

VERBALLY ADEPT FURNITURE TIMBERSMITH TIM LARKIN FINDS NEW EXPRESSIONS FOR FURNITURE, BOTH LARGE AND SMALL, WRITES GRANT THOMPSON.

Tim Larkin with Simon Fraser,
Sideboard, 2000

Tim Larkin began making furniture in 1987. His first project, a chair constructed from a single sheet of customwood, established Larkin's preference for working with a vernacular of processed timber products. He has continued to work within that self-imposed constraint, receiving recognition through exhibitions and awards.

His most recent work, *Doing Furniture Conversations*, 2004, completed while he was a candidate in Wellington's Victoria University School of Design Masters program, employs stainless steel and pegboard to produce pieces that each perform a possible relation between furniture's frame and its cladding. The steel is used unaltered, an expression of lightness and strength, but Larkin messes with the pegboard hoping to reveal its 'poetic nature'. Pegboard is a 'hyper-refined' industrial product that compresses all the variable forces of a forest into a mundane building material. In his work, Larkin takes that manufactured

predictability and, through a process he describes as 'a verb chain' (break it, thread it, burn it, plane it, oil it ...) pushes pegboard toward its point of failure. Through this process, waywardness enters the pegboard's perforated grid. The stacked layers generate a 'grain' and 'bark', and they take on the aroma of wood-smoke, causing the transformed pegboard to resemble timber.

When considering how Larkin's work is produced, his exhibition's title, *Doing Furniture Conversations*, seemed important. I found myself considering the implications of doing rather than making a furniture conversation. Doing seemed to insist upon an act, something extending through time as well as occupying space. Doing seemed somehow a more performative word than making – more about the release of a force rather than its application.

That sense of a force released ran through the line of models presented alongside the five furniture pieces in the exhibition. For Larkin, the models are partly how he decides what to make, and partly a means to describe the 'tonal range' of the project as a whole: 'the relationships between the black-blocky-things and the silver-sticky-things'. For me, they established a field of relations across which the large works could be understood.

In the models there is the 'doing' of Larkin's work, the lightness of ideas taking shape, the holding of a pose before it solidifies into a position. The weightiness of furniture, present in the large works, among the models became something light: an idea cradled, then passed from one to the other and illuminated by each. There is a play of conversation in the models. How about this? Or this? Or this?

Larkin's next project investigates the food safe, a pre-refrigeration technology that lingers on in kitchens not yet modernised. It seems a suitably provisional space for his attentions – not quite inside or outside, not quite furniture or architecture. The project is at the research stage and forms a part of his life alongside lecturing at the Victoria University School of Design and raising a family. I like the suggestion of pegboard in the mesh of the food safe, and wonder how the conversation will take shape. I am curious about the materials Larkin will employ and how the new project will see them transformed. ■■■■

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