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Racine Art Museum Hosts Urban Wood Encounter 2015

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Aligning with its contemporary crafts focus, Racine Art Museum is the first museum to host Urban Wood Encounter, an environmentally conscious exhibition of fine furniture. Open September 25, 2015 – January 3, 2016, Urban Wood Encounter 2015: RAM Explores Contemporary Furniture offers a collection of furniture and objects made by regional artists who apply their individual creativity and personal interests to often-discarded wood.

Contemporary studio furniture is dynamic and varied. Since the last part of the twentieth century, artists have employed numerous techniques and materials as they have investigated the conceptual, emotional, and sculptural potential of furniture, as well as its more traditional utilitarian value. As conversations about the environment and the use of natural resources have gained momentum in a broad social context, many contemporary artists and designers have been exploring and questioning the source of their materials.

Challenging “furniture makers and designers to create inspiring and thoughtful furniture from a regionally abundant and

underutilized natural resource,” Urban Wood Encounter 2015 emphasizes creative uses for urban wood. Rescued from trees that are not harvested for their timber value, this material would otherwise find its way into landfills when they succumb to age, injury, or disease.

Artists scheduled to participate in Urban Wood Encounter 2015 include: Jarrod Beglinger, Robert “Andrew” Black, Michael A. Doerr, Fabian Fischer, Kevin Giese, ICON Modern, Mike Jarvi, Joe La Macchia, Tom Loeser, Aaron Malinowski, Erich Moderow, Paul Morrison, Joseph Murphy, Charles Radtke, Keaton Rogers, Anthony Saporiti / Thuy Khuu, Dwayne Sperber, Andrew Yench.

Milwaukee area furniture maker Dwayne Sperber is the catalyst behind the series of Urban Wood Encounter exhibitions. Sperber was introduced to urban wood over a decade ago and quickly became a major advocate for its use. He has worked tirelessly to build, in his own words, “awareness and markets for the abundance of wood being removed due to insect, disease, or circumstance.” Sperber’s advocacy, especially with this ongoing series of annual exhibitions, underscores the need to raise awareness for – what is for many – a “new” resource.

Another passionate advocate for the use of urban wood is furniture designer and maker, Joseph La Macchia. La Macchia, who has been using salvaged materials for decades and considers it a lifestyle choice, has organized the Urban Wood Collective, a “group of sawyers, woodworkers, wood purveyors, and enthusiasts that participate in salvaging trees from urban environments.” He balances his desire to create fine furniture with social, ethical, and personal concerns.

Other artists, including those using other materials and making different types of work, echo the dedication reflected in the practice of both Sperber and La Macchia. Conversations and considerations regarding “sustainability” permeate popular culture and the art world.

Offering an expansive lens for understanding material use and value, this exhibition is presented in conjunction with Wisconsin Urban Wood, a non-profit organization that is developing partnerships that allow urban wood to be recognized as a valuable resource.

This exhibition is made possible by: Platinum Sponsors – Karen Johnson Boyd and William B. Boyd, SC Johnson, Windgate Charitable Foundation; Gold Sponsors – Herzfeld Foundation, Johnson Bank, National Endowment for the Arts, Osborne and Scekic Family Foundation, Racine Community Foundation, W. T. Walker Group, Inc.; Silver Sponsors – Racine County, Racine United Arts Fund, Real Racine, Wisconsin Arts Board; Bronze Sponsors – EC Styberg Foundation, Educators Credit Union, In Sink Erator, Modine Manufacturing Foundation, The Norbell Foundation, Orkney Springs Retreat, Polyform Products, Inc., Ruud Family Foundation, Inc., Wisconsin Public Radio.



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