

A man with a beard, wearing a white suit and a light-colored hat, stands in a field of tall grass. He is holding a long, thin object, possibly a cane or a tool. To his right, a large, thick log is suspended in the air, hanging from a tree branch above. The background shows a clear sky and distant hills.

*Wendell  
Castle  
Wandering  
Forms—  
Works  
from 1959—  
1989*

*Alastair Gordon*

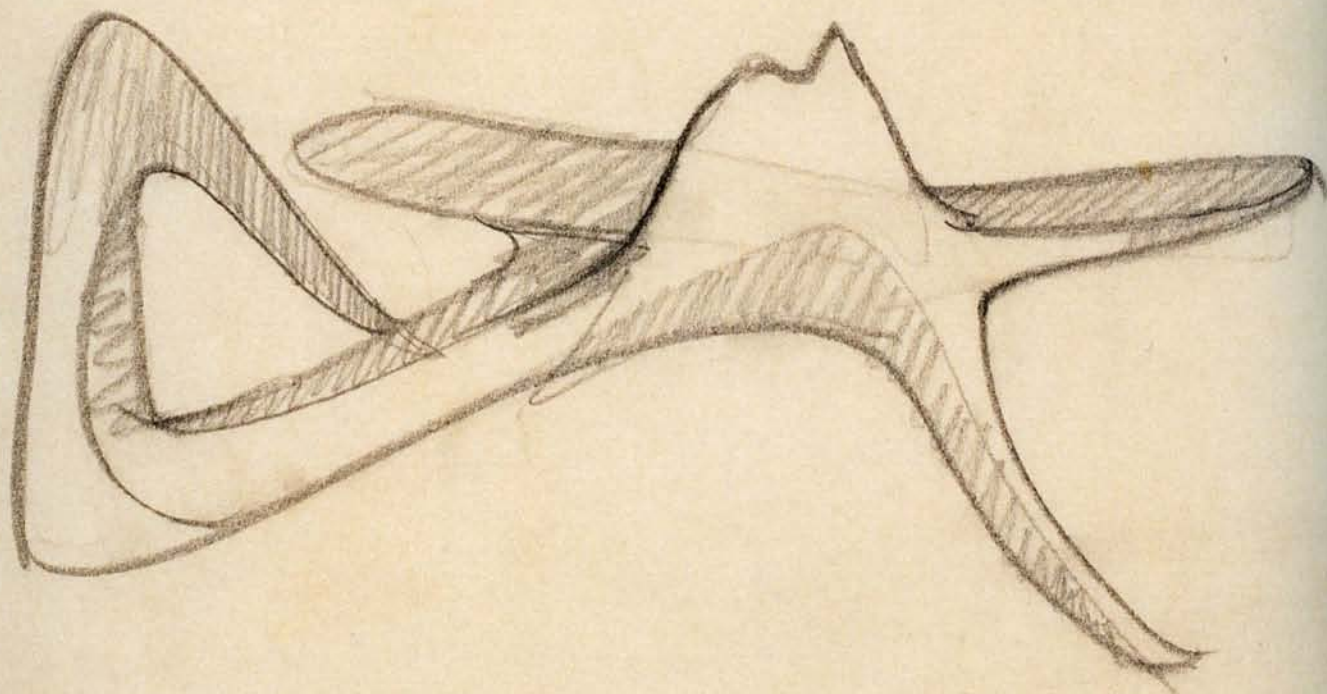
The *Desk* (40 ½ x 89 x 62 ½ inches) of 1967, sometimes referred to as the *Silver Leaf Desk*, was a leap into uncharted territory. A flat writing surface was supported by a contorted base in the form of a whiplash stroke of laminated mahogany, pointed at either end and animated by three acute curves. It might have been read as spider legs, or a jungle vine writhing in such a way that it barely touched the floor at three points to support the desk. One critic described it as a “huge insect ready for attack,” another as a “great, looping serpent’s tail.”<sup>53</sup>

In reality, the origins of this piece were far more prosaic. “The idea came from a paperclip that I bent around into this shape,” said Castle. “But it was a pretty involved process making it work.”<sup>54</sup> He used a combination of stacked finger joinery at the “elbows” of the base and scarf lamination in which long diagonal joints were secured with dowels. Base and desk flow seamlessly as one object and Castle, with his wife Nancy’s assistance, finished off the writing surface with an ethereal *appliqué* of silver leaf.

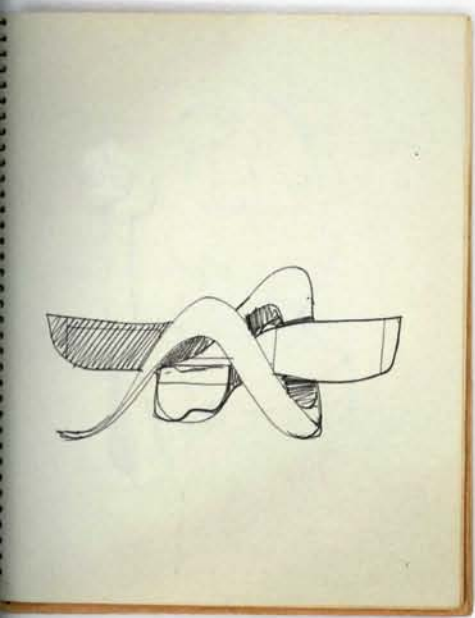
The next in the series was *Serpent Table* (1967), an anthropomorphic gesture that began with a penciled squiggle on paper: something living with an undulating tail, a fin, and a flattened head with a beak that might have been usable for resting a drink or a plate of hors d’oeuvres. Liquid outlines solidified as Castle built up the laminated levels of oak and left the nether end bulging out to provide enough weight to balance the “head” jutting out at the other extremity.

“I’ve done quite a few pieces [like this] where the base lays along the floor and comes up at appropriate times to hold something yet becomes a very important design element in itself, as important as the top, not at all separated from the top,” said Castle.<sup>55</sup>

Sketches for *Desk* (also referred  
to as *Silver Leaf Desk*), 1967.  
Mahogany, cherry plywood,  
gesso, silver leaf; signed: WC  
67; 89 x 62 ½ x 40 ½ inches  
(226.06 x 156.21 x 102.87 cm).  
Collection of Racine Art  
Museum, Gift of S. C. Johnson  
& Son, Inc. in Honor of the  
50th Anniversary of RAM's  
Wustum Museum



desk



Installation view in *Objects USA*, 1972, Museum of Contemporary Crafts, New York







*Desk* (also referred to as *Silver Leaf Desk*), 1967. Mahogany, cherry plywood, gesso, silver leaf; signed: WC 67; 89 x 62 ½ x 40 ½ inches (226.06 x 156.21 x 102.87 cm). Collection of Racine Art Museum, Gift of S. C. Johnson & Son, Inc. in Honor of the 50th Anniversary of RAM's Wustum Museum