



THE CHAIR AS IMAGE

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1984

INTRODUCTION

No other piece of furniture is more intimately associated with our everyday lives than the chair. Few other articles are required to accommodate so many moods and functions. Contemporary designers continue to wrestle with the problems of the 'seat' just as they have in the past. It is not surprising therefore that the chair has appeared in a bewildering range of designs. Many of these, stripped of embellishment signal the purely functional while others express the aspirations of the most flamboyant and eccentric individuals. Perhaps more than any other single piece of furniture, the chair has been a barometer of style and technological development.

This exhibition is not a collection of the best in chair design, although a few "classics" are included; for example, Gerrit Rietveld's 'Red, Blue' chair and Marcel Breuer's 'Wassily' armchair. Neither is it a study in ergonomics despite the inclusion of Loretta Watkin's 'Musical' chair. While some chairs are the result of a strictly developed and applied design philosophy, others are the result of a more pragmatic approach.

We have endeavoured to include chairs that are particularly sculptural, as objects in their own right. We have looked for chairs that are evocative in their design and materials and those that have a well defined character. They may evoke, for instance unease or they may suggest the nostalgia of a more romantic era. The exhibition ranges in mood from the elegance of the Thonet 'Rocking' chair to the bizarre contemporary 'Torso' chair designed by Paolo Deganello.

We hope that this selection will be entertaining and provocative.

CHRIS GENTLE
Gallery Director.

IDI

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1.

THE BATH CHAIR - 1860 - 1880

This rare example was acquired in Bath Spa, County Avon, England.

In the late Victorian era Bath was the most prestigious of the English spas. The English nobility and gentry retired there from time to time to recover from their ailments and/or excesses.

The Bath Chair was developed for these patients to be wheeled around the gardens and the city by attendants.

Kindly lent by Charles E. Hirsch, Antique Dealer, Sydney.

2.

VIKING CHAIR

Ebonised timber frame, seat and back of threaded and stretched cord.

Unknown designer/maker. Danish origin.

Though certainly not as fragile or feather-light, this unusual chair with its throne-like appearance and interplay of space and diagonal line has a curious affinity with the high-backed chairs of Mackintosh's design.

Kindly lent from a Private Collection.

3.

MUSICAL CHAIR 1983

Chrome-plated steel frame, suede upholstery on seat and knee-rest.

Designed and made by Loretta Watkins, Sydney.

This chair was the result of a project set in the design component of the School of Architecture at the University of Sydney.

Required to design a musical chair that is "handsome, sound, comfortable and healthful" Loretta Watkins conceived a form relating to the imagery of the base clef and the musical note. This solution particularly fulfilled the brief in relation to anthropometric and ergonomic considerations.

Kindly lent by the Designer.

4.

HARBOUR BRIDGE CHAIR 1983

Grey-painted tubular steel frame, sheepskin upholstery.

Designed and made by Graeme Soward, Sydney.

Asked to design a typically Australian chair as a design project in the School of Architecture course at Sydney University, Graeme Soward utilised the image of the Sydney Harbour Bridge to produce this chair of welded tubular steel. What better upholstery for an Australian chair, than sheepskin.

Kindly lent by the Designer.

5.

TORSO ARMCHAIR

Steel frame, elastic webbing padded with polyurethane foam and polyester, fabric upholstery and attached table top of lacquered wood.

Designed by Paolo Deganello, Italy, c. 1983. Manufactured by Cassina, Italy.

This chair was designed within a range of two interchangeable parts offering any number of possible variations in the completed form.

Also available in leather, the back of this example is upholstered in fabric from the range of New York textile designer, Jack Lenor Larsen.

Kindly lent by ARREDORAMA INTERNATIONAL PTY. LTD.

6.

WASSILY CLUB ARMCHAIR

Chromium nickel-plated tubular steel, leather seat, back and arms.

Designed by Marcel Breuer, Dessau, 1925. Originally manufactured by Standard-Mobel, Berlin. Manufactured by several companies, this example by Zanøva, Italy.

Marcel Breuer (b.1902) designed the first chair to be constructed of chromium-plated tubular steel while master of the Bauhaus furniture workshop.

Impressed by the strength and lightness of this material in the construction of bicycles, Breuer conceived its application to furniture, designing the Wassily chair in 1925 as part of the furnishings of the Bauhaus campus home of the painter, Wassily Kandinsky.

In its exploration of spatial values using intersecting planes and continuous line, this chair has been described as the direct descendant of Rietveld's Red-Blue chair as well as marking the beginnings of Modernism.

Kindly lent by ARREDORAMA INTERNATIONAL PTY. LTD.

7.

RUSTIC ARMCHAIR c. 1900

Undressed hardwood tree branches.

Unknown maker, South Australian origin. Purchased 1984.

The chair is part of a suite designed for use as garden furniture. Such rustic or primitive furniture was popular for outdoor use during the late Victorian and Edwardian periods.

Kindly lent by the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney.

8.

RECLINING ROCKING CHAIR c. 1875-1905

Bent beechwood with caned seat and adjustable back rest.

Manufactured by Gebrüder Thonet, Austria.

Purchased 1983.

Michael Thonet (1796-1871) worked during the early 19th century in pursuit of an ideal means of making light, wooden furniture of a design suitable for mass-production.

The bentwood technique was the answer. Departing completely from the traditional methods of furniture making, this technique involved the cutting of beechwood into thin, narrow strips or laths, which were steamed to achieve flexibility. Once steamed, the laths were clamped to iron strips which were subsequently bent to compress the timber fibres, thus producing a structurally rigid form.

Kindly lent by the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney.

9.

PATIO CHAIR c. 1960

Plastic-coated steel rod and wire. Unknown maker, possibly Australian origin.

As the 1960's approached, the growing emphasis on outdoor living stressed a need for ease-of-maintenance furniture. This popularised the technique previously used by Harry Bertoia on his Diamond Chair of 1952, whereby steel rod and wire mesh were covered with a plastic coating.

Kindly lent from a Private Collection.

10.

MEZZADRO STOOL

Chrome-plated steel frame, painted steel seat and foot of natural beech.

Designed by A. and P.G. Castiglioni, Italy, 1957. Manufactured by Zanotta, Italy.

Though not a chair in the exact sense, this cantilevered stool with its shaped tractor-style seat exhibits the same simplicity of form and functional preoccupation evident in chair design of the late 1950's.

Kindly lent by ARREDORAMA INTERNATIONAL PTY. LTD.

11.

CORNER CHAIR 1895 - 1900

Wood inlaid with copper and pewter, legs and uprights sheathed in copper, vellum seat and vellum covered drums suspended between uprights.

Made by Carlo Bugatti, Italy.

Purchased 1983

Carlo Bugatti (1856 - 1940) studied architecture in Milan and Paris before opening his own cabinet-making workshop and retailers in Milan in 1888. His highly original designs for furniture and interiors were much admired winning him a silver medal at the Paris Exhibition in 1900 and the Diploma of Honour at the Turin Exhibition in 1902.

Very much in the spirit of the contemporary Art Nouveau style, Bugatti's furniture combined exotic Middle Eastern inspired motifs with an inventive use of materials and decoration.

Bugatti's son, Ettore, became renowned for his remarkable car designs.

Kindly lent by the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney.

12.

BARBER'S CHAIR

Cast iron frame, wood, leather upholstery.
Unknown maker.

This chair is indicative of the seating provided by the barbers of the Edwardian period when cutting the hair and trimming the whiskers of their gentlemen clients.

Kindly lent from a Private Collection.

13.

DENTIST'S CHAIR

Cast iron frame, chrome-plated and enamelled steel, wood, velvet upholstery. Unknown maker.

Typical of the equipment found in a late Victorian dental surgery, this chair with attached spittoon, headrest and manoeuvrable armrest, exhibits an early understanding of basic ergonomics.

Kindly lent by Rudolph Gunz & Co. Pty. Ltd., Sydney.

14.
RED-BLUE LOUNGE CHAIR

Beechwood frame, black and yellow aniline finish, red and blue lacquer finish.

Designed by Gerrit Thomas Rietveld, Holland, 1918. Originally manufactured by G.A. Van de Groeneken Het Goede Meuble, De Bilt.

This example manufactured by Cassina, Italy since 1973.

The Dutch architect, Gerrit Thomas Rietveld (1888 - 1964) began designing furniture around 1900 but it was not until 1918 that his first important design, the celebrated Red-Blue chair was produced.

Designed after he had joined the De Stijl group, this chair, with its severe right angled geometry and use of primary colours, embodies within its three dimensions the formal concerns of the De Stijl aesthetic.

Rietveld developed this further in his Berlin chair of 1923 and the 'Military' series of 1923 - 1925.

Kindly lent by ARREDORAMA INTERNATIONAL PTY. LTD.

15.
GARDEN CHAIR c.1900

Painted, steel wire. Unknown make, possibly Australian.

Part of a suite, this chair and its corresponding two-seater were another version of the outdoor furniture popular during the late Victorian and Edwardian periods.

Kindly lent from a Private Collection.

16.
ARMCHAIR c. 1850

Papier-mache, black japanned and decorated with mother-of-pearl, gold leaf and painted scenes and motifs.

Unknown maker, England.

Purchased 1983 from 'Patrons of the Power House' funds.

Papier-mache is made by glueing or pressing pulped or sheet paper together to form panels or moulded shapes. During the middle years of the 19th century in England, it was used extensively in the making of a range of objects from furniture to trays and tea caddies.

Kindly lent by the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney.

17.
ARNOTT'S SHOP CHAIR c. 1920-1940

Wood with original paint finish and Arnott's logos.

Unknown maker, Sydney.

Purchased 1984.

Such chairs were commissioned by the Arnott's biscuits company for use as shop chairs in the days of the corner grocery store. The seat is slightly higher than normal, presumably to allow the customer to sit at the counter while making his or her purchases.

Kindly lent by the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney.

18.
HILL HOUSE 1 LADDERBACK CHAIR

Ebonized ashwood frame, fabric-covered seat. Designed by Charles Rennie Mackintosh, Glasgow, 1902. Manufactured by Cassina, Italy since 1973.

19.
WILLOW 1 CURVED LATTICE-BACK CHAIR

Ebonized ashwood frame, fabric-covered seat. Designed by Charles Rennie Mackintosh, Glasgow 1904. Manufactured by Cassina, Italy since 1973.

Though trained as an architect, Charles Rennie Mackintosh (1888-1928) also designed furniture, producing a range of remarkable chairs which he conceived as spatial elements within his buildings and interiors.

His most ambitious private house project was Hill House, Helensburgh in 1902 for which he designed the, now famous, featherlight ladderback chair to be set within the White Bedroom.

Amongst his interior design projects was Miss Cranston's Willow Tea-Rooms in Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow where the elegantly curved lattice-back chair was designed for the order desk.

These two chairs show Mackintosh at his best, working with slender slats of ebonized timber exploiting the interplay of horizontal and vertical lines, and producing almost sculptural forms with a semi-religious character.

Kindly lent by ARREDORAMA INTERNATIONAL PTY. LTD.

20.
RUSTIC ARMCHAIR 1983

Undressed hardwood, suede upholstery on seat, back, arms and headrest.

Designed and made by Scott Frazer, Sydney.

Scott Frazer's conception of a typically Australian chair for his design project in Architecture at Sydney University was expressed in roughly hewn eastern blue gum.

Somewhat more ponderous than its late Victorian predecessor, this chair represents for the designer "the appreciation of an untouched landscape".

Kindly lent by the Designer.

21.
OPERA HOUSE CHAIR 1983

Curved, laminated plywood, quilted cotton upholstery on seat, back, headrest.

Designed and made by Dirk Hoogland, Sydney.

Dirk Hoogland's version of a typically Australian chair was in answer to a design project in the School of Architecture at Sydney University.

Fulfilling the brief requirements of lightness and portability, the framework of this chair reflects the profiles of the Opera House shells. This characteristic is further emphasised by the quilting on the upholstery which resembles the tile patterns on the outer surface of the shells.

Kindly lent by the Designer.

22.

INTEGRA STACKING CHAIR

One piece moulded polypropylene with anti-static and ultra-violet inhibitors.

Designed by Charles Fury, 1969. Manufactured by Sebel Furniture since 1980.

Another example of utility furniture designed with ease - of - storage, portability and structural rigidity in mind. This stacking armchair has a built-in overlock armrest linking system for auditoria seating arrangements enabling sturdy, stable rows to be quickly and easily assembled.

Kindly lent by Sebel Furniture, Sydney.

23.

FOLDING CHAIRS c. 1955 - 1960

Painted tubular steel, painted steel seat, back.

Designed and manufactured by Sebel Furniture, Sydney.

The main selling points of the "Fold-a-Bye" chairs were their rigidity in use, ease of storage and portability. These features made the chairs particularly well adapted to a variety of purposes ranging from corner shop courtesy chairs to furnishing an army canteen.

Kindly lent by Sebel Furniture, Sydney.

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ADDENDUM

Deck Chair c.1930
Collapsible teakwood frame with slatted back and seat, brass fittings and hinges
Unknown maker; unknown origin

Designed for comfort, durability and ease of storage, this chair is indicative of the leisure seating provided on the passenger liners of the early twentieth century.

Kindly lent from a private collection

Gujarat Tribal Chair c. early 19th century
Carved wooden back, wood frame, brass nails, woven hemp seat.
Unknown maker; North West Indian origin

Kindly lent by Brian Bates Antiques, Sydney Antique Centre, Surry Hills.

Lounge Chair
Chrome-plated tubular steel frame, pony hide upholstery, leather-covered cylindrical headrest.
Designed by Le Corbusier, France, 1925-1929
This example manufactured by Cassina, Italy since 1973

Kindly lent by Arredorama International Pty.Ltd.

Superman T.V.Chair c.1981
Inflatable red, blue plastic, screenprinted image, child's chair.
Designed for Arco Industries, Ltd, New York
Manufactured in Taiwan

Kindly lent by Gary Davis, Antique Dealer, Sydney Antique Centre, Surry Hills.

ERRATA

Mispelling of ergonomics in no.13
Nos. 10 and 18 not included in exhibition