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NATURE & EMOTION

Reorienting towards nature with new narratives of Life-Centred Design

TACKLING THE URGENT CHALLENGES OF INDIVIDUAL, SOCIAL AND PLANETARY HEALTH TAKES WORKING ACROSS MANY BOUNDARIES TO FIND NEW SOLUTIONS.

In these times of increasing stress, can new forms of natural, social and emotional infrastructures address the urban challenges of today?

Biophilic paintings and essay by Natasha Reid - matter . space . soul (Design for Wellbeing)

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The theory of Biophilia is based on our affinity for the natural world and its benefits for mental health, wellbeing and happiness. It highlights how ecology is fundamental to our lives. Not least, for our survival in the face of the climate emergency.

Tackling the urgent challenges of individual, social and planetary health takes working across many boundaries to find new solutions.

So, the Nature and Emotion concept explores how the arts and culture can play a key role in multidisciplinary innovation and community empowerment across these complex issues.

How we can create new narratives around nature, and the role that emotion can play in moving towards new shared mindset shifts. Ones which address the health of both people and planet together. After all, we are nature.

LIFE-CENTRED DESIGN

Current models of thinking and systems are breaking.

We are on track to exceed our planetary boundaries and the drastic effects of climate change are already apparent in our daily lives and extreme events around the world.

Measuring success through GDP and economic growth at any cost has been questioned in many places.

But moving to a wellbeing-led economy in the UK represents a seismic shift. And deeply entrenched social inequalities are yet to be uprooted.

We need new systems and models of living that can deal in human, social and ecological wellbeing alongside commercial metrics.

CHANGING WHAT WE VALUE

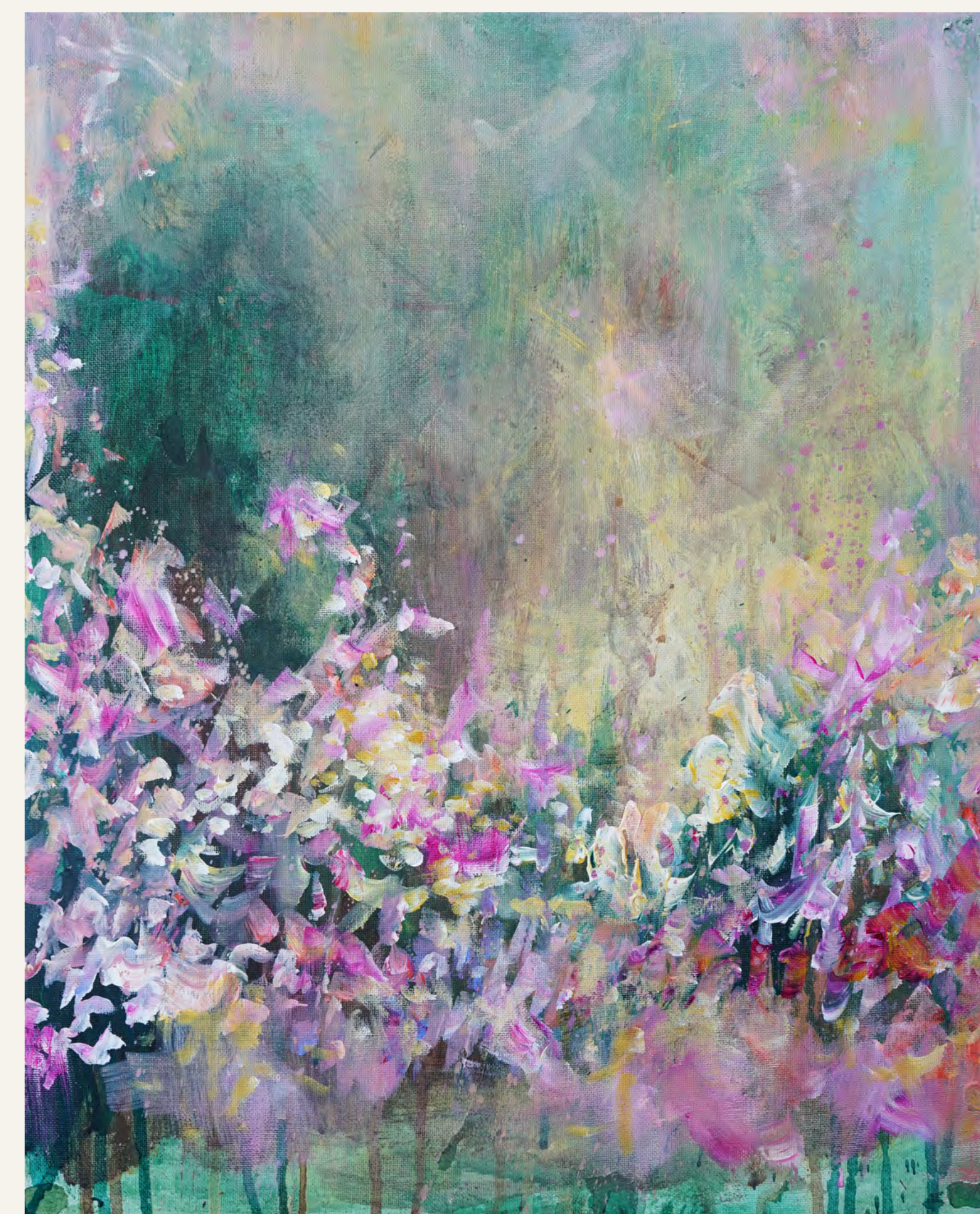
But for this step-change to happen, we need new shared understandings. Ones that place value on what is important.

Because what is not valued is not prioritised.

So there must be a mindset shift. Our perception of ourselves as separate to nature doesn't make sense.

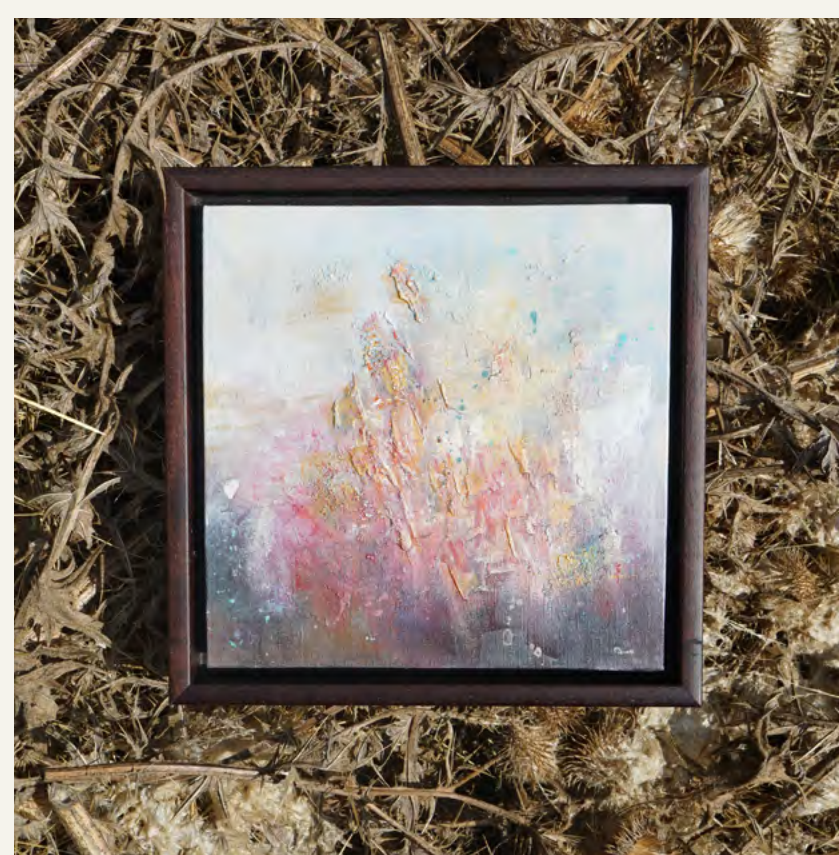
Indigenous practices have long seen our place as simply one part of a larger, interconnected system. But today we need to find a new balance.

Putting humanity back into nature's workings. Reconnecting us with ourselves and our needs - like happiness and health. And seeing the intersections of nature, community and social value as vital civic infrastructure for us all.



"The images of the Nature and Emotion paintings are shown juxtaposed with the effects of this summer's heatwave in the UK, laying in dying vegetation."

Contrasting aesthetic beauty with the immediacy of the damage being done to the natural world, our own habitat."



3 STRANDS FOR LIFE-CENTRED DESIGN

1. NEW NARRATIVES & COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

A mindset shift across "design" means not only the design of places, but of systems, policies, business models and more. Considering the hardware and the software of places together.

Often we see the beauty of the arts as bringing more harmony, healing and joy into people's lives. But it can go beyond this.

The arts can make it possible to see things differently. There is the power to express concepts and draw together ideas in a way that can be hard to put into words. Like design-thinking - which joins the dots across problems to create new unexpected solutions - cultural practices can offer a space to seed new approaches to the complex issues of these times.

When combined with community, the emotive and connective capacity of the arts can play a pivotal role in shaping new values, perceptions, understandings - and eventually behaviours - to shift towards the new normals so needed today.

2. INTERDISCIPLINARY THINKING

There is great complexity surrounding the place-related factors affecting people's health, wellbeing and quality of life. The issues are interdisciplinary and interconnected; from understanding impacts on mental health, to creating a sense of community or how spatial inequalities links to deprivation.

The conditions in the places where people live, learn, work, and play form the building blocks of health and quality of life - as described through the Social Determinants of Health. But currently research does not translate into practice.

New narratives can help bridge the gap, and create a space for joined up thinking. With greater shared understanding, more insights can be brought together from neuroscience, social sciences, psychology, anthropology and many more human/nature focused disciplines, to feed into the design of the built environment.

Creating space for new approaches that cut across sectors to consider outcomes for people, place and planet together as one agenda.

3. EMOTION, EMPATHY, COMMUNITY & NATURE

"People experience places emotionally" Quality of Life Foundation Measuring Success - Social Value roundtable 2022.

Emotion is not a usual subject matter for built environment discussions. Yet it is the medium through which we experience our surroundings.

So emotion and empathy can be lenses through which to create our surroundings differently. A more relationship-based approach addresses how to better create outcomes for individuals, communities and places, through the process of change. The intangible qualities of places can form the basis for new metrics of success.

What could our cities, neighbourhoods, homes, workplaces and community spaces be like if they were shaped based on people's emotional, psychological and social needs?

Can new natural, emotional and social infrastructures be created holistically to catalyse change?

"PEOPLE EXPERIENCE PLACES EMOTIONALLY"

Quality of Life Foundation, Measuring Success - A social value roundtable 2022.

