

SOUTHBANK CENTRE



Poems for
Our Planet

Roots & Routes



National
Academy
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Prescribing

Art by Post: Poems for Our Planet is delivered in partnership
with the National Academy for Social Prescribing



**Poems for
Our Planet**

Welcome to Art by Post: Poems for Our Planet. This is an opportunity to use creativity and nature to inspire you and support your wellbeing. Together, we'll take part in creative activities which invite us to connect with the living world around us, and explore opportunities to care better for our planet.

Getting closer to nature can help us to be happier and feel that our lives are more worthwhile, therefore improving our wellbeing. *The Nature Connection Handbook*, published by the University of Derby, identifies five pathways that can help us grow our connection to nature – we'll highlight some of these throughout this booklet.



About the artist

Disabled artist, writer and part-time superhero Jess Thom co-founded Touretteshero in 2010 as a creative response to her experiences living with Tourettes Syndrome. Touretteshero's mission is to create a more inclusive and socially just world through our cultural practice.

Consistently Significant Tree

Drawing has always been a big part of how I make sense of the world. There was a time when my arm tics – the involuntary movements I make as a result of having Tourettes – made drawing physically difficult, but when I got an iPad in 2019, it became a joyful possibility again.

While there are some challenges to life with Tourettes, I've come to value the spontaneous creativity it lets me access. My vocal tics can be funny and surreal – they often draw attention to details in my surroundings that I would never have noticed otherwise. For example, my tics often chat to the lamp post and trees I can see from my bedroom window. While shielding from COVID, this view, and particularly my relationship with the trees, became very important to me. They were a constant reassuring presence, their massive forms marking out the edge of my world. I created a series of drawn poems about them that were often addressed directly to the trees.



1

Dear Tree

Draw or write a letter to something you love in nature: a tree, a plant or the sky.

- What would you say to it?
- What questions would you ask it?
- How might it reply?
- What does it notice about you or the world?
- How does it change over time – whether that's hours, weeks, months or years?



2

Picturing peace with pain

Making drawings that explore the links between me and the things around me is something I've done since childhood. But in the last few years, a new feature has become part of these drawings: my chronic pain.

I've visualised my pain in lots of different ways, whether as islands in a swirling sea or as everyday objects piled on top of each other. Drawing and writing are ways I make peace with my pain. It doesn't stop it being overwhelming, but so far it's helped me find a way through.

Take any sensation you feel in your body and try drawing or writing to represent it and how it makes you feel.



About the artist

Amanda Thomson is a Scottish visual artist and a writer whose work explores landscape, nature and the importance of care and attention. She has written two books, *A Scots Dictionary of Nature*, a collection of old Scots-language words, and *Belonging: Natural Histories of Place, Identity and Home*.



3

Pay attention!

Sometimes we don't pay enough attention to the everyday world around us. Then, suddenly, we notice it's spring and the birds have started singing, or it's summer and swallows have returned, flowers are blooming. We can't see the birds as well anymore because the trees are in leaf. **What happens when we pay more attention to the world around us?**

Choose something you encounter regularly, perhaps a view from a particular spot, a skyline, a scent, a walk. Maybe the different noises you hear when you open the window. Look, listen - closely - make a sketch or write about the different things you notice every time you're there - it might be about how the ground feels different when it rains, or the changing shadows or sounds at different times of day, or a weed in a wall. **What can you do with everything you gather? A story? A poem?**



4

Local knowledge, local language

I love finding old and forgotten Scots-language words that really capture the nuances of change. There are lovely words for aspects of weather, and for very particular sounds...

Glousterie – windy and rainy

Heavy-heartit – threatening to rain

Spleutterie – very rainy

Jurr – the noise of a small waterfall descending into stones or gravel

Pinking – the sound of a drop of water falling in a cave

Are there certain words or phrases, perhaps specific to where you are from, that you remember people using? These may be from an older generation or yourself when you were younger. Are there sayings that describe and root you to where you are or where you're from? Can you incorporate them into a poem, prose or an audio recording? We would love to hear your voices.



5

The seeds of something



Inspired by Jess's tics that are related to nature, Amanda and Jess invite you to notice small details, see things from a different point of view and get your creative juices flowing. **Would you like to respond to Jess's tics and get creative by writing or drawing?**

Jess

'Often funny, sometimes shocking, always involuntary, my vocal tics can be simple sounds or complex phrases; they often collide ideas together in ways that my conscious mind could never imagine. Sharing my tics and inviting other people to use them as a springboard for their own creativity has been a transformative experience. Touretteshero has an archive of over 6,000 vocal tics, and I'm always fascinated by how each one can lead to so many varied responses.' Visit the website www.touretteshero.com/safe/tics/

Amanda

'When Jess introduced me to the gallery on the Touretteshero website, where every drawing is inspired by a tic, I found the tics fascinating because they open up seeing the world from different perspectives. The following activities take as their starting point some of the tics that Jess and I have selected.'

'Shall we turn the Moon upside down?'

'Imagine you're a pigeon in a leotard of hope.'

What happens when you turn the way you look at something upside down, and see things from a new perspective?

'Sun, your optimism is wasted on the wind chime.'

Create from a different viewpoint. What happens if you draw or write something from the perspective of a mouse, a squirrel peering through the leaves of a tree, a swallow flying overhead or a wind chime swaying in a breeze?

'What happens when a tree farts?'

What's the noise and how does the earth shake? What happens to the roots and the treetop and the leaves, the birds and beasties in the tree? Is it like thunder?

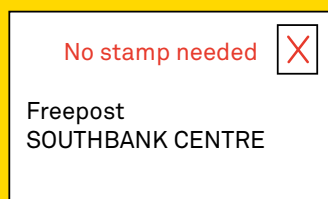
Getting closer to nature can help us to be happier and feel that our lives are more worthwhile, therefore improving our wellbeing. Simply noticing the good things in nature each week brings sustained and clinically significant improvements in mental health. There is now a solid body of evidence that having a strong sense of connection to nature helps people feel good and function well.

To find out more, see *The Nature Connection Handbook*
<http://bit.ly/NatureConnectionHandbook>

We'd love to hear from you!

The Southbank Centre is the UK's largest arts centre, and this summer we're presenting *Planet Summer*, a season of exhibitions, performances and events about our planet and climate change. We're including some *Poems for Our Planet* poetry sent to us by our participants as part of this festival. If you would like to send us poetry and artwork you've created through the activities in this booklet, you can email artbypost@southbankcentre.co.uk

You can also use the yellow envelope provided, or address an envelope to **Freepost SOUTHBANK CENTRE**. Please write your name on the back.



If you can't send us your work by post or email, please arrange for somebody else to send your work to us, or you can tell us about your artwork by phone on **020 7960 4206**.

You're welcome to get in touch to let us know what you think of this booklet, ask questions, give feedback or opt out of the project at any time.

Contact us

By phone: **020 7960 4206**

By email: artbypost@southbankcentre.co.uk

By post: **Freepost SOUTHBANK CENTRE**

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