

NewArtCentre.

Fred Baier

form swallows function

The most interesting British furniture maker of his generation.

- Glenn Adamson

With his defiant, anti-modernist credo – form swallows function – he has made a continuous stream of one-off inventions, each full of wit, imagination and wizard engineering.

- Emma Crichton-Miller, Design Edit, February 2021



Installation view, Design House, New Art Centre.

Fred Baier: *form swallows function*

A self-described 'furniture artist', Baier creates visually challenging and complex furniture that sits somewhere between art and contemporary furniture design. His diverse and inventive body of work is characterised by an embrace of technology and bold experimentation with form, colour and design, as well as an inquisitive and uniquely imaginative approach to functional problem solving. A veneer of humour is balanced by an underlying seriousness, which lies in his commitment to using creativity to funnel challenging mathematical problems into something which can be used.

Baier was amongst the first furniture designers to recognise the potential of computers and digital rendering programs as tools to assist and advance the practice of three-dimensional design. The exhibition at the New Art Centre will feature the first ever piece by Baier to be conceived, modelled, developed and produced using a combination of commercial and homegrown software. Designed in 1982 and rendered in lacquered birch plywood in 1994, *Love Seat* is one of the earliest items of furniture to be completely cyber-generated. Taking an amalgamation of simple solids (cone, cylinder, cube and pyramid) as his starting point, Baier used early computer aided CAD and CNC design and computer numerical control programs to open out two negative spaces in generated planes. These twin recesses formed the lovers' seats: intimate spaces providing sanctuary from the outside world.

Another key work, *Park Life* (1989) - a vinyl-clad chair composed of three prismatic solids colliding at unconventional, irregular angles - exemplifies his practice of beginning with a mathematical principle or conceptual narrative, before turning to software as a means to resolve any functional questions that may arise from his proposition. To ensure that the ambitious design of *Park Life* was feasible, Baier collaborated with a PhD student developing an early 3D-modelling program, to digitally draught the sketches and cut the individual components with such acute precision that the chair would ultimately be stable.

Baier's interest in futurism and his curiosity for the advancements in production methods is balanced by an awareness that, given the physical nature of the furniture he produces, his practice can only ever exist within its immediate present. The immediacy and precarity of the present is reiterated in his 2005 work *A Tool to Place You in the Here & Now*, a stool comprising a flat plane of sycamore on the tip of a cone.

More recently, Baier has pushed back against the increased reliance of designers upon computer aided production and the proliferation of technology in everyday life, during a period of self-reflection that has led him to return to previous works. He has salvaged 'offcuts' from previous designs and reconstituted them as objects in their own right. This process is evidenced in works such as *Rockin Bowls* (2010), the forms sourced from the digital waste bin of his computer modelling program and rendered in lacquered MDF board and birchwood ply. It is this enduring appreciation of innovative design techniques and hand-rendered decorative objects that makes Baier's furniture so unique. His at once forward-facing and deep commitment to the present is what will ultimately serve.

Fred Baier

Pyramid Chair I

2014 (designed 1978/9)

Solid sycamore, laminated
plywood, stained Bolivar,
lacquer

69 x 64 x 60 cm

27 1/8 x 25 1/4 x 23 5/8 in

Fred Baier

Pyramid Chair II

2014 (designed 1978/9)

Solid sycamore, laminated
plywood, stained Bolivar,
lacquer

69 x 64 x 60 cm

27 1/8 x 25 1/4 x 23 5/8 in





Installation view, Design House, New Art Centre.

Fred Baier
Rockin Bowls I
2010
Lacquered MDF board,
birch plywood
54 x 115 x 46 cm
21 1/4 x 45 1/4 x 18 1/8 in





Fred Baier
Rockin Bowls II
2010
Lacquered MDF board,
birch plywood
54 x 115 x 46 cm
21 1/4 x 45 1/4 x 18 1/8 in



Fred Baier
Park Life
2017 (designed 1989)
Stainless steel, automotive
printed vinyl
85 x 70 x 65 cm
33 1/2 x 27 1/2 x 25 5/8 in

Fred Baier
Prism Chair I
2020 (designed 1989)
Stainless steel
65 x 70 x 85 cm
25 5/8 x 27 1/2 x 33 1/2 in

Fred Baier
Prism Chair II
2020 (designed 1989)
Stainless steel
65 x 70 x 85 cm
25 5/8 x 27 1/2 x 33 1/2 in





Installation view, Design House, New Art Centre.



Fred Baier
Tetrahedron & Toroid
2012 (table designed 1995)
MDF polyester lacquer,
English oak
72 x 52 x 50 cm
28 3/8 x 20 1/2 x 19 3/4 in



Fred Baier

Tool to place you in there

Here and Now

2015 (designed 2005)

Stained sycamore

45 x 37 x 37 cm

17 3/4 x 14 5/8 x 14 5/8 in

Fred Baier
Here (brown)
2013/4
Oak cylinder,
Madrona veneer, MDF
44 x 39.5 x 28 cm
17 3/8 x 15 1/2 x 11 1/8 in

Fred Baier
There (blue)
2013/4
Oak, anodised aluminium,
board material
89 x 35 x 31 cm
35 1/8 x 13 3/4 x 12 1/4 in





Fred Baier
Love Seat
1994 (designed 1982)
Lacquered birch, plywood
120 x 117 x 140 cm
47 1/4 x 46 1/8 x 55 1/8 in

Fred Baier
Siblings I
2017
English oak
44 x 39 x 28 cm
17 3/8 x 15 3/8 x 11 1/8 in

Fred Baier
Siblings II
2017
English oak
44 x 39 x 28 cm
17 3/8 x 15 3/8 x 11 1/8 in

Fred Baier
Siblings III
2017
English oak
44 x 39 x 28 cm
17 3/8 x 15 3/8 x 11 1/8 in



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