

NATURE BECOMES SCULPTURE



With his wooden sculptures and installations Thierry Martenon already achieved great success internationally. The French artist is a true craftsman and knows better than anyone how to transform a natural material into a true supernaturally creation.



The French mountain range Chartreuse is an extremely inspiring environment where you are completely immersed in the beauty and power of nature. It should come as no surprise that artist Thierry Martenon (°1967), who has always lived here, has a penchant for working with wood, one of the most natural materials available. He even calls it his mother tongue. His studio can still be found in this part of the Prealps, where trees are up to four and even five hundred years old. They have interesting textures and a rich history to which Martenon's work pays tribute and which he keeps alive in a special way. Indeed, the carving of this material creates a dynamic relief that is often literally put in the spotlight by the lighting. The voids, veins and ridges of the wood catch the light, seem to move and make the material and the sculpture breathe, so that it can continue to exist for many years to come. Martenon also occasionally works in bronze, an equally special material with a timeless look that will acquire a beautiful patina over time.

'NATURE IS IN MY BLOOD'

His works have already been picked up by international collectors, interior designers, galleries and museums. The French sculptor has also completed several prestigious commissions, for example for the luxurious Parisian Hôtel de Crillon. Many of his creations are very impressive, and their size certainly plays an important role in this. They are often monumental sculptures, wall or ceiling-filling panels many square metres in size and creations that generate interactivity. With this article we hope to give a good impression of the work of Thierry Martenon, but we certainly recommend that you keep an eye on the artist in order to discover his special creations in real life.

A HEART FOR WOOD

The passion for wood that Thierry Martenon has had all his life finds its origin in the environment in which he grew up and still lives and works. The Désert d'Entremont between Grenoble and Chambéry is a beautiful piece of nature with few signs of the inhabited world, only small hamlets scattered between the hills and meadows. 'Nature is





in my blood,' writes Martenon in his book that was published a few years ago (*Thierry Martenon. De la nature à l'oeuvre: le bois*, Éditions Ulmer). Just about everyone in his village and many family members were active in the wood industry. As a little boy of barely ten years old, he made wooden toys for himself with a small pocket knife. 'I haven't invented anything, wood is my mother tongue,' the artist says about the inevitable direction his life has taken.

During our interview, Martenon tells us about a local painter who made watercolours and who used to fascinate him enormously, but other than that, religious images were the only form of art he knew. Art was seen as 'bourgeois' in his surroundings and an artis-

tic career was not something he thought about at the time. 'I worked for ten years as a cabinet-maker and carpenter, and I could have continued! I was happy enough. I take pleasure in the act of carving, in handling the wood, in its smells, its textures, its colours,' says the Frenchman. However, there was more talent and creativity in him that gradually came to expression in a different way. 'My obsession was to feel free, and the sculpture helped me in this quest,' he tells us.

LIVING SCULPTURES

With his work, Thierry Martenon transforms nature into sculpture, but as said before, these creations capture the light in an interesting way through which they seem to breathe, thus bringing nature back to life and keeping it alive. The clean, simple lines show a dynamism and result in a design that is at the

same time modern and timeless. The liveliness they radiate certainly contributes to the impressive feeling we experience when we see the – sometimes truly monumental – works in real life. In this way, his work follows in the footsteps of other artists that Martenon looks up to. He mentions Henry Moore, Andy Goldworthy and David Nash, among others. Especially the latter two know how to use nature in a similar way in their work that gives it new dimensions and a new life.

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Besides producing two collections a year of his own, which often end up in galleries and museums, Martenon also works on commission. He has already been allowed to make special sculptures for many big names in the world of interior design and hospitality. These not only gave him great satisfaction, but sometimes also a lot of stress, he tells us. However, he can be very proud of the results, because we too enjoy the unique atmosphere they exude and the experience they give us. A 32m² bas-relief that he was allowed to make in 2016 for the Hôtel de Crillon in Paris as a ceiling covering was certainly a highlight





of his career, enabling him to confirm his talent and value internationally. Another creation that won him a great deal of acclaim was the wooden bear that Martenon made in 2011 for the Musée de L'Ours ('museum of the bear') in Entremont-le-Vieux.

Meanwhile, for more than twenty years he has been making mainly abstract sculptures with a great focus on textures and the way shapes capture light. Wood remains his preferred material of course, also because it is so readily available and the village in which he lives is surrounded by woods, but sometimes Martenon also makes bronze sculptures. He equally likes to be inspired by his walks and the textures he encounters when he goes rock climbing. The artist is always looking for new textures, new forms and new ways to express the material and the essence of the tree. Colour and more figurative work are also still on his list of aspects he would like to elaborate and apply to his profession. Moreover, when we interview him, he tells us that he is working on some new pieces for an exhibition in Paris. Although there is nothing on paper yet – the artist converts his initial inspiration into a drawing and then chooses the specific type of wood with which he will work and then starts cutting in a direct way – our curiosity is already piqued. ✿

(Text: Eline De Mont)



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Images courtesy of Thierry Martenon



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