

Study Statement

1) Working Title

“Under Pressure: A fragile forest”

The ‘A’ is important since work is specifically focussed on the Swinley Forest.

‘Fragile’ describes how I think the forest would feel (if it could) with so many pressures on it, lots of human and non-human lives relying on it for so many different things. On top of all the competing stakeholders particular to this forest there is the wider issue of climate change with extremes of weather putting extra pressure on life in all forests. Fragile seems the right word.

I like the idea of the ‘under pressure’ part of the title, partly due to the connotations with climate change and humans generally exerting far too much pressure in both action and expectation on natural resources but also because I’m a printmaker and therefore all the work will be made under the pressure of a press or a barren.

2) Aims and Objectives

The subject:

The Swinley Forest is an area of over 2,600 acres (11km²) straddling the Surrey-Berkshire-Hampshire border. It has two designated biological Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), contains Special Protection Areas (SPA’s) and ancient woodland. It is owned and managed by the Crown Estate, used by the military and yields 10,000 tonnes of timber per year. To some it is a famous mountain biking destination or a James Bond film location, to others a place to walk the dog. The Devils Highway, a roman road, runs through it just south of Caesars Camp, one of the largest iron age hill forts in southern England. It is home to rare birds, nationally important dragonfly and damselfly populations and forms part of the Thames Basin Heaths due to its areas of nationally rare lowland heath. Climate change is lengthening the summer months of cracked dry earth

and deepening winter's swampy mud. The forest seems to have its own aesthetic, recognisable to those who know it, created by this palimpsest of conservation, changing use and wildlife.

The questions I'm asking myself:

- Why does the forest look the way it does?
- Why do humans enjoy being in the forest so much – what do we get out of it?
- Are we asking too much of the forest by expecting it to be so many things at once or does the intensive management actually benefit wildlife?
- What sort of view to I fancy today – how many different habitats/landscapes can I find in the forest if I go looking and how did they come to be created?

My practice:

I walk with my dog almost every day in the forest, usually for a couple of miles and usually from Bagshot or Ascot. I observe, listen, sketch and photograph, often the same places and the same views again and again, noticing the change in seasons, the difference in the angle of the sun, the animal activity and the changes wrought by the human activity concerned with timber growing and the general management of the forest. I sometimes collect objects of interest such as grasses, pine cones, leaves, fallen lichens or pieces of bark. I use my collections, sketches and photographs as the starting point for prints which, to date, have explored seasonality, light and mark making. I plan on delving more deeply into the history of the forest and walking in areas that I have not previously visited to explore it more thoroughly. I want a better understanding of its history, uses, inhabitants and stakeholders so that I may create work that starts to explore the myriad of conflicting expectations we place upon it.

a) AIMS:

- i) Create imagery to represent and record different forest stakeholders, both human and non-human, historical and contemporary
- ii) Use imagery separately and in combination to create a body of work that makes a statement about the forest as a whole

- iii) Use different printmaking techniques individually and in combination in an exploratory and experimental manner

b) OBJECTIVES:

- i) Identify a range of historical and contemporary human and non-human stakeholders
- ii) Explore the impacts these stakeholders have on the forest from the marks and aesthetics they create and leave behind
- iii) Explore what humans in particular 'want' from the forest
- iv) Explore the notion of 'place' and 'connection to place' as a starting point for creativity
- v) Experiment with a range of printmaking techniques including linocut, collagraph, etching, lithography and monoprint both individually and in combination
- vi) Explore the possibilities offered by additional techniques such as collage and stitch

3) Context

Connection to a particular place:

There is a very long list of writers and creatives whose work has been inspired by their deep connection to a particular landscape, usually one in which they live. Gilbert White, William Cowper, John Clare, William Wordsworth, Emily Bronte and Thomas Hardy are just some well-known examples. John Constable was reported to have stated "I should paint my own places best" (p.189, Owens, 2022). By focussing on a particular place and becoming intimately acquainted with it, it is possible to notice the small everyday details and observe changes throughout the seasons and over time.

Claude Monet and Ivon Hitchens were two artists who, in time, didn't need to venture beyond their own gardens to find all the inspiration required. Hitchens focussed on the close-up details and Monet painted the same subject painted over and over again always finding new possibilities. Repeated images of the same place can inspire new ideas and ways of seeing, it can also nurture a deep connection with a place.

Neil Bousfield explores his local Norfolk coast landscape and notions of 'home' through the medium of relief printmaking. Recent work explored the idea of a dog's sense of place and how routine dog walking builds connections to a place for both the walker and the dog (Bousfield, 2022). Neil combines archival maps and stories from the past with contemporary sketches to build up the many layers within his prints. Exploring the practice of contemporary artists who are deeply rooted in specific places and how they translate this into their work will spark ideas, ways of seeing and help me refine this enormous subject.

Immersion in the landscape as an emotional or therapeutic experience:

While Richard Long advocated immersion in the landscape as a way to rethink it, Nan Shepherd found that her journeys in the landscape, mountains specifically, were a means of journeying deep within oneself (Owens, 2022). In 1778 Thomas West was the first writer to explicitly promote time in the landscape as a therapeutic antidote to urban life (Owens, 2022). During UK lockdowns in 2020 there were numerous reports of people 'discovering' nature on their doorstep and of the nurturing power of nature to sooth and heal, especially during a time of crisis. The idea of 'going for a walk' to aid mental health is not new but collective agreement that time should be set aside to enjoy green space and 'nature' as a way of staying healthy (both mentally and physically) seems more widespread, especially post-pandemic. New targets to ensure everyone lives within 15 minutes of a 'green space or water' in England have just been announced.

I want to further explore the activities people undertake in the forest and possibly find out more about what the forest means to its visitors: what do they do in the forest, what do they get out of their visits and how does the forest make them feel? I wonder whether understanding what others feel about the forest might open up new ways of thinking to me and help me to discover new places within the forest.

Climate change, land art, environmental awareness and protest art:

Land Art and Earthworks was an American movement of the 1960's and 70's. This sought to break art out of the gallery and into the landscape. While earlier work involved creating transient works in the landscape, often with a notion of mastering the landscape, this

gradually morphed into a more sympathetic way of working with the landscape and highlighting the fragility of nature. Richard Long introduced walking as an art making process. From treading a line into a field to creating impromptu sculptures to collecting items for use in the studio, he is interested in circularity and cycles within nature (Blazwick, Wilson and Tate Modern, 2000). Andy Goldsworthy creates transient work in sympathy with the landscape, often his works don't look like art at all. I encounter one of his chalk stones in the South Downs every time I visit West Dean College and didn't realise it was part of a larger art work for ages. Francis Hatch works on her pieces en plein air, frequently using materials found on site and embedding them in the image. She also buries paper in the landscape leaving it in situ for days at a time.

I would like my work to have some sort of message about the fragility of nature and the pressures that humans exert on it, especially in the very densely populated area where I live, about 30 miles from central London. I already use pieces collected from the forest in my collagraph plates but could take this further and soak paper in situ, print directly from leaves and find new ways to transfer natural forms onto plates.

Printmaking:

I have been primarily working in reduction linocut and collagraph and have experimented with several monoprint techniques. I have recently started to explore etching and poly plate lithography. I have an etching press which will print slightly larger than A3 and also own a relief press and a pin press. I am interested in the variety of ways to make marks using printmaking that differ from what can be achieved using a pen or paints. I like rainbow rolls, etching with caustic soda and cutting around marks made by brushes or other materials pressed onto a plate. I embed natural materials into my collagraph plates and want to explore the possibilities of this in etching using soft ground. I use chemicals that are as non-toxic as possible since I print in my kitchen. I use safe wash inks (except for the lithography) so they clean up with soap and water. The paper is an integral part of printmaking, I use a variety of papers and will keep experimenting with more. I want to expand my printmaking skill set but only as far as it enables me to achieve the marks I want. I acknowledge that, for now, my etching and lithography skills are going to remain fairly basic both given time constraints and my lack of facilities. I do like finding

unorthodox solutions to problems though so will keep experimenting with what is possible for me. Printmaking offers the possibility of multiples which is important to me. I may create one off pieces, but the opportunity to use imagery in repeat echoes some of the themes I see in the forest so I am keen to utilise that.

Patchwork/collage/paper manipulation

Traditional patchwork uses fabrics but I would like to further explore piecing papers together. I would like to explore Momigami which creates beautifully wrinkled papers and wonder whether I can use this in some way. I have previously crumpled and ripped up prints then sewn them back together creating a patchwork effect. The ink on the paper created a very fabric-like texture. Many printmakers use up prints that have 'mistakes' by creating collages with them, there is a tradition of creating something new with something imperfect. I want to explore ways of connecting separate pieces to make a statement about the forest as a whole.

4) Methodology

Practical research:

- Walk in the forest every day
 - Take photographs
 - Make sketches
 - Take rubbings
 - Make collections of material for palette studies and for use in plates
 - Note:
 - Seasonal changes – colours, animal/plant life, sounds, weather, mud, water levels etc.
 - Animal/bird sightings
 - Effect of the above on mood/experience etc.
- Seek out marks made by different stakeholder activities in the forest – forestry work, bike tracks, footprints, deer paths, planting, historical wire/fences; record these in my workbook in photographs & notes
- Take lino into the forest to mark in different ways

- Draw directly
- Collect muddy footprints from dogs/humans
- Collect muddy bike tracks
- Press lino into mud to take an impression
- Translate sketches & pictures to print – experiment with different printmaking techniques to make more abstract work as well as recognisable forest scenes
- Experiment with using found materials from the forest in/on plates to expand the range of marks
- Place some paper in the forest and leave for different periods of time and then print, also the reverse - print first and then place the paper
- Explore collage/stitching/paper manipulation as methods of joining prints and creating further layers of texture
- Keep a workbook specific to this project as a whole alongside sketchbooks used in the forest to record ideas, experiments, processes and research

Theoretical/other research:

- Set up online questionnaires for other forest users to discover other points of view about the forest
- Use local libraries and internet resources to research the history and management of the forest
- Use map data (google earth and archive data online & in local libraries) to explore shapes/designations/boundaries/activities/paths etc.
- Conduct library, internet-based, and face to face research into:
 - Landscape based art movements
 - Landscape artists
 - Particularly printmakers
 - Particularly communicating 'place'
 - Printmaking techniques, with a focus on less toxic methods
 - Print based artists using techniques I'm interested in
 - Images communicating contemporary climate change concerns or environmental awareness issues

- Patchwork, collage and paper manipulation techniques useful to me
- Local artists depicting the Swinley Forest or nearby area
- Notions of the landscape as a beneficial place for wellbeing

By exploring map data and the history of the forest I will better understand what I am looking at. For example, I want to explore Caesars Camp, an iron age hill fort, but without the map data I probably wouldn't know I was looking at it since it is not excavated. I hope uncovering old boundaries and ancient roads etc. will help me see more deeply. Exploring landscape art movements of the past and looking at contemporary printmakers and landscape artists may open up new ways of thinking about my own interpretations and provide ideas for new approaches. Some of my research will be technical, but only in so far as it is an aid to my making, I want my technical abilities to naturally grow through pursuing the images I want to make, rather than mastery of the technique to become the overall focus.

5) Outcomes

- a) Separate pieces representing and recording the different stakeholders and visual discoveries I make in the forest
 - i) When presented as a body of work they should make a statement about the forest
- b) The separates all pulled together to represent the forest as a whole
 - i) I visualise some sort of overhead structure with printed paper hanging from it in columns/strips to form a 'forest' which the viewer may be able to walk within.
 - ii) Usually, the trees are the solid part of a forest but in this case the trees would be made from paper and therefore fragile and bearing the marks of all the human and non-human stakeholders using the forest
- c) The plates made to create all the prints could be used in some way to complete the story

6) Work Plan

Weekly plan: (term time & idealised)

	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
9am	Walk	Walk	Walk	Walk in a new part of the forest	Walk	Family walk	Family walk
10am	Life admin						
11am	Printmaking	Workbook / UAL lecture	Printmaking	Printmaking	Printmaking		
Noon		CSM Lecture					
1pm	School run	School run	School run	School run	School run	Printmaking / Workbook / research (family permitting)	Printmaking / Workbook / research (family permitting)
2pm		Blog update	Reading	Reading	Printmaking		
3pm							
4pm	Guest Lecture	Workbook	Reading	Workbook	Reading	Reading	Reading
Evening							

Long term plan:

	Printmaking	Workbook	Research
Weeks 1-3 10 – 30 th Jan	Complete linocut - icy, sunlit pond Experiments with caustic soda etching	Mind map Record research already completed Record winter colours	Contact Crown Estate with questions about the Forest, plan questionnaires for forest users. Plan questions for military friend.
Weeks 4-6 31 st Jan – 20 th Feb	Work on piece for interim exhibition – make prints using multiple techniques	Record experiments in imagery, technique and colour	Send out questionnaire for forest users Walk to the pillboxes Visit UCA Farnham library
Weeks 7-9 21 st Feb – 13 th March	Complete piece for interim exhibition – attach prints to each other & support	Record seasonal colour changes Record interim exhibition piece progress & outcome	Walk the Devils Highway Visit local library – estate history
Week 10 14 th – 19 th March	Review progress	Review interim piece & reflect	Follow up crown estate questions
Easter Holidays 20 th March – 10 th April	Complete a multi block reduction linocut print Complete a mini print	Record seasonal colour changes Record change in foliage and textures	Explore Caesars camp Visit Go Ape (with children) Record bike tracks
Weeks 1-3 11 th April – 1 st May	Focus on utilising multiple techniques in a single image Bluebell print – possibly a series?	Record changing bluebell colours	Visit ancient woodland – bluebells
Weeks 4-6 2 nd – 22 nd May	Focus on utilising multiple techniques in a single image	Record technique combinations Revisit mind map	Start to collate questionnaire responses Talk to military friend about use of the forest
Weeks 7-9 23 rd May – 12 th June	Focus on utilising multiple techniques in a single image	Start to map out plan for final project	Start to consider the forest as a whole – pulling together all the separate strands
Week 10 13 th – 18 th June	Review – what techniques are working well, should any be ceased? Are there any other techniques that should be learned?	Review – is this separate and together approach working? Look for ideas noted but not yet followed up	Review and set further areas for exploration – are there any areas requiring a deeper look. What areas have not yet been covered?
Summer Holidays 19 th June – 3 rd October	Revisit all techniques: Linocut, Monoprinting, etching, lithography & collagraphy. Consider technical abilities & what is working/not	Recording all experiments Capture summer colours & textures	Long range views from the forest – how far can be seen? Elevations, reptile hunting, drought effects Walking in more new areas
Term 4	Complete many of the individual prints & begin to combine Continue with seasonal observations Prepare for printmaking group exhibition		
Term 5	Exhibition with printmaking group – first 'test' of many pieces Possibly experiment with combining individual pieces into one piece as part of the exhibition		
Term 6	Use the lessons from the printmakers exhibition to make the final piece		

Printmaking activities will include sampling and completing final work, practising techniques and manipulating prints with additions such as stitch and collage.

Workbook activities refer to an A3 sketchbook which I plan to use to record my sampling work, general research and ideas

Research activities focus around gathering data about the forest from secondary sources online and in libraries as well as looking at the work of other artists, art movements and contextual sources of information

7) **Bibliography**

Primary Research:

Conversation with Chris Orr in his studio on 2/2/23 recorded in [blog post](#)

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Contemporary artists of interest (works recently seen/experienced in person):

Norman Ackroyd

Jo Barry

Laura Boswell

Neil Bousfield

Molly Brown

Merlin Chesterman

Dale Devereaux Barker

Peter Ford

Andy Goldsworthy

Rachel Gracey

Gemma Gunning

Francis Hatch

Chris Orr

Gerhard Richter

Cecilia Vicuña

Caroline Wendling