

Leafscape: an exhibition

Botanical artist [Jess Shepherd](#) has spent the past few years immersed in the world of leaves, both from a visual and sonic point of view. In this special guest post, Jess writes about how field recording became an intrinsic part of her creative process.

As a botanical painter, I specialise in painting very large watercolours of plants and am always working to surprise the viewer. Between 16th and 25th February, I will be holding my first solo exhibition of over 30 new watercolour paintings in Bloomsbury, London. For this exhibition, I explore my vision of a botanical dystopia, challenging our own sense of scale, its value and how we measure it.



The story began when I picked up a leaf from a London pavement in July 2014. At the time I was moving house and felt that the condition of the leaf told my own story. It had been scuffed by the streets of the city and was no longer attached to the tree, but blowing across the floor in the wind. Like me, it was on the move.

After carefully painting this leaf larger than life size I was drawn to paint another and another. Eventually, after months of painting these leaf portraits, all from different moments in time and place, I have created a visual story. Some of these leaves measure over a meter in length.

 **Leaf 041120151210, *Cercis siliquastrum*, Watercolour on paper, 760 x 560mm**

For the past two years I have also collected the environmental sounds from where each leaf was growing using an Olympus LS-14 recorder. These sounds document a journey from the East End of London, through the avenues of Hyde Park and streets of Chelsea into the deep rural countryside of Granada in Spain where I now have a second studio. I started collecting these sounds because I became interested in documenting the elements of our existence that I could not capture with paint. I also began to wonder how leaves would interpret their spaces if trees could hear. By recording the sounds from the precise locations of my source material, I feel I have been able to add a new dimension to botanical art; that I am able to communicate the importance of plants and our environment more poignantly. It is my way of catapulting botanical art into the 21st Century whilst also looking at topics close to my heart such as what is reality and what it means to exist.

[Spain_birds and rain](#)

[Spain_goat bells](#)

All of these environmental sounds have been skilfully arranged by musician Derek Thompson (Hoodlum Priest) who, through a process of both precise and random digital manipulation, has created a composition where place, time and space become intertwined. This multimedia journey is our vision of a

botanical dystopia; the natural world in a state of decay through interaction with the encroaching urban environment.

[Leafscape extract](#)

The idea of recording sound introduces a completely new element to botanical art and I hope that this interpretation of both the natural and human worlds will encourage listeners to be as aware of the diversity and beauty of sound in the city as much as that of the countryside.



[Leafscape](#) will be on show at Abbott and Holder from 16th-25th February 2017.

A copy of the accompanying book & soundtrack has been donated by the artist to the British Library and will soon be available in our Reading Rooms.

Audio clips and images courtesy of Jess Shepherd.

[Recording of the week: John Blackwood McEwen](#)

This week's selection comes from Jonathan Summers, Curator of Classical Music Recordings.

Scottish composer Sir John Blackwood McEwen (1868-1948) had a distinguished career producing a large amount of music, little of which is heard today. He was Principal of the Royal Academy of Music from 1924-1936 and was knighted in 1931. His String Quartet No. 6, 'Biscay', written in 1913 (and confusingly published as No. 8), consists of three movements. The second and third were recorded in 1916 by the London String Quartet and a live recording from 1951 of the complete work exists from the Library of Congress. Here is the delightful third movement, [La racleuse](#) (The Oyster-Raker) from 1916.

[String Quartet No. 6 \(Biscay\)_La racleuse](#)



Portrait of Sir John Blackwood McEwen by Reginald Grenville Eves (Royal College of Music, CC BY-SA 4.0) via Wikimedia Commons

Visit [Chamber Music](#) on British Library Sounds to listen to more performances by the London String Quartet.

Follow [@BL_Classical](#) and [@soundarchive](#) for all the latest news

Recording of the week: Linton Kwesi Johnson on dub poet Michael Smith

This week's selection comes from Stephen Cleary, Lead Curator of Literary & Creative Recordings.

In this recording, poet and reggae artist Linton Kwesi Johnson gives a lecture on the late Jamaican performance poet Mikey Smith (1954-1983), author of 'Me Cyaan Believe It'. The talk is based on his personal knowledge of the poet and the obscure circumstances of his death.

[Remembering Michael Smith_Linton Kwesi Johnson](#)



The recording was made live in Cambridge in 2012, at the conference '[The Power of Caribbean Poetry: Word & Sound](#)'. [Linton Kwesi Johnson's oral history interview](#), made for the British Library project 'Authors' Lives' 2014-2015, is available to listen to at the Library by [appointment](#).

Follow [@BL_DramaSound](#) and [@soundarchive](#) for all the latest news.

Recording of the week: let it snow!

This week's selection comes from Cheryl Tipp, Curator of Wildlife and Environmental Sounds

There's nothing quite like the sound of walking through freshly fallen snow. This particular recording was made in the Kentish village of Knockholt, just after midnight on the 3rd February 2009. This signalled the start of a prolonged period of heavy snowfall that was to see most of the British Isles grind to a halt, forcing schools, railway lines and even airports to close because of the treacherous conditions.

[Footsteps in the snow, 3 Feb 2009, Kent, United Kingdom, Phil Riddett](#)



Visit [British Library Sounds](#) to listen to more recordings of weather from around the world.

Follow [@CherylTipp](#) and [@soundarchive](#) for all the latest news.

PhD Placement Opportunity: Developing Access to the Evolving English VoiceBank

The *Evolving English VoiceBank* is an audio archive of approximately 15,000 voices created by visitors to the Library's *Evolving English* exhibition in 2010/11. This collection is only partly catalogued and a new placement opportunity at the British Library offers a PhD student the chance to work on this unique and so-far unexplored archive.

During the three-month placement (or part-time equivalent) the student will audit [VoiceBank](#) and [WordBank](#) audio files and prepare cataloguing metadata for about 500 to 750 files for the Sound and Moving Image catalogue. The student will receive training in audio editing software and in preparing cataloguing records, and will also be able to use the collection for original research or potentially to support their own doctoral project. The content will be particularly relevant for students of dialectology, sociolinguistics, phonetics or language variation and change.

The placement student will be a full member of the Spoken English team, which sits within the British Library's Sound & Vision team, and participate in the department's core activities. This may involve taking part in workshops or conferences, writing blog posts, and preparing content for online resources. The placement will support the development of transferrable skills in areas such as public engagement, team-working, and project planning and delivery. It will be an opportunity to engage in the work of a world-class research Library and to understand its content, structure and remit.

The placement would suit someone studying for a PhD in linguistics or English Language. They would be expected to have a thorough grounding in dialectology, sociolinguistics and/or phonetics. Familiarity with British accents would also be desirable. View a detailed [placement profile](#).

Application guidelines

For full application guidelines and profiles of the other placements offered under this scheme, visit the Library's [Research Collaboration webpages](#).

The application deadline is **20 February 2017**.

For any queries about this placement opportunity, please contact Research.Development@bl.uk

A note to interested applicants

This is an unpaid professional development opportunity, which is open to

current (or very recent) PhD researchers only. To apply, you need to have the approval of your PhD supervisor and your department's Graduate Tutor (or equivalent senior academic manager).

Our PhD placement scheme has been developed in consultation with Higher Education partners and stakeholders to provide opportunities for PhD students to develop and apply their research skills outside the university sector. Please note that the Library itself is not able to provide payment to placement students, nor can it provide costs for daily commuting or relocation to the site of the placement. Anyone applying for a placement at the Library is expected to consult their university or Doctoral Training Partnership/Doctoral Training Centre to ascertain what funding is available to support them. The Library strongly recommends to universities that a PhD student given approval to undertake a placement is in receipt of a stipend for the duration of the placement.