

ART SHANTIES ON ICE | WHEN THE FEDS EMPLOYED ARTISTS | VAUGHN BELL'S PORTABLE WORKS

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BIG Human **ISSUES:** Scale

How artists help us make sense of climate change

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Sara Daleiden's social practice put to work in Milwaukee

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Van Gogh float in a Dutch dahlia parade—and many other projects we love (p.13)



Climate

Subtle, elegant, and arresting, public art projects on a human scale help us understand climate change

BY KAREN OLSON

ONE OF THE GREATEST GIFTS AN ARTIST CAN OFFER is to show us the world as it is. Our sense of what is real is often clouded by our preoccupations, passivity, or politics. But when an artwork removes these filters and allows us to see as the artist sees, we can be changed. Our perspective shifts. Our vision expands. We feel more connected.

As a result of this process of revelation, there's often a fine line—or deep connection—between art and activism.

Take the issue of climate change. Many of us have trouble grasping its implications because the news stories we hear are abstract, overwhelming, catastrophic, or utterly hopeless. We don't know how to process what we hear. That's why the storytelling of artists, many of whom have been addressing this issue for decades, is now being recognized as more important than ever. Because artists help us understand climate change on a human scale, we're able to make better sense of it, feel the urgency more, and ultimately change how we act.



With each high tide, Jason deCaires Taylor's sculpture *The Rising Tide* (2015) was slowly submerged under the Thames in London.

Storytelling

The growing role of public art in the international dialogue around climate change became obvious last fall in Paris during the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP21). Ahead of the talks, a pair of arts nonprofits launched ArtCOP21, an arts festival designed to challenge the climate change tropes repeated in political offices and boardrooms. It succeeded, connecting hundreds of thousands of people to more than 550 cultural events, including installations, exhibitions, performances, and myriad gatherings, all of which creatively addressed climate change across Paris, as well as 54 countries worldwide.

While ArtCOP21 had a significant influence before and during the conference, the organizations that started it have been making a difference much longer. Since 2008, the France-based Coalition for Art and Sustainable Development (COAL) has been promoting a new generation of artists who focus on environmental and social issues. Cape Farewell, started in 2001 by artist David Buckland, has

grown into an international nonprofit that brings together creatives, scientists, and informers—including Mel Chin, Amy Balkin, Antony Gormley, David Suzuki, KT Tunstall, and Nick Drake—to shift the climate change conversation to a cultural one.

This work is widespread. Around the world, artists are gathering to take on climate change. The second annual Rising Waters Confab, organized by Glenn Weiss and curated by Buster Simpson, recently brought together a multidisciplinary group of artists for a five-week collaborative residency at Robert Rauschenberg's studio on Florida's Captiva Island, which will eventually be lost to sea rise. For the next two years, Northern Spark—an all-night light festival held each June in Minneapolis—has the theme of “Climate Chaos | Climate Rising.”

At the same time, many artists are working on their own and in communities to offer their unique perspectives on climate change. Here, we look at a handful of recent public art projects that put climate change in the public eye, mind, and heart.

SEEING IS BELIEVING

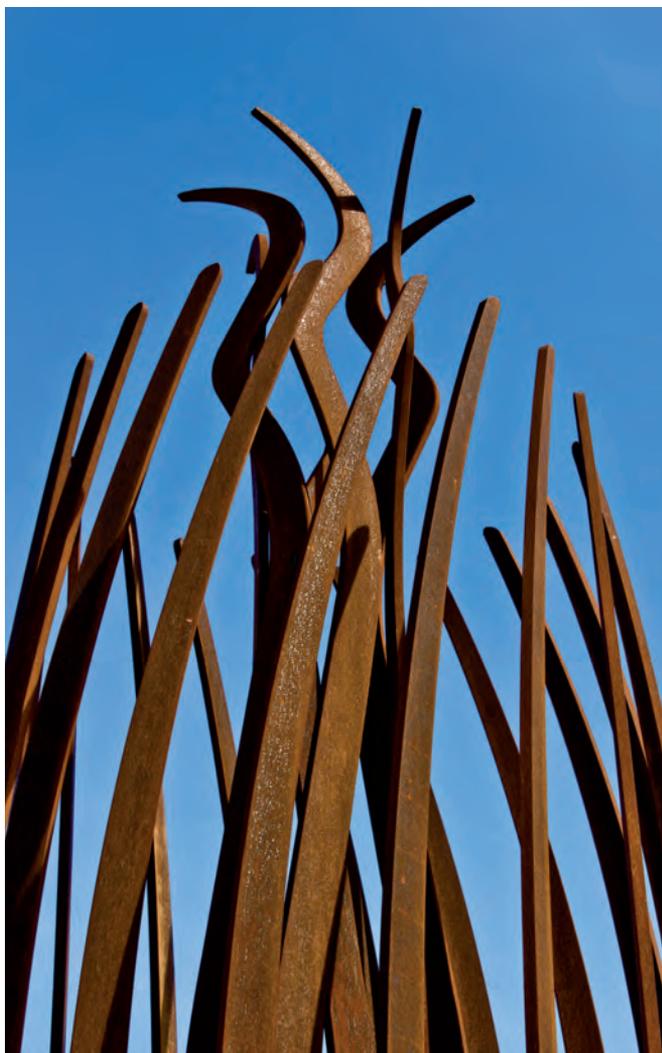
Most of Jason deCaires Taylor's work in the past 10 years has been in the Caribbean, where his underwater sculptures distract divers from over-visited reefs and serve as the foundation upon which new reefs can grow.

With *The Rising Tide*, Taylor took his message to the heart of London, calling attention to the rising waters associated with climate change and the city's damaging focus on perpetual work and construction.

Commissioned as part of the Totally Thames festival and installed for about a month in September 2015, *The Rising Tide* featured four suited figures seated on horses whose heads were replaced by oil-well pumps (see previous page). Set on the foreshores of the Thames right next to MI6 headquarters and opposite the Tate Britain, the sculptures—which recall the four horsemen of the Apocalypse—virtually disappeared twice a day when the tide rose and later emerged when the tide fell (pictured on this page).

“I quite like the idea that the piece sits in the eye line of the place where many politicians and so many people who are involved in climate change all work and make these damaging deals and policies, yet who are in this state of mad denial,” Taylor told the *Guardian* when the work was installed.





Photos courtesy Andrew Bellatti Green.

VISUALIZING WATER

Finding a way to let viewers visualize and better understand the changing conditions of our climate was a goal for artist Andrew Bellatti Green and architect Adam Pyrek when creating *Cyclical Interplay* for the city of Austin, Texas.

The kinetic, computer-operated sculpture—inspired by the cyclical nature of climate—rotates for several minutes every evening at dusk. Then the piece changes shape according to two sets of data: rainfall and water usage, the latter determined by water levels in a local reservoir.

The vertical sculpture's outer set of fins indicate rainfall. If it hasn't rained much in the previous 18 days, the fins contract. If it has rained, the outer fins bow out like a barrel, implying fullness. The sculpture's inner fins shift according to the levels of Lake Travis and Lake Buchanan, the city's primary water supplies.

This 2014 capital improvement project combined the goals of Austin's Watershed Protection and Parks and Recreation Departments. Not only is *Cyclical Interplay* a well-integrated, aesthetically pleasing, moving sculpture in a park alongside a busy roadway, but it also provides public education about the impact of water usage and changing climatic conditions.

MAPPING THE FUTURE

Like many coastal cities, Boston is planning for the uncertainty of climate change and sea level rise. One scenario, mapped by the Boston Harbor Association, shows the extensive, man-made areas of the city, including entire neighborhoods, submerged by 2100.

When artist Catherine D'Ignazio came across the map, she was struck by the fact that the predicted coastline very nearly matches what the coast had been in 1630, and she started thinking about a way people could use their bodies to trace where the water will rise.

She also called performance artist Andi Sutton, whose practice attempts to reposition climate change and other environmental issues on a human scale. One of her projects resulted in a series of paint stencils that reflected participants' fears of "future extinctions," like polar bears, public funding for the arts, and fresh water, and their hopes for the end of things like fracking, racism, and fear of difference.

Together, their ideas felt like a good match. So in June 2015 they held a combined walking event that mapped the future. It was produced in conjunction with the deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum's exhibition *Walking Sculpture: 1967–2015*.

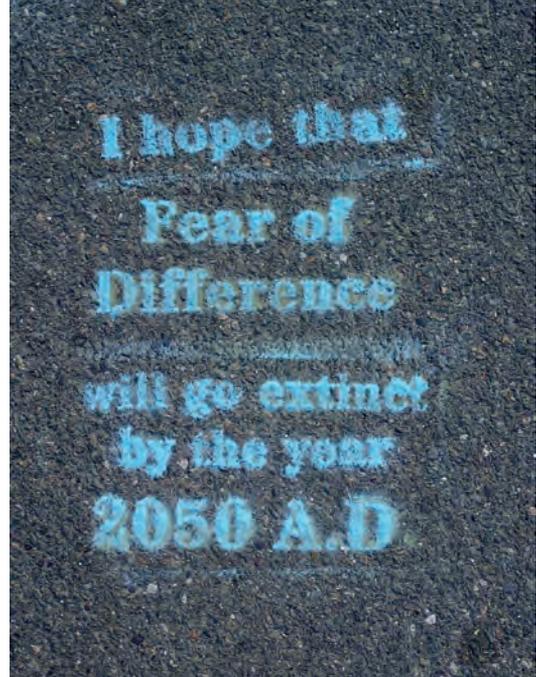
When 30 participants arrived, they were invited to take part in Sutton's *Composing the Future: Extinction/Loss* by creating stencils about what they fear—or hope—will go extinct by 2100. They wore the stencils like placards.

Participants then started walking the three-quarter-mile route marked by D'Ignazio for *Boston Coastline: Future Past*, a "walking data visualization" marking the expected water levels in 2100. The group talked about their placards with passersby

and stopped along the way to hear micro-lectures from guests, who stood on a ladder marked in feet to indicate rising water.

The speakers—including one from the mayor's office, another from the harbor association, and a media scholar—talked about how the city will be affected and what is being done to plan ahead. Sutton and D'Ignazio (bottom) also spoke.

While the topics were serious, the mood was light. Fun was one of the goals of the artists. "Climate change is so dark," Sutton says. "So we thought: Let's bring the rainbows in."



“If the water gets too high, I’ll just grow some gills.”

—Krisanne Baker



A NEW PERSPECTIVE

Krisanne Baker has a lifelong love of water. She grew up sailing and swimming off the Atlantic coast. Now a resident of Waldoboro, Maine, Baker is an ecological artist, water art activist, citizen scientist, and educator. She volunteers for two coastal estuary land trusts performing water quality tests. So, naturally, she thinks about the local effects of rapidly rising sea levels and the acidification of the Gulf of Maine.

“If the water level rises, what are we going to do about it?” asks Baker, a swimmer who often goes underwater without a mask and swims with her eyes open. Baker, who has always had a fantasy of being a fish, had an imaginative

idea: “If the water gets too high, I’ll just grow some gills.”

That thought led her to create *Growing Gills*, a short-loop video projection bombing designed so drivers and passersby could quickly see the video wherever it appeared. Baker filmed the piece herself underwater near Belfast, Maine.

First shown on an outside wall of Waterfall Arts in Belfast in 2013, the film depicts slowly rising waves on the surface of the building.

“When a large wave washes up over the entire projection area,” says Baker, “the viewer is underwater and then comes eye to eye with a large fish slowly swimming by.”





BIG IMPACT

Patrick Marold began *The Shadow Array* as a response to the excavation of a massive valley in order to accommodate a train and platform serving the Denver International Airport (DIA). His concept was simple: cover 10 sloped acres with an array of shadows.

The sculpture—which Marold says honors a prolonged sense of time—makes a big visual impact. “It is visible from the train, the passenger platform, from the air, from the adjacent roadways, and the hotel and plaza at the new DIA hotel and transit center,” he says. “It is even visible from satellites.”

But the impact is more than aesthetic; Marold’s materials choices are also significant. The Denver-based artist considered steel, concrete, and polymer-based products for the sculpture. But environmental impact is always a key component of his work, so he instead chose to use 236 bare timbers of beetle-killed spruce. The lumber was taken from forests devastated by what is likely the largest insect blight ever to hit North America—a blight enabled by a warming climate. “The fact that these infested forests are going to either decompose, burn in a fire, or be used by the timber industry makes them a far more attractive option,” says Marold.

There there’s the economic impact. “The small company that provided the logs, Rocky Mountain Timber Products, was certainly impacted by the order,” says Marold. So were the people hired to strip the logs by hand. Their work meant fewer fossil fuels were used in the process, too.

“My approach in general accounts for ecological impact, and I make decisions that typically help the environment rather than hurt it,” Marold says.

Photos courtesy Patrick Marold.



FROM WATERFALL TO FIREBALL

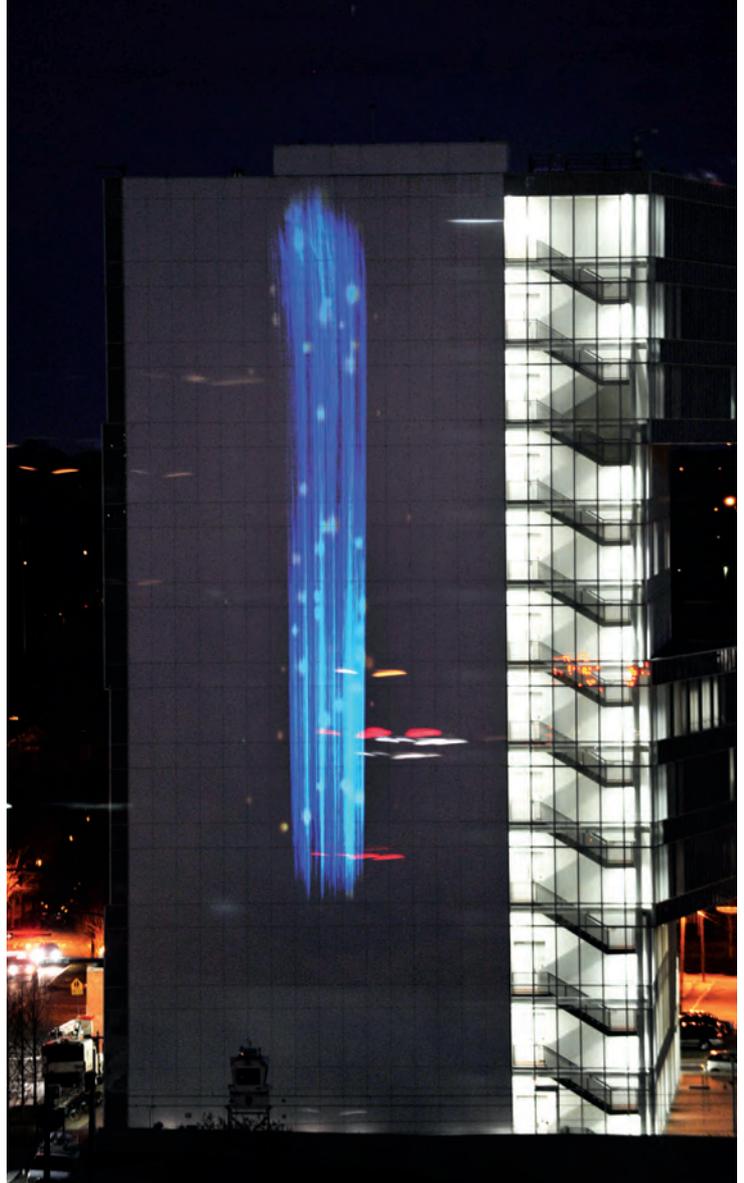
Andrea Polli has been working on the subject of climate change and collaborating with scientists since 2004. One of her artworks, a projection piece called *Particle Falls*, was commissioned by the city of San Jose, California, for its Zero1 Festival in 2010. Her goal: to show the real-time level of air pollution on-site.

“One of the challenges with that piece,” Polli says, “was trying to figure out how to show the problem—particulates that come from burning fossil fuels—and make it beautiful and engaging.”

The site for the work, the curved corner façade of a modern AT&T building, evoked for Polli a cliff and waterfall. Through the San Jose project she obtained a nephelometer, which measures particulate matter. To create *Particle Falls*, Polli and her students at the University of New Mexico took real-time data from the nephelometer, converted it to the visual forms of water and fire, and projected the results onto the wall of the building.

If the air is clear, the image projected is of a clear waterfall. If particulate measurements are slightly higher, then there are sparkles over the waterfall (right). “If there are a lot of particles, the waterfall is obliterated by a huge fireball,” Polli says (below).

There’s been increased interest in the project in the past few years and it’s been installed in several cities, including Pittsburgh, Detroit, and Charlotte. It was set up at the Bismarck American Center in Paris in connection with COP21.





MELTING AND RESEEDING

When Basia Irland was imagining an artwork for *Weather Report*, a 2007 exhibition and catalogue about climate change curated by Lucy Lippard for Boulder's Museum of Contemporary Art, she looked to water. Of course.

For more than four decades Irland has focused her art on international water issues, especially those involving rivers. She writes a blog about international rivers—from the perspective of the river—for *National Geographic*. She was the only artist invited to participate in the Foundation for the Future's International World Water Crisis Forum in 2010.

A large percentage of Boulder's drinking water, Irland discovered, comes from Arapaho Glacier. Because of climate disruption, the glacier is rapidly melting.

In response, Irland created *Ice Receding/Books Reseeding*, a temporary 250-pound sculpture hand-carved out of frozen river water and shaped like a book. She engraved it with a "text" made from the seeds of mountain maple, Colorado blue spruce, and columbine flower, selected with the help of scientists.

When the sculpture was set into the current of Boulder

Creek, it provided a way for people to see what was disappearing. The seeds offered a way to reduce the effects of climate change through watershed restoration: the plants that grew from them along the riverbanks help sequester carbon, mitigate floods and drought, slow erosion, and act as filters for pollutants, among other benefits.

Since the first such installation in Boulder, Irland has created ice books around the globe, in places like Antwerp, Ottawa, and Shoushtar, Iran. Ranging from pocket size to hundreds of pounds, each is embedded with local seeds. *Tome II: Fremont Cottonwood Seeds (Populus fremontii)* (2009) on the Rio Grande weighed 300 pounds (pictured).

"Closed books have seed patterns on the covers, while open books have rows of seeds forming sentences and paragraphs," Irland told *National Geographic*. "These seeds are released as the ice melts in the current. Where the seeds choose to plant themselves is serendipitous, replicating the way seeds get planted in nature."

KAREN OLSON is executive editor of *Public Art Review*.