



'Windsong', 1998, she-oak, kaolin, paint, 25 x 30 x 53 cm

BUSH MARKS

Refined, dynamic and meditative, the wood sculptures of Peter Carrigy evoke the drama of ageless landscapes with the visual allure of sensuous forms and painterly surfaces.

Text by Dr Noris Ioannou. Photography by Alex Makeyev.

CREATED from timber felled by wind, rain and old age, Peter Carrigy's inspiring works are unique in the manner they combine elegant expression of Australia's archaic landscapes with his closely held belief in the "oneness" of creativity and nature. Expressive of a calm, emotional and intellectual gathering, these cogent forms demonstrate an integral purity that is compelling and seductive. Beyond aesthetic fulfilment, Carrigy's pieces are created as an intuitive response to specific locales and, as such, are archetypes that embody the *genius loci*

or "spirit of place" of Australia's diverse landscapes. The creative vigour of Carrigy's recent work, designated the Bush Marks Series, ranks among the most original and impressive sculptural wood currently emerging from Australia. It marks a turning point in a journey of creative striving and personal discovery that has its beginnings in his birthplace, Sydney. There, the Hawkesbury sandstone defines the harbour and pervades the cityscape, as well as delimiting the native bushland that Carrigy would retreat into and trek during his early childhood. He fondly recollects



'Windsong', 1998 (opposite view), she-oak, kaolin, paint, 25 x 30 x 53 cm

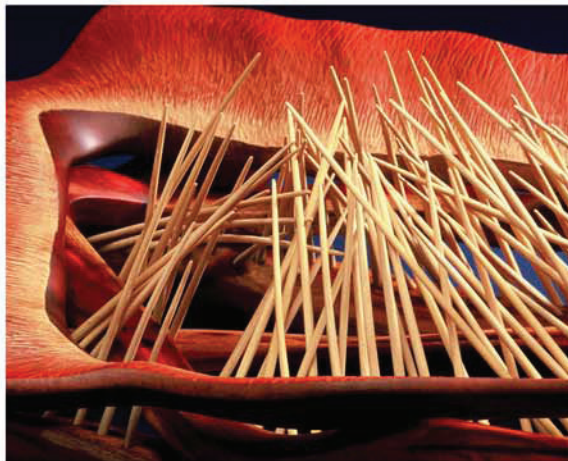


"Hot Spot", 1999, redgum, paint, grass tree resin, 56.5 x 19 x 41 cm. Collection: Dr N. Ioannou, Australia

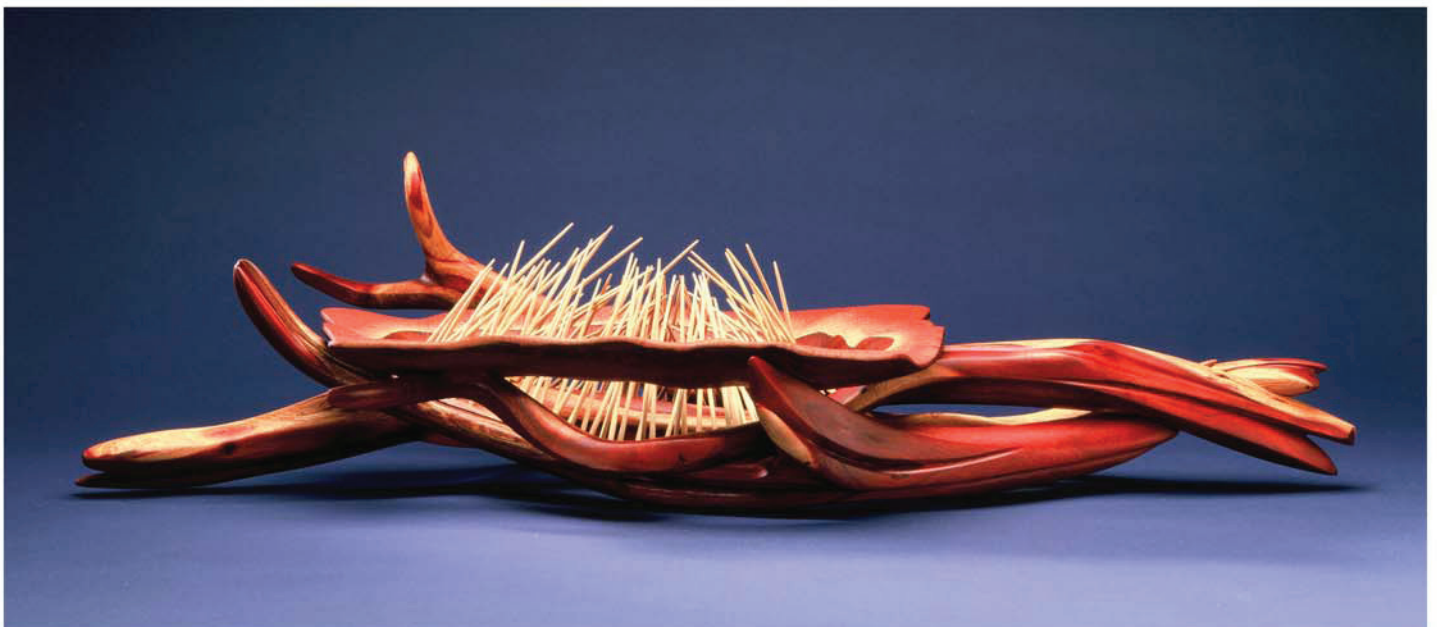


PHOTO: DAVID CUMMINGS

'Bush Fire Rain', 1993, redgum, ochre, paint, grass tree resin, glass by Alex Wyatt, 47 x 14 x 44 cm. Private collection, Australia



'Spinifex Country', 1999, purple heart acacia, redgum, ochre, paint, 20 x 39 x 53 cm. Detail right



the unique angophora trees with their orange-red trunks and twisted sculptural forms, the banksia cones releasing seeds following bushfires, as well as Aboriginal rock carvings, geological escarpments, and a bush flora of delicate grevilleas and blue-foliaged eucalypts. These were among the features that made lifelong impressions on Carrigy, experiences that he recorded with his earliest forays into art as pen-and-ink sketches and watercolours.

Moving to Adelaide, South Australia in 1973 transported him into other landscapes: the extensive sand dunes of the southern coast Coorong, the vast outback and its soon-to-be-discovered deserts, and the spectacular Flinders Ranges and far north flood plains. It was at this point that Carrigy became attracted to the medium of wood.

Largely self-taught, his approach to the material was initially conservative, resulting in the production of realistic figurative carvings, bowls and assorted functional objects. Gradually, an increasing degree of free-flowing inventiveness was released. His current Bush Marks Series testifies to the fulfilment of heightened creativity as the work evolves further into minimalist and abstract directions, while maintaining metaphorical content.

Perhaps more than any other material found in nature, wood affirms its intimate links with landscape, yet beyond these definable qualities there's always another lure – 'something primal about trees'. Carrigy evokes the symbolism of the river redgum, the lifeblood of Australia's interior, its majesty and pervasive presence along watercourses, and its offerings of branches. Through the endless cycle of drought, strong winds, ravaging fires and rising floods, Australia's harsh climate shapes an extraordinary flora and an accompanying and unrivalled variety of unique hardwoods. These range from the exalted eucalyptus and ubiquitous acacia, through to diverse melaleuca, enduring callitris and graceful allocasuarina, to name a few of the tree families endemic to this island continent. The corresponding offbeat vernacular names express our familiarity and affinity for these natives: the gum tree, the paperbark, the native cypress and the she-oak. Their timber, naturally seasoned from decades, sometimes centuries, of exposure to the elements, provides manifold and remarkable mediums, the starting point for Carrigy's aesthetic and reflective explorations.

It is also Carrigy's first-hand understanding and inti-



mate experience of the Australian bush environment that has led him to develop such an acute sensitivity and discerning eye for the intrinsic elegance to be discovered in wood. From this relationship he has developed the insightful ability to transform primary material into arresting sculptural forms that readily evoke the fervent images and other enduring aspects of Australia's landscape. Thus, seeds inspire a procession of endless forms: the nobbled banksia pods, the sweeping curves of the prickly hakea and the multi-form gumnuts. Add to this the geographical riches of landscape: the salt-edged lakes, layered rocks, weathered monoliths and sandstones, to name a few. Steeped in the artist's sensitive response to the outback, Carrigy's recent work also realises a maturation of a personal philosophy inspired by Japan's enduring craft ethos. The latter provides the vital clue to his ability to combine a deep feeling of the Australian bush with aesthetic counterpoint through sculptural form in wood.

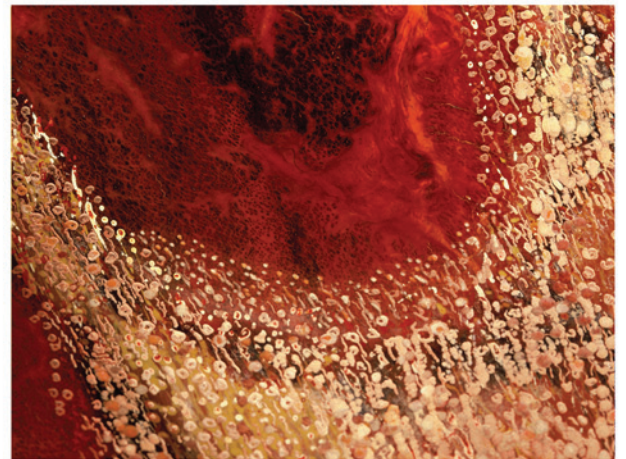
The pivotal point in this direction came in 1989 when Carrigy met Ono Showasai, one of Japan's Living National Treasures. A consummate craftsman in wood, Showasai was 73 years old when Carrigy met him during a visit to Okayama, Japan.

The experience of meeting Ono Showasai brought Carrigy face to face with Japan's ancient legacy of craft tradition, based on a striving for excellence, skill, sense of reverence and truth-to-materials. Especially cogent was Showasai's advice: 'Start with an idea, find the appropriate tools, then execute the object to its final completion ... when you have that "oneness" there's a flow in your work.' It was a philosophy, 'a way of working, of looking at the world', that appealed to Carrigy. This perspective continues to influence his work: 'I'm setting myself very high standards. Also, when I'm working on a piece and it's not progressing I'll shelve it and return to it some months

Above: Base detail showing Peter Carrigy's signature

Above right: 'Firepod', 1999, fiddleback redgum, grass tree resin, 50 x 16 x 47 cm

Below: 'Desert Rain', 1999, coolabah, ochre, paint, 10 x 48 x 49 cm. Detail on right



'Rock Stack Sky',
1999, redgum, ochre,
paint and cast glass
by Annie Lipschitz,
38 x 19 x 36 cm.
Collection: Mr Siu
On Mak, Hong Kong



with his experience of the Australian bush and his use of its bounty of timbers relates to how he absorbs "subliminal influences" of landscape. 'I remain open, I don't go into the bush with an aim to look for a particular form or piece. It's when I'm back at my workshop that it all somehow distils into a defined form. It's a two-way process; you can't impose your will on the wood.' The process has much to do with acquiring a perception of a particular place in the landscape, and the ability to interpret and release the feeling or insight from a specific piece of timber collected from the place. And as Carrigy puts it: 'The timber often dictates what is to be done to it, in turn determined by its source – desert inspired as opposed to water and rock inspired ...'

Hence, within the Bush Marks Series, through the varieties of transformations Carrigy has developed with his accomplished skills and techniques, the works explore the differing moods of favourite landscapes, each an elegy of place.

This is aptly illustrated by *Windsong*, a work carved from a singular piece of she-oak. Although he was given the burl some four years ago, Carrigy was not motivated to begin to work the piece until recently. 'It had been attacked by dry rot and other fungi where it lay *in situ* years ago in the forest of its origin. My first task was to gouge out the softened wood portions, gradually working towards the heartwood, its "bones". I remember the location of the coastal she-oak forest. The wind howling through the drooping canopies and a hawk gliding nearby.' When he started working on the piece he could "feel" the bird form inside, like a physical tension striving to be released'. Gradually, an organic form evolved 'into its own way of being'. Following the carving, Carrigy applied kaolin and paint to emphasise free-flowing contours. Eventually the work emerged in its finished form to suggest, from one angle, the aerodynamic wings of a bird, and from another view, rising clouds. As with his other major works, *Windsong's* polished and painted surfaces enhance its rhythmic sensuality, enticing the viewer to draw closer to experience its rich graining and other alluring qualities.

Other works depart from this soothing vision to embrace an alternative temper. Hence, almost as a

later when my empathy for the piece has returned.' Carrigy also notes how, in Japan, the tools for wood-working are themselves works of art, so much so that 'they're everything'. He is always on the lookout for hand tools and power tools that create what he refers to as 'off-the-tool marks'. An industrial woodcarver he uses has a blade capable of rough-shaping large redgum sections and slabs much faster than hand tools, which are subsequently used to give the subtle and final curves to a piece. However, as Carrigy notes: 'It's important not to let the machine control you.' Other treatments include flaming the wood with a butane torch or applying textural marks with a burning iron. He reiterates his esteem for redgum: 'Its resilience and its woven fiddleback grain permit one to treat it almost like clay, working the surface with wet and dry techniques.'

The way Carrigy's philosophical outlook combines

'Contour', 1999,
redgum, ochre, paint,
15 x 42 x 47 cm.
Collection: Dr Susan
Ellerin, USA



counterpoint to the soaring gracefulness of *Windsong*, another of Carrigy's works, *Spinifex Country*, presents an evocative interpretation of the impenetrable spinifex tussocks of central desert dune country. The sculpture consists of an assemblage of two woods, the needle-like spines of the plant represented with formidable spikes shaped from the sapwood of the rare purple heart acacia, and a cradling framework carved from both acacia and redgum. Carrigy relates how one comes across the 'skeletal forms of purple heart acacias silhouetted against the clear brilliant blue skies of the desert'. *Spinifex Country* portrays this image, evoking the duality of the plant's aggressive protective defence versus its redeeming shelter for small marsupials. The strong colouration of the work's framework – enhanced with paint and ochre detailing – recalls the orange sand dunes and the shimmering heat of this environment.

Another work, *Firepod*, is a smooth and elegant form 'symbolic of the action of bushfires in the Australian landscape'. The devastating event triggers the adaptive release of seeds from the woody interior of the pods or capsules of many native plants, notably hakeas and banksias. Intriguingly, the curvilinear lines of *Firepod* suggest the soaring arches of a cathedral. The drama of fire is also enacted in *Hot Spot*, a masterly piece where Carrigy has combined a juxtaposition of textures, paint and grass-tree resin to evoke the 'after-glow or remnant heat and ash of burnt trees ... ashes, charcoal and smouldering embers'.

Carrigy's resourceful matching of the individual graining of specific woods with images and allusions of forms of the landscape is exceptional in Australian wood art. This is especially demonstrated in the way the complex wood grain of the coolabah tree of central Australia becomes the basis for *Desert Rain*, a work that presents an aerial view of the outback channel country. Carrigy has added painterly and ochre colouration to render the sweep of watercourses and their eroding effects. Whereas the delicate surface patterning of *Desert Rain* suggests interplay between air, water and land and the interface of weather, another work, *Rock Stack Sky*, forcefully portrays a coastal rock formation sculpted by the interplay of natural elements and forces.

As well as painterly and textural treatments, Carrigy has also explored the idea of combining wood with other materials, notably glass or ceramic, hence further extending his vocabulary of expressive forms. We see then how his expertise and skills in working with rare hardwood timbers, coupled with an exacting patience to discern refined form in rudimentary timber fragments, has led to an efflorescence of innovative directions.

As the viewer becomes immersed in the work, he or she engages with its manifold attributes, so that the artist's unique evocations of the Australian landscape unfold, enabling us to share his particular and intense experience of the *genius loci* of the bush. It's his way of telling stories.

For Carrigy it has been an extraordinary pilgrimage through a landscape of art and nature, to reach its fulfilment in the illumination of insight and the accumulation of skills. 'Art is the eternal seducer. It has a life of its own; it drives you to seek ever-purer forms.' Beyond visual, tactile or other sensuous appreciation, Carrigy's Bush Marks Series has the potential to lead us into intellectual or even intuitive levels of awareness. The inspiration of unification is ever present as a common theme, in part as an expression of a philos-



'Thunderbolt Gorge', 1996, redgum, ochre, paint, 12 x 43 x 46 cm. Private collection



'She-oak Ridge', 2000, redgum, ochre, paint, 14 x 38 x 50 cm. Private collection: California, USA

ophy which strives to bring idea and technique into a "oneness", and in part, as a metaphor for the unity found in nature. This may be the reason for the meditative calmness that is often perceivable in his works. This recent work also points to Carrigy's intellectual and emotional grasp of landscape – as metaphor or as spiritual realisation, as well as aesthetic and sensual beauty – and realised as refined physical reality. Little wonder that Carrigy is widely recognised as one of Australia's leading master wood artists.

Carrigy has consummated a lifelong journey of striving for excellence, combining his creativity with an intense passion for landscape. He now proffers the fruits of this unwavering pilgrimage through elegant sculptural interpretation of the unique timbers of the Australian bush. He is also preoccupied with the links between landscape and humanity's relationship to it, that is, the natural and the cultural. Symbolic of the marks of humanity on the landscape, there is a feeling that this new work also signals the fulfilment of finding his true self.

The Bush Marks Series contemplates primal nature and our relationship to it. They interpret the conflicting and complementary impulses of earth, air, fire and water, and their eventual resolution into the organic life of trees and, subsequently, aesthetic form. The issue of a singular imagination, these transformative pieces stand before us, exquisite and moving, as corroboration of a remarkable journey by master wood artist Peter Carrigy.

Dr Noris Ioannou

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