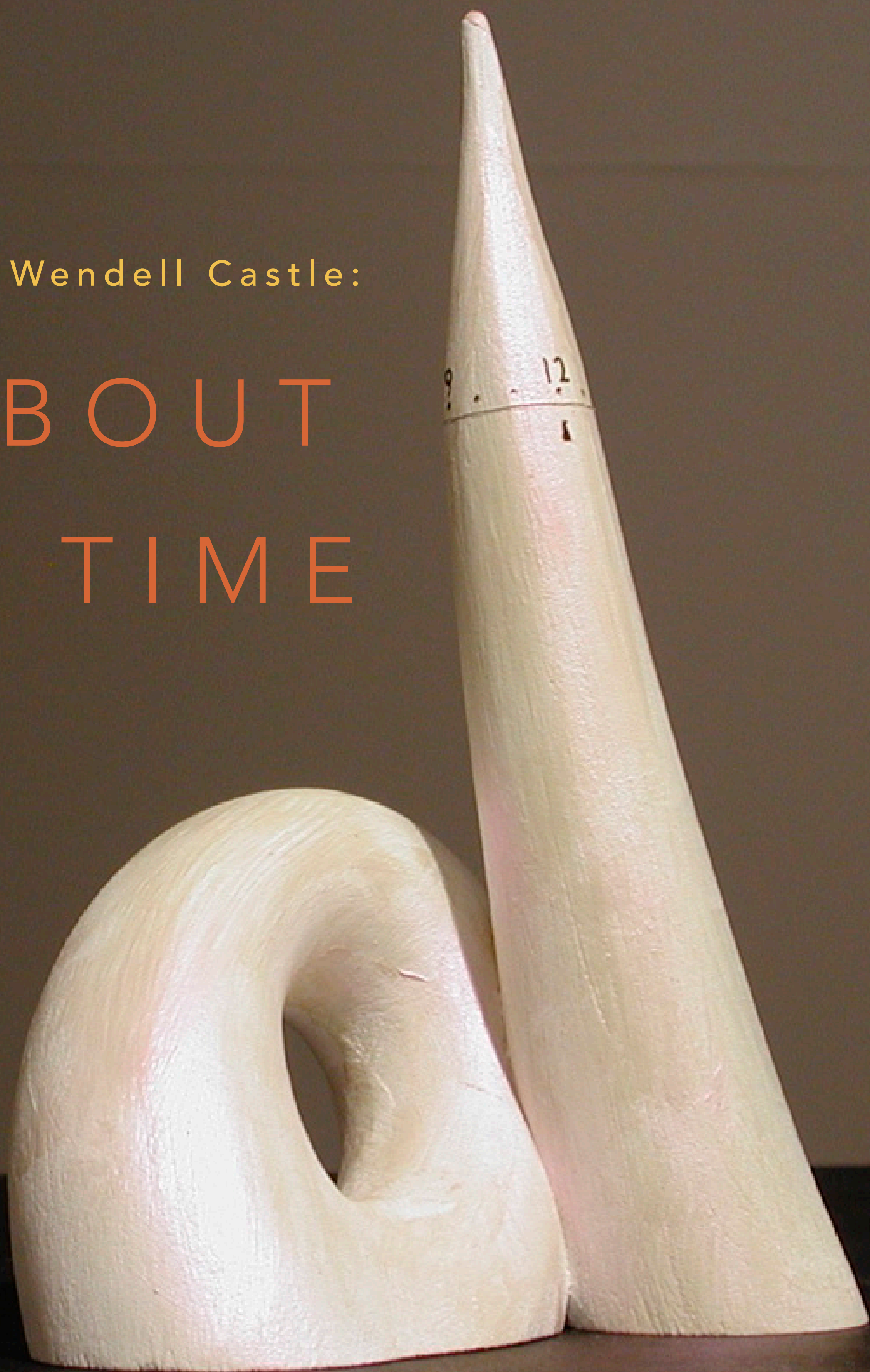
Wendell Castle: ABOUT TIME



Wendell Castle:

ABOUT TIME

Front cover [art]: *Topeka*, 2008, Polychromed Fiberglass, Urethane, Gilded Urethane, Clock Works, 99¾ x 66¾ x 39 in.

Back cover [art]: *Time Table*, 2000, Gilded Jelutong, Copper, Ebony & Mahogany Veneer, Gold-Plated Brass, Clock Works, 58 x 77 x 18 5/8 in.

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"Of Time and Materials: The Art of Wendell Castle"
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Charles C. Eldredge

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Director’s Remarks

We Investigations by artists transform personal experience into expressive proposals, into questions about life—who we are, what we dream. From his investigations, Wendell Castle creates elegant and succinct propositions about time.

For the Spencer Museum of Art, it has been a particular pleasure to work with Castle—on this publication and the exhibition held at the Museum from September 20–December 21, 2008, and as a visiting artist. Our partnership with Castle, an alumnus of the University of Kansas, is one of continuity and engagement; we have long valued his imaginings and creative power. Five of his works are in our collections. We cultivate such partnerships with artists to be part of their ongoing critical and creative conversations with audiences.

In the essay published here, Dr. Charles C. Eldredge, Hall Distinguished Professor of American Art and Culture at the University of Kansas, offers a poetic and insightful exploration of the concept of time in Castle’s art, traveling from the world imagined to the one encountered. Dr. Eldredge’s essay has guided this project.

We thank Lara Kuykendall, the Spencer’s curatorial intern in European and American art and a graduate student in art history, who worked closely with Wendell Castle and his studio manager, Tricia Tinling, to organize both the exhibition and the publication.

We are grateful to Judy and Howard Berkowitz, Wendell Castle, and the Memorial Art Gallery at the University of Rochester in New York for providing works to the exhibition; to the Price R. & Flora A. Reid Foundation for its generous support of this publication; and to Emprise Bank for its sponsorship. Special thanks go to the entire staff of the Spencer for realizing the exhibition and this publication.

Preface

During the last few years of the 1990s, the concept of time seized popular attention in those portions and aspects of the world ordered according to the Gregorian calendar. Not only was a new century dawning, so too was a new millennium, and that was making people jittery about the future. Although the natural world takes no notice of a date change or time's measurement, the human world fretted over the worldwide computer glitches that had been gloomily forecast under the rubric of "Y2K" (with the Y for year and the K borrowed from the Greek *chilioi* [now *kilo*] which means "thousand"). As the first of the four digits naming each year flipped over, how would these machines, which have so come to dominate our world, handle such a simple but seemingly seismic change? Was it like a car reaching the 100,000-mile odometer mark? The year 2000 loomed, and the number looked strange. Neither we nor our computers seemed to know how to process the new date.

In the midst of these considerations, art seemed to offer ways to conceptualize the transition; perhaps it might even be able to stave off cosmic disasters. Among the standouts were the clocks of Wendell Castle, not only for their technical prowess, but also for their sheer wit and exuberance. Since the mid-1980s Castle had been thinking about time and its visual articulation in significant (and often irreverent) ways, with works that had evolved from the sculptural and humanlike to the conceptual and environmental. His clocks were marked by whimsy, big ideas, and literary and pop-culture references. Some focused on the viewer's experience, opening into abstract concepts and room installations, as in the large floor piece *Time to Time* (1997). For Castle, time and art are unpredictable, in some moments moving slowly and in others off and running, endlessly renewable, ready to wink at us.

Although the flurry of events surrounding the advent of 2000 has passed, we continue to ponder the mysteries of time. In fact, these questions seem all the more pressing

Top of the World, 1989, Poplar, Cherry, Bubinga, Honduran Mahogany, Baltic Birch, Leather, Gold Leaf, 79 x 29 x 32 in., Private collection.

as the new century and millennium unfold. Our computers have (miraculously) kept on working, right through the change from one millennium to the next, and the Earth remains intact. However, global climate change, shrinking energy resources, rising food prices, and geopolitical conflicts suggest changes of millennial proportions. As the Gregorian world approaches the end of this first decade of the new millennium and reflects on the directions that the world is taking, Castle's clocks show their continued potency.

Susan Earle
Curator of European and American Art
Spencer Museum of Art

Time to Time, 1997, in Castle's studio.

Artist's Statement
Wendell Castle

None of us can walk, drive, or fly without meeting an instrument of time. Time is visible in all places: clock towers, radios, watches, and cell phones, each dividing years into months, months into days, days into hours, hours into minutes, minutes into seconds, each increment of time marching after the other in perfect succession. Time paces forward with exacting regularity. Time rules our lives. Time is absolute.

Einstein has given us much to ponder about the nature of time. Some of these thoughts have influenced how I think about the concept of time and space in relationship to my work. For example, what if time is a circle, with no beginning or end, endlessly repeating itself? Or what if time flows like water and is occasionally displaced—some cosmic disturbance causing a rivulet of time to turn away from the mainstream and make a connection in a different place? Or perhaps cause and effect are erratic, with time moving forward in fits and starts, sometimes the first preceding the second and sometimes the second preceding the first?

There are two forms of time: mechanical time and body time. The first is as rigid as a pendulum swinging back and forth. The second constantly changes its movement. Each measure of time is true, but the truths are not the same.

The clock that I've called *Time to Time* demonstrates how I believe time to be. *Time to Time* makes one revolution approximately every twelve hours. The surface upon which it rolls will never be perfect, as the road on which we travel will always have interruptions. If *Time to Time* hits a bump in its path, it must gather strength to overcome the disruption, much as we must gather strength to overcome the obstacles in our lives. However, the clock will then move forward. We all get stuck in time, from time to time.

Interview with Wendell Castle

Saralyn Reece Hardy & Lara Kuykendall

April 28, 2008

Wassily Kandinsky once described the artist's decision-making process as following his or her "inner necessity." Over the course of Wendell Castle's career, clocks have become indispensable to his métier—there is for him a recurring urge to imagine and create fresh ways of interpreting and thinking about time. In an April 2008 conversation with Castle that focused on his series of clocks, Saralyn Reece Hardy, Director of the Spencer Museum of Art, and Lara Kuykendall, SMA European and American Art Intern, asked the artist to explore his inspirations, intentions, and process.

Saralyn Reece Hardy: Wendell, let's begin with an obvious question: Why clocks?

Wendell Castle: I don't have a real direct answer to that. I actually never really did a clock until about 1980. In looking in my old sketchbooks, I do have drawings, so I had thought about it. But for reasons I don't remember now, I never actually made them. I can remember a conversation with New York gallery owner Alexander Milliken, probably around 1979, about what my next show might be. In that conversation I mentioned there was one piece of furniture that's more like a sculpture than any other—a tall case clock. Why you even call it a piece of furniture is odd because it's not. You don't sit on it, you don't put anything in it, you don't eat off of it, you don't do any of the normal things that you do with furniture. You look at it. And in some sense that's what you do with sculpture.

SRH: What has brought you back to making work about time over several decades? Is this is a concept you'll continue to pursue?

WC: I think that's probable. I just completed my newest tall case clock, which is in form dramatically different from any other clock I've done. But in terms of keeping time, it's simpler. It kind of works like an egg timer. As soon as I started thinking more about actually doing it, somehow the idea occurred to me that I ought to do it in an unusual way—that I would not have a clock with a face on it. That was not allowed. Somebody had already made a clock with a face and a big hand and a little hand. So I had to avoid that.

SRH: Which I think is fascinating because it's revealing the structure of time itself rather than the structure of some kind of conventional cabinet.

WC: The one that's actually closest to a traditional way of keeping time is the Dr. Caligari clock. That face is huge, and odd, but it does have a face and it does have a big hand and a little hand. That's the one exception.

Lara Kuykendall: Do you feel any connections to Kansas in your thoughts or work about time?

WC: When you think about the creative process, invariably everything you've ever seen, done, or heard will play some part. Sometimes it's kind of hard to pick those out. I think the point is that you respond somehow to everything that's stuck in your memory. Your mind is like a sponge and it soaks up all these things. And then the day comes when you start squeezing it a bit, and all those things that were in there come out—you're getting a little bit of everything.

But I think the organic part probably came from growing up in a rural community. Growing things, having a garden, being around the farm, probably really instilled in me some kind of sense that organic things are important.

LK: *Yesterday is Here* (later renamed *Topeka*) appears to be a very organic work.

WC: Yes, I think that it's the most organic in many ways. I think that going back to the very early clocks that I did, for Alexander Milliken, originally it was going to be twelve. It made sense: there are twelve hours in a day, and so on. And then I thought, "Well, we really need thirteen."….and that is the *Ghost* clock, which is not a clock at all, but people think it is.

LK: Where did the title *Yesterday is Here* come from?

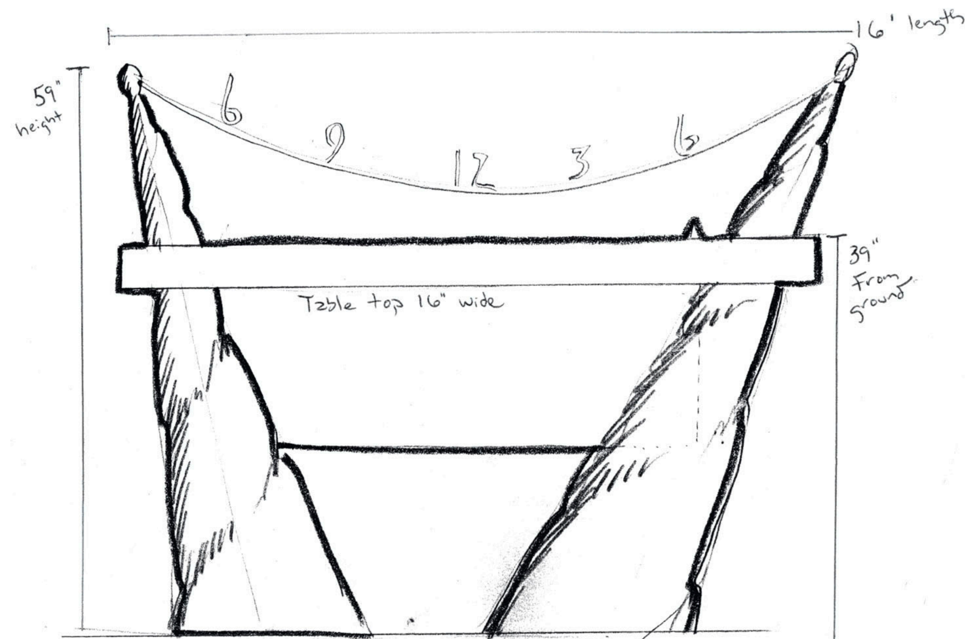
WC: I don't know where it came from. I find that taking words out of context or just switching words around makes things interesting. And whether I found this out of context or I switched things around, I don't remember.

LK: In a sense it invites the viewer to think about how the form of the clock and its function relate to the phrase that you choose.

WC: That's true, and there is more to thinking about time in this clock. That there's a doughnut shape—a ring—and a ring is a continuous thing like time is. And then there's a taller vertical part, the way that tall case clocks need to be. They need to be tall.

LK: Maybe it's not a coincidence, then, that the clock mechanism is at the top of that vertical element. Can you tell us a little about your piece *Time Table*?

WC: I made it a number of years ago. The first time it was exhibited, I remember that somebody in the gallery didn't know it was a clock. It's not very obvious. The numbers are hanging on a string and there's a little arrow that points up toward the numbers. Anyway, somebody said, "What is this thing?" and picked it off of there. It made me think "I need some better engineering here." And then it sort of got shelved. But as I thought about it more and more, I thought the piece was a little



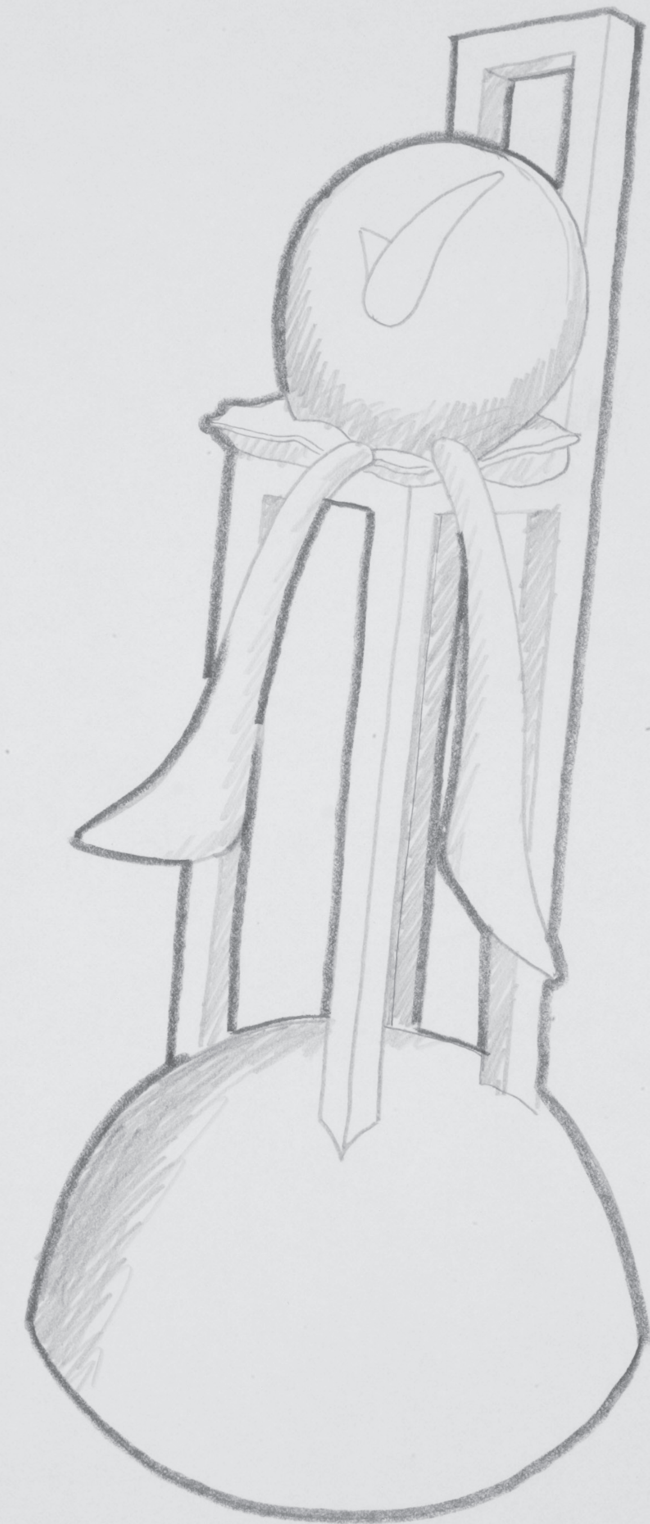
too dark, and I don't think of time as being dark. So I lightened it up a bit. I decided to have the little arrow that runs from left to right (telling you what time it is) run into a Plexiglas® tunnel. It's protected.

LK: That's interesting, protecting time and keeping it from being corrupted. We'll be delighted to show it. When it comes to the Spencer, that will be the first time it's been seen in awhile.

WC: It'll be the first time on view in 10 years or more, and the first time it has been seen in this configuration.

LK: What about the whimsical clock *Top of the World*? How did you arrive at the design for that clock?

Above: sketch for *Time Table*;
Right: sketch for *Top of the World*.



WC: There's a song about a grandfather clock, how it never stops. And it occurred to me that grandfathers are ancient, and given the fact that they never stop, I wondered why they never got tired. It seemed to me that a grandfather clock might get tired and might enjoy having a seat. And then I put it on this sort of sphere—which suggests to me the world—so it sits on top of the world.

LK: Where did you first hear that song?

WC: Probably as a child. The lyrics were, "My grandfather's clock was too large for the shelf, so it stood 90 years on the floor."

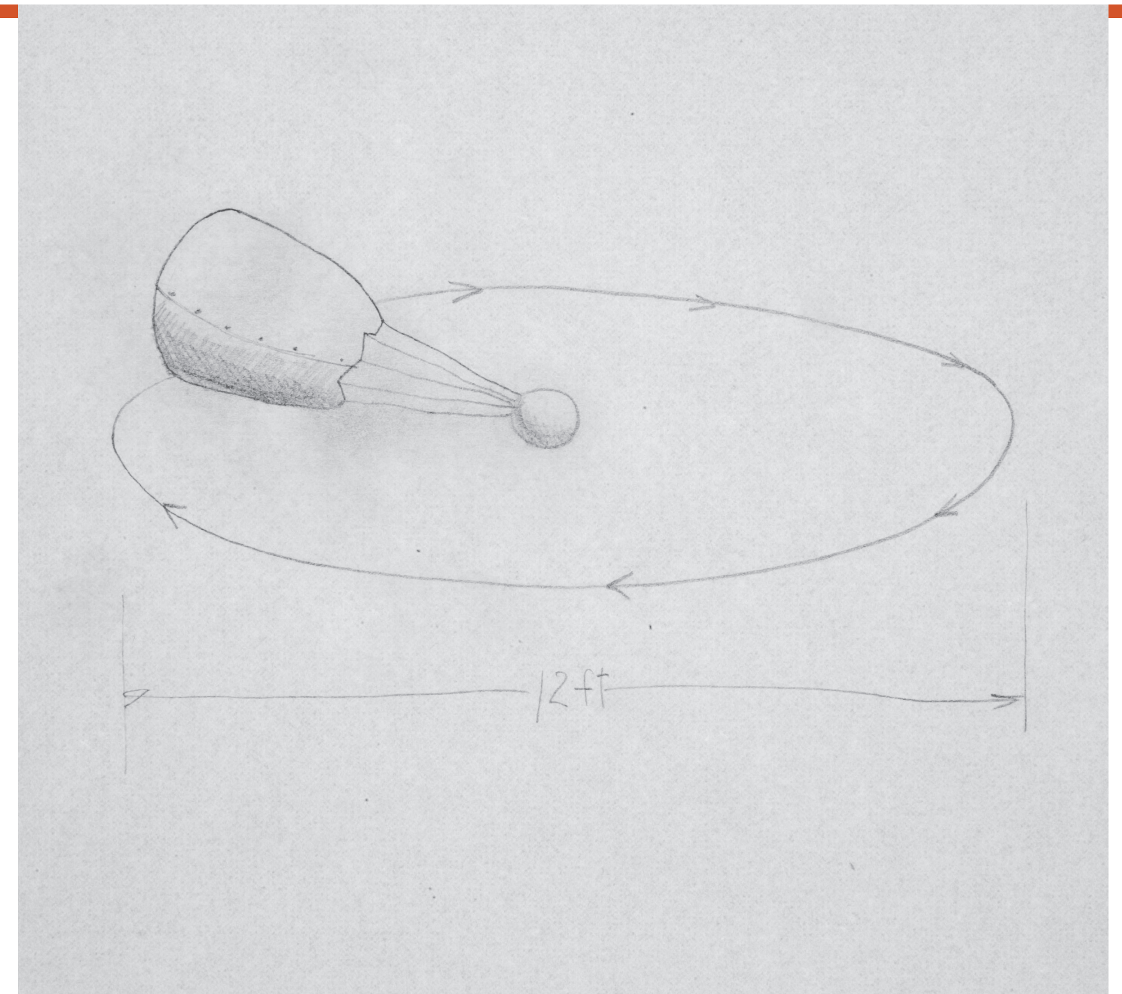
LK: It sounds like maybe the song led you to the shape and then the title came after that?

WC: Everything you make at a certain period of time is influenced by how you are thinking about everything. How you feel about art in general, the political climate, the economic climate—all those things have some impact. I just think about things differently at different times. *Top of the World* reflects on several different periods, so it's sort of a mix.

LK: The 1920 silent film *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* has been a recurring theme in several pieces. Can you explain how those works evolved? How do they relate to the film? How does the clock differ from other Dr. Caligari works?

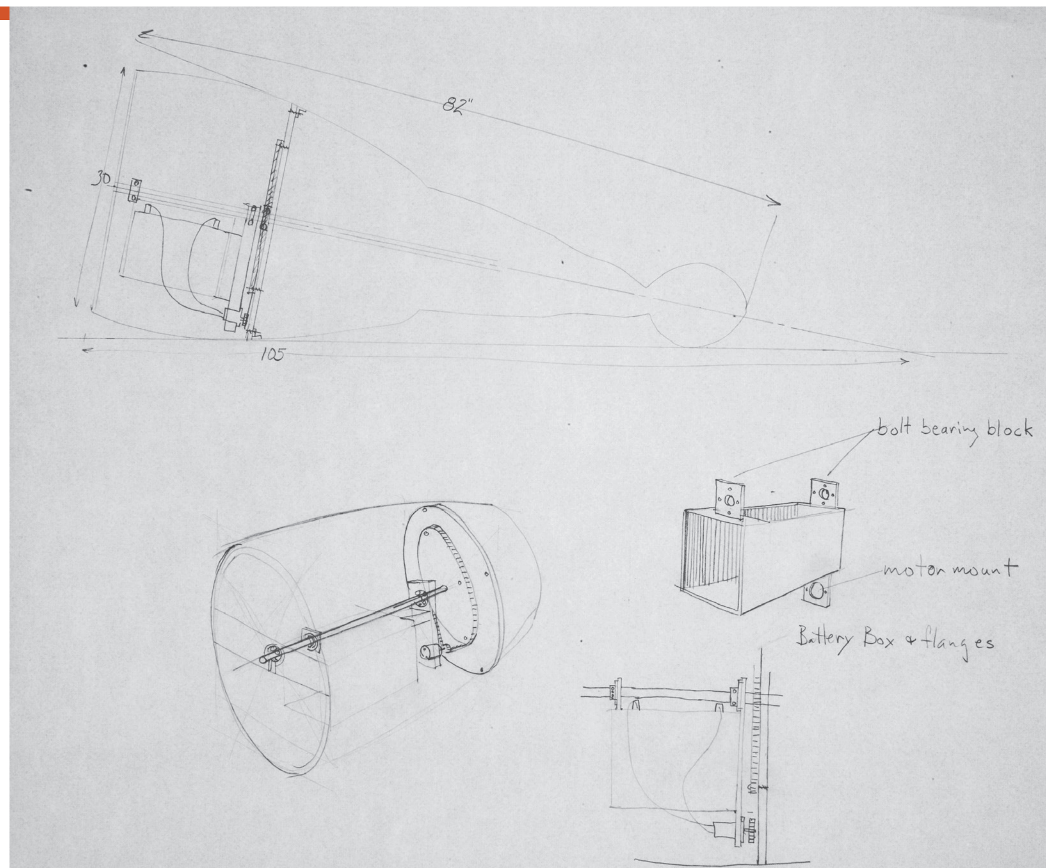
WC: I saw that film in a film series when I was a student at the University of Kansas. I was impressed with it but never thought about how I might use it as inspiration until much later. And I remember the film vividly from that moment, and what I remember about it is not so much the storyline but the visuals. The sets were painted with slashing brushstrokes. The paintings and the furniture seemed slightly askew and abstract. Those two things I wanted to bring into the vocabulary. The clock is blue—it's the only piece of my Caligari furniture that's blue, but I thought that so many of those black-and-white films look slightly blue. I avoided looking at the film while I was making the furniture. And I didn't look at it again until after I was finished with the series.

SRH: I find it quite moving that you had the discipline not to look at the film again. It indicates that you have a fidelity to your own remembering rather than trying to hew to a form of accuracy. Is there a special mining of your own memory that's important to you as an artist?



Sketch for *Time to Time.*

WC: I like the fact that I probably remembered incorrectly. I think it's important that I did. I think it's good to look at things that you might get ideas from and later remember them incorrectly. The most interesting things to look at—the things that spark something—are perhaps the things you see in the dark that you don't see very well and you think they're something that they aren't. Or maybe it's looking at a photograph that's of very poor quality. Those are by far the most interesting images.



Sketch for *Time to Time.*

LK: Some of your works, like *Time Table*, *Time to Time*, and *Yesterday is Here* seem to employ rather nontraditional clock mechanisms. Where do the ideas for those come from? What influence do the clock mechanisms have on the final shape that the clock takes?

WC: Well, I had an assistant in the 1980s who was a machinist-engineer. He helped me realize ideas I had that weren't really the kind of thing that I would have probably made if I hadn't had access to the engineering. We did some very, very strange ones where we built the whole mechanism. In hindsight that wasn't the best idea because then you're the only person who can repair it. More recently I've done simpler ones, with the exception of the one that rolls around the floor (*Time to Time*), which is not really a clock in a normal sense at all. So the engineering of that is simple and doesn't employ anything you can't buy off the shelf, but it's all hidden inside, so you don't have any idea of what's in there.

LK: You have to be patient to see it work.

WC: You do. You have to stand there for at least five minutes. The other interesting thing about it is that whatever surface it's rolling on is probably never perfect, like the world. And there are things that sort of hold time up, and other things that accelerate time. For example: a bump. The mechanism needs to gain momentum to go over the bump and then it will go quickly, but just for a second.

LK: So that clock is more about the experience of time rather than telling time?

WC: Yes. It's very hard to tell time say, within five or ten minutes. *Time to Time* has only been in my studio, but I ran it for three months just to make sure it worked. At that time I just decided that North was 12 o'clock and that if you knew where North was, then you could sort of tell time by that clock.

SRH: Nothing you do seems to follow a formula. You work in a variety of ways, and your ideas collide and come in from the margins. Once you have an idea, what is the technical process that you go through to execute your work? How do you make an idea come into being?

WC: Through drawing. I draw all the time. Sometimes I know what I'm drawing and sometimes I just go to drawing shapes and see if it looks like anything. I sort of jokingly say I have a short attention span, which is not altogether untrue. I really enjoy the fact that everything I make is different than what I made before. In a sense I've never figured out what I'm doing, so it's always new. There's a great quote I like: "If you know what you're doing, you're not doing anything."

SRH: That seems appropriate! Several of your works have an element of surprise in them—do you find that your drawings sometimes surprise you?

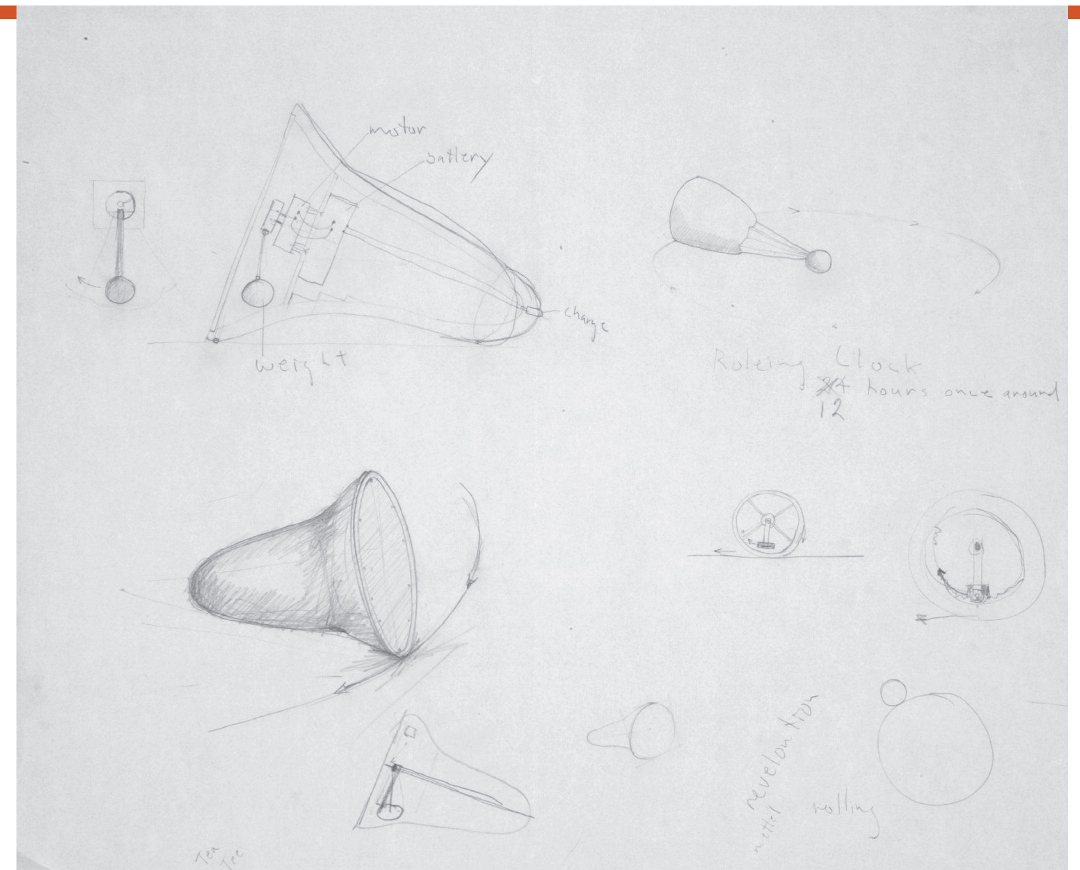
WC: They do. Something starts out as one thing and becomes something else. I don't really start off necessarily with the idea that "Oh, this will be a chair." I just draw this thing and see what it might be.

SRH: So you're drawing a set of possibilities rather than a thing?

WC: Yes. Of course there are exceptions because sometimes you actually need a chair, and you're trying to do that!

SRH: Speaking of a chair, that takes me to another question: How does this concept of time infuse itself into works that are not clocks?

WC: Well it might. I think of pieces and ideas as not having a beginning or an end. I like to think that an awful lot of the themes that I work with, I've continued to work with over the years. They've changed as the years have changed. I look back now on certain bodies of work and say, "Well, that wasn't very good," but then I can also look back on certain others and think, "Hey, that wasn't bad." I constantly do that, reevaluate things. Sometimes I sort of come full circle, back around to some things that I'd thought about a long time ago. And maybe I didn't ever really think that out too clearly and now I have better ideas.



Sketch for *Time to Time.*

SRH: You told Charles Eldredge in a 1998 interview (see page 30) that "Clocks [as a type, in general] are a favorite." Why do clocks hold an attraction for you?

WC: I like the sculptural quality of them, and the fact that there seem to be endless ways of doing clocks. It's not like you run out of ideas and say, "Well, OK, there's no more"—that seems unlikely. I haven't done as many recently, but I'm sure that I'll keep doing them. This latest one hasn't been seen by anybody yet, so we'll see what people think of it, and maybe that will encourage me to try something else. I'm looking at my bulletin board right now, and there are ideas up there for two clocks.

SRH: An artist must invest his or her time into making a work. How do you think about the investment of your own time?

WC: I don't think about it, at least in the beginning. If the idea seems to be worth doing, then you have to do whatever it takes to do it. And if that's a long time, that's it, you just do it.

SRH: What works took you the longest to realize?

WC: Some of those clocks made in the '80s were enormously time-consuming, and they sold for what I thought at that time were high prices. Now they look awfully cheap!

SRH: Let's shift to the idea of scale. What's the attraction to working on something that is room-sized, that has a different kind of relationship to the body or the viewer?

WC: I've actually not realized those, except for the one that rolls around the floor and takes up practically a whole room. They're more conceptual because, of course, you wouldn't have that in your home. They're more for an experience, I guess—an experience of time.

SRH: You brought up this wonderful issue of attention span. There's the attention span of an artist who is making something and then there's the attention span of the viewer. I'm interested to see if there's a moment or two in your career when you stepped back from something and said, "I had this one just right." A moment when you felt utterly fulfilled and satisfied.

WC: Well, if I did have that experience—which I have had in more than one way—and I had that experience after the piece was finished, then it's not really valid because if you love everything that you just did, then the piece that you're currently working on is the best that you've ever made. You always think that. You know that it may not be, but that's the thing you think about, that the one I'm working on right now will be the best one. It takes some time and perspective to look back on it and decide, "Well, actually it was," or in some cases, "No, no it wasn't."

SRH: Do you think that your criteria for evaluating your own work have changed over time?

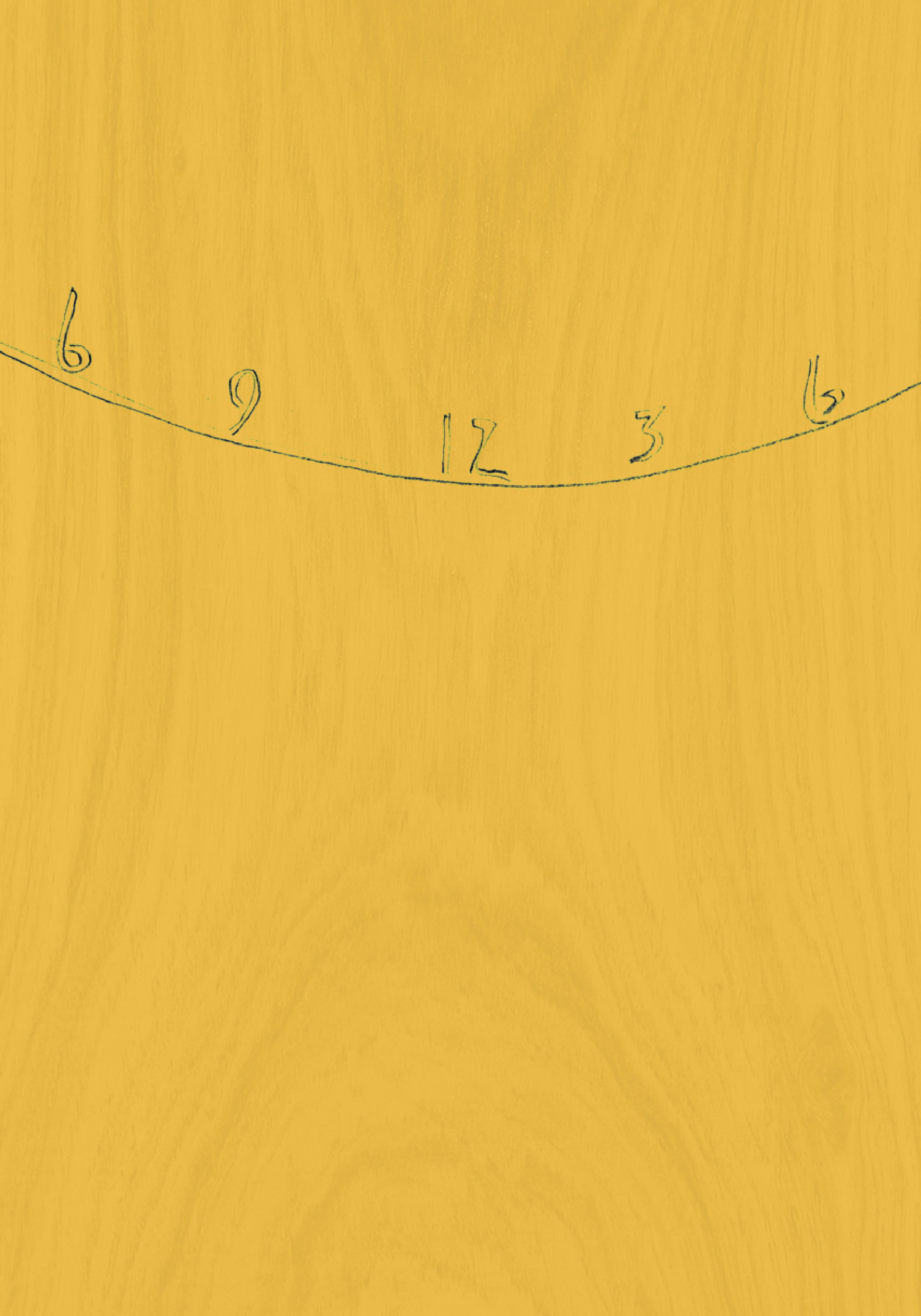
WC: Yes, they have. I think what happened was that I was onto something very good early on, and I felt as if it were something that I needed to corral, to round up, to do quickly in order to have that vocabulary for myself. And in doing that I don't think that I thought so much about individual pieces as sort of that I needed to have these kinds of ideas realized. Because early on I didn't have that much work, and I felt like I had these ideas and I needed pieces. And now, I don't really need pieces anymore—I've got lots of work—so I think about them maybe a little longer than I did then, which isn't necessarily good. I think that sometimes those one-second decisions are good ones. But because there's not anything that I particularly need or have to have made right now, everything is considered with more time.

SRH: Do you know what the next Castle clock will look like?

WC: No, I don't. And I would give the same answer if you asked about the next chair. And in a sense I don't want to know quite yet. The last one is still so fresh—it only left here on Thursday.

SRH: You said this beautiful thing about watching things come out of the dark even when they're not maybe really there, and it strikes me that that's something about how you are investigating, in very mysterious ways, how to make shapes from shapelessness. What is it as an artist that sparks that appetite to try to make something that was not there before?

WC: Well, that's exactly what I'm trying to do, and I enjoy that process. I enjoy discovering the idea on paper, and then I enjoy realizing that and trying to make it what I envisioned in my mind. To see if I can I get that thing in my mind to look in reality the way I think it looks. That's very exciting.



Of Time and Materials: The Art of Wendell Castle

Charles C. Eldredge

"Time is but the stream I go a-fishing in."
(Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*)

Following the highly successful exhibition of his finely crafted furniture at Alexander Milliken's New York City gallery in the spring of 1983, Wendell Castle had a discussion with his art dealer about the future. The show had earned kudos that both men would be delighted to repeat.

In *The New York Times*, critic John Russell hailed the achievement by which Castle joined the ranks of such distinguished predecessors as Mies van der Rohe, Gerrit Rietveld, and other artists who similarly showed the "formal invention, the chromatic invention, and the sense that something difficult has been done to perfection."[1] Russell's applause for Castle's technical finesse echoed internationally in other coverage of the show, bringing pleasure to the artist and to his dealer, who had sold a suite of *Lady's Desk and Two Chairs* for the unprecedented price of $75,000.

Notwithstanding this critical and commercial success, Milliken was concerned that his newest star not reprise the triumph with another series of functional furnishings, however finely crafted, lest he be pigeonholed as a "furniture maker." Castle, whose restless creativity frequently had led him to change forms and motifs, was inspired by this exchange and determined to pursue a conceptual approach in his new work, one which would balance his acclaimed technical skills with considerations of the objects' content or meaning.[2] Thus was born the concept for a series of large-scale timepieces, reinventions of the venerable form of the grandfather clock, along with ruminations on the nature of time.

Examples from the series of thirteen clocks that eventually resulted were featured at Milliken's gallery and in several traveling exhibitions of Castle's work in 1985–86. Again, his imaginative concept and exquisite craftsmanship excited the public's imagination. However, the huge investment of time and materials required by Castle and his skilled assistants, which led to audacious prices even in the escalating 1980s market for art furniture—with individual clocks priced from $75,000 to $250,000—meant that the enterprise was not economically profitable. Coupled with mixed critical response from the art world, to whose acceptance the "furniture maker" aspired, this led Castle to abandon the series. But the issues of time and, more important, metaphorical content in his work, remained vital to the artist and continue to inform his creativity to the present day.

This essay considers some of the initial *Clocks* series, in the company of their progeny and permutations from more recent years. Whereas the artist had once identified the table as his preferred format, he subsequently claimed that "Clocks are a favorite, because I think they avoid the function problem. . . . Its use is so minimal—you don't really sit on it or put anything in it—in fact, you don't really use it. . . . It doesn't have the same kind of function that most furniture items have; it avoids many of the functional aspects of furniture. Therefore, to me, it's closer to sculpture."[3] No longer simply as a furniture form, clocks now intrigue their maker for their metaphoric potential. More than by traditional clock- or cabinetmakers, Castle has in this been inspired by scientists, especially Alan Lightman, whose *Einstein's Dreams*, ruminations on the concept of time, is often cited by the artist in discussion.[4] Unlike the traditional clockmaker's concern with accurate timekeeping or the contemporary furniture maker's with artfully designed and constructed objects, Castle is intrigued by the scientific concept of time. "They [scientists] think about things like, 'Time doesn't move in a consistent way,'" he explained. "Actually, it moves in fits and starts." Or at variable rates, depending on velocity, or altitude, etcetera. "If you're moving at the speed of light, time will stand still; if you're moving very fast, it slows down. If you live on top of a mountain, you'll live longer than if you live at sea level; time is different, it will move more slowly." Such phenomenological concerns are not always realizable in concrete objects, but some are and have led Castle to new experiments. The "fits and starts" are incorporated into *Time to Time* (fig. 1), a piece that rolls on the floor, completing its circular orbit in more or less twelve hours with, Castle notes, "a little time to move quicker and a little time to move slower."

Just as time and sculpture move by fits and starts, so too this appreciation of Wendell Castle's works about time.

Fig. 1
Time to Time, 1997, Aluminum, Clock Works,
80 in. length x 39 in. diameter, Collection of the artist.

one: ROOTS

It is a tradition as old as Lewis and Clark, as timeless as Jack Kerouac, as adventuresome as *Easy Rider*: the Great American Road Trip. In the spring of 1959, nearing the end of his undergraduate studies in industrial design at the University of Kansas, he and a classmate set out for the East Coast, parts unknown to the young Kansans. The attraction of New York City, then in its heyday as the American art capital, was powerful and drew the pair to it. But the adventures that brought the greatest glee to the face of today's noted sculptor and furniture maker took place not in Manhattan, but in more rural settings: Roxbury, Connecticut, and Paoli, Pennsylvania. In Roxbury, where the travelers unexpectedly found themselves, Castle recalled that the town was home to Alexander Calder (1898–1976), and with his companion he determined to meet the renowned sculptor and artist. They approached the Calder home, uninvited and unexpected, and boldly announced themselves; to their delight, the affable artist welcomed his callers with a warm reception and studio visit. The exchange was obviously memorable for Castle. Although he does not today claim any specific influence from Calder's mobiles or other inventions on his later productions, he does confess to a "love [for] the kind of humor and light-hearted part of his art." That, plus the fact that Calder was "not too high-minded about it," made an impression. In a different context, Castle's mature work often captures a Calder-like delight in fantasy and playfulness, mixing eclectic forms and colorful materials to make, as one critic wrote, "objects that exist not only out of space but out of time. Like Disneyland, they are fantasies."[5]

Emboldened by their Roxbury experience, the itinerant pair detoured to Paoli, where they hoped to repeat their social success at craftsman Wharton Esherick's home. Esherick (1887–1970) had early achieved note for his carved sculptures and, in the years around World War II, enjoyed special prominence for his artfully crafted wooden furnishings and architectural interiors. His work had been the subject of a major one-man show at the American Craft Museum in the winter of 1958–59,

accounting for the critical attention that likely drew the Midwestern sojourners to his Paoli studio. Perhaps expecting another amiable host in the Calder manner, Castle and his friend were disappointed by the curt reception accorded by the eminent craftsman. Nevertheless, their brief meeting in Paoli only whetted Castle's enthusiasm for Esherick's work, illustrations of which he had first encountered the year before in Don Wallance's influential study of modern design, *Shaping America's Products*.[6] "One person's work in that book changed my entire thinking about furniture," Castle later wrote. "That person was Esherick. I had never seen anything like his designs before. Further, it had never occurred to me that furniture could be anything so personal and so powerful as sculpture. Seeing those photographs of Esherick's furniture began my involvement."[7]

The choice of Calder and Esherick seems revelatory of Castle's aspirations and is, to some degree, predictive of the directions in which his own work would go and the reception it was to receive. Back in Lawrence, in part inspired by his glimpse of Esherick's work, which had "left an indelible mark on my memory,"[8] Castle continued his own artistic studies, but now pursuing a graduate degree in sculpture. He studied modeling and casting techniques with University of Kansas Professor Eldon Tefft but, though he enjoyed his early experience in that realm, today regards foundry work as "a laborious process I'm not sure I want to get into." His greatest encouragement came from another KU professor, Bernard "Poco" Frazier (1906–1976), who expressed lively interest in the program of the young would-be sculptor. Castle particularly recalls that Frazier introduced him to the process of lamination, "which he was doing, in kind of a crude way compared to what we do now, but I had never known about that before. It allowed me to bend wood," a technique that he was shortly to put to novel use in his own sculpture, which increasingly involved the fabrication of furniture, or furniture-like forms. This he did with Frazier's implicit encouragement, although without the support of other faculty, who did not think highly of such lowly pursuits in the sculpture studio. "So, the little bit that I did, I sneaked around into the industrial design facility." The stealthy young artist reflected the deep influence of the master of Paoli, whom Castle credits for the crucial lesson "that the making of furniture could be a form of sculpture."[9]

Castle's own conception of sculpture was still in the formative stages. Despite Esherick's example, it was clear that to his instructors, and many others in the art world, furniture making was "sort of a second-rate art activity. If you wanted to be a real artist," he concluded, "you would make what I had in my mind as real sculpture—although I wasn't real clear on that either." Castle "was torn with two opposite kinds of influence," enjoying the figurative creations of sculptors such as Giacomo Manzu and Leonard Baskin, then much in vogue, while simultaneously responding to the "organic stuff," abstractions such as those by Henry Moore, Constantin Brancusi, or Hans Arp.

Some writers—Matthew Kangas, for example—see in the natural, organic forms evidence of the artist's upbringing in the country's heartland. It was there, in rural Kansas, that were laid the foundations for the artist's mature and "paradoxical" art, one of "entropic growth . . . uniting theme[s] of growing and decaying natural form." Identifying signature forms of root, leaf, and seed in Castle's work of the 1990s, Kangas traces these to Castle's agrarian roots—his father taught vocational agricultural classes; his grandparents were farmers—and describes his productions as "acts of memory."[10]

Castle is skeptical of that interpretation—as he is about much else—and, with a laugh, recalled, "I *hated* the farm!"

two: APPEARANCES

In 1917, the visiting Parisian dadaist Marcel Duchamp submitted to the ostensibly unjuried Independents Exhibition in New York City his *Fountain*—a ceramic urinal, upended and signed "R. Mutt," a reference to the J. L. Mott Iron Works, source of the fixture, and to the "Mutt and Jeff" cartoon strip. Duchamp's *Fountain* was, probably predictably, rejected and thereby became one of the icons of modern art.

In 1960, Wendell Castle, an ambitious and gifted graduate student in sculpture, submitted an untitled work, of carved and shaped wood, to the juried Mid-America Exhibition at the Nelson Gallery-Atkins Museum in Kansas City, a show devoted to contemporary fine art exclusive of craft. The piece was accepted. Only after the fact did its maker give the piece a title: *Stool Sculpture* (fig. 2).

Years later, Castle explained that "I could make furniture that looked so much like sculpture that no one would realize that it was furniture. Sort of tongue in cheek, or how to beat the system." It was a gesture worthy of Duchamp. Castle was also mindful of the scarcity of good opportunities to exhibit furniture, "except in the craft context, which I had some problems with." Hence the Mid-America Exhibition, which had no craft category, provided the ideal opportunity to test his crafty ploy. His inclusion in the show was, he recalls, "a breakthrough."

"From the beginning I've been interested in pieces not being what they appear to be," he explains. "They're different from what they seem." This question of appearances and their contradiction in physical fact has long intrigued and inspired the artist, starting with the stool that was a sculpture that was a stool. Critic Arthur Danto has likened the problem to Ludwig Wittgenstein's famed duck-rabbit illusion—the ambiguous form that can be read one way or the other, but not both ways at once. With *Stool Sculpture*, Castle had demonstrated that "singular philosophical intelligence" which separated him from his fellow furniture artists. "The very idea that the true identity of the object should reveal itself though an act of transformative perception is evidence of the philosophical character of the piece, construed as an exercise in *trompe l'oeil*, the ambiguity of identity."[11]

The ambiguity appeared anew in the series of carvings on which Castle embarked in 1976, works that appeared to be finely crafted pieces of furniture—tables, chairs, etcetera—containing or topped by commonplace objects carved from the same block of wood. A maple umbrella stand contains a maple umbrella; a mahogany trench coat hangs from a coat rack of the same material; a Hepplewhite hallway table holds gloves and keys, as if casually deposited there by a hasty arrival.

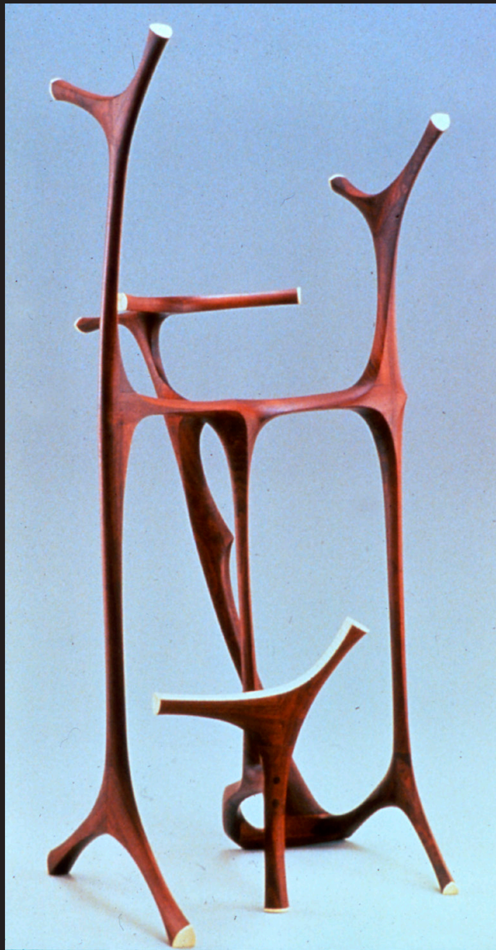


Fig. 2
Stool Sculpture, 1959, Walnut, Ivory,
61 x 23¼ x 37 in., Private collection.

Such illusionism had parallels in other materials—Canadian artist Marilyn Levine's ceramic semblances of worn leather valises or boots, for instance, or American superrealist Duane Hanson's human figures cast of fiberglass and decorated with real hair and startling flesh tones. But in the canon of traditional woodworking, Castle's transformations of materials were astounding, and without precedent. The apotheosis of such illusionistic carving came in the last of the initial clock series, *Ghost* (fig. 3). Beneath the folds of a draped sheet and cord the forms of a grandfather clock are discernible, an illusion dispelled only with difficulty when the viewer realizes that the shroud is carved of bleached mahogany; that is, the same material, the same block as the "clock." *Ghost* is a nonfunctional timepiece, a life-sized sculpture of a draped clock.

Carved drapery had appeared earlier in Castle's *trompe l'oeil* carvings, most notably in *Tablecloth Without Table*, a draped piece of furniture without the furniture. The evocation of that which is absent is powerful, and Castle in retrospect sees the *Tablecloth* piece as one of his most successful *trompe l'oeil* carvings, an indication of the "direction I *should* have gone with it. To me there's sort of a surrealistic aspect there, something sort of more interesting, even though that was early on and I wasn't quite as skillful at pulling off the fabric as later." With the *Ghost* clock, the technical finesse is fully developed and deployed in the illusion. "I think that's certainly the best one," he acknowledges, "because it's so convincing. But yet it isn't convincing." The work at once declares its artifice, yet conceals it. Appearances deceive. As with René Magritte's painted pipe that is not a pipe: *Ceci n'est pas une horloge*. This is not a clock. Or is it?

three: INSPIRATIONS

The sculptor's inspiration might come from many sources. So too does the furniture maker's.

Fig. 3
Ghost, 1985, Bleached Mahogany,
87½ x 24½ x 25 in., Renwick Gallery of
the Smithsonian American Art Museum.

The young sculptor was drawn variously to the organic forms of Isamu Noguchi and Brancusi and to the figures by Manzu and Baskin. The latter inspired some of Castle's work of the early 1960s, shortly after his move to the Rochester Institute of Technology, where he was hired to teach furniture making in 1961, but where sculpture continued to occupy his creative energies. In *Icarus* (1962), an over-life-sized carving of the mythic figure in tennis shoes, the debt to Baskin is clear, both in the choice of subject and in the use of laminated and carved wood, a technique that was shortly to become crucial to Castle as well.

Though lamination had been used by both figurative and abstract sculptors, it generally had not been employed in the fabrication of furniture; in carving the stack-laminated blocks of wood, Castle was able to craft large organic shapes that merged utilitarian function with sculptural form. These ground-breaking pieces from the 1960s, which helped to secure his fame in the furniture game, appeared as organic abstractions, unprecedented in the practice of the furniture maker. When asked where he discovered his inspiration for the forms, he acknowledged the importance of "organic things like shells and bones and plants."[12] The swelling forms, gracefully tapered extensions, and natural materials recall the realm of nature, long influential on American artists working in diverse media. "They are evolved from inherent life forces," the artist explained.[13] The undulant contours of a creation such as *Desk* (1967; fig. 4) echo the extension of limb or root from the original tree, but they also have an arty quality reminiscent of Calder's balanced sculptural forms of the 1940s or the organic shapes in nature-inspired works by a host of American painters, say, William Baziotes or Arthur Dove. The swelling, tripodal legs favored in a number of Castle's later creations recall seed pods or other natural forms, but they also suggest the legs of ancient Chinese bronzes from the Zhou dynasty (1046–256 BCE), with which he might have been familiar from the distinguished Asian art collections of Kansas City's Nelson-Atkins Museum or other holdings. In short, Castle's creativity was fueled both by art and nature.

The resort to such disparate sources suggests a fertile imagination, willing and ready to borrow from anywhere. "When designing furniture anything should be possible,"

Fig. 4
Desk, 1967, Mahogany, Cherry Plywood, Gesso, Silverleaf, 40½ x 89 x 62½ in., Racine Art Museum, Racine, Wisconsin. Gift of S. C. Johnson. Photograph: Jon Bolton.

Castle claims. "Nothing should be taboo. Ideas may come from anywhere and be combined in strange relationships that disregard all tradition—as well as modern conventions . . . . I believe furniture should be sensuous, tactile, and emotional."[14]

In crafting his early carved furniture, the one source Castle outlawed was copyism of historical pieces: "Furniture should not be derived from furniture. This only leads to variations of existing themes."[15] This inventiveness was very much an American idea, as Isamu Noguchi recognized when he claimed that "every American is an inventor, in a sense. After all, that's how America was made, by invention. . . . We Americans admire people like Alexander Graham Bell. They are the real artists of America."[16]

Compelling concepts continued to arise from natural forms, newly supplemented by sculptural inspiration drawn from the figure and from architecture. Several of the clocks from the 1980s connote the human figure, its first appearance in Castle's art since his Baskin-like sculptures of more than two decades earlier. *Harlequin* (1989; fig. 5) derives its diamond patterning from the distinctive dress of figures long familiar in traditional arts, although not in this time-telling function; the anthropomorphic *Four Years Before Lunch* (1984), which is unique in its autobiographical references, likewise reflects Castle's appreciation of the human allusions inherent in the clock form. "Long-case clocks," he notes, "are a way to present the human figure, which, according to the classic and poetic ideal, is the perfect image. They have a face, hands and a body of roughly the same proportions as the human body. Some even have feet."[17] His *Mercury's Dream* (1989; fig. 6) provides the feet—multiplied—referring both to artistic precedent (Giovanni da Bologna's fleet-footed *Mercury* or Umberto Boccioni's Futurist figures) and to the familiar maxim, "Time flies."

Castle's inspiration for other clocks is derived from architectural invention, a source that had been anticipated in Castle's *Late Proposal for the Rochester Convention Center in the Form of a Jewelry Box* (1982). This waggish reference to a recently dedicated local monument shares the Pop sensibility of Claes Oldenburg's

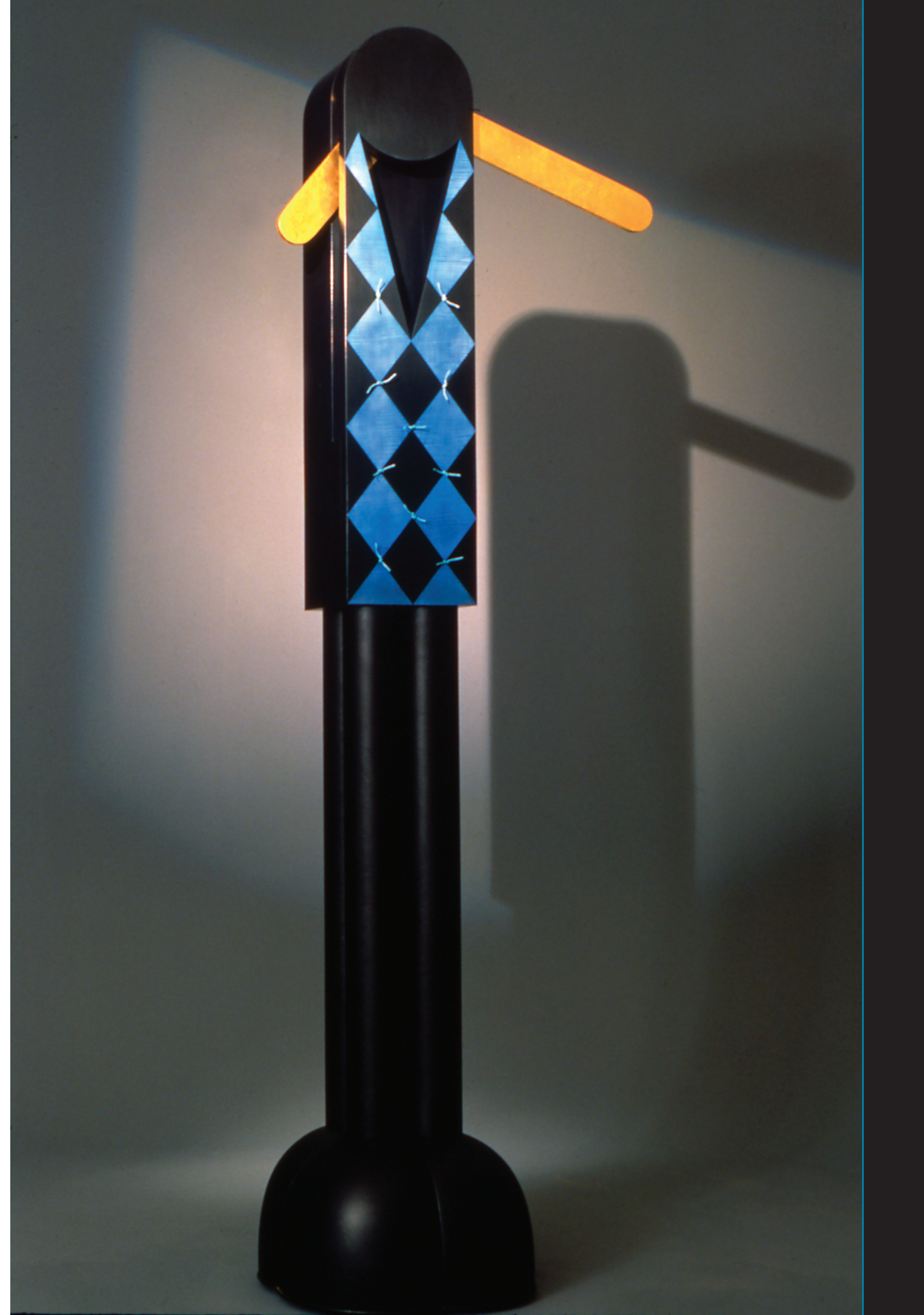


Fig. 5
Harlequin, 1989, Poplar, Curly Sycamore, Black Dyed Swiss Pear, Yorkite, Leather, Gold Leaf, Cedar of Lebanon, Base: 77 x 15½ x 15½ in., Body: 8¼ x 8¼ x 35¼ in. Private collection.

1967 watercolor series *Late Submissions to the Chicago Tribune Architectural Competition of 1922*, but Castle's piece is rendered in three-dimensional form, like an architect's model. That architectonic quality, which some have described as post-modern—a label Castle disavows[18]—reappeared in the elegant geometries of two clocks, *Sun God* (1985; fig. 7) and *Trophy* (1984; fig. 10). Whatever their source—art or nature, man or man-made structures—the inspirations for Castle's most inventive works came from anywhere but the examples of earlier furniture makers.

In the early 1980s, however, his attitude toward historicism changed, at least for a period. The illusionistic works of the late 1970s had required an investigation of earlier styles, for instance, the Hepplewhite table on which gloves and keys rest. In the new decade, in one of the fits-and-starts moves characteristic of his career, he launched with new interest into revivalist works. In 1981 Castle helped organize an exhibition of historic furniture for the Memorial Art Gallery in Rochester. "The Fine Art of the Furniture Maker" project, drawn from the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of art, led him to consider various historic styles and deepened his interest in the subject.

The impact of this curatorial assignment was soon evident in his own work, including the group of exquisitely crafted furniture pieces introduced at Milliken's gallery in 1984, many of them inspired by French Art Deco examples. Castle explained his objective as being to "pick up where Émile-Jacques Ruhlmann [1879–1933], the last of the great *ébénistes*, left off."[19] In retrospect, however, this violation of his tenets in favor of inventiveness and against copyism left the maker dissatisfied. Those pieces now seem to him "way too much based on French Art Deco, the Ruhlmannesque things that I'd like to forget." The works were highly acclaimed and publicized—leading to the general impression that the output was larger than in fact it was—but Castle now regrets that they were "based too much on borrowing aspects from the classical Art Deco things. It's too close." Although he never specifically copied a Ruhlmann design (as others have done, with evident

Fig. 6
Mercury's Dream, 1989, Painted Mahogany, Cast Aluminum, Curly Sycamore, Pear, Maple, Clockworks, 61½ x 48 x 15 in., Private collection.

commercial success), these historicizing feats failed in at least one crucial aspect. As Castle later explained: "I'm interested in the notion of furniture with a concept, which the Ruhlmann pieces lacked."

four: CRAFT

"Unquestionably the foremost furniture maker in America today, Wendell Castle has pushed craftsmanship—and with it public appreciation for craftsmanship—further than anyone thirty years ago could have dreamed possible."[20] Notwithstanding such praise as this from Patricia Conway, Castle remained ambivalent about the role of craftsmanship in his work.

Castle's appreciation of craftsmanship reached beyond his customary realm; it extended to painting, for instance. He saw the appreciation of a beautiful object well crafted as part of the pluralistic trend of the 1980s. "A whole reversal is happening, and not just in *my* mind. Beauty has become something you don't have to be ashamed of," as it had been in the late 1950s when hegemonic abstraction ruled the day. "When I was in college, if people said something was beautiful, that was the worst thing you could possibly say. I don't think that's a criticism anymore. It's just a big rearranging of values, of ideals—which always seems to occur in art. . . . I see more in [the painting of Sir Lawrence] Alma-Tadema than I do in Barnett Newman."[21]

In the early 1980s, at the moment when he was fascinated by historical style and falling under the spell of Ruhlmann, he proposed that "workmanship on an extraordinarily high level could become an art in itself, once you got into these more complex pieces. The workmanship was just as important a part of the whole as anything else."[22] Previously, he had worried that fine craftsmanship "would

Fig. 7

Sun God, 1985, Tulipwood, Purpleheart, Rosewood, Gold Leaf, Battery Operated Movement, 94½ x 39 x 19 in., Private collection.

detract from the art," but now he realized that "in the hands of someone capable of handling it, workmanship becomes an incredible, awesome thing. It's almost an art in itself."[23] Inspired by the *ébénistes* of yore, he intentionally strove for the most expensive piece possible, using the most exotic woods, crafted with the most superior workmanship possible. "It's extreme," he admitted, "and I think extremism is where it's at."[24]

Looking back on his Deco phase, the artist admits that the pieces were finely made, exemplifying an attitude of that time: "that extraordinarily well made things with extraordinary workmanship and extraordinary materials became kind of like art in itself." Today, however, he admits, "I don't think that's true. I don't think that art is really about extraordinary workmanship." After emerging from the Ruhlmann thrall, as he embarked upon the clocks, Castle expressed his aspiration in a more sober vein: "Craftsmanship is a means, not an end."[25]

five: ZEITGEIST

It's an old saw that Art reflects its time, that it presents a mirror to society. When once asked whether his art was intended specifically to respond to his generational moment, Paul McCartney answered honestly: "We [Beatles] kinda knew we were reflecting the times, but if you had asked me then, I would've said the songs just sort of fell out."[26]

Wendell Castle remembers the tumultuous decade that witnessed his emergence, as well as McCartney's: "It [the 1960s] was the last vestige of the artist as a starving individualist expecting everyone else to come around to his thinking. Art didn't have to communicate—art was art." He offers simply that, "I was part of that ideology."[27]

Furniture maker and critic A. U. Chastain-Chapman sees Castle's innovative stack-laminated furniture of the 1960s as reflective of the period's formal and political climate. "Against this background of sculpture and furniture styles that emphasized industrial technology and denied craftsmanship, the natural carved forms, oiled woods and careful craftsmanship of Castle's 1960s work should be seen as a reaction, a form of protest in tune with the social climate of that decade." It was this timeliness that helped to propel Castle's art to the forefront of critical and public attention. Although other sculptors had preceded him in the investigation of biomorphic forms, their work—for instance, Noguchi's carved pieces of the 1940s—were "merely novel." By contrast, Castle's of twenty years later were, in the period parlance, "relevant."[28]

Their relevance might be the product of form as well as materials or technique. Castle's carved work of the 1960s has been described as "pneumatic in its organic swellings and undulations" by one British critic, who found in Castle's furniture references to bodily forms that elsewhere were a national preoccupation of the moment—"either womblike or monuments to the all-American breast."[29]

The *trompe l'oeil* carvings of the late 1970s, marking another phase in Castle's "fits-and-starts" evolution, have similarly been viewed as a reflection of another cultural movement. Arts writer Peter Dormer, for one, has described those bravura productions as "expressive of a particular and recurrent cultural obsession with consumerism and materialism." Drawing an analogy between that moment of material prosperity and seventeenth-century Holland, he discovered a similar "celebration of the good life by and for the merchant classes." He concluded that, "In its emphasis on rich woods and creamy anatomy, much American craft movement furniture is a flight of ecstatic materialism."[30]

It is likely that Castle, although less hyperbolic, would not disagree. In the midst of the aesthetically and economically expansive 1980s, he wrote that "virtuoso pieces—those with such high standards of craftsmanship that the piece is considered a work of art solely on the basis of its technical execution—only flourish in atmospheres that are not restricted by the compromising factors of time and money."[31] In the burgeoning art-furniture field in the 1980s, neither factor constrained Castle. As one critic noted, "In the Sixties, the catchword was 'imagery,' in the Seventies it was 'concept,' but the Eighties is the decade of the Object, better yet, the Functional Art Object."[32] For leadership in that category, Wendell Castle had few competitors.

The timepieces begun in the mid-1980s were functional art objects of a distinctive type, but their maker has minimized the time-telling function. "It's not a very important part of what the piece is about," he explains. "It's in a sense disguised and not all that clear," and Castle does not place very much importance on the actual function of the clock. "I never even bother to put batteries in the ones I have around here [in the studio]. I'm not really very concerned about this. I have clocks on the wall, so I know what time it is." To clients, however, function remains important, sometimes to the artist's chagrin.

Castle's preoccupation with time and its marking might seem very much part of a *fin-de-millennium* mood. He admits to an interest in the metaphoric potential of the clocks but confesses, somewhat sheepishly, that "in a larger sense, I don't have a clue what I'm doing. And I like the fact that I'm never so clear."[33]

Perhaps, like McCartney's music, the clocks do just fall out.

six: MATERIALS

When asked what the truth-to-materials doctrine—once an article of faith honored by craft artists—meant to him, Castle responded, "I don't pay any attention to the truth-to-materials doctrine at all." He recalled that it was the accepted attitude during his school years in the late 1950s but that in his own work he had never paid it much attention. His early carved pieces, using stack lamination, could not be thought of as true to the essential nature of wood and led to accusations of apostasy. "And it really didn't bother me," he recalls. His more recent productions, involving a prodigious variety of materials and techniques, are likewise "not necessarily true to the material; I might paint it or gold-leaf it; I might use metal or dye or other things. It depends on the presence that I want the piece to have."[34]

Despite his investment in decorative surfaces of various types, most of Castle's work, at least until recently, has involved wood in some central role. "It's a material you can manipulate," he explains. "You can move it where you want to move it and make it do what you want it to do. And it's not terribly expensive; it's very reasonable to work with. But it does have a lot of limitations." Those notwithstanding, it is the beauty of wood that inspires Castle's loyalty to the material, however inventively he might treat it. He notes that "it lends itself to lots of different finishes. It has an enormous range of possibilities in the ways it might appear."[35]

In his stack laminations, Castle changed the traditional stick-like role of wood into that of a mass—one that could be shaped by subtractive carving into a sculptural form. Novel though the means and the effect might be, allegiance to the canon of material on which the first generation of woodworkers had rested their achievement was not truly subverted. As curator Edward Cooke noted, "Although Esherick and others of the first generation did not view Castle as a woodworker—Esherick felt that Castle was only after form and that he lacked respect for wood's beauty—

Castle's forms do emphasize the natural qualities of wood, even if they were created artificially."[36] With the heretical introduction of other decorative materials, however, Castle betrayed his origins in the world of the sculptor's studio, not the craftsman's workshop. This had been hinted at as early as the *Stool Sculpture* of 1959, whose ivory inlays contrast with the warm tones of walnut; the interest in color and decoration grew more pronounced over the intervening years. In the late 1960s, he even made a brief digression into sculptural forms fabricated of plastic and neon, decorative objects whose effect depended as much upon color as anything else.[37] Following the *trompe l'oeil* carvings of the early 1970s, generally created from single, monochromatic pieces of wood, Castle turned with new interest to the decorative detailing of his neo-Deco phase, incorporating inlays and marquetry of varied color. With the architectural forms of "post-modern" furniture in the 1980s, and especially with the clocks begun in mid-decade, the chromatic play grew even more pronounced: paint, gold leaf, leather, and metal, as well as varicolored woods and veneers, were used with abandon. In this, he seemed to be following the admonition of another pioneering sculptor and furniture maker, Isamu Noguchi, who advised, "Be not afraid to be even 'vulgar' in the use of color. Study how color can enhance rather than detract from form. Like harmony in music, color plays with its other aspect, form."[38]

In his 1967 appreciation of George Sugarman's polychromed wood sculpture, Castle gave a forecast of his own later fascination with chromatic effects. "Sugarman is very specific about the way he uses color," he explained; "it is not used as decoration. The color works: it may pull a piece along, or stop it when he wants; it may push it back or forward, expand or contract a piece. In some of his earlier work, the color aided in forming discontinuous space relationships. . . . As the form changes, so does the color change to maintain a delicate balance. . . . It is the changing, the infinite variety of form and color, the space relationships caused by the sequence of forms, both related and in some way not, that give his work its characteristic energy and vitality."[39]

In Castle's clocks, color plays a similarly energetic and vital role. His interest in lively colored surfaces dates to his early art training, when he supplemented his industrial design, then his sculpture studies, with classes in painting and drawing. This interest resurfaced unexpectedly in the boldly brushed surfaces of *Dr. Caligari Desk and Chair* (1986; fig. 8), covered with Franz Kline-like strokes of black on a white ground. The desk placed on the exterior what had been contained within the casework of the *Dr. Caligari Clock* of two years earlier (fig. 9); contained within that polyhedron of lapis lazuli hue were similar gestural strokes of black on white.

But Castle's decoration has not been limited to the painted stroke. The variety of colors and materials is dazzling in its brilliance and bold application. The decorative impulse in his productions from the late 1980s onward, which is paralleled in the work of other furniture makers and studio craft artists, suggests a moment of *fin-de-siècle* release comparable to that of the late nineteenth century. The brilliance of glasswork by Louis Comfort Tiffany and Emile Gallé, of decorated furniture by Louis Majorelle or Charles Rennie Mackintosh, the polychromed sculpture of Herbert Adams, or the colorful tile work of Antonio Gaudí: all find their distant echo in the decorative impulse that has marked the recent work of Castle, Dale Chihuly, and a host of other contemporary craft artists.

seven: WORK

Early in his career, Castle thought that he would have an advantage in the furniture field, insofar as his work might be defined as sculpture. Now, looking back, he realizes that that never worked, that the effort "caused a lot of confusion, especially among art historians who weren't willing to accept that furniture can be sculpture. They thought that what I made was furniture *masquerading* as sculpture."[40]

Fig. 8 (above)
Dr. Caligari Desk and Chair, 1986,
Desk: Maple, Rosewood, Painted Yorkite, Ebonized Cherry, Flakeboard, Rosewood Veneer, Silver-Plated Steel Pulls, 29½ x 63 x 41½ in., Chair: Maple, Painted Yorkite, Flakeboard, 31½ x 24 x 24 in. Sydney and Frances Lewis Collection, Richmond, Virginia.

Fig. 9
Dr. Caligari Clock, 1984, Burly Cherry Veneer, Ebony, Gold-Plated Brass, Clock Works, 92½ x 31½ x 26½ in., Memorial Art Gallery, Rochester, New York.

Over many years, much ink has been spilled in the semantic debate over art versus craft, or, in this case, sculpture versus furniture. The arguments often revolve around the question of function—usefulness. "Critical toes seemed to have been stubbed on the boulder of Utility," warns Lisa Hamel.[41] And artists' toes, too. Castle himself confesses uncertainty on the issue. Citing the example of *Ghost*, he notes that it is the artist's intent that determines how an object should be labeled. Objects such as those "were never intended to be used. They were really intended to be looked at, and in this case, that's all you can do. There's no possible use of the piece. So therefore I'm not sure what the difference between that and sculpture is." He defines the distinction between sculpture and furniture, art and craft, simply: "art furniture is furniture, useful. . . . [Art is] useless in the sense of that kind of utility. It may be good for your soul, and all kinds of other high-minded reasons that it's useful. But not actually physically. You can't sit on it."

"I never considered any of my furniture to be sculpture," Castle insisted in the early 1980s. "I always considered my work a sculpturelike activity, but it has always been furniture."[42] On other occasions, however, he acknowledged that "my work is viewed as sculpture just as readily as it's accepted as furniture. I have always considered it to be both."[43] Castle seems comfortable with the irony that, early in his career, he thought "the way to have my work recognized as art was to make my furniture look like sculpture, but it wasn't until my sculpture looked like furniture [i. e., *trompe l'oeil* works] that it was finally accepted as art."[44]

The questioning of definitional boundaries appeared early in the artist's work. Arthur Danto called the *Stool Sculpture* "a meditation in the medium of wood on an ambiguity between sculpture and furniture." The philosopher-critic finally concluded that, "If furniture is to be art, it must be art *as* furniture. It must be at once art *and* furniture."[45] But such simultaneity is not easily accomplished, or recognized.

Isamu Noguchi declared flatly that, "So long as [an object is] useful it's lacking in that quality of art. When it becomes useless it becomes art."[46] (In this, he echoed, perhaps unwittingly, the art-for-art's-sake creed of nineteenth-century French poet, novelist, and critic Théophile Gautier: "There is nothing truly beautiful but that which can never be of any use whatsoever; everything useful is ugly. . . ."[47]) Pointing to one of his distinctive *akari* lanterns as an example, Noguchi explained that "if it didn't have an electric bulb in it, it could be mistaken for art. The very fact that you have a bulb in it removes it from the realm of art."[48] By that measure, the clocks in Castle's studio from which the artist has removed the batteries are art, whereas the powered examples in his client's homes are not. Plug in, drop out, at least from the inutile preserve of Art.

Curator Jonathon Fairbanks has described this utilitarian argument of art versus craft as a "folly," a legacy from outmoded academic notions that elevated painting and sculpture at the expense of every other artistic product. "Dividing the work of fine arts from that of craft is as impossible as separating the functional from the spiritual works," he says. "Just as in life, the physical and metaphysical aspects of art are inseparable."[49] Penelope Hunter-Stiebel, who was Castle's collaborator on "The Fine Art of the Furniture Maker" project, agrees, terming the semantic debate "an irrelevant issue. The point is doing the best work one can. Future generations will decide whether to consider these works major esthetic expressions of our time. It just doesn't matter what the label of the person is."[50]

By whatever name they are called, Castle's creations have generally had a useful role. They work. Cabinets contain; tables and pedestals and seats uphold; lamps illuminate. Even his clocks tell time. And some objects, like *Clock Cabinet* (1990), fill multiple roles. However, over the past two decades or so, the functional role became increasingly secondary, even minimal. Castle has inverted the old "Is it art?" question, and now presents us with the challenge, "Is it furniture?" Critic Jo Ann Lewis insightfully described these creations of the late 1980s as "sculpture that works"—as opposed to furniture that is sculptural—marking a transit in the artist's career, "a new thrust toward 'pure' art."[51]

eight: PLAY

"It's a good idea to be naive, so you'll do things that, if you were smarter, you might not have done and not try to think out everything, every minute detail. Let some spontaneous things happen as you're going along; let one thing lead to another." Wendell Castle's prescription for art making suggests the importance of the innocent eye, of childlike spontaneity in the creative process. The combinations of form and surface decoration that distinguish his recent clocks and other works are lighthearted and playful, sometimes even goofy. The architectonic, rigid monumentality of *Trophy* (1984; fig. 10), which erectly proclaims the hour and its own self-importance, by 1989 had yielded to the irregular forms imbalanced atop a gold-leafed orb in *Top of the World* (fig. 11). Like some dark Humpty Dumpty, the latter's clock face is precariously enthroned in a high chair reminiscent of a child's furnishings. Other clock faces are perched atop similarly unconventional bases of various hues. The irregular red form of *Out of Time* (1996; fig. 12), for example, is impaled on a dark spearpoint over which it droops, its flaccidity reminiscent of other famous timepieces; for example, the melting watches of Salvador Dali's *The Persistence of Memory* (1931). Yet others rise from their slender stalks like birds or flowers.

The colorful, dancing forms of clocks from the 1990s, irregular and imbalanced, seem captured in mid-movement, an elaborate horological choreography frozen in time. In these works, Castle delights in playing with the way forms balance. "I like sort of an awkwardness about the balance," he explains; "the balance is just a little precarious. Imbalance makes it precarious." Although the works are securely fastened or weighted, he makes certain that "visually, the balance hasn't too much prominence." The effect is akin to a circus act—jugglers or tumblers—suggesting the concept of furniture as performance. For Castle, these recent works "have to do with thoughts about gravity, how gravity affects things, pulls everything down. I'm trying to defeat it visually."

Fig. 10

Trophy, 1984, Ebony, Tulipwood, Gold Plated-Brass, Electric Movement, 76 x 21½ x 21¼ in., Private collection.

Fig. 11
Top of the World, 1989,
Poplar, Cherry, Bubinga,
Honduran Mahogany,
Baltic Birch, Leather,
Gold Leaf, 29 x 32 x 79 in.
Collection of Judy and
Howard Berkowitz.

Fig. 12
Out of Time, 1996,
Polychromed Wood,
Gold Leaf, 90 in.,
Private collection.

Although the means are different, the effort to free Castle's colorful forms from gravity's strictures evokes parallels with the mobiles and other kinetic sculptures of his long-ago host Alexander Calder. Castle's playful attitude is also reminiscent of Calder's exuberant persona and performances. The whimsical furniture and clocks of recent years have drawn expressions of delight from the public and acclaim from critics. Jo Ann Lewis, for instance, reviewing Castle's exhibition, "Furniture? Sculpture? The Vanishing Line," at Washington's Fendrick Gallery, reported that "you'd have to be dead not to enjoy [the work]," which she found "lighthearted and fun."[52]

Another commentator noted, "Playfulness of this sort is not common in the orthodox Arts and Crafts tradition."[53] Indeed not! Castle decries "the damage done by William Morris and John Ruskin in the making of fine furniture," blaming them for destroying that specialization of talent on which such products as his depend; "they thought it took away from the dignity a craftsman should have, and from his pride in his own creation. John Ruskin felt that any worker left to his own devices would produce wonderful things. Well that," Castle concluded dismissively, "of course, isn't true."[54]

Whereas the sober artisans of an earlier time found virtue in their craftsmanship and morality in their materials, Castle in his work discovers pleasure and play. "Right from the very beginning," he once confessed, "in all the furniture that I've ever been involved with I've been involved in a kind of game," a game that challenged furniture's traditional meanings and makers' traditional methods and materials.[55]

nine: CONTROL

The spirit of invention or spontaneity that characterizes Castle's recent work is the result of a sophisticated mastery of materials and techniques, not the product of some Ruskinian worker left to his own devices. The apparent imbalance of his sculptural forms is artfully designed and engineered to provide maximum stability, appearances notwithstanding. This control of the physical strength of an individual piece extends to manipulation of the larger environment in which it is placed. Some of his metal chair sculptures, resting uneasily on bases of inverted V form, are anchored to metal "carpets" that secure the precarious seat; additionally, the floor covering ensures that the chair will occupy its own space and not be impinged upon by other objects not of Castle's design. This control of domestic space extends to walls as well as floors. As early as the 1960s, he was making tables of carved laminates that, instead of standing conventionally in a room, cantilevered from the wall to the floor (fig. 13). Just as Anthony Caro, Carl Andre, George Sugarman and others were revising the sculptor's space, taking their art away from the pedestal onto the floor and into the larger arena of the gallery, so too did Castle's furniture escape its usual placement and form, enlivening and participating in its environment.

That use of the wall as support for furniture is recalled in Castle's clocks, such as the suite in *Four Seasons Clock* (1994; fig. 14). These tall forms, carved and colorfully painted with Matissean exuberance, measure hourly time as well as seasonal or calendrical time, and, by metaphoric extension, lifetime. Their vertical planes are the offspring of furniture pieces whose mono- or bipodal supports perforce relied on the wall to provide the third "leg."

Although the clocks in *Four Seasons Clock* are free-standing, their imposing forms and dimensions create an environment into which no other artist's work would seemingly dare intrude. Staking a claim to domestic space is something the artist

Fig. 13

Wall Table No. 16, 1969, Afrormosia, 50 x 81 x 17½ in., Private collection.

Fig. 14

Four Seasons Clock, 1994, Maple Veneer, Poplar, Polychromed Wood, 90 x 42 x 19 in. Private collection.

thinks about, and he attributes that concern to his experience as a furniture maker: "Maybe it's because of the kind of furniture context, where you're put in with other furniture. If I didn't think about what kind of painting is behind it, maybe somebody else's painting will be back there." His use of the wall plane "insures a better environment for the piece," just as "the rug means that nothing's going to be real close to [the metal chair]; at least it makes sure you have a good rug under it."

One of the early lessons that Castle absorbed from Wharton Esherick's example dealt with the importance of this issue of artistic control: "he demonstrated the importance of the entire sculptural environment," Castle recalls, most notably in his Paoli studio and home.[56] Even as a young artist, Castle boldly expressed the wish to do something similar, to make "some really sizeable sort of control situation things where I could build more pieces that go together and have complete control over a room, doing it just the way I want it, including the door handles and door frames and windows and windowsills and baseboards . . . where I pick out the glass in the window and really do the whole thing right."[57]

The desire for control extends beyond the making of the work to its marketing and presentation as well. Always eager for exposure and to be judged by the rigorous critical standards of the contemporary art scene, not solely in the specialized rhetoric of woodworkers and craftsmen, Castle was unique among his coterie of furniture makers for the enterprise he demonstrated in advancing his work. Because of the weight and cost of shipping furniture, such makers were generally limited to exhibiting locally, in shows that were often dominated by the more portable fiber and ceramic arts. But not Castle. As noted by Edward Cooke, "Only Castle demonstrated a keen interest in taking risks, consistently placing his work in such [regional *and* national, craft *and* art] shows."[58] His inclusion in the Mid-America Exhibition in Kansas City, while still a student, marked a move beyond his campus base; two years later, his ambition and his skill took him to New York, where his entry was praised in the Museum of Contemporary Crafts' "Young Americans 1962" show. By 1964, he was showing internationally and was included in the American entry to the Thirteenth Triennial of Milan. Such initiative paid off well, in the marketplace and in public and critical appreciation, and suggests masterful control of the perception and reception of his art, as well as its production.

ten: WORDS

From the outset, titles have been important to Wendell Castle. The intentional ambiguity of *Stool Sculpture* won him a place in the Mid-America Exhibition of art (not craft) in 1960, and ever since, his pieces rarely have been unnamed. For Castle there would be no generic numerical sequences, like Jackson Pollock's *Number 1, Number 2*, and so on; no designations simply by date, such as Clyfford Still's annual titles (for example, *1946-L*), which sometimes were timed even to the month (*November 1950*). Relatively few pieces left the studio as "Untitled," even if the name was simply descriptive (*Desk, Table*, and so forth). Even editioned pieces bore titles, often allusive, such as the trademark *Zephyr* chairs or his experimental plastic seating of the late 1960s, known as *Molar* chairs.

In subsequent years, the titles grew even more allusive or poetic, and sometimes more cryptic. The clocks of the mid-1980s were individually titled—*Ghost, Trophy, Sun Dial*, etcetera—sometimes with clues to their inspiration. For instance, the *Dr. Caligari Clock* alludes to the German expressionist film *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920; Robert Wiene, director), whose angular sets were the inspiration for the clock's faceted construction and expressively painted interior. *Four Years Before Lunch*, by contrast, seems autobiographical in form and implication, recalling a young child (boy Wendell?) in striped shirt, impatiently awaiting the next meal.

Clocks of yet more recent origin continued to reflect the importance of words and titles in Castle's work. Often, his plays on words involved aphorisms about time; some were witty, some clichéd. The artist's evident love of language is especially apparent in one of his time-telling concepts from the late 1990s, which relied on

words for its comprehensibility. *Shakespeare's Clock* was conceived to mark the hours with a laser beam directed to one of twelve standing cones, each inscribed with a quotation from the author that includes a numerical reference appropriate to the hour being "struck." Earlier, Castle's furniture—desks and bookcases—had been made for the production or containment of words; now, the very function of this environmental work depended on the reading of words. Castle thinks often "about this sort of literary aspect of things, [that] little bits of sentences would be good things." He is not interested in the non-sense of random word fragments, like William Burroughs' torn texts, but favors coherence, or at least its semblance. As with his inclination toward ambiguous form, so too is he partial to verbal ambiguity. "I'm kind of interested in things that are nebulous," he reminds his listener; "I think those kinds of words out of context are not real clear what they're about, but yet they're probably about something." Their meaning may be inchoate, yet the words and phrases seem to bear significance. "I like it to be obscure about how effective they should be." Obscurely poetic, or poetically obscure? "But not totally disconnected."

The outcome of *Shakespeare's Clock* is uncertain—the piece has not been realized to date—and Castle recognizes that the concept would place a burden on the viewer. "It's not going to be easy to read," he admits, "because you'll have to walk around the [room-sized] piece to do it. You'll have to constantly change your eye level from there to there" on each hourly cone—reading it like some literary Trajan's column—"so it will take some effort."

Despite the interest in language—and despite his earlier activity as author of articles about his own and other artists' woodworks, including *Wendell Castle's Book of Lamination*—Castle does not foresee this interest in language taking him further into the literary realm. "I don't think I'm a writer," he states, yet he remains fascinated with "certain word combinations and certain sentences out of context," whether Shakespeare's or others.

eleven: DREAMS

"You're innocent when you dream." In 1997 Castle used this poetic phrase as the title for a desk (fig. 15), actually incising the words in script across its elegantly extended surface. He was so pleased with the concept that he employed it anew that same year in a timepiece of the same name, later retitled *There Are Tears in the Bank,* which combines a free-standing clock with a separate painting on a wooden panel (fig. 16). The artist explained the imaginative source of the desk as dream life, not necessarily his own, but in the fantastic transformations he imagines in the visions of those who have really extraordinary dreams. "I'm asked frequently, 'Did you think of this odd thing in your dreams?' Well, it doesn't really happen that way for me, but I imagine if you see a movie of the extraordinary, weird kind of things they're able to do nowadays with computers—of people with their heads turning into something else—I think of that as being dream-like. And you [can] imagine that, and that's why the figure's head [in *You're Innocent When You Dream*] is just sort of stretched out and becomes a desk. You might imagine that in your dreams."

If Castle is quick to disclaim a rich fantasy life of his own—"My dreams are not necessarily like this [desk]"—the subject does recur in his work and in conversation. Aside from the innocent dream (whose title sounds more like advice from columnist Ann Landers than something from William Shakespeare), *Mercury's Dream* and similar fantasies appear in recent works, clocks and others. "I like to abstract the idea of furniture by rejecting modern stylization in favor of fantasy and suggested metaphors," he explains.[59]

Fig. 15
You're Innocent When You Dream, 1997, Pau Amarillo, Polychromed Wood, 36 x 79 x 60 in., Collection of the artist.

Fig. 16
There are Tears in the Bank (in background), 1997, Polychromed Wood, 87½ x 44 x 17 in., Collection of the artist.

twelve: TIME

Castle's interest in clocks was announced as early as 1969, when he wrote admiringly of wood sculptures by Mike Nevelson (born 1922), which had been inspired by the form of the grandfather clock. Noting that furniture is traditionally anthropomorphic, as suggested by the naming of its parts (foot, leg, face, etcetera), Castle wrote of the Nevelson works as a "metaphysical uniting of the two" concepts of figurative sculpture and furniture. Nevelson explained his intent as "sculpture which has as its subject matter a clock." However, in this case, "The starting point is not to make a clock; it is a feeling about a clock."[60]

Nevelson's interest in the grandfather clock arose from his belief that the traditional form was significant in the development of figurative sculpture in America. As explained by Castle, "Nevelson believes that the grandfather clock was the first example of figure sculpture to creep into these [post-Puritan] times. Because of the anthropomorphic qualities and excessive size, the noting of time could not have been its sole purpose. Nevelson feels the grandfather clock to have been a sculpture in disguise."[61] In this, Castle seemingly anticipates critiques of his own work as "furniture masquerading as sculpture."[62]

Although the appreciation of Nevelson's clock-inspired sculptures may have provided a distant impetus for Castle's own turn to the form, it was the conversation with Alexander Milliken that provided the more immediate inspiration. The sustained interest in clocks and time-telling has, however, been fueled by the artist's fascination with creativity of a different sort.

Alan Lightman's *Einstein's Dreams*, published in 1993, has shaped the artist's concepts and forms in profound ways. Castle prizes the little volume, one "that makes it easier to understand some of the ways that scientists think about time." Lightman offers an enchanting elision of physics and fiction, providing ruminations on the varying natures of time as imagined by Einstein early in this century.

Castle's *Time to Time*, as mentioned above, was inspired by one of Lightman's dream worlds wherein "time evolves in fits and starts . . . flows not evenly but fitfully."[63] In just such fashion does the sculpture make its twelve-hour cycle.

In another of Einstein's dreams, the author evokes a world in which there are two kinds of time: mechanical time and body time. "The first is [as] rigid and metallic as a massive pendulum of iron that swings back and forth, back and forth. The second squirms and wriggles like a bluefish in a bay. The first is unyielding, predetermined. The second makes its mind up as it goes along."[64] The latter description could aptly apply to Castle's clocks, whose unconventional carved faces seem to "squirm and wriggle" atop their spindly bases; the irregular character of these sculptures seems improvisational, as if minds were being made up in the process of creation. In short, these clocks are the embodiment of "body time."

Time might also have texture, as dreamt by Lightman's Einstein. "Hypothetically, time might be smooth or rough, prickly or silky, hard or soft."[65] So too do Castle's clocks offer various textures, from the sleek architectural forms of the mid-1980s to the rough, chainsaw-cut forms of more recent date, from rigid columns to softly blooming forms. The physicist's time is translated into the sculptor's colors, forms, and textures.

The restless creativity of Wendell Castle has led him through a dizzying array of forms and expressions. Weary of the illusionism of *trompe l'oeil* carvings, unsatisfied with the art-for-art's-sake finesse of neo-Deco furniture, he turned to clocks, drawn in no small measure by their conceptual power. Art, he now says, "needs more of an idea behind it" than the Ruhlmannesque pieces afforded, "and more of a metaphor, so you're representing something." The clocks appeal because they "have an automatic metaphor," as Lightman also realized. "Other furniture doesn't."

Nevertheless, even serviceable objects, such as a desk or pedestal, might have metaphoric potential. "You have to try to attach other metaphors to this [furniture] thing," Castle admonishes. Beyond just expressing the desk-ness of a writing

platform, for instance, a desk might provide "a metaphor for success, . . . for writing out." Likewise the pedestals, which Castle produced in quantity in the 1990s. Early in his career, Castle explained this interest in formal terms: "essentially a table has always been a kind of flat thing with something holding it up. . . . I kind of like the thing underneath the most. I was interested in . . . getting the base out from under the table and making the whole thing a piece of sculpture."[66] Today, the pedestal might more likely be viewed as an expression of elevation, a metaphor for uplift, a celebration. In pedestals, in desks and other furnishings, and especially in the clocks, Wendell Castle weds concept to consummate craftsmanship to provide a body of visual delights and metaphoric challenges.

* * * * * * * * * *

"Long ago," wrote Alan Lightman of another dream world, "before the Great Clock, time was measured by changes in heavenly bodies: the slow sweep of stars across the night sky, the arc of the sun and variation in light, the waxing and waning of the moon, tides, seasons. Time was measured also by heartbeats, the rhythms of drowsiness and sleep, the recurrence of hunger, the menstrual cycles of women, the duration of loneliness. Then, in a small town in Italy, the first mechanical clock was built. People were spellbound. Later they were horrified. Here was a human invention that quantified the passage of time, that laid ruler and compass to the span of desire, that measured out exactly the moments of a life. It was magical, it was unbearable, it was outside natural law. Yet the clock could not be ignored. It would have to be worshiped. The inventor was persuaded to build the Great Clock. Afterwards, he was killed and all other clocks were destroyed. . . . Then the pilgrimages began."[67]

Happily, in our world, the inventor is not sacrificed. But great clocks continue to be imagined and created by Wendell Castle, and they have become the object of new admiration, even of pilgrimage (fig. 17).

Fig. 17
Wendell Castle standing under his sculpture *Full Moon*, Toronto, 1988, Stainless Steel, Bronze, Gold Leaf, 19 x 10 x 3½ ft., Photograph © 1989 The Detroit Institute of Arts.

notes

1. John Russell, “Wendell Castle,” *New York Times*, March 18, 1983: C-22.

2. For the most complete account of the artist’s development through the 1980s, see Davira S. Taragin and Edward S. Cooke, Jr., “The Career of Wendell Castle,” in Davira S. Taragin, Edward S. Cooke, Jr., and Joseph Giovanni, *Furniture by Wendell Castle* (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1989), 15–99.

3. Castle, Interview with the author, Scottsville, NY, May 18, 1998. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from Castle are from this interview.

4. Alan Lightman, *Einstein’s Dreams* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993).

5. Peter Dormer, *The New Furniture: Trends and Traditions* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1987), 139.

6. New York: Reinhold Publishing Corporation, 1956.

7. Wendell Castle, “Wharton Esherick 1887–1970,” *Craft Horizons* 30 (August 1970): 11.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

10. Matthew Kangas, *Wendell Castle: Environmental Works* (New York: Peter Joseph Gallery, 1993), 4.

11. Arthur Danto, “Furniture, Philosophy, Craft, and Art: The Masterwork of Wendell Castle,” in *Angel Chairs: New Work by Wendell Castle* (New York: Peter Joseph Gallery, 1991), 41.

12. Barbaralee Diamonstein, *Handmade in America: Conversations with Fourteen Craftmasters* (New York: Abrams, 1983), 29. For more on Castle’s innovative laminated pieces, see Dennis Wyatt Durham, “Wendell Castle’s Stack Laminations, 1963–1980,” M. A. thesis (Richmond: Virginia Commonwealth University, 2003). Durham views the laminations as “a radical departure in both technique and conceptualization from traditional handcrafted furniture design . . . [with] significance for both Castle’s early career and the new craft in woodworking as a whole” (30).

13. Artist’s statement, in Lee Nordness, *Objects: USA* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1970), 257.

14. Wendell Castle, “On Commissions,” in Taragin et al., 118.

15. Artist's statement, in Nordness, *Objects: USA*, 257.

16. "Artists in Their Own Words: Isamu Noguchi by Paul Cummings" (1979); in *Isamu Noguchi: Essays and Conversations*, eds. Diana Apostolos-Cappadona and Bruce Altshuler (New York: Abrams, 1994), 138.

17. Wendell Castle, quoted in Michael E. Stone, *Contemporary American Woodworkers* (Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith, 1986), 126.

18. "Castle flatly states that he is not a Post-Modernist but a `historical classicist' who abhors the ironic qualities present in much Post-Modernist work." (Taragin et al., 71).

19. Wendell Castle, quoted in "Royal Suite," *Fine Woodworking* 31 (November–December 1981): back cover.

20. Patricia Conway, *Art for Everyday: The New Craft Movement* (New York: Clarkson Potter, 1990), 259.

21. *The Fine Art of the Furniture Maker: Conversations with Wendell Castle, Artist, and Penelope Hunter-Stiebel, Curator, about Selected Works from the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (Rochester: Memorial Art Gallery, 1981), 109.

22. Diamonstein, *Handmade in America*, 27.

23. Wendell Castle, quoted in Christopher Hemphill, "Against the Grain: The Art of Wendell Castle," *Town and Country* (May 1984): 252.

24. *The Fine Art of the Furniture Maker*, 108.

25. Castle, quoted in Stone, *Contemporary American Woodworkers*, 126.

26. Paul McCartney, quoted in "Paul at Fifty," *Time*, June 8, 1992: 86.

27. Castle, quoted in Stone, *Contemporary American Woodworkers*, p. 120. Times and attitudes change, however; by the mid-1980s, Castle explained to Stone, "Today art is more like a business and now I use decorative motifs to convey my message rather than the idea that art represents art."

28. Urbane Chapman, "Wendell Castle Tries Elegance . . . and Pushes the Limits of Craftsmanship," *Fine Woodworking* 42 (September–October 1983): 69.

29. Dormer, *The New Furniture: Trends and Traditions*, 140.

30. Ibid.

31. Wendell Castle, "The Leading Edge," *Popular Mechanics*, November 1986: 88.

32. Patricia Warner, "Art Camouflaged as Furniture" *Studio*, 198:1009 (1985): 12.

33. In conversation with the artist, he adds, with a grin: "After the fact, I get much clearer."

34. Diamonstein, *Handmade in America*, 34.

35. Diamonstein, *Handmade in America*, 36.

36. Edward S. Cooke, Jr., *New American Furniture* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1989), 16.

37. In 2006, some of Castle's plastic furniture from the late 1960s was reissued in a limited run by the New York gallery R 20th Century, including four designs in a Black Edition. See Julie V. Iovine, "Plastic Fantastic," *New York Times Style Magazine*, April 1, 2007: 40.

38. Isamu Noguchi, "What's the Matter with Sculpture?" (1936); in *Isamu Noguchi: Essays and Conversations*, 19.

39. Wendell Castle, "Wood: George Sugarman," *Craft Horizons* 27:2 (March–April 1967): 33.

40. Diamonstein, *Handmade in America*, 27–28.

41. Lisa Hamel, *Time and Defiance of Gravity* (Rochester: Memorial Art Gallery, 1986), 10.

42. Wendell Castle, Artist's statement, in Denise Domergue, *Artists Design Furniture* (New York: Abrams, 1984), 61.

43. Castle, "The Leading Edge," 90.

44. Castle, quoted in Stone, *Contemporary American Woodworkers*, 120.

45. Danto, "Furniture, Philosophy, Craft, and Art," p. 41.

46."Artists in Their Own Words," in *Isamu Noguchi: Essays and Conversations*, 140.

47. Théophile Gautier, Preface to *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (1834; New York: Modern Library, n.d.), xxv. Gautier continued: ". . . for it is the expression of some need, and man's needs are ignoble and disgusting like his own poor and infirm nature. The most useful place in a house is the water-closet."

48. "Artists in Their Own Words," in *Isamu Noguchi: Essays and Conversations*, 140.

49. Jonathan L. Fairbanks, "Crafts and American Art Museums," in Marcia Manhart and Tom Manhart, eds., *The Eloquent Object: The Evolution of American Art in Craft Media Since 1945* (Tulsa: Philbrook Museum, 1987), 157, 160.

50. Diamonstein, *Handmade in America*, 15.

51. Jo Ann Lewis, "Sculpture That Works," *Washington Post*, October 4, 1986: G-2.

52. Ibid.

53. Edward Lucie-Smith, "Time Capsules," *Art News* 85 (March 1986): 113.

54. Diamonstein, *Handmade in America*, 16.

55. Castle, interview with Robert Brown for the Smithsonian Institution's Archives of American Art, Scottsville, NY, June 3, August 13, 15, and December 12, 1981; transcript, p. 95.

56. Castle, "Wharton Esherick 1887–1970," 11.

57. Wendell Castle in *Woodenworks: Furniture Objects by Five Contemporary Craftsmen* (Washington: Renwick Gallery, 1972), 41.

58. Cooke, *New American Furniture*, 17.

59. Castle, "On Commissions," in Taragin et al.,118.

60. Wendell Castle, "Mike Nevelson: The Gender of Wood," *Craft Horizons* 29 (March–April 1969): 17.

61. Ibid.

62. Diamonstein, *Handmade in America*, 28.

63. Lightman, *Einstein's Dreams*, 86–87.

64. Lightman, *Einstein's Dreams*, 23–24.

65. Lightman, *Einstein's Dreams*, 63.

66. Castle, in *Woodenworks*, 38.

67. Lightman, *Einstein's Dreams*, 150–51.

About Wendell Castle

Known internationally for his innovative designs in wood, plastic, and bronze, Wendell Castle has been a sculptor, designer, and educator for more than four decades. He has exhibited widely, and his work is represented in major museum and corporate collections throughout the United States, Europe, and the Far East, among them the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC; the Art Institute of Chicago, Illinois; and the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Pennsylvania.

In addition, Castle has served as mentor to several generations of artists. He began teaching in 1960 at the University of Kansas and later joined the faculty at the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) and the State University of New York at Brockport. From 1980–88, Castle operated his own art school in Scottsville, New York. Some of his students are now teachers and many have successful careers in art and design. Castle is currently Artist-in-Residence at RIT and is asked often to exhibit, lecture, and teach at educational institutions throughout the world.

Born November 6, 1932, in Emporia, Kansas, Castle holds degrees in industrial design (BFA) and sculpture (MFA) from the University of Kansas.

"It's a good idea to be naive, so you'll do things that, if you were smarter, you might not have done and not try to think out everything, every minute detail. Let some spontaneous things happen as you're going along; let one thing lead to another."

—Wendell Castle

… Castle's clocks offer various textures, from the sleek architectural forms of the mid-1980s to the rough, chainsaw-cut forms of more recent date, from rigid columns to softly blooming forms. The physicist's time is translated into the sculptor's colors, forms, and textures.

—Charles Eldredge