





ARTS & CULTURE » CULTURE

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Sitting pretty

By Rebecca Mazzei

“Sit on it,” “sit tight,” “sit back and relax” or “sit and spin” — there are several phrases (and even more proverbs) that refer to the act of sitting. And even though it’s little more than a position of rest, its execution can be categorized as anything from passive to peaceful, from punishing to pleasurable.

This spring, for the fourth year in a row, Cranbrook art students have tested the artistic limits of what can essentially be considered a chair, focusing more on the formal aspects of the object rather than the metaphors with which it is affiliated. *Holy Sit!*, a juried exhibition of handmade chairs, showcases more than three dozen works. The pieces range from a sand-filled burlap sack to a fiberglass and foam object that looks like a lacquered melting marshmallow. The students have taken on this project with inventiveness and expertise — and the finished pieces prove they can tackle the most daunting design challenges.

Metalsmith Shan Sutherland has constructed an iron-and-steel claw that might snag clothing were it not for the block of ice supposedly serving as “padding.” Veronica Gandha’s “Split and Join” uses the strength and flexibility of bamboo shoots, bending them to form an almond-shaped structure bound by twine. And while Gandha’s piece is reminiscent of centuries-old Japanese basket-weaving, Lauren Zou’s “Down Dog” actually uses yoga mats and steel in honor of the ever-popular Eastern exercise.

Several students reference home and work, whether it’s a tractor or a throne, but there’s nothing in the show quite like Matthew Miller’s “Free Public Heat.” The architecture student stepped outside the theme of respite, instead focusing on Detroit’s homeless problem. Made from scrap steel, Miller’s piece was designed to be laid over the city’s manhole covers. The artist says that when the design is set in place, the metal bed “captures waste steam and redirects it horizontally, providing a warm surface.”

This winter, the public art was installed at Gratiot Avenue, St. Aubin Street and East Vernor Highway for two months, and people caught on quickly. The work is priced at \$10,000, and if sold, proceeds will go toward research and development of improved prototypes. Seems Miller stood up and let the no-collar sit down.

At the Contemporary Art Institute of Detroit (formerly detroitcontemporary), 5141 Rosa Parks Blvd., Detroit; 313-899-CAID. Ends May 5.

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SPLITTING AND JOINING CHAIR

February 2005

Medium: Bamboo, twine

Chair Show 2006

Movement adds the particular experience of a form of solitude and interaction and in the literal sense, of 'taking up a position'.

Every effort to survive through the inhabitant that we belong to; make each path of life become more meaningful.

Life is about getting up and down, inside and outside, seclusion and communication. This pair of chairs uses that notion, creating a personal and interactive space.