

CURATING AS STORYTELLING FOR RURAL ARTS AND NATURE:

**INTERNATIONAL LESSONS IN
CONNECTION AND REPAIR**

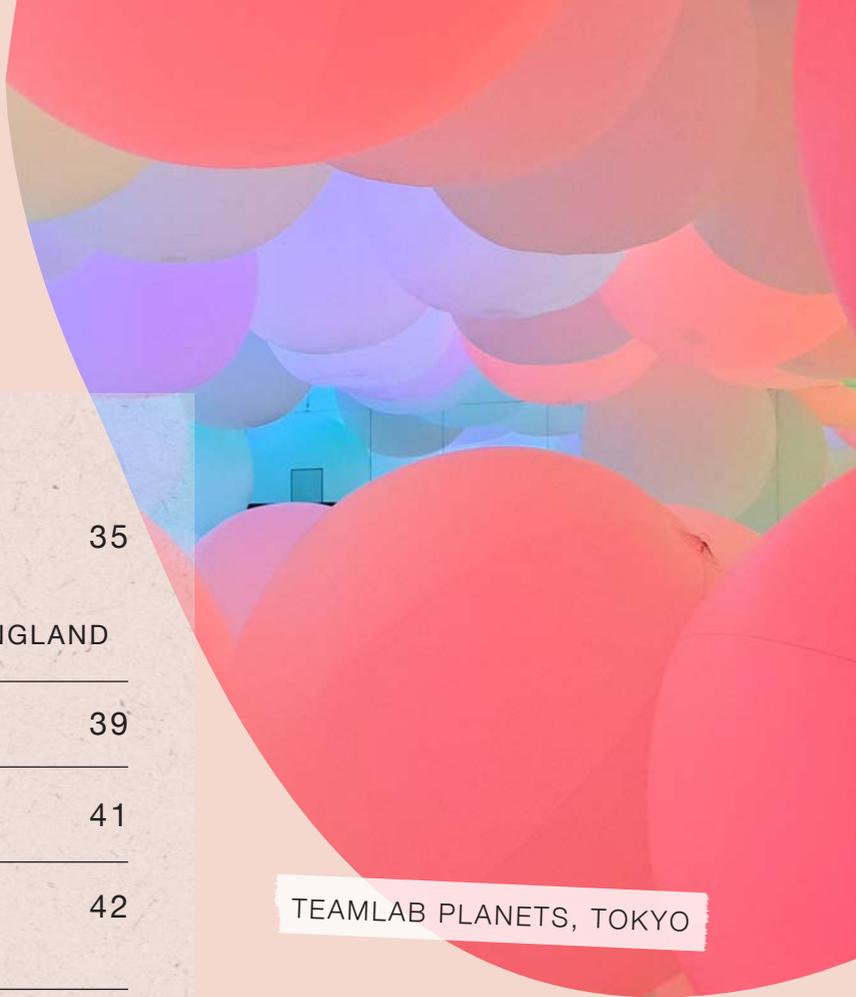
**the
CHURCHILL
fellowship**



HAZEL STONE
2025 CHURCHILL FELLOW

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TEAMLAB PLANETS, TOKYO



OLAFUR ELIASSON, VIEWING MACHINE, 2001/2003

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Churchill Fellowship distils practical lessons from Finland and Japan on how contemporary art in rural environments can deepen connection with nature, foster cohesion and belonging, and encourage environmental stewardship. It complements Forestry England's ambitions and successes in the area of forest resilience and nature recovery efforts. This offers curatorial opportunities that help people understand - and feel part of - environmental solutions.

Across all locations, several shared themes emerged:

- Art as storytelling and repair, making visible the intertwined histories of land, labour, memory and ecology.
- Slow travel as a structuring principle, encouraging presence, attunement, and low impact exploration.
- Volunteering and co-making as community building mechanisms that build long-term stewardship and shared ownership.
- Material sensitivity, whether through reversible builds, low impact structures, or artworks that use natural processes (light, water, wind) as active collaborators.
- Curatorial responsibility, centred on care, context, and place-specific ecological considerations. These lessons reinforce the potential for rural art programmes to create lasting cultural, environmental, and wellbeing benefits when thoughtfully designed.



CONTEXT

WHY NOW?

Forestry England is England's largest land manager, caring for over 1,500 woods and forests across the country - landscapes where decisions influence ecological, social and cultural futures for generations. England's forests are under growing pressure from climate change, biodiversity loss, and rising pest and disease threats - risks identified in Forestry England's 2025 Forest Resilience Strategy, which sets out the principles of **Assess, Diversify, Restore** as essential for securing the nation's woodlands.

At the same time, national research shows a marked **decline in people's connection with nature**, driven by urbanisation, reduced daily encounters with wildlife, and weakened intergenerational transmission of nature experiences. This cultural shift contributes to an emerging "**extinction of experience**", with young people displaying the lowest levels of nature connectedness.

Extinction of Experience was a term first coined by Robert Pyle (1978) and refers to the decline in direct, daily and meaningful interactions with nature. These trends have consequences for ecological literacy and for people's capacity to understand and respond to environmental change.

In this context, contemporary art offers powerful means to rebuild sensory, emotional and imaginative relationships with the natural world - reducing barriers to engagement and surfacing the local histories and identities that shape England's living landscapes.

MUROU ART FOREST



WHAT WAS STUDIED?

This research enabled me to connect with the strong arts heritage and contemporary thinking happening across a number of organisations including: Helsinki Biennial, Setouchi Triennale, Benesse Art Site Naoshima, Echigo Tsumari Art Triennale, Murou Art Forest and Aichi Triennale, alongside organisations such as Frame Contemporary Art Finland, HIAP Helsinki International Artist Programme, Bioart Society, Photo North, Mustarinda, teamLab Tokyo and the Finnish Institute.

SISSSEL M BERGH: HOVREN GÆTIE
(SKY SKIN), 2022. HELSINKI BIENNIAL
HAM HELSINKI ART MUSEUM



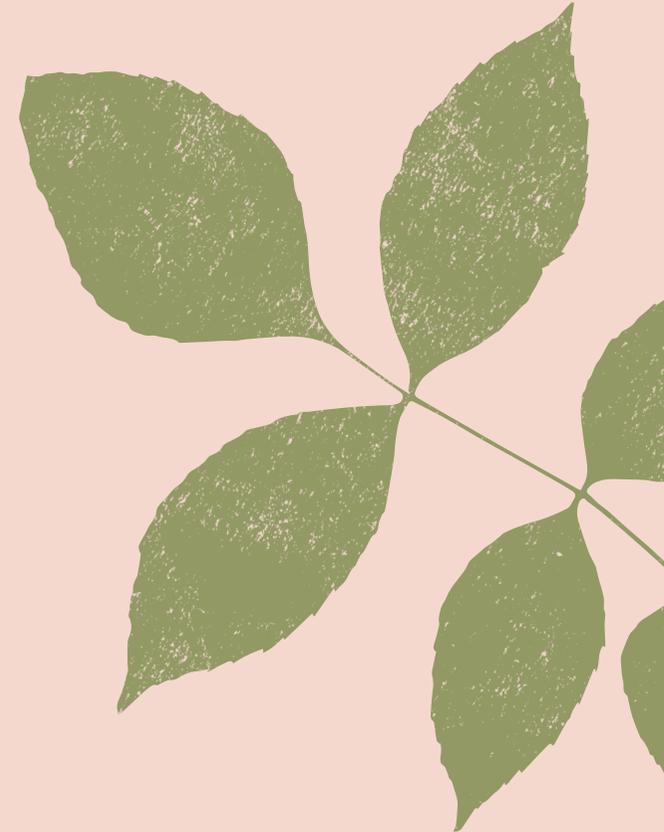
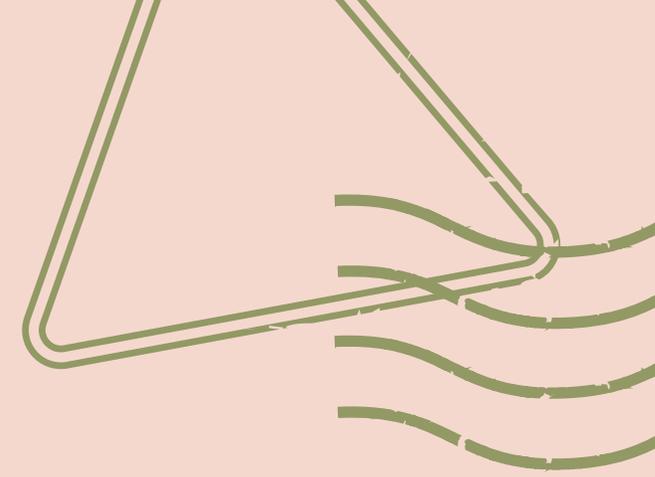
KEY INSIGHTS

Curation as storytelling; contemporary art as an actor for rural resilience, local growth and environmental awareness; volunteer strategies and co-production; and thematic programming across sites and time to build cultural awareness, cultural tourism and opportunities that address challenging histories and environmental degradation.

SELECTING PLACES

This Fellowship provided an opportunity to widen my networks, and create a strategic itinerary that made the most of the hugely strong arts heritage that fosters public understanding of connecting with nature. The timing allowed me to experience some of the largest and most ambitious contemporary art festivals. Japan and Finland were selected because they each hold deep, long-standing cultural relationships with forests, land stewardship and rural ways of knowing.

Both have developed **distinctive contemporary art ecologies** in which artists, communities and landscapes are closely intertwined, though shaped by different historical trajectories. These differences made them ideal for comparative learning.



JAPAN

In Japan, rural contemporary art has, over the past 25 years, become a catalyst for revitalising depopulated and ageing communities, particularly through large-scale, multi-site events such as the **Echigo Tsumari Art Triennale** and the **Setouchi Triennale**. These festivals intentionally activate remote islands and mountain villages, dispersing visitors along slow travel routes and embedding artworks within everyday life - abandoned buildings, agricultural terraces and maritime coastlines. The result is a model in which contemporary art acts as a form of **place repair**, reconnecting people with heritage craft, intergenerational stories, rural knowledge systems and environmental rhythms.

FINLAND

In Finland, organisations such as the **Bioart Society** have developed models in which art, science and ecology are interdependent rather than separate domains. Their programmes emphasise subarctic fieldwork, community dialogue, slow research and multi-species attention - offering insights into approaches that are materially light, conceptually rigorous and environmentally attentive. Alongside these, **Mustarinda**, an artist research community on the edge of Finland's old growth forests, models post-fossil ways of living through shared practices, ecological care and deep attention to place. Its blend of residency, research and everyday sustainability provides a grounded example of how artistic practice can be entangled with ecological and social transformation.



Choosing Japan and Finland together allowed this Fellowship to explore a broad spectrum of rural arts practice: from large-scale, community engaged revitalisation to intimate, research-led environmental art; from island networks and agricultural heritage to subarctic ecology, post-fossil living and experimental biocultural practice. Both contexts offered rich, grounded examples of how contemporary art can help people reconnect with place, understand ecological change and participate in the repair of landscapes and communities.



FINDINGS FROM FINLAND

HELSINKI BIENNIAL 2025

The 2025 Helsinki Biennial, still in its infancy when compared to more established biennials such as Venice, presented its 3rd edition in 2025 with a total of 37 artists and collectives across three sites - two on the mainland and one on the island of Vallisaari. The curatorial approach was inspired by the unique qualities of Vallisaari and the histories that have shaped it.

On arriving at the island there was a powerful sense of time: past human habitation, its role as a military island, and abandoned buildings slowly being taken over by nature. Because the island is ordinarily closed to the public and only opened for the Biennial, this made visiting the artworks feel even more extraordinary and special.



INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE, ECOLOGICAL THINKING AND NON HUMAN PERSPECTIVES

DATES: 8 JUNE – 21 SEPTEMBER 2025

VENUES: VALLISAARI ISLAND, ESPLANADE PARK,
HAM HELSINKI ART MUSEUM

THEME: SHELTER

Due to the lack of human activity since its military use, Vallisaari now boasts an incredible range of habitats and ecosystems where rare and vulnerable butterflies and moths live, as well as other important plant and animal species. Artworks positioned on the shoreline - such as Danish artist Tue Greenfort's **Limulus Polyphemus Lampisaari (Pond Island)** artwork, a procession of cast concrete horseshoe crabs moving from the water towards the viewer - played with proximity and perception, prompting curiosity about human and more than human relationships. These otherworldly beings are vulnerable to damage to their habitat from human activity.

Further along the small island road, Irish artist **Katie Holten** transformed the island's old firefighting depot into a temporary Forest School for Learning to Be Better Lovers, centred on a typeface drawn from Vallisaari's species. Simple instructions, breathing exercises and guided walks invited visitors into interspecies storytelling, unlearning from traditional language and reconnection with nature.

In the old military defences, Peruvian artist **Ana Teresa Barboza** created *Interwoven Stories* (2025) in the dark, subterranean chambers of the Alexander Battery. Through illustrated textiles, Barboza explores parallel

cultural traditions of Nordic and Amazonian peoples, focusing on relationships with the Yanchama tree and birch. These Indigenous craft lineages are brought together to highlight how geographically distant cultures share similar ways of working with trees - materially weaving identity, environment and ancestral knowledge.

The biennial also featured works engaging with Sámi culture, including **Jenni Laiti** and **Carl Johan Utsi's** moving video *Teardrops of Our Grandmother* (2023). Utsi reflects on reindeer herding in the Jahkamahkke region of Sápmi; images of reindeer moving through the landscape carry a quiet sadness as the narrative reveals how climate change threatens the cold conditions that Sámi livelihoods depend upon. The work conveys beauty and fragility, underscored by Utsi's poignant words:

“ We witness the end of our world every day. The melting glaciers are the teardrops of our grandmother. My people have been here since the last ice age, and when the glaciers are gone, we will be gone too. ”

MUSTARINDA



Mustarinda is an artist-research community located on the edge of Finland's old-growth forests in the Kainuu region of North Finland. The Mustarinda House - an old wooden school building situated on one of the highest summits in the area - stands adjacent to the north east boundary of the **Paljakka Nature Reserve**, surrounded by valuable and in some places untouched old growth forests.

The association was founded in 2009 and is internationally recognised for advancing ecological thinking within the arts. Its activities combine contemporary art, boundary crossing research, practical experimentation, pedagogy and community engagement. Mustarinda explicitly seeks to **promote the ecological rebuilding of society** and strengthen the connection between art, science, and multispecies worlds.

The house itself is part of the pedagogy: it models **post-fossil living**, with renewable energy systems (solar, geothermal heating, compost heating), low carbon logistics, and a working food garden providing material support for residents - offering an embodied rehearsal of how artistic life can be aligned with environmental transition.

Work is grounded both locally and internationally, with residents - artists, writers, researchers, activists, educators - invited to share time, space, and inquiry with one another. The residency's position within a landscape of forests, bogs, wetlands and snow-rich winters deepens attention to ecological forces and material relationships.





ECOTONES AS A 2025 GUIDING THEME

In 2025, Mustarinda introduced a **thematic residency year** centred on **ecotones** - the transitional zones between habitats, where species, materials, and stories overlap and interact. The theme invites practitioners to explore these liminal spaces conceptually, materially, and collaboratively, positioning the residency as a living laboratory for threshold ecologies.

The 2025 theme also links to the preparation of the **Vaara Kainuu Art National Park (ANP)** - a proposed long-term initiative aligning nature preservation, cultural programming and regional development. Residents may contribute to Open House events and wider ecological or cultural conversations as part of ANP's evolving framework.

RESIDENCY CULTURE AND POST-FOSSIL PRACTICE

Mustarinda offers a model of how artistic practice and residency structures can contribute to ecological stewardship not through spectacle, but through **everyday entanglements with place:**

- Living slowly in an off-grid context
- Attending to old-growth forests and local ecosystems
- Engaging in communal work
- Sharing knowledge across cultures and disciplines
- Modelling post-fossil futures in practice rather than theory.

Its relevance to rural arts programming in the UK lies in its commitment to **ecological care + cultural experimentation**, demonstrating how residencies can become catalysts for environmental understanding, rather than merely production spaces.





KATIE HOTLEN

'HOW TO BE BETTER LOVERS', 2025 HELSINKI BIENNIAL



ANA TERESA BARBOZA

'INTERWOVEN STORIES', 2025 HELSINKI BIENNIAL



FINDINGS FROM JAPAN

THE SETOUCHI TRIENNALE AND BENESE ART SITE NAOSHIMA

The **Setouchi Triennale** 2025 was a 107-day event, presented across three seasons and extending across eleven islands. It featured **256 artworks** installed across remote islands and six coastal locations along the Seto Inland Sea. The seasonal structure allows visitors greater flexibility, with different artworks appearing in different seasons and locations. Movement is intentionally slow - ferries, bicycles, buses - and the festival passport provides access and a stamp per artwork, dispersing visitors and motivating exploration.

The visitor experience begins with a boat trip, after which most people travel between artistic sites by electric or non electric bicycle or by

bus, minimising traffic on small, winding island roads. Each island hosts a mix of structures - from beautifully designed buildings that house artworks, to buildings that are artworks, alongside traditional sculptures placed within the landscape.

The Benesse Art Site Naoshima is a long-running art project on Naoshima, Teshima, and Inujima that helped spark and shape the Setouchi Triennale, the region's major contemporary art festival.



LIN SHUEN LONG 'BEYOND THE BORDER - PRAYER' 2025 KOU BEACH, TESHIMA ISLAND

COMMUNITY BUILDS AND TEMPORARY WORKS

While the Seto Islands host several impressive permanent art buildings—many developed through the long-term cultural vision of Benesse Art Site Naoshima—the Triennale also celebrates temporary works made from natural materials. A key example is Wang Wen Chih’s *Embrace* on Shodoshima, created in a village with a long history of rural kabuki and community theatre. This structure - one in a series of ephemeral bamboo works that last around a year - was built through collective volunteer effort, with local residents and visiting participants gathering and preparing materials, supporting construction, and facilitating communication with the artist’s team.

This volunteer culture, known locally as *Koebi-tai*, the “shrimp squad”, reflects a wider local tradition of community collaboration. It sits within a landscape shaped by agricultural heritage, craft histories, and rituals such as *mushiokuri*, and by the island’s identity as “Olive Island,” known for olives, *somen* noodles, soy sauce production, and stone materials.



The Setouchi Triennale has grown significantly since its inception, evolving from early site-specific commissions on Naoshima in the 1990s to a multi island festival launched in 2007 and, by 2025, showcasing 256 artworks across the region. This expansion reflects its ongoing commitment to community participation, rural revitalisation and innovative place-based cultural practice.

Mushiokuri is a traditional Japanese summer ritual in which communities walk through rice fields at sunset carrying torches to symbolically drive away insects and protect crops.

SHODOSHIMA: RURAL COMMUNITY THEATRES AND CHANGING FLOWS OF PEOPLE

Shodoshima's sense of place is shaped by a 300-year tradition of rural kabuki-community run theatres built during the Edo period. The Shikoku Mura stage, originally from Shodoshima, demonstrates hand operated mechanisms and stone tiered seating built "by villagers, for villagers".

Historically, soy sauce exports connected Shodoshima to Kyoto and Osaka, enabling cultural exchange that helped bring kabuki to the island.

As rural demographics declined, flows of people slowed. The Setouchi Triennale now draws new visitors back, and community built works like Taiwanese artist Wang Wen Chih's bamboo structures echo the collaborative ethos of rural theatre - reactivating village routes and spaces.



WANG WEN CHIH, EMBRACE -
SHODOSHIMA 2025



TIME, PLACE AND MODELS OF ENGAGEMENT

Two works by Christian Boltanski featured in the Setouchi Triennale 2025, each offering distinct ways for visitors to engage with memory, presence and the passage of time.



Les Archives du Cœur

La forêt des murmures

Installed on Teshima Island, *La forêt des murmures* (The Forest of Whispers) is described as a living, evolving memorial within the trees. Transparent strips inscribed with the names of loved ones are suspended from small bells, creating an auditory field animated by wind and movement. Participation is central: each person who writes a name contributes to a new collective, intertwining their remembrance with that of others. For Boltanski, the work echoes the idea of pilgrimage - a ritual that honours both the living and the dead, connecting participants, the artist and future viewers through a shared, shifting landscape of memory.

This dark, quietly lit installation brings together audio recordings of visitors' heartbeats. Within the space, a desk and computer allow access to an ever growing archive of heartbeat recordings - each captured in a private room, then stored with the contributor's name, time and location. The resulting collective pulse forms a rhythmic soundscape that activates a flashing light, subtly illuminating the room. Unlike artworks that draw meaning from the specific stories or geographies of a place, here it is the literal rhythms of the people who take part that shape the work. Although *Les Archives du Cœur* can exist anywhere, in Setouchi the act of contributing becomes part of the cultural memory of the islands, grounding the archive within the lived history of the site.

VOLUNTEERING MODELS: KOEBI-TAI

Volunteering is at the heart of the Setouchi Triennale. Koebi-tai, the “little shrimp squad”, is the long-running volunteer organisation that supports preparation and delivery across the islands.

Volunteers undertake activities such as:

- Community builds and installation support
- Seasonal landscape care
- Access and welcome
- Interpretation and storytelling
- Citizen science ecological monitoring
- Digital and archival tasks.

These roles require **over 50 volunteers per day** during festival operation. Koebi-tai members also support the **1,000-day preparation period** leading up to each festival cycle - cleaning abandoned buildings, assisting artists, gathering materials, and maintaining artworks. The organisation thrives on intergenerational participation and builds long-term relationships between artists, residents and volunteers.



MODELS OF ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION

The Setouchi Triennale offers valuable lessons in how thoughtfully designed engagement models can minimise barriers, strengthen community relationships, and spark curiosity about ourselves, each other, and the places we inhabit. Contemporary art becomes a means of connecting across difference – inviting reflection, dialogue and shared experience.

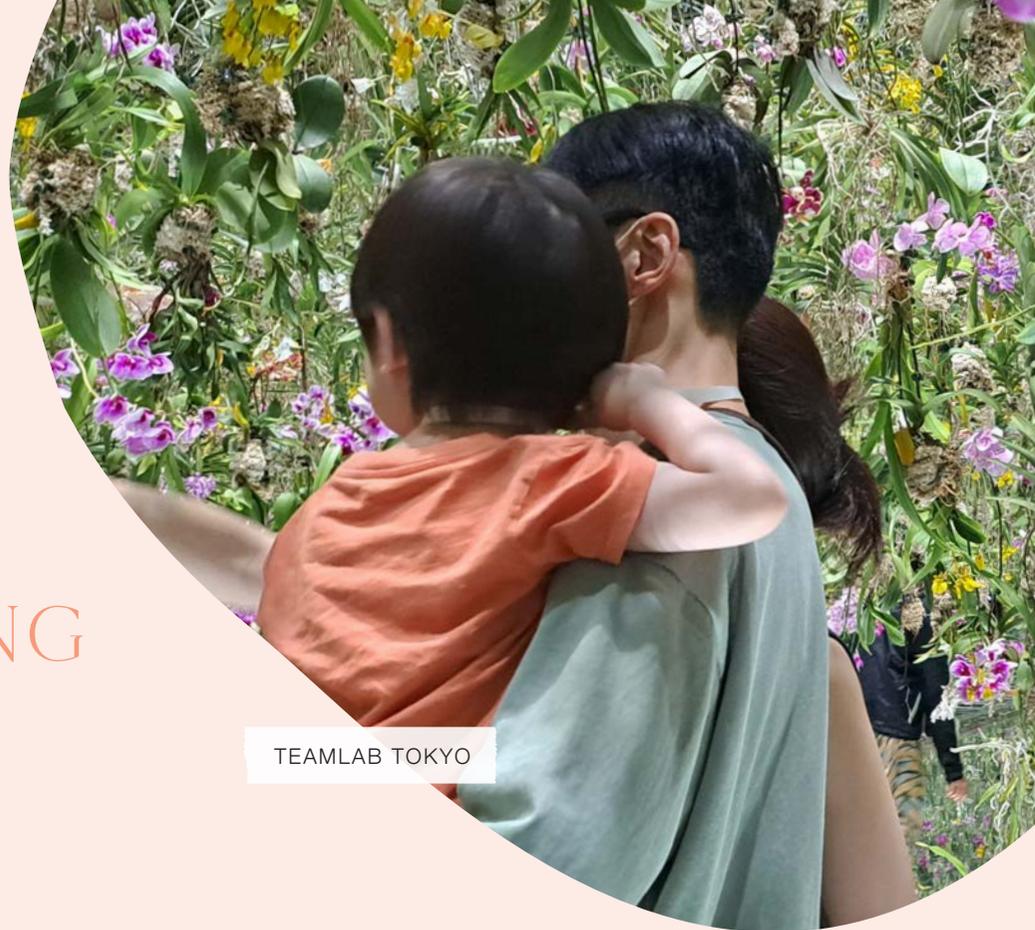
Benesse Art Site Naoshima, which underpins much of the artistic activity in the region, is not a single museum but a long-term, place-based collective of museums, site-specific installations, and outdoor works spread across the islands of Naoshima, Teshima and Inujima. It brings together permanent and evolving artworks embedded in architecture and the natural environment, forming a continuous, living landscape of contemporary art rather than a temporary exhibition programme.

Benesse Art Site Naoshima describes its learning philosophy as rooted in encounters with new ideas, self-awareness inspired through art, and an appreciation of diversity emerging through conversation. These experiences, they note, broaden perspectives and encourage people to question how we live on the planet. Their learning programme distinguishes between artworks that coexist with everyday community life and memory, and those situated within the natural environment. Both categories are understood as catalysts for expanded ways of seeing and being. Alongside on-site workshops and guided programmes, Benesse also offers distance-learning strands. Across all formats, participants are encouraged to interrogate their values and to ask why each experience matters. Young participants in particular are noted for their openness to unfamiliar ideas, their confidence in expressing viewpoints, and their ability to hold differing perspectives. Importantly, the learning programme is designed for people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities.



TECHNOLOGY ENHANCING ACCESSIBILITY

An important example of inclusive practice is the use of the **Ontenna** device, which translates sound into tactile and visual vibration. During Christian Boltanski's installation, students from Kagawa Prefectural School for the Deaf experienced the heartbeat recordings through the device, alongside their peers from the local junior high school. Deaf students described the experience as calming and less intimidating, helping both groups understand the different ways people perceive the world. The device was also used during a visit to the Teshima Art Museum, amplifying the natural soundscape and enabling participants to engage with the site in a heightened sensory way.



TEAMLAB TOKYO



CHRISTIAN BOLTANSKI
LES ARCHIVES DU COEUR, TESHIMA



THE TESHIMA ART MUSEUM - SLOW TIME, WATER AND PRESENCE

The **Teshima Art Museum**, designed by Rie Naito and architect Ryue Nishizawa, is a single sculptural shell situated on the terraced slopes of the Karato area. Shoes are removed on entry, and photography is prohibited - reinforcing the primacy of presence over documentation.

A spherical opening in the roof allows wind, air, rain and birdsong to filter into the space. Water droplets emerge from the floor fed by natural springs which the island is famous for and trickle across the subtly undulating surface, forming temporary pools. Visitors move slowly, following the rhythms of water, weather and light.

The museum is framed by restored rice terraces cultivated as part of public engagement programmes - an example of how contemporary art can sit alongside heritage landscapes without overpowering them.



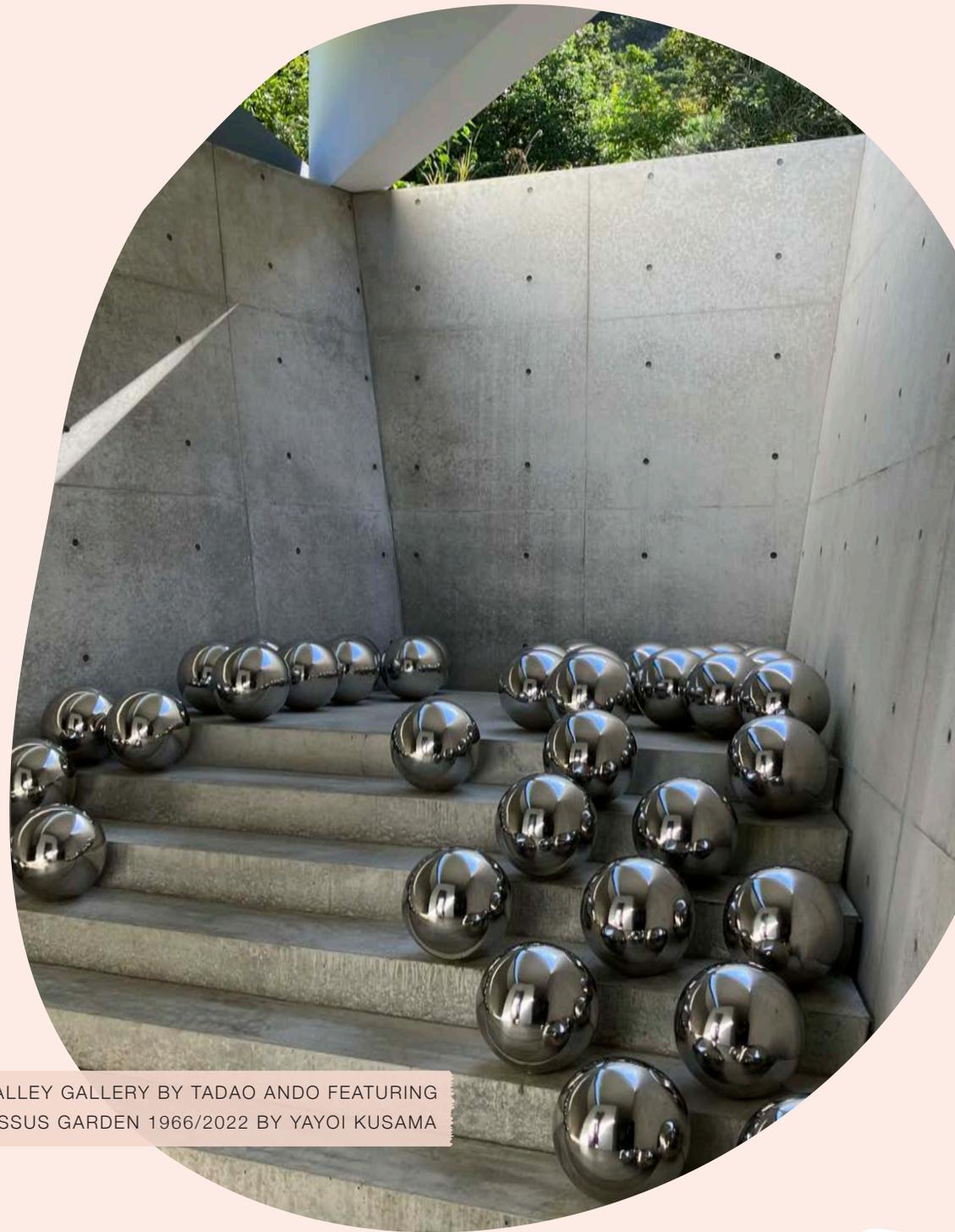
TADAO ANDO'S ARCHITECTURAL WORKS ON NAOSHIMA

Across Naoshima, Tadao Ando's buildings offer stunning examples of how architecture can heighten sensitivity to land, light, and time. These are carefully choreographed spaces in which natural light becomes a material which frames artworks with precision and restraint.

Valley Gallery (2022)

One of Ando's most recent Naoshima projects, Valley Gallery, is a modest geometric structure nestled in a natural valley. It features two angled openings that allow shifting natural light inside, producing a dynamic, ever changing atmosphere.

THE VALLEY GALLERY BY TADAO ANDO FEATURING
NARCISSUS GARDEN 1966/2022 BY YAYOI KUSAMA





YAYOI KUSAMA'S NARCISSUS GARDEN - SILVER SPHERES IN A LIVING LANDSCAPE

Within Valley Gallery and its surrounding water gardens rests **Narcissus Garden**, Kusama's iconic installation of **1,700 mirrored stainless steel spheres**. These reflect sky, land and viewer - multiplying the self in shimmering, distorted forms.

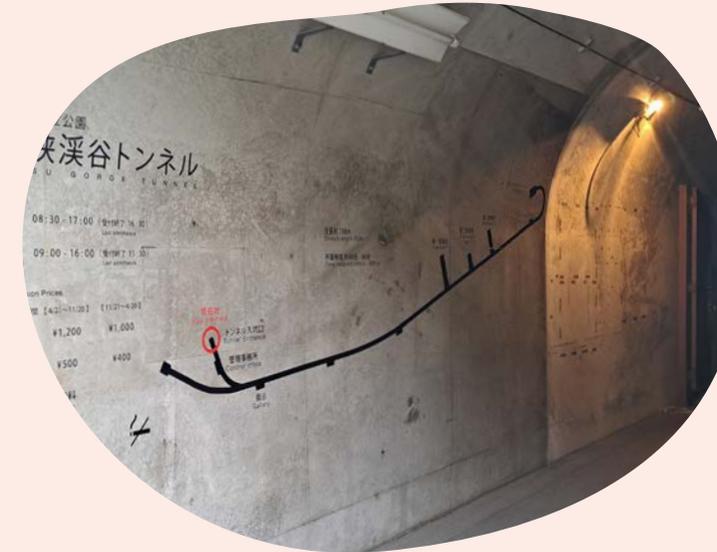
Originally staged at the 1966 Venice Biennale, Kusama's work at Naoshima has found a profoundly fitting context: the wind moves the spheres gently, producing soft metallic chimes, and the surrounding landscape becomes part of the artwork.



ECHIGO TSUMARI ART TRIENNALE

The **Echigo Tsumari Art Triennale** in Niigata Prefecture is one of the most ambitious and influential examples of rural contemporary art practice anywhere in the world. It spans approximately **760 square kilometres** of mountainous terrain - a landscape of terraced rice fields, forests, abandoned schools, empty houses and ageing villages that together form an expansive open air museum.

Founded in **2000** under artistic director **Fram Kitagawa**, the Echigo Tsumari Art Triennale (ETAT) was developed to respond to the acute demographic and social challenges facing the region: **rapid depopulation, extreme winters**, and the long-term effects of natural disasters such as the **2004 Chuetsu earthquake**. Many settlements were losing population, agricultural land was being abandoned and community structures were under strain. The festival asked a radical question:



Could contemporary art play a meaningful role in rural revitalisation and the regeneration of communities at risk of disappearing?



TUNNEL OF LIGHT BY MAD ARCHITECTS 1996



SITE-SPECIFICITY, SATOYAMA, AND ART AS RURAL INFRASTRUCTURE

The ETAT is grounded in the Japanese concept of **sato-yama** - the understanding that humans are part of nature, and that the lived environment is a space of reciprocal shaping between people, land and seasonality. Artworks are chosen and curated to reflect these relationships, emphasising **long-term engagement**, **material sensitivity**, and **site-specific responses** to the social and ecological context of the region.

Rather than being concentrated in a single urban centre, artworks are dispersed across **six regions**: Tokamachi, Kawanishi, Nakasato, Matsushiro, Matsunoyama and Tsunan. These areas are deeply rural, known for their heavy annual snowfall, and the festival requires visitors to **travel slowly** across villages, forests and agricultural land - by shuttle, car, bicycle or on foot.

This networked distribution creates an experience that is as much about movement through landscape as it is about the artworks themselves.

SCALE AND GROWTH OVER TIME

The inaugural Triennale in 2000 featured **153 works by 138 artist groups**, attracting around **162,000 visitors**. Since then, the scale has expanded dramatically.

By the 2018 edition:

- **379 artworks** were presented
- **363 artist groups** from **44 countries** participated
- **Over 548,000 visitors** attended
- **100+ villages** took part (up from 28 in the first edition).

This makes Echigo Tsumari not only one of the largest art festivals in Japan, but one of the most significant rural art ecologies in the world.



COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND STEWARDSHIP

A defining feature of Echigo Tsumari is its **community-led approach:**

- Local residents help host artworks in their **former schools, empty homes and farm buildings.**
- Many artworks are co-produced with villagers, craftspeople and farmers.
- Households and neighbourhood groups support tours, festivals, snow-clearing, and visitor hospitality.
- Pop-up cafés, guest houses and temporary eateries are run by local families, often serving satoyama cuisine.

Where other interventions failed, Echigo Tsumari has shown that cultural practice - when built slowly, sensitively and relationally - can catalyse long-term social resilience.

The festival's impact is not only cultural but also social and economic:

- It has **revitalised vacant buildings**, turning them into museums, cafés and lodgings.
- It provides seasonal and ongoing employment in remote villages.
- It strengthens community pride and intergenerational storytelling.
- It has contributed to stabilising population decline in several settlements.
- It has generated a model widely studied internationally as a pathway for **rural regeneration through art.**



LEARNING FROM THE ECHIGO TSUMARI AND THE SETOUCHI TRIENNALE

Echigo Tsumari and Setouchi offer several insights directly relevant to cultural programming in England's forests:

- **Landscape as a network of experiences:** The festival demonstrates how dispersed rural environments can be unified by narrative, movement and artistic encounter.
- **Deep place-based commissioning:** Artists respond not just to landscape but to community histories, terrains, weather patterns, agricultural practices and memory.
- **Long-term stewardship:** Works often remain in place permanently or seasonally, maintained by local people.
- **Integration of old buildings and working lands:** The reuse of abandoned structures resonates strongly with Forestry England sites where heritage, ecology and public experience intersect.

These festivals stand as mature, globally studied models showing how contemporary art can **reanimate rural landscapes** through community partnership, ecological thinking and sustained cultural vision.

DESIGNING FOR NATURE CONNECTEDNESS

THE FIVE PATHWAYS

Recent research led by the University of Derby identifies **five pathways to nature connectedness** that can reliably enhance people's emotional, cognitive and behavioural relationships with the natural world: **Senses, Emotion, Beauty, Meaning, Compassion.**

These pathways provide a simple but powerful design framework for arts programming within natural landscapes, particularly where the aim is to foster pro-environmental understanding and stewardship.



LUKAS KUHNE HAILOUTO ORGANUM "SCORES FOR VISITORS"

Senses

1

Artworks can heighten sensory perception - sight, sound, touch, smell, and sometimes taste - drawing attention to subtle ecological processes. Works such as the water droplet surface of the **Teshima Art Museum** heighten sensory attunement by slowing the body and sharpening awareness of air, light and water movement.

Emotion

2

Experiences that evoke awe, gratitude or tenderness can deepen emotional connection to place. In the **Helsinki Biennial**, the Sámi film *Teardrops of Our Grandmother* elicited powerful emotional responses by linking climate change to cultural continuity.

THE FIVE PATHWAYS

Beauty

3

Environmental aesthetics - whether the striking geometries of **Ando's Naoshima architecture** or the shimmering light across **Kusama's mirrored spheres** - can immerse visitors in the beauty of natural and built environments, enlivening care and curiosity.

Meaning

4

Ritual, story and seasonal awareness help root works in place. Throughout Setouchi, island histories, agricultural cycles, and intergenerational narratives are embedded in artworks - from **rice terrace planting events** to community maintained theatres.

Compassion

5

Opportunities for action - whether through volunteering, co-making or citizen science - can nurture care for landscapes and their inhabitants. The **Koebi-tai** system exemplifies this pathway, creating a culture of mutual support between volunteers, artists and island residents.

The Five Pathways also have the advantage of offering **measurable outcomes**, through the **Nature Connection Index (NCI)**, enabling arts organisations to track change over time and understand how programming influences ecological awareness and stewardship.

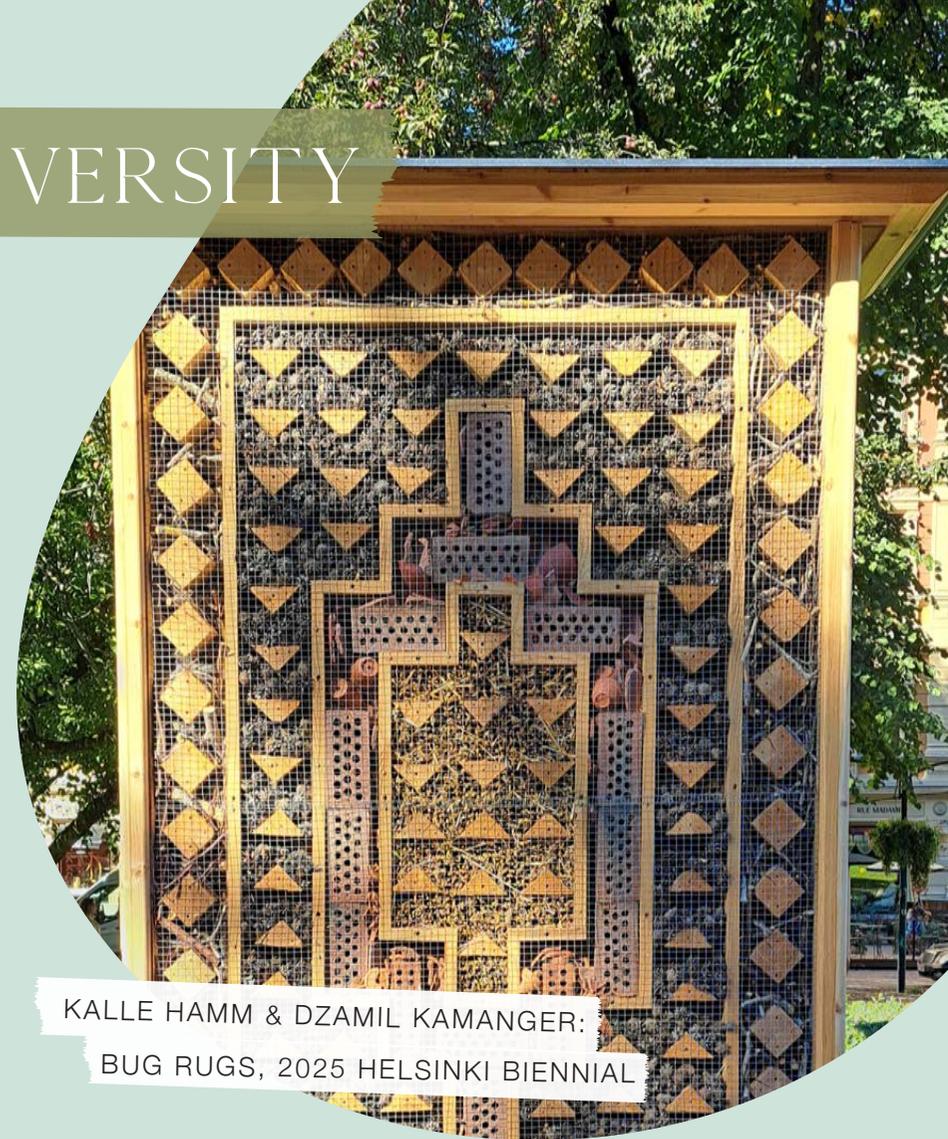
HOW ART SUPPORTS BIODIVERSITY GOALS AND WELLBEING

Across Finland and Japan, numerous examples demonstrate how contemporary art can support biodiversity objectives and public wellbeing in tandem.

Biodiversity and ecological literacy

Art can make ecological processes **visible and legible**, allowing visitors to sense environmental change in new ways:

- The **Vallisaari coastline artworks** illuminate themes of species vulnerability, maritime impacts, and habitat fragility.
- The **Teshima Art Museum**, with its droplets fed by natural springs, reveals micro hydrology and the delicate movement of water across surfaces.
- Agricultural heritage is kept active and relevant through the **rice terraces** surrounding the museum, connecting art with ecological restoration and low impact food production.



KALLE HAMM & DZAMIL KAMANGER:
BUG RUGS, 2025 HELSINKI BIENNIAL

Works that use **biodegradable or reversible materials** - such as **Wang Wen Chih's bamboo structures**, designed to last only 1-1.5 years - provide models for environmentally sensitive construction and deconstruction.

Wellbeing, slowness and embodied experience

Across sites, artworks promote physical and emotional wellbeing by enabling:

- **Slow travel** (ferries, bicycles, island walking routes), encouraging embodied engagement and reducing environmental impact.
- **Sensory immersion**, such as the subtle soundscapes and play of light in Ando's structures, or the mirrored reflections in Kusama's **Narcissus Garden**, which invite introspective contemplation.
- **Co-making and participation**, from community builds in Shodoshima to collaborative volunteer activity in Setouchi.

In these contexts, art operates as a social connector, enabling people to encounter landscapes, stories and each other in ways that build **resilience, pride, and a sense of belonging**.

The combined lessons from Helsinki, Setouchi and Mustarinda reveal how contemporary art can:

- Deepen ecological awareness
- Enhance public wellbeing
- Expand the reach and relevance of rural landscapes
- Support community participation
- Build cultural value in under visited or fragile places.

The next section brings these insights home to England's forests - considering how curatorial strategies, volunteer systems, ecological learning, artist residencies, and slow travel might be adapted to the Public Forest Estate in ways that are **place led, inclusive and future focused**.

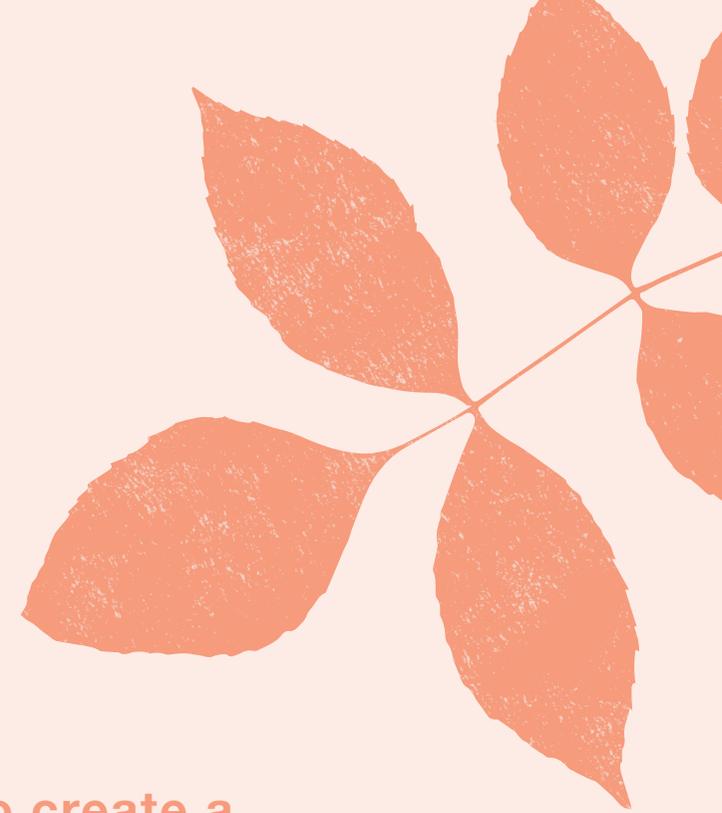
- **Implications for Forestry England**
- **Thematic Clusters**
- **Art in the Nation's Forests Passport**
- **Participation, Commissioning and Success Measures.**

EMBEDDING PARTICIPATION ACROSS COMMISSIONING

Participation should be built into the **design stage**, not added after commissioning. Learning from Koebi-tai, Setouchi's volunteer culture, and Mustarinda's collaborative residency model, shows that participation can include:

- **Open co-creation phases** with local residents
- **Skills ladders** (first time volunteer > experienced steward > paid coordinator)
- **Seasonal volunteer guilds** supporting builds, maintenance and deinstallations
- **Artist-led workshops** to invite community narratives, materials and knowledge
- **Joint authorship** where communities are credited alongside artists
- **Community bursaries** to reduce barriers (travel, food, childcare).

The goal is to create a participatory ecology in which people feel part of something evolving, meaningful and long term.



DEFINING SUCCESS: MEASURES THAT MATTER

Beyond visitor numbers and media coverage, success should be measured through:

1. Nature Connection Index (NCI)

Simple, robust, evidence-based-NCI is ideal for evaluating nature connectedness outcomes.

2. Participation and Inclusion

Track volunteering diversity, skills development, youth engagement, and community leadership.

3. Ecological Indicators

Co-designed with ecologists (soil health, species presence, habitat condition, water retention etc.) - light touch and site appropriate.

4. Stewardship Intentions

Follow-up prompts after visit:

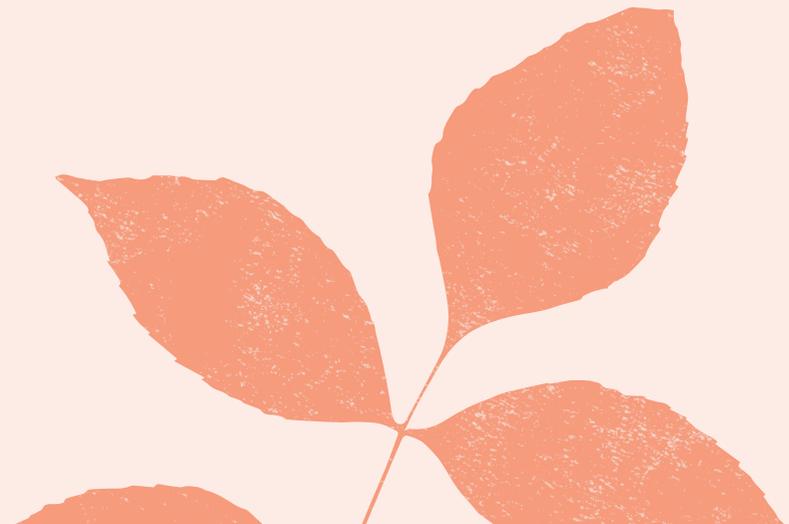
- Have perceptions changed?
- Has behaviour shifted (visits to green space, care actions, volunteering interest)?

5. Creative Passport Model Analytics

Anonymous patterns of movement between sites, dwell-time, cluster popularity, and seasonal return rates.

6. Legacy and Longevity

- Are skills retained locally?
- Are new networks forming?
- Are artworks maintained, adapted, reused, or spawning new community initiatives?



CONCLUSION

This Churchill Fellowship has traced how contemporary art in rural and ecological contexts can strengthen relationships between people and nature. From the island networks of Setouchi to the quiet, elemental practices embedded in the old-growth forests around Mustarinda and the Indigenous ecological thinking of the Helsinki Biennial, each site revealed how the arts can surface deeper imaginative, sensory and emotional understandings of landscape.



DANI KARAVAN, 1998-2006 MUROU ART FOREST,
NARA PREFECTURE JAPAN

NEXT STEPS

Commissioning Frameworks

Adopt multi-season and iterative commissioning that embeds research, prototyping, and reflection. Build briefs that name ecological and cultural contexts as co-producers of the work.

Distributed “Forest Passport” Model

Pilot a participatory “Forest Art Passport” across clusters of woodlands. Each site hosts a work or action with a corresponding stamp, encouraging exploration of lesser-known forests and creating a collectible journey for visitors.

Slow Travel and Itinerary Design

Design routes that promote walking, cycling, and public transport, aligning art encounters with moments of rest and reflection rather than throughout.

Accessibility Toolkits

Co-develop toolkits with Deaf, disabled, and neurodiverse partners - combining tactile maps, captioned audio, haptic devices, and sensory-friendly guidance.

Learning and Community Practice

Embed co-creation with schools, intergenerational groups, and local makers as standard. Support skills exchanges (materials, agriculture, maintenance) that connect artworks to forest livelihoods.



REFLECTIONS ON FORESTRY ENGLAND'S 'GROWING THE FUTURE' STRATEGY

The insights from this Fellowship sit strongly alongside Forestry England's wider ambition to **grow the future**: strengthening ecological resilience, expanding forest habitats, and deepening public relationships with the nation's woodlands. As the organisation continues its long-term work in woodland creation, nature recovery and resilient forest management, there is increased opportunity to integrate **creative, participatory and place-led cultural programming** into this trajectory.

These findings support three reflections relevant to Forestry England's strategic future:

1. Forests as cultural landscapes

The case studies demonstrate how forests and rural environments can be understood not only as ecological systems, but also as cultural terrains shaped by story, ritual, memory, materials and intergenerational labour. Integrating arts and cultural commissioning more intentionally across England's forests can help articulate the complexity and richness of these landscapes, strengthening public understanding of the work that goes into sustaining them.

2. Curatorial approaches that mirror ecological principles

Many international models emphasise vulnerability, seasonality, ephemerality and reversible building - all of which resonate with Forestry England's ecological principles of **Assess, Diversify, Restore**. Art can help surface ecological processes, illuminate resilience strategies, and foster public literacy around threats and change. Temporary or low impact works can sit lightly within forests while still offering deep engagement.

REFLECTIONS ON FORESTRY ENGLAND'S 'GROWING THE FUTURE' STRATEGY

3. Linking flagship forests with nearby smaller woods

Learning from multi-site festivals such as the Setouchi Triennale, there is potential to link larger, well known forests with smaller local woodlands, creating **constellations of cultural experiences**. This structure encourages a sense of journey, pilgrimage and discovery - a way of seeing England's forest estate as a connected landscape rather than discrete destinations and minimising hierarchy of place.

Taken together, these reflections position contemporary art as a strategic pathway in delivering Forestry England's vision of growing the future - by growing ecological care, cultural imagination and long-term public connection to the nation's forests.



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BIOGRAPHY

Hazel Stone is the National Curator of Contemporary Art at Forestry England, with over twenty years' experience leading contemporary arts programming. She has managed one of the UK's largest outdoor art collections, commissioning site-specific sculptures and curating key exhibitions including David Nash: Return to the Forest and The Lumberjill Story. Her practice centres on developing innovative commissioning and co-design models, exemplified through projects such as Digital Forest and Nature Now, and on testing new approaches to audience engagement across rural and natural environments.

She has led national initiatives including the mass participation Faces of Forestry digital project and oversaw the creation of We the Forest, Forestry England's first publication for children aged 8-11. Her wider experience includes work on community opera with blind and partially sighted participants, the development of contemporary arts programmes for young refugees from Eritrea, Sudan and Iraq, and the design of pilot programmes - both in person and online - aimed at widening participation among under-represented communities. She has also taught within higher education, contributing to the development of emerging practitioners.



APPENDIX A: **Glossary of key terms**

Benesse Art Site Naoshima (BASN)

A long-term art, architecture and landscape initiative integrating contemporary art with island life and environmental awareness.

Ecotones

Ecological threshold zones where two ecosystems meet, supporting high biodiversity and complex interactions.

Kabuki

A classical Japanese theatre form known for stylised movement, dramatic acting, expressive makeup and elaborate costumes, often rooted in community heritage.

Koebi-tai

The volunteer “little shrimp squad” supporting the Setouchi Triennale through installation, maintenance, visitor welcome and landscape care.

Mushiokuri

A traditional Japanese summer ritual in which communities walk through rice fields at sunset carrying torches to symbolically drive away insects and protect crops.

Murou Art Forest

A sculpture park in Nara Prefecture, Japan, featuring site-responsive works - most notably by Dani Karavan - that blend art, forest ecology and contemplative pathways.

Nature Connection Index (NCI)

An evidence-based measure assessing emotional, cognitive and behavioural connection to nature.

Antenna

A tactile device translating sound into vibration, enabling Deaf users to perceive soundscapes physically.

Post-fossil Living

A low-carbon lifestyle approach minimising reliance on fossil fuels through renewable energy and ecological practices.

Satoyama

A Japanese concept describing the semi-managed landscapes between villages and mountains, representing a reciprocal human–nature relationship.

Triennale / Biennial

Large-scale art exhibitions held every three or two years that support iterative commissioning and long-term partnerships.

APPENDIX B:

Artists

Ana Teresa Barboza: A Peruvian textile artist blending embroidery, weaving and natural fibres to explore relationships between people, plants and landscapes.

Carl-Johan Utsi: A Sámi filmmaker and reindeer herder documenting the impacts of climate change on Sámi life and winter ecologies.

Christian Boltanski: A French artist known for installations exploring memory, loss, archives and collective remembrance.

Dani Karavan: An Israeli sculptor best known for large-scale environmental and site-specific installations that integrate landscape, memory and architecture.

Jenni Laiti: A Sámi artist and activist addressing Indigenous rights, climate justice and Sámi cultural continuity.

Katie Holten: An Irish artist working with ecological literacy, tree alphabets and activist drawing-based practices.

Lukas Kuhne: A contemporary sculptor known for site-specific works that explore sound, space and human perception.

Rie Naito: A Japanese artist creating contemplative environments that heighten awareness of water, air and light.

Ryue Nishizawa: A Japanese architect whose fluid, landscape-responsive designs shape immersive art experiences such as the Teshima Art Museum.

Tue Greenfort: A Danish artist exploring ecological systems, species interdependence and environmental histories.

Wang Wen-Chih: A Taiwanese artist known for large-scale bamboo structures built collaboratively with local communities.

Yayoi Kusama: A globally influential Japanese artist known for immersive environments, repetition, mirrored forms and explorations of perception.



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