

# TREEWILDER

5 November 2022 – 28 February 2023

Barnwell Country Park, Barnwell Road, Oundle, Northants, PE8 5PB

*Treewilder* is an exhibition of site-responsive interventions, sculptures and video work set in Barnwell Country Park aiming to encourage visitors to explore the woodland space throughout autumn and winter.

Suggestive of both the words ‘bewilder’ and ‘rewilding’, *Treewilder* invites audiences to take a step into the woods and the world of contemporary art, addressing Fermynwoods Contemporary Art's theme of *Xylophobia* (or fear of the woods) head on. As guest curator Angela Kingston suggests, “Feel the fear and do it anyway”, perhaps discovering what might be called ‘xylophilia’, or an attraction to nature, along the way.

## Denise de Cordova

For several years, Denise de Cordova has been walking, often alone, in the deep woods and forest spaces of British Columbia, visiting First Nation and Settler communities as part of an ongoing preoccupation with wildness and remoteness, imagining characters that might inhabit the spaces between the trees to evoke a sense of wildness.

At Barnwell Country Park, the female figure of *The Winter Watcher* sits upon a branch silently watching over the trees, over us. The totemic figure with a birds-eye view features several perches for birds themselves to gather and make themselves visible when not omnipresently observing elsewhere in the woods. In the Visitor Centre the roles are reversed where three uncannily sized avian sculptures roost like visitors from Daphne du Maurier's horror "The Birds". Both unsettling and inviting, with beautifully rendered plumages they watch and beckon visitors into the wilderness.

## Delaine Le Bas

Delaine Le Bas is an artist from a large family of English Romani Gypsies based in the South of England, whose work deals with issues of exclusion and stereotypes that are far-reaching and ingrained into the human consciousness.

English Gypsies are strongly associated with woodland. On one hand, idealised encampments among trees, but on the other as the skipping song goes, “My mother said, I never should, play with the Gypsies in the wood...”

The video and animation work *CHUVIHONI* (the British Romani word for witch) shares the voices of Romany Gypsies telling traditional Romany Gypsy ghost stories set in the woodland.

## Kim L Pace

Kim L Pace recalls the shakiness of identity from being unrecognised as a child on a carnival float dressed as a bear. Themes of transformation and change stem from this experience, developing families of diverse, hybrid tree sprites and personages embodying identity as something fluid and undefinable.

Emerging in locations around the park are suggestions of plant, animal or mineral combined with human characteristics, blurring the boundaries between the human and non-human. *Barny* and *Alcedinidae* recalling park motifs of barn owl and kingfisher, with *Brock*, *Night Warbler* and *Woodland Spirit* suggesting something more mysterious and open ended.

## Jennet Thomas

Jennet Thomas makes films and performances that are darkly comic, using fantasy and the absurd to explore how we deal with the sense of impending doom.

Where the bat has traditionally been associated with a fear of the woods, Jennet notes, "That potent image has now become super-charged by the origin story of Covid-19. Along with the rest of the natural world bat habitats are being destroyed at a terrifying rate. But they've been around for 50 million years. They don't want anything to do with us, and this whole thing is not their fault."

Occupying one of the wildlife monitors in the Visitor Centre, Jennet's short film *Not Yet Out of the Wood* offers bats the right of reply. Created during lockdown the film riffs on the often-repeated phrase during our long entanglement with the pandemic to draw attention to the greater threat that we pose towards bats as a species.

## Danny Treacy

Danny Treacy is interested in territories where people gather because there is nowhere else to go, where communities exist in a fragile state as a result of social exclusion. Often these places are overlooked and not perceived to have a positive function, yet through human interaction and intervention act as a collective for those who are dislocated or marginalised.

Using photogrammetry, a photographic process that uses powerful software to stitch together two-dimensional photographs in three dimensions, Danny captured signs of affection and devotion from social rituals that have taken place at Barnwell, displaying the photographic prints in the shelters around the park.

Infiltrating the annual burning ritual in the park, Danny added parts retrieved from abandoned motorbikes to the fire to reform the molten metal into an ambiguous trophy. Combined with a staff retrieved and whittled by his son whilst playing in the park the work might suggest a Tusken gaderffii stick, a weapon of the ancient world in Russell Hoban's "Riddley Walker" novel, or a symbol of devotion to the woods.

## Johannes Zits

Johannes Zits' multi-disciplinary practice focuses on the many meanings engendered by a body, both human and non-human; extending the notion of the performer to include nature itself.

During a residency at Barnwell Country Park in autumn 2022, Johannes guided local participants through a series of actions and exercises to develop an intuitive durational performance with a group of birch trees, documented on film and shown here in the Kingfisher Cafe.

Moving as a group with the goal of staying connected to one another as humans and to the rest of the nonhuman world, participants aimed to stay in the moment, acknowledging what was in front of them with respect - a pioneer tree species with a typical lifespan comparable to humans themselves, slowly converting areas into more established woodlands. Dressed to reflect their surroundings, at moments participants seem to merge with the spinney of trees and at others their movement patterns make them more visible and reflective of one another.



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