

PROOF PORTRAIT: 21ST CENTURY GREEN MAN



THE CENTRE FOR CONTEMPORARY ART & THE NATURAL WORLD IS AN INNOVATIVE ARTS-LED EDUCATIONAL CHARITY FOCUSED ON EXPLORING NEW UNDERSTANDINGS OF OUR PLACE WITHIN NATURE THROUGH THE ARTS. THE CENTRE HOSTS ARTIST RESIDENCIES, TALKS + FORUMS, ^{ART} EXHIBITIONS + VARIOUS LIVE EVENTS BOTH INSIDE THE PROJECT SPACE + IN THE SURROUNDING FOREST. ALL EVENTS ARE BASED AROUND A YEAR-LONG EXHIBITION IN 4 PARTS, 'FOREST DREAMING', WHICH FEATURES BOTH EMERGING + WELL-ESTABLISHED ARTISTS SUCH AS DAVID MASH, PETER RANDALL, PAGE MICHAEL PORTER + SUSAN DERGES, LOOKING AT CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS' IMAGINATIVE RESPONSES TO THE FOREST ENVIRONMENT. THE SUMMER PROGRAMME INCLUDES PHOTOGRAPHY, ARCHITECTURE, DESIGN, NEW MEDIA, SOUND/MUSIC + PERFORMANCE. THERE'S A 'BIG PICNIC' EVENT ON AUGUST 13TH WITH ENTERTAINMENT + ACTIVITIES FOR ALL THE FAMILY, INCLUDING A SHORT-FILM FESTIVAL + AN ACOUSTIC ECOLOGY WORKSHOP + PERFORMANCES. CLIVE ADAMS, THE CENTRE'S DIRECTOR, IS AN AWARD-WINNING CURATOR WITH OVER 30 YEARS EXPERIENCE OF ORGANISING EXHIBITIONS. PROOF ASKED IF HE STILL SAW THE WOOD FOR THE TREES...

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PORTRAIT COMMISSION: MATT HENLEY

WHY IN THE WOODS?

By establishing itself in Haldon Forest Park, CCANW has taken advantage of a recent emphasis that the Forestry Commission has placed on encouraging significant new public access to the forests they manage. In a first phase of a development plan we have adapted a redundant wooden building into a Project Space, part gallery/studio/office, whilst the FC has created 20 miles of new walking, cycling + horse-riding trails. We are now starting to work on a second phase which could create a shared, contemporary timber building of architectural merit. Our integrated artistic + educational programme will provide the public with valuable insights into today's pressing ecological problems, give them a deeper understanding of 'nature', the importance of sustainability in their lives, + help to develop the educational potential of woodland + the wider rural environment.

WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR GREATEST SURPRISE?

To discover that forestry in Britain seems, like agriculture, to be in crisis + at a crossroads where several different economic + environmental avenues need to be explored. Cheap imports travelling thousands of miles seem to have undermined plans - initiated after the second world war - for Britain to grow + use much of its own timber.

...YOUR GREATEST CHALLENGE?

To use the arts to help people gain a deeper understanding of our place within nature, at a time when we are faced by an unprecedented number of social + environmental challenges.

...YOUR MOST REWARDING MOMENT?

After 11 years of effort, opening the doors of our Project Space for the first time last Easter.

...YOUR GREATEST FRUSTRATION?

Taking 11 years to reach this stage of our development + not having the wisdom to achieve it any earlier.

...YOUR MOST INSPIRING COMMISSION?

I do not want us to rush into commissioning work for the forest. I feel these should come out of the series of artist residencies + other process-led projects we are holding - + from a deeper understanding of the forest. I am particularly excited by Shelley Sacks' 'University of the Trees' on which we have now started to work.

...& YOUR GREATEST AMBITION FOR THE FUTURE?

Moving on from our Project Space, to create a new + remarkable example of contemporary architecture to house our future Centre in the Haldon Forest - a building that will also demonstrate the beauty, usefulness + sustainability of the resource that will surround us: wood*

ART • CLIVE ADAMS

INTERPRETING THE WORLD

How contemporary artists are translating and transforming their environment.

THROUGHOUT HISTORY, when civilisations become stressed by environmental degradation there is a recurrent need for new art forms to evolve which remind humanity of its connection to the rest of nature and the responsibility it bears to the planet.

The landscapes painted on the walls of Roman villas during the first century BCE gave the impression of being surrounded by pleasant groves, yet were painted during a period of over-cultivation and deforestation. In the 17th century, painters such as Claude and Poussin offered an Arcadian vision of nature, as a form of solace in an increasingly complex and rapidly changing world. Blake and Turner both attempted to maintain our bond with nature, but our estrangement accelerated during the Industrial Revolution. During years of conflict in the first half of the 20th century, artists in Britain adopted a plurality of approaches to nature, from re-awakening a sense of the 'pastoral' ideal, to helping frame our national identity.

In the 1960s, however, political and social changes encouraged artists to address nature in new ways. The destruction of habitats worldwide and the deteriorating conditions of urban life also triggered a new wave of activism and environmental awareness.

For some artists, painting landscapes as a way of seeing seemed increasingly incompatible with a new sense of our relationship with the Earth as seen from space and through the eyes of different cultures and religions. Artists and designers continued to be influenced by the imagery, colours and textures in nature, but they also sought to work in a way that reflected how nature itself worked. They tried to understand the new

scientific theories and processes underlying the natural world. This approach can also be traced in the recent history of literature, film, dance/movement, music/sound, performance and criticism.

Since that time, artists of all kinds have responded to nature, landscape and the environment in many, often quite different, ways. Not all of them are addressing strictly ecological concerns. Ecology does not seem to

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have been the prime concern of, for example, many of the early American Land Artists. Artists such as Michael Heitzer and Dennis Oppenheim were more concerned with creating earthworks as grandiose forms of abstract sculpture, and Christo with using technology and manufactured structures to dominate the landscape.

The problem with such work was that it tended to objectify the environment and turn it into an entity that we can think of and deal with as if it were outside and independent of ourselves. Far more important, I suggest, is work – such as that of Richard Long and Ana Mendieta – that cultivates a one-to-one relationship with the land, and that looks at art as a process in much

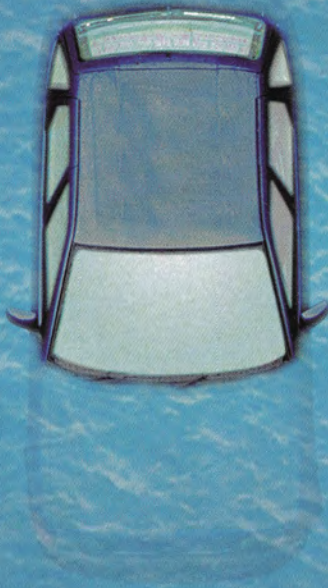
the same way as we look at nature itself.

We might define the most profound form of ecological, socially engaged art, design or architecture to be that which explores, exposes and tries to find strategies to remedy the exploitation, waste and pollution of nature through direct action and sustainable design. The teaching and practice of Joseph Beuys encapsulated this approach, but artists as diverse as Agnes Denes and Barbara Kruger question our consumer society and attempt to find a role for art that is more than mere decoration and the production of investment commodities for collectors.

Work that is most specifically ecological might be described as, for example, transforming damaged habitats or sterile urban sites into life-generating places. Mel Chin's and Viet Ngo's use of plants to revive polluted landfill sites and treat wastewater are perfect examples of this approach.

The publication *Ecovention: Current Art to Transform Ecologies*, produced to accompany an exhibition in Cincinnati in 2002, provides a good analysis of ecological art – albeit with a US emphasis – of projects by such artists as Helen and Newton Harrison, Alan Sonfist, Hans Haacke and Basia Irland. In Britain, groups such as PLATFORM, Common Ground and Helix Arts are among those that have made important contributions to art and ecology over many years.

TODAY WE ARE faced with a convergence of environmental concerns. The Greek root of the word 'ecology' means 'home' and for many, as Suzi Gablik has written, that's a hard place to find these days. By pursuing production and the capitalist idea of 'progress' at the expense of sustain-



Come Hell or High Water, a proposed intervention by Michael Pinsky on the River Tyne COURTESY: MICHAEL PINSKY/HELIX ARTS/www.ClimateChange-CulturalChange.com

ability and a concern for process, we have lost connection within both our local communities and our global home.

The important contribution that the mainstream arts can play in addressing these issues seems finally to have become appreciated and acted upon in the past few years. The Royal Society of Arts has launched its Arts and Ecology programme and the South-West – Devon, in particular – is fast becoming the UK centre for a number of important new courses attracting students to study the subject. Bicton College and the University of Plymouth offer the first Foundation Degree in Environmental Arts and

Crafts, University College Falmouth has its Research in Art, Nature and Environment (RANE) group, Schumacher College offers short courses in Art and Ecology, and Dartington College will start an important new MA course in September 2006.

After ten years of effort, the first phase of the Centre for Contemporary Art and the Natural World (CCANW) opened in the Haldon Forest Park near Exeter in January 2006. This phase involved the creation of a Project Space by recycling a redundant building at the 'Gateway' to the Forest and is part of a new partnership with the Forestry Commission. The next phase will involve the making of an architect-

designed timber eco-building.

These recent developments and CCANW's partnership will all bring tremendous opportunities to engage new audiences, participants and collaborations – both local and global – in programmes of artist-led projects, exhibitions and educational activities that will reach out, across the art forms and other disciplines, to develop new understandings of our connection and responsibilities to nature in the modern world. ●

For more information please visit
<www.ccanw.co.uk> and
<www.greenmuseum.org>

Back to nature

Explore nature at its best this summer at the Centre for Contemporary Art in the Natural World

Limb, by Alice Maher



Badger Footprint in Mud, taken by Martin Prothero

At this time of year, the great outdoors seems to call to us, beckoning us to leave the confines of our homes and explore nature in all its proud, summertime glory.

One of the best places to become more in tune with nature this summer is the Centre for Contemporary Art in the Natural World (CCANW), where art is inextricably linked with the beautiful natural surroundings found at its peaceful site in Haldon Forest Park. Set up to explore new understandings of our place within nature through the arts, CCANW opened its Project Space in the park earlier this year, where it will hold a series of events throughout the summer designed to get us exploring the great outdoors and thinking about how we connect with the natural world.

Core activities at the site centre around artist residencies, talks and forums, art exhibitions and live events, both within the space itself and the enchanting forest that surrounds it.

All events are based around a year-long exhibition called *Forest Dreaming*, which is taking place in eight parts and features both

emerging and well-established artists. *Forest Dreaming* examines contemporary artists' imaginative responses to the forest environment and is currently in its third phase, with work by artists including Alice Maher, James Ursell and Chris Drury appearing until 28 August. The fourth part will be entirely given over to artists from Teignbridge and will run from 2 September-8 October.

Throughout the school holidays, ArtPlay workshops for children will encourage outdoor play with ideas based on the artworks in the exhibition, held every Thursday until the end of August. Themes will include painting and glitter, nature photograms, forest fashion and sculpture and clay modelling.

In fact, the summer programme as a whole spans all forms of modern art including photography, architecture, design, new media, sound, music and performance. Highlights include The Big Picnic on 13 August, where visitors can come along and picnic in beautiful shaded spots, some with spectacular views, and enjoy live events, performances and workshops including an aerial rope performance by Jeremiah Krage and Jennie Hales' Workshop Under the Sky for young children.

If you feel like whipping up a feast, then bring along some dough and toppings to bake a pizza in the oven, but if you'd prefer to sit back and relax, filled crêpes and organic fruit drinks are among the

tempting treats available from the café.

The CCANW's monthly workshop, Going Native with Martin Prothero, will next be held on 27 August, when the artist and bushcraft expert will offer the chance to explore Haldon Forest from an alternative perspective, venturing off-trail to see the site through more native eyes and to learn to appreciate it for its unique location as well as for its plants, animals and trees. Combining both nature awareness and survival skills, the present and the historic, lovers of outdoor life will not want to miss it.

Such events perfectly embody the philosophy behind CCANW.

"Our integrated artistic and educational programme will

provide the public with

valuable insights into today's pressing ecological problems, give them a deeper understanding of 'nature', the importance of sustainability in their lives, and help to develop the educational potential of woodland and the wider rural environment," explains CCANW director Clive Adams.

We agree that there couldn't be a more fun or creative way to explore nature in all its glory than by joining one of CCANW's summer activities. Just make sure you have your walking boots at the ready and prepare to feel inspired. □

• For more information call CCANW on 01392 832277 or log on to www.ccanw.co.uk

*ArtPlay workshops
for children will
encourage outdoor play*



James Ursell's *She Bear*