

ART

When Chairs Become Extraordinary Sculptures

The chairs in *When Attitudes Become Chairs* reveal how a decidedly utilitarian object can become something inspirational and new.



Brendan L. Smith December 24, 2018



Installation view, *When Attitudes Become Chairs*, Pizzuti Collection, Columbus (all images courtesy of the Pizzuti Collection)

COLUMBUS, Ohio — When does a chair become something more than a chair? An unusual and enlightening exhibition at the Pizzuti Collection examines this question. *When Attitudes Become Chairs* features chairs of all descriptions by a diverse group of artists, architects, and designers.

The exhibition complicates the artificial boundaries separating art, design, and craft. What category do you pick for a well-designed, finely constructed, artfully inspired chair? And does it really matter? While you're not allowed to sit on any of the chairs in the exhibition, they are all chairs. Marrying form and function, they reveal how a decidedly utilitarian object can be transformed into something inspirational and new.



Installation view, *When Attitudes Become Chairs*, Pizzuti Collection, Columbus

The exhibition begins with two round papasan chairs that look perfect for a nap or a nostalgic trip back to childhood. The chairs, which were built earlier this year, are completely covered with plush stuffed Snoopys or black cats resembling Felix the Cat, all with X's in place of eyes. The canines and felines spill over the chairs' edges, their feet almost reaching the floor. Brazilian artist-designer brothers [Fernando and Humberto Campana](#) created the stainless steel-and-Cumaru wood chairs with New York-based graffiti artist-designer

[KAWS](#), who designed the stuffed animals drawing from his repertoire of pop culture references.

Other chairs unite art and science, utilizing the latest technology. Dutch designer [Joris Laarman's](#) aluminum "Bone Chair" (2006) features arching struts that branch out organically under the seat and across the back like dividing cells or a mutant skeleton. The chair actually was designed by a computer based on an algorithm Laarman wrote to calculate the ideal form for a curved seat. His lab also built a 3D metal printer capable of welding, a revolution in artistic design with practical applications.



Installation view, *When Attitudes Become Chairs*, Pizzuti Collection, Columbus

The exhibition's title references curator Harald Szeemann's famous (or infamous) 1969 exhibition in Bern, Switzerland, titled *Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form*, which featured work by Claes Oldenburg, Hans Haacke, Eva Hesse, Richard Serra, and other avant-garde artists whose work was displayed in haphazard fashion in or nearby the Kunsthalle Bern. The public hated the exhibition, in part because some artists vandalized the museum by hurling molten lead at it, chipping off plaster, or smashing a sidewalk in

connection with their work. Szeemann subsequently left his job as director of the

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Kunsthalle Bern, but the show [propelled his career](#) as an independent curator known for collaborating with artists rather than dictating to them. The exhibition was so influential that it was restaged in 2013 for the 55th Venice Biennale.



Shiro Kuramata, "Miss Blanche" (1988)

When Attitudes Become Chairs is curated by Marc Benda, founding partner of [Friedman Benda](#) gallery in New York, and curator and writer [Glenn Adamson](#). In an introduction to the catalogue, Adamson writes that they were inspired by the Kunsthalle Bern exhibition because they “really want to achieve for design what the 1969 exhibition did for fine art: to gather a collection of exemplary expressions so the public can experience their combined energies.”

Acclaimed English designer [Ron Arad](#) has propelled furniture design forward for decades. An acrylic rocking chaise lounge titled “Oh-Void 2” (2006) features alternating blue and transparent lines in an oblong shape with two spherical voids of negative space created by openings in the chair’s interior. The design is elegant and sculptural, but it doesn’t look comfortable.

It was one of Arad’s chairs that led Ron Pizzuti to expand his fine art collection into the world of design; this [impressive collection](#) is the foundation for the nonprofit Pizzuti Collection, which Ron runs with his wife, Ann. (In a surprising move, the Pizzutis announced they would transfer ownership of their museum and part of their collection to the Columbus Museum of Art effective January 1, 2019, which will dramatically increase the size and international scope of that museum’s collection.)



Ron Arad, "Oh-Void 2" (2006)



Wendell Castle, "Above-Within-Beyond" (2014)

The exhibition also features several chairs by [Wendell Castle](#), often called the father of the art furniture movement. Castle, who died earlier this year, transformed chairs into sculpture over the course of six decades of groundbreaking work. In “Dark

Matter” (2011), Castle utilizes stack lamination by gluing strips of Peruvian wood together before carving them into an elegant concave chair and adjoining side table that balances together with one leg between them. The innovative design conjures Art Deco or the helm of a spaceship.

So when does a chair become something more than a chair? We could refer to Rule #7 of Castle’s [Ten Adopted Rules of Thumb](#) for some guidance: “If it’s offbeat or surprising, it’s probably useful.”

When Attitudes Become Chairs continues at the Pizzuti Collection (632 North Park Street, Columbus, Ohio) through January 20, 2019. The exhibition is curated by Marc Benda and Glenn Adamson.