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THROUGH SEPTEMBER 8  
NATIONAL ACADEMY MUSEUM



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## Going Against the Grain: Interview with Sebastian Errazuriz

by *carol strickland* 03/28/13

The exhibition "Against the Grain: Wood in Contemporary Art, Craft and Design," at New York's Museum of Arts and Design (through Sept. 15), features almost 90 objects and installations, by 57 international artists and designers, that reveal new approaches to wood as a material. Among the artists are figures like Ai Weiwei, Ursula von Rydingsvard and Martin Puryear; designers with work on view include Ian Spencer and Caim Young from Yard Sale Project, and Joseph Walsh.



fall of 2014 at the Carnegie Museum of Art, in Pittsburgh.

Some of those included blur the artist-designer distinction. A prime example is Sebastian Errazuriz, who expands the concept of furniture, blending utility, expressionism and personal vision.

The 35-year-old, Chilean-born Errazuriz, who lives in New York, spoke with *A.i.A.* by phone this week about his work, which combines virtuoso craftsmanship with multilayered meanings. His first solo museum show will take place in the

**CAROL STRICKLAND** Could you talk about your spiky *Porcupine Cabinet* [2011] in "Against the Grain"?

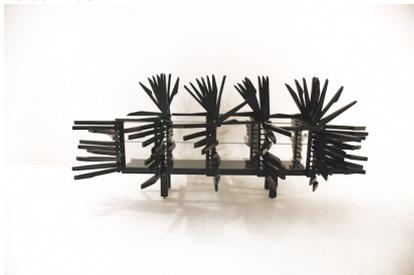
**SEBASTIAN ERRAZURIZ** The cabinet questions the typical paradigm of a cabinet having to be a box with a couple of doors in front. It was very important to me not to create just another pretty box. Why not have instead a flexible wall system that could be opened from anywhere you want? By doing that, we could capture people's imagination with a specific esthetic that is different and interesting but functionally based. At the same time it's a sculptural piece to protect things we hold dear.

**STRICKLAND** Is it important to your work to have a multiplicity of meanings and possibilities?

**ERRAZURIZ** Definitely. It doesn't make sense to simply do pretty chairs. You can add symbolic meaning or a psychological or sculptural element to create products with extra value. For people making anything today, that's our responsibility. We're so saturated with information and images and products, it's important to add value, which can come through craftsmanship. We should create high-quality objects we can use over time, that have sentimental appeal and that we can pass on to our kids.

**STRICKLAND** How important is function?

**ERRAZURIZ** You want to layer functions that satisfy our needs today. You need a practical function, a timeless and esthetic quality, and those extra psychological and sculptural functions to actually give a piece real meaning. If the work can also get us to see everyday things in a different way, then you're really hitting all the right notes and making something much more intelligent and integral. It doesn't make sense to aspire to less.



**STRICKLAND** What's the point of works like your *Boat Coffin* [2012] and *Autopsy Desk* [2009] that remind viewers of their own mortality?

**ERRAZURIZ** My generation and younger generations have very little understanding of death and our fragility. From the moment you're aware, you free yourself from issues that aren't important. You live life in a more passionate way. My message might seem a little morbid and dark but it's not because I have any fascination with death. I embrace life with as much joy and passion as possible. If someone can poke the newer generation now and then to do that, it's not bad.

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## DECODING IMAGES

**STRICKLAND** Do you see yourself as bridging the traditional divide between fine art and design?

**ERRAZURIZ** The distinction between art, design and fashion is a lot more blurry and murky now. The functionalities of one have become more logical to add to the other. To create art works that actually function is a no-no in the art world, but I like to create art works that demand and trigger discussion and to create designs that incorporate existential, psychological, political and social elements. Design and art should have the quality where you keep discovering new things.

**STRICKLAND** Do you deconstruct and subvert convention in order to surprise people and make them stop and deal with the contradictions?

**ERRAZURIZ** Yes, but at the same time I just can't get out of bed to do something that's been done before. Life is short, and I'm not going to make something merely because it's attractive. That's like marrying a girl who's gorgeous but who has nothing else. It doesn't do it for me. I want a smart chick. Why shouldn't I demand the same of the things I do? Especially for self-commissioned pieces, the work should reflect all our interests, our simplicity and our complexity.

PHOTO: Two views of *Porcupine Cabinet*, 2011, lacquered wood, steel, glass. Courtesy of the artist, Cristina Grajales Gallery, NY



[Meredyth Sparks, Untitled, 2010](#)

Mixed Media. Courtesy Elizabeth Dee Gallery, New York, and the artist.

*Extraction*, the most recent series of mixed media collages

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