

# Sit yourself down!

## Art Break August 4 and 7, 2020

Designer George Nelson: “Every truly original idea—every innovation in design, every new application of materials, every technical invention for furniture—seems to find its most important expression in a chair.”

<https://denverartmuseum.org/article/staff-blogs/brief-history-chair-design>

# Mia



Chairs help define the use of a space...or create a space for use. How many of you have a favorite chair? Is it your favorite because it looks good or because it is comfortable?



Left, Tudor Room installation; Right, Alec Soth, *Luxora, Alabama*, 2002, Mia 2007.111.5.



# A brief history of the chair



Skara Brae settlement; Chair of Reniseneb, c. 1450 BCE, Metropolitan Museum; Niobid Painter, red-figure amphora; Hip-joint armchair, c. 1480–1500, Metropolitan Museum; Attributed to Timothy Loomis III, East Windsor side chair, 1770-90, Mia 2015.25

# A brief history of the chair (from 1800s to today)



Vitra, installation of chairs

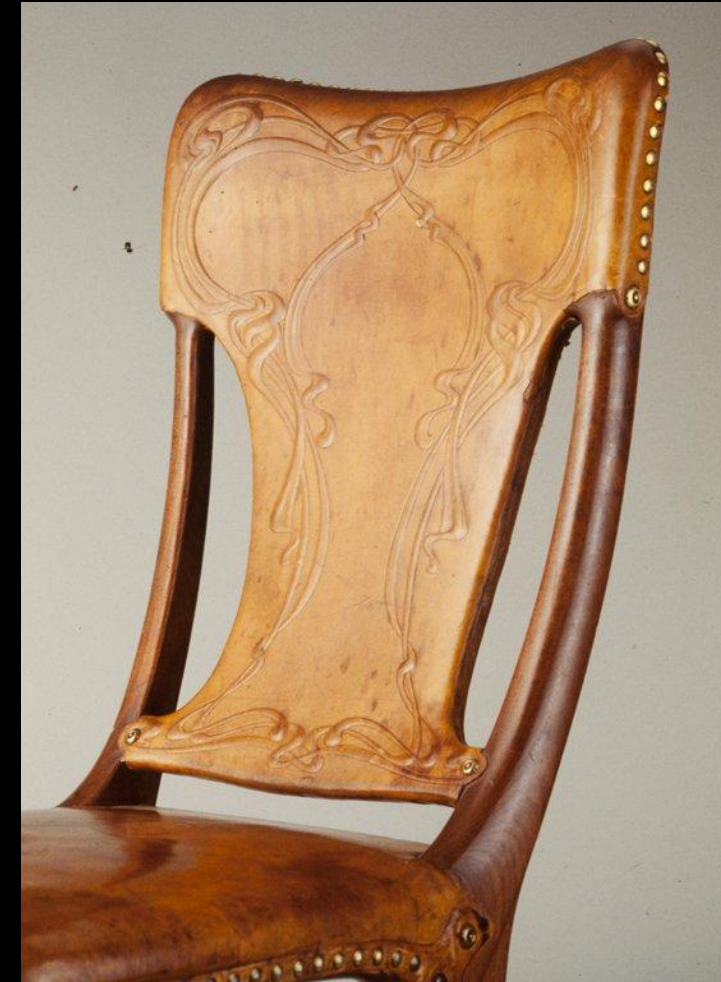
<https://hypebeast.com/2020/5/vitra-design-museum-chair-times-a-history-of-seating-film-heinz-butler>



## Key Ideas:

- Chairs often reflect the newest technology and materials available to the designer/maker at the time of their manufacture.
- Chairs give us an insight into the social, economic, and political contexts of their time, reflecting the lives of the people who made and used them.
- As a functional object, viewers connect with chairs in the galleries in a different way than a painting or sculpture.

What references to nature or organic forms are within the design?



Eugène Gaillard, *Side Chair*, 1900, 94.34

A purchase of one of these chairs and table, for the V&A, eventually led to letters from the public and critics “deploring art nouveau’s ‘debased forms’, wild extravagances and corrupting influences on young British cabinet makers.”



Eugène Gaillard, *Side Chair*, 1900, 94.34; Model dining room in the pavilion "L'Art Nouveau Bing," at the great Exposition Universelle Internationale of 1900 in Paris, image Pinterest.



Sitzmaschine, or  
“machine for sitting.”  
Hoffmann was one of  
the founders of the  
Wiener Werkstätte in  
Vienna.



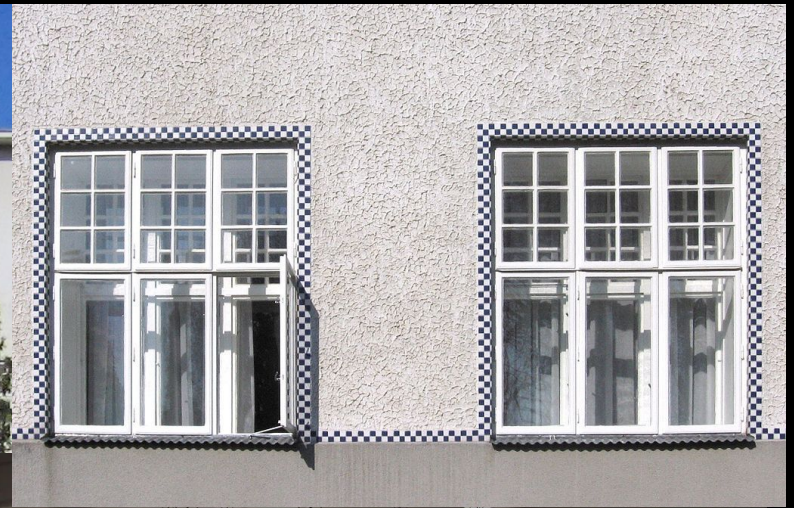
**Minneapolis Institute of Art**



What shapes do you  
notice in the chair's  
design?

Josef Hoffmann; Maker: Jacob &  
Josef Kohn, "Sitzmaschine" reclining  
armchair, model no. 670, c. 1905,  
Mia 98.276.243





Where do you see similar shapes in the Purkersdorf Sanatorium?

Purkersdorf Sanatorium, left and top right, images: Wikipedia; Below right image: wikiarquitectura.com





The sanatorium was a Gesamtkunstwerk, a total artwork. The ambience was meant to be calming to your nerves. How might the furnishings and design have supported that ambience?

Purkersdorf Sanatorium, left images, Cooper-Hewitt; right image, Pinterest.



What details do you notice?

Imagine the chief sitting on this throne.

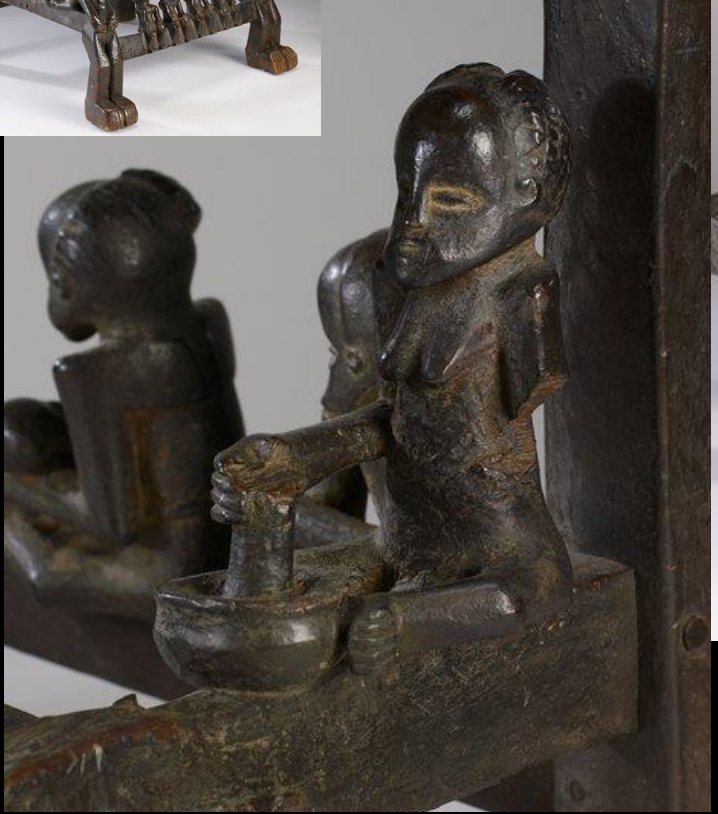


Above, Wikipedia; Right, Moxico School, Chokwe, Angola, *Citwamo Ca Mangu* (Throne), 20th century, Wood and leather, Mia 87.65





What role does gender play in the work?



Moxico School, Chokwe, Angola,  
*Citwamo Ca Mangu (Throne)*, 20th  
century, Wood and leather, Mia 87.65



In 1928, Breuer wrote, "this metal furniture is intended to be nothing but a necessary apparatus for contemporary life."



Marcel Lajos Breuer, Getty Images; Right, Manufacturer: Standard Möbel, "Wassily" armchair, model B3, c. 1926, 2002.133.1; Adler bicycle, image: Phaidon.com



“The ‘African Chair’ is a work dating from the early expressionistic phase of the Bauhaus and a collaborative effort of Marcel Breuer and Gunta Stölzl. Their collaborative project of 1921 was first given the name ‘African Chair’ by Breuer many years later.”

African Chair, chair: Marcel Breuer  
/ textile: Gunta Stölzl, 1921, Image:  
[bauhuaskooperation.com](http://bauhuaskooperation.com)



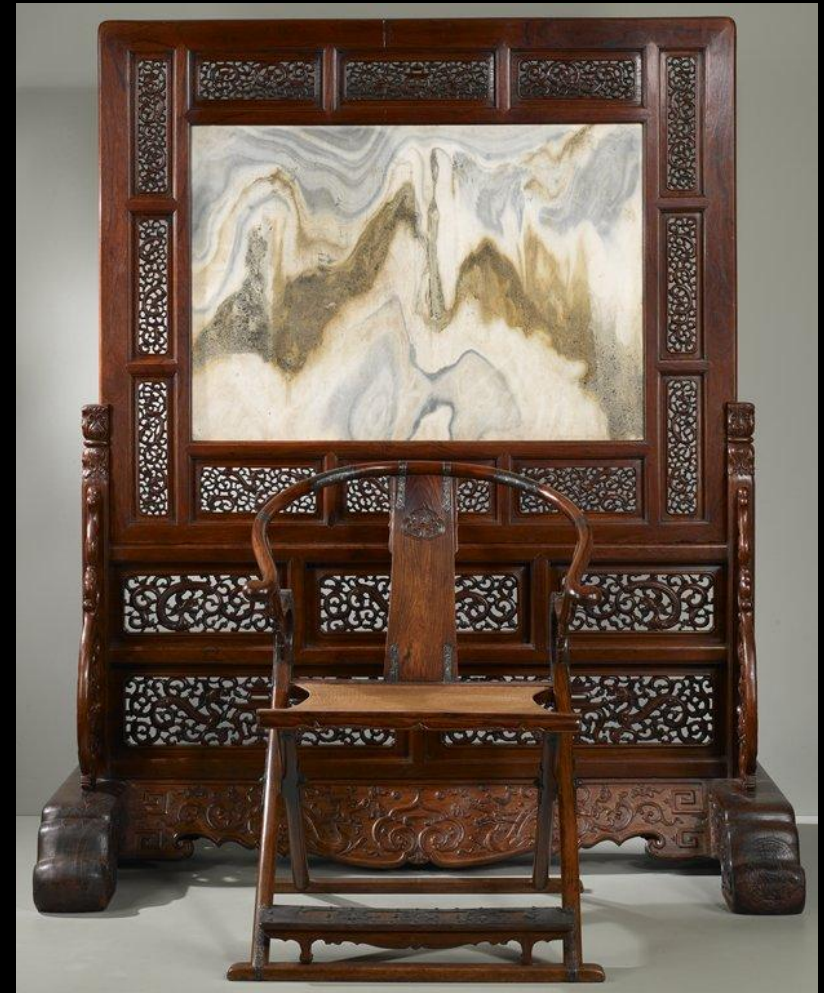


How do these chairs compare?



How would you feel,  
sitting in this chair?

“In paintings, they are  
often depicted in front  
of solid screens, the  
seat of honor from  
which to greet  
important guests at  
formal gatherings.”  
(Mia label)



Unknown artist, China, Folding  
round-back armchair, late 16th century,  
98.80.3. Huang-hua-li hardwood with iron  
hardware.



The chair includes symbols of scrolling lotus on the iron work, carved dragons in the wood supports, and Buddhist emblems on the footrest.



Unknown artist, China, Folding round-back armchair, late 16th century, 98.80.3



“The ‘DAR’ Chair was among the first plastic furniture to be truly mass-produced.” (Mia label)



Top, Charles and Ray Eames, Image: Finnishdesignshop.com; Charles Eames; Designer: Ray Eames; Manufacturer: Zenith Plastics, Gardena, California; "DAR" (Dining Armchair Rod) armchair, 1951 (designed c. 1948), 87.33.2.1





“Built using the principles of assembly-line mass production, Levittown went from a potato field to a community of 82,000 people in less than a decade.”

<https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/us-history/postwar-era/postwar-era/a/the-growth-of-suburbia>



Top, Charles and Ray Eames, Image: Finnishdesignshop.com; Levittown, New York,



Why do you think these chairs remain popular today? What in their design continues to appeal?



Video: [Vitra.com](http://Vitra.com); Midcentury Herman Miller advertisement, Image: [curbed.com](http://curbed.com);



What feeling do you get from this sculpture?



Joe Minter, *Voyage in Chains*, 2000, Mia L2019.154.2, Chair with applied objects.



“The whole idea handed down to me by God is to use that which has been discarded, just as we as a people have been discarded made invisible. That what is invisible, thrown away, could be made into something so it demonstrates that even what gets thrown away, with a spirit in it can survive and grow. A spirit of all the people that has touched and felt that material has stayed in the material.”

<https://www.soulsgrowndeeep.org/artist/joe-minter>



Why might Joe Minter have used a chair for his sculpture's framework?



**Minneapolis Institute of Art**



Joe Minter, Image: Colby Rabon, 2018;  
Voyage in Chains, 2000, Mia L2019.154.2,  
Chair with applied objects.

# Equity lens...

Ai Weiwei gets the credit for this artwork, but should the people who crafted this chair also receive credit?

“He has collaborated with and outsourced his work to highly skilled artisans who are trained in classical pottery and design. Their knowledge, in this case, of marble carving is employed as a means of conserving traditional skills.”



Ai Weiwei, 2012. Photo by Gao Yuan, [https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/exhibitions/ai\\_weiwei/](https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/exhibitions/ai_weiwei/); Marble Chair, 2008, Mia 2010.24.



# Questions?

Ai Weiwei, Marble Chair, 2008, Mia  
2010.24.

