

# *Phantasmagoria*

## Audio guide

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INSTITUTE

#### Stop 8.

My name is Rustan Söderling and I'm an artist and filmmaker.

I'm interested in moving image, how narrative shapes how we view history, how we view mythology and in this case, folklore, I suppose. A lot of my work deal with these sorts of sculptural objects or almost collages of objects.

And in *Fire Gazing* in the fire, there is this all these objects kind of appearing that are meant to kind of represent these different stages in kind of human ingenuity or invention from quite banal things like a toilet to more kind of historical things like the *Venus of Willendorf*.

In *Virus Meadow*, what I wanted to do, in a very formal sense, was to make characters that would act as sculptures in a way, as assemblages of objects that would somehow represent their environment. So there's this kind of character made out of natural objects like twigs and pinecones and moss and fauna and flora. And then there's this character that's made out of more kind of contemporary materials, like plastic bottles and crisps, bags and stuff. So they were meant to be kind of moving sculptural objects in a way.

So it goes through a kind of landscape evolution or like a shaping of the landscape by humans, from a kind of pristine environment. And then it comes into more manufactured environments, stone circles, earth mounds. And then it moves

through a kind of more medieval environment of church ruins, things like this, and comes to a kind of campsite in the middle of a stone circle. And from that point on, it moves through a tunnel, through kind of modern infrastructure roads, and eventually ends up in a kind of rave in the forest.

I had made a work right before that called *The Cadaver Stone*, which I filmed in Cornwall. I had done a lot of reading and research on kind of on English folklore, and a lot of the things that I was excited about couldn't really fit into that film. I really wanted to make a kind of supernatural monster film.

So I wanted to make something that dealt with the Green Man of folklore as a kind of monstrous creature, or the wild man – all over Europe I guess, you have these kinds of foliage heads, I think they're called. The spew or kind of vomit out a certain sort of foliage out of their mouths within Christianity or within the kind of original purpose, the theories that they represent a kind of subjugation of nature. So nature is below God, let's say, controlled by God. it's this kind of chaotic thing, you know, leaves spewing out of a mouth into the world a kind of like life and death cycle. But God is sort of above that.

So I wanted to do something with the Green Man. I couldn't really figure out how or what, what it should be. And then Covid happened, and I had all this time on my hand and I thought maybe Covid, the Green Man, these kinds of things sort of intertwine to each other. It's almost like a kind of a virus from nature, a kind of revenge from nature, this kind of virus spewing out of the mouth of the Green Man.

And I came across this photo of swamp gas emerging from a lake, and it's this kind of green light coming out of a lake. And it looks very mysterious. I came across this theory that swamp gas was probably the origin of the will-o'-the-wisp, which is another kind of folkloric creature or entity. That kind of leads wanderers off track. You know, you follow these lights through

the forest and you kind of get lost. So that was kind of the literal germ of the idea to mix these different folkloric creatures.

A kind of technique I use when I make my films is that I, I call it sort of making by proxy. So I make this kind of world like in *Virus Meadow*. I make this sort of setting and I try to inhabit it, to kind of become part of it in a way. So I will imagine what people in that world would make as a sort of tribes person or something, living inside of a mythology.

I want the work to be, to feel substantial, that you're basically dipping your toe into this kind of lake, and you feel like there's this whole ocean beneath you that you can't see, but you know it's there. So there's this kind of substance. You might just have a notion of something much larger. I think that's what I want people to leave with. Not in a kind of maybe intellectual sense, but in a more visceral sense that you have a visceral reaction to a film or something that lingers with you and stays with you.

This is the end of Stop 8.

This is a transcript of an audio guide produced by Henry Moore Institute for the exhibition *Phantasmagoria*, on display from 15 May to 30 August 2026. For more information visit [henry-moore.org/phantasmagoria](https://henry-moore.org/phantasmagoria)