

GALLERY GUIDE

A sensory exploration of *Forest: Wake this Ground*
through words and poems written by Tjawangwa Dema



Please leave this copy of the guide in the gallery for other visitors to enjoy.

Like the forest floor, which is alive with both the seen and unseen, with sights and sounds, this exhibition is both visual and auditory. We hope you immerse yourself in the deliciously varied materiality of soil and cardboard, ceramic and charcoal, amongst other more entangled forms, but remember too to pay attention to all your senses and to listen out for the sounds of the forest. There is no right or wrong way to engage with this collection of objects and sounds and we encourage you to take your time and to sit with the work.

We live in a time of both infowhelm and uncertainty. We find ourselves considering the ways in which art and history, power and nature, as well as science and beauty are entangled. Artists are no different; they respond to cultural, socio-political, global and personal preoccupations and in turn place an 'object'

– which may be a bead or a branch of a tree – in the would-be rift between our understanding of the world and our desire to know more. Relying on their relationships with their chosen medium and materials, artists offer us ideas to prompt our thoughts or to see things differently. From Brazil to China, local and international artists of our time offer us new and old ways to think about the forest.

You may notice that some of the walls are painted green. Take a moment to absorb the colour. Green often relaxes us, it can help lower blood pressure and reawaken our brains. If you were able to leisurely walk or cycle to the exhibition we hope you appreciate the ways in which your body is more attuned to the abundance of this space.

We hope you find this ground as alive and moving as we have.

HOW TO BE HERE

1. You are here. So, welcome. Be here. Be present.
2. You are your own map. What marks the spot is your willingness to see or hear. Reinterpret and reimagine everything you see by relying on your own senses.
3. The word stanza, as in a stanza of poetry or musical stanza, comes from the Italian word for 'stopping-place or room'. You are in this room. You are now part of its song. Part of its quiet howl and poem.
4. One way of carefully noticing something is by resting your eyes on it. Pick any one work in the room, stand in front of it, facing the object. What do you see? Now stop moving for a moment, feel your body relax, breathe slowly and deeply in through your nose and out your mouth. Repeat while you listen to the sounds in the room.

Can you identify them without turning your head to look? Now block them out as much as possible while looking at the work. Take your time. Look at different parts, resting your eyes on each part before moving on to the next.

Now take a step back and look at it as a whole. What do you see? Can you try this same experiment but this time relying on your hearing by listening to Hildegard Westerkamp's *Beneath the Forest Floor* (1992). Or test your sense of smell with John Newling's *The Night Books, burning forest* (2020-2022).

5. Move slowly in the gallery and be mindful of each other and the artwork which might be more fragile than you think. But do not worry about moving in a straight line or particular

pattern. Move closer or sideways or further away. Entangle your path carefully with a stranger's (without crowding the work or your fellow visitors). Stop and then start again. Remember 'nature abhors a straight line'* , so wander at will; the rest is up to you!

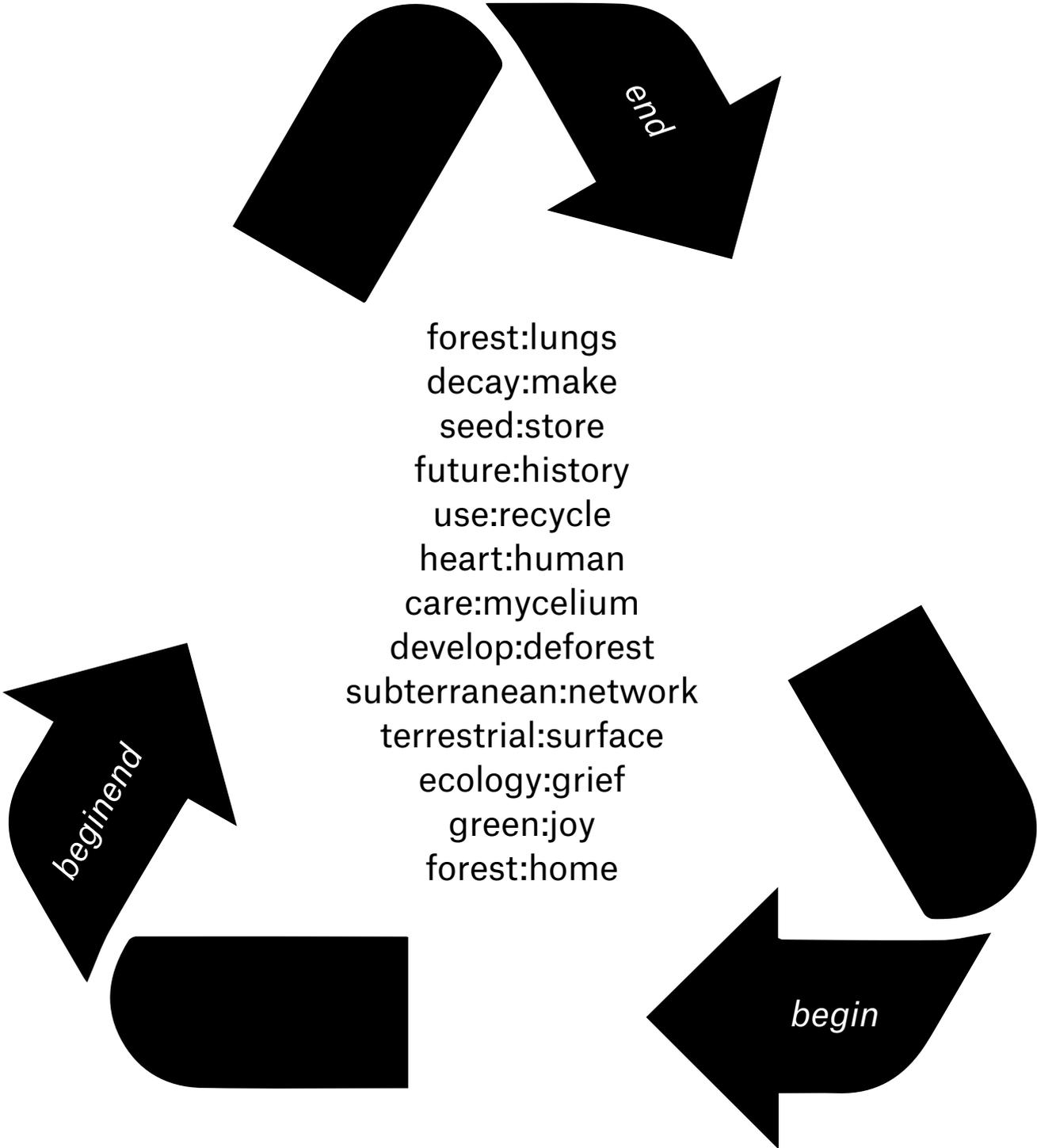
6. But if you like rules, here are a few. Follow what is wide and what is narrow. Follow slowness or the heart's quick beat. Follow what is clean or smeared. Follow stopping and moving. Follow listening and silence. Follow light and darkness. Follow sound – your heart's or the room's. You are part of its song now. If a film is playing, follow sitting or standing. Follow questioning and noticing. Be sure to always follow uncertainty and curiosity. Follow yourself; the only trajectory to seeing is the invisible trace your footprints are making now. There is no wrong path here.
7. At your journeys end today, if it is rest you're after, we have a relaxation room to read, sit and think in. If you are on the ground or first floor follow the stairs or take the lift to find our 'Forest Rest Space'. We have materials available if you find yourself inspired to write a quick note for yourself, or us, or wish to draft your own verse. You are welcome to spend as much time here as you wish.

Part of what stirs any space to life is a meeting with the other. Thank you for helping us 'wake this ground'.

Look at the floor, at your feet - say *thank you for coming*. We thank you for coming. Please come again.

* Quote ascribed to William Kent in Derek Clifford's *A History of Garden Design*, New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1967.

FOREST FLOOR CYCLE



WOOD WIDE WEB *

I

Who are they

The ones for whom light is language

Who chunk paint and earth, and dirt, and clay

Who mould sod, dust and turf

The way a tongue makes speech

They who translate bark into a kind of love

Remake paper into tree

Who are they

Who seek entire catalogues of books in coal dust and soil

Who carve words into meaning

And look then

Beneath the forest floor – its dust and dirt – for wonder

What is it

That wakes them while we sleep

Content with the shape of things

II

It must be love that animates straw and iron

The dull strip of film to story

Only something slow and true could see

In the camera's cold gaze

A way to care

* Suzanne Simard is often credited with the term 'wood wide web' due to her discovery of fungal networks connecting information transfer and resource sharing between trees. See Simard, S., Perry, D., Jones, M. *et al.* 'Net transfer of carbon between ectomycorrhizal tree species in the field', *Nature*, 388, 579–582 (1997).

Long after my beloved has seen and seen my face
And turns to another
Who are they who come to sit as though the face were a field
Or the field many faces
Many maps
Who are they
Who look at the world
As a humble frog might
As the hatchling earthworm might
Who look away from the bird's clean view
Look away from the lush trees
Their waving tops and dappled joy
To seek out the mossy carpet
Its note of crushed pine needle and violet
Its wildflowers and herbs
Its unspectacular ferns
Modest mushrooms and damp song

///

Below the shy canopy and its blooming understory
Lies the forest's quiet yarn
It's threadlike fungi
The milk glass hue of mycelium
Whole cities of networks underfoot
Whisperings beyond the familiar creak and broken thrash
Of falling bough
The wet confetti of rain falling through red maple, alder and ash
Its soft wet thud on leaf after leaf

Sound beyond birdsong or any song as we might understand it
Just one tree to the next and that to another
That they might feed each other
Warn each other
Keep each other
Here where time moves differently in these shadows
Where all small things hide their light
Under this leaf-green bushel
And the soil's oldest secret –
That the smell of rain is not a gift from the sky but the earth's
Bacteria bursting to meet some thirsty plant's oily surface
– unravels
Who now knowing what the lizard and the mouse
Must've always known
Can look away from such reticent wonder

IV

And who is this
Who follows the mundane
The repetition of leaf and flame
The disassembled joy of fallen trees
Who will not let loss slip out of meaning

Here is another
Who must love rope
Its infinite loop of weave and bright braid
The old complexity of hands joining beads joining thread
Joining hands

And here another
For whom sound without words is still song
The crickets' pulse
The raven's call and response
The water's familiar swoosh
The silence too which surely is speech

V

Who are they
Who come here
To move with one eye on the forest's floor
Whose minds are now no doubt caked and scraped
Marked with plaster and ink
With common alder and rope and resin
Whose buoyant burdens are heavy with cast iron
And film and glass
With text and grass and charcoal
And who wander these halls
To pass their time
Here
To wake each slumbering work and bid it
Be!

You could come here already knowing the shape of things
But who wants to
Encounter themselves in the expected ways
You want to anticipate that meeting
The you who came in and the one now waltzing out

WHAT IS WHAT

What is wood

What is fire

What is family

What is tree

What is soil

What is root

What is paper

What is you

What is fragrance

What is rot

What is wet

What is hewn

What is dry

What is peat

What is kin

What is hue

What is open

What is thread

What is sure

What is dew

What is broken

What is sound

What is feeling

What is askew

What is narrow

What is light

What is sanctuary

What is due

What is lost

What is song

What is sediment

What is true

What is memory

What is grief

What is mine

What is blue

What is flower

What is ink

What is ash

What is overdue

What is tough

What is void

What is air

What is in lieu

What is rock
What is cast
What is iron
What is undue

What is entangled
What is cause
What is local
What is two

What is soil
What is shadow
What is human
What is view

What is temperate
What is tropical
What is taiga
What is forest

What is here
What is there
What was then
What is new

In reading this list poem we invite you to ask yourself why someone thinking of forests or nature in general might think about fire or paper or kinship or sanctuary. Why might they think about any of the above words? What connections can you find between this language and the forest floor?

Tjawangwa Dema is a writer, arts administrator, teaching artist, and an Honorary Senior Research Associate in the Department of English at the University of Bristol. Her chapbook *Mandible* (Slapering Hol Press, 2014) was selected for publication by The African Poetry Book Fund as part of its inaugural New-Generation African Poets Box Set series. Her book *The Careless Seamstress* (University of Newbraska Press, 2019) won the Sillerman First Book Prize for African Poets. An ecopoetry chapbook with an accompanying digital archive, *an/other pastoral* (No Bindings, 2022) explores ethnicity and the environment. To find out more please visit www.tjdema.com

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Rodrigo Arteaga, Mark Garry, Alma Heikkilä, Eva Jospin, Jumana Manna, Zakiya McKenzie, David Nash, Maria Nepomuceno, Rosa Nguyen, John Newling, Ben Rivers, Ai Weiwei and Hildegard Westerkamp.

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