AN ANALYSIS "APPROACHES TO NATURE" IN FORMING FURNITURE

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Abstract

As in all other designed objects, designed furniture includes forming methods created by the designer. An analysis of the history of furniture design reveals that the characteristics of living and non-living nature plays a major role in this forming practice. Design and nature are in interaction with each other. The interpretation of nature in forming practice is determined by the training and experience of the designer. Thus, designers’ perception of nature and the influence of this perception on forming may vary. The aim of this study is to describe designers’ approach to nature in context of furniture forming.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The practice of forming can be interpreted as a language which articulates the thoughts and feelings of the designer. In the practice of forming as a language, methods, theories and the search for starting points have always been subjects of research. In the history of design, each period includes different styles and designing approaches. However, nature is a common thread in all periods and it serves a resource for design, even if in different ways. Since design includes concepts and sensations, nature is one of the most important inspirations of design practices. Designers sometimes use exactly the same forms as nature, and sometimes they interpret them.

"In practices of forming, people approach nature in three ways: they either try to reflect nature as it is, idealize it or try to exceed the limits of nature by creating things that do not exist in it" (Aksoy, 2010, p.49) Along with their perceptions of nature, furniture designers also use these approaches.

2. REFLECTING NATURE AS IT IS IN FURNITURE DESIGN

A review of design history indicates that nature has always been a resource for design. In furniture design, the direct reflection of nature is one design methods. "The reflection of nature occurs in the realist movement, which aims to reflect nature as it is in art, and in the naturalist movement, which aims to reflect nature as it seems." (Aksoy, 2010, p.37). As Aksoy writes, "This approach assumes that nature includes perfect forms. What the designer should do is to reflect the most suitable examples of natural forms as they are and describe reality by using the knowledge about details acquired from patient observation of nature." (Aksoy, 2010, p.37).
"Pratone" is an example of reflecting nature as it is. It was designed as a protest against consumerist society, and it symbolizes the longing for nature. It is influenced by Pop Art. By reflecting nature as it is, the designer assigns a symbolic function to the product. (Figure 1)

Figure 1. Pratone, Gruppo Strum, 1966

The use of popular culture images by Pop Art led to many designs being made with reference to living or non-living nature. One example is the Bocca Lip Sofa. (Figure 2)

Figure 2. Bocca Lip Sofa, Studio 65, 1972
(http://www.nova68.com/HELLERBOCCA.html)

The Pony chair designed by Earo Aarnio is an example of the direct reflection of nature. (Figure 3) This chair illustrates the practical functioning of the knowledge of how we should sit according to our sensations, which was the goal of the designer. Aarnio: "A chair is a chair, is a chair, is a chair ... but a seat does not necessarily have to be a chair. It can be anything as it is ergonomically correct. A seat could even be a small and soft Pony on which you can 'ride' or sit sideways." (http://www.eero-aarnio.com/26/Pony.htm)
The Idealization of Nature in Furniture Design

"In the idealizing approach, nature is simplified and reformed in human thought. The purpose is not to reflect nature as it is, but to express how we think of it." (Aksoy, 2010, p. 37). Furniture design also uses this approach. Nature is simplified in the dimension which the designer perceives as it enters our minds. With this style of expression, the furniture gains symbolic functions. These functions reveal the formal language of the designer.

The Ball Chair (1963), designed by Eero Aarnio, was inspired by the shape of an egg. With this design, Eero Aarnio comprehended of the egg form by thought alone. (Figure 4)

The Egg Chair (1956), designed by Arne Jacobsen, was also clearly inspired by the shape of an egg. The Swan Chair by the same designer was, using a similar design approach, inspired by the form of swans. The design of both products aim to express a perception of nature, not to reflect a form in nature as it is. (Figure 5)
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Figure 5. Egg and Swan Chair, Arne Jacobsen, 1956
(http://www.dg3.co.uk/design/arne-jacobsen/)

The idealization of nature can be created by the unique perspective of the designer. According to Aksoy (2010) "In other words, the idealization of nature can be described as grasping and processing every element of the integration which is analyzed or desired to be formed from a very unique perspective." (p. 37).

"Pesce" designed the Donna chair with inspiration from human body. "A woman is always confined, a prisoner of herself against her will. For this reason I wanted to give this chair the shape of a woman with a ball chained to her foot to use the traditional image of a prisoner." (http://www.design-museum.de/en/collection/100-masterpieces/detailseiten/ups-und-up6-donna-pesce.html) Through the idealization of nature, the design creates a description in our minds and obtains a symbolic and aesthetic function. (Figure 6)

Figure 6. Donna, Gaetano Pesce, 1969
(http://www.design-museum.de/en/collection/100-masterpieces/detailseiten/ups-und-up6-donna-pesce.html)

The "La Chaise" lounge chair designed by Charles and Ray Eames is an example of the furniture designs inspired by the non-living nature. The Eames determined the form of this chair with an inspiration from the sculpture "Floating Figure", and it has become the icon of organic design. (Figure 7)

Canbolat (2015). "An analysis "approaches to nature" in forming furniture"
The Surrealist Approach to Furniture Design

The surrealist approach to furniture design is the design of forms which do not exist in nature. According to Aksoy (2010) "In this form of creation, which is called surreal, abstract correlations which are the products of human thought can also be valid, as well as the laws adapted from nature." (p.37). With the surrealist approach, the designer uses the main principles of design such as measure, proportion, rhythm, balance, consistence, opposition, harmony, hierarchy and texture and tries to create forms that do not exist in nature. The use of abstract concepts along with the principles of nature is called the surrealist approach. The surrealist approach to furniture design aims to express nature by its meaning. The concepts of heaviness and robustness are used as aesthetic elements, and they help create unique forms in furniture design. Designs which express the character of the material shaped by its qualities, that is, its core, are the examples of this approach. (Figure 8)

Figure 7. La Chaise, Charles and Ray Eames, 1948
(http://www.stardust.com/eameslachaise.html)

Figure 8. Eccentrico, Angelo Mangiarotti, 1979
(http://designofthetimes.altervista.org/category/tipologie/table/)

Furniture designs have gained new form and symbolic meanings together with new materials, material combinations and changes in manufacturing methods." (Canbolat, 2014, s.119) A surrealist approach to furniture design is to reject the materials and production methods in traditional furniture production and transform the perception of furniture into an industrial appearance. With his design "Big Easy Chair" and "Bodyguard" Ron Arad, who is one of the
major designers of our time, made use of the laws of nature and created new forms by means of high technology. (Figure 9-10)


Figure 9. Big Easy Chair, 1988. (http://www.detnk.com/node/2442)


Figure 10. Bodyguard, Ron Arad, 2007. (Hudson, 2011, p.13)

The Floris Chair, designed by Günther Beltzig, is an example of the surrealist approach with its futuristic form, use of materials and production method. It was designed as a protest against the events of its time and includes both aesthetic and symbolic meanings. Figure 11.


Figure 11. Floris Chair, Günther Beltzig, 1968
(http://www.architonic.com/dcsht/floris-chair-wright/4100237)
3. CONCLUSIONS

All the objects humans make are created by a process of forming. Designers express their thoughts, feelings and tendencies by using different methods in the forming process. Nature as a resource has an important place among all these methods. Living and non-living nature orient the practice of forming with different approaches in furniture forming, too. In forming practice, there are three fundamentally different approaches: the reflection of nature as it is, the idealization of nature and the searching for forms that do not exist in nature. They result from the training and experience of the designer. It is important to put forward the meaning and contributions which these approaches will bring to the designs for designers. Considering this study’s results, designers’ perceptions of nature vary, but they all influence the forming of furniture.

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