

TREE BURLS

Burls form when a tree responds to stress, injury or infection. They create dense, swirling layers of wood that grow in an irregular way. When I look closely, the texture shows:

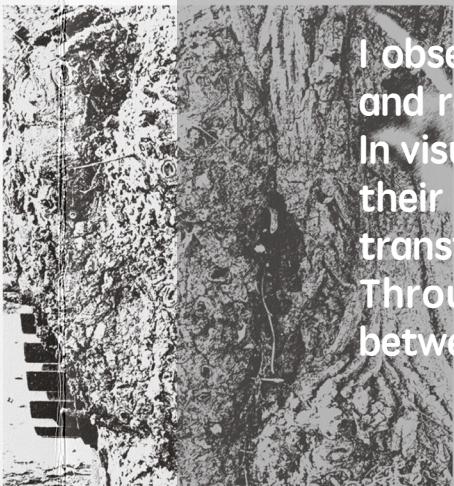
Curved, circular rings that fold over each other

Compressed fibres with no clear direction

A strong three-dimensional surface, rising out from the trunk

Unpredictable patterns, different from normal tree bark

This gives the burl a unique visual rhythm. It is organic but also chaotic, and the texture feels heavy and tightly packed. These qualities make burls interesting as a source for abstract visual forms.



PROJECT 2 Making the Invisible Visible

I observed that trees bear many scars, each telling a different story and reflecting the relationship between trees and their environment. In visual experiments, I extracted textures from these scars, exploring their sense of direction, rhythm, and irregularity, and attempted to transform these "hidden stories" into abstract visual representations. Through studying tree scars, I aimed to explore the relationship between trees and the city.

TREE BURLS

37.318317° N, -121.951172° W



INTRODUCTION

What is "Making the Invisible Visible"?

In “The 99% Invisible City”(Mars & Kohlstedt, 2020), the authors point out that cities are full of details that we almost never notice in daily life.

Once we begin to pay attention to these details, it becomes hard to understand why we ignored them before. On any city street, there are many small design elements that exist everywhere around us.

Inspiration

Inspired by this idea, I started to look at everyday elements that are visible but rarely interpreted.

During my observations, I chose tree scars as my main subject. These scars are not designed signs, but marks that are left behind as trees grow, get damaged, and interact with their surrounding environment over time.

PROCESS

Collection

Why Trees? Why Scars?

I chose trees because they are one of the most common living elements in the city, yet they are often overlooked.

We walk past them every day, but rarely stop to think about their history or the conditions they live in.

Tree scars interested me because they are visible signs of past events.

These marks are left by pruning, damage, pressure from the environment, or human actions.

Unlike official signs or labels, tree scars are not meant to communicate, but they still carry information. They witnessed the growth process of the trees.

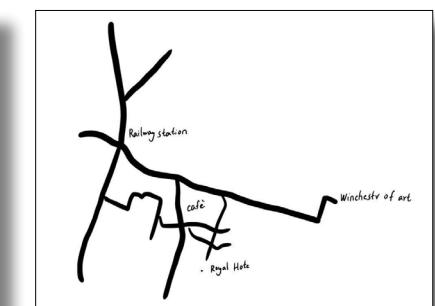
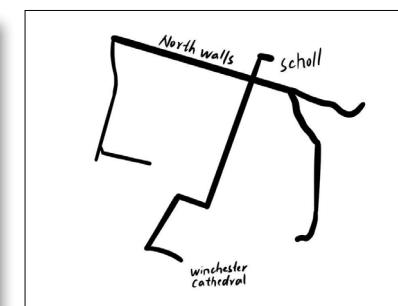
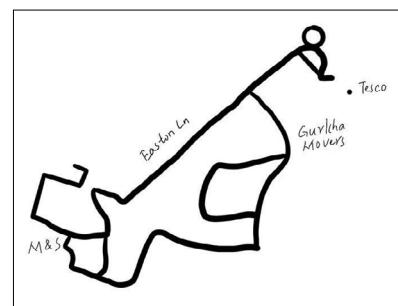
By looking closely at these scars, I realised that they record how trees survive and adapt within the urban environment.

In this way, tree scars become quiet traces of interaction between nature and city life.



After defining tree scars as my focus, I began to structure my observation through everyday movement.

Rather than searching for trees in unfamiliar locations, I chose to work with three routes that I regularly walk in my daily life.



PROCESS

Record Photos

After observing and photographing three daily walking routes, I categorized the scars I captured into three types:

tree burls;

Tree burls are irregular growths formed through natural healing processes over time.

scars left by human pruning or cutting;

Cutting or pruning scars have clear edges and flat surfaces, showing human intervention and urban maintenance.

human carvings and graffiti.

Carving and graffiti marks reflect human expression and turn trees into informal carriers of messages.



PROCESS

Extracting Visual Language

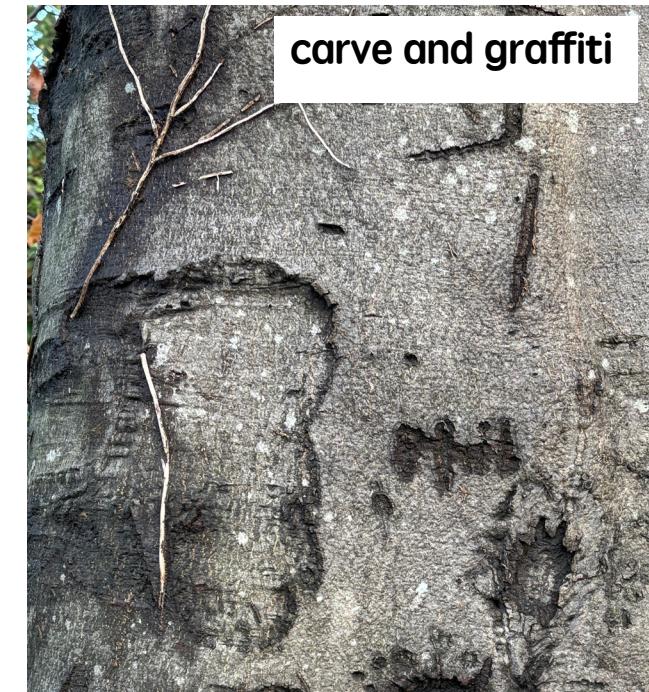
After observing, photographing, and classifying the tree scars along three routes, I began to ponder: how to transform this kind of "invisible information" into an art form with visual language? Tree scars themselves possess very rich textural features, such as rough fibers, twisted lines, cut surfaces, or linear structures left by engravings. These textures all have a strong sense of direction, rhythm, and repetition. By analyzing these textures, I hope can transform them into abstract visual forms.



Curved and compact growth rings.
A strong three-dimensional surface,
rising out from the trunk. Unpredictable
patterns, different from normal tree bark



Flat surface with straight edges.
Clear contrast between inner and
outer layers.



Sharp linear marks.
Irregular depth and rhythm.

PROCESS

Why Texture?

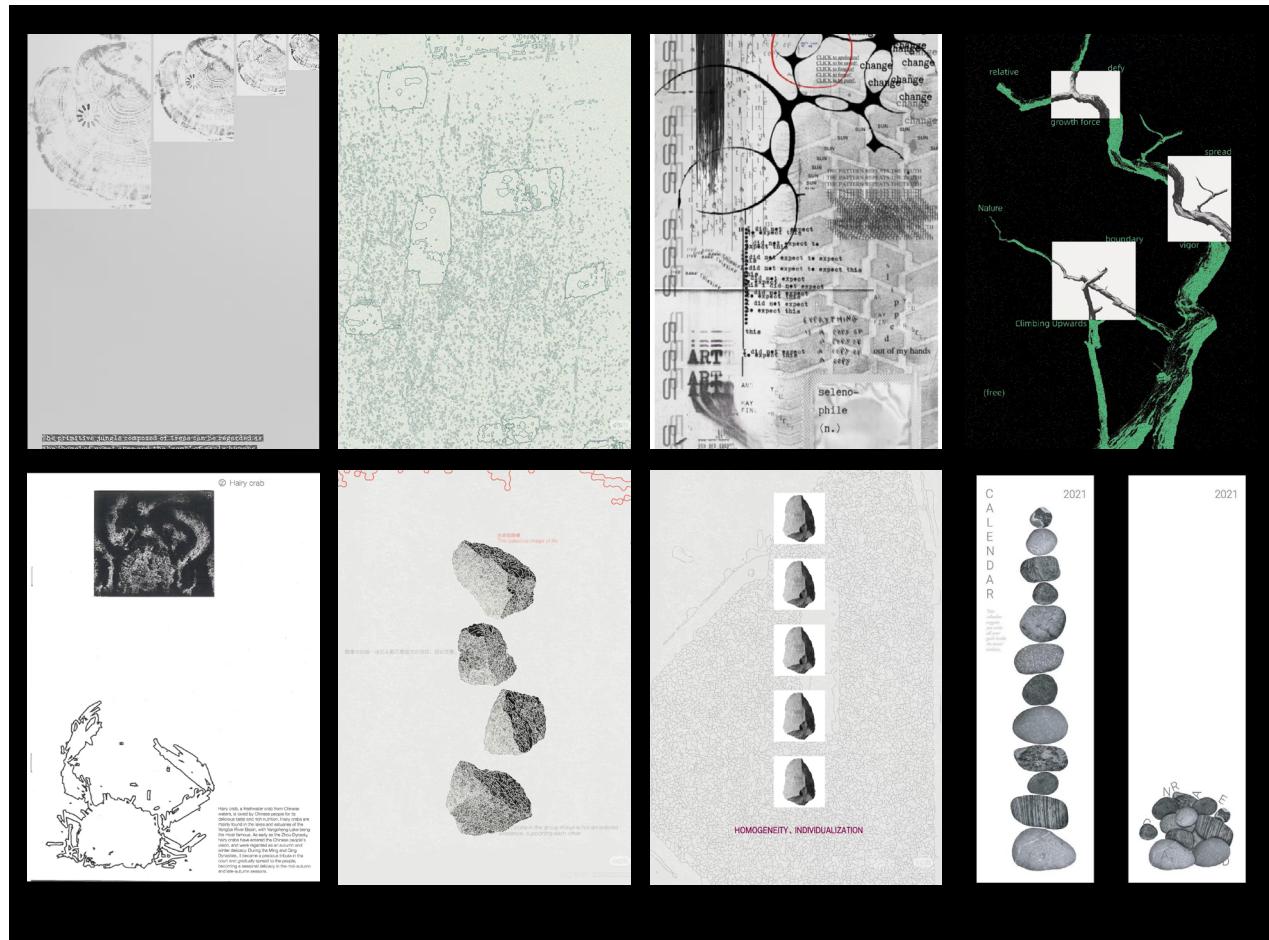
I decided to work with texture because the scars on trees already look like natural patterns. When I looked at them closely, I noticed that each type of scar has a very different surface: some are rough and bumpy, some are smooth and flat from cutting, and some have sharp lines from human carving. These textures are very visual, and they give me a lot of material to work with.

Using texture also helps me focus on the “details that people usually ignore”.

If I only show the whole tree, the scar becomes too small to notice. So choosing texture is not just for visual effect. It is because texture is the part that carries the story. It is simple, clear, and strong enough to turn into a visual artwork.

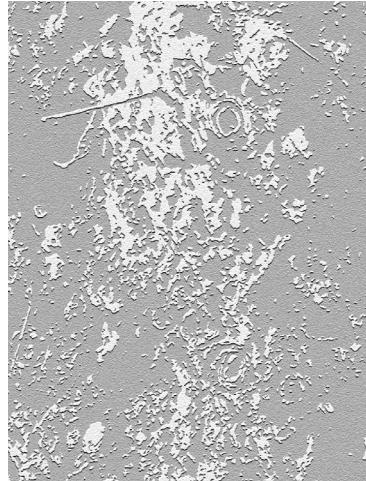
Visual Reference

To help me better translate scars into lines, shapes, etc., I looked for some visual inspiration.



PROCESS

Visual Experiment

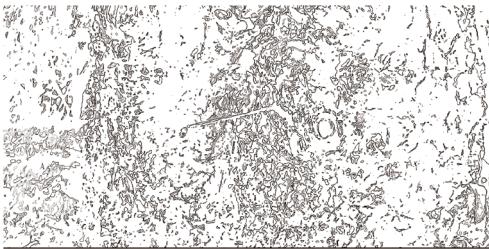


The visual tests helped me decide that the project needs an abstract, texture-based style. By removing extra details and keeping only the scar patterns, the viewer can focus on the natural lines and shapes. This turns the tree scars into a readable visual pattern instead of just a photo.

The purpose of this work is to turn the hidden details in tree scars into clear visual patterns. Tree scars record growth, damage and healing, but we often overlook them. By extracting and simplifying these textures, I want viewers to notice the information that exists on the surface of trees.

I use texture-based patterns because they keep the natural rhythm and direction of the scars while making them easier to read. This set of patterns aims to draw attention back to the small but meaningful traces of life in the city.

OUTCOME



TREE BURLS

Burls form when a tree responds to stress, injury or infection. They create dense, swirling layers of wood that grow in an irregular way. When I look closely, the texture shows...



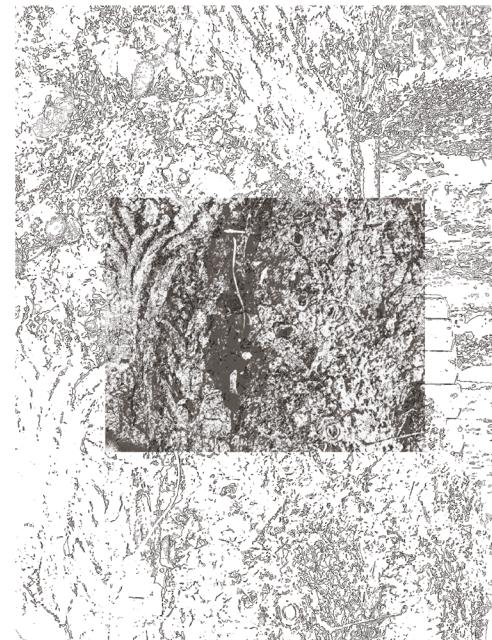
Curved, circular fibers that fold over each other

Compressed fibers with no clear direction

A strong, three-dimensional surface, rising out from the trunk

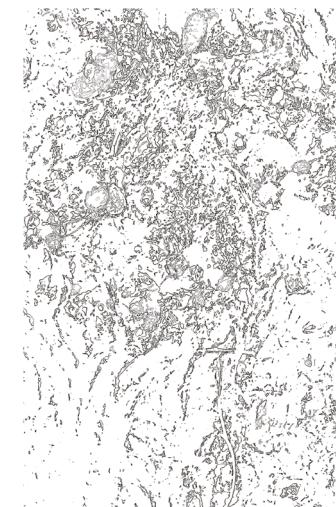
Unpredictable patterns, different from normal tree wood

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TREE BURLS

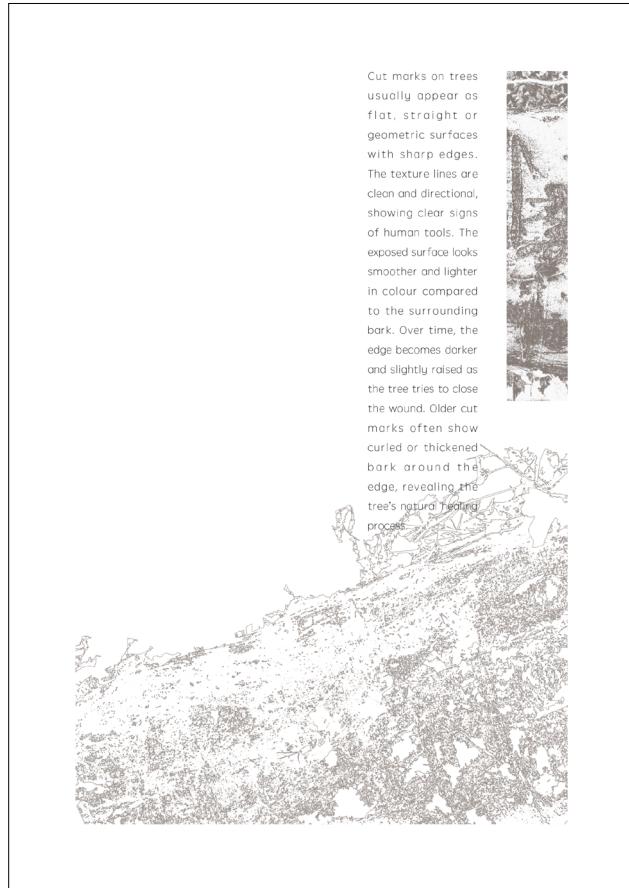
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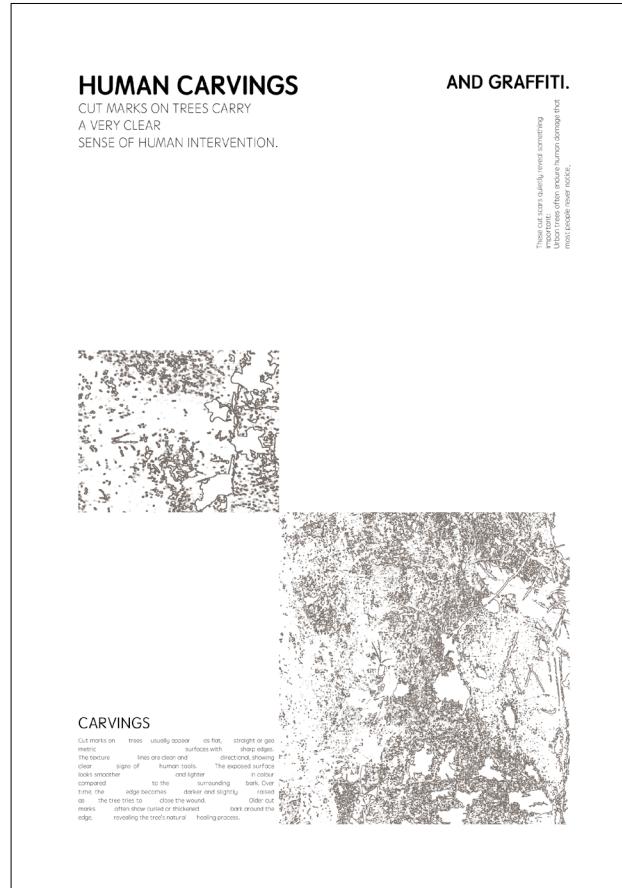
TREE BURLS

Tree burls are solid tissue formed secondary through cell multiplication after tree injury, serving to protect the damaged area. Based on their cause, they can be divided into two types: those caused by external force (injury and stress) caused by biological infection. The primary cause of tree burls is mechanical damage to sieve tube breakage and resulting in localized nutrient overgrowth, when the latter is forced by pathogenic infection. Anatomically, they are characterized by a dense, twisted fibrous structure, high oil content in the xylem, and high density of vessels. Their main functions include blocking pathogen invasion and accumulating nutrients to promote repair. They are fundamentally different from animal cancers, and do not cause systemic diseases.

OUTCOME



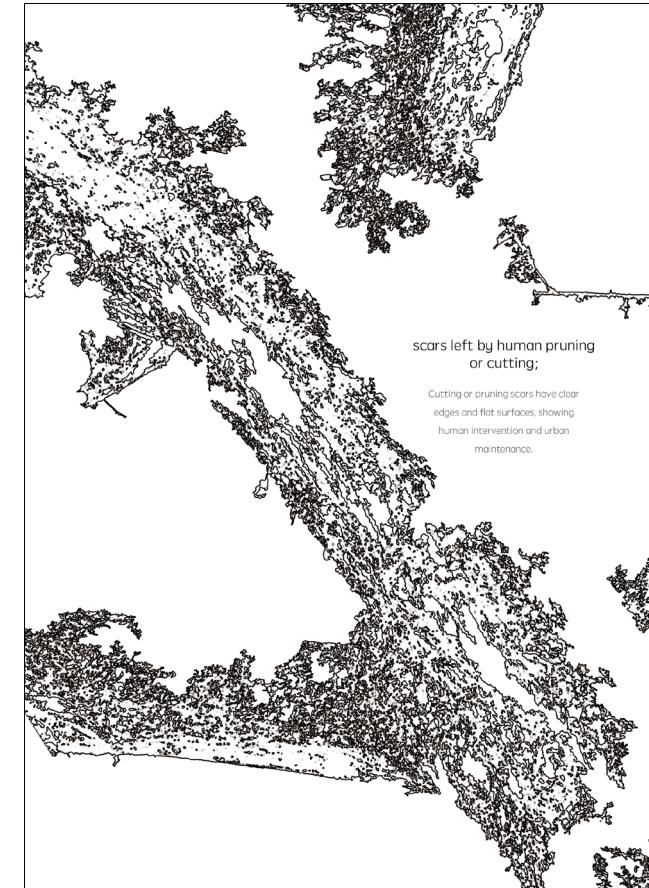
Cut marks on trees usually appear as flat, straight or geometric surfaces with sharp edges. The texture lines are clean and directional, showing clear signs of human tools. The exposed surface looks smoother and lighter in colour compared to the surrounding bark. Over time, the edge becomes darker and slightly raised as the tree tries to close the wound. Older cut marks often show curled or thickened bark around the edge, revealing the tree's natural healing process.



HUMAN CARVINGS CUT MARKS ON TREES CARRY A VERY CLEAR SENSE OF HUMAN INTERVENTION.

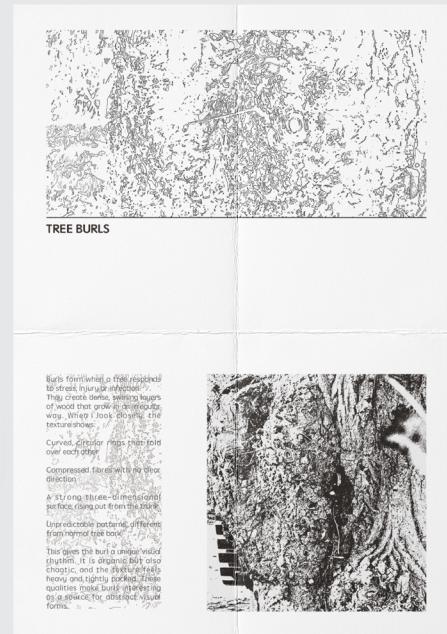
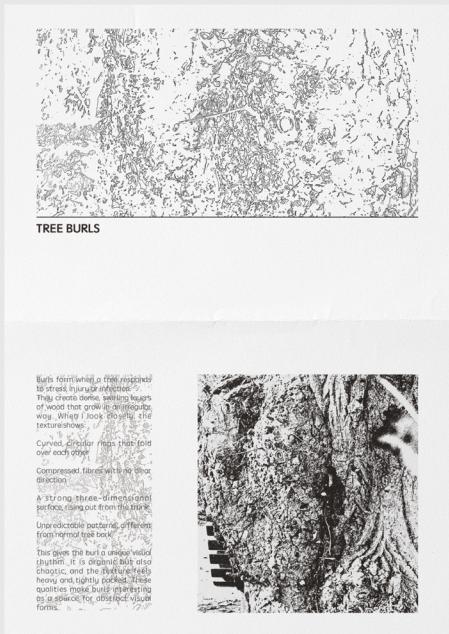
AND GRAFFITI.

These cut scars usually reveal something about trees after endure human damage tree most leave their marks.



scars left by human pruning
or cutting;
Cutting or pruning scars have clear
edges and flat surfaces, showing
human intervention and urban
maintenance.

OUTCOME



REFLECTION

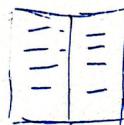
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sketchbook

- Cutting scars
- Tree burls
- Graffiti scars

⇒ File



Record? booklet? zine.



project 2: CDV

individual basis

- Rust
- water traces
- small advertise - HK - booklet

▼

collect individual basis

collect and decode ~~tree~~ overlooked
or "invisible" signal in everyday environment

✓

Tree scars

• Mud v

• Graffiti

• light.

• chimney v

• shadow.

• grow of plants

“tree wounds”

response of trees and
what you can do

“causes of tree injury”

- 1 broken branches;
- 2 impacts, abrasions and scrapes.
- 3 animal damage
- 4 insect attack
- 5 fire

Map:

- ① Tesco
- ② railway station → collection
- ③ school and center