Crafting Furniture in the Global South (Online, 23 Apr–28 May 26)

Online, Apr 23–May 28, 2026
Deadline: Mar 9, 2026

Jenna Allsopp

Call for papers - DHS online symposium:
Crafting Furniture in the Global South: Contemporary Practices, Histories and Futures.

Furniture occupies a distinctive position at the intersection of craft, design, architecture, and everyday life. In regions across South and Southeast Asia and the wider Global South, furniture-making has long mediated relationships between local material cultures, artisanal knowledge systems, colonial and postcolonial histories, and global markets. Yet contemporary furniture design from these contexts remains underrepresented within dominant design history narratives, museum collections, and critical discourse.
This symposium, co-convened by Dr Rukmini Chaturvedi and the DHS, invites proposals that critically examine contemporary furniture design through the lens of craft, with particular attention to practices, objects, and discourses emerging from South Asia, Southeast Asia, and the broader Global South. It seeks to foreground furniture as a site where questions of authorship, labour, material knowledge,
identity, modernity, and global circulation are negotiated and contested.
We welcome contributions that interrogate how contemporary designers, craftspeople, studios, and manufacturers engage with craft traditions, whether through continuity, transformation, disruption, or strategic reinvention, and how these engagements are framed, mediated, and valued locally and internationally. The symposium aims to challenge Western-centric canons of furniture and design history by centring materially grounded, object-led, and decolonial approaches.
AS INSPIRATION FOR PROPOSALS, THE FOLLOWING THEMES MAY BE GENERATIVE:
- Crafting modernity: contemporary furniture practices negotiating tradition, innovation, and global design languages
- The politics of limited editions: craft, luxury, authorship, and exclusivity in furniture design
- Colonial legacies and postcolonial furniture forms: materials, and typologies
- Studio furniture and small-scale production in the Global South: economies, ethics, and visibility
- Global markets, local materials: sustainability, extraction, labour, and representation
- Writing design histories through objects: furniture as a methodological lens
- Craft labour, collaboration, and hierarchy: designers, craftspeople, workshops, and intermediaries
- Curating furniture from the Global South: exhibitions, collections, and institutional framing.
- Furniture as cultural identity: domesticity, nationalism, regionalism, and transnational exchange

FORMAT
The symposium will feature a combination of:
-Keynote conversations with designers, scholars, and curators
-Curatorial dialogues on exhibiting and mediating furniture from the Global South
-Roundtable discussions bringing together designers and craftspeople to reflect on collaboration, process, and practice
Presentations will be designed to encourage dialogue across disciplines and career stages, bringing together historians, designers, craftspeople, curators, and postgraduate researchers.

PUBLICATION AND DISSEMINATION
The symposium is conceived as the foundation for a subsequent curated blog series. Selected speakers will be invited to develop short, accessible written reflections based on their presentations, extending the conversations initiated during the event. This series will provide an opportunity to further disseminate research on contemporary furniture and craft practices in South and Southeast Asia and the Global South, fostering ongoing dialogue beyond the symposium and reaching a wider international audience.

PARTICIPATION AND SUBMISSION
The symposium welcomes proposals from speakers worldwide, particularly those based in or working on South Asia, Southeast Asia, Africa, Latin America, and other regions of the Global South. Contributions from underrepresented voices and early-career researchers are especially encouraged.

Each speaker will give a 10-15 minute PowerPoint presentation via Zoom, followed by a group Q&A discussion.

Proposals should consist of:
-An anonymous abstract of up to 300 words outlining the proposed contribution
-A separate 100-word biography including institutional affiliation (if applicable) and contact details

Please send all submission to the DHS Senior Administrator Jenna Allsopp-Douglas by 23:59GMT on 9th March at designhistorysociety@gmail.com

KEY DATES
Call for Papers deadline: Monday 9th March 2026
Shortlisting commences: Monday 9th March 2026
Speakers notified: Monday 23rd March 2026
Proposed event dates: Thursday 23rd April, Thursday 9th May, Thursday 28th May 2026

Reference:
CFP: Crafting Furniture in the Global South (Online, 23 Apr-28 May 26). In: ArtHist.net, Feb 28, 2026 (accessed Nov 25, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/51859>.