



THE TEXAS CHAIR PROJECT BY DAMIAN PRIOUR



THE
TEXAS CHAIR PROJECT

BY DAMIAN PRIOUR

November 14, 2008 – February 8, 2009
Organized by Damian Priour and Eva Buttacavoli
Texts by Dana Friis-Hansen and Damian Priour



AUSTIN MUSEUM OF ART

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CREDITS

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Four-page composite of Damian Priour chairs; pages 6-9
Damian Priour
Untitled Chairs from The Texas Chair Project, 2007
Limestone, glass
Each approximately 8 x 8 x 8 inches
Various collections

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I like to sit. And it shows. It shows in my collection of chairs. It shows in my projects. And it shows in my body, my chairs, and my body of chairs.

It's likely my interest in chairs originated like most everyone else's whether they know it or not—from mother's lap. It is the most common equivalence, taken to its logical extension—everyone's first chair. A special chair never to be duplicated, never to be matched in comfort or security. Chairs are ubiquitous and underappreciated, mostly taken for granted except when you need one and none are available. They have a human connection that invites anthropomorphizing. Both have arms, legs, backs, and seats. Like chairs, some of us are over-stuffed and comfy. Some of us are bare-boned and austere. Most of us are somewhere in between.

The idea for The Texas Chair Project just seemed to pop into my head. I thought about it, created plans for it, and when it reached that point of development when it kept me awake at night, I knew I had to go forward with it if only because I needed sleep. As an artist, creativity is an integral part of daily life. It's difficult for me to understand when people say they don't have any ideas about how to realize their dreams or how to problem-solve. I'm either very fortunate or very peculiar, but ideas pop and creativity is just a way of life.

First thing one morning, I told my capable studio assistant, David Hesser, that we were going to make 100 small chairs of stone and glass. Each one different. I was on a mission. He could tell I was determined and he liked the idea. Together, it took us six months to create them.

My wife Paula thought the idea unique and worth the effort, but being the security-oriented one of us, she was concerned about the amount of capital and effort I would be pouring into the project.

I avoided telling any artists about The Texas Chair Project because the plan was to send the chairs unannounced to 100 Texas-based artists whose work I admired. The difficult part came in choosing those 100 individuals, because I had so many more on my list of favorites. When the project was finally announced by Jeanne-Claire Van Ryzin of the *Austin American-Statesman*, I received a flood of emails from artists requesting to be invited, but by then the list was already finalized.



With the 100 chairs near completion, I shared my progress with a few close friends to get their input and set up the entire set of chairs in my studio so they could be viewed all at the same time. Pam and Mike Reese, art collectors and philanthropists, convinced me that the chairs should be shown together before being sent out—probably never to be seen together again. They were right. The body of work is stronger than the individual pieces. Thanks to their suggestion, the Austin Museum of Art exhibited all 100 chairs before they were mailed.

When I shared the idea with AMOA's Executive Director, Dana Friis-Hansen, and Director of Exhibitions and Education, Eva Buttacavoli, they were intrigued with the idea of the age-old practice of artists trading with artists. In fact, they were so thrilled with the idea, they offered to exhibit the chairs from the other artists, if at least 50 were traded.

When I shared the concept with friends Candice and Randy House, the creative duo behind ad agency ThinkStreet, they suggested producing a video documentary of the project and led me to RipTearShred, a film production and editing company. Director Rich Carroll, Director of Photography John Brown, and studio principal and editor Cathy Beaudoin documented every aspect of the process and have been to my studio so many times they have their own coffee cups.

Finally, I shared the idea with Nona Niland, an art collector and philanthropist, who was visiting my studio to check on a sculpture of hers. She was so taken with the concept and the chairs that she hosted a fundraising event at her home to help cover some expenses.

I will always be grateful to the people mentioned above and many, many more who contributed to the success of the project—especially the artists! The sponsors of The Texas Chair Project and the museum staff, particularly Eva Buttacavoli, have my most sincere appreciation.

The practicalities of the project are this: We made 100 chairs that would each fit into an 8x8x8-inch box. These were mailed out to artists unannounced with a note explaining the



project and telling them that the chair was theirs to keep, no strings attached. However, if they wanted to participate, I asked them to please make a chair of their own and send it to me in the same box. If they could not participate, they were asked to please return the chair so that another artist could be invited.

Several artists declined the invitation for various good reasons. Several never responded, did not return the chair, and did not respond to a follow up, and these chairs remain mysteriously missing—but that's part of the project too.

It was decided for fundraising purposes that 10 chairs would be retained for sponsors who stepped forward to cover some of the costs of the project—each received a chair as a thank-you for their support; one chair went to an in-kind donor. In total, 88 chairs were mailed out and 80 original chairs were traded with me. Eighty incredible chairs by some of Texas' finest artists are shown in this catalog, photographed by Chloe Priour.

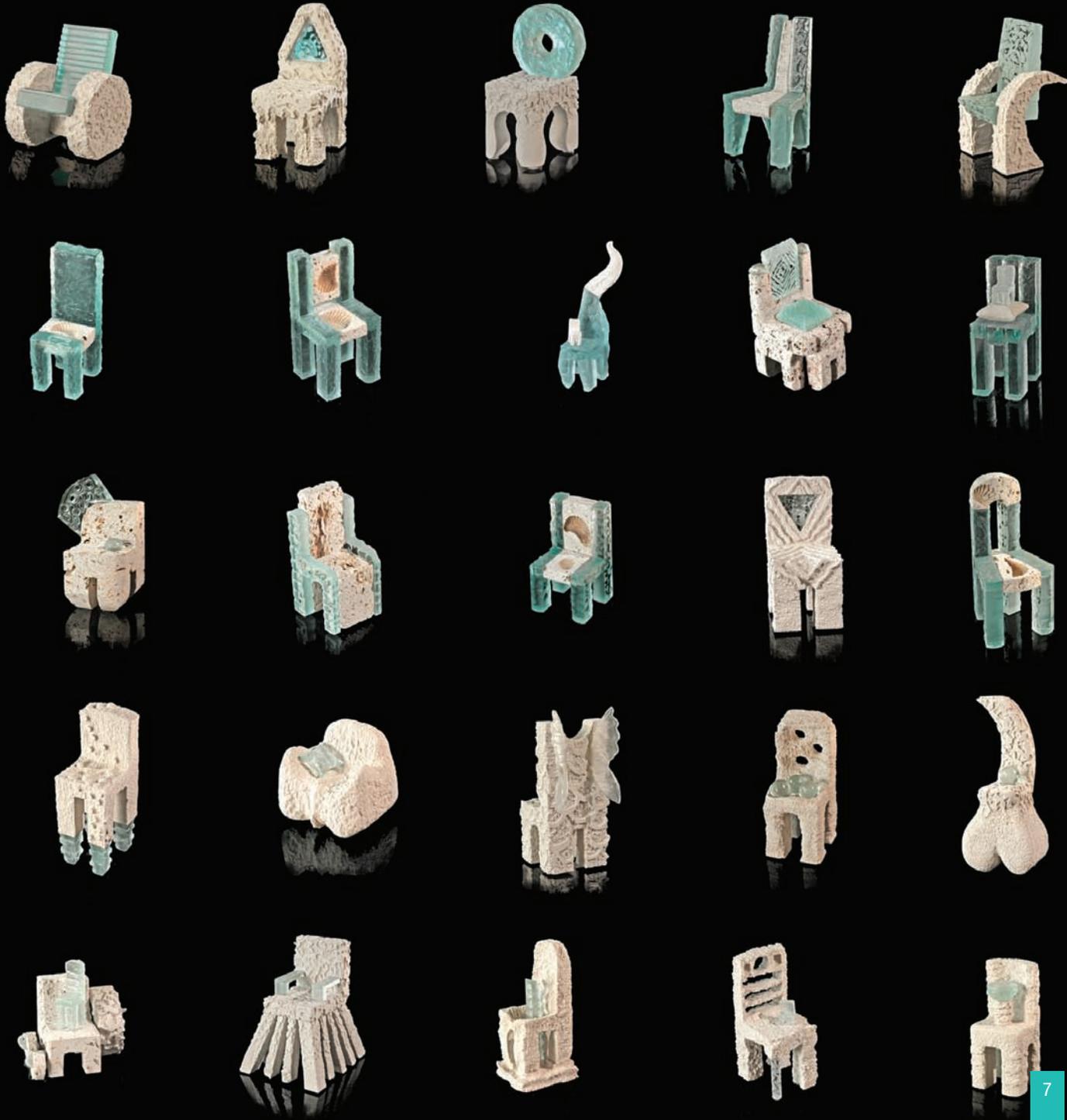


This project has a phase two—but it's not about trading. It's called The Global Chair Project and it's about artists doing their part to help a world in need. A worldwide call will be sent out asking artists to make a chair suitable for collecting and that will fit into an 8x8x8-inch box. Accepted chairs will be photographed and auctioned off one per day at *TheGlobalChairProject.net*. Proceeds will go into a foundation designed to benefit the arts and the environment. If you wish to donate a chair or funds to the Project, or to apply for a foundation grant, please visit the web site: TheGlobalChairProject.net.

Please take a seat! And stand up for the arts!

Damian Priour





In 1965, Jasper Johns wrote in his sketchbook: “*Take an object. Do something to it. Do something else to it.*”¹ With its inspiring inventiveness, dazzling visual variety, and underlying spirit of communal generosity, Damian Priour’s Texas Chair Project underscores how artists can use any humble and familiar object as a springboard to the spectacular.

So much of our life is spent in chairs: as newborns our parents rocked us in their laps; as students we studied in a hard chair; in offices we work seated in a desk chair; we eat our meals at a table and chair; and often we end the day reading, socializing, or watching television in a lounge chair. A chair is such a familiar object that we tend to take it for granted until we encounter one that is truly out-of-the-ordinary.

Throughout history, chairs have been embellished for use by powerful people or for significant occasions. In more recent times, designers, architects, and engineers have pushed the limits of form and materials to new and more interesting realms. Priour himself has included the chair in his art since 1972, and he and his wife Paula have collected unconventional chairs—large and small, functional and conceptual, serious and silly—for over 35 years. And now their collection has expanded exponentially with the remarkable Texas Chair Project.

In 2007, Priour approached the Austin Museum of Art about participating in a secret dream: he wanted to exchange his works of limestone and glass, in the form of different chair designs, with nearly 100 of his favorite Texas artists. The gift

would be sent “no strings attached,” however he would invite them to reciprocate with works of their own making—in different forms of a chair—if they were so inclined. The Museum’s agreement: if at least 50 of the artists responded in interesting ways, the Museum would organize an exhibition. That dream has come true in ways none of us could have imagined.

Artists trading their own works with other artists as part of a creative dialogue has a long and fascinating lineage. Vincent van Gogh and Paul Gauguin, Robert Rauschenberg and Willem de Kooning, and Sol LeWitt and Eva Hesse, among others, have changed art history with their exchanges. Nevertheless, Priour’s sending out his own creations in a near-spontaneous, unbridled mass act of generosity may be closer to “mail art,” an activity popular in the 1960s and 70s connected to the Fluxus movement, in which artists use the postal system as an alternative distribution system to share ephemera, postcards, decorated letters, ‘zines, or broadsides. And yet, in contrast to most mail artists who use reproductive technologies such as rubberstamps, photocopies, and digital printers, Priour’s gift chairs are each individually hand-crafted. The uniqueness of the stone and glass sculptures certainly inspired their recipients to reciprocate with genuine generosity—and to take the “chair challenge.”

A key to the project’s success is that the assignment was narrow, not wide. Priour defined The Texas Chair Project with limitations of time, space, and content. In exchange for a Priour original, a collaborating artist was asked to create,



within six months, an object that would fit in an 8x8x8-inch box, that explored the concept and/or form of a chair. Challenging artists to step outside their routines, to replace their own artistic goals and aspirations with a set of standards provided by another artist, Priour initiated a “call and response,” by which participants in this game applied their imaginations to revise, re-envision, and even re-invent the chair as we know it.

As one considers the 80 responses, the range of materials used strikes one first: books, a beer can, bronze, buttons, cement, ceramic, fabrics, felt, found objects, granite, knives, lead, money, neon, paper, plastic bags, resin, sawdust, toy soldiers, twigs, and video, among others. Many styles of chairs are found here: Adirondack, desk chairs, highchairs, inflatables, recliners, rockers, settees, and stools. In some works, the formal and structural inventiveness—stretching the basic concept of four legs, a back and arms in all directions—attracts all the attention, while others morph from a chair into a cat, the moon and the sun, or an orchid, all while still remaining seating. In other works, there is an emotional narrative, such as those with children in chairs being coddled or tied up, a school desk pierced by a spear, or shaped like an ominous knot. Other artists found inventive ways to fit a larger object into that small box by breaking, folding, or grinding up the original into sawdust. (Still others abandoned the box



altogether and delivered the artwork to the artist’s door. Priour explained, “I like when artists break the rules.”)

Although Priour is a sculptor, he didn’t limit his exchange to only artists working in three dimensions, and thus invited painters, printmakers, photographers, architects, and designers to expand the range of visions and voices.

In the end, The Texas Chair Project transcends the specifics of each chair and becomes a manifesto for community creativity. In his book *The Gift*, about creativity and generosity, Lewis Hyde writes of the beauty and reward of transferred momentum. “The gift must always move.”²

The Texas Chair Project began with nearly one hundred chairs sent out in boxes near and far. On the receiving end, artists pondered the request, and then produced their own chairs in response—a gift reciprocated. Priour shares these with us, and here the viewer becomes yet another recipient of a very special gift, the manipulation of materials and ideas into something new and different, and yet deeply familiar.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Dana Friis-Hansen'. The signature is stylized and fluid, with the first letter 'D' being particularly large and prominent.

Dana Friis-Hansen
The Dr. and Mrs. Ernest C. Butler Executive Director
Austin Museum of Art

¹Jasper Johns, “Sketchbook Notes” *Art and Literature* 4 (Spring 1965), 191-92.

²Lewis Hyde, *The Gift: Creativity and the Artist in the Modern World*. Vintage Books, 1979, p. 4.



Ellen Abbott & Marc Leva

Garden Chair, 2007
Pate de Verre (Kiln Cast Glass)
7 x 3 x 31.5 inches



Bale Creek Allen

Little Man's Throne, 2007

Army men and paint

7 x 6.5 x 3.25 inches



Helen Altman

Kate, 2007

Wood, glass, lead, plastic, distilled water, pigment, found object

4.5 x 4 x 4 inches



Paul Beck

Spoon-Fed, 2008

Wood, latex paint, varnish

4 x 3.25 x 3 inches

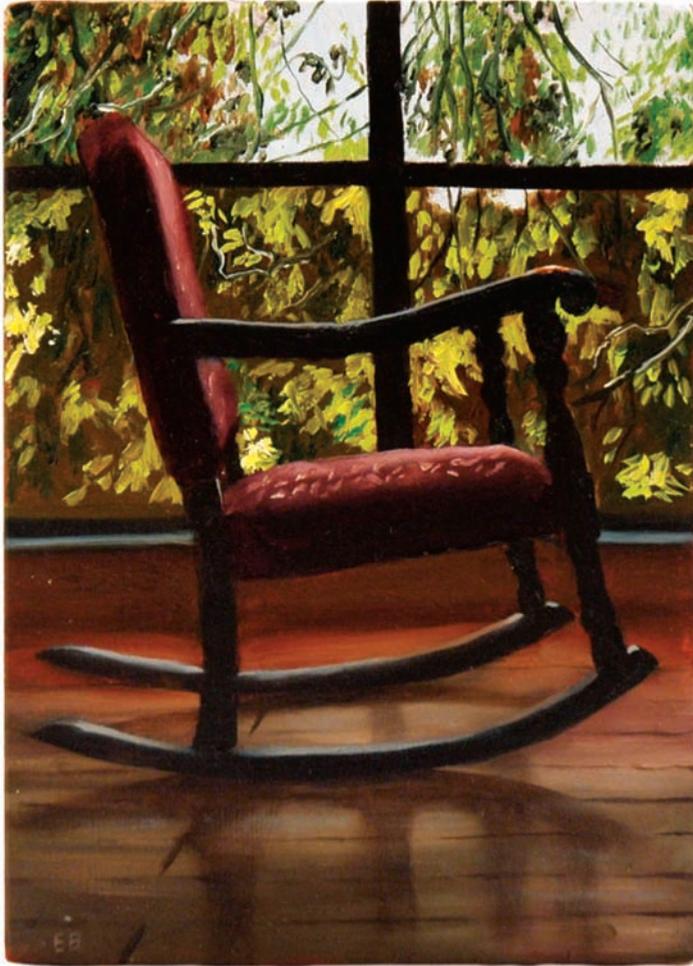


Jill Bedgood

Eternal Vacation, 2007

Sawdust

35 x 31 x .375 inches



Ellen Berman

Studio Rocking Chair, 2007

Oil on board

7 x 5 inches



Paul Booker

Blue Rectangles: C-Shape

Lexan, ink, steel pins

7 x 8.25 x 4.5 inches



Kate Breakey

Dawn, Tucson, 2007
Silver gelatin print
32 x 32 inches unframed



Candace Briceño

Ava, 2008

Hand-dyed wool felt, thread, on wire
9 x 8 x 6 inches

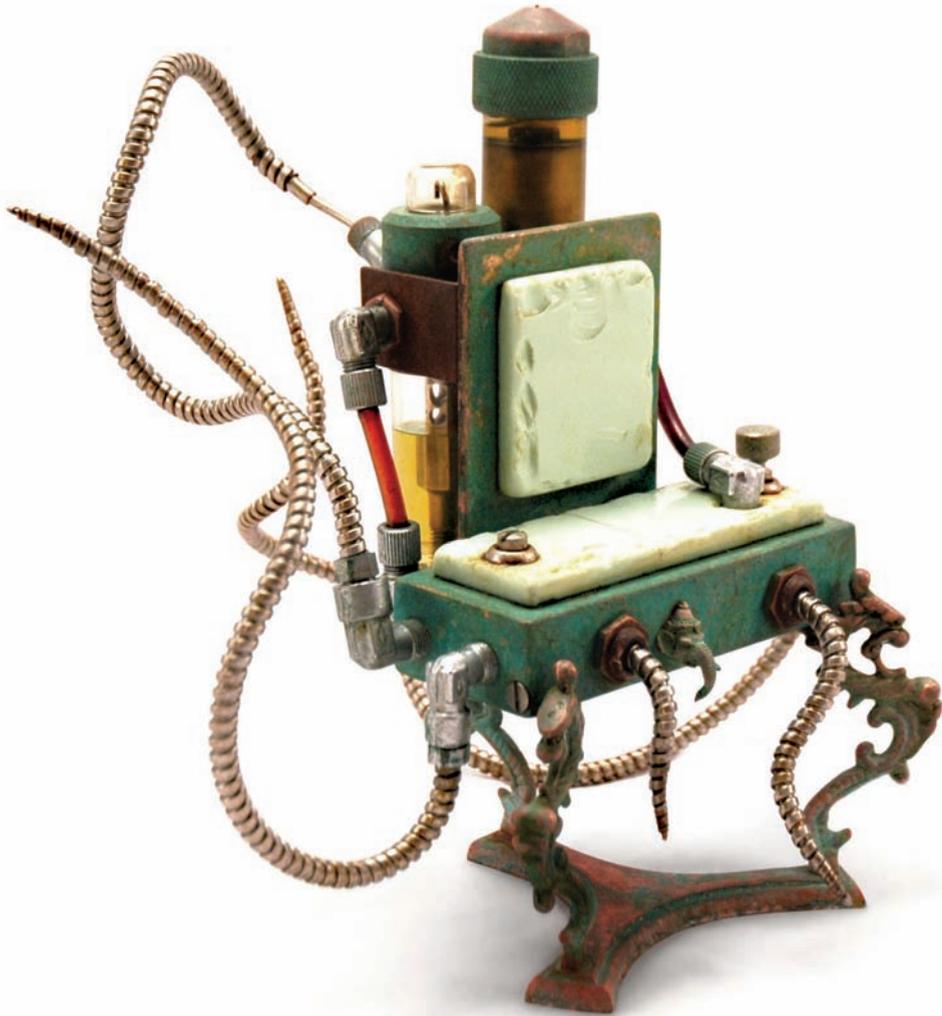


Holli Brown

Continuum, 2007

Tile mosaic

8 x 6 x 5 inches



Steve Brudniak

Bodhisativa Settee, 2007
Assemblage with propylene glycol
9 x 8 x 8 inches variable



Malcolm Bucknall

Once Upon a Big Strange Chair, 2007

Oil and ampersand wood panel

8 x 10 inches



William Cannings

Small Comfort, 2007

Steel and paint

5.5 x 7 x 7 inches



Belinda Casey

Pearl, 2008
Mixed media
6 x 3 x 5 inches



Roger Colombik

Mr. Dickens and Me, 2007

Cast bronze

5 x 7 x 7 inches



Cathy Cunningham

WIRED, 2008

Uranium tubing, argon gas

7 x 3 x 6 inches



Stephen Daly

Monologue, 2007

Cast bronze

8 x 5 x 8 inches



Jerry Daniel

Untitled, 2007

Painted steel

4.75 x 5 x 5 inches



David Deming

Mobile Chair, 2007

Painted steel

8.5 x 5 x 8 inches



Fidencio Duran

Sugar Wafers, 2007
Foamcore, graphite, board, acrylic
6 x 3 x 3 inches



David Everett

Big Cat Rock-O-Lounger, 2007

Wood

3.5 x 2.75 x 6.5 inches



Malou Flato

Chair y Tomatos, 2007

Acrylic

8 x 10 inches



Virginia Fleck

Meditation Cushion, 2007
Plastic, bags, thread, tape, fan
12 x 36 x 36 inches



Benita Giller

I See the Moon, 2007

Bead and trinket encrusted wood chair

5 x 3 x 3 inches



Mark Greenwalt

Fifi and Bob, 2007
Ceramic, steel, string
7 x 4.25 x 4.5 inches



Ken Hale

Six Chairs, 2007

Accordion style hand bound book and slip case, inkjet print and collage, Edition of 6
Closed: 6.5 X 9 inches; Open: variable



T. Paul Hernandez

The Wheelchair and Her Were One, 2007
Plaster and acrylic
6.5 x 4 x 9 inches



David Hesser

Attack Chair, 2007

Stainless steel, leather, wood, and velvet

5 x 6 x 6 inches



Sara Hickman

Wishing Chair Rocks, 2008
Rocks, tin round, acrylic paint, leaves
Variable



Benito Huerta

Leaded or Unleaded, 2008

Lead and wood

6 x 4 x 4 inches



Barbara Irwin

Untitled, 2007

Found objects

4 x 2 x 2 inches



Jimmy Jalapeño

Small Trainer Cowboy Wing Chair, 2008

Wood

6 x 4 x 4 inches



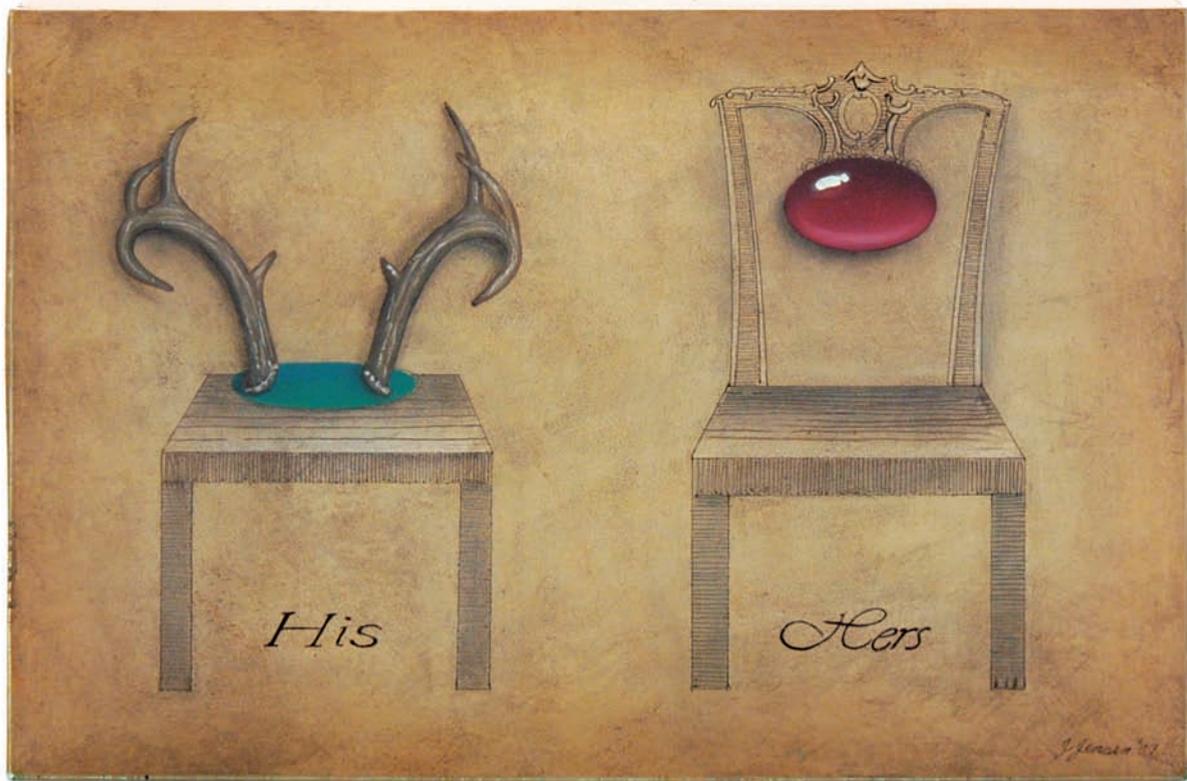
Joe Janson

Lounger with Ottoman, 2007

Wire

Chair: 7.5 x 6.5 x 6.5 inches

Ottoman: 3.5 x 4.5 x 4.5 inches



Judy Jensen

Odd Couple, 2007

Reverse painting and drawing on glass, mounted on board
4.5 x 6.5 inches



Randy Jewart

Untitled, 2007

Marble

9.5 x 4 x 5.75 inches



Danny Kamerath

Tim, 2007

Satinwood

5.25 x 4 x 4 inches



Liz Kerrigan

Eileen, 2007

Welded steel

7.5 x 7.5 x 7.5 inches



Paul Kittelson

Cubicle, 2007
Glass and paper
6 x 6 x 6 inches



Will Klemm

Day and Night, 2007
Pastel on paper
40 x 8 inches



Sharon Kopriva

Rosalie's Chair, 2007

Assemblage, plastic, plaster, papier mache, paint, nails, tacks

7.5 x 6 x 6 inches



Samantha Krukowski

Untitled

Plastic, wood, ink

4.25 x 4.25 x 4.25 inches



Charles Mary Kubricht

Untitled

Silver gelatin print

7 x 5 inches



Jimmy Kuehnle

Chair I Stole From a Bum in Japan, 2007

Steel

7 x 6 x 6 inches



Marilyn Lanfear

Small Chippendale Chairperson: One of a pair (without her sister), 1985

Sewn fabric, wire

16 x 5 x 4 inches



Lauren Levy

Untitled, 2007
Buttons, wire, wood
9 x 5 x 5 inches



Ken Little

Greenback Chair #1, 2007

U.S. currency, paint

6 x 2.5 x 2.5 inches



Shanny Lott

Mother is a Verb, 2007

Mixed media

6 x 8 x 5 inches



Bonnie Lynch

Nkomo Stool, 2007

Pit fired clay

3.5 x 5 x 2 inches



Mona Marshall

The Lazy Boy, 2008
Acrylic on panel
32 x 32 inches



Eric McGehearty

Sitting Pretty, 2007
Steel and auto paint
5 x 4.5 x 3 inches



Melissa Miller

Crow Chair, 2007
Aluminum and oil paint
6 x 4 x 4 inches



Jesus Moroles

Moonscape Bench, 2007
Dakota Mahogany granite
4.675 x 4.675 x 2.5 inches



Connie Morrison

Chair Dancin', 2007

Acrylic on panel with border of recycled metal pieces and shards

7.25 x 10 inches



Steve Murphy

Patterns Leave You Vulnerable, 2007

Lead over wood

3.5 x 3.75 x 4.25 inches



Katy Nail

The Chalice Well Beyond Marfa, 2007

Mixed media

10.75 x 8 x 6 inches



Richard Neidhardt

Typewriter Chair, 2007
Basswood, acrylic paint
7 x 5.25 x 2.75 inches



Pam Nelson

Model for Coil Chair, 2007

Ceramic

3.5 x 5 x 5.5 inches



Sherry Owens

For Alice, 2007

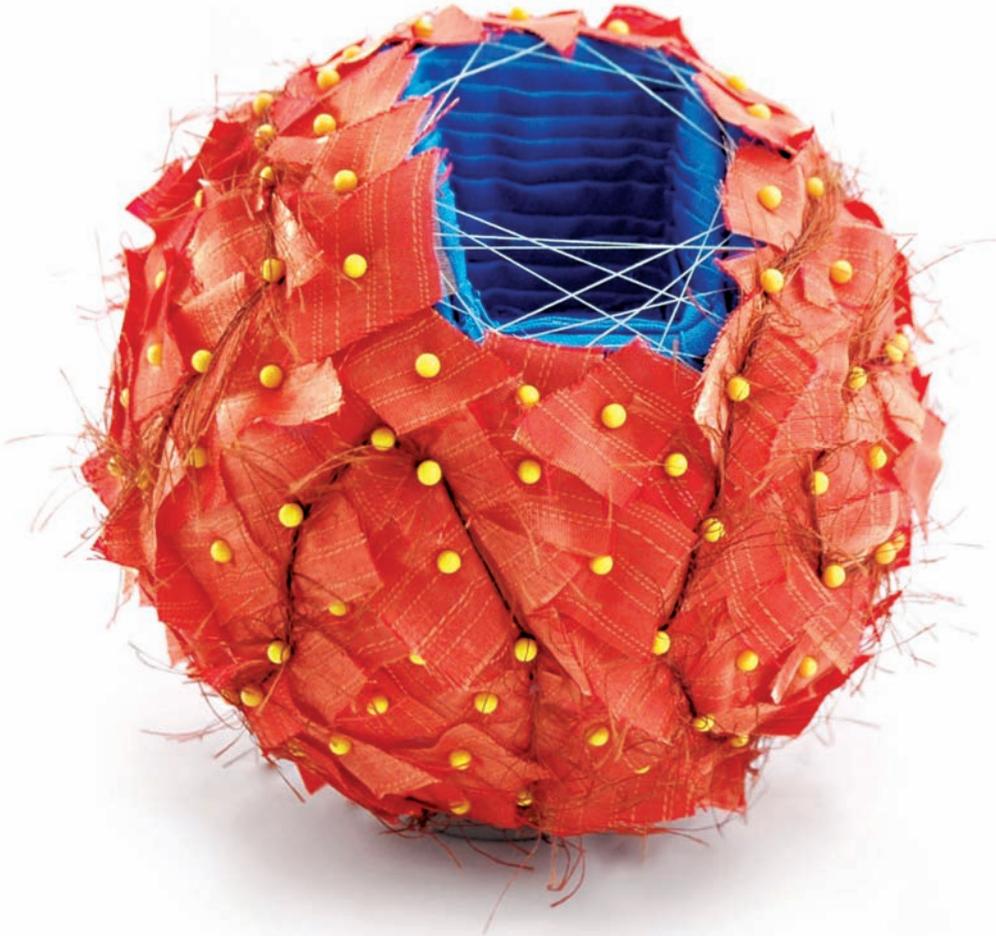
Crepe Myrtle, dye, and wax

6.25 x 5.25 x 4.25 inches



Beverly Penn

Tuft, 2007
Cast bronze
5 x 4 x 4 inches



Chloe Priour

Untitled, 2007

Polystyrene, fabric, pins, thread

6 inch diameter



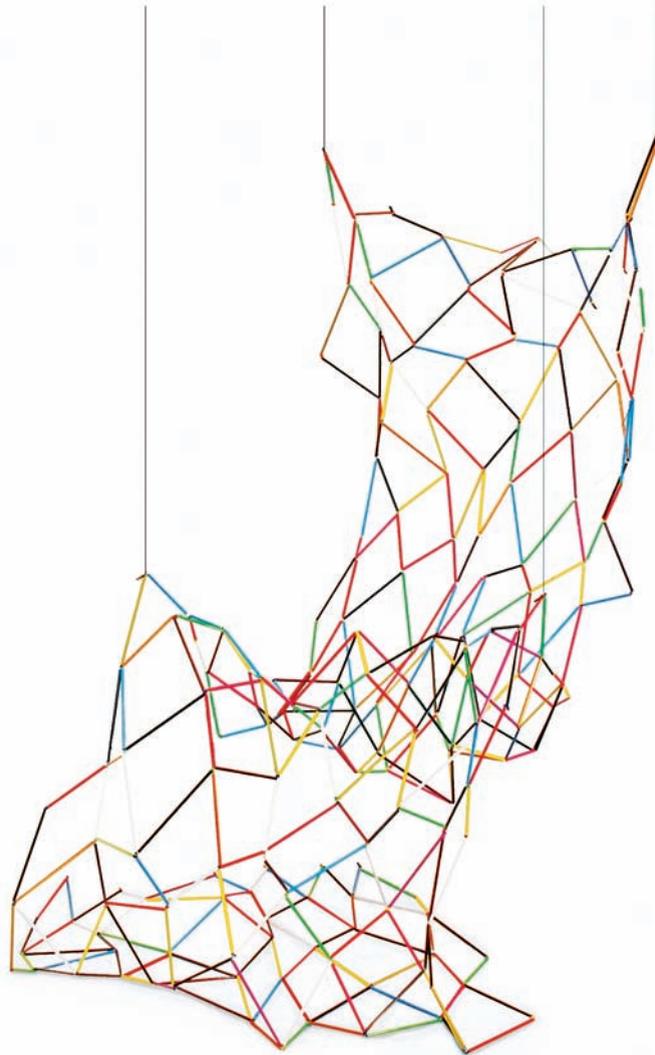
Mike Reese

The Orchid Chair, 2007
Metallic flip-flop paint over nylon plastic
7.75 x 9.5 x 7.5 inches



John Sager

A Good Read, 2007
Altered book and pins
5.75 x 4 x 4.75 inches



Margo Sawyer

Chair of Unknowing-Homage to Rietveld, 2007

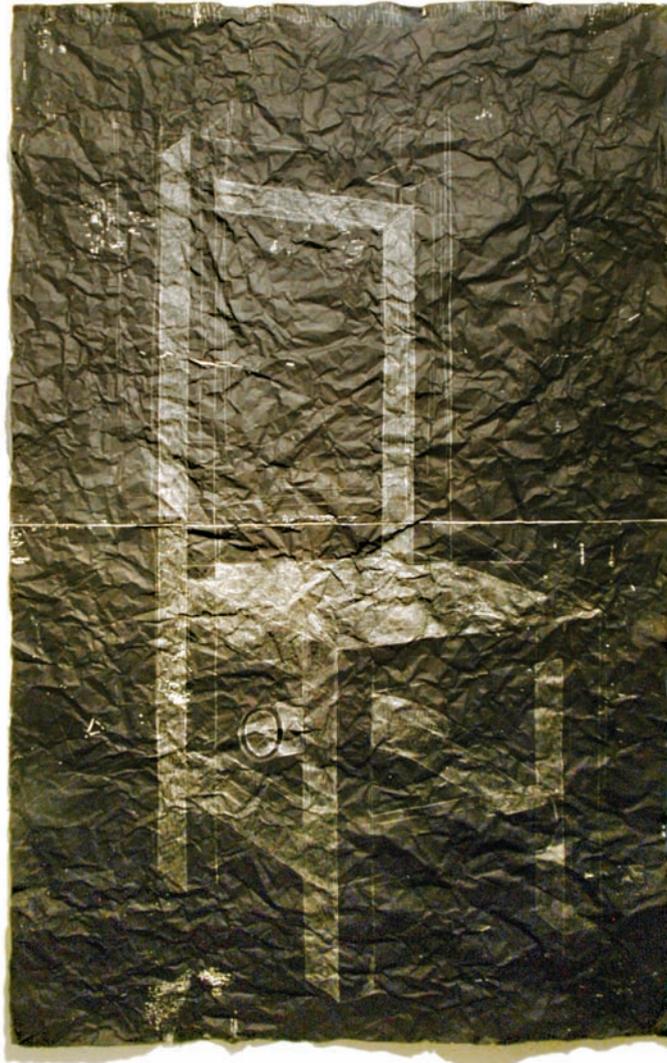
Powder coated copper 1/8 inch tubing, anodized aluminum 1/8 inch tubing

Variable



Mark Schatz

Recliner, 2007
Portland cement
8.5 x 6 x 3 inches



Bob Schneider

Today you are alive. Tonight you're dead, 2007
Intaglio copper plate print
24 x 40 inches unframed

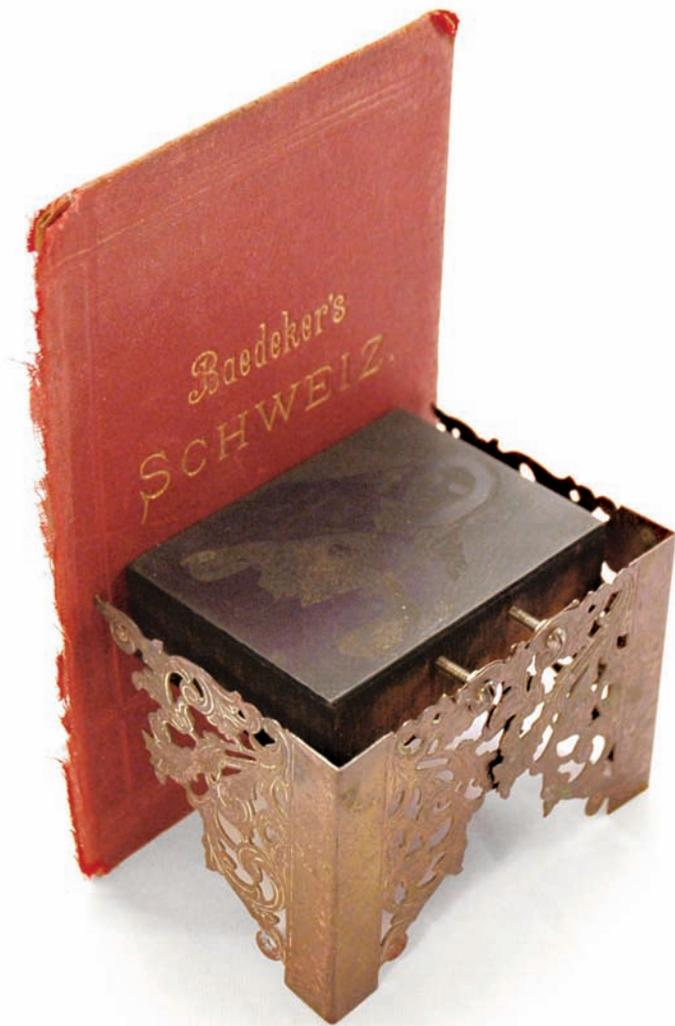


Jane Schweppe

By Land or By Sea, 2007

Mixed media

8 x 4 x 4 inches



James Michael Starr

Mary's Chair, 2007

Assemblage of book cover, decorative brass trim, and printer's block

7 x 4 x 4 inches



James W. Sullivan

Giacometti's Chair, 2007

Plaster and wire

3.5 x 5 x 7.5 inches



James Surls

Little Chair, 2008

Pinon pine (from our mountain-side home site)

6.5 x 3.5 x 3.5 inches



Steve Swagerle

Texas Size Comfort, 2007

Acrylic on panel with border of recycled metal pieces

7.25 x 9 inches



Masaru Takiguchi

Isu (Chair), 2007
Texas camphor wood
6.25 x 3.25 x 4 inches



The Art Guys

Adapted Damian Priour chair—gum specially chewed by The Art Guys and stuck to the bottom of top chair, 2007

Ceramic, glass, and chewing gum

5 x 3 x 2.75 inches



George Tobolowsky

In Via, 2007

Welded steel with lacquer

Chair: 6.5 x 6 x 6.5 inches

Ottoman: 1.5 x 6.5 x 1 inches



Hank Waddell

Ball Chair Tree, 2007

Mesquite, aluminum, yaupon holly with automotive urethanes and chameleons
14 x 3.75 x 3.75 inches



Bob Wade

Untitled, 2007

Beer can

6.25 x 3.25 x 3.25 inches



David Webber

Family of Chairs, 2007

Pecan, Antique Bog Walnut, Mesquite, Maple, Cherry, Texas Ebony, Persimmon, Antique Longleaf, and Pine
8 x 8 x 8 inches



William Wilhelmi

Prior Priour, 2007

Adapted Damian Priour chair, ceramic and glass
6.25 x 6 x 3.25 inches



Steve Wiman

Ball Chair, 2007

Wooden found objects

5.25 x 3.5 x 2.75 inches



Sydney Yeager

Studio Teachings (Red, Yellow, Blue), 2008

Oil on board

Variable



Ziegler Family Group

Just Right, 2008

Video

Variable

The Austin Museum of Art is proud to present this celebration of the artistic impulse and investigation in the chair as a rich, open-ended opportunity for formal, material, and metaphorical exploration. Dedicated to sharing art of regional, national, and international significance with a diverse audience, AMOA also seeks to present explorations that bridge Design and Art, and respond to the question “where do creative ideas come from?” — both important aspects in our programmatic vision.

We are grateful for the support and encouragement of Bettye Nowlin, President, Board of Trustees, and all of the Museum’s Trustees and Board of Advisors, for their confidence in and commitment to contemporary artists and their relevance to our lives today.

The success of this exhibition is the result of the cooperative involvement of many organizations and individuals. First and foremost, I am grateful to Damian Priour, the passionate catalyst of this project. Next, to Dana Friis-Hansen, Executive Director and Chief Curator of the Austin Museum of Art for the insight and guidance he brought to this project. The entire Museum staff has contributed to this exhibition in one way or another, but I want to especially thank our curatorial team: Andrea Mellard, Curatorial Associate and Manager of Public Programs; Cassandra Smith, Registrar; and Joe Janson, Chief Preparator.

We are gratefully indebted to all the sponsors of the exhibition listed at the front of this catalog, but I especially want to express gratitude for the generous in-kind contribution of design by ThinkStreet’s Randy House.

I also want to thank the 80 artists for the opportunity to include their work. We are grateful to you for pushing your creative boundaries to develop works that will delight, challenge, and resonate with our viewer’s experiences and imagination. Thank you!



Eva Buttacavoli
Director of Exhibitions and Education



