

Silvia Sgualdini, “Jessi Reaves and Bradley Kronz *Dorich House Museum/ London*”, *Flash Art*, no. 50, November 27, 2017.

# Flash Art



*Jessi Reaves feat. Bradley Kronz and Jessi Reaves (Waiting for Boots), “31 Candles” (2017), installation view, Dorich House Museum. Courtesy the artists. Photography Plastiques*

## Jessi Reaves and Bradley Kronz *Dorich House Museum / London*

For “31 Candles,” American artists Jessi Reaves and Bradley Kronz have created sculptural compositions that introduce an informal and vibrant presence to the elegantly austere rooms of former studio and home of Russian sculptor and designer Dora Gordine.

In the bright north-facing modeling studio, a large three-part seating arrangement takes center stage, inviting one to sprawl on its painted leather and fabric upholstery. To the side, on the original modeling platform, a line of bronze heads by Gordine is placed right against the edge looking onto the room. *Padded Cabinet* (2017) confronts a bespoke twentieth-century modular shelving unit, whose shape it echoes. Proportions and details have been noticeably altered, layering the classic form with assonant yet disquieting elements. The surface is painted an unrealistic felt-tip shade of brown, and bulging padded areas covered in fabric challenge its functional purpose. The first-floor gallery houses collaborative sculptures by Reaves and Kronz. “Boots,” configured from pairs of vintage fur boots held in corsets, eerily resemble female torsos. Placed on stacked flight cases, these softly slumped anthropomorphic configurations mingle tongue in cheek amid elegant trapezoid plinths holding figurative bronzes by Gordine.

The unsettling cry of a baby draws viewers to the private spaces of the top-floor apartment shared by Gordine and her husband. The looped-sound piece gives voice to Gordine’s *Seated Baby* (1937–38), an early public commission. The sculpture, dissonant in scale and posture, sits upright directly facing *Mother Figure* (2017), which is placed on a luggage stand atop a long table in the dining room opposite. The curtained round windows and low lighting create an intimate and withdrawn atmosphere, strengthening the visual connection between the two works. Through the interplay in scale and the playful involvement of items from the museum collection as active elements in their displays, Reaves and Kronz invite a subtle subversion in the dynamic between the house as exhibition space and its domestic dimension, opening moments of spontaneous dialogue between its present and its past.

by Silvia Sgualdini



Eliza Barry, "A Chair Is A Chair Is A Sculpture: On Jessi Reaves and the Decorative Unconscious", Columbia University, May 24, 2017.

***A CHAIR IS A CHAIR IS A SCULPTURE:  
On Jessi Reaves  
and the Decorative Unconscious***



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In his 1986 essay *On Furniture*, which reads rather like a defense, Donald Judd lays unwavering claim that “the art of a chair is not its resemblance to art, but is partly its reasonableness, usefulness, and scale as a chair [...] a work of art exists as itself; A chair exists as a chair itself. And the idea of a chair isn’t a chair.”<sup>1</sup> Jessi Reaves creates work that could perhaps be understood as the antidote to Judd’s stringent understanding of what a chair is, of what comprises chair-ness. Reaves both complicates and challenges the chair’s status by re-framing its ontology. At first glance, Jessi Reaves’s *Bucket Chair with Covers*, (2017), currently on view at the 2017 Whitney Biennial, appears akin to the way an abandoned chair might as it sits in the back of an upholstery shop waiting to be reupholstered: out of order, naked, innards outwards, tattered. A closer look reveals that what might have appeared haphazard is actually a careful arrangement of fabrics and materials, quilted and bound together according to an idiosyncratic, coded logic.

The chair’s upper half has lines and a silhouette that bring mid-century design to mind. While Reaves’s pieces often reference or directly knock-off household names such as Philip Johnson, Noguchi, or Eames, the body of this chair seems to make reference to the once ubiquitous 1960s Scandinavian Overman Pod swivel chair. The chair’s legs on the other hand, could appear to be from an entirely different lexicon of furniture design. The spartan, metal legs resemble those of a folding quad chair that one might bring camping or set up at the side lines of a local sporting event. Effectively, the chair as sculpture becomes something that while familiar in its pieces, as a whole evades the familiar and appears as a perverse, hybrid creature.

The disparate, unlikely melange of materials— foam, coated woven sisal, leather, silk, polyester— lends a sense that the chair’s components could have been scavenged. There is an underlying make-do-with-what-you-have punk attitude that buzzes about it. The multiple fabrics and material that collide bring to mind a peeling wall which reveals its past lives through its different layers of wallpaper, however, in the case of this chair all of the layers sit resting on its surface. There are contradictions of approaches in its assemblage; delicately sewn, casually draped, practically bound or simply glued. It is also this element of the work that gives the piece an endearing quality. The pity that the chair evokes at first glance shifts to something of a magnetic respect for this *thing* that has been imbued with an almost erotic, corporeal presence. The chair encapsulates a wavering status, treading lines between art and design, art and craft, functional object and representation of functional object.

Reaves, who is only thirty-one and whose appearance at the Whitney Biennial this year marks her museum debut, enters an almost-entirely male dominated lineage of artists who have worked with furniture as a medium and engaged with design in a way that approaches, complicates and crosses the boundary into fine art. In the first half of the 20th century there was Gerrit Rietveld and the De Stijl movement; there was Vladimir Tatlin and the Constructivists who wanted to bring art to the service of the quotidian; there was Bauhaus’s strain of Modernism which envisioned an idealistic future of unity between art and design; there was Brancusi and his furniture sculptures which complicated divisions between the two then opposing practices. These artists, architects and designers all set the stage for what was eventually denominated Minimalism. In 1973, following his

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1 Judd, Donald. “On Furniture (1986).” Donald Judd Writings. Ed Flavin Judd, Caitlin Murray. Judd Foundations and David Zwirner Books. 2016.

move from New York City to Marfa, Texas, Donald Judd arrived at furniture design born from his minimal sculpture practice but went through great, often paradoxical pains, to promote the distinction between his art and design/furniture. Judd in some regards paved the way for artists like Scott Burton in the 1980s, who arrived at furniture making through performance and who integrated his functioning furniture entirely into his art practice. Though Burton's forms were, more often than not, minimal and aesthetically distant from the work of Reaves, conceptually Burton perhaps serves as Reaves's closest kin in the furniture/art lineage.

More recent contributors to this realm of art making include Mary Heilmann and Sarah Lucas. Since the early 2000s, Heilmann, who is known primarily as a painter, has made chairs that appear as extensions of her minimal Pop paintings. They live as sculptural objects, functional furniture and as sites from which to view her paintings (she has often situated the chairs at the center of the gallery space that displays her paintings). Sitting on one of Heilmann's Club Chairs feels as though you are sitting upon, in or have become a part of one of her paintings. The back of a Heilmann chair's frame mimics the stretchers of a canvas. The back-support's cross-hatched nylon webbing mimic the minimal but often brightly colored forms that appear in her paintings, and the body of the chair itself takes cues from minimal, Judd-like structures made of plywood and like Judd, her furniture is sold for far less than her work in other mediums.

In 2013, Sarah Lucas created furniture, some of which is currently on view at Lever House, out of materials that had previously served as plinths and platforms for her artworks which she then repurposed into stand-alone pieces including tables, chairs, benches, a desk, and a freestanding partition wall. These pieces, like Heilmann's Club Chairs and many of Burton's furniture-sculptures, formally employ and recall facets of Minimalism. In Lucas's ongoing Bunny series (1997-wards), she uses

chairs (non-functional ones) as stand-ins for the human body which, as in Reaves's furniture, becomes an anthropomorphic sculptural structure.[2] In the case of Burton, Heilmann, Lucas, and Reaves, the furniture, in its functional value, approaches the avant-garde lineage of the art life paradigm. It becomes unclear as to whether the thing inhabits the realm of art in its "purposeful purposeless" or the realm of life in its air of utilitarian usefulness.[3]

However, unlike that of Burton, Heilmann, and Lucas, Reaves's work is visually distinct and divorced from the Minimalist tendencies that are often riffed upon in their furniture pieces. Perhaps this has to do with the way in which Reaves arrived at furniture as the medium that comprises her practice. Unlike Judd who arrived at furniture through formal sculpture, Burton through performance, or Heilmann through painting, Reaves arrived at furniture through what one might consider entirely divorced from fine art. Reaves can perhaps be understood as having arrived at furniture as medium through craft (and a decorative one at that). After receiving her BFA from Rhode Island School of Design in 2009, Reaves worked part time as an upholsterer. After showing at a Portland gallery in 2011, she showed her work in both 2012 and 2013 at the International Furniture Fair which suggests the flexible nature of her practice. Since 2013, Reaves has shown in fine art gallery settings. In a recent interview with Gaetano Pesce, Reaves said, "People ask me, 'Will you always make furniture?' And it feels like such an irrelevant question because I feel like I'm following the ideas more than a particular form." [4] This notion that the furniture transforms into the notion of furniture while still being furniture comes alive in the work though its hyperbolic presence as furniture, so hyperbolic that the furniture feels as though it is living and might move. In her sculpture, *Idol of the Hares* (2014), Reaves has

2 Press Release for Sarah Lucas Furniture via Sadie Coles Gallery

3 Branden Joseph, Neo Dada and Pop Art Lecture on Fluxus, Columbia University. Fall 2015

4 Conversation with Jessi Reaves and Gaetano Pesce. The Museum of Contemporary Art Online. Ed. Karly Wildenhaus. <https://www.moca.org/stream/post/introducing-gaetano-pesce-and-jessi-reaves>

created a chair and foot rest which has an exterior made of bright bulbous yellow foams of varying shades. The staples holding down the voluptuous foam appear as though they could burst.

Reaves's use of high Modernist design pieces as her canvases both complicates and undercuts the austerity and autonomy claimed by such forms. In her sculpture, *Cesca Leaves the Stack (Modified Chair)* (2016), Reaves takes a Marcel Breuer Cesca chair and outfits it with a foam padded siding and back-support, over which she has created a form fitting translucent pink rayon cover that fits over the chair's entire structure. She puts an outfit on the chair which effectively lends the chair subjecthood and pulls it away from its status as object. The chair which remains visible through the sheer pink fabric becomes feminized. It reveals the craft of the hand and the delicately sewn fabric softens the Cesca chair which it veils, transforming it into a non-industrial, personal object. There is a paradoxical nature that lies within Reave's additions which are at once delicate and crude as well as a gestural aspect present in the chair which lends the sense that the chair could have been constructed rapidly through expressionistic, un-calculated action or perhaps by a novice. Still written on the foam roller that replaces the original back-support of the chair are mysterious dimensions (6 x 54). By adding upholstery to the chair, Reaves gives it flesh. Without using any overtly human forms, the natural forms of her work still manage to suggest the body and at times hint at representations of abject femininity in ways that recall the work of Louise Bourgeois or Lucas.

Made visible in Reaves work is the perceptible distinction between craft and design which are then conflated in many of her sculptures. Craft, of course, connotes something made by hand, something artisanal. It also evokes notions of

domestic crafts which have long been associated with feminine pastimes, later appropriated and used in feminist art-making practices, while design suggests something of high quality assembly-line mass production. It is in Reaves's references to and use of high-Modern design that her work can be read as veiled, disguised Pop, maintaining a high-brow kitsch. In its replica form, what was once avant-garde becomes kitsch. In *Mind at the Rodeo, (XJ Fender Table Noguchi Knockoff #2)* (2016), Reaves creates a satirical replica of Isamu Noguchi's iconic table which he designed for Herman Miller in 1947. Noguchi's table had been developed from a previous table that he had designed in 1939 for MoMA's founding president, A. Conger Goodyear. Herman Miller's design team then hired Noguchi to design an iteration of the biomorphic table which in their catalog they described as "sculpture- for-use" and "design for production." [5] Reaves's take on the table is comprised of the same biomorphic glass table top, however, instead of the glass resting upon two identical curved wooden bases, the glass is situated atop two Jeep Cherokee fenders. Her use of high Modernist design form, as in the case of *Mind at the Rodeo*, have an effect that is, in a sense, akin to the effect that is created by the work of Pictures artists who took pictures of pictures. Her knock offs and replicas of forms come to function in a way as representations. As Rosalyn Deutsch has said about the Pictures artists, if we treat art as representation we no longer can think of it as pure form or autonomous because representation is tied up with power. [6]

The second chapter of Douglas Crimp's recently published memoir *Before*

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5 Pina, Leslie (1998). *Classic Herman Miller*. Atglen, Pennsylvania: Schiffer Publishing

6 Deutsche, Rosalyn. "Feminism Postmodernism." Columbia University. Lecture. Spring 2015.



*Pictures* oddly ties into Reave's practice, dedicated to ideas surrounding design and his personal relationship to decoration's tumultuous relationship with fine art. Crimp discusses Daniel Buren's "open embrace" of his work being cast as decoration and the controversy surrounding his piece *Painting-Sculpture*.<sup>[7]</sup> In a letter penned by Dan Flavin to *Studio International* magazine regarding the mysterious removal of Buren's *Painting-Sculpture* (which Flavin himself is rumored to have instigated) on the day before the opening of the Guggenheim's *Studio International* (1971), he dismissively refers to Buren's piece as "French Drapery." Years later, in 2005, Crimp notes curator Allison Gingeras's reference to Buren's work again as being "merely decorative" which Crimp argues fails to recognize an "on-going decorative strategy in Buren's work." Crimp later refers to such "vocabulary of scorn for the decorative" as a vocabulary that continues to be employed in the present.<sup>[8]</sup> Crimp then uses the thread of the decorative to talk about his first job in New York City, assisting Charles James, a designer and cult figure in the fashion world whom Crimp refers to as "America's greatest—perhaps only—couturier."<sup>[9]</sup> What set James apart, aside from his great talent as designer, was the circles in which he was so well regarded. The art world had recognized him not only as a fashion designer but also as an artist, as Crimp calls him, "a sculptor in cloth." Alfred Barr had given him a solo show at the Brooklyn Museum and Dominique de Menil hired him not only to make her clothing but also to decorate the interior of her home in Houston which had been designed by Phillip Johnson. He was known to have draped the fabric of his constructions directly onto the bodies of his clients during the early fabrication process making "monumental sculptures in fabric."<sup>[10]</sup> Crimp quotes James Martin, the director of the Met's Costume Institute, as saying that a James dress "could very nearly stand on its own, so filled was it with material."<sup>[11]</sup> This passage brought Reaves to mind as she not only also

makes furniture but also makes costumes for furniture via her uncanny upholstery, fitting, and drapery techniques.

In Reaves's *Rules Around Here* (waterproof shelf) (2016), a barely visible shelf is outfitted in a form-fitting vinyl getup with a zipper right down the middle. The nylon outfit visually translates to sexy attire that both eroticizes and anthropomorphizes the shelf. And like a James, the piece appears to be a monumental sculpture out of fabric. Crimp offers a quote from a client of James's who says that "[James] was sometimes so entranced by the shape he was 'sculpting' over one's own shape that when the dress arrived finished it was impossible to get into it. It existed on its own. Much time was spent discerning the proper relationship between shapes." As Crimp notes, the client's description can be read as an inadvertent parody of the notion of Modernist autonomy in its "description of the subject-object relation between dress and owner," which parallels the ways in which Reaves's work functions as parody of modernist autonomy through the simultaneous, confused status of the work as both subject and object.<sup>[12]</sup>

In Crimp's close reading of Hiroshi Sugimoto's photograph of the Guggenheim, which is so soft in focus that that building is reduced to seemingly abstract forms, Crimp lays claim that "our images of modern architecture are by now mnemonic, even dreamlike and, in so doing hints at modernist architecture's own unconscious. Dare we call it the decorative unconscious?" He continues with what feels like a half-serious, Freudian lilt, "and could this unconscious, produced through a repression of modern architecture's affinity with fashion be what Charles James wished to expose when he undertook the interior decoration of Philip Johnson's residence for the DeMenils in 1950?" In its bombast and perversity, in its appropriation and re-contextualization of high modern forms into surreal yet familiar structures, there is an aspect of Reaves's work that feels very much like the literalization of this decorative unconscious about which Crimp speaks.

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7 Crimp, Douglas. *Before Pictures*. University of Chicago Press. 2016. pp 22

8 Ibid [23]

9 Ibid [29]

10 Ibid

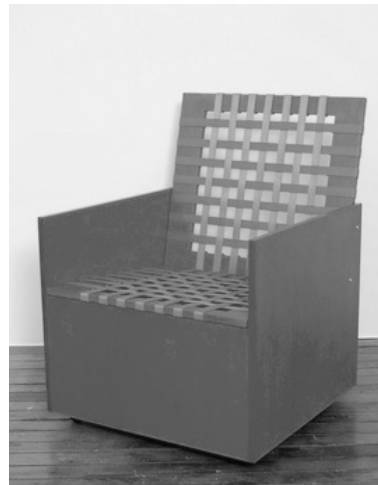
11 Ibid [29]



Donald Judd's work, as previously mentioned, can be seen as a road paver and foil for that of Reaves's. In *On Furniture*, Judd recalls his first foray into furniture making, which seems to be an experience that was later reflected in his draconian parameters:

*"Eighteen years ago someone asked me to design a coffee table. I thought that a work of mine which was essentially a rectangular volume with the upper surface recessed could be altered. This debased the work and produced a bad table, which I later threw away. The configuration and scale of art cannot be transposed into furniture and architecture. The intent of art is different from that of the latter, which must be functional [...] Due to the inability of art to become furniture, I didn't try again for several years"*[13]

Paradoxically, Judd's fabricators recall that in the 1990s, they approached Judd's art and furniture fabrication process in both the same location and using the same methods because the basic layouts were very similar. [14] However, desperate to distinguish between his practices, different galleries were responsible for showing his furniture and his artwork (though his furniture was being shown at galleries that only represented artists not furniture designers). His furniture and artwork were never allowed to be shown in the same setting with a few noted exceptions; one being his 1988 Whitney retrospective in which two benches designed by Judd were displayed alongside his art (much to the shock of the fabricators). [15] While Judd's furniture was strictly furniture not art, in the gallery setting it caused valid confusion. Viewers have of course been socially conditioned to view and not use art encountered at a show or anywhere for that matter. However, at Judd's furniture exhibitions, shows that were explicitly distinct




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12 Ibid [29]

13 Judd, Donald. "On Furniture (1986)." Donald Judd Writings. Ed Flavin Judd, Caitlin Murray. Judd Foundations and David Zwirner Books. 2016.

14 Murayama, Nina. "Furniture and Artwork as Paradoxical Counterparts in the Work of Donald Judd." Design Issues, Vol. 27, No. 3 (Summer 2011), pp. 47-59. MIT Press. pp. 48

from those displaying his artwork, the furniture, like the art, was also not meant to be sat on or used in the context of the exhibition (which casts a shadow of doubt upon the furniture's identity as a utilitarian object). Reaves's works, on the other hand, are sculptures that one can sit on in the gallery space. In a different, but similarly paradoxical fashion, Reaves's works, which she calls sculptures, are often titled in a way that literally suggest that the sculpture is indeed furniture (Bucket Chair with Covers) or a shelf (Waterproof shelf). Contradiction is subsumed into the practice. As Nina Murayama succinctly notes in her essay, *Furniture and Artwork as Paradoxical Counterparts in the Work of Donald Judd*, "Judd's art pieces deny the practice of 'composition' in art and look like design object, whereas his geometrical, hard-edged chairs appear too rigid and his oversized benches too large—they are at odds with ordinary furniture." [16] They reject the Modernist "idealistic unity between art and design" and instead, "pose a matter of fact inquiry into the discourse of art and the everyday perspectives of their users and participants at the mundane level of practice." While Judd arguably made no moves to provoke or challenge the presumptions that fine art is superior and should be held in higher regard than decorative art, he did both "challenge and subvert the stringent socio-cultural hierarchy at the levels of production, marketing, and public display" which paved the way for artists like Scott Burton and now Reaves. [17].

While a blemish alone, a nick in the material, a buckle in the wood that would not even be visible to a viewer, notoriously disqualified a Judd from being a Judd, Reaves's work capitalizes on the very notion blemish. The coolness of perfection in both modern and minimal forms is undone by the warmth of imperfection. It was Judd's fear of such "blemish" that led to his turn to serial schemes and fabrication which brought him more directly in line with Bauhaus and his predecessors. Judd cites his reliance on a team of assistants that worked to oversee every aspect of the fabrication of his work. Reaves, in contrast, works alone out of her basement studio that sits underneath an old carriage house in Chelsea where she shares a space with another artist and calls in an assistant only if she can't physically do it alone. [18]

"I've gotten pretty good at moving things around, a four-by-eight sheet [of plywood]—I can swing that around by myself," she says in her interview with Pesce, who like Judd, relies on a team for the fabrication of his work, whose process is like a small factory. In 2017, Reaves revives the "old assumption" of Renaissance *disegno*—the supposition that a work's quality and integrity lie within the artist's manual abilities and skill—which Judd's technique had reversed although, Reaves's pieces often appear de-skilled in their wonky assemblage. [19]

One of the many contradictions that rests within Judd's practice is his desire to have his work be both specific and serial at once. In Reaves's conversation with Pesce, Pesce muses, "I thought it was interesting that someone like you—a young person called an artist—is interacting with furniture." [20] He goes on to answer his own question, giving the reason why it is he thinks that Reaves engages with furniture as a medium. "Furniture has a kind of magnetic force because it comes from production, and that is something that is very present in our life because everything comes from the production." [21] Though Reaves retorts:

*"That's part of where the interest comes from. What you said before about time and values being liquid and coming in and out of style—I think production has been the same way. In the sixties and seventies, there was this idea that we would revert to the homemade, that the promises of production weren't giving us everything we wanted from our objects or our lifestyle. I take a lot of inspiration from those periods where everyone had a craft hobby and people wanted to teach each other how to make their own furnishings. That failed, and now if a person is building their own bed that's a very specialized skill. We don't expect that from the average citizen at all."* [22]

This DIY approach is a challenge to practicality, a rejection of capitalistic tendency, a rejection of seriality, and of mass production. The notion of functional often implies the notion of practical but in the case of Reaves work, the relationship between the two concepts is fraught. Later in the same interview, Reaves states that when working on a piece, she tries to "almost take all of the practicality out of an object and then tries to put it back in. Even if the function isn't as generous, there's something else that's happened." Again there is yet another counter-intuitive aspect present at the crux of the

15 Ibid.

16 "Judd's art pieces deny the practice of 'composition' in art and look like design object, whereas his geometrical, hard-edged chairs appear too rigid and his oversized benches too large—they are at odds with ordinary furniture" - Murayama

17 Murayama, Nina. "Furniture and Artwork as Paradoxical Counterparts in the Work of Donald Judd." *Design Issues*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (Summer 2011), pp. 47-59. MIT Press. pp. 48

work, in which functional capacity is present but dialled back which in effect calls attention to what about the object “works” and what doesn’t “work.” The making- something-less-functional than it can be becomes part of what makes it art.

Scott Burton, whose work reveals aesthetic continuity with that of Judd’s in its minimalistic appearance, shifted the discourse surrounding art and furniture/design from one concerned with ranking among the two disciplines to what Murayama refers to as a “closer examination of the social nature of participatory observers and users of functional objects.”[23] However, Burton conceptually departs from Minimalism while still employing the minimal form. He manages to reverse its muteness and lack of agency as object and as Roberta Smith says in the opening line of a 1978 feature on Burton for *Art In America*, “makes it talk.”[24] It is in this same piece that Smith notes the subjective, emotional presence within the works. Burton she says, “wants his objects to have charisma—a physical, quasi-erotic magnetism that is both fascinating and a little repellent[...]Unoccupied, they do not seem empty. They almost seem to be their own people.”[25] The name Burton could be switched out for Reaves and the statement would still be bona fide. While Burton’s furniture work lacks the craft element, the softness, the hand, and the sense of bounty that is present in Reaves’s, resting within the furniture sculptures of both artists, though manifest in different ways, is a latent humanness, a “charisma” and “quasi-erotic magnetism,” a slightly repulsive, abject quality. Burton’s writing on Brancusi’s work is also applicable to that of Reaves’s. In an essay Burton wrote on Brancusi that accompanied a show of Brancusi’s work at MoMA in 1989, he cites Brancusi not only as an artist who highly influenced his work, but also as the first Minimalist and the first furniture artist.[26] He understands Brancusi’s furniture work as a “usable meditation on utilitarian form,” stating that the best pieces of [his] furniture [work] are not only functional objects but also representations of functional objects.”[27] Burton also cites Gerrit Rietveld as a figure who advanced the blurring of boundary between art and furniture, saying that Rietveld’s chairs and tables serve as “sculpture conceptually as well as visually by calling attention to structural elements that are usually concealed.”[28].

This is a comment that perpetually appears in relation to the work of Reaves as her upholstery often appears to be de-upholstery, and which serves as a key element of the anthropomorphic quality of the work. (Though while Rietveld shows the skeleton, Reaves shows the flesh).

In an interview in 1987, Burton made the following statement: “all my work is a rebuke to the art world.” Both Burton’s and Reaves’s work can be seen as quietly conjuring an aura of Institutional Critique defined by Andrea Fraser as exposing “the structures and logic of museums and art galleries.”[29] Not only do these artists push the institution of art to expand its frame, they also reveal and challenge the hierarchies and limits at play within our conceptions of what comprises the art/life boundary. In making art that is functional, and in Burton’s case both public and functional, they make art that in its use-value is not entirely distinct from the “real world” and consequently works to debunk the false sense of autonomy and self-contained wholeness that the “art world” claims.

At the Whitney, situated at the center of a gallery space, *Bucket Chair with Covers* both plays on and complicates the role of the traditional gallery seat or bench, which tends to be slick and metallic, to be monotone, to claim neutrality and are not known for their comfort. Gallery seating is almost always made to disappear into the aesthetic framework of institution. Contrarily, Reaves’s piece does the opposite of disappear and instead works to domesticate and destabilize the sterile, autonomous viewing space. In the Biennial, *Bucket Chair*, is situated directly facing a large painting by Carrie Moyer. The chair comes to function as art object, as art experience, and as a vehicle for viewing other art. There is no sign or wall text notifying the viewer as to whether they are permitted to physically interact with or occupy the piece, which leads to a certain dance between viewer and the sculpture. When sitting in the piece there is a momentary dis-ease and feeling of transgression of boundary. The work is not precious but it is also by no means durable or sturdy enough to maintain the thousands of Biennial visitors without its appearance being altered. After returning a few times to see the work, I noticed another one of Reaves’s pieces had ripped and looked nothing like it had the week of the Biennial’s opening. In this sense,

18 Conversation with Jessi Reaves and Gaetano Pesce. The Museum of Contemporary Art Online. Ed. Karly Wildenhaus. <https://www.moca.org/stream/post/introducing-gaetano-pesce-and-jessi-reaves>

19 Meyer, James. “A Minimal Unconscious.” *October*, Vol 130 (Fall, 2009), pp. 141-176. MIT Press., pp 143

20 Conversation with Jessi Reaves and Gaetano Pesce. The Museum of Contemporary Art Online. Ed. Karly Wildenhaus. <https://www.moca.org/stream/post/introducing-gaetano-pesce-and-jessi-reaves>



the pieces also have a sort of time limit just as things we use in everyday life do, things with function, objects with purpose.

I suppose an apt and final question would be what makes Bucket Chair with Covers contemporary? Of course there is the fact that it was made in 2017, but its inclusion in this year's Whitney Biennial signals recognition of its relevance to the now beyond its fabrication date. The brief descriptor of the exhibition on Whitney Biennial's website self-describes the seventy-eighth installment of the survey of American art as "arriving at a time rife with racial tensions, economic inequities, and polarizing politics." [30] It continues, "Throughout the exhibition, artists challenge us to consider how these realities affect our senses of self and community." [31] And so, how does a chair called a sculpture that can actually be used as chair fit into this paradigm? In an age of rapidly advancing technologies, depersonalization, and ecological entropy, Reaves offers a human respite from the cold, impersonal sheen that our 2017 world reflects. Her work has a genuineness and even in its at-times-almost-grotesque presence, a warmth that has dwindled and is craved. It suggests perhaps to slow things down, to work with, riff on, and adapt, to make due with what we have. Not only are her materials largely scavenged but so are the forms. I again returned to thinking of and drawing a parallel to the work of the Pictures artists, who treat representation not as representation of something that already exists but rather they treat it as a site where meaning is produced.

Reaves's work and practice more generally raise a question that rests at the crux of contemporary art: why do we allow art not to be useful? Not practical, but useful. I have one remaining knot of questions to leave you with but which I'm afraid can only be answered by the passage of time. Does a collector of a Reaves chair, be it a museum or private collector, get the chair refurbished after it has been sat upon or used so many times that the seat wears through to the point where there is a gaping hole? What if a leg gives way? Do you take it to an upholsterer? (No). Do you take it back to Reaves herself? Will it be re-de-upholstered, transformed? Or over time will Reaves's sculptures entirely lose their functionality, and become non-functioning, autonomous objects, contradictions of their original selves? ■

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid

23 Murayama, Nina. "Furniture and Artwork as Paradoxical Counterparts in the Work of Donald Judd." *Design Issues*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (Summer 2011), pp. 55. MIT Press.

24 Princenthal, Nancy. "High Style, Clear Form, Sharp Edge." *Art In America*. March 2013.

25 Ibid.

26 Burton, Scott. "Burton on Brancusi: April 7th - June 28th, 1989." *The Museum of Modern Art*. 1989. pp 3

27 Burton, Scott. "Burton on Brancusi: April 7th - June 28th, 1989." *The Museum of Modern Art*. 1989.

28 Princenthal, Nancy. "High Style, Clear Form.

29 Fraser, Andrea. "From the Critique of Institutions to An Institution of Critique." *Art Forum*. September 2005.

30 From The Whitney Museum Website's Whitney Biennial 2017 homepage <http://whitney.org/Exhibitions/2017Biennial>

31 Ibid.

Sharp Edge." *Art In America*. March 2013.

Images in order of appearance:

Jessi Reaves, Kragel's Nap Chair, 201

Jessi Reaves, Cesca Leaves the Stack (Modified Chair) (2016)

Sarah Lucas furniture, 2013

Mary Heilmann, Club Chair

Donald Judd, Side Chairs

Scott Burton, Two Chairs.

Jessi Reaves, Idol of the Hairs. 2014

Scott Burtton, Chaise Lounge Rosa Baveno Granite



Johanna Fateman, “Rights and Privileges: Johanna Fateman on the 2017 Whitney Biennial”, *Artforum*, May, 2017, 296-302.

# ARTFORUM

May 2017

## RIGHTS AND PRIVILEGES

Johanna Fateman on the 2017  
Whitney Biennial



“

Jessi Reaves’s sometimes functional, one-of-a kind furniture pieces provide a kind of unruly connective tissue linking disjunctive works. Her sculptures are revealed as chameleonic decor elements, easy to pair with other artworks despite their big, vaguely dystopian personalities. But Reaves’s repurposed, in-process aesthetic, that of a discerning landfill scavenger and couture upholsterer, finds its best companion in the queer hedonism of Carrie Moyer’s trickily layered, biomorphic compositions. The painter’s loud, seductive

... ”

Cat Kron, “Ginny Casey and Jessi Reaves”, *Artforum*, May, 2017.

# ARTFORUM

## GINNY CASEY AND JESSI REAVES

ICA - INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY ART, PHILADELPHIA  
PHILADELPHIA  
Through August 6  
Curated by Charlotte Ickes



Left: Ginny Casey, *Moody Blue Studio*, 2017, oil on canvas, 70 x 75 inches. Courtesy Half Gallery, New York. Right: Jessi Reaves, *Night Cabinet (Little Miss Attitude)*, 2016, plywood, wood, steel, silk, zippers, 72 x 32 x 26 inches. Courtesy the artist and Bridget Donahue, New York.

A bulbous, raunchy anthropomorphism runs through the paintings of Ginny Casey and the sculptures of Jessi Reaves. Casey's paintings, featuring cool-toned, swollen hands and vases, and Reaves's furniture-based constructions both confront the life of the decorative object. While these emerging artists clearly share a fascination with the everyday, the most striking common aspect of their practices is an uncanny, subtly grotesque emphasis on the body as it assumes the forms of (or interacts with) household objects. This two-person show features more than thirty recent works, several made for the occasion, and comes on the heels of Reaves's critically heralded interventions at this year's Whitney Biennial. Accompanied by a catalogue featuring essays by Ickes and art historian Julia Bryan-Wilson, the show pushes beyond the rote feminist strategy of the appropriation and inversion of the domestic to explore something far creepier.

— Cat Kron

Robin Pogrebin, “Here Comes the Whitney Biennial, Reflecting the Tumult of the Times”, *The New York Times*, November 17, 2016.

## The New York Times

ART & DESIGN

# Here Comes the Whitney Biennial, Reflecting the Tumult of the Times

By **ROBIN POGREBIN** NOV. 17, 2016



The artist Henry Taylor in his downtown Los Angeles studio. Some of his recent portraits will be exhibited at the Whitney Biennial. Credit Monica Almeida for *The New York Times*



FOR the first time in 20 years, the lead-up to the Whitney Biennial coincided with the presidential election, a background that could not help but inform the selection of artists and artwork that will be on view when the biennial opens on March 17, the first in the museum's new downtown building.

"An election year prompts that questioning," said Scott Rothkopf, the Whitney's chief curator and deputy director for programs. "The discourse turns to who we are as a nation."

On Thursday, the Whitney revealed the 63 participants in its sprawling survey of what's happening now in contemporary art — the new, the influential and the potentially provocative.

After visiting artists' studios, dealers and curators in 40 cities during the past year, the biennial's curators — Christopher Y. Lew, an associate curator at the Whitney, and Mia Locks, an independent curator — were struck by themes that resonated with the contentious election: personal identity, social struggle, connection to place.

So much of the artwork "is about the artist or a self in relation to the tumultuous world that we're in," Mr. Lew said.

The featured artists vary in their race, gender, sexual orientation and geographic locations. There are nearly as many women as men; a large delegation from California; and several from outside the continental United States. They work in various media, including technology. (The museum announced in 2015 that the next biennial would be in 2017 rather than this year so curators could adjust to the new building.)

Since moving downtown, the Whitney has tried to better integrate the spirit of the biennial into its year-round activities, by re-energizing its emerging artists program. "A little bit more in the trenches," Mr. Rothkopf said, "a little closer to the ground."

While the biennial includes established artists like Jo Baer, William Pope.L, Dana Schutz and Jordan Wolfson, many are largely unknown.

The curators worked closely with a team of advisers: Negar Azimi of the Middle East publication Bidoun; Gean Moreno of the Institute of Contemporary Art Miami; Wendy Yao of the exhibition space 356 South Mission Road and the art shop Ooga Booga in Los Angeles; and Aily Nash, a curator with the New York Film Festival, who is helping organize the biennial's film program.

"We wanted them to be an invested part of the process from the beginning," Ms. Locks said.

Below is a sampling of some of the lesser-known names in the show.

**RAFA ESPARZA** (Born 1981 in Los Angeles; lives in Los Angeles) He builds structures from adobe bricks that he makes with his family and friends out of dirt, hay and horse manure mixed with water from the Los Angeles River. Mr. Esparza learned this technique from his father — who built his own home in Durango, Mexico — just after the artist came out as gay. For the Whitney, he will create a room made of adobe that will also display works by other artists.

**SUSAN CIANCIOLO** (Born 1969 in Providence, R.I.; lives in Brooklyn) Her fashions of recycled or found textiles have been featured in Barneys and Vogue, and in 2001 she transformed a gallery in the meatpacking district of Manhattan into a pop-up Japanese-inspired tearoom, serving lunch to the installation's visitors. For the biennial, she will reprise the tearoom in the museum's restaurant, Untitled, in collaboration with the chef Michael Anthony.

**ALIZA NISENBAUM** (Born 1977 in Mexico City; lives in Brooklyn) Calling her work "political witnessing," Ms. Nisenbaum makes portraits of immigrants, many of whom she meets through her art classes at the Cuban-born artist Tania Bruguera's community space in Queens. At the Whitney, she will show new large-scale paintings, including one of a Latino runner's club and another of the women's cabinet to the New York City mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, where she was part of the 2015 fellowship program.



Susan Cianciolo Credit Zoe Latta, Courtesy the artist and Bridget Donahue, NYC



Susan Cianciolo's "Untitled" (2000), watercolor on paper.  
Credit Courtesy of the artist and Bridget Donahue, New York, Collection of the artist

**POSTCOMMODITY** (Founded 2007) This collective — comprising Raven Chacon, Cristóbal Martínez and Kade L. Twist — for four days in October 2015 installed a two-mile “Repellent Fence” of 26 balloons that intersected the United States-Mexico border near Douglas, Ariz., and Agua Prieta, Sonora. The Whitney will feature the collective’s 2016 video installation, “A Very Long Line,” in which the camera rapidly moves laterally along the border to a discordant soundtrack, as if from the perspective of a passenger in a car.

**HENRY TAYLOR** (Born 1958 in Oxnard, Calif.; lives in Los Angeles) His early portraits of patients at Camarillo State Mental Hospital in California, where he worked as a psychiatric technician from 1984 to 1994, were featured in his solo shows at the Studio Museum in Harlem in 2007 and at MoMA PS1 in 2012. His 2008 piece “He’s Hear, and He’s Thair” — depicting a homeless man named Emory who became his friend — sold at Phillips auction house on Wednesday for \$60,000. Mr. Taylor’s recent portraits, some of which will be at the Whitney, feature subjects including friends and family.

**JESSI REAVES** (Born 1986 in Portland, Ore.; lives in Brooklyn) Having worked part-time as an upholsterer, she makes sculptures that function as furniture: chairs, tables and sofas created from startling blends of foam, sawdust, plywood, plexiglass and auto parts. Examples will be at the Whitney. “She will take polar fleece and use it as a slipcover,” Mr. Lew said, “applying materials you don’t expect, but will recognize.”

**MAYA STOVALL** (Born 1982 in Detroit; lives in Detroit) Ms. Stovall, who describes herself as a “radical ballerina,” dances in front of liquor stores in her Detroit neighborhood, McDougall-Hunt. She then interviews patrons about her performance and records these events on video, editing the footage and adding a soundtrack. Episodes from this “Liquor Store Theater” will be on exhibition for the first time at the Whitney.

**SKY HOPINKA** (Born 1984 in Bellingham, Wash.; lives in Milwaukee) In “Jáaji Approx.” (2015), Mr. Hopinka, a member of the Ho-Chunk Nation, films his journey through the territory once traveled by his father. Mr. Hopinka pairs the sights through his windshield with stories, songs and conversation from informal recordings he made over a decade. The biennial will feature his new video, shot on St. Paul Island in the Bering Sea, home to one of the largest Aleut populations in the United States.

**OCCUPY MUSEUMS** (Founded 2011) Emerging from Occupy Wall Street, Occupy Museums is a largely New York-based group that focuses on the relationship between art institutions and capitalism. The collective’s Debtfair project, coming to the Whitney, packages works by United States artists who are in debt





The artist Jessi Reaves at work. Credit Oto Gillen, Courtesy the artist and Bridget Donahue, New York

into “bundles” that can be purchased for the cost of the artists’ monthly loan payments.

**CHEMI ROSADO-SEIJO** (Born 1973 in Vega Alta, P.R.; lives in San Juan and Naranjito, P.R.) In 2014, Mr. Rosado-Seijo transformed a museum gallery in San Juan into a classroom, inviting students from a school to the museum for daily Spanish class, and exhibiting works from the museum at the school. At the Whitney, he will bring this project to the Lower Manhattan Arts Academy on Grand Street, the biennial’s only off-site installation.



“Idol of the Hares” by Jessi Reaves. Credit Courtesy of the artist and Bridget Donahue, New York

Gaetano Pesce and Jessi Reaves, edited by Marco Braunschweiler, “Introducing: Conversations Between Two Artists Who Have Never Met Before”, *Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles: Stream*, November 11, 2016, <http://www.moca.org/stream/post/introducing-gaetano-pesce-and-jessi-reaves>



## Introducing: Jessi Reaves and Gaetano Pesce



A conversation between artist Jessi Reaves and artist, designer, and architect Gaetano Pesce. The dialogue took place in person at Pesce's studio in Brooklyn, New York. This is the first time the two have spoken.

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**Gaetano Pesce:** So how will we start, Marco?

**Marco Kane Braunschweiler:** For me, both of your work deals with the plasticity of form and a kind of anthropomorphism. In your case very overt and in Jessi's case a bit more subtle. So I'm curious to discuss your approaches,

I see them as a decomposition of material that's then recomposed into iterative forms. I think of both of your work as an ontology—an ontological study of architecture and domestic objects—a study in what a building, a chair, a vase, can be.

Since we're here in the studio I'm curious a bit about your process. Do you come to the studio early? Do you stay late? Is this typical?

**GP:** Not me, I came maybe half an hour ago. I work only in the morning. Then when I need to come here, I come here. Otherwise, I go to the office on Broadway. There we do what we call "clean work." Like project drawings, relations with museums, exhibitions. That is the way I work when I am in New York, because fortunately or unfortunately, I travel a lot. Every month for a week, if it's not more. And you, Jessi?

**Jessi Reaves:** I do the reverse, wake up and try to get to the studio as quickly as I can, I don't do a lot of "clean work" or office work besides sending emails.

**GP:** So where do you have your office—your workplace?

**JR:** My studio is in Chelsea in the basement of an old carriage house. They used to keep horses down there.

**GP:** And you work alone there?

**JR:** I share the space with another artist. She's there three days a week.

**GP:** But is there is someone helping you, or no?

**JR:** No, every once in awhile I have an assistant, but usually it's just me alone down there.

**GP:** And can you do all this alone?

**JR:** For now I can do it alone. If I have trouble physically doing something alone, I'll wait until my assistant can come. But I've gotten pretty good at moving things around, a four-by-eight sheet [of plywood]—I can swing that around by myself.

**GP:** Yeah, we have this problem too here. But we are...how many do we have here? We are four. And five with me, so...

**JR:** Have you always had people assisting you?

**GP:** I always work in the way I said. There is one office where they do a certain work and a workshop where we research and test material. Yesterday we did a test in something, and we didn't succeed. So today I was thinking that we threw out a thousand dollars. Just like that, boom.

**JR:** Wow.

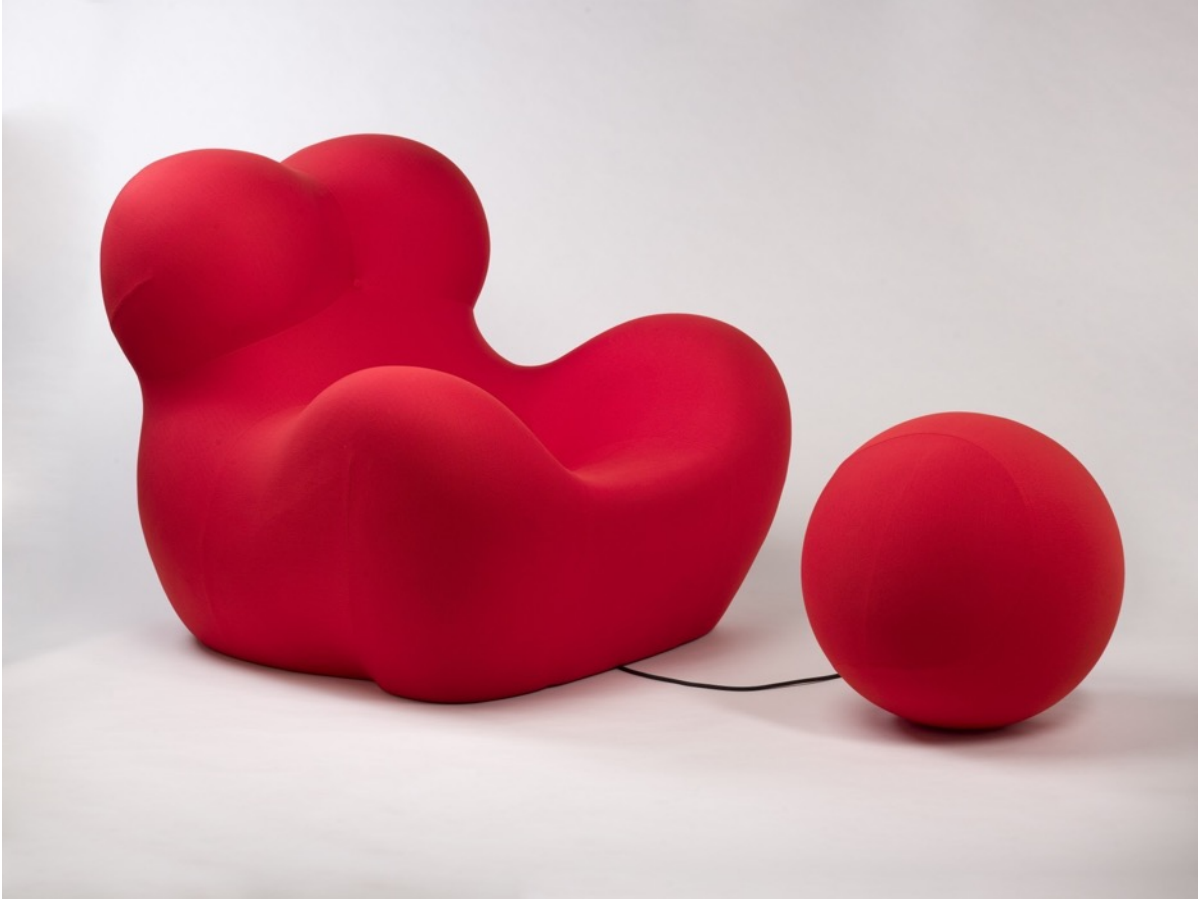
**GP:** Because, well—I don't know why. So that happens, when you do research you never know where...you know where you start, but you don't know if you'll succeed.

**JR:** Right.

**GP:** But Marco said something about the anthropomorphic image, that came to me not out of any kind of will but because when I was young, like you, I thought that the geometry that people were using at that time—and some are still using—was too abstract, too neutral, and I thought it was good to introduce a certain figure and images in general. The images at the beginning were parts of the human body. And for that time, now I talk about the year '72, '74, so it's almost what? Forty-two, forty-four years ago? I realized that if you want to communicate with people, it's good to use images because then they can understand what you do much better.

**JR:** Interesting.

**GP:** And so from human bodies to images, the step was very short.



GAETANO PESCE, UP 5 LOUNGE CHAIR WITH UP 6 OTTOMAN , 1969, POLYURETHANE FOAM COVERED IN STRETCH FABRIC, (CHAIR): 40 X 43 1/2 X 45 INCHES (101.6 X 110.5 X 114.3 CM) (OTTOMAN): DIAM. 22 1/2 INCHES (57.2 CM)

**JR:** I have a similar feeling about geometry in design. I've always felt there was this supposedly "scientific" approach to design that typically used geometry as a starting point. Like they were zooming in on nature and finding these tessellating patterns or molecular structures. And that justified their use of geometry somehow or made the geometry more intelligent—that type of interest in geometry feels so shallow. I don't use images of bodies in the same way that you do, but I do tend to use organic shapes because they refer to the body automatically. So in that way you get a different type of image of nature than you do with hard geometry.

**GP:** The organic is already an image and is very strong if you compare it to a triangle, circle, or rectangular shape. The organic is much more rich.

**JR:** Right, because you see yourself.

**GP:** You can have more or less everything in the organic. They say that I use a lot of organic elements in my representations. But one interesting thing that is good to talk about today is...when I was twenty-four, such a long time ago, almost half a century, I started to think that the best freedom is the one from yourself. At that time the artist was expected to express a certain language and be recognizable through that language.

**JR:** Right—having a recognizable style.

**GP:** And I was saying, "No, that is not what I would like to do for myself." Because we have the right to be incoherent. And why? It's because time is incoherent. And if we follow time we cannot be always the same. Today I more or less follow that idea of incoherence. And usually I judge an artist—if it happens to be that I need to judge someone—through



whether it's recognizable or it's not. Traditionally they start at the beginning and until the end of their life, they more or less they do the same thing. Time is a very serious partner. It changes all day, every day, every hour.

**JR:** You know it's so interesting because lately, I've been thinking about that instinct to change. Something I admire when I look at other artists is whether the work has evolved or changed over time. But on the other hand, I know the feeling of obligation to see an idea or material experiment through—to stick with something until there's really nothing left. It's hard to know when you've gotten to a place with a certain idea, when it's time to move on. I'm always afraid of not squeezing everything out of an idea or material, you know? Not seeing everything that's there to be seen...

**GP:** You said material, material is incoherent. For example: one day someone discovers materials that are very heavy and very strong, and the day after someone else discovers another material that is completely different, very light and soft, but when you have it on your end you don't feel it...

**JR:** But it seems like with your career you've found certain materials that you wouldn't abandon even if something new came along. Like there's something about that one material that lets you have versatility, and even if the material doesn't change itself, there's liquidity and space...

**GP:** If I discover myself working with materials that are liquid then I observe that the time in which I am living has liquid values.

**JR:** People ask me, "Will you always make furniture?" And it feels like such an irrelevant question because I feel like I'm following the ideas more than a particular form.

**GP:** When I saw this [pointing to an image of Reaves' work], I thought it was interesting that someone like you—a young person called an artist—is interacting with furniture. Why? Furniture has a kind of magnetic force because it comes from production, and that is something that is very present in our life because everything comes from the production.

**JR:** That's part of where the interest comes from. What you said before about time and values being liquid and coming in and out of style—I think production has been the same way. In the sixties and seventies, there was this idea that we would revert to the homemade, that the promises of production weren't giving us everything we wanted from our objects or our lifestyle. I take a lot of inspiration from those periods where everyone had a craft hobby and people wanted to teach each other how to make their own furnishings. That failed, and now if a person is building their own bed that's a very specialized skill. We don't expect that from the average citizen at all.

**GP:** When you were explaining why you work with furniture I thought of how I came to what we call design. I discovered design because a woman who was staying with me, we were eighteen, nineteen years old, and she was studying sculpture, I was studying architecture. We were in a school in Venice, and one day she said, "You know they opened a new school called the industrial design school?" I didn't know what that was, and then she said, "Do you want to come with me and go to this school?" And I said, "No, I am in the school of architecture." So she became a student of this school and through her, I understood what design was, I realized that she was talking to me about a kind of art that was practical. And then years later I realized that art, what we call art, was always practical.

**JR:** Right, but if something is functional it's not always practical. Sometimes when I'm working I like to...to almost take all of the practicality out of an object and then try to put it back in. Even if the function isn't as generous, there's something else that's happened.

**GP:** In your work, we have two dimensions, no? There is a chair and then there is something you add to that. A kind of second expression and the second expression is the culture of the object, no? The story of it, and that is why it is interesting...

**JR:** You've talked about liquidity and how it's a metaphor for time. But I also think there's a sense of making something permanent look like it happened very quickly, the idea of a pour...it just feels very fast...I know this wasn't fast [pointing to an in-progress lamp] but it has that energy.

**GP:** At this certain moment in my life I understood that it was much better for me to allow the material to decide itself, and I could decide how to move, how to fix, how to cure. Because I understood it was much richer than what I was able to do.





JESSI REAVES, SHELF FOR A LOG, 2016 PLYWOOD, SAWDUST, CANE CHAIR SEAT, INK, 34 X 68 X 13 INCHES (86.36 X 172.72 X 33.02 CM), COURTESY BRIDGET DONAHUE, NYC

**JR:** My experience with that is more in terms of being attached to the things in their imperfect state—when the upholstery on a piece of furniture has faded from sitting in the same place for years. It's frustrating when people are so attached to perfection and to things looking new.

**GP:** Yeah, you said it—imperfection is super important.

**JR:** When you started working with plastic...there must have been a period of time where plastic was both innovative and exciting but also considered cheap? Or considered to be a lesser material than glass-ceramic? I feel that you elevate plastics to a place where it's beyond those things. There was a time when...when it was both. It was exciting and new but also kind of trashy.

**GP:** There was a time when people were not buying my things because they were considering plastic something that was going to disappear. But slowly also museums now collect plastic objects.

**JR:** Of course!

**GP:** It's not called plastic because that's very negative, it's called synthetic material. Some of the synthetic materials are better than the traditional material.

**JR:** I work with plywood because it's the cheapest way to work with wood. You could call it "engineered wood." It has fragility, it's not pristine and durable like maple or walnut. And it changes, its color fades over time. I really like those qualities, and I like how you use synthetic materials for that same reason.

**GP:** Yeah, but the fade...a piece of wood, if it's very old you see that it's very dark.

**JR:** Yes, it gets darker brown as the light hits it. Or silver if it sits outside in the elements.

**GP:** But then if you sand it, it could become very light again. So everything changes as I said before. The aging process attacks everything—marble, stone, metal, everything. You mentioned glass...I work with glass. But compared to the synthetics I use, glass is a poor material.

**JR:** Right, I imagine working with synthetic materials you can change your mind, too, in a way you can't with glass. I'm kind of intimidated by any material or process where I can't change my mind in an instant.

**GP:** So I saw you work also with foam, no?

**JR:** Oh yes. You know, people always give me a hard time about its longevity. And I feel like people aren't aware that there's foam in everything, you know? We don't show it naturally without a covering, without any fabric over it. People are so repulsed by it. But you're always sitting on foam.

How do you choose your projects? Is it by the location or the feeling from the people who reach out to you?

**GP:** By curiosity. Usually, we work here following ideas or curiosities. And it's very rare that we do something because someone asked. For instance, these chairs we are sitting on—we did them last year but we did them for ourselves and now maybe there is a company in Belgium that is interested to produce them. So it depends on ideas.

**JR:** I'm fortunate to have a schedule of projects coming up, but when I'm in the studio I'm trying to pretend there's no deadline. And trying to do what you're talking about, following ideas and making things for myself without thinking, "this has to be finished by this time."

**GP:** We have deadlines more related to exhibitions but not deadlines for what we do. So there is no carrier work. It's jumping from one subject to another.

**JR:** I can't imagine having a creative practice that wouldn't let you digest that way...like your mood could change...

**GP:** One day you read the paper and you have an idea, and the day after you see a movie and you had another idea. I am not recognizable. I am not doing a bottle, always the bottle, big bottle...

**JR:** [laughs] In one of the first studio visits I ever had someone asked me, "Do you want to have a recognizable style?" I was just so thrown by that question. It wasn't something I had genuinely considered. It's an idea from the outside that enters and once you hear it it's hard to forget. Like, "Oh, a recognizable style?"

**GP:** In 1972, I did an exhibition with others at the Museum of Modern Art, it was a very famous exhibition called Italy: The New Domestic Landscape.

**JR:** Oh, yes. I have the book.

**GP:** And then, who approached me was a very famous gallerist, Leo Castelli. Leo Castelli said, "I would like to see your work." At that time it was very close to the summer, and I was going to Venice. So he said, "I'll come for the Biennale, and we will see each other in two months."

We had an appointment in Piazza San Marco. I did not believe the guy was coming, I arrived late, and he was there waiting. We went to my atelier, and he was interested and said, "What I see—are you able to keep doing this all the time?" And I said, "No." He explained to me, "If you change, I have to always do the work to make you recognizable." He said, "I cannot work with someone who changes all the time." I said, "Okay, I cannot promise to be always the same."

Eric Sutphin, “Jessi Reaves”, *Art in America*, September 2016, p. 144.

# Art in America

## JESSI REAVES

BRIDGET DONAHUE



For this debut solo exhibition, Oregon-born, New York-based artist Jessi Reaves demonstrated her omnivorous approach to making sculptural furniture, offering viewers an assortment of pieces that incorporate materials ranging from plywood to car parts to yellow upholstery foam to driftwood. Reaves treats furniture making as her primary expression, creating pieces that are, as the late artist Scott Burton once wrote of Brancusi's furniture, “not only functional objects but also representations of functional objects.” There is something subtly apocalyptic about Reaves's work: the way every scrap and shred of refuse is somehow incorporated into the making of another piece suggests a diminishing supply. Dried accretions of wood glue and sawdust that had been mixed together to create a molding paste cling to many of the furniture's surfaces like wasps' nests.

Most of the pieces on view had clear functions (sitting, displaying, lighting), but some were more ambiguous. The six-foot tall *Night Cabinet (Little Miss Attitude)*, 2016, for instance, is a jagged, roughly leaf-shaped structure that has been sheathed in shimmering black silk, rendering its interior shelves largely inaccessible. Hand-sewn details include an embroidered rosette and several zippers left unzipped to reveal the plywood construction inside. Various iterations of wrapping, binding, and leatherwork in the show suggested a fetish sensibility. In *Bad House Shelf* (2016) — one of the most overtly sculptural works presented — a cylindrical tube is wrapped in black leather and pinned behind a series of tiered plywood shelves. Additional components include a gnarled driftwood branch twisting upward from the bottom portion of the unit, and a roughly cut plywood backing, with red marker lines showing the places where incisions were meant to be made.

Jessi Reaves: *Night Cabinet (Little Miss Attitude)*, 2016, plywood, wood, steel, silk, and zippers, approx. 6 by 2.75 x 2.24 feet; at Bridget Donahue

*Engine Room Shelving (Recollection Wedding Edition)*, 2015, is a knobby freestanding O-shaped structure with three shelves running across it with a large bowl-like finial on top. The wood and foam framework is wrapped in pearlescent vinyl-mesh cloth that has been aggressively stapled in place. *Dog's Stick Lamp* (2016) is a towering mantid form. Its body is a nearly eight-foot long piece of driftwood, around which the lamp's electrical cord winds, entering and exiting several bored holes. The head/lampshade is made from a steel armature over which green-and-black harlequin-patterned fabric is stretched.

Though Reaves references mid-twentieth-century masters like Charles and Ray Eames, Isamu Noguchi, and Philip Johnson, she rejects the elegant finish of their work in favor of a more provisional approach, nodding to tradition but playfully transgressing it. When I visited the show, the gallery was filled with the scent of incense and cannabis, which had wafted in from a nearby apartment. The heady aroma was a perfect olfactory complement to Reaves's gnarly, tactile creations.

— Eric Sutphin



“Jessi Reaves at Bridget Donahue”, Contemporary Art Writing Daily, June 8, 2016, <http://www.artwritingdaily.com/2016/06/jessi-reaves-at-bridget-donahue.html?m=1>.

# Contemporary Art Writing Daily

Wednesday, June 8, 2016

## Jessi Reaves at Bridget Donahue



*Foam Couch with Straps*, 2016, Upholstery foam, fiberglass, wood, webbing, 29 x 77 x 35 inches (73.66 x 195.58 x 88.90 cm)

Like Rembrandt's Flayed Ox tinged with new meaning against the repetition of his auto-erotic visage, Reaves doubling-down on material entrails in the age of avatars could seem perversely obstinate memento mori; a reminder that, like all that stolen Ikea elegance whose eventual blown out corners reveal its making of all but compressed trash, underneath everything we desire to be is an intestinal makeup of sponge replacing its weight with rumors of dead-cells and dust-mites of a body threatening to turn fungal even while its pubescent biology meets identity, becoming gendered but threatening death makes them erotic like the ox meat.

Christie Chu, “10 Millennial Artists to Watch in 2016: Jessi Reaves”, *Artnet News*, June 6, 2016, <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/10-millennial-artists-watch-2016-511961>.

# artnet® news

## Art World

# 10 Millennial Artists to Watch in 2016

See who made the cut.

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Christie Chu, June 6, 2016



### **Jessi Reaves (b. 1986)**

The symbiosis of art and design culminates in Jessi Reave's work which hovers between furniture and art object. Reaves' creates conventional (and functioning) items you would find in any furniture shop: chairs, a couch, lamps, several shelving units. However, the artist assembles materials unconventionally to create an entirely unique aesthetic.; what is normally kept hidden inside furniture is turned out.

Reaves recently had a solo show at New York's Bridget Donahue gallery.

Kavior Moon, “Jessi Reaves and Sophie Stone”, *Artforum*, Summer 2016, 405.

# ARTFORUM

## Jessi Reaves and Sophie Stone

DEL VAZ PROJECTS

For their first exhibition in Los Angeles, New York-based artists Jessi Reaves and Sophie Stone furnished Del Vaz Projects with works that slyly confused the boundary between the so-called “fine” and “applied” arts. Slouching against walls and scattered across the floor were large, irregularly woven textiles and idiosyncratic furniture pieces that served an aesthetic purpose and much as a utilitarian one. The works fit seamlessly into the exhibition space, given that the gallery is also a lived-in apartment. (The venue housed the artists while they created, in the building’s garage, most of the displayed works during an informal three-week residency.) Recalling neither the artisanal luxury items of the Arts and Crafts movement nor the rationalized, reductive forms of modernist designs, Reaves’s and Stone’s functional objects that often bore traces of previous uses.

In the main gallery - a living room - Reaves exhibited a series of quasi-anthropomorphic chairs and shelving units. *His and Hers Ferraris*, 2014, comprised a pair of steel chair frames padded with wide strips of polyurethane foam, sexily sheathed in sheer dark-rose slipcovers with revealing cutouts edged in bright red silk. A far cry from the disciplined elegance of curvilinear chair designs of Giò Ponti or Carlo Mollino (which seem emaciated in comparison), these paired chairs nonetheless radiated their own ungainly charm. Puckered ribbons of foam were wrapped around a large chair frame covered with a hardened mixture of glue and sawdust in *Life Is Getting Longer/ Baguette Chair*, 2016. One sank down comfortably into the squishy, cellulite-like folds of this armchair, cushioned with foam pieces unevenly colored from varying amounts of light exposure, dust and dirt left by previous visitors. A trio of sculptural shelving units, one freestanding and two attached to walls, all made from biomorphic, Noguchiesque shapes cut from plywood (a very un-Noguchiesque material), completed the furniture set.



View of “Jessi Reaves and Sophie Stone”, 2016. On floor: Sophie Stone, *Untitled (in-reverse #1)*, 2014/2016. Chairs: Jessi Reaves, *His and Her Ferraris*, 2014.

Underneath and alongside Reaves's furniture pieces, hanging on one wall of the gallery's main room and sprawling on the floors of its kitchen, dining area, hallway, and outdoor patio, lay colorful rug-size works by Stone. These textiles were made from new and used cotton, sisal, plastic, and acrylic rugs and mats, cut up and rewoven, thus producing a mixture of colors, patterns, textures and styles. In some, house paint was subtly applied to emphasize the flatness of the picture plane, as in *Untitled (carpet with vine)*, or to further the pictorial push and pull carried out literally in *Untitled (carpeted with pink border)* and *Untitled (carpet with silk edge)*, all 2016. Stone's pieces bring to mind the mediums of painting and collage, yet some of her works can be turned around, such as *Untitled (in-reverse #1)* and *Untitled (in-reverse #2)*, both 2014/2016. Not only are Stone's works easily portable (and sometimes flippable), they are also semantically flexible. All of her textiles can be displayed on the floor, where they are used as rugs as well as on the wall, where they read as paintings or wall decorations. The slippery nature of these works is evident in *Untitled (carpet with pieces)*, 2016, which is composed of two strips of sisal tightly (and suggestively) bound together by cords; hung so that its bottom rests on the floor, the work appears to be either sliding off the wall or creeping its way up.

What Roberta Smith once remarked of Scott Burton's furniture objects can also be said of Reaves's and Stone's works: They emit a "physical, quasi-erotic magnetism that is both fascinating and a little repellent." But unlike Burton's concrete, metal, and stone forms, which are seemingly timeless, Reaves's and Stone's works evoke a cyclical temporality: New materials become old and old materials are repurposed to become new. Eschewing the coldly polished surfaces of Burton's furniture, the artists have given their works absorptive skins that receive and retain incidental marks of touch and use - ongoing records of the objects' biographies. In these pieces, "stains" have been "removed" through a conceptual reframing, allowing seeming imperfections to resonate instead with significance.

- Kavior Moore



David Ebony, “David Ebony’s Top 10 New York Gallery Shows for May”, *Artnet News*, May 25, 2016.

**artnet**®news

ART WORLD

## David Ebony's Top 10 New York Gallery Shows for May

David Ebony, Wednesday, May 25, 2016



Installation view, Jessi Reaves, 2016. Photo Courtesy Bridget Donahue.

### Jessi Reaves at Bridget Donahue, through June 5.

Wacky and irreverent, but made with obvious conviction, Jessi Reaves's furniture-like sculptures and objects constitute an impressive solo debut. Stepping into the gallery space conjures a visit to a modern furniture showroom. But on closer inspection, it might be a place where the Flintstones shopped. The archaic-looking, rough-hewn details and makeshift components of the would-be couches, coffee tables, armoires, and light fixtures are bizarre in the extreme. After spending some time in the show, however, the funky charm and humor of the work gives way to a keen intelligence, and even moments of beauty.

The Oregon-born New York artist makes puns on modern and contemporary art and design in a number of pieces. Mind at the Rodeo (XJ Fender Table Noguchi Knockoff #2), 2016, for example, mimics a Noguchi kidney-shaped glass-top coffee table, except that the base is made of a cut-up bumper from a Jeep Cherokee. One of my favorite works, Foam Couch with Straps (2016), echoes John Chamberlain's foam rubber couches from the 1960s. Reaves's nod to Chamberlain is certainly witty, but would anyone ever want to sit on this thing?

Claire Voon, “The Visual Indulgences of Furniture Made From Scraps”, *Hyperallergic*, May 18, 2016.

# HYPERALLERGIC

## GALLERIES

### The Visual Indulgences of Furniture Made from Scraps

by Claire Voon on May 18, 2016



*Installation view of Jessi Reaves at Bridget Donahue (all photos by the author for Hyperallergic)*

Stepping into Jessi Reaves's show at Bridget Donahue gallery, I was at once slightly thrown by the sense of having entered a showroom display. For the New York-based artist's first solo exhibition at the gallery, she has filled the room with an assortment of furniture: seemingly scattered arbitrarily in the expansive space are chairs, tables, shelves, and other furnishings.

Sculpted from plywood, foam, oriental strand board, sawdust, and other raw materials, these pieces strip bare what we usually see as upholstered, painted, and polished. Rather than coming off as uniform, manufactured objects, however, they maintain an air of whimsy, with undulating forms and an array of textures that tickle the senses. You feel that each of these has a personality, making for something both functional and visually indulging.

One of my favorite pieces is “Trunk Bed Box (Weather)” (2016), a trunk that resembles a small coffin. Its sterling board walls, with their variegated surface of fragmented wood, has an off-putting roughness that threatens to give you a splinter or two; but lined with milky-hued ruffles of foam, it also tempts you to enter — or at least prod its plushness. The cushioning even appears to spill out from the chest, like whipped cream gratuitously smeared on a dessert, ready to dribble at any moment.

It’s this blending of the seemingly sumptuous with stiff, uncomfortable material that make Reaves’s pieces particularly alluring. A chair titled “Bitches Bonnet Seat” (2016) veils a foam-based core in nylon that Reaves has embroidered with ornate floral patterns. While the foam here seems like it would feel itchy, the delicate, lace-like cover softens it. The fabric also imparts a past elegance that lends the whole piece a touch of romance — this is the sort of chair I imagine would be at home in the once-glorious mansion of Miss Havisham. Also consider “Bad House Shelf,” a twisted wooden wall rack pierced by a bolster-like structure made of black leather. The sleek and smooth column, restrained by the wooden shelves, offers a BDSM aesthetic (also alluded to by the work’s title) that satisfies through its hint of provocative pleasure.

Evident throughout all the works is Reaves’s handiwork that adds an additional ruggedness to each of her objects. She has made little effort to cover up some of the details that suggest her process, from lines of ink on wood — meant to guide her cutting — to dried nuggets of glue, to the puckers on soft surfaces made from fastened staples. Such a revealing of the furniture’s anatomy celebrates individual craftsmanship over mass manufactured objects. Two pieces on view particularly express this: labeled “Noguchi Knockoffs,” a pair of glass-top tables mimick the widely produced modernist design by Isamu Noguchi, except one replaces the traditional hardwood legs with detached Jeep Cherokee fenders; the other, cedar chips and sawdust. Reaves’s playful updates are desirous of furniture with more character and presence, urging that the objects with which we choose to surround ourselves should not have to forgo charisma for functionality.

Leigh Anne Miller, “Lookout: Jessi Reaves”, *Art in America*, April 29, 2016.

# Art in America

EXHIBITIONS THE LOOKOUT



## Jessi Reaves

at Bridget Donahue,  
through Jun. 5  
99 Bowery

It may feel illicit to do so in an art gallery, but you can touch—and sit on—Jessi Reaves’s new furniture sculptures. Some appear to have been turned inside out—take, for example, the couch made of dull yellow upholstery foam strapped to a wood armature—while others are more playful renditions of familiar design objects. A narrow plywood shelf is the “functional” part of *Rules Around Here* (*Waterproof Shelf*), zipped inside a vinyl sheath; the way the fabric tapers at the top, near the sculpture’s “neck,” and a piece of wood pokes out where shoulders would be, makes the piece look like a headless witchy figure. Also irresistible are *Bitches Bonnet Seat*, a low-slung chair upholstered in sheer embroidered lace, and two sly Noguchi knockoffs incorporating decidedly un-Noguchi materials like sawdust, cedar chips and Jeep Cherokee fenders.

—Leigh Anne Miller

Pictured: View of Jessi Reaves’s 2016 exhibition at Bridget Donahue, New York.



“Jessi Reaves”, *The New Yorker*, April 27, 2016.



## ART

THE THEATRE | NIGHT LIFE | ART | DANCE | CLASSICAL MUSIC | MOVIE | ABOVE & BEYOND | FOOD & DRINK

### Art

## JESSI REAVES

April 10 2016 – June 5 2016

“Meaning is use,” Ludwig Wittgenstein wrote. This young American artist clearly agrees, as she dissolves the distinction between sculpture and furniture. (Imagine Matthew Barney and Mika Rottenberg collaborating on a project for Design Within Reach.) A plywood shelf is sheathed in a vinyl wetsuit; rolls of yellowed upholstery foam are bolted together into a makeshift couch. Isamu Noguchi’s signature table, with its ovoid glass top and curved wood base, is reimagined with two doors of a Jeep Grand Cherokee, and to make the surface level Reaves has shimmed one with glue and sawdust. The coldness of modernism takes on the warmth of bodies, and quotation becomes, in Reaves’s formation, not just sincere but erotic.

Bridget Donahue

99 Bowery

New York, NY 10002

<http://www.bridgetdonahue.nyc>

646-896-1368

Sam Korman, “Jessi Reaves”, *Flash Art*, April 26, 2016, Issue 307.

# Flash Art

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ISSUE 307



1 / 7 Jessi Reaves, “Foam Couch with Straps” (2016). Courtesy the Artist and Bridget Donahue, New York.

Review / April 26, 2016

## Jessi Reaves *Bridget Donahue / New York*

*Anyone Knows How It Happened (Headboard for One)* (2016), is the most formally straightforward work in Jessi Reaves’s solo exhibition at Bridget Donahue: two shelves flank a large sheet of plywood with a piece of raw foam stapled bottom-center.

In spite of the candor of the presentation and plainspoken materials, *Anyone Knows...* absorbs a full *abécédaire* of art, design, and other vocabularies. The shelves are surreal, biomorphic protuberances; the headboard distorts International Style’s industrial planarity; the staples inscribe medieval crenellations; and a crafty faux-marble swirl decorates the foam. Or it’s trussed dolphin fins, John Chamberlain’s foam contortions, oyster lips, and a bad reaction to an oil spill. The title’s bare-all

evocation (and possibly exaltation) embodies the spirit of Reaves's furniture-sculptures. With basic, short-shelf-life materials, she imbues her Frankenstein-forms with a life-span, and like the monster, they reveal the inscrutable desires—exotic, romantic, abject and ecstatic—behind the dual acts of classification and use.

The remainder of the exhibition is a showroom display of shelves, chairs, couches, cocktail tables, a lamp and an armoire. Viewers are invited to sit on a few of the pieces, which affects the try-it-out comforts of furniture retail, but the experience of any individual work playfully warps the scenario. From its exterior, the use of *Night Cabinet (Little Miss Attitude)* (2016), is not immediately apparent. But, if one unzips the semitransparent silk bodysock, keys and other valuables can be safely stored on the shelves that comprise its spikey internal skeleton. *Night Cabinet* undresses intention, its purpose performing a burlesque between object and observer.

*Twice Is Not Enough (Red to Green Chair)* (2016), is upholstered in iridescent silk, which fluctuates along a chemical-bath gradient of red, green and orange. A square edge suggests it was cut from a loveseat, and its overstuffed plush renders its ad-hoc and unnaturally tumescent appearance pregnant with further upcycling reinterpretations. It is tempting to relegate Reaves's furniture-sculptures to art's systems of critique and value, but their generosity, as well as their ironies, traffic just as potently (and perversely) in other function-oriented contexts. Within Reave's punk theatricality, there is no passive service; her furniture-sculptures free the desire to define, and let it run its course.

*by* Sam Korman

Josephine Graf, "An Ideological Revision of Furniture Design: Josephine Graf in Conversation with Jessi Reaves", *Mousse Magazine*, February 17, 2016, 230 - 237.

# MOUSSE

MOUSSE 52  
J. REAVES

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JESSI REAVES BUILDS SCULPTURES THAT ARE CHAIRS, SOFAS, SHELVES, AND TABLES – AND VICE VERSA. THESE WORKS DISREGARD DIVISIONS BETWEEN THE FUNCTIONAL AND THE AESTHETIC, WHILE SIMULTANEOUSLY STARING DOWN THE HISTORY OF THAT BINARY. IN SOME, REAVES ENLISTS MODERNIST DESIGNS AS SUBSTRATES, BUNDLING THEM IN UPHOLSTERY FOAM OR SHROUDING THEM IN SILK. IN OTHERS, CLASSIC FABRICATION TECHNIQUES ARE BENT TOWARDS THE STRANGE, OR TURNED INSIDE OUT. ANY EQUATION BETWEEN FUNCTIONALITY AND RATIONALITY IS DISLODGED THROUGH A HEAVY DOSE OF THE ABJECT AND EXCESSIVE. JESSI SPOKE TO ME ON THE PHONE FROM LOS ANGELES, WHERE SHE WAS PREPARING FOR A TWO-PERSON SHOW AT DEL VAZ PROJECTS.

Josephine Graf is a writer and curator living in Brooklyn, NY. She is currently a 2016 M.A. candidate at the Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College.

Jessi Reaves (born 1986 in Oregon) has been included in group exhibitions such as "Natural Flavor" at Ludlow 38, New York (2015); "Pavillon de L'Esprit Nouveau: A 21st Century Show Home" at Swiss Institute, New York (2015); and "American Basketry" at Bed Stuy Love Affair, New York (2014). She recently presented a solo project at SculptureCenter, Long Island City, NY (2016) and will hold a solo exhibition at Bridget Donahue, New York in April 2016.

Opposite - *Butter-egg-chair*, 2015. © Jessi Reaves. Courtesy: the artist and Bridget Donahue, New York. Photo: Marc Brems Tatti

**JOSEPHINE GRAF**  
I want to start off with a broad question about how you came to work at the intersection of sculpture and furniture?

**JESSI REAVES**  
It came out of working professionally doing upholstery, and having those materials and the process of regenerating these older pieces around all the time. People would bring me furniture that had been sitting in the same corner for 30 years, so they were stained by the architecture or daily use. I got so attached to them in their kind of undone-ness, and then it would be this painful process of ripping them apart to make them look new again. Literally turning them inside out.

**JG**  
The process of reworking pre-existing forms obviously carries through to what you are doing today. Can you talk specifically to the modernist designs that you intervene in, and the ideological revision that comes along with changing them materially?

**JR**  
That's kind of to the heart of the whole idea, an ideological revision. In some works, there's a frame that remains unaltered. I'm thinking of those chrome chairs (*Butter Egg Chair*, 2014), for example. In certain instances I'm more concerned with the ideology surrounding the history of a specific piece, the designer, the time period. In others, I'm more focused on how a particular piece has been absorbed culturally. With that work and certain others I'm interested in a particular aesthetic, how it seems trapped between modernism and a kind of failed biomorphism. I'm looking for pieces that attempt to interact with classic modernist design, that aim for that type of elegance, and then miss. So with that chair in particular, it's somewhere between a creature and a chair, it's like the shell of a bug. There's something psychological about that mistake, about aiming for something and then just missing.

**JG**  
Can you talk a little about your ongoing show titled "Office Furniture" in the back room at Bridget Donahue Gallery, which extends until 2024?

**JR**  
The idea to use that space as a revolving showroom was really Bridget's. Everyone kept telling her: what you have to do is to get two sawhorses and a piece of plywood. I'm just very grateful that she was willing to do something beyond that, because there are so many ways in the art world where you're presented with these two decisions – either you go fancy, or you go low class. And they kind of mean the same thing. It's also been interesting to give those pieces a second context to be used and seen after they were shown initially. In the case of the current table (*I Can Dissolve*, 2015), knowing the type of constant use it would have really pushed me to focus on durability, which I often deal with as a secondary consideration.

**JG**  
We've touched on the ways you disrupt the modernist design object. But, I was also considering how your work might be, in a slightly perverse way, the apotheosis of the modernist dream of merging artist and designer?

**JR**  
When I think about the tension between modernism and craft, I often wind up thinking about the Studio Furniture movement. I'm thinking here about Nakashima or Wendell Castle - 1960 through the 1980s. I usually consider those people to be more of the apotheosis of Bauhaus, since in many cases those pieces are such successful mergings of sculpture and craft. With my work I end up so far away from traditional craftsmanship, but I really respect that work and look at it constantly.

**JG**  
How do ideas of irrationality or imperfection play out in relation to this notion of craft?

**JR**  
It seems for most people craft implies some level of mastery. Especially with woodworking, you're held to some standard of perfection and durability. But there's also the flip side, craft can be crude and primitive or childlike. I kind of love the split expectation within the idea of craft. Working with sawdust comes directly out of those ideas, because the technique of mixing sawdust with glue to fix an imperfection in wood is a "woodworker's trick" so to speak, but I've turned it into this crude and irrational decorative gesture.



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AN IDEOLOGICAL REVISION OF FURNITURE DESIGN  
J. GRAF



## AN IDEOLOGICAL REVISION OF FURNITURE DESIGN

JOSEPHINE GRAF IN CONVERSATION WITH JESSI REAVES



**JG** Can you elaborate on the role of the decorative? Or what seems like a general tendency towards the baroque?

**JR** When I think of the baroque I'm really thinking about ornate detail and ornamentation, but also the drama and tension it creates. There is a stark contrast to the reductive tendencies of modernist design. There you have this stripping away, all you're left with is the metal and the upholstery, just very simple elements interacting. I like conflating the two, so that the way of creating the detail is through the construction. So a lot of times, as with the shelves for instance (*Bunny's Face, Aliveness Shelf*, 2016), the marker lines that come from drawing out and planning the piece remain and wind up taking the place of other types of ornamentation. It's kind of the same idea with my use of sawdust. Over the summer I was researching the history of engineered woods, and particleboard in particular. I learned that in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century the first sheets of particleboard were completely handmade. There was a lumber shortage in Germany, and they forged the first pieces using floor sweepings pressed with glue. It was coincidental and obviously interesting to me that I had already been doing that with sawdust from my own floor sweepings. I liked the circularity of that, a material that ends precisely where it began.

**JG** To the eye, plywood appears to be such an unassuming material, but you're deconstructing and reconstructing it into something almost surreal. Maybe this is so off, but when I saw your plywood works at Essex Flowers, I couldn't help thinking about *Lord of the Rings* or something along those lines. Like, what kind of house would this be in?

**JR** Yeah, I love the idea of hobbit furniture. There's something very art deco about hobbit interiors, I need to look into that more.

**JG** So the form/function and art/design binaries that seem to run latent through your practice - are they important to you, or is it more critical to surpass them?

**JR** It's both. A while ago, I was actually looking into why it is phrased as form *versus* function. That phrasing comes from the expression form follows function. So you have this directive statement that gets turned on its head almost immediately. Sculpture has been dealing with this idea for so long, but there's still something that feels mutually exclusive. I'm always looking for little ways to further irritate that, sometimes by using details like beading, or fragile clothing fabrics instead of durable upholstery fabric. With the transparent fabrics, I'm interested in the way they kind of trap the stain. If you spill something on the chair, the stain soaks in, but you can still see it through the fabric, it's encapsulated.

**JG** There seems to be a double approach to transparency, where on the one hand, with your use of foam and plywood, you're making it transparent in the sense of laying it bare. On the other hand, there's a literal transparency to the sheer fabrics with which you're swathing or wrapping the works. I'm thinking of *Maraschino Fairy* (2014) where you've draped a Josef Hoffmann chair in gauzy pink

silk, and what the implications, perhaps even feminist undertones, of that gesture might be.

**JR** It looks like it's wearing lingerie or something.

**JG** There's something sort of erotic to it, which brings you into an anthropomorphic territory.

**JR** With that piece, it really did become as if the chair had slipped into something more comfortable, which was my intention, but it did lead me into this whole idea that I'm dealing with a masculine/feminine binary, which I hadn't expected. The design world is undeniably, throughout history, a male dominated field. So by incorporating those kinds of feminine coded materials, it definitely forces me into that territory, and I feel like that's what made me want to also build the frames myself. If I'm going to own the 'feminizing' of these objects then I also want to go to the other side and cut things up and engage with this very masculine tradition of making furniture.

**JG** I feel like you've been increasingly taking the creation of the underlying structure into your own hands. I'm thinking about the works you showed at Old Room, like *Engine Room Shelving* (2015).

**JR** Those were the first works I made where I really built the whole piece from inside out, I wanted to get inside the kind of masculine process of building and see what I could find. With those works, I was also focused on how they would age, how the foam would eventually crumble and fall apart and in the meantime get dirty, and then you would have the frame exposed underneath. I wanted them to imply a certain type of attitude towards the domestic - this rude upheaval or something.

**JG** The idea of narrative seems to subtend a lot of your works. They almost speak to each other as characters, which might be the antithesis of the modernist desire for autonomy or purity.

**JR** I'm definitely conflating those ideas in the pieces I'm working on now for my upcoming show at Bridget Donahue, which are variations of the Noguchi table. I was thinking about him as this character who is both artist and designer, but who fits seamlessly into both worlds and reinforces all of these modernist ideals, especially with that table. It's fetishized as an art object as well as a piece of design history. So I've taken the basic construction and function and turned it into these crude, even brutal reimaginings of that work.

**JG** So much of what Noguchi stands for now, and this could be broadened to include many of the modernist designs we've mentioned, is a sort of silent elegance. It's passé to talk about elegance. It's just supposed to be embodied, disappear tastefully into the background.

**JR** Yeah, it's like good elegance isn't supposed to really present itself as such. I've definitely stripped away all of the elegance from that table in my new version. Nothing elegant left.

Josephine Graf in conversazione  
con Jessi Reaves

Jessi Reaves realizza sculture che fungono da sedie, divani, scaffali, tavoli e viceversa. Opere che non osservano le divisioni tra il funzionale e l'estetico, benché al tempo stesso rivolgono lo sguardo su tale dicotomia. In alcune di esse Reaves si serve di elementi modernisti come substrati, avvolgendoli con della gommapiuma o ricoprendoli di seta. In altre opere le tecniche di fabbricazione classiche sono virate verso la stranezza. Qualsiasi equazione tra funzionalità e razionalità è rimossa servendosi di una dose massiccia di abiezione ed eccesso. Jessi mi ha rilasciato un'intervista telefonica da Los Angeles, dove sta preparandosi per una mostra bipersonale alla galleria Del Vaz Projects.

**JOSEPHINE GRAF** Vorrei iniziare con una domanda generale. Come sei arrivata a lavorare all'intersezione tra scultura e arredamento?

**JESSI REAVES** Tutto è nato dal fatto che mi occupavo professionalmente di rivestimenti e perciò ero sempre circondata da quel genere di materiali e impegnata a rigenerare quei vecchi pezzi. Le persone mi portavano mobili che erano rimasti per trent'anni sempre nello stesso angolo, motivo per cui erano segnati dall'architettura o dall'uso quotidiano. Mi affezionavo a essi e al loro essere rovinati e poi iniziava il doloroso processo che portava a smembrarli per poi conferire loro un nuovo aspetto. Si trattava letteralmente di rovesciarli.

**JG** Il processo di rielaborazione di forme preesistenti ovviamente viene portato a compimento in quello che fai oggi. Puoi parlare nello specifico degli oggetti di design modernisti su cui intervieni e della revisione ideologica sottesa alla loro trasformazione materiale?

**JR** Al centro di tutta quest'idea c'è proprio una revisione ideologica. In alcune opere troviamo una cornice che rimane inalterata. Penso, ad esempio, a quelle sedie cromate (*Butter Egg Chair*, 2014). In alcuni casi mi interessa di più l'ideologia che sta intorno alla storia di un pezzo specifico, del progettista, dell'epoca, ecc. In altre mi concentro maggiormente sul modo in cui un pezzo specifico è stato assorbito dal punto di vista culturale. In quel lavoro



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J. GRAF

Olivia Erlanger and Jessi Reaves, *City Animals*, 2015, "Natural Flavor" installation view at Ludlow 38, New York.  
Courtesy: Jessi Reaves and Bridget Donahue, New York



Above - *I just live here*, 2015. © Jessi Reaves.  
Courtesy: the artist and Bridget Donahue,  
New York. Photo: Marc Brems Tatti



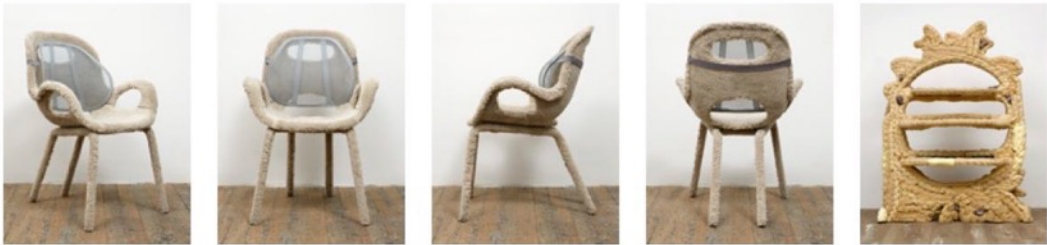
Right - *Kragel's Nap Chair*, 2015. © Jessi Reaves.  
Courtesy: the artist and Bridget Donahue,  
New York. Photo: Marc Brems Tatti

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J. REAVES

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No Reason Work Table, 2015



Keeper's Glove Chair, 2015

Engine Room Shelving Unit, 2015

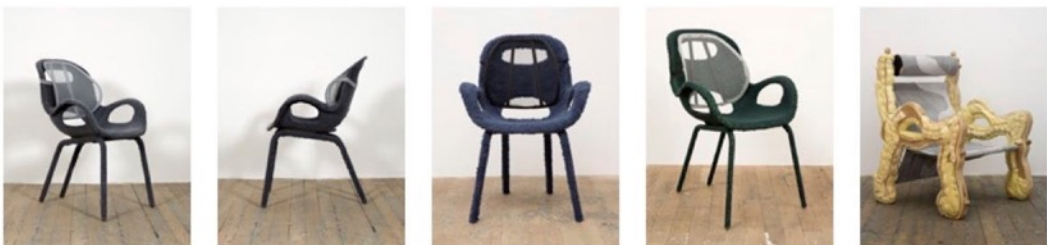


His and Hers Ferraris (Ignazio Giunti), 2014



pro-tour lounge, 2015

sexy hazard ladder, 2015



At Last Night Glove Chair, 2015

Desert Sling, 2015



Idol of the Hares, 2014



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AN IDEOLOGICAL REVISION OF FURNITURE DESIGN  
J. GRAF



*if you want to know what will bring you back to life, it's nothing, 2014*



*Keeper's Glove Chair, 2015*

*Shoe Rack Bench, 2015*



*Rodeo Chair, 2014*



*I Can Dissolve Table, 2015*

*New Life Shelving Unit - Part C, 2015*



*Stained Glass, 2015*



*Dog's Toy Coat Rack, 2015*

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**237** e in certi altri il mio interesse è rivolto a un'estetica particolare, al modo in cui essa sembra intrappolata tra il modernismo e una sorta di biomorfismo mancato. Sto cercando dei pezzi che provino a interagire con il design modernista classico, che aspirino a quel tipo di eleganza senza riuscire a raggiungerla. Per cui quella sedia, in particolare, è a metà strada tra una creatura e una sedia, è come la corazzata di un insetto. C'è qualcosa di psicologico in quell'errore, nel puntare a qualcosa e poi mancarla.

**JG** Puoi parlare della tua mostra intitolata "Office Furniture", attualmente in corso nel retro della galleria Bridget Donahue, che durerà fino al 2024?

**JR** L'idea di usare quello spazio come sala espositiva a rotazione è stata di Bridget. Tutti continuavano a dirla: "Quel che devi fare è prendere due cavalletti e un pezzo di compensato". Le sono molto grata per essere stata disposta ad andare oltre quello, perché ci sono molte situazioni nel mondo dell'arte in cui ci si trova a dover decidere tra due possibilità: usare l'immaginazione o scendere nel cattivo gusto. E in un certo senso significano la stessa cosa. È stato anche interessante offrire a quei pezzi un altro contesto d'uso dopo che erano stati inizialmente esposti. Nel caso del tavolo attuale [*I Can Dissolve*, 2015], il fatto di sapere il tipo di uso costante che se ne sarebbe fatto mi ha costretto a concentrarmi sulla durezza, un aspetto che spesso per me è di secondaria importanza.

**JG** Abbiamo accennato ai modi in cui decostruisci l'oggetto di design modernista. Ma stavo riflettendo anche sul fatto che il tuo lavoro potrebbe essere, in un modo leggermente perverso, l'apoteosi del sogno modernista della fusione tra artista e designer.

**JR** Quando penso alla tensione tra modernismo e tecnica artigianale, finisco spesso per pensare al movimento Studio Furniture. Penso a Nakashima o Wendell Castle, tra gli anni Sessanta e gli anni Ottanta del Novecento. Probabilmente di solito considero quelle persone più una apoteosi del Bauhaus, poiché in molti casi quei pezzi sono una riuscita fusione di scultura e artigianato. Nel caso del mio lavoro vi è un notevole scostamento dall'artigianato tradizionale, ma rispetto davvero quel lavoro e guardo costantemente ad esso.

**JG** Che ruolo svolgono le idee di irrazionalità o imperfezione in rapporto con questa concezione di artigianalità?

**JR** Sembra che per la maggior parte delle persone l'artigianato implichi qualche grado di maestria. Specialmente nella lavorazione del legno sono tenuti a un certo standard di perfezione o di durezza. Ma c'è anche il rovescio della medaglia: l'artigianato può essere crudo e primitivo o infantile. In un certo senso mi piace questa scissione delle aspettative insita nell'idea di artigianato. Il lavoro con la segatura nasce direttamente da quelle idee, perché la tecnica di mescolare la segatura con la colla per aggiustare un'imperfezione nel legno è un "trucco da falegname", per così dire, ma l'ho trasformato in un gesto decorativo crudo e irrazionale.

**JG** Puoi spiegare meglio il ruolo della decoratività? O di quella che sembra essere una tendenza generale verso il barocco?

**JR** Quando penso al barocco penso davvero a particolari decorati e a ornamentazioni, ma anche al dramma e alla tensione che esso crea. C'è un contrasto netto rispetto alle tendenze riduzioniste del design modernista. Lì si procede rimuovendo e rimanendo solamente con il metallo e il rivestimento, elementi semplicissimi che interagiscono tra loro. Mi piace mescolare

le due cose, facendo in modo che il dettaglio sia creato attraverso la costruzione. Così molte volte, come con gli scaffali per esempio [*"Bunny's Face, Aliveness Shelf"*, 2016], le linee tracciate a pennarello che derivano dal disegno e dalla progettazione del pezzo rimangono e finiscono per prendere il posto di altri tipi di ornamentazione. È più o meno la stessa cosa dell'uso che faccio della segatura. Nel corso dell'estate stavo conducendo delle ricerche sui legni multistrati, in particolare il truciolo. Ho scoperto che agli inizi del Novecento i primi fogli di truciolo erano completamente fatti a mano. Vi era una carenza di legname in Germania e costruirono i primi pezzi di truciolo usando i residui sul pavimento mescolati a colla e pressati. È stata una coincidenza, ovviamente interessante per me, che io stessi già facendo la stessa cosa con la segatura raccolta dal mio pavimento. Mi ha colpito la circolarità del processo: un materiale che finisce esattamente là da dove era partito.

**JG** Allo sguardo il compensato si presenta come un materiale così privo di pretese, ma tu lo decostruisci e lo ricostruisci fino a trasformarlo in qualcosa di quasi surreale. Forse sono totalmente fuori strada, ma quando ho visto i tuoi lavori in compensato da Essex Flowers non ho potuto fare a meno di pensare al Signore degli anelli o a qualcosa su quella linea. In che genere di casa potremmo trovare una cosa del genere?



"Now Showing: Jessi Reaves" installation view at SculptureCenter, New York, 2016. © Jessi Reaves. Courtesy: the artist and Bridget Donahue, New York. Photo: Kyle Knodell

**JR** Sì, mi piace l'idea dell'arredamento da hobbit. C'è qualcosa di molto art déco negli interni degli hobbit. Devo analizzare di più quest'aspetto.

**JG** Per quanto riguarda le dicotomie forma/funzione e arte/design, che sembrano latenti in tutta la tua pratica artistica, sono importanti per te o è più importante superarle?

**JR** Entrambe le cose. Un po' di tempo fa stavo analizzando il perché si dica forma contro funzione. Questo modo di dire deriva dall'espressione secondo cui la forma segue la funzione. Per cui si è in presenza di questa affermazione direttiva che viene stravolta quasi immediatamente. La scultura si occupa di tale idea da molto tempo, ma c'è ancora qualcosa che appare come reciprocamente esclusivo. Sono sempre alla ricerca di piccoli modi per andare a toccare provocatoriamente questo aspetto, a volte usando dettagli come delle perline, oppure dei fragili tessuti da abbigliamento al posto dei resistenti tessuti per tappezzeria, perché mi interessa il modo in cui quasi intrappolano le macchie. Se versi qualcosa sulla sedia la macchia si assorbe, ma si può ancora vederla attraverso il tessuto. È racchiusa in esso.

**JG** Sembra esservi un approccio duplice alla trasparenza, per cui, da un lato, attraverso l'uso della gommapiuma e del compensato, ottieni una forma di trasparenza intesa come messa a nudo; dall'altro lato, vi è la trasparenza letterale dei tessuti con cui fasci o avvolgi le opere. Penso a *Maraschino Fairy* (2014), in cui hai ricoperto una sedia di Josef Hoffmann di trasparente seta rosa. Quali implicazioni, forse perfino quali venature femministe, vi possono essere in tale gesto?

**JR** Sembra che indossi della lingerie.

**JG** Vi è un che di vagamento erotico in quest'opera, che ti conduce in un territorio antropomorfo.

**JR** Con quel lavoro è davvero come se la sedia si fosse trasformata in qualcosa di più comodo, che era la mia intenzione, ma questo mi ha portato all'idea di confrontarmi con la dicotomia tra maschile e femminile, che è una cosa che non mi aspettavo. Il mondo del design è stato innegabilmente dominato, durante tutto il corso della storia, dagli uomini. Per cui il fatto di incorporare quei generi di materiali codificati come femminili mi obbliga ad addentrarmi in quel territorio e penso che questo sia ciò che mi ha spinto a desiderare di costruire da me anche le strutture. Se voglio davvero far mia la "femminizzazione" di questi oggetti, allora voglio anche andare dall'altra parte, tagliare le cose e confrontarmi con questa tradizione molto maschile della costruzione di mobili.

**JG** Mi sembra che tu stia assumendo sempre più il controllo del processo di creazione della struttura sottostante. Penso alle opere esposte all'Old Room, come *Engine Room Shelving* (2015).

**JR** Quelle sono le prime opere che ho realizzato in cui ho davvero costruito l'intero pezzo dall'interno all'esterno. Volevo addentrarmi in questo processo maschile di costruzione e vedere che cosa riuscivo a trovare. Con quelle opere mi sono anche concentrata sul loro invecchiamento, su come la gommapiuma alla fine si sbriciolerà e si sfalderà e, nel frattempo, si sporcherà. A quel punto la struttura sottostante sarà esposta. Volevo che indicassero un certo tipo di atteggiamento nei confronti della domesticità, un drammatico capovolgimento o qualcosa d'altro.

**JG** L'idea della narrazione sembra sottesa a molte delle tue opere. Sembra quasi che si parlino l'un l'altra come se fossero personaggi, il che potrebbe essere l'antitesi del desiderio modernista di autonomia o purezza.

**JR** Sto certamente fondendo tali idee nei pezzi su cui sto lavorando per la mia imminente mostra alla galleria Bridget Donahue e che sono variazioni sul tema del tavolo Noguchi. Stavo pensando ad esso come a un personaggio che è al tempo stesso artista e designer, ma che si inserisce senza soluzione di continuità in entrambi i mondi e rafforza tutti questi ideali modernisti, soprattutto con quel tavolo. È feticizzato come oggetto d'arte e anche come un pezzo della storia del design. Per cui sono partita dai suoi fondamenti costruttivi e funzionali e li ho trasformati in rielaborazioni crude, persino brutali, di quell'opera.

**JG** Il Noguchi oggi giorno simboleggia, e questo discorso potrebbe essere esteso a molti degli oggetti di design modernisti di cui abbiamo parlato, una sorta di silenziosa eleganza. È fuori moda parlare di eleganza. Ci si aspetta semplicemente che essa venga incarnata, che scompaia, con gusto, sullo sfondo.

**JR** Sì, è come se la vera eleganza non dovesse realmente presentarsi come tale. Nella mia nuova versione ho privato del tutto il tavolo di tutta la sua eleganza. Non c'è rimasto niente di elegante.



Roberta Smith, “Lower East Side As Petri Dish”, *The New York Times*, April 22, 2016, C29.

# The New York Times

ART & DESIGN | GALLERY GUIDE

## The Lower East Side as Petri Dish

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By ROBERTA SMITH

APRIL 21, 2016



The patron Bridget Finn passes the Jessi Reaves sculpture “Bad Houses Shelf” at Bridget Donahue.  
Byron Smith for The New York Times

OVER the past 18 months or so, the Lower East Side has become gallery central for New York City. You can’t throw a cellphone without hitting a gallery, and quite a few are moving targets. Biggish Chelsea galleries are opening outposts here. Freshman dealers are setting up starter spaces, sometimes while still learning the trade at established galleries, and starters have graduated to larger or more accessible places. And as always, artists continue to take the initiative, opening exhibition spaces of their own. A few art dealers have joined forces to make ends meet.

The neighborhood is like a busy petri dish displaying many stages of the gallery life cycle. Building one of these things and making it last is consuming and risky. It is impressive and also moving to walk the streets of this neighborhood and realize how many people want to take that risk.



## Where the Art Is: A Spring Gallery Guide

Among the new arrivals are smaller Chelsea galleries like Foxy Production, which relocated to a sunny space on Chatham Square and opened with a show of gallery artists. Another transplant, Andrew Edlin, specializing in outsider art, is now ensconced on the Bowery and has mounted an impressive survey of the multi-mediums genius Eugene Von Bruenchenhein. Chelsea's Derek Eller will open on Broome Street on May 6 with the artist Peter Linde Busk. The artist-run Essex Flowers has graduated from the basement of a flower shop to ground-floor quarters on Ludlow Street and now has Saturday as well as Sunday hours. And a few local galleries already have annexes here, most notably Miguel Abreu, among the most esoteric brands in the neighborhood. Starting on Sunday that gallery's large Eldridge Street space will show the videos, film stills and annotated scripts of the uncompromising French independent filmmakers Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet, coinciding with their retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art.

Here are several standout shows.

**BRIDGET DONAHUE** Another strong show is Jessi Reaves's debut at the gallery established on the Bowery last year by Bridget Donahue, formerly a director at Gavin Brown's Enterprise, which also now has a space in the neighborhood. Ms. Reaves makes sculpture that is also furniture, not so much by blurring their shared border as by laying waste to it. Endowed with an aggressive and unsettling wit, her mutant chairs, tables and cabinets take bricolage to a new level, cobbling together found materials, objects large and small, and furniture scraps and innards. A sawdustlike glue is big, as are exposed foam, hand-carved woods, creative upholstery and startling contrasts of materials. Homages abound: Noguchi's classic 1947 coffee table is redone using sliced car doors for the mirroring forms of its base, conjuring Richard Prince. A butterfly chair is rendered in lavender suede and heavy wood, not canvas and tensile metal. I'm not sure how genuinely comfortable some of these pieces are, but they speak in tongues design-wise, turning the language inside out and making a wonderful noise.

Katherine Cusumano, “Domestic Ills: Sculptor Jessi Reaves Elevates Furniture By Making It Weirder”, *W Magazine*, April 21, 2016.

# W

CULTURE » ART & DESIGN » DOMESTIC ILLS: SCULPTOR JESSI REAVES ELEVATES FURNITURE BY MAKING IT WEIRDER



1/12 >

Installation view of Jessi Reaves's solo exhibition at Bridget Donahue Gallery. Photo copyright Jessi Reaves, image courtesy of the artist and Bridget Donahue, New York.

**Domestic Ills: Sculptor Jessi Reaves Elevates Furniture By Making It Weirder** In her debut solo gallery show, the emerging artist Jessi Reaves embraces the misshapen, the uncovered, and the rickety. Climb onboard!

April 21, 2016 5:29 PM | by Katherine Cusumano

Early last fall, the artist Jessi Reaves began work on her first solo gallery exhibition, at Bridget Donahue Gallery in Manhattan's Lower East Side. At first, the process started slow, but ramped up in the three months immediately prior to the opening about a week ago, on April 10.

First came two “knockoffs” of the iconic table by the sculptor Isamu Noguchi: one small, like a coffee table, and a larger piece that incorporates fenders from a car. Reaves works with furniture as sculpture, exploring gender, the dynamic between art and design, and nostalgia in an armchair, a narrow shelving unit, or, say, a Noguchian table.

“Those were exciting pieces to start on,” Reaves said of the knockoffs. “They gave me so many other ideas; it was really easy to move forward from there.”

Over that time, Reaves has gradually accumulated enough pieces to occupy Donahue’s 2,700-square foot gallery. Up until now, the 29-year old artist’s work has mostly been seen in group exhibits. “The pieces have held up well in a group show context because they function in an interesting way next to more ‘traditional’ sculpture,” she explained. “It uses the same basic principles—our main scale reference is still the human body.” She paused, thinking. “I actually don’t think it’s that different.”

What is immediately different, though, is the way that Reaves’s sculptures collapse the distance between the viewer and the art. Her work is meant to be used, sat on, worn in. “Comfort is actually very important to me,” she said. “Sometimes I’ll sacrifice certain materials or I’ll make changes to how something looks visually just so it can be more comfortable.” At the opening, children, their parents, and their pets alike pored over the work, perching on the chairs and couches placed around the gallery alongside shelves and tables. Unexpected combinations abound: A plywood shelf gets a makeover with a vinyl coat (the piece is called “Rules Around Here (Waterproof Shelf)”), while a rich, rust-colored armchair droops and sags in a glamorous, strategically careworn fashion.

Yet, it’s hard to get too comfortable. Reaves worked as an upholsterer after graduating from the Rhode Island School of Design, where she studied painting. That is why she is so at ease producing work that, in many cases, looks not quite right or incomplete. Some pieces haven’t been upholstered; others teeter on the edge of structural integrity. And they exploit a certain kind of nostalgia, memories of furniture that once occupied childhood homes—or maybe, in their misshapen, stripped-bare construction, the curbsides of childhood homes, waiting to be towed away.

But they are still sculptures rather than functional, manufactured design objects. Reaves bristles when the two are conflated. “I actually find design pretty limiting,” she said. “I’m looking to people who aren’t really in the design tradition, even if they’re making functional objects.”

The exhibit follows on the heels of what might more properly be called Reaves’s solo debut, a project with four pieces at SculptureCenter in Long Island City. Two of those pieces are en route to Herald Street Gallery in London, where Reaves will show at the end of the month.

Although the pieces are meant to be interactive, letting them out into the world has required an adjustment. She spent the last two months before the opening at Bridget Donahue working in total solitude at a residency in upstate New York. “Six o’clock would roll around on Thursday and I’d kind of look around and, be like, this is what I’m doing,” she recalled. “I got into it,” she said. “By the end, I didn’t want to leave.”

Jessi Reaves, “Biopic: The story behind an artwork, in the artist’s own words”, *Modern Painters*, April 2016, 4

# MODERN PAINTERS

## BIOPIC

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### Jessi Reaves

**The story behind an artwork,  
in the artist’s own words**

THIS IS A SHELF as well as a sculpture. The piece is constructed of plywood, cedar fence posts, and sawdust. I have built several of these shelves using the same materials, but this is the first that is self-supported, as opposed to hanging on the wall; in that regard, it’s the beginning of a new series.

The scale, color, and cedar wood in this piece are meant to imitate the cabinets built by studio furniture makers in the 1960s and ‘70s. The material and construction are persistently irrational and rudimentary. In that kind of cabinetry you might find details such as carving, inlay, or exotic wood. I have replaced those with my own techniques. The marker lines from measurement and laying out the shapes remain visible. Sawdust and floor sweepings are mixed with glue to create lumpy “details” on the surface of the unassuming plywood, almost like inverse carving.

The piece is meant to approach ideas of imperfection and irrationality as they relate to notions of craft. The term *craft* implies some level of mastery, and, especially with woodworking, you’re held to a certain standard of perfection and durability. But there’s also the flip side: Craft can be crude and primitive or childlike. I enjoy the split expectation within the idea of craft. Working with sawdust comes directly out of those ideas, because the technique of mixing sawdust with glue to fix an imperfection in wood is a woodworker’s trick, so to speak, but I’ve turned it into this crude and irrational decorative gesture.



MP



Eckhaus Latta, "Sightlines", *Art in America*, April 2016, 37.

# Art in America



## ECKHAUS LATTA

The bicoastal design duo shares five recent insights with Ross Simonini



## ART > FASHION

Jessi Reaves is a very good friend who has a show in April at Bridget Donahue's gallery in New York. She makes these deranged, really raw furniture objects. We definitely relate more to contemporary art than to fashion. All our RISD friends have studio practices now, and we feel more in tune with people who are making painting or sculpture or performance-based work than other designers making clothing.

Carson Chan, "The Great Indoors: Show Home", *Pin-Up Magazine*, Issue 19, Fall/Winter 2015/2016, 209 - 225.





# THE GREAT INDOORS

These interiors are stages for public or private ritual, reflection, or adventure. Some even blur the boundaries between the real and the virtual, the world through the looking glass and the world we can hold and touch. So sit back, relax, and enjoy these great indoors!

GRILL ROYAL<sup>178</sup>  
CHALET DE CHARME<sup>186</sup>  
PARABOLOID PAD<sup>194</sup>  
HALL OF MIRRORS<sup>202</sup>  
SHOW HOME<sup>210</sup>



*Clockwise from left:*

*Aranda\Lasch, Off*

*Railing chair (2015);*

*Shawn Maximo, Soft*

*Surrender Lounge*

*rendering (2015);*

*Max Lamb, Marmoreal*

*table (2015); Soft*

*Baroque, Split Wood*

*box (2015); Christian*

*Wassmann, Dodeca-*

*hedron lamp (2015);*

*Philippe Malouin,*

*Mollo (2014); Jessi*

*Reaves, I just live*

*here sofa (2015).*



# SHOW HOME

PHOTOGRAPHY BY NAHO KUBOTA

TEXT BY CARSON CHAN

*PAVILLON DE L'ESPRIT NOUVEAU: A 21st-Century Show Home*, a recent exhibition at the Swiss Institute Contemporary Art New York, was a home-furnishing show in homage to Le Corbusier's seminal temporary pavilion of the same name, which the Swiss-born architect designed for the 1925 Exposition des Arts Décoratifs in Paris. But the pavilion's 2015 iteration also harks back to another significant moment in the history of Modern architecture: Sigfried Giedion's book *Mechanization Takes Command* (1948), a 700-page effort to assemble what the architecture historian called the "anonymous history" of the time. Beyond the museums, villas, and grand urban plans that by the mid-20th century had become emblematic of a modern architecture, Giedion was concerned with the chairs, tables, beds, bathtubs, and kitchens — the objects that more immediately organized quotidian life and increasingly shaped the way humans engaged with the world.

Though the mechanization of the household in the mid-19th century signaled the advent of a "servantless" gentry in Europe, critically, for Giedion, the mechanization of objects and systems that surround us indicated a broader, more essential shift in the manner in which humans live. As assembly lines replaced artisans, and as pastures made way for feedlots, the world we live in and the world we imagine began to align. "Mechanization is the outcome of a mechanistic conception of the world," Giedion observed. In this way, we inhabit and perpetuate a cycle. The Industrial Revolution and the subsequent increasing mechanization of daily lives was as much an entry into modes of efficiency, expediency, and excess, as it was a cycling of machine logic into

human processes. Neither good nor bad, for Giedion, "mechanization is an agent, like water, fire, light. It is blind and without direction of its own." In scrutinizing the machines around us, we get to glimpse the disposition of the self-perpetuating systems of our own creation through which our "anonymous history" becomes individually authored and subjectively hewn.

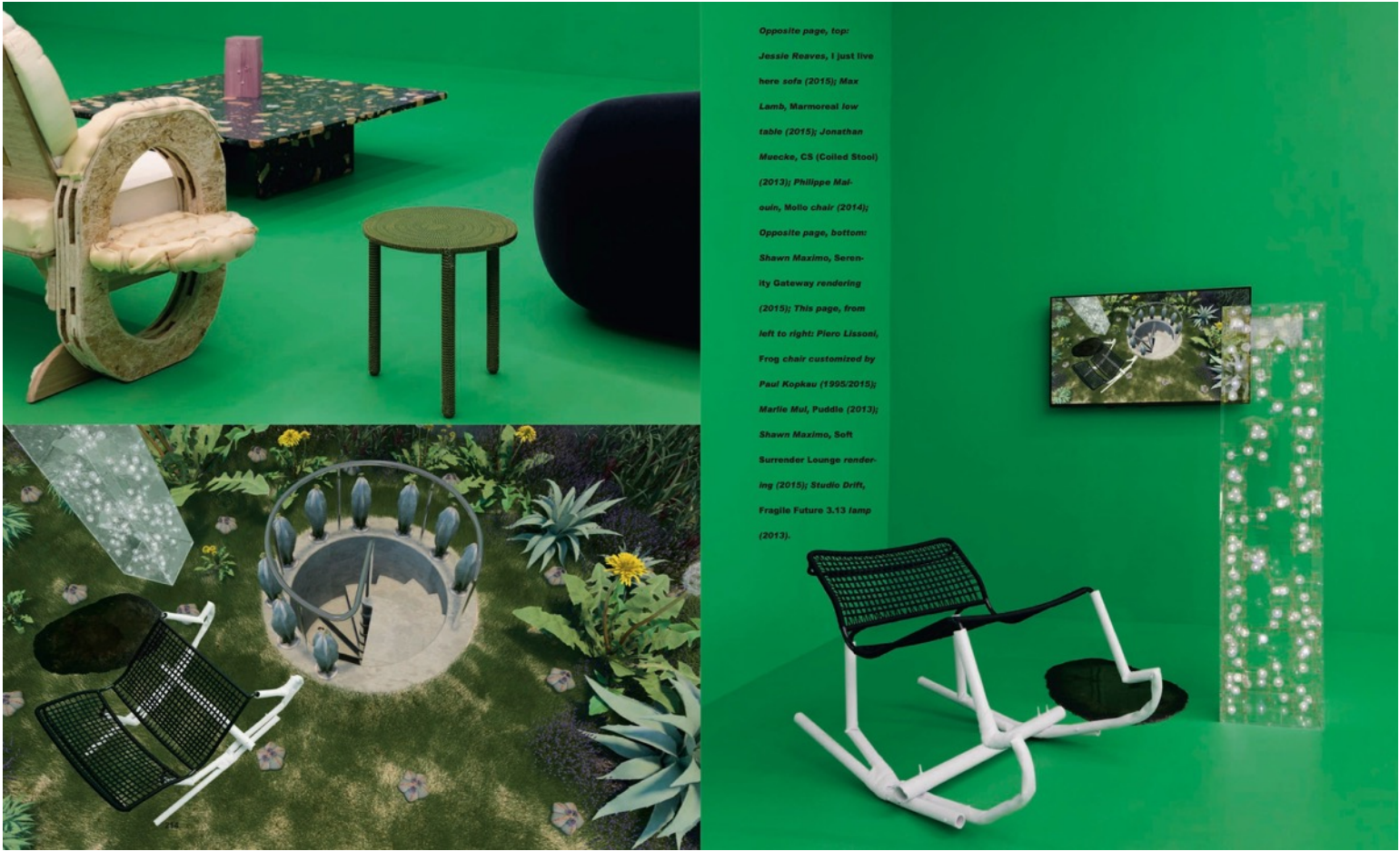
The 2015 *PAVILLON DE L'ESPRIT NOUVEAU* was essentially conceived as a home show with as much affinity to *Die Wohnung unserer Zeit* — a 1931 exhibition of full-scale house mock-ups in Berlin organized by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe — as with contemporary IKEA showrooms. It brings into play the unsettling thought that the things sharing our intimacies, and the objects that tell of our taste and self-image, are often things that entered our home as merchandise, retailed from an ever-expanding list of options. Indeed, networked infrastructures of commerce, communication, and security pervade contemporary living. With walls painted "video green," the exhibition design transformed the Swiss Institute into a giant "green screen" and, in so doing, introduced metaphors of transmission, tele-presence, and surveillance in the home. In each of the six rooms — living, dining, study, kitchen, bedroom, and an outdoor patio — in lieu of framed artwork were flat-screen monitors showing nearby furnishings and visitors transported — chroma-keyed — into other places digitally, from desert scenes to panic-room-like bunker-meets-aquarium interiors. If home shows have traditionally offered new ways to imagine our sense of home in the domestic realm, the exhibition at the Swiss Institute seemed to say: "To be some-



From left to right:  
Jonathan Muecke,  
CS (Colled Steel)  
(2013); Jessie  
Reaves, I just live  
here sofa (2015);  
Hélène Dashorst,  
Mimic pillows  
(2015); Max Lamb,  
Marmoreal low table  
(2015); Soft Baroque,  
Split Wood box  
(2015); Background:  
Shawn Maximo,  
Soft Surrender  
Lounge rendering  
(2015).







Opposite page, top:  
Jessie Reeves, I just live  
here sofa (2015); Max  
Lamb, Marmoreal low  
table (2015); Jonathan  
Muecke, CS (Coiled Stool)  
(2013); Philippe Mal-  
ouin, Mollo chair (2014);  
Opposite page, bottom:  
Shawn Mazimo, Sere-  
nity Gateway rendering  
(2015); This page, from  
left to right: Piero Lissoni,  
Frog chair customized by  
Paul Kopkeu (1995/2015);  
Marlie Mul, Puddle (2013);  
Shawn Mazimo, Soft  
Surrender Lounge render-  
ing (2015); Studio Drift,  
Fragile Future 3.13 lamp  
(2013).









Top: Ian Stell, Side  
Winder tables (2015);  
Lindsey Adelman, Ma-  
rina scences (2015);  
ROLU, 4 Poster Bed  
(2015); Konstantin  
Grcic, Emboss fab-  
ric (2015); Helene  
Dashorst, Mimic  
pillows (2015); Bot-  
tom: Shawn Maximo,  
Holistic Support Zone  
rendering (2015);  
Ifeanyi Oganwu, Bulgy  
Inverted shelf (2014).



Top: Shawn Maxi-  
mo, Synergy Station  
rendering (2015);  
Bottom: Shawn  
Maximo, Sarco  
shelving (2015);  
KramWeisshaar,  
MULTITHREAD desk  
(2012); Alessandro  
Bava, LES chair  
(2015); Konstantin  
Grcic, ALLSTAR  
chair (2014).





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Opposite page: Kram/  
Weisshaar, MULTI-  
THREAD desk (2012);  
Konstantin Grcic,  
ALLSTAR chair (2014);  
Alessandro Bava, LES  
chair (2015); This  
page, from left to right:  
Leon Ransmeier,  
Prototype for Free-  
standing Cane (2015);  
Joris Laarman,  
Maker Chair (Dia-  
mond) (2014); Patricia  
Urquiola, Serena lamp  
prototype (2015).



where is to be somewhere else; to be inside is to be outside; to be at home is to be at work."

In this household scenario of 24-hour self-observation and digital transportation, the most private places can also become the most public. In a recent essay entitled *The Century of the Bed*, architecture scholar Beatriz Colomina argued that "the city has moved into the bed," citing a 2012 report from *The Wall Street Journal* which claimed that 80 percent of young New York City professionals regularly worked from the place usually designated for nighttime sleeping. As distinctions between work and play erode and a machine logic of "24/7 capitalism" (to paraphrase historian Jonathan Crary) sets in, so do the boundaries of our homes dissipate. "Networked electronic technologies have removed any limit to what can be done in bed," Colomina continues and, as if relegating us to the isolating expanses of a digital desert, she concludes that "new media turns us all into inmates, constantly under surveillance, even as we celebrate endless connectivity." Though none of the objects in the Swiss Institute show feature the interactive touchscreens or Internet connectivity one finds in the latest home appliances, all of them were produced through some sort of digital means. At the center of the exhibition is a bed, a ritual place of rest where our bodily needs are confronted with the contemporary need to be always on. Made from a grid of welded wire mesh coated with ChromaFlair iridescent paint, *4 Poster Bed* by RO/LU has the spatial demeanor of Sol LeWitt's boxes, or Superstudio's *Continuous Monument* — a sense that space flows in structured yet unimpeded ways, an effect amplified by the gridded canopy's mirrored ceiling.

In this *21st-Century Show Home*, nature and artifice, individuals and their surroundings, are in communion in ways that seem to bypass the challenges raised by Colomina and Crary. In any case, for many environmental philosophers today, the nature and artifice duality is itself artificial and not particularly useful for forging ways ahead. What surrounds us, be it mechanized objects, or trees, valleys, and sunsets, exists equally within what we call our environment. Even without a green screen, the great outdoors is the great indoors. Both Giedion's study of furnishings as well as the Swiss Institute show point to the fact that we constantly need to reassess the way we engage with what surrounds us. As our environment changes, so too does the anonymous history need to be rewritten. "We must establish a new balance between the individual and collective spheres," Giedion exhorted at the end of *Mechanization Takes Command*. "There is no static equilibrium between man and his environment, between inner and outer reality." In other words, what we design around us are attempts to model larger, even global, systems. In that sense, according to Giedion, Le Corbusier's original pavilion design "was not merely [the architect's] protest" against design as decoration; the components of its interior — each table, vase, chair, or carpet — were words that could recombine into new sentences. Conceived as a whole, "it was at the Pavillon de l'Esprit Nouveau [...] that one first saw [the interplay of heterogeneous elements] clearly and consistently expressed." And as if bestowing to furniture and household items a larger, connected sense of purpose, Giedion concludes that "it is time that we become human again and let the human scale rule over all our ventures."

PAVILLON DE L'ESPRIT NOUVEAU: A 21ST-CENTURY SHOW HOME WAS CURATED BY PIN-UP EDITOR AND CREATIVE DIRECTOR FELIX BURRICHTER, WITH EXHIBITION DESIGN BY ARCHITECT AND ARTIST SHAWN MAXIMO. IT FEATURED WORKS BY LINDSEY ADELMAN, NANU AL-HAMAD, ARANDAILASCH, ALESSANDRO BAVA, JOSH BITELLI, CAMILLE BLIN, LAURELINE GALLIOT, KONSTANTIN GRIC, PAUL KOPKAU, KRAM/WEISSHAAR, JORIS LAARMAN, MAX LAMB, LE CORBUSIER, PIERO LISSONI, PHILIPPE MALOUIN, SHAWN MAXIMO, JASPER MORRISON, JONATHAN MUECKE, MARLIE MUL, IFEANYI OGANWU, LEON RANSMEIER, SEAN RASPET, JESSI REAVES, GUTO REQUENA, RO/LU, ROSSI BIANCHI, JULIKA RUDELIUS, SOFT BAROQUE, ROBERT STADLER, IAN STELL, KATIE STOUT, ELISA STROZYK, STUDIO DRIFT, PATRICIA URQUIOLA, CHRISTIAN WASSMANN, AND BETHAN LAURA WOOD.





Shawn Maximo,  
Sarco shelving  
(2015); Josh Bitelli,  
Outsized Nutrition  
vase (2015).

Julia Trotta, "Scrap Queen", *Pin-Up Magazine*, Issue 19, Fall/Winter 2015/2016, 52 - 53.

# PIN-UP



**SCRAP** When, in early 2015, Bridget Donahue opened her eponymous gallery at 99 Bowery, she decided that, instead of buying standard desks and chairs, she would rather put the money in the hands of one of her artists, Jessi Reaves. A native of Portland, Oregon, the 29-year-old Reaves originally studied furniture design at the Rhode Island School of Design before dropping out, only to return a year later to study painting. On moving to New York in 2010, she got a part-time job as an upholsterer, where she found herself in a studio full of accumulated bits and scraps. It was these leftovers that became the starting point for her sculptural practice. Reaves has a way of making industrial materials look baroque and decorative, coaxing out the character from a slab of plywood or a scrap of foam by carving, twisting, beading, veiling, and manipulating the material with a deliberately un-delicate touch. The results read like a cast of characters — full of individuality, humor, and humanity — and yet they're never divorced from function. They may be sculptures, but they're also chairs, tables, and sofas — pieces that are meant to accommodate the body, to be used, lived with, and loved. Some of the artist's most memorable works are her foam pieces, such as *if you want to know what will bring you back to life, it's nothing* (2014), a wonky lounge chair whose rather Modernist frame carries two roughly-cut foam cushions that are covered in sheer nylon embroidered with decorative beading. Visible through the transparent covers, letters and cut marks are casually scrawled on the foam in black marker, like "seeing someone's pubes

All images © Jessi Reaves. Courtesy Bridget Donahue, New York. All photography by Marc Bruns. All unless otherwise noted.





through sexy lingerie," says Reaves. With her *Engine Room Shelving Unit* (2015), Reaves layered, bunched, and gathered dull-yellow polyurethane foam to emphasize its squishiness, so much so that when the piece was exhibited at Old Room gallery earlier this year, some visitors thought it was made of cookie dough. For Donahue, Reaves produced the *No Reason* work table and the *Keeper's Glove* chair (both 2015). The table, which serves as a communal workstation and centerpiece in the gallery's office, consists of a white irregular tabletop with undulating contours that is carried

# QUEEN

on fleece-upholstered solid X-shaped trestles, the whole stiffened by two wooden stretchers, each of slightly different diameters, that are punctuated by black knobs originally intended as ottoman feet. As for the *Keeper's Glove*, Reaves took five of Karim Rashid's *Oh!* chairs for Umbra and upholstered them in orange, off-white, and gray fleece, and added a sporty nylon-mesh lower-back support. Available for purchase, the office set is playful, comfortable, and clean, and if shrunk down would probably be a good option for a kindergarten classroom.

Donahue is certainly happy. "I told

— **JULIA TROTTA**

Jessi from the beginning, 'There are no rules or guidelines. Just do what you want and I'll pay for the production.' Now all the pieces are sold, and I can't wait for more!" Jessi Reaves has two solo shows planned in 2016, one in January at Del Vaz Projects in Los Angeles and the other at Bridget Donahue in April.

Kate Messinger, "6 Contemporary Female Sculptors to Know (Plus Pieces You Can Afford)", *Man Repeller* (November 12), [http://www.manrepeller.com/best\\_of\\_internet/6-contemporary-female-sculptors-to-know.html](http://www.manrepeller.com/best_of_internet/6-contemporary-female-sculptors-to-know.html).

# MAN REPELLER

## POP CULTURE

### 6 Contemporary Female Sculptors to Know (Plus Pieces You Can Afford)



Andrea McGinty, *I Feel Very Vulnerable Right Now, I Texted Him First*, 2015





*Kate Messinger* | **NOVEMBER 12, 2015**

*You may remember Kate from the time she guided us to starting our art collections. She's back, with more.*

A new wave of contemporary female sculptors are using their hands to break the male-dominated mold: Dwyer Kilcollin, Andrea McGinty, Hannah Levy, Lauren Seiden, Jessi Reaves and Leah Dixon are making names for themselves while pushing art into the third dimension. Their creations are physical manifestations of creativity, strength and wit that demand equal floor space.

However...if your home is not a museum and your biggest financial donor is your boss (the second biggest: your mom on your birthday), there's no reason you can't get started on your own sculpture collection.

So, below, the 6 women in the industry you should know, plus the more affordable "If You Like X, Then Try Y" items to buy.

### Andrea McGinty



*Andrea McGinty, I Feel Very Vulnerable Right Now, I Texted Him First, 2015*

With a killer sense of humor and a refreshing eye on meme culture, McGinty confronts erotica, technology and the Internet by bringing inanimate objects to life. Whether it's through humidifiers dressed in inspirational novelty tees or a series of shattered iPhones displaying her dark sex secrets, McGinty provokes the need to reveal ourselves.

If you like McGinty's wit, try this piece by Brittany Mojo (\$300) or this "Pool Toy" by Misaki Kawai (\$350).

### Dwyer Kilcollin



**BRIDGET DONAHUE**

99 BOWERY 2ND FLOOR, NEW YORK, NY 10002 USA BRIDGETDONAHUE.NYC

*Dwyer Kilcollin, Banquet Conference, 2015*

A stone mason for the digital age, this LA-based artist uses a mixture of organic matter and pigments to handcraft recognizable and abstract objects. Take the chairs and vases resembling formations you might find deep in a cave, or her landscape images that reach out from the stone canvases; Kilcollin's works are at once prehistoric and futuristic.

If you like this table, try this one by Ramon Hulspas (\$1,300).

**Hannah Levy***Hannah Levy, Untitled, 2014*

Using a pairing of organic and metallic substances, Levy makes tactile sculptures that juxtapose the hard and soft textures between body and material. Yes, those fleshy asparagus protruding from the wall might seem risqué and the cutting board with tiny pink nipples a bit off-putting, but by re-crafting everyday objects in materials that resemble skin and bones, humanity is instated where it's least expected.

If you're into the idea of be-nipped household items, try: Universal Isaac pottery (\$65 each)

**Lauren Seiden***Lauren Seiden, Wrap, 2015*

Just because Seiden uses paper and string to craft her large scale sculptures doesn't mean her process is lightweight. Using layers of graphite to create a hardened, almost metallic structure and sheen, these pieces take on the gestures of the artist as she manipulates them while introducing a magnetic movement.

If you like her aesthetic, try Jenny E Balisle for a similar vibe. (Starting around \$750.)

### Jessi Reaves



*Jessi Reaves, Idol of the Hares, 2014*

Who said your furniture can't double as an art piece, and that your art-meets-furniture can't be weird? Reaves turns furniture design inside out (sometimes literally) using expected materials in unexpected places, like foam to make a lounge or polar fleece on an office chair. If Pee Wee Herman had an evil lair, his decorator would be Jessi Reaves.

If you like to get weird, try these pieces by Sabina Ott (\$250) or Margo Weber (\$390)

### Leah Dixon



*Leah Dixon, Stealth Bomber, installation view from the UNTITLED Art Fair in Miami Beach, 2013*

As a performer and an artist, Dixon's work is as much in the process as it is the product. Making objects like a hand-cut yoga mat with images of war or a structure resembling a Stealth Bomber for lounging in Miami beach, Dixon confronts political correctness in physical labor and live creation, describing herself as a "one-woman making machine."

If you like the geometric nature of her work, try this glass and oxidized sculpture by Linda Ross (\$600). If you're looking for a more quiet piece that still takes up space, try Karolina Maszkiewicz. (Starting at \$350)



“Featured Artist: Jessi Reaves”, SculptureNotebook, August 25 - 29, 2015, <http://www.sculpture-center.org/exhibitionsCuratorsNotebook.htm>.

FEATURED ARTIST: **Jessi Reaves**

Operating as both sculpture and furniture, Jessi Reaves' works upend inherited binaries between form and function, fine art and design; Reaves marshals these tensions to their extremes. Forms that reference modernist design are swathed in foam, fleece or sheer fabrics, others are carved and molded out of engineered wood. Through material aggregation and substitution, Reaves disrupts the utopian connotations of rational, industrial purity that haunt the histories of both design and sculpture – introducing, rather, notions of anthropomorphism, fantasy, and excess.

Jessi Reaves (b. 1986) lives and works in New York. She received her BFA from the Rhode Island School of Design. Reaves has work on view at Bridget Donahue, New York, and her work has been shown at venues including STL Gallery, New York; Bed Stuy Love Affair, New York; and Essex Flowers, New York. She will present upcoming solo exhibitions at Bridget Donahue and Del Vas Projects, Los Angeles.



FEATURED ARTIST: Jessi Reaves, pro-tour lounge, 2015. Polyurethane foam, Antron polar fleece, pine, silk, cotton. 30 x 64 x 24 inches. Courtesy the artist and Bridget Donahue, New York. Photo: Marc Brems Tatti.

[www.sculpture-center.org](http://www.sculpture-center.org)

Sat, 29 Aug 2015 12:30:31

#2015 #SculptureCenter #sculpturenotebook #featuredartist #jessi reaves  
#BRIDGET DONAHUE #sculpture



FEATURED ARTIST: Jessi Reaves, New Life Shelving Unit - Part B, 2015. Pine, adhesive, studio trash, ink, polyurethane. Courtesy the artist; Bridget Donahue, New York; and Essex Flowers, New York. Photo: Kyle Knodell.

[www.sculpture-center.org](http://www.sculpture-center.org)

Fri, 28 Aug 2015 12:30:22

#2015 #SculptureCenter #sculpturenotebook #featuredartist #jessi reaves  
#BRIDGET DONAHUE #sculpture



FEATURED ARTIST: Jessi Reaves, Engine Room Shelving Unit, 2015. Pine, polyurethane foam, street, vinyl, linen. Courtesy the artist and Bridget Donahue, New York. Photo: Marc Brems Tatti.

[www.sculpture-center.org](http://www.sculpture-center.org)

Thu, 27 Aug 2015 12:30:12

#2015 #SculptureCenter #sculpturenotebook #featuredartist #jessi reaves  
#BRIDGET DONAHUE #sculpture





FEATURED ARTIST: Jessi Reaves, Idol of the Hares, 2014. Oak, polyurethane foam, silk, cotton, aluminum, and ink. 38 x 28 x 48 inches. Courtesy the artist and Bridget Donahue, New York. Photo: Marc Brems Tatti.

[www.sculpture-center.org](http://www.sculpture-center.org)

Wed, 26 Aug 2015 12:30:26

#2015 #featured artist #SculptureCenter #sculpturenotebook #jessi reaves  
#BRIDGET DONAHUE #sculpture



Jessi Reaves, Keeper's Glove Chairs, 2015. Plastic, steel, Antron Polar Fleece.  
36 x 24 x 24 inches each. Courtesy the artist and Bridget Donahue, New York.  
Photo: Marc Brems Tatti.

Tue, 25 Aug 2015 14:47:48

#2015 #featured artist #SculptureCenter #sculpturenotebook #jessi reaves

“Jessi Reaves”, interview with Bridget Donahue, *Foundations*, No. 3 Fall/Winter 2015, 26 - 33.

FOUNDATIONS





For the latest issue of Foundations we asked several artists, writers, and curators to create conversational pieces that broke out of the traditional question and answer interview format . Using casual models of dialogue, the collaborations would hopefully create interviews that were less institutional, and more unexpected in their content.

# Jessi Reaves

With Bridget Donahue

**BD:** So maybe we can talk about the materials, I think people are really into the material. They are shocked by it.

**JR:** You think because they are confused?

**BD:** Or it's that tension between clean/dirty, design/art?

**JR:** Last night this friend said, I wasn't offended, but he was like, "your stuff just looks better in photos than it does in person." I think he was talking about the material mystery, he was referring to the pieces from the show at **Old Room Gallery**. I guess he didn't see the show, he saw photos from the opening. Then he saw the pieces at the studio, and he felt that once you recognize what the material is, it becomes less interesting. I can really relate to that! You don't often see this material on the exterior, it's covered, but once you warm up to that idea it's not that radical.

**BD:** I wonder if that's an inside-out thing. Like even with the plywood, exposing the edge of that plywood, which you never see, because that clues us in that it is a sandwich of other things; it's not solid wood. I was explaining that to people here the other day.

**JR:** I guess in choosing to use plywood— it is an industrial material that has had all of the qualities of wood taken out of it, it's been transformed into a stable industrial product that behaves nothing like wood. But then when you carve it or treat it in a different way, the undeniable or organic qualities of the material come back, which is the inside-out you were describing. There are also things about "craftsman" woodworking that I'm constantly working against. I always remember, in the brief time I studied furniture, design dudes being like "ooh, the burl of this wood," and like, "yeah, the grain," all of these things that felt like jerkoff qualities about wood. Those people typically reject plywood because it's not luxurious or mysterious, it's a material that's meant to be used in a certain way.

**BD:** Yeah with both materials it seems like making it do what it doesn't do naturally. With the foam and the plywood they are both these standard, flat, rectangular units. Even with the back piece of that chair (points at *Idol of the Hares*).

**JR:** Oh the back of that chair was a miscut from the seat of another chair, but you don't recognize the shape. It's an unfamiliar shape because you're usually sitting on top



## FOUNDATIONS

of it, so when you see that shape on a different plane it seems bizarre, but it's actually a very common upholstery shape from a more traditional chair.

**BD:** That reminds me, I was talking to another artist who makes rather poetic sculpture, and people would say to him, "I love the shadows that it casts on the wall," and he was like, "I call those things 'a given.'" His practice wasn't like Richard Tuttle nor was it like Islamic window/screen carving where one tries to manipulate things in order to make the shadow— so it's a given, he doesn't take credit for that, even though somebody else finds beauty in that. That's a whole different methodology for making abstract art, some people really 'take the given'. For example: the knot in the wood; cool, that's something you can maneuver around but that's such a reactive process. On the contrary, I feel like a lot of things you make are really proactive and aggressive, like carving the plywood or stretching and stitching materials— like the foam, that's more like sculpting the way you push and pull that foam.

**JR:** I guess there is a difference between the pieces where I make the entire frame, which might be considered more proactive, and the pieces like the **ButterEggChair** where I work on top of a found, often modern frame. I think those pieces really juxtapose elements of modernism with the more exposed foam upholstery techniques. You know in modern design they are always talking about the push/pull also, but it's about restraint, like taking something just far enough.

**BD:** What about the fabrics? Do you notice this preoccupation with, for example, sheer fabric, because there have been differences.. for example the first chair (referring to If you want to know what will make you good, it's nothing) where the fabric looks like you could have bought it here in Chinatown and now there are more constructed patchwork fabrics.

**JR:** Well, the sheer fabric comes from wanting to show the markings on the foam, which is something I became interested in when I was working by myself doing upholstery professionally. Whenever I would buy foam from the shop I would buy the cheapest or scrap pieces and they came with all these markings from various attempts to cut out the right size or shape for a certain piece. The foam always had the dimensions marked on the pieces for convenience and I became very attached to that.

**BD:** What about before, I remember you had said something once about the foam getting dirty or showing wear? It's kind

of interesting, the color changes and it picks up dirt, but it's showing us that it happens on all surfaces. On the subway you don't see grime because it's a hard surface, or a leather chair, or a fleece chair; they are all wearing and picking up that dirt or showing use or pollution or dust over time. Do you think about how they will age? Or do you have concerns for the archive or how much these materials are built to last?

**JR:** I guess it's kind of an experiment-in-process to see how they age. Ideally I want people to embrace the kind of patina or whatever you call it.. the stuff that attaches to any object existing in the world. There is a chair that's at my friends house, there are places she spilled and she was concerned about that, I'm just going to sew some patch over it if it bothers her.

**BD:** Like patching clothing?

**JR:** Exactly, I just feel like the longer that I've lived with certain pieces, or ones that I've had in the studio, that have survived parties, I love those pieces more. Even the stains changes over time, spreading out and they kind of have their own life.

**BD:** So then it's interesting, in the grand experiment, that some people will use them as you're intending. Some people will use your work as furniture and some will regard it as sculpture— or furniture for those rooms they don't really use.

**JR:** I hope so; I'd like to see how they age in all different environments. People used to bring me chairs to recover that had been sitting in the same place, in the same house, for so long that they had faded based on the relationship to the windows. It was like they had absorbed the architecture into their surface, which seems ideal to me.

**BD:** So you've never felt compelled, in the studio, to make formal sculpture that wouldn't have a use-function?

**JR:** I mean, there are moments early on when I'm working on something, things aren't attached or screwed together, but the elements are all leaning at these precarious angles. And then I start to understand the allure of the precarious, you know, function is kind of a heavy burden.

**BD:** Of course!

**JR:** With this table for example (referring to **No Reason Work Table**) it was the first big table I'd made, I was terrified that it would wobble or something. If it didn't have to stand up wouldn't





Idol of the Hares, 2014. Oak, polyurethane foam, silk, cotton, aluminum, and ink, 38 x 28 x 48 inches (96.52 x 71.12 x 121.92 cm). Unique.



if you want to know what will bring you back to life it's nothing, 2014. Wood, foam, nylon, beads, and pearls, 33 x 20 x 26 inches (83.82 x 50.80 x 66.04 cm). Unique.



## FOUNDATIONS



that be nice? But at the same time any artist or designer is setting up their own restraints. I really like that restraint.

**BD:** I remember working with one super-smart, big-MFA-grad artist who would make these structural sculptures. The works would go to an art fair or a collector's home and they would warp and break. We'd have to have this big conversation, deducing that this artist, while they learned about conceptual art and theory, they actually don't know how to build things to last, they're just hacking through it! I like the idea of stability as a restraint. I think that's a good way of thinking about it.

**JR:** Yeah well you know what it feels like to sit in a precarious chair or a broken chair.

**BD:** Worst feeling in the world.

**BD:** What about that mirror with the hands? (Referring to **New Life Shelving Unit Part B**) Until that piece, there hasn't been any images in your work.

**JR:** Well, I'm just learning some wood carving, and I was looking at other carved wooden objects to learn. I was looking for things that were created with a certain amount of brute force, or from people who didn't have a lot of experience. I found a few things that jumped out at me. That mirror was really surprising, because it was intended to look friendly, originally it was attached to the this carved wooden sun and it seemed like someone bought it at a Red Hot Chili Peppers concert or something. Whoever created it did not intend it to be creepy, but that's how it turned out. The hands look really emaciated and skeletal and it's thrusting the mirror in your face. I loved the accidentally aggressive attitude of that thing, because when I'm learning a new technique like carving I just kind of power through it.

**BD:** Carving is so exciting because, with you, it's not like you're going back to the land. There's a lot of things that happen in contemporary art, it's not even a deskilling, I just think a lot of artists want to get back into this direct material like the first whittling of wood or Ceramics 101. You know it's like going



upstate and growing your own vegetables. Not to discount that in anyone else's practice, but I like when you go back to something, you don't stop at step one. You blow through the levels, there's not this hippy-dippy attitude.

**JR:** True, some people are in search of the pastoral or the meditative material experiment. Yeah, I think my approach is kind of brutal. I hate sanding. When I get to that stage in making something I always get really angry, wearing the dust mask etc., so I just power through it as much as I can, unlike some craftsmen who might really find pleasure in that and find sanding meditative.

**BD:** Is it about getting to a shape or form that you visualize first?

**JR:** I usually set out with something in mind and then I'm limited by what I can physically accomplish and still have structural integrity. I was stuck in traffic the other day and was stopped right in front of the city street workers and they were chopping up these big pressure treated boards to reconstruct the framework around a huge pipe under the street. It kind of blew my mind watching them for as long as I did. They are incredible! I mean there's the giant water pipe, which has to function perfectly.. and then everything they are building around, it is really patchwork. It still has to be structurally sound but they were improvising, I saw them changing things in midair with the chainsaw. I don't know, I'm really inspired by those people, improvising under the streets. It's the most important architecture in the city but it's hidden so it doesn't have to look perfect; it's big brutal sculpture under there! I'm just interested in any job or task where there are these moments of forfeit, like "this is the best I can do, this is what this is."

**BD:** What about, in the beginning, it was so much about these radical chairs, and then when we built the office you made this big table and then all of a sudden there's many more types of functional objects? Do you just feel like now everything is game? Or how is that process coming along?

**JR:** I think it was the **Engine Room Shelf** at **Old Room Gallery** that was the first thing I've shown that wasn't seating. It was frustrating because with the seating, you have two ways of experiencing it, as the sitter and as the viewer. But with the shelf it was very different, in the end it really functioned more like a sculpture because people didn't really go up and set their drinks down on it, even though I would have been fine with that.

**BD:** Well, also, more of the volume of that piece was dedicated to its shape and form, than to actual storage space. It's usually kind of the other way around.

**JR:** I hadn't thought about that ratio actually! My intention with that piece was to make a shelf that was activated, because usually I think about a shelf as the ultimate dead furniture object; it only exists to hold other objects. I like reassigning function to familiar objects, like if you have a chair in your bedroom that you only throw dirty clothes on, is it still a chair?

**BD:** So what about production? How does that play into all of this? If some design company wanted to make a thousand of one of your chairs, how would you respond to that?

**JR:** I'm not very experienced in the realm of production...so in a certain way I would be drawn to that opportunity just purely for the experience. Especially since they aren't designed for production, I like the idea of adapting them and seeing what would happen.

I like reassigning function to familiar objects, like if you have a chair in your bedroom that you only throw dirty clothes on, is it still a chair?

#### **No Reason Work Table, 2015**

Pine, Antron Polar Fleece, Formica, maple, acrylic, 29 x 48 x 96 inches (73.66 x 121.92 x 243.84 cm). Unique.

## FOUNDATIONS

**BD:** I guess I'm just thinking in terms of Susan Cianciolo, she got swept up into the fashion industry in the early stages of her career. Ultimately she ended up resisting big production, to paraphrase her, "it wasn't about making more." There are imperfect and irregular details in her works. What is nuance in telling someone how to pleat your foam? Because, then, things get generalized or streamlined. Maybe there is enough radicality in your shapes, forms and materials that it could hold anyway.

**JR:** Oh I don't know if I'm that attached to the details. I'm fine with these pieces being re-upholstered and changing over time. But with production, I think about those machines as the ultimate sculptures, you know if you've ever seen pictures of the particle accelerator?

**BD:** I haven't but I'm thinking of Thomas Bayrle's entire body of work?

**JR:** Oh he's incredible! I just feel like the machines that serve production are also incredible. In a selfish way I would want to explore production just to see the machine that would produce these chairs? I see what you're saying with Susan's pieces, because production and materials are so accessible in fashion. I could see how someone would see the beauty and originality in Susan's work and it want to reproduce that. I wonder how that changes between industries? With furniture the materials are a bit more highstakes could we say? To put one of these chairs into production would be a huge undertaking.. I guess that kind of investigation is what's interesting to me.

**BD:** I guess we are lucky because it kind of feels like we are living in a moment when the hybrid is its own topic. You know, we were sending those articles back and forth to each other, *If a Chair is a Work of Art, Can You Still Sit On It?* (referring to the 1991 article in the New York Times by Witold Rybczynski) and that kind of conversation, it's the same thing that happens in comics, fashion, film and art. People will always try to figure out what category something fits into. Actually that show that you're in with Center for Style, from Australia, Matthew Linde's whole PhD thesis argues why fashion can't have a greater seat in art? I kind of find it the most boring topic or debate. Craft vs Art? Give me a break. I guess I feel lucky that I have no hangup myself as to what category things have to fall into. You know, the only time that it creates an issue is in pricing.

**JR:** I agree, I mean I feel like fifty years ago all of these fields of interest were more under one roof: art, architecture, fashion,

film, etc. Those people used to live together and work together and had a much closer dialogue. Now we have these very compartmentalized industries for a variety of reasons. I can't be sure that that was the case, but that's my impression.

**BD:** I think you are right. Even back with Bauhaus or later Donald Judd or Artschwager. You think about these great examples. They felt a little more pure. Now, it's the whole Frances Stark-led USC revolt situation when the industry feeds or influences education. At the end of the day, people are really looking for a return on investment. Be that in their acquisitions but also the education they buy. So the person who is donating money to that school wants there to be an army of people equipped to work for them. You get this more commercialized "communication" department featuring print media, advertising, design, animation, things which lend themselves more to a workforce. I'm sure a lot of great people sacrifice a visionary career in art to pursue one that's more mercenary. You're a tricky one, you worked in furniture so you understand a more mercenary line of work related to furniture. You could have gone to a school that had you sit under a tree thinking about theory. What I appreciate is that when people see your pieces I think they assume it's the opposite.

**JR:** Ha they think it's really dreamy?

**BD:** Yeah, which is a huge accomplishment. I always thought it was interesting because there is a huge facet of visionary architecture and many projects don't realized and many projects get compromised. You continue to keep realizing these wild things. [Doorbell Rings]





New Life Shelving Unit - Part A and New Life Shelving Unit - Part C,  
2015. Pine, adhesive, studio trash, ink, polyurethane. Unique.