

THE NEW PALTZ ORACLE

THE OFFICIAL STUDENT NEWSPAPER OF SUNY NEW PALTZ SINCE 1938

Castle's Curious Creations at the Dorsky



Not many people may look at tables and chairs and think of them as a form of art, but 84-year-old sculptor, designer and educator Wendell Castle would have to disagree with you.

Furniture and art came to a crossroads at the Dorsky Museum on Saturday, Oct. 21 at 2 p.m., where Castle gave a gallery talk describing his journey as an artist and his beginnings in the art furniture world.

"I'm impractical," Castle said. "I'm not interested in practicality, and I've learned that it contributes to creativity really well."

Audience members clustered together around Castle and his sculptures, which are currently on display at the "Artists as Innovators" exhibit in the museum, and listened intently as he explained how he got his start.

Castle described how he stumbled into the field rather randomly, randomness being something he cherishes. He found a series of opportunities related to sculpture and furniture making after graduating the University of Kansas and moved to New York City to pursue being an artist.

Alfonso, Madalyn. "Castle's Curious Creations at the Dorsky," *The New Paltz Oracle*, October 26, 2017.

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"I often find myself thinking about the randomness of the cosmos," Castle said. "I think randomness is essential to life and art. The very fact that I'm an artist is random."

Castle began as a sculptor in New York City unsuccessfully, but found himself teaching furniture design in the 1960s at the Rochester Institute of Technology when he was barely qualified, since he only had a degree in industrial design/fine arts. He got the job after the dean saw one of his pieces in a exhibition and loved it. After some time, he realized furniture was a field he could excel in and began creating his own pieces.

"I realized it was a small niche field and I thought to myself 'Gee I could do well here,'" Castle said. "So I stopped making sculptures and started making furniture."

Castle described how he makes a lot of his unique furniture, using wood, fiberglass or other materials, and explained how he and his team pay special attention to detail and creativity with all their pieces.

"His bold and graceful pieces, often organic and sometimes whimsical, are crafted from rare and beautiful hardwoods, plastics, veneers, and metals in a timeless contemporary style," his website, wendellcastlecollection.com, details. "His expression of color and exotic materials are synonymous with the Wendell Castle name."

After Castle's introductory anecdote, Dorsky Director Sara Pasti moved the gallery talk across the hall and Castle began a small slideshow full of pictures of his fantastical works.

"My favorite thing to make is chairs," Castle said. "Because all it needs is a sitting part, and I can do whatever I want with the legs. It's totally open. Everytime I start a chair, I always think 'What can I do with the legs?'"

Castle explained how his life took its course and pushed him in the direction of artistic furniture. His parents intended on him going to school for more practical work, but after taking an art elective in college, he realized art was exactly what he wanted to be doing.

"It wasn't until I was in college that I realized I loved art. After taking one art course at the college of my parent's choice, I realized I was in the wrong place," Castle said. "I managed to convince them to let me go to an art school for industrial design, really focusing on the industrial part. At first, my parents were so against me doing art. It made me the black sheep of my Kansas farmer family."

Castle left the audience with some inspiration ideas based on how his life and career came to be.

"What I studied in school, industrial design, was a random activity. The teaching job I got in Rochester was a random activity, and when I got to Rochester I expected to be a sculptor but the fact that I'm a furniture maker instead is also a random activity," he said. "I could go on and on ... these are things that happen in all of our lives, and I think the important thing is what we do about it."

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