

## VALE Thorhammer Beowulf - Environmental Artist

Wednesday, 12 August 2015

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Beowulf - Environmental Artist

CBS members, and the bonsai community at large, will be sad to learn of the death on Friday the 7th of August of a fellow member and friend to many, Thorhammer (Thor) Beowulf after a short illness. Our condolences go to Melissa, his wife, and their five sons, Thorsten, Bjorn, Thorin, Beren and Niels, and other family members

Thor was a PhD candidate (interdisciplinary cross-cultural research) at the Australian National University, researching the art and aesthetics of bonsai and how it mediates the highly contested space between nature and art/culture. Thor was recognised by the academic community as Australia's leading bonsai scholar.

Thor was also an environmental artist and bonsai expert who has studied in Japan, Europe and the U.S. and specialised in using living botanical organisms and bonsai in his sculpture practice. He shared an art studio at M16 Artspace in Canberra with fellow artist and partner, Melissa Beowulf.

The focus of Thor's art was to stimulate public interest about ecological systems, environmental issues and ethical concerns by aesthetically re-engaging with the living aspects of the natural world from which art, culture and the modern world has been largely estranged.

In 2012, Thor won the prestigious \$10,000 Woollahra Small Sculpture Prize in Sydney, with a bonsai "steam punk"-inspired work, entitled The Carbon Credit Machine. Thor said, in an artist's statement to the judges, that it was a commentary on environmental science.

"With growing concerns about environmental despoliation, climate change and the fragile

interdependence between humans with their natural environment, this living bonsai sculpture reveals the absurd hubris of human science and technology in their belief they can replicate or improve upon nature's own perfectly functioning carbon storage and conversion machine, a tree,"

Thor has exhibited both classical and avant-garde bonsai at the Art Gallery of NSW during the 2003 Japan Four Seasons Exhibition and in November 2013, he was included in the Natural Flux exhibition, held at the Brick Lane Gallery in London's East End and was a regular exhibitor in gallery and public sculpture events, including the Sawmillers Sculpture Prize at North Sydney; the Sculpture on the Edge Prize at Bermagui and the La Lune: Energy Producing Art exhibition in Sydney, curated by the Environment Research Initiative for Art (ERIA) at COFA, UNSW.

The Beowulf Family has been practising bonsai ever since the family matriarch, Katherine, migrated from Shanghai, China to Australia in 1951. Thor established Bonsai Design Studio (formerly Bonsai Exotique) and a third generation of the Beowulf family is taking up the baton, with Thor's eldest son, Thorsten Beowulf, now managing the business with the support of his brothers.