Scott Burton made *Two-Part Chair* in 1986, the year of his first museum retrospective. This was also the year that the effects of HIV had worn on him to the point where he decided to pursue experimental surgical treatment to halt its course. The cruel combination of this moment of arrival with the need for this drastic step initiated in Burton a fervent attempt to complete his large-scale public art projects and, with *Two-Part Chair*, to begin to reveal the queer experiences that had stealthily underwritten his public sculptures for museums and parks. A watershed for Burton, *Two-Part Chair* was a last-minute but urgent addition to the retrospective, unfinished at the time the catalog went to press. It was a work of self-reflection and revelation.

*Two-Part Chair* is made to be sat upon. It performs as a functional chair while also appearing, at first, to be an abstract, geometric sculpture. That abstraction, however, comes into focus as subtly figurative when we circle to its profile. From there, the formal dynamics intimate a penetrative sexual act in which two schematically rendered figures face in the same direction with one bent over in front of the other. Beyond that allusion to anal sex, what I find especially poetic about the relationship between this sculpture’s abstracted bodies is the way that the two equally massed components are mutually supportive. Alone, neither of these elements would be structurally sound as a chair, but together they are sturdy and load bearing. In Burton’s earlier chairs made from two parts, at least one of the two components could stand on its own. The partners within *Two-Part Chair*, however, both rely on each other, locked in a reciprocal grip. If separated, the two parts would fall to the ground, be unrecognizable as figures, and become useless as furniture. Together these two near-identical elements keep each other vital in their endless moment of accord. It is only that interdependence that allows this work to be strong enough to offer itself to us. Should we agree and back onto the chair, we can, too, feel the sculpture’s enduring performance of support.

—David J. Getsy

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SCOTT BURTON, TWO-PART CHAIR, 1986

Deer Island granite
Edition 3/5
1997:1b: 19 x 20 x 19 inches (48.26 x 66.04 x 48.26 cm); overall: 30 x 23 x 36 inches (101.6 x 58.42 x 91.44 cm);
1997:1a: 42 x 19 x 19 inches (106.68 x 48.26 x 48.26 cm)
© 2018 Estate of Scott Burton / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York
Photo: Biff Henrich
ART AFTER STONEWALL
1969-1989

EDITED BY JONATHAN WEINBERG
WITH TYLER CANN, ANASTASIA KINIGOPOULO,
AND DREW SAWYER

CMOA Columbus Museum of Art  Rizzoli Electa
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