

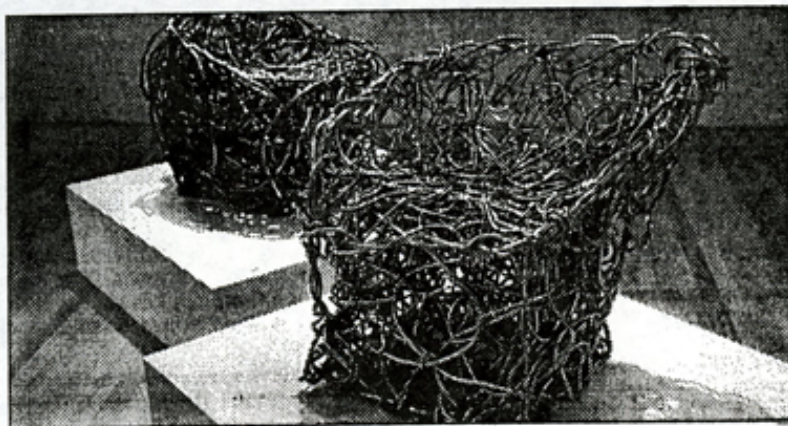
Now, Art That You Can Sit On

Kings and queens have always had furniture highly crafted and embellished with symbolism and art. "But I don't know if there was ever a market for it," said Lois Lambert, owner of the Gallery of Functional Art in Santa Monica, Calif.

Though the functional art furniture that Ms. Lambert's gallery sells may not be as lavish as Egyptian King Tutankhamen's throne, there seems to be a growing market for such pieces. The gallery opened in September to a crowd of 2,000. It is one of a handful of galleries nationwide that exclusively exhibits one-of-a-kind furniture designed and crafted by architects, artists and furniture makers.

The market for this furniture, however, will likely always be limited in large part because of its rich prices. Consider a few of the 70 pieces recently shown at Ms. Lambert's gallery, whose prices range from \$350 to \$10,000. A coffee broker paid \$2,000 for a stout bench built by Jon Bok, a Los Angeles folk artist. It features a back covered with flattened, multi-colored coffee cans and arms of soda bottle tops. Thomas Stender, a Massachusetts artist, crafted a delicate \$1,800 chair from bird's-eye maple and lacewood called "Canilune."

Functional art furniture may now be gaining acceptance, after a somewhat wobbly beginning. Art et Industrie, which pioneered the concept in New York 13 years ago, closed and opened three times. "It was harder than I thought it would be," said Rick Kaufmann, who owns the gallery, which is now located in the Soho



The New York Times/Jim Wilson

Chairs made from crushed wire by artist Forrest Myers.

section of New York.

But he maintains that the business is now flourishing. With pieces that range from \$5,000 to \$50,000 in price, Art et Industrie sold \$2 million worth of furniture last year, up from \$600,000 three years ago, Mr. Kaufmann said.

"Now, everytime I turn around there's a book or an article being written on the subject," he said. "Functional art is a way of sneaking sculpture into a room."

His 8,000-square-foot gallery concentrates on one-person shows of artists like Howard Meister, who designs stylized furniture welded from painted steel and Forrest Myers, who shapes furniture from crushed wire. While Ms. Lambert said her customers include many first-time art buy-

ers and movie studios — she recently sold \$100,000 worth of furniture to set designers for the Arnold Schwarzenegger movie "Total Recall" — Mr. Kaufmann said most of his clients are designers and art collectors.

And he has found a new and lucrative outlet for his art. A quarter of the gallery's revenues last year came from licensing the designs of some pieces to select European and Japanese manufacturers for larger-scale production. About 1 in every 10 pieces is suitable for manufacturing, he said.

"That's the sector that has increased rapidly in the last few years," Mr. Kaufmann said. Last year, the gallery billed \$500,000 for licensing agreements, three times more than in 1986.