



# Museum for Art in Wood

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## MUSEUM FOR ART IN WOOD PRESENTS *TO UNDERSTAND A TREE* BY INTERDISCIPLINARY ARTIST GINA SIEPEL

*The exhibition features an immersive video installation, sculptural works, original music by composer and cellist Vernon David, and research artifacts and ephemera*

Photos: [HERE](#)

**Philadelphia, PA | February 16, 2024** – On March 1, the [Museum for Art in Wood](#) (141 N. 3rd Street, Philadelphia, PA 19106) presents a new exhibition [To Understand a Tree](#) by interdisciplinary artist, designer and woodworker [Gina Siepel](#). The exhibition stems from Siepel's ongoing project of the same name that centers on contemplating a living forest tree, its network of eco-systemic relationships, and the ubiquity of the material of wood – in design and daily life. *To Understand a Tree* is on display in the Museum's main gallery from March 1 to July 21, 2024.

Siepel's interdisciplinary exhibition is the result of years spent at the MacLeish Field Station, a 260-acre forest and research site in West Whately, Massachusetts, observing a 100-year-old northern red oak tree and its immediate habitat. *To Understand a Tree* comprises an immersive video installation including videos of the red oak shot over a two-year period, and functional and sculptural greenwood chairs made from trees killed by invasive insects or storms. Visitors can also view observations, notes, and artifacts that were gathered through direct engagement with the red oak and surrounding ecosystem using environmentally responsible methods.

As a long-term socially- and ecologically engaged project, *To Understand a Tree* has incorporated collaborations and public engagements with artists, ecologists, students, and other specialists. The exhibition highlights Siepel's work with two key collaborators, including original music by composer and cellist Vernon David, and an herbarium collection of important plants growing at the forest project site, created by naturalist Kate Wellspring. The exhibition will be accompanied by a full-color catalogue, which includes essays, commentary, and images of the exhibition works and installation.

"As consumers, we experience wood in its most processed form, whether through the hands of creative and skilled makers or through highly industrialized mass production," said **Jennifer-Navva Milliken**, Executive Director and Chief Curator at Museum for Art in Wood. "In inviting the public to share in her investigation of a single red oak tree, Gina Siepel helps restore this missing connection with the source of the material and the balance between tree, forest, and ecology upon which humankind is so dependent. *To Understand a Tree* demonstrates how art can close the gap, open minds, and inspire us to work to be better stewards of the natural world."

The exhibition stems from Siepel's work as Artist-in-Residence at MacLeish Field Station at Smith College, beginning in 2018, and was inspired by the desire to contemplate a forest tree and its immediate habitat from the perspective of a queer-identified woodworker. *To Understand a Tree* encourages visitors to consider the tree as a living subject rather than an object and challenges the often-assumed binary between living trees and dead wood. Siepel's work functions as a small-scale

exploration on the place of humans in the environment, the scope and speed we consume natural resources, and what organisms are included or excluded in a definition of “community.”

“The works I’m sharing in *To Understand a Tree* provide entry points for viewers to reflect on many of the issues and ideas I have grappled with through my time in the forest,” said Siepel. “I’m eager to share this exhibition with the extended community of the Museum for Art in Wood, where it will have a chance to be in dialogue with many artists and makers who are invested in similar questions.”

**Gina Siepel** (she/they) is a Massachusetts-based interdisciplinary artist, designer, and woodworker. Her artistic practice reflects engagement with place, history, queer experience, and ecology while integrating conceptual concerns and craftsmanship, with a focus on wood as a natural and cultural material. Siepel’s works link various modes of artistic production to other forms of inquiry, including collaboration, social engagement, site-based exploration, and research.

Siepel’s works have been shown in museums and galleries nationally, including the Colby Museum, the DeCordova Museum, the Museum for Art in Wood, Vox Populi Gallery, the Center for Maine Contemporary Art, and Amherst College. She holds a BFA from the School of Art + Design at SUNY Purchase and an MFA from the Maine College of Art. Siepel has taught at Amherst College, Mount Holyoke College, and currently teaches in the Massachusetts College of Art and Design MFA program. In addition to her role as the MacLeish Field Station Artist-in-Residence at Smith College, Siepel is a 2023 recipient of a Teaching Artist Cohort Grant from the Center for Craft. She is enrolled in the Field Naturalist Certification Program at Mass Audubon, and is a member of the Greenfield Tree Committee, a volunteer urban forestry organization in Greenfield, Massachusetts.

*To Understand a Tree* is generously supported by the Cambium Circle Members of the Museum for Art in Wood, Bresler Foundation, Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, Philadelphia Cultural Fund, William Penn Foundation, and Windgate Foundation. In-kind support was provided by Boomerang, Inc.

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**About the Museum for Art in Wood:**

The Museum for Art in Wood is the international leader for contemporary art and creativity in the material of wood. The Museum engages, educates, and inspires the public through the exhibition, collection, and interpretation of contemporary art in wood. Founded in 1986 and sited in Philadelphia, the Museum for Art in Wood serves a local and international community. It has built its reputation by providing opportunities for makers and visitors to experience craft directly, through participatory programming; seminal exhibitions and documentation; and the growth, conservation, exhibition, and care of its permanent collection. The Museum’s practice of keeping these resources free and available to the public emphasizes its commitment to building a democratic and inclusive community. Visit [museumforartinwood.org](https://museumforartinwood.org) to learn more.