





NO PATTERN, YET INSTANT RECOGNITION

SEBASTIAN ERRAZURIZ'S
PRACTICE SLIPS
FROM ART TO DESIGN
AND BACK AGAIN

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"I'M NOT TRYING to fool anyone," says Sebastian Errazuriz minutes after welcoming me to his studio in Sunset Park, Brooklyn. It's an interesting statement for someone who has "fool" splash-painted in bright white human-size letters on the black doors to his sprawling multiroom work space. But a tongue-in-cheek tone has come to be expected from the Chilean-born, London-bred multi-hyphenate. In this instance, he is gesturing to an item that greets visitors near the entrance: a painstakingly detailed facsimile, in *rauli* (Chilean redwood), of his 2009 *Boat Coffin* sculpture, an actual black resting chamber outfitted with a functional marine motor, intended to speed you out to sea for a Viking funeral.

The positioning of objects like this one, in a trendy, artist-filled loft building sandwiched between New York Harbor and the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway, is not an accident of storage space or happenstance. "You're showing a display of skills, like a karate master might do in some weird exhibition," says Errazuriz. "It allows a certain platform over which you can talk about other pieces."

Errazuriz needs this platform because critics seem to struggle with how exactly to define the 36-year-old artist-designer's practice. He cheekily defies classification. Hundreds of sketches fill a 20-foot-high, 30-foot-wide wall behind his desk. "If I have a new idea it goes up on the wall, and if, after six, eight months, I'm still seduced by it, we Google every single word related to it to make sure it hasn't been done before," says Errazuriz. "Then I start trying to distill it and figure out what's the best possible way to make it. Life is short. What's the point of making something that's been done before?"

Though this might be viewed as a calculating approach to artmaking, the range of ideas that make it off this wall is staggering. In the past few years Errazuriz has enlisted up to 12 woodworkers in his fully kitted-out shop, hammering around the clock for six weeks to make an articulating wardrobe, dubbed the Magistral cabinet, 2011, which is spiked with 80,000 wooden dowels. He's tapped custom restorers to rebuild a vintage Norton motorcycle to racing specs, only to fabricate the gas tank in glass, which displayed a taxidermied, rainbow-plumed bird. And if he's feeling inspired by a particular headline in the news, he'll respond with something like the *Occupy Chair*, which transforms from a protester's placard into a portable plastic seat. "I think art should have functionality," he says, be it a sculpture that goes 160 miles per hour or a subversive piece of plastic that carries the message of the 99 percenters into the homes of the 1 percent.

Sebastian
Errazuriz in his
well-stocked
Brooklyn studio.

Top: The Porcupine cabinet, 2010, in lacquered wood, steel, and glass, comes in an edition of 12 and is an extension of Errazuriz's investigation of the storage form. Below: The artist, at left, with the carved wood Metamorphosis shelf, a collaboration with the Horm Furniture Company that riffs on shapes of climbing ivy.



Errazuriz often compares his nimble practice to that of a professional mixed-martial-arts fighter. In other words, he aims to throw swift, efficient punches while shaving off everything extraneous. Rather than sticking to any one discipline or style or rebelling against any previous movement or generation's defining principles, he sees creators like himself as part of "a more honest group of new emerging artists who are stronger and better than the previous ones." For Errazuriz, seeking a signature style or premise is a missed opportunity in the digital era.

"I have no interest in seeing Richard Serra's new work because I know what it's going to look like," he says. "It becomes an exercise in the branding of an aesthetically constructed style that was initially of great virtue and a great contribution to its overall discipline, but after a while became completely dry," he explains. "If you really want to make people believe that all you love doing is folding giant pieces of metal, you're full of shit."

Casting aspersions on one of the most acclaimed living artists is a ballsy tactic for a young artist whose own name might raise quizzical eyebrows, even though his pieces have a lightning-strike quality that's nearly become its own Internet meme. Last year alone, Errazuriz designed the endlessly snapped *I Still Love* NYT-shirt—dyed blue up to the chest to depict a waterline—which raised nearly \$50,000 for Hurricane Sandy relief efforts. He was also tapped to create the piece that greeted visitors to the inaugural Collective Design Fair, a fan installation titled *Blow Me*. As that rarest of birds to show at both Design Miami and Art Basel Miami Beach in December, he drew raves at the design fair for his white canvas-like cabinets painted with phrases like "Buy For 10,000 Sell For 1,000,000," shown by

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New York's Cristina Grajales Gallery; at the art fair, the motorcycle with the glass gas tank rode out of Salon 94's booth for \$150,000. Outside the fairs, at Melissa Shoes's South Beach outpost, he debuted a collection of conceptual/functional stilettos dubbed *12 Shoes for 12 Lovers*, featuring mostly real photos and shockingly frank stories of his muses, spanning the spectrum from Gold Digger to Heartbreaker.

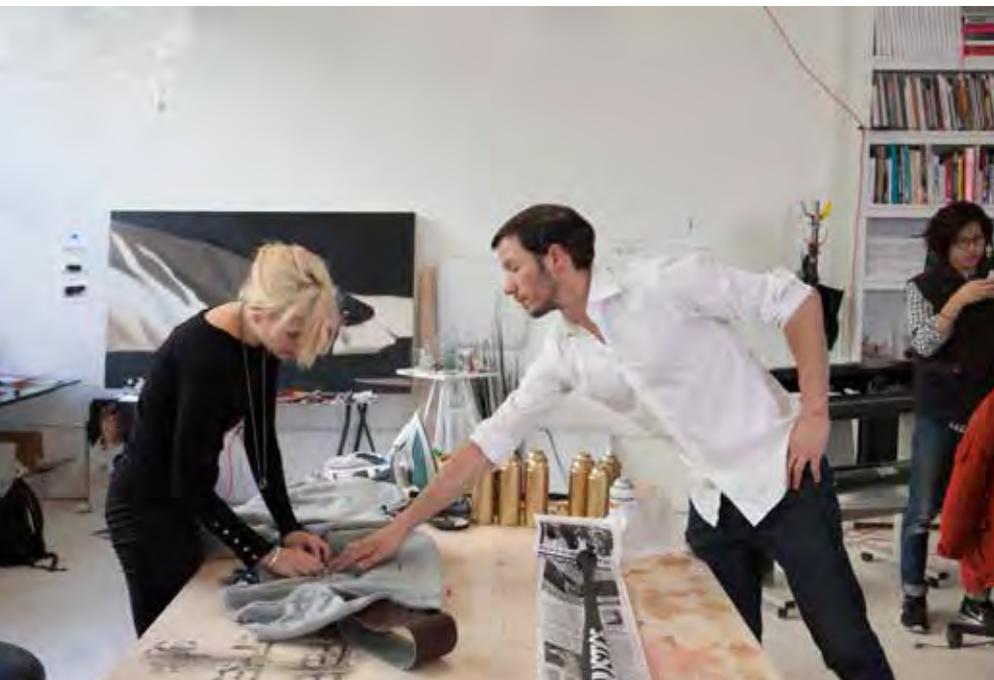
"I just work at a really fast pace," Errazuriz explains. He turns to his studio manager from behind his desk. "Shani, do you know how many projects we're working on right now?" "Forty," replies Shani, without hesitation.

In addition to that, he's prepping for two New York gallery exhibitions and assembling three dozen works for his first solo museum exhibition in the United States, at the Carnegie Museum of Art in Pittsburgh. All three open simultaneously this September.

"The appreciation has really been incredible. All this excitement is happening all around his work," says Grajales, who "fell in love" with it after seeing his articulating, wall-mounted *Piano Shelf*, made from pieces of wood resembling piano keys, in 2006. She's since sold five editions (the first to Ron Pizzuti) of Errazuriz's Porcupine cabinet, for \$75,000 apiece. "So far, everyone has held on to the pieces we've sold them because I think they feel he's going to be one of the great artists," Grajales adds.

In September, while Salon 94 exhibits more conceptual work, like an Errazuriz swing set with one regular seat and one wheelchair attached (*Life Swings Both Ways*), Grajales will do a show based on his cabinets and the simple conceit of boxes.





“He’s really drawn to the cabinet because it’s so basic,” says Carnegie Museum curator Rachel Delphia, who discovered Errazuriz three years ago through the *Magistral*. “He keeps pushing himself to say, ‘How many different ways can I come up with to make a cabinet that still surprises us?’ Every time I talk to him he has another idea, which is wonderful, considering how long cabinets have been around.” A section of the Carnegie exhibition will be devoted to cabinets, including *Kaleidoscope*, 2013, whose sleek modern exterior gives way to an interior lined with kaleidoscopic mirrors, and his newest piece, *Explosion*, 2013, which Delphia is purchasing for the permanent collection.

“It looks like a simple stack of wood, but they’re all runners like you’d have on drawers, so when you pull one they all pull out,” explains Errazuriz, tugging one piece that explodes the cabinet into space for nearly 10 feet in either direction. I snap a photo of the work in progress but he quickly warns me not to publish it, though he admits, “It really kills me not to be able to show this right now because I’m always making and showing, making and showing.”

Errazuriz is a publicist’s dream. This is a man who knows how to harness the power of Instagram. Take *Blow Me*. Like the Sandy T-shirt, it’s a “simple exercise that works,” according to Errazuriz. “I was basically being asked to do the monkey dance. You need to blow peoples’ minds away, literally and figuratively.” The piece consists of nine old-school electric fans, mounted on a wall and controlled by a floor pedal, with the titular phrase scrawled in pink neon across the front. “At the same time, I’m giving everyone on Instagram the possibility—almost like a trap for a mouse—of an easy photo that they will all share, and that I know will allow my piece to live longer than the exhibition,” he says. “A neon sign in pink is, to me, the biggest cliché of art fairs,” he adds. He chose his phrase “because as an artist, you can all go and fucking blow me. At the end of the day, I’ll do what you want, I’ll do the dance,

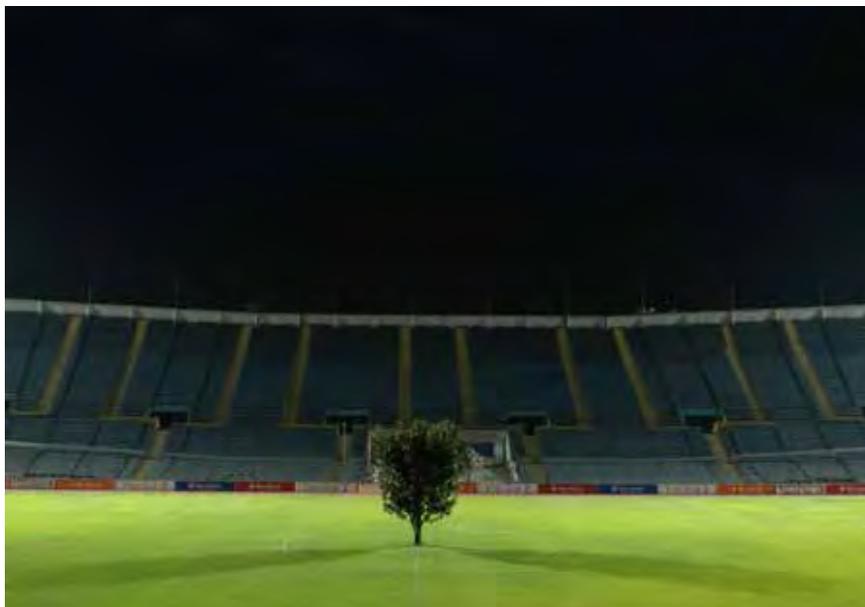


Clockwise from top left: Errazuriz directing an assistant on a piece for his show “Tough Love” at the Storefront for Art and Architecture; the *Magistral* cabinet, 2011, which features 80,000 carved wood spines; *Road Kill*, 2008, uses a crucifix strapped to a muscle car to skewer middle American hypocrisy and assumptions.

but I will maintain my integrity. I managed to distill all the necessary requirements. And then move on to the next piece.”

Sometimes his speed and alacrity drive him to the borderline between clever and crass. The most recent examples arrived on Valentine’s Day at the Storefront for Art and Architecture in New York, where a solo show called “Tough Love” features a series of works that speak to sociopolitical problems from racism to rape. This rapid-response approach is Errazuriz’s answer to the Serras of the world: an art that has the power to react, and perhaps to change things, in real time. One piece called *Evidence* features two framed sweatshirts—augmented with bullet holes and painted blood spatters—that invoke Trayvon Martin, the black teen shot by George Zimmerman in alleged self-defense. “It is the most beautiful and terrible fashion garment one could imagine to wear,” says Errazuriz. Elsewhere, *Rapist* features varsity jackets modified with the letter R on the front and “RAPIST” on the back. Errazuriz intends to contribute proceeds from the sale of such works to push for legislative reforms.

While the gestures seemed sincere, the tossed-off



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Clockwise from top left: *Occupy Chair: Too Big to Fail Is Too Big to Allow*, 2012, pops a seat out of a protest placard; *Boat Coffin*, 2009, features a working outboard motor to spirit the occupant to a watery grave; and *Memorial of a Concentration Camp*, 2006, for which the artist planted a magnolia tree in the middle of a stadium in Santiago, Chile, where political prisoners were once tortured and killed.

execution—iron-on letters on the jackets, for example—left them flat compared with other artists’ works tackling the same subjects. Jeanne Greenberg Rohatyn, owner of Salon 94, says, “It’s not the furniture-making and it’s not really the conceptual art practice, it’s the political side to his brain.”

Errazuriz elaborates: “I believe that artists are social communicators who should not solely create works that satisfy ourselves,” he says. “Art should invite society to remember and feel complex, painful realities that seem to escape our current capacity to understand and solve.”

IT IS A GOAL he has been working toward for some time. “I didn’t get to 18 and decide I wanted to do art; that’s what I’ve been raised to do all my life,” he says. “I don’t know where you could find someone that had a stronger set of requirements.” Errazuriz was raised in London until the age of 14 by a stern art professor father who made his son write his notecards and audit his classes. “I was 5 and I was at the National Gallery, and I was expected to critique a room filled with Turner’s paintings,” he recalls. He was asked to identify which of the paintings in the room was the first of the series and which was the last, where Turner started each painting

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and where he finished within the canvas, and where the artist’s brushstrokes were passionate and where they expressed doubt. “By the time I was 18, I could see my friends’ paintings and say, ‘Oh, you had such a hard time here.’”

Before graduating from New York University with a fine-art degree, Errazuriz launched his career by spending two years and \$40,000 devising an elaborate conceptual piece that involved transporting a cow onto the sodded rooftop of a Santiago skyscraper. A subsequent two-year project involved planting a tree in the middle of the pitch at Chile’s national soccer stadium, on the ground where General Augusto Pinochet once tortured political prisoners. His father couldn’t even watch as they planted the tree, going so far as to turn his back during the installation.

In Errazuriz’s recollection, his father offered little praise, fearing his son would settle. “If my father taught me to be methodical, obsessive, and competitive, my mother in turn taught me to rebel, to fight the system, to find things worth fighting for, to be honest with myself,” says Errazuriz. Even so, he admits, “My name is Juan Sebastian because of Bach, so in all of these projects I would always leave a little bit of funds to hire one of those street musicians to play Bach for [my father] at the opening.” He anticipates a reprise in Pittsburgh, where he’s planning a piece with an orchestra, among other surprises.

BEFORE I LEAVE the studio, Errazuriz walks me over to a door that leans against the wall across from the *Boat Coffin*. He altered it by installing two peepholes instead of one. “We’ve been closing one eye for centuries and it’s stupid,” he says. “Why not open the other one? There’s something really beautiful in being able to see something that has always been there and to tell people, hey, what if we put this like that? Have you ever thought of it like that? See how it changes things? Have you ever noticed we’ve been following rules that don’t make sense?” □