

CHRISTOPHER KURTZ
BADLANDS

SARAH MYERSCOUGH GALLERY
18 September to 7 November 2026



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“Abstraction, functionality, naturalism: all are held in miraculous suspension in the exhibition. The effect is that of a chance encounter in the wilderness, where it’s not quite clear where natural processes end and human intervention has begun.”

—Glenn Adamson

Sarah Myerscough Gallery presents *BADLANDS*, a career-spanning survey of Christopher Kurtz’s sculptural and design practice, on view at the gallery’s newly restored Mayfair home, The Schoolhouse, from 18 September to 7 November 2026.

Taking its title from the prehistoric terrain of the South Dakota Badlands—a landscape central to Kurtz’s origins and his working philosophy—the exhibition marks a decisive shift in his practice, from design toward sculpture. At its centre is a monumental installation of 4,000 hand-carved wooden “skipping stones,” fashioned from twenty years of studio off-cuts and spread across the gallery floor as an immersive terrain for visitors to walk through, handle, and rearrange, distributing authorship between artist and audience.

The upper floors present a survey of Kurtz’s furniture archetypes, including *Between Us: Tête-à-Tête*, his 2024 collaboration with textile artist Dana Barnes, previously shown at the MAD Museum, New York. The exhibition is accompanied by a new publication, *Some Assembly Required*, featuring a critical essay by curator and writer Glenn Adamson situating Kurtz’s practice within contemporary craft, alongside a text by theoretical physicist Sara Imari Walker drawing on Assembly Theory to illuminate the cycles of accumulation, erosion, and transformation that shape his work.

Badlands Installation





Badlands Installation

“I carved my first wooden “stone” after skipping rocks on the Hudson River with my daughter, Willa. Watching that shaped object move across water was a way of thinking about how form carries time, touch, and intention. The floor is covered with thousands of these hand-carved wooden forms, which accumulate into a landscape. Each piece is shaped with hand tools, so every facet records a decision, an accumulation of labor, friction, and devotion. Over time they begin to read as a kind of sediment of time. What begins at the scale of the hand expands into something immersive and environmental.”

—Christopher Kurtz

Hand-carved off-cuts from approximately two decades of studio practice. *BADLANDS* began with a simple act: carving stones from the remnants of my own studio. For nearly twenty years I kept offcuts from finished works—fragments of cherry, walnut, oak, ash, maple, sycamore, and basswood that had already lived another life as sculpture, furniture, maquettes, or experiments abandoned along the way. Rather than discard them, I began reshaping them into thousands of hand-carved wooden stones.

The result is an imagined geology composed not of minerals but of accumulated decisions. Each stone carries its own biography: traces of earlier projects, failed ideas, moments of discovery, and years of labor compressed into a form that feels at once ancient and immediate. Taken together, they become a landscape of bundled histories.

The title *BADLANDS* refers first to the landscape of western South Dakota, a place that shaped me long before I understood its influence. My father’s family established Kurtz Signs there, painting roadside billboards, businesses, and tourist landmarks across the region, including signs for Wall Drug and along the roads leading toward the Badlands themselves. As a child I traveled there several times each year. The

scale of that country—its eroded formations, impossible horizons, and the feeling of time made visible through geology—has never left me. But the title also speaks more broadly to land that is difficult to cross. Emotional landscapes. Historical landscapes. Periods of life that resist easy passage. *BADLANDS* was made during one of those periods, and the work became a way to think through grief, memory, inheritance, and change through the slow repetition of making.

The stones occupy an unusual territory between artifact and landscape. They resemble river stones, skipping stones, markers, cairns, and tools, yet they belong fully to none of these categories. Their material further complicates the analogy. Geological stone records time through sediment and pressure. These wooden stones record time through growth rings, use, memory, and transformation. They are not imitations of geology so much as parallel forms of history.

The installation itself remains deliberately unfinished. Visitors are invited to move the stones, build cairns, create desire lines, or carry individual pieces away. The landscape changes through participation. Nothing remains fixed. Authorship becomes shared and the work accumulates new histories as it travels.

This idea of change has always felt close to a line attributed to Heraclitus: no one steps into the same river twice, because neither the river nor the person remains the same. *BADLANDS* operates in much the same way. Each installation is different. Each visitor alters the terrain. Each stone carries a past while remaining open to another future.

What began as studio leftovers ultimately became a meditation on lineage—not simply family lineage, though that is present, nor solely artistic lineage, though that too matters—but the broader ways ideas, materials, memories, and gestures are carried forward. The landscape is made of countless individual histories gathered together, continuously rearranging themselves into something larger than any one part.

Christopher Kurtz





Badlands installation
Approx. 3,000 wooden stones

Claro walnut, walnut, cottonwood, cherry, sapele, oak, basswood, ash, butternut, sassafras, cypress, sycamore, holly, maple, tulipwood, wenge, pine, redwood, among others.

Dimensions
variable.

The Cairn Side Tables

“A cairn is a marker assembled from individual stones and given meaning through use and shared understanding. It may indicate a trail, a burial site, a summit, or simply evidence of passage. Its significance lies not in any single stone, but in the relationships formed between them.

The *Cairn Side Tables* recast this ancient language of stacking in carved wood. Built from contrasting species, each element retains its own identity while contributing to a larger whole. Like the cairns that inspired them, these sculptures propose that meaning emerges through assembly.”







The Tepui Tables

“The *Tepui Tables* take their name from isolated landforms shaped by erosion and deep time—remnant forms that stand apart from the terrain that once surrounded them. Their stacked silhouettes compress this sense of scale into domestic space, balancing mass, elevation, and precariousness within a remarkably small footprint. Though modest in scale, the works possess the charge of a maquette, suggesting larger architectures or landscapes while remaining fully resolved as objects in their own right.”



Left:
Tepui Drinks Table #1, 2026
68.6 H x 53.3 W x 25.4 D cm
27 H x 21 W x 10 D in

Right:
Tepui Drinks Table #2, 2026
83.8 H x 53.3 W x 25.4 D cm
33 H x 21 W x 10 D in

Both walnut, white oak,
cedar, wenge, basswood,
poplar, ipe, lignum vitae,
maple and steel

The Slab Consoles

“The *Slab Consoles* are among the most elemental works in the exhibition. Each begins as a stack of slabs rejected by the lumber industry—boards marked by knots, bug activity, spalting, checks, or other irregularities that removed them from commercial use. Rather than correcting these conditions, I work around them, allowing the material to retain its history and character.

The stacked form recalls the way freshly milled boards are stickered and left to dry: horizons of wood suspended in space and separated by narrow intervals of air. I have always found this temporary condition at the sawmill unexpectedly beautiful.”



Slab Console #1
2026

Claro walnut, walnut, cottonwood,
cherry, sapele, oak, basswood, ash
and butternut

95.3 H x 233.7 W x 40.6 D cm
37.5 H x 92 W x 16 D in



Slab Console #2
2026

Claro walnut, walnut, cottonwood, cherry,
sapele, oak, basswood, ash and butternut

94 H x 195.6 W x 40.6 D cm
37 H x 77 W x 16 D in



Meridian

“The series takes its name from meridian lines: pathways of orientation that traverse landscapes, bodies, and celestial systems alike. The works are guided by a spatial principle shared with ballet. In classical training, dancers are taught to “pull up”—to lengthen upward through the spine while pressing downward through the supporting leg. Extension is created by working in two directions at once. Gravity provides the resistance that makes length possible, while countless imperceptible adjustments sustain the body’s alignment. In ballet, a line is understood to continue beyond the body itself. Energy is projected through the fingertips, toes, and crown of the head, allowing the viewer’s eye to complete the movement into the surrounding space. Dancers are taught not simply to move through space, but to dance the space itself.”







Furniture Archetypes



Linenfold Drinks Cabinet

“The work takes its name from linenfold, a late Gothic carving tradition in which wood was painstakingly carved to resemble folded fabric. During my research, I became increasingly interested in the material culture of late medieval Europe, particularly the devotional objects, furniture, and architecture produced during centuries shaped by recurrent plague. Rather than memorializing catastrophe directly, these works created places of permanence, ritual, and refuge. They offered psychological shelter as much as physical function.”



Sheets Series

“The *Sheets Series* began while archiving family papers and correspondence, an experience that focused my understanding of preservation. I became interested in how memory is stored—not only in documents and photographs, but in objects, habits, and acts of making.

The layered forms draw inspiration from stacks of shifting paper, bound volumes, and archival storage, translating these fragile repositories into carved wood. What is easily scattered is preserved like a photograph frozen in time. The *Sheets Desk Set* extends this idea further. The desk and chair are conceived as a single interdependent work, each incomplete without the other. Together they form both an archive and a place for archiving—a space dedicated to reflection, preservation, and transmission.”





Sheets Desk
Detail



Wavelet Series

“The *Wavelet Series* began with an investigation into the profile edge of furniture. Decorative traditions have long developed a vocabulary of endings: Roundovers, beads, chamfers, bullnoses, and ogees—but I became interested in what might exist within, or inside of these familiar, yet underexplored forms.”



Skipping Stones Games Table

“The table’s forms borrow from river stones shaped by erosion and repeated contact. Their rounded profiles appear settled and inevitable, yet their arrangement remains slightly precarious, as though balance is always being discovered. Like many of the works in the exhibition, the table brings people together. Games, conversation, and shared rituals become another form of assembly. Individual experiences accumulate over time into something collective.”



The Claude Glass Vanity Set

“The *Claude Glass Vanity* extends the pebble vocabulary into psychological and perceptual territory. Drawing on the Claude glass, the small convex tinted mirror used in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to frame landscapes as idealized picturesque views. The work explores filtering, framing, and the distortion of reality. The distressed silvering of the mirror introduces another layer of instability around perception and self-image.”



Christopher Kurtz & Dana Barnes

A collaboration with Dana Barnes and Christopher Kurtz, *Between Us: Tête-à-Tête* is an invitation to engage—to sit with the discomfort of division and find solace in shared experience. This collaboration emerges from a fascination with the resilience of hand-knotted fiber and the strength of carved wood, blending two distinct yet harmonious practices to create a suspended sanctuary amid the fragmented landscape of contemporary life. Appearing to float effortlessly, *Tête-à-Tête* becomes a catalyst for conversation and introspection drawing viewers closer both physically and emotionally.

In a time of political strife, environmental crises, and digital anxieties, this work encourages reflection and dialogue. It embodies the potential for unity through shared experience, asking us to “sit together” despite our differences. By combining the fluid, sensual lines of Kurtz’s wood artistry where he explores carving to evoke the grace of fabric—a whimsical, almost ethereal “magic carpet” emerges together with the muscular, assertive forms of Barnes’s fiber—powerful intertwined masses of twisted and knotted woolen rope-like structures resembling climbing vines and branching tendrils: creating an architectural enclave for togetherness. The piece reimagines traditional associations of gender in material and craft, inviting viewers to challenge assumptions about masculinity, femininity, and vulnerability. Here, strength and delicacy coexist, embodying resilience and tenderness in equal measure.

Tête-à-Tête also reflects on the impact of digital modes of communication, providing a counterpoint to the immediacy and fragmentation of online interactions. By centering on materials that require presence, patience, and precision, the piece creates an environment where human connection feels authentic, encouraging engagement that goes deeper than surface-level exchanges. In a world increasingly dominated by digital distraction, we hope this piece serves as a call to action of the importance of direct, human connection—an invitation to slow down, to listen, and to reconnect with the enduring craft of human interaction.

By merging wood and fiber in a dialogue of contrasts, *Between Us: Tête-à-Tête* invites understanding not only as an act of perception but as a tactile, bodily experience—an active choice to connect with both the material and another person seated across. In the work, we see the possibility for gentle transformation, a physical space where viewers can share perspectives and cultivate an appreciation for the shared threads of our resilience.





“Looking at the accumulation of sawdust beneath the machines, or the shelves filled with hundreds of carved “stones,” the studio itself has started to resemble a kind of quarry or excavation site — a landscape formed through slow material abrasion and accumulation over time. The work is increasingly feeling less “designed” in the conventional sense, and more geologic or sedimentary in nature.”

—Christopher Kurtz

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ABOUT SARAH MYERSCOUGH GALLERY

Founded in 1998, Sarah Myerscough Gallery is a leading voice in contemporary craft and material-led practice. The gallery represents an international roster of artists working at the intersection of craft, design, and sculpture. Their practices reflect an attunement to cultural relationships with natural materials, particularly wood, combining traditional craftsmanship with innovative approaches that challenge disciplinary boundaries. Through skills honed in dialogue with material, our artists articulate complex philosophical questions that contextualise our present-day relationship to making. Their practices speak to environmental, social, and cultural representation, often navigating a coexistence with the natural world. Through its programming, the gallery invites ongoing reflection on how we embrace the significance of the handmade to foreground the intelligence of materially grounded and conceptually rigorous works. The gallery continues to foster long-term collaboration with artists, curators, critics, and institutions, and is committed to expanding the role of craft within contemporary culture, representing sundry works from bespoke furniture collections and architectural applications, to dynamic sculpture and installation. In 2024, it presented its first international exhibition at Galerie56 in New York, and its artists' works are held in significant public and private collections worldwide. The gallery's programme reflects this ethos across exhibitions, public events, and major international fairs, including TEFAF Maastricht, PAD London, FOG Design + Art San Francisco, and Design Miami.

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