

EIGHT CONTEMPORARY SCULPTORS

BEYOND NATURE,
WOOD INTO ART



THE LOWE ART MUSEUM

EIGHT CONTEMPORARY SCULPTORS

BEYOND NATURE,
WOOD INTO ART

APRIL 28 - JUNE 12, 1994

THE LOWE ART MUSEUM • UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

FOREWORD

It is with great pleasure that the Lowe Art Museum presents this exhibition of large scale contemporary wood sculpture by eight artists, both emerging and established, who individually and collectively explore artistic expression while responding to questions about form, meaning, process, and materiality. If the powerful presence, the sheer physicality of wood, forms the soul of the exhibition, then the thoughtful transformation of that material reality lies at its heart.

Given the scope of the Lowe Art Museum's permanent collection, which encompasses both western and non-western art, it is hoped that after experiencing the exhibition visitors will explore the intriguing relationship that exists between contemporary wood sculpture and the use of wood in the art of earlier and tribal cultures.

Lowe director Brian Dursum and I are especially grateful to the Friends of Art of the Lowe Art Museum for providing additional

funding for the exhibition and catalogue. We extend thanks to our registrars present, Susan Lucke, and past, José Guitian, for working out the many loan details, and to Sonia Cohen, for her early enthusiasm and curatorial assistance. We were fortunate to enlist the scholarship of Josephine Gear, independent curator, art critic, and former director of the Whitney Museum of American Art at Philip Morris. Her insights helped inform the parameters of the exhibition and keep my own curatorial vision in focus. Refining that vision into a body of sixteen works that relate through gallery space and time, while retaining individual artistic integrity, was both the challenge and the delight of the project.

Denise Most Gerson

Associate Director

Curator of the Exhibition

THINKING IN WOOD

Contemporary Wood Sculpture in the United States

By Josephine Gear

The exhibition assembles work by eight artists — Raoul Hague, Mark Lindquist, Gillian Jagger, Jene Highstein, James Surls, Emilie Brzezinski, Ursula von Rydingsvard and Mel Kendrick — to show the different kinds of thinking current in abstraction in wood sculpture. Wood comes with texture, grain, smell, gesture and traditional associations. It visibly responds to each environment in which it is placed. These are the givens that make it so seductive an organic material to the late-twentieth-century sensibility. It is precisely because of this seductiveness that the artist who works with wood must have strongly focused ideas expressed with great clarity — otherwise the ideas run the risk of being overlooked.

The eight artists in the exhibition work either with the physical mass or with sections of wood, and each has to deal with wood's organic nature. However, the issue for the exhibition is not the

nature of wood. The subject doesn't *have* to be organic form just because it's wood. Rather, the purpose of the exhibition is to show the special thinking wood requires, as well as some current thinking that goes beyond the confines of the material to challenge the traditional definitions and functions of *all* sculpture.

The qualities we might love about wood make it challenging for the sculptor. The question is, how to make sculptural form dominate but not deny the integrity of wood? How to impose an idea on a tree trunk? Or, in other words, how to make the most natural of materials into a conscious or idea-oriented object? It's a daunting project whose challenge relatively few sculptors in this country have accepted, hence the comparative neglect of this most American of materials. Each of the eight artists in the exhibition has come to his or her own different terms with wood.

MARK LINDQUIST

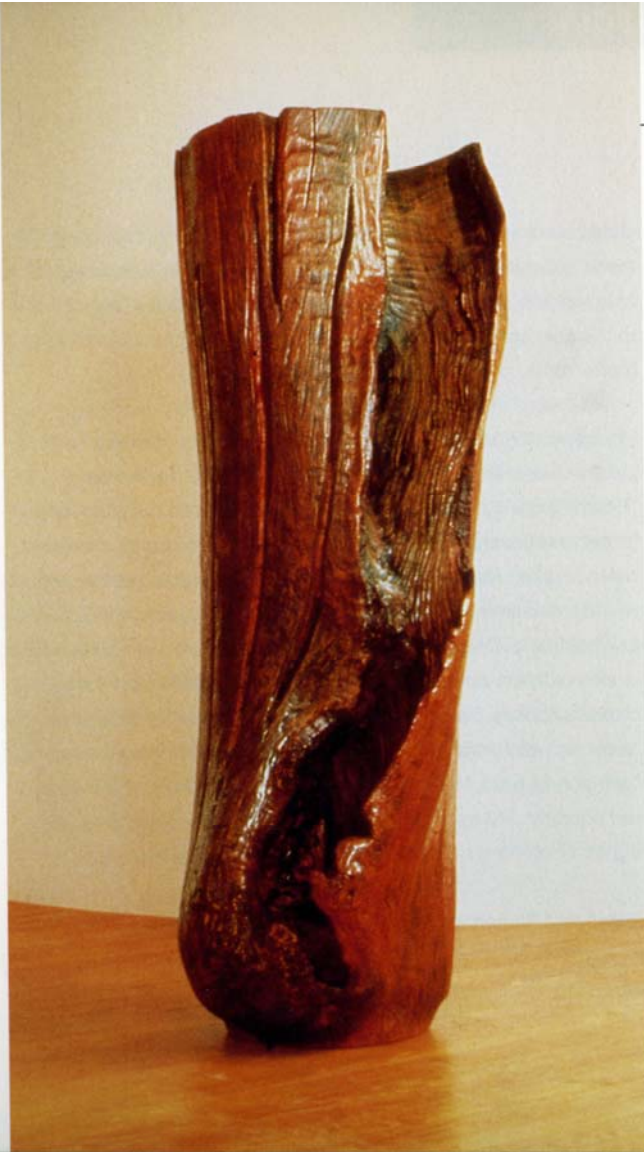
The disciplined, elegant formality of *Kino Kami 1* and *Natabori 1* by Mark Lindquist (b.1949) from the *Ichiboku* (one-tree) series combines traditional associations and a contemporary sensibility. His sculptures seem to share a kinship, not with the rugged formalism of Hague, but with the earlier high-finish Modernist works of Brancusi and Noguchi. The contemporary approach in Lindquist's work lies in his commitment to working with decayed and distressed wood and in the expressionist-cut surfaces of his sculptures. But according to Lindquist, his iconography (the material of wood itself) and his project (the exploration of the cut as the intervention of the human on the natural) come mainly from ninth century Japanese wood carving.

When Lindquist became a sculptor his interest in wood deepened as he began studying the history of Japanese wood sculpture and Buddhist philosophy. *Ichiboku* was a ninth century practice of carving sculpture. In Lindquist's words: "In the philosophy of Buddhist carpenters and wood sculptors, the first action, or first cut, mars the perfection of nature." The sculptors of *Ichiboku* accepted this and attempted to work with nature, and not against it. After a tree had been cut down, they left it alone for a number of years. In their philosophy this enabled the spirit of the tree to calm itself after the agony of being felled. They also kept the

single block intact, hoping to keep the spirit of the tree within. By these actions they hoped to appease the spirit and encourage it to invest life in the image they had carved. This belief led naturally to the practice of inventively incorporating into the sculpture all burls, knots, cracks and fissures.

Kino Kami 1 (tree divinity) is cut from a naturally-spiraled, two hundred-and-fifty-year-old cherry trunk that Lindquist found "dead standing." He stripped the bark, up-ended the trunk and turned a recessed circular base to form the sculpture's center of balance. *Kino Kami 1* had a natural hollow, decayed at one end, which the artist fully excavated, further opening its exterior to follow the line of the natural torque. He scarred the excavated interior and exterior surfaces with deep grooves, shallower marks and cross-hatching. To obtain the sculpture's two-color finish of a deep, rich-red surface and blue-black incisions, Lindquist applied dark acrylic paint to the incisions, and rubbed the surface with red pigment. He sanded the whole to a fine-furniture finish, waxing and polishing until the glaze resembled a fired ceramic.

Natabori 1 (Japanese Buddhist hatchet carving) is cut from cherry with a natural torque but no obvious visible decay. Lindquist stood the trunk on end, so that the sculpture is wider at its top



Mark Lindquist
Kino Kami 1, 1989
cherry with polychrome, 65 h. x 23" dia.

than its base. At ninety inches high, the tapered, spiraled form has an imposing grace. The deeply incised lines in the surface, cut with a chain saw to emulate hatchet strokes, follow the natural downward spiral. The burnt-red pigmented surface, blue-black incisions and waxed patina are close to the finish of *Kino Kami 1*.

Lindquist is a craftsman turned sculptor. As a boy he learned about wood, tools and techniques from his father Melvin Lindquist, pioneer of the studio wood-turning movement. As a young man he produced majestic wood-turned vessels of classical shape, and earned a reputation as one of the nation's most highly regarded master craftsmen of wood-turned objects; he remains one of the most knowledgeable of artists about wood. Like his father, who established the use of spalted or decomposing wood (which had hitherto been generally rejected) Lindquist almost only uses spalted or burl wood. He rarely works with straight-grained or healthy wood.

The artist works with every manner of hand and mechanized technology known to skilled woodworkers. And he has invented some of his own through necessity. When he first turned to sculp-

ture in the 1980s, he continued his practice of turning the larger blocks of wood on a lathe. Following a car accident which impaired his ability to continue this practice, he adapted machinery to enable him to turn large blocks on a lathe while using the chain saw to shape form. Lindquist worked on *Kino Kami 1*, *Natabori 1* and all other columnar works by turning them on the lathe. This method gives his lathe-turned sculptures their center of balance, and heightens their natural torque and tilt.

Lindquist's profound respect for wood leads him to seek his goals through Buddhist ideals. Of the group of sculptors in the exhibition, Lindquist remains the closest to the spirit of the tree. He works with nature as did the sculptors of *Ichiboku*. He imposes no unnatural sense of form, no metaphor and no figurative association. His deep, hatchet-like strokes across the surface release the inner dynamic and allow the essential form to be.

Mark Lindquist
Natabori 1, 1989
cherry with polychrome, 76 h. x 24" dia.

