

 EVERSON MUSEUM OF ART

**EDUCATOR PACKET**

***Good Design: Stories From Herman Miller***

**August 14 – October 17, 2010**

**AND**

***The Edge of Art: New York State Artists Series***

***Designed to Scale***

**August 14 – October 24, 2010**



Marshmallow Sofa, 2000, Herman Miller for  
the Home/Nelson Office

## **Introduction to Herman Miller**

This exhibition explores the collaborative design process employed at Herman Miller, the world-renowned furniture company that used design to solve problems for the home and workplace for almost ninety years.

Herman Miller's story is an interesting one. In 1909, D.J. De Pree, a recent high school graduate, took an office job at the Star Manufacturing Company based in Zeeland, Michigan, and worked his way up to become president in 1919. Star Manufacturing produced reproductions of Victorian and 18-century furniture which were distributed to major American retail stores such as Sears. The furniture, originally designed for the grand homes of wealthy European families, was oversized and ornately decorated with veneers, inlays and hand finishes.

In 1923, De Pree renamed the company the Herman Miller Furniture Company after his father-in-law. During the first few years, Herman Miller produced the same furniture that Star had. However, the Depression quickly brought the company close to bankruptcy. In 1931, De Pree hired Gilbert Rohde, a commercial artist and "modern" furniture designer from New York who convinced him that the designs of the future should utilize clean, simple lines—furniture that was easy to move and could accommodate changing American lifestyles. De Pree believed in Rohde's vision, and the two men began a collaboration that created what we think of today as mid-century modern furniture. De Pree's openness to this new design thinking set the course for Herman Miller, a company that embraced collaborations with many innovative designers over the next several decades including Ray and Charles Eames, George Nelson, Alexander Girard, Robert Probst, Bill Stumpf, Don Chadwick, Ayse Birdsel, all of whom are represented in this exhibition. *Good Design* also showcases archival holdings of concept models, drawings, supplementary photographs and completed masterworks of design in furniture and decorative arts produced by Herman Miller, Inc. since the beginning.

## **Introduction to Designed to Scale**

Designed to Scale, part three of the 2010 New York State Artists Series showcases significant designers from the Central New York region whose work is recognized in the national and international design arenas. Although modest in scale, the exhibition touches on a broad range of innovative design objects—furniture, lighting, commercial products and dining experiences, unique accessories, toys, and surface patterns. Designers include Chrissy Albanese, Don Carr and Liza Lamb (Carr & Lamb), Wendell Castle, Rob Englert (ram industrial design, inc.), Cas Holman, Chris Irick, and Chase Design. Wendell Castle's unique rocking chair made of stacked laminated wood is as much about furniture design as it is about sculpture. The fluid, organic form that has characterized Castle's work for more than four decades is also found in a brilliantly colored retro fiberglass side table originally designed in the 1960s and recently reintroduced to much acclaim.

Using timber reclaimed from the former Lincoln Supply Company, a warehouse located on Syracuse’s Near West Side and sourced by D-Build, the ram industrial design team, which includes Rob Englert, Carlos Suarez, Grant Meacham and Bianca Leigh, designed concept furniture—including these end tables. Ram collaborated with Chris Clemans and his team at the local Cabinet Fabrication Group (CabFab) to execute the two end tables in this exhibition. D-Build, developed by the designers at ram, is an innovative project that aims to connect artists, designers, and builders with desirable reclaimed materials through their website, [www.d-build.org](http://www.d-build.org). D-Build carefully documents the origins of reclaimed materials during removal by stamping a site-specific QR code on the surface. When the code embedded on these end tables is scanned with a smart phone or webcam, it connects the viewer to the history of the Lincoln Supply Company accessible on the D-Build website.

The Edge of Art: New York State Artists Series is funded in part by the New York State Council on the Arts, a state agency.

## **Lessons**

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|-----------------|---|
| <b>Lesson 1</b> | <b>Surface Patterns</b>                     |
| <b>Lesson 2</b> | <b>Functional Design from Found Objects</b> |
| <b>Lesson 3</b> | <b>Sculpture that Fits!</b>                 |
| <b>Lesson 4</b> | <b>Functional Fantasy Furniture</b>         |

## Herman Miller Biography

It comes as a surprise to many that Herman Miller, Inc. was not started by a man of the same name, nor did he even work at the company. He was merely a financial backer for his daughter's husband D.J. De Pree, founder of the company. It all started when De Pree was hired as a clerk in 1909 at the Star Furniture Company in Michigan. It didn't take long for him to make his way up the business ladder, earning a position in 1919 as President of the now named Michigan Star Furniture Company. Just a few short years later De Pree encouraged business man and father-in-law, Herman Miller, to become a majority stockholder of the company. In return De Pree, as president, renamed the company Herman Miller Furniture Company, after the man that helped make it all possible. At this time the company is still designing traditional-style furniture, which was oversized and elaborately decorated.

Unfortunately The Herman Miller Furniture Company was not immune to the Great Depression, so in 1930 De Pree was forced to look for ways to save money and avoid bankruptcy. A fortunate visit from New York "modern" furniture designer Gilbert Rohde encourages De Pree to move away from the bulky traditional furniture and into products that better suited the changing needs and lifestyles of Americans, who were living in smaller homes and moving more frequently. The modern approach by Rohde was to utilize clean, simple lines and focusing on craftsmanship and not decoration to cover imperfections.

Gilbert Rohde proved to be a valuable asset to the company when, in 1942, he designed The Executive Office Group. This collection marked The Herman Miller Furniture Company's entry into the office-furniture market. Unfortunately Rohde died two short years later leaving De Pree to yet again look for a new designer. George Nelson was hired on and became the company's first design director. Nelson and varied company staff were able to collaborate for many years to achieve a level of design that *Fortune* magazine recognized several times from 1986 as an "admired" company. Nelson is also credited for designing the famous "M" logo that is the corporate image of Herman Miller.

Another couple that have left a significant mark on the company are Charles and Ray Eames, who were brought on board by Nelson just a year after earning his position. The Eames reputation for design precedes them, but a few pieces in particular have repeatedly gained recognition. In 1946 the Eames molded plywood chair was introduced and later in 2000 named "design of the century" by *Time* magazine. Becoming a highly visible emblem of Herman Miller quality and innovation was the Eames lounge chair and ottoman, first introduced in 1956. Because of Herman Miller's innovation and ingenious design, other noteworthy designers have come and gone throughout the years, including Isamu Noguchi, Alexander Girard, Robert Propst, Don Chadwick, Jerome Caruso and William McDonough.

Today Herman Miller, Inc., renamed yet again in 1960, continues the ambitions of D.J. De Pree. It was his goal to “design and build a better world around you”. This strategy later developed into a “journey toward sustainability”, which became the central corporate strategy to design with consideration of the environmental impact. Architect William McDonough helped create The GreenHouse, a 295,000 square foot factory in Holland, Michigan. This building, completed in 1995, is an environmentally friendly plant. Continuing with D.J. De Pree’s innovative ideas, buildings were designed so that all employees would be able to look out from a window from no more than 75 feet. Having such a large quantity of windows in each building allowed them to harvest natural daylight, in turn lowering energy bills and eliminating pollution caused by the production of electricity. Along with having natural light and fresh air flow through the building, The GreenHouse requires zero environmental permits due to its sustainable operation, building design and commitment to environmental stewardship. This alone proves that green buildings can be cost-effective and make a productive working environment.

Herman Miller, Inc has proven to not only strive for greatness within their furniture design, but also within every other aspect of the company. They have a new purpose set for the year 2020, called the “Perfect Vision”. It is their goal to have a ZERO environmental footprint by that time. While it has caused commotion on whether they will be able to achieve zero landfill, zero hazardous waste, zero air emissions (VOC), zero process water use, and one hundred percent green electrical energy use, they have already lowered their numbers significantly.

## Herman Miller Key Time-Line

- 1905: Star Furniture Company opens in Zeeland, Michigan  
The company designed traditional, but high quality bedroom suites.
- 1909: Star Furniture Company, now renamed Michigan Star Furniture Company, hires Dirk Jan (D.J.) De Pree at the age of 18 to work as a clerk.
- 1919: De Pree becomes the president of Michigan Star furniture Company
- 1923: D.J. De Pree convinces his father-in-law, Herman Miller, to purchase a majority of Michigan Star Furniture Company's stock. De Pree, as the president, renames the company the Herman Miller Furniture Company after the man that made it possible. At this time the company is still designing traditional-style furniture.
- 1927: After a millwright dies on the job, De Pree makes a commitment to treat all workers as individuals with special talents and potential.
- 1930: The Great Depression puts a stress on Herman Miller and causing De Pree to look for ways to save the company. A visit from New York designer Gilbert Rohde encourages De Pree to move away from traditional furniture and into products better suited for the changing needs and lifestyles of Americans.
- 1942: The Executive Office Group, designed by Gilbert Rohde, signals Herman Miller's entry into the office-furniture market.
- 1945: After Gilbert Rohde's passing in 1944, De Pree starts looking for a new designer. George Nelson becomes Herman Miller's first design director, and later creates the famous "M" logo as the corporate image for Herman Miller. The two work together to recruit Charles and Ray Eames only one year later.
- 1946: The Eames molded plywood chair is introduced, named "design of the century" by *Time* magazine in the year 2000.
- 1948: George Nelson and the Nelson Office design a bound hardcover product catalog, which Herman Miller publishes and sells. This catalog, articulating Herman Miller's philosophy and principles about business and design, is now a collector's item.
- 1951: Herman Miller begins working with noted colorist and textile designer Alexander Girard, leading the Herman Miller Textile Division.
- 1956: The Eames lounge chair and ottoman is introduced, later becoming a highly visible emblem of Herman Miller quality and innovation. This same year the

Nelson marshmallow sofa is introduced.

1960: The Herman Miller Furniture Company incorporates, becomes Herman Miller, Inc.

1962: D.J. De Pree's son, Hugh De Pree, becomes president and chief executive officer of Herman Miller, Inc.

1964: Bob Propst and George Nelson work together on the first prototypes of Action Office 1, later to evolve into the Action Office system in 1968.

1966: Expanding to Central and South America, Australia, Canada, Europe, Africa, the Near East, Scandinavia, and Japan, Herman Miller has nearly 150 dealers worldwide.

1976: Herman Miller introduces the Ergon chair, launching the new era of ergonomic seating.

1980: Max De Pree becomes chief executive officer.

1983: A special stock-ownership plan establishes all Herman Miller employees as shareholders.

1985: The Worldesign Congress names Charles Eames "The Most Influential Designer of the Century" and Action Office as "The Most Significant Design" since 1960.

1986: As Herman Miller is named a Fortune 500 company it is also named Most Admired by *Fortune* magazine, which established furniture manufacturing as a category the same year.

1989: The Equa chair wins a Design of the Decade award from *Time* magazine.

1992: Herman Miller introduces Valuing Uniqueness, a workshop on diversity in the workplace.

1994: Aiming for the residential market, Herman Miller for the Home is formed, reintroducing discontinued products from the 1940s, 50s and 60s.

1997: For the 9<sup>th</sup> time in 10 years *Fortune* magazine names Herman Miller as Most Admired furniture company in the U.S.

2000: After an employee stock option is offered in July, HMI sales reach nearly \$2 billion.

2003: Herman Miller introduces Mirra, a high-performing, environmentally advanced work chair and the first piece of office furniture to be developed from its inception according to cradle to cradle principles. This same year Mirra wins the Best of NeoCon Gold Award.

2004: Herman Miller receives recognition by many companies, including the Most Admired by *Fortune* magazine, GreenGuard Indoor Air Quality certification for most of its products, and named "One Hundred Best Corporate Citizens" by *Business Ethics* magazine - one of only 29 companies to earn a place on the list every year since its introduction in 2000.

2008: *Fortune* magazine yet again names Herman Miller as one of the most admired companies for the 20<sup>th</sup> year, and as one of the world's most innovative companies. This same year the Embody chair for health-positive seating is introduced, designed by Jeff Weber and the late Bill Stumpf.

## Lesson 1: Surface Patterns (Designed to Scale)

### Materials:

Cardstock cut into 3" squares  
18" x 24" sheets of white paper  
Scissors  
Crayons, Markers or Colored Pencils  
Paint

### Introduction:

A **pattern** is a series of repeated design units used to decorate a surface. The motifs can be repeated in a regular or irregular way over the surface to be decorated.

**Objectives:** This activity is intended to provide students with a basic understanding of what patterns are, how they can be created and where they are used.

### Directions:

- Have students imagine a product that they are creating a surface pattern for, such as fabric for a dress, a wallpaper pattern or a China pattern. When choosing their product and creating a surface pattern, students should consider the size of the object as well as its purpose. For example, a China pattern may be small and detailed while the pattern for fabric may be larger.
- Each student receives a sheet of white paper, a 3" square of cardstock and scissors.
- Have students fold the cardstock in half, and then at the crease, cut out a simple shape. Once the design is cut out, students will unfold the cardstock and use it as a template to create their pattern.
- Place the cardstock on the white paper and trace around the edges of the square and the cutout design in the center.
- Repeat the tracing on the page until the entire sheet is filled with the pattern. *Students may turn the stencil in different directions to create more variation in their pattern.*
- Students will then select a color palette of 2 to 4 colors and then, using crayons, markers, paint or gouache, fill in the traced shapes with their design pattern. *This pattern must be used in all the shapes.*
- After students have completed their patterns ask students to share their design ideas answer the discussion questions listed.

### Questions for discussion:

What kind of product is your surface pattern intended for?

What inspired your design?

Why did you select these colors?

### Suggestions for modifications:

\*Ask students to create a pattern specifically for cups and plates. Provide each student with a paper or Styrofoam set of one cup and one plate. Using markers have them decorate the cup and plate, then discuss the work as a class using the discussing questions listed above.

\*Using self-hardening clay, students can create stamps by carving a pattern into a small piece of clay. Allow the stamps to dry completely. Once this process has been completed, provide each student with a fresh clay tile, and ask them to stamp their design into the tile until it is filled. Allow the tiles to dry and then have students discuss their design choices using the discussion questions above. Students may also paint / color their tiles once they have dried.

## **Lesson 2: Functional Design from Found Objects (Designed to Scale)**

### **Materials:**

Cardstock

Glue

Scissors

Assorted found objects (yarn, pencils, bottle caps, paperclips, magazines, etc.)

Reference images for Designed to Scale artists and other Found Object Art.

### **Introduction:**

In the Designed to Scale exhibition at the Everson Museum of Art, visitors will find a wide array of unique designs, many of which are functional items made from found objects or items that would have been thrown away. Using items such as these or objects that you find around you is sometimes referred to as **Found Object Art**.

### **Objectives:**

Each student will use found objects to create a functional object, and in doing so find new ways to use existing materials. For example, old crayons or pencils may be glued together on cardstock to create a placemat.

### **Directions:**

- Review images of functional items made from found objects with students. Discuss how ordinary objects are used for different purposes and the creativity of the artists.
- Before building anything, students should decide what type of functional object they are creating. Be sure to consider the size of the objects; students should design something they can hold and move easily such as a placemat, a lampshade or even a cup. Creating a small-scale prototype for a larger object may also work.
- Sketch ideas on paper first.
- Provide each student with found objects and encourage them to bring in their own.
- Using the supplied materials, ask students to build their objects.
- Once all of the designs have been completed, ask students to share their works with the class, discussing their inspiration, object and design choices.

### **Questions for discussion:**

What kind of product did you select and why?

What inspired your design?

Why did you select these objects?

### **Lesson 3: Sculpture that Fits!**

Sculpture consists of what is there and what is not—positive space is the material itself; negative space refers to the background shapes surrounding it or surrounded by it. Both are fundamental to a composition. A sculptor makes deliberate decisions about how solid forms and the space they shape will look. Create a negative space object that has usable ergonomic qualities, but can stand alone as a sculpture.

As a class look at and discuss the images from Negative Space Sculpture. Work individually to brainstorm and choose a negative space that exists between you and an object to sculpt and display.

Questions to think about:

1. How might holding an object be made more comfortable to meet the shape of your body?
2. What would the shape between a handshake look and feel like?

Using the materials supplied carve and mold your design. Take careful consideration when painting your finished piece. Think about how color, pattern and line may correspond with your individual design.

Materials:

- Air dry clay
- Modeling tools
- Paint

Be prepared to display and share your sculptural negative space with the class. Also have a brief explanation of how it works and why you chose that space.

## Lesson 4: Functional Fantasy Furniture

Manipulate an everyday object into your ideal usable fantasy design.

In groups of 3 choose from the following list of objects to transform, or come up with your own.

Chair/ Stool	Couch	Table/ Desk	Bed
Clock/ Watch	Pillow	Cane	Pencil/ Pen
Cup/ Mug	Utensil (fork, toothbrush, comb)		Shoe

To achieve the best possibly design, your group should think about and consider Herman Miller's use of simplicity, craftsmanship and ergonomics while discussing the following questions:

1. *Where will by furniture/ object be?*
2. *What do I want it to do?*
3. *When dealing with a simplified object, what are its qualities and design aspects?*
4. *What do I consider good craftsmanship?*
5. *What objects do I come in contact with in my daily life that fit the shape of my body?*  
*Ex. Toothbrush, Water Bottle*
6. *What about the design makes it comfortable to use?*
7. *How can I make my furniture/ object ergonomic?*
8. *How can I integrate ergonomics with design?*
9. *What design can I create that will be attractive?*
10. *What color and construction should I use?*

After using the example inspirational photos, work as a group to brainstorm ideas. Home one member of the group keep track of the potential projects by writing them down.

Ex. Clear waterbed couches with fish swimming inside.

### Materials:

Plastic Bottles	Glue
String	Cardboard
Fabric	Found Objects
Wood	

After a list has been created, eliminate until you have one workable object to design. Assemble a prototype to present to the class along with a brief explanation on why you designed it that way.

## **On-Line Design Lesson Plans**

Kinder Art

<http://www.kinderart.com/drawing/creative.shtml>

The Tech Museum of Innovation

<http://thetech.org/education/teachers/inmind.php>

[www.NEXT.cc](http://www.NEXT.cc)

Smithsonian National Museum of American History

[http://americanhistory.si.edu/1942/behind\\_designs/index.html](http://americanhistory.si.edu/1942/behind_designs/index.html)

Thinkfinity

[www.thinkfinity.com](http://www.thinkfinity.com)

note: Type "design" in the keyword box

We were not selling furniture so much as a way of life.

-D.J. DePree