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**Gaze and graze**

By Mark Ellwood

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For this year's Venice Biennale in June Irish artist John Gerrard will commandeer a boathouse on the island of Certosa for a massive installation of his hyper-realistic video animations. In it, he will host lunches for collectors and curators during which they won't just be gazing at his work but also grazing with it, since his latest pieces are not projections but sterling silver knives, forks and spoons for use – and for sale. Moulded from goat bones, the cutlery is signature Gerrard but at \$500 per five-piece set is more affordable than his usual output.

It was commissioned and produced by New York-based Artware Editions, one of the leading companies in a niche but growing sector. Different to design-art, where product designers create non- or semi-functional pieces – see the recent Marc Newson show at Larry Gagosian's London gallery or the Ron Arad exhibition at the Timothy Taylor Gallery, for example – this new offshoot involves artists applying their talents to everyday objects, from furniture to fabrics.

Certainly, this is not a new phenomenon. Donald Judd and Isamu Noguchi both produced classics decades ago (*see below*), while Salvador Dali was famously inspired by Mae West to make his lips sofa. But it is significant that, today, a company such as Artware can thrive solely by selling such work.



John Gerrard with his cutlery moulded from goat bones

Run by two former art gallerists and based in a closet-sized shop in Manhattan's West Village, the three-year-old business works with a roster of artists, selling classics, such as Yves Klein's gold-leaf-filled glass tables, alongside commissions such as Gerrard's cutlery or the rococo cuckoo clock soon to launch from painter Kehinde Wiley.

"This is like maths – which you can finish and be done [with] – versus creative writing, which goes on for ever," says Artware co-founder Rebecca Kong. "Compared with [the artists'] normal work, we give them maths homework – a short-term project – and they like the challenge." (Wiley is currently wrestling with how best to record the drag queen who'll be his clock's hourly chime.)

The market for artist-designed objects is one that Joyce Pomeroy Schwartz, a Manhattan-based promoter of public art projects, is also exploring. Previous installations on which she worked often involved seating or benches and she's now producing some of them – as well as other pieces – as stand-alone furniture, or what she calls "functional sculpture".

Schwartz thinks it's easy to distinguish between a chair conceived by a trained furniture designer and one that comes from the mind of an artist. "The difference between Noguchi and [the] Eames [practice] is this: if Noguchi designed something, he never wanted to change it but Eames was always trying to make a better design. Artists start with the idea and come from left-field; they're not solving the problems of clients and spaces."

Helen Allen, who runs Pulse, one of the art world's top fairs, is equally enthusiastic about more artists moving into the design world. "Most artists don't work solely in one vein," she says. "Photographers are doing multimedia and video, painters are exploring different mediums. People are moving into other realms as it enables them to push their work further."

There's a commercial element too. Just as less expensive prints of an artist's work are designed to whet buyer's appetites for the real thing, so too are art-furnishings. Las Vegas-based art adviser Michele C Quinn points to the Puppy vase that pop artist Jeff Koons produced a few years ago. "It was an edition of 3,000, unheard of in the multiples world – just a mass marketing piece for \$500. But I saw one at auction sell for almost \$11,000 at the height of the market. It's a great way to have a Koons and not spend millions of dollars."

In general, though, she doesn't think artist-designed furniture or homewares should be seen as the same kind of investment as paintings, sculptures or video installations. Rather than heirlooms-in-waiting, they are more dinner-party conversation starters – especially when the cutlery is cast from goat bones.

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"There's cachet in owning an artist-designed vase versus just a vase from Tiffany," Quinn says. "Everyone wants something that no one else has [and] it adds a little bit of an extra story."

Leading artist-designers**Richard Artschwager**

Artschwager trained as a furniture-maker but turned to art after his studio burned down in 1958. He now produces tables and chairs that straddle both genres.

www.gagosian.com

John Chamberlain

Chamberlain's 1970s sofa – a seat carved into a foam block using 10in butcher knives and upholstered in brown suede – was masterminded by one of the doyennes of artist-designed furniture, Elizabeth Cunnick from A/D Gallery. "That sofa looks like the only things you could do on it are smoke a hookah and have sex," she says.

www.adeditions.com

Jackie Hoffman

A minimalist, Hoffman first started making furniture for herself before teaming up with Joyce Pomeroy Schwartz. Her wooden chairs will go on sale this year, in both limited editions (costing \$20,000-\$50,000 per piece) and an unlimited diffusion line (\$4,000-\$10,000 per piece).

Tel: +1 212-245-6468

Donald Judd

When Judd bought a Manhattan house he kitted it out with his own designs. More than 50 are now reproduced in aluminium, copper and various woods under his foundation's strict control. London's Sebastian & Barquet gallery is showing the work this autumn.

www.sebastianbarquet.com

Roy McMakin

Seattle-based McMakin, who founded Domestic Furniture in Los Angeles in 1987, aggressively blends design and fine art. His witty work includes a white dresser with black knobs in increasing sizes and he has even designed entire houses.

www.matthewmarks.com

Jason Middlebrook

Michigan-born Middlebrook makes throne-like chairs (*right*), tables, desks and benches from driftwood and reappropriated, Warhol-honouring Brillo boxes. Though often shown as sculpture, the pieces (from \$12,000) are meant to be used – and are surprisingly comfortable.

www.sarameltzergallery.com

Takashi Murakami

Japanese pop culture phenomenon Murakami debuted a line riffing on his signature smiley flower cartoon at Art Basel Miami Beach in December. There's a sofa covered in tiny, handmade versions of the logo, as well as gigantic ball-shaped stools in the same design.

<http://english.kaikaikiki.co.jp>

Isamu Noguchi

The Japanese-American sculptor produced probably the best-known art-furniture, much-copied and much-loved tables for both Herman Miller and Knoll.

www.knoll.com

www.hermanmiller.com

Franz West

West, an Austrian, is obsessed with furniture, especially chairs. "His work is about interactivity: is it art or is it furniture? He wants you to sit on it," says art adviser Michele C Quinn.

www.gagosian.com

Richard Woods

For its Collaborations range, Established & Sons paired Woods with designer Sebastian Wrong on the Wrongwoods chest of drawers (£2,277) and night table (£978). Each is handmade, so unique.

www.establishedandsons.com

