



MARIAWETTERGREN
GALERIE

AKIKO KUWAHATA & KEN WINTHER

IN PRAISE OF SHADOWS



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Exhibition at Galerie Maria Wettergren, Paris
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Photo credits:

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Shade, 2019 (detail)

INTRODUCTION

By Maria Wettergren

Galerie Maria Wettergren is pleased to present the exhibition, *In Praise of Shadows*, the first Akiko Kuwahata and Ken Winther exhibition in France. Partners in life and art, the Japanese and Danish designer/cabinetmaker couple creates delicate handmade objects, ranging from small sculptural bowls, dishes and lamps to sophisticated pieces of furniture. With wood as their chosen material, Kuwahata and Winther draw inspiration from traditional Japanese craft methods and Scandinavian design, which they combine in new ways through fluid lines, functionality and sensitive craftsmanship. Irresistibly tactile, their work is driven by a radical focus on sensuous qualities and the ambition of creating something that appeals as much to our sense of touch as it does to the eye.

With a title derived from Junichiro Tanizaki's acclaimed manifesto on Japanese aesthetics, *In Praise of Shadows*, the exhibition at Galerie Maria Wettergren focuses on the role of shadow, silence, rhythm and tactility in Kuwahata's and Winther's works. In *Facet* (2018), a petite multifaceted table in maple and glass, the shadow plays the leading part, taking on a slightly darker note with every new facet it encounters as it moves around the table, instilling vibrating life into the monochrome surface. The dialogue between light and shadow is equally central to *Breathe* (2016), a slender chest-of-drawers in maple wood in which the glass panels have slanted, engraved lines facing the carved stripes of the wooden drawers. When the drawers are pulled open, the sliding movement of the converging lines suddenly produces a flickering *moiré* effect, infusing the object with life, like a breath. The subtle *moiré* pattern also characterizes *Shade* (2019), a semi-transparent room divider in

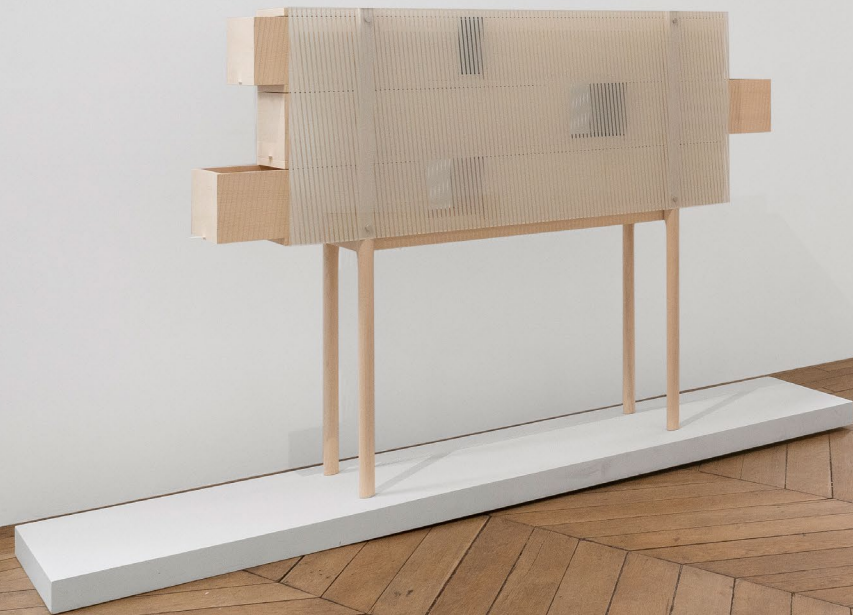
Oregon pine, which offers the spectator a fascinating ever-changing theatre of light and shadow. In the words of Junichiro Tanizaki: "*We find beauty not in the thing itself but in the patterns of shadows, the light and the darkness, that one thing against another creates... were it not for shadows, there would be no beauty.*"*

There is a lot of rhythm and playfulness in Kuwahata and Winther's work. Music seems to be an important source of inspiration, echoed in some of the work titles, such as *Facet* and *Kvartet* (Quartet), small tables based on rhythmic repetitions. Whereas other works are playing with materials and techniques from the textile field, such as the *Stitch* table and stool, made of millimeter thin maple wood delicately sewn together with Japanese cord, or *Fletverk*, a sculptural cushion made of woven beechwood.

With the technical precision of a surgeon, and a sensitive awareness of the inherent qualities of wood, Kuwahata and Winther create works which could be described as equilibristic sensual minimalism. Nothing is left to chance, everything is breathtakingly orchestrated: The grains of the wood, the choice of the tools, the rhythm of the form, the articulation of the joints – every choice is meaningful and plays an essential part in the final expression. It is design and craftsmanship at the highest level, expressing something extremely well-made and well-thought out, filled with tradition and contemporary relevance at the same time. And with a deep inner feeling for what the potential of wood and how it can be expressed. "*It is important to feel it...says Kuwahata... for me it's about being honest. What I'm doing comes from within.*"

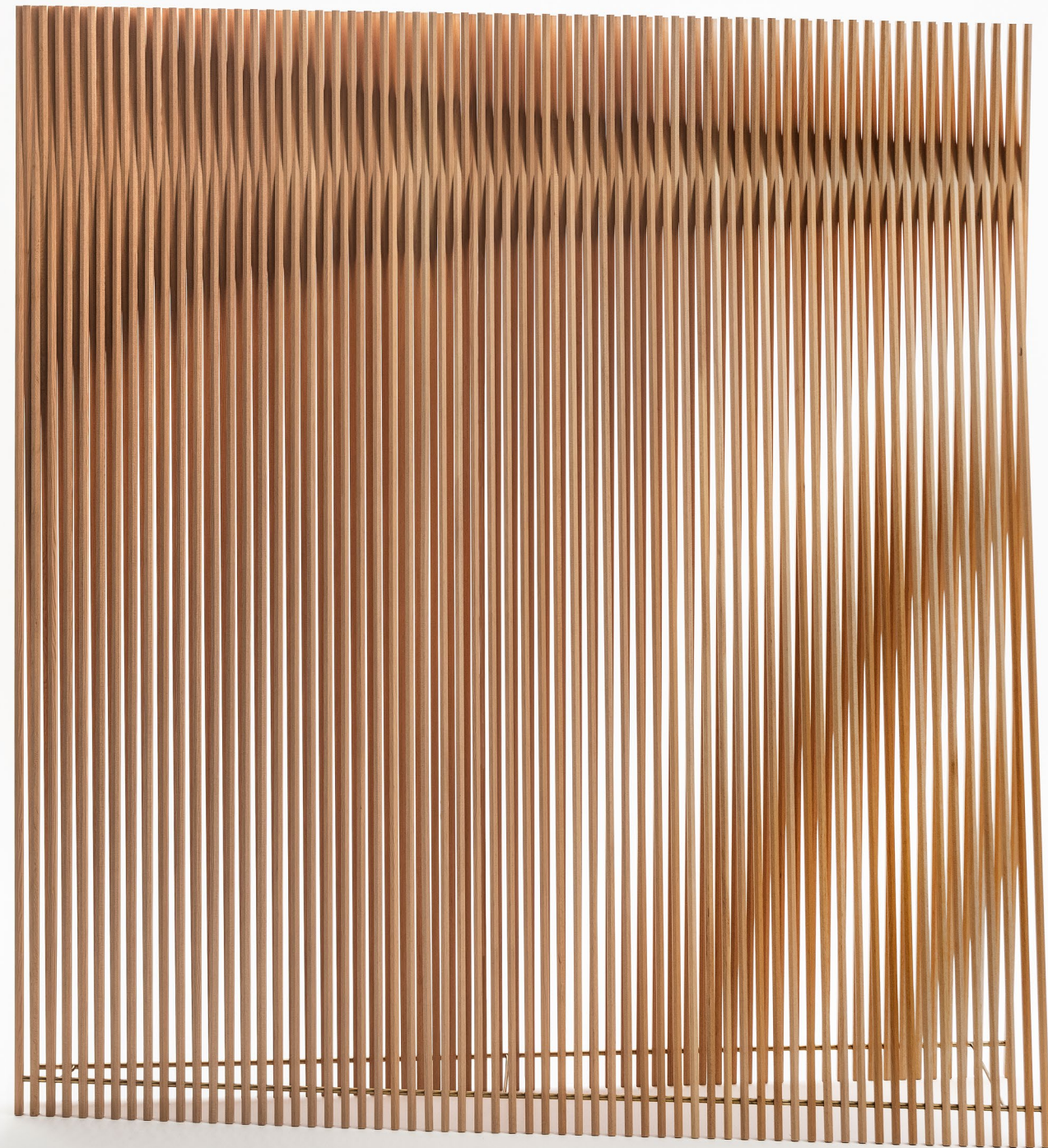


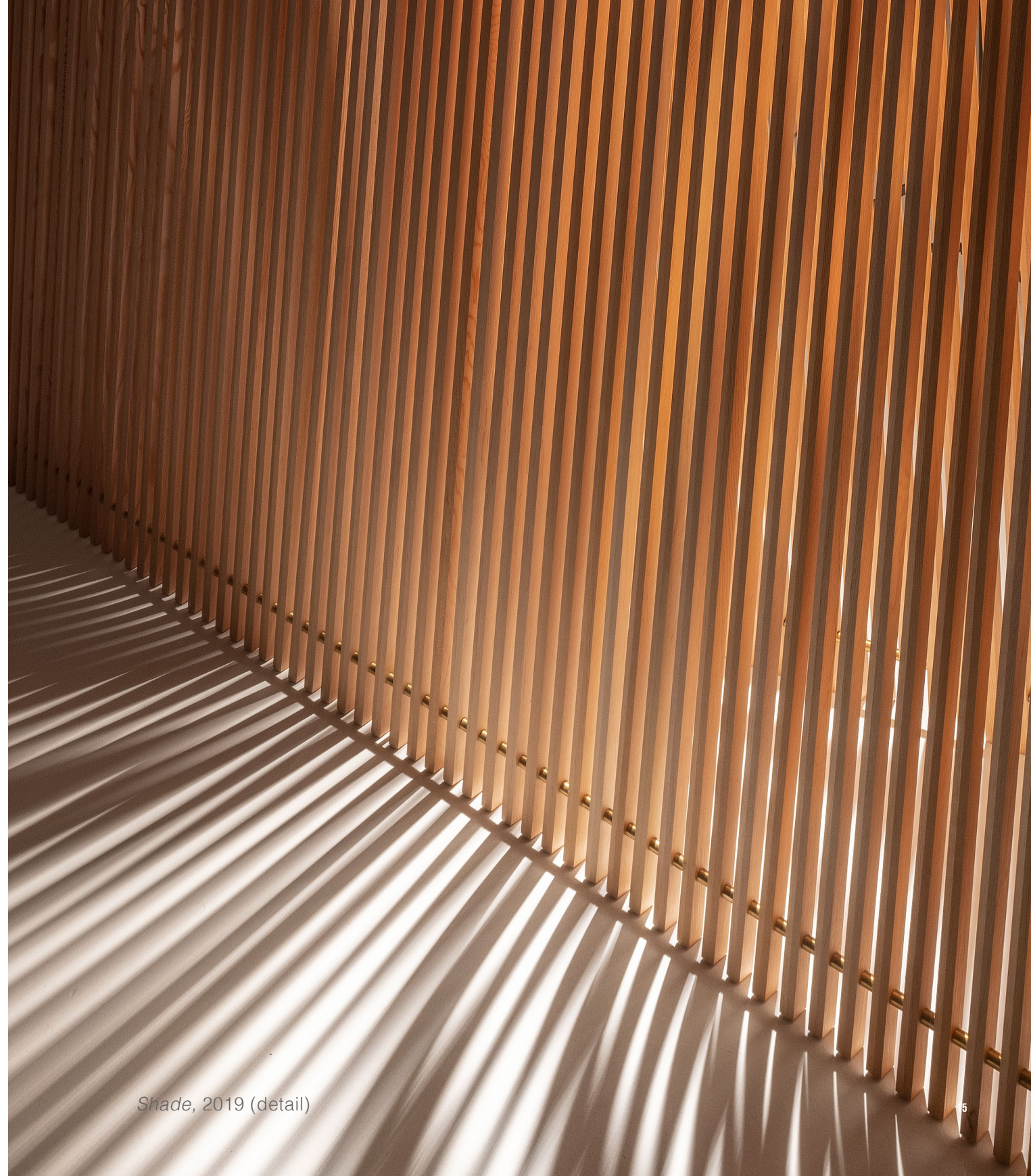
Akiko Kuwahata & Ken Winther
In Praise of Shadows



Shade, a sculptural room divider in Oregon pine, combines functionalist purity with a strong kinetic dimension. *Shade* occupies space like a sculpture, offering the eye a moiré effect created by the rhythmic play of the wooden battens, crossing each other in a flickering pattern. The wooden beams may recall the hammers of a piano and the musical theme appears to be a leitmotif in Kuwahata's and Winther's body of work. In this tactile, interdisciplinary piece, all the senses are invited to vibrate with it.

Shade, 2019
Oregon pine, brass
160 x 45 x 180 cm
Limited edition of 12





Shade, 2019 (detail)

If we study a single color closely, we discover the many color values it contains. A monochrome object exposed to light and shadow reveals an endless range of colors, as the light strikes each new facet from a different angle. This is what Kuwahata and Winther explore with the small, multifaceted table, *Facet*, designed for the 2018 Cabinetmakers' annual exhibition at the Thorvaldsen Museum in Copenhagen, Denmark.

Facet, 2018
Maple, glass
64 x 46 x 46 cm
Limited edition of 12





Exhibition view, Monochrom - SE-Design Exhibition, Copenhagen 2018







In *Facet*, the shadow takes on a slightly darker note with every new facet it encounters as it moves around the table. Just as the jeweler cuts a precious stone to reveal its brilliance, the gesture of the cabinetmaker here is to reveal the infinite nuances of the wood, worked in 44 plates assembled according to a subtle play of angle, in order to catch the light from a slightly new angle. The perfect oval form sublimates the void protected by the glass plate, baring a fine opening, suspended in space. Its design is characterized by an incredible combination of simplicity and sophistication.

Facet, 2018
Rosewood, glass
64 x 46 x 46 cm
Limited edition of 6

In the pure tradition of cabinets as they were used in Europe in the art of the courts of the aristocracy, particularly in the XVIIIth century, *Breathe* is an astonishing piece of furniture in maple wood with preciously ornamented glass panels and elegant proportions. When the drawers are pulled out, the patterns in the glass panel and the drawers interact to create a fascinating visual dance; as the stripes converge and pass each other, they produce a flickering *moiré* effect, that infuses the object with life, like a breath. This interactive dance reflects the creative process itself, where a multitude of internal and external sources come together and are transformed.

Breathe, 2016
Maple, glass
100 x 27,5 x 106 cm
Limited edition of 12









Akiko Kuwahata & Ken Winther
In Praise of Shadows



Inspired by Japanese interior design and textile art, *Fletverk* (Work of Weaving) is a sculptural wooden 'cushion' made from 12 woven ribbons of compressed beech wood. When steam bent, the compression process emphasizes the elasticity and softness of the wood. When dried, the wood retains its firm and final shape. The work of the craftsman here joins the work of the sculptor. The material sculpts the form, which in turn sculpts the void by housing the space.

Fletverk, 2004
Beech
60 x 60 x 24 cm
Limited edition of 12







In the early 19th century, the Danish author Friederike Brun hosted salons at the Sophienholm Manor, where poets and artists met in mutually enriching conversations. The small side table, *Kvartet*, made of steam bent ash and glass, is created in memory of this former art of living: A salon table with shelves to hold a glass of wine, some books, and a flower, inviting people to gather round and enjoy each other's company. Like the intellectual meetings, the interplay of the shelves brings out something new, unanticipated and fascinating. The individual shelves have a simple form, but new expressions and forms constantly emerge when one walks around the piece and sees their mutual interaction.

Kvartet, 2021
Ash, glass
47,5 x 47,5 x 83 cm
Limited edition of 12







In *Tram*, a coffee table made of natural and dyed veneer, the tabletop doubles as a tray. A handle curls through the hole in the tray, keeping it in place, while enabling the table to be carried around. The expression of the narrow table is inspired by the careful craftsmanship and detailing of old city trams as an example of beautiful industrial design, full of sleekness and modernity, with a *clin d'œil* to the various colors of the tram lines (blue, red, yellow, green). The aerodynamic design of *Tram*, with its emphasized curved forms and long horizontal lines, recalls the Streamline Moderne style of the 1930s.

Tram, 2015
Oak, dyed birch
80 x 26 x 53,5 cm
Limited edition of 12





Tram, 2015
Walnut, dyed birch
80 x 26 x 53,5 cm
Limited edition of 12







The sculptural *Koko* bench is characterized by an elegant aerodynamic form, recalling the wings of an airplane. 'Ko' means arch in Japanese, and thus *Koko* takes on the idea of a double arch, subtly expressed through the soft, double-curved sides of bench. The Oregon pine has a remarkable wood grain pattern, noticeable both by the eye and the hand, obtained by using the traditional Japanese surface treatment, *Uzukuri*; by pressing down the soft summer grain with a stiff straw brush, the hard winter grain stands out. Afterwards the surface is polished with a horsetail brush, giving the wood an unequalled level of finish, irresistible to touch.

Koko, 2007
Oregon pine
160 x 50 x 42 cm
Limited edition of 20



Koko, 2007 (detail)





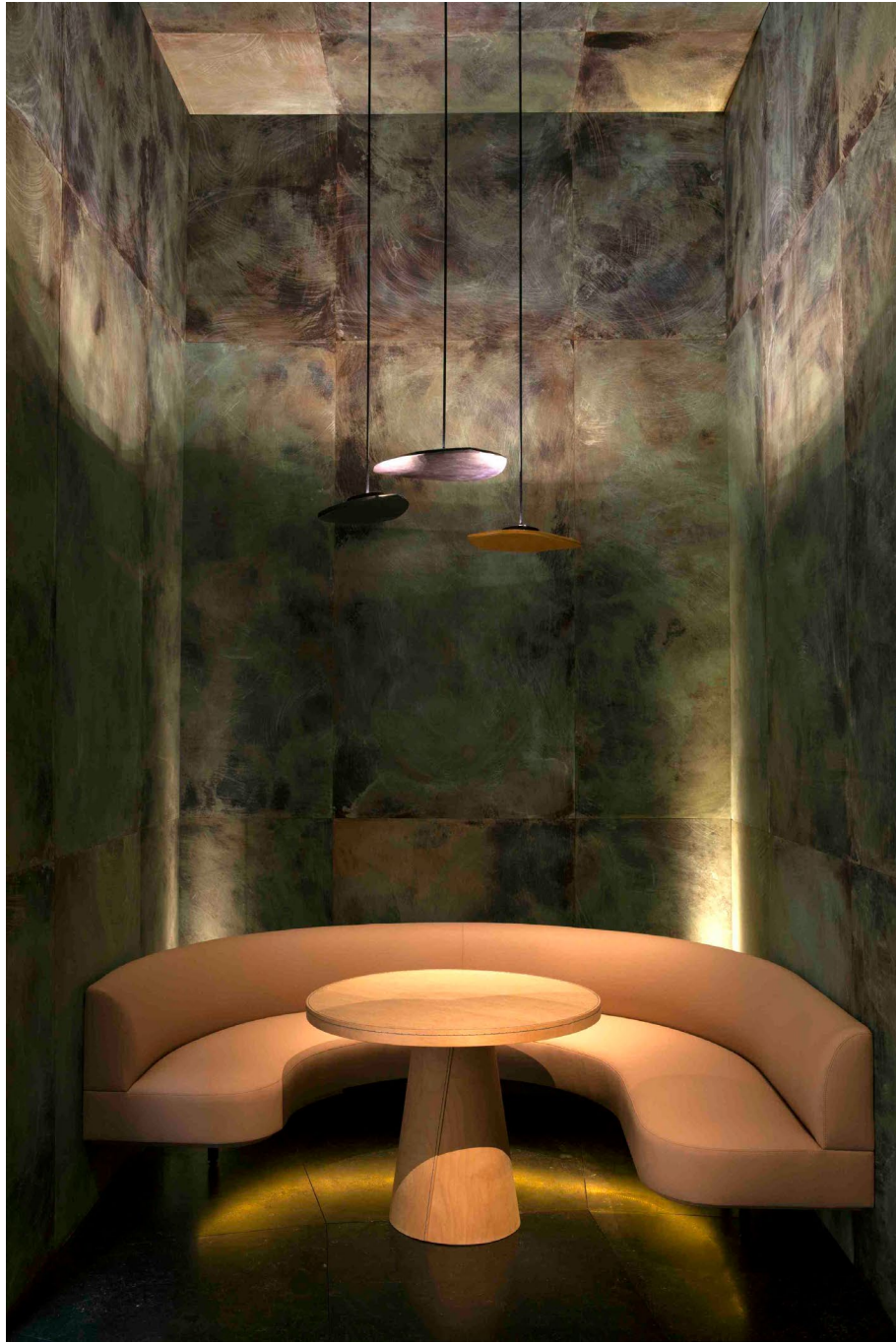


The *STITCH* table and stool are inspired by an old embroidery ring from Japan, made of delicate softwood, stitched together with cherry bark. With *STITCH*, Kuwahata and Winther have created a sculptural piece of furniture, characterized by the same functional perfection of form found in the ancient Japanese tradition. Both light and strong, *STITCH* is made of 4mm thin maple veneer, stitched with wax string and glued together. The poetic work underlines the various potentials of wood as a material and sparks admiration for the technique and innovating aesthetics.

STITCH, 2011
4mm maple, wax string
Table: Ø 90 x 70 cm
Stool: 39 x 29 x 42,5 cm
Limited edition of 20







70 *Stitch*, 2009 © Julien Oppenheim for Pierre Yovanovitch interior architect



Exhibition view, Galerie Maria Wettergren, Paris, 2023

Trapez, a small asymmetrical table in Kalmar pine and iron, presents an intriguing game of illusions, with its tabletop of confronting herringbone patterns, tricking the eye: indeed, the boards are perfectly parallel, despite their apparent trapeze shape. The table has an unusual expression of a know-how excellence combined with extreme fantasy. The fantasy of the circus with its entertainment of acrobats, magicians and jugglers ... The table has an acrobat's balancing stance. Freedom of form, freedom of movement, freedom of line.

Trapez, 2020
Kalmar pine, iron
70 x 36 x 47 cm
Limited edition of 12





74 Trapez, 2020



Trapez, 2020 (detail)

Akiko Kuwahata & Ken Winther
In Praise of Shadows







Trælys (Wood Lights) are made of lathe-turned birch wood, the most emblematic wood of Northern Europe, chosen for its unique expression. Patiently sculpted until finding the perfect shape, the pendants are minimal in form but dense in material expression. When the light is on, it poetically underlines the variations in the wood, making it glow with a mysterious red hue that seems to reveal the soul of the birch.

Trælys, 2019
Birch
Ø 19 x 16,5 cm
Unique piece

Trælys, 2019
Birch
Ø 24 x 16,5 cm
Unique piece



Trælys, 2019
Birch
Ø 18 x 17,5 cm
Unique piece







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With a title derived from one of the greatest artists of modern times, the picnic basket *Pablo*, made of grey birch veneer and rosewood, is a wonderful object for an ultimate date, a date with art. By giving the work a masculine name, Kuwahata and Winther seek to disassociate the basket from exclusively the woman's domain. Perfectly designed to be useful and practical, but first and foremost to be an outstandingly beautiful object, one notes the elegant detail of the seams, delicately hand-sewn with cane, as well as the varying thickness of the rosewood handle, made for exquisite ergonomic pleasure.

Pablo, 2004
Rosewood, grey birch veneer
45,5 x 33,5 x 43 cm
Limited edition of 3







Made from one single block of lathe-turned oak, the *Bowl* is extremely light and thin, yet gracefully present. Combining nobility of material with nobility of gesture, it is representative of Kuwahata's and Winther's spirit of simplicity, rigor and precision, as well as a tribute to wood and timeless form.

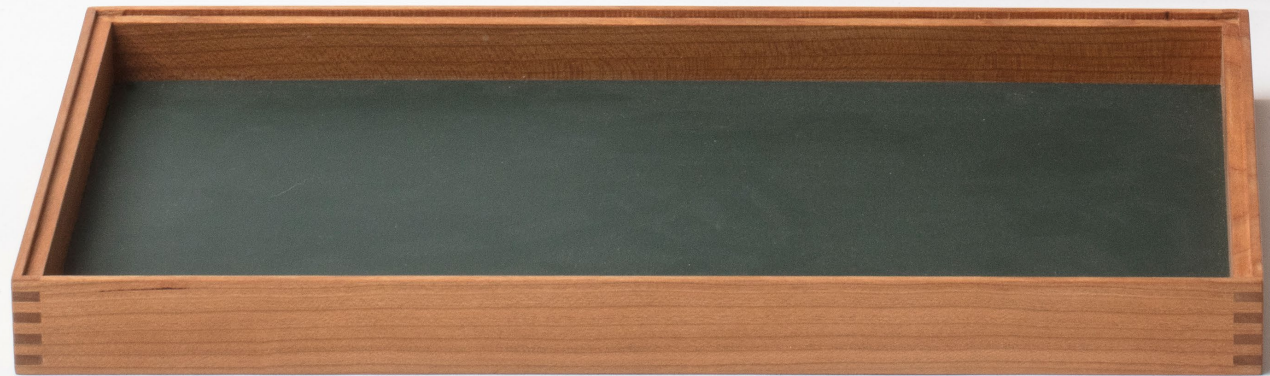
Bowl, 2007
Oak
49,5 x 42,5 x 17,5 cm
Unique piece



Inspired by the art of Japanese boxes, *TrayBox* is a refined box existing in both cherry and maple wood with a handle made of Japanese cord and a linoleum lid that turns into a tray. The handle can be folded into the box when using it for storage. With its rigor of shape and exquisite craftsmanship, *TrayBox* is an example of a perfect balance between function and sculpture. Fill the basket with a few cups, tea and something delicious, carry it out into the garden and enjoy the beauty of it all.

Tray Box, 2015
Maple, linoleum, Japanese cord
24 x 24 x 12,2 cm
Cherry, linoleum, Japanese cord
33,5 x 21 x 12,2 cm
Limited editions of 6







In *Picnic for Two*, Kuwahata and Winther display their taste for the art of living combined with playful functionality and the love of wood. In this sculptural picnic set, delicately made in either padouk or cherry wood, combined with dyed cork and Japanese cord, there is room for two sets of crockery and a bottle of wine, with the box serving as table.

Picnic for Two, 2017
Padauk / Cherry, dyed cork,
Japanese cord
45 x 10,5 x 32 cm
Limited editions of 12



Exhibition view, *Table for 2 - Exhibition*, Aarhus, 2017

Inspired by the abstract beauty of ariel cityscapes, the installation *Coexistence* by Kuwahata and Winther is composed of 26 small objects, such as trays, small displays, cups, a breadbasket and a salt and pepper set. Exquisitely handmade in a rich variety of woods, selected for their nuances and grains, and carefully put into dialogue, the installation embodies simplicity and sophistication, mixing the functional and the sculptural in new poetic ways. The installation represents a reflection on the aestheticism of our daily rituals: the art of presenting small precious objects, the art of preserving tea, the art of seasoning dishes, the art of offering sweets and delights. *Coexistence* expresses a certain art of the essential, blurring the separation between arts and crafts.

Coexistence, 2020
Cherry, birch, maple, elm, walnut, smoked oak, boxwood, oak, pear, bubinga, acrylic, porcelain, silver, gold, cotton, cork
Various dimensions
Unique piece











Akiko Kuwahata & Ken Winther

Akiko Kuwahata: Born 1976, Japan
Ken Winther: Born 1973, Denmark
Live and work in Copenhagen, Denmark

Akiko Kuwahata, born in Japan in 1976, graduated in 1999 from the College of Art at the Nihon University, Japan. She worked as a cabinetmaker at Hinoki Kogei Ltd in Japan (1999 -2003) and studied Furniture and Interior Design at the School of Architecture in Aarhus, Denmark (2004-2005). In 2010, Kuwahata opened her own design studio together with Ken Winther, with whom she has been creating design objects ever since. In parallel, she worked part time at PP Møbler from 2013 to 2020, where she was able to gain a greater understanding of Danish design.

Ken Winther, born in Denmark in 1973, was trained as a cabinetmaker at PP Møbler (1991 – 1995), where he later worked from 1998 to 2021. In 2010, he established his own design studio, Akiko Ken Made, together with Akiko Kuwahata. He simultaneously studied Japanese woodworking and worked as a cabinetmaker at Hinoki Kogei Ltd in Japan.

Kuwahata and Winther were awarded the Arts and Crafts Prize of 1897 in 2016 and the Danish Craft and Art Association Prize in 2017. Their works have been exhibited in Denmark and internationally, including at the 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa, Japan; MINDCRAFT 15 and MINDCRAFT 16, Milan, Italy; The Salon: Art + Design, New York, USA; PAD London, UK; and Design Miami/Basel, Switzerland.

Curriculum Vitae

EDUCATION

Akiko Kuwahata

- 1995 - 1999 Bachelor fra College of Art Nihon University in Japan, graduated with a degree in Living Space Design
- 1999 - 2003 Employee as cabinetmaker at Hinoki Kogei Ltd in Japan
- 2004 - 2005 Student of furniture and interior design at Aarhus school of Architecture in Denmark
Trainee at Hans Thyge Raunkjær design studio
- 2009 Trainee at Cecilie Manz design studio
- 2010 Established own design and making. - (today named Akiko Ken Made)
- 2014 Starting collaboration with Galerie Maria Wettergren in Paris
- 2013 - 2020 Employee as cabinetmaker at PP Møbler

Ken Winther

- 1991 - 1995 Apprentice as cabinetmaker at PP Møbler
- 1998 - 2021 Employee as cabinetmaker at PP Møbler
- 2010 Established own design and making. - (today named Akiko Ken Made)
Work at Hinoki Kogei Ltd in Japan and study Japanese woodworking.

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

- 2022 Fabrik - SE-Design Exhibition, Fabrikken for Kunst & Design, Copenhagen, Denmark
Design Miami/Basel - Galerie Maria Wettergren, Basel, Switzerland
Design Without Borders - Exhibition, Budapest, Hungary.
- 2021 Tid, Takt & Tone - SE-Design Exhibition, Sophienholm Kunsthall, Kongens Lyngby, Denmark

- 2020 Baptism tree - Decoration in Odense Cathedral, Odense, Denmark
Illusions - SE-Design Exhibition, Tivoli Garden, Copenhagen, Denmark
Poesitræ - Exhibition at Dina Vejling/Galleri +RUMMET, Odense, Denmark
- 2019 Irresistibly Sensibly Wood - Solo Exhibition at Grønbechs Gård, Bornholm, Denmark
Project chair - Workshop by Grasslands, Spøttrup, Denmark
Re-Think - SE-Design Exhibition, Copenhagen, Denmark
The Napkin for the Breadbasket for the Napkin - Exhibition at Udstillingssted for tekstil, Copenhagen, Denmark
- 2018 Danish Arts foundation acquire Facet for the Danish Embassy, London, United Kingdom
Monochrom - SE-Design Exhibition, Copenhagen, Denmark
Firstmover - Exhibition at Gallery A. Petersen, Copenhagen, Denmark
PAD Paris - Galerie Maria Wettergren, Paris, France
PAD Geneve - Galerie Maria Wettergren, Geneve, Switzerland
- 2017 Masterclass trip to Japan - Japanese Cabinet technics - Grand by Statens Kunstfond.
Everyday Life / Signs of Awareness, 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa, Japan
Table for 2 - Exhibition, Aarhus, Denmark
UNFOLD - The Danish Cabinetmakers Association, Danish Design Museum, Copenhagen, Denmark
- 2016 MINDCRAFT, Milano salone, Milan, Italy
Design Miami/Basel, stand Maria Wettergren, Miami, USA
- 2015 Hverdag/Every day' - Solo Exhibition at Butik for borddækning, Copenhagen, Denmark
MINDCRAFT, Milano salone, Milan, Italy
The Salon Art + Design, stand Galerie Maria Wettergren, New York, USA
PAD Paris, Stand Galerie Maria Wettergren, Paris, France
Salon Maison et Objet, Human Made by Elisabeth Leriche, Paris, France
PAD London, Stand Galerie Maria Wettergren, London, United Kingdom
PAD Paris, Stand Galerie Maria Wettergren, Paris, France

- 2013 Christmas collection with Lena Nocolejsen, Designmuseum, Copenhagen, Denmark
Crafts Collection 17 - Maison&Object Paris, France
Invited to craftsmarket OVNHUS "Knock on Wood", Nykøbing Sjælland, Denmark
- 2012 Crafts Collection 16 - Maison&Object Paris, France
- 2011 Crafts Collection 15 - Maison&Object Paris, France
WoWoWo (Women Work in Wood) - Exhibition , Dorset, United Kingdom
- 2009 My precious - Exhibition, The Danish Cabinetmakers Association - My Precious Universe, Danish Design Museum, Copenhagen, Denmark
Start of own design and creation
- 2007 Copenhagen Furniture Fair, Copenhagen, Denmark
- 2004 The Scandinavian Furniture Fair, Copenhagen, Denmark

AWARDS AND GRANTS

- 2022 Grant, Danish Art Foundation, Copenhagen, Denmark
- 2017 Håndfuglen - Award, Danish Craft and art association, Copenhagen, Denmark
Grant, Kunstforeningen af 14. august, Copenhagen, Denmark
- 2016 Kunsthåndværkerprisen af 1897 - Award, Copenhagen, Denmark
- 2013 Winner of Odense international short film Craft trophy competition OFF14, Odense, Denmark





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