

SOCIAL ECOLOGIES BY GREG LINDQUIST

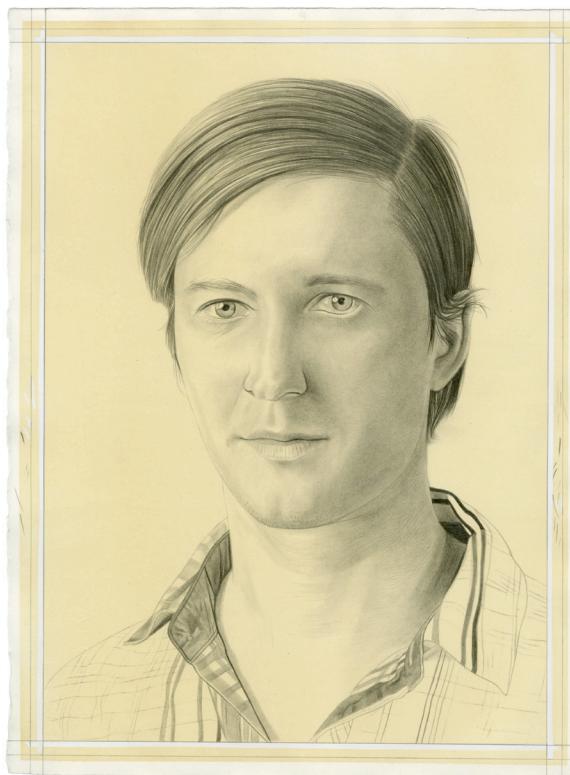
Landscape in art has mythologized, documented, and reimagined the intertwined relationship between humans and the natural world for centuries. And it may reflect more changes than we realize: recent writing on the Anthropocene period that arguably began during the Industrial Revolution highlights the significant global impact of human activities on Earth's ecosystems. An atmospheric physicist, for example, claims that the brilliant, redder sunsets captured in J.M.W. Turner's paintings were a result of heavy air pollution.¹ And currently, changes in ecosystems, biodiversity and species extinction, glacial melting, and rising sea levels confirm shifts in our climates caused by our own activities.

In response to these impacts of human activity, mainstream environmental organizations, starting around 1945, emerged from earlier conservation efforts and largely alongside—but not in collaboration with—grassroots movements. These two approaches reflect differences in class, race and gender, as well as a specific politics of place particular to grassroots movements, in contrast to the more global, abstract perspective of mainstream environmentalism. The environmental justice movement is a quintessential example of a grassroots movement that incorporates social concerns. It emerged in the 1980s, as sociologist Robert Bullard's irrefutable case studies² demonstrated how many ecological problems are inextricably linked to social problems that disenfranchise and disempower people of color and/or lower economic status. While many mainstream philosophies have ignored these issues, social ecology (developed by Murray Bookchin in the 1960s with an emphasis on Marxist dialectics) grimly argues that nearly all our ecological problems arise from deep-seated social problems.

A growing awareness of environmental concern was reflected in the Land Art movement of the 1960s and 1970s, which, by taking the process of art making directly into the landscape (thus sometimes indicating sites of ecological concern) explored critical issues that may be seen as an extension of the formal and phenomenological strategies of Minimalism. Land artists did not appear concerned with direct solutions for the future perils of their medium.

Younger artists who work across varied mediums (a few represented in this Critics Page) have reinvestigated with an ecological perspective critical threads of Land Art, principally by looking at Robert Smithson's extensive body of writing and late reclamation proposals. His preoccupation with ruins, entropy, and deep time has continued to inform our understanding of urbanity and ecology.³

Understanding the complex links between human impact on the environment, the relations among people, and the natural world's response is crucial to seeking solutions. Recent philosophical developments such as speculative realism, object-oriented ontology, and the notion of the nonhuman turn⁴ envision a world recast in egalitarian interconnectedness and treatment of nonhuman objects and beings with the same regard we have for humans. But there is an inherent glibness to these arguments: they assume that humans unanimously practice a sort of humanistic equality. Meanwhile, if we focus on the environment alone, we forget other people. In the United States, and beyond, rampant racial discrimination, gun violence, misogyny, and income inequality remain. Pope Francis's recently



Portrait of Greg Lindquist. Pencil on paper by Phong Bui. From a photo by Taylor Dafoe.

published *Encyclical on Climate Change and Inequality* declares that climate change is a moral problem that disproportionately impacts the poor. He argues for an integral ecology that seeks comprehensive solutions for a crisis that is both social and environmental, solutions that, in the process, unite us.⁵

What function, then, should art serve in the context of the current environment and social concerns, and to what degree of efficacy? Should it solely problematize, polemicize or theorize? Or can art provide an aesthetic, emotional, and beautiful experience while empowering direct environmental action and policy change? Can beauty infiltrate and influence public opinion? What audience should it reach? Can direct human action, organization, and creation effectively take art into a public space? Can art convey a message without being overly didactic? How can it find a common in, and tear down cultural, racial, and economic boundaries?⁶

The preceding questions were included in a cursory version of this introduction sent to writers from varied disciplines. Admittedly, these questions presume a false dichotomy of sorts: aestheticization and direct action could be seen as polarities and thus mutually exclusive, an unintentional effect that some respondents nonetheless picked up on. The prompt's framing may have become a trap, but its provocation was intentional. It's imperative to have these voices assembled here as one layer of respectful argument. But it's also in no way comprehensive or exhaustive. It is my hope that we will take inspiration with urgency for action towards change on individual, social, and global levels.⁷ BR

GREG LINDQUIST is an artist and writer, and the editor of the Art Books in Review section of *The Brooklyn Rail*. He has also taught at MoMA, Parsons, Pratt Institute, Ramapo, RISD and SUNY Purchase. His latest series of ecologically responsive paintings will be shown in an installation at the North Carolina Museum of Art in spring of 2016. He was recently a resident of the Marie Walsh Sharpe Space Program, and received the Pollock Krasner Grant in 2009. He is currently developing several collaborative projects that focus on the Newtown Creek, the polluted three-and-a-half mile estuary that forms the border between Brooklyn and Queens.

ENDNOTES

1. "On Canvas, Clues About Air Pollution." *New York Times*, March 31, 2014. Of course, this sole responsibility of human impact is complicated by the volcanic ash from the eruption of Mt. Tambora in the atmosphere during 1816, the "Year Without a Summer," which created unusually spectacular sunsets during this period and were an inspiration for some of Turner's work.
2. See Robert Bullard, *Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class, and Environmental Quality* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2000).
3. Also: see Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects* (University of Minnesota Press, 2013). A contributor to this editorial, Morton's writing has been associated with Smithson's sense of geological and temporal scale of deep time, has been topics of various conversation for this author amongst David Brooks, Tom McGrath, Ellie Irons, Marc Handelman and Kevin Zucker. Other 1970s artists' practices are being reevaluated, such as Charles Simonds's "Dwelling" series, which involved the participation, collective efforts, and care of the communities in which he created them. For a critical assessment of the urban environment, younger artists are looking to projects and texts by Martha Rosler such as *The Bowery in two inadequate descriptive systems* (1974–75), *If You Lived Here...* (1989) and *Culture Class* (e-flux and Sternberg Press, 2015) all of which broadly address the commodification of the creative worker and the corporatized structures that circumscribe their labor.
4. In "On Human Equality and The Nonhuman Turn" (the *Brooklyn Rail* July/August, 2015) I presented an in-depth consideration of the nonhuman philosophical development and its relation to the environment justice movement and current social concerns.
5. Michael Zimmerman, one of the authors of *Integral Ecology: Uniting Multiple Perspectives on a Natural World* (Integral Books, 2011), in his recent critical appreciation of the Pope's Encyclical, states that while the Pope does address multiple perspectives to seek solutions, there are key aspects of integral ecology that the Pope doesn't address such as connections between exploiting nature and oppressing women, cultural evolutionary theory, and modern and postmodern discourses required to speak about interrelated environmental and social problems.
6. The intention was to burrow into deeper issues: How can art both be research and poetry, why does politicized art seem unartistically closed to interpretation? And, perhaps paramount, why does it rarely shift public opinion or policy? The goal was to use a privileged position of a culture publication to push the conversation beyond aesthetics and polemics, into the discourse of other disciplines.
7. A special thank you to Orit Gat, Ben Gottlieb, Maya Harakawa, Yates McKee, and Laila Pedro for editorial support and guidance throughout this project. An extra special thanks to my intrepid brother, Bill Lindquist, for his editorial support and tolerance of work this prompt involved during our summer ventures across Brazil.

AN ACCUMULATION OF EVENTS BY MATTHEW C. WILSON

Billions of years ago
Comets strike the earth.

2.3 billion years ago
Cyanobacteria cause The Great Oxygenation Event, one of the largest extinction events in earth's history. Oxygen, a byproduct of cyanobacterial photosynthesis, accumulates, producing a toxic environment for oxygen-intolerant anaerobic organisms.

3.3 – 2.6 million years ago
Hominins create oldest known, recognizable stone tools.

2.58 million years ago
Pleistocene glaciation commences, beginning the current ice age.

32,000 years ago
A squirrel buries *Silene stenophylla* seeds in northeastern Eurasia.

10,500 years ago
On the slopes of an Anatolian mountain, a genetic mutation prevents wild grass seeds from dropping when they mature.



Matthew C. Wilson, *Untitled ("Rio Notebook" fieldwork)*, 2015. Video still.

1859
Frederic Edwin Church charges ten cents per person to see his monumental painting *Heart of the Andes*, surrounded by tropical plants, which becomes a popular spectacle.

1873
Charles Darwin receives a copy of *Das Kapital* with the dedication "his sincere admirer Karl Marx, 16 June 1873." Although Darwin only reads the first third of the book, he writes to Marx in October:

I heartily wish that I was more worthy to receive it, by understanding more of the deep & important subject of political economy. Though our studies have been so different I believe that we both earnestly desire the extension of knowledge, and that this in the long run is sure [to] add to the happiness of mankind. I remain Dear Sir Yours faithfully

(Darwin curiously and repeatedly uses the phrase "economy of nature" in his 1859 *On the Origin of Species*, reflecting the influence of the 19th-century philosophers of political economy Adam Smith and Thomas Malthus).

1946
Maize seeds are the first living organism to be launched into space and successfully recovered.

1970s
DNA structure co-discoverer Francis Crick refines the Greek idea of panspermia revitalized in the 19th century—suggesting that life on earth was "seeded."

1982
With the help of volunteers, Joseph Beuys begins *7000 Oaks – City Forestation Instead of City Administration* as a response to urbanization in Kassel.

2000
Bank of England issues £10 notes picturing Charles Darwin and a tropical scene recalling his 1832 travels to Brazil.

2007
Bank of England issues £20 notes depicting Adam Smith.



Matthew C. Wilson, *Untitled ("Rio Notebook" fieldwork)*, 2015.
Digital photo.

~1554 – 1558
The *Popol Vuh*—one of the few Maya books to survive Spanish conquest, colonization, and subjugation—is written, declaring that, after several failed attempts, the gods created the first humans out of corn.

1796
Twenty years after their steam engines' first commercial use, James Watt and Matthew Boulton use steam-powered machines to produce all of Britain's coins for the Bank of England.

1792 – 1819
James Watt attempts to heal his son's tuberculosis through inhalation of newly discovered gasses; uses the same linkages from his steam engines to produce drawing machines, including a portable drawing machine to copy perspective; invents machines for copying sculpture, meeting emerging consumer demand for reproduced art.

1843
Anna Atkins self-publishes *Photographs of British Algae: Cyanotype Impressions*, at once the first book with photographic illustrations and the first significant application of photography to scientific study.

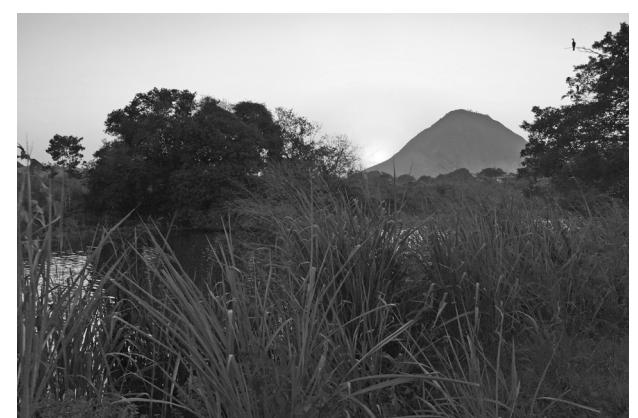
2011
Bank of England issues £50 notes illustrating Matthew Boulton and James Watt.

2012
A group of Russian scientists unearth and successfully germinate 32,000 year-old *Silene stenophylla* seeds from the Siberian permafrost.

2013
Voyager 1 becomes the first known human-produced object to leave the solar system.

2015
The editor and this writer make independent, unrelated trips to Brazil, releasing approximately 3.33 metric tons of CO₂e into the atmosphere. ☺

MATTHEW C. WILSON is an artist based in Brooklyn who works primarily in video, sculpture, and site-specific action. He recently completed the MFA Visual Arts program at Columbia University and the Whitney Independent Study Program.



Matthew C. Wilson, *Untitled ("Rio Notebook" fieldwork)*, 2015.
Digital photo.



John Akomfrah, *Vertigo Sea*, 2015. Three channel video installation, 48 min. Courtesy the artist & Lisson Gallery.

TOUGH ACTS, TO FOLLOW BY SUZAAN BOETTGER

When the current Venice Biennale compilation, *All the World's Futures*, incited critics' antipathy as "morality-based," "provocative but also confining," and "morde, joyless, and ugly," I knew I had to see it. Those remarks recalled the retardataire lusts for "visual pleasure" following 1990s identity politics. Given all the world's ills, it is important that art participate, not per Clement Greenberg's declaration as an avant-garde to "keep culture moving in the midst of ideological confusion," but to spur social and political dialogue. The conundrum is how to make art that both has absorbing alterity, materially and metaphorically, and generates a new collective ethos.

Organized by the politically engaged, globally networked Okwui Enwezor, this admirable Biennale theme demonstrated the difficulty of that synthesis. Predominantly, works emphasized subject matter, often in physical messes symbolizing emotional duress, and operated as statements: Huma Bhabha's floorbound bunch of loose strips tire treads called *Atlas*, as if flattened; Thomas Hirschhorn's shambles, *Roof Off*; and Barthélémy Toguo's (Parisian, born Cameroon) *Urban Requiem*, jumbles of huge wood blocks carved with text, their messages stamped on walls: "End Police Brutality," "We are all in Exile," and "Yes we Can." But no, you can't. It's too late for the primality of Munch's *Scream*. And activist art's good intentions do not obviate the necessity of compelling artistry. (Whereas the exhibition ironically suggested an ambivalence about, if not a loss of faith in, the power of aesthetics as it has been articulated, for example, by Jacques Rancière: a "suspension with respect



Francesco Jodice, *Atlante*, 2015. Film, HD. 8 min., 40 sec. Courtesy the artist and Galleria Michela Rizzo, Venice.

to the ordinary forms of sensory experience," which can paradoxically influence "the question of the common")."

One of those who, adapting Rancière, not only had the "voice" as a Biennial presenter, but distinctive "speech," was the Ghana-born Londoner John Akomfrah, with his film installation *Vertigo Sea*. His trio of large screens imaginatively connected whaling, slavery, and our relationship to the sea in a mesmerizing environmental cosmos that was at once sumptuous and horrifying. But the rarity of its fusion of ethics and aesthetics at the Biennial propelled me off-site, to Fortuny Museum's perceptive spin of cross-historical exemplars of visual/mental *Proportio*. In it, Milanese artist Francesco Jodice's film riposte *Atlante* circled a Hellenistic statue gripping a huge sphere on his contorted shoulders. The *Farnese Atlas*—like us, in our recognition of the anthropogenic basis of climate change, his whole

world in his hands—is shot in melancholic blue-gray. But not simplistically elegiac, *Atlante* intersperses montages that both parallel unsustainable imbalances and enact the distractions, allowing us, as a silent screen inter-title put it, to "really enjoy forgetting." Among them are 1950s home movies of giddy birthday parties, World War I infantry fleeing battlefields, and 1970s TV of mindless consumption. The discerning selection from a social kaleidoscope pointedly quotes the dystopic video game *Deus Ex: Human Revolution*, "This is not the end of the world. But you can see it from here."

And from here—to bring it all back home—you can see a strong example of current environmentalist art thinking and facture at Wave Hill, Riverdale. In the exhibition *Field Notes* (through November 29), Matthew Friday's mobile research station/camping platform, with an au courant library, desk, and easel, has monitored pollution in regional watersheds. From it, Friday produced both an informative brochure, freely distributed, and pigment from PCB-contaminated river sediment with which he covered a large rectangle incised with the Hudson River and its tributaries. His gleaming black/brown painting extends Malevich's and Reinhardt's contrarian squares into the verticality of not only a mapped river but a spine, human and otherwise. Friday's installation *Everything is Downstream*—that is, everyone is both living off of and producing someone else's runoff, we're all in this together—is another rare example of art that successfully integrates environmental conscience, implicit social/political commentary, and sensitively created art. ☀

SUZAAN BOETTGER, an art historian and critic in New York, is working on a book on environmentalist art.

ECOLOGICAL NORMALCY

BY WILLIS ELKINS

In the summer of 2014, a number of large oil sheens were present on Newtown Creek, the 3.8-mile Superfund site that borders Western Queens and Northern Brooklyn. After numerous reports from various citizens that launched an investigation, the New York State Department of Conservation received an anonymous tip—hard proof—of someone dumping waste oil into a drain that fed into the Creek. They were able to identify the parties and clean most of it up; sightings of large blobs of petroleum have since decreased significantly.

In follow-up discussions with various agencies about these events, a few community members learned that certain city employees working near the Creek had seen the same sheens throughout the summer but not made any reports, simply because seeing oil on the Creek was considered "normal." For a number of years, that was true of Newtown Creek. As anyone who traveled up the Creek by boat more than ten years ago, like the environmental watchdog organization Riverkeeper, can attest, there were areas where thick pockets of oil rested above the surface water on a regular basis. These were primarily seeps from the infamous Greenpoint oil spill, sometimes contained by floating booms, sometimes not.

Following community concern and legal action by Riverkeeper and the New York State District Attorney to improve Exxon's remediation and containment of the spill, conditions improved and seepage stopped; come 2014, it was not the norm to see large rainbows of petroleum

product floating around Newtown Creek. However, the city employee's reliance on a framework of normalcy is quite common when dealing with environmental burdens—and also quite troublesome given how short our memory span can be.

Currently, untreated sewage is discharged into New York City waterways during most rainstorms (billions of gallons a year, in fact). This has been happening for as long as any living citizen can remember—so is it normal? Does the fact that our sewer system has been in violation of the Clean Water Act since it was enacted over forty years ago add to the normalcy of the occurrence and our apparent complacency on the issue?

About every six hours of so, the local tidal currents change direction and bring millions of gallons of water into or out of New York Harbor. This massive rising and falling of the sea has happened for thousands of years, through countless human generations. It will continue to happen thousands of years into the future, bringing sea life, sewage discharge, dumped oil or whatever else is normal at the time along for the ride.

One of the greatest consequences of living in an Anthropocene era is how society operates on a completely different timescale than nature. This incongruence skews



Willis Elkins, *Combined Sewer Outfall NCB-083*, 2014.

our perspective on what is considered normal. It is one of the great opportunities of artists and activists alike to expose and hopefully help adjust this discrepancy. Recognition and appreciation are ever more important as human impact begins to impact what is normal for the rest of the planet, be it temperature levels, migration routes, wildlife habitats, or biodiversity. ☀

WILLIS ELKINS is program manager for the Newtown Creek Alliance. He lives in Greenpoint and helps run canoe trips and environmental education programming with the North Brooklyn Boat Club.

ART AS TRAINING IN THE PRACTICE OF FREEDOM

BY NITASHA DHILLON

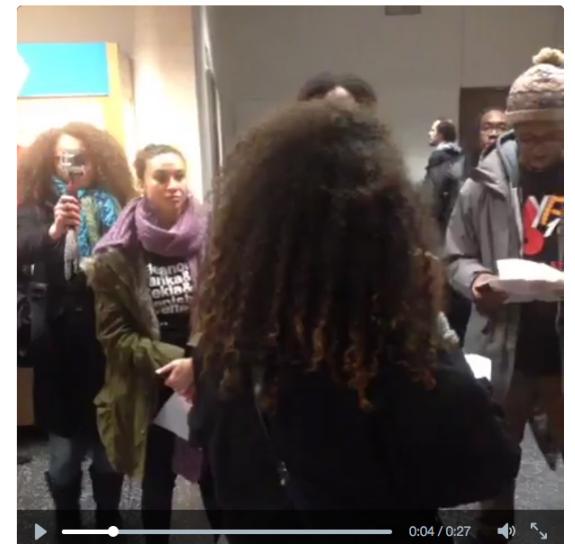
You have asked me what function art should serve with regard to environmental and social concerns. It should be said that we live in a world where art as we know it is corrupt, exhausted, and weak. We see shimmering edifices of cultural wealth erected on the backs of hyper-exploited labor—the pyramids and coliseums of the 21st century—on land turned into concrete. We see museums, galleries, and public art projects serving as the avant-garde of displacement and dispossession. We see so-called “social practice,” the well-funded bureaucratization of alienated people’s desire for community, effectively normalizing oppression rather than engaging in struggle. And we see theoretically savvy “discursive platforms” that speak of radical democracy, militant ecology, and even communication, while recoiling at the prospect of deploying their considerable resources, skills, and potential for the purposes of building a transformative movement. The answer thus cannot exclude the fact that we are all implicated, and that the art world is so thoroughly intertwined with capitalism that there is no space (and little time) left outside of it.

When I think of art after Occupy, I imagine “art” under erasure. We strike art to liberate art from itself. Not to end

art, but to unleash its powers of direct action and radical imagination. Imagine a refugee camp collaged into the symbolic heart of finance capital, a self-organized commons installed at ground zero of empire, an empty minimalist plaza flooded with bodies and voices and cameras, blasting a collective cry to the world: “Sorry it took so long, we are awake now!” Imagine a general strike in New York City, and a never-ending process of experimentation, learning and undoing, resisting and building in the unexplored terrain of an historic rupture. Or, imagine an alternative museum tour of the Museum of Natural History, calling it out for what it is: “a monument for white supremacy,” mic-checking in the Hall of Forestry on “gentrification, natural disaster, displacement, and white supremacy” in one breath, instigating the unlearning, complicating narrative where it matters most, where knowledge is both produced and disseminated.

Finally, let me say (with love) that today we are obsessed with whether the above is “art” or “activism.” Although these frames are useful analytical tools, they are limiting. There is a war being waged in the imagination, and we are urged to ask, “How do we live?” and then, despite the feeling of helplessness, to act. It is by acting that we learn a new way

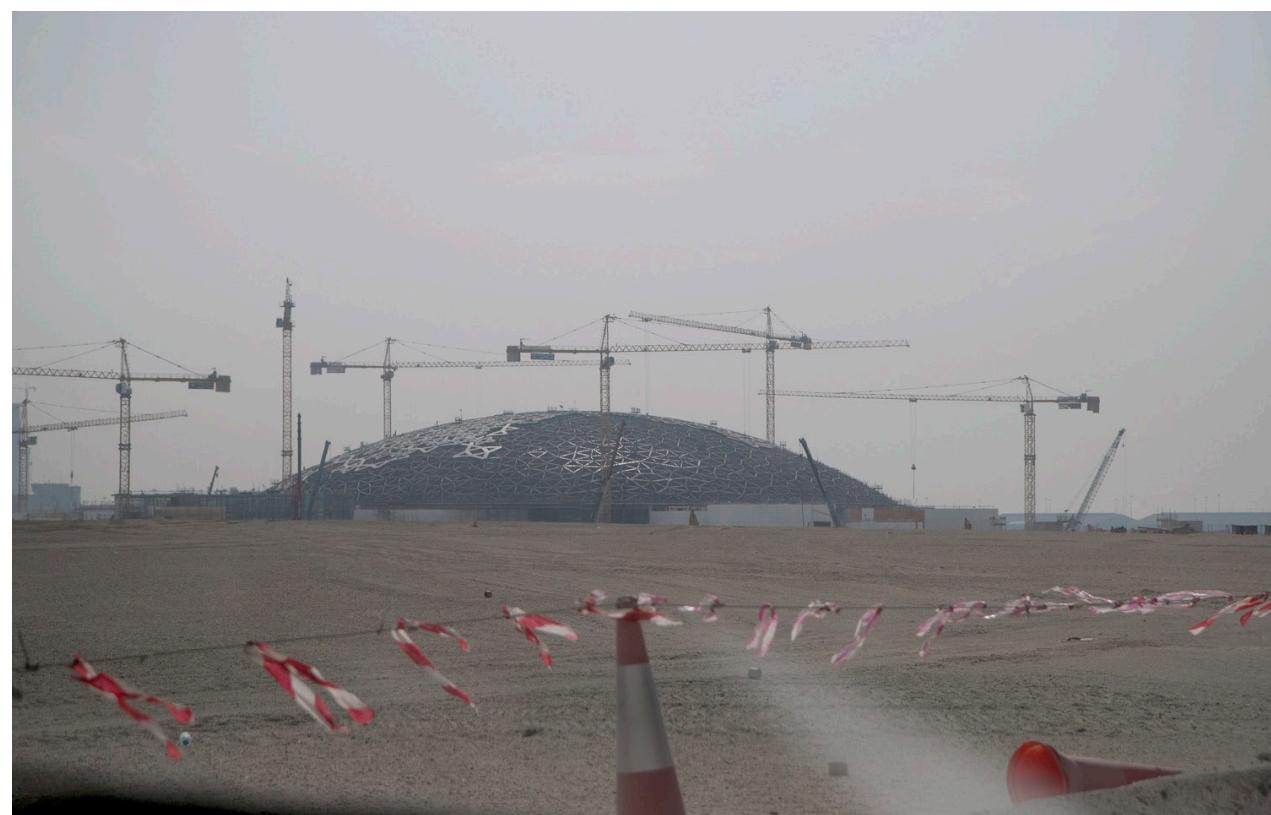
Occupied Theory @occupytheory · Feb 21
Talking about gentrification, 'natural disaster', displacement and white supremacy #BlackOutTour



Detail of #BlackOutTour, Natural History Museum, February 2015.

of thinking, or, as the Zapatistas say, “asking we walk.” As a member of MTL Collective, I am engaged in a practice in which the artist’s work does not add only an artistic flair to this or that campaign, but rather contributes theory and research, action and aesthetics, debriefing and analysis—this entire dialectical process is the art practice. Gulf Labor, and its direct-action wing, G.U.L.F.; #BlackOutTour; Occupy Museums; and Direct Action Front for Palestine are examples of such a practice. They take aim at a range of targets: labor exploitation, white supremacy, the capture of public space, climate colonization, gentrification, police violence, Israeli apartheid, rape and sexual assault, and more. Yet, they do not work in silos. They take action in New York City while making connections to each other, as well as other geographies and struggles. Today, the artist is an organizer, recognizes capitalism has always been hostile to human and non-human life, and understands that people fight where they are. We maintain the specificities of struggle as we build a coalition among equals and move toward a shared horizon of liberation. So let art be training in the practice of freedom. 

NITASHA DHILLON is an artist based in New York and New Delhi. She holds a BA in Mathematics from St. Stephen’s College, University of Delhi, and attended the Whitney Independent Study Program in New York and the School of the International Center of Photography. She’s a cofounder of *Tidal: Occupy Theory* magazine; MTL, a collective combining research, aesthetics, and activism in its practice; and Global Ultra Luxury Faction, the direct action wing of Gulf Labor Coalition. She is also a core member of Gulf Labor Coalition. Nitasha is currently a Ph.D. candidate at the Department of Media Study – University of Buffalo in New York.



Louvre Museum Construction, Abu Dhabi, March 2015.

OIKOS AND POESIS: ART AND OUR PLANETARY FUTURE

BY JOHN CLARK

Thoreau famously proclaimed that, “in wildness is the preservation of the world.” And, as Gary Snyder explains, the poetic mind, the mind of the creative artist, is a realm of wildness. Thus, the eco-syllogism: preservation of the world depends on the wild. The poetic mind is wild. Therefore, the preservation of the world depends on the poetic mind.

What we call “art” is, in reality, technopoesis—the convergence of skillful technique and the creative act. The techne may be the use (or creative non-use) of words, paint, pen and ink, stone or marble, clay, film, the human body and voice, musical notes, or building materials. However, the crucial factor is always that the techne is an expression of poesis.

The problem of our age is that techne and poesis have split. Techne, under the control of capital, has become the great destructive force, devastating mind, spirit, and nature. We have been under the sway of the global death drive, as expressed in the classic formula “money-capital-money.” It has been rightly said that our hope lies in *l'imagination*

au pouvoir (power to the imagination). This really means power to poesis, to life and creativity.

Both nature and artistic creativity act through what Daoist thought calls *wuwei*, doing without “doing” in the sense of manipulating or dominating. This is what the creative artist does through negative capability and what creative nature has been doing throughout the history of life on earth. “Sitting quietly, doing nothing, Spring comes, and the grass grows, by itself.” The system of domination annihilates this greening of the Earth, this greening of the mind.

The combat for the soul of art is thus one with the combat for the soul of nature. It is about *arché* versus *anarché*. It is about the defense of vitality, creative growth, and emergence against the forces of power and profit. Artistic and ecological struggles are one in defending the wild against their common enemy, the ethos and psychology of domination that has been shaped by the megamachine, capital, the state, and patriarchy.

One of the burning questions recently has been what we should call our current geological epoch. “Anthropocene”

has been winning. To be a little less self-centered and much more realistic, we might call it the “Thanatocene,” the age of reversal of the creative activity, the poesis, of the Earth.

But what should we call the next epoch, if there is one, in which we put an end to this era of Death on Earth? We should perhaps call it the Poeticene, since it would be the epoch in which both the creative powers of the Earth and the creatures of the Earth would be allowed to reassert themselves.

It would be an epoch in which all would be allowed to be artists, or poets, in the sense of radically creative beings. In such a poetic democracy, poets would become the acknowledged legislators of the world. And the Earth would be acknowledged again as the Great Poet, the Artist of all artists. 

JOHN CLARK is a native of New Orleans, where his family has lived for twelve generations. He coordinates La Terre Institute for Community and Ecology, which sponsors social ecological projects in New Orleans on eighty-seven acres along Bayou La Terre in the forest of the Mississippi Gulf Coast. His most recent book is *The Impossible Community: Realizing Communitarian Anarchism* (Bloomsbury, 2013), and his next, *The Tragedy of Common Sense*, will appear this winter from Changing Suns Press.

REMIXING MESSAGES: A Call for Collaboration Between Artists and Scientists BY MARY MISS

The environmental issues facing us as a result of climate change are daunting. Scientists are doing important research to address the complex topics such as water supply, food access, air quality, and temperature rise that accompany global warming. Artists are in a unique position to reflect on these topics and engage people with issues that are hard to imagine because they are happening someplace else or in the future. How can these disciplines begin working together to get the interest and attention of a broad public audience?

The double helix is a compelling figure. It is an image that comes to mind in trying to conceptualize the relationship between the research of scientists and the investigations of the visual thinker, suggesting the connection and continuous movement of the shared development of ideas and the ability we may jointly have to create change. The entwined strands seem an appropriate image to describe the relationship between scientific research and the development of the means to implement and communicate these insights to the broader public.

As we have entered the 21st century, it has become clear that we need to redefine how we live our lives, use our resources, communicate, educate, work, and collaborate. It is a time when the imagination and the ability to envision alternatives are our greatest resources. In recent years a number of questions have arisen for many artists: how is it possible to have a more central role in shaping or bringing attention to the important issues of our times? How can the imagination, the prime territory of artists, be used to engage the broader public? How can artists participate in communicating the importance of global ecological awareness? The task is to create new bonds and reconfigure the old ones—between the built environment and the natural world, between various communities, and between our history and current needs. However, change cannot happen without the support, understanding, and participation of the individual citizens that make up our communities. Individuals are key to creating a new paradigm for a sustainable future.

The question that then arises is how citizens can gain access to the research and ideas that are currently being investigated. It is through their individual actions and by understanding that a community's involvement is possible. Political will develops through the engagement of individuals, and change is implemented and accumulated layer upon layer from one scale to the next. For this to be



Mary Miss/City as Living Lab, *Layered Pond: House Creek Basin*, 2005. Courtesy Mary Miss Studio.

possible the issues, the ideas and solutions currently being researched, must be made accessible and tangible, and offer visceral experiences. This has the potential to bring about direct engagement. But how do you bridge this gap between scientific research and public engagement?

Recently, artists have taken the lead in investigating new ways of imagining our cities, through multiple projects that seek to redefine the public domain. They have looked at ways to show the connection between our private lives and public actions. They have revealed layers of events to show that there is no single history of a place. There have been projects that use infrastructure such as bridges, recycling plants, canals, and sidewalks as sites of artistic intervention. In recent decades, the idea of collaboration across disciplines has been the territory of rich investigations. The research of hydrologists, for instance, provides greater understanding and insights into the function of

groundwater systems and the treatment of urban runoff. The implementation or testing of this research is an important next step. This might be accomplished by integrating a series of test situations into a new park or wetland restoration or a street and sidewalk upgrade. However, the means to communicate this research and what has been implemented is often overlooked. At each step of this process, we must ask whether there is a way to work with visual thinkers to engage the public—the interested individual—with what may otherwise go unnoticed. ☀

MARY MISS, an artist known for her environmentally based artwork, lives in New York. For more than four decades Mary Miss's work has examined the intersection of sculpture, architecture, environmental engineering, and installation art in projects and proposals ranging from riverfront walkways to infrastructure sites. Permanent installations include *Framing Union Square* at the Union Square Subway Station in New York City and a wetlands preservation project in Des Moines, Iowa. In 2011, Mary Miss established CALL/City as Living Laboratory to make sustainability tangible through the arts.

LEAVE THINGS OPEN BY TIMOTHY MORTON

Stop the propaganda that pushes people into defiance. Propaganda betrays an underlying fear of art, just art, just patterns for no reason. This fear will saturate everything. People will experience this fear leakage, an anxiety about relating to something that isn't you, that may not even be sentient—like a painting—for no reason. Since that kind of relating is just what relating to another life form is like—uncertain, ambiguous, compelling, uncanny—propaganda blocks ecological awareness.

Stop pleading at me with information dumps. The information will be out of date by the time anyone sees it. And it's overwhelming. We're shocked already. PTSD-survivors have recurring nightmares of their trauma because their psyche is attempting to secrete an anxiety buffer against the shock, the kind of forewarning that they didn't have in real life, where they experienced *fright*, suddenly realizing they were in trauma. You're trying to change the past, which is, of course, impossible. You're encouraging people to put themselves back before ecological awareness, as if they had a choice.

Stop listing extinct species. These lists belong to the mode of elegy, a form designed to *automate mourning* so you don't have to go through it. Elegy is secretly on the side of

sadistic destruction of the loved being who let you down by dying. It's a bit disingenuous to mourn for beings you never really knew. The gesture of bringing them to light disappears them.

Stop insisting on enchantment; *be enchanting* instead. We've been trying to extract richness for a long time; look what happened. We're all *poor* in this world: humans, bacteria, pencils. That's the enchantment, the faded corners, the cobwebs, the gaps, the dusty interior filled with sentient toys.

Stop insisting on Life. Life is hostile to life forms. In the name of Life, we created a global concentration camp. The idea of Life is the idea that existing is always better than any quality of existing. Trillions of beings constantly close to death, wandering around in a zombified stupor, is always better than billions of beings in a state of total bliss. What?

Stop the confession narratives. When someone spectates your spectating of other life forms, they are precisely spectating *you*. You have turned coexistence into a mirror to authenticate yourself. You're suggesting that there's a pre-eco-awareness *you*, who could have acted differently. And you pulled down the fader on the most interesting aspect of this kind of art: the uncertainty, the ambiguity,

the film-noir-like gaps between the narrator and what is narrated. These sorts of twists are exactly what life forms are and what ecological awareness is. Don't delete the hermeneutic spiral, the enmeshment in dreamtime paranoia.

Stop deleting ambiguity. For 12,500 years we've been trying to get really clear: humans and cattle (such as women, cows, and sheep) "over here" in Culture space, everything else "over there" in Nature space, intruders from "over there" specified as pests and weeds to be eliminated. Body "over there," soul or mind "over here." Blankness "over there," human positing/history/economic relations/destiny "over here." Nothing between. No contradictions. No smile. Nothing open. ☀

TIMOTHY MORTON is Rita Shea Guffey Chair in English at Rice University. He gave the Wellek Lectures in Theory in 2014 and has collaborated with Björk. He is the author of *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Coexistence* (Columbia, forthcoming), *Nothing: Three Inquiries in Buddhism* (Chicago, forthcoming), *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (Minnesota, 2013), *Realist Magic: Objects, Ontology, Causality* (Open Humanities, 2013), *The Ecological Thought* (Harvard, 2010), *Ecology Without Nature* (Harvard, 2007), eight other books and 140 essays on philosophy, ecology, literature, music, art, design, and food. He blogs regularly at <http://www.ecologywithoutnature.blogspot.com>.

ALEXIS ROCKMAN with Greg Lindquist

For more than two decades, Alexis Rockman has been depicting the natural world with virtuosity and wit. He was one of the first contemporary artists to build his career around exploring environmental issues, from evolutionary biology and genetic engineering to deforestation and climate change. Artist, *Rail* Art Books in Review Editor, and Guest Critic Greg Lindquist spoke with Rockman at his Tribeca studio about his recent paintings depicting ecological issues of the Great Lakes, and the extent to which art and culture can inspire direct action.

GREG LINDQUIST (RAIL): Do you think that your paintings inspire action and change with regards to ecological crises?

ROCKMAN: I would have to confess that I do, but I have a sense of fatigue from hoping that, and there's a level of futility in that it only helps me cope with what I know. I spend a lot of energy learning about things that are disturbing, that I'm ambivalent or upset about, and that helps me cope with them; it's a feedback loop. The project that I'm working on in this room is about the Great Lakes. And it's two of five large paintings about issues that the lakes have faced and will face in the future, ecologically.

RAIL: Can you give some examples of those?

ROCKMAN: Well, the painting that's on the floor is about resources that humans have extracted from the lakes and the watershed from Pleistocene hunters and reindeer, to the fishing industry, to the introduction of salmon into the Great Lakes for recreational fishing, timber mining, and so forth.

RAIL: Are there specific responses or results—either indirect or direct—that your paintings have had that are instructive for you?

ROCKMAN: I learned that people I idolize are human, which gives me confidence in what I'm doing. What I do isn't for everyone, and I don't think anything worth doing is

for everyone. But I have a tremendous responsibility as an artist. I see the tradition that I'm coming from as civil rights, not to say that I suffer as much as black people did during the civil rights era, but I'm saying that the environmental movement needs activists, in the tradition of civil rights, feminism, gay rights, and so on. I think that the environmental movement has had a pitiful track record of having charismatic leaders.

RAIL: Did you ever at any point want to be a leader in that movement?

ROCKMAN: I think to do that you have to be very patient, and since I'm an only child who spends most of my time alone [Laughs.] I have enough of a struggle to have my family tolerate me. I don't see myself doing well in long-term public situations out of town.

RAIL: Do you think art can successfully influence policy change for climate and environmental issues?

ROCKMAN: I tend to think that art, as we categorize fine art in our culture, cannot. It can—perhaps—on very modest levels. But I think that movies and other popular media can, which is something I've taken upon myself to do. I see myself as not just an artist, but a storyteller. I'm working on a project with a writer with Amazon Studios that was my idea.

I was deeply affected by *The China Syndrome*, which came out in 1979, when I was sixteen. In combination with Three Mile Island Meltdown, a groundswell of negativity was created that the nuclear industry in America never recovered from. I think we need something similar to happen for the climate-change issue—something that is so powerful that it cannot be explained away by clowns. It has to be visceral and powerful, and I think movies



Alexis Rockman, *Ark*, 2014. Oil on wood. 44×56 inches. Courtesy the artist and Sperone Westwater Gallery.



Alexis Rockman, *The Raft*, 2010. Oil on wood. 50×70 inches. Courtesy the artist and Sperone Westwater Gallery.

and television could be that type of format. If there's any hope, I think it's that. It's obviously unlikely that anything can save the world. So many of our problems are because of our evolutionary history that we can't get out of our own way. ☀

ECO-FEMINISM REVISITED BY ELEANOR HEARTNEY

The 1970s saw the simultaneous emergence of environmentalism and feminism as important social forces. At the time, it was obvious to many observers that the two movements were related. A number of artists and historians made explicit connections between them, noting that both rejected social and scientific models based on domination and hierarchy in favor of an approach to society and nature that emphasized relatedness, co-dependence, and interconnection. Both sounded alarms about the continuation of the status quo. Both called for a radical reordering of human priorities.

Reaching back to the Renaissance, when commercial and technological innovations overturned earlier, more organic conceptions of nature, historians like Carolyn Merchant suggested that the modern paradigm of domination and exploitation that had replaced it now threatened the future of the earth. Artists approached the subject from a different perspective. Mierle Laderman Ukeles, for instance, was lured into environmentalism by way of her role as an artist and mother. She suggested that the practice of "maintenance" more commonly associated with domesticity and "women's work" might serve as a constructive model for the larger social, economic, and political systems that sustain contemporary life.

Both figures were part of an emerging ecological consciousness dubbed "eco-feminism." As the 1970s rolled into the 1980s, Ronald Reagan took the solar panels off the White House, the environmental movement was stalled by the combination of neo-liberal economic theory and

cheap gas, and a rift appeared in the feminist movement over the relationship between women and nature. The latter development had implications for environmental consciousness because many of the ideas espoused by eco-feminists were now seen as fatally infected with a retrograde essentialism that merely reinforced the age-old duality of feminine nature and masculine culture. Instead, post-structural-oriented feminists and theorists embraced the idea that both nature and culture are social constructs. In some of the sillier manifestations of this perspective, nature was dismissed as a valid category altogether, as when Peter Halley opined, "The jungle ride at Disney World may in fact be more real to most people than the real jungle."

By the '90s, climate change had ceased to be a Hollywood fantasy and begun to appear disturbingly imminent. Suddenly a belief in nature and its uncontrollable forces seemed less reactionary. Theorists like Timothy Morton (*Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*) have declared the arrival of the Anthropocene era, in which human activity has become the central driver of the planet's geologic changes. With the restoration of the traditional balance between nature and human society apparently now out of the question, artists and environmentalists have turned to the question of how we may best address a world in which climate change is a reality.

From the perspective of the 21st century, the value of many of the founding insights of eco-feminism are ever more clear. By pairing the liberation of women with the restoration of the balance of nature, eco-feminism points

the way toward a more egalitarian, less nakedly competitive world. Today, of course, any survey of environmental activists and artists makes it clear that neither gender has a lock on this way of thinking. Even Pope Francis has drawn a connection between climate change and the rapacious pursuit of capitalism. But the search for an alternative philosophy leads back to feminism and the spirit of interconnectivity and reciprocity that inspired its early practitioners. Rejecting the dualistic and mechanistic vision of nature that has dominated western culture since the Renaissance, a feminist-inflected view proposes metaphors that stress the interrelationship between humanity and nature, and regards nature as an organism whose health depends on the well being of all its various parts, human and nonhuman alike. When humanity is seen as part of nature, environmental solutions can emerge from the creative rethinking of all our systems of economic, social, and political organization.

Recent assessments by climate scientists reveal that we are at a critical juncture in our response to global climate change. Much depends on the model of nature we choose to follow and the solutions that follow from that model. The feminist tradition points toward a holistic approach that inspires and continues to motivate the most significant practitioners of contemporary environmental art. ☀

ELEANOR HEARTNEY is a New York-based art critic and the author of numerous books about contemporary art.

BEFORE THE STORM CLOUDS OF THE 21ST CENTURY

BY MEL CHIN

The artists tried to change us with innovative models of social practice and the democratic socialist revolution laid a clear path in response to environmental change.

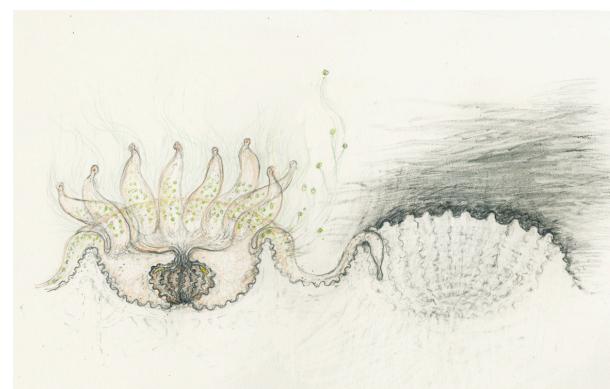
But most people never took on the burden of global warming. Their minds were still collared by a yoke fitted during the last throes of capitalism. Outlawed agents of free markets returned and re-hitched the weak, taking the reins once more to steer things even deeper into the ground. The previous headlock on the overall consciousness of a consuming population resumed, a full nelson, hell-bent on wringing out every last ducat from a whipped, whimpering, depleted world.

Some of the cultural workers broke ranks with do-gooder activism, returning to trust the old market-driven driveline. Some, disgusted and busted with the reversal of developments, ditched it all to hide away as creative could-have-beens, eking out their practices in small locales without notice.

The art world was trumpeted as having a hot, colorful return. But that faded at about the same time that widespread *temp. sensitive chromalveolata endosymbiont death* occurred, prompting the mass coral bleaching in the oceans.

All the politics and economics really didn't matter; the damage was done.

The waters came early. Alongside smoldering hot acid rains, the oceans, unable to sequester the added carbon, unleashed a last offensive on Greenland's frail ice. The melt-watered-sea rose, obliterating flimsy, value-engineered coastal protections. The personal jets of now-aged billionaires, who never trickled down into environmental movements and orchestrated the overthrow of the socialist democrats, were unable to take off. They slipped and slid on shit-smeared runways, the discharges of excrement, grease and pharmaceutical waste, boiling out of un-flushable sewers. A few fleeing and unable to board, wallowed in muck. They were engulfed by swarms of sucking and infecting clouds, and choked on the mosquito miasma, as acrid smoke of exploding transformer PCBs further blackened the unforgiving heavens.



Mel Chin, *Endosymbiont Flight, Polyp Death*, 2015. Graphite, colored pencil on paper. 10½×8 inches. Courtesy the artist.

With an unexpected irony, the poor, made pariahs as the cause of all ills, sheltered some of these undeserving .01 percent-ers—their skills, honed by outcast status, had made them adept at survival. Things had been bad so long they shrugged off the climate changes, reasoning that their sufferings could not be worse than the systemic violence they had lived through.

Urban basements became ballasted breeding pools, foul cellars fostering new pestilence. Über-drug-resistant infections, and blooms of opportunistic viral agents went riding on explosive puffs of mold spores. Once airborne, that dust fell upon acre after acre of sprawling, suburban conformity. Saturated streets became canals filled with bodies, bloated fatty rafts gently rolling in unison upon fetid waters.

Coastal refugees crawled their way up to the Villes. One group led by a museum trustee, once a champion of the preservation of culture, wielded a Brancusi *Bird* sculpture as a bludgeon and was swaddled in shreds of Christopher Wool. He loudly claimed this high ground, a “promised land, full of good Christian country folk” and was mowed down by an Appalachian child with a sharpened garden hoe. Hill people, spooked by years of unrelenting drought, were already fighting for the last drips of ancient springs.



Mel Chin, *Enhanced Full Nelson*, 2015. Digitally manipulated image. 5×5 ½ inches. Courtesy the artist.

Hordes of urban enviro-evacuees, hollowed and crazy-eyed, met crazy-eyed hoarders of guns, loaded up and ready. Fueled by paranoid predictions of take-overs and government control, the Ville people unleashed a shredding barrage of Second Amendment justifications, finally fulfilled.

Once-empathetic souls, witnesses to acts so heinous, were muted into soulless self-preserving silence. The fearsome survivors, who reacted without reflection, did not value expression or emotion. Yet these new masters of the climate chaos were hounded by internal voices, whispers howling for meaning and direction. They began their hunt for the former artists, ingenious in their aesthetics of adaptation and abstracted camouflages, to yank them from dark hidey-holes. It was hoped that those with the shattered, frenzied imaginations could predict the next steps. ☀

MEL CHIN is an artist sequestered in Egypt Township, North Carolina. He is looking for new recipes.

AN ART OF “WHY NOT?”

BY JEFFREY KASTNER

I'd like to try to frame the question that's been posed here less as a consideration of how art might impact thinking about the environment and the various social effects of its continued degradation, and more as an inquiry into how certain styles of thinking might inform art making and shape its ability to effectively influence opinions and action on such issues. It certainly seemed telling that the word “art” didn't actually appear in the prompt until its very final paragraph. It's not quite that art qua art was set up as an afterthought. Yet as structured in this instance (the “aesthetic, emotional, and beautiful,” set against problematization, theorization, empowerment, influence) it felt like just one possible mode of activity—and a potentially compromised one at that—available to the makers and thinkers of today's art world interested in creating effective responses to the range of global crises facing the planet.

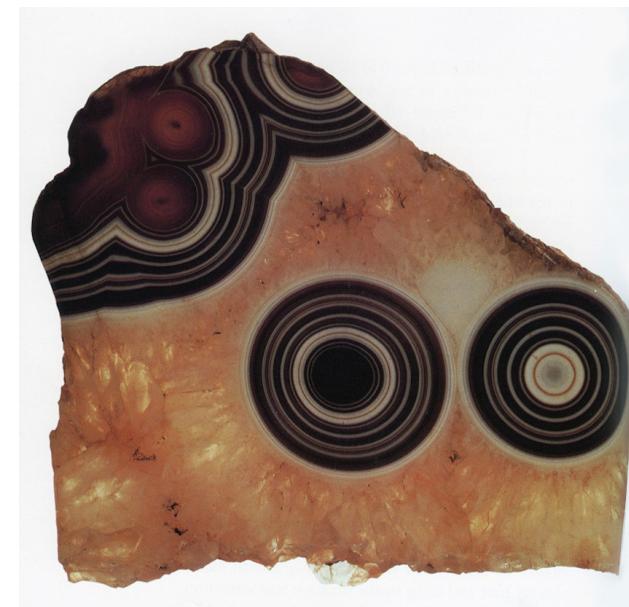
An anecdote that has informed my own thinking about the artistic and the natural—and about the way certain kinds of curiosity perhaps have built into them a kind of ethical dimension—is the story of the break between Roger Caillois and his Surrealist colleague André Breton. Caillois joined the Surrealists in 1932, while still studying sociology at the École normale supérieure in Paris. Initially attracted by the group's openness to forms of intellectual play and imaginative poetic feints, Caillois also always had an eye toward bringing a greater sense of systematic rigor to the Surrealist project. Two days after Christmas 1934, Caillois wrote a letter to Breton formally distancing himself from the movement. He cited, as a signal illustration of the crucial difference between the two men's intellectual outlook, their different responses to a recent incident in which they had been presented with a pair of so-called Mexican jumping beans (seedpods of a particular Mesoamerican shrub that

contain within them the larva of a moth, which, in response to the warmth of the human hand or of sunlight, seem to jump of their own accord). Caillois had suggested cutting the beans open to see what made them move as they did, but Breton refused, saying, according to Caillois, that such an act “would have destroyed the mystery.”

This was, for the young thinker, the final confirmation that his desire to find an equilibrium in Surrealism between what he called the “satisfactions” of “research” and the “pleasures” of “poetry” was destined to be fruitless, as Breton would always be definitively on the side of the latter. Wishing to more fully unite the irrational and the rational in a simultaneously imaginative and methodical exploration of the wonders of the natural and social worlds, Caillois called on a “new science of why not?” and staked out his preference for “a form of the Marvellous that does not fear knowledge but, on the contrary, thrives on it.”

Perhaps it's in such a figuring of both the world and of artistic investigations of it—not the aesthetic or the problematized, the beautiful or the theorized (but such distinctions run into and through each other until their boundaries begin to chafe and dissolve)), a set of conditions understood to grow more rather than less enchanted the more insistently we interrogate them—that the best chance for real change lies. ☀

JEFFREY KASTNER is a New York-based writer and the senior editor of *Cabinet* magazine. A longtime contributor of criticism and journalism to publications such as *Artforum* and the *New York Times*, his monographic essays have appeared in exhibition publications for artists including Doug Aitken, David Altmejd, Jeremy Blake, Michaël Borremans, Tomás Saraceno, and Sarah Sze. His books include the edited volumes *Land and Environmental Art* (Phaidon, 1998) and *Documents of Contemporary Art: Nature* (MIT Press/Whitechapel, 2012).



Eye agate fragment (Uruguay), from the collection of Roger Caillois (1913–1978). Caillois's self-described “materialist mysticism” found perhaps its most vivid expression in his relationship to stones, and he amassed a large collection of cut and polished mineral specimens throughout his life. Their hidden structures and forms presented, Caillois believed, one of many important subjects for what he called “diagonal science,” a set of practices designed to “bridge the older disciplines and force them to engage in dialogue.” Such an approach would “[slice] obliquely through our common world [to] decipher latent complicities and reveal neglected correlations,” seeking to “further a form of knowledge that would first involve the workings of a bold imagination and be followed, then, by strict controls, all the more necessary insofar as such audacity tries to establish ever riskier transversal paths.”

RE: ECOLOGY DRAFT

BY NANCY NOWACEK

On Sep 20, 2015, at 12:41 PM, Nancy Nowacek wrote:

Greg —

I'm sorry I haven't had more time to dedicate to this incredible opportunity—I've been scrambling to get multiple insurance policies, funding, contracts, and materials aligned to build and test the fully engineered bridge prototype next week. We've had to postpone two other times, and this is our last chance before the weather changes and/or the space on the pier gets rented to a longer-term tenant.

Instead of starting a 500-word essay from scratch about why I agree with your thesis, and how Citizen Bridge is an attempt to be both beautiful, experiential, empowering, and a catalyst to inspire others to become environmental advocates and take on the imagination of the future of the city as it sinks—I took a stab at a new draft of the pledge on citizenship that I've been working on in concert with Citizen Bridge. In my mind, it's a pledge that participants can sign before crossing over the water.

Over the course of this project, I have thought a lot about what citizenship means to me, and have come to the conclusion that it's the space between us—between people, and between us and the environment—and how we speak to, act in, and care for that space in-between. More than allegiance to a nation-state, I believe citizenship is how we act with respect to one another and the world around us.

I'd like to call it something like "Citizenship, A Draft for a Future"—thoughts?

xx

N

NANCY NOWACEK draws on grammars of exercise, architecture, urban planning, and engineering systems, to explore the exchange between the body, labor, leisure, and the built and natural environment. Nowacek's work has been exhibited in New York, San Francisco, San Jose, Canada, and Europe, and she is currently a fellow at Eyebeam Atelier. She is based in Brooklyn and teaches at NYU.

I ,.....,
am a citizen of the water.

I acknowledge that the city's waterways are important to my future and the future of my family, neighborhood and city.

I value working with others to realize ideas that support a creative, empowered and sustainable relationship to the water.

I believe that cities are acts of collective imagination, and that through cooperation and sweat, we can actively participate in shaping our future.

I pledge to uphold these beliefs to the best of my ability with patience, kindness, humor, and

Signed Dated

in conversation

SARAH NELSON WRIGHT AND EVE MOSHER

Sarah Nelson Wright is a New York City-based, socially engaged media artist and educator. Eve Mosher is a New York City-based artist and interventionist at the forefront of engaging art to tackle climate change in local communities. Through email exchanges, they discussed the role of art and digital technologies in expressing climate crises.

SARAH NELSON WRIGHT: For your project *HighWaterLine* (2007), you used a sports field marker to trace the border along seventy miles of Manhattan and Brooklyn shoreline that would be severely impacted by increased megafloods if climate change continues. The

area you marked was flooded by Superstorm Sandy in 2012. You've since collaborated with Heidi Quante to expand this project into a toolkit for coastal communities everywhere to visualize the impact of climate change. Based on your experience, what power does art have to address these issues?

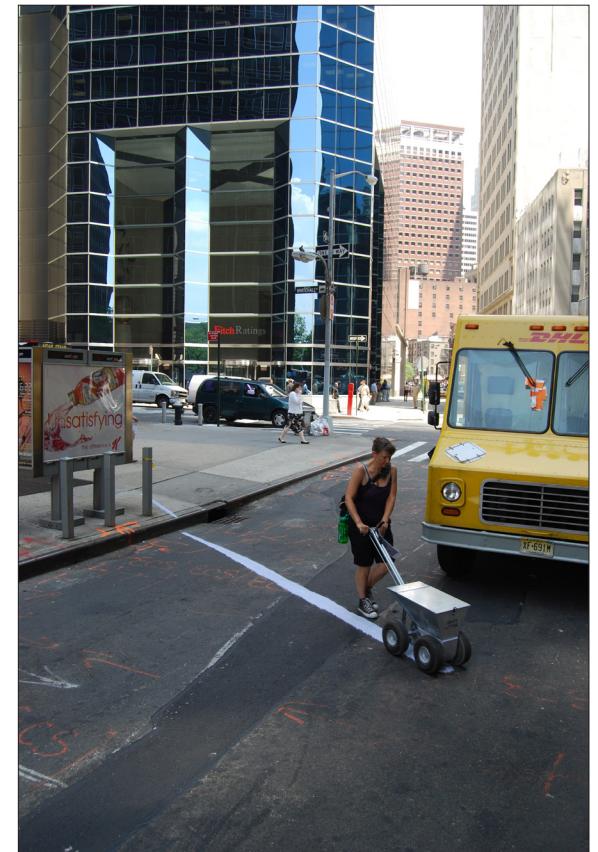
EVE MOSHER: Art provides so many ways into a very complicated and overwhelming conversation. It can simplify complex data, or make the invisible visible. Art and culture can create emotional and visceral responses, which leave a lasting impression. Art can inspire change through imagination and presenting modes of collective power. It can also

make climate impacts personal and local through experience and curiosity. *HighWaterLine* was—and is—so much about having conversations about local impacts of climate change in the actual places they are happening, in neighborhoods at risk of increased flooding. It provides an opportunity to share personal experiences and local resources.

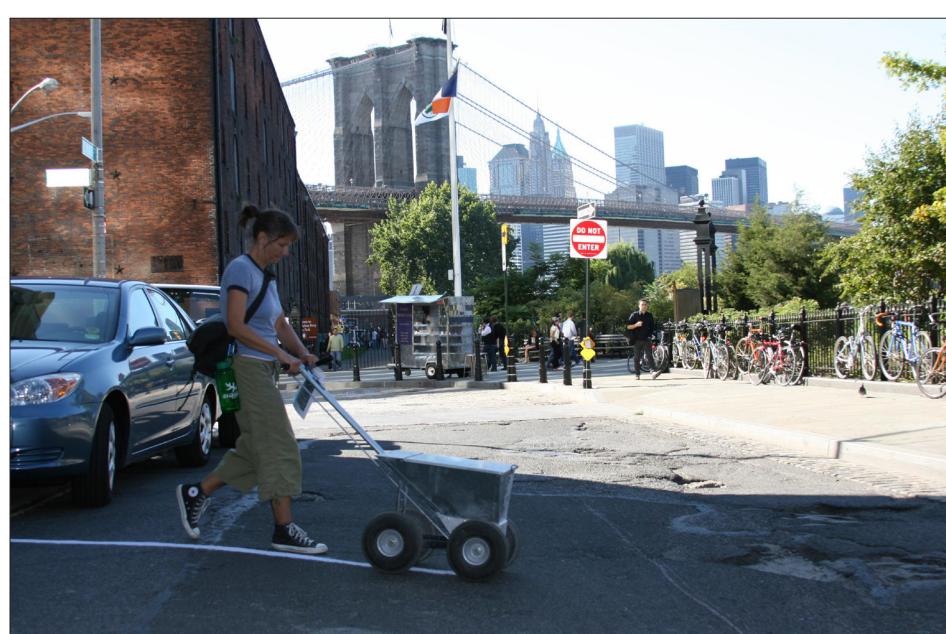
WRIGHT: As a media artist concerned with the environment, I am struggling with the impact of using digital technology to make and promote my work. How can artists reconcile the environmental impact of our work with our desire to be leaders in addressing climate change?

MOSHER: That's a really hard one to answer, in part because there are so many life choices that have an impact that is irreconcilable, and we do them anyway. I think it's a collection of your actions, and a thoughtfulness with which you approach the work. If you never consider it, that's a problem, but if you consider the impact and work towards the best possible outcome, while also communicating about that struggle, that's a good thing to model.

WRIGHT: In an age of climate crisis, is there a place for art that doesn't engage with the environment or other pressing social issues?



Courtesy HighWaterLine. Photo: Hose Cedeno.



Eve Mosher, *HighWaterLine*, 2007. Public Intervention. Courtesy HighWaterLine. Photo: Hose Cedeno.

MOSHER: I think work like that is fiercely valuable. Art can be a place of solace, reflection, escape, curiosity, and playfulness. We need those to be able to cope with the complexities of our times. I hope that some of my work, even while addressing pressing issues, continues to embody some of these aspects. As serious as the undertaking of marking a line denoting climate change impacts is, pushing a sports field marker through the city is a playful act—and leaves, at times, an aesthetically beautiful line. ☺

A BUCKET LIST FOR ARTISTS WORKING IN THE AGE OF ECOLOGICAL COLLAPSE:

The Top Six Things Not To Miss Before They Are Gone!*

BY DAVID BROOKS AND MARK DION

1 Mark Dion (MD): **A Healthy Coral Reef** – I can think of nothing more glorious or conspicuously biologically diverse than a thriving reef—rich in hard and soft corals and all the organisms that depend on it. Corals reefs are desperately in crisis. Most of those surrounding Florida and the Caribbean Islands are so compromised that diving them is a deeply disturbing experience. Too much human-produced nutrients in the seas, destructive fish practices, tourism, climate change, and ocean acidification add up to the future of coral reefs looking pretty grim.

2 David Brooks (DB): **The Xingu River** – Over a decade ago, the Brazilian government proposed to build a hydroelectric dam on the Xingu River in the lower Amazon, called the Belo Monte Dam. It would be the third largest dam in the world, one of the most detrimental to biodiversity worldwide, and nearly wipeout the Xingu people's food supply. Nonetheless, construction has already broken ground and consequently, the Xingu people of the region have openly declared war on the Brazilian government. The Xingu people's unrest and protests have sparked a newly organized resistance of indigenous people against such large-scale projects across the whole continent.

3 MD: Along with sights and experiences that will likely vanish in the near future, are also tastes. This is particularly true of some of our favorite big ocean fishes. **Bluefin tuna and swordfish**, while delicious, are seriously endangered by overfishing. I am deeply conflicted in advising to eat them while it's possible. We really do need some sane global marine management to give the fish stocks a good, long rest.

4 DB: **The Maldives** – This island nation made a big splash during the 2009 Copenhagen Climate Summit when the former president, Mohamed Nasheed, made the strong case to the leading industrialized nations that the Maldives will become the first nation to go completely underwater within the next 100 years due to anthropogenically induced sea level rise. The Maldives is yet another example of a poorer nation receiving a disproportionate level of consequences to the wealthier nation perpetrators.

5 MD: **Bats of the Northeast** – You have probably noticed—if you live in the Eastern USA—the lack of bats hunting the twilight skies. White-nose syndrome is a mysterious fungal disease first seen a little more than a decade ago. Since then, somewhere near ten million bats have been infected and died, all with the distinctive tuft of white fungal growth around their muzzle. At Mildred's Lane we used to watch little brown bats pour out of the ancient farmhouse for close to an hour. Now a trickle of a dozen bats a night remind us of the missing winged hordes.

6 DB: **The Tree Lobster** – This ancient gargantuan hand-sized species of stick insect, *Dryococelus australis*, was presumed extinct since 1920 when a British supply ship ran aground on Lord Howe Island off Australia and a pack of stowaway rats jumped ship, invaded the island, and, within two year's time consumed every known specimen. Then, in 2001 a lone group of twenty four individual tree lobsters were discovered at night, two hundred fifty feet up on a sharp crag of rock, under a single Melaleuca shrub—isolated at sea. Though its breeding program has had some success, it is still, by far, the rarest insect in the wild. ☺

* For the complete list of ten, please visit BrooklynRail.org

MARK DION is a visual artist whose work concerns the history of the culture of nature.

DAVID BROOKS is a New York-based artist whose work investigates how cultural concerns cannot be divorced from the natural world, as well as the terms that nature is perceived and utilized.

LAND OF SYLLEPSIS BY KEVIN ZUCKER

The “mining” of virtual currencies rewards the completion of work required to verify, record, and secure transactions. New currency is released when transaction information is accepted into the network’s ledger. In order to be accepted, this information must be combined with a numerical sequence from a certain range, which can only be arrived at by trial and error.

Twice daily a tanker truck crosses a bridge to make a slow round-trip across a sand island, to a lone house on a walled slice of lawn at the far end. Seen from forty-five floors above, the surface of the island is level and unmarred, except for the tracks left by the truck, and its boundaries are a series of perfect Bézier curves.

While luck remains a factor in being first to arrive at one valid sequence, difficulty levels continually adjust to maintain a regular average interval of time between successes. More nodes and faster hardware produce more guesses per second; lowered odds follow, necessitating further increases in processing power.

Newly planted palm trees line a highway for hours, partially obscuring the national energy company’s installations out by the wavering horizon. The fronds of each tree are still bundled in burlap, and they bend wildly in different directions as if each were subject to its own weather system.

As the currency progresses towards a distant predetermined limit of total units to be released, purpose-built equipment and pooled efforts among large groups of users become requisites for competitiveness.



Kevin Zucker, *Untitled (Black & White Sunset)*, 2014. Polaroid. 3½ × 4¼ inches. Courtesy the artist, Eleven Rivington, New York and Linn Luehn, Dusseldorf.



Kevin Zucker, *Untitled (Black & White Sunset)*, 2014. Polaroid. 3½ × 4¼ inches. Courtesy the artist, Eleven Rivington, New York and Linn Luehn, Dusseldorf.

Inland, a five-story corrugated metal pyramid, housing an automotive museum, looms over the ruin of a recreation of a traditional village. Garbage, broken furniture, and two rusted satellite dishes are embedded around a warren of thatched-roof shelters, where the first drifts of finer, redder sand collect into the suggestion of a border; the desert beginning in earnest.

Both the manufacture of this equipment and the electrical supply required for its operation rely heavily on the extraction and refining of non-renewable resources.

The humid night sky weighing down the city takes its cast from the particular green that illuminates the façades of houses of worship here. It’s the same color that decades of selective reporting have indelibly linked to night vision, the hue of photocathodes and phosphors intensifying and focusing available light into the Claude-glass atmospherics of remote administration.

The cost of hardware and the amount of energy required to power an operation eventually begin to determine profitability. “Mining” becomes simultaneously figurative and literal—a kind of syllepsis—and questions emerge about the capacity of the technology to combat the centralization of economic power.

Hotel carpet, curtains, tinted window glass, and the hot reflection of the sun off the skyline frame a man standing on a small scaffold that has been custom built to match the compound curve of the exterior of the building’s façade. Working methodically with a squeegee, he disappears below the floor-plane in minutes and the windows begin to streak with dust again.

Along with the elegant illusions of frictionlessness and abstraction, distinctions between physical and computational labor and resources collapse. ☺

KEVIN ZUCKER (b.1976, lives in New York) has had solo shows worldwide, and has been featured in group exhibitions at the New Museum, the Brooklyn Museum, and MoMA/PS1, amongst others. Zucker’s work has been discussed in publications ranging from *Artforum* to *The New York Times*, and is in public and private collections internationally, including the Albright-Knox, LACMA, and the Whitney Museum of American Art. He is represented by Eleven Rivington (NY) and Linn Lühn (Dusseldorf).

BEYOND THE SCENIC VISTA BY IAN COFRE

Human beings and their societies alter first nature at best in a rational and ecological way—or at worst in an irrational and anti-ecological way.¹

Now, emotional and aesthetic values have overpowered those pragmatic ones.²

Imagine that a federal government decided to protect a national forest: would that justify a violent intervention against a group of people who were mining illegally? What if these illegal miners were desperately poor? This scenario played out in late April of 2014, when the armed forces and National Police of Peru bombed away the livelihood of a consortium of gold miners in the Amazon—whether as a pretext or not—for ecological preservation.

As a consequence, the aesthetics of environmentalism became the enemy of a community, who has responded pragmatically not only by questioning, but also by becoming openly hostile to ecological concerns, resisting in rational and anti-ecological ways. Although more complicated than can be presented here, this scenario set the backdrop for an artist residency called HAWAPI, which has organized groups of artists over each of the past four years to travel and see firsthand the extremes of ecological emergencies around Peru. At a time when there are few new and revolutionary curatorial practices, founder Maxim Holland's pursuit challenges artists to respond to these contexts and assumptions—both their own and those of the communities they collectively inhabit for about ten days—in very public ways towards a common language, and in this case, to incorporate the



Andres Reyes. Artist rendition of temporary cultural center after collapse in a thunderstorm, 2015. HAWAPI.

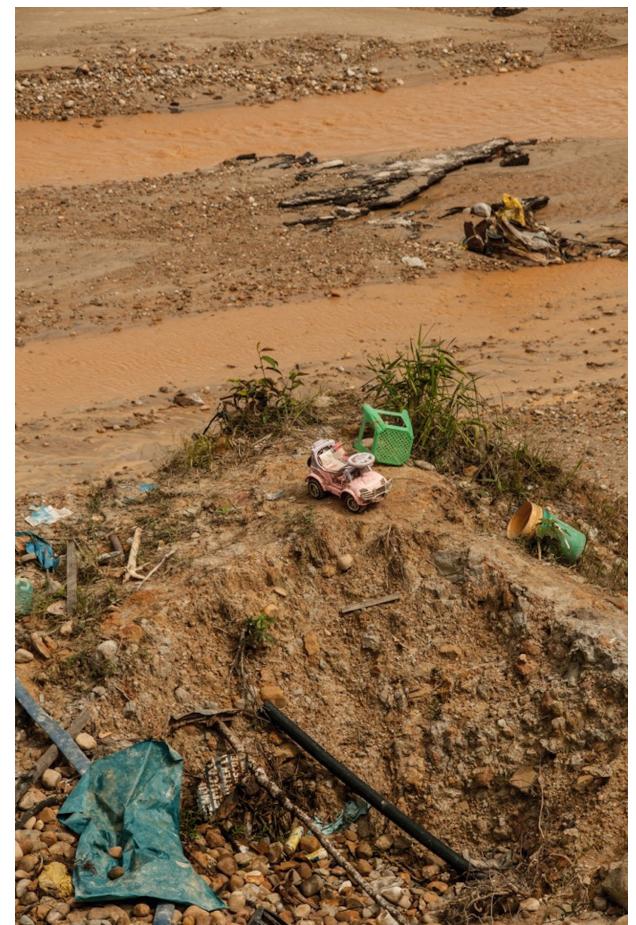
besieged community's narrative to make any inroads to understanding.

Following a recounting of this recent journey, I find relating to and defending Speculative Realism and Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO) difficult, even vis-à-vis Timothy Morton's playful writings, which indulge in literary games and linguistic calisthenics in pursuit of an original subjectivity. When applied to the real world, the solution of a "zero-person perspective"³ seems insufficient to talk about the end-of-the-world ecological concerns that communities in Peru already face from day to day, where conscious decisions are made to dehumanize and violently interdict real people. The major takeaway from Morton and his attempts to destroy capital-N Nature—through the inversion, flattening, and dissipation of hierarchies and boundaries between the human and non-human—is that aesthetics can, in fact, prevent sound ecological thought. Bookchin would even agree: "If nature were no more than a scenic vista, then mere metaphoric and poetic descriptions of it might suffice to replace systematic thinking about it."⁴

However, steeped in assumptions about interconnectedness and the collapse of the domination over "nature," both Morton's and Bookchin's positions overlook that, even with full awareness of environmental damage, an unaestheticized world may not arrive peacefully and is not necessarily an ecological one. Beyond the "scenic vista," Morton seems persistently trapped in the aesthetic dimension—a territory of new representations, metaphors, and ambient poetics that



Huepetuhe, Madre de Dios, Peru. 2015. Photo: Maxim Holland.



Huepetuhe, Madre de Dios, Peru, 2015. Photo: Maxim Holland.

lack an impetus or criticality on their own in this newly denatured world—while in Bookchin's prescription for a *social ecology*, he sees people. It's this latter approach that can scale up from the page to occupy the space of the real world. ☀

1. Murray Bookchin, "Social Ecology versus Deep Ecology: A Challenge for the Ecology Movement," *Green Perspectives: Newsletter of the Green Program Project*, nos. 4-5. (Summer 1987)
2. Jon Mooallem, "Streaming Eagles." *New York Times*, June 20, 2014.
3. Timothy Morton, "Zero Landscapes in the Time of Hyperobjects," *Graz Architectural Magazine* (7): 2011, 78-87.
4. Murray Bookchin, "What is Social Ecology?" *Social Ecology and Communalism*, AK Press, 2007.

IAN COFRE is an independent curator and writer based in New York City, working primarily with emerging and established artists, locally based and from Latin America. Recent projects in 2015 include *an other land...and in the other, our own*, at Prospektrom Normanns (Stavanger, Norway) in May, and *Re/Post* at Storefront Ten Eyck (Brooklyn, NY) in June.

ALTERNATIVE SPACES AND THE ANTHROPOCENE BY GEAN MORENO

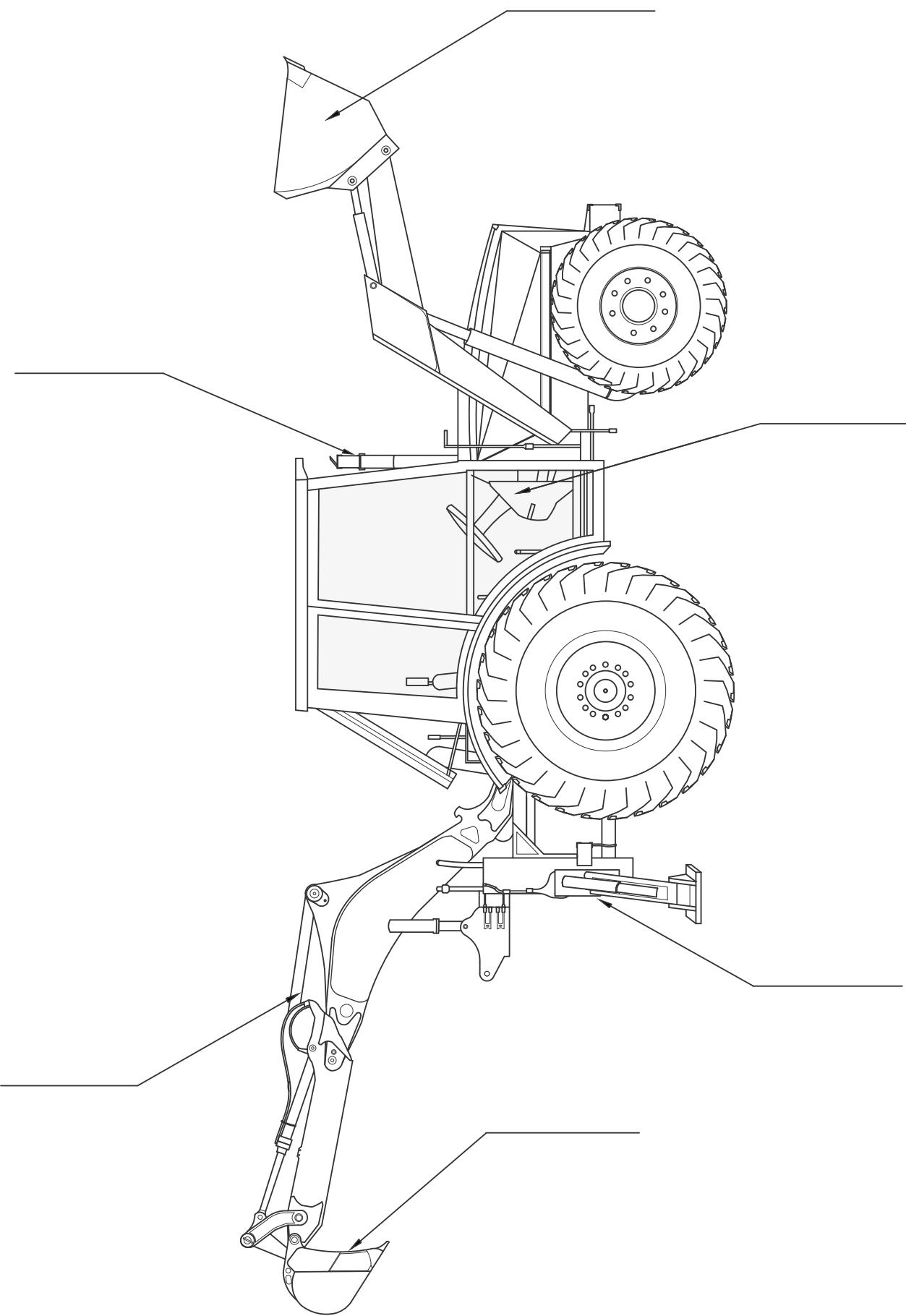
Alternative spaces are inseparable from social history. They've always sought to establish new ways of producing and circulating art beyond the limited options that capitalist relations afford cultural production, even if certain spaces have at one time or another worked against this very mission, becoming sad way stations between educational institution or underground scene and the market. For a long time, however, the abstractions that alternative spaces as a certain kind of entity stood against were clear: commodity form, exchange relation, etc. But something has changed. A new demand is being put to spaces and practices that want to function outside the hegemonic space of the dominant culture. While there is a need to continue challenging the old sociocultural abstractions, as these are either reinforced or reconstituted into forms that penetrate deeper into the social field (and our subjectivities) by capital's shift from manufacturing to finance, we now also face a maligned biosphere whose newly emerging effects impinge on all aspects of human experience. That is to say that the barrier—even if artificially established and exaggerated by our anthropocentrism—that once separated social history and natural history has collapsed.

A growing understanding of this fact is part of our response to living in what we are calling the Anthropocene. And now, not only the problems of a melting permafrost and vanishing glaciers, sea-level rise, drought, and other perils related to environmental instability but also those of visibility and visualization are becoming important determinants in the kinds of subjects and cultural producers we can be, the kinds of politics that can be generated, and the sort of world we will be able to live in.

It seems we have hit a threshold at which the alternative space needs to address more than social contradictions—intimately tied as these are to environmental devastation. Let's not pretend that the Anthropocene is unrelated in any way to capitalist expansion, whether the Golden Spike ultimately lands in 1610 or 1850 or 1945, but we also face problems generated by the novel transactions and displacements of molecules that human agents have set in motion. This, then, is the pertinent question for those in the business of presenting contemporary art while attempting to maintain a particular politics: what should the alternative space, as a typology that still wants to stand for progressive claims, look like in the Anthropocene? And, perhaps more poignantly: is the alternative space even equipped for the

new demand that is being put to it? Native to an age that doesn't look quite like ours, can it expand its program to deal with new realities? And if can't, then what replaces it? What does it morph into? What kind of structure would make sense in its place? The problem, in the end, is that how artistic production needs to change in light of planetary system shifts can't divorce itself from the question of what sorts of new—or repurposed—institutions will be needed to enhance its effective power. An effective disturbance of existing symbolic and political orders has to be part of the equation. In taking the question of presentational platforms seriously, contemporary art production, perhaps no longer looking like itself, may find ways in which to intervene again in the world in some significant way. ☀

GEAN MORENO is an artist and writer based in Miami. His work has been exhibited at the North Miami MOCA, Künstlerhaus Palais Thum und Taxis in Bregenz, Institute of Visual Arts in Milwaukee, Haifa Museum in Israel, Arndt & Partner in Zürich, and Invisible-Exports in New York. He has contributed texts to various magazines and catalogues. In 2008, he founded [NAME] Publications, a platform for book-based projects. He is currently Artistic Director of Cannonball, a non-profit arts organization based in downtown Miami.



DATE: OCTOBER 2015		
CHK BY: DAVID BROOKS		
DRFT BY: A. MIRON		
SCALE: 1"=2.75'		

A PROVERBIAL MACHINE IN THE GARDEN
ELEVATION AND LOGISTICS
SOCIAL ECOLOGIES- THE BROOKLYN RAIL- DAVID BROOKS

DWG NO:

WRITER:

ARTIST:

The sculptural installation and print edition (pictured here) entitled *A Proverbial Machine in the Garden* address questions of how we consume and perceive the natural world, while also foreshadowing an entropic post-industrial future, in which the machinery that has shaped our world will finally lose all purpose. To participate in the project please visit the instructions online at: www.brooklynrail.org/2015/11/criticspage/machine

—David Brooks

The “machine in the garden” is a cultural symbol embodying the tension between the pastoral ideal and the sweeping transformations wrought by industrialization. In his seminal text, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (1964), cultural historian Leo Marx considers that “nature” is often symbolized by a garden in the American mythology, while an invading machine often stands in for “technology.” This metaphor points back to the industrial era in 19th century America and Europe, but is equally useful in describing the increasingly globalized networks of contemporary capitalism.