

# Wallpaper\*

\*THE STUFF THAT REFINES YOU

Roy McMakin makes the familiar strange in a new show of domestic furniture at Lora Reynolds Gallery

by PEI-RU KEH



Roy McMakin has been making seemingly ordinary furniture since 1987. In all that time, the Seattle-based artist/designer has consistently tinkered with familiar furniture archetypes—like sofas and chests of drawers—and turned them into something more. This week, a thought-provoking collection of domestic furniture takes centre stage at Austin’s Lora Reynolds Gallery for a new exhibition.

Throughout the course of his career, McMakin has delved into photography, drawing, sculpture, interiors and architecture, and this multidisciplinary approach is the defining principle behind his furniture designs. Produced by the artist’s workshop Big Leaf Manufacturing, each piece is deceptively standard on the surface, but reveals a host of quirks and eccentricities upon further inspection.

'I grew up in one of those households where the love thing was kind of messed up,' says the artist. 'Being a love-seeking being, as all kids are I think, I sought it out in the safest things around - the stuff in the house. I became very good at finding where the love exists in objects. Clearly objects are just remnants of human behaviour, so if there is love put into them, I tend to be able to see and smell it.'

When designing his pieces, McMakin draws inspiration from a wide range of sources: paintings, films, estate sales, even friends' homes. More often than not, his creations marry cultural references and personal experiences that may be instinctually recognisable by viewers but not easily be placed.

For instance the vibrant blue *11am* armchair is a rendering of the chair in Edward Hopper's painting of the same name. 'It is an idea I have had for years and years, and it was way more hard and odd to realise and give shape to that image,' explains McMakin.

On the other hand, he says, 'I love the chest of drawers from the porn film [*The Chest of Drawers Behind James Jamesson and Jimmy Fanz in Raging Stallions Studios' Timberwolves*] because of the memories it gave me staring at the chest in the video.'

In spite of his artistic reputation, McMakin's *Domestic Furniture* collection is intended for everyday use. 'I have designed tonnes of furniture, mostly for commissions, and made many sculptures and art pieces,' reflects the artist. 'I think about the connection between the two categories of objects a lot, both in my life and in our culture. And the more I think about it, the more blurred and ambiguous I feel about there being any separation between them regarding meaning and emotions.'