



## RO/LU: Matt Olson on the Artsy Commission for Design Miami/ Basel

ARTSY EDITORIAL

“Everything matters” is a founding principle for [RO/LU](#), the Minneapolis-based design studio who are behind the Artsy booth at [Design Miami/ Basel](#), and whose product exceeds a mere lounge for fairgoers—they have fully designed a set. Looking closely at the '70s set design of Guy de Cointet and geometric forms by Lawrence Weiner from the '80s, RO/LU built an experience balancing intentionally over-designed chairs with an under-designed “charging station”—equipped with power strips and outlets for battery-dwindling cell phones—hovering over a heaping pile of pre-demolished concrete pieces embedded with preparatory sketches. Mid-installation, Artsy caught up with RO/LU co-founder Matt Olson to discuss the studio, his recent residency at the former home and studio of Robert Rauschenberg, his self-proclaimed addiction to Instagram, and the process of creating the booth (including chairs you can [purchase on Artsy](#)).

**Artsy: What can you tell us about the RO/LU design studio? What is the focus of your work?**

Matt Olson: Focus doesn't seem like quite the right word. It implies that we have a solid understanding of what exactly it is we want to do, and that's not really the case. There is something we seem to be following, a sort of inspirational moment within a process. It usually reveals itself during research or some sort of action. I love changing my mind and hopefully our work and the opportunities necessary to drive it will continue to evolve as quickly as our ideas and interests do.

We started about ten years ago as a landscape office but always intended to wander with our work. We wanted to emulate the Eames Office, not stylistically, but in the wide range of projects we'd accept. About five years ago we started playing with furniture and photography. In 2010 we presented 22 pieces of sculptural furniture works called *Field Recordings Made of Wood* at MONDO CANE in New York. The body of work seemed to emerge from the studio blog I've been keeping for the last six years ... almost daily posts about art, architecture and design that seemed to be forcing their way into our work.

**Artsy: How important is cross-disciplinary learning and inspiration for you? It seems like music, art, and performance are of equal inspiration to your work as design and architecture.**

MO: The act of learning is deeply embedded in our values. It feels like a map or a compass we use to follow what we love forward ... It's exciting to think that a single image encountered randomly on the internet can come along and change your life. The way we work is the way we live and, in our minds, all

these things are connected: art, design, fashion, music, theater, cinema, poetry etc. But it goes past that and involves nature, love, hope, joy, friendship, and more.

**Artsy: Is this something you were able to fully embrace at your Rauschenberg Foundation fellowship?**

MO: The Rauschenberg Residency was such an amazing gift. I made so much work it was unbelievable and the chance to collaborate with Laura Brunelliere, Mark Lyon, Alle Hankins, and others was life changing. I made chairs with Matt “Sweets” Hall, who worked with Bob for 18 years and had so many amazing stories. I made a music video for an upcoming record by Arp. I made three video works, one of which was shown recently as part of the group show “LLIIGGHHTTSS” in Brooklyn. But I spent most of my time working on a commission for a group of 25 museum directors who were having a symposium at the Aspen Institute called *Propositions for the Future of the Art Museum*. I created a workshop called *Chasing After Something That Hasn't Happened Yet* that was half book and half film. It was one of my favorite projects yet. I attempted to make the case that they and their institutions are addicted to the past and the framework that comes with it... and that, if they paid more attention to all the love that happens in their midst—love of ideas, objects, periods of time, books, spaces, people, etc.—everything in the future would take care of itself.

While I was doing the residency the rest of the gang was back here building a booth for Printed Matter to use at the NADA Art Fair in NYC.

**Artsy: How important is social networking and online communication/documentation to ROLU? For example, your blog is a daily destination for many, and we know you're active in Instagram.**

MO: Our life online has been hugely important to our practice. Totally organic though so, a word like networking doesn't really feel right. Communication, connection, and exchange are at the root of everything. And it's true that I'm totally addicted to Instagram. It's such a fascinating way to see the world that others are seeing. I've always loved the idea that it's barely there too... it's just this constant flow of images and energy. It barely exists.

**Artsy: Can you talk about about the concept for Artsy's booth at Design Miami/ Basel, and how you conceived of the project?**

MO: About two years ago, Sammie Warren, who was a ROLU partner until recently, brought a Lawrence Weiner book that he'd checked out from the library into the studio. In one photo I noticed these really odd, huge sculptural forms in the corners of an exhibition of his that happened in 1989. They were totally mysterious and not at all what you think of when you think of his work. They have stayed in my mind. I think I thought of them as chairs right away, even though they weren't originally. But they are sort of ridiculous too. Way too geometrically indulgent to be chairs. And it seems like we *always* think about Guy de Cointet and Ettore Sottsass. We like to use art and design history as a material rather than a source of knowledge or inspiration, literally extracting parts of photographs and turning the 2D back into 3D.

**Artsy: Can you also tell us a bit about the process of creating the work? How**

**was Lynda Benglis's poured concrete work an early influence to your own use of concrete pieces?**

MO: As I was saying, the two chairs that serve as the anchor of the installation are too much. Too much concept, too much geometry, too much size... just way too much. As a balancing gesture we wanted to add something to the "set" that was the opposite. A form that resulted from something outside our thoughts or decisions. I could get into a sprawling set of ideas related to the quantum physicist David Bohm's beliefs about wholeness but, that'll get too long. We were thinking of Lynda Benglis's pours but, she wasn't the only flash... also Robert Smithson's Asphalt Run-downs and entropy.

**Artsy: How do you feel about the temporary nature of designing a space like the Artsy booth at Design Miami/ Basel?**

MO: We feel like all these objects live their own lives. They pass through us or emerge from situations we are involved in but, one of the best things is seeing what happens next. The documentation will become the work then. The residue that is created in relation to our projects is always as interesting to us as the work itself so...



*Installation images courtesy of Artsy and Claude Gasser. Process images from the ROLU studio courtesy of Matt Olson and ROLU.*