

Mountain Wildwoods: The Resilient Beauty of Juniper Trees

Artist: Tom Benedict

Rocky Mountain Junipers are some of the worlds' oldest trees. The ones that live their lives in the harshest conditions grow gnarled and twisted as they age. By the time I get to them, they are grey, weathered, and dead, but usually still standing. Old growth juniper contains natural rot and insect resistant resins, enabling the dead wood to last for centuries.

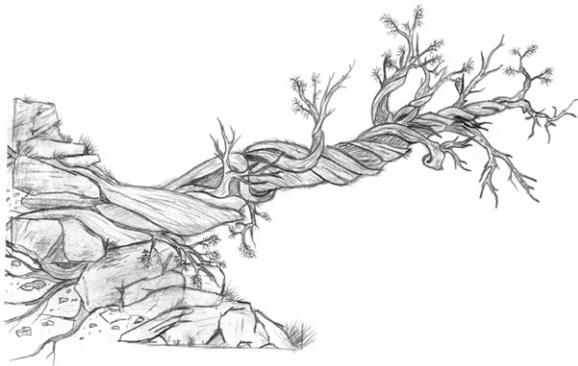
To create my sculptures, I remove much of the original exterior wood, exposing the tree's inner core. Guided by the natural shape of the piece, I exaggerate many of the tree's existing features. The contrasting black coloration is added using a torch. Over time, the sculpture will weather to a light grey coloration while the torched areas will remain black.

While viewing these trees turned into sculptures, it is humbling to ponder the changing world they endured. Their resilience to the natural forces working against them gave them their beauty.

The Corkscrew Juniper

The Corkscrew Juniper, in life, was not oriented upright as you see it. It grew on a steep hillside among boulders, sprawling outward horizontally as it grew. (See drawing below) When discovered, the roots had deteriorated and broken, leaving the dead tree laid out on the rocks below.

This is one of the most elegant and evenly twisted junipers that I have ever worked with. Its evenly twisted yet straight trunk resembles a corkscrew, which was the inspiration for its name. Not much material was removed from this piece, and it is the closest to its natural form of my sculptures presented here.



The Grappling Juniper

The Grappling Juniper grew from a large crack on a rocky cliff. Its root system was deeply embedded through decomposing granite. This tree was discovered relatively soon after it had died. Much of it still had bark remnants sloughing off after insects had fed on the sapwood underneath. This tree has the appearance of two trees twisted together, grappling for the better position. (See drawing to the left)



The Behemoth Juniper

The Behemoth Juniper is the largest and most intensely twisted juniper tree in this collection. It grew alongside cactus on a steep and arid hillside. Its roots grew sharply upward, suspending the rest of the tree over the cactus covered slope below. (See drawing above) Upon releasing the remaining roots, the weight of the rolling tree caused it to break off some of the more delicate and weathered branches.



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Spot That Pattern!

Can you find these animals' markings hidden throughout The Gardens? There are special patterned sculptures painted on juniper wood all around! Check them off as you go. In addition to these small-scale painted sculptures, artist Tom Benedict is exhibiting larger juniper pieces in The Gardens as well. For more info about Tom and his work, see the back of this sheet.

