

Gamperl & van Kesteren

Ernst Gamperl &
Maria van Kesteren

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Foreword

Take two artists. Both critically acclaimed and internationally recognised – both working with the same material. Each beginning their creative process with a simple round plane, a circle, embodied in a cylindrical relic. However, while remaining true to the circle, each has embarked on a very different journey. Both share a great passion for their chosen material but one that is articulated through very different voices. Working with both artists over the period of a number of *Taste Contemporary* group exhibitions, the notion of bringing them together for the first time became an intriguing and increasingly exciting prospect. The opportunity of witnessing a conversation between such disparate, yet connected voices. The idea for a two-person exhibition was sown. After years of talking and thinking about it, I was finally able to bring them together this summer at Maria's home in Hilversum. It was there that these two extraordinary artists spent time together talking about their work.

This inspirational day ended with a date for the exhibition and Ernst leaving with a block of wood from Maria's shed and a promise to make a work out of this log.

Throughout her long career, Maria van Kesteren has maintained a consistent approach to wood. Using the circular form as a starting point and utilising the tension between inner and outer forms, her surfaces are always stained or painted so that the characteristics of the material become completely subservient to form while the fine definitions and tensions between interior and exterior space shine. Highly altered and refined, with smooth matt finishes, we are confronted with an abstract object and find ourselves almost asking 'is that wood?' But throughout this exploration her authority and dedication to perfection is apparent as she asserts her dominance, allowing just a whisper of the tree to remain within the remnants of the original circle.



Ernst Gamperl's interaction with wood takes him on a different path although the circle is also his starting point and remains his favourite form. Celebrating the wood he guides the raw material, allowing the tree to have its say. Throughout his journey he chooses to engage in a more robust conversation. In fact at times we are unsure as to who is leading this conversation.

As a viewer we are drawn to instinctively reach out and touch the wood, to feel the visceral connection with form that at times appears to be only degrees away from its original incarnation.

While his trees continue to speak in his finished work, the viewer is left in no doubt that Ernst has still remained in control during the making process. Just like Maria van Kesteren, he presents a refined finish, but in his case one that strives to retain a delicate balance between the wood telling its own story and the artist imposing his will.

This is the first two-person exhibition by Ernst Gamperl and Maria van Kesteren and I feel privileged to have had the opportunity to facilitate what I feel is a truly unique dialogue between two exceptional artists.

Monique Deul, December 2017



Left:
Objects in Oak, 2018 –
created by Ernst Gamperl
from a block of wood gifted
by Maria van Kesteren.

Maria van Kesteren

When Maria van Kesteren thinks of wood, she doesn't think of a tree or a trunk. For her a tree or a forest is too romantic a notion. For her the wood exists apart from the branches and its roots. She thinks only of the beams and boards from which she can saw her round discs. The forms she has in mind will be created from these wooden discs. Maria van Kesteren is not searching for markings, tree rings, discolorations or knots. For her the form must be perfect and she will only achieve this by making it monochromatic. To complete the creative process she paints the form on the lathe in black, beige, lead-grey and a recently added new colour – Berlage yellow. She has never painted a form brown as that colour is reserved for the wood to which she is opposed.

Maria van Kesteren has been turning wooden forms for 50 years. These are not functional but sculptural pieces that only vaguely resemble boxes or bowls – the emphasis is not on function but on form.

Thimo te Duits

Every form she creates is round and this remains her only starting point. For some this might be a constraint but having worked for over 50 years and having made thousands of forms, for Maria it remains a creative challenge. Her forms have a narrative starting point. They feature stacks, duplications, undulations and rippling's. Their inner and outer spaces have their own language. When you look at one of her forms it feels like music, a shape that is not frozen, but part of a melody that your mind can then take you wherever you wish to go.

Maria van Kesteren finds her inspiration in art and everyday objects and has a preference for abstract art. The walls of her 19th century home in Hilversum are covered with works related to the Zero Group, Egyptian and African masks and many circular pieces by various designers.

She also has many works by artists she holds dear such as Andries Dirk Copier, Jan van der Vaart and Hiltje Andringa, stellar names in Dutch design. Of the thousands of objects Maria has made there is one in particular that remains very dear to her.

This is a form based on a cast iron floor drain, which has been in her backyard for many years. Previously owned by two dear friends, Margje Blitterswijk and Hyke Koopmans, it found its way back to her after their passing away [with Hyke Koopmans, Maria led the leading Kapelhuis Gallery in Amersfoort for decades]. This cast iron object, which now has a prominent place in her home and can be seen from different rooms, has inspired her to make

a number of pieces that resemble abstract tree trunks. Maria van Kesteren likes things that are made, not grown arbitrarily. She loves a farmstead, a curb, the Dutch polder landscape with its dikes and ditches... and abstract trees, at a distance.

Thimo te Duits is an art historian, author and former Curator of Modern Arts and Crafts at the Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam



Ernst Gamperl

According to legend, many centuries ago there was a sculptor who could look at a block of marble in the stone quarries of Carrara and see a figure concealed in the stone.

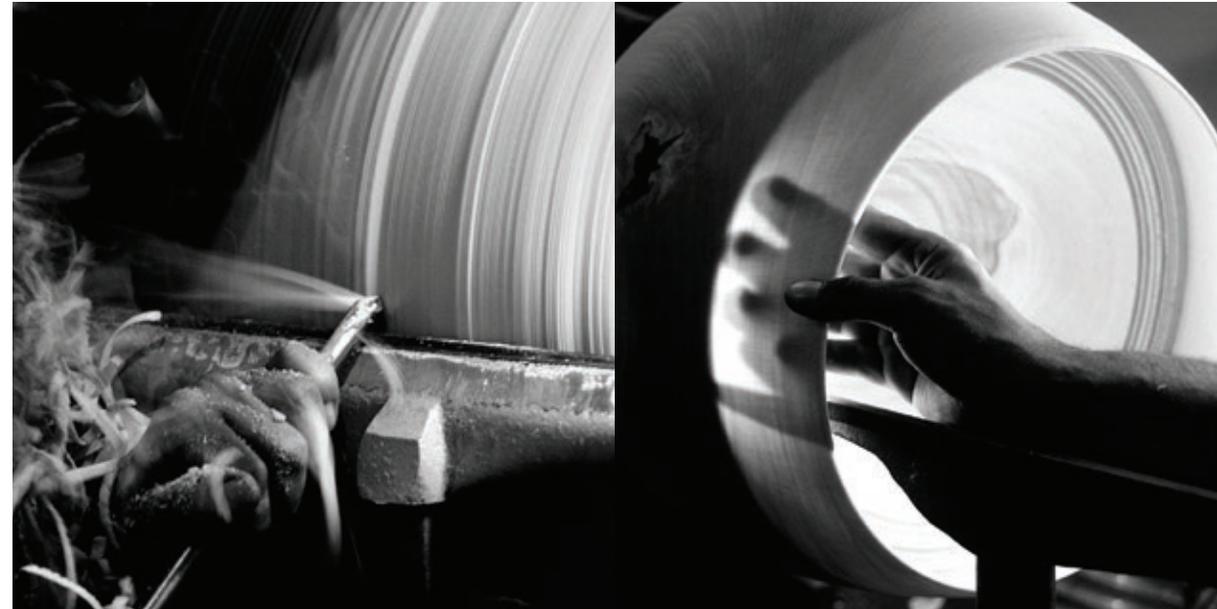
This is not the case with Ernst Gamperl (although he certainly studies the material from where his works will emerge). The sculptor, of course was Michelangelo. For him the figure remained at the foreground; the shimmering material existing only to serve the figure. However with Ernst Gamperl the reverse is the case. Nature and ultimately the material remain at the heart of his exploration. His approach is to take the lead from nature, consider, analyse and follow the form, allowing it to determine the final outcome of the work.

Florian Hufnagl

As a result we get surprising shapes as he manipulates the original appearance of the material with his actions, while at the same time following the structure and inherent characteristics of the wood, deliberately exposing and reinforcing its distinctive qualities.

That is the genius of his artistic approach because nature is always surprising. She never repeats herself and continues to give cause for wonderment and so the work of Ernst Gamperl, even after many years, continues to bring us new surprises. Just like nature.

Florian Hufnagl is an art historian, author and former Director of Die Neue Sammlung, Munich



Ernst Gamperl
Object in oak
44 H x 40 W x 40 D cm
2017



Maria van Kesteren
Number 87, Lead-Grey
Wood, Painted
7 H x 24 W x 24 D cm
2000



Maria van Kesteren
Number 124, Grey
Wood, Painted
12 H x 17 W x 17 D cm
2010



Ernst Gamperl
Object in oak
63 H x 58 W x 47 D cm
2015



Ernst Gamperl
Object in maple
27 H x 37 W x 37 D cm
2013



Maria van Kesteren
Number 122, Light Grey
Wood, Painted
9 H x 17 W x 17 D cm
2000



Maria van Kesteren
Number 23, Ivory
Wood
5 H x 48.5 W x 48.5 D cm
1974



Ernst Gamperl
Object in oak
62 H x 31 W x 31 D cm
2017



Ernst Gamperl

Objects in oak

59 H x 18 W x 18 D cm

53 H x 19 W x 19 D cm

2017



Maria van Kesteren

Number 77, Black

Wood

7 H x 30 W x 30 D cm

1985



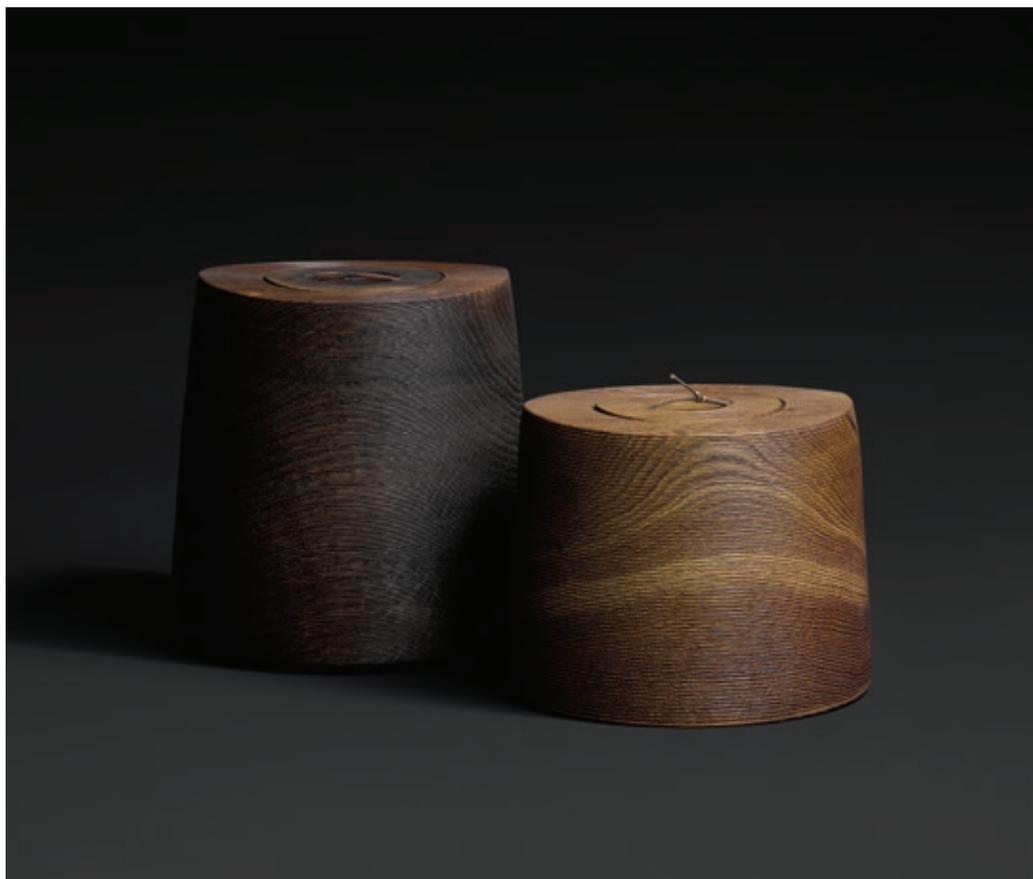
Maria van Kesteren
Number 78, Natural
Wood
16 H x 25.5 W x 25.5 D cm
1990



Ernst Gamperl
Object in oak
78 H x 41 W x 41 D cm
2015



Ernst Gamperl
Objects in oak
25 H x 23 W x 23 D cm
2012
19 H x 23 W x 23 D cm
2013



Maria van Kesteren
Number 85, Lead Grey
Wood
5.5 H x 26 W x 26 D cm
2000



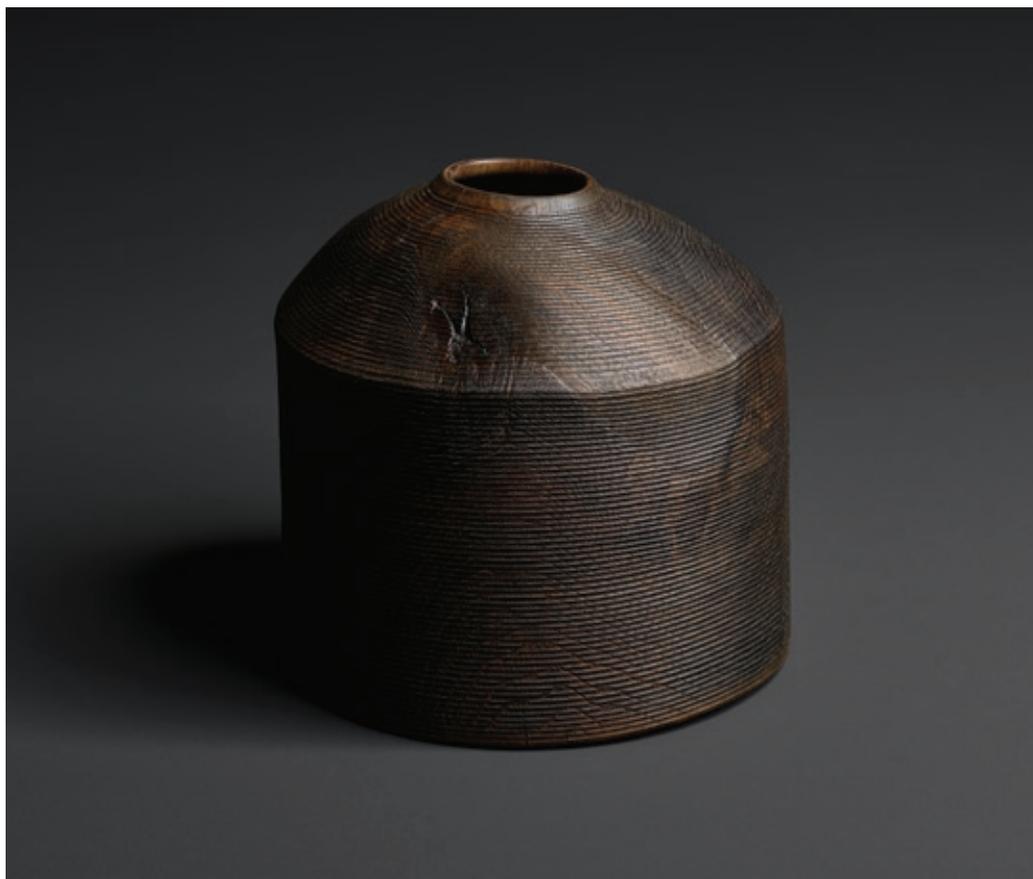
Ernst Gamperl
Object in oak
64 H x 30 W x 30 D cm
2017



Maria van Kesteren
Number 44A, Black
Wood
5 H x 38 W x 38 D cm
1986



Ernst Gamperl
Object in oak
25 H x 25.5 W x 25.5 D cm
2017



Maria van Kesteren
Number 114, Three Part Box, Natural
Wood
18 H x 15.5 W x 15.5 D cm
1992



Maria van Kesteren

Maria van Kesteren emerged as one of the first prominent female woodturners in the late 1950s. Creating simple, smooth, beautifully proportioned bowl and box forms, for this artist the wood is always subservient to the forms she creates, which are almost always a circle. With this circular form as a starting point, she utilises the tension between the inner and outer forms of her pieces. Surfaces are evenly stained or painted so that the detail of the grain remains secondary to the formal properties and fine definitions of the interior and exterior space. While sometimes appearing severe, the subtle curves and transitions within the work reveal a certain tenderness.

The Netherlands b. 1933

She trained with the woodturner Henk van Trierum in Utrecht in the late fifties and is based in Hilversum, Netherlands. Although mostly celebrated for her works in wood, she has also designed glass for Royal Leerdam and ceramics for factories including Koninklijke Tichelaar Makkum. A major retrospective exhibition of her work was held at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam in 1995.

Today, Maria van Kesteren's work is widely collected and can be found in many museum collections including the Cooper Hewitt, New York; Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen Rotterdam; the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; the Victoria & Albert Museum, London and Museum of Arts and Design, New York.



'The circle dares you, you can attack its perfect round form by creating another circle, you can confront it by confronting it with itself... the circle reveals itself in repeatedly new transformations.'

Ernst Gamperl

Ernst Gamperl is a self-taught artist and master craftsman who, over many years, has achieved an extraordinary understanding of wood. This has allowed him create beautiful, organic vessel forms primarily in oak, but also in other materials such as ash, maple and beech.

Turning wood when it is wet, he takes his cue for the final shape of the vessel from the natural characteristics of his material. Working the wood at the lathe, he allows it to bulge, warp and crack during the drying process. To hold the cracks and fissures together he uses wooden and wire staples, which are used to great effect and add further interest to each piece. Gamperl observes the distinctive qualities of the wood; the grain, colour, grooves, knots and burrs and enhances their beauty with surface treatment.

Germany
b. 1965

He waxes and polishes and contrasts the smooth and shiny with the rough-hewn and scarred. Continuously developing his skills, recent work has seen the addition of clay powders and minerals to the surface of the form, allowing him achieve interesting tonal variations while a focus on hollowing has seen the creation of objects with smaller openings. While his work is technically ambitious, Gamperl's dialogue with, and connection to, the material is paramount as he continues to create contemporary and intriguing vessel forms with surface qualities that accentuate the intrinsic beauty of wood to great effect.

Ernst Gamperl has won multiple awards for his sculptures including the LOEWE Craft Prize 2017 for his piece *Tree of Life 2*. His work is in museum collections worldwide including The Museum of Arts and Crafts, Hamburg; The International Design Museum/Die Neue Sammlung, Munich; Collection Issey Miyake, Japan; The National Foundation for Contemporary Art, Paris and the Victoria & Albert Museum, London.

'I look for pieces of wood full of character with knots, irregular growth patterns, tears, breaks and interesting details. With the fundamental structure of a piece of wood in mind I am then guided by the raw material and my emotions to bring out its beauty.'



Acknowledgements

A big thank you to the artists, Ernst Gamperl and Maria Van Kestern. Both of them have been so generous and supportive, opening their homes and studios to me, sharing their histories and insights often over wonderful home-cooked meals. This collaboration has been a pure pleasure for me.

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Last, but not least, thank you to Frances McDonald a true professional and tireless teammate who always manages to get what needs to be done, completed in a way that makes Taste Contemporary better.

Photography

Images of Maria van Kesteren works

by Carla Kogelman photography

Images of Ernst Gamperl works

by Bernhard Spöttel photography

Images on pages 04, 07 and 32

courtesy of Taste Contemporary

Image on page 09 by Pedro Gato Lopez

Image on page 29

by Carla Kogelman photography

Image on page 31

by Bernhard Spöttel photography

Ernst
Maria