

21st century chairs

28 interior designers, architects and designer-makers show that the new may still be possible in the humble chair, reports

Louise Martin-Chew

THE HUMBLE CHAIR CARRIES ENORMOUS WEIGHT ON ITS OFTEN IMPOSSIBLY SLEEK FRAME. This is not just related to the increasing size of the average Westerner. Conceptually, the chair also carries the load of 20th century aesthetics. Modernist chairs have become cult items, with such designers as Corbusier and Breuer elevated to hero status. However, now that the 21st century is with us, the relevance of this modernist aesthetic has been delivered as something of a challenge to Queensland furniture designers by Kirsten Fitzpatrick, curator of the Brisbane City Gallery's *21st Century Chairs* exhibition.

The response from 28 designers—architects, industrial and interior designers, and furniture designer-makers—shows that the new is still possible. Fitzpatrick notes that, based around the idea of seating in the 21st century, there are chairs for new functions, chairs produced from new materials, new forms of seating and contemporary interpretations of classic forms such as the Chaise Lounge.

21st Century Chairs builds on the Brisbane City Gallery's furniture exhibition successes. *Degrees of Latitude* (1998) explored designs for the Queensland climate and *Against the Grain*, 2000, surveyed sculptural furniture. Some of the same names recur (Bruce Carrick, Ian Garradd, John Fuller and Nicole Voevodin-Cash), but this exhibition indicates a significant and growing depth in Queensland designers. Amongst the range of responses some themes emerge.

Environmental sustainability is explored by Michael O'Sullivan and Angus Spencer in *Boomerang #5*, which is constructed from cardboard and is capable of being reconfigured in different seating positions. Recycling of materials is cleverly tackled by Alexander Lotersztain's *Crusoe Sofa*, made from rubber buoys and steel. This seat can be flat packed and (almost) slipped under a door.

The stress of an increasing pace of life is given a conversational solution by John Fuller, with the 2C love seat. Carole Tretheway's *Donut* is the prettiest meditation stool I have ever seen (perhaps not a hard task). Minimally constructed from a seat and a short timber back, it is impossible to use this chair without assuming the cross-legged or lotus position. And Tiffany Burleigh's *Parachute Chair*, constructed from nylon webbing and cord, allows a change of positions with the judicious use of the parachutists 'rip' cord.

Richard Newport's *Nerd Chair* addresses the 21st century by providing every convenience in the only chair you may really need—laptop, mobile phone, CDs, and food storage in an office-lounge arrangement—while Ian Garradd's essay, *Axis Lounge*, looks back to the comfort chairs of the 1930s with compartments provided for magazines, music, glasses, etc.

Novelty and originality are overwhelming in Nicole Voevodin-Cash's *Lobby Play Series-Duet*, two stools, upholstered in real fur, which take the unchic to new

heights. Truly interactive, one screams when sat on, the other vibrates. Designed for corporate lobbies, they may take these environments into a new realm.

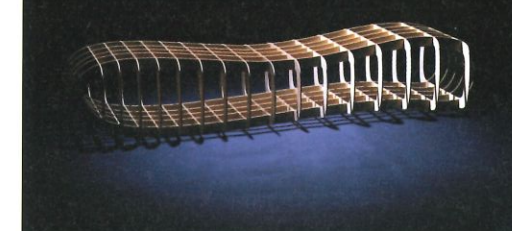
The largest 'chair' in the exhibition, the massive *Colosseum* by William McMahon, is a scale model of Rome's classical ruin. It is playful and lively, and questions future obsolescence.

These designs variously address new technologies and materials, new uses of old materials, issues of sustainability, a retro-aesthetic, comfort and the 21st century psyche. They are witty, playful, functional and rewarding on physical, conceptual and aesthetic levels. Design of this quality makes the point again—there is enormous talent in contemporary furniture design, concomitant with, as Fitzpatrick notes, "a paucity of support and promotion of the work of Australian designers. People can't find and buy this work". This is all too evident in Brisbane where a commercial outlet for contemporary Australian furniture design has not been able to sustain a presence.

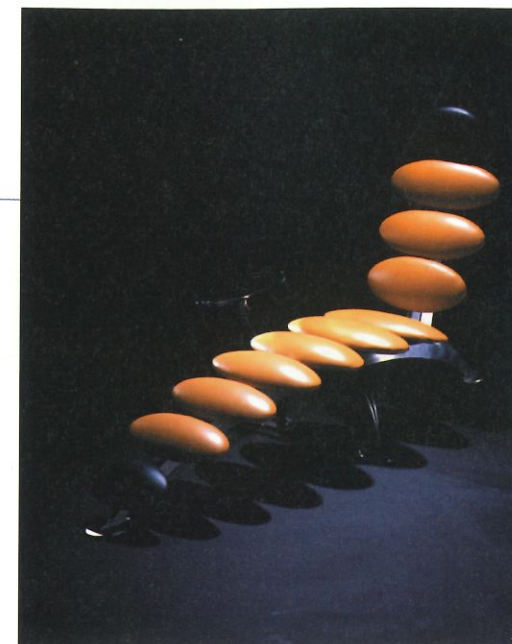
Louise Martin-Chew is a freelance writer, and is Brisbane art critic for *The Australian* newspaper.

21st Century Chairs, curated by Kirsten Fitzpatrick, is at Brisbane City Gallery, 16 August to 13 October 2002.

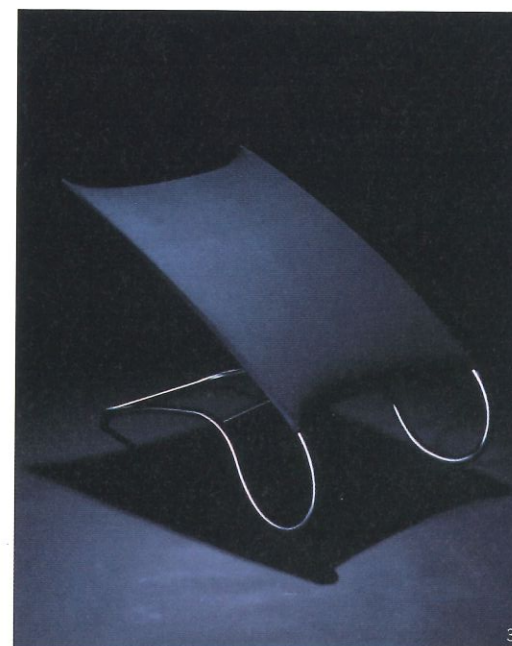
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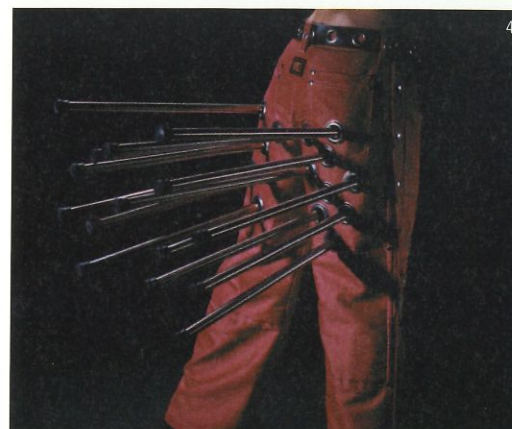
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1 Guy Parmenter, *M1*, 2002. Hoop pine, marine plywood, 380 x 2100 x 590mm.

2 David Shaw, *Space Shaze*, 2002. Laser cut stainless steel, ply, leather, glass, 1100 x 620 x 2100mm.

3 Luis Nheu and Lee Foster, *Slinky Chair*, 2002, stainless steel, neoprene upholstery, 750 x 550 x 1120mm.

4 Matt Dabrowski, *Chair Pants*, 2002. Stainless steel, acrylic prosthetics, jeans, size 32.

All photos: Peter Budd.

5 Paul Fairweather, *Tangled WWW (Web We Weave) Chair*, 2002, Cane, 1080 x 1450 x 1670mm.

6 Michael O'Sullivan and Angus Spencer, *Boomerang #5*, 2002. Cardboard sheets and tubing, 780 x 1700 x 440mm.

7 Kimberly Kersh, *Funk Chair*, 2002, Plantation Ash, veneer bending plywood, 900 x 650 x 470mm.

8 John Fuller, *2C*, 2002, stainless steel, Bluegum, 710 x 1220 x 1280mm.

9 Ian Garradd, *Axis Lounge*, 2002. Ply, timber, steel, upholstery, 780 x 1160 x 830mm.

10 Lorne Hiller and Guy Villiers, *Chaise Longue*, 2002, spotted gum, stainless steel, 800 x 700 x 1850mm.

11 Alexander Lotersztain, *Crusoe Sofa*, 2002. Ply, timber, steel, upholstery, 780 x 1160 x 830mm.

12 Richard Newport, *The Nerd Chair*, 2002. Ply, 1150 x 810 x 1100mm.

13 William McMahon, *Colosseateum*, 2002. Digitally printed fabric, timber, foam, 750 x 2700 x 2040mm.

