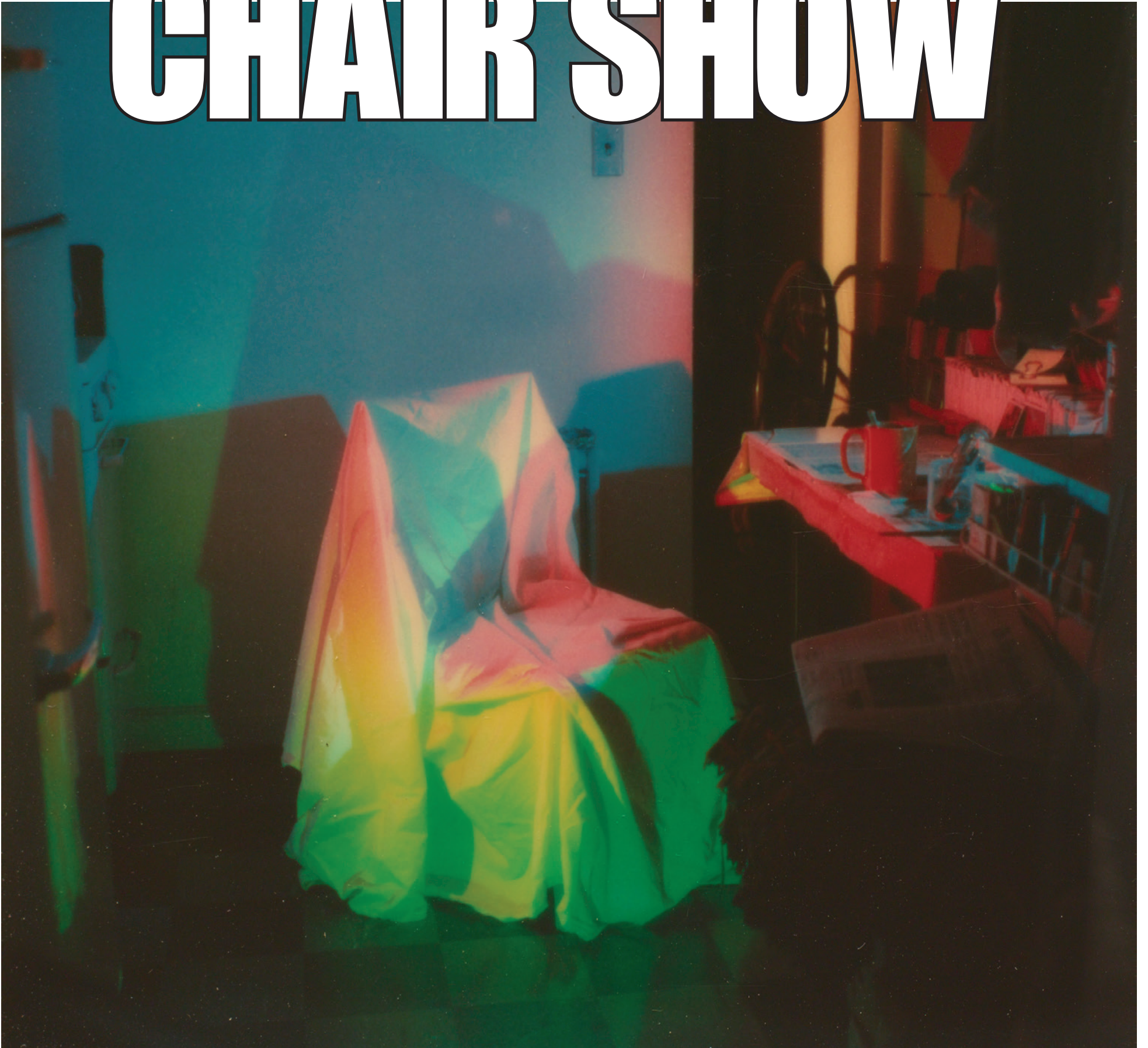


125 NEWBURY

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CHAIR SHOW



FEATURING: GERTRUDE ABERCROMBIE, YTO BARRADA, JOSÉ BENTO, DIKE BLAIR, DAVID BYRNE, JIM DINE, URS FISCHER, HUGH HAYDEN, DONALD JUDD, ALICJA KWAVE, BOB LAW, ROBERT LONGO, RENE MAGRITTE, SYLVIA PLIMACK MANGOLD, ANDRE MASSON, LOUISE NEVELSON, ISAMU NOGUCHI, ADAM PENDLETON, RYAN PRECIADO, ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG, LUCAS SAMARAS, JULIAN SCHNABEL, JOEL SHAPIRO, ARLENE SHECHET, KIKI SMITH, ANDY WARHOL, LAWRENCE WEINER, ROBERT WILSON

FREE PRESS

THE CHAIR

OLIVER SHULTZ

The chair is an indelible image in the history of art. A cipher for both presence and absence, a symbol of authority and power, a technology of comfort and repose, the chair is at once supportive, imposing, and subtly animate. Chairs possess an uncanny anthropomorphism. They stand as a surrogate for the body. They have arms and legs like us. A human body can double as a chair—for instance, when a child sits in their mother's lap. A chair can be womblike; it can enfold and protect. It can also be a cage or an instrument of punishment. Chairs imply order—the strictures of a culture, a society, or a system. In the New Testament, when Jesus expels the moneylenders from the Temple, he overturns the tables and the “benches of those selling doves.” An empty chair suggests a missing person, but it can also speak for itself. It can have power on its own. Every Catholic Cathedral is a chair. The word chair derives from “cathedra” in Latin, which in turn comes from καθέδρα, which in Greek means “placed down” (*katá-hédra*). Chairs are where we place ourselves down. A chair is an anchor for presence.

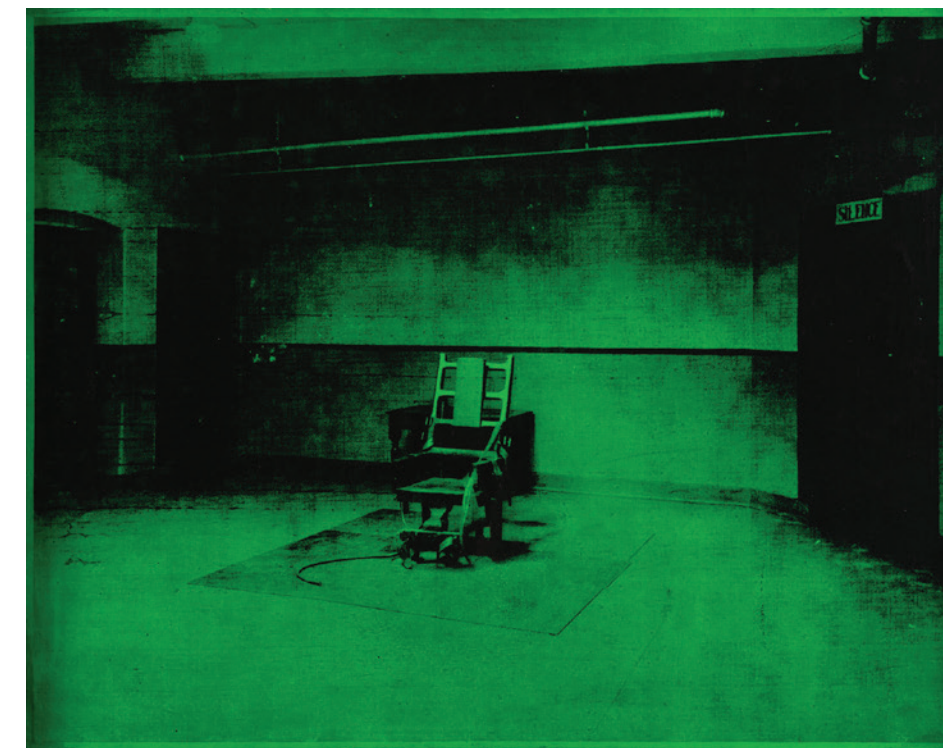
This exhibition at 125 Newbury dwells on the idea of the chair. It takes as a starting point two contrasting approaches to chairs in the work of the artists Lucas Samaras and Donald Judd—Samaras's fantastical, often sinister chair constructions, on the one hand, and the austere geometries of Judd's chairs, on the other. Toppling, rotating, levitating, and otherwise revealing the chair in all its strangeness, CHAIR SHOW builds on the dialectic of Samaras and Judd to explore renditions of chairs by a selection of modern and contemporary artists.

There is an inherent surrealism to the chair. Its arms, legs, and feet suggest nothing so much as a metamorphosed body. Works by René Magritte and Alicja Kwade build on the implicit bodiliness of the chair and its ponderosity. Kiki Smith's elegiac paper chairs meanwhile seem weightless, suggesting the fragility and temporality of the body, while David Byrne's equally ethereal macaroni chair suggests both levity and transformation. Often, the empty chair oscillates between ease and disquiet, and sometimes even latent menace, as in Warhol's famous *Electric Chair* or Hugh Hayden's *Work Study* chair with its urchin-like carapace of spiky metal tools jutting out at all angles.

The empty chair's inherent play between absence and presence is echoed in the notion of a chair and its shadow, explored in two different ways—and decades apart—in works by Urs Fischer and Robert Wilson. Some chairs stand directly for people, as in Bob Law's touching bronze rendition of the iconic yellow chair from van Gogh's *Bedroom*, a metonym for the artist. Meanwhile the idea of the chair as a constructivist object informs many of the artists in the show, including Robert Rauschenberg and Louise Nevelson. Julian Schnabel's monumental painting, finally, reminds us that the genesis of all chairs is in the notion of the throne, the *cathedra*. Across this eclectic range of sculptural chairs, portraits of chairs, or artworks that are (or suggest) seating, the functional chair is made dysfunctional, revealed instead as a site of formal invention, tactile engagement, and social critique. Throughout, the chair persists as a stage for the body and a charged cultural sign.



André Masson, *Chambre Céleste (Celestial Chamber)*, 1937.



Andy Warhol, *Little Electric Chair*, 1964–65.



David Byrne, *Macaroni*, 2006.



Lucas Samaras, *Chair Transformation #9*, 1969–70.



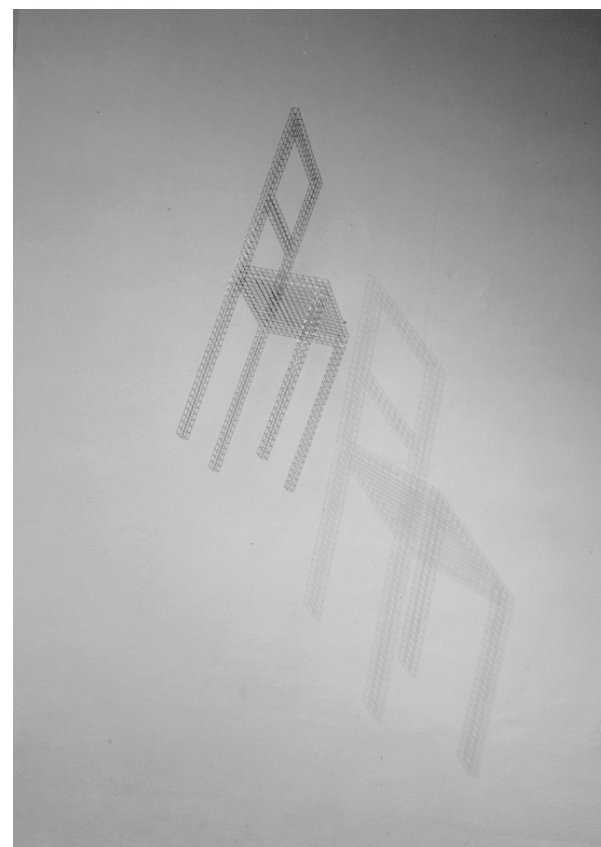
Sylvia Plimack Mangold, *Chair turned over*, 1965.



Rene Magritte, *La Légende des Siècles*, 1952.



Hugh Hayden, *Work Study*, 2024. Courtesy of Lisson Gallery.



Robert Wilson, *Hanging Chair (Freud)*, 1969.



Gertrude Abercrombie, *Victorian Chair*, 1945.
© Estate of Gertrude Abercrombie.
Image courtesy of Karma



Robert Rauschenberg, *Special Place (Waterworks)*, 1995.



Lucas Samaras, *Wire Hanger Chair (Broom Woman)*, 1990.



Urs Fischer, *Midnight*, 2017. "Shucks & Aww," Salon 94, New York, 2025. Photo by Stefan Altenburger. © Urs Fischer. Courtesy of the artist & Salon 94



Julian Schnabel, *Throne*, 1983.

TO BE PHOTOGRAPHING CHAIRS

LUCAS SAMARASAND
ARNE GLIMCHER

Arne Glimcher: Chair, the word chair.
Lucas Samaras : Oh. You want me to free associate?

AG: Yes.

LS: If you say free associate, automatically I go to the Greek word for chair, karekla. It's close to another word, kukla which means a doll. Karekla, kukla.

AG: The chair is transformed into a doll?

LS: No. Just the two words, the sound is close but in English, chair summons chairman or hair in your mouth. The sound doesn't exude exoticism or usefulness or whatever. It's just a nasty sound, like a bird chirping.

AG: Your work contains a lot of chair imagery, so chair has a lot of elasticity of meaning and metaphorical content. What does it mean to you?

LS: Well, since a human being sits on a chair, it's not a monkey, elephant or bird's province. It follows the contours of the body, so when the body leaves, it can still give vibes of a person. It could be a solid shadow of a person or the residue of a person's existence. So there is a slight pathetic quality to it.

AG: Sadness?

LS: Yeah. Chopin for the dumping ground.

AG: Loneliness.

LS: Yup, but there's a viola playing.

AG: How did you begin this photographic chair odyssey?

LS: At a certain point, I began going to street fairs or antique shops or whatever. I never bought a chair that looked good. I remember going to Lillian Nassau around 1967, when Art Nouveau was fairly reasonable. Remember the dump I used to live in, right next to your apartment on 77th St?

AG: Sure.

LS: ... five floors up, cold water flat? When I was going to move to the West Side, I was thinking: do I need a bed or a chair or whatever and then at Lillian Nassau I saw 3 chairs, they were carved like lilies and they were \$3000, you know reasonable, a two person thing and 2 single ones.

AG: A little sofa and two chairs.

LS: Yeah. And I loved the way they looked, but somehow I didn't have the impulse to say, collect chairs. Later I saw one of them in a photograph of Castelli's apartment. I was fascinated to know that the quick tongued, tinsel wit Italian's taste was tangential to mine. I started making chairs in '65, one leaning against the other or having protrusions. They were short stories. Anathema to those who were trying to flee narratives as if that were possible by just using geometry. I found it productive to consider different sensibilities, representatives so to speak, of different cultures and deviations from normal form. I ended up with twenty-five chairs and dozens of chair drawings in '69-70. But it was never the idea that I was going to live with them.

AG: I remember when you were making the set of chairs that was in your 1972 Whitney Museum show. You had all of those chairs, and in the exhibition, the chairs represented different people. I think one was Lilly Brody and you told me that the one made out of window screening was my mother.

LS: I don't remember.

AG: Did the photographs of the chairs come out of the chair sculptures?

LS: During the last show, which was in September '06, I bought a small digital Leica, which fit in my pocket. So it was a pure tourist thing, you know, you slip it in your pocket you zip it out... shades of the raincoat crowd. Even with millions of people with cameras, there is some quotient of embarrassment. So I took my camera around in my neighborhood photographing the street or the buildings. Construction was going on, I would take a picture. Then I would put it in the computer and work on it in Photoshop, so that, however the picture looked, I could always make it more luxurious, more dramatic, more fantastic. My Wacom tablet's pen became a wand. For your information, I'm told that Photoshop was invented around 1980, ten years after I embarked on my Polaroids. I stayed away from it for more than twenty years thinking I did all that and then at the turn of this century I fell in love with it. But first I fell in love with Apple. The challenge of its functions is suitable for an agile young mind but when I heard that I was too old for it I had to go for it. And it was and is a feast for the eyes. Ok, then at a certain point, I started photographing bicycles in all states of disassembly, or luxuriousness or whatever-and, after maybe I had done 1000 pictures or so, I noticed a bunch of chairs on Madison Square Park by Macy's. The city had built up these small parks that were run down, they fixed them up with nice chairs. It was wintry and snowy so I photographed a bunch of them and they were lovely. However, they had the look of French 1930s photography. Nevertheless, I was hooked. I have this...

AG: Can't stop.

LS: Can't stop once I start things. I would go out almost every day, and it's not easy to find chairs on the street that someone is not sitting on. Sometimes you find chairs with tables by a restaurant that has an extension on the street. Other times, people throw away stuff and that's the best because then there's an element of patina, of destruction attached to them. So it was thrilling and it continued to be thrilling for many, many months.

AG: Transform these sad, discarded chairs into beauties.

LS: Well, the beauty of the thing is to find them filthy and simply by application of Photoshop surface to make them gorgeous or wonderful or worthy of being preserved and still have a sense of being thrown out. They don't look like museum pieces, but I give them colors that I churn. They deserve to go to Hell with gorgeousness. So then it ends up not only the chair, but also its air, the den. With color you fix and fit the composition, another *bête noir* of the bubble and squeak sign stuffed smarting smart ones. So then after you do that, you start thinking, well now, what about it? Is it worthy? And you have to think, or I have to think, about what other people are doing with photography or setups or whatever. And I felt there were a lot of things I didn't want. I didn't want to manufacture a setup. Everything, the garbage can, whatever, was exactly as it was, I simply "clicked."

AG: So you found your own setups to photograph? No setups and no paste-ups. The camera's point of view remained the same.

LS: No distortions at this time. Transformation... Transformation, distortion. Over the years, as I was getting older, people kept wanting that. Whenever I did a new body of work, first thing their face facing me wanted to see was: distortion. What happened to the gruesomeness, to the pulling or stretching and all that? It's almost like saying, "what happened to the German element?" I'm seventy-one and this is how my mind pleases me now. Skin on the wound.

AG: You become a cosmetic surgeon for the chair.

LS: It's as if they were in show business, painting their faces and sometimes the lipstick moves a little bit... but they've lost part of their mind too, know what I mean? So it has that pathos.

AG: Like the Brassai photo graph of Bijou, that big fat lady, with her lipstick askew.

LS: Yup.

AG: When you come upon these discarded chairs are they threatening or are they friendly?

LS: None of the chairs, for me, are threatening. It brings up another idea, and that is garbage. Here I am living in this fancy apartment and there you are racing with Ghost in Sardinian waters so I go downstairs with my camera, I'm walking the streets, and people are doing this and that and me, I'm searching in the garbage to see where a chair was thrown out. It's a strange situation. So I don't feel threatened, I just feel funny, but warm-funny not anxious-funny, as I did while I walked the same streets fifty years ago and wondered how was I going to leave the fur business that my family was involved in. A curious furtive pedestrian, I'm searching for something that is considered garbage and yet I know I'm going to take it home and make it better than good. After I do them I'm enthralled, you know. I'm in heat.

AG: So they're like a beautiful person that is sitting there now?

LS: Yup.

AG: All dressed up, shiny and glittering and...

LS: Yeah.

AG: And erotic.

LS: And the nice thing is there's no smell. Are they erotic? Well, sometimes they're in erotic positions. Any sort of 21st-century person would recognize them as being in an erotic entanglement. But I don't think they would create an erection.

AG: In one's consciousness they're erotic. Like that whole stack of chairs fanning out looks like some bacchanal.

LS: Some configurations automatically are read with certain psychologic aspects to them, automatically-it's part of our visual verbal language.

AG: So you have a photograph in which the chair is leaning up against a gas pipe...

LS: Even Michelangelo's God's finger pointing to Adam's finger is a sexual thing. It's automatically read as a sexual creative procreative. No hole in sight, whether you like it or not. I never read it that way. Well, you come from the sticks. That's true, I do come from the sticks. Don't kids in the sticks touch their dicks?

AG: But when we were looking at that photograph the other day...

LS: Which one?

AG: Yours, of the chair up against the front of the building. And then there was the gas pipe coming out of the building. The fuel pipe coming out of the building, and the back of the chair, and you commented on it.

LS: Actually, the funny thing is that Marc first saw the pipe being behind the chair so even though you didn't see it, your son did.

AG: He's younger. I like the photograph of the stacked chairs.

LS: Yeah, the blond chairs. These are blonds, and they have the feel of a blond. You've seen blonds as a young person, there's a certain odor to a blond that's different from a brunette, right?

AG: I look at these chairs and they're soft and sweet and baby-like, hugging each other rather than erotic. Comfy.

LS: Well, erotic grows to be loving.

AG: So will you continue photographing chairs? Or are you already on to something else?

LS: Do I sense hunger for the next assault? I will be doing chairs until the show. Then I'm done with it. The thrill spills. The attacks come in, or the perceived insults insinuate and then it's time for a bit of dying. I won't want to see my lovelies for a while. Make sense?



Louise Nevelson, *Untitled*, 1976-78.



Isamu Noguchi and Kenmochi Noguchi, *Bamboo Basket Chair*, 1950.



Donald Judd, *Chair #45*, 1984.



Kiki Smith, *The Parcel*, 2008.



José Bento, *Untitled*, 2006.



Lucas Samaras, *Two Chairs*, c. 1970s.



Alicja Kwade, *Mono Matter*, 2023.



Arlene Shechet, *Pleat Seat (L)*, 2024.



Dike Blair, *Untitled*, 2019. © Dike Blair. Courtesy the artist and Karma



Adam Pendleton, *Extended Form One*, 2025.



Yto Barrada, *Untitled*, 2013–2015.



Ryan Preciado, *Manuel Stool*, 2025. © Ryan Preciado. Courtesy the artist and Karma



Julian Schnabel, *Untitled*, 2016.



Donald Judd, *Chairs*, 1991.



Kiki Smith, *Homecoming*, 2012.



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Lucas Samaras, *Photo-Transformation*,
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