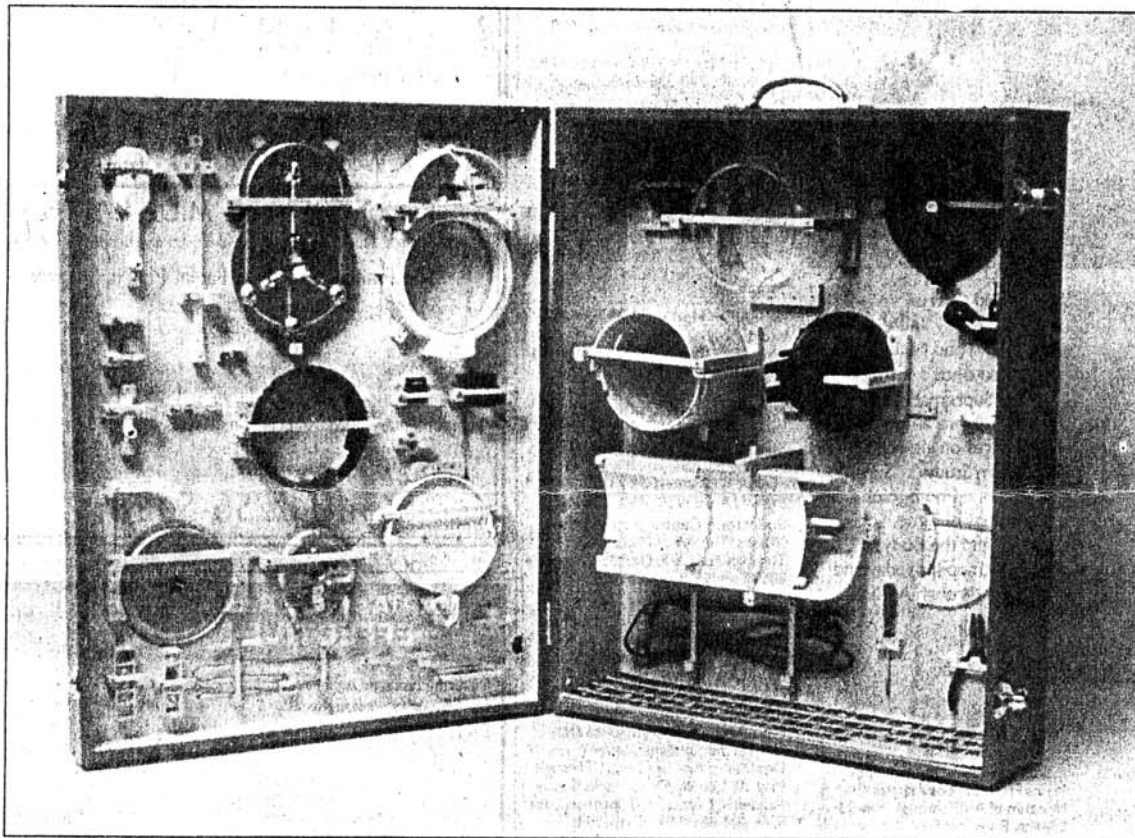


Fox, Catherine.
 "Greatness in the Small."
*Atlanta Journal
 Constitution*, April 2, 1999,
 Q8.



In "Braun 'Aromaster' 10-cup Coffee Maker" (1991), Allan Wexler took apart a familiar appliance and reassembled it into a "kit."

Greatness in the small

Allan Wexler's Zen-like art disassembles objects and life

REVIEW

**"Custom Built:
 A Twenty-Year
 Survey of Work
 of Allan Wexler"**

Through April 25.
 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Saturdays; 10 a.m.-9:30 p.m. Thursdays and Fridays; noon-5 p.m. Sundays. Atlanta College of Art Gallery, 1280 Peachtree Road N.E. 404-733-5051. Also, 1-5 p.m. Tuesdays-Saturdays at City Gallery at Chastain, 135 W. Wieuca Road N.W. 404-257-1804.

The verdict: Zen and the art of psyche maintenance: thought-provoking, witty furniture, models and sculptures from an underappreciated artist.

By Catherine Fox
 VISUAL ARTS CRITIC

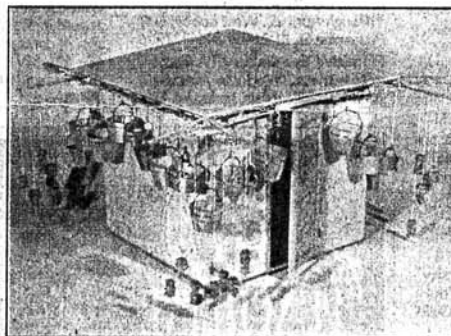
You get up in the morning, fix a pot of coffee and read your newspaper. Big deal. But what if you had to assemble your coffee maker first, piece by piece? You might realize that what you've got going is a morning ritual. Perhaps you might then become more aware of all the activities in which you engage and the objects you use to accomplish them.

You can take a shortcut by looking at the kit containing a disassembled Braun coffee maker on display at City Gallery at Chastain. It's one of the works in a 20-year retrospective of New York artist Allan Wexler, divided between Chastain and the Atlanta College of Art Gallery.

Wexler, 49, is as much a philosopher as an art maker. Eastern thought and design, particularly its elegant pith, fascinates him. The coffee kit and many of his other models and sculptures offer a Western parallel to the Japanese tea ceremony, which "The Book of Tea" author Kakuzo Okakura describes as "a religion of the art of life . . . the Zen conception of greatness in the smallest incidents of life." Oh, and they're funny, too.

Trained as an artist and an architect, Wexler acts, as Robert Rauschenberg would say, in the gap between the two. He makes furniture, and he takes it apart. He makes contraptions that complicate simple tasks. He also builds multi-functional objects as efficient and shipshape as the interior of a boat.

Just as the minimalist artists sought the essence of painting and sculpture, Wexler explores the elements basic to architecture. As with the minimalists, repetition and variation are mantras. In little models, Wexler started with four upright twigs and worked from there, examining not only what makes a house but also the infinite variations possible with a very simple palette of shapes and materials. One series of houses examines doors — swinging out, swinging in, hinged on the right, hinged on the left. As part of an exploration of architecture and water, Wexler made an



Building and water: In this small, exquisite model from 1994, Wexler, who was trained as an architect, replaces gutters with buckets.

exquisite little wood model in which buckets with counterweights replace gutters. Not the most streamlined way to collect runoff, but it does serve to call attention to the issue.

As the coffeepot piece suggests, Wexler's interest extends beyond the physical to the social ramifications of design. In little models and in real-life scale, he explores, for instance, what goes on when people sit around a table. Some of his pieces are contraptions that connect the people sitting there, allowing one to serve or control the other. They dramatize interrelationships we take for granted.

Wexler's work is thought-provoking and witty. This retrospective shows the integrity and logic of a body of art developed over the course of two decades. It's a mystery that he has received so little attention. Kudos to co-curators Debra Wilbur and Chris Scoates for bringing him to ours.

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