

DATEAGLE ART

Catharsis Through Carving
Exploring the practice of Nathan Henton.

Driftwood
Hardwood
 Softwood
Firewood
Ashwood
 Limewood
 Pinewood
 Tulipwood
 Beechwood
Cherrywood
Redwood
Cedarwood



Porous and fibrous, resilient and malleable, hard and soft. For centuries, wood has been utilised as a raw material in human production and transportation. As the building blocks of shelter, warmth and movement, its functional properties are comprehensive and universally exhausted. Wood is found in the roots and stems of living trees and performs a support function in enabling plants to grow and stand strong alone.

It is an internal vessel for the movement of water and nutrients and is a structural tissue built up of cellulose fibres. Possessing high tensile strength, wood's genetic makeup resists compression and withstands the brutalities of the natural environment. Metaphorical connections can be made between the functionality of wood and the human body, and although our genomes are different, our shared purpose is to enable growth.



Producing life-size, wooden sculptures, artist Nathan Henton's practice seeks to investigate shape, form and the void within space. Through a process called direct carving, Henton systematically eliminates material from the outside in, sculpting the final form rather than working from a preliminary model.

Respecting the nature of the material and often working collaboratively alongside it, Henton highlights its individual qualities and uses simplistic forms and finishes to expose its raw materiality. The final results are transcendent, organic and abstract. The work contains direct actions of the artist's hand, where errors blend into possibilities, and the topography of the surface evokes the bucolic Cornish landscape that surrounds him.



- Repetition
 - Instruction
 - Regulation
 - Guidelines
 - Direction
 - Principles
 - Idea-based
- Rhythm
- Recurrence
 - Rules
 - Dictate
 - Mandate

Henton's methodology is founded on restrictions. By juxtaposing the very essence of direct carving, Henton controls the supposed freedom, by setting himself parameters to work within. Working within rules means that he discovers new ideas and innovative solutions; seeking creativity under restrictions. Not only does Henton deal with rules, but the work itself becomes a sequence of cause and effect. The initial removal of material goes on to inform the next gesture in an eternal cycle of consequences. Through eliminating distractions and focusing solely on the process, Henton has discovered the rhythms that different types of materials offer, and how harmony can be produced when working to their demands.





Laboriously, he works in multiple stages making his method ritualistic. Procedure surpasses aesthetic: starting with a trunk of wood sawn down, stripped of its bark, chopped with an axe into blocks and then chiselled. Imitating natural curves, Henton bends, moulds, and shapes his unprocessed forms, using various tools, such as Bench chisels and Gouge chisels, to achieve multiple effects. Another technique practised by Henton is charring, which is done by lightly applying an open flame to a wood plank in order to blacken the surface. This technique also seals the surface and protects it from weather damage and insects.

Besides acting as a shield against deterioration, the aesthetic qualities of charring are also poignant. Burnt tones produce tonal depth that accentuates his exploration into the void and the internalised darkness that comes with pain. This process takes time and elongates existence, symbolically connecting with the environment and our journeys on this earth.



Intensive
Emotional
Feelings
 Loving
 Loss
 Touching
 Sensitive

Tough
Delicate
 Exhaustive
 Awareness
 Reflection

Henton bares all emotions in his work and opens up a space for vulnerability. It has become a vehicle for him to explore pain and personal memories, serving as a therapeutic tool. The nature of these sculptures' tests resilience, both physically and mentally. Working in a labour-intensive manner, many hours, days, and months have been spent in isolation with the material. This has led to an intimate understanding of its properties and enabled a deeper appreciation of each wood's characteristics. Some receive the chisel and others fight back against it, much like emotions. This battle in the process is a significant by-product of the work and can be seen in the sheer scale and presence of the final objects.



Embedded with emotional qualities and cathartic in its making, Henton attempts to use the intensity of the process as a means of healing. The act of physically moving with the material and exercising the whole body gives space for inner feelings to arise, while long periods spent working allow a chance to reflect.

With artwork that is created through live-action, this motion-based method forms a dialogue between performance and sculpture. Often regarded as immaterial and temporary, performance art grapples with the present moment and ideas of impermanence. Fusing the performative act with a sculptural outcome allows Henton to capture human emotion and the spirit abandoned within the object, while simultaneously exploring the physical body and the exertion employed to formulate it.



A sculpture's journey reflects the same struggle as a tree's growth. Both products of their surrounding environment: blemishes and imperfections allude to different memories and record distinctive moments in time. A tree is the earth's way of documenting time through concentric rings in its wood. These show a tree's age and the weather conditions that it endured during its lifespan and differ visually depending on those variables. The notion of time is a contingent thread running through Henton's practice and is used in both a physical and metaphorical manner. The tangible presence of time can be seen running through the material and the hours spent making, whilst the metaphorical concept is seen past creation when the object governs its own time and that of the viewers. Balancing, leaning, and housing his raw emotions, Henton's sculptures form a permanent time capsule of stillness that provides a site for deep reflection.

Time
Existence
Survival
Being
Lifetime
Duration
Generation
Days
Years
Minutes
Seconds
Life

WORDS BY BROOKE WILSON