



## **‘Fragile with Attitude’ project video – written description of the content**

The video starts in Westonbirt Arboretum’s Great Oak Hall, light streaming through the windows. It pans around a series of visual artworks created by the Fragile with Attitude Art Shape artists, displayed around the perimeter of the hall.

The video initially zooms in on exhibition curator, Zoe Partington’s, ‘Blue Mist in the Air’ painting. Acrylic paints, freely applied in swirls of greens and blues cover the entire surface of this canvas, which measures approximately 1 metre square. The colours have the intensity of a peacock’s feathers, overpainted with chalky white, moving down to a dark patch of cobalt blue in the lower right-hand corner, so that the lighter colours above appear to hover. Traces of textured brushwork whip up the surface, scratched with fine lines and dizzying circles. The effect is mesmeric. Zoe calls this image “Blue Mist in the Air” but it could equally be the surface of a pond dappled with lily-pads reflecting blue skies above.

The video then pans to Eleanor May’s ‘Helping Hands’ piece; a life-sized felted sculpture of forearms and hands. The arms are upright, in the style of a tree trunk, with the hands opening out at the top, like branches of a tree. At the base of the tree are felted pebbles in shades of grey, some are textured with open weave cotton fabric over the surface. The trunk of the tree (arms) is covered in brown shades of felt, highly textured, like bark. Some of this extends into the pebbles, as roots. At the wrists, the colour of the felt changes to shades of green. The same bark-like texture extends over the palms and backs of the hands. This piece was inspired by a Blue Atlas Cedar within the Arboretum. The shape of the branches reminded Eleanor of arms reaching out, in a gesture of both offering and requesting help and led her to think of the symbiotic relationship between humans and Nature. The piece is highly textured and invites the viewer to explore the many varied textures to be found within the Arboretum.

While Zoe is speaking, the video moves between scenes of the grassy area outside the Great Oak Hall, head shots of Zoe with grass and trees blowing gently in the breeze in the background, and scenes inside the Great Oak Hall showing Zoe talking during our two-day ‘Re-Storying Landscapes for Social Inclusion’ conference, surrounded by the artwork. This includes, for example, an interactive piece by Art Shape artist, Lisa Barnfield; a book with the written invitation on the front cover to ‘Take a leaf out of my book’. For Lisa, her artwork is a form of communication. Inside the book are a series of white leaves, each attached to a label depicting one word. Visitors are invited to choose a leaf and write down something the word evokes for them; they return their note to the book and take home the leaf as a keepsake.

As one of our artists, Sarah Goddard, begins to speak, the video moves between head shots of Sarah speaking with grass and trees in the background, to scenes of Sarah discussing her work with participants at the conference. One of the pieces shown is Sarah’s ‘Keep Off the Paths’ painting; a large landscape-orientation acrylic painting, with an abstract green background covered in stencilled writing in red, orange, yellow and blues. The background is painted in loose dabbed brush-strokes of bright greens, with more yellow marks to represent a map of the paths running through Westonbirt Arboretum. The stencilled text reads: “Keep off the paths” in red. “Get lost for a while” in red. “Wander and Wonder” in orange. “This is your time... .. take it” in yellow. “Look up” in pale purplish-blue. “Look down” in dark blue. “Pause”, “Smell”, “Touch”, “Listen” in pale blue. “Renew, relax, breathe, inhale, exhale” multiple times in smaller font in shades of blues and yellows. This painting was inspired by a desire to encourage visitors not to treat

the Arboretum as a formal garden, where they might be expected to keep to the paths, but rather to get close to the trees, to walk among them and gain as much as possible from the experience of being in nature.

As artist, Chloë of the Midnight Storytellers, begins speaking, the video spans from head shots of Chloë in a vibrant pink cloak, with grass and trees in the background, to clips of Chloë's fantastic 'Twisted Tree' story video being shown on the projector during the conference, and people speaking to Chloë about the story afterwards.

The video then moves back to Sarah, introducing more of her artwork, interspersed with scenes of the Arboretum, with leaves in vibrant greens, reds and pinks on the trees. When Sarah refers to three large MDF pieces in the video, two appear in shot. One with a mix of swirling greens in the background and nine textured materials from the Arboretum in the foreground (set out in a grid-like arrangement), including a pine cone, varied tree barks, conkers and spiky chestnut covers. The other with a mix of blues, whites and wisps of orangey-peach, with the dark red outlines of nine small acer leaves painted over them, again in a grid-like arrangement. It then shows one of Sarah's paintings of the trees with a tree label inviting a conversation with the viewer from the tree's perspective. The video zooms into one label, which says: "Taxus brevifolia. Pacific yew tree. I could poison you as soon as I look at you. But you... lean in close... I'll bear your weight... my roots will take your tears. My taxol could cure you... breathe deep... hope...". The video then zooms into the large painting with stencilling, described above.

Finally, the video comes back to a head shot of Zoe before spanning more scenes of people exploring the artworks during the conference. This includes elements of the snowdrop series – The Many Faces of The Snowdrop – produced by artist, Julia Nigh. The snowdrop quickly became an obvious choice of subject for Julia. As a child, she loved to visit Westonbirt Arboretum with her grandparents and marvelled at the swathes of tiny white blooms that blanketed the woodland floor. The more research Julia did into this tiny plant, the more she saw how it encapsulated everything we have come to understand about the strength of nature. The video also spans a series of visual pieces produced by artist, Naomi Said, which invite the viewer to connect to a world of feeling, spontaneity and exploration, inspired by the natural world. The pieces are a celebration of being in relationship with nature, with our inner child, and our own emotions, as consciously felt experiences that are unique and subjective to us all.

The video closes with a thank you slide, thanking the Economic and Social Research Council Impact Acceleration Account for funding the 'Re-Storying Landscapes for Social Inclusion' project, alongside Art Shape, Forestry England and all the staff and volunteers at Westonbirt, The National Arboretum, who made this project possible.

You can watch the full video here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4tzdm1mwJ3c>