



## “Variable Directions” by James Hatley

### Artist Statement:



In which direction should we look? “Variable Directions” is a sculptural meditation on the nature of finding our direction, of living with orientation, within a human and more-than-human world. Many indigenous traditions speak of the specificity of directions—north, south, east, west, above, below, within. The Abrahamic traditions in turn insistently direct us beyond the place in which we are at home to the habitations of other persons, other creatures and even to the throne of The Most High. In “Variable Directions,” all of these directions and more are at play. The sculpture is a wind vane but one without any indication of the points of the compass. Rather the work trembles and changes its orientation with the breezes playing through the east field of the Adkins Arboretum. The observer must decide for her or himself the senses of these wind-found

directions.

“Variable Directions” in its very form and matter witnesses the way in which trees offer themselves to the human gaze and to human making. Materials for the sculpture were gathered in the main from branches that fell in Salisbury during a winter blizzard earlier in the year. In making use of this downfall, the sculpture plays with the linearity and equilibrium of branches. Each arboreal component of the sculpture indicates how trees

grow in lines of force establishing a dynamic balance between the upward thrust of growth and the downward pull of gravity. The top section of the sculpture remains aloft merely by the dint of its having formerly balanced one side of its growth against the other. This section is not fixed upon the pole in any manner except through balance.

The sculpture can also be viewed from a distance, as its lines become like a drawing inscribed on a page of meadow. Brought into the winds and weathers of a field, the lines composing the form of “Variable Directions” offer themselves as a perching site for birds, as an object of investigation for curious bees, or as an invitation to contemplation on the part of human onlookers. Viewing the sculpture in its surroundings invites reverie, an attentiveness open to the many senses and images of the meadow—the black flicking of a black snake’s tongue, the sudden spring into flight of a dragonfly from a green stem, the fleshy leaves of pokeberry brushing against one’s legs, the shiver in the body as it registers a tick crawling on its skin.

#### Artist Bio:

James Hatley is a professor at Salisbury University where he teaches environmental philosophy and aesthetics. Hatley also earned a masters in studio art in 1980 from the University of Montana where he studied ceramic sculpture with Rudi Autio and Ken Little.