

ARTFORUM

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Furniture

CASTELLI GALLERY | UPTOWN

The Castelli Furniture show could be thought of as something Dr. Szeemann might have squeezed into Documenta 5 or as an exhibition exhibition (as in exhibition baseball game, i.e., one that doesn't count, which altogether seems an odd notion). However, while the disjunction offers two possibilities, the possibilities are not necessarily so restricted. Generally the "Furniture" show doesn't look much different from other group shows except that we are told the work on exhibit is furniture. In several cases, it is necessary to inquire what kind of furniture is intended. Di Suvero's twisted metal pipe hanging from the ceiling relates to his Loveseat of 1965, but it becomes a swing only when we are told that's what it is. Within the context of furniture, it is not difficult to read almost any of Judd's stainless steel boxes as tables, but here, the boxes are modified so that the tops slide open. However, there is no mistaking the meticulously crafted wooden chair and couches by Gus Spear for anything but furniture, and Chamberlain's foam couches are clearly couches. While Chamberlain is a natural for the "Furniture" show, his inclusion raises some interesting questions regarding furniture as art as furniture. It may be coincidental to this show that furniture is often used in reference to art objects in the assumption of the antiart object position, but the notion of art as furniture does challenge what is probably the last bastion of restriction on the art context: whatever is art must be useless. (A urinal not in use can be art, but a urinal in use cannot be art.) Within this context, art which has use as furniture forms an inconsistent proposition leaving three alternatives: the work in question is not art; the work is art but not really usable (it would not get used); or the restriction must be scrapped. A tour around SoHo makes clear that Chamberlain's couches are used all over the place, so that alternative is out. The questions become: is it used as art or as furniture, and does one use exclude the other?

Outside of contextual questions, Rauschenberg's cardboard coffee table seemed the most interesting piece in the show. The table is several cardboard boxes and flaps of varying shapes connected by pieces of rope and sprawling on the floor as if a new appliance or one of the pieces in the show had just been unpacked. So much did it look like leftover packing that it wasn't immediately recognizable as part of the show. The boxes are secretly reinforced with plywood giving the table more stability and permanence than is apparent. The configuration of the clutter of boxes is like that of a reclining figure which rather falteringly and belatedly confirms the "latent anthropomorphism" of Minimalist objects.

Despite my fondness for rhinos, François Lalanne's rhino chair and sardine-can bed seemed a touch of F.A.O. Schwarz comes to Castelli downtown, in which case, the contextual proposition is amended to read "toy as furniture as art," which may be interesting but isn't to me.

—April Kingsley