

KQED

Jessica Silverman: "Fight the Urge to Sit at Two Shows of Artful Chairs"

By Sarah Hotchkiss

January 17, 2024



(Left): Isabella Manfredi, 'Rest,' 2023. (Right): Barbora Žilinskaitė, 'Roommates Stool [Deep Purple],' 2020. (Courtesy 1599fdT; Photo by Timothy Doyon, courtesy the artist and Friedman Benda)

All hail the humble chair! It supports us when we're tired, it coaxes us into better alignment, or more often, assists us in slumping, splaying, lounging and hunching. At its best moments, it organizes us in space. The chair is both form and function – the ultimate artists' muse.

And so it makes sense, during this week of FOG Design+Art, the Fort Mason fair of couches and paintings, that not one, but two shows would open with a focus on alternative, artistic seating. Chair+ at 1599fdT and Enthroned at Jessica Silverman are within blocks of each other in San Francisco's Chinatown, perfectly situated to provide a survey of sleek and scrappy approaches to this furniture staple.

At 1599fdT, the former Union Cleaners on Kearny Street, Chair + fills the long and narrow space with 13 chairs, all made by local artists, many evincing a lived-with quality that comes from reclaimed materials. Just inside the door is Isabella Manfredi's Rest, shaped from redwood that

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was once part of a barn on her family's Humboldt County property. In a nod, perhaps, to the Shaker practice of hanging chairs on wall-mounted peg rails, Manfredi's Rest is topped with a carved coat hanger.



Installation view of 'Chair +' at 1599fdT. (Courtesy 1599fdT)

Wood appears in multiple chairs — as a collage element in Jesse Schlesinger's Ad hoc Chair 01, as a painting substrate in Jonathan Runcio's child-sized LR and MR, and under enamel in Barbara Stauffacher Solomon's Cube. In Rae Godin's hands, the material becomes less warm and more antagonistic: plywood sprouts spikes.

The chairs of Chair + are appropriately extra. Extra formal (Matt Borruso's Support), extra plush (Kristie Hansen's Rust), extra flammable (David Ireland's Peat Oven). They push back against their presumed roles to become artworks in their own right. Because even "ordinary" chairs push back against the bodies that perch upon them, as captured in Paul Kos' life-sized photograph Emboss.

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Chairs, this show argues, are vessels for memories, stand-ins for bodies, proxy selves. Cross Lypka's ceramic bench, covered in scratched graffiti, came directly from the artists' home. Sahar Khoury's wee bronze stool just might have scampered into the gallery on its own. Seated on the one sanctioned chair (Chris Johanson and Johanna Jackson's contribution), taking it all in, Chair + resembles a cast of characters corralled into a gallery space, temporarily still, but vibrating with life.



Installation view of 'Enthroned' at Jessica Silverman. (Phillip Maisel, Courtesy of Jessica Silverman, San Francisco)

Just up the hill at Jessica Silverman, *Enthroned* contains more figurative forms, but also more finish, creating a push-pull of competing "aliveness." These are high-end objects, often editioned, cast and carved by 10 women designers. Here, they are auditioning to enter new spaces — possibly your spaces.

While some of the objects in this show are smooth and rootless, others seem to come from very specific lands. Barbora Žilinskaitė's cartoonish, colorful furniture would fit well within Pee-wee's Playhouse, while Johanna Grawunder's Meteorite Chair beams in straight from the set of a '70s sci-fi.

One of the show's most intriguing items isn't actually a chair, but a lamp: Jay Sae Jung Oh's Savage Series Lamp, which sensually wraps plastic objects with undulating black leather cord. Everyday shapes become otherworldly under this treatment, as waste is cleverly smuggled into a

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luxury lighting fixture. (Another favorite is Carmen D'Apollonio's No way out, a pair of speckled sea slug-like lamps noodling around on a pedestal.)



Carmen D'Apollonio, 'No way out,' 2022. (Photo by Martin Elder, courtesy of the artist and Friedman Benda)

In addition to lamps, the show contains a mirror, a planter and a shelf. Unlike Chair +, Enthroned is less stringent about its seating theme, and more interested in how designers can disrupt the rectilinear and staid conventions of domestic furnishings.

Frustratingly, hilariously, these are two shows that exert an extreme vertical pull on the viewer. Walking around both is an exercise in restraint. And if the repeated internal monologue of "do not sit, do not sit" becomes too much to bear, both shows can provide plenty of inspiration for an "ad hoc chair" or homemade throne of your own.

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