

# Michael Eddy

## *Je suis*

Curator: Milly-Alexandra Dery  
Small Gallery



### **KING CHAIR'S CACHE**

Jeanne Randolph

#### **The Throne, or thievery in the service of identity**

“You’d think these would sell, but no one tosses their credit card my way,” said King Chair. *King Chair* was this man’s sales persona on television and social media. King Chair had invited me into the basement where the unpopular furnishings were waiting. The basement was brightly lit, the walls well-sealed, temperature and air quality superb. The vast room was pale blue. Its eight tall pilasters were glossy Imperial Red.

“If this marble throne, for instance,” King Chair mused, “was fabricated for Charlemagne, but nobody will pay even a penny for it, it’s worthless, right?”

The throne looked just as Wikipedia describes it: “four simple cream-hued marble slabs joined by bronze straps.” Its form was stark: a vertical slab on each side of the seat cube and a curved back slab. It looked like a chair, except that five wide, white marble steps led up to this throne, cold and poised atop four thick limestone pillars. The pillars formed a stodgy table, four feet high with right and left sides open.

“You could humiliate yourself by creeping under the throne on your hands and knees. Charlemagne relished visitors doing so. He would chortle like a delighted child.”

Who had whispered this? To say it was even a whisper was not quite right. This voice, if it was a voice, wasn’t as loud as a whisper. I perceived it more like a whirr, like mosquito wings close to the ear.

Charlemagne’s throne was whirring a message to me.

“My left slab arm was once a marble table in a first-century Trastevere firehall. You see the lines scraped into the marble? To entertain themselves, bored firefighters had scratched the grid lines required for playing the Nine Man Morris game. In 326 CE, the slab was pilfered for construction of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. The scratches hadn’t been effaced in Jerusalem. They were mistaken for occult Christian graffiti. After five hundred years, this scratched marble slab was purloined from the ruins of The Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Dramatically linked to the time of Roman state worship, the defaced slab bestowed upon Charlemagne a kind of reverse, admittedly pagan, immortality. Instead of going forward to all eternity, his validation went backwards for all eternity.”

The throne abruptly changed the subject, as if it was gagging on my love, not its love, of history.

“I had been protected from the bombs of World War II; I had been buried in sand and covered with tar paper. For eight decades now, the bits of tar sticking to my surface have inflamed an insufferable allergy.”

## **The Rocking Chair, or myths of the Hawthorn tree**

A transparent Victorian crystal bell jar was placed over a rocking chair on a pedestal. The bell jar was somewhat larger than a coffee mug; the hawthorn wood rocking chair was no taller than a ballpoint pen. The minuscule chair had been meticulously carved. The seat was utterly charming: a tiny plank of wood had been whittled into a gentle S-curve to serve as a solid seat. It was nicely concave at the back, then flowing into convexity where the sitter's knees bend over the front. Eight dainty rods formed the back of the chair. The rods were stabilized at the top by a curving wood rectangle with rounded corners. Remarkably, the chair's understated beauty resided in its perfect proportions and the unblemished precision with which the various sections of chair had been fit together. The hawthorn wood surface was so clear it seemed somehow virtuous.

According to King Chair, this was an authentic piece, likely fifty years old. He described a wee inscribed copper label on the underside of the seat:  
FAIT AU QUÉBEC par A. Nadeau.

I leaned closer to appreciate the chair's detail. King Chair suddenly lifted the bell jar and set it on a nearby oak desk. To my dismay, I was so close I could hear the chair—or the hawthorn wood—groaning.

"Mr. King Chair!" I sputtered.  
"The chair! It's making a mournful sound. This is scary. It's upsetting!"

"Ha ha," King Chair responded. His eyes crinkled. His laughter was coarse. "Ha ha scared you did I?"

"The chair is suffering!" I whined.

"Do you know what day it is today?" King Chair asked me.

"Uh, it's a Friday I think."

"Think some more," King Chair said gruffly. "Not just any Friday, Good Friday. For millennia we have witnessed the hawthorn tree weeping and groaning on Good Friday. Hawthorn was the tree that supplied the crown of thorns slammed onto the head of Jesus. Ha ha!"

The chair was so tiny I dared not touch it to give it comfort.

King Chair continued his cruel jocularly. "And when you pluck a thorn from this tree, it screams! It might even bleed. Ha ha! How did Albert Nadeau put up with that kind of racket and mess while he worked on the hawthorn with his good ol' Buck Brothers knife?"

## **Seventeenth-Century Tapestry, or an example of misrecognition**

Responding to a phone call, King Chair had left the basement, but returning now, he bellowed from the top of the stairs: "Have you discovered my angel yet?" To be polite, I quickly checked the objects at a distance from the abraded cube of white limestone I was contemplating.

A tapestry pillow was barely discernible on a plain cherrywood bench two pilasters away. When I came closer I read the card beside the pillow:

17th-Century Tapestry Angel  
with Custom Trim on Rich Gold Silk  
with Sienna Silk Velvet Back  
\$ 3,000

An intricately ornate ribbon bordered the tapestry, attaching it with minuscule ultramarine thread to the silk front of the pillow. I marvelled at the luscious tapestry, parchment white, dabs of midnight green, russet with curling strands of Imperial yellow.

The colours coalesced into a free-falling putto at the moment he collides with an array of—swan eggs? dinner rolls? Were these tufts the undulations of meringue?

Was this a splashdown or crash landing?

“Do I look like Raphael’s putti in the Madonna di San Sisto painting?”

“Actually, no,” I answered without having heard anyone ask the question.

Cherubs in general have inspired many companies: Cherub Children’s Shoes, Cherub Flaorotherm, Cherub Availability Services (cybersecurity), Cherub Hair, Cherubs tomatoes, Cherub Software, on and on. The appeal is obvious, if *cherub* evokes those adorably harmless onlookers at the bottom of the Madonna di San Sisto’s cloud.

Raphael’s darling cherubs at the bottom of the San Sisto painting have been copied ad nauseam since 1512 CE. Copies can be seen on greeting cards, tee shirts and teacups, ash trays and polyester pajamas. Raphael’s sweet cherubs are plump and pink, their eyes bright with curiosity.

I stared into this pillow cherub’s eyes. They were dark. They were tense and narrow. His eyebrows looked like finely tattooed comets, and his mouth was set in a grim red line.

Don’t Christian cherubs flit merrily aloft, smiling at nearby saints? Christian cherubs don’t dive headlong to their doom. And this chubby fellow’s wings did not look like feathers. His wings looked gummy, like melting wax.

“*Vai a dormire!* Fall asleep...  
Fall asleep! Fall, little Icarus, fall!”

## **The Rekhmire Chair, or considerations of Essence**

A slender carved cedarwood chair had been placed upon twelve white-washed planks of acacia wood. The cedarwood chair had no arms. Its four skinny legs curved like cat hind limbs, its fat feline paws steady on the planks. The back of the chair delineated a triangle: a spindly cedar branch was snugly fixed into a hole at the back of each side of the seat frame. The gracefully bent branches were lashed together at the apex. This triangular chair back was more air than support.

A pink Post-It note was stuck on the side of the seat frame. Fastidious script clearly identified the chair as

ca. 1479–1400 B.C.E.  
reign of Thutmose III - Amenhotep II  
Upper Egypt, Thebes, Sheikh Abd el-  
Qurna, Tomb of Rekhmire.

The scent of the cedar was intense. It was almost palpable. Not only did it fill my nose and lungs, but it also filled my ears. It lay as a film on the surface of my corneas. It rang in my consciousness like a quivering cymbal.

I heard nothing, but I knew something was being imparted.

“The Egyptians of Thutmose III’s reign possessed a Ka, a personal occurrence of the life force. But they had not yet discovered Being. The Egyptians had not yet discovered philosophical propositions. Their ethos was limited to deeds and things. Magic incantations were not prayers. They were technologies for influencing deeds and things.”

The chair could have been communicating to me. (The scent of cedar might be a coincidence.)

The cedarwood itself may have been communicating to me. (The scent of cedar is a volatile organic compound, a universal medium of plant signalling.)

If the chair was teaching me, its message was: “In essence, to the Egyptians, I was nothing more than the status conferred by costly Syrian cedarwood.”

If the cedarwood itself was teaching me, its message was: “I tell you—the Being of this chair is nothing more than my Being, the Being of Syrian cedarwood. Neither physical form nor money determine Being.” This aromatic pronouncement seemed to be evidence that plants absorb Heideggerian philosophy, even when they are bent into furniture.

### **The Coconut Chair, or expressive posture and social change**

“Mr. King Chair,” I said in as shy and bewildered a voice as I could feign, “why is the George Nelson Coconut Chair here? Hasn’t it been a coveted modernist icon since 1955?”

“Business purposes,” was his reply.

It could have been named the cantaloupe chair, the scoop chair, even the concave chair, but as the impresario of design George Nelson had said, “Design is a response to social change.” Ten years after World War II, business execs found that the changes were super: drinking Barbados rum through the straw in a coconut, the windswept shapes of cars, tight skirts, open plan offices, the variety of Lacoste polo shirt colours, the Seagram building, basically New York City. I didn’t say any of this to King Chair. I knew perfectly well King Chair interpreted history as an endless supply of objects. If King Chair had been my father and I was still a rebellious teenager, I would have yelled: “You have no comprehension of context! You haven’t

the slightest idea what the word history means!” And then, with a flourish, I would swirl out of the room.

King Chair was ambling to a distant corner to take a phone call.

“You look lonely,” I said to the Coconut.

I was certain the Coconut’s reply would be: “I am.”

It’s a matter of posture. When a person settles into the Coconut chair, they immediately look languid. Arms relax when reaching easily for the sides of the chair, and this conveys confidence, especially because the spine is not stiff. An upright posture conveys orthodoxy. The mid-century exec would lounge in the Coconut; and he would look out into the room; he would be pleased by the sight of post-war social change.

“Pardon me if I am speaking for you,” I said to the Coconut, “but social change in late Capitalism is exemplified by the couch potato. The slouching spine, the head nodding forward, one hand on a TV remote or two thumbs on a cellphone—is it possible to believe this posture expresses participation in social change? Doesn’t it express submission to social change? In other words, I am afraid today’s man would not fit (I mean psychologically) into the Coconut.”

Of course, the Coconut agreed. The Coconut chair was built upon the relationship between a chair and the person sitting in the chair, the chair and the person united in their historical moment.

**Jeanne Randolph** is a cultural critic, author, performance artist and psychiatrist whose work explores the relationship between art and psychoanalytical theory.