

Artist Statement **Sniedze Janson-Rungis**

The Tree Where the Sun was Born

The appearance of the plague in our midst has emerged as a tipping point in the future of our culture, the direction of our tenure as humanity on earth – just as the equinox in our solar cycle marks a tipping point, an inexorable moment - the time at which a change or an effect cannot be stopped.

When the pandemic hit, I began to search through any documented response by artists to previous plague times; this naturally led me to Camus' *The Plague*.

Camus writes:

"In the midst of hate, I found there was, within me, an invincible love. In the midst of tears, I found there was, within me, an invincible smile. In the midst of chaos, I found there was, within me, an invincible calm. I realized, through it all, that in the midst of winter, I found there was, within me, an invincible summer. And that makes me happy. For it says that no matter how hard the world pushes against me, within me, there's something stronger – something better, pushing right back."

"The Tree Where the Sun is Born" shelters just such a shining core: our very own star, our light, our source of life - our Sun. As we gaze on it, my hope is that the piece activates within the viewer a recognition and connection with that "invincible calm ... that invincible summer" that Camus discovered, and which is concealed in our very center.

Solar Totem Tree

WENDELL BERRY, author, environmental activist and farmer, writes:

*"When despair grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting for their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free."*

The eternal cycle of the sun with the autumnal equinox, darkness begins its ascent over light. When despair grows in me, I also go into the woods, and begin the search for treasures to soon assemble into sculptures. The myths of my Latvian childhood, like an ancient GPS, whisper the way in my ear. All around me I sense the presence of living spirits.

When I make art, I 'rest in the grace of the world': my blood pressure harmonizes, my anxiety levels drop, I stop grinding my teeth, I feel happy, free.

Sometimes I feel guilty, like I should be accomplishing something more concrete, something 'useful' - like building a great big wall maybe ...

But then I comfort myself with the thought that at least with my episodes of calm contentment, I do not add to the storm of depression and fear that hovers on our horizon.

My hope is that the viewer - after glancing at the "Solar Totem" - will also be transported, however briefly, to a different realm - where they will remember how our beloved and dependable Sun engraves an eternal, whirling circle into the rhythm of our lives.