

Jean-Guillaume Mathiaut gives a fallen oak a second life

French sculptor Jean-Guillaume Mathiaut transposes the spiritual forest into his new exhibition at Bastok Lessel in Paris (until 13 July 2024)



The French artist-interior architect-designer Jean-Guillaume Mathiaut has a long history with wood. Growing up in the village of Bourron-Marlotte, near the forest of Fontainebleau, he seeks refuge or finds artistic inspiration in the midst of massive trees. And he made the oak, the species that occupies half of the forests of Fontainebleau, his material of fetish.

Over the years Mathiaut made a name for himself, not only for his distinctive inner sense of shape, but also for his love and care of trees. Many people from various creative industries, including high-profile names such as Alain Ducasse and Jay-Z, visited his workshop in his hometown and got spellbound with the sculpture, or what he names 'landscape furniture.'

**'Eden' by Jean-Guillaume Mathiaut at Bastok Lessel,
Paris**



Mathiaut has just unveiled the site-specific exhibition, 'Eden', at gallery Bastok Lessel in Paris (on view until 13 July 2024). He explains, 'The title refers to the garden of Eden. The exhibition is an extension of the forests, the place of rest and recharge. I intended a peaceful heaven with sculptures, an enchanting interlude.' For the prolific artist, it is the third one-man show within two years, after the one at Kolkhoze and another one at Luca Ratton. The tandem behind the new art hot spot Bastok Lessel, Tom-David Bastok and Dylan Lessel, are experts in artists' estate management and partners of Perrotin Secondary Market.



'The basic idea was to recreate my studio, and it was developed into four universes which extend from one floor to another,' says Mathiaut. A guiding thread is a dozen reproductions of Echelle (ladder in French) shelves of his studio. The shelves were painstakingly custom-made and embedded into the walls of every level. In the Sculpture Garden on the ground floor, two monumental totems—half sculpture, half furniture—are surrounded by the shelves that embrace small objects, either in abstract shape or simplified human figure. “

'When his team was about to finish the installation, we were saying that something was missing, like a centrepiece. Then Jean-Guillaume immediately took a piece of wood, vigorously cut it with a sharp blade (not a chain saw) and improvised the new pieces. It was spectacular!', Dylan Lessel says, describing how the artist is always on the move.



Indeed, a tension between the spiritual power of the trees and the intense character of Mathiaut is alive at this immersive show. The upper floor is named Cabinet of Curiosity. As the title suggests, the room offers more eclectic display, with tall or low furniture that evokes somehow the human silhouette. Then in the Architect's Office on the second floor, signature pieces such as Throne chair and Fetish figure are accompanied by a chest of toys. The chest is a homage to the housing unit Cité Radieuse in Marseille, designed by Le Corbusier in the 1950s.

Meanwhile, the top floor features a wooden cabin, a nod to Mathiaut's very first project, a cabin on stilts and it made the then 23 year-old artist the winner of an architecture competition. In this way, visitors of the Eden are invited into the personal universe of the artist at the end of their journey. It is mesmerising, touching.



Mathiaut's work consists of two types of oeuvres. One is assembly, either Mortise and Tenon, or the traditional Japanese technique that he learned in Kyoto. He never keeps any nails in his toolbox, as he opts instead for fish glue. The other is sculpture, which he makes by carving directly into a piece of wood, respecting its organic shape. Everything is handcrafted, using trunks, barks and branches from the Rolf oak, which fell after being hit by the violent storm of 1999. 'I give a second life to these trees. My work is very close to the material. It nourishes the spirit. Don't take me for nut, but I speak to trees every morning.' The artist also shows his sensitivity to biodiversity. 'The oak is the king of the forest and transmits the maximum information to other species.'

Since most of the works were sold on the first day, Mathiaut will add new pieces during the course of the exhibition and he will complete the display with drawings. Under his attentive care, trees live a second life in Eden.