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have to offer the next generation*

Profile

PAULO GOLDSTEIN

Skills in craft and engineering make for playful 'repair' fine art, as **Charles Ormrod** discovered when he talked to Brazilian artist and maker Paulo Goldstein

In the best possible way, Paulo Goldstein's new interior for a VIP reception room at a leading London school of design is full of patched-up old furniture. Commissioned by Jeremy Till, head of Central Saint Martins, the theme for the room in the school's award-winning regeneration of the Granary building at King's Cross is 'Scarcity', suggesting a future where environmental crisis will limit the flood of newly made products, or a present where financial crisis makes them impossible to buy.

Goldstein's response to the idea of scarcity is to repair old and broken furniture that most people would consider fit only for the skip, and bring it back into use. But these aren't cheap, invisible repairs intended to conceal a breakage, nothing like repair in the austerity conditions of the Forties. Goldstein has brought together broken chairs and other furniture from across London and worked with a highly skilled studio team to repair them in visually arresting ways. The repair is meant to be seen and appreciated: it is a major and very obvious change to the original object. The end result is not a restoration but a transformation, conveying a new and different message.

'People see scarcity as a negative thing', Goldstein says, 'as make do and mend, but it can be seen as a very positive thing, as a springboard for creativity.' It is a creativity fully demonstrated in his repaired chairs for the Scarcity room, with ingenious and striking choices of repair materials, high-quality craft methods and thoughtful design. But visually impressive though they are, these repairs work: the chairs are actually very comfortable to sit on, entirely practical.

For Collect 2013, the Crafts Council's major annual show in May, Goldstein took his ideas on repair to their limits, much further than the furniture for Scarcity, which has to be practical. For example, an ordinary set of headphones shown at Collect has its missing earpiece replaced with a much larger handmade item, reminiscent of an Edwardian telephone, but very finely made of precisely turned wood and delicately wrought steel.

Some critics might find the tension between the design of the original object and the quite different design aesthetic of its deliberately obvious repair difficult. It is perhaps most noticeable with Goldstein's repairs to design classics, such as his Anglepoise with its wooden replacement joint and pulley addition, but to see

that tension as negative is missing the point: these pieces are about the repair, not the original object, and the tension between the two helps highlight the repair and its craft qualities.

Goldstein explains his interest in repair as a response to broken political and social systems. His beautiful repairs are his way of showing that individuals are not powerless; that we can literally mend our way out of difficulty.

But though expressed in terms relevant for today, of environmental and financial crisis, it is fascination with craft that drives his work, starting when he was a young boy at home in Brazil making things with Plasticine found in his parents' workshop. Both doctors, his father was also a keen model builder and his mother a sculptor. Their interest in the making process was passed on to their son, who went on to study fine arts in São Paulo. From there he came to the UK to work in the animation industry, making models and sculptures for films including Wes Anderson's *Fantastic Mr Fox* and Aardman's *Shaun the Sheep 2*.

An MA in industrial design at Central Saint Martins followed. But Goldstein is a craftsman at heart, so is there a role for craft in contemporary industrial design? 'The designer has a lot to learn from the craftsman and the craftsman has a lot to learn from the designer,' Goldstein says. 'The craftsman has a much more tactile kind of knowledge and understands materials much better – design sometimes loses that, which I think is a shame. And both craft and design benefit from being combined with the fine arts perspective, thinking completely out of the box, unconstrained by practicalities.'

At a time when so much contemporary design is dominated by the use of computers, when young product designers are becoming experts in the use of CAD drawing and learning nothing about hand tools and craft skills, Goldstein's work with found objects calls for a radically different approach. As he says of the design process for his Scarcity furniture, it has to be hands-on: 'Watching the screen and planning this in CAD – it's not going to work.'

But though his work is deliberately outside the world of CAD/CAM and high-volume production, that doesn't mean he won't work with schemes larger than the Central Saint Martins' room. Clients looking for very different and thought-provoking ideas for, say, a one-off bar or restaurant, could and should consider Goldstein. ■



If it's broke, fix it... Paulo Goldstein, pictured here with some of his 'repairs', recently filled a room at Central St Martins with his work under the theme Scarcity, and also displayed his artistry in the Craft Council's Collect 2013 event