The Legacy of the Individual

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What does it mean to be the Maker? In today’s society, with CNC technology and the ability to create objects without having to physically interact with the medium at hand, why would anyone expel energy doing things “traditionally”? One merely needs to know how to navigate a digital checklist to operate such advanced technology. The internet makes learning this technology even easier. With the help of online tutorials and forums, anyone can get a crash course in such powerful technology. I am not opposed to such technology, for I see it as just a tool that can enable one to work more efficiently if needed, but that is not the question. In a discipline full of artists, craftsmen, fabricators, designers, design-builders, and so on, how does one coexist without being lost in the sea of titles? And more importantly, why do we attempt to define ourselves? I am a maker because it is not about the title, it is about the act.

The object and its conception is what I, as a maker, live for. This physical mass defined by process and material is the common place for means to an end product. To be specific, furniture has become a highly defined object that requires certain attributes to perform a function based off of expectations. Being trained as a “maker” of such objects, I feel obligated to provide specific parameters to the things I create to help the viewer understand what they are looking at and/or interacting with (some form of comfort). In my most recent work, I have begun to question the value of these principles regarding my own title as a maker of furniture; even just to give myself a definitive title can not only limit the potential audience of my work, but the spectrum of work I am comfortable making. To be furniture, objects must obey a set of conventional expectations of utilitarian function regardless of their articulation. As a maker, the objects I make are not bound by functions prescribed by furniture, rather they are reflections of identity manifested through the function of observation. Through the making process, I can evolve into these objects and become part of the conversation; in this way, I am on a search for
selfness while physically constructing these objects. Also, the objects contain “furnitrual” language that cannot deny humanistic interpretation, rather force us to consider the interaction or relationships with one’s existential self to the rest. Furniture becomes a reference point for myself in the realm of making. (Adamson 31)

Furniture is generally defined by the perception of its function. It would seem that considering the Webster’s Dictionary definition of furniture, “chairs, tables, beds, etc., that are used to make a room ready for use,” one could turn any object into a functional piece of furniture. The object’s goal is to furnish and/or define the space it is in and provide a beacon for utility. We rely on these objects for the security of our own relationship to the spaces we occupy on a daily basis. Just like every manufactured object, there are different spectrums of furniture that exist due to the subjective necessity appointed by the end user. There is high-end furniture that uses expensive materials and sophisticated construction methods to embellish the value of one’s lifestyle. This genre of furniture can be viewed as either security in one’s own self-worth or security of investment knowing that these objects will withstand the test of time (sometimes it can be both). The opposite end of that scale exists as well; furniture can be strictly for utilitarian necessity. These generally tend to focus less on ornate details and more on the value of function. In between both genres of furniture exists an array of styles and standards, yet they all preform the same generic task. These principles of furniture date back to early Egyptian civilizations when pharaohs sat upon elaborate golden thrones and their slaves sat on simple wooden stools. Art Furniture or Studio Furniture is a fairly contemporary genre of furniture. Acknowledged in the early 1900’s, it was led by makers such as Tage Frid, Wharton Esherick, George Nakashima, and Wendall Castle. Mostly wood-centric makers, these early studio furniture makers focused on making functional work that was unique and one of a kind. Using furniture as a medium, they
used their artistic vision to push the boundaries of the existing visual vocabulary of materials, processes, and forms that defined furniture at the time. My introduction into the discipline started not unlike most creative furniture journeys: making functional furniture and making it well. After leaving my undergraduate program, I was headed to New York City to begin my job as a Furniture and Lighting Designer for a well-known interior design based architecture firm. The transition from four years of studio furniture making into a “nine to five” industry job that involved no physical making, only computer modeling, was definitely shocking. The immediate change of pace and format was entertaining, but I eventually longed to “make” again. It was then that this distinction between the fine line of art and design became more obvious to me and which of these, I knew, was more important. After being accepted into a graduate program to further my academic studies as an artist/maker, I hastily resigned from my position and left the city. I thought I was embarking on the journey that was supposed to reintroduce me to the craft, little did I know, it reintroduced me to myself…the maker. The first time back into the shop environment was rather intimidating because the whole time I thought I was longing for a material and process fix, I was longing for ownership of the ideological conception of my identity as the maker. However, as Gord Peteran, Sculptural Furniture Maker, said “Virtuosity happens in the mind, not in the hands. I think.” (Adamson 15) The objects I create are bound to furniture by association to the medium. Through their conception, the meditation from physical fabrication is not enough to fulfill my desire to create. The idea of the object has become a vehicle for reference about my identity. Yet, this physical creation process is not limited to any form of making. Being a maker in contemporary art allows me to use multiple methods of fabrication including CNC technology alongside of hand-work. Inevitably, hand-work will always be the final process of making an object because it is evidence of the individual
who created it. Within these methods, I use the chair as a frame of reference rather than a functional object to be. I say “to be” because these forms are not short of the functional object, instead they are “never was” objects. Therefore, we can’t truthfully consider it a chair if it never aspired to be one. In regards to the making process, as the maker, I can consider the work done when I have arrived at this resolved geometric assemblage that has a furniture like scale. As I mentioned before, the chair-form becomes a reference point, this is because the form is completed within the composition and thus so is the object. These “never were” objects are formally unique from any other; each “chair” represents an individual. On an atomic scale, theoretically, no two things are the same. Process and physicality tend to give the illusion that we can repeat things exactly the same, but these forms amplify that individuality through the use of spontaneous layout of construction and interestingly unique assembly techniques; the chair construction happens like surrealist automatism, just bringing the materials together without methodical layout of components but abiding to the constructs of the crafted process. In the making process, I do not desire to create one specific incarnation of the object, rather create a portrait of an idea using the chair as a vehicle. In the terms of Jokab von Uexküllian, the chairs are setting a search tone for a perception image of the maker. “Now, we do not by any means always search for a certain object with a unique perception image, but far more often for an object that corresponds with a certain effect image. We do not look around for one particular chair, but for any kind of seating, i.e., for a thing that can be connected with a certain function tone. In this case, one cannot speak of a search image but rather a search tone.” (Uexküll 117) There is irony that his reference was made about a chair and the function associated with it, yet in my case, we see these “non-chairs” and associate the portraiture of an individual instead of
physical function; I am using these frames as a universal blueprint to reference myself as an individual.

As a maker, one is intentionally intimate with the medium at hand. Whether we are fascinated with the tactile quality of the material or the regiment of the process, the selfish studio practice is a rewarding sense of personal accomplishment. The making process becomes a form of meditation and the objects are a physical receipt of this subconscious journey. The constructed object has become a three dimensional portrait of myself embarking on the path; the presentation and interaction act like the virtual moment of emotive experience, allowing the viewer to “sit down with me”. The materials and process can be traced back to the perception of making furniture but they are not limited to that. “It is the dramatic identity of their dynamics that makes a perception resemble a particle: an actual perception surrounds itself with a cloud of virtual images, distributed on increasingly remote, increasingly large, moving circuits, which both make and unmake each other. These are memories of different sorts, but they are still called virtual images in that their speed or brevity subjects them too to a principle of the unconsciousness.” (Deleuze 148) The objects become snap-shots or frames of a transcendence caught in the act; the known, functional objects are evolving into mere geometry in the common spaces around us. Through the presentation of the “made”, we can reference an identity through this virtual moment, however the actual object has surpassed the limits of the known perception of the signified object. An interesting comparison can be made to the NASA spacecraft from 1977, Voyager 1, launched with the intention of a thorough exploration of our solar system and the beginning to what lies beyond. When it runs out of power in 2025, it will become a floating beacon of our existence with the hope to one day be discovered by an extraterrestrial life form. Employed with “11 scientific instruments to study celestial objects such as planets as it travels
through space”, it was also fitted with a golden plaque that has symbols engraved on it to potentially enable an opportunity for communication. (PDS: Host Profile 1) Although we’ve qualified these symbols, as a human race, to be the most generic representation of our existence, the images serve no value unless the plaque is brought back to earth other than to hope for another extraterrestrial race. It is truly a symbol of hope for mankind, but in comparison to myself, my objects are satellites floating in deep space with the hope to define my own personal identity with the anticipation of some connection from another or to myself as “The Maker”.

The final aspect to examine is that we cannot look at furniture without considering the humanistic relationship. In particular, the chair has a very anthropomorphic quality to it; it has shoulders, arms, legs, a back, posture, and usually some sort of skeleton. The chair is relative to human scale and greets us at the pivot point of our knees. Also, the chair occupies the negative space of our bodies, almost creating a shell of the figure. That being said, when looking at these objects, the viewer tends to put themselves, if not visualize someone else, in the seat of these “chairs”. Even though they were never chairs to begin with, the human figure is present and the object have the potential to transcend a place rather than a physical three dimensional object furnishing a space. “What Gormley shows us, then, is that a body is a place, and that sculpture reveals the shape of that place, the invisible interior space where someone lives or has lived. That place is represented as a positive form, “a statue” that has to be seen as embodied darkness… The place the body is also indicated as an absence, a negative impression or void…” (Mitchell 90) Our own bodies have a physical conversation with a chair when the two meet; there is a symbiotic relationship taking place: the chair provides rest for the human while the human completes the chair’s negative space.
Graduate Works Pre-Thesis

The first work to look at is the Self-Portrait, this particular work happened at a moment of realization after numerous accounts of recreating this “chair form” in various mediums over again throughout my time as a maker. After denying not only myself, but the object as well, this idea of function; I realized the definition of the title as “The Maker” was not limited to a specific path of outcomes. I originally found passion creating an object of ceremony for others to possess, but the transaction was so cold and fleeting, I wanted to give more to all who shared interest in some way.

The “chair” is in a transitory state of change between conventional expectations of scale and function; it is transcending via an escape through materiality by means of a finite change in state. The burning represents a final absolution from the state in which it was conceived as a physical object. Atop the burned threshold is a form e know, yet it has a disposition, and a posture; the “chair” is embracing its “non-objectness”. The first attempt was in making the top half (above the connections) as tall as myself to embrace my own literal individuality through personification of the object. Soon after disappointment set in, the realization struck that the work was not proud enough. I stilted it up higher and used an intentionally obvious pin connection that embraced the fact that it was trying to be as tall as it could with
whatever it means it took to get there. The stance of the chair is delicate, just as our own sense of ego is. This piece is a monument, left by me, for people of the future to contemplate; it is as if you are looking into the mirror to reflect outward consciously acknowledging one’s physical presence.

The second piece (figure 3) is a more direct question concerning our (as the viewer) relationship to the object through proximity. The highly articulated chair-like form, “non-object”, has been arrested in space. The frame represents the volume as a whole and defines it three dimensionally. Once removed from the frame, we are left with a shell of a familiar scale; the form is absent yet we can almost subconsciously “fill in the blank”. The intention is to bring awareness to our own selfish interpretations of what we perceive. What is the value of the difference between the memories of the object spurred by objectification vs. the actual object stripped of its utilitarian components and presented as form (you know what object I speak of)? The “never was object” will always be viewed as the object that was stripped of its contextual understanding. We, as humans, are curious by nature and naive by default; the assumption will be the death of the human race. Can we not transcend individual perceptions and acknowledge what we are not seeing?
The last piece for consideration (figure 4) is rendition of the works mentioned in **figure 3**. This similarly asks the same question, but the conversation of *identity* is present. To make an assemblage, one must combine several components. The “individual component” is the focus here. In regards to the humanistic remarks mentioned earlier, these “non-objects” share unique formal differences from one another. The full composition consists of a network of these forms melded together as one singular moment. As a race, or species, we are humans, and as a humans we are existential beings. Denying the plane of immanence, these forms are just particulate of that will continue to float in a cloud of virtuality, until the viewer accepts transcendence of his/her own self and acknowledges some referent of identity beyond the assumed form. Consideration to the scale of this piece has been of recent conversation, however, the spectacle of size would not alter the dialogue of the piece; with attention to the idea of viruosity and the denial of the actual object ever being feasible, the apparent cluster is enough to define the opposition of actuality. In regards to the individual, “In any case, the relationship between the actual and the virtual is not the same as that established between two actuals. Actuals imply already constituted individuals, and are ordinarily determined, whereas the relationship of the actual and the virtual forms an acting individuation or highly specific and remarkable singularization which needs to be determined case by case.” (Deleuze 152)
Thesis Show Works

Exhibited thesis works take place in a fabricated mission in space. The hope is to communicate with an extraterrestrial race that can relate with me or me as a maker. I began this search not for answers, but to protect value of identity. Preservation of “the individual” is key to sustain hope for not only the studio maker, but also mankind. These “chair” forms are surrogates for myself and have become satellites for humanity as a last-ditch effort to communicate with an outsider into the mind of a “sculptural furniture maker”.

The plaque light represents my Voyager plaque deep in space. The object is a formally a light, but resembles spacecraft with its Sputnik-like proportions. Engraved on my plaque are symbols that share meaning in my making process and my perception of my own identity. One of the images is my chair-forms next to the spacecraft for scale reference. The binary text at the bottom of the plaque says “It should be fine”, which is an affirmation I have grown to use on the regular. There is also other common universal things like our location in our solar
system and the imperial inch (my preferred unit of measure). The object itself is a functional floor lamp with a bulb behind the plaque to illuminate the area around it as if it is traveling through space. The hope is that some distance life-form will encounter this object in space and know that intelligent life exist.

The second piece in this deep-space search is the satellite. This chair-form is equipped with electronics fit for exploration. The metal hardware and foil wrapped electronics mimic NASA’s spacecraft during the earlier eras of exploration. During the day, the solar panels collect and store energy in the rechargeable batteries. At night, the l.e.d. strips on the underside of the chair illuminate the Martian terrain. Ironically, this non-functional chair is providing support for the functional bench underneath its feet. The bench is built from compound angles to depict an extraterrestrial landscape. The antenna gives the illusion that that data is being transmitting its findings back to some mother-ship or distant controller.

The last element of the search is the sentinels. These droids would be sent down to foreign planets containing found life and project images of my ideal objects. Each is equipped with a transmission light and antenna that mimic the processing of their environments. Inside each body is an etched piece of acrylic that is backlit to look like a monitor. The images inside are drawings from my sketchbook of chair-form portraits. These images are sentimental to me because the tall chair (figure #) is when I acknowledged that value of non-functional furniture.
These images are affirmations that making doesn’t always have to be a utilitarian object. The function of all of these non-functional objects relates the early pre-thesis works, allowing the viewer to acknowledge the known object or image without having to perceive its real function.

In conclusion, although to carry the title of “furniture”, objects must obey a preconceived notion of conventional expectations regarding function, as the maker, I am not bound to the
functions prescribed by the principles of furniture, rather the objects are reflections of identity manifested through the function of observation. To confirm, the making process is a search for selfness; I look beyond the finished piece for self-satisfaction. Considering the philosophy of the drive, the physical conception of the object becomes a form of meditation proven by the finite state of presentation. As a maker, I can only hope someone will find my golden plaque and attempt to translate the alien symbols into a form of hope. Secondly, using “furnitural” forms as a point of reference, the objects will always evoke the absence of the human figure. Without physical function, the objects become places that our egos can embody and embrace the individuality’s within all of us. As I continue out into deep space searching for hope, the outcome is unknown but referencing who I am and where I came from through the “non-objectry” taking place in my studio, I will find pleasure in making… And being “The Maker”.
Bibliography

In chronological order:


