

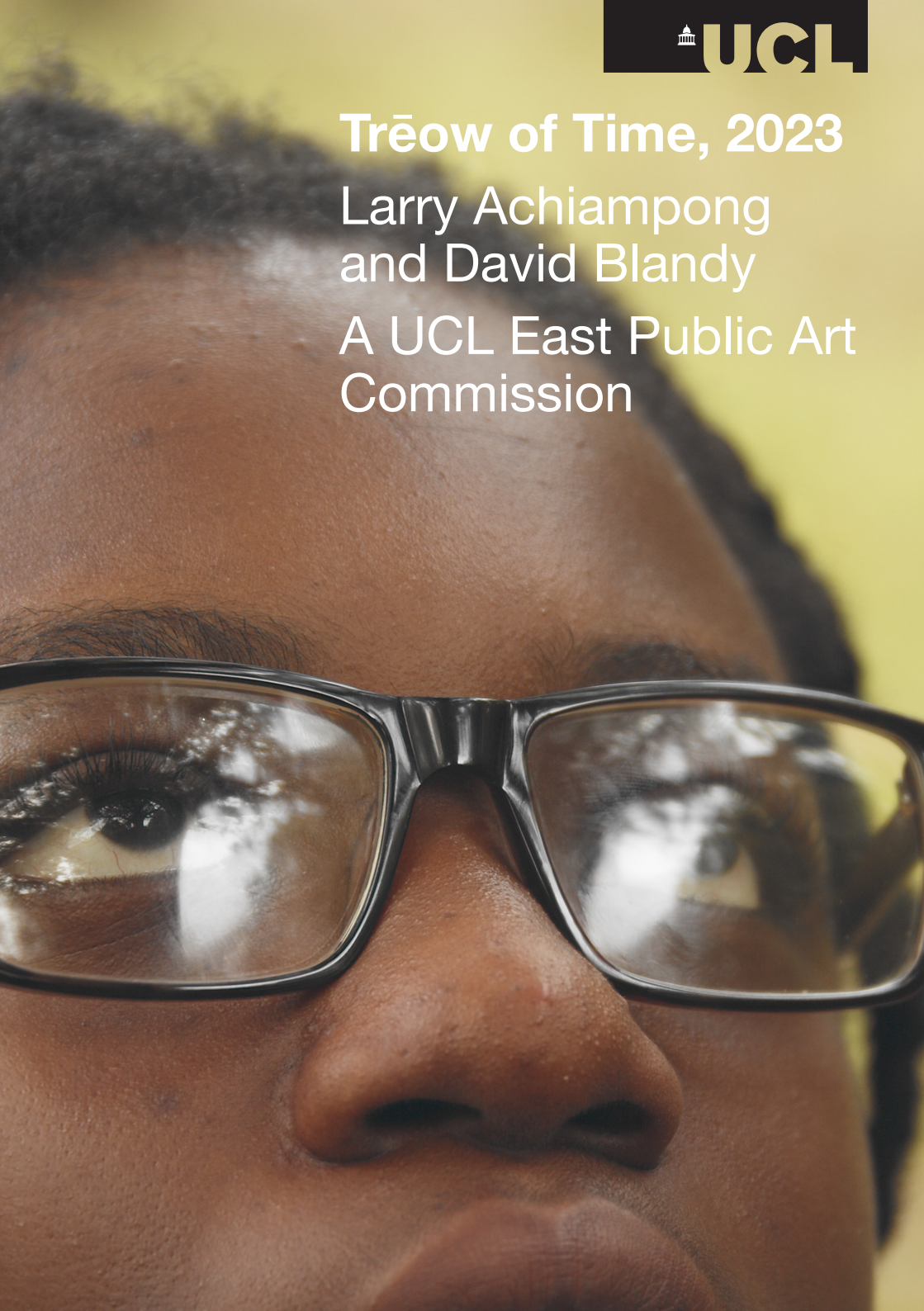


UCL

Trēow of Time, 2023

Larry Achiampong
and David Blandy

A UCL East Public Art
Commission



Overview

For UCL Marshgate Larry Achiampong and David Blandy have created an artwork that acts as both a reminder of the past of the site and as a poem to the future. The sculpture takes the form of a brick-built building, overwhelmed by nature, trees growing through the heart of the ruin, while films screened in the windows show a child exploring and relating to the natural world. The windows act as portals to a mysterious dark wood, the screens immersing the viewer, each side a self-contained moment. As the viewer walks around the sculpture, they take part in a form of narrative journey. The work is a mediation on our relationship to nature and the future, and how a new world might be formed from the ruins that have come before.

Trēow of Time was conceived following lengthy consultation with academics across disciplines at the site, as well as extensive research of the history of the site and the nearby Epping Forest. The local histories of brick-making, industry, community, gentrification and the symbiotic relationship between humans and the environment coalesce in this piece.

Trēow of Time expands Achiampong and Blandy's investigations into anthropology, science fiction, and the virtual, offering a vision of the place we find ourselves in, pointing towards a better world. The work suggests that the rewilding of the world is inevitable. The artists reflect how nature can reveal a different relationship with our senses and our bodies, how shifting scale can modify our sense of connection to the natural world, revealing co-dependency as key to forming a new paradigm. Additionally, the work reflects on the places where we find and lose

our selves, in the forest of nature and the virtual forest of free-roaming sandbox videogames.

There remains a myth connecting blackness with urbanity and the uncivilised, versus whiteness's connection to exploration and the idea of the civilised, that *Trēow of Time* confronts and dispels. The experience of tactile engagement with the tree and the earth belongs to the child in the film, it is a part of their humanity. The sculpture acts as a constant reminder in the space, to academics, students and the local community, about their collectivity and connection. *Trēow of Time* asserts that silos, of access, communication or knowledge, are divisive and ultimately illusory. The campus is rooted in a place, and to thrive it must feed on and fertilise this soil.

The brick ruin grounds the sculpture in the site-specific, with the bricks referencing the former industry of the area and the residential housing that was removed to make way for the advance of the Olympics and luxury apartments. An oak tree grows out of the ruin, pointing to the Royal Forests that would have once stretched as far as Romford Road.

The Title

Trēow is an Old English word that means tree, but also means a forest, and can also be used to mean loyalty, truth or faithfulness. The work is a constant reminder of the space where we all come from, the earth and nature. The idea of growth and construction allude to where we are going, towards change, renewal, and rebirth. The suffix “of Time” refers to a legacy, a reminder of past, present and potential future. But it also refers to a seminal video game, The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time, where the player has to travel across time periods to save the world from the forces of destruction. A wise old sentient plant-form, the Deku Tree, is a prominent character in the game that holds wisdom that no other living creature has existed long enough to retain.

Materiality: Oak

The English oak derives its name from the Latin word for strength, and has a symbolic resonance with the cycle of life. An oak is a witness to history potentially living for hundreds of years, and have been used in war from Viking longships to huge war ships for the British Navy. Oak is also a building material, with industrial, nutritional and medicinal purposes. Oaks also act as markers of climate change and the impact it has had on society, a natural archive of climate information.

Materiality: Brick

The use of the image of brick in the work links to the urban landscape that Marshgate is built on, the clay beneath us. Brick talks of a connection to the earth, and the physicality of the material itself. There is a local history of brick making and building, and brick is still a much used building resource in the borough.

The Film Work

The film explores the idea of the edges of the site of UCL Marshgate East, filming in Epping Forest, which would have once stretched right down to the edge of Romford Road only a few miles from the new campus. The main film location is around an ancient oak pollard, around 350 years old, called Grimston’s Oak, also known as the Monarch of the Forest. Achiampong’s son, a local resident of East London, is filmed exploring the landscape, drone footage rising above the canopy, contrasting with close-ups on the macro life; textures of the bark, light glistening through the trees, the child immersed in nature. Drone footage soars above the figure, placing him in the landscape. The view moves through the branches, giving height, scale and cinematic motion to the imagery.

An immersive soundtrack for the sculpture was created by the artists to embed the artwork in the site and alter the surrounding space.

History

Little India in Forest Gate was once the entrance to Epping Forest, known as “Cockney’s Paradise” in the late 1800’s. The local community surrounding the Forest were instrumental in saving the wood when it was threatened with enclosure and destruction in the late 19th century. In current times, during the pandemic, we’ve seen a renewed need for space and nature, and it’s been evident that this access to nature has not been supported for all communities.



References

Alongside site-specific and thematic research, the artists studied Daniel Defoe’s novel A “Journal of the Plague Year” (1722), where a group of Londoners try to escape the plague by settling in and around Epping Forest. Another author is Arthur Morrison, “the English Zola” particularly “To London Town” where the forest is used as a contrast to the deprivation of East London of the early twentieth century. The artists also researched contemporary nature writers such as Louisa Adjoa Parker, a writer of English-Ghanaian heritage based in Somerset, and Zakiya McKenzie, a writer and storyteller who was the 2019 writer-in-residence for Forestry England.

Credits

Directors: Larry Achiampong & David Blandy

Drone: Larry Achiampong /

Camera: David Blandy

Macro Camera: Claire Barrett

Editors & Grading: David Blandy & Claire Barrett

Soundtrack: Larry Achiampong

Actor: Sinai Achiampong

Location Manager: Louise Searle

Research & Producer: Claire Barrett

Curator: Sam Wilkinson, UCL Head of Public Art & Cultural Engagement, (East)