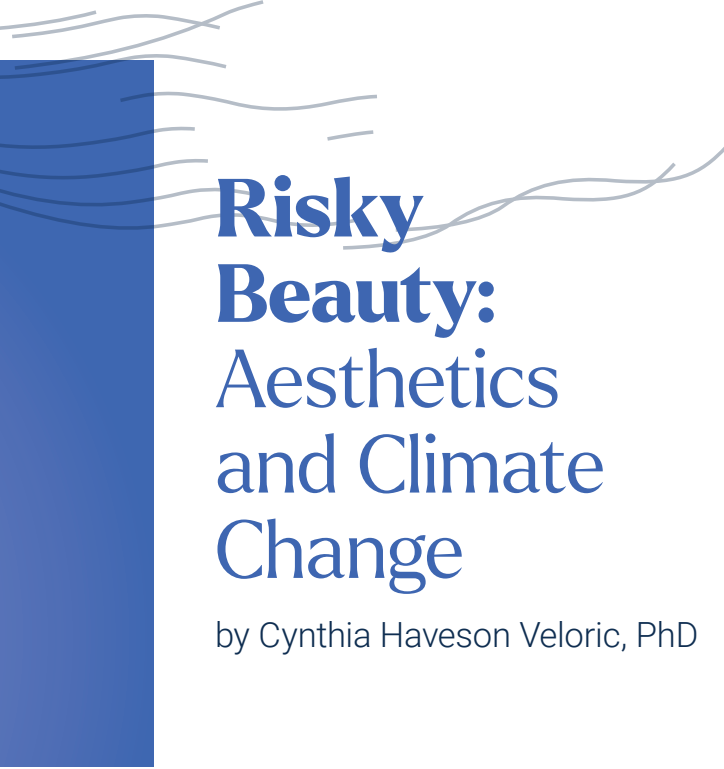


**Risky
Beauty:
Aesthetics
and Climate
Change**

April 14 – June 26, 2023

THE
**NURTURE
NATURE
CENTER**
EASTON, PA



Risky Beauty: Aesthetics and Climate Change

by Cynthia Haveson Veloric, PhD

As our days and months grow ever warmer, COVID seems endemic, and our country is besieged by wildfires, floods, and droughts, many of our fellow citizens are still in denial, or they normalize or compartmentalize the climate crisis.

In June 2022 the Supreme Court limited the authority of the Environmental Protection Agency to regulate greenhouse gas emissions from power plants that contribute to global warming. Politicians continue to placate big oil and gas companies, the military industrial complex, and those who do harm to our ecosystem through large-scale extraction, exploitative land development, illegal dumping, and by generating illegal, actionable levels of toxicity in the air, soil, and water. Greenwashing has become the norm for global corporations who pledge net-zero emissions, yet consistently fail to reduce their emissions in line with the 1.5-degree Celsius warming target established by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

The scientific community, journalists, and environmental activists have tirelessly tried to elucidate the connections between these agents and forces and our worsening climate crisis. They have even offered practical and sustainable solutions to a greener economy and thus a healthier planet. Yet there is still an overriding sense of numbness and apathy when it comes to making significant changes to avert catastrophe. What means are left to challenge our mindsets?

The arts have a way of intervening and awakening us by touching parts of our souls, our senses, our shared sense of humanity. Art succeeds in triggering emotions and sensations that cause us to ponder our role in nature's degradation. Artists expand the discourse by illuminating, questioning, and disentangling the cultural ideologies and forces that led to this crisis. The six artists in this exhibition so profoundly experience the ecological/environmental conditions that are changing the appearance and atmosphere of our planet, that they are moved to employ their media in ways that reawaken others to our collective predicament.

Risky Beauty: Aesthetics and Climate Change showcases artwork in different media that draws in viewers with its sensual beauty and drama, while stimulating awareness and changing perceptions about climate outcomes. This exhibition challenges viewers to consider how their aesthetic experience of nature has changed

in light of the scientific consensus about the validity of the climate crisis, the known societal forces that hasten environmental degradation, and the impact of climate change in their personal environments. Can the autonomist perspective of nature, which separates the inherent beauty and pleasure of nature from moral considerations, continue to have relevance in a disfigured and toxic world? The selected artwork frames landscape within the breakdown of ecosystems, overdeveloped land, loss of biodiversity, and extreme weather events. Each work reminds us of the precious quality and fragility of nature and how its existence (and ours) is threatened by human-induced actions.

A close inspection of each work reveals the destructive forces which undermine a healthy, biologically self-regulating planet. Each artist approaches the critical issues through intellectual speculation, an empathetic worldview, and rigorous craft-making. Environment and ecology have been their preoccupations, whether through biology-based residencies, landscape and waterway interventions, on-site learning labs, travel to the front lines of the climate crisis, extensive photo documentation or communicating with politicians. They do not present the world at face value; instead, they imbue it with multiple layers of personal meaning, philosophy, imagination, and free association.

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Dr. Cynthia Haveson Veloric is an independent curator, adjunct professor at University of the Arts, and environmentalist. She has worked in the curatorial departments of the Smithsonian American Art Museum, The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, and the Philadelphia Museum of Art. She recently combined her passion for art and environmental advocacy by pursuing a PhD focused on international artists' responses to the climate crisis. In 2018 she curated the exhibition *Repairing Our Earth, Diane Burko Artist/Environmental Activist*. She served on the art committee for the inaugural Pennsylvania Climate Convergence in Harrisburg in June 2022.

Essay © Dr. Cynthia Haveson Veloric



Diane Burko's emotional and sensual attachment to the earth's most awe-inspiring geology above and below the sea has led her to create landscapes of breathtaking splendor. She is equally guided by an imperative to expose the worst effects of global warming on vulnerable landforms and organisms. We are confronted with stunning panoramas of a world exploding, disintegrating, and melting due to unprecedented heat. Bold color, huge scale, and multi-panel compositions are used to great psychological and emotional advantage, prompting viewers into awe or terror, an artistic effect known as the *sublime*. The superficial beauty is complicated by the insertion of repeat photography, maps, and charts—the toolkits of scientific communication which emphasize tipping points in the biosphere. The combination of these visual tools with photo-realistic or abstract landscape is the marriage of rational thought and artistic license. The paintings warn that no place on Earth is immune to disaster, from glacial terrain to coral reefs to eucalyptus forests.

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◀ Diane Burko,
Great Barrier Reef, 2018.
Acrylic on canvas, 60" x 84"

▶ Diane Burko,
*Main Rongbuk Glacier
Series 1–3*, 2010. Oil on
canvas, 48" x 208" overall

▶ Diane Burko,
Summer Heat 1 & 2, 2020.
Mixed media on canvas,
84" x 162" overall

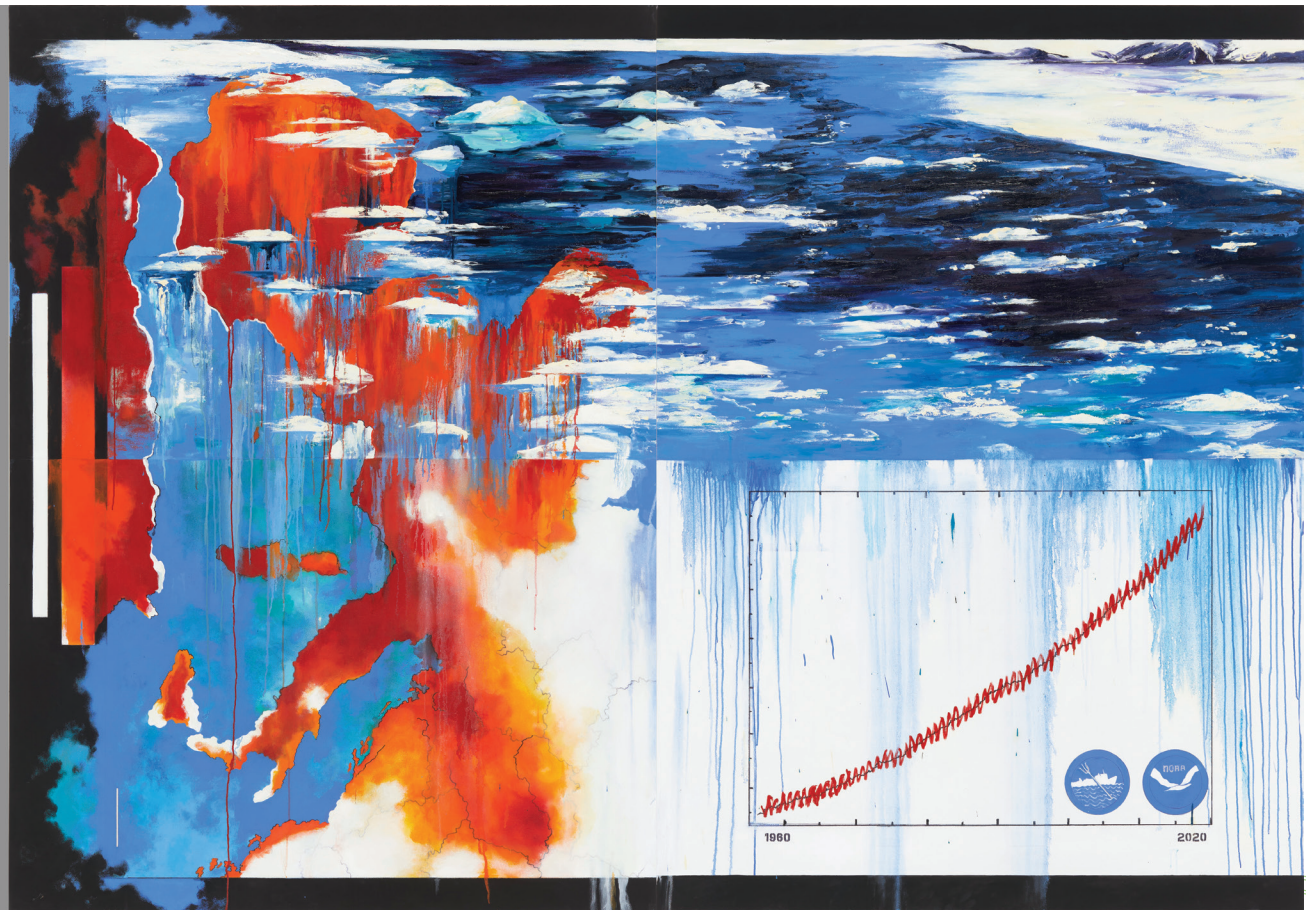
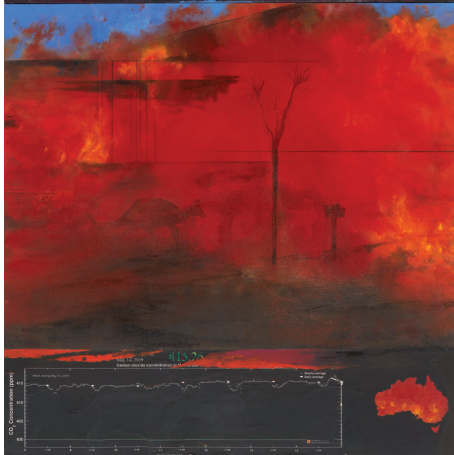
Diane Burko

Artist Statement

I work at the intersection of art, science, and the environment with an artistic practice that is devoted to bringing the challenges of climate change to light. Having spent over four decades exploring monumental and geological phenomena in a wide range of media from painting to photography to video, in 2006 I began devoting myself exclusively to the exploration of environmental issues. My artworks integrate experiences of on-location explorations, interactions with scientists in their labs and research data all resolved into captivating climate-conscious works that

encourage critical thinking about the impact humans are having on the environment. *Great Barrier Reef*, *Summer Heat*, and *Main Rongbuk Glacier Series* each approach the range of ecological crises that spiral out of rising global temperatures. By intertwining my aesthetic instincts with my political beliefs, I hope to inspire awareness, action, and a sense of purpose in confronting this critical moment before us. I want my images to bring both urgency and beauty into the conversation.

www.dianeburko.com



Deirdre Murphy has been studying bird and insect migration and nesting patterns for the last decade, a decade of the most extreme weather events in recorded history. Biology-based residencies have informed work such as *Oculus Minor*, in which she has transformed bird flight data into colorful visual schemes consisting of orbs, starry skies, black matchstick-like shapes, trails of white dots, and marbled (or camouflaged) horizontal strips. This is not the classic human-centric vision of Earth in its seasonal rotation, nor the "blue marble" photographed by NASA astronauts in 1972, both of which are dominated by a sense of regularity and calm. Murphy transforms earth into a series of surreal, boldly-colored celestial globes with different surfaces and rhythms; they are traversed by threatened species whose migrations have been disturbed by weather irregularities, smog, and light pollution. The dots and dashes also represent pathogens and viruses which are roaming more freely in our unstable atmosphere. There is friction between the overall aesthetic harmony of the paintings and the detailed chaos that they contain.

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Deirdre Murphy

Artist Statement

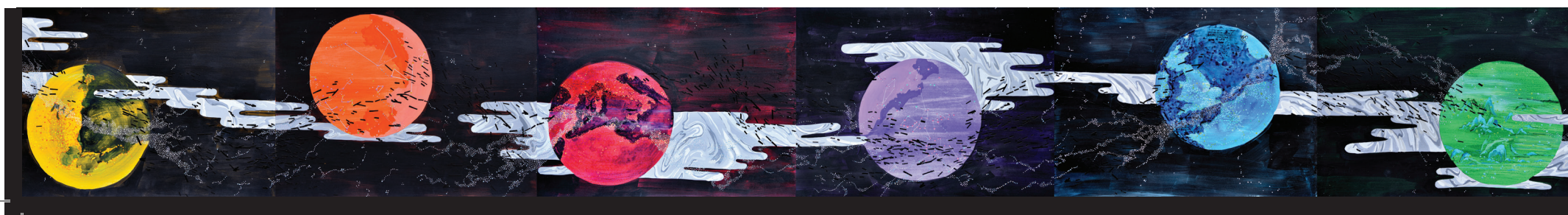
Oculus Minor was produced during a BioArt residency at Integral Molecular Lab funded in part by the Knight Foundation and University City Science Center in Philadelphia. During the residency I worked alongside virology scientists that were trying to identify protein structures on deadly viruses such as Ebola and Dengue and create vaccines. Peering through the lens, I found similarities between the fluorescent microscopic images to light pollution maps and constellations. Just as birds migrate, so do viruses, as we have seen with the COVID pandemic. Climate change has direct implications to the spread of viruses as humans disrupt the deep wildernesses, warming the planet.

▼ Deirdre Murphy, *Oculus Minor*, 2019.
Acrylic on Fabriano paper, mounted to
Baltic Plywood Panel, 24" x 180" overall

Birds know no artificial boundaries and can migrate across country and state lines without repercussions. We humans are just one of Earth's species that migrates, yet we cause so much unnecessary conflict with one another. I choose to study the Arctic Tern, a slender shore bird that crosses both Northern and Southern Hemispheres every year to migrate to its breeding territory. Many migratory birds navigate via the constellations to find their way, just like sailors thus the use of the Milky Way motif. The Arctic Tern travels 25,000 miles per year to lead its peaceful life cycle. We humans can learn from the migratory birds, to open our boundaries to one another, to welcome and embrace all people as part of humankind.

www.deirdremurphyart.com

► Deirdre Murphy, *Light Pollution Map Triptych*, 2019.
Mixed Media, ink on paper, 34"h x 22w" each







▲ Hiro Sakaguchi, *Nebula*, 2022.
Acrylic on canvas, 76" x 114"

More collisions of the natural and unnatural are cunningly, yet artfully embedded in landscapes by Hiro Sakaguchi. Pastel colors, often associated with prettiness, innocence and children, wash over environments that contain the signs and symbols of man-made destructive and polluting forces, as in *Nebula* (literally=numerous clouds of gas or dust in interstellar space). At first the viewer is enticed by nine feet of seductive color,

swirling vortexes, and the deployment of various shapes throughout the composition. But upon closer inspection we find tanks, missiles, cargo ships, airplanes, cars, nuclear reactors, and oil rigs. These are all agents of climate change because they drain the earth of natural resources, create toxic waste, and contribute to CO2 emissions and the greenhouse effect. A cluster of family houses is subsumed in a

Hiro Sakaguchi

Artist Statement

I am interested in making an image, containing a fictional realm that is relevant to my experience as an individual and an artist. I depict images gathered from everyday life, social concerns, interest, and memory. In making artwork I am after a story, which leads the viewer's visual and conceptual departure. In 2022, one cannot escape the reality of the environmental crisis; it is very natural for me to make images that reflect and convey concerns for the wellbeing of this planet that is our home.

www.hirosakaguchi.com

hailstorm of our own making. In *Space After*, these invasive agents are consigned to the lower corner of the canvas, leaving the skies to breathe once again and manifest their glorious, changing diurnal hues.

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► Hiro Sakaguchi, *Space After*, 2015.
Acrylic on canvas, 40" x 50"





◀ Amie Potsic, *Paradise*, installation view 2019.
Archival pigment print on silk. Dimensions variable

Forests are enclaves of wonder and spiritual fulfillment. Research studies have shown that they also provide mental and physical health benefits. They are friendly to humans and non-humans alike, supporting thousands of species, seen and unseen. Amie Potsic's immersive, draped fabric installation lets us linger in a fragment of a forest where time is irrelevant and peace prevails. But when the forest drapery is pulled back, her photographs reveal the harsher realities that assault these oases. We are reawakened to the ever-increasing scourge of wild fires and purposeful deforestation. Potsic positions the viewer between the visible extremes of natural harmony and disharmony; this frisson causes us to think deeply about the disappearing old growth forests and why we must preserve them. *Girl in the Garden* brings a sense of intimacy to the issue by framing the child in sunlight and green arbors, while just steps away, black shadows portend the demise of her environment.

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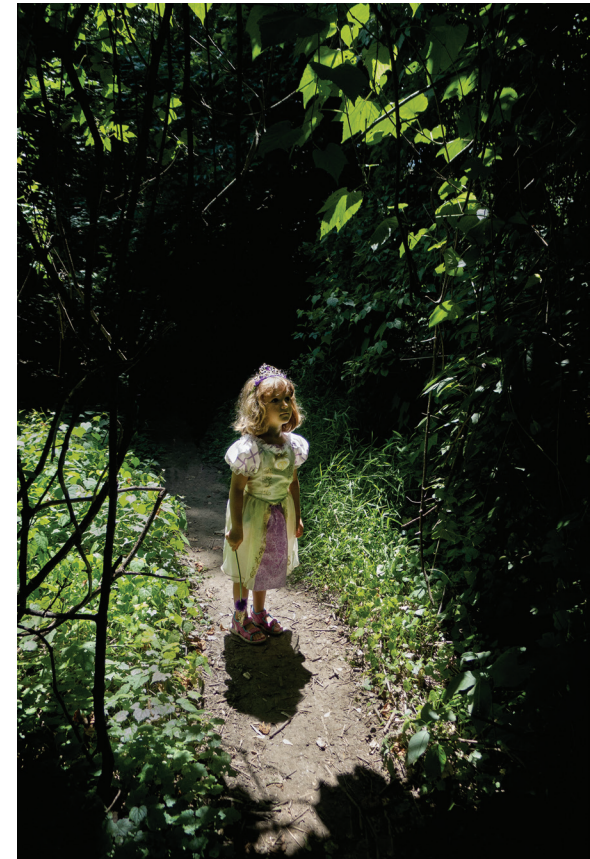
Amie Potsic

Artist Statement

My work references the sensory experience of being within the forest while encouraging us to appreciate and preserve its future. Incarnate environmental explorations, my photographs and installations invite you to connect with your own perception of nature in a manner that is both intimate and enchanting. I focus on the allure and dynamism of the forest to share my sense of wonder, develop our connection to trees, and support environmental protections. Personal experience underscoring the urgency of climate change, I draw attention to deforestation by creating visceral and cerebral connections to trees and the natural world.

Girl in the Garden: Danger in Paradise explores our environment from the vantage points of female agency, deforestation, and Magical Realism. After photographing my daughter in the lush forests of the northeastern United States, I traveled to Paradise, California, and surrounds to photograph the complete devastation caused by the deadliest wildfire in the state's history. With Paradise located upwind from my extended family's home, seeing what we should preserve, and what happens when we don't, was sobering to comprehend. Introducing magical and narrative elements to the overwhelmingly complex issue of climate change, the intimacy of storytelling can examine the concept of Paradise and reveal our role to play in creating solutions.

www.amiepotsic.com



▲ Amie Potsic, *Girl in the Garden #2*, 2019.
Archival pigment print, 33" x 22"

◀ Amie Potsic, *Danger in Paradise #3*, 2019.
Archival pigment print, 22" x 29"



◀ Stacy Levy, Photo-documentation of *Missing Waters*. Flushing Bay Kayak and Canoe Launch, Marina Road Corona, New York, 2020. Chalk and water on pavement, 120 yards x 15 yards

It is not just our ancient forests that are disappearing. Many of our watersheds have been covered, dammed, and lifted above the tidal range, disrupting their natural ebb and flow, and displacing wetland organisms essential to the marine ecosystem. Sculptor and installation artist Stacy Levy focuses on our underappreciated or unseen waterways, and infuses them with new life through artistic interventions which are unexpected, dynamic, and colorful, as in *Bushkill Curtain* which spans the Bushkill Creek in Easton.

At times her installations are participatory, such as *Missing Waters*, documented here in video and photographs. Pedestrians strolling on pavement near the water's edge come upon spiraling, wavy light blue chalk lines that run over one hundred yards. Like ancient Minoan ocean-inspired decoration, the lines represent the vivacity of currents underneath them. While viewing this expanse of subjugated waterways, we are reminded of the degree to which we have tampered with Mother Earth, who seems to be taking her revenge through intensified flooding, cyclones, and drought.

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Stacy Levy

Artist Statement

My pieces are direct collaborations with the force of water. For several years, I have been making chalk paintings to give people a sense of the invisible watershed running under the grid of our cities. These temporary paintings are full scale maps, done with a community of people who paint with water-soluble chalk paint directly onto the paved surfaces of streets and parking lots.

In many temperate areas, climate crisis is driving more frequent rain events that drop more rainwater from the sky. This increased amount of rain is falling on the human-made fabric of parking lots, warehouse roofs, turfgrass backyards, corporate parks and golf courses, and the monocultures of

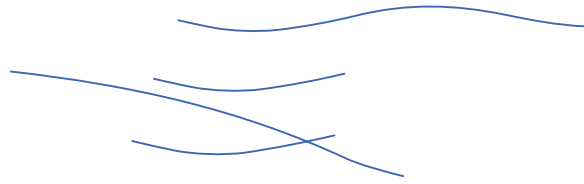


farm fields. All of these surfaces prevent rainwater from soaking into the ground. Without this interlude in the soil, the rain takes a faster route towards the sea: rushing through our cities and suburbs, and often reclaiming the old routes of historic creeks that have been contained by stormwater infrastructure and capped by roads. The temporary chalk drawings map these hidden historic watersheds and show how the ghosts of these streams and wet edges are re-covering the urban areas we had thought would remain dry.

www.stacylevy.com

▲ Stacy Levy, Photo-documentation of *Missing Waters*. Flushing Bay Kayak and Canoe Launch, Marina Road Corona, New York, 2020. Chalk and water on pavement, 120 yards x 15 yards





Maureen Drdak

Artist Statement

In my series *Ardens Mundi (Burning Worlds)* the apocalyptic faces of global warming are evoked through the opposition, collision, and integration of disparate materials. In *Ardens Mundi 1, Inferno*, the metal skin of copper repoussé incarnates the destructive ephemerality of fire and its transmutational power, manifesting the blackened furioso of firestorms.

My process is intensely physical. Hammering charges the copper elements with power to convey the materialization of energy; fire is required in their constant annealing. This aesthetic convergence and integration of paint, mineral accretions, and metal expressively alludes to the essential oneness of being, and by extension, addresses the Earth's paradoxical fragility.

Knowledge of the ancient practice of repoussé was transmitted to me from a Nepalese repoussé master of five hundred year old lineage, the result of my 2011 Fulbright Fellowship to Nepal. My work reframes that tradition, giving new urgency and contemporary voice to this endangered traditional practice. Indeed, Nepal's Himalayan mountains—recently christened the “Third Pole”—are now the world's third fastest site of global warming. Intersecting history, culture, science, *Ardens Mundi* presents a portentous convergence of forms, processes and energies hurling towards environmental cataclysm—my *cri de coeur* for universal action.

www.maureendrdak.com

- ▶ Maureen Drdak, *Ardens Mundi 1, Inferno*, 2017. Copper repoussé elements, mineral particle threads, and abraded acrylic on 1.5" archival wood panel, 48" diameter.





The Mother Earth metaphor can be extended when viewing Maureen Drdak's *Inferno*. The title, combined with the tondo (round form) expresses a planet on fire, one aspect of the Greek Goddess Gaia, who was both bountiful and monstrous. When controlled, plundered, and defaced by men, she suffered greatly-- "And monstrous Gaia was burning all over with an ineffable blast and melted like tin heated beneath the skill of craftsmen in bellowed crucibles or iron...subdued in the mountain glens by blazing fire..." (Hesiod). The warm hues, the glint of gold, the amalgam of textures, and the swirling shapes are magnets for our eyes and conduits to our emotions. Drdak's painstakingly-crafted mixture of metals, minerals, and paint is like a witch's cauldron, a brew of unimaginable heat and toxicity. Yet the unimaginable is here—frequent record-breaking heat waves and uncontrollable wildfires in densely populated regions. Looking at repoussé with a contemporary ecological eye, we link the metal with industrial processes that pollute and contribute to global warming. The life-giving manifestations of Gaia have disappeared.

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Chantal Westby

Artist Statement

Climate change, and its profound effect on our planet, have been my priority for a very long time. As time passes I feel an increasing sense of urgency. It is my principal concern and it increases on a daily basis. I wanted to create a strong message to voice that concern. So, I created this tumultuous sculpture. The male figure represents all of humanity. The body is covered with numerous messages detailing the extent to which we have all underestimated the impending agony of our planet Earth, a veritable "SOS." The figure is trapped in a

vigorous network of vines and branches that symbolize the seriousness of its plight, but it ascends nonetheless, hopefully toward an understanding that will enable it to react before it is too late. Looking back at our beginnings may be the only way to enlighten our future. If we react appropriately and make the necessary changes in our behavior that future can be altered bleak to bright.

www.chantalwestby.com

◀ Chantal Westby, *Point of No Return*, 2020.
Ink, mixed media, plaster PLA, paper, varnish on canvas.
Sculpture 108" high; Painting 54"x54"



Chantal Westby's *Point of No Return* brings a figural element to the mental abstraction of our planetary apocalypse. The sculpture is reminiscent of Rodin's *Gates of Hell*, which in turn was inspired by Dante's *Divine Comedy*, a fictional journey through hell. Westby fashions a contemporary iteration of mankind at a threshold using 3-D printing and found objects. The human being is suspended in a basket-like chamber of dead vines and branches, spinning above a painted abyss suggestive of oil slicks, lithium mines and desiccated river beds. Whereas Dante warns the reader to "Abandon all hope, ye who enter here," Westby's personal mantra and purpose is to "awaken, evoke, stimulate, surprise and sometimes educate." Her use of white color symbolizes purity, new beginnings, and positivity, while the paper strips contain eco slogans to live by. These elements provide antidotes to the despair, denial, and calculated fake news that abounds. While we linger on the human in freefall, we can ponder our ecological choices and deeds, knowing that we can start anew.

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In sum, each artist tries to give shape to an uncertain climate-impacted future. Their narratives lie somewhere between tragedy and hope; between exposing what has been fractured and why we must repair it. They reflect our own disorientation, our pre-conscious memories of untamed land and sea, our paralysis in the face of environmental degradation, and our stubborn perpetuation of a nature culture binary (not seeing nature and humans as one entity). The aesthetic experience in *Risky Beauty* is a negotiation between our sensual selves who place value in the beauty and drama of the picturesque, and our moral and enlightened compasses which recognize disturbing truths about the consequences of human actions. The works hold us spellbound, if only for a moment.

Nurture Nature Center

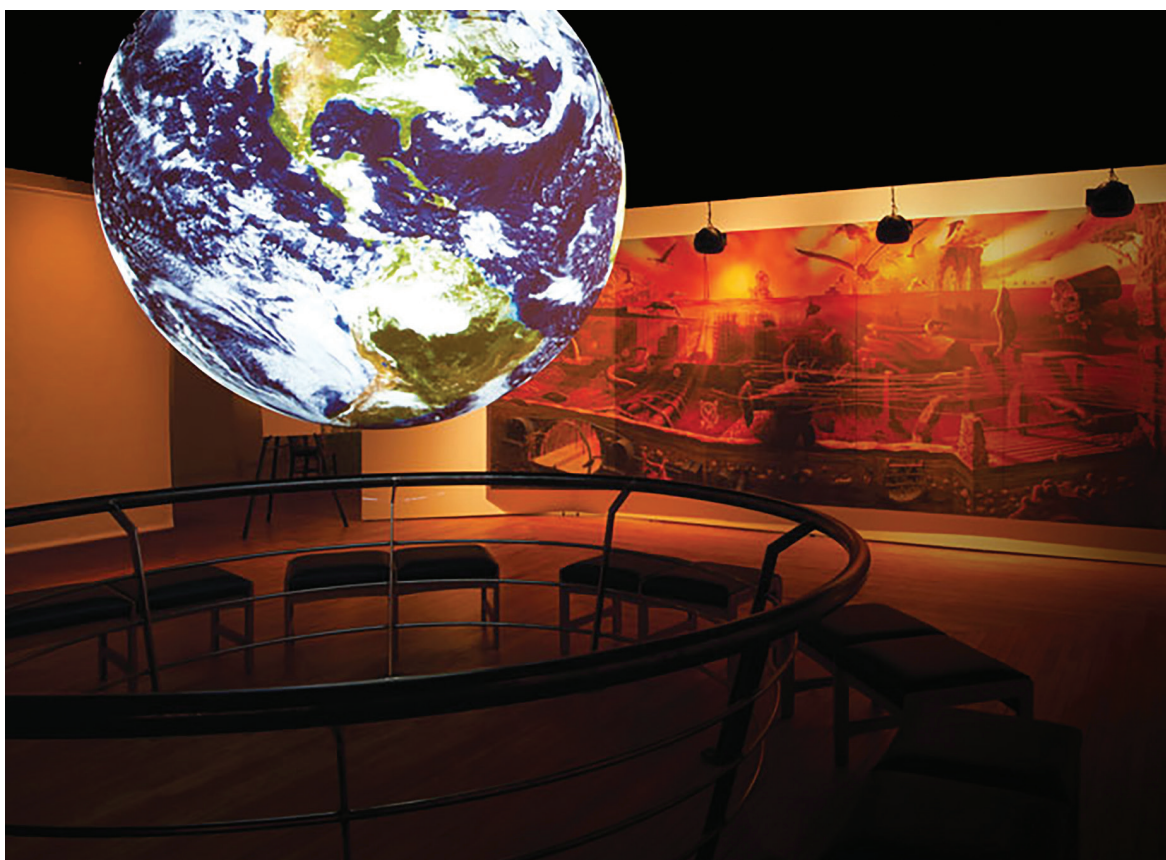
As the science around climate expands our understanding of the human impact on the environment, communities and individuals alike are faced with complex questions about how to respond: **what is it, exactly, that we can do?**

The Nurture Nature Center (NNC) embraces the view that resiliency is built around hope, knowledge, and community, and is rooted in people making decisions, learning about and connecting with the places where they live. Together, through planning, preparedness, information sharing and relationship-building, communities can build the resiliency needed for a future where we can all thrive and be responsible stewards of and connected to our local environment.

NNC was founded in 2007 in response to repeat flooding on the Delaware River in 2004, 2005, and 2006. Initially focused on understanding flood risk and educating and engaging the community to be better prepared for future flooding, NNC has expanded its focus and expertise, successfully building a multidisciplinary model that leverages informal science education, arts-centered approaches to learning, and community

dialogue and networking to build community resiliency to environmental risk. Through public programs, youth education, art exhibits, science demonstrations, urban gardening, interdisciplinary workshops and projects, social science research, and art and science integration, NNC creates ripples of impact that extend well beyond the Easton community.

One recent project that highlights the power and impact of NNC's approach combining science, art, and community is the CREATE Resilience project, a 4-year multi-disciplinary collaboration to engage youth, municipal officials, artists and community members to increase knowledge of weather and climate science, the risks from local hazards, and strategies for hazard mitigation. Through community meetings, surveys, interviews, story-gathering and photovoice exhibits, forums, and community mapping exercises, NNC engaged the community in thinking about what resilience



means while educating about hazards such as flooding and actions that could help mitigate and adapt those hazards. The project resulted in the creation of large murals illustrating the community's vision of resilience for three local communities – Easton, Wilson, and Bangor, PA. The murals created an authentic sense of place, making the idea of resilience relatable and the concept of interconnectedness apparent. A number of products resulted from the project

including educational materials such as hazards cards and community guidebooks, a Science on a Sphere film, and digital resources including a resiliency storymap. These and other practical tools will help our communities prepare for future events. But the most important lasting takeaway message for participants was about the need to form strong connections across the community – from youth and families to municipal leaders and community organizations



– to share information, knowledge and to support communities in making decisions that support resilience. Importantly, CREATE Resilience not only educated about natural hazards and climate change, it engaged a diversity of community members in thinking about a resilient future, a positive approach to focusing efforts on what we can achieve when we work together as a community and think creatively about the ripples we can create.



▲ Stacy Levy, *Bushkill Curtain*, 2011.
Bushkill Creek, Easton, PA

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