

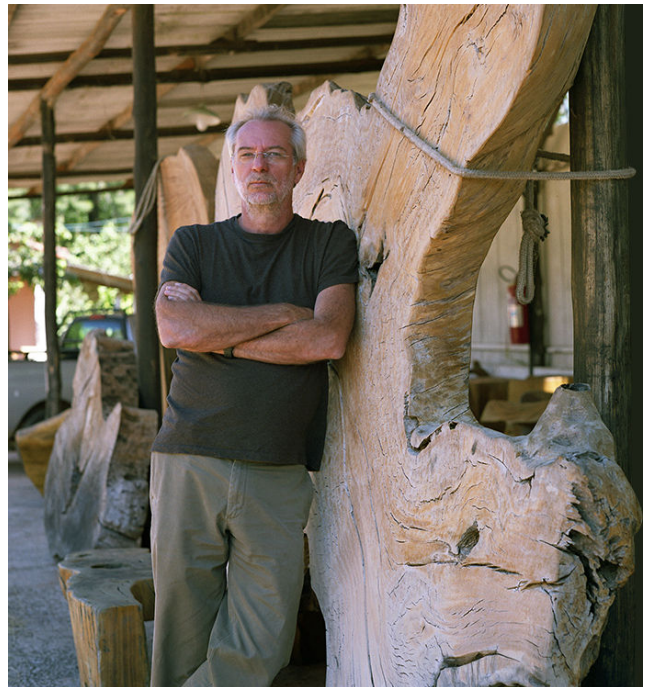
PUBLIC FURNITURE | URBAN TREES

Hugo Franca (Sao Paolo, Brazil)

“This is not art that you can’t touch or feel. The whole idea is to become integrated into the art. The connection is the main point — that you become one with nature and the tree.” ~ Hugo Franca

WHO MADE THIS ART INSTALLATION?

Over the past 20 years, renowned Brazilian carver and furniture designer Hugo Franca has been giving new life to the fallen giants of the forests of his home country. He has worked with trees as small as 25 inches in diameter to several feet in diameter, even some as old as 800 years. In reclaiming and working with decaying, condemned or dead trees and roots as his material, Franca creates fluid and organic sculpture and sculptural furniture, striving to give new form to trees that would otherwise be discarded or go to waste. Born in 1954 in Porto Alegre, Brazil, his journey to become a carver was not through formal art school education, but through hands on learning over a 15 year period. In his early twenties he was working as an industrial engineer for a computer company in Sao Paolo, but felt a desire to live differently, disagreeing with the military dictatorship of the time. A few years earlier, he had protested against the dictatorship and was imprisoned and tortured by the government. In 1982 he moved to the remote the community of Trancoso, in the northeastern coastal area of Bahia, where he met and lived among the indigenous Pataxó.



Over the next 15 years he lived and worked there, learning traditional carving techniques, researching, developing and mastering his wood working craft with the Pataxó community. It was during these years that he began working with local tropical wood that had been discarded or already fallen; most often burned pequi—a dense, gnarled wood abandoned and left over from deforestation in the 1960s and '70s. Though the practice is now outlawed, large areas of rain forest were cleared in those years for agriculture and cattle grazing, leaving behind charred six



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foot tall trunks to decay. The pequi trees he carves can be upwards of 148 feet (45 meters) in height and 10 feet (3 meters) in diameter. Over the years he continues to salvage and scavenge for dead or discarded trees and roots, finding trees that have died of drought or flood and still stand 150 tall in the rainforest or that are unwanted obstacles in farmers' fields.

The furniture he has created over the last 20 years offers a new idea on sustainable design by minimizing waist and working with the forms and characteristics of each tree. He now works between São Paulo and the fishing village of Trancoso, in Bahia, where he maintains studios and teams in both communities, still collaborating with locals in Bahia to source fallen trees to repurpose for his designs. He has had solo and been part of group exhibitions in art galleries and design exhibitions internationally including shows in New York, Miami, Paris and across Brazil. His work can be found in both private collections and institutions.



WHAT WAS THE INSPIRATION FOR THIS ART INSTALLATION?

For this series, the trees, together with ideas of public engagement, waste management and sustainable design in urban settings are central to the works. He spent weeks sources and collecting fallen red cedar and Douglas-fir from the regions of Squamish and Vancouver, moving 4 ton trees and trunks to be carved outdoors in both communities.

Franca's approach is an intuitive sculptural process, a creative dialogue with each tree he works with. His final sculptures work with the natural shape, cracks, knots, forms and flaws of each tree. The memory of the tree lives on and is incorporated into the lines and forms of each sculpture. The unique beauty, form, and sensuality of each tree continue to inspire him each time he begins a new sculpture. Through his sculptures, and especially with this *PUBLIC FURNITURE | URBAN TREES* series, he strives to create work that reconnect trees with people, offering ways to live with and connect with these trees, and giving a new life to wood that would otherwise be discarded or destroyed. He takes care to minimize waste throughout his entire process, finding ways to fully reuse the entire tree, sometimes for one work, or an entire series of works from a single tree. He often works with trees typically rejected from the carpentry industry in Brazil or left behind from deforestation in the past.

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For this urban project Franca was also reflecting on the ongoing challenge of waste management both in urban and rural areas, and how these condemned urban trees can be reused not only for citizens to enjoy, but also for environmental benefit. Reusing the trees is a form of waste management—in creating his sculpture from these wood sources, the trees are prevented from decaying in the forest which would emit carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. Ideas of sustainable design and process motivate him, as he strives to not waste wood that has been discarded or condemned. This principle of attempting to fully reuse each tree guides how he carves each piece.



For the site-specific works in Squamish and Vancouver Franca used drift wood and decayed urban trees from these communities so they may not go to waste. The local wood he used here included red cedar in Squamish and Douglas-fir in Vancouver, and the challenge of moving and transporting was made possible with the support and collaboration with local logging, trucking, transport and equipment sponsors from the region. Over the course of his time in Vancouver, Franca and his team created 7 sculptures in Squamish and 5 in Vancouver, each organic form inviting the public to sit, climb, and experience the trees in new ways. Some works engulf the sitter like a tunnel or cocoon, others are elongated benches or bowl-like sitting platforms large enough to support a class of students. Over the month that Franca and his team worked, the sites were major draws for the community. Rain or shine, local residents, schools classes, loggers, teachers, artists, tourists and journalists were drawn to watch Franca and his team work, learn about the project, and have the chance to sit and experience his sculptural furniture for themselves.

HOW WAS THIS ART INSTALLATION MADE/INSTALLED?

As in Brazil, Franca worked with a team of carving assistants to create his sculptures in Squamish and Vancouver. Using chain saws, hand tools, ropes, and trucks, Franca and his team moved, shaped, and carved each piece of wood, root, and fallen tree into sculptural furniture. The use of the chainsaw to carve is both practical and poetic—while it is usually a tool to cut down trees, through his work Franca reverses this process and the chainsaw becomes a sculptural tool for creation instead of destruction.

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HOW DOES THIS PIECE OF ART CONNECT TO THE ARTIST'S PREVIOUS WORK?



The works created for the Vancouver Biennale are part of an ongoing *PUBLIC FURNITURE | URBAN TREES* series. Franca's work in Vancouver and Squamish mark the first time internationally that he has created work outside Brazil and with a variety of local wood unique to the temperate rainforest of the Vancouver area. Other sites for the series include Parque Burle Marx and Parque do Ibirapuera (São Paulo, Brazil), Museu do Açude (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil) and École de Beaux-Arts (Saint-Étienne, France). He was recently invited by New York City Department of Parks & Recreation to continue the project in all five boroughs. The purpose for this series is to salvage urban trees that would otherwise be left to decay or be destroyed and return them to their cities in the form of public furniture, offering a new concept of public furniture in urban spaces. While many of his other works in the past have been purchase by private collectors, used in private homes, or are now part of art collections, the *PUBLIC FURNITURE | URBAN TREES* series is intentionally one that is meant to reach a wider audience, a work created to be touched and sat upon, and physically experienced, connecting the public with his work and these trees for years to come.

The created artworks will be enjoyed by the public in New Westminster, Squamish and Vancouver. Visit the Exhibition Map on the Vancouver Biennale Website for locations and self-guided tour information.

Artist Website: <http://www.hugofranca.com.br>

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