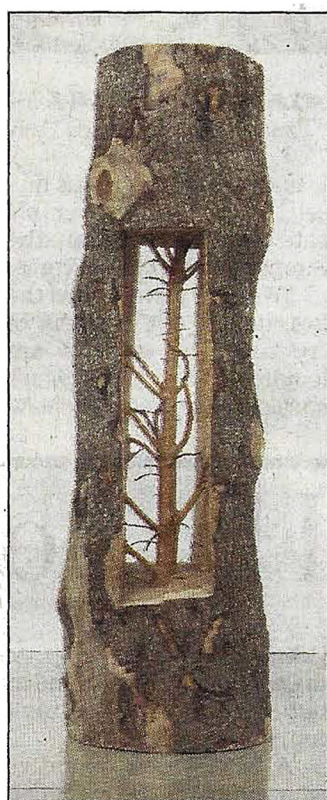


GAGOSIAN GALLERY

Los Angeles Times

Fingerprints from nature

"I don't want to change
the material; I want to follow



JWPictures/Gagosian Gallery

GIUSEPPE PENONE
carved a 10-foot trunk.

its lead," Giuseppe Penone said in a recent interview. The work in his stirring show at Gagosian makes beautifully clear what he means, exemplifying the kind of respect for — and self-identification with — natural materials that has characterized his work since the late '60s.

The sculptures here are recent, but many incorporate or revisit ideas and forms from decades past.

Trees, for instance, have

Gagosian Gallery, 456 N. Camden Dr., Beverly Hills, (310) 271-9400, through Oct. 18. Closed Sunday and Monday. www.gagosian.com

always figured centrally in his work, and the two tree-related pieces here coalesce his most tender and lyrical approaches to the subject and material.

In "Albero Porta — Cedro/Door Tree — Cedar," Penone carves a large rectangular opening in the 10-foot-high trunk, leaving within it a slender, sculpted spine, the tree's own physical memory of its younger self.

For "Luce Zenitale/Zenithal Light," he sheathed another tall trunk with dabs of clay, creating a shell, which he cast in bronze and lined inside with gold, visible through a dozen knothole apertures. The sculpture reads as sacred growth, an earthly constellation, an organic act of alchemy.

The Italian-born, Turin- and Paris-based Penone emerged in association with Arte Povera, though his choice of materials is less ordinary than elemental. The performative aspect of his enterprise is hinted at in a huge image of the lower half of his face, rendered in acacia thorns affixed to canvas.

A few figurative sculptures in bronze are likewise mostly clever, but the works in marble are breathtaking in their evocation of micro and macro realities, the continuity between inner substance and external surface.

As with humans, Penone's work suggests, fingerprints taken from the natural world are traces of soul, not only skin.