

# An Artist Who Predicted Our Present

The Daily Pic: John Chamberlain, who died yesterday, wasn't just a master of car parts.



A foam-rubber sofa by John Chamberlain (Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery, New York)

A Chamberlain draped-foam sofa sits below one of his trademark car-part sculptures, at [his show earlier this year at Paula Cooper](#) gallery in New York. Chamberlain died Wednesday, at 84, and his draped piece now seems elegiac and shrouded. Chamberlain's obituaries and appreciations will almost certainly concentrate on his crushed-car works and their bridging of Abstract Expressionism and Pop, but the works I find most exciting are [the foam-rubber pieces](#) that he made for just a few years in the late 1960s, until, he told me, his dealer ordered him to stop making such unsellable, un-Chamberlain-ish works. If the car-part sculptures carry the past of improvised abstraction forward beyond AbEx, Chamberlain's furniture predicted our current future, where art embraces function and abets new forms of social interaction – as his giant sofas did when crowds sprawled on them during his shows.



Installation view of Chamberlain couch during *John Chamberlain: A Retrospective Exhibition*, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 1971 (Photograph by Robert E. Mates and Paul Katz © The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, New York.)

It seems the [Guggenheim's Chamberlain retrospective](#) in February may be including some of the foam furniture, and let's hope they allow it to be used.

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