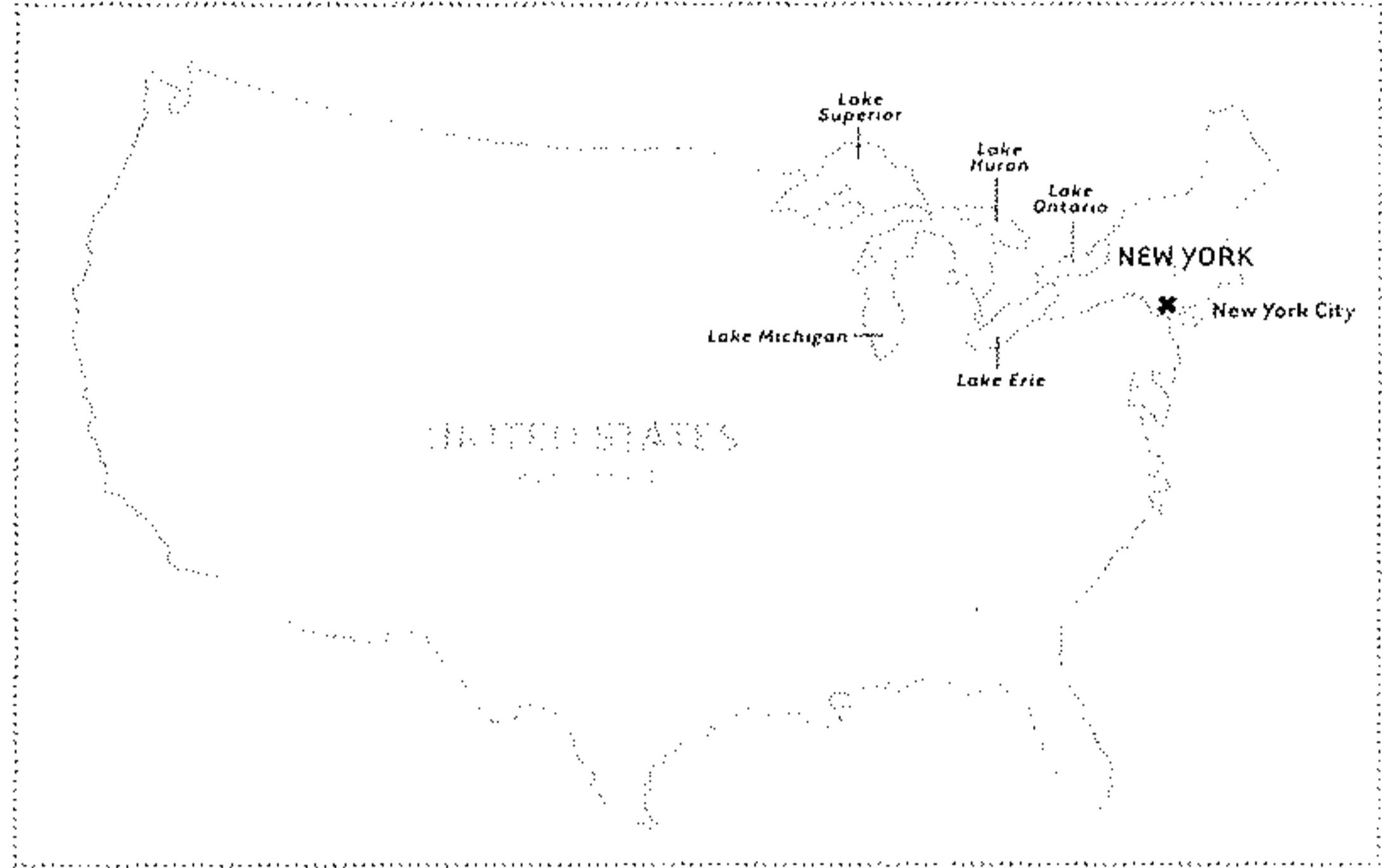
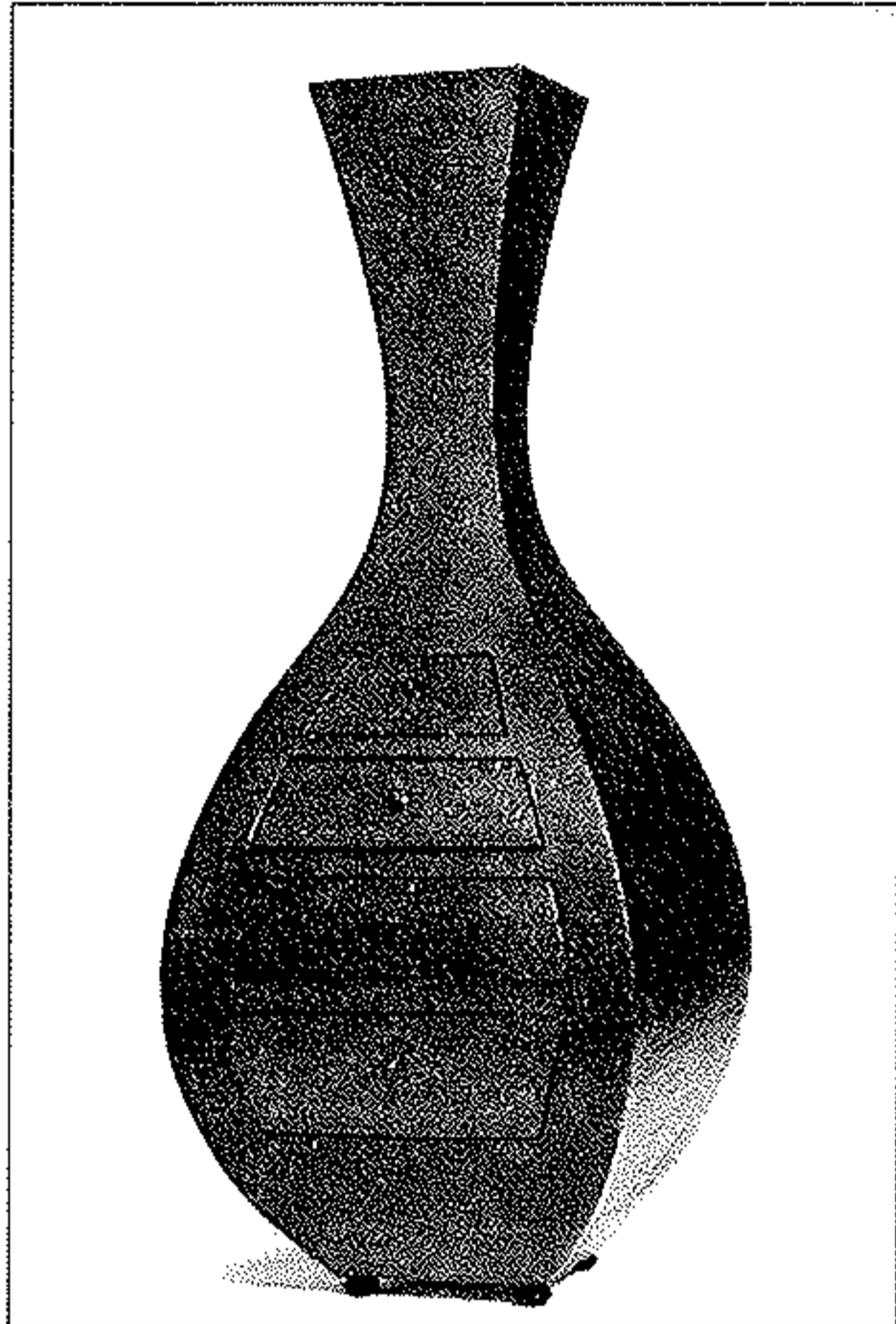


Transparency 1



Richard Snyder, American (born 1951) *Cabinet of Four Wishes*, 1990
Mahogany laminate on plywood and brass; 84 in. x 33 in. x 32 3/4 in.
(215.04 x 84.48 x 83.84 cm) Restricted gift of Marilyn Herst Karsten
in honor of Thomas Loren Karsten, 1990.399

Normally when we think of a cabinet, we consider it as a functional or useful object—something in which to store clothes, dishes, toys, or tools. But what if everyday cabinets had secret, magical qualities? What if furniture had fabulous and exotic histories? What if the drawers of dressers could grant us our innermost wishes? Richard Snyder's *Cabinet of Four Wishes* is just such an object: it takes its viewer's imagination on an extraordinary journey to the **Middle East**, where a young girl's secrets reside in its drawers.

Richard Snyder, a contemporary furnituremaker and artist currently working in New York City, creates imaginative histories for his works of art. According to him, the *Cabinet of Four Wishes* was created in the 16th century for the 11-year-old daughter of a **sultan** by a world-famous magician named Bogor (BOH-gore). The cabinet possessed the power to grant four wishes, one for each of the drawers. Each wish would be revealed as the young girl opened its drawer. Only three of the wishes were ever used. One still remains locked inside.

The fabulous fabricated history of the *Cabinet* evokes the mystery of the Middle East, as does the shape of the work itself. Standing seven feet tall, the enormous object widens from its base to its belly, narrows at the neck, then widens again at the very top, much like a genie's bottle or a wisp of smoke left behind as something magically disappears. With its ruby-colored mahogany finish, curved shape, and **patinated** brass pulls on the conforming drawers, the cabinet has the look of being both ancient and futuristic.

Snyder's objects begin as daydreams set in foreign countries or imaginary places rather than as drawings or computer models. Snyder has said that he has always been attracted to fantastic places. As a child he liked to make **dioramas** that he could look into: "What always interested me was that they had an outside form and an interior that was also a part of the story."¹ Snyder carried that interest into his professional career. As a working artist, he bestows each object with an aura "so that you'll sense that something magical is going to happen to

the objects you place inside... I create special, secret places that you only can enter with your imagination."²⁷

COLLECTIBLES AND CURIOSITIES

The *Cabinet of Four Wishes* is part of a larger series of objects that Snyder exhibited under the title *Collectibles and Curiosities*. All of the works in the series share the common imagined history of having been owned by the 16th-century sultan. Many of the objects were, according to Snyder's story, gifts from kings, **tsars**, and tribal chiefs. One object in the sultan's collection called *The Talking Mirror*, made for his unattractive wife, compliments the person who looks into it with recorded phrases such as "You are so beautiful... I have never known beauty as beautiful as you." As Snyder tells it, the woman's image cracked the mirror so many times that it had to be fitted with special deceptive glass to keep it from shattering. *The Phoenician Magician's Chest*, a vibrant red wood trunk, was once used by a great magician named Abu to contain the device needed for his famous Multiplying Person Trick. After the magician was burned to death (perhaps in the midst of an act), a king gave the chest to the sultan as a gift.

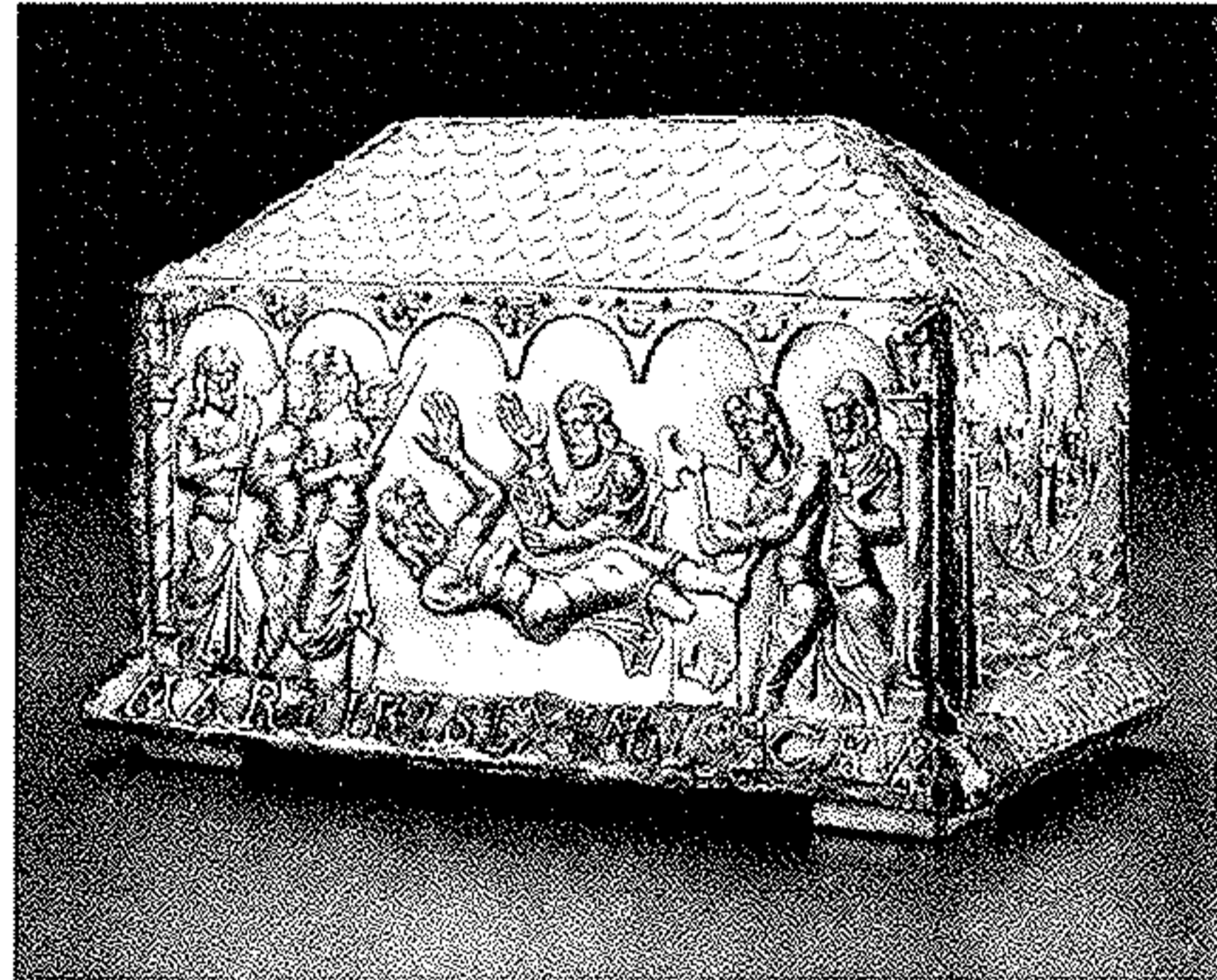


FIGURE 1 Spanish. *Chasse of Saint Adrian*, 1100/35.
Repoussé silver on oak core;
h. 6.3 in. x w. 9.9 in. x d. 5.7 in. (16.2 x 25.4 x 14.5 cm)
Kate S. Buckingham Endowment, 1943.65

HISTORICAL LINKS: RELIGIOUS CONTAINERS AND PERSONAL COLLECTIONS

The Cabinet of Four Wishes was inspired in part by a journey Snyder made to **Turkey**. In a Turkish palace, he saw a box labeled the "Tooth of Mohammed."²⁸ Mohammed was the seventh-century prophet and founder of Islam who spread this new faith throughout much of the Middle East and to parts of Europe and Asia. Containers such as the one holding Mohammed's tooth are called reliquaries, because they contain relics—bodies or parts of bodies—from saints or **divine** figures. Like Snyder's *Cabinet*, reliquaries are rich and lustrous in appearance. They are often lavishly decorated with precious stones, gold, silver, and painted narratives depicting the life—or death—of the saint or divine person whose remains are contained within. The contents are bestowed with miraculous powers to heal or answer invocations. The Art Institute's *Chasse of Saint Adrian* (figure 1) is a **medieval** Christian **reliquary** in a form known as a *chasse*. Shaped like a miniature tomb, the four panels of the silver *chasse* depict scenes from the death of a fourth-century Roman general named Adrian. Once in charge of persecuting Christians, Adrian suffered a violent **martyrdom** after he converted to the Christian faith. The *chasse* was made much

later, in the 12th century, and said to contain partial remains of the fabled saint's body. Throughout time, people made **pilgrimages** to the abbey or monastery where the chasse was kept to ask for the saint's protection. In this respect, both the Art Institute's religious chasse and Snyder's secular cabinet function as containers for and grantors of wishes.

Snyder's *Cabinet of Four Wishes* is also similar to a type of furniture created to contain strange, exotic, or miraculous objects called a *Wunderkabinett* (cabinet of wonders). In 15th- and 16th-century Europe, it was common for the ruling class to form vast collections of oddities—including paintings, sculptures, books, gems, coins, stuffed game and fowl, fossils, shells, and scientific instruments—and place them inside cabinets and drawers of finely designed pieces of furniture or in specially fitted rooms. The Art Institute's *Augsburg Cabinet* (figure 2) is an ornately decorated 17th-century German *Wunderkabinett* made of dark ebony wood veneer with ivory inlay. The front exterior of the piece is decorated with intricate inlays of curving, **organic** designs called "arabesques," which are Moorish in origin. In the interior, narrative scenes

depict royal hunting scenes, including falconry, a sport using trained hawks restricted to the nobility. Part display case, part tool chest, and part safe-deposit box for personal effects, the cabinet contains hidden compartments that fit together like a jigsaw puzzle. Deep inside the cabinet is a locked, secret set of drawers. Here, the owner would have stored the most treasured personal items such as jewelry or precious gems from exotic lands.

Although very different in appearance, the *Augsburg Cabinet* and the *Cabinet of Four Wishes* share a common function. They were designed to contain the closely guarded secrets, private wishes, and rare collections of the nobility. Where do you think the *Cabinet of Four Wishes* would have been kept in the sultan's palace? It might have been displayed in a room filled with other curious objects, something like a German *Wunderkammer* (room of wonders). Here, a person could store larger collected items and gifts from around the world. Based on Snyder's unusual stories about how these objects came into his possession, one can imagine that the sultan also might have built a special, ornately decorated room to contain his collected treasures.

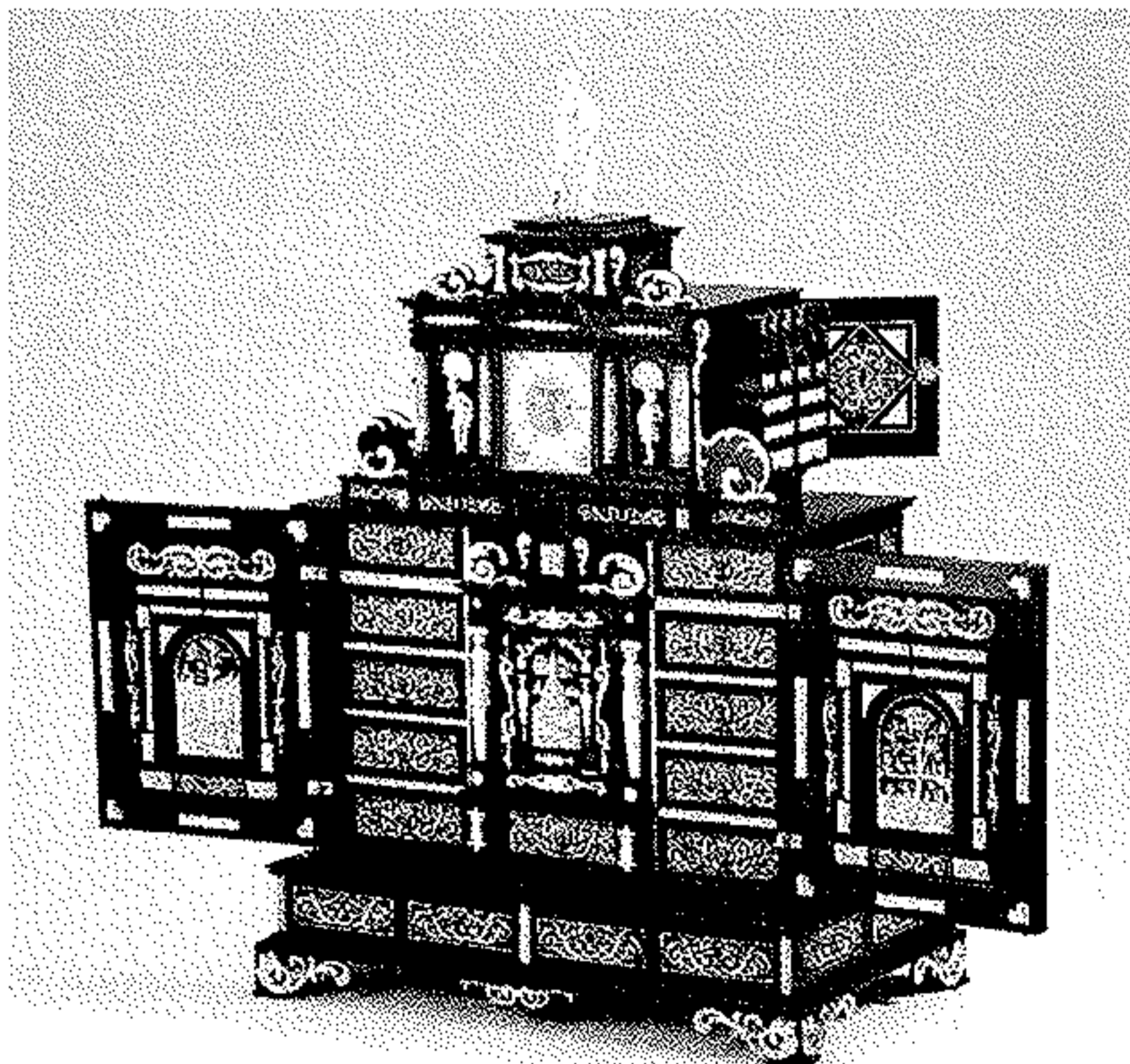


FIGURE 2

German, Augsburg. Maker: Philip Heinhoffer, active 1635–1645. *Augsburg Cabinet*, c. 1640.

Wood, ebony, inlaid ivory;

h. 63 in. w. 43 1/2 in. d. 25 1/2 in. (161.28 x 111.36 x 65.28 cm)

Anonymous Purchase Fund, 1970.404

Classroom Applications

Transparency 1

Richard Snyder. *Cabinet of Four Wishes*, 1990

1. Three Wishes

From Aladdin to Cinderella, elementary-school students are familiar with fairy tales and other stories about wish fulfillment. Usually these tales teach a lesson about the evils of greed, selfishness, and impulsiveness and the virtues of goodness, humility, and generosity. Have students read several of these stories (see *Student Bibliography*) to draw out similarities and to make predictions about the story behind Snyder's *Cabinet of Four Wishes*. Have students write and illustrate their own short stories about wish making and predict what they might find in the fourth drawer of the cabinet.

State Learning Standards: 1A, 2B

2. Where in the World?

Each of Richard Snyder's artworks is woven into the setting of an oftentimes magical story that brings the objects to life. It is the story that inspires the design of Snyder's work. Snyder uses his daydreams or imagines exotic settings in faraway or outlandish places to create a work. Without divulging too much information about the setting or story that inspired Snyder to make this piece, have students imagine a setting for this cabinet. Would it be placed in a house? apartment? mansion? office building? castle? How would the rest of the room or building be decorated? What country or part of the world would you find it in? Who would own this object? What would its drawers contain? Discuss the shape and the materials used to make the cabinet with students. Have students draw an illustration or create a diorama representing the cabinet's location. Instruct students to write a descriptive paragraph or a poem for the *Cabinet of Four Wishes* that addresses these questions. Have students compare their own descriptions and illustrations to those of Snyder.

State Learning Standards: 3B, 25A, 25B

3. Make a Wish

Wish making can be a powerful tool for articulating what we deeply desire, much like dreaming or prayer. Most people are familiar with making a birthday wish, tossing a coin into a fountain, or wishing upon a star. Have students make one wish for what they hope to achieve during their school year or in their lifetime. Instruct students to write these down on star cutouts and hang them from the ceiling of the classroom as reminders of what they strive for and wish. Older students may make plans or outlines about the steps they might take to make their wishes come true.

State Learning Standards: 18A, 18B, 26B

4. Inventing Magical Objects

The design of Snyder’s cabinet was meant to evoke images of a magic bottle or the puff of smoke that lingers after a genie disappears. Discuss elements and **symbols** of magic, such as magic carpets, wands, and magic mirrors. Have students design their own magical piece of furniture and make small models of it using colored posterboard or foam core. Create a small-scale room or building and place the students’ furniture models inside it. Or feature the furniture in a classroom exhibition. Have students include a brief description of the object’s ideal location, materials, and magical properties.

State Learning Standards: 3C, 25A, 26B

5. Our Family Stories

Often many of the furnishings we find in our homes have stories attached to them: pieces of furniture passed down through generations, quilts sewn by family members using designs or fabric of personal significance, objects given as gifts or acquired through funny or unusual circumstances. Have students select a special object from their homes. Instruct students to conduct a family interview to learn the history or stories (provenance) about their chosen object. Have students bring the object to school or sketch it. Create a classroom exhibition of these objects. Older students may write a personal narrative that tells the tale of their object. Post these narratives next to the objects on view.

State Learning Standards: 3B, 5A, 27B

6. Form and Function

The shape of this cabinet is very unusual. Normally, cabinets are box- or rectangular-shaped, like the *Augsburg Cabinet* (see page 17). Richard Snyder chose to create a more organic, pear-shaped form with curved edges. Discuss the difference between organic and geometric shapes with students. Looking at images of Joan Miró’s (1925–1983) paintings (figure 3), Antoni Gaudí’s (1852–1926) architecture, or furniture designed by Hector Guimard (1867–1942) (figure 4) as examples, have students design a room entirely of furniture based on organic forms. (None of the objects should have perpendicular or sharp angles.) What kind of mood does this create? How does it limit the functions of the objects? Would these shapes limit the materials that could be used to construct the furnishings? To extend this project, have students design a room that contains objects that have sharp 90-degree angles. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of both forms.

State Learning Standards: 11C, 25A, 25B, 26B



FIGURE 3
Joan Miró (Spanish, 1893–1983).
The Policeman, 1925. Oil on canvas;
97 5/8 in. x 76 3/4 in. (248 x 194.9 cm)
Gift of Claire Zeisler, 1991.1499

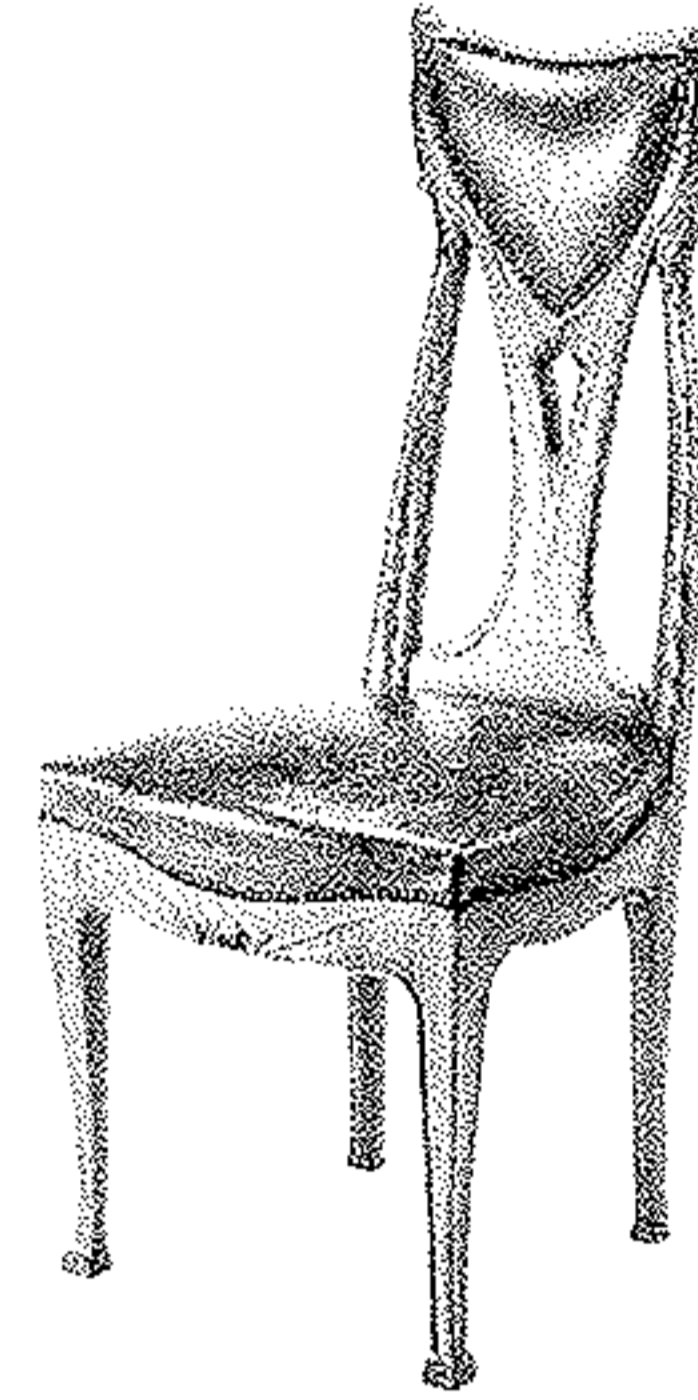


FIGURE 4
Hector Guimard (French, 1867–1942).
Side Chair, c. 1900 or c. 1913.
Pearwood, tooled or stamped leather;
42 in. x 17.8 in. x 18.3 in. (108 x 45.7 x 47 cm)
Through prior gifts of Mr. Walter Brewster,
Mrs. James Cook, Mr. Joseph Nash Field,
Mrs. T. Clifford Rodman, Mrs. Clive Runnells,
Mr. and Mrs. Martin Ryerson, Mrs. Norman Schloss,
Mrs. Sidney Schwartz, Mrs. Diego Suarez, 1985.764

7. Making Tough Choices

Only three of the wishes in the *Cabinet of Four Wishes* have been granted. Snyder's open-ended story invites the audience to speculate what the final wish will be. Spark a critical debate with older students about current events, social issues, or their personal values by introducing a game in which each student chooses one wish from two critical options. For example, ask, "If you had only one wish, would you... eliminate crime or the greenhouse effect? Stop all wars or put an end to homelessness? Be president or a famous movie celebrity? Travel the world or spend one day with anyone you choose?" Discuss responses as a class, weighing the outcome of each option.

State Learning Standards: 4B, 4C