

*Peter, you work with wood - How did you find to this material for your sculptural work?*

Well, I grew up with wood. Already my great-great grandfather used to be a wainwright and my father ran the handicraft enterprise, as family tradition has it, up until several years after World War II. As children we spent ever so much time at my grandfather's workshop where we crafted objects of wood. A wainwright works along with wood, its curvatures, its flow of fibers. He actually works more so with the tree as a whole than merely with wood. At home one used to say that Carpenters don't understand wood since they're looking for a homogenous material, which was found eventually in plywood as in its derivatives.

*You decidedly work with wood. Do other materials play a role at all?*

They hardly do. Wood just turned out to be 'my' material to work with. I've tried working with stone as well as bronze which are ideal for lasting exterior sculptures yet I've never been able to make them my own. At times I do use metal yet up until now it hasn't developed into a self-reliant material to work with.

*Quite a number of wood sculptors use paint for surface design, to define plasticity, to sensitize the shape created by the artist. How do you define the meaning of color except for the natural color of the material you work with?*

I do not use any color since I feel I can't just "smirch" my plastics. I'm too committed to the material to do so. Color might accentuate form, at the same time it covers the material. Particularly in the case of my "cleavage products" the material should be given priority.

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*Let's stick to the subject of color. Wood, exposed to climate, weathers. How do you view the ageing process of wood and, as a result of that, its loss of lively colorings?*

I usually do regret the perishability of wood's specific chromaticity. The transience from fresh to grey in particular doesn't always look very appealing. And yet there isn't any alternative, as far as I am concerned, for the plastics erected al fresco.

*To what extent does the material influence shape, expression?*

Wood can be viewed as having an independent existence determined by growth and structure. I always try to find the exact trunk piece for the implementation of my ideas. In selecting I am able to rely on my long-standing experience with trees' processes of growth. Nevertheless there always remains an uncertainty, e.g. whether or not a piece of wood splits evenly, or whether it is twisted to such an extent that I am, with the utmost effort eventually only producing firewood. It is precisely this contribution of the material to the form finding-process which makes the matter fascinating to me.

*Shape and form determination, an essential conception. Can you give us a more exact explanation?*

Let me give you an example. I once had to sever the, up until then invisible, angular running fiber bundles, with an ax when splitting the trunk for a Crossbeam. In no other way would I have been able to obtain quarters but completely twisted cleavages only, which were unusable for the objectives. I wasn't happy about this at all and saw the project endangered. In the final outcome it is these severed areas which determine part of the captivation. This process isn't open to influence. Repetition is sheer impossible. And yet it is exactly this decisive point which never fails to fascinate me: the fact that it is not just me, the sculptor, who is in full control of the outcome.

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One can get upset about this or one can incorporate, as I do, the forces of nature into his creation and give them scope.

*Your latest work deals with the “Splitting” of wood?*

Yes, they do. To split manually is kind of archaic, perhaps even brutal. It takes one regularly to the limits of one’s physical strength. And yet it is the only way to truly get to know something about the growth of the tree. It is insufficient to experience the latter in a mere cognitive way. One has to experience the resistance the tree allows you to encounter in order to develop sense for its inner strength.

*Nearly every artist constructs his work upon what has been seen, in particular that which other artists have accomplished. Are there any sculptors who influence your works of art?*

The taking of natural forces into sculpting hasn’t begun that long ago. Rudolf Wachter integrates the shrinkage of wood during the drying process into his principle called “Schwundschnitt” (“shrinkage-cut”). His use of form is therefore more so determined by geometrical shapes. David Nash, whom I was allowed to get to know personally, uses the drying process purposely in order to achieve his form determination as can be seen in e.g. Cracking Box. Perhaps I’m taking the splitting a step further into the material than Wachter and Nash do thereby placing even more emphasis on the material.

*Art and Nature is a rather current topic. As far as your artistic work is concerned which are you more interested in: The symbiosis of Art and Nature or rather the contradistinction of Art and Nature?*

Not only is nature beautiful, it is just as much brutal and unjust - nature simply is. Above all nature is not primarily interested in mankind. Against this background I cannot make use of the stated categories. In examining

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art and nature the full spectrum of symbiosis and contradistinction is equally justified.

*You've studied forestry and now you are sculpting, a process in which you are developing conclusive creative-artistic evidence. How has this pathway developed? Are there any connections between the both activities?*

An intensive analysis is required when preoccupying oneself with both topics: nature and art. I haven't come across a nature-art course of studies as of yet. Forestry training teaches one to observe quite accurately, above all the causal relations of the woods. It teaches one that despite all the observations, no matter how accurate, one cannot know nor evaluate everything. Silviculture includes working with nature as well as utilizing the forces of nature in a prudential manner. In this respect my experiences in forestry provide me with relevant fundamentals for my work as a sculptor.

*The square as basic form can be found repeatedly in your sculptures and reliefs. Are you using the square to make a decisive statement?*

The square, even more so the rectangle cannot be found in nature. Both shapes are manmade and therefore can be seen as emblematic of artificiality. By means of splitting I offer a look into the tree, virtually into nature and therewith contrasting the square.

*Excerpts of an interview of Peter Helmstetter by Walter Hettich on the occasion of the exhibition "Spaltprodukte" (Cleavage Products), which will take place at the galerie +kunst as well as the Art-route Barthelmesaurach, autumn 2011.*