

Chinaman's File Rocking Chair

For Broached Commissions 2014, TRENT JANSEN used historical narrative as the foundation for a design outcome, placing story at the heart of his bespoke chair.

In his book *Attachment* (1969), John Bowlby explores our innate human longing for movement, in particular the rocking motion of being walked by our mothers. Bowlby's research shows that this motion has become so important that through generations it has become encoded into our DNA; a baby will be calmed if this kind of movement is emulated.

Chinaman's File is a rocking chair designed for the roughly 16,500 Chinese gold diggers who walked from Robe in South Australia to the Victorian goldfields during the mid-19th Century. At the height of anti-Chinese sentiment during this period, all ships carrying Chinese nationals to the colonies of New South Wales and Victoria were taxed for each Chinese person on board. To avoid the tax, captains began to drop Chinese passengers in South Australia, a few hundred metres off Guichen Bay near the small town of Robe. From here these Chinese gold diggers would travel across country on foot, covering over 480 kilometres in as little as 13 days.

To reach the goldfields, they would load the heavier equipment onto drays, for the trek could be several hundred kilometres. The Chinese men would travel on foot in single file, each carrying supplies in two baskets hanging from the ends of long poles over their shoulders. Each man could carry up to 78 kilograms – more than their average body weight.

Extract from *Gold: The fever that forever changed Australia* by David Hill

This unusual procession resulted in 'single file' becoming known as 'Chinaman's File' during this period.

As economic nomads, moving from China to digging in the search of their fortune, it is likely that these men would have longed for the comforts of home – familiar food, domesticity, the welcoming embrace of a mother, or the touch of a lover. Chinaman's File was designed to simulate the rocking experienced by a baby while being walked by its mother; each rock of the chair designed to subject the user to the

same arc and cadence that a baby experiences during its mother's single step.

To achieve the unusual and particular motion, a filmic study was conducted which analysed the movement of a mother carrying her child on her back as she walked; the motion that the baby experienced during one step was plotted and from this a rocking arc was extracted. Chinaman's File was then designed to rock in a motion that emulates this arc of movement. In theory this action will produce a feeling of contentment that takes us back to our infancy.

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