

## **Bringing the arts into socio-ecological research: An analysis of the barriers and opportunities to collaboration across the divide**

### **Academic and Freelance artist Interview transcript**

Always moving forward, not repeating things.

Interviewee presents a powerpoint of work to us in response to the questions we sent and talked us through their work and collaborations.

Interviewee's artistic practice is about contemplating nature  
Working with scientists – research based art making in 4 stages  
1996-2005 living and working in the US, started with two projects that flowed one from the other.

The first project was in post-industrial area  
a small stream, contaminated  
working on plant identification and memorising the flora – learning new plants as not from this area of US (from San Francisco)  
initially began with 3 artists and a lawyer  
Interviewee's partner explored water quality  
Interviewee explored, plants and soil quality, and working with children  
Interviewee worked with a botanist  
Interviewee guided the botanist through the project  
There were many community dialogues with experts. Organic workshops  
At the end of this project [4 years], did planning with communities and experts – ecological ideas and built environment ideas  
community choosing which is best for them  
funding for the first project came from xxx company  
Then raised additional money for 3 exhibitions, 1 in school and one downtown.  
At the time, this way of working was very new. Interviewee's partner travelled and presented this work internationally, including UK.

They held an eco-vention – and being in a museum [as opposed to a gallery] enabled the exhibiting of live plants.

Then interviewee did the second project  
A shallower study due to the expanse of location - study area - and river flows  
They had a boat and worked along scientists who did things like water quality research  
Community dialogue was a key thing. Every year they held many workshops  
Planning with communities  
Funding from Warhol Foundation  
They had good funding  
Able to include international and local artists  
Two other artists came and stayed and worked for a few weeks

Discussions and presentations

After 5 years an art critic became involved

[This would have raised the profile of the work within an arts context]

Outcome of the second project: A conference and an exhibition

In total, the 2 projects equate to an 8-year project

Throughout this time, interviewee and interviewee's partner were both working as academics in a university.

The university and funders couldn't sustain this long-term project, so it ended, even though it was extremely successful.

Then came to UK 2005. Interviewee's partner took up a post as dean in an art school.

Before leaving the states, they visited pine forests there.

They became fascinated with old pine forests and their ecology.

In UK (Scotland) interviewee began interviewee's PHD.

Worked with partner, a computer scientist and a sound producer

Collaborating - Exploring pine forests in Scotland.

Wanting to learn about the forests in Scotland

Discovered only 4% semi natural forest in Scotland

They questioned: How can forest cover be enhanced? Not just a plantations

Around this time, they met xxx social scientist who read the interviewee's PHD

Then they started working with the social scientist and his team.

The social scientist has made an effort to understand art, but he appears to be quite unique with regard to this.

Through this connection with the social scientist and his organisation, they began working with GIS.

Made a map of Scotland with Gaelic names

They planted of native plants spelling out Gaelic words

Interviewee wanted to understand the nature. Science a great help to understand nature systems.

That's why interviewee did a PHD

There is empathy in the arts

Interviewee's PhD became interviewee's practice

Spending time with philosophers

Human futures, climate change focused

Xxx artists - aesthetics

Animal behaviour and welfare

This became very important

The philosophers helped shaped interviewee's brain

Questioning: how can we shift our perspective from human activities in the foreground to more than human in the foreground – climate and biodiversity focused?

Working with their horse using GPS to understand how their horse moves in the night and when they are not there

The horse loves eating ash leaves and eats different plants in different seasons

Is he, do horses, combine food for different nutrients?

Began noticing their horses wild food choices and thinking of him as an animal botanist [knowing the plants]

And what he is looking at?

What catches his eye?

You know when an animal is content – why do we understand that?

Language – what is the horse's language.

Body language?

We [artists working with the sciences and philosophy] become like an island – the art-world sees too much science in our work. They question where the art is

The scientists aren't openly working with us

We are an island

yet

It is our job to stretch peoples' boundaries

That's what we do and need to keep doing

If the public has a language to talk about the plants and the animals and the water, how will this change the planning and top down decision making?

Through working with artists who work with scientists, little by little communities are able to understand and express

Following science giants and experts as protocol

Artists pull together things like an exhibition

We all learn something

It's a relationship

Building the relationship is essential

Just pulling people together is hard as there needs to be a relationship

It's important to spend as much time together as possible – in a social way

We all work so hard and we end up spending two, three times as much time on a project than was initially anticipated. We want to be in it and attend the meetings

Accesses science papers [published in journals that need a hefty subscription] through contacts and connections

Scientists make hypothesis, but living things go beyond hypothesis. We need many, many, different ways of knowing to fully understand

It's not just science we need

Scientists can be really good teachers – objective

But their stories about little creatures can be amazing. Loves spending time like this:  
hearing their stories [the things that don't go into papers]

Changing perspectives, for example, time: an archaeologist works with a huge time  
frame, an invasion ecologist thinks in shorter timeframes.

The arts world can sometimes seem very narrow.

Working with scientists and philosophers is exciting and interviewee will continue to  
work in this way. Interviewee doesn't, personally, need funding to do this.