

WATERSHED

Place-based research using art practice as a tool for engagement and critical enquiry into human-nature relationships and landscape change

Harriet Fraser

Watershed combines Geography and Art to explore perspectives on nature, culture and landscape change within the Ullswater Valley.

It aims to encourage dialogue between and across different interest groups and inform further work on rethinking relationships within a shared rural environment.

Practice-led Research

A multi-artist team uses socially engaged art practices to invite participation from local residents, land owners and people working in land management, conservation, heritage, tourism, retail, sustainability and landscape decision-making.

A range of perspectives will be collected through cross-disciplinary dialogue (1), one-to-one 'go-along' conversations (2) and group events such as walks and workshops and school participation.

Final artworks will reflect findings from this research, together with the artists' responses to the valley, including other-than-human elements.

How might this approach impact further dialogue and action, and affect relationships between people and place/'nature'?

The project provides a case study for the *Cumbria People and Nature Network*, and findings will be shared with landowners, land managers, farmers and conservation organisations across Cumbria.

Context

Landscape change and decision making are discussed within the context of climate change and global biodiversity decline; post-Brexit agricultural policies and environmental schemes; and initiatives underway in the Ullswater Valley (4).

Five artists from *the PLACE Collective* (5) will carry out independent and collaborative work using film-making, photography, poetry, illustration, installation art, and music (6).

Theoretical underpinnings include post-human and post-colonial perspectives that call for environmental and social justice, and do not place humans at the centre of things but consider living systems to be entangled networks where agency is distributed (7).

Watershed will shape the development of the active research phase of my PhD: 'Rethinking agency and action in environmental and landscape change; art practice as a tool for critical enquiry in protected landscapes'.

Artists' engagement and events: March - July 2023

Exhibition & conversations: July 18-21, 2023

"process and product are of equal importance" (3)



March 2023: A meeting of project artists and 'local stakeholders' to co-design research themes and plans for engagement. The landscape is welcomed into the room, signified by a circle of inbye earth, placed at the centre of the opening discussion.

- 1: For examples of dialogue and process in art practice, see Tim Collins & Reiko Goto; Harrell Fletcher; Chris Fremantle; Grant Kester; Kim Williams & Lucas Ihlein.
- 2: For examples of 'go-along' conversations, where research takes place while walking or working, see Erin Roberts and Phillip Vanini.
- 3: Quote from Harrell Fletcher, 'Some Thoughts on Writing a Manifesto'.
- 4: Local initiatives include the Ullswater Catchment Management CiC; SITU (Sustainable & Integrated Transport for Ullswater); and Friends of the Ullswater Way
- 5: The PLACE Collective (at CNPPA) involves artists in inter- and trans-disciplinary research, centred on the natural environment: www.theplacecollective.org.
- 6: Artists: Kate Brundrett, Harriet Fraser, Rob Fraser, Matt Sharman, Sarah Smout.
- 7: Key voices on post-humanism, plurality and distributed agency include: James Bridle, Donna Haraway, Camilla Nelson, Anna Tsing, Merlin Sheldrake, Timothy Morton.

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