



For immediate release

Andrea Roe
Sentient Forest

Luminescent sentient artwork seeks to explore the Forest of Dean's hidden secrets

15 April 2016 – 14 April 2017

Open by 8am daily

For closing times and parking costs: <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/beecehurst>

Beecehurst Lodge, Speech House Road, Coleford, Glocs.

OS Grid ref.: SO614120

Artist Andrea Roe reveals the unseen communication between trees in the artwork, *Sentient Forest*, a temporary commission by the Forest of Dean Sculpture Trail in collaboration with Forestry Commission England.

Sentient Forest seeks to reveal secrets hidden in the forest. Roe's commission brings the Trail into the 21st century with a technological artwork that utilises LEDs and sensors to create an interactive piece that responds to the presence of viewers. The new work is part of a series of new commissions for the Trail that will be revealed over the coming year, which includes the recently unveiled artwork by Onya McCausland.

In collaboration with electronic engineer Al Bennett, Roe made *Sentient Forest* in response to a scientific theory that suggests every forest has its own communication system known as mycelium, which enables a network of information and nutrients to pass between fungi and trees.

She uses individually programmable LEDs along with interactive sensors to pick up the presence of the viewer and make visible the flow of information between trees. The artwork exposes the interconnectedness of all living matter and reveals the symbiotic nature of trees and fungi as well as the complexity of growth and decay on and below the forest floor.

"The Forest of Dean commission has given me the opportunity to investigate and visualise fungi to tree communication, a subject that fascinates and intrigues me," commented Roe. "I imagined that instead of seeking out an artwork on the forest trail, the artwork would 'sense' you. Al Bennett and I have produced a microcontroller-driven lighting system which mimics underground mycelial networks and, when triggered, communicates the presence of passing walkers to nearby trees."

The Sculpture Trail has a 30-year heritage of commissioning contemporary artworks and installations that explore and reflect the place in which they are situated.

Andrew Stonyer, Chair of the Forest of Dean Sculpture Trust, commented, "As the forest lives, breathes, grows and dies, so do the artworks that have evolved here over the past thirty years. This next generation of newly commissioned public works breathe new life into the Trail, offering visitors something new to explore, as we seek to introduce new ideas and understandings of the Forest of Dean."



Judith Lack, Forestry Commission Recreation Manager, “We’re very excited to be welcoming a new artwork to the Sculpture Trail that will inspire all ages. The Sculpture Trail is instrumental in bringing people to the forest, enabling them to enjoy its beauty and to explore the woods in a different way.”

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Notes to Editors

For high res images, press enquiries, and interviews, please contact Kate Gordon, kate@brightsparkpr.co.uk, +44 7980 921961 or Nathan Taylor, nate@brightsparkpr.co.uk, +44 7889 872700.

Andrea Roe is an artist whose work examines the nature of human and animal biology, behaviour, communication and interaction within specific ecological contexts. She has undertaken residencies in a number of institutions – ranging from the Wellcome Trust to the Crichton Royal Hospital, to the National Museums of Scotland – where she has learned about and responded to research projects and collections.

Roe referenced the work of American mycologist, Paul Stamets, who believes that mycelial (or fungal) networks sense any impression upon them, ‘...from footsteps to falling tree branches,’ and hopes that ‘...through cross-species interfacing, we may one day exchange information with these sentient cellular networks.’¹

www.andrea-roe.com/

¹ *Mycelium Running, How Mushrooms Can Help Save the World*, P. Stamets, Ten Speed Press, 2005

Al Bennett is an electronic engineer who has written firmware for ECG monitors, created wireless sensor hardware and develops devices for the Internet of Things. Fascinated with LEDs from a young age, Al was a hobbyist who went on to complete a degree in Electronic Engineering and worked in research and development of medical devices. Now half of a small electronics startup company, Al continues to work in the electromagnetic field.

Al is a founder member of Edinburgh Hacklab, a communal workspace for makers and tinkerers, and through this has worked on varied projects including props, robots and laser games. Introduced to Andrea at a Hacklab open night, Al was keen to contribute to her work and has designed the control electronics, machined and assembled enclosures and created the off-grid charging system that powers *Sentient Forest*.

Special thanks to Random Switch, Richard Brown, Dr Paul Walton, Prof Roy Watling, Prof Lynne Boddy, Dr Andrew Gardiner, Annie Cattrell, Lizzy Turner and Ray Bennett.

The **Forest of Dean Sculpture Trust** in partnership with the Forestry Commission, commissions contemporary Sculpture that aims to: create experiences and enjoyment of



world-renowned contemporary sculpture that responds to the special context of this Forest; provide free and open access to all to contemporary sculpture; and provide unique opportunities for artists to make sculptures which are informed by a sustained engagement with the Forest.

In addition to Forestry Commission England, the Sculpture Trail is indebted to the support of Arts Council England, Gloucestershire Environmental Trust, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, Honourable Company of Gloucestershire Charitable Trust and Watts Group of Lydney.

www.forestofdean-sculpture.org.uk

Forestry Commission England manages the Sculpture Trail out of its Beechenhurst Family Visitor site. It is recognised and respected as an international leader in sustainable forestry. Working with others, it looks after the country's trees, woods and forests for the good of everyone – today and for the future. Its reputation has been built on its expertise and ability to achieve results that benefit people's lives. These benefits include the unique Public Forest Estate where millions of visitors enjoy a wide range of recreational activities every year.

www.forestry.gov.uk/visit

Forest Art Works is a new partnership between Arts Council England and Forestry Commission England to support achieving great art and culture for everyone in England's public forests. Since 1968 England's Public Forest Estate has played host to artworks and initiatives across artforms. It believes that woodlands and forests are vital places for contemporary artists to engage with, to make and present new work.

<http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestartworks>



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