

REMARKS BY THE HONOURABLE PETER UNDERWOOD AC,
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA OPENING AN EXHIBITION OF DESIGN
FURNITURE BY STUDENTS AND STAFF OF THE UTAS SCHOOL OF
ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN NEWNHAM CAMPUS,
WEDNESDAY , 4th JULY 2012

It seems a long time ago since I was in Launceston to open the Furniture Design Building at Inveresk but in fact it was only just a little more than one year ago and now I am back again to open this wonderful exhibition of office furniture, the work of students and staff of the Furniture Design Programme done in that building.

I understand that for some of the exhibitors this is the first time you have put on display in a major exhibition work that you have designed and created. It is such a personal thing that you have done. As Simon Ancher has said in his curatorial statement "Discovering Design through Furniture is an exhibition of selected works specifically chosen to showcase small personal triumphs in the designer's journey." Every artistic endeavour is a very personal journey isn't it and I sometimes think that exposing that very personal endeavour to scrutiny at a public exhibition, especially if it is your first exhibition, must call for the same amount of courage that would be required to take all your clothes off and stand in the middle of Brisbane Street. But all nine exhibitors at this exhibition have no cause for worry. You are all looking good.

According to the 19th Century American essayist, Agnes Repplier, "Art is never didactic, does not take kindly to facts, is

helpless to grapple with theories, and is killed outright by a sermon.”¹ That is surely the case with the furniture on display at this exhibition. Although all the furniture is linked by the common theme of Office related Furniture, the creativity of the artists has produced an eclectic mix of craftsmanship and design each one provoking a different reflex from the sensibilities.

But the thing about the art on display here this evening is that it is grounded in the real world and this enhances our understanding, or at least my understanding of ways of seeing and appreciating it. And I have good news for all the exhibitors this evening. I was recently reading an on-line edition of the English Guardian newspaper. Under the heading “Where furniture meets Art” reporter Hannah Booth writes:

“Furniture has traditionally had to accrue value by sitting around until it becomes an antique, although there are also a few mid-20th century pieces that have achieved trendy "art" status, such as Charles and Ray Eames' lounge or Arne Jacobsen's Ant Chair. Now, even new pieces - made in small runs by exciting names, and taken out of design stores and into the more rarified environment of a gallery - are starting to fetch mind-boggling sums. A prototype table designed in 2005 by one of the hottest architects around, Zaha Hadid, was

¹ Cited by Professor AC Grayling, *The Meaning of Things*, ISBN 978-0-7538-1359-1. At page 169.

sold at auction for nearly \$300,000 two years ago. Another lounge chair by Hadid from 2006 sits in the permanent collection of New York's Metropolitan Museum.

A Newson or a Hadid - it's surely only a matter of time before these designers attain surname-only status - is beyond the reach of all but the super-rich. But it's not just well-heeled collectors who are drawn to acquiring 'design art'. "It's a new way of buying furniture," curator Libby Sellers says. "There's a growing understanding generally of what good design is, and people are looking for more inspiring products than you find on the high street or in interiors magazines."²

So to the exhibitors - who interestingly are all male - I say stay with your art and your skills. From your statements you all clearly love the work that you do and if you stick with it you too might be able to command what the Guardian describes as “mind boggling sums.”

So with respect to this exhibition, “Discovering Design through Furniture”, I congratulate each of the designers, Simon Ancher and the School of Architecture and Design for together you are truly maintaining the aims of those Launceston designer makers who in

² <http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2008/feb/23/interiorsdirectory75>. Accessed 27th June 2012.

the 1990's conceived the idea of an Australian School of Fine Furniture here in Launceston which would train future generations of furniture craftspeople, preserve the necessary skills and perhaps develop an industry that would gain national and international recognition - if not quite mind-boggling prices.

And so with great pleasure I open this exhibition.