

Art in America



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Art & Politics

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Chris Jordan: Denali Denial, 2006, inkjet print, 60 by 75 inches. Image is composed of 24,000 altered and unaltered GMC Yukon Denali SUV logos.

Global Warnings

BY SUZAN BOETTGER

"Melting Ice / A Hot Topic" proclaims the name of the exhibition subtitled "Envisioning Change," which opened in Oslo last June, traveled to Brussels and Monaco, and opened recently at Chicago's Field Museum. Indeed, after being shocked by the devastation wrought by the Sumatra Tsunami in 2004 and Hurricane Katrina in 2005, educated by Al Gore's film, *An Inconvenient Truth*, and entertained by Live Earth benefit concerts, the public is increasingly confronted with references to disturbed ecosystems and their source in human-induced emissions, carbon and otherwise. Last

fall, Bill McKibben began an article in the *New York Review of Books* by declaring, "During the past year, momentum has finally begun to build for taking action against global warming by putting limits on carbon emissions and then reducing them."¹ Environmentalist ideals—such as making construction and consumption carbon-neutral and sustainable; seeking natural, organic and local food; and recycling whatever and whenever—have turned both public discourse and marketing "green." Now, as declared by a Chevrolet advertisement for a gasoline-free and emissions-free hydrogen fuel cell, "Eco Takes Center Stage." On

Artists' longtime—and rapidly mounting—concerns about environmental degradation and climate change are reflected in a plethora of recent and current exhibitions, both local and international in focus.

Madison Avenue, Barney's department store devoted its 2007 holiday window spectacle to celebrating "green" heroism and offering eco tips such as the use of cloth grocery bags (although they continue to bag customers' luxe purchases in paper). When the largest private employer in the world, the ubiquitous Wal-Mart Stores, pledged to increase the efficiency of the most energy-intensive appliances it sells (air conditioners, microwaves, televisions) by 25 percent, and is considering installing windmills in its parking lots to recharge customers' electric cars with renewable electricity, we know we're witnessing a sea change.²

And in the art world? Acknowledgment by the chief art institutions of our warming planet has so far been decidedly tepid. The vacuum at major American museums, and at last summer's Venice Biennale and Documenta,³ was only slightly alleviated by the previous summer-and-fall show at New York's International Center of Photography, the Second Triennial of Photography and Video, titled "Ecotopia."⁴ However, the ICP focused on artists' representation of "nature" as a socially constructed idea, thus an aspect of "culture"—which thematically blunted the photographers' environmentalism. In the exhibition catalogue, a fascinating group conversation among curators and artists discloses their apprehensions that the works would be taken as simplistic political statements.

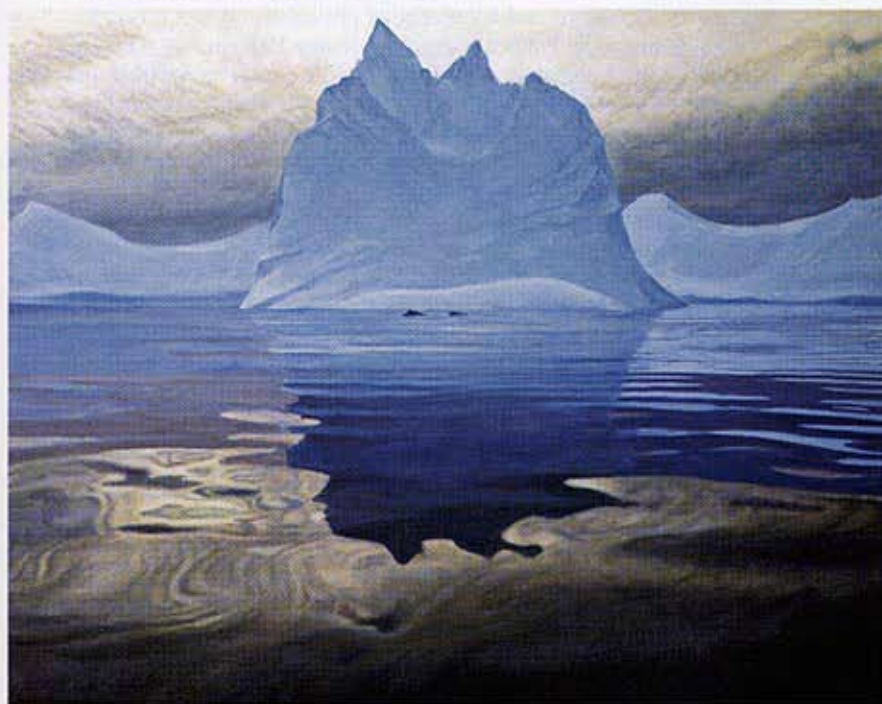
The exchange is notable for the speakers' ability to articulate their own artistic intentions and knowledge of critical theory, yet misunderstanding of historical landscape painting (many 19th-century painters, especially John Constable, were motivated by conservationism⁵) and refusal to be identified as environmental activists. Their conceptualization of their engagement with ecology as metaphorical and tacit made it seem that the stirring, beautiful, disturbing images might just as well have been described as current approaches to the landscape tradition. Everyone seemed pretty uninformed about the history of the genre from which they were distinguishing themselves.

At the other extreme are the proposed functional objects in "Beyond Green: Toward A Sustainable Art," curated by Stephanie Smith at the Smart Museum of Art, University of Chicago, circulated by Independent Curators International and presented at eight institutions from fall 2005 to March 2009 [see Exhibitions sidebar]. Many of these pragmatic yet fantasy constructions demonstrate the problem-solving abilities of the 13 artists or groups included in the show. Within a genre that is frequently termed "ecological art," the way these works focus on social and environmental systems seems authentically "ecological"; the greater challenge is their identification as "art." As installed during its

Subhankar Banerjee: Brant and Snow Geese with Chicks, 2006, from the series "Oil and the Geese," digital chromogenic print, 68 by 86 inches. Courtesy Sundaram Tagore Gallery.



Today there is a new version of “artist as guide to distant terrains”—akin to the 19th century’s Church, Heade and Bierstadt.



Robert Bateman: Antarctic Evening—Humpback Whales, 1999, acrylic on canvas, 48 by 60 inches. Collection Richard Vencill Smith. Courtesy Natural World Museum, San Francisco.

stop at the Museum of Arts and Design in New York, the show evoked a compilation of science-fair projects by New Age inventors—more clever engineering than visual dynamics. The accompanying book is a good substitute for seeing the work.

Last November, the PBS series “Art 21” jumped on the bandwagon.⁶ An episode of the program was titled “Ecology,” seemingly more for topicality than precision. Featuring Robert Adams, Mark Dion, Inigo Mangano-Ovalle and Ursula von Rydingsvard, it showed work related to natural forces. But only Dion’s public-art greenhouse in Seattle, *Neukom Vivarium*, which keeps alive a fallen tree and its botanical milieu, directly references ecological systems.⁷ Yet Dion’s construction implies that our universe will need to retreat within such protected environments to survive.

Significantly, it was two smaller museums, peripheral to the art world, that recently gathered large numbers of artists working on environmental issues to shape notable, truly topical exhibitions. “Melting Ice” was organized by San Francisco’s Natural World Museum. Founded in 2004 and dedicated to presenting art “through innovative programs to inspire and engage the public in environmental awareness and action,” this museum has a small collection in storage; it does not maintain its own exhibition space. Many of its shows, including this one, have been organized in partnership with the United Nations Environment Program to celebrate World Environment Day (June 5) and were presented internationally.⁸ Bay Area independent curator Randy Jayne

Rosenberg selected the work for “Melting Ice” and for the partnership’s group exhibition “Unlearning Intolerance: Art Changing Attitudes Toward the Environment,” which will be shown at the United Nations in May and June [see Exhibitions sidebar].

Concurrently on view last fall in Boulder, Colo., was “Weather Report: Art and Climate Change,” initiated by the local group EcoArts in cooperation with the Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art, and shown there and around the city.⁹ This exhibition had the major advantage of being guest-curated by long-active and deeply informed art critic Lucy R. Lipard. The many works responding to local issues and sites made it impossible for the show to tour. [Pieces by about a quarter of the artists, in some cases the same works, will soon be installed at Deutsche Bank, New York, in a show it inspired, “Feeling the Heat.” See Exhibitions sidebar.] The number of participants in these two exhibitions—43 artists or artist groups for “Melting Ice” and 51 in “Weather Report,” with only a few overlaps—demonstrates that environmental degradation is definitely influencing artistic production. In fact, the interest goes back almost 40 years, to when New York’s John Gibson Gallery mounted “Ecologic Art” (May 17–June 28, 1969), with scale models by Christo, Peter Hutchinson, Will Insley and Claes Oldenburg, and drawings by Carl Andre, Christo, Jan Dibbets, Richard Long, Dennis Oppenheim, Robert Morris and “Bob” Smithson (as the gallery identified him). That was the first, and very loose, use of “ecology” in an exhibition title; the work, while engaging spatial environments, was certainly not thematically ecological. That came later.¹⁰

In Brussels last fall, the second stop for “Melting Ice” was the BOZAR Centre for Fine Arts (originally the Palais des Beaux-Arts, for which BOZAR is an abbreviated homonym). The sprawling 1928 structure by the innovative Belgian designer Victor Horta accommodates adventurous programming of music, drama and dance in several theaters; it also houses exhibition spaces and a film museum. By presenting the exhibition at BOZAR’s locale on the “Mont des Arts” (the Museum of Fine Arts is nearby), the organizers got a prestigious venue in the heart of the European Union’s administrative capital city.

Xavier Cortada: The Markers, 51 colored flags along 500 meters of the moving ice sheet that covers the South Pole, performance documented in video, 2007.

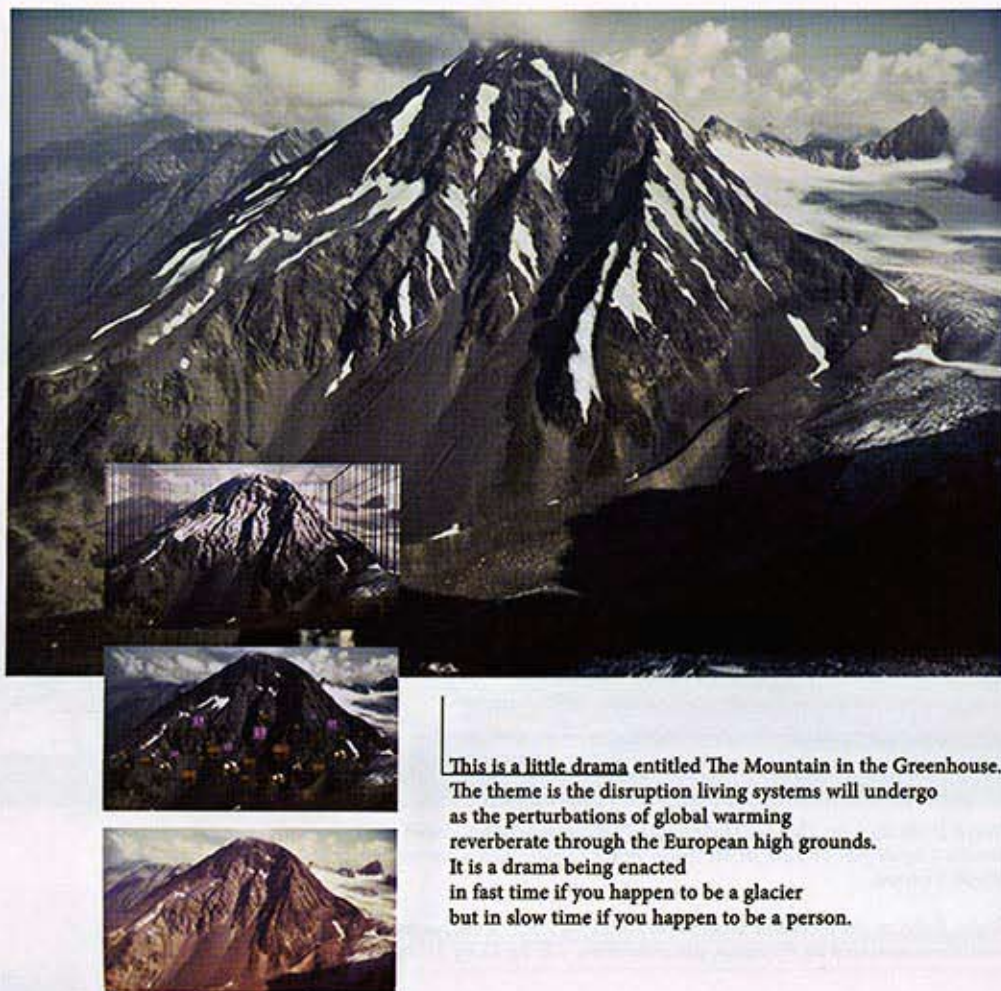


"Melting Ice" was installed in one moderate-size gallery, two levels of lobby walkways and intermission spaces lining the ovoid concert hall. It offered a large number of artists working in a variety of mediums and approaches to the subject, often represented by only one work each. It was obvious that the goal was to support the European Union's priority of protecting the environment through public education. Wall labels stated each artist's country of birth along with a paragraph or so of explanation of the art, but no thematic groupings or signage was furnished to structure this heterogeneity, either as forms of art or social activism. In the catalogue, the works are grouped into sections—"climate change," "extinction is forever," "changing attitudes," etc.—categories too amorphous to be very informative.¹¹ The multiple exhibition areas and levels, some of them dimly lit, constrained thematic partitioning.

Helen Mayer Harrison and Newton Harrison, American artists with a long-standing commitment to environmental advocacy, were represented by two large topographic maps related to their 2003 exhibition at New York's Ronald Feldman Gallery, "Peninsula Europe."¹² These maps forecast the geographical areas that will be submerged if the melting ice caps raise the water level. The maps' large scale monumentalizes the looming potential disaster while subtle coloration suggests a naturalist's detail; the result is artful research documentation. Also documentary in nature is a grid by Sant Khalsa (USA) consisting of a dozen small black-and-white photographs of the facade and signage of stores in the Southwest devoted to selling independently purified water for consumers who think that their tap water is unsafe, or who lack a source of potable water. Part of a larger series of 200, these straightforward images allow the viewer to recognize that clean water is increasingly becoming a limited resource and thus a commercial product.

Several photographers movingly depict places affected by climate change. American Jacob McKean's spare, beautiful photograph of Mt. Kilimanjaro records its diminishing snowcap. The Norwegian Fred Ivar Utsi Klemetsen showed six darkly dramatic images of the indigenous Sami people of northern Scandinavia, whose reindeer-dependent existence is imperiled as environmental change makes it increasingly difficult for the animals to find grass.

The wide curatorial net thrown by Rosenberg rather surprisingly included Christo and Jeanne-Claude, whose focus on site hardly compensates for their consumerist attitude toward nature as a place to apply the same business model they would use for a bridge or building. Their Miami *Surrounded Islands* of 1980-83, represented here by a collage and photograph, only distantly relates to the politics of environmentalism and has nothing to do with the destructive effects of excessively melting ice. In his seascape of tiny humpback whales before huge,



This is a little drama entitled *The Mountain in the Greenhouse*. The theme is the disruption living systems will undergo as the perturbations of global warming reverberate through the European high grounds. It is a drama being enacted in fast time if you happen to be a glacier but in slow time if you happen to be a person.

Newton Harrison and Helen Mayer Harrison: *The Mountain in the Greenhouse*, 2001, video.

jutting glaciers, the Canadian naturalist painter Robert Bateman aims for a dramatic tautness reminiscent of Caspar David Friedrich; however, with its stylized realism and lavender and pink hues, the work devolves into sentimentality. British artist Gary Hume offered a grid of 12 digital prints titled *Hermaphrodite Polar Bear*. The simplified animal form, seen from below, appears unabashedly cartoonish, but learning that the genital deformation is attributed to airborne and waterborne industrial toxins prompts a double take.

In the single formal gallery space allotted this show, Rosenberg grouped the strongest works. (Sufficient and focused lighting made a difference here.) Across a sequence of three large steel panels, New Zealand artist David Trubridge represents the ecological process of warming sea ice breaking up; laser-cut zigzags evoke starkly elegant fracturing. Also striking both conceptually and perceptually is Seattle photographer Chris Jordan's 60-by-75-inch *Denali Denial*, a satirical version of Ansel Adams's photograph of Mt. McKinley in Alaska's Denali National Park. The preserve's name was adopted by General Motors for an SUV. Jordan adapts it further by pixelating Adams's image into 24,000 rectangles—representing six weeks of that gas-guzzling SUV's global sales—cleverly composed of the DENALI logo alternating with the anagram "DENIAL." Nearby, in multiple large photographs and a video, the Icelandic Love Corporation (Sigrún Hrólfsdóttir, Jóni Jónsdóttir and Eirun Sigurpárdóttir) enact *Dynasty*, a parody of an imagined excursion by three "privileged housewives," as the catalogue describes them, "who have escaped the sweltering heat of home



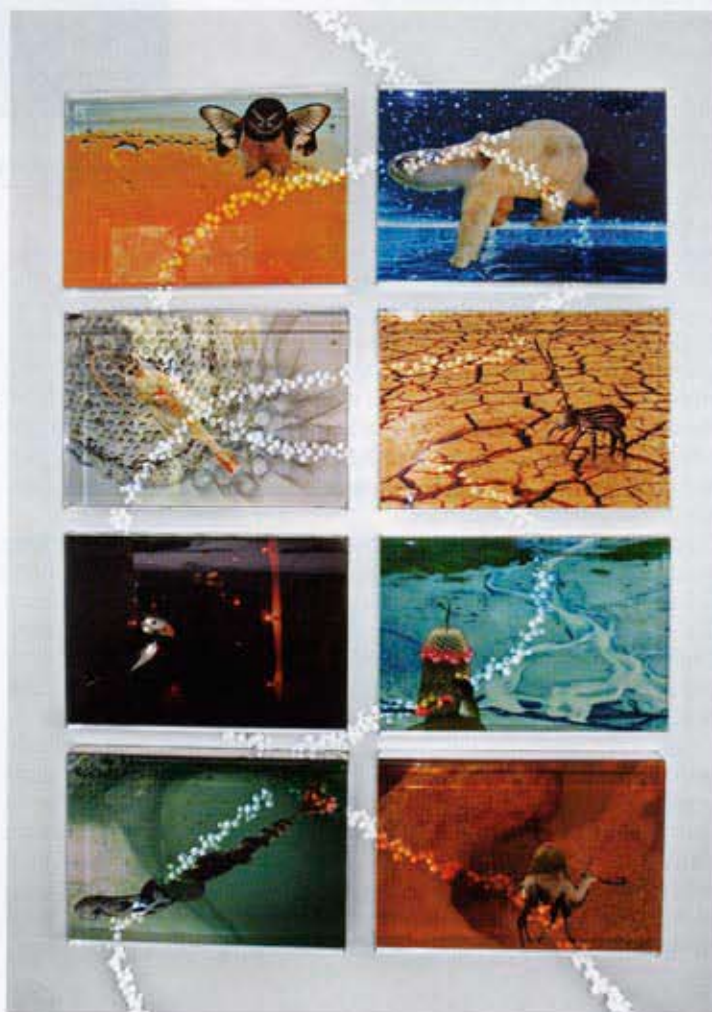
David Trubridge: *On Thin Ice* (rear wall), 2007, laser-cut hot rolled steel sheets, 4 by 27 feet overall; at the Nobel Peace Center, Oslo. Courtesy Natural World Museum.

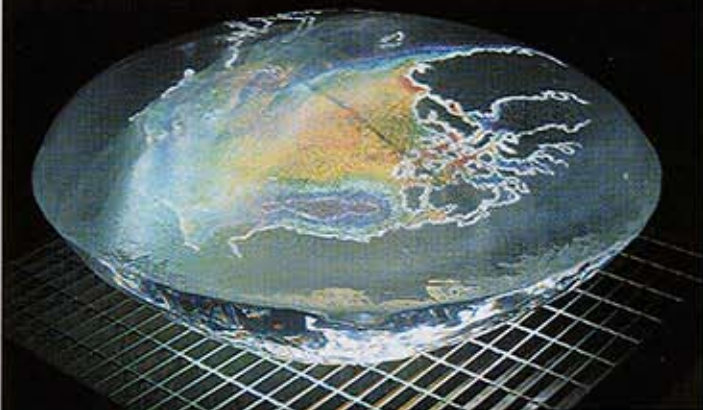
Right, Rebecca DiDomenico: *Intentional Mutation*, 2007, transparency emulsions mounted on Plexiglas, glass marbles, 132 by 42 by 2½ inches.

to take a luxury vacation, during which they enjoy the last moments of one of Earth's few remaining snowcaps" and manicure their nails, play guitar and practice shooting rifles.

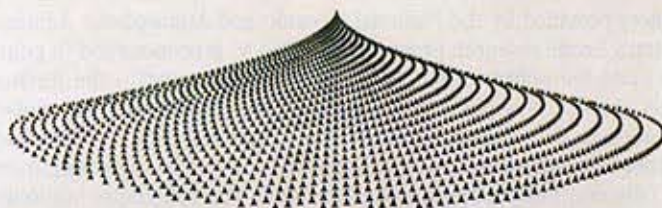
"Melting Ice" does not include any reference to artists' directly reparative interventions, but one work gestures ironically toward a failed effort. *Rines Recyclables* (2004), by Belgian artist Ives Maes, is documented by a stack of posterlike prints available for the taking. It pictures three men leaning against a green VW Bug with yellow hubcaps. Maes made the hubcaps out of resin and hemp and distributed them to Mexico City taxi drivers as a sardonic reward for having a sticker on their cabs certifying that they use unleaded fuel, even though one told him that most actually used leaded fuel because it is cheaper. (Not any more—a wall label should have noted that leaded fuel is no longer sold in Mexico.)

Today there is a new iteration of the landscape subgenre of artist as guide to distant terrains, akin to the 19th-century Hudson River School's Frederic E. Church and Martin Johnson Heade, who traveled to South America and the Caribbean, or Albert Bierstadt to the western U.S., to picture those exotic locales for urban audiences. One of the most prominent artists of what could be called today's "Polar School" is Subhankar Banerjee.¹³ Since 2000 this American photographer has spent long periods in the Arctic in all seasons, making images pertaining to indigenous people's human rights and to land conservation. Banerjee exhibits and lectures widely, and his photographs have been published in three books. His work aims to stimulate protective environmental action, yet his means is to move viewers by merging informative realism, dynamic composition and the kind of beauty that philosopher Edmund Burke called "the sublime." Banerjee's large-format images taken in Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, on view in both "Melting Ice"





In "Melting Ice," New Zealand artist David Trubridge represents, via laser-cut zigzags in steel panels, the process of warming sea ice breaking up.



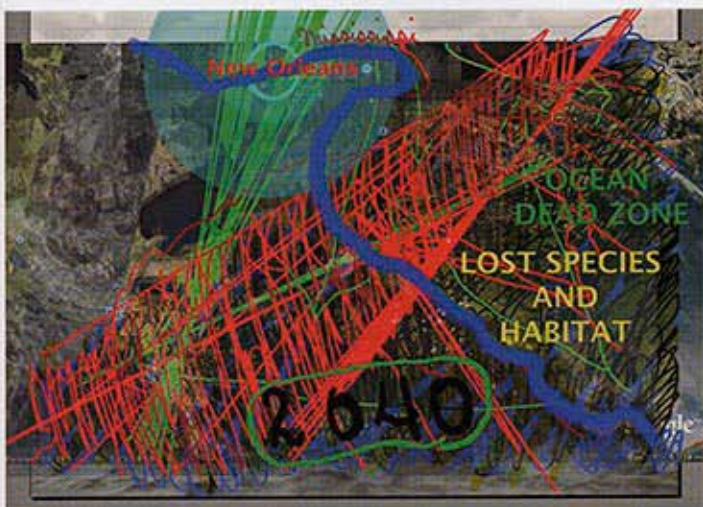
Above, Agnes Denes: Tree Mountain—A Living Time Capsule—11,000 Trees, 11,000 People, 400 Years, Ylöjärvi, Finland. Top, original design, 1983; Bottom, winter 2001.

Left, top to bottom:
Lillian Ball: 66 Degrees, 32 Minutes, 50 Years, 2007, map morph animations projected on ice (in photo) or ice water (as exhibited).

The Yes Men: Exxon Vivoleum, 2007, video.

Arifa Rahmani: Mississippi 2040, from the series "Trigger Points, Tipping Points," 2007, digital print, 13 by 19 inches.

Center for Land Use Interpretation Photo Archive: Dauphin Island, Alabama, November, 2005, inkjet print on paper, 16 by 20 inches.



and "Weather Report," capture the sublime's qualities of "vastness," "obscurity," "power" and "solitude." Both the saturated hues of *Sea Ice in a Warmer Planet* and the abstract design of the aerial-view *Caribou Migration* stand out for their compelling rendering of the exotic icy terrain and its inhabitants.¹⁴

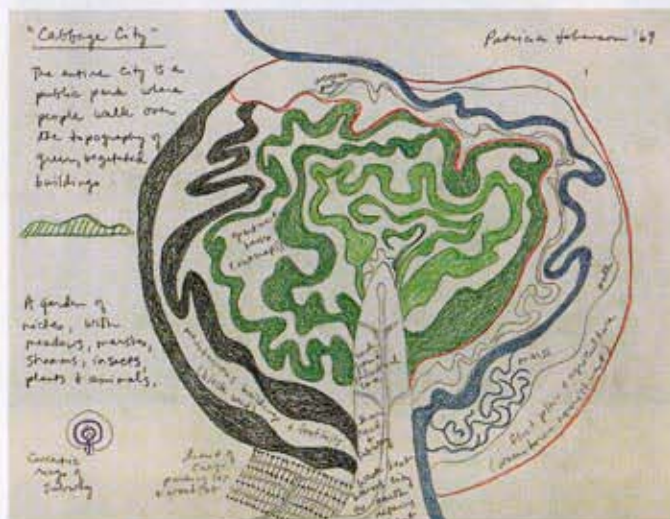
Also participating in both "Melting Ice" and "Weather Report" were the Harrisons, Jordan, Cuban-American installation artist Xavier Cortada and American video artist Andrea Polli. The last two exhibited works from their polar projects in both shows. Cortada's videos and 8-by-10-inch photographs document a trip to the South Pole early in 2007 as part of the U.S. National Science Foundation's Antarctic Artists and Writers Program. There he installed bright flags to mark human events in Antarctica over the past century. More pertinent to the show's theme—beyond the vogue locale for artistic expeditions—were his documentation and the residue of a strangely ritualistic performance in which he placed 24 identical men's black shoes around the South Pole. From each he drew and read a statement from an individual living in one of the world's time zones (such as: "I tell my wife, the day the mountain loses its snow, we'll have to move out of the valley." Jose Ignacio Lambarri, farmer, Urubamba Valley, Peru").



In "Weather Report," Mary Miss's blue disks on trees, fences, bridges and building facades signaled the potential height of Boulder Creek floodwaters.

Polli's *N.* combined Arctic weather data rendered in sound with imagery provided by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Arctic research program. The title *N.* is pronounced "n point" and puns the abbreviation for north with "end point"—the furthest point north and a place where glacier melting signals the globe's devolution. The sound-and-video projection was produced without visiting the region and was facilitated by scientists and engineers Joe Gilmore, Patrick Market and Ken Babb. The time-lapse landscape video, accelerated into jumpy glimpses of numbingly repetitive flat whiteness of icy terrain and sky, is projected as a large disk on the wall and accompanied by a disturbing irregular hum. Both aspects emphasize the place's utter, estranging austerity.

The Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art has, since 1976, occupied a modest 1906 brick building, once a granary, then an ice house. For the museum, with only about 4,600 square feet of exhibition space, to invite 51 artists from all over for this show indicates its ambitions and ideals. Working with EcoArts, the museum supported the ecological conscientiousness of a community where, a year ago, through the local ConservED Project, a hundred residents agreed to adopt a Low-Carbon Lifestyle program and within a year lower their energy usage by 25



Above, Patricia Johanson: *Cabbage City*, 1969, pencil and colored pencil, 8½ by 22 inches.

Top, Basia Irland's receding/reseeding, 2007, 250-pound ice "book" embedded with seeds, 20 by 40 by 10 inches; from the project "A Gathering of the Waters: Boulder Creek, Continental Divide to Confluence."

Left, Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle: *Iceberg (r11i01)*, 2005, anodized aluminum tubes, rapid prototyped ABS plastic and nylon, approx. 25 by 20 by 18 feet; photographed at the Art Institute of Chicago.



percent. The organizations benefited from Lippard's experience with the art/environment intersection since the late 1960s. She included still-active originators of the genre, such as Agnes Denes, Patricia Johanson, Mary Miss, Mierle Laderman Ukeles and Iain Baxter& (who has apparently dropped the ensuing words "N.E. Thing" from the pseudo-corporate name under which he formerly exhibited). Among the veterans of numerous public-art projects deriving from 1970s land art, Miss distinguished herself by designing a deceptively simple outdoor installation that powerfully illustrated the potential danger of climate change in the immediate locale.

Miss worked with geologist Peter W. Birkeland, retired from the University of Colorado, and hydrologist Sheila Murphy of the U.S. Geological Survey to project worst-case water levels of Boulder Creek, which winds through town. It was a scenario of an extreme flash flood that might occur only every 500 years but could happen anytime. "Connect the Dots: Mapping the Highwater Hazards and



View of Mary Miss's *Connect the Dots, Mapping the High Water, Hazards and History of Boulder Creek*, 2007, outdoor work for Boulder.

Left, Marjetica Potrc: *Boulder in a Time of Global Warming*, 2007, ink on paper, one of eight drawings, each 8% by 11% inches.

All photos this article, unless otherwise noted, courtesy Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art.



History of Boulder Creek" placed blue metal disks (29¢ paint-can lids) on trees, fences, bridges and building facades to signal the potential height of the water—up to 19 feet above the streambed—and painted blue dots on the sidewalk to indicate the span of the flood plain. The effect of seeing the bright dots overhead and realizing that one would be swept away by the rapidly coursing water was immediate and gripping. Artistically, the work was satisfying for its visual as well as fiscal economy.¹⁵

The other outdoor work at Boulder with a strong expressive kick was Kansas City-based Brian Collier's focus on the pika, a hamster-size, rabbitlike creature native to the west. *The Pika Alarm* consists of a pole with a motion sensor and speaker, accompanied by a box of illustrated informational postcards; several units were placed around the park bordering Boulder Creek. A visitor's approach caused the pika's squeak to be broadcast. The postcards ask, "Why is the pika worried about climate change?" The answer is that its extreme sensitivity to temperature fluctuations and shifting patterns of vegetation make it vulnerable and place it potentially in danger of extinction. Only the most jaded esthete could resist being educated

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by the adorable pika, seen sunbathing on a rock but wearing a slightly anxious expression.

Lippard's position as an informed advocate of progressive art and social movements was also demonstrated by her wide knowledge of midcareer artists whose work explicitly addresses environmentalism. Among those, some of whom may not be familiar to the mainstream gallery circuit, are Lillian Ball (Long Island and New York City), the Futurefarmers (Amy Franceschini & Michael Swaine, San Francisco), Lynne Hull (Fort Collins, Colo.), Basia Irland (Albuquerque), Eve Andrée Laramée (New York City and Maryland), Beverly Naidus (Tacoma), Chrissie Orr (Santa Fe), Aviva Rahmani (Vinalhaven, Me., and New York City), Buster Simpson (Seattle), Ruth Wallen (San Diego) and Shai Zakai (Holon, Israel). Irland's communal action, involving a long sequence of locals gathering water along Boulder Creek, recalls '70s ecofeminism—women as poetic caretakers and administrators.¹⁶ Frozen creek water, carved to look like an open book, with rows of seeds suggesting lines of text, was returned to the creek to release the seeds to grow into plants that will usefully absorb carbon. This way of engaging citizens was more effective than Hull's whimsical yellow diamond-shaped signs announcing "Wildlife Warning—Global Warming" placed around town where urban space merges with animal habitats, supposedly to warn wildlife as well as humans. Laramée's decorative pink-and-blue poster of a fissured "desertification" of the earth was ironically bannered "Pretty Vacant"; like Hull's work it was—beyond a punning witticism—pretty ineffectual. Both artists (and others here) have produced stronger projects elsewhere. Those whose métier is large-scale environmental projects or complex community-based activism were inadequately represented by documentation. Other works demonstrate the limited impact of agitprop's direct exhortation. More absorbing was the narrative video by the Yes Men (Andy Bichlbaum and Mike Bonnano), who impersonated ExxonMobil and National Petroleum Council executives and managed to deliver a satirical speech to an actual conference of 300 oil men before being hustled off stage.

Among the participating artists from Boulder, Rebecca DiDomenico (in collaboration with the evolutionary biologist Andrew Martin) imaginatively conjured animals' potential shape-shifting as adaptations to environmental reconfiguration. Her luminous color transparencies mounted on Plexiglas hung in front of two dense strands of glass marbles entwined to suggest the double helix of DNA.

For connoisseurs of modernism, Chris Jordan's large inkjet prints delightfully transcribe the scale of postwar painting into encapsulations of current conditions. In addition to the *Denali Denial* piece shown at Brussels, four more from his series "Running the Numbers: An American Self-Portrait" were on view at the Boulder museum and the public library. These all consist of a tight repetition of form and a planarity that call up Minimalism or Color Field painting and are sensually gorgeous, except that they show 2 million plastic beverage bottles (the number used in the U.S. every five minutes) or 30,000 stacked reams of office paper (used in the U.S. every five minutes) or 11,000 jet trails arcing against a blue sky (produced by commercial flights every eight hours). The tall diptych *Jeep Liberty* repeated that SUV's front 200,000 times, the number sold every year since the vehicle was introduced in 2004. But with its dark red, narrow format and central vertical seam, the diptych (each panel 120 by 40 inches) also evokes the sublimity of Barnett Newman's terra-cotta- and brick-red-hued "Onement" paintings (1948 and '49) at the Museum of Modern Art, and also the Twin Towers and blood in Lower Manhattan on 9/11—and subsequently in the Iraq War, which can be attributed to the quest for oil to propel those SUVs.

Considering this "surge" of artists' engagement with environmentalism, as aptly described by Stephanie Smith in her "Weather Report" catalogue essay, one surmises that it may be explained not only by the "rapid rise in public attention to climate change" but also as a wartime reaction. *New York* magazine columnist and public radio host Kurt Andersen has identified environmentalist idealism as compensatory for our "geopolitical debacle—having fucked up Iraq, maybe we can manage to do better on global warming."¹⁷ This convergence parallels the Vietnam era. In 1968, a year of exceptional violence both in Vietnam and at home with the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy, a Gallup poll found that "85% of Americans were concerned about such evils as air and water pollution, soil erosion, and wildlife destruction; that three-quarters favored conserving more public land, and that half viewed population control as a key to high living standards."¹⁸

A challenge is presented by these bold exhibitions not only to the general public, to adopt environmentalist behaviors, but to the art world, to integrate artists' global warnings. While the exhibitions were on view last fall, the Museum of Modern Art nodded to the subject by devoting one of its "Artists Speak: Conversations on Contemporary Art" sessions to "Art/Nature." Director Glenn D. Lowry spoke with Mary Miss and Roxy Paine, a sculptor of leafless stainless-steel trees and choked tabletop gardens, who reductively insisted that he was really a "romantic at heart" offering "meditations" rather than "preaching"¹⁹ (an expression of the art-world fear that political engagement produces propaganda). A vast range of artists' works fall between these antitheses. Yet Paine's sentiments do align with the strongest pieces in these shows, which demonstrate that allusive seduction (mental and sensory) rather than blunt didacticism works better to change consciousness through art, and that a strong visual experience is primary. Or, as Miss eloquently stated in the same MOMA conversation, "I am more than ever convinced of the importance of the role of the imagination, and the role the artist can have in offering that. It's just so overlooked, it's so taken for granted, and we need it to be everywhere." Recently, MOMA more directly welcomed an imaginative ecological spirit at its perimeter by its commission for the forthcoming annual summer transformation of the P.S.1 courtyard. This year there will be a field of crops grown in a range of cardboard tubes, a setup designed by Work Architecture (Dan Wood and Amale Andraos), with a possible harvest and farmer's market.

The Natural World Museum and EcoArts/Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art are admirable for venturing to organize these exploratory exhibitions, even if their approach was so fervent that their installations were stuffed with just too many works and their rosters were impossibly diverse: disparate in artistic approach to environmentalism, ambiguous regarding the geographical scope of participation, and inconsistent in professional experience and accomplishment.

Neither show's literature noted that a majority of the exhibitors were women, or considered what that means regarding feminism and particularly ecofeminism. Both were accompanied by well-designed and well-illustrated catalogues that usefully document the shows but leave much to be analyzed about how artist-advocates function in relation to nature, to the practice of art, to the art world and to the viewer/audience. Nevertheless, the shows heightened viewers' awareness of climatological issues, exposed the extent and forms of artists' current grappling with them, and will undoubtedly inspire more focused, analytical examinations of environmentalist art. □

1. Bill McKibben, "Can Anyone Stop It?," *New York Review of Books*, Oct. 11, 2007, pp. 38-40.

2. Michael Barbaro, "Wal-Mart Sets Agenda of Change," *New York Times*, Jan. 24, 2008, p. C3.

3. At Documenta, the only work with a tangentially environmental theme—actually, more about a recurrence of colonialism—was Viennese artist Ines Doujak's lush planter spiked with faux commercial envelopes of seeds printed with statements protesting corporations' "biopiracy" of patents for seeds from poor countries' crops.

4. "Ecotopia" was on view at the ICP, Sept. 14, 2006-Jan. 7, 2007. The well-illustrated accompanying book contains essays by Brian Wallis, Edward Earle, Christopher Phillips

and Carol Squiers. *Ecotopia: The Second Triennial of Photography and Video*, New York, International Center of Photography, and Göttingen, Germany, Steidl, 2006.

5. For Constable, see Ann Bermingham, *Landscape and Ideology, The English Rustic Tradition, 1740-1860*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1986. For an intellectually current history, see Malcolm Andrews, *Landscape and Western Art*, Oxford, New York, Oxford University Press, 1999.

6. PBS, "Art 21," "Ecology," first aired Nov. 11, 2007. See www.pbs.org/art21/artists/featuredartists.html#ecology.

7. "Environmentalism" art is a term I use to refer to artists' intentions, whatever their medium or genre, to distinguish it from "environmental art." Since the mid-1960s the latter term has referred to expansive installations or sculptural environments encompassing the viewer that were not at all politically or ecologically environmental. Others use "ecological art" or "eco art." The critical terminology still needs to be clarified and a consensus reached.

8. Additional funding came from the design software producer Autodesk.

9. It is unfortunate that EcoArts's name is confused with Ecoartspace, a well-known national organization that presents commissioned environmental exhibitions and programs in various sites. For Exit Art's 2006 exhibition "The Drop: 26 Artists and Collectives Examine the Global Crisis of Water," Amy Lipton of Ecoartspace served as a consultant and organized public programming. More recently Ecoartspace coordinated the debut program of Exit Art's "major new initiative S.E.A. (social environmental aesthetics)" titled "E.P.A." (Environmental Performance Action), presently on view. [See Exhibitions sidebar.]

10. "Fragile Ecologies: Contemporary Artists' Interpretations and Solutions," curated by Barbara C. Matisky at the Queens Museum of Art, New York, 1992, and circulated by the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service, gathered a large number of artists and published a catalogue that remains a scholarly resource. Likewise, the exhibition and catalogue for "Ecovention: Current Art to Transform Ecologies," at the Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, in 2002, co-curated by Amy Lipton and Sue Spaid, recognized and documented artists' direct reparative actions. In 2006, "The Drop" (see n. 9 above), with an informative brochure, turned attention to artists' engagement in this area. Last summer, the Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh went topical with "6 Billion Perps Held Hostage: Artists Address Global Warming," with work by Warhol and a dozen other artists or groups, accompanied by a brochure. An informative online source for artists' environmentalism is www.greenmuseum.org.

11. The "sampler" format is similar to that of the sumptuous coffee-table-style book published in 2007 by NWM/UNEP, with funding by Autodesk, *Art in Action: Nature, Creativity and Our Collective Future*. Again, Rosenberg selected a large number of artists and grouped them into porous, minimally illuminating sections such as "celebrate," "reflect," "interact" and "protect." The publication's title intrigues, but the text addressing how the "actions" of creative responses to nature could affect "our collective future" is slight.

12. See Eleanor Heartney, "Mapping a Better World," *Art in America*, October 2003.

13. Others are Pierre Huyghe, Andrea Polli, Xavier Cordada (all of whom participated in "Weather Report"), Chris Drury, Werner Herzog, Isaac Julien and Stuart Klipper. See www.polarartists.com and www.nsf.gov/funding/pgm_summ.jsp?pins_id=12783&org=OPP.

14. Subhankar Banerjee, *Arctic National Wildlife Refuge: Seasons of Life and Land*, Seattle, Mountaineers Books, 2003, and *The Last Wilderness, Photographs of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge*, New York and Santa Fe, Gerald Peters Gallery, 2004. Stephen Brown, *Arctic Wings: Birds of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge*, Seattle, Mountaineers Books, 2006. [See Exhibitions sidebar.]

15. The publicity for "Weather Report" and ensuing *New York Times* coverage by a Colorado freelancer emphasized the ingenuity of pairing artists and scientists to design exhibition projects. But institutional matchmaking, while remarkable in the '60s in Experiments in Art and Technology (E.A.T.) and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art's Art and Technology Program or in Mel Chin and Patricia Johanson's projects in the 1980s, is by now a well-established procedure.

16. Irland's book about this body of work, *Water Library*, was published by the University of New Mexico Press in 2007.

17. Stephanie Smith, "Weather Systems: Questions about Art and Climate Change," in *Weather Report*, p. 13. Anderson astutely continued, "Americans have also come to take climate change seriously, I think, partly as a result of George Bush's strenuous discounting of the problem. Since his administration's main claims about Iraq have proved spectacularly false . . . an intuitive syllogism has naturally taken hold among Americans: If Bush asserts something, no matter how seriously, then probably the opposite is true." Kurt Andersen, "So We're Green. Now What?" *New York*, Apr. 23, 2007, p. 22. This logic is corroborated by Wal-Mart's chief executive H. Lee Scott Jr.'s explanation of the corporation's environmentalist policies with the statement that "we live in a time when people are losing confidence in the ability of government to solve problems." Barbaro (see n. 2 above).

18. David Lowenthal, "The Environmental Crusade, Ideals and Realities," *Landscape Architecture* 60, no. 14, July 1970, p. 291, as quoted, with further discussion, in Suzaan Boettger, *Earthworks: Art and the Landscape of the Sixties*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London, University of California Press, 2002, p. 221.

19. Museum of Modern Art, "Artists Speak: Conversations on Contemporary Art," Oct. 2, 2007, with Mary Miss and Roxy Paine, interviewed by Glenn D. Lowry, available at www.moma.org/visit_moma/audio/2007/pub_prog/downloadAAPAA_2007.html.

Author: Suzaan Boettger is a scholar of environmental art. Her next book is Nedko Solakov: 99 Fears (Phaidon, fall 2008).

EXHIBITIONS

Melting Ice/A Hot Topic: Envisioning Change, organized by San Francisco's Natural World Museum and the United Nations Environmental Program, opened at the Nobel Peace Center, Oslo [June 5-Sept. 3, 2007], and traveled to the BOZAR Centre for Fine Arts, Brussels [Sept. 6, 2007-Jan. 6, 2008], and the Ministry of Culture, Monaco [Feb. 20-Mar. 20]. An edited version is currently on view at the Field Museum, Chicago [Apr. 18-July 26].

Weather Report: Art and Climate Change, curated by Lucy R. Lippard, was seen at the Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art [Sept. 14-Dec. 21, 2007]. Approximately 15 artists, almost all from "Weather Report," will participate in **Feeling the Heat: Artists and Scientists on Climate Change** at the lobby and gallery of Deutsche Bank in Manhattan. While most works will be exhibited as part of the "Art at Work" program for employees and clients, some can be viewed in the public atrium [May 19-Oct. 31].

Other Group Exhibitions

Beyond Green: Toward A Sustainable Art opened at the Smart Museum of Art, University of Chicago [Oct. 6, 2005-Jan. 15, 2006] and was shown at the Museum of Arts & Design, New York [Feb. 2-May 7, 2006], the Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati [May 5-July 15, 2007], the Richard E. Peeler Art Center, DePaul University Art Museum, Greencastle, Ind. [Sept. 14-Dec. 7, 2007] and the Museum London, London, Ontario [Jan. 4-Mar. 14]; it is currently at the Joseloff Gallery, University of Hartford, Hartford, Conn. [Apr. 2-June 10] and goes on to the Hoffman Gallery of Contemporary Art, Lewis & Clark College, Portland, Ore. [Sept. 11-Dec. 7] and the DeVos Art Museum, Northern Michigan University, Marquette, Mich. [Jan. 21-Mar. 29, 2009].

Ecocentric Video Lounge was on view at the Sonoma County Museum, Santa Rosa, Calif. [Jan. 26-Apr. 20].

GREENWASHING Environment: Perils, Promises and Perplexities was presented at the Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin [Feb. 29-May 18].

Sound the Alarm: Landscapes in Distress, organized by Jennifer McGregor, is on view at Wave Hill in the Bronx [Mar. 8-June 1].

Feedback, Beyond Light Bulbs was at Eyebeam, New York [Mar. 13-Apr. 26].

E.P.A. (Environmental Performance Actions), photographs, texts, and videos documenting performance work that address environmental crises, was on view at Exit Art, New York [Mar. 15-May 3].

Unlearning Intolerance: Art Changing Attitudes Toward the Environment, organized by the Natural World Museum in collaboration with the United Nations Environmental Program and supported by the United Nations Department of Information, is on view in New York [May 8-June 15].

Future Tense: Reshaping the Landscape, curated by DeDe Young, is on view at the Neuberger Museum of Art, Purchase, N.Y. [May 11-July 6].

Polar Attractions is on view at the Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Mass. [June 28, 2008-June 9, 2009].

Solo Shows

Subhankar Banerjee "Resource Wars in the American Arctic" was recently on view at Sundaram Tagore Gallery, New York [Mar. 25-Apr. 19] and is at that gallery in Beverly Hills [June 28-July 28].

Brian Collier's solo show, "Teach the Starlings in Kansas City," was shown at the Urban Culture Project, Paragraph Gallery, Kansas City, Mo. [Mar. 21-May 3].

Chris Jordan's "Running the Numbers" series was at the Handwerker Gallery, Ithaca, N.Y. [Feb. 28-Apr. 6] and is currently at the Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin College, Oberlin, Ohio [Mar. 11-June 1].