

November 21 – January 18

Aalto + Chamberlain



In 1990, Donald Judd acquired the Glascock Building in Marfa, Texas, a two-story building from the late nineteenth century which he designated as his Architecture Office. Judd used the ground floor as the office and the second floor as guest housing in which he installed paintings by John Chamberlain, furniture by Alvar Aalto, and furniture of his own design.

For Judd, the making and viewing of art were coextensive with the other activities of living. Moreover, the ability to live with art was partially dependent on the ability to be comfortable. By placing Aalto furniture and Chamberlain paintings together, Judd created what was for him, a natural situation for viewing art in which one could, “sit there and have a drink, or eat, or lie down, or read” and then “look at the work.” “I think you look at it, think about it, do something else, then look at it again, or you talk and look at it”, he continued, “It becomes a normal thing.”

In 2018, Judd Foundation began an extensive restoration of the Architecture Office. As part of the restoration, the Foundation completed conservation treatment of the Chamberlain paintings, which are to be reinstalled on a permanent basis on the second floor. This exhibition results from and celebrates these efforts by showing the work of Chamberlain and Aalto in combination.

John Chamberlain

During his lifetime, John Chamberlain (1927–2011) was perhaps best known for his distinctive metal sculptures constructed from discarded automobile-body parts and other industrial detritus, which he began making in the late 1950s. While freely experimenting with other materials—from galvanized steel and paper bags to Plexiglas and urethane foam—he consistently returned to metal car components, which he humorously termed “art supplies.” His singular method of putting these elements together led to his inclusion in the paradigmatic exhibition *The Art of Assemblage*, at the Museum of Modern Art in 1961, where his work was shown alongside modern masters such as Marcel Duchamp and Pablo Picasso. Chamberlain’s focus on discovered or spontaneous correlations between materials has prompted the interpretation of his work as a kind of three-dimensional Abstract Expressionism.

John Chamberlain was born in 1927 in Rochester, Indiana, and died in 2011 in New York. He attended the Art Institute of Chicago from 1951 to 1952, and Black Mountain College, North Carolina, from 1955 to 1956. Chamberlain’s first retrospective at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (1971) was followed by more than one hundred solo exhibitions, including *John Chamberlain: Sculpture, An Extended Exhibition*, Dia Art Foundation, New York (1982–85); *John Chamberlain: Sculpture, 1954–1985*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (1986); *John Chamberlain*, Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden, Germany (1991); *John Chamberlain: Sculpture*, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (1996); *John Chamberlain: Foam sculptures* (1966–79); *Photographs* (1989–2004), Chinati Foundation, Marfa (2005–06); *John Chamberlain: American Tableau*, The Menil Collection, Houston (2009); *John Chamberlain: CURVATURE-ROMANCE*, Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich (2011); *Choices*, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (2012); *John Chamberlain: It Ain’t Cheap*, Dan Flavin Art Institute, Dia Art Foundation, New York (2014); and *John Chamberlain, Inverleith House*, Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh (2015). His work has been included in numerous international survey exhibitions, including Bienal de São Paulo (1961, 1994); Biennale di Venezia (1964); Whitney Biennial (1973, 1987); and Documenta 7 (1982).

Alvar Aalto

Alvar Aalto (1898–1976) enjoyed an exceptionally rich and varied career as an architect and a founder of Artek, both at home in Finland and abroad. After qualifying as an architect from Helsinki Institute of Technology in 1921, Aalto set up his first architectural practice in Jyväskylä. From the late 1930s onwards, the architectural expression of Aalto’s buildings became enriched by the use of organic forms, natural materials, and increasing freedom in the handling of space.

It was characteristic of Aalto to treat each building as a complete work of art. In 1935, Artek was formed by Alvar and his wife Aino Aalto, Maire Gullichsen, and Nils-Gustav Hahl to promote the growing production and sales of Aalto furniture. The design of his furniture combined practicality and aesthetics with series production, following the main Artek idea of encouraging a more beautiful everyday life in the home. It has been estimated that during his career Aalto designed over 500 individual buildings, approximately 300 of which were built, the vast majority of which are in Finland. Additionally, Aalto was influential in bringing modern art to the knowledge of the Finnish people, in particular the work of his friends, Alexander Milne Calder and Fernand Léger.

Notable buildings by Aalto include: the Municipal Library, Viipuri, Finland, 1927–1935 (now Vyborg, Russia); Paimio Sanatorium, Paimio, Finland, 1928–1933; Villa Mairea, Noormarkku Finland, 1937–1939; Finnish Pavilion, New York World’s Fair, 1939; Baker House, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1947–1948; Helsinki University of Technology, Espoo, Finland, 1949–1966; University of Jyväskylä, Jyväskylä, Finland, 1951–1971; House of Culture, Helsinki, Finland, 1952–1958; Museum of Modern Art Aalborg, Aalborg, Denmark, 1958–1971; Aalto-Hochhaus, Bremen, Germany, 1962; Institute of International Education, New York City, 1964–1965; Library at the Mount Angel Abbey, Salem, Oregon, 1967–1970; Essen Opera House, Essen Germany, 1959–1988.



The distinctive paint which John Chamberlain used to make the four-by-four-foot paintings is composed of successive layers of transparent lacquer with reflective flake. As Chamberlain noted, he wanted to “bury the flake and make it look suspended.” To this surface, he then attached two right-angled metal bars. Of particular interest to Chamberlain was the multitude of optical effects produced by these works. As he recounted to Julie Sylvester in *John Chamberlain: A Catalogue Raisonné of the Sculpture 1954–1985*:

There was the field, there were two painted bars and then two chrome bars that stood up. But if you counted everything going all the way across, you could count up to thirty: thirty different changes, thirty different notations—how the light struck, how the light changed the field or changed the painted bar, then the bar itself and the reflection, and so on.

In a note from September 6, 1979, Donald Judd lauded Chamberlain’s work, arguing that “ever since he began working Chamberlain has been one of the best artists in the world. He has not been treated as such.” “From the early sculpture of the late 1950s to now is twenty years, a long time for high work.” He continued, “This work not only includes the well-known metal sculptures, but also the paintings of 1964, the pieces made of foam rubber, the movies, some of the vacuum-coated pieces, and many of the sprayed-foil pieces... there are few artists alive whose work is equal to Chamberlain’s.”

In addition to the paintings on view, Judd purchased Chamberlain’s *Mr. Press*, from 1961, which he installed on the fifth floor of 101 Spring Street. In the late 1970s, Judd developed his concept for a public contemporary art foundation, now the Chinati Foundation, which would be centered on the creation of large-scale permanent installations. In 1983, the Chamberlain Building, which includes twenty-two sculptures by the artist, was the first installation of the project to open to the public. It remains the largest permanent installation of the artist’s work in the world.



Alvar Aalto’s furniture production evolved as an integral part of his architectural practice, “deriving from his desire for a comprehensive design conceived as a total concept from townscape down to the door knob.” His production of standard furniture spanned from 1929 to 1959 and, with the formation of Artek in 1935, his furniture became widely available internationally, as it remains today. One of Aalto’s key innovations was his use of laminated wood that could be bent to a desired angle. The cold-bend interlocking L-Leg, first used in Stool 60, became a standard structural unit from which many permutations developed.

Both Donald Judd and Aalto designed furniture for particular buildings, with notable attention paid to function. As Aalto wrote in 1954, “My furniture is seldom, if ever, the result of professional design work. Almost without exception, I have done them as part of an architectonic wholeness, in the mixed society of public buildings, aristocratic residences and workers’ cottages, as an accompaniment to architecture. It has been great fun designing furniture in this way.”

As an avid collector of Aalto furniture, Judd placed dozens of pieces, ranging from the standard to the specific, across his spaces in New York, Marfa, and Europe. For example, in 101 Spring Street and his Architecture Studio in Marfa are many examples of the standard Stool 60, which was designed in 1932–33. Judd also collected rarer examples of Aalto furniture from this same time-period, including a wardrobe that was designed for the Paimio Sanatorium, one of Alvar and his wife Aino’s most important early buildings.

The contemporary examples of Aalto’s furniture included in this exhibition are comparable to Judd’s collection at the Architecture Office.

*Aalto + Chamberlain*  
101 Spring Street  
November 21, 2019–January 18, 2020

Public hours:  
Thursdays, Fridays & Saturdays  
1:00–5:30pm

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with support from George Economou.  
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**artek**

Judd Foundation and the Finnish Cultural  
Institute are pleased to present a conversation  
on Alvar Aalto with Sir David Adjaye,  
Marianne Goebel, Eeva-Liisa Pelkonen,  
moderated by Caitlin Murray, Director of  
Archives and Programs at Judd Foundation.

January 16  
6:00pm

Exhibition Checklist

John Chamberlain  
(from left to right)

*Zia*, 1964  
Metal and lacquer with reflective flake on fiberboard  
68 ¼ × 68 ¼ × 5 inches (173.4 × 173.4 × 12.7 cm)

[untitled], 1964  
Metal and lacquer with reflective flake on fiberboard  
68 ¼ × 68 ¼ × 5 inches (173.4 × 173.4 × 12.7 cm)

[untitled], 1964  
Metal and lacquer with reflective flake on fiberboard  
68 ¼ × 68 ¼ × 5 inches (173.4 × 173.4 × 12.7 cm)

*Toureiro*, 1964  
Metal and lacquer with reflective flake on fiberboard  
68 ¼ × 68 ¼ × 5 inches (173.4 × 173.4 × 12.7 cm)

*Rock-Ola*, 1964  
Metal and lacquer with reflective flake on fiberboard  
68 ¼ × 68 ¼ × 5 inches (173.4 × 173.4 × 12.7 cm)

[untitled], 1964  
Metal and lacquer with reflective flake on fiberboard  
68 ¼ × 68 ¼ × 5 inches (173.4 × 173.4 × 12.7 cm)

*Conrad*, 1964  
Chromed steel and auto lacquer and metalflake  
on Formica  
67 × 67 × 4 ¾ inches (170.2 × 170.2 × 12.1 cm)  
Dia Art Foundation

Alvar Aalto

*Artek Table 81C*, 1935  
Square black linoleum table top with birch L-legs

*Artek Table 91*, 1935  
Circular black linoleum table top with birch L-legs

*Artek Stool 60*, 1933  
Seat in black linoleum with birch L-legs

*Artek Chair 66*, 1935  
Seat in black linoleum with birch L-legs and backrest

*Artek Armchair 400 "Tank"*, 1936  
Birch armrests with Zebra upholstery

*Artek Armchair 41 "Paimio"*, 1931–32  
Seat in birch with black lacquer with birch armrests

*Artek Armchair 42*, 1932  
Seat in birch with black lacquer with birch armrests

*Artek 2nd Cycle Folding Table*, 1935  
Drop-leaf table with birch L-legs  
Particular model produced in the 1930s