forest monologue

Artists:
Béchard Hudon

Curator:
Marie-Hélène Leblanc

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The artist duo of Béchard Hudon make work that examines living beings and the tension between the visible and the invisible, the audible and the inaudible.

Over the past few years, they have analyzed and studied acoustic and visual phenomena, from city centres to the suburbs, including some of the human interventions found therein, such as urban infrastructure and buildings. More recently, their investigations have focused on natural ecosystems and the more-than-human world. Consequently, their fieldwork has shifted to new areas of exploration where flora and fauna converge (birds, rivers, marshes, icebergs, oceans). Now forests, more specifically old-growth forests found in the Outaouais and Estrie regions, are the subject of interest in this forest monologue, opening new territories to scrutinize, observe, and magnify.

Reflecting on Georges Perec's wish that there be "[...] places that are stable, unmoving, intangible, untouched and almost untouchable, unchanging, deep-rooted; places that might be points of reference, of departure, of origin [...]," [1] allows us to perceive the ancient forest as the embodiment of this idealized place, with the exception, perhaps, of its stability. Indeed, the forests we encounter in Béchard Hudon's exhibition rise like rooted spaces, an agglomeration of living and interrelated species, one of whose common denominators is habitat, or rather, the act of inhabiting. Although trees are the forest's most emblematic species, a dense and sophisticated ecosystem cohabits within it, like a kind of vast housing complex. This notion of a forest that is inhabited by non-human living beings is central to Béchard Hudon's unique perspective: their attention is entirely devoted to what lies beyond human perception. Because Béchard Hudon are specifically interested in the notion of habitat and micro-habitat, old growth forests become generous research sites where life forms thrive in areas where little to no human intervention has occurred.

After encountering these distinctly unique forests, the duo turned their attention to dendro-microhabitats, which are groups of unique organic structures found in living or dead trees that provide essential habitats for flora, fauna, and especially fungi.

The ancient forests that Béchard Hudon observed, listened to, and explored over several months are not only complex and fragile ecosystems, but also research sites that demand humility and respect. These forests are unruly spaces where ground strewn with decomposing wood—shelter for countless species—forms the crucial link that transforms death into new life. Old-growth forests harbor many types of interspecies habitats, making them both essential and vulnerable. Through their unique experience, the artists hoped to witness the splendor and fragility of each of these habitats. The forest is given a voice, it reveals itself to itself and to others, it monopolizes the conversation and demands our attention. *Forest Monologue* kindles our fascination for a natural world that exists beyond our human scope by questioning and diversifying the representational codes of the forest; it even exhibits scientific equipment as a kind of abstract installation that helps us better understand this ecosystem and its potential imbalances.

Béchard Hudon's methodology, developed over several years, is rooted in unearthing and exposing often-imperceptible visual and auditory phenomena. Using sophisticated equipment, they attempt to see the invisible, to experience the unexperienced, to hear the inaudible. Special sound sensors are used to record the auditory activity of the internal movement of trees and their surrounding ground, offering an intimate listening experience of the forest's temporal layers. In addition to experiencing the sound of these ecosystems, they use a full-spectrum digital camera to capture what occurs deep inside the forest, extending vision beyond the visible spectrum of the human eye, reconfiguring our notion of reality. Rather than taking a direct documentary approach, Béchard Hudon bring our attention to the complex, dynamic space where these forests reveal themselves from different angles and in unexpected ways, from their overall vastness to the specific folds of their bark or lichen.

In this visual and auditory investigation, Béchard Hudon perceive the forest in its actual state while also taking stock of its ancientness. But although a specific area's relationship to time might remain intangible, what's inherent in this configuration of habitats is a form of extended time that allows these cohabitations, deteriorations, and renewed natural habitats to evolve. The philosopher Gaston Bachelard addressed the imperceptibility of time in the forest this way: "But who knows the temporal dimensions of the forest? History is not enough. We should have to know how the forest experiences its great age; why, in the reign of the imagination, there are no young forests." [2] The value of these forests may lie in their longevity, but Béchard Hudon reveal their depth and uniqueness from a decidedly contemporary perspective.

While the title, *Forest Monologue*, might suggest that the woodland is the exhibition's sole interlocutor, a multitude of voices, ideas, and people were called upon and consulted with to share their knowledge as the project unfolded. This forest cohabitation came together through a partnership with the Institute of Temperate Forest Sciences (ISFORT) and its three researchers, Sylvain Delagrange, Frédérik Doyon, and Audrey Maheu, who agreed to work in collaboration with the artists.

1 Georges Perec, *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces*, trans. John Sturrock (London: Penguin Classics, 1997), 91.

2 Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), p. 188

Audio documentary *Forest Monologue*

Episode 1
Conversation with Frédérik Doyon
and Béchard Hudon

Episode 2
Conversation with Sylvain Delagrange
and Béchard Hudon

Episode 3
Conversation with Audrey Maheu
and Béchard Hudon

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Biography
Catherine Béchard and Sabin Hudon have worked collaboratively for over 25 years. Their work probes the in-between spaces linked to inhabited territories, as well as the alternative or parallel temporalities of all living beings' activities. They are particularly interested in the notion of habitat and micro-habitat, by focusing on the unique characteristics and infinite configurations that are found in environments inhabited by different forms of life. They examine the sound materiality of urban, terrestrial, and aquatic ecosystems, opening intervals of attentiveness to the complexity of the world's permanent humming within the layers of reality. By thoroughly examining the space-time of places inhabited by living beings, they aim to increase our awareness of the complexity of these diverse environments and their numerous cohabitating species, to reveal a world that exists beyond what is typically audible and visible. Their creative projects take the form of installations, sculptures, sound works, videos, and photography. Their work has been presented in numerous solo and group exhibitions in Canada, the United States, the Czech Republic, Brazil, Germany, Croatia, and China.

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