



Red-Blue Chair

Gerrit Rietveld

Not on display**Title/Description:** Red-Blue Chair**Artist/Maker:** Gerrit Rietveld (Maker)**Born:** 1968 c.**Object Type:** Chair, Furniture**Materials:** Paint, Wood**Measurements:** h. 855 x w. 595 x d. 850 mm**Inscription:** 'G. A. v. d. GROENKAN, Utrechtseweg 315, DE BILT, NEDERLAND'**Accession Number:** 31220**Historic Period:** 20th century**Production Place:** Europe, The Netherlands**School/Style:** De Stijl, Modernism

The Red-Blue Chair, designed by the Dutch furniture designer and architect Gerrit Rietveld (1888-1964) in 1918-23, is perhaps one of Rietveld's most iconic pieces of furniture. The chair can be seen as a reflection of some of the ideas that defined the *De Stijl* movement, of which Rietveld was one of the leading exponents.

The chair is constructed of four rectangular panels and thirteen beechwood slats. The connection of the parts, an overlapping joint of three batons, created the distinctive 'Rietveld joint', also called the Cartesian node. [1] This was a prominent feature in the Red- Blue Chair which recalls the fundamental ideas of *De Stijl* that aimed for ultimate simplicity and abstraction by accentuating the individual elements that was part of and created the whole. [2] *De Stijl* had a belief in a balance between the universal and collective and the specific and individual, as it was stated in the third point of their Manifesto from 1918: "The new art has brought forward what the new consciousness of time contains: a balance between the universal and the individual." [3]

The Red-Blue Chair resembles a traditional chair that has been stripped down to its basic structural skeleton, a 'deconstruction' into individual elements from which the chair was made. Through this, Rietveld could manipulate rectilinear volumes and create interaction between vertical and horizontal planes in the same way as he did in his architecture. The exposition of elements also accentuates the process of construction, which creates a furniture based on industrialized production methods and standardized components. Rietveld's furniture was closely concerned with the idea of evolving new types for new methods of production. [4] Although there could be differences in dimensions and finishes, the rationalization and standardization of the chair made it suitable for batch or quantity production. *De Stijl* had a "a utopian faith in the transforming qualities of mechanization and new

technology” [5]

The original chair was designed in 1918 but in 1923 the painted finish was added, incorporating the characteristic primary colours of *De Stijl* - red, yellow and blue - plus the neutral colour black, into the design. White and grey also played a big part in the *De Stijl* palette and there is also a completely white version from the same year. [6] By adding colour to the chair Rietveld also accentuated the individual elements and play between rectilinear volumes, horizontal and vertical planes. The addition of colour to the chair can also be seen as accentuating the thought of the individual element, the chair, creating a unity with the collective scheme of the interior design.

Therese Wiles, April 2022

[1] Drijver et Niemeijer *How to Construct Rietveld Furniture : With Reproductions of Original (-working)drawings = Rietveld Meubels Om Zelf Te Maken : Met Reproducties Von Originele (work)tekeningen*. (Amsterdam: Thoth, 1989) 15.

[2] Paul Overy. *De Stijl* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2001) 9.

[3] Point 3 in “Manifest I of “The Style”, 1918 cited from Paul Overy. *De Stijl* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2001) 47.

[4] Paul Overy, “Carpentering the Classic: A Very Peculiar Practice. The Furniture of Gerrit Rietveld” in *Journal of Design History* , 1991, Vol. 4, No. 3 (1991), pp. 135-166.

[5] Paul Overy. *De Stijl* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2001) 12.

[6] This version of the chair was designed for the the writer Til Brugman (1888-1958) as part of the design of her flat in the Hague 1923-26. The chair is part of the collection at the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

Further Reading

Colquhoun, Alan. “The Avant-gardes in Holland and Russia” in Alan Colquhoun, *Modern Architecture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002),109-136.

Curtis, William J.R.”Cubism, De Stijl and New Conceptions of Space” in William J.R. Curtis *Modern Architecture Since 1900* (London: Phaidon, 1996), 149-159.

Drijver et Niemeijer *How to Construct Rietveld Furniture : With Reproductions of Original (-working)drawings = Rietveld Meubels Om Zelf Te Maken : Met Reproducties Von Originele (work)tekeningen*. (Amsterdam: Thoth, 1989)

Frampton, Kenneth. “ De Stijl: the evolution and dissolution of Neo-Plasticism” in Kenneth Frampton *Modern Architecture - A Critical History* (London: Thames & Hudson , 2007), 142-148.

Overy, Paul. *De Stijl* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2001).

Overy, Paul. "Carpentering the Classic: A Very Peculiar Practice. The Furniture of Gerrit Rietveld" in *Journal of Design History* , 1991, Vol. 4, No. 3 (1991), pp. 135-166
