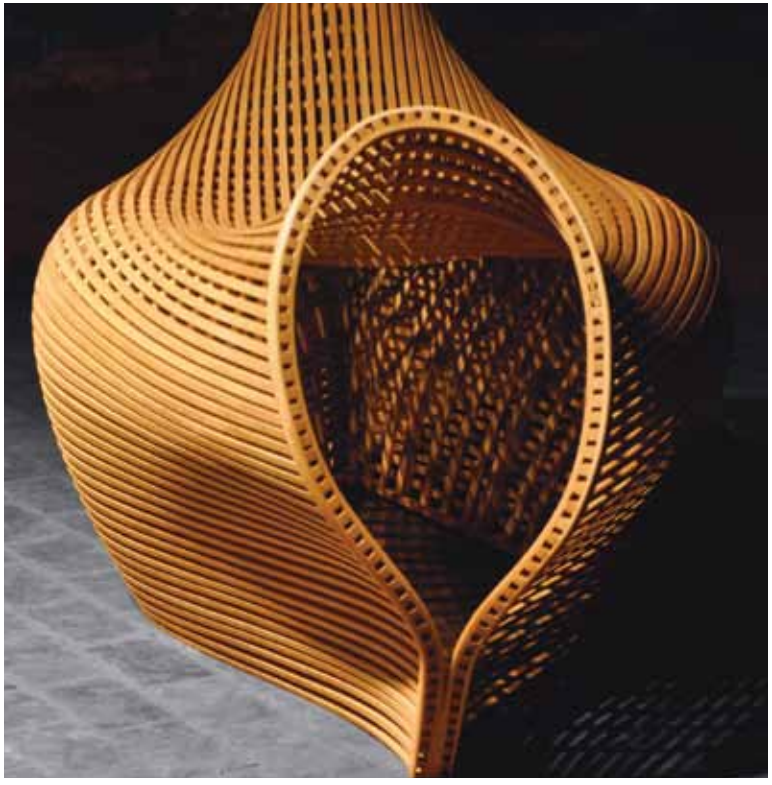
TORQUED & TWISTED:
BENTWOOD TODAY



AN EXHIBITION ORGANIZED BY THE CENTER FOR CRAFT, CREATIVITY & DESIGN

EXHIBITION
Dates & Locations

February 7–June 29, 2012
THE CENTER FOR CRAFT, CREATIVITY & DESIGN
1181 Broyles Road
Hendersonville, NC 28791
www.craftcreativitydesign.org

August 30–October 14, 2012
701 CENTER FOR CONTEMPORARY ART
701 Whaley Street
Columbia, SC 29201
www.701cca.org

October 29–December 7, 2012
STORRS GALLERY
College of Arts + Architecture
University of North Carolina, Charlotte
9201 University City Blvd
Charlotte, NC 28223
www.coaa.uncc.edu/Performances-exhibitions/Storrs-gallery

January 14–March 22, 2013
WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY FINE ART MUSEUM
199 Centennial Drive
Cullowhee, NC 28723
www.wcu.edu/museum

April 13–June 16, 2013
LEIGH YAWKEY WOODSON ART MUSEUM
700 North Twelfth Street
Wausau, WI 54403
www.lywam.org

This catalogue is published in conjunction with the exhibition *Torqued & Twisted: Bentwood Today*, organized by The Center for Craft, Creativity & Design, a center of UNC Asheville.

Alternative formats of this publication are available upon request. 

This exhibition was funded in part by a Grassroots Roots Grant from the North Carolina Arts Council, a division of the Department of Cultural Resources, with funding from the National Endowment for the Arts, administered by the Arts Council of Henderson County.

The content of this publication, developed with funding from the state of North Carolina, does not necessarily represent the policy of the state of North Carolina. You should not assume endorsement by the state government.

COVER
Matthias Pliessnig
Pinch, 2012
steam bent white oak
55 x 28 x 24”

TORQUED & TWISTED: BENTWOOD TODAY

Co-Curators

Katie Lee

Tom Loeser

Artists

Michael Cooper

Frank Gehry

Jeremy Holmes

Mike Jarvi

Yuri Kobayashi

Don Miller

Clifton Monteith

Matthias Pliessnig

Michael Thonet

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AN EXHIBITION ORGANIZED BY THE CENTER FOR CRAFT, CREATIVITY & DESIGN

Foreword

The Center for Craft, Creativity & Design was founded with a broad vision of craft, creativity, and design as interrelated components applied through education, industry and commerce. Since 1998, we have forged a path to ensure that craft has an equal place in both cultural and educational institutions. We are proud to be among those who perpetuate craft in a multitude of ways.

Torqued & Twisted: Bentwood Today follows in a list of significant exhibitions that investigate both the materials and processes used in craft. In a world dominated by pixels and digital reproductions, it is exceptional to be allowed space to interact with the original objects and to contemplate them with a well-informed historical and contextual reference. I am grateful to Katie Lee, Assistant Director, whose curatorial vision accommodates all viewers. This approach has allowed us to introduce craft to broader audiences in an inviting way.

Our appreciation goes to Tom Loeser who partnered with Katie Lee to curate this exhibition. Loeser is Professor and Chair at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and possesses expertise in wood and furniture. His intimate knowledge of the material provided a rare opportunity to present and interpret the objects. This exhibition would not have been possible without him. We also wish to recognize the artists whose dedication, practice, and creativity are so gracefully molded and captured within the objects.

We also are sincerely grateful to our funding supporters—the Board of Directors of The Center for Craft, Creativity & Design and the University of North Carolina Asheville, as well as a Grassroots Roots Grant from the North Carolina Arts Council. And to you—the viewer. This effort would not be possible without your time and appreciation.

Stephanie Moore, Executive Director
The Center for Craft, Creativity & Design

Pushing the Grain by Katie Lee

As a curator, I am interested in creating exhibitions that engage a wide audience—one that appeals to "non-gallery goers" as well as those not interested in examining art presented in a formal setting. What might catch a viewer's attention? What will make an impact if a viewer glances through a window? How do you encourage a viewer to cross over that physical and metaphorical threshold into the gallery? To present an exhibition that is equally as engaging to the scholar as it is to a person who has rarely, if ever, entered a gallery—that is my goal. One might assume that every exhibition should have the intent to draw a varied audience, but while all exhibitions have the potential to engage a diverse viewership, many exhibitions do not succeed in attracting a wide range of attendees. By focusing on a unique and historically important technique such as bending wood, this exhibition promises a broad appeal.

Most of us have seen bentwood incorporated into a piece of furniture, yet, like many things in our material world, we do not consider how it is made. Without understanding the process of how something is made, we cannot fully appreciate craft. Since the industrial revolution, the bentwood technique became popularized as a result of one man's efforts, Michael Thonet. Thonet experimented with bending wood specifically for the sake of increasing the industrial production of both aesthetically appealing and structurally sound chairs. This exhibition considers why studio craft artists and furniture makers continue to engage with this process today, yielding one-of-a-kind works of extraordinary craftsmanship, the antithesis of Thonet's purpose behind developing the bentwood technique.

Torqued & Twisted: Bentwood Today highlights the various ways in which the sculptors, furniture makers, and designers selected for this exhibition from throughout the United States push the material of wood to achieve very different outcomes. To connect with a certain material on such a deep level in a world filled with many material choices provides these craft artists with a sense of agency. That is to say that they carefully consider their material and process choices in order to carry out actions that provide meaning to their lives and to others. And while these objects vary widely, there is continuity in how these objects embody a notion of engagement with the material and the creative process to challenge our ideas about what is possible with wood. As a result, these objects remove us from the speed of time to which we are accustomed in our daily lives, slowing us down to consider the methodical process that is required to execute such technically challenging works of art.

In addition to highlighting a particular technique, this exhibition elicits two important aspects of contemporary craft: having a self-imposed limitation of working with a particular material or materials and a deep engagement in the actual process of making. The focus of craft is more than just a concept or an end product; the importance of craft lies in the process of making.

It is evident in each of these works that there is an obsession with process and a tacit understanding of material that cannot be replicated easily. Along with their distinguishing characteristics, the works in this exhibition highlight many of the attributes that describe the broad field of contemporary craft in the United States—craft as fine art, craft as design, craft as decorative art, and craft as produced from one of five traditional materials, wood.

The Center for Craft, Creativity & Design is interested in supporting exemplars in their respective fields, at any stage in their career. This exhibition is no different, selecting both emerging and well-established sculptors and furniture makers who are mastering, honing, challenging, and pushing the wood arts in a variety of directions. The contemporary works are exhibited alongside historical pieces to show a viewer how this technique has evolved over time. This is not intended to be a survey exhibition, but instead, an intimate selection of work that reflects some of the most ambitious explorations of bending wood today.

Katie Lee, Assistant Director
The Center for Craft, Creativity & Design

Memoria Lignum (memory of wood) by Tom Loeser

The makers in this exhibition are working their magic on a material that still very much carries the initial and inherent characteristics and qualities of the tree all the way through the making process.

I have a theory that I've been carrying around for a few years, and thinking about and testing out with just a few people. I'll go public with it here and find out how it stands up to larger scrutiny. The theory is this: of the primary materials used for object making, wood (along with stone and perhaps some of the natural fibers like wool) remains the least "altered" and closest to its natural state as it is transformed from raw material to finished object. This means that the makers in this exhibition are working their magic on a material that still very much carries the initial and inherent characteristics and qualities of the tree all the way through the making process.

Workable forms of wood are extracted from the tree using various subtractive techniques that generally produce boards. The individual parts are then fashioned from those boards also primarily using subtractive techniques. Most often, joinery enters the picture at this point and the actual object is constructed with additive processes that produce the finished structure. Throughout this process the wood generally is not alloyed, blended, fired, mixed, melted, pulped, or burned. Much wood is subject to kiln drying when it is in board form, but this is low-level heat that is used to hasten the lowering of the moisture content in the wood and speed the process of getting the wood to market. It does not alter the material in any fundamental way. However, given the subject matter of this exhibition it is interesting to note that wood that has never been in a kiln (i.e. air-dried or green wood) is far superior for bending.

What about other materials? Of course there are some ceramicists who make a point of gathering their own clay right from a natural vein and working it directly into objects, but this is the exception. Most clay is mixed up from a recipe that calls for various specialized clays, each contributng to the characteristics the artist/maker desires. Later in the production process, most clay objects are fired to a high temperature in a kiln in a process that fundamentally transforms the clay from its original state. Glass also is blended from recipes and subjected to massive amounts of heat. This renders the material workable for the artist, but it is very distinct from any natural forms of glass other than those amazing fulgurites, which form when lightening hits the earth and instantly turns certain types of sand into glass. Metals used in sculpture and metalsmithing are mostly various alloys developed to provide greater strength or other desirable working qualities. Even metals that can be worked in their pure form, like silver and gold, are not generally found as large solids that can be directly worked. The metals are mined and refined with solvents and heat, transforming the material from its natural state. The vast

majority of painters also are not using paint that can be found ready to use in a natural state. Paint is blended from a variety of materials with significant chemistry involved.

Why is this discussion of the straightforward unalloyed qualities of wood relevant to this exhibition of bentwood objects? It is relevant because it sets a context and provides a filter and a framework for visual analysis of the work, and it goes some way towards explaining the enduring fascination in the woodworking field with exploring bending techniques. It is also important because in this exhibition we are looking at the way in which nine very skilled object makers master the natural qualities of wood and make wood work in their favor even as they are pushing the material to its absolute limits. None of this work would be possible if the makers did not understand and exploit the inherent abilities of wood that allow it to become flexible and bend under certain circumstances.

Wood bending typically is accomplished through one of three approaches: steaming, laminating or greenwood bending. Steaming requires the application of heat and moisture to allow the wood fibers to bend and slide against each other. The bent section is then clamped to a form and allowed to cool and dry into a new configuration. Outside of the furniture field, steaming techniques also developed within the boatbuilding trade. While the planking that runs from bow to stern can usually take the gentler lengthwise curves without steaming, the ribs that run across the narrow dimension of the boat need more extreme curves and usually are steamed and then bent to a form. Laminating involves using layers of wood cut thin enough to become flexible. The flexible strips are clamped against a form with adhesive between each layer until the adhesive cures, locking the laminations into the new configuration. Greenwood bending uses freshly cut smaller diameter saplings, often willow, which are inherently flexible due to the high moisture content in the freshly cut wood. Small diameter green wood, especially willow, can be bent by hand and then held in place within a structure until it dries and holds the new curved form.

It also is possible to generate curved wood forms by working subtractively from a larger piece of wood and sawing or carving out a bent shape. This approach works best for gentler curves. It has the disadvantage of being less strong as the grain cuts across the form instead of following the form. This approach also can be very wasteful as large quantities of the initial material are discarded. Reliefs and paintings from Egyptian tombs dating to as early as 2800 B.C. show bentwood forms on furniture, but there is little known about the techniques used. There is an Egyptian three-legged stool in the British Museum dated 1567-1320 B.C. that has heavily curved legs and shows the grain of the wood following the curve. In this case, either the maker had developed a bending technique or found wood that had grown naturally into the appropriate curve. One other historical precedent is the Greek klismos chair, with its sharply curved legs. While none of these chairs have survived, historians hypothesize that the Greeks also knew how to bend wood.

In the European furniture tradition bentwood forms show up in the Windsor chair design. Just after 1800 the American Samuel Gragg began to market his bent ash and hickory side chair using a very modern looking evolution of a Windsor chair. Gragg's design includes a spectacular steam-bent piece that begins at the crest rail, runs all the way through the seat and then becomes the front leg. It is a strikingly modern design that might easily find its way onto the trendiest design blogs if it was produced today.

Possibly the most transformative historical figure in the western hemisphere to popularize the technique of bending wood is Michael Thonet. He established his own workshop in Germany and then in Austria starting in 1819. Over the following decades he developed a range of sophisticated laminating and steam-

Ultimately, each of these artists demonstrate a profound understanding of wood from its beginnings as a tree to its finished form in these works. These makers know how to push the limits of what it can do.

bending techniques that are considered the first successful use of wood bending in a high-volume, mass production factory setting.

In 1989, architect Frank Gehry became interested in the idea of designing chairs that are inspired from the weave structures used in baskets. In both his chairs and his architecture he demonstrates an ability to defy post and lintel standards for design and instead incorporate the structural supports into the actual design in a non-linear fashion. One of his most well known buildings, the titanium-clad Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain reflects this approach. For Knoll, the company that supported the design and technical development of the Gehry chairs, the bentwood production required sophisticated tooling and techniques that pushed the limits of their production systems

The techniques used by the contemporary furniture makers in this exhibition both borrow from and build upon these historical traditions. Clifton Monteith offers remarkable examples of willow or "twig" bending. The work of Matthias Pliessnig draws from the rib and plank boatbuilding approach yet it builds upon the historical connection through its references to contemporary wire-frame digital modeling techniques. Mike Jarvi unfolds his furniture from within the plank, in a brilliant almost origami-like motion, for which it is hard to find a precedent. Michael Cooper draws from and builds upon lamination techniques used by Michael Thonet in his industrially produced chairs.

As you look at the work in this exhibition, it might be rewarding to trace the material back to its "pre-bent" state. How did it exist in the tree, and how did the maker manipulate it to achieve its current state? In some cases this is relatively straightforward detective work. For example, in Clifton Monteith's "Carleton Chair" we can easily recognize the material and its source. It still has bark on it, and we recognize it as a twig. It is transformed only through the elegant bends applied by Monteith's skillful hands and sophisticated aesthetic.

In the case of Mike Jarvi's "One Piece Table" things get a lot more complicated. We can again see how the bent form came from a single large slab of wood as all the parts of the original slab are still there and still connected to each other. We can see how Jarvi pulls the object from within the plank. Yet, despite the fact that we can see how it started and how it finished, this object provokes a sense of disbelief. Even those without extensive woodworking experience have an intuitive understanding of how wood acts and how wood structures are usually put together. This particular structure defies those

expectations, introducing an element of the magical. Is there a trick or a hidden technique? Certainly not, what you see is what you get. It is a masterwork of material manipulation.

Borrowing from boatbuilding techniques, Matthias Pliessnig has developed a unique system of construction that uses "stations" that define what the form looks like at a series of points along the intended structure. Lengthwise pieces are then steamed, bent, and clamped to the stations. These lengthwise strips fill in the gaps between the stations and "draw" the details of the form with a stunning line-like quality. Pliessnig has posted a stop animation video of the construction process for a recently made piece, which provides a fantastic sense of his studio process. It can be seen at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5OZY6uu41V0.

Although at first glance the complexity of Michael Cooper's laminated constructions seems overwhelming, upon closer examination they are not that much harder to retrace back to the source. Especially with the contrasting color laminations that reflect the use of mixed wood species, we can easily see individual layers and deconstruct how Cooper engineered and fabricated each part. The technical skill required for the shaping of the individual parts and the intricate qualities of the structures is breathtaking.

For Yuri Kobayashi's piece, "Courage", she thins down the wooden component parts until they function like a basket making material. "Courage" transcends any heavy qualities of the material and transforms wood into a threadlike delicate line. Indeed, the finished object appears almost woven and has an ethereal, lighter-than-air quality.

Jeremy Holmes also emphasizes the line-like qualities of wood, soaking very thin planks of wood and then shaping them, resulting in playful yet eloquent "scribbles" in space. Wood becomes especially rubbery and malleable in Holmes' hands as he makes the natural rigidity of the material melt away. While at first the viewer is intoxicated by the virtuosity of the wood forms, eventually our awareness shifts to the spaces in and around the sculpture. What is not part of the work becomes as important as what is.

At first glance Don Miller's work appears deceptively simple. The minimalist forms mostly do not incorporate extreme bends. Closer examination reveals layer upon layer of subtle detailing that builds on itself through carefully calibrated repetition giving the object a persuasive power. We can appreciate how each individual slat is painstakingly bent and tapered until it becomes an exquisite part. Then we move over to the next slat and it is equally superb yet significantly different from the one we were just examining. Most importantly, each marvelous part binds to its mates to generate a magically charged and coherent whole.

Ultimately, each of these artists demonstrate a profound understanding of wood from its beginnings as a tree to its finished form in these works. These makers know how to push the limits of what wood can do. They have each developed and refined their own repertoire of techniques and their own highly personal visual aesthetic, resulting in these extraordinary functional and sculptural works of art that are conceptually challenging and expand our understanding and expectations of wood as a malleable and elastic material.

Tom Loeser, Professor
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Michael Cooper

Sebastopol, California

Michael Jean Cooper was born in Richmond, California in 1943 and grew up in Lodi, California. He completed his B.A. in Commercial Art and his M.A. in Sculpture at San Jose State College before attending U.C. Berkeley where he completed his M.F.A. in Sculpture in 1969. Michael retired from Foothill-DeAnza College, Cupertino, California in 2004 after teaching as an Instructor of Art for 34 years.

During his professional career Cooper has been honored with numerous awards and fellowships including the Crafts Council of Australia Fellowship Grant (a year working in industry in Australia), the Rome Prize in Sculpture (a year at the American Academy in Rome) and a National Endowment for the Arts award. Michael has participated in multiple solo and group shows and is represented in various publications and private and public collections.

Michael lives in Sebastopol, California where he works daily in his studio adjacent to his home. He typically works in wood and metal or a combination of both. His most recent work is influenced by his interest in combining organic and geometric forms with kinetic elements.

A forty-year retrospective entitled *Michael Cooper: A Sculptural Odyssey*, currently is on display at the Fuller Craft Museum in Brockton, MA until May 2012. Thereafter, the exhibition will continue its tour of the U.S. and travel next to the San Francisco Museum of Craft & Design for the final showing.

Above:
detail *Big Bang Theory*

Opposite:
Big Bang Theory, 2007
various hardwoods, steel, aluminum
65 x 53 x 37”

"The sculpture/chair series continues my exploration of wood, aluminum and steel using various laminating, machining and welding techniques. I find that bent wood lamination, in a single plane or in a compound curve, has enormous potential in developing form, strength and design. The sculpture/chair that develops during this exploratory process of options is both mysterious and elusive for me, but it is powerful and seductive when it works."

Frank Gehry

Los Angeles, California

Frank Gehry is one of the most sought-after, internationally recognized and prolific architects and designers in the world today. His architecture defies categorization but has become an icon of architecture with such projects as the Vitra Design Museum in Germany, the Guggenheim Museum in Spain, and the Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles. In addition to designing over 30 existing buildings, Gehry has distinguished himself with a handful of furniture designs beginning in the 1970s with the Easy Edges furniture series.

After studying architecture at the University of Southern California and spending a year at the Harvard Graduate School of Design, Gehry established his own architecture office in 1962, in Los Angeles. The early 1990's brought the development of Gehry's sculptural Cross Check furniture series to Knoll International, a manufacturer and seller of furniture and textiles designed by many internationally reknowned designers.

The inspiration for Gehry's collection of bentwood tables and chairs came from wooden apple crates. Using "woven" strips of maple and requiring no additional structural support, Gehry's functional pieces are decorative as well as structurally sound.

Much of Gehry's work falls within the style of Deconstructivism, which often is referred to as post-structuralist in nature for its ability to go beyond current modalities of architectural design. In architecture, its application tends to depart from modernism in its criticism of following the vernacular. Because of this, unlike early modernist structures, Deconstructivist structures are not required to reflect specific social or universal ideas, such as speed or universality of form, and they do not reflect a belief that form follows function.

Above:
Cross Check Chair, 1991
Manufactured by Knoll, Inc.
maple veneer on plywood strips
34 x 28.5 x 25"
Collection of Knoll, Inc.

Opposite:
Power Play Chair, 1990
Manufactured by Knoll, Inc.
laminate maple
31 x 33 x 30"
Collection of Randy Shull and Hedy Fischer

"I've always been interested in furniture, probably because my dad had a little furniture company in Toronto for a while . . . All of the bentwood furniture to this point—Thonet's, Aalto's, Eames's—always had a heavy substructure and then webbing, or an intermediary structure for seating. The difference in my chairs is that the [support] structure and the seat are formed of the same lightweight slender wood strips, which serve both functions."

Excerpted from a taped conversation between Frank Gehry and David A. Hanks, Montreal, May 24, 1991. *Frank Gehry: New Bentwood Furniture Designs* catalogue, The Montreal Museum of Decorative Arts, pp. 42-43.

Jeremy Holmes

Ithaca, New York

Jeremy Holmes's site-specific bentwood installations bring attention to interior space. In filling voids of unused space, he works with the shapes of walls and ceilings and creates what he calls "abstract wood sculptures." His work emphasizes his preoccupation with materiality and reconstructing the viewer's relationship to objects, our environment, and the spaces in between.

Holmes studied at the State University of New York at New Paltz where he earned his BFA in sculpture in 2007. In 2008, he was the recipient of the Windgate Fellowship award from The Center for Craft, Creativity & Design, which enabled him to continue developing his work. Holmes continues to explore the process of creating sculptural and site specific installations using bent wood to engage the viewer through immersive abstract forms. He currently lives and works in Ithaca, New York.

Right:
Atmosphere #45, 2011
white ash with black dye, steel
30 x 10 x 12"

Opposite:
Untitled, 2011
white ash, steel
84 x 72 x 72"

“I construct abstract wood sculptures, which emphasize materiality and an engagement between the viewer, the site, and the work. I soak white ash in water as well as use the natural bend of the material with a free form bending method using tension and improvisation to form small and large sculptures. A scarf joint attaches the ends together, making endless ribbon sculptures that vary in length from 12 feet to a one quarter mile long.”

Mike Jarvi

Lake Bluff, Illinois

Mike Jarvi is known as a steam bender and as the inventor of the one-piece table and bench. Born in 1952 in the upper peninsula of Michigan, he worked as a residential framer and log cabin builder for many years. Mike's one-piece concept was conceived while working on the property of Crab Tree Farm, a complete working farm with a historical collection of decorative arts and crafts located on the shores of Lake Michigan. In 1998 the owner of Crab Tree recognized that Jarvi had a certain flair for woodwork and suggested a two-year course at Parnham, the John Makepiece School of Woodworking in Beaminster, England. Returning from this pivotal time, Jarvi set up Crabtree woodshop and Jarvi Furniture—a place where ideas seem to form in a friendly atmosphere, design is recognized as a team sport, and work continues in the "Spirit of Steam."

Above:
Folded Bench, 2011
black walnut
18 x 11 x 40"

Opposite:
Jarvi One Piece Table, 2011
white oak
18 x 11 x 36"

“Billowing steam pours out at 210 degrees Fahrenheit as the chamber pops open, the clock is ticking and every move has been rehearsed—there is no time to waste. Cooking for four hours and now there is only six minutes to twist it into its new shape. The jigs are ready and built to take the strain. Putting the fear of failure behind me, it has taken numerous attempts before achieving my goal to form a bench by bending one solid piece of wood. In the ‘Spirit of Steam,’ new ideas will continue to form as I challenge myself with the possibilities of this material.”

Yuri Kobayashi

Providence, Rhode Island

Yuri Kobayashi creates furniture and sculptures that engage in repetition as both a creative endeavor and a ritual, embracing change and emphasizing process. She was born and raised in Japan and received her BA in architecture design at Musashino Art University in Tokyo. While there, she began training in traditional Japanese woodworking and eventually moved to the U.S. to earn an MFA in woodworking and furniture design at San Diego State University. Kobayashi currently teaches within the Furniture Design Department at the Rhode Island School of Design and exhibits nationally. She earned a place in the Windgate Artist-in-Residency Program in Applied Design at SUNY Purchase College in 2010.

Kobayashi's work conveys a sense of identity, origin, and experience through conceptual manipulations of shape and form in wood using traditional techniques. She has cited this overlapping of conceptual thought and traditional technique as an attempt to reflect personal and social levels of consciousness. Through devoting her life and work to making objects, she has acknowledged the potential of craftwork to support and structure everyday life and establish a universal, constantly changing aesthetic based in the natural world.

Right:
Will, 2010
ash
132 x 25 x 22"

Opposite:
Courage, 2011
ash
20 x 11 x 108"

“My work is a reflection of my identity, experiences, and empathy. It is a response to my honest perspective on fragments of humanity and life. I strive to depict facets of human nature that we all possess and share in particular, growth and emotional entities that accompany us throughout our life. In my recent work, I have found it fascinating to manipulate one of the excellent properties in wood bending. It allows me to create work in intuitive manners.”

Don Miller

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Don Miller is a designer who works primarily with bentwood techniques in making functional, yet sculptural furniture. His current work focuses on spherical shapes created through subtle manipulations of oak. The objects retain traces of his roots in instrument design, with its balance and seeming simplicity along with functionality.

Miller has been teaching as a professor at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia within the Crafts Department since 2006, and prior to that, he taught as an adjunct professor of furniture design at Rhode Island School of Design. His work has been shown in numerous exhibitions nationally. In addition, Miller has received many awards and fellowships, including, most recently, the 2010 Niche Award for Teaching Excellence.

Miller earned his BA from the German University of Kansas in 1972 and later obtained additional instruction at the London College of Furniture in 1978, studying Musical Instrument Technology. After many years of focusing primarily on instruments, he returned to school and studied art at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, earning an MFA in 3D Art in 2003.

Above:
Penumbra, 2008
bleached white oak
30 x 8 x 16”

Opposite:
Comb 5, 2011
bleached white ash
10 x 12 x 38”

“Coaxing curvilinear form from wood requires a specific understanding of and empathy for a diverse body of simple materials. Processes involved are often non-linear, requiring extensive risk, problem solving and effort to attain seemingly simple results. I find this dense nexus of spontaneous experience, intuitive knowledge and invisible effort very rewarding.”

Clifton Monteith

Lake Ann, Michigan

Clifton Monteith has been pushing the boundaries of furniture design through bending willow, greenwood, and dried twigs for 24 years. Through his studies in Japan in the early 1990s, he developed a philosophy to making that relates to the ancient Shinto concept that a spirit resides in all things. Accordingly, his process follows that "consciousness is vested in our work and translates to the experience of others who participate with the work when it is done."

In 1994, Monteith studied in Japan under a Japan-U.S. Friendship Commission Foundation Fellowship. He again returned to Japan in 1999 on a Japan Foundation Fellowship to study traditional, natural Urushi lacquer.

"I work with both rigid and bendable woods, in their natural state, to generate the organic forms that evolve from the interaction of these two characteristics. Frameworks of natural rigid grown forms are worked against employing the bendable willow elements to develop structures and surfaces which I feel embody an organic nature that is both from, and in harmony with, these natural materials."

Above:
Looking Toward the Light, 2012
willow, aspen, urushi lacquer, kakishibu on silk
50 x 24 x 24"

Opposite:
Carlton Chair, 2010
willow aspen, gold leaf
74 x 34 x 41"

Matthias Pliessnig

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Matthias Pliessnig's fluid, skeletal furniture forms are made using traditional steam-bending techniques on oak. His interest specifically in bending wood first developed in 2006 after making a boat. A sculptor and woodworker, Pliessnig's training developed during his studies at Kansas City Art Institute, where he earned a BFA in sculpture; at Rhode Island School of Design, where he earned a BFA in furniture design; and at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where he completed an MFA in wood and art (2009). Human interaction with furniture intrigues Pliessnig and is reflected in his one-of-a-kind designs for benches. This functionality provides an additional consideration in the design process, one that is drastically different from the considerations involved in creating a sculpture.

Pliessnig has received national attention for his work and is recognized as one of the top artists/designers working with wood today. In 2008, he received a grant for his MFA project from the Joan Mitchell Foundation; in the same year, he was given the Best of the Year Award for lounge seating by *Interior Design Magazine*. In 2009, his work was purchased by the Museum of Art and Design's permanent collection, and he received a grant from the Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation. In 2010, he was awarded $50,000 from United States Artists, one of the most esteemed artist awards given today. Most recently, eight pieces of his work were included in the prestigious Renwick Craft Invitational. Pliessnig, one of four artists selected, demonstrates superior craftsmanship that combines historical technique with contemporary forms.

Above:
Thonet No. 18, 2012
stem bent white oak,
Thonet No. 18 cafe chair
42 x 22 x 27"

Opposite:
Pinch, 2012
steam bent white oak
55 x 28 x 24"

“I use steam-bending techniques to construct my work. The strips of wood are put inside of a tube filled with hot steam. Ten minutes later, a strip is taken out and bent into the desired shape within 30 seconds. After eight hours, the wood is back to the original strength.”

Michael Thonet

Vienna, Austria

With the development of the bentwood technique in furniture design, Michael Thonet laid the cornerstone of industrial production. He was born in 1796 in Boppard/Rhine, Germany, where he opened his own workshop in 1819. In 1842 Prince Metternich summoned him to Vienna. Together with his sons he founded the successful company Gebrüder Thonet in 1849 and, very quickly, it became globally successful and rapidly expanded. More than 865,000 bentwood chairs per year were produced in today's Czech Republic, Hungary, and Russia. Michael Thonet died in Vienna in 1871, and his sons took over the company.

During the 1930s, Gebrüder Thonet was committed to the construction and technology of tubular steel furniture and quickly became the largest manufacturer in the world. Although World War II represented a difficult period for the company—many plants in the eastern regions closed—the facility in Frankenberg (Germany), founded in 1889, became the corporate headquarters and production site and has continued in that role ever since. Thonet remains a family-owned business and is managed today by the 5th generation. The company manufactures bentwood and tubular steel classics as well as new models, which are developed in cooperation with architects and designers.

With the development of bentwood technique in furniture design, Michael Thonet laid the cornerstone of industrial production. Thonet is still a family-owned business and is managed today by the 5th generation. The company manufactures bentwood and tubular steel classics as well as new models, which are developed in cooperation with famous architects and designers.

Rocking Chair, Model No. 10
Designed by Michael Thonet, c. 1866
Manufactured by Gebruder Thonet, c. 1950s
beech, cane
41 x 20 x 43”

TORQUED & TWISTED: BENTWOOD TODAY

Exhibition Checklist

Michael Cooper
Big Bang Theory
2007
various hardwoods, steel, aluminum
65 x 53 x 37”

Frank Gehry
Cross Check Chair
1991
Manufactured by Knoll, Inc.
maple veneer on plywood strips
34 x 28.5 x 25”
Collection of Knoll, Inc.

Frank Gehry
Power Play Chair
1990
Manufactured by Knoll, Inc.
laminate maple
31 x 33 x 30”
Collection of Randy Shull and Hedy Fischer

Jeremy Holmes
Atmosphere #45
2011
white ash with black dye, steel
30 x 10 x 12”

Jeremy Holmes
Untitled
2011
white ash, steel
84 x 72 x 72”

Michael Jarvi
Jarvi One Piece Table
2011
white oak
18 x 11 x 36”

Michael Jarvi
Folded Bench
2011
black walnut
18 x 11 x 40”

Yuri Kobayashi
Courage
2011
ash
20 x 11 x 108”

Yuri Kobayashi
Will
2010
ash
132 x 25 x 22”

Don Miller
Comb 5
2011
bleached white oak
10 x 12 x 38”

Don Miller
Penumbra
2008
bleached white oak
30 x 8 x 16”

Don Miller
Cartesian Split 1, 2 & 3
2011
ash, glass
22 x 8 x 22”

Clifton Monteith
Carlton Chair
2010
willow, aspen, gold leaf
74 x 34 x 41”

Clifton Monteith
Looking Toward the Light
2011-12
willow, aspen, urushi lacquer, kakishibu on silk
50 x 24 x 24” (approximate)

Matthias Pliessnig
Pinch
2012
steam bent white oak
55 x 28 x 24”

Matthias Pliessnig
Thonet No. 18
2012
stem bent white oak,
Thonet No. 18 cafe chair
42 x 22 x 27”

Michael Thonet
Rocking Chair, Model No. 10
Designed by Michael Thonet, c. 1866
Manufactured by Gebruder Thonet, c. 1950s
beech, cane
41 x 20 x43”

THE CENTER FOR CRAFT, CREATIVITY & DESIGN

The Center for Craft, Creativity & Design, a center of the University of North Carolina Asheville, advances the understanding of craft by encouraging and supporting research, scholarship, and professional development.

The Center accomplishes its goals through programs that invite participation by artists, scholars, craft organizations, and universities, regionally and nationally.

PROJECTS AND GRANTS

Craft Research Fund

The Center awards over $95,000 annually for research and critical writing on U.S. craft through project awards to curators, academics, and scholars, as well as graduate research awards for thesis or dissertation research.

Windgate Fellowships

Each year, ten graduating seniors working in a craft medium or process are awarded a $15,000 Windgate Fellowship. More than 100 colleges and universities across the country are invited to nominate two applicants for the panel selection process.

Windgate Museum Internships

The Center partners with four museums each year to provide $5,000 internships for undergraduate or graduate students to work under the direction of curators or directors in the field of craft.

Think Tank

Each year the Center convenes national and international craft leaders in a two-day discussion to develop initiatives that will advance the understanding and practice of craft.

For more information, visit: www.craftcreativitydesign.org.

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