

**MEDIA CONTACT:**

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“TREE OF LIFE” SHOWCASES SCULPTURAL WORKS MADE FROM THE AFRICAN BLACKWOOD TREE

On View September 30, 2023 – January 6, 2024, at Houston Center for Contemporary Craft

Tree of Life

September 30, 2023 – January 6, 2024

Front Gallery

Houston Center for Contemporary Craft

4848 Main Street, Houston, TX 77002

Exhibition Reception

Friday, September 29, 5:30 – 7:30 PM

The evening will celebrate the fall exhibitions and feature open studios by the current resident artists.

Exhibition web page

<https://crafthouston.org/exhibition/tree-of-life/>

Hours & Admission

Open Tuesday - Saturday, 10 AM – 5 PM. Closed major holidays. Admission is free.

(HOUSTON, TX) August 1, 2023 — *Tree of Life* showcases sculptural objects made from the African blackwood tree, also known as *mpingo* or *Dalbergia melanoxylon*. Native to Tanzania and the territory surrounding Mt. Kilimanjaro, this tree has a naturally dark, nearly black, colored core and other unique properties that make it a preferred choice of material for ornamental turning, carving, and use in woodwind instruments. This exhibition features figural sculptures carved in the Makonde tradition by Tanzania-based artists, Joseph Singombe and Pius Mtembe; ornamental turning by the late Texas-based artist James Harris; and woodwind instruments that explore the different methods artists are using when approaching this material.

Mpingo, a swahili term referring to the blackwood tree, is a culturally significant species for the Makonde people in East Africa. A popular style of Makonde sculpture is called *ujamaa*, which speaks to the interconnectedness of each individual within a larger economy and social network. These sculptures are carved from a single piece of wood and depict a tower of interdependent figures relying on one another for stability and strength. This metaphor for community can be applied to other craftspeople working in this medium. The planting, cultivation, harvest, transport, drying, and subsequent carving of African blackwood are all collective efforts, wherein each role is equally important to the process. *Tree of Life* focuses not only on the skill of these makers, but the conservation, preservation, and scholarship that keeps the tree, and the craft practices surrounding it, alive.

Tree of Life was curated by HCCC Curatorial Fellow, Cydney Pickens.

About Houston Center for Contemporary Craft

Serving as a treasured resource in the Houston arts community for more than 20 years, Houston Center for Contemporary Craft (HCCC) is a nonprofit visual arts center dedicated to advancing education about the process, product, and history of craft. HCCC showcases emerging and acclaimed artists in exhibitions, introduces visitors of all ages to contemporary craft through hands-on and virtual programming, and supports the development of working artists through its artist residency program.

HCCC is open Tuesday through Saturday, 10 AM – 5 PM. **Holiday hours for 2023: HCCC will be closed to the public November 23 – 25 for the Thanksgiving holiday weekend and December 26 – January 2 for winter holidays.** HCCC is also closed on Easter, Memorial Day, Juneteenth, July 4th, and Labor Day.

Admission is free. HCCC is located in the Museum District at 4848 Main Street, three blocks south of the Wheeler Ave. MetroRail station. Free parking is available directly behind the facility, off Rosedale and Travis Street.

HCCC is supported by individual donors and members and funded in part by The Brown Foundation; Houston Endowment, Inc.; the City of Houston through the Houston Arts Alliance; Texas Commission on the Arts; the National Endowment for the Arts, the Kinder Foundation; the Morgan Foundation; Windgate Charitable Foundation; and the Wortham Foundation. HCCC is a member of the Houston Museum District and the Midtown Arts District.

For more information, call 713-529-4848 or visit www.crafthouston.org. Find HCCC on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram @CraftHouston.

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