

Caledonian Everyday Discussions

The following text is taken from the Ecoartscotland website (<https://ecoartscotland.net>), consisting of three blog posts that summarise a series of seminars called “Caledonian Everyday”. The seminars formed part of the Sylvia Caledonia exhibition, 4 April - 22 May 2015, Summerhall Arts Centre, Edinburgh.

Part 1 (originally titled: “Caledonian Everyday Discussions Pt 1 of 4”; posted on 7th April 2015)

<https://ecoartscotland.net/2015/04/07/caledonian-everyday-discussions-pt1-of-4/>

By Chris Fremantle



As part of [Sylva Caledonia](#), one of Summerhall’s contributions to [Edinburgh International Science Festival](#), we are holding a discussion, Caledonian Everyday in four parts. The first part will take place on **Sunday 12 April at 2pm** at Summerhall (Anatomy Lecture Theatre).

We are very pleased that [Paul Tabbush](#), Chair of the Landscape Research Group ([Bio](#)), will join the exhibiting artists to discuss key questions imagining the future of forests in Scotland.

The key questions are:

- Who knows what (and who decides) about the ancient woodlands of Scotland?
Management of forests is no longer restricted to issues of extraction vs biodiversity. In a field including wild and free forest (no management), community management and extraction, and a science-based biodiversity management system, what are the various implications? Who decides? Who benefits? Who speaks for the forest and other living things?
- What can the arts and humanities contribute to well-being of non-human?
The iconic and of the everyday: where is the Caledonian forest embodied in the central belt? Can a deeper ecological community and its aesthetic experience be nurtured within a city? Is it a bonsai forest or a living ecosystem?
- How can the arts and cultural institutions of Scotland enrich our relationship?
Attachment and the challenges of creating connections: do cultural institutions have a role in the public awareness and well-being of ancient forests? Do the institutions of Scotland enrich our relationship with ancient Caledonian forests? What are the examples of practice in making these connections?

Download the [SylvaCaledoniaCatalogue](#)

The subsequent panels will be held on:

- Saturday 25th April, 2pm
- Saturday 9th May, 2pm
- Saturday 16th May, 2pm



Part 2 (originally titled: “Caledonian Everyday Discussions Pt 2 of 3”; posted on 24th April 2015)

<https://ecoartscotland.net/2015/04/24/caledonian-everyday-discussions-pt-2-of-3/>

By Chris Fremantle



Tim Collins and Reiko Goto, *Coille Dubh Rainich (The Black Wood of Rannoch)*, mixed media, 2015.
Photo: Tim Collins

Should artists seek to change the world? That’s where the first discussion ended, having explored the history of pit props; the potential for a poet to contribute to the constraints that a forest manager might have to take account of in planning the management of an area of woodland; the development of ecosystems services assessment and in particular the cultural dimension; Gaelic and the subaltern, and how to protect a bramble patch in Central Scotland. A more reflective and detailed summary of these discussions will be forthcoming in due course.

In the meantime we are very pleased to announce that the next panel (**2pm Saturday 9 May 2015**, the Anatomy Lecture Theatre, [Summerhall](#)) will have on it:

[Beth Carruthers](#) is a philosopher, theorist, artist, and curator known internationally for her work and research over three decades exploring the ethics and aesthetics of the human-world relationship. Her primary focus is on the

transformative capacities of aesthetic experience, and of the arts in human relations to environment and other beings. She has collaboratively across the arts and sciences on the [SongBird project](#) (1998-2002), and in 2006 created a research report for the Canadian Commission of [UNESCO on art in sustainability focused on sci-arts collaboration](#). She has recently begun a collaboration with a neuropsychologist on a project studying interspecies aesthetic engagement in part by imaging the patterns of human brain response to birdsong. Over the past decade she has been developing a theory of “deep aesthetics”, arising from the aesthetics and ontology of Merleau-Ponty, and studies in psychology and cognitive neuroscience. It proposes that aesthetic engagement is potentially transformative of reductive ontology, and hence of cultural practices, looking toward more sustainable futures (see Carruthers, 2008, 2012, 2013, 2015). Her most recent publication is “A Subtle Activism of the Heart” in Piper and Szabo-Jones, *Sustaining the West: Cultural Response to Canadian Environments*, from Wilfred Laurier University Press (May 2015). Also note: “Returning the Radiant Gaze: Visual art and embodiment in a world of subjects” in Brady, J., [Elemental, from Gaia Project/Cornerhouse](#) (forthcoming). Beth lives in unceded indigenous Coast Salish territory on Canada’s west coast. She is irregular faculty at Emily Carr University of Art + Design at Vancouver Canada, and currently a researcher at the University of British Columbia.

[Amy Cutler](#), Post-Doctoral Research Fellow, School of English, University of Leeds Amy’s main academic research focuses on modern literature and its engagement with environmental politics and with old and new geographical imaginaries of Britain. Her specialist areas of study are coasts and forests in popular, small press, and avant-garde writing. She writes on problems of language, symbolism, and definition in particular environmental imaginations. Amy is the lead academic on the new cross-disciplinary White Rose network, [Hearts of Oak: Caring for British Woodland](#), based at the Universities of Leeds, Sheffield, and York.

[Murdo Macdonald](#), Professor of History of Scottish Art, University of Dundee. Murdo’s doctoral thesis (University of Edinburgh, 1986) explored the relationships between art and science. He was editor of *Edinburgh Review* from 1990-1994. He is author of *Scottish Art in Thames and Hudson’s World of Art* series. His recent research focus has been as principal investigator of an Arts and Humanities Research Council funded project [Window to the West/ Uinneag dhan Àird an Iar: Towards a Redefinition of the Visual within Gaelic Scotland](#) (2005-2011). This is a collaboration between the Visual Research Centre of Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design at the University of Dundee and Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, the Gaelic College in the Isle of Skye. It explores the inter-relationships of contemporary art, Gaelic language and culture, and art history. A further research interest is in the generalist ideas of the cultural activist and ecologist Patrick Geddes.

Scott Donaldson, Creative Scotland. Scott is responsible for film education and environmental development. Scott studied literature, film, education and environmental management. He taught photography and media in London colleges and Scottish universities, photographed for Scottish Natural Heritage and programmed cinema and education at macrobert. From 1997 – 2010 at Scottish Screen, Scott promoted film and moving image education in statutory and tertiary education. Since 2010 at Creative Scotland, he managed the [Creative Futures](#) talent development programme and continues to promote film education.

The following and final discussion on **16 May** will have a panel of forestry managers and forestry researchers.

You can download the pdf of the exhibition publication [SylvaCaledoniaCatalogue](#)

For those of you who are observant you’ll notice that we have reduced the number of discussions from four to three – the one this Saturday 25 April has been cancelled. Look forward to seeing you on 9 May.

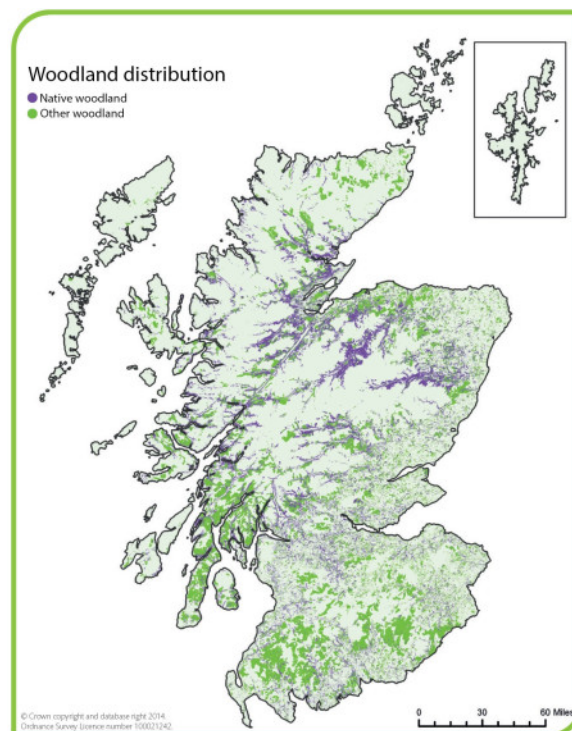


Gerry Loose, *Neon*, 2013. Photo: Tim Collins

Part 3 (originally titled: “Caledonian Everyday Discussions Pt 3 of 3”; posted on 12th May 2015)

<https://ecoartscotland.net/2015/05/12/caledonian-everyday-discussion-pt-3-of-3/>

By Chris Fremantle



Woodland Cover in Scotland from:

<http://www.environment.scotland.gov.uk/get-informed/land/woodlands-and-forests/>

For the third in the series of Caledonian Everyday discussions (2pm Saturday 16 May, [Summerhall](#)) we have a panel comprising foresters (managers and researchers).

At the first panel (12 April) we were provided with an historical trajectory of the issues that Forestry Commission managers and researchers have been asked to take on. We started post war with pit props (a short hand for the role of forestry in the economy) through biodiversity (in the 80s) and community (in the 90s). But the shape of our forests, particularly the ancient woodlands such as Blackwood of Rannoch, have been affected by social and economic changes (human conflict) over a much longer timespan. This historical trajectory is from the period of Jacobite Revolts to the present.

Our second panel (9 May) started with the ways and reasons the Squamish First Nations people spent a decade taking back legal control over woodlands ([Beth Carruthers](#)). They were supported by the new Roundhouse Arts Centre in Vancouver who's initial artist in residence project ended up lasting 10 years.

We went on to explore C19th logging on Rothiemurchus Estate ([Scott Donaldson](#)) and on to contested languages of forestry and the ways that poetry, for instance, can inflect political discourse ([Amy Cutler](#)). We ended with the democratic intellect in Scotland ([Murdo Macdonald](#)). Imperial and post-colonial, institutional and critical, understanding and misunderstanding, ran through this conversation.

For the panel on **Saturday 16 May (2pm, [Summerhall](#))** we'll take a different trajectory again.

Given an increased understanding that everything is connected, what do we need to be sensitive to in managing both ancient and urban woodlands, commercial plantations and even new sites for forestry such as the NHS Estate? What is the role of the arts and humanities? What is the role of cultural institutions?

To address these questions, we have a great spectrum of people involved in forestry including Bianca Ambrose, David Edwards, Richard Thompson and Rick Worrell.

Recently moved from the mountains of North Wales, **Bianca Ambrose** is a social forester, researcher and writer known for her work on public engagement and community connections with woodland who is now based in Bristol. A strong thread within her research work is to understand more about the motivations behind people's engagement with woods and forests, how people feel themselves to be connected to place and with nature, and how this translates into group action and personal satisfaction. The concept of biocultural diversity and the complexities of socio-ecological systems are embedded within her work and thinking. Using environmental sociology and human geography as her epistemological frames of reference, biocultural diversity and socio-ecological systems are manifest as woodland and forest scale cultural landscapes, where agency is directed by culture, place presents the natural resources, and a cultural landscape results. Bianca's recent work in the UK has involved research collaborations with community woodland groups, and communities involved in urban greenspaces both of which included travel to work in the Highlands and Lowlands of Scotland. Previously, she worked in an international context exploring the biocultural diversity of tropical forests and semi-arid rangelands across the world in countries including Cameroon, Mali, Ethiopia, Nepal, India, and the Philippines.

David Edwards, Senior Social Scientist at Forest Research – the research agency of the Forestry Commission – started his career as a forester on rural development programmes in West Africa and South Asia. In 1997 he re-trained in African Studies at Edinburgh University, with a doctoral thesis on the environmental history of southern Tanzania. He joined Forest Research in 2004, where he leads a new programme, 'Integrating science for policy and practice', which aims to demonstrate how to conduct applied interdisciplinary research in ways that enhance its impact. He has a keen interest in the environmental humanities and has been collaborating with artists Tim Collins and Reiko Goto, and a diverse range of partners, to help realise the cultural meanings associated with the Black Wood of Rannoch, one of the largest remnants of ancient Caledonian pine forests in Scotland. In doing so, he has explored the contrast between the official instrumental discourse of 'ecosystem services' and the private narratives of aesthetic and spiritual connection and empathy with nature held by many ecologists and foresters – and the prospect that these less tangible values might be incorporated better into environmental decision-making.

Richard Thompson, Native Woodland Ecologist for Forest Enterprise Scotland – realised his vocation at the age of ten and spent his formative years doing voluntary nature conservation work. He has muddy boot origins having

trained as a forester and worked for a few years supervising harvesting and forest management. However, his interest in nature conservation soon led to an appointment as a conservation forester in Mid Wales and subsequently, a project leader in Forest Research's Northern Research Station, specialising in the ecology and silviculture of upland native woodlands. Richard now provides strategic and site based advice on native woodland management on the national forest estate focusing on the restoration of planted ancient woodland sites, the improvement of condition in ancient semi-natural woodlands and the restoration and expansion of rare woodland types such as montane scrub and Atlantic hazelwoods. The aesthetic complexity of the "natural" environment and palimpsest of cultural use form important facets of Richard's interest in native woods.

Rick Worrell is a self-employed forestry consultant who specialises in the management of native and broadleaved woodland. He has been involved in woodland survey, planning, management, research and policy development; working for private owners, Forestry Commission, local authorities and environmental charities. He is one of a small group of people who argued for native woodlands to be brought into the forestry in the 1980s; and has made a career out of working with the forestry profession to develop the collective competence to manage them. After 25 years we are only part way through that process.

He owns a small ancient oak woodland together with 4 other families, near Aberfeldy, where woodland management becomes personal and collective, and gets entangled with family life. He also, after many years of trying, persuaded a commercial forest owner to sell him a couple of acres of spruce plantation behind his house, which he is restoring to native woodland.

We look forward to seeing you on Saturday.
