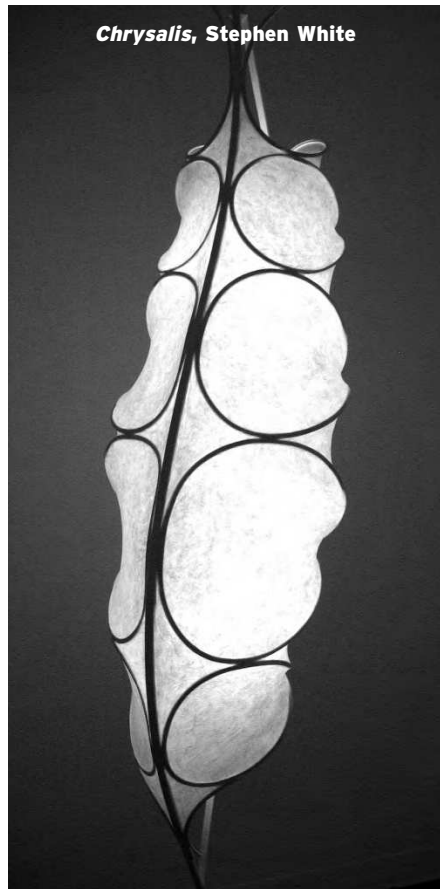


Intelligent Design

Form and function have a go at Maude Kerns Art Center



Chrysalis, Stephen White

Since the purpose of furniture and fixtures is to provide a degree of utility, an art exhibit featuring them must also be judged by whether the pieces within the show can, in fact, be of much use. Some pieces pushed the boundaries of function, and, while they are amazing to look at, would quickly be obsolete if mass-produced. On the other hand, some pieces were too utilitarian and lacked in creative design.

Falling into the first category would be Dave Laubenthal's *Watusi Lounger*. While the idea of an oversized, curved lounge chair in which to rock back and forth seems like a novel concept, Laubenthal's creation is too large and unwieldy for the adult in search of a nap. In practice, it would be far more suitable for a child's playground. Aesthetically, though, the piece's polished simplicity suggests an otherworldly beauty.

Compared to Lynn Ihsen Peterson's candy-shop mirrors, which are all decadence and taffy sweetness, Alix Mosieur's *Ghost Horse Mirror* is the weightier work — reflecting on Oregon's history of logging, forest fires and the freedom of the West. The protective enclosure of the myrtlewood holds the mirror in place while a drawing of wild horses galloping in willy-nilly fashion adorns the surface. But a horseshoe juts out from the bottom, a reminder of the taming effect settlers had in these wild lands.

Adding a bit of traditional imagery to the exhibit, the tapestries of Shelley Socolofsky hang in their colorful glory amongst the more solid furniture pieces. But while her *Incarinations* is a visually coherent work, showing many layers of hands, eyes and faces protruding through the fabric in a grand Cubist vision of self-awareness, Socolofsky's *Well of Surrender* is a muddled misfire.

While I never thought I'd see a door in an art gallery outside of Europe (home to world-famous doors by Lorenzo Ghiberti and Auguste Rodin), this exhibit features the Kimberly Dunn and Dwayne Hill collaboration *Interior/Exterior Door*, made of steel, laminated plywood and carved mahogany. While an interesting piece, it lacks doorknobs and its proper doorway environment, making it feel unfinished and misplaced.

Come to think of it, many of these pieces seem oddly out of place, lacking in context. At one stage in my review of the show, I forgot that I wasn't in an antique store. Maybe it was Stephen DeLang's *Troubadour's Throne* that threw me off, since it would fit in perfectly at a thrift store hawking failed '70s bar stool designs. Uncomfortable, overly lacquered and just plain corny — perhaps a true troubadour's sorry ass would fit nicely upon its woven rush seat. I hope this was DeLang's intention, as anything less than a tongue-in-cheek joke about the modern singer-songwriter would take this work down a few notches.

On a more somber note, Stephen White's light sculptures are crafted with such care and attention to ambience that they could have a show all to themselves. His two major pieces, *Chrysalis* and *Flight*, take

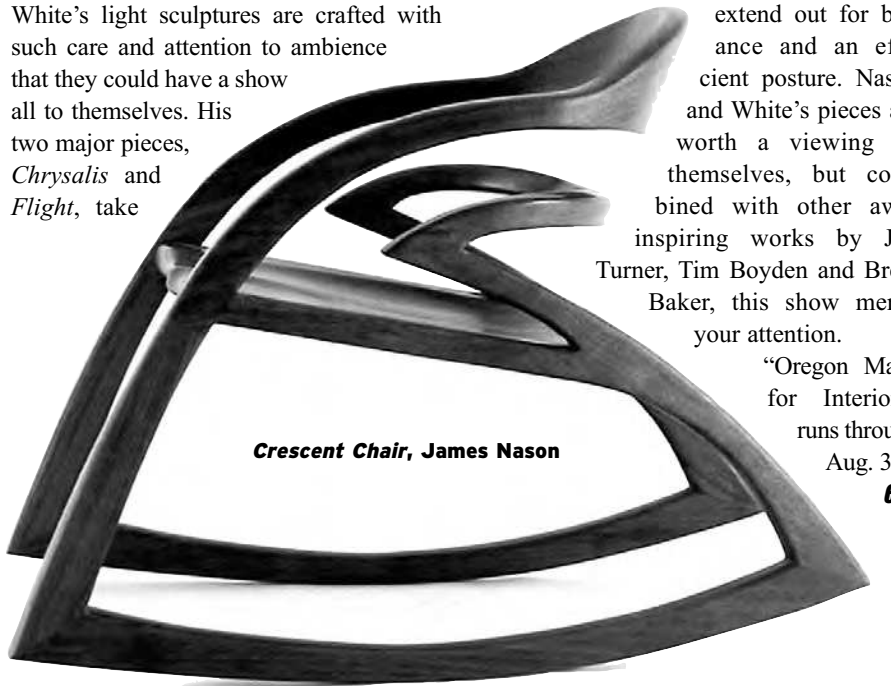
two distinct Oregon traits — butterflies and a ferocious jet stream, respectively — and form glowing, effusive elements from wood frames and laminated paper. His *Kaipua* pieces are smaller, more decorative and use native materials (drift wood, plant material) to more intimate effect. While hardly putting out much light and thereby low on the utility scale, these sculptures nevertheless convey the environment of an Oregon life to a T.

Also worthy of praise is James Nason, who succeeds on every level. He matches form with an innovative, fun design, uses native materials and contemplates the usability factor in each of his works on display. In *Crescent Chair*, Nason crafts what I like to consider the Sydney Opera House of chairs. Using the crescent sliver shape, he folds the arms, legs and seatback into one seamless rocking chair. As an added touch, he even worked an indentation into the seat of the chair for optimum butt cheek comfort.

Nason's *Side Table* further meditates on moon-like shapes, as the half-moon tabletop snugs tightly against the wall and three curving legs extend out for balance and an efficient posture. Nason and White's pieces are worth a viewing by themselves, but combined with other awe-inspiring works by Jud Turner, Tim Boyden and Brent Baker, this show merits your attention.

"Oregon Made for Interiors" runs through Aug. 31.

EW



Crescent Chair, James Nason

The thin line between art galleries and antique stores is crossed and double-crossed in the 11th biennial "Oregon Made for Interiors" juried exhibit at the Maude Kerns Art Center. The show, which was culled from a pool of statewide submissions, features handcrafted furniture, pottery, sconces, wall hangings, mirrors and light sculptures. The theme here is widely defined but loosely based on Oregon's natural resources, history and culture. Thus, many pieces feature driftwood, oak or beach grass and references to native flora, fauna and industry.

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