

# THE NEW YORKER

“Concerning Superfluities: Shaker Material Culture and Affinities”

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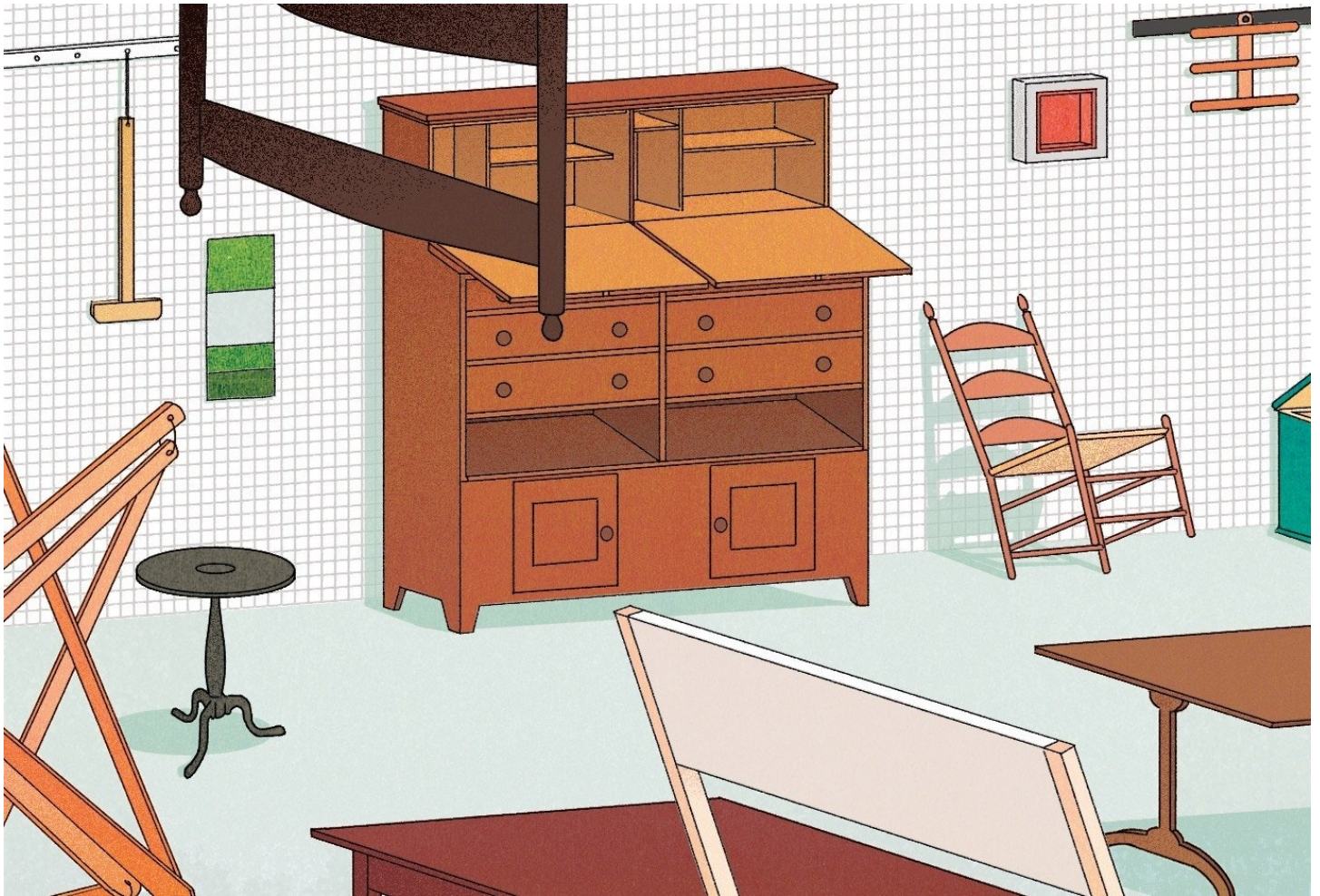


Illustration by Liam Cobb

What does an apple peeler have in common with an Agnes Martin painting? Find out in “**Concerning Superfluities**,” a fascinating, if overstuffed, exhibition at the Essex Street gallery (through Dec. 22), organized by the canny gallerist Maxwell Graham with John Keith Russell Antiques. Pieces by twelve contemporary artists hum on the same frequency as three dozen sublimely utilitarian objects, made by Shakers in the nineteenth century. Martin’s one-foot-square black-and-white study in sacred geometry, from 1959, is the show’s earliest art piece; its most recent are two pithy inkjet-on-linen grids by Wade Guyton, from 2019. The apple peeler—carved from pine, birch, and maple, circa 1850, and a ringer for a mini Brancusi—has pride of place in the front window. Everything makes a persuasive case for the Shaker ideal of formal frugality and for the idea that, as Martin simply put it, “Beauty is the mystery of life.”

— *Andrea K. Scott*