1-18-2001

Bridging the decorative and fine art through furniture

Alejandro Fernandez-Veraud

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarworks.rit.edu/theses

Recommended Citation
Rochester Institute of Technology

A Thesis submitted to the faculty
of the College of Imaging Arts and Sciences
in candidacy for the degree of Master of Fine Arts.

Bridging the Decorative and Fine Art through Furniture

By

Alejandro Fernandez-Veraud

January 18, 2001
Approvals

Chief Advisor: Andy Buck

Date May 12, 2001

Associate Advisor: Thomas Lightfoot

Date 5/10/01

Associate Advisor: Stephen B. Proctor

Date 5/2/01

Chairperson: Richard Tannen

Date 5/14/01

I, Alejandro Fernandez-Veraud, hereby grant permission to the Wallace Library of the Rochester Institute of Technology to reproduce my thesis in whole or in part. Any reproduction will not be for commercial use or profit.

Signature ___________________________ Date Apr 17, 2001
INDEX

I. Introduction
   1. Statement
   2. My perception
   3. My inspiration

II. Historical references
   4. The beautiful and the practical as one
   5. Art for art’s sake
   6. Decorative art vs. Fine art

III. Philosophical assumptions
   7. Emmanuel Kant
   8. George W. F. Hegel
   9. Arthur Danto
   10. Danto and Postmodernism
   11. Philosophical conclusions

IV. Critical discussion of works
   12. Painted panels
   13. Buscando Balance (Searching balance)
   14. Fuego Nuevo (New fire)
   15. Aquellas pequenas cosas ... (Those little things ...)
   16. Cuatro puertas (Four doors)
   17. Cajas de pajaros (Birdcages)
   18. Conclusions of works

V. Bibliography
I. Introduction

1. Statement

Many people believe that art and usefulness cannot be together. They think that either an object is art or useful but not both. This way of thinking has a deep root in our history. Through my work and arguments I support my belief that an object can be art and useful at the same time. I intend to bridge the decorative and fine art through my furniture.

2. My perception

In our contemporary world, furniture can be made from several different perspectives. I will focus my analysis in three: The perspective of design, the perspective of crafts and the perspective of art.

First, the perspective of design is primarily oriented to the function of the piece even though contemporary design has endeavored to find a balance between usefulness and aesthetics. The aesthetics in this approach lies in simplicity and invisibility, the less visible a functional object, the more beautiful it is. Ergonomics, production viability and user needs are also some of the most important considerations. This perspective
is represented by what Octavio Paz says: “Industrial design tends to be impersonal. It is subject to the tyranny of function, and its beauty is rooted in that subjection.”

Second, the perspective of crafts is a mediation between the perspective of design and the perspective of art. Works of craft reveal an intermediate zone between utility and aesthetic contemplation. Its forms are not governed by the economy of function but by pleasure. Handmade production and uniqueness are some of the most important considerations. Octavio Paz explains the essence of the crafts as he says, “The craft object satisfies a need no less imperative than hunger and thirst: the need to take delight in the things we see and touch, whatever their everyday uses.”

Third, the perspective of art is where objects are intellectual and sensible entities, spiritual realities, forms in which ideas are made manifest. This self-oriented and philosophical approach has inner feelings and self-expressions as some of its most important considerations.

From these three perspectives I have chosen two for my own work: the perspective of craft, which is considered a decorative art, and the perspective of art, which is considered a fine art. Both perspectives involve the hand of the creator, and I do not make any distinction between them. I believe that we are entering a new era that Arthur Danto describes as a pluralistic period of the arts, an era where we are starting to be liberated from our inability to associate art and usefulness. In a way this perception is not new because six centuries ago and beyond there was no distinction between these two concepts. This is something that we can see in our museums and

---

private collections where many of the objects gathered, either decorative or fine art objects, belonged to a world in which beauty and aesthetics were not isolated and self-sufficient values. However, this situation does not mean a backward movement but a forward movement because our understanding of art is deeper.

3. My inspiration

As with any art work, inspiration is essential. My inspiration to create my work is rooted in past experiences from my country. Throughout my life, harmony and positive energy have been indispensable elements for a complete and joyful existence. This is why I love Mexico so much, my country, so full of color and life.

I believe that Mexico portrays vitality by the way its people live day by day. Laughter, color and happiness fill our lives. We are highly connected to our environment, to the land, and to the people who surround us. Living the moment, intensively and full of vitality, is very important. These feelings and emotions about Mexico are my source of inspiration for my thesis work.

II. Historical references

History helps us to understand the inspiration behind the works of real importance. The main purpose of the study of history is not to know what has been done but to know why it has been done and the theories behind them.

4. The beautiful and the practical as one

At the beginning of the Western thought, starting with the Greeks in the sixth century BC, there were not intrinsic differences between utilitarian objects and non-utilitarian objects. Neither decoration nor utility was regarded as an inferior artistic activity. Furthermore, for Plato the artist as an image-maker has a lower position than the furniture maker since the last one knows how to fashion in real life what the painter can merely imitate. Artists have no real knowledge at all. Plato's argument is that if the artist cannot make that which exists as the furniture maker does, then he cannot bring anything into true existence.

During the Renaissance, and long after, the beautiful and the practical were undifferentiated. Even until the eighteenth century, the distinction between painting and decoration was all but nonexistent, and pictures were thought of as functional objects as well.

With the French Revolution furniture was downplayed because of its association with the luxurious tastes of aristocrats and nobility. It was Jacques-Louis David who reversed the Platonic order when he was in charge of the artistic affairs of the Revolution. He downplayed functional objects to the minor arts. He decreed a division, classifying furniture making as an inferior art in contrast with the high arts of painting, sculpture, and architecture.
5. Art for art’s sake

In the nineteenth century and late eighteenth century, through the influence of such philosophers as Immanuel Kant, Frederick Nietzsche and George W.F. Hegel, the concept of art as art became something which ought to be made for its own sake. Kant rejected sensory pleasure and emotional appeals from the realm of the aesthetic. The idea of disinterestedness made a distinction between a non-aesthetic "content" and the formal means of aesthetic contemplation. In this context, the disinterested attitude mandates that any component of experience that relates to the urgencies and values of ordinary life is not properly aesthetic. In this state of disinterest, the aesthetic attention is possible only where no trace of personal desire exists. With this logic, furniture making was excluded from the realm of art along with the other craft disciplines. This theory was reinforced with Hegel’s theory of art, which established that the highest form of art is the one less bound to materials.

These theories are the foundation of the Modernist Art, where modernist art objects are made to support aesthetic contemplation. Modernism is part of a search for transcendental absolutes. With Nietzsche, the artist became transformed into inspired beings. Furthermore, the artist reaches the status of God, and became the hero, in a higher status than scientists who are only the providers of tools for the artist. In this way, Nietzsche inverted all the values since the Greeks.
In 1835, theophile Gautier, in his novel Mademoiselle de Maupin expressed in a very deep sense the feeling of the new thought. He said, “Only what serves no purpose is truly beautiful” and “Everything useful is ugly”\(^3\). His contempt for utility was absolute.

Even with this way of thinking, furniture makers made a comeback in France at the end of the nineteenth century, when artists were making decorative and useful objects. Even “The Salon” was opened up to furniture makers.

By the same time, the Arts and Crafts movement in England projected the vision of an aestheticized society in which painting was treated as continuous with design and decoration, and the impulses of function were on a footing with those of art.

However this revaluation of the crafts did not last long. In the mid-twentieth century, once again the painter reasserted primacy of the painterly art. This happened because of the preeminence of abstraction, and the thought that abstractness is at once as antifunctional as possible and perhaps comes close to philosophy. Decoration, illustration, and ornamentation became in the 1950s and especially in New York City as unacceptable and inconceivable.

6. Decorative art vs. Fine art

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, there has been an effort to erase the boundary between the fine and the practical or decorative arts. Artists such as Wharton Esherick during the 1920’s moved from painting to wood sculpting and

furniture making. Since then his work has been a source of inspiration to many furniture makers. He was the first furniture maker who used this media as a means of artistic expression. Esherick's unique work was combining, as never before, the line and spirit of modern sculpture with the techniques of fine furniture craftsmanship.

In the mid-twentieth century the effort to level the fine and the practical arts was founded in the argument that so far as art making was concerned, there was no conceptual distinction between furniture making and what painters and sculptures did. Furniture makers began to think of themselves as artists, and their first effort was to essentialize their practice or their product. At this time the Studio Furniture Movement took its rise just when Pop Art put an end to the exclusionary pretensions of Abstract Expressionism. Even artists such as Roy Liechtenstein decorated some china, and William De Kooning dribbled paint on a wooden toilet seat, redeeming function as art. During the first half of the century, Marcel Duchamp embodied conceptual thinking in furniture placing domestic fixtures in unlikely contexts, and more recently in the 1970's, the sculptor Scott Burton produced chairs.

There have been many approaches to envision furniture as art. Some furniture makers have suppressed the functionality of their work. Its utility seemed to be that feature of furniture which keeps it from the precinct of high art. This effort has been made based in the belief that nonfunctional objects have become the standard of achievement. Others have brought into their work the very essence of the postmodernist spirit in art. Whether in painting or in furniture, art is a matter of meaning. For others, furniture can be art when it is about its own processes or its own substances or even its own
functions. In attempting to claim equal status with art, some have suppressed beautiful materials in a reaction against the effort to identify furniture with these materials based on the thought that skill and elegance in art is suspicious. Others to achieve art's prestige have adopted the style of any recently certified movement, from Abstract Expressionism to Performance Art. For the sake of credibility, others adopted the fundamental principles of Modernist theory – the autonomous object and the language of formalism, as basic elements of fine art. In doing so, they tried to make modern sculpture. Others embracing modernist assertions have broken with the past: the celebration of newness and rejection of the familiar, the stress on originality, the metaphor of the avant-garde.

In 1993, Mark Lyman created “SOFA” (Sculpture Objects & Functional Art), with the goal of bringing together the worlds of contemporary decorative and fine art. “SOFA” has been one of the main vehicles to show the most advanced works in furniture making. In 1996, the “Furniture Society” was created as an effort to bring together contemporary furniture makers. The Furniture Society acquired the term “Studio Furniture” as a way to express the importance of the individual maker and his or her artistic aura, evoking the type of long-term exploratory learning and suggesting a high degree of visual literacy and a vigorous conceptual approach to design and construction.

We are living in a world of fast change. However, Arthur C. Danto expresses with high clarity the following perspectives:
“The distinction between fine art and functionality is historically contingent and constantly under negotiation. It is not a distinction inscribed in Nature. We are closer, at the end of our century, to the spirit of pluralism that characterized the relationships between fine art and functionality during the last turn of the century than we are to our own mid-century’s attitudes on the matter. The attitudes of our mid-century, of course, have a certain inertia in shaping attitudes and aesthetics today, but nothing in history changes overnight.”

III. Philosophical assumptions

History has an important role to play in the philosophical analysis of art. We discussed the history of furniture in relation to painting and other fine arts. Since the Greeks to the present time, history reveals how we perceived furniture through time. From this analysis, we see that the most significant moment in shaping our perception of furniture not as art has been with the philosophers of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, the philosophers of reason. At this point I will discuss some of their arguments.

7. Emmanuel Kant

Kant has been considered by some the most important and influential philosopher in western thought. He believed in the uniqueness and autonomy of art, denying that

---

aesthetic judgment and taste are objective. He stated that a disinterested attitude is necessary for aesthetic contemplation in order to make it rational. He rejected sensory pleasure and emotional appeals from the realm of the aesthetic. Through this thinking he elevates reason as the highest value of humankind.

Kant’s concept of the sublime, which is the demonstration of our capability to recognize that there are things beyond our ability, beyond our capacity to understand, has been a great contribution to human kind. The sublime helps us to identify transcendental boundaries of human cognition and imagination. It represents the desire of man to get connected with the unpresentable and achieve spirituality.

Kant believed that reality should be seen through the eyes of reason and not with our senses. This thought has influenced our Western Culture in the way we perceive reality. This perception has downsized the decorative art versus the fine art, placing furniture outside the realm of fine art.

8. George W. F. Hegel

In a similar way to Kant, Hegel’s thinking elevates the forms of art that are less bound to materials. However Hegel’s teleological view of history offers a new possibility to art. According to Hegel, “World history is the unfolding of spirit in time, as nature is the unfolding of the idea in space.” This means that history is fundamentally the striving of spirit for its own freedom. In terms of art, this means that art history is fundamentally
the striving of art for its own freedom. This freedom means to become self-conscious and obtain a higher level of absolute knowledge. Thus, the gap between subject and object is overcome.

Hegel’s thought is that the world in its historical dimension is the dialectical revelation of consciousness to itself. This means that the end of history comes when the Spirit achieves awareness of its identity as Spirit.

9. Arthur C. Danto

Danto uses Hegel’s argument to explain his theory of post-historical art. According to Danto, art has come to an end in the way we know it. He explains, “when art internalizes its own history, when it becomes self-conscious of its history as it has come to be in our time, so that its consciousness of its history forms part of its nature, it is perhaps unavoidable that it should turn into philosophy at last. And when it does so, well, in an important sense, art comes to an end.” Danto uses Duchamp’s work to confirm the question of the philosophical nature of art from within art, implying that art already is philosophy in a vivid form. Also, Danto uses Andy Warhol’s “Brillo Box” to explain why art came to an end. With “Brillo Box” there was no longer a master narrative dictating what form works of art should take next since having a particular form no longer determined whether a thing was a work of art. He concludes the disenfranchisement of art saying, “So what art finally will have achieved as its fulfillment and fruition is the philosophy of art.”

Based on Hegel’s concepts, Danto believes that we are living a post-historical era in the arts. According to Danto, art no longer raises questions philosophically interesting, and the concept of art is internally exhausted. Danto calls his conception of post-historical art “pluralistic”, meaning that all forms of expression are now permitted. The argument that art is pluralistic is clearly sustained when we observe the answers in *Time* from several art-world personalities when they were questioned “What is art?” All the experts gave similar answers: “It seems pretty clear by now that more or less anything can be designated as art” (Art historian Thomas McEvilley); “By now the idea of defining art is so remote I don’t think anyone would dare to do it” (Robert Rosenblum); “There is no single definition of art” (William Rubin, of the NYC Museum of Modern Art); “There’s no consensus about anything today” (Philippe de Montebello, of the NYC Metropolitan Museum of Art); “Art is whatever people want to perceive it to be” (Peter Hoekstra, Republican Congressman from Michigan).7

Danto uses the term “conceptual mission” as equivalent to “historical significance”. By “historical significance” Danto refers to the ability to create concepts, new concepts. Unfortunately, Danto believes that art has exhausted the ability in this regard. I disagree with Danto. I do not believe that neither the “historical significance” nor the “conceptual mission” of art is to create new concepts. This is a very limited definition of art. I believe that the “conceptual mission” of art is to be a vehicle for understanding and self-consciousness, and a vehicle for the development of the human spirit. By looking at art we can learn about other people’s thinking and we can understand

---

ourselves by comparison. The essence of art is the capacity that it gives to man to be creative, to exalt the deepest emotions and feelings, to give him a better understanding of himself. Purity of art in this sense is irrelevant. Furthermore, it is irrelevant to say which discipline of art, whether painting, sculpture or furniture making, is higher or lower. There is not an intrinsic characteristic in any of these disciplines that could support such a classification of status. This argument makes me think that no matter how material or even functional an art work is, an artwork will or will not be successful depending on the capacity of the artist to connect us through his or her work. For this reason, I believe that furniture could be art. At this point, it is important to make clear that as not every painting is a piece of art neither is every piece of furniture.

What is valuable from Danto's thinking is the idea that art has entered a pluralistic period. Art has more freedom than ever and it is this freedom what makes art more interesting.

10. Danto and Postmodernism

Danto’s pluralistic system is also consistent with Jencks' definition of Postmodernism, which Jencks sees also as pluralistic, and has no single grounding force. This means that there is not a metanarrative that could satisfy the needs, taste and interest of everyone. In this way the postmodern artist chooses and invents his own mythology, his own tradition, and his own narrative. The Postmodern theory is a reaction to the modern’s lack of social context and its disconnection with the past. The concept of
pluralism has opened new avenues with many directions and many truths, and the respect between each other has started to be achieved. However, all these truths have something in common, not as a metanarrative but as a source that is the human soul, and they all come from one single deep truth that is our human condition. This common source allows the pluralistic system not to fall in anarchy.

Danto describes this moment as a period of art so absolute in its freedoms that art seems but a name for an infinite play with its own concept, a period where art can be anything at all. In this context, the gap between decorative and fine art is overcome.

11. Philosophical conclusions

For Hegel, reason is the sovereign of the world. I understand that reason transcends and the body does not. This raises the question: Which is the ultimate goal of man? At this point, I agree with Hegel that our goal is to become self-conscious. However, self-consciousness implies the achievement of spirituality through a better understanding of our human condition and art is a vehicle to achieve this goal.

We have come to a point where art cannot be done in the same manner as before. Art is in a pluralistic period. From Plato’s to Kant’s thinking, art has explored a whole range of concepts, from total imitation or representation to total abstraction, it goes from the negation of meaning through the object to the negation of the object through meaning. However, new or fresh insights into art will certainly open up in the future.
The term "End of Art" has been used in a very sensationalistic manner because art must continue as an instrument of understanding and connection through the expression of deep feelings and emotions. It continues to be a vehicle of human transcendence. We are far from becoming self-conscious. There is a lot of understanding yet to come, and art is indispensable to achieve this capacity. Our world is challenging us more than ever. The rupture with nature, derived from the western thought of reason and abstraction, is forcing us to redefine our way of living. Maybe more than ever, art has a lot to offer as a medium to achieve understanding.

Through this argument, furniture making has a lot to offer in the new pluralistic era. Its feature of utility does not interfere anymore as a limiting condition for being art. Furniture in this new era is an instrument of connection and understanding as are the mediums of painting and sculpture. In conclusion, furniture can be both, decorative and fine art.

IV. Critical discussion of works

Through my work, I intent to blend furniture making and painting. My intention has been to mix both in a way that one does not overcome the other. Instead I intent to create works of art that combine both disciplines. The way I create furniture is the same as I create paintings and sculptures. My works are conceptual, however, interactive and useful. They are statements and expressions of emotions and feelings. When I create furniture, visual aesthetic, conceptual function and utilitarian function are the most important elements in consideration.
All cultures have their icons onto which they project their dreams, needs and desires. Our world is based on these fantasies and dreams. The icons I create are from my imagination, which is influenced by my memories, memories from my beloved Mexico which Andre Breton declared “The most surrealist country.”

People in Mexico live between two worlds: one full of fantasies and stories and another full of reality and struggle. However, these fantasies and ideals keep the people creative, cheerful and hopeful. This is why Mexico is a country rich in culture, full of stories, legends, myths and fantasies.

The importance of color is present in all Mexicans as one of the richest expressions that make up our character. Color illuminates our daily life as seen in street fronts, markets and clothing. Color in Mexico symbolizes an intensity of life. However, color is not merely a matter of preference but a statement of belief.

I am searching for a style that connects with the past, yet fitted for the future, confronting the past without succumbing to nostalgia, learning without imitating.

Through my furniture I intent to transform the space, and through color and textures I intend to create a mood that evokes feelings and emotions from my fantasies, my dreams and my surrealistic memories. I want my work to give pleasure: aesthetic-visual pleasure, intellectual pleasure and sensory pleasure. In essence, I want my work to be decorative and fine art. At this point, I will discuss each piece separately.

---

8 Erika Billeter, Images of Mexico (Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, Texas) pp83
12. Painted Panels

Materials: Wood and Acrylic Paint

As a way to start, I made 40 small paintings. Each painting is a panel of 9" X 9", and they are independent studies created from my imagination, a product of the mind. They are abstract expressions. Each painting is free, expressive and traced through the trail of color and texture. The panels are not related to each other, and in this sense they are not a compressed composition. Some of them are closer to what is considered a painting, an individual composition while some others are not.

I call these paintings my samples, and they are not intended to be considered a piece of art as a whole. They are studies to evoke emotional expressions rather than a visual truth, which is why no imagery was used. The purpose of these works is double: one as an expression of illusions and another as panels capable to transform the space and create a mood.

In some of the panels the element of texture, as important as the colors, provides depth, reflects and absorbs light on the surfaces.

For the thesis show, I placed 20 panels at each side of my exhibition before placing the pieces of furniture. This creation was an installation and I used the panels as a palette and the walls as a canvas placing one by one, changing them constantly until I
was satisfied with the composition, which suggested a sense of flow along the two sixteen feet long walls.

13. Buscando Balance (Searching Balance)

Materials: Wood and Acrylic Paint

“Buscando Balance” is my first attempt to combine furniture with painting. However, even though the paint creates an illusion and feeling, still the paint seems to be more a decorative element than what I originally intended to do.

This is a piece about nature and a critique of today’s life. It reflects my conception of the natural world and the human being’s place in the cosmos. In this conception, the natural world is not seen as an enemy who has to be under control. Neither is it assumed that greater human self-realization is achieved through greater separation from nature. Aspiration is toward permanent integration, which can be achieved only through a harmonious relationship with the rest of the natural world.

The piece has three organic shaped legs that give a sense of immense growth as they start at a point at the bottom, ending as a big mass on the top. Each leg ends at a different height. On top of them are three identical drawers each facing in different directions. However, all together the drawers face forward toward the center in a welcoming position similar to open arms. The drawers look flat, as they are wide and deep but not tall.
The square, symmetrical shape of the drawers reflects the man-made character of the piece, which cannot stand without the legs. Balance is achieved only with a harmonious relationship with the natural organic forms. The piece works only by the integration of the whole.

The blue, green and light yellow paint on the legs and the strong brush marks enhance the sense of growth, representing health and vitality. This rich sense of growth evokes a land of exuberance like that of the rain forest in southern Mexico.

14. Fuego Nuevo (New Fire)

Materials: Wood, Acrylic Paint, Cooper, Gold Leaf, Electronics

"Fuego Nuevo" deals with the concept of time as circular. The universe proceeds through a succession of cycles that, although not identical, pass through the same stages in an unending spiral. In this cosmology, fire and the red color are symbols of new beginnings and rebirth, which deny death.

This clock refers to this attitude towards constant new beginnings. It is a reminder of the opportunities that life gives us to correct our mistakes and keep going. The light that the piece emits provides a quiet atmosphere, evoking spiritual illumination, guidance and prosperity as reflected upon the gold leaf.

The base, similar to an ancient rock that has gone through the test of time, holds the fire and elevates it. This gesture gives a sense of preciousness. The curves, the
inclination and the flow of the piece suggest movement like the one provided by a soft breeze: healthy, pleasant, and full of life and hope.

15. Aquellas pequenas cosas que nos hacen llorar (Those little things that make us cry)

Materials: Wood and Acrylic Paint

A song of Joan Manuel Serrat, a Spanish poet and singer inspired this piece. The song talks about memories and little things that bring those memories back when we see them. The little things can be letters, a dry leaf left in a book, a tape or a picture. These objects are important in our lives and connect us with our past.

The piece has two functions: one of contemplation that is the painting on the back as one opens the cabinet, and the other one utilitarian -- the drawer which gives a safe place to keep those little things that have been significant in our past.

The doors of the cabinet and the overall shape of the piece give a spiritual character to it. This feeling suggests the kind of things expected to be found inside the cabinet and the importance that they have in the life of the user. The little round-shaped pieces hanging from the bottom of the cabinet suggest attachment and the vast quantity of them, a total of one hundred and seventy two pieces, suggest all those fine strings and memories to which we are attached in our lives. However, the feeling is positive as these memories and thoughts help us to shape our present. They represent what we are, the sum of our previous experiences in life and the strength of our hearts.
The placement of the painting in the back of the cabinet challenges the concept of space. This space is not meant to be used; it is supposed to frame the painting. The real challenge will be if after many years a future user of the piece will use this space for utilitarian purpose such as storage space. If that happens, my painting was not a piece of art in the eyes of this user. Therefore, the intention of the piece would fail.

16. Cuatro Puertas (Four Doors)

Materials: Wood, Acrylics, Silk, Dyes

Since I was very little, I appreciated the wonders of life. Our capacity to choose our own destiny has fascinated me always. I believed that we are so free that nothing can stop us to become what we dream to be. Of course, there are many obstacles to face and life is not easy. Our attitude towards life is what really can help us to overcome the obstacles. I call this our state of mind.

The concept of this piece deals with direction and choices, layers, obstacles and transparency. The piece consists of seven spaces arranged horizontally. Each space is cubical and has an unclosed front door and a silk painting on the back. Four of the paintings are doors, and three are abstract spaces that suggest a landscape. The painted doors and the abstract landscapes are alternated.

“Cuatro Puertas” raises questions for us. As we walk through life, we have to make decisions and choices. This piece has the intention to suggest the beauty of life: The challenge that it represents and the free will with which we have been gifted.
The imagery used for the painted doors comes from Mexico. The old doors have been in use for many years, perhaps even centuries. They represent the deep traditions that are so important to my countrymen.

In a way this is the most successful piece from my show. The balance achieved between the silk painting and its function as furniture is harmonious. It integrates both the disciplines of furniture and painting.

17. Cajas de Pajaros (Birdcages)

Materials: Wood and Acrylic Paint

“Cajas de Pajaros” is a work, which comes from my childhood memories when I used to go to the public markets of Mexico with my family.

As a child, these markets full of things and colors were the perfect opportunities for exploration. Fruits, vegetables, baskets, pottery, fishes, piñatas, were placed or hanging everywhere -- a never-ending number of objects of all kinds of shapes, forms, colors and textures.

From all these objects one of the most appealing to me has always been the birdcages, which are usually placed randomly, one over the other, with all kinds of shapes and scales. These unique works sometimes hang from the ceiling and sometimes are elevated from the floor as they are stacked one over the other.
The birdcages have always suggested to me a metaphor: The precious, colorful, vital being inside cannot be given away as a precious jewel. However, it is the wild, fragile, cheerful singing figure that one wants to set free and liberate from his jail.

The piece has seven cages, which have been painted, and the paint has been scraped away in places, to make the work look weathered as if eroded by time. This effect is enhanced through the crackle texture of the cages. The contradiction between the old and the new creates a rich and evocative language, which expresses loudly the mixed emotions of the metaphor. However, the dark browns, blacks, reds and oranges give a feeling of peace as if the birds have been liberated. Finally, there is no more metaphor. The act of love, which gives freedom, wins over the selfish attitude to keep the precious being captive. Now the birdcages are empty but full of humanity.

This piece is the show's most conceptual piece. It deals with the concepts of freedom, absence and history. When the piece is observed, viewers raise many questions. The piece itself raises the question: Is it furniture or sculpture? The utilitarian function of the piece is not clear. However, the small cabinets suggest storage which is left to the user's imagination. It opens many possibilities that only the user can discover, based on the feelings that the piece generates in him. This idea of not imposing a function in the piece is very appealing to me, and it has opened new avenues for my future work.

The idea of stacking pieces one over the other is not new. However, the way they are located -- the play between the horizontal and vertical doors and windows, the position of the five legs, the flow that is suggested and the harmonious colors used and the
natural color of the mahogany -- makes the piece unique and successful. If the user or viewer asks himself whether the piece is furniture or sculpture, then I will say that my goal has been achieved: that is to create furniture from the perspective of craft and art.

18. Conclusions of works

Now at the end of my thesis work, I have gained a deeper understanding of furniture as craft and as art or as decorative and fine art, not only historically but also philosophically. My original interest to bring together painting and furniture in my work has given me a broader vocabulary aesthetically and conceptually.

Through the creation of two-dimensional illusions over three-dimensional forms, new avenues have been opened. These illusions can create powerful statements and concepts that generate deep feelings and express thoughts that combined with the three-dimensional forms enhance the result beyond the materials themselves.

This approach for creation is very difficult, and it is almost impossible to achieve a balance between furniture and painting in one single piece. Only a very fine line can place both of them at the same level of expression. This real challenge is the one that I have chosen. In order to be successful, the concept of the piece has to be very clear, and all the elements of the piece have to be integrated and coherent in a way that both disciplines complement one another without one over ruling the other.
When the expressive power of each discipline is kept at the same level in one unique piece the results can be exquisite. The key is to re-enforce the concept of the piece and achieve a level in which the concept is as powerful as the expressive appearance of the piece -- thought oriented without loosing spontaneity.

The most important thing that I obtained from this process is not only the excellent techniques that I learned but also a way of thinking. In order to be successful one's thinking must be unique, sharp and deep. Through this Master's program, I have made the first step to reach this goal.

When I started my thesis, I wanted to do a study that would be the beginning of a life work. Now at the end of the thesis, I feel that this goal has been achieved because I am fascinated with the idea of combining furniture with painting, bridging the decorative and the fine art. This thesis is just the first step towards a lifetime investigation.

V. Bibliography


6. *Images of Mexico*, Erika Billeter, Dallas Museum Of Art, Dallas,


8. *Sacred (Photographs of Mexico)*, Van Deren Coke, University of New Mexico Press, Alburquerque, 1992


‘Searching balance’ (1999)

‘Those little things that make us cry’ (2000)