



Rijksmuseum falls for young designer

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Visitors to Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum expect to see masterpieces from the Golden Age such as a Rembrandt self-portrait or The Night Watch. But the museum also shows modern works and has just acquired the prototype of Joris Laarman's world-famous Bone Chair.

"It's much more modern than I'd expected, but it's really beautiful," says an American tourist. Her husband calls it "modern and creative". They are visiting the [Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam](#) and admiring Laarman's 2006 Bone Chair.

An enthusiastic Mexican visitor says, "*Me gusta mucho, està bonito* (I like it very much, it's nice)," while a Brazilian tourist calls it, "modern, *bello* (beautiful)." The Rijksmuseum simply says it's an icon.

Numerous modern art museums across the world have added the chair to their collections but it's a real honour for the young Dutch artist to have his work acquired by the Netherlands' national museum.

"I'd rather have the Bone Chair in the Rijksmuseum than anywhere else in the world, it's an enormous honour. I'll have to wait and see what happens next, maybe it'll be in storage in five years' time. But I want people to see it. The Rijks is my favourite museum as well."

Studio

Four people are at work when I visit Laarman's studio in Amsterdam West: a woman wearing a dust mask is working at a table and two men in protective suits have just finished polishing a tabletop. An industrial ventilation system sucks the dust out of the air.

Laarman: "It's an aluminium table with a tungsten carbide tabletop. It's so hard that you can't scratch it with anything," explains Laarman. He uses modern material and the latest research and explores technical possibilities to the utmost. This way of working led him to develop the Bone Chair in 2005; it's based on biological research into bone growth in humans done by the Opel car company.

Models of his work are arrayed in his studio; some of them are clearly not finished but others are. The bone chair is definitely a finished product; it's created from a single piece of aluminium and just 12 of them were made. Standing next to it is a chair that resembles the bone chair but it is far heavier and extremely cold to the touch; it looks as though it is made from marble or porcelain.

Laarman says, *"Yes, we did try that at first; we pulverised porcelain cups and then mixed the powder with epoxy resin but it turned out really grey and grubby looking. Then we tried mixing white marble powder with resin and created a three-dimensional mould using a computer programme. The chair was poured into the mould and finished by hand."*

Rococo

Occasionally, the artist's company ([Joris Laarman Lab](#)) creates a chair or a lamp for a manufacturer. His rococo radiator – his final project at the Eindhoven Design Academy – can be ordered from a Belgian company and there are 12 copies of the bone chair and others in the series. He uses the revenue generated from sales to finance other projects, some of which take as long as a year to complete.

"We tried to translate the bone chair into an industrial process but that ended up being too boring for words. I'd love to be able to launch a variant of the bone chair all over the world. I think I'll be able to do it in about five years."

One of his dreams is Make Me, where industrial robots make his products.

"We want production sites all over the world that are able to produce high-quality furniture and that sort of thing. We'll send a digital blueprint all over the world by internet. And then the furniture maker can programme the robot. It'd be like iTunes for manufacturing products."

His work has garnered high praise and many say he makes beautiful objects. However, Laarman says that it just happens, his chief passion is creating new experimental works. He uses hard metals and plastics that melt at low temperatures and his company discovered China Foam; a substance that foams in an oven before setting to become both harder and lighter than porcelain (just one eighth the weight) with exceptional isolating properties.

He enthuses, *"the best thing about living now is the creation of super high-tech materials. I'm still really young, so I've got lots of time to do lots of really cool other stuff."*