



Katrina Vonnegut
Camo Ottoman
 2011
 Dyed rope, canvas,
 and foam
 18 x 24 x 24 inches
 Edition: Unique
 Courtesy of RH Gallery, New York

KATRINA VONNEGUT

DESIGNER

BY KATY DONOGHUE, PORTRAIT BY AMY McCULLOCH

WHITEWALL: *Some of your furniture was exhibited at RH Gallery in New York early this year. There was a coffee table, a chair, a room divider, and an ottoman. How do you feel about showing your furniture in a gallery space?*

KATRINA VONNEGUT: I think it's more conducive for the work that I do because I can't imagine trying to sell certain things in a store. They are really kind of bizarre, so it makes more sense to be in a gallery. I think the hardest thing is that people perceive furniture as not having a lot of value because it's functional. And that's not always the case; there are collectors and people. But it's strange — I'm in an in-between area. My work definitely has an evident hand, and that's where it's different from other furniture. You can see I made that with my hands.

WW: *Like the room divider that almost looks like it's woven out of rope. It's very sculptural.*

KV: I had been working with a rope for a while. I made this chair that was just covered in rope. And I was thinking, "How do I push this further in terms of color, shape?" I wanted to make a room divider, or something that was overwhelming, and I think I succeeded. I hand-dyed it in batches in my kitchen. It's glued and nailed in. I drew the pattern out before, and followed the lines. I wanted it to look pretty solid. It's more of a sculpture than a room divider. All my work is straddling that line between what is functional and what is sculpture,

and what we can live with in our lives and where we make some concessions. I always feel very torn between those two worlds.

WW: *Have you always been interested in the line between sculpture and design?*

KV: Yes, definitely. I began to discipline myself making furniture, striving for something that's completely functional. You have to learn how to do something before you can break all the rules. I'm still learning, and the next project I'm doing is pretty functional pieces. There is still so much I want to learn, like making joinery.

I had fun experimenting with materiality and using textile applications for furniture, which is what all the pieces at RH Gallery are about.

WW: *How do you choose what materials to work with?*

KV: I guess it's just what I like. Most artists are just naturally drawn to a material for whatever reason. I think this collection of objects is unified through natural fibers, cotton, wood, and the dye. But it's more about challenging material to have a different quality or undergoing some experimentation to change the surface treatment.

WW: *Do you work out of your home in Brooklyn?*

KV: I have a knitting studio in part of my house

and I have a woodshop where I build furniture. But I don't want to get the textile stuff dirty, so I don't do that in a studio. My sister is an artist, too, and she lives with me, here in Brooklyn. It's really important for me to be around my family. I live with my cousin and my sister and my best friend from RISD. I think that's what keeps me making stuff, being around fellow artists and creative minds.

WW: *Aside from being around creative people, what else inspires you?*

KV: I probably get more inspired by things outside the furniture world. That's maybe easier, because then you're referencing something that's not already made — somebody's hand isn't in it already. Like something in nature, or something you see on YouTube...