

Bonsai, a Celebration of Life Through a Story of Survival

by Scott Barboza
Houston Bonsai Society

There is an ancient tree I know that lives in a pot in Washington D.C. It was collected in Japan in 1625 - the year Charles I, King of England ascended to the throne. Centuries passed, kings and countries came and went, and the tree lived on under the care of generations of owners. In 1945 the tree lived in Hiroshima in the garden of Masaru Yamaki. Although the bomb was dropped less than two miles from his home, Mr. Yamaki and the tree survived. The old gentlemen donated the tree to America in honor of the bicentennial celebration in 1976. You can see it today in the National Bonsai Collection in the company of countless fascinating specimens.

And so it is with the living art of bonsai, a celebration of life through a story of survival, reflecting the natural world in miniature. The artist sculpts the story of the tree by nurturing, careful pruning, and wiring. It is a patient art performed in close partnership with the tree and is never really finished in a single lifetime. Such an art demands a considered view over a casual glance to uncover the meaning hidden beneath the living branches.

The earliest depictions of bonsai are found in Chinese and Japanese murals from the 8th and 12th centuries. After World War II the tradition became increasingly accessible to western cultures. Now artists from around the world have adapted bonsai to their unique natural perspective. The view of a grand old bald cypress, twisted and shorn by countless storms and hurricanes, is a uniquely Gulf Coast view of nature often reflected in the trees of local artists.



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Houston's own community of bonsai growers will share some of their work on Sat., Oct. 11, "A Day of Bonsai" at Mercer Botanical Gardens open to the public. Two of the most respected western artists, Boonyarat Manakitivipart and Pedro Morales, will lead demonstrations and workshops throughout the day. Local artists will be available to help you learn to successfully grow these fascinating trees. Come and view a bit of history and, perhaps, bring a piece of it home for yourself.

The Houston Bonsai Society meets on the first Wednesday of every month at 7:00PM at the West Gray Activity Center, 1475 West Gray, Houston, TX 77019. All are welcome. www.houstonbonsaisociety.com