

The nature of growth

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Nature is always my place to begin. I am drawn to how forms respond to the stresses they withstand and the obstacles they confront. Starting with observations of specific phenomena, I abstract the parallels I find in processes as diverse as the surge of lava, the creep of a glacier, the flow of water, or the growth of a tree.

My sculptures (*Figures 1,2*) have evolved from the extended study of plants, seedpods, bones, and shells. They are an attempt to connect my own phases of growth and need for support and protection with what I have observed in nature. My work is inspired by the integrated order that exists throughout the natural world where elements evolve for their essential qualities of function while simultaneously becoming forms of sublime beauty.

My focus is on how a form records its growth process from one condition to another as it responds to its environment. This process of transformation, whether in the natural environment or in the realm of the cultural or the personal, is an essential aspect of life. It is the foundation upon which my work builds.

My construction method has been gleaned from observations of building processes in the natural world: our bodies bundle fibers into muscle, built cell by cell; birds weave resilient nests, accumulated twig by twig; shells grow linear accretions, secreted year by year. This process of slow, constant growth is ultimately a transformation of the small, the fragile, the insignificant into something of strength and resilience as the individual establishes a state of balance with

the forces of its environment.

I echo this process using wood veneer to build up a form. Through layering and gluing, this fragile, flexible material develops its own strength. The wood veneer that I use began its life cycle in the form of a tree and is the result of an intensive milling process. I take scraps of veneer from factories, which would be discarded, and construct them back into organic form, mirroring the efficiency I find in nature.

Bio

Barbara Cooper works fluidly between drawing, sculpture and public art. Her work reflects a sustained interest in flow and movement and how it is manifested in space and structure. She received a BFA from Cleveland Institute of Art and an MFA from Cranbrook Academy of Art in Michigan.

Numerous one-person exhibitions include Perimeter Gallery in Chicago, the Bellevue Arts Museum, Washington, Gerald Peters Gallery in Santa Fe, the Chicago Cultural Center, and the John Michael Kohler Arts Center in Sheboygan, Wisconsin.

A Chicago resident, Cooper has received three Illinois Arts Council Fellowships. Her work can be seen at www.barbaracooperartist.com, and Perimeter Gallery, Chicago.

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Figure 1 Wedge, 2012, wood and glue, 32" × 34" × 17"



Figure 2 Shear, 2011, wood and glue, 70" × 30" × 12"

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