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3 David Nash: Sculpture speaks the language of wood

Jo Melvin

The more I look at the tree, the more
I see the tree: Its space and location,
its volume and structure; its engineering
and balance. More than that, I see
the uniqueness of each single tree, and
beyond that still I see it as a great emblem
of life. A potent vibrant tower, a whirling
prayer wheel of natural energy.

David Nash, *Fledged Over Ash* (1978)

These opening lines are taken from a statement David Nash wrote for the catalogue he made in conjunction with the exhibition *Fledged Over Ash* at the Air Gallery in London. The exhibition and publication grew in part out of the six months he spent as sculptor in residence at Grizedale Forest in Cumbria. Nash was becoming known in the UK by the time he was offered this residency. He had had two solo exhibitions and was included in the international exhibition at the Hayward Gallery called *The Condition of Sculpture*, curated by the sculptor William Tucker in 1975. In Tucker's words, the exhibition 'brought together work done in the last two or three years by artists who appear, consciously or intuitively, to accept the condition of sculpture'.¹ He hoped it would demonstrate the 'persistence of sculpture in the face of avant-garde theory and the lack (in this country at least) of serious economic support'. Tucker included twenty-one 'younger British artists' and twenty 'foreign artists.' The British artists included Garth Evans, Katherine Gili, Philip King, Nicholas Pope and Tucker himself. Among the American and European artists were Carl Andre, Larry Bell, Richard Serra, Ulrich Rückreim and Lucas Samaras. Nash's work, *Split and Held Across* (1971), was made with willow and rope. The pragmatic title describes the process of its making, ash branches split and held taut with rope, and like the similarly descriptive term 'fledged over ash' it also has a poetic ring. Nash and Pope's work was in a different register to

the coloured fibreglass of King and Tucker, older British artists and part of the so-called New Generation who came to prominence during the 1960s. It was unexpected, and also unlike the purity of minimalism. Although, as I will show, Nash's work incorporated and responds to aspects of minimalism with a deft sense of humour.

The Grizedale residence was important for a number of reasons. It enabled Nash to develop the artistic strategies he was fully immersed in, away from his normal habitat and working routine that he had established in Blaenau Ffestiniog, where he had been living for more than a decade. It was in effect an industrial placement, and unlike those organized by the Artist Placement Group, which had taken place in factories, with one in the shipping industry, this was situated outside, in the land, within Grizedale Forest. Nash had already spent time working on an ad hoc basis for the forestry commission, planting trees in his local area, so he was familiar at first hand with a number of the requirements. In Cumbria he found the foresters were initially a bit hostile towards the idea of an artist in the woods, but he soon won them over. He made a point of arriving on site at the same time as the foresters' bus and his saw was still heard when they finished at 3.30pm or 4pm. It was his first chainsaw, a 14-inch John Sorensen, and he made all the work using it.

The forest was home to a lot of wildlife, including red deer, whose frequent darting through the woods created a flash of movement with a fleeting image. Nash utilised the shape of their movement and speed in the large *Running Table* (1978). When glimpsed, the sculpture replicated their presence and its 'frozen moment' added a feeling of majesty that was immediately accessible. Nash recalled how one of the foresters was an ex-butcher, who made wildlife drawings of animals, which he sold locally, helping to smooth out the connection with the forest workforce. Nash made *Feed Troughs* (1978) for the animals, and *Wooden Waterway* (1978) from oak and sycamore in an area where the oaks had been thinned out and

a subsequent gale had uprooted others. The waterway diverted a little stream along troughs Nash had made from fallen trees that he linked together. It was intended to be temporary, but in fact it lasted longer than the other works because people kept on mending it. Nash said:

It didn't matter if the water missed the troughs, the wind would blow the flow of water which would then miss the next trough and stray on to the ground. The wind would drop and the flow would return as intended. I wanted to make a sculpture that connected the water to the trees. I'd observed in February the ground was very wet, a lot of rain and then the ground dried out although it was still raining. And I realised water was being drawn up into trees as they woke up. It was a perfect site; a source of water and two fallen trees lying down a slope. It was a precursor for the *Wooden Boulder*, where I took the wood to the river. This was a very important era, for launching new ideas and also for my self-confidence, and being known as an artist.

The Air Gallery exhibition *Fledged over Ash* showed work from Grizedale, although the inclusions were determined by the spaces. Nash made his first multiples for this exhibition, small versions of *Running Table* and *Willow Ladder*. They were extremely popular. Two other notable situations arose at this time. Clive Adams, who had recently become the director at the Arnolfini in Bristol, offered Nash a solo exhibition, and Diane Waldman, the senior curator at the Guggenheim Museum in New York visited the Air Gallery by chance as she passed by. She was devising an exhibition that would focus on innovative and emerging practices in the UK, and Nash's work was an ideal choice. In 1980 *British Art Now: An American Perspective* opened with eight British artists, including Nash and Nicholas Pope.² It was one of a series sponsored by Exxon that examined current

trends from different countries by artists who were not yet known in the USA. The sponsors provided the budget for acquiring one work by each artist for the Guggenheim collection. The artists were allocated individual spaces, so that in effect the exhibition comprised eight simultaneous solo showings. Waldman bought *Up, Flop and Jiggle* (1975) for her collection and later gave it to the Guggenheim. The exhibition toured to the American Federation Gallery at the University of Texas and returned to the UK for display at the Royal Academy in London. Nash was struck by the fact that his work had had to be shipped across the Atlantic, causing him to reflect on the relationship between the works' production and its subsequent exhibition. The experience led him to develop his strategies for producing work in situ. From this time, when appropriate, making work on site became a condition of the engagement.

Nash speaks and writes about art, the processes of making art and the language of sculpture, in a fashion that is neither dogmatic nor didactic, and he is immediately animated. History, art history, geography, geology, theosophy, forestry and folklore flow through his articulation of the properties of wood, the sap, bark, earth and air around trees. His statements operate like poetry, sometimes concrete poetry. Often these passages, or fragments from them, seem to call for reading aloud. The sounds of the words suggest the noises made by tools at work, in the production of sculpture or drawing; using repetitious actions to create rhythmic structures. Nash's repertoire of tools include water, fire, axe, auger, chainsaw, pencil, chalk, camera and, significantly, the seasons. Together these combine to shape his sculptures. Many of these sculptures are at different stages of growing in the landscape, and others are in the process of decay; arguably, in the natural cycle, both are forms of becoming.

He explains that the wood from different types of trees is like a dialect. Each respond to being worked with in distinctly different

ways; for instance oak has a lot of resistance, and bites back, whereas lime is soft and yielding. The wood also changes in colour and density according to its environmental conditions, and its character comes from the way in which the tree grows. Pragmatically hands on, Nash describes working with wood and how, as a sculptor, this is to come to terms with a language, the language of the medium and/or the materials, and how it is possible to shape something new and yet retain its properties.

Essentially Nash's working process gives the language of wood a sculptural voice. Nash's work is instantly recognisable. The peculiar combination of surrealist humour and primordial presence resonates in Nash's work. I first encountered this juxtaposition in the 1982 exhibition *Wood Quarry* at the Kröller-Müller Museum in Otterlo. Immediately on entering the gallery, the smell of beech wood filling the space was disconcerting because it is not a smell associated with the interior of a gallery. To discover the cause, it was necessary to pass through the first space and enter the main gallery where the scale of the fallen tree as a voluminous, sculptural object became apparent. The tree's sheer size – branches, roots, all contained and positioned within the interior exhibition rooms – was extraordinary.³ Nash made a standing form, called *The Useful Pig* (1982) (fig. 1). On its four legs it looked very pig-like, and every night wild boar would knock it over. In one of the galleries there was a firehose, which Nash used as a water source for a wooden waterway. The water ran down a series of branch troughs, similar to the waterway in Grizedale, and out through the fire exit door. At night it had to be switched off and the doors shut. During the day, the open door added to the attention the exhibition brought to the relationships between the interior gallery and the outside woodland, and to reconsider whether these parameters can be more permanently redefined. The experience of the exhibition did not require any prior knowledge to respond to its profound character and to enjoy its absurdity.

Cubes, spheres and triangles, arcs, domes, columns, grids, frames, ladders, stoves and tables form Nash's vocabulary and grammar, along with trees, rivers, the land, sea and sky. These occur and recur in numerous configurations. The repetitions differ in scale, medium and colour. Colour is a significant component in Nash's practice, and it is not surprising to hear that he began as a painter. The resonance of colour taken from intensely observed details in the landscape is transformed into his work, such as the particular black ringed edge of grey-green lichen, or bright green moss from which tiny red stems emerge. The iridescent blue of bluebells seen through the woods or on the hills of Cae'n-y-Coed, the field just outside Blaenau Ffestiniog, in a damp, richly dense landscape is almost psychedelic in its allure. Excited by its natural indigo, Nash made a sculpture of bluebells in 1984, planting thousands of bulbs onto open hillside in thirty-metre ring. The blue circle was visible for four years until it dissipated into the land.

A visit in 2017 to the Chagall stained glass windows commissioned for All Saints' Church in Tudeley, Kent, generated a resurgence of Nash's explorations of the quality of the colour blue. These took the form of drawings and prints using different coloured chalk to capture the intense Prussian and ultramarine blues, an inspiring response to the quality that continues to attract him. Reds too, so specific from freshly hewn wood and from fire, contrasting with the dense black from charcoal, combine in numerous ways in Nash's oeuvre.

Nash was born in Weybridge in Surrey. When he was a small child his paternal grandfather moved from the south of England to Llan Ffestiniog in north Wales, where he bought a large old house situated in beautiful land where the Cynfal River runs. Nash and his family regularly spent the school holidays there, where they would explore

Fig. 1 *The Useful Pig*, 1982, in exhibition at Kröller-Müller Museum, Netherlands.



and play outside, experiencing the weather and intensity of the changing seasons. Nash describes how the river cut a deep gorge through the granite and in one place 'perched beside the stream was an immense rock'. Nash's choice of the word 'perched' to describe the rock's position animates it with a feeling of immanence and the vulnerability of something living. It suggests it might move again, though it would have fallen in that spot thousands of years ago. Nash recollects his first encounter with the rock after a hard scramble:

Suddenly we were in the presence of this rock 'being'. My first sculpture-experience – that is experiencing an inanimate object speaking its presence. For fifty years I have visited it, taken museum curators and art writers trying to articulate my work to see it. For me it is perfect in its simplicity, size, environment and placement. It is a 'touch stone' for my path as a sculptor.

The density of colour as well as numerous environmental sensations were being absorbed from childhood when he gained an instinctive understanding of this particular place, and the warmth of the fireside in parallel with the seasonal cycle. Accompanying this early familiarity with the locale is an awareness of the elements, earth, air, fire and water. Later as his practice developed this latent understanding became enriched by practical knowledge acquired by working directly with living trees. Nash describes the tree as a weave of the four elements; it is seeded in the earth, which is full of minerals, this is the world of matter and solids. Trees need water, air, light and warmth. The cycles from growth to decay and the four elements are components that configure and reconfigure throughout Nash's practice. Colour's vibrancy, blues, reds, blacks, greens and yellows, as experienced in nature at different pitches and in various hues, constantly resonates in Nash's work.

When he was fourteen, at school in Brighton, Nash was thrilled to learn about medieval alchemy and the related theories. This was how the four elements made up all matter – each possessing two possible thermal states and two states of humidity. The substances were thought to be ranked in a descending chain of fire, air and water with earth the lowest and least spiritual. Fire was opposite water, and earth opposite air. The medievalists believed the elements corresponded to the human body's physical constitution and assigned them colours; black bile, yellow bile, phlegm and blood. Imbalances resulted in moods and varied diseases. Furthermore, these related to the four seasons and the ages of man as well as identifying personality types, like sanguine, choleric and so on. When the teacher said 'of course we don't believe in that anymore' Nash remembered 'the thrill popped like a balloon. But the thought stuck.' And it continues to surface.

It resonated again when Nash was in his second year at Kingston School of Art and Design, studying painting. He came across a copy of *The Signature of All Things* by Jacob Boehme, German philosopher and Christian mystic. Nash found the only way to understand it was to make detailed notes to get a gist of its meaning. Among these handwritten sheets is a small diagrammatic response to Boehme's writing about the interrelations of three spiritually embodied principles. Nash responds visually with the basic design principles of the Bauhaus emphasis on the triangle, circle and square. The triangle is a property of fire, the circle is a property of eternal light and divine essentiality and the square is a property of the outward world.

At Brighton College, Nash's secondary school, he was fortunate with his art teacher, Gordon Taylor, whose extensive understanding of art and architecture nurtured and inspired his pupils. Taylor admired Cézanne, whose thinking on form and composition infused his teaching. The A level syllabus had an extensive art history component, and as well as ensuring the students were familiar with the Romanesque, Renaissance and nineteenth-century art

movements he introduced them to the Bauhaus, Dada, Surrealism and post-war American art. Sympathetic to Nash's distaste of the school's academic curriculum and its exclusion of art as a serious subject, he made arrangements for Nash to go to London to see exhibitions at the Tate, Whitechapel and commercial galleries where he encountered work by Robert Rauschenberg and Mark Rothko as well as Peter Blake and Anthony Caro. It was Taylor's suggestion that Nash, in order to satisfy his father in the choice of career, apply for a foundation course in art and design – with the intention of going on to study architecture of course, Taylor explained. This was really a Trojan horse to get into art college.

When thinking about the significance of colour at this early stage in his career Nash recalls the impact Serge Poliakoff, the Franco-Russian Modernist made on him. His later paintings struck him particularly in the way they presented an experience of pure colour and abstraction. These paintings are often referred to as 'silent paintings.' Another fascinating encounter was with Ad Reinhardt's black paintings in the landmark exhibition at the Tate Gallery *Painting and Sculpture of a Decade 54-64*. Nash remembered watching two Americans standing in front of them. He heard them 'saying "wait, wait...there you see, ah there, you see." I thought what the hell are they looking at? And then I did the same and – yes there was the process of optical division. The surface went into three and then it divided again and divided again. My pupils were obviously opening, so that was a very important experience.'

Another significant realisation occurred around this time when Nash saw the Tate Gallery's 1966 retrospective of David Smith, the American sculptor who incorporated the qualities of industrial manufacturing with the language of art. The processes of welding and burnishing steel and iron, combined with his particular absorption of Abstract Expressionism, Cubism and Surrealism to create a new way of making sculpture, made a deep impression on

Nash. He observed: 'Smith's sculptures spoke steel' and recalled the excitement of becoming absorbed by the possibilities of a sculpture that speaks its own language. 'I was already working with wood. I thought, this has got to be a language. There was much to learn about (my) wood as a language.'

From this powerful encounter with Smith's work, Nash knew he had to find his voice through the medium he would make his own. Constantin Brancusi had already made an equally dynamic impression on Nash, beginning with a visit to Paris in 1965. He made two subsequent trips in 1967 and 1969 to spend time absorbing Brancusi's practice and his reconstructed studio. The way Brancusi lived through his work doing absolutely everything himself provided a model for Nash's practice of living, working and doing in Capel Rhiw, the former Methodist chapel where he has lived and worked since the late 1960s. Nash describes him as 'a hero' or a 'Robinson Crusoe of the art world' who similarly had made a new language of sculptural form with stone, wood and in bronze casting.

The assumption that sculpture was permanent as well as static was the prevailing attitude while Nash was a student. There was no discussion or consideration given to the fact that it might change over time or indeed have a specific duration. This attitude came from the formalist approach of an artist like Anthony Caro, who taught at St Martin's School of Art and encouraged his students to make highly finished rigid, solid structures using metal. These sculptures would resist the elements and supposedly last forever, although outdoors, maintenance would be needed to keep their appearance constant. Their high finish did not indicate the processes of their making, and in the landscape they appear alien.

In contrast with the formalist approach, Nash has always shown how the work is made. This includes the history of its fabrication. *Nine Cracked Balls* (1970-71) (see p. 66), made from one piece of ash,

comprises nine roughly hewn spheres. Nash explains how, when he was making this work, he wanted to engage with wood directly. It took a lot of time and although he was excited by it, at first he did not trust the process, remarking:

I wanted to test the method but not thinking I was making art. I didn't see it as making art. It seemed to be too easy and straightforward. It seemed to me to be much too practical be "art", not metaphysical enough, it had to be much more complicated.' What happened in this process was that at a certain point the properties of the wood took control, by cracking and splitting open. This was after Nash had set it aside and more or less forgotten about it. When he 'rediscovered it' he saw that in a way, the work finished itself. This attitude is similar to the sculptor Barry Flanagan's approach when he said: 'Truly, sculpture is always going on. With proper physical circumstances and the visual invitation, one simply joins in and makes the work.'⁴

Flanagan's *pile 3 1967/68* (1967-68) comprises a stack of four simply folded, different coloured hessian cloths. The structural repetition follows a minimalist approach, but the use of material subverts the expectation of hard-edged precision like the raw wood of *Nine Cracked Balls*. These artists were part of the post-war generation who questioned the function of sculpture and its place in society.

Nash describes how an axe functions to determine the way the work is made. He stated:

The axe became my tool. I had a whole load of axes. Different lengths, different weights; sharpened differently, some were deliberately blunt to give a

more hacked and chopped work. There were chisels of course. But not rasps or sandpaper, not the finishing tools. The actual finish was always difficult for me at art college – how do you finish? What is the end? It seemed to be so refined. I found I liked the textures the tools made. Just be honest to the tool, not just honest to the material, but to the means of making it.

When he bought the chapel, he constructed a series of cubes from discarded floorboards and blackboards. He wanted to manufacture them by chopping the wood, avoiding preciousness. The cubes had mitred edges and are held together by wooden pegs. His decision for this way of working was triggered by seeing a fibreglass sculpture by William Tucker at the Tate on which someone had put a footprint. The disruption to the surface interfered with looking, and in effect the sculpture was impossible to 'see'.

Nash explains how when he started making sculptures with wood, he was warned that fresh wood would crack, warp and bend, as if this were a negative property. He made the conceptual decision to embrace the ways it did this. He focused on the process, so that the subject is this imperfection. *Cracking Box* (1979) (see p. 88), for instance, is pegged together to maximise the cracks; *Crack and Warp Column* (1986) (see p. 86) does both. Nash's use of roughly hewn wood to make repeated forms, cubes and spheres responds to the characteristic shapes of Minimalism, maintaining a relation with it while making a riff on its purity. He describes the processes of sawing wood in meditative terms:

You don't just use your arms – you can go right down to your toes to get the rhythm going. I could saw for half-an-hour to an hour at a time, and it would be like a meditation, going through big pieces of wood ... and this fluid, almost circular, spiralling, curving gesture of

movement would be going into keeping the saw cut straight. And the actual wood I was cutting through had been formed in a gesture of process.⁵

Nash's attention on the reception of his work is remarkable. In 1970, when completing postgraduate study at Chelsea School of Art, he was invited to participate in an Arts Council of England exhibition of younger sculptors curated by Roland Brener, one of the generation of sculptors who had studied and then taught at St Martin's. Nash turned it down, aware that this would place him in a particular context. He knew that it was important to have the right occasion for the presentation of his work and was prepared to wait. He was far more concerned in immersing himself in making work, which he was able to do in Blaenau Ffestiniog, free from the pressure of having to jostle for position in London's intensely competitive atmosphere. Keeping his overheads low he managed to have enough money from three days of teaching or odd jobbing to concentrate on making sculpture. He realised how much Lau Tzu's *Tao Te Ching* had affected him. It resonated when he re-read: 'Don't push yourself – wait until you are asked'.

The first solo exhibition came about when Rufus Harris, a school friend with whom he had shared spaces at college, visited and saw the work in the chapel. Harris was en route to see another friend, Gavin Henderson, a musician who had been at Kingston and was directing the York Festival. He wanted two exhibitions included and was on the look-out for an unknown artist for one of them. Consequentially Nash found himself being offered an exhibition on the terms he wanted, without having solicited it. In 1973, during the festival, *Briefly Cooked Apples* opened in York. His wife, the artist Claire Langdown, made posters to advertise the exhibition from a wood carving, which they distributed throughout the town. Nash devised the small accompanying publication, which, unlike a catalogue, was like an artist's book, a poetic document of the

processes of making, hinting at the sculpture's origins. It included drawings of the works exhibited and the tools used to make them, along with delicately balanced lists of trees, and some seemingly random phrases, like 'fresh daily salad', 'this cheese is hard' and 'briefly cooked apples'.

After this first solo show, Nash treated the publications accompanying exhibitions with the same degree of seriousness as he gave to the production of artwork. The genre of artist's books became increasingly relevant for those artists who were sceptical of formalism and wanted to show the processes of art's production. Sol LeWitt, an American Conceptual artist for whom Nash has a high regard, was a leading innovator in this field. LeWitt's book *Four Basic Kinds of Straight Lines* (1969) documents configurations for drawing lines. Nash's practice chimes with LeWitt's artistic strategy of developing recipes to apply in different situations, with varying results.

In 1987 Nash found himself responding directly to a work by LeWitt. Nash was commissioned by The Walker Art Center in Minneapolis to make a new version of *Nature Frame* (1984). Martin Friedman, The Walker's director, had seen *Nature Frame* on the pavement in Tokyo as part of an exhibition. He recognised that the similarity of artistic intention with LeWitt, although the methods were vastly different, would begin a new conversation on geometric purity. *Three x Four x Three* (1984), an open cube structure made in white enamelled aluminium, provided the counterpoise for Nash's new version of the form *Standing Frame* (fig. 2). An artist living close to Minneapolis had a suitable oak on his land that needed felling. Most unusually for the West, they used a horse rather than a tractor to transport the wood from the forest. Nash remarked on how the centuries-old process of labour was reignited by the horse's presence. It brought a different dimension to the activity and extended the dialogue, in an ontological way, between the



two sculptures. Nash made the interior of the frame correspond directly in scale to LeWitt's cubes. Nash's work became popular in the sculpture garden and was seen by some as a giant viewfinder, in conversation with the city's vistas as well as its immediate situation. In 1994 Nash returned to rejuvenate it by charring it black, as the wood had slowly faded to become lost in its surroundings. In 2016 many were sad to see it leave the garden – as the wood decayed, it had become unsafe.

In 1986 David Nash drew a map to depict the extent of his embodied visualisation of the land, fields, hills, rocky outcrops, streams, rivers and surroundings of his immediate locale at Blaenau Ffestiniog. The drawing is made by repeating the nouns in lines to denote the contours and shape of the land and all that can be found within it. Boulder, path, rocks, grass, sheep, mine shaft, slate, railway track, house, street, pub, shop, playing field, road and so on document the extent of his inhabitation. It is both a record of his recalled observation and concrete poetry (fig. 3). On the drawing-map, Nash wrote: 'By making this map I found the boundary of my personal parish, a form of extended physical body; the area in which I feel in direct contact with a sense of home.'

Wooden Boulder began its existence as sculpture in Nash's hands in 1978, when his father informed him that a 200-year-old oak tree standing near a footpath was unstable and dangerous. Its owner had decided to cut it down. It coincided with a film project on Nash proposed by Peter Browne and funded by the Arts Council of England. Browne's idea for the opening sequence was to film a tree coming down, which Nash would then make into a sculpture. This film was screened during the *British Art Now* exhibition at the Guggenheim. Other artists had experimented with film to record

production, to show the duration of sculpting in action and to stand as a work in its own right. For example, the Land art films made by artists with Gerry Schum for German television included Barry Flanagan's *a hole in the sea* (1969), Richard Long's *Walking a straight 10-mile line forwards and backwards and shooting every half mile* (1969) and Robert Smithson's *Fossil Quarry Mirror with Four Mirror Displacements, Cayuga Lake, NY, USA* (1969).

It follows that the journey of the rough sphere, from the felled oak to the studio and then to exhibition, could be part of the work. What actually ensued is a remarkable set of circumstances, which have continued to unfold for forty years. After felling the tree with a chainsaw, Nash abandoned his plan to carve the sphere with an axe because the cuts did not relate to the mass. Instead he continued to use the chainsaw, making the largest sphere he could from the base of the trunk. The surface showing the marks of the tool is integral to his practice. *Wooden Boulder* is the subject of films, photographs and drawings. It is the subject of text. It is a bronze cast. Nash's transformation of the oak tree to *Wooden Boulder* continues to unfold.

When Nash gave a lecture at Maidstone School of Art in the early 1970s, he showed a group of photographs taken around Blaenau Ffestiniog, including a river in the estuary. He explained that he was like the numerous little streams; metaphorically, each suggests a possible idea, or a different direction. All the streams eventually come together to form a river. At this point, he explained, he was still at the stage of trying ideas: 'trusting the trial and error approach would bind to form the momentum and consistency to become a clearly defined individual river which would grow volume from experience as it descended towards the sea.'

In 1999 he showed a gallery director the River Dwyryd in full surge near where *Wooden Boulder* lay in a small stream, and said that was how his work was progressing. The work was washed into the sea in

Fig. 2 *Standing Frame*, 1987, white oak. Collection Walker Art Centre, Minneapolis. With Sol LeWitt, *Three x Four x Three*, 1984.

2002 by a storm. Its momentum perpetuated its return ten days later. It has disappeared and reappeared in 2002, 2003, 2008 and 2013. The boulder continues to have its own life. Nash's artistic vocabulary continues to excavate and develop the language of wood. We are generously invited to engage with his language and, in so doing, extend our own experience of wood, nature and the cycles of becoming.

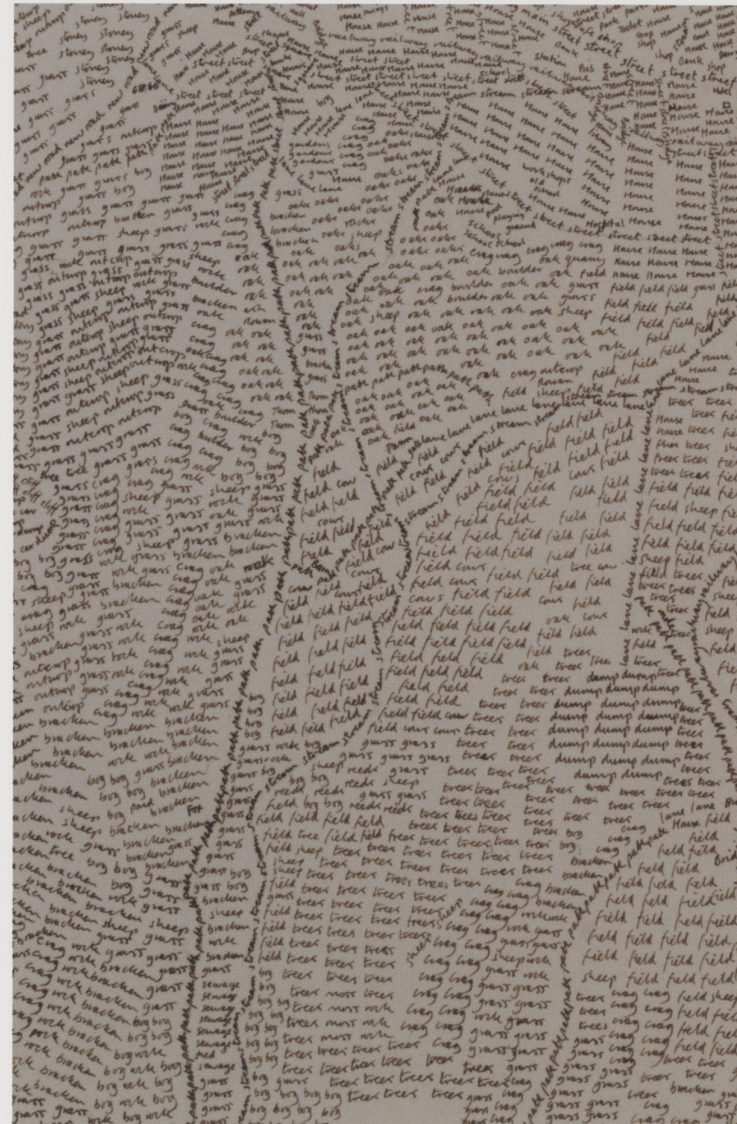
Unless otherwise noted all quotations are from recent discussions with David Nash, whom I would like to thank for his remarkable support throughout this process.

I would also like to thank Amgueddfa Cymru for giving me the opportunity to develop a short essay I wrote on David Nash's work for an exhibition at the Fondation Fernet-Branca, Saint Louis, France 2018.

Footnotes

- ¹ William Tucker, *The Condition of Sculpture*, Press Release Hayward Gallery, 1975.
- ² The exhibiting artists were Alan Green, John Edwards, Tim Head, Keith Milow, David Nash, Hugh O'Donnell, Nicholas Pope and Simon Read. The exhibition ran from 18 January to 9 March 1980.
- ³ As a sixth form student, I thought, if a tree like this inside a gallery, can be art, then art is amazing.
- ⁴ Barry Flanagan. "Sculpture made visible: In discussion with Gene Baro." *Studio International*, October 1969, p. 122.
- ⁵ David Nash in *David Nash*, Thames & Hudson, London, 2009, p. 13.

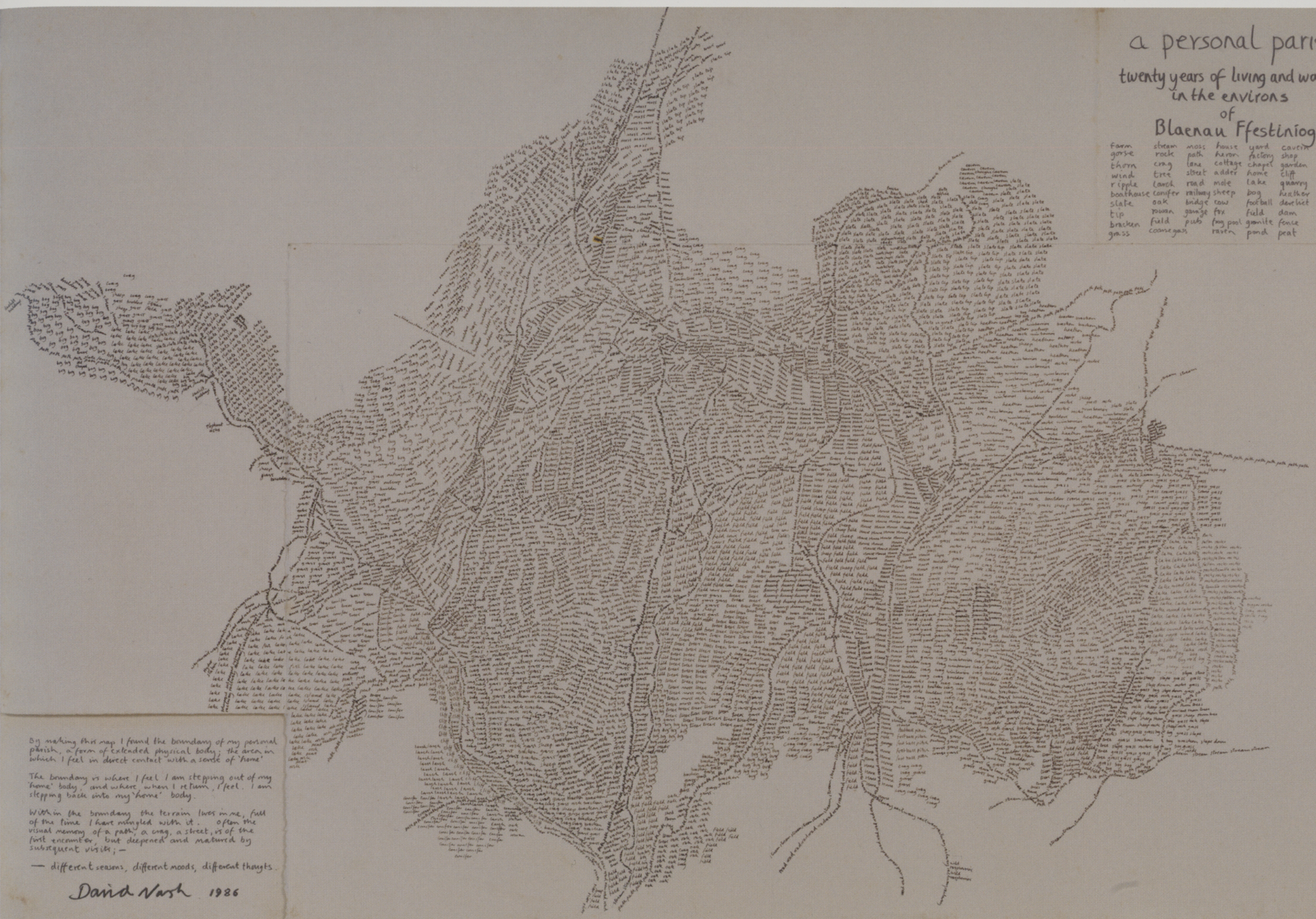
Fig. 3 Left, A Personal Parish (detail); right, A Personal Parish, 1986, ink and graphite on paper (produced for Common Ground's touring exhibition *Parish Maps*).



a personal parish
twenty years of living and walking
in the environs

of
Blaenau Ffestiniog

farm	stream	mass	house	yard	cave	gunpowder
gorse	road	lake	cottage	factory	shop	rock
thorn	crag	tree	street	adder	garden	path
wind	land	road	mole	home	cliff	river
ripple	conifer	railway	sheep	lake	quarry	incense
boathouse	oak	bridge	cow	bag	heather	willow
slate	moor	gauge	fox	field	dam	willow
tip	field	pub	dog	pool	peat	willow
broken	coarse	raven	pond			



On making this map I found the boundaries of my personal parish, a form of extended physical body, the area in which I feel in direct contact with a sort of 'home'.

The boundary is where I feel I am stepping out of my 'home' body, and where, when I return, I feel I am stepping back into my 'home' body.

Within the boundary the terrain lives in me, full of the time I have mingled with it. I feel the visual memory of a path, a way, a street, is of the first encounter, but deepened and matured by subsequent visits; -

— different seasons, different moods, different thoughts.

David Nash 1986