Max Lamb

"Shelter is necessary to give shade and to keep in warmth. Sleep and adequate rest are essential and the time and effort you put into making your shelter comfortable will make them easier to get… In Polar areas simple shelters will be those already waiting for you in natural caves and hollows. But to build in hard snow you need some kind of implement to cut into it or make blocks from it. The ideal snow will bear a man's weight without much impression, but be soft." From 'The SAS Survival Handbook', John Wiseman

Max Lamb's body of work defies classification by 'school' or tendency; he works across diverse processes, materials and means of production. Lamb has both created objects for industrial production and through his own craftsmanship. He has utilized high-tech and capital-intensive means such as rapid prototyping alongside labour-intensive carving and casting by hand. As fellow designer Tom Dixon has remarked, Lamb is "a prototype of the confused 21st-century designer, with interests in advanced technology, the low-tech and the conceptual." For 'Decompression Chamber' Lamb has created a body of work which uses materials which are ordinarily 'invisible'. Lamb's principal material – polystyrene – is ordinarily employed for the protection and packaging of products, rather than as product. But polystyrene, being cheap, malleable and available in vast quantities – can create a raw, unexpected beauty. Lamb 'carves' this 'raw material' with basic tools or by hand to arrive at idiosyncratic, "rugged" shapes. There is an element of risk involved: each work requires improvisation, and the results often imply Lamb has 'attacked' his material. In the words of curator Libby Sellers, his work "suggests an aggressiveness that is characteristic of the atavistic spirit in design today."

Lamb's work in 'Decompression Chamber' is in his own words, "about human capability, the need for rest, and the scale of the human body. To rest comfortably, one must first find a discrete place to do so; or create that place oneself. The simplest way to do the latter is with basic tools and cheap materials. I also imagine the polystyrene forms as a natural landscape, as Henry Moore might have done, and myself in search for a place to shelter and hide. My polystyrene spaces are immediate, both in their creation and visual impact. They are purely functional spaces – minimal." Lamb describes his new works as "sitting caves" – 'chambers' for one individual to sit or lie in isolation. Each "cave" adapts a different furniture-type (the chaise-longue, the armchair, the day-bed) into novel, sculptural variations. Each is roughly and aggressively carved from a monumental slab. By only carving certain planes, Lamb contrasts industrial perfection with the surfaces that are "eaten into" and which have a "rough, rock-like texture". A rubber skin-envelope renders each work durable, whilst retaining a 'give' when bearing the weight of a body. It is thin enough to reveal the irregular, tactile surface underneath, but is flexible. Each object embodies contrary sets of associations: strength and fragility; softness and rigidity; permanence and disposability.