

Towards an Endless Sculpture

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Attila Pokorny's sculptures express our relation to nature, to the permanence of nature within the human consciousness and sensibility. His sculptures are flexible, adaptable, part of a living process. We can consider Pokorny's sculptures *Endless Sculptures* for they participate in nature's cycle of life, a process that goes on and on forever. As endless sculptures, Pokorny seizes on the ephemeral aspect of life, that everything is changing, in transition, part of a process of life. In so doing he establishes his understanding of life's place in art, and art's place in life. An art that comprehends sustainability is truly an art with a vision. There is a continuous tension in the nature culture exchange that is healthy. In screen-bred cultures of the new technology we sometimes forget our place in the physical tactile world.

Pokorny's art reminds us that physics is the most radical of all art forms, for it changes invisibly, all the time transforms, is a process that involves unseen but manifest energies. And Attila Pokorny has taken up the challenge, with a sensitivity and capacity to experiment. There is never any perfection in experimentation, but when one truly seeks, one finds. Nature becomes an incredibly diverse studio, and all the materials are not store bought. Nature provides everything. And everything becomes part of the art. Attila Pokorny's sculpture reveals a capacity to see the process of life in a grand scale, and to see art as a detail, as part of the picture. A detail in an environment Pokorny's art enlivens and adds a touch of something human to a holistic process we are, and have always been a part of. We see this tendency already developing in the temporary works made by the sea or near water in Sicily and Romania. These stitched patterns were made of leaves and sand. They projected a strong contrast, like ink sketches do in a sketchbook. Left to disintegrate as climate, the action of waves and of nature gradually returned the art to earth. These gestures, enacted by Attila Pokorny are healing actions, cathartic and in context with place. As Thomas Berry has written in *The Dream of the Earth*, "...We need to alter our commitment from an industrial wonderworld achieved by plundering processes to a integral earth community based on a mutually enhancing human-earth relationship. This move from an anthropocentric sense of reality and value to a biocentric norm is essential (for the earth's survival).¹

Wood on wood, stone on stone, reworking materials. Wood by a stream. Stone in a field. Sculpture by a tree. Sculpture that is a tree. Wind, weather, water, leaves, earth, air in between. All this is accompanied by light, by sky. Light captures the artist's traces and tracks. Then the artist documents it all. The photo and video documentation becomes an art form also. Nature becomes the source. Nature was always the source. We are a part of nature. Even in ancient cultural times, we were sculptors. We had to make tools for hunting and tools to make tools; the process was often passive, not violent. You had to pick the right stones to carve them, chisel them. Recognition was as important as the act of cutting, shaping. And Attila Pokorny's process is similar for he also pays attention to the environments he works in. These contexts collaborate in the art and are a part of the art.

Nature and culture intertwine all the time in Attila Pokorny's environmental sculpture. Pokorny is participating in an interdependence ritual between the human and nature. Culture and nature intertwine.

With *The Wounds of Drought* (2008) created in Pécs on an exposed hillside Pokorny is effectively embroidering this "wound" with an organic relief phrasing on the hillside. Nature, then becomes the "body" and nature is the medium. Nature is also the art gallery. Nature is the theatre as well. Nature is part of the art. The art is part of nature. What makes this initiative interesting is that it is created with its own dissolution, its gradual deterioration, as part of the conception. Thus Pokorny's inter-dialogue is with time, the way physics and forces of nature interact with the artist's initiative. Visually the piece could be part of an ancient ruin, and there is something Romantic to the quiet integration, as if nature itself, this hillside into which the relief carving is engraved were part of a vast architecture and civilization that is nature, with the art being a very visual integration but only as part of the larger picture of nature. And Pokorny's conception is of an art that is unframed and has no container for the perception. It becomes part of an animated and living experience that is endless and changing.

Sculpture as living theatre and an archaeology of the present. We see this in *(Sewn Cavity)*, where a tree is the sculpture, and Attila Pokorny's "addition" makes it into sculpture. Intention then plays a role in our conception of this work as art. In Bayern, Germany, an inverted trough, or raised line of sand has leaves placed along its upper crest the full length. So Pokorny here is drawing with nature. As a nature drawing the piece builds an interwoven dynamic of art in nature. The same goes for the *Grout of Four Seasons* series. Here the artist infills with various natural materials like sticks and leaves along the cracks in stone walls (Cesky Krumlov, Czech Republic, 2009), in a deteriorating brick wall with green leaves in Tolcsva (Hungary, 2010).

Nature is the house and the earth a carpet in *Velence Lake*, Hungary in 2010. Here Pokorny builds decorative patterns out of green bio-matter. The patterns resemble those found in shirts, carpets, and curtains. Indeed, the original designs themselves used in embroidery or printed textiles were themselves based on natural forms, leaf shapes, organic design. In Pákozd, Hungary in 2010, Attila Pokorny broadened the scale of the drawing in nature, following a long natural crack in the stone geological rock façade. Nature's architecture, geological formation, and the breaks in these now ancient rock forms, becomes an opportunity to heal, to stitch visually in three dimensions. Again, the context is permanent, the artist becomes an interceptor, integrating his visual effect into a pre-existing permacultural context.

Celebrating nature's diversity, Attila Pokorny's sculptures draw on the wisdom of our ancestors who accepted nature's place in our life. Nature, culture, language, and diversity in all its manifestations are now threatened on earth. He has been involved in healing gestures using stone, brick, leaves, wood. As visually site-specific embroidery on architecture, in nature, and galleries these works recall the traditional embroidery found in Transylvania and Hungary and most of Eastern Europe. His mother always sewed his clothes and made the clothes that are the buildings we wear, so there is a direct relation to family history in this way of working with aesthetics, materials and the integration of art with environment. The environment is the body. The earth is the body. We are bodies who live in relation to all this.

Earlier work like *Buttons* brings a human element to what is nature. Descending the trunk/branch of a tree, are a series of buttons and a coat line, and so the tree becomes a "body". Indeed throughout Pokorny's artworks the idea that nature itself is a home, and that the diverse elements of nature form a body of sorts emerges continuously.

Part of this is the result of Pokorny's environment, the region where he lives, which is abundant with nature, all this layered over with traditional village, town and city habitats. During a stay in Czechia (2009), a moss covered trunk of a mature tree became a "bridge". Pokorny animated the sculpture structure by raising it off the ground, then giving it a myriad series of "legs". Supported by tiny wood branches, the tree is supported by its own growth, and the branch structures that are appendages to its monumental form. The tree crosses a section of open forest ground and becomes a bridge structure. Bridge is also a nature structure in the holistic theatre of the cycle of life. In a forest a tree is essential to maintaining the topsoil and water, even cover for the many animals and birds, bugs that live there.

While in Czechia, the artist becomes a catalyst, effectively sewing the roots of a mature tree. A series of bands of wood become visual connectors, relating the various outgrowths of roots to each other. Here, Pokorny interacts to produce visual environmental effects. Nature's designs, produced procreatively, are acted on by the artist/creator to become aesthetic sculpture structures in the natural environment that has been home for humans for millennia. Also at Cesky Krumlov (2009) in 2009 Attila Pokorny embroidered a variety of nature structures in various venues. A huge tree stump, cut through with a saw is bonded and linked together by the artist. What could be perceived as a death, the death of this great tree, now becomes an opportunity for aesthetic healing. The death of a tree is not a death at all, but a stage in its life cycle. As the biologist David Suzuki has commented, "Over time even the toughest tree is relentlessly punctured, penetrated, infected and weakened. The death of a tree is not signaled by a still hear, a flatting brain, or final breath. A dying tree continues to function in fits and starts; (...) But eventually the tree becomes a lifeless snag, which nevertheless supports a huge number of other species. When it finally falls, the decaying tree continues to feed and support a succession of life-forms for centuries."¹

Wood Infusion (2009), created in Czechia, and later exhibited at the Egon Schiele Art Centre is an on-site sculptural installation that, like *Bridge*, builds linkages between the tree corpse and the space it rests in. Cut tree sections are "connected" by smaller branch links. Between each section there is a branch link.

Tree – Branch – Tree – Branch – Tree – Branch

Nature, as Pokorny adapts it using two scales of wood becomes a language of communication. The artist communicates the progression of nature's growth cycle in a very simple and emphatic way. I could think of the process of time itself, and its universal quality through this spatial interlocution, this language of materials

In *Angdul* (2009) the tree stump, analogous to a pillar or column in classical architecture – the base – has a cut section adjacent that stands next to it. Thus linked, two sections of trunk from the same tree mirror each other. We can see the same growth rings, the concentric patternings in each. They become a mirror of each other. Pokorny connects these two parts of the same tree by placing tiny pieces of wood. They create a strong visual pattern that act as links in the space between. Wood becomes the jumping space between. These gentle actions are those of a healer, conscious of the earth's place in her history. Pokorny senses the process of time in a long scale. The wood as material becomes a kind of language and the artist introduces his vernacular to its living and essentially organic vocabulary of growth, life, death and decay. Pokorny's Joseph Beuys' *aktionen*, Pokorny's take what is there and act upon it. The sensibility is more passive and involves recognition of the real events and environments of place he encounters. The artist becomes a bridge who gives nature our home and that which supports, feeds and provides for us, a visibility, an aesthetic dimension that includes the human ingredient. This soup is both nature and human culture intertwined!

Ground Controller (2010) has a beautiful rough feel, a very textural Brancusi-like quality. Rough cut and carved, this former tree is transformed into a sculptural object. At intervals Pokorny carves the entire outer surface. The effect is that of a fold art object, or some primitive interface between human and wood. It could likewise have some unknown or forgotten functionality. This is pure sculpture as sculpture, and less environmental, more object-based than the others works.

At the *Zsolnay factory* in Pécs, Pokorny sought to "heal" an abandoned fore brick wall in this factory building with his *Sewn Wall*. Titled *Brickcarpet*, Pokorny's four metre high brick incised patterns look like weaving. Pokorny's carved forms in the brick look as though they have been revealed or are part of an ongoing pattern hidden beneath the white plaster walls. Visually the approach is similar to graffiti art, but the forms are more traditional. As Pokorny comments: "The walls, hills, streets and the sutures of trails expropriated by me are made almost in secret. I create these in a hurry in a few hours or a day or two. The weather and other factors do not allow the work to be lengthy." And yet the act of introducing a "natural weave" to an essentially geometric brick structure produces a counterpoint that is not just decorative but juxtaposes geometries on two levels. The structure of the brick wall per se, and then the reworking of what was once a functional structure into a wall artwork.

The process of Pokorny's art is non-intrusive and works with what exists. In an old brick factory in Pécs, an abandoned wall was carved into with visual pattern motifs in an act of healing. In *Cesky Krumlov* at the Egon Schiele Art Centre in 2009, Pokorny effectively "healed" cut tree trunk sections with branches linking the tree back together. "Sewing is regeneration for the earth. The winds of time. The first idea came from my clothes. I saw micro-sewings. This idea came from my clothes. I came to make this as a collaboration with nature with stones, leaves, branches, and even with water sewing." Many of the works are temporary and conceived as gestures within a particular moment in time. Photographs record these events...

There is an element of cosmology to the way Attila Pokorny sees the earth and stones and the context of nature. The cracks between the earth inspired the artist right away at *Bodvaszilas*. The breaks between the earth are like brief moments and the fits between the earth like painful truths. Initially Pokorny placed tiny sections of sticks between the cracks as if healing the wounds in the earth. The metaphor of healing through an artist's gesture is very real, for it reminds us of how distant we can be from the earth. These sticks Pokorny weaves and fits between are the healing gestures. The artist becomes the catalyst for positive connectivity to larger energies and forces of nature and the cosmos. The artist is also a healer of sorts. Pokorny visually heals by creating an aesthetic relief to disruption and destruction, whether by war or by manipulation of the landscape and its resources.

For the *Granary building*, Pokorny's site-specific sculpture plays off the arches and stone architecture of the building itself. The light coloured stones and embroidered stick motifs create a gift of nature back to humanity. The art is nature. We are nature. Pokorny builds a link that exists always but we seem unable to be conscious of most of the time. Sculpture works with existing space. Attila Pokorny's motivation is to create sculpture in a site-specific way that reveals the beauty of the immediate physical reality of nature and the environments we are a part of. Doing so involves recognizing the limits in the limitless, the bio-specific and geo-specific character of each place we are in. The specific informs the general. The micro-cosmos and the macro-cosmos are thus linked. Assembling Nature's materials, Attila Pokorny works intuitively, and with an instinct for how things "fit" to create sculptures that speak of a greater unity. Unity implies cosmos. Cosmos is eternal, has no bounds. These are endless sculptures. They play on structures, assemblage. The structures are his own, and they intercede the structures that exist in nature. Creation and procreation. These two forces intertwined are encapsulated in Attila Pokorny's art. Pokorny understands our relation to nature, to permaculture and the history of the human experience that we are participating in, in the cosmos, that living theatre our ancestors, like us, were always astonished by. As the anthropologist Wade Davis has commented, "All memory is convulsed in an upheaval of violence. There is a fire burning over the Earth, taking with it plants and animals, cultures, languages, ancient skills and visionary wisdom." Pokorny's art actions are a recognition of our capacity to heal the wounds, and to recapture that sense of wonder that comes from unity with, from being in context within our cosmos. Lets all grow our creativity in this cosmos..

Footnotes

1. Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth*, San Francisco; Sierra Club, 1990, p. 30
2. David Suzuki, *Tree; A Life Story*, Vancouver; Greystone Books, 2004, p. 6-7.
3. Wade Davis, *The Clouded Leopard; Travels to Landscapes of Spirit and Desire*, Vancouver, B.C.; Douglas & McIntyre, 1998, p. 231

Writer bio - John K. Grande will curate *Earth Sculpture* at the Van Dusen Botanical Gardens in Vancouver, B.C. in 2012. Mr. Grande is the author of *Balance: Art and Nature* (Black Rose Books, 1994), *Art Nature Dialogues: Interviews with Environmental Artists* (State University of New York Press, 2007, (www.sunypress.edu)), and *Dialogues in Diversity: Art from Marginal to Mainstream*, Paris, Italy, 2008 (www.paripublishing.com). He recently co-curated *Eco-Art* with Pia Hovi-Assad and Peter Selz at the Pori Art Museum (2011) in Finland. www.grandescritique.com. His latest Art and Ecology book will be published in Shanghai, China in 2012