In conversation with Tania Kovats

I find Darwin’s thinking hugely inspiring, coupled with his bravery to profoundly challenge orthodoxy.

Among the scenes which are deeply impressed on my mind, none exceed in sublimity the primeval forests untouched by the hand of man; (...) no one can challenge orthodoxy.

Charles Darwin, The Voyage of the Beagle

Tania Kovats was commissioned to create a sculpture for the Natural History Museum’s TREE exhibition, which celebrates Darwin’s 200th birthday and the bicentenary of the publication of The Origin of Species.


The exhibition TREE, which opened in January 2009, featured works by over 30 artists interpreted Darwin’s theories of evolution, ecosystems and biodiversity. The museum’s collection of 3D specimens was a key resource for the artists, who were invited to work with elements from the museum’s research, teaching and exhibition collections.

Visit www.nhm.ac.uk/tree-gallery

Thank you to all involved in Darwin’s journey, and to the team at NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM. The voyage of the BEAGLE led Kovats to create her own geological cross-sections, and her work will be a challenge for future generations.
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The oak tree was growing in the woods of the Longleat Estate, in Wiltshire, England. It was commissioned to mark the anniversary of the publication of Charles Darwin's landmark book, The Origin of Species (1859). This tree, approximately 200 years old, was selected to symbolise the passage of time and the profound impact of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution on our understanding of the natural world.

Darwin's lens to our understanding of the world led Kovats to create a work that exists in the space between science and art. By expressing scale and evoking a sense of time, this installation not only honours the monumental significance of the tree itself, but also serves as a model for our thought processes. The tree is a model of the vast time scales of landscapes, but also their minute details.

The oak tree is a symbol of endurance, with its branches extending out in all directions, representing the idea of propagation. The tree was selected for this project because it is one of the tallest and most prominent in the landscape, standing out from its surroundings. The tree is also an important part of the estate's history, having been there for over 200 years.

Kovats used the tree as a model for her work, taking a wafer-thin, longitudinal slice from it. This slice was then crafted into a model that could be displayed in the gallery. By creating the piece, Kovats extends the life cycle of the tree beyond its natural lifespan, allowing it to continue to grow and thrive in a new form.

The oak tree serves as a reminder of the importance of considering the natural world and our place within it. By honouring the tree's significance, this installation highlights the need for us to continue to seek out and understand the mysteries of nature. The oak tree is a reminder of the vastness of time and the interconnectedness of all living things.

Thank you Tania Kovats for sharing your thoughts with us.
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I find Darwin’s thinking hugely inspiring, coupled with his bravery to profoundly challenge orthodoxy.

Among the scenes which are deeply impressed on my mind; (...) no one can exceed in sublimity the deeply impressed on my mind, his bravery to profoundly inspire, coupled with his sense of loss, is in representing our thought processes. The tree is a model of it actually looks like thought, given how significant the tree form

...Wood is also everywhere around us in furniture, but I think timber as a material is very separated from how we think of trees. Like lots of stuff we consume, it’s easy not to think about its source, the chain of production that has created it... I wanted something old, something that has been here a long time... Why an oak tree?

The oak tree was growing in the woods of the Longleat Estate, in Wiltshire, England. It was considered to be over two hundred years old, and it was believed to be one of the oldest oaks in the area. The tree was chosen for its significance and its ability to convey a sense of history and continuity. The tree was felled, and its wood was used to create a large-scale sculpture that would become the centerpiece of the exhibition. The sculpture was designed to be a flowering tree, with branches and leaves that would grow and change over time, reflecting the natural cycle of growth and decay.

The sculpture was created by Tania Kovats, an artist known for her work with landscape and nature. She has created a number of large-scale sculptures that explore the relationship between humans and the natural world. This sculpture, however, is unique in its scale and its ability to convey a sense of history and continuity. The sculpture was created using a combination of traditional and modern techniques, including woodcarving, painting, and digital modeling.

The sculpture was installed in the Natural History Museum, where it was displayed for a period of two years. During this time, the sculpture was observed and studied by scientists, artists, and visitors alike. The sculpture was a popular attraction, and it is hoped that it will inspire further research and creative projects in the field of landscape and nature. The sculpture was eventually donated to the museum, where it will be displayed as a permanent exhibit.
Charles Darwin, his body.” In man than the mere breath of
without feeling that there is more
stand unmoved in these solitudes
the hand of man; (...) no one can
none exceed in sublimity the
Tania Kovats
In conversation with
Sketch from Charles Darwin’s Transmutation Notebook B, 1837
Do you think
stage. And 200 oak saplings were planted in its place.
sure to take the tree from a well managed woodland with exemplary
production that got it to you, or the waste involved. For
stuff we consume, it’s easy not to think about its source, the chain of
thoughts branching out but connected to where they came from.
expressed in trees, the family tree. Trees are an image of connectivity,
why an oak tree?
time to tiny incremental changes, and it’s these geological thoughts
On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection
written all over it once you open it up and start to read.
similarly reveals the life of the tree, which you can read
geological rock formations that I have modelled and set into formal
drawing. Other landscape works include sculptures of compelling
again and again. It encompassed my two preoccupations: landscape
MUSEUM OF THE WHITE HORSE
make
MEADOW
TREE
fit with your other works?
practical side, actually crafting the piece?

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how landscapes are made, and Darwin’s geological understanding
up the vast time scales of landscapes, but also their minute details.

Thank you

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Do you think

One of my starting points

Another thing that was

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