

TRANSFORMATION AT THE GERMAN SHOE MUSEUM, HAUENSTEIN 2011

Die filigrane Welt der feinen Schuhe

Ausstellung von Isabell Buenz im Schuhmuseum

„Transformation“ – so umschreibt die Papierkünstlerin Isabell Buenz aus Edinburgh (Schottland) ihre Ausstellung mit filigranen Schuhkunstwerken, die morgen, Sonntag, um 11 Uhr im Schuhmuseum Hauenstein eröffnet wird.

Isabell Buenz bezeichnet sich selbst als Papierkünstlerin, Fotografin und Schriftstellerin. Sie bleibt dem Schuh treu und wandelt „Realität in Kunstformen“ um, was nach ihrer eigenen Aussage in idealer Weise mit dem Kunstobjekt „Schuh“ gelinge. Seit 2002 hat Isabel Buenz, die in Schottland lebt und arbeitet, rund 50 Ausstellungen in Großbritannien gezeigt, aber noch keine in Deutschland. Die Hauensteiner Ausstellung mit ihren künstlerischen Schuhformen ist auch eine Premiere für ihr künstlerisches Schaffen in ihrem Heimatland, dem sie um 1990 den Rücken kehrte.

Seit Jahren hat Buenz Schuhe und ihre Besitzer „studiert“. „Man kann viel über eine Person lernen, wenn man sich ihre Schuhe ansieht“, sagt sie. Schuhe verkörpern ihre Eigentümer: Im Gegensatz zu anderen Kleidungsstücken verändern sie ihre Form während des Gebrauchs und bleiben in dem Zustand, auch wenn sie nicht benutzt werden. „Fußbeklei-

dung hat sich von ihrer ursprünglichen Rolle von einer Funktionalität in ein Objekt entwickelt, das Identifikation, Festlichkeit und Begierde repräsentiert“, reflektiert Isabell Buenz über ihre Kunst.

Ihre Papierschuhkollektion regt die Vorstellungskraft der Besucher an. Sie lockt den Betrachter in eine Welt voller magischer Transformationen, eine wunderliche Welt voller Schuhe, die für Märchenfiguren und mythische Geschöpfe geeignet sind und dazu einladen, Charaktere und Geschichten zu erträumen. Die Ausstellung ist bis 17. Juli zu sehen. (ys)



Isabell Buenz zeigt auch ihre bekannten Fotos. FOTO: YS

Die Rheinpfalz – 18th June 2011

Hauensteiner Bote – 14th July 2011

Ausstellung im Deutschen Schuhmuseum

TRANSFORMATION

Exhibition 2011

DEUTSCHES SCHUHMUSEUM HAUENSTEIN
Sonderausstellung "Transformation"
(Künstlerische Umgestaltung von Schuhen)
Isabell Buenz (Schottland),
bis 17.07.2011, täglich von 10 -17 Uhr geöffnet.

A new lease of life

Once upon a time, a great wych elm stood in the Edinburgh Garden. It was a majestic giant, nearly 200 years old, with elegant branches stretching high into its broad crown, and was much loved by visitors. When Dutch elm disease struck in 2003, the tree had to be felled and many mourned its loss.

But the timber was saved and the tree's spirit was given new life through the Wych Elm Project, which invited some of Scotland's leading crafts people and artists to transform the wood into beautiful new work. With the opening of the John Hope Gateway, visitors to the Garden could once again admire this tree – in its many new manifestations.

The exhibition showcases a striking range of designs, from stylish furniture to jewellery, calligraphy and even a Kyrgyzstan-style yurt. Some makers, such as jeweller Caroline Cloughley, were working with wood for the first time. Others were already familiar with the eccentricities of wych elm,



such as Roger Hall, a furniture maker who now specialises in letter-carving. One of his works features the inscription 'he who has planted a tree has not passed in vain upon the earth.'

It is apparent that every piece of this tree has been treasured and nothing has gone to waste. The off-cuts from commissioned furniture have been made into beautiful bowls for sale,

one intricately bevelled, others inlaid with platinum and gold. Even the wooden shavings from the making of the magnificent Aeolian harp have found a new lease of life as decoration for Isabell Buentz's exquisite paper shoes, crafted for the mythical little creatures that may once have lived in the old, gnarled branches of the majestic wych elm.

The Wych Elm Project runs until Sunday 28 March at the John Hope Gateway, 9.30 am (9 am on Saturday and Sunday) until 6 pm. Closed Christmas Day and New Year's Day. Free. For information on the accompanying publication visit www.rbge.org.uk/publications

Above: The Wych Elm Project in the John Hope Gateway, featuring commissioned pieces all crafted from the wood of the one tree.

Inset: Necklace by Caroline Cloughley. **Left:** Children from Kalmes Special School were involved in the Wych Elm Project. Here they visit the exhibition and make boats to float on the Garden's pond to celebrate the opening.



Wych craft brings elm back to life

A 200 year-old wych elm which grew at the garden until 2003, when it fell victim to Dutch elm disease, has returned as the key element of the inaugural display in the John Hope Gateway's temporary exhibition space.

In keeping with the RBGE's commitment to recycling, wood from the tree was scavenged and distributed to 30 manufacturers and artists to use in a series of commissioned works and to create pieces ranging from furniture to sculpture, pottery, jewellery and toys.

The role of the tree is not always immediately apparent. For example, the pixie looses and fairy slippers by Isabell Buentz incorporate leaves and shavings of the tree in the paper used for making the shoes. Bespoke fishing rod maker Harry Jamieson, meanwhile, used the wood to create a decorative feature in the handle of his piece.

With a rich colour and distinctive grain pattern, wych elm has many traditional uses: the first piped water ran through elm pipes in the 17th century and wooden wheels invariably had hubs of elm. Yet, with few exceptions, it was never popular for furniture making. Ironically, it was its ready availability as a result of Dutch elm disease in the 1970s that led Borders-based furniture maker and sculptor Tim Stead to refocus attention on the timber. His work celebrated the convoluted grain and large outgrowths (knurs) found in the wood. A table and bench by the Workshop of Tim Stead will be the only pieces to remain after the exhibition closes.

The exhibition is accompanied by a book, profiling the makers and telling the story of wych elm. It is further complemented by short film documenting the commissioning process of some pieces.

● **The Wych Elm Project runs at the John Hope Gateway until 28 March 2010, 9.30am-7pm (9am on Saturday and Sunday). Admission is free.**



Above: 'The Botanics' – Winter 2009

Right: 'The Scotsman Magazine' – 10th October 2009

Artists in wood

Women breathe new life into wych elm

The Wych Elm Project, to be unveiled at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh this summer, sees a much-loved but diseased tree given new life by a range of craftspeople. Fi Martynoga takes a look at the female artists taking part.

In 2004, Dutch elm disease reached a favourite old tree near the Chinese Hillside in the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE), affectionately called the Botanics. The tree declined swiftly, became dangerous and was felled.

The wood, however, was not carted away for firewood. It was cut up and taken to Lothian Trees and Timber to be planked and stored. Air-dried for three years, the planks were then moved into drying sheds, where a dehumidifier brought the moisture content down sufficiently for the wood to be ready to work.

At that stage, RBGE announced its plans for *The Wych Elm Project*. It builds on the experience of two previous art-based tree projects at the Botanics. The first was *The Botanics Ash* in 1993, when Tim Stead single-handedly created a memorable exhibition by opening up and displaying the entire sections of the trunk and branches from an ash tree felled in the Gardens. He also used the wood to make a series of intriguing objects – boxes, boxes within boxes and three-dimensional puzzles.

The idea of using all the wood from a single tree was developed further in 2001, when an oak provided the material for a second project. Called *One Tree*, this time a variety of different artists and makers contributed work to display the inner secrets of the mature oak with their furniture and finely wrought objects in another remarkable exhibition.

Facing page, clockwise from top left: Furniture maker Fiona Campbell at work; jeweller Caroline Cloughley creates delicate butterflies with elm inlays; sculptor Jennifer Watt's pod- and seedlike shapes are inspired by birth in its many forms. Right: Elfin shoe by Isabell Buenz. Photos: Amy Copeman/RBGE; Isabell Buenz.

The Wych Elm Project plans to do something similar. This time, there will be an additional note of celebration in the exhibition being planned. It will inaugurate the gallery space in the John Hope Gateway, the splendid new visitor centre to open at the West Gate of the Botanics this summer.

The tree project was launched with a dedicated website www.wychelmproject.org and other publicity intended to get both artists and potential clients to sign up. RBGE undertook to match individual clients and their needs to appropriate artists, although the showcase provided

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Caroline Cloughley

by the website, with its links to the artists' own websites, has actually made it easy for potential clients to select possible artists for themselves.

A total of 22 artists are taking part, too many to mention all, although there are names like Roger Hall and Geoff King that will be familiar from recent issues of this journal. Instead, since female artists have been shamefully under-represented in this column, the project offers an excellent opportunity to have a closer look at the work of the nine women involved.

Champagne and smiles

It is notable that several of these women are already award-winners and, from the quality of their work, destined to be high-fliers. Fiona Campbell was Student of the Year when she gained her degree in Aberdeen. Now, after a further year at the Chippendale School in Haddington, she is skilled in the use of both hand tools and machines to turn out furniture – from the most

lovingly traditional Windsor chair to innovative chess tables and pieces.

Elm, with its rich-coloured grain, is Campbell's favourite wood. She is complimentary about *The Wych Elm Project* and the way it is being organised: "It is good that the Botanics people are keen to show processes and stages of development of work, not just the finished product. They want to display sketchbooks and photographs of work in progress, to help people understand what is involved." Campbell has made champagne trays from some of the elm. These will be used at the opening reception for the new John Hope Gateway Centre in June. The new exhibition space will house the wych elm artists' work for around six months.

Michaela Huber, a furniture maker, will have to call back pieces she has made to commission for the project. One of them is a revolving bookcase which will display the good grain of the wood



she was given from the wych elm. Huber trained in Munich as a cabinet maker, but has practiced her craft in Scotland since 1980. She works almost exclusively in Scottish hardwoods, so the elm offered by the project was perfect for her purposes.

Her portfolio is varied, showing hand-made kitchens, conference tables, music stands, handrails and desks, but best of

Artists in wood

all she loves making chairs, particularly rocking chairs. These employ a range of woods, and often have elm seats, though the laths are usually ash and the arms can be other hardwoods. "Scottish-grown laburnum makes wonderful arms for a chair," says Huber. "It has rich yellows and browns and takes on a polish like that of stone."

"The wych elm, with its many gnarled branches and full leafy canopy, could have been a perfect living and hiding place for little creatures."

Isabell Buenz

Of her own unusual design for a kissing chair, with scorched larch laths and yew seats, she comments: "I was so delighted when I saw people at an exhibition sitting in my chair. They found themselves obliquely opposite each other, making easy eye-contact. Suddenly they were smiling and laughing. It made me feel really good!"

Jennifer Watt is an award-winning sculptor. She lives in Dumfriesshire, and as she likes to work in British hardwoods, she was naturally attracted to *The Wych Elm Project*. "Recently I have been working on a series I call New Beginnings. The pieces are all inspired by birth in its many forms, whether it is a chestnut opening to reveal its glossy inner shell, a seedling pushing through the ground, or the birth of a baby."

One such piece, a pod revealing its cradled seed, she made, appropriately, from the Botanic elm at the request of a client they found for her. Like all her pieces, it has an exquisite, lustrous finish that illuminates the inner nature of the wood. The seed is made from a dark rusty-brown wood. This contrasts strongly with the pale grain of the section of elm from which Watt has chosen to make the pod.

Butterflies and faeries

Two jewellers are among the women artists embraced by *The Wych Elm Project*. Caroline Cloughley and Beth Legg are both recent graduates from

Edinburgh College of Art. Cloughley's attitude to materials is fresh: she likes to appose the precious and the familiar or commonplace.

Her plan for the elm is to use shavings and inlay them with tiny pieces of metal to create pieces like the wings of the white letter hairstreak butterfly which breeds in the tree. "As well as an artistic challenge, I feel this is a worthwhile cause, as it is raising ecological awareness," she says.

Legg likes to work very intuitively with materials to explore their embedded memory. That makes taking on sections of a 200-year-old elm with a known human history particularly attractive to her. She is aware that it is "touched by different eroding processes which give them resonance and a sense of preciousness."

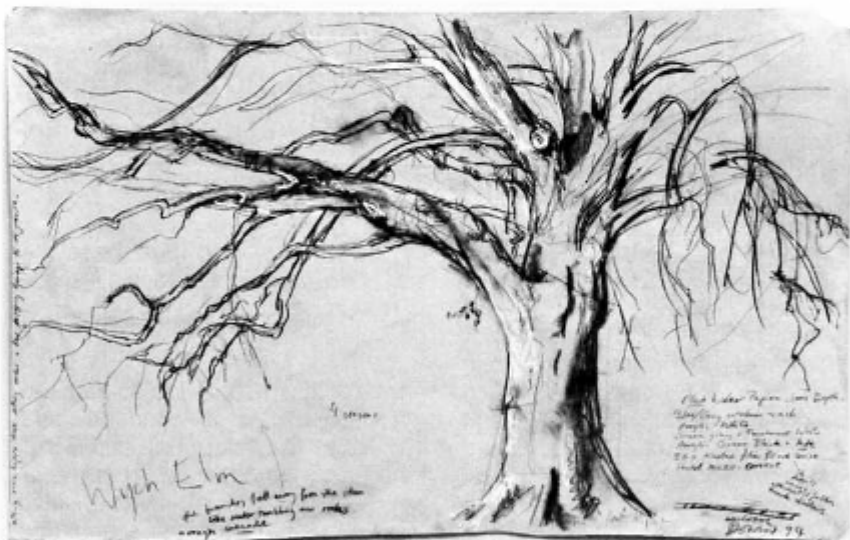
A similar sense is conveyed by the beautifully wrought boxes made by Mette Fruergaard-Jensen. For these, the elm provides the material for lids, while the boxes themselves are made of other natural materials like amber, bone,

from the elm. They have a real sense of faerie.

Artists who work in other media have also become involved. Kate Downie was first attracted to the living elm tree when she used it as a model for a massive light installation in the Edinburgh City Council offices in 1994. She has produced two new screen prints based on the tree then, and one of its offspring growing today. She will exhibit drawings of the tree as it lived.

Jane Kelly is a potter who makes fine domestic ware, all of it with an interesting history. She frequently uses raku, so the connection with the elm is its sawdust, which will be used to fire her raku kiln.

These vignettes of artists' work are intended as tasters of the exhibition. With all this wealth of design and craftsmanship described, along with the work of the 14 men who are contributing, the opening show at RBGE's John Hope Gateway gallery looks set to be stunning.



horn and copper. Originally a potter, boxes are now Fruergaard-Jensen's speciality.

Isabell Buenz has a different and charmingly creative approach to the project. "The wych elm, with its many gnarled branches and full leafy canopy, could have been a perfect living and hiding place for little creatures," muses Buenz. To tell her fairy tale about the tree she creates elfin boots, sandals and slippers out of paper made of shavings and leaves. These she adorns with twigs and tiny wooden beads also derived

Find out more online

Wych Elm Project website
www.wychemproject.org

Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh
www.rbge.org.uk

A full-colour book entitled *Wych Elm* will accompany the exhibition. See www.rbge.org.uk/publications

Fi Martynoga is a freelance museum researcher and writer from the Scottish Borders.

Above right: Drawing of the living tree by artist Kate Downie. Photo: Michael Wolchover.

A 'Frosty Morning' to you!
Our winning Christmas image

We are keen to support local art and enterprise so we invited artists and photographers to contribute images for this year's Christmas card. The winning image, chosen by a panel of staff, was 'Frosty Morning' (below) by Isabel Buenz. This will appear on around 300 cards distributed across the UK and further afield.



www.isabellbuenz.co.uk

Above: 'Dumfries & Galloway Life' magazine – January 2010