

# The Chair

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# When and why is a chair a chair?

Dale Hardiman

When and why is a chair a chair? Is it the functionality of a chair, or is it our historical understanding that classifies a 'thing' as being a chair? Over the past 10 years, I've seen the liberation of the chair as an object. Whether it's due to the speed at which information is now delivered to us, or the accessibility to new and old materials and techniques, I have increasingly seen more expressions of experimentation using the chair as a medium. The chair is fluid; no longer simply a physical thing.

When I co-curated my first group exhibition *Object Future* with Suzannah Henty in 2013, we were often asked why the chair was presented on a plinth, unable to be sat on by viewers of the exhibition, as they saw the chair as something to be experienced through its physical function. We were deliberately challenging the idea of the chair as something to be experienced through its physical or performative function. We sought to deconstruct the chair and reconstruct it in both its conceptual and supply chain terms: the tree has been cut down, timber milled and hauled across the country or world all before the designer or maker has selected this timber. Then come countless days working out the best way to use the timber, and then countless days machining, gluing and finishing the timber. Given the knowledge of what's gone into the chair, why do you only need to sit on the chair to experience it?

The chair is an object with incredible potential to discuss the world. Unlike walking into an art gallery and potentially being confused by an abstract sculpture, we all understand what a chair is and its relationship to us and our body. Chairs are more often than not directional, and create a boundary within spaces. We know the chair to have a backrest and a seat, and even when these elements are completely non-functioning and abstract, we still see it as a chair and how it would fit alongside our body. The chair form offers a canvas to discuss the world, in a similar way to the paper this text is printed on. The chair, much like a painting, can be a representation of time and place, technological advancements, new materials, society and even pandemics.

While the chair has always existed within physical reality, over the last 20 years the rise of digital spaces and furniture has been meteoric. Since 2005, IKEA's catalogues have contained increasingly digital renderings rather than photographs of physical objects. In 2021, Barcelona-based designer and 3D artist Andrés Reisinger sold a digital chair for almost USD 70,000, with the entire furniture collection selling for more than USD 450,000. These chairs are only available digitally, and the ownership is held entirely within the digital space. When my company Dowel Jones first began producing commercial furniture in 2011, we realised that only a small percentage of people who viewed the chair would ever see it in person, with most viewing it on the internet. This changes the way we think and feel about the presentation of the object as a part of the design process, and therefore the way the audience perceives it. The rise of social media platforms focused on imagery has created an immediacy and an easily viewable metric as to what is currently popular, which has resulted in creatives quickly adapting trends into new products and getting them to market as soon as possible, into the digital space.

Used as a medium, the chair is not only a representation of current trends and manufacturing capabilities but also a self-portrait of its creator and a broader representation of society at any given moment. While the digital space has provided us with new opportunities for sharing and collaborating, one can never truly experience the craft, emotion and wonder of a chair without seeing it in real life, or dare I say, the old-fashioned way.

Dale Hardiman is the co-founder of Dowel Jones and Friends & Associates



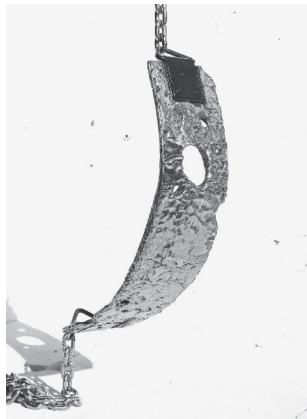
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*The Chair* is the first in a series of exhibitions presented by Craft Victoria honouring iconic objects of functional craft and design with a material driven approach.

The exhibition is presented as part of Craft Contemporary 2022.

1. **Anna Varendorff**  
*Concentric Chair*, 2022  
stainless steel, old bike wheels  
dimensions variable  
\$1,600

*Concentric Chair*, made from discarded bike wheels and formed stainless steel, is a utilitarian object constructed principally from other end-of-life objects re-employed. The project results in a functional chair without the need for re-processing the materials again into a new form, thus skipping an additional layer of manufacture. The design calls upon the open-source projects of Socialist Italian design such as Enzo Mari's do-it-yourself furniture. It imagines a new purpose through playful reconstruction.

2. **Ash Allen**  
*History Chair*, 2022  
powder coated galvanised steel  
550 x 450 x 900 mm  
\$1,100

*History Chair* is an experimentation with galvanised steel mesh, exploring its inherent strength and malleability, as well as its potential for shadow-play. The more the mesh chair is sat on, the more it softens and becomes broken-in. Its patina is its load history, and the heavier the weight, the greater the mark. The flocked royal blue mesh is reminiscent of quilting and opulence, ironically chosen for its associations with royalty. However, this cage is to be sat on and enjoyed by all. The chair is faux regal; hollow and without substance.

3. **Ashley Eriksmoen**  
*Two wrongs could make a right*, 2018  
reclaimed wood chairs, twine, acrylic  
spray paint, oil finish  
dimensions variable  
\$2,500

*Two-wrongs could make a right* is a mash-up of two wooden chairs remade into one denser and more comfortable chair. The original chairs had been discarded as waste. Though still structurally intact, they had lost any perceived value, having become unfashionable and unsellable despite residual functionality. In the context of an affluent, consumer society, they had become 'wrong'. Utilising post-consumer waste as a material source addresses expanding landfills linked to an overabundance of low-quality consumer goods. This consolidation of two discarded chairs by appropriating traditional seat-weaving techniques results in a single, more ergonomic seating option that is a Frankenstein furniture, post-modern medley of outmoded styles.

4. **Bern Chandley**  
*Lowbow Diner*, 2014  
American walnut  
dimensions variable  
NFS

The *Lowbow Diner* is a contemporary approach to Windsor chair-making and combines modern lines and proportions with traditional Windsor joinery. Windsor chairs have incredibly strong joinery, allowing them to endure generations of punishment. There are numerous original chairs up to nearly 300 years old extant. The key feature of a Windsor chair is a solid, hand carved seat into which all parts are tenoned. The leg tenons are tapered at six degrees, matched by the mortises which are drilled through the seat and reamed at six degrees. When glued in place a wedge is driven into the top of the leg creating an immensely strong and durable join.

5. **Brodie Neill**  
*Cowrie Chair*, 2013  
plywood faced with ebonised ash  
750 x 740 x 640 mm  
\$6,765

The *Cowrie Chair* is a sculptural lounge chair inspired by the concave lines of seashells. The curvilinear form is the result of extensive research and an innovative process that bridges the handmade with the digital. Sweeping lines are displayed in a gentle, single surface monocoque fold. Perfectly proportioned, the all-in-one structure is formed in bent plywood with ebonised ash veneer from certified sustainable sources. The *Cowrie* is a striking piece of usable art; a contemporary manifestation of designer Brodie Neill's ongoing fascination with natural, organic forms recast as functional design.

6. **Brud Studio**  
*Aluminiowe Skos*, 2022  
aluminium  
450 x 535 x 450 mm  
\$5,200

This chair is cold, hard and very heavy. It is inspired by communist-era war memorials known as 'spomenik' and made with very simple and direct intentions – sanding, slotting and hammering. Its construction method is the language of the finished object and cast aluminium pieces are positioned together without the need for nails or screws. The *Aluminiowe Skos* chair is the manifestation of designers Andy Kelly and Mitchell Zurek and their ongoing exploration of brutalist, primitive design methods with contemporary and absurdist ideologies.

7. **Cordon Salton**  
*Scagliola chair*, 2022  
gypsum, pigment, pearl glue, wax,  
cotton, stainless steel  
670 x 380 x 380 mm  
\$4,800

Scagliola (pronounced "sca-lee-oh-lah") is a material technique that was first developed as a substitute for marble. It was popularised in the Baroque and Rococo periods where it became a celebrated art form and a desirable material in its own right. The *Scagliola chair* is a modern celebration of the technique and plays with its sculptural ability. Pigments not typically found in natural marble or stone are used, and the molten material is applied in a slapdash manner around a stainless-steel substrate, reminiscent of the Queen's painted roses in Alice in Wonderland.

8. **Bonhula Yunupingu & Damien Wright**  
*Bonggawa wu Nhana'nhmirri (Boss's chair)*, 2022  
Gadajka, ancient red gum, copper wire, oil finish  
900 x 800 x 800 mm  
\$8,800

Yanbi yawungu mak gadurr mak gathura (I thought it was yesterday but maybe it is tomorrow today). Bala ga lili (Two ways Learning) is an ongoing, circular cross-cultural collaboration between Bonhula Yunupingu, a Yoiungu man of North East Arnhem Land and Damien Wright of Melbourne. Yunupingu and Wright first met in 2010 when Wright was invited by Gumatj elder Galarwuy Yunupingu to establish a furniture craft studio in the Gunyangara community. Wright and Yunupingu work together to find a sculptural and poetic language. They tell a disruptive narrative; theirs is a disruptive relationship. What should look like a contradiction is a promise. What should keep one apart, draws us together. Wright and Yunupingu are represented by Gallery Sally Dan Cuthbert.

9. **Dean Norton**  
*Float Chair*, 2022  
glass  
400 x 610 x 1050 mm  
\$3,990

*Float Chair* explores transparent forms and subtle texture overlays. The chair is light, shape-shifting and made entirely of glass. Its seamless form changes depending on its viewing angle, and with the help of material opacity, textured layering, and a dynamic mix of fused straight lines and curved edges. *Float Chair* is an extension of Dean Norton's Float series and continues his language of visually engaging functional pieces.

10. **Duncan Young & Noah Hartley**  
*CastChair*, 2022  
cast glass/timber (A. melanoxylon)  
480 x 420 x 715 mm  
\$6,900

*CastChair* is a union between the two distinct material driven practices of Noah Hartley and Duncan Young – Noah is a glassblower and designer; Duncan is a furniture designer and arborist. Reflecting on their own craft-focused backgrounds, their collaboration came from a motivation to develop a new body of work through inhabiting each other's studios. *CastChair* showcases a contrast of materials and the diverse making processes involved in working with cast glass and timber.

11. **Georgia Weitenberg**  
*Bent Wood Chair*, 2021  
southern mahogany  
850 x 500 x 500 mm  
\$4,500

*Bent Wood Chair* is an ironic one-liner: a wry description of exactly what is perceived, and by allusion, everything the chair is not when a Thonet Bentwood is the measure – but what if we actually liked the alternative? A chair that was heavy and stocky and well, awkward? What if it was more relatable, even endearing? This chair is an uncanny mix of modernist and vernacular styles. Its distorted proportions challenge conventional taste and add a new, peculiar charm. Precision of machine fabrication has been combined with the character and nostalgia of an archetypal chair to reimagine an object for the home in 2022.

12. **Isabelle Avendano-Hazbu**  
*W&K*, 2022  
European beech, organza  
700 x 660 x 610 mm  
POA

Imagine bending a kayak in the middle, sitting on it, and resting your back on the bow and stern. The *W&K chair* is inspired by the construction methods and the profile of the West Greenland Kayak. This skillfully crafted chair explores the possibilities of creating concept-driven sculptural furniture using lamination techniques. The seat of the chair consists of a series of bent timber ribs typical in the construction of a boat's hull. The form is highlighted with ropes made from silk organza reminiscent of kayak decks and of the lashing methods used to connect the ribs and stringers.

13. **James Lemon**  
*Zoe*, 2022  
bronze, stainless steel chain  
540 x 150 mm (chain approx. 3500 mm)  
edition 1/3  
\$8,500

The swing is one of the funnest chairs. In close competition is the rocking chair or the powerful office chair that lifts you up and down. Heatwave Zoe is the first heatwave to be given a name. Like some demon baby (DB hereinafter). Naming the DB feels wrong yet also the right thing to do.

Yes, it's a DB, but it is still OUR DB. We have to call it *something*. We can't just call it DB, however cool that is. I live next to a park and if I'm up at an antisocial hour, I sit there with my tea and vibe. Once I caught myself staring at the swings as I flicked through the pages of my audiobook imagining a chaotic heatwave (let's say heatwave Jenna after my housemate's cat) blowing through and melting everything in sight. The transformative power of fire: entrancing. The swing's exhilarating experience: love. What's gonna happen to the gorgeous, fun things during demonabythropicocene? I don't think I'll be able to look away, it might be beautiful. This chair is made of bronze and has a stainless-steel chain. You can swing on it if you like.

14. **Jess Humpston**  
*Ch-air*, 2022  
stained American white ash, monofilament weaving  
550 x 540 x 810 mm  
POA

*Ch-air* is an exploration in visual and structural lightness allowing for unobstructed views of a vista or a table beyond. The form is inspired by traditional stick chairs with the typical solid timber seat subtracted from the structure. Its strength comes from the triangulation of router-formed dowel elements and a hand-woven seat kept in place with fluted detailing.

15. **Jill Stevenson**  
*SPLT MILK: a lesson in liquid*, 2022  
milk, vinegar, heat and pressure  
340 x 420 x 700 mm  
\$900

This chair manifests as an exploration into milk as a material and asks the question: can this liquid matter be turned into a solid form? A forgotten method of manufacturing plastics that precedes petroleum-based plastics is revived and used to explore matter, form and fragility. The protein extracted from milk is called 'casein', which coagulates and solidifies with the addition of vinegar, similarly to how cheese is made. Heat and pressure are then slowly and carefully applied to morph and sculpt the soft milky mass. Without the use of industrial machinery, the delicacy and subtleties of this material are observed. Equally elastic and fragmented, the resulting form is a product of its intrinsic nature and speaks to a dichotomy of industry and craft, and of force and time.

16. **Johnny Nargoodah & Trent Jansen**  
*Ngumu Janka Warnti (All Made from Rubbish) Chair*, 2020  
New Zealand leather and aluminium  
900 x 500 x 600 mm  
Edition 1 of 20 + 2 AP  
\$10,000

*Ngumu Jangka Warnti* (2020) is the Walmajarri phrase for 'whole lot from rubbish'. It is part of the 'Partu' (skin) collection, and collaboration between Johnny Nargoodah and Trent Jansen, and began with a trip to the local scrap metal yard in a vague search for anything interesting. Here, a selection of discarded aluminium mesh was salvaged and used as the starting point for experimentation. A substrate was cut haphazardly in the shape of a chair. It was then whacked with hammers, concrete blocks and tree stumps until a desired form was achieved. This beaten geometry was then softened by laminating New Zealand saddle leather to skin the mesh, masking its geometry and tempering its idiosyncratic undulations. Nargoodah and Jansen are represented by Gallery Sally Dan-Cuthbert.

17. **Two Lines Studio**  
*Simple(y) (a)Settee*, 2022  
patinated brass  
1670 x 850 x 532 mm  
\$8,000

"I had three chairs in my house; one for solitude, two for friendship, three for society."  
— Henry David Thoreau.

*Simple(y) (a)Settee* is a sculptural abstraction of the chair. Heavy and hard yet curved and playful, this chair is stoic, reliable and welcoming. Made with patinated brass, it is not just a piece of furnishing but is a meaningful and lasting sculptural object with character and soul. I picture this chair sitting patiently in the corner, ready to help when needed – one day covered in clothes, the next a stack of books. It is ready to hold our weight in a moment of silence or be climbed over like an outdoor playground. The chair will always be there, the patina changing with time and memories.

18. **Liam Mugavin**  
*Hamra Chair*, 2015  
Tasmanian highlands silver wattle  
470 x 470 x 800 mm  
NFS

The *Hamra Chair* gains inspiration from Donald Judd's exploration of objects as they exist in space. Where Judd's chairs consist of purely rectilinear flat surfaces and 90-degree backrests, this design differentiates itself with subtle curves and slight angles, appearing impossibly thin. The chair features only three joints and it is this simplicity that aids the aesthetics, structure and function alongside production efficiency.

The chair also pays homage to Liam's great grandparent and generations of Hamra Furniture makers. Hamra Furniture was established by George and Joseph Hamra in Adelaide, South Australia in 1927 and closed in 2015.

19. **Marta Figueiredo**  
*2 x K Chair*, 2022  
HDPE, recycled plastic bottles, recycled plastic grocery bags  
820 x 840 x 540 mm  
\$3,500

Why buy new materials when there is so much readily available to recycle? This chair is a development of the Assembly Chair (a finalist for the MPavilion Chair in 2021) and includes the addition of a pearlescent pink beaded seat cover. While the Assembly Chair employs recycled HDPE (high-density polyethylene) plastic from Victoria's waste collection, the pearl grid is made of LDPE (Low-density polyethylene) from recycled plastic grocery bags. At the end of the chair's life, LDPE and HDPE can be fused together to create a new product (Medium-Density Polyethylene), which contributes to circular design.

This iteration continues the ethos of the original design and the challenge of developing a flat-pack, stackable object – it requires no other tools or materials to assemble.

20. **Michael Gittings**  
*The Throne of Eve*, 2022  
stainless steel  
720 x 650 x 670 mm  
\$8,250

*The Throne of Eve* is part of Michael Gittings' 'most recent collection': 'when the night ripped a hole through Eden'. The piece is a re-interpretation of Eve's seat and forms part of Michael's imagined, alternate Eden – something darker and more magical, where the plants eavesdrop on sleeping minds and feast on the dreams and nightmares of living things, small and large. The throne is where Eve both rests and rules. The leaves move and contort with her body. They conspire with the curves of her flesh and move to the rhythm of her will.

21. **Sam Tomkins, Iain [Max] Maxwell & Ben Ennis-Butler (Canberra Design Lab)**  
*Re-pete*, 2022  
recyclable polyethylene terephthalate (rPET) plastic  
380 x 400 x 470 mm  
POA

*Re-pete* is a lightweight, zero-waste seat produced from robotically extruded recyclable polyethylene terephthalate (rPET) plastic. It draws inspiration from the billowing and cellular forms of the 2022 MPavilion design and features a complex doubly-curved shape that enhances the chair's stability and stiffness at key locations, as well as flex and suspension at others. The translucent yet highly textured surfaces animate the piece, amplifying its environment through flickering plays of light and casting spectrums of colour. "Our work demonstrates a circular approach encompassing design, fabrication and recovery while celebrating the aesthetic and functional possibilities of emergent material techniques and robotic fabrication technologies." – Canberra Design Lab  
Winner of the MPavilion 2022 Chair Design Commission. In partnership with MPavilion, Craft Victoria participated in the selection panel for the MPavilion 2022 Chair Commission. *Re-pete* will be used throughout the program as seating for public talks, gatherings and events. A prototype of the design is showcased in *The Chair* prior to the opening of MPavilion on 17 November 2022.

22. **Nicole Lawrence & Thomas Coward**  
*Tebunginako*, 2021  
zinc-plated steel  
1500 x 600 x 700 mm  
\$2,500

*Tebunginako* is a hypothetical beach chair. It is named after a sunken village on an island in the Pacific Ocean. Although made from materials that can withstand the island's fierce heat, it is too hot to ever use and can only be admired as a symbol of aspiration. This chair speaks to the imminent danger of the climate crisis and was initially designed and made for the exhibition *A World We Don't Want* presented by Friends & Associates as part of Melbourne Design Week 2021.

23. **Trent Jansen for Broached Monsters by Broached Commissions**  
*Pankalangu Arm Chair*, 2017  
Tasmanian wallaby pelt, plywood, copper, stainless steel, French leather, polyurethane foam  
800 x 770 x 730 mm  
Edition 3 + 2 AP  
\$14,300

Pankalangu is one of three groups of mythological creatures whom frequent Western Arrente country. He is a territorial being that lives in the scrub and is completely camouflaged in the desert and bush. Pankalangu can only move with the rain, and is made visible when the water droplets that falls over his body are caught by the light, defining his form. The underside of the *Pankalangu Arm Chair* is lined with Tasmanian wallaby fur and copper. The wallaby fur obscures the copper scales in its pile, until the light catches them and exposes its insect-like body perched above four moth inspired legs. This chair was commissioned as part of the Broached Monsters series.

24. **Zachary Frankel**  
*Cloud Chair*, 2022  
recycled plastic, aluminium, wool  
800 x 730 x 915 mm  
\$1,950

The *Cloud Chair* is a forward-thinking piece of furniture crafted from post-industrial waste and recycled plastics. It is constructed without the use of glue and uses rods and bolts that can be easily disassembled and assembled as needed. The base material is composed of UV-stable and moisture resistant plastic, making it suitable across both indoor and outdoor settings. The chair successfully elevates its composite of recycled products beyond secondary objects and into a contemporary piece of design: versatile and comfortable, it is as much at home in your lounge room as it is poolside.