



Canadiana: Wilderness Weirdness

by

Carson Wronko

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Industrial Design

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Abstract

Canadiana: Wilderness Weirdness provides a distinctive design through form, detail and handcraft. The practice of object making utilizes traditional pairings of domestic materials with traditional and contemporary manufacturing processes, resulting in objects that reference the Canadian landscape/natural environment. The physical structure of each piece is influenced by the simplicity of minimalist sculpture, and enhanced by craftsmanship, texture and marquetry. Each piece is handmade; building an honest union between the product and maker, who is dedicated to the creation of well-crafted, unique designs. Within the home these pieces represent a reunion with the wilderness, their primary source of inspiration and a reconnection between craft and nature.

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Wronko Woods Photography:
Robert Faulkner
Caleb Maurice

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Rebecca Fletcher

Wronko Woods Industrial Design:
Michael Peel
Robert Faulkner
Devin Hobbins

Ceramics:
Molly Bradford, Stranger Design

Upholstery and Leatherwork:
Jessica Nepton-Chayer, Copper Cherry

Thesis Supervisor

Tim Antoniuk

Examining Committee

Sean Caulfield, Fine Arts, University of Alberta (Chair)
Tim Antoniuk, Industrial Design, University of Alberta (Thesis Supervisor)
Sue Colberg, Visual Communication Design, University of Alberta (Advisor)
Robert Shannon, Theatre Design, Department of Drama, University of Alberta (External)

1.0 Introduction

The process of creation begins with a rough sketch, which is then crafted within the workshop to further develop and refine the form. My thesis research project is about creating objects through handcraft and allowing instinct and my senses to design in an improvised design process. The physical form is created using a traditional artistic approach, where the craftsperson makes a few additions then steps back to discover queues as to how to progress the piece. After the completion of a prototype, I allow myself to reflect on what I have created. Rather than researching and designing heavily beforehand to inform an object, the physical process allows me to generate a form which then informs the function of the object. For me, this is an ongoing process of making and reflecting. This is not the most time-efficient way of creation, but it allows for an organic process of evolution. Allowing intuition to influence the physical design process through experimentation, leads to a rich and authentic connection of material and form.

2.0 Background

2.1 Undergraduate Degree

During my Bachelor's Degree in Fine Arts at the University of Victoria my artwork primarily focused on the relationship of individually fabricated structures and the human body, expressed through sculpture, live performance and photography. I explored a fascination with the construction of objects that would act as sculpture, but could be enlivened through bodily involvement, similar to the works of Charles Ray where his body is used to activate or complete sculptures (image. 1).



(image. 1) Charles Ray, Phantom Limb, 1985



(image. 2) Carson Wronko, I-Beam, 2012

My performative objects were constructed to create a conversation about physical labour in the construction of the structure and the human body, through gestures and specific actions that tested my physical boundaries. A physical and bodily reality was presented to the viewer, they were placed in an indeterminate state where their participation was never being fully detached from or actively included in the experience (image. 2). The functionality of the uninhabited structure remained ambiguous, until it was activated through physical interaction. This is demonstrated in the photographs (images. 3-6) below in my performance *Dunk-Ups* (2012) where I would submerge my head in paint to be then hit against a canvas that was directed through an audience member's participation. Through this action the participant would become the "artist" and I was just part of the mechanical apparatus to create their painting.



(image. 3) Carson Wronko, Dunk Ups (paint storage), 2012



(image. 4) Carson Wronko, Dunk Ups (painting apparatus), 2012



(image. 5) Carson Wronko, Dunk Ups (performance), 2012



(image. 6) Carson Wronko, Dunk Ups (performance), 2012

As a secondary focus, I created objects like *Blue Collar Springsteen* (image. 7) that did not directly relate to my own physical performance, but continued the suggestion of the involvement of the human form. *Blue Collar Springsteen* is a kinetic sculpture that repeatedly lifts the American flag.

I believe the triangular interrelationship between object, body of the performer and the viewer has the potential to evoke meaning through utility and immediate labour, and awaken desire from a juxtaposition of brute force and beauty.



(image. 7) Carson Wronko, *Blue Collar Springsteen*, 2013

2.2 Professional Experience

After completing a bachelor's degree in Visual Arts, I searched for employment that would allow me to think creatively and work with my hands. Given the rarity of making a living as a paid artist intern, I began working for the furniture design company *Room B*, based in Calgary, AB. *Room B* produces modern designs for residential and commercial markets (image. 8). At *Room B*, I had taken on the role of shop/studio manager, where my responsibilities ranged from product development to production and marketing.



(image. 8) Room B, Contour Chair, 2014

Over the course of two years, the direction of my creative output increasingly shifted towards furniture design as a result of the involvement in the design community and through the mentorship of Brian Buchik (creator of *Room B*). During this period, I began to reevaluate my previous mode of making and realized that I was frustrated with the “art world”. I was frustrated that my artwork could only be shown in a gallery setting which has a daunting application process for a young artist. I found galleries to be restrictive in terms of the volumes and types of people that could see my work. I was also frustrated that these objects could only exist in a gallery as opposed to being an object of utility, that is created for daily use. After exploring various forms of artistic creation, I had come to the realization that I no longer wanted to be a tangible component of the performance artwork because I over-extended my boundaries physically and mentally. Although it resulted in a strong body of work, by the end of my degree I was exhausted and felt creatively constrained. In consequence of this shift in my creative practice, I began designing my own handcrafted furniture (image. 9). I became “addicted” to designing and making my own work, although my technical skills were quite limited.



(image. 9)Carson Wronko, Canopy Side Table, 2014

To further my technical skills in both woodworking and metalworking, I relocated to Vancouver, B.C. to work for a furniture company named *Union Wood Company (UWC)* founded by Craig Pearce in 2009. *UWC* is at the opposite end of the spectrum in comparison with *Room B*, as *UWC* primarily builds custom handmade furniture (image. 10). During my employment at *UWC* I was exposed to a new approach to manufacturing furniture with an alternative business model, which focused on creating a strong brand identity and cultivating a distinct culture by utilizing social media platforms.



(image. 10) *Union Wood Company*, Custom Tables, 2015

I am grateful for the opportunity to work at both of these companies. I was able to learn invaluable lessons about creating furniture and the complexities surrounding the business of furniture design and manufacturing. In keeping with the value that designers place on professional experience, I was fortunate enough to produce furniture for high-ranking companies such as Starbucks, Google and Lululemon. These experiences began to shape me as an emerging furniture designer.

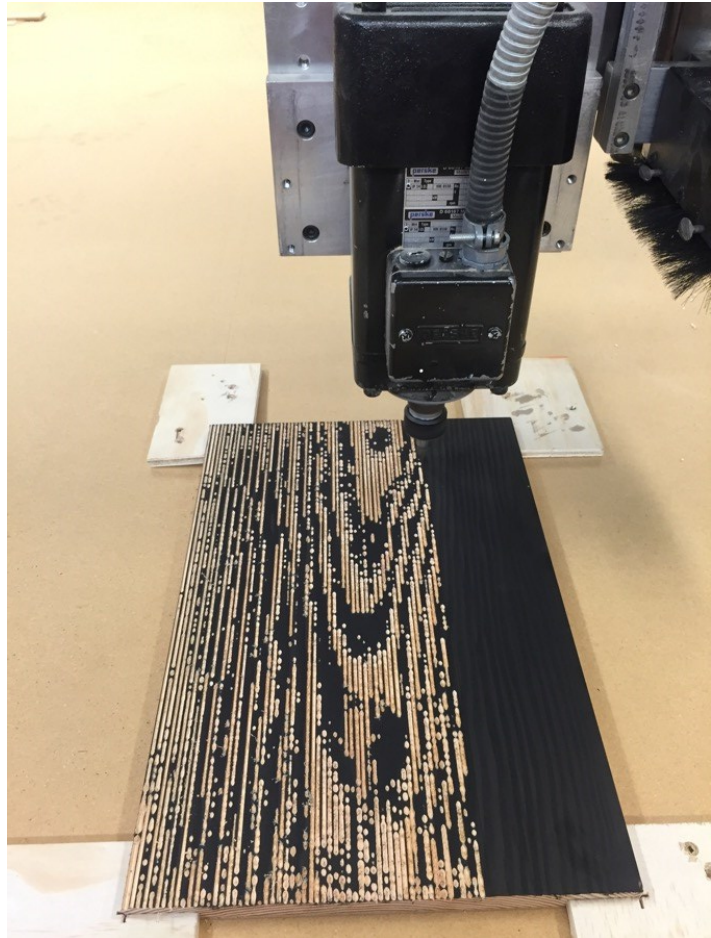
While working for these companies and exploring my own craft, I continued to strive to push my own work and continue my education. Rather than attending an artist's residency, or another design internship, I was looking for a formal design education through a practice-based Master of Design program. From this education, I could derive better understanding of design research methods which could then inform my designs. My ambition was to continue creating furniture while exploring different techniques and aesthetics. The University of Alberta's Industrial Design program seemed unique due to its facilities, resources and the open-minded faculty. I felt that this would be the perfect fit to continue my practice-based research and expand my personal design aesthetic to develop a collection of unique furniture

3.0 Practice-Based Research

3.1 Sculptural experimentation

At the University of Alberta, I began my research by discovering my own design aesthetic through a process of experimenting with wood working processes. Focusing on manipulating texture and form to influence the ideas for furniture designs.

During this period of experimentation, I began familiarizing myself with the lathe, CNC (computer numerical control) router and hand router which added to my vocabulary of technical skills. The objects created by the CNC router began by replicating natural textures (wood grain, beaver chewed wood) that were 3-Dimensionally scanned (image. 11).



(image. 11)Carson Wronko, CNC Router Experiment, 2015

As these CNC Router experiments were quite time intensive, and relied on the shop technicians, I also experimented with different forms and textures derived through the use of different hand and power tools. After many different experiments, a texture evolved through using the hand router, consisting of a randomized pattern of small gouges on the wood's flat surface (image. 12).



(image. 12)Carson Wronko, Texture, 2015

My focus on replicating natural textures shifted from a random repetition of mark making to a consistent repetition of a singular form to generate a pattern. These experiments were an exercise in creating objects in a sculptural mode by focusing on the form and surface without considering a specific function(image.13). In creating without a definitive utility, the form is removed from any boundaries or restraints in the development of texture or shape. This allowed for an organic and experimental result.



(image. 13)Carson Wronko, Texture & Form Experiments, 2015

During this period of intensive form and material manipulation, I began to research the types of furniture and home accessory objects that referenced sculptural experimentation. I found that the furniture market was flooded with clean and minimalist designs, aesthetically similar to the designs that I had manufactured at *Room B* and *Union Wood Company*. Therefore, I thought there was an opportunity in filling a niche in the market place by means of transposing sculptural forms and texturally informed natural materials. This process will move beyond a straightforward modernist or minimalist approach and develop new ways of seeing, experiencing and feeling which are enlivened by the development of texturally augmented materials.

3.2 Wronko Woods Formation

In early 2016, I took the processes from the experimental research sculptures and applied them to furniture making (image.14).



(image. 14)Carson Wronko, Side Table, 2016

Shortly after producing and displaying my first creations on social media platforms, I started gaining a following of people wanting to commission me to design and build custom furniture. From these initial commissions, I began designing products that could go into production like the CUB Chair (image 15). An area of design and practice that I was familiar with because of my professional work with *Room B* and *Union Wood Company*, although these designs were created and manufactured in my new role as the principle designer.

CUB is a solid wood dining chair that was envisioned to be ergonomically comfortable and be robust like a bear. The design features a smooth transition of hand-turned legs with a contrasting seat composed of compound angles. With a blend of minimalist and modern aesthetics, the chair also has traditional woodworking elements of joinery to visually and structurally enhance the chair. This chair informed my designs for the next year through many lathe-based designs (image. 16).



(image. 15)Wronko Woods, CUB, 2016



(image. 16)Carson Wronko, working on lathe, 2016

Reflecting on this moment with greater clarity now, I realize that this was an important water-shed moment for me. Not only was it amazing to finally receive interest and funding for my original designs, it provoked the impetus to form an official studio practice under the name *Wronko Woods*. By naming my practice, I believed it would legitimize my company and me as a professional, instead of just a hobby woodworker. This has proven to be important to my success as an emerging designer, to test my designs in the public realm. The name *Wronko Woods* stems from a couple different sources. By using my surname Wronko, I am rooting my family's identity to the brand but not a direct relation to my own specific identity. By leaving out my first name, it remains ambiguous enough to create a brand that is associated with the furniture instead my own identity. In addition, it allows *Wronko Woods* to grow as a company that will eventually add other designers and/or craftsmen to the team. The term "Woods" does not specifically come from woodwork even though it is the primary material and process I use. "Woods" predominantly describes the location where I was raised, and gained the inspiration to create objects. Similar to "The Hundred-Acre Wood" from *Winnie the Pooh*, it is the "Wronko Woods". I grew up on a farm where our property was divided into agriculture land and a nature reserve. Here I developed my basic skills in building a connection to wood.

3.3 Wronko Woods Brand Development

The practice-based research that was directing my designs expanded from a physical process to the formation of the concepts of branding, marketing and a business model, which produced a symbiotic relationship with the furniture collection. Given the positive input that I was receiving from the public, and because I would be exhibiting my work in local design shows (*Latitude 53 Art Gallery*) and possibly in Tradeshow (see section 3.4 Wronko Woods Industry Involvement). I wanted to test the outcome of representing my work through a website, social media platforms, and printed promotional material. This eventually had proven to be as important as the physical body of work. I needed to represent my work in a unique fashion to support and compliment the collection's physical forms. Therefore, I branded my work around the tagline *Canadiana: Wilderness Weirdness*.

The tagline *Canadiana: Wilderness Weirdness* can be broken down in three parts: "Canadiana" describes my family history and roots, "Wilderness"; my inspiration and "Weirdness"; my work. Canadiana is a term associated with the culture and history of Canada. To each person this may bring up varying imagery. To me "Canadiana" represents primarily the broad landscape as well as the diversity of climate, ecosystem, geography and settlement of Canada. It evokes nostalgic imagery of the Hudson Bay Company, the homes of the trappers and settlers, and how their objects were influenced by the land and season (image. 17). This lifestyle emphasized the basic essentials of living with the importance of heirloom (valued) objects.



(image. 17) *DH Nelles and his orderly sitting in Nelles' tent. 1907*

Not only is Canada diverse through the geography, but also through the origins of the people. Our country is multicultural, which contributes to the traditions of what it means to be Canadian. As Canada is a young country, our identity is made through the influence of many other nations. Through multiculturalism the Canadian furniture design aesthetic does not have a distinct style, it has a blend of many other cultures such as Japanese, Scandinavian and American. This cultural blend also shown through the works of *Jeff Martin Joinery* (image. 18) and *Hinterland* (image. 19), where the designers create a unique aesthetic that continually evolves and allows the designer artistic freedom to gain inspiration from across the world.



(image. 18) *Jeff Martin Joinery, Tuning Forks Table, 2017*



(image. 19) Hinterland, Shepard's Chair, 2017

The collection *Canadiana: Wilderness Weirdness* is inspired by natural elements native to Canada, therefore, the furniture was photographed in those environments. The photographs have a majestic quality to them through the contrast between the sculptural forms of the furniture and the snowy landscape placed like a beacon or an inuksuk in a blizzard.



(image. 19) Wronko Woods, Coal, 2017

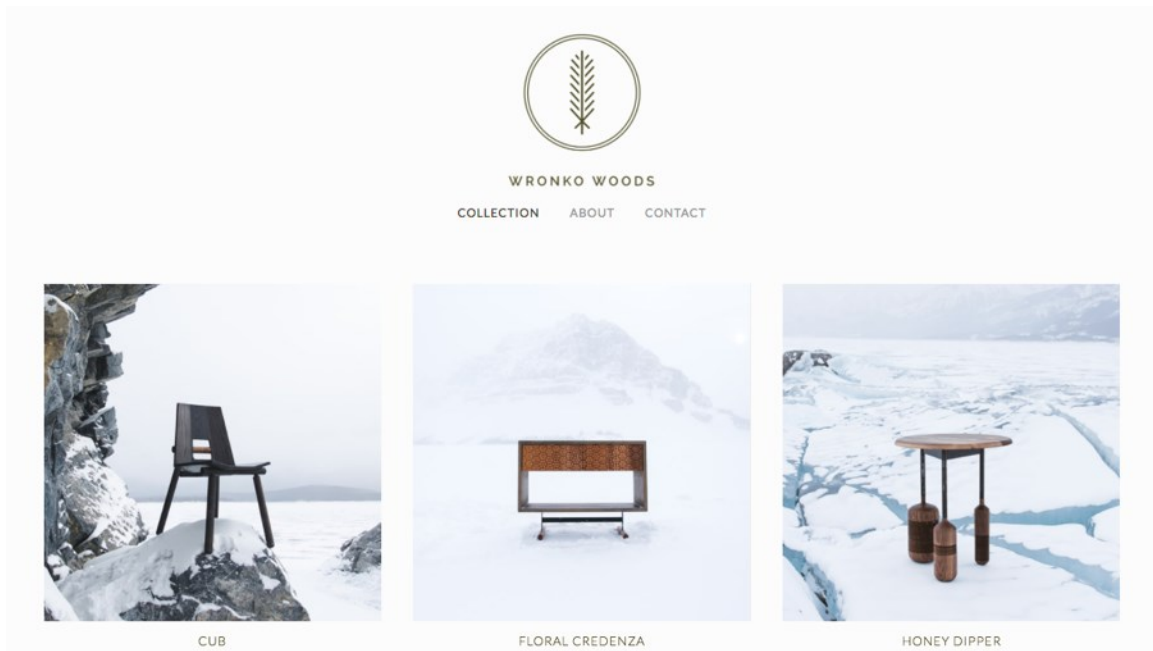


(image. 20) Wronko Woods, Honey Dipper, 2017

Utilizing the imagery and landscapes that have influenced my work, I choose to target the collection toward a demographic population who are involved in outdoor or mountain culture. I believe the photographs (images. 19-20) in the mountain landscape gave the furniture context and spoke to its inspiration and origin. *Canadiana: Wilderness Weirdness* gives the collection a foundation for a story to be told through the physical objects.



(image. 21) Wronko Woods, Website-Homepage, 2017



(image. 22) Wronko Woods, Website-Collection, 2017

The development of my website (wronkowoods.com) and promotional material was quite beneficial in generating the branding and business model for *Wronko Woods* (images. 21-22). I wanted to represent my work as a cohesive collection of objects that aesthetically referenced one another through materiality and form. Each piece within the collection has customizable elements of materials, sizing or detailing. This in turn creates an intimate relationship with the client as they receive a one of a kind product. The pieces within the collection are quite labor intensive to produce and are made from high quality materials,

which reflects the high price point. Therefore, I wanted to create an online store for the website that focused on objects in a moderate price range of under \$500.00. This business model was borrowed from the business strategy of *Union Wood Company*. “How can I sell inexpensive objects to sustain a steady income of projects flowing in?” Depending on your own business model or financials this can steer your creative output into a different direction. I found it informative to investigate other business models. Through researching other companies, I made the decision to sell lower priced items, such as cutting boards (image. 23) to maintain a consistent flow of revenue.



(image. 23)Wronko Woods,
Circular Cutting Boards, 2017

This is a concept that I struggle with: The creation for sales or the creation for the highest creative output. This mode of thinking seemed very uncomfortable to me at the time, but slowly I began to realize to stay to true my approach of testing and pushing my creativity, instead of focusing on making money. My supervisor, Tim Antoniuk, consistently reminded me that design is not just a man-made artifact, that it is an entire ecology of thinking, testing, prototyping, branding, and business model development.

3.4 Wronko Woods Industry Involvement

After launching the website, there was a great response towards the branding and collection of my work. The website is a great tool for showcasing and exposing my work internationally. Through this resource I was able to connect and have my collection shown in blogs (Design Milk, Ignant, Azure Magazine, Western Living) across the world. Social media platforms, such as Instagram have also been a key resource, not only in generating sales, but in gaining critical feedback from a community that I am designing for.



(image. 24)Wronko Woods, IDS Vancouver, 2017

Around this time, at the end of my first year, I realized the importance of physically displaying my work because of the sculptural and tactile qualities of the collection. The textural, material and finish quality cannot fully be appreciated without observing the collection in person. Through this approach, I have found that it is easier to gain credibility and connections with interior designers, retailers and the media. The most beneficial way to physically exhibit my work has proven to be through trade shows and retailers. In the summer of 2017 I attended two trade shows: *Address Assembly* and *IDS Vancouver*, which were both located in Vancouver, BC (image. 24). Trade shows are a great exercise in understanding how I want to represent and discuss my work, as well as a great opportunity to network and reach new customers. I acknowledge that exhibiting at a tradeshow can be seen as a sales effort, but in furniture design (especially custom hand-crafted furniture design that is so steeped in Canadiana) this is an industry standard. Unlike the “art world” where an artist receives funding to exhibit in galleries, a designer must pay to exhibit in trade shows. In this environment, the professional buyers are industry insiders whose job it is to seek out interesting and saleable product to retail in stores and interior settings. Therefore, the supporting media, branding and display of your

product is crucial to receive the viewers' interest. This type of venue, which is quite different than a traditional gallery setting results in a brutally honest response from the viewer, as to why they are interested in your work, or not. Comparable to a rigorous conference paper presentation, where experts give feedback about your paper, this setting lasts for 8 hours a day, for multiple days, and allows for hundreds of points of feedback and critique. Fortunately, the most common response from the people I interacted with was a positive response towards the aesthetically unique pieces within the collection. The feedback that I receive from exhibiting my work influences future designs. I want to sustain a continuous evolution of my aesthetic by experimenting with detail and form (image. 25).

Coal Chair Design Evolution



(image. 25) Wronko Woods, Coal Chair Design Evolution, 2017

4.0 Aesthetics & Function

As a furniture designer focusing on traditional practices and materials for domestic interior objects, I wanted my process to incorporate unconventional methods of form and function. It is proposed that “form follows function” a phrase coined by Louis Sullivan¹, but in my case, form *informs* the function. By creating objects with long-standing and known functional parameters (chairs, tables) I focus strictly on developing products from an aesthetically unique perspective. For example, when designing the Moloo Stool, I wanted to incorporate two separate details of randomized grooves and inlays (images. 26-27) into a piece of furniture. Knowing that these details would be the focal point I needed a minimalistic form to compliment the details. As a result of this form, the function of the stool was created, where the general physical form is constant between each model, but varies by randomized detailing (images 28).



(image. 26) Wronko Woods, Inlays, 2016

¹ Sullivan, Louis H. The tall office building artistically considered. Lippincott's Magazine, March 1896.



(image. 27) Wronko Woods, Moloo Stool, 2016



(image. 28) Wronko Woods, Moloo Stool, 2016

With my work, form does not necessarily follow a strictly formalist notion of ergonomic functionality. Function is not just about direct utility; it is a conversation that has a relation to its surrounding interior environment. I would argue that not only should a custom commissioned piece reflect my evolving aesthetic, it should also reflect the user's personality through the union of material and craftsmanship. Furniture can be the spark for communication and discussion; it can be the foundation for community as a place for reflection and interaction. Although aesthetic preference plays a large role, my body of work and exhibiting at a variety of exhibitions and tradeshow has reinforced the truth

that people are drawn to handcrafted furniture through the tactile qualities that it can offer and through the touch of the maker's hand.

5.0 Influence

5.1 Art and Design History

From the fundamentals of my post-secondary education, I did a great deal of thinking about how the knowledge of art/design history was constantly imposed on us. How can you be creating for the future if you don't know the past? At that time, it was difficult to digest all the information I was learning from all the new mediums, theories, names and movements, and on top of it all you were discovering your own practice. How can it all stick? Let's just say art or design history didn't make its way in my history, at least at a conscious level when I have been creating and prototyping ideas. I do believe in its importance because there are years of inspiration and knowledge to reflect on in one's early education, but for my research I am not looking in-depth for information to support my work or even to direct where I should go with it. Instead of conducting in-depth research into the past, I investigate more into artists/designers who are currently practicing. By utilizing social media as a research tool, one can observe other company's processes and direction. My form of research is through hands on experimentation and production with natural materials. Throughout the two years at the UofA, I believe that there has not been a specific artist/designer that has directly influenced my work. From an outside perspective, I understand that one could draw connections with the materiality and form of other designers, such as George Nakashima (image. 29) and his philosophy of honesty to the material and allowing material to dictate form.



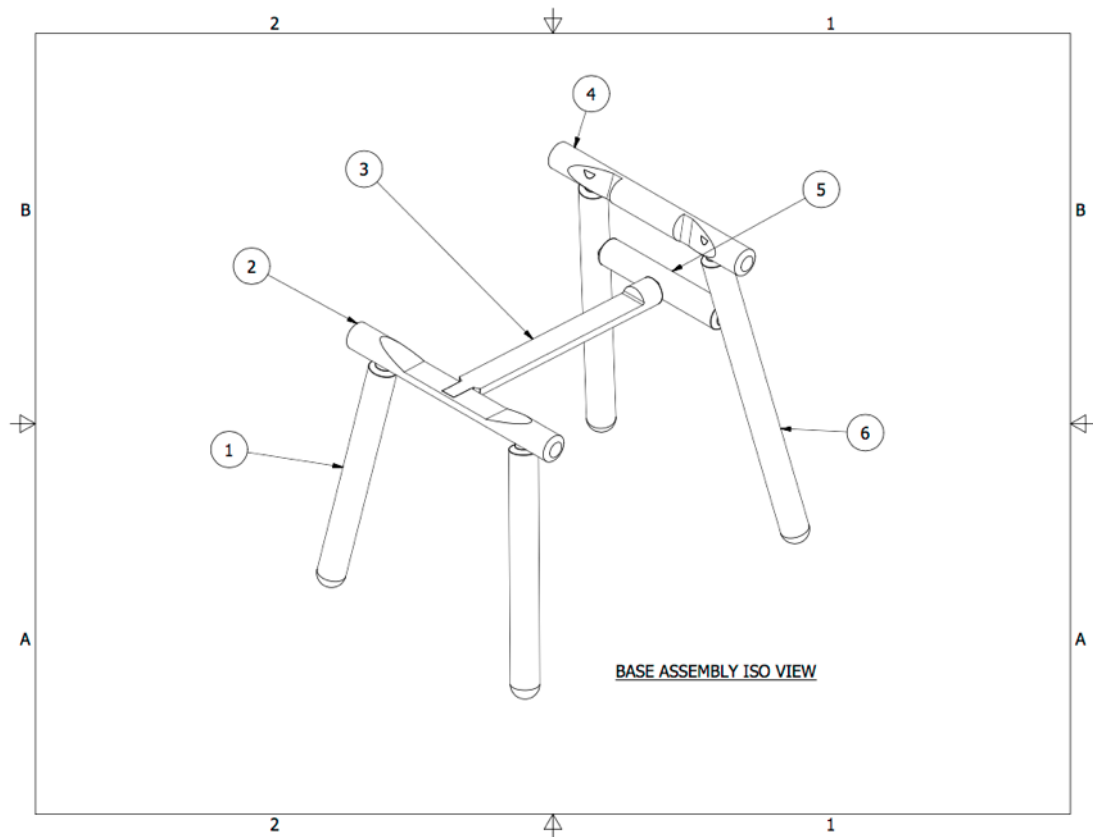
(image. 29) George Nakashima, Conoid Bench, 1977

For my process, much of my work is self-guided through experimentation. A part of my struggle and growth has been to better understand how I work best and how my design process actually occurs most efficiently and effectively. The pressure to academically reference art or design history within my research would be inauthentic to my process of creation, reflection, and re-creation.

My research does not use traditional methodologies, each product is not developed through market or demographic evaluation (nor through referencing the work of one of my predecessors) rather it is realized through the action of experimentation. Although majority of the objects that I create are a custom design for a client, I have come to realize that they are developed through a personal collaboration. To say I have achieved success alone would be a false statement. I have collaborated with other designers, artists and photographers in the development of my collection and promotional material (see section Acknowledgments).



(image. 30) In Collaboration with Caleb Maurice (Photography)



(image. 31) In Collaboration with Michael Peel (Industrial Design)



(image. 32) In Collaboration with Robert Faulkner (Industrial Design and Photography)



(image. 33) In Collaboration with Copper Cherry (Leatherwork)

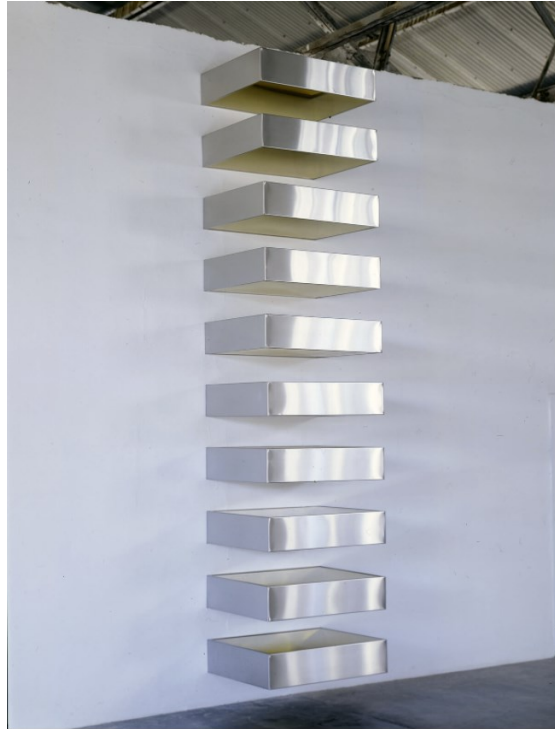
Each collaboration was formed from when I thought that their own talents exceeded my own or would be an interesting addition to my work (images. 30-33). The collaborations were a form of inclusive design or participatory design, but ultimately it was imbedded in practice-based research through experimenting with another creative mind that could positively influence my process.

That being said, I distill my aesthetics through the filters of minimalist sculpture (section 5.2), ritualistic objects (section 5.3) and the wilderness (section 3.3). These are totemic to my world view and aesthetic. Each one of these sources is rich in texture and form, and when designing I try to combine these different elements together to create a more tactile and engaging product that wants to be touched and studied.

5.2 Minimalist Sculpture

Minimalism Sculpture refers to the reduction of objects to the essential geometric abstraction². Minimalist sculpture is generally characterized by precise, hard edged, unitary geometric forms. From the reduction to the pure self-referential form and the absence of any external reference the sculpture becomes only what it is; a breakdown of material and form (image. 34). Through repetitive or singular forms, Minimalist Sculpture emphasizes the subtle differences in the perception of the “form” as the viewer moves around the sculpture.

² Penny, John Edward. "Minimalist Sculpture: The Consequences of Artifice." 2002



(image. 34) Donald Judd, Untitled. 1969

This mode of thinking physically plays a role in my designs by the minimalist qualities through the structure of an object, in order to contrast with surface ornamentation and texturing (images. 26-28).

5.3 Ritualism and Objects

As referenced earlier, throughout my undergraduate degree I was fascinated with the term “ritualism” through performance, gestures, sacrifice and objects. I explored the ideas of the term “ritual” through the mediums of sculpture and performance art. The objects that were created were activated in a fictional ritualistic ceremony, either in a live performance or through photographic documentation. During each performance, live or documented by camera, I would be totally engrossed in the function with a primal connection (image. 35).



(image. 35) Carson Wronko, Purity Performance, 2012

Initially I found the concept of the ritual bizarre because in contemporary society traditional rituals are vanishing. Reflecting back on my research, I realized that a ritual does not need a monumental ceremony, but the repetition of a daily activity can become a ritual. Through the fabricated rituals I also found how incredible the experiences were both mentally and physically, from the moment of the formation of the idea to the manufacturing of the objects to actual ritual performance. In some cases, I would spend a full semester everyday ritually creating objects to be used for a one-hour performance.

When I progressed from performance art, what I took from this medium was the ritual act of handcraft and ornamentation. Furniture also has a direct physical interaction, but from a maker's perspective the mark of the hand and soul can be put in each object (image. 36).



(image. 36) Jessica Nepton-Chayer, Carson Carving Flowers, 2016

Each piece is a physical reflection of what the maker dreams, thinks and believes. In the last year, I believe I have created my own style and aesthetic, which suggests ritualistic qualities through surface ornamentation, texture and form. (image. 37).



(image. 37) Wronko Woods, Memphis Bedside, 201

5.4 Lifestyle and Philosophy

In addition to the subtle yet relevant aesthetic inspirations that I have taken from the above sources, the collection *Canadiana: Wilderness Weirdness* is “conceptually” inspired by a compilation of different lifestyles and philosophies.

Slow living is the ideology of mindful decision-making and time management.³ Through constant technological sensory stimulation our daily lives have become a rush of communication, growth and consumerism. Slow living tries to counter act that with a conscious effort to evaluate our daily decisions, allowing us to step back and consider whether this is what we truly want. Each aspect of your day has a purpose, in a sense it changes the traditional definition of productivity. Living a slow lifestyle is not totally about reclaiming time, it also emphasizes the quality of time and quality of life through daily rituals. In this lifestyle, you consciously construct not only your environment through people, place, food and objects living in that environment. You have a direct influence on what is going in your body and what is surrounding it. With this mentality, you begin to hygge. Hygge is a Danish practice and philosophy of living that describes a quality of presence and an experience of belonging and togetherness. It is a feeling of “coziness” being warm, safe, comforted and sheltered⁴.

The architecture of shelters that we create is both psychological and physical. It is made up of the places where we find sanctuary to pursue our daily rituals. We create walls to house our unique rhythms to allow our human behavior to exist without judgment. Our homes are spaces where we can savor life on our own terms and learn to become more aware of what we really want. Home can be a place of refuge, but it can also be place to foster relationships and connect with friends, creating memorable conversations and discussions. Depending on what is important to us home might be a sanctuary of wool blankets and a quieter pace of roaming thoughts and enjoying the company of inspiring interiors. You should find peace and perspective in the connection of handcrafted objects and natural organic elements in your home to bring a closer connection to nature. This reflects what is alive in your space, but also that you are growing and creating history within your environment.

The concept of appreciating time and nature’s ability to add a deeper meaning to our lives is not new in some culture’s objects. Objects that have become worn with use are often praised more highly than those that are shiny and new.

³Williams, Nathan. *The Kinfolk home: interiors for slow living*. Artisan, 2015.

⁴Brits, Louisa Thomsen. *The book of hygge: the Danish art of comfort, coziness, and connection*. Plume, 2017.



(image. 38) Wronko Woods, Kodiak, 2016

Wabi Sabi is a Japanese concept that savors the flawed, imperfect, the weathered, from the uneven. In this case beauty is not confined to the purely physical form of an object, but instead expands to the intangible, the atmosphere and the feeling of our belongings and of spaces, joy found in celebrating details.⁵

Our home and how we construct the environment shapes who we are and vice versa; it is a reflection of our own identity. Within these ideologies of Slow Living, Hygge and Wabi Sabi the appreciation for the handmade and craft culture is quite prominent, and in my view, questions the traditional notion of how form follows function. People are willing to invest in craft that is well-made, locally-sourced and made with good intentions. This approach to life does not mean giving up technology or refusing to buy material goods, but to be consciously aware of where the objects came from, how they are made and why you are purchasing them. Objects will become richer through their existence and purpose in your life.

With these ideas and approaches in mind, as a craftsman I believe it is crucial to make responsible and sustainable decisions in order to stay truthful to the materiality and integrity of a piece. Object making can be a form of meditation through the focus of the present moment of manipulating a material. The choice of progression becomes instinctual. With woodworking, you become comfortable with the inherent vulnerability and risk involved in the craft.

⁵Koren, Leonard. *Wabi-Sabi for artists, designers, poets & philosophers*. Imperfect Publishing, 2008.

“Craft is understood not only as a way of making things by hand, but also as a way of thinking through the hand manipulating a material. Craft is thus a means for logically thinking through senses.”⁶

Through the qualities of hand-made objects you create a form of communication that reveals your process, technical abilities, and philosophies. Each object is a direct reflection of the maker. As a consumer, you are receiving that story and object which carries the persona of the maker

6.0 Thesis Exhibition

In planning for the thesis exhibition, my goal is to display the furniture collection that I have developed during my MDes thesis project. The work will be shown in a modern-heritage building, *The Foundry Room* with an interior that consists of mixed grey tones of smooth concrete, brick and steel. I chose this space because of its open concept to allow my furniture to dictate the flow of the environment. The furniture will be displayed in a showroom format of small vignettes of furniture and objects. My original idea was to publicly display my work outside of a gallery setting and in a fictional environment based on a Hudson Bay trapper’s tent. The display would look as if someone was living a modern nomadic lifestyle, reflecting the imagery of Canadiana. Logistically, the tent would be unrealistic for safety and security reasons. Although it is somewhat of a compromise displaying at *The Foundry Room*, it is an intentional experiment because it will allow me to test my dissemination and display process in a setting that is closer to where I will be displaying my work in the future in showrooms and at tradeshow. This experimentation is important because I can easily take the lessons that I will learn from this display, and apply them to future forms of exhibition. I have experienced this process before when I exhibited in the Industrial Design building with Tim Antoniuk in March 2017(image. 39).

⁶Nimkulrat, Nithikul. "Hands-on Intellect: Integrating Craft Practice into Design Research." *International Journal of Design* 6.3 (2012): 1-14. ProQuest. Web. 26 Oct. 2015



(image. 39)Carson Wronko, ID Show, 2017

Within *the Foundry Room* it will feel similar to the trapper tent of a minimalist lifestyle within the collection of objects, but each object will be rich in form and aesthetic that will “boomerang” you back to the past, and then to contemporary design. When people enter into the space, they will be welcomed as if they in someone’s home, and be encouraged to use, touch and interact with objects.

This exhibition will be in an untraditional MDes thesis exhibition format, as it is off-campus and lacks the qualities of a traditional gallery. My experience of a traditional gallery is a white cube that acts as a neutral backdrop for the work to be displayed. Usually furniture is displayed in an interior setting and used in the user’s daily life. The objects become part of a collection that reflects the values of a person or community. Within a traditional gallery space this is lost, as the objects lose their utility, a tension occurs between the viewer and the object, where you cannot interact with the object and “No Flash Photography”. A gallery filled with plinths, text, renders, 3D printed prototypes and projections. Where is the personality in representing the designer? When an artist has an exhibition, do they have a projection next to their painting on how they made it? I want my furniture to be in an environment that automatically feels like a space where people want to relax, have a beer, and socialize with friends. Throughout the space there will be no text on the walls or within the space to eliminate distracting the viewer from the environment I am trying to create. There will be small booklets that each person can take away with information about the collection, *Canadiana: Wilderness Weirdness*. I would like the viewer to understand my process through the mark of my hand, form/aesthetic and the “conversation” that each object has with the others.

7.0 Conclusion

Throughout my final thesis year I have produced my first major collection of furniture. Engaged in countless hours of material experimentations, manipulations and various kinds of practice-based research. I have come to realize that the production and sales of my pieces has resulted from exhibiting my products across Canada. It is the consequence of a continual journey of creation, reflection and re-creation and from evolving *Wronko Woods* aesthetics and the signature details that are defining it, and my body of work. During my thesis project, the actions of an iterative design process were a constant cycle. This cycle includes the development of technical skills, ideation and experimentation. The designs evolved immensely through client and marketplace testing. Many of these cycles call for reflection and revision every few months. A constant evaluation of my work generates evolution in my designed objects. Through following my instincts in the form of handcraft, I am voluntarily allowing the years of my creative knowledge and reflection to guide the experimental process. The process of rapid physical/personal prototyping and material creation/experimentation has abled my designs to generate a continuous momentum of a large body of objects, and an ability to create more efficiently and effectively. Having said this, it is important to acknowledge that not every object or process that is created will be successful, but it adds to the creative vocabulary.

The final outcome of where I am now I could not have predicted. Without the resources, guidance and financial support that the Industrial Design program at the University of Alberta has provided I truly believe my research would not have developed to its full extent. Going into the Master's program, my goal was to simply have a couple pieces to start a collection, I was not expecting to develop a personal brand, establish the foundations of a career, and have a 15-piece furniture collection.

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