

“The great cathedral of magnificent trees...these are my personal relationships...ones I would cherish through the years.”

George Nakashima was a gifted Japanese American architect and woodworker, a master craftsman, whose work received international recognition, including the Third order of the Sacred Treasurer by the Emperor of Japan in 1983. He worked with architect Antonin Raymond in Japan and integrated traditional Japanese theories of architecture with the more progressive European ideas of Le Corbusier. In the mid thirties he volunteered to work with the Golconde project in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. He was drawn to the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and became a member of the Ashram. - *“The answer to all my searches, finally conferring meaning on my life”*. There he was given the name Sundaranda, meaning “one who delights in beauty”.

During his lifetime, he often spoke about giving new life to trees, and his creative development followed a path through several different cultures and philosophies. So in work, as in living, Nakashima was a citizen of the world, a Hindu Catholic Shaker Japanese American.... but above all he thought of himself as an intermediary between heaven and earth, joining hands with nature rather than destroying and dominating her.”

The Altars for Peace / The Peace Table

In 1984 when George Nakashima received an unusually large and beautiful walnut log, as he pondered what to do with this phenomenal gift from nature, he had the vision to make something truly marvellous, a creation that would be, as he later said, “The most extraordinary piece of furniture ever made...a symbiosis of nature and man in the deepest spiritual sense.” Moreover he hoped that this remarkable work would in some mystic way bring peace to the world.

“as a genuine expression of nature and an act of beauty...Peace in a tangible form, instead of an abstract idea and an absence of war...the pure spirit of Peace for which all people yearn and the world politicians spurn....A shrine for all people and owned by no one.”

He decided to make not one, but a series, of works truly global in concept from the log: six magnificent altars to Peace, one for each continent, each to be placed in a site consonant with its meaning and purpose.

“A while back there appeared a great bole of a tree, a walnut. It was about five feet in diameter at the small end, about seven at the flare, and twelve long with extraordinary characteristics. In a small but firm voice the bole asked to be realized; two adjoining slabs opened to make an extraordinary table, roughly twelve feet by the same dimension wide, weighing almost 1 ton. It was a dream- An Altar for Peace!

Gradually a few people became interested in the project and suggested we make six altars – one for each continent.

It will be a symbol, a token of man's aspirations for a creative and beautiful peace, free of political overtones, an expression of love for his fellow man...Enthusiastic contagion would be useful, as

peace in the world is uppermost in our consciousness. it must be a joyous peace, not a fear or absence of war ... It is a question of surrender. A surrender to the Divine Consciousness to end in a most beautiful aura of love."

October 1, 1984

- The first Altar for Peace was consecrated and installed at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City in 1986.
- The second Table, built to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations in 1995, was made from the same monumental black walnut tree as the first and blessed in the same Cathedral. After serving its mission as a unifying presence at The Hague Appeal for Peace in May 1999, it was finally placed and inaugurated in the Russian Academy of Art in Moscow in 2001.
- The third Table, the Peace Table for Asia, was meanwhile built and was dedicated in Auroville in 1996, where it first was housed in Bharat Nivas, The Indian Pavilion of Auroville's International Zone. Later it was shifted to the Unity Pavilion, where it is awaiting the completion of the Hall of Peace, which will be its permanent home.
- Presently the fourth Peace Table is under construction and is to be placed in the Desmond Tutu Peace Centre in Cape Town, South Africa.

We now foresee the development of an active Peace work emerging connecting the Peace Tables and feel that Auroville, with its foundation in the ideals of Human Unity and Unity in Diversity can take a clear lead in making this happen. The realization of the International Zone of Auroville with the Unity Pavilion and the Hall of Peace together with the National Cultural Pavilions creates a base for work, study and research, which will promote an active international hub for this work of the realization of Peace, not only for Humanity but finally in the context of the Earth and all its beings.

Hall of Peace

The Hall of Peace is part of the Unity pavilion Complex and is designed by Aurovilian architects Piero and Gloria Cicionesi, who write: *" We met architect Nakashima several times, and had with him a very deep connection, admiration and love. We feel this will be the appropriate place for the table he offered to humanity as a prayer for the peace of the world. Without peace there will never be real Human Unity. The Peace Table is not only a very beautiful piece of art; it is also a beautiful symbol for the International Zone."*

The conception of the environment of the Hall of Peace was also inspired by the "Light Matter expo" by the Aurovilian artist Pierre Legrand . The intention is to create a simple and artistic collective environment that generates an atmosphere of Peace, inwardness, lightness and beauty. The Hall of Peace will be actively used for dialogues and meetings by the Auroville Community, as well as for other workshops and activities connected to its purpose. This space endeavours to hold the qualities of depth and harmony, so essential for a real mutual search and exchange.

The Foundation ceremony for the Hall of Peace took place on the 12th October 2008. On the 28th of February 2009 as the pillars of the Hall were completed, the Table was brought out for the day, placed on a bed of surrender roses, and celebrated with a beautiful meditation on the site. The construction of the building is ongoing and is hoped to be fully completed by 2012.

Looking around the world today, everywhere one sees a need for Peace. The desire for peace and harmony between individuals and nations lies at the heart of virtually every human being. Yet as

individuals we feel powerless to achieve it – except in the immediate context of our own family, workplace or group. The Peace Tables, placed one on each continent can act not only as focal centres for gatherings and activities, but radiate vibrations of Peace, not only to individuals who come into their presence, but much further afield, to all humanity - like the ripples on a lake's surface.

The friendliness of light
arrives through the hours
people speak the translucence
born within

the peace of the omnipotent force
the peace of perfect communion
the peace of integral awakening

highlighted poems by Anu Majumdar
parts of the text from Mira Nakashimas book “Nature Form & Spirit”