
Anna Aagaard Jensen.

Interviewed by RICHARD PALLARDY
Portrait by WALTER PIERRE

Your *'Basic Instinct Chairs'* explore how men and women take up space differently. What led you to choose furniture as a medium for exploring that?

Furniture design is my 'original' background so it came natural to me to work with furniture. Choosing a chair as a medium is related to its observation as an 'everyday object' in which we are all given the same amount of space. This notion that our subconscious mind guides us in how we use space according to our gender shows that we have different ways of behaving in terms of what is proper according to societal rules and gender. We sit many hours of our lives and the way we sit has become a natural act. Manipulating this act disturbs our perception of something that has always been one way. A chair - or the disruption of it - seems to be a good way to disrupt our perception of 'normality' and to change our current state of mind.

You made an accompanying short film comprised of clips of female talk show guests. Can you explain why you chose to focus on celebrities?

In our contemporary western part of the world, media has a huge impact on our everyday life. With the expansion of social media we are exposed to celebrities 24/7. Our body language and our behavior are very much influenced and adopted by what we are exposed to. It was therefore impor-





Mama Chair, (Segregated Family: A Concept in Decay), 2017 © Francesco Pace



Lady with balls, The Big Lady, Lady A (A Basic Instinct), 2018 © Iris Rijskamp



Lady with Balls, The Big Lady (A Basic Instinct), 2018 © Anna Aagaard Jensen

tant to focus on celebrities as they are the people who subconsciously navigate my behavior and my perception of things.

The chairs are molded from fiberglass and resin. Can you describe the process of constructing them?

The shape is sculpted in styrofoam through a process of constantly adding and reducing material. When I have the rough shape in styrofoam I start layering the fiberglass and resin until an appropriate amount of fiberglass is reached. After these steps it's about the detailing. This is done by sanding the material but still adding a lot of resin. This is really the moment where details are placed and made, where I choose either to have the sanding to be smooth or to be rough - for me this is where the personality and uniqueness of the objects emerge.

Why did you choose these materials?

First of all, styrofoam is an extremely forgiving material, as well as the resin. Through working with the resin and fiberglass I'd found my own language and my own way of working with it. I like that the material can gain a stone-ish texture. It gives the work a more sculptural look and thereby, in my opinion, does remove itself from the classical notion of furniture. It gives us a chance to understand something differently and see furniture as something that moved in an alternative direction.

The surface of the chairs is somewhat raw, showing traces of how the shapes were molded by hand. Why did you opt for this aesthetic rather than, say, polishing them and making the surface perfectly smooth?

My furniture reflects the human body and I don't see the body as symmetrical nor particularly smooth. I think the body is perfect through its imperfections. It's here that we all find ourselves in a position of being unique, this is where we become different from one another. The roughness gives them character, an attitude, and it makes them - in my opinion - very honest. It is not a way of saying that we are dishonest as humans, but more to say that we are extremely restricted to a certain way of being and looking in order to fit into our culture and context.

Did you use actual cosmetics to tint the chairs pink? How much makeup did it take?

I used different shades of blush. For some of the chairs I used a non-labeled blush varying from a very pink hue to a more peachy one and mixed them. I did a collection of ladies for Functional Art Gallery where I used MAC blush in 5 different colors varying from fuchsia to very peach. With the MAC, it takes around 3-4 pockets of blush per chair, depending on size. So surprisingly, not that much actually.

How have female visitors reacted to the chairs? Male visitors?

There are many different reactions to the project but mostly they have been very positive, both from men and women. A lot of women really wanted to try them and there have been both laughter and great conversations. Some women have been thoughtful about the work, contemplating if they would 'dare' to sit down, but when they finally did, they seemed to look relieved after some time. I think talking about body language as something that should not be restricted or related to specific genders makes us feel more free. This is also not only in relation to my chairs, but in general when we talk gender and

what specific body language is related to one's gender. Bottom line, articulating these stereotypical actions and exposing us to alternative ways of perceiving things can hopefully create a new discourse in how we see each other and also how we see gender.

I had some encounters with men (but also with women), both in the physical world and online, where they found the project ridiculous and repulsive. The fact that they suddenly felt discriminated against because they couldn't sit created a defensive reaction. Discrimination is extremely unpleasant, even the fear of it can be terrifying. Creating this barrier between men and women in this project underlines the fact that we are not equal in a simple gesture, like sitting - that I, as a woman, fear discrimination by sitting with wide-spread legs in public. The sign that only women can sit makes it very clear that there is a difference between men and women. Even though we immediately don't think there is, it is a lingering unconscious act that has been precoded - making us behave in certain patterns. Those patterns and structures we have to break in order to move beyond - to move towards more equality. The project causes a reaction and a reaction can cause reflections, action and hopefully resulting in a change.

Why are men not allowed to sit in the chairs? What would happen if they did? Has anyone tried?

The chairs are made for women and made to give women more confidence by forcing them into a posture that is frowned upon. Men already have the privilege of sitting in this posture, also meaning that they are naturally allowed to take more space than a woman. I agree with people telling me that this is discrimination but I find it to be a positive discrimination. I am not discriminating in order to exclude a certain group of people from a specific action. Men should still be allowed to sit the way they want, but the chairs create a balance by allowing women to act the same. It is important also to understand that when I say allowed, it is related to a code of conduct - unwritten rules in our society - that we very strictly follow in order to not be or feel discriminated upon. There have been men who have tried, some did it as a provocation and some just did not see the sign and were very apologetic after. Nonetheless, when it was done in provocation, these men proved the imbalance more vividly. That some men still feel superior to women and by sitting in the chairs they fight equal balance between gender.

In addition to being exhibited on their own, the chairs were part of a group show in Milan. How did they relate to the work of the other artists in the show?

There are always some difficulties in managing people when you have works that can only be used by 50% of the crowd and the rest of the works are available for everyone. But, these situations have always led to good conversations so, I never see it as a disadvantage or a bad thing that my work is incorporated or situated in the context of furniture that can be used by everyone. It helps the work move into a more general context but also an everyday context which is needed.

The more it is adopted by people, the more we talk about it, and one day it will become a norm.

Is your work intended as a Feminist Statement? What is your relationship to feminism?

The work is a statement, for now. Hopefully it will become a normality in the near future. It is a way to expose us to a common behavior that shows how we as women are still restricted in.



The Tall Lady, Boss Lady (A Basic Instinct), 2018 © Micheline Nahrha