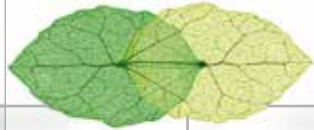


COLLINS & GOTO Studio



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# The Caledonian Decoy

The center for Nature in Cities



Collins & Goto Studio

Exhibition at the Intermedia Gallery  
The Centre for Contemporary Art  
Glasgow, Scotland  
2017



ALBA | CHRUTHACHAIL





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February 2017

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Collins & Goto Studio

Collaborators:  
Martin Burns, narration  
Chris Malcolm, sound/software  
Dave Russ, Campsie Creative  
Geoff Sample, Ecology - Music - Landscape  
Pam Scott, Equestrian Photography

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The image on the front cover: Nadia Scholnick

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## A Critical Forest Art Practice

*We live in the age of the anthropocene. A time that demands reflection on environmental changes and crisis. Under these circumstances we intend to make art that explores new relationships between humanity and nature. We seek to:*



**Establish** a model for art with forests rather than in forests. Considering the process, method and form of art as forest interface in a rural setting and as a correspondent image, idea or artefact in an urban setting.

**Experiment** with the idea of empathic exchange between people and trees in urban and rural settings, to consider the ways that trees and forest embody culture and how people embody the forest in daily life, regular practices or celebration.

**Consider** how art might contribute to the potential wellbeing or prosperity of a tree or forest community in the age of environmental change.

(Originally written in 2012, edited again in 2016)

## Exhibition Overview

The Caledonian Decoy continues our work on the cultural aspects of ancient forests in Scotland. We make this work to clarify our own questions and ideas and to initiate discussions with others. The Caledonian Decoy follows the first precept of our critical forest practice statement. We intended to develop correspondent images, ideas and/or artefacts. Working with the idea of a cultural decoy we developed visual and conceptual entanglements in Caledonian forest and its meaning. As urbanites and legal aliens at home in Scotland we have an interest in experiences that attract us into imaginative and critical relationship with the experience, value and meaning of ancient and semi-natural Caledonian forests.

We hope to enable an engaged imagination that has potential to reshape perception, understanding and value. The agencies at work here are forests themselves and the human interests (in deer, sheep and timber) that shaped

the form of even the wildest forests of Scotland. While working on this exhibition we found ourselves considering a passage from Grant Kester where he discusses a redemptive model of aesthetic agency. He suggests that it is defined by creative immanence, or pure potential life force, energy that has both generative and regenerative capacity. (2011, P. 178) If we embrace the Bergsonian idea of 'Élan vital'; we can consider the forest as an embodiment of a creative force. It seems right to then think that the primary value of ancient Caledonian forest (as opposed to a plantation forest) is the direct experience of, or the comfort derived from knowing that, this vital force still exists in Scotland and it is now expanding in direct relationship to human appreciation rather than utilitarian interest.

Some of the key people in this ongoing dialogue include: Ruth Anderson, Annie and Bob Benson, Emily Brady, Rob Coope, David Edwards, Alex Fention, Chris Fremantle, Alex Maris, Graeme Findlay, Gerry Loose and Morgan McGregor, Murdo MacDonald, Pauline Phemister, Geoff Sample, Bid Strachan, Paul Tabbush, Jo and Petra Vergunst, and Donald Urqhart.



# DECOY

Collins and Goto Studio

With Martin Burns, narration

Geoff Sample, environmental sound

Dave Russ, video installation

Two screen video projections (15 min.)

Decoy is a film about being entangled with a forest and its wild things. The images were simultaneously shot deep in a Caledonian pine forest. The full coloured image moves forward into the landscape and the black and white image draws backward through the landscape. With this work we are trying to get at the passage of time in the forest and raise a set of questions about point of view, voice, representation and correspondent experience with a highland forest. We committed a period of months to this experiment, returning to the forests over and over again spending time during the deer rut, shooting late at night and early in the morning trying to find the right mix of weather and light. We bought and built various devices to limit our hand in the filming to let the forest tell its own story.



### **Text from the video: DECOY**

The Caledonian forests of Scotland are living things that maintain themselves against the mischief of the world by their own capacity for self perpetuation, regeneration and expansion; they are vibrant with life forces.

**Forests** are often understood as places of harvest. In historical terms they were landscapes (with or without trees) occupied by four-footed creatures hunted for sport and food. Woodland managers understand forest as trees planted for felling. Ecologists are interested in forests for biodiversity. They see natural communities of trees and bushes, mosses, lichens, ferns and fungi that reflect a range of ages and support creatures large and small.

A wild forest suggests nature removed from human interest and influence. We are in one of the remnant semi-natural wild forests of Scotland. It is only one of six estates that are over 1000 hectares. A wild forest is presumed by many to be uninhabited and uncultivated, the longer it is ignored the wilder it becomes. We stand with many others that would suggest that a wild natural forest is a space that needs to be appreciated rather than ignored. A space where the aesthetic ecological and spiritual are closely aligned these forests have essential cultural import.

**Decoys** are primarily understood as skilfully crafted

objects created to capture wild game. Decoys have been used to set traps and divert attention. As representations of living things, or as imitations or counterfeits of objects of desire they have been used to lure and entice others into compromising relationships.

**Cultural decoys** capture our attention and curiosity. They are autonomous objects that offer a visual and conceptual entanglement in things and meaning. They can most often be found in museums and archives. A cultural decoy is an embodied idea that has a finite form here and now but links to an infinite set of things that occupy a separate historical or spatial context. In this work they refer to the natural and cultural aspect of forests. If fully embraced our cultural decoys challenge ideas about the separation between artefacts, nature, cities and highland forests.

**Art** expresses human experience. it tests the boundaries of perception, meaning and value. Looking at art we begin with reflective awareness then slowly engage our memory and imaginative intelligence. How far from the world does art have to be to retain its strengths and how close to the world does it have to get to engage the interests of people, places and things? Art is one of the ways we understand who we are in this world. The decoy is used here as a creative vehicle to explore the relationship between nature and culture, cities and distant Caledonian forests.

**Empathy** is a type of perception led by something outside of us. It is about (but it is also more than) a simple understanding and inter-relationship with human and non-human others. Empathy is beyond self-interest and most often directed at something different or foreign. It involves attention to expressions of life force and engagement with the world. We use a metaphorical projection to comprehend the experience of the other. Empathy relies on the accumulation of familiar experiences and memories to give meaning to encounters with foreign things such as rare ancient forests.

As we consider Caledonian forests we ask ourselves what

do they mean? These forests emerge from history, yet they are at the edge of imagination and often beyond the experience of many people that live in cities. Some of these forests are three hundred year old or more. They embody culture, reflecting centuries of conflict and land use changes. Yet they are living examples of something that is wild and free, uniquely Scottish. Some suggest that wild forests are best served when the rest of us choose to ignore them. Still others argue that wildness is an alignment of aesthetics, ecology and spirituality that demands to be engaged. Cultural Decoys provide creative visual and conceptual entanglement that can be more accessible than the forests themselves, yet build a community of interest around the idea and experience of these forests.





# FIADH

Collins and Goto Studio

Sculptural installation (2m x 9m x 1.5m)

Metal fencing, wooden posts, cowberry, bilberry, heather and bracken

Fiadh is Scottish Gaelic for deer, but it also references wildness. This is an experimental and evolving sculpture first presented in Sylva Caledonia exhibition at Summerhall (2015) as a deer enclosure model; a fence that protects the forest from the ravages of large deer herds promoted by hunting estates of Scotland. The work was inspired by the idea that a very large version of this sculpture/word fence could be placed over a recently harvested forest plantation, in a region heavy with deer. The full scale version of this work would have three forms, a social aesthetic form as the work is developed, a constructed material form while the fence is still visible and viable, then a living forest form. The first flush of tree growth would eventually outlast the fence itself, leaving the ancient name of the deer, spelled out in native trees and visible over centuries. Deer are essential to the forest, but in large numbers they constrain the forest. Decoys can be about desire and possession; here the cultural form is used to project an imaginative desire for a wild forest set free or perhaps simply as a focal point for a discourse about art and its relationship to human perception, meaning and value.



## The Ladder in the Wood

Collins and Goto Studio  
Photo print (40cm x 53cm)

Deep inside the Black Wood of Rannoch there is an old wooden ladder. It was left behind by a former deerstalker who worked this forest patch over thirty years ago. It was used to climb that tree to sit quietly and shoot deer. The sitting platform is long gone. Now it is almost indiscernible from the forest itself. It functions as a wooden object, which bridges the gap between the human world and natural world through aesthetic appreciation. It is a decoy for the minds desire for imaginative speculation about a different presence in that forest. Here the artists found a cultural decoy. It is a lost utilitarian object that has new meaning as a correspondent image, a photograph. The work intends to capture the viewers unique forest imagination.



## TAOD GAOISDEI and AN DORCHADAS

Collins and Goto Studio

With Pam Scott, Equestrian Photographer

Birch twigs and horsehair (91cm x 33cm x 3.5cm),  
photo print (530cm x 690cm)

Taod Gaoisdei and An Dorchadas (Darkness) are related artworks: one is a bitless bridle made of birch twigs and horsehair, the other one is an image of a horse with the bridle. This term 'taod gaoisdei' is found in Scottish folklore that talks about catching a Kelpie with a special bridle. Taod gaoisdei is a Gaelic term that means 'a bridle that is made of birch twigs'. The idea became a decoy, drawing the artist into a relationship with this object. It began with what does it look like? How to use the birch tree twigs? This harness suggests an intimate ancient connection between human and horse. The strength of the bridle comes from the material nature of that tree which is soft and pliable. The photograph of the bridle with an actual horse captures this artistic bond.



## FEÀRNA / CO2

Collins and Goto Studio

With Chris Malcolm, computer programming,  
The support of Gas Sensing Systems,  
Director, Alan Henderson.

Tree bark, carbon dioxide sensor and speaker  
(68cm x 30cm x 6cm)

‘Feàrna’ means alder tree in Gaelic. In the summer of 2013 We found a piece of bark from an old Alder tree that exists between Coire Buidhe and Camghouran Burn near the south-western edge of the Black Wood of Rannoch. When we found it we were about to climb Leagag hill and get a better view of the Black Wood. On the way back down, with its image still in our head, we found our way back to it and decided to carry it home, something we don’t normally do. We held it in a prominent place in the studio before deciding to combine it with a Carbon dioxide (CO2) sensor that reveals CO2 level in the atmosphere. Reiko developed a sound file then worked with Chris Malcolm to refine the sound and use it to sonify the changing carbon dioxide levels. As human proximity causes CO2 to increase beyond 400ppm the sound becomes louder.





## **Lanolin, Can you see the forests of Scotland?**

Collins and Goto Studio

With Sogol Mabadi, artist and Helen de Main, artist

Tapestry, washed and unwashed fleece (122cm x 183cm)

This artwork has been previously shown as a part of 'Caledonia Futures: The Forests are Moving' at the Tent Gallery, in Art Space and Nature (2013). It is a commentary on the relationship between landscape, trees and sheep in Scotland. The work emerges from experiences in Loch Katrine with the Native Woodlands Discussion Group.

Photo: Birch saplings in the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park



During the walk Ruth Anderson, a member of the group showed Goto the robust bonsai-tree like stem of a native birch tree and its root structure. It supported new tree growth once sheep were removed (and deer fenced out) of that area of the new National Park. The removal of sheep from the Scottish landscape makes an enormous impact on trees and their ability to regenerate and prosper.

Working with unwashed fleece the artist carefully carded the wool and established the background for the lighter, washed wool of the Saint Andrew's Cross, the Saltire. The land is the context for culture, and the trees are the language of landscape that emerges once the pressure of sheep is lifted. Lanolin is another cultural decoy, conflating nationalism and past land use with future visions of an expanded forest in Scotland.



## Biographies

Born in Japan, Reiko Goto Collins is an environmental artist and researcher. Her creative practice is concerned with empathic relationships with living things. Reiko is currently focused on the development of new work dealing with empathic relationships, sentience and collaboration with a horse, a philosopher and an animal behaviour scientist. She has been a participant in the Council for Uncertain Human Futures, a group of women working through the Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities at the University of Edinburgh.

Tim Collins was born in Rhode Island. He is an artist, author and planner and an honorary research fellow, at the University of Aberdeen. He works across art, science and philosophy to develop projects related to nature, culture and public space. He is currently collaborating with a social scientist at Forest Research, Scotland.

The artist's met at the San Francisco Art Institute. They have been working together since 1990. Tim and Reiko are principals in the Collins and Goto Studio in Glasgow. They were research fellows in the Studio for Creative Inquiry at Carnegie Mellon University from 1997 through 2006 working on post industrial landscape and public space. They have been developing work on Scottish ancient forests for five years. They are currently developing the Centre for Nature in Cities (CNC). This builds on previous work on post industrial ecologies and current work on cultural ecologies. They are developing new research around the relationship between biodiversity, aesthetics and spirituality.