

032c

Why Furniture is “Survivalist Art”: Dozie Kanu x Rimowa in Milan

Text: THOM BETTRIDGE

Photography: PIETRO SAVORELLI AND IVAN GRIANTI

April 24, 2018



Created in collaboration with Rimowa and presented by Kaleidoscope, furniture designer Dozie Kanu's exhibition at Milan's Spazio Maiocchi was a material study on the tension between the portable (suitcases) and the un-portable (furniture). The most totemic manifestation of this paradox were his marble Rimowa chairs: impossibly heavy-looking marble blocks with Rimowa's signature wheels dangling helplessly, and permanently, above the ground. At play here is the idea that in a creative landscape that has become increasingly nomadic — the Rimowa landscape — use value and form can be assigned at will. This is the notion of “living out of a suitcase” taken literally.

032c's Thom Bettridge spoke to Dozie Kanu in Milan:

When I was looking at your marble stools with the suitcase fused to them, I thought of this very deadpan one-liner by Mitch Hedberg: “An escalator can’t break, it can only become stairs.”

[Laughs]

In your case, a suitcase can’t break, it can just become a chair.

That’s so funny. This is essentially what I’m doing.

What were your first thoughts when you started approaching these “anti-suitcases”?

Right now, the concept “traveling frequently” is very central to my interests and art. I started thinking about what I gain from traveling, because every year I travel more than I did the last year, and every year I get closer to what I’m truly doing as a living. The more you travel, it’s like you reach another level of understanding, not only of people but cultures and yourself. The two objects that sort of communicate that the best are the mirrors, the distorted mirrors, and the stepladder that became a bookshelf. I was also really intrigued by the idea that a planter and a wastebasket can essentially be the same shape, but they do completely opposite things. One’s for getting rid of stuff and one’s for keeping and growing stuff.

There’s this funny point of divergence between furniture and artworks, where furniture is set apart by being considered “useful”? How do you play with that idea of use value?

I have this anxiety because every day I find out about another new artist, and then I’m like, “Damn, there’s an endless pool of artists in this world.” And, in a weird way, they’re fighting for the stability to continue making art, but also for their place in art history. Sometimes I feel there’s no way that art can accommodate all of these people.

Interesting.

So, in a hundred years, two hundred years, what happens to all of these artworks that are being made? These objects that essentially don't do anything feel like adding that extra layer of functionality might give the work an extra life.

So furniture is a survival tactic for your artwork. Even if all the history is burned, and no one knows who you are, they can sit in your chair.

They'll look at it and be like, "Oh, this is a chair. I can use this." Wanting to be useful adds a layer of sincerity.

That's funny because a lot of modern art is about saying, "Wait, how do I take something useful and make it not work?" Like Duchamp.

Right. I'm the opposite of Duchamp.



032c