



## museum of arts and design

### **AGAINST THE GRAIN EXPLORES EMERGING TRENDS IN CONTEMPORARY WOODWORKING WITH NEARLY 90 WORKS OF ART, CRAFT AND DESIGN ON VIEW**

**Part of MAD's "Materials & Process" Series, Exhibition Features New Works by Sarah Oppenheimer, Martin Puryear, Marc Andre Robinson, and Alison Elizabeth Taylor**

**And Recent Installations, Sculptures, and Furniture by Ai Weiwei, Maarten Baas, Sebastian Errazuriz, Mark Moskowitz, and Ursula von Rydingsvard, Among Others**

New York, NY (February 7, 2013) Featuring nearly 90 installations, sculptures, furniture, and objects, ***Against the Grain: Wood in Contemporary Art, Craft and Design*** explores the most cutting-edge conceptual and technical trends in woodworking today. On view March 19 through September 15, 2013 at the Museum of Arts and Design, the exhibition emphasizes the way artists, designers, and craftspeople have incorporated post-modernist approaches and strategies into woodworking—deconstructing vessel shapes, playing on the relationship between function and form, and utilizing woodturning and furniture techniques in the creation of sculpture. The works, most of which have been created since 2000, challenge traditional applications of wood within the design and craft worlds, and exemplify the wide-ranging, frequently unexpected, approaches to the medium by contemporary artists and designers.

A press preview for the exhibition will be held on Tuesday, March 19 from 9:00-11:00 am. Curator Lowery Stokes Sims and a number of the artists will be available for questions throughout the event.

MAD's presentation will feature 57 artists and designers with new works by artists **Sarah Oppenheimer, Martin Puryear, Marc Andre Robinson** and **Alison Elizabeth Taylor**, and by designers **Ian Spencer** and **Cairn Young** from Yard Sale Project, and **Joseph Walsh**. Also included are recent works by influential sculptors **Ursula von Rydingsvard** and **Courtney Smith**; installation artists **Gary Carsley** and **Francis Cape**, designers **Maarten Baas, Sebastian Errazuriz**, and **Pablo Reinoso**; and studio wood artists **Wendell Castle, Hunt Clark, Andrew Early**, and **Bud Latven**, among others.

"*Against the Grain* is a complete immersion into the seemingly limitless world of contemporary woodworking, an imaginative experience where function is subsumed by fantastical forms and textures," says Holly Hotchner, MAD's Nanette L. Laitman Director. "The creators featured in the exhibition exemplify the innovative practice that MAD is dedicated to supporting and bringing to the fore. Their work defies clear categorization and draws together traditionally disparate themes, ideas, and techniques into stunning and surprising works of art."

The exhibition explores several thematic threads that encapsulate the breadth of creative production in wood. Many of the artists and designers are inspired by wood's most natural state as trees, utilizing branches, logs, and planks and creating works that draw upon the wood's grains, textures, and patterns. Others fuse a variety of wood elements together to create distinctly new visual forms, producing a more powerful experience than the individual parts might allow. Digital techniques have also transformed woodworking, allowing creators to manipulate materials and produce illusions that were previously impossible. The use of wood as a material to convey political and social content, as well as humor and visual puns, has also grown and been refined as artists experiment with the medium. Additionally, environmental issues will be woven throughout the exhibition as increased ecological consciousness is implicit in the work of all contemporary woodworkers.

"Wood is a ubiquitous material and a medium of basic function as well as tremendous versatility. In the last several decades, artists have truly begun to test its creative boundaries, expressing and expanding wood's aesthetic and conceptual possibilities," says Sims. "The artists featured in *Against the Grain* represent the forward-thinking approach that has spurred the medium's renaissance."

Highlights from the exhibition include the following works:

- A wingback chair by **Martin Puryear** that was created specially for MAD's presentation of the exhibition. Combining the exquisite craftsmanship and elegant design for which Puryear is best known, the chair walks the delicate line between functional furniture and art object.
- **Marc Andre Robinson's** site-specific installation in MAD's lobby, which fuses a set of chairs into an unbroken circle, subsuming their functional purpose.
- An architectural intervention by **Sarah Oppenheimer** developed for one of MAD's moveable gallery walls, creating an unexpected view across the 4<sup>th</sup> floor space.
- **Mark Moskovitz's** fully-functional chest of drawers—mimicking wood stockpiled for the winter—exemplifies the type of camouflage and secret compartments that have long been an intriguing feature of furniture. His *Facecord Chest*, 2011, was inspired by the haphazard geometry of cordwood and the accidental poetry in its stacking.
- In *Oddychajaca*, 2011, **Ursula von Rydingsvard** manipulates a field of flat 2-by-4 beams into an organic form that gently curves out into space.
- Designers **Ian Spencer** and **Cairn Young** of **Yard Sale Project** produce furniture that combines computer-aided design and traditional construction techniques. They will present *Roccapina V*, 2012, a chair whose richly patterned surface resembles a volumetric quilt.
- **Alison Elizabeth Taylor's** installations of illusionistic marquetry, which recreate architectural elements of abandoned houses—including linoleum floors or painted and papered walls whose many layers have been worn away after years of water damage.

- **Maarten Baas**' "smoked" version of a Marc Newson chair, which has been torched and rendered nonfunctional and yet maintains lyricism and elegance in its new sculptural form.
- A painted diptych by **Judith Beltzer**, which transforms tree bark patterns into a new vocabulary for abstraction. In *Inner Life of Trees #1*, 2007, the grooving of the tree bark appears as a landscape of hills and valleys.
- A chest of drawers by artist **Courtney Smith**, whose functionality has been subverted by the insertion of arbitrary rectangles and boxes of plywood. The resulting sculpture challenges ideas of structural integrity and authorship as Smith intrudes on existing design elements.
- **Ai Weiwei**'s 2008 evocation of a cluster of "grapes" in his eccentric assembling of ten simple Qing Dynasty stools, rendering the group useless.
- **Gary Carsley**'s cabinet installation is part of an ongoing project of photographing parks and landscapes all over the world, printing them on vinyl, and then applying them to walls and IKEA furniture. He plays with our sense of space as the print blends the wall and furniture together into one landscape environment.
- Cameroon-born artist **Barthélémy Toguo**'s large-scale stamp, hewed out of a block of wood and engraved with "Who is the true terrorist?," taps into the tradition of the woodblock-printed image and evokes the political paranoia infecting recent international relations.

#### **EXHIBITION ORGANIZATION, CREDITS, AND TOUR**

*Against the Grain: Wood in Contemporary Art, Craft and Design* is organized by the Museum of Arts and Design and curated by Lowery Stokes Sims, Charles Bronfman International Curator at the Museum of Arts and Design, assisted by Elizabeth Edwards Kirrane, Assistant Curator at MAD and project manager for the exhibition.

A version of this exhibition was previously presented at the Mint Museum, Charlotte, NC from September 1, 2012—January 27, 2013.

*Against the Grain: Wood in Contemporary Art, Craft and Design* is made possible through the support of the Windgate Charitable Foundation and, in part, by the National Endowment for the Arts, with additional support from Larry and Madeline Mohr.

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#### **CATALOGUE**

The full color, illustrated, 160-page catalogue includes essays by Sims on the conceptual framework of the exhibition and Kirrane on how history, environmental issues and politics have predicated the use of various woods as well as text by noted writer on art and craft Suzanne Ramljak, who examines the enduring preoccupation with wood in human cultures. Published by Monacelli Press, it focuses on some of the most interesting conceptual and technical trends in woodworking today, presenting pieces that play against traditional ideas of wood as a medium, and push the limits of its use. A comprehensive accompaniment to the exhibition, the book

explores the more than 90 installations, furniture pieces, vessels, and sculptures presented and explored in *Against the Grain*.

## **PUBLIC PROGRAMS**

### **An Evening of Pianola, presentation with Randolph Herr and Maria Elena Gonzalez**

Thursday, March 14, 2013 - 7:00 pm

This program will include the live world premiere of *Skowhegan Birch #1, 2012* (from the *Tree Talk* series), by artist Maria Elena Gonzalez, executed on a player piano by renowned interpreter Randolph Herr. Gonzalez created the pianola music score from the bark of a fallen birch tree she found in the summer artist colony in Skowhegan, Maine. Striations in the bark were scanned and digitally cut onto scrolls for piano rolls by the company, Laser Cutting Shapes, in Columbus, Ohio. The result is literally a sound created directly from a tree. A video documenting the work and featuring Randolph Herr's interpretation will be presented in the exhibition *Against the Grain: Wood in Contemporary Art, Craft and Design*.

### **New York Public Library: Design and Style Series**

Wednesday, May 8, 2013 - 6:00 to 8:00 pm

As part of its Design and Style series, the New York Public Library is presenting a dialogue in conjunction with the exhibition *Against the Grain: Wood in Contemporary Art Craft and Design*. The participants include designer **Sebastian Errazuriz** and artists **Willie Cole**, **Sarah Oppenheimer**, and **Ursula von Rydingsvard**, whose works are included in the exhibition. The conversation will be moderated by exhibition curator, **Lowery Stokes Sims**. This event is also part of the NYPL series 'An Art Book', a celebration of the essential importance and beauty of art books. Copies of the exhibition catalogue will be available for purchase. This free program will be held at the New York Public Library, Stephen A. Schwarzman Building, 5th Avenue at 42nd Street, Berger Forum (Room 227, 2nd Floor).

### **Curator Led Tour of *Against the Grain: Wood in Contemporary Art, Craft, and Design***

Thursday, March 21, 2013 - 6:30 pm

Charles Bronfman International Curator Lowery Stokes Sims leads an hour-long tour of the exhibition. A number of the artists will be present.

### **Excess of Void**

Saturdays - February 2, March 9, April 20, and May 18, 2013

All Day, Free with Museum Admission

Exploring the possibilities of producing a new type of source material, NYC-based artists Aaron Anderson and Eric Timothy Carlson take residence in MAD's Open Studios through the spring of 2013 for the project *Excess of Void*. Anderson and Carlson will transform the surface of natural wood sheets with dye and pigment to a visually-saturated state, creating a graphic effect similar to celestial patterns or tie-dyed fabric. For each monthly installment, the artists will delve further into the creation process of this new type of material, while influenced by aural and visual elements, such as amplified electronic ambient music and live feed video projections.

## **ABOUT THE MUSEUM OF ARTS AND DESIGN**

The Museum of Arts and Design explores the intersection of art, design, and craft today. The Museum focuses on contemporary creativity and the ways in which artists and designers from

around the world transform materials through processes ranging from the artisanal to digital. The Museum's exhibition program explores and illuminates issues and ideas, highlights creativity and craftsmanship, and celebrates the limitless potential of materials and techniques when used by gifted and innovative artists. MAD's permanent collection is global in scope and focuses on art, craft, and design from 1950 to the present day. At the center of the Museum's mission is education. The Museum's dynamic new facility features classrooms and studios for master classes, seminars, and workshops for students, families, and adults. Three open artist studios engage visitors in the creative processes of artists at work and enhance the exhibition programs. Lectures, films, performances, and symposia related to the Museum's collection and topical subjects affecting the world of contemporary art, craft, and design are held in a renovated 144-seat auditorium.

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