

Recreations of Furniture Found Discarded in Alleys and on Curbs While Driving Around San Diego Several Bright Summer Afternoons with David, 2013

Roy McMakin

Public Art Installation, Helen Price Reading Room, Floor 8
New Central Library, San Diego

Roy McMakin's public art installation in the Helen Price Reading Room on the eighth floor of the new Central Library is a collection of twenty-five unique pieces of bright blue furniture interspersed among the dark furnishings selected for the room by the library's interior design team. Each piece of furniture in McMakin's collection was found—discarded—in alleys and on curbs of San Diego's urban neighborhoods in the summer of 2012. McMakin and his friend and colleague David Jurist drove around the neighborhoods of North Park, East Village and others searching for cast-off chairs, tables, cabinets, love seats and ottomans.

Upon amassing a large group of found furnishings, McMakin curated the collection, narrowing it down to twenty-five pieces. The items were fumigated and transported to McMakin's Seattle fabrication studio, Big Leaf Manufacturing, where each object was painstakingly recreated with McMakin's signature attention to craftsmanship and quality. For example, one found love seat featured a mechanically carved, low-quality wood frame that had been broken in several places. McMakin's recreation of this same love seat was hand-carved by a master wood carver from superior quality wood before it was reupholstered using commercial-grade fabric. In another example, McMakin had a disintegrating wicker chair meticulously secured and rewoven in a gesture that elevates seasonal summer furniture known for its fleeting existence to a perennially enduring salon chair.

Why would an artist search for cast-off, old furniture to make new furniture for a new library? Is it a statement about the introduction of non-native species to a pristine ecosystem? Is it a social commentary about bringing pieces of San Diego's neighborhoods into the library? Is it a documentary survey of what people throw away? Or is it simply a study of various forms highlighted by the uniformity of a single color? Those are questions that McMakin is unconcerned with answering. He expects library patrons to draw their own conclusions about the meaning of his art and he finds a certain contentment in leaving his intentions open to interpretation. When

asked why he chose the color blue, he responded, “There’s no reason other than it seemed the right color to me. I’m an artist. We don’t have to have a reason.”* McMakin does acknowledge that the found object is the centerpiece of his artistic vernacular and he regularly expresses compassion or affection for the basic, the unassuming, the plain, the underdog.

He points out that his work for the library tells a story of transformation, redemption and caring—a classic rags-to-riches story with furnishings as the main characters. McMakin is known for his playfulness with words, wit and whimsy as the title demonstrates. He hopes that his furnishings will be moved around the reading room by library patrons looking to settle in for some quality reading time. He likes the idea that the pieces can be arranged in unexpected configurations every day and they will eventually begin to show wear, a reflection of being lovingly lived in. Beyond that, library goers will have to sink into an interpretation of his art the same way they will sink into one of his easy chairs.

McMakin acknowledges the public art commission for the City of San Diego as something of a gateway to what he is coming to understand as a San Diego homecoming. McMakin lived in San Diego during his tenure as an MFA student at UCSD. He eventually settled in Seattle where he established several businesses and an art studio. When McMakin left San Diego, he thought he would never return. Not until his husband, Mike Jacobs, a scientist, suggested a job change and relocation to San Diego, did McMakin reconsider making San Diego his new permanent residence. It was the momentum of the San Diego library public art commission paired with the award of a second local public art commission, this one at the San Diego International Airport, that helped move McMakin towards San Diego. “I never thought I would live here again, but now I’m glad I do. This place really does feel like my home,” he says.

All signs seem to be supporting McMakin’s decision to relocate. “My husband got a great new job, my friend David moved back to San Diego, I was able to purchase a vacant lot in Banker’s Hill and I have my one and only chance to build my own house from the ground up. It feels serendipitous, like everything was saying ‘Come home, Roy.’”

**All quotes from a September 12, 2013 interview with Dana Springs, Public Art Program Manager, City of San Diego Commission for Arts and Culture.*

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