

# The Philadelphia Inquirer

## One marriage, two artists

By Edith Newhall  
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**WEXLER GALLERY**  
Mami Kato's "Umbilical Field" (2011), at Wexler Gallery

The Philadelphia-based furniture-maker Michael Hurwitz is a star in the studio furniture firmament. His wife, Mami Kato, born in Japan and a Philadelphia resident for 30 years, should be better known — and no doubt will be, thanks to Hurwitz and Kato's handsome two-person show at Wexler Gallery.

“Concurrence and Divergence” offers a perfect example of the ways in which artists who know each other — and each other's work — play off each other's sensibilities, even when their art and their objectives might seem at odds.

I'm not sure I would have expected Hurwitz's supremely elegant cabinets, benches, and chairs to make a natural aesthetic connection with Kato's semi-abstract sculptures, but they're surprisingly compatible.

Gallery goers may have glimpsed Kato's startling work previously in group shows here and in Delaware, but she has mainly exhibited in Japan.

Her two largest sculptures in this show, *Umbilical Field* (2011) and *Big Knot* (2019), are so strangely appealing, with such tactile surfaces, that you're immediately drawn to them. They may appear to be made of coir, the brown fiber harvested from coconut husks and commonly used for doormats, but Kato's material is rice straw. She buys it in Japan in rope form, untwists the ropes back in her Philadelphia studio, ties the straw into bundles, and gradually creates a seamless sheath.

A wall sculpture, *Closed Beginning Opens the End* (2018), is fashioned from dozens of eggshells. Other wall sculptures refer to the heads of animals — they're lacy, webbed forms made with fabric, toughened with epoxy resin.

Kato's tubular rice straw pieces are so grounded they make Hurwitz's delicate *Yellowheart Cabinet* (2019), with its latticework doors and its graceful curved legs, look as if it's floating. His *Tapered Oval Chair* (2019), on the other hand, is solid and self-possessed, made from dark wenge and purpleheart woods with a curved seat covered in burgundy leather.



**WEXLER GALLERY**

Michael Hurwitz's "Yellowheart Cabinet" (2019), at Wexler Gallery

A red elm bench is a reinterpretation of one that Hurwitz made with the sculptor Martin Puryear for the Glenstone museum in Potomac, Md. It's the most minimal work in this show, but its curves are subtly sexy.

Both artists share a preference for colors and shapes found in nature, a remarkable attention to detail, a patience for the time a work can require, and an appreciation for the profound silence it can command.

*Through July 27 at Wexler Gallery, 201 N. Third St., 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Mondays through Fridays (summer hours). 215-923-7030 or [www.wexlergallery.com](http://www.wexlergallery.com).*