

MEDIA ALERT

Pulitzer Presents First Major Survey of the Work of Scott Burton in Nearly Four Decades

Contemporary artists Brendan Fernandes and Gordon Hall create performative responses to Burton's work

Sept 6, 2024–Feb 2, 2025

What

This fall the Pulitzer Arts Foundation presents an exhibition of the artist Scott Burton's work from the 1960s to 80s that addresses the social nuances of spatial relationships among people and furniture, informed by his queer identity. Accompanying archival material illustrates the artist's shape shifting among art world roles—as artist, critic, social choreographer, collector, and curator. In the spirit of Burton's intergenerational conversations with artists, the Pulitzer has invited contemporary artists to respond to his legacy and physically engage with Burton's furniture works, fulfilling the artist's intention for these artworks to be in contact with the body.



Scott Burton: Shape Shift

Pulitzer Arts Foundation presents the most comprehensive exhibition ever mounted in this country on the art of Scott Burton (1939-1989), who referred to his work as “sculpture in love with furniture.” *Scott Burton: Shape Shift* assembles 40 sculptural furniture pieces alongside never-before-exhibited documentation of Burton's performances and a career-spanning array of archival materials on loan from the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York. The exhibition traces Burton's career, beginning with notes, scores, and photos of his early performance work; highlighting his shift to sculpture with an array of his iconic chairs in a variety of materials and forms—vernacular and of the artist's own invention; and culminating with Burton's design of numerous “public art environments” that carefully integrated seating into land and cityscapes with the goal of making artwork available and accessible to the general public.

Key features of the exhibition include *Bronze Chair* (1972-1975), a Queen Anne-style reproduction that the artist found, cast in bronze, and then left unattended on a street in Greenwich Village, and the Pulitzer's own *Rock Settee* (1988-1990), one of only three works on permanent display at the museum. Like much of Burton's work, the five-ton granite form of the *Settee* registers under the radar, camouflaging its identity as both furniture and art. By the time of his untimely death at the age of 50 from an AIDS-related illness, Burton had devised a multidisciplinary practice that toggled between high and low and incorporated performance, conceptual art, sculpture, functional design, proxemics, and public art, and anticipated queer theory—while also making a name for himself through art criticism and curatorial work. To consider his career today is to marvel at how prescient were his preoccupations and how newly relevant they are within the contemporary discourse.



Brendan Fernandes [working title]

The Pulitzer Art Foundation has invited Chicago-based artist Brendan Fernandes to compose a series of movement scores for performers to activate Burton's furniture sculptures. The performances explore cruising, visibility, and camouflage in homage to Burton's *Individual Behavior Tableau* (1980) and employ soft sculptural 'props' expanding the generous and supportive character of Burton's seating.

Additionally, the Pulitzer is organizing a performative-lecture, also using Burton's furniture, by artist Gordon Hall, the founder of the Center for Experimental Lectures, and a talk by art historian David Getsy, whose book *Queer Behavior: Scott Burton and Performance Art* was released in 2022 by the University of Chicago Press.

When

September 6, 2024–February 2, 2025

Where

Pulitzer Arts Foundation
3716 Washington Boulevard, St. Louis, MO 63108

Admission

Free

Hours

Thursday through Sunday, 10am–5pm, with evening hours until 8pm on Friday

Organization

Scott Burton: Shape Shift is organized by independent curator Jess Wilcox and Heather Alexis Smith, Assistant Curator at the Pulitzer. *Brendan Fernandes* is organized by Jess Wilcox and Kristin Fleischmann Brewer, Deputy Director, Public Engagement at the Pulitzer.

About the Pulitzer

Located in the heart of St. Louis, the Pulitzer Arts Foundation presents art from around the world in its celebrated Tadao Ando-designed building and surrounding neighborhood. Exhibitions include both contemporary and historic art and are complemented by a wide range of free public programs, including music, literary arts, dance, wellness, and cultural discussions. Founded in 2001, the Pulitzer is a place where ideas are freely explored, new art exhibited, and historic work reimagined.

In addition to the museum, the Pulitzer has several outdoor spaces, including Park-Like—a native plant rain garden, the Spring Church—an open-air pavilion and beloved landmark, and the Tree Grove—a shady picnic spot. The museum is open Thursday through Sunday, 10am–5pm, with evening hours until 8pm on Friday. The outdoor campus is open daily, sunrise to sunset. Admission is free. For more information, visit pulitzerarts.org or on social media @pulitzerarts.

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Images

Scott Burton, *Section III. Sexual Presentations [alternating aggressive and passive]*, 1980. Gelatin silver print, 7/8 x 1 7/16 inches (2.2 x 3.6 cm), Scott Burton Papers, II.87. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. © 2024 Estate of Scott Burton/ Artist Rights Society (ARS), NY, Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY

Scott Burton, *Bronze Chair*, 1972. Bronze, 48 x 18 x 20 inches (121.9 x 45.7 x 50.8 cm). © 2024 Estate of Scott Burton/ Artist Rights Society (ARS), NY, Photo Credit: The Art Institute of Chicago / Art Resource, NY, Gift of Lannan Foundation. 1997.136