

# WALDEN

## **Open call for a commission to make a response to Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* – deadline 10<sup>th</sup> October**

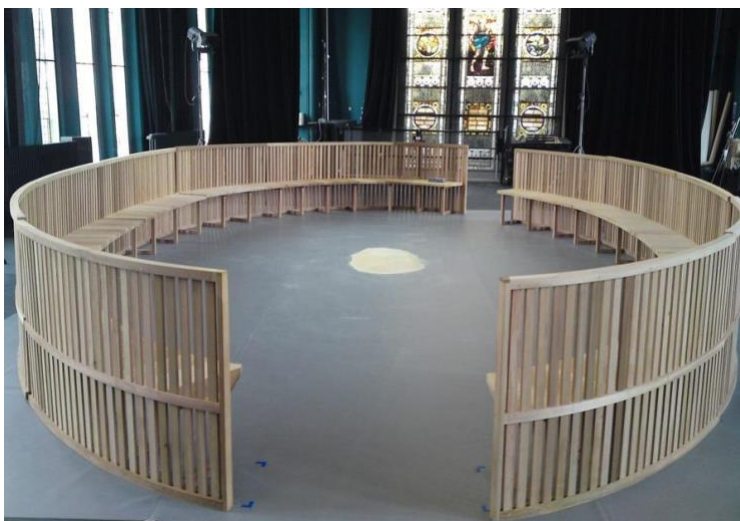
We are seeking proposals from artists who identify as being part of the Global Majority\* (see page 3 for further explanation of this term) for a response to Henry David Thoreau's book *Walden*. The resulting work will be shared alongside Magnetic North's own adaptation during performances at the Fruitmarket gallery, Edinburgh in March 2023.

### **What is *Walden*?**

On 4th July 1845, Henry David Thoreau started to live in a hut he had built in the woods near his hometown of Concord, Massachusetts. The hut was next to a lake called Walden Pond and for the next two years he attempted to live entirely by his own resources.

*Walden*, Thoreau's account of his 'experiment in simple living', is one of the most extraordinary and unclassifiable books ever written. Magnetic North's highly-acclaimed adaptation - a collaboration between writer and director Nicholas Bone and Calgary-based environmental arts practice Sans façon - is a simple distillation of this classic meditation on self-sufficiency, the individual's relationship with the environment, and the desire to 'live deliberately'.

First produced in 2008, it was widely toured through the UK in 2009-10. The set is a specially-made oval bench made from American pine which both creates a performance space and seats the 40-strong audience.



(above: the bench in Gilmorehill Theatre, Glasgow in 2009)

Thoreau had a privileged background: he was a Harvard graduate from a well-connected family. He understood the advantages this brought him, and was aware that less-advantaged people generally went unnoticed by his class. When he went to live in Walden Woods, it seems he was consciously siding with those less fortunate than he: as the book *Black Walden* has documented, there was a history of the woods being home to the disadvantaged. He acknowledges the history of the land in the book, writing of “disturbing the ashes of unchronicled nations who lived under these heavens long before we did” when he digs the soil. His thinking was deeply influenced by Hinduism – he refers to the Bhagavad Gita in *Walden* – and Buddhism, and by Chinese philosophy. This was unusual for someone of his background in the 1840s, but Thoreau was always quietly radical, and his writing on Civil Disobedience (a phrase he coined) was hugely influential on many activists, including Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr, throughout the 20th century.

### **What we are looking for**

When we revive *Walden*, we want both to celebrate Thoreau’s legacy - his radicalism and influence – but also to explore his paradoxes. Though an active abolitionist, he barely mentions the community of around 15 formerly-enslaved people already living in the woods when he began to live there. We want to amplify the other voices that are present (and less present) in his writings, but maybe less noticed, so we are seeking proposals to make a response to Thoreau, and *Walden* in particular, that can happen alongside our production. We are open to the form this response takes and to what opinions it expresses: examples of what it could include:

- an installation that adds a new context,
- an alternative performance,
- an addition to the existing piece,
- an event that uses the set as a venue for discussion,
- a film that can be shown in the space

or anything else that the project suggests to you.

The two pieces will be presented alongside each other in the Warehouse in March 2023.

### **How to apply:**

This call-out is open to artists working in any artform who identify as being part of the Global Majority\*

We are initially inviting outline proposals; we will shortlist up to 4 proposals for further development before making a final selection. Shortlisted artists will receive a fee of £250 for work on further development.

The proposal should outline your idea for a response to *Walden* and explain what interests you about undertaking the project. It should be between 1 and 2 sides of A4 and can include pictures. Please send it with a CV to [artistdevelopment@magneticnorth.org.uk](mailto:artistdevelopment@magneticnorth.org.uk) by midday on Monday 10<sup>th</sup> October.

### **Fee and budget:**

A fee of £5,000 is offered for the commission with a separate budget of £2,000 for materials or other related costs.

### Reference resources:

Free version of Thoreau's book [here](#)

Archive video of Magnetic North's adaptation of *Walden* [here](#) (please do not share publicly)

Script of Magnetic North's adaptation of *Walden* [here](#) (please do not share publicly)

*Black Walden: Slavery and Its Aftermath in Concord, Massachusetts* by Elise Lemire is available to buy [here](#)

An article on *Black Walden* from the New York Times [here](#).

### Application and Project Timeline:

- Applications open for outline proposals: Monday 29th of August
- Application Q&A sessions on Zoom: Monday 19th of September, 2pm and 7pm
- Applications close for outline proposals: Monday 10th of October, midday
- Shortlisted applicants notified: week beginning Monday 17th of October
- Final applications close: Monday 28th of November, midday
- Selected artist notified: Monday 5th of December
- Fruitmarket performance/presentation: week of 27<sup>th</sup> March 2023

### Access:

Magnetic North actively encourages applications from disabled artists.

If you have any access requirements which need to be met in order for you to apply, please get in touch with Ellen Renton at [artistdevelopment@magneticnorth.org.uk](mailto:artistdevelopment@magneticnorth.org.uk). We have a designated budget for access needs and aim to be as inclusive as possible. You can submit either written or audio responses, and if you wish to do so, you can attach an access rider document.

*\* Global Majority is a collective term that first and foremost speaks to and encourages those so-called to think of themselves as belonging to the global majority. It refers to people who are Black, Asian, Brown, dual-heritage, indigenous to the global south, and/ or have been racialised as 'ethnic minorities'. We acknowledge language is fluid and evolving and aim to ensure our use of language remains inclusive and inoffensive.*



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