

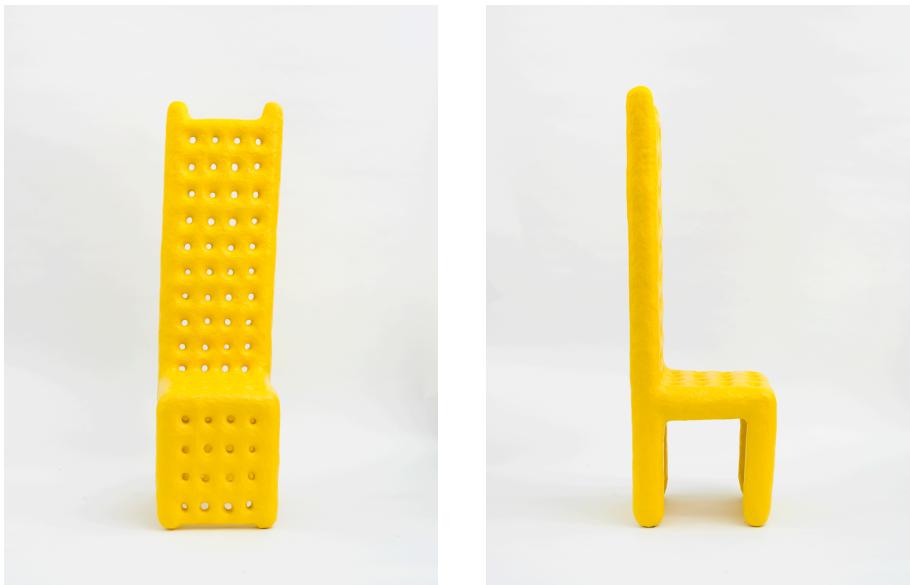
Thomas Barger's childhood memories inform cartoonish paper pulp chairs

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By Eleanor Gibson



Brooklyn artist Thomas Barger has created a series of furniture pieces based on his childhood experiences in Illinois, which are on show at New York's Salon 94 Design gallery.

The Growing Up exhibition is a coming-of-age showcase for the 25-year-old artist, who grew up on a farm in Illinois and moved to New York three years ago. "My furniture is turning into sculpture," said Barger. "Since 'coming out' to my family last winter I have been reflecting more than ever about my childhood experiences." "Each piece seems to be split down the middle with an equal focus on a love element and a utilitarian one," he added. "This body of work embraces my past as I enter into adulthood."



The designs on show at Salon 94 Design, on Manhattan's Lower East Side, are all connected to places and rituals Barger remembers from his time in the Midwest.

For example, curvaceous chairs with chunky legs, rounded handles and irregular perforations are modeled on sand formations he used to see at a nearby creek. Barger's creations also bear exaggerated, childish shapes: a throne-like seat has a perforated, tall wonky back that resembles a potato waffle. There is also a similar smaller version, while other designs include curvilinear handles and tubular legs.



With these bulky, irregular forms in block hues of green, yellow and pastel pink, the series follows a trend for cartoonish furniture that emerged last year.

Barger created the shapes by applying "paper pulp" to used chairs, or his own creations made with foam found on advertisement website Craigslist. He sourced the paper from recycling bins outside of a New York police station and then mulched it in his Cuisinart kitchen blender. The material was then secured to the chair frames with resin and finished with paint.



Barger's upcycled designs draw similarities to the work of his mentor Misha Kahn, who also creates furniture from scavenged materials. Barger trained with Kahn after moving to New York, having previously studied landscape architecture and architecture at the University of Illinois.



Growing Up is on show from 6 to 31 March 2018 at Salon 94 Design, which is located at 1 Freeman Alley, Manhattan. It will be open to the public every Wednesday to Saturday from 10am to 6pm.