

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF FURNITURE PRODUCED
AS ART BY SELECTED SCULPTORS

By

JOHN W. REED

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Oklahoma State University

Stillwater, Oklahoma

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A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF FURNITURE PRODUCED
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Thesis Approved:

Christine J. Salmon

Thesis Adviser

Homer McKinney

Leenera Pepin

D. Durbin

Dean of the Graduate College

803715

PREFACE

Design is relative to all forms, whether created by man or occurring in nature. Design is present in everything we see and comes from everything we do. With every movement, our own bodies create design in space. It is derived from nature to man, and from man, visually back to nature. This can be, and is, a major part of the search for a "rightness"¹ or feeling of "fit"² in the appeal of furnishing in our homes. Good design has a basic element, natural form. In this study, the writer wishes to show how this underlying element of natural form is the cause for a feeling of rightness, correctness, and fit in furniture. "The beautiful is the manifestation of the secret laws of nature, which, but for this appearance, had remained forever concealed from us" (Goethe)³. The feeling of perfection stated here may never be achieved by human craftsmen, but its presence in nature is with us every day, and it is the most important principle in designing forms for living. Because good design is basically nature oriented, the furniture maker is faced with this problem in design.

Nature, in its relationship to furniture, comes to the human environment through design; in the styles of furnishings, in the arrangement of furnishings, and in the total feeling of a completed room. In establishing a definition for design in relation to nature and furniture, Scott defines design as, "a basic human act. Whenever we do something for a definite reason, we are designing."⁴

This definition says design is a function which has a purpose--a basic human act, or condition of the human environment. Robert G. Scott explains the function of design in four phases: "human need"⁵ being the first cause is the need for creating. When a requirement must be fulfilled--human need results. Next is the "formal cause"⁶--the stage where formal thought begins and ideas start to form. The third step is known as the "material cause."⁷ Materials for the actual construction must be chosen, and at this stage, nature begins to play a part in the design. The last phase is the "technical cause"⁸--the stage where the piece is produced and the design becomes a reality.

Referring to Scott's definition of design, we begin to see the effect on furniture. Variations and entirely different environmental settings may be created from one design idea.

Continuing with the design aspect of furnishings, it becomes apparent that basic principles on how to create a design must be determined. Friedman in the book, Interior Design,⁹ gives a good explanation on how a design decision is handled and the variations of the aspects of design. Scott states, "Design decisions about how something is to be made are of two kinds, sometimes made separately and sometimes mixed together."¹⁰

One kind of design decision is concerned with making things work better--making them more comfortable, more efficient, safer, and more economical. The other kind of decision is concerned with how things will look and feel. The first category is often called "functional design"; the second is "visual" or "aesthetic design." The designer finds himself turning out a product which is or is not a success in visual terms, no matter how much he may want to avoid the area of

aesthetics. It is actually very interesting to notice that the best "technical designs" of this sort are usually admired for their appearance as well as their functionality, while peculiar and grotesque-looking pieces of engineering often turn out to work badly also. Some design decisions seem at first to have little to do with "functional design." There can be a very comfortable and practical chair which is very unattractive. The designer succeeded in the practical side of his work, but failed in the visual result of what he was doing.

Trying to improve the chair would probably be impossible because of the difficulty of making changes in appearance without making basic changes in form and construction. Scott continues with, "To design a chair which is successful, both functionally and aesthetically, requires that the job be done from the beginning with the understanding that the two things are inseparable."¹¹

Correctness occurs when man feels good in his surroundings. The feeling of correctness in a home is very important. It causes a sense of belonging, which is fit to each person's own taste. If this feeling is not created, the home becomes, not a home, but merely a place of habitation.

The home has been studied in its various forms (with respect to the particular culture) throughout history. Christopher Alexander says:

A peasant farmhouse, an igloo, or an African's mud hut has a combination of good fit in relation to their respective cultures. These homes, apart from variations caused by slight changes in site and occupancy, have not changed in hundreds of years. Superficial examination shows that they are all versions of the same single form type and convey a powerful sense of their own adequacy and nonarbitrariness. Mies Van Der Rohe's Farnsworth House, though marvelously clear and organized under the impulse of tight formal rules, is certainly not a triumph economically or from the point of view

of the Illinois floods. Buckminster Fuller's geodesic domes have solved weight problems of spanning space, but it is almost impossible to put doors in them.¹²

This, then, is the problem with which we are faced in the design of the home and its furnishings. The human existence that varies so greatly from nature now brings about the problem of a "rightness" to our man-made environment. Quoting from Arnold Friedman, we begin to sense the problem:

We can admire a beaver dam, a bird's nest, or a wasp's nest very easily; but houses and towns and cities leave us less certain of our reactions. In some way we all sense the directness and 'rightness' of natural situations. The man-made elements in our surroundings only occasionally share this quality of 'rightness' Simple rules that try to tell us good design require that things be simple or complex, geometric or curvilinear, symmetrical or asymmetrical simply do not apply to the natural world because the natural world includes examples of all these things The visual result is not something that has been arranged for us to look at. We rather have developed the ability to see in order to help ourselves understand the environment in which we live Our learning is by no means complete, but our main method of learning more is by looking and then trying to understand what we have seen.¹³

The lines in furnishings themselves come from basic forms in nature. The need for specific shapes, as in chairs and beds, were brought about through the shape of the human body. This relationship brought about the "fit" of the human body to the shape of the chair. Nature, in relation to design, is the material from which all design is created. Design is created to satisfy a particular human need. For an understanding of this, we go again to Christopher Alexander.

Design begins with an effort to achieve fitness between two entities; the form and its context. The form is the solution to the problem, the context defines the problem. The rightness of the form depends upon its fit with the context Form is a part of the world over which we have control.¹⁴

The context, in relation to furnishings, is the response created by the furnishings placed in the home and the need for their existence. The

form comes about through the design of these pieces and the control man exerts on the design. The feeling created by this design again is the function with which we are working. The designer, therefore, must take this as a major step in the design of a piece of furniture.

Nature, the basis of design and through which designs flourish, is the deciding factor in creating a sense of natural existence within a design. This does not mean copying or embellishing furnishings with imitations of natural objects but creating the feeling of the proper form which takes place in nature. Beitler states,

Design today, as always, is directed by the combination of tools and materials, methods of construction and purpose or use of the design. The familiar statement that 'form follows function' may not be as clear to some as the statement that 'function should determine form and form should express function.'¹⁵

As stated in Design for You, we see that the modern idea of design is that it should not follow function but merely go along with or coincide with function. Aesthetically, one cannot survive without the other.

Modern furnishings are escaping the role of style as in furnishings of the past. Period furniture formerly tried to achieve this relationship with nature by elaborate decoration and copies of natural objects.

Primitive man may be credited with our modern concepts of form in relation to design. Knowing no rules for his basis of design, he looked only at the true form of nature. Line and shape only had meaning in their simplest forms. The true beauty of the lotus blossom was expressed as a symbol in its most natural line. Beitler states "Unless one can appreciate the beauty of a lowly weed, he cannot appreciate the beauty of a cultivated plant."¹⁶ As design progressed, the search for relations to nature lead to the various period styles in furniture. The

Renaissance, with the idea of glorification of man, showed man's awareness of nature but sometimes lost its entire effect through over-elaboration. Later periods in furniture, such as Rococo and Baroque, are also examples of the ultimate in elaborate ornamentation. Design here became so elaborate that a complete false sense of nature was established. Design had reached a point of grotesque proportion. It was not until the founding of the Bauhaus in the 1920's that designers again turned their attention to the true forms of nature.

The Bauhaus began to teach simplicity of form.

Form related to function began to appear and join artist and craftsman. 'We can create the new building of the future which will unify architecture and sculpture and painting, to rise one day towards heaven from the hands of millions of workers as the crystalline symbol of a coming new faith.'¹⁷

This manifesto of the Bauhaus gave man his new concept of design.

Today's trends in furnishings deal with form through nature by simplicity of line, shape, and color. Emphasis is placed on natural form through balance, proportion, and rhythm. Shape follows the contour of the human figure in forms of smooth plastic or fiberglass, materials that are man-made but conform to the shapes of nature.

Furnishings merely reflect this feeling. When designed properly and arranged within a specific order, furniture can help reflect this feeling of rightness as found in nature. Citing definitions of design has given an insight into how the hidden magic of nature can be portrayed.

The awareness of steps used to create a design, the reasons for design and why design is created in everything we do, give the reason for the feeling of "fit."¹⁸ The ability to note the design in a leaf, then notice its appearance in the motifs found in the home, gives this

feeling. The viewing of a flower and how each petal "fits" in place shows why balance and symmetry within a room or furniture grouping can be perceived. Becoming aware of how natural stone, wood, and other materials relate furniture to home and home to natural setting gives the idea of this "fit."

Nature, refined from crystals of ore to ingots of metal, is still the cause of an effect. The microscopic design in particles of rust indicate a direction back to nature. Refinement in the home and in furnishings is seemingly at the furthestmost point from nature, yet design is still present and that, within itself, gives a definite bond with nature.

Finally, in the words of Esther Warner: "There are as many paths to beauty as there are to God."¹⁹ Design evolves through nature, so it is man's duty to relate nature to his designs, in turn, creating an affinity of man with his environment.

The completion of this study would not have been possible without the cooperation and encouragement of my thesis adviser, Mrs. Christine Salmon.

A special thanks goes to my committee members, Dr. Florence McKinney and Miss Leevera Pepin, for their advice and assistance.

FOOTNOTES

¹Arnold Friedman, John F. Pile, and Forrest Wilson, Interior Design (New York), 1970), p. 7.

²Ethel J. Beitler and Bill Lockhart, Design for You, 2nd Edition, (New York, 1961), p. 16.

³Sybil Emerson, Design: A Creative Approach (Scranton, 1961), p. 3.

⁴Robert G. Scott, Design Fundamentals (New York, 1951), p. 5.

⁵Ibid., p. 6.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid., p. 7.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Friedman, p. 8.

¹⁰Scott, p. 15.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Christopher Alexander, Notes on the Synthesis of Form (Massachusetts, 1968), pp. 15-31.

¹³Friedman, p. 7.

¹⁴Alexander, p. 20.

¹⁵Beitler, p. 17.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 13.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Alexander, p. 29.

¹⁹Beitler, p. 16.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Art has had a significant influence on furniture and the environment for many centuries. Its influence on furniture came mainly through the use of art objects in the home in association with furniture. Occasionally, furniture would appear in works of art. Visual representation and artistic expressions often were placed on the surface of furniture as applied decoration.

With the inception of modern art, the role of both art and furniture began to change. Industrialization began to affect both mediums with a combining of artistic decoration and furniture during the period of Art Nouveau. The Bauhaus and its functional approach to design, which later derived the concept of "form follows function," split the forces of this combined effort. Today, there exist two forms of furniture design. First, is furniture which is created for mass production and maintains a functional approach to its design, and the second is furniture which is created with an artistic concept and exists as a limited production form of highly expressive, and creative furniture. This latter form of furniture is the topic of this study--furniture that exists as a form of artistic expression, maintaining a symbolic visual representation and an aesthetic appeal; it is an art form as well as a functional piece of furniture, existing in a sculptural context in its relation to space and the environment. This form of expression which

does not exist as a style but rather as an area of furniture design may be considered "art-furniture."

Statement of Problem

Contemporary trends in furniture design are questioning the acceptability of the "form follows function" concept of past decades in relation to the role furniture must play in the modern environment. To what extent can form follow function and maintain an aesthetic appeal? The purpose of this study is to show, through a comparison of selected designers, the changing role of furniture by presenting a relationship of art to furniture design. This relationship is represented by a limited number of highly artistic creations in the field of furniture design and will be considered as art-furniture. The space relation concept which applies to sculpture is beginning to show some appearance in furniture design and the modern environment. This concept is testing how far the function of a piece of furniture can be stressed and still maintain the proper aesthetic appeal needed to relate to the modern environment.

The modern environment has been created through a continuing awareness of our ecological resources. Materials are becoming a factor, where excess of materials causes pollution and those foreign to nature and the natural environment are regarded as hazards to the existence of man. In the interior, the environment is becoming more confined and space is becoming an essential factor in relation to this confinement. The appeal created for living within this environment becomes a matter of essential awareness. In its totality, the environment must relate to the basic nature of man and not work in contrast to this nature.

Furniture designers of today are not considered in the role of craftsmen as were traditional furniture producers. Traditionally, the craftsman was one who had a strong technical skill but did not conceive designs outside the realm of traditional skills passed down from generation to generation. Today's designer has become an artist as well as a craftsman and in many cases the functional piece is created by the designer as an artist-craftsman. His furniture is designed so that each piece will serve as an art object and still function as a piece of furniture.

The concepts of furniture have changed and will continue to change due to the rapid pace of the innovations of modern technology. Furniture is no longer backed against a wall but placed in the open spaces of the interior environment and must serve as a place to relax as well as shape the surrounding space in the room. This latter concept serves the same function as sculpture in relation to its environment. This need for furniture to become sculptural in its aesthetic appeal, creates a dual role for the furniture designer. This role requires that he become an artist as well as a craftsman and has given furniture the right to be considered as an art-form.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to:

1. gain knowledge and understanding of the design aspects of furniture production and designers who work in the area of "art-furniture";
2. show how furniture can function not only for comfort but as a form of artistic expression, limited in production and personal in aesthetic appeal;

3. compare the particular designs of the three leading artist-designers in the area of furniture as an art form;

4. motivate others into the realization that furniture can be more than just a place of rest or storage and that it can be extremely expressive and personal in its aesthetic appeal and that there is more to furniture design than the functional mass produced designs which are in abundance today.

In today's world of mass production and functional design in the field of furniture, there are a limited number of designers who work, not only as designers but, also as artists. These designers are aware of the problems that exist in furniture design that is controlled by automation; they are also aware that design is more than a means to this end. These artist/designers are working, not for planned obsolescence, but for well crafted furniture of an individual style that is not meant for the majority of the public but for those few who appreciate art-furniture. They are creating a form of furniture which is aesthetically pleasing, personal in its relationship to people, natural in its relationship to the environment, individual in its style, may be considered an art-form, and can aptly be called art-furniture.

Methodology

For the purpose of evaluation, three artists were selected who have designed furniture and who maintain similar views on design and its relation to the environment. Isamu Noguchi, primarily a sculptor, has at various periods in his life designed furniture. He is continually involved in creating art as a part of life, nature and the environment. Wharton Esherick, primarily a sculptor, has been highly regarded as the

"Dean of American Craftsmen."¹ He is most noted for his achievements in the sculptural and individualized style of his furniture and the relationship of it to the total environment. Wendell Castle, also a sculptor, is noted for his artistic expressions in the form of furniture design and in creating total sculptural living environments.

These three artist-craftsmen were chosen because of their similarity of views regarding art, not as a limited nor specialized profession but, as a benefit for all mankind. All three have similar views of nature believing it to be the true basis of all design, its presence in form must be maintained for the existence of an artistic expression. They were also selected for their common endeavors to create a totality of form in relation to the total environment and for their common ideal that furniture should not only be functional but should also exist as a form of artistic expression and create an aesthetic appeal relating to the total environment.

Limitations

The primary purpose of this study is to question the feasibility of the concept of "form follows function" in relation to the modern environment and show that due to mass production, a certain lack of aesthetic appeal and visual expression is omitted in furniture design. In recognition of this fact, a limited amount of highly creative and artistic furniture is being created as a visual statement expressing the need for a relationship to the environment in the design of furniture.

Limitations occur in the fact that there are so few artists turned furniture designers whose work is created as a form of artistic expression which can be recognized as a true form of furniture and art. Due

to the individualized styles of each artist, comparisons can only be made in a general nature of their expressions and concepts dealing with artistic philosophies.

FOOTNOTES

¹Gertrude Benson, "Wharton Esherick," Craft Horizons, Vol. 19:1 (January, 1959), p. 33.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Isamu Noguchi

A sculptor by profession, Isamu Noguchi is also known for his achievements as a furniture designer. Art to him is not a limiting or specialized profession but an all encompassing form of expression that plays an important part in every person's life. In relating architecture to art, he states that they "should complement each other. Art can include the furniture we sit upon, the light we use and all objects inside and outside a building" ¹

Israel Horowitz, in an article entitled In the Noguchi, cites an apt example of Noguchi's awareness of art when he was commissioned to erect a piece of sculpture at Piazza del Duomo in Spoleto, Italy. The piece arrived and was erected but no one knew what it was. (Figure 1)

Suddenly, kids came from nowhere, hundreds of them, everybody knew that kids know enough not to mess around with anybody's orange cement sculpture, especially Isamu Noguchi's. They climbed on it, in it, through it, under it, around it. A car. A train. A tree. A mum. A dad. A stage. A wonderful everything. They hugged it. Kicked it. Kissed it. Used it. Abused it. Loved it.

Carefully climbing into the thing, I climbed through it and finally on it, where I sat and pretended I didn't understand the psychological ramifications of wanting to sit on top of the huge orange thing on the Piazza del Duomo I poked my head out of one of the round holes and saw Noguchi, himself, poking his head out of one of the round holes from an apartment I saw how happy he was that none of the grownups knew what was going on while all of the kids knew exactly what was going on. ²

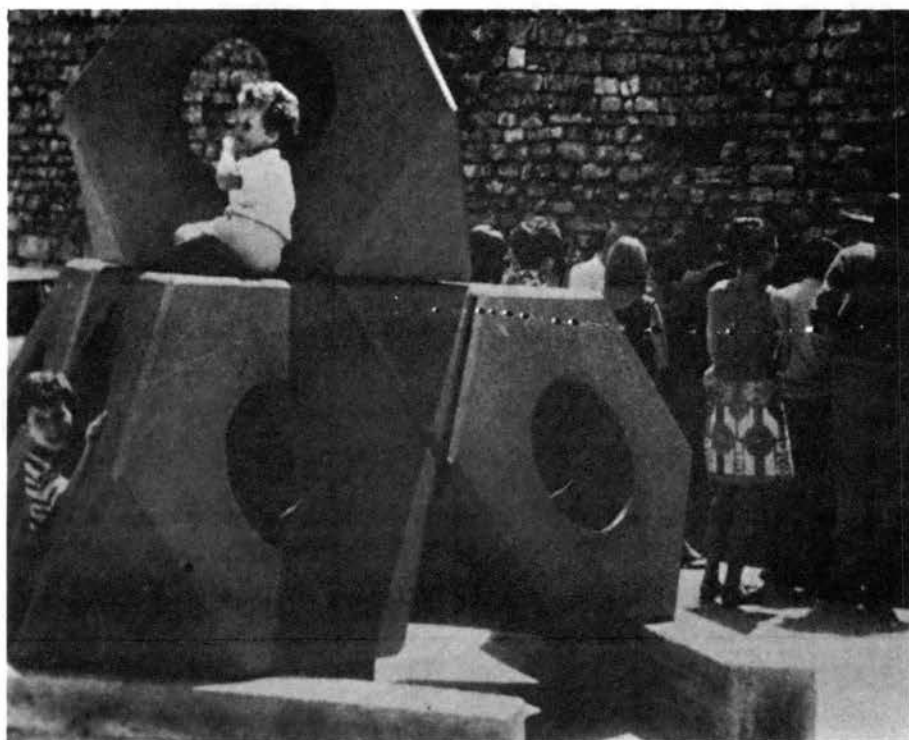


Figure 1. Sculpture by Isamu Noguchi Erected at Spoleto,
Italy

Here it becomes evident that the role of art is changing in the modern world.

Due to the pressure being placed on our environment by an increasing population, space is becoming a more important factor. Art is being crowded into a very limited and specialized role. John Gruen expresses this point in The Artist Speaks: Isamu Noguchi, "I guess most people won't accept art unless it's labeled art--and that's a sad thing."³ For Noguchi art is an all encompassing reality, and should not follow a limiting role.

Artists have become specialized technicians or specialized wonder boys. They've become priests of a small area, instead of functioning parts of a large society. I think the creation of art an intimate involvement between matter and man.⁴

Noguchi states his feelings for his playground equipment as for me playgrounds are a way of creating the world. It is not a job, it's a way of creating an ideal on a smaller scale I want the child to discover something I created for him. And I want him to confront the earth as perhaps early man confronted it.⁵

Returning again to Horowitz,

In viewing the rather delicious juxtaposition of the Noguchi and the church on the Piazza del Duomo, I was struck by Noguchi's vision of not only what these objects should be but where they should be; the ultimate design.⁶ (Figure 2)

Isamu Noguchi once said that it was his wish "to make sculpture a living and vital part of man's environment. I want to make it useful, pleasing and human, something more than simple decoration."⁷ Noguchi, a sculptor, seeks to use his talents for the creation of an overall environment to extend the role of art into the lives of people. In relating his sculpture to the environment he states,

You see, I'm not really interested in doing sculpture, as such. I do them, of course. But it's the world I look for, there where everything is sculpture. And in looking for it

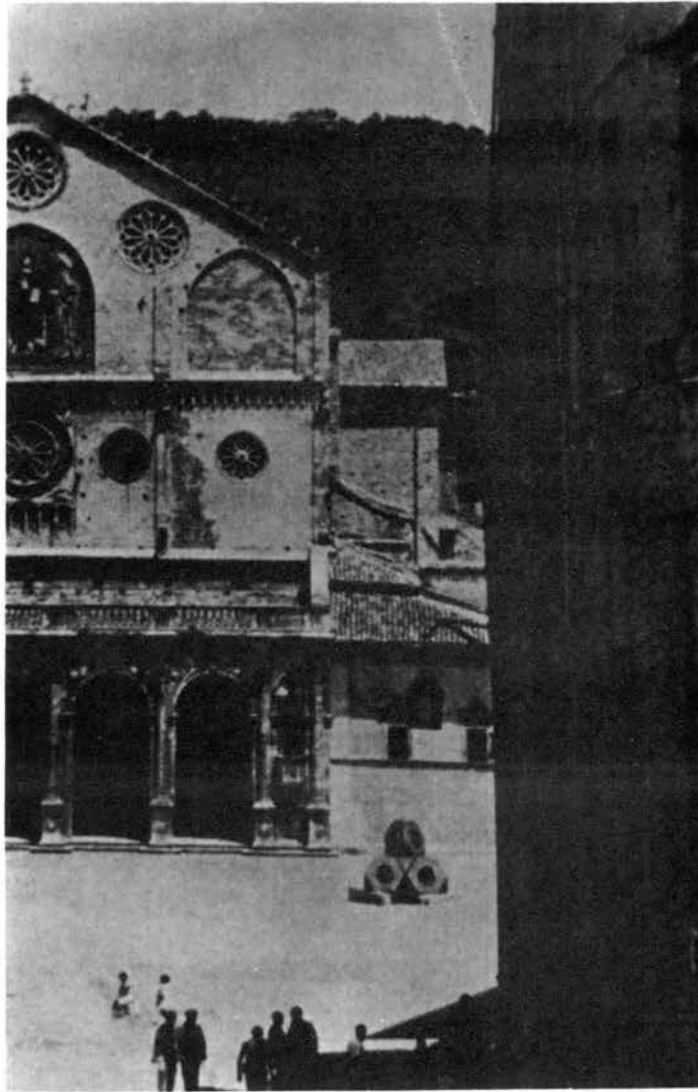


Figure 2. Piazza del Duomo in Spoleto, Italy

I try to do something about it. I want it to be the way it ought to be--or the way it was. I think there's an awful lot of clutter you have to get through in order to find that simple truth.⁸ (Figure 3)

This is why Noguchi deals not only with sculpture but relates his views to many other areas, including furniture design. "At one point, when I became disillusioned about my function in the art world, I decided I would work in some other field, but still as an artist. And so I did furniture."⁹ (Figure 4)

Believing that by turning to furniture design he was not making himself any less of an artist but merely feeling that

I couldn't function; or make a living in the acceptable art world. Now the art world has become freer--you are able to do things that have to do with light and all sorts of things that have a direct contact with the life experience.¹⁰

Noguchi indicates here how he feels that art involves many fields and all are working for a better life experience by their involvement with art.

Nature maintains a significant share of Noguchi's attention. Having an oriental father and having spent his early years in Japan, Noguchi's work relies on natural forms and symbolic representations of oriental spiritual symbols. Noguchi says of his work: "Whatever quality my work has now is I hope of nature There has been a minimum of the importance of will and thought. The medium which is the earth itself has its own way" ¹¹ Noguchi is quoted by Mary Jo Weale as "He regrets the passing of nature from art and believes we cannot survive long without it."¹² In a discussion on his sculptural forms he also states "My sculptures are nature."¹³ Materials are also handled with a sense of reverence for their character. Dore Ashton states

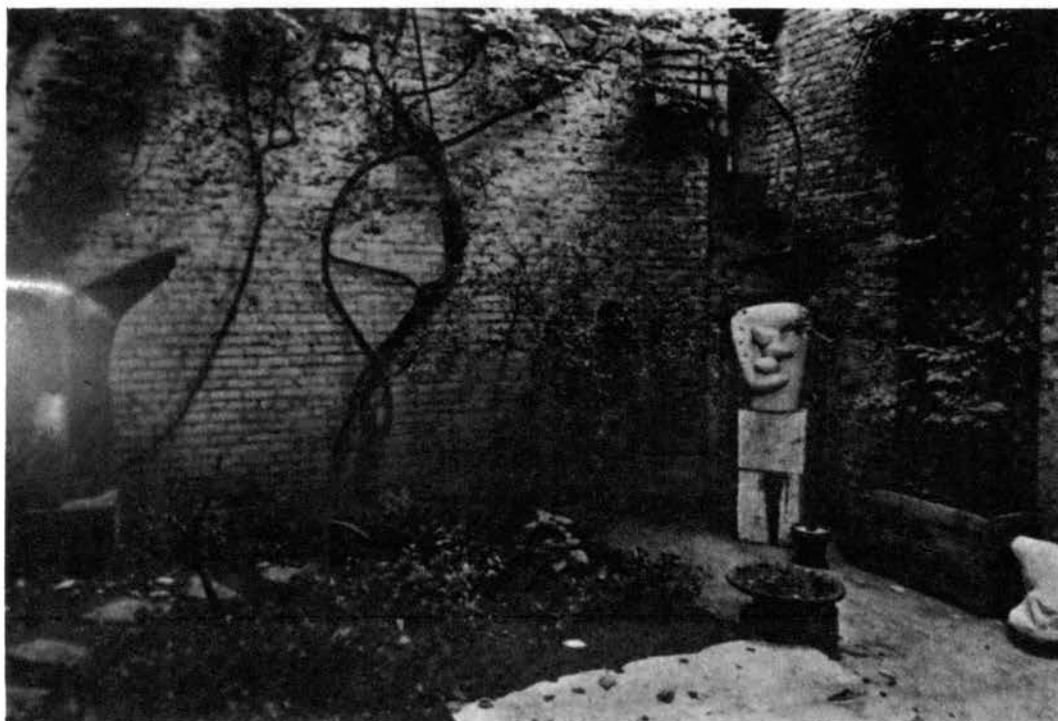


Figure 3. Sculptural Environment by Isamu Noguchi

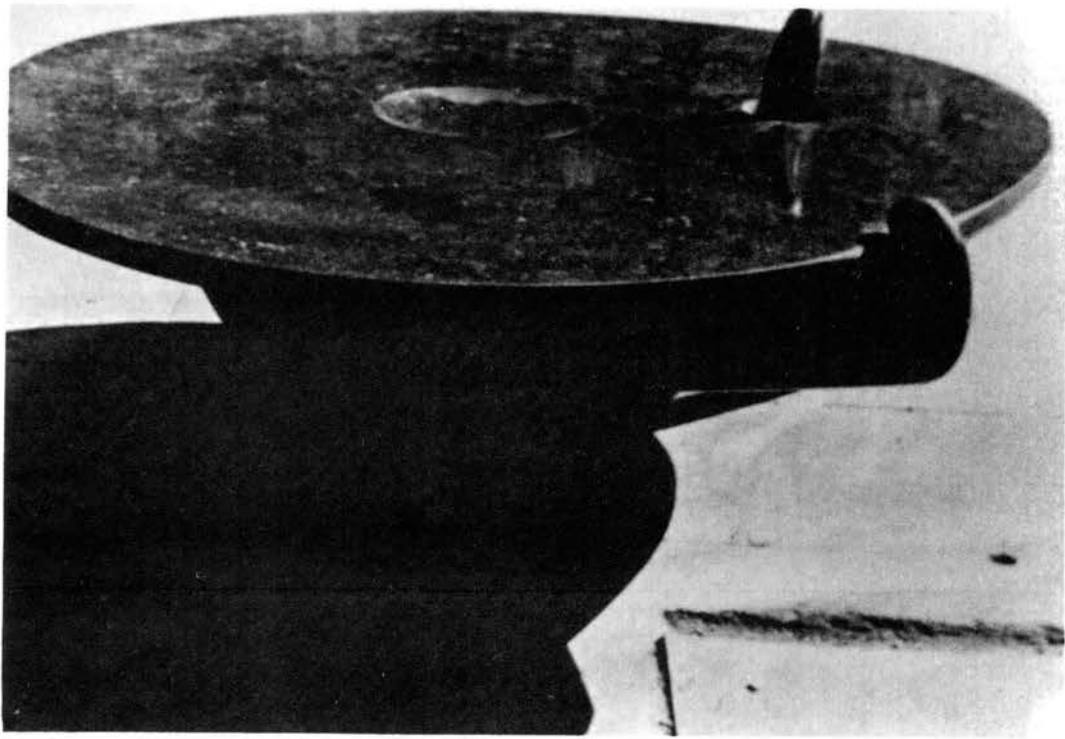


Figure 4. Table for Samuel Dretzin by Isamu Noguchi

Noguchi searches for "the purest visual description of the characteristics he senses in his materials."¹⁴

Wharton Esherick

Wood has never been held by more sensitive hands than by those of Wharton Esherick, nor has its grace and warmth been depicted in a more loving manner. Nature reigns supreme in Esherick's designs. Wendell Castle made this statement about Wharton Esherick: "Esherick taught me that the making of furniture could be a form of sculpture; . . . he demonstrated the importance of the entire sculptural environment."¹⁵ "Dean of American craftsmen" has often been placed after his name. He is recognized by his achievements in sculpture and environmental design. Comparing Wharton Esherick's work and philosophies with those of Noguchi would do honor to both men. Gertrude Benson, a Philadelphia art journalist, called Esherick "a Thoreau of our times . . . a ruggedly honest, independent worker and an engaging, many faceted personality, he is many things to many people."¹⁶ (Figures 5 and 6)

Conceptually, Wharton Esherick's idiom is that of a sculptor. His incessant desire to create a total environment along with his feeling and love for nature rank him between Thoreau in the past and Noguchi in the present. Dorothy Grafly states that "Given a feeling of place, Esherick can follow through to create an environment that is sculptural in its own right."¹⁷ It is this relation of his furniture and sculpture to its environment that enables Esherick to be compared to Noguchi. Referring again to Grafly "The aptness of the creation to its environment gives Esherick's work much of its peculiar charm, indoors and out."¹⁸ Gertrude Benson calls him "a sculptor who thinks and feels in large



Figure 5. Wood Chair With Leather Seat and Back by Wharton Esherick

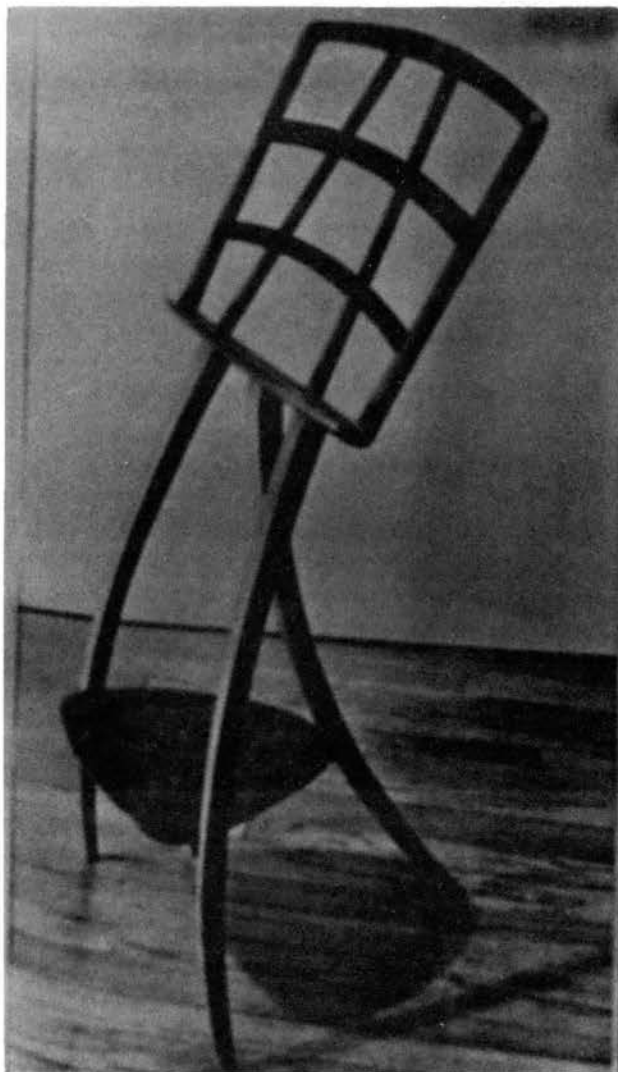


Figure 6. Cherry and Walnut Music
Stand by Wharton Esherick

concepts and a craftsman capable of envisioning and executing every detail in an experimental approach."¹⁹

Comparing Esherick again with Noguchi, their control and handling of space becomes an important element in relation to their designs. RIBA Journal (Royal Institute of British Architects) indicates "Often commissioned to produce sculpture to stand in front of important buildings, Noguchi says that he asks to be allowed to model the whole space instead."²⁰ Dorothy Grafly states that what Esherick does

is instinctive reaction to his innate feeling for form and balance in space. His entire creative process is a matter of growth and the final achievement thus differs radically, as a rule, from the original sketch.²¹

Referring again to Noguchi, "The more I change, the more I'm me, the new me of that new time. To change is to invent, to create anew. That is why I applaud change."²² Showing again the close relationship between the two artists by their concepts of space and change.

Industrial design states that Wharton Esherick's aim is to elevate furniture to the category of sculpture, to instill the pure utilitarian function of furniture with the same characteristics that govern sculpture; mass, line, movement and planes that appeal to the eye with an interesting play of light and shade.²³

Thus showing that Esherick was a sculptor who created furniture by "a love of nature, materials and oriental art. From the depths of such sources well up basic abstract forms that induce a mood."²⁴ Grafly again states "sculpture considered in the light of basic form, can extend its range to embrace virtually everything to which a relation between form and space is essential."²⁵ By this rule, Wharton Esherick lived and created environments that reflected his life style. Environments that may not be considered in themselves a style but the totality

of a man's life-long dreams. Looking again to Grafly, we find "to him art was growth; growth belongs to nature; nature lives not only in man but also in wood and the fields."²⁶ (Figure 7)

Esherick once stated "The sculptor knows that as work progresses it needs constant creative adjustment."²⁷ Like Noguchi, Wharton Esherick was a firm believer in change and did not claim to have a particular style of work but merely a life style of his own. Relating this attitude of life to his art he stated in a discussion, with Sam Maloff, on wood, "If it is perishable what of it? Nothing lasts forever. Trees die. Other trees grow. If it is so in nature, why not in art?"²⁸ Wharton Esherick created some of the most individual and creative works of furniture of our century.

Wendell Castle

Esherick did not teach and did not have any apprentices to carry on his contribution to furniture design but he does have one disciple who credits him with having created his awareness of sculptural form in furniture design. Wendell Castle states,

Esherick's furniture began my involvement I had never seen anything like his designs before. Furthermore, it had never occurred to me that furniture could be anything so personal and so powerful as sculpture.²⁹

A sculptor by profession, Castle was inspired by the idea of a functional piece that created such aesthetic appeal as a form of visual expression. Mary Jo Weale states, "Castle began designing furniture when he discovered his sculpture looked like furniture and today he designs architecture, interiors, and space."³⁰ Today his projects show a similarity in design philosophies to those of both Esherick and

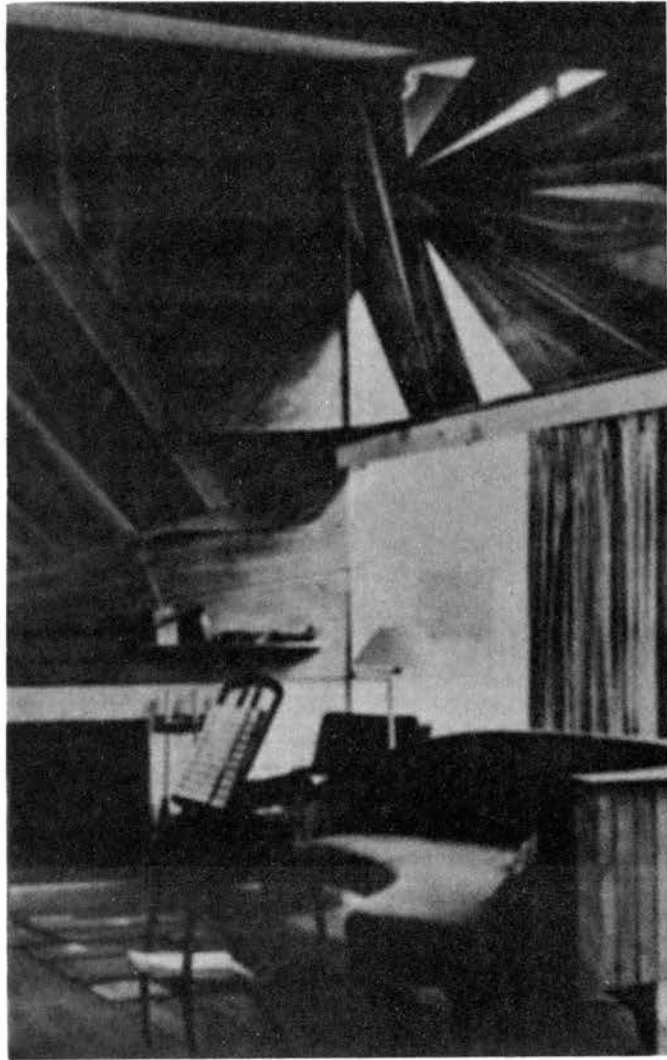


Figure 7. Interior Environment by Wharton Esherick

Noguchi. Castle states in "Limber Timber," an article for Newsweek, "I am trying to get furniture off its legs and to be itself."³¹ This idea easily could have come from either Esherick or Noguchi. Mary Jo Weale quotes Castle as saying,

I derive my forms from the structure of nature. To be inventive and playful and produce furniture which is a complement of nature, rather than in contrast to it, is my philosophy Furniture forms should not be shaped by trends or what is currently in vogue in furniture fashion, but rather the forms come from inherent life forces. Furniture should not be subservient to the mechanics of life's activities, or to the techniques of the machine. I believe furniture must be conceived with vision. Perhaps this will eliminate furniture or merge it with architecture.³²

Helen Giambruni concludes that his furniture is "personal rather than anonymous and, therefore, goes smack against the mainstream of twentieth century design."³³ (Figure 8)

Nature holds a strong influence on Castle's designs. Its bimorphic shapes are prevalent in his designs. For this relationship, Castle states: "To me an organic form as an entity does not let itself be grasped in the sense that a box-like form is easily comprehended and measured at first glance,"³⁴ indicating in this passage that the longer a work holds the attention of the viewer the more valid it will be in its relation to him. If an object is conceived in a glance, then the less relevant it will be to him and the quicker it will be forgotten. Attention creates a greater awareness of the visual statement the piece wishes to confer. Helen Giambruni compares these ideas to those of Odilon Redon, who said of his own creations:

My originality consists in bringing to life, in a human way, improbable beings and making them live according to the laws of probability, by putting--as far as possible--the logic of the visible at the service of the invisible.³⁵

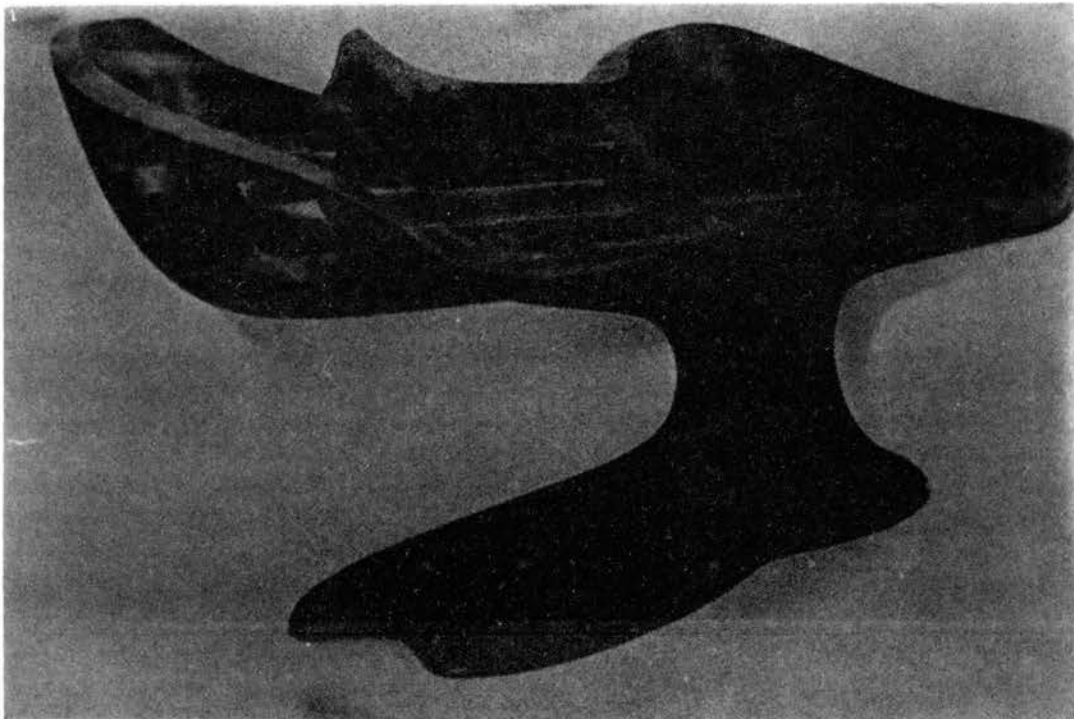


Figure 8. Laminated Wood Bench by Wendell Castle

Castle feels that a similar purpose is served by his work:

I try in my work to fulfill both the aesthetic and the practical purpose but if one were to become dominant I would choose the aesthetic My idea is not to reconstruct or stylize natural forms, but to produce a synthesis or metamorphosis of natural forms.³⁶

This type of furniture becomes more than a mere functional piece that sits in a corner. If it were placed in a corner it would control the space and create more interest. Helen Giambruni reasons that:

Castle found that almost no modern furniture interested him because everyone was doing 'form-follows-function' pieces, distinguishable, perhaps, by quality of craftsmanship but not by individual expression with the exception, of course, of the work of Wharton Esherick. It seemed to him that because the craftsman cannot hope to compete with the machine in efficiency, or economy, he should emphasize the one thing in which he cannot be surpassed by the machine--his imagination. Each craftsman should find, out of endless expressive possibilities, what speaks for him; he must reach beyond questions of utility to individuality, to the ideological function of art.³⁷

In this sense, Castle, being an artist, has the ability and awareness to create what he feels to be a valid answer to the problem he encountered in furniture; namely, a piece of furniture which becomes personal and expressive with an inherent relation to natural forms. Thus, furniture becomes a combination of artistic expression and functional furniture creating a functional form of expression that can aptly be called art-furniture. (Figure 9)

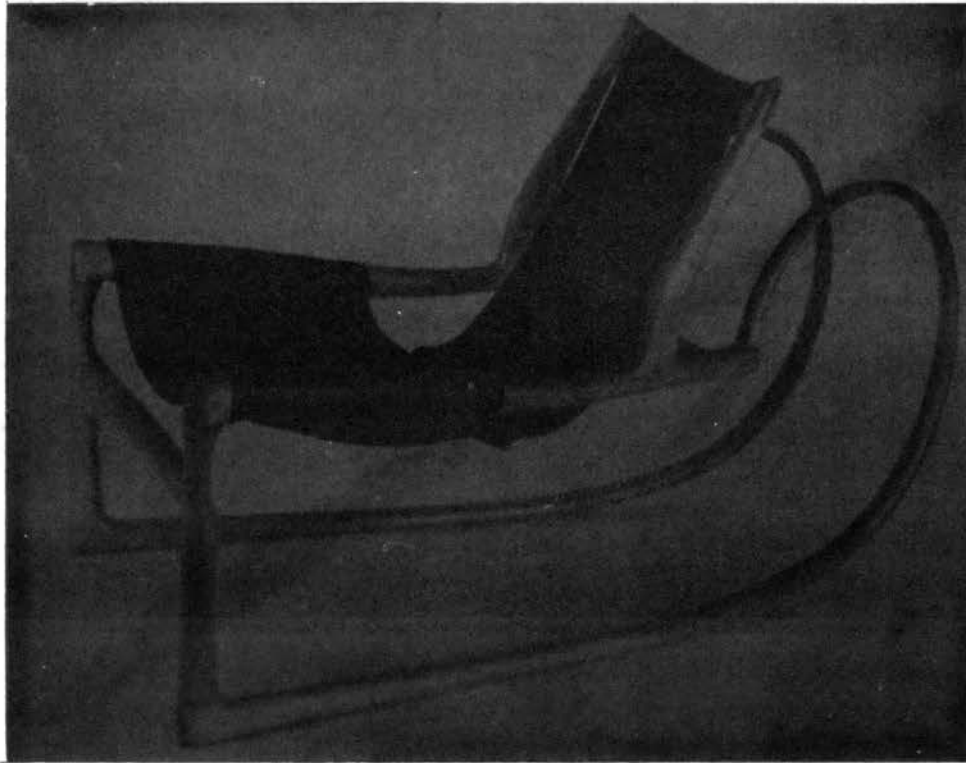


Figure 9. Sling Rocking Chair by Wendell Castle

FOOTNOTES

¹Dore Ashton, "Isamu Noguchi," Arts and Architecture, Vol. 76 (August, 1959), p. 14.

²Israel Horovitz, "In the Noguchi," Craft Horizons, Vol. 28:5 (September, 1958), p. 36.

³John Gruen, "The Artist Speaks: Isamu Noguchi," Art in America, Vol. 56 (March, 1968), p. 30.

⁴Ibid., p. 31.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Horowitz, p. 48.

⁷Gruen, p. 31.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid., p. 30.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 31.

¹¹"Back to Clay," Time, Vol. 44 (December 6, 1954), p. 34, cited in Mary Jo Weale (unpublished dissertation), Florida State University, 1968, p. 798.

¹²"Isamu Noguchi," Home Furnishings Daily (April 15, 1968), p. 1, cited in Mary Jo Weale, p. 798.

¹³Ibid., p. 2.

¹⁴Dore Ashton, "Art," Arts and Architecture, Vol. 84 (July-August, 1967), p. 4.

¹⁵Wendell Castle, "Wharton Esherick 1887-1970," Craft Horizons, Vol. 30:4 (August, 1970), p. 11.

¹⁶Benson, p. 36.

¹⁷Dorothy Grafly, "Wharton Esherick," Magazine of Art, Vol. 43 (January, 1950), p. 9.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 11.

- ¹⁹Ibid., p. 10.
- ²⁰"Isamu Noguchi," RIBA Journal, Vol. 76 (December, 1969), p. 537.
- ²¹Grafly, p. 10.
- ²²Ruth Wolfe, "Noguchi, Past, Present, Future," Art in America, Vol. 56 (March, 1968), p. 34.
- ²³"Esherick and Leoni in Retrospect," Industrial Design, Vol. 6 (January, 1959), p. 18.
- ²⁴Grafly, p. 11.
- ²⁵Ibid.
- ²⁶Ibid.
- ²⁷Benson, p. 37.
- ²⁸Sam Maloof, et al., "Wood," Craft Horizons, Vol. 26 (June, 1966), p. 16.
- ²⁹Castle, p. 71.
- ³⁰Mary Jo Weale, "Contributions of Designers to Contemporary Furniture Design," (unpublished dissertation), Vol. II (1968), p. 573.
- ³¹"Limber Timber," Newsweek, Vol. 64 (May 13, 1963), p. 95, cited in Mary Jo Weale, p. 573.
- ³²"Fantasy Furniture," Interiors, Vol. 125 (February, 1966), p. 114.
- ³³Helen Giambruni, "Wendell Castle," Craft Horizons, Vol. 28 (September/October, 1968), p. 28.
- ³⁴Ibid.
- ³⁵Ibid., p. 50.
- ³⁶Ibid., p. 31.
- ³⁷Ibid., p. 51.

CHAPTER III

FINDINGS

Isamu Noguchi

In devising a study of furniture design as an art-form, it becomes evident that the designer must function as an artist who needs insight and true artistic expression. It is also obvious that this association of the artist will have to take place in a sculptural context due to the work being produced in terms of an actual three dimensional art form.

Isamu Noguchi is considered in this context as a sculptor who has, to a limited degree, produced and designed furniture. The furniture, which consists mainly of low tables, is considered to be a form of art-furniture due to the expressive quality noted in the handling of the individual pieces. These pieces of furniture contain more of an actual aesthetic quality than the normally produced pieces found in the home. In part, due to the limited production of these pieces, this quality is enhanced when considering the individual and personalized attention that goes into the creation of each piece. This quality must not overshadow the true nature of the object as a functional piece of furniture. In considering the reasons for this work of art, one must remember that the furniture is an actual piece of art and has an additional function similar to that of a piece of sculpture.

Noguchi's designs are as much a form of visual expression as a functional unit of furniture. The expression which exists in the form of Isamu Noguchi's tables becomes more of an expression against mass production and commercial design than function as a table. In his autobiography, Noguchi states that,

I had met Robsjohn Gibbings, the furniture designer, who had asked me to do a coffee table for him. I designed a small model in plastic and heard no further before I went west I was surprised to see a variation of this published as a Gibbings advertisement. When I remonstrated, he said anybody could make a three-legged table. In revenge, I made my own variant of my own table, articulate as in the Goodyear Table, but reduced to rudiments.¹ (Figure 10)

Here Noguchi's tables pose as a form of artistic expression demonstrating the fact that anybody could make a three-legged table. (Figure 11)

Another point in considering the Noguchi furniture is the actual character and mode of expression of the artist. Noguchi, being first a sculptor, is innately endowed with a sense of basic form. Dore Ashton states in his writings on Noguchi as a sculptor,

The excitement of experiment that the fresh materials sponsored often obscured the significance of the shaping imagination, of the sensitized hand and the highly developed intuition of basic form.²

Continuing on with a definition of basic form, Ashton explains

Nothing could be more difficult to describe than what is meant by basic forms. Yet the senses know what is meant The artist knows, as his hand gropes its way toward perfection, and he strives to hold onto his immediate primitive sense of tact even after he has sophisticated his mind and imagination.³

Dore Ashton here explains the sense that is so critically needed in the relationship of forms and especially the relation of furniture to the environment. He continues with,

Isamu Noguchi has arrived at a juncture in which the hand is perfectly coordinated with the dreaming imagination. The basic sculptural forms are endowed with tremendous

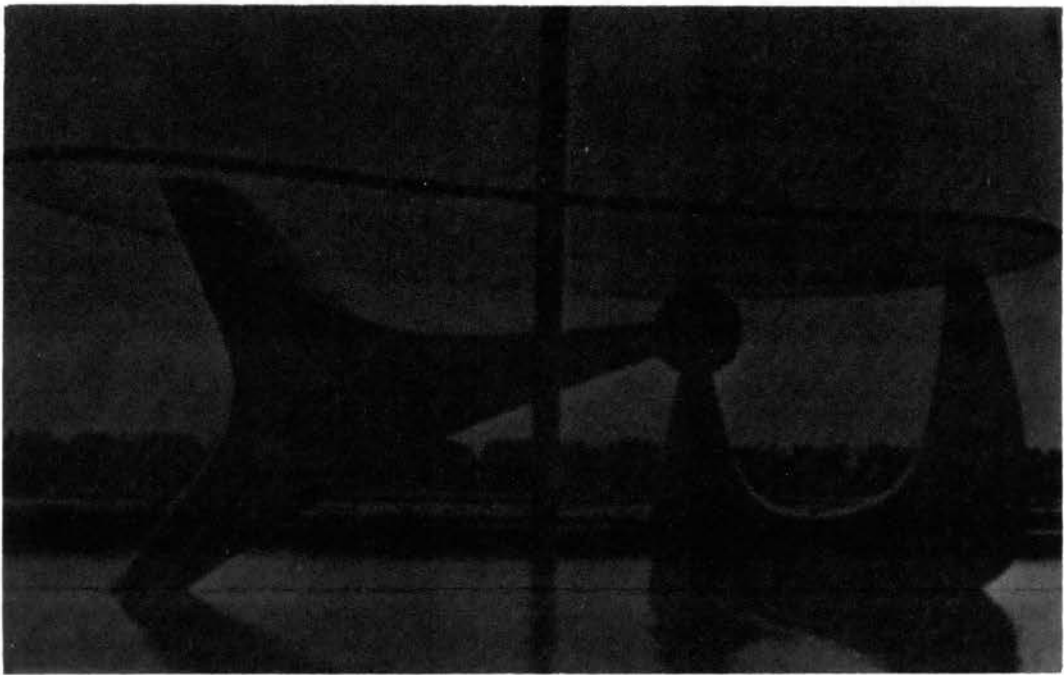


Figure 10. Table for Conger Goodyear by Isamu Noguchi

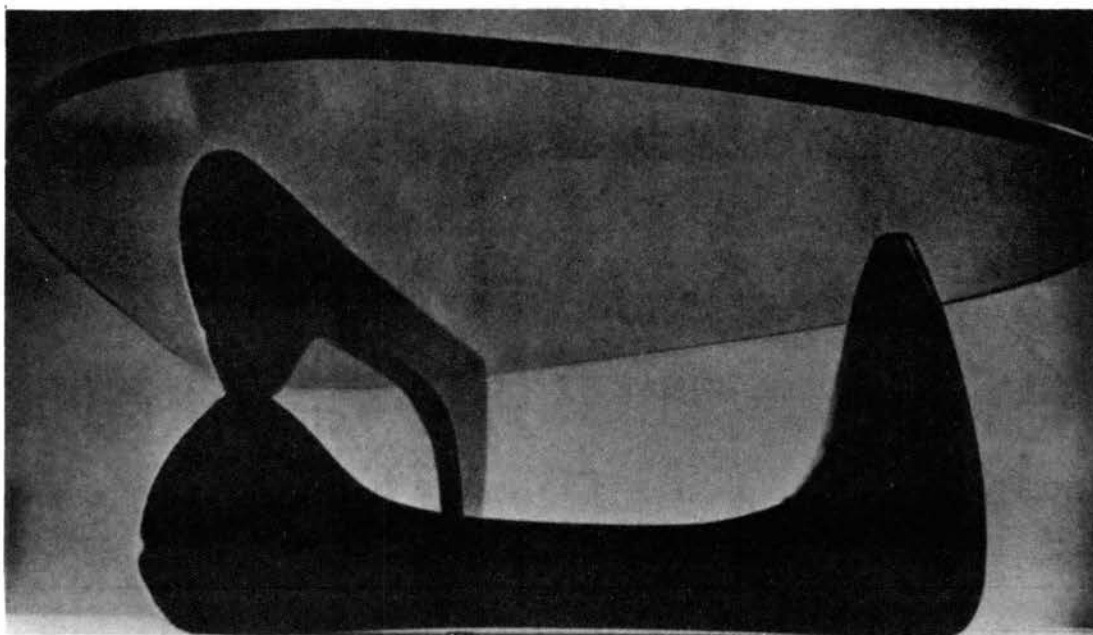


Figure 11. Three Legged Table by Isamu Noguchi Manufactured by
Herman Miller, Inc.

reverberations. Each form is at once the germ and fulfillment of an idea.⁴

Ideas created not only sculptural forms but also relationships with the total environment. Buckminster Fuller describes Isamu Noguchi as "a visio-tactile formulator."⁵

Relating this sense of basic form and design to furniture, it becomes evident that the qualities needed in the creation of furniture are not limited to furniture designers, but may exist more profoundly in the expressions of an artist. (Figures 12 and 13)

Oriental ideas have greatly influenced furniture design because of a great sense of basic form and awareness of the relationship between nature and design. Buckminster Fuller states,

The Oriental genes of Noguchi provoked spontaneous communication in response to his evolutionary experience. You did or you didn't communicate in your visio-tactile universal language. Noguchi did.⁶

Noguchi maintains an inherited relation to the ways of the oriental world. Through this bond, he articulates in his sculpture his influence and love for oriental forms of expression. As a young man at the age of twenty-one, Noguchi showed this oriental influence through his application for a Guggenheim fellowship,

It is my desire to view nature through nature's eyes and to ignore man as an object for special veneration. There must be unthought of heights of beauty to which sculpture may be raised by this reversal of attitude.⁷

Further on in his Guggenheim application, Noguchi states,

Indeed, a fine balance of spirit with matter can only concern when the artist has so thoroughly submerged himself in the study of the unity of nature as to truly become once more a part of nature--a part of the very earth, thus to view the inner surface and the life elements.⁸

Aesthetics become the issue when considering art-furniture versus furniture which is commercially produced. It is this relationship to

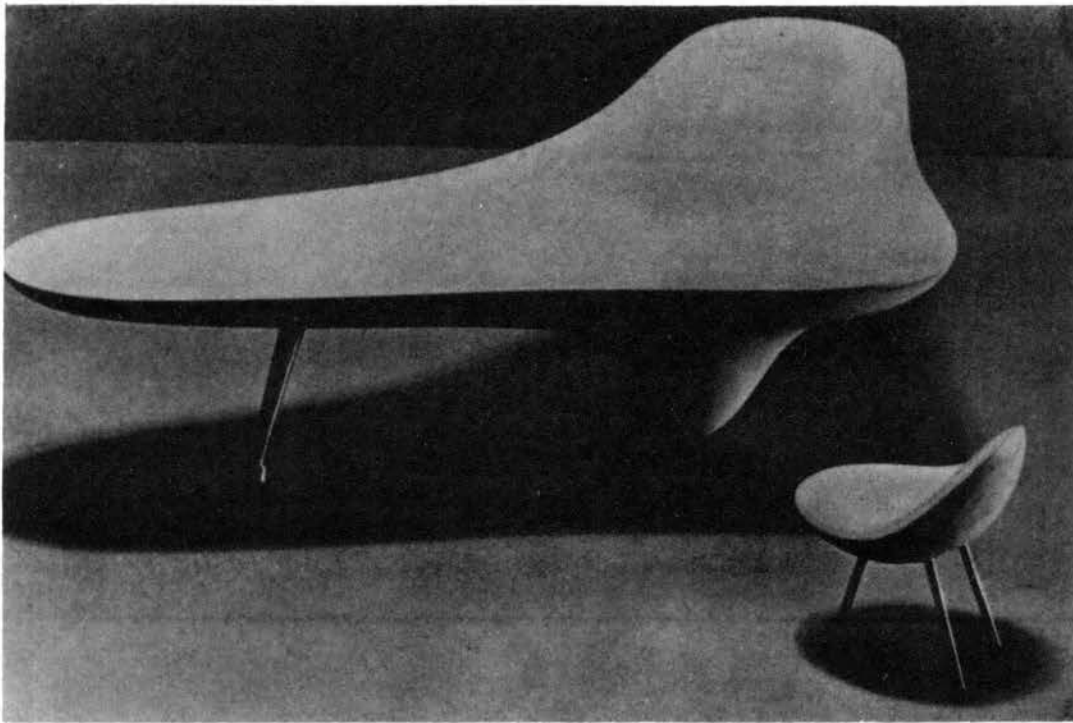


Figure 12. Dining Table for William A. M. Burden by Isamu Noguchi

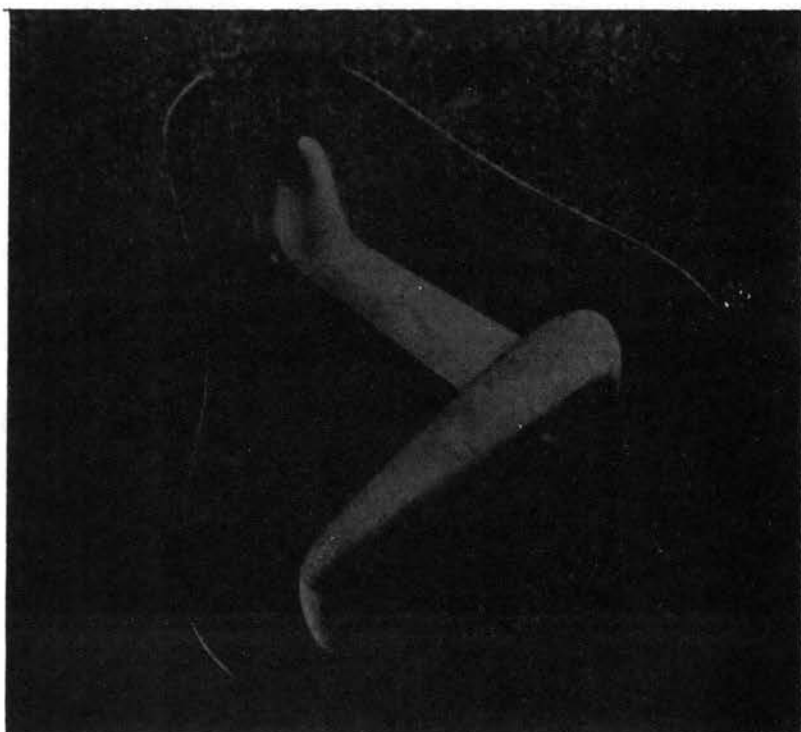


Figure 13. Plaster Prototype Table by Isamu Noguchi

design that becomes evident in Noguchi's furniture. Because he is a sculptor first and then a furniture designer, his works show an exquisite amount of aesthetic appeal. The visual statement made through a piece of art-furniture becomes more involved with the environment than could a piece of machine-made, mass produced furniture. A sculptor works with the shaping of space whereas a furniture designer is involved with the shaping of a piece of furniture. Dore Ashton states,

Man's relation to the earth is equivocal in Noguchi's terms. He is at once a part of it, identifying himself with the accidental shapes and rises and falls in topography, and he is apart, a thinking animal endowing each phenomenal experience with meanings beyond the senses.⁹

Wharton Esherick 1887-1970

Wharton Esherick first studied to become a painter, but by making wood cut prints he became interested in the characteristics and potentialities of wood. Being an "overeducated painter"¹⁰ he turned to sculpture and furniture design. At the time of his death in 1970, he was known primarily for his furniture designs, although he considered himself to be a sculptor. His furniture is considered to be the most individual and imaginative in America in the twentieth century. It is a form of furniture unrelated to any other style. Due to this individualized character styled after Esherick's life, it becomes more of a form of expressive ideas than a functional entity. It is considered art-furniture.

Wharton Esherick comments that "it takes a sculptor to sculpt. A furniture designer cannot do it. Most of the chairs that have been so called just have an odd shape."¹¹ He considered his chairs a form of sculpture and states "it must be beautiful in all positions, even upside

down."¹² It is this relationship to the environment that has made Wharton Esherick's work so significant in the field of furniture design. There is an aesthetic appeal that cannot be produced by the mass production designs of an age that Esherick calls "creative conformity."¹³ It is in this area that his work takes precedence over other well designed pieces of furniture. (Figures 14-16)

His aim is to "create an environment which is sculptural by fashioning furniture to occupy unusual spaces, and by interrelating line and mass."¹⁴ Deriving his forms directly from nature, Esherick becomes an artist in his relation to form and aesthetic awareness. He states "I never know what I'm going to do, it sort of shapes itself like a sponge sopping up water."¹⁵ Wendell Castle explains that Esherick is "not a worshipper of wood for the sake of wood. His approach was that of a sculptor who knew and understood the structural and aesthetic qualities of his materials."¹⁶ It is this love of nature and understanding of the material that is brought directly into the expressions he creates in wood. His feeling for nature and the relationship to the total environment came from his love for and appreciation of oriental art. To Esherick "Art is growth, and growth belongs to nature, so he likes to see his sculptures placed outdoors, even though it is perishable wood."¹⁷

The environment has played a significant part in Esherick's life. Due to his close relation to natural objects, the curve is the most dominant line found in his work. This relation to curves and the lack of geometric shapes creates an individual style that could belong only to Wharton Esherick. With asymmetrical lines and balance, the entire environment is created with the need for its forms relating to each other.



Figure 14. Desk and Stools by Wharton
Esherick

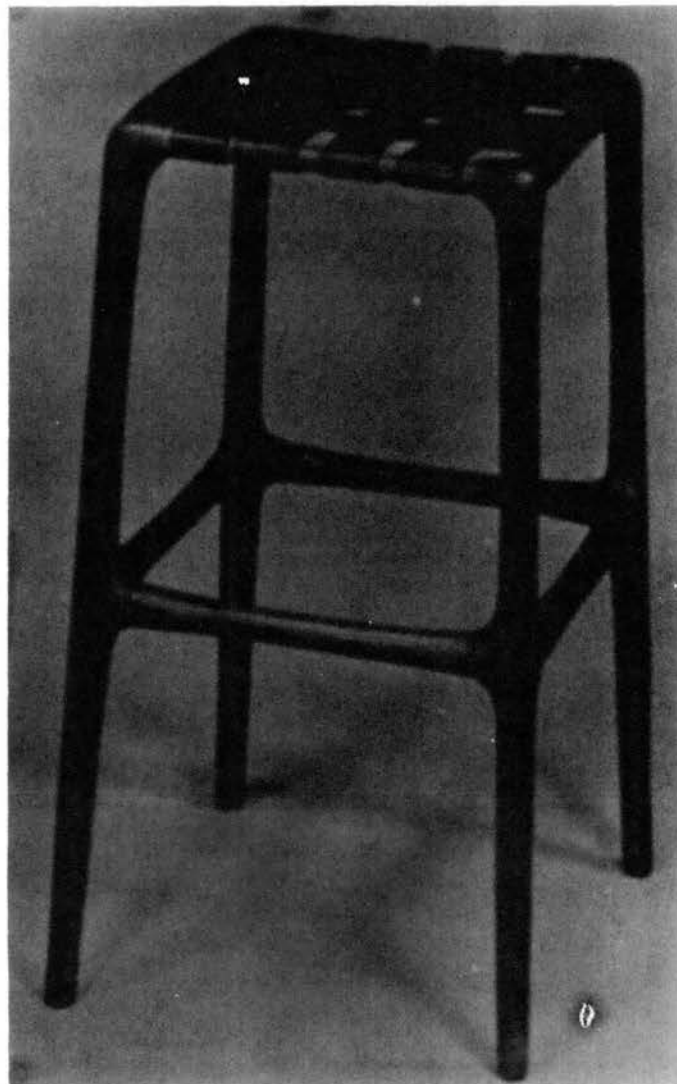


Figure 15. Stool With Leather Strap Seat by
Wharton Esherick



Figure 16. Corner Table by Wharton Esherick

In this respect, Esherick's work becomes a fantastic play of shapes, angles, and curves related in a masterful way to the total environment. Through this artistic awareness, Wharton Esherick's furniture creates the special appeal which is needed but is not present in much of the furniture of today. Wharton Esherick believes that

by controlling the spirit of the design as a whole, the sculptor can breathe into it pulsing life that is lacking in a majority of places built with less appreciation of the personality to be housed.¹⁸

Wendell Castle

Today, a new awareness of man and his relation to the environment is being created. Less is being taken for granted and more questions are being raised about our existence on this earth. Young innovators are creating new designs that are helping to form a new image for man. One of these innovators is Wendell Castle. Awareness of his environment and its relation to those about him is spurred by his conviction to "produce furniture which compliments nature rather than function as contrast to it."¹⁹ Furniture produced by Wendell Castle is represented in large organic shapes flowing down to a base which appears to become part of the floor.

Castle gives Wharton Esherick credit for creating his initial awareness of the fact that sculptural form may be used to create furniture. While studying to become a sculptor, Castle first became conscious of the fact that his sculpture possessed forms common to both sculpture and furniture. Here again, it is this overall sculptural connotation of Castle's furniture that becomes an important issue in the relation of the forms of the furniture to those of the interior. Aesthetics becomes a major issue with Castle where he desires to "create

a total environment with each component subordinated to a single aesthetic statement."²⁰ With this idiom, Giambruni finds Castle akin to his predecessors in Art Nouveau. The preoccupation of Castle with the totality of an environment is similar to the work and ideals of Art Nouveau artists. "I try in my work to fulfill both the aesthetic and practical purpose, but if one were to become dominant I would choose the aesthetic."²¹ Evidence is given here that Castle's furniture serves a greater purpose than to function as a utilitarian object. His furniture becomes a visual as well as aesthetic experience. It functions as a visual statement expressing the artist's views on the environment and on the lack of appeal created by most furnishings. In talking about one "the scribe stool," Castle explains "I meant it to be a sitting experience. I meant it to be just what I called it--a scribe stool. It can be used for writing notes."²² (Figure 17)

A notable distinction of Castle's furniture is that each piece, due to its asymmetrical balance, gives a twisting, vine-like quality which stems from deep within. Contrasting this to the vine-like quality of Art Nouveau, Castle's seems to have a much deeper meaning within the piece rather than mere surface decoration. Most works seem to have a truncated appearance which emphasizes the feeling of natural or organic forms. (Figure 18)

Space is as important to Castle as it is to all sculptors. The manipulation and control of space becomes of great importance. This is quite evident in his hanging piece where the traditional space above the table is controlled because the entire piece is suspended from the ceiling. A certain sense of playing with gravity is created by this new use of space in furniture plus a definite defiance of tradition.

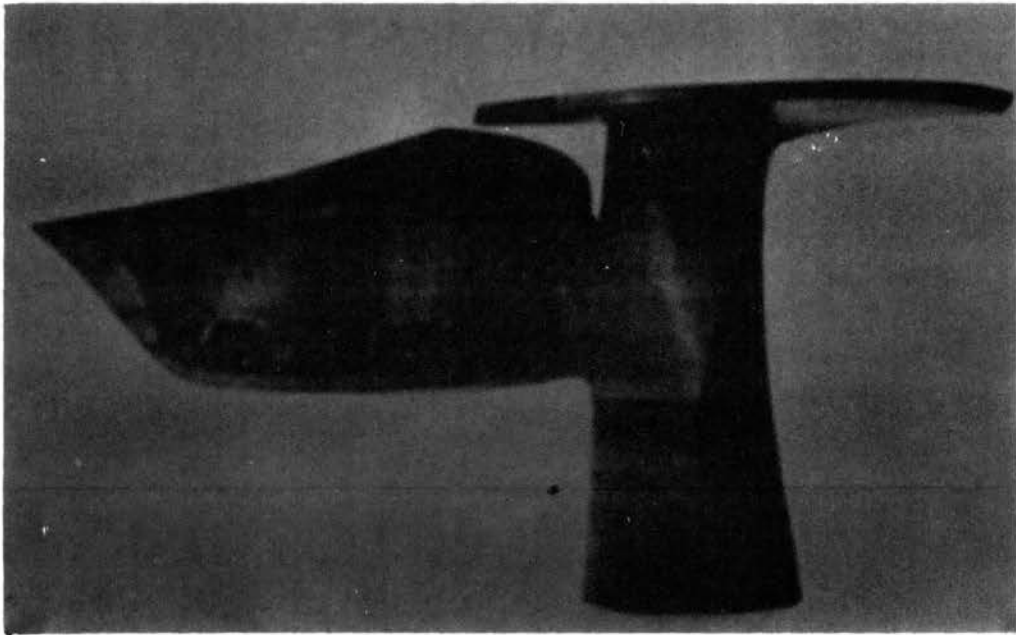


Figure 17. Scribe Stool by Wendell Castle

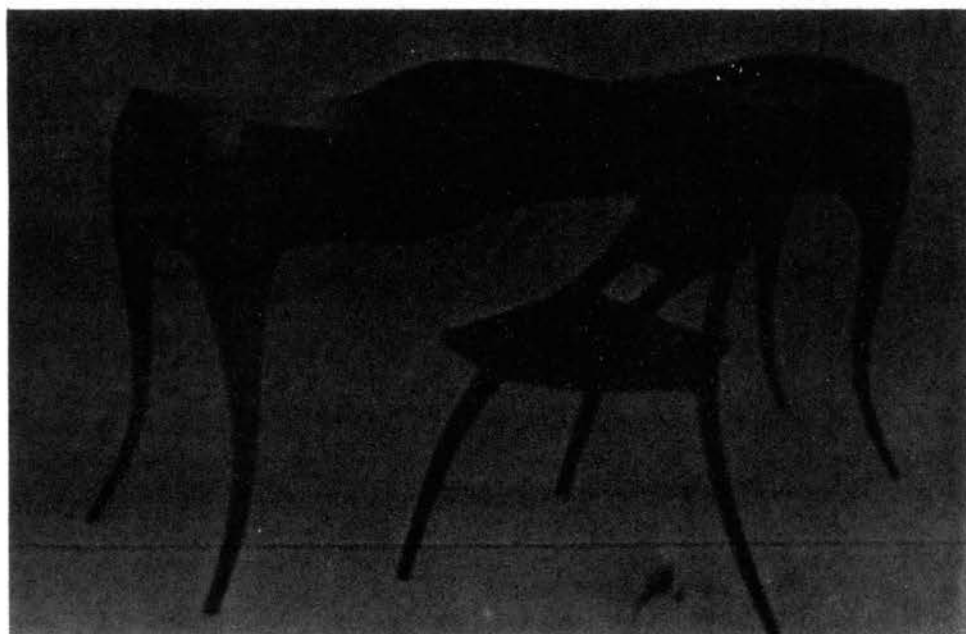


Figure 18. Writing Desk and Chair by Wendell Castle

In his later works, Castle is dealing more totally with the entire sculptural environment. The visual statement made by his furniture is one of personal, rather than anonymous, relationship to the total environment. (Figure 19)

Comparisons

In the final consideration of the three artists, who are the leaders in their field, several similarities in philosophies and artistic expression are evident. It was considered that each artist was also sufficiently skilled in furniture manufacture and that they could be considered as craftsmen, therefore, they are referred to as artist-craftsmen. It is also concluded that each artist-craftsman feels that visual integrity is as important to a piece of furniture as that of its function and that this integrity is included in its overall function.

For the purpose of comparison of the individual forms of expression linking each artist with the stylistic trend of art-furniture, the comparisons were made on their individual design philosophies rather than citing singular pieces of work.

The first fact noted about each artist was that he is a sculptor working with three dimensional form. Due to this fact, the manipulation and control of space is a major part of each artist's design philosophy. The design of space leads each artist to become increasingly aware of his responsibility to the environment. Therefore, the awareness of their relationship to the environment and each one's desire to work with the design and control of a total environment is effectively shown in the work of each artist.



Figure 19. Hanging Table by Wendell Castle

Similarities were also found in the fact that each of the three artists considered art more than a limited or specialized area in the field of fine arts. Each artist considered art as an all encompassing form of expression. Through this form of expression, a visual language is established which communicates through its aesthetic form. The aesthetic function and appeal created by each piece of furniture was considered by its designer as the most important basis for the existence of the piece of furniture.

The aesthetic quality of this type of furniture is a common ground for these three artists. Reliance and belief in nature is the singular basis for their design philosophies.

Isamu Noguchi and Wharton Esherick may also be compared for their love and admiration for oriental art and aesthetics. Wharton Esherick may also be noted for his influence on the basic design philosophy of Wendell Castle.

In considering similarities in the work of each artist, it is seen that each man was skilled in his particular craft, primarily on his own initiative and that they all share a common fondness of natural materials. Noguchi primarily works in stone, whereas, Esherick and Castle work in native woods. In relating individual pieces, it can be noticed that each artist has a certain dedication to the illusion of gravity. Noguchi's massive stone pieces seem to float in the air and a paradox may be seen between his pieces where heavy materials give the appearance of lightness of weight and light materials create a strange heaviness as if to defy gravity. Esherick's works, especially his winding stairs, seem to have a similar mystical defiance of gravity. His tables and chairs give the feeling of sturdiness in their relation to the floor. (Figure 20)

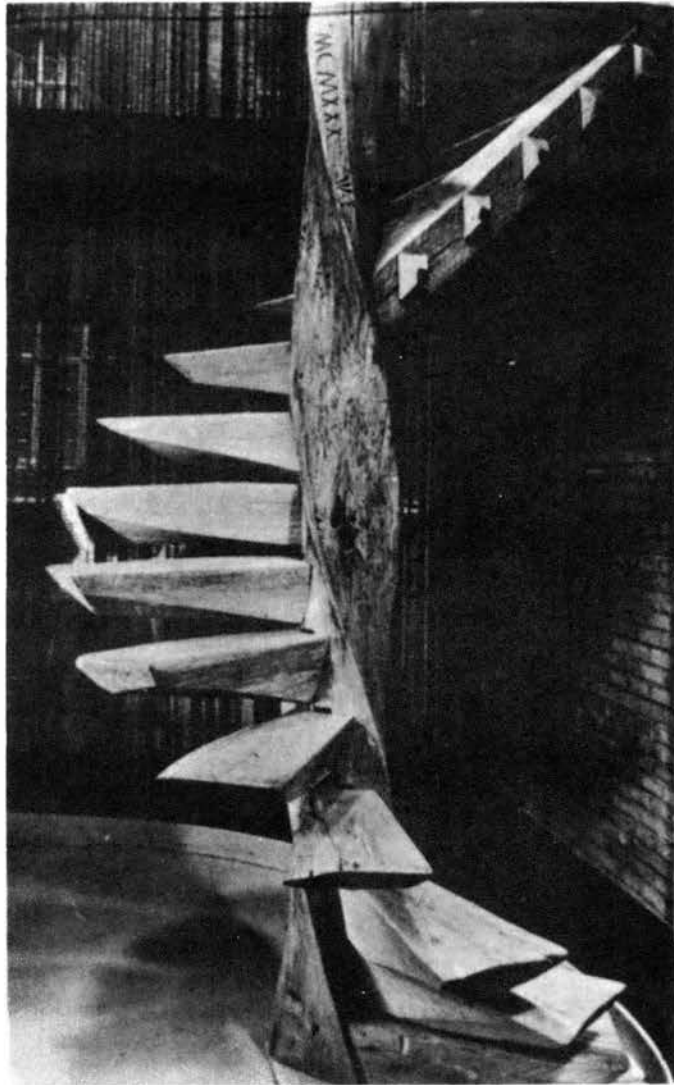


Figure 20. Winding Stairs by Wharton
Esherick

Wendell Castle's designs in furniture also have a certain play with gravity where he hangs a table from the ceiling or cantilevers a desk top out into open space creating an alluring openness in space. His chairs seem to defy gravity in their proportion of size and method of construction. His materials seem to have an unnatural strength created by his laminating process. (Figures 21 and 22)

In the actual form of the furniture, similarities may be noticed in the use of organic shapes and asymmetrical balance. Geometric shapes and straight lines are eliminated for a straight line as such does not exist in nature.

Comparisons may be made between the three designers' tables. The tops of each maintain a curious non-spherical, non-elliptical shape with an abundance of free flowing curved lines connecting corners, if any are to be found. A peculiar similarity may also be found common to each artist in the vine-like twist given to pedestals and rectangular form. A spiral effect is given to each column which occurs in the base or any rectangular member in many examples of each artist's work. Noguchi's "Mortality" and "Solitude" may be cited here for the exquisite illusion of motion and defiance of gravity. Esherick's winding staircase may again be cited and his sculptural work "Twin Twist" show a similar spiral creating a stem-like illusion of a twisting movement about each piece. Wendel Castle's "Library Sculpture" shows a similar spiral movement about the columns. (Figures 23-27)

Comparisons are made to show the common bond between these three art-furniture designers to show their realization of the need and existence of art-furniture.

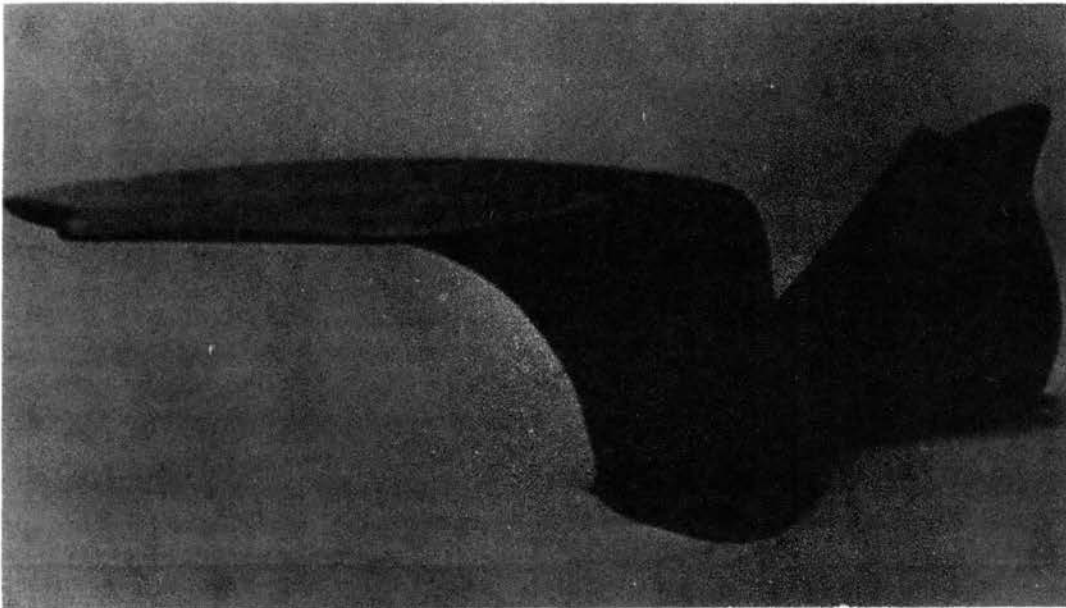


Figure 21. Cantilever Table by Wendell Castle

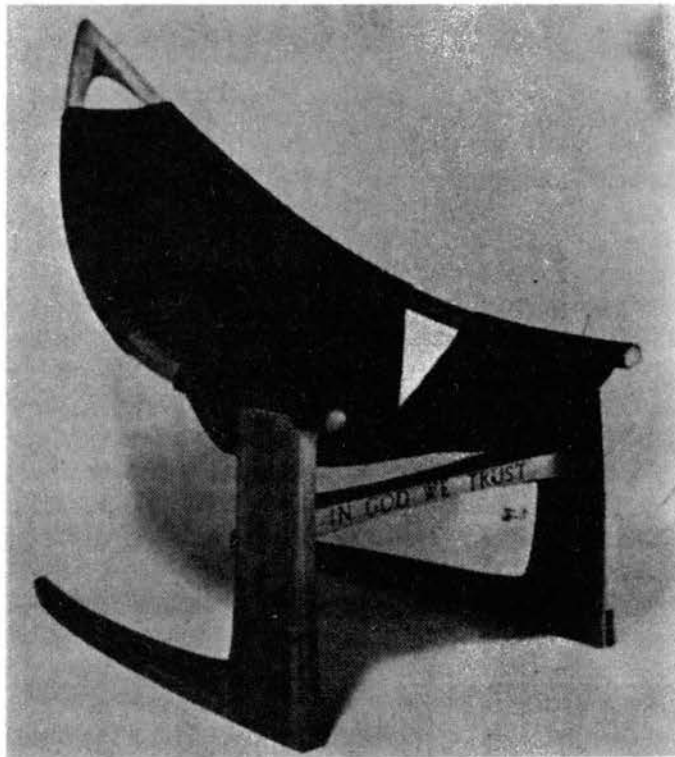


Figure 22. Sling Chair by Wendell Castle

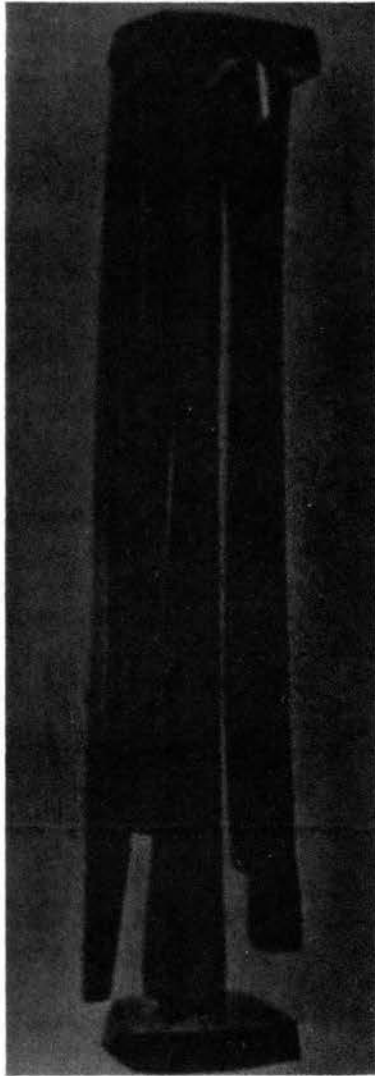


Figure 23. "Morality" by
Isamu Noguchi

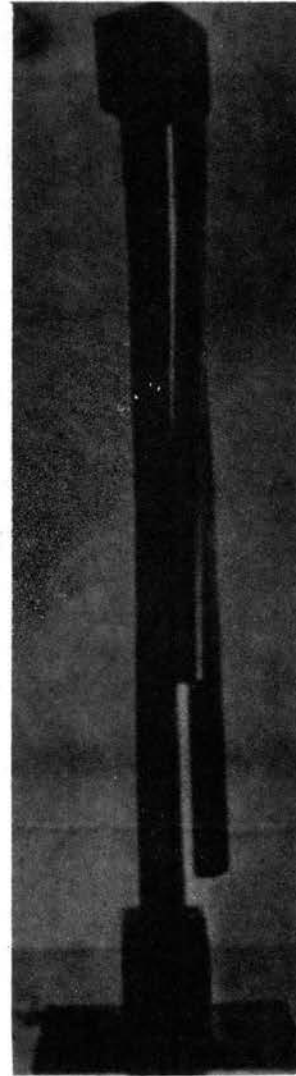


Figure 24. "Solitude"
by Isamu
Noguchi

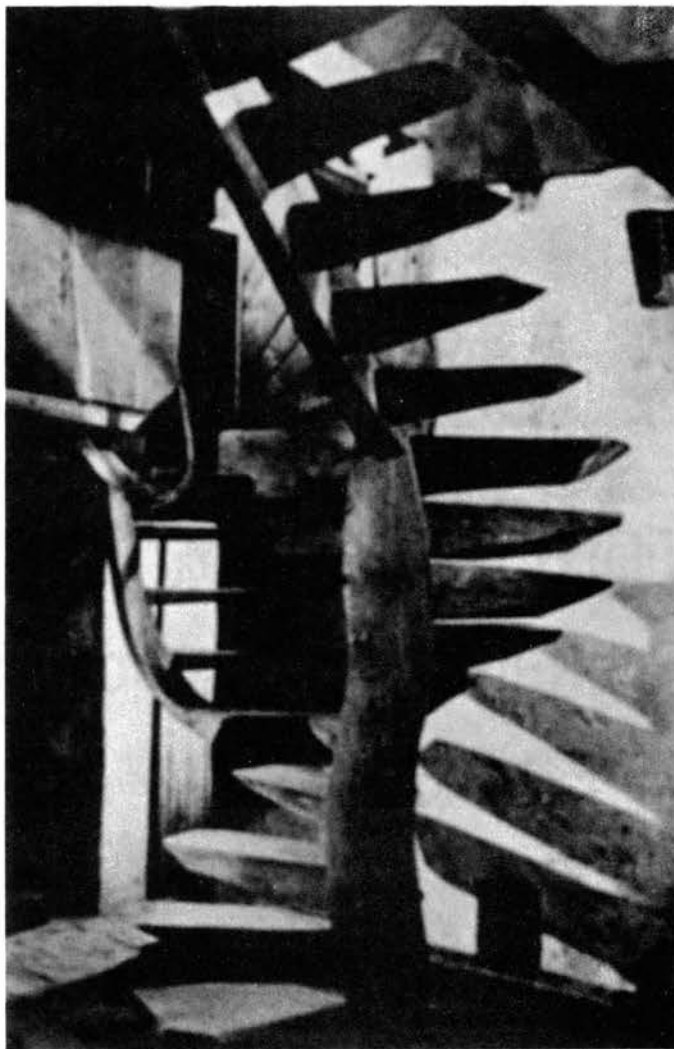


Figure 25. Winding Staircase by Wharton
Esherick

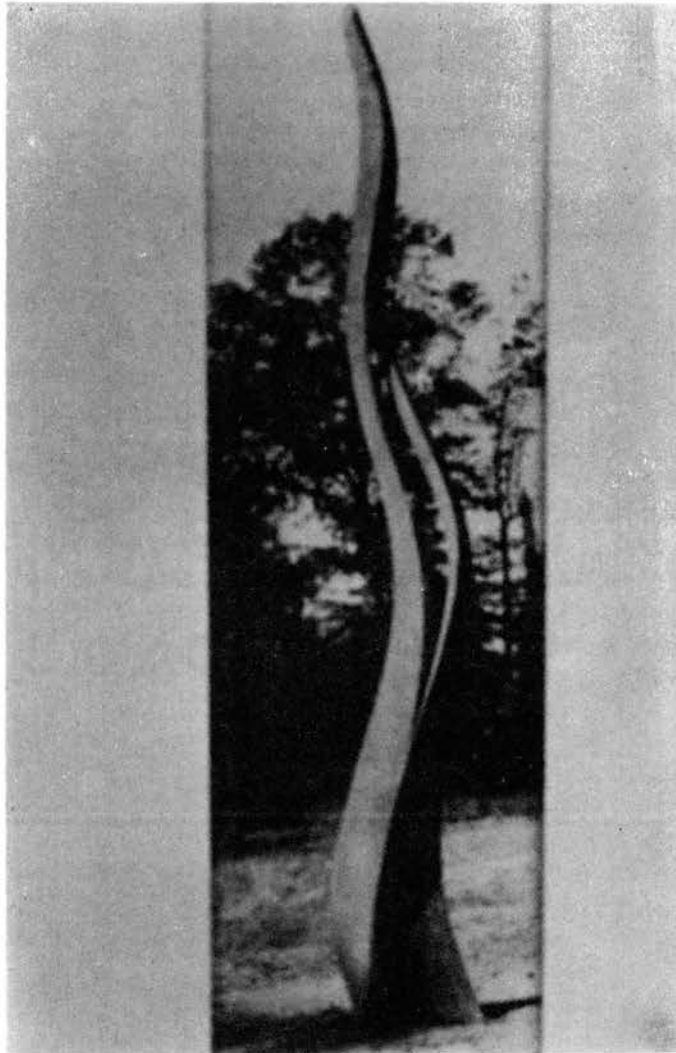


Figure 26. "Twin Twist" by Wharton Esherick



Figure 27. "Library Sculpture" by Wendell Castle

FOOTNOTES

- ¹Isamu Noguchi, A Sculptors World (New York, 1968), p. 26.
- ²Ashton, p. 6.
- ³Ibid.
- ⁴Ibid.
- ⁵Noguchi, p. 7.
- ⁶Ibid., p. 8.
- ⁷Ibid., p. 16.
- ⁸Ibid., p. 17.
- ⁹Ashton, p. 30.
- ¹⁰Benson, p. 37.
- ¹¹Betty Pepis, "To Finish Add Salt and Pepper," The New York Times (May 29, 1954), p. 18.
- ¹²Ibid.
- ¹³Wharton Esherick, "Ed. Staff, Interiors, Vol. 118 (February, 1959), p. 92.
- ¹⁴Weale, p. 615.
- ¹⁵Pepis, p. 18.
- ¹⁶Castle, p. 12.
- ¹⁷Weale, p. 618.
- ¹⁸Grafly, p. 9.
- ¹⁹Giambruni, p. 28.
- ²⁰Ibid., p. 50.
- ²¹"Far Out Furniture," Industrial Design, Vol. 13 (March, 1966), p. 54.
- ²²Ibid.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY

Design philosophies in the furniture industry are divided between two factions. In one group are the furniture designers who believe furniture design should remain true to the tradition of creating functional furniture. The design is controlled by its adaptation to the assembly line. It is destined to the fate of planned obsolescence; an adequate end for a piece designed for such an existence.

Conversely, some artists feel that mere function defies the potential of a true piece of furniture. These artists have chosen to create furniture that is adequately designed to meet its function to its fullest extent. A piece of furniture exists with a visual reality as much a function of furniture as its comfort. The visual appearance of a piece of furniture may be considered to have the potential of a piece of sculpture. When designed to this extent, the furniture becomes an art form.

Three sculptors, Isamu Noguchi, Wharton Esherick, and Wendell Castel, have designed furniture that does exist as a form of sculpture. Classifying this furniture in an area, separate from furniture designed for mass production, it is considered art-furniture. This furniture is given a new function, that of becoming a mode of expression and with a personality of its own. This creates an aesthetic appeal which is uncommon in furniture but a necessity in art. This becomes one of the

problems that faces art-furniture designers. Its first appearance came with the period of Art Nouveau but was quelled with the appearance of the "form follows function" concept of design. New awareness in design is increasingly indicating that design must relate to its environment. Furniture, designed only for functions of comfort and mass production, relate only with an industrial form. Art furniture relates with a personalized expressive quality and an aesthetic appeal created by the hands of sculptors.

Conclusions

Design is the process by which man creates. The shapes in which these creations exist constitute their form. Form may be visualized in two processes; man-made or natural. In the research of man-made form in the field of furniture design, it has been noted that certain mass produced pieces of furniture exist in a form that is neither pleasing to perceive nor functional to use.

These pieces exist in an abundance of eclectic neo-styles serving neither form nor function. The age of the machine is in existence and cannot be denied for its function to serve the mass populace of the world. Furnishings must be produced in mass quantity, but the character of the design does not need to be cold and austere in its relationship to the environment. The proof here lies in the form of furniture design which, in this study, has been considered art-furniture.

This particular area of furniture is very expressive in its relation to visual appearance and form. Considering it not only as furniture, but also as an art form, may be justified by its mode of expression and aesthetic appeal.

The artist is a visual poet. The designer is no less of a poet from the standpoint of the aesthetics of a design. The poetry of the design is the form of the product. To create form in poetry, the poet must follow certain rules of rhyme, rhythm, and meter. The designer must also follow certain standards which are defined by man and nature to create form. Form is not the creator of design but the real aesthetic value of any design. Form is here defined by Webster as: "The objective realization, esp. in a work of art, of an imaginative conception; that which is the product of design itself."¹

Form gives the feeling of "fit"² or fitness in a work of art, a piece of furniture or an environment. This feeling of "fit" is achieved through an aesthetic appeal.

The aesthetics of style are not lost but half hidden in fad, fashions and every conceivable imitation of neo-revival styles in mass produced form. Nature is not lost but merely encrusted in plastic and fiberglass, glued together, or oozing out of the corner, created from a synthetic foam. The natural forms and structures underlie it all but are merely well concealed.

Taking a passage from Mary Jo Weale:

A foreign writer said in 1876 that 'there are standing controversies in art, which are perpetually breaking out afresh: they take new forms with every new age, but they are essentially the same always. These violent and dogmatic decisions crush and wither the timid likings of plain people, which might have developed into cultivated taste.'³

Nature's role is most important for it gives man direction in his search for aesthetic form. Goethe once wrote, "I have observed that nature systematically produces living forms as pattern for all art forms."⁴

Indicating a direction for the designer to search for a true form of expression, Tet Borsig wrote in his book Design in Nature,

Life in nature reveals the truth, therefore examine it, diligently, follow its example and do not withdraw from nature in your judgment True art is hidden in nature; he who can extract it will have it.⁵

The awareness of this problem is now becoming an issue in relation to furniture design. A limited number of designers are creating furniture which serve more than function and create an aesthetic appeal. This appeal will only come when it is recognized that furniture can function as an art-form; existing as a form of visual expression as well as a functional piece of furniture. It can be sculptural in concept with a visual appearance that is aesthetic and should therefore get full recognition as an art form.

Isamu Noguchi, Wharton Esherick, and Wendell Castle, have defined art as all encompassing in form of expression. Their furniture designs prove the existence of furniture as a visual form of expression. A style may never be achieved due to the many facets of our world and the need for mass production but a classification may justly be considered for those who wish to create furniture for more than its mere utilitarian function and it may justly be called art-furniture.

FOOTNOTES

¹Meriam Webster, "New International Dictionary of the English Language," Ed. William Neilson, 2nd Edition (Springfield, 1947).

²Christopher Alexander, "The Synthesis of Form" (Cambridge, 1968), pp. 28-43 (Alexander, in chapter three describes the "Source of Fit").

³Weale, p. 213.

⁴Karl Vietor, Goethe the Thinker (Cambridge, 1950), p. 22.

⁵Tet Borsig, Design in Nature (New York, 1961), p. 5.

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VITA

John W. Reed

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Science

Thesis: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF FURNITURE PRODUCED AS ART BY
SELECTED SCULPTORS

Major Field: Housing and Interior Design

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Blackwell, Oklahoma, April 2, 1945, the
son of Mr. and Mrs. John W. Reed.

Education: Graduated from Lamont High School, Lamont, Oklahoma,
in May, 1963; attended Oklahoma State University, Stillwater,
Oklahoma; studied architecture 1963-1967; received Bachelor
of Fine Arts degree from Oklahoma State University,
Stillwater, in 1969, with major emphasis in Sculpture and
Ceramics; completed requirements for the Master of Science
degree in July, 1971.

Professional Experience: Graduate Teaching Assistant, Department
of Art, 1969-71.

Organizations: Omicron Nu.