

Study on the Influence of Contemporary Art on Furniture Design -Based on the Analysis on <Stool with Partitions 1,2,3> with Key Features of Contemporary Art and Furniture Design-

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ABSTRACT

The history repeatedly shows that designers have sought their creative inspiration from fine arts. <Stool with Partitions 1,2,3> was also influenced by contemporary art such as surrealism or installment works. This thesis aims to examine the inter-relationship between contemporary art and contemporary furniture design with examples of organic modernism and minimalism furniture design. Also, <Stool with Partitions 1,2,3> will be analyzed in light of such interdisciplinary relationship, explaining the significances of <Stool with Partitions 1,2,3> in scholastic perspective. The previous research analysis of finding out examples of how fine art and design sought mutual exchanges to develop will help to examine the significance of <Stool with Partitions 1,2,3> in the context of art history. This analysis could be used as an important academic material to understand the origin and characteristics of modern design furniture.

The features of surrealism and minimalism will be discussed in light of their influences on and interactive relationship with organic modernism furniture design. This provides important basic material to further analyze <Stool with Partitions 1,2,3>.

Furthermore, the artistic language and plastic features of contemporary sculptors and installment artists such as Jean Arp, Richard Serra and Anish Kapoor will be examined to show how <Stool with Partitions 1,2,3> integrated and combined main features of those artists.

<Stool with Partitions 1,2,3> extracted cognitive and phenomenological aspects from Serra's works that overwhelm viewers with their massive scales. Somewhat abstract yet somewhat primitive and dynamic features of Arp's works was also referred to <Stool with Partitions 1,2,3>. <Stool with Partitions 1,2,3> are made of FRP, composed of three partitions and six stools. This work was analyzed in aspect of form, composition and function. They have organic and flexible formations with free composition availability which endow free disassemble and arrangement. Also, they have cognitive features as of small elements are freely dispersed upon spaces to bestow certain presences. Based on this, this thesis could develop scholastic researches that examine the mutual and interactive relationship between contemporary art and furniture design with much more detailed discussions and examples.

Key words: Contemporary Art, Furniture Design, Stool with Partitions 1,2,3.

1. INTRODUCTION

1-1 Background and Aim

Designers have sought inspirations from fine arts, as repeatedly shown in the history of art.

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Especially, the abstract features of surrealist works heavily influenced all areas of arts and designers over many centuries. The organic modernism furniture design could be cited as a good example of this as shown by artists from Northern Europe and USA in 60's.

Northern European Designers such as of Alvar Aalto(1898-1976) combined the artistic language of contemporary art with his ethnical and regional features, forming the basis of the organic modernism furniture design. Later on, Aalto's organic modernism was spread to USA through reciprocal influences with the works of Charles Eames(1907-1978) and Eero Saarinen(1910-1961).

Also, American artists in 60's have created minimalism art which interpreted the wholeness of trendy paintings in light of geometric forms while eliminating any references of emotions or feelings.

This study is based on my works, <Stool with Partitions 1,2,3>, and they were created as the doctorate degree application works. They were exhibited in the Modern Art Museum of Hongik University from September 1st to 5th of 2008. The works were inspired by the contemporary surrealist works and installations works. This research reflected and materialized furniture designs under the influence of a minimalist Richard Serra(1939-), a surrealist Jean Arp(1886-1966), a sculptor Henry Moore(1898-1986), and an installation artist Anish Kapoor(1954-).

This thesis aims to study the reciprocal relevance of organic modernism and minimalism furniture design works, citing the most known cases of furniture design under the influence of contemporary art. Also, <Stool with Partitions 1,2,3> will be analyzed in view of such aspect, to find out their unique features and significances. This study enumerates and analyzes the mutual development of contemporary art and design with references to actual examples. Such attempt can be used as an important academic resource in grasping the fundamental concepts and features of contemporary furniture design.

1-2 Research Methodology and Scope

The research will first go through surrealism and minimalism that influenced organic furniture design and minimalistic furniture design, respectively. At this stage, their individual unique features and inter-relevance between art and design will be discussed. These will be the fundamentals in analyzing <Stool with Partitions 1,2,3>. As for organic modernism and surrealism, the evidence of direct and/or indirect interchanges or reciprocal influences between contemporary artists such as Jean Arp, Henry Moore, and Isamu Noguchi(1904-1988) with furniture designers will be highlighted. For this, the features of these contemporary artists will be overviewed in view of the organic furniture design works of Scandinavian designers such as Alvar Aalto, Hans Wegner(1914-2007), Finn Juhl(1912-1989) and Arne Jacobsen(1902-1971), along with American designers such as Charles & Ray Eames(1907-1978 and 1912-1988) and Eero Saarinen(1910-1961). As for the minimalistic furniture design and minimalism art, four designers who are one of the first generation artists of American minimalism artists will be cited. They were also designers who created works with furniture which has functions. They are Donald Judd(1928-1994), Sol LeWitt(1928-2007), Scott Burton(1939-1989), and Richard Artschwager(1923-). Also, the concept of modernism in the early 20th century will be discussed with the works of Constantin Brancusi(1876-1957) who also greatly influenced minimalists. Along with this, the avant-garde concepts, works and artistic background of the Marcel Duchamp(1887-1968) will be examined. Especially, the works of Richard Serra, Jean Arp and Anish Kapoor will be scrutinized since they were the key artists who directly influenced <Stool with Partitions 1,2,3>. This study will discuss how the conceptual language and formality of these contemporary artists were transferred to and was reflected in <Stool with Partitions 1,2,3>. The reciprocal influences will be discussed, analyzed to provide conclusion in the end.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2-1 Surrealism and Organic Modernism Furniture

The unique features of surrealism works greatly influenced furniture designers who sought to overcome the formalistic limitations on modernism, and this brought in the creation of organic modernism. The sculpting works of Jean Arp, who opposed mechanical and dominance of reason, emphasized the importance of subconscious with irregular and abstract features, which were born on to randomness and chances. Henry Moore portrayed the human figures in primitive or unrealistic way, based on his own reflection on the relationship between nature and human, and nature and universe. Noguchi was influenced by African sculpture and sought simple primitive forms and plasticity that transcend any religious ideologies. Noguchi had interchanged his ideas with Brancusi, and this inspired him to realize his love toward the nature and the universe, building his own idea that the natural environment and art works should be in harmony and synthesized. (Diane & Bruce 1994) His later works reflect such notion. (Choi 2004)

The works of those contemporary artists could be summarized as organic, symbolic, primitive, visionary (fanciful), unrealistic, relying upon chances and irregularity. Finish architect Alvar Aalto from was the actual pioneer in the organic modernism furniture design, and he started to make chairs as early as 30's by organically shaping white birch trees. This was a great contrast and departure from the modernism furniture with the dominance of Bauhaus in Germany. Alvar Alto admired Arp's works and was deeply immersed in the organic forms shown in early relief works of Arp. This provided the basis for Alto's organic modernism furniture design. His one of the most known work is <Paimio Chair>, designed for the patients' lounge in the Paimio Senior House, which is often cited as Alto's most ergonomic architectural work<Fig.1>. This work provided the starting of organic modernism aesthetics in furniture design. Paimio chair enabled wood furniture with soft angle design. In this work, the contact surface of the patient, sitter, and the chair was treated in soft lines; an organic furniture design.

Denmark, in fact, was a bit late comer in the international furniture design, but it brought huge public success, and Hans Wegner(1914-2007), Finn Juhl(1912-1989), and Arne Jacobsen(1902-1971) were great contributors for this. Hans Wegner preferred hand-craft features so used natural wood, making hand-finished furniture. His furniture has delicate details that cannot be made with machines. Finn Juhl showed his new furniture works along with Arp's relief works in the exhibition, *Cabinetmakers' Guild exhibition*(Copenhagen, 1941). This was Finn Juhl's explicit declaration of Arp's influence<Fig 2>. (Hiort 1990) A Scandinavian designer, Arne Jacobsen presented organic modernism furniture such as <7 chair>, <Egg Chair> and <Swan chair> under the influence of American designers such as Charles Eames and Eero Saarinen.

Charles Eames and Eero Saarinen attracted huge public attention by receiving the first prize in the Organic Design in Home Furnishings Competition, held in MoMA, New York, 1940, paving the way toward the bloom of organic modernism furniture in America. Charles Eames could create organic modernism furniture under the influence of surrealism; because of his wife Ray Eames and his friend, a Finnish designer, Eero Saarinen. Ray Eames herself was a creative artist as a pupil of Hans Hoffman, and Picasso and Miro was frequented Hoffman's studio. She studied fine art (painting) and textile design and often created highly experimental works. Her inclination toward organic forms greatly influenced Charles Eames' furniture design. Eero Saarinen introduced organic



Fig. 1. Paimio chair by Alvar Aalto.



Fig. 2. Furniture by Finn Juhl and relief of Jean Arp, Cabinetmakers' Guild Exhibition (1941).

formality in architecture with his TWA Terminal of New York JFK Airport, and he continued this inclination to furniture design by creating shell-furniture forms than straight lined storage furniture. The romanticism and humanism as a Finnish designer combined with the rationalism of America, expressed as organic modernism furniture design.



Fig. 3. Painting by Ray Eames (From left 1,2), Molded-plywood sculpture by Ray Eames, and TWA air terminal by Eero Saarinen (Far right).

The Scandinavian furniture designers, Alvar Aalto as a pioneer, adopted the surrealism, and they sought further development in this with seeking exchanges with American designers such as Charles Eames and Eero Saarinen.

They further created furniture design with three-dimensional, organic formalistic and symbolic features. The organic modernism furniture also influenced contemporary furniture designers who seek free and advanced concepts, paving the basis for the furniture to develop into a medium of expression.

Now, furniture design has departed from the previous notion of the architectural element and is now viewed as art objects, and organic modernism furniture design greatly contributed to this.



Fig. 4. Surrealism artists' works (From left, 1,2,3) and furniture design works under surrealism influence (Right, 1,2,3).

2-2 Minimalism Art and Minimalism furniture

The regularity and symmetric concept of the early 20th century art notions shown in Russia's constructivism, De Stijl and Bauhaus influenced the minimalism furniture design. Also, we cannot omit the wide and huge influence of Duchamp who questioned and denied the intrinsic value, meaning and notion of fine arts to all levels of society.

Like many minimalism artists, minimalism furniture designers were actively involved in deterritorialization works, constantly aiming to find a balance in/between the border of design and art. There are contrasting and many differentiated opinions among not only art critics, designers and artists as to whether minimalism furniture design could be called either as art or as design.

Donald Judd insisted that we should accept the genuine difference lying between art and design; on the while, Button insisted that all art objects will have to have functional features as everyday object in the future. Judd insisted the notion of specific object which is neither a sculpture nor a painting. (Bloemink 2004) His art works convey ascetic, geometric and abstract concepts, departing from convention art works, but rather providing new and dynamic functions.

On the other hand, Button stated that furniture and sculpture are all very equally important as art and design, and individual work obtains its' value by coexisting of function and artistic value.

He emphasized the objective necessity and adequacy of art by saying ‘art is a personal language, learned from people who love art. What is important is making art understandable by those who don’t know art.’ (Bloemink 2004) Sol LeWitt designed furniture upon very practical reasons, yet, he wasn’t a utilitarianism who only sought practicality. His works emphasized geometric pattern, and he added circles and triangles in 80’s, complementing previously sharp angled designs. His application of check patterns and colors are still widely used until now.

Artschwager was interested in ‘how to make art that has no boundaries’. (Bloemink 2004) Ultimately, he distinguished practical from non-practical objects, based on how we use the object. He believed that the realm of art was decided by how the viewer interprets the relationship between him/herself with the world.

The minimalism furniture created by minimalism artists in America are still regarded as one of the most creative and difficult works to understand. Brancusi, Duchamp and other minimalism furniture designers who integrated and combined the artistic lexicons of Minimalism aimed to convey difficult and complex concepts with simplified yet controlled aesthetics. Unpolished raw materials, found objects, were preferred by Richard Tuttle, Carl Andre, Robert Morris, and they emphasized that there exists only least of difference between art object and non-art objects exists. (Baker 1993) They sought to expose the actual presence of raw material with primitive artistic language by adopting frank use of raw materials, candid and simple composition and bold presence.

They inherited and further developed Duchampian notion, calling ready-made objects as artifacts, and the artists are finders not creators of art works. Likewise, such avant-garde and new concepts were the fundamental of the complex and profound concepts laid under the simple forms of minimalism art.



Fig. 5. Works of Brancusi, Albers, Duchamp and Judd (Left 1,2,3,4) and Minimalism furniture works (Right 1, 2, 3).

3. ANALYSIS ON <Stool with Partitions 1,2,3>

As organic modernism and minimalism furniture designers were influenced by contemporary artists, and I created <Stool with Partitions 1,2,3> based on understanding of contemporary sculptures and installation artists such as Jean Arp, Richard Serra and Anish Kapoor. I cited phenomenological and physical aptitude from Serra’s works that overwhelm viewers with its immense scale and formality. The function of furniture was moved toward sentimental aspect from previously engineering aspect. Like Uchida Shigeru had said, the furniture had evolved into something that moves and a touch human’s heart. Furniture now has become a media of expression departing from previous functional importance. Arad and Hadid are designers who pioneered in this aspect. Their works fully show the artistic value of functional furniture design.

Previously, design was a medium of function and was clearly distinguished from art. However, now design had changed into a medium of expression. In this respect, now, design is competing its status with art. Expressing something internal and hidden into external world with aesthetic language belong to the realm of art. (Jeong 2009) A term ‘design-art’ was made to refer such

changes in design sector. (Jeong 2009) Previously existing boundary between furniture and art-object, furniture and space, designer and artists, designer and user had become abolished. Now, those, once separated concepts and actors are integrated and combined. <Stool with Partition 1,2,3> was created out of attempt to explore, understand and capture the aesthetic language of Serra, Arp and Kapoor so to create a artistic design.

Serra's sculpting works identified the mundane as the creative space for art, overcoming previous distinction of art and non-art. He sought and endowed equal right to artists and viewers, preferred to derive mutual exchange in the context of universality than particularity. The abstract forms of Arp's sculpture show primitive, dynamic language. Arp is a sculptor who opposed technicality and the priority of reason. He tried to emerge into subconscious state when creating works, embracing the art of chances. He was the most widely received among furniture designers.

I chose FRP (Fiber Glass Reinforced Plastic) as my prime material to freely experiment organic and surrealistic plasticity which is hard to obtain when using wood, in this way, I could not be restricted by choice of materials. The reason behind why the furniture design could adopt abstract yet very organic plasticity under the influence of surrealism were the finding and use of new material, i.e. plastic, and the development plastic manufacturing technology. Designers who overcome the restrictions of materials or manufacturing processes sought experiments with more free and flexible furniture design like the experimental works of surrealism artists.

Even when creating works, I put more priorities in chaos, disorder and instinctual impulse, rather than efficiency of manufacturing or functions. Like many deconstruction artists, who lauded chaos as the spring of creative ideas, (Noblet 1996) insisting that we could further develop ideas in more creative and affluent way through, so-called 'creative chaos'.

<Stool with Partitions 1,2,3> is composed of three partitions and six stools, and followings show its expressive features.



Fig. 6. Works of Arp, Serra, Kapoor that influenced <Stool with Partitions 1,2,3>.



Fig. 7. FRP Manufacturing Process.

3-1 Organic and Uncertain forms

When creating <Stool with Partitions 1,2,3> I was inspired by Serra's works such as <Tilted Arc> and <St. John's Rotary Arc> which brought huge controversies when first exhibited in light of public art. The difference would be that my works need users to change its composition or arrangement upon one's needs. In this respect, <Stool with Partitions 1,2,3> do not require grand

scales as to overwhelm human and surrounding environment even though I cited Serra's organic and soft curves. In my works, the partitions and stools could be separated with flexibility upon users' needs, creating uncertainty in its form. The process of rearranging and recomposing works require the intention and will of users, and again this determines the identity of works, which is one of the intriguing elements

As for <Stool with partitions 1,2,3>, the partition and the back of chair could be separated, and they are not suitable to support the users' back. In this work, the partition plays the role of determining the domains of the work. The light-weight stool, separated from the back of the chair, encourages flexible composition of the work. The user could compose one's own spaces by moving around six stools with great ease. At this time, interestingly, the users can always stay with the partitions, without any need to be away from partitions; because, with this work, one can perfectly safeguard one's privacy even in most public places.

3-2 Changeable Composition

<Stool with partitions 1,2,3> is made up of three partitions and six stools, yet each and every one of them is an independent object. This work encourages and endows changeable composition in which a user can freely deconstruct and reassemble the whole work. In this process, the user plays an important role, and it is the user not designer who determines the final composition and formality. This is the significance of this work. The most known example of furniture design with changeable composition that encourages users' participation is <Superonda> presented by Archizoom Associati, the avant-garde design group from Italy, in 1966. Andrea Branzi (1938-) and other four designers created Archizoom Associati<Fig.8>.



Fig. 8. Superonda by Archizoom Associati.

Now, designer encourage users finalize the furniture design, and such feature guides our direction to unpredictable and flexible elements of the works, actively embracing such features as part of design elements. In other words, the furniture could be easily disassembled and re-composed upon users' needs and wants, apart from designers' intentions or ideas. In this way, the designers can open possibilities and potential for users to participate to making works, so one can easily bring evolution of the works. Likewise, the works have flexible yet uncertainty in which the meanings, significances, forms and functions are entitled upon users' needs and wants. (Lee and Hong, 2006)

What I aimed to portray with the <Stool with partitions 1,2,3> was a deviation from previous furniture designs, which emphasized finished items that are placed in certain fixed spaces, totally eliminating any further and future participation of users. I adopted novel approach toward furniture design; therefore, I wanted to create works that induce and invite users to actively participate to change its form, functions, and compositions, like the examples shown in <Superonda>. In this way, the furniture could build and develop its own distinct domain when placed within spaces.

Such furniture could induce much more dynamic, emotional and active spaces in which the users or residents could endow one's own characters with much more flexible and organic composition.

3-3 Cognitive Domain

Cognitive domain is the contrasting term with physical domain. Cognitive domain signifies domains that are not predetermined and pre-composed space but as spaces in which small elements are freely scattered, so the occupant could slowly build the domain features. This is relevant to Korea's traditional view toward space. Our ancestors regarded that we don't necessarily build concrete walls to determine personal domain. As for the cognitive domain, the relationship between the furniture and space is important.

The <Seamless collection> of Zaha Hadid (1950-) is a good example of cognitive domain featured furniture design. They present unique curve designs and plasticity, and the endless changes in design that remind one the anti-gravity space, and objects that connote organic elements. Each and every individual object in itself presents aesthetic beauty as a finished sculpture, but when they are placed together, they present much more integrative and cognitive beauty. When they are placed together, they seem like a one whole mass like stuck together with a magnetic, but at the same time, they could be read in independent piece.

A Danish architect, Arne Jacobsen, 1902-1971 designed <Swan> (1958) and <Egg> (1958) to decorate SAS hotel lobby; and they also show such cognitive domain features. SAS hotels is constituted with immense horizontal volume (functional) and vertical volume (as being the lower part of the building). The hotel is in itself as a whole very much masculine and geometric. Swan chair and egg chair were designed in surrealistic forms to contrast with such architectural surroundings. The wings of swan chair and arm rests of egg chair are designed to fully embrace sitters' body. In this way, the sitters can still maintain one's private domain even in the high ceiling of hotel lobby.



Fig. 9. <Stool with Partitions 1,2,3> forming cognitive domain

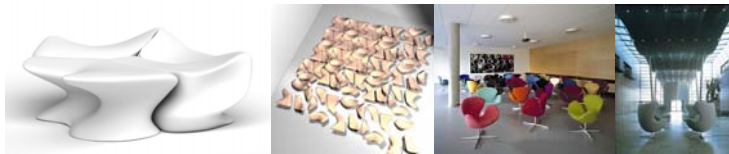


Fig. 10. Seamless Collection by Zaha Hadid(left 1,2), Swan and Egg by Arne Jacobsen(Right 1,2).

4. CONCLUSION

<Stool with Partitions 1,2,3> are doctorate application works for Hongik University in September of 2008. They were created out of influence and based on thorough understanding of contemporary artists such as surrealists and installation artists. Likewise, designers have repeatedly embraced and were inspired by contemporary art.

The aim of this study is to investigate the relevance of contemporary art with the organic modernism and minimalism furniture design, which are one of the most known furniture design that were under the heavy influence of contemporary art. I cited cognitive and phenomenological domain features of Serra's works, and primitive yet organic elements from Arp's works. In this regard, <Stool with Partitions 1,2,3> were studied in light such notions, deriving its significances and importance in light of history of art and history of design.

<Stool with Partitions 1,2,3> were all produced with FRP materials and are composed of three

partitions and six stools. They were analyzed in light of form, composition and function. <Stool with Partitions 1,2,3> have unfixed and organic form; flexible composition that enable disassemble and arrangement at ease; and feature cognitive domain in which the individual elements compose the whole by freely arranged in a given space.

The case studies of how contemporary art and design have sought mutual exchanges and reciprocal influences provided fundamental basis to grasp and understand the major elements and characters of furniture design. This provided important ground to analyze the subject works. If permitted, I want to further derive researches on the reciprocal development and relevance between contemporary art and furniture design with much more in-depth analysis with examples.



Fig. 11. Stool with Partitions 1,2,3.

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