



RICHARD ARTSCHWAGER (1923-2013)

Chair

oak, cow hide, formica, steel

39 x 40 x 52 in.

ed. of 100

1987-1990

14698

PROVENANCE:

Lehmann Maupin, New York

Private Collection, NY

Richard Ernst Artschwager (1923 - 2013) was an American painter, illustrator and sculptor, best known for his stylistic independence; however, he had associations with the Pop Art movement, Conceptual art and Minimalism. In 1941, Artschwager entered Cornell University, where he studied chemistry and mathematics. In the fall of 1944, he was sent to England and France to fight in World War II, as part of his military service. In 1949, taking advantage of the GI Bill, Artschwager began to study with Amédée Ozenfant in Paris for a year. Ozenfant was a purist painter, who placed precision and rationality above all else. In the early 1950s, Artschwager abandoned art to work at various jobs, particularly as a turner and a bank employee. While he was working to support his family, Artschwager continued to think about art. This was during a time when abstract expressionism reigned supreme. He enrolled in a workshop concentrating upon the nude and painted in the abstract easel format, derived from landscape painting. His paintings and drawings from this period were exhibited in two group shows at the Terrain Gallery in 1957 and in October 1959 at the Art Directions Gallery on Madison Avenue, where they were recognized by Donald Judd.

In the 1970s, Artschwager began to work on architectural motifs. During the first half of the decade, he employed two processes—fragmentation and expansion. His theme was domestic interiors. He also included associations of various styles of furniture, gradually moving away from the rudimentary nature of them. During the years 1971, 1972 and 1973, he explored the theme of very bourgeois interiors, which gave him a sense of stability while working on other paintings during this time of instability. Artschwager included the dissolution of any visual design on six Celotex paintings in 1972, which depicted the explosive demolition of Traymore Hotel in Atlantic City using photographic reporting. In 1974, he developed classic architectural motifs, a compromise between the stillness of the interiors and the ongoing disintegration of destruction. The subject here is light, its ability to guide the eye, the movement's vision and the constant movement and fluid look. A series of imaginary drawings, representing all six items combined (a door, a window, a table, a basket, mirror, rug), uses inversions of scale, imaginative combinations and locations. This reflection on the spaces capable of containing all six, which is also a question about the context, causes them to turn again to the blps. For the next five years, his production was essentially three-dimensional. He added to his works very large blps. In the 1980s, there was preponderance of the mirror as object-own furniture to accommodate the reflections,

possibly combined with other materials like Celotex, painted wood, and Formica. In 1984 and 1985, he used painted wood and remained very active. This design occupies a central place in his creative process. From about 1986 to the late 1990s, Artschwager, like many artists, employed studio assistants. The crew could number as few as three or as many as 15, expanding for large scale projects such as the construction of an evergreen tree, for the Chazen Museum of Art in Wisconsin (then known as the Elvehjem Museum of Art). In the 1990s Artschwager made an extensive series of sculptures in the form of shipping crates. Of Artschwager's body of work and recent shows, art critic John Yau notes that the artist has always been "interested in domesticity—tables, chairs—right from the first things ... paintings that were about interiors, houses, but always domesticity was held at a kind of arm's length, and now it seems to me something changed in this most recently completed body of work, which has people in it; it's a different view of domesticity and time." Artschwager's "Osama" painting of Osama bin Laden was withheld from his 2003 exhibition at Gagosian Gallery in London because of its "potentially politically incendiary nature" and was not reproduced in the catalog. However, it was reproduced in a French catalog from Domaine de Kerguehenec (2003) opposite a portrait of George W. Bush. His final gallery exhibition in late 2012 at Gagosian Gallery in Rome featured five laminate sculptures of upright and grand pianos. Utilizing the Formica patterns to make references to early 20th-century artists as diverse as Kazimir Malevich and Henri Matisse, they also made a retrospective nod to his first piano sculpture in 1965.

Artschwager began to be included in group exhibitions and had his first solo exhibition as a mature artist at Leo Castelli Gallery in January 1965. His first Los Angeles solo exhibition was at Eugenia Butler Gallery in 1970. In 1979, the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo, New York, staged the first major survey of his work. Between 1986 and 1998 Mary Boone showed his work. He was later represented by Gagosian Gallery.

The Whitney Museum of American Art produced its second Artschwager retrospective in 1988-89, at the time he had been linked to the new Neo-Geo movement. It later traveled to San Francisco, Los Angeles, Madrid, Paris and Düsseldorf. Artschwager's work has since been the subject of many important surveys, including the Centre Pompidou, Paris (1989); Deutsche Guggenheim, Berlin (2003); and Kunstmuseum Winterthur (2003). The artist also participated in numerous group shows, such as documenta (1968, 1972, 1982, 1987, 1992) and at the Venice Biennale. His second retrospective, "Richard Artschwager!" was organized by Jennifer Gross at the Yale University Art Gallery and opened at the Whitney Museum in 2012, travelling to venues in the U.S. and Europe during 2013.

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