In 2015 I started off trying to write a book about renewable energy and the need to limit climate change (and our population), and realised that the way electricity is priced is grossly unfair and nonsensical if we agree that everyone needs access to the basic necessities of life. I was looking into the legality behind standing charges for electricity, water, sewage and other non-optional services, which for a small farmer or rural business now includes broadband internet access. These connection or service charges are taxes by any other name. I defy anyone to live in the middle of a town or city and manage, as we almost can on our small farm, to be unconnected to any of the major utility services.

The final inescapable implication from the Charter of the Forest, which says that you cannot stop people having access to (or tax them for using) life's necessities, is that for all the utilities, including water, electricity, gas if you have it, sewerage, phone and broadband (since the government requires some reporting online, such as tax or farm returns), there should not be any standing charges at all and instead the overheads included in the unit costs. That's what probably makes your electricity bill illegal today, because these charges are hidden taxes.

The remaining woodlands and forest of Britain cannot possibly support the entire population of the country for the sustainable future if everyone invokes the Charter and starts helping themselves to whatever they need from our forests, as mediaeval peasants were expected to, so we should all be getting a Universal Basic Income in lieu instead. But how could our society afford such a cost?

By coincidence, just over a year after the *Evolving the Forest* conference, the House of Commons actually debated Universal Basic Income. The concept had resurfaced precisely because so many people fell through the cracks of the government's rescue packages during the 2020 coronavirus pandemic, especially the poor and self-employed, and were becoming destitute, just as they had when the estates were declared Crown property as Royal Hunting Forests under King John. Which led to the barons' second revolt, forcing King Henry III to fix his seal to the Charter of the Forest.

Back in 1217 the Crown could afford to allow displaced peasants to return to their work and earn a subsistence living from the resources found in our forests. Today there are too many of us to do the same, but our nation is richer than ever, so do we need a new 'Charter of the People' based on our oldest and best law, the 800 year old Charter of the Forest?

Green Truth – the forest as a unique creative space

Angela Summerfield

Dr Angela Summerfield is a contemporary British artist and author, whose colourful paintings celebrate trees and Nature. She divides her time between London, North Yorkshire and rural North Gloucestershire, where she now lives. Her art practice aims to create new contemporary landscape categories, such as tree-nature portraits, treescapes and landscapes of wonder, as well as visualising ideas of the rural. Angela's book and art catalogue publications include the lead essay 'Why do artists paint trees?' in 'The Arborealists: the art of the tree,' Sansom & Co. 2016. Angela is also an experienced art curator and public speaker, and in 2019, she was a guest speaker, on the subject of art and trees, at The Times & The Sunday Times Cheltenham Literature Festival. Her art works are in private collections in the UK and abroad.

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Angela Summerfield *Being with Trees – Summer* 2020

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Introduction

The colour green's etymological origins can be found in mediaeval written and illustrated studies of plant and tree life and their inter-relationships with the health of the planet and human beings. In text such as *De Proprietatibus Rerum* (*On the Property of Things*) 1240, written by the influential theologian and scholar, Bartholomaeus Anglicus, greenness was associated with plant and tree physiology and the healthy balance of the world's phenomena, such as the Four Elements. Greenness was identified as a substance found within all these things and became associated with the concept of Green Truth (Viriditas). In Causae et Curae (Causes and Cures) 1150, Hildegard of Bingen, polymath and theologian, introduced a new correlation between the state of human health (the body and the human soul) with the natural world: thus greenness could exist within humans too. Her writings also invited humankind into a communion with the essence of things; a communion which drew on ideas of contemplation, a state of grace and beatitude. Collectively Hildegard's writings and music can also be interpreted as a celebration of the role of the human imagination, as a creative force in accord with nature. In our contemporary world, we would associate these experiences with current ideas surrounding the concept of wellbeing and humankind's engagement with natural environments, such as forests.

Emotionally-engaged experiences of Nature, such as forest bathing, draw on all our senses, but require the process of Slow Time; the freely available Forestry England publication 'Forests for Wellbeing', highlights the benefits of this activity[1]. In contemporary UK healthcare terminology, forests are also defined as one of the 'living systems' which offer a beneficial 'green space' to be both experienced and understood as a model for a 'more regenerative way of life[2]'. Recent research, published by the leading neuroscientist, Professor Susan Greenfield, has shown that walking in natural environments, as opposed to urban settings, enhances our cognitive abilities to notice, remember and develop deep thoughts (Greenfield 2016). These experiences have become more pressing and poignant within the context of the 2020 Covid virus lockdowns, individual economic uncertainties and loss of life which faces our worldwide communities. This current situation gives an urgency and focus to contemporary visual art which accords with nature. I am a British artist for whom the contemporary visualisation of trees and landscapes, relating to Empathy Aesthetics, is central to my creative art practice (Summerfield 2018). This essay explores the experience of forests as a unique creative space, whose appeal for contemporary painters, such as myself, lies in its very separateness from urban temporal sensibilities, such as the rush from A to B, and physical structures, such as pavements, road signage and street lighting.

1 Forestryengland.uk/resource: internet access 4th September 2020. Forestry England is part of the Forestry Commission.

2 *Green Space and Health* Centre for Sustainable Healthcare https://sustainablehealthcare.org.uk/courses/green-space-and-health, accessed 4th September 2020.

Angela Summerfield: *Treescape — Empathetic Green*

English Forests

Most of the forests in England permit public access and are managed by the Forestry Commission. They vary in scale, but unlike a wood, forests are large areas of trees and undergrowth, occasionally including pasture, such as the New Forest and the Forest of Dean. In terms of tree species, English forests include both native deciduous trees and, with the establishment of the Forestry Commission, the post-1919 planting of coniferous trees from Scandinavia and the North-West coast of America. In an English managed forest, a single tree species usually appears collectively and en masse with tall elongated growth habits reaching for the light. Such trees include the deciduous larch, English (pendunculated) oak and beech; and the coniferous trees douglas fir, Norwegian spruce and sitka. The under-storey of a well-managed forest offers a second group of trees which include the deciduous silver birch, hazel, holly and elder, alongside mosses, ferns and fungi. Forests vary too in origin, being either originally royal hunting grounds, and therefore including large swathes of ancient and native trees, or new 20th century commercial plantings of fast-growing trees. Forests in England, therefore, exist in a liminal state of managed naturalness. Walking these forests, an artist has a creative awareness of this past and present. As a British contemporary landscape painter, I have explored many forests, but the ones I know best and have a familiarity with are those from my childhood, in North Yorkshire, and where I now live in Gloucestershire.

Forest Sensibilities

Entering a forest means passing from one world of sensibilities to another, where physical orientation and decision-making can be determined solely by an individual creative impetus. Hearing becomes accustomed to shifting silences and sudden sounds of rustling undergrowth and bird song over head. Footsteps become more measured and take on a different pace, releasing quite literally the smells of the forest: rich and peaty with the fresh astringency of pine needles and with this too comes the experience of spaces as coolness or warmth. A forest's floor becomes an earthy softness to one's tread, with tree roots and fallen branches as traversing pathways. Confronted by a densely grown rank of trees, in a coniferous forest, light becomes both diminutive and distant. The forest's canopy limits the fall of light to the ground and therefore the possibilities of plant life. It is a natural inclination shared by all of us to walk towards the light and, in creative terms, this balance is often visualised by passages of deep tone, shadow and illumination which traverse the picture plane. So as to communicate the authentic experience of moving within the forest, traces of coloured light become forms of painted visual passageways and the use of conventional Western perspective is dispensed with in my paintings. Compared with a coniferous forest, in the company of deciduous trees in full leaf, the fall of light is more open and scattered in its variations of shadow and pattern. So that light once more becomes observed as falling shafts on branches and tree trunks, or as intricate patterns upon the ground. Light allows you both to trace and glimpse things: the smoothness of beech trunks or the deep weave of fissures to many conifers. Disconnected from obvious visible signs of the sky's sun or moon, light becomes its own natural force in the forest.

In an English forest there are often official way-marked tracks and pathways, but there is always the possibility of losing your way, or, as in life, perhaps finding it again. In our visual wanderings of the forest we can create the

sense of paths or trails through and around trees, over up-rooted ones, tree stumps, unexpected tree roots, uneven ground, habitation holes, bushes, brambles, bracken and all manner of clinging undergrowth determining nature's pace and not our own. Forests as a form of space can in terms of spatial reading be disorientating: to walk the forest is to experience vastness, deepness and the impenetrable. Looking ahead only ever gives a partial sense of trees, whereas to look-up involves the receptors in our feet rooting us firmly to a spot, so as to avoid a sense of toppling. Our sense of space too moves from close compression to sudden openings, experiences which present a compositional challenge to artists. Alongside these personal experiences, artists such as myself explore forests with an awareness of how artists of the past have responded. The early 20th-century Canadian artist, Emily Carr, for example, captured the vertiginous experience of towering redwoods and larches in her paintings. While the mid-twentieth century British landscape painter, Ivon Hitchens, created what he termed visual 'compartments' of semi-figurative imagery and large dragged brushwork over double and triple-square canvas formats.

A Green World

To enter a forest is also to enter a green world of moss-covered trees, spring and summer leaves and undergrowth: a world which presents its own hidden order of living things — 'the ways of the forest' are still referred to as such by those who inhabit it. Artists have also been forest dwellers and there have been famous artists' colonies associated with forests, such as the Barbizon in France and the Abramtsevo in Russia. The 19th-century Russian artist, Ivan Shishkin, created a new type of landscape painting which encouraged other Russian artists to explore a wilderness of native silver birch and oak. Some of these artists responded to the geography of the forest as places of work, ownership and property, while others sought to exemplify forests as sacred and spiritual places associated with ideas of the 'natural church', The Old Believers and Pantheism. In 19th-century France the influential Barbizon colony of artists (named after a village of the district), developed around the Forest of Fontainebleau, noted for its ancient oak trees. These artists developed a new type of painting composition, known as the sous-bois, in response to the Forest's scale and depth, which evoked the experience of being immersed within a forest or woodland interior. The Dutch artist, Vincent Van Gogh, carried forward this visual legacy, with a group of paintings created 1887-90, which sought to capture the immediacy of the experience of an artist peering out from his surrounding undergrowth towards the light. The modern and contemporary artists' experience of a green environment of trees, however, does not necessarily mean an artist's palette of greens, or a pictorial representation. For the influential 20th-century art theorist and artist, Paul Klee, both trees and the forest environment held a life-time fascination. His colourful works, which exist between the abstract and the figurative, evoked a sense of being somewhere, rather than a formal depiction of a forest. His interest in Theosophy, a form of spiritual philosophy, informed his art theory which situated the development and expression of human artistic creativity within the context of a natural world. In his famous lecture, entitled 'On Modern Art', delivered at the Jena Kunstverein, in 1924, Klee explored the development of an artist as analogous to the growth of a tree, through his own drawings. Many contemporary artists, such as The Arborealists (www.arborealists.com), continue to celebrate trees and their green environments in multiple ways: such as living works of art; sources of personal creative inspiration; signifiers of eco-social impact; and as collective symbols or visual metaphors of humanity and survival.

The green world of the forest also evokes memories of a cultural past full of folk tales, folklore and classical mythology inhabited by woodland spirits, dryads and gods: the forest a place subject to magic, mystery and divine powers. In our contemporary world to walk the forest is also to be aware of multiple narratives: cultural, the autobiographical and eco-social. As a contemporary artist, the strong anthropomorphic qualities of trees in a forest always suggest both a presence and a sense of expectancy, even when all other living creatures are seemingly absent the forest, in terms of etymology, also offers a deeper human resonance still, for we can speak of entering the forest to reach its heart. To wander through a forest is, therefore, to become, by degrees, a part of something: a gradual fusion between human nature and Nature, the resultant art works being a visualisation of this accord between a living environment and an artist. From the 1880s, in mainland Europe, a new response to the forest in art developed in contemporary landscape painting. This was termed the psychology of the forest and featured in several international exhibition forums, such as the Vienna Secession exhibitions, notably in 1902. The psychology of the forest in painting was associated with a particular type of interior, dimly-lit forest scene of young, fast-growing and seemingly crowded trees, often silver birch or beech: Nordic artists such as Victor Westerholm (Finnish) and Prince Eugen (Swedish) alongside the Austrian artist, Gustav Klimt, created works of art as part of this development. The brooding presence of conifer trees in the paintings of the Norwegian artist, Edvard Munch, can be seen as a further development of this creative response. To be within a forest is to experience an atmosphere which can reach the core of the human soul and mind. In his essay entitled *Morality* that inveterate traveller and walker, Robert Louis Stevenson, observed:

> *'But indeed, it is not so much for its beauty that the forest makes a claim upon men's hearts,*
>
> *as for that subtle something, that quality of air, that emanation from the old trees, that so wonderfully changes and renews a weary spirit.'*
>
> *(Stevenson 1905: 169)*

This experience of 'that subtle something' may become so intense that one may simply not wish to leave the forest. Our sense of time, born of an urban world and its commerce, gradually receding so that we no longer recall how long ago it was that we entered such a place as this. We slow down with ease to see and study detail, rather than glance or look without regard. In pausing we discover the virtue of delight and wonderment. We sit, nestle-down even, on a fallen trunk or stump, with a sketchbook or notebook to hand: and so our creativity fuses with the calming green tissues of natural life. In the green world of the forest we have the possibility to notice, remember and develop deep thoughts - each of us finding answers to our own silent questions.

Artists can encourage a collective moral responsibility for the future of our forests. Through their artwork they can celebrate, investigate and explore with the aim to captivate both the intellect and the imagination of others. Above all they can share a passionate awareness of the human need for greenness in the world: greenness which is both an environment and a sensibility deep within us all. The creative possibilities, within such a unique natural space, are like the forests' own natural paths, simply

endless. The mediaeval concept, Green Truth, informed pre-modern medicine and introduced the belief in casual relationships between nature and human nature: a belief grounded in observation (see Sweet 2006). In this essay, I have explored this affinity within a particular context, the contemporary artist and the forest: an exploration which reveals the contemporary significance of Green Truth, which in turn defines the forest as a unique creative space. This meaning of course resonates with us all, whether we are artists or not. By caring for forests, we can also care for ourselves and others creatively, emotionally, spiritually and physically — all of which adds up to the health of a human being and a green environment. The contemporary value of Green Truth is to be found in the future of our forests.

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Forests as Commons:
a manifesto for future opportunity

Kate Prendergast