Howard Meister, Forrest Myers, Robert Ryan, Peter Shire, Richard Snyder, Carmen Spera, Jonathan Teasdale, and Eleonora Triguboff.

CHAPTER

1

Chairs

Sofas

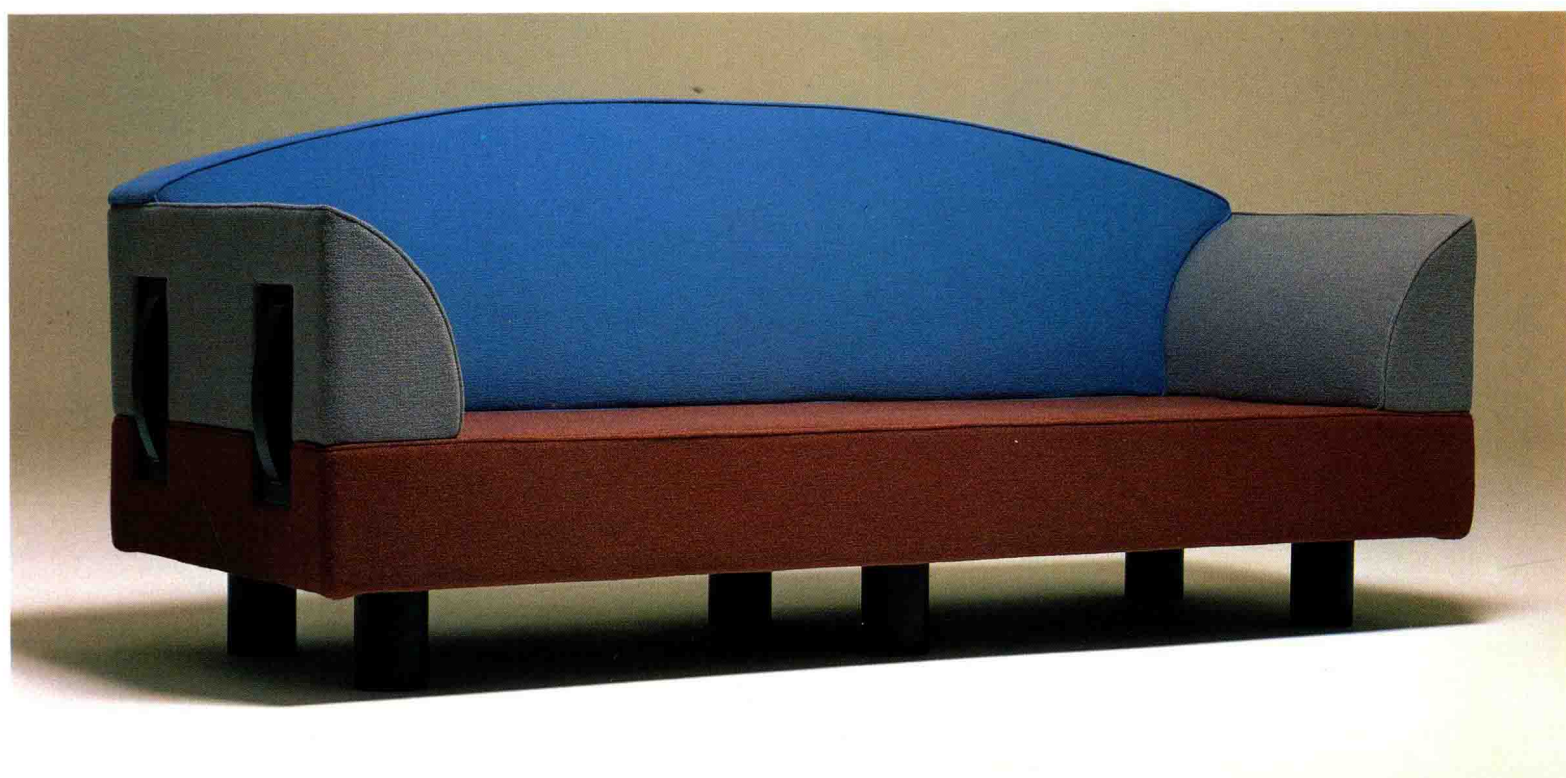
Stools

Benches



PRODUCT
ORIENTAL CHAIR
DESIGNER
BETH YOE
FIRM
CUTTING EDGE
MANUFACTURER
CUTTING EDGE
PHOTO
TOM FREEDMAN

PRODUCT
"JANUARY" SOFA
DESIGNER
SHIGERU UCHIDA
FIRM
STUDIO 80
MANUFACTURER
CHAIRS
DESCRIPTION
3-PERSON SOFA
PHOTO
NACÁSA & PARTNERS INC.





PRODUCT
HOUSE CHAIR
DESIGNER
FREDERIC SCHWARTZ
FIRM
ANDERSON SCHWARTZ
ARCHITECTS
PHOTO
STEVE MOORE