

ALLAN WEXLER RONALD FELDMAN

The unanswerable questions that motivate many cross-disciplinary careers—what is the difference between art and craft? between sculpture and furniture?—fall away when the work they generate is any good. That has long since happened with Allan Wexler's objects and installations, which are both applied design and art. The 15 full-scale works recently shown, all made (mostly of wood) in the last few years, constituted an affable crowd of crypto-figurative, not-quite-functional, almost scholastically self-referential objects. All were also chairs.

Among them were two with pencil points under their feet that leave traces, on paper laid beneath, of their occupants' movements toward and away from a table that separates them (*Body Language*). In a related exercise, a chair offered itself up to a self-portrait drawn with its own partly charred legs (*Burnt Chair/Charcoal Drawing*). There were models of self-sufficiency—two chairs slipped into their own chair-shaped crates—and of interdependence, in the form of paired seats cantilevered, back to back, from a shared frame (*Co-Exist*). In *Interchange*, snaky extensions link the legs of otherwise discrete chairs.

Even for those seated in solitude, the balance Wexler contrives is an active force: *Floating/Self Portrait* is a chair suspended scant inches off the floor with the help of counterweighing bricks placed on an ungainly structure behind: a wry icon, perhaps, of the baggage we carry, and how we'd be lost without it. The most elaborate work shown was *Desk*, which features an elegant (and only seemingly overbuilt) cat's cradle of scaffolding that extends in a grand, doodling sweep from chair back to desk top. The result, with a nod to Robert Morris and another to Saul Steinberg, is an object that seems to contain the sketch of its own making.

Also on view were 45 small drawings for more chairs, 14 larger and more refined "digital paintings" of



Allan Wexler: *Desk*, 2009, wood, brick, latex paint and wax, 105 by 72 by 88 inches; at Ronald Feldman.

assorted furnishings, and dozens of small models for various architectural follies—mazes, clefts and declivities in the landscape; various buildings for single occupants; and, most intriguing, six portable voting booths. These encumbrances—they hang from shoulder harnesses like sandwich boards or ballpark hot-dog trays—are little essays on exercising one's franchise, which as Wexler pictures it is both an inalienable right and a heavy responsibility. The show's final component was documentation of an enormous public work in progress at the Atlantic Terminal transit hub in Brooklyn, on which he is working with his wife Ellen Wexler, who also collaborated on a wonderfully—and forcefully—convivial seating/tabletop project at Hudson River Park (2006), a permanent installation.

Closer in spirit to Siah Armajani's investigations of the social dimensions of design than to Jorge Pardo's sleek architectural pastiches, Wexler has no interest at all in the language of style. It is questions of function—and the behaviors it both follows and shapes—that absorb him, an infectious preoccupation.

—Nancy Princenthal