



NATURAL BEAUTY: Mastrangelo with pieces from his furniture line made from poured cement.

Landscape artist

A sculptor whose **designs imitate nature** wants to disrupt the artist-gallery-collector relationship

Sculptor and high-end furniture maker Fernando Mastrangelo has a gigantic pile of dehydrated shrimp to thank for his eureka moment.

Originally enrolling in art school to study painting, he switched to sculpture, and after earning an M.F.A. became an assistant to art star Matthew Barney. An early assignment: execute a piece called Ambergris. Real ambergris is the waxy vomit of sperm whales, so Mastrangelo fashioned Barney's vision from a log of dried crustaceans, then came up with the idea of finishing it with a coating of epoxy resin. "I realized I could do anything with resin—it could be a binder for everything," he said. "I knew that this would be the definition of my practice."

Through experimentation Mastrangelo mastered the art of mixing and casting cement and resins with materials like powdered glass, stone, sand, sugar and salt in the creation of chairs, bookshelves, wall pieces and sculptures with unique textures and colors that evoke nature.

A Mastrangelo couch looks like it was cleaved from a boulder. His tables resemble a cross section of a giant geode. A bookshelf has colorful layers similar to veins of minerals in rock. "We all want to experience nature, and I love the idea of providing a moment of feeling that in

my work," Mastrangelo said. "When you see the beautiful strata in the Grand Canyon, I'm trying to imitate that."

Buyers line up for his work, which can cost \$56,000 for the couch and \$100,000 for a mirror cut from 1,452 individual segments. Google just hired him to make more than 50 furniture pieces for its New York offices.

Born to Uruguayan parents in New Jersey and uprooted to Florida and then Mexico, Mastrangelo embraced the role of outsider while growing up—and now in the art world.

He just leased a 10,000-square-foot studio in East New York, Brooklyn, with a showroom to present his and other artists' work directly to buyers rather than selling through galleries, which charge hefty commissions.

"I have a deep desire to shift the artists' role in the contemporary market," Mastrangelo said. "The middlemen have reaped the benefits of our hard work."

This year he expects sales of \$2 million but dreams of building the business to many times that. And he is shopping for land upstate where he can build a house from the ground up. "Imagine a home with walls that are cast out of sand and an interior that looks like a landscape," Mastrangelo said. "I've created a language, and I want to use it for more than furniture." — DANIEL GEIGER

"I'm trying to imitate the beautiful strata in the Grand Canyon"

FERNANDO MASTRANGELO

AGE 39

GREW UP Fort Myers, Fla., and Monterrey, Mexico

RESIDES Bushwick, Brooklyn

EDUCATION B.F.A. in sculpture, Cornish College of the Arts; M.F.A. in sculpture, Virginia Commonwealth University

BITTER END Mastrangelo sold one of his first resin sculptures to a Texas collector for \$30,000 in 2006. He cast it from hundreds of pounds of pure sugar, but because he didn't use enough resin at first, the piece began to melt. He fixed the work.

CONVERSATION PIECES Mastrangelo and his former assistant Boyd Holbrook, now an actor, collected coal in Holbrook's home state of Kentucky in August. They used it in a collection of sculptural pieces to capture the moment in U.S. politics when coal was "part of the national conversation."