Futures Gallery: What if we all had a say?

ASSEMBLY OF TREES (What if we all had a say?) can be found on Level 1 of MOD. in the Futures Gallery.

ABOUT ASSEMBLY OF TREES (What if we all had a say?)

We sometimes forget that it's not all about us.

Humans make up a fraction of life on Earth yet our decisions impact everything.

What would have to change to radically improve the way we make decisions? Could we give personhood to non-human animals? What about giving trees a vote?

In this gallery, we look at how we might listen to the perspectives of trees on our democratic decision making. While plants may not have voices, changes in tree canopy coverage can indicate a tree's level of wellbeing.

Come in and meet The Assembly of Trees, 23 representatives of plants across greater Adelaide. Browse through bills and consider how they might be responding to changes we make. Do they approve?

Credits

Artist – Jonathon Keats

Design/Build – Featherweight

Data – Aerometrex

Build – Yellowtail Construction

You are in a room which is 13m long X 7m wide. The space is configured so that you will head south through an alley with information display boards on either side.

Narrow metal cages like scaffolding, each 1.1m square and 25cm deep have been stacked one on top of the other, creating functional wall-like room dividers, they are 2 sections high and 3 sections side-by-side. Extremely thick cardboard (about 2cm deep) forms the base of the display boards, they are 3.3m long and 1.5m high.

The first display board is hung on scaffolding of 4 metal cages, it takes up the first 3 alcoves, and in the fourth unit, cardboard inserted into the cage creates a shelf 1.1m off the ground. Another bank of 3 metal cages is pushed against the black drapes to the west, which intersects a third bank forming an 'L' shape, in front of the southern windows.

First board, green text box reads: *Democracy sounds great, but only humans get a say*. Beneath, black text reads: *If we look at issues like climate change, it's clear our choices not only affect humans but all other life on earth*.

Humans make up 0.01% of the present-day biomass of life on Earth. And all life that currently exists now is only 1% of all life that has ever existed on earth.

Two colourful graphs depict graphical representation of the global bio mass distribution by taxa. The sum of the biomes across all taxa on Earth is 550 gigatonnes of carbon (Gt C), of which approximately 80% are plants, dominated by land plants.

Other species can inform how we look at problems and think about solutions.

Trees have lives that are very different from ours and bring another perspective.

Green text block reads: *What if we could involve trees in democratic decision-making?*

A large cube (20 x 20cm) made of stacked wooden blocks (some coloured) sits on the cardboard shelf, left of the first display board. This is another representation of the biomass distribution data. The plain wooden blocks (over 80%) show the biomass of land plants, and the smallest white painted section shows the biomass of humans who currently make up a tiny 0.01% of the present-day biomass of life on earth.

The second display board is to the right. In the middle is an A2 poster-size image of a large leafy tree in a park, with green mown grass underneath a blue sky.

On the left, a green text box reads: Like us, trees get stressed.

To include trees in democratic decision making we need to be able to tell if they're getting more or less stressed over time.

We can do this by measuring how they grow.

We can then correlate these changes with the political situation.

Image of a tree in full leaf (heavy canopy) equals = Approval of current policies (positive or no impact)

Image of a tree with less canopy (or leaves) equals = Disapproval of current policies (negative impact)

On the right, black text reads: When trees are stressed, they devote less energy to growing new leaves. We can compare the canopy coverage from year to year to see how the trees are responding to current decisions.

Green text box reads: Could this be a way to give trees a voice in our system?

In front, on the third display board, is a grid of square images (4 rows of 6 columns) which show 23 different trees. The final square is blank. Beneath in black capitals: 'The Assembly of Trees'.

Small black print beneath reads: The twenty-three trees of The Assembly.

The trees are regularly monitored so we can learn their preferences.

On the left, black text reads: The Assembly of Trees is an experiment to figure out how we might govern with others.

Green text box reads: 'We invite you to explore how trees might be part of the democratic decision-making process'.

To the left is a video of Jonathon Keats, Artist and Experimental Philosopher from San Francisco. He discusses "What if trees had a vote?" and how we can think about other non-human interactions.

This space holds two further exhibits, one interactive and the other an experiment.

On the northern black wall, white text reads: What if we all had a say? In the middle of the room, is a large, raked screen supported by a triangular wooden frame and mounted on a large wooden plinth.

Hung above the large screen a white neon sign announces ‘THE ASSEMBLY OF TREES’. This interactive exhibit follows 23 identified trees in the Adelaide area and displays data collected on their respective canopy coverage. If you would like assistance with this, please ask for a MODerator.

At the end of the gallery is the Democratic Tree, an experiment in keeping a tree indoors, and monitoring its health outcomes over the duration of the exhibition (1 year).

INTERACTIVE COMPONENT

‘The Assembly of Trees’– at the lower front edge of the large, raked screen are three smaller screens. The three screens contain duplicate information.

The home screen is blue with the title ‘The Assembly of Trees’ in green text at the bottom of the screen. Above, individual images of the 23 trees are arranged in 3 rows of 8 columns. A green button beneath the title reads: Tap to enter.

The next blue screen asks “What if we polled the trees of Adelaide to monitor their stress levels in relation to changes in law?”

On the following screen the 23 trees of ‘The Assembly’ are located as large blue dots on a topographical map of the City of Adelaide. When you select a tree, the large dot becomes green, and you can ‘Examine the stress of the tree over time’. A slide on the left of the small screen, allows you to select the data set for various years such as, Spring 2023 or Winter 2023. This then brings up the specific measurements for the selected tree. The screen displays images of the tree and beneath data about the Canopy Health for this tree. Has canopy increased or decreased (as a percentage) since the previous tree stress measurement data. The tree stress data was captured using citizen science canopy photos [Error margin is 2 – 3%]. Below are side-by-side aerial photographs of the tree in situ and its

coordinates (longitude and latitude). To > start again<, press on the green button on the lower right corner of the screen, or tap another blue dot to select the next tree.

In a panel on the right of the small screens are a list in green text on blue background: LEGISLATIVE BILLS PASSED IN 2023.

Beneath 10 bills are listed. You can select these to read further information and details on the specific bills. You can vote here as to how you think the selected tree would respond to the legislative bill.

On the large screen the map of suburban Adelaide is colour-coded, this relates to the overall increase and decrease in canopy coverage. Ranging from magenta suburbs (indicating a -25% decrease) through orange and yellow (zero change) to green and blue (indicating a +25% increase). Detailed statistics of various suburbs appear and disappear on the left of the large screen. For example, in Tonsley (postcode 5042) there has been a decrease in canopy health of -19%. The sea and the Adelaide Hills are shown in tonal greys.

At the far end of the Futures Gallery is the final exhibit, the Democratic Tree.

HAZARD WARNING: As you move to this section of the Gallery, be aware of a curtain of clear plastic strips, each about 10cm wide which hangs from the ceiling. The lower edge is about 1m above the floor.

Live tree

A large rectangular boxlike frame (3m high by 2m wide and 2m deep) is covered with green shade cloth. Inside this structure is a live tree, it is a 2m high Ficus. A popular ‘fig’ tree, this Ficus has a single trunk and a dense canopy of dark shiny leaves, it is planted in a large square pot.

Light is provided to the tree by two large white globes which dangle from the ceiling, along with a square broad-spectrum grow light that sits above the structure providing the necessary input for growth and the continued health of the tree.

Also inside the structure is a small white fan placed on the floor, which provides air flow and creates a wind to move the leaves, replicating as far as is possible a natural outdoor habitat.

On the front side of the structure are two screens which relay information captured on iPad's placed within the structure. The screen on the left uses LiDAR (Light detection and ranging) technology to create a 3D image of the foliage on the tree.

On the right is an infrared image of the tree. This reveals an unseen light beyond the usual visible light spectrum, used for detection of temperature fluctuations.

There is also a natural sound scape, that includes the sounds of rain and wind, emanating from a speaker that sits on the floor near the fan. The soundscape was recorded by Sasha Grbich.

Between the screens three clipboards of transparent green acrylic hang in a vertical line down the middle of the structure. They hold pages of an academic paper titled CELL, Sounds emitted by plants under stress are airbourne and informative.

To the west of the Democratic Tree, four low blue stools are tucked under a narrow wooden bench which holds another 8 clipboards with other academic articles and a pile of related books. Titles include Thought Experiments: The Art of Jonathon Keats, Why Birds Sing by David Rothenberg, Models of Democracy by David Held, Gaia's Body by Tyler Volk, Plant Sensing & Communication by Richard Karban and HoneyBee Democracy by Thomas D. Seeley.

The survey station is at the eastern end of the gallery as you head to the exit.

SURVEY STATION

Poses the question "What might make democracy more representative?"

Select the corresponding Letter for the following survey options:

A Lower the voting age to 16

B Quotas for gender representation

C Representation of racial diversity

D Legal rights for the environment

E voting rights for private companies

Please place your Broken pentagon token into the chosen survey slot to submit your response.

If you would like assistance with this, please ask for a MODerator.

This concludes the audio description track for “ASSEMBLY OF TREES (What if we all had a say?)” in the Futures Gallery, by Access2Arts for MOD. You will find the next exhibit by exiting the doorway on your right and turning right as you exit, walk down the corridor to the next gallery on the left.