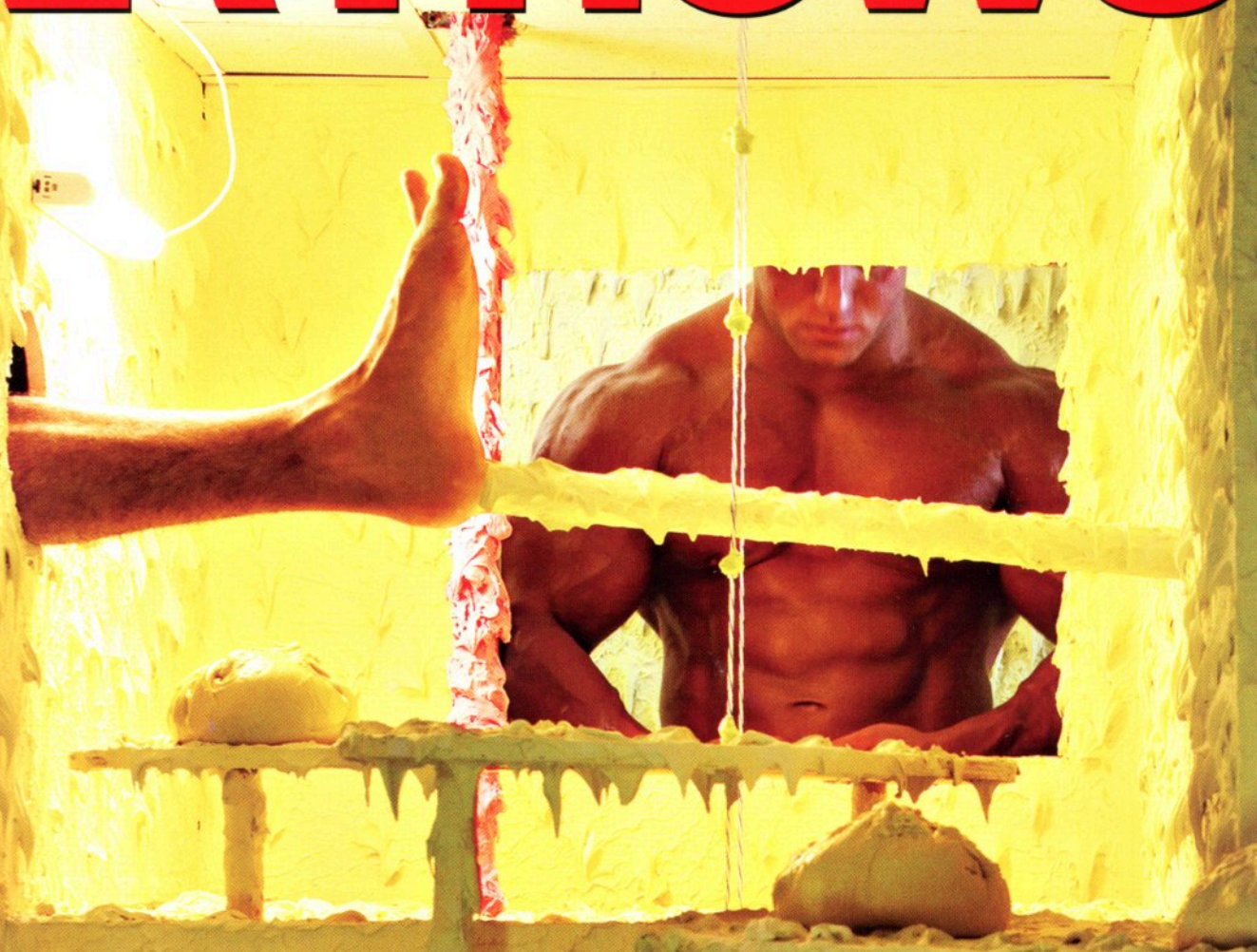


DECEMBER 2008

# ARTnews



## MIKA ROTTENBERG Gets Surreal

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**The Dalí Sculpture Mess**  
**Design, Duchamp, and High-Concept Chairs**  
**'Gossip Girl' Secret: The Art Is Real**

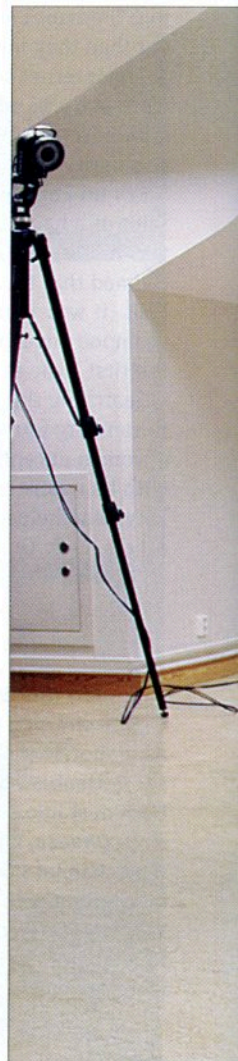
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# Please Don't Be Seated

Designers turn chairs into sculptures.  
Artists transform consumer products into  
spectacular installations. Increasingly artists and  
designers are tapping into the same tools,  
technologies, and art-historical precedents



BY STEVEN SKOV HOLT AND MARA HOLT SKOV

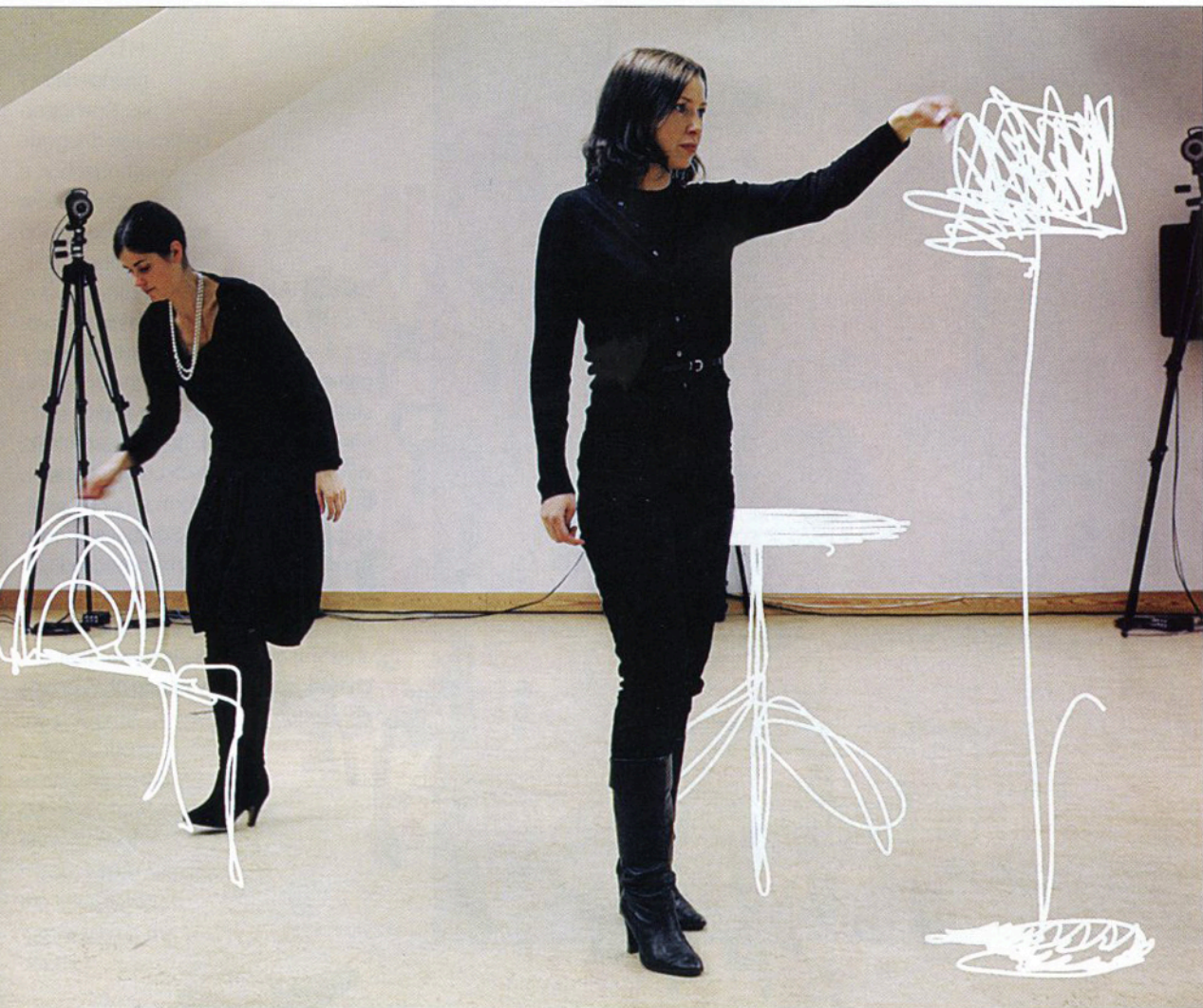
When a chair is wrapped, torched, chopped, or framed—when its traditional function as an object to sit on is challenged by the way it is created—the question arises, Is it a functional design object, or is it art? And this leads to the more basic question, What is the purpose of such an object? Is it enough for it just to be admired? And further, what does “function” itself mean? Perhaps “postfunctional” best describes the nature of many objects today—even those as familiar and ancient as chairs. Designers are increasingly addressing the same conceptual and philosophical concerns as artists, and artists are exploring many of the same technological and production questions as designers. Art and design impulses can now commonly be found jumbled together in the same creative mind.

Whereas artists often co-opt the tools of designers and engineers, designers, already willing participants in consumer culture, also create “products” that have no recognizable purpose. Drawing on the intellectual heritage of Marcel Duchamp’s Readymades and Robert Rauschenberg’s Combines, artists and designers are pushing their work into new territory.

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*Writers and curators Steven Skov Holt and Mara Holt Skov teach at California College of the Arts in San Francisco. Their current book and exhibition project is “Manufactured: The Conspicuous Transformation of Everyday Objects,” on view at the Museum of Contemporary Craft in Portland, Oregon.*



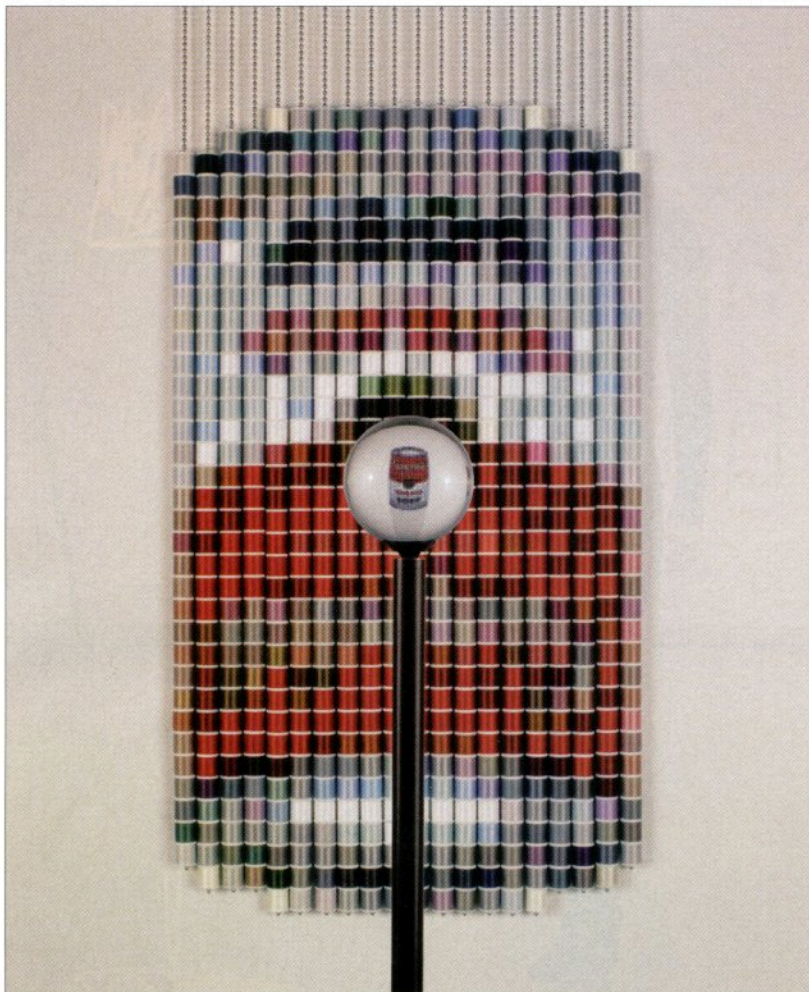


## FRONT

Perhaps one of the best examples of postfunctional design is the “Sketch” chair, 2006, by the Swedish design team Front. “Sketch” results from a process in which a software program captures motion through “pen strokes” that the designers make in space. Then a 3-D printer filled with a plastic goo (liquid polymer) turns their sketches into products. The chair—whose usability takes a backseat to its status as sculpture and concept—emerges fully formed, with little waste, and requires only hand polish to ready it for market. In “Sketch,” art, design, and technology truly merge.







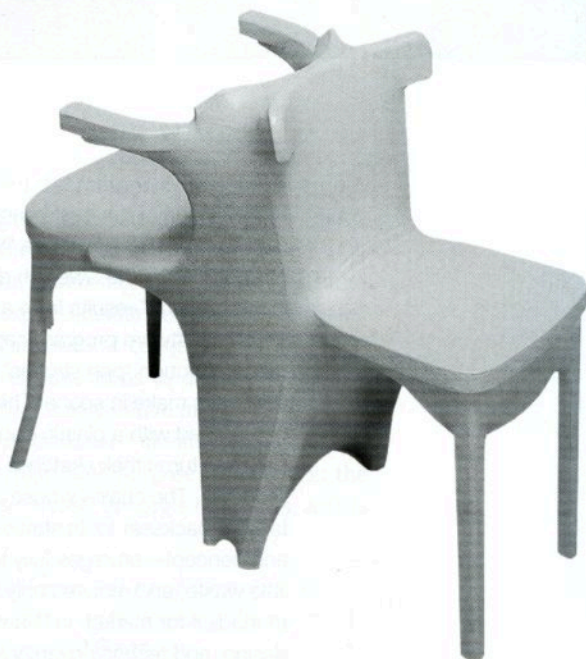
### DEVORAH SPERBER

For her assemblage *After Warhol 1*, 2008, artist Devorah Sperber gathered 698 spools of thread, stainless-steel ball chains and hanging apparatus, and a clear acrylic viewing sphere, which concentrates the spools so they form a recognizable image. Sperber's spools upon spools of thread, composed to form pixelated images of familiar objects and icons of art history, have an uncanny illusionistic power that challenges the very nature of perception.

### JURGEN BEY

Dutch designer Jurgen Bey explores the very nature of chairs by encasing an unmatched pair in a sheath of "skin" made of a synthetic elastic fiber to create an object for sitting that is both familiar and alien. This model, the "Double Chair," 1999, comes from his Kokon Furniture series.

Bey's "Tree-Trunk Bench," 1999 (opposite, bottom), gives an ironic nod to the prehistoric log chair but delivers it straight to the 21st century. The neoprimitivist seating unit combines an unfinished log with three cast-and-polished bronze chair backs, suggesting modern high-style erudition. The result is a mash-up of indeterminate purpose and primal appeal.





**STUART  
HAYGARTH**

British lighting designer Stuart Haygarth assembled a hodgepodge of weathered plastic containers and other man-made detritus from a stretch of the Kent coastline into a glowing lighting fixture. The jewel-like "Tide Chandelier," 2005, shows how deterioration, decay, and destruction can bestow fresh meanings on familiar objects. The sphere, which also demonstrates the power of accumulations, is, according to the designer, "an analogy for the moon, which affects the tides, which in turn wash up the debris."







### RÉGIS MAYOT

Artists have increasingly been turning to manufactured products as their new raw materials and combining them in an undertaking that could be called "manufacturing," whereby the goods are transformed through a variety of hand, tool, machine, and production processes. In this spirit, French artist Régis Mayot made the sculpture *Grand Magasin*, 2001, a carefully curated array of cast-off plastic bottles, each with its sides carved away so that only the edge, base, and mouth are left as an outline. The remains have been placed on a shelf fixture as if in a store, a Technicolor display of nonproducts in noncontainers.

### MAARTEN BAAS

Maarten Baas's "Smoke" project began when the Dutch design student burned a Victorian-style armchair with a blowtorch until the surface was charred and fissured. For his second act, "Where There's Smoke," 2004, Baas turned to torching original pieces by his design heroes: a Charles and Ray Eames screen, an Ettore Sottsass bookshelf, a Tejo Remy chest of drawers, and Gerrit T. Rietveld's revered 1918 "Red and Blue Chair" (right). Baas preserves his burned appropriations in epoxy. Through the process of destruction, he gives design history new relevance.





## CONSTANTIN AND LAURENE LEON BOYM

Design partners Constantin and Laurene Leon Boym mine history, art history, popular culture, and news for their wide-ranging works. Their "Buildings of Disaster" project makes violence and destruction the subject of a series of metal tabletop design objects that resemble souvenirs or shelf-top follies. The models commemorate sites that have gained mythic status in recent popular culture. Examples include the

"Unabomber Cabin," 1998 (right); the Dakota apartment building, in front of which John Lennon was shot; the Oklahoma City Federal Building; the Alma tunnel, in which Princess Diana's car crashed; and the Chernobyl nuclear reactor. The Boym's' work also extends into



repurposing found objects and even

art, and combining them to come up with new meanings. The couple used reproductions of paintings as functional seating surfaces for their Ultimate Art Furniture series. For "Mars and Venus," 2006 (left), they created a minimal chair form and clothed the seat and back and part of a mirror with an oil-on-canvas replica of a Paulo Veronese painting. In so doing they deftly defined the very notion of "art furniture."



## TEJO REMY AND RENÉ VEENHUIZEN

Concerned with reuse and appropriation, the Dutch design team of Tejo Remy and René Veenhuizen created a series of rugs composed of cast-off bedcovers. The "Blanket Carpet," 2007–8 (right), refers to brain structure and maps, among other forms, depending on the context of the piece. Although many of their witty and provocative conceptions take the form of utilitarian objects (chairs, bottles, rugs, lights), their works tend to remain curious hybrids. This is embodied in Remy's iconic strapped-together assemblage "Chest of Drawers" and his "Milk Bottle Lamp."

