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WATERSHED



EXHIBITION
JULY 2023





In March 2023, a group of 20 met in the Village Hall to discuss what matters to them. The conversations helped to shape the direction of enquiry for the next stage of research.



The Spaces in Between

in between the names of places
and the endless flow of water

love
for what is treasured
what has been lost
what can be gained

in between the names of places
mouthfuls of cloud
the sound of water over rock
hands in soil
struggle and joy

earth
at the centre
of all we know
and all we don't yet know

earth
at the centre
of lives that are not ours
but are ours to guard

in between
the named and the counted things
this breathing earth
stories to be heard and told

in between us all

a future
waiting

Harriet Fraser



Ullswater Watershed : a map of water
Harriet Fraser

Introduction

The exhibition in Glenridding Village Hall was part of the ongoing Watershed project. This project uses an artistic process to bring together different perspectives on land, landscape, culture, nature, heritage and the possible futures of the Ullswater Valley. It is being run in connection with Harriet Fraser's PhD, which uses art as a tool for research into agency and action in environmental and landscape change. Among the questions it explores are: which voices are heard - or not heard - in processes of decision making about land use, and what happens when art and artists become part of the conversation. What might be provoked? What new ways of seeing arise? What new connections might be formed?

The exhibition shared work from five artists who created pieces in response to meetings and conversations with residents of the valley, and with people who are involved in landscape decisions through their work. While it was in place, it offered a novel space for reflection and conversations. The exhibition is just one stage in a longer process of research and discussion, the forging or strengthening of connections, and the co-creation of artworks.

This document offers a record of the exhibition, with images of the artworks and links to music and film. A report of this phase of the project will be shared separately.

Artists

Kate Gilman Brundrett : installation

Harriet Fraser (lead artist): poetry and installation

Rob Fraser (project manager) : photography and installation

Matt Sharman : film

Sarah Smout : music

www.theplacecollective.org/watershed

Watershed has been funded by UKRI through its Enhancing Research Culture programme, and has been run by Harriet Fraser through Cumbria University, with Dr Jamie Mcphie as principle investigator. The artists are all members of the PLACE Collective, which sits within the UK's Centre for National Parks and Protected Areas (CNPPA) at Cumbria University. All photographic images are by Rob Fraser.





Many conversations, five key questions

The ambition of this phase of the Watershed project was to use a variety of art forms to reflect a range of perspectives about the valley. As part of this process, each artist carried out five interviews; between us, we met and spoke with 28 people. Most of our meetings took place outside, in locations chosen by the interviewees. While the conversations were wide-ranging, at each meeting the same five questions were asked:

- 1 For you, where is the wonder in this place?**
- 2 Thinking about legacy, what would you like to pass on to future generations?**
- 3 If you think about the landscape and the other-than-human inhabitants as having a voice, what might they show us, or ask of us?**
- 4 What are you curious to find out more about in this valley?**
- 5 What would you like visitors to the exhibition to leave with?**

One of the challenges of this project, which is common to the work of many artists and researchers, is how to include the the perspective of 'nature' and the other-than-human. Time spent alone in the valley, has been important for each artist.







Rob Fraser
Photography

The portrait images on the following pages were taken by Rob, who explains his process below.

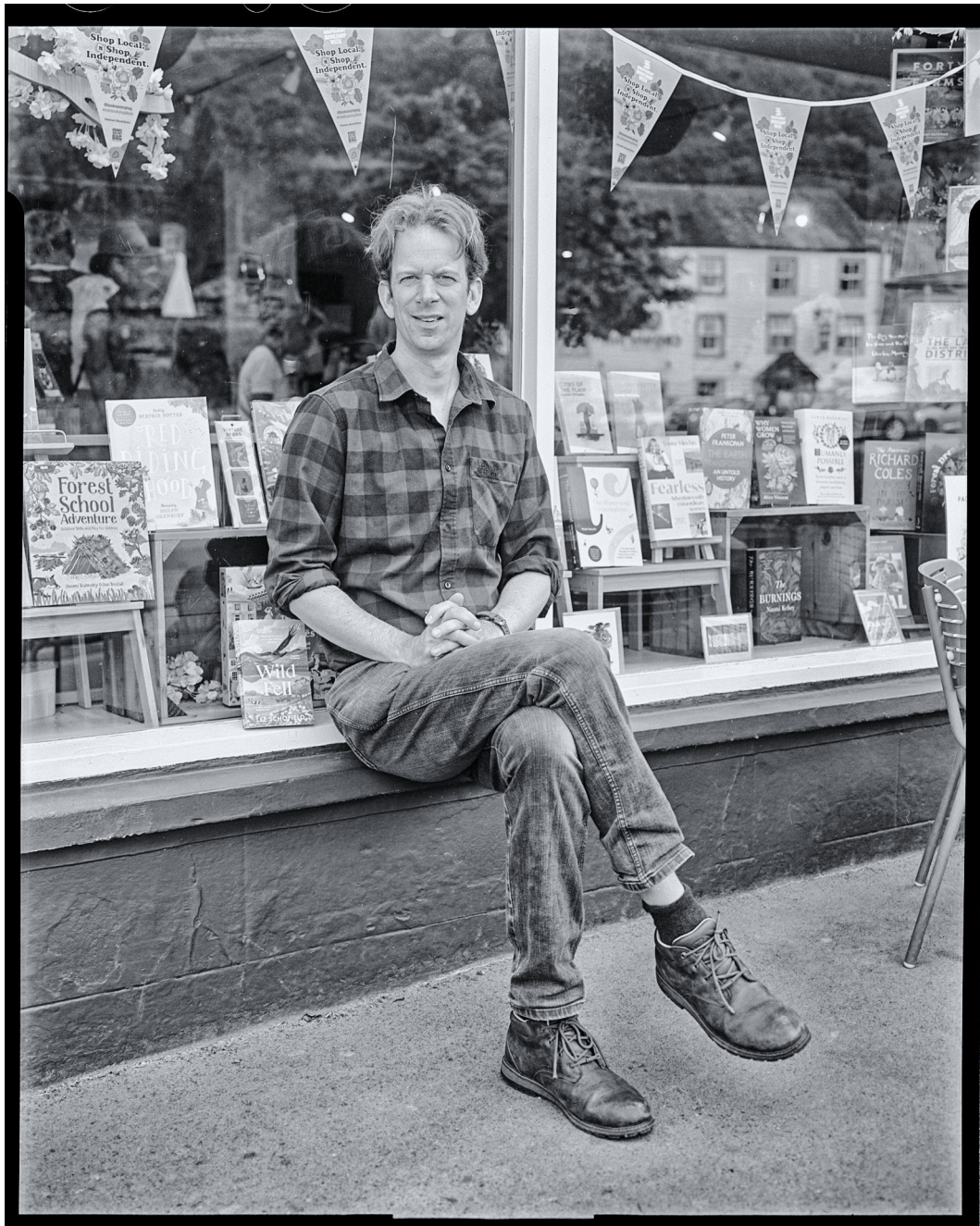
“These 10 portraits form a part of my response to working on the Watershed project. They were made using a large format field camera, which uses plates that are inserted into the back of the camera after I’ve finished focusing. The plates hold sheets of Ilford monochrome film that measures 5 inches by 4 inches.

My process in making these images is slow and measured, a different process to most of my work carried out on digital gear. I firstly frame the background I want to include and then invite the person to step into the scene. The only instruction I give them is to look directly into the lens when I press the shutter – that way they are engaging directly with you, the viewer. I always show the edge of the film, the rebate, when printing an image.

I selected the quotes from the recorded interviews made during our time with each person.

I was fortunate when making these images that every day was dry and sunny, though I far prefer doing portraits when it is overcast, as there are no harsh shadows to deal with.

I have had this camera for 30 years now – half of my life – and have used it to frame people and landscapes in a number of wild places across the planet.”



Al Verey

Owner, Verey Books, Pooley Bridge

“The UK is not a particularly big place. I’m not a patriotic person, but I keep coming back to this feeling that this part of England ... think of Rupert Brooke, ‘If I should die here, think only this of me: that there’s some corner of a foreign field that is forever England.’ For me, this is the bit that is forever England, because it’s so unique. This is a fragile area that really needs looking after, but at the same time, we should be very proud of it, celebrate it, and extol it through art and literature.”



Anne and Tim Clarke
Friends of Ullswater Way

Tim "Understanding our environment is so crucial to deciding how we live as a community. Everything you do has an impact in one way or the other, on someone else, or some other species. So just be very, very careful about what you do."

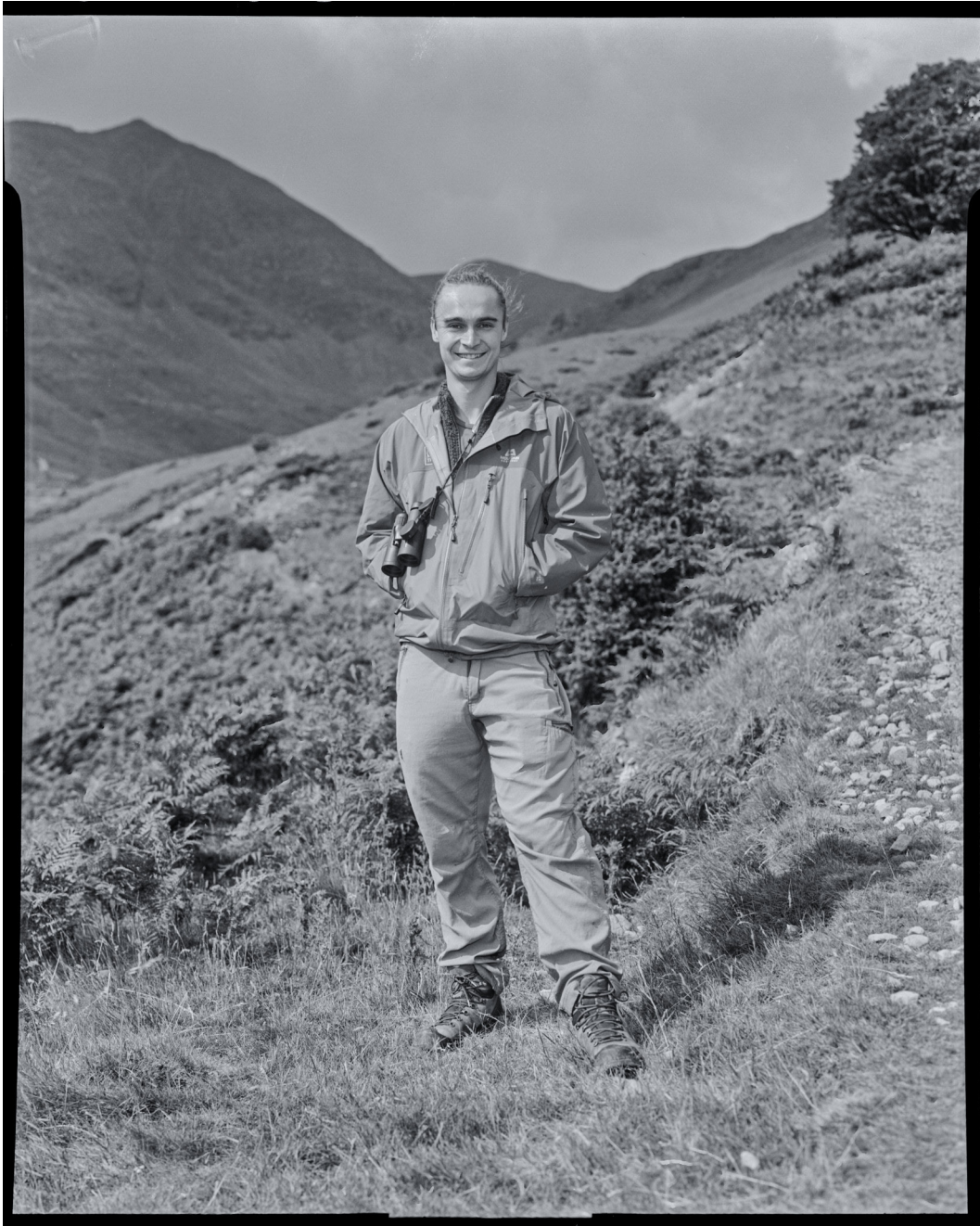
Anne "Involving myself in the history of this valley has made me fascinated by what you can see when you look at the environment that tells us about the past, and how that informs our decisions from the future."



Ben Martynoga

Freelance Writer and Journalist

“All life is fundamentally related in terms of evolution, in terms of genetics, but it’s also interconnected and interdependent - all life forms rely somehow on other life forms, whether they eat them, are eaten by them, infected by them, or something that consumes the waste. So, that’s what I’d like to pass on: a new framing, a new way to see these wonderful insights, that can deepen our appreciation of a landscape like this.”



Isaac Johnston

Glenridding and Helvellyn Ranger, John Muir Trust

“What happens across a lot of the UK in rural areas is a drain of young people who move into large, urban areas for higher education and money and opportunities. I think that’s a shame, when we are from an area like this, and I see it here, even amongst my friendship group. It’s difficult to carve out a niche for yourself in a rural community, doing something you want to be doing, because opportunities are few and far between for really interesting, rewarding work. I think if more young people were able to work in the rural landscape, where they’re from, I think we can get only good things from that.”



John Pring

National Trust, Property Manager for Central and East Lakes

“We have freed up a river that’s been kept in a straitjacket for 250 years - how often do you get to move a river? What we’ve achieved in just two years is truly fabulous but it’s going to get better and better. The river is going to keep doing more and more things, some things will surprise us, some things won’t.

I think nature can recover, it just needs to be given space, it needs to be given a helping hand. We built a new river here, we scraped out a course for it. But we knew that wasn’t the final thing: it’s a dynamic process.”



Judith Morris

Volunteer alpine plant grower for the John Muir Trust

“Caring for this landscape is urgent and we’ve all got a part to play. Don’t just think ‘Oh it’s only little old me’, if there’s a lot of little old mes, good stuff happens and this growing group is a prime example of that. You’ve got to find your own way to get through to people, to get on their wavelength, to make them see that it is important. I think things like a growing group are a perfect way of doing that, and I came into it by the fact that I love to grow plants. And now I’ve come to understand more what the purpose of that is. I would like more people to get involved on that basis really.”



Karen Mitchell

*CEO, Cumbria Action for Sustainability,
and co-chair of the Zero Carbon Cumbria Partnership*

“The aspiration, I guess, would be that there is always going to be enough here to still create a sense of wonder. It might be different, the baseline is going to be different. There might not be quite so many birds singing, there might be a different make-up of trees, but there might also be some new species as a result of climate change. I just hope there’s still enough wonder here to inspire people to carry on fighting to protect it. I guess that would be a good legacy.”



Laura Ruxton

*National Trust, General Manager covering Ullswater,
Langdale and Grasmere*

“I can remember starting to work in the Lake District and being taken out with rangers and they would point things out in the landscape, like the old ring garths* that are still in place, where the valley bottoms were first used for agriculture. And they’re still there, you know. We still use the same stones to build the dry stone walls that will have been used for 1000s of years, and you just feel like you’re holding pieces of history in your hands.”

* a ring garth is a mediaeval wall built to stop animals grazing on cultivated land.



Graham and Peter Lightfoot

Farmers and Commoners, Gillside, Glenridding

Graham "The wonder for me it's just odd moments when you're up at the intakes fetching sheep in on the quad bike, working the dogs, and you're starting to look down across that lake and you just think, yeah, we are lucky."

Peter "I run most of the sheep at Watermillock, six miles away. I'd be down there before six in the morning - lambing time - and even now I set off at five to go down shepherding, especially in this heat. And it's just a lovely time of morning, especially spring time when you got the mist in the bottom."



Warren Allison

Greenside Lead Mines historian

“I suspect the mines have been here since the Elizabethan period. From 1825, up to 1962 they were worked continuously, apart from nine months in 1935, when it went under care and maintenance during the Great Depression. The impact it had on the whole community was immense and it provided continuous, well-paid employment for 130 years. After the mine closed in ‘62 the local parishes never really recovered. A conservative estimate would be that 250,000 tonnes of lead was mined, from crushing about three million tonnes of rock.”



Listening in

(on doing interviews out of doors)

We rest on the limb of an alder, bark pressing into our thighs.
She talks to me about this place, wonders out loud:
Will beauty carry on?

Behind her, butterflies the colour of wet earth
fly among tall grasses, confetti on the breeze.
Birch shuffle their leaves, bend their silver selves.

I listen to her words, the open question, *how can we do more
of the good stuff, together*, and I listen too, to the insistent
call of a wren, determined to have its say.

Down valley, in the too-warm sun, there are stories
to be shared. A photo has been brought out - pride,
community, framed - and the family huddles round.
Arms stretch to point out hefts and gathering routes
across the fells, links between one farm and the next,
between this valley and the next, across the years.

Later, standing in the dappled light of trees, I learn
what it has taken to release a river *that has been in a straitjacket
for two hundred and fifty years*, and what begins to come with freedom.
A willow leans in. A damselfly, blue and busy, darts over stones
and out in the open, cows wander with their calves.

So many small things. Trying to gather all the pieces
is like asking clouds to settle on a single crag,
or thinking one waterdrop can move a stone.

In the late summer light, I take myself to a waterfall.
I close my eyes, breathe out, let it pound
my shoulders and my head, and I listen in:
this time with a whole body's worth of skin.



The movement of water

Ten samples of water collected while walking, with notes and found objects from each location

As we walk, we notice the flow of water does not always match the marks on the map and there are many small waterways that appear, or disappear, depending on the weather. The water and the map are always changing, even though there's a suggestion of constancy. Water in Ullswater has a 'retention' time of 350 days, before it flows onwards.

During the exhibition, visitors were invited to add to the map.

Harriet Fraser





Earth Circle

At the first Watershed meeting in the village hall in March, the Earth Circle was located in the centre of the room, with 20 people seated around it, discussing what matters to them. For the exhibition in July, the grass was no longer winter-brown: it was green and full of flowers.

Thank you to Sam and Can Hodgson for allowing us to borrow the clods of earth; and to Charlie Whinney who converted our idea into a beautiful steambent ash structure.

Harriet Fraser and Rob Fraser





The Marvellous Adventure of Bob the Raindrop

At the end of June, the children at Patterdale School spent the day with Harriet, Rob and Kate, on a quest to create a new story for the valley. We began with an introduction to the area and a glimpse at some of the hidden life of the lake, then took a walk outside to conjure up ideas.

The children imagined Place Fell as a serious mountain, reading a book, feeling slightly grumpy about rubbish being dropped, and wondering about changes in weather. They considered the journey of water, their own experiences of being out on felltops and on the lake, what happens on farms when it's too dry or too wet, memories of floods, and hopes for the future ... and during the course of the morning they created a story line.

Once the plot was in place, a name for the central character - the raindrop - was chosen using the democratic process of suggestions in a hat. 'Bob' the Raindrop came to life, and the story found its expression in full colour.

The panels were created by all the children, working in mixed-age groups. After the exhibition it will be displayed in the school. Huge thanks to all the children for wonderful work, and to the school staff, particularly headteacher Nicky Steeles.

Patterdale School



Kate Brundrett

Untitled, mixed media

“This installation emerged through a sense of place from the people I interviewed, from my own history about the place I call home, and through an art practice that explores our relationship with places and people.

I began with till rolls as a vehicle for capturing the words I heard. The rolls were from my mum’s flower shop, a business based in Penrith for the past 30-years. So, on one hand they could represent a kind of transaction – because in our world we relate everything to the system of money to express our needs and desires, values and priorities. But the awe, vastness and wonder of this landscape expressed in many different ways, somehow surpasses this system – it is outside it, beyond it, transverses it.

For me that probes the question: What exactly do we value, as individuals, as communities, as humanity?

The transaction is also the conversation, which falls like a waterfall, words getting tangled. Where do they land? Which are heard? How are they heard? What is at the heart of what’s being said? Connected with the words and sentences are pebbles from each site of conversation. These rocks, direct from the earth, have been there all the time, for a long time, surpassing our lifetime, hidden in plain sight.

Perhaps here is found a common thread.”



Unseen Connections

The small plant in the hanging book is a Downy Willow. This is one of five rare montane willow species that are suited to life on the crags between Red Tarn and Helvellyn. Over the last century or so they have declined in number, and for more than a decade, a programme of reintroduction has been in place to boost this remnant population.

Recently, a growers' group has been working with the support of the John Muir Trust to grow new plants, taken from cuttings from 'mother' plants. More than 1,000 plants have been propagated and planted out since 2017. Local volunteers are also involved in nurturing rare alpine plants such as mountain avens.

Transferring plants to the crags is a specialist business involving skilled climbers: the new plants are settled in to spaces out of reach of people and sheep, to give them the best chance of a future.

We have used the hollowed-out book in other locations across the UK, each time with a different tree.

Thank you to Anne and Tim Clarke for lending us this willow

Harriet Fraser and Rob Fraser

Seeding Futures

not all plants are easy
but the willow takes well

in spring, clip a branch,
place the cut edge in earth - and wait

it will make roots
it will do what it knows how to do

from Glenridding to Tirril
from garden to crag
mother plants and people have teamed up
an extended family of growers

dark-leaved, tea-leaved and downy willows
some hybrids too, settle in to pots
show their soft leaves to the sun
gather strength

it's not easy to get to the crags
but that's the point: climbers'
careful hands reach ledges
relocate the plants high above
the dark shine of the tarn

willows arrive, alpine flowers too
and now in summer, inaccessible
crag blaze with colour
as if meadows hover
over rock

imagine - a windless night
moon almost full
moths dancing among flowers and stone
the joy of a small island home

Tethera, Tan, Yan

by Sarah Smout

Valley, Lake, Tree, Fell
Valley, Lake, Tree, Fell
Foss

and there's knocking at the door
(Tethera Tan Yan, Tethera Tan Yan)
it's time to let the land in

The Land in

The land in
The land in
The land in

Ullswater, wolves' water, your water, my water
Ice-shadow home for a river to wonder
and weave

and there are flowers in the field
(Yan Tan Tethera, Yan Tan Tethera)
there's hope in all the seedlings

a feeling
it's changing

The wonder is in
the dawn swim
the hawthorn that blooms the soonest
the fell gate, the day is closing

Underneath my skin there is
more than meets the eye not
just beautiful

We are kith and kin to the
veterans and the mothers the
yellow rattle seeds

Hefted from the stone a village
full of heart needs you

to stay here
to love here

The wonder is in the dawn swim
the oak trees who find us listening
the skipper that paints their soul deep
in ripples that join together

and there's knocking at the door
it's time to leave it open



Sarah Smout

Cello, song writing, poetry.

“My initial ideas going into this project were quite different to what I ended up with. My intention was to collect lots of field recordings and record outside, but my time in the valley to do this was prevented by the weather. On the other hand, the five interviews gave me so much to think about, and to try and reflect, that my composition became my next focus – who or what am I writing this song for?”

Trying to fix onto a manageable concept was my first main challenge. Pretty soon, my musical ideas merged into the lyrics. I wanted to create something where the music could represent the valley, lake, tree, fell and foss, and capture this moment in time in Ullswater; a backdrop of sound that bubbled along, like Aira Beck, and down into the lake, with the dynamic range of the fells. I felt like the land’s identity came across so strongly, something I wanted to incorporate in the lyrics with some Cumbrian dialect. Tethera Tan Yan (the title and lyrics), came about when thinking about the different timescales in the landscape – human and non-human, some very short and some very long – and the idea of counting how certain things are growing, like the wildflowers or the trees, whereas other things, like sheep, are reducing in places.

From my conversations, it was clear that allowing nature the space to thrive was important to everyone. The tensions surrounding what this place is for, and how much pressure it comes under are urgent questions going forward for people who live here, and for nature; and how that reflects on a global scale in a time of climate and biodiversity crises.

The variety of different voices, again non-human and human, were evident, and so I’ve included people’s response to “where is the wonder?” in the chorus lyrics. I was just so struck by what people said about their love for and connection to the valley. So, this is a song that celebrates the natural ‘being’ that is Ullswater Valley – the way that the people and the landscape are so intertwined, and how that relationship fosters care and passion. I have brought in the land’s voice the best I can, with sounds of Aira Beck and the lake itself, captured from the boat *Raven*. It’s an anthem, if you like, to keep going, no matter how small the impact might feel in the moment. It all started with a seed.”

LISTEN HERE:

https://theplacecollective.org/sarah_smout_tethera/



Matt Sharman

Film

“Many things start with a good conversation. In this case a series of conversations, some recorded, some not. Five people, on different days, sat chatting in the woods and fields surrounding Ullswater, kindly providing insight and perspectives. The conversations were ranging and varied, covered lots of ground and, I hope, will continue.

The amount of information though presents a problem: to include everything, to provide the space for all the valid, thoughtful and multi-faceted elements would mean a 5-hour film, at least. The mindset during editing has to be one of distillation, a sifting through of the ideas and leaning into the challenge of choosing what to retain, and what to lose. It’s a difficult debate, and rarely provides clear answers. You’re often left with a creeping sense you’re oversimplifying - worried that to distil is to dumb down.

However, in the end this is a beginning - a way in, or an invitation, to consider the prompts, suggestions and feelings that made the cut and take them as places to start, doorways to look through, positions to consider, thoughts to ponder. It is, as with everything, an ongoing process.

The Ullswater watershed is a complex system. It defies simple explanation, and insists on holistic, respectful and nuanced thinking. Without a willingness to embrace this complexity, to acknowledge the various pressures, demands, motivations and realities across all communities, human and non-human, you’ll always only ever have a partial picture. This ecosystem, if we’re committed to its evolving health, asks something of you: What is our place in this place? How might we connect in order to thrive?”

WATCH THE FILM HERE:

<https://vimeo.com/somewherenowhere/watershed-land>

Seeking the edge of the watershed, towards Stony Cove Pike

it's one of those days
when the air is like water

in one of those places
where sky settles on the land

no wind, only the kind of wet
that seeps in

underfoot
stars and sphagnums
sodden, soft

and all around
mist, and silence

until a duet sounds:

skylark, somewhere in the air
and water, somewhere in the moss

Harriet Fraser



A photograph of a forest stream with a sign that reads "ALL THE SMALL THINGS". The stream is filled with large, mossy rocks. The background is a dense forest with sunlight filtering through the trees.

ALL THE
SMALL
THINGS



All These Truths Overlap (above)
Pencil on Somerset art paper, with traced watershed map

The 25 interviews carried out by the artist team revealed a wealth of information, and many provocative thoughts. For this piece, I selected one phrase from each interview and have chosen to show them overlapping, randomly, like a series of waterdrops on the lake.

Rob Fraser

The Canvas (left)
Cloth and photographic stand
2.5 metres x 2.5 metres

We have been using this canvas since January 1st, 2019, for different projects, each time in a different location with a new phrase that is inspired by the place and people we work with. The importance of valuing the ‘small things’, both for themselves, and for their part in a complex, interconnected environment, was one of the themes that emerged from our Watershed conversations. We placed the canvas in Glencoyne Beck (pictured here); and then erected it in the exhibition space.

Harriet Fraser and Rob Fraser

A kind of wonder

there is a kind of wonder
in the pink light of dawn
sun on Place Fell
mist across the lake

in lichens living with ancient oaks
in the star-shapes of plankton

there is a kind of wonder
in the persistence of people
who've shaped this place
and care: dogged, innovative, kind

and wonder too
in the lives of birds
ring ouzels among rocks
a peregrine in flight
and the continued arrival of spring
when seasons seem to be shifting

all this is a kind of wonder
but it's not blind love
for what feels good
what looks like beauty

it's a love that's been thought through
worked for, that carries a kind of ache
a kind of faith

each morning, the blackbird names the day
each dusk, among the trees, owls

Harriet Fraser

Harriet Fraser

Poetry and installation

“Although I know the Ullswater valley reasonably well, having visited regularly over the past 30 years from my home near Kendal, I don’t live here. Each encounter with the people and place helps me to see the valley in a new light and what I learn prompts me to rethink my own perspectives. Again and again my reading of this place, and its continuing evolution, gains a new layer.

When it comes to writing poetry, I sometimes describe myself as a ‘maggie’. As I gather material, I turn my attention to things that stand out or feel new - things that sparkle. These may come from conversations, from my physical sensations, from emotions, from observations. Being outside, listening, and taking time to still my thoughts are all an important part of the process. I make notes, allow the beginnings of poems to arrive, and then weave a textual fabric.

The poems I developed for the Watershed exhibition offer a series of openings that may lead to another question, another poem, another discussion. At the outset, I suspected I might compose a poem for each theme, or each interview. But after ten interviews and a series of conversations during a small group walk, something different settled: poems that borrow from all the questions, and all the answers, and don’t rest in any one category. This feels fitting, perhaps. It’s a reflection of the way so many lives, so many pathways, overlap and intersect in this landscape.

The other work I’ve developed - the map, the canvas, and the Little Books of Wisdom - are all rooted in poetics: a distillation of complex, tangible and intangible things, into words.

Rob and I worked together to carry out the interviews. We also took most of our walks together, and regularly talk about our idea, and what has felt remarkable to us. My process of composing poems and devising visual works is never solitary.”

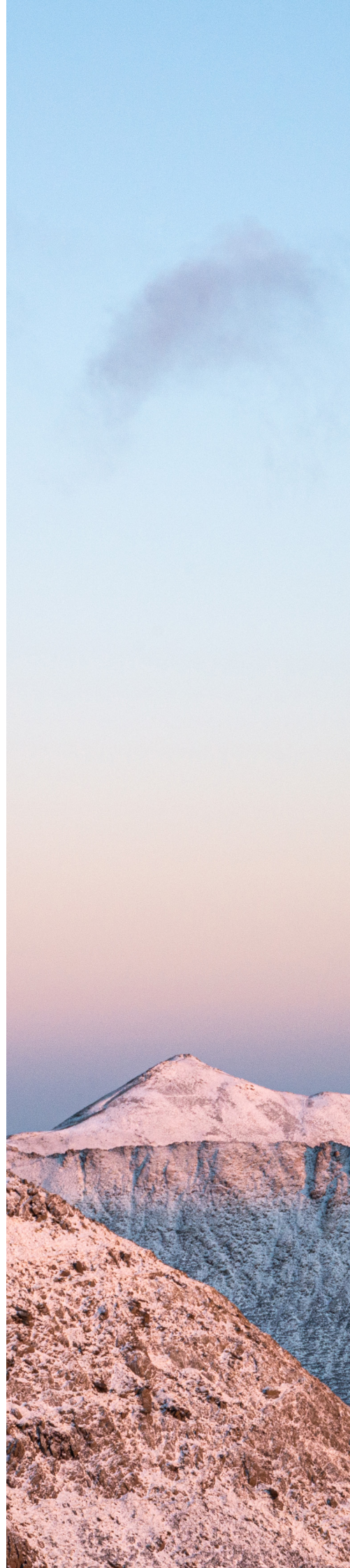
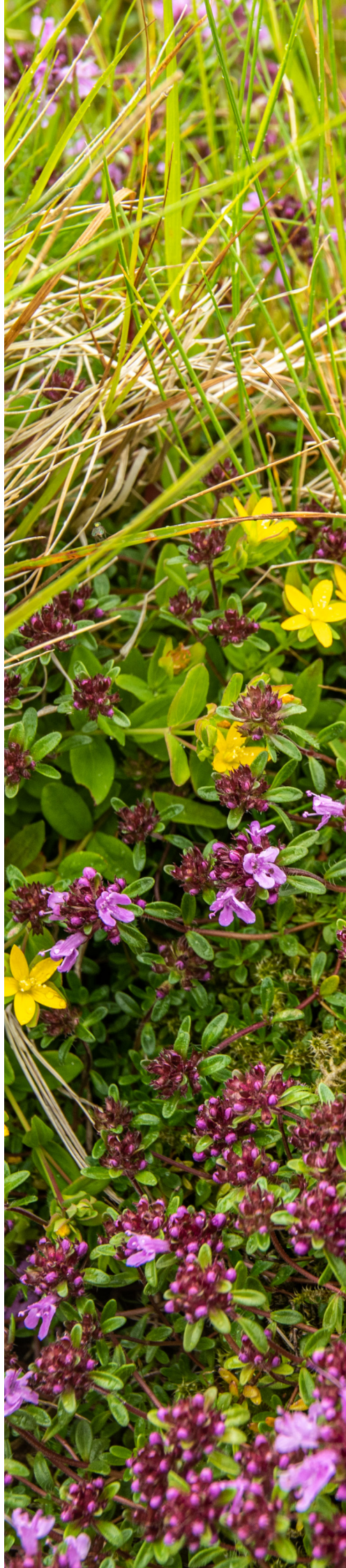
The Little Book of Ullswater Wisdom, 1 and 2

Art paper, Herdwick wool

Everyone I’ve spoken to has been extremely thoughtful about their answers to questions. Our conversations have gone beyond these questions, and they have often been deep and considered. I have been struck by phrases that sound like ‘words of wisdom’. It felt fitting to present these in book form, something to be reflected on, whichever page you open.

Harriet Fraser





A Code of Care

tread lightly

as if this place were fragile

dwell delightfully

for joy is a two-way thing

leave nothing

that does not belong here

nurture gently

so it may grow, as you'd wish a child to grow

be kind

as if this land were your mother

celebrate

the many acts of kindness and dedication

remember

that what you do today affects tomorrow

pause, regularly

you may notice something you've never noticed before

be mindful of the small things

the landscape is made of these

return

and each time, it will feel different

Harriet Fraser

Feeling like I can come back here
and care about it, even though I
don't live here.

*Moments of recognition, of truth,
of contemplation*

A sense that people care and
positive change is possible ...
art can create change.

Respect for the land

***Knowing that lots of people
also do care***

Sarah's lyric 'it needs you' in
the song - so moving.

We need to work together to
look after our precious world.

*Look beyond, look beneath.
Pause, regularly.*

A little hope

WHAT DO YOU TAKE AWAY FROM HERE?

***A renewed pride in the place I
live.***

Threads of conversation

Inspiration Courage Energy

***It's so important. I bet
people have been surprised
to find this here.***

A chinwag, and ideas.

*Interconnectedness -- lots of 'little
old mes' all woven together in and
with the valley.*

*I've been trying to work out how to
get our local community involved
in protecting our harbour, near
New York. This gives me so much
motivation. Bring in the artists!*

***Positivity of knowing that there is
hope: others care too.***

Gives infectious energy

Harriet's poetry ... joy is a two-way thing.

A selection of comments

*Of more than 40 collected on post-it notes
around the question: What do you take away from here?*

Thank you

Thank you to the many people who have so generously given us their time, joined us for conversations, shared their stories and shown us parts of the valley that are special to them. We have felt privileged to meet them all, and to learn. People have welcomed us into their homes, taken us out onto the fells and the lake, and have shared insights from their personal and their professional lives. Their backgrounds span a range of interests and livelihoods, including land management and land ownership, farming, tourism, sustainability, community groups, retail, cultural heritage, local history, ecology, hydrology and education. We are extremely grateful, and look forward to our conversations continuing.

Thanks to:

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More information about this and other projects at:

theplacecollective.org

&

somewhere-nowhere.com



