

ARBORETUM UPDATES

An Interview with Daniel Popper



The [Human+Nature](#) exhibition officially opens on May 28, 2021, and will be at the Arboretum for at least one year. The exhibition is included free with general admission to the Arboretum. [Timed-entry tickets](#) must be obtained in advance online. Tickets are not available at the gatehouse.

We take you behind the scenes for an interview with Human+Nature artist Daniel Popper.

What is the story behind the Human+Nature exhibition?

DP: Each sculpture has a story behind it, but I like to leave the questions about each piece a little bit open, so people can come and bring their own ideas to it. I want people to come here and question their own relationships with nature.

How is your spirit affected by nature? Ask yourself: What do you feel? How does this connect you with your feelings about nature? Some people might get nothing. Some people might be inspired. I don't have an overall message I want people to get. I want people to bring the message for themselves.

For example, *Hallow*, if you look at that piece—a woman opening herself up—what does that mean? Everyone can find some meaning for themselves. They may see something about opening up emotionally, growing internally, opening up themselves to nature or to the natural world, or to their own internal growth. There's an unfinished quality to it. I think unfinished things are more interesting because people can bring something of their own to it. You will find more magic in things that way.

What interested you in connecting your art with trees?

DP: As an artist, I've always been interested in trees. They're very inspirational. I spent a lot of time on the ocean and hiking around. I went with friends to explore the forest. There are so many beautiful places near Capetown (South Africa, Popper's home) to explore. I was close to so many trees and mountains and rivers. In school, I used to sketch trees. I love the rhythm in the growth of a tree. And I've always been interested in the human form. I've taken a lot of figure drawing classes. That merged with nature. It's more of a subconscious thing than a deliberate thing.

I think I started with an interest in the textures and materials; beautiful natural materials. My interest in these materials led me to using them and seeing how we could do forms in different ways. One thing led to another, and I got interested in mixing art and nature together.

When did you begin making art that fits into a landscape?

DP: I was making sculptures in the desert in South Africa. It's the landscape that opened me up to visualize how I could work with landscapes. I get the feeling of the space and see how that informs the work and see what comes up. And then I think about the actual installations in response to the space. I think about the work based on the surroundings.

How did you approach creating sculptures that fit in The Morton Arboretum's natural spaces?

DP: I walked through the spaces and tried to get the landscape to speak to me. I was just amazed at the space and the magical quality that this whole area has. It's truly beautiful. One is struck by the majesty of nature.

Something happens to the subconscious mind and to your body when you are inspired by nature and by the work. When I came back for the second time, I was alive to having that happen. I had in mind the pieces I wanted to make and which ones should go in which space. I saw that this one would be beautiful over here and that one would be beautiful by the oak trees. I started to think, "What would this look like in the snow? It's going to be so beautiful." It's a privilege to come and do something at the Arboretum.



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