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VISUAL ARTS & ARCHITECTURE: Curvaceous contours

Stylish seating shines at show in Gainesville

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Three furniture artists make waves in "Functional + Extraordinary," an exhibition of works by Vivian Beer, Erik Wolken and Paul Freundt on view at Brenau University in Gainesville.



Courtesy of Vivian Beer

Vivian Beer manages to create movement from material that is fundamentally stiff and seemingly unbending.



Debra Wolf

Erik Wolken's sassy 5-foot bench 'Chairform 3' is an elegant illustration of his enjoyment of wavy, pointed form and inverted symmetry.

REVIEW

Functional + Extraordinary: Contemporary Art Furniture Through Dec. 9. Noon-4 p.m. Tuesdays — Fridays; 2-5 p.m. Sundays. Prices: \$950-\$6,800. Brenau University, Leo Castelli Art Gallery, 429 Academy St., Gainesville. 770-534-6263; www.brenau.edu **Bottom line:** A fine example of art furniture makes for pleasurable viewing.

Fine art furnishings draw significantly from 20th century modernism. From Bauhaus to post-war to Pop, architect-designers like Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe, Isamu Noguchi and Vernon Panton relied on architectural, geometric and freeform shapes in creating interiors for their residential and commercial settings. Utilizing both industrial and natural materials, these masters and others paved the way for the clean, curvaceous contours on view in this show.

Vivian Beer's chairs are delightful interpretations of rounded shapes executed in stainless steel and wood. She creates a sense of continuous movement out of materials that are seemingly unbending.

"Current," for example, is an indoor-outdoor steel chair with a weave of rippling slats of blue. "Red Letter" is playful in fire-engine red, with a semi-circular spine connected to a wavy seat-back. Resembling a tipped letter "G," it echoes the 1940s "Molded Plywood Chair," still in wide usage.

Erik Wolken offers graceful outlines in contrasting woods. His long bench of Baltic birch plywood, "Chairform 3," is stylish and whimsical with its lean, rectangular seat. It is supported by sassy legs that resemble futuristic lightning bolts.

Wolken's pair of elegant hanging cabinets takes female form. Both are lusciously rounded with a satiny finish. "Torso 3" is executed in vertically grained cherry and mahogany, while "Torso 4" is a soft wash of white ash and birch, horizontally grained. Each female torso mirrors the other in shape and opens to reveal stacked glass shelves against a subtle backing of digital imagery.

While every object in the exhibition is worthy of praise, Paul Freundt's sexy, sculptural works are particularly accomplished.

His "Swept Back Chair" in stainless steel exploits the pleasure of an asymmetrical curvy back, a nearly triangular seat, light-catching surface patterning and sleek, tubular legs. His patinated steel "Attica" chaise lounge is equally seductive, with its undulating profile, single arm rest, open back and warm, bronze tone.

Freundt's work offers irresistible tension — curves and lines, volume and space, sophistication and approachability. His seating also appears remarkably comfortable, molded to human contours. With allusions to Isamu Noguchi (in biomorphic shapes) and Stefan Wewerka (in combinations of three-sided, three-legged and four-legged forms), Freundt's pieces are intelligent as well as enticing, in a show that illustrates that functional can indeed be extraordinary.