

Beyond Canvas: Environmental Artists as Agents of Change

Author: Sean Kang
Korea International School
skang24@student.kis.or.kr

Abstract

The human impact on the environment continues to grow. Throughout time artists have taken to exposing these devastations. Environmental art emerged in the 1960s when numerous artists started trailblazing the way for art intertwined with the earth, showcasing either the planet's destruction or its glory. Soon after, others began figuring out ways to turn waste into beauty or created art that physically tried to heal our world.

This research paper will introduce the leading artists for each category and show how these essential artists have helped prevent climate change and continue to bring awareness to such a critical development.

Introduction

This research paper aims to highlight the environmental artists who refine and walk through a path less taken in the art world. These environmental artists can be categorized into three groups: artists who showcase the destruction of the world, artists that showcase the beauty of the environment, artists who use waste to create beauty, and artists whose art tries to heal the environment.

Artists Who Showcase the Destruction of the Environment

Artists who showcase the destruction of the environment display the adverse effects of a manufactured society that bled through the natural world. One of these prominent artists includes Olafur Eliasson. Olafur Eliasson is an Icelandic-Danish artist known for sculpture and large-scale installation art employing elemental materials such as light, water, and air temperature to enhance the viewer's experience. In 1995 he established Studio Olafur Eliasson in Berlin, a laboratory for spatial research. In 2014, Eliasson and his long-time collaborator, German architect Sebastian Behmann, founded Studio Other Spaces, an office for architecture and art. Olafur represented Denmark at the 50th Venice Biennale in 2003 and installed The Weather Project later that year, which has been described as "a milestone in contemporary art" in the Turbine Hall of Tate Modern, London. Olafur has engaged in several projects in public space, including the intervention Green Giver, carried out in various cities between 1998 and 2001; the Serpentine Gallery Pavilion 2007, London, a temporary pavilion designed with the Norwegian architect Kjetil Trædal Thorsen; and The New York City Waterfalls, commissioned by Public Art Fund in 2008. Like much of his work, the sculpture explores the common ground between art and science. It is molded into the shape of a toroid, recalling natural forms found from black holes and galaxies to seashells and coils of DNA. Olafur covers a wide range of areas to showcase the destruction of the environment.



Justin Brice Guariglia is an American conceptual artist and a former photojournalist famous for his work which traverses the link between humans and mother nature. In his research-based art practice, Brice frequently collaborates with scientists, poets, and philosophers to address climate change and its ecological impact. One of his notable works includes a series of seven missions he's flown with NASA scientists since 2015 to observe Greenland's fast-shifting ice, which he took photographs that he used as source material in his work. Most of his artworks hold a simple message: pictures of melting glaciers printed on materials that will outlast us all. The collaboration includes one of Greenland's most important glaciers, the Jakobshavn Glacier, also known as a 'galloping glacier' because of its high melting rate. The oldest ice on Greenland is thought to be 110,000 years old, and if it all melts, global sea levels may rise by up to 6 meters. Greenland's glaciers and ice sheets are melting around the clock in their isolation. Guariglia's art permits us to bear testimony despite being out of sight and out of mind. Artist Justin Brice Guariglia's technique includes NASA flights,

cutting-edge technology, and a desire to raise issues about significant environmental challenges. Guariglia's work is massive, and his influence on other artists even more.

Chris Jordan, an American artist, photographer, and film producer, has most of his works revolved around photographs of mass consumption and garbage. In his work, daily commonalities are often used to depict the result of American consumerism and its blind unawareness. While his art is often disturbing, it is a message about unconscious activities in our daily lives, letting the audience draw their own conclusions about the unavoidable consequences of our habits. Chris Jordan's striking mass consumption photographs send humanity a clear message: it's time to sweat the minor stuff.

Individual purchases of devices, single-serving foods, and plastic comforts do not, on their own, conjure up images of an environmental catastrophe. However, as the human population approaches eight billion, every modest act of consumption is amplified, resulting in rapid and widespread destruction of the natural environment. Jordan toured landfills and recycling sites to capture large piles of wasted things like cell phones, chargers, circuit boards, smashed cars, glass bottles, and other consumer goods for a body of work titled "Intolerable Beauty: Portraits of American Mass Consumption." Jordan also combines consumption and waste statistics into composited visuals that graphically connect the data to its environmental impact in a work named "Running the Numbers." The haunting visuals of Jordan's "Midway" and "Camel Gastrolith" pieces attract our attention to the innocent victims of our excess, while these works show the volume of consumer waste creation. Throughout his work, Jordan highlights the devastating implications of our daily choices and the urgent need for change.



Artists That Showcase the Beauty of the Environment

Acknowledged as a New York City living art legend, Bettina Werner, additionally hailed as "The Salt Queen," is a much-admired pioneering artist from Milan who creatively employs a salt technique as an innovative art medium throughout her practice. She is additionally known for developing a novel language of expression in art, translating as an atypical manifestation that is only discovered in some of the most renowned artists of our times. Initial indications of her artistic calling arrived when Werner fell in love with her first husband, a young, handsome philosopher who, together, pursued her passion for books, art, and culture, thus igniting her spirit, intellect, and imagination. In relation to her preferred key medium, salt – the Philosopher

Homer named the ingredient "The Divine Substance" and is additionally recognized to bring good luck, thus being a protector against negative energy. "When I invented my salt texture technique, through a complex process of amalgamating sea salt and colors I created into paintings, I found magic occurring in every single crystal," explains Werner. "I adopted the minimalist philosophy of 'less is more', she continues, "and when experiencing the artwork, one is able to fully appreciate the natural movement of the textures and depth of colors at its height."

Andy Goldsworthy is a British artist known for his site-specific installations involving natural materials and the passage of time. Working as both sculptor and photographer, Goldsworthy crafts his installations out of rocks, ice, leaves, or branches, cognizant that the landscape will change, then carefully documents the ephemeral collaborations with nature through photography. "It's not about art," he has explained. "It's just about life and the need to understand that a lot of things in life do not last." Goldsworthy used the dry-stone construction method, which does not need mortar to bind the stones together. Weight, balance, and symmetry create the domes' shape and prevent them from collapsing. To accomplish this, the stones are carefully stacked flat; they diminish in size and are cantilevered inward toward the top. Goldsworthy has constructed these holes using materials such as leaves and sticks to slate, mud, and clay. No matter what medium he uses to make the hole, it has the same effect.

Nils-Udo, a Bavarian artist, has been working directly with nature since 1972 to create spectacular, site-specific works of art that honor the land's beauty. Found berries, leaves, branches, and petals are converted into enchanting works of art that evoke secret portals and dreamy fairylands deep in the woods. Each ephemeral intervention, from a carefully placed scattering of petals on the surface of a pond to stunning nests made of twigs, leaves, and wildflowers, is a mirror of nature in its most basic state.

Artist That Use Waste to Create Beauty

Vik Muniz is a Brazilian artist and photographer. Initially a sculptor, Muniz grew interested with the photographic representations of his work, eventually focusing completely on photography. As much as Vik Muniz strives to encourage people through his art, he claims that the time he spent creating 'Waste Land' has significantly inspired him and made him more environmentally conscious in a variety of ways. The much-discussed documentary, which was shot near Rio de Janeiro at the world's largest dump, focuses on the experiences of catadores, or local garbage pickers who search through piles of trash looking for recyclable objects. Benjamin Von Wong, not only an artist but an engineer, designs artworks to create imagery that rallies people around environmental and social causes.



Von Wong's work makes these subjects understandable and approachable. He uses dramatic, spectacular scenarios to explain global challenges, evoking the emotions of his viewers. His work embodies what it means to engage in activism through art, and his passion for the purpose of raising awareness and inspiring action shines through. Plastic microfibers emitted in washing machines, technological waste, and marine plastic pollution were among his past undertakings. In conjunction with Greenpeace and aerial performance artist Katerina Soldatou, his most recent production underscores the fact that a truckload of



garbage enters the ocean every minute.

Nik Gentry, another artist that pursues the beauty of nature, believes that everything has a life cycle, and technology is no exception, with a constant push into the unknown in search of better, more efficient products. Hundreds of billions of floppy disks have been produced since their inception in 1981, and production is now coming to an end after 30 years. Physical media objects will soon become rare artifacts, despite their historical prevalence. The floppy disk has stood the test of time as a symbol for the fast-paced modern life cycle, mass production, and today's throwaway culture. Reusing objects can reduce waste by providing a new function that is often more appealing than the original. Seeing art made in this manner can inspire a more imaginative approach to everyday objects that are considered obsolete or useless. The combination of the nostalgic and familiar, as well as the freshness of a new form of expression, is what brings the overall concept to life.

Artists Whose Art Helps Heal the Environment

Maya Lin began her career working with themes of memory and loss, and she has been drawn to continue working with these topics throughout her life, while still pursuing her art and architectural practices. She was able to make something that is both an environmental sculpture artwork and a part of a larger advocacy initiative with Ghost Forest. A monument dedicated to raising awareness about what we are losing from the natural world, as well as what can be done to protect and restore species and habitats while simultaneously reducing climate change emissions.

During the 1960s and 1970s, Agnes Denes gained global prominence for environmental, ecological, and conceptual art. She is a trailblazer of many art movements as she is able to combine different mediums like science and ecology with her own creativity. Denes transforms her research into lovely, sensual visual forms, poetry, and philosophy she's formed over the course of her career. She is a major individual among concept-based artists. *Wheatfield – A Confrontation*, which the scholar and curator Jeffrey Weiss has called "perpetually astonishing . . . one of Land Art's great transgressive masterpieces" (Artforum, September 2008), is her best known work. It has been dubbed as 'one of Land Art's greatest transgressive masterpieces.' Denes planted a field of golden wheat on two acres of rubble-strewn landfill between the World Trade Center and Wall Street over a four-month period in the spring and summer of 1982. Two hundred truckloads of soil were delivered, and 285 furrows were hand-dug and cleared of rocks and garbage. During those four months, the field was maintained, and an irrigation system was installed. The grain was harvested by August 16th, yielding over 1000 pounds of healthy, golden wheat. *Wheatfield* was a symbol that represented food, energy, commerce, world trade, and economics. It alluded to mismanagement, pollution, world hunger, and environmental issues.



Marry Mattingly is a Brooklyn-based artist whose work focuses on environmental themes such as sustainability, climate change, and displacement. Mattingly creates poetic ideas of adaptation and survival by combining photography, performance, portable architecture, and sculptural ecosystems. We see Nomad struggling under the weight of their belongings in her work. We see them make their way through dry regions and swelling pools of water. We witness people fleeing a polluted past and looking for a sustainable future in nature. Mattingly not only cares about our environment but tries her best to portray it to a broader audience to educate them. Marry Mattingly also has used her prior knowledge of environmental losses through personal experience in her pieces to touch the hearts of the people who might also have shared similar insights. She bundles objects to giant boulders to represent consumption and human vices/virtues to mother nature. Marry started and cocreated "foodway" in 2017, allowing New Yorkers to publically forage for the first time in over 100 years.

Conclusion

Environmental artists have received appreciation for their excellent works as well as for bringing attention to the environmental issues facing our globe. The phrase "environmental art" is relatively broad and encompasses a variety of distinct movements and techniques. Only a few trends can be categorized as environmental art, including Land art, Earth art, Sustainable art, and conceptual art. Because of this, environmental artists employ a variety of media, techniques, and aesthetics. Environmental art first became popular as a trend in the 1960s, thanks to influential figures including Nils Udo, Jean-Max Albert, and Piotr Kowalski. Since then, they have continued to produce environmental art, furthering the ideals of environmental art. When referring to them, it's critical to distinguish between people who are less concerned with ecological issues and those who are a member of this movement that aims to specifically examine the relationships between nature and the human world in order to increase awareness of ecological problems. Famous land artists like Christo and Robert Smithson (who created the iconic Spiral Jetty) have come under fire for the long-term ecological harm some of their works have caused. However, many of them who work in the arts have devoted a lot of time to examine the connection between the natural world and the world of people. Like Margaret Mead has said before, "We won't have a society if we destroy the environment." With the environment deteriorating second by second, awareness imposed by environmental artists like those mentioned above are the real heroes in our world.

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