



# Nico Yektai Explores the Unexpected in Art Furniture and Sculpture

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by Pat Rogers

Modern art furniture— it has a lofty ring. In the case of artist-made functional objects by Nico Yektai, the description is apt. The reference to modern refers to Modern Art versus the expected modern movement in furniture design. Gazing at the pieces in his current solo show at a contemporary art gallery reveals the beauty that emerges from the synergy of art and design.

Born from a practiced craft tradition melded with modern art aesthetics and philosophy, Yektai's objects are at home in both worlds while pushing the boundaries of each. This is no surprise: pushing boundaries in the world of handmade furniture is one of the driving forces behind Yektai's designs.

In his first solo show at [Tripoli Gallery](#) in Southampton, "[Nico Yektai: Cousins](#)" presents functional furniture, wall objects and sculpture. The combination of unique handmade furniture pieces with sculpture visually demonstrates the aesthetic connection between Yektai's design and art practices.



Wall Sculpture by Nico Yektai, 2016. 46 x 60 x 6 inches. Courtesy Tripoli Gallery.

The sculptural furniture as well as the wall objects make use of broad gestural components rendered by steam bending wood to create graceful curves that infuse motion to his furniture designs and now sculpture. Favoring maple or sapele in most of his work, Yetkai makes individual objects as part of a specific series (or system), but the creative dynamic in each piece is expressed differently and is unique, the artist said in an interview at the gallery.

"Creating a system gave me complexity," [Yetkai](#) said, ensuring his furniture making is grounded in art making versus production that swerves toward the commercial.

Yektai has two different series of benches that, while sharing a creative philosophy, can also push away from each other visually. Benches can be designed for indoor or outdoor use. He also makes desks, tables, tabletop objects (such as candleholders), decorative mirrors, wall art, console tables and other functional objects.



"Bench 15" by Nico Yektai, 2012. Sapele, white cast concrete, 32 x 87 x 17 inches.

The journey of creating something new within a given set of boundaries and expectations leaves Yektai free to explore an array of possibilities.

"The techniques of woodworking gave a seed of the idea of how to express myself differently," Yektai said. "For me, furniture design is art. Art is intimate. My father was an artist and I grew up among artists. Moving away from art into design ... gave me the freedom to explore within a new subject."

Nico Yektai's father was the abstract expression painter [Manoucher Yektai](#) (Iran, b. 1922) and his mother, [Niki Yektai](#), an author and children's books illustrator. Nico studied both art and craft before beginning his furniture design practice. He studied art history at Hobart College and graduated from the School of American Craft at the Rochester Institute of Technology.

Drawing from philosophies of both design and modern art, Yektai's designs shift surface planes to create asymmetrical relationships. Swooping curves and unexpected special visual interactions create surprises in his benches, furniture and sculpture. He favors dividing single pieces of wood to create positive and negative spaces and unusual relationships that are connected by their sharing of the same grain, thickness and characteristics but still present differently in form.



"Helix" by Nico Yektai, 2015. 68 x 13 x 18 inches.  
Courtesy Tripoli Gallery.

Since benches and desks are functional, the surprises in Yektai's designs aren't confined to the visual. Benches can have arm rests and seating possibilities that are instinctively positioned to ensure comfort. Drawers unexpectedly curve outward yet retain a functional logic and are easy to use.



"Desk 2 and Chair 4" by Nico Yektai, 2011 and 2008. Maple and upholstery, 32 x 68 x 26 inches and 34 x 18 x 20 inches.

Yektai combines wood with concrete and glass to introduce additional contrasts in texture and to explore form within the specificity of the constructs of his series. The juxtaposition of elements, whether in the relationship between the wood elements or between other materials is where Yektai's explorations yield pieces that relate to each other while retaining their uniqueness.

"What happens within the techniques is important," Yektai said, "and I brought this to the sculpture."



"Cousins" by Nico Yektai, 2016. Black concrete, 20 x 50 x 4 1/2 inches.

For "Cousins," curator Tripoli Patterson selected objects and sculpture that weave colored blue concrete into select pieces, resulting in an exhibition that continues the surprise element of Yektai's work. All the works exhibited have a distinct energy and radiate motion. Taken together, the show reveals Yektai's evolution and creative path as a modern furniture maker and sculptor.



"Waves" by Nico Yektai, 2015. Bleached maple and concrete, 19 x 94 x 14 inches.

"When a system feels like it has a lifetime of possibilities, I get excited," Yektai said. "I feel like I can explore this for a long time."



"Pontus" by Nico Yektai, 2013. Walnut, colored ash, cast concrete and glass, 32 x 56 x 12 inches.

Nico Yektai's work is currently on view through May 23, 2016 in "Cousins" at Tripoli Gallery. His work is also exhibited in the group show "East End Collected2" at Southampton Arts Center through June 12, 2016. His work will be included in LongHouse's "Planters On & Off The Ground" presented from June 25 - July 30, 2016.

His work has been presented at Design fairs, including the Architectural Digest Home Show in New York City, the American Craft Council Show (Baltimore); the American Craft Expo (Evanston, IL) and the upcoming Hamptons Contemporary in Southampton in June.

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**BASIC FACTS:** Designs by Nico Yektai can be viewed at [www.nicoyektai.com](http://www.nicoyektai.com).

“[Nico Yektai: Cousins](#)” is exhibited April 23 – May 23, 2016 at Tripoli Gallery, 30A Jobs Lane, Southampton, NY 11968. [www.tripoligallery.com](http://www.tripoligallery.com).

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