

Matthew Hilton – Furniture for our Time

Tuesday 15 February to Sunday 25 June 2000

Matthew Hilton is one of the UK's most successful furniture designers. His work has helped to shape the style of contemporary domestic interiors and many of his pieces are already considered modern classics.

Matthew Hilton's work expresses the qualities associated with classic English furniture but in forms that are undeniably modern. "Hilton's work has a quality of quiet assurance and close attention to detail. He clearly understands the materials and processes of manufacture, so that structurally his furniture works and will stand the test of time", says David Dewing, Director of the Geffrye.

Based in East London, much of Hilton's work is made here. "It is fitting that the Geffrye should choose to mount the first solo exhibition of Matthew's work, in celebration of his achievement as a British furniture designer whose reputation both here and abroad is growing with each new project" says Dewing. "The Geffrye's displays of domestic interiors from 1600 to the present day are essentially a history of design and taste and in many ways Hilton's designs typify the quality of contemporary urban living. The Geffrye was founded in 1914 to provide inspiration for local furniture makers and it is in the same spirit that we hope this exhibition will bring Hilton's work to the attention of a wider public".

The exhibition at the Geffrye marks a watershed in Hilton's career. In the mid-1980s he was one of a group of designers, including Tom Dixon, Jasper Morrison and Ron Arad, who were producing some of the first British furniture of international significance since the 1960s. Since then, Hilton has quietly and confidently continued to design highly influential furniture, creating pieces appreciated by both his peers and the public. "Digging through the past was a bit uncomfortable at first", says Hilton, "but I now feel that the process of putting together the Geffrye exhibition has provided me with a valuable opportunity to take a breather, and to make a mid-life assessment."

Hilton considers all the pieces in the exhibition important for a particular reason, either stylistically or formally, or because certain pieces have afforded him the opportunity to work in a new material or with a new manufacturer. "I have learned something from all of the pieces chosen for the Geffrye show. All are loaded with meaning and memory, and are very personal to me. They are like friends", he says.

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Research conducted by the Geffrye in 1998 into the preferences and buying patterns for furniture and domestic objects revealed how Hilton's furniture reflected ideas of 1990s taste. Two pieces in particular, the Balzac chair and the Flipper table, have been widely publicised and feature on the best-seller lists of three of the most significant contemporary design retailers in London: Conran, Heal's and SCP. Both were selected for permanent display in the Geffrye's 1990s period room which depicts a loft space, a living area for young affluent city dwellers interested in the culture and style of design.

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Notes to Editors

- 1 For further details or transparencies, please contact Nancy Loader, PR Officer, on 0171 739 9893.
- 2 The show will be accompanied by a book written by Catherine McDermott, the exhibition's curator. Catherine is a Reader in Design History at Kingston University and a consultant exhibition curator.
- 3 To complement this exhibition, two smaller furniture shows will be mounted in the Design Centre.
- 4 The Geffrye presents the quintessential style of English urban middle class interiors from 1600 to the present day through a chronological sequence of period rooms. The museum is set in the former almshouses of the Ironmongers' Company, elegant 18th century buildings surrounded by tranquil gardens, including an award-winning walled herb garden and a new series of period garden rooms (open April - October). In 1998 the Geffrye opened a major extension designed by Branson Coates Architecture which features four new period room displays for the 20th century and provides the opportunity for the museum to address issues of current and future style and taste.
- 5 The Geffrye Museum is an independent charitable trust, grant-aided by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. The Trust actively seeks to attract donations and corporate sponsorship to support the museum's services and development plans.