

Famed designer Wendell Castle exhibits at Kentucky Museum of Art and Craft



Wendell Castle [American, b.1932], *Angel Heart*, 2010. Bleached Mahogany, 29 1/2 x 37 1/4 x 67 1/2 inches. Unique.

LOUISVILLE, KY.- The Kentucky Museum of Art and Craft celebrates the master American craftsman Wendell Castle during his 80th year with an exhibition curated by KMAC Associate Curator Joey Yates entitled, *Wendell Castle: Forms within Forms - The 21st Century*. In observance of this important year KMAC joins a roster of concurrent exhibitions opening at galleries and museums in New York and Connecticut. Situated at the intersection of fine art and furniture design, Castle has been a vital figure in the design world for over five decades. His distinct forms and processes have been reinvigorated in recent years with new iconic works in wood, concrete, fiberglass, and stainless steel. Studying industrial design in the

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mid-50's, during the era that produced the modern classic masters George Nelson and Charles and Ray Eames, Castle set about a career that pushed furniture further into the realm of art than any designer had before. He found uncharted territory, transforming modern art sensibilities into functional objects of fantasy and desire. To view Castle's work is to witness an erasure of the lines between art, craft and design. This exhibition explores Castle's recent advances in sculptural furniture and demonstrate his relevance in a field populated by few artists.

Castle's recent woodwork employs stack-lamination, a construction technique he first used in the early 1960's. Rejecting the construction standards of most furniture designers from that that time, Castle instead borrowed a 19th century sculptural technique used for making duck decoys. Castle takes blocks of wood from oak, walnut, mahogany, and more recently yellowheart, bonds the pieces together and then molds them into the biomorphic shapes he has become most known for.

Wendell Castle: Forms with Forms-The 21st Century focuses on Castle's newer works drawing connections between previous forms and how the artist has been influenced by his own work. Castle has frequently found inspiration in the polish and design of classic cars. From the urethane paint to the musculature design of the body, the automobile has remained a potent source from which to draw ideas for his one of a-kind furniture pieces. From the mechanic to the organic, his forms often reference nature or biomorphic shapes that almost seem to grow directly from the gallery floor.

Since 1856 Steinway and Sons have partnered with various artisans to produce a unique line of Art Case pianos. Wendell Castle's Caligari piano from 1990 belongs to a series of works that were inspired by Herman Warm's set designs for the classic 1920 horror film *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*. The sharp angular forms and abrupt corners that cover this Model L Grand Steinway Piano are also reminiscent of German Abstract Expressionist painting. The Dr. Caligari series is one of Castle's most well known experiments in combining form and surface decoration. The Dr. Caligari clock from 1984 and the Dr. Caligari Desk and Chair from 1986 are a few of the other pieces from this suite.

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Wendell Castle was born in Emporia, Kansas on November 6, 1932. He attended the University of Kansas receiving his BFA in Industrial Design in 1958 and a MFA in Sculpture in 1961. After moving to Rochester, New York, in 1962 to teach at the Rochester Institute of Technology's School for American Craftsmen as an associate professor of furniture design he began developing special techniques for molding organic forms from stack-laminated wood. In the late 1960s he established his studio in Scottsville, New York where his initial experiments in molded plastic surprised craft and design audiences. His works from the 1960's in both wood and fiberglass have gone on to become renowned pieces in the art-furniture movement.

Castle's numerous awards include a 1994 Visionaries of the American Craft Movement award sponsored by the American Craft Museum and a 1997 Gold Medal from the American Craft Council. In 2007, he received the Modernism Lifetime Achievement Award from the Brooklyn Museum. He has received grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation, among others. His work is included in many museum collections, including The Museum of Modern Art, New York; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Museum of Arts and Design, New York; the Brooklyn Museum, New York; the Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC; The Art Institute of Chicago; the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; and the Detroit Art Institute.

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