



2023
Forest
of IMAGINATION

EVALUATION REPORT

FOREST OF IMAGINATION 2023

**ASSEMBLE IN
THE FOREST**

forestofimagination.org.uk

FOREST OF IMAGINATION 2023



'If you were a tree, what would you be?'

Assemble in the Forest

Forest of Imagination is a contemporary arts and design event created by Grant Associates, House of Imagination and local creative industries that reimagines a familiar space to inspire everyone's creativity and heighten a sense of nature in an urban environment. All around the world people use forests as places to find respite, either individually or together. Forest of Imagination is open to all and actively inclusive. We invite children, families and people of all ages to explore, make and learn in a creative, intuitive and imaginative way.

In 2023, We were inspired by the opportunity to link art, nature, and the social life of the city into an experience that takes full advantage of the grand internal rooms and the distinctive outdoor spaces in The Bath Assembly Rooms. The Assembly Rooms has recently returned to the management of The National Trust and they are working to develop a new Georgian experience, currently due to open in 2026.

In the interim, The National Trust is partnering with various organisations to bring visitors to the Assembly Rooms and interact with other exhibitions and events. House of Imagination partnered with The Nation Trust to bring Forest of Imagination 2023: Assemble in The Forest to The Bath Assembly Rooms from the 14th June - 14th July.



"We were delighted to work alongside Forest of Imagination for their tenth year. Having such a unique creative experience in the Assembly Rooms, combined with the broad range of visitors each day engaging with the installations, gave us an opportunity to try out different ways of using the building as we develop our plans for the future. The learning that we've taken from this collaboration will help inform our thinking as we work towards a new experience for visitors to this important Georgian building, alongside developing an ongoing programme of twenty-first century assembly."

– Tom Boden, General Manager, National Trust

KEY THEMES OF 'ASSEMBLE IN THE FOREST'

'Assemble in the Forest' was an invitation to come together and celebrate the beauty and biodiversity of Bath and once again to showcase the imagination of our community. In addition, it provided an opportunity to shine a light on the importance of forests across the world and what they mean to us in Bath, especially in response to the climate emergency.

This year, we were asking 2 main questions to people who visited the forest:

If you were a tree, what would you be?

If you were to plant a tree to save the world, and that tree was you, what would you do?

Internally and externally, we envisioned a 'Forest Community': a calming green space in the city and a venue for interactive installations, stories, music, creative play, and for placing a focus on the life and diversity of the forest. We expanded the event into our biggest space yet, spread over a month, and invited collaboration with other creative and ecological initiatives within and around Bath.

We invited the creative and cultural ecology of the city to 'Assemble in the Forest' and showcase our collective imagination to all. More than just that, we wanted to inspire action across the city in response to the climate and biodiversity emergencies and to find new ways to create inspiring landscapes and habitats that enrich the lives of everyone.



"It really is remarkable that Forest of Imagination has turned ten this year. Over the last decade, and during some very challenging times for our world, Forest of Imagination has always championed creativity and nature's power to unlock our imagination. We are deeply thankful to have been able to work in such close partnership with the National Trust this year, to deliver what has been a truly unforgettable month-long creative celebration."

– Andrew Grant, director of Grant Associates and co-founder of Forest of Imagination



INSTALLATIONS, EVENTS, AND PERFORMANCES

Creative engagement and participation were developed in new directions this year, with innovative events, workshops, and public talks, covering artistic education, the role of activism in children's lives, and creative approaches to education.

Assemble in the Forest was open to the public Friday-Monday 10-4, with Mondays-Thursdays closed for school visits and private tours. The workshops, school days, and installations were complemented by evening events, partnership

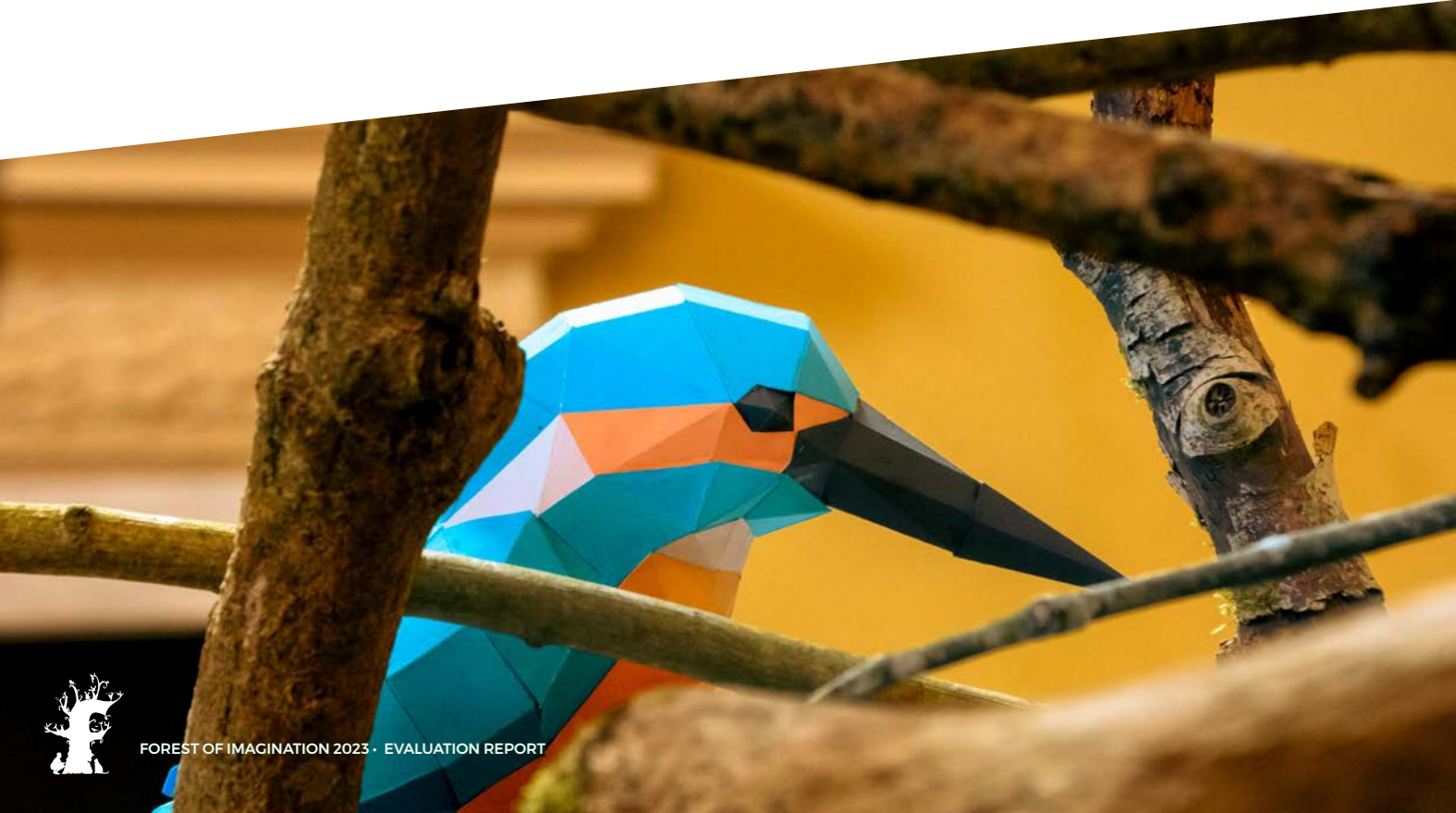
hosting talks with the RSA as well as performances from local and international artists. Together these developed an emerging dynamic for the event, giving the Forest of Imagination a new cultural depth, range, and quality.

BIRD SONG

Morag Myerscough

A fun and colourful display added to the front of the existing building: defined the entrance to the Assemble in the Forest experience with an exotic sensory experience - birdsong, scented plants etc.

"Walking into work today, I had a big smile on my face as I walked through the bamboo entrance to the sound of Birdsong and the smell of lavender."





WONDERING WAYS

Andrew Amondson and Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios

A unique journey around the Ballroom space - filled with tall grasses to wander through, a wood henge made from a 250 year old fallen beech tree, the same age as the assembly rooms. Beautiful and haunting soundscape from 9 years of recorded amber listed British bird song.

"What happens when you grow a living forest inside a darkened theatre or fill a grand ballroom with tall grasses? With both the Living Tree Forest and Wondering Ways, I've had the opportunity to explore how bringing nature inside, into the buildings that hold our stories and our histories, can help us feel more connected with the natural world, seeing nature as not being outside of us but an inseparable part of who we are."—Andrew Amondson

"Honours history with a hopeful future."

'It's like something a child would dream up.'—Ava
[on entering Wandering and Wondering]

DARK FOREST

Matt Leece

An installation in the main internal corridor - creating a moody experience with dead box trees, lighting, and soundscapes. A space to reflect on deforestation and the balance of ecosystems.

"The dead trees were extra sad!"

"I could hear the caterpillars. It made me think about nature."

"Absolutely amazing experience visited with my autistic / ADHD daughter and she has such a fab imagination, so this was truly an experience for her to feel free and VERY content! Thank you. Can't wait for more events!"





BEAVER DEN

Grant Associates, Invisible Studio
and Charley Brentnall

A recreation of a beaver den in the Grand Octagon celebrating the return of Beavers to the River Avon in 2021. VR Headsets, soundscapes, and access inside the den, immersing visitors in experiences of beaver families.

TREE ROOM

Grant Associates, Bathscape, National Trust
and Rainforest Concern

A celebration of trees and forests in Bath and around the world. Rainforest Concern, Bathscape, National Trust.

'Today I went to the Forest of Imagination – it was amazing when I got there – I was excited to go inside. When I did get in I felt really excited because all of the rooms were really creative!'

'I want to visit more forests!'

"The Tea Room looked fantastic, Grants Associates team delivered what we wanted in a really short timescale and gave an overall interesting and coherent exhibition in an extremely large space, for all the elements with good anecdotal feedback from visitors. We were very pleased to be involved in something that felt significant in breathing new life into a classic Bath building in a thought-provoking way."— Dan Merrett, Bathscape



*I dont want to
go to school
anymore, I just
want to go to
the forest...*





COMMUNITY FOREST SHELTER

Invisible Studio, Charley Brentnall and Reading University Students

An innovative and striking timber shelter outside the card room offering a place to meet, rest, hold outdoor workshops, and host Bath Community Kitchen lunches.

DOCUMENTATION SPACE

House of Imagination, Amy Corcoran and Emily Boxall

A space for interaction, workshop, and an ever changing and growing display of artworks and installations made by visiting school children, local schools, and families.

'The spaces we learn in are as important as what we learn.' – Andrew Grant

'I loved coming to see the tree we made'

'Today we made sticky rice paper wraps and puppets'





SITTING QUIETLY WITH THE MOON

Clare Day

Quiet, dark space in one of the smaller rooms - projection of Clare's ceramic moon. A space for quiet reflection and an invitation to create 'shadow forests.'

"The moon was really calm"

"In the moon room I felt as if I was outside"

IT'S ALWAYS OURSELVES WE FIND IN THE SEA

Martyn Ware, Gabriel Ware, Oscar Blustin and Anna Soberblom

Captivating and thought-provoking sound and art installation, an exploration of the waters of earth and how the power of water binds all of humanity together.

"Our shared collective mythology of water should propel us towards a shared collective response in the face of the rising seas." - Martyn Ware

"It made me relaxed in the water room."

"I saw the water in the glass getting smaller and smaller."

"I imagined I was a boat in a storm"



SCHOOL VISITS

The designated schools' days provided a clear opportunity for widening participation for local schools both familiar and new to Forest. The engagement activities on the school days are also able to make a greater impact beyond the event because they also include teachers and other educational professionals, who can experience different ways of learning and interaction to take back to the classroom.

'I don't want to go to school any more, I just want to go to Forest.'

Children and young people were engaged in: making, exploring, experimenting, imagining, making narratives, exchanging ideas about the environment and sustainability. They were constantly in dialogue with artists, scientists, writers, engineers, designers, architects. They learned through sensory engagement through dancing, making music, problem solving, and collaborating with each other and the environment around them.

*"This is the best school, this is MY school."
'This is the best day ever'*



FAMILY DAYS

Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays, and Mondays were set aside for families and other informal public engagement for a wider audience. The setting provided a place for families to spend however long they wanted wandering between rooms, relaxing and reflecting in quiet spaces, and creating and engaging in workshops, cooking, and self-led creative activities.

Many families had been to Forest of Imagination in previous years, plenty of others had come for the first time because they had heard about it on social media.

The setting was an unusual one - many tourists who turned up expecting the Bath Assembly Rooms with all its Georgian context - stumbled upon a Forest. Many were delightfully surprised, others found it more challenging. Either way, the juxtaposition and combination of the

traditional and lavish setting with the wild and playful nature got people thinking. The age of the building prompted one visitor to reflect that Jane Austen would be heartbroken at the destruction we have caused our planet since she used to frequent the Assembly Rooms. Such a historical setting certainly provided an opportunity to put the climate emergency into context.

"The emphasis of Forest of Imagination 2023 has been the symbiotic relationship between humans and the more-than-human world. We are nature, nature is inside us, and our DNA is in the forest. We have been thinking deeply about climate education and how we can respond with hopeful and imaginative solutions to the ecological emergency."
-Penny Hay



SOCIAL MEDIA

The Forest of Imagination social media platforms: Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook allows Forest of Imagination to connect with a wide range of people across Bath, the UK, and beyond.

Creating and editing content for social media takes up a great deal of time, but this presence, mutual support, and reach and effect should not be undermined or underestimated - it will become more important every year as part of the audience's interaction with the event and how Forest of Imagination shares what it does and what it is hoping to do.

The following is a summary of the various statistics and feedback relating to the social media platforms we engaged most with: Twitter and Instagram.



Our fastest growing platform. A visual medium that encapsulates Forest and reaches a younger audience.



INSTAGRAM

@forestofimagination

2,915
Total followers

39,825
Impressions between
June and July

"If you're in Bath, it's so worth a visit. I loved it and left feeling inspired thanks to this tireless work, brought to life over the years by Penny Hay and many wonderful artist collaborators I wonder what world we would create if we were to all bring our connection to nature into our imagination and into the spaces we create at home, at work, and inside of ourselves..."

"A sea of grasses in a regency ballroom.... Ok! @forestofimagination at @ntbathassemblyrooms didn't disappoint. I think we've been to every one and they bring up the goods every year. Interesting. Interactive. Always with a message!"



SOCIAL MEDIA



TWITTER

@forestimaginatn

4,804
Total followers

156k
Impressions between
June and July

"Thrilled to make it to the last day of the amazing Assemble in the Forest by @forestofimagination and @NTAssemblyRooms in Bath, a creative immersive experience to collectively imagine how things can be different. Thank you

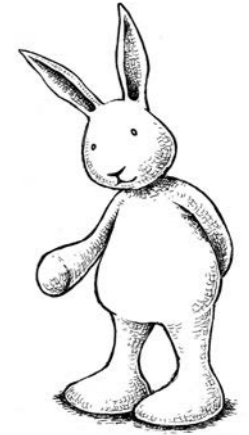
"Teachers had a penny-drop moment after clambering through the beavers' den & gathering in Wandering Ways @forestimaginatn: support our primary scientists-oracle experts-artists- geographers to design peer & family experiences in the school woodlands to educate/promote eco empathy."

"I appreciate the need for traditional education but I want to be able to live in this world."

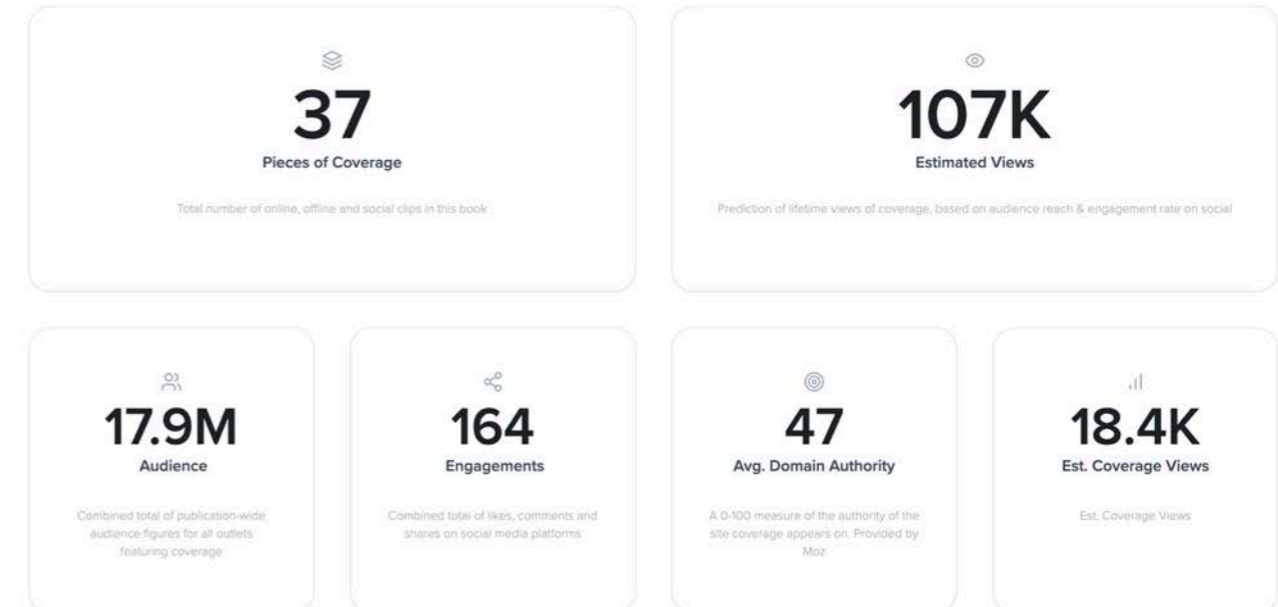
REACH



11,000 visitors including local families, 20 schools and early years settings including 1500 children and over 100 educators.



Summary of PR coverage



FINAL THOUGHTS

"We really enjoyed being part of 'Assemble in the Forest' in Bath this Summer, celebrating creativity, inspiring ideas & learning from all the RSA Fellows' talks, artists & young people involved - thank you for hosting us all." – RSA

"Sad to see it all coming down... but, what a magnificent thing you created...think of the connections, friendships, legacy, spin-offs, the hours of joy, the energy, and wonder that will echo in this old building for longer than your forest grew."

"Forest of Imagination this year was bigger and bolder than ever and was a huge success. Our artists had bold ambitions this year and it was fantastic that we were able to make that happen. The public response to these installations has been powerful; seeing children having conversations around conservation and climate change and questioning the ways in which they can do more to look after their plants was a joy to witness. We had a vast array of people coming to visit Forest of Imagination, lots of our regulars who come every year to experience it and also lots of new visitors who stumbled upon Forest of Imagination because of it being located in the Bath Assembly Rooms, but said they will return in future. It was well received by everyone who attended, with people coming back for multiple trips to bring friends and family to see it. I see us keeping this momentum and pushing Forest of Imagination to be bigger and brighter every year, bringing in more national and international artists." – Poppy Clover, artist and FOI 2023 Curator

"...the House of Imagination shows just what can be achieved by adapting flexibly to changing conditions when you have a diamond-sharp vision of what you want to achieve." – François Matarasso

To read *Trusting the child* by François Matarasso visit www.forestofimagination.org.uk/trusting-the-child-francois-matarasso/



"Forest of Imagination is supported by local and national partners and funders and is a great example of what can be achieved when the local cultural, creative and educational community work together alongside local and international artists, increasing engagement and longer-term impact.

One of our missions was to encourage everyone who participated to develop and express their creativity and imagination through a collaborative approach to learning that is transdisciplinary, collaborative and innovative.

We believe the forest is a forever project." – Dr. Penny Hay, Professor of Imagination

"My response to the whole initiative is how gratifying it was to see the spaces in a historic building being animated in such an engaging and immersive way. When I visited, it was clear that visitors, including families were being drawn into the rooms by the interventions.

I spent some time watching people arrive and was interested to see the variety of visitors, including the age range of children, and their responses. It was a playful experience from the very start. I also know from friends who visited with children how much time they felt they were able to spend in the rooms and how relaxed they felt. This is what I want to hear from families visiting our places and this project clearly achieve it many times over." – Ruth Lewis, National Trust



KEY PARTNERS

House of Imagination
Grant Associates
Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios
Bath Spa University
Invisible Studio
Imaginnovation
National Trust
Egg Theatre
RSA
Bathscape
Rainforest Concern

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