

Task #3b: Inventory

Map the Interiors and Furniture of Your School Building.

There are lockers, benches, shelves, tables and desks, drawers, rubbish bins, boards, and an endless number of chairs (probably more than students and teachers!). Among them, however, are many identical copies, or even hundreds of interchangeable pieces of furniture. Will you manage to map the diversity of the furniture in your school?

For example, you can:

a) Compile a handbook of chairs. As with handbooks of birds or mushrooms, there could also be one that gathers all the chairs in your school. What makes every chair special? What are the key features that distinguish different chairs? What are different chairs meant for, and what kinds of sitting positions do they evoke? What are the materials used to make them?

b) Perform a thorough inventory or research of one chair. What parts does a chair consist of? Can you find out the correct terminology for all the parts and document them (by sketching or photographing, for example)? Can you identify the materials, take the measurements, and ascertain the function of every part? A crafts teacher may be able to help you with this.

c) Compile a photo catalogue of different pieces of furniture and other interior elements. What kinds of lockers, cupboards, benches, shelves, tables, and chairs can you find in your school? How do they match each other? What kinds of movements and situations are encouraged by their layout and placement? What kinds of materials are they made of? How do they support life in school? Or maybe they are causing problems instead – how?

d) Write a critical review of one piece of furniture, just like reviews are written of books, films, or music. You can discuss how the designer came up with this kind of piece, what could have been the goals, references, and inspiration, or how she/he was influenced by the culture, tradition, and trends in design or technology. Try to describe the atmosphere and mood this piece creates for the user. How do you feel while using this piece? Do you think this kind of effect was aimed at while creating this object.

e) ...

Present the work in a suitable medium (a handbook or inventory of a chair as a picture book, for example, or as a short video presentation of one minute or less; a furniture catalogue as a photo gallery with comments; a critical review as a text with a couple of photos).

A Few More Notes

1. It is worth remembering that basically every object in the world is born to serve some purpose (even if the purpose is to provide artistic enjoyment). When examining objects, you may not always see them used for their purpose (for example, nobody is sitting on a chair at the moment); therefore, it is easy to forget its basis of existence. Let's try to keep that in mind, though!
2. Before jumping into action, take a moment to examine relevant examples (handbooks, critical reviews). This can make planning and directing your work easier.

Some relevant references:

#1

One and Three (1965)

<http://cartellogiallo.blogspot.com/2013/01/joseph-kosuth.html>

A series of works by American artist Joseph Kosuth juxtaposes objects and their representations (as a photograph or a dictionary definition). What kind of meaning is carried by the word "chair"? Immediately, an image pops into our minds. A photograph describes the chair in even more detail. Only the object itself, placed next to the explanatory text and the photograph, is more accurate than the photograph. But in the gallery, as a part of the art piece, is this chair even a chair anymore? It is not used for sitting, it no longer serves its original purpose; instead, it has become conceptual art, aiming to provoke thought.



#2

1001 Chairs for Ai Weiwei

17 April 2011

"1001 Chairs for Ai Weiwei" was a global call to all artists by New-York-based art organization Creative Time, urging them to bring chairs in front of all the Chinese embassies everywhere in the world and sit there to peacefully demand immediate liberation of the Chinese artist Ai Weiwei. He had been arrested by the authorities in his home country. Tax fraud was the declared reason, but the public art world

perceived it as a reaction to his provocative art. The chairs used for the protest act were at the same time a reference to Ai Weiwei's work "Fairytale" (2007). The chairs collected to support the artist also symbolized a vacant spot to signify the missing person.



#3, (only for the tutor)

What Makes a Chair a Chair?

grabner.family/helmut/papers/Grabner2011Chair.pdf

A short introduction on the research of Helmut Gabner, Jürgen Gail, and Luc van Gools, aiming to create a computer program capable of recognizing seating furniture (chairs, benches, sofas) from other three-dimensional objects. It is not easy reading, but very specific to the field of research, making it a good example of how complicated something as elementary as a chair can be. We, humans, can recognize seating furniture effortlessly, even if we see some piece of furniture for the first time. But how to create a computer that is equally clever?