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WoodEar: A multimedia installation for tree and network

August 29th – October 3rd, 2014

Opening reception + dance performance, 5:30 – 7:30 PM, August 29th

Ruffin Gallery at the University of Virginia

179 Culbreth Road,

Charlottesville, VA 22904

WoodEar is a sound and video installation using live data and audio streams from a tupelo tree growing in artist Peter Traub's backyard. Sensors attached to the tree report fluctuations in the tree's natural environment to drive real-time content at a remote installation site.

For the Ruffin Gallery exhibition, Traub collaborated with artist Jennifer Lauren Smith and dancer Katie Schetlick, who also lectures in the University of Virginia Dance Department. The installation will feature four large-scale projections incorporating graphics, photo sequences, and video, accompanied by a multi-channel sound piece. Both the visual and sonic elements of WoodEar are driven by real-time changes in the tree's environment as told by the light, temperature, pressure, humidity, and sway sensors, as well as two specialized microphones affixed to the tree.

In the largest projection at approximately 10' in height, "sunstars," Smith's camera captures intimate details of the tree, emphasizing through composition the relationships between the living arboreal system and that of the human body. Driven by a combination of hardware and software, the images are melded with overlaid graphics to represent changes in infrared and visible light as reported in real time by luminosity sensors on the tree.

In "spritewood," a vertical projection on raw wood, Schetlick performs a series of movements inspired by the changing conditions of the tree throughout the day. Shot from above and crossfading over the course of 24 hours, Schetlick's movements liken the body to an unfurling leaf or flower, while simultaneously seeming to embody the woody spirit of the tree itself. Small but constant variations in air pressure at the tree drive a quicker cross-fade between different variations on Schetlick's moves.

“x/y” transports the perspective of the tree into the gallery. Shot from the point of view of the tree, and positioned overhead in the gallery, these videos portray the gathering clouds and bursts of sunlight experienced by the tree itself. A simple graphic is overlaid on the video, driven by an accelerometer (the same kind of sensor that detects motion in a smartphone) high on the tree’s trunk.

During the August 29th opening reception, from 5:30pm – 7:30pm, Katie Schetlick will present an accompanying dance piece with 12 dancers moving in and around the gallery space and building. The event is open to the public and drinks and hors d’oeuvres will be served. Following the reception, the gallery will be open during regular hours from 9 – 5pm M/W/F and 9 – 4:30pm T/Th.

Biographies:

Peter Traub (b. 1974, Johannesburg, South Africa) is a composer and multimedia installation artist. He completed his Ph.D. in the Composition and Computer Technologies program at the University of Virginia in 2010 and his Master’s in Electro-Acoustic Music from Dartmouth College in 1999. He has composed numerous works of electronic music as well as online and physical sound installations. His most recent work, WoodEar, received an NEA funded grant from Turbulence.org and premiered at the Pace Digital Gallery in NYC in 2013. His work has also been presented at SIGGRAPH (Vancouver), Pixilerations (Providence), Spark Festival (Minneapolis), transmediale.02 (Berlin), Art on the Net 2001 (Tokyo), and Art Center College of Design (Pasadena). He is currently based in Charlottesville, Virginia.

Jennifer Lauren Smith (b. 1979, Portland, ME) is a visual artist working in video, photography, and performance. She received her BA from Reed College in Portland, OR and her MFA in Sculpture + Extended Media from Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, VA. She has received numerous awards including a Vikki Katen Memorial Fellowship, a Wynn Newhouse Grant, a John Ringling Towers Grant, and a Toby Devan Lewis Award. She has shown her work in galleries and film festivals in the US and abroad including Dorsch Gallery (Miami, FL), Pierogi Boiler (Brooklyn, NY), Reynolds Gallery (Richmond, VA), The Façade Film Festival (Plovdiv, Bulgaria), Skulpturenmuseum Glaskasten, (Marl, Germany) and the Crown Heights Film Festival (Brooklyn, NY), and has participated in residencies at Seven Below Arts Initiative (Burlington, VT), Kimmel Harding Nelson Center for the Arts (Nebraska City, NE), and Binghamton University’s Cinema Department (Vestal, NY). This fall, Smith will be a Collaborative Studio Program Fellow at UnionDocs Center for Documentary Arts in Brooklyn, NY. For more information please visit www.jenniferlaurensmith.com.

Katie Schetlick is a dance artist, choreographer, researcher and current lecturer in Dance at UVa. Her work focuses on developing deeper kinesthetic conversations between seen bodies (performer), seeing bodies (viewer) and the environment. Katie's choreography and research have been presented at the Ailey Citigroup Theater, Dixon Place, Movement Research, NADA Hudson, Fleet Moves Dance Festival, New York University, Tom Tom Founders Festival, SESC Vila Mariana (Brazil), Museum Perron Oost (Amsterdam), and the International Dance Theatres Festival (Poland). Katie holds a MA in Performance Studies from New York University and BFA in Dance with a minor in Anthropology from the Alvin Ailey/Fordham University program. Along with collaborator Zena Bibler she is co-founder of the Movement Party, a collaborative platform for investigating physical, environmental, and social awareness through dance and Fleet Moves, a site-specific dance festival in Wellfleet, MA.