



HART WOOD

OF
THE

COMER WOODS
DUDMASTON. WV16 6QN



Press release

Hart of the Wood is a bold new multidisciplinary, multimodal art and film project, led by artist and filmmaker Benjamin Wigley, that celebrates humanity's ingrained relationship with the woods.

The project's capacious branches envelope an ambitious range of art forms that include: a long-form avant-garde documentary film, outdoor expanded cinema live event, kinoscope hand-crank celluloid film projection sculptures, and an exhibition of handmade celluloid film prints, paintings, and projections.

Benjamin Wigley has been working with a team of artists on this pioneering project at Dudmaston's Comer Woods. This project was originally conceived to mark the 40th Anniversary since the property came under the care of the National Trust, but the pandemic caused delays and during that time has evolved into an inspiring collection of works that explore ideas around the multitude of ways people can immerse themselves in an idea or story.

Kinoscope Hand Crank Celluloid Film and Soundscape Sculptures

For the Kinoscope film sculptures, Ben has collaborated with well-respected folk musician, and sonic adventurer, Nathaniel Robin Mann, to create three film and sound works. These works also feature the beautiful voice of award-winning folk singer, Lisa Knapp. The film and sound works are presented on three solar powered, hand-crank film projector boxes which have been installed at three locations in Comer Wood, and will remain there for two years, free for visitors to use.

Placing your head inside the box and turning the handle engulfs the audience immediately in a wash of dreamlike imagery and sound, inspired by folk mythology and the woodland spirits. When you crank the handle of the sculpture, a bespoke built low-powered projector unit displays the images from a 16mm film print, (processed by hand), off a mirror onto the back of the box. An earthy soundscape then emits that feels like it could have risen directly through the humus on the woodland floor underneath your feet. The artworks are interwoven with sounds and images made from, audio archive, contemporary woodlanders, and theatrical sequences inspired by folk mythology, created with artist, mask maker and performer, Stephen Jon Cooper, that resonate within our consciousness from time immemorial.

Ben said *'I have become fascinated with the idea around the Green Man, what he represents, about our enduring relationship with the woods, and why it's so important that he rises up again now. These works are an extension of my exploration of the cinematic form. Bringing film into the landscape and building an expanded cinema experience that has the opportunity for the art explorer to get a sense of both a physical, and an experiential journey; interacting, immersing and participating.'*

Outdoor Expanded Cinema Live Performative Art Event

25th June 2022 NT Dudmaston's Comer Woods

As a further exploration of the expanded cinema, and immersive multimodal film project, Hart of the Wood will be further bringing film into the landscape through a live art event in the woods. On Saturday June 25th 2022 there will be a one-off day of celebration in the woods at Comer Woods. H.O.W artists and collaborators will perform, make, and interact with audiences along a cyclical route through the National Trust woodland. People will step over the threshold into a wooded phantasmagoria for the day. They will encounter installations and sculptures based around the seasons, live performances, and surprise happenings. The performances will include the opportunity for audience participation, as folk singer and sound artist Nathaniel Robin Mann gives a richly guttural performance in front of an army of wind wanders that encroach on the brow of a hill, reminiscent of an ancient woodland tribe 'Wind Wands' are handmade instruments made from branches that 'bull roar' when swung, and the Wind Wand orchestra will be led by the gifted artist and craftsman Martin Somerville. Artist, performer, and mask maker Stephen Jon Cooper will invoke the Hart of the Wood, the ancient spirit of the White Stag, at the Winter 'Bone Tree' shrine performing as the Deer Shaman. The award-winning folk singer, Lisa Knapp will be performing as Gaia, and will be singing for Spring, as the spells of the undergrowth rise up from the head of the decapitated Green Man. There will also be the well-known Shropshire choir the Mere Singers, led

by Mary Keith. The audience will be encouraged to hang bones, flowering sticks, and draw the 'watching' eyes of the trees with white chalk, as they navigate through the seasonal woodland rides.

At the start and the end of this cycle there is the 'Summer' Barn exhibition. This outdoor building space will be transformed to present a curated collection of the visual art made by Wigley and the H.O.W collaborators through the whole expanded film and art project. Wigley's films fuse documentary and Avant Garde theatrical performance that present allegorical conceits that use folklore and mythology as a way of having a meaningful conversation about our relationship with the woods, in the wake of climate change. In the projection space, there will be some short sequences of the long form film to showcase the film project. There will be new film sequences, and the kinetoscope films presented at standard film speed. The Kinetoscope film, sculptures run at around 6 frames per second and create a dreamlike visual work. Alongside the motion picture film, Wigley also made a series of photographic portraits, on Medium Format still photographic film that were made across the different locations that the film journey took him. The works are all printed by hand in the darkroom.

The Hart of the Wood film project explores beyond Comer Woods and the National Trust. The long form film spawned an exciting collaboration with the University of Birmingham's trailblazing science experiment in the woods called, F.A.C.E (Free Air Carbon Experiment) at BIFoR (Birmingham Institute of Forest Research). Here a strange futuristic woodland site was explored through the complicated structures used for the experiments around the carbon dioxide uptake of trees, testing at the Carbon levels they expect in 30-50 years' time. Ben also spent a period of time with an intentional community living in the woodland near Glastonbury, and a life-long ecological warrior inspired by the teaching of the 20th century Austrian forest scientist, Viktor Schauberg. These collaborations form the documentary vignettes of the film, and also feature in the photographic portraiture project on display in the barn. The portraits are made in a playful participatory way that is inspired by the visual vernacular of the ecclesiastical foliate head carvings of the Green Man, found in churches.

There are photographic prints taken directly from the 16mm motion picture film, printed by hand in the darkroom and painted. Other paintings and art objects adorn the barn's 'Summer Shrine', that include hand dyed fabric with flower prints, Phytogram photography (images created on film by the direct application of flowers on the negatives), and oil paintings of the narrative cycle, a 'Poor Man's Bible' from the myth we present of the 'Spirit of Vegetation', that is crowned by a painting of Stomata.

This free, one-off event will celebrate not just Comer Woods but our relationship with woods through all time.

Link: [Expanded cinema & Live Event](#)

The Long Form Feature Film: Hart of the Wood:

Made in conjunction with the visual art, and the film sculpture project. The Hart of the Wood feature film is a linear 64-minute multimodal documentary that blurs the boundaries of form between documentary, fiction, and Avant Garde film. Ben shot all the 16mm film and processed it by hand in his darkroom at home. The film is non-site specific and is a wider study that considers our profound relationship with the woods. The film was shot over two years at different woodland locations across the UK, where unique experiments and interactions occur that venerate the woods in a strange and ritualistic way. The film has started to be distributed to International Film Festivals and is waiting for its 'World Premiere'.

Logline

'Hart of the Wood', is a long-form 'Avante-Garde' documentary film that sits in a fictitious conceit that begins in a distant future, inspired by Russell Hoban's cult novel 'Riddley Walker'. A medley of documentary, fantasy, song and dance: shot on a tapestry of celluloid film stocks and developed by hand.

Synopsis

A strange hominid, from a different time, is swallowed down under-earth where he discovers a weird film projection device from his distant past. He cranks a handle and is confronted with a film of visions, disgorged

from a fermented face from the past, that reveals a phantasmagoria of contemporary life; that sits in a liminal place between the real and the oneiric.

A climate-fiction; film-dream. Inspired by literature, folklore, science and arboriculture. We are projected through portals to deep past; distant future; and an eerie series of mysterious interventions, invocations, and experiments, that enables us to reflect on humanity's deep relationship with the woods. 'A waking dream', of an arboreal utopia; layered with sensations and memories, that confront our own nightmares that lay arising on our immediate horizon.

Partners:

The Hart of the Wood film sculptures and live event project is delivered in partnership with the National Trust and supported through Arts Council England's National Project Grants and ARTDOCS. Gow Gibson, property manager says 'We are keen to encourage more people to access, enjoy and appreciate this beautiful woodland.'

The Hart of the Wood Feature film is supported by ARTDOCS, and made with partners: BIFoR (Birmingham Institute of Forest Research), Dragon Hill Woodland Community, Buster Nolan and Family and the National Trust.

Elements of the Hart of the Wood project that focus on BIFoR's work were presented at COP 26 in the Green Zone. This included photographic prints and a short film sequence that will be shown at the barn, and forms a sequence in the Hart of the Wood feature film.

Ben has a track record of ground breaking creative collaborations. Hart of the Wood builds on two previous successful collaborative projects with the National Trust, ('A Lost Paradise', Kinetoscopes at Shugborough, and the Paa Joe & the Lion international artist residency and finale performance at Clumber Park that also formed a major part of Ben's first experimental documentary feature film Paa Joe & The Lion. PJ&L showed at over 30 international film festivals and sold to Amazon Prime North America).

Link here: [Hart of the Wood Feature Film](#)

Ends

For more information or images about the live event contact producer Sian Allen

sianallencreativeservices@outlook.com 07837915460

For more information, images, short film sequences, private links to the main feature film, in regards to the HOW feature film & art exhibition contact Benjamin Wigley

Ben@artdocs.co.uk 0777913445

Follow Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/hart_of_the_wood

Lead Artists:

Benjamin Wigley <http://artdocs.co.uk/>

Nathaniel Mann <http://nathanielmann.co.uk/>

Featuring artists:

Lisa Knapp : www.lisaknapp.co.uk

Martin Sommerville (By Our Hands We Make Our Way): <http://wemakeourway.co.uk/>

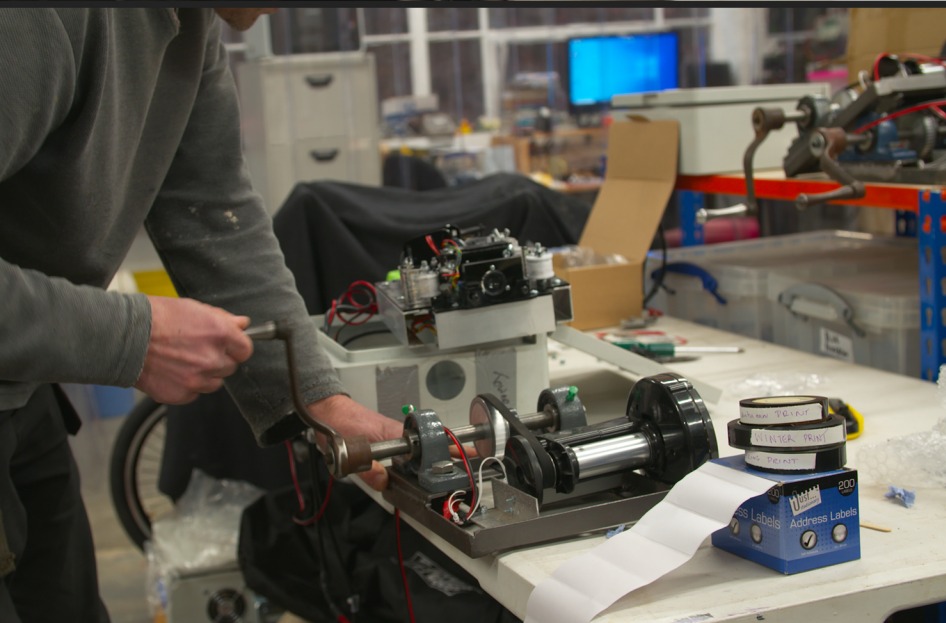
[Stephen Jon Cooper : https://stephenjonmask.com/](https://stephenjonmask.com/)

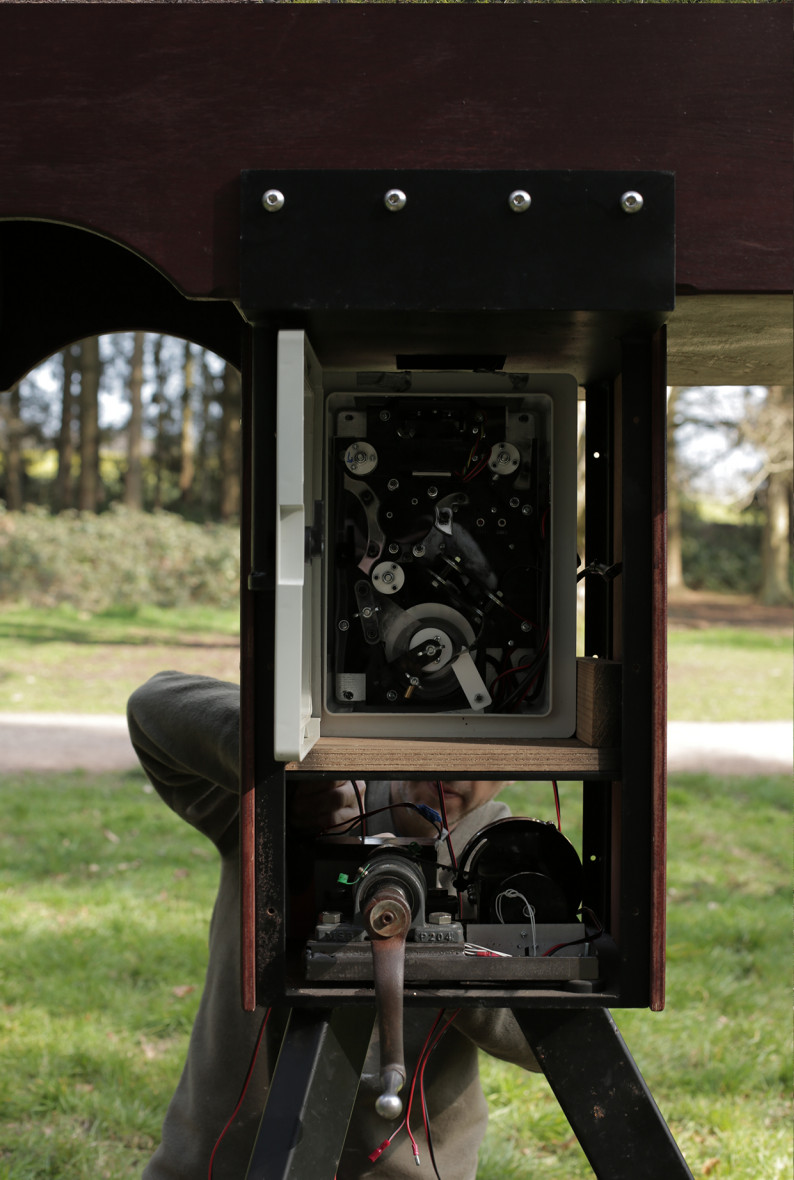


















HART OF THE WOOD

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DUDMASTON. WV16 6QN



SATURDAY JUNE 25TH. 2022
11AM - 3.30PM

'Hart of the Wood' charts and celebrates human relationships with the woods and trees through time past and into the future.

Take a walk through Comer and see the woods through new eyes. Following a self guided trail, you'll discover unusual and extraordinary installations, events and mini performances. Meet characters associated with woods, some mythical, others very real. Return to the meadow and visit the barn exhibition, where you can see prints, paintings, and short atmospheric film sequences taken from Ben's long - form film Hart of the Wood, that explores our deep relationship with the woods, through ancient myth to modern day.

Hart of the Woods is a partnership project between ARTDOCS and the National Trust. Supported through Arts Council England's National Project Grants.

From Easter 2022 you will also find three kinetoscopes, solar-powered celluloid film projector sculptures, sited in the woods. The kinetoscopes will show original film and sound works, interweaving audio archive of the Comer woodlanders with beautiful folk singing. Turn the handle and see the woodland world in a new way.

All these events are free.

HART OF THE WOOD COLLABORATORS

Benjamin Wigley: lead artist, film

Nathaniel Robin Mann:

sonic-adventurer, performer

Stephen Jon Cooper:

artist, mask-maker, performer

Martin Sommerville: artist, carver, performer

Lisa Knapp: additional vocals, performer

Dr Matthew Little:

hand-crank-projector engineer



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