



PAIR OF ACES

PearsonLloyd emphasizes functionality in multi-use designs.

words : lori fredrickson



If British design studio PearsonLloyd could be summed up in a single phrase, cofounder Luke Pearson says, it might be this: "Simplicity is a complex process."

"It sounds like an oxymoron," Pearson says, "but it's actually very straightforward. Simplicity of design requires a complex process, because you have to cover so many bases to make sure you're getting it right."

And though the products that PearsonLloyd creates are in fact diverse—the firm, headed up by Pearson and Tom Lloyd since 1997, is lauded for object and furniture design as much as it is for less common design products, such as health care equipment and first-class airline seating—they share a very simple objective: functionality. Be it an office chair or a shelf system, it will work in the best way to fit the space or needs of the user—and the aesthetic, which never comes last, usually fits like the final piece of a puzzle.

The design firm owes its success in part to the unique partners at its helm. Having met at the Royal College of Art in the early 1990s—Lloyd, an industrial design student, and Pearson, a furniture design student at the time—they were later brought together out of an increasing dissatisfaction with the limitations of their chosen fields. "I've always been fascinated by innovation, but when I started my degree, I found that for the main part, industrial design was about creating a style envelope around the things that are technologically forward," Pearson explains. Lloyd, on the other hand, "was interested

in furniture but frustrated by being locked in by craft processes. As I was running away from the superficiality of design, Tom was running toward the possibilities of it."

Early on, they found that their different backgrounds and combined interests complemented one another, making way for a design studio that would essentially be a hybrid of the two fields. "Industrial design is heading toward new possibilities in design but doesn't have any depth, whereas though furniture materials have changed, its design has basically remained the same," Pearson says. "We were interested in the wonders of the industrial age versus the reality of archetypes, how to not change but improve them."

Within just a few years of starting up, PearsonLloyd had gained the interest of such leading clients as Walter Knoll and Artemide. By 2004, they'd graduated beyond just furniture to designing a multi-award-winning airline seat for Virgin Atlantic. Upcoming projects, along with high-end furniture, now include another airline project and a commission to do furniture design for the historic British city of Bath.

"We've developed a reputation for synthesis between high-tech and super simplicity," Pearson says. "We tailor the project to the client's needs. And we'll start by playing a verbal ping-pong about a project; we won't even put a pen to paper because that stamps the project too early on with a visual. Talking it out keeps it fluid and ambiguous."



This page: *Turtle Chair* (2004) for Walter Knoll
Opposite (from top): *Upper Class* for Virgin Atlantic Airways (2006) and *Peggy* (2009) for SCP

This abstract approach has allowed the partners to focus their designs on being purposeful as well as versatile. For example, the *Peggy* table series has a flexibility and streamlined aesthetic applicable for both residential or commercial use. The *Cobi* chair for Steelcase, an office chair that uses a unique mechanism to make it more lightweight and mobile than most office chairs, does so without detracting from its durability.

It's also brought them into much more diverse fields than just furniture. "One of our more recent projects was with the Design Council and the National Health Service in the UK," Pearson says. The objects were far from glamorous: a commode and a patient chair. "It's a new area and a challenge for us," he says, and



Cobi (2009) for Steelcase



PARCS (2009) for Bene

stresses that health care is a valuable field that has remained largely untouched by design influence. "Design is one of the last things that comes to peoples' minds when they think of health care equipment, but it should be one of the first things. It makes a patient feel valued to know that some care has gone into these devices."

On top of a number of new furniture pieces due to launch in the spring, PearsonLloyd has recently been approached for projects such as glass objects and the design of an opera. Pearson attributes this largely to the fact that, unlike many designers and artists, they've shied away from branding themselves with any one style—and instead focused on each project as its own unit.

"The last thing we set out to do is produce something fashionable, though we're delighted if it becomes fashionable," Pearson says. "We're more interested in discovering what the future might be rather than in changing the status quo."

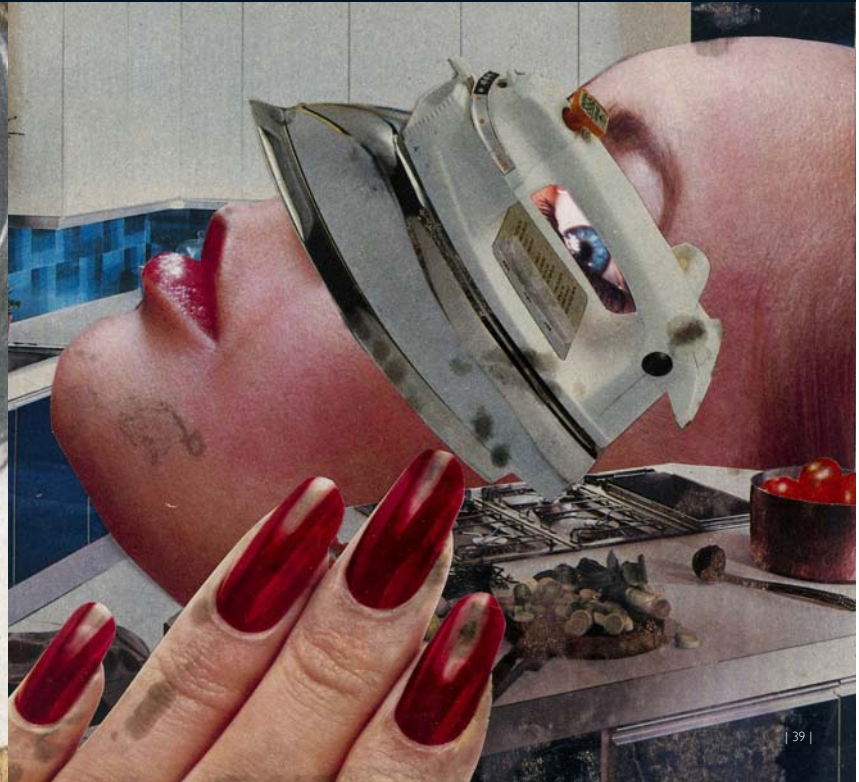
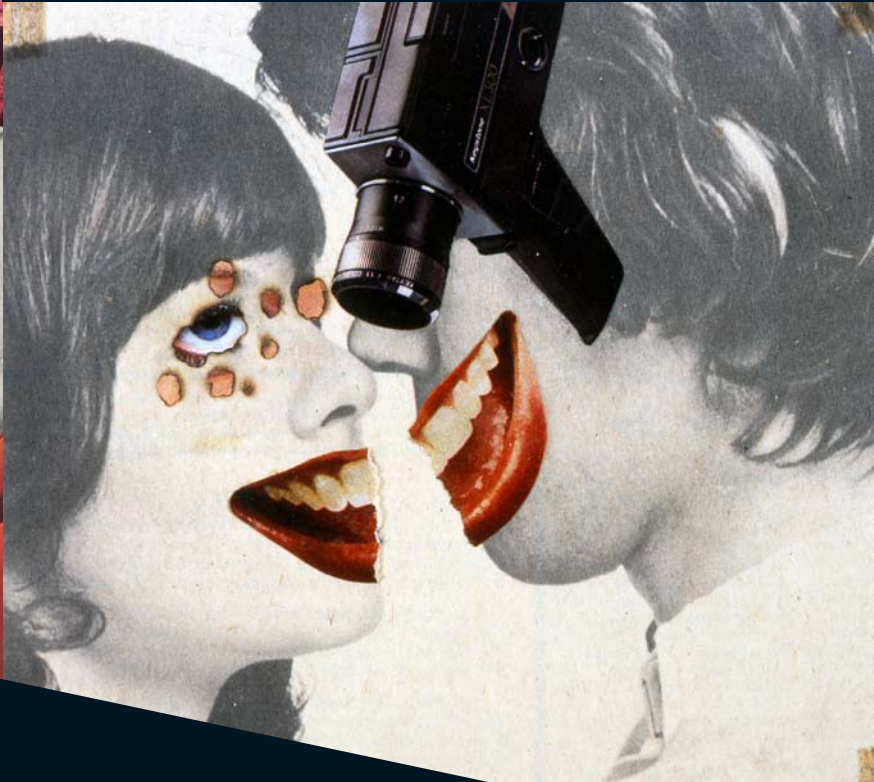
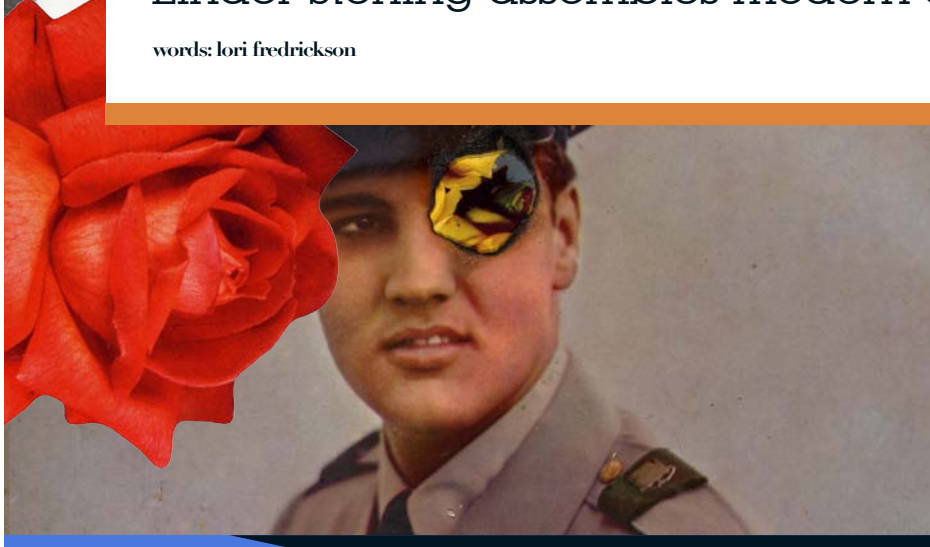
"Design is one of the last things that comes to peoples' minds when they think of health care equipment, but it should be one of the first things. It makes a patient feel valued to know that some care has gone into these devices." –Luke Pearson



ALTERED ASSEMBLAGE

Linder Sterling assembles modern art.

words: lori fredrickson



"I'm as intrigued and excited by the gaps between sounds, images (and) characters as I am in the actual sounds, images and characters themselves." –Linder Sterling

Of the Manchester post-punk artists only recently getting their due, Linder Sterling may be one of the most enduring. Her trademark collage work of photographs of nude models plastered with cut-outs of household appliances—most famously seen in fanzines and on Buzzcocks album singles—made an impact not just in the arts but in feminist and cultural studies. And if Sterling's name slipped slightly under the radar in the 1980s and '90s, retrospective and contemporary works have earned her critical acclaim over the last several years. As a result, her pieces have been featured in multiple group and solo shows, including the MCA Chicago, Institute of Public Arts in London and Cornerhouse in Manchester, among others.

As a visual and performance artist in the late '70s and founding member of the post-punk band Ludus, Sterling's feminist and anti-consumerist works were little less than confrontational: shocking audiences by whipping out a dildo onstage, or handing out packages of meat at concert tables. Though Ludus disbanded in 1983, Sterling's work as an artist continued to evolve. She now holds a monograph to her name, *Linder Works 1976-2006*, with contributions by friends Jon Savage and Morrissey. A 2007 P.S. 1 exhibit displayed

both her ongoing *Pretty Girl* series and more recent *Star* series, which replaces the appliances with flowers. Thirty years out of the Manchester scene, her performance pieces are being seen at the Tate Triennial. And it's given her a new sense of focus.

"In 1977, it felt as if we were holding up a mirror to the world that we saw around us," Sterling explains. "Then, knowledge and 'newness' were quite hard to find. We rarely even had phones in our home. But looking back, the irregularity of communication helped create gaps and spaces for meaning, where secrets survived—in contemporary life, there is so much of everything all the time. Now I'm as intrigued and excited by the gaps between sounds, images [and] characters as I am in the actual sounds, images and characters themselves."

Partly for this reason, she's turned to mythology and folklore for inspiration. A recent performance piece—held at Tate St. Ives for Halloween as part of the *Dark Monarch* exhibit—focuses on mysticism in British Art. And in April 2010, she'll be performing at the Glasgow International Festival. "This will be my most ambitious performance piece," Sterling asserts. In collaboration with long-

time friend and muse Stuart McCallum, with music that "sounds like a 16th century witch on acid," the piece is derived from satirist Ben Jonson's "The Masque of Queens Celebrated from the House of Fame," written for Queen Anne in 1609. "She scandalized her court by painting herself black for the starring role—similar to British culture through to 1978, when the BBC still showed 'The Black and White Minstrel Show,'" Sterling says.

More recently, she explains, she's been focused not just on what is portrayed in the media, but what isn't. "It feels odd that you rarely catch images of women of 50," Sterling says. "It's like looking in the media mirror and there's nothing there."

In the modern day—the "one-touch world" of cell phones and music-on-the-go—it's not about holding up mirrors. Mirrors are everywhere. Now, for Sterling, it's about finding a new focal point. "There are still discrete gaps in communication and culture that offer opportunities for true change. Still, we miss them all the time," Sterling says. "How to make the absent present? I'm still working on that one."

This page: left: detail from *Untitled 1977*, collage on paper; right: detail from *Untitled 1978*, photomontage

This page, clockwise from top: details of *Untitled 1979*, collage on paper; *Untitled 1977*, collage; *Untitled 1978*, photomontage; *Golden Jewel 2007*, collage on LP album cover; flower from *Super Star 2006*, collage. All images courtesy of Stuart Shave/Modern Art, London.