

that made the air vibrate around you, and caused the suspended mylar panels to reverberate, creating water like ripples of light on the floor of the space. The tenor of the audio is meant to convey a breathing forest and the arch of sound is designed to mimic the arch of a court proceeding. The 13-layer, 20-minute audio track builds to a crescendo meant to give the impression heated court proceedings including a cold mechanical element which Martineau thinks of as a court clerk and a booming judge's gavel that signals the start and end of discussions. The combination of the audio track and the creature-like trees was meant to put you on edge and scratch at the surface of human vulnerability.

Within the installation you can't help but feel intimidated and out of place. It's a strange place to be for a human, realizing that you're being judged by the non-human. It's interesting to speculate on how one would fair under the jurisdiction of this jury. Martineau sets up a fantastical proposition for visitors to consider. What would happen if our non-human neighbours were our judges, juries, and executioners? What sorts of criteria would they use to determine our worth and our fate? Our culture teaches us to believe that we are above nature, at the "top of the food chain" or that we have "dominion over nature." Martineau's work reminds us that this is a construct and events like floods, fires, pandemics or finding oneself at the centre of *Strange Jury* remind us that many things are beyond our control.

Martineau's jury look like they are alien or foreign but the images he used come from the Mill Creek Ravine. The audio too contains some sounds that Martineau has recorded in the river valley but they have been distorted and slowed down to a point where they become unfamiliar and unrecognizable. Martineau wants us to consider that even though we might be occupying the same familiar spaces, trees are living in almost a parallel universe that we have little insight into—and vice versa. It's easy to consider the similarities between you standing over a small sprout in your garden trying to determine what it is, where it came from and if its welcome. The types of criteria used to decide value in this case would be so completely untranslatable. How could that sprout possibly convey its worth or potential harm? How could we convey our worth or potential harm to Martineau's *Strange Jury*? The audio echoes the otherworldliness that Martineau is creating and further expands upon notions of separate realities in shared spaces. Although we are sharing spaces with trees our understanding of reality is completely different. This is its most evident in our experience of time. The audio contains forest sounds that should be familiar but experienced at a different speed and they distort to the point that instead of being calming they make you uneasy.

This work is important because it takes direct aim at the assumption that humans are separate from nature and pushes back at the belief that there is a self that exists outside our environment or that we can serve the self to the exclusion of all else. The work shifts perspective and creates a bit of space for a more holistic, scientific, compassionate worldview. Martineau's use of symmetry evokes our ancient hard-wired pattern recognition for bilateral symmetry and stokes our sense of animism. We see the familiar symmetry of human life and ascribe personality and intent to things we normally see as

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inanimate objects, or don't see at all. This animism, or perhaps more poetically—sensing the “spirit” of a place—ignites a feeling that, as Martineau puts it “nature’s got its own thing going on, and there are significant, intense, worthwhile lives and events happening all around us, whether we’re there to observe them or not.”

We’ve been trained to see the self as central and superior, *Strange Jury* really teases us with that by making us central and inferior. When we see the ground, forest, water, air, as separate from us, we don't give a thought to abusing and using them. We will burn our life support system, and exterminate our evolutionary cousins, in the name of our own survival, not realizing we are killing ourselves in the process. The viewpoint that we are central and superior also prevent us from participating in the extreme joy and wonder that is around us everywhere, at all times.

Strange Jury gives the chance to set aside our ego and appreciate the infinitely complex web of life— the network of mycelium on the tree roots, the ants ranching aphids on the underside of a leaf, bugs living on the surface tension of water, the epic stories happening under a slab of concrete— we gain a better understanding of our place in the universe. For Martineau, this opens up a more truthful and joyous perspective that can lead to a more fulfilling and meaningful life.

Sincerely,
Lindsey Sharman



Curator