



Stour Valley Arts is an environmental public art project that enables people to explore contemporary art within the natural and historical context of an ancient woodland setting. Based at King's Wood in Kent, Stour Valley Arts invites contemporary artists to undertake commissions that are accessible to visitors, appeal to their senses, and inspire reflection on the perennial themes of time, place, life, decay and regeneration. Stour Valley Arts (SVA) offers an extensive education programme for students at all levels of their art education.

objectives

- To promote a greater interest in the countryside and increase public awareness and enjoyment of environmental art through the work of artists in residence and international exchanges.
- To offer an artist-led educational programme for students of all ages and abilities.
- To provide a regional resource for artists, environmentalists, teachers, students, tourists and the general public.

actions and achievements

The Stour Valley Art Project was launched in 1993 by a committee of Kentish Stour Countryside Project (KSCP), South East Arts, Forestry Commission, Ashford Borough Council and Kent County Council. Stour Valley Arts became a limited company in 2000, and in the following year acquired charitable status, establishing a base at the former Forestry Commission offices at King's Wood.

Artists and Commissions: Artists are invited to create works for the forest, other galleries and SVA publications. Selected artists:

- Richard Harris: group of three interventions in old flint pits. Harris also created a growing piece - hedging sweet chestnut into an archway that is re-woven each winter.
- Rosie Leventon: 'B52' an area of sweet chestnut cleared and the landscape carved into the shape of a B52 bomber.
- Chris Drury: *Coppice Cloud Chamber* a chestnut 'igloo' that brings the outside in.
- Tessa Farmer: *'Touchwood'* over a hundred tiny fairies and goblins crafted out of twigs, leaves, seeds and flowers were seen 'flying' from branch to branch.
- Emily Richardson: *'Aspect'* a 16mm film using time-lapse photography of light across the changing seasons, set to a soundtrack by Benedict Drew.
- Jem Finer: *'A Score for a Hole in the Ground'* music created by falling water on percussive instruments in the ground, inspired by Japanese water chimes.

Education Programme: Artists, poets, musicians and dancers work with schools and community groups, offering creative workshops in the 'outdoor studio' and visits to the sculptures.

- Kings Wood Symphony: Composer, Matthew King, Wigmore Hall and Guildhall School of Music and Drama worked together using wood as the inspiration to create a 'dialogue' between ancient woodland and the urban environment.
- For You Too: Themed workshops involving artist training with schools and groups.
- Art Eco: Arts and science project involving an artist, an ecologist and a local school.
- Salon Workshops, Student Bursary Awards and partnered ventures.

Publications: High quality artists' books that are distributed worldwide. For example: *Walking Through*, Hamish Fulton, a celebration of walking through the forest.

background

In 1993 the Stour Valley Arts Project began as a local initiative between KSCP and the Forestry Commission to make King's Wood, a 400 hectare ancient woodland in Kent, more accessible to visitors, by improving paths and signage, and developing its recreational potential. Given the forest's history and ecological diversity it was felt that placing art works in the forest would encourage more people to visit and enjoy this important site. SVA were keen to develop an ambitious and long-term project. They contacted artists and offered a series of residencies. International artists Richard Harris, Dominique Bailly, Hamish Fulton and Chris Drury were some of the first to take up residency. Supported and nurtured by SVA the artists produced unique artworks using natural materials that not only capture the essence of the forest - its geology, archaeology, lifecycle, and the changing seasons – but become part of the forest that takes on a life of its own.

The education programme evolved out of a two-day workshop at which children from local schools created drawings, sculptures and installations. Following the acclaimed 'For You Too' programme the team started 'Art: Eco' a project that incorporates the school curriculum as well as developing team-working and social skills in pupils. In the Higher Education sector SVA works with the University College of the Creative Arts offering student bursaries to produce art in the forest, and offers support to a number of colleges, including Canterbury College, South Kent College and the University of Kent. They have recently carried out a feasibility study for the development of an arts and education centre in the forest, designed to be an eco-centre and visitor attraction with interior and exterior exhibition space, studios and education programmes.

quotes

"The residency allowed me to be more ambitious, more experimental, and enabled valuable time for complex post-production. My practice has been significantly moved forward by this opportunity." Emily Richardson, Film maker.

"Children that I've noticed don't particularly engage in the classroom have worked diligently the whole time; working together as a team ... and children that wouldn't usually be classed as leaders in the classroom are leading the projects that they are working on." Class Teacher, St. Simon's School, Ashford.

"Marvellous morning, it was the best of my entire life. My favourite sculpture was the Cloud Chamber." Daisy, age 7.

partners

Ashford Borough Council
Cornerhouse Publishing
Dada South
Engage
Fabrica
Forestry Commission
Kent County Council
Kent Downs AONB
Kentish Stour
Countryside Project

Metropole Gallery
Music for Change
Salon
Strange Cargo
Turner Contemporary
University College of
Creative Arts
University of Kent
Wigmore Hall

funding

Total: £600,000
Arts Council England
The Ashden Trust
Ashford Borough Council
Awards for All
Creative Partnerships
Esmee Fairbairn Foundation
Kent County Council
Henry Moore Foundation
Peter de Haan Trust

lessons learnt

- The most successful outcomes are realised when the artists' research develops in close dialogue with the Forestry Commission officers.
- Artists whose proposals are sympathetic to the forest and are keen to immerse themselves in the forest environment deliver intelligent and exciting projects.
- Children's learning is enhanced hugely through working closely with artists in the natural forest environment.