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# Making *Sense of Here*: revealing multiple narratives of place through artistic process and integrating art and artists into transdisciplinary research

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**ABSTRACT**

The celebrated English Lake District, a national park and World Heritage Site, embraces complexity and tension. In landscape decision-making, farmers, landowners, policy makers, ecologists, residents, tourists and businesses have vested interests, as do the land and other-than-humans; yet the challenge remains in considering voices equitably and integrating complex environmental data. The art project *Sense of Here* (2018–2020), incorporating learning from local experts, scientists and land managers, and using walking, poetry, photography, film and installations, aimed to portray and connect multiple perspectives. Learning from *Sense of Here* was instrumental in the establishment of the multi-artist PLACE Collective within the UK Centre for National Parks and Protected Areas; and contributed to the Windermere Accord, formed through the Ensemble Fellowship to improve pathways to better understand, mitigate and adapt to environmental change. This paper shares insights from *Sense of Here* and considers the role of art in shifting patterns of dialogue across different silos.

**KEYWORDS**

Arts-led research; landscape decision-making; environmental arts; poetry; world heritage site; photography; walking practice; transdisciplinarity; national parks; environmental change

## Introduction

The English Lake District embraces complexity in its natural, cultural and social systems. This area of hills, valleys, lakes, towns and villages covers 2362 square kilometres[1] within the county of Cumbria in the UK and is designated as a national park and a World Heritage Site. Farmers, landowners, policy makers, ecologists, residents, tourists and businesses, as well as artists and literary enthusiasts, are invested in the way the area looks and functions, as are other-than-human inhabitants and natural ecosystems. In common with all other areas, it faces declines in biodiversity[2] and severe weather events due to climate change that necessitate change in land-based practices and an evolution of decision-making processes. In these respects, the English Lake District is not dissimilar to other areas that have protected status[3], in the UK and elsewhere. It is an evolving landscape, and attitudes to landscape management can be contested, with interpersonal and political tensions. For example, there may be disagreement between conservation authorities and farmers (or groups of farmers) about elements of practice (such as numbers of

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livestock, areas used for grazing, decisions about tree planting); or suggestions for changes to the appearance of the landscape may be at odds with World Heritage Site specifications. While not all land use or change is contested, disagreements and difficult negotiations have been relatively common for many years (Fraser & Fraser, 2014; Rebanks, 2023; Schofield, 2022).

One of the main challenges of making decisions about landscape management is to bring in multiple voices and data from different sources in a way that is inclusive and equitable. Given that decisions happen at many scales of place and time, and in different cultural contexts, we argue that consideration of different perspectives, integration of scientific insights, and attention to the relationships and overlaps between them, are necessary; not with the aim of finding one solution, but for decisions to become relevant to specific locations. In this paper, we discuss *Sense of Here* (Fraser and Fraser, 2018–2020), with reflections on modes of practice that offer insights for decision makers. We also discuss the development of the multi-artist PLACE Collective (2021). We argue that artists and artworks have much to bring to conversations about landscape change; where art practice is a relational process that can support community discourse (as described by Crawshaw and Gkartzios (2016) in relation to engagement with communities on the Holy Island of Lindisfarne). We propose that artists, as part of a transdisciplinary community, can introduce motivation and catalysts for research and action in communities whose lives and work affect landscapes.

## Our practice: a background

Since 2011, through our collaborative practice *somewhere-nowhere*, we have been working in The Lake District and in other UK Protected Landscapes. Our research includes spending time with scientists, academics and people whose expertise comes from experience; undertaking multi-day walks; carrying out ethnographic research; creating photographs, poetry and temporary and permanent installations; and conducting participatory events.

We describe ourselves as artists, researchers, socially engaged practitioners, enquirers, geographers. Our work bridges academic disciplines and brings in voices and expertise from beyond the academy in a transdisciplinary practice. Rather than being solution-led, we use art to provoke questions and catalyse new connections. Our work aims to explore and affect relationality, between people, and between people and place (*Land Keepers*, Fraser & Fraser, 2012–2014; *The Long View*, Fraser & Fraser, 2015–2017; *Moss of Many Layers*, Fraser, Fraser, et al., 2022, as examples). We are interested in the way that artistic practice can cross boundaries of place and perspectives, as part of a process that brings people together and impacts landscape management.

Our work sits within the diverse family of EcoArt, which 'brings multiple spheres of knowledge and skills together to reframe and/or address the most pressing social and environmental problems of the Anthropocene[4]' (Geffen, Rosenthal, Fremantle, & Rahmani, 2022, p.3). Physical artworks are points for reflection, but the process of engagement, relationship-building and participation is enormously significant, both in rural settings and within research teams. In this respect our approach sits within the wider field of artists who place emphasis on process, among them Crawshaw & Gkartzios, 2016; Edwards, Collins, & Goto, 2016; Hawkins, 2015; Kester 2005; Tarlo & Tucker, 2019; Williams & Ihlein, 2019. Landscape research presents a challenge: to attend to details and consider the system (micro/macro). Our work is also influenced by practice within and alongside multi-disciplinary teams. *Sense of Here* did not focus on a single issue (such as soil health, tourism, waterways); instead, it offered a helicopter view of landscape as a system, or system of systems, using art practice to engage in discussions about individual elements in relation to the whole. This intention reflected a trend among environmental scientists to look at complete systems and systems thinking, a view shared with us by Professor Gordon Blair, co-director of the Centre of Excellence in Environmental Data Science: 'Scientists are having to come together with different perspectives on the natural environment, to integrate data and modelling, to pull all the knowledge together' (G. Blair, personal communication, January 29, 2019).

To engage with experience as well as theory, our practice includes joining people for physical work such as sheep gathering, walling or tree planting, with wide-ranging conversations, and solitary long-distance and night-time walking. We use this fieldwork to ground-truth data from other sources; and the physical challenge reminds us of the value of embracing complexity and difficulty, or, as Donna Haraway asserts, of 'staying with the trouble' (Haraway, 2016).

We argue that artistic process, including poetry, can make nuances and complex connections that impact landscape decision-making more visible, and in doing so can impact the ongoing dialogue. The ability for art to 'read' communities (Crawshaw and Gkartzios 2016, p. 142) can be a form of 'community diagnostic'. Where art is made in response to, and in collaboration with, specific regions and communities, what it reveals and the processes it catalyses become part of ongoing development within that region or community. The same applies within research teams, as described by Gordon Blair who comments that a 'very strong facet of working with artists is that they bring an extra dimension to the dialogue' (G. Blair, personal communication, January 29, 2019).

In some previous projects we focused on a particular subject. As examples: *Land Keepers* (2012–2014) enquired into hill farming; *Water Finds its Way* (2015) was concerned with water and soil; *The Long View* (2015–2017) featured trees. Each project, however, revealed a complex overlapping of issues, systems and perspectives. This reinforced our interest in acknowledging the relationships between things/opinions/places as much as the things/opinions/places themselves. *Sense of Here* provided the opportunity to follow the evolution of our practice and investigate the dynamics of landscape change in the Lake District. We had been developing the idea since 2016 but the opportunity to integrate it into wider research came through our inclusion as artists in the Ensemble EPSRC Fellowship[5] team. This multidisciplinary team spanned disciplines and subject areas and explored the use of digital technologies 'to gain insight and see breakthrough in mitigation and adaptation strategies related to environmental change' and led to the publication of the Windermere Accord (Blair et al., 2021).

Our appreciation of complexity in the natural environment was influenced by scientists and data analysts on the Ensemble team, and in other institutions. It also relates to interpretations of systems as enmeshed, entangled or rhizomatic (elaborated by writers including Bennett, 2010; Deleuze & Guatarri, 1988; Sheldrake, 2020; Tsing, 2015), with different terminology used to discuss interconnectivity. Since recognition of complexity and concepts of entanglement may bring a paralysis of thought, however, if it obstructs the possibility of locating any single point that will affect change, it is useful to ask how entering conversations about complexity through art might benefit wider research and decision-making processes.

## Thinking about 'here'

As has been discussed in other papers in this issue, and elsewhere (Saratsi et al., 2019) landscape decision-making is a multi-layered process. While some 'decisions' lead to concrete actions or definable endpoints (such as the planting of a hedge, or a transition to renewable energy), the majority are junctions on routes through time and place. Decisions are rarely binary ('this' or 'that'), they entail a number of actions, and single influences cannot always be isolated (Edwards, in this issue; Jacobs et al., 2016). Concepts of 'here' may be understood at many scales, and we often walked with the question posed by the Harrisons: 'How Big is Here?' (Grande, 2012).

This is not the place to explore landscape decision-making in depth. Nevertheless, in the context of the Lake District National Park, some factors are key. These include ownership; designations of protection (UK Government, 2017); finances; environmental stewardship schemes; grants; world views; and regional, national and international targets around climate change and biodiversity (Gove, 2018; United Nations Environment Programme, 2022; United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), 2018).

Land ownership in the national park is divided between private owners and non-governmental organisations including the RSPB (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds), National Trust, and United Utilities, with the National Park Authority owning 4%. It embraces SSSIs (Sites of Special Scientific Interest) and SACs (Special Areas of Conservation) whose habitats and species are designated for protection and conservation under UK regulations (Joint Nature Conservation Committee, 2023). Roughly 129 square kilometres or 16% of the national park area is common land[6], where owners and tenant farmers collaborate in decisions around land use. Other factors affecting decision-making include uncertainties around markets and government payments to farmers for the delivery of public goods, and programmes focusing on 'rewilding' areas of land (Rewilding Britain, 2022; Hawkins, Convery, Carver, & Beyers, 2022; Schofield, 2022). Cultural and social systems, conscious and unconscious biases, and the influence of national and international trends and policies all play a part (Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), 2021; Foundation for Common Land (FCL), 2023; Lewis-Stempel, 2022; Monbiot, 2017). Existing relationships also matter; decision-making processes are shaped by the people included in, and excluded from,

conversations. Equally important is the quality of listening, within and between multiple individuals and organisations; projects such as the Loweswater Care Project (Waterton, Norton, & Morris, 2006) demonstrate the beneficial impact of inclusive work focussed on listening and sharing different perspectives.

As artist researchers, we have lived and practiced in Cumbria for almost thirty years. Our personal connection to the area began through a love of hillwalking; this leisure activity has given us the skills to walk and camp in all conditions and has evolved to be an integral part of our active research. The cultural lenses through which we encounter the Lake District carry influence from English literature and art inspired by this region, and from our close involvement with hillfarming communities and experts concerned with conservation through projects undertaken since 2011. Familiarity with landscape management practices and social networks helps us access different areas, eases introductions to new people and allows relationships to build over time. That we were not born here (referred to as 'off-comers' in Cumbria), do not farm, and are not employed by an organisation connected to land management, lends us a degree of objectivity: our work is not impacted by landscape decisions, nor are we paid to enact or facilitate change.

## *Sense of Here*

The design of *Sense of Here* was influenced by questions including: What is the process? What outcome is sought, by whom, and for whom? What data is considered? How are different needs and timescales addressed? Who/what has been omitted – and is change driven by outsiders 'with minimal participation or decision-making authority from {local} communities' (David-Chavez & Gavin, 2018, p.9)? Integrating these questions into our practice required conversations as well as, quite literally, pacing them out as we walked.

After three years of planning *Sense of Here*, on 9 January 2019, we stepped out of our car beside Thirlmere Reservoir, into a misty day. We walked slowly uphill, through conifer woodlands, past the stumps of trees recently felled, and further, passing young caged-in trees that were doing their best to put down strong roots. We carried on up, onto the thin soils and rocky ground of the Helvellyn massif, into a short, bright afternoon. Mesmerised by our location on the ridge of one of England's highest mountains, with precipitous drops to valleys far below, we savoured the open space. It was cold: freezing actually. For a minute or two, just before dusk, the sun appeared in a sliver of clear sky between land and clouds: a gold orb, spreading molten light across black hills. Then it was gone.

From our vantage point, we could see for miles across a national park that stands for so much in the English psyche: a kind of love, attachment and appreciation of the place that has become embedded over time. Ideas of the Picturesque established by William Gilpin in the 1870s, and the writing of William Wordsworth that has been popular for more than 200 years, have been key elements in a collection of artistic and literary reflections of the English Lakes that, according to UNESCO, have become universally influential. Visual beauty and ideas of leisure/pleasure in this rural landscape were instrumental in the formation of the national park, and continue to be emphasised in 21st Century tourism marketing. It is true to say that we appreciated a certain kind of beauty: ourselves, small, in a big landscape; far-reaching views of ridges lit softly, as if in a water-colour painting; the elegance of ravens playing above us; the glow of lichen on rocks. But we were struck by the bareness of the fell, and all the rolling fells around it similarly bare: close cropped grass, and rock. Instead of seeing the view as something to be preserved, we felt concern, and sensed the potential for these uplands to be more ecologically diverse, and for fragmented bio-abundant habitats to become joined up. A poem came into being on that day.

here we stand, wind bitten
taking in the view of the past
that has led us to here

here we stand, on the highest hill
looking over threadbare land
a hanging-on of fragments
linked by remnant strands
and the beginnings of repair

what might our view be
from the highest hill
in five, ten, a hundred years' time?

could it be -
this tattered land, healed,
through acts that begin
with the simple art of listening?

Questions arose about scale, and the impact of actions across place and time; about the need to consider other-than-human species, both for their own sake and because human and other-than-human co-exist. We thought too, about expanding values beyond what Nicolson (2017) calls 'narrowly and historically defined interests' and the need for a shift in responsibility: 'We have, of necessity, entered the age of empathy.' (Nicolson, 2017, p. 22).

*Sense of Here* aims for empathy and integration of information on a foundation of listening, dialogue, and taking time; and it uses walking and time outdoors to ensure a richness of emotional and sensory experience, and embodied learning that complements scientific modelling of potential landscape change. We describe the project as being about *the knowing and feeling of place*.

We devised a format that allowed us to explore intersections and overlaps between issues, voices and experiences, and interrogate meanings of 'here'. We imagined a circle divided into twelve sections of 30-degree segments (like a clockface) radiating from the Under Helm Sycamore[7], which grows on a scree-covered fell outside the village of Grasmere. In 2019 we spent the year 'clocking' the national park. Each month we researched a specific issue (the twelve included soil, water, trees, communities, tourism and farming, as outlined in Figure 1); we walked; we camped; and we installed a poem canvas, each month holding a different phrase. This framework, we hoped, might help us challenge dominant narratives to 'seek other ways of knowing people and places' (Hawkins, 2015, p. 41) and allow us to reflect on 'which worlds get noticed' (Jukes, Clarke, & McPhie, 2021).

The approach brought relationships into focus. In the circle, all slices are related; they meet in the centre. In physically and metaphorically progressing around a circle, there is no exit. Places and seasons are repeated cyclically; with a semblance of permanence, yet actions, conversations and knowledge evolve. Complexity is always present within the imposed structure, just as it is within the landscape and within decision-making. Any expectation that a conversation or an art project (or perhaps any project) will end with a clear outcome, or a decision that's final, is illusory; the process is ongoing. *Sense of Here* was a way to 'negotiate the ambiguous territory between means and ends.' (Williams & Ihlein, 2019, p. 343).

The project included the creation of a poem, whose 12 phrases were placed on a 2.5 metre-square canvas (see Figure 2). A new phrase was installed each month, in a new segment, moving at 30-degree intervals. This poem appeared sequentially but in its entirety is circular. It can be read by starting at any point, clockwise or anti-clockwise: it has no beginning or end. This technique was an evolution of the practice of Open Fell Poetics (Fraser, 2017), which replaced the 'space' on the page, which can be said to 'open up mental spaces we don't expect' (Tarlo, 2011., p. 9), with the 'space' of the land between phrases; in effect bringing the land into the expression and experience of the text. This mirrored work by artists such as Hamish Fulton (b. 1946) and Richard Long (b. 1945), with a shift towards a form of a poem that moves across place and time.

The monthly camp was curated as an installation, with the tent pitched precisely in line with the Under Helm Sycamore, at 30-degree intervals. This set up a relationship - unseen connection and tension - between the tent, the tree, ourselves, the land. In January, we camped on the thirty-degree line (when the temperature fell to minus-8 degrees centigrade and our boots froze); in February we camped on the 60-degree line; in March at 90 degrees; and so on, ending in December at 360 degrees, directly north of the sycamore (another camp in sub-zero conditions).

## The knowing and feeling of place

Twinning intellectual enquiry with bodily engagement has relevance for decision making; what people *feel* cannot be overlooked, since emotional impulses and bodily sensations are inseparable from thought and action (Damasio, 2006; Pert, 1999).

Our active research needed to be responsive to place. For example, we had to instal the poem canvas once per month, and needed a rainless day with windspeed below 18 miles per hour; in some months the weather excluded installation on more than 20 days. For each installation, we studied a map and chose an area of roughly 1 square kilometre, then once outside, in selecting a site we reacted to the lay of the land, the angle of light, and any incoming weather systems. Similarly, when camping, we headed to a general


**Figure 1.** *Sense of Here:* mapping issues for consideration. Fraser, H. (2019).

area and then used a map, GPS device and compass to orient ourselves precisely in relation to the Under Helm Sycamore, while also avoiding rocks, bogs, slope, and wind. These acts brought together certainty and uncertainty, knowing, and feeling; a moment-by-moment response to place and weather. This way of being echoes a 'response-ability', a term used by ecofeminist scholar Donna Haraway (Tsing et al., 2017, M. 3) in discussing appropriate reactions to a surrounding environment. This responsive practice is also embedded in photography and poetry; and the wood, the fell, the vast sky, the sodden bog, the tent are all iterations of 'here'. Through the year, as our collection of artworks grew, we deepened our enquiry into the impact of one *here* – one spatially or temporally or ideologically defined location – on another, and the way decision processes can address different factors.

In our consideration of emotional relationships with place, we referred to emotional information as 'Data of the Heart'. This data extended beyond the attention we paid to ourselves to include contributions from more than 250 people: an online survey delivered more than 10,000 words of text. Our analysis revealed themes, value systems and expectations, but no ultimate, outstanding 'answer'. This inspired further poetry in an attempt to capture something that can't easily be articulated. Studying the contributions of others became part of our enquiry into relationships and distributed agency (Barad, 2007); where simplistic or polarised statements around cause and effect cannot be made, but each element matters.


**Figure 2.** The 2.5 $m^2$ Poem Canvas in place, January 2019. Fraser, R. (2019).

## Multiple perspectives

Over twelve consecutive months, we camped 12 times (Figure 3), we installed the canvas 12 times (Figure 4), and we carried out 48 separate walks. We held conversations with more than 50 people, asking them to reflect on their personal perspectives, including their experiences, value systems, and concerns in the context of landscape. Among them were farmers, land managers, hydrologists, foresters, social workers, data analysts, people with tourism-related businesses, climate specialists, economists, writers, filmmakers, geographers, ecologists, visual artists and soil scientists. In our selection we aimed to give equity of voice, and avoid hierarchy determined by academic qualification, gender, profession or other factors. Despite expertise, absolute separations between issues did not occur; for instance, the quality of soil is inseparable from what is happening with water, tourism, forestry practices, and farming.

> In the Ensemble project, our practice offered alternative ways of ground-truthing, as a complement to models and analyses of datasets. We learnt from scientists in the team about research into specifics such as soil, hydrology or entomology. In team workshops that lasted 1-3 days, we shared insights and reflections from our fieldwork through photography, artifacts and poems. We also ran participatory exercises, using photography and poetic techniques. These 'proved to be a core exercise, which brought the motivations/fears/aspirations of the participants into the heart of the discussion.' (Blair et al., 2021). The collective work from the final workshop resulted in the establishment of the Windermere Accord (Blair et al., 2021.), which laid out a vision for a new kind of environmental science with a framework and associated roadmap that has since informed environmental research practices. The art on its own did not do this: the work of the art and artists was part of a collective process.
>
> In an ongoing dialogue, both in the field and in research meetings, perspectives were passed through us, to others, presenting a plurality of views and seeding new conversations. One of the most notable discussion points relating to landscape decisions in the Lake District - and reflected through the call for transparency and greater openness of methods in environmental science - was the importance of building and sustaining trust. In the context of caring for landscapes into the future, as Short (2008) suggests, good relationships can help in the ability to 'see sustainability as a process of consensus building' (p. 126). Our experience of 'conversation without the pressure of outcomes, listening without judgement, and in-situ dialogue occurring outside of our normal social circles' (Williams & Ihlein, 2019, p. 340) is an example of the way artists 'transcend disciplinary boundaries' (Saratsi et al., 2019, p. 17). This ability to dwell in different places, without affiliation to an external organisation, and to share learning in different settings is a privilege and has ripple effects through communities who, despite varying agendas, all have one thing in common: the land.

**Figure 3.** Camping as an installation, November 2019. Fraser, R. (2019).

## Why physical practice – and slowness – matter

The physical act of walking as part of *Sense of Here* allowed us to experience the relationship between landscape, movement and thought, where thought follows the pace of movement (Solnit, 2002). Walking brings qualities to research that have been outlined by numerous artists and geographers, for instance, as a way to encounter the land as a 'taskscape' shaped by people and animals over centuries (Ingold, 1993); to open up conversations (Heddon & Turner, 2010); to identify exclusion of certain communities or cultures (Testament, 2021); or to foster creativity (Jones, 2015). Our own repeated acts of walking catalysed ongoing evaluation. While walking, in touch with the land, information from external sources can be related to specific sites; this is an essential element of research that also makes space for us to sense, and respond to, other-than-human elements.

> Discomfort played an important role: camping in sub-zero conditions, walking for days on end with heavy bags, and the challenge of installing a canvas accompanied the mental exertion of thinking long and hard about complexity. It feels important for the practice to extend us beyond what we perceive as the edges of our physical and intellectual capability: this is where questions present themselves, imagination thrives,

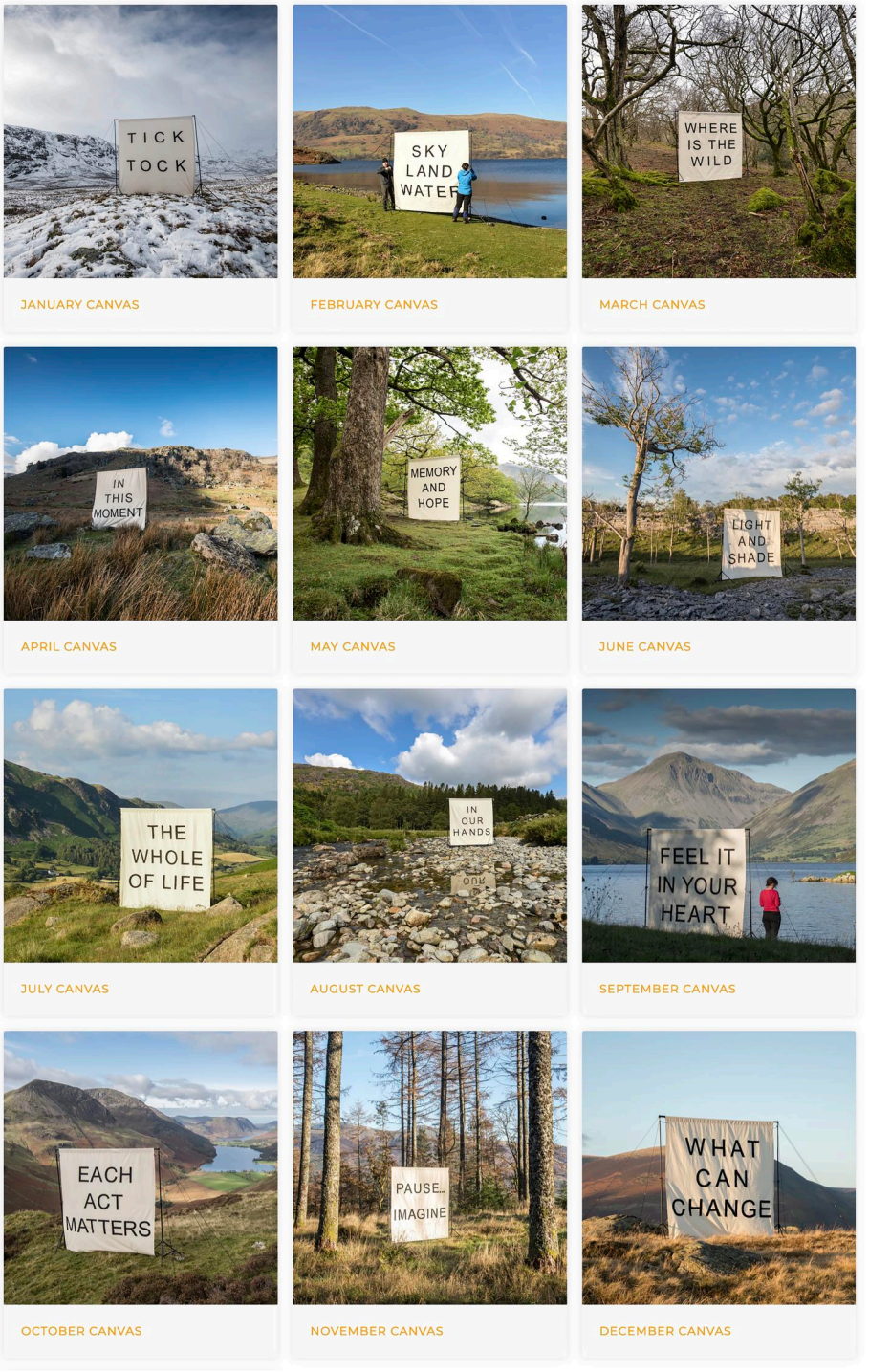


**Figure 4.** Twelve poem canvases, images of installations. Fraser, R. (2019).

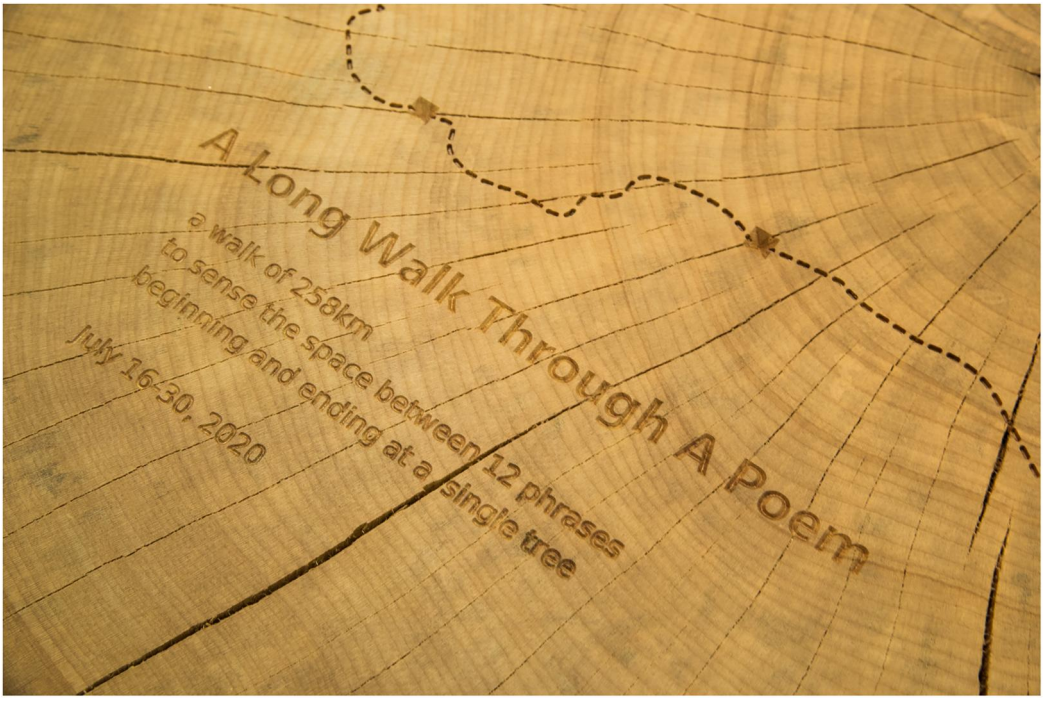


**Figure 5.** Detail: sycamore cross-section etched with GPS-tracked route of the 16-day *Sense of Here* walk. Fraser, R. (2020).

processes shift and there can be lightness - a new energy surging through the body, or a lightbulb moment. As one of Harriet's poems suggests: 'It takes the act of going to the edge/to see the clearest view', a line that was laser-cut into sycamore wood with a map of our 16-day walking route and displayed in the *Sense of Here* exhibition (Figure 5).

Stillness is equally valuable. Stopping outside allows us to gradually attune our senses to other-than-human elements and critters. Making photographs involves slowing down and framing a moment, drawing in macro and micro. Poetry is similar. Our practice also includes meditation. This has no simple definition, but with reference to the Yoga System of Patanjali (Woods, 1988, p. 44), it can be said to bring the practitioner into the present moment, without distractions, and can reduce the sensation of separation between self and other. Periods of stillness, acute noticing with multiple senses, as well as long walks, deepen this sense of being together with, and becoming with, the land and its components; being *in relationship*. This act does something that conversation or intellectual thought alone could not achieve. David Hinton phrases it well:

'… getting to the nub of things, really understanding existence, will always be elusive when we try to 'reason' it or put it into words - but the act of being, simply, wordless, may bring us a step closer to feeling that we are actually part of existence/place and in the flow, rather than becoming describers, explainers, objectifiers.' (Hinton, 2016, p. 39)

In 2020, we completed our research with a 16-day walk, beginning and ending at the Under Helm Sycamore, taking in the twelve sites of the canvas installation; in effect, walking with and through the traces of a poem. We followed our remapped clockface in a clockwise direction and spent nights in our tent. We walked with and through a landscape in a way that allowed us to integrate the information we had acquired over the year and to witness different valleys, fells, villages and watersheds. We noticed the porosity of boundaries between habitats and landscape conditions, the way that the land does not adhere to the boundaries of academic or organisational disciplines, and the way one thing affects another. Over 16 days Harriet created a new poem incorporating the 12 phrases from the canvas; a poem that was influenced by, and indeed necessitated the intervention of, landscape, weather, and physical experience.

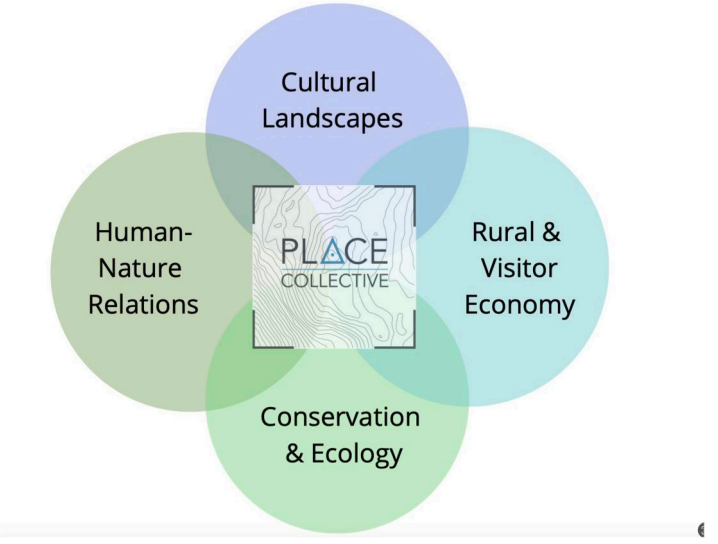


**Figure 6.** Diagram showing the PLACE Collective within the four themes of the Centre for National Parks and Protected Areas; University of Cumbria (2020).

## *Sense of Here* events and the formation of the PLACE Collective

*Sense of Here* public events in 2020, including interdisciplinary residencies and a symposium bringing young people into conversation with land management organisations and NGOs, were cancelled due to Covid-19. When lockdown conditions eased, an exhibition was shown at the galleries of Grizedale Forest, incorporating photographic images, poetry, creative maps and 3D works. In-person activities were limited, though, with events held online. An event combining a visual tour of the exhibition, a film and a discussion was hosted by the Royal Geographical Society and was attended by almost 300 people; and a separate event was part of the Entangled Festival hosted by Lancaster University. This allowed the dialogue to continue, yet for us, the project did not follow the path we had expected. With hindsight, we see this as a metaphor for decision-making and landscape change; not all plans are realised, and there are always barriers to, and catalysts for, action.

> That art cannot on its own shift decisions is important to recognise; this is at the crux of transdisciplinarity where the collective, and the act of working between and across disciplines and knowledge systems, is its strength. One potential pitfall of working across disciplines may be that an expected endpoint or outcome is not reached, but this must be seen in the context of time: decision-making is seldom a linear process, and the visible impact of an insight or decision may not become obvious for some time - years even. The learning from *Sense of Here* is a case in point. In the context of research direction, it had an impact through our work with the Ensemble team, and through the Windermere Accord. In the context of landscape management and decisions in the Lake District and other Protected Landscapes, learning from *Sense of Here* inspired the formation of a collective to create links between artists, rural communities, academics, and organisations charged with caring for landscapes. In 2021, the PLACE Collective an acronym standing for People Land Art Culture and Ecology - was established at the Centre for National Parks and Protected Areas, at the University of Cumbria (Figure 6). This transdisciplinary centre 'addresses complex local and global challenges and develops innovative practices to enhance landscapes and communities' (University of Cumbria, 2023).
>
> The PLACE Collective (2021) is an extension of our practice, grounded in transdisciplinarity, art in the field, and community interaction, and provides the mechanism for artists with different personalities and specialisms (Figure 7) to join research teams. Projects have included *Moss of Many Layers* (Fraser, Fraser, et al., 2022) and *Watershed* (Fraser, 2023). Over time, the impacts of art and artists on processes of decision-


**Figure 7.** Skills and practices: the PLACE Collective. Cristensen, C. (2022).

making will be evaluated. The PLACE Collective has ambitions to challenge paradigms and bring diverse perspectives together … always asking more questions.

## Conclusion

There have been calls for more creative practice within traditional modes of Geography and scientific research (Hawkins, 2015; Madge, 2014; Skains, 2018; Springer, 2017; Thomas, Roberts, Pidgeon, & Henwood, 2021.). There is a growing collection of artists around the world whose practices address this call, and this paper has referenced some key practitioners. Our own practice combines intellectual enquiry with embodied experiential learning to encounter multiple perspectives, using art in research teams and to offer a catalyst for relationships to form and/or shift. The contribution of

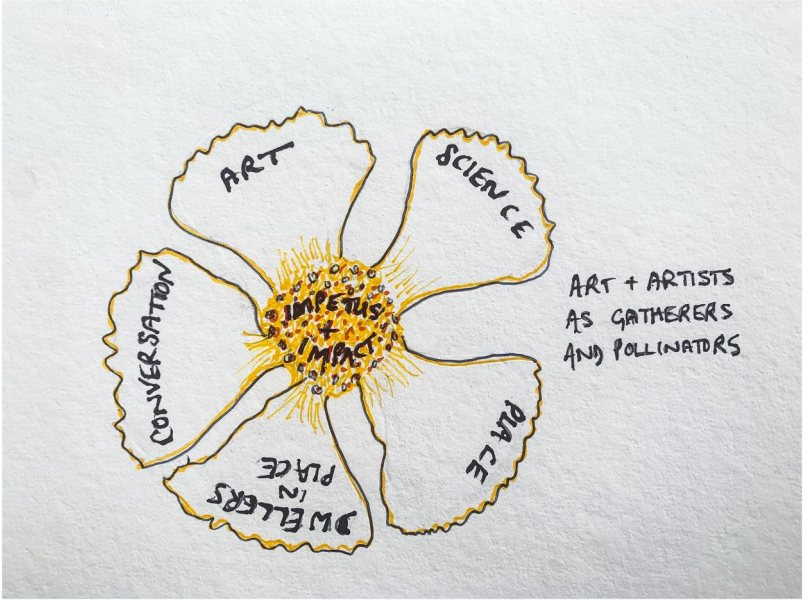


**Figure 8.** Sketch: the dynamics of pollination. Fraser, H. (2022).

*Sense of Here* to the formation of the Windermere Accord has been significant in its recommendations for research, while learning continues in ongoing projects. As part of this learning, we propose that some insights from *Sense of Here* offer messages for decision makers.

Firstly, transdisciplinary approaches are indispensable in broadening the range of voices included in gathering and analysing information, and taking discussions beyond isolated silos. This helps to challenge assumptions and widen learning and can be instrumental in the formation of new relationships and collaborative teams.

Secondly, we point to the value of walking and physical engagement with places and people in question. While we do not propose that walking per se should be part of every process, engaging with materiality allows theoretical propositions to become relevant, and is vital when it comes to making decisions about specific places.

Slowing down is also a useful tool. Taking time to be still, even if only for short periods, offers a space away from any sense of overwhelm and provides an opportunity to think deeply.

Finally, where *Sense of Here* expresses the fact that there is no ultimate solution, it also suggests the value of keeping the conversation going and nurturing relationships. Artists can play an important role, where the art 'is in the doing, the dialogue and the artifacts, and holds a potential to transform' (Hawkins, 2015, p. 12); and the tangible impacts of decision-making processes will play out over time.

The PLACE Collective is an example of an initiative that expands the potential for art and artists to become involved in landscape research. Artists may be agitators, reflectors, conveners, facilitators, and can act like pollinators (Figure 8), carrying ideas, stories and seeds that may be adapted to suit new settings. Ongoing research, we hope, will promote the development of practices and collaborations, with resilience arising from thinking, and doing, collectively. We close with a poem composed during the 16-day *Sense of Here* walk, which considers the combination of effort, reflection and integration of information, to build foundations for future challenges.

## Resilience

this small skin-held society, my body
feels its way
over grass and stone

leans into wind

an ecology of muscles
sinews, joints
eyes, feet

knees find consciousness
pain rises, then eases

like a river after rain

day by day, body
takes over mind
shows what it knows

learns as it goes

when weariness sets in, the mind
compels those final, necessary movements
to set up home, to make food
to eat

then, lying flat, lets go

muscle by muscle
tendon and nerve
thought by thought

relaxes into healing

over time, like land weathered
the body finds its strongest form

to be upright, and certain
in the face of a storm

## Notes

1. Lake District National Park Authority, 2022.
2. State of the Park Report: 'habitats are declining and urgent action is required.' (Lake District National Park Partnership, 2018, p. 6).
3. Definition of UK protected landscapes: 'an area of land managed mainly for landscape conservation and recreation where the interaction of people and nature over time has produced an area of distinct character with significant aesthetic, cultural or ecological value, and often with high biological diversity, the integrity of which needs to be protected and maintained in order to allow it to continue to evolve.' https://www.lawinsider.com/dictionary/protected-landscape.
4. A discussion about whether the Anthropocene is defined as an epoch or as a boundary between epochs is not within the scope of this paper, but may be explored through ongoing research.
5. Ensemble: EPSRC Senior Fellowship in the role of Digital Technology in Understanding, Mitigating and Adapting to Environmental Change.
6. Figures from Federation of Cumbrian Commoners, https://cumbriacommoners.org.uk/commons-in-cumbria/ Retrieved November 20, 2022.
7. This tree is the central tree of seven that featured in *The Long View* (Fraser & Fraser, 2015–2017).

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## Notes on contributor

***Harriet Fraser*** and *Rob Fraser* have a collaborative arts practice, somewhere-nowhere, which is rooted in encounters with land and research focused on sensitive environments and cultures. Their practice brings together walking, photography, poetry, film and installations and they regularly work with scientists, farmers, data analysts and public organisations concerned with land use, landscape care and rural policies. With an emphasis on collating multiple perspectives, they combine participatory work, exhibitions and the creation of spaces for dialogue to broaden conversations and encourage collaborations. The Frasers are Fellows of the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) and Visiting Research Fellows at the University of Cumbria, where they established the multi-artist PLACE Collective to bring artists into transdisciplinary research connected with the changing natural environment. In 2023, they were awarded the Royal Geographical Society's Cherry Kearton Medal and Award for their 'discipline-crossing work' in the context of rural landscapes. Harriet's practice-led PhD at the University of Cumbria uses art as a tool for engagement and enquiry into agency and action in landscape revolution.

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