

Title: “Peace of Nature” – A Proposal for A Therapeutic Sculpture Park

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Fig 1

This proposal looks at the creation of a therapeutic sculpture park, entitled ‘Peace of Nature’. It will be set within an area of forest with a lake adjacent. There will be four artists commissioned to create sculptures from all-natural materials, these will be scattered throughout the woodland and waterside setting. Wherever possible the natural materials will be sourced from the immediate surroundings. The aim of the park will be to explore “the Japanese practice of shinrin-yoku (森林浴), translated into English as “forest bathing”. This is the practice of mindfully walking in the environment of a forest for the sake of one’s health.” (Copland, 2017, pg. 15). This will be achieved through an immersive experience of being in the forest searching out the sculptures, physically interacting with them and having the freedom to play with the materials nature has provided.

Traditional or stereotypical exhibition spaces are often sterile, white, and impersonal. There is nothing comforting about them, they feel detached and precious, designed specifically so your focus is on the

individual pieces of work not the surrounding areas. You can't touch anything and engagement with the work happens mostly visually and occasionally audibly. My idea for the sculpture park is very much the opposite of this. The whole concept is designed to be open and welcoming, where you can physically interact with the pieces and explore the woods. The sculptures are part of their environment, constructed from materials found in their locations. Unlike traditional exhibition spaces where the curated space is unobtrusive and secondary to the work, the sculptures in the forest will have a symbiotic relationship with their landscape, not drawing attention away but instead highlighting it. They might draw the eye, frame a view, or invite a closer inspection, to smell, touch or otherwise physically engage with the piece, to consider their construction, the materials they are made from and their relationship to the surroundings.



Fig 2

The aim of this sculpture park is to help people find an escape from the stresses of modern-day life and aid in healing by reconnecting with nature through eco-therapy or “forest bathing”:

Recently, the physiological effects of this practice have been studied scientifically, and biomedical researchers have found significant health benefits, ranging from lowered blood pressure to increased immune cell activity and expression of anticancer proteins.

(Copland, 2017, pg. 15)

Other benefits shown through the many studies conducted on “eco-therapy” include reducing stress and aiding mental recovery. In one study individuals diagnosed with Major Depressive Disorder were reported to show “significant increases in memory span” (Berman, et al., 2012) and mood, after a nature walk relative to an urban walk.

In another study by Roger S. Ulrich from 1972-81, patients “who had a view of the trees had shorter post-operative stays in hospital... and had fewer negative minor post-op experiences requiring medication, such as nausea and headaches” than those with only a view of a brick wall who “required many more painkillers of often potent analgesics as opposed to the other group which typically required weaker oral painkillers.” (1984) even the mere presence of nature in an image yielded positive results in test subjects. (Lunden and Ulrich 1990)

The evidence is empirical, spending time in nature is greatly beneficial to one’s health in a multitude of ways. It is because of this that I am proposing the creation of this sculpture park as a means to raise awareness of the need for spending time in nature, for both physical and mental health; but also, as a way to actively aid in improving health.

The park will allow people to relax, de-stress and breathe easier. Take in the surrounding nature and enjoy the art. I want them to engage with the sculptures. Go inside them, touch them, and change them. This will give people an outlet to express themselves and a way to communicate through art. It can be a tool to help heal or strengthen.



Fig 3

People's individual experiences will be unique with every visit. Being outside means all encounters are affected by elements outside of human control. For example, the weather, the seasons, and the time of day will trigger the senses in ways that will drastically alter how the work and surrounding areas are perceived. The passage of time will also play a big part in the condition of the sculptures. Once created they will be left to gradually change and ultimately decay naturally.

“Movement, change, light, growth, and decay are the lifeblood of nature, the energies that I try to tap through my work. I need the shock of touch, the resistance of place, materials and weather, the earth as my source. Nature is in a state of change and that change is the key to understanding. I want my art to be sensitive and alert to changes in material, season, and weather. Each work grows, stays, decays. Process and decay are implicit. Transience in my work reflects what I find in nature.” (Goldsworthy)



Fig 4

Within the Peace of Nature Park, I intend for there to be up to 16 sculptures, two or more from each artist depending on the complexity and time needed, scattered among the trees and onto the shore of the lake. Half their locations will only be known to the artists and myself to create a sense of adventure for the visitor. Whilst there will be paths leading through the forest, some of the sculptures will not necessarily be visible from them. I will curate it in such a way that people will be invited to engage more directly with nature by exploring greater depths of the woodland before they are able to experience all

the sculptures. “I prefer people might find them by chance.” (Byles). Seating areas will be provided throughout the park to aid periods of rest and contemplation, and to help provide a fully immersive experience.

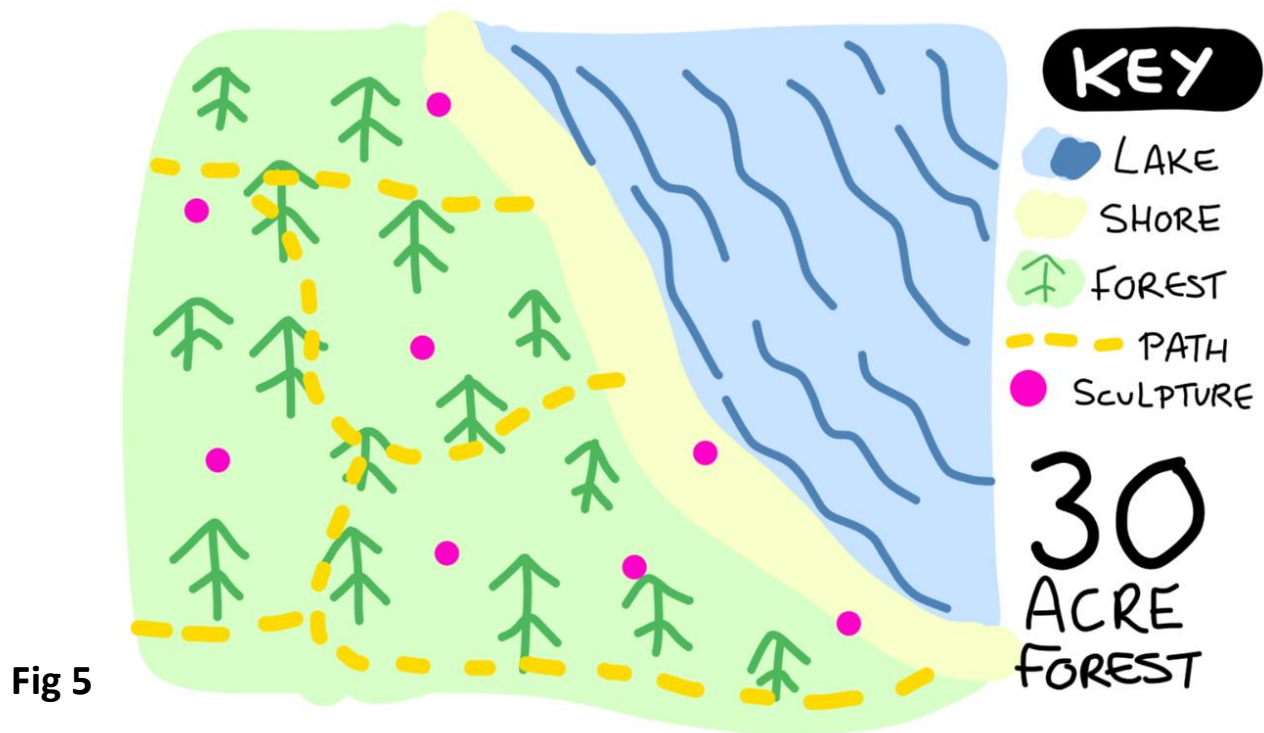


Fig 5

Three of the four artists I propose to commission for this project; Andy Goldsworthy, Spencer Byles, and James Brunt, all work with natural found materials from the landscape to create location-based pieces. These materials might include, but are not limited to, wood, stone, mud, sand, leaves, and grasses.



Fig 6

James Brunt is known for his ephemeral geometric patterns made from materials such as stones and leaves. Often times he creates them in places where they will be washed away by the tide or moved by the winds. My intention is that he will create some of his stone instillations on the lake side location. As the lake isn't tidal, they should last longer than if they were on a beach, however they will still be affected by the rain and wind or people touching them.

Byles works without a plan or sketches, deciding what direction to take once he has entered the landscape. He often has multiple installations on the go at once, moving between them, building and reworking parts until he reaches a point where he feels he can't move forward or backwards. Only then does he decide he is finished. "My sculptures reflect an affiliation between the materials, the space in which I work and my own 'imagination and ideas'" (Byles)

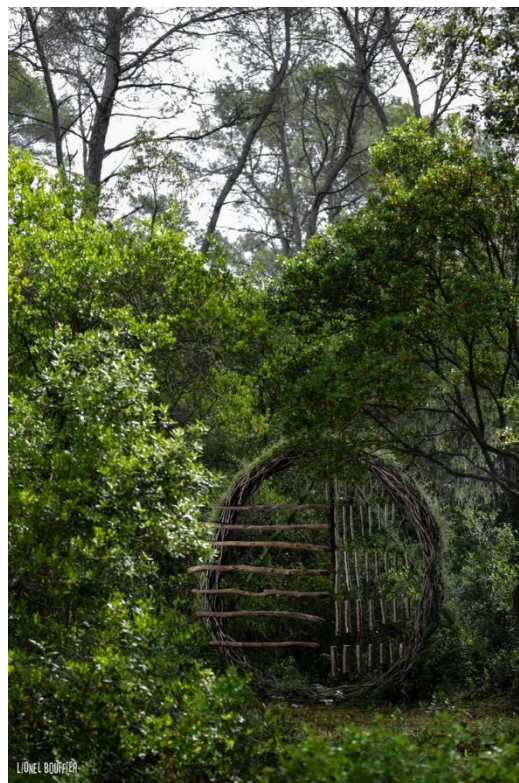


Fig 7

When creating his sculptures, Goldsworthy is incredibly mindful of his surroundings becoming attuned mentally, physically, and emotionally before he begins. This creates a connection between him and the materials he uses which allows him to understand the essence of them.

“We often forget that WE ARE NATURE. Nature is not something separate from us. So, when we say that we have lost our connection to nature, we’ve lost our connection to ourselves.” (Goldsworthy)

The fourth artist, ‘Anna and the Willow’, creates woven willow sculptures. These den-like structures are often large enough that you can go inside. Because of the amount of willow needed and the kind she uses, Anna would be bringing it in from an outside source though still “Working with a natural, sustainable material grown in England” (Anna).



Fig 8

Figs. 1-7 are not the exact pieces that would be on display but rather examples of what the artists are capable of and give an idea of the kind of work they would be creating within the space provided. All of them would have a time scale of four months to complete the sculptures, freedom to let their imaginations run wild, and the entire forest and lake’s shore to work with.

In conclusion, the aim and purpose of the Peace of Nature Sculpture Park is to get people to focus less on the stresses in their lives and give them something fun and calming to do instead. I have purposefully chosen the two different types of location, woodland, and lake side, as both are capable of creating a calming environment in which to explore and enjoy art and fully engage the senses for a richer experience.

Figures

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