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Background

Sensing the Forest (sensingtheforest.github.io) is a project funded by the UKRI Arts and Humanities Research Council that aims to raise awareness among forest visitors, artists, scientists, and the public about the connection between forests and climate change. The project aims to improve understanding of forests by presenting complex scientific data in creative and artistic ways.

What we did

We ran a Summer School for 10 artists which culminated in an exhibition called "Your Sonic Forest". The Summer School began with six online sessions, each one introducing a different topic such as forest research, installation art, and environmental design. The artists used these sessions to develop ideas for their installations the in-person event.

Your Sonic Forest took place on the 20th of June 2024. The exhibition was set-up along an easy access walking trail in Alice Holt Forest in the south of England. It was free to enter and fully accessible.

One of the exhibits, "Dendrophone" (Pete Batchelor) will remain *in situ* for 12 months, along with the two audio streamers (Luigi Marino) and a live data feed from a logger at our long-term forest flux site in Alice Holt.

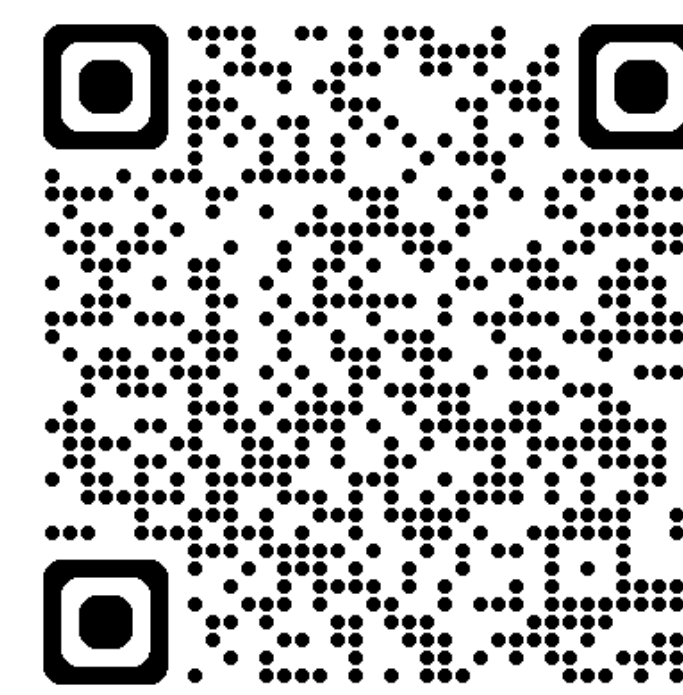


Figure 2. Some of the works; top left – "Within and Between" by Rosa Sungjoo Park. Bottom left – "A tree listens to itself" by Miles Scharff". Right – "Dendrophone" by Pete Batchelor (Photo credits: Shuoyang Zheng, Queen Mary University of London).

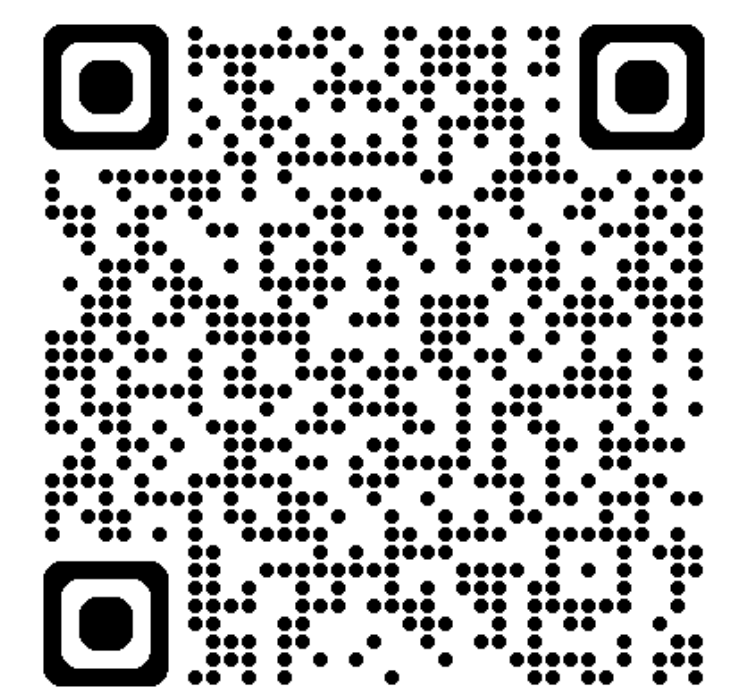
The artists' work

One of the big strengths of the event was the quality and variety of the work on show. Examples can be seen in the photos above. Videos of each piece can be seen on the project website (QR code below).

All of the artists have the opportunity to present their work digitally for the next 12 months.



See videos of the works



Listen live to the streamers

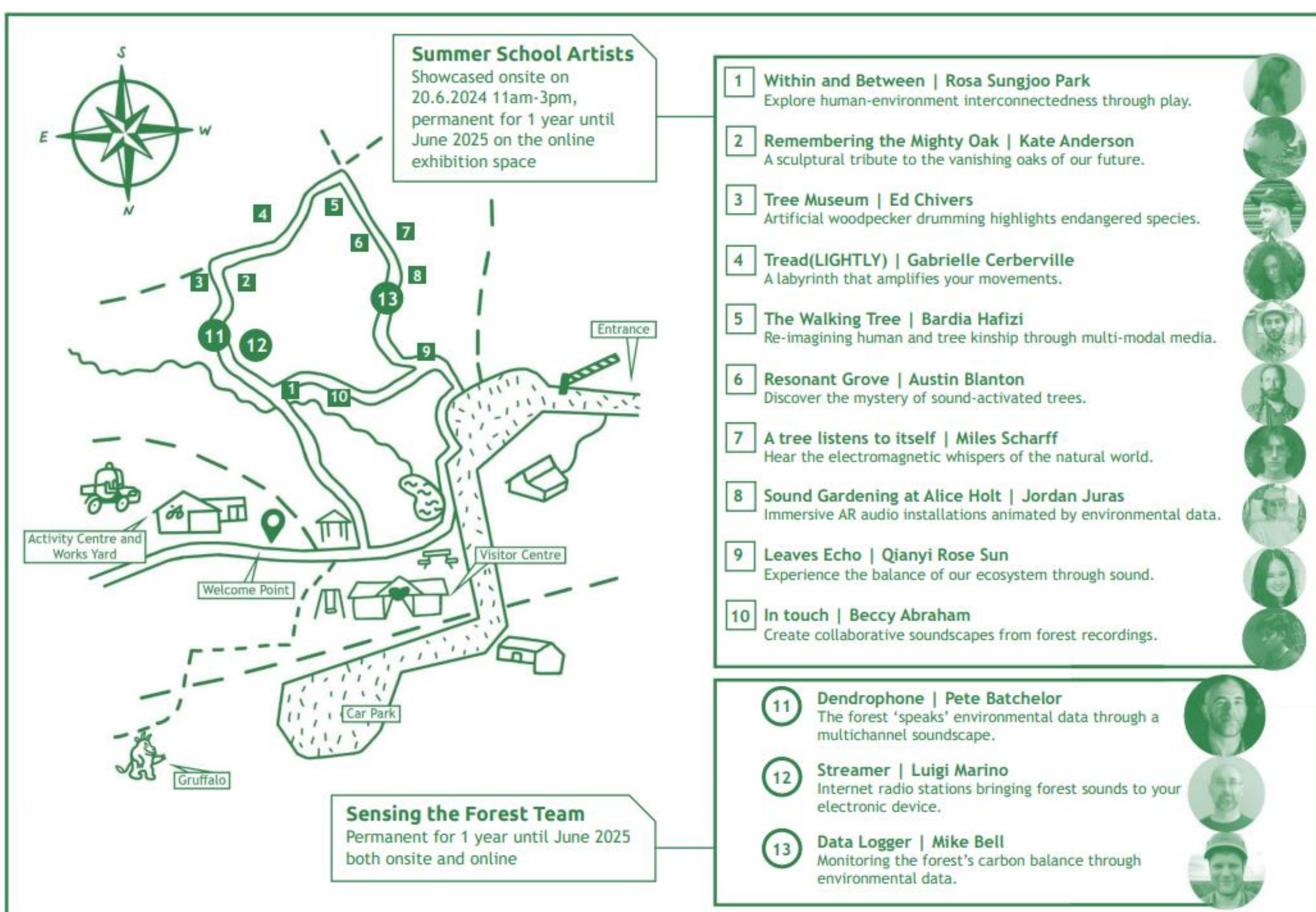


Figure 1. Top – Map of the Your Sonic Forest trail along with titles of the works (Credit: Johana Knowles, Forestry England). Left – Signage for the event. Right – The beginning of the trail (Photo credits: Shuoyang Zheng, Queen Mary University of London).

The team

The project team was highly interdisciplinary and included artists and scientists with a wide range of backgrounds. Forestry England staff, both local and national, who were experienced in running successful events in Alice Holt and other forests across England were also involved from the outset. This combination made for a great team, and ensured that the artists' creative ideas would also work practically and safely in the forest.

The audience

On the day, about half the visitors had come especially to see the exhibition, whilst the other half stumbled across it by chance.

There was a broad mix of artists, scientists, Forestry Commission and Forestry England staff, as well as the general public (dog walkers, young families, retired people) in attendance.

Feedback

- "It was a great day out and a massive amount of fun. I learned a lot, especially about Forestry England and Forest Research, including their role within the UK."
- "Very novel. I wish it could be repeated in other green spaces around UK."
- "Continue making more!"
- "I liked the general vibe and the enthusiasm of the participants."

Things that worked well

- Having a project team, and group of artists, with a mix of backgrounds made the event more dynamic and creative.
- The artists were encouraged to link their pieces to the local environment.
- Having Forestry England staff on the project team from the outset meant that the event was well incorporated into their program of events at the Visitor Centre.
- On the day, the leaflet and map was really well received and signage across the site drew more people in.



Figure 3. The Summer School participants, organisers, and facilitators (Photo credit: Shuoyang Zheng, Queen Mary University of London).

Acknowledgements

All the artists, attendees and Visitor Centre staff for making it such a fun and rewarding day.