

Arts & Entertainment

SECTION N

The Atlanta Journal □ THE ATLANTA CONSTITUTION

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Eleanor Ringel

Behind Door No. 1: The Stoned vision of Morrison myth

"Jim Morrison — He's Hot, He's Sexy and He's Dead."

So blared the cover of Rolling Stone magazine in September 1981.

Ten years earlier, Morrison, the lead singer for the Doors, died in Paris of an apparent drug overdose.

Ten years later, Morrison is still dead. But he's hotter and sexier than ever, thanks largely to the new Oliver Stone movie "The Doors," which opened Friday.

Stone's version, starring Val Kilmer as the Dark Prince of Psychedelics, emerged from a veritable pack of in-development Doors movies. Star names attached to the project have ranged from John Travolta and Tom Cruise to Jason Patric and Keanu Reeves. From directors Brian De Palma and Hal Ashby to William Friedkin and Ron Howard.

When you're strange, no one remembers your name. When you're strange and dead, everyone does.

The Doors Movie Marathon began in the early '80s, when the singer's younger sister announced plans to produce a movie about her sibling, the Lizard King. About the same time, De Palma announced his Doors picture, "Fire," to star Mr. Saturday Night Fever himself, Travolta.

Then Allan Carr, having lionized the Village People with "Can't Stop the Music," threw his hat into the ring by optioning "No One Gets Out of Here

Alive," a Doors memoir by Danny Sugarman.

Ron "Opie" Howard and his company, Imagine Entertainment, got into the act in 1985. Somehow, they hung in there through changes, delays, etc. In 1990, Variety reported that

Carolco Pictures, (current home of Sly Stallone and Arnold Schwarzenegger), in conjunction with Imagine (who now owned the Sugarman rights) would make the Doors movie. Stone, on the rebound from his on-again/off-again "Evita," would direct.

It's somehow fitting that Stone won the Doors bidding wars, earning him the chance to immortalize Morrison and company on film. As a filmmaker, he's profited from the '80s, yet some part of him still champions the '60s. His heroes have always been counterculture cowboys: Willem Dafoe's poet-soldier in "Platoon"; James Woods's gonzo journalist in "Salvador"; Tom Cruise's straight-arrow-turned-activist in "Born on the Fourth of July."

Interestingly, the Doors' keyboardist, Ray Manzarek, always wanted Stanley Kubrick to direct the movie. Manzarek told the Hollywood Reporter in 1987, "He's the director of the times we live in."

I'm afraid Manzarek misses the point. A movie about the Doors isn't about the times we live in: It's about the times some of us lived in in the late '60s. It's also about a time many wished they'd lived in — the most devoted Doors fans I know were about 9 when the band was at its peak. In a sense, the movie needed to be about the myth of the Doors, even more than their reality.

Stone's always been at his best when he's felt the need to convince his audience that something was at stake. And that was one of the most cherished self-delusions of the '60s: that something was always at stake. Inherent in Morrison's Dionysian excesses was a live-fast, die-young ethos — black-light decadence and mushroom manifestoes. You cannot petition the Lord with prayer, as the lyric goes.

Bless his bleeding hippie heart, Stone still believes in the stoned soul of the '60s. He's the right director for the Doors because he takes them personally. And taking things personally, you might say, is what Jim Morrison and his era were all about.

AN ARTFUL CONNECTION BETWEEN

Form & FUNCTION



"Wave Good-bye" is by New Yorker Tom Stender, who will show at the new Weinberg Gallery Inc.



Michelle Pizer and Douglas Macon of Art Forms Inc. emphasize the sculptural aspects of the functional pieces they exhibit. Everything in the small storefront gallery on Trinity Street is shown on a pedestal.

Atlanta galleries turn tables on expectation by exhibiting hottest hybrid: art furniture

By Catherine Fox
Staff writer

Contemporary art that you can put your socks in or eat your lunch on or take a nap upon suddenly seems to be in vogue. Art furniture has hit its stride, and Atlanta has two — soon to be three — commercial galleries devoted to this new hybrid form.

Over the past 30 years, the American crafts movement nurtured studio (individually made) furniture, shifting from its original reverence for wood and traditional forms to an emphasis on design and freedom of materials. Artists from other fields, who introduced a more expressive and conceptual emphasis, enriched furniture-making further. Memphis, the wild Italian designers of the early '80s, goosed it a bit more.

This synergy of art, design and craft has taken off during the past decade. Art furniture is as varied as the artists' imaginations. Gordon Chandler's chairs, constructed out of pipes and other industrial scrap in his Carrollton studio, are closer to John Chamberlain's sculpture of crushed car parts than the decorative arts. New Yorker Thomas Hucker's

chest of drawers, with its graceful convex burl veneer front, is an elegant abstraction of a William and Mary chest filtered through an admiration for Ming dynasty furniture design.

Alabama artist Craig Nutt is inspired by his vegetable garden. A carefully crafted wood table might be

supported by four large cayenne pepper plants or an asparagus stalk that curves like a cabriole leg.

Unlike "fine" artists who use furniture as a metaphor — such as Joel Otterson, the subject of an upcoming High Museum of Art show — the furniture artists

Please see FURNITURE, N12 ▶



Christina Ernst and Sam Watson perform "Color," which depicts how hues mix and change.

Chicago dancers make humor a standard move

By Helen C. Smith
Staff writer

In "Wired," a frenzied piece about the overuse of caffeine, sugar, television and other additions of modern society, the Ernst/Watson dancers periodically get juiced-up by shocks from the tube and go haywire against a cacophonous sonic collage.

Which isn't at all unusual for this Chicago group.

"I tend to have a crazy tone to a lot of my pieces," says Sam Watson, 30 — who, with Christina Ernst and two other dancers make up Ernst/Watson. The group performs at 7 Stages Performing Arts Center on Friday and Saturday. "I think silliness is needed. There's not much humor out there."

Ms. Ernst, a 33-year-old Swiss citizen, agrees. The two former members of the Chicago Repertory Dance Ensemble choreograph collaboratively as well as individually.

"We're not trying to be meaningful, we're not heavy, we're not dramatic," Ms. Ernst says. "We goof around in some of our works, but they are carefully crafted."

In "Unbreakable," for instance, the dancers — which include Judy Austin, 29, and Richard Havey, 28 — stomp on Mason jars and toss beer bottles around as casually as if they were Koosh balls. The recorded sounds of furiously shattering glass fool the ears into believing disaster has happened. But nothing is broken.

For contrast, the quartet also performs playfully lyrical dances, two of which will be performed here — "Color" (depicting how colors mix and become different hues) and Ms. Ernst's untitled duet for two women.

Founded in 1986, Ernst/Watson was a performing arm of Chicago Repertory Dance Ensemble until last year, when it became its own entity. The troupe tours throughout the United States and, for about a quarter of each year, in Europe.

INSIDE



ASO announces season

▶ Yuri Temirkanov (above) will be among guest conductors joining the Atlanta Symphony in '91-92. N4

Inside the Arts

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Furniture: Form follows function to a sense of fun

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relish utility as part of the challenge. The same goes for craftsmanship, though they may choose not to flaunt it or make it their raison d'être as did craftspeople of the '50s and '60s.

The High Museum of Art bought its first piece of art furniture, Robert Whitley's Throne Chair, in 1981. Donald Peirce, the High's decorative-arts curator, says he adds about a piece a year. The city's crafts galleries — the Signature Shop and Connell/Great American — exhibit furniture regularly. And Eve Mannes Gallery, which attracted collectors from around the country when it showed Boston artist Judy Kensley McKie's furniture animated by animal imagery in 1987, mounted a major show last year.

With the new galleries, however, the discipline is receiving attention of a different order in Atlanta.

Axis Twenty Inc., started four years ago by interior designers Joe Langford and Renee Gaston, has just moved into a spiffy new Peachtree Hills space, doubling its size. The gallery's purview is the broadest of the three, including early modern as well as contemporary furniture and production pieces in addition to unique ones.

Chairs by historically important designers Eliel Saarinen and Wendell Castle are mixed in with a new line of production furniture by architect Michael Graves and an elegant figured mahogany bed by Dick Wickman. The Wisconsin craftsman, who works entirely by commission, embellishes the gently arched head- and footboards with cord and black PVC pipe.

"We are not trying to dictate a design direction as much as set a quality level," Mr. Langford says.

Yet these different works do share an underlying aesthetic vision.

"We're interested in honesty regardless of material — it could be plastic or wood," Mr. Langford says. "I think there's a restraint and elegance to the work, not as many gimmicks. We're looking for furniture that has a sense of permanence. We want to show the classics of our time."

Doug Macon and Michele Pizer are interested in emphasizing the sculptural aspect of functional forms at their Art Forms Inc. gallery. Everything is shown on a pedestal in this small storefront venue, which opened in the southernmost part of downtown in October next door to Mr. Macon's Trinity Gallery.

Most of the 10 or so artists they represent are Atlantans. Timothy Sutherland, a longtime furniture maker, is exhibiting a spalted elm chair with a gently curving silhouette in the current show. Kris Gunderson has contributed a dramatic pair of 40-inch twisted metal candleholders as well as sinuous metal halogen lamps and an organically shaped coffee table of metal and marble. Turner Duffey's oval mahogany cocktail table rests on inverted mahogany cones that balance on cherry spheres.

"You can find people who are doing great things technically, and people who are strong aesthetically, but it's hard to find people who have both," says Mr. Macon, who shows only unique and limited-edition pieces.

So will Marc Weinberg, who plans to open Weinberg Gallery Inc. near Buckhead in April. Although he wants to seek out regional talent for his stable, his inaugural show will feature works by artists of national reputation.

Galleries carrying furniture as art

► **Art Forms Inc.** 253 Trinity Ave. S.W. Open 10 a.m.-5 p.m. weekdays; 11 a.m.-3 p.m. Saturdays. Free. 525-7546.

► **Axis Twenty Inc.** 200 Peachtree Hills Ave. N.E. Open 10 a.m.-5 p.m. weekdays; 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Saturdays. Free. 261-4022.

► **Connell Gallery.** 333 Buckhead Ave. N.E. Open 10 a.m.-5 p.m. weekdays; noon-5 p.m. Saturdays. Free. 261-1712.

► **Eve Mannes Gallery.** 116 Bennett St. N.E. Open 9:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m. weekdays; 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturdays. Free. 351-6651.

► **Signature Shop and Gallery.** 3267 Roswell Road N.E. Open 9:30 a.m.-5 p.m. weekdays; 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturdays. Free. 237-4426.

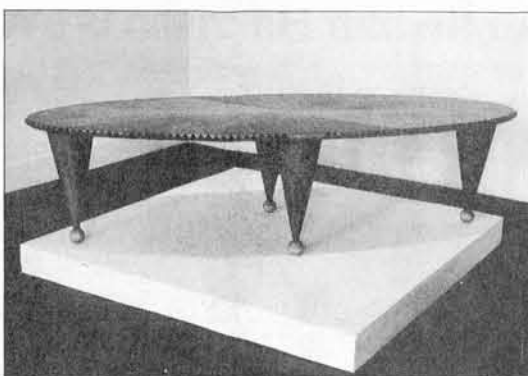
Californian Gary Knox Bennett, for example, is known for his irreverence and imagination. In one of his more famous pieces — considered a statement against the glorification of craft — he constructed an impeccably crafted cabinet only to hammer a single nail into its surface until it bent.

"Wave Good-bye," a curly maple hall table by New Yorker Tom Stender, combines wit and craft. The only departure from its simple shape and straightforward celebration of wood is the way the top surfs off into an undulant wave at one end.

Mr. Weinberg, who has been a dealer of 18th- and early 19th-century American antiques for the past decade, is passionate about the historical importance of the studio furniture movement.

"From my understanding of furniture history, this is a new combination of the designer, the craftsman and the artist. Never before have the designer and craftsman been the same person. Chippendale [18th century], Ruhlman [art deco] and Mies [modernist] were all designers," he says.

Though he will sell wearable art as well, Mr. Weinberg says he has confidence in the market for this furniture. The upswing of interest may reflect increased awareness and credibility engendered by the support of major museums. "New American Furniture: The Second Generation of Studio Furnituremakers," a traveling show originated by the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, has at-



This oval cocktail table, by Turner Duffey of Atlanta, is mahogany with a cherry base. The artist is represented by Art Forms Inc. gallery.

tracted major media attention.

Both Mr. Langford of Axis Twenty and Martha Connell, owner of Connell Gallery, suggest that high prices of retail furniture help the cause.

"You can buy a piece of artist-made furniture and get something with some individuality for about the same price," Ms. Connell maintains.

Even so, most of the furniture doesn't come cheap. Prices start at \$40 for a Gunderson candle-

stick or \$350 for a production end table, and rocket into the tens of thousands — depending on the size and complexity of the piece and the maker's reputation.

The dealers would agree, however, that there is more to this than furnishing a home.

"You don't come here if you are just looking for a table," says Mr. Macon of Art Forms. "You're looking for a work of art."

Elements of art, craft, design converge for these new creators

Art furniture — an art form that straddles the boundaries between design, craft and art — was bound to attract practitioners from all three territories.

Charles Bernier, who uses exotic woods and metals for spare, modern benches, mirrors and tables on view at Axis Twenty Inc., studied interior design at Georgia State University. The Atlanta artist, 38, spent his time in the woodshop.

Kris Gunderson, 33, and Dick Wickman, 43, came to furniture from sculpture. Mr. Gunderson began, as many furniture craftsmen have, by making things for himself out of metal. A friend saw the pieces and encouraged him to pursue furniture making. "At first I did it to pay my bills. Now I'm completely involved in it," says the Atlanta artist, who is showing his curvilinear tables and halogen lamps at Art Forms.

Mr. Wickman believes his fine-arts background is more crucial to his art. "It taught me a way of seeing and looking," says the Wisconsin artist, who cites art deco, Shaker furniture and

Native American and Japanese art as influences.

Unlike the sculptors, Thomas Hucker, 35, knew he wanted to make furniture when he was 17. He found the "anything goes" character of contemporary art too unstructured and the life of an artist too unstable.

"Furniture offered parameters at a scale I felt comfortable with, and a chance of mastery of materials and techniques [similar to] the visual arts," he recalls. "There was lots of excitement in crafts in the '70s, and I wanted a place where I could avoid getting caught up in fashion trends."

"That was true then. It's not so true now."

Though he has earned a reputation, he is uncomfortable with the new art status of furniture. He also has distanced himself from the crafts community.

"I call my work design," the New Yorker says. "I would like to get my work into production. I don't think that a bunch of expensive objects for the elite is such a great thing. I would rather design a great folding chair."

— Catherine Fox

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