

Stiftung  
Kunst  
und Natur

Museum  
Sinclair-Haus

# Forests

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From the  
Romantic Period  
to the Future



# Forests

## From the Romantic Period to the Future

To this day, people in Germany view forests as the 'other side' of culture and everyday life – as a symbol of nature per se. Yet forests are both culturally occupied spaces, used and shaped by humans, as well as complex and vulnerable ecosystems – of which we perceive only a small fraction when we visit them. The fact that they also trigger positive associations such as beauty, recreation and vitality is partly thanks to the Romantic movement, which discovered the forest as an aesthetic space around 1800. In the following, forests will be artistically explored, made accessible and in some cases reinvented. More than simply depictions, art opens up a realm of possibilities in which the Romantics negotiate different relationships to nature, viewing it from at least three perspectives: first as an independent, creative force (*natura naturans*); secondly, the products of nature (*natura naturata*) – these include not only animal and human bodies but also stones and all ways of being-in-the-world; thirdly as the permanent interweaving between these two natures, forming a wide spectrum of interactions. This understanding of nature as a dynamic fabric, of which humans are a part, can lead the way in today's search for new relationships with nature.

The exhibition at Museum Sinclair-Haus is dedicated to the arts as a field of experimentation in which new forms of perception, encounters and connections with the forest can be explored. Seen together, the contemporary and Romantic works raise questions such as: What images and assumptions shape our understanding of forests? To what extent do we consider ourselves as part of them – or the forest as part of us? What roles do woodlands play as elements of our culture and way of life? What can we learn from Romanticism for modern perceptions of our forests?

The Romantic movement represented not only a new understanding of nature but also enhanced imagination and sensibility, in conjunction with knowledge and reason. Last but not least, the exhibition at the Museum Sinclair-Haus is a tribute to the beauty and liveliness of forests. A poetic approach based on appreciation, respect and knowledge can help us better understand and feel how inextricably we are linked, how our survival and well-being are bound together.

# Into the Woods!

Shimmering light, rustling, crackling, twittering – the fresh scent: forests appeal to all of our senses. The Romantic movement referred to ‘romanticizing’ as expanding and deepening our perception of the forest, finding new means of expression for the interplay of sensory experiences, emotions, imagination and knowledge. In doing so, they created a realm of possibilities within the arts for relationships with nature characterized by interest, sensitivity, respect and appreciation. These perceptions are important for us today – not only in order to comprehend ourselves as observers, disrupters and a part of the living world, but to be able to also feel connected – this is the path we have been on since the Romantic period. The first chapter tells about it, and invites us to see our relationships with forests in a new light.

**Deutsches Romantik-Museum**

➤ **Nature as Subject: The Forest as “You”**

**Senckenberg Naturmuseum Frankfurt**

➤ **Forest Knowledge**

Bettina von Arnim, *Correspondence of Fräulein Günderode and Bettine von Arnim*, 1861

All independent thought seems to me like sin, when I am surrounded by nature ; had one not better listen to her ? I know thou thinkest that thought is derived by listening to it, but no, that is very different. When I watch Nature, for listening I will not call it, as it is more than the ear can compass ; but the soul can watch. Seest thou, I feel everything as it passes within her ; I feel the sap that rises up into the top of the trees, rising in my blood. I stand thus and listen, and then I perceive, — not exactly think, at least not that I am aware, — but wait and hear how it goes on. All that I look upon, I suddenly perceive, — just as though I were Nature itself, or rather everything she produces ; blades of grass as they shoot up out of the earth, this I feel to the very root ; all flowers and all buds I feel differently.

## **Correspondence of Fräulein Günderode and Bettine von Arnim**

Bettina von Arnim (1785–1859)

Transl. Minna Wesselhoeft, Burnham 1861 (orig. Die Günderode, 1840, Bd. 1, Grünberg: Levysohn); the three quotes in the exhibition were handwritten by Andrea Thiele.

Bettina von Arnim wrote and made music not simply about nature but with it – and even in the midst of it, while sitting in the poplar tree of her grandmother's garden for instance. In the fictional novel of letters, 'Die Günderode' von Arnim processes her exchanges with the deceased poet and once close friend Karoline von Günderode (1780–1806). Passages in the book vividly portray a relationship with nature that is anything but distanced: Nature is understood as a living, active force permeating one's own existence –that is, if the openness exists to being touched by it. This is an important prerequisite for feeling a sense of belonging to the living world at all.

Literary scholar Frederike Middelhoff discusses the quotes from Bettina von Arnim in a text dealing with Arnim's ecological thinking: Frederike Middelhoff: "Phytoökologien in den Briefbüchern Bettina von Arnims", in: Roland Borgards, Frederike Middelhoff and Barbara Thums (eds.): *Romantische Ökologien. Vielfältige Naturen um 1800*, Heidelberg: J. B. Metzler, 2023, pp. 127–160.



## **And Then the World Changed Colour: Breathing Yellow**

Mariele Neudecker (\*1965)

2019, mixed media incl. glass, water, salt, plastic, light, 63.6 × 56.6 × 168.5 cm

On loan from Dr.-Ing. E. h. Frank Asbeck

© Mariele Neudecker. All rights reserved, DACS/Artimage 2024,

VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2024

Mariele Neudecker says about this work: "There is a sort of human residue in the space, someone has been there, has seen it before you...this is something that is always really important to me: that we're looking at a landscape like a cultural, human space, not an untouched bit of nature." The mixture of materials, light and water only becomes a 'forest' in our imagination – how far does this also apply to the woods we wander through or take a stroll in? To what extent do our notions of landscape influence or superimpose themselves on the ecosystems we experience? Neudecker's artificial forest is inspired by the fairytale-like landscapes, bathed in yellow light, of the Norwegian painter Harald Sohlberg (1869–1935).

Bettina von Arnim, *Correspondence of Fräulein Günderode and Bettine von Arnim*, 1840

All men suffer the same contact with Nature, only they do not know it. I am just as they are, with only this difference, that I am conscious, for I have had the heart, urgently, and with passionate love to ask. Some indeed read it as a poetic fable, that Nature begs for release ; others are filled with awe when they stand alone in the unbroken silence of Nature, their hearts are oppressed and they know neither to awaken the spirit within themselves nor to subdue, but unfeelingly avoid it, although an inner voice tells them that something is taking place to which they should yield themselves up ; but then they are overcome with fear and withdraw again into the habits of daily life.

Bettina von Arnim, *Correspondence of Fräulein Günderode and Bettine von Arnim*, 1840

Ah, when I look around and see the branches stretching towards me and speaking to, that is, kissing my soul, all things eaking, and all look at clinging with its lips to the lips of my soul, when color, form, fragrance, all will manifest themselves in language, – is not then color the tone, form the word, and fragrance the spirit, and can I not say all Nature speaks to me, that is, kisses my soul ; on this the soul must thrive, it is its element, for each living thing in Nature has its element.

Bettina von Arnim: *Correspondence of Fräulein Günderode and Bettine von Arnim*, Boston: T. O. H. P. Burnham, 1861, here: pp. 184–185, 188, 185.





# One Tree ID – How to Become a Tree for Another Tree

Agnes Meyer-Brandis (\*1973)

1986, ongoing since 2019, biochemical and bio-poetic scent communication,

Installations and experiments, variable dimensions, [www.onetreeid.de](http://www.onetreeid.de)

On loan from the artist

© Agnes Meyer-Brandis, VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2024

Lemony, musty, mossy, nutty, spicy and earthy are the smells in a forest. Artist Agnes Meyer-Brandis works with this fragrant language of trees: Her 'One Tree ID' consists of a perfume containing gas molecules from a specific tree. These volatile organic compounds (VOC) are scents that trees use to exchange information with each other and other living beings. Her work enables us to intervene in the speculative conversations between the trees. But some questions remain unanswered: Do the trees perceive me – and if so, how? What does my smell trigger in them? How does my existence affect theirs and vice versa?

**One Tree ID – *Parrotia persica*** (Persian ironwood) was realized in collaboration with Prof. Dr. Jörg-Peter Schnitzler and Dr. Andrea Ghirardo, Helmholtz Zentrum München, research unit Environmental Simulation (EUS), Institute of Biochemical Plant Pathology (BIOP), and Marc vom Ende, senior perfumer, Symrise, as part of the exhibition gREen. Sampling Color at the Muffatwerk, Munich, 2021.

**One Tree ID – *Cedrus deodara*** (Himalayan cedar) was realized in collaboration with Prof. Dr. Birgit Piechulla and Dr. Uta Effmert, Biochemistry, Institute of Biosciences, University of Rostock, and Marc vom Ende, senior perfumer, Symrise, as part of the exhibition Experiment Zukunft at the Kunsthalle Rostock, 2019.



**Video:** Scientific  
backgrounds of the work

## **Making Music with Nightingales**

Sam Lee (\*1980)

*Improvisation – Singing with Nightingales, 2019, Cooking Vinyl UK, 5:26 min*

We are affected by the songs of birds. For centuries, artists have celebrated nightingales in particular, and some have even made music with them. According to her own story, Bettine von Arnim accompanied a nightingale on the guitar; in 1924, a nightingale duet with cellist Beatrice Harrison was heard on BBC radio. Since 2019, folk singer Sam Lee has been making music with these migratory birds in the woodlands of Great Britain, although his fascination is also confronted with the threat of loss: some concerts have already had to be canceled because the nightingales have not returned.

Sam Lee's collection of folk songs (some of them about nightingales):  
[songcollectors.org](http://songcollectors.org)

## **Woods in a Landscape Park**

Heinrich Hackel, Court gardener from 1809–1844

1816, "Plan of the Royal Bosquet, as it could be improved and beautified", Bad Homburg vor der Höhe Palace Gardens (reproduction)  
Hessisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, Wiesbaden

The 'romantic forest' is almost inconceivable without the landscape gardens of the 18th century. Its 'living paintings' were modeled on depictions of an idealized landscape. In turn, the staged wooded parks inspired the imagination of Romantic artists. One such park is located in the immediate vicinity of the Sinclair House Museum: the lower part of the palace gardens in Bad Homburg. From 1771, Princess Caroline von Hessen-Darmstadt (1746–1821) had the vineyard south of the palace redesigned. The map displays the "wooded bosquet" with numerous paths opening to a variety of inviting views for visitors to take a stroll. Some of these paths still exist today.



## **Flute as Walking Stick**

1888, tropical hardwood, ivory, 86.7 cm

On loan from the Reiss-Engelhorn-Museen, Mannheim

© Reiss-Engelhorn-Museen Mannheim

The *csakan* is a woodwind instrument first crafted at the beginning of the 19th century. It was also available in the form of a walking stick: the rise of making music outdoors in the Romantic period required instruments one could comfortably take along. Strolling through parks had become common in the previous century, but spending time in the forest for recreation or aesthetic enjoyment was still considered odd. Around 1800, the Romantics began to discover forests on foot and horseback, pioneering a hiking movement that developed into a mass phenomenon from the middle of the 19th century, when the first hiking guides appeared and clubs were founded.

Novalis, *The disciples at Saïs*, 1799

The substance of these impressions which affect us we call Nature, and thus Nature stands in an immediate relationship to those functions of our bodies which we call senses. Unknown and mysterious relations of our body allow us to surmise unknown and mysterious correlations with Nature, and therefore Nature is that wondrous fellowship into which our bodies introduce us, and which we learn to know through the mode of its constitution and abilities.

Novalis (1799): *The disciples at Saïs and other fragments*, trans. F. V. M. T. and U. C. B., London: Methuen & Co, 1903, here: p. 123 (orig. Novalis: „Die Lehrlinge zu Saïs“ (1799), in: *Schriften*, ed. by Friedrich Schlegel und Ludwig Tieck, Berlin: Buchhandlung der Realschule, 1802).

# Earth-Life Painting

Painters of the Romantic period did not depict the woods as they were, but re-imagined them through the interplay of observation, feeling and knowledge as part of the creative process. The Dresden doctor and painter Carl Gustav Carus coined the term 'earth-life painting' in 1835, to distinguish Romantic art from traditional landscape painting. An earth-life image encompasses more than the eye can see: the artists' feelings, knowledge of natural history and interpretation of natural spaces, which they translate into pictures. For Carus, 'earth-life' is analogous to 'human life'. These depictions always formulate a relationship to the forest, a view of nature, or they raise a question. Nature and man are interwoven, indivisible – this has long been scientifically proven, but is hardly noticeable in everyday urban life. This chapter displays works of art that explore connections between people and woodlands, making them perceivable in a variety of ways. What are forests for humans – and: what are humans for the forests?

**Deutsches Romantik-Museum**

↗ **The Whole Forest**

**Senckenberg Naturmuseum Frankfurt**

↗ **"We" and the Forests**



## Forest Studies

Around 1800, the forest became an aesthetic space – one worthy of appreciation. Romantic artists began drawing directly in nature to capture and understand the precise textures of rocks, plant communities in specific locations, the characteristics of trees and flowers. In doing so, they often arranged compositions in which the forests we view are invented – but seem alive in their details because they are based on countless hours of immersion in the forms and colors of the woodlands. Many artists also studied the specialized natural history literature of their time. Their ideal was to acquire knowledge through art, and to achieve art through knowledge – art and scientific knowledge interacted with each other even then.



## **Weimar Surroundings, Sketchbook**

Friedrich Preller the Elder (1804–1878)

1861/62, pencil on wove paper, 18.5 × 47 cm

Museum Zitadelle Jülich, Landschaftsgalerie

© Museum Zitadelle Jülich, Landschaftsgalerie, inv. no. 2022-0350

(On Loan from a private collection), Photo: Bernhard Dautzenberg

Friedrich Preller studied at the *Fürstliche freie Zeichenschule* in Weimar, where he later worked as a professor and royal court painter. During his travels to Rügen, Norway and Italy, among other places, he immersed himself in drawing in the midst of nature.





## **Forest Interior, Two caricatured male profiles on the lower right**

Johann Wilhelm Schirmer (1807–1863)

1835, gray pencil on paper, 52.7 × 70 cm

Inv. no. 5411, Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main

© Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main

Johann Wilhelm Schirmer and Carl Friedrich Lessing founded the *Land-schaftlicher Componierverein* (landscape composer club) as students at the Düsseldorf Art Academy in 1827, since landscape painting was not yet taught at the academy. Every two weeks, the members met outdoors to draw, paint and exchange ideas. From the 1830s, Schirmer led the first class for landscape painting at the Düsseldorf Art Academy, making it a subject in its own right.

## **Oak Forest**

Carl Friedrich Lessing (1808–1880)

February 1837, gray pen and brown opaque paint over pencil

on yellow-brown paper, 37.2 × 50.5 cm

Inv. no. 6816, Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main

© Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main

Lessing had already been trained in drawing as a teenager. This sheet was created in his studio following studies in nature, possibly in the Solling hills of Lower Saxony – still known today for its oak woodland. Lessing undertook a study trip to the Solling in the summer of 1836 and to the Harz mountains in autumn.

## **Forest Interior**

Heinrich Dreber (1822–1875)

1839, Pencil, wiped and brown wash, heightened with white, on vellum paper, 24.9 × 42 cm

Inv. no. 17642, Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main

© Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main

A recurring motif of Romanticism is the 'forest interior': a woodland scene without a horizon filling the entire image, thus placing an observer of the picture in the heart of untamed nature. Dreber attended the Dresden Academy of Art from 1836 to 1841. Like many Romantic artists, he spent the following years of his life mainly in Rome.



## Sunlit Forest Landscape

Carl Friedrich Lessing (1808–1880)

1854/57, oil on canvas, 63 × 94.5 cm

Inv. no. MUWI-KS-M-0105, Museum Wiesbaden

© Museum Wiesbaden

What does a human being mean to the forest? In this painting, the tiny figure of the hunter almost disappears within a forest of huge trees. Lessing depicted plant species such as foxglove and oak true to nature, studying the nature of rocks while drawing (see tablet computer in the exhibition) and in natural history writings, but he created the overall composition from his imagination. The man in the image appears lost and secure at the same time: the forest is both harmonious and eerie. This 'in-between' state is an essential feature of the Romantic view of nature: there is a longing in it, but no arriving.

Carl Gustav Carus, *Nine letters on landscape painting*, 1815–1824

To take the argument a step further: might not a work of art, too, exert a lasting effect in tune with the initial feelings of the artist? And if within the artist there were some deeper vision of vast movement and constant interaction within the earth, its atmosphere, its waters, and its living creatures, might not this endow a work of landscape painting with a special character, a new and distinctive effect on the mind of the viewer? (...) Seen from our present viewpoint the name itself, “landscape,” begins to appear trivial and inadequate. There is something artisan-like about it that revolts my entire being. Another term must be found and introduced, and for this I propose Erdlebenbild, Erdlebenbildkunst [earth-life painting, or earth-life art].

The eye must be opened to the true and wondrous life of nature, and the hand must be trained to do the soul’s bidding quickly, easily, and beautifully. Lead the young landscape painter on, to see the necessary connection between the outward forms of mountain ranges and the inner structure of their masses, and the necessity with which that inner structure follows from the history of those mountains; the inevitability of specific plant growth in specific places; the entirely regular and law-abiding inner structure of a plant; the conditions that modify the growth of a plant, tree, or bush, now in one way and now in another; and the differences in the nature and movement of different bodies of water.

Carl Gustav Carus (1815–1824): *Nine letters on landscape painting* : written in the years 1815–1824; with a letter from Goethe by way of introduction, trans. David Britt, Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2002, here: 117, 119, 125, 126.



## Gray Tree 10

Loredana Nemes (\*1972)

2019, Gelatin silver print, from the series *Graubaum und Himmelmeer*, 98 × 72.5 cm

On loan from Galerie Springer Berlin

© Loredana Nemes

“Flawless, these German beech trees standing on the island. I pulled out my semi-circular protractor and laughed out loud with Pythagoras at so much precision. They are beautiful, and their order does me good.” Nemes was actually just looking to relax on the island Rügen – and found the beech forests near Sassnitz. She was so fascinated that she returned there 15 times over the course of two years to photograph them. Her black and white images create new impressions of the different tree shapes and relationships. Born in Sibiu, they remind Nemes of her childhood, and the beech forests of the Carpathians.



## **Forest Landscape (motif to Pan and the Nymphs)**

Johann Wilhelm Schirmer (1807–1863)

Circa 1845, oil on canvas, 44.5 × 33.5 cm

Museum Zitadelle Jülich, Landschaftsgalerie © Museum Zitadelle Jülich, Landschaftsgalerie, Inv. no. 2011–0062, Photo: Börries Brakebusch

Schirmer's oil study provides an insight into his intensive artistic exploration of light, shadow, colors, as well as the forms of trees and other forest plants. Open-air oil study painting is an important part of the Düsseldorf School of painting, to which Schirmer belonged. The oil study was incorporated into the composition of the etching *Pan and the Nymphs*, which he executed in 1846.



## **Dying Primeval Forest after Storm (in the character of Telemark)**

August Cappelen (1827–1852)

completed by Johann Wilhelm Schirmer (1807–1863)

1851/52, Oil on canvas, 40 × 65 cm

Museum Zitadelle Jülich, Landschaftsgalerie © Museum Zitadelle Jülich, Landschaftsgalerie, Inv. no. 2021-0001 (donation Dr. Matthias Bühler), Photo: Bernhard Dautzenberg

Herman August Cappelen studied from 1849 in Johann Wilhelm Schirmer's landscape painting class. He is known today for his ancient, mysterious forest landscapes, often characterized by decay. Cappelen's teacher Schirmer completed the pupil's painting after his death.



## **Ashes, Côte-d'Ivoire**

Ashes of a tree near Gorohoui-Congoli Mountains, Savannah region,  
Ivory Coast (8°49' N – 4°07' W)

Yann Arthus-Bertrand (\*1946)

1998, Digital print on Museo Silver Rag, 73 × 110 cm

On loan from the artist and LMS Gallery, Brussels

© Yann Arthus-Bertrand

Yann Arthus-Bertrand has been capturing the impact of man on nature from a bird's eye perspective since 1993. Controlled burning of undergrowth and grasses is part of traditional agriculture in the forests and savannahs of north-eastern Côte d'Ivoire. This makes hunting easier, and the ash also acts as a natural fertilizer - the targeted use of fire maintains the cycle of life and death. This fallen tree burned slowly: white ash remains as a ghostly replica of its former form.





## Elnath

Beth Moon (\*1956)

2017, gelatin silver print, from group of works: Ancient Skies, Ancient Trees 76.2 × 50.8 cm

On loan from the artist and A.galerie Paris

© Beth Moon/Courtesy of A.galerie Paris @agalerieparis

This giant sequoia lives in California's Sequoia National Forest. The image is part of a group of works for which Beth Moon journeyed to the oldest trees in the darkest places on Earth, to photograph at night. The 30-second exposure time reveals more details and colors in the sky than the human eye can discern. Two scientific studies examining how cosmic radiation affects tree growth formed the basis for the photographs, in which heaven and earth are joined.





## **Landscape with Forest Chapel**

Johann Wilhelm Schirmer (1807–1863)

Museum Zitadelle Jülich, Landschaftsgalerie

© Museum Zitadelle Jülich, Landschaftsgalerie, On permanent loan from the  
Städtisches Museum Schloss Rheydt, Mönchengladbach,

Inv. no. 7875, photo: Siegfried Peters

Forest paintings from the Romantic era often depict motifs such as crucifixes, monks and chapels. For the makers of such images, experiencing and immersing themselves in nature also meant feeling the forces of the divine in the world.



## Hambach Forest

Sophie Reuter (\*1994)

2018, Digital print, from the series *protests\_hambacher forest*, 50 × 75 cm

On loan from the artist

© Sophie Reuter

With its interplay of light and image-filling view of the forest, Reuter's photograph is reminiscent of the Romantic motif 'forest interior', in which the woodland takes center stage. Here however, signs of human presence are also visible: structures and banners of squatters protesting against the clearing of Hambach Forest for coal mining. The image thus also conveys human responsibility for the continued existence of our woodlands, respect for life and our capacity for change. The forest has been occupied since 2012 and cleared several times. The photographer herself takes part in the protests.



## Forest Interior

Wilhelm Klein (1821–1897)

Mid-19th century, oil on canvas, 47.5 × 63.5 cm

Museum Zitadelle Jülich, Landschaftsgalerie © Museum Zitadelle Jülich, Landschaftsgalerie, Inv. no. 2007-0014, Photo: Bernhard Dautzenberg

Wilhelm Klein was also a pupil of Johann Wilhelm Schirmer. His version of the 'forest interior', a motif often painted in the Romantic period, takes the viewer under the treetops of a sun-drenched woodland where no sign of human life can be detected. The artistic imagination creates a 'forest solitude' that in reality was difficult to find: at the time the painting was created, forests were already heavily influenced by human intervention and probably rarely as dense and intact as portrayed here. There is a special Japanese word for the play of light between the leaves: *komorebi*. The term 'forest solitude' (*Waldeinsamkeit*), on the other hand, was invented by writer Ludwig Tieck and first appears in his tale *Der blonde Eckbert* (1797).

# 1st Floor

## Earth-Life Painting

In this room, forest landscapes are gathered together through four different media: painting, photography, drawing and music. Sit and listen to Robert Schumann's *Waldszenen* while letting your gaze wander over three very different woodland views: the dimension and image-filling detail of Thomas Struth's photography entices you to immerse yourself into the fullness of life; Abel Rodríguez combines memories and knowledge: the drawing exemplifies his portrayal of a more-than-human world in which plants, humans, animals and spirits form a community; Carl Blechen presents a sculpted forest of light and shadows. Finally, Robert Schumann's music evokes a forest within us.



## Paradise 21

Thomas Struth (\*1954)

2001, Yuquehy, Brazil, C-print,

From the group of works *New Pictures From Paradise*, 180.1 × 223.8 cm

On loan from the artist

© Thomas Struth 2024

Thomas Struth's group of works 'New Pictures From Paradise' is comprised of 36 forest photographs from all over the world. The large-format images draw the viewer into detailed scenes with their great depth of focus. In these forest 'cutouts,' we experience at eye level a veritable puzzle of leaves, ferns, stems and tendrils. Our gaze finds no center, remaining in constant motion and jumping from detail to detail. The title of the work and its motif pose the question: what utopias are conceivable today, and what roles do forests play in them?





## **Territorio de montes firme**

Abel Rodríguez (\*ca. 1944)

2021, colored inks on paper, 70 × 100 cm

On loan from private collection

© the artist, Courtesy: the artist and Instituto de Visión, photo: Nicole López

Mogaje Guihu was born in the Colombian part of the Amazon basin, and belonged to the Nonuya tribe. He passed on his extensive knowledge of plants in the region as a guide to NGOs researching the flora there. In the 1990s, Guihu fled to Bogotá to escape the civil war violence that was also increasing in the jungle. He now called himself Abel Rodríguez, and began making botanical drawings based on his memories and acquired knowledge. These depict the plant species in their habitat and various roles, for example as foodstuffs or building components, as well as in conjunction with rituals or animals.



## **Forest Interior with Broken Branches**

Carl Blechen (1798–1840)

After 1833, oil on paper on wood, 22 × 32 cm

On loan from Stiftung Fürst-Pückler-Museum Park and Schloss Branitz, Cottbus

© Carl-Blechen-Sammlung der Stadt Cottbus bei der Stiftung Fürst-Pückler-Museum Park und Schloss Branitz

Blechen is considered a master of sketching. This small oil painting study also displays his ability to translate fleeting impressions into an image. Blechen worked to further the development of landscape painting of the era with his paintings, aiming at bringing sensory perceptions to the canvas with the use of light and color. Blechen's work is considered as being on the threshold from Romanticism to Realism.



## Waldszenen (forest scenes)

Robert Schumann (1810–1856)

1848/1849, Nine pieces for piano, op. 82

Interpretation by Sviatoslav Richter, 1995, Deutsche Grammophon GmbH, Berlin

Illustration: Title page of the first edition of Robert Schumann's *Waldszenen* op. 82,

Leipzig, 1850 © Brahms-Institut an der Musikhochschule Lübeck

Robert Schumann composed *Waldszenen* in the countryside near Dresden, far from the aftershocks of revolutionary unrest in May 1848. The cycle is conceived as a walk in the woods: the cheerful 'Entrance' (1) is followed by an encounter with 'Hunters in waiting' (2). The tone subsequently becomes quieter and more somber: 'Lonely flowers' (3) lead to a 'Disreputable place' (4): Schumann prefaced this piece with verses by the poet Friedrich Hebbel that inspired him, telling of death – the forest holds a sad secret. The 'Friendly landscape' (5) leads us out of the darkness. After visiting an 'Inn' (6) we hear the nocturnal 'Bird as prophet' (7): this piece became famous for its bizarre bird calls. The 'Hunting song' (8) is followed by the 'Farewell' (9). According to Romantic understanding, the sounds in our ears touch the soul, while the sense of sight creates distance. Schumann's *Waldszenen* encourage us to listen closely to the forest created within us when we hear his music.





## Atmospheric Forest

Rasa Smite & Raitis Smits (\*1969 & \*1966)

2020, multi-channel video installation, 17:04 min.

RIXC Dr. Rasa Smite & Dr. Raitis Smits © Rasa Smite, Raitis Smits

Trees produce not only oxygen, but also emit fleeting particles. These 'volatile organic compounds' (VOC) produce the typical forest odor in conifers. Scientists have discovered that trees 'breathe' more strongly under drought stress, meaning they emit more fragrances than usual – the consequences of this are not yet clear. The work visualizes measurements of VOC and resin production that were carried out at an open-air observatory in the Swiss Pfynwald (Pfyn forest). Using point clouds, color and sound, the visual walk through the woods makes it possible to experience events in this ecosystem that normally remain hidden from our senses. In this way, the installation provides an insight into the complex relationships between forest, climate change and the atmosphere.

Atmospheric Forest (2020), an immersive VR artwork by Rasa Smite and Raitis Smits, is the result of the Swiss National Science Foundation-funded research project "Ecodata – Ecomedia – Ecoaesthetics" (2017–2021) under the direction of Yvonne Volkart (Principal Investigator), organized by the FHNW Academy of Art and Design Basel, and carried out in partnership with the Swiss Federal Institute for Forest, Snow and Landscape Research (WSL)

Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder and Ludwig Tieck, *Die Pfingstreise*, 1793  
Letter from Ludwig Tieck to August Ferdinand Bernhardt in Berlin  
Sunday evening, ninth day (Leupoldsdorf – Fichtelgebirge – Fichtelsee –  
Ochsenkopf – Bischofsgrün)

The Fichtel Mountains now began with a beautiful beech forest, the morning sun shone in, every leaf sparkled, the birds sang, the meadows were fragrant – with the feeling of the adventurous region, the solitude – it was a divine morning! (...) We soon realized that our messenger was not quite as knowledgeable as he was reputed to be, for he tried this way and that, but none of them were quite to his liking. We got to see some very interesting parts of the forest, but as we realized that one could easily ride around in such a large forest for a day without getting out, we felt uncomfortable. (...) Our situation was extremely adventurous; I was sitting on a stone, the horses were grazing after their exertions, Wackenroder was sitting next to me, a dead, silent forest was all around us, the whole of nature as if extinct, not a sound as far as our ears could reach, – and all this quite deep in the uninhabited, deserted Fichtel Mountains. I struck a stone very softly with my stick, and it rumbled deep into the valley and the forest, making a loud echo. (...) We rode on for a long time and came to a buried tin mine, almost at the top of a mountain to a small, lonely hut (Seehaus) (...). I was extremely hungry, so I asked the people for bread and butter, both of which I received very well. We sat down on the grass by a small pond, the horses grazed around us, and the messenger ate with us. We had a wide view before and behind us, but nothing but mountains covered with spruce forests, among which the Schneeberg and the so-called Ochsenkopf stood like giants. It was extraordinarily lonely and romantic; the little hut in particular made a wonderfully melancholic effect in the vast, wild landscape.

Just as we were about to stop eating, a crowd of people came up the mountain on the other side. I had expected nothing less in the solitude here. They had measured some forests and looked at us as if we were real wonder animals (...).

Ludwig Tieck and Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder: *Die Pfingstreise von 1793 durch die Fränkische Schweiz, den Frankenwald und das Fichtelgebirge*, ed. by Christoph Schaller, Helmbrechts: Saalfrank 1970.

# Forest of Fear, Forest of Joy

In the forest realm of Romanticism, not only the marvelous reigns, but also the fear of losing one's self, mind or life. Fairy tales and stories reflect this tense relationship between humans and the living world surrounding them. Even today, stories and images portray forests as “landscapes of fear”. Its otherness remains impenetrable and uncontrollable – at least as a concept, because in reality every forest is now potentially usable or destructible by humans.

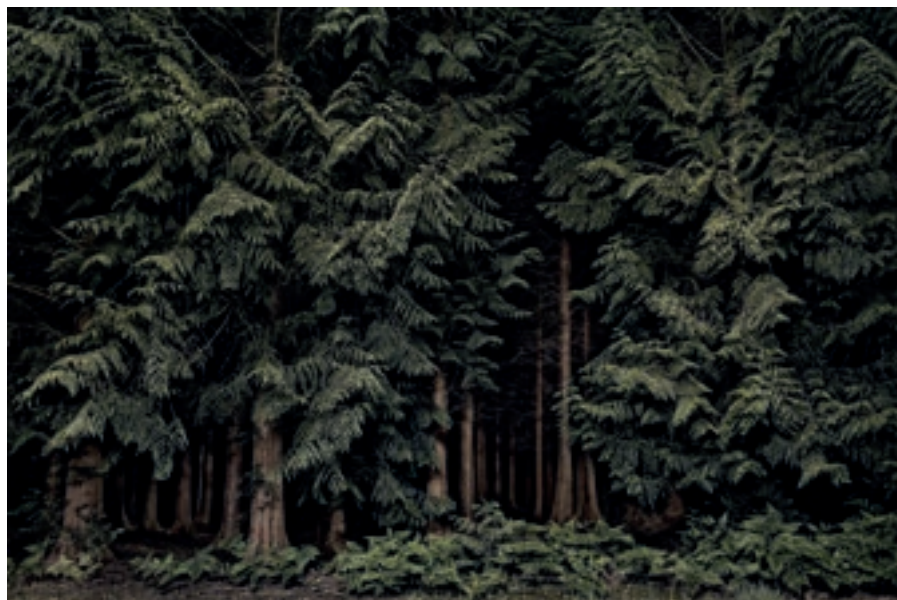
The present climate and biodiversity crises have added another dimension: the fear of losing our woodlands. ‘Solastalgia’ describes the feeling we experience when we lose familiar natural spaces. This chapter explores both sides: the forest as a setting for dealing with our fear of nature, and the existential fear of irretrievably losing a landscape of the soul.

**Deutsches Romantik-Museum**

➤ **The Forest's Rights**

**Senckenberg Naturmuseum Frankfurt**

➤ **The Life and Death of Forests**



## **Cedars**

Jasper Goodall (\*1973)

2019, digital print, from the series Twilight's Path, 90 × 135 cm

On loan from the artist

© Jasper Goodall

## **Stars 9**

Ellie Davies (\*1976)

2014/15, digital print, from the series Stars, 80 × 120 cm

On loan from A.galerie Paris

© Ellie Davies/Courtesy of A.galerie Paris @agalerieparis

Forests are more than the eye can see. Our perceptions are informed by fairy tales, myths and our own inner fears. These works reflect two sides of the human imagination related to the forest: the scary and the splendid. Goodall's photographs are taken after dark, using studio lighting. The dense forest appears mysterious and terrifying, recalling formative stories of eerie creatures and losing our way. In Ellie Davies' photography, the forest appears imbued with a special magic: The artist photographs British forests, inserting elements or later computer-generated images into them that reinforce the impression of 'wonder' – in this case images of the starry sky taken by the Hubble telescope.

## **Little Red Riding Hood in the Forest**

Eduard Weichberger (1843–1913)

1877, lithograph (reproduction)

© Deutsches Märchen- und Wesersagenmuseum, Photo: Hanna Dose (CC BY-NC-SA)

The brothers Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm published their 'Children's and Household Tales' between 1812 and 1858, a collection of both orally told and previously published fairy tales. They reworked the tales according to the tastes of the time, adding own ideas about the educational value of the stories. The forest in these tales is often a setting that holds both threatening and healing powers as a natural space. Little Red Riding Hood's famous encounter with the evil wolf goes back to a tale written in 1695/97 by Charles Perrault.

## **Hansel and Gretel**

Lotte Reiniger (1899–1981)

1954, silhouette animation film, 9:24 min.

With permission of the agency for Primrose Productions, Munich

The fairy tale of Hansel and Gretel has captured the imagination of millions of children since its publication by the Brothers Grimm in 1819. Abandoned alone in a deep forest, the siblings have to rescue themselves from a seemingly hopeless situation. The forest symbolizes a hostile world in which the two are left to their own devices. We present here an animated version of the tale by Lotte Reiniger, a pioneer of silhouette film whose first work was published in the 1920s. In her version, some things differ from the Grimms' telling: the children follow their curiosity into the forest and animals help them defeat the evil witch, breaking her magic wand.

## **Organic Life in Nature**

Moritz von Schwind (1804–1871)

1847/48, from: Fliegende Blätter, no. 144 (reproduction)

Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg

Moritz von Schwind satirically explores here the projection of human forms and feelings onto nature, creating an erotically charged scene of trees depicted in human form. The idea that humans and trees are related can also be seen in anatomical drawings from the 17th century.

## **The Blond Eckbert**

Ludwig Tieck (1773–1853)

1797, edition with woodcuts by Johannes Lebek (1901–1985),

Memmingen: Edition Curt Visel, 1998

This early Romantic-era thriller introduced a new word to the world: ‘*Waldeinsamkeit*’ (forest solitude). Ludwig Tieck tells a hair-raising story about friendship, betrayal of trust and loss of identity against the backdrop of the forest. The woods are portrayed here as a typical Romantic ‘ambiguous image’, either wonderful and peaceful or terrifying and eerily threatening. The permanent exhibition at the German Romantic Museum dedicates a separate area to Tieck’s fairy tale.

## **Nature Spirit**

Paul Lehmann (1923–2022)

1987, Figure design for Der Eisenhans, GDR, 1988; Pencil, 42 × 59.7 cm

Filmmuseum Potsdam/ Institut der Filmuniversität Babelsberg collections

KONRAD WOLF, inventory no. No29/0129

For thousands of years, people have been passing on stories of creatures that are partly human but fundamentally different in nature. 'Wild' men or women have haunted our imagination, from the epic of Gilgamesh (ca. 2500 BC) to the Brothers Grimm's Iron John – or the beings called 'Ents' in J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* and the Marvel character 'Groot', who embodies a force of nature alien to city dwellers. These figures also represent encounters with the notion of an independent force of nature and the place of humans in it. This 'Nature Spirit' was designed by Paul Lehmann: as a set designer he created from 1957 settings for more than sixty films and television productions at the Deutsche Film Aktiengesellschaft (DEFA), the East German state-owned film company.

## **Treebeard, Guardian of the Forest**

2023, Eaglemoss Publications Ltd, Character of Treebeard based on the novel

*The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*, 1954, by J. R. R. Tolkien (1892–1973)

Private collection

The longing to be able to talk to trees likely also played a role in Tolkien's invention of the Ents figures. They are up to four meters tall, and look like trees when they stand still. In Tolkien's saga, Ents are the guardians of the forest who do not actually interfere in other matters, but join forces here with the hobbits and other creatures against evil.



Brothers Grimm, *Iron John*, 1850

The huntsman therefore betook himself with his dog to the forest. It was not long before the dog fell in with some game on the way, and wanted to pursue it; but hardly had the dog run two steps when it stood before a deep pool, could go no farther, and a naked arm stretched itself out of the water, seized it, and drew it under. When the huntsman saw that, he went back and fetched three men to come with buckets and bail out the water. When they could see to the bottom there lay a wild man whose body was brown like rusty iron, and whose hair hung over his face down to his knees. They bound him with cords, and led him away to the castle. There was great astonishment over the wild man; the King, however, had him put in an iron cage in his court-yard, and forbade the door to be opened on pain of death, and the Queen herself was to take the key into her keeping. And from this time forth every one could again go into the forest with safety.

Jacob Ludwig Grimm and Wilhelm Carl Grimm (1850): *Iron John*, in: Grimm's Complete Fairy Tales, New York: Garden City, 1900, here: pp. 435–436.

## **Where Groot Walks – Death Follows!**

Where Monsters Dwell, Marvel Comics Group, vol. 1, no. 6, 1970  
Private collection

When Groot first appeared in the Marvel Comics universe, he was an extra-terrestrial being who invaded Earth in order to carry out experiments on human beings. He thus symbolizes a narrative thread that continues to this day, in which a great (natural) force threatens mankind.



## **The Strange Child**

Tale by E. T. A. Hoffmann (1776–1822), 1817;

Illustration by Katina Vasileva Peeva (\*1980)

2019, Digital illustration, Berlin: Secession Verlag 2022 (reproduction)

On loan from the artist

© Katina Vasileva Peeva Katina

Vasileva Peeva's illustrations were created for the first Bulgarian translation of Hoffmann's fairy tale, published in 2019. In the story, the artist depicts nature speaking through numerous eyes and mouths. Unlike folk tales, a literary tale is written by a specific person.

E. T. A. Hoffmann, *The Strange Child*, 1817

The other day, when Felix and Christlieb went into the forest at the usual time, the strange child was already waiting for them, and if yesterday it had known how to start wonderful games, today it was creating the most graceful wonders, so that Felix and Christlieb were shouting with joy and delight one after the other. It was funny and very pretty at the same time that the strange child knew how to speak so gracefully and shyly to the trees, bushes, flowers and the forest stream while they were playing. They all answered so audibly that Felix and Christlieb understood everything. The strange child called into the alder bushes: “You talkative people, what are you whispering and whispering among yourselves again?” Then the branches shook more vigorously and laughed and lisped: “Ha – ha ha – we are happy about the nice things that our friend Morgenwind whispered to us today as he rushed along from the blue mountains in front of the sunbeams. He brought us a thousand greetings and kisses from the golden queen, and a few good wing beats full of the sweetest scents.”

E. T. A. Hoffmann (1817): „Das fremde Kind“, in: *Poetische Werke*, Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1963, pp. 593–640.

## The Cold Heart

Tale by Wilhelm Hauff (1802–1827), 1827;

Illustration by Carl Offterdinger (1829–1889)

from Wilhelm Hauff: *Fairy Tales for Sons and Daughters of Educated Classes*,  
Stuttgart: Rieger, 1875 (reproduction)

Forests had long become an economic factor at the time of Romanticism – the Black Forest was widely regarded as the largest supplier of timber. In the 18th century, timber rafting had experienced an enormous boom: Dukes sought to replenish their royal coffers with a “timber campaign”, while the pre-industrial charcoal burning trade was gradually disappearing. In the works of the Romantics, charcoal burners symbolized people who live and work in harmony with nature. In the tale *The Cold Heart*, charcoal burner’s son Peter trades his heart for money. Hauff’s character stands for the conflict between the longing for material goods and its seemingly unavoidable price in return: becoming numb toward the living world.

These people work chiefly in the Forest as wood-cutters and timber-merchants They fell their pine-trees and then float them down the Nagold to the Neckar, down the Neckar to the Rhine, even travelling as far as Holland, the rafts of the Black Forest being known upon the sea-coast. They stop their rafts at every town they come to, so that folks may buy their timber if they have a mind to; but the broadest and tallest beams and masts are sold to the Dutch ship-builders for a good round sum of money.

Wilhelm Hauff (1827): “The Cold Heart”, in: Wilhelm Hauff, *Fairy Tales*, tran. L. L. Weedon, London: Ernest Nister, New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., undated (ca. 1922), pp. 207–275, here: p. 208.





## Region near Forbach in the Murg Valley

Georg Primavesi (1774–1855)

from Georg Primavesi and Alois Wilhelm Schreiber (ed.):

*Mahlerische Ansichten zu dem Werke des Herrn Hofrath Schreiber.*

Handbook for travelers to Baden near Rastatt, the Murg Valley and the Black Forest,  
Heidelberg: Engelmann Verlag, 1810

This print appeared in a travel guide to the Black Forest. In the midst of an otherwise idyllic landscape, tree trunks are being transported across a river – rafting was experiencing a boom at this time. The picture documents the Black Forest's function as a place of recreation as well as timber supplier, a relationship already fraught with tension at the beginning of the 19th century.



## The Revenge of the Tree

1852, detail from: Fliegende Blätter, No. 362 (Reproduction)

Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg

This satirical drawing portrays the perceived disharmony between forestry and life in the woods as early as 1852. The first nature conservation movements in Germany became active at the beginning of the 20th century – after the Romantic era. But even in the midst of Romanticism there was an awareness that landscapes and plants were worth protecting, their beauty then playing a particularly prominent role. Ecology, the science of environmental relationships for which Romanticism provided important impulses, was first introduced by Ernst Haeckel in 1866.





## **Fire with Fire (Test Apparatus #5)**

Julius von Bismarck (\*1983)

2018–2021, Carbon archival print on Photo Rag Baryta paper, ceramic frame, 135 × 90 cm

On loan from the artist and Galerie alexander levy, Berlin

© Julius von Bismarck, VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2024.

Courtesy Julius von Bismarck and alexander levy, Berlin

Forest fires are natural disasters that receive a lot of media attention. Julius von Bismarck has photographed fires in Germany, Sweden and California, using axial reflections to distort the fire's power and beauty. They are reminiscent of inkblot images ('klecksography'), from which artists developed stories in the 19th century, and later also used in psychological tests. These distortions of forest fires also raise questions: What does it trigger in us, the knowledge that our industrialized way of life is directly or indirectly destroying ecosystems – and that their decline is leading to the extinction of species, and thus to the loss of beauty and diversity?





## Forest fire, Jüterbog #1

Thomas Wrede (\*1963)

2023, FineArt-Prints, *Jüterbog #1*: 170 × 240 cm;

without image: *Lieberose #2*: 120 × 275 cm

On loan from the artist

© Thomas Wrede, VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2024.

Courtesy Beck & Eggeling, Düsseldorf

Thomas Wrede's depictions of nature create and reflect tensions in the relationship between humans and landscape. For this new group of works, the artist photographed forest fires in Brandenburg. In an open-air laboratory, researchers there are investigating how forests regenerate under different conditions following fires: how could a forest ecosystem be developed that remains resilient despite climate change? The PYROPHOB (fire-repellent) research project, with the participation of the Senckenberg Society, is dedicated to questions like these. Wrede's photographs are present-day landscapes, displaying a moment in the cycle of life between destruction and renewal.



## **Le Sacre du printemps (Tandvärkstallen)**

Zheng Bo (\*1974)

2021/22, 4K video, 16 min.

On loan from the artist and Kiang Malingue

© Zheng Bo, Courtesy of the artist and Kiang Malingue

Zheng Bo explores the relationship between humans and nature, viewing the resulting works as co-creations. Moments are enacted revealing the connectedness between all living beings – Zheng poses alternatives to a world view centered on human beings. This video and dance work turns our conventional ideas about the coexistence of humans and plants literally on their head.

In 2021, five dancers spent a week in the Swedish Dalarna forest, building relationships with mosses and pine trees through touch and movement. They shake, beguile and embrace the trees in ways that range from tender to erotic.

# Forests

## From the Romantic Period to the Future

Deutsches Romantik-Museum, Senckenberg Naturmuseum Frankfurt,

Museum Sinclair-Haus, Bad Homburg

16 March–11 August 2024

Project directors: Anne Bohnenkamp-Renzen, Brigitte Franzen, Kathrin Meyer | Head curator, global concept: Nicola Lepp | Project coordinators: Andreas Doepke (3-9/2023), Anastasia Remes (11/2023 to 3/2024) | Project outreach: Eva Roßmanith, Lena Sistig (Director), Kristine Preuß, Ann-Cathrin Agethen, Doris Schumacher | Communications: Kristina Faber (Director), Alexandra Donecker, Judith Jördens, Claudia Praml, Andrea Preis | Exhibition design: Ifm2 - laufendequadratmeter in cooperation with raumlaborberlin, Christian Göthner, Marius Busch, Benjamin Foerster-Baldenius | Textile elements: Ifm2 & raumlaborberlin & Julia Lipinsky | Exhibition graphics: Rimini Berlin / gardeners, Frankfurt am Main

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The Whole Forest  
Forest Change  
Forest Change (Zoogenic)  
The Forest Up Close  
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