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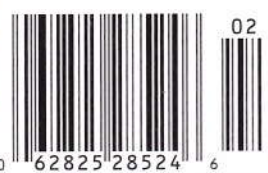
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Fig. 1: *Pisces* by Wendell Castle, 1995. Jelutong and mahogany. H. 42, W. 60, D. 24½ in. Courtesy of Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Photography by Lee Fatherree. Considered a pioneer in the field of studio furniture, Wendell Castle has strived to erase the boundary between furniture and art throughout his forty-year career. This piece, part of his "Seeing Stars" series, reflects the artist's ongoing exploration of organic themes, while the multilayered and highly textured finish emulates metal. Functioning as both a pier table and a piece of sculpture, *Pisces* exemplifies Castle's desire to produce artistic furniture.

Fig. 2: *Chase Table* by Judy Kensley McKie, 1989. Bronze and glass. H. 16, W. 48, D. 38 in. Courtesy of Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Photography by Lee Fatherree. Inspired by Native American, pre-Columbian, African, Greek, and Egyptian art, Judy Kensley McKie incorporates stylized plants, animals, and ambiguous creatures into her furniture. Best known for her carved and painted wood furniture, McKie began making editions in bronze in the late 1980s. By casting these forms in bronze, McKie makes a stronger connection between her furniture and traditional sculpture, at the same time preserving the lively, energetic, and "animated" quality of her designs.

A Personal Touch: Furniture



A successful commission is a collaborative process between artist and client. The artist contributes his skill and creative vision; the client, his needs and trust. When the artist knows the client on a personal level, the commission can incorporate individual memoir to achieve a higher artistic level.

This experience is exemplified by the studio furniture collection of Ron and Anita Wornick of California, who began collecting contemporary decorative arts in the mid-1980s after a carved vessel by wood artist David Groth captivated their attention. Collecting primarily wood art at first, in the 1990s the Wornicks began expanding their collection to include other media. Says Ron, "Because all this work was showing in spaces that also showed ceramic, glass, fiber, metal, and so on, ... [w]e would say, 'Well, we don't really collect ceramic, but we really like this,' so we would buy it." About this time the couple also became interested in nonfunctional sculptural form, and, spurred by their new home in Napa Valley, they started collecting and commissioning studio furniture by such artists as Wendell Castle (Fig. 1), Judy McKie (Fig. 2), Tommy Simpson, and Michael Hosaluk (Fig. 3).

past." Above these are icons that reference "the Harvest—the fruits and the bones from the work & construction of the past" (a plate with utensils, and a vial filled with synthetic bones). The final rung features a wood screw which stands precariously on its point like a top. This, notes Simpson, is "a smile in the sky."¹

The personal relationship between cabinetmaker Gord Peteran and the Wornicks allowed for the blurring of the line between patron and artist when Peteran made *A Table Made of Wood* (Fig. 5) for the Wornicks in 2005. Peteran, whose philosophies align him with conceptual artists more than woodworkers, creates studio pieces that reference furniture forms. In his "Table Made of Wood" series, Peteran captures the essence of the demilune form, but uses scrap wood to create uneven surfaces that suggest instability and question our perceived notions of waste. After Ron mentioned to Peteran that he liked the series very much the Wornicks received an envelope containing a single piece of scrap wood. Scrawled on it were the words: "Dear Anita + Ron / Hang onto this / theres [sic] more on / its way / Gord." Intrigued, the Wornicks followed the artist's instructions and stashed the piece away. The table arrived a while later, but was incomplete. Allowing the collectors into the

from the Wornick Collection

by Julie M. Muñiz

While the Wornicks often purchased furniture that complemented the conceptual and sculptural works they were collecting, the commissioning of specific pieces allowed them to obtain works that expressed personal narratives. In their library, a ladder by furniture-maker Tommy Simpson leans against the shelves, its six rungs morphing into icons of varying shapes, widths, and stability. Stripped of its practical use (it would be impossible to climb), Simpson's ladder bridges the gap between function and fantasy. It also recounts the Wornick family history like a totem. Commissioned by the Wornicks in 1991, *The Story Ladder* (Fig. 4) alludes to the family's history in woodworking and Ron's subsequent work in the food industry. The bottom three rungs, which depict carpentry tools including a hammer on whose handle is stamped the family name, represents, in Simpson's words "the Foundation you stand on...the

Fig. 3: *Unusual Fruits* by Michael Hosaluk, 2000. Wood, acrylic paint, gels and metal. H. 25½, W. 22, D. 13 in. Courtesy of Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Photography by Lee Fatherree. Like other woodworkers active in the 1980s, Michael Hosaluk uses personal narrative and textural surface design throughout his work. In this table, Hosaluk carves the wood to emulate turning techniques and to create a precariously balanced assemblage of prickly pears and other organic shapes. The fatty arched legs whimsically recall the cabriole legs of a Chippendale-style tea table.





Fig. 4: *The Story Ladder* by Tommy Simpson, 1991. Wood and mixed media. H. 84, W. 25, D. 2 in. Courtesy of Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Photography by Lee Fatherree. Like a Northwest totem pole, Simpson's ladder tells the Wornick family history: from their woodworking roots on the bottom rungs, to their involvement in the food science industry in the center rungs, up to the "smile in the sky" represented at top. Simpson's "smile" looks upon a fortuitous future that hints at further involvement in the wood arts by the inclusion of a wood screw balanced at top.


Fig. 5: *A Table Made of Wood* by Gord Peteran, 2005. Wood. H. 37, W. 36, D. 17¼ in. Courtesy of Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Photography by Lee Fatherree. Rather than creating functional furniture, Peteran creates art that refers to furniture. Made of scrap wood, Peteran's table is both an impressionistic rendering of the demilune form and a confrontation of our notions of waste. Peteran involved the Wornicks in the creative process, allowing them to insert the final piece — the light trapezoidal member on the left of the table's surface.

Fig. 6: *The Chair That Built Itself* by John Cederquist, 2000. Plywood, wood veneers, litho ink. H. 58, W. 17, D. 24 in. Courtesy of Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Photography by Lee Fatherree. Like other pieces in the artist's *Furniture That Builds Itself* series, this chair echoes imagery used by Cederquist in past works. In 1993, the artist produced *Deconstructionist Saw Chair* and *Revenge of the Deconstructionist Saw Chair*, which feature whirling blades dissecting members of the chair's frame. Similar in size and shape to these objects, the work shown here features a hand saw cutting off an edge of the chair's back. Were it not for the title, the viewer would be uncertain if it were in the process of construction or deconstruction.



creative process, Peteran invited the Wornicks to insert the final piece—the original scrap he'd mailed to the Wornicks fit perfectly.

The construction-like nature of the Peteran table relates well to the Wornick family history in woodworking, as does a chair by California artist John Cederquist. Like Peteran, Cederquist creates furniture about furniture. His work explores the dichotomy between illusion and reality. In *The Chair That Built Itself* (part of the artist's "Furniture That Builds Itself" series) Cederquist juxtaposes cartoon-like images of deconstruction and reconstruction (Fig. 6). As a saw cuts away part of the seat back, a mallet hammers a nail that holds the sawed portion in place. Other images, including a chisel and screwdriver, confirm the carpentry nature of the work and relate to Wornick's roots.

Inevitably, the relationship between the art, the artist, and the owner changes over time. "The pieces that are worthy, you continue to see [new things in], and you like them more every day," says Ron. "At some point you think you know them in a way that nobody else could really know them, because you've seen them on different days and different moods and different times." 

Sly Boy, She Devil and Isis: The Art of Conceptual Craft, Selections from the Wornick Collection, is on view at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, until January 6, 2008. All objects pictured here are promised gifts to the museum. For more information on the Wornick collection and exhibition, call 617.267.9300 or visit www.mfa.org.

Julie M. Muñiz is a curatorial research associate at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Along with Gerald W. R. Ward, she co-curated the Wornick exhibition.

¹ Note to Ron and Anita Wornick from Tommy Simpson, dated January 3, 1992.

