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The Resident: Carlos Motta on Furniture, Ecology, and São Paulo



Espresso is the first US gallery to exhibit the acclaimed Brazilian designer Carlos Motta's work. The exhibit, *Atelier Carlos Motta: 40 Years*, runs now through October 12, and features 50 furniture pieces including 11 limited edition works created for the exhibit.



Carlos Motta's Pindá chair (\$56,950) was designed ergonomically using Perobinha do Campo wood. "The piece is beautiful and very sensual. Tempting. The stings or spines in the back are something that I had to do because temptation has to be some way guarded - as nature itself wisely makes almost everything that is a temptation," explained Motta.

If you ask him, Carlos Motta couldn't care less about being called a designer. Titles don't interest him. "I make wood furniture," he shrugged, sitting 63 years young atop one of his own tables in a Tribeca art gallery surrounded by a hundred people hanging on his every word.

Despite Motta's laid-back Brazilian surfer persona, he clearly cares deeply for his work, which is evident in each of the 50 pieces showcased in his US debut this week at Espasso Gallery in New York.

"Something in my heart belongs to this. It's ecology. I like the idea of not cutting a tree. But instead making something useful from a tree already knocked down," said Motta, his hands gestured expressively, causing his wild, shaggy gray hair to move with him.

Atelier Carlos Motta

The show at Espasso is titled *Atelier Carlos Motta: 40 Years* is the first ever US retrospective of Motta's work. Running now through October 12, the gallery is showcasing his most iconic furniture, including 11 brand new works created exclusively for the exhibit.

The show reflects four decades of Motta's life and career – photos of which cover the gallery's walls. It is also a reflection of the continued collaboration and friendship between Carlos Motta and Espasso gallery owner Carlos Junqueira.

“It might be seen as a snobbish thing to celebrate my atelier in New York and not Brazil. But I've been friends with Carlos since he founded Espasso in 2002. It's a place that's become very important - and very effective – in terms of Brazilian design.” The 50 pieces introduced to the market with this exhibition are being exclusively sold in the US at Espasso.

The Museum of Modern Art in Rio, the Oscar Niemeyer Museum and Museu da Casa Brasileira in São Paulo have all organized past shows of Motta's work. Now, for São Paulo native Carlos Junqueira, it is “a joy” to showcase Motta in Tribeca.

A Utilitarian Approach to Beauty

Looking back on 40 years, Motta reflected on his purpose: “You'll need a chair today, yesterday and tomorrow. I don't make things that are ephemeral.”

In 1975, a shopkeeper gave Motta a book documenting the creation of utilitarian objects throughout human history. This inspired him to take his own place in this trajectory, setting him on a search for simplicity and usefulness.

Soon after, Motta started experimenting by making wooden bowls, plates, and dishes – and presented them at a local Japanese art gallery. There, curator Rui Othaki showed him identical bowls and dishes made by ancient Egyptians, and Indians in the Amazon. Othaki congratulated Motta, telling him he was “in the right way.”

Thus began a lifetime of woodwork.

“I see that not much has changed. It has always been the same concept, driven by my same passion for woodwork, architecture, and people,” said Motta of his career longevity.

But there’s more to it than that. With disarming humility and warm smile, he could make most any buyer feel special, as if the chair they sit in was made especially for them – a physical acknowledgement of their life.

Sustainable in São Paulo

To appreciate his furniture is to appreciate Motta himself, a proponent of continuity and connectedness between people and their natural environment.

Using only reclaimed or certified wood from Brazil, Motta is known for practicing sustainability in the 1970s before it became a design buzzword. This also comes from a life spent mostly outdoors. A longtime surfer and

fisherman, Motta affectionately names select pieces after Astúrias beach near São Paulo, where he resides.

Still, the work has a definite edge. “The city is crazy and cruel. It is still developing, still third world in a way. And there is a love-hate relationship between the “Paulistanos” [those born in the city of São Paulo] and the “Paulistas” [Those born in the state of São Paulo.] I try to reflect that,” said Motta, again with arms waving.

Motta’s Greatest Hits

A great example of this edge is also one of the highlights at Espasso - the Pindá Chair. Designed ergonomically, the sharp spikes on its wooden back contrast a smooth sensual front.

“Think of a beautiful animal with a soft, pink belly and a spiny back - like fish in the ocean. Its belly is nice to touch and very delicate, but watch out - there's a spine that can harm you,” explained Motta.

Other highlights being premiered at Espasso include “Nave,” a combination lamp and side table, created through a 13 month process of laser cutting, welding and oxidation to transform coffee filters, rusted iron and reclaimed wood; and an armchair titled “Sergio,” which is a tribute to Motta’s close friend, the late Sergio Rodrigues.

“I was in my Atelier, in the developing process of this armchair, when I got the emotional news that my good friend Sergio, partner in design and architecture, had passed away. So, I think, what can I do for him? I leave this tribute,” said Motta.

As a young student of architecture and drawing, Motta looked up to Rodriguez - who was considered the Brazilian furniture design in the 1950s. In 1987, Rodriguez presented Motta with a design award at the Museu da Casa Brasileira. "It was so important to me to receive the award from his hands," said Motta, his eyes welling up. Rodriguez was 85 years old when he passed.

As for Motta, his motto is to *keep on trucking*. Surrounded on three sides by walls filled with keepsake photographs of his furniture, his atelier in Brazil, his wife and four children – I ask what is next for him.

"I'll just keep adding pictures. I don't know what is reserved for me - if I'll be around or not. But it's all a flow. There are no ruptures between husband, father, surfer, furniture maker. One reflects on all the others," he said, coming to his own conclusion. "I want to be a better person spiritually."

'Atelier Carlos Motta: 40 Years' is on view until 12 October at Espasso Gallery: 38 N Moore Street, New York, NY 10013.

<http://www.blouinartinfo.com/news/story/1239223/the-resident-carlos-motta-on-furniture-ecology-and-sao-paulo>