



Ugo  
Rondinone  
at Klubhaus



## Ugo Rondinone

### Air gets into everything even nothing, 2006

Cast aluminium, white enamel  
375 x 405 x 340 cm

In almost all cultures the tree is one of the most meaningful and versatile symbols. We have the tree of life and the tree of wisdom. Its massive trunk stands for strength and persistence. The thin and extensive branches convey an air of vulnerability. Trees remind us of the ever-recurring cycles of the earth – growth and transience. And while thick leaves offer tranquillity and rest, is there any better visualisation for our innermost ancestral connections than roots reaching deep underground?

Since the late 1980s, trees feature repeatedly in the work of Swiss-born and New York-based artist Ugo Rondinone. He is interested in the existential dimension of things – time and evanescence, reality and fiction, day and night, nature and culture – and is concerned with our own role in all of this. “I see the world as a mysterious place where appearances are deceptive and ultimate reality is rarely perceived,” Rondinone once said. “A world where each individual creates its own time and space.”

In his work he often takes on a decidedly romantic and melancholic twist. Using essentially archetypal motifs like sad and depressed clowns, gigantic stones and rocks, colorful rainbows, or, for that matter, trees, he creates works that seem to be deliberately simple and easy to understand, yet come laden with dreamlike and enigmatic symbolism. His allusive and poetic titles only add to this.

So is the case with the sculpture *Air gets into everything even nothing* (2006). It is part of an ongoing series of casts Rondinone makes from ancient olive trees just outside the city of Naples, Italy, where his parents come from. Some of these trees are more than 2000 years old, and just as gnarly and stout. Age-old as they are, they feel almost brought down by a life on the verge of eternity. But here they are, still standing – and alive.

Weathered and crumpled, shaped by the winds, the water, and the available resources over an extremely long period, these trees seem to embody the passing of time itself. Furthermore, cast in aluminium and coated in white enamel, “they become,” as the artist puts it, a “memoriam of condensed time.” They confront us with the astonishing endurance of life and, at the same time, its inevitable end. When time stands still, we are reminded of its persistent movement.

Uprooted and transplanted as they are, he places his tree sculptures in environments trees would not naturally inhabit, in concrete city plazas or clean and artificial exhibition spaces. But far from becoming pitiful symbols of the decline of nature or a fundamental estrangement, the overarching symbolic power of those sculptures is more potent. They take hold of their environment, almost enchanting it with their sheer presence. Yet, they do not feel overpowering, but rather approachable. “If nature is my religion,” Rondinone once said, “the tree is my friend.”



Swiss Reinsurance Company Ltd  
Mythenquai 50/60  
P.O. Box  
8022 Zurich  
Switzerland

Telephone +41 43 285 2121  
[www.swissre.com](http://www.swissre.com)

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