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Led by Land: Nature Connectedness Through the  
Lens of Non-invasive Environmental  
Collaborations

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Fine Art

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**Niamh McGoldrick-McGrath**

2025

**Led By Land: Nature Connectedness Through the Lens of  
Non-Invasive Environmental Collaborations**

**Curatorial Dissertation**

A Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a Bachelor of  
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**Abstract:**

'Led by Land' is a unique exhibition proposal that contributes to conversations surrounding the topic of the land-human relationship and ecological thinking. This exhibition critically analyses nine artworks, underpinned by a well-researched ecological and nature-connected framework. These artworks, in contrast to traditional land art, aim to highlight the non-invasive ways that artists can collaborate with natural environments. Overall, this exhibition will educate an urban audience of the importance of nature-connection and the inherent impact humans have on the environment, seeking to inspire new artists to work non-invasively in nature.

## **Positionality Statement:**

This dissertation has been underpinned by a twenty-year journey to becoming nature-connected and a two-year long artist practice involving non-invasive environmentally collaborative mediums.

This dissertation has been written by someone with Dyslexia. With consideration to the ecological theme of this proposal, ethically, the use of AI felt wrong, due to its high carbon footprint caused by fossil fuel usage and water consumption. I have written this dissertation alone, without the grammatic assistance of Grammarly or any other AI.

When talking about myself as an artist, I write in third person, and when discussing my opinions on theory, I write in first person.

## List of Key Definitions:

Nature connectedness:

An emotional closeness to land on multiple levels, reflecting the extent to which one includes nature as part of their self-identity (Lengieza and Aviste, 2025).

Environmental art:

Artwork that highlights the relationship between humans and the natural environment (Truitt and Ford, 2023).

Non-Invasive:

To not cause harm to or effect the natural goings-on of an environment (Oxford Learner's Dictionary, 2025).

Ecology:

The study of relationships between living things and their environment (British Ecological Society, 2024)

Anthropocene:

The period of geological time that human activity has had a dominant impact on the natural environment (Everard, 2026 p.15).

Symbiocene:

The proposed geological period in which humans will live in harmony with the environment, in ways that allow mutual and equal benefits for both humans and the planet (Everard, 2016, p.139).

## **Introduction:**

My connection to land is one of the most important relationships in my life. I believe that land shapes us just as much as we shape it, if not more; It is the formation of our world, it holds, supports, and guides us as we grow. So, I've never understood why, when it comes to art, people don't treat land with the same care and respect that it gives us. Environmental art is often defined by an artist's "environmentally friendly" motive (Tate Gallery, 2017), however, if you look closely, that isn't often the case. Having been involved in environmental art for over two years, I have become increasingly aware of the commonality of artists interfering with land in their practice. I've had artists suggest to me digging up land, rearranging it, or even bringing it inside to make an artwork. This mentality has been ongoing since the 20<sup>th</sup> century when artists turned to using land as a physical material, instead of just a muse, in an attempt to highlight ecological issues (Lewin, 2018). However, the methodological use of nature within these artworks inherently cause more harm than good, and as someone who feels strongly against this invasive practice, I sought to create an exhibition that highlights artists that collaborate with natural environments without taking from or disrupting them.

This curatorial dissertation forms an original contribution to knowledge through the proposal of the exhibition 'Led by Land.' This proposal was curated by Niamh McGoldrick-McGrath as a counter response to traditional land artists such as Andy Goldsworthy, as well as a display of her personal relationship and respect for land. In doing so, she seeks to explore the human-land relationship through ecological creativity and influence audience thinking surrounding these contemporary collaborative methods.

This exhibition will be held in Strange Field warehouse in Glasgow and will display a range of contemporary artworks that explore concepts of ecology and the land-human connection through the use of non-invasive environmentally collaborative mediums. Each artwork has been selected due to their unique site-specific imagery and ability to represent environments without the use of land as a physical material. This

exhibition aims to highlight lesser-known artists, seeking to give a platform to their non-invasive practice as well as them as artists.

Chapter one outlines the curatorial thesis, discussing the inspiration and theory behind this exhibition through the analysis of two peer reviewed academic journals and one academic book. This thesis outlines three elements of inspiration; the land-art connection, underpinned by 'For Creative Geographies,' (Hawkins, 2013); the lack of ecology in environmental art, underpinned by 'Sustainable Art Should Not be Installed at Natural Sites' (Guarino, 2025); and the land-human connection, underpinned by 'Do people who feel connected to nature do more to protect it? A meta-analysis' (Mackay and Schmitt, 2019). Chapter two outlines a variety of other sources that have inspired the exhibition's ecological concept, from an analysis of 'The Living Mountain' (Shepherd, Macfarlane, Winterson, 2019) to the discussion of the relationship between Symbiocene and Anthropocene. Chapter three critiques the 'Andy Goldsworthy: Fifty Years' exhibition as a key motivation behind this exhibition, as well as providing analysis of the nine selected artworks that will be displayed, outlining the justification for their involvement and an overview of the artist's practice. Finally, chapter four discusses the curatorial aims of the display, including the justification of the chosen venue and opening events.

## Chapter One: Curatorial Thesis

This chapter will discuss the theory behind the 'Led By Land' exhibition and the reasons that it is necessary through the analysis of two peer reviewed academic journals and one academic book.

### 1.1 The Land-Art Connection

Art has been involved in the foundation and expressions of geography for centuries (Hawkins, 2013). It provides insight into our world, into its history, the way it grows, survives, and functions. The cross over between land and creativity is irreplaceable as a way in which to share unique forms of knowledge that allow us as a society and ecosystem to collectively learn and grow. 'For Creative Geographies' (Hawkins, 2013) discusses this relationship on multiple levels; the role of art as an influence on geographies, the part geography plays in informing artwork, and the importance of both existing in the same realm. This interconnection Hawkins (2013) describes as "the coming together of artistic and earthly creative forces" pushes the boundaries of traditional visual art, blurring the lines between art, artist, and viewer, through the use of collaborative creative methods. If we let the land lead in the process of creating art and immerse an audience in an experience and reflection of nature rather than an opinion or interpretation, we change the engagement with the artwork from all areas.

Alongside the push against the roles of "artist" and "audience," Hawkins (2013) makes a point to highlight the energy that this creative-geography framework can bring to the contemporary world.

*To insist on the liveliness of art, as this book does, is to rework understandings of art, artist, and audience, and to demand two things. Firstly, that we need to move towards a sense of art as "productive of," attending to the doings of art, rather than focusing on questions that centralize the idea of art "produced by." (Hawkins, 2013, p.10)*

This shift in understanding promotes the work that art does, recognising it as something in itself, an item that creates motion and development in our world. Hawkins (2013) inspires us to move away from seeing art as a direct product of a person and

see it as an entity of its own, something created by many elements that can produce environmental and societal shift, not just as a personal reflection of an experience, but as an experience itself.

A place that this change in perception can be explored more specifically is in the relationship between art making and location. Site specific art, where creatives collaborate with the geography of a specific environment to produce an artwork that directly depicts the essence of that place, is an important form of research and geographical exploration. This form of research can inform both the art world and geographical world (Hawkins, 2013). The collaboration between land, people and art in this methodology creates a realistic portrait of land and provides insight between these three realms of life.

## **1.2 The Lack of Ecology in Environmental Art**

The trends surrounding environmental art often cause more harm to the environment than good. 'Sustainable Art Should Not be Installed at Natural Sites' (Guarino, 2025) has been key to my research into the ecological impact art has on nature. Although the act of installing artworks in natural, rural areas is intended to draw attention to the beauty of the environment and broaden the human-nature relationship by using artwork to immerse an audience in landscapes, who maybe wouldn't do so otherwise, at its core, the presence of an artwork in nature disrupts the ecosystems of the land through physical alterations made to install the work and an increase of human footfall caused by viewers. Artwork installation often requires clearing of land and building of frames, the attraction of a large group of viewers results in soil compaction as well as an increased chance of pollution and waste, all of which disturb ecosystems and lead the area away from its natural life cycle (Guarino, 2025).

Guarino highlights that even artists such as Andy Goldsworthy, who seek to collaborate with nature with minimal disruption inherently interfere with the life of the area they work in, through the re-arrangement of natural elements and the projection of a human concept onto the environment (Guarino, 2025). While discussing Goldsworthy's use of nature, Guarino (2025) references Jacques Derrida's (2000) framework 'Of Hospitality':

*This mirrors the dynamics of hospitality discussed in Derrida's framework, where the host (nature) often bears the burden of accommodating the guest (the artist). The conditional hospitality of nature—allowing human interaction while maintaining its cycles—is finite. How can ecological artists ensure their work does not overstretch this hospitality? (Guarino, 2025, p.3)*

In questioning this, this paper plays a vital role in the hopeful beginning of discussion and change in the world of environmental art. As an ecologist, Guarino (2025) argues that any art practice that disrespects the natural world and the wildlife within it is not “environmental” and cannot have been created from a place of being ecologically educated. I would take the argument a step further in questioning not only the effect of installing art in natural sites, but also vice versa, the effect of installing nature indoors as an artwork. I would be interested in examining the ethics of this method, the damage that can be caused by ripping earth and plants from their natural habitats and bringing them into studios and galleries to create artworks, which is becoming an increasingly popular trend (Steer, 2024).

### **1.3 The Land-Human Connection**

Nature and humans are eternally intertwined, and artists have been exploring this relationship from different perspectives for a long time, however, not all do so from an ecological perspective (Guarino, 2025). The sense of nature connection is a useful insight into this land-human bond, ‘Recent meta-analyses indicate that higher levels of nature connectedness are positively associated with both higher levels of evaluative and eudaimonic wellbeing,’ (Martin et al, 2020). Nature connectedness is a term used to define an individual’s connection to the natural environment (Mayer and Frantz, 2004). It is more than just physical contact with nature. Just like human-human relationships, nature connectedness describes an emotional closeness to land on multiple levels, reflecting the extent to which one includes nature as part of their self-identity (Lengieza and Aviste, 2025). The more we immerse ourselves in and reflect on our meaningful time in nature, the more we feel it to be part of us. Although this term is most often used in science and psychology, bringing nature connectedness into artistic thinking means approaching the depiction of the land-human relationship from a more intimate level, not just as a viewer of nature but as something within it, as artists such as Calum Wallis (2025) and *Planetary Intimacies* (n.d.) do. This is an

addition to artistic practice that can promote improvements of environmental and creative health.

Self-identity is the key director of someone's attitudes and behaviours towards themselves and others. So, the sense of including nature as part of oneself results in behaviour that reflects that. If nature is part of someone then harming it would be harming them. In a world where the planet is suffering as a result of human behaviour, nature connectedness could be the key to ecological thinking, that protects the natural environment rather than harming it. To explore the correlation between the human relationship with land and ecological mindsets, I have researched 'Do people who feel connected to nature do more to protect it? A meta-analysis' (Mackay and Schmitt, 2019), which analysis the role of nature connectedness in the personal motivation to act carefully towards the environment. Research that studied behavioural intentions, self-reports of behaviour, and externally observed behaviour, found a strong correlation between nature connectedness and pro-environmental actions (Mackay and Schmitt, 2019). "Participants who answered questions about how they felt connected to nature reported higher pro-environmental intentions and were more likely to volunteer for conservation efforts than participants who answered questions about how they felt disconnected from nature" (Mackay and Schmitt, 2019). The sooner we embrace the fact that we are a part of nature, the longer everything within it will survive. By fostering a relationship with the natural world, we can develop a sense of care for it, still live in and work with the land, but in ways that let it be and cause no damage.

#### **1.4 Summary**

Bringing together these three theories surrounding geographical art, nature connectedness and non-invasive practice, in this exhibition I would like to give a platform to the importance of being one with land, collaborating with environments in ways that don't interfere with them, and the interconnection between the two. In doing so, I would like to highlight and push the need for ecological thinking in art from an original and lesser-known perspective, as the trends surrounding interfering with land, deemed as 'environmental art,' are lacking ecological understanding and I believe the art world needs a change in attitude before the damage greatens.

## Chapter Two: Additional Influences

This chapter will outline and discuss further influences that have informed the ecological and nature connected concept behind this exhibition.

### 2.1 The Living Mountain

'The Living Mountain' (Shepherd, Macfarlane, Winterson, 2019) is a novel that follows Nan Shepherd's journey through the Cairngorm mountains in Scotland. Originally published in 1977, this book has since been adapted to be introduced and concluded by novelists Robert Macfarlane and Jeanette Winterson in 2019. Although this book doesn't directly consider the concept of nature connectedness or any ecological facts, it is a poetic comment on these topics in its own right. Shepherd's personal philosophies surrounding being one with nature has led this book to be a unique observation of the human-land connection, described as a "meditation on the magnificence of mountains and on our imaginative relationship with the wild world around us," (Shepherd, Macfarlane, Winterson, 2019).

Shepherd discusses the interrelationship between people and land from the perspective of both elements having natural influence over each other, "We are co-natural with the world and it with us, but we only ever see it partially," (Shepherd, Macfarlane, Winterson, 2019, p.3). We are eternally intertwined with nature, we are part of it and its part of us, but because we only experience the human side of that relationship, we often fail to acknowledge the true impact we have on the land. Shepherd goes on to discuss the importance of immersing ourselves in the natural world for our being and highlights the ways in which we have lost sight of our interconnection with nature, "We have come increasingly to forget that our minds are shaped by the bodily experience of being in the world – its spaces, textures, sounds smells and habits," (Shepherd, Macfarlane, Winterson, 2019, p.109). This observation was made in the 1940's, before we had the internet and had felt the full effects of modern technology on our relationships with each other and the natural world. Since then, our disconnect to nature has vastly grown, and the importance of spending time in nature has increased. In this comment, Shepherd has acknowledged the

fundamentals of nature connection; the recognition of being one with the environment, and that those elements of nature help form who we are.

Alongside the concept of being one with land, Shepherd touches upon the connection between that and ecology, “The first law of ecology is that everything is connected to everything else,” (Shepherd, Macfarlane, Winterson, 2019, p.xxii). This highlights that we are connected to nature, it to us, and that understanding that is key to our relationships and ecological behaviour towards the natural environment. Overall, this book is an early and original contribution to the discussion around nature connection and ecology. It is this philosophy of Shepherds that has influenced my own personal philosophies in my journey to becoming a nature connected artist and curating this exhibition.

## **2.2 How the Earth Must See Itself**

‘How the Earth Must See Itself’ (Cash and Kenyon, 2019), is a short creative film inspired by and in collaboration with Nan Shepherds book ‘The Living Mountain’ (1977). Shot in the Cairngorms and produced by the National Theatre of Scotland, the film features a group of performers, elegantly moving through the land, immersing themselves amongst the heather and rivers of the earth. This combination of figurative and environmental movement creates a beautiful visual representation of the concept of nature connection, as the people and the land become one. Alongside these visuals, the film features narrated extracts from ‘The Living Mountain’ (Shepherd, 1977). With narrations such as, ‘I have walked out of the body and into the mountain’ (Cash and Kenyon, 2019), the voiceover continues to emphasise the nature connected feeling of this film and the people within it.

The title is another inspiring aspect of this film. ‘How the Earth Must See Itself,’ a quote taken from ‘The Living Mountain’ (Shepherd, 1977), directs the audience to consider the perspective of the land itself. It inspires us to contemplate how the earth is impacted by our actions, how it may look at us, and what it thinks of itself. This is a perspective I believe is important in the journey to becoming nature connected and thinking more ecologically. If the earth could talk, what would it tell us?

### **2.3 The Ecosystems Revolution**

To examine the land-human relationship even further, I have researched 'The Ecosystems Revolutions' (Everard, 2016). This book explores the human relationship with the natural world, through the lens of Anthropocene and Symbiocene. Anthropocene is a term used to describe the period of geological time that human activity has had a dominant impact on the natural environment (Everard, 2026 p.15). To begin, Everard (2016) acknowledges that our global lifestyles have led to the depletion of ecosystems throughout our environment, exploring how our lack of care and overconsumption has caused damage to our planet. Despite his somewhat acceptive understanding of the negative environmental impact of our day-to-day lives, Everard (2016) goes on to highlight that we can no longer afford to ignore the consequences of our actions. He argues that as a society, we now know the environmental ramifications of our current lifestyles and we have the research available to make change (Everard, 2016). This change of habits will be essential to our collective growth as a planet;

Substantial revision of human lifestyles is essential if we are to secure a decent future, a global revolution that has at its core recognition and integration within the profound and irreplaceable values of ecosystems, their processes, and beneficial services, (Everard, 2016, p.15).

This approach can be applied to the world of land art as well. The concept of Anthropocene is a useful insight into the inherent impact of human actions on the planet. Alongside our lifestyles, artists too can re-consider their practice in order to enact change.

The goal of these changes is to reach a place of Symbiocene. Counter to Anthropocene, Symbiocene is the proposed geological period of time in which humans will return to nature and live in harmony with the natural environment, in ways that allow mutual and equal benefits for both humans and the planet (Everard, 2016, p.139). Everard (2016) approaches the concept of Symbiocene, not from a forceful perspective, but from a point of co-creation.

This will not be a revolution brought about by force or violence; rather, it is one that we will co-create, indeed are co-creating, through shared understanding, aspiration, and consideration of the ramifications of our incremental decisions and actions...It is about us co-creating a revolution that progressively embeds the multiple values and importance of thriving, regenerating ecosystems into the ways that we think, act and live lives of potentially expanding opportunity and fulfilment. (Everard, 2016, p.3).

Becoming symbiotic with nature does not mean putting an end to our lives as we know them, it just means adjustment, planning our day-to-day habits and activities in ecological ways that allow other ecosystems to thrive alongside us. To reach this place of harmony, just as is needed to form nature connection, it is vital that we recognise our interconnection with the natural world (Everard, 2016) (Lengieza and Aviste, 2025).

We and the sum total of our activities are entirely subsidiary to this vitally interdependent biosphere, which not only supports and shapes humanity but also is reciprocally shaped by the ways in which we use, abuse, and manage it, (Everard, 2016, p.13).

The ways in which we treat the environment not only effects the ecosystems around us, but us too, in taking care of the planet we are in inherently taking care of ourselves.

We, as a society, have a long journey ahead of us in order to reach Symbiocene. As Everard states towards the end of the book, this revolution is not something that can be left for the environmentalists to tackle alone (Everard, 2016, p.151). Each person in each career and lifestyle will play a significant role in this ecological development. As artists, the understanding of our interconnection with nature is an important driver to step back from overconsumption and use more ecological methods in our making, as artists such as Wallis (2024) and Leahy (2020), displayed in this exhibition, do. This change in practice will in turn be a small step towards reaching Symbiocene.

## Chapter Three: Curatorial Influences and Choices

This chapter will critique the Andy Goldsworthy: Fifty Years exhibition (National Galleries Scotland, 2025) as the key motivation behind this exhibition, as well as outlining the nine artworks selected to be displayed, including the justification of each artist and an analysis of their practice in relation to the ecological subject matter.

### 3.1 Andy Goldsworthy: Fifty Years

The initial motivation for this exhibition stemmed from my counteractive response to the Andy Goldsworthy: Fifty Years exhibition at the RSA in Edinburgh. Andy Goldsworthy is an internationally recognised land artist who explores the relationship between people and land through the use of natural materials (National Galleries Scotland, 2025). This particular exhibition highlighted his art practice over the course of fifty years and brought his artwork inside to a contemporary gallery space, “the land is brought indoors, in Scotland’s capital city,” (National Galleries Scotland, 2025). Despite this exhibition being themed around the human-land relationship, I did not find it positively inspiring, it did the opposite. The interferent use of nature in this display has inspired me to curate an exhibition contrary to Goldsworthy’s practice, an exhibition that demonstrates the human-land relationship through the use of non-invasive mediums.

Despite Goldsworthy’s fascination with land, he appears to damage the land that he is so keen to connect with, as he uses the land as a material to visualise his ideas.

*Working as a teenager on farms near Leeds in Yorkshire, where he grew up, Goldsworthy developed a passion for working with the land: harrowing the fields, bailing hay, picking out and piling stones, feeding cows and sheep. This is where he acquired many of the skills he uses in his practice today: cutting, digging, gathering, stacking, building, (National Galleries Scotland, 2025).*

The use of these techniques within nature unnecessarily interferes with the land and disrupts the ecosystems living within it. In this exhibition, it was the combination of these techniques, alongside the large quantities of nature brought inside to the gallery space, that stood out to me as anti-ecological.

The 'Red Earth' (2025) wall sculpture in this exhibition is one example in which Goldsworthy lacks ecological thinking within his choice of medium and process (Goldsworthy, 2025). In this artwork he has created a wall of dried clay, dug up from the land of the Lowther Hills in Dumfriesshire.

“For this exhibition, clay-rich earth was dried, crushed, mixed with water, and passed through a sieve to remove stones. Dried once more and reconstituted into a workable material, it was applied to the wall, cracking as it dried,” (National Galleries Scotland, 2025).

Working with this long process to strip the land of all its natural components, then bringing that earth indoors to display a manipulated sense of its beauty, is not a true representation of the land. The true beauty is in the clay field untouched, in its natural area, where it thrives and belongs. Bringing the land indoors is only disrupting its nature, the land should be left to be seen where it lives. If we want to see the material of land, we should go to the landscape itself and connect to it there, rather than in a gallery. This piece is intended to be a comment on the sense of being one with land, “This earth is a vivid red because of its high iron content. Our blood is also red because of the iron in it. It's a reminder that we are bound to the earth,” (National Galleries Scotland, 2025). This concept of being connected to land is contradictory to Goldsworthy's use of material. If he wished to have a sustainable connection to the land he works in, he would not disrupt the ecosystems within it, he would understand the disturbance caused by the moving and manipulation of earth and chose to document this feeling of oneness in a more ecological way, such as photography or print.

In contrast to this use of the nature, I am interested in promoting the ecological and nature connected ways in which to collaborate with land. Where Goldsworthy uses branches, earth, and flowers, I will use photography, print, and film. This display will highlight artists care and love for land, through the use of these non-invasive land-art-people collaborations, not as an argument, but as insight and education.

### **3.2 Artworks on Display**

This exhibition will be held at Strange Field Art Centre in Glasgow. On display throughout the interior of the gallery will be the following nine artworks. No artwork will be on display around the outside of the building as not to disrupt the natural goings on and ecosystems of the land surrounding the gallery. Each artwork was carefully picked for each location in the space to fit size, lighting, and intended flow and intimacy of the exhibition. This exhibition aims to highlight lesser-known artists and give a platform to both the artists and their ecological practice. The minimal artists exhibited highlights the rarity of the use of non-invasive nature-collaborative methods and thus seeks to inspire new artists to fill this gap.

**Figure 1:**



'Nearing its Next Great Movement' Calum Wallis, 2m x 2m,  
charcoal and graphite on canvas

The First artwork on Display will be 'Nearing its Next Great Movement' by Calum Wallis (2025). This artwork was created in collaboration with and in response to the geological landscape of the Isle of Eigg, in Scotland. While depicting the scene of a cliff face of corroding rock, Wallis creates a narrative in this artwork, connecting him and the land, "a place where I felt the land was ready to tip over and where I could feel the tension of weight and time acting upon a place," (Wallis, 2025). He uses small, delicate marks to express the feeling of movement within the drawing, as well as his emotional influence. Not only does he immerse himself in the land, but he immerses the artwork too, "I wanted to make a drawing that had lived and breathed the landscape before being brought indoors," (Wallis, 2025). Stretching the canvas outside in the landscape of Eigg to make this drawing, Wallis has allowed the elements of this area (wind, rain, mud) to influence the piece directly, collaborating with the environment without using the land as a physical material (Wallis, 2025). This use of environmental and personal influence in this artwork is vital to the connection to ecological art and nature connectedness.

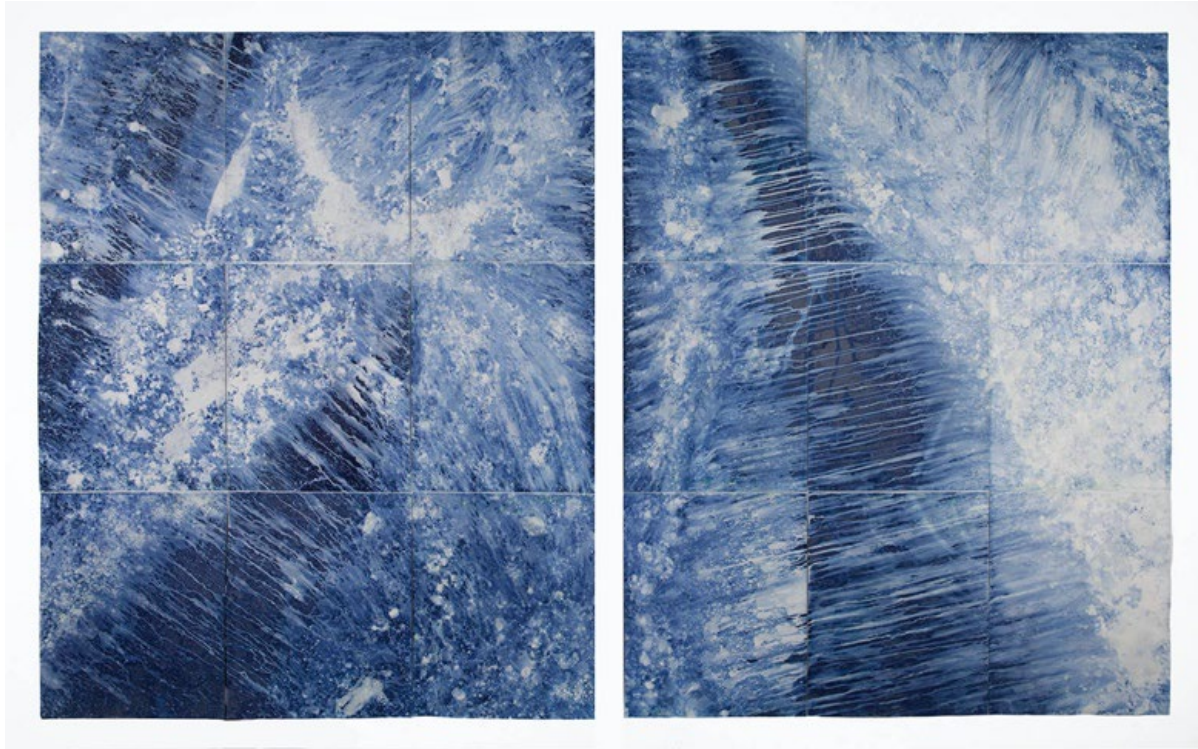
**Figure 2:**



‘Warm Ice Cold Hands’ Jonathan Kay, photogram from Huapapa/Tasman glacial ice on archival fibre, dimensions unknown

The second artwork on display will be ‘Warm Ice Cold Hands’ by Jonathan Kay (2023). Kay works with alternative photography to explore and represent territories of landscape that are less accessible to humans yet still critical to the human-environment relationship. This series was created in collaboration with the Huapapa and Tasman glaciers in New Zealand. Similarly to Wallis, Kay is interested in the changing of land over time. Over the space of 7 years, he regularly visited these two glaciers and analysed and documented the change that’s taken place due to global warming (Coca, 2024). In this series, he has used photograms to directly document the glacial environment. He has placed light sensitive paper directly onto the glacier to collaborate with the textures and flow of its surface, without taking from or damaging the ice (Kay, 2023). In using this immersive method of documentation, over a continuous period of time, Kay creates an intimate dialogue between the human (himself as the artist) and the glacier, which highlights the continuous interrelationship between people and the environment, as well as the use of ecological creative collaborations.

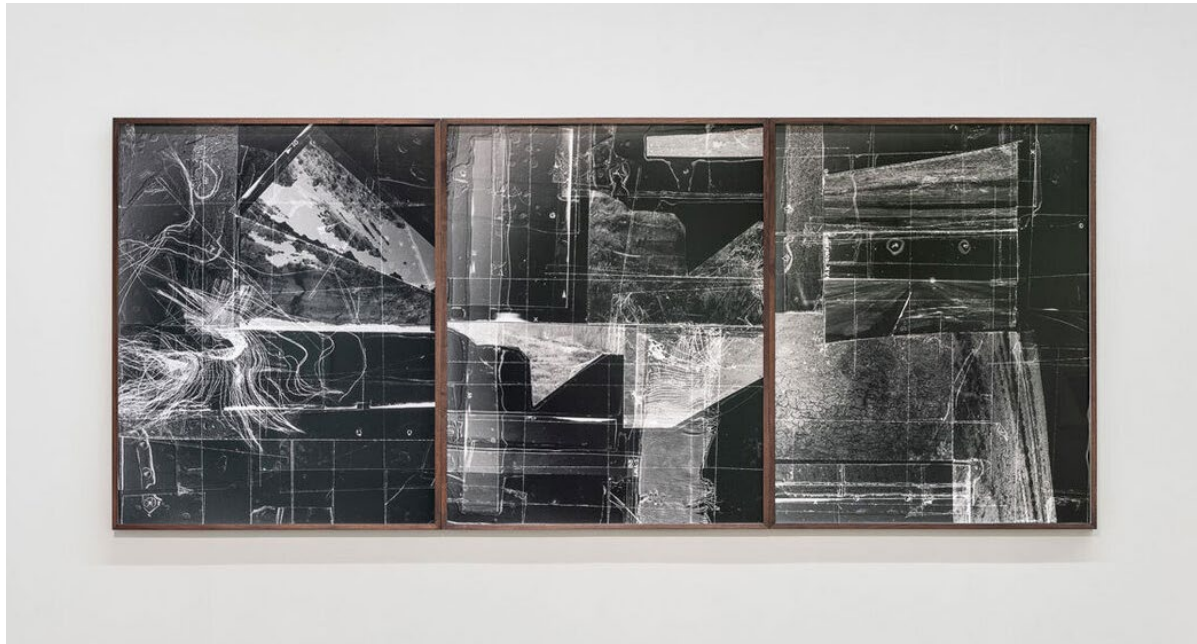
**Figure 3:**



'Ecotone #60' Meghann Riepenhoff, 182cm x 330cm, cyanotype

The third artwork on display will be 'Ecotone #60' by Meghann Riepenhoff (2016). Driven by Riepenhoff's fascination with the relationship between people and landscape, this artwork is part of a large series exploring the concept of an ecotone; the area where multiple biological habitats adjoin. To do so, Riepenhoff has engaged with the natural textures and objects within landscapes to create cyanotype prints that display the distinctions of environments. As well as examining the texture of the land, she has also embraced the natural elements of weather by collaborating with the precipitation, letting the fog, ice, snow, and rain that was present during her visits take over the print (Riepenhoff, 2016). This combination of collaborations with land textures and weather results in this piece "tracing both the built and unbuilt topographies" (Riepenhoff, 2016) without disrupting or using any of those elements as physical materials. The large scale of this piece allows the audience to truly be immersed in the elements of the landscape, just as Riepenhoff was during the process.

**Figure 4:**



**'Critical Zone Bog Study I, II, III'** Catrina Leahy, 300cm x 125cm, gelatine print

The next artwork on display will be 'Critical Zone Bog Study I, II, III' by Catrina Leahy (2020). In this piece Leahy uses analogue photography to explore the peat bogs of the Irish Midlands. After the centuries of industrial extraction of peat from this area in Ireland, peat has now become a limited material. Through the visual survey of this bog, Leahy seeks to highlight the geological unsettlement of this area and the environmental disturbance being caused in Irish landscape (Glucksman, 2025). While approaching the land-human connection from a more social, historical stance, this artwork is still an interesting insight into the intimate interrelationship between the land and the people that live in it. This piece explores the land connection of the people digging and using the peat of this bog, as well as the nature connection of Leahy as a person immersing herself in this land to create the work itself. The land-collaborative method in this piece is the use of manipulated analogue photography. Leahy has worked with the landscape to create photographs that capture its historical essence, then deconstructing the negatives of the photographs to create topographies and new textures, she has created artworks that display this landscape from a range of perspectives

**Figure 5:**



'Untitled' Planetary Intimacies, painted on canvas on map stands,  
dimensions unknown

The next artwork on display will be an untitled series of paintings by Planetary Intimacies (n.d.). The artist behind this work, describing themselves and their ongoing practice as 'Planetary Intimacies,' explores landscapes through immersive painting and artistic research, highlighting the ever-changing aspect of their living. They make a point of being level with land, not superior to it, through the use of a title; "Planetary Intimacies is less about authorship or visibility, and more about a way of approaching the world – an attempt to stand beside something, not above it," (Planetary Intimacies, n.d.). This name is also used to highlight and question the relationship between people and land, "Planetary Intimacies is not a persona, but a position. A position that invites

others to fill in the gaps, and to ask: With what view do I look at the world? And what does this perspective do to me, to society, and to the planet?" (Planetary Intimacies, n.d.). This is a unique commentary on the nature of art and leads the audience to question their relationship with the environment, rather than projecting a narrative onto them.

This series of paintings were created as immersive research to explore the artists fascination with Anthropocene. Collaborating with both land and time, the artist painted 26 sheets of canvas in landscapes over the space of 4 years, capturing the textures of the land and their emotional response to them directly as they were experienced. These paintings are displayed rolled around map stands, allowing the paintings to map the story of those 4 years through a new visual narrative (Planetary Intimacies, n.d.). The use of this immersive practice creates a powerful combination of collaboration with a landscape as well as the artists personal connection to the space.

**Figure 6:**



'Deeptime' Azita Gandjei, photograph on paper, dimensions unknown

Referencing a more traditional form of land-collaboration, the next artwork on display will be 'Deeptime' by Azita Gandjei (n.d.). Through the medium of digital photography, Gandjei explores the relationship between humanity and nature in a mythological, spiritual way. Using the human figure and the textures and shadows of the natural world to blur the lines of separation between land and people, this photograph captures the intimacy between two people and the landscape they are immersed in. The bodies are nestled into each other as well as the hollow in the rock, there's a combined vulnerability of the figures and of the rock degrading around them (Stone, 2025), and the contours of the land fits and forms with the contours of the bodies, to bring them together as one. Although the medium of digital photography and the context of this piece is slightly more traditional in comparison to others in this exhibition, the composition of this image gently, yet powerfully speaks to the interconnection between land and the human body, allowing the viewer to see nature "not merely as a backdrop but as an active participant in the human story" (Gandjei, n.d.).

**Figure 7 and 8:**



'A Place to Grow' and 'A Place That Forms' Niamh McGoldrick-McGrath, 150cm x 200cm and 200cm x 210cm, cyanotype and thread on cotton

The next two artworks on display will be 'A Place That Forms' and 'A Place to Grow' by Niamh McGoldrick-McGrath (2025). Driven by McGoldrick-McGrath's personal relationship with land, this series presents her journey through landscapes in Scotland, using environmentally reactive mediums to collaborate with both the land and her body. She lays in the land, curled up into foetal positions, allowing the environment to leave its imprint on herself as well as the artwork, as the cyanotype she lays on reacts to the light and weather of the area. Using embroidery to engage with the topography of the landscape visited, she fits her figure into gaps in land to consider how the contours shape and interact with her figure (McGoldrick-McGrath, 2025). The use of foetal positions and topography in these works is an interesting depiction of the land forming and influencing who people are, with reference to "mother nature." The combination of this concept along with the use of cyanotype in the environment creates a powerful dynamic between ecology, land, human body and identity.

**Figure 9:**



'Moor' Dalziel and Scullion, film

The final artwork on display will be 'Moor' by Dalziel and Scullion (2024). This is a film that explores the nature of the land surrounding Mealaisbhal, a mountain on the Isle of Lewis, Scotland. Cutting between the view of an observer and the view from above, this film examines how the land has been shaped by geological forces and human activity over periods of time (Dalziel and Scullion, 2024). Following the subtle narrative of an onlooker, we see an intimate view of ecosystems within the land from plants to bugs to deer. At various moments throughout the film, the camera zooms out to a drone shot panning over the land and under the sky, which highlights the vastness and all-consuming feeling of the environment. This film also focuses on the wildlife of animals, not just the land, as it is important to explore the area for all that it is, presenting this rural environment from a range of perspectives. Dalziel and Scullion (2024) present the viewer with a real depiction of the human-environment relationship through the eyes of someone in the land and the observation of the human effect on this landscape.

### 3.3 Exhibition Layout

In order to visualise the exhibition, I have created images of the intended layout of each artwork within the space of Strange Field warehouse. The majority of the artworks will be laid out across the walls of the venue, while Ecotone #60 (Riepenhoff, 2016) will be hung from the ceiling in the middle of the room and Moor (Dalziel and Scullian, 2024) will be projected onto the wall in the back corner.

Figure 10:



Figure 11:



Figure 12:

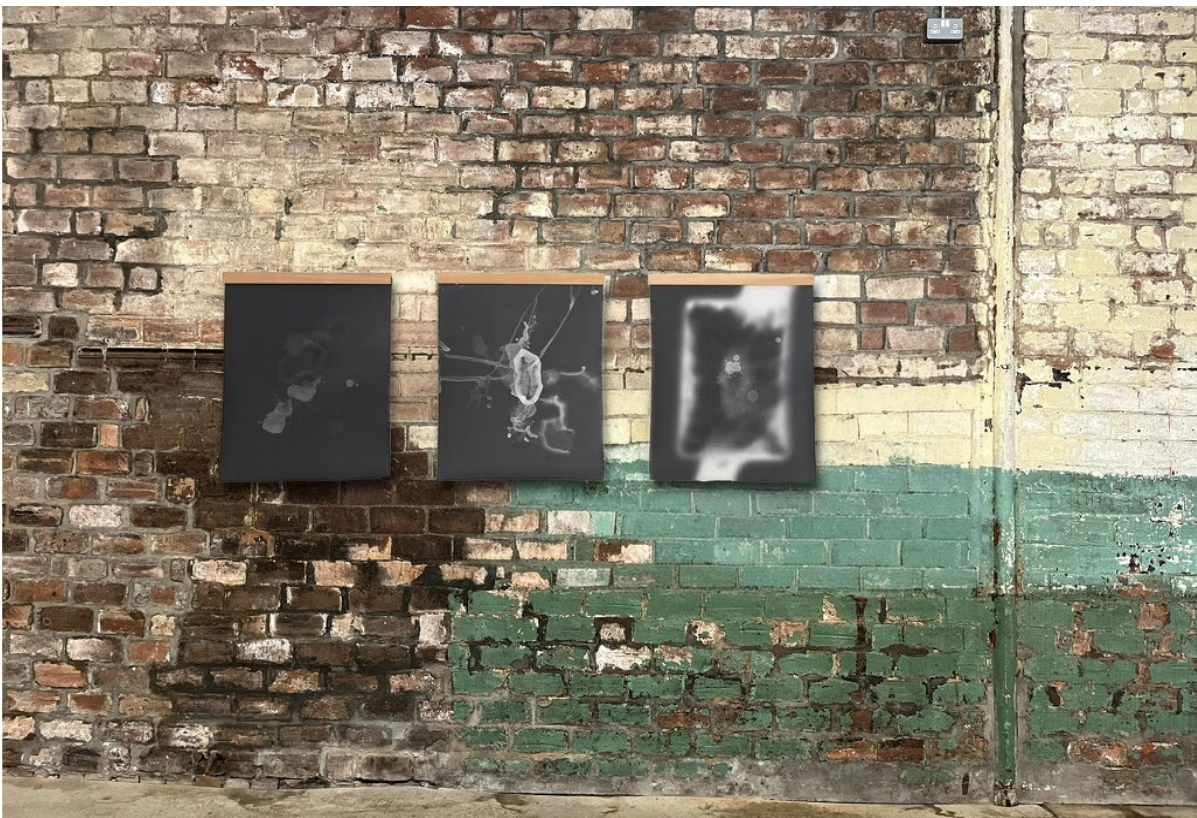


Figure 13:



Figure 14:



**Figure 15:**



**Figure 16:**



Figure 17:



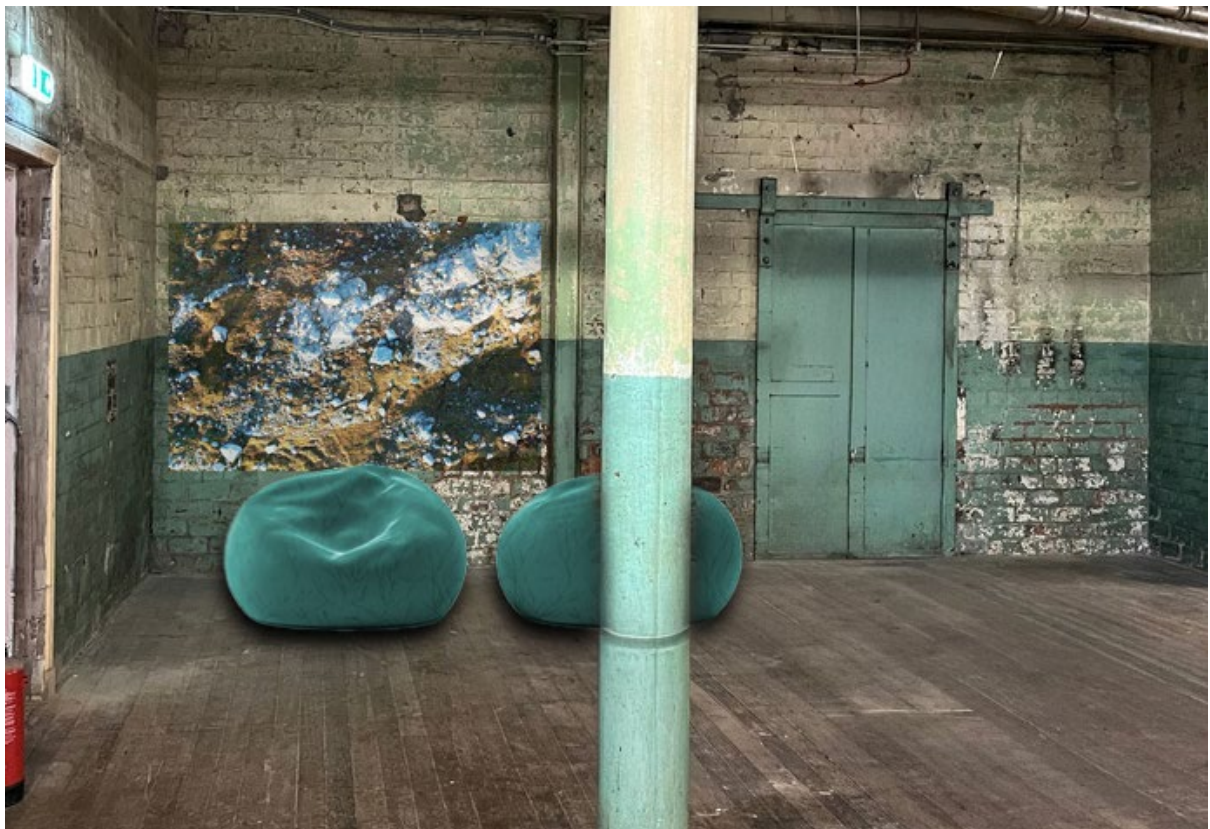
Figure 18:



Figure 19:



Figure 20:



## **Chapter Four: Curatorial Aims**

This chapter will outline the reasons behind my choice of venue and opening events, as well as why these choices are important in order to reach the intended audience.

### **4.1 Choice of Venue and Intended Audience**

There were many factors considered in my process of choosing a fitting venue for this exhibition. Initially I considered holding the exhibition in a remote venue, amongst the hills, that had a focus around ecology. This choice of venue would make sense as the environment within the artworks would blend together with the surrounding landscape, and the regular demographic of the venue and surrounding rural area may be likely to attract an audience of ecological thinkers, who would appreciate and understand the exhibition. However, I have chosen instead to bring this display to an audience who may not be so nature connected and who don't often see or think about art from an ecological perspective. Holding this exhibition at Strange Field warehouse, a venue in the industrial area of Glasgow, allows the concept of non-invasive, ecological art to be reached by people who live in an urban area and may not have a strong relationship with the natural world. I aim for this exhibition to inform a wide audience of the constant interference we have on the environment, how we can feel more connected to land, and how these two things can be represented within art.

Visually, Strange Field warehouse allows each artwork to stand out in contrast to the rough, urban feel of the interior. The floors of the venue are made of wooden board and panelling, and the walls raw, roughly painted brick. This space was originally a weaving factory, built in 1899, and has since been taken over as an arts venue since 2012 (Strange Field, 2018). The warehouse feel of the space has been left to be as it was, it hasn't been taken over and re-furbished to a point that deletes its history. This untouched element of the building was another important factor to my decision, as it mirrors the non-invasive value of leaving an environment be, but in a contrasting urban environment. This parallel yet opposing value of the venue continues to highlight the anti-interferent concept of the exhibition, in a way that may lead audience members to question our collective influence on environments.

Holding this exhibition in a post-industrial site promotes the concept of the restoration of nature. The industrialism of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century Glasgow caused severe environmental damage, as the coal and oil-powered factories created large amounts of carbon emissions and water pollution, which caused harm to both nature and humans (Anderson, 2024). The artworks on display in this exhibition will now exist within the skeleton of the factories that caused so much environmental destruction. In this choice, the exhibition arrives, it's as if the natural world is taking over the remains of the factory, re-claiming the area. As the nature focused artworks emerge from the post-industrial scene, the concept of the site returning to nature appears, which highlights the power and importance of nature in our world.

As an organisation, Strange Field focuses on providing opportunities to underrepresented artists as a means to increase creative development and education within the surrounding community (Strange Field, 2018). A key aim within the curation of this exhibition was to give a platform to underrepresented environmental artists and to educate an urban audience of the ecological issues within the arts. This alignment of values had a significant influence on my choice, as I believe it is important to collaborate with organisations that hold the same values as you, matching the development of the creative vision. The experience of this combined passion should increase the enjoyment and education of this exhibition for visitors.

#### **4.2 Choice of Exhibition Opening Events**

To highlight the ecological influence of this display, I have considered the period of time that this exhibition will open and the educational events that could take place around it. The exhibition will open on World Environment Day, Friday 5<sup>th</sup> June 2026, as a means to draw attention to the environmental subject of the display. World Environment Day is a yearly event, organised by the United Nations, to share information and enact change regarding our environmental impact (World Environment Day, 2025). Previous years focused on problems such as plastic pollution and ecosystem restoration, however, due to the current severity of climate change, World Environment Day 2026 is taking a stronger and wider focus with a theme of 'A Global Call for Climate Action' (World Environment Day, 2025). Through holding the exhibition opening on this day, I hope to inform an urban audience of the

ecological thought behind these artworks as well as the larger problem of climate change within our world.

To add to the ecological influence of the opening day, each artist will give a talk about their artistic practice, in conversation with Italy based ecologist, Riccardo Gaurino. Inspired by his admiration for nature, Gaurino's studies focus on the human exploitation of the planet and the ways in which to change it (Guarino, 2017). Guarino is one of the only people that I have come across that has analysed land art from an ecological perspective and critiqued the methods used within it. Considering this, it felt right to give him the platform to talk about ecology with these eight contemporary environmental artists. This evening of ecological discussion will further provide an urban audience with insight into and education around the human influence on the environment, highlighting the ways in which to have an ecologically creative relationship with nature, as well as giving a platform to these underrepresented artists to speak about their practice.

## **Conclusion:**

Underpinned by the research of two peer reviewed academic journals and one book, as well as research into exhibitions, artists and their creative mediums, this proposal provides an original contribution to knowledge through the analysis of nature connection and ecology in the making of non-invasive art. This exhibition, *Led By Land*, highlights a new perspective on environmental art through the presentation of nine contemporary artworks that use experimental mediums to collaborate with environments without interfering with their nature.

Currently, environmental art has a focus on invasive practice, where artists such as Andy Goldsworthy invade landscapes, moving and manipulating nature to create their own narratives of their 'appreciation' of the environment. This exhibition aims to change a diverse audiences' perspectives on this contradictory practice and highlight the non-interferent ways one can collaborate with nature. The concept of nature connectedness is vital to this change in attitude, as it allows us all to feel more empathy towards our planet and in turn act more ecologically.

*Led by Land* is an essential starting point to wider discussions around the relationship between art and ecology. Through the display of artworks and the conversational events held in Strange Field warehouse, this exhibition will educate and influence a diverse and perhaps lesser informed audience of the interconnection between humans, land and art. In a world where our connection to nature has been diminished, the topic of ecology and nature connection is one that requires more of a spotlight discussion. By giving these underrepresented artists a platform, this exhibition seeks to increase the conversation of ecological art and inspire others to evolve their practice in similar ways to the artists exhibited.

This dissertation has supported and assisted the development of my studio practice through the research of a conceptual framework around ecology in environmental art, as well as a clear understanding and analysis of relevant critical theory, most specifically, 'Sustainable Art Should Not be Installed at Natural Sites' (Guarino, 2025).

This proposal does not provide an answer to environmental problems, its purpose is to spark ecological thinking and conversation, which is the starting point to the co-creation of a harmonious future. This proposal encourages further questions around the making of non-invasive artworks, as it is a field that will require continuous development and encouragement. This proposal has shown the ways that art can react to an environment without harming it, however, future research could focus on how art can directly benefit the natural world.

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