

GHYSLAIN BERTHOLON

REZILIENTIA



Created out of a massive, burnt-looking sequoia tree stump, topped by a bronze and gold axe, the work *Rezilientia* [Resilience] presented at the Domain of Chaumont-sur-Loire is the most imposing variant Ghyslain Bertholon has ever produced in this series of stand-alone pieces begun in 2020, variations of which can be seen in Paris, Lille and Saint-Étienne. [...]

This out-of-the-ordinary work is altogether consistent with thought the artist has been giving for the last twenty-five years to a question that has become increasingly crucial over the decades: that of the relationship of domination we maintain with nature. In some ways, the question is classical: running through the whole of human history, it became a central concern in western humanist thought during the Renaissance, which made science the heart and driver of progress in order to make us “like masters and possessors of nature”¹. Highlighting the power of the human mind, the era began to think of nature as an instrument – an idea that would reach its apogee with the industrial revolution.

In the mid-19th century, however, thinkers started to question our warped relationship with nature, hence Henry David Thoreau and his famous *Walden or Life in the Woods*² and, later, the theorisation of “the enframing of nature” (Gestell) by the German philosopher Martin Heidegger, hidden away in his cabin in Todtnauberg in the Black Forest... By dint of regarding nature as a simple “available fund” (Bestand)³, Heidegger warned in the 1950s, we have perverted our manner of being in the world, and, by setting ourselves up as “masters of nature”, as Descartes urged, we have lost sight of ourselves, lost ourselves, spiritually disconnected from the world. In the 1960s, there was Rachel Carson and her *Silent Spring*, and in the 1970s, the emergence of *Deep Ecology*, in particular with Arne Næss⁵. World-weary, we didn’t listen to or believe any of it. So, as the year 2000 dawned, Ghyslain Bertholon undertook (to borrow Heidegger’s expression) “to live in the world as a poet”, occupy the world as an artist.

As a result, following his *Petra Silva* series⁶, this monumental work, based on a pure, age-old artist’s gesture was born. As, first of all, another stump had to be it “removed” from the sequoia’s gangue, a sort of tree-stump archetype that the artist wanted to bring forth, like an encasement, a mise en abyme, like the sculptor extricating David from the block of marble. [...]

The notion of hybridisation is a recurrent term in contemporary practice and vocabulary. While hybridisation is one of the driving forces of Ghyslain Bertholon’s body of work, here, the ideas of contamination, ingestion, amalgamation and shifting seem to predominate: the wood “contaminates” the axe; the metal seems to have integrated into and amalgamated with the branch, become the support for a new life, more specifically, a resilience, drawing on the traces, the cinders, the irrefutable remains of a trauma in order to be born again and reinvent itself.

With his ever-critical eye on what we call the Anthropocene, on what, in our opinion, constitutes the self-destructive heart of human nature — *hubris*, its love of immoderation — Ghyslain Bertholon’s work outlines a reversal of power and suggests that, if we do not endeavour to know and respect its laws, nature always ends up taking its course.

Here, retaining the “ecopoetic” and metaphorical dimensions of Peter Wohlleben’s *The Hidden Life of Trees*⁷, Ghyslain Bertholon imagines the way in which nature, which always finds its way⁸, calls all the synergies of the living world to it, mobilising its resources in order to be reborn where you least expect it.

Marie Deparis-Yafil, January 2026

1- René Descartes – *Discourse on the Method* – 1637

2- Henry David Thoreau – *Walden or Life in the Woods* – Published in the United States in 1854 and in 1922 in France

3- Martin Heidegger – *The Question concerning Technology* – 1954

4- Rachel Carson – *Silent Spring* – 1962

5- Arne Naess – *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle* – Original publication, Denmark, 1973, then 1989 in English.

6- In particular in the *Chevets* (Bedside Tables) series, Ghyslain Bertholon presents small pieces of old-fashioned furniture, Louis XV-style for example, their feet seemingly animated by a driving force. His *Chevet de retour en forêt* [Bedside Table Returning to the Forest] seems to want to escape and take flight in order to get out of the house, return to nature and regain its freedom. A subtle and amusing way of imagining how wood, taken “by force” in the forest, becomes a manufactured object but, at bottom, only ever aspires to return home.

7- Peter Wohlleben – *The Hidden Life of Trees* – 2015

8- Allusion to Professor Ian Malcolm’s famous reply in Steven Spielberg’s *Jurassic Park* (1993): “Life finds a way”