

SYLVA CALEDONIA

Collins and Goto Studio • Gerry Loose and Morven Gregor • Chris Fremantle, ecoartscotland

Summerhall, Edinburgh, Scotland, 2015



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This exhibition is developed for *How The Light Gets In*, curated by
Edinburgh International Science Festival
ASCUS Art and Science and Summerhall

Presented at Summerhall
Edinburgh, Scotland, 2015

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An introduction to the *Sylva Caledonia* exhibition

The historical Meadows' elms edge their way into *Sylva Caledonia.* One of the city's most prominent recreational areas, the urban park gained world-wide recognition hosting the 1886 International Exhibition on Industry, Science and Art. This now popular open space embodies man's disposition to enjoy the fruits of nature. It was once the site of the Old Town's main water source additionally used for washing animals, and when no one was looking a depository for human waste. In 1722 it was drained, and the area began to evolve, however the public did not gain full access till the mid-19th century.

Framed by the windows of the gallery, and the *Sylva Caledonia* environment, the frill of the Meadows subtly alludes to what the artists - Tim Collins and Reiko Goto, with Sara Ocklind, and Gerry Loose and Morven Gregor, and Chris Fremantle - seek to absorb, share and question. Their enquiries unearth the subject of cultural ecology, addressing our relationship with nature, specifically the woodlands of Scotland. Presented within the Phenotype Genotype Gallery are nurtured responses to man's need to feel and often create nature, whilst attempting to manipulate the evolution and history of a landscape, and the chasm which ensues. *Sylva Caledonia* is anchored by the artists' experiences in these areas where the wild is monitored and managed; vast spaces often out of sight and mind for the populace. It focuses on our relationships with these ancient forests, while also engaging with the all-consuming topic of climate change, and our duty to assume responsibility for sustainability.

The artists' sensitivity brings hope to these testing, murky and encumbering dynamics, presenting a series of works arresting their understandings, within and around the glass cabinets, framing the treescapes much like the windows of the gallery. Achieved through interdisciplinary methodology, their practices are informed through conversations and relationships they have prompted with scientists, foresters, ecologists, land managers as well as poets and other artists. This aesthetic pragmatism towards cultural ecology learns from the past, contextualises the present, and brings optimism to the future.

Holly Knox Yeoman
Summerhall Exhibition Manager

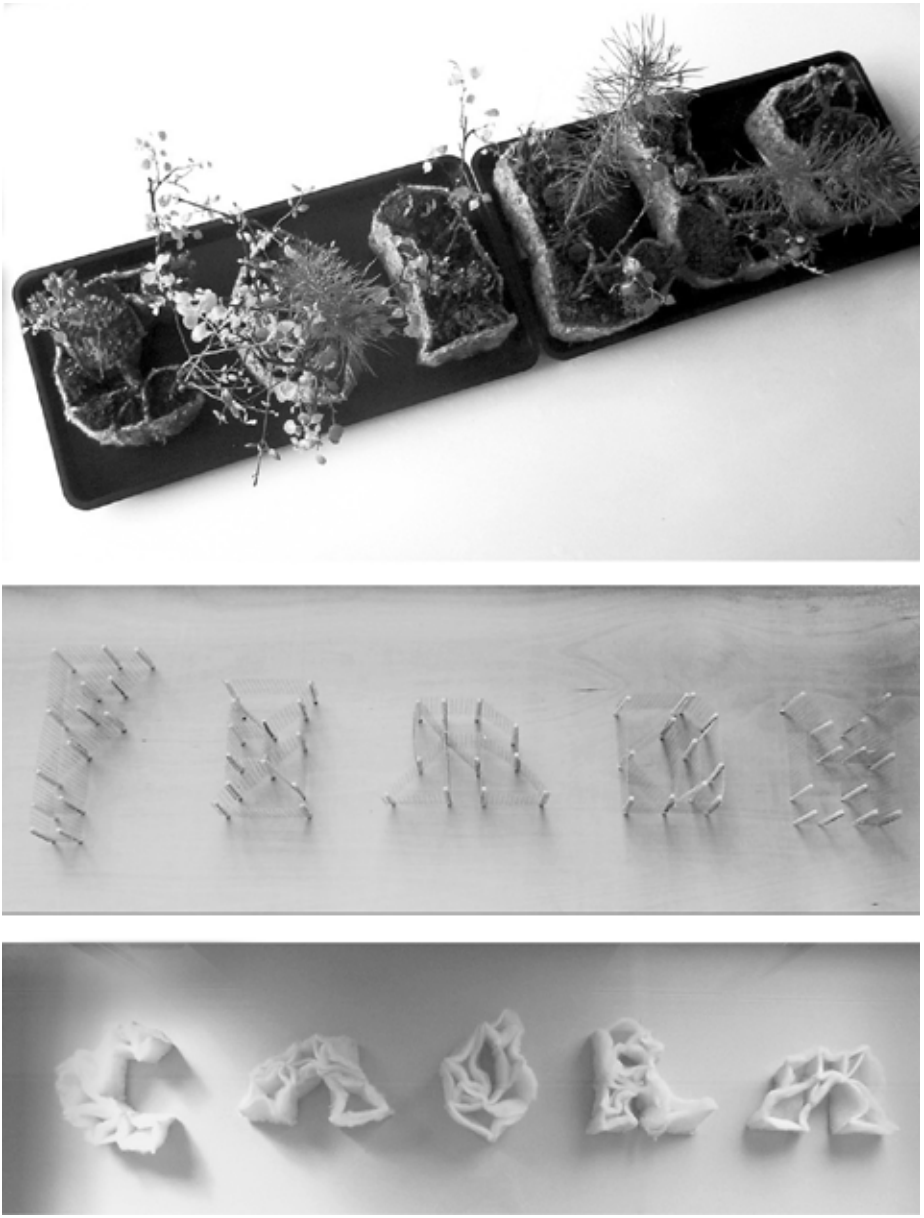
Tim Collins, Reiko Goto and Sara Ocklind
Translation by Beathag Mhoireasdan

The Black Wood of Rannoch has been the focal point of the Collins & Goto Studio for two years; the artists work closely with Anne Benson an artist and forest advocate in Rannoch. The Black Wood is the most significant Caledonian pinewood in the southern highlands. It is proximate to the great cities of Scotland yet unknown to most people. The artists talk about it as a great cathedral without a congregation. There are no road signs or obvious map supports for those who try to find their way there.

The Black Wood project began with a specific idea about working with local communities interested in supporting the renewal of an ancient trail network. When the trail idea was blocked the artists worked to understand the history of the Black Wood the Jacobite forfeitures and the clearances as well as the more recent tensions between conservation managers and those with a broader range of social interests. The effort embraced the idea that art best serves as an ephemeral forest interface in a rural setting and as a correspondent image, idea or artefact in an urban setting. As the work unfolded the artists were interested in how the forest embodied culture. They were also interested in the apparent lack of a cultural record concerning the forest.

With a year's work funded by Creative Scotland the process evolved through artist residencies; starting with the Black Wood community in Rannoch, then within the Perth Museum and Art Gallery and then in the archives at the Forestry Commission. The focal point of the effort was a workshop organized with the project partners to consider how the arts and humanities contribute to the social and cultural aspects, while clarifying the ecology and management challenges within the Black Wood. The intent was to explore the potential for public awareness and public interest without bringing negative impact to the Black Wood itself. The project culminated at Forest Research where time was set aside for reflection with a social scientist and ecosystem scientists considering public awareness, access and cultural ecology for publication.

The contribution to *Sylva Caledonia* is intended to realize the corresponding relationship between Edinburgh and Rannoch. In the sculptural work, *Coille Dubh Rainich* (The Black Wood of Rannoch), *Fiadh* (deer) and *Caora* (sheep) Reiko



The photo at the top provides a detail of *Coille Dubh Rainich* (The Black Wood of Rannoch) in felt and Caledonian forest plant materials. The middle work is constructed of wooden posts and thin metal screen, the title is *Fiadh*, the word for deer in Gaelic. The bottom photo is created with hand made felt from fleece, the title *Caora* is Gaelic for sheep.

Goto took the lead on filling the gap between Summerhall and Rannoch by reconstructing experience and memory. Working directly with living materials to foreground the Gaelic language, as another way of looking at the world. Sara Ocklind spent eight months working with Collins & Goto to produce the current form of the large map. It depicts the historic district of Breadalbane and the upper catchment basins of the Tay river; the landscape has been historically described in Gaelic on the OS Maps. The map will become a focal point in additional work and discussions about Gaelic place names. The video *Tha a' Choille a' Gluasad* (The Forest is Moving) describes the opportunities and constraints within the Black Wood. While *Am Beàrn Eadar Na Craobhan…* (The space between the trees…) provokes an ethical and aesthetic consideration of two types of forest regeneration.

This new work at Summerhall has emerged from ongoing experience in the field and reading, writing and talking with artists and scientists. *Sylva Caledonia* is the first urban step in a series of efforts to explore ideas about cultural ecology. Collins and Goto are interested in the range of approaches that the arts and humanities bring to conflicted land use histories, divergent present perceptions and values and future forest forms and inter relationships.



Comh-Chomhairle Bràghad Albainn (The Breadalbane Deliberation) Translator: Beathag Mhoireasdan. In the photo Reiko Goto and Sara Ocklind look at detail.

Gerry Loose and Morven Gregor

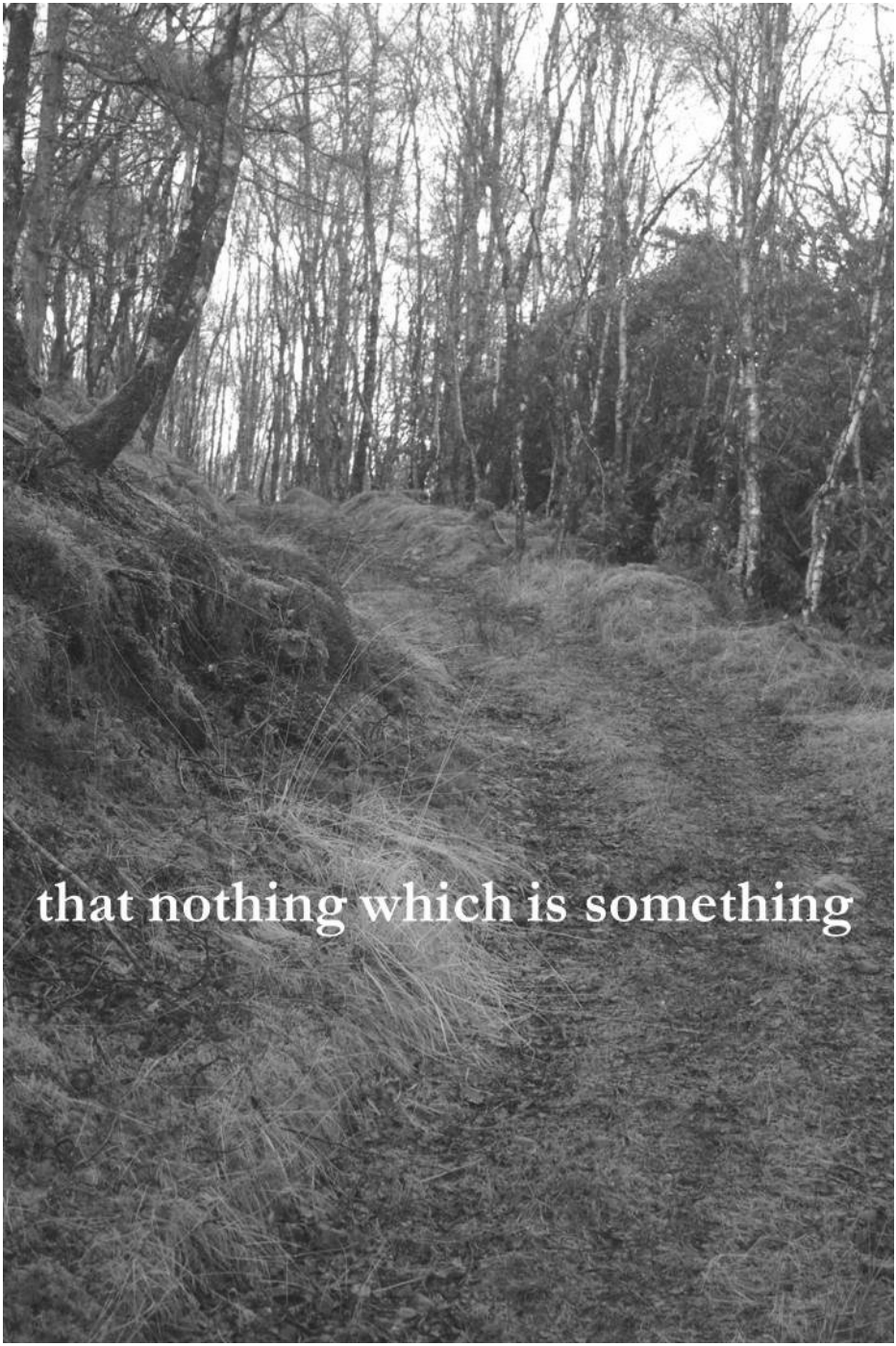
The central question for Gerry Loose and Morven Gregor is: how do we perceive woodlands? Having lived in and travelled through the Sunart Oakwoods for a number of years, the work here in *Sylva Caledonia* presents some reflections on that experience: the building of a relationship and the development of a dwelt, pragmatic and empirical understanding of the interconnected lives in and of the oak wood.

In Sunart they walked with a camera, notebook and pencil to document and allow the woodlands and waters to slowly reveal themselves.

Thus oak galls and acorns become mysterious objects, hazels grow into two languages, offcuts of various timbers become a reflection of economic use of ancient woods and wooden boat wreck fragments signify lives lived. The waters of Loch Sunart, combined with abundant rainfall, are crucial to the survival of this niche environment as well as its intertwined history of industry and travel. Thus Loose's neon works make play with both navigation and botany.

While often described as "remote" (from where, one asks) the Sunart Oakwoods are usually first encountered from the network of roads that present-day travellers use to navigate the peninsulas of Ardnamurchan and Morvern. Gregor's work *Never Alone* reflects travelling on that network on foot, by car, by bus and by bicycle while also making reference (as does *A Wren Travels Through the Canopy*) to the other creatures who inhabit the woodlands and suggest a starting point for understanding how Scotland's ancient woodlands may be approached.

The joint works of photographic image look to the present and perhaps future of woodlands in Scotland. These layered images draw from Loose's suite of poems which conclude the section on Scotland in their forthcoming book *An Oakwoods Almanac*.


that nothing which is something

Sailean nan Cuileag

the pelt of sea its tongues
smooring and quenching and

plucking what will be left
at tide's going air

of what's uttered oystercatcher's
pitch and pipe smew and craik of

curlew pulse of what's given
what's yielded what's opened

Above: poem Gerry Loose: from An Oakwoods Almanac
Opposite: from Almanac, Morven Gregor & Gerry Loose, 2015

Chris Fremantle, ecoartscotland

The Caledonian Everyday

Chris Fremantle describes *Sylva Caledonia* as an idea that emerged from a six hour discussion with Collins, Goto, Loose and Gregor about the role of the arts and humanities in the perception of the ancient woodlands of Scotland. He is interested in how the arts & humanities represent something that is remote (either historically or geographically) for an urban audience. He suggests that representation is successful when it brings the subject alive for the audience. This is a particular challenge when trying to bring ancient forests into the heart of the capital city.

During the exhibition Fremantle will open up a civic space for a wider conversation. The discussion centres around three key thoughts. One thought is about the Anthropocene and management and it goes like this, "If we are affecting everything, then we need to think about what it means to manage everything?" Management of forests is no longer restricted to issues of extraction vs biodiversity. If we are managing everything, and management requires information, then we need to learn to be sensitive in new ways.

The second relationship is between the iconic and of the everyday. Where is the Caledonian forest embodied in the central belt? How can the arts and humanities engage with forests, in particular ancient Caledonian forests, and how might that relate to connections with other woodlands, commercial, urban, even degraded motorway edges?

The third question relates to attachment. We know that the arts and humanities can create connections. Do the cultural institutions of Scotland enrich our relationship with ancient Caledonian forests? What are the examples of practices making these connections?

Reflections on these topics resulting from discussions with foresters, artists, curators and funders will be posted on ecoartscotland after the exhibition.







Chris Fremantle, *the ecoartscotland library.* It is available for reading and research through out the exhibition. After the exhibition access can be provided by appointment at the office in Ayreshire.

BIOGRAPHIES

Tim Collins works across art, science and philosophy, developing artwork, public artwork, and research related to nature and public space for over twenty years. Recent publications (with Goto and scientist David Edwards) includes *Future Forest, Caledonian, Aware, Access*, Black Wood (Creative Scotland, 2014) and *Future Forest, The Black Wood, Rannoch Scotland,* (Landscape Research Group and Forest Research, 2015).

Chris Fremantle is a researcher and cultural producer working in the context of art and ecology. He is a Senior Research Fellow and Co-Investigator for Design in Action, at Robert Gordon University. In 2010 Fremantle established ecoartscotland as a platform for practice and research. Fremantle's most recent project, *Nil by Mouth: Food, Farming, Science and Sustainability* (2013-2014) was commissioned by the Crichton Carbon Centre, produced with Wide Open, and presented at the Scottish Parliament.

Reiko Goto is an artist. She has sustained a creative inquiry concerned with empathic relationships with living things for twenty years; primarily working with small creatures and their environments. Goto seeks interrelationship and empathy with other life forms and ecological communities. She is participating in the Council for Uncertain Human Futures at the Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities, University of Edinburgh.

Morven Gregor is an artist. Her experience of woodlands is informed by twenty years of extended visits to a woodland hut. This intimate knowledge of one place inspires her approach to unfamiliar environments. Previous exhibitions include *Changing Ground* (Barony Centre) *Crossing Alba* (Collins Gallery). Her work can be found in various publications including *Ten Seasons* (SPL/Luath), *Seed Catalogue* (YSP), and *Shared Writing* (Baltic).

Gerry Loose is a poet and land-artist who works primarily within the natural world, as well as the world of geo-politics. His work is found inscribed on wood and stone as well as on the page. His latest book is *fault line* (Vagabond Voices). Forthcoming is *An Oakwoods Almanac* (Shearsman, June 2015.) His most recent landwork is in Mynamaki, Finland, where it will take thirty years growing to completion.

Sara Ocklind is a research associate with the Collins and Goto Studio in Glasgow. She has undergraduate training in architecture and a post graduate degree from Art, Space and Nature at the University of Edinburgh. Over the past two years she has moved back and forth between Scotland and Japan where she has developed and presented new work. She returns to Japan for an artist's residency in 2015.



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