

SIDE GALLERY

MICHAEL VAN BEUREN (1911-2004)



Michael van Beuren, Klaus Grabe & Morley Webb
Chair model "Miguelito"
Manufactured by Grabe & van Beuren
Mexico, 1941 (designed), 1947 (manufacturing)
Ayacahuite pine wood and woven strips of agave fiber (ixtle)

Measurements

81,28 cm x 55,25 cm x 66,04 cm
32 in x 21,75 in x 26h in

Provenance

Private collection, San Diego (USA)

Exhibitions

Found in translation. LACMA Los Angeles. Design in California and Mexico 1915-1985. From 17 September 2017 to 1st of April 2018.

Collections

LACMA Museum, Los Angeles (USA)

Essays

The San Miguel or San Miguelito side chair is one of Michael Van Beuren's most successful and representative designs. (Michael van Bueren was referred to as Don Miguel or Don Miguelito in Spanish, from where he took the name.) The chair is a modern interpretation of the traditional butaca, or butaque (commonly referred to as Campeche chair), which was popular in Mexico's coastal areas since colonial times, including the Yucatan Peninsula and Veracruz. This particular iteration of the San Miguelito chair was likely produced from 1947 to 1960, the period when the bulk of Domus production was manufactured using the more inexpensive Mexican white pine wood (ayacahuite) combined with natural fibers such as woven agave fiber (ixtle) and palm (Ilona Katzew, Curator and Department Head, Latin American Art).

Biography

Michael van Beuren was born in New York, on March 18, 1911. He arrived in Mexico in 1937 looking for new horizons and the possibility of working as an untitled architect. First he spent a season in Acapulco, and took over the construction and interior design of the Flamingo's Hotel bungalows, then headed to Mexico City. His first jobs in the capital were a series of houses that would carry numbers 1, 2 and 3 on Liverpool Street.

Once attached to the country, Van Beuren realized that it would be difficult to practice without the title of architect, but with his skill and knowledge acquired in the Bauhaus, he could venture into the furniture industry and provide Mexican society with a new offer of design, more in line with the new times, and that would adapt to the modern architecture that already stood out in the panorama.

In 1938 he began to design furniture with his colleague of the Bauhaus, the German designer Klaus Grabe, in this way they created a small company that operated under the name of Grabe & Van Beuren.

Subsequently Michael van Beuren created Domus, his first brand and probably the best known. With that name, the first store would be opened at number 40 on Hamburg Street in the 1940s; this company served as an umbrella for various brands that flooded the Mexican market with interesting designs and a much more international and modern approach, leaving behind the "Mexican style" that intellectuals and artists had tried to put on fashion in this frantic search for an identity national.

Michael van Beuren continued designing and retired to live in the city of Cuernavaca where he died in 2004. Today his furniture represents one of the most fruitful moments of furniture production in the country, and has become an important part of history of design in Mexico of the twentieth century.