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Visiting Artist and Designer Explores Ecosystem Change with Scientists
Harvard Forest Open Studio to Feature Works in Progress

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(Petersham, Mass.)—David Buckley Borden, a 2016-2017 visiting research fellow at the Harvard Forest in Petersham, spends a lot of time on the edge. His laboratory is a shingle-clad, 700-square-foot art studio flanked on one side by a sweeping cow pasture, and on the other by thousands of acres of oak, maple, and pine.

“Everybody in ecology knows that the most interesting stuff happens in the ‘edge condition’ – places of rapid change and interaction,” says Borden. “The studio is my creative lab. It is where I experiment with ideas, materials, and representations.”

Borden has been a Charles Bullard Fellow at the Harvard Forest since September, discovering and rediscovering the landscape from his perspective as an interdisciplinary artist and landscape designer trained at the Harvard Graduate School of Design.

Borden’s work includes site-specific landscape installations in the woods and data-driven maps in galleries. His process is rooted in collaboration; at Harvard Forest, he is working with field ecologists, social scientists, laboratory scientists, and computer-based landscape modelers.

Borden will be hosting an open studio at the Harvard Forest on April 29, 2017, from 12:00 to 4:00pm, where students and the public will be able to speak with the artist about his ongoing work. Borden also welcomes scheduled studio visits. To learn more, visit davidbuckleyborden.com.

The focus of the Bullard Fellowship program, which since 1962 has supported studies by scientists, foresters, conservationists, economists, and social scientists, has broadened in recent years to include the occasional artist, writer, and now, a designer.

“The Bullard program enriches the Harvard Forest and the entire University by bringing distinguished scholars and practitioners from around the globe into our community to broaden our efforts and thinking on forest ecosystems and their relationship to society,” says David Foster, Director of the Harvard Forest. “The incorporation of the arts extends the realm of work and thought that we engage in, and exposes our research to much broader audiences. With David, we are exploring interfaces between art and science, academia and policy, and, of course, people and nature.”

With the Landscape Futures project, a major focus of his work this winter, Borden is working with scientists to visualize how New England forests might look in 50 years. The visualizations include a range of possible scenarios for timber harvest, agriculture, land conservation, and development; and a range of natural impacts like forest growth and tree-killing forest pests. According to Borden, every pin-point on a map of New England is really a set of decisions: “Did the agriculture button get pushed? Or the development button? Doing that thousands of times on the landscape, and measuring the result -- that’s ecology.”

Social media is central to his work, which goes beyond art-science collaboration and includes education, outreach, and land stewardship. Borden posts works in progress on Instagram and Facebook — along with

glimpses of the Forest. “I want to give outsiders a view into the Harvard Forest,” says Borden. “It’s my interpretation—insights you don’t get from the website. Like, I spent this morning at the sawmill.”

Some students have the opportunity to work up-close with Borden; he has led hands-on workshops for Harvard University students, given lectures for 5-college students, and led studio tours for local K-12 classes. In summer 2017, he’ll be co-mentoring a full-time intern on an art/design project as part of the Forest’s Summer Research Program for undergraduates. “I want to take students who are sitting on the fence between art and science, and show them, you can have both,” says Borden.

Borden’s year-long collaboration with Harvard Forest will culminate in a multi-disciplinary, immersive exhibition in fall 2017, featuring silkscreen prints, mixed media drawings, maps, and installations in the Harvard Forest Fisher Museum and the surrounding landscape.

In support of the exhibition, Borden will create several smaller installations throughout greater Boston.

Previously, Borden has been awarded artist residencies at the Santa Fe Arts Institute, Teton Artlab, Trifecta Hibernaculum, and MASS MoCA. Still, Borden notes that his year-long residency at the Harvard Forest is unique. Although the artist often engages communities in his place-based projects, this is the first time the Borden has been an embedded designer within a research community.

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Borden’s work at Harvard Forest: <http://harvardforest.fas.harvard.edu/art-design-david-buckley-borden>

Borden on social media: <https://www.instagram.com/davidbuckleyborden/>

<https://www.facebook.com/DavidBuckleyBordenArtandDesign>