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John A. Harris

24 January – 23 February 2008

press release

private view Thursday 24, from 6pm to 9pm

Galerie Patricia Dorfmann is proud to present the first solo exhibition in Paris by the designer John A. Harris. *'THE WOOD THAT WAS'*

The modernity of the wooden furniture designed and crafted by John A. Harris lies found not so much in its style or the techniques used to make it, but in its mode of production.

For the pieces of furniture made by Harris belong to that multifarious cohort of objects now coming to the fore on the art scene. These are objects that subvert the established categories, which cannot be placed in the category of functionalist design or decorative arts, let alone in that of the visual arts, bogged down as these are in obscure discourse. Visually remarkable and immaculately crafted, the merit of these objects is that they tell us about their maker. They are the fruit of a great number of lived experiences, and their perfection is the result of first-hand knowledge, passion and a real engagement with the material. Today, after years of deprecation, skill and technique are making a comeback. No longer synonymous with stifling crafts traditions, they are now part of a free and empirical learning process.

The “haute couture” furniture made by John A. Harris shows that excellence is no longer the exclusive preserve of the specialist cabinetmakers, but can also be conquered by men and women who, following the imperatives of their creative process, are reinventing traditional techniques and thus, without necessarily thinking in such terms, are sculpting the contours of the future.

John A. Harris was born in Nottingham, England, in 1964. He lives and works in London. In 1989 he and three friends founded an acid jazz group called The Sandals. They signed a contract with London Records and had two hit singles, Feet and Nothing, on the back of which they spent two years travelling round the world. Later, Harris became contributing fashion editor for Black Book magazine, New York, then Fashion editor for Rubbish magazine, London, he also worked as a stylist for The Independent.

He made his first piece of furniture in summer 1990. This, he realised, was what he really wanted to do. As he himself recalls, with great simplicity, “I started working on a rather crude piece, putting it together with nails. I used whatever came to hand – an oak plank and a few bits of very old elm did the job. In spite of the roughness of the wood, its strangeness, I was really fascinated by this material. This was a real discovery that inspired me to create”.

Harris works to his own rhythm, allowing long periods of latency when, he tries “to let the wood express itself while I am restoring and taking care of it. I wait for each piece to tell me what it wants to become.” These periods of waiting, discovery and listening thus constitute a kind of apprenticeship.

The work is at once technical and ethical, resulting from the long quest for an asceticism that is elegant, subtle and richly expressive. And while this asceticism is obtained in the solitude of his studio, in the midst of his singular struggles with the material, it is no less cultivated for all that, meaning that it comes out of both the American tradition of a George Nakashima or a Ralph Rapson, and the European one of designers like Janette Laverrière and Gustave Gautier. The latter’s influence can be seen in the extreme delicacy of the finishes and articulations, and in the bold play on veneers. Such are the no doubt fortuitous formal evocations in the work of this artist who offers a talent combination of skill, originality and sensitivity.

Patrick Favardin - Paris, November 2007