

TOUCH WOOD

Camouflaging a full dining set, Panya Clark Espinal's installation plays with perception

BY SHANNON ANDERSON



↑ Each component of *Lost in the Wood* lines up perfectly within the overall composition.

WHEN IT COMES TO ART, everyone is well acquainted with the rule “Look but don’t touch”, but artist Panya Clark Espinal trades social convention for communal interaction with her sculpture *Lost in the Wood*, a collaboration with architect Nathanael Gray. The dynamically rendered piece contains a fully functional dining set that visitors can touch and even use, further breaking down that invisible barrier. When it debuted at Toronto’s Christopher Cutts gallery last spring, people hosted culinary gatherings within it. Fabricated using two plywood screens and felt flooring as a base, the entire installation, including the table, stools and place settings, is adorned with the same wood plank graphics. The earth-hued “planks” are reminiscent of Brit designer Richard Woods’ architectural works with real and painted timbers. Indeed, Clark Espinal’s piece straddles the

realms of art and design, beauty and functionality. “I wanted to make art that could engage people in a different way,” she says. “It’s an attempt to let them step inside an artwork, let it be fluid and transforming.”

Fabricated using high- and low-tech methods – laser cutting and 3-D printing, hand-painted surfaces and hand-cut flooring – *Lost in the Wood* plays with anamorphosis: when viewed from a particular spot, the furnishings appear to flatten and become camouflaged, playing with the concepts of what is tangible and what is accessible. The gallery installation is just a launching pad for the work: envisioning future encounters, Clark Espinal imagines everything from partnerships with restaurants to a banquet in a farmer’s field. For the artist, “It’s a bit of an experiment.”