

The image shows a close-up of a wooden chair seat, likely made of oak, featuring a complex, multi-layered carving. The top edge has a decorative, scalloped border. Below this, the surface is covered in a dense, intricate pattern of interlocking, organic shapes, possibly representing a forest scene or a stylized floral motif. The wood grain is clearly visible, and the lighting highlights the texture and depth of the carvings.

The Seven-Year Throne by Knut Fjaestad

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The Seven-Year Throne by Knut Fjaestad

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The Seven-Year Throne (Sjuårstronen) is a unique chair, made from a single piece of timber and richly carved in an Art Nouveau style characterised by romantic nationalism. Its back is supported by snow-burdened branches spreading across it. Natural shapes appear in a relatively stylised form on the chair, both figuratively and sculpturally. The chair's back features the carved figure of a spruce tree and is crowned by Knut Fjaestad's signature spider. The legs of the chair have winding snake-like forms and branches that, seen from the front, are symmetrically placed.

Knut Fjaestad began carving wooden furniture around 1907, when he bought an 18th-century house, Bjälbo, at Skärsåtra farm on the island of Lidingö, outside Stockholm. Knut found the spruce stump that was used for *The Seven-Year Throne* on Lidingö, on land belonging to his cousin, John Fjaestad. This was the first piece of furniture created by Knut Fjaestad; it took seven years, which thus gave it its name. Each piece of furniture he made had a unique design and the timber itself determined the type of furniture it became.¹ Fjaestad worked in both spruce and birch and, to obtain the furniture's relief effects and surface structure, Fjaestad carved, oiled, tarred and burned the wood, achieving the lighter surfaces by scrubbing the wood.²

The Seven-Year Throne is part of a Swedish tradition of producing tree stump chairs – or *stabbestolar*, as they are called. This type of chair has its roots in the log



Fig. 1 Knut Fjaestad (1860–1937), *The Seven-Year Throne*, c. 1908–15. Fir-tree, carved and sculpted from a single piece. 116 x 72 x 83 cm. Gift of Ann Stern through the Friends of the Nationalmuseum, Nationalmuseum, NMK 194/2018.

chairs that were once made by peasantry throughout Sweden and were common into the 19th century. They could be carved out of a round log or made with a barrel-type construction; hollowing out the base reduced weight and created a space that could be used for storage.³

A decisive influence on Knut Fjaestad was the furniture made by his younger brother, Gustaf Fjaestad (1868–1948). Gustaf exhibited his first tree stump chair at *Konstnärskörbundet* (the Artists' Association's) exhibition in 1900. His best-known furniture is the suite that consists of a sofa, two chairs and a table that he created for Ernest Thiel (1859–1947) and which are now kept by the Thiel Gallery.⁴ Knut was well aware of these unique and magnificent furnishings and compared his own works to them. One problem with tree stump chairs is that wood can warp, so it was important that the timber was old and properly stored, so it did not crack. If it warped, it was reinforced with large iron hoops. The material for the sofa and chairs Gustaf Fjaestad produced for Ernest Thiel was old timber from an abandoned building in Segerfors, outside Arvika. These enormous timber pieces took seven months to complete and arrived in Stockholm in 1907.⁵

Knut Fjaestad was originally a merchant in Stockholm, with a shop in Gamla stan (the Old Town). He began to carve furniture after closing his business and moving to Lidingö. In the 1920s, Knut Fjaestad dedicated his time to producing Madeira-type wine according to his own recipe, which included rosehips, figs, apples and rowan berries. The wine was called *Bjälbo-tappning* and sold well for a while.⁶ Knut Fjaestad often visited his brother Gustaf and his sisters Anna and Amelie in Rackstad; it was among Anna and Amelie's weaving students that he met his wife, Ellen.⁷ Unlike his brother, who had studied at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts and the Artists' Association's school, Knut had no artistic training. He was an autodidact and refused to call himself an artist, something

he emphasised to the press when talking about his artistic activities. Knut Fjaestad called his carved wooden furniture "imaginative works" and first displayed them at an exhibition on Birger Jarlsgatan in Stockholm, in 1923.⁸ The contemporary press wrote of these furnishings that "they do not remind us of anything we have previously seen, neither classic nor contemporary, Rococo nor futurism, but are entirely unique".⁹

Knut Fjaestad's artistic achievements can be said to be shaped by two trends. One is that he worked in a time that raved about artistic uniqueness and handicrafts, and which was strongly influenced by the British Arts and Crafts movement at the end of the 19th century. At the same time, a national variety of Art Nouveau was evolving. Fjaestad reshaped this, making it his own through his handmade, carved furniture. He worked in an era when Swedish motifs were particularly visible in the arts, something emphasised by Richard Bergh (1858–1919), among others. Artists were searching for a mystical inner essence of humanity and nature, as well as what was perceived to be genuinely Nordic. There was a desire to discover a national art, one in which Swedish motifs were highlighted and their uniqueness displayed. Richard Bergh believed that "[s]uch as nature is in a country, so is also its visual art"¹⁰ and encouraged the study of Sweden's nature to find motifs and modes of expression. He particularly emphasised the twisted, stunted pine as a symbol of Swedish art.¹¹ The Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris*) tree and spruce trees are the most common tree species in Sweden; the pines referred to by Bergh are deformed and knotted, with winding and creeping branches, because they grow in exposed locations with few nutrients.¹²

Notes:

1. Waldemar Swahn, "Vinberedaren och Skulptören på Lidingöns äldsta gård", *Stockholms-Tidningen*, 11 December 1927.

2. "Fantasiarbeten i trä", *Stockholms Dagblad*, 18 November 1927.

3. Erik Andrén, *Möbelstilarna: En handbok i den svenska möbel- och inredningskonstens historia*, 6 ed., Stockholm 1972, p. 12.

4. Jan Torsten Ahlstrand (ed.), *Signums svenska konsthistoria [Bd 11] Konsten 1890–1915*, vol. 11, Lund 2001, p. 409.

5. Agneta Fjæstad Nordmark, *Fjæstads konst*, Arvika 1999, p. 77.

6. Waldemar Swahn, "Vinberedaren och Skulptören på Lidingöns äldsta gård", *Stockholms-Tidningen*, 11 December 1927.

7. Fjæstad Nordmark, Agneta, *Fjæstads konst*, p. 83

8. "En intressant debut", *Svenska Dagbladet*, 16 November 1923.

9. The quote in Swedish: "de påminna oss knappast om något vi sett förut, varken av forntid eller nutid, rokokko eller futurism, utan äro helt egenartade". "Fantasiarbeten i trä", *Nya Dagligt Allehanda*, 20 November 1923.

10. The quote in Swedish: "Sådan naturen är i ett land, sådan plär ock dess bildkonst vara". Richard Bergh, "Svenskt konstnärskynne", *Ord & Bild*, vol. 9, Stockholm 1900, p. 9.

11. Richard Bergh, *Om konst och annat*, Stockholm 1919, p. 151 and p. 169.

12. Daniel Prytz, Karin Sidén and Anna Meister (eds.), *Symbolism och dekadens*, Stockholm 2015, p. 38.