



Woods to Where Else

Ideas, investigations and inspiration
King's Wood – Challock



stour
valley
creative
partnership

A Stour Valley Creative Publication

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Clare Smith - untitled

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Woods to Where Else Pull-out



Background



Stour Valley Creative Partnership is made up of environmental conservationists, artists, educators and landscape managers*. The partnership formed in 2015 to promote and support thoughtful, inspiring and creative engagement with the environment of King's Wood.

We provide opportunities for local artists, communities and arts/education agencies to experience, develop and share artistic practices in this special public space.

Whether participant or audience, we want people of all ages and abilities to be inspired and challenged by the magic of King's Wood and to gain a deeper appreciation and understanding of our complex relationship with the environment.

King's Wood

King's Wood is a large, ancient wood just outside Ashford, Kent. With open public access throughout, it is a landscape with a long history. Hidden within it is a Neolithic burial mound, and the fallow deer that can occasionally be glimpsed are a reminder of its history as royal hunting woods. Today people enjoy the space in different way and for different reasons; for pleasure, health and inspiration.

There are many ancient trees throughout, while plantations of beech, conifer and sweet chestnut are visual reminders that it continues to be working woodland. Sweet-chestnut is coppiced on rotation for fencing products. Areas of trees are cut to their base, which open up the ground to light, allowing ground flora and specialist wildlife species to flourish. The coppiced trees regrow and the whole process starts again - a process of dynamic visual and environmental changes.

King's Wood is also synonymous with the creative arts and education. It is a place where many diverse ideas and responses to our environment are explored, created and experienced and where artworks can be discovered. This includes several sculptures commissioned by Stour Valley Arts (SVA) 1993-2014. SVCP have secured this legacy; looking after the artworks in the woods, on the sculpture trail, and in creating the SVA archives held at the University for the Creative Arts – Canterbury.

* Stour Valley Creative Partnership (SVCP):
Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership, Forestry England, University for the Creative Arts,
University of Kent, Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty



Tabula3 by Anthony Heywood and Uwe Derksen – installed 2017

Woods to Where Else

This booklet is the result of artists' research and development work exploring the Woods to Where Else Concept (WWe); the starting point for this project.

Led by artist Mavernie Cunningham, seven artists spent time in King's Wood taking part in a series of planned, participatory walks, creative workshops and group discussions. The group was varied in age, background, experience and artistic practice, but they bonded rapidly (the food helped) and were stimulated by their different experiences, perspectives and thoughts around the WWe concept and own responses to the woods. Each artist also had a short residency in the Forest Studio, allowing them to have a deeper more personal experience of the woods, to develop their ideas and work.

There was no requirement to produce artefacts, but the artists were asked to present their responses, alongside presentations by guests Dr. Terry Perk and Adam Chodzko, at the Woods to Where Else Symposium at the University for the Creative Arts in 2018.

The booklet and pull-out celebrates and shares the diversity of artistic practice, approaches and ideas that was brought to the project and emerged from this process. It has been designed to provide artists and educators of all age groups, with a practical and stimulating resource that can both inform and encourage new creative engagement with King's Wood, or other 'natural' environments. The pull-out includes a map for planning visits to King's Wood and suggests a variety of fairly simple starting points for artistic exploration, all inspired by the WWe artists.

From a reflection on cultural representations to personal experiences and questions about our relationship with nature, there is food for thought to be found within these pages and among the trees.



First walk with WWe artists



Woods to Where Else Concept

King's Wood has always been a working wood, a cultured landscape marking an interface of natural resource and human activity.

Stour Valley Creative Partnerships seeks to explore this ecological tension between nature and cultivation and to examine and question the identity of the woods as a purely natural and harmonious environment.

Thinking about the woods as a site of industry and labour, rather than simply a pastoral space of natural beauty, this project will look at the woods both historically and in its present context.

From the production of timber to a site of leisure and recreation King's Wood is inherently ideological; the woods serve as a hub in a network of intertwined economic and ecological movements and distributions, in which nature becomes material and moves outwards beyond the woods to be used and employed elsewhere, whilst human activity enters into it, traversing through it and affecting its ecology.

This economic and ecological dance of nature and industry that creates a distinct 'time' for the woods, one that defines its territory as constantly shifting and changing, a poetics of visible and invisible forces that continually reshape it.

Ideas, investigations and inspiration

T e r y P e r k

Re-negotiating Nature

"If the landscape changes, then I don't know who I am either. The landscape is a refracted autobiography. As it disappears you lose your sense of self." Iain Sinclair

What does it mean to talk about nature? Whether violent, imposing, tranquil or sublime, we often describe nature through language that implies an intrinsic entanglement with human activity, as a force within which a sense of the human spirit is intimately entwined and with a struggle for self, power and the assertion of will. This idea of nature's entanglement with humanity is at the heart of our ecological understanding of ourselves and growingly serves as a resource for artists' exploring our sense of place in the world.

From 16th October 2003 to the 21st March 2004, London's Tate Modern played host to Olafur Eliasson's dramatic *Weather Project*. Fourth in the series of Unilever sponsored art commissions for the museum. *The Weather Project* presented an industrial image of a setting sun, constructed inside the building. Viewed through a haze of smog, the image was created by way of half-circle or mon-frequency lights mounted behind semi-transparent material, in the internal façade of the Tate's cavernous Turbine Hall. The complete circle of the 'sun' was formed by reflection through the installation of a series of mirrored panel covering the 155 metre long and 22 metre wide ceiling, transposing an image of the outside onto the building's vast architectural interior. The ever present fog was blown into the hall thorough large vents on either side of the Turbine Hall. Eliasson made no attempt to hide the fact that the mist, light and temperature were the residue of large constructed machines. Descending the Hall's steep ramp, the gas could be seen leaking into the building, in which the pretence of the situation was clearly visible. The industrial brutality of the lights, pipes, vents, fans and radiators used to produce the work, challenged any attempt to experience the image as natural.

The artifice of Eliasson's installation played directly with the material and linguistic experience and idea of 'atmosphere', in which the signification of the word, referring to both a meteorological state and an emotional mood, could both be understood as constructs, activating a condition that the art critic Adrian Searle argued was sublime and "difficult to ignore."

Along with the notion of beauty, the idea of the sublime has often been used to think about our experience of nature. In the 1750's the Irish philosopher Edmund Burke distinguished the terms in relation to scale. He defined the beautiful as something small, weak, light and delicate, in opposition to the sublime, which he said was vast, rugged, obscure and powerful. He argued that the former was simply attractive, whilst the latter engaged and strained our senses, encapsulating a state of pleasure aroused



Olafur Eliasson, *The weather project* – Tate Modern 2003

by objects that would usually repel us. Soon after Burke, Emmanuel Kant outlined a subtler distinction between the two terms. Kant argued that beauty was a measurable experience, while the sublime could refer to any feeling that seemed immeasurable, whether it was 'fearful excitation' or 'quiet wonderment'. He wrote:

"The beautiful in nature is a question of the form of the object, and this consists in limitation, whereas the sublime is to be found in an object even devoid of form."

Kant described the experience of the beautiful as a two-part process: Firstly, apprehension, and secondly, imaginative comprehension. The first part of this process was shared with an experience of the sublime, whilst the second only belonged to the beautiful. Both concepts were dependent on an underlying set of power relationships that relate the possibility of knowing or not knowing to the sensuality of perception. In the case of the sublime, the concept houses the notion that things that are more powerful than us, or outside our comprehension, aren't simply intimidating, but might also generate a sense of awe or respect, in which an implied danger is also capable of producing an overwhelming sense of pleasure. These ideas still retain a particular hold on our collective and social relationship to the idea of nature, in which notions of fate and our sense of humanity become inextricably tied; an idea still deeply embedded in our conventional sense of ecology.

One of the reasons Eliasson gave for his choice of 'weather' as the subject for his installation at Tate Modern, was that the weather is something he sees as communal. He described it as a common means through which people, both friends and strangers, are able to socialise. It is a part of our lives, and we often use it to facilitate our actions and desires, whether tending our gardens or enjoying our holidays. And when the garden or holiday does not meet our expectations we will even blame nature in the form of the weather. In this sense we use it to manage our experiences.

"We have a desire to assume that certain things, like our reactions to the weather, are natural, but they are in fact cultural, and the result of this can be entrenched ideologies, which we take to be inevitable."

This understanding of perception as inherently biased confronts the relationship between the idea of nature's reality and its representation in both image and our mind's eye.

Another of Eliasson's projects, *Green River*, is a particularly good example for illustrating this and for inviting people to "reconsider [their] assumptions about the natural world" and its relationship to the 'real'. The project, which has had iterations in a number of major cities worldwide, involved pouring a harmless green liquid into rivers passing through those cities, creating what looked like an ominous or even toxic invasion. Eliasson's *Green River* interventions emphasized the dynamism of the different rivers, disrupting the idea that they were static symbolic objects in the city.

“For a moment the river becomes three dimensional, a space, instead of the usual two-dimensional, static, representational experience we tend to have of a city centre.”



Olafur Eliasson, *Green River* 1998 – Stockholm 2000

Again, there are obvious power relationships at play here, opening up questions of agency and who determines or defines this expanded sense of nature? How and why should one understand, enable or give voice to a river and, by extrapolation, other objects of nature; a tree, an industrial logging process or a woodland.

In pre-modern cultures in the West, nature was often conceived as a female and powerful reproductive force deeply connected to both the individual human spirit and communal well-being. Similarly, in many non-western cultures, human existence has been intrinsically tied to the natural world and seen as a constituent part of it. In the West, the division between nature and human culture is a predominantly modern phenomenon. William Connolly argues that in modernity, “nature becomes a set of laws susceptible to human knowledge, a deposit of resources for potential use or a set of vistas for aesthetic appreciation.” In this modern sense the value of the relationship to nature shifts, becoming a force for humans to dominate and control.

John Jervis has pointed out that the reason for this shift in sensibility in the West was partly economic. He argues that considering the mining of the earth’s resources as a form of ecological rape “would have seriously inhibited the transformation of the world

wrought by modernity.” This rationalisation of nature, as a set of potentials for human use, undid an image of the earth as a mother figure that would have, “served as a cultural constraint restricting the actions of human beings.” As such we are moved away from any sense that nature is “apprehendable in some pure state,” emphasizing instead, how it “is always mediated or incorporated through practices of use, ritual, observation, and assimilation,” both ours and those of other agents, machines, processes, systems, histories and futures.

This ideological shift, emphasizing the loss of nature's independence from human agency, has been reflected on despondently by some, who have argued that this change marked the loss of an existence that somehow fitted into a larger and more powerful set of laws, readable in the form of natural signs. However, it is becoming less and less possible to see a form of nature that does not bear the mark of human agency.

“Still powerful in our own time, the romanticism of ‘nature as wilderness’ remains deeply paradoxical. For a start, wilderness is fragile. Once touched, it disintegrates; once entered, it is lost. ‘Wilderness’ represents the ideal of immediate contact with non-human otherness; but that very contact corrupts the rationale for the contact in the first place.”

Jody Berland has addressed this growing realisation of the way in which our relationship to nature has become more consciously inscribed in our use of technology and media to mediate our relationship with the world. Instead of looking nostalgically to the past however, she argues that we should face up to our changed relationship to nature, which despite our intervention is still capable of shocking us with its force. She argues that nature,

“Is now more like a difficult child than a wilful parent – sometimes nasty, sometimes agreeable, always compelling our attention, always challenging our knowledge of it, and yet unnervingly responsive to our words and deeds. We are related to it, we do affect it, and to that extent we are responsible for its wellbeing.”

In this context, many artists have begun to adopt methodologies that embrace our more complex cultural relationship to nature. Many have sought out scientific or psycho-geographic strategies, as well as alternative forms of anthropological fieldwork within their work, in which there is an unveiling or reconstituting of nature and its landscapes as sites of fiction, fable and mythology. Their research often sets out to uncover something beyond or under the skin of such landscapes, weaving tales through film, performance and imagery into the factual texture of a given place. These artists and writers set out to disrupt and reflect on any knowingness we might have about nature and its geographic context. This kind of reflection is what Robert McFarlane has called “a mash-up of hauntology, geological sentience and political activism”, in which the hedgerows, fields and hills of our countryside “might be set seething.”

The challenge to artists working in King's Wood is therefore multiple: To think about the tensions between the ancient woodland as a site of leisure, industry and labour, as well as a constructed space of pastoral beauty. Understood in this way, each artist's personal movement, performance and relationship to King's Wood must be defined in a network of intertwined industrial, biological, economic and ecological narratives, movements and distributions, in which they traverse through it and affect its ecology. Their work and activity would thus create distinct 'times' for the woods, each of which would establish its territory as constantly shifting and changing, a poetics of visible and invisible forces that continually reshape it.

Dr Terry Perk is a Professor of Fine Art Education and Head of School of Fine Art & Photography for the University for the Creative Arts - all campuses.



**what happens
when artists get together?**

Mud by Mavernie Cunningham



Mavernie Cunningham

Woods to Where Else Project Leader

The workshops

King's Wood is a site of both leisure and labour, ancient yet constructed by humankind, where public access and timber production co-exist. It is a productive relationship; one that has produced networks of walks, public art works, myth, folklore and a timber economy - a carefully managed 'dance' between the imagination, community and commodity. It is interesting to see what happens when artists come together in such a space. Emilia Fagerstam in her paper 'Space and Place, perspectives on outdoor teaching and learning' states that

'What transforms space into place is a human experience of space as well as the bonds that people establish and meaning they attribute to that space' (Fagerstam 2012:26).

As project leader, I introduced the WWe artists to King's Wood via a range of approaches; to experiencing the space as springboards for developing the ideas and responses the WWe concept had inspired. There were walks disrupted by changing surroundings due to coppicing; de-centering us with the absence of familiar trees and paths. Blindfolded workshops wherein the artists experienced drawing using haptic, auditory and other non-visual senses. And work that challenged expected perspectives - looking at the woods from the woodland floor less than two feet from the ground; or imagining the view as if a bird; or as an insect, or worm who burrows and brings the underground to the surface and takes the surface back underground.

The artists found new and different ways to connect with the woods and its history. Themes grew from discussions, forming the basis of their research and development. Common themes of ritual, mythology and connectedness emerged, the creative processing, akin at times to the invisible movement of fungus mycelia, moving and stretching for miles under the feet inaudibly, as we traversed the woodland.

Cunningham is an interdisciplinary artist working in film, print and performed spoken word. She currently works collaboratively with Chris Hunt. She works as Programme Director of Fine Art, UCA Canterbury Campus.

Website: maverniecunningham.com/

Julia Giles

‘King’s Wood...a working wood, a cultured landscape marking an interface of natural resource and human activity...’

From her experience growing up on a farm, Julia Giles’s approach to the project and concept comes from an understanding of the land as a site of industry and labour rather than simply a pastoral space of natural beauty or a site of leisure. Her practice engages directly with the environment so that her working process can incorporate ‘unpredictable variables’ introduced by the elements. Giles’s wind and rain drawings are an example of this approach.



Rain drawing - 2017

Her work also includes video, installation and performance. In 2012, Giles presented the ‘*Keskerdh An Kammva Dro*’ at Kestle Barton Rural Centre for Contemporary Art in Cornwall. Roughly translated from Cornish, it means ‘Procession around the Turnstile’. This performance and installation drew upon ceremonies and customs embedded in local history to mark the cycle of the seasons. The participation of people from the local community imbued it with the authenticity of ritual, reviving links with old mythologies.



Keskerdh An Kammva Dro - 2012

Giles said 'I am interested in the way we try to negotiate our uncertain relationship with the land and the elements - and the way we try to intercede, through rituals and customs, with forces on the land which are beyond human control.'

Giles brought this same intention and focus to the WWe project, making contact with the workers in King's Wood, as well as interacting with the woodland itself. With a notion of ritual and the unpredictable power of the nature in mind, the residency gave her the freedom to spend time walking and discovering 'narratives' in and about the woods.

The exploratory nature of the project saw Giles adopt new formats, film and creative writing, to record experiences in new ways. 'Bruised Ground' is an atmospheric film poem in response to the woods, as she began to understand it as a single, whole organism.

Julia Giles continues to explore the impact of industry on the land; taking part in the CWND (Canary Wharf New District) artists' residency in London's Docklands, in the summer of 2018. An exhibition of work from participating artists in London is planned for 2020. In October 2019, Giles's wind drawings will be showcased with a group of three other artists whose work draws on the landscape, in the upper gallery at the Tremeneheere Sculpture Gardens, near Penzance in Cornwall.

Video link for Bruised Ground - [youtube/8UPvE9AdWOk](https://youtube.com/8UPvE9AdWOk)

Website: artworkjuliagiles.co.uk/



Spout 2017



Lines 2018



Julia Giles – Saw detail

Susan Turcot

..the woods serve as a hub in a network of intertwined economic and ecological movements and distributions.

Turcot was born in Canada, where she developed an art practice that was largely based around the consequences of human interaction, and processes of extraction from the landscape. Landscapes that have been harvested on an industrial scale have been source environments and starting points for Turcot.

The WWe project enabled her to further consider her global outlook and relationship to the land. She valued the experience of spending time in the woods and all that this revealed to her.

Turcot explores the land, looking for signs of human connectedness as well as of human isolation and protectionism. For Turcot the process of walking, talking and looking is a performative act and one that allowed the woods to be observed, and drawing a means of connecting to, describing and translating her experiences.

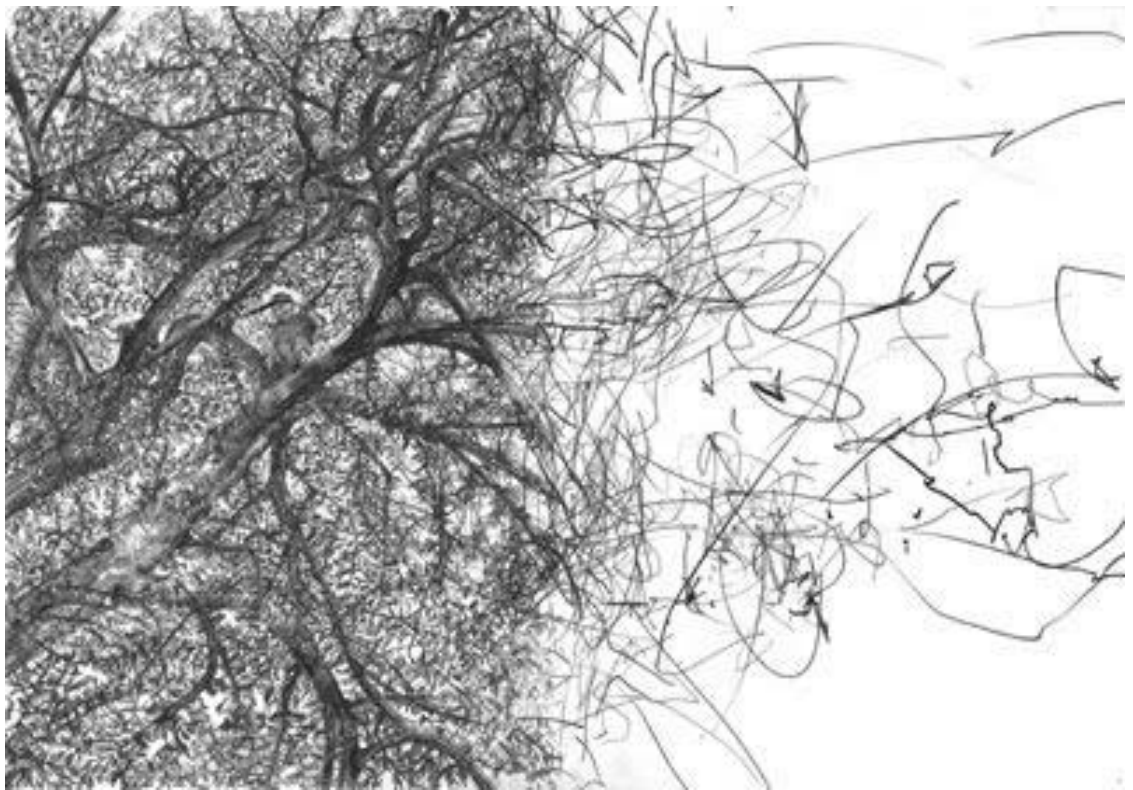
She considered the way we tell stories about our relationship to the environment and explored ways to eliciting responses from people who visit or know King's Wood to illuminate this aspect. Talking and sharing stories as her own means of 'extraction'.

'King's Wood is a place of production and renewal, through the coppicing process trees are harvested but not destroyed. It is also an ancient place: connection today to 'longer deeper temporalities'

Her thoughts, facts and imaginings are laid out in the work '6th Extinction - Woods to Where Else?' This 'timeline map' combines her reflective thinking on her positive experience of the project with her global concerns about the environment as an act of 'Public storytelling against the currency of anxiety'. The work posits an urgency and an urge to act - a manual for interaction and action. It triggers questions: what lies beneath the land, what has been on the land and what has been taken away from the land and how does creativity play a role?

Susan Turcot now lives and works as a Lecturer in Visual Arts and Media at University of Quebec in Montreal, Canada

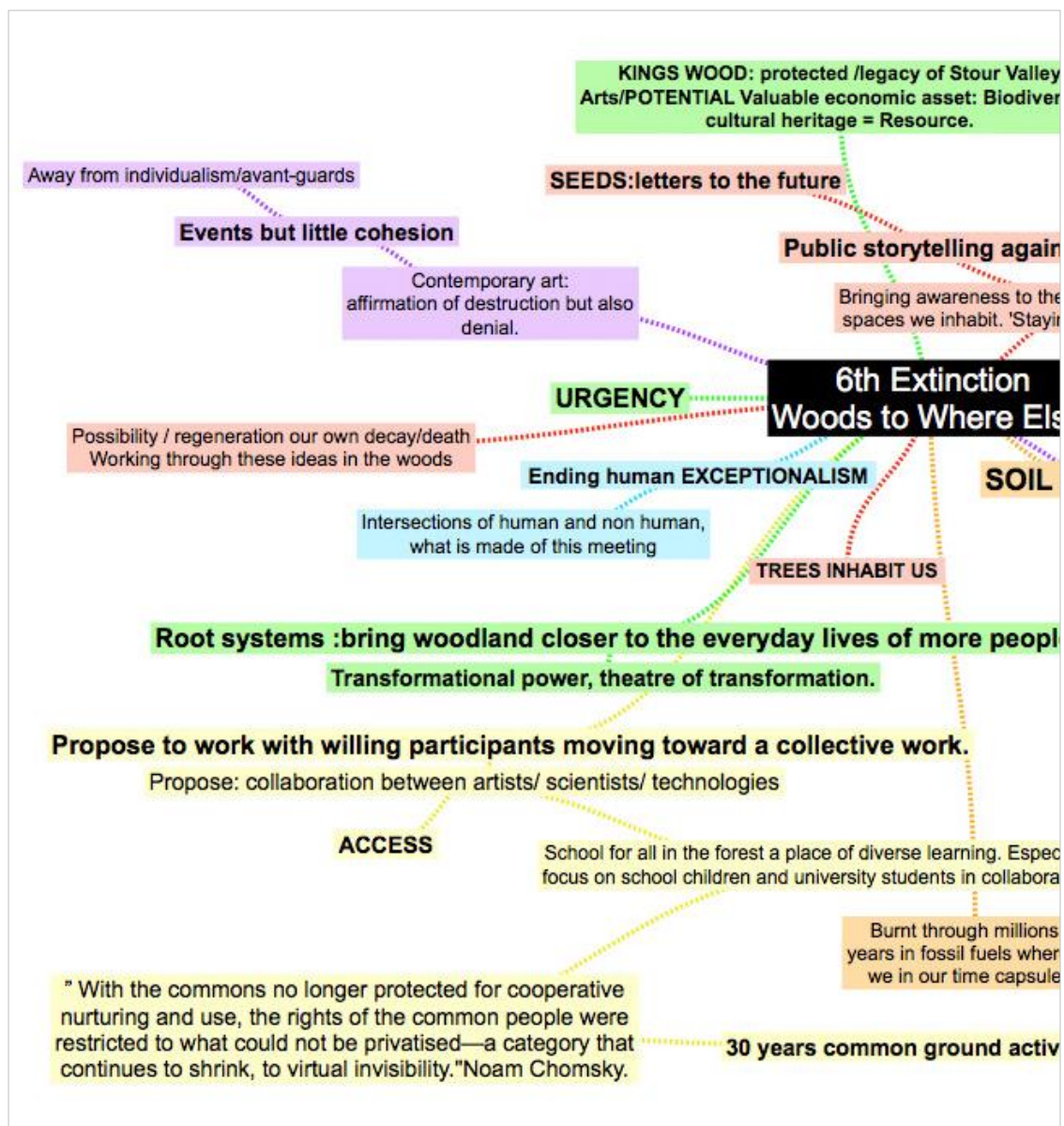
Website: susanturcot.info/

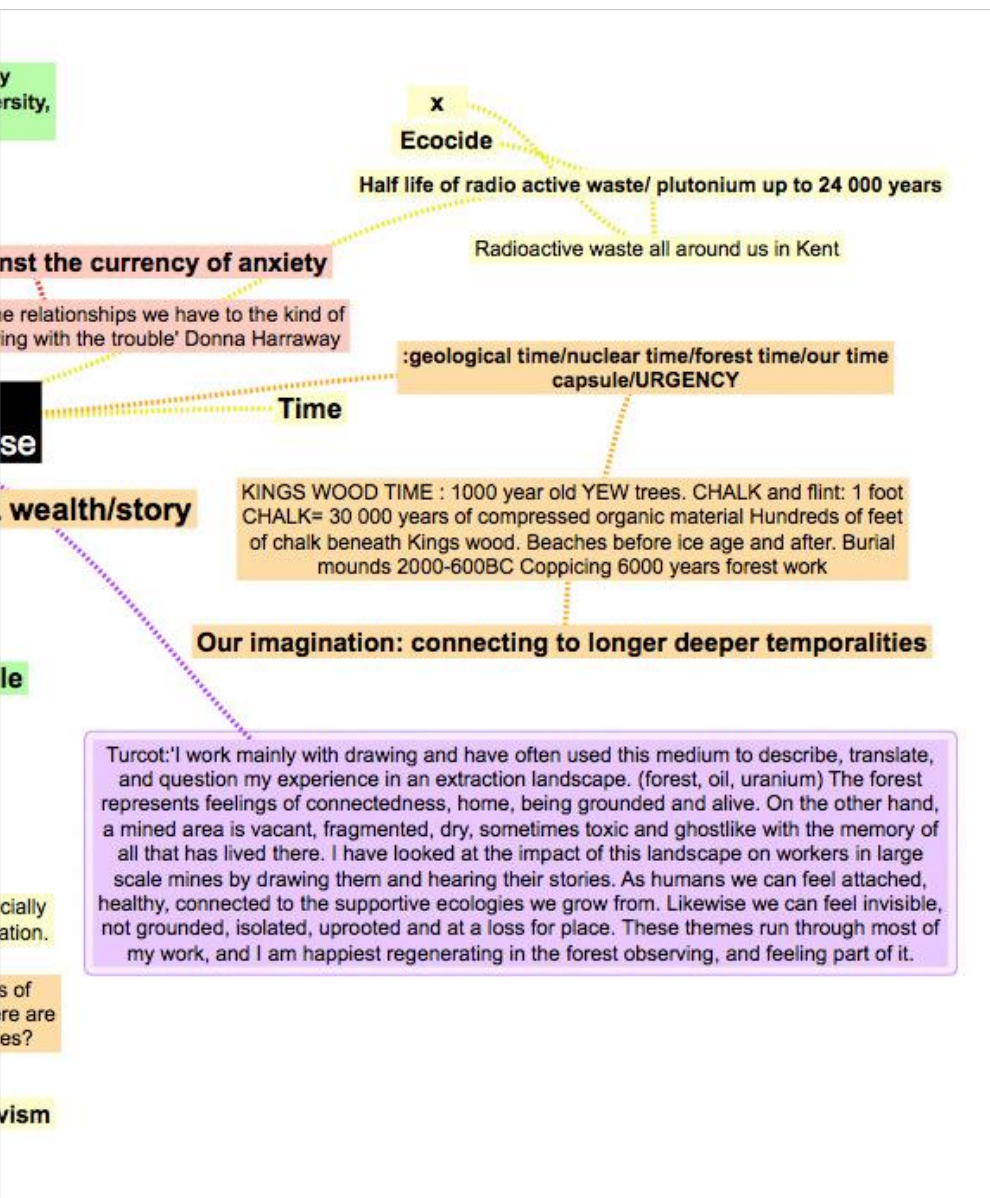


Divided subject – tree



Bitumen, blood and carbon climb 2008





Susan Turcot – 6th Extinction

Emma Dove

‘..the ecological tension between nature and cultivation..’

Emma Dove came to the WWe project from a background in graphic design, and this project allowed her to explore the processes of making and develop a methodology for generating ideas outside of her design practice.

Dove had a particular interest in the coppiced areas in King's Wood and the contrast that these spaces had with the rest of the woods. The harmony and tension, symmetry and imbalance; activity and inactivity of these spaces enabled her to explore the textures, patterns and colour palettes of the woods. These cycles of activity and industry, growth and harvest create for Dove a rhythm of repeated energy a pattern of systems and sequences that directly fed into the work she produced for this project.

For Dove this dramatic paradoxical relationship of the woods posed a challenge to her established design methodologies and the workshops offered her the challenge to explore redefine and develop. *‘The workshops changed the way I worked’ (Dove 2017)*

During this project her investigation was forensic, using photography, notes and sketches of her experiences in the woods. Dove developed a practice of collecting material direct from the woodland as well as exploring the archaeology of the site. She discovered and uncovered elements in the environment that had harmony and connected one system with another. Be it a pathway, colour or a texture that unite or contrast one space from the other.

Industry and nature are the building blocks of her imagery; using techniques of layering and stencilling, as the means to describe their relationship. They do not illustrate this narrative, but rather record her discoveries and experience of the woods.

Her images are minimal in their composition, and form shape into pattern as they are repeated. With Dove the woods are codified as a spiral, lozenge, circle or curve – indexical symbols of a place in the woods.

The ideas Dove developed in King's Wood still influence her work. She continues to work with lino and collagraphy, and she has taken part in a series of exhibitions around Kent, participated in South East Studios and her designs were selected as part of the ‘Snowdogs Discover’ trail in Ashford.

Website: emmadoveart.co.uk/



Untitled



Emma Dove – Woodland Ferns detail



Maureen Jordan – Free Oxygen. WWe artists / organisers enjoy taking part in the project development



Greg Stobbs - Bottled Oxygen 2018

Vicky Paine

'King's Wood...a poetics of visible and invisible forces that continually reshape it.'

Paine has long been fascinated with natural forms. Instinctively she homed in on the notion of visible and invisible forces in the woods.

Through the discipline of sculpture Paine has for some time made objects that have a connection to the land – capturing the underneath, the roundabouts of, and the spaces that the object used to occupy. She is drawn to the indexical marks left by whatever has had an encounter on the floor of the woodland. It is filled with trails, trails that are temporal and easily disturbed by the weather - the rain, the wind and the sun.



Untitled

Marks are selected and recorded by Paine, using plaster to capture a negative impression. Her processes are both forensic and documentary – an animal footprint, a tyre track, a mushroom – taken at a time, at a spot and at a moment. They are captured, recorded, logged and categorised.

During her time in the woods she worked with photography. Recording 'negative spaces' formed from shadows cast by objects onto the surface of the woodland - in one image her own shadow.

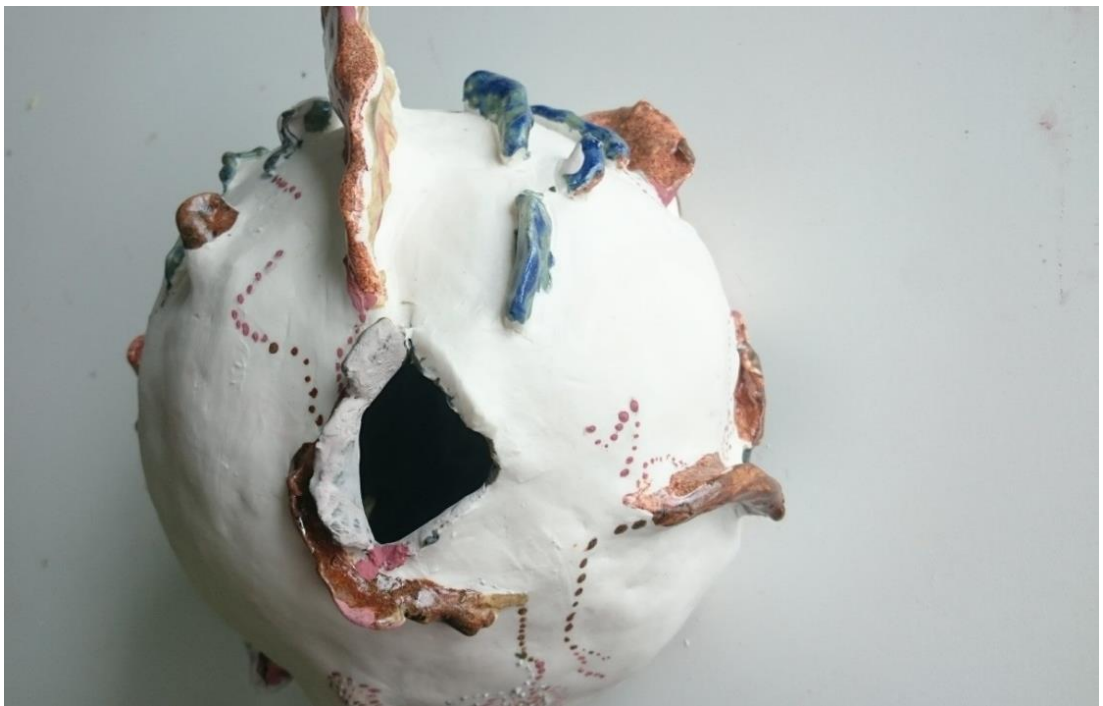
The experience of the Woods to Where Else project for Paine was an opportunity to spend time there, to catalogue but also to continue her investigation of the mostly unseen world of mycelium, in particularly its rhizome, web-like structures - *'the hidden world of productivity in nature'*. (Paine)

When compared to a plant mycelia are like the root system. (fungially.com/what-is-mycelium-natures-world-wide-web)

Mycelium (plural mycelia) develops from the fungal hyphae. While mycelia play an important role in reproduction, they are also involved in the decomposition of organic matter... (www.microscopemaster.com/mycelium)

Paine endeavours to make objects as emblematic 'conduits' - the unseen pathways and tracks of mycelia as a metaphor, or even a desire, for man to reconnect with nature. The wider ethos of Paine's work extends to her interest in the relationship between mental health, wellbeing and our connection to the environment.

Vicky Paine is a technician for Fine Art and Fashion, Creative Studies, Ashford College



Untitled



Greg Stobbs

‘...to examine and question the identity of the woods as a purely natural and harmonious environment...’

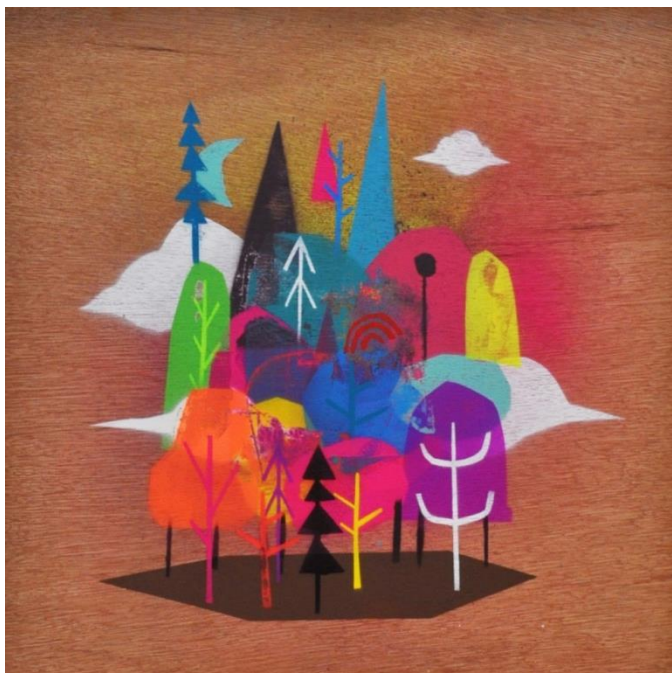
Stobbs is an artist and educator whose work is influenced by comics, cartoons, street art and children’s art. His work ranges from fine art to illustration, installation and murals. There is usually a story or message to consider in his work, which covers a range of themes represented in his own distinctive style.

Stobbs initially approached the Woods to Where Else project as an opportunity to explore human relationships with woods; the legends or mythologies around King’s Wood and in particular ‘fear’ of the woods, something he had experienced and was inherent in so many children’s stories.

However, through the discussions, workshops and the experience of spending time in the woods, he started to consider different elements suggested by the WWe concept; ideas around communication and connectivity. He began to notice the trees - what was perhaps being communicated in plain sight, was there an unseen language and how was he going to be able to understand it?

‘I am the Lorax, I speak for the trees, for the trees have no tongue’ (Dr Seuss)

Stobbs noticed how trees were grouped, suggesting potentially active networks – a secret world of collaboration. He considered the idea that beech trees co-operated with each other to ‘defend their territories’ whilst other species might allow more integration.



Tree gang 2018

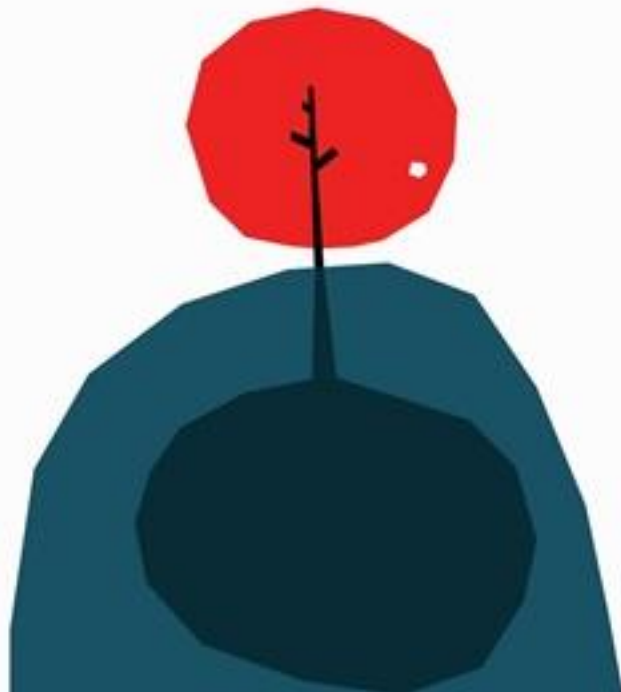
Imbued with his illustrators' sensibility and love of narrative, Stobbs observed markings on trees; in particular painted dots or 'tags' communicating between humans - a protective marking perhaps. So, when he came across a dot formed of lichen, that almost perfectly mimicked the tags, it was as if he had found visible evidence of tree communication - arboreal consciousness. This opened up a new, rich seam of narratives; from seeing woods as something to fear and be distant from, to a place to interact with and learn the language of – the Lorax.



'The brief allowed me to explore the forest as a place for human activity, where the imagination is allowed to run wild.'

Stobbs followed WWe project with a successful residency and exhibition at Grizedale in 2018. Since then he has exhibited nationally and his work appeared in live events for Bang & Ollufsen, BoConcept and in John Lewis, Oxford Street. Participating in innovative work, using image and sound, with partially sighted people - trees are appearing in his work all over the country.

Website: squirrelart.org/





Mauren Jordan

‘...territory as constantly shifting and changing, a poetics of visible and invisible forces that continually reshape it...’

Jordan’s work has been inspired by Marina Warner’s *‘Fantastic Metamorphosis: Other Worlds’* likening the life cycle of the butterfly with the myth of Leda and the Swan. Magic, fairy tales and wonder at shape-shifting in nature and in the landscape.

Jordan takes an environment like the woodland to produce work intended to evoke an unease in the viewer that is evocative of something primal. King’s Wood, with its’ ancient histories, combined with its modern role as a site of production and leisure, provided rich material for her imagination.

‘We visit woodlands for many reasons: forests stir in most people a sense of closeness to ‘nature’; its beauty, its regenerative cycle of genesis, growth and decay – a cycle of life familiar to us, even reassuring, as it reflects our own passage throughout time on Earth. But it also stirs other, more disturbing responses, a primal fear of dark woods that we also bring with us. It was these dark woods I explored during the WWe residency (Jordan 2017)

Using photography and figures, Jordan explored ways of expressing these ideas and responses. A strange doll-puppet sits on a large pile of badly stacked branches or collapsed shelter. Lit from behind, the scene is mysterious one could say ominous. In another image, a human-animal hybrid ‘Little Red Riding Hood’ becomes the Fox - is she dressed up for a night out, is she going hunting? She played with the narratives of myth and fairy tale – what if Beauty *is* the Beast? For Jordan the woodland is also a character in the story and always a site of imagination. During the WWe project she also engaged fellow artists in her exploratory work Free Oxygen Here set in King’s Wood.

‘We bring our expectations into the woods, and the woods take our creativity somewhere else’ (Jordan 2017)

Jordan took the WWe experience into other projects including an artist’s residency at the Vermont Studio Centre (VSC) in North America in 2018. Located in rural Johnson, beside the River Gihon, ‘it provided a perfect setting in which to further develop some of the ideas fostered in King’s Wood’.

Early in 2019 Maureen relocated to Folkestone to set up a making space ‘Bouverie Studio’

<https://bouveriestudio.blogspot.com/>

Website: myjordan.com



Foxy



Girl on a Woodpile



Rapunzel's ladder

Clare Smith

What excited me about the WWe concept was the statement that *“King’s Wood has always been a working wood, a cultured landscape marking an interface of natural resource and human activity”* and the challenge to think about *“the woods as a site of industry and labour rather than simply a pastoral space of natural beauty”*.

Smiths’ original proposal was to further develop ideas around the nature of work in spaces usually perceived of as places of rest, healing and peace; by linking the physical effort of creating artworks with the labour used to construct landscapes.

The project was the perfect opportunity to extend her recent work on gardens (Boldshaves Garden – Wealden Literary Festival Residency), defined broadly to include public parks and other bounded constructed natural spaces - as sites of invisible labour. The woods, though perhaps less enclosed, also exist somewhere in-between, *“at the interface of natural resource and human activity”* and can, like gardens, be considered as a heterotopia, as conceived by Michel Foucault.

The woods as a Liminal Heterotopic Space – Heterotopias are spaces that have a layered meaning. They can exist in the real and also be more existential. The philosopher Foucault used the example of a mirror, which is a real object, that reflects a space that is virtual, both ‘spaces’, real and virtual, coexist. Liminal space is at, or on both sides of, a boundary.

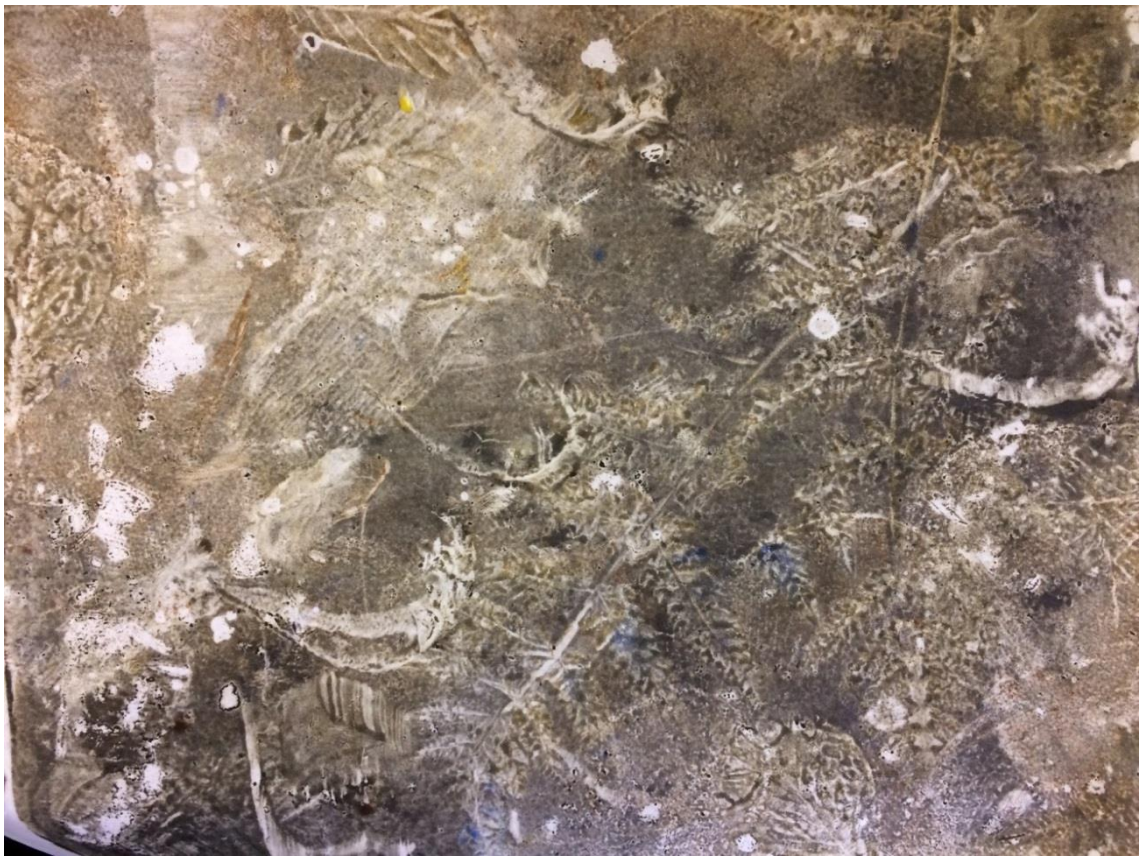
Smiths’ initial ideas were to extend her existing practice of ‘intuitive gathering’ and assembly of things, by including the use of multiple cameras to record ‘simultaneous or contiguous actions’. Bringing them together, with physical mark making and print/drawings, to present different sensory experiences - sound, touch and vision. *‘What better place to consider the idea of network than the woods, where economy, nature, environment and human life are not separate but connected’*.

Her practice uses performative acts of repetition and movement, working with materials and surface, creating marks to the point of obliterating the subject and the exhaustion or disintegration of surface.

Maps as a way of describing space are also relevant here and the reverse side of the overworked prints is an accidental map – accidental as in unplanned - and suggests that experience of a place is a network of connecting points.

The notion of disintegration became a concurrent theme which is reflected in the series of films ‘This is not the lake’ (2018), created by Smith as a result of this project.

Clare Smith exhibits widely and is a co-founder and co-director of Dover Arts Development.
Website: artworkarchive.com/profile/clare-smith



Untitled



Still from film



Stills from film series *This is not the Lake*

Adam Chodzko

Woods to Where else - The Arboreal Health Centre

Let's take this path:

It looked very much like a wood.

I mean, how a wood used to work. For us.

What it *did*; how a wood made good, back then.

However...

A close inspection of any of the trees' root crowns showed that each was stamped, somewhat discreetly, with a 2cm wide embossed *Costa* logo. Originally this company's humble origins were as the ubiquitous pedlars of coffee but *Costa* slowly evolved to become the leading Delhi-based Pharmaceutical company that we all rely on today.

All remaining human industrial production – from managerial to factory floor workers - now begins with the consumption of a daily dose of highly specific Dimethyltryptamine molecules which provide a consistent and convincing illusion of being 'in the woods.

Numerous variants can satiate any particular desired level of canopy, sunlight or shade, undergrowth, path meander, and so on, as well as, of course, any cocktail combination of tree species. It keeps us all quite happy whilst optimising our ability to provide the intensive physical and emotional labour that will eventually allow us – they've assured us - to experience the few remaining clusters of the real thing.

Proper forest!

That's always, for generations, been our incentive.

Another path:

A few days ago, I was ferrying a stranger in my sculpture, *Ghost*, through the collapsed oak canopies of the woods lining the littoral zone of the Helford River in Cornwall. The oaks have fallen down the riverbanks and now claw the river's edge. I can manoeuvre into these, propelling us between branches, and then drift, incredibly smoothly and silently into the shadowy chamber beneath.

It feels like zero-gravity weightlessness to my passenger (and me, but they see *first*, properly, without the drag of a body. I still need mine in order to paddle them). Soaring like a bird on a thermal, or the perception of a sustained steadicam manoeuvre, it feels unreal. Eerie. A leaving of the body. Leaving the body behind, taken over by the complexity of the interconnection of stuff inexorably doing its thing all around us: water, hawthorn, berry, dead oak branch, lichen, seaweed suspended from twigs, a beam of sunlight channelled through these clusters to land on the slowly undulating surface of deep wet beneath us...

And why are we doing this?

Partly to hope for a better way in, to seeing all this 'outer stuff'. I mean, really seeing it, for the first time. But it's also a proposition for a relationship of mutual encounter - for two - a shared, paired ecology of attention. This kind of voyage away from the city, in a vessel of this design, should at some point, become the best way to be with another human. That's the long-term plan.



But for lovers of the short-term here's the thing about arboreal economics:

"There is no magic money tree" Theresa May patronisingly assured an exhausted and poorly paid nurse. But the 'magic money tree' is surely the bright leafed, shimmering, singing-ringing tree that marketing people knock up in acid green in *Illustrator* to show *Telegraph* readers a visual symbol for economic growth. A growth that is infinite and all totally natural, apparently (which, just as an *idea* – a delusion - becomes highly addictive and confused with reality). The justification for neoliberalism as the only true way to relate to the world - it's 'meant to be' - giving us permission to not do much more than buy a 'bag for life' as our contribution to the environment. The *natural* way is, it seems, to already have money to grow.

But there is some extreme degree of disavowal here to not incorporate into this spring-based fiscal vision the acknowledgment that everywhere in nature is simultaneously also showing signs of the stagnation of growth and the move into death. It's all growing, beyond us in the thicket, but part of that growth cycle is also the process of dying...along with us. 'Economic growth's' maintenance of belief in the magic money tree is interfering in this. It's a toxic tree – it's us! - and will kill everything. Werner Herzog's monologue of disgust at the relentless sexual promiscuity of the jungle in *Burden of Dreams* (1982) might be apposite here; revived as oblique metaphor in the

collective dreams of Lehman Brothers' staff from the night after they cleared their desks after their firm's announcement of bankruptcy, September 1, 2008, wondering, which was the *natural* part of all this?



How then to justify the continued existence of woods on land that could be used for housing, fracking, motorway extensions or industrial farming? The woods surely can't just prevail, mostly empty of people, as a physical manifestation of the internal space of 'wilderness' and imagination... can it? Or is it that our projection onto it, of the fallibility of the human body and mind, is its emerging function? The woods become a hospital; inhalation cures for the asthmatic, hornbeam groves for depression meetings, clearings of bracken for cancer sufferers to sit in, isolation pods made of lichen that are suspended in ash trees for the sick but affluent, while those crippled with RSI strap themselves into harnesses on wind-swaying beech boughs in order to teach their bodies how to move freely again. And then there's the tapping of phloem sap to extract the messenger RNA's used in robotic systems. And alongside all this there's the rituals that can only take place there, in the woods at night.

It's really busy in there.

Beyond real botanical medicine there's a long history of the projection into the woods of ailing bodies. The liverwort is so-called because of its resemblance to the liver and the *doctrine of signatures* (100AD) is based around such correlations that plants that look like body parts, internal or external, must therefore have medicinal properties directed towards healing that anatomy (e.g. Eyebright petals look like eyes so must surely be used for curing eye infections). The theological belief by certain botanists was that God would have wanted to make it easy for us to figure out how to cure ourselves with plants. If sick you just needed to wander into the landscape and locate the ill part of yourself mirrored in the landscape, then put this vegetation inside you.

Escaping from the dysfunction of society and the self and heading into the woods means not just some furtive hiding behind a bush but the human body fully assimilated or transformed into a tree or plant. From ancient Greek mythology Daphne becoming a laurel to evade Apollo's unwanted attentions, to the fate of anyone who enters '*The Shimmer*' in Alex Garland's *Annihilation* (2018) becoming embodied into plant material is aesthetically amazing. It works (on the heart of the audience) much better than its inverse; the trees becoming human (for example, that disappointing demystification in Act V scene 4 of the military cause of the supernatural movements of Birnam Wood in *Macbeth*).

So, let's decide that 'becoming tree' is a process of sublime and gently ecstatic surrender; finally we are what we were always meant to be.

Adam Chodzko is an artist working across media, exploring our conscious and unconscious behaviour, social relations and collective imaginations through artworks that are propositions for alternative forms of 'social media.' Exhibiting work nationally and internationally since 1991, his work speculates how, through the visual, we might best connect with others.

Website: adamchodzko.com/

Mavernie Cunningham

Personal Response

I found myself intrigued by the conversations and work processes explored by the group which led me to consider my own experience of the space. I became fascinated with what is unseen or barely perceptible in the woods - the movement underground, sounds which are inaudible as well as those that can be heard, the dips in the pathways, the bumps and mounds covered by countless layers, years of leaves and wood and rot and new soil and life. But mostly I became interested in the rocks. These objects of the everyday, the unnoticed, walked on and kicked about, shapes and fragments formed by almost incomprehensible millennia of force, compression, heat and pressure, which have slowly made their way to the surface.

One very particular configuration of rocks is The Church of St Cosmas and St. Damian in the nearby village of Challock. A story recounted in The Golden Legend (13th century) tells of a verger called Justinian, who dreamed that the twin doctors St. Cosmas and St. Damian operated on him, removing his cankerous leg and replacing it. He awoke from the dream cured of the canker, yet with the black leg of a recently deceased Ethiopian. This story is not just a metaphor of subjection, of a black man in the service of a white man, it is a story of humans behaving in much the same way as nature does, habitually devouring and recreating itself, working as if in a dream, making miracles out of pain and renewal.



Master of the Rinuccini Chapel (Matteo di Pacino) (Italian, active 1350–75)

Humankind is like a rock that exists both under and above the ground, a fragment of something larger than itself, a form which is, much like the woods, the result of fusion, heat, compression and weathering. Not unlike the verger, the artists in this project have dreamed and processed their ideas into reality.



Mound in leaves

On closing

For a fairly short project, Woods to Where Else produced a rich vein of creative thinking and responses. As the facilitator I was privileged to take part and observe some of the workshops and discussions and get to know the artists. What I observed fascinated me as I felt that the mix of ages, perspectives and artistic practice echoed the creative dynamic found in the woodland; where areas of different trees species and ages of growth meet, and we find the greatest biodiversity.

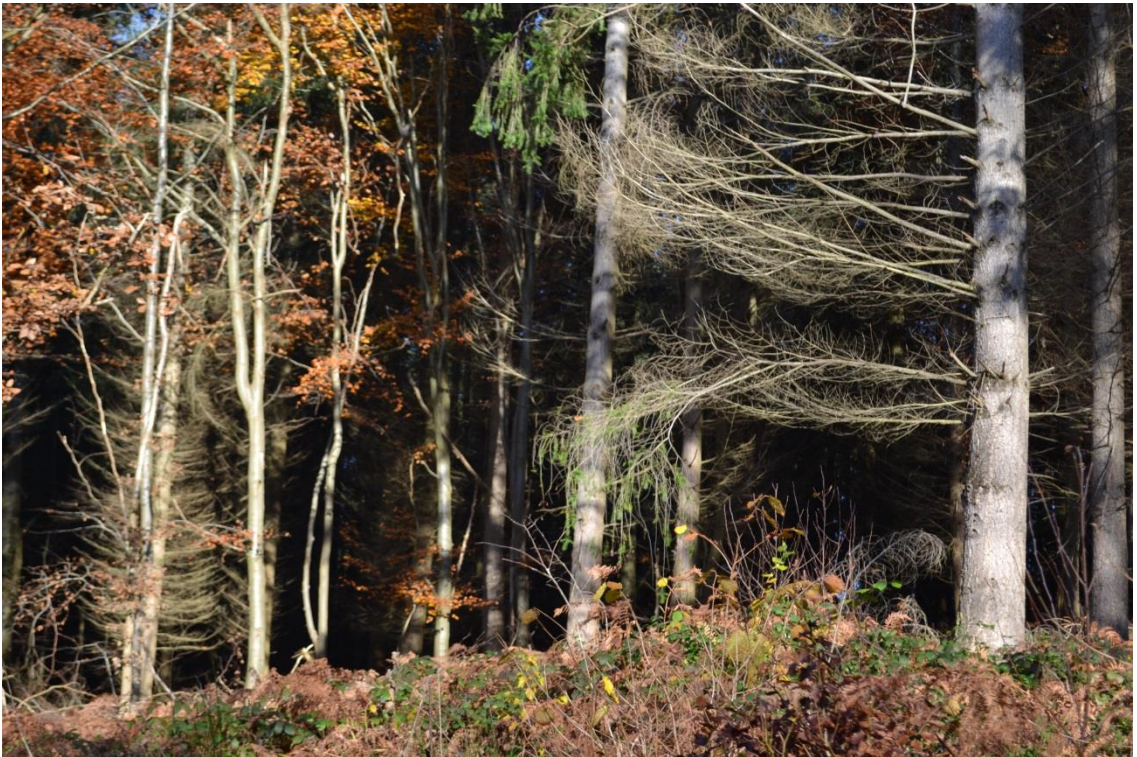
Today, as climate change has at last received the attention it desperately needs, the value of woodland and our need to work with our environment sustainably is more widely accepted. King's Wood represents many aspects of the crossroads we find ourselves at; a landscape that provides a resource but also as a place where nature should thrive, and people can reconnect to the world we are part of and depend upon.

Art engages people with our history and imaginative responses to experiences and ideas. We hope this publication and pull-out provide ideas and inspiration for you to creatively investigate in King's Wood, or another natural environment nearby.

Diane Comley – Stour Valley Creative Partnership



The artists taking part were selected for the project based on their proposals. We would also like to acknowledge the contribution of Chloe Rowland and Benjamin Hunt. Chloe was a work experience student with KSCP, studying Ecology and Anthropology. She took part informally to observe and develop her creative interests; bringing a fresh perspective and intellectual curiosity. Benjamin Hunt was an active part of the group initially, keen to look at the 'rhythmic patterns inherent within natural landscapes' but work and life meant he was not able to develop or present his responses.



Autumn – King's Wood



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