

# Review: For Robert Wilhite, painting and sculpture take shape as furniture and musical instruments

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| ART CRITIC |

JAN 30, 2019 | 6:30 AM



Robert Wilhite crosses paintings and sculptures with musical instruments, furniture and lamps. (as-is gallery)

Since the late 1970s and early 1980s, Robert Wilhite has made eccentric sculptural objects that do double duty. Painting merges with sculpture, neo-Bauhaus designs cross fine art and craft. His aesthetic rejects the independent autonomy of objects.

A compelling selection on view at as-is gallery includes flatware and chairs constructed from asymmetrical compositions of geometric shapes. The formats recall Dutch De Stijl and Russian Constructivism from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Furniture can be a musical instrument. A wooden box with a single string stretched taut across a sound hole waits to be plucked. A pink sphere is a mysterious percussion instrument. Three gongs made from a suspended circle, square and triangle suggest varied sounds for shapes cut from sheets of copper, steel and brass.



At top, a balsa-wood and paper "skyscraper" lamp protrudes from the wall above sculptural chairs. (as-is gallery)

Some objects were props for performances by the late Guy de Cointet, their indeterminate state as high art or low stuff giving material form to the destabilizing languages of his abstract texts. Others are knickknacks displayed in a tall *étagère*, such as three white cubes stacked on a lumpy white plinth and titled “Snowman.” Tabletop and floor sculptures turn out to be lamps.

The most captivating lighting is a chandelier — albeit one that sticks out 5 or 6 feet into the room from high on the wall, like a mutant sconce. A horizontal row of three progressively smaller trapezoidal boxes made from balsawood covered in paper, like a Japanese lantern, starts with a bulb and ends in a flat plane of paper suggesting a blank billboard. Titled “Hanging Gardens,” the sculptural chandelier is a tipped-over skyscraper advertising the diminishing glow of its topsy-turvy self.

Like De Stijl and Constructivism of the 1910s and '20s, which dreamed of reconceiving the world in the tumultuous wake of European revolution and war, Wilhite's neo-Bauhaus American work is usefully considered as arising in the aftermath of Vietnam. In the process it assumes a wry position in relation to the explosive art-market boom of the 1980s: Sculptures and paintings are pointedly — and wittily — delivered as cathartic commercial product design.

*As-is gallery, 1133 Venice Blvd., L.A. Through February; closed Sundays and Mondays. (213) 610-4110, [as-is.la](http://as-is.la)*



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