

## **Soil as a Cultural Collaborator: Pigments, Place, and People.**

By **Phil Lambert**

*Independent*

Phil Lambert's practice positions soil not only as a subject of study but as a cultural collaborator, a material with multiple identities: scientific, historical, ecological, aesthetic and more. Across human history, soil has served as pigment, building substance and food source, informing artworks from prehistoric cave paintings to the contemporary works of Herman de Vries and the varied approaches of the artists gathered at this conference. Working with site-specific soils processed into paint, Lambert's work uses this layered identity to invite conversations about place, perception, and the overlooked fundamentals of life.

Often working plein air and in response to specific locations, Lambert's methods draw on "attentive seeing" in a sense a form of field sketching and observation informed by Goethean science. The aim being to encourage alternative ways of knowing, emphasising open-ended exploration and resisting fixed conclusions, and reframing soil as a partner in enquiry. Adapting the processes and sharing the work in a playful, open-ended way creates opportunities for participants and audiences to explore the tactile experience and different meanings of soil. Ultimately helping them to create their own relationship with soil.

Lambert believes that related arts practices can create the space for genuine two-way dialogue where participants' interpretations hold equal weight to expert perspectives. This resists the limitations of message-driven outreach and allows scientific knowledge and personal experience to meet on equal terms. This talk will reflect on Lambert's 15 years of public involvement and widening access experience alongside his arts practice and extensive work in Primary Schools. In the context of current environmental challenges, such approaches can foster curiosity, empathy, and perhaps most importantly, a renewed love for the very ground beneath our feet.

**Keywords:** soil-pigment, open-ended, field-sketching, interdisciplinarity, cultural-material, observation, public-engagement, Goethean-science, New-Materialism