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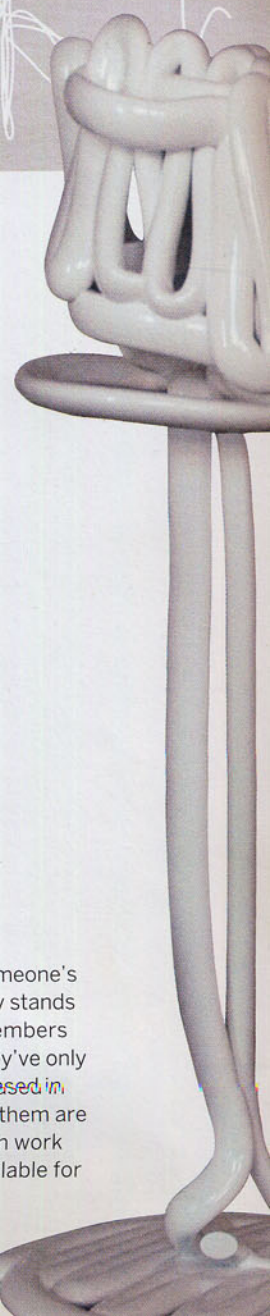
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At the base of the design process exists the sketch, where a designer's idea comes to life. That initial sketch usually gets modified, reexamined and rendered in a trajectory that will eventually lead to a final product. But what if that drawing ended up being the product? No strangers to incorporating process within the work of a finished piece, the members of Swedish design unit Front – from left to right, Sofia Lagerkvist, Katja Sävström, Charlotte von der Lancken and Anna Lagerkvist – mixed design with performance at their Sketch Furniture exhibit this past November. Part of Tokyo Design Week, the show found the Stockholm-based collective in a Japanese city for two months. Invited by the gallery Tokyo Wonder Site Art (which offers a six-week residency program) and the motion-capture company Crescent, the group jumped at the opportunity to work in Japan – which, according to Sävström, “is the future when it comes to technique.”

The Sketch Furniture series brought together two separate technologies that intrigued Front: motion capture, which is how the sketch takes shape, and rapid prototyping, where the recorded data gets its physical form by way of laser sintering. Both had been used in one of Front's previous projects, Design by Animals (2003), with the Fly Lamp. “We recorded a fly's path around a light and then printed it out, and the path became a lampshade,” explains Sävström. With Sketch, the motion capturing, done openly with strokes of a light pen, is where the performance aspect of the project came in. Front created 3-D sketches inside a dedicated space surrounded by mounted sensor cameras that recorded the light pen's strokes as exhibition attendees were invited to look on. As Sävström says, “We worked a lot with the storytelling function within the product.” With the data recorded and the performance over, the next step involved the actual construction of the furniture. The 3-D digital files were transmitted to a laser machine that layers and hardens the liquid polymer to build up the final product.



The result? Chairs, tables and lamps that look as if they leaped out of someone's paper scribbles, giving an organic quality to a collection that immediately stands impeccably true to the designers' initial concept. Although Front's members intimate that more products are planned using the same techniques, they've only let out a few details regarding the full extent of their production while based in Tokyo. “We have worked on many projects,” says Sävström, “but all of them are secret before we launch them.” In the meantime, three editions of each work from the Sketch Furniture series created during the exhibition are available for purchase at Barry Friedman in New York.

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JEAN SNOW