If a tree fell ...? [slide]
by Robert A Durden

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts.
Montana State University
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Abstract:
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by

Robert A. Durden

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY
Bozeman, Montana
May, 1990
APPROVAL

of a thesis submitted by

Robert A Durden

This thesis has been read by each member of the thesis committee and has been found to be satisfactory regarding content, English usage, format, citations, bibliographic style, and consistency, and is ready for submission to the College of Graduate Studies.

17 MAY 1990
Chairperson, Graduate Committee

5-17-90
Head, Major Department

Approved for the College of Graduate Studies

June 6, 1990
Graduate Dean
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ARTIST'S STATEMENT

The work produced for this exhibition has been centered around the forest as a lyrical metaphor. The sculptures are meant to be seen as human-like tree forms. It is my intention to describe whimsical characters which are based both on imagination and specific individuals in my life. It is the similarities between the human form and trees that I find most interesting. The branches of the trees relate to human appendages, the bark to the clothing that one might wear, and the color to the spirit of the individual, etc. . . . In some cases, the relationships are very evident and at other times they are less apparent or more symbolic because of the way in which they are exaggerated.

The narrative aspect of the sculptures has become more and more important in my work. This is apparent in the sculptures The Weeping Tree and The Donut Tree. The Weeping Tree retains more of the human qualities of the vertical forms than does The Donut Tree. These two sculptures present the contradictions of life. The Weeping Tree has a movement which radiates from the center outward to the ground indicating the sadness and suffering that is an ingredient in life. The Donut Tree, on the other hand, has a repetitive upward movement which is intended to promote an optimistic point of view. In all of the sculptures,
the connection between the ground and the figure has been
demphasized. This transition provides an awkward visual
tension which implies that this figure is either standing
precariously bent on falling or it has the ability to stand
firm on very little ground.

All of the work present in this exhibition is produced
by the method of displacement casting in sand. Because
of the method that is utilized, the castings are relatively
spontaneous. The immediacy of the process allows the freedom
of working through ideas quickly and capturing the spirit
of the moment of creation without becoming too removed
from the initial conception. In using this process, the
tree forms are literally cast from the earth and dug up
to be cared for.

The manner in which the sculptures are painted is
symbolic of the spiritual or emotional character of the
individual or narrative which is being portrayed. The
color provides an awkward and humorous feeling to the work.
This quality is a direct reflection of the way I view the
world and is not contrived to evoke any particular response.
What the viewer finds humorous I may actually intend to
be taken very seriously and vice-versa. The color is also
used to enhance the form or embellish the surface of the
form without hiding the fact that these are cast aluminum
sculptures.
Ultimately, the works are intended to interpret the process of living in a positive manner, not unlike the Classical Greek search for harmony in a chaotic world. Hopefully, the viewer will see the beauty of nature and the optimism of the human spirit present in these forms.
LIST OF SLIDES

1. Divinitree
   Cast Aluminum
   66"x12"x8"
   1989

2. Divinitree
   Detail

3. (Left) Personalitree #1
   Cast Aluminum
   106"x12"x6"
   1989

   (Middle) Slender Pine
   Cast Aluminum
   82"x12"x8"
   1989

   (Right) Short Pine
   Cast Aluminum
   72"9"x5"
   1989

4. Personalitree #2
   Cast Aluminum
   96"x18"x15"
   1989

5. Personalitree #2
   Détail

6. (Left) Night Pine
   Cast Aluminum
   81"x10"x10"
   1989

   (Right) Personalitree #3
   Cast Aluminum
   110"x17"x15"
   1989

7. The Weeping Tree
   Cast Aluminum
   120"x60"x60"
   1990

8. The Weeping Tree
   Detail
LIST OF SLIDES (CONT.)

9. The Weeping Tree
   Detail

10. The Weeping Tree
    Alternate View

11. The Donut Tree
    Cast Aluminum
    120"x60"x60"
    1990

12. The Donut Tree
    Detail

13. The Donut Tree
    Detail

14. The Donut Tree
    Detail

15. The Donut Tree
    Alternate View