



Judy Kensley McKie

Essay by Michael Hurwitz

Drawing by David Sipress

November 8 – December 14, 2019

Gallery NAGA
67 Newbury Street
Boston, Massachusetts
02116

Essay

by

Michael Hurwitz



Michael and Judy

Michael Hurwitz is a Philadelphia-based furniture maker and a longtime friend of the McKies.

Judy McKie’s work has always struck a universal chord within viewers, having a presence that can feel both as familiar and as alarming as a déjà vu experience. Though it may sometimes remind us of the material culture of “primitive” or ancient societies, it more importantly stands as an icon of our collective consciousness; it stands there as if it has always stood there.

Perhaps the reason we’re so ready to receive her work is because it feels like it’s already part of us. As viewers we experience an accessibility—a permeability—that we don’t often get to feel with other work. This quality is fundamental to its attractiveness: it’s as if we’re interacting with a magnetic field that offers us no choice but to be drawn into its realm.

I had the pleasure of meeting Judy a little over forty years ago, during my last years of college. In fact, her *Blanket Chest With Birds* included in this exhibition is the companion piece of the one she included in the 1979 show, *New Handmade Furniture*, hosted by the American Craft Museum (the sister-cabinet from that exhibition was recently purchased for the permanent collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art). I think it’s safe

to say it was that travelling exhibition and her three stellar pieces in the show, that launched her career; the press it garnered over the two years it travelled always focused on Judy's work. (I remember because I was slightly peeved that my work, along with the other thirty five participants, was so easily overshadowed. But in fact, Judy's work was clearly much more interesting!)

Following my graduation in 1979 I joined the same cooperative workshop where Judy was a member and over the next six years of my tenure there she became not only a good friend, but an important inspiration for me. During that time together I witnessed something about her ways of working, the things that were important to her, and learned much about her nature. I'd like to share a few observations/anecdotes from that time period that I think illustrate some fundamental truths about her.

At that time, in a young field where a little ambition would go a long way, it was a joy to work next to someone whose only ambition seemed to be to make honest work. In fact, early on she stopped taking commissions, afraid not only of the impact that process might have on her designs, but also because she sincerely did not want to risk disappointing the client.

This consideration for the unknown client was consistent with her modesty. I remember in '81 or '82, Judy was working with only one part-time assistant, trying to keep up with the demand for her work. At that time she got a call from a major New York gallery that hoped to entice her with the promise of securing more work and getting higher prices for it, stating that if she signed on with them she would "get bigger and bigger." Judy's reflexive response was, "But I don't want to get bigger... I want to get smaller." She hung up the phone and that was the end of that conversation. I know that similar offers have been made recently, and they've been met with a similar response—she has always been clear and certain about what is important to her and how she wants to work.

Judy has also always had a sense of clarity about what the essence of each project was to be, and she has been steadfast in her determination to "get it right." This has sometimes meant re-carving, refinishing and re-refinishing before it ever leaves the studio, and it doesn't leave unless it is right. And by "right" I mean that it is at peace with itself and all of its elements are consistent with, and supportive of, its essential nature.

With this new body of work Judy continues to honor her instincts and to adhere to the principles that have always guided her, while bringing an evermore distilled vision of the world that we'd all, no doubt, like to inhabit. Her trademark expression often includes a mix of the jubilant, serene and nuanced. Though the colors she gravitates towards tend to be subdued, they present themselves as joyful. The gesture of the carvings on the mirrors and chests are often uplifting, with the same gravity-defying energy that either represents or suggests a life force such as a plant sprouting or a spring forcing a spire of water.

The expressions on her creatures' faces are like mirrors of our own spirit—perhaps mischievous, content or pensive; they are what we want them to be, and they're likely to change like chameleons as they are lived with. They will hold their secrets indefinitely, though unlike the sphinxes of ancient Egypt that Judy's work is sometimes likened to, her forms possess considerably more *joie de vivre*. There is after all, a life to be enjoyed, Goddammit.

Perhaps the most poignant quality that I've come to appreciate in Judy's work is that every lovingly made object that comes from her hands presents itself to the world outside her studio as a gift. This generous spirit, which is consistent with her nature, is palpable in all her work from the simplest of drawings to the most complex bronzes. These offerings of hers are being made toward us with outstretched arms, with the pure instinct of one who knows that it feels good to give. Allow yourselves fully into this world, and enjoy its riches.



Monkey Table

2018
cast bronze, glass (edition of 12)
28^{1/2}x54x20"



Blanket Chest with Birds

2017

carved basswood

31¹/₄x36¹/₄x22¹/₄"



Pony Table

2017
cast bronze (edition of 8)
40^{1/2}x42x14"



Swan Side Table

2018

cast bronze, glass (edition of 8)

29^{1/2}x48x16"



Blanket Chest with Foliage

2017
carved basswood
29^{1/2} x 31 x 19"



Painted Blanket Chest with Leaves

2017

carved basswood, milk paint

29^{1/2}x31x19"



Crocodile Bench

2018

cast bronze (edition of 8)

18x47x18"



Flower Coffee Table

2017

carved basswood, milk paint

18^{1/4}x35^{1/4}x21^{1/4}"



Flower Cabinet

2017
carved basswood, milk paint
47^{1/4}x30^{3/4}x17^{1/2}"



Blanket Chest with Trees

2017
carved basswood
29^{1/2} x 31 x 19"



Turtle Table

2018

cast bronze (edition of 8)

17x41x15"



Vase with Pointed Leaves

2018

cast bronze (edition of 8)

33^{1/2}x11x11"



Circle Table

1994
carved and painted walnut
29x47x47"



Fern Stool/Table

2018

cast bronze (edition of 8)

18x18x18"



Vase with Ferns

2018

cast bronze (edition of 8)

29^{1/2}x13x13"



Cactus Mirror

2017
carved basswood, mirror
24X24X1 1/2"



Abstract Mirror

2017
carved basswood, mirror
24X24X1 1/2"



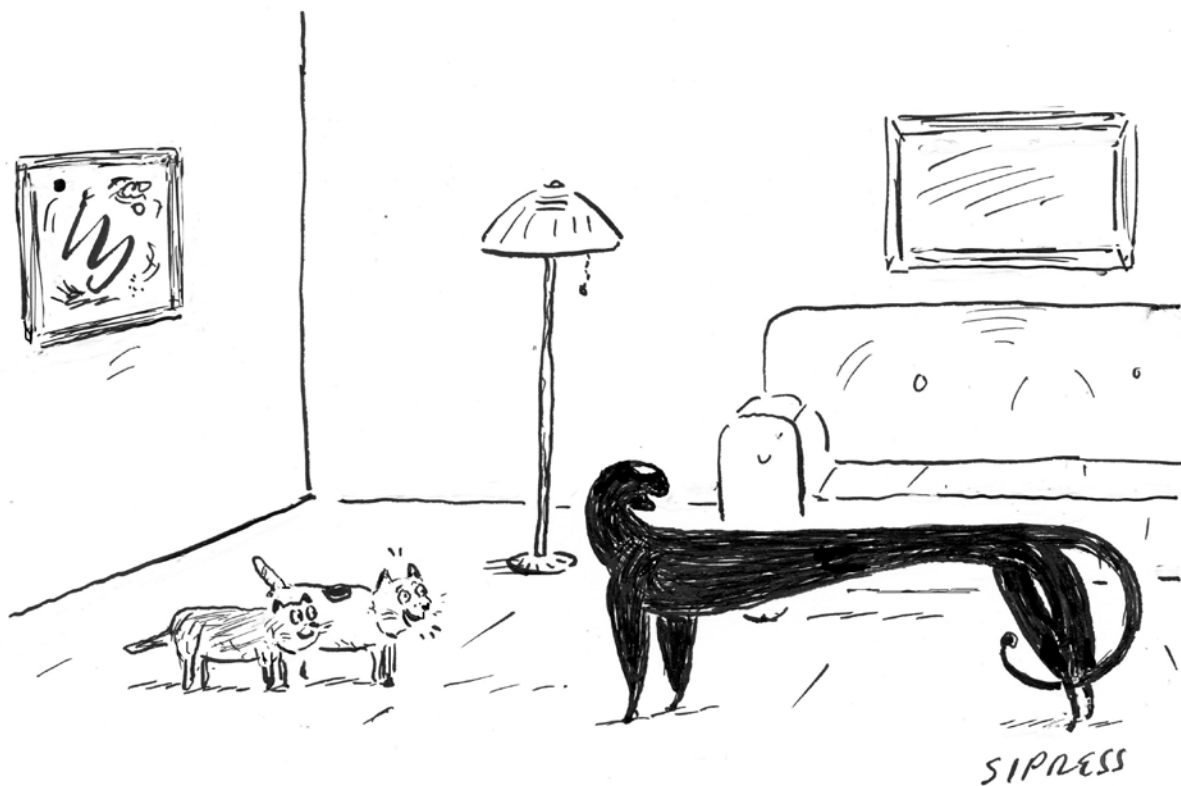
Mirror with Vines

2017
carved basswood, mirror
24X24X1^{1/2}"

Mirror with Leaves

2017
carved basswood, mirror
24X24X1^{1/2}"

David Sipress *has been a staff cartoonist for the New Yorker since 1998. He has published more than six hundred cartoons in the magazine.*



"I think I'm in love."



Alligator Tray

2018

carved basswood, milk paint

1x15x9^{1/2}"

Judy Kensley McKie

Born 1944 Boston MA

Education

Rhode Island School of Design
Providence RI 1966
BFA, Painting

One Person Exhibitions

Gallery NAGA Boston MA 2019
Museum of Craft and Design
San Francisco CA 2018
Gallery NAGA Boston MA 2013
Gallery NAGA Boston MA 2010
LongHouse Reserve East Hampton
NY 2009
Pritam & Eames East Hampton NY
2008
Chris Winfield Gallery Carmel CA
2008
Gallery NAGA Boston MA 2006
Pritam & Eames East Hampton NY
2004
Gallery NAGA Boston MA 2002
The McTeigue & McClelland Jewelers
Great Barrington MA 2001
Pritam & Eames East Hampton NY
2000
Pritam & Eames East Hampton NY
1997
Gallery NAGA Boston MA 1995
Pritam & Eames East Hampton NY
1994
Albuquerque Museum
Albuquerque NM 1993
Helander Gallery New York NY
1992
Pritam & Eames East Hampton NY
1991
Pritam & Eames East Hampton NY
1989

Pritam & Eames East Hampton NY
1987
Eve Mannes Gallery Atlanta GA
1987
Elements Gallery New York NY
1984

Selected Group Exhibitions

Naples Museum of Art Naples FL
2009 ***Living With Studio Furniture***
Museum of Fine Arts Boston MA
2007 ***Selections from the Wornick
Collection***
Peabody Essex Museum Salem MA
2006 ***Inspired by China***
Museum of Arts and Design New
York NY 2005 ***Dual Vision: The
Chazen Collection***
Fuller Craft Museum Brockton MA
2004 ***The Perfect Collection***
Museum für Angewandte Kunst
Frankfurt Germany 2003 ***Form
and Content: Corporal Identity***
Museum of Art Rhode Island School
of Design Providence RI 2003
***Twentieth-Century Furniture
from the RISD Museum
Collection***
Smith College Museum of Art
Northampton MA 2003 ***Sit Up &
Take Notice***
Smithsonian Museum Washington DC
2003 ***Masters of Their Craft:
Highlights from the Smithsonian
Museum***
Museum of Fine Arts Boston MA
2003 ***The Maker's Hand:
American Studio Furniture 1940-
1990***
American Craft Museum New York
NY 2001 ***Objects for Use:
Handmade by Design***
Leo Kaplan Modern Gallery
New York NY 2001
Women in Furniture

Bard College Annandale-on-Hudson
NY 2001
***Women Designers in the USA
1900-2000***
Albuquerque Museum
Albuquerque NM 2001
Hounds in Leash
American Craft Museum
New York NY 2000
Defining Craft
DeCordova Museum and
Sculpture Park Lincoln MA 2000
***Celebrating Contemporary Art
in New England: Recent
Acquisitions***
Rose Art Museum Brandeis University
Waltham MA 2000
Visual Memoirs
De Young Museum San Francisco CA
1999 ***The Art of Craft: Works
from the Saxe Collection***
Yale University Art Gallery
New Haven CT 1999
Please Be Seated
Museum of Fine Arts
Boston MA 1999
Drawn to Design
Norton Museum of Art
Palm Beach FL 1998
Animal as Muse
Barry Friedman Ltd.
New York NY 1998
Harvard Club Boston MA 1998
The Flagler Museum
Palm Beach FL 1995
Please Be Seated
Museum of Art Rhode Island School
of Design Providence RI 1995
***Contemporary Decorative Arts
from the Permanent Collection***
Albuquerque Museum
Albuquerque NM 1994
Selections from the Collection
The Sybaris Gallery
Royal Oak MI 1993
Visions Reflected
Gwinnet Fine Arts Center
Atlanta GA 1993
Sculpture for the Garden

The Grassi Museum
Leipzig Germany 1992
Crafts Today USA

Eve Mannes Gallery
Atlanta GA 1991
Artists Design Furniture

Museum für Angewandte Kunst
Frankfurt Germany 1990
Crafts Today USA

Craft and Folk Art Museum
Los Angeles CA 1990
Art that Works

Rose Art Museum Brandeis University
Waltham MA 1990
Todd McKie and Judy Kensley McKie

Museum of Fine Arts
Boston MA 1989
New American Furniture

Joanne Rapp Gallery
Scottsdale AZ 1989
Collaborations

Museum of Art Rhode Island School
of Design Providence RI 1988
Rhode Island Collects: 1900 to Now

Bernice Steinbaum Gallery
New York NY 1988
Pioneer & Pioneering 20th Century Women Furniture Designers & Furniture Designers/Makers

Gimpel/Weitzenhoffer Gallery
New York NY 1988
Sculpture with Color

Musée des Arts Decoratifs
Paris France 1988
Crafts Today USA

Museum of Applied Arts
Helsinki Finland 1988
Crafts Today USA

United States Information Agency
Washington DC 1986
Design in America

American Craft Museum
New York NY 1986
Craft Today: Poetry of the Physical

Norton Gallery of Art
West Palm Beach FL 1986
Artist Designed Furniture
Gallery NAGA Boston MA 1985
Elegant Wit: Contemporary New England Furniture

Smithsonian American Art Museum
Renwick Gallery Washington DC 1985
Material Evidence: New Color Techniques in Handmade Furniture

Esther Saks Gallery Chicago IL 1985
A Renaissance in Furniture as Art: Master Woodworkers
American Craft Museum
New York NY 1984
Art for the Table

Pittsburgh Center for the Arts
Pittsburgh PA 1984
Artiture: Furniture of the 80's Ornamentalism
Harcus Gallery Boston MA 1984

Pritam & Eames East Hampton NY 1984
The Boston Influence in Furniture Design

Clark Gallery Lincoln MA 1983
Furniture Invitational

Columbia Museums of Art and Science Columbia SC 1983
Wood and Fiber

The Hudson River Museum
Yonkers NY 1983
Ornamentalism: The New Decorativeness in Architecture and Design

American Craft Museum
New York NY 1982
Approaches to Collecting

Fuller Museum of Art
Brockton MA 1981
Woodforms

Addison Gallery of American Art
Phillips Academy Andover MA 1981
Judy Kensley McKie: Furniture/Todd McKie: Painting

Museum of Fine Arts
Boston MA 1979
New Acquisitions
American Craft Museum
New York NY 1979
New Handmade Furniture
Rose Art Museum Brandeis
University Waltham MA 1979
Three-Dimensional Possibilities

Public Collections

Addison Gallery of American Art
Andover MA
Albuquerque Museum
Albuquerque NM
ARC Union
Paris France
DeCordova Sculpture Park and Museum Lincoln MA
de Young Museum San Francisco CA
Fuller Craft Museum Brockton MA
LongHouse Foundation
East Hampton NY
Mint Museum of Craft and Design
Charlotte NC
Museum of Art Rhode Island School
of Design Providence RI
Museum of Arts and Design
New York NY
Museum of Fine Arts
Boston MA
New Britain Museum of American Art
Hartford CT
Philadelphia Museum of Art
Philadelphia PA
Rose Art Museum Brandeis
University Waltham MA
Smith College Museum of Art
Northampton MA
Smithsonian American Art Museum
Renwick Gallery Washington DC
Toledo Museum of Art
Toledo OH
Frederick R. Weisman Art Foundation
Los Angeles CA
Vice President's Residence
Washington DC

Yale University Art Gallery
New Haven CT

Honors and Awards

Fuller Craft Museum Luminaries
Award 2008
The Furniture Society Award of
Distinction 2005
The James Renwick Alliance
Master of the Medium Award,
Furniture 2005
Fellow of the American Craft Council
1998
Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation
Award 1989
National Endowment for the Arts
Craftsman's Fellowship 1982
Massachusetts Artists Foundation
Fellowship 1980
National Endowment for the Arts
Craftsman's Fellowship 1979
Rhode Island School of Art European
Honors Program Rome Italy
1966

Selected Bibliography

Books

**Studio Furniture of the Renwick
Gallery**, Smithsonian Museum,
Washington DC, 2008
500 Chairs, Lark Books, New York
and London, 2008
The Year of American Craft, Harry
N. Abrams, Inc., New York, 1992
David Barquist, **American Tables
and Looking Glasses**, Yale
University Press, New Haven CT,
1992
Marjorie Elliott Bevin, **Design
Through Discovery**, Harcourt
Brace Jovanovich, San Diego CA,
1994
Patricia Conway, **The Art of Everyday**,
Clarkson N. Potter, Inc., New York,
1990

Patricia Conway and Robert
Jensen, **Ornamentalism, The New
Decorativeness in Architecture
and Design**, Clarkson N. Potter, Inc.,
New York, 1983
Denise Domergue, **Furniture by
Artists**, Harry N. Abrams, Inc.,
New York, 1984
Gene A. Miller, **Art in Focus**,
Macmillan/McGraw-Hill, Mission
Hills CA, 1994
Seth Stem, **Designing Furniture**,
Taunton Press, Newtown CT,
1989

Exhibition Publications

**Dual Vision: The Simona and
Jerome Chazen Collection**,
Museum of Arts & Design, New York
NY, 2005
Carl Belz, **McKie: Todd McKie and
Judy Kensley McKie**, Rose Art
Museum, Brandeis University,
Waltham MA, 1990
Patricia Conway, **Judy Kensley McKie**,
Pritam and Eames Gallery, East
Hampton NY, 1997
Edward S. Cooke Jr., **New American
Furniture**, Museum of Fine Arts,
Boston MA, 1989
Arthur C. Danto, **Like a gift for
someone you love: The furniture
art of Judy Kensley McKie**, Gallery
NAGA, Boston MA, 2002
Jonathan L. Fairbanks, **Judy Kensley
McKie**, Gallery NAGA/ Clark
Gallery, Boston MA/ Lincoln
MA, 1995
Michael Goodison, **Sit Up & Take
Notice**, Smith College Museum of
Art, Northampton MA, 2003
Geraldine Wojno Kiefer, **Furniture
as Sculpture**, The New Gallery of
Contemporary Art, Cleveland
OH, 1981
Pat Kirkham, **Women Designers in the
USA 1900-2000**, Yale University
Press, New Haven and London,
2001

Jack Lenor Larsen, **The Furniture
Art of Judy Kensley McKie**, Pritam
& Eames, East Hampton
New York, 1994
Kari M. Main, **Please Be Seated**, Yale
University Art Gallery New Haven
CT, 1999
Michael Monroc, **The Furniture Art
of Judy Kensley McKie**, Pritam &
Eames, East Hampton NY, 2000
David Sipress, **Judy Kensley McKie:
Furniture/Todd McKie: Painting**,
Addison Gallery of American
Art, Phillips Academy, Andover
MA, 1981
Paul J. Smith, **Craft Today: Poetry of
the Physical**, Winfield &
Nicholson, New York, 1986
Paul J. Smith, **Objects for Use:
Handmade by Design**, Harry
Abrams, Inc., New York, 2001
Kenneth Trapp, **Masters of
Their Craft: Highlights from
the Smithsonian Museum**,
Smithsonian Museum,
Washington DC, 2003

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—JKM

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Cover ***Pony Table*** (detail)

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