

Design

'8 Chairs' by Clarke & Reilly at Gallery Libby Sellers, London



The current exhibition at London's Gallery Libby Sellers showcases 8 period chairs that have undergone a dramatic transformation at the hands of bespoke furniture duo Clarke & Reilly. *Courtesy Gallery Libby Sellers and Clarke & Reilly. Photography: Ed Reeve*

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It's the destiny of most furniture designers to craft an iconic chair – something that will be known by its own proper name for decades. For David Grocott and Bridget Dwyer – an antique furniture expert and fashion designer respectively – that pursuit has taken an unusual direction. Their iconic chair 'moment' comprises injecting personality back into a collection of neglected cast-offs.

The bespoke furniture designers, who call themselves [Clarke & Reilly](#) after their mothers' maiden names, sourced eight vintage chairs spanning three centuries of design, from Queen Anne to mid 20th-century: an English nursing chair, a 19th-century factory model, and so on. Over five years the duo lived with the chairs, re-covering them with period silks and cottons they believed spoke to the character of each chair.

Then, in a bit of design theatre, they put the refashioned chairs through the wringer. They stranded them on a rooftop in South London throughout one harsh February. And, when they sojourned in California, they left the chairs to dry in the parched [Joshua Tree National Park](#).

The chairs returned in various stages of decay. One sad antique slipper chair came back with its silk nearly dissolved. The pair spent another few months restitching frayed bits into the guts of chairs, themselves things of distinguished beauty.

'The idea was really seeded when David and Bridget were in Antwerp and passed through a children's playground,' says Libby Sellers, who selected the [8 Chairs](#) for an exhibition at her London gallery. 'They saw these plastic chairs sitting in circle, unattended. It was like a meeting, all of these chairs brought together and left to the extreme conditions to develop their own personalities.'

The homage of eight appear on plinths at [Gallery Libby Sellers](#), alongside video and photo travelogues of their journey. They are mummified in tatters of fabric, yet Sellers confirms they are all highly functional. 'The Irish chair, with leather straps added from an old industrial lathe, is really very comfortable,' she says.

The duo added an olfactory element after meeting perfumer Azzi Glasser at a previous exhibition. They invited Glasser to the studio after the chairs were unpacked and asked her to recreate the dusty scent. Glasser's signature fragrance will fill the gallery environment and bring viewers even closer to the extreme conditions endured by the chairs.



Information

'8 Chairs' runs at Gallery Libby Sellers until 26 April

Website

www.libbysellers.com

Address

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