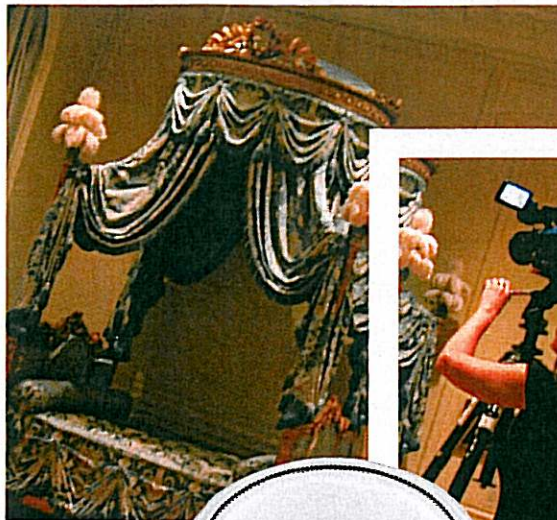


THE RADAR CULTURE

BY GARY BAUM



SITTING PRETTY: Nicole Cohen (right) shoots a backdrop for the project. A brown leather Etienne Meunier chair and its white pleather counterpart.

THE RECLINE OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION

Fancy chairs and their inimitable original lairs star in a new video installation at the Getty

If you swooned over Sofia Coppola's *Marie Antoinette*, you can have your own Kirsten Dunst moment at the Getty this fall. Via green-screen magic, you'll be able to pretend you're sitting regally at Versailles in one of the deposed queen's original boudoir chairs. This French fantasy is part of an installation called *Please Be Seated*, opening September 18, that takes the design world's high-gloss furniture fetish to even more over-the-top heights.

Mining the museum's pedigreed decorative arts collection, noted video artist Nicole Cohen selected six aesthetically and historically consequential posterior perches for the project. Then, she duplicated the ornate 18th-century furnishings—which range from neoclassical to baroque to rococo—in gleaming white pleather, imbuing them all with that distinctly Kelly Wearstler-esque, deluxe-pop vibe that's been all the rage in Hollywood homes for the last half decade. Next, Cohen, who was specially commissioned by the Getty, stylishly photographed both the pieces and their original environments in Europe, including Marie Antoinette's boudoir.

Now, thanks to the only-in-L.A. wizardry of cleverly arranged live-feed cameras and those aforementioned green screens, as well as some spiffy, specially designed computer effects programs, Getty visitors will be able to plop their respective tushes down on the pleather reproductions and appear, on an adjacent screen, to be in a decadent, period-correct state of recline (an impossible task in real life, as both the chairs and their respective rooms are almost all off-limits to fanny-packed

plebes). "You literally get a chance to sit where [Antoinette] was sitting when she was getting her wig pouffed," says Peggy Fogelman, a curator who worked with Cohen on the Getty project. Adds the artist: "It's sort of like virtual trespassing. And it's sort of like time travel."

The installation is as unabashed in its delivery of crowd-pleasing fun as are those holographic ghosts that appear to be cozily scrunched on the bench between you and your friend at the end of the Haunted House ride at Disneyland. There's even a soundtrack—though the early idea of using songs like "Girls Just Wanna Have Fun" (a *très* Sofia Coppola, giggly-12-year-old-at-a-slumber-party choice) was superseded instead with a relatively less anachronistic, looping DJ remix of Bach's "Fantasia in C Minor."

Still, at heart the piece is really all about indulging in the sort of head-in-the-clouds musings about representation that you'll find in Jean Baudrillard's *Simulacrum*. "Your very temporal existence is called into question," insists Fogelman. For those now clucking, *They're just chairs, dude!*—well, take a seat and decide for yourself. The Getty's cutting-edge experiment in 3D lifestyle porn will be available for both navel-gazing and take-a-load-offing for the next 18 months. So construe it as you will. "I don't like to tell people how to interact with the piece," Cohen says. "It's important to let them have their own experiences and come to things in their own way. When it comes down to it, this is just a framing device to get people thinking about their relationship with history." **A**

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