

# PIN-UP

## BOYFRIEND MATERIAL

by: Efe Ramirez  
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however, the catalogue quietly asks whether the artist's mixed-media marvels are architecture at all. In his short contribution, David Adjaye argues that Kingelez had much more in common with psycho-geography (think mapping how you dream about a place) or even film (think montage), while Princeton professor Chika Okeke-Agulu brings Kingelez in line with post-colonial critique, showing us how to read the wry commentary playing behind the swags, scallops, and trims. It is very tempting to agree with him that Kingelez practiced a form of symbolic resistance in the manner of Kinshasa's street-fashion vigilantes known as *les sapeurs*. All in all, the catalogue is nice primer on an artist who "stomped all over the landscape of modern architecture," as Okeke-Agulu has it, yet whose true measure both in architecture and art has yet to be well defined.

— Pierre Alexandre de Looz

*Thomas Barger photographed in his studio by Chandler Kennedy. Below: I Never Had a Closet - Closet (2018). Right: Tall Church Boy chair (2017).*



### Boyfriend Material



At first glance the work of 25-year old Thomas Barger appears like the furniture you might expect from a *Wallace & Gromit* animation. Although they're perfectly functional, Barger does not see his objects as mere tables and chairs, but rather sculptures that speak to his life and identity as an artist. "What is important to me isn't so much the design aspect of the work, but highlighting the relationships I find significant in my life. I'm more excited about sharing a story than making a chair."

*Growing Up*, Barger's first solo exhibition at New York's Salon 94 Design gallery this spring, showed pieces with wonky proportions, soft edges, and perky colors to communicate his turbulent experiences with domesticity,



hetero-conventions, and queerness. "The nature of my work changed a lot after coming out to my family," explains the artist, who grew up on a farm in Mattoon, Illinois, the son of Christian, conservative parents. "Where before I only made arbitrary sculpture-chairs, I began finding clear references to what I was talking about." Now, in preparation for his fall show, at Functional Art Gallery in Berlin, these references include everything from farm animals and tractor tires to religion and his first boyfriend. Since he chooses to express himself through furniture, Barger's work has often been read through the lens of design, something he's never felt entirely comfortable with. "I identify as an artist making this work, not as a designer. I want to express things and not have them confused as utilitarian furniture." His practice grew out of the time he spent assisting friends such as artist Misha Kahn and working for the woman he now calls his mentor,

Courtesy of the artist and Salon 94 Design, New York. Studio photography by Chandler Kennedy for PIN-UP.

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Tall Church Boys (Black) (2018); Paper pulp, wooden frame, polyurethane, and paint. Photographed by Chandler Kennedy for PIN-UP.



outing will return to the "much more explicit, much more concentrated" sexual nods of his first chair experiment while pivoting between past reflections and present experience. "Now that I've had a relationship and the experience where I have loved and felt loved, I'm really excited to share that story and be in that vulnerable place again."

— Efe Ramirez



Jessi Reaves, who empowered him to "to do something even though you're not skilled at doing it." Barger's pieces recline on the associations with home alluded to by the discarded structures they're built on, such as old IKEA chairs or foldable furniture. "I started out with that [first experimental] chair because it was all about home and all about this world of conservative beginnings. That was a layer of content and detail that was special. It was really just a way working on a framework that reminded me of home." Barger finds himself today fine-tuning the expression of his works through pieces he calls "wall drawings." "They were meant to be on the floor originally, but I didn't want them to turn into functional works." These hanging paper constructions,

which are an evolution of his previously exhibited laundry unit, *I Never Had a Closet-Closet* (2018), merge sculpture and drawing into one, and are intended to unshackle the meaning and relationships of his work from all functional misconceptions. Other objects making their way into the Berlin show include two elongated pieces that merge a table, a lounge, and a bed evoking "what you do on a date night with a sweetie," along with an allegorical sculpture of two cows — "depending on each other, the way you do in a relationship," Barger offers. Still on a pastoral note, he describes some of his upcoming pieces with comic uncertainty as "unequally yoked or equally yoked." Under the general theme "boyfriend," Barger's Berlin



Above: Don't Forget me on the Train chair (2017); Paper pulp and Styrofoam. Left: View of Barger's studio in Brooklyn, photographed by Chandler Kennedy for PIN-UP.

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